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#### Spirit

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Summary: In 1892, a wealthy, seventeen-year-old, married couple, Tess and Tobias Goodraven, lay ghosts to rest for the thrill of it but, separated by the terrible witch who was responsible for the Salem witchcraft horrors, they may not have strength to survive, much less help the dead.

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First Edition

As always, to Kim and to my family.

With deep thanks to my talented, skillful, patient editor, Ruth Katcher

### PREFACE

hese are not the Salem witches you know.

The objects under consideration in these pa

The objects under consideration in these pages are not the innocent men and women caught up in the Salem trials—born of hysteria and hate—but rather, the real and true thing.

Much has been written of the witch trials. But there were other trials, later and less famous, in the Massachusetts township. It was left to secret judges and tribunals to deal with the real forces of darkness in that terrible age.

This story reaches back many centuries, and no doubt will reach forward many more, but the first serious investigation into the true Salem magicians began in the Victorian period.

#### **PROLOGUE**

The Salem Woods

1892

SIN

The morning was cold, as it had been yesterday, and the day before that. The girl's coat was not thick enough, but she said nothing to her father. His job was to inspect the rails before the train from Salem to Blackthorne went through for the first time in ages. He had taken her along, because his wife had passed on, and there was no one to watch over the honor of a fifteen-year-old girl, and he disliked the rough young men eyeing her at the bakery, where she'd bought a meager breakfast.

She was unhappy, but did not complain. She could ensure he finished the task, for he was known to be lax, a wanderer, fond of whiskey, who could not hold employment. They were lucky to have any money in their pockets. Eighteen ninety-two had been a hard year, with little to look forward to. Truth be told, the two of them could wander off into the landscape and never return, and no one would be surprised.

They were completely alone on the railbed that ran along the snowy forest, joined only by the sound of his long metal cane tapping at the tracks.

She wandered a few feet into the woods after an animal,

perhaps a deer, though it seemed larger, some dark thing moving among the snowdrifts in this bitter patch of wilderness not far from Blackthorne. It was low to the ground, like a shadow, and slipped with terrible, silent grace beyond view, the feathery snow and the trees conspiring to create a veil.

It was then she noticed the tapping had ceased.

When she turned, she saw her father had stopped. His gaze seemed to fix upon her, and even at this distance she could see his face carried no expression whatsoever. For a very long moment, unsure of his meaning, she simply returned his look, drawn mysteriously into a sense of growing fear. She glanced behind her and saw no threat that could have taken his attention. He had about him a completely alien intensity, a predatorial aspect, as when a dog stiffens before moving into attack. He carried the metal cane in one hand and he remained motionless, even his eyes, still, unblinking.

What have I done, she thought desperately. But she could think of nothing. She called to him, but he gave no reaction at all.

He stayed unmoving for so long that finally she began plodding toward him, her feet stinging with the cold in worn-down boots. Stopping not a foot in front of him, she saw a foreign presence in his eyes. A blue smoke drifted across his pupils as if he were somehow burning within.

Then something changed in the air. His head turned to the forest, as if recognizing some new arrival she could not see in the snow flurries. A crackling sound cut across the woods, and for just an instant her father was overcome with white vines of electricity, as if he were covered by a luminous ivy that had grown up from

the ground, but was gone again in a blink, leaving only a charred smell.

His hand slowly came forward and took hers into an iron grip. She was suddenly aware of a thick azure mist rising from the snow around the tracks. Again she spoke urgently to her father, and again he said nothing.

The mist dissipated around him. She wanted to scream, but could not. And then, still saying nothing, he walked her calmly but firmly onto a great sheet of ice, a frozen lake that lay beside the tracks.

They stood on the frozen waters together, and she asked him what was wrong, begging for an answer. He did not reply, but instead raised his metal cane above his head with a heavy grunt, and then brutally brought it down onto the ice. She tried to run, but he held her to the spot.

He cracked open the frozen lake and pulled her down with him into the black water.

# The Home of the Ghosthunters, A Drawing Room, New York City, 1892

## CHAPTER ONE

Tess and Tobias Goodraven, in their mahogany chairs, facing each other near the bay windows, cellos at the ready, and now beginning to play. The petite young lady, dressed in white, dark hair in a perfect coil behind her head, and the light-haired young man, dashing but unkempt, were again building a musical wall between themselves and the world.

The room was large and its two occupants might have looked fragile beneath the high ceiling, but to Tess this was the safest and friendliest of places, even in the midst of an argument.

Neither spoke. They let their cellos do the talking. The low throbbing of the strings, like a prisoner humming a dirge, reverberated off the portraits, the antiquities, the dark emerald wallpaper and the black wood of the floor, and wrapped the couple in a cocoon of their own making.

Such gloomy noises fit perfectly in the Goodraven mansion.

The room was lined with dusty books, overflowing from the library, volumes filled with the sinister ramblings of forgotten men, accounts of travels made in the worst of times to places never meant to be visited—all stories Tobias had paged through,

but never finished, each time driven to a new one, or to his maps, or into his own investigations.

His restlessness was exciting to Tess, and wearying, and often she couldn't decide which she felt more.

The music moved through her entire body as she held the cello between her knees, the instrument's long swanlike neck rising beside her head, its strings digging pleasantly into her fingers.

She was never going to admit she'd been wrong.

To look at her, you would never have known she had such a rebellious spirit. She seemed much the same as any pretty, upperclass woman in the city, but spend two minutes in conversation with her, and her devilish playfulness and desire to shock the prim sensibilities around her would be obvious.

She was more than matched in this by Tobias, who forever relished in playing the scoundrel.

They had been married less than a year.

This was their first real disagreement, though his silence was not unusual; he seemed to crave it at times. But the music often healed him, brought him back to her.

Her playing had become a mere scraping of the strings. She regained her concentration, but too late. Tobias furrowed his brow, noting her distraction, answering her trills with his own. He was a tall, slim gentleman, Tobias was, with a handsome, rounded face that softened the impression made by his shockingly white hair. Those snowy, fine angelic strands often fell forward over bored, faded green eyes that lit up whenever something morbid or novel presented itself.

Because as a rule he was so humorous, Tess half expected him

to smile at any moment, but he was altogether different when he was immersed in playing. He'd make no exception today.

It was a quiet, ancient piece, moody in the extreme, the kind Tobias usually favored, full of contemplation, never quite giving in to the melody. The music conjured up images of reverberant chambers in a decaying castle, in a time of plagues and sorrows, with the dead piling up in the streets, while behind the high gates of a fortress, the approval of a lovelorn nobleman was all that concerned the court musicians. (At least, this is what floated into Tess's mind.)

Tobias played the more difficult, lower bass line, investigating a rich darkness Tess would never dare to reach, exploring a cold emptiness she would fear. His eyes fell closed.

Now the couple departed from the written notes, and instead joined each other in finding new ground. Tobias had a genius for this. His improvisations perfectly matched her higher wanderings, the two streaming lines of music separating and harmonizing. Though Tess was not always certain of *his* next moves, he knew exactly where she was going, and met her there with a chivalrous echo, playfully teasing out her adventurousness, drawing from her new pleadings. He continually surprised her, and pleasantly so.

He dominated her now, taking over the slight melody and moving the music into a territory more bleak than any Gothic landscape, and she accompanied him with a plain bowing.

She had a tendency to follow him wherever he went, in music, as in life.

The Goodravens were unique, and they knew it, and they enjoyed it. Not many seventeen-year-olds were so rich, or lived on their own in a mansion, with a butler and house staff to do whatever they wanted; not many people their age were married; and very few hunted ghosts just for the thrill of it. Their lives were magical. And dangerous beyond measure.

Tess had a small but growing awareness of this danger.

She had begun to worry about where this witches' trail was going to take them.

"Are you ready to talk about it yet?" she inquired, somewhat playful. Lately their music had often preceded deep and wideranging discussions.

But he didn't look up. He made his bow strikes a bit angrier, slicing out a quicker tempo. No, he was not ready to talk.

The "incident" in the Salem graveyard several nights ago had been something more than the quiet séances they'd joined in New England, more than the gentle sensing of spirits they'd observed in their journeys in Europe, or even in distant India, where they had witnessed the moving of furniture all on its own in a British ambassador's residence.

This Salem business was considerably more aggressive.

Tess moved her eyes past Tobias to the bay windows and a solemn brownstone building adorned with grim, overfed gargoyles. She could dimly hear the ragged clatter of hooves, and coachmen sniping at each other and their horses, trying to steer a clear path. The second-floor parlor did not allow a view of the Manhattan street below, but Tess had imprinted the avenue in her mind's eye: darkly dressed men, in top hats and bowlers, high collars smudged with ink by the end of the day, and the light, at the dinner hour, drifting lazily down through

billows of smoke. The windows were thick, but she was faintly aware of them, could *feel* their bitter mélange of tired-out resentment.

The muffled sensation, a low-burning plaintive anger, of men wanting something better, drifted upward, pressing on Tess, as if a weight had been laid upon her back. She'd have blocked it out if it were possible. But the feelings of others radiated, floated, and permeated the air immediately around them inescapably. Tobias shared her odd ability to pick up on these stirrings, but the effects seemed to toughen him, causing him to view them as entertainments, while she tended to take on ever more sympathy, more pain, more worry, for others, for the unfortunates of the world.

Now his long, agile fingers bent the strings to a demanding rise in melody, as her hand fell, finishing with a descending elegance.

His voice intruded on the silence.

"So what exactly is it you want to talk about, Tess? Is there something I need to set right?" he asked, lightening his brooding expression, as if ready to grin.

She paused. Keeping a straight face, knowing he could read her every emotion, she said, "Tobias, I'm not asking for an apology for your sharp remarks, which I am overlooking with characteristic grace and a heroic lack of self-pity. But I'd like you to admit the situation in the Salem graveyard was more frightening than you had expected."

"Of course it was. And it was fantastic."

Tess refused to smile. "Something awful could have happened to us."

"That's the general idea of adventuring, my dear."

"That thing was monstrous."

He made himself look appalled. "Dearest Tess, are you and I remembering the same night?"

# Five nights earlier, A cemetery, Salem, Massachusetts

### CHAPTER TWO

hey had come on a mission to aid the dead, but the Goodravens instead discovered an angry, disoriented phantom. Her ghostly form, bones visible under skin, glided through the rainstorm, mist upon mist, whispers within whispers. She—it—emerged from the blackness, and then lost all shape and definition, dissipating into nothingness.

The wraith-woman reached out for Tess Goodraven, who stood before her, straining to see the vanishing likeness. Tess stumbled back. In the stabbing rain and blinding flashes of lightning, she could not be sure she had actually seen the wraith approaching amid the gravestones.

Tess twisted her body, her boots firmly set in the mud. In the thunderstorm's white pulses, she could see the whole Salem graveyard lit up, and there behind her, the comforting figure of Tobias.

He stood staring ahead like a man mesmerized by a magician. Had he seen it? She had no time to speak, before she felt the unmistakable touch of a spirit. Tiny pinpricks of ice fell upon her neck, and her heart seemed to stop for an instant. Mist gathered sleepily around her, swirling in the gusts of wind.

Around the muddy hem of her dress, the mist slowly spun, low and thick, with Tess in the center of its motion.

She stared at Tobias, who watched with blank fascination, perhaps even jealousy. The fog had a quality, an indefinable life within it, an *intention*.

The mist, the spirit-creature, closed in around her, and suddenly Tess perceived the wraith's urgency. It was not just anger she was giving off. It was need.

Tobias's hand thrust into the mist, and he pulled Tess out of the rising column before the wraith's aim could be fully known.

"Step clear of the grave," he said. Tess fell back behind Tobias, and watched in the scatterlight as he confronted the empty fog: "Mary, stop—we've not come to disturb you. I've brought back what was stolen..."

Perhaps at the sound of its name, the Wraith halted, the mist seemingly frozen in the air.

Tobias reached back, pulling from the darkness a small cedar box. He slid it open, revealing a collection of skeletal fragments.

"They're your bones, Mary. Your bones. I've found them," Tobias called.

For just an instant, the thing near the open grave became mortally realized and took on a female appearance, almost an innocence: a Puritan lady in tattered clothes. But at that instant Tobias slipped on the dirt mound where he stood, and suddenly the box slid loose from his fingers, the skeleton pieces tumbling into the grave, falling past the Wraith-woman, who seemed to feel the passage of her very bones through her. And then she was gone, as if obliterated by the shock of it.

Tobias recovered, perched on the edge of the gravesite, and turned to see that Tess was safe. She looked down, wide-eyed, into the darkness of the pit below.

"Bury it," Tess uttered against the rain.

Within moments, the grave was covered in earth. Finished with the work, Tobias slammed a thin weathered headstone back into place that read:

# MARY SUTTON VICTIM OF THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS DIEDYOUNG 1692

And Tess exhaled with relief.

The bones, stolen ages ago by souvenir hunters, and tracked down with great difficulty by Tess and Tobias, had at last returned to their final resting place, precisely two centuries since the woman's death.

Exhausted, Tobias rose to stand by Tess, amid the rain-ravaged, broken gravestones. For a moment the storm calmed, and Tess heard water pattering off the ivy hanging on the forlorn statues of the marble angels. And then the calm was shattered as the headstone before them squealed and cracked, and gave out something like a breath.

A bluish mist emerged from the grave and instantly gathered body and fullness, the Puritan girl's spirit soaring free. It was the soul of Mary Sutton, reaching for the heavens, and as the phantom crossed through her, Tess again felt a deep chill, as if a frost had settled in her veins.

For an instant, their minds were one, Tess and the Puritan girl, and then the spirit moved on, passed into Tobias, and then lifted

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