

A promotional image for the film 'The Devil's Due' featuring Arliss Adams. The image has a dark red, monochromatic color scheme. In the foreground, a close-up of Arliss Adams' face is shown with a serious expression. In the background, a scene from the film is visible, showing two women in white, flowing dresses standing on a stage or set, with one woman appearing to be in a state of distress or being held. The overall mood is dramatic and mysterious.

**Arliss Adams**

**THE  
DEVIL'S  
DUE**

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THE  
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ARLISS ADAMS

L & L Dreamspell  
Spring, Texas

Cover and Interior Design by L & L Dreamspell

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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.

ISBN: 978-1-60318-235-5

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Published by L & L Dreamspell  
Produced in the United States of America



Jen's story is told in two parts.

Part One  
Devil's Dance

Part Two  
The Devil's Due



# ONE

An aspiration is a joy forever, a possession as solid as a landed estate. ~Robert Louis Stevenson

SEATTLE-LATE NOVEMBER, 1971

I should have been ecstatic. Instead, I was scared stiff! I struggled to fold my blouse neatly, but my hands wouldn't stop shaking. My heart pounded as though it would explode. *Phantoms of the Square* opened to rave reviews in Seattle, and the next thing I knew, we had contracts for a run in Los Angeles. There was even talk of taking our musical to New York. We were flying high.

Don't get me wrong. It wasn't sudden success that scared me. I'd dreamed of that for many years. What terrified me was returning to Los Angeles.

"Viola, I can't find my green belt." I paced my bedroom pulling open drawers, pawing through clothes, slamming the drawers shut, then repeating the whole routine over again. "You know the one I mean—the wide one with the big gold buckle."

"Now Jen, you just settle yourself down a bit. I'm gonna find that belt for you." She rummaged in a drawer, and there it was, right where it should have been. Holding out the elusive length of leather, she chuckled, her eyes like bright brown buttons in that dear, wrinkled mahogany face. "You sure are in one big turmoil."

A body would think you never packed a suitcase before. Settle down. You gonna do just fine. You'll only be gone three weeks."

Taking the belt, I rolled it up and tucked it into the case, sighing, "What would I do without you, Viola?"

"Don't you be fretting so. You're strong now; nothing like that frightened young woman you were when poor Mr. Paul was killed. You got to thank your lucky stars. For Paul, for Nadya."

"And for you." I brushed her parchment cheek with a light kiss. "I shudder to think what might've happened if you hadn't made me ask Nadya for help."

"Don't go troubling your head with that now. You called her, that's the important part." A smile lit the old woman's face.

"I know you're mighty worried about this, but you shouldn't ever think you're not strong enough to face what life gives you. You just got to keep the faith."

*Keep the faith.*

"I wish I had your unwavering belief. Sometimes I don't believe in anything. Maybe that's why it always takes me so long to recover."

"You always land on your feet."

"I've made a decision." I struck a pose like a fighter ready to deliver the KO punch. "We both know there's no question that Paul's mother will confront me once she finds out I'm back in LA. She wants to take PJ away from me. Wants to declare me an unfit mother. Well, she'd better watch out, because when she does, I'm going to turn the tables on her and—"

Viola cheered me on while I bounced around, shouting, "Watch out, Mrs. Stewart! Here I come, you miserable bitch. Just try to get PJ away from me now!"

Her eyes telegraphed delight. "Amen! When you see her, you better make sure to let her know I'm here with you now. Don't know how I worked for that awful woman so many years. Knowin' we're together should vex her some. She's sure a *most unusual woman*, that Mrs. Stewart."

I always loved when she said that, because I knew it was Viola-speak for bitch.

As I finished packing, memories of my nervous breakdown after Paul died sneaked into my head. Thankfully, the sound of Viola's voice brought me back to the present. "Want me to close up your suitcase?" She hovered around me with loving care.

"No thanks. I'll leave it open in case I think of something at the last minute."

It was almost time to go. For the tenth time, I ran to the window facing the tree-lined street to see if Vince's car had arrived.

I looked at my watch again. Stupid nerves! He wasn't even due for another half hour.

When I turned from the window, Viola was grinning wide. "I am so glad you and Mr. Vince are together now. He's very good for you. I think of him as Mr. Sunshine."

Speaking of my new love, Vince arrived right on time. He bounded up the stairs two at a time. As he stood there in the living room, drinking me in with his eyes, I saw what Viola meant. He did look as though someone had turned on the sunshine. He took me in his arms, kissing me tenderly. "I know you'll be in good hands with Miles and Jon while you're gone, but—" He jabbed his thumb at his chest "—until I see you in LA, this man sure will miss you."

When I said, "I'll be fine," he seemed to relax. "Thanks for offering to stay here with Viola and PJ while I'm gone."

He took my face in both hands, his voice growing a bit husky, sounding the way he did when we made love. It took everything in me not to betray my growing desire. His voice remained level, but his eyes broadcast longing too. He winked, letting me know his calm manner was for Viola's sake. "PJ and I are buddies, so promise me you won't worry. We'll be just fine as long as Viola here takes care of us bachelors."

We went up to get my things. Vince gathered the last few remnants of my clothing, then carefully placed them in the still-

open case on the bed. He gave me another kiss. "Gotta take care of you even more, now that you're my girl. Is there anything you've forgotten?"

"Nothing I can think of."

Just before we walked out to the car, he called over his shoulder, "Viola, don't cook dinner tonight. You've got a hot date with two handsome bachelors. We're taking you out on the town."