



ALL

IN

HER

HANDS



A NOVEL

AUDREY BLAKE



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CHAPTER 1

August 14, 1849; London

ONLY FOUR STEPS TO CLIMB TO THE GLOSSY FRONT DOOR of 43 Great Queen Street, but Nora's strength unraveled further with each one, dropping completely from her shoulders the moment she slipped inside the dim entrance hall.

The house was quiet. Nora let out a sigh and plucked at the linen rag covering her chest. It had been a pressed blouse just this morning, before she'd had to sally out into the late-summer heat. But the air inside was almost as stifling.

She had one goal—to sit in the ice room with closed eyes until the waves of heat stopped radiating off her skin. Then she could finally open the letter she'd received yesterday but hadn't had time to read. Navigating past a pile of newly arrived crates in the hallway, she glanced at the labels—India. Horace must have gotten word of some exciting specimens. Detouring around them, she stepped into the parlor and stopped, letter and ice room forgotten. A tall, slender man was stretched across the sofa, slippered feet hanging off the edge. The newspaper draped over his face lifted ever so slightly with each of his languid breaths. Daniel was sleeping.

Though her sore arms begged her to drop her heavy bag with a thump, she lowered it carefully to the floor so as not to startle him. Besides, it held too many precious medicines and instruments to treat it with anything less than the utmost care.

She tugged at her bootlaces to free her tired feet. Leaving the dusty boots in a heap, she tiptoed closer, studying her new husband. The newsheet, rising and falling with each exhale like the gentle swells of a calm sea, bore an article about American gold prospecting in California.

A trained surgeon, she lifted the paper with remarkable care and transferred it to the sofa arm, revealing his face—his sideburns trimmed with her usual precision. Daniel could have done as well himself, but she enjoyed shaving him. She liked any excuse to touch him, particularly those opportunities requiring a battle between deliberate motion and reckless proximity. The first time, she'd gotten carried away and actually nicked him. Daniel had teased her for weeks.

Nora grinned, nudged her way onto the edge of the cushion, and bent, kissing his cheek. He looked younger than his thirty years when he slept.

"You're home," he said before he managed to open his eyes. His arms found her and tugged her close as he turned to his side and burrowed into the sofa to make room for her. "You missed supper. I hope it was an interesting case."

"Nothing exciting. I was treating a girl with a fever in a rookery. When word spread a doctor was there, I had a line down the hall all the way to the front door. I opened a cyst, removed a dead fingernail, and tomorrow I have a child coming into the clinic. He's tongue-tied and needs to have it clipped."

The poor didn't mind so much when their doctor wore skirts. Since returning from Italy six months before, the clinic here had grown more and more empty. Most middle-class men simply refused to submit to her care. Nora took a deep breath. "How was your day?"

"Three surgeries. An amputation, a bone excision, and a bunion removal."

Nora tamped down her jealousy, diverting her attention to Daniel as he pressed his lips into her hair, sending a rush of electricity over her scalp.

"Let me squeeze you for a minute, and then you can go eat."

"I can't eat yet. I'm still too hot. I meant to go to the ice room."

A throat cleared behind her. Nora sat up. "Hello, Mrs. Phipps. Did you want something?"

The housekeeper wasn't normally inclined to interrupt, but as general manager of the chaos contained in their household, specimen room, hospital ward, surgery, and clinic, she often needed to. "I *want* you to be able to eat, perhaps sleep, and freshen your clothes." Her presence was always more forceful than her rail-thin, diminutive stature justified. "But I'm afraid a messenger's come to the clinic. Mrs. Franklin is asking for help. She's on Milk Street. It's urgent." Her voice softened. "I'm sorry, Nora. Cook is packing you a sandwich."

Untangling himself, Daniel sat up, too. "I can come with you." Mrs. Franklin was a skilled midwife, but if she needed help—

Nora glanced at him, his cheek red and indented where it'd been smashed against the button of the tufted pillow. He must

be tired, even more so than she, if he'd done three surgeries this afternoon. And he was scheduled to work at St. Bart's, one of London's enormous teaching hospitals, again in the morning. "You need to sleep. I'll manage fine."

"Don't walk," he said. "Take the carriage and rest your feet for a few minutes."

"The driver is already bringing it around," Mrs. Phipps said as Nora wrestled her boots back on, her feet magically sorer than when she'd stripped them off only minutes ago. "I'll have the sandwiches and your vaporizer put in."

As she disappeared, she kindly closed the door.

Daniel came up behind her, resting his hands on her shoulders and working at her knotted trapezius muscles. "Are you certain, Nora? I'm happy to help."

"Go up to bed." She rummaged through her bag, opening the protective case of her newest acquisition—a beautifully crafted glass syringe. No cracks. Good. "I'll join you as soon as I can."

She hadn't meant any innuendo, but he gave a complaining groan and kissed the back of her neck. "Not soon enough."

She swallowed and waited for her stomach to return to its rightful place, then turned and placed a pert kiss on his head. "No fair making me regret going when I have no choice. And just so you know..." She paused at the doorway. "I'm going straight to sleep when I get home."

"We'll see." The sound of Daniel's laugh chased her down the hallway, the feel of his hands on her shoulders lingering until she was in the carriage, rolling toward Milk Street.

She wished she could have stayed home.

But she was needed, and this promised to be today's most challenging case—probably the most demanding work she'd do all week. A humbling thought. Six months ago, in the midst of the furor she'd caused by registering with the medical association as a surgeon free to practice in the city of London—without letting them know N. Beady was a woman—she'd conducted a successful cesarean section, something no other English doctor could claim.

But the victory of her one incredible feat was fading, and she couldn't make a career out of dangerous and rare surgeries. If she kept doing only the work no other doctors would take—and no male patients would give her—next time she needed to do a cesarean, she'd be out of practice, dangerously so. She couldn't collect enough fees or keep her mind and fingers sufficiently trained dressing burns, treating bunions, and removing ingrown toenails.

Nora took another bite of her sandwich and extracted the letter in her pocket. With traffic clogging the streets, she ought to have time to read it all. And she was anxious for news of her teacher and mentor, Magdalena Marengo, a surgeon and professor of obstetrics and midwifery at the University of Bologna. Magdalena would have good advice for her, whether she knew Nora's current troubles or not.

Nora broke the letter's seal with a quick flick of her thumb, smiling as she studied Magdalena's handwriting. It was so like her—flowing, bold letters that dominated the page. Another bite—Nora shook some fallen crumbs off the paper—and she started to read, chewing as she devoured her former teacher's words.

My darling Nora,

Yes, I'm sure your husband is excellent, but I also know that you have no real yardstick by which to judge. After all, you never did sleep with Salvio Perra, which on the whole I think was wise. He's generous, but so easily offended. That becomes tiresome. However, I'm glad you are happy and glad that Daniel makes you so. I told Salvatore, and he looked like he'd bitten a lemon.

Nora huffed. Magdalena tended to be even more forthright in her letters than she was face-to-face. Wrenching off another bite of sandwich, she chewed furiously.

The recipe Dr. Croft sent for the primrose tincture is very nice. Please offer my thanks.

No, I'm afraid I have no female students since you left, excepting the midwives, of course.

At the mention, Nora saw the faces of her friends. The midwife nuns had been separate from her, of course, by their vows and customs, but they'd worked hand in hand, nursing and bringing children into the world. Here in England, most doctors considered a midwife as little more than a woman with a water bucket and some ragged towels. They were certainly not trained to work in hospital like their Italian counterparts. Licensed doctors, known as accoucheurs and obstetricians, now claimed the world of English childbirth, leaving midwives to

attend to the impoverished and those too frightened of high mortality rates to go to charity hospitals.

I worry over it. In my mother's time, the university had four women attending classes. At present I am the only female, if I don't count the nuns. I want to train others — other women, I mean; there are enough men enrolling in my classes — but I have found no one willing to try. Once I'm gone, what of the girls who'd like to learn then? Who will help them, or show them that this is possible? That women are not just capable of this work, but meant for it?

You must think of this too. I know in England right now there isn't a way for them —

Nora swallowed, looking blindly through the carriage window. There truly wasn't. Unable to remove her from the medical register once she'd qualified, the college had instead made a new rule, barring women applicants entirely. They might not be able to get rid of her, but they'd stop every other woman who tried.

Her stomach twisted with familiar guilt. She'd snuck her way in, unintentionally damming the way for any other woman to follow, though none had tried, yet.

It's the college's doing, not yours, she reminded herself and returned her attention to the letter.

You must think of the future, Magdalena continued. *For the women who would and will work with you. For the sisters you will care for and save.*

Throat tight, Nora refolded the letter. Magdalena meant well. She was fierce and uncompromising in her beliefs, but what exactly did she think Nora could do about this? She'd barely clung on to her license. She had practically no patients, certainly none who could afford to pay her. The clinic stayed afloat only because Horace still attracted enthusiastic—and paying—crowds at his lectures and demonstrations.

She was tired, hungry—even after the sandwich—and probably destined to spend all night tending a woman in labor. And next week and next month, she'd do more of the same, waiting for the rare, sporadic cases to keep her mind and hands from rusting.



The driver stopped, and Nora scrambled to swallow one last bite as she hoisted up the delicate vaporizer and her kit bag. Wriggling from the carriage, she almost bumped into a thin young woman twisting her hands anxiously. “Are you Mrs. Gibson?” she asked. “Mrs. Franklin told me to wait for you.”

“Yes,” Nora answered, glad to have extra help. She passed the girl her instrument bag. “Careful with that.” She'd carry the vaporizer herself. It had just been recalibrated and repaired, and was every bit as fragile as her new glass syringe. “Take me to her.”

The girl rushed through an alley to a crooked staircase that clung to a filthy, soot-stained building with doors and landings at intervals leading to even dirtier flats.

“Mrs. Franklin's worried,” the girl said, her words separated by breathless pants. Nora struggled to keep pace—the steps

were steep, and she didn't trust the rickety railing. They ducked inside a door, three floors up. "Just in there." The girl handed Nora her bag and retreated, only too eager to flee. Nora didn't blame her, but she didn't understand, either. Whenever Nora heard screams of pain, her blood quickened, propelling her toward the crisis, not away.

Her adoptive father, Horace Croft, renowned for his work in surgery, medicine, and science, was just as intrepid, luckily for her—and not only because he'd dared to develop and make use of her skill, once he'd seen that she shared his curiosity. First, he'd plucked her, nearly lifeless, out of a flat not much better than this when her entire family perished from cholera. His heedless rush into every undertaking had saved her life.

It had been a searing experience for an eight-year-old girl—losing her family to cholera, nearly dying, then awakening in the home of a strange surgeon with sobbing patients and specimen-filled shelves. But since she'd nowhere else to go, she'd done her best to stay by trying to make herself agreeable and useful. It took Nora years to trust the gruff stranger and even longer to approach his exacting trade with anything other than horror.

Unfortunately, Horace attended fewer surgeries since his stroke last year. His weakened left hand might be just as dexterous as the average man's, but Horace was a renowned surgeon and not accustomed to being average at anything.

Nor did Nora aspire to the commonplace. Squaring her shoulders, she hurried toward the growing moans, willing her eyes to adjust to the dark and her nose to air that already smelled of blood and birthing.

CHAPTER 2

THANK THE LORD," MRS. FRANKLIN BREATHED AS NORA burst into the back bedroom. "You're here. It's happening now."

"What's the trouble?" Nora asked, searching out a safe spot to store her vaporizer and already fearing whatever made the stoic Mrs. Franklin look so anxious.

"Breech. Which is no great problem, usually. I just have a feeling." The woman's wrinkled brow glistened with exertion, but she forced a smile onto her face as she turned to the patient. "You'll be fine, Betsy. Dr. Gibson's here to help."

"Let me take a look." Nora knelt at the end of the bed. As Mrs. Franklin had said, this birth was well underway. And breech. Instead of a bit of scalp, she caught a glimpse of baby buttocks crowded against Betsy's opening—still small, which was a concern. Nora had no idea how long Betsy had been laboring, but big babies and little pelvises always flooded her with dread.

"Blood loss?" Nora asked as she unbuttoned her sleeves.

Mrs. Franklin jerked her head. "No. But poor Betsy's worn out. This is her first. I usually wait for the babe to make his own way through, but we've been here for hours."

A moan mounted, ending in a scream that tore at Nora's

chest. Patients coped with pain differently, but as Nora added up factors—breech presentation, primigravida, unproductive labor, maternal exhaustion...

“It’s good that you sent for me.” She glanced at the vaporizer, then turned back to the patient. “Betsy?”

No response. She was too lost in her suffering to register anything.

Mrs. Franklin gripped Nora’s arm and angled her away from the bed. “Betsy’s my niece. My sister died three weeks after giving birth to her.” Her jaw clenched, and Nora noticed her drenched collar and glistening neck. “I can’t let it happen again.”

Nora scrutinized the scene with new eyes. Everything changed when family was attending. The baby’s buttocks inched forward with a contraction, then slid back again. At least the child was prone—*face to the tail*, as the midwives said. “It’s not the worst position,” Nora reassured Mrs. Franklin. “We’ll take care of Betsy together.”

Nora yanked out her jars of wine and olive oil and threw some of the oil over her hands just as Magdalena had taught her.

Never force your hand into delicate tissue. You must be as slippery as the child itself. And for the sake of everything holy, keep your nails short. Slow down and think!

Betsy screamed again and the buttocks slid forward, far enough that Nora could see the hip joints.

“That’s progress,” Mrs. Franklin cried.

Nora was about to lower into a better position, but Mrs. Franklin was already there, weathered hands poised and a mask

of fierce concentration on her face. “Bear down, now, Betsy. It’s a boy. We’re almost through it.”

“You continue,” Nora said, shifting sideways. “I’m here if you need me.”

For all her earlier anxiety, Mrs. Franklin was confident now. Nora understood the sudden change. Frequently, an oncoming crisis simply forced uncertainties to vanish, compelling you to succeed. And sometimes that swift, blind courage worked, but it was hell when it didn’t. So as Nora leaned back, crouching on her heels, she watched carefully.

Betsy groaned and panted as the baby’s body slowly emerged, his legs pinned up, unable to fall loose. Betsy’s thighs shook with pain and pressure, and Nora longed to pull the child out and make the suffering stop, but birth required faith and restraint. The progression stopped, and Nora and Mrs. Franklin leaned in closer. The tiny feet had wedged behind the vulva like bolts in a lock, impeding further descent. Nora started to reach forward when, with practiced movements, Mrs. Franklin hooked her fingers behind the baby’s knee joints and flexed upward, freeing the feet to pop out and dangle as she held up the child’s belly.

Nora smiled. Most doctors would have tried to stretch the opening laterally, but someone had taught Mrs. Franklin this gravity-assisted technique—one Nora had seen only in Italy. Nora spared a glance at Betsy’s purple face, swollen from hours of exertion, her eyes tormented slits.

“Nearly there,” she said, reaching up to press the mother’s tightly clenched fist.

The baby’s back slid into view, tilting to take advantage

of every sliver of open space. Screaming, Betsy grabbed her bedcovers, so Nora jumped to her side, rubbing Betsy's upper arms and shoulders with hard, grinding strokes as the nuns had taught her.

"I'm going to die like my mother," Betsy sobbed.

"You'll do no such thing," Nora promised as she tried to massage some courage into her. She glanced at Mrs. Franklin, who hadn't responded to her niece's cry.

"What?" Nora asked. Something else was wrong.

"One arm is pinned up by the head. I've seen breeches like that where the child was palsied all their life."

Nora nodded. Nerve damage at the neck and shoulder could be crippling. "Let me look."

The vaginal wall quivered. There wasn't a centimeter left, no give for the bulging weight of the baby. "I need to cut." Nora spoke softly, only for Mrs. Franklin's ears. "Can you get the surgical scissors from my bag?"

Nora didn't hold with cutting, though many doctors favored the procedure—which they called episiotomy.

Mrs. Franklin answered with a grim frown. "You need to hurry." She knew, better than Nora, that delay was dangerous.

"I assume these are the ones you want?" Mrs. Franklin passed Nora the blunt-edged scissors. A quick nod—they were the right ones for this, though not specifically what she'd requested. This midwife had good instincts.

Nora exhaled. She liked to have a little more time to select her spot, but this would have to do.

She closed the blades and Betsy jerked, letting out a piercing scream. "Sorry," Nora whispered through grinding teeth. Blood

ran from the wound as Nora inserted her hand, working her fingers carefully between the baby's sternum and Betsy's pelvis, the contractions crushing her hand painfully. She waited as the pain mounted, her fingertips numbed from the pressure. She could just brush the baby's chin, but not yet reach his mouth.

"I need gentle pressure from outside. Extremely gentle," Nora warned as Mrs. Franklin applied her hands to Betsy's swollen abdomen. The extra push worked, and the head slid toward Nora's fingers. She hooked her pointer finger into the baby's mouth, blinking when the tiny tongue flickered against her.

"He's moving!" She sighed, relief sweeping from the top of her head and rolling over her shoulders. At least there was that. But he wasn't having a better time than the rest of them. There was no reaching the arm. She had no room at all. How a man with larger fingers ever navigated this...

Giving up, she carefully withdrew and reached her bloodied hand into her bag for the forceps.

Mrs. Franklin's eyes went wide from her position above Betsy.

"These are short forceps," Nora explained. "Some doctors treat them only as leverage to pull harder, but we're smarter than that. They can reach where we can't. Every tool is a good tool in the right hands."

"No!" Betsy screamed at the sight of the large metal clamps. "I can't."

"It won't increase your pain," Nora vowed. "It will help it end sooner."

Betsy didn't seem to hear, protesting even louder. Nora

wished momentarily for the vaporizer, but there was no time to ready it, let alone administer a dose of ether.

“Stand there.”

Mrs. Franklin repositioned herself as Nora slipped one forcep into the inferior opening near Betsy’s tailbone and eased it into position on the right side of the head. “Hold this one in place here,” she explained over Betsy’s hysterical screams. “Then we do the same on the left side. I extend the handles beyond the head, so the curved bits help push instead of pulling on the neck.”

Necks were so fragile.

“Try and keep her still.”

Murmuring incomprehensibly, Mrs. Franklin leaned in and grabbed her niece’s knees, holding her fast while Nora clamped the forceps together and rested the tiny body on top of them to support his weight before she guided the head downward. Horace had often warned her of the unique times you needed to ignore a patient in order to save them, but today, Nora couldn’t manage it. “We’re almost there, Betsy. Try to hold on to something.”

She turned back Mrs. Franklin. Flushed, sweating, she also looked at the point of breaking. “As soon as the chin appears—” She grunted as the nape of the neck and the mouth began to emerge. “You stand and draw the child up and out, toward the ceiling, decreasing the circumference for the mother.”

Almost as soon as she spoke, it happened. The head escaped, the rubbery cord dropping nearly to the floor as Betsy gave a shuddering cry.

Nora dropped the forceps and collected the baby from Mrs.

Franklin's trembling hands. The midwife rushed to clutch Betsy's shoulders. "Well done, love. Well done. We've got him out."

Nora turned the baby over, wrapping him in her billowing apron. He was limp now—the suck she'd elicited moments ago absent when she thumbed his tiny mouth. She rubbed his chest, waiting for the first gasp.

"Come on, dear," she whispered, opening the mouth and sweeping it with her finger. Still no response. Nora rubbed harder, angling the baby's head toward the floor.

"Is something the matter with him?" Betsy asked urgently.

Mrs. Franklin, moving like lightning, reached for the child with hands so demanding and certain that Nora relinquished him, the slack limbs flopping as Mrs. Franklin swiped his face with a towel. She opened his lips and placed her mouth over his, then gave a steady blow. The tiny chest swelled.

"Pinch his foot," Mrs. Franklin ordered, then lowered herself for one more puff. Nora obeyed, and his limp fingers opened like a five-pointed star bursting to life in the sky. He sputtered indignantly, purple face reddening as he let out an objecting wail.

"Oh, my heart." Mrs. Franklin exhaled, her head dropping in relief. "He's fine, love," she reassured Betsy as she wiped away the white coating of vernix. "Sometimes they're too stubborn to take their first breath and we have to make them."

She delivered the child into Betsy's arms while Nora pulled out her threaded needle to suture the cut. In her experience, if she worked quickly now, the mother's exhaustion and joy dulled the pain.

It took another hour to deliver the placenta. When all was

settled, and the nervous father and grandfather brought into the room to watch over Betsy and bestow extravagant praise on the baby, Mrs. Franklin steeped some tea and pushed a cup toward Nora across the rickety table in the sitting room. The room was too hot and stuffy for it, but Nora accepted the cup gratefully, if only as an excuse to quiet her nerves.

“You did well,” she told Mrs. Franklin. “I know it’s harder with someone you know and love, but blowing into the lungs worked.”

Mrs. Franklin closed her eyes. “A fair mite better than swinging them around. I swear on my life I once saw a doctor take a babe by his feet and swing him like a cat.”

Nora lifted an eyebrow, praying the unnamed doctor wasn’t Horace. He was never afraid to be unconventional. No, it couldn’t have been him. His favorite maxim was to treat things quietly. “Did it work?”

Mrs. Franklin’s nose twitched in disgust. “Aye. But I thought the head might snap off. Not to mention the baby could have slid straight out of his grip and gone flying across the room. I’d never let anyone try that on a baby in my care, especially not my sister’s grandson.” Her eyes lowered and her words slowed. “I felt like my sister was watching today, and I suspect she was as terrified as I was.”

“It was a difficult birth,” Nora agreed, collecting her thoughts as she indulged in the sweeter sips at the bottom of her cup. “Betsy will have a slow recovery, most likely.”

“I want to know more about those metal instruments you used,” Mrs. Franklin said, cocking her eyebrow. “I’ve only seen one doctor use them, but it was on a dead child.”

“They can save lives if you’re trained, but they’re dangerous

in the wrong hands. I learned the use of these ones in Italy and taught Dr. Croft and my husband.”

Mrs. Franklin turned her cup around in her saucer. “Could you teach me?”

Nora stopped mid-sip.

She lowered the teacup, her mind racing through scenarios, laws. She’d have to study the restrictions. Doctors and surgeons were protective of their privileges, and certain methods were only allowed to be taught in hospitals and universities by instructors approved by the Royal College of Surgeons. She could lose her license if she misstepped.

Three years ago, she’d nearly cost Horace his, so she knew better than most the consequences of medical experimentation. She’d conducted an emergency surgery under anesthesia to save a man’s life. But she hadn’t been licensed. And she was female, so how could she possibly be considered a pupil or an apprentice?

It didn’t matter that she’d begun making anatomical drawings while still a child. (Horace found her talent a convenience, but Mrs. Phipps, who’d largely taken charge of orphaned Nora’s upbringing, was the one who’d brought in a drawing master.) By the time she was twelve, Horace was using her as an assistant in preparing cadavers and, soon after, as an extra hand on living patients. By the time she was twenty-two, she’d received as deep and full a medical education as any of his students. If any other aspiring doctor had repaired that man’s hernia, he’d have been celebrated, but because she’d done it, the surgery was, in the words of one newspaper, “a travesty and a scandal.” The doctors of London had called for everything from censure

to fines to stripping Horace's licenses. Some had even argued for prison. Luckily, Horace's prestige and her hasty escape had deflected these scenarios.

She'd dodged their ire by absconding to Bologna, Italy, where they allowed females in their university, and earned her own medical license. She now worked quietly among the grudging London surgeons, winning a few over with her obstetrical expertise. But she needed to tread carefully.

"I'd very much like to teach you," Nora said slowly, returning to Mrs. Franklin. "But..." She forced a smile. "I could get in trouble training you outside of a hospital."

But then, she possessed a hospital owned by the most respected surgeon and lecturer in London. While she studied in Italy, Horace had enlarged and renovated his home, building a small but modern hospital that he'd turned over to Nora the moment she returned to London. He knew it would be the only place she was allowed to practice in peace—if one called the continual criticism and censure she received *peaceful*.

Horace's name and reputation had always provided considerable protection. Even with her license, she relied on it every day. There might be a way to train Mrs. Franklin without getting either of them dragged into court, but only within the walls of her hospital at 43 Great Queen Street.

Her thoughts flashed to the letter tucked away in her instrument bag.

Magdalena knew. If they didn't train more women, the door Nora had forced open for herself might be closed forever. Magdalena had complained about fewer women training in medicine, but here in London, Nora was the sole female

representative of the profession, and there were fewer midwives working every year, largely because of male doctors advocating that they were better skilled for the job. Midwives were scorned by the scientific community as uneducated nuisances, useful only for poor patients who couldn't afford real physicians.

As patients turned increasingly to doctors, midwives' unique and undervalued skills—like Mrs. Franklin blowing into Betsy's boy's lungs—might be lost.

Nora looked away from Mrs. Franklin's sharp brown eyes, frustrated by the latent intelligence crouching there. Mrs. Franklin had safely brought more children into London than scores of doctors combined. She'd performed flawlessly today. If she wanted to learn to use short forceps, she deserved to.

Magdalena would teach her, so why couldn't she? While Nora intended to be careful, this looked like an instance where she needed to stick her foot in a door, forcing an opening again. "You know, I happen to be giving a demonstration lecture tomorrow at my hospital. I'd be happy to have you join."

"Hospital instruction?" Mrs. Franklin straightened her shoulders, a grin creeping over her mouth. "If it were a lecture by some doctors I've seen at work, I'd save my time. But after seeing your forceps, I think you may have some tricks to teach me."

Nora smiled, recalling the quick release of the baby's tiny feet freed by Mrs. Franklin's capable hands. Her fearless exhalation into the child's mouth. "Perhaps we have things to teach each other."