

Title: Painting the Future  
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“Sit up Hannah, you’ll feel better.” I plunge my washcloth into the warm water, twirling it around so it’s soaked. Dabbing it gently onto Hannah’s head I can see the beads of sweat trickling down her forehead, as shivers erupt all over her body. “Another 50 innocents were accused today, Amara. Please be careful. The Salem Witch Trials are to be taken seriously.” My heart pounds, as I continue nursing Hannah. I know the danger. Everyone in Massachusetts has been on edge ever since the witchcraft obsession spread hundreds of years ago in Europe. When Tituba was the first accused of being a witch last month, she announced that the devil came to her and requested her to serve him. From that day on, paranoia spread like an infectious disease for the next couple of weeks. “I’ll be careful, now you take care all right? Don’t let the vision I saw for you get to your head, they are never set in stone.” As she nods, I grab the bucket with one hand and my son’s palm with the other. “Let’s go, Tobias, it’s getting late.” We trudge back to our little house tucked in a small neighborhood, aligned alongside other houses. We plod through snow and the pitch night. I’m on high alert, taking in every crevice of darkness. Once we reach home I make the fire, and Tobias and I huddle around. I’m hugging him close, so tightly. I never want to let him go, never want him to uncover what evil is rooted in this world. As I’m watching the fire crackle, and the sparks of gold jump and dance, Tobias’s little voice fills the empty silence. “Mom? I was wondering about your magic. What you did for Hannah, what you do for the others, why is it a secret? Why can’t I tell anyone about your superpowers?” I look into his eyes, my little 10-year-old son, so full of light and life. He doesn’t deserve to be crushed by the merciless world. Yet for us to survive he must know. “Listen Tobias. You are to never tell anyone about my magic, no one outside of our close friends, do you understand? There are things out there, evil, lurking in every corner. It isn’t safe.” I kiss his forehead, bringing him closer to me. “Alright mom, can you

at least read my future then?” Shaking my head I reply, “I don’t think

that’s a good idea.. I don’t know Tobias.” “Oh mom, I won’t tell anyone I swear.” Such a heavy secret, such a burden to place upon a young soul. It’s the least I can do, I think. “All right, but stay behind me, and alert me if someone’s coming.” As he nods, I gather my materials. I place the coarse linen rag in the middle of a ring of lit candles. Kneeling on my rug I begin my chant, a spell as ancient as time. “*Nasagwagusa, isawagusa inai gogona inai gogona nabwibwi..*” Continuing my chant, I’m so immersed that I don’t see my son’s eyes widening. Black images swarm my mind, dark visions swim in my head, the same star pattern over and over, again and again. It’s my worst nightmare, taunting me. The images race past in a blur, making fun of my very existence. My hands are painting furiously on the rag, scribbling so hard that I tear through the linen. “Find him, and kill him.” The words are shrieking at me, piercing through my skull, and suddenly I’m screaming. I feel my eyes glow hot, and my head lurches back as I push forward, desperate to finish. “Mom, mom, STOP” Tobias cries. But his pleas go unheard. “You’re bleeding, stop, I’m sorry!” Maybe a part of me could hear him, as I feel the warm red blood trickling down my nose. Every bone in my body is telling me to stop, so I will myself to end this brutality. Suddenly everything goes dark, and I collapse on the floor, drained. “Wake up, wake up please!” Tobias nudges me, and my eyes begin to flutter open. Every inch of my body aches. I reach up and touch my nose, shocked at the sight of the sickly red blood flooding it. This has never happened before. I see Tobias sitting there crying and sniffing. I try to grab his hand, to give him comfort. Then I see it. The tiniest flinch of his body, as if my touch is made of poison. Perhaps it’s nothing, perhaps it’s a usual twitch. But I can’t shake his uneasiness off. The look of repulse in his eyes, the way his body inches away from the monster in front of him. He’s scared

of me. The long silence is interrupted by a whisper, “so what does it mean?” I take a second and finally see the linen in front of me. The pen had torn into it like a lion to its prey. For

the first time, I can't understand what lay before me. Black stars fill the page, tipped with 5 corners. The ink bleeds into a prophecy, something I can't decode. Everything is swirled into one, with scrawls of the words “they're coming” written in the Theban alphabet. The eyes etched into the rag are filled with evil. It's as if darkness had come to life, as if haunting nightmares were projected on this thin rag. “It just means that many adventures await you. Now go to bed. I'll tuck you in.” I ruffle his hair and walk him to bed. I kiss him goodnight when he says, “can you sleep with me? I'm scared.” My heart sinks. I'm a horrible mother, I should've known never to let him see this side of me. He didn't ask for his mother to be a dreadful beast. “Of course. Dream about slaying all evil monsters, and coming out victorious.” As hours pass I hear his breathing normalize, and quietly slip out of bed. I'm feeling restless, and there's no way to cure the uneasiness creeping into my heart. I head to the secret room down the corridor and lock the door. The danger repels me, but something has to calm my anxious mind. I light 47 candles and place them around the room, watching the wax melt and drip on the floor. The dark powder tucked in a vial under my bed is sprinkled along the floor creating a perfect circle. I'm contacting the spirits. My hand trembles and my legs are weakened by fear. Sitting in the circle I call upon them desperate for an answer. “*Nasim kluna fa gehe Nasim kluna fa gehe... Demispor nasgua..*” The room begins to shake as if a tornado has engulfed it. The candles flicker on and off, its hot wax creeping towards me. I can feel their power, the strength of the spirits as their slithery words fill the still room. Their hisses circle me and a cold breeze whips through the now open window. Words are drilled into my mind, and with every whisper comes agonizing pain. “Help me, my

son is in danger. I don't know what this is." I'm crying now, begging for their help. I don't notice the shadowy figure lingering in the darkness outside, peering through the open window with eyes of horror. He slinks away unnoticed, and the spirits begin screaming at me. "*As the day awakens*

*he will be marked, and watch as his world falls apart. It's a dangerous place for you here. An uncontrollable force in him, silently stirring deep within. Run far Amara, and never return. The Salem witch trials are coming forth. If you don't make it he will be dead. They are on their way and will not rest. Suddenly you will be put to the test.*" The powder is circling me, squeezing tighter with every shriek from the ghostly phantoms. My lungs are constricted, and I'm gasping for air. "Make it stop, Make it STOP! It hurts, please, I can't see!" I scream as my eyes roll into my head and the tiny flames become a ring of fire. Everything comes to an abrupt stop. The candles flicker back on, and I see everything in absolute chaos. Shaking uncontrollably I slip outside and let my thoughts consume me. What uncontrollable force? What danger are we in? Checking on Tobias, I see he sleeps so peacefully, untouched and safe. I'm sobbing quietly as I fall asleep near him. Tracing the shadows of his face, and kissing the moonlit parts, I hold him tightly. I can't understand this. I love him so much and will protect him to the end, no matter what. I fall asleep, holding that thought to protect my anxious mind. I wake up to an ear-splitting scream coming from Tobias. Suddenly, my heart is in my mouth. "Tobias! What happened?" He's shaking like a leaf, yelling "It burns, mom, it burns, fix it!!" I stare in horror at the star burned into his wrist. My blood runs cold as I see 5 tips etched into it. The prophecy, everything is coming true. The spirit's words flood my mind, "*he will be marked, and watch as his world falls apart.*" The mark on his arm is scorched and red, and I pull back his sleeve and gag. I want to throw up. His whole arm is covered with these burned stars, peeling and flaking off. I look into

his eyes. "Here's what we're going to do. Pack your clothes, and meet me in the kitchen. We need to leave now. Consider this an adventure." Before he can say anything I grab a bag and begin packing. Immediately I hear a knock at the door. Slowly I inch quietly towards it. "Shh Tobias, stay silent." Paranoia has corrupted my broken mind, as my wavering hand opens the

door. I sigh in relief as I see Hannah. My relief turns to panic as Hannah says, "Amara, they know. Someone reported you to the Salem council, and they are coming for you. I don't know how, but you take that boy and run." Every bone in my body tightens and I'm trembling in fear. It's then that the image of the shadowy figure reemerges in my mind. How could I have been so irresponsible? This secret that I've protected since I was a child, being exposed terrifies me. I realize I'm the reason Tobias is in danger. There's no time to waste. "Thank you, Hannah. Farewell." With a nod, Tobias and I head off into the frigid morning. We march towards the danger we've been running from. The dimly lit moon leads the way. I hear him shiver as the icy winter pierces my raw flesh. We're leaving, desperate to make it out of this cursed state. Holding tightly onto Tobias's hand until my knuckles turn red, he suddenly collapses, exhausted. "Tobias!" I pick him up, pulling him under the warmth of my thin scarf. Breaking off wood from a nearby snow-topped tree, I rub them and ignite a burst of sparks. The fire radiates its warmth, bringing a flush of rose back into his pale cheeks. We rest until I see the tips of the silvery moon. As we continue forward, a sudden wave of nervousness devours me whole. I feel the eerie sensation of being watched or followed. The moon plays along, providing no light amidst the darkness. I'm weaving my way through dense trees while holding Tobias. Thorns scratch my face and I hear him fall and yell. I drop to the floor, running my hands over the dirt as I try desperately to grasp his arm. My breath runs quickly as I begin to hyperventilate. My efforts in vain, I scream

into the night calling him. "Tobias! Where are you?!" I push through the aching pain, running as the cold whips my face and rocks scratch my feet. Out of exhaustion, I fall, sobbing. He's gone.