The Crucible, Act IV

Setting: a Salem jail cell

* Herrick comes in, drunk, and nudges Sarah Good to wake her up. Tituba also wakes up. Herrick tells the two of them to get out of there. He asks where they’re going and Tituba says they’re going to Barbados.
* When they hear a cow bellowing, Tituba says it is “the majesty” and calls out for it to take her home.
* The Deputy Governor arrives. Danforth and Hathorne enter, followed by Cheever. They want to know when Hale arrived and what he was doing here.
* Herrick says that he sits and prays with those who are going to hang.
* Danforth says that man has no right to be here, so why does Herrick let him in? Parris commanded him to.
* Parris walks in and greets Danforth and Hathorne. Danforth immediately tells him that he shouldn’t let Hale in to see the prisoners, but Parris says that Hale has been urging Rebecca Nurse to confess and save her life.
* Then Parris admits that his niece Abigail has disappeared with Mercy Lewis. He thinks they’ve boarded a ship and escaped the area. Abigail even broke into his strongbox and took all his money.
* Parris thinks the rebellion in Andover, where they threw out the witchcraft court (a rebellion Danforth says is over) is what has caused Abigail to flee.
* Then Parris starts standing up for those who are left to hang. He says some of those who hanged earlier were bad sorts—they drank their family to ruin, or they lived in sin for some years before marrying—but Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor are good people. Hathorne responds that she is condemned as a witch, and Parris suggests that they postpone the hangings for some time. Danforth denies the request but does say that he will work until dawn with those who might still be brought to God.
* Then Parris says that his life is in danger, as he has received threats. If Danforth continues by hanging these folks….
* Hale enters and asks Danforth to pardon those who have yet to be punished, but Danforth says he can’t do that since others have already been hanged for the same crime.
* They turn their conversation to Proctor, and Danforth wonders if he might change his mind and confess if he sees his wife, who is now very pregnant. Parris thinks it’s possible, while Hale urges Danforth again to postpone. He suggests that if he doesn’t, he will urge people to rebel.
* Herrick enters with Elizabeth. Hale urges her to speak with her husband, to compel him to confess so he can live. He says he made mistakes in the past and he will count himself a murderer if Proctor hangs.
* Then Danforth joins in the urging, though with a different purpose—he thinks Proctor is guilty. He asks Elizabeth if she is a stone. Her husband is going to hang in the morning—doesn’t she want him to live?
* Elizabeth says she would like to see him, but she doesn’t promise to convince him of anything.
* John Proctor now enters, a changed man—bearded, dirty. He and Elizabeth look at each other with deep sorrow and emotion.
* Hale asks Danforth to give them some privacy, and so the men file out, though it takes Parris a little longer—he needs to receive an “icy stare” from Proctor before he gets the point.
* At first, Elizabeth and Proctor discuss the child that is yet to be born, and who is taking care of the other children. Elizabeth says many have confessed, a hundred or more, but Rebecca refuses to confess.
* Giles Corey was tortured to death when huge stones were put on his chest to try to make him confess. He refused to confess, but he also refused to deny the charge; doing so would have meant he could not have passed his farm on to his sons.
* Proctor says he has been thinking he would confess, and he wants to know what she would think of this. She says she would not judge him. He says he is not a good man, and if he goes to the hanging without confessing, he is saying he is a good man.
* He wants Elizabeth’s forgiveness. She says it is not hers to give.
* He asks again. She says he needs to forgive himself, but she almost sobs as she says it.
* Then Elizabeth says she knows he’s a good man. She says it takes a cold wife to turn a man into a lecher. He is taking her sins upon himself, she says. She believes that she didn’t love herself, so she couldn’t accept his love.
* Hathorne enters and asks Proctor what he would say. Dawn is breaking. Proctor says he wants his life, and Hathorne leaves, saying that Proctor is going to confess.
* Proctor turns to his wife and asks her if what he has done is evil, and she sobs, saying she will not judge.
* Hathorne, Danforth, Cheever, Parris, and Hale enter, praising God and saying that Proctor must sign his confession. But at that, Proctor balks. He does not want to write his confession out. He will confess verbally but he will not sign.
* Proctor is in the middle of making his verbal confession when Rebecca Nurse enters. She is shocked and dismayed to hear him confess.
* Danforth asks Proctor if he ever saw any of the others with the Devil, but Proctor denies ever seeing any of them with the Devil.
* Then Danforth says he cannot accept the confession, as it is a lie. Others have already said they saw these people, including Rebecca Nurse, with the Devil.
* If that is true, Proctor counters, then why does he need Proctor to also say it?
* Hale steps in and asks Danforth to accept Proctor’s confession. It is enough, he says, that he is convicting himself.
* Danforth accepts the confession, but Proctor still won’t sign. And Danforth won’t be satisfied without a signature. So Proctor signs, but then he won’t give the signed confession back to Danforth.
* When Danforth protests, Proctor says that God sees his sins and that is enough. He says he has three children and he cannot teach them what is right and good if he sells his friends out.
* Danforth suggests it is no different if he says Proctor said something or if Proctor signs it, but Proctor says that’s not true. This is his name, the only name he has; he has given Danforth his soul, but he won’t give him his name.
* And so Danforth says the document is a lie, and he can’t accept it.
* Proctor tears the paper and crumples it. Danforth calls for the Marshal, while Parris and Hale plead with Proctor to change his mind.
* But Proctor says he will go to his death with at least some goodness in him.
* As Elizabeth bursts into tears, he tells her not to cry because that gives them pleasure.
* Rebecca counsels him not to be afraid because “another judgment waits us all.”
* Danforth and Herrick leave. Rebecca starts to faint, and Proctor catches her. She apologizes, saying she has had no breakfast.
* Herrick takes the two of them out. Parris urges Elizabeth to go to her husband while there’s still time. They hear the burst of drums.
* Hale, also, pleads with her to go talk to her husband, to convince him not to give up his life for nothing.
* But Elizabeth says she cannot take his goodness from him, now that he has it.
* The drums crash and Hale “weeps in frantic prayer,” while the sunrise lights up Elizabeth’s face.
* The curtain falls.