

The Trial

Three men stood, dressed in black, breasted, three-piece suits with matching ties, soulless. On a wooden platform, elevated above a congregation, the men looked down at the girl with faces stern and unmoving. Brother Brown was a large, wide man whose hair had left him decades ago. Brother Black was small yet broad; he seemed to be trying to hold onto the few scrawny strands of hair that desperately clung to his patchy scalp. Brother White stood between these two, obviously the oldest, yet somehow, still had a head full of white and grey hair perched like a crown of wisdom. His glasses hung low on his nose as he stared down at the girl.

She stood before them dressed in a modest blue and white dress whose length flirted with the floor. The girl's head bowed, dark eyes downcast, and hands clasped tightly around each other. Her mother stood behind her, staring off at nothing, not offering her condemned daughter any kind of comfort before the trial.

A congregation sat behind the girl, sprawled along the wooden benches, out and ready for the show. In contrast to the elders dressed in black, the audience came dressed in every color. An array of bright shades adorned the congregation, like a wedding celebration. The men in colorfully patterned bow ties and socks. The women with lavish hats that looked as if they could take flight at any moment. Many of them sat whispering amongst themselves.

“Did your husband tell you anything, Sister Brown?”

“You know my husband. If it's official elder business, he won't tell me anything.”

“All I've heard is that Brother White was shocked about the whole thing.”

“Did he say what happened?”

“No, just how ashamed he is of her.”

“She can’t have done anything that bad. She’s so sweet and lovely. Always smiling and helping her younger siblings.”

“Yes, but you know her family. They aren’t an excellent lot.”

“Of course not. The mother has eight children. And from how many different men?”

“The mother’s sins are not the child’s.”

“No, but you know where the apples tend to fall.”

“Will you stop gossiping already?”

A man in a yellow bowtie silenced a group of four bird-hats. Brother Black was now standing on the platform with his arms raised, calling for the congregation’s attention.

“Brothers and sisters, we call you here to bear witness to a confession. We ask for silence as Sister Draper shares her sins, before us, with God.” The man turned towards the three chairs set on the platform like thrones and took a seat alongside his companions. The three men gave the nod for the girl to begin.

The girl stood up slowly, willing herself not to cry, not to shake. She was blinking quickly, trying to stop the tears from piling up. Pity would not save her now.

“I would like to confess a sin before God.”

“We are here to bear witness to your confession, sister.” Brother Black followed.

“I have had sex.” The girl’s voice came out as a whisper. Everyone shifted forward, trying to catch the fleeting words.

“Come again, sister.” One of the elders called.

“I have had sex!” The girl affirmed in a louder voice.

A cry of shock, disbelief, and disgust rippled through the congregation. A few knowing glances flashed between feathered and winged and veiled hats. The girl trembled a little bit as if feeling everyone’s reactions; still, she kept her gaze fixed on the floor. The elders glared down at her like judges, some shaking their heads in disapproval.

“When did this happen?” One of the elders asked.

“Six months ago.” The girl answered, trying desperately to control the trembling in her voice.

“The scandal!” An incredibly colorful and dramatic bird-hat squawked out, covering her mouth with a gloved hand.

“Jehovah, save us!” Cried another bird-hat draped in purple fabrics.

“Order on the floor!” Brother Brown cried. He stood, raising his hands wide to ensure all received the power of his command. Quiet overtook the sheep in attendance.

“Why have we only now heard of this?” The elder directed his gaze at the girl, narrowing his eyes accusingly.

“I thought...” The girl began. “I thought if I pretended like it never happened that it would go away, but I feel the sin crawling on me. Every time I try to pray and read, God’s word has been torture. Even though Jehovah knows what I have done, he’s watched me try to bury it. I know now I can’t be close to Him until I confess.”

Brother Brown settled back into his seat, glancing at the men on stage with him.

“Very good, if you have come here to confess, then tell us all.”

“I had sex with a boy because I wanted him to like me, and I regret it.” The girl cried. She swallowed back the tears threatening to make their way out and dared to look up at the men judging her.

Brother White leaned forward. “We need to know all, young sister.”

“All?” The girl’s eyes clouded over with confusion.

“Who took their clothes off first, you or him?” Brother White spoke calmly, never taking his eyes off of the girl. The words flowed forth so naturally as if he asked this every day.

“I... um... he took his shirt off, but I kept my clothes on. I thought at first, we were just going to sleep together.”

“What happened next?” The elder pressed. The crowd of bird-hats shifted, sharing glances and fanning themselves expectantly.

“Well... he started rubbing up against me and touching my... my breasts.”

“Did you like it?” Brother White grilled.

“Um... I... I didn’t stop it. I guess... it felt nice.” The girl’s gaze went back to the floor quickly.

“So, what happened next?”

“He uh... he reached into my pants and started... started touching me.”

“You didn’t stop him?”

“No. I didn’t. I wanted him to like me, and I think I liked the way it felt.”

“Did you take your pants off, or did he?”

“He did, but I didn’t stop him. I... I guess I didn’t want to.”

“And?”

“And we had sex.”

“Did he put it in, or did you?”

“Objection!”

The girl glanced up for a moment looking over her shoulder. Her mother stood behind her, glaring at the elders on the judgment platform. Voices rose up in the congregation.

“Did she just interrupt an elder?”

“Who does she think she is?”

“Do you think she knew and encouraged her daughter not to tell?”

“Hush! I can’t hear what they’re saying.”

“Objection?” Brother Brown raised a hand to silence the congregation as he peered down at the mother.

“To what?”

“Why do you need to know all the details? She’s only seventeen.”

“Sister, it is not your place to question the method of the elders. We need to know the extent of the girl’s sin. Only then can we, as elders, pray for God to forgive her.” Brother Black answered. His demeanor was that of a father scolding his child.

The mother looked at each of the elders before glancing at her daughter and taking her seat. She never spoke again.

“Please answer the question, sister.” Brother Black said, waving his hand as if giving her the floor.

“Which question?” The girl asked meekly.

“Did he put it in or did you?” Brother White offered again.

“Oh... he put it in.” The girl was finding it hard to remember how breathing worked. She desperately wanted to turn around and share a look with her mother, just a glance. Fingers twisted around each other in a sweaty knot as she willed herself not to pass out and to look up and hold eye contact with the men judging her.

“And how did that feel?” Brother White pressed.

“It hurt.” Her answer came quickly and with conviction.

“Did you tell him to stop?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I... I wanted him to like me, so I thought maybe it would feel better after a minute.”

“How long was he inside you?”

“I don’t know?”

“A long time would you say then?”

“No... maybe like... ten minutes maybe... I’m not sure. I wasn’t keeping track of time.”

“How did it finish?”

“He uh... it hurt pretty bad, so I asked him to stop.”

“Did he stop?”

“Yes.”

“Did he finish?”

“Finish?”

“Did he cum inside you?”

“I uh...,” the girl glanced back at her mother, clearly confused by the question. She glanced briefly at the audience of feathered hats before turning back to the elders. No one could help her now.

“I don’t know.” She offered meekly. The elders all shifted in their seats, with Brother White leaning forward. He peered at the girl through round glasses.

“Weren’t you afraid of being pregnant?” The elder questioned. He was relentless. The girl twisted her fingers around each other, eyes fixed on her feet.

“Yes, but... I got my period not long after so... I wasn’t anymore.”

“So after you finished, did he leave?” Brother White pressed.

“No, we went to sleep.”

“Why didn’t you send him home?”

“I... I don’t know... I guess... I wanted to be held.” The girl shifted her weight from one foot to the other. The bird-hats chirped softly behind her, fluttering between each other.

“When did he leave?” Brother Black stepped forward, silencing the birds and calling attention to his small but broad frame.

“Early the next morning. I snuck him out the way he had come.”

“And are you still seeing this boy?”

“No, I haven’t seen him in months. We broke up after.”

The elders shared looks, settling back into their seats. Brother White adjusted his glasses while Brother Brown reached under his seat and pulled out a grey bible. He leafed through the pages that were marked in scribbles and posted notes. Stopping, the elder held the bible up before the congregation before reading a passage.

“1 Corinthians 6:18 reads: Flee from sexual immorality! Every other sin that a man may commit is outside his body, but whoever practices sexual immorality is sinning against his own body.” Brother Brown paused to glance over at the congregation before settling his gaze on the girl.

“You have sinned against God, but most importantly, you have sinned against your own body. You have stolen from yourself and your future husband a precious gift that you can never get back. You gave it off to some boy who doesn’t care about God and doesn’t care about you.”

The girl started to tremble; the tears she had been holding back for so long rushed forward, blurring her vision. She leaned forward, overcome with shame. The crowd behind her shifted, some shaking their heads in disapproval while others nodded in agreement. She had

shamed them all. Brother Brown flipped through the marked pages a little more before stopping at another passage.

“Jehovah is a living God, the one who is ready to forgive those who seek him out. Acts 3:19 tells us, Repent, therefore, and turn around so as to get your sins blotted out, so that seasons of refreshing may come from Jehovah himself.” The elder glanced up from his bible to address the audience.

“When you repent, He is ready to forgive.”

Brother White stood up to stand beside Brother Brown.

“It is the job of the elders to preside over God’s people and deal out judgment where we see fit. Sister, we have heard you repent and now hear our judgment. We condemn you as a whore. You will be silenced until this mark has been washed clean. From this day forward, you will not be able to speak inside the house of God until you are clean again. Fall on your knees and thank God for his mercy. Your soul will be saved.”