

Unresolved Injustices

“BRING HER IN!” exclaims the prosecutor, Mr. Kramer. Then, a middle-aged woman dressed in dark, unflattering clothing gets dragged into the courtroom by the guards. “Before you, I have a malicious woman who has brought death upon our community by engaging in witchcraft.” The woman was weak and weary; her long sleeves hid the bruising caused by the beating she endured before being brought in. “A woman who was once a simple housewife, the PINACCLE OF OUR SOCIETY decided to have a little dance with the devil.” He glanced at her with a sinister smirk. “Isn’t that right?”

Quivering, the 43-year-old Mary dropped to the floor, sobbing profusely. Mr. Kramer walked up to her and, while staring at her from above, said, “Do you have any shame after what you did? Are you not remorseful for your actions?” He then looked around the courtroom and loudly exclaimed, “This woman before you had brought the death of her husband, William Smith, a successful miner and my dear friend.” Mary’s sobbing grew louder, but a cascade of gasps from the witnesses and the jury drowned it out.

“I knew Will since we were young lads, and I’ve never seen a man as healthy as my old friend; it wasn’t until he married Mary that his health started to deteriorate.” He displayed a sorrowful look. “He was no longer the same; now he was constantly nauseous, exhausted, and in pain, unable to do his work; he spent his last days trapped in his bed. Three days ago, when I visited the market, I saw Mary in a black dress buying a goat of a similar colour. As an educated gentleman, I knew there was no good reason for an old maiden to be wearing a black dress, so I approached her to enquire about her affairs. Upon seeing me, she quickly rushed away with her newly bought goat as if too guilty to face me. Now, I am not a superstitious man, but do remind me, isn’t a black goat the devil’s spawn? Would you believe me if I said that only a day later, when I went to visit my dear friend, I found out he was dead? Some might say that it is but a mere coincidence, and if so, it is the truly most remarkable one straight out of a play!” He turns towards the judge. “But this is no play we live in, right? So, what other explanation do we have other than blatant witchcraft?” The judge lets out a sigh, trying to fully take in what the prosecutor has said.

He proceeds to ask, “Mary, do you have anything to say?” Mary is still on the floor trying to force out a proper sentence despite her shaken state: “He was ill... infected... by the water... we both were, but... he never got better, and that’s why he... he...” “BLASPHEMY!” shouts Mr. Kramer as he yanked her hair, forcing their eyes to meet. He leans close to her face. “There is no way water does that to a person, and if so, it must have been you who meddled with it.” Mary remained silent, and her expression went blank. Mr. Kramer lets go of her hair, and she remains on the floor facing the ground. The courtroom alongside Mary

stays silent, convinced of her guilt, awaiting the judge's verdict. The judge states, "I declare Mary Browning guilty of witchcraft resulting in the death of her husband, William Browning, and thus sentence her to death by hanging. The sentence will commence tonight, on April 30th, in the town square. Case dismissed." The courtroom roars with excitement, and Mary, still frozen, gets dragged away by two guards.

As the clock approaches midnight, town folk start to gather. In towns like this with a population of no more than 1500 people, rumours spread fast, and public executions were no less common nor entertaining than a local fair. Mary gets prepared for hanging by her executioner; he dresses her in plain, common clothes. Though this would usually be done by a family member, Mary had nothing of the sort. As she walked from her cell to the gallows in the town centre, she reminisced about her life. She thought about the time her father, brother, and even mother had died after falling sick in a similar manner to that of her late husband. She knew the signs of a chronic biofilm infection all too well but was too poor to afford the medication. She knew the still water from the lake on which the town relied on garnered all sorts of bacteria, and despite countless attempts to inform others about it, everyone was quick to dismiss her. In the 17th century, the words "common sense" and "women" could not be combined in the same sentence. Oh, dear Mary, what could she have done? Even now, with all the technology available, we still struggle with eliminating bacterial infections, and they remain a leading cause of death. Suggesting a change would have brought her the same fate, for change is what people are most afraid of.

Lost in thought, Mary does not notice that they have arrived. She looks up at the faces whose eyes are fixed on her. Some are grinning, others look angry or displeased, but not a single face cries for her. They all ultimately believe that before them stands a witch who is a danger to them all. She does not cry herself, and instead she prays silently, hoping the pain will at best be short. The executioner places the noose around her and, with a level, pulls the rope up. Mary strangles as she slowly suffocates, and without a chance for a last word or a way to save herself, she takes her last breath. She was one of such many incidents.