

# storytellers' newsletter

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## The Year of Our Lord, 1692

*An original article by Susan Meissner*

The afternoon light is fading. Soon darkness will flood this windowless cell and I and the women seated around me will begin our nightly test of wills. In the darkness it is easy to imagine the impossible; that the holy light of God has been extinguished in Salem and there is no hope for any of us. Few choices are left to me as I sit here in chains and use the last of my ink. But I can choose to believe that which my heart bids me to hold fast. I must believe it: God has not abandoned us. He is with us when the sun rises triumphant and when night descends like a shroud. And He is with us in this in-between moment—when neither light nor darkness reigns complete.

God knows I am innocent of the charges against me.

I, Mercy Hayworth, am no witch.

My soul belongs to God Almighty alone and I serve no other.

I look around at the other women in this cell, innocent like me, sentenced to hang like me, and I see in their eyes the very thing that brought us here.

Fear.

Fear of what could not be explained.

Fear of what had been set in motion and seemed

unstoppable.

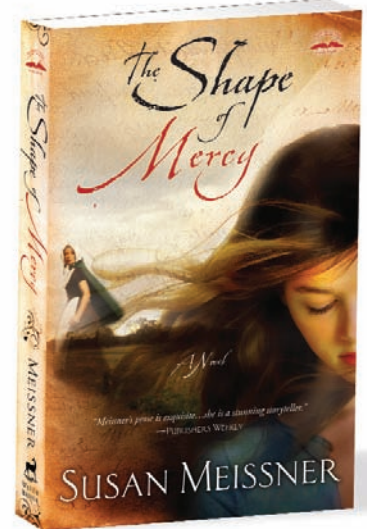
Fear of the will of empowered people.

Fear of the sway of deception.

Fear of the daring and extravagant nature of love and mercy.

Surely they know we are the bravest women in Salem. We have not confessed to a lie. When this madness at last ceases, and I know it will, it is Truth for which Salem will be remembered. Not for the innocents executed under a siege of fear, but for the unflagging devotion to God that flung us heavenward.

And it is this act of mercy toward our accusers—our courage—that will rend the heavy curtain that now hangs over Salem.



My ink is almost gone.

I have placed my diary in safe hands.

I have filled all the empty places within me with thoughts of my beloved.

And I have forgiven those who in ignorance have accused me falsely. A day is coming when in anguish they will realize their error and I pray they will be able to find a measure of peace.

Salem means peace. Did you know that? My dear Papa told me this long ago. Peace distinguishes itself when striving ceases. He told me this as well.

In the Holy Bible, God's chosen people, the Israelites, pronounced it shalom. I love the way that word falls from my tongue. And my quill.

So soft.

Like a prayer.

Shalom.

I can already feel the heavy curtain beginning to tear...

## Who will she choose?

The long-awaited conclusion to Cindy Woodsmall's best-selling Sisters of the Quilt series

Also Available  
When the Heart Cries  
When the Morning Comes



Coming to stores  
September 16th

## New Author Spotlight: Susan Meissner

When I was in eighth grade I played the role of a young girl accused of witchcraft in the play *To Burn a Witch*. My role required me to be the accused one moment and then an accuser the next, as my character chose to save herself by suddenly claiming to be bewitched by an innocent girl who shared her jail cell. I've never forgotten how it felt to imagine myself falsely accused. Nor have I forgotten the hot shame in condemning an innocent person to death to save myself and align with the crowd.

Conjecture surrounds the Salem Witch Trials. Historians can only suppose what fueled the hysteria. In the end, this peculiar and sad moment in our nation's history reveals what can happen when the crowd mentality takes over and we believe the worst about others simply because the crowd tells us to. In *The Shape of Mercy*, I chose to weave in a secondary theme: What brings out the worst in one can bring out the best in another. Love shines the brightest in the theater of fear and apathy. Mercy has a shape and that shape is love.

