

LONDON BEGINNINGS • BOOK 2

*The*  
HEART'S  
APPEAL

JENNIFER DELAMERE



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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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O magnify the Lord with me,  
and let us exalt his name together.

—PSALM 34:3



*In memory of my aunt,  
Margaret DeBolt Edwards,  
a lovely and feisty woman in her own right*



CHAPTER

1



FEBRUARY 1881

**J**ULIA BERNAY WAS GOING TO BE LATE. If there was one thing she hated, it was not being punctual. It showed a lack of respect and, if she were honest—which she always was—it made her look bad. She was on her way to a lecture by Dr. Anna Stahl, a physician from America, and she was determined to make a good first impression. After months of toiling away at Queen’s College on Harley Street, this was her first real opportunity to interact with London’s medical professionals.

Julia had been in London for nearly a year, but the official start to her medical studies had yet to actually begin. She’d come with high hopes of beginning her training right away, only to discover—after failing London University’s matriculation exam—that her schooling thus far in life had not been enough. The laws for licensing physicians required that she pass the exam before any course she took at the London School of Medicine for Women could count toward a medical degree.

Queen's College was primarily a school for training governesses, but it also offered the courses needed by women seeking to qualify for a higher education in medicine. Although Julia had given herself fully to her studies over these past months, she was anxious to get beyond standard academic courses and begin training in medicine. Having obtained special permission to attend Dr. Stahl's lecture, she was not going to miss it.

Unfortunately, her plan to take the Metropolitan Underground Railway to her destination had turned out to be a mistake. All around her, the platform was crowded with passengers who had watched three trains come and go because the third-class carriages were too packed to accommodate even one more person.

Julia had bought a third-class ticket to save money, taking the reasonable view that the train would get there at the same time, regardless of which carriage she was in. She hadn't realized that during this time of day, train after train would pass by without her being able to board. Meanwhile, the first-class carriages were only half full.

Now she was in a dilemma, for money and time were both commodities she could not afford to waste. The news she'd received from her benefactor just this week proved that. Mrs. Staunton's letter had sorrowfully informed her that due to a bank failure in Bristol, she could no longer pay for Julia's training. While Julia grieved for the Stauntons as they struggled to reorganize their affairs, this had placed her in an awkward position. She had enough to live on for several more months, because Mrs. Staunton had refused to take back any money already given. Julia could complete her preparation for the matriculation examination, which would allow her to begin studies at the London School of Medicine for Women in October. If she was very frugal, she might even be able to make the money stretch for her first term. But then what? Should she even begin school with no clear means of continuing?

Perhaps she should consider moving in with the Morans. Her sister Rosalyn and her husband, Nate Moran, were away from London most of the year, traveling on tour with the opera company, but Nate's family lived in a large house with room to accommodate boarders. It would be cheaper than the lodgings she had now, if farther removed from the school. It was something she would ask about when Rosalyn and Nate came home for Easter.

All of this assumed she could even pass the matriculation exam. She was still behind in Latin, which was a critical component of the test. With no extra money for a tutor, passing it seemed more daunting than ever.

She might have to consider going back to nursing, but having come this far, nursing could never give her the satisfaction that it had in the past. She would have neither the time nor the money for medical school. She would earn a scant ten pounds per year. Nurses were boarded together in sparse lodgings at the hospital and worked all hours of the day and night. Her goal of becoming a doctor and a medical missionary would be set aside, and Julia could not believe God would allow these dreams to be lost forever.

"Sufficient unto the day," she reminded herself as she watched yet another train pass her by. "The morrow will take care of itself."

She took a deep breath and prayed that the next train would come quickly.



Michael Stephenson stood with his sister Corinna at the entrance to the Underground station while Miss Laura Maynard, the third member of their party, bought a nosegay from a flower girl. He watched as Laura studied the selections in the small, battered flower cart and made her choice, then handed over a few coins to the girl. The flower girl received the coins with a smile and even gave Laura a little curtsy.

Laura held the flowers to her nose and breathed in appreciatively. She was a pretty blonde, slender and charming in an ethereal kind of way. Her light blue cape showed her complexion to advantage, especially with the cart of colorful blooms as a backdrop. The hothouse flowers made a bright contrast to the drab February day. Admiring Laura's beauty and poise, Michael decided he was reasonably content with the idea that she could one day be his wife.

Feeling a nudge in his ribs, he turned to see his sister looking at him expectantly. He realized she'd been speaking to him. "I'm sorry, what were you saying?"

Corinna's gaze traveled pointedly to Laura before settling back on Michael. "I was reminding you about Lady Amberley's annual ball in July."

"As you have every day since you received the invitation."

Getting invited to this ball was the social prize Corinna had spent years striving for. This year it had been granted at last, probably because of Laura's influence. Corinna was bursting with pride and had immediately begun her plans for the event, although it was still months away.

She poked him again. "I was saying that the ball has gained a reputation for being the night when the most fashionable alliances are announced."

"Ah yes, right." It was no surprise that Corinna would refer to an engagement as an *alliance*. He also knew full well what his sister was hinting at. She'd been doing everything in her power to promote a match between Michael and Laura, who was the youngest daughter of the late Viscount Delaford. Such an *alliance* would go a long way toward regaining the social standing the Stephenson family had lost. Truth be told, Michael was committed to the plan as well. The ball was nearly five months away, but he expected to have gained approval for Laura's hand long before that. Even so, he couldn't resist teasing his sister and keeping her

in suspense. He patted her arm. “I suspect this year’s ball will exceed all expectations.”

“Oh?” Corinna’s eager expression showed that she’d taken the bait.

“Yes, indeed. I heard the old Duke of Norlington’s granddaughter plans to announce her engagement to that wildly radical member of Parliament, Mr. John Waverly.”

Corinna’s eyes narrowed. “You know that’s not what I was referring to.”

Still amused by his sister’s social machinations, Michael decided to play the devil’s advocate. “But, Corinna, I’ve only known Miss Maynard a few weeks. Not to mention that she’s just come out of mourning for her father.”

“That’s precisely the point—she is *out* of mourning. There is no time to waste, as she will have plenty of suitors. And the new viscount is much more amenable to the idea of your union with his sister.”

This was true. Laura’s father, the old viscount, would have been dead set against the idea of his daughter marrying into the Stephenson family after the way Michael’s father had dragged it into financial and social ruin. Laura’s brother, however, viewed things differently. He saw Michael’s trajectory to success, both in prosperity and respectability. Being a young man, he did not have the same memories of the past as his father, nor did he put much weight on them. He was anxious only to get his sister settled in a good marriage.

“Besides,” Corinna continued, “you’ve already spent more time with Miss Maynard than I did with David before we were married.”

This remark sobered Michael. Corinna’s marriage had been one of convenience, and in thirteen years it had not evolved much beyond that—at least on Corinna’s part. A flicker of doubt played at the edges of Michael’s mind. Would his marriage end up the same? He pushed the thought aside. He might not actually be *in*

love with Laura, but there was nothing displeasing about her. Why shouldn't they be happy together? Besides, he could not forget that Corinna had married a wealthy man as much for his sake as for hers. Still mulling these things over, he gave a murmur of acquiescence.

This was not enough for his sister. She gave Michael a third, sharper poke in the ribs. "Michael Stephenson, I absolutely forbid you to even *think* about marrying Laura Maynard."

Michael started back in surprise. "And why is that?"

Her expression softened to a smirk. "Because you never do anything until someone expressly tells you *not* to."

He couldn't help but laugh out loud.



If the next train was full, Julia would be forced to slip into one of the second-class carriages—or even one of the first-class carriages if necessary. And really, what would be the harm in that? She wouldn't be taking a seat from anyone. Besides, was she not a child of God, intent on giving her life to His purposes? Wasn't everyone equal in His sight? The constant harping on class distinctions might constitute the very fiber of her homeland's psyche, but in Julia's view, it was something that ought to be changed.

If she could get onto one of the other carriages, she did not think anyone would stop her for looking out of place. She'd worn her best day gown for this event. The clerk at the secondhand shop had assured her it was only a year old, not so far out of the current fashions. Everyone waiting for the more expensive carriages appeared to be upper-middle class at best. The very rich people traveled in their personal carriages and would never be caught on the Underground. The designation *first class* was a bit of a misnomer.

The shriek of a train whistle filled the air once more. Overhead, the large globes of the gas lamps swayed as the train pulled into the station.

A collective groan filled the air when those on the platform saw, as Julia did, that this train was also filled to bursting.

This was it, then. Julia had worked hard to get permission to attend this lecture, and she wasn't going to miss it. She began to press her way through the crowd, needing to move swiftly but not draw attention. The third-class carriages were located at the front of the train, closest to the smoke belching from the engine. The first-class carriages were in the center, followed by the second-class section at the end. Julia sent a quick glance toward the station guard. He was conversing with the train conductor over some issue with the engine car, but another guard was eying her from across the platform. Had he seen her standing with the third-class passengers earlier?

Julia paused, trying to look as though she'd been standing here all along. Two women stood nearby. The first was a brunette, tall and striking, if not classically pretty. She stood an inch or so taller than Julia, who at five feet seven inches, considered herself above average height. The other woman was petite, with pale blond hair and a fur-trimmed cape. Her hair was delicately curled into an intricate bun, visible beneath a hat that perfectly complemented her clothes and was set on her head at precisely the most flattering angle.

They were too busy chatting to notice Julia. She overheard enough of their conversation to know they were on a shopping trip. Perhaps they were housewives with husbands who were prosperous merchants or businessmen in the financial district of London called the City. The blonde was detailing three different kinds of gloves she needed to buy. It was more than Julia could imagine buying in a year. Perhaps, Julia thought wryly, if she couldn't pass for one of these ladies, she might be mistaken for a maid who'd been brought along to carry packages.

Whatever issue the officials had been discussing seemed to

have gotten resolved. A platform attendant was now urging people into the carriages and closing the doors after them. Julia didn't have time to reach the second-class section at the back. A surreptitious glance toward the other guard showed he was heading in her direction.

A gentleman who had been standing near the two ladies spoke to them, moving them forward with a polite sweep of his arm. The three of them boarded together, and Julia followed, just making it onto the carriage before the platform attendant closed the doors. With a sigh of relief, she found an empty seat away from the window. Within moments, the train was in motion, hurtling into the tunnel.

Julia had ridden the Underground a few times since arriving in London, but she always found the experience disconcerting. She could not get used to the smoky darkness and the knowledge that the train was shooting at breakneck speed through a tight space. At least this compartment was more spacious than in third class. In addition to being farther away from the smoke, the carriage had proper lighting, and the seats had cushions. There were two other men already in the carriage. Both were absorbed in reading their newspapers and barely looked up as Julia and the others got on board. As no one had challenged her right to be here, she settled back in her seat, confident now that she would arrive at the lecture hall on time.

The gentleman had taken a seat across the aisle from the two women, and they were now engaged in casual small talk. Julia guessed he was just a few years older than she was, or perhaps nearing thirty. He was tall and broad shouldered, with dark hair trimmed neatly at the sideburns. Wearing a perfectly pressed dark suit, he projected an air of affluence and confidence.

Julia opened her copy of *The Lancet* medical journal, planning to make the best use of the travel time by reading. But her atten-

tion kept straying to the gentleman and the two ladies he was traveling with, trying to guess their connection. She revised her earlier guess about the women, deciding the tall one must be the man's sister. Their interactions had a comfortable familiarity, and there was a certain family resemblance in height and hair color. The blonde, on the other hand, kept throwing sly glances in his direction, as though to check whether he was paying attention to her. Julia guessed she was not married and had her eye on him.

She wondered if this man was the sort who would find such a woman attractive. He was handsome—even Julia, who paid little attention to these things, could see that. But he did not appear vain or frivolous, as the blonde did. There was a hard-set edge to his mouth. Julia saw determination in him, the kind of man who would be serious about whatever he made up his mind to accomplish.

“Are you sure you won't stop with us at Selfridges for coffee before going on to Gray's Inn?” the blonde asked him. “It would be so nice to have you join us.”

“Only on the condition that I be allowed to escape before you two set about your shopping,” he returned with a smile. It seemed a genuine, warm smile. So warm, in fact, that Julia's estimation of him went down several notches. Perhaps he was the type to have his head turned by such a woman after all. She supposed she ought to have known. Handsome men always seemed drawn to beautiful women.

*Why should you care?* Julia chided herself. Today she was going to attend an important medical lecture, and in a few years' time she would be on her way to Africa and a life of service as a medical missionary. She had better ways to occupy her thoughts than to wonder at the private lives of privileged Londoners.

She was just about to suppress her little smile at her own foolishness when the man turned his head and caught her looking at

him. He must have thought her smile was aimed at him, for his eyebrows lifted and he tipped his chin in acknowledgment. She detected an amused gleam in his eye, as though he were used to having unknown ladies smile at him on the train. She bristled. She was most definitely not that sort of person. How dare he think so!

His eye traveled from her face to take in the rest of her. Julia knew he must be appraising her, noticing the secondhand clothes, the unstylish hat, and gloves that were worn though still presentable. For the first time in her life, she felt an embarrassed self-consciousness. How had he been able to do that with one look?

Was her face growing warm? No. She could not be blushing. Julia Bernay never blushed. That was for hapless females like the blonde sitting in front of her. She quickly averted her gaze, lifting her copy of *The Lancet* and making a point of reading it. That would show him the kind of serious woman she was.

Neither of the women had noticed this little interchange. The brunette said, "You know we would never subject you to something so incredibly tedious as shopping." She spoke with a sarcastic air. "Although you might consider finding a valet who can be a little more creative in your choice of clothing."

The man shrugged. "What would be the point? There's no need to be creative in my profession."

Julia lowered her journal just enough to peek over the top and risk another glance at him. What was his profession? The blonde had mentioned Gray's Inn. He must be a barrister. This was easy to believe. It took no trouble at all to imagine him standing in a courtroom, addressing a jury. He had the kind of presence that turned heads and garnered attention. What would he look like in a barrister's wig and robe? She was sure he would be very imposing.

The train pulled into the next station. Julia could see the platform here was crowded, too. While most of the people vied for

the third-class compartments, a dapper man in a fur-collared coat and diamond-patterned cravat strode into the first-class carriage. From the corner of her eye, she saw him send a curious glance her way. She tried to project the casual air of someone who rode in first-class carriages every day, but she needn't have bothered. His gaze traveled quickly over her and settled for a much longer moment on the blonde before he took a seat.

The barrister took a cigarette holder from his pocket and opened it. Julia found this disappointing. She'd read some reports indicating there could be adverse effects to smoking, even though equally as many doctors touted its health benefits.

"Michael, will you hand me a cigarette?" the brunette asked.

He looked at her askance. "Now, Corinna, I don't think David will appreciate me leading his wife astray."

"Then don't think of me as David's wife," she snapped. She held out her hand. "Remember that I am also your sister."

With a sardonic smile, he replied, "Well, since you put it that way . . ."

He rose and stepped into the aisle to give her a cigarette.

At that moment, the train, which up to this point had been rattling and shaking in normal fashion, suddenly came to a screeching halt. It careened sharply to the left, its right side lifting as though loosed from the tracks, forcing Julia and the other passengers to grab hold of their seats to keep from being pitched to the floor. The man Julia knew only as Michael was thrown hard to the left, crashing backward into the carriage window. He tried to right himself, stunned, before he seemed to lose consciousness. As he fell to the floor, his head and neck scraped the jagged glass still attached to the frame. The rest of the glass fell with him, scattering across the floor and mingling with the blood flowing from his head.