

Episode 2, *Stanton 2017*: “Mary”— by Joey Madia

Scene 1. St. Michael’s Teaching Hospital

[We hear the sounds of a hospital. Machinery, voices, gurneys being wheeled along hallways; then on the intercom system:]

INTERCOM: *Paging Dr. Daniels. Please report to the OR—stat. Paging Dr. Daniels.*

[sound of electric, sliding door opening and closing; sound of several babies, mewling, crying, cooing]

ANITA STILES (Head of Neonatal Nursing): Nurse Douglas, are you still here? Your shift ended over an hour ago.

MARGARET DOUGLAS: Nurse Stiles. I’m sorry I didn’t sign out. I’m here on my own time. I’m just checking on this little baby here. The one born just a few hours ago.

ANITA: You’ll have to be more specific. This is Neonatal after all.

MARGARET DOUGLAS: This one here. His mother is the sixteen year old, the one who looked so scared when she came in. Mary, I think.

ANITA: I haven’t a clue what they’re teaching in nursing school these days. You have no business getting involved personally with either the babies or their mothers. Single teenage mothers who won’t tell us anything about the father are far from unusual. What makes this one so special?

MARGARET: I assisted with delivery. The APGAR was fine, but there’s something about this baby that isn’t quite ... right.

ANITA: Are you a first-year nurse or an obstetrician? According to his chart, he’s been cleared by his doctor, who most certainly *is* an obstetrician. And the APGAR is more than fine. It’s perfect. Say your goodbyes to the baby, Nurse Douglas, and go home, before I write you up for ignoring proper procedure.

INTERCOM: *Nurse Stiles, please report to the Nurses’ Station. Nurse Stiles to the Nurses’ Station.*

[sound of the electronic sliding door opening]

ANITA: Are you coming, Nurse Douglas? Or shall I write you up while I’m there?

MARGARET: Just give me a minute. Like you said, to say goodbye.

ANITA: Very well. But you’d better be gone when I get back.

MARGARET: I will be. I promise.

Scene 2. The newsroom of *The Eastern Standard*. Editor in Chief, Maury Skinner

[we hear computer keyboards, phones ringing, overlapping voices in a large open room talking “news talk”]

SKINNER: Stanton! In my office. Immediately!

URIEL STANTON: You need me for something, sir?

SKINNER: Not particularly, Stanton. I just feel more secure with a rookie reporter by my side... Of course I need you for something! A baby barely five hours old has been kidnapped out of the neo-natal unit at St. Michael’s Teaching Hospital. It was last seen with a newbie nurse named Margaret Douglas. Now, get your carcass over there and cover it.

STANTON: You’re giving this story to me? But it’s my first day.

SKINNER: My philosophy is simple, Stanton. Throw the toddlers to the sharks. If you’re nothing but ballast I wanna know that on Day 1.

STANTON: I don’t even have my credentials yet.

SKINNER: Listen, kid, cause I’m only gonna say this about a thousand times—your great-grandfather may have co-founded this newspaper. Your father may be a bigshot over at the University, and you may have been tops in your class, but to me that all means NOTHING. To me you’re a twelve-year-old, pimply, flat-chested girl who somehow got invited to the senior prom... You got that?

STANTON: Yessir...

SKINNER: Good. HR’s got your credentials. Now get over to St. Mike’s and get that story!

STANTON: Yessir!

SKINNER: [*sotto voce*] Rookie.

Scene 3. St. Michael’s Teaching Hospital

INTERCOM: *Will Barbara Hall please report to fourth floor billing. Barbara Hall, please report to hospital billing.*

[sound of elevator door opening]

STANTON: Excuse me, nurse.

ANITA: Yes? Can I help you?

STANTON: Uriel Stanton. *The Eastern Standard*. City desk.

MALE VOICE: Nurse Stiles has no comment.

STANTON: Are you with the military? What is the military doing here?

MALE VOICE: Go back the way you came, sir.

STANTON: Listen, I'm here about the kidnapped infant. I just wanna talk to the nurse on duty when it happened.

MALE VOICE: I said, there's no comment. Don't make me escort you out of here.

STANTON: Okay, okay. I'm going.

MALE VOICE: Sergeant, I want the neo-natal unit secured! If another reporter gets through here, it'll be your ass!

STANTON: (as the elevator door closes) What the hell?

Scene 4. Outside the basement of St. Bartholomew's Catholic Church

[sound of knocking on a steel basement door]

FATHER JOE VICOLARE (An Italian-American priest in his late fifties) (speaking without opening the door): This building is closed.

MARGARET: Even to the possibilities?

FJ: Never to the possibilities.

[we hear several locks opening. The door opens and then closes]

FJ: Margaret. Welcome. And you've brought a baby! You want me to bless the child. Of course. Just let me get my things.

MARGARET: It's not a blessing this baby needs, Father Joe. It's an exorcism.

FJ: Then what I need, for now, is my cigarettes and wine. Sit Margaret, please.

[sounds of FJ lighting and inhaling a cigarette and pouring a glass of wine] I would offer you wine, but I haven't enough for us both, and I anticipate a long night.

MARGARET: That's fine, Father. One of us, I think, should be sober for this.

FJ: And it's good of you to volunteer. Now, tell me everything. From the beginning. Leave nothing out.

Scene 5. Outside of St. Michael's

[sound of traffic, ambulance approaching a block away, cell phone rings]

STANTON: Uriel Stanton.

SKINNER: Rookie. What's happening down there? My sources on the inside tell me there's Air Force, FBI, CIA swarming the place...

STANTON: I only got as far as the elevator, Maury. Then some Air Force lieutenant got in my face. I was about to interview a nurse...

SKINNER: It's doubtful she would have told you anything worth printing.

STANTON: I'll be back to the newsroom in ten minutes. Sorry, Maury...

SKINNER: You're gonna be if I see your sorry ass anywhere near this place before tomorrow. You've still got a story to chase. I got people on the inside kid, monitoring what's happening. Who they are, you don't need to know. Not yet. Now, put away your press pass and lay low near the hospital. I'll give you your next move within the hour.

[sound of disconnecting phone]

STANTON: Helluva first day, Stanton. Great grandpa would be proud...

Scene 6. The basement of St. Bartholomew's Catholic Church

[sound of baby softly crying]

MARGARET: Hush, little boy. It's gonna be alright.

FJ: There isn't much time, Margaret. [Sound of sirens]. The police are already sweeping the city. It's only a matter of time before they find you. Tell me why you've done such a risky thing.

MARGARET: I beg you, Father Vincolare—perform the exorcism first and then I will tell you all you need to know.

FJ: That's not how it works, my child. You know that. I did not flee prosecution by the Holy Church because I disregarded her rules. It's because I followed them too faithfully for the tastes of the Modernists. What signs have you seen in this infant to convince you he's possessed?

MARGARET: I only wish that I could articulate it for you, Father. It's a feeling. You have taught me well to intuit evil. Isn't that why I was chosen?

FJ: Indeed, it was.

MARGARET: Then you must trust me. His mother ... I believe she was a virgin. She could tell us nothing about the father because there *isn't* one. And this is not the Christ-child. I know that in my heart. So it must come from his dark brother, the terrible liar, Lucifer...

FJ: And you believe this as both a child of God and as his warrior?

MARGARET: I do.

FJ: Then I will get my things. You will find the *Rituale Romanum* on the shelf among the other sacred books. I must go in the other room and collect the rest of what I need. Open the door for no one—not even a fellow Whalewatcher. Do you understand?

MARGARET: I do.

[sound of the priest crossing the floor. A door on the other side of the room opens and closes]

MARGARET: Do not be afraid Little One. Father Vincolare will save your soul.

[she crosses the room and we hear her searching through a pile of books]

MARGARET: Here it is. The *Rituale Romanum*. [flipping through book] Chapter 13—The Rite of Exorcism.

[sound of sirens fast approaching. Screeching tires. A bullhorn:]

MAN'S VOICE: Margaret Douglas! We know you're in there, and that you have the baby with you. The building is surrounded. You have 10 seconds to give yourself up and then we will be forced to take you out of there by force. 10. 9. 8... [countdown continues under Margaret's action and lines]

[sound of Margaret running across the floor. Tries door that Father Joe left through. It is locked]

MARGARET: [pounding on the locked door]. Father Joe! Please, please let us in. Father Joe! Father Joe!

MAN'S VOICE: ...1. Time is up Ms. Douglas! You leave us no choice.

[sound of the door being broken in. sound of military boots, weapons being cocked, etc.]

MAN'S VOICE: Don't move! If any harm comes to that baby we'll drop you on the spot.

NURSE STILES: Margaret. Don't do anything foolish. These men are not kidding around. Let me have the baby—and for God's sake put down that book—and I'll do everything I can to see that you get the help you need.

MARGARET: Nurse Stiles? How did you find me so quickly?

NURSE STILES: Your fellow nurses are concerned for you. They know how devout your faith is, Margaret. Lord knows there aren't many churches in this God-forsaken city.

MARGARET: This child is possessed by evil. You all know it. Why else would the military be here?

NURSE STILES: This child's grandfather is a general in the United States Army. As you can see, he has extensive resources at his disposal. You would be wise to keep that in mind, Margaret. Now, give me the child.

[sound of more weapons being cocked]

MARGARET: Very well.

NURSE STILES: [as the baby begins to cry] Lieutenant, she's yours to do with what you must. I will see that the infant is returned to its mother.

MAN'S VOICE: You'll have a detail to escort you back to St. Michael's, ma'am. Sergeant, see to it. You men, take Nurse Douglas into custody. Put her in my Suburban. There are some people who want to talk to her.

MARGARET [as she's led away]: But Nurse Stiles! You said you'd help me! Nurse Stiles! There's something about that baby I *have* to tell you!

[sound of military moving outside the basement]

STANTON: Dammit, am I too late?

MAN'S VOICE: You're the kid from the *Eastern Standard*, right?

STANTON: My name's Uriel Stanton, lieutenant. Care to make a statement?

MAN'S VOICE: I'll make a statement, alright. A very plain and simple one. I don't know how you tracked us here so fast, Stanton. You've obviously got good contacts, but they're nowhere near powerful enough to save your ass if I decide to kick it, you hear me?

STANTON: Loud and clear.

MAN'S VOICE: There's no story here. A delusional nurse with a Jesus fixation thought she was doing humanity a service. She wasn't. Within the hour the baby will be back with his mother and all will be well. If you'll excuse me, I have someplace I need to be.

[sound of Lieutenant walking away]

STANTON [seeing the *Rituale Romanum* on the table]: Hmm... *The Rituale Romanum*. Chapter 13—Rites of Exorcism. Exorcism?...

Scene 7. Mary's apartment

[sound of a deadbolt being opened. Door opens]

MARY: Here we are, baby Christopher. This is your home.

[baby is cooing. sound of door closing. Several locks being locked]

MARY: I know it's not much, but at least we have each other. And the police will be outside 24 hours a day so nothing else bad can happen to you. No one's gonna take you from me ever again. You wanna go to sleep? I have your crib all ready for you. [enters another room] There you go. Sings:

“Lullaby and good night!
Dream of Paradise bright
While near thee, at hand
The angels shall stand
If God will, thou shalt wake
When the morning doth break
If God will, thou shalt wake
When the morning doth break”

Good night, baby Christopher. Sweet dreams.

[we hear the door close; the baby is cooing, as contented baby's will. Then, the cooing slowly but surely begins to change into something slightly sinister, then

deeper and more frightening, until, finally, we are left with the sounds of something not of this world.]

End