

Dancing With Beatrice

Sherri Stone

Chapter One

“Don’t drop her!”

The command came from hospice nurse Susanna Larkin, somewhere between a hiss and barely controlled laughter. Laughter would have seemed inappropriate at the moment and she sent up a silent prayer of thanks that Mr. Roswelle was in the living room on the phone instead of in the bedroom watching her and her colleague, social worker Elizabeth Mitchell, trying to lift Mrs. Roswelle – or more accurately, Mrs. Roswelle's recently deceased body - to carry her to the car.

Burial awaited, and it was their job to help Mr. Roswelle get his wife to the Springfield Nature Preserve where the ground keepers were already opening a grave for her. It was the first time that Susanna had participated in a green burial and she really liked the idea of it. No embalming fluids, no casket or vault, nothing to pollute the ground... just a simple burial in the ground like people used to do before funerals became such big – and expensive – business.

She was a little less enamored of it right at the moment, though, as the arrangements for Mrs. Roswelle had them helping with the transport of the shroud-wrapped body to the burial site. Looked good on paper. Not quite so much when you're the one hauling the body.

“I'm sorry,” Elizabeth whispered back loudly. “It's harder than I thought it would be. She's just dead weight.”

As soon as she said it, both women froze, staring at one another with huge eyes just waiting...

Elizabeth snickered first and then both were fighting so hard not to laugh out loud they had to put Mrs. Roswelle back down on the bed until they could get themselves under control.

Susanna wondered why the sounds of suppressed laughter were so much funnier when you couldn't and really shouldn't laugh out loud. Like in church, she thought, desperately grasping for a serious thought.