

The trench in Union Avenue wept. The blue overlay of Mother Mary's robe pressed against yellow crime scene tape as she strained to get a better look. Her nose twitched from the stink of river muck, and sweat from the unfamiliar June heat collected beneath her robes. A man in the jostling crowd stepped on her foot. "Sorry, Ma'am," he immediately apologized. Before Mary could tell him it wasn't his fault, a woman angling to the front elbowed her in the gut. Undaunted by the crush of the living, Mother Mary—also known as the Holy Mother, Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven and Mother of God, to name a few—held her ground.

"Give me your arm," she instructed Little c as traffic snarled and honked around them. Little C, her six-foot-five Guardian Angel from the fierce order of cherubim, towered over her.

"You sure you want to see in there?" Little c tilted his head at the trench. The angel, who had chosen for this trip the curly black hair and deep blue eyes of a Botticelli prince, still wore his traveling suit, a golden ensemble of feather and fur undoubtedly meant to be a silent, but effectively loud protest against their hasty departure from heaven. "Doesn't sound promising," added the angel, who, like Mary, had heard the crowd talking about a "makeshift grave."

"No, I'm not sure." That was an understatement. Mary's heart fluttered like a bird in a cage, its wings of hope beating helplessly against her ribs. What if looking into the trench confirmed her worst fears?

When Jesus had gone missing from heaven, Mary had stood it as long as her mother's heart allowed. Then, on the evening of the third day, during vespers when the Heavenly Chorus hit High C and the aperture to earth opened, she'd had a moment of panic, and she scooted. Never before had she left heaven without permission. She refused to think about the consequences of what she was doing as she zigzagged through the clouds. Ignoring the grousing