



# A Wiser Mary

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Mary sat in the kitchen, her laptop open with her phone nearby. The wooden table's surface was covered with a turbulent sea of open textbooks and graphing sheets. Among the scholastic detritus stood several empty juice bottles like lighthouses, refracting the light from the fixture above.

It was late Sunday night. Her parents were off college hunting with her older brother, and she was comfortably home alone. Clad in fleece pajamas, she wearily crammed for her Monday geometry test.

Looking at the microwave clock, she groaned. It was one in the morning. To help her cope, she spied the toaster and began daydreaming about a bagel with cream cheese.

But then the air changed. It hummed with ionized energy as a vague figure stepped into the kitchen from the hall. Tall and seemingly human, its face sculpted into handsome features by an invisible force. Feathered wings rustled free from its back as leather armor, molded in Grecian decorum, emerged from its milky surface.

Completely formed, a pristine angel stood before her, sheathed sword at his side.

Handsome.

Regal.

Smiling.

As he reached a welcoming hand out to Mary, she deftly snatched up her phone, took several pictures of him, and frantically texted with her thumbs.

The angel's smile soured. "Ah, yes. The phone. No modern human can be without its comfort."

"I'm texting your photo to all my friends, so if they find my body in the river the police have a face to hunt." Her speech was crisp and as rapid as her darting thumbs. "Now get out of my house."

With a snap of his fingers, her phone screen blanked. Then shut off. "No curiosity, child?" His eyes were a gentle grey. "No sense of wonder at the Heavenly splendor before you?"

"Curiosity isn't the emotion I experience when a strange, full-grown man materializes in my kitchen late at night while my parents are away." Slowly

standing from the table, she walked to the toaster, head craned over her shoulder. She wouldn't let him out of her sight.

“But child! Blessed vessel! I come unto thee-”

Palm out, Mary snorted. “I'm gonna stop you right there. You aren't coming unto *anyone*.” She pointed a manicured finger forcefully down the hall. “The front door is behind you. Or you can ‘poof’ back to where you came from. Either way.”

“Mary, rejoice.” His voice quivered with a magnificent timber. The lights softened and the glassware sang. “Rejoice, for I am Gabriel. I deliver tidings. You are chosen by Him to carry his child. The next messiah, son of the Lord, is to be bestowed upon your virgin womb. God has commanded me with His own voice.”

She yanked a kitchen knife from the wooden block near the toaster. Flipping it tip first, she held it behind her head, ready to fly. “Come closer and you get a knife!”

Seeing Mary's wild, frantic eyes, the angel lowered his hands. “Mary. Sweet, Mary. You are favored by the Lord! The Lord is with you. Don't be afraid.”

“Afraid? I am pissed!” she seethed. “You think I won't do it? Some families go bowling. We throw axes at a sports bar!”

The angel was flummoxed. Breathing deep, he suppressed his frustration. “Now, Mary... you have found favor with God...” For a moment, the angel seemed to question such judgement. But he continued. “You will become pregnant, give birth to a son, and name him-”

The kitchen blade whistled by the angel's head, thunking into the drywall near his ear. Mary hoisted the wood block to her hip and drew another knife. “That was a warning shot. First off, I get pregnant on *my* timeline. I love my boyfriend and won't even sleep with *him* yet, so there is no way God is calling dibs on my ‘ute.’ Secondly, I get to name *whatever* pops out of me.” Her face scrunched. “And third, why would I have a kid with a dead-beat dad, anyways?”

Gabriel gasped. “Blasphemy!”

“Maybe, but is blasphemy worse than God ‘metooing’ a girl only to abandon her with the baby? I won't be that Mary.”

“But Mary is revered!” Gabriel's voice snorted with heat as his eyes glowed.

“Revered is what you call being famous for only your untouched cooter and watching your son, the light of your life, die horribly? Forsaken?”

Gabriel nearly stamped his foot in a tantrum. Realizing his elevated rage, he disciplined himself. Breathing deep, he released a soothing sigh. “Mary is indeed revered, noble above all women-”

“For the boy she gave.”

“Stop interrupting! Mary is charming, funny, and brilliant. You don’t know her,” Gabriel implored.

“You’re right, Gabe. I don’t know her. And why is that? Shall we talk about the women of the Bible? Because I’m not invited to Bible study anymore and I got questions.”

“No, I... no.”

“Right. Now, I’d like to put down this knife block and make a bagel. Want one? You’re Hebrew, right? We got schmear.”

Gabriel, stupefied, blinked.

“Come on,” Mary encouraged. “The power of cream cheesus compels you.”

“The power of the Most High will overshadow you!” Gabriel seethed through his teeth. “No more distractions. You have been called upon by our Lord! Therefore, the holy child-”

“Therefore, my friends will drive me to Planned Parenthood.”

Knuckles reddening on his sheathed sword’s hilt, Gabriel sputtered in disbelief. “You can’t do that!”

“In this state, I can. It went blue last year.” She slammed the knife block back down onto the counter. Violently pulling a cupboard door open, she fetched a pack of bagels.

Defeated, Gabriel’s head rocked back and his shoulders slumped. “Can’t you just... say ‘I am the Lord’s servant? Let everything you’ve said happen to me?’ You can just say that and I’ll leave.”

Opening the refrigerator door, Mary ducked in for cream cheese and butter. “Listen. I’m sure you’re a nice enough angel when you aren’t stalking poon for your dad or leveling cities, but I really am going to give this all a pass. I’ve got a geometry test tomorrow, and in three weeks I’m starting volleyball. Between all that, my boyfriend, and piano, I just don’t have the time even if I did want God to be my baby-daddy. Maybe check the underage girls in Texas or something. I’m sure a few would be delighted to take a break from their uncle’s fingering them so

God can squeeze on in. Oh! Or the Brighton's oldest daughter down the street. She's game for anything."

Gabriel's wings drooped. "The Brighton girl is an idiot."

"I know, right? Now, I've got... onion and chive, raisin, pumpernickel, poppy..."

Pulling a chair out from the table, Gabriel sat down, his wings slumped. "Poppy," he muttered. Utterly dejected, he gazed in despair at the kitchen table's wood grain.

"Good," Mary said, deftly cutting two bagels in half. "At least you'll have a full stomach when you tell God that 'no-nut November' came early this year."

The steel toaster crisped the bagels perfectly, filling the kitchen with a tantalizing aroma. While Mary scratched over each half with cream cheese, Gabriel's eyes wandered over her school work. She had meticulous handwriting in some spots, and frantic scribbles in others. There was a chaos to her materials, but also a focus toward understanding and practice. Every inch of each page was filled with graphed curves or color-coded highlights. No worksheet's real estate was wasted.

Gently she set down his warm bagel before him with a glass of chilled orange juice. She carried a similar snack to her own side of the table. Picking up a mechanical pencil, she clicked it and continued working on her current solution. Crumbs tapped the paper beneath her as she took her first crunchy bite.

"But... a child shall be born... to save you all."

While placing her ruler, Mary replied absently. "Didn't Christ already do that? A second child isn't needed. And if a second child *was* needed, then I guess Christ failed. And if he couldn't succeed, no one can."

Gabriel's eyes flickered with a moment of insight, followed by a snicker. A weight was off of him, and leaning on the kitchen table, he took his first bite of bagel.

They ate and sipped their orange juice in silence. After shuffling the crumbs loose from his fingertips onto the plate, Gabriel stood from the table.

"Thank you for the bagel, Mary."

"You're welcome." She capped a yellow highlighter to switch to a pink one. "Take your dishes to the sink, please."

Gabriel did so. "I'm sorry for disturbing you, Mary," he said gently.

She finally raised her eyes to meet the angel's. "Just text first if you're going to come by again, okay? I don't want to be playing video games on the couch with my boyfriend if you pop up again."

With a smirk, he nodded in agreement. Slipping back into the hallway, he faded out of both sight and sound.

"Very funny, Jesus." Gabriel said upon his return.

"My impression of Dad is flawless."