

# SALEM



# Sandra Triname

Salem

(Roman)

*« In some religions, reincarnation is the migration of the soul, which, at the time of death, passes into another body. » Larousse*

«If I had the power to  
forget, I would forget.  
Every human memory  
is full of sorrows and  
troubles» Charles  
Dickens.

# PROLOGUE

## SALEM VILLAGE, 1690

The young woman finished burning the cloths she had just used to dress the multiple and bloody wounds of the poor man lying on his table. He had received a important beating, and even that was a weak word. His tormentors had beaten the unfortunate man and had stopped only because they had probably thought he was dead. He must have been nearly seventy years old and was obviously alone at the time. He certainly couldn't have done anything but protect himself from the blows, hoping that the storm would pass before the Grim Reaper began his fatal harvest. Beating an old man, what a great display of courage!

With a sigh, she considered her hands, so full of blood that one would have thought she was wearing gloves, for a second, before quickly washing them in a basin that was there. This was the third time she had treated such wounds since the beginning of the week, on all sides. The madness of Men knew no limits!

"Thank you," said the Amerindian who was standing behind her.

No doubt the son of her patient. His features were defeated and fear was oozing from every pore of his skin. She could understand it, the old man was close from death tonight. The young woman discerned something else familiar about him, but she couldn't define what it was, and she preferred not to dwell on it too long. She had no interest in fraternizing with members of either side. The longer she stayed away from this sterile conflict, the better off she would be.

"You're welcome, it'll probably take him a little while, but he'll get over it. Give him this mixture as an infusion, twice a day for eight days," she explained, handing him a small canvas bag containing herbs. "Soon he will be back on his feet. If he has a fever, come back, I'll give you what he needs. It is, in any case, essential that I see him again in two weeks so that I can remove the threads I used to close the wounds. Some were too deep to heal by themselves. He will have some marks, but at least he will be on the side of the living."

The Indian nodded seriously.

"My father is a warrior. The scars that will come or that he already bears are only proof of his courage in battle. He has never given up without a fight, he is a brave and proud man."

"Pride sometimes equals stupidity," Kanda grumbled. Submitting without discussion "Run, in some cases, save a life."

The Indian squinted, the flames in the fireplace dancing morbidly in his eyes.

"For what it's worth," he replied, "he's done no wrong. The whites came after him when he was in his right," he tried to explain. "We were hunting on our land, not theirs."

"I don't want to hear about it," the young woman cut in, "your quarrels with the locals are not my concern."

She had probably been more curt than she would have liked, but she had no desire to get involved in all these stories between Puritans and Indians. That was one of the reasons why she lived alone and away from the two towns, on the edge of the forest along the road that connected them. All claimed to be pacifists, victims or in the right, but in the end, the blows were delivered with application on both sides, whatever each one said. Ah, the human being and its mania for imposing its way of living or thinking on its brothers, without ever agreeing to learn anything from them, and supposedly for its own good! Because it is well known that instilling a lesson is always more effective with a lot of fights, humiliations, or worse.

"Why help him, then?" asked the Indian, surprised.

"Because he is a man like any other. Who would I be to decide who should live or die? I have knowledge that he needs, I offer it to him, and it is up to him to make good use of it."

"The Whites are suspicious of you," he breathed, lowering his gaze.

"You also," retorted she directly.

He smiled, amused, his face suddenly illuminated by the glare of his immaculate teeth. With his square jaw, his black eyes cut in almond, his coppery skin and his hair raking the plumage of a raven, which fell on his shoulders, he was beautiful. Yet there was something special about him, something reminiscent of a great beast. He embodied the quiet strength of those who are aware that they do not need to show violence to impress or knock down their opponent. If he had been afraid a few minutes earlier, the feeling had quickly dissipated. Always beware of sleeping water, Kanda mused without taking his eyes off the Indian.

"Maybe it's because you refuse to give up your secrets. Who taught you the magic of plants and nature? I don't know anyone who knows how to use them like you. Whoever taught you must have a great deal of knowledge, and it certainly wasn't a white man."

She shrugged her shoulders without breaking the visual joust for a second.

"It doesn't matter. You wanted me to heal your father, it's done. I would do the same if one of them was brought to me. I tell you again, I'm not interested in your little battles. Now go away before daylight, I don't want to get into trouble."

"You may be right, but you can be sure that we will remember what we owe you. We always honor our debts and now that you have saved the life of one of our own, we will not hesitate to save yours if necessary. You will have our eternal gratitude."

She nodded her head in agreement. However, Kanda thought that she would never go to them or anyone else for help. The only way to preserve herself was to stay away from everything and everyone. That way, no one would find out her secrets and she wouldn't have to suffer for being attached to anyone. Her condition demanded some sacrifices, but that was the price to pay to stay alive...

"I thank you, but I never demand anything in exchange for the care I give. Let us say that the good that I dispense around me looks after my soul," smiled the young woman. "Besides, tonight, I'm in a generous mood, so I'll give you and yours a piece of advice: avoid hanging around in the forest at night. The area is not safe, and not just because of the Puritans. Some... beasts, don't like it when you disturb their rest, or disturb them while they are hunting. It would be a shame if one of you were to get hurt again".

"I am a warrior and an excellent hunter, I am not afraid of anything or anyone," replied the Indian with a pinched air.

She smiled and shook her head. Whether they were born Puritans, Quakers or Indians, men were always the same: convinced that their simple nature as males made them safe from danger and too proud to admit that, unfortunately, it was never enough to thwart death.

"You should, though. Fear sometimes proves to be a remarkable means of conservation," she said, opening the door to invite them out. The whites are right about one thing: caution is the mother of safety.

He shrugged, then gently lifted his still unconscious father into his arms, sniffing, looking smug. As he passed her, he stopped for a second to stare defiantly into her eyes. With another person, in another place, this would have ended in a bloodbath, but Kanda simply held his gaze as she began to close the door, pushing him out of the house. She would never capitulate, neither in front of him, nor in front of anybody, and in this moment she dismissed him, purely and simply. He could revisit this scene dozens of times in his mind, change the smallest detail, she had just taken over in their little silent confrontation.

Don't play the game of dominance if you want to, it can't be learned, it's innate, or not. In nature, any animal knows it. Only humans were left not to be aware of it. All the riches of the world would not be able to tame her. On the other hand, without any money or difficulty, she could exterminate this insignificant mammal called Man.

Once alone, the young woman was content to lie down on her straw mattress, in front of the fire, in the warmth of her little hut. It was a more than modest dwelling, made of raw wood that she treated with oils so that it would not rot, poorly insulated and whose windows were mostly scratched, but it was hers. The forest belonged to no one, for the moment, and the inhabitants had no problem with her settling here. In fact, most of them never seemed to notice her, except when they needed her services, of course.

Kanda stretched with a sigh. It was going to be a long day, with more people to help, more children to deliver, more wounds to heal. She would also have to look for plants before the cold weather came, so she could dry them. It was going to be a tough year, and the neighborhood feuds were not going to stop any time soon.

With a smile, she mused that, as long as that was all there, it wasn't so bad after all. While they were busy killing each other, they didn't worry about anything else and that was fine.

# 1

## Danver, nowadays

Griggs whistled cheerfully as he wandered through the oldest aisles of the cemetery. The night, combined with the thick fog and the stone headstones decorated with crisscrossing bones or gaping skulls, most of which were lopsided, gave the place an even more mournful atmosphere than usual. However, he didn't care; after all, the most dangerous being here was him.

He had come to pay a courtesy call on the eminent people of Salem. Not the ones left in history, not a chance! They had been nothing but ridiculous puppets. No, they had been too sanctimonious and timid for him to regret them. Besides, he didn't really miss the others either. He had just taken advantage of his return to come for a walk, like the members of an ordinary family who pay their respects to the graves even though they did not know the deceased themselves. A sort of duty of memory!

In Griggs' case, it was more a matter of unhealthy amusement than of any respect. He wanted to mock those who had allowed him to be still here today, three hundred years later... The men who had taken part in the real trial, the one that had taken place behind closed doors, in the greatest secrecy, while the rednecks of this uninteresting town rushed to see the witches in court. A ridiculous sham that they had taken care to set up, piece by piece, like a smoke screen.

It's a good thing they didn't live to see this century! Because if drinking a little too much or consuming before marriage was proof of witchcraft, they would have asked for the arrest of half the population of this country!

In this case, they didn't have to worry about finding any more idiotic evidence to prove that the accused was practicing witchcraft. From the beginning of the hearings, they knew the verdict. It was enough to drag things out a bit, using the excuse that they had to listen to this girl's testimony again in order to convince her to confess and save her soul, as the orders required, before finding her guilty - no matter what - without arousing the suspicions of the court or prison staff, of course. A parody of justice to satisfy a vengeance, terrible and radical, monstrous even, but they hadn't really had the opportunity to refuse; either they obeyed or they died. And then this damned woman had almost cost him his career and made him look ridiculous at the same time! So the dilemma didn't last very long. Death was the best way to shut her up and allow him to stay alive.

That said, he had managed to get much better. Immortality and eternal youth! His companions could have taken advantage of the situation as he did, but most of them were too religious, or too cowardly, to conspire with evil. They had been content to claim immunity for their family or a few lands. A great deal! A life of misery and deprivation to end up as a feast for maggots! They might have imagined that Eden would be open to them, but in the meantime, no one had come back to say whether it really existed! To live forever on earth and enjoy all the pleasures that existence could offer, that, at least, was concrete.

In the end, there were only three of them to take the plunge into eternity. Betty Parris, through whom everything had begun, or almost, and who had taken it upon herself to convince Ann Putman and Abigail Williams to support her in her lie, in order to "have a little fun". Only eleven years old at the time and already a high-flying bitch! She had to wait until her eighteenth year to be transformed, but she had put that time to good use, either by luring mortals back to the nest or by ruining their lives with a thousand little tricks full of pure wickedness. She was a master at plotting and spreading rumors while pretending to be a naive young woman who was shocked by her fellow human beings. Machiavelli had better watch out!

Unfortunately, it wasn't enough, she had been killed a few weeks ago, in dark circumstances. After having spent the evening hypnotizing humans in order to bleed them like chickens, in a local bar, she had, according to those present that evening, decided to go home, because she was not having enough fun. No one had seen her afterwards. She could have decided to leave town despite the orders, which would have been stupid, but not impossible. However, her tattered mink coat, one of her shoes and her purse had been found covered in blood not far from the road leading to Salem. Everything suggested that she had either been trapped or pursued by her killer before being massacred. That said, such a pain in the ass had few, if any, real friends. Betty was one of those people deeply inhabited by evil. Wanton wickedness was her leitmotif, so as long as she got a little money for it, she didn't have to be forced to abuse it. In all likelihood, she had finally found her master, or had the devil considered her too much of a competitor and decided it was time to end the game. May she rest in peace.

The second thief to sell his was Danford Bell, who, though he never admitted it, was too afraid of growing old and dying one day to turn down such an opportunity. Too afraid to say out loud what he was thinking, he had nevertheless taken it upon himself to create the psychosis without appearing to do so. Every conversation he had with his neighbors or friends about the other inhabitants ended with a: strange, worrying, unchristian, and finally, for good measure, satanic. In this way, he had aroused the suspicion of all and sundry, while at the same time getting his own way. Quick and efficient. In the eyes of the world, he had found himself on the side of the honest Puritans while all these people were being taken to the Boston jail. If there had been any doubts, the possibility of recovering property or land had dissuaded them from voicing them publicly.

And, of course, the third and final accomplice, himself. He had been responsible for setting the wheels in motion by diagnosing the first cases of possession. How difficult it had been to hold back the laughter at the appalled faces of these frogs! This simple word, "Evil", was enough to plunge them into a state of indescribable terror.

Then things went very fast. The girl had been arrested, tortured, as required, and then killed. He had fulfilled his contract and received his reward. Their little shenanigans had led to some collateral damage, of course, but in the end it had all been worth it! What were a few peasants or vagabonds compared to eternal life? Since then, and despite his fears, he had always managed to come to terms with his conscience. After all, if the roles had been reversed, would they have hesitated? Not sure...

He had finally had to leave the area, so that no one would realize that he was not aging and would not wonder. Moreover, once transformed, he had fallen under the yoke of his initiator and he had no choice but to follow him. He had never set foot there again, nor had he ever felt the urge to do so. However, a few months ago, for a reason he couldn't explain, the masters had wanted to move back here. He had tried to escape this chore, but Conrad wasn't kidding and, to upset him was to sign his death warrant. Well, going home wasn't so bad after all. It was even amusing to see the changes in the city and the way people reacted to the trial. Today, the ploy would never have worked. In the end, this time had its good points and its advantages, at least as far as he was concerned.

A chill wind had risen, and he thrust his hands into the pockets of his frock coat, a touch of old-fashioned coquetry, after waving at one of the steles that read:

#### BURTON GRIGGS 1656-1701

His elder brother, a simpleton, who, in his adoration for his younger brother, had not ceased to support the latter's version by repeating that the Evil One was evolving among the members of the congregation, that he had seen it with his own eyes. This was totally false because he almost never left the family home. He had formally forbidden him to do so, lest he blunder about his real medical skills.

Griggs had indeed studied, but he had never managed to get his degree. His taste for parties, women and alcohol had not really helped make him studious. After two unsuccessful attempts and the

untimely death of his parents in a wagon accident, he decided to practice anyway, but far away from their hometown, Alberta. They hit the road, moving from city to city, Griggs offering his services as a so-called specialist and spending money almost faster than he earned it. Then one day he met a couple of Puritans. The credulity of these people and their fear of the Almighty had almost dazzled him. He finally had a way to start over and make a fortune. He had studied the religion assiduously before setting out to find a community. The hardest part had been getting it into his brother's thick skull that they too were Puritans. Having been raised a strict Anglican, Burton found it difficult to understand why he should change his ways. He had explained to him that as one grew up, one also had to change one's way of worship and - thank God! - that explanation had gone down like a bullet! Burton couldn't have been more than five years old mentally, so most of the time he just obediently followed his younger brother's orders. Without knowing it, he had been the instrument of his brother, who had never for a minute considered negotiating with the masters in his favor. As soon as the trial was over, the doctor placed him in a specialized institution, claiming that the agitation caused by him had made him uncontrollable. In order to match the symptoms, he had not hesitated to fill him with psychotropic drugs. Burton had ended his life there, totally devastated by the abandonment of his brother whom he had admired for years. In any case, it was necessary to see things as they were: never Conrad would have converted him, Burton's delay would have represented a great danger for the rest of the nest. As for him, he was more than tired of dragging this ball and chain! The placement was the best solution for everyone... At least for him.

"See you later, bro! And thanks again for the service! If you meet the old guys, say hello to them for me."

He was about to leave the cemetery to go back to the city when something brushed against him so fast that he almost lost his balance. Surprised, he looked around, looking for one of his fellow creatures who had tried to play a joke on him, but he saw nothing. His sense of smell did not detect any other presence. Griggs shook his head and smiled, probably just a stronger than usual gust of wind, and lost in his reverie, he must have stumbled on a pebble. This place was definitely making him paranoid! It was time for him to leave this city for good! He resumed his progression towards the exit and was about to reach the gates when, this time, something hit him, delivering a searing pain in his left arm and sending him tumbling face down. As he tried to get up, he discovered his limb was gone and screamed. He scanned the area in panic, mentally listing the creatures that could hurt him so badly. Unfortunately, as at the time of the trial, the immortals had invaded Salem again, and he had too many enemies on both sides to make an inventory so quickly. He frantically searched the floor for his arm. If he could get it back in place, it would weld itself back together.

"Who's there?" he shouted, as his claws were already replacing the nails on his remaining hand. "What do you want from me?"

For all answer, a new shock and the loss of his right arm. Kneeling on the cold gravel, frozen with fear and pain, Griggs pleaded: "Please! Why are you picking on me? Who are you?"

In front of him, he heard footsteps. However, because of the surrounding mist, he did not immediately distinguish the approaching creature, which was undoubtedly a quadruped. It was when he saw the golden eyes emerge from the night and the fog that he knew he was dealing with a wolf. Nevertheless, it was only when he recognized the animal, thanks to its so particular coat, that the fear changed into terror.

"It is impossible, impossible...," he stammered. "How..."

He didn't have time to scream again when his body was already scattered to the four corners of the cemetery.