

Synopsis in English

A lone magpie swoops low over Sund. Who is he?

The new district judge Nils Psilander has arrived to the Åland islands after studying in Dorpat. With him he has brought books with new knowledge – knowledge about the devil and what should be done to those who associate themselves with him. The parish priest Bryniel Kjellinus welcomes these new thoughts.

– The Lord needs me. – And me!

Lisbeta Skarp lets her call be heard over the woods to protect her cows. Nothing remarkable about that, neither her husband Per Skarp nor the other farmers would ever interfere with the superstitions women have always relied on. But Karin from Emkarby reads spells of her own.

– I have asked the devil for support!

Caught in the act. The judge and the priest gather the jurymen to persecute Karin. – Yes, I did it! But so did you, and you, and you!

Karin accuses twelve other women of witchcraft, among them Lisbeta and Ebba. All twelve answer the accusation with denial and terrible profanity.

At home on their farm Lisbeta seeks comfort and support from Per. – You should have told it like it is!

– So how is it?

The jurymen take testimonies from the villagers. The maid Elin adds fuel to the fire, while the castellan's wife Kristin pleads for common sense. The judge and the priest are not so easily shaken.

– Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!

On his way home from the courts the parish priest is pursued by illusions, he sees black beaks stabbing at him in the dark. At the same time, Ebba prepares Karin for her execution.

”Sententia! For the reasons stated, along with the unanimous verdict of the jury, Karin, Sigfrid Eriksson’s wife in Emkarby, who was caught performing witchcraft and superstitious deeds, and furthermore, has confessed that the selfsame things transpired, and as almighty God in the highest has himself in his holy law, as described in Exodus 22, verse 18, strictly commanded that a witch shall not be suffered to live, I sentence the previously named wife Karin, Sigfrid Eriksson’s wife in Emkarby, to be put to death by axe and her body then burned on the pyre.”

– The flames quickly rise, the fire rages with a particular heat, and I ascend towards heaven in loops and puffs of thick smoke. I will fall. I will fall like rain over your rye fields and hop land. Everything I have said is true!

INTERMISSION

On the naked stone floor in the dungeon of Kastelholm castle sit Lisbeta, Ebba, Margreta, Maria, Anna and Ingeborg. It is the longest winter anyone can remember.

– We have so many stories to share with you. So many truths to present to you.

– So many words, so much unsaid, but we only know one language and you do not know the same.

The parish priest Kjellinus leads the interrogation and torture of the women accused. In the end he manages to break Ebba and she is the second woman to be executed for witchcraft.

Per Skarp is alone. He has his farm, his animals, his maid and his sons, but he doesn’t have Lisbeta.

– From my farm I see the whole world, everything that is missing in it.

Per makes one last attempt to make Psilander’s jurymen change their minds, but to no prevail. Kjellinus and Psilander pressure the women to tell the story of Blockula, and are tricked into a dance that will give them more than they asked for.

– And everything is just an illusion. Flows like water between the fingers.

Psilander does not take lightly to being made a fool of. He returns to his books and calmly declares what is right.

– Line by line, just follow them from left to right. Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!

Lisbeta is the last one standing. Alive.

– You can chop me to pieces like coal, I'm not going to lie!

But the torture is unforgiving. Braces cold as ice tighten around her knuckles as Lisbeta remembers the beauty of the life she's lived.

– I confess! Rather than be tormented by you more, I confess! One day my innocence will be obvious and clear. But not today. They have taken me away from me.

The twelve jurymen finally see the truth about the acts they've been convinced to commit.

– Enough is enough now, District Judge! Enough, Parish Priest! We see clearly again, and what we see is innocence rewarded with death. Enough is enough!

It is too late to save Karin, Lisbeta, Ebba, Margreta, Maria, Anna and Ingeborg. From the other side they see what was done to them, and what was never done to do them justice.

– Your black truth – the stars will pierce it with holes. We fall like rain over your rye fields and hop land!

My body.

My fire.

Rain.