



Historical Association

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Burn Vile Creature

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Thursday, 18th August 1644.

Smoke emissions loomed in the environment; plumes of the thick, noxious substances hurried off into the atmosphere blocking out the only source of light – the sun. The pungent smell of burning hung low assaulting people's nostrils who attended the horrific event. Crackling could be heard from deep in the burning pit as the hot embers began to spread and singe all things it encountered leaving a stygian trail of remnants never to be rejuvenated or wielded again. Wind furrowed through the dense stacks of wood becoming a catalyst for the flames to whip up to the higher pieces of wood setting them alight one by one.

The hellish monstrosity begged for its life.

Crowds surrounded the fire with an ardent desire to observe this event and watch the evil within society burn to the ground. Chanting and cheering encircled the core of the event as people celebrated with food and other festivities – evil was banished from the village. Erased. Eradicated.

Exterminated. A sense of relief ripped through the crowds of men, woman and children as the infernal flames reached the base of the long hellish dress that the corrupt creature wore beginning to scorch the lower part of her leg. The man in charge of the party-like event held in Pendle was Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins who had arranged the capture and murder of the vicious beast at the stake. According to locals, an anonymous individual had discovered her malevolent link to pure evil and, being a good citizen, reported it to the highest authority on a recent survey surrounding disturbance in the

area. As shown by the multitudes of people of all ages and sizes, many people of this town genuinely believed that the burning of this women is for the best.

The creature started screaming in pain.

Flesh of the woman began to sizzle like bacon on an open fire; clumps of skin cells could be seen drifting off into the abyss, floating in an angelic manner. Her grimy, black toenails began to curl into themselves digging into the flesh of her turbid feet, piercing the skin going deep into the muscles of her; this made her screaming treble in volume with feline-like shrieks being unleashed from the darkest corners of her chest. The licking flames spread up to her torso which only fuelled the fire further as her stomach erupted leaving all the digested food to spray out and supply more energy.

The witch became unconscious.

Being tied to a stake was the only thing holding her charred, limp body from toppling over and rolling into the crowds of other people. The ropes holding her up were laced with garlic and silver under Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins' order so to keep Lucifer's storm at bay. These ropes had left severe cuts along her body which, in the end was what killed her. They had reached such an elevated temperature the skin began to fray and crumble underneath it. Near the top of the beast, the rope was pulled. The rope was pulled with such strength. The audience had decided enough was enough and the fire wasn't doing enough. Just before this, she appeared to be coming round from her earlier state of unconsciousness, so they did it. The rope around her neck was yanked back with pure force and determination. Then there was a large, echoing smack on the nearby ground.

The evil had been exorcised.

Slicing through her thin bony neck, the rope left jagged ends of bones and nerves and muscles. The blood. There was so much blood. It sprayed out in all direction as her heart took its last pulse leaving thick, oozing blood to remain. If you looked close enough, you could see that her spine hadn't snapped. It had not broken; in fact, it had been brutally mutilated and torn off the brain leaving about two inches of crystal white vertebrae just hanging there. Waiting. Waiting for that signal to move that will never come.

The woman was dead.

Monday, 15th August 1644 – 3 days earlier.

Pendle was a quiet village, near Clitheroe and other little, quaint villages in the North-east of Lancashire. Nothing much ever happened here. The harvest was always excellent. They had managed to avoid the plague so far. There had obviously been a few close calls with a neighbouring village, Chatburn, getting struck down with the plague but it never seemed to affect the innocent village of Pendle. The only noticeable things that ever happened were miraculous recoveries from those on their death bed.

Celeste was always sure to be at the side of the ill.

With the destruction of Catholic monasteries during King Henry VIII reign, there had to be immediate action on how to treat those who were ill. In the town of pendle, it was Celeste's Grandmother who had organised this in early 1538. With the help of her young daughters, she had transformed a decrepit old public house into a make-shift doctor's surgery. The role of healer had been passed through the Althea family and had now landed on Celeste. Celeste upheld this role to a remarkably high standard and left no patient untreated or even ill. From tumours to buboes to a common cold, no-one left that public house with even a sniffle in their nose.

Celeste was excelling especially in the treatment of young children.

Tuesday, 16th August 1644

A young boy paced into the surgery; he was very obviously holding back a tear as he clenched his arm looking nervous. Celeste approached him with caution so not to spook him in this nervous state. "What's wrong my dear?" she asked him ever so softly. He made her aware of the situation – he had broken his arm after climbing a tree and slipping on the morning dew. She went to the back room and the boy heard deep rumblings coming from within. A potion was being concocted that she knew would heal him straight away.

The room Celeste was in was full of delights.

Flowers garnished the window frames, there were tulips, buttercups, daisies, daffodils and so many more diverse, colourful beauties. Glimmering through the window, the sun shone brightly down onto the wooden floorboards. It was heaven on Earth. Whimsical little jars of different herbs and spices laid on the shelf with dust gathering on top of them, they all had their own individual label on them written in lovely cursive writing. Small, ceramic cauldrons were strayed across the counter with remnants of previous concoctions and potions stuck to the edge like cereal on a bowl. The cauldron she was using was a dark coloured, medium sized one that was new. It was a few weeks ago that she had crafted a whole new set of plates and similar crockery for all her neighbours in the village.

She gave the boy the potion and he was right as rain.

This wasn't the only time Celeste had helped somebody she had no knowledge of who they are or how it affects her. It was only last week she had helped water a little old lady's crops and overnight, they had miraculously flowered and were the most glorious flowers in the whole of Pendle. Most people in Pendle didn't notice but the little old lady did. It didn't bother the little old lady because she knew Celeste was one of the good ones; she was there to help and would never think of harming even a butterfly.

Celeste was a witch.

Celeste wasn't the kind of witch that everyone thought existed. Most people in this time believed that witches were vicious, evil creatures that were the physical embodiment of the devil; they did his work and wreak havoc on anything they find. No. This was not her at all. She was kind and courteous and cared for everyone around her. She was the reason that the town was brilliant. If it weren't for her, God knows what would happen.

The woman was a saviour for the town.

It wasn't all fun and games though, there were still a few people who didn't trust the witch. They wouldn't send their kids to her surgery. They wouldn't let her help with their chores, their gardening and all things like that. It wasn't her fault. She didn't act malevolent in any way – ever. Luckily, it was only a minority of people who didn't trust her.

The number however, seemed to be steadily increasing.

Wednesday, 17th August 1644

In Pendle, there was only one newspaper that arrived once a week. This was due to the extreme costs of the printing of the newspapers and the delivery of it. The newspaper arrived every Wednesday at 8am sharp which meant a lot of people dragged themselves out of their houses to meet into the village hall and listen to the people who could read as they read aloud the weekly updates.

Many people still were unable to read or write due to the severe lack of education among the working class. Shock. Shock and fear ran through people as the title on the front page was read aloud. It couldn't be real. Pendle was such a peaceful town; this can't be happening. Could it? Could this be correct?

The title read 'Hopkins says witches are in North-East Lancashire.'

Presumably, this meant that he would be on his way. He would be arriving in Pendle. Many people were joyous over this thought as Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins was renowned for coming into towns and villages and ridding the devil within a day or two which is what many people believed should happen, especially with the full belief of witches being pushed by the King. On the other hand, there were many of the citizens of Pendle who were dreading the arrival of him as yes, he may catch a witch or two, but their evil intent is not there and realistically, they weren't linked to the devil as everybody perceived. Not that that would make any difference.

The witch finder general soon arrived.

It was mid-afternoon when he arrived. The sun was at its highest point spreading a warm august heat across the village. Arriving in horse and cart, he sped down the track and the echoing 'click-clack' from the freshly polished horses' hooves broke the daunting silence that was present in the village. The whole village stood still as the man in a hat set foot on Lancashire ground. He had arrived. He was here and he wasn't leaving until the evil had been ridded from this tranquil place.

The trials began.

Many women were fearful for their lives as they knew that due to the patriarchal society they lived in, they would be targeted whether they displayed any supernatural ability or not. Celeste was distraught. She knew that she would be heavily attacked due to her previous actions. It was times like this

when a whole town could turn against a person, even though they were previously an active member of the community and many people held that person with an elevated level of respect. Society could crumble just by the presence of Hopkins as people went insane believing the devil haunted them.

Of course, this wasn't the case.

The devil wasn't out to get people or ruin the world, they were more like a supernatural law enforcer who only intervened in severe cases like Richard III or Genghis Khan. Even then, they weren't supporting the evil or anything in that region, they would just send support to go against the malevolent force. The devil isn't bad. The sinners are bad. A key issue with this is that humans often can't see the difference between good and evil; especially in cases linked to witchcraft and magic. People automatically link it with danger and fear as they are petrified at the prospect of things in their utopia like village changing to anything that didn't follow their archetypal views of what is right and wrong. Celeste, even though many people loved and cared for her, sadly didn't fit into these archetypal views as she was a woman who stood up for herself and made sure she was heard.

This was her downfall.

Witchfinder General Hopkins took it upon himself to go around the village holding unplanned questionnaires that people had no prior knowledge of or could plan for. The main purpose of these questions was to isolate those that did not fit into societal norms and penalise them; this often resulted in fatal consequences for the woman affected. By the time daylight hours were over, the Witchfinder had compiled a list of people to be put on trial. The list was separated into two separate columns. The first column, titled 'for trial,' consisted of woman who had a chance of being innocent. They would have a court trial in which they could prove that they were innocent through many precarious tests and challenges. This list was read out in the village church at 9pm. They were to be trialled on the 19th of August. One day after what happened to those who found themselves on the second list.

Celeste didn't hear her name.

Fear was building within her. She felt as if she would faint; her legs were shaking; she felt as if someone or something was clenching her gut making her

nearly throw up. She knew what this meant. She knew it would be her doom. Her damnation. Her death. She was on the second list. Anxiety ran through her core as she knew the second list was the list for immediate expulsion. Not expulsion from the town. Not even expulsion from Lancashire or England. No. This was far worse than that.

It was expulsion from life.

As he read the second list, the Witchfinder General looked overly impressed to read out Celeste's name and her name alone. The title of the list read 'For the stake.' Why were people cheering? It was only yesterday that she was saving people and helping the vulnerable. People shouldn't be excited. The stake was where she would die – tomorrow. Being burned alive was the only thing my life had left. Her death date was tomorrow. Tomorrow at ten in the morning she would be tied up and at half past, she would be set alight.

Her death wasn't the thing about which she was worried.

Before this, the future looked bright. She had just moved in with her girlfriend (not that anyone else knew this as she would be killed faster than being a witch) she was going to get a lovely cat and raise it like a child. Her girlfriend even had ideas to upgrade the house and incorporate a surgery for the medical work in there rather than having to trek five miles into the centre of Pendle every day. Celeste's girlfriend was a surprisingly good builder, so she was going to build a room for this around the back of the house. This was all going to be torn down and destroyed. For Celeste, her death wasn't even the worst part. That was inevitable. It was the soul-crushing idea of her soulmate being stranded in a world that was built against her without anyone to support her or love her.

Celeste went home to break the news to Anastasia.

Walking through the village to get home was hell on earth for her. People would pull their children aside in fear that she would feed them to the devil or brutally murder them. Groups of adults would launch potato peels and other pieces of rotten vegetables at her. Children sweeping the street would drop their brushes and burst into tears fleeing into the nearest house they saw. It was like she was a stray cat that had fleas wandering through the town.

Everyone was against her.

Once at home, she collapsed on her chair – numb. Her head was empty. There were no thoughts. There wasn't anything to think about. She didn't see the point of making the best of the situation, the whole town had betrayed her. They gave up hope and fell into the trick of the Witchfinder. He wasn't helping the town in any way, he was tearing it apart and causing so, so much chaos. Celeste's life was nearing over as she finally told Anastasia the horrible news. Anastasia cried for hours and hours hoping it was all a dream, but it wasn't. Her beautiful girlfriend was going to be burned to a crisp in the early hours of tomorrow. They both got no sleep that night as they were full of fear and anxiety.

The morning and her death both grew nearer.

Thursday, 18th August 1644

Awoken after having an awful nightmare about Anastasia being burned alongside her, Celeste couldn't get back asleep at all. The words kept swirling around her head, they kept going and going never to cease movement until her body ceased life. These last few hours of her life were going to be haunted by that same phrase. It was a hellish shadow following her around refusing to leave her alone like a stubborn child. A little while later, Anastasia came downstairs, yet she still couldn't shake those words that danced around her heat-oppressed brain; Anastasia tried to comfort Celeste, but her attempts didn't work, and for a fair reason. Today she would die and those words would not leave.

'Burn the witch, condemn the devil.'

This did not resonate with her at all as she did not deserve to be burned and the devil shouldn't be condemned, they should be doing the condemning. Yet she knew it would impact her massively. Strangely, the chanting in her head was getting louder. It was almost becoming real. She tried to block it out, to ignore it but it just wouldn't leave. After many failed attempts to block it out of her head, she came to the awful conclusion that it was time; the crowds of people were approaching her house to take her to her deathbed.

The witch soon would be dead.

She called for her girlfriend to flee while she could as if they were caught together, she would likely be killed for assisting a supernatural entity. "Run my

love, get as far away as you can,” she shouted through the house with the soft echoes of her tears following quickly. Anastasia echoed back a short but sweet goodbye whilst holding back tears herself. Knock. Knock. Knock.

They had arrived.

They bashed the door in ripping it off its hinges causing a loud whack to resonate through the house. Celeste handed herself in as she knew there was no escaping this. Her specialty was working with herbs and healing people not any kind of fighting. She walked straight into Hopkin’s arms willing to help him drag her away. And that is what they did. They dragged her all the way into the centre of the town in the most humiliating manner possible. She was hoisted up onto four men’s shoulders and carried like a coffin into the village centre. The transition from the men’s shoulders to being tied up on a stake was all a blur for her. It was as if she blinked and then she was there. The whole town watching in a trance waiting for her body to burn and become a forgotten pile of ashes. Calm and collected, she stood waiting for it to begin as she knew that the sooner it began, the sooner it would be over and she would lose this utter sense of fear hovering around her mind. Yes, she was fearful but she then became conscious of a new emotion surrounding this horrific turn of events – sorrow. She felt bad for the town’s people. She knew they would suffer without her. She had been holding the town together through a large variety of things. They may have been the reason she was there, about to be killed, but she knew it wasn’t them that had run this whole course of events. That was Hopkins; he had radicalised them all into a twisted mindset in which they believed she was pure evil.

The match was lit; the fire began.