

*The*  
BEAUTY  
DOCTOR

Second Edition, 2024, with Author's Preface

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Black Rose Writing | Texas

For my late father, Stanley P. Hutchison,  
in whose footsteps I have followed more than I realized.

## Preface to Second Edition

The story you are about to read is fiction, with plot and characters that spring from the author's imagination. But what inspired me to write this suspenseful mystery/thriller was something very real—the history of modern-day cosmetic surgery, which begins in the Victorian era. So, while the tale of *The Beauty Doctor* may shock you, it is not as improbable as you might think.

By 1907, when the novel takes place, women had just begun to break free from many Victorian-era constraints. The illustrator-created Gibson Girl (artist Charles Dana Gibson, 1867-1944)), featured in many popular magazines, represented a new Euro-American ideal that equated beauty with strength and power. Beauty doctors, as they were called, capitalized on this evolving vision of women's potential. Between 1870 and 1909, the self-trained beauty doctor John H. Woodbury became wealthy by establishing a chain of beauty surgery *institutes* in six states as well as creating his own brand of soaps and cosmetics. The procedures that he and his staff of twenty-five doctors and surgeons performed included nose reshaping (rhinoplasty), eyelid trimming, facelifts, creating dimples, and filling wrinkles with paraffin wax. Other beauty doctors may have profited on a smaller scale; however, their aggressive newspaper advertising introduced the concept of beauty surgery to a wide audience.

But there were problems.

In the early 1900s, with the field of medicine struggling to regulate itself, opportunities for quackery abounded. This was certainly true in the nascent field of beauty surgery. Abuses in all areas of medicine eventually led to stricter guidelines for medical education and credentials. Because of the Flexner Report, published in 1910 under the sponsorship of the Carnegie Foundation, almost half of all medical schools in the United States were judged inadequate; eventually, these schools merged with others or were shut down completely. This caused at least one unfortunate side effect: Previously, women had made progress in obtaining medical school admission, but now fewer available slots for aspiring doctors meant that virtually all women were to be excluded. It would take some time to reestablish women among the ranks of medical students at American universities.

During the same period, the eugenics movement—which sought to create a “super race” through authoritarian control of human reproduction—was widely embraced by academic institutions and governments throughout the world. Many wealthy individuals like Carnegie and Rockefeller contributed sizeable sums of money for eugenics research. It was not until the 1930s that enthusiasm for the doctrine began its decline. By the end of World War II, eugenics was widely discredited. However, practices of forced limits on reproduction, as well as involuntary sterilizations and hysterectomies, continue in some countries to the present day.

Concurrent with the rise of eugenics was the public’s fascination with people exhibiting rare congenital conditions, such as conjoined twins (then called *Siamese twins* because of the famous Siamese brothers Chang and Eng, 1811-1874). The cruel exploitation of such individuals is well documented. Only with greater medical knowledge concerning the causes of such afflictions did public attitudes begin to change.

These facts of America's Edwardian era converge in a fictional story full of unexpected twists and turns, as a young woman who dreams of becoming a doctor serving the poor of New York City discovers that appearances can be deceiving, and perhaps deadly. I hope you will be intrigued by both the history and mystery of this re-edited Second Edition of *The Beauty Doctor*.

Elizabeth Hutchison Bernard

January 4, 2024

*Into whatsoever houses I enter, I will enter to help the sick, and I will abstain from all intentional wrong-doing and harm, especially from abusing the bodies of man or woman, bond or free.*

–From the Hippocratic Oath, fifth century BC



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## CHAPTER 1

The maid assigned to the construction of Abigail's elaborate hairdo stood at attention, her smile reflected in the dressing-table mirror.

"Are you pleased with it, Miss Platford?"

Abigail sighed. Really, what difference did it make? What mattered was that everything had been done exactly as her future mother-in-law instructed. Her honey-colored hair was arranged over several layers of padding that rose nearly half a foot, and the formidable mass was ornamented with plumes and several strings of pearls from Mrs. Hennessy's own jewelry box.

"Very nice. Thank you."

"Will there be anything else then, ma'am?"

"No, that's all."

She was relieved when, finally, the door of the guest room closed, and she was alone.

It was April 19, 1907, precisely five months before her wedding date. That night, Mr. and Mrs. Hennessy were hosting a lavish banquet at Sherry's, one of the most expensive venues in Manhattan. The purpose was to announce their only son Arthur's engagement and, Abigail assumed, to ease her introduction into New York's high-society circles, if such a thing was possible. The

invitations, handwritten in French, announced the theme of the night was a royal garden party. Mrs. Hennessy had invited three hundred guests and asked them to come dressed in eighteenth-century costumes—an ideal excuse for her to oversee Abigail's attire for the evening, likely fearing that otherwise her son's fiancée would fail to make the correct impression.

Abigail had to admit, the dress Mrs. Hennessy had selected for her was beautiful—deep blue to match her eyes, with a square neck, tight sleeves layered with ruffles, a flounced skirt, and a fitted bodice that emphasized her slim silhouette. And, as the final touch, an exquisite diamond choker, purportedly among the most precious of the venerable family's heirlooms. Abigail contemplated it now with mixed emotions. If security was what she desired, then she surely had found it in Arthur Hennessy. But as she lifted the borrowed necklace to her throat, it seemed only a symbol of her irrevocable captivity.

She thought back to the gloomy gray morning in mid-February when she had fled her mother's home. Finding Arthur at the bank, she had intended to ask him for a position. A teller, a secretary, anything that would enable her to move out and never again be subjected to the lewd advances of her new stepfather. She and Arthur had barely known each other. Still, he had taken pity on her, offering her temporary asylum in his parents' home.

How well she remembered the gallery of dour-faced family portraits under which she had unsuspectingly sat on that fateful night when Arthur proposed in a rush of words that seemed painfully well rehearsed. At the time, it seemed there was nothing she could say but *yes*. To a man for whom she felt not the slightest spark of passion. To a life she didn't want, one filled with the endless insincerities of polite social intercourse and the useless pastimes to which women of the Hennessys' class so ardently devoted themselves. And, of course, children. She had never desired

them, but as certainly as all the rest she didn't want, they were ahead of her now. All because of one tragically foolish mistake that had stolen her father—and her future—forever.

There was a tap at the door. Before Abigail could reply, a gnarled stick of a woman, dressed in a lavish gold-and-burgundy brocade gown that trailed at least three feet along the floor, entered the room. Mrs. Hennessy was followed by Arthur's sister, Sarah, whose multi-layered costume of canary-yellow silk with orange chiffon only made her appear larger and more awkward than usual.

Abigail held her breath as Mrs. Hennessy slowly circled her, checking for any slight deviation from perfection. "You actually look quite lovely," she finally said, offering a subdued smile. "Doesn't she, Sarah?"

Sarah's tight-lipped expression made it clear she intended to be difficult. "That necklace belonged to Grandmother Hennessy. She wouldn't want it worn by a stranger."

Abigail reached to undo the clasp, more than willing to relinquish the family jewels. "Leave it, Abigail," Mrs. Hennessy commanded. She turned to Sarah. "It's only for one night, dear." Sarah gave a little sniff, turned on her heel, and stormed out, a suffocating cloud of French perfume lingering in her wake.

"I was thinking," Abigail began uncertainly, the choker now unbearably tight around her neck, "might this outfit look best without jewelry?"

"Don't be silly. The important thing is that tonight you appear like a lady."

Abigail ignored the inference that she could not appear so without the Hennessy diamonds at her throat. "Arthur should have been here by now."

"Oh, he telephoned from the bank. He's planning to meet us at Sherry's later."

She tried to hide her displeasure. How could he send her off to the party alone, knowing not a single soul among all the guests? “Couldn’t we wait for him?”

“Come along now,” Mrs. Hennessy said. “The limousine is in front.”

They were about to head downstairs when the maid, the same one who had styled Abigail’s hair, rushed into the room. Her eyes flitted uncertainly from the mistress of the house to Abigail and back. “Ma’am, did you mean to leave this behind?” she asked, passing something to Mrs. Hennessy who then turned to Abigail, her arm outstretched.

“For you.”

It was a fan, mounted on a stick of ivory with inlaid mother-of-pearl. Carefully, because she could tell it was old and fragile, Abigail spread the silk folds. Exquisitely painted, the intricate design weaved a mythical tale of castles and sailing ships, mermaids strumming lutes, cupids peeking from behind clouds. She would have loved to linger, piecing together the various fragments of the artist’s imagined story, losing herself in the magic, but there was no time now.

“Thank you,” she said, uncertain if this was a gift or yet another item on loan. “It’s beautiful.”

Mrs. Hennessy’s next comment was direct and deliberate, and Abigail had no trouble reading between the lines. “I always feel that a fan lends a woman an air of mystery, don’t you?”

In other words, the less her future daughter-in-law might reveal about herself, the better.

. . . . .

Abigail had never been to Sherry’s, but even if she had, she would not have recognized it that night. An entire floor of the restaurant

was decorated to create the ambiance of a royal French garden. Fresh sod had been laid over the marble tiles in a soft carpet of green. Arbors of cascading purple wisteria sheltered the banquet tables set with sparkling gold and crystal, each with a stunning centerpiece of pink roses paired with white lilies. Abigail hesitated in the doorway, intimidated by the overwhelming opulence, before Mrs. Hennessy turned to her with a stiff smile.

“You are not to call attention to yourself or discuss the engagement with anyone. Mr. Hennessy will make the announcement later in the evening, and I want it to be a surprise.”

Abigail made no reply, her attention drawn to laughter in the hallway signaling the evening’s first arrivals. As the guests came into view, she saw that all wore colorful period costumes as extravagant as Mrs. Hennessy’s, likely modeled after famous portraits of Louis XV and his mistress Madame de Pompadour, or Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Certainly, none among the Hennessys’ set would be caught dead in an outfit less than authentically regal.

“Go on and take your seat. You’ll be at the head table.” Mrs. Hennessy pointed toward the center of the room. Among all the round tables for ten was a long, narrow one with seating for twenty. “There’s a place card with your name. Hurry now. Don’t dawdle.”

If Mrs. Hennessy wished not to call attention to her, this was not the way. Sitting alone at the head table would only make her more noticeable and encourage speculation as to who would merit such a prestigious spot and why she was unaccompanied. Nevertheless, she did as she had been asked, settling herself into the designated seat and trying to look as if she belonged there. She was glad when several others took their seats, followed by a few more, until the table was almost full. The chair to her left, however, remained empty, with a place card that said it was reserved for Mr.

George Kilroy, whoever he might be. The vacant seat on her right was Arthur's.

She had not yet seen Arthur in his costume but tried now to imagine him, with his long, serious face and sparse rust-colored moustache, dressed as a sword-wielding eighteenth-century Frenchman. The thought of it brought a brief touch of levity to her otherwise anxious, and increasingly annoyed, state of mind. However ridiculous he might look she would try to keep from laughing. Arthur was extraordinarily shy and, even if he might deserve a taste of humiliation such as she was being forced to endure, she didn't have the heart to embarrass him.

She need not have worried. The moment Arthur walked through the door it was apparent that he'd planned his late entry purely to maximize the attention he would receive. There was a swagger to his step, a flush to his cheeks, an exuberance that was palpably heady. In fact, Abigail had never seen him look so comfortable with himself as he did in that full-skirted and elaborately embroidered jacket, the long waistcoat underneath open at the neck to display a frilled shirtfront and lace cravat fastened with a black velvet bow. Even the powdered wig seemed to suit him well, tied at the back with another bow. He had apparently decided a sword was unnecessary. Instead, he carried in his hand, probably so as not to muss his hair, a three-cornered hat bound with gold galloon and sporting a trim of flat rosettes of ribbon.

Abigail watched as he went around to every table, taking his time, chatting amiably with the guests. He was animated, confident. Though she couldn't help a curious sort of admiration for his new attitude, her irritation far exceeded such kinder sentiments. Had he no appreciation of how uncomfortable she felt, surrounded by people she didn't know? People who obviously had very little interest in knowing her. And the way his mother

had treated her! It was as if Mrs. Hennessy didn't trust her to open her mouth for fear of what might come out.

Suddenly, she felt the chair to her left move. Looking up, she encountered a gentleman who was noticeably out of place with his black evening suit and white bow tie. His neatly trimmed hair was dark and wavy, his moustache thick and waxed at the ends. He was older than she, likely in his forties, but he struck Abigail as one of those men who become even more handsome with a slight graying at the temples. The hesitancy in his manner led her to believe he realized he was at the wrong event.

"Pardon me," he said. "I believe this is my place."

"Mr. Kilroy?"

"No, Mr. Kilroy couldn't make it, I'm afraid," he said, proceeding to take the seat. "He's a little under the weather. But Mrs. Kilroy—" He nodded toward the head of the table. A stout woman, her costume adorned with stunning jewels obviously worth a fortune, stood talking with Mrs. Hennessy. She gestured toward the gentleman now seated next to Abigail. A slight frown creased the space between Mrs. Hennessy's painted brows.

"Mrs. Kilroy," he began again, "persuaded me to accompany her in place of her husband. And if you know Mrs. Kilroy, you'll understand I really had no choice," he said with a smile.

By now, Abigail had further assessed his appearance: the firmness of his jaw, the sharp angle of his cheek, the depth of his dark eyes. He was a distinguished-looking man, but the rakishness of his smile suggested an impetuous nature. She noticed, too, a peculiar scent about him, slightly acrid. It was so familiar.

An image popped into her mind. Row upon row of stoppered bottles and lidded apothecary jars, her face reflected for a moment in the glass of the medicine cabinet before she opened the door, reached inside ...



“It’s rather embarrassing, however, to be the only one from the twentieth century in attendance.”

She pulled herself back to the present. “Actually, it’s a welcome relief to see a modern man. I was beginning to feel I’d been sent off in one of Mr. Wells’s time machines.”

“Ah, one of my favorite books!”

“Mine as well.”

“An intriguing premise, traveling into the future to see what we humans have become.”

“Yes, quite a fantastical story, but with a rather solemn truth at its core.”

“Solemn truth?” He thought for a moment. “Yes, you’re right. You’re absolutely right.” He gave her an approving nod, pausing only a beat before adding, “Tell me, what else do you like to read?”

He probably expected her to be a fan of Gothic novels, like most women of her age and education—proper young ladies who nonetheless harbor secret longings for surrender to reckless passion. In Abigail’s case, such longings had always been overridden by what her mother liked to call a *morbid fascination* with the human body and the variety of afflictions that so mercilessly render it helpless.

“*Gray’s Anatomy*,” she said, realizing full well what an odd choice it must seem. Perhaps just as strange was her sudden and inexplicable urge to tell him how Father had always encouraged her to study science. How she’d grown up believing she would follow in his footsteps and become a doctor despite the many challenges women faced. To think that she had once imagined herself becoming a student at Johns Hopkins! Yet, since her father’s sudden passing, that dream and so many others had died a slow, agonizing death.

“Excuse me—” The stranger was speaking again. “Since we appear to have no one offering to introduce us, allow me to do the honors myself. I’m Dr. Franklin Rome.”

A doctor!

She inclined her head politely, a hot flush spreading over her face. He must think her incredibly pretentious to have mentioned *Gray’s Anatomy*. He had no way of knowing the countless hours she had spent poring over that revered book. Eight hundred illustrations—all the skeletal parts laid bare of flesh, meticulously labeled as to the various bones, nerve openings, attachments of the tendons.

“I’ve only recently opened my practice here. Mrs. Kilroy is one of my first patients.” He glanced at the elderly woman with what seemed a condescending smile. “I’m not sure what I can do for her, but I’ll think of something. However—” He turned back to Abigail. “Far more important, you haven’t yet told me who *you* are.”

She thought of Mrs. Hennessy’s warning. “Abigail Platford.”

“A pleasure, Miss Platford. It is *Miss*, isn’t it?”

Mrs. Kilroy had taken a seat directly opposite Dr. Rome and now called out across the table. “Dr. Rome, I see you have landed yourself a spot next to the loveliest girl in the room. I suppose I should be thankful you’re the one sitting next to her, instead of my husband. I doubt poor George’s heart could take it.” She and everyone around her laughed.

“If my goal was to rub elbows with the loveliest of all the lovely creatures here tonight, then surely I would have maneuvered a seat next to you, Mrs. Kilroy.” Dr. Rome turned to Abigail with a sly wink.

“Oh, Doctor! Are you sure your degree isn’t in flattery?” Mrs. Kilroy snapped open her jeweled fan and fluttered it by her cheek. “I suppose I should explain how I came to be accompanied

by this charming gentleman tonight. Lest you think,” she said, turning right and then left to make sure everyone was listening, “that I’ve run off and left my poor ailing George for another man. Dr. Rome can attest to the fact I’ve done no such thing. You see, our own personal physician, Dr. Hannity, is on holiday overseas. Just when we need him, of course! But—and don’t ask me how, because it’s a very long story—I was fortunate to have recently made the acquaintance of Dr. Rome, who has been tending to George for several days now with uncommon devotion. Though my husband wasn’t quite up to stepping out tonight, I wouldn’t dream of disappointing our hosts. So, I convinced Dr. Rome to assume the role of my escort, an invitation he graciously accepted. And isn’t it nice to have at least one gentleman around here without flowing curls or a velvet-bowed rat tail?”

“Most certainly,” agreed a stylish woman sitting two seats to Mrs. Kilroy’s right, who had been studying Dr. Rome with a keen eye.

“The pleasure is all mine,” Dr. Rome replied. “Miss Platford and I were just discussing time machines. As a time traveler, I could hope for no better place to land than a royal banquet in eighteenth-century France. The perfect setting for one who enjoys excess in all things.”

“Excess, Doctor?” said the same woman, who’d not taken her eyes off him. “But I thought those in your profession most often preach moderation.”

He chuckled. “My calling may not be quite what you imagine. Anyway, how a doctor advises his patients and how he behaves himself are often two very different things. We are, after all, only human.” Turning to Abigail, he leaned close to whisper, “I must admit you’ve intrigued me, Miss Platford. We’ll have to discuss *Gray’s Anatomy* in more detail later, all right?”

Arthur appeared the next moment, slipping into the chair to her right with a mumbled apology. She had never been happier to see him. His absence had left her vulnerable not only to the curiosity of others, but to her own curiosity about the handsome doctor on her left. Abigail hadn't spoken of her interest in medicine for so long, not even dared to think of it. What had made her bring up the subject—and to a total stranger?

Of course! It was that smell.

Antiseptic.

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The meal proceeded uneventfully, if one could call a feast with eight separate courses uneventful. Abigail had never seen so much food, wave after wave of bowls and trays and platters piled high and steaming with the scents of tarragon, thyme, rosemary, and sage. There were four different soups, three kinds of salad, stuffed pheasant, roasted duck, veal, ham, and several whole fish, each entrée accompanied by its own exotic sauce. The procession of French champagnes of every variety and vintage was unending, the pop of a cork sounding every minute from somewhere in the room.

Surrounded by such abundance, Abigail merely picked at her food, apprehensive about what was to come. Soon there would be three hundred pairs of prying eyes trained on her. The flowery toast would be followed by discreet whispers and polite applause, Mrs. Hennessy's frozen smile fooling no one. Abigail *who*?

She was grateful to Mrs. Kilroy for dominating the conversation so completely that, throughout the meal, she scarcely had to speak. Careful to orient herself to the right, toward Arthur, she hoped to avoid further dialog with the doctor on her left—though she wasn't entirely sure why. It might have been that nervous flutter she'd felt when she first saw him; even now, the recollection was

vaguely disturbing. More likely, though, it was the memories he had inadvertently evoked. Her Father quizzing her on anatomy and how hard she would try to impress him. The affection in his smile, his words of gentle encouragement. “Someday we’ll practice medicine together,” he’d say. “Someday we’ll be partners.”

Mr. Hennessy rose from his chair and tapped a knife against his glass, those seated around Abigail joining in. The clamor from the head table quieted everyone around the room. Abigail felt the urgent thumping of her heart as the host straightened his wig and began.

“I hope everyone is having a wonderful time. This entire evening was my lovely wife’s idea. She never ceases to amaze me with her talent and imagination!” He paused for the mandatory applause while Mrs. Hennessy dipped her head in acknowledgment.

“Besides a desire to treat our many dear friends to a banquet to end all banquets, we have another reason for inviting you here tonight. A reason that we have kept a secret until now.” Mr. Hennessy looked over at Arthur, beaming. “Our only son, Arthur, has long been our pride and joy. His accomplishments of the last several years, on behalf of our family’s banking enterprises, show him to be a young man of exceptional abilities. I have always believed, as well, that he is a gentleman of refinement and taste, qualities confirmed by his selection of a most charming young lady to be his future wife.”

An audible gasp arose throughout the room. “It gives me great pleasure,” Mr. Hennessy continued, “to introduce her to you now.” He turned again to Arthur. “Son, please assist Miss Platform to rise and let our guests get a good look at the two of you together, the future Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hennessy!”

Arthur stood and offered Abigail his arm so she could display herself by his side while the elite of New York City applauded their impending union. Those at the head table were the first to

stand. Soon all were on their feet, giving the couple an ovation more suitable, Abigail thought, for the stars of an opera or a nominee for political office. To her, the thunderous noise went on forever. But actually, it was less than a minute until the guests were back in their seats, choosing from among the decadent assortment of multilayered cakes, cream-filled pastries, and chocolates delivered to the tables on huge rolling carts.

It was then she noticed Arthur seemed to be in a heightened state of agitation. She could tell by the way he kept fingering the ruffles of his shirt, eyes down, mouth tight. He had lost the effortless grace she'd so admired earlier in the evening. Now he seemed more like a man awaiting execution.

"Arthur? Are you all right?"

He glanced uneasily toward the door leading to the hallway outside the banquet room. Abigail followed his eyes. There was a young man standing there, handsome in a delicate sort of way, with a look of distress that mirrored Arthur's distracted air.

"I'll be back." Arthur rose abruptly from his chair.

She watched him leave, feeling rudely abandoned. Had she done something wrong? Embarrassed him? She concluded he must be having second thoughts about his affections, or the wisdom of marrying someone of such little note. His proposal, after only a brief acquaintance, might seem imprudent to him now. Despite her own ambivalent feelings toward the marriage, it was intolerable to think Arthur might be similarly torn. He was to have been, if nothing else, her rock. But might he so easily crumble? Was he no stronger, no surer, than she?

"It seems that congratulations are in order." Dr. Rome leaned toward her, speaking in a confidential tone. "I didn't realize I was sitting next to the evening's guest of honor."

"I'm not really," Abigail said, aware that her heart was again pounding but for a different reason.

“And here I thought perhaps you aspired to practice the medical arts. Or was that only a passing fancy?”

“It was a long time ago.”

“And no more?”

The effort to explain was too great. Besides, she felt ill. “I apologize, but I really must excuse myself.”

Abigail jumped from her chair, ignoring the inquisitive glances from others seated at the head table. Keeping her head down, she maneuvered through the crowded banquet hall toward the exit and into the hallway. The stairs were straight ahead. Gripping the banister for support, she dragged herself to the top. Thankfully, the ladies’ room was only a few steps away. She burst through the door, collapsing in disarray onto a tufted-velvet chair—praying no one would come along. Or, if they did, that she would have enough presence of mind to blame her condition on the champagne.

Not her sudden realization that, somehow, she must escape.