



Reluctant Press

Ghost Lover

Jackie Devine



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHAS

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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Ghost Lover

By Jackie Devine

CHAPTER ONE.

The ocean breeze was cool and refreshing as it pushed the foamy greenish blue water up across the sandy shore. The sun was beginning to go down and it flushed the sky a deep orange yellow, except for a younger couple walking along the beach in the distance, Catherine found herself alone in splendid solitude.

Catherine sat on the pale brown sand and closed her eyes gently; the salty ocean-scented breeze that came off the water washed over her face. She enjoyed the ocean; most evenings at this time she would come to the ocean's shore to sit, relax and take in the end of the day.

Catherine had just moved to the small seaside town of Calvert. The move came when her old life in the city became way too complicated and a change in pace was needed. Catherine had decided to move some time ago, it was done without regrets and was the best decision she had made in her life.

Catherine was not your average woman; she had many secrets. Twenty-nine years earlier, Catherine was born Mark Pruett, the only child of Alex and Margo Pruett. Catherine had been brought up in a very loving, positive household. Both parents had accepted Catherine when, at the age of sixteen, she came out to them as gay. Catherine had thought that since he (Mark) had a deep attraction to men, he must be

gay. Later she realized she was transsexual and again both parents accepted her for what she was.

Catherine did little at first to move into the role of being a woman. Occasionally Catherine would dress up and go to a gay bar just to dance and let loose but this was the extent of her going out. Up until then, the idea of transitioning had rarely crossed Catherine's mind.

The death of her parents four years previous due to a car accident had come as a shock. A head-on collision with a drunk driver claimed both lives. This devastated Catherine and even now, Catherine struggled to get past that sad chapter in her life. The only other relative she had in the word was a distant aunt named Rosalie. It was quite a surprise when Catherine received a letter from her aunt's lawyer stating that she had passed and had left her estate to Catherine. It turned out that Aunt Rosalie was a wealthy lady.

Catherine met with the lawyer and signed the appropriate papers to inherit the estate; she learned that a house was included in the inheritance. After this meeting, Catherine decided to give up her small apartment in the city, she bought a new car and was off to discover a new life.

Up to the actual move to Calvert, Catherine had still been known as Mark. As a boy, Catherine had soft feminine features and characteristics. Catherine always wore her hair long, which was becoming since she had naturally thick, black, wavy hair that brushed her shoulders. When she was clean-shaven, many mistook her for a woman, not knowing her true sex. Catherine possessed a rare natural beauty; being slight in stature helped Catherine in her feminine pursuits.

The day before the drive to Calvert, Catherine decided that this might be the perfect time to try living full time as a woman. Why not now, when she could start life anew in a new town where no one knew her past? Passing was not an issue; with the aunt's money and Catherine's natural feminine looks. She would not have to work for a living anymore, so there was not anything stopping her from trying living full-time as a woman.

The old apartment had been fully furnished, so Catherine had only to take her personal belongings with her. The last night in the apartment Catherine, spent much time planning her two-hour drive to Calvert. She made sure she had everything packed and spent time going over what she would wear for her first full day out as a woman. Catherine had a rather extensive femme wardrobe that had been collected over her years of being an occasional transvestite. Catherine decided on a nice cream-colored minidress and sweater set with a pair of matching flat shoes. It was a lovely choice of ensemble.

The next morning, the weather was wet and foggy. Drizzle drifted in mist throughout the air. On a day like this, Catherine would normally have preferred to curl up in bed and read some nice novel but today too many things had to be accomplished. The two-hour drive took three; the road was wet and slippery. Catherine hydroplaned more than once, then decided to reduce speed and proceed with caution. The scenery was breathtaking and Catherine felt entranced by the view as the road began to wind its way along the ocean's side.

Catherine stopped for gas at a roadside gas station just before entering Calvert. The young male attendant filled the gas tank, took Catherine's money and with a smile said, "Thank you, Ma'am." These few simple words rang inside Catherine's head and made a smile come across her wine-painted lips. To be recognized as a woman was absolutely wonderful. The young man saw that the attractive lady was smiling back at him. He would have never guessed the real reason that brought on such a happy reaction to his words.

Just a little ways past the gas station was a sign that read, "Welcome to Calvert pop: 4000". Quite a small town, thought Catherine. The town was built alongside the ocean. Catherine tried to take in as much as she could, looking around while she drove into town. Catherine pulled the car over to the side of the road. Leaving the windshield wipers on, she reached into her purse and fumbled for the small piece of paper that contained the address of the Aunt's house. "Number Two Old Point Road," Catherine mumbled to herself, reading the address as she pulled back onto the road. How was she going to find this road? Most of the streets seemed to not even have a name. Catherine spotted a small convenience store and pulled into the parking lot. Catherine ran quickly inside to try and avoid getting wet. Behind the counter sat an older plump gray-haired lady. The lady smiled at Catherine and got up from her stool. "Can I help you, dear?" she asked. "Yes, could you please tell me where 'Old Point Road' is located?" inquired Catherine. The lady nodded and said, "Yes, dear, it's quite easy to find, its just down at the end of the street on your left, it's the only dirt road left in town. There are only two house on that road. First there is the old Rice house which has lain empty for the past five years. They rarely come here anymore, preferring to spend their time at their other home in Florida. The Pruett home is at the end of the road way out on the point, lovely spot overlooking the ocean. Poor Aunt Rosie passed about six months ago. Nice old lady, I miss her terrible and now it's just there vacant. I do hope someone moves in soon, it's not good for a house to lie vacant for too long. It would be so sad to see the property go to ruin and disrepair." The lady shook her head when she said this. "Thank you very much for the infor-

mation,” said Catherine. She then turned and walked out of the store and got back into her car.

The dirt road was easy to find from the woman’s directions. It was a little rough to drive on but nothing that Catherine could not handle. The Rice home came into view not far off the road. Catherine stopped the car to take a look at the large wooden structure. It was a two-story home with a large attached sun porch. The house looked cold and empty. The white paint had begun to crack and scale off the house and many windows were boarded up. The yard was very overgrown. It’s so sad, thought Catherine with a sign. To see something that was once obviously so beautiful begin to fall apart was terrible to behold. Much like aging in people, Catherine reflected.

Driving on, the road gave way to a large clearing and Catherine stopped the car and took in the view of the Pruett house. The home stood tall and regal against the backdrop of the ocean. A large imposing Victorian structure much more grand than Catherine had imagined. A verandah ran completely around the first floor of the house. The second story of the house rose up and was topped off with intricate decorative scrollwork. The roof was adorned with majestic wrought iron.

Catherine drove her car up the driveway, put the car in park and shut off the engine. Taking her purse, Catherine stepped out of the car and walked up the steps to the front door of the house. She unlocked the front door with a key given to her by the Aunt’s lawyer. It was one of many keys for the various doors throughout the house. The lock clicked and Catherine pushed the door open and stepped inside.

Catherine was amazed at what she found inside. She found herself in the foyer. There was a large staircase to what she guessed was the second floor. On her left side was a set of double doors that led into a Victorian-style formal living room. To her right was a smaller sitting room/library combination that held bookcase filled with volumes and volumes of books. At the back of the hall, Catherine found the doorway that led into a large older-style kitchen. She went back into the formal living room and noticed another door that led her into a gorgeous dining room furnished with a large table made for eight with a matching sideboard in a dark wood.

It was all too much. This was hers now. Catherine sat on a wine-colored velvet chaise. Aunt Rosalie must have led a grand life. Who was she? Why did she leave all of this to me? asked Catherine to herself. Only once had Catherine ever heard the Aunt’s name mentioned. She could not remember what the conversation was about as she was little at the time. The one thing that she did remember was that you were never to mention Aunt Rosalie’s name in the presence of Grandma and

Grandpa Pruett who were now long since dead. Aunt Rosalie was Grandpa's sister. That was all that Catherine had known about Aunt Rosalie.

Catherine unloaded her belongings from the car and carried them inside. It was beginning to get dark out, so Catherine turned on some lights throughout the house and fixed herself a sandwich with some supplies she had brought with her.

Upstairs, Catherine found what she assumed was the Aunt's room. The bedroom held a large four-poster bed; there was also an armoire, a big chest of drawers and a dressing table. Catherine looked up on one of the walls; there was a painting of a beautiful woman with long black curly hair. Up close, Catherine examined the date on the painting and knew that it must be a portrait of Aunt Rosalie.

Catherine lay down on the soft mattress; it had been along day and tiredness was creeping in on her. In one of her suitcases, Catherine found a pink silk nightie and slipped it on her petite frame. She brushed her teeth, used the toilet and slipped beneath the bed's warm covers. In the dark, lying there, Catherine felt so complete and content. Looking forward to the next day, she fell into a deep sleep.

Catherine awoke in the morning to the distant cry of seagulls crying. For a moment, she did not recognize her surroundings. Then it all came back to her where she was, what she was doing there.

The bathroom off the bedroom contained a large old white claw-footed bathtub. Catherine filled the bathtub to the brim with warm soothing water and stepped into the bath.

Shaving was one part of womanhood that Catherine despised. Sometime soon in the future she hoped to throw down the razor and have her body free from hair permanently. Despite that, Catherine did shave religiously to keep her body smooth and feminine. Catherine took her time shaving her legs, relaxing in the warmth of the water. The iridescent morning sun shone in through the bathroom window; the weather outside looked fresh and crisp. April was here and spring was coming along nicely.

The house may have not been empty for a great deal of time but in the midmorning sunlight, Catherine could see that dust and cobwebs abounded everywhere. After a light breakfast of toast and coffee, Catherine dove into the chore that was ahead of her. Cleaning and airing out the house was at the top of her priority list. She went around the house, opening windows on both floors, letting the sea breeze drift in, filling the house with its delicious scent. Catherine cleaned with relish most of the morning. She enjoyed doing domestic work, it made her feel more womanly. Back in the kitchen, Catherine had begun to clean out the cup-

boards that lined two of the four walls of the kitchen. The cupboards still contained things from the aunt's life. Cookbooks abounded and Catherine was delighted with the many old antique dishes she found. They would shine up nice when cleaned.

"Hello," a deep male voice called. Catherine stopped what she was doing and walked into the front hall where the voice seemed to call from. Standing there was the most handsome man she had ever seen. Tall, dark complexion, green eyes and curly brown hair that looked wind-swept on his head. "Yes, can I help you?" asked Catherine, standing in the hall with a cleaning rag in her left hand. "I was just walking along the shore and spotted your car and decided to say hello. I was curious to see who had moved into this house. My name's Brad, by the way, Brad Duggan." The man extended his hand to Catherine. Catherine shook his hand and said, "I'm Catherine Pruett, this was my aunt's house." Brad put his hands in his pocket, looked around a bit and said, "I should get going. I have some things to do, maybe I'll drop by again sometime." "Ok," said Catherine, smiling, "feel free anytime. I like having company." When Brad left, Catherine continued cleaning the kitchen. She was going to like living in Calvert.

To take a break from the chore of kitchen cleaning, Catherine sat down at the small kitchen table and made a short list of things that she needed immediately to run the house. A run into town was necessary. With the list completed, Catherine glanced at her reflection in the hall mirror, tidied her hair, and applied a new coat of lipstick. *There*, thought Catherine, *sensible and passable, a good combination*. It was just the look needed for a midmorning trip into town.

With no trouble, Catherine found what passed for Main Street in Calvert. This little stretch of road consisted of a tavern, hardware store, souvenir shop, grocery store, gas station, and two clothing shops. A small post office was also located next to the hardware store.

First stop, groceries; the cupboards were bare except for a few tinned goods that had been left by the aunt. Catherine needed some cooking supplies badly. A year ago, Catherine decided to start eating well, cutting-out fatty, fried and other processed foods. She now concentrated on keeping her diet healthy. This consisted of eating primarily chicken and fish and limiting red meat. Fruits and vegetables became new friends along with whole grain breads and other healthy, tasty foods. The grocery store was modest in size but contained an excellent selection of produce. Catherine paid special attention to the other shoppers. Catherine knew she passed well; that was not an issue. She was, however, very observant, trying to see if anyone detected what she truly was. Catherine did not like the idea of being "read".

On the drive home, Catherine thought about that handsome man, Brad, who had shown up earlier that day to introduce himself. He seemed rather nice and if he came around again, it might be swell to have him stay for supper. There could be advantages to having a man around.

The kitchen got cleaned and Catherine had a chicken roasting in the oven along with some new potatoes by six. She would top the potatoes off with sour cream and fresh chives. The smell of the chicken roasting spread through the kitchen and made the room smell alive and home-like. Then Catherine realized something for the first time: she was home and that made her feel terrific.

Supper was delicious and Catherine commended herself on her tasty cooking. Culinary arts were on her list of womanly attributes that she was proud to possess. After the table was cleared and the dishes washed, Catherine went upstairs to her bedroom. Moving in that first day, she had noticed a cedar trunk at the foot of the bed that must have belonged to the aunt. Curious as a cat, Catherine opened the trunk and began to sort through its contents.

The trunk held many things: old black and white photos of people that Catherine did not know, stacks of what Catherine guessed was love letters, some tied with bunches of faded silk ribbon. The treasure, however, was a dress, a breathtaking creamy lace and satin wedding dress. It must have been the aunt's. Was she married? Catherine did not know. Catherine took the wedding dress and lay it on the bed. She ran her hand across the satin bodice and felt the lace collar between her fingers. Catherine's mind drifted; she had always wanted to be a bride. This was a fantasy of hers. Slowly, Catherine removed her own clothes and unbuttoned the wedding dress, taking special care with the delicate, aged garment.

Catherine slipped the satin dress on easily; it fit her like it was made for her own use. In the dressing table mirror, Catherine admired herself. Her black hair contrasted the creamy satin wonderfully. In a dreamlike state, Catherine could see herself in a garden with a bouquet of yellow and white roses, her veil frosting her blushing doll-like face. It was her wedding day. Amusing butterflies fluttered in her stomach, making her feel nervous. A hand appeared on her arm. Catherine turned to the man she would marry and spend the rest of her life with. His face was the face of all men and no one in particular at the same time. She smiled at him and he took her white-gloved hand in his and kissed it softly, saying in a deep voice, "I love you so much, Rosie." With those words ringing in her ears, Catherine came out of her daze and fell to the bedroom floor, weak and sweating. The dress came off quickly; Catherine put it in the trunk and closed the lid. It was too weird! That daydream didn't feel

like a dream. Did it happen for real? Who was the man? He had called her "Rosie" in her dream. Why would that happen?

That night, Catherine was uneasy in the bedroom. She no longer felt alone in the house, her aunt's house. Maybe it would be a good idea to get rid of some things in the house. *Make it more my own*, thought Catherine. She would start first thing the next morning.

Catherine awoke early and, after a cup of hot coffee, she decided to go for a walk along the beach. Maybe the fresh ocean air would help her see things more clearly.

The air was damp and wet, a heavy mist hung over the ocean. It was clear that the day was going to be a foggy one. Catherine was dressed moderately warm in a pair of stone washed jeans, sneakers and rain-proof wind jacket. She stopped and looked out over the salt water, not really thinking about anything in particular. If she had been paying attention, the footsteps behind her would not have made her jump. A hand slid over her shoulder.

"Hey", said a male voice. Catherine turned and was a little taken aback by the surprise the hand on her shoulder had given her. It was Brad. "Hi, how are you? Not a very nice day today," said Catherine, hugging herself, trying to keep warm. It was a lot colder and damp than she first thought. "Yeah, the weather's like this a lot this time of the year, but the summers are great," said Brad. "I just came down to the beach to get some air, the house is keeping me pretty busy getting settled away and all," explained Catherine pushing some stray hair behind her left ear. Brad was certainly a handsome man, really nice to look at. These thoughts made Catherine blush a little; she hoped that Brad would not notice. "Would you like to come up to the house?" asked Catherine, motioning in the direction of the home. "Yeah, sure. I would not mind a cup of tea, might warm me up," replied Brad with a devilish smile. "OK then, let's head up." Catherine led the way back. All the while, all she could think about was warming Brad up herself.

In the house, Brad followed Catherine into the kitchen and sat at the kitchen table. Catherine filled the kettle and turned on the stove. She then took two mugs and placed them on the kitchen table with two tea bags, teaspoons, cream and sugar. The kettle boiled quickly and she filled the mugs with boiling water. "This house is really wonderful, I have always loved this old place," started Brad. "Yes, it's really something. It's taking me a while to get use to the size of this place. Do you know anything of the history of the house?" asked Catherine, seeing this as an opportunity to possibly find out about the house and the aunt.

“Yes, I know some things. This house, you know Catherine, is a landmark here in Calvert. It’s one of the oldest houses in town, built in 1914. Aunt Rosalie, from what I understand, moved here about 1933. She was going to marry young Mr. Calverston, the youngest son of the family who owned this house. But tragically, he was found washed up on the beach two days before their wedding—drowned, of course. Being a small town and all, there is talk that his ghost can still be seen walking along the shore and on the property here, although I have never seen him.” Brad shrugged when he finished the story. “That’s so sad. So my aunt never married and stayed on here in this house?” said Catherine. “Yes,” nodded Brad, “love can make people grieve for the rest of their lives.”

CHAPTER 2

The aunt’s wedding dress stayed in its place in the cedar trunk. Catherine thought about getting rid of the trunk’s contents, including the dress, but after hearing the story of the aunt’s tragic romance from Brad, decided against it. It seemed the dress belonged in the house. *After all*, thought Catherine, *who am I to remove it?*

Through the spring, Catherine sorted out much of the clutter of the house. Many boxes were filled and donated to the church’s goodwill shop in town.

Summer came quickly and the lilac trees, along with the many rose bushes, filled the warm summer breezes with exotic perfumes. The plants drooped with blossoms that Catherine would pick and place in every room.

Rusty Boudreaux was hired to paint the outside of the house. Rusty was a nice older man who made Catherine laugh with his good-natured jokes and well-intended flirtatious remarks. *If only he knew*, thought Catherine, when Rusty would tell her how attractive she was and that she should get herself a good man.

On one warm Summer’s evening early in the season, Catherine sat outside on the verandah in an old wicker rocking chair that had been in the attic, which she had dragged down. Catherine sat rocking slowly. She closed her eyes and drifted away in thought. Catherine opened her eyes and everything looked different to her. Faint music drifted out from the open sitting room window inside the house, old-type waltz music. Catherine stood up and almost tripped. She looked down at herself in surprise; her clothes were not her own. She was dressed in a pale floral dress that fell just above her ankles; her hand went to her neck to feel a good locket and chain. Where was she?

Confused, Catherine went inside the house, startled by the house's appearance. Everything looked new, the rooms did not have their same old antique appearance. What was going on? Walking past the hall mirror, Catherine stopped to look at herself. Her eyes were opened wide, her reflection was not her own. She let out a moan and ran back outside. Shaking, Catherine sat back in the wicker rocking chair and closed her eyes. *I must be dreaming*, she told herself. *Wake up!*

Opening her eyes, everything was back to normal, the music was gone and the floral dress was replaced by her own navy short set. But was it a dream? It all seemed so real, and the reflection she had seen of the aunt staring back at her...the image was just like the aunt in the painting.

Catherine did not feel herself after that dream. She no longer felt alone in the house. It was like someone was watching her. Could it be the aunt? Was she trying to tell Catherine something? *Maybe she's reaching out to me*, thought Catherine. Catherine had always believed in ghosts and other supernatural things. Maybe it was all true, maybe life beyond the grave *did* exist.

With a few phone calls, Catherine found out the location where the aunt was buried. "Mercy Cemetery" was the name. It was found easily and was not far from Old Point Road. Catherine parked the car outside the old iron gates and walked inside. The cemetery was quite large. The aunt's grave was near the front. Catherine had been given directions from the church that the aunt had belonged to. It was almost as if something led Catherine to the grave. Looking down at the grave, Catherine read the gray marble headstone. Rosalie Pruett 1914- 2003, A gentle soul, was all the epitaph read. Catherine said a little prayer, stayed for a moment and then left.

That night, sleep did not come early or easily for Catherine; she lay in bed in a aubergine silky slip of a nightie, The warm Summer night air blew in through the open bedroom widow caressing her body, the sheer white curtains flapped in the moonlight. Catherine turned on her side and was sure that someone was standing beside the bed. She opened her eyes and looked around. No one. She closed her eyes again and felt a hand caress her leg, moving up onto her hip. Strangely, Catherine was not afraid. Catherine turned on her back. Her nightie slid up on its own around her waist she felt the touch of a masculine hand move higher onto her right breast. It teased her nipple, making it erect and aroused. She had never been touched like this before. Up to this point, Catherine had been a virgin! Catherine moaned and tossed her head back and forth at the foreign touch. Lips, he felt lips and a tongue on her neck and her breast, which had now been exposed.