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The Lady's Not for Burning

Summary

Thomas Mendip, a poor former soldier, wanted to be hanged. He confessed to killing old Skipps and a worthless pander, but he could get no one to take an interest in his case because everyone in Cool Clary was interested in a woman called Jennet Jourdemayne, a wealthy young orphan whose property would be confiscated if she were condemned for witchcraft. She was accused of turning old Skipps into a dog and doing other evil deeds.

Mayor Hebble Tyson was tired of strangers dropping into town with such ridiculous requests. Thomas, however, held out for hanging. He confessed to killing old Skipps and a worthless pander. He did not expect to get the favor of hanging for nothing; he knew the rules, all right.

Thomas’ interview with Hebble was interrupted by the announcement that Jennet Jourdemayne, was waiting to see the Mayor. Jennet thought the accusations a joke. She had come to Hebble for his protection at the crimes of which the mob outside accused her. Hebble, not amused, sent for the constable to arrest her. Thomas tried to divert attention from her to himself, but no one paid attention to him. All he got for his pains was to be thrown into the cell with Jennet.

Hebble, the mayor, and his associates had a problem on their hands. Jennet would admit nothing, and Thomas would not stop confessing, so Hebble and his associates decided to leave Jennet and Thomas alone together while they listened at an open door, thinking themselves alone, the unfortunate pair would confess—she to witchcraft and he to innocence. Overhearing this conversation, Hebble was convinced that Jennet was a witch.

Unhappily for Thomas, he had fallen in love with Jennet and she returned his love. He had no wish to be in love; life was miserable enough. Jennet, on the other hand, did not want to renounce her factual world for one of love and fancy.

Fortunately, for all, old Skipps was found alive. Hebble, still coveting Jennet’s property, would not be satisfied, but a softhearted justice allowed Thomas and Jennet to slip out of town in the dark.