

*Dancing With Beatrice*

*Sherri Stone*

## Chapter One

“Don’t drop her!”

Hospice nurse Susanna Larkin tried to make it a command, but the directive ended up somewhere between a hiss and barely controlled laughter. Which, given the circumstances, was the best she could hope for.

At least Mr. Roswelle was in the living room on the phone instead of with her and Elizabeth in the bedroom. Lifting a dead body—specifically Mrs. Roswelle’s—was part of her training, but as a social worker Elizabeth was out of her league and what should have been serious was becoming comical.

“All we have to do, Ms. Mitchell, is carry her to the car,” Susanna said in a stage whisper, glaring at Elizabeth to stifle her giggles. “At least we don’t have to dig the grave, too.”

Well, that was the wrong thing to say. Elizabeth guffawed and dropped Mrs. Roswelle’s feet back onto the bed. Susanna bit the inside of her cheek and sent a completely unconvincing withering look her friend’s way.

The Roswelles wanted a green burial. That was a first, but Susanna had liked the idea originally. No embalming fluids, no casket or vault, nothing to pollute the ground, just a simple burial like people used to do before funerals became such a big business.

Now? A green burial looks good on paper but is quite another thing when you are the one hauling the body.

“I’m sorry,” Elizabeth whispered back. “It’s harder than I thought, is all. She’s just dead weight.”

Susanna froze, staring open-mouthed at Elizabeth as she fought a losing battle with the giggles. Elizabeth snickered first. Not that it mattered, because soon both were fighting so hard not to laugh they had to put the body down or drop it.

Why are things so much more funny when you couldn’t—and really shouldn’t—laugh? It reminded Susanna of church.