

Salem Village, Massachusetts

November 11, 1701

The moon was in its last quarter, in the house of Gemini. This would prove to be important on another such night in Salem Village. But on this night, six solemn-faced men gathered round the rough-hewn table in the tiny room that served as the rectory of The Salem Village Meeting House. The Reverend Samuel Parris' tall lanky frame held the floor like a mast at one end of the narrow room. His five companions who, like their speaker, wore long black woolen coats over matching breeches, sat hunched like a murder of crows bent on dissecting the meaning of the words written on the large vellum document before them.

“Where is it written then that we have assurance of this deed?” The Very Honorable Judge Jonathan Corwin leaned forward and pressed the first finger of his smooth plump hand on a phrase, rising slightly from his seat in order to read it yet a third time.

“And ye shall have all that is desired within your grasp for as long as the collateral is held in trust so that all power and profit shall come to those whose names appear on this indenture as long as they and their descendants shall live.” Corwin's wispy thin eyebrows rose high on his broad forehead as he lowered the document. “I'm not comfortable. The language is too ambiguous.”

“Speak plain man,” Sheriff George Corwin's sharp voice turned all eyes on him. “Some of us are simple men.”

Danvers, Massachusetts

November 8th – The Present

“So what do you think they’re going to do with the old insane asylum?” Jeff asked, as we walked down Maple Street past the gargantuan boarded-up structure. On this dark afternoon, the deep burgundy buildings making up the main complex sat shuttered and guarded like a group of moody old trolls—nasty, dirty, and dangerous.

“Tear it down and make condos,” Hawk replied, as he fiddled with the adjustment buttons on *The Dune Buggy*, his nickname for his wheelchair. I walked along behind him, holding onto the handles because Aunt Marsha had asked me to make sure he went slowly down the steep sidewalk, especially since there was still snow on the ground. I wasn't sure I was the best choice for the job, because I'd always had this weird kind of feeling when I was around someone in a wheelchair—like I was a kind of jinx or something. Besides Hawk, there had only been two occasions when I'd been close to someone in a wheelchair—and both times, that someone had died. Oh, I was assured each time, that it wasn't my fault. But I knew that if I had been more attentive, a better daughter, a better granddaughter, things might have turned out differently.