

Witch Hunt

Carol Morosco



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WITCH HUNT

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For My Family:

Descendants of Susannah Martin:

Greg, Joe, Kate, Andrew, Emily, Danny,

Ella and Matthew

May you always enjoy the sunrise

Chapter 1

Sara's Story – Present Day

“Mom, what did you say?” Sara snapped her head away from the window and stared at her mom driving the car. “What did you just say?” she repeated.

Sara's mom glanced over at Sara and continued driving. “I said now that we live in Salem we'll have a chance to visit the memorial to your ninth great grandma, Susannah Martin. Sadly, she was hanged as a witch.”

“Wait. You never told me about her. I have a great grandma who was a witch?” Sara wiggled in her seat and pulled on the seatbelt as she turned to look at her mother.

Sara's mother shook her head. “She was hanged as a witch, but she wasn't one. Sara, there is no such thing as witches. This was so very long ago during a time when people were afraid of things and people they didn't understand. And what they didn't understand they would destroy.”

“Even a person?”

“Yes, even a person. Now enough talk about that.” Mom pulled the car into the garage and shut it off. “Help me with the groceries, Sara.”

“OK, but I really want to talk about this,” answered Sara, as she grabbed two filled bags off the back seat of the car.

“Later, after dinner. Let's get these in the house.”

Sara threw her bags onto the kitchen table. “Mom, why don't I set the table while you put the food away?”

“I think you're trying to hurry me up.”

“Yes, I am.” Sara smiled. “Now, where are the knives and forks?” Sara walked over to the stack of boxes piled by the wall. She found the box labeled ‘kitchen’ and pulled the tape off the top of the box. “Found them.”

Sara and her mom, Eileen Martin, had just moved to Salem, Massachusetts from Cape Cod. They left their little house by the ocean after Sara's Dad had died. They both agreed they felt sad living in the house without him. Everywhere they looked they saw something reminding them of Tom Martin. He had built most of the wood furniture in their house, the bookcases, the kitchen table and even Sara's bunk bed.

Their town on Cape Cod was small. Every summer it filled with vacationers from everywhere who came to swim in the ocean and get on

fishing boats to see the giant whales. And every fall everyone went home leaving the town quiet, empty and closed until next summer. They both felt alone without Sara's Dad and people around them. Sara's Mom was the first to say, "Let's move somewhere to a new house and to a town filled with people who stay all year."

"Do you think we won't miss Dad anymore in a new house?" Sara had asked, with crossed arms and her eyes on the tips of her shoes.

Her Mom had gathered Sara into her arms. She rested her head on Sara's and spoke softly to her, "We will always miss your dad. He is and will be a part of us forever and ever and I'm so glad of that but I know he would want us to be happy and living here without him doesn't make us happy anymore." They packed up and moved to Salem.

Thinking of her old house, Sara stood still in the kitchen and looked around the room. It wasn't like her old kitchen. It had a sink, a stove, a refrigerator but where were the blue gingham curtains on the window over the sink? Not there. Where was the calendar on the wall? Not there. Where were the family pictures taped to the refrigerator? Not there. Where was Dad cooking dinner at the stove wearing one of Mom's flowered aprons and singing a weird song as loud as he could? Not there.

Now with her eyes on her mom, Sara said, "I just don't know if we should have left Cape Cod. Sometimes I feel as if Dad were still with us in our old house."

"I know, Sweetie. All of this is hard right now and will be for a while before it gets better."

"I don't want to get used to Dad being gone." Sara burst into tears and ran out of the kitchen.

Her Mom followed her into the living room. The two of them sat in silence side by side on the sofa. Sara was softly crying and wiping her nose into her sleeve.

Sara's Mom spoke first, "Do you need a tissue?"

Sara answered, "Yes, but who knows what box they're packed in?"

"I know where the paper towels are. I'll get you one."

Sara's mom handed her a piece. "Are you ready for dinner?"

Sara blew her nose and stood up. "I guess so. I'll get out the dishes and glasses. I saw them in the box under the forks and spoons."

Within minutes the table was ready. Sara watched as her mom put hamburgers in a pan to fry. Sara thought back to when her dad was alive.

He was the cook of the family. Mom would feel guilty leaving the dinners for him to do. "I'll cook tonight," she would offer when she came home from work at the health clinic where she was a nurse.

"Don't be silly," her father would say. "We all know I'm the better cook." Then he would laugh, pick up Sara's Mom and spin her around the room, until she begged him to stop, "I'm dizzy. Put me down."

"That's right," he would answer. "Too dizzy to feed a hungry husband and a growing monkey."

Sara sighed. Sometimes the memories of her dad made her laugh; such as how excited he got when he spied the wild turkeys in their back yard. He would run out the back door yelling, "The turkeys are here. Sara, come out and see them. Hurry." He loved the turkeys and would scatter seed on top of the snow all winter for them.

Sometimes the memories made her sad. Mom took care of dad when he was so sick. It was hard for him to talk but he wanted Sara to be with him to hold his hand. He would smile and give her hand a little squeeze and she would squeeze back.

Right now, they made her want. Way down inside herself where she imagined her soul lived, a huge longing for her dad made her ache all over. He always called her his little monkey. Now she was no one's little monkey. Her Dad, Tom Martin, was gone forever.

"What do you want with your hamburger?" asked her mom.

"What are the choices?"

Mom poked her head into the refrigerator. "We have sliced tomatoes, round tomatoes, and whole tomatoes. What sounds good?"

"I'm thinking I'll go for the tomatoes with my hamburger."

"Good choice. Me too."

Sara thought they must be poor. Dinner was always the same three choices: hamburgers, hot dogs or macaroni and cheese. She missed her dad's fish dinners on Cape Cod. They would have scallops and lobster once a week. Things were different now; however, Sara wasn't going to lose hope. Maybe she could persuade her mom to buy a small package of chicken for dinner next week. She would offer to help cook it too.

Right now, Sara couldn't wait for dinner to be over to hear the story of her witch grandmother. She sat across from her mom and with her mouth full of tomatoes and hamburger and said, "Hurry up and eat, Mom, so you can tell me the story of my old grandmother."

“Sara, please, don’t talk with your mouth full.”

At that second a large piece of meat flew out of Sara’s mouth and landed with a plop on the table. Sara laughed and said, “I guess I’m eating like a monkey.”

After the dishes were cleaned up and put in the cabinet, Sara pulled on her mom’s arm. “Let’s sit and talk about my witch great grandmother.”

After they settled down on the sofa, Sara began, “How come you and Dad never told me about her before?”

“Well, Sara, the truth is I didn’t know anything about this until after Dad died and I’m not even sure he knew about it.”

“Why wouldn’t Dad know about his own family?”

“After he died and after we decided to move. I went upstairs into the attic to clear out some of the old things we had up there, such as your baby crib and things we won’t need anymore. I hadn’t been up there for years. I found an old trunk of your father’s tucked away in a corner. When I opened it, I saw there wasn’t much in it, just some old folders and a small wood box on the bottom. Then I remembered when his mom, your grandma, had died your dad brought the old trunk to our house with some other things, including her homemade quilts.”

Sara interrupted, “You mean the star quilt you have on your bed?”

“Yes, and another blue one that’s in the closet.” She continued, “I was so busy getting ready to move I didn’t have a chance to go through all the papers in the folders but I did glance through the folder which was placed on top. That’s where I found old court papers on Susannah North Martin.”

“What are ‘court papers’?” asked Sara. “I don’t understand.”

“Remember, all this was news to me. Your father never shared any of this information with me. So I really believe he never knew about her. The court papers covered several different times, over the years, when Susannah was accused of doing witchcraft in her village. One time a neighbor claimed she put a spell on his oxen and made them all walk into the river and drown. She and her husband, George Martin, said the accusations were false and the judge said she was innocent in the earlier years. Of course, we all know now the last time in court the judge declared her guilty of being a witch and ordered her to be hanged. It’s all so sad.”

“Mom, you said you found a box in there too. What’s in the box?”

“The box is locked shut and the key is missing. It’s not in the trunk. I looked in every corner. One of the things I know is locks and flat keys

weren't invented until long after Susannah Martin's death. So whoever put the lock on the box wasn't born when Susannah was alive. The box belonged to other people over the years."

Sara jumped off the couch. "Can I see the folders and the wood box?"

"They're in one of the moving boxes in my bedroom. I must dig them out. Can it wait until tomorrow? It's been a long day."

"Mom, please, please, this is important. I want to just see them. I'll help you search for them."

"OK." Mom sighed as she got up from the sofa. "Let's have a look."

Sara and her mom climbed the stairs to the bedroom. Cardboard boxes were piled everywhere. "Where do we start?" asked Sara.

Mom pointed to a box by the bed. "Maybe that one."

After opening three packing boxes, Sara in triumph held up folders over her head and announced, "I got them." She dived back into the box looking for the wood box. "Found it."

Sara sat on the bed. She turned the small box over and over. Mom joined her as they examined it. The sides were dark and stained brown in places. The top was rough and splintery. The key hole was black. Sara shook it. A soft rustling sound came from inside. Sara's gave a cry. "Mom, something's in here. Listen." She held the box up to her mother's ear and shook it again. "Do you hear that?"

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