

~~WILLARD. (*At bench L.*) Good morning, Majesty.~~

~~DANFORTH. Where is Mister Parris?~~

~~WILLARD. I'll fetch him.~~

~~DANFORTH. Marshal. When did Reverend Hale arrive?~~

~~WILLARD. It were toward midnight, I think.~~

~~DANFORTH. (*Suspiciously.*) What is he about here?~~

~~WILLARD. He goes among them that will hang, sir. And he prays with them. He sits with Goody Nurse now. (*Crossing to R. bench, clears straw from it.*) And Mister Parris with him.~~

~~DANFORTH. Indeed. 'That man have no authority to enter here, Marshal; why have you let him in? (*Hathorne sits bench L.*)~~

~~WILLARD. (*Laughing.*) Why Mister Parris command me, sir. I cannot deny him.~~

~~DANFORTH. Are you drunk, Marshal?~~

~~WILLARD. No, sir, it is a bitter night, and I have no fire here.~~

~~DANFORTH. Fetch Mister Parris.~~

~~WILLARD. (*Crossing toward entrance.*) Aye, sir.~~

~~DANFORTH. There is a prodigious *stench* in this place.~~

~~WILLARD. (*Stopping at door.*) I have only now cleared the people out for you.~~

~~DANFORTH. Beware hard drink, Marshal.~~

~~WILLARD. Aye, sir. (*Exit.*)~~

HATHORNE. Let you question Hale, Excellency; I should not be surprised he have been preachin' in Andover lately.

DANFORTH. We'll come to that; speak nothin' of Andover. Parris prays with him. 'That's strange. (*Blows on his hands.*)

HATHORNE. I think sometimes Parris has a mad look these days.

DANFORTH. Mad?

HATHORNE. I met him yesterday coming out of his house, and I bid him good morning—and he wept, and went his way. I think it is not well the village sees him so unsteady.

DANFORTH. Perhaps he have some sorrow.

CHEEVER. I think it be the *cows*, sir.

DANFORTH. 'The cows?

CHEEVER. 'There be so many *cows* wanderin' the highroads, now their masters are in the jails, and much disagreement who they will belong to now. I know Mister Parris be arguin' with farmers all yesterday—there is great contention, sir, about the cows. (*Danforth sits bench R.*) Contention make him weep, sir, it were always a man that weep for contention. (*He turns, as do Hathorne and Danforth,*

*hearing a man coming up the corridor off U. R. Danforth raises his head as Parris enters. He is gaunt, frightened and sweating.)*

PARRIS. *(To Danforth, instantly.)* Oh, good morning, sir, thank you for comin', I beg your pardon wakin' you so early. Good morning, Judge Hathorne...

DANFORTH. Reverend Hale have no right to enter this...

PARRIS. Excellency, a moment.

HATHORNE. Do you leave him alone with the prisoners?

DANFORTH. What's his business here?

PARRIS. *(Prayerfully holding up his hands.)* Excellency, hear me. It is a providence. Reverend Hale has returned to bring Rebecca Nurse to God.

DANFORTH. He bids her confess?

PARRIS. *(Sitting.)* Hear me. *(Cheever crosses, sits end of L. bench.)* Rebecca have not given me a word this three month since she came. Now she sits with him, and her sister and Martha Corey and two or three others, and he pleads with them confess their crimes and save their lives.

DANFORTH. Why—this is indeed a providence. And they soften, they soften?

PARRIS. Not yet, not yet. But I thought to summon you, sir, that we might think on whether it be not wise to... there is news, sir, that the court, the court must reckon with. My niece... I believe she has vanished.

DANFORTH. Vanished! *(Hathorne rises.)*

PARRIS. I had thought to advise you of it earlier in the week, but...

DANFORTH. Why?—how long is she gone?

PARRIS. This be the third night—Mercy Lewis is gone, too.

DANFORTH. *(Alarmed.)* I will send a party for them. Where may they be?

PARRIS. Excellency, I think they be aboard a ship. My daughter tells me now she heard them speakin' of ships last week, and tonight I discover my... my strongbox is broke into.

HATHORNE. *(Astonished.)* She have robbed you?!

PARRIS. Thirty-one pound is gone. I am penniless.

DANFORTH. *(Rising.)* Mister Paris, you are a brainless man!

PARRIS. Excellency, it profit nothing you should blame me. I cannot think they would run off except they fear to keep in Salem any more—since the news of Andover has broken here...

DANFORTH. Andover is remedied. The court returns there on Friday, and will resume examinations.

PARRIS. I am sure of it, sir. But the rumor here speaks rebellion in Andover, and it...

DANFORTH. (*Strongly protesting.*) There is no rebellion in Andover.

PARRIS. I tell you what is said here, sir. Andover have thrown out the *court*, they say, and will have no part of witchcraft. There be a faction here feeding on that news, and I tell you true, sir, I fear there will be riot here.

HATHORNE. Riot!—Why, at every execution I have seen naught but high satisfaction in the town. (*Danforth sits bench L.*)

PARRIS. Judge Hathorne—it were another sort that hanged till now. Rebecca Nurse is no Bridget that lived three year with Bishop before she married him. John Proctor is not Isaac Ward that drank his family to ruin. (*To Danforth.*) Let Rebecca stand upon the gibbet and send up some righteous prayer, and I fear she'll wake a vengeance on you.

HATHORNE. Excellency, she is condemned a witch. The court have...

DANFORTH. (*In deep concern, he raises a hand to Hathorne.*) Pray you. (*To Parris.*) How do you propose, then?

PARRIS. Excellency... I would postpone these hangin's for a time.

DANFORTH. There will be no postponement.

PARRIS. Now Mister Hale's returned, there is hope, I think—for if he bring even *one* of these to God, that confession surely *damns* the *others* in the public eye, and none may doubt more that they are all linked to Hell. This way, unconfessed and claiming innocence, doubts are *multiplied*, many honest people will weep for them, and our good purpose is *lost* in their tears.

DANFORTH. Cheever, give me the list. (*Cheever opens dispatch case, searches.*)

PARRIS. It cannot be forgot, sir, (*Danforth rises, gets list from Cheever, takes spectacles out and reads by light of lamp.*) that when I summoned the congregation for John Proctor's excommunication, there were hardly thirty people come to hear it. That speak a discontent, I think, and...

DANFORTH. There will be no postponement.

PARRIS. Excellency...

DANFORTH. Now, sir—which of these in your opinion may be

brought to God? I will myself strive with him till dawn. (*Crosses to Cheever, hands him list.*)

PARRIS. There is not sufficient time till dawn...

DANFORTH. I shall do my utmost. Which of them do you have hope for?

PARRIS. (*In a quavering voice, quietly.*) Excellency... a dagger... (*He chokes up.*)

DANFORTH. (*Irritated.*) What do you say?

PARRIS. Tonight, when I open my door to leave my house—a dagger clattered to the ground. (*Pleading plaintively.*) You cannot hang this sort. There is danger for *me*. I dare not step outside at night. (*Hale enters. They look at him for an instant in silence. He is steeped in sorrow, exhausted, and more direct than he ever was.*)

DANFORTH. Accept my congratulations, Reverend Hale; we are gladdened to see you returned to your good work.

HALE. You must pardon them. They will not budge.

DANFORTH. You misunderstand, sir; I cannot pardon these when twelve are already hanged for the same crime. It is not just.

PARRIS. Rebecca will not confess?

HALE. The sun will rise in a few minutes. Excellency, I must have more time.

DANFORTH. Now hear me, and beguile yourselves no more. I will not receive a single plea for pardon or postponement. Them that will not confess will hang. Twelve are already executed; the names of these seven are given out, and the village expects to see them die at dawn. Postponement, now, speaks a... a floundering (*Willard enters.*) on my part; reprieve or pardon must cast doubt upon the guilt of them that died till now. While I speak God's law, I will not crack its voice with whimpering. If retaliation is your fear, know this—I should hang ten thousand that dared to rise against the law, and an ocean of salt tears could not melt the resolution of the statutes. Now draw yourselves up like men and help me, as you are bound by heaven to do. —Have you spoken with them all, Mister Hale?

HALE. All but Proctor. He is in the dungeon.

DANFORTH. (*To Hathorne.*) What's Proctor's way now? (*Hale sits bench.*)

WILLARD. (*In doorway. Drunkenly.*) He sits like some great bird; you'd not know he lived except he will take food from time to time.

DANFORTH. (*Thinks.*) His wife... his wife must be well on with child now.