

Forbidden Holy Children

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There had been some discussion of death. Mary and Jack and the other children were told it was strictly taboo, but they couldn't help themselves. They spoke in hushed voices in the back corner of the large bedroom that fit all seven of the children. They were hidden behind the rows of bunk beds; it was safe there. Out of sight. Barely audible. Night time offered them security. Mother would be back in the morning to check on them and it was then that they would become their proper, perfect selves. But tonight, they held their little meeting. Death had been shunned from discussion for quite some time, yet none of the children knew why. Little Avery, only five, brought back a squirrel from the garden once. It was missing quite a few limbs and had sizable chunks taken from its side. Probably the work of a nearby cat. The children held a funeral for it. Little Avery had been so distraught about the tiny creature, so they made a headstone of twigs and decorated the ground with moss.

Mother saw them in the flower beds.

The children were terrified as she marched into the garden. Her face had turned a sickly white, her body shaking. A scream louder than anything they'd ever heard echoed through the trees, startling any living creature nearby. The children stood in a stunned silence as the figure in front of them was unrecognizable. The banshee-like scream that left her continued on as she dug her fingers into the earth, grabbing the squirrel from the loosely packed dirt and throwing it violently into the woods. Without a word, she left back into the Manor, the children left alone in fear.

Later that evening, Mary crept downstairs. She had only wanted a snack from the pantry. That's what she had told the others. What she really wanted was to find answers. Mary was the eldest and felt that it was her duty to keep an eye on the rest. Besides, she was too curious. Too apprehensive. Too skeptical. From the bottom of the staircase hidden around a corner, Mary could see Mother from a window. She watched as Mother went back out in the dead of night, only to return minutes later with the squirrel she had thrown away earlier. Mary watched intently as she brought the stiff body into the kitchen. Mother squished the squirrel in a jar, crushing what was left of its bones and organs and chanting quietly under her breath. In front of her very own eyes, Mary watched the squirrel bubble and fizz inside the bottle until it was a dark viscous liquid. She fled back to the bedroom before she saw anything more.

Now, the children talk every night amongst themselves as they imagine why Mother would do such a strange thing. Jack suggests that maybe Mother has magic. Avery suggests maybe she just didn't like dead things. But there was

no explanation for the strange chanting and a liquified squirrel. Maybe she was making medicine, one of the others suggests. They continue to talk into the dead of night, ideas bouncing between them. The only silent child is Mary; she was the only one who had seen it. The others only knew what she had told them.

Mary relived the moment over and over with every detail ingrained in her head. As Mother had whispered the incantations and lifted her arms into the air, Mary saw a different woman. The Mother she knew was no longer the same. Her skin was so pale— Mary could almost see through it. Her hair turned darker than fresh blood and it grew long down her back, dragging onto the floor. Her voice was deep and scratchy, clawing at the inside of Mary's ears. But what disturbed Mary to her core was her eyes. As Mary was running away, she had turned around to catch one last glimpse of who she once knew as Mother. Her once beautiful blue eyes were now hallowed pits, digging into Mary's soul. Jack was right; Mother had magic. Mother was Death. Even as the others slept, Mary sat awake, wondering, how long till she rotted her and the other children?