



Bloody Mary

Myth or Demonic Spirit?

by Patty A. Wilson

I was about ten years old when I first heard of Bloody Mary. Two of the teen-aged girls on the bus were talking in the seat behind mine. I knew that it was not polite to eavesdrop, but they were loud and I could not help hearing. Besides, when I heard the words "Bloody Mary" and "spirit," my ears just seemed to prick up despite themselves.

Wendy was telling Susan about the sleepover that she had hosted the previous Saturday, and about the séance that she and the other girls had held. Wendy claimed that, one by one, they had gone into her bathroom and turned off the lights. They had chanted "Bloody Mary" several times. Not all of the girls saw Bloody Mary, but Wendy claimed that she had seen her.

Historical Background

Throughout my teenage years I would come to learn more about the elusive Bloody Mary. The general consensus is that she was nothing more than an urban legend created to amuse bored teenagers. However, I grew up to become a writer and historian, and I realized that many myths and folk stories have a kernel of truth in them. Every so often I'd revisit the theme of Bloody Mary. I could not help but wonder if there was any truth to that old tale. Before I could learn that, I would have to trace back the myth and see where it led.

The most likely historical origin for the Bloody Mary legend is the life of Mary Stuart (known as Mary, Queen of Scots), antagonist of England's Elizabeth I. Mary

was ruler of Scotland and became queen of France by marriage, but her ambitions did not stop there; she also desired the throne of England. She was convicted of murder after her first husband died, but she was to be married two more times. Mary was involved in various plots and intrigues against Elizabeth, and caused many deaths before her own execution in 1587.

Mary I of England reigned from 1553 to 1558, and she, too, has been associated with the name Bloody Mary. In her bloody attempts to bring Catholicism back to England, she had more than 300 people burned at the stake for heresy, and countless others persecuted for their beliefs.

Another name associated with Bloody Mary is that of Mary Worth, who was allegedly in a terrible accident sometime in the 19th century. Her face was horribly disfigured and covered with blood as she died. Apparently, her awful death was caused by the cruelty of some children. The burning anger she felt at the time of her death allowed her to return as a demon or evil spirit. As Bloody Mary, Mary Worth is believed to seek revenge against young people. They are injured or cursed to death by viewing Mary's torn and bloody face.

A woman named Mary Magdalene is also associated with Bloody Mary—not the Mary Magdalene of the Bible, but rather a woman who was accused of witchcraft and killed violently as a result. Some sources indicate that her accusers were children. It is again retribution that brings Mary Magdalene back to injure or kill young people who dare to call her name.



Mary, Queen of Scots.

Mexican Legends

In some parts of the world, Bloody Mary is associated with La Llorona, an evil spirit from Hispanic culture. She supposedly was a beautiful young noble widow named Maria who fell in love with a handsome young man from a good family in Mexico. The man used Maria badly, even though he knew that she loved him with all of her heart. Maria had two small children from her first marriage, and the young man cited the children as the reason he could not marry her.

The young widow eventually heard that her lover was about to marry someone else. Maria snuck into the villa and had a confrontation with the young man. Again, he cast her off, telling her he would never raise another man's children.

with a mirror. You must chant Bloody Mary's name and call her forth. Some people believe that for Bloody Mary to come you must call her three times, six times, or thirteen times. In fact, nearly every number from 3 to 100 times been given for conjuring up Bloody Mary.

Opinions differ when it comes to how many people may be in the room. Some insist that Bloody Mary will only appear if you are alone. Others believe that she will come to small groups as well. Some insist that this must be done at the stroke of midnight while others claim that only a darkened room and mirror are required.

Most sources indicate that Bloody Mary will only appear to young people, but that does not always seem to be true. I have spoken to people who were in college when they decided to conjure her up. Some of them succeeded and were sorry that they had done so.

Mirrors or other reflective surfaces are always used in the ritual. Bloody Mary will not come forth unless she is provided with a reflective surface through which she can pass. Mirrors are often associated with souls, ghosts, spirits, and death. Some ancient cultures shunned mirrors because they were believed to reflect the human soul. Even today in the American South, it is believed that mirrors must be covered so that the soul of a loved one does not get trapped in them upon death.



Virginia Zuri as "La Malinche" in the 1933 Mexican film *La Llorona*.

Other legends claim that mirrors should not be allowed in rooms where people are ill because their souls are vulnerable at those times and can be trapped in the looking glass. In rural areas it was once believed that one should not gaze into a mirror by firelight or at night lest you see spirits looking back at you and unwittingly release them.

Encounters Related

Does Bloody Mary really exist? Is she an historical figure, a figment of overactive imaginations, or a demonic entity that preys upon young people and uses their innate curiosity against them?

I began asking around for people who have called up Bloody Mary and lived to tell the tale. Their stories gave me pause. Consider them before we go on:

"My sister went to a slumber party when she was 11 years old and she and the

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other girls went to the bathroom at midnight and shut the door. One of the girls had a flashlight, so they turned off all the other lights. They chanted 13 times 'Bloody Mary,' and suddenly they saw a red light way down deep in the mirror. The girls got frightened when they saw the light, and they began to scream and cry. The mother who was hosting the party heard them and caught them. She growled them for such foolishness, but for years afterward my sister was haunted by what she had seen. I don't mean that she was haunted like she couldn't stop thinking about it, but rather that she was really haunted. Things would move in her bedroom, and she'd scream at night. My mom always thought it was imagination until one afternoon at lunch a bowl picked itself up and flung itself at my sister from the counter. My sister and I were across the room. There was no way that we could have had any part in it. Mom took my sister to church to be prayed over many times. Eventually the haunting seemed to slow down and stop as she grew up."—Amy

"We were at Church camp of all things, and were telling ghost stories in our room. Some of the girls wanted to do Bloody Mary and see her. I went along, but I chickened out at the bathroom door. I don't know why, but I just felt that I shouldn't be in there. Anyhow, there were six girls in the bathroom—including two from the room across the hall. They did the Bloody Mary thing, and suddenly I heard screams and giggles, and the girls came running back.

A → TIME

Most of them were laughing because they didn't see anything. However, a girl named Sandy did see something. She was quiet and crying. She was shaking. The other girls teased her about being a baby and a wimp. They said that she had imagined it all. Three days later they weren't laughing anymore. Sandy died in a bus accident on the way home from camp. She was the only one to see that Bloody Mary thing and she was the only one on the bus to die. Might be a coincidence, but..."—Leslie

"We were at football camp when I was about 16 years old. The older guys were psyching out the younger ones with those stories, and then they chucked the young kids in the bathroom and slammed the door after shouting for Bloody Mary several times. The little ones screamed and bawled. They were really frightened. I told my friend that it wasn't funny and that they should let the boys out. To show them that it was just a joke, my friend and I went into the bathroom, shut the door and did that Bloody Mary thing. You know, turn off the lights, call Bloody Mary three times and wait. Suddenly there was this pain in my back and side. It started as a burning and got worse. I finally yelped as it burned more and more. My friend was in front of me, and I was in the back. There was no one behind me because the door was closed. I wanted to get the h— out of there. I opened the door and flipped on the lights. I pulled up my shirt and saw long, thin scratches on my back and side. It looked like a woman's fingernails had raked me

Maria went home and hacked her children to death in a paroxysm of anger and insanity. Then, still covered in their blood, she returned to the villa. The sounds of the wedding party told Maria that the young man had already married her rival. Wild with grief, she forced her way past the gates, soon finding herself at the edge of the wedding party. Maria screamed out her deeds to her lover in the hopes that he would come to her yet. The guests were horrified.

Maria was quickly tried for her crimes and executed. The horror of her deeds, the grief for her children, and the loss of her lover had unhinged her mind. Upon her death, Maria became an evil spirit and a harbinger of death. Maria, as La Llorona, is seen just prior to the death of children. In some places, she is said to appear in the water or in quiet places to talk children into dangerous situations. Once summoned, Maria will not go back into the spirit world without a young soul to accompany her, or without at least drawing blood.

An older legend of Mexico might actually be the genesis for the La Llorona legend. It is said that when Hernan Cortez came to Mexico in 1519 he took a young native woman named La Malinche as his lover. She believed that she was his wife and she gave him three children. La Malinche learned of her husband's desire to overtake her homeland and destroy her culture, but her love was so great and her faith in her husband so strong that she gave him information that enabled Cortez to conquer her land and bring her own people into

submission.

Eventually Cortez returned home to marry a Spanish woman, and he left La Malinche without a thought. Her treachery was known, and people shunned her and the children. Life became unbearable. La Malinche took her children to the ocean and drowned them before she, too, filled her lungs with water.

After their deaths, stories began to be whispered of a crying woman named La Llorona who mourned children's deaths, or warned of them.

Wife of Satan?

It is believed by some that Bloody Mary is Satan's spouse. Good and evil seem to follow similar paths. As Mary gave birth to the son of God, so, too, did another woman give birth to Satan's child. This woman is known in literature as Anti-Mary. Mary, the mother of Christ, became revered in history and is believed by many to be a special spirit capable of granting healing and help. The woman who gave birth to Satan's spawn became a spirit who harms and kills, bringing death and destruction to young people. She always exacts the price of a life or blood when called forth. As Mary reaches out to people with compassion and love, Anti-Mary is the opposite. She is the darkness to the light of the Biblical Mary.

The Ritual

So how does one call up Bloody Mary? First you must lock yourself in a dark room