

On this, her first morning out of doors in two months, the world was dense. The mist rising from the tracks mingled with the steam of the locomotives hunched on either side of the station platform, lending an opacity to the day despite the sunlight just starting to cut through the shrouds. Caroline herself was embalmed in a damp haze, a state she dimly attributed to the dose of laudanum administered by her traveling companion earlier that morning. Her fingers curled languidly over her knees. They seemed made from mist rather than flesh and bone, so little could she feel them.

Caroline lifted one hand to her face and flitted her fingers. At least her hands were under her control, though they were no longer callused from garden work or smeared with pencil lead. She sneaked a glance at her traveling companion on the opposite side of the bench, only to catch Mrs. Dennison's watchful eye.

"What are you doing?" the doctor's wife said, her voice a knife that sliced through the mist.

Caroline linked her fingers together in her lap once more. "Nothing." A tiny part of her whispered that she could snap back at the woman—she was almost free of Mrs. Dennison and the doctor—but she was used to docility now, and the laudanum made submission easy.

Caroline sensed Mrs. Dennison's attention on her, even if the doctor's wife appeared to be absorbed in the Bible open on her lap. She could occupy herself well enough staring at her own hands like a ninny. The sun was smiling this morning, the air scented with new growth and life. It was May now, and felt it. Despite everything, and through the fuzz in her brain, Caroline felt a twinge of optimism.

Mrs. Dennison's carpetbag sat between them like a well-trained dog.