

Porte (pawr-TAY) Carried. This ballet movement travels a dancer's step in the air from one spot to another.

Chapter One



Riverfield, Wisconsin

Buried beneath the covers, I shiver when a floorboard creaks in the dark. The whistling wind howls, and branches like an evil witch's long black fingernails, scratch at the window. Barney's deep rumbling growl churns my stomach, and I struggle to keep my wild imagination in check. When I dare to peek, only innocent moonlight dances across my bedroom wall casting the eerie, black shadows that harmlessly stalk us. I squint as they slowly morph into menacing shapes. Maybe Barney watches them, too. Stroking his thick furry coat—more for my reassurance than his—I wonder why after fifteen years of mostly sweet dreams, these awful visions suddenly invade my sleep.

Dad's endless snore drones from the end of the hallway while I review choreography in my mind; a trick that's always worked before on the occasional restless night. The neon green

glow of my digital clock taunts 3:33 a.m. Tossing and turning with each passing minute, I wrestle with my bed-hogging dog. Eventually, I give in to the heaviness of my eyelids, strangely lulled by the scent of lilacs that gently wafts into my room. Like a dancer's porté, my dream carries me to the one place I am most desperate to avoid.

...I drift into a brightly lit room where an unfamiliar teenage girl dances weightlessly with a hazy feminine figure. Mesmerized by the duet, I long to join them but unseen and uninvited, I cannot. The girl reflects joyously in a sparkling mirror that flows like a silvery waterfall, yet her partner's image remains wispy and blurred. A piano's lingering melody accompanies the pair as they perform an unearthly pas de deux. When the ghostly ballerina releases her grasp of the young dancer, it turns to notice me. With an outstretched arm and a slow roll of her skeletal fingers, she beckons. Trembling, I step forward. Her face instantly distorts and solidifies into rock. In one gravity-defying leap, the apparition performs the perfect, seamless grand jeté and disappears. The abandoned girl moves to follow but instead sinks into the darkness of a bottomless pit, her bloodcurdling screams echo cruelly in my head. In the grayness of fog, my world spins. I see the young dancer again. This time, she lies deathly ill on a sterile hospital bed surrounded by grieving mourners; the painful scene is crushingly sad. I want to cry with the onlookers but the encircling haze pulls me against my will along a peculiar corridor of an old turn of the century building. A chandelier dancing with the soft glow of a

thousand crystals briefly illuminates a magnificent foyer. Through the dreary mist, a winding staircase and trickling fountain fade in and out of view. Two ornately framed portraits of women glide mysteriously in the ominous cloud. In one, the face at first beautiful and serene, horrifically melts like dripping wax before it erupts into a searing ball of flames. In the other, a woman stands rigidly. Her eyes reflect an underlying wickedness as she reaches beyond the canvas for a heart-shaped locket that hypnotically floats towards me. She snatches the necklace and clutches it to her chest scowling as though I were a thief in the night. Within seconds, her face ages grotesquely like a decaying corpse. I cringe at the morbid scene and breathe in sharply. Out of thin air, the dancing ghost reappears. She resembles a weathered statue with cold marbled eyes that lack comfort. If only I could wake up right now, but I've been here before and know the worst is yet to come.

A screeching iron gate imprisons me, and I beg for this ride to end. From above and below, scalding flames attack. A disturbing voice whispers, "Li...bee." I kick and claw, frantic to escape. Without warning, I drop in a sickening "tower of terror" plunge. The disembodied voice whose very breath now brushes the back of my neck again whispers my name. From beyond the shadows, the chilling voice declares, "She deserves to die."