

Bring Out Your Dead

Mary saw the sun shine down on the city, through the dirty window. People bustled along the streets. Children played in groups. It seemed like a whole different world. But the window was the wall of a prison. In Mary's reflection, her unkempt red hair was a mess of curls, her cheeks puffy with tears, and her green eyes dim and subdued. Her small frame was shrunken in on itself with the weight of sorrow. The life she knew was over.

“Mary Stewart! Are you listening to me? Come along child.”

“Yes, ma'am.”

“You may refer to me as Mother, or Mother Celeste.”

“Yes, Mother Celeste.”

Mother Celeste started walking down the hallway on the second floor of the orphanage and Mary had no choice but to follow. Mother Celeste had grey hair in a bun and a sharp nose. She would brook no nonsense.

“Now, if you have some blessing, a family will eventually take you in, but being eleven years already, you're old for most families. It's the little ones who are usually adopted.”

“Yes, Mother Celeste.”

Mary had already been shown the hall on the first floor; it was a huge room full of tables where she would eat her three meals a day in the company of strangers. The hallway on the second floor, where she was now, had one door on either side. Each opened up to a large room full of beds. After looking through both, Mother Celeste took Mary through the door on the right.

“If nobody takes you, you will stay with us until your eighteenth birthday, at which time you may leave, or join us to take care of the other children.”

“Yes, Mother Celeste.”

They followed a row of beds to the end of the room and stopped. The last bed was only a couple feet away from another dirty window. The overhang from the roof of the orphanage blocked the sun from shining in.

“Here is your bed. Dinner is in one hour. You will hear a bell. Do not be late.”

“Yes, Mother Celeste.”

Mary lay down on her new bed, as many other young girls must have done over the years and cried.

Fredrick sat up in bed. His short brown hair was a wavy mess from sleeping. His brown eyes scanned the room for what had woke him from his dream. His mind was still running over the dream. *The phone*. He jumped out of bed and grabbed the phone. “Hello?”

“Fred, it’s ten in the morning. Were you still asleep?”

“Actually dad, it’s nine in the morning here, and I don’t have class until eleven thirty, so yes, I was still asleep.” Fred’s father was a time zone away in Banff, Alberta.

“Well get your lazy ass out of bed and talk to your old man.”

“Yeah, yeah, I am. But guess what, I had a crazy dream last night. I was that little girl again, Mary.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Remember when I was little I used to have recurring dreams about being a little girl named Mary? She lived in England in the past.” Fredrick’s mother used to deal with the dreams he had, not his father.

“I vaguely remember. Didn’t they stop about ten years ago?”

“Yes. That’s why I was surprised that it happened again. She’s older now. Eleven. And her parents are dead. She’s in an orphanage.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing son. It’s probably just because it’s getting close to the anniversary of when your mother passed away.”

Fred didn’t want to think about that, so he changed the subject. “What’s new with the research?”

Fredrick’s mother passed away five years ago. She died of Hepatitis C. Since then Fredrick’s father immersed himself more into his work. Fredrick assumed he was trying to save the world, because he couldn’t save his wife. Fred wanted to save the world too, but he wasn’t sure if biogenetic research was the way to go.

“You know I can’t talk to you about that.”

“Not even your own son? Your own flesh and blood?”

Even though his dad’s research is usually “top secret”, Fred could usually count on his father telling him generally what it’s about.

“Not this time, son.”

“Creating super killers or something?”

“No, no. We’re trying to save lives, not destroy them.”

“Funded by the military?”

“That’s not the point. It’s all for our protection. We want to be ready if, or when the biological wars start. There’s always a whack job who figures in order to rule the world, he just has to kill everyone in it.”

“You guys figure if you can’t beat ‘em, at least destroy the world ahead of them.”

“Fredrick!”

“I’m just kidding dad. I’m sure your research is to create antidotes and vaccines or something saviour-iffic like that.”

“Enough about my work. How’s college going?”

Fred was born in Nanaimo, BC although he travelled around a lot with his dad’s work. That’s why he had decided to attend Malaspina University - College. “College is fine. Midterms are just finished. I did well.

“Have you settled on a major yet?”

“I haven’t narrowed it down. I left a lot of doors open in the sciences, but I don’t know which one to go through.”

“You better get off your ass and choose. Time’s running out. And speaking of choosing, you know we could use more geneticists.”

“Subtle dad. I have a couple months before registering for next year. I’ll figure it out by then.” Fred wasn’t sure if he wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps. He wanted to create his own path and fame. “Anyways dad, was there a reason you called, or was it just to wake me up?”

“I’m coming out to see you, so we can spend some time together. I’ll be there in a few weeks, sometime around the twenty-third. I just have a couple things I have to wrap up in here first. I have two weeks vacation, so we can do whatever you want.”

“That’s great dad, can’t wait to see you again.”

“Good. I’ll call you and tell you when my flight will be getting in. I have to go. More “not so secret” experiments to take care of. I love you son.”

“I love you too dad.”

Shit. I gotta start getting ready for class.

“Hey Freddy!” Nicole called from across the lawn. Nicole was a year older than Fredrick, but only in her second year as well. They’d had a couple of first year classes together, and were in second year math and chemistry. She had curly brown hair down to her shoulders, a thin athletic frame, and stood a few inches shorter than Fred. Her eyes were green and piercing with smooth features rounding out her face. In essence, Fredrick found her breathtaking. But they were just friends. Nicole had a boyfriend when they met, and Fredrick hadn’t found the right moment to brooch the ever-dangerous subject in the months since the break-up.

“Hey Nikki. What’s up?” Fred walked across the lawn to Nicole. She wasn’t small, but next to Fred she looked it. He was six feet tall and close to two hundred pounds. He played a lot of sports, so he was in good shape.

“I thought you were a no-show. I was about to head up to class without you.” She smiled and Fredrick lost his witty comeback.

“My dad called. Threw my whole routine off.”

“Yeah, I hear talking can do that to some people. How is your dad?” Nicole had given Fredrick no chance to retort.

“He’s good. You know, fiddling with this, messing with that.” Fredrick had told Nicole in a round about way what his father did for a living.

“It would be cool to play God like that. Do it right and you could save the world. One big screw up and you could destroy it. The rush must be amazing.” Nicole was more intense than Fredrick. She liked the highs and lows of life. Fredrick preferred an unchanging mundaness.

“If you say so. I prefer leaving the God-Playing up to God... providing he exists.”

“How can you not believe in God? Just look around you.” Nicole and Fred had had this argument many times.

Fredrick looked around for a minute and then said, “What? I don’t see anything special. And definitely nothing that can’t be explained by science.” Nicole wasn’t a diehard Christian, but she went to church a few times a year, Easter, Christmas, and an occasional Sunday. She was of the mind that you can worship God perfectly well from your own home. One thing she hated though was people who said that life could be explained through science. Which is why Fred always brings it up.

“Science. I’ve taken all these sciences you speak of, and though they explain a lot, they leave a lot more unexplained.”

Fredrick wasn’t really in the mood to argue about the existence of God. “That’s where the aliens come into it.” Once Fredrick brought up aliens, Nicole wouldn’t bother arguing anymore. It was kind of an unspoken sign to let the argument drop.

“Oh shut up. You think everything is caused by aliens.”

“Yeah well, if the government would let us know what’s really going on...”

“We’re late for class. Lets go.” Nicole picked up her pace towards the stairs.

Fred was dreaming again. He was inside Mary’s head looking out through her eyes. He didn’t realize it was dream; he *was* Mary.

Mary didn’t like being an orphan. The other children would seldom even talk to her. She hadn’t tried to be accepted. She missed her parents, and often didn’t feel like eating at meal

times. She just sat for hours staring out the window on the second floor near her bed. There were more children than chores, so Mary was left to herself every second day. She gazed at the street below and dreamed of a better life. A man in the street caught her attention. He was tall and blonde, and wore a long black jacket that reached his ankles. Mary lost sight of him as he entered the house across the street. She wished *she* were free to go wherever she wanted. The sun outside was in contrast to the dreary light that seeped into the room. It mirrored Mary's heart. Shadowed on the inside looking out at a bright world.

Flash

The world shifted in a blinding light and the dream changed. As Fred's / Mary's eyes re-adjusted, they looked out the window. The house across the street was boarded up now. The people had all died. Everyone was dying. Some of the other children had caught the plague. They were kept apart in the east corner of the room, still only thirty feet from Mary's bed. They looked half dead, pale and covered in sweat. They had boils on their thighs and arms. Occasionally they would cough up blood. A little boy named Kenny had a purple colour to his skin. He looked dead already as he lay in his bed unconscious. He had been running and playing the day before. Mary didn't need to be told to stay as far away from the sick children as she could. Now more than ever she wished she could escape out into the bright sunny world and never look back.

Flash

The world shifted again. Almost all of the children and most of the sisters were now either sick in bed, or dead. It was only four days since Kenny had gotten sick, and three since he died. Mary was one of the few who hadn't gotten ill yet. She avoided the other children as she always had and prayed to God to save her. In her heart she didn't believe He would. Why would God

waste a miracle on a little orphan girl? There were no more children playing in the streets below. The few people who were wandering the streets stayed as far away from one another as possible.

Mary looked up from her window as the door opened at the end of the room. A man walked in. He was over seven feet tall, with long blonde hair, and a black coat that almost reached the floor. His arms were as big as Mary's head and his shoulders were as wide as a house. He could crush Mary with his hands if he wanted to, and Mary was afraid he might. His face was hard and unsmiling, and his eyes were not normal. They were completely black, even where the white should have been, pools of darkness. He frightened Mary so much when he looked at her, she let loose her bladder.

The man walked over to a young girl's bed and touched her on the forehead. A mark was left there for a minute and then seemed to sink into her skin. The man then looked back towards Mary and started walking towards her. "Mary Stewart?"

Mary screamed and ran. She skirted around the man and out into the hall. Mary decided it was time to get away. She didn't know if she could survive in the streets with no food or shelter, but she knew if she stayed, she would die. She ran down the stairs as the man in black came into the hall behind her. Mary ran out the front door and started running down the nearly deserted street. The people she passed shrunk back in fear. Some of them wore bird masks and lenses with a hat and long coat walking briskly down the street. Mary wasn't sure that she was seeing straight. She ran until she could run no longer and collapsed. She hoped the man in black hadn't been able to keep up. Mary fell asleep from exhaustion in the corner of a doorway.

Mr. Malone was an ex-cop that had made a new career in finding people. Not always in the flesh. Fred had decided contacted Mr. Malone shortly after the first recent dream he had had of

Mary. He wanted to find out if Mary had been a real person, or just a figment of his imagination. That was just over a week ago.

Fred and Nicole walked into Mr. Malone's office. "Thanks for coming with me Nicole," Fred said.

"No problem. I didn't feel like going to class anyways."

Fred checked in with the secretary who was distractedly listening to her radio, and he and Nicole sat on the couch to wait.

Fred said, "I dreamt about her again last night."

"The night before your appointment? Ironic... Think she's real?"

"I don't know." Fred stared off at nothing.

Nicole waited for Fred to tell her about the dream, but got impatient quickly and asked, "So what was the dream about this time?"

Fred focussed and looked at Nicole. "It was strange. It was more recent than the last one, but only by a couple weeks as far as I could tell. It jumped around a little, almost like a movie would. People were dying from some kind of disease or plague."

Nicole said, "You think it's around the Middle Ages right?"

"Yes."

"Well, if it really is the past, then it could be the Bubonic Plague. Black Death. But why are *you* dreaming about it?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's a past life, or a psychic residue."

Nicole frowned. "You believe in past lives and psychic residues, but you don't believe in God?" Nicole was open to past lives and psychic powers; she just believed they came from a higher source.

Fred smiled at her. “Past lives and psychic abilities are human possibilities. The human mind is capable of a lot more than we give it credit for. It can be explained by science. Or at least parascience.”

Nicole looked skeptical. “Parascience? Is that even a word?”

“I don’t know. It should be. Paranormal science.”

Fred often made up words. They were usually words that could exist, or even should exist, but nobody had ever thought of using them before. He had lost marks on English papers for words like unrealism, but it didn’t stop him from using them. Nicole responded to his original statement. “Yeah, well, God is capable of a lot more than you give *Him* credit for. How does your science explain life starting in the first place?”

“Maybe-

Whatever Fred was going to say was cut off by Mr. Malone’s secretary. “Fredrick? Mr. Malone will see you now.”

Mr. Malone was in his forties, with grey-streaked brown hair, a salt and pepper beard, and a hard angular face. He looked like the kind of cop who would always play the bad cop in ‘good cop, bad cop’, but from what Fred could tell by speaking with him on the phone, he was a kind and gentle man.

Mr. Malone was smiling as he greeted them. “Hello Fred, sit down, sit down, and who is your lovely girl here?”

Nicole blushed and reached her hand across the desk. “I am a friend of Fred’s. My name is Nicole.”

“What a pretty name for a lovely girl.” Mr. Malone kissed her hand, and Nicole blushed again. She sat beside Fred in the two chairs opposite Mr. Malone’s.

“So, Mr. Malone, you said on the phone that you could find people, including people who are already dead.” Fred couldn’t keep the eagerness out of his voice. He was finally going to find out if Mary was actually a real person.

“Yes. Yes I can. I think you’re going to consider your money well spent, my man. I am the best in the business. Yes, I am.”

Fred hesitated. “This is going to sound kind of strange.”

“Go ahead my boy. I’ve heard a lot of strange things in my day.”

Nicole had to nudge Fred to get him to continue. “I have been having a recurring dream. It is about the same person every time. A little girl named Mary Stewart.”

“And you want to know if she really exists, or if it’s just your mind playin’ games with ya, eh?”

Fred was shocked. “How did you know?”

“You aint the first person in here searching for a dream character, no you aint.”

“Could you help me then?”

“Well, we’ll see what we can do. I need a little more than a name to go on. Are the dreams taking place in the now, so to speak, or the past? Do you have a city for me? Any info on the child’s description?”

“The dreams take place in London, I believe. In the past. A long time ago. During the bubonic plague. Mary has red hair and green eyes. She was orphaned when she was eleven.”

“Excellent, excellent. Good details. Time period, place, description. I think I can help you with this, Freddy my boy. If she lived, I’ll find her. If I can’t find anything, well then you can be ninety percent sure that she never existed, apart from inside your little dream world.”

Nicole was skeptic. “You really think you can find out something about a girl who may have lived almost seven hundred years ago?”

Mr. Malone said, “Nicole, baby. If anyone can find Mary, it’s Joe Malone.” Mr. Malone winked at Nicole. “That’s me.”

Mr. Malone turned to Fred. “So, this is gonna take a while eh? But, I am thorough. More bang for your buck.”

Fred stood up and Nicole followed his lead. “I don’t know what to say Mr. Malone. I really appreciate this.”

Mr. Malone handed Fred a business card. “If you ever need any other P.I. work, or any of your friends do, don’t hesitate to call. I’m always open.”

“Thank you, I hope you can find something for me.”

“Good, good. My secretary will see you out. Pleasure doing business and all.”

As Fred and Nicole were leaving the office, they caught a news report on the radio:

...Jack FM. There was some sort of accident at the Canadian Bio-research facility in Banff, Alberta yesterday. Few details have been disclosed, but there appears to have been several deaths. In sports, the Calgary Flames beat the Nashville Predators last night to take over fourth spot in the conference. The Canucks, who are now one point behind Calgary and five behind Colorado, play the Blue Jackets tonight. With only seven games left in the season, it could be a photo finish.

“Banff. Is that where your dad is working?” Nicole said.

“Yes.”

Nicole hadn't known what to say, so she kept silent on the way home. There was no further news on the car radio, as Fred flipped from station to station. As they arrived, Fred ran into his townhouse and turned on the TV. Nicole followed him in for moral support. Fred needed to know if his father was involved in the accident and if he was okay.

The five o'clock news was on. The newscaster shuffled some papers around.

In our top story, a sudden illness has hospitalized dozens of people in Calgary, Alberta. Doctors have yet to release information about the cause of the illness. They have however released a statement confirming that the illness is not SARS, as many had originally feared. It isn't known if the illness is contagious or how serious the threat is. A couple doctors have refused to treat the sick. Symptoms include unusually high fever, discoloration of the skin and in some cases the patients have coughed up blood. We now go live to Calgary.

As the camera showed the hospital in Calgary, doctors and patients alike looked lost and scared. The camera zoomed in on one of the ill patients. They were wet with sweat, and looked to be in pain. Their skin was discoloured purple. "I've seen that before!" Fred said.

Nicole said, "Seen what? The hospital?"

"No, no. In my dream. It the Bubonic Plague."

"Are you sure? I know that you think Mary actually existed, but are you sure that everything you saw really happened?"

"I am sure. I can feel it. I need to contact the hospital."

"Fred. I am sure if it is the Bubonic Plague, the doctors have already discovered it. They are probably just running tests to confirm before they release the information to the public."

"But what if they don't know. They could help those people. There is a cure now."

“Yes. And they are doctors. If you recognized it, you think they would not recognize it? They have gone to school for like ten years. Besides, do you really think that you would be able to get through to the hospital right now? Everyone in Calgary who does not know where a loved one is, is calling the hospital right now.”

Fred sighed. “You’re right. I’m sure they know what they are doing. If they don’t release any information in the next couple of hours though, I’ll try calling them. I have seen the effects first hand, where they haven’t.”

The camera continued its trip through the hospital. In some rooms masked doctors checked on the patients. In one room, a tall blonde man in a black trench coat stood over a young man, touching his forehead. Something tugged at Fred’s memory, but the camera moved on before he could place it. The news switched to sports:

The Canucks are at home to the Columbus Blue Jackets tonight...

For a moment Fred almost had forgotten why he was watching the newscast in the first place. The rest of the newscast hadn’t said anything about the incident in Banff at the research center. Fred was really beginning to worry about his father.

Fred lived in a two-bedroom townhouse that he was renting about twenty minutes walking distance from the college. He thought about getting a roommate, but the rent wasn’t too high, and his father helped him out a bit. Fred didn’t know exactly what kind of money his father made in biochemical research, but their family had never been short on cash. Fred supposed there would be a large hazard pay bonus in that kind of work.

Fred woke up from a dreamless, restless sleep worried about his father. He hadn't heard anything more on the news about the accident the day before. He tried calling the research centre three times, but all he got was an automated message, "*We are sorry for the inconvenience, but all of our operators are unavailable at the present time. Please call again later.*"

Fred had no idea what was going on, he just hoped that his father was okay. He should have called to check in already.

Fred threw the newspaper on the kitchen table face up, instead of flipping it over to read the sports first like he usually did. He didn't even care how the Canucks did last night. On the front page in large letters was the headline, *BLACK DEATH STRIKES AGAIN*. Nicole was right. The doctors did know what they were doing. Fred scanned the article:

Doctors have now released a statement concluding that the bubonic plague, or Black Death as it once was known, is the cause of the recent illnesses in Calgary.

Unfortunately, the vaccine that is usually used to treat the disease does not seem to be having any effect. With more people falling ill every hour, and a decrease in healthy doctors, Calgary International Airport has been officially closed from seven o'clock this morning. There remains concern that with two hundred and fifty flights and thousands of people flying in and out of Calgary in the previous twenty-four hours, the plague may have already been transported around the world. In Vancouver, two patients are in quarantine. Both arrived in Vancouver from Calgary yesterday afternoon. In Calgary, ten of the patients admitted yesterday have died. Doctors recommend that people avoid taking unnecessary flights until the scope of this outbreak can be determined and dealt with.

There were pictures of the two patients in their beds surrounded by a plastic shield. In the corner of one of the pictures stood a tall blonde man with a trench coat staring at one of the patients.

Holy shit. First SARS, then the bird flu, now the bubonic plague in a super form. Not to mention mad cow disease. One thing after another seemed to be out to destroy the human race. If there was a god, he wasn't happy with the way people had turned out. Fred didn't feel like eating breakfast, he grabbed his bag and headed up to the school. He hoped school would take his mind off everything.

As Fred headed up to the Physics building, he noticed that people were huddled in pairs or by themselves, and avoiding getting too close to anyone else. People were afraid of getting sick. Nicole came around the corner from the other direction.

“Hey there Freddy, class is ‘history’.”

“What do you mean ‘history’? Cancelled?”

Nicole smiled. For being an A student, she always seemed happy when she didn't have to go to class. “The whole College is cancelled.”

“Because of the Calgary thing?”

“Yes and no. The Black Death. Scary stuff. Especially when it's so close to home.”

Nicole wasn't smiling anymore.

“You mean the two in Vancouver?”

“Nanaimo.”

“Somebody in Nanaimo has the plague?” Fred stumbled over a crack in the walkway.

“When?”

“There were over twenty flights from Calgary to Vancouver yesterday. Some of those people hopped the ferry to the island. The first suspected case checked into the hospital at five this morning. The radio gave a news report at eight confirming that the man has the bubonic plague and is quarantined in the hospital. The College decided to close its doors around eight thirty or so.”

“Then why are you here?”

Nicole shrugged. “I just found all this out about twenty minutes ago. I figured you might not have heard and would show up to class anyways.”

“This is major.” Fred stared at the ground trying to imagine what all this meant.

“Have you heard from your father?”

“Nothing.”

“He’s probably shut in somewhere working on a cure for the plague or something. I just hope it all blows over soon.”

“What if it doesn’t?” Fred was still staring at his feet. His father worked with diseases, and there was an accident at the research centre just before all the madness started. It didn’t take a college student to put two and two together. Fred hoped it wasn’t his father’s fault.

Fred was dreaming again. He was asleep in a doorway. Fred / Mary woke up alone. The scary man hadn’t found her. She was cold, but luckily it was spring and not winter. Her stomach was twisted and knotted begging for food. She hadn’t eaten since yesterday. It was odd to be out this early in the morning as the sun wasn’t even up yet. A slight pink colour was just starting to form around the horizon signalling dawn. It was going to be a sunny day, a contrast to the Death that had shrouded the city. In the street, Mary saw a fruit vendor’s cart that seemed to

be abandoned. Mary slowly crept up to the cart, snatched an apple from it and ran away. Mary knew it was wrong to steal and felt guilty even though she knew she had to eat, and there was nobody in the street to catch her anyways.

She returned to her doorway to eat her prize. The doorway was the closest thing she had to a home now. The house behind her was silent. Nobody had gone in or out all night. Maybe she could live in it. It would be nice to be warm, but Mary was too afraid to go into the house in case people were inside, or might come home. She devoured her apple, and even ate the core. If anything her stomach seemed to grumble more.

When Mary looked up, the blonde man stood before her. The first rays of the sun lit up the man's face. His eyes soaked in the light and his hair reflected it back. Mary couldn't move. She couldn't think.

"I've seen you before." Mary said.

"Yes. In the orphanage." The man's voice was so deep; it almost hurt Mary's ears.

"In Calgary. And Vancouver." Mary didn't know what Calgary and Vancouver meant, even though she was speaking them.

"Yes. There too." Mary flinched from the deep rumbling.

Fred was becoming aware of himself in the dream. "What are you doing here?" Mary / Fred looked around. "What am I doing here?"

"You are Mary Stewart."

Fred was taking control of the dream. "No. I'm Fred." Mary / Fred looked down at her / his body. "No. I *am* Mary. I'm dreaming again."

“It is more than a dream, but it is irrelevant. It is your time now, Mary.” The man reached out his hand and touched Mary’s forehead. They both felt the mark the man drew with his finger sink into her head and disappear inside.

“What did you do to us?” Fred understood now that he was talking through Mary.

The man’s obsidian eyes seemed to look through Mary at Fred. “You felt the mark, but it was for her in this time. Your time is not yet. Fear not, I will find you.” He turned abruptly and proceeded to walk away. As Fred’s eyes followed the flowing black cloak, it turned to shadow. He looked to where the man should have been, but he too was gone. Before Fred had time to think about what had just happened, he felt a familiar sensation run through his body.

Flash

The world shifted in a flash again. Mary was lying in a bed. She was having trouble breathing. She vaguely remembered somebody picking her up out of her doorway. It looked like a bird, or a man wearing a bird mask. Fred had recognized the outfit that doctors wore during the plague. Mary didn’t know when she was taken. Thinking was hard. She used all her effort to look down at her arms and saw her skin was discoloured purple. Mary was sick now. She knew she would die like all the others. Maybe everyone would die.

Fred whispered from Mary’s lips, “No.” And then her eyes, and his awareness with them, closed into blackness.