

CORRUPT

DEVIL'S NIGHT

PENELOPE DOUGLAS

BERKLEY ROMANCE

New York

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

For Z. King

You are my creator, but I am your master.

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

DEAR READER,

This book deals with emotionally difficult topics, including revenge fantasy, abusive/violent and misogynistic behavior, toxic relationships, physical and sexual assault, date-rape drugs, dubious consent, bondage, kidnapping, group sex, and reference to incest. Anyone who believes such content may upset them are encouraged to consider their well-being when choosing whether to continue reading.

BEHIND DEVIL'S NIGHT

It all started with Michael Myers.

From the moment I saw *Halloween* as a child, I was hooked. Michael isn't like the other fictional slashers. He's not relatable, like Jason Voorhees, Jigsaw, or Pinhead. He's not flamboyant in his style like Ghostface or Freddy Krueger. And he's not funny, like Chucky. He's smooth and methodical.

There's no background story. No reason why he is the way he is. He's strong, quiet, and unsettling in his stalking skill. He's simple in his technique, and he never explains himself. He doesn't like to talk.

And neither do I. Lol.

The similarities don't end there, either! He's from the Midwest. I'm from the Midwest. He loves masks. I love masks.

He lives for Halloween, and my goodness, so do I. You'll often find me doing a marathon of *Halloween* movies on release days, because I find him much less stressful than putting a book out into the world.

So given all of this, is it any wonder why I named my hero in *Corrupt* Michael? I had to do a shout-out to my favorite slasher villain, especially since the story had a similar vibe.

When I decided to write *Corrupt*, it started out with the idea of a young woman who's blamed for sending some young men from her town to prison, and the storyline spun from there. I went crazy. I added in everything I loved—my entire dark heart and all the

aesthetic I've been drawn to since I was a kid. Halloween, autumn, abandoned places, catacombs, cathedrals, cemeteries, suspense, murder, mystery, danger . . . I decided to show people the kind of world I really loved and wished I could live in sometimes. A whole theme park of adventure, chases, and dark spaces, and I can honestly say writing this book was when I realized how much I love world-building. I loved that it had a plot outside of the romance, and it's one of the stories I consider my best work so far.

Of course, as with everything I write, there are things I hope to say to the world. *Corrupt* is all about owning who you are and not apologizing for what you like as long as it doesn't hurt anyone. But more than that, I wanted *Corrupt* and the Devil's Night series to be an escape into another world. I wanted readers to be immersed in a different reality where not only can we enjoy danger and fear in the safety of a book, but to have the opportunity to know these characters like we know ourselves. Every book gets bigger. Every installment more detailed. You don't say goodbye to any of them at the end of their individual story. You'll stay with them the whole way.

Thank you to everyone who supports this series, and I hope it's one you feel like revisiting often, because those are the best books!

L'appel du vide!

Pen

PLAYLIST

- “Bodies” by Drowning Pool
- “Breath of Life” by Florence + the Machine
- “Bullet With a Name” by Nonpoint
- “Corrupt” by Depeche Mode
- “Deathbeds” by Bring Me the Horizon
- “The Devil in I” by Slipknot
- “Devil’s Night” by Motionless in White
- “Dirty Diana” by Shaman’s Harvest
- “Feed the Fire” by Combichrist
- “Fire Breather” by Laurel
- “Getting Away with Murder” by Papa Roach
- “Goodbye Agony” by Black Veil Brides
- “Inside Yourself” by Godsmack
- “Jekyll and Hyde” by Five Finger Death Punch
- “Let the Sparks Fly” by Thousand Foot Krutch
- “Love the Way You Hate Me” by Like a Storm
- “Monster” by Skillet
- “Only Happy When It Rains” by Garbage
- “Pray to God (feat. HAIM)” by Calvin Harris
- “Silence (feat. Sarah McLachlan)” by Delerium
- “37 Stitches” by Drowning Pool
- “The Vengeful One” by Disturbed
- “You’re Going Down” by Sick Puppies

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CHAPTER I

ERIKA

He won't be here.

There'd be no reason for him to show up at his brother's farewell party, since they couldn't stand each other, so . . .

No, he won't be here.

Pushing up the sleeves of my lightweight sweater, I hurried through the front door of the Crist house and speed-walked across the foyer, heading straight for the stairs.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spied the butler rounding the corner, but I didn't stop.

"Miss Fane!" he shouted after me. "You're very late."

"Yes, I know."

"Mrs. Crist has been looking for you," he pointed out.

I shot up my eyebrows and immediately stopped, turning around to peer at him over the railing.

"Has she really?" I eyed him with mock astonishment.

He thinned his lips, annoyed. "Well, she sent *me* to look for you."

I broke out in a smile and leaned over the banister, planting a quick kiss on his forehead.

"Well, I'm here," I assured him. "You can get back to your important duties now."