

Heads Deacon, Tails Devil

P.J. McCalla

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Reviewed by Paige Lovitt for Reader Views (8/09)

Right after Rachel marries Robert Grant, against her mother's wishes, she immediately knows that she has made a huge mistake. Because divorce was not common in the early 1900s, Rachel is stuck with this abusive man. Having five children with him, his abuse extends to their children. Robert presents a charismatic, man-of-God persona to the outside world. Inside their home, he is the devil incarnate. Having some special intuitive abilities, Rachel's mother recognizes Robert for who he truly is. She visits often to try to intervene with his bad behavior.

As time passes, Robert's behavior becomes even worse. In addition to continuing to brutalize his wife and children, he also begins having affairs. The women in these affairs also don't fair well with him. Rachel and her mother become desperate to protect her and her children. Drastic measures have to be taken to keep everyone safe. Unfortunately, Robert wins some of the battles. To survive, Rachel holds on to her faith and her love for her children.

"Heads Deacon, Tails Devil," is an incredibly intense novel. Knowing that the main characters were based upon real people related to the author, and that some of the story was based on true events, greatly increases the drama and suspense. As I read the story, I hoped and prayed that the man that Robert was based upon was really not as bad as the devil in the book. McCalla wrote her story in a manner that could easily convince me that he was. That is the scary part.

Having dealt with women who have been in abusive relationships really opened my eyes to how difficult it would have been for women back in this time. There were no restraining orders, easy-to-get divorces, welfare or women's shelters. Even in our times today, it is very difficult to get an abusive man out of your life. This story really made me reflect on how hard it would have been to be in this time, especially when women had less rights. Because of this, evil men were probably even worse back in those days because they had less to stop them. McCalla really hit this issue on the head with her story. I think that readers will find it very eye opening and in spite of the harshness of the story, they will appreciate the relationship that Rachel has with her mother and her children. I highly recommend "Heads Deacon, Tails Devil" by P.J. McCalla.