

EDUCATING ELIZABETH

GROVER TOWN DISCIPLINE - BOOK FOUR



YASMINE HYDE



Published by Blushing Books
An Imprint of
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.
A Virginia Corporation
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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EBook ISBN: 978-1-64563-466-9

Print ISBN: 978-1-64563-467-6

Audio ISBN: 978-1-64563-468-3

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Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

CHAPTER 1



There was so much blood.

Staring at the body on the floor, still, not moving, her heart was beating hard and her breath was shallow. She felt sick to her stomach and dizzy. Her legs were shaking so badly that she was afraid her knees would buckle and she wouldn't be able to get off the floor. The patrol would come and find her right here by the dead man.

As she turned, white spots flashed before her eyes, then nothingness.

Slowly, she opened her eyes, blinking away the confusion. She felt hot, flushed. Unsure of why she was lying on a rug at the bottom of the stairs, she started to rise but noticed something in her hand, a candelabra. Everything came rushing back to her mind. She peered over her shoulder and saw first, a set of male legs in britches then, a torso. She wouldn't allow herself to look further to confirm that a man was on her floor.

A man she had known for the last five years, a man she would have said was a friend or at least a confidant and advisor. Three years ago, her parents were killed in a carriage accident during a

bad storm and this man had come into her life as an advocate who had already worked with her father. He became her support.

Now, he was dead, at her hands.

"I can't stay here." She stumbled to her feet as the sterling candleholder dropped from her limp fingers. Her fingers were just as numb and lifeless as the man behind her who had stained her family's carpet with the blood from his head. The soft thump of the metal, as it struck the carpet then bumped into her ankle, jolted her out of her reverie and into action.

Rushing from the parlor through the archway, she dashed right up the wide stairs to the second floor. She raced down the hall and thundered into her room. At this moment, she wished she had not given Nellie the night off, or any of the servants, for that matter. However, he'd told her that he needed to speak to her urgently, that the matter was private and of extreme importance. Following his dictate, she'd let her few staff members take some time away from their nightly duties. Now, she needed help getting her belongs together.

She turned left then right, trying to decide what to grab. First, she started for her trunk underneath her window seat, one of her favorite places to be in the house when her parents were living. She enjoyed sitting for hours sipping chocolate and pretending to read a book or write missives, but she would truly stare out onto the street and watch people and couples going by. After her parents had passed, she'd become one of those people passing by. There were parties a plenty for her to attend. Her best friend Margie Beechum threw the most fabulous soiree and afternoon teas, and at least one night a week, she had singers, or poets, or musicians over—both local and those renowned around the country. It was because Margie's husband was the Deputy Mayor and he had all sorts of connections.

He was many years older than Margie, but she could come and go and shop as she pleased. There were no parents or older brother or solicitors governing what she could do. Just her husband, and

Lord Beechum was a pile of mush when it came to Margie and her beautiful big blue eyes and bow mouth. Margie was buxom and all the boys in the schoolhouse had wanted her. She'd married rich instead of handsome. Margie had repeatedly talked about making a match for her with some of Lord's friends, many of whom were looking for a second or third wife.

No, no, no. Elizabeth refused to settle for just anyone. Since she would have money after her next birthday, she could afford to wait. It was what the solicitor, Ronald Gerner, always told her. Until tonight.

Biting into her nails, she tried not to think about how that same solicitor was now dead on the floor beneath her feet. Elizabeth ran back out of her room to the spare closet, where they kept the bigger trunks for long travel. Taking hold of one of them, she stooped awkwardly as she dragged it behind her toward her open door. Once she was back in her room, she flung it open on the floor, not wanting to take the time to lift the cumbersome object onto her bed. Grabbing armfuls of her dresses from her wardrobe, she dumped them into the maw of the trunk.

Without any order or reason, everything she thought she could not live without went inside. She even tossed inside the Baxter mantle clock off her dresser that was her great-great-grandfather's. She'd always adored it. Her father had gotten it fixed for her thirteenth birthday because she loved it so much.

When she flipped the lid of the trunk over the pile, she realized that all the items were bulging out of the side. *How did Nellie do this?*

She opened it back up and attempted to stuff the things down, then, when she closed it again, she applied her body weight on top to try and help secure it. But that didn't work. When she started out of the room for a second trunk, her heart leaped at the knocking on the door downstairs.

She turned toward the front hall that would lead to the stairs that led to the front door. Standing there, she ceased breathing, wondering who would come to her home. It was the evening hours,

almost eight by the clock in her room, and for the most part, she had lived alone over the last six months, her great aunt having returned to her home in Virginia since Elizabeth was going to be a woman of independent means soon. It may have also had a lot to do with the fact Elizabeth was 'a handful'. That was what her Aunt Lucille had said on a daily basis when she wanted to stay out late or dance with the same gentleman more than was proper, or heaven forbid she let one or two men walk with her in the garden, too close to dusk.

But Elizabeth was young, and soon she would be free, and the last thing she wanted was anyone to tell her what she could do or where she could go. She was a nineteenth century lady of sophistication...or that's what she aspired to be.

The knock came again. And she stepped close to the wall and hid in the shadows, even though she told herself it was silly, that no one could even see her from the front of the house to the upstairs. When the third knock came, she was sure she heard someone calling out her name. The familiar voice reminded her that the governor's clerk had asked to call on her, escort her to the theater. The man had taken a shine to her two days ago, at a lawn affair. She loved the theater and had agreed, instantly. At that time, she had known Nellie, her maid, would be available to attend as a chaperone type. That was before Mr. Gerner had sent over the urgent message that he needed to see her.

Shaking her head to clear it of the man growing colder as she delayed, she moved back to her room on silent feet and grabbed her carpet bag from the floor of her wardrobe. There was no time for her to hire a rental carriage and driver to help her get her things out of the house. With the clerk at the front door, that way was barred to her anyway for an escape.

For a moment, she considered going down and greeting the young man, allowing him to take her out. Then she could come home and pretend she had just found the solicitor on the floor, overtaken by burglars.

"No, no, no," she whispered this time. That wouldn't do. There was no way that she could appear calm and her normal vivacious self, knowing that a man was dead at her home. If she could pull that off, she could be an actress on the stage instead of a patron in the audience. She removed a few of her favorite skirts, tops, and underthings from the trunk.

I'll have to escape by the back door. She opened the top roller of her oak wood secretary and grabbed her journal. It was her secret place where she stashed bills from the budget Mr. Gerner, advised by her brother, kept her on. He made her account for every red cent, whether she bought a new hat, gloves, or replaced a buckle on her favorite boots. When her friends treated her to tea or a luncheon in the city, she'd put her cost for the meal away but let a small fib slip from her lips to the solicitor. She'd tell him she had spent it while out and lost the slip.

Why should he worry her so, when in a little while she'd be her own woman and she'd be telling him how much of her money to give her? Or so she had thought. However, she'd been so wrong. Her eyes began to burn as she thought about the papers on the table before the couch, scattered about. She had tossed them down after she read them. It had to be wrong, some foul trick.

Now, wasn't the time to replay the printed words. Instead, it was time for her to get away. Once she had some space to think, she would know what she needed to do. She could make a plan.

The last thing she grabbed was the sterling silver brush set her father had given her mother years before as a gift. Elizabeth loved the beautiful carvings and had often traced the vines that made a heart shape on the back. Heading out into the hallway, she moved quickly until she reached the back-servants' stairs. With her palm pressed against the wall for balance down the narrow passageway, she didn't stop. In the kitchen, she grabbed up the few rolls Cook had on a plate from breakfast. There was also a small pouch of shelled pecans. She knew that Mrs. Oaks had shelled them for her special pie on Sunday.

It made her heart ache to know that she would not be here to get a big slice when it was warm and fresh. Swallowing the tightness in her throat, Elizabeth pulled open the back door and went out into the night. There was a crispness to the air from the rain that afternoon, but it was still a beautiful night. It would have been a perfect night to walk with a gentleman under the streetlamps after a great performance. Tonight, was supposed to be one of the great Shakespearean tragedies.

She made haste along the stone path between the flower beds—one bed of daffodils and the other of crocus. The sight of the summer buds always brought a smile to her face when they bloomed each year. She wondered if she would ever see them again. On the other side of the wrought iron gate, she turned and stared at the bright red and purple petals in the late evening light. One step, then two, she backed away from her family home. It was time for her to go. By morning, the staff would return, and they would see what lay sprawled on the floor in the front room and the officers would be notified. They would come, and there would be many questions. A search for her would be on, and if they found her, she'd be tossed into prison.

That wasn't the life she wanted. It wasn't the life her parents would have wanted for her. Without further delay, she moved in the direction away from the main road. She'd need to think about how she could get away, far away. Where she could go, she wasn't sure, but here, she couldn't stay.

An hour or so later, when she was far enough away from her home and anything that was familiar, she spotted a carriage. Walking through a back alley, she was grateful that the lantern at the back doors of the shops had been lit. When she arrived at the side street, she barreled into someone who stepped in her path.

"Whoa there, miss." Thick hands grabbed at her forearms and set her away.

"Oh, excuse me, sir—" She looked up, and only because the air

whooshed out of her lungs at the sight of the officer before her in all-black regalia and big silver buttons, did she not scream.

They've found me.

"No worries. Where are you 'bout?"

"Um...sick...carriage...sick...aunt...sick." Her words didn't make much sense to her own ears. Her tongue felt like a piece of wood in her mouth as it splintered out the lie.

He chuckled and tugged his hat back in place, knocked off center from their collision. "Ahh. A sick aunt, you say. No wonder you're at sixes and sevens. I'll get that rent a ride."

She told herself not to balk at the lawman's touch. He moved her to the curb as he whistled and grabbed the attention of the carriage driver. The driver was a bit on the unkempt side, but she didn't care at this moment. If someone created a yell, or for one moment, the officer saw something suspicious in her manner, he could start asking questions, things that she couldn't answer...didn't want to answer, lest she planned to spend the remainder of her days in jail.

Only a moment or two passed before she was helped up into the ride.

"Where are you needin' to go?" The Irish brogue of his accent filled the interior.

"The train station. I must catch a train." It wasn't until that moment that she realized where she needed to go. The locomotive was the fastest way to travel and she needed to get away fast, now.

"I'll see that he gets you there safely." The officer tipped his hat then moved away and closed the door.

She could hear him call up instructions and warn the man that if he didn't get her there safely, he'd have to answer to him.

The driver called out a garbled response before he set out. Elizabeth clutched her bag to her queasy stomach and sent up silent wishes that she would be able to leave the city. No matter where the train was going, she would be on it.

An hour later, Elizabeth settled into her seat in her satin dress.

The bodice was practically soaked through from her sweat and anxiety as each minute ticked by while she sat in the depot waiting for the next train to arrive.

"Are you traveling alone?"

Elizabeth met the gaze of the woman seated across the aisle from her. "Um, yes."

The woman, with auburn locks wrapped in a severe high and tight bun at her crown, not a single strand out of place, offered Elizabeth a warm smile. "It will be nice to have some company on the trip. May I?"

When the woman gestured toward the seat on Elizabeth's side that was vacant, Elizabeth considered telling her a respectful no but then changed her mind. The law would not be looking for two women traveling together. "Please."

"Thank you." The other woman shuffled over a bag a little smaller than Elizabeth's and not as fine. Then she settled in the high polished wood seat that faced Elizabeth and held her hand out. "I'm Beth. Well, Bethany Talbot."

With a hesitant smile, Elizabeth slipped her hand into the other woman's. Bethany's shake was firm and steady, almost manly. "I'm Elizabeth Taylor."

She wondered if she should have given the woman her real name. However, it was too late for her to take it back.

"Well, isn't that something? We practically have the same name." Beth's smile was large.

"Something."

Elizabeth observed that the woman was similar in height but noted she was wide in the shoulders and hips, with a face plain but kind. Their names were where the similarities ended.

"I'm headed to Kansas. How about you?"

"Yes. Kansas City." Elizabeth knew someone outside of Kansas City. If she couldn't think of another place to get off the train, then Kansas City would have to do.

"I'm headed to Grover Town." A blush crept up the woman's

features as she leaned forward. "I'm a bride. A mail order one."

"Oh." Elizabeth had heard about an agency in the city that catered to helping lone, hopeless women connect with lonelier men out west. Bethany wasn't unattractive, plain, definitely, but surely there were men a plenty in Boston who would have taken her to wife...and breed. In Elizabeth's experience, men were always trying to find a wife and over eager to have children. She'd gotten offers practically daily since sixteen.

She didn't think there was ever a need to leave home and go off to marry some stranger in a strange town who could look like the good Lord only knew what.

The train's horn blew, and moments later the locomotive began to roll down the track. Elizabeth kept her face turned toward the opposite window, away from the depot to keep anyone from recognizing her through the window. She'd spent hours sitting on one of the wooden benches, worried that one of her servants would come back to the house early and find the solicitor by now. When they didn't find her within the residence, they'd begin a wider search. Her staff would confess how she'd strangely sent them away that night. The law would begin to question her friends, who'd say they hadn't seen her, that she hadn't made it to the theater that evening.

The tension in her shoulders released even more as the only city and home she'd ever known sat farther and farther in the distance as the engine moved on.

"...I know it is strange. My sister had some luck with it."

Elizabeth realized that Bethany had still been chattering along as she'd been bemoaning the loss of her city and home.

"Your sister? Has done what, you say?"

"Oh, the mail order thing. She went by wagon trail with a group of other women and families doing the same. They were bound for a farther destination...Montana. It was five years ago. But she wrote that she was fine and had two children already. Her husband has a sheep farm. She tends it with him."

A sheepherder. Elizabeth didn't realize she was shaking her head until she heard the other woman agree.

"It couldn't be me either." Bethany laughed. "My intended, well, husband practically, since we signed the papers by proxy, he's the town doctor and I'm going to be a big help to him. I completed training a couple years ago and was working at the clinic connected to the New Haven school. I came home a year ago to tend to my mother who was ill. Once she was buried and with my schooling, not a lot of men were looking my way, because I'm so much older than most."

Tilting her head, Elizabeth studied her. She didn't seem fresh-faced, but she wasn't matronly by any stretch. "How old is that?"

"Twenty-four." She shrugged. "It's not too old to have little ones if we start right away. Since some of the towns in the Midwest don't have many women, they're not as picky."

"I wouldn't guess they would be. Aren't you nervous? You know, because you don't know what he looks like or his house, for that matter. He could be in some shack with the roof caving in."

Bethany laughed again. It was kind of a broken snort. "No. It wouldn't bother me because I could help him fix it. But I already know he just finished adding on to his home. Well, the clinic side anyway."

Elizabeth didn't know what to say to that. The woman seemed happy at her prospects. The last thing Elizabeth would want was a bunch of sick people traipsing in and out of her home. To each their own.

"What about you?"

"Me?" Turning, Elizabeth glanced around at the other passengers in their train car. There were a couple families, a few gentlemen riding along or in pairs, no one she recognized from her circle of friends.

"Yes. I'm headed to a town in Kansas, how about you? Doubt you're a proxy bride."

"That's right. I'm no one's bride. I'm not even twenty yet." She

fingering one of her perfectly placed pinned curls. Her maid worked hard on her hair daily to make it curl just so. Since her hair was bone straight and long, it took them a lot of time in the afternoon, when she awoke, to get her hair to stay curled in the high-fashion style.

"So, what takes someone so young out of the city?"

Elizabeth wished the woman wouldn't ask so many questions. She much preferred silence or when the woman was speaking about herself. "I'm going to visit family...outside of Kansas City."

The lie tumbled out of her mouth. She only knew one person in the Midwest and since she was in a lot of trouble, he wasn't going to be so happy to see her.

"A nurse, you say. Tell me about some of the things you've seen." Elizabeth didn't want to know. Ill people made her ill. However, she figured it was the only way to keep away the questions about herself.

Bethany started talking and Elizabeth silently hummed a song in her head, helping her to smile and nod as they continued their long journey.



"SO, WHAT D'YA THINK, DOC?"

Doc Clarkston continued to press gently along the deep purple bruising along the man's dark skin. Reggie and his family were one of three new families of color who had moved into Grover Town over the last year. They, along with others, were part of the boom that was happening in town. The Greens, ex-slaves, had come up from Texas.

Looking into the man's face, covered in sweat, Martin told him honestly, "That mule got you good. You've got at least two broken ribs."

Reaching into his black leather case, he removed a handful of the wide strips he kept for bandaging. Bell, Reggie's wife and

mother of the three children sitting on the porch waiting to hear what was wrong with their pa, came over and gave him a hand.

Reggie hissed and groaned as they pulled the bandage stark against his skin firmly and tied it off.

"How long is he going to be down?" Bell used a cloth to wipe the added sweat off her husband's brow as they helped Reggie lie back down.

"At least three weeks." He patted the man on the leg before he rose. "I'll come back out in a week and check on you."

"I can't be laid low for that long." Reggie attempted to sit up but quickly fell back down, grunting and clutching his side.

"The soybeans need harvestin' so we can start preparin' the feed to sell to the farmers. This is our first good one." Bell glanced from the bed where her husband lay to him.

Pulling out two bottles from his bag, Martin moved back to the bed and poured out a spoonful of the liquid, offering it to the man. "This will help you sleep, Reggie."

The man's eyes were squeezed tight as he opened his mouth and nodded.

Removing a handkerchief from his pocket, the doctor shook out some pills from the other bottle. "Bell, you give him two of these with each meal, startin' tomorrow. They'll help with his pain for the next couple days. Don't let him out of that bed, though."

"Yes, sir." Bell's skin was a soft reddish brown, a few shades lighter than her husband's. "I'll let my middle child, she's seven; she can keep an eye on him while we is all in the field."

"I'll pass your situation on to Pastor Morgan. I'm sure he'll be around to check on you all and get the word out. In Grover Town, we try to make a habit of helping our neighbors." With a hand on her shoulder, he added, "There'll be hands to help out you and the children."

Bell sniffed and brushed away a stray tear as she rose from the low bed. "We sho' do 'preciate all you've done."

"Think nothin' of it." Martin retrieved his hat from the table and headed with bag in hand toward the door.

Once he was on the porch, three sets of eyes turned and stared at him. "Your pa will be all right. He'll just need a few days to rest."

"Doc Clarkston."

At his horse, Martin turned and glanced back. Bell was rushing toward him with a wrapped bundle in her hand. "Hot water cornbread. I made it fresh the morning. It ain't much. But once we get the harvest done, Reggie'll make sure your paid."

He smiled and took the small bundle. It wasn't the first time he was paid in baked goods. He'd also gotten more chickens and eggs than a single man could ever have use for. Money didn't dictate who he helped in town. "Oh, this will do just fine. I don't get much in the way of home cookin' so it's payment enough."

The large smile on her face at hearing his words lit the woman's brown eyes, and he could see how Reggie had fallen for her. With a nod, he mounted his horse and headed on his way.

Pulling out a piece of the fried, flat meal bread, he lifted it to his mouth and quickly took a bite. It was the first time he'd tried it. People in these parts didn't cook anything like it. The crispiness of the edge complimented the savory flavor of the cooked batter and brought a grin to his face.

Soon, his wife would arrive, and from her letters, she was a decent cook. He was excited to get someone fixing meals for him like Reggie and all the other husbands in town got on their table. He was looking forward to not taking all his meals at the Drummonds' or Manny's Saloon.

Lifting a second piece, he made mental plans to introduce his wife to Bell and see if she could teach her to make the hot water cornbread, as she'd called it.

Yes, soon, life for him would be good. He'd get the support he needed, a warm body to warm his bed, and someone to make his house a home. He could have picked one of the nice young ladies from Grover, but since the town's population had started to grow,

he barely had time to relax, let alone court. He'd been away from town at medical school down in Texas while his friends were at barn dances, summer picnics, and other town social gatherings makin' eyes at the few young women in town, even of an age to marry.

Sending a letter to the address on the flier at the postal service office and telling the mail order service what he'd like in a wife seemed the most efficient way for him to get things done.

There hadn't been a letter from Beth in almost a month. She'd written and told him she was leaving Boston and would see him soon. With her traveling by train, he'd expected the trip to take about three weeks, but it had been a little more than a month. He had made it a daily habit to be at the new train depot after lunch to see if she'd arrived, but there had been no sight of her yet.

He wasn't worried, because he knew there were parts of her travel where she'd have to take a stagecoach between towns to catch one train or another. In another week, he'd send word to the agency requesting either a new bride or the return of the money he'd sent for her passage.

Being the only doctor in town, it didn't allow him to travel to the east and accompany her out, like a honeymoon trip. The only thing he could hope was that something hadn't happened to her.



ELIZABETH SAT in the chair across the small room of the boarding house, as she stared at the second dead body before her in not even six weeks. This death was just as much at her hands as the last one. The only difference was she'd wielded an object that had killed him, and this time it was her inexperience that had done it.

Tears rushed down her face and her stomach ached from how many times she'd emptied it into the bucket. The room smelled like waste, bile, and death, both the humidity and scent suffocating her. She couldn't take being around someone who was so sick. They had

only made it as far as Kansas City, Missouri before Bethany had been so ill, she couldn't go on.

Her companion had been ordered from the train lest she get other passengers sick. The woman had clutched at Elizabeth and begged her not to leave her. Elizabeth may have been inept in some things, but she wasn't heartless. It had taken all of Elizabeth's money to get the room for the week.

Bethany's remaining funds had covered the bland soup they had both eaten and the medicine to keep her friend out of pain. The local doctor had said there wasn't anything that he could do. Bethany's appendix had ruptured, and by the time they'd gotten off the train, the bacteria had already tainted her blood. Bethany's body was already septic. He'd left a large bottle of laudanum before walking out.

"Make her comfortable," had been his last words.

That had been five days ago. Five hellacious days of Bethany writhing and groaning in pain when she wasn't unconscious from the medication.

There was a knock at the door as someone called out, "Your soup, ma'am."

Wiping at her own mouth and nose, Elizabeth rose then moved to the door on unsteady legs. Turning the handle, she opened the door and stared at the boarding house owner's thirteen-year-old daughter. The girl, Mary, usually delivered the soup, bread, and fresh water for Elizabeth to tend to Bethany.

"I need the undertaker." Elizabeth tried to keep her voice steady, but she could hear the wavering in her own ears.

Mary's gaze shifted from Elizabeth to the bed beyond her shoulder. Sadness filled the girl's blue eyes as she pushed the tray toward Elizabeth then walked away.

Balancing the tray, Elizabeth used her foot to kick the door closed. She moved to the table and set her burden down. Staring at the food and the pitcher of water, she wasn't sure what she was supposed to do. The woman going cold on the bed behind her had

become a friend of sorts during their travel. Elizabeth felt horrible that someone so young had lost her life.

Glancing over her shoulder at the ashen woman, she thought about all of Bethany's hopes and dreams. She'd talked nonstop for weeks about her proxy husband and the new life she would have in Grover Town. Once she'd gotten sick and they had settled into the room, Bethany had made her read the letters from the doctor out loud.

Most of the letters described what he did on a regular basis in caring for the sick and broken. None of it did Elizabeth find appealing to hear or read. The man described his home and the changes to the clinic and what was going on in the town with all the new people moving in since the train had set up there.

"Now, she will never have the life she'd hoped for." Elizabeth poured herself a glass of water from the pitcher. She drank it, not because she was thirsty, but she used it to rinse down the bitter taste of bile from her mouth.

She couldn't think about how her companion's life had ended, without thinking about how her own life was empty. If either of them had to die, it probably would have been better for it to have been Elizabeth. "No one would have missed me."

Her parents were dead and her relationship with her only close relative was distant at best. One day, she'd gone out into the town and had asked around about a tanner named Eileen and she'd gotten more than a few strange looks. When her brother had come home for their parents' funeral, she'd sworn he'd told her that he'd been in or around Kansas City and had said something about planning to marry some woman who worked with cow or cattle skin. She hadn't really paid much attention to the things he said, she'd been devastated and refused to leave Boston and travel west with him.

Now, there was really no place for her to go. She was out of money. She couldn't even post a letter if she had someone to write to. She thought about her friend Margie, but officers by now would

have questioned her. Margie and the entire city would know Ronald Gerner was discovered dead at the Taylor house. No, she couldn't wire Margie; it was too risky.

She didn't even think it was best to stay in this city. If she didn't think of a plan, the law would eventually track her here. No one had to tell her that the hunt was on for Elizabeth Taylor.

"What will I do?" She stared at the bundle of letters and papers on the nightstand. Perhaps she could give them to the owners of the boarding house and ask them to post them. "But where?"

She had a thought about the agency that had set Bethany up with the proxy husband and sent her on her way.

There came another knock.

When she opened the door this time, there was the round woman with the short, capped, dirty blonde natural curls, another man with a cleric collar, and another slim man dressed all in black whose eyes were dark as coal in his pale face. The last man made a cold chill slide down Elizabeth's back.

"I've come to give the last rites." The priest was the first to come in as he was followed by the other two.

There was a lot of discussion happening about cleaning the body and getting it moved and the room having to be aired out, all while the priest was removing a small, clear bottle from the folds of his dark robe.

As he uncorked it, he asked, "What's the name of the deceased?"

"Beth...Elizabeth Taylor." Her own name came tumbling out of her mouth before she could process her actions. Numb, she watched as he tipped what she assumed was holy water on his fingertips before he touched the dead woman's forehead, making the sign of the cross.

Another chill washed over her and made her nauseous as she listened to the man send a benediction for the end of the life of a woman known as Elizabeth Taylor on the same day that marked her birth.