

JOHN PROCTOR
30s

ELIZABETH PROCTOR
30s

The Crucible

Arthur Miller

First presented in England at the Bristol Old Vic in 1954 and set in Salem, Massachusetts.

The play is based on the witch-hunt of 1692, where a small community is stirred into madness and innocent people are 'cried out' as witches and hanged. John Proctor, a well-respected farmer, has allowed himself to be seduced by the wiles of his 17-year-old servant, Abigail Williams. His wife, Elizabeth, has dismissed the girl, and now Abigail has accused her of witchcraft.

In this scene, Elizabeth, realising that Abigail wants her dead so that she can take her place, insists that John makes a final break with her so that she no longer has a hold over him.

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Act Two

ELIZABETH [*quietly*] Oh, the noose, the noose is up!

PROCTOR There'll be no noose.

ELIZABETH She wants me dead. I knew all week it would come to this!

PROCTOR [*without conviction*] They dismissed it. You heard her say—

ELIZABETH And what of tomorrow? She will cry me out until they take me!

PROCTOR Sit you down.

ELIZABETH She wants me dead, John, you know it!

PROCTOR I say sit down! [*She sits, trembling. He speaks quietly, trying to keep his wits.*] Now we must be wise, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH [*with sarcasm, and a sense of being lost*] Oh, indeed, indeed!

PROCTOR Fear nothing. I'll find Ezekiel Cheever. I'll tell him she said it were all sport.

ELIZABETH John, with so many in the jail, more than Cheever's help is needed now, I think. Would you favour me with this? Go to Abigail.

PROCTOR [*his soul hardening as he senses . . .*] What have I to say to Abigail?

ELIZABETH [*delicately*] John – grant me this. You have a faulty understanding of young girls. There is a promise made in any bed—

PROCTOR [*striving against his anger*] What promise?

ELIZABETH Spoke or silent, a promise is surely made. And she may dote on it now – I am sure she does – and thinks to kill me, then to take my place.

[*Proctor's anger is rising; he cannot speak.*]

ELIZABETH It is her dearest hope, John, I know it. There be a thousand names; why does she call mine? There be a certain danger in calling such a name – I am no Goody Good that sleeps in ditches, nor Osburn, drunk and half-witted. She'd dare not call out such a farmer's wife but there be monstrous profit in it. She thinks to take my place, John.

PROCTOR She cannot think it! [*He knows it is true.*]

ELIZABETH [*reasonably*] John, have you ever shown her somewhat of contempt? She cannot pass you in the church but you will blush—

PROCTOR I may blush for my sin.

ELIZABETH I think she sees another meaning in that blush.

PROCTOR And what see you? What see you, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH [*conceding*] I think you be somewhat ashamed, for I am there, and she so close.

PROCTOR When will you know me, woman? Were I stone I would have cracked for shame this seven month!

ELIZABETH Then go and tell her she's a whore. Whatever promise she may sense – break it, John, break it.

PROCTOR [*between his teeth*] Good, then. I'll go. [*He starts for his rifle.*]

ELIZABETH [*trembling, fearfully*] Oh, how unwillingly!

PROCTOR [*turning on her, rifle in hand*] I will curse her hotter than the oldest cinder in hell. But pray, begrudge me not my anger!

ELIZABETH Your anger! I only ask you—

PROCTOR Woman, am I so base? Do you truly think me base?

ELIZABETH I never called you base.

PROCTOR Then how do you charge me with such a promise? The promise that a stallion gives a mare I gave that girl!

ELIZABETH Then why do you anger with me when I bid you break it?

PROCTOR Because it speaks deceit, and I am honest! But I'll plead no more! I see now your spirit twists around the single error of my life, and I will never tear it free!

ELIZABETH [*crying out*] You'll tear it free – when you come to know that I will be your only wife, or no wife at all! She has an arrow in you yet, John Proctor, and you know it well!