

CHALLENGING THE SURVIVAL OF THE VEILED FACE

The story of the interwar abortion reform movement in Great Britain

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HIS 391
Dr. John Wertheimer

“What is this ban on abortion? It is a survival of the veiled face, of the barred window and the locked door, of burning, branding, mutilation and stoning; of all the pain and fear inflicted ever since the grip of ownership came down on women, thousands of years ago.”

-Stella Browne

*Abortion Law Reform Association Conference in London, England,
May 1936*

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

CATHERINE O'MALLEY (fictional): Irish; former journalist; historical researcher; pro-abortion reform activist

FRANCES ADAMS (fictional): Working-class woman; founding member of Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA); campaigns in the interest of the ordinary British woman

HAROLD JAMES (fictional): Medical student and eventual physician; former boyfriend of Frances Adams; initially opposed to abortions

DOROTHY MCCROY (fictional): Working-class woman; best friend of Frances; dies after receiving an illegal abortion out of financial necessity

STELLA BROWNE (historical): Elite, feminist reformer; founding member of ALRA

MAUD MITCHELL (historical): Nurse; opened private residence to accommodate and assist with illegal abortions

DR. DANIEL POWELL (historical): Well-known illegal abortionist; charged multiple times with performing abortions

THOMAS MCCROY (fictional): Scottish; husband of Dorothy McCroy; shipyard worker who is financially impacted by the Great Depression

MARGARET ADAMS (fictional): Mother of Frances Adams; conservatively opposed to abortions on religious grounds

DR. DEVI SASUN (historical): Illegal abortionist; convicted after performing an illegal abortion in 1920

DORA WINIFRED RUSSELL (historical): Feminist philosopher and reformer; wife of Bertrand Russell; founding member of the ALRA

ALICE JENKINS (historical): Feminist reformer; Founding member and secretary of the ALRA

DR. JOAN MALLESON (historical): Feminist physician; specialized in abortion reform and contraceptive reform; founding member of ALRA

JANET CHANCE (historical): Elite reformer; founding member and first chair of the ALRA

DOROTHY THURTLLE (historical): Working-class woman; politician; radical member of the Birkett Committee; author of Birkett Committee's final Minority Report

SIR NORMAN BIRKETT (historical): Judge; conservative co-chair of Birkett Committee

DR. F.J. MCCANN (historical): Roman-Catholic gynecologist; representative of the League of National Life; anti-abortion activist

DAME LOUISE MALLORY (historical): Ulster Protestant physician; anti-abortion activist

DR. MARY CARDWELL (historical): Roman-Catholic physician; local secretary of Catholic Medical Guild of St. Luke, St. Cosmas, and St. Damian; representative of Catholic Women's League; anti-abortion activist

MRS. KEMBALL (historical): representative of Catholic Women's League; anti-abortion activist

DR. ALECK BOURNE (historical): Physician acquitted of performing an abortion in 1938; member of ALRA; later an anti-abortion activist

SIR MALCOLM MACNAGHTEN (historical): Judge presiding over Bourne trial; acquitted Aleck Bourne

EDITOR'S NOTE

In my fifteen years as an Irish journalist, I had never seen anything like the Ms. Y case. It was an incident that stunned the rest of the world, but it is an issue to which we Irish are accustomed. I started covering the story in July 2014,¹ back when I was working for *The Irish Times*. I was writing articles about the legal proceedings and ups and downs of Ms. Y's mental state until the baby boy was born in August. The more I wrote, the more invested I became in the story.

Ms. Y came to Ireland in March 2014, claiming asylum. That April, she found out she was pregnant due to an alleged rape in her home country. Due to the timing and her immigration status, Ms. Y was unable to travel out of the country.² Despite proclaiming that the pregnancy was making her suicidal³ and initiating a thirst and hunger strike,⁴ Ms. Y was not granted a legal abortion. The baby was delivered against her will that August.⁵

I retired from journalism after I finished writing about this case. While I watched with interest as international news sources picked up the story of two Irish women live tweeting a trip to the UK for an abortion,⁶ I could not write about it. Knowing that I could not just observe injustice going on in my country, I had to do something to promote change. I turned to the

¹ Ms. Y's legal predicament came to the attention of the Health Service Executive (HSE), Ireland's program to provide health and social services to all citizens, in mid-July 2014. Kitty Holland, "'Ms Y' to sue 11 respondents over abortion refusal," *The Irish Times*, 19 September 2015.

² In 2015, 3,451 women travelled from Ireland to the UK to access legal abortions. "Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2015," *UK Department of Health* (c. June 2016). <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/abortion-statistics-england-and-wales-2015> (accessed 25 September 2016).

³ Consultant psychiatrists for the Irish government proclaimed that Ms. Y's desire for an abortion was not due to a mental health disorder but was a clear choice. Kitty Holland, "Timeline of Ms. Y case," *The Irish Times*, 04 October 2014. Abortion is currently illegal in Ireland unless one is performed to physically save the mother's life, which includes risks of suicide. *Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act*, 2013. c. 35 (Ireland).

⁴ Holland, "'Ms. Y' to sue."

⁵ On August 6, 2014, Ms. Y gave birth to a baby boy via a Caesarian delivery. The child was taken into HSE care. Holland, "Timeline."

⁶ Liam Stack, "Irish Woman Live-Tweets Trip to Get Abortion in England," *The New York Times*, 23 August 2016.

development of abortion law in the United Kingdom for guidance. Initially focused on the 1960s, I soon found my attention drawn instead to the interwar period.

The tone of scholarship surrounding the abortion movement tends to focus on the importance of either the male doctors involved or the elite, reformist women at the forefront. Scholars emphasize the roles of Stella Browne, Dora Russell, and Dr. Aleck Bourne, who undoubtedly did contribute the eventual success of the movement. However, many academics decline to give as much attention to the lower class, more ordinary British women. It was these women who turned to illegal abortions in times of necessity and, ultimately, had invaluable impacts on the nature of the movement of the 1930s as it influenced that of the 1960s.

Ann Farmer is one such scholar who argues that the abortion movement was wholly derived from the ideas and philosophies of male sexologists.⁷ Colin Brewer and Madeleine Simms echo this sentiment, claiming that the medical profession and male-dominated Parliaments were the mechanisms behind abortion reform.⁸

Malcolm Potts describes the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) as “feminist” and founded in 1938 by “a wealthy woman with influential friends.”⁹ Frances Adams, however, was different. A middle-class woman who was very in touch with the financial necessities of the working class,¹⁰ Adams campaigned with the ALRA and brought the focus to the everyday British woman and her needs. After enduring an abortion procedure herself, Frances truly understood what the movement meant to the common, middle-class British woman.

⁷ Ann Farmer, “Feminists, Abortion and Sexuality in Britain: An Historical Perspective,” *An Irish Quarterly Review* 90: 358 (Summer, 2001): 142.

⁸ Colin Brewer and Madeleine Simms, “Abortion,” *The British Medical Journal* 2: 6186 (1979): 389.

⁹ Malcolm Potts, Peter Diggory, and John Peel, *Abortion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 285.

¹⁰ The economic depression during that the early 1930s caused much financial hardship that made abortions necessary for many women and families. Anthony Horden, *Legal Abortion: The English Experience* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1971), 7.

Just as we stand on the brink of economic uncertainty in Ireland today,¹¹ English citizens in the 1930s faced harsh economic conditions following the crash of the New York Stock Market in late 1929. Stephen Brookes focuses on the feminist, political motives of the abortion reform movement, characterizing it as one that was defined by specific philosophical ideas and vocabularies.¹² While wealthy activists like Stella Browne and Dora Russell were unworried about finances themselves in the 1930s and advanced abortion reform for philosophical reasons, the economic depression during that time caused much financial hardship that made abortions necessary for many women and families. Adams's story makes this evident.

The legal implications of Ms. Y's predicaments still fresh in my mind, I looked into the landmark Aleck Bourne trial of 1938. Bernard Dickens and Rebecca Cook argue that the Bourne case established a new legal and social precedent in British society: "it may be considered to have served to develop general understanding in the law that a surgeon acting in good faith in the honest belief that a woman's life or physical or mental health are endangered by continuation of her pregnancy may lawfully terminate pregnancy, even when the only enacted law on abortion expresses only prohibition."¹³

Other scholars, such as Keith Hindell, emphasize the importance of members of the Birkett Committee, an inter-departmental Parliamentary committee set up in 1937 to investigate the status of abortion in Britain, in changing perceptions about the legality of abortions. The Committee employed a thorough analysis of evidence from a variety of sources, and was mainly made up of male and female doctors and upper-class women.¹⁴ It did not advocate for complete

¹¹ Eoin Burke-Kennedy, "Brexit effect expected to shrink economy by nearly 4%," *The Irish Times*, 07 November, 2016.

¹² Stephen Brooke, "'A New World for Women'? Abortion Law Reform in Britain during the 1930s," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 2 (2001): 439-440.

¹³ Bernard Dickens and Rebecca J. Cook, "Development of Commonwealth Abortion Laws," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1979): 432.

¹⁴ Keith Hindell and Madeleine Simms, *Abortion Law Reformed* (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1971), 73.

legalization by any stretch. Instead it built upon the precedent set by Bourne. Hindell still argues that it provided a more comprehensive explanation to the British people.¹⁵ Potts furthers this sentiment as he describes the evidence and debate presented by committee members as akin to those of the 1960s, ahead of their time.¹⁶

Both the Bourne case and Birkett Committee's findings were important but not pivotal. Ambiguity clouded their effectiveness and comprehensiveness, and they did not carry much weight in the actual medical profession. Scholars tend to overlook one of the most influential outcomes of the initiative and trial: the single Minority Opinion written by one Birkett Committee member. Dorothy Thurtle, one of the few women and the only female, working-class representative of the group, dissented from her peers and advocated for a more radical, liberal approach to abortion reform. Neither opinion carried much weight at the time, but Thurtle's assertions clearly provided a framework for the 1967 legalization of abortion in Britain.¹⁷ Had the country not become enveloped by WWII shortly after her publication, perhaps more would have been done in the immediate aftermath to address abortion reform, taking into account the Bourne case, the Majority Opinion, and Thurtle's Minority Opinion. Instead it became a lost dialogue.

I discovered Adams as I pored through ALRA records at the Wellcome Library in London.¹⁸ Consistently speaking in meetings and advancing plans for programs in favor of lower-class women, she caught my attention as her name was repeated throughout transcripts and minutes. I began searching for more information about Adams and eventually visited the

¹⁵ Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 73.

¹⁶ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 287.

¹⁷ Abortion became legal in the UK in 1967. *Abortion Act*, 1967. c. 87 (Eng.).

¹⁸ The ALRA records are actually kept here. "Records of the Abortion Law Reform Association (1935-1970)," *The library at Wellcome collection* (c. 2016).
<http://archives.wellcome.ac.uk/Dserve/dserve.exe?dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqCmd=NaviTree.tcl&dsqField=RefNo&dsqItem=SAALR#HERE> (accessed 30 November 2016).

International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.¹⁹ As I pored through its collection of Adams' papers and diary entries, I began to piece together her tale.

Adams's story demonstrates the importance of the often-overlooked, ordinary, middle-class woman in the abortion reform movement through her bravery and agency in the face of a male-dominated world, her understanding of the economic necessities of abortion, and her relationship with the rest of the ALRA and Thurtle. In a country currently confused by the standards and qualifications to which the abortion law is held, we can all learn from the determination of women like Adams and Thurtle. I publish Adams's tale with the hope of inspiring change in my own Ireland. To move forward today, we *must* look to the past for guidance.

Catherine O'Malley

October 20, 2016

¹⁹ Dora Russell's papers are held by the International Institute of Social History, so I took fictional liberty and also located Adams' papers there. Though Adams was clearly not as well-known as Russell was, I am assuming that because she was a member of the ALRA, social historians would have taken notice of her collection and preserved it. "Dora Winifred Russell Papers," *International Institute of Social History* (c.2016). <https://search.socialhistory.org/Record/ARCH01225/ArchiveContentAndStructure> (accessed 30 November 2016).

CHAPTER I

September 13, 1929

Today was the day. Frances Adams took a deep breath, walked out of her home in Muswell Hill²⁰ and stepped onto the pavement as cars drove by. Her father had already left for work at Morris Motors²¹ in Oxford, and her mother was inside, writing a letter to her sister in Cornwall. Frances hurried along to the Muswell Hill Railway Station, purchased her ticket to Paddington Station, and waited for the train.²²

Upon boarding, Frances sat next to the window and looked out as the train made its descent deeper into London. At only nineteen years, Frances was conflicted. She desperately wanted to hold a job or career which would allow her to travel to London daily, but her current job offers consisted of mundane housework²³ opportunities in the equally mundane suburb of Muswell Hill.

²⁰ Muswell Hill was one of the fastest growing suburbs in London during the early twentieth century. It is located in North London and became a strictly middle class neighborhood during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Frances's Edwardian home is an example of villa architecture as it was advanced in the late nineteenth century under architects like W.J. Collins. Helen C. Long, *The Edwardian House: The Middle-Class Home in Britain 1880-1914* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 57-59.

²¹ Frances's father, William Adams, is a project engineer at the Morris Motors factory plant in Oxford. This would have been at least a two-hour train journey, so he had to wake up early to get to work. Morris Motors is extremely appropriate for the time as the late 1920s and 1930s included the growth of the automobile, even during the economic recession. As a project engineer, William would not have been one of the lower-class factory employees, but he would also not have been one of the higher-class, better educated, business directors. He would have earned a substantial salary, enough to place his family in the middle-class category so that his wife did not have to work. Arthur Exell, "Morris Motors in the 1930s. Part I," *History Workshop* 6 (Autumn, 1978): 52-78.

²² The Muswell Hill and Palace Railway Line opened under the authority of the Great Northern Railway in 1873. The price of Frances's ticket to Paddington Station would have fluctuated depending on the day and rates, which were not always constant. Also dependent on the exact day of this trip are whether or not Frances would have had to switch trains or not; construction and changing routes was a common phenomenon in the interwar period as Britain focused on its internal infrastructure. The trip would have likely taken at least one hour but likely no more than two. Mansion House Association on Railway and Canal Traffic, *Report on the Nine Railway (Rates and Charges) Order Confirmation Acts, 1891, 1891, 9, 37.*

²³ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, due to few employment opportunities available to women as men came back from WWI and regained their occupational posts, the only job opportunity available to most middle-class women was "domestic service [and they were subject to]...a cut in wages and a decline in working conditions." Until factories began to require women with the onset of WWII, positions as housemaids were most common, especially in the suburbs and rural areas of England. Frances would not technically have to work, since she is from a middle-class family; her desire for employment stems more from independence than necessity (as is obvious by her decision *not* to go into domestic service; less financially stable women would have been forced to seek domestic

Frances sighed and looked down at her clothes. Her green woolen skirt was shorter than her mother would have liked.²⁴ Frances felt slightly guilty for leaving before her mother could lay eyes on her appearance, but today was special. Green was Harold's favorite color, and he was always talking about her legs. They may be stocking-clad, but their shape was evident, and she was glad her shorter skirt showed them off.

Gazing idly at the seat beside her, Frances picked up last week's copy of the *Times*, probably left behind by a businessman on his daily commute. She opened the paper, and read the first article she saw: "Death of a Film Actress."²⁵ Frances's stomach sank as she read about Evelyn Grieg. Frances was not familiar with any of her films, but she shuddered as she read about the girl's death²⁶ from an abortion.²⁷ She closed the newspaper down on her lap. Was this a sign?

Biting her lip, Frances quickly thought through the arguments she had been making to herself all week. She was neither her mother nor her grandmother. Sex was a different thing then than it was now. Anyway, all Frances's friends talked about it. And it *was* Harold. Frances knew that he loved her more than anything, and she was sure of his plan to marry her upon graduation

employment). Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 116-117.

²⁴ According to Katina Bill's "Attitudes Towards Women's Trousers: Britain in the 1930s," the interwar period led to a significant change in women's dress, especially for middle class women in both Europe and America: "...skirts became shorter, clothes became lighter and less restrictive and bifurcated." Katina Bill, "Attitudes Towards Women's Trousers: Britain in the 1930s," *Journal of Design History* 6:1 (1993): 45.

²⁵ This article actually appeared in *The Sunday Times* in April 1929. "Death of a Film Actress," *The Sunday Times* [London, England] 14 Apr. 1929: 20, *The Sunday Times Digital Archive*, 1822-2006. I have, however, set it in September 1929 for fictional convenience. Despite the event occurring before the May 1929 enactment of the Infant Life Preservation Act, Grieg's death was still ruled as being due to an *illegal* abortion.

²⁶ Grieg died from septic poisoning after receiving an illegal abortion. "Death of a Film Actress," *The Sunday Times*.

²⁷ Septic poisoning was a common cause of death during illegal abortions. During 1929, 605 women died from deaths "attributed to or associated with abortion" in England and Wales. This was the highest number of deaths from 1928 until 1937. Ministry of Health-Home Office, *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Abortion* (London: HMSO, 1939), 6.

from medical school. So what did shagging²⁸ before marriage matter if they were to be married anyway?²⁹ She thought back to a pamphlet her best friend Dorothy had snuck out of her older sister's room.³⁰ It had included an essay written by a woman of whom Francis had never heard. But one part had especially stood out to her: "To me, the important task of modern feminism is to accept and proclaim sex..."³¹

Frances did not know much about feminism. Her mother preferred to stay indoors, write letters, and do needlepoint;³² neither her father nor her younger brother ever offered much opinion that Frances should do anything but follow in her mother's domestic footsteps. But Frances knew she could do more,³³ and if the first step was deciding to have sex before marriage, then so be it.

²⁸ During the 19th century, "shag" was coined as a slang term for "have sex" in England. The term grew in popularity during the early 20th century and remains part of British jargon today. Tom Dalzell and Terry Victor, eds., *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1972-73.

²⁹ During the inter-war period, both the Catholic Church and Anglican Church of England disapproved of premarital sex. However, many sex reformers (e.g. Marie Stopes) appealed to the Church of England as religion became less of a dominant influence upon regular English life and civil marriages increased in number. Other activists openly defied the Church and condemned its strict positions on human sexuality and premarital sex especially. Barbara Brookes, *Abortion in England, 1900-1967* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 13.

³⁰ In America, manuals including tips and explanations of sex were produced and targeted at the middle class; printing ideas of sexual pleasure and activity in these ways contributed to its normalization and perception as an activity of leisure in the 1930s. Michael Gordon, "From an unfortunate necessity to a cult of mutual orgasm: sex in American marital education literature, 1830-1940," *Studies in the sociology of sex* (Appleton-Century-Crofts: New York, 1971), 53-77. These pamphlets were likely either produced or distributed in England as well (especially in London), offering a new perspective for the younger generation.

³¹ This is an actual excerpt from Dora Russell's 1925 publication "Hypathia or Woman and Knowledge." Russell wrote the piece as a feminist response to Anthony Ludovici's 1925 *Lysistrata, or Women's Future and Future Women*. Dora Russell, *Hypathia or Woman and Knowledge* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925), 24-25.

³² In 1931, only 10.4% of married women participated in the labor force. Frances's mother, Margaret Adams, would not need to work due to her matriarchal status in a middle-class household. Without servants, Margaret's days would consist mainly of maintaining the house and performing domestic duties within her own suburban residence. Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England*, 211. Margaret is also an older married woman, so the movement of female employment in the late 1930s and early 1940s, which focused mainly on younger women, would have little impact on her. *Census of England and Wales 1931: Occupation Tables* (London: HMSO, 1934), Table 5.

³³ Frances was likely aware of and exposed to the increase in participation by women in terms of political issues. In May 1929, "Equal franchise for men and women became an accomplished fact...[and] women...gained a political majority over men." "Women's Political Majority," *Daily Mail Atlantic Edition* [London, England] 3 May 1929: 7, Daily Mail Historical Archive, 1896-2004. During the March 1930 Parliamentary Debates of the Ministry of Health, several women participated in the discussion. As Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Susan Lawrence not only did her duty of recording discussion and information, but she also participated in the

The train screeched to a halt at Paddington Station. Frances stepped onto the platform and immediately located Harold with his tall stature and red hair. He grinned at her, and she rushed towards him.

“I’ve missed you ever so much,” Frances exclaimed as soon as she reached him.

“As have I,” Harold responded, embracing her in the middle of the crowd.

Frances and Harold strode out of the station and onto the pavement alongside the busy road. Frances gripped his hand in hers. She was calm and measured on the outside, but her heart was racing with anticipation – and a slight knot of fear lay in the pit of her stomach.

“Harold,” she said. “Are you sure it will be okay? Nothing will – um – happen, right?”³⁴

Harold smiled. “It will be fine, Frances. Absolutely fine.”³⁵

They walked until they reached Harold’s residence hall.³⁶ He held open the front door for Frances and led her up to his bedroom.

conversation about maternal health and mortality. Likewise, Susan Rathbone, an Independent MP who took office in 1929 and known for her commitment to women’s rights, intervened in the discussion with opinions of her own. United Kingdom, Ministry of Health, 31 March 1930, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 237, cc983-1034.

³⁴ During this time, birth control options were indeed available to women. In the 1920s, the birth control movement was a widespread female activist campaign that sought to educate and provide options for women. However, for a middle class young women like Frances, the only options for obtaining methods of contraception were through “rubber shops and mail-order services [that] continued to provide devices, douches, pills, and potions that were not subject to any standards.” Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 79-80. This system would not necessarily be attractive nor easy to utilize for Frances. Additionally, the British government held conflicting views on birth control in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During a Ministry of Health meeting in 1930, Dr. Vernon Davies, an obstetrician and gynecologist, spoke to members of Parliament (MPs) about the topic of birth control and its relationship to the medical profession. Upon perceiving some support within Parliament for birth control, Davies said, “It is apparent from those cheers that there are some hon. Members opposite so misguided and so ignorant as to imagine that the Government should have power to ensure that their medical officers give advice on the subject. The competent medical opinion of the country is definitely opposed to birth control.” However, MP Rathbone responded to the assertions of Davies and several male MPs, saying, “the action of the Ministry in that matter is actually impeding the women of the country in getting the kind of information which they most desire, to enable them to control the conditions of their own maternity.” United Kingdom, Ministry of Health, 31 March 1930.

³⁵ Harold, a medical student, is representative of the new generation of medical professionals. However, his teachers and mentors are members of the 1920s profession, which was characterized by doctors [like Dr. Davies] who “remained reluctant to be associated with any methods of birth control.” Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 14. Therefore, Harold would not have known much on the subject of contraceptive measures besides the standard practice of preventing ejaculation during vaginal intercourse.

³⁶ Harold’s residence hall is based on a plan for a university hall to be built in Bloomsburg London in 1930 for students from overseas. Though Harold is British, he would be able to gain a place in this hall due to his status as a medical student in London, needing to be near the University College Hospital. Further relevant to his position as a

November 18, 1929

Frances was scared. It had been two months since her last period, since before *it* had happened. Harold had said it would be fine; he had promised, in fact. They had not performed the act, as her mother would say, since. But Frances could feel it. It was not just that she had not menstruated in eight weeks and felt sick every morning. Her body was changing.³⁷

November 25, 1929

Frances sat at her mother's writing desk, staring at a blank leaf of paper before her. She thought back to the day prior, when she finally confessed her secret fear to Dorothy. Shocked, Dorothy had been without words, and Frances tried to hold back tears of worry. Dorothy, however, was a sensible girl. In this way, she was a good balance for Frances's often rash and emotional decisions (Frances sighed, thinking that Dorothy would not have consented to a shag in the university hall on a Tuesday afternoon). Dorothy had rushed to her sister's papers and pulled out a leaflet.

It was an advertisement:

London Welcomes

resident in the hall is the presence of representatives from the Royal Colleges of Physicians and of Surgeons, under whose tutelage and mentorship, Harold is learning. "London House. A Student's Hall of Residence," *The British Medical Journal* 1: 3624 (1930): 1144.

³⁷ During the early 20th century, there were few conclusive chemical tests to prove pregnancy (none that a woman could acquire on her own without a doctor). Thus, signs of pregnancy were measured in physical signs such as breast enlargement and morning sickness (nausea). Thomas Watts Eden, *A Manual of Midwifery* (London: W.T. Keener & Company, 1908), 55-56.

the 1929 WORLD LEAGUE FOR SEXUAL REFORM CONGRESS³⁸

featuring essays and discourses by lecturers

Bertrand Russell, Norman Haire,

Dora Russell,³⁹ and Stella Browne⁴⁰

Topics of discussion including:

Marriage, Contraception, Fertility, and Abortion⁴¹

Dorothy pointed at the name “Stella Browne.” “You need to talk to her,” she exclaimed.

“Whatever it is, she will know how to help you.”⁴²

Frances clutched her stomach. “An abortion?”

Dorothy looked at her pointedly. “Frances. Your mother would have a fit if she knew you were,” she paused. “With child and not married,” she finished quickly.⁴³

³⁸ The 1929 World League Sexual Reform Congress was held at Wigmore Hall in London in September 1929. It was a gathering of philosophers, sexologists, and women’s rights activists from all over the world. “League For Sexual Reform.” *Times* [London, England] 9 Sept. 1929: 9. *The Times Digital Archive*.

³⁹ A “leftist reformer,” Dora Russell worked with gynecologist Norman Haire to organize the event. While Haire and other male lecturers tended to focus more on birth control and medical practice philosophies, women like Russell and Browne were more interested in driving forward the women’s reform movement and securing necessary rights. Abortion presided as a topic relevant to both parties’ interests. Ivan Crozier, “‘All the World’s a Stage’: Dora Russell, Norman Haire, and the 1929 London World League for Sexual Reform Congress,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12: 1 (January 2003): 17.

⁴⁰ Stella Browne was a feminist activist who focused on birth control and abortion rights. Haire was not fond of Browne, and he wanted to censor her paper from the Congress. Crozier, “‘All the World’s a Stage,’” 29. Browne, following the Congress, began to focus more on abortion activism, writing in a 1929 paper: “[t]o-day, however much the traditionalists twitter and the theologians roar, and the politicians wriggle, the ultimate right [to abortion] is about to succeed birth control as the main demand of feminism.” F.W. Stella Browne, “How the Fight Goes,” *New Generation* (October 1929): 113. The rivalry between Haire and Browne is representative of a wider conception of *who* led the abortion movement. Claims have been made that it developed from the philosophies of male sexologists and then was reformed through the practices and trials of male medical professionals. Farmer, “Feminists, Abortion and Sexuality in Britain,” 142. Brewer and Simms, “Abortion,” 389. However, other sources point more to the female activists and abortion recipients who championed the movement toward reform, citing women like Stella Browne as prime examples. Lesley Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne: Feminist and Free Spirit* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2011), 157. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 285.

⁴¹ Crozier, “‘All the World’s a Stage,’” 16-37.

⁴² In the 1920s, young women’s peers were likely to support and encourage abortions in the cases of unwanted pregnancies. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 34.

⁴³ While America a sexual revolution in the 1920s, social historians have largely concluded that Britain’s working-class remained conservative in its views on sexual before marriage. “These interpretations often focus on women, who are presented as fearful of pregnancy and social stigma, and restricted by sexual ignorance and inhibitions; hence it is argued that they viewed premarital sex as a dangerous, rather than pleasurable activity which

“You’re right, and anyway, I do know I’m not ready for a baby and don’t particularly want one. But I don’t know where, how...” Frances gulped. “What would I say to Harold?”

“Harold does not matter right now, Frances. *You* do,” Dorothy exclaimed.

So Dorothy found Stella Browne’s address in her sister’s directory, and she wrote it down for Frances. Frances did not know what to write, how to say it. An abortion? She had never *really* thought about abortions. She knew they happened, and she knew they could be deadly.⁴⁴ But her world had always seemed so separate from one of scary procedures and underground doctor networks. It was illegal⁴⁵ for crying out loud.⁴⁶

It was necessary now, though. She picked up her pen and began to write.

December 1, 1929

Frances hurried along the Maida Vale street until she reached a tall, detached home.⁴⁷

She was alone, not even electing to bring Dorothy with her on her mission. The quicker she did it, the less anyone would have to know about it, and she would hardly have to speak of it ever

ought to be avoided. Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113-114. While Frances was enlightened by feminist theory opposing such views, her mother would have been more steadfast in her traditional opposition to sexual intimacy before marriage.

⁴⁴ In a 1930 interim report, mortality due to abortion in England was recorded at 168 deaths. In the 1932 final report, it was recorded to be 410 deaths. James Young, “The part played by contraception and abortion,” *The Medical Press and Circular* (July 1937): 74.

⁴⁵ The Infant Life Preservation Act was enacted in England in May 1929. The Act stated that “any person who, with intent to destroy the life of a child capable of being born alive, by any willful act causes a child to die before it has an existence independent on its mother, shall be guilty of felony, to wit, of child destruction, and shall be liable on conviction thereof on indictment to penal servitude for life...” The Act, however, did stipulate that if the mother’s life was in physical danger, an abortion would not be considered a felony. *Infant Life Preservation Act*, 1929. c. 34 (Eng.).

⁴⁶ “For crying out loud” was a slang term that originated in England around 1924. Dalzell and Victor, *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary*, 316.

⁴⁷ The Maida Vale residence is based on a classified advertisement describing a large, 5-bedroom home in West London. “Multiple Classified Advertising Items.” *The Sunday Times* [London, England] 13 Jan. 1929: 26, *The Sunday Times Digital Archive, 1822-2006*.

again. Frances solidified this plan in her mind: after she got this bloody⁴⁸ procedure over with, she would never speak of it again.

Frances nervously knocked on the door of the residence. Almost immediately, the door was opened by a tall woman, wearing a pair of dark green slacks⁴⁹ and blue sweater.

“Frances? Come in, poppet,”⁵⁰ she said, quickly looking up and down the road, making sure Frances was alone.

Frances stepped timidly into the foyer.

“I am Maud Mitchell,⁵¹” the woman announced, leading Frances up a set of stairs, past a sitting room, and into a study. “I’ll be taking care of you and making sure you don’t leave here unless you are completely healthy. And this is Dr. Powell.”

A man sat in a chair before a desk. He wore spectacles and a stethoscope around his neck.

“Good afternoon,” he said gently. “I am Dr. Daniel Powell,⁵² and I will be performing the procedure today. I have the utmost respect for Miss Browne, and I am happy to help any friend of hers. I’m glad she sent you here.⁵³ Obviously, I assume that no one knows you *are* here nor *why* you are here.”

⁴⁸ “Bloody” became a regular feature in everyday slang and expletives after being featured in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, which was first performed in London in 1916. Dalzell and Victor, *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary*, 79-80.

⁴⁹ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, women’s trousers became acceptable and fashionably popular for women of various social standing. Bill, “Attitudes Towards Women’s Trousers,” 47.

⁵⁰ “Poppet” is a typical British form of endearment. “poppet,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc, 2003), 965.

⁵¹ Maud Mitchell was a woman who worked with Dr. Samuel Shields in providing illegal abortions to young women in early 20th century England. Mitchell would accept appointments, provide accommodation, and nurse women following the procedure. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 35.

⁵² Dr. Daniel Powell was an abortionist who had been acquitted of manslaughter twice and to whom “doctors...recommended their patients.” Due to his prominence in the underground abortion community (women from throughout England attended his 1938 funeral, and one client contributed £1,700 to his legal defense), it is likely that Stella Browne would have known of Powell and likewise referred women to him. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 35-36. I have chosen to replace Dr. Shields with Dr. Powell in terms of the partnership with Mitchell in order to better convey the sympathy and support exhibited by certain doctors, such as Powell, to their patients. Shields, on the other hand, had a slightly more marred history, issuing a false death certificate and lying about the cause after an illegal abortion on a woman became fatal. Madeleine Simmons, “Forty years back – abortion in the press,” in *Abortion Ten Years On* (London: Birth Control Trust, 1978), 10-11. I also wanted to emphasize the importance of women’s roles in facilitating illegal abortions, so I included Mitchell in this part of the narrative.

Frances swallowed nervously. “No, no one at all. Pleasure to meet you, and thank you,” she said softly. Her embarrassment and shame at being *here*, in *this* situation could not help but creep upon her features, tingeing her face a slight red.

Maud sensed Frances’s apparent discomfort and beckoned her into a bedroom across the landing.⁵⁴ She helped Frances lay down on the queen-size bed.

“Do you mind if I feel your stomach, Frances? I know you’re late on menstruation, but we do need to be sure,” Maud said in a calming voice.

Frances shook her head, and she moved her hands from where they protectively over her slightly swollen stomach.⁵⁵

Maud began to feel Frances’s abdomen, and she nodded her head, “Definitely pregnant, poppet.”⁵⁶

Frances lay still on the bed, her mind spinning and anxiety rising up in her throat. She wanted to scream, to run, to leave the house, to never think of this again. Most of all she wanted not to be alone. She swallowed nervously, thinking about what Harold would say if he knew where she was, *what* she was about to do –

⁵³ Browne likely knew of illegal abortionists due to her role as an activist. However further intimate knowledge of the underground networks of abortion likely came from experience. In the early 20th century, Browne underwent three early abortions herself. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 48.

⁵⁴ During the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s and 1940s, unsupervised “nursing homes” in London were current locations for illegal abortions. Many illegal abortionists operated out of these kinds of places, located in large residences, which came to light during convictions. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 65-66. Nursing homes or home hospitals, however, were controversial in the eye of the medical profession, and a 1927 act sought to better regulate their facilities and practices. Brian Abel-Smith, *The Hospitals, 1800-1948: A Study in Social Administration in England and Wales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 141-142.

⁵⁵ Though most women don’t show significantly at about eight weeks pregnant, the abdomen will feel firm and swollen, so pregnancy can be evident to those trained to see it. “8 Weeks Pregnant,” *What to Expect* (c.2016). <http://www.whattoexpect.com/pregnancy/week-by-week/week-8.aspx> (accessed 23 September, 2016).

⁵⁶ Hormone tests to determine pregnancy were developed in 1929 by German gynecologists Selmar Ascheim and Bernhard Zondek. Their method, known as the “A-Z test” was a bioassay test that could be performed in hospital laboratories. However, it involved the injections of the woman’s urine into a mouse; this was a complicated process obviously not accessibly to the majority of women and their doctors. Kristin Kelley, “The Ascheim-Zondek Test for Pregnancy,” *Embryo Project Encyclopedia* (September 12, 2010). <http://embryo.asu.edu/handle/10776/2078>. Thus, most pregnancies in the early 20th century were determined by missed periods and/or physical signs.

Dr. Powell entered the room. He smiled gently, “Frances, do you want me to explain the procedure to you before we begin?”

Frances shook her head vigorously. But the words that came out of her mouth surprised her. “Yes, please,” she said in a small voice.

“All right then, love,” Dr. Powell began. “I’m first going to give you some whiskey⁵⁷ to sip on. It will take your mind off the pain.”

“Pain?” Francis panicked. She had been so caught up in the fear of deciding to go through with the abortion that she had forgotten about the pain involved.

“It will hurt a bit,” Dr. Powell admitted. “Nothing like childbirth, but something similar to menstrual abdominal pain.”

Frances nodded slowly.

“Then I am going to insert spoon-shaped curette into the cavity of your uterus by way of your cervix.⁵⁸ It won’t be too painful because I am going to use warm water and alcohol to dilate your cervix beforehand.⁵⁹ With the curette, I will *very* gently scrape the walls of your uterus and remove the cell tissue from your body.⁶⁰ Then it will be over.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Anesthesia was not a widely-used abortion drug during this time period, due to the illicit nature of abortions and their locations outside of hospitals. Instead, doctors and abortionists often provided “alcohol, aspirin, or other mild analgesic” to their patients for the procedure. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 265.

⁵⁸ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 180-183. The curette was originally used as the primary tool for completing an abortion, as in Frances’s case. However, after WWII, vacuum aspiration became a more widely used technique and the curette was used only at the end of the procedure to scrape away any remaining fetal or placenta cells.

⁵⁹ Even today, doctors performing abortions use warm water-soaked sponges over the course of a few hours to dilate a cervix sufficiently. Another faster technique is inserting metal rods of increasing size into the vagina until the cervix has widened enough. “Suction Cutterage,” *Michigan Department of Health & Human Services* (c. 2016). http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-73971_4909_6437_19077-46301--,00.html (accessed 25 September 2016).

⁶⁰ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 180-181. According to the same source, “In Britain, this procedure belongs to the realm of the experienced illegal abortionist [a category in which Dr. Powell qualifies].” Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 265.

⁶¹ This process was widely used in Britain to provide for a quick recovery, and the goal was for patients to be able to leave as soon as the procedure was over. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 265.

Dr. Powell handed Frances a glass of whiskey. She took a sip and swallowed, feeling it like fire down her throat and to the pit of her empty stomach. Dr. Powell donned surgical gloves and placed a wet sponge between her legs.

Frances took another gulp of whiskey. Dr. Powell began the procedure.

December 2, 1929

Frances walked slowly along the pavement until she reached the coffeehouse. Her upper thighs ached, and her entire lower body exuded soreness and an acute sense of emptiness. She walked past the wide coffeehouse window, and through the glass, she could see Harold sitting at an empty table. His attention was slightly diverted; he was talking to a tall, young chap⁶² in a white doctor's coat at the table next to him. The lad⁶³ was someone Frances recognized from the fall university class dinner, a classmate of Harold who was doing his residency at St. George's Hospital⁶⁴ in Tooting.

As Frances walked through the door, she saw Harold's face change. His calm expression turned into one of confusion and then disbelief and finally, hurt as he turned from what his friend was saying met Frances's eyes upon hearing the bell above the door. He stared at her. His friend looked uncomfortable and turned around to his table, opening a folder of notes and immediately engrossed himself in their contents.

Frances sat.

⁶² "Chap" is a common English term used to designate any male figure. It first originated in the early 18th century, and it is still widely used today. Dalzell and Victor, *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary*, 316.

⁶³ "Lad" has a similar meaning to "chap."

⁶⁴ St. George's Hospital in Tooting was founded in the 18th century, and it served as a premier teaching hospital in England up until today. Many medical students trained at St. George's with teaching doctors on real patients. "About Us," *St. George's University Hospitals (NHS Foundation Trust)* (c. 2016) <https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/about/> (accessed 25 September 2016).

“Frances,” Harold began. “Jonathon has been working in Tooting.”

Frances, confused to that statement’s relevance, smiled quizzically. “Well that’s excellent for him,” she started.

“Frances,” Harold interrupted. “Do you know under whom Jonathon is training?” His voice was getting louder now, his eyes becoming more and more accusatory, yet wounded at the same time.

“Dr. Powell, Frances,” he managed. “Dr. Daniel Powell.”⁶⁵

“No,” Frances opened her mouth slightly. “No, it isn’t, it wasn’t, I don’t...”

“Jonathon had to bring round some files for Dr. Powell yesterday afternoon, Frances,” Harold said. “And he had to drop some at the home of Maud Mitchell.” He raised his voice, “And, tell me *why*, Frances, were you leaving the home of Maud Mitchell? Jonathan saw you as he was walking toward the house.”

Frances knew it was over. Harold knew too much about these doctors, and he knew all their students; he probably knew all about the underground abortion network. He knew who Dr. Daniel Powell was and what went on at the home of Maud Mitchell.

Harold’s voice cracked, “Why didn’t you tell me, Frances? It’s me. I would have helped you. I would have known what to do.”

Frances looked down at her hands. “I was afraid.”

Harold raised his eyes, now devoid of emotion. “Well a lot of fucking good that does us both now,” he snapped. “That was *our* decision, Frances. You are not the only one in this. I’m a doctor, for crying out loud. I know a hell of a lot more about this stuff than you do anyway!”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Dr. Powell lived and worked out of Tooting, London. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 35-36. It is highly likely that he was involved with staff and students at St. George’s, the primary hospital in the area.

⁶⁶ The medical profession and men in general during the early 20th century had ambiguous attitudes towards abortion. Many members of the medical profession abstained completely from being involved with the process or its

He stood up. “Goodbye, Frances.”

development, even from a philosophical or research-based position. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 14. Men, as a rule, were less likely to support young, unmarried women’s choices of abortions than their female peer counterparts. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 34. As a mixture of both ideologies, Harold’s reaction demonstrates not only his emotional shock, but also the most prominent perception of the day that women and their ideas and motives were still inferior to those of men and consultation with men regarding important matters, even those regarding women’s own *personal* health, was necessary.

CHAPTER II

January 6, 1932

Frances hurried along the pavement; it was so cold that she could see her breath in the crisp, winter air. The newsstands that she passed displayed grim headlines. She stopped to glance at an article in the *Financial Times*, describing the rising British unemployment rates as a result of the Great Depression and its subsequent effect on the trade market.⁶⁷ Frances knew that she was lucky that her family was still financially afloat, her father's job in the automobile industry safe,⁶⁸ but she empathized with those not so fortunate.

Frances sighed. The members of the ALRA had discussed the issue of the economy at its last meeting, worried about the subsequent rising illegal abortion rates.⁶⁹ Without any government action, however, there was little they could do to ensure safe abortions for the lower-class population and combat fatalities.

Her thoughts taking a more positive turn, Frances bounded up her front steps. She burst into her family's home⁷⁰ in Muswell Hill, eager to see Dorothy at last. Dorothy and Frances's mother, Margaret, were seated in the living room, enjoying a cup of tea and discussing Dorothy's new life in Scotland.

⁶⁷ This actual article appeared in the *Financial Times* and described the growing worries as America's Great Depression's impacts spread throughout Europe. "Industrials and Trade Depression," *Financial Times* [London, England] 4 Jan. 1932: [1]. *The Financial Times Historical Archive, 1888-2010*.

⁶⁸ The economic depression did not have as drastic an effect on southern Great Britain as it did on America, northern Great Britain, and Wales. "In the south-east of England where new light industries such as chemicals, electrical goods and automobiles had been developed, families were affluent. In fact, people with jobs benefited from the Depression because prices fell and they could buy more!" "The Depression of the 1930s," *BBC History* (c.2016). http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/britain/depressionrev_print.shtml (accessed 01 December 2016). Frances's father's job in the automobile industry, therefore, would likely have been safe as sales remained high in the southern area of Great Britain.

⁶⁹ According to Brookes, there was a marked increase in abortions by the mid-1930s than during the previous decade. This was due to the "post-war slump" and, notably, economic factors of the depression. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 9.

⁷⁰ Due to the economic climate of the early 1930s and Frances's status as unmarried, relatively young woman, it is plausible that she would live at her parents' home, as most young women did prior to marriage. Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England*, 55.

“And so Thomas has leave from work, does he?” Margaret Adams asked.

“Yes, the shipyard⁷¹ has given him the week off,” Dorothy replied lightly.

“Well, he is lucky he still has a job and given all the news in the papers...,” Margaret shifted her attention to Frances upon hearing the door.

Frances bounded toward Dorothy and hugged her tightly. She felt a sense of relief in Dorothy upon her arrival, and Frances suspected that her mother had been badgering her friend with nonstop questions since her recent arrival.

“Where have you been, Frances?” Margaret admonished. “Dorothy has come miles⁷² to see you, and you are nowhere to be found.”

“I’m ever so sorry, Mother,” Frances turned to Dorothy. “I was at a most interesting talk. Dora Russell and I – you remember her, don’t you? She is married to Bertrand Russell,⁷³ the philosopher! – anyway we attended a lecture by Lord Riddell at the opening of the Hampstead General and North-West London Hospital Post-Graduate School.⁷⁴ He spoke about abortion and judges and how we can change the law once and for all!”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Dorothy’s husband Thomas McCroy (a fictional character) works for the Stannergate Shipyard in Dundee, Scotland. Workers at the Stannergate Shipyard mostly manufactured passenger and cargo steamers, such as the 1463-ton *Royal Scot* in 1930. “Dundee Harbour News and Notes,” *Courier and advertiser* [Dundee, Scotland] 4 Mar. 1930: 3, *British Library Newspapers*.

⁷² The distance between Dundee and London is about 480 miles. Under the 1921 Railways Act, many British railway companies were grouped together and regulated, making travel throughout the UK more efficient and economical. *Railways Act*, 1921. c. 55 (Eng.). It integrated Scottish companies as well, making rail travel between England and Scotland more common and easier. *Railway Economics* (Taylor and Francis), 113.

⁷³ Bertrand Russell was a British philosopher, essayist, and social critic who was married to feminist activist Dora Winifred Russell. Andrew David Irvine, “Bertrand Russell,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/russell/> (accessed 12 October 2016). He was known in the abortion circles for his theory of an eventual vanishing family structure; he believed that “children should be seen as the property and concern of their mothers,” but if the state intervened, it upset this trend, and this could lead to a more stable population. Farmer, “Feminists, Abortion and Sexuality,” 143.

⁷⁴ This is today the North West Thames Foundation School located in Russell Square, in the northwestern area of London. “North West Thames Foundation School,” *Imperial College London* (c. 2016). <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/medicine/study/nwtfs/> (accessed 12 October 2016).

⁷⁵ This lecture by Lord Riddell actually occurred on January 6, 1932, at the opening of the Hampstead General and North-West London Hospital Post-Graduate School and was titled “Ethics of abortion, sterilization, and birth control.” In his speech, Riddell concluded, “It seemed highly desirable that the law should be altered, or that there should be an agreement between judges as to the principle on which these cases were dealt with. Parliament

Margaret rolled her eyes and released a sigh.

“Frances, it is simply not a Christian act,”⁷⁶ she protested vehemently. “I shudder just to think what would make one choose to do such a thing...killing a poor *baby*...” She shook her head.

Frances avoided looking at Dorothy. No one in her family was aware of her own procedure two years prior, and the only person who knew to this day, outside of the circle of her reformer friends and Dr. Powell, was Dorothy. She could never tell her mother; she feared the shame⁷⁷ that would inevitably follow the truth were Margaret to know.

Before Frances could launch into her typical tirade about a woman’s right to choose,⁷⁸ Dorothy stood abruptly. She made eye contact with Frances, and Frances understood.

“Let’s go up to my bedroom, Dorothy,” Frances beckoned her friend towards the stairs. “I want to show you my new *Nash*’s!”⁷⁹

was not likely to change the law without strong pressure from public opinion.” Ethics Of Abortion, Sterilization, And Birth Control: Address by Lord Riddell," *The British Medical Journal* 1: 3706 (1932): 106. Lord George Riddell was “an expert in medical jurisprudence and an eminent publisher.” Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 39.

⁷⁶ The Adams family members are Anglican and belong to the Church of England. The Church of England did not officially prohibit abortion as the Catholic Church did, but at the 1930 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, the attendees proclaimed, “[We abhor] the sinful practice of abortion.” The Lambeth Conference, *Encyclical Letter from the bishops with resolutions and reports* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), 43-44. Conversely the lack of official condemnation of abortion by the Church of England allowed room for the movement to develop, making abortion “more acceptable than in countries where the main churches did [officially] oppose it.” Scott A. Merriman, *Religion and the State: An International Analysis of Roles and Relationships* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009), 3. Because the Church of England was not united under a central, purely religious authority (like the Pope in Catholicism), there was no core prohibition of abortion. Nonetheless, many members relied upon their local Bishops or Anglican representatives for guidance, and they were likely to adhere to those individuals’ personal opinions. “What does a bishop do?” *Diocese of Oxford* (c.2016). <http://www.oxford.anglican.org/who-we-are/what-does-a-bishop-do/> (accessed 28 November 2016).

⁷⁷ Not everyone was receptive to the idea of abortion. Oftentimes the degree of acceptance would depend on the woman in question’s circumstances. Most likely to receive sympathy would be a single woman “pregnant through rape or incest.” Married women who were young and did not have any children already received the least amount of sympathy. Young, single women who became pregnant through voluntary sexual intercourse would likely “receive support from her peers if she sought an abortion, but not from those who frowned upon promiscuity.” Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 8.

⁷⁸ In the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, the feminist argument centering around abortion focused on the idea that “the fetus is not yet an independent human being and that every woman, by virtue of the right over her own body, is entitled to decide whether it shall become one.” George Riddell, *Medico-legal Problems* (H.K. Lewis, 1929) 35.

“Lovely to see you again, Dorothy,” Margaret called after the two friends. “Please tell your mother that we’ve missed her at bridge⁸⁰ the past few weeks.”

Up in her green and yellow-wallpapered bedroom,⁸¹ Frances sat on the edge of her bed and began searching in the stack of papers beside her for the copy of this month’s *Nash*. She did not notice Dorothy’s apparent discomfort, as she sat perched on Frances’s dressing table stool, until she looked up, having found the magazine.

Dorothy looked back at Frances, her green eyes full of tears. She placed her hand on her stomach and her voice cracked as she spoke.

“I’m pregnant, Frances,” she murmured. “About 24 bloody weeks, I think.”

Frances looked Dorothy up and down, unable to speak for shock. Now that she knew, Dorothy did look bigger, fuller. Her large, somewhat shabby cardigan covered any signs from her stomach, and Frances had barely noticed her friend’s weight.⁸² It was cold⁸³ outside, and she

⁷⁹ *Nash’s Pall Mall Magazine* was a wildly popular British fiction magazine that was published and distributed monthly. Mike Ashley, *Age of the Storytellers: British Popular Fiction Magazines, 1880-1950* (London: British Library, 2006), 129. The January 1932 issue included eight short stories, fourteen special features, which focused on describing travel in Russia, and two serials. Both male and female authors were included in the magazine, and it featured advertisements for World Cruises from England to the West Indies, West Africa, Spain, and the Mediterranean. *Nash’s Pall Mall Magazine* 88, no. 464 (January 1932): 2, 69.

⁸⁰ The game of bridge became popular in England during the 1930s, though it was developed by Americans. Carol A. Osborne and Fiona Skillen, *Women in Sports History* (London: Routledge, 2014), 56. Bridge clubs, in turn, became especially popular among middle-class women as a chance to socialize and play the game outside of the family sphere. Some bridge clubs even became quite competitive, and prizes were often available. “Frampton Cotterell Bridge Club,” *Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror* [Yeovil, England] 26 Feb. 1936: 4, *British Library Newspapers*.

⁸¹ Frances’s bedroom is inspired by a drawing of a 1930s bedroom in the United States. Because Frances lives in a relatively urban suburb of London, the room would likely be smaller than the US model but decorations and layout similar. “1930s Feminine Bedroom (Armstrong Cork Ad in Pictorial Review),” *Antique Home Style* (c. 2015). <http://antiquehomestyle.com/inside/color/30pr-bedroom.htm> (accessed 16 October 2016).

⁸² At 24 weeks pregnant, most women are noticeably showing their condition. The fetus, at that point, is usually about 12.5 inches long and weighs over one pound. “Pregnancy Week 24,” *American Pregnancy Association* (c. 2016). <http://americanpregnancy.org/week-by-week/24-weeks-pregnant/> (accessed 16 October 2016).

⁸³ In January 1948 (the earliest date for which historical weather data are available for London), the temperature ranged between about 8.9° C (48° F) and 3.3° C (37.94° F). It can be assumed that 16 years prior, the climate had not been drastically different, and the same general temperatures ranges would apply. “UK Climate – Historic data station: Heathrow (London Airport),” *MetOffice* (c. 2016). <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/pub/data/weather/uk/climate/stationdata/heathrowdata.txt> (accessed 16 October 2016).

thought that Dorothy had simply been trying to keep warm, having acquired more outerwear clothing after her move north to Scotland.

“I cannot keep it,” Dorothy began.

“Oh, Dorothy,” Frances started. “You don’t understand how hard –”

“Can you help me do it, Frances?” Dorothy interrupted, pleading.

“Are you sure? It isn’t,” Frances paused, “easy. It hurts quite a bit⁸⁴. And anyway, you and Thomas are married. No one would harbor any judgment against you for having a baby.⁸⁵ You have a flat.⁸⁶ Your husband loves you, and – ”

“Frances, we can’t afford a baby,”⁸⁷ Dorothy interrupted. “Thomas lost his job last week, and he’s been searching ever so hard for another, but there just aren’t any right now.⁸⁸ We tried to be careful, but...”⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Frances’s abortion was of the curette method, and she had no access to anesthesia, since it was not performed in an official hospital. Like many women, she was given only alcohol to numb the pain of the procedure. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 265.

⁸⁵ In fact, Dorothy would likely receive more judgment were she to choose an abortion. According to Brookes, “A married woman, particularly if she was young and childless, met less sympathy when faced with an unwanted pregnancy. Maternity was regarded as a responsibility of married life, even if a woman had been sexually coerced or experienced contraceptive failure.” Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 8.

⁸⁶ “Flat” is typically used to mean an apartment in the UK. Norman W. Schur. *British English A to Zed: A Definitive Guide to the Queen’s English* (Skyhorse Publishing Inc., 2013), 133.

⁸⁷ The Great Depression hit the US in 1929. The fall of the New York Stock Market had repercussions across the world, especially in the United Kingdom, having huge effects on industry in the North (e.g. Scotland shipbuilding). The Depression did not devastate the UK as much as it did the US, but “production, prices, investment, and profits [in England] fell rather more steeply.” H.W. Richardson, “The Economic Significance of the Depression in Britain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 4:4 (October 1969): 6. In Britain unemployment rose, income fell, and the need for abortions became more pronounced. In the United States, “The disaster of the Great Depression...brought about a new high in the incidence of abortion...[As a result of increased need,] the medical practice of abortion, legal and illegal, expanded during the 1930s. Physicians granted, for the first time, that social conditions were an essential component of medical judgment in therapeutic abortion cases.” Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 132. A similar trend occurred in England: “In 1934...following the economic depression, there were 100 inquests in Britain on women who had died after criminal abortions.” This number was extremely high in comparison with the years prior- and post-1934. Horden, *Legal Abortion*, 7.

⁸⁸ Shipbuilding in the northern part of the UK was an industry affected heavily by the economic depression. As of 1931, 75% of shipyard berths were empty, and “half of the workmen [were] unemployed.” “Shipbuilding Industry’s Parlous State,” *Financial Times* [London, England] 15 Apr. 1931: 7, *The Financial Times Historical Archive, 1888-2010*.

⁸⁹ Different contraceptive measures were being developed in the early 19th century. The most economical method was condoms. Condoms were modernized in the early 1930s, when they began being made from latex.

“I can help you,” Frances began. “I don’t make much money at the firm⁹⁰, but everything I have –”

“No, Frances!” Dorothy exclaimed. “It’s not just a matter of a few months. If I have this child, it will be my responsibility for the rest of my life. It’ll be bloody bills for decades and decades, and I just can’t do it!”

Dorothy fell to the ground, hard sobs causing her body to contract violently as she heaved against the wooden floorboards.

“What about your sister?” Frances inquired. “She is such good friends with Stella and Dora and Alice,⁹¹ and she is so swept up in the movement as well! Have you told her? I’m sure she knows the best place to go.”

“My bloody sister doesn’t understand,” Dorothy snarled. “To her, it’s a matter of philosophical thinking and civil liberty, but it’s my bloody life. I don’t want an abortion to prove my right to do so; I want one because I bloody need one!”⁹²

These contraceptive methods had a “failure rate of about three per HWY [or failure rate per hundred women years of exposure].” Horden, *Legal Abortion*, 47. Compared to contraceptive protection today, this is not a high success rate. Condoms cost about 10p-15p per dozen, and wages were only about £1 a week in the northern parts of the UK. Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870 – 1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984), 17.

⁹⁰ I am basing France’s employment with a “large food firm” on that of Dorothy Scannell, a middle-class woman living in London during the interwar period. Scannell got the job by chance; usually it required knowing someone in the industry for a woman of her status and young age to be employed, but there had happened to be an unfilled opening. In her memoir, Scannell described being paid a “plum wage” but the office was like having to work in “a hot damp cellar.” Her work consisted primarily of processing invoices, and she considered it to be quite boring. Dorothy Scannell, *Mother Knew Best: Memoirs of a London Girlhood* (London: Pantheon Books, 1975), 180-181.

⁹¹ Frances is referring to Alice Jenkins, another feminist reformer who rotated in the same circles as Stella Browne and Dora Russell. She eventually became Secretary of the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) and worked with Browne to “break the silence on abortion by letters to the press and by raising the issue at conferences.” Brooke, *Abortion in England*, 89.

⁹² Dorothy’s outburst is demonstrative of a conflict in the abortion reform narrative. Though some elitist reformers (Stella Browne, for example) did undergo abortions, many simply adopted the reform movement under the general feminist cause. Brooke asserts, “...abortion reform in interwar Britain had distinctive qualities. It compromised a more complex language, bringing together different vocabularies of femininity toward the aim of legalizing abortion. Abortion advocacy did demand a public recognition of a woman’s private right to control her body. But it also drew on a more established vocabulary of women’s roles, specifically that of maternalism.” Brooke, “‘A New World for Women?’,” 439-440. Dorothy and Frances, however, represent the experiences and

“Okay,” Frances conceded. “I know where we can go.”

Dorothy gazed up, her tear-stained face glinting in the sunlight that crept in Frances’s window.

“How much will it cost?” she managed to ask.⁹³

Frances reached out to Dorothy and enveloped her in a hug.

“I know where we can go for no charge,” she murmured, holding her best friend closely.

“But just to confirm: you *are* sure, Dorothy?”

“Absolutely so,” Dorothy said definitively.

Frances thought back to her own biggest mistake years ago. She had no regrets about the abortion itself, but she did wish to go back and change one thing.

“Have you told Thomas?” she ventured.

“Yes,” Dorothy nodded. “He knows, and he said that if it’s what I want to do, then we’ll do it.”⁹⁴

January 13, 1932

necessity associated with abortion for many middle-class women. Far from the elite essays of the highly-educated Browne and Russell, Frances and Dorothy are examples of the women who sought out abortions because they *had* to do so, not because they were choosing to exercise their personal rights as women. The analysis of the abortion reform movement (for more examples, see Malcom Potts’s *Abortion*, Ann Farmer’s “Abortion and Sexuality in Britain: An Historical Perspective,” or Ivan Crozier’s “‘All the World’s a Stage’: Dora Russell, Norman Haire, and the 1929 London World League Sexual Reform Congress”) focuses heavily on the legal reform activism by elite women, and it does not lend much thought to the experiences and hardships faced by the everyday women who obtained illegal abortions.

⁹³ Typically, a standard illegal abortion by an experienced abortionist in Britain cost around £50-£75 in the 1930s. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 66.

⁹⁴ In the United States, Reagan asserts, “Although it was unusual for husbands to be as involved as many boyfriends were in their sweethearts’ abortions, some men supported their wives’ plans to have abortions or helped them find abortionists.” Reagan, *When Abortion was a Crime*, 34. This was especially true during the financial burdens of the Great Depression. Even though this source describes the United States, where the financial effects of the Great Depression were much harsher than in the United Kingdom, Thomas’s job in the shipbuilding industry was heavily impacted by the economic state of the nation, making this assertion plausible. Thomas’s support of Dorothy’s desire to get an abortion therefore rests heavily on the economics of the situation, as well as her personal health and preference.

As Frances entered the tall, Maida Vale home in west London, she could not help but shudder as she thought back to the fear and trepidation that had clouded her last visit. She followed Maud Mitchell into the sitting room, and she accepted her offer of a cup of tea. Neither Dorothy nor Dr. Sasun was anywhere to be seen. Frances had hoped to leave her friend with the trusted Dr. Powell, but Maud had informed her that he had moved on to a different area, after facing several legal charges for his illegal procedures in London.⁹⁵

Frances looked anxiously at the delicate silver watch around her wrist.⁹⁶ It had been over four hours since she had left Dorothy here, in the capable hands of Maud and Dr. Sasun.

“Is everything okay?” Frances questioned Maud, her mouth hovering above the hot cup of tea in her hand.

“Ah yes, I’m sure it is,” Maud responded lightly. “Just some minor complications with the procedure, last I heard.” She sighed. “We’ve had quite a few more girls in the past few months than last year.”⁹⁷

Frances was silent. After her own abortion, she had become increasingly involved in the legalization movement⁹⁸; however, it was her first time being thrown into the actual events of the

⁹⁵ I have chosen to replace Dr. Daniel Powell, who performed Frances’s abortion, with Dr. Devi Sasun as being in partnership with Maud Mitchell two years later. Neither Powell nor Sasun ever actually worked with Mitchell; she worked with Dr. Samuel Shields to provide a place and nursing care for women seeking abortions. However, for the sake of fictional convenience, I have merged their stories. Powell was twice acquitted of manslaughter for his performance of illegal abortions. One of his patients even paid the cost of his legal fees because she was so grateful to him. Due to Powell’s legal problems, it is believable that he would not have continued performing illegal abortions in the same place for an extended period. Sasun “was a well-known panel doctor in London’s East End who attended over 3,560 patients. He performed abortions for between five and ten guineas [because of Frances’s connections in the abortion world, she was able to secure one for Dorothy for free].” He served many working-class patients, so it is likely that he attended women like Dorothy. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 35.

⁹⁶ Women’s wristwatches became very popular in the 1930s. They were more statement accessories than practical timekeeping tools, but they could tell time generally well. Wayne Hemingway and Geraldine Hemingway, *The Vintage Fashion Bible: The Complete Guide to Buying and Styling Vintage Fashion from the 1920s to 1990s* (David & Charles, 2015), 48.

⁹⁷ Again, this is due to the data discussed by Brookes regarding increased abortion rates in the mid-1930s. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 9.

⁹⁸ The abortion reform movement would not enter its mode of full swing until the mid 1930s, but in 1932, women like Browne and Russell were writing and publishing influential articles, making philosophical arguments

procedures themselves in two years. She had been so caught up in the philosophy and elite ideas of women's rights that she had forgotten about the pain, tension, nerves, and general cold feeling of necessity that surrounded the procedure itself.

Suddenly Frances heard a door close upstairs, and Dr. Sasun came running down the steps and into the sitting room. By the time he arrived, his face was tinged green with apparent worry.

"What? What's happened? Where is Dorothy?" Frances rushed to her feet.

Dr. Sasun did not answer. He looked quickly at Maud, whose face mirrored Frances's concern.

"Blood poisoning,"⁹⁹ he said quickly. "Come upstairs, please. Quickly."

Maud followed Dr. Sasun up to the landing, moving with a high sense of urgency. Frances followed.

In the bedroom that Frances remembered from two years prior, she saw Dorothy. A white sheet, stained with blood, covered her from the head down, and she lay motionless. Frances began to cry out, and Maud reached for her shoulder, steadying her.

"You cannot do anything now," Maud said softly.

about feminism and the right to abortion. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 212. Discussing these efforts by Browne, Brooke claims, "The radicalism of the abortion campaign of the 1930s can also be seen in the question of control and autonomy." Brooke, "'A New World for Women?'" 442. This, again, asserts the idea that early abortion reform in England was less focused on practicality and necessity, but it was more so concerned with self-determination and defying limitations.

⁹⁹ Blood poisoning and hemorrhages were common risks of curette-style abortions until the development of sulphonamides in the mid 1930s. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 41. Sulphonamides are "a class of organic compounds that are amides of sulphonic acids, some of which...act as powerful inhibitors of bacterial activity, although bacteria have become increasingly resistant to them." "sulphonamide," *The Medical Dictionary* (c. 2005). <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/sulphonamide> (accessed 17 October 2016). They were discovered in 1935 by Gerhard Domagk, and then used in conjunction with abortions to prevent bacterial infection/poisoning. C. Jesman, A. Mluszik, and M. Cybulska, "[History of antibiotics and sulphonamides discoveries]," *US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health* (c. 2011). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21675132> (accessed 17 October 2016).

“Are you sure?” Frances turned to Dr. Sasun, her voice breaking and tears beginning to flow.

Dr. Sasun nodded, his face and eyes heavy.¹⁰⁰

“You should leave, Frances,” Maud urged. “If this is found out...”

“She’s my bloody *best* friend,” Frances burst out. “I can’t just *leave*.”

“You have to,” said Dr. Sasun. He looked around urgently. “We all have to. As soon as possible!”¹⁰¹

He started for the door.

“But what about Dorothy?” Frances was hysterical. “Her body...”

“Dr. Sasun and I will handle it,”¹⁰² Maud responded. “Frances, I know it’s difficult – I know more than you could ever imagine – but if you don’t leave, and we don’t take care of this right away, we won’t be able to keep offering abortions. We won’t be able to help any more women.”

Frances swallowed, looked into the still eyes of her best friend, and walked down the stairs and out the door.

January 16, 1932

¹⁰⁰ Dorothy’s death from an illegal abortion performed by Sasun is based on the actual death of Elsie Wright in London in 1920. “Coroner Inquiries into Archway Mystery,” *Evening Telegraph and Post* [Dundee, Scotland] 18 Feb. 1920:3, *British Library Newspapers*. I have chosen this specific doctor and date, though not accurate with the fictional account, because of the location of the abortion and subsequent criminal trial of Dr. Sasun.

¹⁰¹ In 1932 abortion was still illegal under the 1929 Infant Life Preservation Act. Because Dorothy’s life was not in immediate danger due to her pregnancy, the abortion would be considered a criminal offense. *Infant Life Preservation Act*, 1929. c. 34 (Eng.).

¹⁰² In reality, Sasun brought Wright’s body into the archway, and then he later told a police officer that the woman was passed out drunk (she was in fact dead). The police officer reported speaking to Sasun after the doctor alerted him of the body on the London street, but after he and his team began to examine Wright’s body, Sasun disappeared into the crowd. “Coroner Inquiries into Archway Mystery,” *Evening Telegraph and Post*.

Frances stared at the evening's paper. The headline tore into her heart: "Coroner Inquires into Archway Mystery." The article detailed the finding of a young woman under an archway on a London Street. The young woman was dead.¹⁰³ The doctor was to be investigated. There would be a trial.¹⁰⁴

But all Frances could think about was Dorothy, and now she was gone.

February 17, 1936

Seated around a small table, Frances took in her company in the well-furnished Chelsea¹⁰⁵ flat. To her left, sat Stella, and beside her, Dora perched on a cushioned stool. Alice sat on the other side of Frances, and they were all slightly turned to face the remaining two women. Joan Malleson¹⁰⁶ and Janet Chance¹⁰⁷ smiled at the rest of the group, turned to one another, and both began to speak at the same time. Laughing, Janet indicated that Joan should speak first.

"Ladies," Joan began. "It is so lovely to have you all here today. Thank you all for bringing your influence and your passion to our reform movement."

¹⁰³ The actual article that Frances is reading appeared in the *Evening Telegraph and Post* in Scotland in 1920. "Coroner Inquiries into Archway Mystery," *Evening Telegraph and Post*. However, because the actual event with Elsie Wright took place in London, it is not far-fetched that Frances would read about it in the paper in London. The date has been changed as a matter of fictional convenience, as the similar methods of abortion procedures continued from 1920 until 1932. Likewise, the same risks applied in 1932 as in 1920 before the development of sulphonamides.

¹⁰⁴ Dr. Sasun was tried in 1920 and sentenced to ten years of penal servitude. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 35. Because Frances left the premises almost immediately, and my fictional Dr. Sasun does not mention her presence and role in helping facilitate the abortion to the authorities, Frances is safe from any criminal investigation.

¹⁰⁵ Browne is known for having lived in Chelsea in southwest London from the early 1910s and throughout the 1930s. The area was "rather socially mixed," and it was in this environment that Stella's social activism developed and flourished. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Joan Malleson was "a doctor specializing in contraception and sex education [who] called a meeting of those who supported legalized abortion [in February 1936]." She was known for publishing *The Principles of Contraception* in 1935. Brookes, *Abortion Law Reform*, 94.

¹⁰⁷ Janet Chance was a "wealthy woman with influential friends," who eventually became the first chairman of the ALRA. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 285.

“Thank *you*, Joan,” Janet interrupted. She turned to the rest of the group, already seeming to take charge. “It is so valuable to have an actual physician’s input, instead of just us philosophical *thinkers*.”

The ladies began to talk amongst themselves, and amongst the group, elected positions were decided. Janet became chairman, and Stella was chosen as vice-chairman. Alice was appointed to secretary, and she began to take notes as the meeting progressed.¹⁰⁸ Eventually the women¹⁰⁹ began to discuss political motive.

“Restricting abortion – to me –,” Stella began, “is a survival of the veiled face, of the barred window and the locked door, burning, branding, mutilation, stoning, of all the grip of ownership come down on woman, thousands of years ago.”¹¹⁰

“I wholeheartedly agree,” Frances addressed Stella and the other women. “However, I think it also very important that we consider the economic reasons for an abortion. How can we provide some immediate relief to those women who do not just choose to have the procedure, but *need it*?”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ These are the actual positions and women who filled them. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 94. Also important was the Executive Committee, which was made up only of women, and included Frida Laski, Dora Russell, Berthe Lorsignol, and Beryl Henderson. The initial meeting took place on January 25, 1936, and positions were decided on February 17, 1936, but for the sake of fictional convenience, I have chosen to merge the meetings into one. “Executive Committee Minutes,” 24 January 1936, and 17 February 1936, *ALRA Archives*, CMAC.

¹⁰⁹ While the ALRA would eventually grow to include men, it was established by only women in the winter of 1936. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 285.

¹¹⁰ During the ALRA Conference in May 1936, Browne said, did indeed describe restricting the rights to abortion as the “survival of the veiled face, of the barred window and the locked door, burning, branding, mutilation, stoning, of all the grip of ownership come down on woman, thousands of years ago.” “ALRA Conference,” 15 May 1936, Bound, *ALRA Archives*, CMAC. I have chosen to use it in this initial meeting, however, because it accurately captions her passion towards abortion and the sense of philosophical injustice she felt at its restriction under English law.

¹¹¹ This argument would eventually form one of the bases for the ALRA’s reform policy, and it was broadened to relate to the idea that involuntary parenthood was often worse for the entire family, including the unborn child in question. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 94. The argument that Frances poses (though as a fictional character, she was certainly not present at the real meeting to discuss these ideas) also is one that resonated widely with the ALRA. Though these ideas were not as popular as the political ones amongst its leadership, during a later conference in May 1936, the group made a significant effort to include working-class women and their perspectives in their panels and reform objectives. “ALRA Conference,” 15 May 1936, Bound, *ALRA Archives*, CMAC.

Stella nodded, almost halfheartedly. It was as if the concept of the cold truths behind abortion disappointed her in comparison to romantic proclamations of political agency.¹¹²

“And of course, we must consider the Soviets and their exemplary progressive thinking,”¹¹³ she reminded the group.

Frances thought she sensed a slight sigh of resignation travel through the room. As Stella began her political tirade about the benefits of Communism, Frances could feel more and more women become uncomfortable.¹¹⁴

The group became increasingly animated on the subject of politics and the philosophies behind the abortion campaign. As the women began trading interpretations back and forth, Frances found herself sinking slowly into herself. She tried to apply her friends’ lofty thinking to her own situation, but she just found their naivete¹¹⁵ incompatible with her own reality.

As she looked around, she could not help but think of Dorothy – the reason she was even here. Years had not numbed Frances’s grief. All she desired was to help women like her closest friend access safe abortions without facing fatal consequences.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Browne was clearly a champion of asserting women’s rights to abortion; however, she was not in touch with the lower class and its economic necessities. Despite Browne’s personal experience with abortion, she chose to focus her speeches and essays on the political ideologies behind the right to terminate a pregnancy. She did certainly emphasize the practical components of abortion and statistics relating to maternal mortality, but this was not her primary focus. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 147.

¹¹³ The USSR legalized abortion under Lenin in 1920. Abortion remained legal in the USSR until June 1936 when it enacted new, restrictive measures on abortion. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 65. Jenkins and Chance would go on to write about the new law, condemning both the USSR and England for restricting the rights of women. Brookes, *Abortion Law Reform*, 95.

¹¹⁴ Browne considered herself sympathetic to Communism, and she was very vocal in her support of the USSR, its government, and its policies regarding abortion. Browne was once a member of the Communist Party, but she left in the 1920s during the debate within the party about a woman’s right to control her own body. Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight Against It* (Pluto Press, 1997), 154. However, the ALRA was not necessarily united behind this Communist philosophy. In fact, “Browne often embarrassed her own supporters” by overly emphasizing Communism and its relationship to the abortion reform campaign in England. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 285-286.

¹¹⁵ Browne was one of the women involved with the ALRA who actually had multiple abortions. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 48. However as a fairly wealthy woman and one who chose abortions not out of necessity but for personal liberty, her experience was likely much different than those of Frances and Dorothy.

¹¹⁶ Because of the illegal nature of the abortions being performed in England during this time period, it was difficult for contemporary figures to retrieve exact statistics about the prevalence of the relationship between

But as Frances sat listening to the chatter about Communism, eugenics,¹¹⁷ the next meeting,¹¹⁸ and even the gossip surrounding the king,¹¹⁹ she could not help but wonder: Was this the right place? Could this group of women even have an impact on the harsh realities of those so far removed from themselves?

maternal mortality and abortion procedures. It was in 1936 that Parliament, led by Minister of Health Sir Kingsley Wood, began considering “setting up a Royal Commission to inquire into the operation and results of the present law relating to abortion, with a view to its reform” in the form of the Birkett Committee. United Kingdom, *Maternal Mortality*, 24 November 1936, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 318, cc232-3.

¹¹⁷ “Eugenics” is “a science that deals with the improvement (as by control of human mating) of hereditary qualities of a race or breed.” “eugenics,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc, 2003), 430. When discussing Browne and Dora Russell, Farmer specifies that prior to their involvement in the birth control and abortion movements, the women “had a first allegiance to eugenics and population control.” Farmer, “Feminists, Abortion, and Sexuality,” 141.

¹¹⁸ The ALRA began to meet regularly after their initial establishment; at the very least, its members convened monthly as evidenced by entries in Russell’s personal diary and day planner. Dora Winifred Russell, Inv.nr. 2/7, 1936, *Dora Winifred Russell Papers*, International Institute of Social History.

¹¹⁹ King Edward VIII became King of England in January 1936. He abdicated the throne in December 1936 in order to marry Wallis Simpson, an American divorcee. Their relationship was a source of gossip during his reign, and his eventual abdication caused a scandal in England at the time. “Grave Fears of Abdication To-day,” *Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror* [Yeovil, England] 10 Dec. 1936: 12. *British Library Newspapers*.

CHAPTER III

December 13, 1937

Frances was anxious. She sat on the bench in Hyde Park,¹²⁰ bundled up in her new, green overcoat.¹²¹ The inside was lined with fur, but Frances could still feel the biting December chill¹²² as she became more and more impatient.

“Frances?” A woman sat down beside her.

“Mrs. Thurtle?” Frances exclaimed, sitting up straighter. “It’s a pleasure to meet you finally.”

“Oh do call me Dorothy,” the woman¹²³ smiled.

Frances felt a pang upon hearing the familiar name on a stranger’s lips, but she quickly collected herself.

“Thank you for meeting me here,” Frances began. “I feel sometimes as if your work, you – you are the only one truly representing us¹²⁴ out there on the Committee.”¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Hyde Park is a famous park in central London. The bench upon which Frances is waiting is based upon a photograph of one of the park’s benches. Michele Bergh, “Hyde Park Bench,” *Michele Bergh Photography* (c. May 2011). <https://michelebergh.wordpress.com/2011/05/02/london-england-may-2010/hyde-park-bench/> (accessed 5 November 2016). During the interwar period, better transportation developed around the park, making it a convenient meeting space for Londoners. Lindsey German and John Rees, *A People’s History of London* (Verso Books, 2012), 201.

¹²¹ Frances’s overcoat is based upon a 1936 image depicting contemporary overcoat fashions for women. The coats are of varying lengths, but generally appear thick and lined with fur for increased warmth. Due to it being December, Frances’s coat is likely one of the longer ones, hitting just above her knees. “Les Grand Modeles No. 39a – 1936,” *Retrowaste* (c. 2015). <http://www.retrowaste.com/1930s/fashion-in-the-1930s/1930s-fashion-for-women-girls/> (accessed 5 November 2016).

¹²² In December 1948 (the earliest date for which historical weather data is available for London), the temperature ranged between about 8.8° C (48° F) and 3.8° C (37.94° F). It can be assumed that 11 years prior, the climate had not been drastically different, and the same general temperatures ranges would apply. “UK Climate – Historic data station: Heathrow (London Airport),” *MetOffice* (c. 2016). <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/pub/data/weather/uk/climate/stationdata/heathrowdata.txt> (accessed 5 November 2016).

¹²³ Dorothy Thurtle was a member of the Birkett Committee. She was a working-class woman, Labour politician, and the wife of Edward Thurtle, who was a vice-president of the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA). Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 73.

¹²⁴ Not only was Thurtle a working-class woman, but she was also seen as an “outsider” on the Birkett Committee. Most other members were doctors and wealthy women, many of whom were married to male politicians. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 73. Thurtle is also described as “the one radical member [of the committee].” Jane E. Hodgson, ed., *Abortion and Sterilization: Medical and Social Aspects* (Academic Press, 2014), 61.

Dorothy smiled softly. “It isn’t an easy opinion to have in the midst of such caution,” she said thoughtfully. “But I truly do believe that criminal abortions are happening all the time,¹²⁶ and the only thing we can do is make it safe for women!”

“Right you are,” Frances responded. “And I am just so glad that you are on the committee. It feels as if you are a sort of representative for the ALRA. Not just the ALRA in fact...” she paused. “Stella, Dora, Jane, and all the rest mean so well,¹²⁷ but they don’t *actually* understand the plight of the common woman.”

“I’m doing my best,” Dorothy smiled wanly. “But they’re a hard crowd all right.”¹²⁸

Frances clasped Dorothy’s hand in her own.

“Please know,” she began. “Whatever you need from us at the ALRA – evidence, statistics, testimony – we will provide¹²⁹; I’ll facilitate it. Just please let me know.”

¹²⁵ The Birkett Committee was established by the joint Home Office and Ministry of Health Interdepartmental Committee in May 1937. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 73. The Committee was set up as an Inquiry initiative in response to the 1937 *Report on Maternal Mortality*; its goal was to investigate the influence and effects that abortion was having on maternal mortality and morbidity. The eventual solutions that the Committee recommended, however, “were determined by the suggestions of experts whose language and opinions they respected and understood and not by the opinion of the average woman.” Barbara Brookes, *Abortion in England, 1900-1967* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 105-107.

¹²⁶ “[Thurtle] believed that criminal abortion was very much more prevalent than the committee’s cautious estimates.” Hodgson, *Abortion and Sterilization*, 61. Thurtle’s belief in the prevalence of illegal abortions contributed to her work within the Birkett Committee and strong relationship with the women and doctors of the ALRA.

¹²⁷ Though the ALRA was made up of mostly doctors and elite women at this point in time, it is important to note that the members did recognize and advocate for the rights of working-class women. The group described working-class women, in fact, as “the most important section of experience and opinion in this country.” ALRA Memorandum, Ministry of Health (MOH)71/21, PRO. Women like Thurtle were monumental in helping advance this perspective within the Parliamentary reform procedures. So, while Frances still finds it hard to relate to elite women like Stella Browne and Dora Russell, Thurtle offers an example of a real working-class woman who was a pivotal part of the legal reform campaign in Britain.

¹²⁸ According to Brookes, “The Birkett Committee could agree with the ALRA’s points that abortion was induced for reasons of necessity and that evils arose from the operation being forced underground... The problems the Committee foresaw involved questions of individual morality, medical freedom, and national welfare.” Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 121.

¹²⁹ The ALRA often provided evidence and testimony during the Committee’s inquiries. Dr. Joan Malleeson, for example, spoke to the Committee about public health figures in 1937. She demonstrated how the statistics contributed to a growing concern for maternal mortality and its relationship to illegal abortions. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 75. In addition, Malleeson and Browne both gave evidence to the Committee regarding the situation in the Soviet Union in terms of abortion legalization. Malleeson spoke of traveling to the USSR and her assertion that there was a significantly “low mortality rate and a morbidity rate that was scarcely greater than that from childbirth.”

Dorothy smiled. “I understand,” she responded. “Please keep doing what you have been, and with people like you, we will change the law.”

Big Ben¹³⁰ struck the hour, and Dorothy gathered herself and stood.

“I’ll see you next month,” she said. “It’s going to be a bloody tough session in January, but your support will be warmly received.”

With an encouraging smile, she turned and strode towards the sounds of the bells.

January 26, 1938

Frances folded and unfolded her hands in her lap. She had never been anywhere so formal, and it was her first time being present at an actual Committee hearing. Joan, seated next to her on another dark green, padded chair, was more at ease. This was not her first session, and today she was not under the stress of having to present evidence.¹³¹

The wood-paneled walls of Committee Room 15 were illuminated by the simple, but elegant chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. The members of the Birkett Committee were seated in a horseshoe fashion in the middle of the room.¹³²

Browne backed up Malleeson’s on-the-ground experience by emphasizing the safety of the procedure itself. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 122.

¹³⁰ Big Ben is London’s famous clock tower. The clock is part of the Elizabeth Tower, which is located “at the north end of the Houses of Parliament.” It chimes every hour, and it can be heard throughout London. “Big Ben,” *UK Parliament* (c. 2016). <http://www.parliament.uk/BigBen> (accessed 07 November 2016).

¹³¹ As previously stated, Malleeson was often present at Committee hearings, providing evidence and testimony on behalf of the ALRA (which she founded in 1936). Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 122; Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 75.

¹³² The description of Committee Room 15 comes from an online interactive tour of the Lower Waiting Hall of Parliament in London. The current design and layout of the Committee Rooms have changed little since the early 20th century according to the website. Obviously, the technological elements since added to the room (as shown in the virtual tour) would not have been there in 1938. “Committee Room 15,” *Parliament* (c. 2016). <http://www.parliament.uk/visiting/online-tours/virtualtours/committee-rooms/> (accessed 09 November 2016). In my correspondence with Dr. Barbara Brookes of the University of Otago (author of the aforementioned *Abortion in England, 1900- 1967*) via email on November 9, 2016, she asserted the following: “I think you could imagine that the Inquiry took place in a Committee Room in Parliament. I think (from memory) that people were invited to offer statements of their points of view and then asked questions (or cross-examined) by members of the Committee.” I have no specific reason to believe that the Inquiry took place in Committee Room 15, but as one of the prominent Committee Rooms, it is certainly feasible as the location, and I can find no evidence asserting otherwise.

Sir Norman Birkett¹³³ opened the proceedings, stating the purposes of the committee and bowing the usual respects to the rest of Parliament and the King.¹³⁴

Frances turned her attention to the day's people of interest, seated in a line before the group of Committee members.¹³⁵ The National League for Life's¹³⁶ Dr. F.J. McCann¹³⁷ and Dame Louise Mallory¹³⁸ sat side by side towards the front of the room. Near them sat Dr. Mary Cardwell¹³⁹ and Mrs. Kemball,¹⁴⁰ both of the Union of Catholic Mothers.¹⁴¹

Dorothy rose and began the hearing with her usual question.

“This Committee has been set up to consider ways and means of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity arising from abortion. If all abortion attempts now being carried out in

¹³³ Norman Birkett was a judge who chaired the Birkett Committee. At the time, he was Sir Birkett and would later become Lord Birkett. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 286.

¹³⁴ In December 1936, following the abdication of King Edward VIII, his brother became King George VI after assuming the throne. “Royal Assent Given to Abdication Bill,” *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 11 Dec. 1936:1, *British Library Newspapers*.

¹³⁵ The location of these people in the room is based on the set-up as indicated by the aforementioned virtual tour of Committee Room 15. “Committee Room 15,” *Parliament*.

¹³⁶ The League of National Life was a Roman Catholic organization founded in 1925. Its membership also included Anglican English men and women. “Its aims were: ‘to promote family life, to stop the adoption of a national municipal policy of birth control and to uphold the honour and blessing of parenthood.’” Rose Knight, Madeleine Simms, Ann Kingsburg, Raewin Stone, Gwyn Vorhaus, and Eileen Fairweather, “No Right to Choose,” *Feminist Review* 4 (1980): 62-63. “

¹³⁷ McCann was a Roman Catholic gynecologist who represented the League of National Life. Knight, “No Right to Choose,” 63.

¹³⁸ Mallory was an Ulster Protestant and “the leading woman doctor of her day.” She considered abortion to be an example of extreme moral laxity. Knight, “No Right to Choose,” 63.

¹³⁹ Cardwell was a Catholic doctor who was very involved with her faith and acted as a local secretary for the Catholic Medical Guild of St. Luke, St. Cosmas, and St. Damian. “Catholic Doctors and the British Medical Association,” *The Tablet* 160:4809 (July 1932): 58.

¹⁴⁰ Kemball is mentioned along with Cardwell in Knight's article, but there exists little information about her (her first name is not specified). Knight, however, stipulates that, along with Cardwell, she was “blessed by the Archbishop of Westminster and received the support of the Catholic Women's League.” Knight, “No Right to Choose,” 63.

¹⁴¹ The Union of Catholic Mothers was founded in 1913 under the umbrella of the Catholic Women's League. Its objects included “to uphold the sacramental character and permanence of marriage and the observance of God's natural laws in the married state.” “UCM – Union of Catholic Mothers (Archdiocesan Branch),” *Archdiocese of Birmingham Archives* (c. 2009). http://www.birminghamarchdiocesanarchives.org.uk/collection_detail.asp?collection=42 (accessed 07 November 2016).

secrecy and under bad conditions were to be carried out by skilled practitioners in aseptic conditions, do you think a reduction in maternal mortality and morbidity would result?”¹⁴²

After several Catholic representatives gave evidence regarding the topic, Dorothy began to question Dr. Cardwell directly. Frances sat on the edge of her seat. This is what she had been waiting for; she couldn't wait to see Dorothy in action, championing the mission of the ALRA in the face of these well-meaning, but obviously misguided conservatives.

Dorothy began by asking Dr. Cardwell how she would advise a woman who already had seven children, could not afford an eighth, and was already on public assistance.

“I should explain to her why I should not really be helping her if I offered her either contraceptives or abortifacients,”¹⁴³ Dr. Cardwell replied confidently.

Frances had to restrain herself from rolling her eyes. Though she could understand the argument with regard to protection of potential life, she could not fathom such clear denial of choice in the matter.

Dorothy responded without hesitation.

“Your view would be that she must have the eighth or ninth child without taking any step?”

“I should not say that baldly to her,” Dr. Cardwell offered, with a sense of self-importance.

“In fact, you are saying it baldly to us,” Dorothy countered strongly.

¹⁴² According to Brookes, this is the question that Thurtle presented to each group giving evidence, inspired by the ALRA's emphasis on the safety of proper abortions and their success in reducing maternal mortality in the USSR. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 122.

¹⁴³ Abortifacients were abortion-inducing drugs, often in the forms of pills. The BMA had historically (since the early 1900s) criticized distribution of these drugs. However, “the Secretary of the BMA was less concerned about the possible danger of such drugs than the fact that the advertisements suggested to young women and girls that ‘the natural result of sexual intercourse can be overcome without any difficulty.’” “Evidence of Dr Cox and Dr Crosse, representatives of the BMA,” *Select Committee on Patent Medicines* (HMSO, London, 1914), 97; Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 55.

Frances felt a swell of pride as Dorothy spoke, and she reached over to squeeze Joan's hand. Both women felt an inevitable sense of solidarity with Dorothy against the doctor. Frances tried to catch Dorothy's eye and offer an encouraging smile, but the Committee member was focused on Dr. Cardwell's reply.

Dr. Cardwell reemphasized that the average mother indeed wanted to continue having children. Frances could feel the tension in the room between Dorothy and the doctor, and Sir Birkett, obviously also attuned to the situation, changed the topic to contraception.¹⁴⁴

"You see people who have been using contraception for years, who are the very picture of health. How do you explain that?" he addressed Dr. Cardwell.

She was quick to respond.

"Would it not be better to say, if I may suggest it, were *apparently* the picture of perfect health? There are such things as psychological ill effects, apart from the obvious physical ill effects."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ The Catholic Church has historically opposed birth control measures, and it was joined by many other Protestant faiths prior to the 1930 Lambeth Conference, during which the Anglican Church began to relax its prohibitions on contraception. "People & Events: The Catholic Church and Birth Control," *PBS* (c.2001). http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peoplevents/e_church.html (accessed 09 November 2016). Such a view is exemplified by the 1939 *Sertum Laetitiae* by Pope Pius XII in which birth control is described as something for those who are "immoderate and blind egoists." Pope Pius XII, "*Sertum Laetitiae*," *Vatican Encyclicals* (c.1939). http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_01111939_sertum-laetitiae.html (accessed 09 November 2016).

¹⁴⁵ All quoted material is from the actual exchange that occurred during this inquiry session between Thurtle, Cardwell, and Birkett on January 25, 1938. I added adjectives and descriptive verbs (as well as italicized emphasis within the quotations) for fictional effect based on textual interpretation of the words themselves and how the conversation is recorded. Knight, "No Right to Choose," 8-9. Brookes describes similar exchanges between the League of National Life and the Committee and cites Ministry of Health records, which I have not been able to access virtually (MH17/21, PRO). Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 116. The kind of exchange was typical of the inquiries conducted by the Committee. As previously stated, the ALRA also gave evidence before the members prior to their publication of the group's final report. Hindell emphasizes the Committee's work, though not instantaneous and demonstrative of a tedious process, as having a monumental impact on changing perceptions about the legality of abortions in England. In comparison to some of the other events that impacted reform, Hindell asserts that the Committee employed a much more thorough analysis of evidence from a variety of sources and was made up of male and female doctors and upper-class women (as well as Thurtle). Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 73. Other scholars diminish the importance of the Committee in comparison to other efforts toward legal reform. Horden describes the Committee as, despite its eventual recommendation of a change in law, having little effect on the situation at hand. Horden, *Legal Abortion*, 8. The thoroughness of the questions and scenarios, as demonstrated

Frances felt Joan stiffen beside her, and she knew that her friend was radiating with fury after such an attack on contraceptive measures.¹⁴⁶ The remainder of the session passed by in a blur. Frances was so shocked that a *woman*, a *doctor* nonetheless, could oppose such integral female rights.

After briefly offering words of support to Dorothy, Frances and Joan exited the building onto the busy square.¹⁴⁷

“What did you think?” Frances asked Joan, eager to hear her elder friend’s opinion on the proceedings.

“We need something bloody big to happen,” Joan sighed. “Or else these tossers¹⁴⁸ will run us into the ground.”

July 18, 1938

The Old Bailey courthouse was large and grand; its oak-paneled walls exuded structure and commanded a sense of respect.¹⁴⁹ Dr. Aleck Bourne, the defendant, sat, surrounded by his

by the above dialogue, are evidence of the extent to which the Committee sought to gain multiple opinions – ranging from the ALRA to Catholic activists to non-biased medical professionals – in order to make an eventual, conclusive recommendation to Parliament. While both the Committee hearings and later Bourne case had impacts on legal reform, Thurtle’s efforts and eventual Minority Report stand out as grasping the greatest understanding of the realities of the illegal abortion situation and how to best address it.

¹⁴⁶ Malleson was a particularly passionate proponent of contraceptive measures, which detailed the usage and accessibility of methods like condoms in the 20th century. Joan Malleson, *The Principles of Contraception: A Handbook for the General Practitioner* (London: Gollancz, 1935), 155.

¹⁴⁷ The British Parliament – both the House of Lords and the House of Commons – is housed in the Palace of Westminster, which is located on Parliament Square in London. “Houses of Parliament/The Palace of Westminster,” *Historic England* (c.2016). <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1226284> (accessed 09 November 2016).

¹⁴⁸ “Tosser” is British slang for “a stupid or unpleasant person.” “tosser,” *Cambridge Dictionary* (c.2016). <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/tosser> (accessed 09 November 2016).

¹⁴⁹ The trial of Dr. Aleck Bourne took place at the Central Criminal Court in London, also known as Old Baily. *Rex v. Bourne*, 3 All. E. R. 615 (1938). The current building was constructed in 1907; all of its four courtrooms were designed in the same way. “The four oak-paneled courtrooms contained space for all those who needed to attend modern trials, including solicitors and barristers, court reporters, the press (who by now were the most important conduit to the public for information about trials), and spectators. Each courtroom had a spacious dock, enclosed by low partitions, for the defendants, with a staircase leading directly below to the holding cells.”

barristers,¹⁵⁰ in the front of the room. The Judge, Sir Malcolm Macnaghten,¹⁵¹ sat in the center. His white, powdered wig¹⁵² added to his air of importance. To the other side of him sat the prosecutors,¹⁵³ acting on behalf of the crown. Frances anxiously perched towards the back of the room, and Stella and Dora¹⁵⁴ sat on either side of her. The women had managed to push their way through the crowd in front of the building and found seats in the courtroom.¹⁵⁵

The defense had been presenting its argument all morning. Aleck Bourne had, indeed, performed an illegal abortion (at no charge) for a fifteen-year-old girl in a London Hospital. However, they stipulated, his charge under the Offences against the Person Act 1861, section 58 was unjust. It mattered, in this instance, that the girl had become pregnant as a result of rape.¹⁵⁶

The defense called a new witness; it was what the women had been waiting for. Frances held her breath as Joan entered the room and took the stand. The Attorney-General began to question her¹⁵⁷ about the circumstances under which abortions were performed.

Joan defended Aleck, and she began to discuss instances of illegal abortions under far less pressing circumstances, as a point of comparison for the jury.

“History of the Old Bailey Courthouse,” *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey* (c.2015).
<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/The-old-bailey.jsp#courtroom> (accessed 12 November 2016).

¹⁵⁰ Bourne’s lawyers were Roland Oliver K.C. and Gerald Thesiger. *Rex v. Bourne*.

¹⁵¹ *Rex v. Bourne*.

¹⁵² The description of Macnaghten in his wig is based on an undated photograph of the judge. In it, he dons the traditional black judges’ robes, an elaborate white collar, and a long, white, powdered wig. Lafayette, Ltd, *Sir Malcolm Macnaghten (1869-1955)*, 1931, Harvard Law School Library, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁵³ During the Bourne trial, the prosecutors on behalf of the crown were Sir Donald Sumervell K.C. (Attorney-General), L.A. Byrne, and H. Elam. *Rex v. Bourne*.

¹⁵⁴ Aleck Bourne was an eventual member of the ALRA and close acquaintances with both Browne and Russell. Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 285. I could find no definitive proof of their presence at his criminal trial, but it highly likely that they were in attendance, especially as one of their colleagues was to give evidence. Bertrand Russell wrote a letter of support to Bourne, so it is probable that his wife was also very interested in the trial. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 71.

¹⁵⁵ This trial was highly publicized, and the British public considered it a fascinating criminal inquiry of national importance. According to Hindell, “large crowds gathered outside the court each day and the newspapers gave it full coverage. [Bourne] received hundreds of letters, some hostile but many more strongly sympathetic...” Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 71.

¹⁵⁶ This information is clearly stated in the official court files describing the facts and holding of the trial. *Rex v. Bourne*.

¹⁵⁷ Malleison had put the unnamed girl into contact with Bourne at St. Mary’s Hospital after the girl’s “school care committee had referred her” to Malleison. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 70.

“I know some doctors who would actually produce a miscarriage for humanitarian reasons when the child is likely definitely to inherit a bad trait,” she announced, implying that abortions were right if done in the interests of the mother’s health.¹⁵⁸

Frances’s heart swelled with pride. Joan was here, speaking to all these people as a representative of their organization and positive change everywhere. She squeezed her friends’ hands with joy and noticed a sense of relief on Aleck’s face in the dock, and he smiled at her.¹⁵⁹ The ALRA was not about to let one of their own go down without a fight.

Joan’s testimony was followed¹⁶⁰ by some male doctors,¹⁶¹ who also gave evidence on behalf of Aleck. As Frances listened to the physicians speak, she noticed someone else in the public seating area who was listening almost as intently. He looked familiar. Frances looked closely, now completely caught up in trying to discern the man’s identity from the back of his head. She caught her breath. It was Harold.

July 19, 1938

¹⁵⁸ This quotation is a direct transcription of Malleeson’s actual testimony during the Bourne trial on July 18, 1938. A reporter for the *Derby Evening Telegraph* recorded her words and described it as “striking evidence.” “Operation on Girl.” *Derby Evening Telegraph* [Derby, England] 18 July 1938: 1. *British Library Newspapers*.

¹⁵⁹ According to a journalistic account of the trial, “[Bourne] pleaded not guilty in a deep, calm voice, and only once during the hearing did he turn round – to smile at a woman friend seated in a public seat behind the dock.” “Doctors’ Plea for Surgeon.” *Daily Mail* [London, England] 19 July 1938: 11. *Daily Mail Historical Archive, 1896-2004*. Though this woman was obviously not Frances Adams, who is a fictional character, it is plausible that it could have been a friend from the ALRA or supportive acquaintance like Frances.

¹⁶⁰ It is unclear whether or not Malleeson’s testimony actually came before the ones currently being described. For the sake of the fictional plot, I have decided to assert this fact; its actual order would not have had monumental impact on the outcome of the case, and it can therefore be considered an appropriate fictional liberty.

¹⁶¹ These doctors included Lord Thomas Horder (the King’s physician), Dr. John Rawling Rees (a psychological specialist), and Mr. William Gilliat (an obstetrician). According to a reporter present at the trial, “All three agreed with the course of action taken by Mr. Bourne...” “Doctors’ Plea for Surgeon,” *Daily Mail*.

Back at Old Bailey for the second day of proceedings,¹⁶² Frances was on edge. She had seen Harold the day before, but he had not noticed her. Her mind was racing. Why was he here? What would he do if he saw her? What did he think of her now?

Seated again between Stella and Dora, Frances was knocked out of her own thoughts by the judge's voice, announcing his charge to the jury. She glanced at Aleck and moved forward on her seat.

Justice Macnaghten reviewed the evidence and legal qualifications of the case. Frances was so lost in the legal jargon¹⁶³ that she almost missed the key moment. She felt Stella tense up beside her and relief rushed through the two women as the judge announced his opinion.

“The Act¹⁶⁴ does not permit termination of pregnancy except for the purposes of preserving the life of the mother. But I think myself that these words ought to be construed in a reasonable sense: if the doctor is of the opinion, on reasonable grounds and on adequate knowledge, that the probable consequences of the continuation of the pregnancy would indeed make the woman a physical or mental wreck, then he operates in that honest belief, for the purpose of preserving the life of the mother.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² According to official court records, the trial lasted from July 18, 1938 until July 19, 1938, when the jury gave their decision after only forty minutes of consideration – a rather brief trial for the time. *Rex v. Bourne*; “Girl Congratulates Surgeon on Acquittal.” *Courier and advertiser* [Dundee, Scotland] 20 July 1938: 6. *British Library Newspapers*.

¹⁶³ In his lengthy speech to the jury, Macnaghten went through much of the detailed, legal information about the pre-existing laws and exact circumstances of the case. *Rex v. Bourne*. Frances, not very well versed in legal jargon and distracted by the presence of Harold, would have been hard-pressed to follow his longwinded discussion.

¹⁶⁴ In this quotation, Macnaghten originally used “it” to refer to the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act; I have changed this for clarity in the story. This legislation originally proclaimed that any pregnant woman intending to induce her own miscarriage or having someone unlawfully administer an abortion “shall be guilty of felony, and being convicted thereof shall be liable...to be kept in penal servitude for life...” *Offences Against the Person Act*, 1861. c. 100 (Eng.). This legislation was clarified by the Infant Life Preservation Act, which allowed that if the mother's life was in physical danger, an abortion would not be considered a felony. *Infant Life Preservation Act*, 1929. c. 34 (Eng.).

¹⁶⁵ This quotation is a direct excerpt of the judge's full charge to the jury before they made their decision. It captures the judge's personal recommendation to the jury that Bourne be acquitted and the law better defined. *Rex. Bourne*. Bourne was acquitted because of the difficulty the Court found in deciding “between a woman's *life* being in danger, and her *health* being in danger.” Macnaghten further urged that pregnancy has both physical and mental

Forty minutes later, the jury returned and unanimously acquitted Aleck. Frances, along with his other close friends and acquaintances, rushed to congratulate the doctor.¹⁶⁶ In the confusion, Frances felt someone bump her arm, and she turned and caught her breath.

“Frances,” Harold said softly.

She turned away, tears already stinging her eyes involuntarily. She couldn’t talk to Harold. She couldn’t bear the shame he would inflict upon her. It had been eight years, and she had still not accepted his denial of her choice.

“Frances,” he called after her as she rushed to exit the courthouse. “Frances, I was wrong.”

Once outside on the pavement, Frances turned back, thinking she had imagined what he had said. But he was there, hurrying towards her.

“I don’t want anything from you, Frances,” he managed, out of breath from running. “I don’t expect forgiveness or acceptance. But I do want you to know, that I support what you did. Not then, but now. I’ve spent the last few years with Dr. Bourne, at St. Mary’s.¹⁶⁷ I didn’t know then, but I understand now. I know why it was, and still is, necessary.”¹⁶⁸

effects, so preserving the life of the mother through an abortion could be done so by preserving her health – both mentally and physically. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 71.

¹⁶⁶ When the jury announced the acquittal, “[Bourne] was surrounded by friends and warmly congratulated. Among the first to greet him was the girl who had given evidence in the case.” *Girl Congratulates Surgeon on Acquittal.* *Courier and advertiser.*

¹⁶⁷ A medical student in 1930, Harold is now a doctor, and though he is a fictional character, it would have been expected for him to work at a big London hospital. St. Mary’s Hospital in Paddington in London is where Bourne was based, and under his influence and proximity, Harold would have likely been exposed to the procedures of abortions and the contact between Bourne and Malleson of the ALRA. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 70. Additionally as a member of the ALRA, Bourne was exposed to many of the reform initiatives and could have shared them and their foundational philosophies with Harold.

¹⁶⁸ Harold is representative of the changing views of the medical profession towards abortion. In the early 1930s, most doctors opposed legalized abortion. One big reason was that it was part of a feminist campaign, and many male doctors were in favor of maintain restricted women’s roles. Later, as the Birkett Committee conducted its investigation in 1937, the medical profession – as represented by the British Medical Association (BMA) – tried to avoid being too involved with the topic. “Doctors, for ethical and professional reasons, had no desire to assume the trade of the abortionist... Through the BMA general practitioners expressed their opposition to consultation, notification, or any further restrictions on therapeutic abortion. The law, they believed, required some clarification to enable practitioners to operate freely without fear of prosecution.” While the Bourne judgment took some steps to

Frances's lips turned into a sad smile.

"Thank you for saying that," she murmured. Her face hardened. "But I'm afraid it is too late now." Her voice cracked. "Not after Dorothy, Harold."

And, echoing Harold's own dismissal of eight years prior, she turned to leave.

"Goodbye, Harold."

July 10, 1939

Disappointment pervaded Stella's sitting room. The women of the ALRA had arranged themselves in a circle. Before them, on the ornate coffee table, lay two collections of papers, abandoned by the group after being passed around.

"Well," Stella broke the silence. "A whole lot of bloody good those tossers did, wasn't it?"

Joan looked somber. "After all that," she sighed.

Frances looked back down at the first stack of papers. It was the Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Abortion.¹⁶⁹ It was disappointing.

"After two whole years," she lamented. "One would think they could have come up with something a bit more compelling than all that ambiguity.¹⁷⁰ Wasn't it their job to *clarify* the law?"

clarify the law, it still left the medical profession confused. "Not all in the profession were comforted by the Bourne judgment, which suggested that doctors take mental health into account." The medical profession thus became unsure of how to refer anxiety regarding pregnancy. Was it an issue of physical or mental health? Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 53, 124, 149. Scholars like Bernard Dickens and Rebecca Cook argue that the Bourne case was, conversely, vital for the clarity of the law. Dickens, "Development of Commonwealth Abortion Laws," 432. While this ruling may have had legal significance, it did little to quell the uncertainties within the medical profession. While male doctors were coming around to the idea of abortion (some joined the ALRA), as Harold represents, others remained conflicted.

¹⁶⁹ The Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Abortion was published in 1939 by the Birkett Committee. It concluded the prevalence of abortion and merely asserted that the "law on abortion [was] still uncertain." Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 73.

“At least Dorothy had some sense,” Dora offered as a consolation.

The women turned their attention to the second stack of papers, Dorothy Thurtle’s Minority Report.¹⁷¹ The copy of the report was accompanied by a letter from Dorothy to the women of the ALRA.¹⁷²

“She doubted their estimates,” Frances told the group. “She told me that in her letter before the Report was published.”¹⁷³

“She’s arguing on behalf of the poor, lower-class women,” Stella said. “We ought to do that better ourselves.

Frances nodded in agreement.

“On the whole, she *understands*. She advocates for abortion options for women who become pregnant underage or through rape or incest. And she knew that leaving the discretion of when abortions are necessary to the medical profession – *male* doctors – would not help women with less agency.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ The Committee failed to assert a clear perspective on the law as it stood, and it merely offered a recommendation for the law: “We recommend, therefore, that the law should be amended to make it unmistakably clear that a medical practitioner is acting legally, when in good faith he procures the abortion of a pregnant woman in circumstances which satisfy him that continuance of the pregnancy is likely to endanger her life or seriously to impair her health.” *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Abortion* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1939), 122. Clearly the Committee, unlike scholars like Dickens and Cook, did not see the Bourne case as a revolutionary turning point in the law.

¹⁷¹ Thurtle disagreed with the majority report of the Birkett Committee, and she submitted her own. In it, she “began from the premise that the risks of abortion were no greater than those of child birth.” Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 126. Thurtle went onto argue that it was “reasonable and legitimate” for women to want to avoid bearing children. “Minority Report by Mrs. Dorothy Thurtle,” *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Abortion*, 139.

¹⁷² As far as I am aware, a letter to the ALRA from Thurtle is a fictional concept; however, given Thurtle’s close relationship with the men and women of the ALRA (her husband was a member himself), it is a reasonable assertion to make. Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 73.

¹⁷³ Thurtle “disputed the estimates accepted by the Committee, and said she believed that criminal abortion constituted a higher proportion than 40 per cent of the total.” Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 74.

¹⁷⁴ Brookes describes Thurtle’s Minority Report as being much more in tune with how abortion reform could practically help lower class women in Britain. Thurtle also applied this logic and thinking to birth control accessibility as well. Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 127,

“It’s full of understanding and courage,” Janet said simply.¹⁷⁵

“First the ambiguity of Aleck’s case and now this.” Stella lamented. “Will we ever get real change?”

“If there’s any hope,” Frances countered. “It’s in this Minority Report. We just need to work on publicizing this over the next few years.”¹⁷⁶

The ALRA members nodded in agreement.

“If anyone can do it,” Frances affirmed. “We *can*, and we *will* for all women across England!”

¹⁷⁵ Janet Chance actually described Thurtle’s report in this manner according to a transcript in *Abortion Law Reformed*: “Jane Chance commented: ‘This Committee sat for many weeks, collected a great deal of valuable information and issued a feeble report...Mrs. Thurtle published a Minority Report full of understanding and courage.’” Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 74. It is unclear in what context this was stated, but it is obvious that Chance was distinguishing Thurtle’s dissenting report from that of the rest of the Birkett Committee.

¹⁷⁶ Scholars like Hindell, Dickens, Cook, and Horden focus on the importance of the Birkett Committee’s Report and the outcome of the Bourne Case as being pivotal to the abortion reform movement. However, in terms of legal reform, no one had a bigger impact on the realities faced by everyday women than Thurtle. Unfortunately, it would take until 1967 for this vision to become a reality for Britain.

EPILOGUE

A few months after this meeting of the ALRA, Britain entered World War II on September 3, 1939, and its forces began mobilizing against Germany.¹⁷⁷ Frances and many of the other women in the ALRA became swept up in the war effort while trying to keep the organization afloat,¹⁷⁸ and their reform movement was put on pause.

The Birkett Committee quickly dispersed, and little came of their abortion reform recommendations.¹⁷⁹ Norman Birkett was assigned to a national security committee¹⁸⁰ as the country's priorities shifted.

Stella Browne, Dora Russell, Janet Chance, and Dr. Joan Malleson remained committed to the abortion reform movement and kept the ALRA alive in wartime.¹⁸¹ Stella, Janet, and Joan all died in the 1950s. Dora, however, lived until the 1980s and saw the passage of the Abortion Act of 1967 after much campaigning from the ALRA in the post-war period.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ "General Mobilisation in Britain." *Daily Mail* [Hull, England] 1 Sept. 1939: 1. *British Library Newspapers*.

¹⁷⁸ Women contributed to the war effort in a myriad of ways. Winston Churchill called upon and lauded their participation in a 1943 speech. "I remember in 1939 at Manchester making an appeal for a million women to come forward into the war effort in all its forms. This was thought to be a very extravagant proposal at the time, but it is not a third of what has since been required or what is to be forthcoming." Winston Churchill, "No Fear of the Future" (speech, National Conference of Women, Albert Hall, London, September 28, 1943), *Ibiblio* <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1943/1943-09-28a.html>. During its July meeting, the ALRA was certainly worried about the prospect of war. In the meeting minutes, recorded retrospectively, by Jenkins, she said, "Mrs Chance, Mrs Browne and I agreed to form a 'skeleton' Committee, and kept the ALRA alive during the war years." "Note made 7 February 1959," SA/ALR/A.1/2/1. This Executive group did keep track of information and answered inquiries but did not stage notably reformist demonstrations or proposals during the war. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 246.

¹⁷⁹ "The action of the Second World War ensured that no action was taken on any of the recommendations, and indeed, there is evidence which suggests that no action was planned." Brookes, *Abortion in England*, 127. Similarly, Hindell asserts, "...then war broke out and the consideration of [facilities for legal abortions] was deferred for nearly two decades." Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed*, 75.

¹⁸⁰ Birkett was appointed to the Home Secretary's advising committee, which worked on detaining alleged enemy agents. H. Montgomery Hyde, *Norman Birkett: The Life of Lord Birkett of Ulverston* (Random House, 1965), 464.

¹⁸¹ The ALRA became more active again in 1944 and began holding consistent Executive Committee meetings following the end of the war. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 248-249.

¹⁸² During the 1960s, the ALRA concentrated mostly on lobbying parliament. "The coincidence of militant action, rather than reaction, in the 1930s and 1960s was concurrent with the young age of the group's leadership. Those in society who were helping to orchestrate social change in the 1960s were reflected in the new letters of the ALRA – young, energetic, left-wing men and women..." The ALRA elected a new chairwoman, Vera Houghton.

Dorothy Thurtle also lived through the war until 1973 and supported the passage of the 1967 Act.¹⁸³

Dr. Aleck Bourne adhered to a strict interpretation of the law established in his 1938 landmark court case. In 1945, he resigned from his position on the ALRA's Medico-Legal Committee.¹⁸⁴ Before the 1967 Act was enacted, he founded the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC)¹⁸⁵ and became an anti-abortion activist until his death in 1974.¹⁸⁶

Harold James joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in October 1939 at age thirty and was deployed to the Middle East in 1940. There he died while on active duty in August 1942.¹⁸⁷ He had been writing letters of apology to Frances throughout the war until his death.

Frances Adams joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) after the outbreak of the war and was deployed in anti-aircraft batteries.¹⁸⁸ Frances was one of the first women to be brought so close to combat zones during the time. During the war, she met many other working-

Melanie Latham, *Regulating reproduction: A century of conflict in Britain and France* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 106.

¹⁸³ "Dorothy Thurtle," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (c. 2008).

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/69/101069843/> (accessed 16 November 2016). It is unclear whether Thurtle actively supported the passage of the 1967 Act, but from her heavy involvement during the interwar period, I would assume it so; even if it were not so, it can plausibly be included for fictional effect.

¹⁸⁴ Jenkins supported Bourne's resignation and wrote a tribute of appreciation to him. Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, 249.

¹⁸⁵ SPUC was founded in 1966; "As a result of the Bourne case, more and more abortions began to be practised in Britain in cases where the woman's physical or mental health was thought to be in danger, a loophole in the law that was interpreted increasingly loosely. Dr Bourne became so concerned about the results of his action that he became a founder member of SPUC." "Our history & aims," *Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child* (c. 2016). <https://www.spuc.org.uk/our-work/history-and-aims> (accessed 16 November 2016).

¹⁸⁶ Bourne held that SPUC would "be a counterweight against the growing propaganda for 'abortion of demand' which would be a disaster for our womanhood." Aleck Bourne, personal communication, 1967 quoted in Potts, Diggory, and Peel, *Abortion*, 289.

¹⁸⁷ Harold's wartime experience is based on that of Major John MacMillan, who served Britain in the Royal Medical Corps as a doctor in Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. "Doctor Dies on Service," *Press and journal* [Aberdeen, Scotland] 3 Aug. 1942: 3. *British Library Newspapers*. Though Harold would not have risen to the rank of major so quickly, I have decided to base my fictional character on MacMillan due to his profession and the circumstances of his service and death.

¹⁸⁸ Because of labor shortages, women were introduced into the ATS anti-aircraft batteries for the first time in Britain during WWII. "In order to preserve the non-combatant status of women, the female recruits were not allowed to load or fire the guns. Their roles were instead restricted to plotting and aiming." Gerald J. De Groot, "'I Love the Scent of Cordite in Your Hair': Gender Dynamics in Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War," *History* 82 (January 1997): 73.

class women through ATS,¹⁸⁹ and these acquaintances inspired her to continue fighting for working-class female reproductive rights following the war. She worked with the young men and women of the ALRA to persuade Parliament to pass the 1967 Act. In 1968, she helped found and worked with the British Pregnancy Advisory Service¹⁹⁰ until her death in 1990 at age eighty.

Were it not for the women of the ALRA, abortion would not be as accessible or acceptable today. Were it not for Frances Adams, the interwar reform movement, and perhaps the later movement of the 1960s, would not have heard the average, working-class women's needs as effectively.

¹⁸⁹ Dorothy Sheridan, a woman who served with the ATS during WWII, spoke of the opportunities that the service created for working-class women. “[I] wanted to do something totally different because I came from just an ordinary working background...the ATS came as something whereby I could sort of leave home and be an adventurer.” Dorothy Sheridan, “ATS Women 1939-45: Challenge and Containment in Women’s Lives in the Military during the Second World War,” unpublished M Litt dissertation (University of Sussex, 1988), 32.; De Groot, “I Love the Scent,” 77.

¹⁹⁰ The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) was founded in 1968 because “[a]lthough the 1967 Abortion Act had legalized abortion, many hospitals were not providing abortion care and many doctors were still refusing to sanction them. Private abortions were expensive and therefore inaccessible to many women.” The BPAS charity service helped many women obtain accessible, affordable abortions in the wake of such new legislation. “Our history,” *British Pregnancy Advisory Service* (c. 2015). <https://www.bpas.org/about-our-charity/history/> (accessed 16 November 2016).

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