

Title (up to 20 words) - Salam

Strapline (up to 40 words) - The Salam witch trials began in 1692. They were a series of hearings and prosecutions of women who were accused of witchcraft. More than 200 people were accused in Massachusetts over the course of a year.

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) - The day is the 18th September 1692 and I have been in hiding since the day I was born. My mother gave birth to me in a normal hospital, on a normal day, with normal nurses. But there was nothing normal about it. The gene of magic has been passed through the women in my family for generations, I was no exception to this gift. Earlier this year, February to be exact, I was walking home from the forest. I had been out collecting herbs for spell jars upon Mothers request, my skirt was hanging around the tips of the grass and my hair flowing through my eyelashes with the gust of the day in front of me. The streets were lined with people on my walk home. I always aimed to avoid the people of my town, avoid the looks and the names. It took me a while to pick up my eyes and see what was taking place, people were shouting. No. Screaming. They were screaming in a joyful manner. I maneuvered my way through the sea of people to get the view that they were seeing. There was a tall wooden structure that had been built across the middle of the town centre, placed just outside the church. Two thick wooden beams were placed on the floor, crushing the grass that once lived where death had been placed. Two further beams stood vertically connected by one large thin beam across the top at which a noose hung down. A large, human sized hole had been cut out of the floorboards. People were still shouting. No. Screaming. "What's going on?" I asked the group of people who stood around me. A young man turned from in front of me with a wicked smile painted across his face like the makeup of a clown, "They're hanging the witch." He replied like it meant nothing.

My heart sank. The blood was pulsating around my body and making my heart beat with such vigor it pounded at my ribs. I couldn't breathe. I was trapped. My feet glued to the ground with my heart now lying lifeless on the floor in front of me. I had quickly become a vessel for anxiety and a lifeless corpse full of dread.

"Hang the witch. Hang the witch." Echoed throughout the streets of town.

It was weird, they were chanting like I would chant a spell. Ironic really. The Salam witch trials had begun. The town had been brought together by the disaster of my people. I pushed toward the front of the crowd. Never in my life would I have pushed myself to be the centre of attention but today adrenaline had taken over. My body was not in my control anymore. My legs moved without brain signals, simply the cognition of my past lives forcing each foot step. There was a young lady standing on the wooden platform in front of me. People continued shouting. No. Chanting. She was blind folded and her long hair had been forcefully pulled into a scraggy bun

at the bottom of her head using an old piece of string. The black cover laid on top of her beautifully infantilising face structure, leaving nothing but cracked lips and dirt covered eyebrows. The dress she was wearing was similar to mine. Long and pleated, clearly hand made by the loose threads I could see from here. The mayor of my town pulled the noose down from the upper beam of the newly built structure. He pulled it around her neck, tightening it as he did. You could tell she was not ready for what was about to follow as she began to struggle. Words came muttering from behind her covered face. No. Chanting.

The mayor spoke louder, making her voice inaudible to anyone who was not listening, "If this witch truly is magic, she will rise and we shall kill her again. If she is honestly mortal. She will die and we will know the truth."

With the last spout of his sentence he pulled the string that was tied around her neck then released her into the gap between the two floor boards. She was struggling. Reaching for her neck to release herself. She needed me but I was too caught up in the moment to see this. She needed my help but I stood cowardly at the fear I would be killed on the spot if I intervened. She stopped moving and her beautiful hair turned lifeless, hanging over her face like a pair of curtains drawn shut. She turned cold and as she did I ran. I ran fast and I ran hard. The herbs I had collected from the forest were now laying on the floor. Also lifeless. Everything became lifeless as she did.

"It's begun," I emotionlessly conveyed, bursting through the door of my house, "the trials," I confirmed, "the trials have begun."

We didn't leave the house for the next seven months. Until today. September 18th. My 17th birthday. I left our place early in the morning to avoid any attention from the local people that suspected we were hiding something. I walked to my usual spot in the woods and began chanting to myself.

"Where the willows hang down, where the birds begin to sleep, where my mother calls for me. That's where I will be." I forced a deep breath and closed my eyes.

"That's where I will be," I said this time, much quieter than the last. My voice breaking with emotion as I did. I knew they would find me eventually. If not me then my mother or my grandmother or my sister. They would find me. I knew it deep down. And when they did I would be screaming. No. Chanting. Chanting for revenge.