

The Unlocked Path

FIRST CHAPTER...Sneak Peek

Chapter One

May 1897

Blackened toast crumbs clung to the soft yellow egg curds. Four white plates dissolved into the white tablecloth, a blur of sameness.

Eliza Edwards reached for the plate next to her spot at the end of the table, always to her mother's left.

"Miss Eliza!!!"

She turned toward the hallway, the call of her name piercing her ears with an urgency not often heard from Molly. Dropping the plate, a crust bounced onto the carpet. As she stooped to retrieve the nibbled toast edge, again, this time a screech.

"It's Mrs. Maria. Please, hurry."

Eliza flew up the staircase, her auburn hair streaming behind her. As she sprinted down the hallway, a lump of briny gruel traveled up her throat. Preoccupied with her own concerns over the past few weeks, she had disregarded traces of Aunt Maria's increasing distress. Now, with Molly sounding an alarm, how could Eliza help?

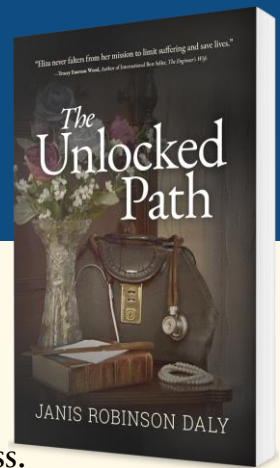
Curtains drawn tight blocked fresh air from circulating life into the bedroom. Eliza bent over her aunt's listless figure; rank odors of an unbathed body seeped through the sheets. On the nightstand, a bottle of digitalis tablets lay empty. Two ovals remained on the table, white with their false innocence, disguising their potency. Maria, translucent like a crescent moon, curled on her side, clutching a pillow to her chest. Shallow, intermittent breaths rattled with a faint rasp. Eliza picked up a pale, wilted wrist. Maria's stream of life pulsed feeble and slow while Eliza's throbbed in her ears and across her temple. "Aunt Maria, what have you done?"

Maria lifted her arm in a ballet dancer's flowing arc to Eliza's face. With the back of her hand, she brushed Eliza's cheek before the weightless arm fell to the bed. Molly tapped Eliza's shoulder, "She was singing to William when I came for her tray. Fifteen years since he went to Our Lord. This is the first time she's said his name. Gone upstairs, she is."

Eliza pushed Molly away, hissing, "You are never to talk like that. Aunt Maria has her troubles, but we always take care of her. Fetch Dr. Wilcox. Tell him it's an emergency."

"No," Maria said, her voice faltering. "Those men don't understand."

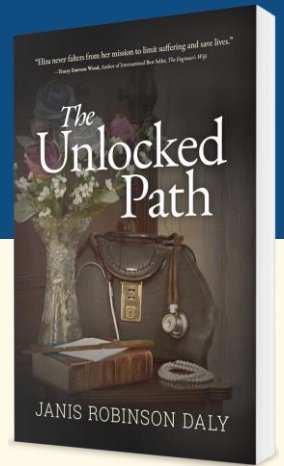
Eliza placed the heels of her hands on the windowpanes and thrust the window up with a bang. Turning to the bureau, she moved Maria's journals aside to reach the ewer. A torn page fluttered to the floor.



JANIS ROBINSON DALY

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EXCERPTS...Scene Teasers



Chapter Seven

Anandi's Application Letter

The determination which has brought me to your country against the combined opposition of my friends and caste ought to go a long way towards helping me to carry out the purpose for which I came, i.e. is to render to my poor suffering countrywomen the true medical aid they so sadly stand in need of and which they would rather die than accept at the hands of a male physician. The voice of humanity is with me, and I must not fail. My soul is moved to help the many who cannot help themselves.

Eliza dropped the letter into her lap, folding her hands on top to safeguard it from flapping away in the breeze. Dearest Anandi. How brave. How strong. Her loss so similar to Aunt Maria. Yet, Anandi's resolve gave her life and purpose. She channeled her grief and observations into an application letter for an institution which shone a light on women's intellect, ability, and empathy. Anandi strode forward; Maria shrunk backward.



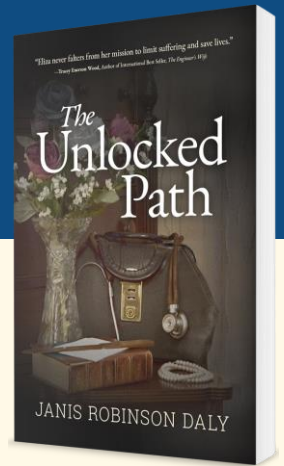
Women's Reception at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, October 10, 1885.

Drexel University Archives – Woman's Medical College

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EXCERPTS... Scene Teasers



Chapter Thirteen

First Semester Exam Period

A wreath of more greenery occupied a pedestal beside the lectern. Around the wreath stood one pink and three purple candles with a single white one in the center. Two purple candles glowed with flickering flames to mark the second Sunday of Advent.

“For everything that was written, the past was written to teach us,” intoned Reverend Abrams, “so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind...”

Today’s reading fostered the ideals of prophecy, endurance, and hope before the Savior’s birth. Would it be blasphemous if Eliza thought the ideals should apply to term exams?

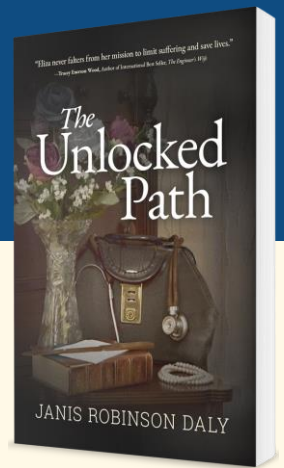
Dear God, please give me the endurance and encouragement to make it through next week. My mind is addled. My hopes are dim. These examinations may kill me. If the College uses my body for dissection, I doubt they’ll find the cause of my death buried in tissues and organs. Mental exhaustion hides itself deep in the brain where neurons send tired tentacles out to every muscle until they cannot move.



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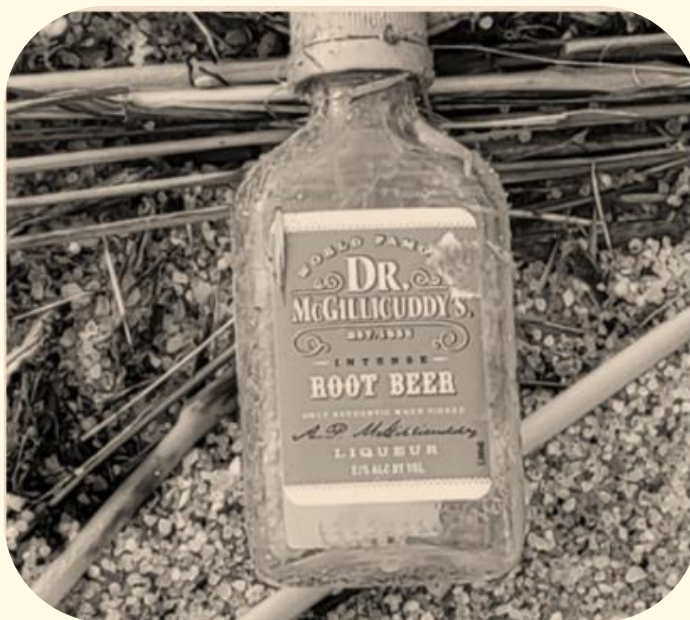
Chapter Twenty-Eight

Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

“I don’t need those pills,” Nina grunted. “Mrs. Lydia Pinkham’s Remedy works wonders for me. I sleep as sound as this here babe.”

I’m sure it does, Eliza snorted to herself. Lydia Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound included twenty percent alcohol content, not any magical curative powers. *Unless one considers the power of suggestion.* Eliza recalled the advertisement in Ladies’ Home Journal which proclaimed it restored the health of over 500,000 women who suffered from the worst forms of female complaints and touted it eased change of life symptoms, and that “wise women insist on Mrs. Pinkham’s”

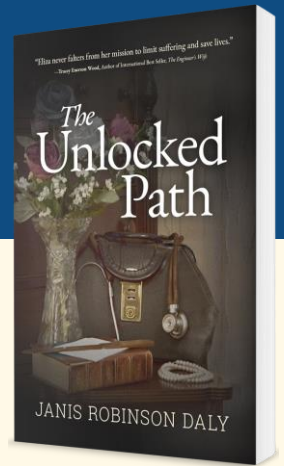
Nina Silvestri’s old-fashioned wisdom may never yield to more modern ways. Convincing her a drug compounded by dissecting and pulverizing cow ovaries could stem menopausal symptoms sounded as foreign as warming a bed with an electrified blanket instead of using a hot water bottle, or a man’s body.



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EXCERPTS... Scene Teasers



Chapter Thirty-Eight

Spanish Influenza Pandemic

Starting in her heart, fatigue claimed her body. A throb in her temples spread to a twitch in her fingers. Eliza knew exhaustion on a first-name basis. Over her career, it visited her often, made itself at home and settled into her bones. But this debilitation consumed her unlike any other time. Her life classified fatigue into physical or emotional. Exam study, double shifts at the hospital, and looking after two energetic sons required physical exertion. The heartbreak of losing X, cradling a dying patient's hand, dealing with XX's volatility, or concern over her children's health drove emotional exhaustion. Here, she fought a simultaneous battle. Hour after hour she tended to patients. She lifted their limbs, walked the rows in an endless loop like Will's train set, and carried trays of water and salves. Her arms and legs numbed. Men died; not one, not two, but eight over the course of nine hours. The enormity of it drained every fiber of her verve. A helpless anguish seized control.

X = No spoilers!



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