



Reluctant Press presents:

Eye Of The Lotus



Monica James

A 'Her TV' E-BOOK

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The Eye Of The Lotus

By Monica James

There was once a chronicle to unfold
Of life and love enrolled in two souls together.
A quiet story to be gently told.
Our own beach sand, bleached by the sun,
Overlooked the wet horizon
As we kissed the surf and were loved by the sea.
There will never be a love as right as you and me
And when I remember us, I can only trust
The light I saw that set us free.

Paul Truman 2011

I.

"Why not?" Danny demanded as he continued to force his hands higher on Amanda Delphine's thigh. "We are going to be married."

Amanda could see the bulge in her boyfriend's trousers. Though she admitted to strong feelings for him, an inner conviction fed her defense. "You will have to wait," she said with an exasperated huff. "I am not fond of you pawing me every time we go out. It's getting so I dread it."

Danny sat stiffly at the wheel of his car. "That is not an explanation; it's an excuse to avoid giving me what I need. I don't mess with other girls but if you can't tell me what is so very wrong about how I feel, I'm going to break up with you."

"That's your option. When did I ever promise you sex? Every other issue that comes up, we handle really well."

"This is an impasse," he said angrily. He started the car. "I'm taking you home now."

She tried to control her grief by reasoning. 'I knew this would happen, Grandmere told me it would. She said I was born under a different star; one that hung too low in the sky. Danny wants me to be pregnant so I'll do those other things he wants. What do *I* want?' She looked out the window as the panorama of the night sped by. The old bridge over Bayou Teche rumbled when he drove over.

He slammed on the brakes leaving a cloud of dust in her driveway. "Don't call me, I'll call you," he said curtly.

She turned to face him so he could see the tense expression on her face. He reached over, touched her lips with her fingers and next dropped his hand to fondle her breasts.

She pushed his hand away and in a display of anger-fused energy, slammed the door behind her. She didn't look back.

Once in the house she threw herself into her grandmother's arms. "We broke up," she sobbed. "It's because I wouldn't have sex with him. I wanted to but I couldn't. Am I going to be in this austere prison all my life? Is there no escape?"

Noranda patted her on the back. "You have your mother's instinct. You didn't want to get into a relationship that would come back on you. Come along now. I'll fix you some coffee. We need to talk."

They went into the kitchen. Amanda sat morosely at the table and fingered a paper napkin. She watched as Noranda poured the coffee, added a like amount of hot milk and set the cup in front of the distraught girl.

"Here you are, dear," Noranda said. "Don't be too harsh on the young men. Your beauty attracts 'em."

Amanda sipped the *café au lait* and briefly considered adding some strong spirits to settle her ruffled feathers. "I am concerned which is natural, I suppose. I didn't want to break up with him for precisely the reason you just said. I'll attract more attention once the word gets around. I almost told him I needed to be his girl so all his Cajun buddies would leave me alone. It's as if I've lost interest in boys. That's a revelation."

Noranda frowned. "You can't lose what you never had, dear." She paused in thought. "I see your mother in you every day. There's no doubt about that. Her sad-

ness was brought on by a man that broke her in one night and disappeared the next day. She told me about it with the excuse she had to learn what it was like. That guy, your father, must have been very fertile. Your mom's brief escapade ended with the birth of twins. She brought you and your sister here to me, as you know. After a few days, she came back for one of the twins. How adorable you both were. She went to the magistrate to file a claim. I never saw either of them again. When I inquired, the magistrate wouldn't talk to me."

Amanda sipped the warm brew. "Do you know why she never again came to you? Did she somehow know her twin daughters would end up as she had?"

"I've asked myself many times in search of an answer. When your grandpere died, I truly had my hands full caring for you and the house. I've never seen nor heard anything since."

"Tonight with Danny Guice, it was as if my mother was there warning me to avoid her destiny. Didn't my mom have any guys calling on her?"

"It seems she did at school but I don't recall any visiting her here. She did have several close girlfriends but they have babies of their own by now."

"Thank you for explaining what could never be explained," Amanda whispered and patted the back of her grandmother's hand.

#

Danny waited until Amanda was inside her house. He threw the gears in full, revved the engine and

screached the tires. Speeding down the familiar road, he headed for the Bayou Bar.

‘That witch was using me,’ he told his reeling brain. ‘Take me here, go there; come at such a time; all of it. I was a fool to let her lead me around by the nose. So pretty; what can a guy expect? Cold pussy! She never knew a mom and dad; only that doddering old woman that disappears into the swamps. What does that old bat do there? Does she have a coven or a band of zombies to care for? Nothing would surprise me.’

He raced past the Creole Kitchen, across the bayou bridge and headlong in a rush to the fork in the road. To the left was home; to the right was the Bayou Bar. Indecision swept over him and he impulsively jerked the steering wheel until his car smashed hard enough against a huge oak to scatter some Spanish moss.

The forlorn call of his horn broke the silence of the night. He was slumped over the wheel with his neck crushed between the dashboard and the shattered windshield. Later there was the distant sound of a siren but he was unconscious.

II.

Clouds scudded across the night sky. The moon flashed silver like a newly-minted coin.

Noranda made her way along the path to the boat-house. The silence of the backwater swamp was broken by occasional calls from the wild. She unhooked her pirogue, took up the paddle and was soon slipping across the dark water to the other shore, to a nearly submerged island.

‘Barataria is quiet tonight,’ she thought as she approached the temple entrance. The cypress grove appeared to her grotesque, nearly naked branches reached into the night, each stump like a huge club foot.

She retrieved her pouch from a hiding place beneath a stone slab used for a table. She arranged some herbs around the *Eye Of The Lotus*, a large amulet handed down to her. Basking in the ghostly glow of the mythological water lily promoted a comfortable spell. The amulet she valued was believed to have magic power. Her incantation was pleading for attention.

“Bring Danny Guice through this terrible tragedy,” she began in a fervent whisper. “Our innocent Amanda is not able to handle such a burden of guilt.”

She rearranged the circle of herbs and adjusted the amulet to draw on the light of the moon. Her moans increased and she broke into dismay with sad lyrics from the ancestral cant. An ephemeral cloud arose and Noranda fell forward, semi-conscious under the charm’s influence.

Alone, draped in hospital white, Danny Guice was inert while the medical apparatus kept him alive. At the precise moment Noranda fell forward, though it was many miles away, he opened his eyes.

#

“Your injuries are very serious,” the doctor said. “We had to reshape your spine and begin the first stage of a series of operations to restore you well enough to function.” His voice was soothing, confident.

“Like what?” Danny asked. His voice startled him because it was high-pitched like a girl.

“You might have already noticed the change in your genitals. Well, we had to remove most of the torn tissue. We have a cosmetic specialty surgeon on call so we’ll be able to give you an update after the consult.”

Danny tried to move his hips to get more comfortable. He cried out in alarm at the sharp pain coursing through his body. He searched the doctor’s face as the competent physician perused the clipboard.

“Will I always squeak like this?” he asked.

The doctor smiled. “We can’t be certain until the phonoplasty is complete. We hope, of course, for a full recovery but it is likely your voice will continue to be that of a mature woman.”

“Phono what?” Danny asked. He was getting more nervous by the moment and began to suspect the medical establishment was playing games with his crushed body. “What else?” he asked angrily.

“Listen! You were driving; you smashed up your car and your body. Don’t be annoyed with us for an event you caused.”

“Sorry, Doctor. How long will this recovery take? What can I expect?”

The doctor frowned. “More surgery and a lot of rehab. Don’t depend on a full physical recovery.”

“Omigod! Am I never going to get laid again?”

The doctor smiled. “A young lady spent a lot of time here. She said she was your fiancée.”

“We had a fight and I lost it. Her name is Amanda Delphine; I’d like to see her if that is all right.”

The doctor set the clipboard down. "The nurse will limit the time but it appears you do have some issues to discuss."

"Like I'll never be able to have children. Is that what you mean?"

"Among other tacky conditions," the doctor answered and left the room.

#

Amanda and her grandmother, Noranda, were asleep in the hospital lobby when the nurse woke them. She said Danny was awake but they couldn't stay long and warned against allowing her patient to get overtired.

Amanda touched his hand and smiled when he opened his eyes. "Danny, I'm so sorry!" she said. "I'll stay with you as long as you want me."

Saying nothing, Noranda sprinkled some powder in a circle around Danny's bed. After that, she left.

"Grandmere invoked some magic power she is familiar with. It is helping your recovery," Amanda said. "She knew exactly when the spell took effect."

"Hogwash!" Danny said. "No, don't touch me; I hurt all over. Look Amanda, maybe you and your grandmother should leave. I learned from the doctor. I have a girl's voice and, worse than that, I'll not pester you for sex. Well, maybe later but I still want you, Amanda."

"The nurse told us about that. You might go on a poster as the annual seat belt cover girl." She smiled and hoped he would be encouraged.

"I am NOT a girl!"

"Something to think about," she answered. "We have to go now. I'll see you tomorrow. The doctor said I could visit. He didn't ask about your family."

Danny frowned. "It is well you don't say anything to them. We don't need my dad careering through here in a drunken rage."

"There will be insurance forms and such," she said after a pause. "I can help you with the paperwork." She pressed her lips, touched them with her fingers and threw him a kiss.

III.

"Grandmere," Amanda began while they were driving home, "how did you know when Danny was going to recover?"

Noranda was pensive. "There is a turnabout and boat launching area just ahead. Pull in there, we'll open our picnic lunch and have a chat. Like it or not, you are due to inherit some special powers. But first you have to learn what they are."

"You know I don't believe in voodoo rites," Amanda said slowly, aware that she might hurt the elder lady's feelings.

"You believe the sun will rise tomorrow; it isn't all that difficult." Noranda grasped the picnic basket and began setting up their lunch on the rustic table. They settled on the benches which were darkened by age and the weather.

A slight breeze rustled long lost leaves near the BBQ pit. "If it is important to you, I will listen. But, if

this charm riding on some sort of spell or fetish is real, I've yet to experience any of it."

Noranda opened a can of beer and offered Amanda one. "Like anyone else, you scarcely are aware of forces most people can neither see nor feel. Centuries ago, there was family activity in the Atlantic Ocean center passage. Our people remained on the Cape Verde Islands until the authorities there sold them to cover their costs. The town is Mindelo. My father took me there when I was a young girl. It is beautiful, untouched, and sits nestled in the foothills of the Monte Cara mountains. There has been so much intermarriage over the generations that you were born with the slightly dark skin and features more French than Creole."

Amanda flushed, almost frightened of what her grandmother was going to say. She was unsure she wanted to hear it at all, any of it. "There are legends," she said finally. "Weird stories we heard in whispers about zombies, the undead."

Noranda touched her arm. "There is no threat. Some people out of the past were so maltreated that they longed for death. Their bodies would not allow them that luxury. They walk even today around the Barataria Temple. It is a strange manifestation augmented by Voodoo rites."

"Strange without a doubt," Amanda said. "Do you see them when you go into the wetlands?"

"I do not fear them. They leave me alone. Sometimes in the dead of night I can hear them moaning. Maybe it is a way of speaking, I don't know."

"So we are descendants of refugees from the islands. What then?"

“Our ways are firmly rooted in Haitian Vodou which the tribal records detail. You have to decide about your own life, dear girl. Do you want to risk bringing babies into this topsy-turvy world?”

Amanda toyed with a po’boy and licked the juices oozing from the bread. “It is hearsay; all the girls talk about family and husbands. I am not sure but it seems clear to me, from what you are telling me, that I should think very seriously before producing some copy of a deified ancestor. It is scary but I recognize the confusion.”

“There is conflict in everyone’s lives, darling,” Noranda answered. “Now, what about Danny Guice?”

“What are you asking me? He is in no shape to marry and raise a family. How can we predict what the future might hold?”

Noranda began packing up the lunch. Standing, she let one hand rest on Amanda’s shoulder. “While you were visiting with Danny, I talked to a resident physician assigned to his case. His opinion is that Danny will be happier if he can adjust to being a girl.”

IV.

Several visits to the hospital over the months of struggling rehabilitation netted Amanda little more than snarls and recriminations. She hesitated to voice any feelings, instead waiting for Danny to open the subject of their future together.

“I know this is not your fault,” he said one sunny afternoon. “But I still blame you. Now look at this broken body of mine. How can you remain loyal to me when I can give you nothing?”

"I'm not asking you for anything, you know. I'm not going to abandon you just because you are in a bit of trouble."

"More than a bit," he said sarcastically. He glanced at the lovely girl sitting next to his bed, knees together, mini-skirt recklessly pulled aside and her blouse pulled firmly against her breasts. He leaned over as if to speak confidentially.

"Last night I dreamed I was a man again," he said sadly. "You were in the dream; we were walking along the bayou talking about the Creole Kitchen of all places."

"I'm happy you were allowing me in your dream. Lately you've given me the feeling I'm not welcome when I visit you. Yet, what can I do? You still blame me for what you did. That isn't likely to change, is it?"

"I cannot give you sex like other guys. That's another issue I don't see getting corrected. Yet, as always, you turn me on just looking at you. Would you do something for me? It won't hurt, I don't think."

She smiled and shifted in her chair, closer to the bed. "Do they have sex videos on your TV? Maybe that will brighten your day."

One of his rare smiles appeared. "I guess they do but I only compare what I see with what I know about you. I want you to raise your skirt so I can see your nice figure. You can walk around the bed like you are on a stage. Will you object if I kiss you?"

She was overjoyed. "Oh Danny, you are really getting well if you can talk like that. Of course I'll put on a show for you." She leaned against the bed, angled her torso and softly kissed him on the lips.

#

Amanda left the New Orleans Charity Hospital and wandered aimlessly until she came to the outskirts of the French Quarter. Her mind was filled with Danny's recovery and she began to consider what their lives might be like with his infirmity. Drawing on her feelings, most of which she did not understand, she turned onto Iberville Street.

'Moses Bar & Lounge,' the sign said. She turned in, not knowing for certain why she had the compelling sense that she had been directed there.

A tall, handsome woman with muscular shoulders smiled as she entered.

"Is Moses here?" Amanda asked lightly.

The hostess grinned and touched Amanda's arm. "'He was but we lost him in the bulrushes.'"

"Oh!" Amanda exclaimed. "You are making a joke. I'm not offended; it happens all the time."

"Come in, darling and I'll buy you a drink. Have you been here before? I don't recall seeing you."

Amanda viewed the cozy barroom when her eyes adjusted to the dim lighting. "Thank you, I'm sure," she said and let the hostess lead her to the lineup of barstools.

The barmaid set a cocktail napkin in front of her. "This girl is so beautiful she makes me glad I came to work today."

There were several tables near the tiny dance floor. Dreamy soft music wafted in the stale air. That was when Amanda saw the full-scale painting over the bar. She gasped.

“What is it?” the hostess asked. “What do you see?”

Amanda turned and looked at the door. She was ready to bolt but the hostess’s firm hand on her shoulder kept her seated. “It is Grandmere; her name is Noranda,” she said. Her voice shook with panic as she tried to control it.

“Another drink,” the hostess said to the barmaid. “We have a celebrity here.” Her tone was light, amused.

Amanda downed the second mixed drink and retched slightly as it burned her throat. “Who is going to explain this?” she asked.

The barmaid had summoned the owner. “My name is Faye Sienna.” It was a soft voice behind her.

Amanda faced the stunning woman and tried to smile. “I’m confused about the painting,” Amanda said pointing at the eerie backdrop behind the bar. “It is my grandmother sitting there looking at me.” She fidgeted under the speculative gaze of the owner. “To my knowledge, Grandmere has never been near a place like this.”

Faye smiled and moved the adjacent barstool aside. The mural did not depict a woman; only a peaceful scene from the river delta. She put one arm around Amanda’s waist, the other on the bar. “We need to talk,” she said with quiet conviction. “Apparently you are getting a special message from your grandmother. She led you here for a reason. Would you like to learn more?” She was role-playing, a game she enjoyed.

Amanda gulped. “Yes, of course, uh, Faye; thank you.” She squared her shoulders and faced the gorgeous woman standing close enough to transmit sensual vibes.

“And, in return for these secrets,” Faye said slowly, “will you explain why you’ve come here? We are delighted to meet you, of course. Is your grandmere still living?”

“Yes; she took my twin sister and I into her home many years ago.”

“Oh? Twin sister was it? You get more fascinating by the minute.” She moved one hand to Amanda’s knees and fondled the smooth flesh there. “And where is your twin sister now?”

“I do not know; there are conflicting stories. One is that my mom died giving birth. Another tale is that she ran off with my sister into the swamps. It is likely we will never learn the truth, mostly because it does not matter.”

Faye moved one hand higher on Amanda’s thigh. “There are many unexplained mysteries in the wetlands, I know.”

Amanda was growing impatient though fortified with the third drink from the bar. “Why are you feeling my legs?” she asked, making an effort to hide her surging hostility.

“Are you offended?” Faye asked and drew her fingers on the shapely thigh.

“No, only more confused.”

“Have you had sex with a woman?”

Amanda was startled. She pushed until she was standing. Everyone else, the hostess and barmaid plus some curious patrons, did not show interest. “No and this is not the time or the place, I suppose, to drape my body on your bed.”

Faye laughed, a light tinkle in her throat. "Moses Bar & Lounge is a gay hangout but of a special kind. You have been led by some power neither of us understand because of your concern for a transsexual in your life. The women you see here, including me, are now or may once have been guys."

"Omigod! No! You guessed my burden; remarkable." She glanced quickly to gather reassurance from the mural she earlier saw as her grandmother. It had disappeared.

"Naturally I don't know the full story but there has to be some reason you are here," Faye answered. She kept one hand on Amanda's thigh. "Are you interested in dressing up?"

Amanda swiftly took up the cocktail napkin off the bar and covered her face. She started to cry but, even with such an emotional display, only Faye was interested. "Let me tell you," she said finally. "My fiancé, Danny Guice, is in the hospital recovery ward. He was badly mangled in an auto wreck. His vocal chords were ruptured so he talks like a girl. Even after some restorative surgery, he won't be able to function as a man. He is permanently impotent and dysfunctional."

Faye sighed and touched Amanda's waist. She appeared complacent while only a moment before she was anxious to persuade Amanda to cooperate.

"I see. Does your Danny boy want to take up life as a girl? Pardon me, obviously I've misinterpreted why you are here. Maybe your fiancé is the one that needs to visit us. He already is a kindred soul from what you say."

“One of the hospital residents, a physician assigned to assist him, has mentioned that very option. Of course, Danny is firmly opposed.”

“Of course,” Faye repeated. “I understand. You came here to learn about our second world and the people that inhabit it.” She reached behind the bar and pulled out a catalogue. It was titled “*Suddenly Fem.*” It had a cover girl in a sexy pose and a website, www.crossdresser.com. “Bring this to Danny,” she said, forcing the catalogue into Amanda’s hands. “Talk to him about learning to live as a girl if he is to function at all. Tell me, have you two enjoyed each other sexually?”

Again, Amanda looked toward the door. “I’ve no experience about that. I have a very strict family home. Grandmere is from the ‘old school’ that girls are girls until they are wed. Really, Faye, you have been wonderful to put up with my histrionics. I apologize but I must run if I’m to get back in time.”

Faye stepped aside to let the distraught Amanda stand. When Amanda’s step faltered, she quickly grasped the girl’s shoulder to support her. “Here now, you better take it easy. You’ve only had a couple drinks.”

“I don’t have much tolerance to alcohol,” Amanda answered. “Cheap date, I suppose.”

Faye supported Amanda with one arm across her back. She spoke crisply to the barmaid. “Carafe of black coffee to the hospitality room.”

The small room a few steps from the end of the bar was used for counseling, business obligations and computer services. There was a large picture window so Faye could observe the lounge area uninterrupted.



“Here, darling girl,” Faye said, settling Amanda on the love seat that was angled in one corner of the office area. “Catch your breath and help me drink this strong coffee.”

Amanda sipped from the decorated mug and forced a smile. "I'm being a big baby, I know. I'll go as soon as my head stops spinning."

"We can chat for awhile. You are not only lovely in the everyday sense, you are what is known on the street as 'hot.' To tell me you've never had any experience is difficult to believe but a sheltered life would explain it. You seem so attached to Danny that I think there must be more to his story."

"There is," Amanda replied. "We were an item during school and after graduation. I consistently avoided sensual contact and we often argued about it. He said, since we are to be married, that I should be more, uh, giving. I couldn't do it."

Faye was fascinated. "All right, what's the rest of it?"

"You are quick," Amanda said and crossed her legs. She leaned forward to give the impression of confidentiality. "One night we had a big fight. Danny became very angry. He roared off, spun his wheels and sped down the road. He lost control of the car and smashed himself and the car in a wreck. I feel it would not have happened if I had allowed him some small liberty to encourage him. He admits it is not my fault but he still blames me."

Faye embraced the girl. Amanda sobbed quietly, her body shivered with the depth of feeling. She kissed Amanda on the forehead and smoothed her hair to one side of her face. "There there, pretty girl. From all you've told me, I firmly believe we have the answer to Danny's problem. If I'm right, you will no longer have to carry the guilt in your heart."

Amanda sniveled. "You are so nice; thank you. Tell me more about the attractive people here."

"As I said earlier, it's a different world for us. When you came in, the incident was not unusual. Pretty girl loose on the town looking for someone to eat her pussy. My behavior, as you learned, was to that end because you are not only charming but have a terrific body. This is one small corner of the world that has people dedicated to honesty in their relationships. Not always easy otherwise."

Amanda sat up and dabbed at her eyes with a tissue. "I admire honesty but your language borders on offensive. Of course I've heard of girls enjoying oral sex but to be so graphic bothers me."

Faye slipped one hand around Amanda's waist. "It's something you should consider in light of present circumstances. Would you object if Danny took your body 'all-the-way' just using his mouth?"

"Right; it's something I have to think about. When I show this cross-dressing catalogue to him, I shall mention that I am agreeable if he wants to be my lover."

Faye clapped her hands. "Good for you. If you just stick with him to help him adjust, it is very possible you can both live a comfortable life together since your love is obvious."

Amanda frowned. "Now I have to decide if I am going along with this because it is an obligation or if I really want him to satisfy his primal urges. Such a predicament!"

Faye went swiftly to her desk to answer a call. While speaking to a vendor she turned to admire the gorgeous Amanda sitting quietly so close and yet so far. When she put the phone down, she was adamant

that this marvelous girl would be far better off experiencing the art of cunnilingus. But, she knew full well, tough times are to be expected.

Amanda stood up and extended her hand. "Thank you so much for taking an interest in us," she said. "I am feeling better now. I want to learn more about all this." She waved her hand in the air to include the lounge and especially the people.

Faye smiled and stepped close to her. She caught Amanda's chin with the tip of her finger, tilted the girl's head slightly and kissed her tenderly on the lips.

"Darling, please come see me when you can. I've made you my secret mission in life."

Amanda chuckled and stopped at the bar on the way out. She offered to pay for the drinks but the busy barmaid just waved her on. She thanked her and, for the first time ever, cast a critical eye on the cute girl. 'Is she or isn't she,' was the question in her mind. 'Is he or isn't he?' she further considered.

V.

Noranda was standing in the kitchen doorway tapping her foot in anger. "Where have you been, young lady?"

Taken by surprise, Amanda brightened, "I left the hospital and went for a walk. Met some interesting people in New Orleans. I knew it is late, but I went back to see Danny anyhow. They wouldn't let me in; after hours they said."

"What did you do with these interesting people?"

“Just talked, mostly. A fine lady not much older than I am listened to my sad tale about Danny, the car wreck, the injuries and all. Her name is Faye Sienna. She runs a bar for people with alternative lifestyles.”

Noranda raised one eyebrow. “I want to meet this lady because I have my suspicions. You are too beautiful to go running loose on the French Quarter streets.”

“What suspicions? She was very nice to me.”

“I’ve no doubt of that. Did you tell this snake charmer you are a ‘nice’ girl?”

Amanda acted shocked. “Grandmere! It isn’t like that; well, perhaps some. She can help Danny adjust to his trauma by coaching him to live like a girl. Danny already has the high voice. Quite charming, actually. He will never be able to have sex like other men. That’s what we talked about.”

Noranda reached for her wrap, a hand knit fascinator. “We will discuss this further,” she said tersely. “I’m going out.”

Amanda stepped forward, hands on hips. “Where do you go in the middle of the night?”

Noranda paused and studied her granddaughter with a critical eye. “You asked how I knew Danny would recover. I did that with some magic my mother brought with her from Haiti. Now I am going to see to Danny’s recovery which I hope will include him accepting his situation.” She stared as if obsessed. “I think it is time for you to come with me. We can talk on the way.”

Noranda held the pirogue steady while Amanda settled on the center seat. She dipped the oar in the black swamp water as she crossed the bayou to

Barataria Island. An eerie silence descended on them like the eye of a tropical storm.

She tied up the boat at the makeshift dock as by habit. "Come along, dear. Just a few steps from here to the temple."

Amanda was taken with a sudden fright. The mystery, the grove of cypress trees casting shadows and Noranda's obsessive attitude affected her. "What temple?" she asked.

Noranda spoke in a guttural whisper. "It is this way, dear. You will see. It is the Barataria Temple but for all I know it is haunted by Jean Lafitte and Dominic Yu. Not likely; don't be frightened. There is no threat."

Amanda stood in a small clearing vaguely outlined by the light of the moon. "Grandmere! They were blood-thirsty pirates."

Noranda flashed a wan smile. "The temple is over this way," she said. "True, they were pirates but when men of their fame and stature lose their blood, they become zombies."

"You are really scaring me now," Amanda said, trembling.

Noranda chuckled. "There is nothing to fear. I have been coming here for many years. I think it is time for you to get exposed to the influence of your ancestors."

Amanda followed her grandmother along a narrow path through a copse of brush and short trees. They went over a rickety bridge of rough hewn timbers. "If I have a legacy, I want to know about it. This is my day to learn about new adventurers."

Noranda whispered under her breath. "Which includes being seduced by a beautiful transvestite."

“What was that?”

“Oh, nothing. Here we are. Stand over there so you don’t break the light into a bunch of shadows we don’t need.”

The temple, Amanda could see, had seen better days. Several of the more narrow columns lay crisscrossed on the ground. Decaying vegetation left a stench in the air of which neither Noranda nor Amanda was aware. Several large timbers were supported by the standing columns. Amanda watched in growing horror as Noranda uncovered her hidden stash. She peered at the array of contents with a nervous tremor. When Noranda gasped in surprise, Amanda stepped back. “What is it, Grandmere?”

Noranda sat back on her heels. “In time you will learn about each of these charms and the magic spells. Incredible as it may seem, there is an addition to my fetish collection. Do you know this item?” She held up a torn and threadbare glove made for the left hand.

Amanda’s voice went up a decibel. “It’s Danny’s driving glove. I’d swear to it. How did it get here?” Goose bumps scattered on her naked arms and creased her skull. She watched as Noranda completed the sacred rites. The last motion was after a long pause while she sat staring at the *Eye Of The Lotus* amulet. She held the driving glove lightly in her hand and with a majestic gesture, set it on one side of the circle of charms. She sprinkled some herbs and the glove burst into blue and yellow flames like natural gas on the stove. “We must go now,” she said with a tired voice.

“Not soon enough for me,” Amanda said. “What happened? Why did you burn the glove? Was it like a sacrifice of some kind?”

Noranda smiled. "Sacrifices are not necessary. The glove, note it was from the left hand, helped us communicate, which we did until it was no longer needed."

"How so? Do the spirits understand Danny's trauma?"

"I can't answer that because I don't know. I called on the mystic powers to influence Danny's decision to make a life for him and you. The rest is up to you."

They clambered onto the narrow boat and Amanda sensed Noranda was hastily making an escape of some kind. "Me? That makes no sense. Danny wants sex and can't perform. I can't do anything about it."

As they strolled back on the path that skirted the bayou's edge, Noranda was pondering how to say what was on her mind. "I realize you think of me as a crazy old woman. However, the people you met at the Moses Bar know how to find satisfaction. It is up to you to investigate that. I would suggest you tell Danny what you have learned and how you feel. With the forces put in motion this very evening, he may grasp the straw of opportunity."

Amanda did not reply. Being a virgin the rest of her life was not in her plan.

#

Amanda disciplined her attitude before tugging open the hospital doors. She forced a smile on her face and stood next to Danny's bed as he lay sleeping. She considered what she had learned and tried to analyze her feelings for the injured fiancé. When his eyes flickered, she touched him on the cheek.

"You can't be Dangerous Dan and sleep all the time," she said lightly.

"Oh, hello; glad you came by. I read that catalogue, 'Suddenly Fem' that you gave me. It made me so angry I threw it across the room. Can you imagine me dressed up in such clothes? Oh, no, not me; that's what I thought."

Amanda's chin quivered. "Danny, I'm trying to help but nothing seems to do much good."

"You are wrong again. When you danced around the room to show me your body, it was an immense turn-on. Remembering you like that put things in perspective. Last night the orderly came in and I asked him to retrieve the catalogue as I'm a bit restricted here. I was overcome with a weird feeling. Putting aside all my attitudes and concentrating on you, I've decided I have no option but to cross-dress so I can be someone you would like."

Amanda approached him. She took his hand. "Danny; important! What time was it when you had this change of heart?"

"How do I know?" he asked, surly. "If you are that curious, look at the entry on my clipboard. The night orderly has to record when he was here."

Somewhat afraid to calculate the times, she realized Danny's revelation came at precisely the time Noranda burned the glove. She shook her head in wonder. "Dan, I met some people. A lady gave me that catalogue when I told her why I was so deeply disturbed."

His grin was sheepish. "When do I get to meet this lady?"

"I don't know. I'll find out. It appears you aren't going anywhere." She tried to affect an affable voice.

He reached beneath his pillow and brought out the catalogue. "I want to know more about all this," he said with conviction. "My big question is how these people survive with their pent-up sexual needs. Also, what will you think if you walk down the street holding hands with another girl?"

Amanda was encouraged. "We can learn together. Her name is Faye Sienna; she runs a bar in the French Quarter called Moses. The girls I met there are nice in the extreme. Faye told me some of them endured a restorative operation changing their gender from male to female. That's what you are. A potential girl and the more I think of it, the more I am intrigued. As for the sex, Faye says some are happy with oral sex."

Danny's eyes opened wide. "Of all the times I've tried to feel you, you never once told me you would like me to go down on you. Now what are you telling me?"

She blinked away some sincere tears. "There is much to decide. Most girls I know think only in terms of a family, diapers and not much sleep. It would take a man with a firm hand to get me into that situation. You are no longer such a man."

"You didn't answer my question. I would dearly love to feel your body explode under my touch. I've never felt otherwise about you."

Amanda moved her chair closer to the bed. Taking his hand, she fondled it with her thumb. "Would you forgive me for what happened if I let you do that?"

"Let me? Get serious! This isn't a one-way street. Do you want me to do it?"

She stifled a sob. "I don't know, Danny. Will you forgive me?"

He stared at her for a long time. "When I get over this sense of confusion, my attitude should change. Are you willing to try? Knowing I have sex with you in my future will make all this hardship easier to endure."

She kissed him on the lips and touched his neck below his ear. "I never noticed that about you before," she whispered.

"What, silly girl?"

"You have a sexy mouth."

#

"What did Danny say?" Noranda asked.

"He wants to try but it requires some progress in rehab. Are you going to the Barataria Temple tonight?"

Noranda brightened with a broad smile. "I wasn't planning on it but if you want to go, I'll show you the way again. Tell me what you are thinking."

"It is simple. I asked Danny precisely when he decided to consider the transsexual life. He told me to look on his chart. It was there, plain as day. The time was when you burned the driving glove. Grandmere, I take it all back; this is not mumbo-jumbo zombie magic. I do not need any stronger result to convince me. Now I want some help along the way. I believe you have led me to the answer."

Noranda embraced the vivacious girl. "The moon is not in the perfect arc right now but we can go. There is an issue there I want you to understand."

They continued to chat during dinner and when the evening shadows crept along the bayou trail, they headed for the boathouse.

Once in the temple, they sat on the stone bench and held hands. "There is a special magic here for people like us. Not everyone can communicate. It has to do with your outlook. As the number of visits here add up, you will begin to find some peace in your heart. Problems that once seemed immense will disappear or be resolved without effort."

Thus said, Noranda retrieved her legacy pouch and instructed Amanda on each charm, fetish or talisman. The *Eye Of The Lotus* shone brightly and winked in the moonlight. "It is important," Noranda said, "to understand where the power comes from." When the evening visit was over, Amanda felt completely exhausted while Noranda's step had a new bounce.

"It really is magic," Amanda said.

#

Amanda's head was full of girlish visions of romance. She looked forward to going to the Barataria Temple each evening. After several trips, Noranda left her to find her own way which was the tradition in the family.

"Are you ready to discuss Danny's transition with him?" Noranda asked.

It had been a week since she last visited the hospital though she telephoned several times a day. "Soon, Grandmere," she answered. "I have my studies to do but all I've learned thus far is how wrong I've been to shelter my life and future under a rock. Tell me about my twin sister. I've asked at the temple without result. Maybe there isn't any history to reveal."

They were sitting on the wide wrap-around porch overlooking the road that was like a loose ribbon skirting the Barataria swamp. "I have criticized myself for letting her go," Noranda answered. "You were both so adorable and formed a sisterly bond so easily. Her name is Daphne, Daphne Delphine."

Amanda sipped her coffee. She was pensive. "I shall ask for her this evening. Maybe I needed the name or, like the driving glove, something to communicate."

Noranda grinned. "You learn fast. I hope whatever you find will put the matter to rest. One issue is certain; Daphne is in your heart."

"If that is so, I only need my heart to get the attention of some deified ancestor."

Noranda finished in the kitchen and set fresh flowers on the dining room table. Glancing out the window she saw Amanda Delphine, the forlorn sister, walking steadfastly to the bayou trail. In that moment she saw herself when she was Amanda's age, all wrapped up in dreams and purpose.

At the temple, Amanda took out the legacy pouch and went through her usual litany of recognizing the mystical powers before discussing her most personal thoughts.

A cloud of tranquility descended on her as she knelt and fingered each of the fetish items. She praised Danny's progress in rehab and was thankful she was able to recognize the growing need to discuss all this with someone close who understood Danny's circumstances. She knew that 'someone' was Faye Sienna.

Finishing the visit, she carefully gathered together all the items which she called human reminders. Clos-

ing the pouch, she was startled to feel a new weight. Curious, and thinking she might have dropped something extra in the pouch, she looked again. It was a panic flash. Danny's driving glove was included in the collection. She knew at once her thoughts had been answered. She stood tall with her feet slightly parted and looked around the temple enclosure. The words that tumbled from her lips seemed inadequate to the moment but she took a deep breath and exhaled slowly as she said, "Don't stop."

There was an unseasonable breeze that night as she paddled across the choppy water. Her paddle seemed to have little effect so she let the boat drift downstream to the next landing. She knew there was ample space along the path to pull the pirogue home with the mooring rope. It was not to be. The wind shoved the boat back into the current and against the far shore, an area new to her.

She finally realized she was being asked to return to the Barataria Temple. After securing the boat, she retraced the shore line and found the familiar path.

Approaching the temple, she was surprised to come on a small group of members. The light was only from the quarter moon. Two tall men moved about in ungainly steps. The only sound was the breeze whistling through the trees.

She crept closer, not wishing to disturb the meeting. That was when she saw the girl standing near the entrance. When she recognized the girl, she caught her breath, stared incredulously and fainted. The mystic of the night had presented her clone, correct to the last detail: She believed it was she herself.

She regained consciousness to find her pirogue properly moored. She told herself it was a dream or

hallucination but the message had been clear. She had been inducted into the society accompanied by the souls of the undead. Instead of being terrified at the significance, she was elated because the peace of the ages had accepted her. One unknown task remained; she knew there would be a trial of sorts, the initiation.

She ran with abandon up the well-worn path. Her skirts flopped on her naked thighs. "Grandmere! You will never believe what happened."

#

Amanda rushed along the hospital corridor to Danny's room. Her heart dropped in disappointment. He was not there. She inquired at the nurse's station to learn Danny was in rehab and should be returned to his room in an hour. She thanked the nurse and walked down Tulane Avenue until she crossed Canal Street. Moses Bar & Lounge was her direct destination.

She hesitated at the door. The dim lighting bewildered her. The hostess came out of the shadows. "Nice to see you again," she said sweetly. "Amanda, isn't it?"

"Yes, hello. I was at the hospital to see my fiancé but he is not available right now." She stepped inside as the room's features became visible.

The hostess smiled. "You better get out of the light streaming from outside. It is directly behind you and everyone in the room can see your stunning figure."

Amanda blushed. "Right, thanks. I don't want to start a riot."

They both laughed. "If there is anything I enjoy in a country girl, it is self-confidence."

Amanda went to the bar and plunked her purse down. "No free drinks for me; I'll pay. Last time I was here, you gals got me smashed. Well, almost."

Amanda sipped her mixed drink. She wore a smart collegiate cardigan, mini-skirt and some feathers woven into her hair. Her smile was bright and charming as she looked around. Her search caught the cute barmaid's attention.

"Last time I looked, Faye was hiding in the hospital room. Shall I announce you?"

Amanda grabbed her purse in one hand and her drink in the other. "No, I'll surprise her."

The girl giggled. "Believe me, there is very little that will surprise our intrepid leader."

She stood in the doorway and, causing no distraction, deliberately admired the handsome business owner. Faye wore a matching vest and skirt, spike heels and a white starched blouse with lace ruffles at the throat.

Faye finally looked up to see the marvelous girl with a wide grin on her face watching her intently. "Amanda. Wonderful. Come in."

"You aren't angry because I didn't keep in touch like I promised?"

They embraced and Faye held the hug longer than proper. Their breasts meshed which electrified them both.

"You were full of whisky; drunks promise all sorts of things." Faye laughed and guided Amanda to the love seat in the corner. "Bring me up to date. How is, uh, Danny boy? Did I get the name right?"

Amanda let her body relax into Faye's. "You seldom miss on anything. Danny is in rehab today. I came here so you wouldn't forget me."

"Oh, and the catalogue; what did he say about that?"

Amanda grinned happily. She was aware of Faye's hand fondling her knees. "He had a few bad moments at first which, I believe, you predicted. After some persuasion which included a hospital room strip show of sorts, he now tells me he wants to learn more."

"That surprises me," Faye answered. "I can wager the strip show with you as the star was very influential."

"He likes my figure. We briefly discussed what I later learned is called cunnilingus. It was a lot closer than he had ever been with me and now, with his extended injuries, he understood I wanted to encourage him."

Faye moved one hand higher on Amanda's leg. "Wonderful! What did you have in mind?"

"To enlist you to give him a personal interview. I told him you were knowledgeable as well as attractive. In the full view, he is interested." She opened her purse and took out a brief folder of snapshots. "This is my guy," she said handing the pictures to Faye. "Just ignore the photo of me in my bathing suit."

"Hard to miss that." Faye leaned forward and planted a firm, erotic kiss on Amanda's lips. "Oh, darling girl," she whispered. "How long can you stay in the city? We need to get better acquainted."

"My time is my own. I told Grandmere I would look for you. I also told her about Danny accepting the

cross-dressing. There is more but it is ancient history already.”

Faye’s stared at Amanda’s lips. “I look forward to hearing the entire story.”

With the next kiss, Amanda moved one hand to Faye’s shoulder. She sighed happily. “I’m still the naïve backwoods girl from Bayou Teche. I’ve thought of little else than some of the things you suggested when we first met.”

“Hmm, since Danny can’t come here yet, we might meet in his hospital social room, I guess. Really, honey, this is awkward. I’ve conducted many counseling sessions but usually in a more intimate atmosphere. If I’m not comfortable in my surroundings, my message can easily go astray. What do you think?”

Amanda relaxed back and parted her knees a few inches. “Since Danny is agreeable, we are not in an intervention here. Therefore, I see nothing urgent. Can we just let time take its course like the Bayou Teche?”

Faye kissed her again and moved one hand inside her cardigan to mold her fingers to Amanda’s breast. “You are delightful. Do you mind my kisses and caresses?”

Amanda squirmed as Faye’s hand moved higher onto her thigh. “Just recently I went over all this in my mind and speaking to an imaginary suitor, I said ‘don’t stop.’ Don’t think of me as a country tart trying to take Bourbon Street by storm. Not my style.”

Faye sighed and relaxed back. “Bourbon Street has weathered many a storm, not one of which was as beautiful as you. Have you had something to eat? Let’s go out.”

“Well, certainly, if you wish. I have some money.”

Faye smiled. "Your grandmother provides for her li'l darling."

They settled on a tasty dinner at Broussard's and went on a short walk toward Jackson Square. "This is all so interesting," Amanda gushed. "You take such good care of me."

Faye pointed to a block long row of apartments facing a tidy park. "I have a studio apartment here. Would you like to see it?"

"Lead on," Amanda said. There was no improper thought in her head. She had convinced herself that whatever the night might bring added experience to her eventual goal in assisting her fiancé.

In the apartment, Faye served them both an aperitif and they went out onto the narrow balcony to view the early evening revelers. "Did you think of what your plans might be if I refused to help Danny with the transition?"

Amanda was taken aback. "Well, no; I did not. Human assumption is hardly redemption, am I right? What are you suggesting?"

"Your cooperation; that should be payment in kind."

"Then you have it. Are you going to tell me what I'm to do?"

"Yes but first you have to understand the underlying physical changes that take place in a transgender adjustment. It isn't just the daily living arrangement but the satisfying of special needs that often come up out of the blue."

Amanda was perplexed but not alarmed. She shivered slightly in the night air. Faye was quick to cover

them both with a downy blanket. "You better explain that," she said.

Faye soon had her hand beneath the blanket, caressing Amanda's thighs. "I'd like to enlighten you. You have to expand your knowledge if you are going to please me." They kissed again and Amanda dutifully parted her lips to allow Faye's tongue to explore. "If you are chilled, we can go inside. It sometimes gets cool in the evening. The damp air, perhaps."

"I like it here," Amanda replied. She knew she was delaying Faye's advances.

Faye moved her hand onto Amanda's mons and pressed. It was a lusty suggestion and Amanda sighed. "Do you give yourself a finger wave?"

"You mean? Uh, yes, with one hand but only recently."

"What do you think of when you excite yourself?"

Amanda blushed. "For true? All right; I think of the way you kissed me just now. It doesn't always send me over the edge but I can feel the tickle in secret places. Why?"

Faye took Amanda's hand and pressed it to her breast. "Feel me," she said in a low voice registering her growing passion. "Do you like doing that?"

Amanda nodded her head 'yes.' "You are the most exciting woman I've ever met."

"Are you distressed that Danny will never be a man for you? Have you told him what he could do about it?"

"Yes but not in detail because I didn't know that much. He wants anything of me he can get. I told him I think he has a sexy mouth. He liked that."

“And do you like my mouth, hot little Amanda?”

“Yes, of course. I told you that.” Her tone suggested impatience.

Faye kissed her again and let her tongue linger on Amanda’s lips, then her smooth neck and shoulders. “Do you know I want to go down on you?”

“I’ve never had that before,” Amanda said with wide-eyed innocence.

Faye stared fully into Amanda’s eyes. “After tonight you won’t be able to say that. Are you afraid?”

“No; I thought you might say or do something toward that end. At first I was uncomfortable not knowing precisely what to expect. No, not afraid.”

“Now to our agreement of cooperation. Are you ready for the next step?”

Amanda was startled because the ideas and the emotions were getting confused. “Yes; I agree to cooperate. What’s next?”

Faye kissed her again, long and tender, gently. “I want your mouth, Amanda.”

“Oh, you mean me? Yes, you do.” She pointed her finger at Faye and for the first time saw the lust shaping the older girl’s face. “Please be patient with me.”

“I promise. Come on; let’s go in before you take a chill. If truth be known, I’m hot enough to warm us both.”

Amanda giggled and followed Faye into the combination den and bedroom. “How elegant,” she said and sank back as Faye embraced her from behind. She shivered with joy when Faye’s hand caressed her firm buns.

“Give me your hand,” Faye said and forced Amanda’s hand onto her crotch. Still in the back embrace, she felt Amanda making an effort to explore her. Then Amanda stopped.

“What? Faye, I don’t understand this.”

“It’s called an erection, darling. I’m not a girl but will be soon.”

“Oh my god, Faye. Why didn’t you tell me? Am I to squander my virginity on a chic bar owner?”

Faye turned her around to face her but kept pushing the young girl’s hand onto the hard tool. “I want you to put it in your pretty mouth.”

“So this is the initiation,” Amanda said with conviction.

Faye smiled. “Initiation? Explain that.”

“I will one day when you come out to the bayou with me. It’s too long a story now. I wondered what I would be asked to do. Now that you’ve told me, I actually feel relieved.”

“There are some deeds that do not need a reason. You don’t have to take me all the way if you are opposed. Just seeing your lips in action will be quite enough.” Faye threw a small pillow between Amanda’s feet and motioned to her. “On your knees, country wench,” she said and pressed down with both hands on the girl’s shoulders.

Amanda gulped. ‘I should be terrified but I’m not,’ she thought when her knees hit the pillow. ‘It is an act Danny wanted me to do and now, after all the turmoil, I am about to do it.’ She worked her nubile fingers until Faye’s skirt fell to the floor bunched around her feet.