



# Scotch Verdict: The Real-Life Story That Inspired "The Children's Hour"

*Lillian Faderman*

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In 1810, a Scottish student named Jane Cumming accused her school mistresses, Jane Pirie and Marianne Woods, of having an affair in the presence of their students. Dame Helen Cumming Gordon, the wealthy and powerful grandmother of the accusing student, advised her friends to remove their daughters from the Drumsheugh boarding school. Within days, the institution was deserted and the two women were deprived of their livelihoods.

Award-winning author Lillian Faderman recreates the events surrounding this notorious case, which became the basis for Lillian Hellman's famous play, *The Children's Hour*. Reconstructing the libel suit filed by Pirie and Woods—which resulted in a scotch verdict, or a verdict of inconclusive/not proven—Faderman builds a compelling narrative from court transcripts, judges' notes, witnesses' contradictory testimony, and the prejudices of the men presiding over the case. Her fascinating portrait documents the social, economic, and sexual pressures shaping the lives of nineteenth-century women and the issues of class and gender contributing to their marginalization.

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