



With
EVERY BREATH

A NOVEL

ELIZABETH CAMDEN

A decorative floral wreath with various leaves and flowers, framing the text.

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*For Jane and John Auchter,
my first readers and the best of parents*

You gave me a foundation of love, faith, and inspiration.

I will be forever grateful.

Prologue

WASHINGTON, D.C.—1879

There was only one thing Kate Norton loved more than winning, and that was winning against Trevor McDonough.

Trevor had been her nemesis since the day he arrived at their private academy four years ago. They'd both earned perfect grades throughout school, and for the first time in the history of the academy, there was a tie for valedictorian. Today's grueling academic challenge was the tiebreaker, and a college scholarship rested on the results.

With forty spectators crammed into the classroom, it was warm and crowded, made worse by Kate's tight corset and high-collared blouse. She and Trevor stood at the head of the class as they battled in the spelling portion of the test, which had been dragging on for a mind-numbing forty minutes, and most of the audience was surely hoping either she or Trevor would stumble soon. Kate's father sat in the front row, mopping his brow and looking ready to faint, for Trevor was already ahead in today's competition. This morning he'd won the biology, chemistry, and physics tests, while Kate had won calculus and history. Only spelling and trigonometry remained, and she had to win

both if she had a prayer of going to college. Attention turned to Trevor as the headmaster read the next word.

“Mr. McDonough, please spell *abstemious*,” the headmaster said. “Abstemious is defined as ‘practicing an unusually high level of self-restraint with a lack of joy.’”

Oh, the irony.

Trevor McDonough was the most abstemious person ever born. Kate glanced at him. He stood tall, brooding, and gangly, a swath of black hair tumbling over his forehead and obscuring the sullen darkness of his eyes.

In the front row, Kate’s little brother fidgeted and clung to her father’s leg. “Hang in there, Tick,” she whispered to her six-year-old brother. His real name was Timothy, but the joyfully eager way he clung to everyone had earned him the nickname.

Trevor swallowed hard and asked for the word to be repeated. She had a natural advantage over Trevor in spelling. When he first came to their school, his Scottish accent was so heavy it tricked him into spelling mistakes. He learned quickly, though. Over the years he’d scrutinized the way others spoke and trained himself to speak without a trace of his old accent. She held her breath while Trevor took a stab at the word.

And misspelled it. A jolt of anticipation surged through her.

All she had to do was spell *abstemious* correctly and she would win the spelling test. Tension ratcheted higher. There were forty people gathered on her side of the classroom: her family, her friends from school, and a bunch of people who lived at her family’s boardinghouse. Even the postman and the milkman were here to root for her.

On Trevor’s side there was but a single person: the coachman who drove him to school each day. Wearing a navy frock coat with gold braids and shiny black boots, the coachman was the best-dressed person in the room.

Trevor had all the advantages stacked on his side. He lived in a mansion and had the best of everything. She didn't know what happened to his parents, but his guardian was a rich senator from Maryland. Trevor probably had his dinner delivered on a silver platter, while Kate spent her evenings juggling serving trays and waiting on the thirty people who lived at the boardinghouse.

"Miss Norton, you must now spell *abstemious*."

She closed her eyes. *Please . . .*

She spelled the word perfectly, and the crowd burst into cheers as she was declared the winner. Her father vaulted out of his seat and swept her into a bear hug. The school's janitor grinned and clapped her on the back. Tears pricked behind her eyes, and it was hard to breathe.

She mustn't get carried away. She still had to win the trigonometry contest before she would be declared the valedictorian. The next twenty minutes would determine if Kate would go to college or stay working at the boardinghouse.

Not that there was anything wrong with working in a boardinghouse, but she had such dreams. . . .

"You will have twenty minutes to complete the trigonometry equations," the headmaster announced. "The winner of this test will be declared valedictorian and receive a full scholarship for college."

Two chalkboards with squeaky wheels were rolled into the room, both filled with identical equations. She and Trevor darted to the boards and began tackling the equations at the headmaster's prompting. The only sound in the classroom was the mad clicking of chalk on the slate surface. Kate's mind worked faster than her fingers as she processed the complex stream of mathematical equations, but beside her Trevor wrote just as fast.

Her all-consuming battle with Trevor McDonough began the first day he arrived at their school four years ago. Like a vulture,

he immediately spotted her as his only real academic competition. It didn't matter the subject, they competed. Grades were the major thing, but they competed over stupid things too. Who could skip a stone farther. Who could memorize more lines of poetry or hold their breath longer.

The heavy coil of Kate's red hair began sliding down the side of her head, but she couldn't falter now. She needed to complete the equations with a perfect score, and then a college scholarship was hers. Her hand began to shake as she sped toward the end of the final equation.

"Time!" the headmaster called out. He held a stopwatch in his hand and waited for both of them to set their chalk on the trays.

Kate shoved her hair back and glanced at Trevor's equations while he did the same to hers. His black eyes showed no emotion as he scanned her work. Their trigonometry equations looked like ancient hieroglyphics to the untrained eye, yet Kate immediately spotted the two areas where she and Trevor diverged in their methods.

"Please stand back while I score the tests," the headmaster said, the answer key held in his hand. Who was right? She had taken a longer path to arrive at the same destination, but Trevor's work looked tighter, more eloquent.

She glanced at her family in the front row. Her mother had the fingers on both hands crossed, but her father looked ready to start weeping from the stress.

The headmaster finished assessing their work and stepped to the front of the room, a hint of unease in his eyes. Papa came to stand behind her, her mother on the other side.

"It has been a pleasure to have two such academically gifted students over the past four years," the headmaster began. "No matter what their futures hold, I am certain both will enrich our community and go on to great things. However, the school

can only endow one student's college education per year. This year, that honor will go to Mr. Trevor McDonough."

The oxygen was sucked out of the room. She felt hot, then dizzy as her father pulled her into a tight hug. "It's okay, baby girl," he murmured, but there was heartbreak in his voice.

It wouldn't be okay. She was going to spend the rest of her life hauling laundry and washing dishes in the boardinghouse. She glared over her father's shoulder at Trevor. He didn't even need this scholarship! He wore a gold watch that probably cost more than her parents earned in a year. The principal walked over to shake Trevor's hand, but no one else did.

The air grew thick as people crowded her, hugging and patting her on the shoulder. She had to think of something to say. She had to pretend that all her wild hopes and ambitions weren't collapsing as she stood there. She forced a smile. "I'll be all right," she said, trying to mean it. Tick nudged through the crowd, his spindly arms reaching out to hug Kate's hips.

"Did you win?" his childish voice chirped as he looked up at her expectantly.

What was she supposed to say? It felt as if she'd let the entire neighborhood down, not just her baby brother, who thought she could do no wrong.

Her mother pulled Tick away. "Hush now," she soothed.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed Trevor leaving the room, the coachman walking a few steps behind him.

"Go congratulate him," her father said. Kate pulled back to see if he was serious. Tired, weary, with grief welling in his eyes, her father nodded. "I know it may be hard for you, but it's the right thing to do. Go shake Trevor's hand and wish him well."

She'd rather stick her hand into a vat of acid. She wished she'd never laid eyes on that joyless, awful boy. Other than being smart, there wasn't a single redeeming feature in Trevor

McDonough's entire being. Straightening her shoulders, she followed Trevor out the door and down the hall into the cool spring air. The late afternoon sun was shining, and the sky was a crystalline blue. But the cloudless day only made her feel worse.

“Congratulations, Trevor.”

He paused, his face frozen in its typical expressionless stare. His black eyes looked like lumps of coal on his chalky-white face. He finally stepped forward and shook her hand. “Thanks,” he muttered before turning away to climb inside the coach. It was lacquered in glossy maroon paint with velvet seats inside.

She watched the horse-drawn carriage roll away, a cloud of dust kicking up from its wheels. No matter how much she disliked him, there was no doubt Trevor McDonough would go on to a dazzling future. He was rich, privileged, and brilliant. Trevor didn't *need* that scholarship, but how strange that when she shook his hand, he was trembling like a mouse trapped in a corner.

She refused to feel sorry for him. He could have made friends if he had tried. If he wasn't so gloomy and hadn't gone out of his way to rebuff every person who tried to be nice to him, he wouldn't have been so ostracized.

To the bottom of her soul, Kate hoped she had just seen the last of the horrible Trevor McDonough.

1



TWELVE YEARS LATER
WASHINGTON, D.C.—1891

Kate held the letter in her hands. She'd read it so many times over the past week, the words were engraved in her mind, yet she still couldn't understand why a world-renowned doctor would have singled her out to apply for a prestigious position at Washington Memorial Hospital.

Around her, rows of women filled the cavernous room, all of them sitting before tabulating machines. The women busily fed punch cards into the machines, filling the air with the sounds of clicking, humming, and rattling. Kate used to adore her work here at the census bureau. Analyzing data to better understand the world around her had been a joy, the perfect job, and one that drew on her statistical abilities. But that was last year, before the machines invaded the bureau's office.

The machines had put statisticians out of work everywhere. It seemed there was no longer an office in the entire city that didn't have an adding machine or a tabulating mechanism. There was still plenty of statistical forecasting work that needed to be

done by people with a good head for numbers, but those jobs went to men.

Men with college degrees.

She pushed the thought away. Tomorrow morning she was going to interview at Washington Memorial Hospital for a position to analyze data and predict trends in health and disease. Never had she wanted a job so badly. It would free her from this beehive and give her the chance to do something meaningful with her brain.

“Are you really going to go through with it?” Betsy Waters asked, leaning over from her tabulating station.

Kate startled and quickly slipped the letter beneath a stack of files. “I’ve got to,” she said in a low voice. “I’ll wonder for the rest of my life if I don’t.”

She still wondered how Dr. T. M. Kendall had learned of her existence. After all, there were dozens of statisticians who had been put out of work when the census became automated, so why did he single her out for an interview?

“I hope Mr. Gertsmann doesn’t fire you on the spot,” Betsy said. “Last year he fired Letty Smitson just for reading the advertisements for open positions in the Treasury Department.”

Kate was well aware of her supervisor’s hostility toward any employee who dared to lift her head up and aspire to something outside the beehive. Washington had always been a little unusual in the number of women who were able to find office jobs. Government agencies required an awesome number of clerical workers, and in a small city like Washington, that opened doors for women. Almost a third of the people working in government offices were women, but most were under the thumb of men like Mr. Gertsmann, who greeted Kate’s request for three hours of leave with a long, hostile stare.

“I insist on knowing the reason you will miss work in the mid-

dle of the week,” Mr. Gertsman said. “Such lack of discipline is not something I will condone without a good explanation.”

“Sir, I’m only asking for three hours tomorrow morning. I will be in the office by eleven o’clock.” At all costs, she must not let him know she was interviewing for another position or he might fire her then and there.

“I will not allow you to gallivant around this city without knowing your reason for missing work.”

“I’ve worked here for twelve years,” Kate said. “In all that time I’ve only been absent from work once.”

“Yes, but that involved an entire week, and you did so without advance warning.”

She sucked in a sharp breath. “That was when my husband died! And I didn’t receive advance warning the scaffolding he was standing on was going to collapse.”

She blinked rapidly. The accident had been four years ago, and Kate hardly ever cried over it anymore, but to have Nathan’s death flung at her made her want to break something.

Other women in the office sent her sympathetic glances. Mr. Gertsman was condescending to all the women in the office, but he always singled her out for the worst of his ire.

“You have no bereavement now, so again I insist on knowing why you plan on missing work.”

The clattering of the machines tapered off a little as some in the office started listening in. Given the way the other women in the room glared at him, it was almost surprising that Mr. Gertsman didn’t burst into flame.

“It’s a personal matter,” she finally answered.

“And is this ‘personal matter’ in relation to employment at the Washington Memorial Hospital?”

She winced. “How did you know that?”

He yanked a small envelope from his pocket. “Because I’ve

had a request for your references. The newly appointed Dr. T. M. Kendall wishes to know about your vaunted skills as a statistician.”

The way he said *statistician* made it sound like a puny and pathetic word. After all, with machines taking over so much of the tabulating work, Mr. Gertsmann thought statisticians ought to be put on the shelf alongside the bow and arrow and everything else that had been rendered useless by modern technology.

“I certainly hope you will find working at the hospital a fulfilling outlet for your ambitions, because I can’t imagine employing a woman of questionable loyalty here at the census bureau.”

“Are you firing me?” It would be a disaster if she lost this job before securing another. With all the pricey improvements her parents made to the boardinghouse, Kate’s income was needed to pay the bank note each month.

Mr. Gertsmann assumed an artificially pleasant tone as he smirked at her. “And if I decide to terminate your employment if you miss work tomorrow morning?”

She had to be smart about this. Mr. Gertsmann was a small man whose ego needed regular tending, and she braced herself to do just that.

“Then naturally I will be here on time,” she said calmly. If she had to miss the interview, she would find another way to make contact with Dr. Kendall.

Her conciliatory words had the desired effect. Mr. Gertsmann preened, puffing his chest out and fiddling with the buttons on his vest.

“Excellent,” he said. “I am a generous man and will permit you three hours’ leave, but I trust this will be the end of your foolish ambitions. Women are ideally suited to the monotony of census work, but if you wish to toy with the fantasy of pursuing a rigorous intellectual position, it will be amusing to watch.”

He patted her on the shoulder, and she tried not to cringe. “I hope the disappointment is not too great,” he added before leaving the room.

“That man makes me long for a bucket of tar and a sack of feathers,” Kate muttered as she returned to her station. She was twenty-nine years old and was dying on the vine at the census bureau. The position at the hospital was a long shot, but she intended to fight hard for it.



“Why does he hate you so much?” Charlie Davis asked as he lounged in the windowsill of the boardinghouse’s dining room, his thin frame looking as delicate as a reed. For such a skinny man, he was always voraciously hungry and appeared the moment the scent from her mother’s kitchen began percolating through the boardinghouse. With his gray hair immaculately groomed and his neatly clipped mustache, Charlie was like the grandfather she never had, and their daily chat while she set the dinner table had been a ritual since the time Kate was a child.

His question made Kate pause as she retrieved the heavy pewter flatware from the sideboard. “Mr. Gertsmann doesn’t like anybody, but one time I stopped a report from going out that had a string of errors in it. A batch of punch cards had been fed into the machine backwards, skewing the data. He ought to have noticed the numbers looked off-kilter, but it slipped past him. I think he was embarrassed I caught it.”

“You might have saved his job,” Charlie said.

“Maybe.” She began laying the plates next. They were large plates, as her mother delivered heaping portions of the best food on the Eastern Seaboard, making their boardinghouse famous among the elected officials in Washington. Most government jobs didn’t pay much, and unless the elected officials were

independently wealthy, they usually stayed in boardinghouses or hotels whenever Congress was in session.

The dining room was large, with three windows facing H Street and providing a view of the US Capitol building only a few blocks away. The dining room's creamy yellow walls and crown molding was typical of the Federal style that dominated the city. A long table stretched down the center of the room, and Kate had been setting this table each evening from the time she was old enough to be trusted with the crockery.

From behind the swinging door to the kitchen, pots clattered and a kettle whistled. Dinner was at least twenty minutes away, yet the scents of fresh bread and simmering beef were probably tormenting Charlie as badly as a hound tethered just out of reach from a juicy steak. "How about I sneak in the kitchen and see if I can steal a blueberry muffin for you? Mother made them this afternoon."

Charlie's eyes sparkled. "You are an angel of goodness and mercy."

Charlie had lived at their boardinghouse ever since he was elected to Congress thirty-two years ago. He witnessed all her childhood triumphs and tragedies. He taught her to tie her shoelaces and looked the other way when she slid down the polished oak banisters. He listened to her wax ecstatic over her adolescent crush on Nathan Livingston, the funniest boy in school, who could balance a fiddle on the tip of his nose and still look devilishly handsome while he did it. Charlie cheered her on at horseshoe matches and commiserated when she lost the college scholarship to Trevor McDonough. Charlie came to her wedding, and he was a pallbearer at Nathan's funeral only two years later. She would be forever grateful for that. Nathan had always been a little in awe of Charlie Davis and would have been

flattered that Pennsylvania's longest-serving congressman did him that final honor.

The aroma of roast beef and simmering onions surrounded Kate as she pushed into the warm kitchen. Steam rose from kettles on the massive cast-iron stove. Kate used a pair of tongs to open the door of the warming compartment. "Please look the other way while I steal a muffin for Charlie."

Her mother didn't turn around from slicing onions into a pan of sizzling butter. "Just *one*," she cautioned. "That Bauman girl is bringing three guests to dinner and gave me only an hour's notice. I ought to start charging Justice Bauman extra for all the mouths they drag in here."

Irene Bauman and her father had been living here the past eight years whenever the Supreme Court was in session. Justice Bauman was a decent man, but his daughter? Kate snatched a muffin and thought about skipping dinner if Irene was going to be there.

No such luck. When Kate returned to the dining room, Irene had plopped down in a chair opposite Charlie, playfully twirling a lock of her honey-blond hair. It was bad enough to watch an eighteen-year-old girl flirt with a man in his sixties, but did she really need to twirl her hair?

"Alms for the hungry," she said, dropping the muffin in Charlie's palm. "If you'll excuse me, I need to starch my dress shirt for tomorrow."

Charlie knew about the interview, of course. It would not surprise her if he'd already put in a good word for her at the hospital, although he denied it. "I've never met this Dr. Kendall fellow," he said. "But if he is half as smart as people say, he'll snap you up immediately."

"I hope you aren't going to wear that boring pinstripe shirt," Irene said. "I'll loan you one of my mutton sleeve blouses, if you like. You would look so much smarter."

Here we go. Why couldn't she and Irene be in the same room for two minutes without the competition beginning? Irene always compared their clothing, their hairstyles, their jewelry. There was nothing Kate loved more than matching wits or skill in a healthy competition, but over fashion? And yet the moment Irene moved into the boardinghouse, the natural rivalry seemed to take root and spring up at the worst times. It reminded Kate of school, when she spent years matching wits against Trevor McDonough. At least Trevor was smart; Irene was a nitwit.

Although she had to admit, Irene's mutton sleeve blouses were spectacular. Would it be so wrong to borrow one? Temptation clawed at her. Just once it would be nice to be as stylishly turned-out as Irene, but Kate couldn't take the bait. If she got this job, Irene would lord it over her for ages, insisting it was her blouse that won Kate the job.

"My pinstripe blouse will be fine." It had gently gathered sleeves and fabulous cuffs that buttoned tightly all the way to her elbows. She loved the dashing feminine appearance the blouse gave her. It was nothing compared to a real mutton sleeve blouse, but it still looked smart.

"Suit yourself," Irene said. "It's such a shame you're interviewing for another job involving math. It must be awful squinting at numbers all day. It will put lines on your face for good."

Charlie winced at the insult, but Kate took it in stride. "Oh, Irene, my face is the place nasty worry lines come to roost for fun."

Kate never worried too much about her appearance. She had a trim, athletic figure from running up and down four flights of stairs to keep the boardinghouse operating, and she never bothered with jewelry or ornamentation. With a wealth of smooth red hair, she simply mounded it atop her head in the Gibson girl style that was becoming so popular.

Kate grabbed a handful of pewter spoons and began laying them alongside the plates. “Who are your guests for dinner this evening? Mother is scrambling to stretch the meal.”

“Jenny Fayette and her parents,” Irene said while she kept twirling her hair. “I met them at the Smithsonian this morning. Her father is in the navy and his uniform is so dashing. I think he is a captain.”

Kate almost dropped the spoons. “Captain Fayette?” she gasped. “Captain Alfred Fayette of the Naval Academy?”

“Do you already know him?” Irene looked mildly disappointed. “I was hoping to surprise everyone with my fancy guests.”

Kate didn’t have time for explanations; she merely shoved the spoons in Irene’s hands. “Here, you finish setting the table. I’ve got to run.”



Kate was breathless by the time she ran to the Marine Barracks on Eighth Street. It was a hot June day, and a stitch clawed at her side while a blister screamed on the back of her heel, but none of that mattered.

Her little brother was going to get into the Naval Academy if she had to pull every string in the city. Tick had dreamed of it ever since he was a child, and last year’s rejection was a blow none of them anticipated. No one in her family had gone to college, so how was she to know the application process began so early? Or that they needed letters of support from officers and elected officials?

Tick ended up joining the Marine Corps after finishing school, but Kate wasn’t going to let it end there. His letter of rejection encouraged him to apply again, and this time Kate would make sure his application sailed through with a chorus of angels singing his praises. Timothy “Tick” Norton was going

to be the first member of their family to graduate from college if it killed her.

The blister got worse as she turned down Eighth Street. It was an older part of the city that hadn't yet been renovated. Washington used to be a small, muddy town, but after the Civil War, money flowed into the city to widen the boulevards, line the streets with trees, and erect elegantly wrought lampposts to illuminate the city. Government buildings were torn down and replaced with palaces of white granite and imposing columns that glittered in the sunlight.

In the southern part of town, the stately government buildings gave way to oak-shaded streets and redbrick walls. Only two blocks north of the US Navy Yard, the Marine Barracks consisted of a long row of buildings with an armory and living quarters. It was impossible to get through the gate this late in the afternoon, but the brick wall was only five feet tall, and with a jump she was able to hoist herself up to brace her elbows on the ledge. Tick was playing a game of dice on a table beneath the thick branches of an oak tree.

"Hey, Tick!" she called. "Get over here!"

Tick whirled around, a grin spreading over his face. With blond hair and sky-blue eyes, Tick had grown into a handsome young man. He was eighteen and already six feet tall, and he wasn't finished growing. Dressed in a plain shirt and brown pants, Tick had changed out of the field uniform he wore during the first part of the day when he served as guard to the surgeon general. His long, loping strides devoured the ground.

"Quit calling me Tick in front of other people," he said as soon as he was opposite her.

"Sorry," she said with a wince. She had been trying to quit, but he'd been Tick since she'd changed his diapers and taught him how to walk. With her mother cooking and cleaning for

thirty boarders, Kate practically raised Tick, and she'd loved every minute of it. She was eleven when he was born, and he was the best gift any girl ever had. She loved his soft baby smell and the drooly smile he gave her every morning when she lifted him from the cradle. Later, he clung to her like a tick she could never shake, hanging on to her leg as she walked around the house. Whenever she came into his line of sight, he would launch himself across the room and straight into her arms.

"Listen," she whispered. "Captain Fayette from the Naval Academy is coming to dinner tonight. Change into your dress uniform and get back to the house. This is too good an opportunity to miss."

"Tonight? I can't leave without permission. There are rules about things like that."

"If your mother was dying from a heart attack this very moment, don't tell me you couldn't figure out a way to get home. Now go ask for permission. And quick. Dinner begins in fifteen minutes."

Tick shifted. "This isn't exactly a life-or-death thing, Kate. I don't want to get a reputation for slacking off."

She wanted to leap over the wall and shake some sense into him. "But this is a perfect opportunity. You're acting like I want this more than you."

Tick didn't answer her right away. He glanced back at the others playing dice beneath the tree, then back at her. "Of course I want it, but I have a good position here. I can't risk it to go chasing after another."

What he said made sense. After all, wasn't she risking her job at the census bureau by chasing after a long-shot position at the hospital? Kate was a risk taker, while Tick had always been more cautious.

She dropped back down to her side of the wall, brushing the grit from her elbows. "Okay, I get it," she conceded.

Tick reached a hand over the wall to grab her shoulder. “Thanks for coming, Kate. If Captain Fayette comes again, let me know and I’ll try to get time off, okay?”

She nodded, hoping the disappointment wasn’t showing on her face. “Deal.”

“And good luck on the job interview tomorrow,” Tick said. “The surgeon general has been trying for years to lure Dr. Kendall to Washington, so working for him would be a real coup.”

Tick meant the words kindly, but they just ratcheted Kate’s anxiety higher. A man of Dr. Kendall’s sterling reputation would surely have his pick of applicants, and the odds of her getting the job were slim. Still, she had to try.

The blister cut into her heel as she began walking home. Two blocks ahead of her a horse-drawn streetcar was picking up passengers. For five cents she could ride home in time to help serve dinner. If she hurried, she could catch it before it set off at a brisk trot up Virginia Avenue.

Or she could race it home.

She suppressed a grin as she hiked up her skirts and made a dash down the street. The streetcar had a good head start on her, but she could still beat it home if she pulled out all the stops. She sprang over curbs and around pedestrians, gaining a few yards with each block. The blister was forgotten. All that mattered was drawing up alongside the streetcar and passing it and reaching the front stoop of her house in first place.

The thrill of competition surged in her veins. Pitting her will and stamina against the horse gave her something to strive for, to battle and win.

After all, there was nothing she liked better than winning.

2



The hospital was an imposing Gothic building at the end of New Hampshire Avenue. With five stories of dark red brick, two massive corner turrets, and large windows sparkling in the morning sunlight, it looked stately and rich resting amidst the leafy neighborhood.

Kate smoothed her skirt as she descended from the streetcar. Her freshly starched pinstripe blouse was tucked into a slim charcoal-gray skirt, and she hoped she looked more confident than she felt.

What did she know about medicine? Statistics came naturally to her, but she wished she wasn't such a novice when it came to medicine. The female clerk who greeted visitors in the receiving area was impressed when Kate asked to meet with Dr. Kendall.

"Such a handsome man, that one!" she cooed. It seemed a little odd for a gray-haired matron to be gushing over a man. "I declare, I think all the nurses are carrying a torch for that man. They all stare after him as he walks down the hallways, and they're forever bringing him cookies and sweets."

If anyone ever brought Mr. Gertsmann cookies, Kate would suspect they had been laced with strychnine.

The clerk must have noticed Kate's confused expression. "Not that Dr. Kendall ever encourages them," she rushed to add. "Oh my, no. A more proper man you'll never meet. If you wait on the bench outside the conference room on the fourth floor, I'll let him know you have arrived."

Kate followed the directions. Although the front lobby had been grand and imposing, the hallways were lined with cold sage-green tiles. Her footsteps echoed off the tile, and the medicinal scent of carbolic acid made her nose twitch.

The wall outside the conference room displayed the diplomas and awards won by the hospital's doctors. A half dozen of the framed commendations were dedicated to Dr. T. M. Kendall, and they came from research clinics all over the world. Her brow rose in surprise when she saw Louis Pasteur's signature under an award for research in bacteriology.

She plopped down on the bench, dazzled by all the activity in the hall. Orderlies wheeled patients on gurneys while nurses carried trays of medicine. Kate wondered if she would be required to dress like them if she took a position here. The nurses' uniforms were distinctive with nipped-in waistlines, white aprons, and little folded caps on their heads.

At the end of the hall she spotted a tall, dark-haired man coming her way. He must be a doctor, for he was dressed differently from everyone else, in a formal black suit and tie, a starched collar, and a fine serge vest. Everything was covered by a white lab coat, a stethoscope draped over one shoulder. He must be Dr. Kendall, for he locked gazes and headed toward her, his lab coat flaring out as he strode down the long hallway.

She smoothed a strand of hair and wished she'd borrowed Irene's fancy blouse after all.

It was easy to see why the nurses would be attracted to Dr. Ken-

dall. He was a handsome man, though with such an austere face. She'd find him attractive too, if he didn't remind her so much of . . .

No. It couldn't be.

She blinked and stared hard as he drew closer. He had the same dark eyes, the same humorless expression on his lean, handsome face.

She shot to her feet. "Trevor McDonough!"



If he was surprised to see her, he gave no indication, his expression blank. "Hello, Kate."

"What are you doing here? I thought I was to meet with Dr. Kendall."

"I'm Dr. Kendall. I changed my last name when I went to college."

She was flabbergasted. "Why would you do such a thing?"

"You changed *your* name."

"I was married!"

"Yes, I heard about that. My condolences." Not a flicker of emotion crossed his face. A fence post showed more emotion than his stern features.

Trevor unlocked the conference room door and gestured for her to go inside. Kate stepped into the room, the warm wood paneling and book-lined walls a welcome change after the cold severity of the hallway.

Trevor didn't look like a gangly boy anymore. When they were in school, his clothes hung on his skinny frame like a scarecrow. He was still lean, but he looked taller, more fit. The underfed pasty-faced boy was gone. Trevor had a finely molded face with sharp cheekbones, a long blade of a nose, and flashing dark eyes. But there wasn't a hint of a smile on that straight mouth

of his. Never in a million years would she have expected Trevor to grow into such a fine-looking man.

She could see why the nurses would be impressed, which was a horrifying thought. It was like becoming accustomed to an annoying weasel that pestered your garden, then one day noticing it had transformed into a handsome prince.

Trevor McDonough was no prince. He might have grown into a handsome man, but he still had that awful killjoy look on his face. Nothing had changed.

“Why the new name?” she asked.

Trevor tossed a file on the large conference table in the center of the room, then rifled through his pockets until he found a pencil. He motioned for her to sit. “We’re not here to talk about my personal life. I need to find out if you have the qualifications for the statistician job.”

This was a waste of time. Working for Trevor McDonough would be impossible. He would have her squashed under his thumb even more tightly than Mr. Gertsmann. At least she was smarter than Mr. Gertsmann and could outmaneuver him with ease. That wouldn’t be the case with Trevor.

“I know you have the mathematical ability for the position,” he continued, “but this is no ordinary statistician’s job. We will be working with terminal patients, and that requires a certain mettle. I am measuring the effect of a new serum to see if it can strengthen the blood of patients suffering from tuberculosis. I need someone to analyze hundreds of data points and run the necessary calculations.”

Despite herself, she was intrigued. The noise from the hallway faded as she leaned forward to catch every word Trevor spoke.

“Tuberculosis is a dangerous disease,” he said. “Some people have qualms about being around infected patients. Do you have a good understanding of what tuberculosis is?”

She had to confess she did not. Over the next ten minutes her blood ran cold as Trevor explained the disease. There were lots of other names for it: consumption, the white plague, the white death. It occurred when bacteria took root in the human lung and began multiplying like mad. Scar tissue developed, creating lesions that stiffened and bled when the patient coughed. The lung tissue was gradually destroyed by cavities that filled with fluid and blood, making it hard to get enough oxygen and sapping the strength of the victim. From there the bacteria could seep into the bloodstream, crippling bones and infecting the heart, kidneys, even the brain.

Kate had always feared illness. Ever since two of her brothers died from diphtheria, she'd been haunted by the prospect of death. There had been four children in the Norton family. She was the oldest, and then Carl and Jamie, with Tick being the youngest. When she was fifteen, diphtheria descended on their neighborhood, clobbering all three of her brothers. Those awful weeks were seared into her memory. Kate had tried to nurse her brothers, but she was a disaster, always starting to weep as she coaxed broth down their throats. One morning she awoke to find Carl's bed empty and was told he'd died during the night. Jamie died two hours later. Kate went numb, but she bawled for an hour when Tick's fever finally broke and she knew he was going to make it. Nursing her dying brothers had been harrowing, but Nathan's death was even worse. The first warning of trouble came when a police officer knocked on their door. . . .

She shook off the memory. If the position here was confined to mathematics, she wouldn't have to worry about more people dying on her. "Would I need to help care for the patients?"

"Not as a nurse, but you would be with me as I examine them to record their data. You would be in daily contact with the patients."

“I’ve never been very good around sick people.”

“Perhaps you’d like to hear what Mr. Gertsmann had to say about your qualifications. Let’s have a look, shall we?” Trevor’s face remained blank as he removed a small envelope from his breast pocket. The paper crackled as he extracted the letter, his voice cool as he read the words. “‘Mrs. Livingston is a diligent worker, but one who thinks far too highly of her intellectual skills. You will find her to be arrogant and contentious with her superiors. The only capacity for which I can recommend her is in a clerical position in which she is given no responsibilities that would reinforce her negative tendencies.’”

Kate was speechless. She wanted to lunge across the table and tear the offending letter to shreds. But then with a flick of his wrist, Trevor tossed the note in the trash can.

“I doubt you will find other employment as long as the eloquent Mr. Gertsmann is writing your reference,” Trevor said dryly. He straightened and continued to outline the position as though that note hadn’t just soured the air. “So you will be required to work with tubercular patients. There is no cure for the disease, but I am determined to find one. I am trying to stop it from infecting vital organs once it’s in the bloodstream. I need to measure how the serum I developed affects the proliferation of the bacillus.”

This was going to be a challenge. Trevor was still a cold fish and would be hard to work for. At least fish had hearts beating somewhere in their cold-blooded bodies. With Trevor she couldn’t be certain. For twelve years she’d carried the image of Trevor as he beat her that final day in the classroom, his face as disinterested as if he’d just tied his shoelaces.

“I always wondered something,” Kate began hesitantly. Trevor cocked a brow but said nothing. She braced herself and asked the question that had nagged at her for twelve years. “Why did

you fight to win that scholarship when you knew it was my only chance to go to college? When you were being driven around town in a fancy carriage and had gold cuff links, why did you do that?"

"I wanted the money."

She choked on her own breath. "Your family was rolling in money! You had tailor-made clothes imported from Scotland. Your own carriage."

"You asked a question, and I answered it honestly." There wasn't the slightest trace of appeasement in his voice or compassion on his face.

"Why did you change your name?"

"Do you want the job or not? If you do, I'll expect you to be here at nine o'clock on Monday morning." His voice was as flat and detached as though they were discussing the weather. Even the way he held himself seemed remote. He sat stiffly in the chair without touching the armrests or the back.

She would never land another job as long as Mr. Gertsmann was her supervisor at the census bureau. Trevor's job sounded important and challenging, but a niggling suspicion took root in her mind. Maybe Trevor was doing this just to get her under his thumb. Back when they were in school, they waged a full-bore battle against each other with every scrap of intelligence they could gather. Sometimes she won, sometimes he did, but they always began the day on an equal footing. That wouldn't be the case if she worked for him. He could grind her nose into the dust every day if he wanted.

"Why would you want *me* for this job?" she pressed. "I have no medical background, and there are plenty of people in this city who are skilled in statistics."

"I can teach you the medical knowledge you need," he said. "What I'm looking for is a lot harder to find. A cure for tuberculosis is nowhere in sight, but with God's help I *will* find a cure."

It's going to take decades and promises to be a long, brutal slog, but I will get there in the end."

Trevor leaned forward. He wasn't a cold, emotionless man anymore. A spark of electricity flashed in his eyes and transformed his entire face. Urgency and excitement simmered just beneath the surface, seeping into his voice.

"I'm going to need help, and I need someone who is *fearless*. Someone who isn't afraid to stand up to dragons and battle them day after day. Our results may not show promise for years. Our patients will die. There will be days when you feel so beaten down you'll want to crawl home and give up. But I'll need you to get up, dust yourself off, and be ready to wage battle the next day." He locked eyes with her. "I need someone who wants to win as badly as I do. *That* is why I want you for this job."

The passion in his voice made her rock back in her chair. It made perfect sense. Blindingly beautiful, perfect sense. She had always been at odds with Trevor, but what if they joined forces? What if they funneled all of that competitive drive toward the same goal, throwing every ounce of their combined passion at one of the world's deadliest diseases? Trevor rolled a pencil between impatient fingers as he looked at her with that curious gleam still burning in his eyes.

"What of it, Kate? Can I convince you to tear yourself from the joys at the census bureau and take up the crusade against tuberculosis?"

Working for Trevor would be a gamble, but every instinct urged her to take the chance. Though putting faith in her old nemesis was risky and frightening, she wanted this job and was never one to back away from a challenge. "All right, Trevor. I'll work with you."

A tiny smile flickered over Trevor's face before he reverted to his chilly demeanor. He opened a file and withdrew a page.

“Here’s an announcement that will appear in tomorrow’s *Washington Post*. Please review it for accuracy.”

Kate took the paper and read.

Mrs. Katherine Livingston has accepted a position at Washington Memorial Hospital as statistical forecaster for the Tubercular Research Clinic. Inquiries regarding the data collected in the study may be directed to her at the hospital’s main office.

She was shocked. “Why on earth would you do this?”

“Public perception is vitally important in this sort of research. We won’t ever make a move in the clinic without keeping the public informed. They can turn against you quickly. People fear tuberculosis like it’s a modern-day plague. We are rarely popular with the local community.”

She held up the page. “And you think this will help?”

“It can’t hurt. It will appear in tomorrow’s paper.”

“You were awfully confident of my response. What if I had said no?”

He flipped open another file and began making notes, his pencil scratching in the silence. “Then I would withdraw the announcement. But you’ve never struck me as a foolish person. Impulsive and overly emotional sometimes, but never foolish.”

He was baiting her, yet Kate refused to fall into the trap. It would be better to score a point. She affected a casual tone.

“If you really want to make an impression on the public, you ought to get an announcement in the *Congressional Record*. It is circulated all over the world and has a cachet no mere newspaper can wield. I can arrange for an announcement if you’d like.”

“You could do that?” Trevor looked impressed.

Anything spoken on the floor of Congress was submitted to the *Congressional Record*, but members of Congress could also

slip in announcements, and there was a good chance Charlie Davis would do it for her.

“Of course,” she said.

Trevor leaned back in his chair, wiggling a pencil between nervous fingers as he considered her. She could see the thoughts spinning in his head as he weighed a response. He shifted in his seat and began tapping his foot, growing more frustrated by the second. “Okay, I have to admit, that’s pretty good,” he finally said.

She tried not to preen, but these little victories over Trevor were so rare it was hard not to savor them.

“Coming from you, I’ll consider that a compliment, Trevor.”

His expression stiffened. “That’s fine, but when we’re working around other people, you will need to call me Dr. Kendall.”

“You can’t be serious.”

He didn’t even look up from his file as he began collecting papers. “I’m entirely serious. It is my legal name and it’s important to keep a professional distance, so you’ll need to call me Dr. Kendall like every other employee in this hospital.”

He seemed determined to hide why he’d changed his name, but she would figure it out in short order. Besides, she had no desire to advertise their long association to anyone else working in the hospital.

“I’ll see you Monday morning, Dr. Kendall.”

3



She didn't even bother to return to the census bureau. Instead she headed straight home, where Charlie Davis reclined on the sofa in the front parlor with his feet propped on a stool, reading the morning newspaper. As she shut the door, he dropped the paper and rolled into a sitting position.

"How did it go?" A chicken potpie dish, scraped clean, sat on the table beside him. Kate picked it up, as well as the plate that once held muffins and fresh fruit.

"I got the job," she said as she carried the plates into the kitchen.

Her mother dropped the lid over a kettle. "You did?" Her face lit up as if she were about to levitate. Charlie followed her, batting aside the swinging doors as he followed her into the kitchen.

"You did?" Charlie asked. "Why then do you sound so tense?"

Kate folded her arms and tried to keep the shaking from her voice. "I'll be working for Trevor McDonough."

Her mother gasped. "The horrible Trevor McDonough? *That* Trevor McDonough?"

"The very same. Except now he's calling himself Trevor Kendall, and he won't explain why he changed his name."

Charlie and her mother exchanged glances. “That does seem a little odd,” Charlie conceded.

“That boy was always so strange,” her mother said. “I don’t like the idea of you working for him. Not one bit.” The light had faded from her eyes as she picked up a knife to slice carrots. Her mother never forgave Trevor for snatching that scholarship, and if he was smart, he would never set foot in this house. Her mother knew how to hold on to a grudge, and she was fierce in protecting her cubs.

Charlie was more generous. “I always thought you and Trevor McDonough were destined to be either mortal enemies or the very best of friends. You’re too alike to be anything else.”

Her mother dropped the knife. “Kate is nothing like that horrid boy! Everyone likes Kate. She is always smiling and helpful. If that McDonough boy ever smiled, it would crack his face into pieces. I doubt he has a friend in the world.”

Kate grabbed an apple and leaned against the counter, a long-buried memory rising to the surface.

There was only one time Kate tried to befriend Trevor. It was shortly after he’d arrived at their school, and his Scottish accent was so thick it made him a target for mocking. If Kate had been on the receiving end of that kind of teasing, she would have laughed and corrected their accents, trilling her words in a lovely Scottish brogue until she forced them to laugh alongside her. Not Trevor. He just withdrew even more. While most students played games during their lunch break, Trevor walked off behind the school to stare moodily into the distance. If he hadn’t been so unfriendly, people would have invited him to play, but Trevor made it tough. One day Kate persuaded Nathan to ask Trevor to join a game of kickball with the rest of the boys. Nathan was the friendliest person ever born, but when he invited Trevor to the game, Trevor just glared at Nathan and stormed off behind the school.

Nathan looked at Kate and shrugged before joining the other boys. Kate was mortified on Nathan's behalf, but she'd seen enough temper tantrums from her little brothers to know hurt feelings when she saw them.

She followed Trevor around the back of the school. He was sitting on the ground, gangly legs sprawled before him, with his head braced in his hands as he stared at the dirt. "Why are you so unhappy?" she asked.

He startled, scrambling to his feet. Had he been crying? It was impossible to tell because before she could get a good look, he kicked dirt at her. "I'm not unhappy," he said and then ran off into the woods.

They didn't see him at school for the rest of the week. He must have caught trouble for it at home, because after that, Senator Campbell's fancy carriage arrived every morning to drop Trevor off and retrieve him at the end of the day. Everyone knew that Trevor's guardian was the senator from Maryland, and that bought him a certain level of respect. His academic brilliance was another point in his favor. But during the entire four years of school, Trevor never made a single friend.

Her mother loaded a plate with fresh bread and a thick wedge of smoked Gouda cheese. "Fetch the kettle," she said. "We need to talk about this."

Ten minutes later they were at the dining table. They had been joined by Sergey Zomohkov, a diplomat from Russia who had been living with them for the past three months. Mr. Zomohkov rarely rose before noon, but he and his wife usually stayed awake until at least two o'clock in the morning.

"The job sounds perfect," Kate said. "I'll finally have a chance to do something really important. It means working for Trevor, but I am used to dealing with cold fish. I've prepared fresh herrings for the past decade."

Her mother looked ready to pull her hair out. “But you will be quitting a safe job to work for a man you barely know.”

Of course, Kate *did* know Trevor. He was so tightly stitched she was surprised he didn’t squeak when he walked, yet there was no denying he was the smartest person she’d ever met. And in a strange way, she enjoyed their rivalry at school. Just knowing Trevor was in the classroom made her try harder, study longer. Already she could feel the anticipation to test her skills against him rising to the surface.

The Russian diplomat smacked his hand on the table, rattling the china. “Why does this old rival want to work with you?” he demanded. “Maybe now that you are a widow, he hankers for you?”

Kate shuddered. “I will need a bucket of bleach to scrub that mental image from my mind.”

“Why else would a man want a woman to work in his office?” Mr. Zomohkov asked. “Men have desires. Men have—”

“Stop!” Kate pleaded. The last thing she wanted polluting her mind was Trevor’s manly desires. The very idea made her shudder.

Her mother nodded. “Mr. Zomohkov is right. There is something odd about Trevor McDonough . . . or whatever he is calling himself these days. He’s always been peculiar.”

She could not quite believe it, but she was going to defend Trevor. “Tick says the surgeon general knows Trevor. That he spent years trying to lure him to Washington. Apparently, Trevor is a very famous medical researcher.”

She was about to tell them about the fancy awards Trevor had hanging on the wall in the hospital, but the diplomat’s wife made her appearance. She was a large woman, with a triple strand of pearls around her thick neck, even at noon. The woman smiled and nodded at everyone, her pin curls bobbing with each

nod. She didn't speak a lick of English, which made dining a challenge, but her husband was always willing to translate for her.

No translation was necessary, though, as Mr. Zomohkov rose and embraced his wife. He growled something in Russian and kissed his wife on the lips. Twice. He also swatted her on the behind and flashed her a lusty grin, which Mrs. Zomohkov returned.

Customs must be very different in Russia, for these two engaged in open affection with each other each time Mrs. Zomohkov made her appearance. Kissing, hugging, and murmuring words that brought a flush to the Russian woman's cheeks. Though their blatant affection sometimes bordered on embarrassing, Kate thought it rather charming. Except it made her miss Nathan. It had been four years since he died, and the ache of loneliness was getting worse instead of better. At least she was finally able to listen to fiddle music without dissolving into tears. Nathan was a carpenter by trade, but he loved the fiddle and played it whenever they wished to celebrate. Birthdays. Inaugurations. The first sight of tulips in the spring. When Mama made an apple pie. Really any excuse was good enough for him to break out his fiddle. They had been so happy together. . . .

Her mother set a tray of pastries before Mrs. Zomohkov, then launched into another tirade against Trevor. "That boy has nothing but vinegar in his veins. The sour will spread to anyone standing next to him. It's not safe, you working for that man."

"Life is never safe," Charlie said. "Tell us, what is it Trevor will be having you do?"

Trevor's face, tense with barely contained energy, flashed before her. "*I need someone who wants to win as badly as I do.*" Just remembering the intensity vibrating in his voice made her heart race a little faster.

“He’s testing a new serum that might stop a lung disease from spreading to other organs in the body. If it works, it will prolong the patient’s life.”

“What kind of disease?” Mr. Zomohkov asked.

“Tuberculosis. He only takes the very worst cases.”

The diplomat reared back. Turning to his wife, he unleashed a spiel in Russian. Mrs. Zomohkov gasped and shot to her feet, tipping over her teacup. Kate tossed a napkin over the spreading stain, but Mrs. Zomohkov was shrieking in Russian and gesturing like a madwoman.

The diplomat finally persuaded his wife to stop yelling, but not before she grabbed her pastries and fled upstairs.

“What do you know of tuberculosis?” Mr. Zomohkov demanded.

Kate looked around the room and all the faces staring at her, awaiting an answer. “Trevor explained the disease to me. It sounds horrible, but he is determined to find a cure.”

“There is no cure for tuberculosis,” Mr. Zomohkov pronounced. “Only misery and death. It spreads from person to person and leaves people twisted and crippled and dead. It is a dangerous disease, Mrs. Livingston. You will be playing with fire if you tamper with it.”

He stormed off to follow his wife, and Kate was left to wonder if he was right to be so afraid of the disease.



It was the first question she asked Trevor on Monday morning. She arrived at the conference room promptly at nine o’clock to find the large table covered with stacks of paper. Once again, Trevor was wearing a black suit with a vest and tie beneath his white lab coat, a stethoscope clamped around his neck.

“Of course it is dangerous,” Trevor said. “I told you that.”

“Is it frightening enough to send a woman shrieking from the room at the very mention of it?”

The clock on the conference room wall ticked out a steady beat as Trevor contemplated her with that expressionless stare of his. “She is a wise woman. Tuberculosis ought to strike fear in the heart of anyone who works with it. All my employees are tested each month to ensure they have not contracted the bacillus. I’ll need you to provide me with a sputum sample as soon as we go upstairs.”

Heat stained her cheeks. She’d happily go through the rest of her life without mentioning the word *sputum* in polite company. “Isn’t that overreacting?” Kate asked.

“If we catch the disease early, there is a chance at recovery.”

“How good of a chance?”

“Almost none, so try not to get it.” He continued to sort his papers as though she were going to be satisfied with that horrific assessment.

“Is that your best scientific opinion? You want me to risk my life over a flippant response like that?”

His face softened just a trace. “Only around ten percent of people who get tuberculosis will survive. We are beginning to believe that moving to climates with high, dry air is the best chance for a cure. People who go to such settings can double their odds of survival, but tuberculosis is still usually a death sentence. You will need to be scrupulous about following the safety rules while you are here.”

He went on to describe how the disease was contracted by inhaling the bacillus. Victims of tuberculosis were often seized with uncontrollable fits of coughing, during which moisture from their lungs sprayed into the air. The most common way for the disease to spread was to inhale air near an infected person who had been coughing.

“I insist you wear a mask whenever you are near the patients. If you follow the rules, you will be fine. Come on, let me show you the ward.”

Kate followed him up the narrow staircase to the top floor. She’d never been in a hospital clinic and didn’t know what to expect, but it seemed remarkably homey. The entrance had a sitting area tucked into the semicircle of a turret. An assortment of comfortable chairs, a sofa, and a small table filled the cozy space. Beneath the window were a set of bookshelves crammed with reading material. Cotton drapes on either side of the window billowed forward in a gentle breeze.

“Tuberculosis spreads in cramped, poorly ventilated quarters,” Trevor explained. “The more fresh air we can keep in the ward, the better. It will get chilly in the winter, but the fresh air is good for the patients. Here’s a mask. Keep it with you from now on and always wear it in the wards.”

The other side of the reception area had a nurses’ station with a single desk and filing cabinets, all behind an oak counter. The nurse at the desk was a dark-haired matron wearing a starched uniform with one of those funny little caps. Kate nodded and smiled to her, but Trevor didn’t bother to introduce Kate as he strode down the hallway.

Kate scurried to keep up. “It would be nice to be introduced to people. I’m new here, and it seems a basic courtesy.”

Trevor shrugged as he opened the door to the ward and gestured her inside. It was a spacious room with huge windows on one wall and rows of beds on the opposite side, all filled with patients. They were all women, and a few turned to look as Kate entered the room. Others were reading, and some still slept.

“Everyone, this is Kate Livingston. She will be helping me to gather data.” Trevor looked at her. “Happy?”

She smiled. “You are as warm and friendly as I remember.”

A thin girl in the bed nearest to Kate started snickering. “You tell it to him, ma’am,” she said with approval in her voice. Kate thought the girl was going to laugh, but instead the child was racked with a deep, scratchy fit of coughing.

Trevor tied a mask over his face and motioned for Kate to do the same. The heat of her breath felt strange against her face as she tied it on. The damp warmth was uncomfortable, but she dared not take the mask off.

The girl struggled to heave in a lungful of air while she reached for a mask on the small metal table beside her bed. It sounded like she had gravel rattling in her lungs.

Trevor took a seat on the chair beside the girl’s bed, then motioned for Kate to come closer. Seeing him with the lower half of his face covered by the white cotton mask underscored the danger of her new position. Had the Russian diplomat’s wife been right to run screaming from the room at the mere mention of the disease?

Trevor shot her an impatient glower and beckoned her again. She took a tiny step forward but couldn’t make her other leg move. It was as if her feet had taken root in the cold linoleum floor. That poor, sweet child . . . but Kate dared not get any closer. An invisible weight kept her frozen in place.

“It’s all right,” Trevor said. “This patient is not currently contagious, but I insist all coughing patients use a mask until the seizures pass, whether they’re contagious or not.”

He went on to explain that patients were not usually contagious, that only when the bacillus morphed into a particular stage did it have the ability to infect others, and he carefully monitored each patient’s health daily. The employees always knew which patients were contagious.

She could see little of Trevor’s expression behind his mask, but his voice was typically clinical. He motioned again for her

to draw closer. Kate forced her legs to move, praying that Trevor was right about what he said. She was unable to meet the girl's eyes. What must the child think of her?

"My name is Kate," she said, silently asking the girl's forgiveness for her hesitation.

"Hi, Kate. I'm Hannah Wexler." If the girl resented the way Kate behaved, she gave no indication. Kate looked directly at the girl. Beneath Hannah's chalk-white skin, a tracery of blue veins fanned across her face.

"Pull up a chair, Kate. I'll show you how I gather data and track the results."

Curiosity nudged away the fear as Kate took a seat in a plain metal chair beside Trevor, who grabbed a chart hanging from the end of Hannah's bed. "This is patient 27F62. That means she's the twenty-seventh female patient admitted to the study, and her birth year is 1862. All the patients are filed under their numbers. As I scan data, it's easier for me to place their relevant details when referring to them by their numbers. Lean forward, please."

Trevor pressed his stethoscope against the girl's back and closed his eyes to listen, but all Kate could think was that she and the child were the same age. If Hannah was born in 1862, that made her twenty-nine, just like Kate. The girl looked so wasted away and tiny, as though she hadn't even reached puberty yet.

Trevor explained that the first thing he did each morning was to listen to all the patients' lungs and take their temperatures. All patients were to drink a vial of the serum Trevor was hoping could slow the progress of the disease, and two hours later Trevor would draw samples of blood and saliva for testing. The samples were sent to the laboratory for analysis, and the results sent to Kate to calculate the effect of the serum.

Trevor gestured to a column of numbers on Hannah's chart. "This is where we track her weight, temperature, white blood

cell count, and the levels of iron in her blood. So 27F is doing comparatively well in the past few weeks.”

“*Are you feeling better, 27F?*” Kate asked Hannah. “I can’t help but wonder what it feels like to be referred to as a number. If it is in any way a life-affirming practice, perhaps I can get a number too.”

Hannah smothered a laugh. “We’re all used to Dr. Kendall and his strange ways. Besides, I’d rather deal with Dr. Kendall than the undertaker,” she said with a wink.

Kate blanched. Had she understood the girl correctly? This sort of gallows humor seemed shocking, but perhaps it was the way the patients coped with their condition.

As they progressed through the ward, Trevor examined one patient after another, all of whom he referred to by their patient numbers. There were fifteen patients in the room, and one empty bed. On their eighth patient, Trevor turned the chart over to her and instructed her to begin writing down the data.

It felt good to handle numbers again, and she was eager to learn how to interpret all this data. She closed the manila folder of the last female patient and followed Trevor out of the room. The male patients lived in an identical ward across the hall. She thought they were going into the men’s ward next, but Trevor reached behind her to close the door to the female ward with a smack.

“Do you know why bed number nine is empty?”

Kate gave him a blank look. Trevor tugged his mask down to dangle around his neck and continued, “It’s empty because 23F died on Tuesday. I will have another patient take her place as soon as I find one who meets the criteria for this study, and that patient will also be referred to by her number. Trust me, it will be easier for you to think of a patient as 27F rather than Hannah Wexler.”

“But she’s a human being, not a number.”

Trevor gave her a wintery smile. “This may be difficult for you to accept, but there are areas where I have far more insight than you. Treating dying patients is one of them. Every person you just met will be dead within a year. They won’t be among the lucky ten percent who can hope for a cure because their cases are too advanced. All I can do is buy them a few more months and the satisfaction of knowing their participation in this study may someday lead to a cure. They will all die, and they know it. It will be easier if you refrain from becoming friendly with them. Don’t ask after their children. Don’t look them in the eyes or encourage pointless conversation. They are research subjects, not friends.”

There might be a grain of truth to what he said, but did he have to be so stone-faced? “Trevor, you are the most cold-blooded person I’ve ever met. I’ll bet you need to sun yourself on a rock to generate body heat.”

His face remained stoic as he grabbed a set of blank forms from a wall bin. “We do the same procedure for the male patients,” he said, then pushed open the door and strode into the men’s ward, where all sixteen beds were filled.

The men ranged in age from a boy of sixteen to a man of fifty. Some of them didn’t appear to be all that sick, while others looked like skeletons. One man was so weak he couldn’t sit up on his own. Trevor helped peel him up from the mattress so that the patient sagged over, then Trevor pressed the flat disk of his stethoscope at various spots on the man’s back. When instructed to take a breath, the man’s eyes darkened in pain. The ridge of his spinal column was so prominent it tented up the back of his nightshirt. As Trevor helped the man lie back down, she wondered if it hurt to lie on a spine that exposed. His name was Ephraim Montgomery, and agony distorted every line

of his face. Despite his emaciated frame, he had wide shoulders and broad hands. It would not surprise her if Mr. Montgomery had once been a carpenter or a longshoreman. He was probably once a strong man who could have hauled twice his own weight. Now he could not sit up without help.

“Kate?”

She shook herself. Trevor had been feeding her data while she stared at the dying man. “I’m sorry, could you repeat that?”

He did, but Kate’s fingers trembled as she recorded the data. When her husband died, it had been quick. One moment Nathan was framing the fifth floor of a new office building, and the next moment the scaffolding beneath him collapsed. She was told he’d died before they even got him out from under the rubble. She prayed it was so, that he never suffered agony or knew what was happening. Ephraim Montgomery knew exactly what was happening to him, and the resignation in his eyes made her want to weep.

When they’d finished their rounds, Trevor showed her to the office they would share, a rectangular room with two desks in it. She hadn’t realized she would be working so closely with him. Trevor’s desk was placed beneath a window overlooking the wooded area behind the hospital. The smaller desk was on the other side, with a worktable in the middle of the room. One wall was lined with wooden filing cabinets.

“We will be sharing this office for as long as you are employed here,” Trevor said. “I won’t feed the rumor mills, so the door must always remain open.”

“Certainly.” It would be mortifying if anyone imagined she and Trevor were up to no good behind a closed door.

She tugged the mask off her face, relieved to feel cool air on her skin again. “Why do you only take dying patients? Why don’t you take people who might be cured?”

Trevor pulled out his desk chair and sat. “Tuberculosis starts in the lungs. It’s possible to live for decades so long as it remains confined in the lungs, but if it gets into the blood it can spread to other organs, and people die fast. All our patients have it in their blood, which means it’s likely to infect their organs soon. The serum I give them is rich in nutrients, and I’m hoping it will strengthen their blood enough to help slow the spread to the organs. I estimate it buys the patients an extra six months of life.”

“What’s in the serum?”

“It’s a concentration of beef bone marrow and minerals, all distilled into a cod-liver-oil base. The patients drink it twice a day.”

Kate wrinkled her nose. “Cod liver oil is disgusting. Can’t you mix it into something like honey or tea?”

“Cod liver oil has a high concentration of nutritious properties. If the patients don’t like it, they can go somewhere else to die.”

She smiled tightly. “There’s that warmhearted man I’ve always admired.”

He handed her a file. “Henry Harris is the laboratory assistant who analyzes the samples. Have him show you around the rest of the clinic. And give him a sputum sample while you’re at it. He will be testing you monthly, so get used to it. I may have time to be back later this afternoon. If not, I will see you tomorrow morning at nine o’clock.”

“You’re leaving?” It was her first day and she was already completely overwhelmed.

Trevor hung his lab coat on a hook beside the door. “You’d be surprised how much time sunning myself on that rock requires.”

He left the room without looking back.



Henry Harris was a mighty bull of a man. He wasn’t fat; rather, he gave the impression of a solid wall of muscle. He

literally had no neck. His massive shoulders sloped toward a broad face that looked like a gentle giant.

“Princeton football, national champions, 1878!” he introduced himself with pride.

“Congratulations,” Kate said as she shook his hand. The center of the lab was dominated by a long table with a black countertop, topped with a series of sleek microscopes arrayed like soldiers lined up for battle. Shelves loaded with dark bottles and empty glass beakers covered the walls of the lab. It was Henry’s job to evaluate the samples taken from the patients, and afterward the data would be passed to Kate for analysis.

“I’ve got the best job here,” Henry said, hunching over a microscope. His beefy hands looked too large to manipulate the tiny dials and wheels of the microscope. “I look at the blood and saliva samples and track the numbers. You would not believe the things you can see under a microscope. It’s like a whole world of tiny cells and weird creatures.”

He showed Kate how to look into the eyepiece and rotate the dial until the sample under the glass zoomed into focus. He was right! “Is it only because these people have tuberculosis that all these little things are living in their saliva?”

Henry reached behind him and grabbed a glass plate and slid it into position beneath the column of the microscope. “Have a look at this one. This sample came from Nurse Ackerman, and you’ll see hers doesn’t look much different, except there are no little cells that look like purple grains of rice. If those little purple tubes show up in your sample . . . well, I guess it’s best not to think of it. Just wear your mask when you’re around the patients, all right?”

Henry showed her the rest of the clinic. There were three washrooms: one for the male patients, another for the female patients, and a third for the staff. Apparently even sharing wash

facilities with the patients carried the risk of infection, since a damp hand towel could carry live bacillus for hours.

A staff table was behind the nurses' station. "We eat all our meals here," Henry said. "We get the same thing the patients eat. The patients have a hard time keeping on weight, and Dr. Kendall feeds them like royalty. Beef, milk, and eggs at every meal. Hot chocolate. Cheese. And desserts."

Perhaps this explained Henry's immense size.

At noon an army of young women arrived, pushing carts loaded with covered trays. Wearing pale pink uniforms with white aprons, these women were at the lowest rung of the hospital-staff ladder. The attendants delivered meals, changed linens, and bathed patients. Each of them donned a white cotton mask before entering the wards to distribute the meals. The orderlies were men who did the heavy lifting and transporting of patients.

It didn't take long to learn the hierarchy at the hospital. The female attendants and male orderlies were at the bottom. Then came the nurses with their light gray dresses and starchy white aprons and caps. The laboratory staff was somewhat higher. And at the very top were the doctors, who strode about the halls like lords of the manor.

Kate joined Henry at the staff table for lunch. Nurse Ackerman staffed the nurses' station at the front of the clinic, and Henry had already warned Kate that the woman was as cheerful as a rainy day. Nurse Ackerman wore her severe dark hair slicked tightly back, her only ornamentation two gold rings hanging from a chain around her neck.

"My husbands, may God rest their souls," the nurse said as she cleared the staff table in preparation for lunch. "I was widowed when I was twenty-nine, and then again at forty-three."

Nathan's death had knocked Kate beneath a suffocating avalanche that took years to lift. She couldn't imagine enduring that

tragedy twice, and she sent Nurse Ackerman a sympathetic look. For a moment she saw the gleam of remembered pain surface in the nurse's dark eyes. A moment of shared understanding. Only women who'd endured the tragedy of widowhood could understand the hollow ache of such loss.

A pretty young attendant wheeled the meal cart toward them, setting covered plates on the staff table. After trays were delivered, the attendant held a final tray out.

"Dr. Kendall isn't here?" The disappointment in the girl's voice was comical.

"Go on with you, Jenny," Nurse Ackerman scowled. "Dr. Kendall doesn't have time for the likes of you."

Jenny rolled her eyes as she put Trevor's plate back on the empty meal cart. "I just like looking at him," she said. "I dare not get too close or I'd probably get frostbite."

Kate hid her smile as the young woman left. It was nice to know she wasn't the only one who thought Trevor could use a blast of human warmth to melt the ice off him.