

Wendy, I wish I could help you to die. . . Big Ben is booming, 8 o'clock.

Next day the doctor told us once again that Wendy would never improve beyond her present state: "Don't clutch at straws," she advised my brother Alf.

Earlier this summer I had a call from England. The trial of the "murderer" was held at the Old Bailey; eight years for assault with intent to kill was the verdict. No witnesses were needed since the man had immediately given himself up at the local police station after he had committed the crime. He pleaded guilty. He had no self-recriminations whatsoever over his premeditated and vicious attack. If Wendy dies before one year and one day after the attack, he will be on trial again — for murder.

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PART III

Wendy died slowly over the last few weeks with the turning of summer into autumn, quietly and alone one mid-September Sunday afternoon.

The case reopened at the Old Bailey on the Wednesday following. Let justice be done? Little Jimmy's sentence remains unaltered. With no psychiatric help and as a "model prisoner," he will probably be released from jail within three years.

As for Wendy, she lived in the state of death the four seasons through.

Summarizing the case, the judge said Little Jim "was a weak and ineffectual man. He was totally reliant first on his mother and secondly on his wife. He was a lonely man who had great difficulty making friends. When his wife left him, his pathological hatred of her made him totally preoccupied with vengeful thoughts which led to this murderous attack."

Wendy had lived in fear of her life for over a year. Just before Christmas, only one month after she had left Little Jim, Wendy visited the house on his plea to discuss Christmas arrangements. Quite unsuspectedly he attacked her with the carving knife. She had stitched slashes on the back of her hand when I arrived home to celebrate the Christmas holiday that year. Drawn, thin, and bewildered, she explained that, fortunately, her teenage son was able to intercept this ugly, and obviously planned, assault.

Wendy was urged to charge her husband. She explained why she did: she thought the court would impose the psychiatric visits on him which she had wanted him to have for his depressions. The social worker involved in the case agreed. However, Little Jim merely got a fine of £25 (\$50) for attacking his wife with a carving knife, for making an attempt on her life.

A year later Little Jim attacked Wendy again, and this time she died.

Witchwoman

Nothing to do but
wipe dirty bottoms
rap grasping knuckles
wring the wash
sweep the hearth
want for something to
break the monotony
so dabble in henbane
pull screeching mandrake
steep belladonna
fly high over rooftops
out of your skull
gain a healing reputation
from garnered herbs
and folksy cures.
As years pass
and back crooks
eyes cross in fear
power becomes suspect
then
hated
hunted.

Cackle in derision
then screech in terror
as flames lick
or prove innocence
floating
head down
witchwoman.

Ah, the legacy you've left
of the worthiness of
wiping dirty bottoms
wringing out wash
sweeping the hearth.

Rita Rosenfeld
Ottawa, Ontario