The Board Meeting

A Diary of Murders Prequel

Thursday 25th July 1895

No matter the age of a man, starting a new job would always make him feel like a boy.

Dr John Bennett had thought about this when he first entered the building three days ago and the idea had yet to dissipate. Sitting in the brown leather chair at a large wooden desk, filling in his diary with the many meetings he was suddenly bombarded with, John would occasionally look up and round at his new office. Each glance would only add to this very small and intimidating feeling. He let out a hot rush of air through his nose, and went back to organising his upcoming week, trying to ignore the fact that his hands were shaking; making his already scrawling scribbles look juvenile. He couldn't help but imagine the thwack of the cane on the back of his hands if anyone were to see his rudimentary handwriting.

It was the fourth day of his new employment, so he had yet to unpack his personality and make the office his own. It was all still so foreign to him. The bookshelves were seemingly barren as he had yet to bring his medical books and paraphernalia to the hospital. Seemingly, because on his first day, John had discovered a deep drawer that could hide a cheeky collection of alcoholic beverages. Its first habitant was a bottle of expensive peaty whisky that his new employer had gifted him on Monday. Sir Fredric Clayton was, indeed, a generous man.

The Clayton Hospital had stood for only three years and yet it had carved itself a golden reputation. It was already pioneering care for patients of all classes and the

amicable management of Sir Fredric was wildly celebrated even outside the hospital's white, stone walls. Any medical student and doctor worth their salt was already frothing at the mouth to get in. Even a doctor as nomadic as John had heard whisperings of how special the Clayton Hospital was. Dr Bennett, an accomplished surgeon, had spent the past five years or so bouncing around the city, earning his keep by lecturing at different universities and training hospitals, whilst also giving free care to working classes in slums and social housing. So, John was both astonished and enthused to have been poached directly by Sir Fredric.

It was nice to finally have a home.

Still, John could not quell the nerves that he had whilst accepting the new position, what with the name of the place looming over him long before the building did. As he briskly walked down Shaftsbury Avenue on his first day, John gripped his excitement as tightly as he did his briefcase. His knuckles as white as his pale, nervous face. The air was tinged with powerful possibilities as a gentle wind whipped around and through him. He steeled himself and walked through the wooden door, ready for his life to shift.

What followed was a fierce handshake from Sir Fredric, an intense one-to-one with the Head of Surgery, and subsequently John's direct boss, Doctor Peters, and a fair few amount of tours with a multitude of introductions. Beyond his own name, John said few words. As always, he established his own reputation as quiet early on.

Yet his mind whirred wildly. Cogs turning over and over with every corner he took. He couldn't quite shake the idea that his appointment here would be life changing. He wandered the wards, scanned the surgery, and checked even the lowliest of cupboards. However, he found nothing of note.

When John was finally left alone in his office to take it all in on late Monday evening, there was a pebble of disappointment in his stomach, as though the one skimming across the surface of his soul finally had to sink. The hospital was fine. Better than fine, actually. It was as ferociously generous as it proclaimed. It just ran quite ordinarily. John did not

know what he was expecting. Something to truly move him. Something to truly capture him. Something to truly sate the howling hunger within him. He just knew that it was around the corner.

And the very idea of it had infantilised him.

In fact, John was so consumed by the notion, as he scribbled notes intensely, that he did not hear the door of his office opening. He barely registered the fast, loud steps of someone heading towards his desk. He did not notice the shadow of a person before him, falling upon his papers.

"John?"

The doctor jumped, pressing the nib of his pen down hard upon his journal. A small puddle of black ink spread across the page, consuming the last thing he wrote. His upcoming Tuesday meeting with Peters now had no discernible time. He sighed, cursing silently to himself as he leaned back in his chair. Running his hand through his dark wavy brown hair, he looked up and said softly, "Good morning, Michael."

The tall, blond-haired man before him raised an eyebrow. He was clutching a black notebook in one hand which he tapped out an impatient tune upon. "Had you not heard me knocking?"

"Apologies, I was lost in thought." There as a brief pause. "There is much to process."

"Understandable. My first week here was as though one were entering a labyrinth. And there are definitely monsters lurking. However, I trust you are settling in alright?"

"Oh yes, fine."

"That's good. Though, Matron's tour is very fast, I doubt she has shown you everything, or everyone for that matter. So, there are still some surprises left for you, I suppose. Perhaps some today…"

John blinked and watched as his friend Doctor Michael Jenkins, the hospital's pharmacist, spoke quickly and soon, incoherently. When they had first met over a year ago at Camden Cricket Club, Michael was similarly loquacious. He had a marvellous ability

to say whatever he was thinking in thick and fast sentences, rushing out of his mouth in floods. John had developed a particular habit for zoning out whenever Michael drowned the atmosphere with his nouns and verbs. John would often think on supper or the latest cricket scores. Or sometimes he'd theorise on the world.

Today, John thought on how he himself had said little this week. He wondered if, perhaps, the reason he didn't say much was because men like Michael had stolen all the words in the world.

As Michael took a deep breath of air, John seized his chance. "May I ask as to what brings you here Michael?"

"I am here to escort you to the board meeting."

John put his hands in his deep green velvet waistcoat and produced an ornate gold watch. The hands were edging closer to 10am. He frowned, "I thought board meetings were at 11am."

"Usually, but it is Phipps who is chairing today's meeting and unfortunately he has places to be." Michael tapped his fingers again against the leather of his ledger. "Come now, we wouldn't wish to be late."

As John followed his friend dutifully down the corridors, he felt more like a schoolboy than ever.

The feelings of adolescence and agitation did not disappear as John took his seat at the board meeting. If anything, they mounted. The big round table was as imposing as the men who inhabited it. There was no seat in which John could slink into the shadows either. He followed Michael to a chair by the window. They were tall, and thin, splotched with little droplets of rain. Thick clouds uncommon to the summer month loomed over

the city making the water on the window look ink like. Looking down at his hand, stained with black, John's cheeks burned.

As John took his place beside Michael, he had hoped the daylight would obscure him. Yet as he opened his notebook, John could feel a few stares and mumbles from the men he had yet to meet. Shuffling under their gaze, he focused instead on placing today's date on top of the notepad. The mutters melded maliciously in his mind.

The door swung open with an almighty bang and in walked two older gentleman. One was tall and stocky, with a great big grey handlebar moustache and mutton chops who John recognised as Sir Fredric Clayton, the hospital's Chairman and Director. The other was short and stout, with a shrewd bespectacled clean-shaven face that John was unfamiliar with and yet he walked into the room with great importance. The pair were talking furiously to one another as though they were already in a great debate.

John went to stand. Michael tapped him gently on the arm and shook his head. "Sir Fredric is adamantly against any of those formalities for his entrance."

John nodded and sat back down, knowing that a frightening shade of red was consuming his once pale face. He wished his facade could be as enigmatic as the rest of him. Alas, his features would sometimes betray his silent demeanour. He went back to focusing on the page, making whatever notes he could as though he were tracking every word he could hear.

Sir Fredric's booming voice soon filled the boardroom. "Good morning gentleman and…" There was a pause. John glanced upwards to see Sir Fredric frown and turn to the man beside him. "I believe there is a missing member of our board, Gerard."

"Perhaps she has been held up…" Deputy Chairman Gerard Phipps, as John now deduced the shrewd stout man to be, had a light Scottish brogue. There was a familiarity in the way in which Phipps spoke – as though someone else had grabbed the sentences and tried to ring them free of any discernible accent. John's own Manchester tone had

been forcibly taken from him. Gerard shrugged as Sir Fredric eyed him wearily. "… All members were given adequate notice Sir Fredric."

"Unlikely." Michael whispered suddenly to John. "Phipps loathes her as much as I do."

John tried to stifle a smile, knowing immediately to whom Michael was referring. Doctor Miriam Clayton. She was already a hot topic for John's pharmacist friend, even before John had accepted the position at the hospital. As the daughter of Sir Fredric and the Head of the Women's Wards, Miriam was earning herself quite the name as a headstrong woman that upset the board on a regular basis. Michael raved about her impertinence nearly all the time. A bit too suspiciously. John had even joked that Michael sounded like someone with a crush, causing the tall man to turn a violent shade of purple.

In the boardroom now, John had wanted to make a similar joke but thought better of it, especially as Sir Fredric took command of the meeting again. "We should continue regardless. Before I hand you all over to Phipps, I wish to start by introducing the latest edition to our team." There was the briefest pause as John froze and dared not look up. "Please welcome Doctor John Bennett, our new Deputy Head of Surgery."

There was a half-hearted smatter of applause. John tried his best to compose himself, running his fingertips through his moustache. Offering a small nod of thanks to Sir Fredric and the room, as the claps subsided, John turned back to his journal, finding solace in the blank pages.

Phipps' discussion was about the upcoming installation of electricity within the hospital. He spoke about what that would mean for the future of the building, what particular allowances would be needed for the work, and when each department would be converted. If - Sir Fredric countered - the board completely agreed with the change. John listened somewhat enthusiastically. There was part of him that would miss the dull roar of gas lamps and the shades of amber that fell upon the walls of his office. However, he could not deny how much electricity excited him. It was as though it bounded

through him now, a sparking, joyous energy that denoted progress. The 1890s was a terribly fascinating decade already. A charging change gripped London greatly and John could not help but be drawn to the illuminations. Even now as Phipps spoke about lightbulbs and machinery, John's heart skipped.

The door swung open, and another loud bang reverberated throughout the room. Phipps quietened immediately as a procession of groans and the squeaking of chairs sliding, followed the echoing sound. Michael nudged John sharply. The whole room was now standing, and John scrambled quickly to join them. He wasn't quite sure why everyone was on their feet suddenly, but he was positive his face was now beetroot so, instead, he hung it low. There were irritated mutters around him.

"Oh, my apologies, I was looking for the hospital board." The voice was a woman's, and it was loaded with sarcasm. "Instead, I find myself in a room full of flapdoodles."

The wicked insult had caused a cacophony of grumbles and gasps.

A small snicker unexpectedly left John's mouth as he turned his eyes upwards to the doorway.

Standing there was a woman, wiping blood from her right hand into her apron. Her hair was curled and gathered in a nest at the top of her head, protruding messily as though she had had little time to put herself together. She had a plump frame and a chubby, round face, with pink cheeks and a large wonky nose. Red stains dotted her apron which covered an emerald, green velvet skirt, and a brown blouse. Though unkempt and clearly furious, the woman's striking deep blue eyes sparkled.

All of a sudden, there it was.

Electricity.

John let out a gasp that was different in nature than the shocked ones that had left the lips of his peers. The sight of this woman sparked through him with an incandescence that he had never known before. He was afraid of touching anything just in case it set alight. His heart thudded so loudly and quickly in his chest that he could hear the

thrumming in his ear. There was a brightness now, in that room, as if the sun had suddenly climbed through the grey and found a home within the pompous boardroom. The women had eclipsed him completely. John was altogether frightened and thankful for it.

He knew that he was staring but he couldn't help it, nor did it seem to matter. She stood heatedly, looking over the heads of the men before her as if they were all beneath her. The stance made John smile slyly to himself.

"Ah Miriam," Sir Fredric said to smother the annoyance in the room. John looked towards the Chairman and saw that he was similarly smiling. "You are here!"

"Indeed, though I am certain someone was eager for me not to be." She looked pointedly at Phipps.

"I sent correspondence informing all members of the time change." Phipps asserted though there was a quake in his tone.

"Perhaps my invitation got lost. After all, most men here treat my ward as if it is as distant as Timbuktu… and equally as treacherous." Miriam paused, trying not to grin as the men mumbled again. She gestured to the room. "Sit, gentlemen, please. I am positively ebullient to hear what Phipps has to say." Miriam then took her place opposite Phipps, just a few seats away from John.

So, this was Miriam Clayton. A physician. The young female doctor who was in charge of the Women's Wards at the Clayton Hospital. The renowned hot-tempered daughter of the amicable Sir Fredric. The woman who riled up the board members so much so that word had spread across London of her deeds. Doctor Miriam Clayton. She leaned back in her chair, folding her arms whilst her angered gaze never left Phipps. He stammered as he continued his talk, looking like a pathetic, lectured child.

In just a handful of minutes, John could see her completely – body and soul. Miriam Clayton was, indeed, better than any man in that room, and just as powerful. Moreso even. Finally, John understood why she had got under Michael's skin so much. She was

utterly unafraid of the men and their authority which must've upset his friend's more traditional sensibilities. She had disturbed John but in a different way. In the way a hurricane could upend a village. In the way a bird's song could break a tranquil morning. In the way a fire could rip through one's quiet home.

What alarmed John most was how fine he was without the sanctuary of his peace now. There was no need for it. Miriam Clayton had entered his life and there was no going back. One thought hammered in his skull violently. He must have her. There were the most indecent images racing through his mind, and he hesitated to look at her again, though his whole body yearned for him to stare. John was afraid that if his eyes wandered to her, she would be able to feel his invisible hands pulling at her clothes. Oh, how he craved to unravel her beneath his hands.

Instead of listening to Phipps, Doctor John Bennett furiously scribbled of his need for her – Doctor Miriam Clayton.

The meeting had seemingly ended just as quickly as it had started. John was dismayed that he would no longer be in the same room as Miriam but equally excited that he now had the opportunity to speak to her. The board members gathered their things and began to slowly filter out the room. All except John's boss Dr Peters, who had pelted out of the room faster than anyone. During the meeting, he had somehow implied that Miriam would not have the intellect to understand how the new electrical system would work, to which the physician had called him a "pigeon-livered ratbag who possessed an intelligence so meagre that the only profession he could maintain in the building was sawing up bodies."

The insult sent shockwaves through the sensibilities of the men yet only added to John's desire for her. Even if she had insulted his profession.

Telling Michael to go ahead, John frantically tried to build up the confidence to approach her. It was simple. After all, Miriam had missed her father's speech at the beginning of the meeting. Now the two Claytons were stood speaking to one another. If John approached, he was certain that Sir Fredric would introduce the new doctor to his daughter. Easy. Effectual. Elementary.

So why was John so petrified?

He clung desperately onto his notebook with his left hand and wiggled his right as though he was warming up for the handshake. In just a few small steps, he would be in Miriam Clayton's world as similarly as she was in his.

John slowly walked around the desk; carefully passed Phipps and closer to her.

"Oh Phipps." Miriam said sternly, causing both the older man and John to jump slightly. "A word before you go, if you don't mind."

"Certainly." Phipps said, in a tone that was quite the opposite.

Miriam bounded over to Phipps which meant that she was suddenly walking somewhat angrily towards John. She did not note this strange man who was hovering between her and her intended target. Her sights were firmly locked onto Phipps. A voice roared loudly inside John's head, begging him to interrupt her stride and introduce himself.

As she got closer, and closer, however, a different roar consumed him.

Instead, before Miriam could collide with him, John took a step to the side.

Not quick enough.

Her shoulder brushed up against his for a brief wonderful moment.

"Excuse me."

The soft voice gave Miriam pause. She had walked only one step away from the person she had slightly struck with her shoulder. Yet there was something in the manner in

which he apologised. Something new. A lightness to his tone that she did not recognise. Miriam whipped around and tried to find the source. Starring at the place in which they had bumped into one another, Miriam found that there was no one there. She looked further but could see only the backs of the board members as they walked back into the hubbub of the hospital.

Only her father remained, waiting for both her and Phipps at the other end of the room. He stood like a referee at a boxing match. Any layman would surmise that Sir Fredric waited as any guardian would, wishing his daughter to not be alone with a man - lest that man do or say something untoward.

Miriam knew that it was not her reputation that Sir Fredric protected. It was Phipps' ego. Though there was a familiar glint in his eye, gleeful at whatever insults Miriam could muster, Miriam knew he waited in order to temper her disagreement. Under his watchful eye, Miriam tried desperately to be indifferent.

"How can I help you, Miriam?" Phipps said as she slowly turned back to him.

Miriam sucked in air, biting the inside of her cheeks desperately. As she exhaled, she said, "Doctor Clayton."

"Hmm?"

"My name is Doctor Clayton in these halls." She tried desperately to hold back. "Even outside this hospital… *Gerard.*"

"Oh yes, quite right." Phipps said dismissively, waving his right hand around as though he were trying to swat a fly. He probably thought of Miriam as a pest that he wished to squash underneath his hand. There was a brief pause before he huffed. "Well, what is it girl?"

Miriam closed her eyes and counted to five, taking deep breaths with each second. When she opened them, she answered with an air of tranquillity. "I wished to discuss today's oversight." Truthfully, she was picturing slamming Phipps' head repeatedly against the table. The thought of doing so produced a strange calm.

"As I said before, I sent word to every board member." Phipps turned away from her discerning gaze as a petal of red appeared upon his cheeks. Placing the final documents in his suitcase and locking it shut, he puffed out his chest like a bird, trying to look intimidating. It was not lost on both of them that Miriam was taller than Phipps. Still, he could not meet her eyes again as he said quickly, "It is not my fault that your department is in such a disarray that such a message did not reach you."

Sir Fredric uttered a tut, a gasp, and then a long-suffering moan.

"Listen here you—"

Miriam flounced back into her office and flopped on her chair, causing it to spin around quickly. Her heart raced loudly, beating so violently that she could practically see it protruding through her clothing. As the chair began to slow its cycles, she unbuttoned the top part of her blouse before placing a calming hand on her chest. The thought of how exceptionally brilliant her pulse drummed inside her made her more excited, if that was even possible. Miriam listened to the rhythm for a while, relishing the power that she had stolen.

"How was the meeting?"

The sudden interruption caused Miriam to jump. The fear added more stress to her heart, and for the briefest moment, she thought it would burst. Miriam leaned back in her chair, running her hand through her tightly curled fringe as she looked up and said, "Good morning, Matron."

The small, stern older woman did not waver. Instead, she said dourly, "Had you not heard me knocking?"

Miriam shook her head, removing her hand from her chest and carefully buttoning her blouse back up as if Matron could not see her doing so. "Apologies, I was lost in thought."

"No matter." Matron replied. "How was the meeting?"

"Interesting." Miriam said.

"Hmm." Matron nodded, taking a few more steps into the office, allowing the door to close on its own. There was a wry smirk forming on Matron's wired lips. "Who did you insult today?"

"Huh?"

"Come on, I know that look. You are practically glowing."

"Oh! Doctor Peters!" Miriam laughed, putting the back of her hands against her cheeks to feel them burning. There was, indeed, a grin on her face. One that she did not know was there. "As well as that damned Phipps. He said that our department is in disarray."

"The nerve." Matron shook her head. "Pray tell, Doctor Clayton, what was your response?"

"I told him he was a repulsive, repugnant, and reprehensive little man." Miriam replied, unable to shake away the smile that now seemed permanently etched onto her face. Even if her cheeks had begun to ache.

Matron raised an eyebrow. "And?"

Miriam took a deep breath. "And that if he is as unsatisfactory as a husband, as he is a deputy chairman, then I lament for his poor wife."

"Oh Dr Clayton, you are a terror!"

"It was, perhaps, a little uncouth." There was the briefest pause as Miriam winked at Matron. "But it was glorious watching him deflate like one of those blasted hot air balloons."

"That's my girl." The two women burst into giggles before Matron stopped abruptly, causing Miriam to not only stop laughing, but stop smiling altogether. Matron Elizabeth Lockett commanded the utmost respect in the hospital. Though there were moments in which she was fun, especially with Miriam, Matron could immediately turn the tides into

more important matters. Matron fiddled with objects hanging on her chatelaine before she found the smallest of notebooks and opened it quickly. "We were able to finish dressing Miss Clyde's wound. It did not look infected, but, regardless, we cleaned it with an alcohol solution before bandaging."

"Did you broach as to how she acquired such an injury?"

"Insisted she fell down a flight of stairs."

"I see." Miriam stood up, sighing at the excuse that she had heard countless times in her wards. As she brushed herself down, she thought on the dried red stains on her apron – remnants of Miss Clyde's blood. "A magical flight of stairs that sliced into her cheek as perfectly as a small blade. Do you wish for me to talk to her?"

"You cannot."

"Has she vanished?"

"Indeed. I suspect she has gone back to… him."

There was a heated rush of air that came out of Miriam's nose. "Do you mean to tell me that she was one of… his?"

"I am afraid so."

"Fucking Harry Wright!"

There was a small gasp before Matron let out a tut and a sigh just as long-suffering as Sir Fredric's before. Miriam scrunched up her face by way of apology, but her mind began to beat wildly in rage. Her thoughts had turned cold and cruel. Harry Wright. Miriam had not met the man, but stories of his misdeeds spread equally across the streets of Soho and the halls of the hospital. Miriam had not met the man, but many women that she had treated in her wards were prey to his vicious brand of nastiness. Miriam had not met the man, but soon she was picturing twisting a knife into his guts.

"Doctor Clayton?" Miriam barely registered her name as she dreamed of being covered in the blood of this man, instead of another one of his victims. "Miriam!" Matron snapped, bringing the doctor out of her haze. "It is hardly the time to be smiling!"

"I'm smiling?" Miriam brought her hands back up to her face and gulped gently. "Oh, I believe I am!"

The smile did not leave Miriam's face all day.

It hung around like a bad cold. Even when Miriam was being stern with nurses, sympathetic with patients, or stroppy with the male doctors, Miriam could not hide grin that crept onto her mouth at the most inopportune times. There was no reason nor rhyme to its presence. Of course, she found some glee at castigating that stuffy old Phipps and imagined how delightful it would be to sever Harry Wright's head and mount it on a stick for all to see, but those were passing dreams. They ebbed away as quickly as they had arrived. This was something more - a deeper, richer river that had no clear source.

When alone in her office at the end of the day, Miriam examined the exhilaration that was coursing through her. If she didn't know any better, she would say this was the beginning of a crush. The thought was risible at best. There was no man in this hospital, nor woman for that matter, that could conjure such excitement. The only doctor close to her age was Michael Jenkins and she loathed him as much as he loathed her. There were pretty nurses, but they kept themselves in tight packs. Still, there was a notion nestled in her stomach. A genesis of something leaping and jumping, ready to emerge from its cocoon.

On the bike ride home to Clapham, she peddled fast, swerving through the crowds and zooming by the landmarks so the city would blur around her. The hope was to work her legs fast enough to run away from his feeling, exhausting the limbs until whatever unmoored joy stopped bobbing giddily within her. As she cycled down the lanes and over the river at Vauxhall bridge, Miriam pictured herself atop a great machine, circling her

legs round and round and round again, enough to generate power. Miriam felt was though she could illuminate the entire city with the charge that was rushing through her.

The sun was starting to set by the time she got home. Her legs were pulsating from the activity, her hair in more of a disarray than ever, and her face aggressively red. Puffing and wheezing, she focused on nothing more than the calming of her lungs. When she jubilantly praised herself for being successful in her mission, Miriam found that she was smiling again. "Oh, what fresh hell is this!" She exclaimed as she walked through the door of her family's townhouse.

The smile stayed there long through dinner, even as Sir Fredric tried to chide her for being churlish that morning. She could feel the jovial expression growing on her face, making her look impudent. She bit down on the insides of her cheek to stop it fully forming, desperate to listen to her dear old father and his calm demands. Even if Sir Fredric thought Phipps was, as he so lightly put it, a buffoon, the Deputy Chairman should not be undermined in front of the staff. "Miriam. I formed a rather nasty headache due to Gerard's complaining. So, for me, please do try to be a bit more… well… courteous and let certain things go."

"For you Father, anything." Miriam replied kindly though she was staunchly against doing so. She kissed him gently on the cheek as a way of informally agreeing whilst also bidding him an early goodnight. The whole day had fatigued her in many different ways.

Yet as she lay in her bed, her eyes were wide open, and she was completely awake. She grabbed one of her pillows, placed it over her face, and screamed. It wasn't until she brought the cushion down from her face that she heard it again.

"Excuse me."

That voice. Miriam clutched onto the pillow tightly. The voice was an unfamiliar one. It did not match anyone that she knew. It was not deep nor booming like the men that she had known and fought with. It was light and gentile. There was a kindness to the tone; agile in nature as it wrapped around her with an unexpected warmth. A calming

melody in that politeness. But the person whom it had belonged to had vanished. Disappeared into the sea of groaning, stuffy old men. Now Miriam was eclipsed by that mysterious sound as if she were a thirsty man stumbling upon a mirage in the desert.

Her shoulder still tingled where she had struck it against someone unsuspecting. Goosebumps and sensations rushed down her white, supple skin. Sliding the sleeve of her night gown to examine herself, Miriam traced the collision spot as if it were a souvenir of something special and she wanted to memorise it forever.

As she lay there, examining the day, she laughed to herself. Something was coming. Something to truly move her. Something to truly capture her. Something to truly sate the howling hunger within her. And the very thought of it made her feel infantile – like a schoolgirl tittering in the playground.

Instead of sleep, Miriam removed her diary from the bedside drawer and sat up in bed. She found some solace in the blank pages before her. As she scrawled her conceits down, she began to lose herself in the imagery. The tingles that bounded down her spine. The calm voice that resounded around her. She pictured a pebble skimming upon the surface of a lake. One that had caught the sky - as brightly blue as a pair of icy eyes.

And when the pebble would sink, she did not know. Nor was she certain where it would land.

Something life changing was coming, Miriam would chase this feeling wherever it led. She'd wander down the wards, she'd scan the surgeries, and she'd even check the lowliest of cupboards.

For all Miriam knew was that she had to follow.