

Deadly Double

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Prologue

Ste. Genevieve, Illinois Country

1785 - great flood

The water boiled around her. The others had left long before, gathering whatever they held dear and scurrying for higher ground, but not Marie Jean. She held nothing dear--not since that bastard Cruzat doomed her to marriage with the monster others called her husband.

Damn Cruzat. Damn the church. Damn everyone who told her she had no choice--that God's will was greater than her own.

She would show them all.

Grasping the rough logs of the cedar stockade she clung to, she stared down at the water. She could give in, throw herself into the angry current of the Mississippi, but there would be no satisfaction in that--no revenge.

She had a better plan. She'd thought of it last night, when the others were packing, when her husband was chortling about the Lieutenant Governor's denial of her request for a divorce.

How she had wanted to kill him then--pick up the saber he kept hanging on the wall of their cabin, and pierce his heart, stand there laughing as the black blood of his soul spilled out on the dirt. But no, she was too weak, he would have used it on her instead, but damn his twisted soul, he wouldn't have shown her the mercy of death--just continued the same torture she'd endured for years.

Enough. She had had enough.

"So, you came." The voice was low, masculine in a way that sent shivers of expectation up her spine.

She turned. He stood an arm's length away, his feet braced on the roof of a cabin, his waist-length hair clinging to his bare chest. His eyes glimmered at her in the growing darkness. A second shiver danced over her rain-soaked skin.

"You expected me?" She pressed her back against the stockade, her heart beating like a bird's.

"Come." He held out one hand. "The water is rising. There isn't much time."

She paused only an instant before slipping her work-calloused hand into his and letting him pull her to the safety of the roof beside him.

He stared down at her, his eyes an eerie blue against his dark skin.

"Will you help me?" she asked, her fingers tangling in his

hair, her palm brushing his skin.

"I'm here," he replied. "What is it you want?"

She swallowed, her heart expanding at the thought of her vengeance. "My husband dead, and then..." she paused deciding what to ask for next. "a curse. Can you curse them all?"

He threw back his head, laughter rolling from his throat. "A curse? This..." He swept his arm out, gesturing to the hellish waters surrounding them. "...isn't curse enough?"

She narrowed her eyes, thinking of her sister and her aunts, all prim and pious. Judging her for not accepting her fate. "Not for what they would have left me to. No, I want revenge that will last for centuries, eternity." The last came out in a hiss.

His arm slipped around her waist pulling her close against the hard length of his body. "You have the wrong demon, mon oiseau. I am no witch. I have no magic for you."

"But..." She pushed her hands against him.

He ran his hand down the length of her back, making a shushing sound against her ear. "No magic, but if it is revenge you seek. I can give you that, and the ability to survive this." He nodded to the water now lapping at their feet.

Marie Jean relaxed her body back against his. "Power, can you give me power?"

He nodded, his head dipping toward her neck as his hand

swept her long hair over her shoulder. "Ah, mon oiseau. That I can do."