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The Bloodstained Nun

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THE BLOODSTAINED NUN

A phantom that haunted the Castle of Lindenberg, making it uninhabitable . . . It was a nun wearing a veil and a bloodstained habit. In one of her hands she carried a spade, in the other a lighted candle . . . A Spanish nun, she had left the convent to live with the lord of the castle. As unfaithful to her lover as she had been to her God, she betrayed him, but was in turn betrayed by her partner, whom she wished to marry. Her body was left unburied, and her soul, deprived of a final resting place, wandered about for nearly a century. She begged for a little plot of land for her body and a few prayers for her soul . . . once both things had been promised her, she disappeared.

Mother Abbess, here I am sent from the house of my parents.

There was no bread for us at the table of men.

Our useless body was pledged to the Lord

In the house of the Lord we shall eat.

In the house of the Lord we shall sleep.

Mother Abbess, and what shall we be with no body
and no cavalier?

Our passion is the Lord, our exercise

Paradise, our object the world

We shall be nuns in a convent.

Elisabeth de Hoven

A nun in the convent of Hoven, in the twelfth century. One day she found the devil in her cell. Recognizing him by his horns, she went straight to him and gave him a resounding slap that sent him flying through the air . . . On another occasion, she thought that a man had succeeded in entering the convent, but when she later became convinced that she had been face to face with the devil, Sister Elisabeth exclaimed: "My goodness! Had I realized it at the time, I would have boxed his ears soundly!"

Mother Abbess, here I am sent from the house of my parents.

There was no bread for us at the table of men.
Our fertile body was husbanded to the cavalier
In the house of the Cavalier we shall eat.
In the house of the Cavalier we shall sleep.

Mother Abbess, and what shall we be with no body
And with no cavalier?

A prime orchard, a mount
For his empty battles, cheap labour.
Our passion is the world, our exercise
Its children, our object the cavalier.
We shall be given in marriage.

Ralde (Maria de la)

A pretty sorceress imprisoned at the age of eighteen. She had begun to practise her art at the age of ten and was taken to a Witches' Sabbat for the first time by a sorcerer named Marissans. After the death of the latter, the devil himself took her to the Assembly, where, according to Maria's testimony, he assumed the form of a tree . . . but also appeared at times in the form of an ordinary man, sometimes red, sometimes black. Maria never entered into carnal embrace with the devil, but witnessed how this was done. She added that she liked the Sabbat very much because "it seemed just like a wedding." The witches heard music so sweet that it was as though they were in heaven . . . and the devil convinced them that the fire that burns eternally was not real, but artificial.

Mother Abbess, here I am sent from the house of my parents.

There was no bread for us at the table of men.
The work of our bodies we hired out to the lords.
With the money of the lords we shall eat.
In the dung that remains we shall sleep.

Mother Abbess, and what shall we be with no body
And with no cavalier?

Barren earth, a mount

For his empty battles, cheap labour,
Where you shall hire out your body.
They will say: 'Your strength—why not?'
And where you hire out your strength, they will say:
'Your body—why not?' Our passion is bread, our
Exercise the world, our object
The lords of working women and whores.

Maillat (Louise)

A demoniacal young woman born in 1598. Having lost the use of her members, she was taken to the Church of the Holy Redeemer to be exorcized. It was proven that she was possessed by five demons, called wolf, cat, dog, poppet, and griffin. Two demons flew out of her nose in the form of balls the size of a fist, one of them as bright-red as fire and the other, the cat, completely black. The other demons left her body in a less violent manner. Once expelled from her, the demons circled round the fire and then disappeared. It was discovered that Françoise Secrétaire had caused the young girl to swallow the demons by concealing them in a crust of bread the colour of dung.

Mariagrane (Marie)

A sorceress who said she had many times seen the devil coupling with a great number of women, and that it was his habit to take pretty women from the front and ugly ones from behind.

Mother Abbess, here I am sent from the house of my parents.

There was no bread for us at the table of men.
If our strong body fills with passion for the cavalier
The bread of the devil we shall eat.
In the house of the devil we shall awake.

Mother Superior, and what shall we be with a body
And with a cavalier?

Earth of yourself, a mount
For its empty battles, a working woman's hands.

Lost, when you yield up your body.
They will say: 'Your body, our distance.' Our
Passion will be the cavalier, our exercise
The body, our object the world.
We shall be mounted as cavaliers.

Gabrielle d'Estrées

Mistress of Henry IV; died in 1599. It is common knowledge that she did her best to get the King to marry her. She was with child for the fourth time, and was living in the house of Zamet, a renowned financier . . . While strolling in the garden, she had a serious heart attack. She spent a bad night, and on the following day was overcome with such terrible convulsions that she turned completely black and her mouth twisted about so violently that it ended up at the nape of her neck. She breathed her last amid great torment, hideously disfigured . . . A number of persons attributed this charitable act to the devil. They said that the devil had strangled her to keep her from causing further scandal and disturbances.

And what shall we do, Mother Abbess, what shall we do?

There was no bread for us at the table of men.
If all of our bodies were meant to be married, the value
Of money would fall, the demand would be balanced
With the convents, the boredom of brothels would be
Embellished for use. With neither lords nor cavaliers,
Neither brothels nor convents. The men
Divide themselves into men
And lords. But of women all men
Are lords. In the houses
Of lords and men
And cavaliers we give them their meaning, for in opposition
They define themselves. We give them their foundation
And thickness; outside these houses we shall roam. No house
Is ours. No one is our brother or sister. For sisterhood
Only the convent. In solidarity
With no one, married and sold from ourselves
There was no bread for us at the table of men.

Cecilia

Around the middle of the sixteenth century, a woman named Cecilia attracted attention in Lisbon. She possessed the art of projecting her voice in such a way that at times it seemed to come forth from her elbow, at other times from her feet, or even from a place it would not be proper to mention. She had converse with an invisible being . . . who answered all her questions. The woman was reputed to be a sorceress, and possessed by the devil; by special dispensation, however, rather than being burned at the stake, she was merely banished forever to the island of S. Tomé, where she died in peace.

And what shall we do, Mother Abbess, what shall we do?

I will tell you what we shall do with a body
And with a cavalier. Our passion will be the body
Our exercise the world, and our object
The cavalier. Our strong body to the cavalier
We shall give at night, but the body
Of the cavalier we shall take. The exchange
Will be broken at dawn. We shall say:
'Cavalier, I want my body back so that I
May take up my day.' They will call you
An Amazon. But do not roam the world
As far as hell. In the convent you shall love
The cavalier. You shall bear witness to this
And demand justice. In the house of the cavalier-husband
You shall love the cavalier-lover. You shall bear witness to this
And demand justice.
And you will be given a convent. In the brothel you shall say:
'I have faith in the Lord,' and you shall love a cavalier.
The foundations of the convent
Will tremble. Let the cavalier run
From convent to brothel, and from there
To his house, without ever finding you:
You escaped to yourself in your passion.

Brinvilliers (Marie Marguerite de)

A young and pretty woman who, from 1666 to 1672, poisoned, without malice, and often with complete indifference, kinfolk, friends, and servants. She even went to hospitals and there administered poison to the sick. All her crimes must be attributed to a hideous madness or to the most terrible sort of depravity, but not to the devil, as is frequently the case. It is true that Brinvilliers began her criminal career at the age of seven and that superstitious folk suspected that a fearsome devil had possessed her . . . Twenty-four hours after she was burned at the stake, in 1676, people were searching for her bones and regarded them as relics, claiming that she was a saint . . . for the poisonings continued after her death.

You escaped to yourself in your passion. In solidarity
With no one, married and sold from ourselves
There was no bread for us at the table of men.
And what shall we do, Mother Abbess, what shall we do?
No one is our brother or sister. For sisterhood
Only the convent. Let the cavalier roam
As far as your madness. Do not whip your body
In his, as refuge from his dread. Let him fall
With no house. There you shall come
From your passion.

And what shall we do, what shall we do?

Deshoulières

Madame Deshoulières decided to spend a few months on an estate four leagues distant from Paris, and was invited to choose the finest chamber in the château, with the exception of one that was visited every night by a phantom. Madame Deshoulières had long wanted to see a phantom, and despite all the objections that were raised, she installed herself in the haunted chamber. When night fell, she went to bed, picked up a book, as was her habit, read for some time, and having finished it, put out the light and fell asleep. Suddenly she was awakened by a noise at the door, which would not shut properly. Someone opened the door, and entered the chamber with a heavy tread . . . Stretching out her hands, Madame Deshoulières seized two furry ears, and patiently held

on to them until the following morning . . . when it was discovered that the supposed phantom was a large dog who found the chamber more comfortable to sleep in than the stables.

In the world abandoned where shall we roam?
Passion shall be the sole object and exercise.
Do not call me sister till another world comes.
Reject the possibilities of a new convent. In the rubble
We shall find brothers. Those who lost nothing
And were crushed by nothing, since they had no
Houses. But let us still keep our guard, for these brothers
Will say: 'You made the citizens
Now the City is ours.'
Three times will our brothels betray us:
In bread, in body, and in the City. Do not arm me as cavalier
Of your anguish. We would take up again in the rubble
Old phantoms. We shall find our way back to the root
Of our anguish, women alone, till we say:
'Our sons are sons are people and not
Phalluses of our machos.' We shall call the children
Children, the women women, and the men
Men. To replace the demiurge
Of Cyclopean works,
We shall call a poet to govern
The City.

30 March 1971