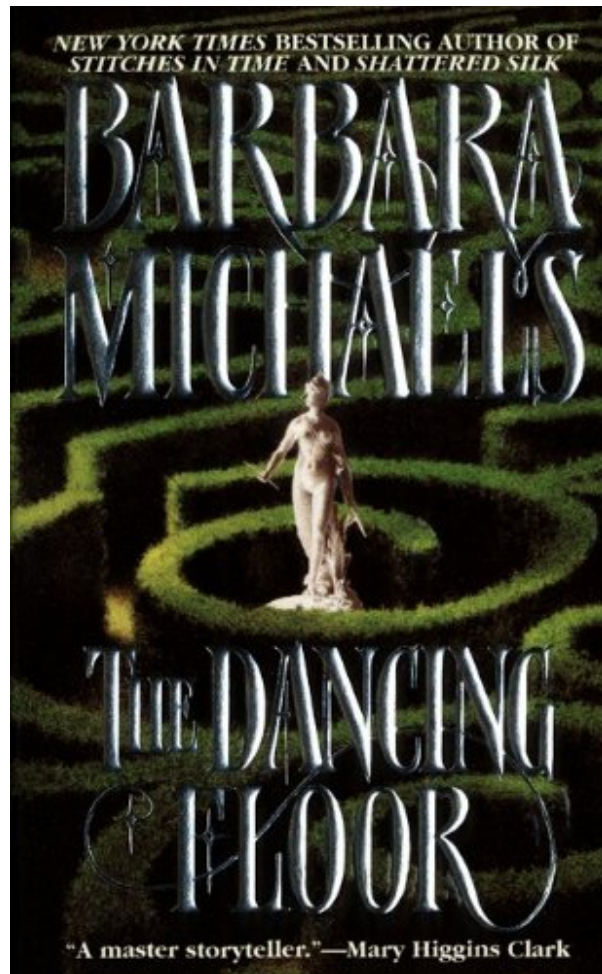
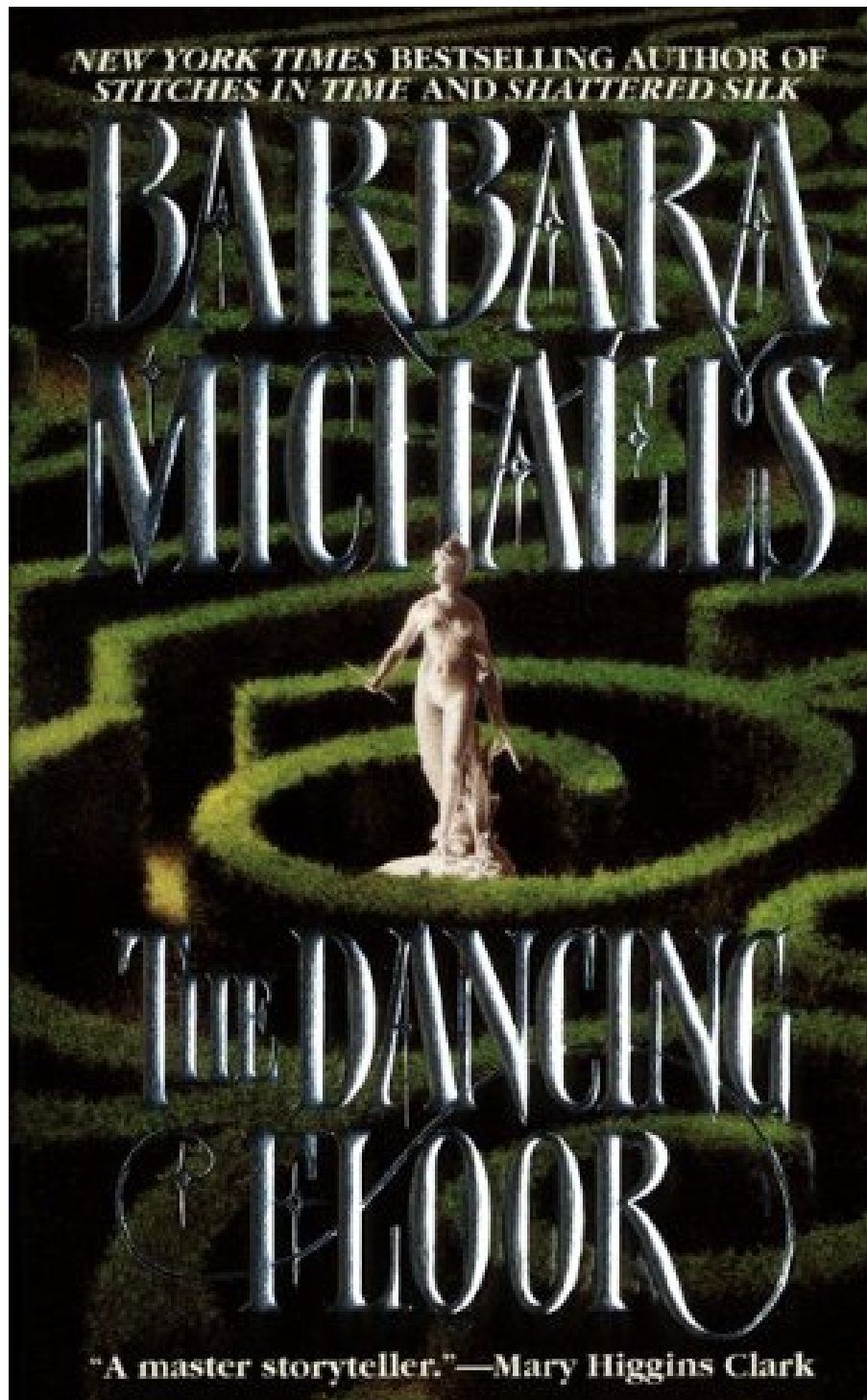


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For years, Heather Tradescant had dreamed of the journey she and her father would take to England--a pilgrimage to the great gardens of history. Now that her father is dead, Heather is determined to fulfill his dreams. Unfortunately, her request to see the fabled 17th-century garden of Troytan House is denied by the owner. Though unwelcome, she braves the walls of briars and reaches the Victorian manor house beyond. She senses a strange mission of evil lurking, tainting the manor's peaceful beauty. Only then does Heather begin to wonder whether it is only stories of long-vanished witchcraft that haunt Troytan House or whether there is some more modern horror, hearer at hand, and far, far more dangerous.

Continuing in the classic tradition she established with such acclaimed novels of suspense as *Stitches in Time*, *Vanish with the Rose*, and *House of Stone*, New York Times bestselling author Barbara Michaels has penned a chilling tale that will keep you reading until the last page.

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Most helpful customer reviews

19 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Entertaining and informative

By EA Solinas

Barbara Michaels has a special talent for injecting both entertainment and interesting information (Gothic novels; politics; roses; vintage clothing; etc) into her novels. This one is no exception, offering the dual info caches of ancient witch-burning and the complex gardens in England.

Heather Tradescant is an intelligent, rather too-blunt heroine who has always dreamed of going to England with her father. Though her father is now deceased, a hefty wad of insurance money now allows her to go. While she sightsees, she stumbled into a massive maze of hedges and plants, and soon stumbles into the eccentric Mr. Karim and his son Jordon. Karim is intrigued first by her name (explanation in the book) and then by her, and invites her to stay awhile.

Heather soon discovers that the local village is a bit obsessed with the famed Pendle Witches, a family group that was burned for witchcraft centuries before. She also meets a group of odd people: Jennet, a kindly but reticent woman who fits into the role of "village witch"; Lindsay, a shallow, manipulative woman with a Barbie-doll body; Giles, Lindsay's handsome and long-suffering hubby; Lindsay's monstrous son Bobby and tormented daughter.

Mystery-readers soon grow tired of the usual, boring, gorgeous and immensely attractive heroines (Jacqueline Kirby doesn't count--she's quirky). Heather is none of these: She's a bit overweight, enjoys her food immensely, is rather plain in appearance, but with a sharp intellect and bluntly truthful manner. I found it highly enjoyable that the men around her found her interesting, because of her brain rather than her body.

Frank Karim, despite his little bouts of maliciousness, is overall a fun character to read about, the weird millionaire. His son Jordon is a little less interesting, as often he seems to be rushed into his interest in Heather. Lindsay is despicable from her first scene, screeching at Lindsay then putting on a facade of

neighborly sweetness; Giles is likable from his first scene. As Heather does, it takes a while to warm up to Jennet, as she is so reticent, but she is a strong and likable character as well.

I was very pleased that though this book contains Jennet and other Wiccans, it was not gratuitous. It's actually connected to the plot and the villain, and to the massive maze of bushes and hedges. Though I could have used a teeny bit less of Jennet's expounding on Wiccan philosophies, it overall didn't affect my enjoyment of the book. (And I just LOOOOOOOVE the descriptions of her shop and the exotic merchandise in it. What I wouldn't give to buy some of the jewelry and clothing from there...)

The descriptions are good; I particularly liked descriptions of the maze, the house, and the aforementioned shop of Jennet's. The mild obsession with the old witches was well-made, such as the murder mystery. The only problems were that it is a bit too actionless for a stretch in the middle, and the relationship between Heather and Jordon feels a bit forced compared to other novels by Ms. Michaels. However, the portrayal of the spoiled-rotten, maliciously-bratty Bobby is spot-on.

Overall, this is a good mystery and immensely entertaining, as well as informative.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Save the next dance for me

By ealovitt

"The Dancing Floor" is not one of Barbara Michaels's best novels. Most of her books are compulsive page-turners (I've been reading her ever since "The Master of Blacktower"), but the plot of this one gets literally lost in the maze (the 'dancing floor' of the title). The heroine gets lost in the maze too, but fights her way out and makes a dramatic entrance into the lives of her future employer and his disdainful son.

The son, Jordan doesn't believe the maze exists. He is also suspicious of the heroine, Heather's semi-accidental precipitation into the middle of his breakfast. However his father is intrigued by a woman, self-described as pudgy and plain, who has the same unusual surname as the seventeenth-century landscape artist who had designed his newly-acquired manor's gardens. The rich old man persuades Heather (who happens to be an avid student of seventeenth-century garden designers, or 'florists' as they were then called) to stay on and help him renovate his gardens.

Heather is a very pugnacious heroine who fights with almost every other major character in the book, including a very nasty little boy and his equally nasty mother. She even gets physical with the boy after he causes her to wreck her car, and again when she catches him torturing his sister. She also falls for the nasty boy's father, an Ashley Wilkes clone who suffers nobly, and conveniently leaves the scene when Heather figures out whom she really loves. This book isn't quite as long as "Gone with the Wind," but it still takes Heather four hundred and fifty pages to ditch the Ashley character and announce her true feelings.

The maze wanders in and out of the plot. Heather discovers that a local coven is using it as a meeting place. A body is found within. The reader learns a bit about the history of mazes and labyrinths. Most of the supernatural activity, unlike previous novels by Barbara Michaels, occurs in Heather's dreams---a bit of a cheat, if you ask me. The maze was getting such a big build-up, I figured there was going to be a shuddery, occult denouement within its shrubbery. Not a crazed murderer who seemed to lack motivation for his or her heinous deeds, and who was hoist on such a convenient petard.

If you are a new Barbara Michaels reader, try one of her earlier novels (I was particularly fond of "Sons of the Wolf"), or else wait for her next dance.

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Realistic heroine

By curvynovelsdotinfo

Heroine: husky

American school teacher Heather Tradescant has journeyed to merry Olde England on a trip that is anything but merry. She is living out her father's last wishes and visiting the famous ancient gardens as they had once dreamed of doing together.

Heather particularly desires to see the seventeenth century garden of one Troyton House, but is denied access by the owner. Determined to at least get a glimpse of the fabled grounds, she gives in to impulse and trespasses on the property, blundering her way through a monstrous prickly hedge that does far more damage to her than she does to it.

Arriving on the far side of the vegetation Heather is left with a deep-seated sense of uneasiness extending far beyond that of merely breaking the law. She senses that perhaps God's own laws are somehow being broken at Troyton House, but by who or what she does not know--and is desperately afraid she will find out.

What worked for me:

I give Heather big points for being a teacher, and a lover of gardening, traditional Regency romance novels, and chocolate!

I enjoyed the fact that the story was steeped in the lore of several cultures. I wish it gone into even further detail in some cases, it was so interesting.

Size-wise Heather describes herself as being big-boned but flat-chested. But it didn't seem to lessen her appeal to the other gender, as she had four men interested in her at one time or another.

What didn't work for me:

Reading this story felt like mentally traversing a maze with its twists, turns, and false leads. And yet, it wasn't that highly suspenseful for me. I think I went into it expecting something shocking, like a "Blair Witch" meets contemporary gothic romance sort of hybrid, and when I didn't get that kind of intense, high-speed action I found it to be a bit draggy.

Overall:

"The Dancing Floor" didn't quite have the zing the back cover blurb really promised. Still, it's definitely worth the searching out at the library if you are a fan of witches and/or gardening.

Warning: There are several mentions of the occult in this novel and don't expect many mentions of floors, dancing or otherwise in this oddly-named story.

If you liked "The Dancing Floor" you might also enjoy "Thornyhold".

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