



Reluctant Press presents:

Andala: Voodoo Princess

Monica James



ILLUSTRATIONS BY COLLETTE ZASTROW

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Andala

Voodoo Princess

By Monica James

CHAPTER I Lure of the Jungle

“You go first,” Cassandra said pushing her husband, Michael Tyrone, to the admissions desk. She watched with fascination as the young girl skillfully registered him, assigned work and their garden apartment.

“You’re next,” Michael said, smiling. He watched Cassandra sit primly in front of the desk. Her long, elegant legs flashed flesh below the mid-thigh hem.

“What’s your middle name, honey?” the girl asked, cracking her chewing gum.

“Oh, it was originally recorded as Anne but my grandmother insisted that is an error,” she answered, conversationally, trying to be friendly.

The girl sighed, paused at the keyboard and grinned. “So, what did your Muz say it should be? We’re old fashioned here.”

Cassandra crossed her legs and let one shoe slide off her heel. “Andala,” she answered.

“Oh!” the girl exclaimed.

“Is something wrong?” Cassandra asked.

“No, nothing. Just a thought,” the girl answered and handed over their keys. Before the newly arrived worker-vacationers left the room, the girl was on the phone telling someone, with great excitement, “Yes, I’m sure. She even spelled it. A-n-d-a-l-a.”

At their garden apartment, just the other side of the swimming pool, they found their luggage delivered. Cassandra dutifully began sorting and putting away their belongings. She waved in good nature as Michael left to go to the dining hall. His job as sous-chef awaited him there.

Cassandra fit in easily with the regular swimmers at the pool, one of her favorite exercises. Yet, she reflected, they kept her in reserve. It was as if she was somehow different than the rest of them. Normally outgoing, especially with other swimmers, it bothered her not to be accepted. More than that, they seemed to perceive her as some threat or a privileged person. It was difficult to just shrug it off. Did they know something she did not? She dismissed the thought as fanciful.

“Don’t worry about it,” Michael mentioned casually. “They live here and you don’t. Also, you are so much prettier; maybe they’re jealous. How is it going at the resort office?”

“I file reservations, organize invoices, like that. Usual stuff. Easy work. The only thing is, as I remember our correspondence, it isn’t what I signed up for.”

“Could be you so outshine everyone else they are keeping you where they can admire you.”

“Michael, honestly! If the world were coming to an end, you’d say the gods on Mount Olympus were jealous of my good looks. I’m not any more than average in the looks department and you know it.”

“Ah, humility. Honey, you are very sexy. Everyone with any libido can see that.”

“If you are hitting on me, I accept,” she said with a grin.

He wrapped her in his arms and kissed her cheek. “Don’t concern yourself with those girls, Cass. Which one of them wants to have sex with you?”

She punched him playfully. “Not a one, you know it.”

“I know you’ve thought about having an affair with a woman. Since it hasn’t happened yet, maybe the longing is getting stronger. Hum?”

She accepted his kiss. The idea of getting sensual attention from an attractive woman aroused her. “Maybe someday but don’t hold your breath.”

He unbuttoned his shirt and threw it on the dresser. “Well, if I was a woman, I’d like to make love to another woman. I think girls are terrific.”

“Always the joker,” she said and let him unbutton her blouse. “Would you rather be a woman?”

“If I was, I’d try to get you between the sheets. You turn me on.”

“Umm, good. And that, my happy-go-lucky sir, is why I married you.”

* * * * *

Later, when the night had closed around them like a humid envelope, Cassandra lay awake. The active lovemaking with Michael had sent her feelings farther along a sensual path.

She thought of the girls, four especially, at the pool that afternoon. She began to fantasize about them, about their bodies and remembered their polite but distant treatment of her. Next she imagined one of them caressing her legs and hips, fondling her breasts and kissing her sensual lips. She squirmed in the bed. Not wanting to awaken her husband, she slipped on her robe and stood looking out on the garden. Trying to think of anything other than the pretty girls was difficult. Ideas kept coming back, ideas about femininity and gentle kisses. She closed her eyes, perchance to dream. Then she almost cried out when she had the distinct feeling that a woman's firm tongue was at the opening of her vagina. Looking down, there was no woman there, but the feeling was, as her husband had joked about, getting stronger.

* * * * *

The next evening, she sat alone in the garden after Michael had gone to the kitchen for his night turn doing, mostly he said, sex dishes for room service. She looked out into the jungle. Darkness left only a bleak appearance. A few lights from other garden apartments did little to illuminate the dense blackness. The jungle, teeming with wild sounds that changed each moment, mystified her.

When Michael came in she was still sitting there looking out at the jungle. He sat next to her and sighed.

"Dark, isn't it?" he said gently. "What do you suppose goes on in there?"

"It fascinates me," she answered, a distant appeal in her voice.

"Are those drums I hear?"

"Yes, a long way off. But they seem to pulse, like a heart in the jungle."

"Yes, the heart of darkness. You may recall..."

"Michael, shut up and listen. And quit quoting Joseph Conrad."

"OK, then. I'll call your bluff. Let's go."

"Go... in there? I don't think so."

Both Cassandra and Michael, lured to the jungle clearing to satisfy a lingering curiosity, stepped along a path lush with fallen leaves. The staccato drumbeats were a calling. Farther away, barely in hearing, other sounds, not quite human, wild birds perhaps, were unexplained.

"Come on," Michael said taking Cassandra's hand. He tugged her along the path and she shuddered as the jungle closed behind them.

“Please, Michael. Let’s not go where we’re not known. The rulebook said, if you recall...”

He interrupted her. “Never mind the rule book. This is just another adventure for us to remember.”

She said no more but the onset of a foreboding, an alluring destiny, combined with the new reality as they made their way farther into the jungle shadows. “*Déjà vu*,” she said to Michael. He didn’t hear her.

As they came onto a small clearing, Michael stopped abruptly. “Hush,” he said. “Something going on up here.” He dropped to his hands and knees. Cassandra followed his lead. The drums were more distinct as they crept closer.

Moving a large over-hanging leaf out of the way, Cassandra gasped. “Oh, Michael. What?”

“I don’t know but, for sure, this is no golden age. Look at those creatures.”

Moving slowly, a cadre of extremely thin men came onto the clearing. Their eyes had a far-away luster, open but not seeing. Their steps across the jungle floor were positive but measured. Then it dawned on Michael what they were seeing.

“You won’t believe this. I don’t and we’re looking at them.”

“Looking at, ulp, what?”

“Zombies,” he replied in a whisper. “They don’t see us but, my cautious nature tells me to get us out of here.”

“But, who are they? What?”

As they backed away and retraced their steps to the resort, Michael explained. “They are the living dead. It is said that once, when Hell was full, the dead walked the earth.”

“Nonsense,” she whispered though they were well out of earshot. The pulsating drums were still with them.

“Nobody has answers for what we’ve just seen, darling,” he said jovially. “I do think we can thank our errant stars we were able to escape. One false slip and, bingo, we’d be one of them.”

“You’re trying to scare me and doing a good job.”

He laughed. “Let’s not go there again. I hear they eat humans to get new members for their group. How pretty girls fit into that I’ve no clue but I can understand having an appetite for a pretty girl.”

She hit his shoulder playfully. “Always jokes. Be serious, will you? Should we get the next boat off this island?”

“And miss all the fun? No way, come on, loosen up. No geeks allowed.”

Yet, in the darkest part of the night, the drums still called to her. The heart-beat throbbing kept her half awake. Then she sat straight up in bed and clutched at her throat. The distant sounds had stopped.

“I’m going back there, Michael,” she said firmly. She pulled her robe tight at her waist and found her slippers. “Something is calling me.”

Her husband, turned over, socked the pillow with his fist and went serenely into a deep sleep.

She shook her head and, not knowing why or how, knew she would keep her date with destiny in the tar-dark of the jungle. She belonged, as the feeling told her, on this island whose history boasted slave ships laden with corpses, casualties of the middle passage, and callous ships’ masters.

Stepping briskly onto the path, a random vine pulled at her clothes and opened her gown. She pushed it aside and stepped further into the darkness. A sharp leaf brushed her flesh and cut her thigh. She ignored it. ‘Only blood,’ she thought.

Reaching the clearing seemed easier than it had earlier. She could easily see some of the dead creatures milling around. She felt ashamed to be spying on them. ‘Alas,’ she considered, ‘they have rights, too.’

Across the narrow field she could make out the temple to the *Cult of Marie Laveau*. It was a small round structure with Doric columns, a conical roof that was fringed with Grecian figures, surmounted on the top with a statue of *Pallas Athena*. The simple altar with a torch flanked on either side, flickered with an occasional breeze that ruffled the flames. Behind that was the abode of the acolytes, like a crude shelter except it was made of massive cut stone. A miniature Parthenon. An atmosphere of smoke, like tar burning, lay over the scene.

A new, more modern, light flashed and the drums started anew. A priest-like figure, dressed in fine linen, his robe was white except for a cluster of sequins on



one side, stood quietly at the altar. His head was covered by a hood but with large cutouts to accommodate his vision.

‘Wow. Ku Klux Klan or, like, something.’ She decided. With all the impact of the scene in front of her, Cassandra felt no fear, only a tugging at her brain. ‘Awesome.’

It was sudden. The priest raised his arms high. The drums stopped. The zombies trudged into the jungle. Hands grasped Cassandra and pushed her toward the altar.

“Hey,” she called out. Looking around, she saw three girls each fitted with a blouse with tunic-length hem drawn to mid-thigh, hair flowing to their shoulders, who had taken her aside.

“Do not fear,” one said.

“OK for you to say,” she answered looking toward the altar. “How about keeping your hands off the pastry; sugar melts and I’m not going anywhere.” Her attempts at levity fell short but she knew, if they’d meant her harm, it would have been done by then.

They pushed her again. “So I’m going. Just don’t hurt me; I’ll do anything you say.”

‘Yea,’ she thought. ‘Like I have an option.’

Standing in front of the altar, she raised her chin and straightened her shoulders. She hoped it showed defiance but wasn’t certain. One girl removed the robe, bare in front from being torn by the jungle vines, and laid it aside. Her gap in her gown revealed a generous patch of shapely thigh. The cut had healed but the dried blood was a visible rivulet.

She started to speak, to protest, but the priest raised his hands. His simple gesture silenced her.

“Our acolytes welcome you here. The blood on your nubile flesh is a fitting sacrifice. You have entered a sacred circle and are accepted. You may enjoy their Sapphic diversions, perhaps not. In any event, we suggest it unwise to go spying in the jungle in the dark of night.”

She nodded. All that came to mind was ‘Yes, Sir,’ but that didn’t come out.

After his brief speech, the priest turned and left the small stage. He did not look back, but he did return later that night.

One girl took Cassandra’s hand and led her around the altar into the shelter in back. A

Skylight let in the rays of the full moon. Two other girls followed. When she heard a brief giggle from behind her, Cassandra knew there was no violence intended ... but what?

“My name is Erato,” the girl who had led her said softly. “This is Terpi, and Calli.”

“I’m Cassandra,” she answered looking at the three of them. She winced when they all burst out laughing.

“We know,” Erato said. “And much more than you think.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Without answer, Erato motioned to the other girls. They deftly, but gently, pulled Cassandra’s gown off the milk-white shoulders. Her halter was soon away and her two trim, firm, breasts were bare.

Terpi moved behind Cass and pulled her body against her own. Cass felt the tips of the other girl’s breasts, like nubs, pressing her back. Terpi started to raise her hands to fondle Cassandra’s breasts but ran into resistance.

“Take it easy, Creep,” Cass said. But she knew it was useless to object.

Erato took over. She grasped one hand and raised her arm so Terpi could reach the pert melon-mounds. Calli did the same to the other hand. “Lovely,” Erato said. “Don’t fight us. We have already seen your body at the swimming pool and it will be a great game to play with you. But, you need something more.”

“More? Like what?” Cassandra asked.

“Calli here has a special treat for you.” Erato touched Cassandra’s naked waist and tugged at the sash. “She is going to thrill your sexual center with her tongue.”

Cassandra felt like she had been hit in the stomach with a bowling ball. Barely out of breath, she faced Erato. “And, then what?”

Erato was calm, as if ordering a pizza delivery. “You will give me your mouth.”

“And your sister, Terpi, does she share in the spoils as well?”

“Terpi will help.”

Cassandra faced them again. “Look,” she said firmly. “I can’t stop you. But, you can’t order me to do what is against my nature.”

Erato grinned at the irony. “When your time comes, you will have a nature you never suspected. And, when finished, you will be ready to receive ...” She stopped and looked around as if interlopers might hear.

“Receive who?” Cassandra asked.

“Marie Laveau,” Erato answered. “She has appeared here, several times, but found nobody worthy, we think. Our priest has mandated that you will please Marie Laveau and thus extend our cult another hundred years.”

“What does she look like?” Cass asked, floundering.

“More beautiful than all the women you’ve seen added together. She will make juices dampen your pretty legs just looking at her.”

“Wow, what am I to do?”

There was no verbal response. Calli knelt in front of Cassandra and slowly pulled the under-skirt down, over the flowing hips. Cass stepped away. Cassandra’s skin warmed, like under a heat lamp, and she nearly fainted when she felt

Calli's lips and tongue cruising her thighs. Her knees buckled; no longer able to stand, she let herself be guided to the floor. The soft matting was luxurious. Calli, aggressive to the last ounce of strength, wrapped muscular arms around Cassandra's hips and buried her face between the elegant thighs. Cassandra fainted.

She awoke feeling warm cloths caressing her skin. In her dream, prompted by the ecstasy she had just experienced, she was moving to the ministrations of a beautiful woman. She tried to see her face to identify her. Then, when she awoke with a start, she saw the girl in the dream was the same woman holding her, Erato. The other two girls were lounging against the inner wall.

"Darling," Erato cooed. "The high priest is here. He wants to see you alone. I'll be just outside."

Cassandra sat up by pushing herself on one elbow. "Erato," she said, "send the others away. It is you I want."

"As you wish. I am greatly flattered."

The high priest came in and set a bright lantern on the floor next to Cassandra. "I've come to see about an important matter, Mrs. Tyrone. I must examine the birthmark on your thigh."

'Why not?' she considered. 'Everyone else is helping themselves.' She faced him; as he still wore the hood, she wondered what he might look like. His eyes were intense and he carried himself with a masculine dignity. 'Sexy,' she thought.

He lifted the gown and asked her to raise her leg. The double-star design was unmistakable. He had seen it on some archeological artifacts that surfaced in the Louisiana low country. "This is my first encounter," he whispered. His voice was hoarse with emotion. "There can be no doubt. You are Andala, Marie Laveau's heir and you have the rank of high priestess in her cult."

"So what? I'm not buying whatever it is you're selling."

"You've no choice. You are to reign by my side until Marie Laveau herself wills it otherwise."

Cassandra sat up and covered her legs. "Look, I'm here with my husband. We've had enough of this island paradise. How can you make us stay here?"

The priest shook his head. "There can be only one male in the *Cult of Marie Laveau*. You belong to us now. Your husband will have to fend for himself."

'Uh-oh.' She felt a twinge of pain, a panic as she put together what the local Gestapo in white was saying. 'They will have Michael for lunch and he will be wandering around in this over-grown greenhouse for eternity. His eyes will be open but not awake. Think fast, Cass.'

The priest stood up to go. "The induction ceremony is on the next full moon. You will return here then."

"Hey. Just hold on a minute, you forward pervert. That's not an answer to my concern for my husband. Let's play Make-a-Deal."

He shook his head. "I can do this. Your status here gives you great freedom. I can guarantee you that your husband will not lose his life over this matter and that, as long as you cooperate, he will be secure."

"Umm. That's a start," she said wistfully. "Can I trust you?"

"A priest has little call to lie to Andala."

"Oh, yes. I forgot. OK, let's go with that." But, in the back of her mind, Cassandra knew she was buying the precious time she needed to pack them both out of there. Yet, the fear of betrayal kept her aware. And, also, she would need to agree to the terms. 'Oh, Cassandra. You're in the pickle jar again,' she thought. The goose bumps on the flesh of her arms were very real.

CHAPTER II Search and Rescue

"Where is she? Can't just up and disappear like this." Michael struggled to moderate his voice. He knew shouting at the man would do no good.

Rafael Ordens, CEO and owner of the resort, raised his hands. Supplicating, he spoke softly. "Now, please be calm. I've no idea why your wife would wander off in the middle of the night. Has she done this before?"

"Never. She's afraid of her own shadow."

He was thoughtful. "Then something more important than her self security apparently prompted her. But, relax. We'll start a search party immediately. Have a coffee. There's some rum on the shelf there if you like the mix."

Michael stood to leave after deciding he would himself be a search party of one. Ordens stopped him with a question.

"New Orleans. Has your wife ever mentioned an affinity for that place?"

Michael looked at him. "No, but we've been there on vacation, sight-seeing, like that."

"And you went to the cemeteries? Please try to remember. This is important. It may give us a clue."

Michael poured a generous rum and coffee. "Yes. It was interesting. Why?"

Ordens eyes were fixed on him. "Did your wife at any time, in the cemetery complex, see something or feel anything unusual?"

"How the hell would I know? She said nothing to me, if she did." Michael felt obligated to contribute something. "Maybe, she's a little spaced out often enough."

Rafael Ordens smiled. "Yes, it goes with the gender, *n'est pas*? My friend, please. There are mysteries. Some we know about, others, no. But it seems to be more than a coincidence that your wife's name is Andala. Let me explain."

"Yes, go on." There was something self-assured in Rafael Ordens, an attribute, Michael observed, that put him at ease.

“At the cemeteries, in New Orleans, you were no doubt shown the tomb of Marie Laveau. It was the one with the statue of the little girl knocking on the door.”

“Yes, I recall. Strange next to all the crosses and inscriptions.”

When Marie Laveau was a little girl, we’re thinking early teens; her father locked her out of her home. Through the door he accused her of selling sexual favors on the streets of that wicked city. She continued to knock on the door but, eventually, left.”

“Ouch!” Michael said, “That was cruel.”

“It was one way the father, in those days, could react to the fear that somehow his precious daughter had gone astray.”

Ordens poured himself another coffee. “Ah, to continue. Always resourceful, Marie Laveau learned the ways of the streets. In time, putting her unusual beauty to task, she opened a house of pleasure on the other side of Rampart Street. There was a little backwater basin there, teeming with wild birds. It came to be named Basin Street. Later, when other people built homes, shacks no doubt, around Marie Laveau’s pleasure palace, the area came to be called Storyville.”

“That has nothing to do with my missing wife. It’s just a story.”

Ignoring Michael, Ordens continued. “Marie Laveau had fifteen children, some by a New Orleans gentleman gambler named Baron Samedi. The children eventually went their own way but one of them, Andala, inherited her mother’s gift for gathering the spirit of lost souls into her mind. As time went on Marie Laveau was a very powerful name, indeed. Legend has it there is a group on this very island – *Cult of Marie Laveau*.

“Unbelievable. Taking hostage the souls of the damned.”

“Andala is a descendant, there can be little doubt. Physical attributes and the birthmark identify her. Legend has it Marie Laveau had the same hair, height, weight, full voluptuous figure and sensual nature you see in your Cassandra.”

Michael’s jaw dropped in shock and apprehension. “So, where is she?”

“If, last night, she was called into the haven of creatures of the damned, then we can assume she is there still.”

“Well, *andiamo*. Where is this place?”

Ordens was thoughtful. “I hope you understand, Michael, that there are areas on this island off-limits to us flesh-and-blood folk. It would be best for us to await her return but foolhardy not to search along the adjacent jungle paths in hopes she has been abandoned.”

It was time for confession. “Mr. Ordens. Maybe telling you of an adventure we had together will help. When the drums started calling in the middle of the night, Cass and I crept to the clearing used by the members of that cult. We were fascinated, naturally, but also frightened so we fled. I think Cassandra went back there and I want you to go with me to bring her back.”

“I see. Perhaps you’ve been incautious in not telling about this immediately. You were fortunate indeed to escape whatever it was. That same legend has it there is a priest who governs the ceremony. The priest is to be the only masculine influence. Other males are zombies, the undead, many of whose souls resided in the secret corners of slave ships coming here on the center passage. I’m not schooled in these things, you know, but it is a tradition we learned as children, things we whispered about. Only one man can survive in the camp of the damned; he is the high priest.”

“And Andala?”

“You are perceptive, Mr. Tyrone. Andala is the chosen one, high priestess of the *Cult of Marie Laveau*.”

At that moment, a very pretty young girl rapped gently on the side of the open door and entered. Ordens looked up. “May I introduce you, Mr. Tyrone? This is Terpi. Her name is really Terpsichore so we call her Terpi for short.” Michael nodded and smiled.

“Sir,” the girl started haltingly, “the lady, Mrs. Tyrone, has returned from the jungle. She is sitting in the garden at her apartment. We were in the pool when she walked out of the bush, across the lawn, passed us without a word, and just sat down. She said nothing.”

Immediately, Michael was on his feet.

“It seems, Michael, that our efforts were rewarded. Again, in ways we’re not supposed to understand.”

CHAPTER III Betrayed

For several days, accepting no help from Michael, Cassandra sat in the garden alone. She stared at the jungle as if awaiting something or someone to emerge. Thus was the anxiety she exhibited. But, nobody came. She waited. Day and night, she waited.

Early one evening, after Michael had gone to his job in the dining room, Terpi approached the garden and stood near the gate. Cassandra opened it for her and Terpi stepped inside with a quiet show of discretion.

“Mistress,” the young girl said in a whisper, “your request to speak to Mr. Ordens has been approved. He asked me to bring you to his quarters. Do not be afraid.”

As the two walked across the green toward the residential complex, the gloom and quiet desperation that had kept Cassandra captive lifted. She thanked Terpi and accepted the other girl’s hand to walk along the path. She once again put her situation in perspective and, thinking of Michael, felt the fear return. ‘Michael is in danger,’ she told herself. ‘It is up to me to protect him.’ The more she dwelt on

the aspects of her bondage, the cult and the ceremony, the undead and their mysteries, Erato and Marie Laveau, the more worked up she became.

Terpi stopped at the door to Rafael Ordens' suite. "Wait here," she said and was gone.

Cassandra could see inside through the Levelor blinds. Ordens was alone so she rapped on the windowpane. She stood solidly against the tropical fare of his garden; the leaves were hanging as if to bid her enter. The night was humid, the wetness pervasive. She had a feeling of intent, of a need to resolve what she believed Rafael Ordens could provide.

Both thin doors, floor to ceiling, opened to her. "Come in," Ordens said with a smile. The girl in his doorway, darkness behind her, light shining from within, was a specter of beauty that made him gasp. 'Andala,' he thought, 'is getting more like Marie Laveau every day. An incredible transformation.' She stepped into the room with a firm sense of purpose. Her demeanor was at once apparent.

"Mr. Ordens, please. I must talk to you. Much has happened and I'm at my wits end."

He motioned her to a stuffed chair. She sat down and modestly tugged at the hem of her mini-skirt. He was amused. "Perhaps something to drink? I have some Kahlua. That might help."

"Thanks, yes. But I don't need perking up, Mr. Ordens. I need help. I'm desperate and there seems nowhere to turn."

He pulled over a straight-back chair and sat next to her. Leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, his hands were nearly touching her naked legs. "What then?"

She started to sob, tears flashed on her cheeks. "Michael and I went to the clearing in the jungle and, seeing what was there, ran away."

"Prudent," he said, nodding. "No place for two such beautiful people."

"Caution to the winds, the saying goes. After Michael fell asleep, I returned there."

"And? I can only sense some impending disaster."

"Three girls, Terpi was one of them, captured me and brought me to the high priest. To make a long story short, I learned from him that he, umm, they believe I am descended from Marie Laveau, the namesake of their cult. Further, they believe I am destined to be their high priestess."

"All very dramatic," he answered slowly. "And after you told him you could not accept such an assignment, what then?"

"How do you know I did not take the position?" she asked, immediately suspicious.

He laughed. "Because, dear girl, you would not be here in such a state if you had."

"Oh, yes; quite right. Forgive me. I'm just nervous."

“Why all this? Are your concerns essentially valid? Is there some threat?”

His questions silenced her. Quietly, she looked at the wall and then back to Ordens. “The difference,” she spoke, finally, “is that I believe them.”

“Logical? Or do you just feel it, wanting to believe, like blind faith of some kind?”

“I was called there and I answered. The name, Marie Laveau, is only faintly familiar to me. Maybe I heard it somewhere. That’s all.”

“It’s known as the *Cult of Marie Laveau* and members reside on this and other islands. It is not new to residents here; we grew up with some outlandish tales that the souls of slaves are here, their bodies functional, but their minds very dead. They did not die, we are told, but became ghosts of their past, the living dead, because of beatings and torture aboard ship that induced their illness and death. It’s only a legend, Mrs. Tyrone.”

“And, Marie Laveau? She’s not a zombie, I hope.”

He laughed again. His good-natured mood was somehow comforting. “Correct. She embodies all that the voodoo worshipers can give her. When you and Michael were in New Orleans you visited the tomb of Marie Laveau. It was the one with the statue of the young girl knocking on the door.”

“Yes, I remember. She ended up the top madam of the red-light district, or something.”

Ordens leaned closer. His fingertips brushed her knee. Her eyes widened as she looked down at how close the man was to her flesh. But she felt no distraction.

“You are her descendant. You belong to these people. They need a leader, someone to give birth to the new high priest.”

“Ulp. Not me. Can I tell them to get another girl? I’m not going to shepherd a bunch of zombies who were so messed up they can’t die.”

“Do you believe in destiny, Mrs. Tyrone?”

“Yes. I’ve always felt there was some force leading me on. Many people, I’ve learned, feel that from time to time. So what? It doesn’t mean I’m supposed to be the Mother Superior to a bunch of creaking skeletons. Too far out.”

“The priest explained to you that you would stay and Michael would have to do as best he can. There can be only one male. And, as the legend has it, the high priest has to father his own replacement. It keeps the cult alive, if you will.”

The more he talked, the more Cassandra realized he was saying things he could not know from casual conversation. A wave of panic creased her brain and the suspicion came back stronger. ‘This guy sure knows a lot,’ she thought, ‘too much.’ When it dawned on her what was happening, she sputtered before she could get the words out.

“Mister Ordens! There is only one way you could know.”

He smiled again. "I was there, Cassandra. When you meet Marie Laveau at the ceremony on the next full moon, you will then become Andala, high priestess of the cult. You've no choice. It is your destiny."

She was short of breath. "You are the priest, aren't you?" she asked, accusing him of deception.

"And the only one who can help you. I watched you in the passionate embrace of those acolytes. I saw you orgasm, over and over, until you fainted from exhaustion. Your swoon was so strong you could barely understand what, if anything, happened to you other than the most exquisite sexual adventure you've ever had."

Cassandra started to cry. "I feel betrayed. I came here asking for help, for pity, and you undress me with your eyes."

"You are lovely and a valuable asset to add to our small cabal. In time you will see all this differently. Now, as Erato confessed to you, and as I command you, it is time to come to terms. I want from you the same act that Erato asked for—your mouth."

"Mister Ordens! Please. I won't even do that for my husband. I've never considered it."

"But you've thought of it; all women, especially those as sensual as you are, have thought of satisfying a lover with her mouth."

"Did you say terms?" Cassandra asked not wishing to argue her passion, or lack of it.

"Yes, good girl. You love your husband, I can tell. And you wish no harm to come to him. Actually, you came here tonight to protect him without knowing how that can be done. You have options."

Her head swimming with doubt, Cassandra managed to keep herself together without running screaming into the night. "Name them, these options of yours."

He moved closer and raised his hand. She shuddered as his fingertip moved across her forehead, then her cheek, to touch her pursed lips. "Options are not mine, dear, they are yours. One; Michael will be the victim of an unfortunate accident. Two, Michael will fall prey to the zombies and become one of them. Three, since there can be no other males in the cult than the high priest, Michael will be awarded a gender reassignment. Any questions?"

Stunned, Cassandra could only shake her head. "The accident. Out of the question. I cannot even think of it. The living death, unacceptable. He is too much alive, too loving and playful, to be put in suspense for eternity."

Ordens rubbed his hands together. Gleefully, he moved closer to her. "It is settled then." He stood tall next to her, his knees pressing her thigh as she squirmed in the chair.

She looked up at him and moved as if to stand. His strong hand on her shoulder kept her. "You could let us go. Let us off this island. We could promise not to trouble you in any way."

Standing over her, the sight of her uplifted face intense with grief and despair overwhelmed him. The firm breasts called to him as surely as the wild jungle called to Andala. "You will stay," he said, his voice husky with lust, "and your husband will eventually rejoin you but as a girl, one of the acolytes." He then took her hands and held them close to the sash of his robe.

She kept her eyes cast down, looking away, but he held her hands. "Is this what you want from a woman?"

"Beauty and brains, uncompromising. Remember, lovely lady, that dominance is but the flip side of the coin from acceptance." He reached for her blouse and unbuttoned it. Next he unhooked her brassiere and smiled his indulgence when bra and blouse slid down her arms. "Open my robe, Cassandra. Take my hard cock between your breasts. Hold it there. Keep it near your heart. Let me feel your warmth."

She moved again to stand up. He pushed her back down. "And if I refuse?"

He smiled, a rueful grin. "Changes nothing. You will find solace in the arms of the beautiful Erato. You will accept this which you now reject until you become pregnant with a child who will, as you will see, live a full and quite glorious life. But you will never see your husband again. And his demise will weigh on your consciousness every waking moment."

She started to sob again. When he forced her hands lower, all strength to resist left her. "You can stop the act." He guided her hands and she felt tentatively inside his robe. The engorged penis sprang out and settled between her palms. "Go. That's it. Just a little closer. Now, use your thumbs to hold the sides." He leaned over forcing his body against her. He raised the hem of her skirt until he could see the dark patch of pubic hair there.

"Give me some time," she asked. "This is new to me."

"Nonsense. You know full well my cock is headed for your pretty lips. The other is some hang-up you've not come to terms with. Before very long you will throw your hands down to capture Erato's crop of hair while she gives you head. Then, completely at the mercy of your nether self, you will bury your tongue between that terrific girl's legs. Do not toy with such ideas. They needn't be evaluated. Enjoy."

He moved higher until his bulbous head pressed her lips. "I can't," she said softly.

"Put it in your mouth, protect it by curling your lips over your teeth. It will soon be over and you'll have only the memory of a mouthful of lust."

"Have pity, please."

He raised his arm above his head and came down across her face, palm open, with full force. The slap shocked her and she screamed. Opening her eyes, she watched him raise his other arm. "Want more?"

"No. Stop. Don't hit me again. I'll do that. I'll suck you."