

*Hail Mary, full of grace*

My soleless leather shoes slap against the marble floor with aching rhythm. Running to the beat of my own heart-- a symphony of all the life left in me, though there isn't much to spare. There are no footsteps to warn me of my hunter, only the stench of death thick in the air and an undeniable presence that raises the hairs on the back of my neck.

*The Lord is with thee.*

Singing. A voice so soft that one could not possibly imagine the monster behind it. Somehow, it is both angelic and demonic, its dissonance as magnetic as death itself. I can feel myself slipping, succumbing to its fatal lullaby, and everywhere I run the chilling voice grows louder. She's found me.

*Blessed are thou among women*

If there ever was a God, he stays hidden. If he was ever merciful, he withholds his mercy from me. Just like how he withheld it from my sisters. Maybe there is a reason for this; maybe God does not save those who gave up on him long ago.

*And blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus.*

My convent is not righteous like the others. We have secrets, and they run deep. Beneath our robes and veils lies not a servant of God, but that of his exiled counterpart. Singing divine hymns by day, and the long-forgotten, forbidden chants by the safety of night, we are the worshippers of Our Fallen Mother.

*Holy Mary, Mother of God*

They call her Bloody Mary, but we sisters know that she is far greater than a name. More treacherous than the sky and more punishing than the sea, she is turned red with the rage of loss

and betrayal. The force of vengeance incarnate, she is insatiable-- perpetually thirsting for the blood of all traitors, the scum of the earth, and now, the lives of her own followers. We always knew we were playing with fire, but we did not expect to get burned this quickly, nor this fatally.

*Pray for us sinners*

I reach the chapel. Groping for a way in, my hand slides against something sticky-- the undeniable warmth of fresh blood. My sobs don't dare to leave my chest; God knows that the first sound I make could be my last. Screwing my eyes shut, I push, and the heavy wooden door gives way to a dimly lit room. There, rows upon rows of my sisters are kneeling in the pews, their heads lowered in silent prayer. Laying prostrate before the altar is the Reverend Mother. A fresh flame of hope ignites in my chest as I make my way towards her— here is my salvation at last! Alone, I am powerless against the Fallen Mother. But all of my sisters together, we could have a fighting chance. We could take the Bloody Mary down once and for all, we could finish what we so mistakenly started all those years ago, we could—

The Reverend Mother lifts her head, and ever so slowly, her veil parts to reveal a face sullied by pure evil. Her eyes are obscured by a translucent white film, and crimson tears leak from her eyelids, cascading down a withered face. Scarlet thread is woven between her lips, sealing them shut and bleeding them raw. All at once, I am met with the realization that I am not standing in a room full of my sisters at all. No, I have made my way into the enemy's lair, where the marred faces of the women that once kneeled beside me are now the faces of an undead battalion come to rain hell on earth. I can see their eye sockets now, soaked with blood where kind eyes once resided. Clutching at my throat, I narrowly hold back my cries as the Reverend Mother stretches her bony hands towards my face. I scramble away, but there is nowhere to run.

Her nails pierce the skin of my cheeks as she wrenches my head to the side, forcing my gaze towards the altar, where a single object rests: a mirror.

*Now and at the hour of our death*

My reflection is almost unrecognizable. Eyes bloodshot and glassy, face hollow with exhaustion, and dry lips peeling, I look nearly as dead as the Reverend Mother and the rest of my corrupted sisters. As dead as I am about to be.

*“Don’t be afraid, child,”* a sickly sweet voice whispers in my ear. *“Just do as I say, and I’ll make it quick. I promise.”*

Tears are falling fast from my eyes now. “Please!” I sob. “I- I’ll do anything.”

*“Say my name.”*

“What?”

*“Say it. Look in the mirror and say it.”*

“Bloody Mary,” I croak out, unable to slow my tears. Something in my blood shifts, as if the very force of evil is being pumped through my veins.

*“Now say it again.”*

“Bloody Mary.” This time, the change is tangible. A single droplet of blood emerges from my left eye, dancing sinfully down the length of my cheek and onto my cracked lips until I can taste its metallic sweetness. My hands are shaking uncontrollably; my flesh is on fire.

The voice laughs with delight as I shriek and writhe in pain. *“Once more. Once more and it will all be over.”*

“No!” I wail. “I can’t.”

*"You must."*

It comes out as a whisper: "Bloody Mary." And then all I can do is watch. I watch as the blood vessels in my eyes burst one by one. I watch as my lips are sewn shut with a web of scarlet thread. I watch as my neck snaps. I watch as my face hardens and then cracks as if I were a statue. I watch until all I can see is blood, and then nothing at all. I watch until all the life has left me, like it has so many before, and will all those to come in this godforsaken, fire flooded purgatory.

*Amen.*

