

GIROD STREET CEMETERY  
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA  
AUGUST 1836

*The corsair stands stiffly in the shadow of his son's damp grave as the priestess limps unsteadily toward the object of their nocturnal quest. The night is dark and heavy with alluvial decay, and somewhere in the distance a lone African drum thumps a languorous beat. Around him, ornate marble structures and humbler tenements of concrete vaults stacked six high bear the names of friends and enemies and more than a few associates in commerce.*

*Ghosts. He knows he himself must appear spectral, returning now after so many years. He'd seen the glimmer of recognition in the priestess' careworn eyes and the averted gaze of the liveryman who'd driven him from the wharf. The corsair had often imagined himself passing into a spirit world more familiar to him than the one in which he'd lately resided. Now, amid this dismal necropolis, he feels poised between two spheres. One ethereal and beyond his reach, yet familiar somehow. The other terrestrial but altogether alien.*

*The priestess slows now, turning to her left and raising her torch for closer inspection of a headwall. She'd found it, he could see. Reaching deep into folds of billowing calico, she removes a small object the corsair cannot discern and begins waving it in a series of spasmodic motions, murmuring a deep-throated incantation that seems to emanate from the depths of the earth beneath her. This is followed by louder staccato chanting and the discordant rattling of a small percussive instrument made of what might have been bone.*

*Minutes pass, the corsair fidgeting with his cane, poking at the wet moss and gravel, losing himself in fleeting evocations ... The actress' porcelain skin against her crimson glove ... Her honeysuckle scent and practiced blush beneath attentive mahogany eyes. ... The pompous*

*impresario with his ivory handled cane and resplendent cravats. A charlatan, yes, but true to her to the end. Truer than he.*

*Ah, Cher Jane. Ever present to him, even now, though endlessly elusive. Had she taken their treasure with her to eternity, as she had said she would? Would they meet again? The corsair is not normally given to such contemplations, but more and more he finds himself lost in these thoughts.*

*Her ministrations concluded; the priestess produces a small leather pouch which she presses against the headwall. She intones a few short phrases and then, stooping gingerly, places it against the base of the structure. She takes a few steps back, turns slowly to face the corsair, nods gravely, and hobbles away, her white headdress receding into the deep night like a waning moon on the ocean's horizon.*

*Apprehensive, the corsair lets some time pass before beginning his own halting approach. The tomb is surprisingly plain, the corsair thinks, given Caldwell's penchant for the ostentatious. Two simple columns support a granite arch with an inverted torch carved into the center of its façade. Inset between the columns, a gray marble headwall bears Caldwell's epitaph:*

*TO THE MEMORY OF JANE PLACIDE*

*There's not an hour of day, or dreamy night but I am with thee;*

*There's not a wind but whispers o'er thy name.*

*And not a flower that sleeps beneath the moon,*

*but in its hues of fragrance tells a tale of thee.*

*He'd lifted the passage, the corsair knew. The actress would have expected as much from the man she chided as "Poseur!" But whatever else Caldwell may have been, he'd provided*

*security and stability, two things the corsair could never promise. And after all, the actress was herself no stranger to the arts of deception. "I pray you, do not fall in love with me, for I am falser than vows made in wine ..."*

*The corsair glances down to where the priestess' gris-gris stands sentry against malign spirits. He hopes it will bring the actress peace, but what does he know of such things? Leaning forward, he presses his lips to the marble.*

*"Au revoir, Cher Jane," he whispers. "Je suis desole, je n'etais pas un homme meilleur."*

*Yes, I should have been a better man. To you. To so many.*

*Pushing away from the tomb, the corsair turns, leaning on his cane, and begins to drag himself away through the darkened avenues of death, away from time and memory, toward his own final resting place.*