

THE WITCHCRAFT OF SALEM VILLAGE

by SHIRLEY JACKSON

It all began when a group of girls, ranging in age from nine to nineteen, formed an informal club. The place was Salem Village in Massachusetts, and the year 1692, when people still believed in witches.

Nearly every day the girls would gather in the big cheerful kitchen of Samuel Parris, the local minister, to talk to his Indian slave, Tituba. The grownups thought that Tituba was instructing the girls in the various duties of housework and cooking, but Tituba was telling them stories—stories filled with the magic and superstition she had known in her youth.

Little by little the girls began acting very strangely. They were bewitched, people said, and they pressed the girls to name the person or persons who were causing them to scream and fall into fits. The "afflicted" girls suddenly realized that their game of make-believe had gone too far and that they might be severely punished if they told the truth, which was that they themselves were responsible for their foolish behavior. So they accused some of the most respected men and women in the village of being witches who were torturing them!

The furor that followed as one innocent and God-fearing person after another was examined, tried, and hanged forms an episode in our history as strange as it is shocking, a true story that rivals the weirdest tale of suspense you have ever read.