

Kora was a lonesome and withdrawn girl; her idle hours of the day were occupied with novels, volumes, narratives, whatever she could get her eager, craving hands on.

“ And she lived happily ever after with her prince charming,” Kora whispered with a smile that did not quite reach her unnervingly violet eyes. The final words of Kora’s favorite story dispersed, just as she was tracing them with her pale, bony fingers. Darkness unfurled across the gloomy chamber, and Kora laid the oil lamp she had just smothered with her thumb and forefinger on the bedside table. Kora tugged her comforter higher and nestled into its warmth on that frigid winter night; she experienced a smug sensation of eternal happiness identical to that of every other night when she uttered those reassuring words into the black abyss.

Exhausted after reading late into the night, sleep claimed Kora even before her head hit the pillow. Dreams of loyal companions and an affectionate family she so desired tormented Kora’s restless slumber.

“I daresay, Kora will read for us. Will you now, dear?” Mrs. Wilkins implored of her quietest student. Never had Kora read aloud, for she feared its consequences. Shrinking in her desk, Kora’s cheeks burned with mortification as all attention turned towards her. She observed the mass of eyes focusing upon her from this prying class of 1740.

In the heat of the moment, Kora failed to politely decline as she routinely did. Although her every fiber screamed out, *refuse, refuse*, Kora heard her voice reply, “Certainly, Mrs Wilkins.”

“Scurvy is...” she began a bit shaky, but before long launched into the tale about pirates and seafarers, about the dreadful disease that claimed and inflicted them all.

Describing the details, her stormy emotions tearing across each page, listeners soon became engrossed in this thrilling account. The words flowed off the page, dancing before the children as Kora proceeded.

“The unfortunate soul knew his end was advancing. Blisters engulfed his mouth, his gums turned to black rotting flesh, while excruciating fevers rattled his frail frame. Unexpectedly, James Lind bounded into the sailor’s cramped quarters, cradling a simple lemon as if it were a precious diamond.”

A shriek suddenly pierced the stillness. All eyes whirled towards the disturbance. Lissa. Clutching her jaw in hand, Lissa was screeching and sobbing at the top of her lungs. Through her long, laced fingers a ghastly sight of rotted and inflamed gums could be glimpsed. How odd, Lissa was suffering of symptoms Kora had just read.

Mrs. Wilkins dismissed the class abruptly and with a harshness unlike her benign nature, cradled the whimpering girl by her arms. All the while her eyes glared accusingly into Kora's petrified violet eyes as she escorted Lissa out the door to locate someone to render attention.

Dazed and terrified, the students remained unmoving, frozen in their masks of horror for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, Mrs. Wilkins returned, too downcast to receive a shock at the class's unwillingness and inability to even shift positions in the time she had been absent.

Not one dared ask after Lissa's condition, but Mrs. Wilkins soon confirmed their unuttered doubts. Lissa was dead.

The burial was to be held on the morrow, just as the sun reached its peak in the sky, the colorful wisps of sunrise departing and preparing for a new dawn. A sign of hope. The teacher again glared at Kora with violent hatred; she knew.

Kora's heart burst and she sank to the floor grief stricken. "What have I done? What have I done?" Muttering and sobbing like a madman until her eyes could cry no longer, Kora was left to mourn on the soiled ground in solitude.

She remained prone on the floor hours after all her tears had been shed. Her crying had ceased and in its midst the scheme had been devised.

After all, I am a guilty thing who knows where it belongs, Kora persuaded herself, ousting all emotions of regret and sorrow from within.

The waning light of day gave way to blazing stars and Kora, rose with purposefulness from her cramped position, stunned that night had trickled into her periphery unnoticed.

With not a moment to waste, Kora rushed to her teacher's belongings upon the desk and ruffled through the archives, until satisfied with her findings. Kora then dashed off as quickly as her stiff legs would carry her. The single report clutched in her damp hand was titled, "The Salem Witch Trials of 1692."

The gathering of black figures huddled together in a forest of gray tombstones and dying flowers steadily increased with the sun's creeping over the horizon. Among the mass, a girl stood silently, cloak pulled tight so that only her violet eyes could be seen. She slipped silently through the crowd until positioned in the foremost line. As she trudged on, the mourners shifted aside, anticipating a sorrow filled youngster wishing her companion a final farewell.

Instead, Kora reached into her tightly bound cloak, extracting a piece of parchment from the hidden fold of her garment. She cleared her throat and consequently began her reading, lest any unconfused persons discovered her fragile scheme. Before long, the mourners were paralyzed, their gaping mouths frozen at the sound of Kora's hypnotizing and bewitching voice.

“ 1692. Known as a notorious year of accusations, executions, and extreme hysteria. And to believe it all commenced with the cruel antics of Abigail Williams and her fellow schoolmates.

‘The Devil is here in Salem,’ Abigail cried out to a shocked John Hathrone.

Recovering from his shock, Judge Hathrone requested of the girl, ‘Where may I say is the devil exactly at this given moment?’

‘Right here. Ask Sarah Good, I think likely. She's got the Devil's eye,’ Abigail hollered, pointing an accusing finger at poor Sarah Good.

Judge Hathrone turned gingerly towards Sarah, ‘Do you, Sarah Good, have valid evidence to offer me against your performing this horrible deed in league with the Devil?’

Poor Sarah was not prepared for such an occurrence and was too stunned to plead her case. Following Sarah's accusation, the girls went on ranting until the whole town became delirious and accused their fellow colleagues of witchcraft. Twenty were hanged and plenty arrested. Fortunately, this hysteria excluded proper witch executions -burning at the stake- as did witch hunts in Europe,” Kora breathlessly concluded.

The atmosphere turned tense as the dazed congregation aroused from their hypnotic state. Some were unfortunate and remained still, their eyes rolled back in their heads.

Mrs. Wilkins' body shook violently in a spasm, the whites of her eyes bloodshot. Her attempt to utter something direly important caused saliva to trickle from her trembling jaw. "T-The D-evil is-s among *us*!" Mrs. Wilkins hissed and spat in a raspy voice. "And *she* is the one!" Her eyes shot daggers into Kora's.

One crazed man declared, "I say we burn her. *At the stake!* All in favor?"

Dozens of *Is* permeated the hushed churchyard.

Spellbound and befuddled, they seized Kora and bound her to the nearest oak, setting fire to its roots. The flames lapped at her feet and the heat was rapidly increasing. Orange hues danced around Kora while the fire roared loud in her ears.

The violet of Kora's eyes flashed, void and empty in the blaze. By condemning herself to death, Kora hoped to atone for her grave sin; she had desired this result as part of her plan. Deep down though, there was a kernel of regret, triggered too late.

All feelings of remorse, however, vanished in those final moments. Although she feared Death, Kora pleaded with it to grab her into its unwelcoming claws and to end her agony.

I murdered an innocent girl with my wicked curse. A wretched and devilish creature, I am. Just take me, Death for I know where I'm going... to Hell!

Works cited

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