



# Season of the Serpent

*Cara Swann*

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An award-winning journalist in the late 80s can't accept the unsolved murder of her parents -- and finds the sudden appearance of a long-lost cousin odd. Soon she is pursuing his past involvement with her father to buy an old rundown mansion. Upon her visit there, she is slowly drawn into the strange ghostly haunting in the mansion -- and attracted to the mysterious man who lives nearby and who may be a murderer. (Recently edited/updated)

Excerpt:

*Chelsea went to look out the attic window, the sky had darkened and it was beginning to rain lightly. As she watched, the rain became a hard, slanting onslaught that streaked the windowpanes, gusts of wind battering the rooftop, tossing the willow and cypress limbs recklessly below, thunder booming and lightning crackling.*

*It looked forbidding, and almost the moment that thought occurred to her, she was stunned by utter silence in the attic. Even though she could still see it raining, the noise of the storm had ceased, not the least sound of wind, rain or thunder. Her heart seemed to climb up in her throat, and she felt like she'd been submerged in quicksand, unable to move from her position.*

*Then a sound came from the attic doorway behind her; but she could not turn to look in that direction, still paralyzed by fear. She heard the familiar wailing start, slowly gaining in strength, a melancholy sound that shattered the quiet, making Chelsea's scalp prickle with terrified anticipation. Gritting her teeth, she pivoted, stared at the door, now closed...*

*She'd left the door open, hadn't she?*

*Suddenly, Chelsea couldn't remember if she'd closed the door, but was almost certain she'd left it open. And there was no one in the attic with her; she was all alone.*

*The sound seemed to penetrate the closed door, and in spite of her fear, Chelsea listened attentively. It was more of a crying whimper now, punctuated by snuffles; and unlike the piteous weeping of the woman she'd heard, Chelsea knew this was a child's unmistakable high-pitched crying, hiccupping off and on with exhaustion, gradually ending in a heart-rending sob.*

*When the voice came, she was not prepared for it: "Mommy, please don't...don't...hurt me...mommy, mommy...it hurts."*

*Chelsea felt her throat ache with unshed tears, hearing a small boy's begging plea for mercy. She was rooted to the spot, still hearing the little boy begging, crying, then hiccupping...his small voice finally, mercifully fading away.*

*As though released from a trance, Chelsea ran to the door, violently pushing on it, shoving a shoulder against the wood, straining against it with all her might...a sickening feeling in the pit of her stomach as she realized the door was either stuck or locked from the other side.*

*She ceased her frantic efforts, stood there listening to the ragged sound of her own breathing, nerves taut. And then came the Chopin waltz drifting into the room, the eerie tinkling of the music box that caused*

*Chelsea to mumble, "No, oh no, please...no!" backing away from the door to stare at it transfixed as the tinkling music played on and on. Gasping, she saw a wispy white vapor swirling in front of the door, rising toward the ceiling, hovering like a vaporous cloud, mystical and mysterious.*

*Trembling, Chelsea told herself she was imagining it, that her eyes were playing tricks on her...but she could now see the shape of a voluptuous woman assembling out of the whiteness, lowering to the floor, more like the vague image on a developing Polaroid film than a real-life person.*

*A woman's sultry, southern voice spoke: "Leave this place, don't come back."*

*Chelsea heard herself ask in a trembling voice: "Who are you, what do you want?"*

*The piteous weeping started and Chelsea saw the ghostly figure clutching its face, blood-red tears falling to the floor...staining the wood as a puddle of blood formed.*

*"Please," Chelsea begged, "tell me who you are, how I can help you."*

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