

The scream rent the air like cotton fabric ripping, rising over the din of the looms and pulleys, bobbins and gears, belts and spindles and spinners. The room was so loud Minnie had not heard the *thunk* that must have preceded the scream, the moment when Netta, tired from sitting up the night before with her new baby, accidentally stepped too close to the machine and the belt snatched the loose fabric of her dress, yanked her into an embrace, and Netta flung out her hand to try to pull back the cloth.

The scream went on and on, cutting through Minnie's ears, and she stood paralyzed in front of the rows of spools of white cotton thread. It was just before lunchtime, and the February air was thick with cotton lint, so when Minnie looked toward the end of the room where Netta worked, everything seemed coated in falling snow.

Then she was running through that white snow toward Netta, who had fallen to the floor and was clutching her arm, a bright red stain growing on the yellow cotton print of her lap. Minnie bent over her, her arm around Netta's shoulder.

“What is it, Netta? Show me.”

But she didn't want to look.

Netta was shivering now, rocking herself back and forth, cradling the arm.

The other winders had begun to gather around them, leaning in to try to see. “Call First Aid,” Minnie shouted. She could barely hear her own voice over the roar of the machines. “Get a supervisor in here.”

She shook Netta's shoulder. “Netta. Show me.”

Still shivering, Netta held up her arm. Where there should have been a hand, there was a mess of mangled bone. Bright blood squirted from the open wound onto the floor, spattering onto Minnie's shoes. Minnie turned away, gasping. The hand lay several feet away, palm up,