

Mary and I

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The Virgin Mary looks at her, and she looks back at The Virgin—capital V. She wonders if Mary knows that this girl is going to hell.

It's that simple; she is going to Hell. One-way street, no return flight. Hell—capital H. Who knew it was so easy to fall from grace, such a simple thing. The series of missteps were so easy they felt like a dance.

She'd never been religious before, bar the morning of her communion. That morning, God had visited her. Granted, it was in a dream. He was there to tell her how pretty she looked, warn her that she would be inundated with presents. She remembers the whole day well, 18 hours of being let into Heaven. At the altar, her mother had let go of her shoulder and cupped her own hands gently for the communion wafer, light and white and pretty in her worn palms. The priest sounded bored, reading out the old psalms. And she had stood still and obedient, quiet as a lamb.

That was a different day, before it Happened—capital H. Today, she is going to Hell, and she is not happy about it.

When she was younger, after her encounter with the divine, she had looked for God in everything. Sitting at the table and eating her Coco-Pops, she looked for God in every dried, crackling grain. She was

certain the face of God would appear any moment. Walking to school, she knew that the Messiah would spawn in to take her away. God was somewhere, hiding, just waiting to be found. In the beetle she saw scuttle under the rock, shining her own face back at her—gap-toothed and shiny, grotesque in his bulbous back. In the rat she saw in the kitchen near the washing machine before her mother chucked a shoe at God’s twitching, hungry body.

But after a month without God—an eternity when you’re eight—she decided she could come back to her quest later. God was there at the creation of Heaven and Earth; He could certainly wait another few years.

However, now that she was going to Hell, her meeting with God had been permanently postponed. Had it been a better reason, it wouldn’t sting so badly when she thinks about it. If it was blasphemy, or eating meat on Sundays, or reading Harry Potter, she could have survived it.

This is not one of those things. This Thing is a boring one, an oversight. To her, nothing seems a more boring, run-of-the-mill reason to burn forever than the tiny abortion pill the chemist had handed over the counter. There is something rotting inside her. There is something rotting its way out. And because of this, she is now doomed to rotting herself.

She was young for her year in school, always the late bloomer. She was last in the foot races, the shortest on the chart, the meekest in the classroom. A plain girl. But she knew she had love in her. That was how the entire mistake had begun after all. Too much loving. She was young, and always had been one of the youngest for her year, a perpetual youth. But Mary was too. In the Bible, Mary was only 13. She had read that on Twitter. When she was 13, she had been learning how to do eyeliner and searching for the perfect dress for the disco, hitting the exact middle point between slut and prude, wishing for a third option. Yet somehow, she felt that Mary knew much more than

her. When Mary looked at the beetle, it shone back a Halo. When Mary saw the rat, it curled up in her lap. And when Mary looks at her, she looks right back, entranced. She understands suddenly how the Children of Lourdes felt, staring up at The Virgin, except they were fast tracked to Heaven.

The Boy had been a nice Boy, but he'd never get it. He said it was her choice all along. Which it was but that didn't make it fair. He wasn't going to be the one condemned to Hell, she'd be there burning all on her own. She'd be looking up at him, again. On her knees, again. Waiting for it to end, again.

When she smokes weed with him, her throat always hurts. The hurt travels down to her chest, slimy and prickling with each step of new ground it conquers. She loves him like a cough. It tickles the back of her throat, fighting its way out of her chest. No cough can be hidden, or stifled. She tries to stifle the coughs under a blanket, she tries to stifle the love under the same. Both keep on bursting out—unexpected and embarrassing. When she coughs it's contagious, mass hysteria confined to two. It's as if their lungs, both pairs, have realised they aren't controlled by the mind but by the brain. A rebellion in breathing. And it feels like they are a real pair—like they have a lung each. Like she is made of him, Eve comes from the Rib and she comes from the Smoke-Filled-Rattling-Lung.

But when the coughing is done and they are both sober again, he asks her to leave. And every time she does, embarrassed to want more. Her need is humiliating. Her wants betray her.

She looks at Mary. Mary never needed. Mary gave it all up, lived immaculate, never even touched.

The longer she finds herself looking at Mary, the angrier she gets. While she burns in Hell, Mary will be by the side of the Almighty, All-Knowing, King. But at the end of the day, they did the same thing: got pregnant. Mary was touched by Him, while she was touched by the

Boy. Why did He get a capital and the Boy didn't? The Boy at least lets her see him, when it's late and he is lonely. That's more than He ever did.

But when She feels lonely, a girlish need, all that is waiting is the quiet staring statue and the cold, creaking church.