

**Title: 'Breaking convention'**

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**Aged 13**

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## Breaking Convention

The dissecting chamber was dimly lit, with lustreless lanterns sporadically dotted across the small space. Cadavers lay atop the many tables, with all but their torso covered by threadbare, off-white linen. Brushing off the stares directed at her, Elsie Inglis made her way to her assigned workspace – chin up, shoulders squared.

Elsie sat on the edge of her seat, fingers tapping on the wooden workbench in anticipation. Today was her first medical dissection – she would be observing a diseased liver. This was just the beginning, the start of her medical journey. She hoped one day, she would be one of the leading surgeons, wielding a shiny scalpel in her hand, opening a disease-ridden body, saving a life.

One day, she would inspire other women to fight to be treated as they deserved.

A scuffle of footsteps snapped her out of her thoughts. She looked up, eyes scanning for the new arrival. She was met by a sneering, middle-aged man, clothed in matching dark blue attire and a white laboratory coat pulled over – undoubtedly the professor. Upon seeing her, his emerald, snake-like eyes widened as if in surprise. Raising a brow, he scoffed and sauntered over to his desk.

Elsie narrowed her eyes in disgust. He hadn't even bothered to disguise his prejudice.

The professor began the lesson by introducing the basic anatomy of the abdominal region; specifically, the liver. With detailed instructions and great interest, he explained the assignment. Elsie followed this very curiously, and, despite his poor first impression, she supposed he wasn't as ill-mannered as she had thought.

The lesson went on with the professor asking questions frequently, although, much to her dismay, she was never the one to answer, no matter how many times her hand was raised. He asked another, to which it seemed to her that nobody else knew. Seconds passed, and not one person in the room had grasped the answer.

The professor's question lingered in the room. She raised a hand futilely. Prolonged silence spread throughout the room. She sighed, already knowing how this was going to end. She could practically feel the professor's hesitation. Another hand shot up.

"Yes, Mr. Clark?"

She gritted her teeth as the man smugly replied. Obnoxious little weasel. The audacity that he had. It made no sense to her; why women were different to men. It wasn't as if her intelligence were lower than the arrogant, haughty men around her. Ever since she had began her education, she had been consistently denied the chance to speak her opinion. Instead, the chance had been given to the men.

Always the men.

A sun-kissed breeze wafted in from the open window, diluting the thick, muggy air. It settled her, calming her frustration, and she loosened her tight grip on the scalpel. She closed her eyes, pushing away the rising anger and instead focusing on the waxy, jaundiced corpse laid out before her. With the smooth metal a reassuring weight in her hand, she began her work.

