



- 219 **Parris** (*trembling*). Rebecca, Rebecca, go to her, we're lost. She suddenly cannot bear to hear the Lord's—
- 220 (Giles Corey, *eighty-three, enters. He is knotted with muscle, canny, inquisitive, and still powerful.*)
- 221 **Rebecca**. There is hard sickness here, Giles Corey, so please to keep the quiet.
- 222 **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.
- 223 **Putnam**. Man, be quiet now!
- 224 (*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.*)

225 **A**nd 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,<sup>13</sup> 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.

226 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 between partisans of both sides, and it is said to have lasted for two days. As for Rebecca herself, the general opinion of her character was so high that to explain how anyone dared cry her out for a witch—and more, how adults could bring themselves to lay hands on her—we must look to the fields and boundaries of that time.

227 As we have seen, Thomas Putnam's man for the Salem ministry was Bayley. The Nurse clan had been in the faction that prevented Bayley's taking office. In addition, certain families allied to the Nurses by blood or friendship, and whose farms were contiguous with the Nurse farm or close to it, combined to break away from the Salem town authority and set up Topsfield, a new and independent entity whose existence was resented by old Salemites.

228 That the guiding hand behind the outcry was Putnam's is indicated by the fact that, as soon as it began, this Topsfield-Nurse faction absented themselves from church in protest and disbelief. It was Edward and Jonathan Putnam who signed the first complaint

<sup>13</sup>the time of the delusion: the era of the witchcraft accusations and trials.



## NOTICE & NOTE

against Rebecca; and Thomas Putnam's little daughter was the one who fell into a fit at the hearing and pointed to Rebecca as her attacker. To top it all, Mrs. Putnam—who is now staring at the bewitched child on the bed—soon accused Rebecca's spirit of "tempting her to iniquity," a charge that had more truth in it than Mrs. Putnam could know.

- 229 **Mrs. Putnam** (*astonished*). What have you done?
- 230 (Rebecca, *in thought, now leaves the bedside and sits.*)
- 231 **Parris** (*wondrous and relieved*). What do you make of it, Rebecca?
- 232 **Putnam** (*eagerly*). Goody Nurse, will you go to my Ruth and see if you can wake her?
- 233 **Rebecca** (*sitting*). I think she'll wake in time. Pray calm yourselves. I have eleven children, and I am twenty-six times a grandma, and I have seen them all through their silly seasons, and when it come on them they will run the Devil bowlegged keeping up with their mischief. I think she'll wake when she tires of it. A child's spirit is like a child, you can never catch it by running after it; you must stand still, and, for love, it will soon itself come back.
- 234 **Proctor**. Aye, that's the truth of it, Rebecca.
- 235 **Mrs. Putnam**. This is no silly season, Rebecca. My Ruth is bewildered, Rebecca; she cannot eat.
- 236 **Rebecca**. Perhaps she is not hungered yet. (*to Parris*) I hope you are not decided to go in search of loose spirits, Mr. Parris. I've heard promise of that outside.
- 237 **Parris**. A wide opinion's running in the parish that the Devil may be among us, and I would satisfy them that they are wrong.
- 238 **Proctor**. Then let you come out and call them wrong. Did you consult the wardens<sup>14</sup> before you called this minister to look for devils?
- 239 **Parris**. He is not coming to look for devils!
- 240 **Proctor**. Then what's he coming for?
- 241 **Putnam**. There be children dyin' in the village, Mister!
- 242 **Proctor**. I seen none dyin'. This society will not be a bag to swing around your head, Mr. Putnam. (*to Parris*) Did you call a meeting before you—?
- 243 **Putnam**. I am sick of meetings; cannot the man turn his head without he have a meeting?
- 244 **Proctor**. He may turn his head, but not to Hell!
- 245 **Rebecca**. Pray, John, be calm. (*Pause. He defers to her.*) Mr. Parris, I think you'd best send Reverend Hale back as soon as he come. This

### ANALYZE CHARACTERS AND MOTIVATIONS

**Annotate:** Mark details in paragraph 245 that show Rebecca is religious.

**Interpret:** How does her faith in God differ from Mr. Putnam's?

<sup>14</sup>wardens: officers appointed to keep order.



will set us all to arguin' again in the society, and we thought to have peace this year. I think we ought rely on the doctor now, and good prayer.

- 246 **Mrs. Putnam.** Rebecca, the doctor's baffled!
- 247 **Rebecca.** If so he is, then let us go to God for the cause of it. There is prodigious danger in the seeking of loose spirits. I fear it, I fear it. Let us rather blame ourselves and—
- 248 **Putnam.** How may we blame ourselves? I am one of nine sons; the Putnam seed have peopled this province. And yet I have but one child left of eight—and now she shrivels!
- 249 **Rebecca.** I cannot fathom that.
- 250 **Mrs. Putnam** (*with a growing edge of sarcasm*). But I must! You think it God's work you should never lose a child, nor grandchild either, and I bury all but one? There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires!
- 251 **Putnam** (*to Parris*). When Reverend Hale comes, you will proceed to look for signs of witchcraft here.
- 252 **Proctor** (*to Putnam*). You cannot command Mr. Parris. We vote by name in this society, not by acreage.
- 253 **Putnam.** I never heard you worried so on this society, Mr. Proctor. I do not think I saw you at Sabbath meeting since snow flew.
- 254 **Proctor.** I have trouble enough without I come five mile to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation. Take it to heart, Mr. Parris. There are many others who stay away from church these days because you hardly ever mention God any more.
- 255 **Parris** (*now aroused*). Why, that's a drastic charge!
- 256 **Rebecca.** It's somewhat true; there are many that quail to bring their children—
- 257 **Parris.** I do not preach for children, Rebecca. It is not the children who are unmindful of their obligations toward this ministry.
- 258 **Rebecca.** Are there really those unmindful?
- 259 **Parris.** I should say the better half of Salem village—
- 260 **Putnam.** And more than that!
- 261 **Parris.** Where is my wood? My contract provides I be supplied with all my firewood. I am waiting since November for a stick, and even in November I had to show my frostbitten hands like some London beggar!
- 262 **Giles.** You are allowed six pound a year to buy your wood, Mr. Parris.
- 263 **Parris.** I regard that six pound as part of my salary. I am paid little enough without I spend six pound on firewood.
- 264 **Proctor.** Sixty, plus six for firewood—



- 265 **Parris.** The salary is sixty-six pound, Mr. Proctor! I am not some preaching farmer with a book under my arm; I am a graduate of Harvard College.
- 266 **Giles.** Aye, and well instructed in arithmetic!
- 267 **Parris.** Mr. Corey, you will look far for a man of my kind at sixty pound a year! I am not used to this poverty; I left a thrifty business in the Barbados to serve the Lord. I do not fathom it, why am I persecuted here? I cannot offer one proposition but there be a howling riot of argument. I have often wondered if the Devil be in it somewhere; I cannot understand you people otherwise.
- 268 **Proctor.** Mr. Parris, you are the first minister ever did demand the deed to this house—
- 269 **Parris.** Man! Don't a minister deserve a house to live in?
- 270 **Proctor.** To live in, yes. But to ask ownership is like you shall own the meeting house itself; the last meeting I were at you spoke so long on deeds and mortgages I thought it were an auction.
- 271 **Parris.** I want a mark of confidence, is all! I am your third preacher in seven years. I do not wish to be put out like the cat whenever some majority feels the whim. You people seem not to comprehend that a minister is the Lord's man in the parish; a minister is not to be so lightly crossed and contradicted—
- 272 **Putnam.** Aye!
- 273 **Parris.** There is either obedience or the church will burn like Hell is burning!
- 274 **Proctor.** Can you speak one minute without we land in Hell again? I am sick of Hell!
- 275 **Parris.** It is not for you to say what is good for you to hear!
- 276 **Proctor.** I may speak my heart, I think!
- 277 **Parris** (*in a fury*). What, are we Quakers?<sup>15</sup> We are not Quakers here yet, Mr. Proctor. And you may tell that to your followers!
- 278 **Proctor.** My followers!
- 279 **Parris** (*Now he's out with it*). There is a party in this church. I am not blind; there is a faction and a party.
- 280 **Proctor.** Against you?
- 281 **Putnam.** Against him and all authority!
- 282 **Proctor.** Why, then I must find it and join it.
- 283 (*There is shock among the others.*)
- 284 **Rebecca.** He does not mean that.
- 285 **Putnam.** He confessed it now!

<sup>15</sup>**Quakers:** an English religious sect—much hated by the Puritans—who often “spoke their heart” during their religious meetings.



- 286 **Proctor.** I mean it solemnly, Rebecca; I like not the smell of this “authority.”
- 287 **Rebecca.** No, you cannot break charity<sup>16</sup> with your minister. You are another kind, John. Clasp his hand, make your peace.
- 288 **Proctor.** I have a crop to sow and lumber to drag home. (*He goes angrily to the door and turns to Corey with a smile.*) What say you, Giles, let’s find the party. He says there’s a party.
- 289 **Giles.** I’ve changed my opinion of this man, John. Mr. Parris, I beg your pardon. I never thought you had so much iron in you.
- 290 **Parris** (*surprised*). Why, thank you, Giles!
- 291 **Giles.** It suggests to the mind what the trouble be among us all these years. (*to all*) Think on it. Wherefore is everybody suing everybody else? Think on it now, it’s a deep thing, and dark as a pit. I have been six time in court this year—
- 292 **Proctor** (*familiarly, with warmth, although he knows he is approaching the edge of Giles’ tolerance with this*). Is it the Devil’s fault that a man cannot say you good morning without you clap him for defamation?<sup>17</sup> You’re old, Giles, and you’re not hearin’ so well as you did.
- 293 **Giles** (*He cannot be crossed*). John Proctor, I have only last month collected four pound damages for you publicly sayin’ I burned the roof off your house, and I—
- 294 **Proctor** (*laughing*). I never said no such thing, but I’ve paid you for it, so I hope I can call you deaf without charge. Now come along, Giles, and help me drag my lumber home.
- 295 **Putnam.** A moment, Mr. Proctor. What lumber is that you’re draggin’, if I may ask you?
- 296 **Proctor.** My lumber. From out my forest by the riverside.
- 297 **Putnam.** Why, we are surely gone wild this year. What anarchy is this? That tract is in my bounds, it’s in my bounds, Mr. Proctor.
- 298 **Proctor.** In your bounds! (*indicating Rebecca*) I bought that tract from Goody Nurse’s husband five months ago.
- 299 **Putnam.** He had no right to sell it. It stands clear in my grandfather’s will, that all the land between the river and—
- 300 **Proctor.** Your grandfather had a habit of willing land that never belonged to him, if I may say it plain.
- 301 **Giles.** That’s God’s truth; he nearly willed away my north pasture but he knew I’d break his fingers before he’d set his name to it. Let’s get your lumber home, John. I feel a sudden will to work coming on.
- 302 **Putnam.** You load one oak of mine and you’ll fight to drag it home!

<sup>16</sup>**break charity:** break off; end the relationship.

<sup>17</sup>**clap . . . defamation** (dĕf-ə-mā’shən): imprison him for slander.



- 303 **Giles.** Aye, and we'll win too, Putnam—this fool and I. Come on! (*He turns to Proctor and starts out.*)
- 304 **Putnam.** I'll have my men on you, Corey! I'll clap a writ on you!
- 305 (*Enter Reverend John Hale of Beverly.*)

306 **M**r. Hale is nearing forty, a tight-skinned, eager-eyed intellectual. This is a beloved errand for him; on being called here to ascertain witchcraft he felt the pride of the specialist whose unique knowledge has at last been publicly called for. Like almost all men of learning, he spent a good deal of his time pondering the invisible world, especially since he had himself encountered a witch in his parish not long before. That woman, however, turned into a mere pest under his searching scrutiny, and the child she had allegedly been afflicting recovered her normal behavior after Hale had given her his kindness and a few days of rest in his own house. However, that experience never raised a doubt in his mind as to the reality of the underworld or the existence of Lucifer's many-faced lieutenants. And his belief is not to his discredit. Better minds than Hale's were—and still are—convinced that there is a society of spirits beyond our ken. One cannot help noting that one of his lines has never yet raised a laugh in any audience that has seen this play; it is his assurance that "We cannot look to superstition in this. The Devil is precise." Evidently we are not quite certain even now whether diabolism is holy and not to be scoffed at. And it is no accident that we should be so bemused.

307 Like Reverend Hale and the others on this stage, we conceive the Devil as a necessary part of a respectable view of cosmology.<sup>18</sup> Ours is a divided empire in which certain ideas and emotions and actions are of God, and their opposites are of Lucifer. It is as impossible for most men to conceive of a morality without sin as of an earth without "sky." Since 1692 a great but superficial change has wiped out God's beard and the Devil's horns, but the world is still gripped between two diametrically opposed absolutes. The concept of unity, in which positive and negative are attributes of the same force, in which good and evil are relative, ever-changing, and always joined to the same phenomenon—such a concept is still reserved to the physical sciences and to the few who have grasped the history of ideas. When it is recalled that until the Christian era the underworld was never regarded as a hostile area, that all gods were useful and essentially friendly to man despite occasional lapses; when we see the steady and methodical inculcation into humanity of the idea of man's worthlessness—until redeemed—the necessity of the Devil may become evident as a weapon, a weapon designed and used time and time again in every age to whip men into a surrender to a particular church or church-state.

<sup>18</sup>**cosmology** (kōz-mōl'ə-jē): a branch of philosophy dealing with the structure of the universe.



- 313 *(He appears loaded down with half a dozen heavy books.)*
- 314 **Hale.** Pray you, someone take these!
- 315 **Parris** *(delighted)*. Mr. Hale! Oh! It's good to see you again! *(taking some books)* My, they're heavy!
- 316 **Hale** *(setting down his books)*. They must be; they are weighted with authority.
- 317 **Parris** *(a little scared)*. Well, you do come prepared!
- 318 **Hale.** We shall need hard study if it comes to tracking down the Old Boy. *(noticing Rebecca)* You cannot be Rebecca Nurse?
- 319 **Rebecca.** I am, sir. Do you know me?
- 320 **Hale.** It's strange how I knew you, but I suppose you look as such a good soul should. We have all heard of your great charities in Beverly.
- 321 **Parris.** Do you know this gentleman? Mr. Thomas Putnam. And his good wife Ann.
- 322 **Hale.** Putnam! I had not expected such distinguished company, sir.
- 323 **Putnam** *(pleased)*. It does not seem to help us today, Mr. Hale. We look to you to come to our house and save our child.
- 324 **Hale.** Your child ails too?
- 325 **Mrs. Putnam.** Her soul, her soul seems flown away. She sleeps and yet she walks . . .
- 326 **Putnam.** She cannot eat.
- 327 **Hale.** Cannot eat! *(Thinks on it. Then, to Proctor and Giles Corey.)* Do you men have afflicted children?
- 328 **Parris.** No, no, these are farmers. John Proctor—
- 329 **Giles Corey.** He don't believe in witches.
- 330 **Proctor** *(to Hale)*. I never spoke on witches one way or the other. Will you come, Giles?
- 331 **Giles.** No—no, John, I think not. I have some few queer questions of my own to ask this fellow.
- 332 **Proctor.** I've heard you to be a sensible man, Mr. Hale. I hope you'll leave some of it in Salem.
- 333 *(Proctor goes. Hale stands embarrassed for an instant.)*
- 334 **Parris** *(quickly)*. Will you look at my daughter, sir? *(leads Hale to the bed)* She has tried to leap out the window; we discovered her this morning on the highroad, waving her arms as though she'd fly.
- 335 **Hale** *(narrowing his eyes)*. Tries to fly.
- 336 **Putnam.** She cannot bear to hear the Lord's name, Mr. Hale; that's a sure sign of witchcraft afloat.
- 337 **Hale** *(holding up his hands)*. No, no. Now let me instruct you. We cannot look to superstition in this. The Devil is precise; the marks of



- his presence are definite as stone, and I must tell you all that I shall not proceed unless you are prepared to believe me if I should find no bruise of hell upon her.
- 338 **Parris.** It is agreed, sir—it is agreed—we will abide by your judgment.
- 339 **Hale.** Good then. (*He goes to the bed, looks down at Betty. To Parris.*) Now, sir, what were your first warning of this strangeness?
- 340 **Parris.** Why, sir—I discovered her—(*indicating Abigail*) and my niece and ten or twelve of the other girls, dancing in the forest last night.
- 341 **Hale** (*surprised*). You permit dancing?
- 342 **Parris.** No, no, it were secret—
- 343 **Mrs. Putnam** (*unable to wait*). Mr. Parris's slave has knowledge of conjurin', sir.
- 344 **Parris** (*to Mrs. Putnam*). We cannot be sure of that, Goody Ann—
- 345 **Mrs. Putnam** (*frightened, very softly*). I know it, sir. I sent my child—she should learn from Tituba who murdered her sisters.
- 346 **Rebecca** (*horrified*). Goody Ann! You sent a child to conjure up the dead?
- 347 **Mrs. Putnam.** Let God blame me, not you, not you, Rebecca! I'll not have you judging me any more! (*to Hale*) Is it a natural work to lose seven children before they live a day?
- 348 **Parris.** Sssh!
- 349 (*Rebecca, with great pain, turns her face away. There is a pause.*)
- 350 **Hale.** Seven dead in childbirth.
- 351 **Mrs. Putnam** (*softly*). Aye. (*Her voice breaks; she looks up at him. Silence. Hale is impressed. Parris looks to him. He goes to his books, opens one, turns pages, then reads. All wait, avidly.*)
- 352 **Parris** (*hushed*). What book is that?
- 353 **Mrs. Putnam.** What's there, sir?
- 354 **Hale** (*with a tasty love of intellectual pursuit*). Here is all the invisible world, caught, defined, and calculated. In these books the Devil stands stripped of all his brute disguises. Here are all your familiar spirits—your incubi and succubi; your witches that go by land, by air, and by sea; your wizards of the night and of the day. Have no fear now—we shall find him out if he has come among us, and I mean to crush him utterly if he has shown his face! (*He starts for the bed.*)
- 355 **Rebecca.** Will it hurt the child, sir?
- 356 **Hale.** I cannot tell. If she is truly in the Devil's grip we may have to rip and tear to get her free.
- 357 **Rebecca.** I think I'll go, then. I am too old for this. (*She rises.*)
- 358 **Parris** (*striving for conviction*). Why, Rebecca, we may open up the boil of all our troubles today!