

Chapter 1

Spencer Elliot is what many people would refer to as an everyman. He appears to be somewhat shy and retiring and he will typically do his very best to avoid any undue attention. Certainly, this is not because he fears confrontation, because the last thing that passes through Spencer's mind is fear.

Actually, most folks consider Spencer to be a loner. About the only friend Spencer had, was his ever present black Labrador Retriever, Smoke. He and Smoke were nearly inseparable.

But, I'm getting way ahead of myself. This tale actually began several hundred years ago intention late seventeenth century Massachusetts.

Now, if you'll recall your junior high school history lessons, you'll remember that during the late 17th century, in the region surrounding Danvers, in the Township of Salem Massachusetts; scores of people were put to death by hanging or remanded to life in prison. These individuals were the target of the now infamous, Salem Witch hunt.

Among those put to death, many were native to the Caribbean, brought north along the path of a highly profitable Spice Trade. Others, however, Were long standing members of this God fearing Region of a still young United States of America.

Many of these individuals were put to death or otherwise punished for fraternizing with those who practiced the Black Arts.

Well, on this particular dark and dismal evening, Lightning glows and pulsates within the banks of a bank of roiling, dark clouds. The silhouette of the rocky shoreline would disappear, as the lightning fades. The clouds continue to glow, before ultimately fading into darkness, once again.

The more common legal jargon of the era, referred to these individual's crimes as consorting with the Devil.

The year was 1692 and on this night, clouds would intermittently reveal, then conceal a bright, full moon. The rocky beach stretches seemingly without end. The surf pounds against the wall of a cliff. Moving up from the rocky beach, the moon emerges, casting an eerie glow. A giant Oak dominates, barren of leaves, with sprawling branches.

A long branch curves within ten feet of the ground. Three nooses dangle precariously, swaying in the breeze. The moon disappears

behind clouds.

In the distance a procession draws near. The silhouettes of wagons, people on horseback and walking. The crowd grows closer and a steady drone of unintelligible chanting breaks an eerie silence.

Members of the procession carry torches. Clad in black, their faces appear pale and lifeless. Their eyes hollow.

Nearby, a hillside overlooks the coast and the somber procession.

On the hillside, two young, dark skinned pre-teen girls and an older dark skinned boy peer down upon the procession. They lie on their bellies, concealed within a thicket, straining to watch, as the procession draws near the giant Oak tree. Wide eyed, the children glance at each other, and then, down upon the procession.

A smaller, dark skinned boy crawls amongst the others. He taps the older boy on the shoulder and points to the trail wagon. In a strained whisper "They sure 'nuff got's Mizz Abigail."

The older boy scowls, placing a finger to his lips. "You shush, now. Or..." Wide-eyed, he cocks his head. "They'll be havin' you."

The procession reaches the Oak. Members of the crowd mill about, impatiently eyeing the giant Oak tree and the dangling nooses, through hollow eyes.

An older, dark skinned woman, a young dark skinned man and a young white woman kneel in the back of the trail wagon, their hands lashed behind their backs.

The white woman is Miss Abigail. She has long blonde hair and is pale, in a stark contrast to her fellow captives.

A hulking man approaches the wagon.

The moon disappears behind clouds. Flickering torches cast a wavering, eerie glow upon the area.

The wind picks up. Whistling, as members of the crowd shiver. They tug at their coats, like shrouds against the chilling wind.

The large man steps up into the wagon, jerking the prisoners to their feet. He places bags over the heads of the dark skinned man and woman. He leers at Miss Abigail. She scowls and spits into the man's face.

The man reaches back to strike, as Miss Abigail glares defiantly, with nary a flinch. The man pauses and lowers his

hand. His eyes narrow to mere slits, as he wipes his face on his sleeve. He grins sinisterly.

Miss Abigail maintains her cold scowl, as she pans the crowd.

Members of the crowd turn away, avoiding eye contact.

Miss Abigail scowls at the crowd. "Turn your heads. Each of ye." She closes her eyes. "How do ye stand by and--"

The large man places a bag over Miss Abigail's head, muffling her voice. He then places nooses around each of the prisoners' necks.

Miss Abigail's voice is muffled, yet remains defiant. "This act shall alter nothing. Yet it will haunt all of ye, throughout eternity."

The crowd cowers, as her voice grows deeper. Somewhat surreal. "Each of ye shall suffer far beyond your pitiful, mortal lives."

A brilliant flash of Lightning brightens the area, followed by the rumble of rolling thunder.

Miss Abigail is not shaken. "It will follow all of ye to your graves and far beyond." Miss Abigail's words fade into an eerie silence.

On the hillside, the children fidget, straining to watch and listen. A tear dribbles down the cheek of the youngest girl. She sniffles and wipes it away.

Faces amongst the crowd glimmer in the light Of the torches.

Lightning illuminates several rows of unmarked graves near the base of the giant Oak. They glow eerily in the momentary brightness.

Rolling thunder breaks the silence, as a Preacher steps from within the crowd. His long gray hair flutters in the breeze, accentuating his hollow cheeks.

The crowd silences and the large man hops down from the back of the wagon.

The crowd parts, allowing the Preacher passage.

Lightning illuminates the area and then darkens just as quickly.

Long, rolling thunder.

The horses jerk about, shaking the wagon.

The prisoners, nooses pulling at their throats, stagger about in the wagon.

The large man grips the reins tightly, steadying the horses.

The Preacher surveys the crowd and raises his hands toward the heavens, tightly clutching a Bible in one hand. His eyes are glazed and hollow. "Tonight, we shall rid our community of those who practice the black--"

A brilliant flash of lightning and a rolling clap of thunder silence him. Startled, he looks toward the heavens. Then, his hollow gaze returns. "They were brought to us from the Isles of the Caribbean, evil traveling at their side. And now, Lord..." He casts a glare at Miss Abigail and breathes deep. "They have caused our own to stray. And we shall... no... we must cast her aside with her chosen brethren, before they bring upon the minds of our youth a further pall."

He gazes upon the unmarked graves. The members of the crowd follow his gaze... then back to the prisoners.

The Preacher closes his eyes. "Before a further blight can be cast upon the good people of Salem, the almighty Lord shall strike them down, cleansing our community of their darkness."

Lightning flashes and thunder rolls.

The Preacher motions to the large man.

The large man strains to steady the horses.

From the hillside, the children watch intently, squinting against the darkness. The youngest girl covers her eyes, then slowly spreads her fingers to peek.

The large man releases the reins and steps back.

The Preacher rants on, but his words are unintelligible.

The prisoners stand shoulder to shoulder, nooses around their necks.

The large man removes a whip from his belt and raises it, allowing its' length to stretch along the ground. With rapid flips of his wrist, the whip curls and cracks, loudly, as it bloodies the horse's flanks.

The horses whinny, rear and surge forward, as a single bolt of lightning shatters the darkness, striking the oak at the base of the branch.

A flash of light, then smoldering fire, as the severed branch crashes to earth.

The horses sprint away.

The branch jerks the prisoners from the back of the wagon. They crash to the ground, motionless.

The crowd and the Preacher panic and bolt away, screaming out, as they flee.

The large man's eyes grow wide, as he draws a pistol from his belt. He aims at Miss Abigail's shrouded head. Then, he glares and slowly cocks the pistol, as...

A loud crack, as lightning once again strikes the Oak, splitting the trunk in a brilliant flash of light and a deafening crack.

Stunned -- the large man drops the pistol and backs away. He stares, mouth agape into the pulsating glow of the fire. He glances at Miss Abigail, then dashes away, following the crowd.

Miss Abigail lies motionless, her neck raw and bleeding.

On the hillside, the wide eyed children jump to their feet and race toward the smoldering Oak tree.

The silhouette of the Oak is barely visible.

The final remnant of the crowd crests a hill and disappears, as clouds separate and a bright full moon emerges.

A rustling sound, then a stirring on the ground, as the prisoners struggle against their restraints.

The children appear out of the darkness. They pause and their lips upturn into broad smiles, as they approach the prisoners. They hug, unmask and release them.

The prisoners stand, grasping at their throats and gasping for breath.

Miss Abigail spots the pistol and retrieves it. She tucks it into her jacket belt. She places a hand to her neck and brings it down. It is smeared with blood. She forces a weak smile and points to a nearby tree line. "We must go. Father will not allow this to pass." She glances toward town, then walks briskly toward the grove of trees.

The other prisoners and the children follow.

The smallest boy takes a few steps, then stops. He dashes back to the smoldering Oak. He looks at the branch, then his gaze drifts to the heavens. He gazes across the ocean, as a gentle rain begins to fall.

The smoldering branch sizzles and steam billows, as the rain strikes it.

The boy grins and grabs the smoldering branch. He struggles, as he drags the branch into the darkness of the night.