

COME TO ME

SIN SORACCO



Ithuriel's Spear



The Green Arcade

San Francisco

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With respect for the people who will change the world for the better—
People working against climate change. Occupy Wall Street. Black Lives
Matter. Workers, dreamers and wild hopeful dancers.

For this book—Andrew Ahn, Patrick Marks, Gent Sturgeon, Tia Resleure,
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Pomba Gira, come to me!
Bloody fate, sweet destiny—
Pomba Gira, come to me!

The woman stiffens, turns around, blind, spinning out of control, eyes rolled back, limbs trembling. Her outstretched hands open and close, grasping, capturing only air.

In a white flash several doves circle high into the night. They disappear into the moon.

Shivering, the woman lets the people dress her as they sing to her, they slip the red skirt trimmed with black lace over her hips.

She picks up her whip, her black fan.

Flames start up in her dark eyes, in the slash of red lipstick, in the sudden whip crack.

“Pomba Gira, please help us!” Bookmakers streetwalkers transvestites lost souls murmur, “Pomba Gira, you are so lovely.”

She accepts rum and gold-foil-wrapped chocolates from them.

“Pomba Gira, please help us!” Petty thieves card sharks late night stalkers whisper, “Pomba Gira, you are so clever.”

Common dealers sleight of hand squealers call for “Champagne for the Lady. Another song for the Lady.”

She struts among them stiff-legged, her proud eyes unseeing. She uses a long silver holder to smoke a sweet tobacco cigarette, she condescends to bless the dancers with the smoke. More drums! Stronger! Sing louder... Dance. Dance!

“Give me give me give me—”

“Give your very best to the wife of Eshu.”

“The Queen of night! The Queen of Hell! Her pleasure is the dance—her laughter, endless desire. Bloody fate, sweet destiny, my beloved Mistress Pomba Gira, come to me!”

Vinha caminhando a pe para ver se encontrava a minha cigana de fe—

CHAPTER ONE

Magdalena Carvalho, renamed and reborn as “The Gypsy Woman Oleander,” stood on a San Francisco street corner, humming. She held a plate of cornmeal and a bottle of rum in her hands. A glowing point in the darkness, she was a boldly sexual woman brightening the starkness of the urban desert. Raising the rum bottle to the night sky in cheerful salutation, she took a healthy swallow.

A small boy danced at the top of the hill. A black giggling roly-poly creature, he somersaulted down the street toward Oleander.

The streetlights dimmed.

The lights weren’t usually so unreliable, but the neighborhood wasn’t wealthy. These things happen.

Shadows stretched across garage doors, pooled up against fences, leaked away through missing boards.

Oleander crouched down by the gutter, her solid body radiating, a hot shadow within the greater shadows, she poured out half the rum, sprinkled the cornmeal in a circular pattern. Singing: *Eshu-oh. Elegbar-ai-yey. Eshu ohhh—*

The streetlights got brighter.

Maybe a cloud moved away from the moon?

Oleander smiled at the small child rocketing down the hill—an odd hop and he stood tall before her, transformed into a grand figure in a wide brim fedora, vintage tuxedo, mirror shades and red tennis shoes. He bent down to greet her. Pulling her up, he hugged her, kissing her on the left on the right on the left. Formal. Ceremonial.

The streetlights blinked. Off. On again. Fragile light dimming. Dimmer.

Oleander handed the tall elegant man a cigar, held the match for him. Every gesture graceful. They stood close together in whispered conference. Comfortable and intense.

Ever since Oleander started having corner confabs with her nebulous pal, the predatory hustle had ground to a halt in

the neighborhood. The scammers and grabbers, the folks who just want to get over, get off get down get ahead get naked get loaded—they simply didn't work those few blocks any more. The newest set of tough missionary crack dealers vacated the area just hours before; nervous spit coagulating in the corners of their mouths, they told each other how this strange dude came up to them, not saying a word. One of them said he wore a tux, flashed a gun, another swore he was in sweats, carried a blade, the other one said he wore a baseball jacket, talked on a silver cell phone. His face was thin, thin, skull thin and cold. They all agreed they wouldn't be back.

The streets were silent. No wind. No motion.

Sudden footsteps, thudding with determination, broke the calm of the night. A small woman straggled up the sidewalk puffing under the weight of a ten foot palm tree she'd recently boosted from in front of a hotel. It wasn't quite what she had in mind when she started out that evening, but the snotty doorman returned from his break three minutes early. Sometimes you go for whatever you can get.

While Gina appeared to be a delicate little woman—tangled hair obscuring heavy-lidded eyes, sharp pointed nose and a sweet pouting mouth—she wasn't particularly fragile nor was she especially gentle, nor stupid. However, she was perfectly glad to let anyone make those assumptions, in fact she encouraged it. She blended, she faded into the situation; her ability was not so much to be invisible as to be unremarkable.

Of course just then, trundling a palm tree down the street, her habitual camouflage wasn't working. She raggedly hoped that this sort of late night palm tree transport maybe happened around here a lot? She dropped the palm tree, pushed her hair back, a rough gesture, her eyes flashed out with bitter intelligence. From between the fronds of the palm she surveyed the neighborhood as she caught her breath. It wasn't a particularly warm or cheerful place at night, she wished she could be somewhere else. But she couldn't, she suffered from obligations.

As she lifted her tree Gina caught sight of the woman on the corner: a steamy babe talking to herself, waving a bottle of rum, sucking on a huge cigar. The hair on Gina's arms raised up.

The streetlights went out.

Gina didn't mind the dark, there'd been more than one occasion she'd been grateful for the cover; those days were, for the most part, gone. Involuntary retirement: a nasty combination of broken bones, torn ligaments and handcuffs. She had fallen off a ladder during a badly planned robbery. She didn't talk about it.

Huffing, Gina hustled across to the opposite side of the street with as much grace as she could sustain under the weight of the palm tree. She heard the woman laugh, saw her turn. The beautiful crazy woman looked right over at her.

Tucked up small behind the palm tree, Gina scowled. The sweat chilled on its way down her spine. The woman beckoned to her.

No way. Eyes forward, Gina shook her head. Not even gonna look across the street again, get herself all twisted up in someone else's dream. End up in the shit again. In an uncertain world that much was a lead pipe certainty. Times like this Gina always made it a point not to see whatever it was she didn't see.

Gina knew a lot about crime, she wasn't afraid of crime, she had a graduate degree in crime, she understood crime from motivation to modus op; but whatever was going on here—ah, this loopy street corner hoodoo stuff—not so much.

A quick set-to-it double time jaw clenching block later, panting, Gina put her tree down, peeked back along the street. No one around, a look up the street, down the street, nothing. She entertained herself with speculations: The madwoman was lurking in the shadows, a dusky demon conjure woman out to get her, gonna jump her. Steal her palm tree. Right. Things that go bump in the night. "Shit." Gina muttered, "Whatever happened to simple crime? Rob the rich? Another tradition gone to hell." That's why, Gina grumbled, she ended up boosting palm trees. Wouldn't be right to show up empty handed.

Gina made a snorting noise, took a couple deep breaths, shook her arms to relax the tension, opened and closed her cramped hands. Ground her teeth against the pain.

Hadn't always been like that. Well, of course not. No one could live with pain like that all the time. The pain came and it went. The past half year she'd spent chasing down quack

remedies: water therapy, gold salts, mega-vitamins, mini-minerals. *Pain is good for you, it's a learning experience, an indication of energy blockage. Open Up. Oooooopen up. Ooga wooga.* Then there was the no-meat no-dairy no-salt no-sugar no-caffeine routine; but Gina didn't want to Attain Sainthood in this lifetime, she only wanted to stop the pain. One infamous trance medium hissed at her to Visualize Health, told her to put fifty dollars in an envelope and—Gina had taken the old charlatan's fringed lamp, her crystal ball (it turned out to be ordinary glass) and the black table cloth with the silver stars and moons.

When she realized the pain wouldn't kill her, she decided the damn cures just fucked up her style. She lived with the pain. Banged some heroin when it came her way. Beat hell out of the alternatives.

Gina sat on some handy uninhabited front steps, used the back of her hand to wipe the sweat off her forehead, wrapped her arms around the palm, and grumbled: *I'm no good at this.* Gina swore softly as she got up, hefted her burden and trudged up the dim street.