

ACT TWO

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PROCTOR: And what see you? What see you, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH, "conceding": I think you be somewhat ashamed, for I am there, and she so close.

PROCTOR: When will you know me, woman? Were I stoned I would have cracked for shame this seven month!

ELIZABETH: Then go and tell her she's a whore. Whatever promise she may sense—break it, John, break it.

PROCTOR, *between his teeth*: Good, then. I'll go. *He starts for his rifle.*

ELIZABETH, *trembling, fearfully*: Oh, how unwillingly!

PROCTOR, *turning on her, rifle in hand*: I will curse her hotter than the oldest cinder in hell. But pray, begrudge me not my anger!

ELIZABETH: Your anger! I only ask you—

PROCTOR: Woman, am I so base? Do you truly think me base?

ELIZABETH: I never called you base.

PROCTOR: Then how do you charge me with such a promise? The promise that a stallion gives a mare I gave that girl!

ELIZABETH: Then why do you anger with me when I bid you break it?

PROCTOR: Because it speaks deceit, and I am honest! But I'll plead no more! I see now your spirit twists around the single error of my life, and I will never tear it free!

ELIZABETH, *crying out*: You'll tear it free—when you come to know that I will be your only wife, or no wife at all! She has an arrow in you yet, John Proctor, and you know it well!

Quite suddenly, as though from the air, a figure appears in the doorway. They start slightly. It is Mr. Hale. He is different now—drawn a little, and there is a quality of deference, even of guilt, about his manner now.

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HALE: Good evening.

PROCTOR, still in his shock: Why, Mr. Hale! Good evening to you, sir. Come in, come in.

HALE, to Elizabeth: I hope I do not startle you.

ELIZABETH: No, no, it's only that I heard no horse—

HALE: You are Goodwife Proctor.

PROCTOR: Aye; Elizabeth.

HALE, nods, then: I hope you're not off to bed yet.

PROCTOR, setting down his gun: No, no. Hale comes further into the room. And Proctor, to explain his nervousness: We are not used to visitors after dark, but you're welcome here. Will you sit you down, sir?

HALE: I will. *He sits.* Let you sit, Goodwife Proctor.

She does, never letting him out of her sight. There is a pause as Hale looks about the room.

PROCTOR, to break the silence: Will you drink cider, Mr. Hale?

HALE: No, it rebels my stomach; I have some further traveling yet tonight. Sit you down, sir. *Proctor sits.* I will not keep you long, but I have some business with you. *A*

PROCTOR: Business of the court?

HALE: No—no, I come of my own, without the court's authority. Hear me. *He wets his lips.* I know not if you are aware, but your wife's name is—mentioned in the court.

PROCTOR: We know it, sir. Our Mary Warren told us. We are entirely amazed.

HALE: I am a stranger here, as you know. And in my ignorance I find it hard to draw a clear opinion of them that come accused before the court. And so this afternoon, and now tonight, I go from house to house—I come now from Rebecca Nurse's house and—

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ELIZABETH, shocked: Rebecca's charged!

HALE: God forbid such a one be charged. She is, however—
mentioned somewhat.

ELIZABETH, with an attempt at a laugh: You will never believe,
I hope, that Rebecca trafficked with the Devil.

HALE: Woman, it is possible.

PROCTOR, taken aback: Surely you cannot think so.

HALE: This is a strange time, Mister. No man may longer doubt
the powers of the dark are gathered in monstrous attack upon
this village. There is too much evidence now to deny it. You
will agree, sir?

PROCTOR, evading: I—have no knowledge in that line. But it's
hard to think so pious a woman be secretly a Devil's bitch after
seventy year of such good prayer.

HALE: Aye. But the Devil is a wily one, you cannot deny it.
However, she is far from accused, and I know she will not be.
Pause. I thought, sir, to put some questions as to the Christian
character of this house, if you'll permit me.

PROCTOR, coldly, resentful: Why, we—have no fear of ques-
tions, sir.

HALE: Good, then. *He makes himself more comfortable.* In the
book of record that Mr. Parris keeps, I note that you are rarely
in the church on Sabbath Day.

PROCTOR: No, sir, you are mistaken.

HALE: Twenty-six time in seventeen month, sir. I must call that
rare. Will you tell me why you are so absent?

PROCTOR: Mr. Hale, I never knew I must account to that man
for I come to church or stay at home. My wife were sick this
winter.

HALE: So I am told. But you, Mister, why could you not come
alone?

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PROCTOR: I surely did come when I could, and when I could not I prayed in this house.

HALE: Mr. Proctor, your house is not a church; your theology must tell you that.

PROCTOR: It does, sir, it does; and it tells me that a minister may pray to God without he have golden candlesticks upon the altar.

HALE: What golden candlesticks?

PROCTOR: Since we built the church there were pewter candlesticks upon the altar; Francis Nurse made them, y'know, and a sweeter hand never touched the metal. But Parris came, and for twenty week he preach nothin' but golden candlesticks until he had them. I labor the earth from dawn of day to blink of night, and I tell you true, when I look to heaven and see my money glaring at his elbows—it hurt my prayer, sir, it hurt my prayer. I think, sometimes, the man dreams cathedrals, not clapboard meetin' houses.

HALE, *thinks, then*: And yet, Mister, a Christian on Sabbath Day must be in church. *Pause*. Tell me—you have three children?

PROCTOR: Aye. Boys.

HALE: How comes it that only two are baptized?

PROCTOR, *starts to speak, then stops, then, as though unable to restrain this*: I like it not that Mr. Parris should lay his hand upon my baby. I see no light of God in that man. I'll not conceal it.

HALE: I must say it, Mr. Proctor; that is not for you to decide. The man's ordained, therefore the light of God is in him.

PROCTOR, *flushed with resentment but trying to smile*: What's your suspicion, Mr. Hale?

HALE: No, no, I have no—

PROCTOR: I nailed the roof upon the church, I hung the door—

HALE: Oh, did you! That's a good sign, then.

MADRIS: It may be I have been too quick to bring the man to God, but you cannot think we ever desired the destruction of religion. I think that's in your mind, is it not?

HALE: Not altogether giving way; I—have—there is a softness in your regard, sir, a softness.

ELIZABETH: I think, maybe, we have been too hard with Mr. Paris. I think so. But sure we never loved the Devil here.

HALE, nods, deliberating this. Then, with the voice of one administering a secret test: Do you know your Commandments, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH, without hesitation, even eagerly: I surely do. There be no mark of blame upon my life, Mr. Hale. I am a covenanted Christian woman.

HALE: And you, Mister?

MADRIS, a trifle unsteadily: I—am sure I do, sir.

HALE, glances at her open face, then at John, then: Let you repeat them, if you will.

MADRIS: The Commandments.

HALE: Aye.

MADRIS, looking off, beginning to swear: Thou shalt not kill.

HALE: Aye.

MADRIS, counting on his fingers: Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods, nor make unto thee any graven image. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain; thou shalt have no other gods before me. With some hesitation: Thou shalt remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. Pause. Then: Thou shalt honor thy father and mother. Thou shalt not bear false witness. He is stuck. He counts back on his fingers, bearing false witness. He is stuck. He counts back on his fingers, knowing one is missing. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.

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HALE: You have said that twice, sir.

PROCTOR, *lost*: Aye. *He is flailing for it.*

ELIZABETH, *delicately*: Adultery, John.

PROCTOR, *as though a secret arrow had pained his heart*: Aye. Trying to grin it away—to Hale: You see, sir, between the two of us we do know them all. Hale only looks at Proctor, deep in his attempt to define this man. Proctor grows more uneasy. I think it be a small fault.

HALE: Theology, sir, is a fortress; no crack in a fortress may be accounted small. *He rises; he seems worried now. He paces a little, in deep thought.*

PROCTOR: There be no love for Satan in this house, Mister.

HALE: I pray it, I pray it dearly. *He looks to both of them, an attempt at a smile on his face, but his misgivings are clear.* Well, then—I'll bid you good night.

ELIZABETH, *unable to restrain herself*: Mr. Hale. *He turns.* I do think you are suspecting me somewhat? Are you not?

HALE, *obviously disturbed—and evasive*: Goody Proctor, I do not judge you. My duty is to add what I may to the godly wisdom of the court. I pray you both good health and good fortune. *To John*: Good night, sir. *He starts out.*

ELIZABETH, *with a note of desperation*: I think you must tell him, John.

HALE: What's that?

ELIZABETH, *restraining a call*: Will you tell him?

Slight pause. Hale looks questioningly at John.

PROCTOR, *with difficulty*: I—I have no witness and cannot prove it, except my word be taken. But I know the children's sickness had naught to do with witchcraft.

HALE, *stopped, struck*: Naught to do—?

A C T T W O

PROCTOR: Mr. Parris discovered them sportin' in the woods.
They were startled and took sick. 65

Pause.

HALE: Who told you this?

PROCTOR, hesitates, then: Abigail Williams.

HALE: Abigail!

PROCTOR: Aye.

HALE, his eyes wide: Abigail Williams told you it had naught to do with witchcraft!

PROCTOR: She told me the day you came, sir.

HALE, suspiciously: Why—why did you keep this?

PROCTOR: I never knew until tonight that the world is gone daft with this nonsense.

HALE: Nonsense! Mister, I have myself examined Tituba, Sarah Good, and numerous others that have confessed to dealing with the Devil. They have *confessed* it.

PROCTOR: And why not, if they must hang for denyin' it? There are them that will swear to anything before they'll hang; have you never thought of that?

HALE: I have. I—I have indeed. *It is his own suspicion, but he resists it. He glances at Elizabeth, then at John.* And you—would you testify to this in court?

PROCTOR: I—had not reckoned with goin' into court. But if I must I will.

HALE: Do you falter here?

PROCTOR: I falter nothing, but I may wonder if my story will be credited in such a court. I do wonder on it, when such a steady-minded minister as you will suspicion such a woman that never lied, and cannot, and the world knows she cannot! I may falter somewhat, Mister; I am no fool.

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HALE, quietly—it has impressed him: Proctor, let you open with me now, for I have a rumor that troubles me. It's said you hold no belief that there may even be witches in the world. Is that true, sir?

PROCTOR—he knows this is critical, and is striving against his disgust with Hale and with himself for even answering: I know not what I have said, I may have said it. I have wondered if there be witches in the world—although I cannot believe they come among us now.

HALE: Then you do not believe—

PROCTOR: I have no knowledge of it; the Bible speaks of witches, and I will not deny them.

HALE: And you, woman?

ELIZABETH: I—I cannot believe it.

HALE, shocked: You cannot!

PROCTOR: Elizabeth, you bewilder him!

ELIZABETH, to Hale: I cannot think the Devil may own a woman's soul, Mr. Hale, when she keeps an upright way, as I have. I am a good woman, I know it; and if you believe I may do only good work in the world, and yet be secretly bound to Satan, then I must tell you, sir, I do not believe it.

HALE: But, woman, you do believe there are witches in—

ELIZABETH: If you think that I am one, then I say there are none.

HALE: You surely do not fly against the Gospel, the Gospel—

PROCTOR: She believe in the Gospel, every word!

ELIZABETH: Question Abigail Williams about the Gospel, not myself!

Hale stares at her.

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PROCTOR: She do not mean to doubt the Gospel, sir, you cannot think it. This be a Christian house, sir, a Christian house.

ACT TWO

HALE: God keep you both; let the third child be quickly baptized, and go you without fail each Sunday in to Sabbath prayer; and keep a solemn, quiet way among you. I think—
Giles Corey appears in doorway.

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GILES: John!

PROCTOR: Giles! What's the matter?

GILES: They take my wife.

Francis Nurse enters.

GILES: And his Rebecca!

PROCTOR, to Francis: Rebecca's in the jail!

FRANCIS: Aye, Cheever come and take her in his wagon. We've only now come from the jail, and they'll not even let us in to see them.

ELIZABETH: They've surely gone wild now, Mr. Hale!

FRANCIS, going to Hale: Reverend Hale! Can you not speak to the Deputy Governor? I'm sure he mistakes these people—

HALE: Pray calm yourself, Mr. Nurse.

FRANCIS: My wife is the very brick and mortar of the church, Mr. Hale—indicating Giles—and Martha Corey, there cannot be a woman closer yet to God than Martha.

HALE: How is Rebecca charged, Mr. Nurse?

FRANCIS, with a mocking, half-hearted laugh: For murder, she's charged! Mockingly quoting the warrant: "For the marvelous and supernatural murder of Goody Putnam's babies." What am I to do, Mr. Hale?

HALE, turns from Francis, deeply troubled, then: Believe me, Mr. Nurse, if Rebecca Nurse be tainted, then nothing's left to stop the whole green world from burning. Let you rest upon the justice of the court; the court will send her home, I know it.

FRANCIS: You cannot mean she will be tried in court!

HALE
God bless you
good evening