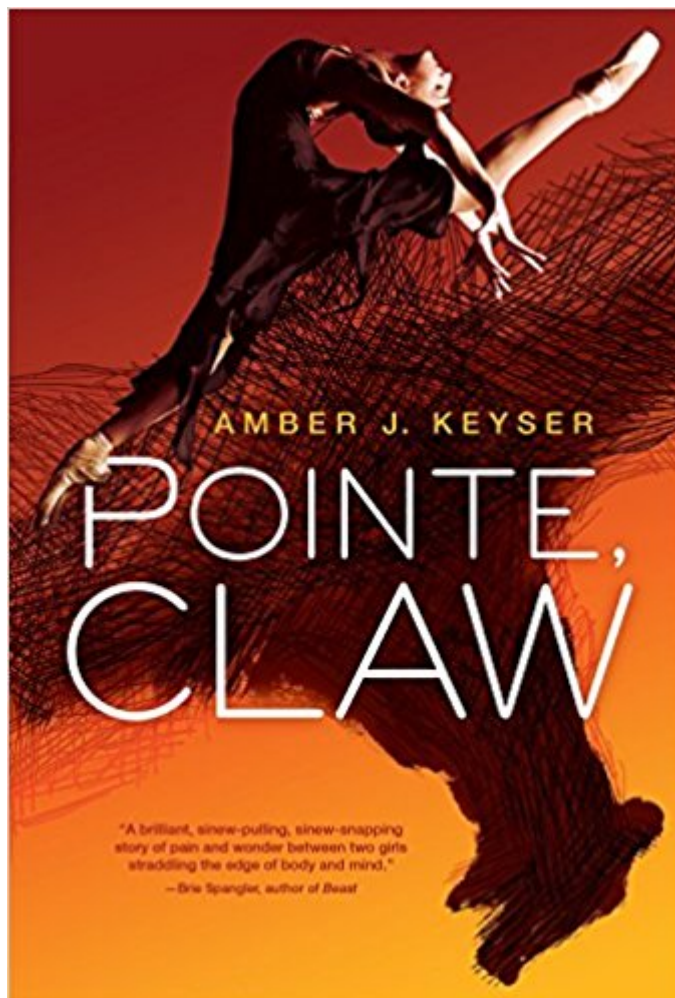


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# Pointe, Claw



## Synopsis

Jessie Vale dances in an elite ballet program. She has to be perfect to land a spot with the professional company. When Jessie is cast in an animalistic avant-garde production, her careful composure cracks wide open. Nothing has felt more dangerous. Meanwhile, her friend Dawn McCormick's world is full of holes. She wakes in strange places, bruised, battered, and unable to speak. The doctors are out of ideas. These childhood friends are both running out of time. Jessie has one shot at her ballet dream. Dawn's blackouts are getting worse. At every turn, they crash into the many ways girls are watched, judged, used, and discarded. Should they play it safe or go feral?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"It is a book of contrast and counterpoint . . . Lines blur as the story develops, save for the knife-sharp ferocity of two young women locked in an empowering duet." --starred, Booklist Keyser's writing shimmers with raw emotion and empathy, and her finale, much like in dance, is poetic, bittersweet, and life affirming. --starred, Publishers Weekly "[A] book of contrast and counterpoint, where scientific methodology accompanies nature's unpredictability, and the beauty of ballet exists as a result of grueling rehearsals. ---starred, Booklist "[A brilliant] story of pain and wonder between two girls straddling the edge of body and mind." --Brie Spangler, author of *Beast* "The narrative is appropriately dark . . . [and] viscerally evokes struggles of modern teenagers in a brutally authentic manner." --Kirkus Reviews

Amber J. Keyser is a former ballerina and evolutionary biologist with a master's degree in zoology

and a doctorate in genetics. As a research scientist, she studied evolution in western bluebirds, blue grosbeaks, marine copepods, and fruit flies and published extensively in the scientific literature. Now she writes both fiction and nonfiction for young adult readers. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband, two children, a flock of charismatic chickens, and a dog named Gilda.

POINTE, CLAW by Amber Keyser captures the lives of two separated childhood friends, Dawn McCormick and Jessie Vale, as they come of age. Jessie is every mother's perfect child. She's chic, beautiful, independent and a talented ballet dancer with the chance to become a professional. Yet hidden beneath that flawless exterior is her obdurate family who refuses to acknowledge her passion as a realistic career choice. Dawn, on the other hand, is her mother's worst nightmare. Despite taking a college course that, if she passes, will guarantee Dawn a college education at Stanford, she is nothing but a disappointment to her egocentric mother. She isn't the frilly, girly princess her mother wants or the obedient, invisible, daughter her stepfather wants. On the surface these two teenagers have lost the bond that they once held sacred. However, when fate offers a second chance for these friends to reunite, their bond and love for each other only strengthens. Jessie and Dawn were best friends growing up until they were ripped from each other's arms when Jessie's family spontaneously moved. Eight years passed and as they adjusted to living without each other, they developed into unique individuals who possess entirely new personalities. It isn't until Jessie enrolls at the Ballet des Arts, a prestigious ballet program for adolescents that has launched the careers of many renowned ballet dancers, in hopes of obtaining a permanent spot in the Ballet des Arts Academy that Jessie and Dawn live near one another again. Only two dancers from this training program will be brought into the company permanently, and this is Jessie's last opportunity to succeed before she turns 18. If she fails, her parents will oblige her to give up ballet and obtain a professional job. The dancers will be chosen by Eduardo Cortez, the head of the Academy, after the final performances of the year. Eduardo will direct Four Variations, a traditional piece, while Vadim Ivanov, the star male dancer in the Academy, will direct Turbulence, an untraditional dance he constructed that showcases the ugliness of human nature instead of its beauty. Just as Jessie feels like she is on the verge of a breakthrough, she is selected to dance in the less prestigious performance, Turbulence. Even more unnerving, she is suddenly reunited with Dawn via a phone conversation. As Jessie struggles to maintain her composure she is riddled with concern over reconnecting with Dawn. Meanwhile, Dawn has been struggling with blackout episodes wherein she can't control what she does or where she goes. Doctors are baffled by her condition which results in no diagnosis. Unbeknownst to

her mother, Dawn has kept a meticulous record of her blackout episodes. She discovers that her episodes are brought on by aggression and that she appears to feel an attractive pull towards captive animals while in a blackout. Unfortunately, Dawn is unable to tell a soul about her findings until she reunites with Jessie. Both girls are no longer the carefree 9 year olds they once were, but as they spend more time together they find their love for one another is as strong as it once was. Sadly, Dawn's blackouts are increasing in both severity and frequency. Jessie and Dawn's lives climax the opening night of Jessie's grand performance. While I thought the transitions between Jessie and Dawn were executed well, I did find that the book fell a little flat overall. The ending elicited more questions than answers, and Dawn's mental state was never clearly defined. However, the reunion between Dawn and Jessie seemed to be well constructed and felt genuine. I would recommend this book to any realistic fiction lovers or for anyone who enjoys ballet. Reviewed by Emily G., Teen Board Member

Powerful, unforgettable. It's rare to come across a YA that is doing something fresh and different. This is the kind of book that could be life-changing in the hands of a teen reader.

Amber Keyser's lyrical book about the metamorphosis one goes through once you stop being what is expected and become who you are is a must read for those trying to figure out what is next.

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