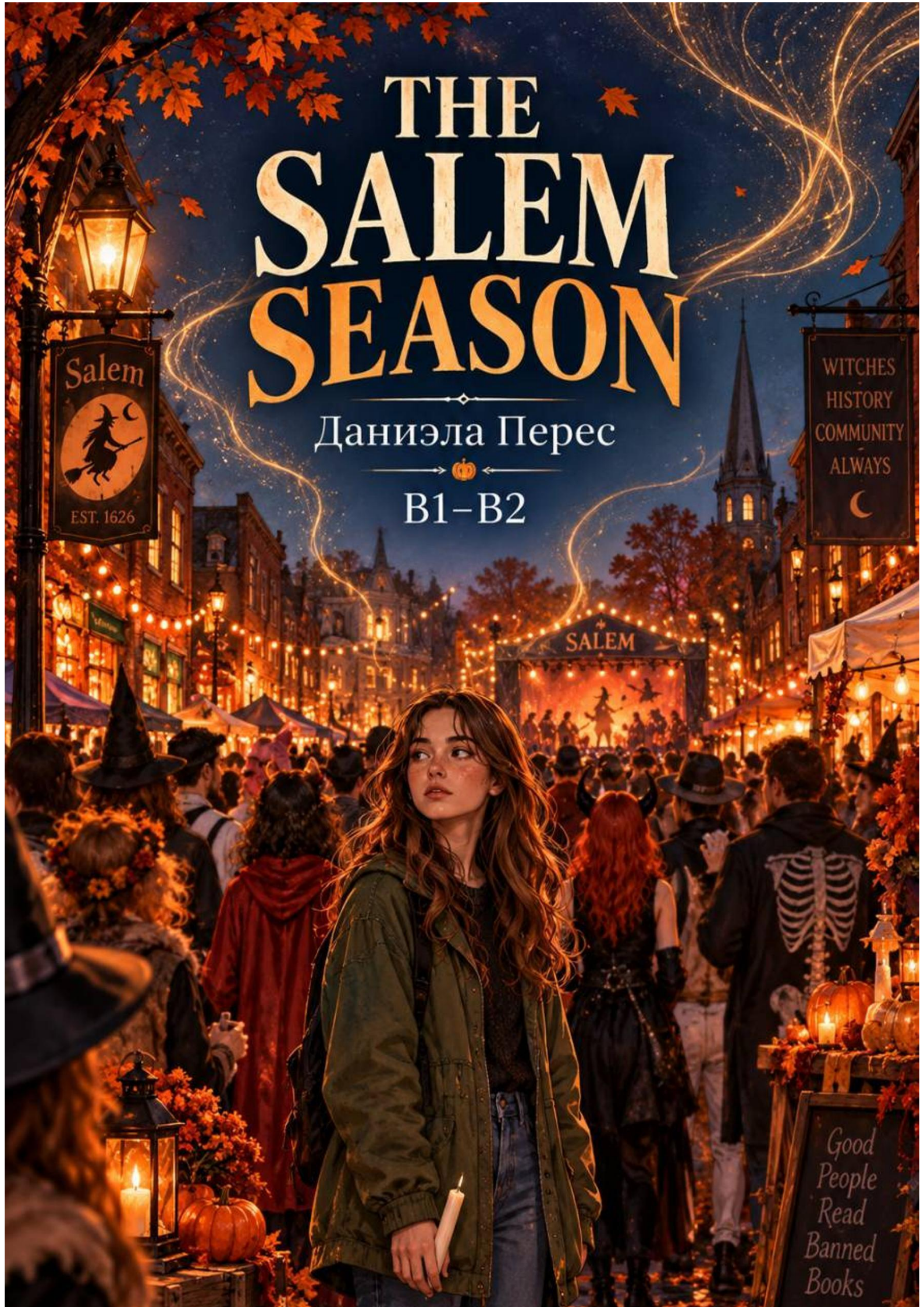


THE SALEM SEASON

Даниэла Перес

В1–В2



Даниэла Перес

The Salem Season

«Автор»

2026

Перес Д.

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Первого октября Салем закрывает улицы для машин, ставит сцены на Коммоне и открывает сезон. К середине месяца в городе не протолкнуться, к тридцать первому на Эссекс-стрит выходит сто тысяч человек в костюмах, и семнадцатилетняя Джун Хейл, как каждый год, стоит за прилавком семейной свечной лавки и продаёт туристам ароматические свечи по восемнадцать долларов. Их магазин самый скучный на улице. Ни кристаллов, ни карт таро, ни вывески с полумесяцем. Между двумя лавками, где предсказывают будущее за сорок долларов, Хейлы торгуют воском и фитилями и, по мнению всей Эссекс-стрит, упускают величайшую коммерческую возможность Новой Англии. Магазинчик хранит тайны. Узнать их можно, прочитав книгу на английском. Уровень B1-B2.

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Даниэла Перес

The Salem Season

THE SALEM SEASON

Daniela Perez

English B1-B2

Chapter 1. The First of October

Key vocabulary

a candle — свеча
wax — воск
a wick — фитиль
a counter — прилавок
a till — касса
a shift — смена (рабочая)
a tourist — турист
a costume — костюм
a stall — ларёк, палатка
a pedestrian street — пешеходная улица
crowded — переполненный
a season — сезон
a landlord — арендодатель
a rent — арендная плата
to close up — закрывать (магазин)

The First of October

Salem shuts the street to cars at seven in the morning on the first of October and does not open it again until the second of November.

June Hale watched them do it from the doorway of her grandmother's shop with a cup of tea going cold in her hand. Two men from the city put out the barriers, one at the Washington Street end and one at the New Liberty end, and a third man brought the signs. It took nine minutes. It took nine minutes every year, and June had watched it every year since she was five, and she had never once seen anybody stop to look at it except her.

By half past eight the stalls were going up on the Common. By ten the first coach had arrived from Boston. By eleven Essex Street had about four thousand people on it and a man in a full skeleton costume was doing something with a unicycle outside the museum.

The season was open.

—June, said her grandmother from inside. The pumpkin ones.

—I put them out.

—You put out six.

—There were six in the box.

—There are twelve in the back and I need all twelve on that table by the door, because it is the first of October and the first of October is pumpkin, said Margot Hale, and it does not matter what you or I think about that.

Hale and Co. had been at 41 Essex Street since 1908 and had sold candles the entire time.

That was the whole business. Candles. Beeswax and soy and paraffin, tapers and pillars and jars and tea lights, plain white ones in packs of fifty for churches and restaurants, and, for the month of October, a range of scented ones with orange labels that June's grandmother described as an insult to the trade and made four thousand dollars a month from.

The shop was narrow and deep, with a wooden floor that sloped towards the back, and it smelled of wax the way a bakery smells of bread. There were shelves on both sides from the floor to the ceiling. There was a counter halfway down with a till on it that was newer than everything else in the building and looked wrong. Behind the counter there was a door to the workroom, and behind the workroom there was a yard with a fence and two bins and a cat that belonged to nobody.

On the left of Hale and Co. there was Mystic Wing, which sold crystals, tarot decks, incense and forty dollar readings, and which had a purple sign with a crescent moon on it.

On the right there was The Third Eye, which sold crystals, tarot decks, incense and forty five dollar readings, and which had a black sign with a crescent moon on it.

Between them, Hale and Co. had a plain white sign with black letters that said HALE AND CO. and, underneath, in smaller letters, CANDLES.

—Everyone thinks we are a joke, June said, once, when she was fourteen.

—Everyone thinks we are boring, said her grandmother. That is different and it is much better. The first proper customer of the season came in at nine minutes past ten.

She was about fifty, in a good coat, with a Boston accent and a bag from one of the shops on Derby Street.

—Do you do anything for protection? she said.

—We do candles, said Margot Hale.

—I know, but do you do a protection candle? Black salt or anything?

—No.

—Oh.

—The lady next door does, said Margot. She does them in three sizes and the middle one is the best value. Tell her Margot sent you and she will not charge you for the box.

The woman looked slightly confused, thanked her and went next door.

June waited until she was out.

—You just sent forty dollars next door.

—I sent forty dollars next door on the first of October, said her grandmother, and in exchange Nadia will send me every single person who comes into her shop and asks for a plain white taper, and by the thirty-first that will be about ninety people, and they spend more than the woman in the coat.

She put six more pumpkin candles on the table by the door.

—Also I like Nadia, she said.

At eleven the man with the unicycle came in, still in the skeleton costume, and bought two boxes of plain white tapers and a lighter.

—Fifty in a box? he said.

—Fifty in a box.

—You are the only shop on this street that sells anything I actually need.

—I am aware, said Margot Hale.

June rang it through. Twenty two dollars. The man paid in cash, put the boxes in a bag that already had a bicycle pump in it, and went out, and through the window she watched him get back on the unicycle outside the museum with a bag of a hundred candles on his shoulder, which was, she thought, roughly what October in this town looked like from the inside.

June worked the shop every day in October. That was the arrangement and it had been the arrangement since she was fifteen. School until half past two, shop until seven, homework at the counter between customers, and on Saturdays and Sundays the full day. In exchange she got paid properly, above minimum wage, in a way that her grandmother refused to discuss and that June had worked out at sixteen was about three dollars an hour more than anybody else on that street was paying.

She was seventeen. She was in her last year at Salem High. She had four college applications open on a laptop that lived under the counter, and she had not finished any of them, and it was the first of October, which meant she had thirty days in which she would have no time to think about it at all.

That was, she admitted privately, part of why she liked October.

In the two hours after lunch the shop took four hundred and sixty dollars, which June knew because she rang all of it through, and about three hundred of it was pumpkin.

The rest was interesting if you had been standing behind that counter for three Octobers.

There was a woman who bought nine plain white tapers and asked whether they were pure beeswax, and was told yes, and paid without looking at the price. There was a man of about thirty who came in, looked at nothing, said the word Hale as though he were checking it, and left. And at ten past twelve a boy of maybe nineteen came in and asked for a hundred metres of wick, which is not a thing anybody asks for, and Margot Hale went into the workroom and came out with it in a paper bag and did not charge him.

June said nothing about any of it, because in three Octobers she had learned that asking got you an answer that closed the subject.

At half past twelve her mother came in with two coffees.

That was still new. Catherine Hale had come back to Salem on the eleventh of September, after nineteen years in Portland, Oregon, with two suitcases and a job interview and no explanation that anybody had considered sufficient. She was forty-four. She had June's hair and none of June's patience, and she had spent three weeks in the house on Chestnut Street being extremely careful and helpful and had not once come into the shop for longer than four minutes.

—Busy, she said.

—It is the first of October, said Margot.

—I know what day it is, Mum.

—Then you will know why it is busy.

June took her coffee and got out of the middle of it.

There is a particular way that two people who have not lived in the same house for nineteen years talk to each other in a shop, and June had been watching it for three weeks and had not yet decided whether it was going to get better or worse.

At two o'clock a school group came in, forty children, and bought two hundred and eleven dollars of pumpkin candles in eleven minutes, and June ran the till and her mother wrapped and her grandmother stood at the door and counted them out in fours, and for about a quarter of an hour it was almost like a family that worked together.

At four, Priya arrived.

Priya Rao had been June's best friend since the fourth grade and had, in September, started a podcast about Salem, which she recorded in her bedroom on a microphone her brother had left behind and which had, so far, eleven listeners, four of whom were her family.

—Episode three, she said, coming through the door. October in Salem: fun for tourists, hell for everybody who lives here. I need a quote.

—No.

—One quote.

—Priya, I am working.

—Mrs. Hale, said Priya, do you have anything to say about the impact of the Haunted Happenings festival on year round residents of Salem?

Margot Hale did not look up from the wick she was trimming.

—One million people, she said. Forty two thousand residents. Twenty four times our own population, in thirty one days, on eleven streets.

Priya held the phone closer.

—And?

—And they are welcome, said Margot Hale. Every single one of them. And I will say that on your podcast and I mean it, and anybody in this town who complains about it can go and look at what happened to Lynn.

Priya turned the recording off.

—That was a really good quote and you did not even have to think about it.

—I have had thirty one Octobers to think about it.

—Fifty two, said June.

—Thirty one that mattered, said her grandmother.

They closed at seven.

Closing up took twenty minutes and it was the same twenty minutes every night. June cashed up and counted the float and wrote the number in a book. Her grandmother went round the shelves with a clipboard and marked what needed restocking. Then she went into the workroom and did something for about four minutes with the door half shut, and then she came out, and then they turned off the lights and locked the front door and went out through the yard.

June had watched the four minutes in the workroom perhaps a thousand times.

She had asked about it exactly twice, at nine and at thirteen, and both times her grandmother had said that she was checking the orders, and both times June had accepted it, because at nine and thirteen you do.

At seventeen she had begun to notice that there was nothing in the workroom that took four minutes to check.

—Gran.

—Mm.

—What do you do in there?

—I check the orders, said Margot Hale, and turned off the lights.

They walked home the long way because it was the first night of the season and because her grandmother, who complained about October from the first of the month to the last, went out of her way every single year to walk through the middle of it.

Essex Street at eight o'clock on the first of October is not a quiet place.

The string lights were on between the buildings. There were two food stalls outside the museum and a queue at both. Somebody had set up a speaker on the corner by the visitor centre and was playing something with a heavy bass line that came up through the bricks. There were perhaps six thousand people on that street, and about a third of them were in costume, and the rest were carrying bags.

June saw four witches, a Frankenstein, a group of eleven people dressed as different flavours of a soft drink, and a man in a completely ordinary suit who had painted his face green and who looked more unsettling than everybody else combined.

—Do you know what I like? said her grandmother.

—What?

—That it is loud.

They stopped at the corner by the pharmacy, where the street narrows and the crowd bunches up, and stood for a moment because there was nowhere to go.

And June, waiting there with her bag on her shoulder and her grandmother's arm through hers, looked up the street towards the Common and felt something she had no word for.

It was not a sound. It was a sort of pull, up and to the left, the way you feel a bus go past behind you. It came from the direction of the Common, and it lasted about two seconds, and then it stopped.

She turned her head.

—What? said her grandmother.

—Nothing.

—June.

—I thought I felt the ground move.

Margot Hale did not say anything for slightly too long.

—It is a crowd, she said. Six thousand people on cobbles. You feel it in the buildings.

—Yeah.

—Come on. I want to be in by nine.

They walked up Church Street towards Chestnut, away from the noise, and June looked back once, at the top of the street, at the lights and the crowd and the glow over the Common where the fair was setting up for tomorrow.

She would not have been able to explain, then, what she was looking for.

At home her mother had made dinner, which was still surprising after three weeks.

They ate at the kitchen table, the three of them, and talked about the school group and the woman in the coat and the fact that the landlord had put the rent up again in August, by two hundred dollars, which Margot had paid without arguing and had not mentioned until the middle of September.

—We should talk about that at some point, said Catherine.

—We are not talking about it in October.

—Mum, if the rent has gone up two hundred a month, that is two thousand four hundred a year, and if it goes up again in August then...

—Catherine, said Margot Hale. It is the first of October and I have been on my feet since seven and there are thirty days left. We will talk about it in November and I will show you the books and you can be as sensible at me as you like.

Her mother stopped.

—All right, she said.

—Thank you.

—I am only trying to help.

—I know you are, said Margot, and it came out gentler than the rest of it. I know. And you have been back three weeks and you have been extremely careful with me and I have noticed, and I would like you to stop, because it is making me nervous.

Catherine Hale laughed, which June had not heard very often.

June went up at half past ten.

Her room was at the front of the house and it looked down Chestnut Street, which is one of the most photographed streets in Massachusetts and which, in October, has a queue of people taking pictures of it from six in the morning.

She lay on the bed with her laptop and opened the college applications and read the first question on the first one, which asked her to describe a challenge she had overcome, and closed the laptop again.

Then she lay in the dark for a while and listened to the town.

You can hear the Common from Chestnut Street on a still night. It is about half a mile away and it comes across the roofs as a low sound with no edges, and on the first of October it went on until about midnight, and June lay there and listened to it and thought about the pull she had felt on the corner by the pharmacy.

It had come from the Common.

It had felt like something moving past her, going the same way as everybody else, and it had felt very slightly like the moment when water goes out of a bath.

At about eleven she got up and went to the window.

The sky over the Common was orange with the lights. You could see the top of the big wheel they put up for the month, turning very slowly with nobody on it, and you could see the glow of about nine hundred people who had not gone home yet.

And you could see, if you had a particular kind of eyesight, which June did not know she had and would not find out about for another twenty two hours, a thin thread of pale gold going up from the middle of all of it, bending east, and running away over the rooftops in the direction of the water.

She saw nothing at all.

She stood at the window for four minutes, thought about the fact that she had not started a single one of her applications, decided to start one tomorrow, and went to bed.

Downstairs, at twenty past eleven, her grandmother sat at the kitchen table on her own with a candle in front of her.

It was a plain white taper about eight inches long, the kind they sold in packs of fifty for churches and restaurants, in a brass holder that had been in that house longer than anybody living.

Margot Hale lit it.

She watched it for about a minute. Then she took a pencil and a small hardback notebook out of her cardigan pocket, opened it near the back, and wrote:

1 Oct. Common. Large. Not local.

She looked at what she had written.

Then she added one more line, and underlined it, which she had not done in the notebook since 2011.

She felt it.

Chapter 2. The Common

Key vocabulary

a crowd — толпа
a stage — сцена
a microphone — микрофон
a speaker — колонка, динамик
an audience — аудитория, зрители
a queue — очередь
a fairground — ярмарочная площадь
to gather — собираться
to notice — замечать
a thread — нить
to drain — утекать, сливаться
exhausted — измотанный
dizzy — испытывающий головокружение
to blink — моргать
to make sense — иметь смысл

The Common

Salem Common is a public park of about nine acres with a bandstand in the middle and a black iron fence around the outside, and for the whole of October it stops being a park.

The fair goes up on the second. It takes one day. When June went past on the way to school at half past seven there were four lorries and a lot of shouting, and when she came back at three there was a big wheel, a wall of stalls selling fried dough and lobster rolls and hot cider, a stage at the north end with lighting towers on both sides, and about two thousand people.

By six there were five thousand.

She had not planned to go, and the reason she went is worth putting down, because it was not curiosity and it was not Priya. She had planned to work until seven, go home, and finally open the first college application.

Then at half past four Priya sent nine messages in a row.

episode 4

i need crowd noise

june

june i need crowd noise and you have a phone

also verity cole is on at 8 on the main stage and there is a queue already

a QUEUE. for a FREE THING. at 4pm

i want to interview people in the queue

please

i will buy you fried dough

June looked at the message for a while and then wrote:

who is verity cole

The reply came in eleven seconds and was a screenshot of a profile with 2.1M under the name and a photograph of a woman standing on a beach at sunset with her arms out.

manifestation coach. she is HUGE. she has rented a house here for the whole month and she is doing free talks and paid circles

paid circles are \$180

ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY DOLLARS

June closed the app and put the phone under the counter.

At seven her grandmother said, without being asked:

—Go.

—I said I would help you close.

—June, I have closed this shop on my own nine thousand times.

—I was going to do my applications.

—You were going to open your laptop and look at it, said Margot Hale, which is not the same thing, and which you can do just as badly at eleven o'clock tonight. Go with Priya. It is the second of October and you are seventeen.

She was already reaching for the clipboard.

—Take a jumper. And be home by half eleven.

The Common at eight o'clock in the evening on the second of October has a particular smell, which is fried sugar and diesel from the generators and cut grass and about six thousand people.

The queue went along the path and doubled back on itself twice, which meant that somebody had organised it, which meant that somebody had thought about it in advance.

June found Priya at the edge of the queue with the microphone out.

—Right, said Priya. I have eleven minutes of queue interviews and they are gold. There is a woman here from Ohio who has flown in for this. Flown. For a free talk in a park.

—What does she actually do?

—Manifestation.

—Priya.

—I do not know, said Priya. That is the whole point of the episode. I have listened to four hours of her and I could not tell you what she does. She says things like: the universe is not withholding, you are.

—What does that mean?

—I have no idea and two point one million people find it extremely helpful.

They got fried dough and stood at the back, because the front of the crowd was already packed and because Priya wanted the wide shot.

The stage was fifteen metres across with two screens and proper lighting. Somebody had put a single armchair in the middle of it, and a small table with a glass of water, and nothing else.

At three minutes past eight the music dropped and the lights came down and about three thousand people made a noise.

Verity Cole came on from the left.

She was twenty nine and she looked like her photographs, which is not true of everybody. She was tall and had long dark hair and she wore a cream coat and boots and she came out with no microphone stand and no notes and stood at the front of the stage and waited until the noise stopped, which took about forty seconds, and which she let happen without doing anything at all.

Then she said:

—Hello Salem.

The noise went up again.

June, who had come because of fried dough, found herself watching quite carefully, because whatever else was true, the woman was extremely good at this.

—Is she good? said June, out of the side of her mouth.

—That is the wrong question, said Priya, who had her professional voice on. Ask me whether she is effective.

—Is she effective?

—Look at the queue for the merchandise stand.

June looked. There were about ninety people at a stall on the left of the stage buying candles, which she noticed for reasons that had nothing to do with anything at that point and which she remembered very clearly two days later.

The talk lasted forty minutes.

It was, June thought afterwards, about seventy per cent nothing. There were stories about a difficult year in 2019, and about a flight to Lisbon, and about a woman in Denver who had written something on a piece of paper and put it in a drawer. There was a section about how everybody in the crowd was, in some sense, already the person they wanted to be. Priya recorded all of it and would later describe it in episode four as beautifully constructed and completely empty.

Priya kept the recorder up for all of it and made notes with her thumb on her phone at the same time, which was a skill she had acquired in about three weeks and which June found genuinely impressive.

—She has said the word carrying nine times, Priya said at one point.

—Is that a lot?

—In forty minutes? It is a choice.

But at about thirty minutes in, it changed.

—I want to do something with you, said Verity Cole. It is very simple and it will take about ninety seconds and I would like everybody here to actually do it rather than watch other people do it.

Three thousand people went quiet in about four seconds.

—I want you to think of one thing you are carrying that you would like to put down, she said. Not a big one. Do not go for the big one tonight. A small one. A conversation you have been avoiding. A message you have not answered. A thing you said in June.

Somebody in the crowd laughed and then stopped.

—Have you got it? Everybody got one?

A noise of agreement.

—Right. Now I want you to hold it, said Verity Cole, and look at me while you hold it.

June was standing at the back of about three thousand people on a piece of grass in the middle of Salem, and this is what happened.

It started at the edges of her eyes.

She thought it was the lighting rig, because there were four lights on a tower to the left of the stage pointing back over the crowd and they were doing something with the smoke from the machine. So she turned her head to check, and the thing at the edge of her eyes turned with her, and did not go away.

Then it moved to the middle.

She could see the crowd. She could see the stage and the woman on it and the screens either side. And through all of it, above the heads of the people in front of her, there were threads.

They came up out of the crowd. One from every person, or nearly every person, thin and pale gold and not very bright, going up about two metres and then bending. They bent all in the same direction. They ran together as they went, three and four and eleven joining into one, the way water does on a window, and by the time they got to the stage there were perhaps twenty of them, thick and slow moving, and all twenty went into the woman in the cream coat and did not come out.

June stopped breathing for a moment.

Then she looked down at herself.

There was one coming out of her.

It came up from about the level of her collarbone, thin as a hair, absolutely steady, and it bent to the left with all the others and went towards the stage.

—June, said Priya.

—Yeah.

—Are you all right? You have gone weird.

—I am fine.

—You have gone extremely weird.

—I am fine, said June, and stepped backwards out of the crowd.

The thread came with her.

She took four steps and it stretched and stayed with her, and she took four more, right to the fence, and it was still there, going from her chest across forty metres of people to a stage.

She put her hand up through it.

Nothing. No feeling, no resistance, no warmth. Her hand went through it the way a hand goes through the beam of a projector, and the thread did not move at all.

Then she looked at the woman on the stage properly for the first time and found that she could see something else, which was much harder to look at and which she thought about for weeks afterwards.

Verity Cole was standing in the middle of about twenty streams of it, and she was not holding still. She was moving very slightly, backwards and forwards, a few centimetres at a time, in a way that would have looked to anybody else like a person shifting her weight.

She was not shifting her weight. She was adjusting.

June had watched her grandmother wind a wick onto a spool five hundred times, and it looked like that. It looked exactly like somebody doing a job with their hands that they had done every day for years and could do while thinking about something else.

June looked at the screens on either side of the stage.

The camera was on Verity Cole's face in close up, six metres high, and on the screens there was nothing above the crowd at all. No threads, no gold, nothing. Just a woman in a cream coat with her eyes half closed and three thousand people in front of her.

Whatever this was, a camera could not see it.

—Beautiful, said Verity Cole, into the microphone. Now let it go.

Three thousand people let out a breath.

And the threads went out.

Not slowly. All at once, everywhere, like a light being switched off, and the field of gold over the crowd was simply gone, and there was a park at night with a stage in it and a woman standing in the middle of the stage with her hands together, smiling.

June sat down on the grass.

—Okay, said Priya, kneeling next to her. Now you are being properly weird and I am going to get you some water.

—I am fine.

—June, you have gone the colour of that fence.

—I need to go home.

—Give me the water, said June.

—You are shaking.

—It is cold.

—It is fourteen degrees, said Priya Rao, and you were fine ten minutes ago, and I have known you since we were nine, and something has happened.

—Priya, if I tell you I do not want to talk about it, will you let me not talk about it and be annoyed with me tomorrow instead?

Priya thought about it for about two seconds.

—Yes, she said, and sat down on the wet grass next to her without another word, which is why she had been June's best friend since the fourth grade.

The talk finished at twenty to nine.

June did not hear the last ten minutes. She sat on the grass by the fence with a bottle of water Priya had bought and watched three thousand people applaud for a long time, and then watched them start to leave, and this was the part that stayed with her.

They came past her in twos and fours, going out through the gate towards Washington Street, and they were happy. That was not in question. Almost every single one of them was talking, and about a third of them were talking about how good it had been, and June heard a woman say the word *incredible* four times to four different people.

And they were tired.

Not the ordinary tired of a Thursday evening. There was something else in it and June could not name it for another two days. A man in a green jacket stopped in front of her to answer a phone call and said, twice, that he was fine, and then said, in a slightly puzzled voice: no, I do not know why either, and hung up. A woman of about twenty five stopped by the gate, looked at her own phone, frowned, and typed something and deleted it and typed it again.

And a boy of about eight, going past on his father's shoulders, said, quite clearly:

—Dad, what were we doing?

—What do you mean?

—Just then. What were we doing?

—We were listening to the lady, said his father.

—Yeah, said the boy. But what were we doing?

And his father laughed and said that he was tired and that it was late, and they went out through the gate, and June sat on the grass by the fence and got extremely cold.

She stayed until the field was nearly empty, because Priya was interviewing people at the gate and because standing up seemed difficult.

The fair carried on. That was the strange part. Forty metres away the big wheel was still turning and the fried dough stall still had a queue and a group of teenagers were throwing balls at a stack of tins, and none of it had stopped for a second, and nobody on that whole nine acres appeared to have noticed anything except a seventeen year old girl sitting on the grass by the fence.

Priya walked her home.

She talked the whole way, which June was grateful for, because it meant she did not have to.

—Episode four is going to be so good. I got nine interviews. There is a man from Rhode Island who has been to eleven of her events and he could not tell me one thing she has ever said, he could not do it, I asked him three times and he kept saying it is more of a feeling.

—Priya.

—And I got the whole ninety second bit on tape, which is going to be great for the podcast, because you can hear three thousand people go quiet, it is genuinely eerie.

—Priya.

—What?

They had stopped at the corner of Chestnut Street.

June opened her mouth to say it.

I saw something. There were threads coming out of everybody's chest and they went into her and they came out of me too and I could not see them before this evening.

She stood there with it in her mouth for about four seconds and then understood, completely and all at once, that she could not say it. Not because Priya would laugh. Priya would not laugh. Priya would take it seriously and get her phone out and want to know everything, and would then have it, and would be a person who was carrying it, and June had no idea what that meant yet.

—Nothing, she said. Send me the episode when it is done.

—It will be Thursday.

—Send it Thursday.

—You are being so weird tonight.

—I know.

—Are you okay? Actually?

—I do not know yet, said June, which was the most honest sentence she had produced all evening.

June walked the last hundred metres of Chestnut Street on her own.

It is one of the most beautiful streets in New England and it was completely empty at half past nine, and she did not look at any of it. She looked at the air above the street, and at the space over the rooftops in the direction of the Common, and she saw nothing at all, and she could not tell whether that was a relief.

The house was dark except for the kitchen.

Her mother had gone to bed. Her grandmother was at the table with a cup of tea and a plain white candle burning in a brass holder, which she had never once done in front of June, and which June did not think about until much later.

—You are early, said Margot Hale.

—Yeah.

—Was it good?

June stood in the kitchen doorway with her bag still on her shoulder.

She had prepared four different ways of saying it on the walk from Chestnut Street, and all four of them fell apart, and what came out was:

—Gran, what is a thread?

Her grandmother put down the cup.

She did it very carefully, and she took slightly longer over it than she needed to, and she did not look up straight away.

—Sit down, said Margot Hale.

—Gran.

—June. Sit down, and I am going to lock the front door first, because I have wanted to have this conversation for about four years and I am not doing it with a door open onto Chestnut Street in October.

Chapter 3. Four Things

Key vocabulary

a rule — правило
a witness — свидетель
intention — намерение
a cost — цена, издержки
to charge (a price) — брать плату
a ledger — учётная книга
an anchor — якорь, опора
to hold (a working) — удерживать
a spell — заклинание
a trade — ремесло
to inherit — унаследовать
a bloodline — родовая линия
to practise — практиковать
ridiculous — нелепый
to take something seriously — относиться серьёзно

Four Things

Margot Hale locked the front door, and then she checked it, and then she went into the front room and closed the curtains, which she did not do in October because the house was one of the ones people photographed and she said that closed curtains looked unfriendly.

Then she came back and sat down and put both hands flat on the kitchen table.

She sat down opposite her granddaughter, and for the first time in June's life she looked like a woman who had been waiting for something and had stopped being able to put it off.

—Tell me what you saw, she said. All of it. Do not tidy it up.

June told her.

It took about eight minutes and it came out in the wrong order, and twice she had to go back, and her grandmother did not interrupt once except to say, at one point, *how many joined together*, and to write the answer on the back of an envelope.

When it was finished, Margot Hale said:

—The boy on the shoulders. Say that again.

—He said: what were we doing.

—Twice?

—Twice. And his dad said we were listening to the lady, and he said yes but what were we doing.

Her grandmother looked at the candle in the brass holder for a while.

—Right, she said. I am going to tell you four things. I have been putting this off since you were thirteen and your mother has been telling me to do it since she came back, and she was right, and I am going to say that to her tomorrow and it will be the first time in nineteen years.

She turned the candle holder a quarter turn on the table, which June had seen her do a thousand times and which she now suspected was not nothing.

—One. What you saw is real, it happens, and you are not the only person who can see it, but you are one of very few, and the number in this town is currently four.

—Four people.

—Four, said Margot Hale. Me. You. A man called Roland Pike who is eighty one and does not leave his house. And a woman who is currently living in a rented place on Federal Street who arrived on the twenty ninth of September.

June sat with that.

—Verity Cole.

—Verity Cole.

—Gran.

—Two, said her grandmother, because if I stop I will not start again. Two is how it works, and it is very simple and everybody gets it wrong. It takes three things. Intention, cost and witnesses.

She held up three fingers and put one down.

—Intention. You have to want a specific thing. Not a feeling. A thing. And it has to be one thing, and you have to be able to say it in one sentence, and if you cannot say it in one sentence you have not got an intention, you have got a mood.

She put the second finger down.

—Cost. Everything is paid for. Nothing is free, and there is no version where it is free, and anybody who tells you otherwise is either lying or is about to be extremely surprised.

—Paid with what?

—I am coming to that. Third.

She put the last finger down.

—Witnesses. And this is the one that nobody outside the trade understands, and it is the reason this town is what it is.

She leaned back.

—Nothing works alone, June. Nothing. You can sit in a locked room with the best intention in the world and the purest heart in New England and you will not move a teaspoon. It needs to be seen. It needs people who are aware that something is happening, and the more of them there are, the bigger the thing you can do.

June looked at her.

—How many for a teaspoon?

—Three, said Margot Hale, and looked pleased. That is a very good question and it is the right one. Three people, paying attention, for something the size of a teaspoon. Eleven for a candle to light itself. About forty for something you would tell your friends about.

—Can I ask something stupid? said June.

—There are no stupid ones tonight.

—Does it have to be people? Could you do it with a camera?

Her grandmother looked up sharply.

—Why do you ask that?

—Because there were two screens next to the stage and her face was on them six metres high, and I looked, and there was nothing above the crowd on the screens. The camera could not see it.

—The camera cannot see it, agreed Margot Hale. That is well spotted and it is also not what I asked. Why did you ask about cameras?

—Because there were about nine people filming.

Her grandmother did not answer for a moment.

—Put that to one side, she said. We will come back to it and I do not want to come back to it tonight.

—And three thousand?

—Three thousand, said her grandmother, on a stage, on a lit field, in October, in this town, all of them consenting, all of them looking in the same direction.

She stopped.

—Three thousand is more than I have seen in one place since 1998, she said, and I am not going to pretend to you that I slept last night.

The kitchen was very quiet. Somewhere on Chestnut Street a car went past slowly, looking for a parking space that does not exist in October.

—Third thing, said Margot Hale.

—That was three things.

—That was one thing in three parts. Do not be clever, it is twenty past ten.

She got up and filled the kettle, which she did when she wanted to be doing something with her hands.

—Third thing is who pays.

—The person doing it, said June.

—No.

—Then who?

—The witnesses, said Margot Hale, and turned round. Every time. Always. That is the entire trade. That is what people mean when they say a price. The cost of a working is taken out of the people who watched it, in proportion, split between them, and the more of them there are the less each one pays, which is why big is safer than small and why everybody wants a crowd.

June sat with her hands round a mug of tea that had gone cold.

—Paid with what? she said again.

—Small things.

—Gran.

—I am not being vague, said her grandmother. That is the actual answer. It comes out in small things, and it is always something that is easy to lose and hard to notice. A day of memory, usually a dull one. The taste of something. Your ability to feel cold for a while. Two weeks of patience with your family. A tune you used to know.

—That is horrible.

—Yes, said Margot Hale.

—No, but that is genuinely horrible.

—Yes, said her grandmother again, and did not soften it, which June appreciated later and did not appreciate at all at the time.

June thought about three thousand people going out through a gate.

—The boy, she said. The one on the shoulders.

—The boy paid about ninety seconds of memory, said Margot Hale. From about ten minutes before. He will never get it back and he will never miss it and by tomorrow he will not know there is anything to miss. That is what it looks like from the inside, June. It does not look like anything. That is the whole problem with it.

—And me?

Her grandmother looked at her.

—What did you have for lunch on Monday? she said.

June opened her mouth.

She sat in a kitchen on the second of October and could not remember what she had eaten for lunch two days earlier, and then thought, quite reasonably, that most people cannot, and then could not decide which of those two thoughts was true, and this, she discovered over the following month, is the exact feeling that the whole thing runs on.

—I do not know, she said.

—No. And you never will, and it does not matter, and if you spend the next thirty days checking you will go mad. I have watched somebody do that.

—Who?

—Fourth thing, said Margot Hale, and sat back down.

—Can it be undone? said June. If somebody has paid, can you give it back?

—No.

—Never?

—June, if there were a way of giving it back, this town would look extremely different, said Margot Hale. You can stop a working. You can break an anchor. You can make somebody's next one cost them more than it is worth. You cannot return what has already gone, any more than you can put a Tuesday back.

The fourth thing took the longest.

—Our family does not practise, she said.

—What?

—We do not do it. We have not done it since 1971 and we do not do it now and you are not going to be taught it.

—Then what are we?

—We are chandlers, said Margot Hale, which is the old word for candle makers, and which is on the deeds of that shop in 1908 and on a document I have upstairs from 1804.

—Gran, that is not an answer.

—It is the whole answer and I am going to explain it, said her grandmother. Sit still.

She turned the brass holder another quarter turn.

—A working needs to be held, she said. Intention, cost, witnesses gets it started. Something has to hold it while it happens, or it goes off all at once and does whatever it likes, and that is where people get hurt. So you need an anchor. A physical object that the working sits in while it burns.

June looked at the candle on the table.

—Yes, said Margot Hale. Now you have got it.

—Candles.

—Candles. Because a candle is the only anchor that tells you when to stop. A stone will hold a working forever. A ring will hold it for fifty years and then somebody sells it at a market in Rowley and it is on a stranger's hand. A candle burns for four hours and then it is over and there is nothing left but wax.

She tapped the table.

—That is our trade. We do not do workings. We make the things that hold them and we make them so that they run out. Twelve hours, four hours, ninety minutes, twenty. There is a hundred metres of wick in the workroom and there is a reason every single spool is a different thickness.

June thought about the boy of nineteen who had come in on the first of October and asked for a hundred metres of wick.

—The special orders, she said.

—Twenty three of them, said Margot Hale. Twenty three people in Essex County who buy from me, and I know what every one of them does, and there is a book in the workroom with all of it in.

—The four minutes.

—The four minutes.

—What do you actually do in there?

Her grandmother put both hands flat on the table again.

—I write down what happened in this town today, she said. Every night. Who worked, where, roughly how big, and what it cost. I have done it every day since 1971 and my mother did it before me and hers did before her, and there are forty one books in a cupboard in that workroom, and the first one starts in November 1804.

June sat absolutely still.

—You are saying our family are the people who write it down.

—I am saying our family are the people who write it down, sell the anchors, keep them small, and do not work, said Margot Hale. That is the trade. It is not glamorous, it is not exciting, and everybody on that street thinks we are the boring shop, and that is exactly the point, and I have been extremely happy doing it for fifty two years.

—Why did we stop? said June.

—Stop what?

—You said we do not practise since 1971. That means we did before.

Her grandmother took a long time over that one.

—Yes, she said.

—What happened in 1971?

—I am not doing that tonight.

—Gran.

—June, said Margot Hale, and there was something in her voice that June had heard perhaps four times in her life. I have given you an enormous amount in one evening and you have taken it well and I am proud of you. That one costs me something and I would like to be sitting down properly and not at twenty to eleven on the second of October. You will get it. Not tonight.

June let it go, which she was not certain about afterwards.

—Does Mum know? she said instead.

—Your mother knows everything I have told you tonight and about four things I have not.

—Is that why she came back?

—I do not know, said Margot Hale. She has not told me and I have not asked her, because we have nineteen years to get through and I am doing it in the order that seems least likely to end badly.

—Then tell me about her, said June.

—Verity Cole.

—Yes.

Margot Hale got up and took the notebook out of her cardigan pocket and put it on the table between them, and opened it near the back, and turned it round.

29 Sept. Federal St. Arrived. One woman, no coven, hired help only.

30 Sept. Nothing.

1 Oct. Common. Large. Not local.

2 Oct. Common, main stage, 20.03 to 20.44. Approx 3,000 consenting. Took memory, low grade, spread thin. Anchor not identified.

June read it three times.

—You were there tonight, she said.

—I was at the back by the bandstand from ten to eight.

—You told me to go.

—I told you to go, said Margot Hale, because you have been able to feel it since you were about fifteen and you have not known what it was, and I have been waiting for the year when the thing was big enough that you would see it instead of only feeling it, and I did not expect that year to be this one, and I am not sorry.

—You could have told me first.

—Yes.

—Gran, you could have told me first and then I would not have sat down on wet grass in front of three thousand people.

—June, I have been a Chandler for fifty two years and a grandmother for seventeen and I am considerably better at the first one, said Margot Hale. Yes. I could have told you first. I have been getting that wrong since 2011 and your mother will confirm it at length if you ask her, which I would rather you did not do before Sunday.

She closed the notebook.

—Now, she said. Ask me the question you have been holding since you sat down.

June looked at the table.

—Is she going to do something bad?

—That is not the question.

—Then what is?

—The question, said Margot Hale, is why a woman with two point one million followers, who could fill a room anywhere on this planet, has rented a house for thirty one days in a town of forty two thousand people.

—Because it is Salem in October.

—Because it is Salem in October.

—Because of the crowd.

—Because there is nowhere else on earth where a million people turn up in one month and think about this on purpose, said her grandmother, and because the thirty first of October on Essex Street is about a hundred thousand people in eleven streets, and because there is no permit in the world that stops somebody standing in the middle of that with an intention.

She blew out the candle.

—And because she is not doing one thing, said Margot Hale. She is doing it in pieces. Four events so far and there will be more, and every one of them takes a little and none of them takes enough to notice, and something in this town is being filled up.

—Filled up with what?

—I do not know.

—What is holding it?

—I do not know that either, said her grandmother, and that is the part that has stopped me sleeping, because a working that size needs an anchor, and I have sold every serious anchor in this county for fifty two years, and I have not sold her one.

She stood up and put the mugs in the sink.

—Bed, she said. It is quarter past eleven and you have school.

—Gran, you cannot say all that and then say bed.

—I can and I am going to, said Margot Hale. Tomorrow after school you are not working the shop. Tomorrow after school you are coming into the workroom and I am going to show you the books, and then you are going to decide whether you want any of this, and I want you to know now that if you say no, that is a real option and I will never mention it again.

She stopped in the doorway.

—Your mother said no at nineteen, she said. And I handled it extremely badly, and she went to Oregon for nineteen years.

Chapter 4. The Workroom

Key vocabulary

a workroom — подсобка, мастерская
a shelf — полка
a cupboard — шкаф
a spool — катушка
a mould — форма (для отливки)
to pour — лить, отливать
a batch — партия
a label — этикетка
a record — запись, документ
an entry — запись (в книге)
handwriting — почерк
a supplier — поставщик
a customer — клиент
discreet — сдержанный, неболтливый
to keep track of — вести учёт

The Workroom

There is a version of this book in which the interesting part of that Friday is the cupboard, and June has told it that way about nine times since, because it is a better story.

What actually mattered was the wick.

The workroom at Hale and Co. was four metres by three and June had been in it perhaps eight hundred times.

She had swept it. She had carried boxes through it. She had done her homework at the small table in the corner when the shop was too busy to sit at the counter. She could have drawn it from memory: the two long benches, the wax melter, the racks of moulds, the spools of wick on their pegs, the deep sink, the smell.

On the third of October she came in through the back after school and found her grandmother standing in the middle of it with the lights on and her coat still buttoned.

—Right, said Margot Hale. Look at it.

—I have looked at it eight hundred times.

—Look at it properly.

June looked.

It took about a minute.

The moulds were on the left, and there were about forty of them, and she knew all of them by shape. Tapers, pillars, tea lights, the tall square one they used for the church order.

The spools of wick were on the right on a board with pegs, and there were nineteen of them, and June had always assumed that different candles needed different wicks, which is true.

The benches were where the work happened.

And along the back wall, above the sink, there was a cupboard with two doors that had been painted white about five times, and which had a lock on it, and which June had never once seen open.

—The cupboard, she said.

—The cupboard, said her grandmother, and took a key out of her coat pocket.

There were forty one books.

They were not identical. The oldest ones were small and brown and hand stitched. There were four in the middle from the 1880s that had been rebound at some point in green cloth. The ones from the 1960s onwards were ordinary hardback notebooks of the kind you buy in a stationery shop, and the most recent was blue, and there were about thirty pages left in it.

They filled the whole cupboard, two shelves, spines out, in order.

—November 1804 to now, said Margot Hale. Six women. My great great great grandmother started it, and then her daughter, and then her daughter, and then my grandmother, and then my mother, and then me.

—Six.

—Six, said her grandmother, and did not say the obvious thing, which June noticed and was grateful for.

She took out the first one.

It was smaller than a paperback and the cover was soft with handling, and when she opened it the paper was thick and brown at the edges and the handwriting was small, sloped and very regular.

—Read that, she said.

June read.

4 Nov 1804. Hobbs, at the yard. Small. Fish. Cost taken from six men. One lost the smell of tobacco.

7 Nov 1804. Nothing.

8 Nov 1804. Nothing.

11 Nov 1804. Ash Street. Woman I do not know. Middling. Cost taken from about twenty at the market. Two forgot an errand.

June looked up.

—This is a diary of what other people did.

—It is a record, said Margot Hale. That is not the same thing. A diary is about the person writing it.

—Why?

—Why what?

—Why write it down at all? If we do not do it. If we are just the shop.

Her grandmother took the book back and put it on the bench with great care.

—Because somebody has to know what is in the ground, she said.

—In the ground?

—Sit down. This is the part that takes twenty minutes.

They sat at the small table in the corner, where June had done four years of homework.

—Everything that gets done in a place stays in the place, said Margot Hale. Not the working. The working ends when the anchor ends, that is the point of the anchor. But the cost does not disappear. It goes somewhere.

—Into the people.

—Out of the people, said her grandmother. And then into the place. It settles. In the ground, in the buildings, in the water, in whatever will hold it. And it sits there and it does nothing at all for a very long time.

—What happens when it stops doing nothing?

—It gets picked up, said Margot Hale. By the next person who does a working in the same spot. And they get a bigger result than they paid for, and they do not know why, and they do it again.

June thought about that.

—So a place can be full.

—A place can be full. Yes.

—Is Salem full?

Her grandmother looked at the cupboard with forty one books in it.

—Salem, she said, has four hundred years of people doing things to each other on purpose in public, and then three hundred and thirty years of a million visitors a year thinking about it, and I have a book in that cupboard from 1904 in which my great grandmother wrote the sentence *this town is not empty and never will be again*.

She turned the blue notebook round on the table.

—We write it down so that in fifty years somebody knows where it is thick, she said. That is the job. Not stopping anybody. Not policing anybody. Knowing.

June sat with her hands on the table.

—Gran, that is genuinely the strangest job I have ever heard of.

—It is also, said Margot Hale, extremely boring for about eleven months of the year, and I would like you to understand that before you get excited about any of it.

—Can I ask about the wick? said June.

—Ask.

—Nineteen spools. I always thought it was because a fat candle needs a fat wick.

—It is, said Margot Hale. That is completely true and it is also not the reason there are nineteen. She got up and took one down, a thin grey one, and put it on the bench.

—Wick decides how fast it goes, she said. Thin wick, small flame, slow burn. Fat wick, big flame, fast burn. In an ordinary candle that is about how long you get before you have to buy another one. In an anchor it is something else entirely.

—What?

—It is how hard the working is allowed to push, said her grandmother. A twelve hour pillar with a thin wick does something very small for a very long time. A twenty minute taper with a fat wick does something quite large and then stops. And there is no anchor in this workroom, and there never has been, that does something large for a long time, because that is the one shape we do not make.

June looked at the nineteen spools.

—Nobody makes it?

—Anybody could make it, said Margot Hale. It is a candle. It is wax and string. The reason it does not exist is that six women decided it would not, and every chandler in New England agreed with them, and that has held since about 1811, and I would like you to notice how thin that is.

The twenty three special orders took the rest of the afternoon.

Margot got a second book off the bench, a small green one, and opened it, and June discovered that her grandmother kept a customer list of the kind that no shop in the world keeps.

Pike, R. 81. Federal St. Twelve hour pillars, four a year, beeswax. Weather only. Harmless. Deaf now, do not phone, write.

Delgado, M. 44. Peabody. Ninety minute tapers, twelve a year. Finding things. Charges for it, which I do not like, but she is careful and she keeps her numbers small.

Okonjo, B. 29. Salem, Lafayette St. Twenty minute. Sleep only, for her mother. Never more than three witnesses. Good.

Ferris, T. 52. Marblehead. Four hour pillars. Refused since 2019, will not say what for. Watch.

There were twenty three of them and June read all twenty three.

Some of them were two lines. One of them, near the end, was most of a page.

—These are all real people, she said.

—All real.

—I have served some of these people. Mr. Pike's order goes out in January, I have packed it.

—You have packed it four times.

—And they all just walk into our shop.

—Where else are they going to go? said Margot Hale. There are people in this county doing small careful work who have never met each other and never will, and every one of them needs an anchor that runs out, and there is one shop that makes them, and it has been in the same building since 1908.

June turned back to the entry that took most of a page.

—What about this one?

Her grandmother reached over and closed the book.

—That is a person I do not sell to any more, she said. And that is Sunday's conversation, along with 1971, and I have not forgotten that I owe you that one.

June let it go for the second time.

Later she worked out that she had let it go three times before her grandmother finally sat down and told her, and that all three times she had let it go because she trusted her, and that this was the correct decision and also cost them about eleven days.

—Where do they come from? said June. The customers. How does somebody in Marblehead know that a candle shop in Salem is the one to come to?

—They are told.

—By who?

—By the person who taught them, said Margot Hale. That is the whole system and it is four hundred years old and it is held together with nothing at all. Somebody learns from somebody, and at the end of the learning they are told two things: keep it small, and go to Hale.

—And if somebody was never taught?

Her grandmother looked at her.

—Then they do not know to keep it small, she said, and they do not know to come to us, and they work out the rest on their own, and it takes them about four years, and by the end of it they are extremely good and they have no idea what they are standing on.

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