

Summary: Act IV

How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!

That fall, Danforth and Hathorne visit a Salem jail to see Parris. Parris, worn and gaunt, greets them. They demand to know why Reverend Hale has returned to Salem. Parris assures them that Hale only wants to persuade the holdout prisoners to confess and save themselves from the gallows. He reports that Abigail and Mercy vanished from Salem after robbing him. Hale now appears, haggard and sorrowful. He begs the men to pardon the prisoners because the prisoners will not confess. Danforth replies that postponement or pardons will cast doubt not only on the guilt of the seven remaining prisoners but also on that of the twelve who have hanged already. Hale warns that the officials are courting rebellion. As a result of the trials, cows are wandering loose, crops are rotting in the fields, and orphans are wandering without supervision. Many homes have fallen into neglect because their owners were in jail or had to attend the proceedings. Everyone lives in fear of being accused of witchcraft, and there are rumors of revolt in nearby Andover.

Hale has not yet spoken to Proctor. Danforth hopes that Elizabeth can persuade him to confess. Elizabeth agrees to speak with Proctor, but she makes no promises. Everyone leaves the room to allow Elizabeth and Proctor privacy. Elizabeth tells Proctor that almost one hundred people have confessed to witchcraft. She relates that Giles was killed by being pressed to death by large stones, though he never pleaded guilty or not guilty to the charges against him. Had he denied the charges, the court would have hanged him, and he would have forfeited his property. He decided not to enter a plea, so that his farm would fall to his sons. In order to force him to enter a plea, the court tortured him on the press, but he continually refused, and the weight on his chest eventually became so great that it crushed him. His last words were "more weight."

Proctor asks Elizabeth if she thinks that he should confess. He says that he does not hold out, like Rebecca and Martha, because of religious conviction. Rather, he does so out of spite because he wants his persecutors to feel the weight of guilt for seeing him hanged when they know he is innocent.

After wrestling with his conscience for a long time, Proctor agrees to confess. Hathorne and Danforth are overjoyed and Cheever grabs paper, pen, and ink to write the confession. Proctor asks why it has to be written. Danforth informs him that it will be hung on the church door.