

**The Dancing Zombie Diva**  
**A Love Story**  
**By Phibby Venable**

She had given up it up at least fifty years ago, but the holes in her clothing testified that she had once been a smoker. Small black burns were embedded in her lovely flapper dress. She had been wearing it the night she was killed. She was dancing with a wonderfully handsome, dark eyed man, having the time of her life one moment, and the next, he had danced her into the shadows, and cut her throat. All she remembered after that was darkness, and the suffocating feel of the long, white strips of linen that held her tightly in place. It seemed that she lay somewhere for an eternity. Then, one night, long after she had given up any hope of ever escaping her position, she had grown aware of voices. Someone was chanting her name. Someone was asking her to stand. Oh, it was marvelous to be on her own two feet again. She felt excitement rising inside her. The voice was so compelling, so firmly certain of her abilities. How happy she was to stand and walk, although it was more of a shuffle really, with little of the mobility she had once taken for granted. She felt confident that all her abilities would return once she was unwrapped from this dreadful cocoon.

"Elizabeth," the voice crooned, in the most hypnotic of inflections, "Rise and walk." She did so, almost against her will. She hoped they would remove the rags from her mouth first. She had so much to say. Instead, she felt a cool rush of air against her lips. Someone cut a slit in the linen, but small, so dreadfully small. The next two slits restored her sight. She could see the night lit by a brilliant moon. The trees were swaying in a soft breeze. Next, she was given the gift of smell, and she inhaled as deeply as she could. Magnolias! Oh, how she loved them, how she had missed them. How she had missed everything in the world! She felt a great yearning inside herself to dance and twirl, to leap lightly to the music, as she once had!

The voice droned on and she could feel someone slowly removing the linen that had kept her so still. Suddenly, the last piece was ripped away. The heavenly cool of the night filled her nostrils and her body with the joyful vibrations of new birth. "Ohhhh," she said happily, trying to stretch her bones. Instead of the luxurious stretch she was reaching for, her arms flew straight out in front of her. "What the devil!" "Exactly", someone laughed, "definitely the work of the devil."

She tried to lift her feet, her lovely, light dancing feet, but nothing more than a shuffle could be obtained from all her efforts.

Suddenly a strange, yet familiar face appeared before her.

"You!", she said hoarsely, "it was you that killed me."

"True," he shrugged, "but I have now brought you back to life, my little dancer, so all is well that ends well!"

Her gaze drifted past him to the hooded figures beyond. She noticed tombstones and shivered delicately. A graveyard! Oh, how she despised graveyards. She realized that she was the center of attention, and shifted uneasily. She was fairly certain that she wasn't looking her best. She wanted to pat her hair into place, but her arms were just ridiculously rigid. She planned to limber up the moment she could ditch the gruesome group before her.

"Well, thanks," she said politely, "I appreciate all efforts on my behalf, but I really need to walk about and loosen up a bit."

"You won't be walking anywhere unless I desire it,"

She tried to bite down her annoyance.

"Haven't you done enough?"

"Oh no, I am just getting started. My ceremony is complete. Let me welcome you to the world of the undead..Alive, yet dead. Delightfully complicated process, but it has been a success. Your time now will be spent under my command, doing exactly as I tell you to do."

"And if I don't", she asked, defiantly.

"Oh well, back to bed, stashed in your linen tablecloth, cozy with the worms in yonder hole."

She turned to glance back. She wished immediately that she had not done so. The dank smell of moist earth, and dirty linen sickened her.

"Alright, you win," she said, "your wish is my command."

"Good."

He circled her slowly and gave a disgusted sigh.

"Go to my house, and wait for me there."

She wanted to speak. She wanted to let him know that she had no idea where his house was located, but strangely enough, she suddenly did know. She shuffled off obediently. She also knew automatically to slink in the shadows and to avoid being seen. She arrived across town, irritated and exhausted. Her legs were trembling. Her arms were still extended as though a manicure

was imminent. The whole town seemed different, somehow, cleaner, and definitely more lights! She reached his house, which turned out to be a neat, well kept little cottage type place. She slunk into the side door and slowly entered the parlor.

She could hear his voice in her head, warning her off his white sofa and English leather chair.

Sullenly she drooped into the kitchen to wait for him.

Suddenly she noticed her own reflection in the window and screamed. She moved closer and stared. Her hair was a black rat's nest of tangles. Her blue eyes were as vacant as an endless summer sky. Bits of flesh seemed to swing from her once rosy cheeks. She peered more closely and noted one tiny gold earring hanging loosely. So was her ear lobe. A great despair filled her. Not only was there nothing open this late at night, but she was supposed to keep hidden. We will see about that! she mumbled to her reflection. All at once she became aware that he wasn't in her head. By concentrating deeply, she could see him in her mind. He was busy with the group in the graveyard.

She worked her way to the bathroom. She discovered that with his attention diverted

elsewhere, it was possible to work her arms back into a normal position and achieve a bit of agility. Soon she was able to rummage the medicine cabinet. With a bit of tape, she restored her ear to its previous position. By carefully scraping with a razor, she was able to remove the dead skin from her cheeks. Next, she turned on the bath water, and dropped in. She rubbed vigorously to restore a bit of natural luster to her hair. The hot water even pinked her skin up a bit. She hated to leave the tub, but was afraid that he would return before she could freshen up more. She stepped out and grabbed his robe off the back of the door, notching it tightly. It was a deep blue, and brought out the color of her eyes. She felt in her dirty bra for the lipstick she had concealed there for the dance, where she had met her demise. It was still there, a rich, lovely red. Contented with her improvements, she retired to the parlor to watch the fire.

Naturally, her psycho killer returned at that moment.

“What do you think you are doing in my robe?”

“My clothes are filthy, what do you expect me to wear?”

“The undead do not freshen themselves up. They wear what they died in! The whole concept of the walking dead depends on a hideous appearance!”

He was enraged now and needed a drink to steady his fury. He poured a scotch and water and turned his evil eyes upon her once more. She felt uncomfortable and unwelcome.

“Well”, she burst out, “if you wanted some hideous creature to do your bidding, you should have chosen more wisely. What was I doing when you turned crazy on the dance floor and decided to cut my throat? I was dressed in my best dress and my hair was cut in the latest fashion..but did you notice? It is your own fault. You have no sense of planning or style.”

“How dare you criticize me!” he shouted, “I am your master.”

“Not in this lifetime,” she replied coolly.

“Look”, she continued, “it was nice of you to repent of your wicked ways and remove that gaggy linen. It was the first decent moment I had enjoyed in days..but you have to admit that you were the one that put me in that position to start with. If I am not all out grateful..well, I could be in my own cozy apartment at the moment feeding my cat.”

He strode across the room and placed his hands on the arms of the chair she sat in. She tried to withdraw by was immobilized by his bulk and anger.

“Listen to me , you idiot, it wasn’t a few days! You have been dead fifty years! You are undead. You are nothing and no one remembers you. I have brought you forth to do my bidding. I am a vampire. I have eternal life. You are a piece of dead meat that I have awakened because I felt like it.”

Big tears filled her eyes and her freshly reddened lips trembled.

“How dare you speak to me in such a manner. I am a guest in your home. Don’t you dare try your control tactics with me. If its all over your silly old robe..well..you can have it back! Here!” She struggled out of the robe and held it out to him with two dainty fingers.

He looked past it at the beautiful young body before him. Amazingly enough the linen had been most effective in keeping her body smooth and intact. She still appeared to be a beautiful, well endowed twenty year old woman.

A stirring of desire blended with his anger for a moment and he stared openly.

“Hope you get your eyes full,” she said, between sobs, “Just because you are a vampire, you think you can treat people any way you like. Well, I am not afraid of you. I have been very nice to you, but all you can do is shout and scream. I think you let your powers go to your head.”

Now the vampire felt uncomfortable. He had thought it amusing to wake the dead; that she was one of his own victims made it even more amusing. He had planned to watch her struggle blindly with fear and obedience. He had never planned on this sort of thing..all this back talk, accusations, and worst of all, tears. He hated tears. And why did she have them anyway. They should have dried up long ago. Her body was beautiful, as were her large eyes, and lovely trembling lips. For the first time in centuries, he felt like a monster.

"Here," he said gruffly, "take this robe, you may use it. And stop sniffing. Let us start fresh. My name is Drake. Your name is Elizabeth. We each have a job to do. For the moment, you may call me Drake instead of Master."

She stared at the robe for a moment and then relented and slipped it back on. She had never been especially good at holding a grudge, and her naturally inquisitive and bubbly personality reasserted itself.

"Thank you, Drake", she said politely, "Do you live alone? Do you work here in town?"

"I have no one here with me. I haven't worked in five hundred years. Not since I became a vampire."

"Well," she said, thinking it was like pulling teeth to get this man to speak, outside of his great verbal tirades when angered, "That is a long time to be unemployed. You do not look poor. This is a great place."

"I take money anytime I wish," he bragged, " and I do not have to work again ever. I decorated this place myself."

She noted the pride in his voice.

"What do you do for fun, do you have a hobby?"

"I kill people and drink their blood!"

"Well, that's gotta get old, you know, I mean, over and over again for five hundred years. Sounds a bit dreary and repetitive."

He frowned.

"I have eternal life," he said.

It was just as she suspected, outside of the graveyard with his buddies and all that peer pressure, he wasn't such a tough guy after all. Possibly, he was just lonely. She could understand that. She was often bored to the hilt in her nine to five dress shop job, when she was alive. Could barely wait for the weekends and a little dancing and dating.

"Hey, are you seeing anyone," she asked, "anyone special in your life. I mean besides those poor souls you feed upon?"

He felt himself blushing. He had died young and had only dated once before becoming a vampire. It made him feel inadequate to admit it.

"I focus on my music," he said.

"REALLY! Do you play guitar? I love dance music."

"No, I enjoy Bach. I particularly like the violin concerto in G minor."

"Ah," she said, "that is beautiful music and I am sure it is enjoyable, especially to sleep by, but I like things a bit more lively. "

"Well, a few years ago this fellow, Ray Charles wrote some songs I enjoyed. I have the album right here."

He hurried to the book case and brought out, Sweet & Sour Soul. He put it on the turn table and asked her to listen. He moved the needle to his favorite song, Cry Me A River.

"Oh, how beautiful," she said, "and it is perfect dance music... so melancholy and blue!"

Both of them listened quietly to the music. She leaned back and shut her eyes. He studied her

face. There was something he should do, but he could not remember what. Suddenly her eyes flew open,

"Let's dance," she said.

She arose from the chair and put her small arms around his neck. He could feel her fragile bones beneath the robe, and the sway of her body, warmed by the fire.

"Drake," she whispered, "you are a natural dancer." He held her more tightly.

Her soft hair under his chin felt delightful. They danced until the album ended. The rest of the night was spent talking about the latest music. He tried to catch her up on all the events since her death. She seemed gracious and grateful. When she complained that her neck felt a little weak, he hurried from the room and then returned with a black choker necklace. It was soft velvet and fit across her old wound perfectly. She smiled her gratitude. Her luminous eyes captivated him completely.

Soon it would be morning, so he explained about his coffin and day time sleep. She assured him that she could amuse herself while he was resting.

Each of them recognized something special and wonderful in the other.

"Please," he said, lifting his coffin lid, and staring longingly into her eyes, "please do not try to leave me." She kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"Where would I go," she said, calming him with her touch, "and more importantly, why? I have no cat, no apartment, nothing. And you are my master."

He blushed. "Sorry about all of that," he said.

She laughed, "Don't worry, after you stopped yielding your power, I realized that you are a great guy. I will be here in the morning and for many mornings to come." He kissed her and closed the lid. She left to busy herself in the kitchen, hoping that he would wake up early so that they could dance the night away.

Drake woke up around eight. It had just turned dark outside & she had been able to rinse and dry her dress out. She was excited to hear the creak of his coffin.

"Elizabeth", he called. She could hear the fear in his voice that she would not answer. She could sense his hope that she had stayed. She hurried into the room & took a few turns to show off her dress.

"You look lovely", he said, grinning and scooping her into his large arms.

"As lovely as the first time I saw you."

"Well," she teased, "let's hope that this time you can resist cutting my throat!" She gave him a long, soft kiss to take the bite out of her words.

"Oh, come in here, I want to show you what I have prepared."

He followed her into the kitchen. The table was set for two. A pound of raw, bloody hamburger lay on his plate & a large glass of tomato juice. She felt it all looked appetizingly blood like. He was pleased that she had tried to find something that would appeal to him. On her plate, lay a well done hamburger steak with a few sweet peas and carrots. She had poured herself a scotch and coke.

"Coke tastes different than it used to," she mused.

"Yes, they took out a most vital and calming ingredient. One might say the coke has been removed from Coke."

They sat down facing each other, but he jumped up and brought a bottle out of the fridge.

"Try this on your hamburger steak", he said.

She poured it on liberally and then took a big bite.

"Oh, My God! This is incredible. What a delightful flavor."

"It is called A-1 sauce. If you stay with me, you will be enjoying quite a bit of it. It started out as a common sauce, but as it grew to popularity, it became very expensive."

She gave him a reassuring smile.

"Have no fear! I have no intention of leaving you. You are incredibly handsome and I have spent a splendid day admiring your fine taste in records and furniture. And your bed! It moves around when I try to lie down on it, but once I finally accomplished a prone position, it was wonderful."

"Its called a waterbed," he said, proud to teach her of modern marvels.

She had a lot of questions as they laughed and talked their way through the meal. He wanted to show her his PacMan game, but wasn't sure if she could grasp the concept. Instead, he asked which of the albums she especially liked.

"Oh, that is easy", she said, "I would love to hear Louis Armstrong. I want us to dance to Hello Dolly!"

After dinner he put on the album she had requested and took her into his arms. The feeling was as soft and magical as before. They swayed through Hello Dolly and Blueberry Hill, and she did a personal little dance just for him to Jeepers Creepers. He noticed her ear hanging a bit and lovingly glued it back more tightly.

"That ear has annoyed me all day," she said.

As soon as it was past midnight, they went for a long walk. She wore one of his long capes over her dress.

"We must look like two specters of death on a date," she giggled.

He smiled indulgently. How lively and fun she was. He wished the night would stretch on forever. Unfortunately, all too soon, the warning coral streaks entered the black sky. They made their way home and he returned to his coffin.

The next night when he arose was much the same as the one before, only instead of walking, he held her firmly under one arm and flew about the neighborhood.

"Whew!", she said, " that was fantastic." Her eyes were brilliant with happiness, her tender smile melting his heart. Then he frowned. As he searched her face lovingly, he could not help noticing that her ear was on upside down, and that the other one also seemed a bit loose. He tried to ignore it. Then, when he was changing shirts in the bedroom, he noticed a patch of dark hair in a clump on the pillow. He decided he would not mention it to her for fear of hurting her feelings. They had a wonderful evening but he felt troubled when he pulled down his lid for the day. He slept badly. The next night he awakened very hungry. She was reading in the bedroom so he slipped out of the house for a quick bite. He ran across a husky youth trying to ignite an old homeless man in the alley. He drained him quickly, stomped out the newspaper around the old man, and hurried home.

Elizabeth was thrilled to see him up and about, having no idea that he had ever left the house. She wanted to show him a new dance she was practicing, one that she hoped to teach him also. He kissed her and settled himself on the sofa for her performance. He watched her beauty, her graceful movements, and had to stop her several times just for a kiss. He was stunned on the last kiss when a small piece of her lip lingered on his. He put his hand up to his mouth, as though coughing, and removed it. Elizabeth wasn't easily fooled.

"My mouth is breaking off," she cried, "I am falling to pieces."

He tried to calm her but she would not be comforted. Her heart breaking sobs made him desperate and fearful. He could not lose her now, not piece by piece, not any way at all. She

was his beloved.

"Tomorrow", she sobbed, "when you wake up, I may be all over the house.

Oh, my darling, our love is doomed, lost in the marketplace of decay!"

"No," he said, "I have an idea. You stay here. I will be right back. I know the answer to this dilemma!" She nodded, her trusting eyes looking pleadingly into his own. He could not fail her. He had waited centuries for love and would not be denied. He settled her gently in their comfortable chair and flew hurriedly out the window.

Drake flew fast and furious. He had an idea and everything inside of him believed it would work. He headed to the hospital. Some nights when he wasn't in the mood for a kill, he would steal the plastic bags of blood from the hospital to drink instead. Tonight he needed them for a different purpose. He took a body supply of blood and some tubing and hurried home.

Elizabeth was sitting quietly, looking frail and hopeless. She appeared to have been swallowed by the chair.

"Oh!" she cried, "You are back!"

"Yes, I have an answer to our problem, my darling." He explained to her that if he wanted, he was capable of creating other vampires. He said he planned to use the same theory with her, but since she was bloodless, he would first give her a transfusion. Next, he would suck the blood from her neck and replace it with his own. She would no longer be a zombie or undead. She would be alive again.

Elizabeth flung her arms around his neck.

"Oh, my darling, thank you, thank you!"

"Just lie still", he said, it isn't painful at all. He transferred the blood through the tubing and then began to suck it back out. Then he replaced the hospital blood with his own. He stepped back and surveyed her carefully.

For a heart stopping moment, he believed he had failed. Her eyes were closed and her face very white. Then suddenly she started to change.

Her eyes grew bright with periwinkle sparkles of vitality. Her flesh became firm and rosy. Even her hair, which held a natural gloss, enhanced a thousand times into a black sheen and grew to her waist. He had found her beautiful before, but now she was beyond anything he could imagine. She leapt to her feet and darted to the mirror! He could hear her gasp in astonishment.

"Oh Drake", she said, "I am alive and beautiful once more." Her voice was husky with emotion. Perhaps a little too husky.

"I love you.", he said simply.

"I love you, too. More than anything!" Now he was certain he wasn't imagining it. Her voice was a definite baritone.

"Your voice is different," he said gently, "Sing a few lines of Hello Dolly."

She started to sing and then stopped in horror.

"Oh", she said, "I sound just like I have a frog in my throat! Oh, do something, Drake."

"I don't know what to do my darling. It is a very disconcerting sound!"

"Oh", she said in her new bass voice, "well, pardon me..and I suppose you think you are perfect!"

"Close", he said.

"Well, let me tell you. The way that one tooth of yours in front hooks over the other one is no fine thing to look at!"

"You said it was sexy",

Drake felt self conscious. He could tell that Elizabeth was only lashing out because of that dreadful voice.

"I am so sorry, Elizabeth. You should be sheer perfection. I suppose it was the cut on your throat. It was a bit deep. He sighed heavily. The guilt of the imperfection lay in his own actions. He had permanently marred what he now loved most. He adored Elizabeth and told her so. His stricken face was too much for her gentle heart.

"Its ok," she said gruffly, "it is not as though you ruined a great singing career." He hugged her to him. She could make him feel better in even the worst of circumstances.

"If you put up with my crooked tooth, I shall learn to enjoy your voice."

Suddenly, they were both laughing. Elizabeth shrugged.

"We are beautiful and alive. Let us always remember and see only that."

He took her into his arms. They happily danced away the next few centuries, even appearing once on the Sonny and Cher show, where she was finally able to accept her deep voice. After all, it was not much lower than Cher's..and she was famous!