

The Execution of Katie Stirn

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Katie Stirn was a witch. Everyone in the village knew that, and Katie had never tried to hide it. The wonderful, wild dancing that Katie Stirn would do was enough to make the villagers wonder. The way young boys would look at her made villagers suspect. But, it was the way that all the children adored her that made all the mothers suspect and fear Katie Stirn. She could make the most uncontrollable child be calm and quiet with her songs. Every child in the village would gather 'round when Katie Stirn told a story. Only a witch could have done that. But still, everyone kept quiet, because they were all scared of Katie Stirn, deep down inside.

This all happened very long ago, in a village called Dearmad. It was a village right by the sea, the kind of village where everyone knew that it would be so much easier to live somewhere else, but where no one ever left. It was the kind of village where the sea would crash down on everything anyone had ever built, but this only made the people fight harder. And so, Dearmad had made a troupe of the most hard-working, resilient, and stubborn people ever to have walked this earth.

In this village, no one had ever had a good reason to dislike Katie Stirn. She was the most hard-working villager of all. Everyone in Dearmad owed something to Katie Stirn. Mothers were always grateful for her way with their unmanageable and unruly children. The fishermen were grateful for her uncanny knack of knowing where the fish had gathered on any given day, and a great many other people were grateful for her wit and her kind heart. That didn't change the fact that they all knew she was a witch. Some

villagers had wanted her dead for years. They had argued that she was bewitching them all, and that one day, she would curse them all with one of her horrid spells. Still, more people argued that without her, they would all go hungry, or the winter would catch them off guard, or that some wicked child would run off with all their wealth and possessions. (It was the mother of little Fergus who said that, and, truth be told, he would probably murder someone on accident without Katie Stirn.) So Katie Stirn lived without interruption, for the time being.

Then, one day, Katie Stirn did something absolutely unforgivable in the villagers eyes. She performed magic openly. When she calmed down wild children, when she saw things others couldn't, Katie Stirn was only doing small, imperceptible magic, and the village pretended to know nothing of her hidden skill. It was on a dreary night, an already horrible night, that Katie Stirn had too much confidence. It was only a small weather spell. The witch wanted to see the stars, and so she reached up, and brushed away the clouds. The night sky was so beautiful, and Katie Stirn stared up at it as if in a trance. Maybe everything would have been fine. That spell was so quiet, so harmless. But then, the scream broke all hopes of a peaceful night.

"Witch!" He yelled, and everyone stepped back from Katie, not wanting to be mistaken for the witch, "You horrible creature! You horrible, terrible, creature! You think it's fun to curse us, and our children, and our village?"

Poor Katie Stirn took a step back from the boy yelling at her. His name was Jamie McKinnon, and he had been her friend, once. When they were younger, they had

been almost inseparable. That was before he had learned about witches. In one day, everything had changed. Jamie's mother had always disapproved of her son and the witch, and so one night she told him every horrible, gruesome detail about witches. Now, he was usually the one screaming for her to be executed. He was just scared of her. That was all. Just very, very scared.

A woman piped up from behind Jamie, "He's right. She's done magic, actual magic! Next thing you know, that wicked thing will be killing us all!"

"And you think everything I did to help you wasn't magic?" Katie growled, finally finding words from the anger that was quickly clouding out the hurt. "I helped you all with magic somehow, and this is how you treat me? You're all just scared aren't you? You're scared that the big mean witch is gonna eat you?"

For all her hateful words, tears streamed down Katie Stirn's face. She had helped. She had cared. She had *loved*. None of them had ever loved her, and here was proof. As if to express everything that Katie could not, clouds rumbled back in to cover the sky. Thunder roared at the villagers, and Jamie started towards Katie Stirn.

"I say we get rid of this witch!" Rain poured down on Jamie. "We've sheltered this monster for too long, maybe it's time for use to be rid of this horrid monster!"

A crowd had gathered at the sound of Jamie's voice. Now, there was a great cry of agreement. It was a cry from scared mothers, from impatient and angry men, from people who would do anything for that village, and who were about to condemn their village, their strong, stalwart, and stubborn village, to doom.

Jamie held Katie Stirn with firm hands, pinning her hands behind her back. He dragged Katie Stirn to the village square. It was a large, open place, and there was nothing there. Nothing except for the people, for every person in Dearmad was now gathered around Jamie McKinnon and his prisoner.

“Who here has a sword?” Jamie called to the crowd. “Who has sword, or a dagger, or *something* that will take this pestilent witch’s life?” Everyone was silent for a moment. Only a moment. Then someone responded to Jamie’s call.

“I have a dagger,” The person came stumbling sheepishly through the crowd, to stand, panting, in front of Jamie McKinnon. His name was Aiden MacCool, and Katie had known him as a boy. He had been a timid and obedient child, always eager to please. Somehow, it cheered Katie to know that nothing had changed.

“Why, would you be kind enough to use it for me?” Jamie was clever, but he was a coward. He was too scared to kill Katie by himself. “Just a simple, straightforward execution, Aiden. No reason to be afraid.”

Above the crowd, the thunder growled again, and lightning flashed somewhere nearby. Aiden looked at the sky, then at Jamie, and then at Katie. He was, in that moment, going through the kind of painful struggle that occurs when you must decide whether to act on fear, or love. It is the kind of experience that we all have, at some point, but that none of us look forward to.

“Oh... right,” Aiden was racked with indecision. “An execution. I suppose... Yes, yes, I could do that. But, well, I could just- well, you might be more qualified...”

“Nonsense, good fellow!” Jamie had a fake smile stretched across his face, “You are perfectly capable of performing an execution. Why, once this horrible business is all over, you would be remembered by many after us. Everyone will remember you as a hero, the one who vanquished the terrible, evil witch of Dearmad,” This was a lie, of course. Jamie was the one who intended to be remembered. The truth was, neither would be.

Katie, having been called terrible one too many times, did the only thing that seemed sensible in that moment. She twisted out of Jamie’s grasp, stood up to her full height, and smacked him, hard, across the face. Witches are uncommonly good at that sort of thing, and Jamie reeled back from Katie as though she had slapped him (which, of course, she had). Jamie turned back to Katie with something beyond anger, or outrage, or hate. It was loathing. Everyone in the village was looking at Katie with a fiery hatred, and some looked very, very scared. Again, Jamie lunged at her, and for a moment, Katie was too shocked at everything to resist. That moment was all Jamie McKinnon needed.

“Now, Aiden. Do it *now*, you idiotic fool!”

Aiden, too confused and helpless to object, brought the knife swiftly down across Katie Stirn’s unprotected throat. Then all was silent. Everyone was staring at anything but the lifeless body of Katie Stirn, the witch. Poor Aiden had covered his face with the hood of his cloak, so that none of him was visible, and so that no one would see his shame. After many moments, Jamie looked down at his prize. Jamie McKinnon looked down at the head of Katie Stirn. But the head of Katie Stirn wasn’t there. Instead, at the

feet of Jamie McKinnon lay the head of Aiden MacCool. Jamie let out a small scream and jumped back, and in doing so, caught sight of the body in the middle of the square. What he saw drove the breath from his lungs, and the triumph from his eyes, for the body he saw wasn't the body of the witch he had tried so hard to kill.

“Hello, everyone,” Whoever was under the cloak of Aiden MacCool let the hood slip off their head. “You are all so quiet tonight,” said Katie Stirn. “This village really is too quiet to be remembered for the horrible, wicked witch that lived, and was vanquished here. This village really is too quiet to be remembered...at all.”

That was the last night that the village of Dearmad, and all who lived there, existed. All because of the execution of the wickedly wonderful Katie Stirn.