

The Padded Room

By: Austin Huibers



## Chapter 1 - Candlelight Whispers

Eleanor Whitfield had learned, before she could read or write, that candlelight could be dangerous.

Not the flame itself, though her mother had often warned of that too, but what it revealed.

When the sun dipped behind the far tree line and the wind moaned through the thin seams of the Whitfield farmhouse, the rooms grew darker than pitch. Only the trembling glow of tallow candles kept the blackness at bay, and it was in that soft, wavering light that Eleanor first noticed her mother's peculiar habit.

At first, she thought her mother was simply tired from a day of mending, cooking, and tending to their small vegetable garden. She would pause, needle poised above her lap, her gaze caught by something in a far corner. Her lips would part slightly, as though she had been interrupted by a voice too faint for Eleanor to hear. Then she would murmur back, low and gentle, her words shaping in that steady rhythm of conversation.

The first time Eleanor asked who she was speaking to, her mother smiled faintly and said, "*An old friend, Ellie. Don't look at them too long, it's rude.*"

It was a strange thing to say, but Eleanor was eight then, and in the way of children, she let the answer settle into the unquestioned truth of her world.

As the years passed, the whispers changed. They grew quicker, the tone sharper, her mother's eyes darting like a bird's. Some nights she would snap at the empty space in the corner, her voice brittle with anger. Other nights she would beg in a trembling whisper, tears sliding down her cheeks as she clutched her nightdress to her throat.

Eleanor learned to keep her head down when the candlelight twisted shadows against the wall. She would stare at her sewing or the pages of her father's old Bible, willing herself not to look at the corners where her mother's eyes seemed magnetized.

The neighbors began to talk.

They said her mother had the devil in her.

They said madness ran in the Whitfield blood.

By the time Eleanor was fourteen, she had grown accustomed to the muttering, the midnight crying, and the uneasy glances of townsfolk when they passed her on the dirt road. But there was one thing she could never get used to-the way her mother would stop, mid-task, fix her gaze on a spot where there was nothing, and speak as if answering a question Eleanor had not heard.

That, and the last thing her mother said to her before everything fell apart:

*"If you see them too, Ellie... run."*

## **Chapter 2 - The Taking**

It was in the last weeks of autumn, when the fields lay bare and the skeletal trees rattled in the wind, that Eleanor's world shifted for good.

The air carried the damp smell of rotting leaves, and the nights came early, smothering the house in blackness before the fire could take the chill from the walls. On one such night, Eleanor woke to the sound of her mother's voice-urgent, high, not the murmured conversations she'd grown used to, but sharp and quivering like the snap of frost underfoot.

She rose from her bed, bare feet finding the cold plank floor, and crept to the doorway. There, in the dim glow of a single candle guttering on the hallway table, stood her mother. Her hair was loose, her eyes wide, and in her hands she gripped the fire poker as if it were a weapon.

"There was a man in your room," Margaret said without turning her head. Her voice was tight, as if each word was being pulled from her. "A man with no eyes. He was standing over you."

Eleanor felt a chill crawl up her back. She looked into her bedroom, half-expecting to see someone-or something-lurking near her bed. But it was empty. The blanket lay rumpled from her rising, the candle's faint glow stopping just short of the shadowed corners.

"There's no one there," Eleanor whispered.

Her mother's grip on the poker tightened until her knuckles shone white. "He's gone now. But he'll be back."

The next morning, the frost on the windowpanes was so thick it seemed painted on, and the air in the house was brittle with tension. Eleanor tried to speak of other things-of bread to be baked, of mending to be done-but her mother was distracted, eyes fixed on something only she could see.

By midday, Reverend Cole arrived. He was a stooped man with a voice like worn leather, and he carried a Bible under his arm as though it were a musket. He stayed with her mother in the kitchen for over an hour, murmuring prayers and reciting verses while Eleanor lingered in the doorway, unsure if she was being comforted or warned.

When the Reverend left, another visitor came-a physician from Albany. His name was Dr. Sloane, a thin man whose spectacles caught the light in a way that made it impossible to see his eyes. He asked Eleanor to wait in the parlor while he spoke with her mother.

Through the thin door, she could hear his questions. Did she see visions often? Did she hear voices? Did she believe she was in danger?

Her mother's answers came in a mix of defiance and pleading, but Eleanor could hear the shift-the slow, steady tightening of the noose of judgment.

By the second day, the black carriage appeared. It rolled up the dirt path in silence, drawn by two horses whose breath steamed in the frigid air. The men who stepped down wore long dark coats and stiff collars, their faces expressionless as they entered the house.

Margaret fought them. She screamed, clawed, kicked, and cursed. She swore she was protecting her daughter from *the eyeless man*, that they were all fools for not believing her. Her voice cracked on the last scream, and Eleanor thought she heard something in it-not madness, but desperation.

“Mother!” Eleanor called, running after them as they pulled her through the front door.

Margaret twisted once in their grip, her face flushed from the struggle, and for an instant her eyes locked on Eleanor’s. There was something in them-warning, sorrow, and a terrible knowledge Eleanor couldn’t name.

They pushed her into the carriage, the iron bars across the window rattling as the door shut. Eleanor ran into the yard, the frost crunching under her bare feet, and reached for her mother’s hand as it gripped the window.

The carriage began to move.

The hand slid from her grasp.

The last Eleanor saw of her mother was that pale, desperate hand clinging to the bars until the fog on the road swallowed the carriage whole.

### **Chapter 3 - Return to Greystone**

Eight years passed between the day the black carriage swallowed her mother and the day Eleanor saw the building again.

She had not intended to return-not as a visitor, and certainly not as an employee-but life has a way of bending people toward the things they most wish to avoid. Work was scarce for an unmarried woman with no family to speak of. Nursing, they told her, was respectable enough if one had the stomach for it.

And so she found herself climbing the long frost-hardened road to Greystone House for the Mentally Afflicted on a wind-scorched morning in January.

The building loomed at the crest of a barren hill, four stories of mottled stone and black-shuttered windows. The roof was steep and slick with ice, the gutters dripping steadily onto the frozen ground below. A high iron fence surrounded the grounds, its gate set into heavy brick pillars. Rust had eaten at the bars, but the lock looked sturdy enough to hold a man until Judgment Day.

A constable at the gate checked her letter of employment, then admitted her with a nod. Eleanor stepped onto the crunching path that wound toward the main entrance. To her left, a tangle of bare trees rattled in the wind. To her right, a scattering of wooden crosses marked the small cemetery where patients who died without kin were buried. The snow had gathered in the hollows of the graves, softening the mounds like shrouds.

Inside, the smell struck her first. Not the clean, sharp smell of a physician's office, but a heavier, layered odor-bleach over damp stone, sickness over stale air, the faint ammonia bite of unwashed bedding. The ceiling was high enough that her voice, had she spoken, would have echoed.

The matron, Mrs. Hartwell, met her in the foyer. She was a short, stout woman with a plain cap pulled tight over graying hair, her voice brisk as she led Eleanor through the corridors.

They passed ward after ward. Some held men in loose canvas trousers and shirts, pacing in their cells. Others held women in simple linen gowns, some sitting quietly, others muttering, a few staring fixedly at the ceiling as if waiting for something to descend.

At the far end of the ground floor, Mrs. Hartwell stopped before a narrow hallway.

"This is the east corridor," she said. "We keep the more... unsettled patients here. You'll learn which doors to leave shut."

Her tone implied that questions were unwelcome, and Eleanor did not ask them. But as they turned away, she thought she heard something from within-just the faintest whisper.

By the end of her first day, Eleanor's feet ached, her apron smelled faintly of bleach, and her ears rang from the constant undercurrent of noise: shuffling footsteps, soft cries, metal keys clinking.

When she lay down that night in the small dormitory room provided for staff, she told herself the east corridor was just another wing of the hospital. Nothing more.

But she could not stop thinking about the way the air had felt there-colder, heavier, as though the walls themselves were holding their breath.

## **Chapter 4 - The East Corridor**

Three weeks into her employment, Eleanor was given the keys to the east corridor.

It was an unexpected responsibility. Mrs. Hartwell had taken ill with a sudden cough and fever, and another nurse was needed to distribute evening tonics to the patients in that wing. The head attendant handed Eleanor the heavy ring of iron keys and a small oil lamp.

“Don’t dawdle,” he said. “Keep your eyes down. And if one of them starts jabbering nonsense, best to let it pass over you like wind.”

The east corridor was narrower than the others, the ceiling lower, the walls weeping with a constant film of damp. The floorboards sagged in the middle, and every step echoed faintly ahead of her, as if someone else were walking just beyond her sight.

The air was colder here-enough that she saw her breath in the lamplight.

The cells were smaller too, their doors reinforced with iron straps. She unlocked the first, sliding a small tin cup of bitter-smelling tonic through the hatch. A thin woman with tangled hair accepted it silently, her eyes following Eleanor until the door closed.

It was at the third cell that she first heard it.

A whisper-not from within, but behind her.

She turned sharply, lamp lifted. The corridor stretched empty in both directions, the shadows deep enough to seem solid. She told herself it was just the voice of another patient carrying from some unseen vent.

But as she knelt to pass the tonic to the occupant of the next cell, the whisper came again. Closer this time, curling right against her ear.

*“You look like her.”*

Eleanor dropped the tin cup. The patient inside-a gaunt man whose wrists were bound in rough cloth restraints-snickered softly.

She left the spill for the cleaners and moved on, her hands trembling as she unlocked the last door.

It was a padded cell. She had not seen one up close before-thick linen-covered walls, floor, and even the door, the padding worn thin in places to reveal the coarse stuffing beneath. Inside sat an old man with clouded eyes, rocking gently. He did not look at her.

But as she stepped back into the corridor, she saw something.

At first she thought it was a shadow, slanting across the far wall. But then it moved-slowly, deliberately-until it took the shape of a tall man. His outline was indistinct, but where his eyes should have been there was only smooth, unbroken darkness.

She blinked, and he was gone.

That night, she lay in her bed unable to sleep, her mind racing. Her mother's voice came back to her, clear as if she were standing at the foot of the bed:

*"If you see them too, Ellie... run."*

## **Chapter 5 - Whispers in the Ward**

The next few days passed in a haze of unease.

Eleanor tried to convince herself the man in the east corridor had been nothing more than a trick of the shadows-a shape conjured by her tired eyes and the dim, wavering light of the oil lamp. She tried, too, to forget the words she'd heard whispered in her ear.

But the whispers didn't stop.

At first they came only in the east corridor, slipping into the edges of her hearing like a draft under a door. Then they followed her elsewhere-down the main hall, into the laundry, even to the small staff dormitory where she slept.

Most of the time they were too faint to understand. Other times they came clear, the voices strange yet familiar. A woman sobbing softly. A man calling her name.

On the fourth night after the shadow-man appeared, she woke to find her dormitory colder than it had been in weeks. Her breath hung in the air like smoke. She sat up and listened.

From the far corner of the room came the sound of someone breathing.

She lit her bedside lamp, but the light reached only as far as the foot of her bed. The corner remained in shadow-thick, almost palpable.

Her mother's face came to her mind unbidden, as it had been that last day: flushed, eyes wide with urgency, warning Eleanor about the man with no eyes.

The breath in the corner stopped. Then, very slowly, the shadow began to stretch upward.

Eleanor's hand trembled so badly she almost dropped the lamp.

The shadow elongated until it reached the ceiling, its form resolving into something like a man-tall, shoulders slightly hunched, head tilted as if studying her.

"Get out," she whispered.

The figure didn't move. But in the next breath, she felt it-cold fingers brushing her hair back from her forehead, just as her mother had done when Eleanor was a child.

Her heart pounded. She shut her eyes tight and whispered a prayer, willing herself not to open them again until morning.

When she finally dared, the corner was empty.

But her hair still lay smoothed against her head, and on her nightstand was a small smudge of soot she couldn't explain.

By breakfast, her hands shook too much to properly pour tea. Another nurse, Clara, noticed.

"You've gone pale," Clara said, leaning close. "Not sleeping?"

Eleanor hesitated. "I've been hearing things. Seeing things, too."

Clara's brow furrowed, but her smile was practiced and light. "You must be careful saying such things here, dear. People will get ideas."

Eleanor tried to laugh, but the sound caught in her throat. She realized, with a sickening twist of her stomach, that she had heard those exact words before.

Her mother's neighbors had said them.

The week before they took her away.

## **Chapter 6 - A Familiar Hand**

Snow had been falling for hours, muting the outside world in a thick, white hush. Inside Greystone, the air was heavy with the damp heat of coal stoves and the restless sounds of patients pacing their rooms.

Eleanor had been assigned to the women's ward for the afternoon—an easier shift, or so she thought. Most of the women were docile in the winter months, preferring to huddle near the fireplaces or wrap themselves in the thin wool blankets issued by the hospital.

She was carrying a basin of hot water to one of the older patients when she felt it—a hand slipping into hers.

It was small, delicate, the grip strangely familiar.

She looked down, expecting to see one of the patients who often followed the nurses around like children.

No one was there.

Her breath caught. The hand was still there, fingers laced with hers, cool to the touch—cooler than the water in the basin. Slowly, deliberately, it guided her toward the far end of the ward.

The hall there ended in a tall, narrow window, its glass crusted with frost. The light was dim, more shadow than day.

The hand released her.

She turned to look behind her—and froze.

Her mother was standing there.

Not as she'd last seen her, pale and feverish in the carriage, but younger, hair unbound, eyes bright and wet with urgency.

"Eleanor," her mother said, voice trembling, "you have to leave this place."

The words came out in a cloud of mist, and the sound seemed to echo against the walls though her lips barely moved.

"You're dead," Eleanor whispered.

Her mother reached for her again, but her fingers passed through Eleanor's sleeve like water through cloth. "They will not help you here. The man with no eyes walks these halls, and he is not alone."

Eleanor stepped back, shaking her head. Her mind felt split down the middle—half of her wanted to fall to her knees and beg for forgiveness, the other half wanted to scream that none of this could be real.

Footsteps sounded behind her.

The vision vanished as Clara appeared, carrying a tray of laudanum bottles. She glanced at Eleanor's face, then at the empty space in front of her.

"What are you doing here?" Clara asked, her tone too light.

Eleanor swallowed hard. "I saw—" She stopped herself, but the words spilled anyway. "I saw my mother. She spoke to me."

Clara's smile didn't reach her eyes. "That's... unusual."

Eleanor heard the unspoken word *madness* sitting just behind the careful tone. She heard the quiet judgment in the pause that followed.

By evening, she realized she had made a mistake. Too many people in Greystone had ears, and the walls themselves seemed to pass along whispers.

The night nurse avoided her gaze. The head attendant looked at her with a kind of pity usually reserved for the patients.

And when she returned to her dormitory, she found an unfamiliar brass key on her nightstand.

A tag dangled from it, handwritten in spidery script: **East Corridor - Padded Room.**

## **Chapter 7 - The Promise**

The next morning, Eleanor was summoned to Dr. Whitcombe's office.

He was the senior physician at Greystone, a man in his late fifties with a meticulously trimmed beard and an accent that suggested time spent in London. His office smelled faintly of tobacco and chalk dust, the shelves lined with anatomy texts and strange medical instruments in polished wooden cases.

"Miss Harrow," he began, gesturing for her to sit. "I understand you've had... an experience."

Eleanor hesitated. "Who told you?"

"A concerned colleague," he said smoothly. "We value the mental health of our staff, just as we do our patients. I'd like you to feel you can speak freely."

She wanted to leave. Every instinct told her that admitting the truth here was like stepping into a snare. But part of her was desperate to be believed, to have someone confirm that she was not following her mother down the same dark path.

So she told him-about the whispers, the shadow-man, the hand that had guided hers, and her mother's voice warning her to leave.

Dr. Whitcombe listened without interrupting, his eyes steady, hands folded neatly atop his desk. When she finished, he leaned back in his chair.

"I believe you," he said.

Eleanor felt a sudden rush of relief-so sudden it made her dizzy.

"There are," he continued, "phenomena which science has yet to explain. And while most here would dismiss such claims, I have long been interested in... unconventional afflictions. There is a gentleman arriving from Boston tomorrow. He has had remarkable success in dispelling persistent hallucinations, even those of supernatural origin."

Eleanor frowned. "An exorcist?"

"Not in the religious sense," Whitcombe said. "A physician of a most progressive school. He will work with you in the east corridor, where we can ensure your privacy. We don't want the other staff gossiping, do we?"

She nodded, though unease pricked at the back of her mind.

That evening, Clara stopped her in the hallway. "I hear Dr. Whitcombe is sending you to an expert. That's good, isn't it?"

Eleanor studied her face. Clara's smile was the same one she'd seen on orderlies leading patients into solitary confinement-too wide, too careful.

In the night, Eleanor dreamed of the east corridor. She saw the padded cell with its fraying seams, and in the corner stood the shadow-man, taller than the room, his eyeless face

turned toward her. Behind him, the walls were wet-not with water, but with something darker, thicker.

When she woke, her bedsheets were damp with sweat, and the brass key still sat on her nightstand.

## **Chapter 8 - The East Corridor Again**

The morning of the “treatment” was gray and wet, the kind of weather that made the hospital’s stone walls sweat and the air inside smell faintly of mildew and coal ash.

Eleanor ate nothing at breakfast. She sat at the end of the staff table with her tea untouched, watching the steam curl away until it vanished into the drafty air.

By mid-morning, an orderly appeared in the dormitory hallway. He was a broad-shouldered man named Rutledge, his head shaved to the scalp and his eyes unreadable.

“Dr. Whitcombe wants you now,” he said.

No further explanation.

Eleanor followed him through the main hall, the sound of her own footsteps swallowed by the thick carpeting. But when they turned down the east corridor, her stomach clenched. The place seemed even darker than before, the oil lamps casting weak, trembling halos on the damp walls.

The smell here was different-old straw, cold stone, and the faint metallic tang of rust.

They passed the same cells she had tended weeks earlier. Some of the patients watched her silently through the small grated openings, eyes glimmering like trapped animals’. Others mumbled to themselves or pressed their foreheads against the doors.

Halfway down, she caught it again: a whisper.

It slid into her ear so clearly she almost thought the speaker was standing beside her.

*“Eleanor... leave now.”*

Her breath caught, and she quickened her pace. Rutledge noticed.

“Don’t worry,” he said without looking at her. “You’ll feel better after this.”

They reached the padded cell at the far end. The thick door loomed ahead, its surface worn smooth by decades of hands, fists, and heads pounding against it. The iron hinges were streaked with corrosion, and a faint chill seemed to radiate from the cracks around the frame.

Dr. Whitcombe was already there, standing with another man Eleanor did not recognize. This newcomer was smaller, wiry, with a neatly waxed mustache and the kind of smile that felt more like a smirk. His black leather bag rested at his feet.

“Miss Harrow,” Whitcombe said warmly. “This is Dr. Collingwood, the gentleman from Boston I mentioned.”

Collingwood gave her a brief, almost absent nod. His gaze swept over her like he was sizing up a piece of furniture.

“Before we begin,” Whitcombe said, “I must ask for your complete trust. The procedure is harmless, and if successful, you will never again be troubled by these... apparitions.”

Eleanor glanced at the padded door. Something was wrong. The moment her eyes settled on it, she felt the same pressure in her head she'd experienced the night she saw the shadow-man-the sense of being watched from just beyond the edges of vision.

"I thought we were speaking," she said quietly. "You said this would be a consultation."

"And so it is," Whitcombe replied, his tone soft as cotton. "But some consultations require privacy. This is for your safety."

Rutledge unlocked the door. The smell of stale air and old fabric rushed out, dry and suffocating.

The cell was small-so small Eleanor doubted she could stretch her arms out without touching both walls. The padding on the walls had yellowed with age, and in some places it sagged inward, the stuffing visible through small tears.

A single stool sat in the center.

She stepped inside hesitantly, feeling the floor sink slightly beneath her weight.

Behind her, the door swung shut.

The lock clicked.

## Chapter 9 - The Lock Turns

The click of the lock was louder than it should have been, a metallic punctuation that seemed to sink into Eleanor's bones.

She turned, expecting to see Whitcombe standing in the doorway, ready to explain the next step. But the thick padded door filled her vision, solid and unmoving. The narrow seam of light at the edges had vanished.

It was just her-and the silence.

The air inside the cell was different from the rest of the corridor. Heavier. Every breath felt like drawing in dust that had been sitting here for years. The faint scent of mildew clung to the padding, undercut by something sharper-carbolic acid, maybe, or the ghost of it.

She crossed the room in two steps and pressed her hand against the wall. The padding yielded slightly under her fingers, the fabric rough with age. In the faint glow of the single oil lamp hanging from a wall sconce, she could see faint discolorations: brown stains in the corners, smudges from countless hands or fists.

She didn't sit on the stool. Her legs were tense, her heartbeat too loud in her ears.

From somewhere deep in the padding-no, *behind* it-came a soft sound. A slow dragging, like fabric over wood.

“Hello?” she whispered.

The dragging stopped.

She heard another sound, closer this time: a deep exhalation, like someone standing just behind her ear.

Her skin prickled.

The shadow-man's image returned unbidden to her mind-tall, eyeless, waiting. She took a step back until her calves touched the stool, and she gripped its edges with cold fingers.

The door opened suddenly.

Dr. Whitcombe stepped in, followed by Dr. Collingwood and Rutledge. They moved with an efficiency that set her nerves screaming-no wasted words, no hesitation. Rutledge closed the door again, this time from the inside, and stood in front of it.

Whitcombe smiled in that same gentle way he had in his office. “Now, Miss Harrow, I must commend you. You've been very brave. Few have the fortitude to confront their affliction so directly.”

Eleanor's throat was dry. “I told you-I'm not-”

“Of course you are not mad,” Whitcombe said smoothly, cutting her off. “But hallucinations, ghosts... they are cousins of the same illness. And cousins, as you know, share blood.”

Collingwood set his leather bag on the stool between them and unlatched it. Inside were instruments Eleanor had never seen before-long, thin rods of polished steel, a mallet, a curved scalpel.

Her breath came faster. "What is this?"

"A revolutionary treatment," Whitcombe said. "It severs the faulty pathways that cause your mind to conjure these visions. Many patients find complete relief afterward. And you, Miss Harrow—" his eyes gleamed in the lamplight—"are fortunate to be among the first."

Collingwood lifted one of the rods and held it to the light, inspecting the tip. "We go in just above the eye," he said almost casually. "Quick and merciful. You won't feel a thing after the initial tap."

Eleanor backed toward the wall, the padding giving slightly under her weight. "No," she said, her voice breaking. "You said you believed me."

Whitcombe's expression never changed. "I do believe you. I believe your mother too. But belief does not cure."

Rutledge stepped forward. His hands, massive and calloused, closed around her arms. The shadows in the corners of the cell seemed to thicken. For a moment-just a moment-she thought she saw her mother there again, mouth open in a silent scream. And behind her, the tall figure with no eyes watched patiently, as if this moment had always been inevitable.

Whitcombe reached for her chin. "You're lucky, Miss Harrow," he said softly. "Lucky to be one of the first patients to receive it."

### **Chapter 10 - After**

The first strike of the mallet was not pain.

It was light-blinding, white, searing through her skull like someone had split her head open to the noon sun.

Then came the pressure, deep and strange, the sound of her own pulse roaring in her ears. A metallic tang filled her mouth. She tried to cry out, but her tongue felt clumsy, swollen, unwilling to obey.

Someone-Rutledge?-was holding her head still.

A voice counted softly, not in numbers, but in slow, careful syllables.

“...and now the other side.”

Another flash of white, another plunge into the unnatural silence that followed.

When the hands released her, Eleanor sagged sideways against the padded wall. She was distantly aware of Whitcombe and Collingwood talking, of the soft squeak of the stool being moved aside. But their words blurred into nonsense, washed away by the new emptiness inside her.

The shadows in the corners were gone.

So was the whispering.

But not because they had never been real-she *knew* they had been real.

She simply no longer had the strength to care.

Time stopped meaning anything. She might have sat there for minutes or days. The lamplight dimmed and brightened again, though she did not see anyone bring fresh oil. The padded cell seemed smaller now, the walls breathing faintly, as if they, too, were alive.

Once, she thought she saw her mother kneeling in front of her, reaching out with trembling hands. Eleanor tried to meet her gaze, but her eyes no longer seemed to focus the way they should. The figure faded.

Another time, the shadow-man appeared in the corner, his towering shape indistinct but steady. He stood there for what might have been hours, waiting for her to notice. But she couldn't summon the fear she knew she should feel.

Whitcombe returned once more, stepping carefully around her as if she were made of glass. “Rest now, Miss Harrow,” he murmured. “The worst is over.”

Her lips moved soundlessly.

“Such a privilege,” he continued, almost to himself, “to be on the very cusp of medical progress.”

He paused at the doorway, looking back at her with the faintest trace of satisfaction.  
“You’re lucky,” he said. “Lucky to be one of the first patients to receive it.”

The door closed.

And in the muffled silence of the padded room, Eleanor stared at nothing at all.

### **Author's Thoughts**

*The Padded Room* explores how society dismisses those who see the world differently—whether through illness or truth others refuse to accept. Set in a time when mental health care was cruel and misguided, the story shows how fear and control can silence voices and erase identities. The lobotomy symbolizes this brutal silencing. Ultimately, the padded room is a prison not just of walls, but of disbelief and isolation.