

**An Excerpt from *Sewing Can Be Dangerous & Other Small Threads***

**From A Drunkard's Path**

“...Are you *kidding* me?” Deborah exploded. “My life is falling apart! C’mon, curses don’t really happen, do they? I mean, what can I do? You tell me now!” She segued into a screech.

“Come over to my place tomorrow and I’ll try to relate it all to you, I promise...”

....“Do you know anything about the Salem Witchcraft trials?” The older woman leaned in toward her niece, as if casting a spell herself.

“No, not much, why?”

“You remember Martha Stinson from my quilt group? Well after the wedding, she showed me a journal written by a relative of hers and frankly, I am very concerned about you. It seems one of the accused witches from the original Salem trials might have actually had a connection with a real witch, an ancestor of Martha’s...”

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Inside the packed meetinghouse, dust particles from mud-caked boots floated throughout the air, rendering it dense, murky. That year, April had been an unkind month to Salem Village. Rain-drenched meadows produced a sludge that clung to the edges of women’s dresses, creating odors so foul that in such tight quarters, it became difficult to breathe. But people weren’t concerned with such matters on this day. They had gathered for a higher purpose: the Devil was in Salem, and they wished him thwarted at all costs. Even the constant threat of Indian attacks and surviving harsh winters paled in comparison to what was happening now, in that room, swelling with apprehension.

Crammed into high-walled pews, dark wooden benches, or simply shoved up against walls, spectators filled every conceivable space in the meetinghouse. Donning black hats, cloaks, and breeches, the men angled forward, their eyes boring holes into the five men sitting up front, yet it was the women who carried the greatest burden that day; their hooded coats and muffs covering their recently unkempt hair and unwashed fingernails, couldn’t disguise the uncertainty they felt about their community’s loyalty to them and how it would all end.

Sitting at the head of the counsel table, amongst other magistrates in the newly appointed Court of Oyer and Terminer, John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin quietly conferred with each other before beginning their first round of questioning. Arrogant, self-important, the black-robed magistrates assumed their positions on the political totem pole, and having been brought to Salem for such a specific purpose, they dared not disappoint. They were on a mission to deliver souls. Hathorne, displaying the greatest exhibition of self-aggrandizement, seemed the most severe. With no real legal experience, and having only glanced at Sir Mathew Hale’s *Trial of Witches*, and Joseph Granvill’s *Collection of Sundry Trials in England, Ireland* the week before, he nonetheless believed he was more than competent to interrogate the accused.

At the front of the room facing the magistrates, sat all the accusers, the “afflicted” girls: Abigail Williams, her cousin Betty Parris, Ann Putnam, Sarah Bibber, Sarah Churchill, Elizabeth Booth, Mercy Lewis, Susanna Sheldon, Jemima Rea, Mary Warren, Mary Walcott and Elizabeth Hubbard. With downcast eyes and folded hands, they appeared demure; inwardly they were experiencing emotions quite different from anything they had ever known. Childhoods stocked with adult repression and fear now served as a springboard to the frenzy of accusations they had created, because on this day, along with their catharsis and even exhilaration, came the most important emotion of all: a sense of empowerment. At last, they were getting adults to listen to them, and it was intoxicating.

John Hathorne commenced with the proceedings. “Bring in the accused, Bridget Bishop....”

