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Reza Tokaloo

A Peculiar Case in Plymouth Court

"ORDER IN THIS COURT! Order I say!! Order in the name of the crown immediately!" thundered the booming voice of Judge Hallowsworth: a rotund giant, ominous on his judicial perch.

"The final ruling on the case of the Crown's Law versus Mr. Fishmonger finds the defendant guilty of using occultism in order to catch fish which are creatures made by our mighty Lord." came down Judge Hallowsworth's hammer of judgment on the second to last case of the evening. He had fought through the testimonials and rendered a decision as fast he could. He could not wait to get home to have herring with his wife.

"But your honorliness!" cried out the stunned Mr. Fishmonger. "I was merely singing to the fish as I always do when I am out all alone. I sings to em' so as to please em' and then that gets em' comfortable enough to take a nibble of that which I puts on the hook. Why is that a crime honorable sir?"

"Mr. Fishmonger..." crawled the slow methodical retort of the judge. "You have been found guilty of a crime by this court of Plymouth colony. Under the power of our King and crown! The verdict stands: guilty of occultism and punishable by death by hanging!" The judge's dark brown gavel strikes a final blow to a solid wooden block at the edge of his mighty perch above the courtroom.

"But sir... I mean your honorliness, pardon me. Don't you think it's odd that my main accuser is a merchant that has been trying to buy my land and docks for his mercantile for many days? It's also a fact he was here two months ago claiming the same thing in this court against Mr. Stonehouse, my neighbor, and had him executed and took his land as well. Is that not a little bit of a coincidence my lord?" replied the diminutive Fishmonger.

For a brief moment, the crowd assembled in the court was silent. For even the tell tale sound of breathing could not be heard. The people wondered if the judge may have been hasty in his decision and maybe Fishmongers pleas might have fallen deeply within the man of justice's heart. The silence was almost all consuming.

"Well..." Hallowsworth began and then raised a hand to scratch at his chin. "No! You are guilty of singing to the fish in which you caught so as to lull those poor creatures of God! Anyway, I find that behavior to be quite satanic as well. We'll see you at the gallows Mr. Fishmonger. Good morrow to you."

Fishmonger was taken away by two burly bearded guards of the court to shouts of "Devil worshiper!" and "Satan's son!" as the plaintiff in his case, the merchant Belvedere, walked by the judge, winked, and then passed a stash of money to him then walked out with a big smile.

"Next and final case of the evening!" shouted the clerk of the court over the rabble of a crowd assembled. "This case to be tried by the honorable Judge Hallowsworth!" the clerk briefly turns to the already seated judge Hallowsworth who rolls his eyes and waves on the clerk to contin-

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ue. "The Royal Crown's Plymouth colony versus the..." the clerk stopped as he read off the paper. Almost not believing what he read.

"Mister Clerk, please read as dictated so by the court of law by the crown please." barked the judge with a slow forceful tone and with a widening wolf-like glare from his eyes.

"The case of Plymouth colony versus ...the...were-toad? Also known as Jacob Shurtleff." announced the clerk to the silent stunned room finally.

"Well that was not so difficult was it now." commanded the judge interrupting the hollow silence in the room. "Where is the defendant's representative?"

"Right here your honor!" cried out a tall thin man tripping and stumbling his way to the front of the court.

"Mr. Fuller." gleamed down the judge to the spindly defense lawyer. The two had crossed paths only a few times, but judge Hallowsworth detested the young man. "Late again as usual are we Mr. Fuller? Maybe next time the crown should send you a formal invitation?" the judge barks again not letting any rebuttal come from Fuller. "Let's get on with this! Shall we?"

"Right you are sir!" Fuller finally was allowed to return.

"It seems your client has been accused of becoming a were-toad on certain nights and has caused certain members of the crown's community to receive warts. How do plead and why Mr. Fuller?"

"Well your honor..." begins Fuller. "We plead innocent of all charges. Even if my young client – who happens to be a schoolboy of the age of 10 years old –was a were-toad, how could anyone be sure that the toad in question was he? There are many toads here in the New England. The toad in question could be well out in the forest as we speak?"

"Well let's hurry this along Mr. Fuller. Bring out the first witness and victim." The exhausted judge replies with eyes rolling already.

"The court calls Mr. Longfellow to the stand!" bellows the clerk of the court into the crowd.

"I'm coming!" replied Longfellow.

"And who might you be?" Sarcastically questions the judge to the man now seated beside him as witness.

"Why I am the teacher of the accused sir. He is one of my students. And he gave me warts your honor! All over my hands! The most severe of cases I have ever witnessed and also experienced as a God fearing man of this community. He must be of the devil!" cried the teacher while pointing with an outstretched arm.

"Well, may we see your hands Mr. Longfellow?" retorted Mr. Fuller.

"Uh...why sir?" Longfellow said trying to slowly hide his hands.

"May we examine this unusual ailment that you speak of?" the judge returned slowly.

"Well." Longfellow began while slowly extending a victimized limb

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like a child caught in a lie. "It has gotten better though! But it was surely dreadful when at first it happened!"

"Sir I see no marks of any kind on your hand." Fuller questioned as he approached the witness peering beside the judge leaning over his pulpit. "I dare say that not a wart of any kind has been on that hand in many a long-year sir if you don't mind me saying!" Fuller projected with a growing loudness then spins toward to the crowd of the court in exclamation.

"But he did give me warts that little buggah! He never liked me anyway! I knew his father Archibald and he was a buggah too! He used to put leafs down my bottom and sing funny songs at me afterward! A rude bunch that family!" the teacher sobbed.

"I venture that your case against young Mr. Shurtleff is more personal than paranormal Mr. Longfellow." Conjectures Fuller as he puts an elbow on the wooden rail around which Longfellow was sitting behind. "I think you never liked the defendant's family or the defendant for that matter and have decidedly taken this vendetta thus far as to teach them a lesson for past grievances against you!"

"Mr. Fuller!" interrupted the judge.

"Yes your high honor." Fuller Returned to a more diminutive form with a lunatic's smile and folded hands.

"Are there any other witnesses?" the judge said sarcastically and with a sigh of annoyance.

"Ah, apparently there is your honor. But none of them wish to appear for they fear the wrath of the were-toad sir." bellowed the clerk of the court.

"What?" answered the stunned judge blinking his angry eyes.

"That is correct sir. They do not wish to testify for they fear the defendant will either exact revenge himself or maybe through other toads sir." The clerk pauses for a moment. "Well, that's the truth your honor."

"But your honor," Fuller said with a sudden change in tone.

"Yes," replied the judge with extreme trepidation. "What is it Mr. Fuller?"

"I think this is an open and shut case as they say at Oxford." Fuller illuminated while straightening his collar and puffing out his chest.

"And how is that Mr. Fuller?" The judge said showing more interest in the case.

"I have come to the conclusion that all of this is not my clients fault at all your high honor!" Fuller pointed off toward the ceiling with a sword like thrust.

"Go on Mr. Fuller." said the judge becoming more and more interested in Fuller's appeal.

"Well sir. It is a fact that the witness on the stand is the only real witness to these events that we now are deliberating over. Correct?"

"Yes Mr. Fuller! Get on with it!" interjected the judge.

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"Sorry sir." replied the fumbling attorney. "The main problem I see with my client sir is that he remembers none of these events in which he has been accused of. He has no memory of any transformations when he was younger. And there are no records in the colony of outbreaks of warts or any toad related illnesses. Very peculiar, wouldn't you say?"

Fuller paces a few steps away from the judge, then turns sharply and returns toward the judge's high seat once again.

"I venture that none of these happenings are the soul fault of my client your high honor." With a short pause the thin-limbed lawyer turns to the crowd assembled. "And good people of the colony. I would venture that the true victim in this case would indeed be the very person whom I have been sworn unto the crown and Providence of our divine Lord represent and serve."

The crowd turns to each other amazement and interest at the same time. What could Fuller mean by these closing statements? Even the venerable judge himself bends over from his mighty pulpit in extreme interest to find out where this speech is going.

"You see." Fuller turned very slowly and for a moment touches his folded hands to his lips briefly. "My client *is* the victim in this sinister game! He is the victim of..." Fuller stops to build the crescendo of his words in perfect oratory manipulation. The crowd, the judge, and even two gentlemen with tattered clothes standing at the doorway listen intently and with bated breaths for the coming words.

"My client is the victim of... Bad schooling!!! Yes!! Poor educating on the part of the one and only attending witness!!" Fuller thundered at the teacher still seated beside the judge.

The crowd roars with the revelation by Fuller. The power and force of his words over ride the sheer comedy of the argument. And even the mighty Judge Hallowsworth seems swayed towards the speech of Fuller. All in the courtroom are caught up in the mass hysteria of the moment. The teacher, Mr. Longfellow, finds himself now the defendant in his own case.

"That is preposterous!!" Longfellow shouted from the front of the court.

"Is it now?" Fuller returns pacing towards the teacher. "I would venture that almost the entire blame for this poor afflicted child can be placed firmly upon your head my dear sir!"

"Please explain my dear sir!" retorted Longfellow sarcastically and with a hint of anger as well. "This I need to hear!"

"It is quite simple my dear professor. If you had schooled this lad well as your title would suggest of you, then this child would have *known* he was a were-toad and would most likely sought help for his condition. He would have known better than to warn his neighbors and sought the proper help from our local ecclesiasts! Had you done your job properly, this poor mischievous child would not have the brand of Satan upon him!" Fuller formulated.

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The crowd once again surges with the words of the lawyer. They scream and yell and within the commotion some even throw tomatoes at the teacher and scorn him. The judge then turns slowly with a wolf's glare to the teacher.

"You can't honestly believe this hypocrisy your high honor?" Longfellow whimpered up toward the high-seated judge. "Can you?"

"Mr. Longfellow," begins the judge with the fire of scorn growing in his glare. "I have now listened to this case with my fullest attention." Turns and claps his hands together killing a fly and then returns his gaze to the witness still at the front of the court. "Where was I? Oh yes! My fullest attention! And I see that my final decision is thus."

The entire court waits at the final decision to be rendered. Men and women nearly falling from their uncomfortable colonial seating and a pair of vagabond children listen with mouths open.

"I find that the defendant is...innocent!!" Boomed the judge's deep percussive voice.

The people in court burst out as soon as the decision leaves the judge's mouth until quieting down soon thereafter. Even the two raggedly dressed men at the steps of the court embrace each other then fall down the steps in a laughing drunken stupor.

"But," continued the judge toward a final analytical observation concerning this case before the rowdy courtroom. "I find the witness guilty of miseducating the defendant which led to his committing of these satanic crimes against the Godly people of this colony!"

The stunned teacher's jaw nearly drops from his face in utter shock and dismay. The two burly men in charge of the convicted step out from the chamber door at the side of the court cracking their knuckles and laughing to one another.

"I sentence thee Sir Longfellow to death by hanging!" announces the judge while putting on his black cap.

"Your honor." cried out one of the men in the crowd. A farmer with mud and dirt stained overalls. "Actually, we's got no rope for any hangin'. My cow is ready fer berthin' and we has her strung up so as to help her drop out her little one!"

"Oh bloody hell!" the judge cries as he struggles to pull out a small black rim fire pistol out from under his black robe. "I guess there's no time like the present!"

Bang!

The court empties of its population. The two burly men take the body of former teacher Longfellow away. The judge removes his black cap and white wig and walks down from his high seat. And when the victorious lawyer, Mr. Fuller, is the last to leave, he notices that his client is gone and his hands are covered in warts. And strangely enough, the clothes his client wore to the trial are in a suspicious pile on the wooden floor of the courtroom.