**Act 2 Summary**

John Proctor sits down to dinner with his wife, Elizabeth. Mary Warren, their servant, has gone to the witch trials, defying Elizabeth’s order that she remain in the house. Fourteen people are now in jail. If these accused witches do not confess, they will be hanged. Whoever Abigail and her troop name as they go into hysterics is arrested for bewitching the girls.

Proctor can barely believe the craze, and he tells Elizabeth that Abigail had sworn her dancing had nothing to do with witchcraft. Elizabeth wants him to testify that the accusations are a sham. He says that he cannot prove his allegation because Abigail told him this information while they were alone in a room. Elizabeth loses all faith in her husband upon hearing that he and Abigail were alone together. Proctor demands that she stop judging him. He says that he feels as though his home is a courtroom, but Elizabeth responds that the real court is in his own heart.

When Mary Warren returns home, she gives Elizabeth a doll that she sewed in court, saying that it is a gift. She reports that thirty-nine people now stand accused. John and Mary argue over whether Mary can continue attending the trials. He threatens to whip her, and Mary declares that she saved Elizabeth’s life that day. Elizabeth’s name was apparently mentioned in the accusations (Mary will not name the accuser), but Mary spoke out in Elizabeth’s defense. Proctor instructs Mary to go to bed, but she demands that he stop ordering her around. Elizabeth, meanwhile, is convinced that it was Abigail who accused her of witchcraft, in order to take her place in John’s bed.

Hale visits the Proctors because he wants to speak with everyone whose name has been mentioned in connection with witchcraft. He has just visited Rebecca Nurse. Hale proceeds to ask questions about the Christian character of the Proctor home. He notes that the Proctors have not often attended church and that their youngest son is not yet baptized. Proctor explains that he does not like Parris’s particular theology. Hale asks them to recite the Ten Commandments. Proctor obliges but forgets the commandment prohibiting adultery.

At Elizabeth’s urging, Proctor informs Hale that Abigail told him that the children’s sickness had nothing to do with witchcraft. Taken aback, Hale replies that many have already confessed. Proctor points out that they would have been hanged without a confession. Giles and Francis rush into Proctor’s home, crying that their wives have been arrested. Rebecca is charged with the supernatural murders of Mrs. Putnam’s babies. A man bought a pig from Martha Corey and it died not long afterward; he wanted his money back, but she refused, saying that he did not know how to care for a pig. Every pig he purchased thereafter died, and he accused her of bewitching him so that he would be incapable of keeping one alive.

Ezekiel Cheever and Herrick, the town marshal, arrive with a warrant for Elizabeth’s arrest. Hale is surprised because, last he heard, Elizabeth was not charged with anything. Cheever asks if Elizabeth owns any dolls, and Elizabeth replies that she has not owned dolls since she was a girl. Cheever spies the doll Mary Warren gave her. He finds a needle inside it. Cheever relates that Abigail had a fit at dinner in Parris’s house that evening. Parris found a needle in her abdomen, and Abigail accused Elizabeth of witchcraft. Elizabeth brings Mary downstairs. Mary informs the inquisitors that she made the doll while in court and stuck the needle in it herself.

As Elizabeth is led away, Proctor loses his temper and rips the warrant. He asks Hale why the accuser is always considered innocent. Hale appears less and less certain of the accusations of witchcraft. Proctor tells Mary that she has to testify in court that she made the doll and put the needle in it. Mary declares that Abigail will kill her if she does and that Abigail would only charge him with lechery. Proctor is shocked that Abigail told Mary about the affair, but he demands that she testify anyway. Mary cries hysterically that she cannot.

**Analysis**

Abigail and her troop have achieved an extremely unusual level of power and authority for young, unmarried girls in a Puritan community. They can destroy the lives of others with a mere accusation, and even the wealthy and influential are not safe. Mary Warren is so full of her newfound power that she feels able to defy Proctor’s assumption of authority over her. She invokes her own power as an official of the court, a power that Proctor cannot easily deny.

Proctor’s sense of guilt begins to eat away at him. He knows that he can bring down Abigail and end her reign of terror, but he fears for his good name if his hidden sin of adultery is revealed. The pressing knowledge of his own guilt makes him feel judged, but Elizabeth is correct when she points out that the judge who pursues him so mercilessly is himself. Proctor has a great loathing for hypocrisy, and, here, he judges his own hypocrisy no less harshly than that of others.

Proctor’s intense dilemma over whether to expose his own sin to bring down Abigail is complicated by Hale’s decision to visit everyone whose name is even remotely associated with the accusations of witchcraft. Hale wants to determine the character of each accused individual by measuring it against Christian standards. His invasion of the home space in the name of God reveals the essential nature of the trials—namely, to root out hidden sins and expose them. Any small deviation from doctrine is reason for suspicion. Proctor tries to prove the upright character of his home by reciting the Ten Commandments. In forgetting to name adultery, however, just as he “forgot” it during his affair with Abigail, he not only exposes the deficiency of his Christian morality but also suggests the possibility that his entire household has succumbed to the evil influence of the devil and witchcraft.

When Proctor asks indignantly why the accusers are always automatically innocent, he comments upon the essential attractiveness of taking the side of the accusers. Many of the accusations have come through the ritual confession of guilt—one confesses guilt and then proves one’s “innocence” by accusing others. The accusing side enjoys a privileged position of moral virtue from this standpoint. Proctor laments the lack of hard evidence, but, of course (as Danforth will later point out), in supernatural crimes, the standards of evidence are not as hard and fast. The only “proof” is the word of the alleged victims of witchcraft. Thus, to deny these victims’ charges is almost a denial of the existence of witchcraft itself—quite a heretical claim. Therefore, those who take the side of the accusers can enjoy the self-justifying mission of doing God’s will in rooting out the devil’s work, while those who challenge them are threatening the very foundations of Salem society.

Hale, meanwhile, is undergoing an internal crisis. He clearly enjoyed being called to Salem because it made him feel like an expert. His pleasure in the trials comes from his privileged position of authority with respect to defining the guilty and the innocent. However, his surprise at hearing of Rebecca’s arrest and the warrant for Elizabeth’s arrest reveals that Hale is no longer in control of the proceedings. Power has passed into the hands of others, and as the craze spreads, Hale begins to doubt its essential justice.