

BURNED

Written by

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INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Row after row of books wrap around a main desk like a warm sweater of knowledge. SYBIL occupies it like a throne. She is 40+ with eyes like deep pools and an air of confident mischief as she types.

MARJORIE (O.S.)
Excuse me, Sybil?

Sybil glances up. Before her stands MARJORIE, 20s and timid.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Um, I'm having a little trouble
figuring out where to shelve a few
of these new arrivals.

Sybil reaches for the books flips through them. She stops at one.

SYBIL
Ah. This ol' thing.

MARJORIE
Malleus Maleficarum?

The chair directly behind Sybil's, hidden until now, launches over on its castors as RAQUEL, 55+ with big Aries energy spins around in it and snatches the book.

RAQUEL
Oooo, "The Hammer of Witches!"
Shall we burn it?

Sybil snatches it back.

SYBIL
Raquel.

RAQUEL
Seems only fair.

SYBIL
We do not ban or burn books. Only
the weak-minded do that.

MARJORIE
The Hammer of Witches?

SYBIL
Yes. Written by one Heinrich Kramer
in the 1480s, responsible for the
torture and deaths of around
100,000 people, mostly women.
(MORE)

SYBIL (CONT'D)

Only outsold by The Bible for
hundreds of years.

MARJORIE

So, shall I put it under Witches?
Or Law? Or History?

RAQUEL

Or the trash. What? I'll stop.

Sybil chortles.

SYBIL

You know, many things benefit from
a bit of context. Have a seat,
Marjorie.

RAQUEL

Oooo, story time!

Marjorie look nervous, but pulls up a chair.

RAQUEL (CONT'D)

Don't worry, she won't come right
at you with the chapter on stolen
penises being kept in a nest and
fed oats.

Marjorie freezes mid-sit. Sybil blinks and gestures. Marjorie
settles.

SYBIL

How do you feel...

The room seems to darken as if a cloud is passing in front of
the sun as Sybil leans toward the younger woman.

SYBIL (CONT'D)

About witches?

Marjorie gulps and shrugs.

MARJORIE

I mean, I don't really believe in
magic, and I was raised in the
Church so...

RAQUEL

So you're scared. Thank Kramer for
that.

SYBIL

She's wary. As one tends to be of things until they're understood.

The lights seem to flicker briefly.

SYBIL (CONT'D)

Heinrich Kramer was certainly wary. Picture it now. Innsbruck Austria, 1485, and a mystery is a foot!

Thunder rumbles and the library fades into the past as Sybil narrates.

EXT. INNSBRUCK, 1485 - DAY

The thunder morphs into the hoofbeats as a horse trots over cobblestones.

SYBIL (V.O.)

A noble knight, one Sir Jorg Speiss, has died!

The horse stops, boots hop down and amble over to the body of SIR JORG SPEISS as it is being carried out of a grand house on a stretcher.

SYBIL (V.O.)

That alone wouldn't be that big of a deal, people died all the time. I mean plagues, wars, no antibiotics, it was rough. But Jorg had been ill, and had seen a doctor. A doctor who had given him very specific orders if he wanted to avoid death.

A hand associated with the boots snatches a note from Jorg's tunic. The note reads:

INSERT - NOTE

Goest no more to the home of Helena Scheuberin, lest ye die!

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

MARJORIE

That doesn't seem like something a doctor would order.

RAQUEL

To be fair "doctor" was a loose term back then, this was even pre-"barber surgeons" so...

SYBIL

I'm paraphrasing. The exact note did not survive, but he was warned not to go to that specific house.

MARJORIE

Oh. But why would a doctor order that?

SYBIL

Excellent question.

INT. HELENA'S ESTATE, 1485 - NIGHT

A medieval party rages. At the center of it all is HELENA SCHEUBERIN, 30s and fierce.

SYBIL (V.O.)

All that's really known about Helena Scheuberin prior to that time is that she was married to a rich Bergher-

RAQUEL (V.O.)

Bougie.

SYBIL (V.O.)

-they threw big parties, and that she was "aggressive, independent, and not afraid to speak her mind."

RAQUEL (V.O.)

I love her.

Helena rules over the party with flair. She taps the glass of a GUEST and it is immediately filled by a SERVANT. She stops a passing WOMAN and looks her up and down disapprovingly, fixes her dress then nods. A KNIGHT IN A MASK grabs her and twirls her around the dance floor to her delight.

SYBIL (V.O.)

Now who knows, maybe the doctor knew Helena spiked her drinks with a drug Jorg needed to part ways with, or maybe he was in danger of being poisoned because he was having an affair with her.

The man takes off the mask and reveals himself to be Jorg. He kisses her neck.

RAQUEL (V.O.)
Or with her husband.

Jorg kisses HELENA'S HUSBAND's neck.

SYBIL (V.O.)
Whatever it was, Jorg ignored the
doctor's advice, and died.

Jorg grabs at his chest then falls down, dead. The crowd swirls and begins whispering.

SYBIL (V.O.)
So of course rumor swirled that
perhaps it was...

CROWD/RAQUEL (V.O.)
Witchcraft!

Lightening flashes and thunder booms.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

A book tumbles in through the returns slot in the door and Marjorie jolts.

MARJORIE
So, they burned her?

SYBIL
No! The town loved Helena.

RAQUEL
But the rumors were enough to bring
Heinie onto the scene.

EXT. INNSBRUCK, 1485 - DAY

Church bells chime three times over the village. An eager young Dominican Novice, HANS, 14, scans the dirt road leading out beyond the wall.

Suddenly the hem of his robes lifts off the ground revealing his legs. He bats it back down in a panic wheeling around to face ADA, 16 and his sister. She's holding a long stick and laughing. They both speak with English accents.

HANS
What...? ADA!

ADA
Hans! What will the Pope think,
going about flashing your dangly
bits?

HANS
It's not funny!

ADA
It's funny.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

MARJORIE
Wait, you said this was in Austria?

SYBIL
Yes.

MARJORIE
But, you gave them all English
accents?

SYBIL
Oh it just sounds nice though,
doesn't it? We're trained to
recognize it's the past if people
are using British accents. Sets a
scene.

MARJORIE
Isn't that perpetrating
colonization-

SYBIL
At this time Rome would have been
the colonizers, but I get your
point, it's just that my Austrian
accent is horrid. I'll give them
Midwestern accents, how's that?

EXT. INNSBRUCK STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Hans now speaks with Midwest accents.

HANS
It's a great honor to welcome and
serve under the Inquisitor. It's
important I make a good impression.

SYBIL (V.O.)
 Nope. That's too weird. Back to
 British.

They continue on with English accents.

ADA
 Don't get your fringe in a knot,
 little brother. You'll do great. Is
 that him then?

Hans follows her gaze then takes off running to greet a cart
 that's just appeared over a hill in a cloud of dust.

HANS
 Brother Heinrich! Welcome!

The cart doesn't stop, or even slow much, but a window does
 open as Hans runs along side. A distinct profile can be seen
 within. He might be resting, or he might be praying, but
 either way he is HEINRICH KRAMER, 50s.

HANS (CONT'D)
 Wel-Welcome to Innsbruck! It will
 be my extreme honor to serve you
 during your time here.

HEINRICH
 To serve the Lord is always an
 honor. Your name?

HANS
 Hans, sir. Brother Hans.

HEINRICH
 Well then, Brother Hans...

Heinrich raps on the carriage roof with his cane. The
 carriage comes to a stop.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)
 Help me down. I shall be seen to
 walk from here. More humble. Set up
 my office as usual, Jons.

He hoists himself down. JONS, the driver nods and continues
 on. Hans helps Heinrich as they trod into town.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)
 Now tell me about the witchcraft
 that plagues your town.

HANS

Oh, well, I hadn't honestly heard much about it until Sir Speiss' death. Mostly just the normal remedies for sickness or-

HEINRICH

It hides in plain sight, my boy. Witches are far more sinister than your herbal "healers" would like you to think. Only God can heal. Witches are in league with the Devil himself!

HANS

Oh. I didn't...

SYBIL (V.O.)

He really didn't. We have Heinrich to thank for the idea of tying the women who would have once held power in a society to Satan.

HEINRICH

You must know the signs. Are you familiar with this witch?

HANS

With Helena Scheuberin? A bit. Her parties are rather famous. My sister works in her household.

Heinrich stops and faces Hans. He licks his lips.

HEINRICH

Has your sister been seduced by her?

HANS

What? N-no. She just dresses her and-

HEINRICH

Dresses her? And undresses her. You can be sure sinful caresses have been exchanged. Your sister's soul is in peril. What does she say about their private moments together?

HANS

She...she doesn't really say anything.

HEINRICH
 We'll change that. She clearly
 knows she should be ashamed. Have
 you smelled her fingers?

HANS
 ...no?

Heinrich nods as if his point has been made and continues on.

HEINRICH
 Women's natures are universally
 weak, they all bend to Satan's will
 if not strictly lorded over. How
 would you describe this Helena
 Scheuberin's husband's control over
 her? Is he weak?

HANS
 I honestly don't know, Brother
 Heinrich. He seems well-respected
 in the- oh! That's actually her
 now.

Helena sashays up to Heinrich, her LADIES in tow.

HEINRICH
 In the name of-

Helena spits at his foot.

HELENA
 Fie on you! You bad monk. May the
 falling evil take you.

Then she signals to her ladies and they all continue on their
 way. Heinrich is frozen for a moment. He stammers then turns
 to reply but he trips and lands in the mud. Hans helps him
 up, after a few failed tries, and bustles him away.

The laughter of the ladies can be heard as they retreat. It
 mingles with Raquel's.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Raquel is laughing in delight.

RAQUEL
 She actually said that - it's one
 of the few quotes we have of hers.
 Just perfection.

MARJORIE

Ooo, she was bold.

SYBIL

She was. But remember, at that point they hadn't begun burning up women right and left, it was still rather rare.

RAQUEL

I mean, they WERE burning and killing.

SYBIL

Groups in power seems to, sadly. Tho prior to this they were concerned with "heretics" not so much "witches."

MARJORIE

Was Helena the first?

SYBIL

Now, now, Library Rules, hush. Where was I? Ah, so Heinrich set himself up in the pulpit at Innsbruck and proceeded to give sermons against Helena and her friends.

INT. CHURCH, 1485 - DAY

From the pulpit Heinrich charismatically rages.

HEINRICH

Many troubles we face all harken back to this. For Woman, made not but from a single rib of Man, cannot help that she is weaker and more susceptible to the whisperings of the Devil.

Snickering and whispering can be heard in the pews.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

But it is Man's responsibility to stomp out-

HELENA

Oh please, you can barely step, let alone stomp.

More giggles.

HEINRICH
Stomp OUT that evil where-whenever-

HELENA
Oh no, I think he's hearing the
"Whisperings of the Devil." Perhaps
he is the one more susceptible.

HEINRICH
Quiet! You dare question Christ's
teachings!

Helena stands.

HELENA
No. I question your supposed
commitment to Christ our Lord, for
you are an evil man in league with
the devil! Waste not your time
here. He teaches only hate and
needless fear.

With that she, her husband, and many others get up and leave
the church. Heinrich bangs on the pulpit in anger. First
once, than again and again with each declaration as a child
might.

HEINRICH
You risk your soul as well as your
body to follow a woman! Especially
one so clearly in league with
Satan! You have been warned! I'll
not warn you again!

In his tensing, a loud and long fart reverberates out across
the shuffling crowd. Giggles are bitten back, but some
escape.

Hans turns to watch even more of them go and his sister gives
a shrug and a grin before following them out. The church
doors thud loudly behind them.

INT. HEINRICH'S OFFICE, 1485 - NIGHT

Heinrich stamps his seal on a document. A knock is heard.

HEINRICH
Enter.

Hans cautiously enters.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

Brother Hans. I have seen enough. Helena Scheuberin and her coven are very clearly in league with Lucifer. They avoid sermons-

HANS

They were rather disruptive when they did come, perhaps that's for the b-

HEINRICH

They encourage others to avoid the word of God. They exhibit wanton disregard for all morality. Now they dare to haunt my dreams with their sexual perversions.

He beckons Hans closer and licks his lips.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

They came to me. Writhing naked, their forked tongues licking, their fingers probing...

He seems lost in the moment and Hans gulps then slowly leans away. The movement snaps Heinrich back out of his fantasy.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

Ungodly acts all meant to tempt me away from the path of righteousness. The signs are there. So we must do as God commands and declare her a Witch. Take this decree to the court. I shall commence a trial within the week.

Hans gingerly takes the document and bobs his head before retreating.

EXT. INNSBRUCK STREETS, 1485 - NIGHT

Hans hurries along the cobblestones. He stops by a side door and knocks frantically.

HANS

Ada. It's me. Ada, open u-

The door cracks and a cranky COOK glares down at Hans.

COOK

It's late.

HANS

I'm sorry. I just need to speak to my sister, it's-

The door opens a little wider and Ada peers out.

ADA

He won't be long.

The cook grunts and shuffles off.

ADA (CONT'D)

Are you trying to get me a beating? What is it?

HANS

He's done it. He's actually declaring her a Witch. Starting a trial. You should leave. Or-

ADA

What? Really?! How absurd.

HANS

Yes, really, this is the decree. I'm to take it to the court now. I don't want you caught up in all this, please-

ADA

Hans. Nothing is going to happen. You've seen him, no one can take him seriously. I'll tell the mistress, but-

HANS

Ada, no, you MUST take this seriously! You must leave!

ADA

No, Hans, you must. Goodnight.

With that she rolls her eyes and closes the door.

INT. INNSBRUCK COURT, 1485 - DAY

A door opens and Heinrich enters carrying a number of religious texts. He approaches the huddle of MEN at the center desk, but they don't take much notice of him.

After an awkward beat of being ignored, Heinrich clears his throat.

A Bergher clearly comfortable in his position of leadership stops his discussion and looks up with the patience you might show a slightly annoying child. This is FRANZ.

FRANZ

May we help you, Brother?

HEINRICH

I am Brother Heinrich Kramer. Did my decree not reach your hands? I was told it had.

FRANZ

Your decree?

Another Bergher whispers a reminder into Franz's ear.

FRANZ (CONT'D)

Ah, right. Your decree identifying Helena Scheuberin as a ... witch.

Chuckles are not stifled. Heinrich drops one of his documents and bends to retrieve it, dropping more.

HEINRICH

I assure you it is no laughing matter. The Devil is at work in Innsbruck.

He gives up and leaves them on the ground, standing with effort.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

Just last night she dared to conjure herself into my dreams again. Her naked flesh so burning hot I could almost blister from it.

The Berghers give subdued medieval spit-takes and smirks.

FRANZ

I see. Brother Heinrich, you would not be the first man to be haunted by such visions, but we can hardly blame women for the natural lust we have in ourselves, hmm?

HEINRICH

Lust!? I am a man of God, how DARE you! I no more have lust than-

FRANZ

Right, well, you have no jurisdiction here, and I hardly have time for th-

HEINRICH

I am chosen by the Pope himself! To deny my power is to deny God. Will you endanger your souls so? Witches are real and among you! Do you deny Sir Jorg his justice?

FRANZ

Yes, "witches;" the herbalists who care for our populace and apparently whip up potent love potions, very frightening. As to Sir Jorg, he was ill for quite some time and drank in excess, it was hardly witchcraft that killed him. The Scheuberins are upstanding citizens and patrons of our village, we will not have them accused-

HEINRICH

I will begin the trial of Helena Sch-

FRANZ

You will not! There will be no trial. And your time with us has come to an end, Gentle Brother. I do hope your journey BACK to whence you came is a pleasant one, as you are no longer welcome in Innsbruck. Good day.

Heinrich's jaw flaps.

FRANZ (CONT'D)

I SAID "Good Day."

With that the Berghers return to their papers and discussion and Heinrich is left to try and gather his documents from the floor.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

RAQUEL

I'm just going to end every convo I'm done with that way. Good day. I SAID "Good Day!" Iconic.

SYBIL

I really should have been a comedienne.

MARJORIE

Oh, so you're just making this all up?

SYBIL

Hardly. Heinrich, Helena, all of this was quite real. I'm just filling in... a few gaps that have been lost in time with entertaining bits to make you pay attention. Now where was I? So Heinrich went off shouting something like...

INT. HELENA'S ESTATE, 1485 - NIGHT

From under a window Heinrich raises his fist in the air and speaks with Sybil's voice ala *Drunk History*.

SYBIL (V.O.)

You can't be rid of me that easily!

He reacts to his voice being hers, then scurries off into the dark. Inside an epic celebration is underway.

SYBIL (V.O.)

And Helena and her friends celebrated.

RAQUEL (V.O.)

Mmm, I bet that party was glorious.

Dancers spin, games are underway, an exotic animal or two flit around, an effigy of Heinrich is spanked, and the mead flows.

SYBIL (V.O.)

But they had not seen the last of Brother Kramer.

INT. VATICAN CHAMBER, 1485 - NIGHT

Heinrich can be seen whining to a candle-lit papal silhouette.

SYBIL (V.O.)

He had gone straight to Pope Innocent VIII-

The Pope holds out a jewel-encrusted hand and gives the sign of the cross before signing and stamping a document with his seal.

RAQUEL (V.O.)

Ooo, these names. "Innocent" yet this guy invested in the African slave trade, sold church positions to the highest bidder, and ran a whole scheme where the church accused noble widows of heresy so they could take their money.

Heinrich's face splits in a smug grin as he bows and takes the decree.

SYBIL (V.O.)

They were quite the pair. But focus. Heinrich took his Summis Desiderante-

RAQUEL (V.O.)

That's Latin for "Better be nice to this whinny little b-"

SYBIL (V.O.)

And returned to Innsbruck.

INT. INNSBRUCK COURT, 1485 - DAY

The decree is smacked onto the desk before Franz and the other Berghers.

HEINRICH

By Papal decree, I believe you will find that Witches ARE real, THEY ARE Heretics, that I, bequeathed with the power of the Church, have the right to try them, and that anyone who interferes are themselves Heretics and punishable as such.

SYBIL (V.O.)

Witches may not have been feared at that time, but being accused of Heresy, well, that had long since meant death.

Franz sighs and takes the decree.

INT. INNSBRUCK COURT, 1485 - LATER

A gavel hammers down calling the court to order. Hans is recording those in attendance. Heinrich sits at the head bench along with two other MONKS and two BERGHERS.

HEINRICH

Bring forth the accused.

The doors open and Helena and her ladies are issued in. Ada is among them. Hans nearly drops his quill.

HANS

Ada?

He looks to Heinrich but doesn't have time nor the courage to protest. One of the Bergher Judges gavels order and the mumblings cease.

BERGHER JUDGE 1

Helena Scheuberin. You and the Ladies of your Court stand accused of Witchcraft. How do you plead?

HELENA

Not. Guilty. But you know that.

The crowd stirs.

BERGHER JUDGE 1

Order! Presenting the Church's case, Brother Heinrich Kramer shall commence questioning and enter evidence of the charges before this court. Brother Heinrich?

HEINRICH

Thank you. Helena Scheuberin, I came to Innsbruck after word of the mysterious death of Sir Jorg Speiss reached the Inquisitorial Commission which I myself head. Since arriving, I have become aware of your personal wantonness and wickedness. You are married, are you not?

HELENA

I am.

HEINRICH

And you engage in marital relations with you husband regularly?

HELENA
... how is this-

HEINRICH
Answer the question!

HELENA
I do. Is that not as the Church
commands?

HEINRICH
How many times per day do you do
this?

HELENA
I...

BERGHER JUDGE 2
Brother, is this relevant to the
charges?

HEINRICH
Answer!

HELENA
I do not count. It varies.

HEINRICH
Yet you have no children and are
not pregnant now.

Helena falters a bit at that sting.

HELENA
God has not blessed us-

HEINRICH
He has not blessed you because you
are wicked! Describe in detail your
most recent sexual act.

Helena's husband stands and yells from the audience.

HELENA'S HUSBAND
What is this depravity? My wife is
no witch! I-

HEINRICH
Order!

HELENA'S HUSBAND
How dare you badger her about our
private-

HEINRICH

Remove this man! Remove him!

HELENA'S HUSBAND

She's right about you! You are the one in league with the Devil!

Guards escort Helena's Husband from the court. The door thuds heavily.

HEINRICH

Let that stand as an example of the accused's ability to bewitch a man beyond his senses. Now, during your last sexual encounter, that produced no progeny, were you laying on your back or on your stomach?

HELENA

Neither.

HEINRICH

What was that? Speak up?

HELENA

Neither. I was sitting.

Heinrich leans forward slightly, licking his lips.

HEINRICH

Where.

HELENA

Atop my husband.

Helena stares back fiercely. The crowd murmurs blushing.

HEINRICH

Ah ha! Proof that she wields unnatural control over men. You all saw her husband, she could not have physically forced him down beneath her.

HELENA

He was certainly not forced.

The crowd chuckles.

HEINRICH

Men do not willingly lay themselves down to be mounted.

HELENA

Do they not?

The laughter grows bawdier.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Honorable Judges, if I could control men would I not control a few in this very courtroom?

HEINRICH

Silence! Threats! Do not try your spells further on us! It is but for the protection of God that we stand immune to your powers. Tho they are but glammers. Illusions. Not really power at all.

HELENA

If I wield no real power then why are we here?

HEINRICH

Satan wields power! And you suckle at his orifices to acquire it.

The crowd reacts.

MONK JUDGE 1

Brother Heinrich!

Heinrich just leans in more.

HEINRICH

You dare to deny that you and your coven, in league with the Devil himself, caused the death of Sir Jorg Speiss? That you observe the orgiastic Witches' Sabbat? That you have caused your spirit to issue forth and haunt the dreams of monks of the Dominican order?

Helena scoffs. The crowds murmurs grow.

HELENA

I deny all of that nonsense. Sir.

HEINRICH

Exodus 22:18 tells us "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." And yet, Innsbruck, you have suffered much and far too many witches live within your walls.

(MORE)

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

I shall prove, via witness
testimony and undeniable evidence,
that these women hold their
allegiance to the Devil alone, and
you SHALL confess!

The increasing murmurs and protestations of the crowd melt
into the clattering of wagon wheels down a dirt road.

EXT. INNSBRUCK STREETS, 1485 - DAY

A carriage rolls away in a cloud of dust.

RAQUEL (V.O.)

They did not confess. Nor were they
found guilty.

Helena and her ladies watch it go. There's some celebration
but it's subdued for them. Hans approaches Ada and the
siblings grasp hands in relief.

SYBIL (V.O.)

But Heinrich was not done with
them.

INT. TORTURE CHAMBER, 1485 - NIGHT

A cell door swings open to reveal Helena, her ladies, and Ada
huddled in the dark.

SYBIL (V.O.)

A few weeks later he returned with
guards and permission to detain the
women and subject them to the tried
and true method of extracting a
confession: torture.

Two GUARDS reach in and drag Helena out of the cell.

GUARD 1

Back to work, sweetheart.

GUARD 2

But don't worry, we'll have time to
play again after.

They chuckle as they strap her arms behind her into the
Strappado. Once secured, she kneels, awaiting the pain to
come. Slow footsteps approach from the darkness.

HEINRICH

Helena, Helena, Helena. 27 days. 27 days of such needless suffering. Confess and this can end. The Devil in you is strong.

He kneels down to face her.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

But God is stronger.

HELENA

You do not serve God.

He motions to the Guards and they turn a wheel raising Helena's body off the ground by her clasped arms. She groans in pain.

HEINRICH

Confess! You are a Witch!

HELENA

You know I am not.

HEINRICH

You suckle at the Devil's teet to gain unholy powers. You send out your naked spirit to haunt dreams and tempt men, and even women.

HELENA

Wishing it...will not make it so.

HEINRICH

You admit to wishing your spirit out then?!

He salivates as he nears her face.

HELENA

...no.

Helena begins to make choking sounds. The sobs of the other women can be heard. Hans creeps forward from where he was recording the proceedings for Heinrich.

HANS

Brother, she cannot breath.

HEINRICH

Confess and it can all be over. Salvation is only possible in God!

Helena cannot speak.

HANS
Brother Heinrich... please.

Another beat passes.

Finally he signals the Guards and they release the wheel, dropping Helena to the floor where she gasps.

Heinrich consults his notes. Only the sounds of the fire crackling and women sobbing echo around the chamber.

Suddenly Heinrich flips the book closed and turns to the Guards.

HEINRICH
The young one.

They go to the cell and drag Ada out. Hans stiffens.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)
The Devil is crafty. It is true.
But God is more so. Over the years
holy men have developed many ways
to prove one is a witch when one
will not confess. I came across
this method in my studies, and
until now have not encountered
quite so stubborn a demon as to
require its use. But here we are.

Helena, wrists still bound behind her, has mostly caught her breath and is paying attention.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)
The mechanics are simple. The
accused need only take hold of an
item imbued with God's own burning
flame and take three steps.

He steps over to the fire pit and gazes at the flame within.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)
Just three. If they are innocent,
God's love shall protect them and
give them strength. But a Witch...

He uses the tongs to lift a red-hot chunk of iron from the fire.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)
Well, a witch will scream and drop
the holy object. She simply cannot
hold it. Thus, her guilt shall be
proven.

Ada's eyes grow huge.

ADA

No! No, please! I'm not a witch!
But that WILL burn me, it would
burn anyone!

HEINRICH

If you truly know God you need not
fear.

He steps toward her.

HANS

Brother Heinrich! She's my sister.
Please, she's no witch!

HEINRICH

Then she has nothing to fear. Put
out your hands, girl.

Ada tries to shrink away but the Guards hold her. They force
her hands forward.

HELENA

Stop!

Heinrich turns.

HEINRICH

Something to confess?

HELENA

She is a child. She is not a witch.

With difficulty, Helena stands.

HELENA (CONT'D)

And neither am I. Unbind my hands.
Test me in her stead. I shall prove
it to you.

Heinrich considers. He steps toward Helena and lifts the
glowing chunk up so that it lights both of their faces. His
face emanating lust and loathing, hers full of disgust and
determination.

HEINRICH

Unbind her.

The Guards release Ada and cut the binding on Helena's hands.
Hans runs to and holds Ada. He prays over her softly.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

Bring in the Brothers and Berghers
to serve as witness.

A Guard exits while Heinrich and Helena are locked in a gazing duel. They share words only the two of them can hear.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

I shall end you, Witch. Your power
is no match for God's.

HELENA

You shall never end me, whether you
kill me or not. I know, as you do,
that you are not working for God.

HEINRICH

Exactly what a handmaid of the
Devil would say.

He sniffs her neck.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

Mmmm, I can smell Satan's lust on
you. Even now you try and project
yourself into my mind. Slithering
like a naked worm. Pushing your
unholy thoughts where none can
grow.

Helena glances down, and scoffs.

HELENA

When we are history all will see
your perversion and self-loathing
for what it is. If there is a Devil
it is only you who have answered
his call.

HEINRICH

And who is it that you think WRITES
history?

HELENA

How long do you think one hand can
hold a quill?

HEINRICH

Yours never shall.

HELENA

Then others shall write for me.

The door creaks open and Franz, a few other Berghers, and monks shuffle in, reacting to the smell as they do.

FRANZ
 Brother Heinrich, this is inhumane!

HEINRICH
 And I shall prove they are not human.

The other monks mumble prayers.

FRANZ
 God, be done with this.

He cannot bring himself to look at Helena.

HEINRICH
 He shall oblige. God's divine fire burns in this very iron. If the accused can hold it and take three steps, God will have judged her innocent. But if she drops it, we shall all see her for the Witch she is.

FRANZ
 Hold a red-hot coal?!

HEINRICH
 It is only hot to those not protected by His holy love.

BERGHER
 Is that why you're using tongs?

HEINRICH
 Silence! Those who question the Church are Heretics. Shall we test you first?

Eyes reply but tongues do not.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)
 Stand, Helena Scheuberin. Confess now and spare yourself this test.

HELENA
 Burn me if you must, it will not change the fact that I am no witch.

She holds out her hands. He slowly, relishing the moment, lowers the coal and presses it into her flesh.

With immense mental effort she stifles the natural instinct to recoil. Sizzling can be heard. She takes one shaky step.

Then another.

All eyes are locked on her. Some willing her strength, one set enjoying her agony and awaiting her downfall. She seems to waiver, almost passing out from the pain.

Then with a great breath she takes the final step. She then falters, launching the glowing ingot toward Heinrich. It rolls down the front of his robes, searing them.

HEINRICH

Ahhhh!

Helena drops to her knees and the Berghers rush forward to catch her. Heinrich bats his smoldering robes in a panic.

FRANZ

Ha! What's the matter, Brother Heinrich, is God's love not protecting you?

HEINRICH

Impossible!

The other monks aren't sure what to do.

FRANZ

Enough! We all saw that she passed. Is that not so, Brothers?

The monks nod. Especially Hans.

HANS

We did, Sir. God has shown us the truth.

HEINRICH

Lies! A glamour! She bewitched us all. Test her again!

FRANZ

No! She is innocent. Let them all out now. Help her. And you...

He steps toward a fuming Heinrich.

FRANZ (CONT'D)

You will leave.

SYBIL (V.O.)

But, he would not.

EXT. INNSBRUCK STREETS, 1485 - WEEKS LATER

Helena, her hands bandaged, and her ladies shop the market stalls.

SYBIL (V.O.)

Heinrich remained in Innsbruck,
harassing Helena and other women.

RAQUEL (V.O.)

Like the prototypical troll he was.

From an alleyway, Heinrich can be seen lurking behind them. A PEASANT WOMAN jolts as he spits an insult at her. She retaliates by flinging a fish head at him like a stray dog. He recoils and backs further into the shadows, mumbling until only his eyes can be seen.

SYBIL (V.O.)

Until the towns leaders appealed to
the Bishop, who finally ordered
Heinrich to leave. But as you might
have noticed, he wasn't very good
at letting something go.

INT. HEINRICH'S OFFICE, 1485 - NIGHT

Heinrich's back can be seen haunched over a desk, where he manically scrawls in the candlelight.

SYBIL (V.O.)

He poured his frustration out into
his Malleus Maleficarum-

RAQUEL (V.O.)

What would today just be a rage
post online.

SYBIL (V.O.)

It was published in 1486. And, with
it's illustrations of floating
genitalia in nests being kept like
pets by women-

RAQUEL (V.O.)

See, I wasn't kidding about that.

SYBIL (V.O.)

And other oddly specific imaginings-

RAQUEL (V.O.)

Like women licking the Devil where
the sun don't shine. What? I'm just
giving accurate cliffnotes.

Heinrich puts down the quill, reaches up under his robes, his
back still to us, and pleasures himself to his own drawings
with the jerky coordination of a starving chicken scratching
at barren earth.

SYBIL (V.O.)

It was not taken very seriously at
the time. The Catholic leaders said
that what he'd written was
"unethical, illegal, and also
inconsistent with established
Catholic beliefs on demonology."

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Sybil slaps the book down on the desk.

SYBIL

But it found a footing in extreme
circles. And when Heinrich had died
and his true nature was largely
forgotten, some thought it should
be taken quite seriously. It was in
print and "old" after all, and
included the Papal Bull in the
front.

RAQUEL

Media literacy has been lacking for
a loooooong time.

Sybil stands with the book and the other two join her. She
makes her way through the stacks.

SYBIL

For over 300 years this book served
as a manual for how to get away
with legally murdering any woman
you cared to be rid of. The
impoverished widow, the attractive
neighbor, the mentally ill, the
midwife who couldn't save your
child, the mother of your rival.
Anyone. Mostly women. Just folk.

MARJORIE

None were actually witches?

SYBIL

We don't even have a record of all of their names. But say some were. How do you define "Witch"? Remember Heinrich was the one who linked them to Lucifer.

RAQUEL

Hell of a rebrand.

SYBIL

Did they deserve to die? And how many lives are acceptable collateral damage in order to get at those one sees as "bad guys?"

RAQUEL

Ooof, there's an Uncomfy Unpackable. We accept A LOT of collateral damage deaths for all sorts of things.

SYBIL

We always have.

She stops before a specific shelf and turns to the others.

SYBIL (CONT'D)

But perhaps we should not. We are capable of change. Adaptability is rather our super power. That, and empathy. When we choose to use it.

MARJORIE

So... are you saying... I should file it under a new heading? Or is there a book to pair it with for context?

Sybil turns back to the shelf, pushes a book aside to make room. As she does we see her through the opening she just made from the other side of the shelf.

SYBIL

Oh, perhaps not a book.

With that she looks at the camera.

SYBIL (CONT'D)

Where do you want to file it?

She slides the book in place.

CUT TO BLACK.

Credits flow over animated drawings straight from the *Malleus Maleficarum* and a smattering of these quotes from Heinrich:

"What are we to think about those witches who shut up penises in what are sometimes prolific numbers, twenty or thirty at a single time, in a bird's nest or some kind of box, where they move about in order to eat oats and fodder, as though they were alive - something which many people have seen and is reported by common gossip?"

They are defective in all the powers of both soul and body

Woman, therefore, is evil as a result of nature.

Any woman would likely find themselves succumbing to her passions and becoming a witch.

