

Mary Jekyll stared down at her mother's coffin.

*"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord."*

The rain had started again. Not a proper rain, but the dreary, interminable drizzle that meant spring in London.

"Put up your umbrella, my dear, or you'll get wet," said Mrs. Poole.

Mary put up her umbrella, without much caring whether she would get wet or not. There they all were, standing by a rectangular hole in the ground, in the gray churchyard of St. Marylebone. Reverend Whittaker, reading from the prayer book. Nurse Adams looking grim, but then didn't she always? Cook wiping her nose with a handkerchief. Enid, the parlormaid, sobbing on Joseph's shoulder. In part of her mind, the part that was used to paying bills and discussing the housekeeping with Mrs. Poole, Mary thought, *I will have to speak to Enid about overfamiliarity with a footman*. Alice, the scullery maid, was holding Mrs. Poole's hand. She looked pale and solemn, but again, didn't she always?

*"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labors."*

At the bottom of that rectangular hole was a coffin, and in that coffin lay her mother, in the blue silk wedding dress that matched the color of her eyes, forever closed now. When Mary and Mrs. Poole had put it on her, they realized how emaciated she had become over the last few weeks. Mary herself had combed her mother's gray hair, still streaked with gold, and arranged it over the thin shoulders.

*"For so thou didst ordain when thou createdst me, saying, dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. All we go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia."*

"Alleluia," came the chorus, from Mrs. Poole, and Nurse Adams, and Cook, and Joseph, and Alice. Enid continued to sob.

"Alleluia," said Mary a moment later, as though out of turn.

She handed her umbrella to Mrs. Poole, then took off her gloves. She knelt by the grave and scooped a handful of dirt, scattering it over the coffin. She could hear small pebbles hit, sharper than the soft patter of rain. The afternoon, the sexton would cover it properly and there would be only a mound, until the headstone arrived.

*Ernestine Jekyll, Beloved Wife and Mother*

Well, at least it was partly true.