THE WITCH HUNT

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Author's Note

This essay wasn't written to make you comfortable.

It was written to hold up a mirror — not to the past, but to the choices we continue to make when fear knocks and conformity answers.

I've always been fascinated by what we choose to remember, and more importantly, what we choose to forget.

The Salem Witch Trials are a cautionary tale, not about magic, but about mob justice, blind obedience, and the cost of being different.

We weren't taught to fear witches.

We were taught to fear becoming them.

And in that fear, we learned to stay silent.

If this made you uncomfortable — good. That was the point.

— Sai Krishna

Beneath Smoke And Ash

The Salem Witch Trials weren't about the supernatural. They were about social survival — a collective agreement that someone had to suffer so the rest could sleep better at night. The devil was a convenient excuse. The real danger was non-conformity. In Salem, keeping your head down wasn't cowardice — it was a survival strategy. And looking away wasn't cruelty — it was currency.

History often attributes the trials to hysteria, as though fear alone could weaponize a whole community. But hysteria doesn't produce detailed testimony. It doesn't create court records. It doesn't pass laws or plan executions. What happened in Salem wasn't chaos — it was a system. One built on silence, sanctified lies, and the ruthless efficiency of moral outsourcing.

No one wanted to be the next to hang. That was enough.

The testimony of children was elevated to the divine, while the pleas of the accused — often midwives, widows, women who spoke too plainly or refused to kneel — were treated as evidence of guilt. The sin was never witchcraft. It was *otherness*. Being odd. Being too quiet. Too smart. Too angry. Too poor. Too female.

In truth, the villagers didn't fear witches. They feared being seen siding with one.

The fear wasn't of evil — it was of exclusion. And when belonging becomes currency, empathy becomes contraband. People condemned their own friends because it was easier than being the only one who didn't. They cheered the punishments not because

they believed in them, but because they feared what it meant if they didn't. This is the kind of justice that only feels like justice from the middle of a mob.

And so we were taught to fear the witches — not the people who *burned them alive*.

The Pitchfork Emoji

The trials didn't end — they evolved.

They changed their clothes, updated their vocabulary, and moved online. Today, the stakes are rarely death by hanging. But careers, reputations, mental health — those are fair game.

Modern witch hunts look different, but they operate on the same emotional architecture: *us vs them*, *virtue vs deviance*, *safety vs threat*. The masses still rally behind a banner, often moral or ideological, and the target is still someone who refuses to fold. The accused are labeled: problematic, difficult, dangerous, not because they are, but because someone needed to be.

Social media became our new town square. Callout posts are the new gallows. The most viral accusation wins. And dissent, even reasonable or informed, gets spun into guilt. Because in New Salem, silence equals complicity and nuance equals betrayal.

Historically, the people accused of witchcraft were never the ones with power — they were the powerless, the isolated, the inconvenient. That hasn't changed. In every generation, there's a need to sacrifice someone so the rest can feel righteous. And nothing fuels collective morality quite like shared outrage. It gives people the illusion of integrity without the burden of introspection.

We romanticize being the hero — the one who speaks out. But most of us are the crowd. We don't need to believe in the fire to enjoy the warmth. And even when we know something's off, we keep quiet, because being right is never as rewarding as being accepted. It's safer to retweet than to re-evaluate.

Conformity isn't passive — it's strategic. Especially in a system that punishes difference with exile. People rarely jump on bandwagons because they're convinced. They jump because they're scared to be left behind. We don't follow the mob because we're evil. We do it because we've learned — painfully — that standing still while everyone runs is how you get trampled.

So when we say Salem was a fluke — mass hysteria, cultural ignorance, primitive thinking — we lie. It wasn't a glitch in the system. It *was* the system. The same one that still thrives under new names. Cancel culture. Moral panic. Political purging. Office gossip. Groupthink. Each its own polished pyre.

We may have stopped chanting in churches, but we're still pointing fingers. And deep down, we know: it's only a matter of time before someone points at us

Liar, Liar

Let's begin with a correction.
No witches were burned at the stake in Salem.

That image — screaming women tied to poles, flames licking their ankles — is a fabrication. A lie made viral by repetition. Nineteen people were executed during the

Salem witch trials, all by hanging. One man was pressed to death with stones. Burning? That was a European favorite — not an American one.

And yet, most of us believe otherwise. Myself included. I referenced it earlier. And I knew better.

But I chose the image anyway. It felt more powerful, more familiar, more… acceptable. You didn't question it either. Maybe you knew the truth. Maybe you didn't. But you let it pass.

That, right there, is conformity.

It is easy to choose the light over the dark. However, the light, much like the dark, is blinding.

And so we agree — not because we're convinced, but because we're conditioned.

This is how history is shaped. Not by facts, but by consensus.

By enough people agreeing on a lie until even the truth begins to feel unstable. We weren't taught to question the myth — only to remember the fire.

Conformity is not cowardice. It's instinct. But left unchecked, it becomes something far more dangerous — *compliance*.

The kind that led a Puritan town to kill its own because silence felt safer than scrutiny. The kind that let neighbors, pastors, judges — people who should have known better — accept the cries of children as gospel and dismiss the pleas of adults as heresy.

And it still happens.

In classrooms, in politics, in social circles. Every time we nod along with something we disagree with because we don't want to "make it a thing." Every time we say nothing when we should say something — not because we're powerless, but because we're afraid to stand alone.

What happened in Salem wasn't about witches. It was about *witnesses*. About people who chose to be spectators because challenging the mob meant becoming its target.

And if you think you're any different... pause.

You'd agree the Earth is flat too — if a mob with pitchforks surrounded you and the last guy to disagree hasn't been seen since Tuesday.

A Tale Of Two

It's easy to worship the defiant once they're gone. Martyrs are polished posthumously. Their stories are engraved into textbooks, quoted at rallies, and whispered like prayers when someone needs to feel brave. But what about the ones who bent? Who bowed, just enough to survive?

Let's begin with Giles Corey — an elderly man accused of witchcraft in Salem. He was given the chance to plead guilty or innocent. He chose silence. Not stoic silence for drama's sake, but tactical silence. By refusing to enter a plea, Giles ensured his estate wouldn't be seized by the authorities. In doing so, he protected his family's inheritance. The cost? They laid him on the ground, placed a wooden board on his chest, and added stones. More weight, they demanded. "More weight," he replied. Those were his last words.

He was pressed to death over three days.

Now let's meet Tituba — an enslaved woman of African and Indigenous descent. The first to be accused. The first to confess. She told them what they wanted to hear. That the Devil came to her. That she rode through the night on a pole. That others — white women — danced with her in the dark. Her confession wasn't cowardice; it was calculation. Tituba survived. She outlived the trials. Because unlike Giles, she didn't have the privilege to be a martyr. She wasn't protected by whiteness, by property, or by a family name. Her life was the only thing she had — so she chose to keep it.

And now we're here. At the center of this essay. At the crossroad between defiance and submission.

I want to be like Giles. I want to imagine myself gritting my teeth under the weight of a hundred stones and dying with my principles intact. But when I really look in the mirror? I know I'm Tituba. Most of us are. Why be ashamed of what keeps you alive? Of what leads you back home when the dust settles? No amount of honor is worth being the empty seat at your dinner table.

We survive not by doing what's right, but by doing what's normal.

History remembers the rebels, but society rewards the compliant. And if you're lucky, really lucky, maybe you can live long enough to write about the one you couldn't be.

Mob Knows Best

We like to believe mobs are made up of mindless, foaming beasts. We imagine them as something we could never be part of. But mobs aren't monsters. They're people. They're

you. They're me. They're just scared individuals desperate to belong to something louder than their fear.

Mob justice thrives on volume, not truth. The louder the accusation, the truer it sounds. And the less resistance there is, the more the silence begins to sound like consent. All it takes is one spark — a rumor, a scream, a pointing finger — and suddenly the air smells like smoke and something ancient stirs in the pit of your gut. Not empathy. Not logic. Just instinct. *Survive.*

In Salem, one little girl cried witch, and the entire town fell to its knees. But they didn't fall in prayer — they fell in line.

The beauty of the mob is that it lets you bleed someone else without ever getting your hands dirty. You don't have to light the fire yourself — just step back and watch it spread. And if you feel uncomfortable about it? Don't worry. There are a hundred other voices yelling louder than yours. All you have to do is nod.

And if you refuse? If you hesitate? That makes you *different*. And the mob does not tolerate different.

We think monsters hunt in shadows — but the scariest ones are those in daylight, applauding as someone is dragged away, relieved that they aren't the one being taken.

There is no honor in being swallowed by the mob, but there is safety. And that's enough for most.

So if you still believe you'd be the exception — that you'd speak up, push back, say *no* — I ask you:

Where were your doubts when I told you witches were burned in Salem?

Exactly.

Conclusion

There's a reason we were taught to fear witches and not those who hunted them.

It's easier to hate the outsider than to admit you'd follow the crowd holding the torch. It's easier to vilify the accused than to question the accuser. And it's far easier to call yourself moral than to prove it under pressure.

The Salem Witch Trials were not a tragedy of superstition, they were a triumph of conformity. People died not because they were evil, but because they were inconvenient. Because they made others nervous. Because they said too little, or too much. Because they reminded the crowd of what it feared most: difference.

The real horror isn't the gallows. It's how quickly the crowd becomes executioner. It's how silence becomes guilt. How a nod becomes testimony. How your neighbor would trade your name to the flames if it meant their child gets to sleep safe. And you'd do the same. Maybe not proudly, but quietly. Convincingly.

We've always believed we'd do the right thing. That we'd stand up, speak out, resist.
But history is littered with the bones of those who thought they were better than the mob — until the mob turned to them.

We fear monsters, yet forget how easily we become them.
And when the torches rise, it doesn't matter what hand you play. The house always wins.

So if you want to know how history will remember you, don't ask what you stand for — ask who you'd stand against.

Not whether witches truly existed, but whether those who condemned them realized they became the very demons they sought to destroy.

Because in the end, the fire doesn't care who lit the match.

But the smoke — the smoke remembers every hand that fed the flames.