Opening Extract from...

SPIRITED

Written by **Julie Cohen**

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Spirited

Also by Julie Cohen

Dear Thing
Where Love Lies
Falling
Together
Louis & Louise

Spirited

JULIE COHEN

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This book is written in the spirit rather than the letter of the truth. The places are imaginary even when they have real names; the clippings are a mixture of true and false; and all the events are fictionalised even when they really happened.

A page from The County of Dorset Calendar of Prisoners Tried at the Autumn Assizes, Holden at DORCHESTER on Thursday, the 21st day of October, 1858. The large calendar has been folded many times, and then flattened and bound into a book (Dorset History Centre archives item D-698/6). It is heavy duck-egg blue paper, printed in black ink in columns. The edges are water-stained, brown and buckled; the right-hand side has been damaged.

No. *7*
Name. *Viola Worth*
Age. *21*
Trade. *None*
Date of Warrant. *28th Aug., 1858.*
Offence as charged in the Commitment. *Fraud against Mr Theo. Selby, on 27th Aug., 1858, at Fortuneswell, by trickery and deception, selling to him what is claimed to be the image of a ghost.*

Chapter One

April, 1858
Kimmerton, Wiltshire

They were married in mourning.

Viola's black day dress was simple, as were all her clothes: close-fitting in the bodice with bell sleeves and a modest crinoline. Jonah wore black morning dress and a black tie, black crêpe tied around his hat. Neither of them had new clothes for the wedding. Viola's dress had been made up so recently that it seemed hardly worth buying a new one for her wedding day, and Jonah hadn't been back from India long enough to order a new suit.

The only lightness was Jonah's white shirt, and the strand of white pearls that Viola wore around her neck. Strictly, she shouldn't be wearing them whilst in full mourning, but they had belonged to her mother, who had worn them on her wedding day. The locket with her father's hair lay under her dress, out of sight, close to her heart and Viola's chestnut hair was tucked underneath a black bonnet. Jonah's face was tanned from the Indian sun, but still managed to be pale; his eyes, blue in her memory of summers past, were grey. Viola felt that her own face was as colourless as the weak spring sunshine.

Mrs Chapman stopped them outside the vicarage, before they got into the carriage that would take them to the church. 'Your father wouldn't mind these,' she said to Viola. She held two knots of the violets that grew in the vicarage garden. The housekeeper tucked one knot into the band of Viola's hat, and the other into

Jonah's buttonhole. 'There,' she said, standing back, 'you can't marry without flowers.'

The words were kind, but the tone was bleak.

'It's a new beginning for you both,' Mrs Chapman said. 'And the first and last wish of your father's heart.'

'I know,' said Viola, and she pressed the hand of this dear woman who had been with her nearly all her life. She wanted to glance at the face of the man she was about to marry, but she was afraid that when she looked at him, she would see only her father – his waxy face, eyes open, mouth open, a bristle of white on his chin which he had always so carefully shaved every morning as the sun rose; his hair no more than a dishwater wisp. It had nearly all gone, at the end.

Her father had died six weeks ago and since then she had seen his dead face. It floated before her when she closed her eyes to sleep. It appeared at the table when she tried to eat, his mouth open to show the missing molar, his tongue a sandpaper sponge. She had washed his body herself, tied the bandage around his head to close his mouth, and his skin had been – not cold, but not warm. His skin had been an object. He had ceased to be a person and become an appendage of the bed in which he lay, a carving of a naked skeleton which she cleaned as gently as if he were a newborn baby.

'Viola?' said Jonah softly, and she started. He was holding out his hand to her to help her into the carriage.

She stared at his black-gloved hand with the sudden conviction that, were she to touch it, the flesh underneath would be as dead as her father's.

'Thank you,' she said, and turned away to climb into the carriage without assistance. Jonah followed her and settled beside her, closing the door. In the enclosed space, his clothing rustled and his breath was a soft hush. The cloth of his jacket touched the side of her skirt. There was a faint scent of camphor. She heard the driver chirrup the horses and they started off. Without looking,

she knew that Jonah was staring straight ahead, as she was, at the wooden opposite wall of the carriage. These same horses had driven her father's body the same route to the Kimmerton church, along the same lane he had walked at least twice a day.

A carriage is larger than a coffin. He'd had white lilies, not violets. They weren't going to the Kimmerton church but to the church in the next parish, and in another hour this carriage would be driving them back to the vicarage, man and wife. The first and last wish of her father's heart.

She couldn't breathe.

'Are you unwell? You're unwell. I'll ask Langley to stop.'

Jonah raised his hand to knock on the carriage but she said, quickly, 'No,' and he subsided into his seat.

'It isn't far,' she said. 'We should have walked.'

'I'm not confident that your legs would carry you, Viola. And it will rain.'

She should have let him help her into the carriage. It was a weakness on her part. Two summers ago, before he'd left, he'd taken her hand as they walked through the field strewn with poppies, and his fingers had been warm and his eyes the brightest shade of blue she could imagine.

'I won't melt,' she said now, hating the reedy sound of her own voice. It had diminished, it seemed, with the rest of her. She couldn't help but recall how Jonah had looked at her last week, when he returned to Kimmerton. They hadn't seen each other for over two years. She'd always been slim, never blooming, prone to freckles if she wasn't careful enough with bonnet and parasol. She'd always wished for rosier cheeks and brighter eyes, womanly curves instead of her wan, straight body. Her hair was the only part of her that she liked. It grew bountiful and glossy, conker-red, whilst the rest of her was meagre. It had to be combed and tamed and twisted and pinned.

She hadn't looked in a mirror for weeks, even before her father had finally died and all the mirrors in the house had been covered

with crêpe. But when Jonah returned from India, she saw in his shocked expression how much she'd changed from the girl with whom he had walked, hand in hand. She was no longer the girl whom he'd said he loved.

He'd changed, too; but he'd been away, doing things. He had been caught up in a war. He had saved a life. He was a hero. Those things would leave a mark. She had failed to save anyone.

She cleared her throat. 'Tell me about sunshine.'

'You know all about sunshine,' he replied with a smile.

'Tell me about India.'

'No,' he said quickly.

'But you've hardly said anything about it since you've come back.'

'There's nothing to say.'

'There's lots to say. I want to know more about it. The good things. Did you see monkeys?'

'I said, I don't want to talk about it.' His tone was sharp.

She looked down at her lap, at her black gloves.

'I'm sorry,' Jonah said.

'We shouldn't be doing this,' she said.

He didn't answer straight away. The carriage jolted and she heard a splash as they went through a puddle.

'You think we should've waited?' he said at last. 'But where would you have lived? Who would have looked after you?'

'I think a bride should be full of joy and not sadness.'

'Oh Viola,' Jonah said, and he made a move as if to take her hand. She flinched slightly before she could control herself. He noticed it, and returned his hand to his own lap.

'You're sad,' he said. 'It's natural that you're sad. Your father was a wonderful man. I loved him as if he were my own father. It was an utter shock to hear he had passed away. I had no idea he'd been so ill for so long. Your letters …'

'I didn't want to worry you, or make you feel that you should come home. You'd been through enough, and you had to recover.'

'I wish I'd been by his side when he died.'

'No,' she said, unable to repress a shudder. 'You do not wish that.'

'But you must see that this is the best thing for us to do. I wish we could wait longer, until you're less sad, until you're well. But we have no one else, now, except for each other. We're both alone in the world, and you need someone to look after you. The sooner we're married, the sooner we can start anew. As Mrs Chapman said.'

'A new beginning should be fresh and bright. Not … not like this.'

'It will be,' he said. 'I'm determined that it shall.' He drew himself more upright in his seat. 'I'm conscious of my duty to you, Viola. I won't fail you.'

It was raining by the time the carriage stopped outside the church at Bonner Green. Langley hopped off the driver's seat to help Viola down. She allowed herself to lean on his arm, swathed in his thick, wet greatcoat, as she stepped down into the muddy lane.

'Blessings on you both, Miss Goodwin,' Langley muttered. 'It's just what your father, God rest him, would have wanted.'

'I know, Langley. Thank you.'

Jonah appeared at her elbow and held an umbrella over her head. It wasn't quite large enough to shield her dress completely, and she felt rain falling on the silk, spoiling it, as they walked hurriedly up the path to the church.

A tall, reed-thin man with dusty black clothes and pure-white whiskers was waiting for them in the porch. 'Oh,' said Viola. 'Mr Adams. I wasn't expecting to see you.'

'I'm here to give you away, Miss Goodwin,' said the man who had been her father's deacon.

'Oh,' she said again. 'That's very kind, but there's no need, it's not at all necessary.'

'I'm a poor substitute, but your father would never forgive me if I didn't.'

She hesitated. She'd insisted that she and Jonah marry in Bonner Green church rather than Kimmerton, which had been her father's parish, specifically because she did not want any reminders of her previous life. Mr Adam's bony figure had hovered at her father's elbow over countless Sunday sermons, and occupied a regular seat at their table at Sunday lunches. As a bachelor, he was often present at other meals, too, or ensconced with her father in his library, smoking and talking. He had stood by her father's sickbed, turning a worn Bible over and over in his hands. He had led the psalms at her father's funeral.

Now, standing in the porch with his battered hat and old coat and a small drop at the end of his long nose, he looked like a crow perched on a tombstone.

But refusing him would be selfish. 'Of course, Mr Adams. It's an honour.'

He smiled his thin smile and he wiped at the end of his nose with a black-edged handkerchief. 'It's my honour, Miss Goodwin. Your father was … he was … I don't know how I'll do without him, and without you, once you and Mr Worth are gone.' His watery eyes welled up.

'Cheer up, Mr Adams, it's our wedding day,' said Jonah, and his words were forced. He patted the deacon on his back.

'Yes. Yes, I don't know what … I'm sorry, I … '

Viola pulled off one of her gloves so that she could remove a few violets from the posy in her hat. She gave them to Mr Adams. 'For your buttonhole, sir.'

He nodded and gulped. Jonah turned to Viola. 'I'll go in.'

He left her with Mr Adams in the porch. Viola drew on her glove and tried to use the boot scraper to brush some of the mud off her shoes. Mr Adams, obviously embarrassed by his show of emotion, busied himself with wiping his eyes and arranging the small flowers.

She hadn't pictured her wedding day like this. She'd imagined it sunny, the stained-glass windows of her father's church casting

dancing rainbows on the stone floor. She had seen herself in a sea-green dress, with roses in her hand, entering the church on her father's arm, holding fast to the man who'd supported her all her life. She'd seen Jonah standing at the altar, red and purple light in his brown curls, his well-known smile greeting her. He would hold out his hand and she would take it and step into her new life, from her father's care into Jonah's.

It would be a moment like a jewel, to be treasured and taken out to polish and admire and cherish. Her father would take a photograph afterwards and they would keep it on the wall of their home to look at whenever they wanted to remember.

When Jonah returns and we marry, she had thought, over and over and over like a refrain. When her father started coughing and could not visit his parishioners. When his voice grew too weak to read his sermons and she sat next to him and read the news about what Jonah had done in Delhi. *When Jonah returns and we marry, Father will get better. He's so proud of Jonah. Happiness will cure him.*

When he had to stay in bed and the doctor visited, in the night, she forced the refrain to repeat in her head and sat in her chair by the fire in her father's bedroom, changing the cool cloths on his forehead, all through the dark hours until the sun rose, mentally rehearsing the cheerful letters she would write to her fiancé who was under the Indian sun, recovering from his ordeal. Even in war and death, Jonah had saved a child. Happy endings *were* possible. *When Jonah returns and we marry.* The sunshine would surely come.

A sparkling jewel. The happiest day of her life.

In the last days, she hadn't been able to see it. Not clearly, in her mind. She thought the words, the refrain, over and over, but sunshine was beyond her imagining. She set up the camera in her father's bedroom at his bidding and she uncovered the lens, and when the exposure was done, she said it aloud, 'Jonah will like to see that photograph. When he returns and we marry.'

Her father was asleep by then. Her words sounded hollow, bodiless, a lie.

That was the night she had written to Jonah and begged him to come home, as soon as he could. It was the first urgent, and truthful, letter she had written to him since he had left. It never reached him; he was already at sea by that point. Jonah only heard of her father's death three weeks ago when he was greeted at Dover by cheering crowds waving British flags, and her second letter on black-edged paper. He had gone straight to London to sort his affairs and engage an agent to find them a house, and then he had come here to marry her.

'Well,' said Mr Adams. He went to the church door, opened it, and peered in. Then he returned and held out his bony arm to Viola. 'I think they're ready. Shall we?'

She couldn't avoid taking his arm. When she did, it felt brittle, like a bundle of twigs wrapped in wool. But he smiled down at her, that clear drop still hanging at the end of his nose, and that made it better. They walked in together.

The interior of the church was the same colour as the rain and even colder than outside. Grey walls, windows without light, a long stone aisle in front of them. Their footsteps echoed. Mr Adams walked slowly, his shoulders stooping. She knew Mr Morris, the vicar, who watched their procession. He attempted a smile at her, a baring of teeth.

Ahead of them, Jonah waited at the altar. He gazed straight ahead, not looking back at her as she approached.

For the first time since he'd returned, from this distance and without his eyes to avoid, she could look at him. He, too, had lost weight; his suit was too big for him in the shoulders, and gaped at the back of his neck. He stood almost unnaturally upright, hands by his sides. His hair had been flattened by his hat.

Although Viola had known him nearly all her life, she realised with a jolt that if she hadn't known that this was Jonah, she wouldn't have recognised him.

They drew abreast. Jonah's jaw was set. Viola recalled the words he'd said about duty.

She couldn't blame him for not wanting to marry her. She should've been strong and broken off the engagement, for his sake. But it seemed as if the promise of this day had been the only thing keeping her alive. If she'd known it was going to be so grey and thin and cold, would she have clung to its prospects so much?

'Are you ready to begin?' Mr Morris said.

Viola hesitated. It wasn't too late to release Jonah. But then what would she do? Her father had left her almost nothing. She couldn't remain in the vicarage; it was needed for the new vicar. She couldn't live somewhere else alone. This limbo, between two men, between death and marriage, could not last indefinitely. If she didn't marry Jonah, she would have to find another man to marry – and who would that be? How could she marry anyone aside from Jonah, who had been a fact of her life for as long as she could remember? How could she possibly like another man?

'Viola?' prompted Jonah softly. Caught off guard, she glanced at him. And there it was: underneath the resignation, the stiffness, the pallor, there was his dear face. The face of her playfellow and her first, best friend. The old Jonah hovered there like a ghost standing just behind this new, sombre Jonah. He was a slender bridegroom, wearing violets at his breast, his eyes as blue as the summer sky.

'I'm ready,' she said.

He took off his right glove and she took off her left so that he could slip the slim gold band onto her finger. The ring had been her mother's, kept for her by her father until the day she married.

Her left hand lay in his gloved palm. It was a cold, small thing, a naked animal. As he slid the ring onto her fourth finger, the tips of his own fingers touched hers. They were chilled here in this empty church, cold and clumsy, and Viola had to think very hard about sunshine, about violets, as the man whom she had promised to love forever put the ring of a dead woman onto her own finger.

Chapter Two

And then they were man and wife.

Jonah stayed behind to pay the vicar who had married them, and Viola walked out with Mr Adams onto the porch.

'Well, God bless you, Mrs Worth,' said Mr Adams, gazing at the relentless rain and shaking the tail of his coat as if it were dull feathers.

'Mrs Worth,' she repeated. 'Just like that.'

'You will be very happy together,' Mr Adams said, as if he hadn't heard her. 'The two of you were inseparable as children. I remember you tumbling into the drawing room at teatime and upsetting all the tables.'

'Yes, we used to do that, didn't we?'

'And now you're married. And our Jonah Worth is a famous man. I'd be surprised if he didn't get a medal from the Queen. When will you go to the coast?'

'Tomorrow morning.' She held her left hand, the one with the ring, out from the shelter so that she could feel the rain. It pattered on her glove.

'Your whole life is ahead of you,' he said to her. 'Never found the right woman myself. It's too late now.'

'It's never too late,' she said, but it was automatic.

Jonah opened the church door and came out, putting on his hat. Mr Adams shook his hand. 'I wish you joy,' he said.

'I'm sure we'll have lots of it,' said Jonah. 'Would you like to

share our wedding breakfast? Mrs Chapman is bound to have outdone herself.'

He said it so naturally that Viola nearly failed to notice how smoothly he had transferred mastery of the vicarage from Viola to himself. No matter how many times Viola's father had urged Jonah to consider the house his own, he had always been very conscious of his status in the Goodwins' home as a ward, not a natural son. Until ten minutes ago, he would have left the invitation to Viola.

'Yes,' she said, though with an awareness of the mere form of her assent. 'Please do, Mr Adams. I know how you enjoy Mrs Chapman's cooking, and this may be the …'

It would be the last time. After the newly-married Worths left tomorrow, Mrs Chapman would be going to Trowbridge to live with her sister. She'd refused their offer to take her with them to Dorset; she'd never left Wiltshire in her life and she wasn't about to start now. Viola wasn't sure if she would ever see her housekeeper again, and if she did, it would never be the same. Mrs Chapman had been with them for as long as she could remember. She had let the young Viola play in her kitchen, and taught her how to sew. Her father's death had ended that relationship, as well.

'We'd like it very much if you joined us, after your kindness,' she said instead.

Mr Adams wavered, but the thought of Mrs Chapman's pastry lit a greedy light in his thin face. 'I wouldn't want to intrude.'

'Not at all,' said Jonah. 'Mr Morris is coming as well, and his clerk. I hope that's all right with you, Viola.'

She swallowed. 'Of course. The more the merrier.'

Breakfast finished, guests departed, neither of them as merry as she might have hoped, Viola walked between the pale forms of the dust-sheeted furniture, feeling insubstantial. Jonah had leased a furnished house for them on the Isle of Portland, so that Viola

could take the sea air. It was the first thing he'd done on his return from India, before he'd come to Kimmerton to marry her. His own belongings had gone there already. Only her personal things from this house would follow them. The Kimmerton living, and this house, would go to a new vicar. Other people would sit in this chair, use this table, take a book from this case. Wouldn't they think of the people who had gone before them?

Jonah found her in the library, running her hands over the wooden crate that held her father's books.

'Shall we do the last boxes?' he asked her.

'I've been dreading it,' she admitted.

'I've already written to Burnham about your father's photographic equipment,' Jonah said, 'and he's willing to take anything you don't want to keep. He has some students—'

'No,' she said quickly. 'No, I don't want to sell it.'

'Then we'll take it all.'

Outside, Jonah opened an umbrella for her and they hurried across the garden to Papa's studio in an adapted outbuilding. She hadn't stepped into this place since she had developed the last photograph of her father, a week before he died. That photograph was already packed, folded among her clothes to keep the gilt frame from breaking.

She had carried the camera upstairs, taken the photograph of him in his bed. His body weight had hardly dented the pillows. In the photograph, his hands were folded on the neat coverlet. His wedding ring was loose, but his nightshirt was starched, hair combed, face shaved, sideburns trimmed. His eyes glittered with fever. But he smiled and gazed straight at the camera lens, because she stood behind it.

When she looked at the photograph now, she could see the echo of his love captured in the image. She treasured it, but it was too difficult to look at except in glances. It was like holding a knife by the blade.

Viola unlocked the green wooden door with one of the

keys at her waist. Even though it was still pouring outside, the white-painted studio was lighter and airier than the inside of the vicarage. A chair and small table sat in the centre of the room in front of a screen that her father had painted to look like a formal garden. His tripod faced the chair, waiting for him to place his camera upon it. As always, the chemical scents of photography greeted her nostrils. The rusty twinge of ferrous sulphate, the lavender oil in the shellac.

It was as if her father were there just out of sight in the darkroom, making prints, and she had only to wait for him to step outside and greet her, to hold out his hands stained black with silver nitrate.

Viola stifled a sob. Jonah turned to her quickly.

'I can pack all of this,' he said. 'I know your father's equipment almost as well as you do. Why don't you take a rest. It's been a tiring day.'

'But I should do this. It…'

She was putting her father into a coffin again.

'You put the albums together,' he said to her kindly. 'I'll get you some brown paper and string. And I'll do his equipment.'

She nodded. She began to stack the heavy albums of prints together, without opening them, though she knew the contents of each one. This room was where her father had taught her to prepare a plate, how to frame a composition. He had stood behind her and taught her the names of every chemical he used to fix the image and print the negative; discussed with her the difference between a daguerreotype and a calotype, outlined the advantages of the newer wet-plate method, his gentle voice in a red-lit room.

'The house in Portland,' Jonah said, from across the room where he was carefully wrapping her father's wet plate camera, 'was built by an artist. It has a studio in the attic. We could work side by side. The agent says there's even a place for a darkroom.'

She wrapped a shroud of brown paper around the stack of albums.

'I don't think I'll ever want to take another photograph again,' she said.

Jonah had come to them when he was eight years old and Viola was six. His parents lived in India and he was going to spend this summer with them in Kimmerton until he started boarding school. His parents wanted him to have a proper English education. He would spend every holiday with them too, until he was grown up.

'You must look after him, Viola,' her father had said. 'He came all this way from Delhi without his parents, and he doesn't have any family in this country. You have lost a mother, so you know what it is to miss a parent. Only speak of it if he wishes to. Try to talk of pleasant things and make him know that he is welcome here.'

It was a hot day in July with heavy bumblebees weighing down the flowers in the garden. They were still making calotypes then. She and her father had set up the tripod on the lawn and she was dressed as her idea of an Arabian princess, draped in pink and orange scarves and with a pheasant's feather, one of her treasures, tucked behind her ear. Father was adjusting the lenses when she heard the carriage draw up in the front of the house. She ran around in time to see Jonah Worth step down, next to Mrs Chapman who had been to fetch him from the station. He was slender and tanned from the sun, and wore a linen suit that was too short for him in the arms and legs. He must have grown during the journey from Delhi. His hair was a jumble of curls. *He has no one to comb it for him*, she thought with pity, although when she thought it through when she was older, of course even if his mother were in England instead of far away in India, she wouldn't be combing Jonah's hair any more. Her own mother had

died the year before, but Viola had been brushing her own hair since she was four.

She had never met a real person from India before. But aside from the tanned skin, he looked very much like a child who had grown up in England.

'I'm Viola Goodwin,' she said to him, and although she wouldn't do this with her playmates, she held out her hand as she had seen her father do with his contemporaries. He took it, and shook it in what seemed like a kind of daze. He had a narrow face, pink lips, large blue eyes. With his abundance of curls he looked as pretty as a girl, which pleased her.

'Jonah Worth. You're Mr Goodwin's daughter?'

She nodded. 'My father and yours were best friends, you know. They were at school together.'

'I know. My father told me all about it.'

'Was the boat trip very long to get here? Months and months at sea? Who looked after you?'

He shrugged narrow shoulders. 'Mrs Brownlee, whose husband knows Father.'

'Was she kind to you?'

'She was seasick. I kept busy drawing. Why do you have a feather in behind your ear?'

She released his hand. His palm had been a bit sweaty, so she wiped it on one of her scarves. 'Father's taking photographs and I'm Scheherazade. You can be Aladdin now that you're here. Come on, we'll find you some better clothes.'

He followed Viola around the house to the back garden and to the studio. Father had moved to the back of the camera now and was only a black shape under the cloth. 'I'll introduce you in a minute, when he's finished,' Viola said, passing him. 'There's no point interrupting him when he's busy. He won't even hear us. We might as well go to the studio and find a costume.'

'I thought your father was a clergyman?' Jonah said, staring at the spindly-legged camera and the black cloth in the shape of a

man, the piles of cushions and the potted palm plants arranged on the lawn.

'He is. Photography is his hobby, and it's mine too. We'll teach you all about it this summer.' She unlatched the door of the studio and headed straight for the racks of costumes. Only when she turned to speak to Jonah did she realise that he had stopped just inside the door, gazing with wonder at the equipment around him. She went over to hand him a curved sword which she had made herself of cardboard and covered with silver paper.

He took the sword without looking at it. 'Can you really use all of this equipment yourself?'

'I can. It's very delicate, though, and expensive, and you must be very careful. Some of the chemicals are poisonous. I'll show you how to use it safely.'

'I like drawing,' he told her. 'I want to be an artist one day.'

'Then you can draw, and I can photograph. We can do it together.'

They didn't talk about his parents or her mother all that summer. They didn't need to: there were photographs to take, and countryside to explore, and scenery to draw, and books to read, and games to play until it was September and he went to school until his next holiday.

Two years later, when they'd had the news that both his parents had died of typhoid, he came to them for the Easter holidays wearing black. She put her hand in his and he squeezed it. 'Let's not talk about it,' he whispered to her. So they didn't.

They drank tea in the dining room because all of the furniture in the drawing room was covered. Jonah sat on one side of the wide mahogany table and she sat on the other. Just as they used to sit, when they were children, with her father between them at the head of the table.

Now they were husband and wife. Conversation had run out

and Viola was weary to her bones. The silence stretched between them like the expanse of glossy table.

Outside it had grown dark.

Mrs Chapman came in with another plate of fruit cake and set it on the table between them.

'Thank you,' Viola said to her. 'Please don't stay up on our account. I'll take these to the kitchen after we're finished.'

'Oh no no no, I wouldn't hear of it. It's your wedding night, Mrs Worth. You shouldn't be carrying crockery.' Mrs Chapman hesitated. 'You gave no instructions as to where you would choose to sleep tonight. If you let me know which room, I'll have a fire lit. I'm sorry, I would have lit a fire in each of the rooms, but with everything ready to go, I didn't want to cause extra mess.'

Viola's eyes widened. With everything to do, with the weight of her loss on her shoulders, she hadn't thought of bedrooms. She had thought of tonight only as the last night in her childhood home, not the first night of her marriage.

Her bed was narrow, as was Jonah's in his room. The only bed big enough to fit both of them comfortably was …

Cold horror seeped through her.

'Thank you, Mrs Chapman,' said Jonah. 'You've been very kind to us today. We don't need a fire.'

'Much joy to you both,' she said, and left them alone together.

Jonah lifted his cup. He put it back down again without drinking. 'You're not well, Viola.'

Her throat was dry. 'My father died in that bed. I can't.'

He recoiled, as if he'd been slapped. 'You think I'd make you sleep in your father's bed?'

'I think that – I think that we're married now.'

'But that doesn't mean … I wouldn't …'

She couldn't look at him; she looked at the gold rim of the tea pot. 'I honestly haven't thought about any of this, Jonah. I've been living through each moment as it happens, watching one

foot step in front of the other. I haven't been able to glimpse the road ahead.'

'You're not strong. It would be cruel to insist upon … upon starting that aspect of our marriage at present.'

Viola nodded. The silence stretched out between them again. In another room, muffled by cloth, the clock struck nine. She'd been awake since before first light this morning.

'You're exhausted,' said Jonah. 'And tomorrow will be tiring, too. We should go up.'

They walked up the stairs side by side, Jonah holding the candle. Their shadows loomed large on the flocked wallpaper along the staircase: two heads, one taller, two sets of shoulders, one broader. The angle of the light and the fullness of her skirt made it appear as if their divided shadows grew out of one body below the waist, like a fairground sideshow, conjoined twins.

He paused outside her bedroom. 'Goodnight,' he said. 'Sleep well, Viola.'

It was no different than the hundred, the thousand other times he had bade her goodnight before they went to their separate rooms. She hesitated, touching the unfamiliar gold ring on her left hand with her thumb, and he stooped and placed a swift kiss on her cheek.

'I'll see you in the morning, bright and early,' he said, and gave her the candle, and walked to his own room at the end of the corridor.

When she was in the privacy of her own room, she put her hand to her cheek where he had kissed her. Her first kiss as a married woman.

Viola undressed slowly, hanging her dress in the wardrobe that was empty save for the even plainer black travelling costume she would wear tomorrow. She unlaced her corset, pulled her lawn nightdress over her head and buttoned the sleeves and neck. She unpinned her hair and brushed it, sitting on the edge of her bed instead of at her dressing table with its covered mirror.

She'd pictured her wedding day many times, over and over. She hadn't given her wedding night much thought at all. Only, perhaps, the idea of Jonah helping her with her gown. Perhaps him taking the brush to smooth out her hair. She had thought of him removing his jacket and waistcoat and standing before her in his shirtsleeves, but she couldn't picture him without his shirt. She had never seen him without a shirt on since they were children.

Her father's chest, the skin draped loosely over bone as she had bathed him for the last time.

Viola shivered. She washed quickly, said her prayers, blew out the candle, and climbed into her bed. The sheets were cold and her teeth chattered as she lay on her back, gazing up at the black ceiling and breathing in the smoke from her candle. She should sleep. Tomorrow would be another long day. And the day after that, and the day after, in a new town by the sea. She would be known there only as Mrs Worth; Miss Goodwin would be gone forever. All of her days stretched out in front of her, as wreathed in darkness as her bedroom.

Several rooms away, Jonah would be getting ready for bed. What did he do? What did he wear at night? Did he still pray by his bed, as she did by hers? Did he hope, unlike her, that his prayers might be answered? Why hadn't she asked him while they were sitting in silence at that table? She knew him, but she didn't know him. She had grown up with him and she had promised to cleave to him forever but now that they weren't children any more, his thoughts, his tiny intimate actions, were hidden from her.

It seemed like so much to know. So much effort.

She knew this house better than she knew her husband, and yet she was leaving it. This house was old and draughty; the floors creaked. She listened hard, wondering if she could hear Jonah. Instead, she heard the soft familiar tread of Mrs Chapman coming up the back stairs to bed, and a few minutes later, the lighter tread of Nora the maid. The chiming of the clock. A

distant drip of water. Perhaps a leak in the roof. She didn't have to worry about the roof any more.

Jonah would have got into bed by now. Folded back the bedclothes and climbed beneath them. Perhaps he had lit a candle and was reading. He had used to like poetry, but lately he had been reading Gibbons. The only sound in his room would be the turning of the pages of his book. Now he would be closing his book, placing it on his bedside table. Laying his pillows flat. Blowing out the candle. Closing his eyes. Did he sleep on his side, or his back? Curled up or straight?

Once she'd come across him sleeping in the studio on a pile of cushions, curled up like a child. His pencil and drawing pad had slipped to the floor. But he had been twelve then, maybe thirteen, and she had put a shawl on him and crept away.

Chapter Three

May, 1858
Geneva, Switzerland

Mr Selby was coming.

It was whispered in the back of theatres, spoken with satisfaction over games of whist. Mrs Henriette Blackthorne heard of it as she was on her way back to her lodgings from her visit with Lady Fanshawe. She had sat all afternoon in the dowager's bedroom, holding her paper-dry hand and passing on messages from her eldest son, who had died in the Crimea. The Honourable Robert Fanshawe, even after death, liked to talk about the weather and horses, and Henriette was quite weary. Lady Fanshawe, however, found this conversation very stimulating and she had actual colour in her cheeks when she patted Henriette's hand and said, with surprising vigour for a dying woman, 'Thank you, dear. It has given me such joy to speak with my Bobby. Tomorrow, I shall call for my solicitor and ensure you are remembered in my will.'

Henriette had, of course, protested, but only enough to seem gracious. 'You'll outlive us all,' she said to the dowager, and drew on her gloves to leave, wondering if Lady Fanshawe would remember Henriette enough for her to be able to pay the debts she'd incurred in London.

She wasn't having much luck with widows, lately. She'd had some hope of Madame Fournier, but it turned out that all the jewels that Monsieur Fournier had given his wife throughout their marriage had been paste – a fact that M. Fournier had not seen fit to impart during his long conversations with his wife

from beyond the grave. Henriette had been bequeathed a matching 'emerald' necklace and earrings, both of which she gave to her maid. Elise wasn't fond of them, either.

Hat settled on her head, she headed towards her lodgings near the cathedral. In the Place du Bourg-de-Four she encountered Mr Munro. Or rather Mr Munro encountered her. 'Madame Blackthorne!' he called from across the square, and bustled over to her, watch chain gleaming, sisters trailing behind like three black crows. 'Have you heard?' he said, kissing her hand. 'Mr Selby is coming.'

'Mr Selby?' she said, feigning ignorance. Though she knew who Mr Selby was, by reputation. Mr Selby, who had written about the Fox sisters, and Mrs Hayden. Quite perceptively, she thought, though his educated language barely hid his contempt. It was a sort she recognised: the fury of a man who looked at a woman he'd thought to be a virgin and whom he now suspected of being a whore.

Selby never investigated Daniel Dunglas Home, or Paschal Randolph; he had never been interested in Henriette herself, until after her husband Ethelred had died. Henriette wondered if he had been romantically scorned by a female medium, or if he simply hated women. It was an idle wonder: she intended never to find out.

'He's corresponded with Madame Richard and Herr Müller. And to you, too, perhaps?' The financier's pale eyes blinked up at her. His sisters had caught up by now, and were listening.

'You must have had a letter from Mr Selby, Madame Blackthorne,' said Miss Sally, the youngest (at forty-seven). Miss Sally had been their father's favourite and as a result she had an independent income. She'd been using it to pay Henriette, in secret, for messages from her piano tutor for whom she had shared an unspoken passion before he died in a boating accident in 1819. The passion was much more spoken now than it had been in Sally's youth.

'How glorious it would be for him to meet *you*, Madame Blackthorne,' said Mr Munro. 'All his doubts would vanish in an instant, I know they would. He would no longer be a sceptic. And the cause of Spiritualism would be furthered!'

'I haven't read my post,' she said, extracting her hand from his as gently but firmly as she could. 'I've been with poor Lady Fanshawe. But I'll look, right away.'

'So gratifying that he would come to Geneva!' said Miss Evelyn. 'It *must* be to witness your work!'

'Quite,' agreed Henriette. 'Thank you for telling me.'

'We shall see you at Herr Müller's this evening?'

'Yes, of course,' said Henriette, her mind already on boat trains. She bade them farewell and made her way, rather more quickly, to her lodgings. Mr Selby's letter lay on the table in the entranceway, with all the rest of today's post. She put the letter straight into the fire, unread.

It took her very little time to pack her trunks. She had done it so many times before. It took hardly any longer for her to write letters to her landlord, to Herr Müller, and regretfully, to Lady Fanshawe. By the time the cab arrived at her door she was ready to go, changed into a black travelling suit and a hat with a veil. She did not allow the driver to take the small battered satchel, a contrast to the well-appointed matching steam trunks which she directed him to instead. Instead she carried the satchel herself into the back of the cab: a stained and cracked leather bag, marked near the handle in ink with the initials H.S. She cradled it on her lap like a child.

An extract from *The Spirit Moves Me: Spiritualism and Feminist Spectacle by* Elisabeth Nwabara, published by Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012, page 114.

The Isle of Portland in the south of England is connected to the mainland by the thinnest of threads, a pebble beach. It is most famous for its limestone and its lighthouse, its prison and its role as a major embarkation point for D-Day. But in the summer and autumn of 1858 this island in Dorset became a very different sort of battleground – between science and religion, between male law and female spirituality. A battle that culminated with one woman jailed and another vanished, while men in courtrooms debated the legal reality and economic worth of life after death.

Chapter Four

June, 1858
West Weare, Isle of Portland, Dorset

So this was what scientific discovery was like. Jonah wiped rain from his eyes. His hat was dripping, his coat soaked through, his feet squelching in his boots. Sea, sky and cliff all melded together in one sheet of grey and red and brown. He scrambled over slippery rocks to where his new acquaintance, Mr Field, had been digging.

Mr Field was practically dancing with joy. 'We must document the position of the skull and the teeth we find; it will make reconstruction so much easier.' He waved his brush in the air like a magic wand.

Jonah extracted his sketchbook from the inner pocket of his coat and unwrapped it from its oilcloth covering. He peered at the fossil and began to sketch its outline, trying to shield his paper with the oilcloth as he drew. Raindrops fell on the paper and blurred his pencil lines.

'The skull,' enthused Mr Field. 'The skull is always a special find. This is so much more than ammonites. We are looking a creature in the eye, who lived thousands of years ago. Thousands of years, Mr Worth! A creature who never saw the Garden of Eden. It's the death knell of Christianity.'

Mr Field sounded positively joyful about the death of what many people considered a perfectly good religion.

All religions are true, or none of them are. The voice was quite clear in Jonah's head. He wished it weren't.

He stooped down to get a better look at the skull. Closer, he could see more of its shape emerging from the mud. It wasn't dissimilar to the head of the crocodiles he had seen basking in the sun on the banks of the Yamuna River. In India, crocodiles were sacred. But this was – so Mr Field said – an ancient fish, worshipped by no one.

'I take it that you're a good Christian,' Mr Field commented.

'I'm . . .' He straightened and corrected the lines of his sketch, adding the spikes of teeth. He'd met Mr Field the week before, by chance. Jonah had been crouched at the side of a disused quarry, drawing a bee orchid, when a well-spoken but very dirty man had hailed him as a fellow scientist. It soon transpired that they lived within a mile of each other on the south side of the island. 'You must come and hunt fossils with me,' Mr Field had said, and so here they were. Jonah hadn't, however, anticipated a theological discussion on a muddy cliff.

All, or none. He cleared his throat. 'I was raised by a clergyman, my wife's father. My father-in-law hoped that science and religion could be reconciled.'

'Oh, no no no. Not at all. We're in a brave new world, Mr Worth. This skull is only one instance of the ascendancy of science. A society built purely upon reason and understanding, with every fact subjected to scrutiny and proof. Can you imagine how beautiful it will be, eh?'

Mr Field went back to painstakingly brushing clay from the skull. The dead animal was interminable. It was impossible to get an idea of scale when it was found in so piecemeal a fashion, each fossil removed and taken to a safe, dry location. Jonah, who preferred to draw landscapes and botany, could not put the ichthyosaur together in his head from the parts. It was a puzzle in a mash of mud and rock, not something that had once lived and breathed.

Something glinted in the red earth. He stooped again. 'Mr Field, there's a piece of jewellery here?'

Mr Field didn't look up. 'I'm not here to look for treasure, my son.'

'It's not treasure, it's …' He dug with his fingers into the mud. The rain and sand had covered it up already, but he found it eventually: a child-sized silver bangle. He held it out on the palm of his hand to the fossil-hunter.

'Oh,' said Mr Field. 'Oh yes, that is mine. I must have dropped it. My littlest one, Gracie, gave it me this morning. For luck, she said.'

'Luck in finding fossils?'

'No; luck in not being buried alive. Gracie's heard the stories of Mary Anning's dog, who was killed by a landslide further up the coast. I lost my pickaxe in a slide last week, and she's worried. I indulge her too much.' He tucked the bracelet into his breast pocket, inside his oilskin. 'These cliffs are constantly collapsing. We're lucky that all the fossils weren't washed out to sea long ago. One day, all of Dorset will be in the sea. This island will be gone.'

Jonah eyed the cliff to see if it were about to move. The island's famous stone was made out of dead things: shells and bones. This ichthyosaur's bones had been underground so long that they had turned to rock.

People would do the same. The body of a person, left abandoned on a floor soaked with blood. All the bones of someone you loved, slowly fossilising as their memory faded away.

He turned away swiftly towards the hard grey sea. Gulls screamed overhead.

'I daresay that on a day like this, you'd as soon be inside in front of a fire with your pretty new wife, eh?' asked Mr Field, with the air of someone who would rather be nowhere else than here, on this muddy shifting cliff full of fossilised bones. He'd been a London barrister before giving up the Old Bailey in favour of digging up ancient creatures and starting a family with a younger wife.

Jonah forced a smile. 'She's willing to sacrifice me in the name of science.'

'Well.' Mr Field gazed up at the sky, which was a bit of a mistake as at that moment, the heavens opened and the rain turned from a drizzle into a deluge. 'Duty before pleasure, eh?' he yelled over the sound of the raindrops and the surf.

'Duty,' said Jonah. 'Always duty.'

Their house was built on a hill, with other houses above and below, so from a distance it looked as if they were layered on top of each other, like sedimentary rock. It wasn't large: three windows on the bottom and three on top, with the attic skylights in the roof. Not quite the fairy castle he and Viola had imagined living in as children, and much smaller than the haveli he still owned in India. But it was new and well-built, and large enough for the two of them whilst being suitably modest.

Inside, he bent to remove his boots and saw that they and his trousers were coated with clay. In the gaslight it looked shocking white, as if from knee down he had turned to bone.

'Oh my goodness, you're soaked through,' said Viola, coming into the hallway. He straightened quickly.

'It's all for science. Mr Field found a whole skull today.'

'A skull! Incredible. Go up and get changed. I'll make you some toast.'

Dry linen and shoes made all the difference. When he came down to the sitting room, Viola was kneeling in front of the fire, carefully toasting a slice of bread on a long fork. A tray of tea and cake sat on the table.

A fire, a devoted wife. It was enough to make any man happy.

Jonah reminded himself of this fact.

'It's ready,' she said. 'Sit down and I'll pour you some tea.'

The toast was exactly as he liked it, golden and brown with a pat of melting butter. She had used to make toast for them both at teatime when they were children. He'd thought, then, with

great satisfaction about this future that they were living now. He'd pictured it much as it actually was: a comfortable routine, with a helpmate and companion to make his house a home.

His younger self didn't have the imagination or the knowledge to picture a marriage as anything greater or lesser. At thirteen, sixteen – even twenty – he wouldn't have known how a life that should be perfectly content could be hollowed out in the middle. How it could have a deep, immovable coldness at its heart. Growing up, it would have been unthinkable for him to keep secrets from Viola, especially something so dramatic and important. And now… now, he had no choice.

She needed him. She had no money and no protector, and he had enough inheritance for them both. During his own illness in Calcutta, he'd thought about ridding himself of his Indian property and investments, tearing up the deeds and the lists of figures that he never could understand. He didn't want to be tied to a system that he knew was wrong, that could lead to such death and hatred. But his drawings hardly raised any money, and he was useless at any kind of business. He could not ask Viola to live in poverty. He could not tell Viola anything about it.

So here he was, in this house paid for by other people's labour, being waited upon by other people.

Like Viola, he wore mourning – it was almost a relief at being able to wear it publicly. Sometimes he'd seen her holding the photograph of her father that she'd taken weeks before his death. She'd gaze at it intently, as if her will could bring her father back to life. He should feel compassion for her, but his first emotion was envy.

She had buried her father, but Jonah had lost someone he loved too. He had watched her die. He didn't know what had happened to the body. Sometimes at night he woke alone in the darkness from a dream in which he'd been the one left behind, gasping his life out with no one to save him. And then he lay there catching his breath, trying to calm his heartbeat. Feeling all the miles and

uncertainty, the story that had been cut off, bleeding, before it could finish.

As miserable as Viola was, at least her father had died peacefully in bed, and she had been able to hold his hand. She had his photograph, and she was allowed to grieve for him in public. Jonah had none of that.

And then he felt ashamed. Viola wasn't the girl he used to know: she was hesitant and solitary. It wasn't only because the death of her father. She'd been ill when they came here, but she was better now. The sea air and good food were working their magic on her, and her body was stronger, though her manner was a shadow of the confident girl she'd used to be.

It was his fault, although she would never say it. His fault that every night they went up to separate bedrooms. At first it had been because she was tired, and then for the sake of her health. But they had been married three months now. He took long sketching walks all over the island, collected botanical specimens, went on fossil-hunting expeditions, shut himself inside his office to pretend to look at business papers and correspondence from India. He gave her his drawings as gifts and he gave her none of his thoughts. He did everything to put distance between them when he should be drawing her closer.

It was all his fault. Everything here; everything in India.

'Tell me about the skull,' she said. The request, like the tea and toast, like the way she'd made this rented house cosy and homelike, was designed to please him. She worked hard to keep conversation flowing between them, though sometimes the silence was an immovable wall. 'Was it very grisly?'

'It wasn't grisly. Here, look.' He passed her the sketchbook, and she bent her head to the drawing. 'I don't know enough to tell you about the creature it came from – some sort of giant fish. But we can learn more together. Mr Field invited us to dinner tonight. I said yes.' And, as an afterthought: 'I hope that's all right.'

'Oh. Yes, of course. I could, yes. We haven't been very social, have we? You must be bored.'

'No, no I'm not bored. But I thought it would do you good, to have some lively company. We don't have to go. I can send a note.'

'No, we should go. We should get to know the neighbours. In Kimmerton I knew everyone.'

He sat back in his chair, relieved. Any society was better than none, and definitely better than another evening of silence between them. Or, even worse, a conversation that circled round and round and left them both still strangers to each other.

'I have to warn you, though – Field is an avowed atheist.'

'I shall try my hardest not to quote Corinthians at him over the soup.'

He took a large bite of toast. 'What did you do today?'

In Kimmerton, whenever he saw her, she had always been busy. She helped her father with his photographs and his parish duties. She read his sermons for him and she visited the sick and poor. She was a dutiful daughter and now she was a dutiful wife. But here there was nothing for her to do.

'I wrote some letters,' she said. 'It was too wet to walk.'

'I was thinking that it would be interesting to photograph Mr Field's fossils, instead of drawing them. It would be fitting to use a chemical process to document scientific discovery.'

'I don't wish to take any photographs, Jonah.'

'Of course. I understand. It's just … it would give you something to occupy your time, and it might do some good.'

She was silent. Of course a dutiful wife would not contradict her husband. They were both trapped by this duty.

He put down his tea. 'I want you to be happy, Viola. It's what I want most in the world.'

'What about your happiness?'

'I'm already happy,' he lied.

Chapter Five

The Fields had six children and they did not believe in having a nanny or governess. The door was opened by one of the children, a small grave creature in a green frock, who curtseyed and let the Worths into the cluttered hallway. While Viola stood looking around her at the specimens of birds and butterflies in glass cases, Mr Field rushed to greet Jonah and take their dripping umbrellas. 'Thank you so much for coming, Worth,' he whispered. 'Laeticia has invited those Newhams from Weymouth. He's her second cousin. Unavoidable. It will be good to have another sensible person in our midst.'

'Sensible person?' Jonah repeated, mystified, and surprised to see the head of a stuffed fox glaring at him from the top of the coat rack.

'Mrs Newham has Ideas.' He handed the umbrellas to the green-frocked child and ushered them through to the drawing room, where Jonah accepted a glass of sweet sherry from another child with sticky fingers.

'Ideas?' But he was being borne down on by a large, pink-cheeked man with a large white moustache and bushy white sideburns and very little hair on his large, pink head.

'Admiral Newham,' said Mr Field quickly, and with the air of self-defence. 'This is my neighbour, Mr Jonah Worth.'

'Jonah Worth,' boomed the Admiral, shaking Jonah's hand

vehemently. 'Jonah Worth. Think I've heard that name before, somewhere. Not from Portland?'

'No, my wife and I recently moved here. I grew up in Wiltshire, mostly, though I was born in India.'

'Worth. India,' mused Newham. 'Now why is that familiar?'

'It's a common name,' said Jonah quickly. 'This is my wife, Vio—'

But Viola was gone, drawn aside by a woman nearly as large and as pink as her husband, who was talking down at her. There seemed to be no sign of Mrs Field.

'I'm a Weymouth man, born and bred,' said Newham. 'My wife Louisa's from London, makes me spend the winters there, but I'm happiest right here by the sea. What brings you to Portland, Mr Worth?'

'We came for the air and the views. I'm an amateur artist. Though today I've been drawing Mr Field's ichthyosaur.'

'Ah yes, fossil hunting,' boomed Newham. 'Nice little hobby, that. I've found an ammonite or two in my day.'

'It isn't a hobby,' said Mr Field, testily. 'I am a palaeontologist.'

'A paleo-what? Isn't that head bumps or some such?'

'The science of the shape of the head is phrenology, Thaddeus,' called Mrs Newham from across the room. 'Remember, we attended a demonstration of phrenology and mesmerism by Mr Elliotson in Hanover Square.'

'Oh yes. Fascinating stuff. Fascinating. Do you know that you can tell by the shape of someone's skull whether he has criminal tendencies or not? Your whole fortune is in your skull.' Admiral Newham rapped his own large head with his knuckles. 'My wife knows all about it.'

'Palaeontology is the study of the great lizards, through using the fossil record,' said Mr Field. 'It is a science. Unlike phrenology, which has no scientific basis and has been soundly discredited.'

'You study old bones,' said Mrs Newham, bustling across the

room, Viola in her wake. 'How can you tell anything about the creatures you study without looking at their skulls?'

'A skull can tell us what a creature ate and what its relative intelligence was,' said Mr Field. 'It can't tell us whether the creature had criminal tendencies or was destined for genius. Isn't that so, Worth?'

'Fortunately,' said Jonah, 'I don't believe that fish are capable of committing crimes.'

'You have the most extraordinary skull, Mr Worth,' said Mrs Newham. 'Don't you think, Thaddeus? Such a noble brow. There's a distinct lack of interesting skulls in this part of the world.'

'Are there?' asked Viola.

'Oh yes, child, you have only to compare the skulls in Dorset to the skulls in London. There's a huge variety in the metropolis. Here, everyone is the same. Interbreeding, for generations.'

A child, even smaller than the other two, appeared at Jonah's elbow. 'Dinner is ready,' it said in a piping voice, and Viola took Jonah's arm to walk into the dining room.

'Are you all right?' he whispered to her, and she nodded.

'I don't think Mrs Newham finds my skull very interesting,' she whispered back, and Jonah smiled. Perhaps this was all they needed: more society, more to talk about together, and they could find their way back to who they once had been.

'Do you think the children will serve the dinner?' he whispered.

'I'm worried that I won't be able to tell the difference between the scientific specimens and the food.'

Her chair, when he pulled it out for her, had a doll on it. A person, presumably Mrs Field, who was presiding over the table with a baby on her hip, swooped in and removed the doll, giving it to the baby. 'The children had their lessons in here this afternoon,' she explained, blinking her eyes rapidly behind spectacles, before she shepherded the miscellaneous children out of the room.

The dining table was, to Jonah's mingled disappointment and relief, skull- and specimen-free, but there was an ink stain on the

cloth near his fish knife. He moved his plate to cover it. Viola saw his action and their eyes met, and she covered her mouth with her hand. It was like old times, when they'd exchange covert glances over the tea table, stifling their laughter during Mr Adams's detailed enumeration of his health problems.

'Fancy saying that phrenology has no basis in science!' Mrs Newham was saying as she entered the room. As soon as Mr Field was seated at the head of the table, the servant began to ladle the soup, even though the mistress of the house wasn't present. 'It has been extensively proven by the best minds of the day. The *best minds*.' She raised her chins. 'I am a good Christian, and a woman of science.'

Mr Field made a noise into his soup, and Viola said, 'My father always said that science was the best test of religion, and religion was the best proof of science. He said everything that we understood as faith, would be explained one day with fact. He was a clergyman and also an amateur chemist,' she explained, turning to Mr Field, her voice soft and warm. 'He would have been fascinated by your discoveries.'

'Exactly!' cried Mrs Newham. 'Science and religion, hand in hand!'

'By God! You're Jonah Worth!'

Admiral Newham's exclamation rang across the dining room, cutting over Mrs Newham.

'Yes?' said Jonah cautiously.

'Worth! I have it now! Knew I recognised you! You're the Hero of Delhi!'

His stomach sank. 'Oh. Well, that's what the newspapers said, but I hardly think that I—'

'Louisa! It's that fellow I was telling you about! Front page of the *Evening News*! He saved the life of a child, in that city full of savages where they were killing every white man, woman and child they could find! Brought her out in a laundry cart or something, didn't you, Worth?'

'A laundry cart, yes. But you can't call the Indians savages, they—'

'I knew it,' said Mrs Newham. 'Your head struck me as extraordinary as soon as I laid eyes upon you, Mr Worth. Didn't I say: such a noble brow? We may expect great things of a young man with a skull like that.'

'I didn't know you were a hero during the Sepoy Rebellion, Worth,' said Mr Field.

'I'm not a hero,' said Jonah. 'We managed not to die, that's all. People do it all the time.'

He felt the weight of everyone's eyes on him, including Viola's.

'You must come and give an Evening for us, Mr Worth!' said Mrs Newham.

'An Evening?' enquired Viola.

'Just a little thing I do on occasion, to host intellectual gatherings. We have missionaries, reformers, philanthropists, exceptional people. It's my little way of bringing a flavour of the capital to Weymouth. It would be quite thrilling to hear of your Indian adventures.'

'It's kind of you, but I'm not much of a public speaker. I'm sure people would much rather hear about skulls, or … or whatever other topics you find.'

He took a spoonful of soup, in a desperate signal to end the conversation.

'You have missionaries?' Viola said. 'And philanthropists? I would like to hear them, one day.'

'You must come, Mrs Worth. You must come to them all. You will meet the best people in Weymouth, and improve your mind. On Friday we have *Mrs Blackthorne*!'

She announced it as if she were announcing the Queen. Mr Field grunted, but Jonah was grateful for the change in topic.

'It's quite a coup,' Mrs Newham added. 'She's come all the way from Geneva. I'm sure you've heard of her.'

'I can't say that I have,' said Viola.

'In London, she flew,' said Mrs Newham. 'Positively flew around the parlour of Mr George Dubbins.'

'*Flew*?' said Mr Field, with a dangerous quiet to his tone.

'Oh yes,' said the Admiral, comfortably. 'In front of dozens of witnesses, too. I can't say I'm entirely convinced that it's a respectable thing for a woman to be doing. Not in skirts, at least. Mr Daniel Dunglas Home flies all around London, I hear, inspired by spirits. It seems more of a man's habit, flying.'

Mr Field stared at Admiral Newham across the table. Admiral Newham gazed back, unperturbed.

Silence.

'Well,' said Viola, 'it's very kind of you to invite us. I've never seen anyone fly.'

'Do you have any children, Mrs Worth?' asked a voice from the end of the table.

The company, except for Mr Field, turned and stared. Mrs Field had, at some point during the previous conversation, joined them at the table and was calmly spooning soup.

'I … do not,' Viola said.

'I have six daughters,' said Mrs Field. 'How many children are you hoping for?'

'I …' Viola glanced at Jonah, who, to his own dismay, flushed deeply. 'We will be content however God sees fit to bless us.'

'And does this Mrs Blackthorne have any children?' Mrs Field asked Mrs Newham.

'That is – I cannot say for certain, but I think she does not. She's a widow.'

'I supposed as much. One has very little time for flying when one has children.' She turned back to Viola. 'Have as many as you can, my dear. They have been the great joy of Erasmus's and my life, and it is the natural purpose of a woman. Perhaps you have one on the way now?'

Jonah dared to look at Viola. She was utterly pale, her hands folded in her lap. She did not look at him.

'Start while you're still young,' Mrs Field advised her. 'A woman's body is designed to care for children but as one ages, one loses one's natural elasticity and strength. Start right away, and you will find it easier.' She settled back in her seat with an air of great satisfaction. 'This soup isn't very good, is it?'