

THE DEVIL DON'T DANCE

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Down in Georgia there's a place called Creedy's Swamp. Legend has it during the War of Northern Aggression a pair of Confederate soldiers deserted their posts during Sherman's assault and tried to hide out in Creedy's. Before the war was over they was caught by the army and hanged, right there in the swamp, for treason. The tree where they was hanged is still there, with the two ropes still hanging from the branches.

It's under these branches that the Devil lives, and I do mean the Devil hisself. I ain't never seen him myself, but that's cause I don't go down into Creedy's Swamp, not during the day, certainly not at night, and never, not ever, not even to save my own life, would I go down there at night when the moon is waning. That's when it's going away from full to new, if you didn't already know. Anyways, I don't go to Creedy's Swamp, on account of Lester Brighton.

Lester had two left feet, which might not mean much to you or me, but this was especially bothersome for the man because he loved nothing more than dancing. Nothing he tried could change the fact, however, that God had not given him the grace, or the skill, or even the raw talent to be a dancer. Now, I don't know what goes on in another man's head, but something inside of Lester's said that if God didn't make him a dancer, maybe the Devil could.

Now everyone knows the Devil don't dance. You gotta have something in your heart in order to dance. Dancin' without feelin' is like eatin' without swallowing. Why on earth would you do it? And the Devil, he ain't got any feelings. They all been burned out of him by the fires of Hell a long, long time ago. But just cause the Devil can't do something, don't mean he can't arrange it so someone else can. Devil can't bake a cherry pie to save his life, but don't nobody doesn't like Sara Lee, you hear?

So Lester goes down to Creedy's Swamp, under the light of a waning moon, and he finds the Devil sitting under that hangin' tree, dropping a line in the swamp. Now Lester, up close and personal like, is starting to have second thoughts, but before he can back off, the Devil's lookin' him in the eye and asking him to sit down. Well, Lester ain't got no choice now but to sit and see where his cards lie. The Devil asks Lester his business and Lester informs the Devil that he wants to be a dancer. Lester says he's even willing to trade his soul for the right moves. The Devil just laughs at that, says he's got enough souls already and he'll give Lester his dancin' talent if Lester comes back in ten years to provide him with some company.

Lester was so eager, he didn't even stop to think. Quick as a blink the two shook hands and

the deal was done. The moon disappeared behind the clouds and when it came back, the Devil was gone.

Lester woke up the next morning and sure as spit he was now a dancing machine. You name it, he could do it. Rumba, fox trot, waltz, pop and lock, cabbage patch, two step, line dance, if was accompanied by music, Lester could do it and he did it better than anyone else around. With his happy feet Lester traveled first to the capitol, then to New York City, and then around the world. He won dance competitions, he had the lead in Swan Lake on both sides of both oceans, he formed his own dance company. He even had his face put on a Wheaties box. It was just a Christmas present, but for a boy like Lester it may as well been the real thing.

Well, ten years pass might quick when you're jet settin' 'round the world. Lester was living in London at this point, going by the name L'Bright and he was married to the prettiest little thing you could imagine. But an obligation was an obligation, so on the tenth anniversary of that night with the Devil, Lester found himself back in Creedy's Swamp, bathed in the light of that waning moon.

"How ya been, boy?" asked the Devil, pole still dipping into the water.

"I've been doing well, thank you," replied Lester.

"And the wife?" asked the Devil.

"She's also doing well," replied Lester. He didn't know how the Devil knew about his wife, but the Devil knows a lot more than he ever lets on. Everyone knows that.

The Devil then flips his line out of the water and looks Lester right in the eyes. I'm lonely, says the Devil. Well that's why I'm here says Lester. To provide you some company. The Devil just grins, and flips his line back into the water. You certainly are, says the Devil as he pulls the line back up. Rising out of the water at the end of the Devil's hook was a cradle. Well Lester looks at that, and looks at the Devil and he puts two and two together with his wife's week long streak of morning sickness and he begins to feel a little ill himself.

"Now hold on a minute," says Lester. "I thought you just wanted me to come visit you every now and again."

The Devil just snorts at this as he finishes pulling the cradle out of the water. Settling it next to the tree the Devil looks Lester right in the eye. "In nine months I'll be coming for what's mine."

Lester pleaded with the Devil. Got right down on his knees in that swamp and outright

begged the Devil not to take his unborn child. He offered money, he offered things, he offered his own soul once again. The Devil was unimpressed. At his wits end Lester sputtered out a challenge to the Devil. "I challenge you to a dance off!"

As we all know, the Devil doesn't dance. Not a lick. And here was Lester, the greatest dancer the world had ever known, challenging him. Strange as it might seem, the Devil actually smiled. "All right," says the Devil. "You go first."

So Lester danced, and he danced and he danced some more. His feet flew across the swampy ground as he twirled and twisted and spun as hard as he could. His body was sweatin' and his lungs burned and still he danced till he finally leapt in the air, backflipping through the night, his legs spread in a text book example of the splits and landed on his feet.

The Devil was duly impressed. Clapping his hands in appreciation the Devil set down his fishin' pole and rolled up his sleeves. "And now," said the Devil. "It's my turn."

And with that, he ripped Lester's soul right out of his body.

You see, the Devil learned a long time ago not to challenge anyone, especially in Georgia, to anything if the Devil wasn't absolutely sure he was going to win. So the Devil did the only sensible thing, he cheated.

Lester never did leave Creedy's Swamp and 9 months later his pretty little thing of a wife died in childbirth. The baby itself was lost. Not that it died mind you, it was just there, and then it twern't. No one knows what happened to it, or at least no one wants to say.

But I'll say this, braver folks than myself have gone down to Creedy's Swamp, and they've gone at night, and they've gone when the moon is waning and they've told me what they've seen. They say they've seen the hangin' tree shining in the moon light, and underneath the tree are two figures, one big, one not so big, dipping their fishing lines in the water. And even though there's never any wind, they swear they can see the two ropes hangin' from the tree swinging and swaying in the air, like legs dancin'.

Cause the Devil don't dance. But he sure likes watchin'.