

"Meticulously researched and beautifully written.

The story of a life well lived."

– KATHLEEN GRISSOM, NY Times Bestselling author of *The Kitchen House*

The
Path Beneath
Her Feet

A Novel



JANIS ROBINSON DALY

CHAPTER ONE

Spring 1936

Boston, Massachusetts

“I’m sorry, Dr. Edwards.”
Seated across the desk from the hospital administrator, Eliza Edwards stared into Dr. Miles’s steel-gray eyes. His blank expression offered no sympathy.

“Surely, you must understand. The Peter Bent Brigham Hospital cannot add a position to our payrolls in this economic climate,” he said, running his index finger down a list of names and dates. He shook his head in defeat. “I’ve double-checked. No one is retiring this year from the maternity ward. Dr. Gallagher’s date is closest, although he may decline. He may be unable to give up his wages. He lost a great deal in ’29 and I’ve heard his daughter and her four children moved in at Christmas.”

Eliza sighed with an audible groan. *I’m sorry*. That short phrase had become a constant refrain as it reverberated around the country and in her ears over the past six months. *I’m sorry*, said every administrator she spoke with about a position. *I’m sorry*, said the landlord as he reminded Eliza that she and Olga Povitsky owed rent on their office space. *I’m sorry*, replied the druggist when Eliza asked him to reduce his prices on prescriptions that she wrote for her patients who struggled to buy

groceries, let alone a month's supply of pills to ease menopausal symptoms.

Eliza stood. She should have worn higher heels, not for the extra femininity they would present, but for a taller stature they could provide than her five feet two inches. Although she doubted that even an Amazon woman standing before Dr. Miles could alter the facts on his staff sheet. She offered her hand. "I'm sorry, too, Dr. Miles. I believe my years of experience would be a great asset to the Brigham."

As Eliza headed toward the door, Dr. Miles's voice halted her reach for the glass knob. "I've a thought. It's radical, but I have enough sway around here to make an exception."

Eliza turned to hear his idea. At this point, she could manage radical.

"Every year, like clockwork, it happens," he continued. "Our new hires, with the ink barely dry on their certificates, find themselves with a diamond on their fingers soon after, which means many of them disappear off to birthing their own children before they get started. I realize you're married, but we could make an exception given, well, I don't suppose you'd be coming in to announce a pregnancy?"

Her eyebrows shot up as he suggested her child-bearing years had passed. She had taken great care to conceal her fifty-seven years. She had fought enough battles in her life to prove her abilities as a woman. She didn't need to pile on proof she still had all her faculties about her.

Dr. Miles's face colored to the same red as the bowtie at his chin. "Would you consider a nursing position?"

Eliza's cheeks flared to match his, not from embarrassment, but from fury. She doubted that he offered the same alternative to the young man, with his freshly minted Harvard degree, whom she had met in the waiting area.

"As I said, Dr. Miles, thank you for your time. However, may I remind you, again, I hold a degree from the Woman's Medical

College of Pennsylvania and have run a successful private practice with Dr. Povitsky. I am a doctor. I intend to remain one for many more years.”

She wasn't sorry.



Read on for snippets of the rest of the chapters...



Chapter Two

Thirty-five years of experience crumpled into a ball of worthless waste.

Chapter Three

Plumes of pollen, like a thin layer of bumblebee dust, had coated car windshields and hoods, streets and sidewalks, and every black wrought-iron railing which graced the stoops of her Beacon Hill neighborhood.

Chapter Four

Too many ghosts skulked in the streets of Philadelphia. A college teetering on closure. Dead and buried grandparents, parents, and aunts. Classmates blown to all corners of the country and around the globe.

Chapter Five

When her grandfather spoke of the letter opener, he reminded Eliza and her brothers of his work on behalf of men like Daniel Dangerfield by stating, "Those that have, and can, must care for the defenseless and the powerless, for they have no one else."

"When do they need me?"

Chapter Six

A city girl her entire life, the quiet air engulfed her. A person could lose themselves in a spot like this with few distractions but the purpose at hand. Or find themselves.

Chapter Seven

When Kay spoke of how the constant, excruciating pains which shot through her body and up her spine dissolved into the bliss of the water, Eliza teared up. This dear young woman swam toward strength and serenity. She would need both to become a mother.

Chapter Eight

Olga to Eliza: "The few times I left you on your own, you fell in love with the wrong man. Twice! Now don't go falling for a suave Southern gent, fooled by a syrupy drawl and rugged good looks. A third time isn't always a charm."



Chapter Nine

Time to get back to Scarlet's conversation with Ashley, her long forbidden love. Ashley has told Scarlet that she shouldn't be surprised at how her life has changed from what she had hoped for once upon a time as a young, naïve, Southern belle. How true, Ashley, how true, Eliza thought. We must not expect our paths will follow a straight and narrow one.

Chapter Ten

"This restaurant needs to realize they could increase their charges if the ladies could order a glass or two with their dinner. A bar doesn't always mean it will automatically draw a male clientele. Women like the comforts of a good pour, too."

Chapter Eleven

Laurel Hill. Mosswood. Why did city planners name cemeteries related to living elements in the natural world? Did they portend a sense of hope that life would continue? Or that names of peaceful settings would soothe a visitor's grief?

Chapter Twelve

The tools of her life's work lay inside, each item sterilized and wrapped, awaiting her hands to put them to use.

Chapter Thirteen

"Come in, come in. Welcome to our humble town. We are so appreciative you've come all this way."

Chapter Fourteen

Whereas Hester Prynne's scarlet "A" marked her as a fallen woman, perhaps a large "DR" stitched across Eliza's breast in bright red lettering could mark her and her peers as ones to be revered, not shunned.

Chapter Fifteen

Her delicate features resembled a wildflower which despite its outward beauty had the inner strength to weather the pressure of an unexpected spring storm.

Chapter Sixteen

The prism of colors washed away darkness and brought hope for a new day. Eliza felt Grace's plea that a ray of sunshine from Rosie could wash away her mother's darkness.



Chapter Seventeen

As she reached for the bag, she said to Grace, “And to be true to oneself, you must not only follow, but throw your entire soul into realizing those desires. I’d like to share a few words of wisdom from a woman who helped unlock my desire.”

Chapter Eighteen

“It’s time I got home to Vermont, where I can inhale without swallowing a mouthful of no-see-ums mixed with a pint of humidity.”

Chapter Nineteen

But now, as the idea grew in scope and her list spanned multiple pages, anxiety elbowed its way into her psyche. Eliza had never managed such an undertaking.

Chapter Twenty

Bessie edged closer, narrowing her eyes onto an armband on Eliza’s upper left arm. “And I absolutely adore this!” Eliza wore the AWH armband Dr. South had given her with as much pride as the badge of courage she had fashioned for Harold Newcombe out of a gauze square.

Chapter Twenty-One

“Did it ever occur to you that I’m stringing him along? I’m perfectly happy with the arrangement. We have good times together and I don’t worry that I’ll have a passel of kids like Mrs. Baker, keeping me tied to one spot. I come and go as the story takes me. It’s a freedom few women take advantage of. You should try it sometime, Auntie E. Think of yourself and your needs.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

“This type of situation is delicate to discuss. But, if you mean to be a doctor, you need to learn how to separate the personal from the clinical and focus on the facts. I won’t judge you for what you’re about to say. Keep that in mind. This is to help Leonie.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Grace had cut the pumpkin into chunks, steamed them to a soft mush, then rotated turns with Timmy, using a wire masher and hand-cranked eggbeater to puree the chunks and mix in cream and cinnamon. Don’t forget-there’s still no electricity out here, which means you can’t just plug in a Kitchen Aid!



Chapter Twenty-Four

With the final pushing stage, Eliza urged the woman on before total exhaustion took hold for all of them: mother, child, and doctor. Through her weary eyes, she watched the morning's dawn darken instead of brightening as the hours rose toward noon.

Chapter Twenty-Five

With those distractions halted, worry reared its ugly head. Like a writhing serpent, it gathered strength and fed upon her anxieties. It would not be sated until it constricted the very breath from her lungs.

Chapter Twenty-Six

With a quick peek in the small mirror over a washbasin in the corner, Eliza shrugged at the dark circles under her eyes. No amount of pancake make-up could conceal the rings. Instead, she pinched her cheeks as she had read Scarlett O'Hara had done when she went to visit Rhett in prison.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

In times of need, Eliza appreciated the constants in her life. The women in her circle of family and friends never abandoned her. Their interest in each other's work and lives remained true. Success would come from other women.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

His biceps flexed and quivered beneath his flannel shirt. He snorted and kicked the toe of his boot into the dirt like a bull taunted by her red kerchief.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

"By sharing her personal experience, she demonstrated she trusts us. This will help her, and us as her attending medical professionals, throughout her pregnancy. A woman knows her body better than anyone. You never want a patient to withhold information about what they're feeling."

Chapter Thirty

Today, Eliza turned sixty. She had received a beautiful, thoughtful gift. One more would complete her day.

Chapter Thirty-One

Nearly as sinister as submerged vessels laden with stealth torpedoes, another evil announced itself during the reception.



Chapter Thirty-Two

A solitary life devoid of meaning stalked her like the shadowy figures who slunk through Boston's back alleys, ready to pounce and grab the riches of a fulfilled life.

Chapter Thirty-Three

The task, however, which she couldn't bear to add to her list remained untended. For the past twenty-four hours, she had allowed cowardice and denial a victory they didn't deserve.

Chapter Thirty-Four

With a clenched jaw, she turned to the upended suitcase on her bed. She rummaged through the satin pleated pockets lining the inside edges and each crevice. Save for a wad of lint and two loose bobby pins, she withdrew empty hands.

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