



Bridget Bishop will finally stand trial.

On June 2 at ten o'clock in the morning, the Salem witch court is called to order. Before witnesses are introduced, Doctor William Griggs physically searches several accused women for the "devil's mark." They find one on Bridget—a "preternatural excrescence of flesh between the pudendum and anus much like teats and not usual in evidence." Barton examines her again in three hours—the mark has disappeared! The thought can't be avoided: Has the Devil removed the evidence?

Bridget is brought upstairs. Her five accusers are present. She looks at them and, immediately, they are thrown into convulsions. None of the twelve jurors can possibly ignore the spectacle.

The courtroom is silent as the evidence is presented. There's a lot of it, and it is damning.

One of the afflicted girls, teenaged Susannah Sheldon, says Bridget's spirit admitted to her that she had killed four women. Another young victim sits with her hands folded and describes

calmly how Bridget took her from her spinning wheel to the river and threatened to drown her if she didn't sign the "Devil's book."

The gruesome testimony continues. A thirty-two-year-old tailor, John Louder, says Bridget's specter came at night and beat him on his chest. When he confronted her in person, Louder testifies, the Devil "sent black pigs and a talking, flying monkey with the face of a man to threaten him."

"Not true!" Bridget cries. "I don't even know this person."

Judge Stoughton is appalled. "How can that be when your orchards are next to each other? And the two of you have had many arguments?"



The verdict is guilty. No one is surprised.

Since the medieval reign of the Holy Roman Empire and its *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* code of law, the proper method of executing a witch has been burning at the stake. It is estimated that fifty thousand such killings have been conducted this way in Germany, Scotland, France, England, and Scandinavia since the fifteenth century. Yet a new English law stipulates that hanging is now the legal style of execution.

Judge Stoughton issues the sentence. "Whereby [the accusers'] bodies were hurt, afflicted, pined [*sic*], consumed, wasted and tormented," even if they looked healthy to spectators, Bridget Bishop, alias Oliver, is ordered "hanged by the neck until she is dead."

Until that moment, Bridget still had hope. Since 1647, eighty people have been accused of witchcraft in the colonies but only thirteen have been executed. Bridget will be number fourteen.



Midmorning on June 10, the bedraggled Bridget Bishop is taken from her cell and put on a cart. As she is drawn through Salem,

people stop whatever they are doing to look at her. There is hate in their eyes. Her journey is one very long mile. She is taken to a rise visible from much of the town, which will soon become known as Gallows Hill. A small crowd follows the wagon. Among them are several of the afflicted girls and Reverend Hale, who is holding a Bible.

The summit is too high to pull the cart all the way to the top. So at the bottom of the ridge, at a rocky outcropping that will become known as Proctor's Ledge, Bridget's hands are tied behind her back. There is no room to build a gallows, so a tree will suffice. Her dirty petticoats are fastened tightly around her legs, for modesty. Reverend Hale lowers his head and prays loudly. The fact that he would pray for a witch disgusts several people, and they will tell him so later.

Sheriff George Corwin reads out the sentence: death. One last time, Bridget pleads her innocence, begging for help. The last thing she sees before the burlap sack is placed over her head is the pious and bearded Reverend Hale, a fifty-six-year-old pastor grasping his Bible as if it were a weapon.

It is a beautiful spring morning. The sun is shining, a sign of God's approval. A ladder is put below the thick branch of an old oak tree. Two men lift Bridget onto it. She feels the noose as it is placed over her head, then tightened around her neck.

Suddenly, the ladder is kicked out from beneath her. Bridget slowly strangles, kicking out hard with her legs. Then she is still.\*

The crowd approves. They are safer now.

But in reality, no one is safe in Salem.

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\* There is no record of what happened to Bridget Bishop's body. The ground beneath what will become known as Proctor's Ledge was too rocky to serve as a burial site. In legend, victims were buried in shallow graves and at least three of them were later recovered by their families and reburied near their homes. A memorial was unveiled at Proctor's Ledge in 2016. There is also a memorial at Charter Street Cemetery, which was dedicated in conjunction with the Witch Trials Tercentenary in 1992.