

A decorative floral wreath with various leaves and flowers, framing the title text.

*With*  
EVERY BREATH

ELIZABETH CAMDEN



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*For Jane and John Auchter,  
my first readers and the best of parents*

*You gave me a foundation of love, faith, and inspiration.  
I will be forever grateful.*

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## *Prologue*

WASHINGTON, D.C.—1879

There was only one thing Kate Norton loved more than winning, and that was winning against Trevor McDonough.

Trevor had been her nemesis since the day he arrived at their private academy four years ago. They'd both earned perfect grades throughout school, and for the first time in the history of the academy, there was a tie for valedictorian. Today's grueling academic challenge was the tiebreaker, and a college scholarship rested on the results.

With forty spectators crammed into the classroom, it was warm and crowded, made worse by Kate's tight corset and high-collared blouse. She and Trevor stood at the head of the class as they battled in the spelling portion of the test, which had been dragging on for a mind-numbing forty minutes, and most of the audience was surely hoping either she or Trevor would stumble soon. Kate's father sat in the front row, mopping his brow and looking ready to faint, for Trevor was already ahead in today's competition. This morning he'd won the biology, chemistry, and physics tests, while Kate had won calculus and history. Only spelling and trigonometry remained, and she had to win

both if she had a prayer of going to college. Attention turned to Trevor as the headmaster read the next word.

“Mr. McDonough, please spell *abstemious*,” the headmaster said. “Abstemious is defined as ‘practicing an unusually high level of self-restraint with a lack of joy.’”

*Oh, the irony.*

Trevor McDonough was the most abstemious person ever born. Kate glanced at him. He stood tall, brooding, and gangly, a swath of black hair tumbling over his forehead and obscuring the sullen darkness of his eyes.

In the front row, Kate’s little brother fidgeted and clung to her father’s leg. “Hang in there, Tick,” she whispered to her six-year-old brother. His real name was Timothy, but the joyfully eager way he clung to everyone had earned him the nickname.

Trevor swallowed hard and asked for the word to be repeated. She had a natural advantage over Trevor in spelling. When he first came to their school, his Scottish accent was so heavy it tricked him into spelling mistakes. He learned quickly, though. Over the years he’d scrutinized the way others spoke and trained himself to speak without a trace of his old accent. She held her breath while Trevor took a stab at the word.

And misspelled it. A jolt of anticipation surged through her.

All she had to do was spell *abstemious* correctly and she would win the spelling test. Tension ratcheted higher. There were forty people gathered on her side of the classroom: her family, her friends from school, and a bunch of people who lived at her family’s boardinghouse. Even the postman and the milkman were here to root for her.

On Trevor’s side there was but a single person: the coachman who drove him to school each day. Wearing a navy frock coat with gold braids and shiny black boots, the coachman was the best-dressed person in the room.

Trevor had all the advantages stacked on his side. He lived in a mansion and had the best of everything. She didn't know what happened to his parents, but his guardian was a rich senator from Maryland. Trevor probably had his dinner delivered on a silver platter, while Kate spent her evenings juggling serving trays and waiting on the thirty people who lived at the boardinghouse.

“Miss Norton, you must now spell *abstemious*.”

She closed her eyes. *Please . . .*

She spelled the word perfectly, and the crowd burst into cheers as she was declared the winner. Her father vaulted out of his seat and swept her into a bear hug. The school's janitor grinned and clapped her on the back. Tears pricked behind her eyes, and it was hard to breathe.

She mustn't get carried away. She still had to win the trigonometry contest before she would be declared the valedictorian. The next twenty minutes would determine if Kate would go to college or stay working at the boardinghouse.

Not that there was anything wrong with working in a boardinghouse, but she had such dreams. . . .

“You will have twenty minutes to complete the trigonometry equations,” the headmaster announced. “The winner of this test will be declared valedictorian and receive a full scholarship for college.”

Two chalkboards with squeaky wheels were rolled into the room, both filled with identical equations. She and Trevor darted to the boards and began tackling the equations at the headmaster's prompting. The only sound in the classroom was the mad clicking of chalk on the slate surface. Kate's mind worked faster than her fingers as she processed the complex stream of mathematical equations, but beside her Trevor wrote just as fast.

Her all-consuming battle with Trevor McDonough began the first day he arrived at their school four years ago. Like a vulture,

he immediately spotted her as his only real academic competition. It didn't matter the subject, they competed. Grades were the major thing, but they competed over stupid things too. Who could skip a stone farther. Who could memorize more lines of poetry or hold their breath longer.

The heavy coil of Kate's red hair began sliding down the side of her head, but she couldn't falter now. She needed to complete the equations with a perfect score, and then a college scholarship was hers. Her hand began to shake as she sped toward the end of the final equation.

"Time!" the headmaster called out. He held a stopwatch in his hand and waited for both of them to set their chalk on the trays.

Kate shoved her hair back and glanced at Trevor's equations while he did the same to hers. His black eyes showed no emotion as he scanned her work. Their trigonometry equations looked like ancient hieroglyphics to the untrained eye, yet Kate immediately spotted the two areas where she and Trevor diverged in their methods.

"Please stand back while I score the tests," the headmaster said, the answer key held in his hand. Who was right? She had taken a longer path to arrive at the same destination, but Trevor's work looked tighter, more eloquent.

She glanced at her family in the front row. Her mother had the fingers on both hands crossed, but her father looked ready to start weeping from the stress.

The headmaster finished assessing their work and stepped to the front of the room, a hint of unease in his eyes. Papa came to stand behind her, her mother on the other side.

"It has been a pleasure to have two such academically gifted students over the past four years," the headmaster began. "No matter what their futures hold, I am certain both will enrich our community and go on to great things. However, the school



can only endow one student's college education per year. This year, that honor will go to Mr. Trevor McDonough."

The oxygen was sucked out of the room. She felt hot, then dizzy as her father pulled her into a tight hug. "It's okay, baby girl," he murmured, but there was heartbreak in his voice.

It wouldn't be okay. She was going to spend the rest of her life hauling laundry and washing dishes in the boardinghouse. She glared over her father's shoulder at Trevor. He didn't even need this scholarship! He wore a gold watch that probably cost more than her parents earned in a year. The principal walked over to shake Trevor's hand, but no one else did.

The air grew thick as people crowded her, hugging and patting her on the shoulder. She had to think of something to say. She had to pretend that all her wild hopes and ambitions weren't collapsing as she stood there. She forced a smile. "I'll be all right," she said, trying to mean it. Tick nudged through the crowd, his spindly arms reaching out to hug Kate's hips.

"Did you win?" his childish voice chirped as he looked up at her expectantly.

What was she supposed to say? It felt as if she'd let the entire neighborhood down, not just her baby brother, who thought she could do no wrong.

Her mother pulled Tick away. "Hush now," she soothed.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed Trevor leaving the room, the coachman walking a few steps behind him.

"Go congratulate him," her father said. Kate pulled back to see if he was serious. Tired, weary, with grief welling in his eyes, her father nodded. "I know it may be hard for you, but it's the right thing to do. Go shake Trevor's hand and wish him well."

She'd rather stick her hand into a vat of acid. She wished she'd never laid eyes on that joyless, awful boy. Other than being smart, there wasn't a single redeeming feature in Trevor

McDonough's entire being. Straightening her shoulders, she followed Trevor out the door and down the hall into the cool spring air. The late afternoon sun was shining, and the sky was a crystalline blue. But the cloudless day only made her feel worse.

“Congratulations, Trevor.”

He paused, his face frozen in its typical expressionless stare. His black eyes looked like lumps of coal on his chalky-white face. He finally stepped forward and shook her hand. “Thanks,” he muttered before turning away to climb inside the coach. It was lacquered in glossy maroon paint with velvet seats inside.

She watched the horse-drawn carriage roll away, a cloud of dust kicking up from its wheels. No matter how much she disliked him, there was no doubt Trevor McDonough would go on to a dazzling future. He was rich, privileged, and brilliant. Trevor didn't *need* that scholarship, but how strange that when she shook his hand, he was trembling like a mouse trapped in a corner.

She refused to feel sorry for him. He could have made friends if he had tried. If he wasn't so gloomy and hadn't gone out of his way to rebuff every person who tried to be nice to him, he wouldn't have been so ostracized.

To the bottom of her soul, Kate hoped she had just seen the last of the horrible Trevor McDonough.

# 1



*TWELVE YEARS LATER*

*WASHINGTON, D.C.—1891*

Kate held the letter in her hands. She'd read it so many times over the past week, the words were engraved in her mind, yet she still couldn't understand why a world-renowned doctor would have singled her out to apply for a prestigious position at Washington Memorial Hospital.

Around her, rows of women filled the cavernous room, all of them sitting before tabulating machines. The women busily fed punch cards into the machines, filling the air with the sounds of clicking, humming, and rattling. Kate used to adore her work here at the census bureau. Analyzing data to better understand the world around her had been a joy, the perfect job, and one that drew on her statistical abilities. But that was last year, before the machines invaded the bureau's office.

The machines had put statisticians out of work everywhere. It seemed there was no longer an office in the entire city that didn't have an adding machine or a tabulating mechanism. There was still plenty of statistical forecasting work that needed to be

done by people with a good head for numbers, but those jobs went to men.

Men with college degrees.

She pushed the thought away. Tomorrow morning she was going to interview at Washington Memorial Hospital for a position to analyze data and predict trends in health and disease. Never had she wanted a job so badly. It would free her from this beehive and give her the chance to do something meaningful with her brain.

“Are you really going to go through with it?” Betsy Waters asked, leaning over from her tabulating station.

Kate startled and quickly slipped the letter beneath a stack of files. “I’ve got to,” she said in a low voice. “I’ll wonder for the rest of my life if I don’t.”

She still wondered how Dr. T. M. Kendall had learned of her existence. After all, there were dozens of statisticians who had been put out of work when the census became automated, so why did he single her out for an interview?

“I hope Mr. Gertsmann doesn’t fire you on the spot,” Betsy said. “Last year he fired Letty Smitson just for reading the advertisements for open positions in the Treasury Department.”

Kate was well aware of her supervisor’s hostility toward any employee who dared to lift her head up and aspire to something outside the beehive. Washington had always been a little unusual in the number of women who were able to find office jobs. Government agencies required an awesome number of clerical workers, and in a small city like Washington, that opened doors for women. Almost a third of the people working in government offices were women, but most were under the thumb of men like Mr. Gertsmann, who greeted Kate’s request for three hours of leave with a long, hostile stare.

“I insist on knowing the reason you will miss work in the mid-

dle of the week,” Mr. Gertsmann said. “Such lack of discipline is not something I will condone without a good explanation.”

“Sir, I’m only asking for three hours tomorrow morning. I will be in the office by eleven o’clock.” At all costs, she must not let him know she was interviewing for another position or he might fire her then and there.

“I will not allow you to gallivant around this city without knowing your reason for missing work.”

“I’ve worked here for twelve years,” Kate said. “In all that time I’ve only been absent from work once.”

“Yes, but that involved an entire week, and you did so without advance warning.”

She sucked in a sharp breath. “That was when my husband died! And I didn’t receive advance warning the scaffolding he was standing on was going to collapse.”

She blinked rapidly. The accident had been four years ago, and Kate hardly ever cried over it anymore, but to have Nathan’s death flung at her made her want to break something.

Other women in the office sent her sympathetic glances. Mr. Gertsmann was condescending to all the women in the office, but he always singled her out for the worst of his ire.

“You have no bereavement now, so again I insist on knowing why you plan on missing work.”

The clattering of the machines tapered off a little as some in the office started listening in. Given the way the other women in the room glared at him, it was almost surprising that Mr. Gertsmann didn’t burst into flame.

“It’s a personal matter,” she finally answered.

“And is this ‘personal matter’ in relation to employment at the Washington Memorial Hospital?”

She winced. “How did you know that?”

He yanked a small envelope from his pocket. “Because I’ve

had a request for your references. The newly appointed Dr. T. M. Kendall wishes to know about your vaunted skills as a statistician.”

The way he said *statistician* made it sound like a puny and pathetic word. After all, with machines taking over so much of the tabulating work, Mr. Gertsman thought statisticians ought to be put on the shelf alongside the bow and arrow and everything else that had been rendered useless by modern technology.

“I certainly hope you will find working at the hospital a fulfilling outlet for your ambitions, because I can’t imagine employing a woman of questionable loyalty here at the census bureau.”

“Are you firing me?” It would be a disaster if she lost this job before securing another. With all the pricey improvements her parents made to the boardinghouse, Kate’s income was needed to pay the bank note each month.

Mr. Gertsman assumed an artificially pleasant tone as he smirked at her. “And if I decide to terminate your employment if you miss work tomorrow morning?”

She had to be smart about this. Mr. Gertsman was a small man whose ego needed regular tending, and she braced herself to do just that.

“Then naturally I will be here on time,” she said calmly. If she had to miss the interview, she would find another way to make contact with Dr. Kendall.

Her conciliatory words had the desired effect. Mr. Gertsman preened, puffing his chest out and fiddling with the buttons on his vest.

“Excellent,” he said. “I am a generous man and will permit you three hours’ leave, but I trust this will be the end of your foolish ambitions. Women are ideally suited to the monotony of census work, but if you wish to toy with the fantasy of pursuing a rigorous intellectual position, it will be amusing to watch.”

He patted her on the shoulder, and she tried not to cringe. “I hope the disappointment is not too great,” he added before leaving the room.

“That man makes me long for a bucket of tar and a sack of feathers,” Kate muttered as she returned to her station. She was twenty-nine years old and was dying on the vine at the census bureau. The position at the hospital was a long shot, but she intended to fight hard for it.



“Why does he hate you so much?” Charlie Davis asked as he lounged in the windowsill of the boardinghouse’s dining room, his thin frame looking as delicate as a reed. For such a skinny man, he was always voraciously hungry and appeared the moment the scent from her mother’s kitchen began percolating through the boardinghouse. With his gray hair immaculately groomed and his neatly clipped mustache, Charlie was like the grandfather she never had, and their daily chat while she set the dinner table had been a ritual since the time Kate was a child.

His question made Kate pause as she retrieved the heavy pewter flatware from the sideboard. “Mr. Gertsman doesn’t like anybody, but one time I stopped a report from going out that had a string of errors in it. A batch of punch cards had been fed into the machine backwards, skewing the data. He ought to have noticed the numbers looked off-kilter, but it slipped past him. I think he was embarrassed I caught it.”

“You might have saved his job,” Charlie said.

“Maybe.” She began laying the plates next. They were large plates, as her mother delivered heaping portions of the best food on the Eastern Seaboard, making their boardinghouse famous among the elected officials in Washington. Most government jobs didn’t pay much, and unless the elected officials were

independently wealthy, they usually stayed in boardinghouses or hotels whenever Congress was in session.

The dining room was large, with three windows facing H Street and providing a view of the US Capitol building only a few blocks away. The dining room's creamy yellow walls and crown molding was typical of the Federal style that dominated the city. A long table stretched down the center of the room, and Kate had been setting this table each evening from the time she was old enough to be trusted with the crockery.

From behind the swinging door to the kitchen, pots clattered and a kettle whistled. Dinner was at least twenty minutes away, yet the scents of fresh bread and simmering beef were probably tormenting Charlie as badly as a hound tethered just out of reach from a juicy steak. "How about I sneak in the kitchen and see if I can steal a blueberry muffin for you? Mother made them this afternoon."

Charlie's eyes sparkled. "You are an angel of goodness and mercy."

Charlie had lived at their boardinghouse ever since he was elected to Congress thirty-two years ago. He witnessed all her childhood triumphs and tragedies. He taught her to tie her shoelaces and looked the other way when she slid down the polished oak banisters. He listened to her wax ecstatic over her adolescent crush on Nathan Livingston, the funniest boy in school, who could balance a fiddle on the tip of his nose and still look devilishly handsome while he did it. Charlie cheered her on at horseshoe matches and commiserated when she lost the college scholarship to Trevor McDonough. Charlie came to her wedding, and he was a pallbearer at Nathan's funeral only two years later. She would be forever grateful for that. Nathan had always been a little in awe of Charlie Davis and would have been



flattered that Pennsylvania's longest-serving congressman did him that final honor.

The aroma of roast beef and simmering onions surrounded Kate as she pushed into the warm kitchen. Steam rose from kettles on the massive cast-iron stove. Kate used a pair of tongs to open the door of the warming compartment. "Please look the other way while I steal a muffin for Charlie."

Her mother didn't turn around from slicing onions into a pan of sizzling butter. "Just *one*," she cautioned. "That Bauman girl is bringing three guests to dinner and gave me only an hour's notice. I ought to start charging Justice Bauman extra for all the mouths they drag in here."

Irene Bauman and her father had been living here the past eight years whenever the Supreme Court was in session. Justice Bauman was a decent man, but his daughter? Kate snatched a muffin and thought about skipping dinner if Irene was going to be there.

No such luck. When Kate returned to the dining room, Irene had plopped down in a chair opposite Charlie, playfully twirling a lock of her honey-blond hair. It was bad enough to watch an eighteen-year-old girl flirt with a man in his sixties, but did she really need to twirl her hair?

"Alms for the hungry," she said, dropping the muffin in Charlie's palm. "If you'll excuse me, I need to starch my dress shirt for tomorrow."

Charlie knew about the interview, of course. It would not surprise her if he'd already put in a good word for her at the hospital, although he denied it. "I've never met this Dr. Kendall fellow," he said. "But if he is half as smart as people say, he'll snap you up immediately."

"I hope you aren't going to wear that boring pinstripe shirt," Irene said. "I'll loan you one of my mutton sleeve blouses, if you like. You would look so much smarter."

*Here we go.* Why couldn't she and Irene be in the same room for two minutes without the competition beginning? Irene always compared their clothing, their hairstyles, their jewelry. There was nothing Kate loved more than matching wits or skill in a healthy competition, but over fashion? And yet the moment Irene moved into the boardinghouse, the natural rivalry seemed to take root and spring up at the worst times. It reminded Kate of school, when she spent years matching wits against Trevor McDonough. At least Trevor was smart; Irene was a nitwit.

Although she had to admit, Irene's mutton sleeve blouses were spectacular. Would it be so wrong to borrow one? Temptation clawed at her. Just once it would be nice to be as stylishly turned-out as Irene, but Kate couldn't take the bait. If she got this job, Irene would lord it over her for ages, insisting it was her blouse that won Kate the job.

"My pinstripe blouse will be fine." It had gently gathered sleeves and fabulous cuffs that buttoned tightly all the way to her elbows. She loved the dashing feminine appearance the blouse gave her. It was nothing compared to a real mutton sleeve blouse, but it still looked smart.

"Suit yourself," Irene said. "It's such a shame you're interviewing for another job involving math. It must be awful squinting at numbers all day. It will put lines on your face for good."

Charlie winced at the insult, but Kate took it in stride. "Oh, Irene, my face is the place nasty worry lines come to roost for fun."

Kate never worried too much about her appearance. She had a trim, athletic figure from running up and down four flights of stairs to keep the boardinghouse operating, and she never bothered with jewelry or ornamentation. With a wealth of smooth red hair, she simply mounded it atop her head in the Gibson girl style that was becoming so popular.

Kate grabbed a handful of pewter spoons and began laying them alongside the plates. “Who are your guests for dinner this evening? Mother is scrambling to stretch the meal.”

“Jenny Fayette and her parents,” Irene said while she kept twirling her hair. “I met them at the Smithsonian this morning. Her father is in the navy and his uniform is so dashing. I think he is a captain.”

Kate almost dropped the spoons. “Captain Fayette?” she gasped. “Captain Alfred Fayette of the Naval Academy?”

“Do you already know him?” Irene looked mildly disappointed. “I was hoping to surprise everyone with my fancy guests.”

Kate didn’t have time for explanations; she merely shoved the spoons in Irene’s hands. “Here, you finish setting the table. I’ve got to run.”



Kate was breathless by the time she ran to the Marine Barracks on Eighth Street. It was a hot June day, and a stitch clawed at her side while a blister screamed on the back of her heel, but none of that mattered.

Her little brother was going to get into the Naval Academy if she had to pull every string in the city. Tick had dreamed of it ever since he was a child, and last year’s rejection was a blow none of them anticipated. No one in her family had gone to college, so how was she to know the application process began so early? Or that they needed letters of support from officers and elected officials?

Tick ended up joining the Marine Corps after finishing school, but Kate wasn’t going to let it end there. His letter of rejection encouraged him to apply again, and this time Kate would make sure his application sailed through with a chorus of angels singing his praises. Timothy “Tick” Norton was going

to be the first member of their family to graduate from college if it killed her.

The blister got worse as she turned down Eighth Street. It was an older part of the city that hadn't yet been renovated. Washington used to be a small, muddy town, but after the Civil War, money flowed into the city to widen the boulevards, line the streets with trees, and erect elegantly wrought lampposts to illuminate the city. Government buildings were torn down and replaced with palaces of white granite and imposing columns that glittered in the sunlight.

In the southern part of town, the stately government buildings gave way to oak-shaded streets and redbrick walls. Only two blocks north of the US Navy Yard, the Marine Barracks consisted of a long row of buildings with an armory and living quarters. It was impossible to get through the gate this late in the afternoon, but the brick wall was only five feet tall, and with a jump she was able to hoist herself up to brace her elbows on the ledge. Tick was playing a game of dice on a table beneath the thick branches of an oak tree.

“Hey, Tick!” she called. “Get over here!”

Tick whirled around, a grin spreading over his face. With blond hair and sky-blue eyes, Tick had grown into a handsome young man. He was eighteen and already six feet tall, and he wasn't finished growing. Dressed in a plain shirt and brown pants, Tick had changed out of the field uniform he wore during the first part of the day when he served as guard to the surgeon general. His long, loping strides devoured the ground.

“Quit calling me Tick in front of other people,” he said as soon as he was opposite her.

“Sorry,” she said with a wince. She had been trying to quit, but he'd been Tick since she'd changed his diapers and taught him how to walk. With her mother cooking and cleaning for

thirty boarders, Kate practically raised Tick, and she'd loved every minute of it. She was eleven when he was born, and he was the best gift any girl ever had. She loved his soft baby smell and the drooly smile he gave her every morning when she lifted him from the cradle. Later, he clung to her like a tick she could never shake, hanging on to her leg as she walked around the house. Whenever she came into his line of sight, he would launch himself across the room and straight into her arms.

"Listen," she whispered. "Captain Fayette from the Naval Academy is coming to dinner tonight. Change into your dress uniform and get back to the house. This is too good an opportunity to miss."

"Tonight? I can't leave without permission. There are rules about things like that."

"If your mother was dying from a heart attack this very moment, don't tell me you couldn't figure out a way to get home. Now go ask for permission. And quick. Dinner begins in fifteen minutes."

Tick shifted. "This isn't exactly a life-or-death thing, Kate. I don't want to get a reputation for slacking off."

She wanted to leap over the wall and shake some sense into him. "But this is a perfect opportunity. You're acting like I want this more than you."

Tick didn't answer her right away. He glanced back at the others playing dice beneath the tree, then back at her. "Of course I want it, but I have a good position here. I can't risk it to go chasing after another."

What he said made sense. After all, wasn't she risking her job at the census bureau by chasing after a long-shot position at the hospital? Kate was a risk taker, while Tick had always been more cautious.

She dropped back down to her side of the wall, brushing the grit from her elbows. "Okay, I get it," she conceded.

Tick reached a hand over the wall to grab her shoulder. “Thanks for coming, Kate. If Captain Fayette comes again, let me know and I’ll try to get time off, okay?”

She nodded, hoping the disappointment wasn’t showing on her face. “Deal.”

“And good luck on the job interview tomorrow,” Tick said. “The surgeon general has been trying for years to lure Dr. Kendall to Washington, so working for him would be a real coup.”

Tick meant the words kindly, but they just ratcheted Kate’s anxiety higher. A man of Dr. Kendall’s sterling reputation would surely have his pick of applicants, and the odds of her getting the job were slim. Still, she had to try.

The blister cut into her heel as she began walking home. Two blocks ahead of her a horse-drawn streetcar was picking up passengers. For five cents she could ride home in time to help serve dinner. If she hurried, she could catch it before it set off at a brisk trot up Virginia Avenue.

Or she could race it home.

She suppressed a grin as she hiked up her skirts and made a dash down the street. The streetcar had a good head start on her, but she could still beat it home if she pulled out all the stops. She sprang over curbs and around pedestrians, gaining a few yards with each block. The blister was forgotten. All that mattered was drawing up alongside the streetcar and passing it and reaching the front stoop of her house in first place.

The thrill of competition surged in her veins. Pitting her will and stamina against the horse gave her something to strive for, to battle and win.

After all, there was nothing she liked better than winning.