

WHERE
DEMONS
DANCE

A Novel

by

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For my parents

CHAPTER ONE

Outskirts of Cedar City, Utah Territory

May 19, 1874

The hoe vibrated in her hands as she struck the ground, loosening the weedy soil around the tomato plant stakes that Henri, her husband, had driven into the ground earlier that summer. Dirt sprinkled the bottom hem of her cotton dress with every swing. She took no notice of the darkening fabric as she continued along the garden row, working quickly. The sun lit the sky behind her with graceful hues of orange and red, commingling together in a burning sunset. All around her, the dusk began to set, but the heralding of the evening could not stifle the warm air of summer.

Penelope Cavey was someone to take notice of. Fiery red locks fell well past her shoulders and swayed in the evening breeze. Her smooth, fair skin was speckled with freckles, and her green eyes watched her work fixedly. She had a small nose, and her mouth was tightly closed, hinting at frustration. A green dress draped over her frame, and though it was clear she was not wealthy, her clothing was in good repair, save for the dirt that now soaked the hem. An apron was tied around her waist.

Suddenly, the echo of a gunshot sounded across the field. Her eyes darted to their small, three-roomed house about a quarter of a mile away. She could not see the porch, only the

back door that led down to a few steps and into the huge field where she stood. Candle lights reflected in the windows as she wondered who would shoot a gun with night approaching. With a grunt of frustration, she struck the hoe into the ground definitively and stood up while eyeing the house. Though she could not see her husband, the anger inside of her grew. She knew he was inside, probably playing the piano. Carefully, she wiped her dirty hands on her apron and pushed her hair back behind her ears. With night coming, she knew she must go back inside; else, Henri would worry about her. Swallowing down her dread, she collected herself and marched back to the house, her feet sinking into the dirt as she went.

Penelope picked up her skirts as she approached harder ground and paused at the back door of the house; no piano music sounded.

Strange, she thought to herself.

The silence was deafening. She carefully grasped the warm knob in her hand and pushed the door open. Her boots clicked on the wooden floor as she made her way to the middle of the kitchen.

“Henri?” she called out but received no response. The rhythmic ticking of the clock in the next room taunted her.

Where is he?! she thought with resentment.

She stepped into the parlor and froze. Her blood turned to ice as her stomach dropped, and a cold wave of fear washed over her.

Henri lay across the room on the floor, his lifeless eyes staring at the ceiling. A large puddle of blood had seeped from the bullet hole in the side of his head. His black hair was soaked in blood, and his hands lay limp at his sides.

She rushed to his side and embraced him, his head lolling.

“Henri!” she screamed, pulling him close to her. “Henri, what happened to you?!”

Tears began to run from her eyes as she grasped him, the warm blood soaking the dress she wore.

“Darling, come back to me,” she cried, her voice quivering.

She began to shake with tears as she rocked back and forth, gripping her dead husband to her chest. Unable to contain it, she let out a gasp of grief, shocked at the very circumstances she found herself hurled into. Their useless argument from earlier that day was forgotten as she grasped his lifeless body. She fervently prayed that he would wake as thousands of memories flashed before her eyes. Rocking on her knees, the pain inside of her chest only increased. Time seemed to stand still as she held him, unwilling to let go.

Finally, she swallowed hard when the realization struck her—someone had come here. While she was out in the garden, someone had entered their home and murdered her husband. The memory of hearing the gunshot that killed him made her heart quake with fear and rage. Carefully, she laid Henri back down and got up from her knees. Stumbling to the desk, she yanked the drawer open and was relieved to find that the gun and ammunition were still there. She seized the weapon and shoved it into her apron pocket, along with all the bullets she could find.

She whipped around and paused when she caught sight of the bedroom—hundreds of papers were scattered across the desk and bed.

What were they looking for? she wondered anxiously.

She hurried to the papers and began collecting them.

Selecting one, she began to read it but stopped when she noticed the blood on her hands. The horror of what had just happened sank into her, and she fell back, sobbing.

“Why, why, why?!” she screamed.

She stuffed the papers into Henri’s suitcase and tied it shut, then turned to the closet and snatched a few dresses to pack into another suitcase.

She left the room with both cases in hand and went over to Henri’s body. Kneeling beside him, she closed his eyes and kissed him.

“I love you, Henri,” Penelope whispered as she put his hands to rest on his chest.

Summoning all her strength, she dragged his lifeless body into the bedroom and managed to hoist him onto the bed, defiling her dress even more. Just before turning away, she paused—there was a bit of paper clenched in his right hand. She pried open his fingers, and two slips of paper fell out. Through her tears, she made out the words:

Be go to St. Joseph

The second message was written on the back of her favorite picture of him. Her brow knit in confusion as she turned it over to find a strange message written on the back:

Find Jacob Lee

Perplexed, she reread the line, trying to understand what it meant.

Who is Jacob Lee? Where is St. Joseph?

Her head spun with questions as she quickly slipped the picture and the paper into her apron pocket. She glanced over Henri's body to see if anything else was amiss and noticed a small piece of fabric sticking out of his other fist.

What is this? she wondered. *Could it be from the cloak of whoever killed him?!*

She added the bit of material to her apron pocket and hurried over to the piano where a map of the Utah Territory hung on the wall above. She froze, horrified that Henri's blood had splattered the instrument he had so dearly loved. Tears filled her eyes at the sight of the ivory keys speckled red. Taking a deep breath and trying to focus, she turned to the map and ran her finger along it, trying to find St. Joseph.

"St. Joseph, St. Joseph..." she murmured to herself as she traced the towns and roads, finally landing on her target after a few minutes of searching. It looked to be at least a day's ride from the outskirts of their town of Cedar City.

Suddenly, in her peripheral vision, Penelope caught sight of something black. The slick glass of their beautiful mirror had been defiled with something scratched into the surface with black chalk. A chill went down her spine as she read the words:

Demons Dance

Her mind reeled. Reaching up, she touched the letters with her fingers and then froze. Something glimmered in the mirror, which reflected the window behind her. A face was watching her. From the porch, the face's eyes followed her every move. It was the murderer. It had to be. Something reflected the light and sent flickers across the room.

Penelope spun around and raced toward the stranger. As she did, the face disappeared into the night, but she still pulled open the window.

“Stop!” she screamed as a shape ran away into the darkness.

Penelope leaned against the windowsill as her chest heaved with grief. Wiping her cheeks with the back of her hand, Penelope got up and went back to the suitcases she had packed. Quickly, she selected the one filled with papers and hurried into the bedroom where she pulled the dresser across the floor to reveal a loose floorboard. She chuckled sadly—Henri’s idea of fixing the floor had been to put the dresser over it to hide it.

You were right, my darling, she thought sadly. *It wasn’t worth the trouble of fixing it.*

Reaching down, she pulled the nail out, and the board came loose, exposing an empty vessel in the floor. She inserted the case of papers into the hole, then replaced the nail and floorboard and moved the dresser back across it.

Going back into the parlor, she blew out all the candles but one and picked up her suitcase of dresses. Casting one last glance toward Henri, she stepped out into the night, holding the candle up to light her way.

The barn obscured the glow of the moon, which rose like a ghost in the night, casting a shadow across the ground that sent chills down her back. She lifted the rusty door latch and went inside the barn where her horse, Quincy, a brown Morgan, neighed in welcoming. The stall was made of rough-hewn wood, and the floor was dirt. A saddle sat to one side, along with a bridle and reins. Setting down the candle, she saddled and bridled Quincy, and attached her suitcase to the back of the saddle. After opening the barn door, she put her foot into

the stirrup and mounted the horse. Penelope rode off into the darkness, leaving her home and her beloved behind.

It was well into the night by the time Penelope arrived in Cedar City. The street was lined with dark houses where their inhabitants slept peacefully. She rode down the main road, past many different stores and shops. The town was filled with tall, three-story structures—wealthy people lived in Cedar City. Some rented out their houses for people to stay just the night, and some were used as dormitories. The homes were painted various colors from yellow to white to green. Penelope trained her eyes forward and did not take note of any of this.

The dirt thudded beneath Quincy's hooves as they headed toward the outskirts of the village to where her brother Samuel lived. Her tears had dried, but their tracks still marked her swollen face. Upon exiting the town, she rode down a dirt road that inclined slightly and made her way toward her brother's magnificent home.

Being the oldest in their family, Samuel was considerably well off. He never said how he had obtained his riches, but because he was a philanthropist to the rest of the family, no one ever asked. Being nearly ten years Penelope's elder, he was the one she always went to.

The house loomed before her, its white paint shimmering in the moonlight. Instead of being a plain rectangular building, Samuel had built many additions onto the sides of the enormous mansion. A porch welcomed her to the house, and she rushed up the wooden stairs to the entrance.

Swallowing hard, Penelope raised her hand and pounded on the door with all her might, hoping desperately that someone would hear her.

“Samuel?!” she yelled, pounding again.

There was no response.

Tears started to flow from her eyes as she knocked on the door even harder, praying someone would answer.

“Samuel! Please help me!” she screamed.

Suddenly the door opened to reveal Samuel and one of his wives, Alice. Both were dressed in their nightgowns and had stunned looks on their faces.

Samuel stood tall with his short black hair a mess about his face. He wore a goatee and mustache, and though he was dressed in nightclothes, his muscles showed through his shirt.

Alice, round and tubby, stared at Penelope, her mouth open with surprise.

“Goodness, Penelope, what’s happened to you?” she gasped.

Penelope glanced down to see her dress was soaked in blood, but turned back to them, her eyes misted.

“Henri—” she tried to say.

Alice’s mouth dropped open even wider.

“Come inside, dear,” she said, beckoning.

“Thank you,” Penelope whispered.

Alice took Penelope’s hand and led her into the elegant parlor where they sat on a pink couch. Samuel lit the oil lamps, illuminating the exquisitely decorated room with a dull glow. He took a seat across from them.

“Tell us what’s happened,” Samuel said, his face concerned.

Penelope gasped as her tears ran. It took a few minutes before she could compose herself enough to speak, and her shoulders still quaked as she took a deep breath.

“I—we had an argument tonight,” she began. “He’s been

gone a long time, you see, and he didn't tell me where he went, so I was frustrated."

"Of course, dear, of course, only natural," Alice echoed.

"We argued for a long time, and I got so furious I went outside to the garden to work my anger into the ground. I don't know why I got so angry—" she choked on another flood of tears.

"Oh, darling, it's all right. You didn't know," said Alice.

"What happened next, Penelope?" Samuel asked gently.

Penelope wiped her face, then continued, "I don't know how long I was out there—an hour? Maybe two? However, dusk came, and I knew I had to go back inside. That's when..."

Penelope's voice trailed off, and she stared into space, the truth of the memory sinking in on her. She burst into a fresh set of tears.

"It's all right," Alice tried to reassure her.

"It's not!" Penelope shrieked, and then began to speak very quickly. "I went into the house, and I found him lying on the parlor floor. He was already dead—someone shot him!"

"My dear!" Alice cried, her face twisting into shock. She reached for Penelope's hand.

"Are you sure?" Samuel asked. "I know this is hard for you, Penelope, but could he have killed himself?"

Penelope shook her head vigorously. "It was a bullet wound to his head. There was no weapon—the gun we keep at home was in the desk and wasn't fired. And someone went through the bedroom and tore the place apart!"

Samuel sat back in the chair and stroked his goatee, his brow creased with consternation.

"This is horrible news, Penelope," he spoke softly. "I'm so sorry."

Penelope was overcome by grief. Tears ran freely from her

eyes, and her whole body shook. Alice embraced her, rubbing her back with her hand.

“Shh,” she hushed her. “It’s all right.”

Penelope made no reply. She had never liked Alice very much, but given the present circumstances, her prior prejudices were forgotten.

“Is he still at the house?” Samuel asked, his voice solemn.

Penelope nodded, “I didn’t know what else to do.”

“It’s all right. I’ll take care of everything so that you won’t have to bear the pain of it. You’re welcome to stay here however long you may need. I understand if you have no wish to return home.”

Penelope nodded.

“Tomorrow I’ll go to the elders and tell them of this tragedy,” Samuel said.

Penelope shook her head, pushing herself out of Alice’s embrace.

“I’ll do it, Samuel,” she said firmly.

“Penelope, are you sure?”

Penelope nodded, brushing her hair back from her face.

“I want to talk to them,” she said.

“All right,” Samuel said. “I’m sure you’re exhausted. Alice will show you to the guest bedroom.”

“Have you any clothes, dear?” Alice asked.

“I do,” Penelope nodded. “Thank you, Samuel.”

“I wish it were under better circumstances,” Samuel replied.

Alice led Penelope up the stairs and through a whitewashed hallway into a tiny bedroom crammed with one window, a bed, a dresser, and a stool. The bed was covered with an ornamental

quilt, much like the tablecloth in the parlor below.

“Samuel will put your horse in the barn,” Alice said.

“Thank you,” Penelope breathed.

“Anytime, dear. I’m so sorry for your loss.”

Penelope closed the door, not wanting to speak any longer. She lit the candle on top of the dresser, lighting a small section of the room. She poured water into the washbowl and rubbed her hands in it. Bile rose in her throat as the water turned crimson with Henri’s blood. Quickly she picked up the bowl, opened the window, and threw the water outside.

Shoving it back down on the dresser, she unbuttoned her bloodied dress and let it drop to the ground in puddles at her feet. She unclasped her corset and threw it on the stool.

Wearing nothing but her underwear, she climbed into the bed, clutching a pillow to her chest as the agony grew to unbearable heights. Tears flowed down her face as emptiness consumed her, an aching, torn loneliness that could not be filled. A thousand questions raced through her head, screaming for the thousand answers that she could not seem to find.

Who did it? Who took him away from me?! Why?!

Questions streamed through her mind in circles, one after one, until, finally, the blackness of sleep consumed her. However, even in sleep, the two words that the murderer had scratched into the mirror were branded in her mind—*Demons Dance*.