

Dancing With Beatrice

Sherri Stone

Chapter One

“Don’t drop her!”

~~The command came from h~~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.~~Laughter would have seemed inappropriate at the moment~~
~~_____ and she~~ At least ~~sent up a silent prayer of thanks that~~ 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. ~~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.~~

_____“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 ~~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~~ but is quite another thing when
you are the one ~~. 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, is all ~~it~~
~~would be~~. She’s just dead weight.”

Susanna froze, staring open-mouthed at Elizabeth as she fought a losing battle
with the giggles. ~~As soon as she said it, both women froze, staring at one another with~~
~~huge eyes just waiting...~~

~~———Elizabeth snickered first. Not that it mattered, because soon both were~~ ~~and then~~
~~both were~~ fighting so hard not to laugh ~~out loud~~ they had to put the body down or drop
it ~~Mrs. Roswelle back down on the bed until they could get themselves under control.~~

~~———Susanna wondered w~~

Why are things so much more funny when you ~~the sounds of suppressed laughter~~
~~were so much funnier when you couldn’t—and—and really shouldn’t—laugh laugh out~~

loud? It reminded Susanna of church. Like in church, she thought, desperately grasping
for a serious thought.