

Salem Shadows Bonus Chapter

Constance

How had it come to this?

I wracked my brain over and over again, but I simply could not come up with the inkling of a plausible answer as to how human beings could act with such an utter lack of humanity.

Maybe they were not humans, but demons in disguise. That explanation was becoming less and less farfetched by each hour I toiled away in my cell.

There had to be a law against keeping a pregnant woman in jail. What, did they think that women in that specific condition became pregnant on purpose so that they could blatantly commit crimes and shamelessly get away with it?

I had no idea when this baby would arrive. I had had enough of a maternal instinct to sense when my first daughter and son would come, but this tie-breaker third child was putting me through a special pregnancy.

I was so hungry. We had only two dry biscuits and a glass of water for breakfast every morning. I could not let my baby become malnourished. I looked longingly at the woman in the cell across from mine, who was communicating with a woman facing diagonally from her cell.

As I gazed at the biscuits she had set aside atop her bed, one of them became enveloped in a bright glow.

I looked down at my hand, and it appeared squarely in my palm.

Oh, my goodness! My baby had used its powers for the first time!

I was so enveloped with pride and the knowledge that my baby was healthy enough to accomplish such a feat that I barely had time to realize that the woman was through talking to her neighbor and stuff the whole biscuit in my mouth before she could notice.

She looked confused for a moment, turning the covers for the missing biscuit, but then seemed content to relegate things to the possibility that she had already eaten it and simply forgotten about it.

I wished I had her nonchalant attitude about things, content to gossip with strangers and not have to worry about the many chores and responsibilities that would await at home, should any of us be exonerated in time.

I did not judge any of these women, but I could not be so quick to surrender to the possibility of untimely death; if I died, my baby died. So, succumbing to this barbaric logic that we were the mistresses of Satan, be it with grace or tenacity, was not an option.

Night fell, and when I was certain that the others were all asleep, I allowed myself to weep. What could I do to escape this nightmare? Could something occur that would free all of us? Would I have to escape via magic and condemn my fellow accused, right before some miraculous piece of evidence was about to free them all?

If I did escape, how could I succeed as a fugitive? My legs and back were so sore from the pregnancy that, even if I made it past the bars, I would not make it half a mile before being spotted.

Even if I could be swift, what about the baby? I could not deliver it by myself, nor have any money or resources to keep it clothed and fed while in cognito.

And, of course, there was my beautiful preexisting family. I could not let Jude, Kate, and Leonard pay for my sins if I skipped town, nor live without them even if I could.

I wish I knew if any of these other ladies were witches, and that we could come up with a plan together. But, so far, none had revealed any possession of magic. I was almost tempted to go for broke and announce to them that I was a witch and try to negotiate a deal. After all, we were all in the same boat, one that almost could not be worse.

I closed my eyes and imagined being back at home; the feel of the heat coming from the fireplace, the smell of good food coming from the oven, the look of my daughter's and son's smiles.

I felt a strange, heady sensation that I feared for a second was a contraction. However, when I opened my eyes, I could have been knocked over with a feather.

Was this an illusion? Was I dreaming? I took in my surroundings. I was inside a house, but not my own. Nothing looked familiar. Had my baby teleported me out of prison?

I stayed rooted to my spot and tried to remain calm, for the baby's sake as much as my own. This could mean many things.

"What the devil?" came a voice from the nearest doorway. Before I could scarcely breathe, a woman appeared through it. "Who are you, and what are you doing in my house?" she demanded, a stern look on her face and arms akimbo.

"Ma'am, I can explain...no, I cannot. But I can tell you that I mean you no harm."

"Your meaning is immaterial. Do not think that I will not call the constables on you."

"Ma'am, you do not understand. I—" I cut myself off. Maybe the less talking on my part here, the better.

"Tell me your name," she commanded.

"Constance. Constance Winthrop. And yours?"

She sighed. “If you must know, it is Mabel Truman. Now, how did you get in here? The doors were all locked. Unless—oh no! Stay back! I will report you and have you put in prison!”

“That has already happened.”

“Tell me what I have to do to get you away from me, before I am arrested for harboring a fugitive.”

A new possibility suddenly dawned on me, thanks to these new circumstances. “You can clear me of my charge!”

“Excuse me?”

“I was labeled a witch because my neighbor thought I was using magic to kill his chickens, when really it was a wild dog who did it. If you can claim that the dog was yours, it will clear my name.”

“Look, I—oh, oh,” she said, suddenly starting to collapse. My pregnant state did not allow me to reach her before she hit the ground, but when I did make it to her side, I treated her with utmost care. “I feel dizzy...and my stomach hurts...*aaahhh!*” Her face contorted in pain.

I squeezed my eyes shut in fear, and when I opened them...Mabel had a very large bulge in her belly, whereas my stomach was flat as a board.

The baby had switched itself from my stomach to hers!

Mabel

This could not be happening. I had finally sent the last of my nieces and nephews away, and now I was primed to give them a cousin.

“Do not worry. This happened for a reason,” said Constance.

“Oh, really, and just what exact reason is that?” I asked sardonically.

“It could be...*many* reasons.”

“You are stalling,” I pointed out.

“Right. Look, all you have to do is clarify my trumped-up charge, and I am sure the baby will transfer itself back to me.”

“I cannot lie to a police officer or a judge. Unlike you and your kind, I actually have scruples.”

“But you would be helping me.”

“Oh, no. I do not play that kind of game. What is right is right, and this is wrong.”

“Fine. I will leave, and you will have to explain to all who see you why you are eight-and-a-half months pregnant.”

My eyes narrowed in loathing. I did not know if she knew that I was not married, but the humiliation of an unwed pregnancy would be worse than a guilty conscience from bearing false witness.

“Fine. I agree. But how am I going to disguise this?”

“Judging by your reaction to all of this, am I correct in assuming that you are a witch?”

“Pah! My family are witches, not me.”

“Well, if you would permit me, perhaps I could look in your family’s spell book for a cloaking charm—”

“Absolutely not! This is already ruined beyond all words! Besides, not that I care, but you could steal from the book and use it to kill my family, not to mention kill me.”

“Do you want this to stay hidden, or not?”

I retrieved the book from where it was hidden in the kitchen, and Constance performed the cloaking spell. The following morning, after she was rested and had eaten her fill, I went to the higher-ups and cleared Constance’s name while she hid in the bushes, ready to transfer herself back into her cell with her baby in her body and be declared free the following morning before anybody could put together that she had not left under anybody’s supervision. It was surprisingly easy.

However, just when I thought that this nightmare was over, I blinked and was transferred to Constance’s cell inside the jailhouse, with my baby bump uncloaked.

That wench! She probably had this set up as a trap the whole time!

When Judge Harper came into the jail to exonerate Constance and instead found me, not only did he not free me, but he set a warrant out for Constance’s arrest.

When I woke up from a fitful sleep, I was back inside my house, on my bed, Constance wiping at my forehead with a cool washcloth.

“What happened?” I asked.

“I think the baby sensed your concern for me.”

“It might have sensed my concern for myself. I might be the new number nine, Constance.”

“I cannot tell you how sorry I am for that, which is why I cast a very heavy but very risky memory loss spell on those who observed the switch. The thing is, the caster will be remembered within twenty-four hours.”

“That does not keep us safe for very long. Even if the baby is born and safe and healthy, what would you do? Even if the judge stays true to his word and the warden comes to free you tomorrow, which he likely will not if that memory spell you cast takes hold, it might be noticed if you show up again in jail tomorrow morning not pregnant. Could you make a run for it with your baby in tow, leaving behind your husband and other children?”

“Well, I am certainly not going to be a martyr and die at the gallows, nor give the baby over to you. If I force my family to desert Salem, I may lose them all, not to mention die myself, to Indians. Though, maybe I could be safe if just me and the new baby vanish together. To fake mine—and subsequently the baby’s—death would leave them heartbroken, and my kids may abuse their powers to try to retaliate. I—”

“Aaaagh!” I involuntarily interrupted her, doubling over in pain.

“Oh, no! You are going into labor!” she shrieked.

The room started spinning. It could not be! “Call Dr. Tanner. He is a family friend.”

“He may turn me in. Or you, for that matter.”

“His civic duty may lead him to do that, but his Hippocratic Oath will at least save the baby.”

Joseph came immediately, delivered the baby from me safely, and promised not to report either of us.

I gave the baby over to Constance, and escorted her back to her house. Although I had no magical powers, I did everything I could to make their escape from the city undetectable.

I knew that I would never look at baby Temperance the same way again.

The day before the hanging, it was announced that the same number of witches were to be executed. Apparently, none of the authorities wanted it released that there was apparently a jailbreak, meaning Constance’s spot quickly and discreetly replaced.

With another pregnant woman.