

Abigail (*pulling her away from the window*) I told him everything; he knows now, he knows everything we —

Betty You drank blood, Abby! You didn't tell him that!

Abigail Betty, you never say that again! You will never —

Betty You did, you did! You drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor!

Abigail (*smashes her across the face*) Shut it! Now shut it!

Betty (*collapsing on the bed*) Mama, Mama! (*She dissolves into sobs.*)

Abigail Now look you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this. Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents' heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! (*She goes to Betty and roughly sits her up.*) Now, you — sit up and stop this!

But Betty collapses in her hands and lies inert on the bed.

Mary Warren (*with hysterical fright*) What's got her? (**Abigail stares in fright at Betty.**) Abby, she's going to die! It's a sin to conjure and we —

Abigail (*starting for Mary*) I say shut it, Mary Warren!

Enter John Proctor. On seeing him, Mary Warren leaps in fright.

Proctor was a farmer in his middle thirties. He need not have been a partisan of any faction in the town, but there is evidence to suggest that he had a sharp and biting way with hypocrites. He was the kind of man — powerful of body, even-tempered, and not easily led — who cannot refuse support to partisans without drawing their deepest resentment. In Proctor's presence

a fool felt his foolishness instantly — and a Proctor is always marked for calumny therefore.

But as we shall see, the steady manner he displays does not spring from an untroubled soul. He is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct. These people had no ritual for the washing away of sins. It is another trait we inherited from them, and it has helped to discipline us as well as to breed hypocrisy among us. Proctor, respected and even feared in Salem, has come to regard himself as a kind of fraud. But no hint of this has yet appeared on the surface, and as he enters from the crowded parlor below it is a man in his prime we see, with a quiet confidence and an unexpressed, hidden force. Mary Warren, his servant, can barely speak for embarrassment and fear.

Mary Warren Oh! I'm just going home, Mr Proctor.

Proctor Be you foolish, Mary Warren? Be you deaf? I forbid you leave the house, did I not? Why shall I pay you? I am looking for you more often than my cows!

Mary Warren I only come to see the great doings in the world.

Proctor I'll show you a great doin' on your arse one of these days. Now get you home; my wife is waitin' with your work! (*Trying to retain a shred of dignity, she goes slowly out.*)

Mercy Lewis (*both afraid of him and strangely titillated*) I'd best be off. I have my Ruth to watch. Good morning, Mr Proctor.

Mercy sidles out. Since Proctor's entrance, Abigail has stood as though on tiptoe, absorbing his presence, wide-eyed. He glances at her, then goes to Betty on the bed.

Abigail Gah! I'd almost forgot how strong you are, John Proctor!

Proctor (*looking at Abigail now, the faintest suggestion of a knowing smile on his face*) What's this mischief here?

Abigail *(with a nervous laugh)* Oh, she's only gone silly somehow.

Proctor The road past my house is a pilgrimage to Salem all morning. The town's mumbling witchcraft.

Abigail Oh, posh! *(Winningly she comes a little closer, with a confidential, wicked air.)* We were dancin' in the woods last night, and my uncle leaped in on us. She took fright, is all.

Proctor *(his smile widening)* Ah, you're wicked yet, aren't y'! *(A trill of expectant laughter escapes her, and she dares come closer, feverishly looking into his eyes.)* You'll be clapped in the stocks before you're twenty.

He takes a step to go, and she springs into his path.

Abigail Give me a word, John. A soft word. *(Her concentrated desire destroys his smile.)*

Proctor No, no, Abby. That's done with.

Abigail *(tauntingly)* You come five mile to see a silly girl fly? I know you better.

Proctor *(setting her firmly out of his path)* I come to see what mischief your uncle's brewin' now. *(With final emphasis.)* Put it out of mind, Abby.

Abigail *(grasping his hand before he can release her)* John – I am waitin' for you every night.

Proctor Abby, I never give you hope to wait for me.

Abigail *(now beginning to anger – she can't believe it)* I have something better than hope, I think!

Proctor Abby, you'll put it out of mind. I'll not be comin' for you more.

Abigail You're surely sportin' with me.

Proctor You know me better.

Abigail I know how you clutched my back behind your house and sweated like a stallion whenever I come near! Or

did I dream that? It's she put me out, you cannot pretend it were you. I saw your face when she put me out, and you loved me then and you do now!

Proctor Abby, that's a wild thing to say –

Abigail A wild thing may say wild things. But not so wild, I think. I have seen you since she put me out; I have seen you nights.

Proctor I have hardly stepped off my farm this sevenmonth.

Abigail I have a sense for heat, John, and yours has drawn me to my window, and I have seen you looking up, burning in your loneliness. Do you tell me you've never looked up at my window?

Proctor I may have looked up.

Abigail *(now softening)* And you must. You are no wintry man. I know you, John. I know you. *(She is weeping.)* I cannot sleep for dreamin'; I cannot dream but I wake and walk about the house as though I'd find you comin' through some door. *(She clutches him desperately.)*

Proctor *(gently pressing her from him, with great sympathy but firmly)* Child –

Abigail *(with a flash of anger)* How do you call me child!

Proctor Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time. But I will cut off my hand before I'll ever reach for you again. Wipe it out of mind. We never touched, Abby.

Abigail Aye – but we did.

Proctor Aye, but we did not.

Abigail *(with a bitter anger)* Oh, I marvel how such a strong man may let such a sickly wife be –

Proctor *(angered – at himself as well)* You'll speak nothin' of Elizabeth!

Abigail (*pulling her away from the window*) I told him everything; he knows now, he knows everything we —

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Abigail Betty, you never say that again! You will never —

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Proctor (*looking at Abigail now, the faintest suggestion of a knowing smile on his face*) What's this mischief here?

Abigail She is blackening my name in the village! She is telling lies about me! She is a cold, sniveling woman, and you bend to her! Let her turn you like a —

Proctor (*shaking her*) Do you look for whippin'?

A psalm is heard being sung below.

Abigail (*in tears*) I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretense Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men! And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? I will not, I cannot! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet! (*He turns abruptly to go out. She rushes to him.*) John, pity me, pity me!

The words 'going up to Jesus' are heard in the psalm, and Betty claps her ears suddenly and whines loudly.

Abigail Betty? (*She hurries to Betty, who is now sitting up and screaming. Proctor goes to Betty as Abigail is trying to pull her hands down, calling 'Betty!'*)

Proctor (*growing unnerved*) What's she doing? Girl, what ails you? Stop that wailing!

The singing has stopped in the midst of this, and now Parris rushes in.

Parris What happened? What are you doing to her? Betty! (*He rushes to the bed, crying, 'Betty, Betty!'*) **Mrs Putnam** enters, feverish with curiosity, and with her **Thomas Putnam** and **Mercy Lewis. Parris, at the bed, keeps lightly slapping Betty's face, while she moans and tries to get up.)**

Abigail She heard you singin' and suddenly she's up and screamin'.

Mrs Putnam The psalm! The psalm! She cannot bear to hear the Lord's name!

Parris No, God forbid. Mercy, run to the doctor! Tell him what's happened here! (**Mercy Lewis** rushes out.)

Mrs Putnam Mark it for a sign, mark it!

Rebecca Nurse, seventy-two, enters. She is white-haired, leaning upon her walking-stick.

Putnam (*pointing at the whimpering Betty*) That is a notorious sign of witchcraft afoot, Goody Nurse, a prodigious sign!

Mrs Putnam My mother told me that! When they cannot bear to hear the name of —

Parris (*trembling*) Rebecca, Rebecca, go to her, we're lost. She suddenly cannot bear to hear the Lord's —

Giles Corey, eighty-three, enters. He is knotted with muscle, canny, inquisitive, and still powerful.

Rebecca There is hard sickness here, Giles Corey, so please to keep the quiet.

Giles I've not said a word. No one here can testify I've said a word. Is she going to fly again? I hear she flies.

Putnam Man, be quiet now!

Everything is quiet. Rebecca walks across the room to the bed.

Gentleness exudes from her. Betty is quietly whimpering, eyes shut.

Rebecca simply stands over the child, who gradually quiets.

And while they are so absorbed, we may put a word in for Rebecca. Rebecca was the wife of Francis Nurse, who, from all accounts, was one of those men for whom both sides of the argument had to have respect. He was called upon to arbitrate disputes as though he were an unofficial judge, and Rebecca also enjoyed the high opinion most people had for him. By the time of the delusion, they had three hundred acres, and their children were settled in separate homesteads within the same estate. However, Francis had originally rented the land, and one theory has it that, as he gradually paid for it and raised his social status, there were those who resented his rise.

Another suggestion to explain the systematic campaign against Rebecca, and inferentially against Francis, is the land war he fought with his neighbors, one of whom was a Putnam. This squabble grew to the proportions of a battle in the woods