

## When the Saints go marching in.

New Orleans's flooded arteries glowed in the blood red moon. The French Quarter, more Venice since hurricane Zachary; the fourth one-in-a-hundred-year meteorological event so far this year had blown through.

Moreton Ludlow sat on the balcony of the Louisiana Lounge sipping a delicate biscuity champagne as bourbon chased waters syncopated below. Crawfish pie straight out of the bayou and a second champagne glass stood untouched on the wrought iron table. Now where horse drawn carriages once trundled, a succession of punts not gondolas taxied the flotsam and jetsam. Crypto gamblers bound for the gladiatorial combats in the Saints' Ceasars Superdome, musicians to their speakeasys, itinerant whores to saturated assignations and for those looking to drown their own sorrows, to places where the stars had already fallen.

New Orleans: currently the newest, badass, chthonic, environmental catastrophic ridden city on earth. Where plughole scum floated but never drained.

Moreton was waiting. Not just for any girl. His girl. But and this was the big but, she happened to be the FBI's #1 most wanted. An enormous price on her head since the president had banned DEI and her mother's 'Gretta-eco-terrorism' too.

A tarpaulin on a punt flapped to its own drumbeat. Second-era prohibition, thirty-nine-percent tariff illicit booze suddenly disappeared - not into a flooded cellar - but up on a block and tackle into an inaccessible attic, awaiting some dollar rich mobster or disaster tourist to come knocking.

A St Elmo's fire of clear and present danger fizzed through Moreton's senses. Below a funeral cortege, played out in New Orleans's time honoured respect. The first punt bore a hurricane lamplit coffin and was closely followed by a conspiracy of raven dressed mourners and sisters of the cloth. A third swung with a trumpet tooting Dixieland Jazz band, who, religiously banged their ragtime drum. Being fed to the fishes, the latest eco way of disposing of bodies. Land being somewhat at a premium.

The band upped tempo and 'when the saints' pricked Moreton's ears he shuffled in his seat, hypervigilant. Someone whistled along. He instantly recognised that whistle. There was a soft puff and he clasped the dart in his neck. Dis-orientated, he lurched forward. With a surreptitious helping hand, he tumbled over the balcony and rippled into the miraculously open coffin. What Voodoo was this?

How much time had passed he couldn't tell. Conscious once more, blurred lace curtains wafted on the breeze and the moon's reflected light, rippled on the ceiling. A slow turning fan spread his laboured heat.

‘Sister Charlie, I wondered how you’d make your entrance; such a drama queen.’

Sister Charlie removed her wimple. Let her long red tresses down and walked across the room. Her hair swished as she let her habit fall too. ‘Needs must Moreton. You never know who’s watching.’

Outside, the sun had long refused to shine, candles flickered erotic shadows on the four walls. Sister Charlie kissed Moreton’s lips and whispered. ‘Shut up husband dearest. My turn to march right on in.’