

# The Submissive Muse

By

Tiffany N. York

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# Chapter One

*“...when pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure.” – Jane Austen*

*Eleven years earlier...*

The severed artery in her wrist hadn't been intentional. Elizabeth had simply sliced too deep while cutting. At twenty-three, she hadn't learned how to temper the restlessness she'd experienced since a teen. She hadn't yet found her voice with her parents, who shook their heads in dismay over everything she did.

She'd returned home after graduating college with a BA in Art History. Four years of drunken hook-ups that left her feeling like used meat. Elizabeth had wanted one of them to mean something, but they wanted relationships with no strings attached. She wasn't wired that way. After sex she felt bonded to them, and that only made it more painful when they ended things. “It's too much, too soon,” they'd tell her. “You're too intense.” “Can't we just be friends with benefits?”

Dating was no easier at home. Her girlfriends told her there was a set of rules to follow in order to ensnare a man. “Let him chase you. No sex until you have a commitment, but date others until he's ready to be exclusive. Never give more than you get or you'll scare him away. And don't baby a man; he already has a mother.”

But Elizabeth didn't want to date more than one man at a time. If she liked a man, she didn't want to worry that cooking him dinner or buying him a present might scare him away. She longed to take care of a man, please him in any way he needed and wanted. Weren't there any men out there who could appreciate what she had to offer?

Her home life was worse than her dating life. Her parents were in their sixties because she had been an “oops” baby, so their antiquated notion of a woman's path after college was cut-and-dried; it was either choose a career, any career, or find a rich man to have babies with. Soul-searching was for hippies.

“What's your plan, Elizabeth? How long can you work as a cocktail waitress? If I had known this was where your college tuition was going to go...” The constant pressure from her father only made her indecision and angst worse. Confusion and frustration became her daily companions.

What did she want to do for a career? What would make her happy? Why couldn't she find a man who treasured her? Round and round she went until her head tightened like it was being compressed in a vise. Her inner state of being was similar to a covered pot of water. Some days Elizabeth was calm, like cold, standing water in a pot. And then there were days she'd feel agitated and irritated for no good reason, like water slowly heating, beginning to sputter. Other days her emotions would build to an innate unease, churning, a pacing tiger in too small a cage, and this resembled water just on the brink of boil. Lift the lid of the pot when it began to shake and rattle from the pressure of the boiling water and—*whoosh*—an explosion of heat and bubbles.

The way to turn off this inner boiling pot was through the sting of a blade on her forearms. A shiny silver razor blade nestled within a box cutter. The only solution she knew to bring sweet release from the unbearable emotional pain trapped within her body. The physical pain of a blade slicing through skin was nothing compared to the agony of the emotional torture within her.

Besides, it only hurt for a few moments before a tingly sensation took over and a sense of relief washed over her. The guilt and feelings of failure would come later, but for the time being, she gained some much needed serenity.

Blood had a hypnotizing effect on her. Drip by drip, she'd watch the crimson liquid flow out of her, telling its own tale.

*Close your eyes and relax, your emotions no longer control you. Your mind is focused on the task at hand. You are the one in control now. Feel the sense of accomplishment as the trail of blood runs down your arm. Shhh, that's it, forget everything. Any problem you have is just bleeding away.*

But one particular day, her agitation had been unusually troublesome, coupled with a hopelessness and sadness she wasn't used to. Going for a run only made her nervous adrenaline worse.

*Worthless loser, what are you going to do with your life? You can't live at home forever. Choose a direction.*

*What man will want you? You see how you are with them—you give, only to be taken advantage of time and time again. Your beliefs about catering to your man, obeying him, making his life easier take you back to the mentality of a 1950s housewife.*

The cuts were more aggressive this time. Deeper and longer. Blood, bright red, flowing freely, instead of in drops. Elizabeth knew right away she had gone too far. Holding her arm tightly covered with tissues, she came down the stairs in her blood-soaked nightgown and calmly told her parents she needed to go to the hospital. Her mother shrieked as soon as she saw blood. Her father muttered a curse.

They pulled up to the curb of the ER and Elizabeth passed out the moment she stepped from the car. She awakened to find herself being carried in the arms of a man with the most magnetic blue eyes. Unnerving, focused eyes that drove into her rather than through her. Eyes that held concern as he studied her face, asking if she was on any drugs.

She found out later he was one of the best pediatric neurosurgeons in the San Francisco Bay Area. Dr. John Wolfe. He'd been coming in to do his rounds when Elizabeth collapsed. All she thought about while waiting to be stitched up were those eyes that reminded her of the color of her favorite pair of perfectly-broken in blue jeans. Shame and humiliation over what she had done and the fact that she had bled all over his white button-down shirt were almost enough to hope she never saw him again. Almost.

When he checked on her, he slid open the curtain with an air of authority, going straight for her chart without saying a word. After what seemed like an eternity, he came over to her bedside, his gaze settling on her with those haunting eyes. She dared not speak first.

"Are you suicidal?"

She shook her head. "I slipped up. It won't happen again."

"Maybe you should see a counselor."

"It was a mistake."

"Tell me why I should believe you."

"I don't want to die. I just wanted the stress to go away."

"There will always be stress in life, Elizabeth." He said her name as if they were already on a familiar first-name basis. "You need to find better coping mechanisms."

She stared down at her bandaged arm. "I know."

Of course, she knew this. She just hadn't found a better substitute yet.

“It won’t happen again,” she repeated a little more firmly this time, uncomfortable from his scrutiny and wishing she wasn’t the reason for his disappointed expression.

“Can I hold you to that promise?”

Despite not being sure whether she could commit to such a weighty undertaking, Elizabeth found herself nodding yes.

\* \* \*

*Present...*

A sealed vial of blood no larger than half her pinky hung from a silver chain around Elizabeth’s neck. John’s blood. Their version of a collar. It might seem morbid to some, but for her, it signified a piece of him with her always, even in death. She’d once seen an article about how it was possible to put some of your loved one’s cremated ashes into a vibrator and she’d shown it to John, laughing over the ridiculousness of it. It didn’t seem so ridiculous now.

No, she knew now with startling clarity what it was like to miss someone with a force so overpowering it left her unable to experience any other positive emotion. Grief was like having that one egocentric friend, an “energy vampire,” who was always taking without ever giving back. Most of the time depression numbed her, but there were a few times when she was so consumed with rage over John’s death, her entire body shook while she repeatedly clenched and unclenched her fists.

“I will not cut,” she had to repeat over and over like a mantra; she made a promise to John that she wouldn’t. But that didn’t mean she wouldn’t dig her nails into her skin hard enough to draw blood or scrape the thorns of a rose over her wrists.

John knew exactly how to handle her when forceful or disturbing emotions threatened to derail her. Whether they were hormone-or stress-related or simply her inability to express her frustrations in a constructive manner didn’t matter. He always knew what she needed.

“Bring me the paddle,” he’d command in a calm voice. Or the flogger or the crop. “I won’t tolerate your irritability or you snapping at me. You know better than that.”

Elizabeth hated hearing displeasure in her husband’s voice, despised the fact that she wasn’t in control of her emotions like he was of his.

“Bend over. Now.”

Thirty smacks of anything, even just his hand was all it took for an attitude adjustment, her focus switching from her ill temper to the stinging pain on her behind. After, as he held her in his arms and wiped her tears, the safety and love he provided produced an equally calming effect. Yes, he knew her better than she knew herself.

After a year of battling grief, she was tired of living without the man she had promised to love for the rest of her life.

“It’ll get easier,” everyone said. “The pain will lessen. In time, you may even fall in love again.”

But it hadn’t gotten easier; the ache in her chest had worsened. There was nothing compelling her to get out of bed in the morning. Or the afternoon, which was usually the time she rolled out of bed. She had no desire to see anyone or do anything. No desire to return to teaching gothic architecture at the university. No desire to attend the grief support group she went to for the first six months after John was gone.

Nights were the hardest in the bed she had shared with her husband of almost ten years. She still slept on her side. The comforting darkness used to embrace her with its silence; now it was a deafening reminder she was alone.

Her best friend, Lila, was the only one who hadn't deserted her after her husband's death. Sure, the outpouring of support had been huge at first. Couples she and John had been friends with during the years they'd been married, his colleagues from the hospital, hers from the university where she taught. But slowly, they all began to drift away, especially the married ones, as if Elizabeth's widow status might be contagious.

Lila had seen her through the darkest of times. Times when she hadn't eaten in days or bathed or even gone outside to greet her horses. Times when she just wanted to go to sleep and never wake up. Yes, Lila was a very good friend who truly cared for her and Elizabeth hated knowing she was going to cause her such pain. But she'd eventually come to understand why she had to do what she did. Lila knew John had been her whole world, her everything. She'd realize Elizabeth couldn't survive without him.

She had been planning her suicide for months. The mere fact the decision wasn't an impulsive one, that she had been methodical about it—from a meticulously-written letter to Lila to the specific number of pills she would ingest—proved it was not an overly dramatic cry for help. Fear or sadness didn't threaten to sway her; only the sweet anticipation of seeing her lover once again filled her mind.

On the one-year anniversary of John's death, Elizabeth dressed in clothes she knew her husband would approve. A black satin corset with magenta brocade trim, a black fitted skirt of mid-calf length, and riding boots. Her long hair had been freshly dyed the color of ink and her heavy bangs trimmed just above the eyebrows. John preferred light makeup on her. Nothing on her pale, translucent skin, just a bit of black liner and a swipe of mascara to accentuate her dark eyes, and lips stained with a touch of berry gloss.

She grabbed a black velvet jacket, along with a bottle of pills, a fifth of vodka, and a cut apple, and headed across the pasture to the barn. Bronte and Poe each gave a high-pitched whinny when she entered, indicating an apprehension that wasn't typical for them. She fed them a piece of apple she hoped would soothe them, but their nervous behavior continued. Ears flicking back and forth, eyes rolling, hooves stomping.

"Don't worry, my babies. You'll be well taken care of after I'm gone. I've written explicit instructions to Lila." Elizabeth kissed their foreheads, laying her cheek there for a moment longer. "I'm so sorry," she whispered to them, tears springing to her eyes.

*Now is not the time to get emotional or have second thoughts. I've made my decision.*

Vodka would be her voice of reason. She twisted open the cap and took a long slug. And then another. Sunlight filtered in through the open barn door, creating a perfect rectangle on the ground. She plopped herself down in the middle of it, tilting her face to the warmth of the light. Another long swallow, some of it dribbling down her chest this time.

"My career gives me purpose, but you, Elizabeth, give me the desire to be more than a surgeon. You define me as a man. You're the reason I've become more than I ever hoped to be."

Elizabeth had their wedding vows memorized.

"You, John, have calmed my restless spirit by allowing me to be myself, the good, the bad, and the ugly. You love and accept all of me and in return, you are forever imprinted in my soul. There will never be another."

*There will never be another.*

She fiddled with her phone until she found Danzig, one of her favorite bands. John didn't like metal, but he'd come to learn whenever she put it on, it meant she was feeling neglected and wanted his attention. She was careful not to play the brat card often, but when she did, it was usually because he had been away many hours at the hospital and then holed up in his home office, working.

She knew exactly how to incite rough passion in John. He exhibited too much seriousness when he was behind the desk in his office, making it all the more a challenge to break that steely façade of his, a dangerous game for sure.

One time she dressed up like a cat, wearing only ears, a butt plug with a furry tail, and a collar around her neck attached to a leash. She crawled into his office on her hands and knees, meowing.

"Not now, my pet." he said, without looking up from his papers.

When she turned on music, his eyes lifted to hers.

"I need to—" he started to say, but the rest of his words were drowned out by the volume of the song. Three quick strides and he was beside her, switching off the music.

"Let me finish what I'm doing and then we'll play."

Elizabeth raised one eyebrow challengingly and flipped the music back on. A deafening guitar solo filled the room. She dropped to her knees and reached for the zipper on his slacks.

John grabbed her wrist tightly. "You're being a very bad kitty right now." His tone was firm and even. No matter how irritated, he never raised his voice to her. Ever. That was one of the qualities she especially loved about him. "Kitten needs to wait until her owner is done working or she won't get any milk."

He released her wrist and returned to his desk. "Now turn off the noise. I'll only be another hour at most."

But being the bad kitty she was, Elizabeth followed him and swatted a few papers off his desk. "Meow?"

That quick flash of annoyance in his eyes caused her groin to tighten. Oh, yes, her body would pay the price of her defiance. He slowly pushed his chair back. She held his gaze, even though he had this unsettling way of hardly blinking which made her very nervous.

"Do you know what happens to naughty kittens?" he asked softly, unzipping himself.

Before she could answer, John yanked hard on her leash, forcing her to her knees. "Hands behind your back." He grabbed the back of her head. "Open," he commanded as she did as she was told. "Take it all in." She gagged as he hit the back of her throat over and over again. Saliva poured down her lips and chin.

"Disobedient pets need to learn a lesson, so I'm not going to be my usual gentle self." He let out a low moan. "Besides, this is for my pleasure, not yours."

As promised, he fucked her mouth mercilessly. Right before he knew he was going to come, he leaned back in his seat. "Stroke me." She did, as milky cum sprayed over his belly. "Now lap it up like a good kitty," he said. "Every last drop." She licked him clean, relishing his seed because it had come from him and anything that was a part of her husband belonged inside her. He gave her a smile that told her he was pleased. And when her husband was pleased with her, all was right in her world.

\* \* \*

Bronte and Poe stomped their hooves. Bronte let out a loud neigh.



“All right, calm down, I’ll change the music.”

Elizabeth put on something less jarring and took another swig of vodka. She closed her eyes and swayed to the music. Once she began to move, her spirit responded, but the momentary contentment was too fleeting to erase the heaviness that had consumed her all year, heaviness she was convinced would never go away. She didn’t care that she’d never hear music again or breathe fresh air, or smell flowers; she no longer cared about anything. Apathy is worse than misery, she decided, because at least with misery, you still *feel* something.

*Take the pills and be done with it.*

Elizabeth shook the bottle like a maraca.

How was she supposed to take these without water? She snorted at the absurdity of requiring water to take pills when vodka would be more effective, but her throat and mouth felt like she had swallowed sand; she didn’t want any more vodka, she wanted water, only she hadn’t brought any water with her.

Screaming in frustration, she hurled the bottle of pills across the barn, followed by the vodka bottle, which smashed into pieces after hitting the wall. Elizabeth sank to the ground and began to cry. “I can’t go on anymore without you, John. I’m not as strong as you believed. You made me promise to stay alive for one year and one year only. That year is over *today*.”

She crawled in the direction of the pills, bits of straw and hay clinging to her clothes. “Where did you little bastards go?” Her eyes strained to focus. “Come out, come out, wherever you are.” She reached the dark, recessed area of the barn and froze.

Lying on the ground in the shadows was a dead man.