

1999

How to Bring the Dead Back to Life

Wanda Rimsek

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/astarte>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rimsek, Wanda (1999) "How to Bring the Dead Back to Life," *Astarte*: Vol. 6, Article 32.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/astarte/vol6/iss1999/32>

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the [UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication](#).

How to Bring the Dead Back to Life

You think because you've lived with him forever, bein' born married and all, that it goes without saying that you cannot live without the man. Now that he's gone, what you to do? You've come to me, Mizz Jasmin Delilah Dalrymple, that's what. I am an original. I'm the rooster on the roof pointing the direction on a windy day. Cock-a-doodle-doo! Now where you going? Come back here. I know what you want. Yes, my lady, I do.

But I tell you, Dr. John, he's out of practice. And voodoo queen herself, Mizz Marie Laveau, is no longer taking appointments, at least not with any middle-class whites living outside the Quarter. As Marie would tell you, if she was to talk to any ordinary person like yourself, there simply is no place else for respectable voodooists to live within these here United States.

You think: I'll go there myself, urn in hand, and visit St. Louis Street. You think you can figure it out yourself. How hard can it be to bring the dead back to life, you say. You say you have what it takes. You have all the minerals, the solid matter, everything but the 98% water. There's Lake Ponchartrain. Plenty of water there. And the Lake, it don't distinguish between people of color and those that be white. No. That old Lake only knows alive and dead. Tasty or stale be the gator's domain.

And if you go, and if your black heart is in the right place, that urn full of gardenia white remains can be made whole again. That man you're so sure you can't live without can be yours once more. You doubt this? Then you the fool. Queen Marie did it for so many. She been doin' it for two hundred years. Born in 1794 she was, and still going strong.

You, yes you, can do it too. How? How? You sound like an Injun. Shut up and listen! You bein' told how. The instructions are oh so simple.

First, you get yourself a real good black face job, you know, Hollywood quality. Then you pack the old man off in his urn to the New Orleans International Airport. Keep your hands on him now. Don't turn him over. They come here from all over, you know. You're not the only one. With your black face and your white hands, you carry that man to the Vieux Carre. That's French Quarter to you honey. And don't be listening to no Elvis songs. Now write that down.

Understand, it's important you walk to the Quarter, all the way. Now I know that old airport's in the city of Kenner and it's gonna take you a while. Maybe all day. You get tired now, you chant:

*Sister, Sister. Sister of light,
see me through this endless night.*

*Give me back this man, this dead man I need,
send us home together mounted on a flashy steed.*

*From the desert we came, oh Marie, for your pity.
Help us now to rejoin in the magic of this City.*

That's an old one. Works every time. The rhythm will carry you through. And you see, making that walk will prove to Queen Marie that you mean business. You know, they say she be dark and mean and ugly, but it's not so. Marie, she's a pillar of light, a practitioner of holiness. She has the power, Marie. She know the magic. The voodoo. Ancient wisdom. Great power.

Be careful now about one thing. You're taking good notes there, I can see, but you best underline this instruction. This is the important one. Once you get there, you'll be all sweaty for sure. The Quarter in August is huuuuuught! Trust me, you be sweatin' and that black face be gone. So you need to touch up, repaint if necessary, before you presents yourself to Queen Marie. Now don't pay no attention to all those white folks' books that say she's buried in a tomb in St. Louis Cemetery 1, or 2, or both, because I'm telling you she ain't.

Don't ask me how to fix your black face. There's separate instructions for that. All this is, as promised, was instructions on how to bring the dead back to life. Hallelujah! Praise the spirits! Every last one of them.

Now when you in the Quarter, you watch out for those dancing boys, those cute little colored boys, dancing in their hightops on trash can lids, with those so-called Civil War era Derby hats sitting there just askin' for your change. Careful you don't give them boys no money. They be charlatans.

You get to Queen Marie in one piece, with that urn under your arm, and she'll take it from there. Yes she will. Even if your man be all shook up. Remember that Elvis song? Nevermind. Wind's kicking up.

You believe in magic, don't you? Got to believe in magic. Otherwise, you might as well be in that urn, next to your man.

You believe me, don't you? Then fork over a hundred dollars. Life's instructions, they're not free.

—Wanda Rimsek