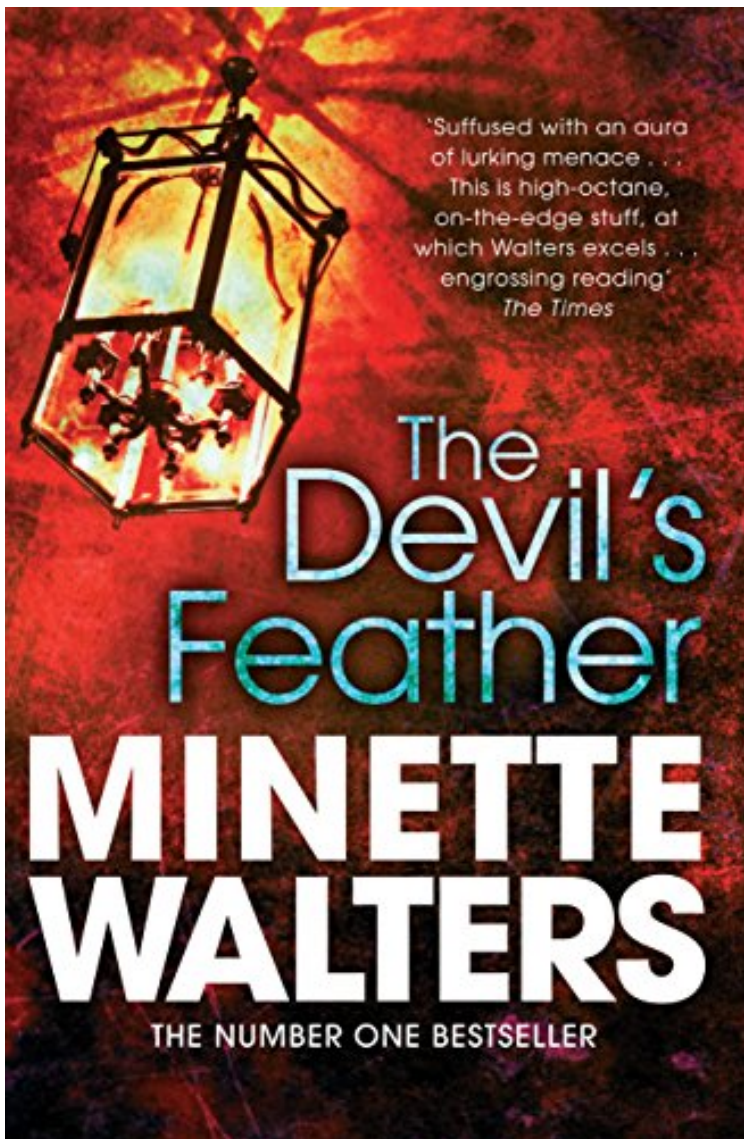


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The Devil's Feather (English Edition)



Par Minette Walters
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(Free download) The Devil's Feather (English Edition)

Par Minette Walters : The Devil's Feather (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Devil's Feather (English Edition):

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Description : Description du produitWith private security firms supplying bodyguards in every theatre of war, who will notice the emergence of a sexual psychopath from the ranks of the mercenaries? When five women are brutally murdered in Sierra Leone, Reuters correspondent, Connie Burns, questions the arrest of three rebel soldiers for the crimes. No one listens. In the wake of a vicious civil war which saw hundreds of thousands killed and displaced, the rape and murder of women is of little consequence. And who cares if child soldiers are beaten into a confession? With little to go on, except her witnessing of a savage attack on a prostitute, Connie believes a foreigners responsible. A man who claims to have been in the SAS and works as a bodyguard to a Lebanese diamond trader. She remembers him from Kinshasa when he was a mercenary for Laurent Kabilas regime, and she suspects he uses the chaos of war to act out sadistic fantasies against women. Two years later in Iraq, the consequences of her second attempt to expose him are devastating. Terrified, degraded and destroyed, she goes into hiding in England and tries to rebuild the person she was

before being subjected to three days of conditioning in a Baghdad cellar. In the process, she strikes up a friendship with Jess Derbyshire, a loner whose reclusive nature has alienated her from the rest of the Dorset community where she lives. Seeing parallels between herself and Jess, Connie borrows from the other womans strength and makes the hazardous decision to attempt a third unmasking of a serial killer knowing he will come looking for her

Prsentation de l'diteurHave you ever wanted to bury a secret so deeply that no one will find out about it? With private security firms supplying bodyguards in every theatre of war, who will notice the emergence of a sexual psychopath from the ranks of the mercenaries? Reuters correspondent Connie Burns is no stranger to the worlds troublespots, including the vicious civil unrest in Sierra Leone and the war in Iraq. But as she begins to suspect that a foreigner is using the chaos of war to act out sadistic fantasies against women, her efforts to bring him to justice leave her devastated. Degraded and terrified, she goes into hiding in England and strikes up a friendship with Jess Derbyshire, a loner whose reclusive nature may well be masking secrets of her own. Connie draws from the other womans strength and makes the hazardous decision to attempt a third unmasking of a serial killer . . . Knowing he will come looking for her . . . Barry ForshawSometimes, an author is obliged to change pace when their usual territory is becoming over-farmed not least by themselves.

And at first glance, *The Devils Feather* would appear to represent a radical new direction for Minette Walters. But -- wait a minute -- why would Walters need to dip into a new genre of novel? After all, she is now unquestionably in the upper echelons of British crime queens, quite as successful as P D James and Ruth Rendell at mining darker psychological territory, with (in her case) a strong sociological underpinning. Such books as *Acid Row* and *Fox Evil* have been bitter pictures of Britain as much as they have been crime novels. *The Devils Feather* is more ambitious than any of her preceding work, notably in the massive international canvas (including a war-torn country) that is the novel's backdrop. Five women have been savagely killed in the Sierra Leone conflict. Connie Burns is a correspondent for Reuters who asks awkward questions about the arrest of three young soldiers accused of the crime. Their forced confessions (after savage beatings) count for little in the middle of the Civil War, and Connie's theory -- that the murders were committed by a foreigner indulging his own sanguinary fantasies in the middle of a war -- proves to be very dangerous for her. Her attempts to track the killer down bring catastrophe on her own head, and she is forced to escape, going to ground in Dorset and dealing with the psychic scars she has been left with. It is, of course, inevitable that she will be tracked down even in the safety of the English countryside by her implacable opponent. As the foregoing conveys, this is very different territory from that which Walters has made her own, but she proves equally adept at the International blockbuster thriller as at any of her more tightly focused British novels. It goes without saying that the character portrayal (notably of the terrified Connie) is an on-the-nail as ever, and the considerable tension engendered by *The Devils Feather* may glean a whole new legion of readers for Walters. --Barry ForshawExtraitII dont know if that story was picked up in the West. I believe some interest was shown in South Africa, but only because rape and murder had been high on that countrys agenda for some time. I was transferred to Asia shortly afterwards, so I never learnt the outcome of the trial. I assumed the teenagers were convicted because justice, like everything else in Sierra Leone, was subject to economic restrictions. Even if the court went to the expense of appointing a public defence lawyer, confessions of guilt, with graphic details of how each victim was murdered, would attract a summary sentence. I know Alan Collins was troubled by the indictments, but there was little he could do about it when his request for an experienced pathologist was refused. He was in a difficult position more an observer than an adviser with less than two weeks of his secondment left at the time of Amie Jonahs abduction, and the youths descriptions of their crimes effectively sealed their fate. Nevertheless, Alan remained sceptical. They were in no fit state to be questioned, he told me. Amies family had reduced them to pulp. Theyd have said anything the police wanted them to say rather than face another beating. He was also troubled by the crime scenes. I saw two of the bodies in situ, he said, and neither of them looked like a gang attack. Both women were huddled in the corners of the rooms with their heads and shoulders sliced to ribbons and defence wounds to their arms. It looked to me as if they were trying to protect themselves from a single individual who attacked from the front. A gang would have been slashing at them from all sides. What can you do? Very little. No ones been interested since the youths confessed. Ive written a report, pointing up the anomalies, but there are precious few doctors in Freetown, let alone forensic pathologists. He smiled ruefully. The thinking seems to be that they deserve what they get because theres no doubt they were trying to abduct young Amie. If youre right, wont the killer strike again? Wont that exonerate the boys? It depends

who he is. If hes a local, then probably . . . but if hes one of the foreign contingenthe shruggedIm guessing hell export his activities elsewhere.It was that conversation which increased my suspicions of John Harwood. When he was first pointed out to me in Paddys BarFreetowns equivalent of StringfellowsI knew Id seen him before. I wondered if it was in Kinshasa in 1998 when I was covering the civil war in the Congo. I recalled him being in uniform thenalmost certainly as a mercenary because the British army wasnt involved in that conflictbut I didnt think hed been calling himself John Harwood.By the spring of 2002 in Sierra Leone he was dressed in civvies and had a bad reputation. I saw him in three fights while I was there, and heard about others, but he was never on the receiving end of the damage. He had the build of a terriermiddling height, lean muscular frame, strong neck and limbsand a terriers ferocity once he had his teeth into someone. Most of the ex-pats gave him a wide berth, particularly when he was drinking.At that time Freetown was full of foreigners. The UN was coordinating efforts to put the country back on its feet, and most of the ex-pats worked for the international press, NGOs, religious missions or world charities. A few, like Harwood, had private contracts. He was employed as chauffeur/bodyguard to a Lebanese businessman, who was rumoured to have interests in a diamond mine. Once in a while the pair of them vanished abroad with heavily armoured cases, so the rumours were probably true.Along with everyone else, I tended to avoid him. Life was too short to get involved with loners with chips on their shoulders. However, I did make one overture during the six months I was there when I asked him to pass on a request for an interview with his boss. Diamonds were a hot topic in the aftermath of the conflict. The question of who owned them and where the money was going had been a bone of contention in Sierra Leone for decades. None of the wealth was fed back into the country and the peoples resentment at their grinding, subsistence-level poverty had been the spark which ignited the civil war.Predictably, I got nowhere near Harwoods boss, but I had a brief exchange with Harwood himself. None of the local women would cook or clean for him, so most evenings he could be found eating alone at Paddys Bar, which was where I approached him. I said I thought our paths had crossed before, and he acknowledged it with a nod.Youre bonnier than I recall, Ms. Burns, he said in a broad Glaswegian accent. Last time I saw you you were a little mouse of a thing.I was surprised he remembered my name, even more surprised by the backhanded compliment. The one fact everyone knew about Harwood was that he didnt like women. It poured out of him under the influence of Star beer, and gossip had it that he was in the tertiary stage of syphilis after contracting it from a whore. It was a convenient explanation for his aggressive misogyny, but I didnt believe it myself. Penicillin was too freely available for any Westerner to progress beyond the primary stage.I told him what I wanted and placed a list of questions on the table, together with a covering letter explaining the nature of the piece I was planning. Will you pass these on to your boss and give me his answer? Access to anyone was difficult except through a third party. The rebel fighters had destroyed most of the communications network and, with everyone living in secure compounds, it was impossible to blag your way past the guards without an appointment.Harwood prodded the papers back at me. No to both requests.Why not?He doesnt talk to journalists.Is that him speaking or you?No comment.I smiled slightly. So how do I get past you, Mr. Harwood?You dont. He crossed his arms and stared up at me through narrowed eyes. Dont push your luck, Ms. Burns. Youve had your answer.My dismissal, too, I thought wryly. Even with a score of ex-pats within hailing distance, I didnt have the nerve to press him further. Id seen the kind of damage he could do, and I didnt fancy being on the receiving end.Paddys was the favoured watering-hole of the international community because it remained open throughout the eleven-year conflict. It was a large open-sided bar-cum-restaurant, with tables on a concrete veranda, and it was a magnet for local hookers in search of dollars. They learnt very quickly to avoid Harwood after he hurt one so badly that she was hospitalized. He spoke pidgin English, which is the lingua franca of Sierra Leone, and cursed the girls vilely in their own tongue if they tried to approach him. He called them devils feathers and lashed out with his fists if they came too close.He was rather more careful around Europeans. The charities and missions had a high percentage of female staff, but if a white woman jogged his arm he always let it go. Perhaps he was intimidated by themthey were a great deal brighter than he was, with strings of letters after their namesor perhaps he knew he wouldnt be able to get away with it. The less articulate black girls were easier targets for his anger. It persuaded most of us that he was a racist as well as a woman-hater.There was no telling how old he was. He had a shaven head, tattooed with a winged scimitar at the base of his skull, and the sun had dried his skin to leather. When drunk, he boasted that hed been in the SAS unit that stormed the Iranian embassy in London in 1980 and the scimitar was his badge of honour. But, if true, that would have put him in his late forties or early fifties, and his devastating punches suggested someone younger. Despite the strong Scottish accent, he

claimed to come from London, although no one in the UK ex-pat community believed him, any more than they believed that John Harwood was the name he had been born with. Nevertheless, if Alan Collins hadn't made his remark about the foreign contingent, it wouldn't have occurred to me that there might be more to Harwood's violence than anyone realized. Even when it did, there was nothing I could do about it. Alan had returned to Manchester by then and the murders of the women had quickly faded from memory. I ran my suspicions past a few of my colleagues, but they were sceptical. As they pointed out, the killings had stopped with the arrest of the boys, and Harwood's modus operandi was to use his fists, not a machete. The tenor of their argument seemed to be that, however despicable Harwood was, he wouldn't have raped the women before murdering them. He can't even bring himself to touch a black, said an Australian cameraman, so he's hardly likely to soil himself by dipping his wick into one. I gave it up because the only evidence I could cite against Harwood was a particularly brutal attack on a young prostitute in Paddy's Bar. A good hundred people had witnessed it, but the girl had taken money in lieu of prosecution so there wasn't even a report of the incident. In any case, my stint in Sierra Leone was almost at an end and I didn't want to start something that might delay my departure. I persuaded myself it wasn't my responsibility and confined justice to the dustbin of apathy. By then I'd spent most of my life in Africa, first as a child, then working for newspapers in Kenya and South Africa, and latterly for Reuters as a newswire correspondent. It was a continent I knew and loved, having grown up in Zimbabwe as the daughter of a white farmer, but by the summer of 2002 I'd had enough. I'd covered too many forgotten conflicts and too many stories of financial corruption. I planned to stay a couple of months in London, where my parents had been living since 2001, before moving on to the Reuters bureau in Singapore to write about Asian affairs. The night before I left Freetown for good, I was in the middle of packing when Harwood came to my house. He was escorted to my door by Manu, one of the Leonean gate-guards, who knew enough about the man's reputation to ask if I wanted a chaperone. I shook my head, but protected myself by talking to Harwood on my veranda in full view of the rest of the compound. He studied my unresponsive expression. You don't like me much, do you, Ms. Burns? I don't like you at all, Mr. Harwood. He looked amused. Because I wouldn't pass on your request for an interview? No. The one-word response seemed to throw him. You shouldn't believe everything people say about me. I don't have to. I've seen you in action. A closed expression settled on his face. Then you'll know not to cross me, he murmured. I wouldn't bet on it. What do you want? From the Hardcover edition.