



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# Double Play

Monica James



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AN 'ADULT TV' E-BOOK

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# Double Play

**By Monica James**

Mind is the master power that molds and makes  
And man is mind as forever more he takes  
The tool of thought  
And shaping what he wills,  
Brings forth a thousand joys  
Or a thousand ills.  
He thinks in secret  
And it comes to pass  
Environment is but his looking glass.

— J. Allen

## **I - MALGRÉ SIDEWALK CAFE**

“Hi, do you mind? It’s really busy here and I’m supposed to meet a friend. Your table is the only one with extra chairs.”

Stella/Stefan looked up at the vivacious girl and nodded ‘yes.’

“Sure, sit down. If you want a coffee in this bistro, hope your friend is late. Service is somewhere between slow and nonexistent.”

The slender girl ran her fingers through her leonine crimson hair in a nervous gesture. After sitting in a chair that provided a view of the street, she reached across to greet Stefan. “Hello, call me Tony. Actually, my name is Antoinette but everyone calls me Tony.”

Stefan smiled. “Tony spelled backwards is ‘Y not?’ Does that describe you?”

Tony took a long look at Stella/Stefan Picard. She noted the straight brown hair that framed his face, kept hippie style with a black ribbon at the back of his neck. The ice-blue eyes sparkled with interest, warmth and an easy sensuality. It was a quiet evening on a cross-street in the New Orleans French Quarter.

That was when the contrast struck her. She spoke up with an impudent tone and direct question. "You're a girl, aren't you?"

"Yes, you are observant. My name is Stella but I go by Stefan. Now, that that's settled; we both have alternate names."

"And alternate lifestyles, it would seem," Tony said as she kept staring at the handsome 'guy' sitting across from her.

Stefan set his newspaper aside and spoke softly to the pretty Tony/Antoinette. "You shouldn't be shocked to meet a transvestite in this permissive corner of the globe."

"You are really good. When I first saw you, I was certain you were a guy. I hesitated to say anything but I wanted to be visible from the street for my friend." She looked around and smiled when she saw the waiter headed for them. "Uh, may I buy you a coffee? It's to pay rent for my share of the table." Her grin was mischievous.

"Café au lait, if that's OK," Stefan said with a sly wink. "I want to pay proper homage to the French Quarter."

Tony grinned. She nodded to the waiter and ordered a serving of beignets. "The French Quarter is Spanish architecture inhabited by Italians."

Stefan was thoughtful. "Seems fitting, don't you agree? Voltaire made the comment that the Holy Roman Empire was not holy, not Roman and not an empire."

Tony was enthused. "Your point is that Voltaire might have been slightly mistaken. Thus, the French Quarter is peopled with all kinds of straights, gays, lesbians and, oh yes, transvestites. I do want you to be represented."

"I hope your friend is delayed. I'm enjoying talking with you about this, that and nothing-at-all. Does he usually stand you up?"

"Oh, rarely but the traffic might cause the usual delay. My friend is a girl, not a guy but, in present company, who is keeping track?"

They both laughed.

Stefan grinned and smiled as the waiter served a steaming mug of coffee and an order of beignets dusted with confectioner's sugar. "Ah, so sinful it has to be good. Does your friend have a name?"

Tony glanced toward the corner. She watched the cars racing to the stop sign at the end of the block. The street lamps winked on in the early evening. The humid night air left a faint halo around each light.

"Her name is Noriko. Noriko Samisen, Japanese American."

"Great, maybe we can add her to the mix."

Tony tried with practiced delicacy to take a bite of the pastry without getting a cloud of sugar all over.

Stefan laughed to see the attractive girl raise her little finger to brush the sugar off her nose.

Tony stifled a sneeze. Her cell phone buzzed and she glanced at the text message. "Just a few minutes. Oh, this has been fun with you here."

Stefan opened his cell phone. "Let me note your number."

She rattled off her contact data and stood up to wave at the yellow VW Jetta that approached. After leaving some money on the table, she was gone.

Stefan frowned as the street had become suddenly empty without her. He shrugged and reached for the pastries she had left for him. 'Well,' he thought, 'being a guy in a mixed-up world isn't all that bad. Now, if I can just elude the storm troopers from the enemy camp, all will be well. My, but that girl is attractive.' He drummed his fingers on the table and left a tip for the waiter. "I think I'll get a cat," he whispered as he sauntered along beneath the porch overhangs on St. Louis Street.

#

Stefan arrived at his patio apartment which he termed his 'den of iniquity' to see his neighbors that occupied the two other apartments had returned for the day, as evidenced by their bicycles parked outside.

He glanced with routine interest at his mailbox which was fashioned in a hole in the brick wall facing



the street. There was a crumpled piece of paper. He started to throw it away but stopped when he saw his name scribbled in pencil on one flap. Curious, he opened it.

"My name is Jayce," the note said. "I would have introduced myself at the Malgré Cafe but I saw you with a pretty girl. I have to see you. Urgent." He noted the cell phone number.

Stefan wandered into his kitchen and uncorked a split of Cabernet. His mind kept up a curious nagging about a mystery note from a mystery person named 'Jayce.' He poured the wine and looked at the note again.

Jayce knew his name, his address, what he looked like and where he would likely be after dinner at the Malgré Cafe. Stefan decided there was more than one reason to investigate, one of which was survival.

He was pensive as he walked up Royal Street. His cell phone contact with Jayce had been brief, as if there was someone else with him at that time. He considered that he was not well enough known to have his services in demand. He fervently hoped nobody knew about his ability to carve out a comfortable living by fencing 'hot' jewelry. Most of his contacts, as he continued his analysis, were with one operative who had a small office in the rear of a tourist shop fronted with antiques on Decatur Street. That, he concluded, would be the one person who knew him well enough. He was secure in the belief his brief contacts with the operative were in confidence.

Stefan scanned the several sidewalk tables for one with only one person. He took a vacant table and ordered a draft beer and pickled egg. He hoped that would settle his nervous stomach.

'Well!' he thought looking at the outlandish character standing just off the sidewalk and searching. Jayce, he noted, was about six feet and at least six inches. His skirt hugged fishnet stockings just below the knees. The filmy blouse looked to Stefan more like a peignoir; it was caught just below the breasts, Empire style, cinched tight with a belt. Its buckle matched the boot buckles. After a second look, to get an overall picture in his mind, Stefan saw that the boot heels added six or eight inches to his height. 'There can only be one word to describe this marvelous transvestite; bizarre.' He stood up, approached Jayce and led him to his table. Jayce said nothing until he had settled in one of the wrought iron captain style chairs and flounced his skirt.

"I'll take a beer," he said softly. Stefan caught the inflection right away. Jayce spoke with a soft, friendly tone which was not a southern drawl or local brogue. His sparse smile was affable enough but he briefly flashed a wry face for no apparent reason. Stefan couldn't avoid a chill when he looked into the hostile eyes of this very strange inhabitant of the French Quarter.

Stefan tapped his beer glass and pointed at Jayce so the waiter would bring his guest a cool drink to go with the humid night air.

"How do you know me so well?" Stefan asked in his most friendly manner.

Jayce looked at the waiter and nodded when the frosted beer glass was set in front of him.

"Please explain," Stefan said. He was instantly alive and alert. "How did you come to learn my name and all?"

"We have a mutual business friend," Jayce began slowly as if measuring each word. "You know who he is. A friend of mine, we have several cross-dressers that crash at my pad on St. Ann Street, wanted me to sell some jewelry he said he inherited from an aunt. When he couldn't remember the aunt's name, I assumed the jewels were hot. Our mutual operative returned a handsome price after taking his commission. I also took a chunk for myself so the poor fellow had very little left with which to restock his liquor cabinet."

Stefan held his breath in fear of what was next. "And, be honest with me, answer my question," he pressed. "This trivia with some friend of yours is hardly a solid connection between us."

Jayce sat back and sipped the cold beer. His eyes bore into Stefan like an X-ray. "You're a girl, aren't you?"

"Does that help? Yes. The reason you didn't get it earlier is that I have the benefit of a laryngoplasty procedure. A few years of trim and, Voila!, you get what you see. Don't look so perplexed; it's just a saying."

The slightest hint of a smile curled Jayce's lips. "I like the feel of women's clothes, especially the lingerie, against me. One day I plan to have a transsexual procedure to set me free of this awful masculine body. That brings us to the reason for this meeting." He squinted at Stefan.

"I'm quite satisfied the way I am. However, the procedure you are talking about is very expensive. May I suggest that money is the reason we are here sipping beer on a quiet New Orleans street?"

Jayce continued. "Precisely. After my recent adventure with the hot jewels of someone's inheritance, I uncovered an outlet I think you will find interesting. I'm proposing a partnership. You provide the jewels you get from whatever sources and I will get you top dollar."

Stefan remained silent. He had the feeling of *déjà vu* because this was exactly the approach he used when forging an agreement with some unsavory underworld characters endowed with too much jewelry from several heists around the free world. He had to make a quick decision. "It appears you've made an error," he said in a quiet tone. "I've no interest in buying and selling someone's castoff jewels or whatever. If I had the sources you infer, it might benefit us both but I do not."

Jayce frowned. "You take me for a fool. Perhaps I had that coming. I've been too direct and am aware you have no reason to add credibility to our meeting. I foresaw just such a development so I brought this to give you as a token of my sincerity." He carefully withdrew a match box wrapped in black cloth from his purse. He handed it to Stefan.

Stefan was intrigued. He opened the package and was astonished to find a large diamond sparkling in the subdued light. He looked up at Jayce to see a stoic expression. "Zircon?" he asked.

"Cubic zirconium," Jayce repeated. "I see you've done your homework as have I. Is this a labor of love?"

Stefan smiled. "Better described as market research. A passing interest."

Jayce took a large swallow from his beer. "May I suggest, sir, we retire to my place so you can view this in the proper light with state-of-the-art lenses? May I call you sir? You are a very attractive boy for being a girl." That time, his brief smile flashed even white teeth.

Stefan nodded. He left some money on the table and stood up. 'There is something foreboding about this guy,' Stefan thought as they walked along Royal Street. 'He is either under terrible stress or is, as I first surmised, the very embodiment of something sinister, evil. Yet, there is a mystic quality that is perhaps untapped in some weird way.' He admitted to himself, at that juncture, that Jayce had an element of fascination in his person, his lifestyle and his personal mission.

They sauntered along the street portraying an ironic couple for perceptive passersby. One guy dressed like a girl; one girl dressed in guy-garb. They continued on their walk, paying no attention to the stares, laughter and jeers. It was as fun-filled as a Mardi Gras parade in miniature.

## #

Once in the St. Ann Street crash pad, Jayce looked seriously at Stefan. "It is all an act, you know," he said as if Stefan might have been offended. "Like many apparitions in life, the real, the imagined or the fantasy, they see what they want to see. Thus, they do not see what we are hiding. You understand this, n'est pas?"

Stefan sat primly on a wide armchair near the doorway. "It occurs to me that those of us that work to grasp what is right are really only spending energy defining what is wrong. I think the word is conundrum. Where is this workshop you mentioned?"

Jayce closed all the blinds and pulled the drapes. He placed a 'Do Not Disturb' sign from a local hotel on the outside doorknob. He threw the strong bolt that assured them of privacy. Next he stepped into an alcove that he used for a dressing station. He threw off his wig and put a sailor's cap on his head. That was when he hung up his girl-garb and put on a set of coveralls with oversize patch pockets. He motioned for Stefan to follow him.

'There has to be an inner sanctum' Stefan thought as he fought off a chill he identified as caution or blatant fear. He allowed Jayce to lead him down a long hallway. There were several rooms along the way; a kitchen and dining area, bedrooms and a luxuriously appointed bath with walk-in shower and Jacuzzi hot tub.

"This place is larger than it looks from the street," Stefan said.

"True. What interested me when I took it was that it continues through the brick wall dividing this address from the one facing the next street. On that side, our present facilities look like an abandoned gardener's shed complete with pots and a rack of tools. Neat, huh?"



Stefan nodded. "What you are telling me is that you need a place to hide. Is there an exit through the gardener's shed in case of emergency?"

"You catch on quick for a girl," Jayce said to Stefan. Before opening a door toward the end of the corridor, he turned to face Stefan. He moved one hand along Stefan's arm and inside the suede jacket. His fingers found the breasts he assumed were regular equipment. "Very nice; I've been curious about them ever since the Malgré Cafe. You keep them hidden."

Stefan tried to avoid a growing impatience. "I dress the part; easy for you to understand. Did you bring me all this way to seduce me? You are wasting your time. I'm not interested in your sperm count; not in the least."

"How refreshing," he answered and let the heavy door swing open. Stefan gasped at the surprise that awaited him. A complete workshop with lapidary machines, chemistry lab tables and a cabinet of test tubes, petri dishes and some chemicals in dark brown jars filled the large room. Against the far wall, Stefan counted a dozen tall storage shelves and racks, all cluttered with supplies of some kind.

Jayce stood in the doorway with a smug look on his face. "The jewelry evaluation shop is this way." He led Stefan into an enclosure vaguely reminiscent of an old-time darkroom. The footstool was on casters. Stefan sat down and opened the small box. He put the gem on the holder and tightened the set screw.

With the lens in place and having released the universal mount, Stefan could see the icy lattice texture of the gem. He saw a few minor flaws which he attributed to origin rather than the gemologist. He switched on the scanner light and studied the screen which showed optical dispersion. "It's marvelous," he whispered in awe to be looking into the depths of such beauty. "You should have no difficulty finding a home for it."

Jayce frowned. "You forget, sir; I gave the gem to you as a gift. Consider it an act of faith on my part."

Stefan switched off the light and turned around on the small stool to face Jayce. "It seems to me, if a vote of confidence was needed, just showing me this place should cover it. If the authorities were aware, you know we would both be in the lockup."

"Which brings me to the question that's been nagging me. I ran your name through my files and came up with a curious entry. You have served hard time. Was it for selling stolen goods?"

"No, if you must know, I was caught with the artful gem collection on my person which I lifted from a wealthy family while working there as a waitress during a birthday celebration. Part-time assignments like that give girls like me an opportunity to smoke out some valuables. Also, it helps to know what to steal. Any more questions?"

"Yes, do you believe in honor among thieves?"

Stefan grinned. "When you pave the way with gems like this, I do." He turned and faced the sober and serious Jayce. "What exactly do you have in mind?"

Jayce pursed his lips in thought then turned toward the door. "Come on, my friend, let's take a walk. I can't get over the fear that, just maybe, these walls have ears."

Stefan followed Jayce out and they walked to Jackson Square. When they found a bench away from direct light, Jayce motioned Stefan to sit down.

"OK, this is what is happening, the scene as we often say. I think you will see how you might fit into the scam." Jayce looked around to be certain they were not in earshot before he continued.

"We have several operatives who have access to bank fraud records. Others are janitor types who can copy police files. Identity theft is becoming the white collar crime of the modern age. Once a new identity is established, the thief turns to us for additional documents, information and heirloom jewelry. This item is where you fit in. You have the knowledge to evaluate the hot jewels that flow into the hands of the workers who fashion necklaces, broaches, bracelets, rings and so on. These become of value to the person assuming the new identity by wearing conspicuous pieces."

Stefan took a deep breath to process what Jayce was saying. Finally, he asked, "So what?"

Jayce displayed one of his rare smiles. "We have to have a dollar base to work with in order to keep control. Also, we farm out certain pieces that need engraving, altering and so on, all to add credibility."

"So, where do I fit in?"

"We have what stockbrokers call a 'market order.' We have to be certain our products have a genuine look. By the time the thief turns to us to supplement his or her new identity, they have scammed enough cash to make it all profitable. The advantage, may I call you sir?, is that you have little or no risk. You come and go according to the work to be done but you don't have to shop your wares as you are now doing. Neat, aye?"

"I didn't see any of your workers when you gave me the tour of the shop today? Where do they hide?"

Jayce grinned again. "Like our mutual friend on Decatur Street, we package and deliver. A detail of what needs to be done and the gems or precious metals to do it are provided. Hell knows no fury like a hungry jeweler."

"Who delivers?"

"Fugitives from the Age of Innocence. The two pretty girls you met earlier at the Malgré Café are perfect. Antoinette, the one they call Tony, was sent to meet you. The scene was made to look casual when Noriko picked up Tony at the curb. We have a very close-knit group, as you have seen."

"All right," Stefan said after a long pause. "I like it. When do we start?"

Jayce chuckled. "Soon, I hope. We need to finish this interview because there are some missing pieces of information about you I would like to know. Call me nosey if you like; I need to have a background, which in our business is often difficult to compile."

"I can imagine. Uh, that girl, Tony, is she available? I really like her looks. Vivacious girls appeal to my sense of adventure."

"So, you like girls. That's a start. Tell me about the prison life you had to endure."

Stefan relaxed and slid forward on the bench. "Being a girl in an all-girls prison, or anywhere for that matter, requires making adjustments. I was very lucky to have an attractive cell mate who lost little time in seducing me. For a while, at first, I was a vulnerable gal feeling like I was fifteen years old. Oh, I'd had some first hand introduction to sex but I didn't really get the message until I spent a few days and interesting nights in the County Lockup. I attract the predators like ants on a honey jar."

Jayce smiled. "I can see you have the right equipment for it. Yet, you have cross-dressing down to a fine art. It's more than just a gender change to hide behind, I suspect. Tell me about that."

"It's an issue you should be aware of before you turn me loose to demonstrate my various skills. Instead of surrendering my loot in order to get a reduced jail sentence, I stashed it. There were two reasons, neither of them easy. I felt I worked too hard to get that collection and wasn't about to hand it over to some authority to take to his girlfriend. Secondly, I was approached by a secret operative, mob-related I've always thought, who wanted to employ me in laundering a large haul of jewelry. The agreement was to deduct my commission and expenses; the balance of the sale went to them."

"So, now I get the picture. You have a large stash of your own to draw on for living expenses, plus you have the other contributions. That means there are two groups looking for you—the law and the mob. Not a promising situation."

"You can see I took the path of least resistance, so to speak."

Jayce was pensive a moment. "We have an expansion plan which is why we are so in need of your expertise. A legitimate front seems to be the best course of action. Our new company will be called "Heirlooms, Incorporated" and the promo slogan is "Create a Family Name." He looked briefly at Stefan before continuing. "Get this scenario. The love-smitten swain is courting the charming Southern belle. When she finally agrees to marry him, he springs out the heirloom jewelry, silver service, whatever, to show her he has a family name but did not want that to influence her decision."

"Dynamite! I like it," Stefan declared. "And we provide the entire family identity to calm the little lady down. Neat!"

Jayce looked bright for a moment. A rare demeanor for him. "Now, there is more. If we discover the young gent has access to a family bankroll, we can discreetly suggest he part with a large chunk of it if he wants to keep his new family identity secret from the beautiful bride."

"Ah, blackmail; thy heart has no space for the light of day."

"You would have come to the same conclusion."

"Perhaps but it is nice you have confidence in me." Stefan paused. "All right, I'm in. Not only am I confident I can contribute, but the lure of illicit adventure excites me. When do I get introduced to the Tony/Antoinette girl?"

"You have a one-track mind," Jayce laughed. "Relax; I'll arrange for you to go to dinner or something. I guessed she is the 'something' you are interested in. You will have to work that out for yourself; I'm not in that business."

They both laughed.