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THE NUN OF WATTON

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INT. CRYPT - DAWN

A subterranean stillness, thick with the cold scent of damp limestone and spent beeswax.

Where a single candle burns in the gloom, casting a chiaroscuro glow against the heavy Romanesque pillars.

This is the undercroft of a great northern abbey - a foundation of privilege, piety, and wealth.

FATHER GILBERT (70s), the venerable founder of the Gilbertine Order, kneels before a stone statue of the Virgin Mary.

He is dwarfed by the dark, a frail silhouette in a completely black monastic habit.

The statue of the Virgin is delicate, her face smooth and innocent.

In a soft glow of light, her figure appears almost flesh, and her downward gaze as if listening to the old man's despair.

Who clutches a wooden rosary, trembling through a prayer - a penitent's dread, that shakes his narrowing shoulders.

He whispers in Latin-

GILBERT

*Ave María, grátia pléna, Dóminus
técum.*

He stops, his throat catching an uncomfortable globus. He stares up at the Virgin, begging for fortitude. He goes on-

GILBERT (CONT'D)

*Benedícta tu in muliéribus, et
benedíctus frúctus véntris tui, Iésus-*

The prayer breaks. Gilbert is weeping. It is the *Donum Lacrimarum*, reserved for the saintly - the gift of tears.

They flow freely, etching through the dust on his ancient cheeks.

He crosses himself, an exhausted yet nurtured motion.

He rises from the stone and retreats from the darkness, stepping towards the pale grey light leaking down the stairwell.

INT. SCRIPTORIUM - DAY

The sun breaches the horizon. It slices through the unglazed lancet windows, falling like razor blades of white light.

Dust motes dance vigorously across the room, in the beams of the sharp, ordered, imposing architecture.

Gilbert steps through a grand Norman archway, its stone carved with interlocking chevron zig-zags.

He sniffs, not keen on the smell of the scriptorium - of iron gall ink and scraped calfskin.

Where BROTHER AELRED (20s), a young scribe with a face rather unblemished by the world, sits at a sloping wooden desk.

He pushes aside a manuscript of Saint Augustine's 'City of God' and retrieves a sheet of stretched vellum.

He sets it out carefully before him. Fresh. Then seeing the Abbot Father, rises, bowing his head.

AELRED
Benedicite, pater.

Gilbert waves a dismissive hand, gesturing for the 'boy' to sit. He already begins to pace the perimeter of the room.

Aelred obeys, dipping his goose-feather quill into the black inkwell. He holds it poised, waiting.

Gilbert moves in an anti-clockwise circle. We hear the rhythmic SHHH-SHHH of his leather sandals against the flagstones.

GILBERT
Write this, Brother.

Aelred lowers the quill to the vellum. Gilbert uses every last ounce of energy to tell this tale.

GILBERT (CONT'D)
I relate the tale of the misfortunes
of Sister Agnes. A once pious young
oblate, driven to despair by the
errors of sin-

Gilbert stops his pacing. He stands in one of the sharp shafts of light. His face hardens, remembering the cell, the chains.

GILBERT (CONT'D)
No. Driven to despair by the zealotry
of her own sisters and their
terrifying lack of mercy.

Aelred's quill halts. He looks up, his youthful brow furrowed in shock. To record such a condemnation of holy women is heresy.

Gilbert stares back at the boy. The need to protect the Order collides with the horrific truth of his memory.

He closes his eyes and yields to a 'better' version of history.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

No. Erase lack of mercy.

Aelred quickly scrapes the wet ink from the vellum with a small pumice stone.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Write, driven to despair by the errors of sin. But, by the grace of God, a miracle did thence occur, to the glory of His name.

Aelred writes the amendment, the scratch of the quill sounding loud and final, he is pleased to write to the glory of God.

Gilbert turns his back to the scribe, looking out of the window towards the barren moors.

EXT. NORTH YORKSHIRE MOORS - DAY

A sprawling, purpling landscape under a thick autumn sky. The light is dim, the air mist-choking. The moors are dying.

Bracken rots into trodden earth. A river, swollen and fast-flowing, carves through the scarred limestone.

GILBERT (V.O.)

Among the sanctuaries I founded with such remarkable fervour across this northern wilderness, there was one located in the province of York. A more pleasant clime.

EXT. WATTON PRIORY - DAY

Downstream the river floods the banks.

Tangled in the dead hawthorn bushes are the remnants of life - discarded animal bones and the foul refuse of the settlement.

GILBERT (V.O.)

It was situated in Watton. A place surrounded by marshland and incorruptible waters.

(MORE)

GILBERT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was known to the locals, in
their tongue, as the 'wet town'.

The Priory rises as 7-acres of high stone walls, with the nuns separated from the monks by giant iron-barred gates.

Far back in the distance, a glimpse of York Minster rises under the oppressive clouds.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

A total, suffocating blackness. No windows.

Sound of a drip of condensation, and then the terrifying CLANK of iron links dragging against stone.

GILBERT (V.O.)

We built walls to keep the devil out.
But in times of peril he may also be
locked inside.

A heavy iron latch throws open. A sliver of pale light cuts across the floor of straw.

AGNES (16) lies in the dirt. Her face bruised, her black habit torn.

And beneath the ruined fabric, her belly is visibly pregnant. She is barely conscious, shivering violently.

The restraint is medieval, brutal, precise. To each of her bare feet are fitted two iron rings.

Where chains run from the rings to an enormous, immovable log, fastened deep into the timber with iron nails.

A secondary chain runs through a hole in the wall to the outside corridor, held taut by a locked bar.

PRIORESS ELISABETH, a towering female figure, stands in the doorway, in pristine black and white.

She is holding a lantern and a small wooden bowl. She steps into the cell. For a second it seems she may have pity.

But then the light reaches her eyes and she glowers down at the girl with a gaze of pure, sociopathic disgust.

And speaks with such laboured venom that, in spite of any Latin readers, we must resort to subtitles.

ELISABETH

Spurcitia diaboli. Vas iniquitatis.
(Filth of the devil. Vessel of
iniquity.)

She drops the bowl onto the straw. Inside there is a single,
rotting morsel of bread.

ELISABETH (CONT'D)

The river of damnation threatens to
flood thee, Sister Agnes. Make a dam
of your suffering, or perish in the
current.

AGNES

(cracked, desperate)
I seek pardon. Please, Mother- God
forgives-

ELISABETH

God's will is not a pardon! 'Tis first
a scourge.

Agnes bows her head, showing the grime on her cheeks. Wet with
tears of despair.

AGNES

But then mercy.

Elisabeth's face tightens. The word mercy offends her to her
core. She turns her back.

She grips the leather cincture around her waist, with a
repressed, frustrated desire to strike the girl again.

But she strides out, slamming the door. And plunging the cell
back into near total darkness.

GILBERT (V.O.)

She was sustained on bread and water,
and tormented with daily scolding.

In the dark, we hear rustles as Agnes crawls towards the bowl.
Her filthy fingers find the bread. She tears into it.

As she chews, faint ambient light from under the door displays
the inside of the loaf.

It is writhing with insects and black weevils. But Agnes does
not stop. She digests the creatures with a hunger of the damned.

INT. SCRIPTORIUM - DAY

The scratch of the quill stops. Aelred's hand hovers over the vellum, where ink threatens to drip from the nib.

He looks up at Father Gilbert, stricken with unease. Holy women acting as instruments of torture is truly alarming.

And then a faint, dreamlike chanting seeps in through the stone arches and walls - nuns singing their divine office.

Aelred parts his lips to ask a question, seeking theological justification for such barbarity, but Gilbert stops pacing.

He meets the 'boy's' eyes. The old man does not offer comfort, rather a slow nod - 'keep writing.'

Aelred knows in his sinking heart that it is not his place to question a damn thing.

AELRED

Laus Deo.

(Praise be to God.)

He lowers the quill and the recording resumes.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

Agnes chokes down the insect-ridden bread, but the rotting taste triggers a violent physical reaction - her eyes lurch back.

Then her body quakes, recoiling against the chains, as she is submerged into the shock of total recall-

INT. CRYPT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Seen in fragmented, strobe-like flashes, illuminated by a single, most powerful candle, and yet a dying one-

Agnes is pushed up hard against a stone pillar, panting. By BENEDICT (20s), a young monk with a handsomely feral face.

He crowds her person with rough, groping hands, reaching beneath the wool of her scapular.

AGNES

No. Benedict. No more to defile what is pure. *Corpus Christi.*

BENEDICT
 (but he just shushes her,
 hotly against her ear)
 We are already in the mud. What more
 is pure?

AGNES
Corpus Christi-

BENEDICT
 Let us finish what we have started.

AGNES
 No more.

BENEDICT
 But do you not love the flesh?

AGNES
 I have known the flesh with thee
 already.

BENEDICT
 And delighted.

AGNES
 Let me go!

She struggles, but he is too strong. He forces her down onto the flagstones. She yields, exhausted, the fight draining from her.

But now Benedict's cruelty amplifies. He clasps a hold of her head viciously, as if to fasten her to his lustful will.

He ignores her pleas, fixated only on his own dark release.

GILBERT (V.O.)
 Like a dove, seduced and spiritless,
 she was caught in the talons of the
 hawk. Corrupted over and over in the
 flesh, as she had already been in the
 spirit.

INT. CHAPEL - DUSK

The sun casts its final, blood-red rays through the high lancet windows, pooling over the stone altar.

Where THE NUNS OF WATTON lie in full prostration, their bodies pressed flat against the uneven floor, arms outstretched.

The chapel peals with their collecting weepings, that turn into haunting wailings.

GILBERT (V.O.)

How many laments arose from those most holy virgins. Yet they did not weep for the girl. Fearing for their own honour, they worried only that the sin of one would be imputed to all.

INT. REFECTORY - DAY

The main vaulted hall of the monastery, with timber roof bossed in foliage, where MONKS AND NUNS gather for a Feast Day.

They sit in strict silence at long oak tables. The meal is meagre - boiled roots and salted fish - but eaten with pleasure.

And the clatter is minimal, as they eat with wooden spoons. Prioress Elisabeth sits at the high table.

Her sharp eyes scan the monks' benches on the far side of the erected lattice separating them from the nuns.

A moment passes as she notes the empty space where a certain monk appears missing - Benedict.

Beside her sits PRIOR GEORGE (60s), a weary Priest who oversees the men's cloister.

He sees her glaring and lowers his eyes to his bowl, avoiding her wrath, and yet can't abstain himself from Latin-murmuring.

PRIOR GEORGE

Sine utraque crescere usque ad messem.
(Let both grow together until the harvest.)

Elisabeth turns her head. She stares at him dripping with contempt for his clear leniency. George shrinks, quietening.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

Agnes is upright now, her back against the large wooden log. She clutches her swollen, pregnant belly protectively.

Elisabeth stands over her, blocking the corridor's faint light.

AGNES

I know not his name, Mother. I care for him not. And I care not for this child.

ELISABETH

You are a liar, Sister Agnes.

AGNES

No. It was a mistake.

ELISABETH

Then you shall prove it.

AGNES

But how-

Elisabeth marches out. Then from the corridor, 3 NUNS emerge.

Among them is SISTER BLANCHE, her youthful face converted into one of frightening, self-righteous hatred.

They descend upon the chained girl. Agnes screams as the first KICK lands squarely in her ribs.

The nuns strike her in silence. 'Tis most uncanny to see such wild violence under curfew, and so veiled.

Then a boot whumps Agnes precisely in the stomach. She wails, curling into a tight ball. The chains rattle.

Elisabeth stands in the corridor, listening to the muffled thuds and screams. At last she steps back in and raises a command.

The sisters instantly cease, panting, smoothing their habits out, and step away from the bleeding, sobbing Agnes.

INT. CHAPTER HOUSE - DAY

A high-domed room with an apse, but built for solely for judgment. The nuns sit on a stone bench lining the walls.

The atmosphere is electric with a zeal of vengeance. Elisabeth stands at the lectern, pointing at each sister in turn.

ELISABETH

Sister Agatha. You may speak.

SISTER AGATHA, elderly, rises from the stone bench.

AGATHA

It is best that this pregnant whore be given back to the wicked youth. Let the worries fall on him whose ill deeds occasioned them.

ELISABETH

You motion plainly to expel her?

AGATHA

Yes, Reverend Mother, Expel her.

A murmur of some agreement ripples through the room. Blanche leaps to her feet, agitated.

BLANCHE

No! If we expel her into the world, it poses danger to the reputation of our souls! The commoners will say Watton breeds harlots. We must leave what is destitute in the cell where it belongs, to die alone with her devil's offspring. Let the stone bury the sin.

Elisabeth pauses to absorb Blanche's beautiful words, then in a chillingly hushed voice pronounces the 'Truth'.

ELISABETH

It is God's will that she suffers so for what she has done.

From the back of the room, SISTER HENRIETTA (30s) - frail, with dark circles under her eyes - stands up in defence.

HENRIETTA

Has she not suffered enough? She is but a child herself, and can change her ways.

Elisabeth looks at Henrietta, unalarmed. Rather, a slow, bloodthirsty smile stretches across the Prioress's face.

ELISABETH

My darlings. What is the greatest virtue we possess?

AGATHA

Our innocence.

ELISABETH

And what is the greatest pain to our Lord Christ Jesus in offence of this, our most holy and prized virtue?

BLANCHE

Adultery!

ELISABETH

Then raise your arm if you believe it just for the Lord to further condemn Sister Agnes's suffering, in what hath only just begun.

Elisabeth raises her own arm. Confidently, Agatha raises hers. Blanche follows.

All around the circular room, the brides of Christ raise their hands in a unanimous vote for torture.

Henrietta looks around, tears welling in her eyes. The peer pressure of the absolute is suffocating.

Trembling and entirely defeated she is the last to raise her arm into the air.

EXT. WATTON PRIORY - DAY

A calcified frost grips the earth. The stillness is broken only by the abrasive caw of crows circling the high towers.

Upon a deeply-frozen part of the river, a single swan in the ice elegantly rears its white head against the biting wind.

Along the banks, Gilbert rides a heavy-footed horse. His posture is rather the opposite, stiff against the penetrating weather.

EXT. STABLES - DAY

Gilbert dismounts. Where a LAY BROTHER, dressed in coarse, mud-stained wool, rushes forwards to take the reins.

He keeps his eyes lowered, respectfully. But Gilbert places a soft, gloved hand on his shoulder.

GILBERT

Benedicite, frater. Dominus tecum.

(Bless you, brother. The Lord be with you.)

The lay brother now doth look up, moved by the Abbot's humility.

INT. ABBEY CHURCH - DAY

Thick with frankincense. Tens of beeswax candles burn upon the high altar, casting a warm-gold over the choir stalls.

Where the soaring, polyphonic chant of the Christmas Introit - *Puer natus est nobis* - echoes off the vaulted ceiling.

At the altar, Father Gilbert is clothed in glorious white and gold vestments. He elevates the Host.

The pale, circular wafer catches a single beam of winter sunlight piercing the east window. As it becometh the real Lord.

The entire congregation - monks to the right, nuns left - are on their knees in unison, not even gazing up at the holiness.

CONGREGATION

*Domine, non sum dignus, ut intres sub
tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo, et
sanabitur anima mea.*

(Lord, I am not worthy that you should
enter under my roof, but only say the
word and my soul shall be healed.)

Gilbert steps down to distribute the Eucharist.

He places the host on the tongues of the kneeling sisters. As he
moves down the line of black veils, his eyes search the faces.

Agnes is not there. Her absence is felt, since this sister was
once a dear, orphaned girl put into Gilbert's care.

INT. REFECTORY - DAY

Nativity Feast Day / Christmas, and the vast hall hums with the
quiet, permissible chatter of celebration.

The offering is richer today. Trenchers of roasted fowl, spiced
pork, and white bread line tables, with chalices of mulled wine.

At the High Table, Gilbert sits beside Elisabeth. He pushes
white bread around his plate, playing with his food. Troubled.

GILBERT

My dear Prioress.

ELISABETH

Abbot Father.

GILBERT

Sister Agnes? The oblate Archbishop
Murdac brought to us.

ELISABETH

Of course. The pious girl.

GILBERT

Where is she?

Elisabeth sips her wine, perfectly serene, impenetrable.

ELISABETH

Archbishop Murdac met a rather nasty
end, did he not, Father?

GILBERT

But he is with God-

ELISABETH
Stripped of his power, swallowed by
his own politics. We should do well
not to dwell on him?

Gilbert is astonished.

GILBERT
And Sister Agnes?

ELISABETH
The girl has undertaken a severe vow
of fasting.

GILBERT
In total absence?

ELISABETH
Indeed she asked to be left alone in
the lower cells, seeking absolute
union with Christ's suffering.

GILBERT
On the feast of His nativity?

ELISABETH
She is our most pious sister, Father.
I should think such devotion puts us
all to shame.

GILBERT
Well-

ELISABETH
Would you have me drag her from her
prayers to eat roasted meat? Or break
the holy enclosure that so glorifies
the order before Our King?

Gilbert sighs, yielding to her authority over the women's house.

GILBERT
I trust you are taking good care of
her, Elisabeth.

Elisabeth's blood flares - a truly haughty, Norman pride that
views his Saxon gentleness as weakness.

ELISABETH
I am a daughter of the House of Percy.
We do not ever fail our charges, but
rather temper them anyhow is best.

GILBERT
With your best fetters I don't
hope?

Elisabeth remains silent. She now knows that he knows what she knows.

INT. SCRIPTORIUM - DAY

A drop of black ink falls from the quill. It splatters the vellum, spreading into a most unwanted stain.

Aelred stares at the blot. His worldview is collapsing, hearing that the holiest women he knows are irredeemably corrupt.

Gilbert stops his pacing.

GILBERT
Leave it, Brother. The blot does not
matter.

AELRED
Must we continue?

GILBERT
The record must be stained on
parchment. I no longer care for the
severity of what I relate. We shall
all meet our Maker on the Judgment
Day.

AELRED
Yes, Father.

GILBERT
Then you need not fear any earthly
crime.

AELRED
Yes, Father.

GILBERT
Nor whisper it to any mortal man.

AELRED
No, Father.

Gilbert turns towards the window. He deliberates aloud, inviting the young brother deeper into his mind.

GILBERT
Shall I talk about her early life I
wonder. Her girlish abandon?
(MORE)

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Her character before the second fall
of concupiscence's rage. Or shall we
not waste space upon the page?

AELRED

Are you asking me, Father?

Gilbert turns back, looking at the young man.

GILBERT

If you would care to answer?

Aelred swallows hard. He sits up straighter, as a sudden, bleak
clarity drifts into his mind.

AELRED

I do not think it is overly important,
Father. Her character before the event
does not alter the sin of it, nor of
the community. Since what happened is
what must be recorded - the historian,
like the theologian, is a teller of
truth.

Gilbert looks at Aelred, a little sorrowfully, recognising the
loss of the boy's innocence.

GILBERT

You are a true scribe, Aelred.
Memories true to mine own delight are
not relevant to the record. History
requires only the injury of the event,
over the shadows of its soul.

Gilbert takes a shuddering breath, eyes half-closed. Bracing
himself.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Dip your quill then, Brother. For
the descent is upon us, and we
shall not squander what little
hours of sleep remain.

EXT. NORTH YORKSHIRE MOORS - POSSIBLE TIME-LAPSE

Of the brutal passage of deep winter. The moors freeze, thaw
into thick, impassable mud, and freeze again.

The hawthorn trees are stripped bare, reduced to skeletal claws
scratching against a relentless, iron-grey sky.

The river turns to black ice, forgetting its passage.

INT. CONVENT CORRIDORS - NIGHT

A distant moan echoes from below. Henrietta, frail as ever, holds a rushlight, lighting up her fear-hollowed eyes.

She hath broken the Great Silence, as in night's thick bosom she creeps down the forbidden stairwell towards the lower cells.

EXT./INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Henrietta reaches the bulky oak door. She presses her face against an iron-barred peephole.

Inside, there she suffers, curled up to her swollen belly and chilled to the bone - Agnes, anchored to the dark.

A pool spreads beneath her coarse woollen shift - blood. The starvation and trauma hath forced her body into a miscarriage.

HENRIETTA

(almost at a weep)

Agnes. Child- The Lord is with thee.

It- It shall be well. Hold to the light.

Agnes moves an inch, registering the mercy of her sister. But it is almost impossible for her to communicate back.

AGNES

There is- No- Light.

Henrietta covers her mouth to stifle a sob. She cannot console an agony this absolute. She turns and runs back up the stairs.

INT. THE GRILLE - NIGHT

Part of that wall, the dividing line of Watton Priory, pierced only by a small barred window and a rotating wooden turn-wheel.

Henrietta throws herself against the stone, gripping iron bars.

HENRIETTA

(hushed shout)

Brother! Please! In the name of Christ. Brother. Hear me!

On the other side of the darkness, a hooded figure/monk approaches. BROTHER THOMAS, the night doorkeeper.

THOMAS

Sister. You must not be here. Why do you break the Enclosure?

HENRIETTA
I must speak with the Abbot Father.

THOMAS
Impossible.

HENRIETTA
Now!

THOMAS
Silence!

HENRIETTA
There is a soul perishing in the pitch
black of this rotten house.

THOMAS
Sister, come to your senses. The Abbot
rests at this hour, and no earthly
woman may summon him in the night, nor
the daylight. Return to your cell. And
remember. *Quia adversarius vester
diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit,
quaerens quem devoret.*
(Demons prowl the night, seeking
someone to devour.)

HENRIETTA
The demon is already inside!

Henrietta presses her pale, tear-streaked face entirely against
the iron.

Brother Thomas stares at her through the bars, his adherence to
the Rule gradually shattered by the terror in the other's eyes.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
Just tell him of the oblate. He must
know that Sister Agnes, she of the
late Archbishop Murdac's ward, is
chained, bleeding to death in the
undercroft, and- And there is the seed
of the enemy's child in her womb. If
neither you speak of this damnation,
then your habit too shall be stained
in the sinner's blood and rotted.

Speechless, Thomas just crosses himself. Then he spins on his
heels and vanishes quickly into the dark of the men's cloister.

INT. ABBOT'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

A fire burns in the hearth. Gilbert sits in a sturdy chair, wide awake, reading an illuminated Gospel by the firelight.

He is clearly burdened by the spiritual intensity of his tens of monasteries. Then comes a sudden rap at the door.

Thomas enters, bowed as low as it is possible to be.

GILBERT (V.O.)

I was roused from the beloved Gospel
of Luke by a terror of disorder I had
long feared, but never dared to name.

The brother whispers the news into Gilbert's ear. The Gospel slips from his lap, thudding onto the floorboards.

He looks at the fire, flames reflecting in his startled eyes.

GILBERT (V.O.)

I had built a sanctuary for the
broken, as Saint Benedict commanded of
the faithful in community, and they
had turned it into a self-righteous
den of madness. A slaughterhouse of
vengeance in the name of the spirit.

Suddenly Gilbert rises, moving with a new agility born of urgency. He grabs a huge ring of keys and a lantern.

INT. SCRIPTORIUM - DAY

Right back to the harsh morning light of the Scriptorium.

Where Gilbert is pacing again, more frantic than before. The agony of hindsight perturbs his voice, as he looks to Aelred.

GILBERT

Is it better to leave the tomb sealed,
Brother Aelred? To let sleeping dogs
lie? For I have been criticised in the
past for my lack of rigour. For
oversight. And yet can such a stance
of maintaining the peace be at
conflict with man's sinful nature? Can
an Abbot, being too faithful, place
too much faith in the faithful?

Aelred watches him, his quill still hovering above the stained parchment, somewhat in awe of it all.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

It may be said that my mercy bred this corruption. And so, I took up my lantern, and I descended upon her cell, where I inevitably expected to find the devil's work. I heard great horrors and tumult beyond that cell door, but when I entered- I- I witnessed only a miracle.

Gilbert stops. Exhausted, as if the memory itself is draining the life from his veins.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Shall I stop here?

AELRED

But, Father, there are no details.

GILBERT

Shall we not seal the truth away in the dark? Belongeth it there perchance?

Aelred stares at the next page of blank vellum. The silence of it waits - true faith requires staring straight into the abyss.

AELRED

Pray, Father. Pray, let the truth be unsealed. True faith reveals itself so. No matter the scales of darkness.

Gilbert stares at the young man. A profound respect passes between them.

GILBERT

Words I wish had spoken. But lest a good monk forget the words of Christ to St Peter. *Vade post me Satana, scandalum es mihi, quia non sapis ea quae Dei sunt, sed ea quae hominum.*

(Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.)

Aelred smiles, embracing the remark's innate wisdom.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Very well. Dip your quill.

Gilbert turns towards the window, bracing himself for the harrowing.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

When I reached the door of the undercroft- I heard an un-Godly commotion- That which shall never cease haunting my soul until the Day of Judgment.

EXT. NORTH YORKSHIRE MOORS - NIGHT

A violent downpour. Two hulking LAY BROTHERS, tunics drenched in rain, drag a thrashing figure through the deep, sucking mud.

It is BENEDICT. His monastic habit is torn, his face bruised. He kicks, spits, kicks, but the brothers are relentless.

They bypass the gated archway of the priory. Instead, dragging him around the perimeter wall towards a hidden postern door.

They haul him up.

And standing in the narrow stone threshold, lit by her shielded lantern, is Elisabeth, waiting with stillness and relish.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Now packed with cloaked figures of the nuns, clustered in the background shadows, breathing as a collective, frenzied hum.

The lay brothers hurl Benedict onto the straw before the chained Agnes. He struggles, but the brothers have him easily pinned.

They strip the lower half of his habit away, exposing him completely. Their brutal task complete, the lay brothers depart.

Elisabeth steps out to kneel right down beside Agnes. It isn't clear what on earth she is doing there.

Until Agnes' right hand comes free from the log - she's unlocked.

Then Elisabeth presses a rusted pair of scissors into the girl's quaking palm, willing the dawn of an unspeakable act.

AGNES

(intelligible only to her,
her head aflame)

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata
mundi, miserere mei.*

ELISABETH

(sociopathically calm)

Strike at the root, Agnes.

(MORE)

ELISABETH (CONT'D)

Enact the most holy vengeance. By
cleansing the temple of the body!

Benedict thrashes, in primal terror. Agnes looks at the blade.

The extent of the abuse and her suffering pushes her over the precipice of sanity. She lets out a deadly SCREAM.

And then the background falls into the darkness, as we close in tight on Agnes's insane face, committing the insane act.

And after the world slows down, we hear a wet, sickening SNIP.

Then Benedict's gargling SHRIEK.

Then the manic prayers of the sisters at a distance, drowning out all other sounds.

INT. UNDERCROFT CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Father Gilbert listens to the screams. Then hurries down the spiralling stone steps, his lantern swinging.

He presses his frail body back into a dark alcove as a procession of nuns rushes past him.

Between them, they struggle with a blood-soaked linen sack. The grim debris of Agnes's miscarried child.

Gilbert just stares, he does not seem concerned by what it is.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Gilbert steps into the doorway, holding his lantern high. Benedict is gone. The mob of sisters is gone.

Only Prioress Elisabeth remains, gliding towards him. Her hands clean, her expression convincingly one of being at peace.

GILBERT

The chains-

ELISABETH

She is a worthy penitent.

It's a choice of extreme asceticism, but not an act of penance unheard of.

GILBERT

The screams-

ELISABETH

The agony, Father. The agony. Come and see the piety for yourself. It is a miracle of our Lord. Nothing more can be said.

Gilbert has questions, but he trembles a second too long, and she vanishes into the dark. He steps further into the cell.

Agnes sits alone on the floor. Her stomach is entirely flat.

The heavy iron cuffs lie open on the straw, but beneath her is still slick with dark blood and amniotic fluid.

And it appears that her bruised ankles have miraculously slipped free from the iron rings.

Agnes stares blankly in the direction of the rusted blade she enacted castration with - it lies hidden in the corner.

Gilbert lowers his lantern.

He does not see the reality of sheer trauma, rather his desperate mind sees only the 'miracle' of a blessed penitent.

He falls to his knees in good faith and pulls the catatonic girl into his chest, sobbing tears of relief.

GILBERT

Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis.
(I absolve you from your sins.)
You are blessed, Agnes. The angels have unchained thee. The Lord has taken thy burden, and thy child. He has granted thee the promise of an eternal life.

Agnes just stares over his shoulder into the blackness. Her eyes remain utterly vacant.

INT. SCRIPTORIUM - DUSK

The darker hues of a winter sunset. Long bars of shadow stretch over the flagstones. Aelred's quill scratches the final letters.

GILBERT (V.O.)

And so, the Lord cleansed her. The chains fell away as to dust, and the burden of her flesh was lifted to the heavens.

Aelred carefully blows the wet ink dry. He studies the manuscript. A 'miracle' forever cemented into the books.

Gilbert just stands by the window, a weary silhouette against the dying light.

AELRED

A miracle, Father?

Gilbert comes to life, spinning to face Aelred.

GILBERT

The chains lying like shed skin
upon the straw, and her womb made
flat and silent as a tomb, shall
this be the greatest crime known to
all Christendom, or the lantern of
our Lord that never succumbeth to
the darkness?

AELRED

And she spoke of it?

GILBERT

Though she had crossed the Styx,
she was well by the hour of dawn to
receive Our Lord as the sun graces
the high altar.

Aelred just nods, and holds his tongue.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

You will bind this manuscript,
Brother. But you shall not show it to
anybody. It is not to be kept a
secret, but neither is it to be
published and glorified across the
parishes. Our Lord's miracles are
worked every day in the mud and the
blood of this earth. And thus there is
not need to make a Saint out of every
survivor. Do you understand?

AELRED

No, Father.

Gilbert sighs, complicity written into his stooped shoulders.

GILBERT

Now, I shall retire. You will do as I
request.

He moves towards the door.

AELRED

Yes, but Father- Is she well?
Sister Agnes?'

Gilbert pauses in the archway, not turning around. In his mind, he knows the truth he cannot speak.

That Agnes is already dead, having succumbed to the internal injuries sustained during her captivity and miscarriage.

But he says nothing.

GILBERT

You may come and visit our house in Watton someday, good Brother, and see her for yourself. Though I would advise against too much communion with the nuns. We have learnt much from this escapade, of course.

AELRED

(swallowing the bile in his throat)

Of course, Father. You are right. Please pardon my curiosity.

Gilbert turns back and blesses Aelred with the sign of the cross.

GILBERT

In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.

And then departs to his chambers, leaving Aelred alone in the scriptorium. He stares out at the darkening moors.

For the first time, we see just how pale and haunted is his youthful countenance. For he is a visionary.

But one who hath seen the terrifying face of God's kingdom on earth - nevertheless one called by the desires of his devotions.