



a novel

THE GIRL
in HIS
SHADOW

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international bestselling author of *The Engineer's Wife*

AUDREY BLAKE

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For Ivy

To Nana, Nancy Runyan, whose gift for healing as a decorated WWII army nurse in the Pacific Theatre brought compassion and hope to the survivors of the Baton Death March. You inspire me always.

Prologue

Hefting his black bag, Dr. Horace Croft stumped down the uneven pavement. Despite the afternoon sunshine, the street was silent and the air thick with fear. Shop doors were shut and bolted, and too many anxious faces watched from the windows. For fifteen years London had dreaded the cholera. Now it had come.

Croft had tried to prepare, studying initial reports of the epidemic from India, Russia, and Japan. An irreligious man, he gave silent prayers of relief when the outbreak of 1827 died in the Caucasus before reaching Europe. Foolish of him. Four years later, the deadly disease advanced from the dark forests of the East into the shadowy Balkans. The following year it breached England's rocky shores. Miraculously, the outbreak was contained in Sunderland, but this was respite, not reprieve. Three months later, the disease erupted in London.

He'd paid ten calls already today, all within a mile of each other. He frowned, still troubled by the last.

Jemmy Watt had first sent for him yesterday to tend his feverish wife. Today, she was dead. So were her children, and Jemmy was failing rapidly. It would be a miracle if Croft found him alive tomorrow. This disease was too strong to fight. Even worse, the lads at the parish were cowards, unwilling to come for the bodies of Jemmy's family. Croft had shouted and cursed, warning them against leaving corpses harboring contagion until they'd finally cleared them away, but not before binding linen around their faces as a shield against the miasma of disease. All the shouting left Croft's throat dry as pasteboard.

One more stop before he could go home. With this patient, at least, he had some hope. Francis Beady, a stationer, was gone already, buried in quicklime a week ago, but the wife, Margaret, ignored grief with an iron will. Yesterday, though terse and thin-lipped, she'd been determined to keep her ailing mother-in-law alive. Better yet,

her child and baby were still healthy. He had left Margaret Beady with a tincture of willow bark for fever and instructions to get help with her mother-in-law's care, though they knew no one would come.

"I'll try, Doctor," Margaret said, spooning water between the dry lips of her mother-in-law, while the little girl—a mere eight or nine—bounced the baby on her knee. The old woman seemed to be turning the corner.

Yes, he expected to see improvements in the Beady house. The shop was closed, naturally, so he knocked loudly on the door. No answer. He checked his watch. Mrs. Beady knew to expect him.

"Mrs. Beady!" Still no sound. Worried now, he rattled the handle. It moved beneath his hand. Unlocked. Horace frowned. It wasn't like Mrs. Beady, but there was little danger of invasion. The neighbors all knew of their affliction. Croft stepped inside, past the dimly lit shelves of notebooks and paper. In only a week, the counters had acquired a film of dust.

It was a small shop, but the Beadys made a better living than Jemmy Watt. Not that money dissuaded cholera or made it any less lethal. He made his way up the stairs to the family's rooms on the second floor. "Mrs. Beady?" It was too quiet, and the telltale stench hovered on the landing. Resigned to what he would find, Croft walked in, stepping over the toy blocks abandoned on the floor.

He found the mother-in-law's wasted body in the bedroom, but Mrs. Beady had been well enough then to cover her with a sheet. Mrs. Beady was curled up on the sitting room floor, her hair still damp, her lips cracked. The baby lay beside her. It must have died after, for it lay uncovered in a pool of filth, and Croft knew Margaret was not a woman to leave her child untended. He sighed and straightened, tugging at his coat. As for the older child...

Croft looked around. He couldn't see her. "Miss Beady?" He didn't know the girl's name. "Miss Beady!"

He felt more than heard a faint exhalation. She was behind him, huddled deep in a shabby armchair. He tilted back her chin—still alive, her skin hot, her eyes unfocused. He reached to take her pulse, frowning as he counted the slow, thready beats, noting the tremor in her fingers. In her other hand, cradled against her stomach, she clutched a dipper. The basin beside her was empty. Her lips moved, and though she failed to produce any sound, he could almost hear the crackling of her flaked skin.

Water, she mouthed. There was none in the room.

“I’ll be right back,” he said and went to find the kitchen. There was no water to be had, but in the teapot on the table was an inch of cold brew gone sludgy at the bottom. It would do.

He tried dripping it onto her lips, but the liquid rolled away before she could catch it. Anxious now, he soaked it up with his handkerchief. When he laid the wet cambric on her mouth, she sucked. Her fingers, already skeletally thin—cholera was terrifyingly aggressive—came up to clutch the cloth. He let her work on it, then had to pry it away to soak again. Her grip was stronger than he’d expected, but he warned himself against hope. It was easy, depressingly easy, to imagine patients looking better. Hadn’t he thought the old woman would pull through? This child looked as fragile as a dandelion puff.

She couldn’t stay here alone. She must be bathed and put into clean clothes. Someone must soak the handkerchief for her and, in all probability, watch until she gave up and died.

Ah. There were curtains. Good enough, and probably the cleanest linen in the house. With two hands, Croft gripped the child’s soiled nightdress and tore it down the front. She flinched, but whether it was his hands or the noise that disturbed her, he couldn’t say. She was too blue, too thin. With the spare, efficient movements of a battlefield surgeon, he peeled the dirty garment away and pulled at the curtains. The rod broke, and the rings tore and crashed to the floor in a swirl of dust and plaster as sunlight knifed into the room. He squeezed his eyes shut and coughed. The girl made a sound. Leaning close, he cataloged the flicker of her hollowed eyes, the tremor of her lips.

“Hush. We’ll get you covered. These curtains will do.”

He picked her up and swathed her in the yards of sturdy cloth. Even with the wrapping, she felt no heavier than a good-sized border collie. Croft was sturdy and used to lugging around deadweight, but the extra fabric was a hazard, tangling his arms. He looped it around her slack legs and carried her down the stairs. No one stopped him on the way out, but he made himself knock at the neighbor’s door.

“You must send for someone to carry away the bodies,” he said to the tired-eyed woman peering suspiciously through the peephole.

She blinked. Croft resisted the urge to blast her. The fool woman must have known the Beadys were ill but hadn’t moved an inch to help them. “And that one?” she asked.

“I’ll take her.”

The woman didn’t argue, blind or indifferent to his contempt. In the street, the eyes that found him and his burden swerved away. By the time he got home, he was

breathing hard, unable to manage his key. He had to knock and wait for his housekeeper.

“What’s this?” she demanded. “You can’t bring corpses in the front door.” His regular deliveries always came in the dead of night, at the back, because flaunting the fact that he bought stolen bodies was a good way to get his windows smashed.

“This one’s alive. You’re blocking my way, Mrs. Phipps.”

Her face blanched. “You can’t bring cholera here!” But she stepped aside. Croft marched upstairs, Mrs. Phipps fretting behind him. “She’s sick! What am I supposed to do with her?”

“Get her some water. No, sweet tea. We’ll try that. And fetch something for her to wear. One of my shirts will suffice. I’ll need your help to bathe her.”

No response. He looked back, fixing his housekeeper with a stern look. “Everyone in her family is dead.”

Mrs. Phipps sighed with exasperation. “And you think you can save her.”

Horace lifted one side of his mouth. With the girl in his arms, it was impossible to shrug. “Probably not. But I’ll try.” When he reached the next floor, she called after him. “Not the blue guest room! Those are the best sheets!”

* * *

Unlike her employer, Mrs. Phipps was religious. When she arrived with a sponge and a basin of water, she forgot her desire to safeguard the best household linen. “God in heaven,” she murmured. The girl’s skin was almost transparent, her eyes sunk in hollows of plum-dark bruise. Her dark-blond hair spilled in a tangled mass against the pillowcase.

“Don’t try to speak.” Mrs. Phipps advanced with her wet sponge. “Save your strength, child.”

The girl improved at first, then weakened for days until she was as thin as an eggshell. The tea and broth spooned into her so laboriously passed through her without even changing color. When she turned as gray as ash and dry as paper, Dr. Croft rubbed his chin and Mrs. Phipps went to the pantry to wring her hands unobserved. Then she set her jaw and marched back upstairs to dose and poultice and bathe, resolute as any soldier facing a hopeless battle. When the fever broke and natural sleep fell upon the girl, Mrs. Phipps wept.

This earned a chiding glance from the doctor. “Don’t get sentimental,” he said. He finished measuring the child’s pulse and went to the chair by the window to record his

notes.

Too late. Mrs. Phipps was past forty with no husband. “Mr. Phipps” was a necessary invention due to her promotion, twenty years ago, from upstairs maid to housekeeper. To Mrs. Phipps, the quiet girl stirring in her sleep was no longer a patient. She was a miracle, a baby brought by a river in a rush basket. And Mrs. Phipps didn’t even know the child’s Christian name.

As soon as the little one recovered her speech, the housekeeper broached the subject between spoonfuls of broth. “Now you are mending, I should like to call you something besides Miss Beady,” she said, watching the girl’s throat. “Good. Swallow it down. Take another spoonful.” She blotted a drip of broth with a soft napkin. “What did your parents call you?”

The child blinked but a lone tear escaped, leaving behind a glistening silver trail like the snails so injurious to the rosebushes Mrs. Phipps nourished in the patch of earth behind the house.

“Are they gone?” Her dark eyes wheeled around the shadows of the room, searching.

Mrs. Phipps nodded, unable to speak.

“All of them? Peter?”

“All but you.” Overcome by her failure with words, Mrs. Phipps pressed the child close, surprised when tiny fingers clung to her.

The child closed her eyes against the pain and whispered, “My name is Eleanor.”

“It’s a pretty name.” Mrs. Phipps caressed the girl’s hand, surprised the gesture came without thinking. She had no experience with children.

“They called me Nora.”

“And so shall I. Only two more spoonfuls.” When she set aside the empty cup, Mrs. Phipps smoothed Nora’s hair, then thought better of it and went for a comb. She unpicked the tangles and would have tied the limp strands back with a ribbon, but Nora was asleep.

* * *

The first time Nora was well enough to leave her bed and eat gruel in a chair by the fire, Mrs. Phipps shut Nora’s bedroom door, tiptoed downstairs, and confronted the doctor in his study. She made certain his door was shut, too.

“Eh?” Dr. Croft looked up.

“Still doing better.”

“Good, good.” He looked down at his notebook, but Mrs. Phipps ignored this cue of dismissal.

“Sir? I’d like to know what you intend with Nora.”

“Who?” He looked up in confusion.

Mrs. Phipps liked and respected her employer. Usually. “Miss Eleanor Beady, the girl you brought home for me to drag back from the grave.”

“I suppose we’ll have to find out if she has any family.”

Mrs. Phipps had already made inquiries and ascertained there were none. Keeping her hands neatly folded (though her nostrils flared), she explained this to the doctor.

“Perhaps the parish—” He caught her stern look and aborted the thought. “I could find a school for her, I suppose.”

“She’s not a fish. You can’t throw her back.” She’d never used such a tart voice with him before. “I want to keep her.”

“Where?”

“In the blue room, of course. I’m not going to store her away in some cupboard.”

“But why?”

The scalpel-sharp question confounded her. She couldn’t explain. Mrs. Phipps only knew that she needed the girl, that she would weep for days and days if she lost her. Unable to speak, she mashed her lips together, and Dr. Croft, who regularly had to pick up on what people were helpless to say, suddenly understood this was an emotional matter. He did not like to unduly antagonize his housekeeper. She was the only woman in England who tolerated dusting around severed body parts. He nodded once and returned to his writing. “Never mind. Excellent notion. Might as well keep the girl. In a year or two, when cholera returns to London, I can observe if she’s gained any immunity.”

Mrs. Phipps was speechless, but decided to overlook his callous words. She’d won.

Chapter 1

Thirteen years later. 1845.

Nora pushed a wayward curl off her damp forehead. The morning fog on the Thames refused to lift, collecting the summer heat like a wet rag spread over the city. Fetid odors lingered in the streets, insinuating their way into the house. Even Nora's tolerant nose wrinkled. She pressed a scented handkerchief to her face and hastened to answer the front door.

Another candidate. They needed a new hallboy, one with rare and expensive qualities: Dr. Croft's household required servants who were quiet and discreet. So far, Nora's interviews had been unsuccessful. Teeth on edge, she tripped over the wrinkled rug in the hall and cursed quietly, half for the rug and half for a boy who didn't know to use the back entrance.

With an annoyed frown, she yanked open the door. "I expected you around back," she announced.

"Pardon?"

Nora's eyes adjusted to the fierce outdoor light. Oh no. Certainly not a hallboy. This was a man, a tall one, wearing a neat beard that failed to hide his youth. He carried an expensive beaver hat in his hands. Nora dusted her hands against her wrinkled skirt and rearranged her face into a flustered smile. "I'm terribly sorry. May I help you?"

He hesitated. "Was I supposed to go to the back? Is that where the clinic is situated?"

Ah. A new patient, a Mayfair one by the looks of him. Nora blushed and wondered why he'd come here instead of sending for Dr. Croft. Perhaps he was suffering from a private complaint, the sort of malady that came from raucous clubs and free women.

This one was handsome—handsome enough to get himself into that kind of trouble. People traveled further afield to conceal such things from their neighbors. Or wives.

Nora cleared her throat. “I’m so sorry. I’m afraid Dr. Croft had to go out. They needed him at hospital to cover another doctor’s lecture. If you come back in an hour... Or you could come in and wait.” *Please don’t let him come in and wait.* She’d been too busy this morning with interviews to examine the state of the parlor.

“I’m happy to wait. Perhaps I could look the consulting rooms over?”

Nora blinked. Had she offended him? After coming all the way to Great Queen Street, did he think their clinic inferior? True, the neighborhood was faded and the house shabby, but the clinic was bright and pristine.

“Or if my room is ready, I could unpack my bags,” he said.

“Bags?” Only at that moment did Nora see the luggage beside him on the front stoop. *Did he intend to stay?* There were no surgeries scheduled for the day, but that didn’t mean Dr. Croft hadn’t promised something and forgotten to inform Nora.

“I’m afraid I’m caught out,” Nora admitted. “I didn’t know Dr. Croft was expecting an overnight patient, but I’m happy to prepare a room.”

“I’m sorry,” the man replied, not sounding apologetic at all. “I think we’re confused. Let me make a proper introduction. I am Dr. Daniel Gibson, the new under surgeon.”

Her mouth fell open. “Under surgeon of what?” she finally managed to ask.

He withdrew the outstretched hand she had failed to notice. “Of this establishment. Dr. Croft hired me. Surely he spoke of me...” Dr. Gibson’s voice trailed off as he took in her shocked face.

The day had come—hot and monotonous and like every other morning, except today she found herself staring into the face of her own replacement. He smiled. Was he trying to charm her?

Taking advantage of her surprise, the man picked up his bags and stepped into the hall. His shoes were impossibly shiny after navigating their busy street, as if dust refused to cling to him.

Mrs. Phipps appeared at Nora’s elbow. *Good. An ally.* “Is there a problem here?”

“This man says he was hired by the doctor to be an under surgeon. Here!”

“Never!” Mrs. Phipps puffed, squaring her tiny shoulders. She was barely the height of a road pony and spare as the poles they tied them to, but the tall man swallowed uncomfortably under her scrutiny. “Shall we ever learn not to be shocked?” she asked, casting her eyes to the ceiling.

“Well, I freely admit that I am.” Nora folded her arms and planted herself in front of the man to halt further trespassing. “Dr. Croft can’t have hired you. Not without consulting me—the rest of the household, I mean. It’s impossible. In the meantime...”

“In the meantime, perhaps someone could take my coat? It’s unnaturally warm today.” He set down both his bags and went to work unbuttoning his greatcoat.

Nora started to argue, but Mrs. Phipps gave a stern look. “I’m sure Dr. Croft will explain,” she whispered to Nora. “What did you say your name was, Mr...?”

“Dr. Gibson. Daniel Gibson.” He tipped his head. “Thank you for being so accommodating,” he said.

Mrs. Phipps returned his smile and offered, “I’ll have Cook make up a sandwich since you’ve come all this way.”

“That would be lovely. Perhaps after I’ve seen the clinic.”

“Certainly,” Mrs. Phipps said.

She led him down the hall, leaving Nora abandoned with his luggage in the entryway. That wayward curl, sensing Nora’s losing streak, sprang free and landed in the middle of her forehead. Pushing it away, she hastened after them.

She rounded the corner and nearly collided with the man. He’d stopped to frown at a particularly overwrought painting of a storm-tossed ship, unfortunately hanging askew. He reached out and righted it, glancing at her.

Nora suppressed a grunt, painfully aware of the worn hallway carpet, her serviceable dress, the clash of shabby grandeur and utility in the fixtures. Gibson (she wouldn’t think of him as *doctor* until he proved his skill) didn’t belong here. His impeccable demeanor and Mayfair manners were as abrasive to Nora as grit on the tongue. Maybe if he got an honest look at the house he’d decide not to stay. Nora quickened her steps, keeping pace with him as he hurried after Mrs. Phipps to the clinic.

* * *

This was deuced awkward. Daniel frowned, cursing Croft’s absentmindedness. Perhaps coming here was a mistake. His family certainly thought so, but he’d insisted. He was lucky, he told them, to have this chance to study with a surgeon as respected as Dr. Croft.

Of course, none of them—Father, Mother, Lillian, Mae—understood why he wanted to study surgery at all. He’d tried to explain: surgery was the vanguard of scientific discovery, a challenge, a test of his mettle, a set of skills that saved lives. Mother had

softened at the idea of fame and success, but this contretemps over his arrival made Daniel doubt the wisdom of his choice. *Surgery? Why indeed.*

The housekeeper looked like a true martinet, pacing ahead of him, her skirts swishing with almost mathematical precision. As for the other one... She was peevish, plaintive, and clearly ill-suited for the role of surgeon's wife. No wonder Croft never mentioned her. If he dealt with this at home, perhaps it explained his distracted muttering and long hours at the dissection table. A young wife was a fine catch for a grizzled, middle-aged man, but Croft was paying dearly for this one.

At least you needn't trouble about her. Enduring some female ill-temper—and *eccentricity*, Daniel thought, spying a sheaf of notes weighed down with an enormous skull—was a small price. Horace Croft was a prize surgeon. His lectures at St. Bartholomew's Hospital were always impossibly crowded, and he hadn't taken an assistant in his private clinic for years. Plenty of men envied Daniel this position.

He would simply have to be patient with Croft's distracted ways and try to nourish a more favorable impression with the women of the house. It wasn't their fault they didn't know to expect him. "I'm sorry my arrival has caused so much inconvenience. A sudden houseguest is quite the surprise."

The housekeeper sighed. "I'm accustomed to surprises after almost twenty years with the doctor." Her mouth snapped shut like a cigar box on tight hinges. The young lady, walking beside him, said nothing.

Well, they didn't have to like him all at once. If it took time to earn his way into their good graces, so be it. At least the housekeeper acknowledged his apology. Whatever people said, in large dwellings, the housekeeper was the woman of the house. Once he won her firmly to his side, he'd make an attempt to get in the good graces of Mrs. Croft, but if that failed, there was always the cook. Daniel had a weakness for toffee trifle.

Names would be nice, though. They had his, and he felt uncomfortable not knowing what to call them.

The housekeeper stopped at the end of the corridor. "The clinic is this way."

The young lady at his side stiffened. "We don't know—"

Daniel spoke up, his thoughts of friendly overtures forgotten. It was time to insist—firmly, but gentlemanly. "I'm here at the invitation of Dr. Croft, madam. I am not a liar."

She stared mulishly at him, practically daring him to pass.

The housekeeper interceded. "I'll show him the clinic." She spoke to the girl, looking past him. "If you'll decide on a room for Dr. Gibson?"

She nodded once, sharply. "Yes, Mrs. Phipps." She left without another word. Daniel decided he would definitely get along better with the housekeeper.

"This way," the older lady beckoned.

Daniel kept pace beside her. "I hope Mrs. Croft will overlook our awkward start."

"Who?" she asked sharply, her insistent steps losing their steady beat.

"The lady, Mrs. Croft." She was probably not a day over twenty, which put her thirty years behind her husband. She had a lovely complexion, completely unmarred by smallpox. Certainly, she'd be one of the inoculated ones. Dr. Croft was an outspoken advocate for the procedure.

"There's no Mrs. Croft." A reluctant smile cut through the frown lines of the housekeeper's cheeks. "Unless he went and grabbed a wife this morning, as well as you. One never knows."

Daniel frowned and paused to quiz out this new puzzle. "But the lady at the door? Forgive me. I thought her the doctor's wife. He told me specifically he had no children."

"Nor has he." The housekeeper's patience was waning. She sniffed as if to say that a stranger appearing from the London streets and announcing he was to live at her house could nearly be tolerated, but a nosy man was insufferable. "You met his ward, Miss Eleanor Beady. She runs the home and helps manage the clinic. The doctor may not have mentioned her, but I suggest you show her the utmost respect." The stern press of her lips gave notice that it was far more than a suggestion. He wondered if the pretty ward was a bastard child or a relative's orphan.

"Of course. My apologies." Daniel counted how many times he'd apologized in the last five minutes and didn't care for the tally. Especially when his only crime was to arrive at his appointed time, well presented and punctual.

The housekeeper led him downstairs to a room lined with bookcases and labeled drawers, as well as a battered desk. "The doctor consults in here. He has a surgical theater where the atrium used to be. Best light." She flicked her head toward the door. "He plans to turn the servants' hall into more convalescing rooms when he expands, which makes you wonder where the servants will eat."

Daniel nodded as if vastly interested, though he wondered no such thing. He was pondering how Dr. Croft kept curious onlookers from beholding gory surgeries in a

glass atrium. Surely it must be boiling in the summers, and at St. Bartholomew's Hospital Croft always advocated keeping patients cold.

The housekeeper continued, warming to the subject of her domestic difficulties. "Of course, there is only me and Cook that live in, and both of us have rooms upstairs. The other servants live out and come during the day. Odd, but there it is." She clamped her hands into a knot, daring him to argue.

"I'm sure you manage things admirably." She'd find no complaints from him so long as there was strong coffee in the morning and plenty of patients to see. "Where will the doctor expect me to stay?"

She sighed and rubbed her forehead. "I'm not sure yet. We've some empty rooms on his side of the house, though that's a grisly prospect as they are full of his specimens. The third floor is nicer, but I can't have you near my or Eleanor's rooms."

"Certainly not," he agreed quickly. The thought of bumping into the housekeeper in her dressing gown on the way to her bath produced an inward shudder. He smiled sheepishly. "I'm afraid I did not catch your name."

"Gracious. What am I thinking? I'm Mrs. Phipps, the housekeeper, and in spite of what you've seen, I'm generally used to commotion." Her eyes narrowed. "Though I hope you are less forgetful than Dr. Croft. One of him is enough. And I don't care for gentlemen who leave bits lying around."

"I spent years at medical school without a valet. I'm used to tidying up after myself," Daniel assured her.

She stared at him a moment, then broke into a laugh. "Lord love you, Doctor, I wasn't thinking about stockings or neckties. I meant bones and things. Just yesterday afternoon I found a handkerchief wrapped around a severed thumb. Dr. Croft had forgotten to put it away."

"How terrible," he mumbled. "I do my best to keep my patients all in one piece."

She gave an approving nod. "Well, that's something. This way, Doctor. I'm sure you'll want to get a look at the surgery." She led him up a half-dozen stairs. They were newer than the rest of the house, and opened into a black cave. "Just give me a moment with the window shades," she said.

He heard her fumbling with something, then he blinked, struck full in the face by a lance of sunlight.

"Let me help." Daniel crossed the room and reached for another cord. He pulled it tight, raising the shade as far as it would go and doubling the light in the glass-

enclosed room. He twisted the cord around a cleat so the shade would stay up and stepped back.

The house may be shabby, he thought, but the surgery is incredible. The stone walls came only to waist height, with glass panes filling the remaining walls and the entire ceiling. They were covered now by a series of thick window shades, except for the two panels they had lifted, and the light from that segment alone filled the entire room.

“The shades are a little cumbersome,” Mrs. Phipps said at his elbow.

“No, they’re perfect,” Daniel said. Dark and thick on the outside, they shielded the room from the sun’s heat when lowered. The slate floor kept the room pleasantly cool. At night or on hot days, with the shades down, the white canvas lining would reflect and amplify any lamplight within.

Scrubbed tabletops shone whiter than the holystoned planks of a navy frigate, and gleaming basins sat upside down to dry in a neat row on the cupboards lining two of the walls. A tray of instruments waited under a layer of bleached linen toweling. Beneath the scent of lye, he detected the smell of blood, but faint enough he couldn’t be certain. There was no sign of dust, let alone stains. Four tall mirrors in wooden frames stood along one of the empty walls, and a system of pulleys hung from the metal supports girding the roof—for lamps? Or applying traction? And there, next to the door—

“Why is there an easel?” Daniel asked.

Mrs. Phipps coughed. “Sometimes Dr. Croft has an artist come make drawings of different specimens.”

“Of course.” Daniel should have realized. Dr. Croft was known for the quality of the illustrations that so often accompanied his reports. “I look forward to meeting the fellow.”

“We ought to see about getting you that sandwich,” Mrs. Phipps said.

“Of course.” He agreed out of politeness, telling himself he’d soon have a chance to look over this marvel of a surgery, inspect the contents of the many fitted drawers, and learn the workings of the pulleys on the ceiling. “This room is fitted up wonderfully. I’m surprised he doesn’t offer demonstrations—”

“He lets a few in at times, but the hospital theaters are better equipped for that,” Mrs. Phipps said quickly. “This space is far too small.”

It wasn’t large, but Daniel knew many men who’d be willing to stand shoulder to shoulder and chest to back to see Dr. Croft working in this environment. However, he

was not foolish enough to contradict Mrs. Phipps and followed her meekly back into the house, up the stairs, and into the front hallway.

“No, don’t worry about your cases,” she told him. “I’ll have them brought upstairs once the room is ready. You can wait in Dr. Croft’s consulting room and I’ll send in your tray. I’ll let the doctor know you are here as soon as he gets in.”

She motioned him into a dimly lit room filled with dancing dust motes and mammoth, threadbare chairs. The heavy door closed behind her. To pass the time, Daniel scanned the books crammed higgledy-piggledy onto the shelves, recoiling at the discovery of a misshapen human ear floating in a glass jar. Of course, Daniel had seen far worse in medical school, but one expected to see specimens there. He gave his jacket a smart tug and settled into Dr. Croft’s chair, humming to ward off nerves and wait for his lunch. Hopefully the petulant girl and floating ear hadn’t spoiled his appetite. Ten minutes ago, he’d been starving.