**Puritan Protester**

**How Anne Hutchinson got into trouble for speaking her mind in colonial America.**

By Jonathan Blum

**CAST OF CHARACTERS (16)**

* Anne Hutchinson, a nurse, midwife, and religious leader
* William Hutchinson, her husband
* Mary Dyer, a friend of Anne Hutchinson's
* John Winthrop, governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony
* Thomas Dudley, deputy governor
* Minister Hugh Peters
* Minister John Wilson
* Minister Zechariah Symmes
* Minister Thomas Shepard
* Minister John Cotton, pastor and friend of Anne Hutchinson's
* Increase Nowell, a magistrate from Charlestown
* Narrator A
* Narrator B

**PROLOGUE**

**Narrator A:**

In 1634, Anne Hutchinson, her husband, and their many children left England for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Most of the colony's 7,000 settlers were Puritans, a Christian sect, escaping the oppression of the Church of England. But the Puritans, in turn, were intolerant of other beliefs.

**----------------------------------SCENE 1----------------------------------**

**Narrator B:**

In 1635, Puritan ministers throughout the colony hold regular meetings to discuss their interpretations of the Bible. Only men can be ministers, and only men can attend the sessions.

**Narrator A:**

Anne Hutchinson has other ideas. Unlike most women of the day, she can read and write. One evening, she is at home with her husband and a friend.

**Anne Hutchinson:**

There is so much about the Bible I'd like to share with others. Would it be all right, William, if I invited other women here to discuss such matters?

**William Hutchinson:**

Of course. I trust you completely.

**Mary Dyer:**

But wouldn't you be breaking the law?

**Anne Hutchinson:**

I won't be speaking publicly, only privately.

**----------------------------------SCENE 2----------------------------------**

**Narrator B:**

Hutchinson's meetings begin. At first, she speaks only of child care and other traditionally women's subjects. But soon she starts talking about God and the Bible. Her meetings become the most popular in Boston. Up to 80 people attend—some men as well as women.

**Hutchinson (to a gathering):**

To be saved, we must receive the presence of God into our souls. We don't need a minister, nor do we need to know how to read the Bible. God reveals Himself to His faithful.

**Dyer:**

Are you saying that all men and women are inferiors in the presence of God?

**Hutchinson:**

With all my heart.

**Narrator A:**

When colony leaders learn what Hutchinson is teaching, they are outraged.

**John Winthrop:**

This is heresy! How dare she? God speaks only through his ministers.

**Thomas Dudley:**

That isn't all. She has been criticizing some ministers! She says that they aren't educated enough to interpret the Bible.

**Winthrop:**

Her meetings are dividing the colony—she must be stopped!

**Narrator B:**

The leaders order Hutchinson to stand trial.

**----------------------------------SCENE 3----------------------------------**

**Narrator A:**

In November 1637 a group of 40 magistrates gathers in the Court of Massachusetts, in Cambridge. The court—the highest in the colony—bases its rulings on the Bible.

**Narrator B:**

Hutchinson arrives with her husband and Mary Dyer. She acts as her own lawyer. Most of the magistrates oppose her, but she has many allies in the courtroom.

**Winthrop:**

Mistress Hutchinson, you are called here for troubling the peace of the commonwealth and its churches. You speak against our ministers and hold religious meetings in your home. These acts are not tolerable in the sight of God.

**Hutchinson:**

What is my crime?

**Winthrop:**

Have I not just stated it? You have violated the laws of God and of state.

**Hutchinson:**

How, in particular?

**Winthrop:**

Your practices go against those of the commonwealth!

**Hutchinson:**

My private beliefs have nothing to do with the law.

**Winthrop:**

I don't want to go on about this, certainly not with one of your sex. I have this complaint against you: You hold public meetings with other women.

**Hutchinson:**

In the Bible, doesn't Paul say that elder women are to teach the younger?

**Winthrop:**

It's one thing to teach one person. It's another to teach 80 people. Besides, we know that you teach women older than yourself.

**Hutchinson:**

They come to my home. Shall I turn them away?

**Winthrop:**

Your meetings will lead women astray, and expose them to opinions contrary to God's word.

**Narrator A:**

Hutchinson is unbowed.

**Winthrop:**

Mistress Hutchinson, the court also accuses you of criticizing certain ministers. I shall now call them to testify.

**Minister Hugh Peters:**

Mistress Hutchinson says that our teachings about salvation are wrong and that we are not capable ministers.

**Hutchinson:**

Prove that I said so!

**Winthrop:**

These ministers say so.

**Narrator B:**

One by one, ministers stand and testify against Hutchinson.

**Minister John Wilson:**

Last month, I had to have Mistress Hutchinson removed from the women's side of the meetinghouse for speaking heresies.

**Minister Zechariah Symmes:**

Aye, she did speak against us ministers.

**Minister Thomas Shepard:**

Indeed!

**Dudley:**

These ministers have testified against you. What say you?

**Hutchinson:**

I merely quoted the Bible to them. That is not a crime.

**Winthrop:**

This court will give you some time to reconsider the error of your ways. Return here tomorrow.

**----------------------------------SCENE 4----------------------------------**

**Narrator A:**

The next morning, two of Hutchinson's supporters testify in her favor. Then Deputy Governor Dudley addresses another supporter, John Cotton.

**Dudley:**

Has Mistress Hutchinson ever said to you that these men were not capable ministers?

**Minister John Cotton:**

No, she has not. Only that there are differences in the way ministers preach.

**Hutchinson:**

I have committed no punishable offense. I only speak my conscience. I bless the Lord, who has shown me the path toward right.

**Magistrate Increase Nowell:**

Shown you? How?

**Hutchinson:**

How did Abraham know that God wanted him to sacrifice his son Isaac?

**Dudley:**

He got a voice from God.

**Hutchinson:**

So did I.

**Narrator B:**

The magistrates gasp.

**Dudley (outraged):**

How dare you say you have received God's word! You have been tricked by the devil!

**Hutchinson:**

The Lord will deliver me from any punishment. You have power over my body, but only the Lord Jesus has power over my soul.

**Winthrop:**

This woman believes that God speaks to her directly! To protect our commonwealth, we must cut her out of it. Ministers, will you swear an oath before God that your accusations against Mistress Hutchinson are true?

**Peters:**

I swear.

**Wilson:**

I swear.

**Symmes:**

I swear.

**Shepard:**

I swear.

**Winthrop:**

I see no reason to further delay sentencing.

**Narrator A:**

The magistrates vote, 37 to 3, to banish Hutchinson.

**Winthrop:**

Mistress Hutchinson, you are banished from this colony.

**Hutchinson:**

Why?

**Winthrop:**

Say no more! The court knows why, and is satisfied.

**EPILOGUE**

**Narrator B:**

After undergoing a second trial in her church in 1638, Hutchinson was forced to leave Massachusetts. She and her family moved to a new settlement in Rhode Island. Roger Williams, another outcast from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, had founded it. There, Hutchinson enjoyed true religious freedom. But life was hard. The family later settled in what is now Westchester County, New York. In 1643, Hutchinson and five of her children were killed in an Indian attack.

Source: *Junior Scholastic,* September 8, 2008.