



Dear Reader,

Life provides no road signs. No markers to warn of hairpin curves or abrupt detours. Certainly, it posts no alerts for the mundane moments when something you encounter will become your driving passion—a longwing butterfly in the net of a future entomologist or the laces of a baseball in the hands of a future pitcher.

So, it was the day I flipped through a book of historical essays, casually searching for something to stave off boredom. At first just a glance, a perusal, an intriguing paragraph and then in a matter of pages my life jumped the median, swerved into a new lane, and caught fire with a new idea.

The history of medicine. It is the extremely human story of how we attempted to fix our fragile, amazing bodies when we didn't know how they worked in the first place. It is a story of people so hungry for answers they snuck deceased patient's lungs home in their top hats for a few more hours of research. A story of electrical currents, new chemical compounds, bodies borne away in the night for dissections, broken coffins, and shattered hearts.

The rise of Victorian medicine intersects some of the greatest stories of our modern world—Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, The Secret Garden, Little Women. If Victorian medicine were a painting it would be a Caravaggio, a masterpiece of chiaroscuro, dark and light, with sable shadows of ignorance and the blinding light of discovery. Which makes the title of our novel so fitting—The Girl in His Shadow. Not only do we dive deep into the forensic world of a new scientific field, we do it with a female protagonist who embodies the challenges of brilliant women in the past.

Eight-year-old Nora Beady is her family's sole survivor after the 1832 cholera epidemic crushes London, killing thousands. Horace Croft, the doctor who finds her half dead, carries her home in a desperate attempt to find a treatment to the vile disease. But when she survives, the genius, anti-social surgeon has no notion what to do with her. Raised in a house of horrors and cadavers by an eccentric doctor and a protective housekeeper, Nora is exposed to a world most young women know nothing about—anatomy and medicine. Perhaps society would learn to forgive her knowledge, but it can never forgive her true crime—savoring her talent for healing.

This book is a joint endeavor where my co-author and I put our passions and strengths together to bring this strange world to light. I am trained in historical research, she in health sciences, and we both enthusiastically plumbed the depths of Victorian London to bring you a portrait of what your health care would have looked like almost 200 years ago.

Be grateful you live today.

And enjoy the fascinating story of how we got here.

Happy Reading,
Audrey Blake