

OLIVIA HARDY RAY



BOOK 1 OF THE SALEM WITCH SERIES

ANNABELL
HORTON
LOST WITCH
OF SALEM

ANNABEL HORTON
LOST WITCH OF SALEM

Annabel Horton, Lost Witch of Salem
Olivia Hardy Ray

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Table of Contents

PART ONE

- [Chapter 1](#)
- [Chapter 2](#)
- [Chapter 3](#)
- [Chapter 4](#)
- [Chapter 5](#)
- [Chapter 6](#)
- [Chapter 7](#)
- [Chapter 8](#)
- [Chapter 9](#)
- [Chapter 10](#)
- [Chapter 11](#)
- [Chapter 12](#)
- [Chapter 13](#)
- [Chapter 14](#)
- [Chapter 15](#)
- [Chapter 16](#)
- [Chapter 17](#)
- [Chapter 18](#)
- [Chapter 19](#)
- [Chapter 20](#)
- [Chapter 21](#)
- [Chapter 22](#)
- [Chapter 23](#)
- [Chapter 24](#)
- [Chapter 25](#)
- [Chapter 26](#)
- [Chapter 27](#)
- [Chapter 28](#)
- [Chapter 29](#)

PART TWO

- [Chapter 1](#)
- [Chapter 2](#)
- [Chapter 3](#)
- [Chapter 4](#)
- [Chapter 5](#)
- [Chapter 6](#)
- [Chapter 7](#)
- [Chapter 8](#)
- [Chapter 9](#)
- [Chapter 10](#)
- [Chapter 11](#)

PART THREE

- [Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[PART FOUR](#)

[COMING SOON](#)

Annabel Horton

Lost Witch of Salem

A Novel
by Vera Jane Cook



PART I

DOMINION

Chapter 1

Some say I am a stain on your history, a nameless statistic, — a grotesque misfortune that is alluded to in your text- books. I cannot disagree. Allow me to introduce myself as I am. Patience Annabel Horton is my given name, though I refer to myself as Annabel, never much caring to claim a virtue I do not possess. I am in spirit form, for the most part. Though it was not always so.

It was in the year 1692 in the town of Salem, in the state of Massachusetts, that I swung by my neck. Many of us died there, such needless, senseless tragedies.

But I am not here to condemn anyone for my suffering. So, do not be alarmed. As you may or may not know, men who believed they were doing God's work chastised many of Salem's citizens as witches, and brought us to trial. Many, like myself, were hanged. I was eighteen years.

I will tell you what really happened in Salem Village before the century turned. You never learned the truth of it. Your history books do not contain the truth. But I will open the veil of time for you.

It is difficult for me to speak of my physical death but I will share with you all that I can recall of it. Hear me well, new friend. It may ease your pain to learn that death is only a cacophony of singular experiences ... a trick of perception. I did not know that in 1692 as I faced the rope. The texture of the cord lay against my skin with such cruel ambivalence, for it caressed me like the comfort of a lover's hand. I thought it would feel rough and coarse and burn my flesh, but that was not so. The rope was painfully soft, as velutinous as a cat.

What a beautiful spot it was on Gallows Hill, near Town Bridge, just south of Stone's Plain. The morning was ablaze in amber light on the day of my death, and birds fretted in the sky, oblivious to human insanity.

The good Reverend Parris stood before us, his mouth drawn in a somber frown.

"I will pray for your souls, witches," he mumbled. "I will pray to

banish the evil from your heart. May ye find God. May ye rest in peace.”

So many of the townspeople came to see us die; what an odd curiosity they shared. They stood off in clusters and prayed, “God rest ye almighty souls.”

My heart was beating so fast that I might have passed out. My mouth was dry, my eyes nearly blinded by tears. Still, I could see him as he stepped forward, seemingly out of nowhere: A man with an anguished expression. He held my arm with a firm and steady hand. Gently, he led me up the ladder steps.

“Do not be afraid,” he whispered as he carefully placed a blindfold over my eyes.

“I am afraid,” I told him.

His was the last voice I heard, the last face I saw. I had never seen him before, or so I thought. He was not from my village; I was sure of that. He had features so fiercely handsome that even in my desperate state, I noticed and wondered of the familiarity. His hair kissed his brow in tight black curls that shone in the morning sun. His deep dark eyes gazed with haunting despair into my own. How I hated his pity.

As the rope was slipped around my neck and the knot pulled close against the nape, I felt his whisper once again as it grazed my ear.

“Count to three,” he said. “Then turn your head sharply to the right and hold it. Do it girl and be spared!”

But it was quick that a hand pushed me from the ladder step. My fall was brief. My bone broke and snapped in two. My breath left me. I struggled for air but there was none to take in. Death had taken me, death as I had understood it.

I felt my body sway. How odd it was that I could feel anything at all, but I did. I was heavy as a log in water. Suddenly, the heaviness was lifted and I became light as a feather in the wind. Then I lost touch with the earth altogether. My soul rose, vanished into obscurity. I disappeared into semi darkness and I would remain in this shadowy dimension for hundreds of your years, except for occasional life journeys back into living flesh.



Light is no longer the same to me as it is to you. I see your world through shades of gray. All sound in my dimension runs together and I receive only remnants, discordant vibrations from which to decipher language. Movement appears to me as a brief motion wrapped in gauze and released like tiny bursts into reflections of dim light.

When I am not in the form of flesh I live in the confines of shadow.

The psychics of your dimension have said that I can be seen floating between the kiss of dusk and the evening moon. Yes, some of you can actually see me, though you are unaware of what I am. You usually ignore me because I vanish so quickly. I simply blend into the surface of your world and disappear — into objects — into trees — into the soft fur of a sleeping squirrel — into anything that will have me.

Before I begin my tale, you must know this: I can also blend into a human body. I can steal your flesh if I choose. But before you judge me, you must understand my loneliness. You have no idea how desperately I desire the physical senses you so cavalierly take for granted. But please, do not fear me. I will not harm the innocent. Hear me out before you cast any stones. There are secrets in my tale worth knowing.

The snap of my neck appears to have granted me immortality as a captured soul, doomed to live over and over again in stolen flesh and blood. Therefore, I take bodies in exchange for my freedom. I want you to understand that if I were to ever choose your flesh, I would mean you no harm. I would simply borrow the luxury of your language and take comfort in the pleasure of your warm beating heart.

Be assured, the process of my abduction is painless. You see, the earth holds time. When I consume a body all I do is absorb time. It is quite simple. My soul moves out of one perception and into another. Let me reassure you that though I can take any one of you, I prefer the flesh of those whom the devil favors and I do not have to go very far to consume the devil's own.

Let us go back to how it all began once I realized my eternal fate. The first body I took belonged to my youngest brother. Oh, I did not take him. That was my first and only mistake. I took his third daughter. She was just ten years but I took her anyway, believing she would be better off, and in due time, she was.



“Father, look at the light,” Elizabeth cried as she chased me.

Jeremiah scowled. “Child, do not imagine things that are not there.”

The fool did not know that Elizabeth could see me through this opaque shadow that I had become.

“What do I look like, Elizabeth?” I whispered.

I watched in astonishment as she clapped her hands and giggled. “Pretty, pretty,” she called. *My God, she can hear me*, I thought.

“Ah, so you see me as I am, as Annabel?”

But I do not think she actually understood my question for she ran and hid from me, chasing me with her eyes as I flitted across the yard.

She was a bright child. My brother's favorite. He favored her a bit too much if you know what I mean.

"Come Elizabeth, sit upon my lap," he called as he patted his legs.

He kept the child on his lap for hours, the bastard. A little game it was. He would wiggle her about and would not put her down until after he had rocked and shaken the poor child to death and had soiled his pants with the sin of his evil.

I took Elizabeth away from that.

"Forgive me," I said softly. "You will soon be with me, Elizabeth. Jeremiah will meet the devil on his own terms ... and let the devil take him."

One night, as she slept, I seeped into her bloodstream like a tic upon a dog, filling her little soul with my own and gently forcing her to leave her flesh.

"You will be safe," I uttered.

I filtered through her blood like a rushing stream until I felt that I had overwhelmed the balance.

"I am afraid," she screamed.

Of course she was afraid; she did not know where she was going. Neither did I. I did not learn what became of her for so many years. I thought that she would be with me. I prayed that she would be with me but instead it was I that wound up sitting on my brother's lap while the fool grunted and groaned in my ear. But Elizabeth was gone. My sweet Elizabeth was gone to a fate that would take me two long centuries to learn.

So, it would seem, I became Elizabeth. I inhabited her flesh and all saw me as Elizabeth. But my own soul was intact and when I caught my reflection in glass it was that of Annabel Horton. You see, I always capture the image of my original soul in the looking glass.

Eventually, my brother Jeremiah fell to his death. I had nothing to do with it. Eventually, in Elizabeth's flesh, I became the wife of a very ambitious man and lived to be almost twenty-nine years old. I thought I would see Elizabeth again when her flesh and blood gave way to a dreadfully congested chest full of mucus that drowned her in her sleep, but as her flesh died, my spirit rose again into the solitude of familiar darkness.

I shall always carry my grief for Elizabeth. My despair has been endless. It was then I swore I would never again consume the innocent. I vowed I would only take evil and alter it through the presence of my soul. It was Jeremiah that should have been forced from his flesh, not sweet Elizabeth. How perfect for me; take only the evil ones, Annabel, and leave

goodness alone. Unfortunately, evil does not alter easily.

There was evil in Salem Village in 1692 but it was not in the soul of any of those women they hanged. Poor Goodwife Nurse, now she was the saddest of the lot to be taken to the tree. No more of a witch than poor Bridget Bishop. No one was safe from the devil's fire; certainly I was not, not with my detachment, my disinterest in the other girls of my village and their silly games. You see, I knew I had powers and it kept me apart, but I told no one my secrets. Of course, I only tell you now because it no longer matters.

Chapter 2

Before my death, one year to be exact, a presence came to me.

“Who goes there?” I called in the dark. His form was like mist. His answer was like wind.

“Leave me, ghost,” I whispered coarsely.

The wind became a breeze and caressed my lips. I knew he had kissed me and I shuddered.

“Who are you?” I asked softly.

“Yours,” I thought I heard him say.

“You hold me in your arms and yet I cannot see you.” I looked around the room. I felt his movement. Once again, he came so close.

The wind was like a dance as it lifted the hair from my brow. I felt him take me in his arms and embrace me, air around my body so light and sensual, touched by a gentleness that caused my heart to pound.

“Show yourself,” I commanded.

He circled the room, a tall grey mist. I was sure his hair was black, his eyes as dark as evening.

After that, I waited for him every night, and almost every night he came to me. It was not long before I fell in love with this spirit, as helplessly in love as any restless young woman can be.

These ghostly visits continued right up until my physical death. I always knew when he was near because the air would become faint with the scent of fresh rain and I would feel drugged with the fragrance that lingered in my room.

“You smell like late afternoons in summer, after a rainfall,” I told him, but he did not answer. He spoke to me so seldom. It was quite by chance that I heard his whisper.

“Matthew,” he said.

“Matthew is your name?” I asked.

I listened so carefully as the shutters moved and some papers on my bureau fluttered like wings.

“Matthew?” I asked again. “Oh, please speak more. Tell me where you come from?”

My illusive shadow was silent.

“Matthew. Matthew,” I implored. “Speak to me! Show me your face. Let me see the hand that strokes me.”

Suddenly, the wind returned. “I am so far,” he uttered.

“A spirit that has found me in his path?” I called. “It must be so.”

Miraculously, the papers on my bureau flew around and around, as if chasing each other in a playful game of tag.

I knew he could not reach me, could not fully pass beyond the barriers between us. Yet I felt him like an artist must feel his subject.

“You are tall,” I said. “Your shirt has cuffs of white and I have images of your smile. Does time part us, Matthew? Are the centuries between us too vast?”

I saw a shadowy light. It shone before me and revealed a man of great height, but in a split second the light was gone, the image within, too oblique to recall.



Soon after his first visit, I received letters. They appeared out of nowhere. I would find them all over the house, always beginning: *To my wife.*

“What’s this?” I stammered as I held the letters in my hand.

Know that I love you and I’ll come to protect you. He had written.

His notes were always signed with the letter *M*, for his first name.

“Matthew,” I whispered. “How is it that you can leave notes about the house and yet not show me your face?”

But my ghost was silent and could not find a way to answer me.

“Why do you sign only with the letter *M*? I asked. “Is Matthew really your name?”

Silence remained, as still as the night wind beyond my window.

I began to think that I had truly gone insane. Oftentimes, I doubted the presence of my ghost and I questioned Father about the mysterious letters. For surely, I thought, the sun must be too hot and had affected my brain.

“Father, I have received notes of affection. Do you know who sends them?”

Father laughed. “A neighbor’s boy must surely be culprit to the bow of Cupid, daughter.”

Ha! I knew better. No neighbor’s boy in Salem would dare call me his wife. I frightened the boys of my village. They thought me haughty and

illusive. Oh, there was a young man from Andover with the courage to court me, and I might have married him if not for my fascination with my ghostly lover, but I never got that chance.

It must be you who writes me. I smiled to myself. *Mustn't it be so, Matthew?*

If only I had known then that it would be centuries before I would see the face of my beloved. But in 1692, I could only cherish his words. So I made myself a wooden box and covered his letters with a beautiful purple cloth. I placed all the letters inside. I then covered the box with a square piece of coarse fabric and hid it under the tallest elm tree by Frost Fish Brook. Many afternoons that year I read the letters in the shadow of the branches. The writer's hand was full of lovely twists and loops, and the ink was black.

Had I not of died so soon I might have lived my life with my ghostly lover and never come to know him as a man of flesh. I would have assumed that some lost spirit had written the letters and had found a way to leave them inside the house. But, that innocence was not to be, and it was not fate that made it so. It was Urbain, Urbain Grandier, and the power given him.

Chapter 3

This is my magic, but is it evil? None of us were evil, and Reverend Parris's slave knew it. Yes, Tituba knew it. The children knew it, too. I begged Father to take me to New York to escape the madness of murders around us but we could not leave the farm, and Father did not believe that any harm would ever come to me. My brothers swore they would protect me, but I knew better. I knew I would be named a witch and taken to the tree. I could not sleep at night or enjoy the sun as it burst upon me in the mornings.

Soon enough, they served me my warrant as I lay in the field praying that God would see fit to help me. Ann Putnam had accused me. She hardly knew me but she had seen me in Andover buying wheat and grain for the farm. My brother James tried to shield my face from hers when she fell on the ground before me and writhed at my feet. She pointed and held her side in pain.

"She torments me!" she screamed.

I fell into my brother's arms and wept.

"Look into her eyes," she called to all who listened. "They are of the devil, green as evil's slime."

I turned from her accusations but she would not desist.

"Begone, witch," she called.

And the townspeople came and stood around me. They looked into my eyes and said, "Yes, it must be so."

"She accuses everyone that comes to mind," I pleaded.

"She is weak and stupid," I heard my brother say.

I took his hand. I knew that I could not prevent my fate surrounded as I was by fools.

I hated the insidious evil that had inflicted the village. "God, cure them," I prayed. "They have surely gone mad."



I knew the truth, and tried to speak it, yet none would hear it. There was only one other that knew as much as I did, the Reverend's slave girl, Tituba. Yes, Tituba knew. She recognized the darkness and made a pact with the devil and the devil saved her from the tree. I made no pact with the devil and so I swayed by my neck in the August sun.

You might as well know the truth now. It was the slave girl that told the children stories of witchcraft. That is true. The stories came with her from the slave ships. They were a part of her heritage. But it was Thomas Putnam that used the Arawak to incite the children.

"Give them your magic," he told her. "I will see you safely removed from Salem when the time is right."

And why should she not survive in a land that sold her kind like meat at the village square?

"What will you have me do?" she wept.

He bent down close and held her face firmly in his hand. "Fill their head with the nonsense that is in yours," he commanded.

So, Tituba planted the seed in the minds of the children because Thomas Putnam bade her to do so. The ignorance and cruelty that surrounded her was ample fuel for the devil's fire. Do not blame the slave girl. She believed she would save her own soul by recognizing evil when she stood in the presence of it.

I will tell you where the evil thrived in Salem. It was in the child, Abigail Williams, and in the deviousness of the town leaders. They should have destroyed the girl right off and recognized the vindictive plan behind Thomas Putnam's perfidious handshake.

What wickedness there was. Surely, both were the devil's prey. Tituba knew this. She also knew that none would accept that evil could dwell in a child's soul. Yes, Tituba knew better, and she saw the devil's presence in the child the day she followed the girl out to Crane River.

It was an afternoon in late spring. I learned of it as I sat in jail awaiting my trial.

Tituba had watched as Abigail Williams held a child's puppy, a sweet thing named Lark, under water, despite the poor dog's struggle for freedom. Tituba had fallen to her knees in fear as Abigail held poor Lark down by his neck and sang a church song as she did. The puppy yelped and whined for air, but Abigail continued to sing, and to giggle, and to hold the poor dog down until it was silent.

Tituba watched quietly as the child dragged the dog's poor limp body from the water and poked it with a stick. The sweet brown hair now matted and wet, and the eyes still open in fear. Then Abigail sat by the dead puppy and sang. Certainly, the child was the devil's own and Tituba

knew it. Anyone who was not of the devil would have known it.

Later that evening, Tituba went out to Porter's Hill with fresh chicken blood and called forth the witches of light. She asked for protection against the white man's evil. She called forth the witches but it was the devil who answered her call.

The next morning, when Tituba awoke, she began to tell Abigail tales of witchcraft.

"Drink this potion," she told the child. "And the devil will come to you. You will have the power of Satan's sword."

Quickly, Abigail drank the chicken blood.

I will do the bastard's bidding, Tituba thought. So my neck will not wind up in a noose.

Soon, under Thomas Putnam's instruction, Abigail, believing herself infused with the power of Satan, convinced the other children to follow her lead and they pointed their fingers at Putnam's enemies.

"There is the presence of the devil in this town," Thomas Putnam told the courts. "We must cleanse our streets."

"Nay, we must cleanse our souls," they cried.

Soon, the entire town fell under Thomas Putnam's control. Under the name of God, Putnam served the devil. Abigail was only possessed with her own meanness. She was a perfect vessel for the devil's insidiousness. The other children were only pawns in Urbain's game to upset the pious and sacred God-fearing village of Salem. Yes, Urbain Grandier, the devil's own disciple, was having his day once again. Urbain had a perfect evil conduit for his plan. But Abigail Williams had no real power. She was no better a witch than Tituba. You must remember, that once the devil's servant was through with Abigail, and Putnam's insatiable hatred, he cast them all aside and left Salem.

I thought that the devil came to Salem, Massachusetts in 1692 because there was too much of God to be found there. I thought he came because Tituba called him and the child Abigail could receive him, but he did not come because of God or Tituba ... or even the demented Abigail. He came, because of me. For many of your centuries I did not know that. But I know it now. The devil rejoiced in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. But the devil always rejoices. Your world is shrill with the devil's laughter. He continues to make fools of us. Perhaps, he always shall.