Eve Brewer

INT. CARRIAGE FROM ASYLUM—DAY

Nellie and Peter A. Hendricks (the lawyer who came to get her out of the asylum) are seated on opposite sides of the ambulance. Nellie has huge dark circles under her eyes, her hair is dull and tangled, and her lips are chapped, but her expression is fierce and her eyes are bright. She is wrapped in a large knit shawl.

NELLIE

I’ve got it.

She produces her battered notebook from the folds of her shawl and hands it over to Peter. He flips through the first few pages.

NELLIE

I wrote down what I could, and I have the rest of my experiences safely in my memory. Look, right there-

PETER

What’s this about? Miss Bly-
The page he has turned to is covered in incoherent scribbles. The words “Cuba” and “I want my trunks!” are visible among the chicken scratch. He looks at her with some concern.

NELLIE (REALIZING)

Oh! Oh, that. Utter nonsense for inquisitive scientists. They took the book away from me for a while early on, and I never got my pencil back, but I put down the names of-

TILLIE (O.S.)

Stop! Stop, please, you’re making a mistake-

Outside the carriage, Tillie Mayard (haggard and disheveled) is running across the lawn, a nurse some way behind her. She is still dressed in the sack-like gown all the patients wear, but her straw hat is gone. She reaches the ambulance and presses her hands up against the door beseechingly.

TILLIE (CONT’D)

Nobody here will believe me. Please, sir, you must know, it was you who inquired after me! I’m the real one, she is passing herself off as me, I am Nellie Brown!
Peter is shocked, Nellie saddened. The nurse catches up with Tillie and pulls her away from the ambulance. She is struggling weakly and sobbing that she is the real Nellie Brown and they must believe her.

NURSE

Get away from there, you! Very sorry about this, sir. (to Tillie) Come on, back to the rest, and you’ll be put on the ropes if this behavior is kept up!

She takes Tillie’s arm and drags her back toward the other patients milling around in the pavilion. The ambulance starts to move, and Tillie’s forlorn figure and the shape of the distant asylum grow smaller as Nellie watches out the window.

PETER

Good heavens! We got you out just in time.

Nellie looks at him questioningly.

PETER

How terrible to be put among lunatics! With creatures like that running free, why, you might have been killed. Good thing that nurse was watching.
Nellie’s head snaps up, glaring out of the depths of her shawl. She reaches across and plucks the notebook out of his hand.

NELLIE

Miss Mayard was as rational as you or I when she was first brought here, Mr. Hendricks. She was suffering from nothing more than a nervous debility, and it is the treatment she received at the hands of those nurses that has left her in her current state.

Peter realizes he messed up. Nellie continues…

NELLIE

Sitting on a hard chair all day, not allowed to speak, eating spoiled food and being given cold baths in filthy water—what could produce insanity quicker than that treatment? Poor Tillie.

The ambulance arrives on the pier, and Nellie and Peter silently make the transfer from it to the ferry back to the mainland. They’re alone on the ride.

PETER

…What are you going to write?
Nellie sighs. She’s not mad with him, but she’s tired of his misconceptions.

NELLIE

Before I came here, I thought I’d be disproving all those lurid romance novels about poor innocent girls locked up and mistreated in asylums...

The insane are the most helpless of God’s creatures, and I wanted to prove to myself that they were being treated properly.

But when I saw what was happening to Tillie, I determined to try by every means to make my mission of benefit to my suffering sisters and show how they are committed without ample trial.

PETER

You’ll have to go before a grand jury if you want to make anything of it, you know. As soon as you publish, they’ll claim libel.

Nellie smiles.
NELLIE

I think I’m ready for it. Make sure there’s something to eat when we get to the city, won’t you...?