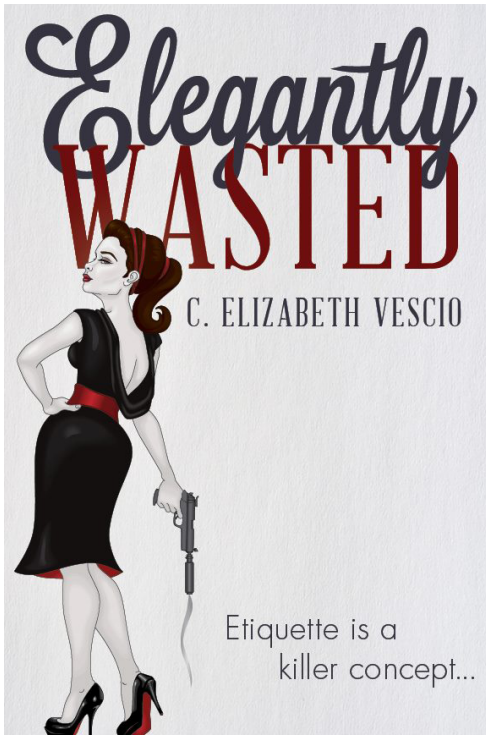


A SAMPLE OF

Elegantly Wasted

by C. Elizabeth Vescio



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Chapter One

“THE INSANE, ON OCCASION, ARE NOT WITHOUT THEIR CHARMS”-
KURT VONNEGUT

All the events of my life had boiled down to a single choice. It's often the story with such things, you make a decision and it has permanent consequences. It warps your life forever. It only takes a few seconds. I made these types of choices for other people all the time but it had never effected me this directly before. What if I was wrong? What if I made the wrong choice?

I didn't know how I got to the breaking point, but I was there- and oddly I was smiling.

The awkward grin was plastered on my face for two reasons.

First, my grandmother was dead and her funeral was about to commence.

Second, I was going insane.

Somewhere in there my brain and my body weren't exactly on the same page. I felt like if I blinked, shifted my weight or made any small attempt to move I would start screaming at the top of my lungs, drawing unwanted attention to myself. So, I sat in a church pew near the back of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, afraid to move.

I tried to keep up with the speed of my thoughts, the effort leaving me with a dull pounding in my brain. The headache I was used to by now, but my newly found due north moral compass was annoying the shit out of me. What if God really existed and he was pissed that I was sitting in his church? Fire, brimstone, smite... all that crap might be on my horizon. I was never afraid of consequence before. I didn't understand it and my anger was growing by the minute.

“Frankie,” I felt an elbow jab in my side. “Stop grinning like a goddamn psycho.”

My face remained in its twisted grin.

“Katharine Fairholm, you can’t just say goddamn in church,” I whispered. “You’re going to hell.”

“Frankie, you and I are both ending up there, and you know it.”

My smile spread to Kat and we both stifled laughter. There is no laughing at funerals. We recovered quickly and I pursed my lips together for a quick recovery. I started to relax despite my odd predicament. That damn choice that had to be made before the funeral was over...

My name is Francesca Fairholm. Everyone calls me Frankie. I am- in part- a serial killer. I think the more PC term is contract killer. I don’t kill people on a whim- nor do I really kill for pleasure- although I suppose my work does appease some sort of inner demon. I kill for money.

The funeral I was attending was not my doing. But that didn’t stop me from being happy about it. The woman in the coffin was horrible, and don’t you dare feel sorry for her. If I had to dissect my life entirely, I would say she was the main reason I was this fucked up in the first place. She was the reason my entire family was nuts.

Joan Rosemary Fairholm lay dead in a shiny platinum casket just up the aisle from me. On all sides I was surrounded by a horde of money-hungry family members, ready and waiting for their part of the Fairholm fortune. I kept my distance. Truth was they disgusted me. I can’t remember any instance where I enjoyed being around them, and they all played their small parts in this Shakespearean tragedy that was unfolding in my head.

Our family’s own Lady MacBeth, my Grandmother, had died of a stroke a few days prior. I had felt nothing when my mother’s words floated through my cell phone.

What her obituary should have said was something like: Joan was born in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1918. She was a North Sea oil heiress, two-time widow and one-time divorcee. She moved to Phoenix, Arizona after she had killed off her first two husbands and then proceeded to raise a family with her third victim. She is survived by her four daughters, Greta, Bette, Marlene and Audrey. She didn’t love any of them, but loved to see them bicker amongst themselves- usually over her acceptance. She loved money, power and Corgis. She hated black people.

“You’re not going to do it,” Kat whispered to me, interrupting my thoughts. “You’re better than that.”

My dear Katharine. My rock. My sanity. Kat was one of my cousins. The other had yet to show up, which was totally not her style.

“Where is Addi?” I ignored her, mainly out of guilt. “She’s supposed to be here.”

“Late,” was all Katharine would say. Kat wasn’t too happy with me at the moment. She knew what was going through my mind. She knew what I was contemplating. Kat had to know how conflicted I was, but she was showing no signs of giving a shit, which also fed my anger.

My mother, Marlene, sat on the opposite side of the church in the front, where family was *supposed* to sit. Next to her were her three sisters- the trifecta from hell. She turned her head towards me in that moment. She gave one of those mother looks, like I was the main annoyance in this sea of jerk-offs. She was probably even happier than I was at this point, but that still didn’t mean I could whisper, smile or laugh during this ceremony. She had very little tolerance for rudeness... even if she hated her now-dead mother.

Dead. The word kept running through my mind, taunting me. Even as I sat and gazed upon her coffin, it wasn’t registering. I half expected my dear grandmother to leap out of the coffin and scream that we were all disinherited for believing she could die.

This family wasn’t virtuous. We weren’t cookie-cutting, home-making, smiling, happy people. Those people were delusional. The Fairholms were emotional black holes, alcoholics and at least two of us were cold blooded killers. I glanced at the empty space next to me.

Where the fuck was Addi? I was beginning to lose my cool. Katharine could only do so much to ease my mind in this potentially catastrophic situation.

I cast my gaze back to my mother. She would have been so disappointed if she knew how I had really turned out. She tried so hard to raise a good kid. I wasn’t good. I was clearly the opposite of good as I contemplated death, murder and a serious absence of love for my own grandmother under the gaze of a loaded Catholic arsenal of holy shit.

I wanted to take in a huge deep breath to calm myself down, but I would have just choked on the acrid smell of Moth Ball No. 5 that was wafting over from all the little old ladies in front of me. My headache wasn't letting up.

I still had time to make my choice. Despite what Kat wanted to believe, I was undecided. There was too much to consider. She couldn't make the decision for me, as much as I'm sure she wanted to. It was all up to me- and time was running out.