

Antidote to Murder

FELICITY YOUNG

 HarperCollins *Publishers*

PROLOGUE

I climb onto the bridge wall and sit just beyond the gaslight's beam. The iron weight of the Thames below draws me with a magnetic pull as powerful as my own impulses. How easy to jump, to fracture the murk and sink into the river's fetid embrace. Will I struggle? I like to think not, but who knows? Perhaps I will, when a reflex breath betrays me and invites the rushing waters in. I am unable to swim and the thrashing won't last long. My body will sink and rise again with none of the beauty of resurrection. Black, eyeless and bloated, I will finally show my true form.

Big Ben strikes. Seven, eight, nine, ten. The clatter of traffic across the bridge has eased, though the heat still presses through the dark like the stink of the river in my nostrils.

I straighten my seat on the warm stone ledge and press my heels into the wall. Mortar crumbles like stale bread. I brace myself and prepare for the Gates of Hell.

'Come on, mister — 'tain't that bad.'

I gasp and turn to face the voice.

'Nothin' a bit o' comfort won't fix, I reckon,' another female voice chimes in. What is it to them? Is it the expensive cut of my tailcoat draped across the parapet, the sheen of my top hat sitting next to it? The bridge light shines on their painted faces. Their garish dress makes them almost identical clowns.

I glimpse the waif Jack, hanging about in the shadows. I'd given the boy a penny and told him to go home. He must have guessed my intentions and enlisted the help of these streetwalkers.

'Go away. Leave me alone,' I cry, beads of sweat tickling beneath my shirt.

'Whatcha wanta do a fing like that for?' the larger whore persists, dropping a heavy hand onto my shoulder. I turn to shrug her off and find myself caught in the glare of the street lamp.

The slighter one says, 'Hey, Maisie, I know 'im — it's the doc. The geezer I been tellin' you about from the Satin Palace.' She turns to the boy and cuffs him over the head, knocking his hat to the ground. 'Why didn't you tell us that in the first place, you li'l rascal?' Then to her friend she says, 'This is the gent what fixed me up when I worked there.'

I squint at her through the unnatural light; perhaps the pinched face does hold a vague familiarity.

'Blimey,' Maisie says. 'We can't let a talent like that go to the river.'

A shell bursts inside my head. I touch my temple and feel the throbbing scar, taste the cordite as it dissolves upon my tongue, and pray to keep the fit at bay. Please, God, not now.

'Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me,' I recite. I abhor what I do, but seem unable to stop it. I slide down from the wall and stand at the large whore's side. The moment has passed.

Maisie looks puzzled; she does not know her Bible and that in itself grieves me.

A smile traces her lips. 'Well, oo'ever does do it, we're mighty grateful an' all.' She links her arm through mine and I feel the heat of her flesh burning through my shirtsleeves.

The thin whore takes my other arm and with her free hand scoops up my hat and coat. 'C'mon, Doc, there's

nuffink a good shot o' gin and a bit o' comfort won't cure.
We owe you that much at least. Get lost, scallywag.'

I hear Jack's bare feet pattering into the darkness.
Godforsaken boy.

'You don't owe me anything,' I protest, but it is useless:
the women will not take no for an answer. And neither will
the Beast.

CHAPTER ONE

June 1911

It was unlike Pike to be late. Dody McClelland pulled out her fob again and frowned. She scanned the rattling traffic and was treated to a mouthful of dust and petrol fumes. Hansom cab, motor taxi, omnibus — or would he choose to walk? Not the latter, she hoped — not with that knee. Perhaps he'd been unable to find transport at all. There always seemed to be someone on strike these days. She should have sent Fletcher to pick him up in the Benz.

Dody had never experienced such a heat wave. The sun, felt more than seen, pressed invisibly upon the London streets; and the low blanket of smoke and cloud ensured that its heat stayed there, steaming like clams any foolish enough to linger in it. A fool she was not. Dody clung to her boater and was about to dash through a gap in the traffic to the shady side of the road when a hansom slid to a halt alongside her and out stepped a trim, suited figure.

Pike. He held his cane and small suitcase awkwardly in one hand and tipped his bowler with the other. 'Sorry I'm late; the traffic was terrible.' His northern accent, barely discernible for the most part, today sounded straight from Leeds. He turned to pay the driver.

Dody tried to hurry him up. 'We'd better not dawdle. Surgeons don't like to be kept waiting.'

He appeared not to have heard. For a moment he stood trance-like, watching the cab ease from the kerb to the jingle of harness and the clash of metal hooves on stone. She put a hand on his arm. 'Matthew? It's going to be all right, you know. Mr Barker performs this type of surgery almost every day.'

'Of course it's going to be all right.' He smiled, patted her hand and pointed to the gate with his cane. 'Shall we go in?'

They climbed the steps and passed into the hospital's front entrance. It was slightly cooler inside. Pike removed his bowler. He'd been sweating. Dark hair plastered his scalp.

Dody checked with the clerk at the desk that all was in order, then pointed towards a sweeping stone staircase. 'Your ward is on the third floor, but we can take the lift, if you like.'

'I can manage the stairs,' he said. 'In fact, I'll wager I reach the top before you.'

Dody laughed, picked up her skirts and followed at a brisk pace, allowing him to beat her by a hair's breadth.

'You held back,' he said, panting. She waited with him near the lifts while he got his breath back. The odour of carbolic reached them from the ward.

'I won't be holding back for much longer. Once your knee is fixed, there'll be no stopping you. Soon you'll be leaving me for dead on that ridiculous boneshaker of yours, or galloping off in a cloud of dust on a horse through the park—'

'I'd like to see you on a horse,' he interrupted.

And I you, Chief Inspector, she thought, hoping the heat would mask her blush. How dashing he must have looked in his cavalry officer's uniform. 'Off it, more like, and face down in a soggy field. I'm not much good at riding, I'm afraid. My family were never part of that set,' she said.

‘I could teach you.’

‘You could try.’ She laughed. ‘That might be your greatest challenge yet.’

The lift jolted to a halt, the metal cage clanked, and out stepped a nurse pushing an old man in a wicker wheelchair. The man had clearly been a soldier: a row of medals was pinned to his dressing gown and both his legs were amputated above the knee. Dody said good morning and the man replied with a friendly smile and a wave as the nurse wheeled him into the ward.

Dody looked at Pike. How pale he had become — was he recalling the trauma of his injury? She was visited with a sudden image of her sister Florence, ashen-faced after being force-fed at Holloway Prison. Unlike Florence, though, Pike refused to talk about his terrible experiences. This was part of the problem, she felt, and so typical of men who, like him, had fought in the South African war. He had taken a long time to agree to the operation, but it was at least a step in the right direction.

‘One of your ward mates, I suppose; seems like a nice chap,’ she said, trying to jolly him along.

Pike said nothing.

The ward consisted of two rows of twenty beds with double doors at each end. After spending so much time at the Women’s Hospital and the Clinic, Dody had almost forgotten the collective odour of sick men: tobacco, urine, sweat and Macassar hair oil. But as she gazed down the wide aisle, she could see that the ward itself was clean and orderly. Some of the men were sitting up in bed reading, their bandaged limbs propped on pillows. Others slept despite the groans of a man near the door who thrashed about in a bed with raised sides.

They stopped at the desk, where Dody made the introductions to the sister in charge. The tall, redheaded

Irish woman walked them briskly down the aisle to an empty bed and took Pike's case from him. 'You won't be requiring that here, Mr Pike,' she said. 'Everything you need is in the locker next to the bed. Undress, change into the nightshirt and then pass water into the bottle provided.' She whisked the curtains around the bed, giving him no time to reply, let alone protest.

The man in the bed next to Pike's began to moan in his sleep. Across the aisle someone hawked and spat into the potted palm next to his bed. Pike's curtains quivered.

'Mr Stratton,' the sister admonished. 'If you must expectorate, please use the cup provided.'

'Sorry, Sister,' the man said, wiping threads of tobacco from his pyjama jacket and lighting up a cigarette.

If Dody ever had a say in the running of a hospital, she would start with a no-smoking rule on the wards. She smiled wryly at her brief flight of fancy. What influence could she possibly have when most of the larger London hospitals wouldn't even allow female doctors to practise within their hallowed halls?

The floorboards shook under the weight of several pairs of feet. She looked up to see Mr Barker at the head of the ward with three younger men in his entourage. 'I'll be back in a moment, Matthew,' Dody said to the curtains and hurried to meet the surgeon before he began his rounds.

'Doctor McClelland,' Barker said as he took her hands in both of his and vigorously pumped.

Dody smiled warmly at him. Mr Barker had offered his support when she applied for a bone surgery internship and it was no fault of his that she had been rejected for the course.

He leaned closer to say softly, 'I'm sorry things didn't work out. I'm afraid there are too many old fuddy-duddies on the board who don't like the idea of lady surgeons.'

Dody smiled again. ‘Thank you, but I have landed on my feet. I am working with the Home Office now as an assistant autopsy surgeon to Doctor Bernard Spilsbury.’

One of the medical students failed to hold back a snigger. Even Barker looked at Dody askance. Her smile became rigid. He might be open to the idea of a female surgeon, but a female autopsy surgeon — a student of the ‘Beastly Science’ — that was something else again.

‘It’s not full-time employment,’ Dody added to forestall any unwelcome comment, ‘so it means that I can still give time to the Women’s Hospital and the Clinic. But sir, I know you are busy, so I had better explain why I’m here. Last week you saw Chief Inspector Pike in your rooms and you booked him for a knee repair today.’

It annoyed her to give in so quickly, but she had achieved her purpose and Barker seemed relieved that she had changed the subject. ‘Yes, I remember the man; Boer War veteran turned policeman. X-rayed his knee and found shrapnel lodged under the patella. A straightforward operation, provided the anaesthetic agrees and there are no post-operative infections.’

Dody had lost count of the number of bodies she’d examined with death attributed to anaesthetic complications. It was one of the risks of the operation she had mentioned to Pike, though strangely the prospect of death by anaesthetic had not seemed to worry him. His fear seemed deeper than that. But how would she feel if something untoward happened as a result of the operation she had pushed him into having? A hollow ache formed in the pit of her stomach. Better to cast that thought to the back of her mind. Would she not advise a patient to whom she had no attachment a similar course of action? Of course she would.

‘He is quite apprehensive,’ she said to the surgeon. ‘I was hoping you might be able to spend a few minutes this

morning explaining again what the operation entails and putting his mind at ease. I'm afraid I don't seem to be making a very good job of it,' Dody said.

'You are too close to him, that's why. A no-nonsense approach is always best.'

'Please don't get the wrong idea, sir. We are friends, nothing more.'

Mr Barker looked at her over his half-rim glasses. Dody felt the heat rise in her face once more and cursed the ready blush that would only confirm the argument that women were too emotional to be doctors.

'Come on then, let's go see this chap of yours,' Barker said, with a sigh of impatience.

Dody bit her tongue and led him down the long ward.

The curtains were still drawn around Pike's bed. 'Chief Inspector Pike, are you ready?' she called.

There was no answer.

The surgeon folded his arms.

Dody cautiously drew back the curtain's edge before ripping it fully open. The bed was neatly made; the patient nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER TWO

Wednesday 9 August

Dody drew a sharp line beneath the notes of her last Clinic patient, put them aside for filing and picked up a clean sheet of paper. About to ring the bell on her desk to inform the nurse that she was ready for the next, she stopped her hand midair. It was all too easy to rush from one patient to the next. She needed a moment or two for herself.

Nearly six weeks had passed since Pike's disappearance from the hospital and Dody had heard nothing from him; it was as if he had vanished with the river mists. It was fortunate, she told herself, that her work left her little time to brood. When the opportunity did present itself, as it did now, her thoughts were accompanied by a mix of frustration, helplessness ... and something for which she had no ready word — was it loss? Yes, she was missing him. But it was not an unalloyed missing. She was angry with him too: angry that he had not trusted her professional judgement; angry that he had left her looking like a fool in front of the surgeon and his colleagues.

Where had he gone? What was he doing and why had he not contacted her? Embarrassment, she supposed. He'd said that after the operation he was planning on visiting his daughter while he recuperated. Violet would be spending the

school holidays with her grandparents, the parents of his late wife — perhaps he was there now. He'd also proposed an outing with Dody upon his return to London — a day-trip to the seaside if she could find a free day.

At least he had not taken it for granted that she would have free time. As the days went by her thoughts were increasingly dominated by a single, strangely comforting question: even if he had made contact, apologised and explained his behaviour, did she really have the time and inclination to take courtship with this complex man a step further?

A few weeks previously she had celebrated her thirtieth birthday with her family. Dody was now considered to be past marriageable age. Even her mother, Louise, had gently probed for her views on the subject, realising perhaps that the prospect of grandchildren from either of her daughters was becoming ever more remote. Louise managed a brave face when Dody explained that Spilsbury — the Home Office pathologist under whom she worked — had implied that more avenues might be open to her if she remained unmarried. Never could she aspire to Spilsbury's lofty heights, of course, but employment as a senior pathologist might one day be realistically attainable. A spinster's life could in fact be very liberating, she told Louise, and embracing it was the only way a woman could pursue a challenging career.

These reflections made her feel better and helped strengthen her erstwhile faltering resolve. *No* was the answer to her earlier question. She had no time left for Pike, not after all this. She had spent enough hours wondering and worrying about him. Thank God they had not given more to one another, for giving more meant more to lose. Better their attachment come to an end now, before irrevocable decisions were made.

She picked up the hand bell from her desk and gave it a vigorous shake.

*

Dody knew what the girl wanted the moment she sat down. There was something about the way she twisted her hands, the way her eyes hunted around the shabby surgery.

‘I’m not regular, Doctor,’ she said. ‘My monthlies, I mean. I need you to give me something.’ Her eyes rested on the corner medicine cabinet.

Dody felt the warning press of a headache and brushed a palm across her brow. The surgery was stuffy; the windows were closed against the odours of the street. A furious bluebottle buzzed, trapped between the lowered blind and the windowpane.

She took note of the girl’s distressed state, the way she smelled. She had an odour about her that had nothing to do with dirty clothes or the heat wave. It was the scent of fear.

‘When did you have your courses last, Miss Craddock?’ she asked gently.

‘Umm, two, three months ago. Maybe.’

‘Might you be with child?’

Esther Craddock shook her head so vigorously a papier-mâché grape dropped from her straw hat and rolled beneath the desk. ‘I’m not pregnant, no, and I don’t want to be, neither. You got to give me something so’s I’m not.’

Dody sighed. This inability to differentiate between contraception and abortion was common amongst girls such as Esther Craddock. Herbs, gin, gunpowder, washing soda — anything that caused vomiting, cramps and contractions — had been experimented with over the years by women desperate to get rid of their unborn children. Dody had even heard of women drinking the water of boiled copper coins. Sometimes these remedies worked and sometimes the mother died also. More often than not, nothing happened at all.

‘Do you use preventatives?’ Dody asked.

‘What?’

‘French letters, sheaths?’

‘You got to be joking — ’ave you seen the price of ’em? Three shillings a dozen!’

‘They can be washed out and re-used,’ Dody said, fearing her advice was already too late.

‘No. Don’t need ’em.’ The girl folded her arms, turned her head towards the closed blind and stared at it.

Dody wondered how much the girl knew about conception. Unlike the majority of her medical companions, Dody did her best to inform her young women patients about the dangers of intimacy with men. Only the previous week a fifteen-year-old had come to the Clinic fearing she had ‘caught a baby’ through the passionate kisses of a boy. At least she had been able to reassure that misguided child, but what of all the others? Surely there would be less risk of unwanted pregnancy if they understood clearly the consequences of what they did. There really needed to be an education program.

Dody leaned down to pick up the dropped grape. The keys to the medicine cabinet on her belt tinkled and the pressure in her head rose.

Esther took the grape by its pin and rammed it back into the fruit salad arrangement of her hat. She met Dody’s gaze with her own. Her face was flour-white, her eyes bright and shining. ‘Just give me something,’ the girl said, balling her fists. ‘If you don’t give me something, I’ll ... I’ll ... kill meself!’

Dody took a deep breath and tightened the light reflector around her head. ‘Before I can help, I have to examine you.’

Ignoring the girl’s sulky protests, Dody took a wooden spatula from a tray of instruments on her desk and examined her mouth, making note of a blue line on the gums near the junction of the teeth. Next, she pulled down Esther’s lower

eyelids and aimed her light at mucous membranes the colour of old meat. ‘Stomach ache?’

‘Touch o’ colic.’

Probably more than a touch, Dody thought, writing down her observations. She screwed the lid back onto her fountain pen and slowly laid it on the top of her patient’s notes. ‘You are showing signs of plumbism, Miss Craddock — lead poisoning. Have you been exposed to lead in any form? Are you aware that lead poisoning can cause miscarriage?’

The fruit salad shuddered. ‘No, miss, no.’

Dody proceeded cautiously. ‘Some women take lead deliberately to poison their unborn babies.’

Over previous years lead had become an increasingly popular abortifacient, with slightly better results than the other remedies. Knowledge of its efficacy originated from the large numbers of female workers in the Midlands paint factories who found themselves suffering early miscarriage and passed by word of mouth from friend to friend, mother to daughter.

The girl’s voice rose. ‘I wouldn’t do nothin’ like that. You shouldn’t ought to be saying such terrible things!’

Dody raised her palms. ‘Hush now. Take off your outdoor things and climb onto the examination table. I can’t be certain of anything just yet.’

Esther reluctantly unpinned her hat and laid it carefully on the desk. With shaking fingers she undid the buttons of her light summer coat and levered off her boots. As she flung her coat onto the chair a twisted knot of fabric fell to the ground.

Esther hadn’t noticed it. She lay on the examination table with her eyes screwed shut, her fingers, bare of rings, digging into the table’s padding.

Dody picked the small bundle up, thinking it must be the girl’s handkerchief, but discovered it was a patch of frayed muslin wrapped around some small, hard objects. She

peeked beneath the fabric's folds and found they concealed a small collection of tablets.

Esther's eyes remained clamped shut. Dody slipped the bundle back into the girl's coat pocket. It would help her to treat Esther if she knew what the tablets were, but the last thing she needed now was a confrontation that might destroy the girl's tenuous trust.

Dody palpated the girl's abdomen and then her swollen breasts. There was no mistaking the diagnosis. She helped Esther rearrange her clothing and tried to encourage her back to the chair, but the girl refused to sit.

Concerned that the news might bring about a fainting fit, Dody edged closer. 'You are carrying a child of approximately three months' gestation, although I suspect you already knew that.' Esther's hand flew to her mouth. It was one thing to suspect the worst, another to hear the words as truth from a stranger's lips. Dody gave her a moment to absorb the news. 'Who is the father?' she asked softly. 'Is he likely to support you?'

Esther lowered her head. 'I'll lose me job.'

'Where do you work?'

'In Bedford Square.'

'You are in service?'

'Scullery maid.'

Dody busied herself for a moment, giving the girl time to think. She removed the light reflector and glanced at her image in the metal disc, then tried and failed to straighten her untidy pile of mahogany hair. 'Are you in love with this man?' she finally asked. 'Have you plans to marry?'

'Love? What would you know about love?' Dody shot her head up to catch a sneer curling the girl's lip. 'A dried-up old maid like you wouldn't even know what it's like to lay with a man, not to mention love him — though your sort are always quick to preach to those of us what does!'

It was an impulsive tirade brought about by rage and desperation, but it stung Dody nevertheless. She tried to compose herself and placed the reflector slowly back on the desk.

'I'm sorry, miss, I didn't mean that,' Esther said, meek as a lamb again. Perhaps she realised that aggression would not help her cause.

'Are you still seeing this young man?' Dody knew the answer before she had asked the question. With only one afternoon off a week, courting was almost impossible for a girl of Esther's station. The father was most likely the master or son of the house or an opportunistic delivery boy in the kitchen yard. Or it might be the case of creeping out of her window at night and supplementing her meagre wage with services provided on the street.

Esther said nothing. Dody put a hand gently on her arm. 'If you are unable to obtain assistance from the man or your family, there are organisations I can put you in touch with. The Salvation Army often helps young women in your predicament, then there are the nuns at St Luke's.' Or the workhouse. Dody kept that thought to herself, knowing how unwelcome it would be.

Esther knocked away Dody's hand and screamed into her face, 'I don't want no nuns, nor do-gooders neither. Don't you understand? You got to 'elp me!'

Dody held her ground and slapped away the hands that grasped for the keys on her belt. The girl was tall and sturdy, her work-reddened hands quick and strong. She lunged again. Dody grabbed the thick wrists and struggled to hold her back.

'Elp me!' Esther was hysterical now, using her weight to push Dody towards the wall, desperately grasping for the keys at her waist. Dody could feel her grip on the powerful wrists failing. There was only one thing for it. She jerked her

leg up and brought it down hard, slamming the heel of her boot onto the sensitive arch of the girl's foot.

The girl yelped and jumped back.

Dody took a breath. 'I'm sorry, Miss Craddock,' she said through gritted teeth, 'but I can't do anything for you until you sit down and calm down.'

The girl stared for a moment. Her pale face blossomed with embarrassment. 'I'm sorry, Doctor,' she whispered as she slumped into the chair. 'I don't know what come over me.'

'I do. It's called blind desperation.'

Dody adjusted her belt, smoothed her blouse and willed her heartbeat to steady itself. She had two options. She could call out and have Nurse Hamilton escort the girl from the Clinic, after which Esther would doubtless continue her search for an obliging doctor. Or she could follow the recommended procedure, which was to telephone the police and have the girl arrested for attempting to procure an abortion. Either the girl would put herself at dreadful risk in the hands of an unprincipled physician or the wretched child would be born into circumstances even more reduced than they were now. To Dody, neither of these options was acceptable.

'Have you taken any other medicines for your condition?' Dody asked.

'Pills. Got 'em from the apothecary,' Esther whispered. 'Zimmerman's.'

'What kind of pills?'

'Widow Welch's.'

Widow Welch's female pills; prompt and reliable for ladies. On the back of the box in tiny writing it was written, *On no account to be taken by females desirous of becoming mothers*, a disclaimer included by the manufacturers to avoid prosecution and an irresistible lure to those desperate to

abort. Laboratory analysis had shown the pills to be mostly composed of sugar and Dody knew they would not have caused Esther's symptoms. Surely it wasn't Widow Welch's she'd seen tied in the muslin bundle?

'You took lead as well. In what form? Where did you get it from? Zimmerman's too?' Dody asked.

Esther folded her arms and looked away.

What might this girl try next? How many girls like Esther had Dody seen on the mortuary slab, fished from the Thames as a result of suicide or bungled criminal abortion? Dody shuddered. Countless. There had to be a better way.

Dody took the keys from the belt at her waist, moved to the medicine cabinet and took a small brown bottle from the top shelf. 'I can give you something that will help with your nerves. Take the dosage as instructed and then come and see me next week when you are more clear-headed and we can discuss your options. On no account are you to take anything else, especially lead. Is that clear?'

The girl nodded.

'And this will clear up the effects of the lead poisoning.' Dody uncapped her pen and reached for her prescription pad. 'Have it made up by the chemist, not the apothecary,' she said, tearing the paper from the pad and handing it to the girl, 'and he will write the dose on the bottle.'

'But, Doctor,' Esther said, looking searchingly from the prescription and back to Dody, 'will it make me bleed?'

The Clinic was part of a scheme devised by Doctor Elizabeth Garrett to put disused buildings to use as temporary free clinics for women of no means. Doctors and nurses prepared to work for nothing were hard to find; and all those who worked there had private incomes or other paid employment.

Dody slipped her note onto the admissions desk in front of Nurse Daphne Hamilton and held her breath as she

waited for the verdict. Nurse Hamilton was one of Florence's suffragette friends; like Dody, she was from a wealthy family and devoted two days a week to the Clinic. Many of her kind treated their charity work as a game, coming and going as their whims dictated, but Dody had always been impressed with Daphne's stamina and dedication and had been encouraging the young woman to undertake an official nurse's training course. If she could persevere with the rigours of hospital-based training, Dody felt sure that Daphne Hamilton would make an excellent qualified nurse.

But birth control was a divisive subject amongst the militant suffragettes, with many against it. Dody knew that if she failed to get the support of the Clinic staff, she might as well give up now on her newly hatched idea.

When Daphne nodded with approval, Dody had to stop herself from jumping on the spot like a child. Daphne's support should have been no surprise; she had probably seen as many of the tragic results of ignorance as Dody had.

'*A weekly lecture at the Clinic on health and hygiene,*' Daphne read. 'I take it you also mean birth control?' she added in a whisper.

Dody nodded. It was against the law to explicitly advertise, though not to discreetly provide, contraception education. 'Thank you, Nurse, I'm very glad you feel that way,' Dody said, slipping the draft note in her pocket with the intention of revising it once the other doctors had been consulted and a timetable clarified.

She attempted to adjust her boater by feel — the Clinic did not provide such luxuries as mirrors — and Daphne reassured her that it was on straight. Thank God Florence had not chosen the Ritz this time. Looking the way she did, she would surely be directed straight to the kitchen entrance.

'Will you sound out Doctor Wainright for me, Daphne? I can't stay to see her today; I'm meeting Florence for lunch.'

But please tell her I'd like to talk to her tomorrow about a series of lectures we could give between us.'

Dody glanced around the waiting room. Women of all ages, shapes and sizes, snuffling children and wailing babies filled the seats. Doctor Wainright was in for a busy afternoon.

'Certainly, Doctor. I'm sure she and the other doctors will be behind you too. And say hello to Florence for me,' Daphne said with a conspiratorial twinkle to her eye. 'Tell her I'm looking forward to our return to the fray.'