

DEVIL'S DANCE

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This is a work of fiction, and is produced from the author's imagination. People, places and things mentioned in this novel are used in a fictional manner.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all of the young girls and young women who have suffered kidnap and rape experiences—those who survived and those who did not. Although this story is set in the era from the 1950's to the 1970's, these travesties still exist in our society. We see them on the news, are horrified, and then rationalize that it could never happen to anyone we know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Devil’s Dance” (Book 1) and “The Devil’s Due” (Book 2) are works of fiction that were in development for many years. I would like to thank the people who helped me through the emotional rollercoaster and challenges of writing these two books.

Author and forensic psychologist, Morton Reed, who read the very first version many years ago and told me frankly it would never get published the way it was. Without that honest evaluation, I might never have rewritten it...many times.

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Later, to members of Henderson Writer’s Group, for their astute critiques as the tale continued to unwind and go through revision after revision.

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Most of all to my author friends Fred Rayworth and Mike Dennis, and my editor, Cindy Davis. Their editorial contributions and helpful suggestions transformed the manuscript into the book you now hold in your hand.

Fred was fully invested in the character Jen Connor’s life and helped me revise some issues I was wrestling with. After that, the mammoth manuscript split into two books, which it should have been all along.

When I asked Mike Dennis for his critique and edit suggestions, it didn't take long for Mike to also become fully involved in Jen's destiny. He worked closely with me, giving invaluable help as once again we edited and polished the manuscripts finally submitted to my publisher.

Cindy lent her professional skills as an editor for the final touch and I am extremely grateful for her astute eye and wise suggestions.

That leads to my thanks to L&L Dreamspell for bringing my dream full circle—finally having the story of Jen Connor's tragedy and triumph in print.

And, to everyone mentioned above for caring so much about what finally happened to Jen.



ONE

A door slamming makes one jump, but it doesn't make one afraid. What one fears is the serpent that crawls underneath it. ~ Collette, Cheri

CHICAGO, NOVEMBER, 1956.

I didn't care if I ever opened my eyes again. *Had it really been a whole year?* Images raced through my mind like the pictures in one of those flip books—the kind that look like they're moving when the pages are fanned.

The images sped up, swirling faster and faster. As each new image appeared, my feeling of terror built. *Flip. Flip. Flip.*

Can't breathe. Arms, legs. Hurt. Move, move. The sheet was drenched with perspiration. A non-stop string of panicked thoughts taunted me. *Paralyzed? Please God, not polio. Where's Mama? Work early? Breathe. Breathe. Judy still here?*

I tried to cry out, but my tongue slid around something wedged in my mouth, while hot tears welled in my eyes.

Concentrate!

I fixed on bits of dust clinging to a leafy design pressed into the plaster ceiling, thinking they looked like furry caterpillars ready to spin cocoons. The awful realization hit me like a sledgehammer. *Not my ceiling! Not my room!*

Flip. Flip. Flip.



A squeaking noise, maybe door hinges that needed to be oiled, broke the silence.

Footsteps. Gardenias. Stale tobacco.

My heart pounded like it would jump right out of my chest. A tall woman stood at the foot of the bed, holding a tray. She placed it on the dresser, then came closer and bent toward me, blonde hair spilling over her shoulders like a glistening shawl. “Well, Jenny, you’re awake. Good.”

Recognition filled me with relief. *Sherry?*

The gold flecks in her hazel eyes flashed like caution lights. Her full lips, painted brilliant scarlet, drew into a sneer. Something was terribly wrong. “Aw, is the little ballerina frightened? You’re such an idiot.” She reached over, then stroked my hair—her long fingers gliding through tangled black waves.

Cupping my chin in a vise-like grip, she said, “You know, you’re awfully naïve for a seventeen-year-old.” Her scarlet lips curled into a nasty smile that scared me to death.

She stepped back and glared at me. “There’s no harm in telling you now. Remember, when you said the Coke tasted funny at lunch yesterday? Well, guess what? I slipped something into it to knock you out. Honey, you lost your cherry last night.”

Tears snaked down my cheeks. *Cherry?*

She bent forward, dug her fingers into my shoulders, then tightened her grip and shook me. “Stop that damn crying. You’d better do exactly as I say or...”

My friend had become a terrifying stranger.

Her eyes flashed. “I brought you some toast and juice. Damn you, quit wiggling! Just calm down. If you’re good, I’ll take that thing out of your mouth for awhile.” Her fingers traced a line along my cheek, stopping at the fabric. She untied the knot. The fabric fell away.

I managed to plead in a raspy voice, “Sherry, get me out of here, please. I want to go home.” My mouth felt like it was full of cotton balls.

Silence.

A gnawing pain between my legs hurt more than the time I fell on the edge of a wooden milk crate in kindergarten. Back then, the doctor told my mother I had bruised my vagina, and I couldn't stop giggling because I thought the word was so funny. Tears leaked down my cheeks, leaving damp tracks in their wake.

My mind seemed fuzzy. I croaked, "Sherry?" I let my eyes beg her to answer me, but all she did was stare. Not a word. She fixed me with a look as frigid as the winter wind blowing off Lake Michigan.

"Sh-Sherry, you're frightening me."

Her face moved closer to mine, releasing hot puffs of breath against my cheek. "You're a real pain in the ass, Pavlova. Quit bawling and drink the damn juice. Want to know why you're here? Because Tommy Boy and I kidnapped you, that's why."



A voice sliced through my confusion, followed by a goofy hee-haw sort of laugh. "Know what I think, Sher? That horny old goat will *love* our sweet little ballerina."

That laugh. It was one I recognized. He moved toward me. "I told you, the cops will think she ran away." Sherry's boyfriend Tommy was in the room, too.

Her face grew fuzzy again, as though it were veiled by a piece of chiffon. She said, "Yeah, if we're lucky. I'm keepin' my fingers crossed it goes that way, Tommy Boy!"

I wandered through the haze of my mind, wincing at disjointed memories of a horrible fight Mama and I had last November. That was when I realized she would never sign the contract the New York City Ballet had offered me. After that, everything in me faded away until there was nothing left.

I still walked to the bus stop on Clark Street after school every day, then took the bus to the Vaganova Academy on Howard Street, just like I used to. But I only watched the other dancers. My existence became that of a body without a soul. I knew I'd never dance again.

I'd first seen Tommy at the Academy, sitting on my chair in

the corner watching the others. He winked and said, "Hey, gorgeous, how about a smile for the new piano player?"

It had been one of those days when I felt more like a robot than a person, but that wasn't unusual. Since the fight with Mama, I was like that most days. When I was the robot-me, I could shut off my feelings. That was much better than wanting to cry all the time. Tommy used to tease me about having the saddest eyes he'd ever seen, but he never got a rise out of me.

Now both Sherry and Tommy stood there staring at me like I was a piece of meat in the butcher's case. My eyes darted around the room frantically while the pounding of my heart echoed in my ears. I kept telling myself it was okay because the walking dead aren't supposed to care about anything. I tried not to be afraid. It didn't work. I was petrified.

Tiny blood red specks blinked furiously on the dark blanket inside my head, growing larger and larger, until everything turned pitch black.