

CHILDREN of SALEM

Love in the time of the Witch Trials

by Robert W. Walker

BOOK ONE

Prologue

Boston, March 5, 1692

“You want me to go into Salem Village Parish disguised as a man of the cloth and that doesn’t offend you?” Jeremiah Wakely hoped the level of his shock didn’t show on his face.

“Not in the least!” Reverend Cotton Mather fired back, registering the surprise on Wakely’s starkly handsome Black Irish features.

“Not in the least,” parroted Jeremiah in a near whisper, pushing aside a shock of raven-black hair.

“Not so long as it provides us with what we need, Brother Wakely.” The two men had walked the length of the public area of the great North Church of Boston from rear pew to altar.

“Look here, Jeremiah, my friend, you’ll have no problem ingratiating yourself with this Reverend Samuel Parris.”

“I am not so sure, sir? Not from what I’ve seen of him in the court records your father provided me.”

“Parris has *asked* for another pair of hands at his troubled meetinghouse, so the man’s expecting us to send someone,” Reverend Cotton Mather assured Jeremiah Wakely as he walked him deeper into the bowels of the First Church of Boston. “And you with your gift of appearing

anything but who you are...and with your knowledge of law and theology—who better to pull off this subterfuge?”

“My going into Salem Village Parish disguised as a man of the cloth doesn’t offend you . . . or your father?” Jeremiah asked.

“Not so long as it provides us with what we need, Brother Wakely.”

“I’m just not anxious to go back to the place of my birth as...as an agent for the Boston Church.” It was hardly the only reason Jeremy wished to steer clear of Salem. Bad history for one, and Serenity for another—Serena, he and her brothers called her.

Jeremy had seen Serena’s family name on more than one of the petitions and complaints labeled at the relatively new minister at Salem, this dubious fellow named Parris. Truth be known, Jeremy’s true reluctance to take on this assignment had all to do with Serena Nurse— youngest daughter to Rebecca and Francis Nurse. His plan—*if ever to make her his*—had not included spying while playing the role of an apprentice minister. Even so, his heart swelled at the thought of finding her after all this time.

He pictured her smile, the radiant blue eyes, sun-dappled hair, and trim body. He recalled their last kiss at the Frost Fish River’s edge, and their first kiss in the great hayloft. He recalled her laughing and running from him. He pictured her swinging down on a knotted rope that her father had made for the children’s sport.

The Nurses had been a large and generous family, and he’d loved Serena. But it had been a decade since he’d left Serena behind without word of *why*.

“Please, Jeremy,” Mather was speaking in his ear, having to tiptoe to reach Jeremy’s height while holding open the door to the great hall leading to the sanctuary and the library.

“Who better for this work than you?”

“There’s Boswell, Connery!” Jeremy held hat in hand and still the doorway must be negotiated carefully for his six-foot frame.

“But you know the terrain and the people—you were once one of them.”

“I was never one of them, sir.”

Jeremiah caught sight of himself and Mather in the great mirror at the end of the polished red corridor. An odd-looking couple ill-fitted to one another. Wakely’s muscular lanky frame beside Mather’s hefty, barrel-chested body created the look of a blackguard highwayman conspiring with a cloaked minister whose tender limp spoke of the gout. Certainly, Mather appeared too young for the disease but in fact, he ate far too well. Jeremiah must slow his own stride to keep from out-pacing the minister who’d placed so much coin in his hands.

“You know what I mean. Father insists you are our man—the best hope in this affair.” Mather’s appeal bounced off the wall and echoed down the corridor. He may as well be shouting.

Jeremiah wondered how effective he could be on this—*hopefully*—his last assignment on behalf of Increase Mather—Cotton Mather’s father and head of the church in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

This wasn’t the first time he’d been summoned to the back rooms of the largest church in all of Boston to do a job for the Mather family. The pay was generous, and the favors and promises real gifts. To have Increase Mather’s respect and gratitude, not to mention the top minister and legal mind in the country indebted to him? These rewards were too good a prize for a young and ambitious man to turn from. Jeremiah had searched for years to find his place in the world, here in the Bay Colony, and to see his way to his fortune and his comfort. He’d long before stopped dreaming of all that he wanted in life, but here was a chance at a gold ring or two.

“Get inside that disturbed parish, Mr. Wakely,” Cotton Mather instructed.

“To be honest, sir—” Jeremiah felt odd calling Cotton, a shorter and even younger man than himself, *sir*, but Cotton Mather was the heir apparent here—“I’d rather tangle with pagan Indians than face *certain* Salem villagers.” *Returning unannounced and doing the sort of work I do? What might it cost in the end? Any last vestige of hope of making peace with Serena? It’d surely amount to old wounds reopened. Or seeing the ugly truth of it—wounds so well healed over as to give her no discomfort whatsoever?*

Mather laughed at Jeremiah’s last remark and showed his guest through an inner door, a magnificent library, something to challenge the library at Harvard College. Jeremiah scanned the room, wishing he could read every book here when his eye fell on an infamous title: *General Rules for Excommunication and Witch Craft Proceedings*. One tomb he cared not to read.

“You’ve done well keeping us apprised of Indian movements, Jeremy.” Mather indicated a leather chair, but Jeremiah continued scanning book titles instead, mesmerized. “But this matter of that troubled village parish has become a disease, and we must know the facts.”

“So many differing sides from what I’ve seen so far,” Jeremy muttered.

“Exactly! It’s become a hydra of tongues in our courts.”

Mather’s unusual metaphor for the troubles among the parishioners at Salem Village and some in Salem Seaport threw Jeremiah into a reverie. From all the papers that he had read of the cases that had continually plagued the courts, it appeared that since the day Reverend Samuel Parris signed his contract at Salem, discord ruled. The minister himself had become an angry, bitter, and displeased fellow; displeased with a large contingent of his congregation.

“Perhaps the man is angry by nature,” Mather continued, shrugging, “but now he’s angry over this infernal contract.”

“Questions every word and point, it seems,” Jeremy agreed, turning from the books to face Mather. “And he wishes to sue individuals and whole families.”

“Repeatedly!” Mather’s hefty mid-section bounced with his laughter. “And the man’s repeatedly choking the court system. He’s obsessed! Imagine a man using the courts to combat those who’ve employed him.”

Jeremy had seen Parris’ court papers a few days before when Increase Mather asked him for an opinion. It was the first time he’d seen the Nurses named in the suit—Serena’s father, Francis in particular. In fact, his initial reaction to seeing anyone finding any fault with Francis Nurse left Jeremy scratching his head. This man and his wife had been the kindest of people toward Jeremy.

The opposition had tired of Parris’ three-year reign over the village parish, and according to these parishioners, it’d been a tyrannical rule at best. A Puritan meetinghouse held certain democratic principles, at least among the elder male and female adults, but even these freedoms of the ‘freemen’ and ‘freewomen’ in Salem Village, some felt, were under threat of complete loss so long as Parris presided there.

Mather broke into Jeremiah’s thoughts with, “My father and the minister at Salem Town Church—”

“Reverend Nehemiah Higginson, is it? Is he still at the pulpit?”

“Yes, *aha!* You *do* know people in Salem.”

“Only in passing as a boy.” Jeremy recalled Higginson’s booming voice filling the meetinghouse in the village on occasions when he’d visit from his seaport parish. He recalled a sturdy, strong, and straight up man in black with graying hair and huge shoulders. Serena Nurse

had once said of Higginson that he was a minister whose compassion would put angels to shame, but that was ten years ago, and Serena was, like Jeremy at the time, a fifteen year old.

“At any rate,” continued Mather, “it’s at Reverend Higginson’s behest that we find evidence against Parris.”

“How much evidence—and evidence of what nature?” Jeremiah pressed Cotton Mather.

“Enough to topple him from the parish altogether. Whatever it takes.”

“I shan’t fabricate evidence, sir.”

“No need of crafting it with this man,” countered Mather. “He is his own worst enemy.”

“Then this matter is already decided?” Jeremy sat now.

“My father and Mr. Higginson are old friends and colleagues.” He offered Jeremiah a dram of ale poured from a pewter pitcher. Jeremiah took the offering and drank deeply.

“I understand they go back to Seminary School together at Harvard College.”

Cotton nodded appreciatively. “You’ve done your homework.”

“Harvard, where eventually and for many years after, your father presided as president before taking over as spiritual leader of the First Church here. Little wonder your father is suspicious of this Samuel Parris.”

“Father finds it curious that Mr. Parris *claims* to’ve been ordained at Harvard when there is no record of his finishing there.”

“It’s not unusual for a minister to complete his ordination elsewhere. And if memory serves, wasn’t there a fire at the Divinity School that wiped out some records?”

Harvard had begun as a Divinity School and to date was the only school of higher learning in the colonies; aside from getting a berth to Europe or England, there was no other

place for a man seeking higher learning to go. Jeremiah had put in two years of study of law and history there himself since leaving Salem as a young man.

“Look Jeremy,” Cotton continued, his tone pressing like a knife now, “Reverend Nehemiah Higginson has tried to pin Parris down to *exactly* what year he was ordained—*anywhere!*—to no avail. *Said* and I quote—”

“Never mind, quoting me, Cotton!” came a booming voice and a man with a noisy cane entered through a door where he’d been listening at the keyhole, or so Jeremiah surmised. “Mr. Wakely, I am Higginson.”

They shook hands, and Higginson added, “Young Mr. Mather here is not emphasizing our *need* hardly enough—and that time is our enemy.”

“But, sir,” countered Mather, “I thought we agreed—”

“Never mind what we agreed. Look here, Wakely, I recall you...”

“You do, sir?” Jeremy was skeptical.

“Recall your father, your birth mother, *and* your beautiful stepmother, all dead now. And I recall you as a boy in Salem. You tended bell and fire on Watch Hill for Deacon Ingersoll.”

“I am flattered, sir, that you recall it. I remember you as well.” But this man did not look like the strong giant of Jeremy’s memory. This man was ashen with only tufts of snow white hair, sunken eyes, shriveled lips and voice, a scarecrow’s body held up by a rickety cane. The years had battered the minister as if in some cosmic war and on the verge of losing.

“Son, it wasn’t my parish in Salem Town who excommunicated your father.” A pained look came over the weary features. “Rather ’twere those unmerciful souls inhabiting in the village at that time—many who’ve passed on to whatever reward awaited them.”

“Them, yes, that refused my stepmother a seat in the meetinghouse, and later my father a burial plot. Yes, sir. I know the sort well.” Jeremy’s eyes bore into Higginson. No one in authority had intervened on behalf of a poor dish-turner, he thought but held his tongue.

“And so you have scars from that place—*a good thing!* You must do all you can for this cause, young man. Else...else I’m off to my grace afore seeing the village holdings returned to our control. Wrested free of this *misguided* Barbados businessman’s control. He must relinquish any fanciful belief in his ownership in perpetuity of *our* property!”

“But then why did the Select Committee make such a deal in the first place?” Jeremiah lamented the question even as it escaped him. He set aside his empty cup.

“The pact was with only half his congregation.”

“So I am hearing.”

“The half that signed away the parish property and parsonage,” the aged, white-haired minister fired back. “In essence, he and the others’ve *stolen* property of the First Church—me, man, me! And the entire congregation!”

“Sounds outrageous.”

Higginson remained sharp, picking up on Jeremy’s sarcasm. “See here, Mr. Wakely, you must have some allegiance to your old parish. The parish that molded you.”

“My allegiance is to Reverend Increase Mather, sir.” Whenever dealing with theologians, Jeremy felt as if walking a tightrope. It was a struggle to keep one foot in the real world without insulting such men. *Does this old minister really believe that I owe Salem Village a thing?* How he wished that Increase hadn’t abandoned him to these two—one officious, the other in his dotage. Among church and statesmen, Increase Mather alone was the exception—as practical as he was intelligent. His son, Cotton, was an empty shadow of his father.

But the covenant tonight was with these two—Higginson and Cotton Mather as Increase was gone—almost as if he'd planned it. Such poor timing, to be away now—two days under sail, months before he might return.

Higginson took Jeremy aside, a palsied hand on his shoulder. “You do understand that the parsonage, even the meetinghouse, and everything on the grounds Parris claims as his.”

“Deeded over to him by his congregation so I've read.”

“An unlawful contract!” shouted the old man who fell into a coughing jag. “And being enforced by his deacons.”

Mather added from where he stood, “Even claims the parish apple orchard!”

Higginson seconded this with a pounding cane to the floor. “Yet those lands and buildings rightfully belong to Salem Town Parish!”

Jeremy squinted at this. “Your parish, sir?”

“Created as an offshoot of the main parish, yes!”

Jeremiah nodded appreciatively. “Then any such dealings rightfully go through your council of elders and deacons?”

“Yes, Jeremiah, before you were born that parish village home and meetinghouse was built to create a convenient place of worship for those living in the village.”

It never gave me or mine any comfort, he thought.

“Especially during particularly rough winters,” added Higginson.

Cotton Mather erupted with, “And now they've given it—lock, stock, and barrel—to this man Parris!”

What few teeth Higginson still had, Jeremiah feared he'd crack, so hard was he gnashing them now. “And then there's this claim that he is a Harvard educated minister, *ordained*—ha!”

“Then you think him a fraud?”

“Parris has no more right to the property than any of the eight or nine ministers who came before him.”

Mather brandished paperwork over his head. “The original grants—same as those offered the minister before Parris, all broken! Every commandment, every contract! Thanks to the party that recruited Parris.”

“Led by men Parris has named as deacons and elders, some of whom are the man’s *relatives!*” Higginson found a seat, looking faint.

“Outrage . . . untenable,” Jeremiah knew the words to this game. If Increase Mather and such dignitaries as Higginson wanted this man Paris out, they’d find a way to uproot him with or without any dirt that Jeremiah might dig up.

“Porter is his cousin,” sneered Higginson, a bit of uncontrolled spittle escaping his mouth. “He and that fool Thomas Putnam, brother-in-law, went clear to Barbados to entice the devil to come to Salem!”

“These men you name,” began Jeremiah, “they led the delegation to Barbados?”

“Trust me . . . they’re all abed together in all these nefarious affairs.”

Jeremiah asked at this point. “Will you, sirs, and your father, Reverend Mather, will all three of you back me if I am exposed?”

Higginson didn’t hesitate. “If you can prove this hiring of Samuel Parris three years ago was an ill-conceived contract, that there are holes, young man, you have my undying gratitude—which means that of Increase Mather as well.”

“Demonstrate your ability with the law,” added Cotton Mather, “demonstrate that it is an illegal contract. And yes, absolutely, we’ll back you, Wakely. And the more evidence we can bring to bear . . .well....”

“We need your experienced eye and ear in that parish, man,” added Higginson. “Meet me at midnight tomorrow night before going into the village.”

“Midnight? Where?”

“At Watch Hill—” he coughed roughly—“before you enter the village for the parish house. When we meet in public, no one can know that we’ve had any contact.”

“Understood but Watch Hill at the witching hour?”

“This fiend, Parris, believes himself the owner of the entire parish and its buildings.” More coughing interrupted the old man. “I will have additional papers, affidavits you should see and read before you go much further.”

“I hope your confidence in me is not misplaced, Reverend Higginson.”

Mather laughed and poured more ale for them all. “Come, come. This is a challenge for a man of your talents, and if you rise to it, Wakely, your star will rise as well. You will’ve finalized your indenture to our family and take up your final education in the law. My father will see to it that you are well rewarded.”

Jeremiah kept his eyes pinned on the elder statesman of the church. Higginson did not flinch or blink. “Increase spoke of a magistrate’s seat opening up...an appointment in a district along the Connecticut, I believe. Once this is over.”

Jeremiah turned to Mather. “I’d like that in writing, sir.”

Again Mather laughed. “That’s why my father likes you, Jeremy! Preparation and reparation. You’re wise enough to cover your backside.”

The powerful Mathers had obviously discussed this matter at length with the patriarch Higginson some time before Reverend Increase Mather had sailed for England in a bid to negotiate a new Charter for the colonies with the *new* King of England. The Mathers and Higginson believed that an *insider* was needed, one of the powerful ministers, in the end, could control.

Mather now lifted his ale cup and toasted: “Get word back to us, Jeremy.”

Jeremy stayed his hand for any final toast. He feared his coming off as ridiculous in Serena’s eyes—*no matter her current situation*—when he should show up in that cursed village as a Prodigal Son who’d turned to the clergy. There as an *apprentice* working toward being ordained a Puritan minister. Far from the promises made to Serena in the letter he’d penned and left behind, that he’d return when he made his way in the world as a man worthy of her. As a result of these careening thoughts, Jeremiah’s ale cup was the last to go up in toast to seal this backroom deal.

The sloshing cup in Higginson’s hand shook like a windblown sheaf of paper. The old man’s other hand, planted firmly on his cane, shook as well, so hard that it sent the cane from side to side. Still, the three men drank to success while Jeremiah thought, but dared not say: *Higginson’s one foot is in the grave, the other slipping, while Cotton Mather is the definition of an opportunist. What private conversations have they had? What do they figure to collect from their schemes? Have I struck a bargain with the devil?*

All three men now emptied their cups, but this caused even more ghastly coughing coming from deep within Higginson’s gut. Regardless of Higginson’s difficulty, they all shook hands after Mather, at the last moment, snatched on a white glove.

Then Jeremiah Wakely put aside his cup and said, "I'd best be off...prepare for my trip back to Salem."

As Jeremiah rushed off, he gave a fleeting thought to Serena Nurse. She represented the only true penitence that'd come of his having left Salem a decade ago. She'd likely be well married by now, perhaps with a toddler if not two, and she'd scarcely give him a glance. As for his giving her a glance, it'd likely be from afar if at all.

She'd be *untouchable* of course, and she'd surely have forgotten all about him by now. Serena hadn't been the only reason he'd not wanted this duty, but she remained the only reason he'd not spoken of. To speak of the depth of his pain and longing to such men as Mather and Higginson might well have gotten him a cheery pat on the back and a bit of a chuckle but hardly understanding. At least he imagined as much now as he made his way along the closed-in, dark streets of Boston's North End, going for his lodgings.

The few lamps that lit his way only made the darker corners and hideaways blacker still: places that cloaked piratical Portuguese sailors waiting for a berth alongside the usual scoundrels and human jetsam. His path took him within speaking and hearing distance of such men lolling about a tavern or locked away in the North End jail. All signs said that a cutthroat might leap out at him at the next footfall. Someone who might as casually kill him for what loose coin jingled in his pouch as say "*G'evenin' gov'ner.*"

As he passed ships in the harbor, the rigging beating an ominous sound in a building wind, he thought of how Reverend Mather had meant to keep Reverend Higginson's presence in Boston their little secret until the old man came storming from behind that door.

Did everyone in the church have a secret passion or something to hide? What did it gain Mather the Younger to align himself with the most powerful churchman in Salem Town, a

seaport doing twice the business with England and foreign ports as Boston these days? A seaport destined to become the center of all commerce in the Massachusetts Bay Colony?

Sleep on it, he told himself.

It'd been a long journey to Boston from Casco Bay, Maine, where his last assignment had taken him to another *troubled* parish. Then the Puritan leadership kept close watch on a former minister of Salem Village, Reverend George Burroughs.

The minister had left Salem in disgrace and under a dark cloud; in fact, he'd left from a jail cell. Nonpayment of debts that'd accrued from two funerals—one for his wife and the other his children, all dead of a plague. Reverend Burroughs had resettled in Maine as a *possible heretic*. However, Jeremiah's reports, he believed, vindicated the man, and so he imagined that was one fire he'd doused—and that perhaps his work served a noble purpose after all. But thus far, only Reverend Cotton Mather had read his reports on the matter and no action one way or the other had been taken in the Burroughs affair.

To be sure, George Burroughs proved a colorful character indeed for a man who earned his living from behind a pulpit. Jeremy thought him a minister who might fit in with that colony of misfits—Rhode Island.

By the time Jeremiah found his bed and undressed for sleep, as sleeping naked was his preference, it'd grown quite late. He lay on his rough mattress and pillow in the crowded Red Lion Inn, wakeful yet.

Again he was thinking far more of Serena Nurse than he was of riding off to Salem out of some sense of duty. He worried far more about his first confrontation with her than any eccentric minister or possible heretic, or of Mather's cow-towing to Higginson, for that matter.

In fact, the image of Serena, ten years younger than today, swept out all other thought. He remembered her golden hair, often flowing loose, always luxurious and framing a heart-shaped, smiling face. He recalled how she smelled as fresh and wonderful as the new morning's dew that once they rolled about in as foolish and young hearts. He recalled how creamy and smooth her skin was against his, and how sweet her lips to his taste. Her hands so tender and warm, her arms welcoming. All romantic memories that wanted so much to push away the awful reality of the situation.

Bittersweet memories of Serena afforded some comfort, despite his losing her, despite the ache in his heart. It was an image to lull and to anchor a man. Even a man without a home; to lull him into a desire for slumber over drink or gambling or worse vices still. *Serena*, he asked himself as he dozed off, *do you remember or care to remember what we once had?*

Chapter One

Swampscott, Essex County, Massachusetts, March 6, 1692 at the midnight hour

At two-score-ten and four, the woman in tattered clothes chewed tobacco, lit a candle, shakily stood alone in the abandoned McTeagh cabin, then waddled straight for her hidden magic needles and the doll.

The doll she'd paid dearly for was fashioned by Sam Wardwell, both blacksmith and cunning man, some openly called the Wizard of Andover. Sarah had made several trips to make payments, and each time Wardwell would display the doll in its progress from wood to realism. Sarah Goode believed the man a magician.

Further, Wardwell asked no questions beyond her specifications. He kept mum, too, and never knew that his creation was in the image of Betty Parris; that it was a doll that'd do harm to Reverend Samuel Parris' eleven-year-old, little Elizabeth Junior, named for her mother.

The doll, once stuck full with pins—as *Parris's Barbados servant, Tituba Indian, had instructed*—would thereby inflict pain on the minister's daughter; thereby inflicting suffering on the minister himself. But only if Sarah used a lock of the child's real hair, pinned to a swath of cloth belonging to the child made into a pouch harboring the child's nail clippings. All items Sarah had bartered from the hands of Tituba, the Barbados witch and servant to the Reverend Samuel Parris. Aside from a few pretty shells and a green bottle, all that Tituba had wanted from the bargain was that Sarah Goode eventually destroy Reverend Parris.

The old woman was unsure if she believed *everything* that Tituba had told her about Reverend Parris—like the business of his having either stolen or killed Tituba's infant at birth—*and* that it was *his* child—but Goode understood why the black servant hated her master. “Tit'shuba hates 'im 'cause what Parris done to her. Same as me—took her child same as my Dorcas.”

Goode's candle flickered against a pinched, prune-dried face. The bowlegged Sarah must push and pull her weight on legs reluctant to take her the final step. It was, after all, a grave undertaking she had planned: to strike hard at a minister. A plan that would take her into the dark arts far deeper than ever she had practiced before—to *commit witchcraft on a child*.

This last reluctance held her; perhaps she ought not to do what her anger dictated. Perhaps she should show a measure of Christian forgiveness, mercy. But when she looked for such things as pardon and clemency, all she found were the vilest of Christian curses to hurl at the Reverend Mr. Parris.

In fact, none of the simple curses would do. Nothing as mundane as ‘may your dog ne’er hunt, may your pig ne’er grunt, may your cow ne’er milk, nor your worms e’er silk; may your lock ne’er latch, the wind take your thatch. Things had gone far beyond such humdrum incantation, and Goode had tried all the more tedious hexes on Parris, but the man’s protection proved strong against the commonplace. Besides, murderous thoughts had come of an old woman’s rage. So murderous and heinous that for days now, her incantations had continued nonstop. She’d gone without sleep.

She stopped in her machinations long enough to mutter another curse—this one the strongest yet directed at the minister’s heart: “*May the hot coals of your hearth, Mr. Parris, fall ‘pon your home and burn your heart! May your legs go lame, and your ugly soul perish in flame! May your wife shrivel and die as winter grass, and may your children’s catechism turn to the Devil’s class.*”

She ended with an aged tear escaping her left eye.

“No damming curse is ’nough,” the crone muttered. “A curse alone’ll not do. Not for the likes of you. Damn you for stealing wee Dorcas from me.”

She recalled how the minister had handed Dorcas over to a parish family to become a maidservant—used as a wee slave by strangers! “To learn a trade,” the minister had said.

Sarah knew better; it was outright theft of a child from her mother, and the minister had taken coin for placing Dorcas—*as addled and sick a child as her*. “Old Porter’ll use her badly, sure. But he’ll be cursed next!” She spat the names of villagers she hated. “Parris, Porter, Putnam—all three . . . the Devil take all of thee.”

She placed the candle on the floor at the northeast corner. There she had safely hidden the instruments of her witchcraft. She worked to loosen the board, and from below it, she

snatched up the long knitting needles all wrapped in linen. Below these, she located her book of spells, and below the book, the doll exactly where she'd hidden it on her last trek to Swampscott. She stared now at the well-crafted doll, so lifelike...its blue eyes and corn silk hair reflecting in the weak candle glow. One strand the girl's true hair.

Cackling in delight, Goode came away from her kneeling position with all of her necessities balanced in her arms. Duck-toeing to the center of the room, she placed each item onto a low-standing oaken table. Here the shining, winking needles acknowledged her like an old friend, and why not? She had used them many times before to make an enemy suffer.

But this was the first time she'd set out to harm a child, and a minister's child at that. It gave her pause. Then Goode lifted her longest needle to her eyes, and it spoke to her, whispering the words: *use me*.

The gleaming long needle wanted using. The feel of it against her palm said so.

With leathery jowls roiling, Goode's jaw worked in a habitual circle, her tongue rolling tobacco around her gums. A brown drool escaped from time to time, soup spatter about her chin. Tobacco held healing powers. This her sore gums attested to daily. She would trade her last table scrap for a wedge of 'bacca.

She now opened the tattered little book of spells, leafing through to find just the thing to harm Reverend Mr. Parris, the *lying-thieving-bastard*. She spied the right page and flattened the yellowed edges, creasing the pamphlet with aged thumbs. She scanned the ancient Latin words she'd memorized as a child from her mother before her, because Sarah could only read a handful of words.

The doll's ruffled dress moved. *A breeze . . . cracks in the old cabin walls accounts for it*, Goode decided when the frilly dress stilled. Another strange wind threatened her candle and

lifted the book page, flapping it ever so gently as if by an invisible hand or fairy. Now a stronger gust blew into the cracks, threatening to extinguish the candle.

She attempted to save the candle from going out, but the page tore from the book, lifted and wafted off and below the table.

Is Reverend Parris at the window? Is he before his fire, sending forth his familiars to bedevil me even as I mean to bedevil him? Is the man in black a black-hearted wizard himself? Could he be causing me to lose my page and my calm?

“A pox on ye!” she shouted the habitual chant before bending, reaching unsteadily, and finally crawling below the table for the page. The page regained, she groaned with her rising. Upright, a hand on her backside, her eye went from window to door, half-expecting to see it broken in, followed by men and lanterns and dogs come to drag her to the nearest tree. All with Parris overseeing her hanging. She imagined herself squealing, kicking, fighting to no avail until choked to death, her neck broken.

But all remained silent. *Just the wind kicking up.*

Her hazel eyes went directly to the blue eyes of the doll again. Warm blue pools so like the minister’s daughter, wee but plump Betty Parris.

“Gawd but that clever Andover blacksmith put so much of you into the likeness,” she said to the empty cabin. “He did fashion you well, my Betty. Even got your dimples down. Gaw’d blind me, if you ain’t-a-spittin’ image.”

Trembling in anticipation of her full-blown magic and the results of her witchery, Sarah smiled her toothless grin. The witch held the doll against her breast, sobbing over it, asking its forgiveness, calling it by the child’s name as she did so. “Forgive me, Betty, dear.”

She held it against the table with one hand while her other lifted overhead and sent the longest needle into the doll. The needle deeply and evenly penetrated the soft, balsa wood belly. She brought the likeness, needle and all, up close to her mouth and kissed its lifelike lips, noting how extraordinary the little nostrils appeared, so real in the candle glow. As if breathing on its own...a pained breathing... and those eyes . . . vacant and innocent, had they been painted brown, the doll might be a likeness of her own Dorcas.

Sarah felt the pang of onrushing emotion. She freely cried for the child, Betty, and she cried for her missing Dorcas. "I didn't ask for this trouble between your father and me, child," she told the doll. "Twas all *his* doing! First *excommunicating* me from that damned church, and then *stealing* my Dorcas! And cloakin' it in the goodness of his parish duties! Lying swine. Sold my Dorcas into slavery is what he's done! *Money* changed hands!"

She jammed another long needle into Betty's likeness. Tearfully, Goode cried out, "The sins of the father are visited 'pon the child! Not my rule! Not my sins."

She heard the doll whisper, *I understand, Goodwife Goode.*

Goode rammed another needle into the doll.

The doll winked at her under the candle glow as if to add, *Father's left you no choice.*