

Philadelphia at night was like a bruised fruit. One need only bite its flesh to find the rot.

On Market Street, the smell of fresh bread from the day had given way to the opium dealer's cart of night. Men ducked into doorways with women not their wives, and young girls no older than Molly sold themselves for a quarter. And everywhere was the dank, fecund smell of the river.

The carriage plunged deeper into the city's heart. As the neighborhoods became poorer, the mask of good health fell completely away. Chamber pots splashed out windows onto snow-packed streets, and eyes peeked from shadows. Twice, Molly heard a scream.

How easy it would be to simply disappear into this hell and have no one look for you again.

How easy for the Knifeman to find you . . .

The horses slowed, and Molly felt a chill work its way up her spine. The ice-covered trees disappeared, revealing a large snowy expanse, bumps like rotten teeth rising on its hills.

They were parked at the gates of a cemetery. Opening the door, Tom helped her outside.

"Who am I to be tonight?"

"You're here to claim your sister. You can even give her a name if it'll make it easier. Gertrude. Or Jane or Victoria, for all I care."

"All right, I have a sister. And?"

"And you're to ask the man inside for her body. I'll go round and get the wagon to collect her. The boys working for me have it now on another run, but they should be here shortly."

Molly stood perfectly still.

"Give me your coat," Tom said. "If you look like a lady, they won't ask as many questions."

She did as he asked, shivering as the freezing air hit her skin.

"The corpse is female, aged sixteen to twenty, brown hair, with a mark above her lip. She'll be waiting for burial in the paupers' grave. They like to get a good bunch of 'em together before they dig."

Her stomach clenched.

"Look," said Tom. "There's some folks who get put off by it. Say keeping a corpse from being buried, you're dooming them to hell. Me, I think it's a job. Somebody's got to give the sawbones something to practice on, and your aunt makes sure we do it respectful-like, as much as we can."

"Sawbones?"

"The doctors. I don't suppose you'd want them practicing their skills on living folk, would you now? All medical students have to dissect a body to graduate. They cut 'em up and look for a prize, like kids with a king cake. The only legal way to get one is to wait for a criminal to be executed, and there ain't close to enough of those."

He peered at Molly, his one good eye glowing in the moonlight. "What about you? Are you afraid of the devil?"

She thought of Kitty, the priest who had condemned her simply for how she'd been born. Of Edgar, first using Kitty and then cutting off a piece of her to keep.

"I don't believe in the devil," said Molly. "It's people who are bad."

"Now, there's a girl." Tom gave her a half smile. "Perhaps you'll prove your aunt right after all."

"What about the dead girl's family?" Molly asked. "The real one? What will they do when they can't find her?"

Tom scoffed. "Ain't no families of the ones we take. Tomorrow, the gravedigger will throw her in the ground and cover her up with a half dozen like her, and that will be that. The only way she'll do anybody any good is if you get to her first."

He waited, tongue poking nervously at the edge of his lip, as if he expected Molly to collapse in a faint. "You could always quit," he said, sounding almost hopeful.

She let the numbness that circled her heart freeze the rest of her.

And when she answered, her voice was steady. "Tell me what I need to do."

*Her name is Mary.*

Molly spoke the words over again to herself as she approached the groundskeeper's shack, her hands clutching at the skirt of her fine dress, soaking it with sweat.

*Mary.*

She had chosen the moniker of a woman the orphanage priest had spent an entire sermon condemning. She had never forgotten it, though the Mass had been years ago. Mary Shelley, the priest had told them, was a godless woman who'd written a godless book about a monster. Clearly, said the priest, a female's mind twists and rots when not focused solely on family and children; her demonic book was the spawn of a too-worldly woman. But Molly had not cared. She'd thought only how wonderful it must be to earn money for something that you'd done with your own hands and for no other reason than it pleased you.

*Mary.*

The name became a story, a person, a truth.

*Her name is Mary, and I loved her very much.*

She took a deep breath and rapped twice at the groundskeeper's door. The cold wood stung her knuckles. From inside came the scrape of a chair and the stomp of a booted foot hitting the floor.

"Who's there?"

The door swung wide.

Molly moved the skirt of her dress aside in an awkward curtsy. "Sir." She did not have to pretend her fear. "I am sorry to disturb you so late. Only . . ." Her throat tightened, so that she could barely finish the sentence. "My sister. I think she is dead. Her name was Mary, and I loved her very much."

The groundskeeper studied Molly, inch by inch, reading her gown as he might a hand at the card table. Behind him, a small fire flickered in the stove. Molly saw the remains of the man's supper on the table — a half-eaten loaf of bread and the moldy rind of a cheese.

"Your sister, eh? And I suppose she's out in the deadhouse."

Molly's heart hammered. "Yes, sir." She felt as if this man could see through the holes in her clumsily stitched lies as clearly as if they were made of tatting lace. "That is, I don't know if she is or isn't, but only there was word of it, from a friend."

The groundskeeper lifted a filthy nail to pick a bit of rind from his teeth. "A friend, eh? He ain't an ugly fellow with a necklace, is he?"

"Sir?"

Seeing her genuine confusion, he relented. "No, I don't guess you'd be the type to run with him. Not dressed like that." He stepped aside, fingering a ring of keys at his belt. "Come in out of the cold. You'll have to excuse my manners. We ain't used to true friends of the dead these days."

Molly followed him into the closed confines of the room, the air thick with the smell of smoke and unwashed body.

"You must admit it's strange, a lady coming in here in the middle of the night." He gave her a final, penetrating stare.

"I was afraid the grave robbers would get her," Molly said quickly. "There's tales of them preying on folks all over the city. I came as soon as I could."

He grunted. The groundskeeper was an imposing figure. He was tall and thick-muscled, arms like knotted tree stumps bulging through his jacket. But it was his eyes that scared her. She felt the cold prick of them through her clothes.

"What did she look like, your sister?"

"Brown hair, well-formed, a birthmark just above her lip," Molly said, reciting Tom's carefully memorized description.

"Aye, we might have her at that," the groundskeeper allowed. "Pretty girl."

Molly nodded demurely. "Yes. Mary was kind and sweet."

"Not so sweet anymore, I think." He leered, waiting for her to rise to the bait, but Molly pursed her lips closed.

Lifting a lantern from the table, he sighed. "All right. Let's go have a look."

They picked their way through the graves, the wind pushing the lantern's flame into a dance. Around them, the snowy graveyard harbored no sound, and Molly wondered at its stillness. Surely, not everything here could be dead. Where were the live things whispering in the dark?

"Here we are." He lifted the lantern and leaned into the door of a stone building, its walls a mausoleum. Ugly cherubs perched on top, their wrinkled baby faces aged beyond time. "You're shaking."

“I’m frightened.”

It was easier, Molly had found, to couch a lie in honesty.

At the hotel, she’d pretended to be a confident married woman. Here, she let herself be the terrified girl she really was.

“There’s no need to be afraid.” He hawked a great wad of spit onto the ground, and she watched it hit, sluglike, bending the frosted grass. “The dead can’t hurt ya.”

The door to the deadhouse groaned open. Inside was nothing but shadows.

“You need me to go in with you?” he asked.

“No, I can manage.”

She used her hands to feel her way inside. The walls were as frigid as a butcher’s locker, trapping the winter’s freeze. But here, instead of meat hung neatly on hooks, the flesh was laid out on the earth, bodies stacked awkwardly one on top of the other.

“She’ll be on your right,” the groundskeeper called, and Molly heard amusement in his voice. He seemed to be enjoying her discomfort, one of the men who used the small bit of power he was given to make others feel less.

“I’ll need a light.”

He handed his lantern through the door, smirking.

Snatching it, she nearly tripped on a well-worn black boot, a foot still inside.

Swallowing back the bile that rose in her throat, Molly stepped over the body and began down the line. Covers had been carelessly thrown over most of the dead, oiled canvas cloths that could be easily washed off and reused. Limbs peeked out from beneath—a hand here, a leg there.

Steeling herself, she pulled back the first sheet.

A boy’s face stared at her, eyes bulging, lips purple with swelling. He could be no more than ten. She choked down a scream.

Outside, the hiss of a match sounded, followed by the groundskeeper’s chuckle. “You all right in there?”

“I’m fine.” If her voice was unsteady, all the better. So would a grieving sister’s be.

Molly moved to the next body. This one was not so decomposed, the face still full of a grim kind of life. But it was a man’s face, not the one she needed.

The next body was too mangled to tell gender or age.

Then, from the shadows, she caught the pale flash of a white wrist against the dirt. Setting the lantern down, she knelt. With a gentle hand, she pulled back the sheet.

A girl stared up at her, brown eyes as clear as a first-day fish at market.

Molly reached out to touch the face, sure that she was still alive.

But her fingers met cold flesh, the cheek rubbery beneath her touch. Along the girl's mouth was a cluster of sores and a small birthmark.

"You find her?"

Molly jumped back, nearly knocking into the groundskeeper, who had unexpectedly appeared behind her. "Yes," she managed. "This is her."

"A pity, when they go so young." The man nudged the body with his boot.

"Leave her be."

"Your sister, did ya say?" The groundskeeper peered at her through the dark. "What was her name again?"

"Mary." Molly's mouth was dry. "I loved her very much."

She could do this. Had to do this if she wanted to prove herself capable enough to remain at Ava's and find Edgar. Her heart sped.

The groundskeeper removed the smoking pipe from his mouth and dumped its ashes inches from the corpse's dress.

"Have some respect!" She felt strangely confident.

The groundskeeper took hold of Molly's arm. "Now see here . . ."

A shadow appeared in the doorway behind them.

"Tom!" Molly said with relief.

But it was not Tom.

Even before he spoke, Molly could see that. The shadow was huge, larger than the groundskeeper by a head. When he moved, a clinking sound followed, like a child's rattle.

"Who's she?" His voice was deep and graveled, like rocks knocking against a can. He stepped into the lantern's glow, and Molly gasped.

This was not a man but a nightmare.

His suit hung from his body in tattered black strips, as if he had stepped from the grave himself. Looped over his bare neck hung a long necklace, its chain strung with tiny bits of glowing white.

"Thought you might turn up," the groundskeeper said. He yanked Molly forward. "Allow me to introduce you. Girl, meet the Tooth Fairy."