

Excerpt

## **Broken Dolls**

By Susan D. Peters

### **Chapter 1**

*Friday August 13, 2004*

The five o'clock news predicted a major thunderstorm, but the evening began with a deceptive soft summer breeze. Barely an hour later, the willowy trees in the home's back yard seemed to suddenly sweep forward, bowing their heads to the west. The decorative chimes began to tinkle furiously with a light discordant melody.

The top of the wood-grained rain barrel was blown across the yard, landing against the fence with a hard clash. Thick sheets of rain cut slices through the air. Soon it saturated the pavement, showering the vegetables and flowers in the lush garden. Though the rain beat itself into the ground with unrelenting and thunderous strokes, still the smell of fragrant but battered roses wafted into the study.

Dennis Gregg regained consciousness on the floor of his study. The last thing he remembered was sorting through August accounts payables—and his unexpected visitor. His head throbbed with an ache that would probably last longer than the storm.

*How long have I been unconscious?*

He barely noticed the crimson drippings from his nose as he pulled himself up on unsteady feet. He scanned the room, feeling it pitch and roll as the images of his surroundings stared at him from blurred edges.

*If I can get some fresh air.*

Dennis trudged toward the open garden door and ambled a few steps from the threshold. Still dazed, the icy rain pelted him as the last words spoken to him reverberated in his ears. *You're a goddamned liar! You aren't healed. I saw you ... I saw you ...* The steady progression of cold rain plastered his shirt to his burly frame, sending a chill rippling through his body. By the time he made his way back inside, he was breathing heavily and had to lean on the desk to steady himself.

Then there was a voice, almost an echo, which asked, "May I come in?"

Dennis grinned inwardly in relieved anticipation of the sympathy and support he would receive from the familiar voice behind him. Before he could turn to receive the embrace of his rescuer, a deafening sound ripped through the air. A flash of fire was followed by a whisper of smoke. In the next instant, the immortal soul of Elder Dennis Gregg was set free

## Chapter 2

*BOOM!!!!*

The first explosion snatched the middle-aged Nancy Gregg from a drug-induced sleep. She glanced out of the window, trying to decide if that uncanny sound was thunder or something else. Before she could make up her mind ...

*BOOM!!!!*

The second blast propelled her from the bed. She was groggy and shaken, but mustered enough strength to yank a pink satin robe over her frail frame then stuff her narrow feet into pink and white satin bedside slippers. She clutched the spiral staircase railing and was instinctively drawn toward her husband's den. The lights glowed as an ominous sign that something wicked had happened right in the comfort of their home.

Nancy made her way past the hallway credenza and a mahogany bookcase filled with collector vases. She placed a hand on the half-opened door to her husband's study. A chill rippled through her and she took a long, slow breath. She recoiled at the fetid smell of blood, but she was not deterred. There was a lifeless figure sprawled out on the plush beige cut pile carpet! Fighting to hold down the small amount of dinner she managed to force down, she inched back until her body pressed against the door. Nancy stared at the mass of tattered flesh that had been the face she had adored most of her adult life. She panicked when she remembered the sound of her son's voice calling up to her as he had come into the house earlier. *Marcus? Sweet Jesus!* Was her baby son capable of this?

She cursed herself for not coming down when Marcus had called out to her. There had always been undisclosed tension between her son and husband. Nancy's incapacitating physical pain had kept her from coming downstairs when Marcus stopped by this evening, but she secretly had hoped that by staying in her room, father and son would take the time to sort through their issues. Tonight she regretted abdicating her role of the ever-present mediator; the stabilizing force between the two men. Nancy inched forward, her heart slamming against her frail chest. Denny was unrecognizable in his current state. Lifeless. Mangled.

Ever since Marcus had moved in with his best friend Scott's parents during his sophomore year in high school, every encounter between her husband and son had been filled with anger. Marcus' connection to the family was held together by the tenuous thread of his afternoon visits with her while his father was at work. She wished she had worked harder to bring them together. Unfortunately, the easiest way to avoid the inevitable conflicts was to see Marcus on Friday afternoons and tactfully share his progress with her husband when they were alone. In hindsight, not the best idea, but it was what it was.

Nancy clutched at her robe. Every nerve ending in her body tingled. The painkiller's potency was ebbing, and the pain that stalked her was now slowly overpowering her. She knew that calling the police was the right thing to do. But she also knew that while the pain was in control, she couldn't think straight. Now was not the best time to talk to the police. She might give away too much.

At the moment, the one person she needed to protect was her son, despite the fact that he apparently was the one who had taken away the man she loved more than life itself. Marcus stilled deserved to be shielded, and for that she needed to have her wits about her.

Staggering backwards through the den door, she shuffled into the hallway. Blinded by tears, Nancy Gregg grasped the staircase railing, hand-over-hand hauling her feeble form up each step.

What she wanted right now was freedom from the pain and time to think. She screamed inside her head for help. There was no help for her and there was no more help for poor Denny. And truthfully, with the way she had handled things in the past, there might not be any help for her Marcus.

She would call the police in the morning.