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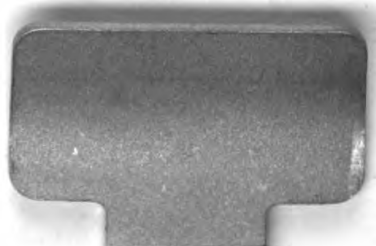
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THE WORKS OF
RONALD FIRBANK

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RONALD FIRBANK

VOL. V

PRANCING NIGGER
CONCERNING
THE ECCENTRICITIES OF
CARDINAL PIRELLI

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PRANCING NIGGER

The title “Prancing Nigger” which this book bore when first published in America is now adopted instead of “Sorrow in Sunlight” under which it appeared in the original English edition.



I

LOOKING gloriously bored, Miss Miami Mouth gaped up into the boughs of a giant silk-cotton-tree. In the lethargic noontide nothing stirred: all was so still, indeed, that the sound of someone snoring was clearly audible among the cane-fields far away.

"After dose yams an' pods an' de white falernum, I dats way sleepy too," she murmured, fixing heavy, somnolent eyes upon the prospect that lay before her.

Through the sun-tinged greenery shone the sea, like a floor of silver glass strewn with white sails.

Somewhere out there, fishing, must be her boy, Bamboo!

And, inconsequently, her thoughts wandered from the numerous shark-casualties of late to the mundane proclivities of her mother; for to quit the little village of Mediavilla for the capital was that dame's fixed obsession.

Leave Mediavilla, leave Bamboo! The young negress fetched a sigh.

In what way, she reflected, would the family gain by *entering Society*, and how did one enter it at all? There would be a gathering, doubtless, of the elect (probably armed), since the best Society is exclusive and difficult to enter. And then? Did one burrow? Or charge? She had sometimes heard it said that people "pushed" . . . and closing her eyes, Miss Miama Mouth sought to picture her parents, assisted by her small sister, Edna, and her brother, Charlie, forcing their way, perspiring but triumphant, into the highest social circles of the city of Cuna-Cuna.

Across the dark savannah country the city lay, one

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of the chief alluring cities of the world: the Celestial city of Cuna-Cuna, Cuna, city of Mimosa, Cuna, city of Arches, Queen of the Tropics, Paradise—almost invariably travellers referred to it like that.

Oh, everything must be fantastic there, where even the very pickneys put on clothes! And Miss Miami Mouth glanced fondly down at her own plump little person, nude but for a girdle of creepers that she would gather freshly twice a day.

“It would be a shame, sh’o, to cover it,” she murmured drowsily, caressing her body; and moved to a sudden spasm of laughter, she tittered: “No! really. De ideah!”

II

SILVER bean-stalks, silver bean-stalks, oh hé, oh hé," down the long village street from door to door the cry repeatedly came, until the vendor's voice was lost on the evening air.

In a rocking-chair, before the threshold of a palm-thatched cabin, a matron with broad, bland features and a big, untidy figure surveyed the scene with a nonchalant eye.

Beneath some tall trees, bearing flowers like flaming bells, a few staid villagers sat enjoying the rosy dusk, while, strolling towards the sea, two young men passed by with fingers intermingled.

With a slight shrug, the lady plied her fan.

As the Mother of a pair of oncoming girls, the number of ineligible young men or confirmed bachelors around the neighbourhood was a constant source of irritation to her.

"Sh'o, dis remoteness bore an' weary me to death," she exclaimed, addressing someone through the window behind; and receiving no audible answer, she presently rose and went within.

It was the hour when, fortified by a siesta, Mrs. Ahmadou Mouth was wont to approach her husband on general household affairs, and to discuss, in particular, the question of their removal to the town; for, with the celebration of their pearl wedding close at hand, the opportunity to make the announcement of a change of residence to their guests ought not, she believed, to be missed.

"We leave Mediavilla for de education ob my daughters," she would say; or, perhaps: "We go to Cuna-Cuna for de finishing ob *mes filles!*"

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But, unfortunately, the reluctance of Mr. Mouth to forsake his Home seemed to increase from day to day.

She found him asleep, bolt upright, his head gently nodding, beneath a straw hat beautifully browned.

"Say, nigger, lub," she murmured, brushing her hand featheringly along his knee, "say, nigger, lub, I gotta go!"

It was the tender prelude to the storm.

Evasive (and but half awake), he warned her. "Let me alone; Ah'm thinkin'."

"Prancing Nigger, now come on!"

"Ah'm thinkin'."

"Tell me what for dis procrastination?" Exasperated, she gripped his arm.

But for all reply Mr. Mouth drew a volume of revival hymns towards him, and turned on his wife his back.

"You ought to shame o' you-self, sh'o," she caustically commented, crossing to the window.

The wafted odours of the cotton-trees without oppressed the air. In the deepening twilight the rising moonmist already obscured the street.

"Dis place not healthy. Dat damp! Should my daughters go off into a decline . . ." she apprehensively murmured, as her husband started softly to sing.

" 'For ebber wid de Lord!'

Amen; so let it be;

Life from de dead is in dat word,

'Tis immortality."

"If it's de meeting-house dats de obstruccion, dair are odders, too, in Cuna-Cuna," she observed.

"How often hab I bid you nebba to mention dat modern Sodom in de hearing ob my presence!"

"De Debil frequent de village, fo' dat matter, besides de town."

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"Sh'o nuff."

"But yestiddy, dat po' silly negress Ottalie was seduced again in a Mango track—; an' dats de third time!"

"Heah in de body pent,
Absent from Him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my movin' tent
A day's march nearer home."

"Prancing Nigger, from dis indifference to your fambly, be careful lest you do arouse de vials ob de Lord's wrath!"

"Yet nightly pitch—" he was beginning again, in a more subdued key, but the tones of his wife arrested him.

"Prancing Nigger, lemme say sumptin' more!" Mrs. Mouth took a long sighing breath. "In dis dark jungle my lil jewel Edna, I feah, will wilt away. . . ."

"Wha' gib you cause to speak like dat?"

"I was tellin' my fortune lately wid de cards," she reticently made reply, insinuating, by her half-turned eyes, that more disclosures of an ominous nature concerning others besides her daughter had been revealed to her as well.

"Lordey Lord; what is it den you want?"

"I want a Villa with a watercloset—" Flinging wiles to the winds, it was a cry from the heart.

"De Lord hab pity on dese vanities an' innovations!"

"In town, you must rememba, often de houses are far away from de parks;—de city, in dat respect, not like heah."

"Say nothin' more! De widow ob my po' brudder Willie, across de glen, she warn me I ought nebba to listen to you."

"Who care for a common woman, dat only read de *Negro World*, an' nebba see anyt'ing else!" she swelled.

Mr. Mouth turned conciliatingly.

"To-morrow me arrange for de victuals for our ebenin' at Home!"

"Good, bery fine," she murmured, acknowledging through the window the cordial "good-night" of a few late labourers, returning from the fields, each with a bundle of sugar-cane poised upon the head.

"As soon as marnin' dawn me take dis bizniz in hand."

"Only pramas, nigger darlin'," she cajoled, "dat durin' de course of de reception you make a lil speech to inform de neighbours ob our gwine away bery soon, for de sake of de education ob our girls."

"Ah sha'n' pramas nothin'."

"I could do wid a change too, honey, after my last miscarriage."

"Change come wid our dissolution," he assured her, "quite soon enuff!"

"Bah," she murmured, rubbing her cheek to his: "we set out on our journey sh'o in de season ob Novemba."

To which with asperity he replied: "*Not for two Revolutions!*" and rising brusquely, strode solemnly from the room.

"Hey-ho-day," she yawned, starting a wheezy gramophone, and sinking down upon his empty chair; and she was lost in ball-room fancies (whirling in the arms of some blonde young foreigner) when she caught sight of her daughter's reflection in the glass.

Having broken or discarded her girdle of leaves, Miss Miami Mouth, attracted by the gramophone, appeared to be teaching a hectic two-step to the cat.

"Fie, fie, my lass. Why you be so *Indian*?" her mother exclaimed, bestowing, with the full force of a carpet slipper, a well-aimed spank from behind.

"*Aie, aie!*"

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"Sh'o: you nohow select! "

"*Aie*. . . ."

"De low exhibition! "

"I had to take off my apron, 'cos it seemed to draw de bees," Miami tearfully explained, catching up the cat in her arms.

"Ob course, if you choose to wear roses. . . ."

"It was but ivy! "

"De berries ob de ivy entice de same," Mrs. Mouth replied, nodding graciously, from the window, to Papy Paul, the next-door neighbour, who appeared to be taking a lonely stroll with a lanthorn and a pineapple.

"I dats way wondering why Bamboo no pass dis evenin', too; as a rule, it is seldom he stop so late out upon de sea," the young girl ventured.

"After I shall introduce you to de world (de advantage ob a good marriage; when I t'ink ob mine!), you will be ashamed, sh'o, to recall dis infatuation."

"De young men ob Cuna-Cuna (tell me, Mammee), are dey den so nice? "

"Ah, Chile! If I was your age again . . ."

"Sh'o, dair's nothin' so much in dat."

"As a young girl of eight (Tee-hee!), I was distracting to all the gentlemen," Mrs. Mouth asserted, confiding a smile to a small, long-billed bird, in a cage, of the variety known as Bequia-Sweet.

"How I wish I'd been born, like you, in August-Town, across de Isthmus! "

"It gib me dis taste fo' S'ciety, Chile."

"In S'ciety, don' dey dress wid clothes on ebery day?"

"Sh'o; surtainly."

"An' don't dey nebba tickle? "

"In August-Town, de aristocracy conceal de best part ob deir bodies; not like heah! "

"An' tell me, Mammee . . .? De first lover you eber had . . . was he half as handsome as Bamboo? "

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"De first dude, Chile, I eber had, was a lil, lil buoy, . . . wid no hair (whatsoever at all), bal' like a calabash!" Mrs. Mouth replied, as her daughter Edna entered with the lamp.

"Frтт!" the wild thing tittered, setting it down with a bang: with her cincture of leaves and flowers, she had the éclat of a butterfly.

"Better fetch de shade," Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, staring squeamishly at Miami's shadow on the wall.

"Already it grow dark; no one about now at dis hour ob night at all."

"Except thieves an' ghouls," Mrs. Mouth replied, her glance straying towards the window.

But only the little blue-winged bats were passing beneath a fairyland of stars.

"When I do dis, or dis, my shadow appear as formed as Mimi's!"

"Sh'o, Edna, she dat provocative to-day."

"Be off at once, Chile, an' lay de table for de ebenin' meal; an' be careful not to knock de shine off de new tin teacups," Mrs. Mouth commanded, taking up an Estate-Agent's catalogue and seating herself comfortably beneath the lamp.

"'City of Cuna-Cuna,' " she read, "'in the Heart of a Brainy District (within easy reach of University, shops, etc.). A charming Freehold Villa. Main drainage. Extensive views. Electric light. Every convenience.' "

"Dat sound jußt de sort ob lil shack for me."

III

THE strange sadness of evening, the *détresse* of the Evening Sky! Cry, cry, white Rain Birds out of the West, cry . . .!

"An' so, Miami, you no come back no more?"

"No, no come back."

Flaunting her boredom by the edge of the sea one close of day, she had chanced to fall in with Bamboo, who, stretched at length upon the beach, was engaged in mending a broken net.

"An' I dats way glad," she half resentfully pouted, jealous a little of his toil.

But, presuming deafness, the young man laboured on, since, to support an aged mother, and to attain one's desires, perforce necessitates work; and his fondest wish, by dint of saving, was to wear on his wedding-day a pink, starched, cotton shirt—a starched, pink cotton shirt, stiff as a boat's-sail when the North winds caught it! But a pink shirt would mean trousers . . . and trousers would lead to shoes . . . "Extravagant nigger, don't you dare!" he would exclaim, in dizzy panic, from time to time, aloud.

"Forgib me, honey," he begged, "but me obliged to finish while de daylight last."

"Sh'o," she sulked, following the amazing strategy of the sunset-clouds.

"Miami angel, you look so sweet: I dat amorous ob you, Mimi!"

A light laugh tripped over her lips.

"Say, buoy, how you getting on?" she queried, sinking down on her knees beside him.

"I dat amorous ob you!"

"Oh, ki," she tittered, with a swift mocking glance at his crimson loincloth. She had often longed to snatch it away.

"Say you lub me, juſt a lil, too, deah?"

"Sh'o," she answered softly, sliding over on to her stomach, and laying her cheek to the flats of her hands.

Boats with crimson spouts, to wit, steamers, dotted the skyline far away, and barques, with sails like the wings of butterflies, borne by an idle breeze, were bringing more than one ineligible young mariner back to the prose of shore.

"Ob wha' you t'inking?"

"Nothin'," she sighed, contemplating laconically a little transparent shell of violet pearl, full of seawater and grains of sand, that the wind ruffled as it blew.

"Not ob *any* sort ob lil t'ing?" he caressingly insisted, breaking an open dark flower from her belt of wild Pansy.

"I should be gwine home," she breathed, recollecting the undoing of the negress Ottalie.

"Oh, I dat amorous ob you, Mimi."

"If you want to finish dat net while de daylight laſt."

For oceanward, in a glowing ball, the sun had dropped already.

"Sho', nigger, I only wish to be kind," she murmured, getting up and sauntering a few paces along the strand.

Lured, perhaps, by the nocturnal phosphorescence from its lair, a water-scorpion, disquieted at her approach, turned and vanished amid the sheltering cover of the rocks. "Isht, isht," she squealed, wading after it into the surf; but to find it, look as she would, was impossible. Dark, curious and anxious, in the faſt failing light, the sea disquieted her too, and it was consoling to hear close behind her the solicitous voice of Bamboo.

"Us had best soon be movin', befo' de murk ob night."

The few thatched cabins that comprised the village of Mediavilla lay not half a mile from the shore. Situated between the savannah and the sea, on the southern side of the island known as Tacarigua (the "burning Tacarigua" of the Poets), its inhabitants were obliged, from lack of communication with the larger island centres, to rely to a considerable extent for a livelihood among themselves. Local Market days, held, alternatively, at Valley Village or Broken Hill (the nearest approach to industrial towns in the district around Mediavilla), were the chief source of rural trade, when such merchandise as fish, coral, beads, bananas and loincloths would exchange hands amid much animation, social gossip and pleasant fun.

"Wha' you say to dis?" she queried as they turned inland through the cane-fields, holding up a fetish known as a "luck-ball," attached to her throat by a chain.

"Who gib it you?" he shortly demanded, with a quick suspicious glance.

"Mammee, she bring it from Valley Village, an' she bring another for my lil sister, too."

"Folks say she attend de Market only to meet de Obi man, who cast a spell so dat your Dada move to Cuna-Cuna."

"Dat so!"

"Your Mammee no seek ebber de influence ob Obeah?"

"Not dat I know ob!" she replied; nevertheless, she could not but recall her mother's peculiar behaviour of late, especially upon Market days, when, instead of conversing with her friends, she would take herself off with a mysterious air, saying she was going to the Baptist Chapel.

"Mammee, she hab no faith in de Witch-Doctor at

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all," she murmured, halting to lend an ear to the liquid note of a peadove among the canes.

"I no care; me follow after wherebber you go," he said, stealing an arm about her.

"True?" she breathed, looking up languidly towards the white mounting moon.

"I dat amorous ob you, Mimi."

IV

It was the Feast night. In the grey spleen of evening, through the dusty lanes towards Mediavilla county society flocked.

Peering round a cow-shed door, Primrose and Phœbe, procured as waitresses for the occasion, felt their valour ooze as they surveyed the arriving guests, and dropping prostrate amid the straw, declared, in each other's arms, that never, never would they find the courage to appear.

In the road, before a tall tamarind-tree, a well-spread supper board exhaled a pungent odour of fried cascadura fish, exciting the plaintive ravings of the wan pariah dogs, and the cries of a few little stark naked children engaged as guardians to keep them away. Defying an ancient and inelegant custom by which the hosts welcomed their guests by the side of the road, Mrs. Mouth had elected to remain within the precincts of the house, where, according to tradition, the bridal trophies—cowrie-shells, feathers, and a bouquet of faded orange blossom—were being displayed.

"It seem no more dan yestidday," she was holding forth gaily over a goblet of Sangaree wine, "it seem no more dan yestidday dat I put on me maiden wreath ob arange blastams to walk wid me nigger to church."

Clad in rich-hued creepers, she was both looking and feeling her best.

"Sh'o," a woman with blonde-dyed hair and Buddery eyes exclaimed, "it seem no more dan just like yestidday; dat not so, Papy Paul?" she queried, turning to an old man in a raspberry-pink kerchief,

who displayed (as he sat) more of his person than he seemed to be aware of.

But Papy Paul was confiding a receipt for pickling yuccas to Mamma Luna, the mother of Bamboo, and made as if not to hear.

Offering a light, lilac wine, sweet and heady, Miami circled here and there. She had a cincture of white rose-oleanders, and a bandeau of blue convolvuli. She held a fan.

"Or do you care for anyt'ing else?" she was enquiring, automatically, of Mr. Musket (the Father of three very common girls), as a melodious tinkle of strings announced the advent of the minstrels from Broken Hill.

Following the exodus roadward, it was agreeable to reach the outer air.

Under the high trees by the yard-door gate, the array of vehicles and browsing quadrupeds was almost as numerous as upon a market day. The quiet village road was agog, with bustling folk as perhaps never before, coming and going between the little Café of the "Forty Parrots," with its Bar, spelled *Biar* in twinkling lights. All iris in the dusk, a few loosely-loinclothed young men had commenced dancing aloofly among themselves, bringing down some light (if bitter) banter from the belles.

Pirouetting with these, Miami recognised the twinkling feet of her brother Charlie, a lad who preferred roaming the wide savannah country after butterflies with his net to the ever-increasing etiquette of his home.

"Sh'o, S'ciety no longer what it wa'," the mother of two spare lean girls, like young giraffes, was lamenting, when a clamorous gong summoned the assembly to the festal board.

In the glow of blazing palm logs, stoked by capering pickneys, the company, with some considerable jostling, became seated by degrees.

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"Fo' what we gwine to recebe de Lord make us to be truly t'ankful." Mr. Mouth's low voice was lost amid the din. Bending to the decree of Providence, and trusting in God for the welfare of his house, he was resigned to follow the call of duty, by allowing his offspring such educational advantages and worldly polish that only a city can give.

"An' so I heah you gwine to leab us!" the lady at his elbow exclaimed, helping herself to a claw of a crab.

"Fo' de sake ob de chillen's schoolin'," Mr. Mouth made reply, blinking at the brisk lightning play through the foliage of the trees.

"Dey tell me de amount of licence dat go on ober dah—" she murmured, indicating with her claw the chequered horizon; "but de whole world needs re-vising, as de Missionary truly say!"

"Indeed, an' dat's de trute."

"It made me cry," a plump little woman declared, "when de Minister speak so serious on de scandal ob close dancing. . . ."

"Fo' one t'ing lead sh'o to de nex'!" Mr. Mouth obtrusely assented, turning his attention upon an old negress answering to the name of Mamma May, who was retailing how she had obtained the sunshade beneath which, since noon, she had walked all the way to the party.

"Ah could not afford a parasol, so Ah just cut miself a lil green bush, an' held it up ober my head," she was crooning in gleeful triumph.

"It's a wonder, indeed, no one gib you a lif'!" several voices observed, but the discussion was drowned by an esoteric song of remote tribal times from the lips of Papy Paul:

*"I am King Elephant-bag,
Ob de rose-pink Mountains!
Tatou, tatouay, tatou . . ."*

provoking from Miss Stella Spooner, the marvellous daughter of an elderly father, a giggle in which she was joined by the youngest Miss Mouth.

Incontestably a budding Princess, the playful mite was enjoying, with airy nonchalance, her initial experience of Society.

"Ob course she is very *jeune*," Mrs. Mouth murmured archly, behind her hand, into the ear of Mr. Musket.

"It's de Lord's will," he cautiously replied, rolling a mystified eye towards his wife (a sable negress out of Africa), continually vaunting her foreign extraction. "I'm Irish," she would say: "I'm Irish, deah. . . ."

"Sh'o she de born image ob her elder sister!"

"De world all say she to marry de son ob ole Mamma Luna, dat keep de lil shop."

"Suz! Wha' nex'?" Mrs. Mouth returned, breaking off to focus Papy Paul, apparently, already, far from sober. "I hav' saw God, an' I hav' spoke wid de President, too!" he was announcing impressively to Mamma Luna, a little old woman in whose veins ran the blood of many races.

"Dair's no trute at all in *dat* report," Mrs. Mouth quietly added, signalling directions to a sturdy, round-bottomed little lad, who had undertaken to fill the gap caused by Primrose and Phoebe.

Bearing a pannier piled with fruit, he had not got far before the minstrels called forth several couples to their feet.

The latest jazz, bewildering, glittering, exuberant as the soil, a jazz, throbbing, pulsating, with a zim, zim, zim, a jazz all abandon and verve that had drifted over the glowing savannah and the waving cane-fields from Cuna-Cuna by the Violet Sea, invited, irresistibly, to motion every boy and girl.

"Prancing Nigger, hab a dance?" his wife, transported, shrilled: but Mr. Mouth was predicting a

banana slump to Mrs. Walker, the local midwife, and paid no heed.

Torso-to-torso, the youngsters twirled, while even a pair of majestic matrons, Mrs. Friendship and Mrs. Mother, went whirling away (together) into the brave summer dusk. Accepting the invitation of Bamboo, Miami rose, but before dancing long complained of the heat.

"Sh'o, it cooler in de Plantation," he suggested, pointing along the road.

"Oh, I too much afraid!"

"What for you afraid?"

But Miami only laughed, and tossed her hand as if she were scattering dewdrops.

Following the roving fireflies and adventurous flittermice, they strolled along in silence. By the roadside, two young men, friends, walking with fingers intermingled, saluted them softly. An admirable evening for a promenade! Indescribably sweet, the floating field-scents enticed them witchingly on.

"Shi!" she exclaimed as a bird skimmed swiftly past with a chattering cry.

"It noddin', deah, but a lil wee owl!"

"An' it to make my heart go so," she murmured, with a sidelong smiling glance.

He had a new crimson loincloth, and a blood-pink carnation at his ear.

"What for you afraid?" he tenderly pressed.

"It much cooler heah, doh it still very hot," she inconsequently answered, pausing to listen to the fretting of the hammer tree-frogs in the dusk.

"Dey hold a concert, honey lub, all for us."

Rig a jig jig, rig a jig jig. . . .

"Just hark to de noise!" she murmured, starting a little at the silver lightning behind the palms.

"Just hark," he repeated, troubled.

Rig a jig jig, rig a jig jig. . . .

V

LITTLE jingley trot-trot-trot, over the Savannah, hey—!

Joggling along towards Cuna-Cuna the creaking caravan shaped its course. Seated in a hooded chariot, berced by mule-bells, and nibbling a shoot of ripe cane, Mrs. Mouth appeared to have attained the heights of bliss. Disregarding or insensitive to the incessant groans of her husband (wedged in between a case of pineapples and a box marked "lingerie"), she abandoned herself voluptuously to her thoughts. It was droll to contemplate meeting an old acquaintance, Nini Snagg, who had gone to reside in Cuna-Cuna long ago. "Fancy seein' you!" she would say, and how they both would laugh.

Replying tersely to the innumerable "what would you do ifs" of her sister, supposing attacks from masked bandits or ferocious wild animals, Miami moped.

All her whole heart yearned back behind her, and never had she loved Bamboo so much as now.

"—if a big, shaggy buffalo, wid two sharp horns, dat long, were to rush right at you?" Edna was plaguing her, when a sudden jolt of the van set up a loud cackling from a dozen scared cocks and hens.

"Drat dose fowl; as if dair were none in Cuna-Cuna!" Mrs. Mouth addressed her husband.

"Not birds ob dat brood," he retorted, plaintively starting to sing.

"I t'ink when I read dat sweet story ob old,
When Jesus was here among men,

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How He called lil chillens as lambs to His fold,
I should like to hab been wid dem den!
I wish dat His hands had been placed ahn my head,
Dat His arms had been thrown aroun' me,
An' dat I might hab seen His kind look when He
said,
' Let de lil ones come unto Me! ' "

" Mind de dress-basket don't drop down, deah, an' spoil our clo'," Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, indicating a cowskin trunk that seemed to be in peril of falling; for, from motives of economy and ease, it had been decided that not before Cuna-Cuna should rear her queenly towers above them would they change their floral garlands for the more artificial fabrics of the town, and Edna, vastly to her importance, go into a pair of frilled " invisibles " and a petticoat for the first amazing time; nor, indeed, would Mr. Mouth himself " take to de pants " until his wife and daughters should have assumed their skirts. But this, from the languid pace at which their vehicle proceeded, was unlikely to be just yet. In the torrid tropic noon-time, haste, however, was quite out of the question. Bordered by hills, long, yellow and low, the wooded savannah rolled away beneath a blaze of trembling heat.

" I don't t'ink much ob dis part of de country," Mrs. Mouth commented. " All dese common palms . . . de cedar-wood tree, dat my tree. Dat is de timber I prefer."

" An' some," Edna pertly smiled, " dey like best de bamboo. . . ."

A remark that was rewarded by a blow on the ear.

" Now she set up a hullabaloo like de time de scorpion bit her botty," Mrs. Mouth lamented, and indeed the uproar made alarmed from the boskage a cloud of winsome soldier-birds and inquisitive paroquets.

"Oh my God," Mr. Mouth exclaimed. "What for you make all dat dere noise?" But his daughter paid no attention, and soon sobbed herself to sleep.

Advancing through tracks of acacia-scrub or groves of nutmeg-trees, they jolted along in the gay, exalting sunlight. Flowers brighter than love, wafting the odour of spices, strewed in profusion the long guinea-grass on either side of the way.

"All dose sweet aprons, if it weren't fo' de flies!" Mrs. Mouth murmured, regarding some heavy, ambered, Trumpet flowers with a covetous eye.

"I trust Charlie get bit by no snake!"

"Prancing Nigger! It a lil too late now tot'ink ob dat."

Since, to avoid overcrowding the family party, Charlie was to follow with his butterfly net and arrive as he could. And never were butterflies (seen in nigger-boys' dreams) as brilliant or frolicsome as were those of mid-savannah. Azure Soledads, and radiant Conquistadors with frail flamboyant wings, wove about the labouring mules perpetual fresh rosettes.

"De Lord protect de lad," Mr. Mouth remarked, relapsing into silence.

Onward through the cloudless noontide, beneath the ardent sun, the caravan drowsily crawled. As the afternoon advanced, Mrs. Mouth produced a pack of well-thumbed cards, and cutting, casually, twice, began interrogating Destiny with these. Reposing as best she might, Miami gave herself up to her reflections. The familiar aspect of the wayside palms, the tattered pennons of the bananas, the big silk-cottons (known, to children, as "Mammee-trees"), all brought to her mind Bamboo.

"Dair's somet'in' dat look like a death dah, dat's troublin' me," Mrs. Mouth remarked, moodily fingering a greasy ace.

"De Almighty forgib dese foolish games!" Mr. Mouth protestingly said.

PRANCING NIGGER

"An' from de lie ob de cards . . . it seem as ef de corpse were ob de masculine species."

"Wha' gib you de notion ob dat?"

"Sh'o, a sheep puts his wool on his favourite places," Mrs. Mouth returned, reshuffling slowly her pack.

Awakened by her Father's psalms, Edna's "What would you do's" had commenced with volubility anew, growing more eerie with the gathering night.

" . . . if a Wood-Spirit wid two heads an' six arms were to take hold ob you, Mimi, from behind?"

"I no do nothin' at all," Miami answered briefly.

"Talk not so much ob de jumbies, Chile, as de chickens go to roost!" Mrs. Mouth admonished.

"Or, if de debil himself should?" Edna insisted, allowing Snowball, the cat, to climb on to her knee.

"Nothin', sh'o," Miami murmured, regarding dreamily the sun's sinking disk, that was illuminating all the Western sky with incarnadine and flamingo-rose. Ominous in the falling dusk, the savannah rolled away, its radiant hues effaced beneath a rapid tide of deepening shadow.

"Start de gramophone gwine, girls, an' gib us somet'in' bright!" Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, depressed by the forlorn note of the Twa-oo-Twa-oo bird, that mingled its lament with a thousand night cries from the grass.

"When de saucy female sing 'My Ice Cream Girl,' fo' sh'o she scare de elves."

And as though by force of magic the nasal soprano of an invisible songstress rattled forth with tinkling gusto a music-hall air with a sparkling refrain.

"And the boys shout Girlie, hi!

Bring me soda, soda, soda,

(Aside, spoken) (Stop your fooling there and let me alone!)

For I'm an Ice Cream Soda Girl."

THE WORKS OF RONALD FIRBANK

"It put me in mind ob de last sugar-factory explosion. It was de same day dat Snowball crack de Tezzrazine record. Drat de cat!"

"O Lordey Lord! Wha' for you make dat din?" Mr. Mouth complained, knotting a cotton handkerchief over his head.

"I hope you not gwine to be billeous, honey, afore we get to Lucia?"

"Lemme alone. Ah'm thinkin'."

Pressing on by the light of a large clear moon, the hamlet of Lucia, the halting-place proposed for the night, lay still far ahead.

Stars, like many Indian pinks, flecked with pale brightness the sky above; towards the horizon shone the Southern Cross, while the Pole Star, through the palm-fronds, came and went.

*"And the men cry Girlie, hi!
Bring me—"*

"Silence, dah! Ah'm thinkin'. . . ."

VI

CUNA, full of charming roses, full of violet shadows, full of music, full of Love, Cuna . . .!

Leaning from a balcony of the Grand Savannah hotel, their instincts all aroused, Miami and Edna gazed out across the Alemeda, a place all foliage, lamplight, and flowers. It was the hour when Society, in slowly parading carriages, would congregate to take the air beneath the pale mimosas that adorned the favourite promenade. All but recumbent, as though agreeably fatigued by their recent emotions (what wild follies were not committed in shuttered-villas during the throbbing hours of noon?), the Cunans, in their elegant equipages, made, for anyone fresh from the provinces, an interesting and absorbing sight. The liquid-eyed loveliness of the women, and the handsomeness of the men, with their black moustaches and their treacherous smiles—these, indeed, were things to gaze on.

"Oh ki!" Miami laughed delightedly, indicating a foppish, pretty youth, holding in a restive little horse dancing away with him.

Rubbing herself repeatedly, as yet embarrassed by the novelty of her clothes, Edna could only gasp.

" . . .," she jabbered, pointing at some flaunting belles in great evening hats and falling hair.

"All dat fine," Miami murmured, staring in wonderment around.

Dominating the city soared the Opera House, uplifting a big, naked man, all gilt, who was being bitten, or mauled, so it seemed, by a pack of wild animals carved of stone; while near by were the University,

and the Cathedral with its low white dome crowned by moss-green tiles.

Making towards it, encouraged by the Vesper bell, some young girls, in muslin masks, followed by a retinue of bustling nuns, were running the gauntlet of the profligates that clustered on the curb.

"Oh, Jesus honey!" Edna cooed, scratching herself in an ecstasy of delight.

"Fo' shame, Chile, to act so unladylike; if any gen'leman look up he t'ink you make a wicked sign," Mrs. Mouth cautioned, stepping out upon the balcony from the sitting-room behind.

Inhaling a bottle of sal volatile, to dispel *de megrims*, she was looking dignified in a *décolleté* of smoke-blue tulle.

"Nebba do *dat* in S'ciety," she added, placing a protecting arm around each of her girls.

Seduced, not less than they, by the animation of the town, the fatigue of the journey seemed to her amply rewarded. It was amusing to watch the crowd before the Ciné Lara, across the way, where many were flocking attracted by the hectic posters of "A Wife's Revenge."

"I keep t'inking I see Nini Snagg," Mrs. Mouth observed, regarding a negress in emerald-tinted silk, seated on a public bench beneath the glittering greenery.

"Cunan folk dat fine," Edna twittered, turning about at her Father's voice:

"W'en de day ob toil is done,
W'en de race ob life is run,
Heaven send thy weary one
Rest for evermore!"

"Prancing Nigger! Is it worth while to wear dose grimaces?"

"Sh'o, dis no good place to be."

PRANCING NIGGER

"Why, what dair wrong wid it?"

"Ah set out to look fo' de Meetin'-House, but no sooner am Ah in de street dan a female wid her har droopin' loose down ober her back an' into her eyes, she tell me to Come along."

"Some of dose bold women, dey ought to be shot through dair bottoms!" Mrs. Mouth indignantly said.

"But I nebba answer nothin'."

"May our daughters respect dair virtue same as you!" Mrs. Mouth returned, focusing wistfully the vast flowery parterre of the Café McDhu'l.

Little city of cocktails, Cuna! The surpassing excellence of thy Barmen, who shall sing?

"See how dey spell 'Biar,' Mammee," Miami tittered: "dey forget de *i*!"

"Sh'o, Chile, an' so dey do. . . ."

"Honey Jesus!" Edna broadly grinned: "imagine de ignorance ob dat."

VII

Now, beyond the Alemeda, in the modish faubourg of Farananka, there lived a lady of both influence and wealth—the widow of the Inventor of Sunflower Piquant. The *veto* of Madame Ruiz, arbitress absolute of Cunan society, and owner, moreover, of a considerable portion of the town, had caused the suicide indeed of more than one social climber. Unhappy, nostalgic, disdainful, selfish, ever about to abandon Cuna-Cuna to return to it no more, yet never budging, adoring her fairy villa far too well, Madame Ruiz, while craving for the International-world, consoled herself by watching from afar European Society going speedily to the dogs. Art-loving, and considerably musical (many a dizzy venture at the Opera-house had owed its audition to her), she had, despite the self-centredness of her nature, done not a little to render more brilliant the charming city it amused her with such vehemence to abuse.

One softly gloomy morning, preceding Madame Ruiz's first *cotillon* of the Season, the lodge-keeper of the Villa Alba, a negress, like some great, violet bug, was surprised, while tending the brightly hanging grape-fruit in the drive, by an imperative knocking on the gate. At such a matutinal hour only trashy errand-boys shouldering baskets might be expected to call, and giving the summons no heed the mulatress continued her work.

The Villa Alba, half buried in spreading awnings, and surrounded by many noble trees, stood but a short distance off the main road, its pleasaunces enclosed by flower-enshrouded walls, all a-zig-zag, like the

folds of a screen. Beloved of lizards and velvet-backed humming-birds, the shaded gardens led on one side to the sea.

"To make such a noise at dis hour," the negress murmured, going grumblingly at length to the gate, disclosing, upon opening, a gentleman in middle life, with a tooth-brush moustache and a sapphire ring.

"De mist'ess still in bed, sah."

"In bed?"

"She out bery late, sah, but you find Miss Edwards up."

With a nod of thanks the visitor directed his footsteps discreetly towards the house.

Although not, precisely, *in* her bed when the caller, shortly afterwards, was announced, Madame Ruiz was nevertheless as yet in dishabille.

"Tiresome man, what does he want to see me about?" she exclaimed, gathering around her a brocaded wrap formed of a priestly cope.

"He referred to a lease, ma'am," the maid replied.

"A lease!" Madame Ruiz raised eyes dark with spleen.

The visit of her agent, or man of affairs, was apt to ruffle her composure for the day. "Tell him to leave it and go," she commanded, selecting a nectarine from a basket of iced fruits beside her.

Removing reflectively the sensitive skin, her mind evoked, in ironic review, the chief salient events of society, scheduled to take place on the face of the map in the course of the day.

The marriage of the Count de Nozhel, in Touraine, to Mrs. Exelmans of Cincinnati, the divorce of poor Lady Luckcock in London (it seemed quite certain that one of the five co-respondents was the little carrot-haired Lord Dubelly again), the last "pomps," at Vienna, of Princess de Seeyohl *née* Mitchening-Meyong (Peace to her soul! She had led her life). . . .

The christening in Madrid of the girl-twins of the Queen of Spain. . . .

"At her time, I really *don't* understand it," Madame Ruiz murmured to herself aloud, glancing, as though for an explanation, about the room.

Through the flowing folds of the mosquito curtains of the bed, that swept a cool, flagged floor spread with skins, showed the oratory, with its waxen flowers, and pendent flickering lights, that burned, night and day, before a Leonardo saint with a treacherous smile. Beyond the little recess came a lacquer commode, bearing a masterly marble group, depicting a pair of amorous hermaphrodites amusing themselves; while above, suspended against the spacious wainscoting of the wall, a painting of a man, elegantly corseted, with a violet in his moustache, "Study of a Parisian," and its pendant, "Portrait of a Lady," signed Van Dongen, were the chief outstanding objects that the room contained.

"One would have thought that at forty she would have given up having babies," Madame Ruiz mused, choosing a glossy cherry from the basket at her side.

Through the open window a sound of distant music caught her ear.

"Ah! If only he were less weak," she sighed, her thoughts turning towards the player, who seemed to be enamoured of the opening movement (rapturously repeated) of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*.

The venetorial habits of Vittorio Ruiz had been from his earliest years the source of his mother's constant chagrin and despair. At the age of five he had assaulted his Nurse, and, steadily onward, his passions had grown and grown. . . .

"It's the fault of the wicked climate," Madame Ruiz reflected, as her companion, Miss Edwards, came in with the post.

"Thanks, Eurydice," she murmured, smilingly exchanging a butterfly kiss.

FRANCING NIGGER

"It's going to be oh so hot to-day! "

"Is it, dear? "

"Intense," Miss Edwards predicted, fluttering a gay-daubed paper fan.

Sprite-like, with a little strained ghost-face beneath a silver shock of hair, it seemed as if her long blue eyes had absorbed the Cunan sea.

"Do you remember the giant with the beard?" she asked, "at the Presidency fête? "

"Do I? "

"And we wondered who he could be! "

"Well? "

"He's the painter of Women's Backs, my dear! "

"The painter of women's *what?* "

"An artist."

"Oh."

"I wanted to know if you'd advise me to sit."

"Your back is charming, dear, *c'est un dos d'élite.*"

"I doubt, though, it's classic," Miss Edwards murmured, pirouetting slowly before the glass.

But Madame Ruiz was perusing her correspondence and seemed to be absorbed.

"They're to be married, in Munich, on the fifth," she chirruped.

"Who? "

"Elsie and Baron Sitmar."

"Ah, Ta-ra, dear! In those far worlds . . ." Miss Edwards impatiently exclaimed, opening wide a window and leaning out.

Beneath the flame-trees, with their spreading tops a mass of crimson flower, coolly white-garbed gardeners, with naked feet and big bell-shaped hats of straw, were sweeping slowly, as in some rhythmic dance, the flamboyant blossoms that had fallen to the ground.

"Wasn't little Madame Haase, dear, born Kattie von Guggenheim? "

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"I really don't know," Miss Edwards returned, flapping away a fly with her fan.

"This villainous climate! My memory's going. . . ."

"I wish I cared for Cuna less, that's all!" Miss Edwards said, her glance following a humming-bird, poised in air, above the sparkling turquoise of a fountain.

"Captain Moonlight . . . duty . . . (tedious word) . . . can't come!"

"Oh?"

"Such a dull post," Madame Ruiz murmured, pausing to listen to the persuasive tenor voice of her son.

"Little mauve nigger boy,
I t'ink you break my heart!"

"My poor Vitti! Bless him."

"He was out last night with some Chinese she."

"I understood him to be going to *Pelléas and Mélisande*."

"He came to the Opera-house, but only for a minute."

"Dios!"

"And, oh, dearest." Miss Edwards dropped her cheek to her hand.

"Was Hatso as ever delicious?" Madame Ruiz asked, changing the topic as her woman returned, followed by a pomeranian of parts, "Snob"; a dog beautiful as a child.

"We had Gebhardt instead."

"In *Mélisande* she's so huge," Madame Ruiz commented, eyeing severely the legal-looking packet which her maid had brought her.

"Business, Camilla; *how* I pity you!"

Madame Ruiz sighed.

"It seems," she said, "that for the next nine-and-ninety-years I have let a Villa to a Mr. and Mrs. Ahmadou Mouth."

VIII

FLOOR of copper, floor of gold. . . . Beyond the custom-house door, ajar, the street at sunrise seemed aflame.

"Have you nothing, young man, to declare?"

" . . . Butterflies!"

"Exempt of duty. Pass."

Floor of silver, floor of pearl. . . .

Trailing a muslin net, and laughing for happiness, Charlie Mouth marched into the town.

Oh, Cuna-Cuna! Little city of Lies and Peril! How many careless young nigger boys have gone thus to seal their Doom!

Although the Sun-god was scarcely risen, already the radiant street teemed with life.

Veiled dames, flirting fans, bent on church or market, were issuing everywhere from their doors, and the air was vibrant with the sweet voice of bells.

To rejoin his parents promptly at their hotel was a promise he was tempted to forget.

Along streets all fresh and blue in the shade of falling awnings, it was fine, indeed, to loiter. Beneath the portico of a church a running fountain drew his steps aside. Too shy to strip and squat in the basin, he was glad to bathe freely his head, feet and chest: then, stirred by curiosity to throw a glance at the building, he lifted the long yellow nets that veiled the door.

It was the fashionable church of La Favavoa, and the extemporary address of the Archbishop of Cuna was in full and impassioned swing.

"Imagine the world, my friends, had Christ been born a girl!" he was saying in tones of tender dismay as Charlie entered.

Subsiding bashfully to a bench, Charlie gazed around.

So many sparkling fans. One, a delicate light mauve one: "Shucks! If only you wa' butterflies!" he breathed, contemplating with avidity the nonchalant throng; then perceiving a richer specimen splashed with silver of the same amative tint: "Oh you lil beauty!" And, clutching his itching net to his heart, he regretfully withdrew.

Sauntering leisurely through the cool, mimosa-shaded streets, he approached, as he guessed, the Presidency. A score of shoeblacks lolled at cards or gossip before its gilded pales. Amazed at their audacity (for the President had threatened more than once to "wring the Public's neck"), Charlie hastened by. Public gardens, brilliant with sarracenias, lay just beyond the palace, where a music-pavilion, surrounded by palms and rocking-chairs, appeared a favourite, and much-frequented, resort; from here he observed the Cunan bay strewn with sloops and white-sailed yachts asleep upon the tide. Strolling on, he found himself in the busy vicinity of the Market. Although larger and more varied, it resembled in other respects the village one at home.

"Say, honey, say"—crouching in the dust before a little pyre of mangoes, a lean-armed woman besought him to buy.

Pursued by a confusion of voices, he threaded his way deftly down an alley dressed with booths. Pomegranates, some open with their crimson seeds displayed, banana-combs, and big, veined water-melons, lay heaped on every side.

"I could do wid a slice ob watter-million," he reflected: "but to lick an ice-cream dat tempt me more!" Nor would the noble fruit of the baobab, the paw-paw, or the pine turn him from his fancy.

But no ice-cream stand met his eye, and presently

PRANCING NIGGER

he resigned himself to sit down upon his heels, in the shade of a potter's stall, and consider the passing crowd.

Missionaries with freckled hands and hairy, care-worn faces, followed by pale girls wielding tambourines of the Army of the Soul, foppish nigger bucks in panamas and palm-beach suits so cocky, Chinamen with osier baskets, their nostalgic eyes asworn, heavily straw-hatted nuns trailing their dust-coloured rags, and suddenly, oh, could it be?—but there was no mistaking that golden waddle: "Mamma!"

Mamma, Mammee, Mrs. Ahmadou Mouth. All in white, with snow-white shoes and hose so fine, he hardly dare.

"Mammee, Mammee, oh, Mammee. . . ."

"Sonny mine! My lil boy!"

"Mammee."

"Just to say!"

And, oh, honies! Close behind, behold Miami, and Edna too: the Miss Lips, the fair Lips, the smiling Lips. How spry each looked. The elder (grown a trifle thinner), sweet *à ravir* in tomato-red, while her sister, plump as a corn-fattened partridge, and very perceptibly powdered, seemed like the flower of the prairie sugar-cane when it breaks into bloom.

"We've been to a Music-hall, an' a pahty, an' Snowball has dropped black kittens." Forestalling Miami, Edna rapped it out.

"Oh shucks!"

"An' since we go into S'ciety, we keep a boy in buttons!"

Mrs. Mouth turned about.

"Where is dat idjit coon?"

"He stay behind to bargain for de pee-wee birds, Mammee, fo' to make de taht."

"De swindling tortoise."

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"An' dair are no vacancies at de University: not fo' any ob us!" Edna further retailed, going off into a spasm of giggles.

She was swinging a wicker basket, from which there dangled the silver forked tail of a fish.

"Fo' goodness' sake gib dat sea-porcupine to Ibum, Chile," Mrs. Mouth commanded, as a perspiring niggerling in livery presented himself.

"Ibum, his arms are full already."

"Just come along all to de Villa now! It dat mignon an' all so nice. An' after de collation," Mrs. Mouth (shocked on the servants' account at her son's nude neck) raised her voice, "we go to de habadasher in Palmbranch Avenue an' I buy you an Eton colleh!"

I X

"PRANCING NIGGER, I t'ink it bery strange dat Madame Ruiz she nebba call."

"Sh'o."

"In August-Town, S'ciety less stuck-up dan heah!"

Ensconced in rocking-chairs, in the shade of the ample porch of the Villa Vista Hermosa, Mr. and Mrs. Mouth had been holding a desultory *tête-à-tête*.

It was a Sabbath evening, and a sound of reedy pipes and bafalons, from a neighbouring café, filled with a feverish sadness the brilliantly lamp-lit street.

"De airs ob de neighbehs, dat dair affair; what matter mo' am de chillen's schoolin'."

"Prancing Nigger, I hope your Son an' Daughters will yet take dair Degrees, an' if not from de University, den from Home. From heah."

"Hey-ho-day, an' dat would be a miracle!" Mr. Mouth mirthlessly laughed.

"Dose chillens hab learnt quite a lot already."

"'Bout de shops an' cinemas!"

Mrs. Mouth disdained a reply.

She had taken the girls to the gallery at the Opera one night to hear "Louise," but they had come out, by tacit agreement, in the middle of it: the plainness of Louise's blouse, and the lack of tunes . . . the suffocation of the gallery . . . Once bit twice shy, they had not gone back again.

"All your fambly need, Prancing Nigger, is social opportunity! But what is de good ob de Babtist parson?"

Mr. Mouth sketched a gesture.

"Sh'o, Edna, she some young yet. . . . But Miami

dat *distinguée*; an', doh I her mother, b'lieb me dat is one ob de choicest girls I see; an' dat's de trute."

"It queer," Mr. Mouth abstrusely murmured, "how many skeeter-bugs dair are 'bout dis ebenin'!"

"De begonias in de window-boxes most lik'ly draw dem. But as I was saying, Prancing Nigger, I t'ink it bery strange dat Madame Ruiz nebba call."

"P'r'aps she out ob town."

"Accordin' to de paper, she bin habing her back painted, but what dat fo' I dunno."

"Ah shouldn't wonder ef she hab some trouble ob a dorsal kind; same as me gramma mumma long ago."

"Dair'd be no harm in sendin' one ob de chillens to enquire. Wha' you t'ink, sah?" Mrs. Mouth demanded, plucking from off the porch a pale hanging flower with a languorous scent.

Mr. Mouth glanced apprehensively skyward.

The mutters of thunder and intermittent lightning of the finest nights.

"It's a misfortnit we eber left Mediavilla," he exclaimed uneasily, as a falling star, known as a thief star, sped swiftly down the sky.

"Prancing Nigger," Mrs. Mouth rose, remarking, "befo' you start to grummle, I leab you alone to your Jeremiads!"

"A misfortnit sho' nuff," he mused, and regret for the savannah country and the tall palm-trees of his village oppressed his heart. Moreover, his means (derived from the cultivation of the *Musa paradisiaca*, or Banana) seemed likely to prove ere long inadequate to support the whims of his wife, who after a lifetime of contented nudity appeared to be now almost insatiable for dress.

A discordant noise from above interrupted the trend of his thoughts.

"Sh'o, she plays wid it like a toy," he sighed, as the sound occurred again.

PRANCING NIGGER

"Prancing Nigger, de water-supply cut off!"

"It's de Lord's will."

"Dair's not a drop, my lub, in de privy."

"'Cos it always in use!"

"I b'lieb dat lil half-caste Ibum, 'cos I threaten to gib him notice, do somet'in' out ob malice to de chain."

"Whom de Lord loveth He chasteneth!" Mr. Mouth observed, "an' dose bery words (ef you look) you will find in de twelfth chapter an' de sixth berse ob de Book ob Hebrews."

"Prancing Nigger, you datways selfish! Always t'inkin' ob your soul, instead ob your obligations towards de fambly."

"Why, wha' mo' can I do dan I've done?"

Mrs. Mouth faintly shrugged.

"I had hoped," she said, "dat Nini would hab bin ob use to de girls, but dat seem now impossible!" For Mrs. Snagg had been traced to a house of ill-fame, where, it appeared, she was an exponent of the Hodeidah—a lascive Cunan dance.

"Understand dat any sort ob intimacy 'tween de Villa an' de *Closerie des Lilas* Ah must flatly forbid."

"Prancing Nigger, as ef I should take your innocent chillens to call on po' Nini; not dat eberyting about her at de *Closerie* is not elegant an' nice. Sh'o, some ob de inmates ob dat establishment possess mo' diamonds dan dair betters do outside! You'd be surprised ef you could see what two ob de girls dair, Dinah an' Lew. . . ."

"Enuf!"

"It isn't always Virtue, Prancing Nigger, dat come off best!" And Mrs. Mouth might have offered further observations on the matter of ethics had not her husband left her.

X

PAST the Presidency and the public park, the Theatres Maxine Bush, Eden-Garden and Apollo, along the Avenida and the Jazz Halls by the wharf, past little suburban shops, and old, deserted churchyards where bloom geraniums, through streets of squalid houses, and onward skirting pleasure lawns and orchards, bibbitty-bobbitty, beneath the sovereign brightness of the sky, crawled the Farananka tram.

Surveying the landscape listlessly through the sticks of her fan, Miss Edna Mouth grew slightly bored—alas, poor child; couldst thou have guessed the blazing brightness of thy Star, thou wouldst doubtless have been more alert!

“Sh’o, it dat far an’ tejus,” she observed to the conductor, lifting upon him the sharp-soft eyes of a paroquet.

She was looking bewitching in a frock of silverish *mousseline* and a violet tallyho cap, and dangled upon her knees an intoxicating sheaf of the blossoms known as Marvel of Peru.

“Hab patience, lil Missey, an’ we soon be dah.”

.

“He tells me, dear child, he tells me,” Madame Ruiz was rounding a garden path, upon the arm of her son, “he tells me, Vitti, that the systole and diastole of my heart’s muscles are slightly inflamed; and that I ought, darling, to be *very* careful. . . .”

Followed by a handsome borzoi and the pomeranian “Snob,” the pair were taking their usual post-prandial exercise beneath the trees.

“Let me come, Mother, dear,” he murmured with-

out interrupting, "over the other side of you; I always like to be on the right side of my profile!"

"And, really, since the affair of Madame de Bazvalon, my health has hardly been what it was."

"That foolish little woman," he uncomfortably laughed.

"He tells me my nerves need rest," she declared, looking pathetically up at him.

He had the nose of an actress, and ink-black hair streaked with gold, his eyes seemed to be covered with the freshest of fresh dark pollen, while nothing could exceed the vivid pallor of his cheeks or the bright sanguine of his mouth.

"You go out so much, Mother."

"Not so much!"

"So very much."

"And he forbids me my opera-box for the rest of the week! So last night I sat at home, dear child, reading the Life of Lazarillo de Tormes."

"I don't give a damn," he said, "for any of your doctors."

"So vexing, though; and apparently Lady Bird has been at death's door, and poor Peggy Povey too. It seems she got wet on the way to the Races; and really I was *sorry* for her when I saw her in the paddock; for the oats and the corn, and the wheat and the tares, and the barley and the rye, and all the rest of the reeds and grasses in her pretty Lancet hat, looked like nothing so much as manure."

"I adore to folly her schoolboy's moustache!"

"My dear, Age is the one disaster," Madame Ruiz remarked, raising the rosy dome of her sunshade a degree higher above her head.

They were pacing a walk radiant with trees and flowers as some magician's garden, that commanded a sweeping prospect of long, livid sands, against a white green sea.

"There would seem to be several new yachts, darling," Madame Ruiz observed.

"The Duke of Wellclose with his duchess (on their wedding-tour) arrived with the tide."

"Poor man; I'm told that he only drove to the church after thirty brandies!"

"And the *Sea-Thistle*, with Lady Violet Valesbridge, and, *oh*, such a crowd."

"She used to be known as 'The Cat of Curzon Street,' but I hear she is still quite incredibly pretty," Madame Ruiz murmured, turning to admire a somnolent peacock, with moping fan, poised upon the curved still arm of a marble mænad.

"How sweet something smells."

"It's the China lilies."

"I believe it's my handkerchief . . ." he said.

"Vain wicked boy; ah, if you would but decide, and marry some nice, intelligent girl."

"I'm too young yet."

"You're *twenty-six*!"

"And past the age of folly-o," he made airy answer, drawing from his breast-pocket a flat, jewel-encrusted case, and lighting a cigarette.

"Think of the many men, darling, of twenty-six . . ." Madame Ruiz broke off, focusing the fruit-bearing summit of a slender areca palm.

"Foll-foll-folly-o!" he laughed.

"I think I'm going in."

"Oh, why?"

"Because," Madame Ruiz repressed a yawn, "because, dear, I feel armchairish."

With a kiss of the finger-tips (decidedly distinguished hands had Vittorio Ruiz), he turned away.

Joying frankly in excess, the fiery noontide hour had a special charm for him.

It was the hour, to be sure, of "the Faun!"

"Aho, Ahi, Aha!" he carolled, descending half

trippingly a few white winding stairs that brought him upon a fountain. Palms, with their floating fronds radiating light, stood all around.

It was here "the creative mood" would sometimes take him, for he possessed no small measure of talent of his own.

His *Three Hodeidabs*, and *Five Phallic Dances for Pianoforte and Orchestra*, otherwise known as "Suite in Green," had taken the whole concert world by storm, and, now, growing more audacious, he was engaged upon an opera to be known, by and by, as *Sumaia*.

"Ah Atthis, it was Sappho who told me—" tentatively he sought an air.

A touch of banter there.

"Ah Atthis—" One must make the girl feel that her little secret is out . . .; quiz her; but let her know, and pretty plainly, that the Poetess had been talking. . . .

"Ah Atthis—"

But somehow or other the lyric mood to-day was obdurate and not to be persuaded.

"I blame the oysters! After oysters—" he murmured, turning about to ascertain what was exciting the dogs.

She was coming up the drive with her face to the sun, her body shielded behind a spreading bouquet of circumstance.

"It's all right; they'll not hurt you."

"Sh'o, I not afraid!"

"Tell me who it is you wish to see."

"Mammee send me wid dese flowehs. . . ."

"Oh! But how scrumptious."

"It strange how dey call de bees; honey-bees, sweat-bees, bumble-bees an' all!" she murmured, shaking the blossoms into the air.

"That's only natural," he returned, his hand falling lightly to her arm.

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"Madame Ruiz is in?"

"She is: but she is resting; and something tells me," he suavely added, indicating a grassy bank, "you might care to repose yourself too."

And indeed after such a long and rambling course she was glad to accept.

"De groung's as soft as a cushom," she purred, sinking with nonchalance to the grass.

"You'd find it," he said, "even softer, if you'll try it nearer me."

"Dis a mighty pretty place!"

"And you—" but he checked his tongue.

"Fo' a villa so grand, dair must be mo' dan one privy?"

"Some six or seven!"

"Ours is broke."

"You should get it mended."

"De aggervatiness'!" she wriggled.

"Tell me about them."

And so, not without digressions, she unfolded her life.

"Then you, Charlie, and Mimi are here, dear, to study?"

"As soon as de University is able to receive us; but dair's a waiting list already dat long."

"And what do you do with all your spare time?"

"Goin' round de shops takes up some ob it. An' den, ob course, dair's de Cinés. Oh, I love de Lara. We went last night to see *Souls in Hell*."

"I've not been."

"Oh it was choice."

"Was it? Why?"

"De scene ob dat story," she told him, "happen foreign; 'way crost de big watter, on de odder side ob de world . . . an' de principal gal, she merried to a man who neglect her (ebery ebenin' he go to pahtys an' biars), while all de time his wife she sit at home wid her lil pickney at her breas'. But dair anodder

gemplum (a friend ob de fambly) an' he afiah to woe her; but she only shake de head, slowly, from side to side, an' send dat man away. Den de hubsom lose his fortune, an', oh, she dat 'stracted, she dat crazed . . . at last she take to gamblin', but dat only make t'ings worse. Den de friend ob de fambly come back, an' offer to pay all de expenses ef only she unbend: so she cry, an' she cry, 'cos it grieb her to leab her pickney to de neglect ob de serbants (dair was three ob dem, an old buckler, a boy, an' a cook), but, in de end, she do, an' frtt! away she go in de fambly carriage. An' den, bimeby, you see dem in de bedroom doin' a bit ob funning."

"What?"

"Oh ki; it put me in de gigglemints. . . ."

"Exquisite kid."

"Sh'o, de coffee-concerts an' de pictchures, I don't nebba tiah ob dem."

"Bad baby."

"I turned thirteen."

"You are?"

"By de Law ob de Island, I a spinster ob age!"

"I might have guessed it was the Bar! These Law-students," he murmured, addressing the birds.

"Sh'o, it's de trute," she pouted, with a languishing glance through the sticks of her fan.

"I don't doubt it," he answered, taking lightly her hand.

"Mercy," she marvelled: "is dat a watch dah, on your arm?"

"Dark, bright baby!"

"Oh, an' de lil 'V.R.' all in precious stones so blue." Her frail fingers caressed his wrist.

"Exquisite kid." She was in his arms.

"Vitti, Vitti!" It was the voice of Eurydice Edwards. Her face was strained and quivering. She seemed about to faint.

X I

EVER so lovely are the young men of Cuna-Cuna—Juarez, Jotifa, Enid—(these, from many, to distinguish but a few)—but none so delicate, charming, and squeamish as Charlie Mouth.

“Attractive little Rose . . .” “What a devil of a dream . . .” the avid belles would exclaim when he walked abroad, while impassioned widows would whisper “Peach!”

One evening, towards sundown, just as the city lifts its awnings, and the deserted streets start seething with delight, he left his home to enjoy the grateful air. It had been a day of singular oppressiveness, and, not expecting overmuch of the vesperal breezes, he had borrowed his mother’s small Pompadour fan.

Ah, little did that nigger boy know as he strolled along what novel emotions that promenade held in store!

Disrelishing the dust of the Avenida, he directed his steps towards the Park.

He had formed already an acquaintanceship with several young men, members, it seemed, of the University, and these he would sometimes join, about this hour, beneath the Calabash-trees in the Marcella Gardens.

There was Abe, a lad of fifteen, whose father ran a Jazz Hall on the harbour-beach, and Ramon, who was destined to enter the Church, and the intriguing Esmé, whose dream was the Stage, and who was supposed to be “in touch” with Miss Maxine Bush, and there was Pedro, Pedro ardent and obese, who seemed to imagine that to be a dress-designer to

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foreign Princesses would yield his several talents a thrice-blessed harvest.

Brooding on these and other matters, Charlie found himself in Liberty Square.

Here, the Cunan Poet, Samba Marcella's effigy arose—that "sable singer of Revolt."

Aloft, on a pedestal, soared the Poet, laurel-crowned, thick-lipped, woolly, a large weeping Genius, with a bold taste for draperies, hovering just beneath; her one eye closed, the other open, giving her an air of winking confidentially at the passers-by.

"Up, Cunans, up! To arms, to arms!" he quoted, lingering to watch the playful swallows wheeling among the tubs of rose-oleanders that stood around.

And a thirst, less for bloodshed than for a sherbet, seized him.

It was a square noted for the frequency of its bars, and many of their names, in flickering lights, showed palely forth already.

Cuna! City of Moonstones; how faerie art thou in the blue blur of dusk!

Costa Rica. Chile Bar. To the Island of June. . . .

Red roses against tall mirrors, reflecting the falling night.

Seated before a cloudy cocktail, a girl with gold cheeks like the flesh of peaches addressed him softly from behind: "Listen, lion!"

But he merely smiled on himself in the polished mirrors, displaying moist-gleaming teeth and coral gums.

A fragrance of aromatic cloves . . . a mystic murmur of ice. . . .

A little dazed after a Ron Bacardi, he moved away. "Shine, sah?" The inveigling squeak of a shoeblack followed him.

Sauntering by the dusty benches along the pavement-side, where white-robed negresses sat communing in

twos and threes, he attained the Avenue Messalina with its spreading palms, whose fronds hung nerveless in the windless air.

Tinkling mandolins from restaurant gardens, light laughter, and shifting lights.

Passing before the Café de Cuna, and a people's "Dancing," he roamed leisurely along. Incipient Cyprians, led by vigilant, blanched-faced queens, youths of a certain life, known as bwam-wam bwam-wams, gaunt pariah dogs with queſting eyes, all equally were on the prowl. Beneath the Pharaohic pilasters of the Theatre Maxine Bush a street crowd had formed before a notice described "Important," which informed the Public that, owing to a "temporary hoarseness," the rôle of Miss Maxine Bush would be taken, on that occasion, by Miss Pauline Collier.

The Marcella Gardens lay towards the end of the Avenue, in the animated vicinity of the Opera. Pursuing the glittering thoroughfare, it was interesting to observe the pleasure announcements of the various theatres, picked out in signs of fire: *Aïda: The Jewels of the Madonna: Clara Novotny and Lily Lima's Season.*

Vending bags of roasted peanuts, or sapodillas and avocado pears, insistent small boys were importuning the throng.

"Go away; I can't be bodder," Charlie was saying, when he seemed to slip; it was as though the pavement were a carpet snatched from under him, and, looking round, he was surprised to see, in a confectioner's window, a couple of marble-topped tables start merrily waltzing together.

Driven onward by those behind, he began stumblingly to run towards the Park. It was the general goal. Footing it a little ahead, two loose women and a gay young man (pursued by a waiter with a napkin and a bill), together with the horrified, half-crazed crowd; all, helter-skelter, were intent upon the Park.

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Above the Calabash-trees, bronze, demoniac, the moon gleamed sourly from a starless sky, and although not a breath of air was stirring, the crests of the loftiest palms were set arustling by the vibration at their roots.

"Oh, will nobody *stop* it?" a terror-struck lady implored.

Feeling quite white and clasping a fetish, Charlie sank all panting to the ground.

Safe from falling chimney-pots and sign-boards (that for "Pure Vaseline," for instance, had all but caught him), he had much to be thankful for.

"Sh'o nuff, dat was a close shave," he gasped, gazing dazed about him.

Clustered back to back near by upon the grass, three stolid matrons, matrons of hoary England, evidently not without previous earthquake experience, were ignoring resolutely the repeated shocks.

"I always follow the Fashions, dear, at a distance!" one was saying: "this little gingham gown I'm wearing I had made for me after a design I found in a newspaper at my hotel."

"It must have been a pretty old one, dear—I mean the paper, of course."

"New things are only those you know that have been forgotten."

"Mary . . . there's a sharp pin, sweet, at the back of your . . . *Oh!*"

Venturing upon his legs, Charlie turned away.

By the Park palings a few "Salvationists" were holding forth, while, in the sweep before the bandstand, the artists from the Opera, in their costumes of Aïda, were causing almost a greater panic among the ignorant than the earthquake itself. A crowd, promiscuous rather than representative, composed variously of chauffeurs (making a wretched pretence, poor chaps, of seeking out their masters), Cyprians, patricians (these in opera cloaks and sparkling

diamonds), tourists, for whom the Hodeidah girls would *not* dance that night, and bwam-wam bwam-wams, whose equivocal behaviour, indeed, was perhaps more shocking even than the shocks, set the pent Park ahum. Yet, notwithstanding the upheavals of Nature, certain persons there were bravely making new plans.

"How I wish I could, dear! But I shall be having a houseful of women over Sunday—that's to say."

"Then come the week after."

"Thanks, then, I *will*."

Hoping to meet with Abe, Charlie took a pathway flanked with rows of tangled roses, whose leaves shook down at every step.

And it occurred to him with alarming force that perhaps he was an orphan.

Papee, Mammee, Mimi and lil Edna—the villa drawing-room on the floor. . . .

His heart stopped still.

"An' dey in de spirrit world—in heaven hereafter!" He glanced with awe at the moon's dark disk.

"All in dair cotton shrouds. . . ."

What if he should die and go to the Bad Place below?

"I mizzable sinneh, Lord. You heah, Sah? You heah me say dat? Oh, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," and weeping, he threw himself down among a bed of flowers.

When he raised his face it was towards a sky all primrose and silver pink. Sunk deep in his dew-laved bower, it was sweet to behold the light. Above him great spikes of blossom were stirring in the idle wind, while birds were chaunting voluntaries among the palms. And in thanksgiving, too, arose the matin bells. From Our Lady of the Pillar, from the church of La Favavoa in the West, from Saint Sebastian, from Our Lady of the Sea, from Our Lady of Mount Carmel, from Santa Theresa, from Saint Francis of the Poor.

XII

BUT although by the grace of Providence the city of Cuna-Cuna had been spared, other parts of the island had sustained irremediable loss. In the Province of Casuby, beyond the May Day Mountains, many a fair banana or sugar estate had been pitifully wrecked, yet what caused perhaps the widest regret among the Cunan public was the destruction of the famous convent of Sasabonsam. One of the beauties of the island, one of the gems of tropic architecture, celebrated, made immortal (in *The Picnic*) by the Poet Marcella, had disappeared. A Relief Fund for those afflicted had at once been started, and, as if this were not enough, the doors of the Villa Alba were about to be thrown open for "An Evening of Song and Gala" in the causes of charity.

"Prancing Nigger, dis an event to take exvantage ob; dis not a lil t'ing, love, to be sneezed at at all," Mrs. Mouth eagerly said upon hearing the news, and she had gone about ever since, reciting the names in the list of Patronesses, including that of the Cunan Archbishop.

It was the auspicious evening.

In their commodious, jointly shared bedroom, the Miss Lips, the fair Lips, the smiling Lips were maiding one another in what they both considered to be the "Parisian way"; a way, it appeared, that involved much nudging, arch laughter, and, even, some prodding.

"In love? Up to my ankles! Oh, yes." Edna blithely chuckled.

"Up to your topknot!" her sister returned, making as if to pull it.

But with the butt end of the curling-tongs Edna waved her away.

Since her visit to the Villa Alba "me, an' Misteh Ruiz" was all her talk, and to be his reigning mistress the summit of her dreams.

"Come on, man, wid dose tongs; 'cos I want 'em myself," Miami murmured, pinning a knot of the sweet night jasmine deftly above her ear.

Its aroma evoked Bamboo.

Oh, why had he not joined her? Why did he delay? Had he forgotten their delight among the trees, the giant silk-cotton-trees, with the hammer-tree-frogs chanting in the dark: Rig-a-jig-jig, rig-a-jig-jig?

"Which you like de best, man, dis lil necklash or de odder?" Edna asked, essaying a strand of orchid-tinted beads about her throat.

"I'd wear dem both," her sister advised.

"I t'ink, on de whole, I wear de odder; de one he gib me de time he take exvantage ob my innocence."

"Since dose imitation pearls, honey,—he gib you anyt'ing else?"

"No; but he dat generous! He say he mean to make me a lil pickney gal darter: an', oh, won't dat be a day," Edna fluted, breaking off at the sound of her mother's voice in the corridor.

"... and tell de cabman to take de fly-bonnets off de horses," she was instructing Ibum as she entered the room.

She had a gown of the new mignonette satin, with "episcopal" sleeves lined with red.

"Come, girls, de cab is waiting; but perhaps you no savey dat."

They didn't; and, for some time, dire was the confusion.

In the Peacock drawing-room of the Villa Alba the stirring ballet music from *Isfahan* filled the vast room with its thrilling madness. Upon a raised estrade, a

corps of dancing boys, from Sankor, glided amid a murmur of applause.

The combination of charity and amusement had brought together a crowded and cosmopolitan assembly and, early though it was, it was evident already that with many more new advents there would be a shortage of chairs. From their yachts had come several distinguished birds of passage, exhaling an atmosphere of Paris and Park Lane.

Wielding a heavy bouquet of black feathers, Madame Ruiz, robed in a gown of malmaison cloth-of-silver, watched the dancers from an alcove by the door.

Their swaying torsos, and weaving gliding feet, fettered with chains of orchids and hung with bells, held a fascination for her.

"My dear, they beat the Hodeidahs! I'm sure I never saw anything like it," the Duchess of Wellclose remarked admiringly: "that little one, Fred," she murmured, turning towards the Duke.

A piece of praise a staid small body in a demure lace cap chanced to hear.

This was "the incomparable" Miss McAdam, the veteran ballet mistress of the Opera-house, and inventrix of the dance. Born in the frigid High Street of Aberdeen, "Alice," as she was universally known among enthusiastic patrons of the ballet, had come originally to the tropics as companion to a widowed clergyman, when, as she would relate (in her picturesque, native brogue), at the sight of *Nature* her soul had awoke. Self-expression had come with a rush; and, now that she was ballet mistress of the Cunan Opera, some of the daring *ensembles* of the Scottish spinster would embarrass even the good Cunans themselves.

"I've warned the lads," she whispered to Madame Ruiz, "to cut their final figure on account of the Archbishop. But young boys are so excitable, and I expect they'll forget!"

Gazing on their perfect backs, Madame Ruiz could not but mourn the fate of the Painter, who, like Dalou, had specialised almost exclusively on this aspect of the human form; for, alas, that admirable Artist had been claimed by the Quake; and although his portrait of Madame Ruiz remained unfinished . . . there was still a mole, nevertheless, in gratitude, and as a mark of respect she had sent her Rolls car to the Mass in honour of his obsequies, with the *crêpe* off an old black dinner-dress tied across the lamps.

"I see they're going to," Miss McAdam murmured, craning a little to focus the Archbishop, then descanting to two ladies with deep purple fans.

"Ah, well! It's what they do in *Isfahan*," Madame Ruiz commented, turning to greet her neighbour Lady Bird.

"Am I late for Gebhardt?" she asked, as if Life itself hinged upon the reply.

A quietly silly woman, Madame Ruiz was often obliged to lament the absence of intellect at her door: accounting for it as the consequence of a weakness for negroes, combined with a hopeless passion for the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford.

But the strident cries of the dancers and the increasing volume of the music discouraged all talk, though ladies with collection-boxes (biding their time) were beginning furtively to select their next quarry.

Countess Katty Taosay, *née* Soderini, a little woman and sure of the giants, could feel in her psychic veins which men were most likely to empty their pockets: English Consul . . . pale and interesting, he would not refuse to stoop and fumble, nor Follinsbe "Peter," the slender husband of a fashionable wife, nor Charlie Campfire, a young boy like an injured camel, heir to vast banana estates, the darling, and six foot high if an inch.

"Why do big men like little women?" she won-

dered, waving a fan powdered with blue *paillettes*: and she was still casting about for a reason when the hectic music stopped.

And now the room echoed briefly with applause, while admiration was divided between the super-excellence of the dancers and the living beauty of the rugs which their feet had trod—rare rugs from Bokhara-i-Shareef, and Kairouan-city-of-Prayer, lent by the mistress of the house.

Entering on the last hand-clap, Mr. and Mrs. Mouth, followed by their daughters, felt, each in their several ways, they might expect to enjoy themselves.

"Prancing Nigger, what a *furor*!" Mrs. Mouth exclaimed. "You b'lieb, I hope, now, dat our tickets was worth de money."

Plucking at the swallow-tails of an evening "West-End," Mr. Mouth was disinclined to re-open a threadbare topic.

"It queah how few neegah dair be," he observed, scanning the brilliant audience, many of whom, taking advantage of an interval, were flocking towards a buffet in an adjoining conservatory.

"Prancing Nigger, I feel I could do wid a glass ob champagne."

Passing across a corridor, it would have been interesting to have explored the spacious vistas that loomed beyond. "Dat must be one ob de priveys," Edna murmured, pointing to a distant door.

"Seben, Chile, did you say?"

"If not more!"

"She seem fond ob flowehs," Mr. Mouth commented, pausing to notice the various plants that lined the way: from the roof swung showery azure flowers that commingled with the theatrically-hued cañas, set out in crude, bold, colour-schemes below, that looked best at night. But in their malignant splendour the orchids were the thing. Mrs. Abanathy, Ronald

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Firbank (a dingy lilac blossom of rarity untold), Prince Palairret, a heavy blue-spotted flower, and rosy Olive Moonlight, were those that claimed the greatest respect from a few discerning connoisseurs.

"Prancing Nigger, you got a chalk mark on your 'West-End.' Come heah, sah, an' let me brush it."

Hopeful of glimpsing Vittorio, Miami and Edna sauntered on. With arms loosely entwined about each other's hips, they made, in their complete insouciance, a conspicuous couple.

"I'd give sumpin' to see de bedrooms, man, 'cos dair are chapels, an' barf-rooms, beside odder conveniences off dem," Edna related, returning a virulent glance from Miss Eurydice Edwards with a contemptuous, pitying smile.

Traversing a throng, sampling sorbets and ices, the sisters strolled out upon the lawn.

The big silver stars, how clear they shone—infinitudes, infinitudes.

"Adieu, hydrangeas, adieu, blue, burning South!"

The concert, it seemed, had begun.

"Come chillens, come!"

In the vast drawing-room, the first novelty of the evening—an aria from *Sumaia*—had stilled all chatter. Deep-sweet, poignant, the singer's voice was conjuring Sumaia's farewell to the Greek isle of Mitylene, bidding farewell to its gracious women, and to the trees of white or turquoise in the gardens of Lesbos.

"Adieu, hydrangeas——"

Hardly a suitable moment, perhaps, to dispute a chair. But neither the Duchess of Wellclose nor Mrs. Mouth were creatures easily abashed.

"I pay, an' I mean to hab it."

"You can't; it's taken!" the duchess returned, nodding meaningly towards the buffet, where the duke could be seen swizzling whisky at the back of the bar.

"Sh'o! Dese white women seem to t'ink dey can hab ebberyting."

"Taken," the duchess repeated, who disliked what she called the *parfum d'Afrique* of the "sooties," and, as though to intimidate Mrs. Mouth, she gave her a look that would have made many a Peeress in London quail.

Nevertheless, in the stir that followed the song chairs were forthcoming.

"From de complexion dat female hab, she look as doh she bin boiling bananas!" Mrs. Mouth commented comfortably, loud enough for the duchess to hear.

"Such a large congregation should su'tinly assist de fund!" Mr. Mouth resourcefully said, envisaging with interest the audience; it was not every day that one could feast the gaze on the noble baldness of the Archbishop, or on the subtle *silhouette* of Miss Maxine Bush, swathed like an idol in an Egyptian tissue woven with magical eyes.

"De woman in de window dah," Mrs. Mouth remarked, indicating a dowager who had the hard but resigned look of the mother of six daughters in immediate succession, "hab a look, Prancing Nigger, ob your favourite statesman."

"De immortal Wilberforce!"

"I s'poge it's de whiskers," Mrs. Mouth replied, ruffling gently her "Borgia" sleeves for the benefit of the Archbishop. Rumour had it he was fond of negresses, and that the black private secretary he employed was his own natural son, while some suspected indeed a less natural connexion.

But Madame Hatso (of Blue Brazil, the Argentine; those nights in Venezuela and Buenos Ayres, "bis" and "bravas"! How the public had roared) was curt-seying right and left, and Mrs. Mouth, glancing round to address her daughters, perceived with vexation that Edna had vanished.

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In the garden he caught her to him.

"Flower of the Sugar Cane!"

"Misteh Ruiz. . . ."

"Exquisite kid."

"I saw you thu de window-glass all de time, an' dair was I! laughing so silent-ly. . . ."

"My little honey."

". . . no; 'cos ob de neighbhehs," she fluted, drawing him beneath the great flamboyants that stood like temples of darkness all around.

"Sweetheart."

"I 'clar to grashis!" she delightedly crooned as he gathered her up in his arms.

"My little Edna . . . ? . . . ? . . . ?"

"Where you goin' wid me to?"

"There," and he nodded towards the white sea sand.

A yawning butler, an insolent footman, a snoring coachman, a drooping horse. . . .

The last conveyance had driven away, and only a party of "b—d—y niggers," supposed to be waiting for a daughter, was keeping the domestics from their beds.

Ernest, the bepowdered footman, believed them to be thieves, and could have sworn he saw a tablespoon in the old coon's pocket.

Hardly able to restrain his tears, Mr. Mouth sat gazing vacuously at the floor.

"Wha' can keep de chile? . . . O Lord . . . I hope dair noddin' wrong."

"On such a lovely ebenin' what is time?" Mrs. Mouth exclaimed, taking up an attitude of night-enchancement by the open door.

A remark that caused the butler and his subordinate to cough.

"It not often I see de cosmos look so special!"

"Ef she not heah soon, we better go widout her,"

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Miami murmured, who was examining the visitors' cards on the hall table undismayed by the eye of Ernest.

"It's odd she should so procrastinate; but la jeunesse, c'est le temps où l'on s'amuse," Mrs. Mouth blandly declared, seating herself tranquilly by her husband's side.

"Dair noddin', I hope, de matteh. . . ."

"Eh, suz, my deah! Eh, suz." Reassuringly, she tapped his arm.

"Sir Victor Virtue, Lady Bird, Princess Altamisa," Miami tossed their cards.

"Sh'o it was a charming ebenin'! Doh I was sorry for de duchess, wid de duke, an' he all nasty drunk wid spirits."

"I s'poge she use to it."

"It was a perfect skangle! Howebber, on de whole, it was quite an enjoyable pahty—doh dat music ob Wagner, it gib me de retches."

"It bore me, too," Miami confessed, as a couple of underfootmen made their appearance and, joining their fidgeting colleagues by the door, waited for the last guests to depart, in a mocking, whispering group.

"Ef she not here bery soon," Miami murmured, vexed by the servants' impertinent smiles.

"Sh'o, she be here directly," Mrs. Mouth returned, appraising through her fan-sticks the footmen's calves.

"It daybreak already!" Miami yawned, moved to elfish mirth by the over-emphasis of rouge on her mother's round cheeks.

But under the domestics' mocking stare their talk at length was chilled to silence.

From the garden came the plaintive wheepling of a bird (intermingled with the coachman's spasmodic snores), while above the awning of the door the stars were wanly paling.

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“ Prancing Nigger, sah, heah de day. Dair no good waitin’ any more.”

It was on their return from the Villa Alba that they found a letter signed “ Mamma Luna,” announcing the death of Bamboo.

XIII

HE had gone out, it seemed, upon the sea to avoid the earthquake (leaving his mother at home to take care of the shop), but the boat had overturned, and the evil sharks . . .

In a room darkened against the sun, Miami, distracted, wept. Crunched by the maw of a great blue shark: "Oh honey."

Face downward, with one limp arm dangling to the floor, she bemoaned her loss: such love-blank, and aching void! Like some desolate, empty cave, filled with clouds, so her heart.

"An' to t'ink dat I eber teased you!" she moaned, reproaching herself for the heedless past; and as day passed over day still she wept.

One mid-afternoon, some two weeks later, she was reclining lifelessly across the bed, gazing at the sun-blots on the floor. There had been a mild disturbance of a seismic nature that morning, and indeed slight though unmistakable shocks had been sensed repeatedly of late.

"Intercession" services, fully choral—the latest craze of society—filled the churches at present, sadly at the expense of other places of amusement, many of which had been obliged to close down. A religious revival was in the air, and in the Parks and streets elegant dames would stop one another in their passing carriages and pour out the stories of their iniquitous lives.

Disturbed by the tolling of a neighbouring bell, Miami reluctantly rose.

"Lord! What a din; it gib a po' soul de grabe-yahd

creeps," she murmured, lifting the jalousie of a sun-shutter and peering idly out.

Standing in the street was a Chinese laundrymaid, chatting with two Chinamen with osier baskets, while a gaunt pariah dog was rummaging among some egg-shells and banana-skins in the dust before the gate.

"Dat lil fool-fool Ibum, he throw ebberyt'ing out ob de window an' nebba t'ink ob de stink," she commented, as an odour of decay was wafted in on a gust of the hot trade wind. The trade winds! How pleasantly they used to blow in the village of Mediavilla. The blue trade wind, the gold trade wind caressing the bending canes. . . . City life, what had it done for any of them, after all? Edna nothing else than a harlot (since she had left them there was no other word), and Charlie fast going to pieces, having joined the Promenade of a notorious Bar with its bright particular galaxy of boys.

"Sh'o, ebberyt'ing happier back dah," she mused, following the slow gait across the street of some bare-footed nuns; soon they would be returning, with many converts and pilgrims, to Sasabonsam, beyond the May Day Mountains, where remained a miraculous image of Our Lady of the Sorrows still intact. How if she joined them, too? A desire to express her grief, and thereby ease it, possessed her. In the old times there had been many ways: tribal dances and wild, austerities. . . .

She was still musing, self-absorbed, when her mother, much later, came in from the street.

There had been a great Intercessional, it seemed, at the Cathedral, with hired singers from the Operahouse and society women as thick as thieves, "*gnats*," she had meant to say (Tee-hee!), about a corpse. Arturo Arrivabene . . . a voice like a bull . . . and she had caught a glimpse of Edna driving on the

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Avenue Amanda, looking almost Spanish in a bandeau beneath a beautiful grey tilt hat.

But Miami's abstraction discouraged confidences.

"Why you so triste, Chile? Dair no good at all in frettin'."

"Sh'o nuff."

"Dat death was on de cards, my deah, an' dair is no mistakin' de fac'; an' as de shark is a rapid feeder it all ober sooner dan wid de crocodile, which is some consolation for dose dat remain to mourn."

"Sh'o, it bring not an atom to me!"

"'Cos de process ob de crocodile bein' sloweh dan dat ob de shark—"

"Ah, say no more," Miami moaned, throwing herself in a storm of grief across the bed. And as all efforts to appease made matters only worse, Mrs. Mouth prudently left her.

"Prancing Nigger, she seem dat sollumcholly an' depressed," Mrs. Mouth remarked at dinner, helping herself to some guava-jelly that had partly dissolved through lack of ice.

"Since de disgrace ob Edna dat scarcely s'prisin'," Mr. Mouth made answer, easing a little the napkin at his neck.

"She is her own woman, me deah sah, an' I cannot prevent it!"

In the convivial ground-floor dining-room of an imprecise style, it was hard, at times, to endure such second-rate company as that of a querulous husband.

Yes, marriage had its dull side, and its drawbacks; still, where would society be (and where morality!) without the married women?

Mrs. Mouth fetched a sigh.

Just at her husband's back, above the ebony side-board, hung a Biblical engraving, after Rembrandt, of the *Woman Taken in Adultery*, the conception of which seemed to her exaggerated and overdone, knowing

full well, from previous experience, that there need not, really, be so much fuss. . . . Indeed, there need not be any: but to be *Taken* like that! A couple of idiots.

"W'en I look at our chillen's chairs, an' all ob dem empty, in my opinion we both betteh deaded," Mr. Mouth brokenly said.

"I dare say dair are dose dat may t'ink so," Mrs. Mouth returned, refilling her glass; "but, Prancing Nigger, I am not like dat: no, sah!"

"Where's Charlie?"

"I s'poge he choose to dine at de lil Cantonese restaurant on de quay," she murmured, setting down her glass with a slight grimace: how *ordinaire* this cheap red wine! Doubtless Edna was lapping the wines of paradise! Respectability had its trials. . . .

"Dis jelly mo' like lemon squash," Mr. Mouth commented.

"'Cos dat lil liard Ibum, he again forget de ice! Howebber, I hope soon to get rid ob him: for de insolence ob his bombax is more dan I can stand," Mrs. Mouth declared, lifting her voice on account of a piano-organ in the street just outside.

"I s'poge to-day Chuesd'y? It was a-Chuesd'y—God forgib dat po' frail chile."

"Prancing Nigger, I allow Edna some young yet for dat position; I allow dat to be de matteh ob de case but, me good sah! bery likely she marry him later."

"Pah."

"An' why not?"

"Chooh, nebba!"

"Prancing Nigger, you seem to forget dat your elder daughter was a babe ob four w'en I put on me nuptial arrange blaſtams to go to de Church."

"Sh'o, I wonder you care to talk ob it!"

"An', to-day, honey, as I sat in de Cathedral, lis'nin'

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to de Archbishop, I seemed to see Edna, an' she all in *dentelles* so *chic*, comin' up de aisle, followed by twelve maids, all ob good blood, holdin' flowehs an' wid hats kimpoged ob feddehs—worn raddeh to de side, an' I heah a stranger say: 'Excuse me, sah, but who dis fine marriage?' an' a voice make reply: 'Why, dat Mr. Ruiz de milliona'r-r-r,' an' as he speak, one ob dese Italians from de Opera-house commence to sing 'De voice dat brieded o'er Eden,' an' Edna she blow a kiss at me an' laugh dat arch."

"Nebba!"

"Prancing Nigger, 'wait an' see'!" Mrs. Mouth waved prophetically her fan.

"No, nebba," he repeated, his head sunk low in chagrin.

"How you know, sah?" she queried, rising to throw a crust of loaf to the organ man outside.

The wind with the night had risen, and a cloud of blown dust was circling before the gate.

"See de raindrops, deah; here come at laßt de big rain."

" . . . "

"Prancing Nigger!"

"Ah'm thinkin'."

X I V

IMPROVISING at the piano, Piltzenhoffer, kiddy-grand, he was contented, happy. The creative fertility, bursting from a radiant heart, more than ordinarily surprised him. "My most quickening affair since—" he groped, smiling a little at several particular wraiths, more or less bizarre, that, in their time, had especially disturbed him. "Yes; probably!" he murmured enigmatically, striking an intricate, virile chord.

"Forgib me, dearest! I was wid de manicu' of de finge-nails."

"Divine one."

She stood before him.

Hovering there between self-importance and mad-capery, she was exquisite quite.

"All temperament . . .!" he murmured, capturing her deftly between his knees.

She was wearing a toilette of white *crêpe de chine*, and a large favour of bright purple Costa-Rica roses.

"Soon as de sun drop, dey set out, deah: so de manicu' say."

"What shall we do till then?"

" . . . or, de pistols!" she fluted, encircling an arm about his neck.

"Destructive kitten," he murmured, kissing, one by one, her red, polished nails.

"Honey! Come on."

He frowned.

It seemed a treason almost to his last mistress, an exotic English girl, perpetually shivering, even in the sun, this revolver practice on the empty quinine-bottles she had left behind. Poor Meraude! It was

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touching what faith she had in a dose of quinine! Unquestionably she had been faithful to *that*. And dull enough, too, it had made her. With her albums of photographs, nearly all of midshipmen, how insufferably had she bored him:—"This one, darling, tell me, isn't he—I, really—he makes me—and this one, darling! An Athenian viking, with hair like mimosa, and what ravishing hands!—oh my God!—I declare—he makes me—" Poor Meraude; she had been extravagant as well!

"Come on, an' break some bokkles!"

"There's not a cartridge left," he told her, setting her on his knee.

"Ha-ha! Oh, hi-hi!

Not a light:

Not a bite!

What a Saturday Night!"

she trilled, taking off a comedian from the Eden Garden.

Like all other negresses she possessed a natural bent for mimicry and a voice of that lisping quality that would find complete expression in songs such as: "Have you seen my sweet garden ob Flowehs?", "Sst! Come closer, Listen heah," "Lead me to the Altar, Dearest," and "His Little Pink, proud, Spitting-lips are Mine."

"What is that you're wearing?"

"A souvenir ob to-day; I buy it fo' luck," she rippled, displaying a black briar cross pinned to her breast.

"I hope it's blessed?"

"De nun dat sold it, didn't say. Sh'o, it's dreadful to t'ink ob po' Mimi, an' she soon a pilgrim all in blistehs an' rags," she commented, as a page-boy with bejasmined ears appeared at the door.

"Me excuse. . . ."

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"How dare you come in, lil saucebox, widdout knockin'?"

"Excuse, missey, but . . ."

"What?"

Ibum hung his head.

"I only thoughted, it bein' Crucifix day, I would like to follow in de procession thu de town."

"Bery well: but be back in time fo' dinner."

"T'ank you, missey."

"An' mind fo' once you are!"

"Yes, missey," the niggerling acquiesced, bestowing a slow smile on Snob and Snowball, who had accompanied him into the room. Easy of habit, as tropical animals are apt to be, it was apparent that the aristocratic pomeranian was paying sentimental court to the skittish mouser, who, since her *περιπέτεια* of black kittens, looked ready for anything.

"Sh'o, but she hab a way wid her!" Ibum remarked, impressed.

"Lil monster, take dem both, an' den get out ob my sight," his mistress directed him.

Fingering a battered volume that bore the bookplate of Meraude, Vittorio appeared absorbed.

"Honey."

"Well?"

"Noddin'."

In the silence of the room a restless bluebottle, attracted by the wicked leer of a chandelier, tied up incredibly in a bright green net, blended its hum with the awakening murmur of the streets.

"Po' Mimi. I hope she look up as she go by."

"Yes, by Jove."

"Doh after de rude t'ings she say to me—" she broke off, blinking a little at the sunlight through the thrilling shutters.

"If I remember, beloved, you were both equally candid," he remarked, wandering out upon the balcony.

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It was on the palm-grown Messalina, an avenue that comprised a solid portion of the Ruiz estate, that he had installed her, in a many-storied building, let out in offices and flats.

Little gold, blue, lazy and romantic Cuna, what chastened mood broods over thy life to-day!

"Have you your crucifix? Won't you buy a cross?" persuasive, feminine voices rose up from the pavement below. Active again with the waning sun, "workers," with replenished wares, were emerging forth from their respective depots nursing small lugubrious baskets.

"Have you bought your cross?" The demand, when softly cooed by some solicitous patrician, almost compelled an answer; and most of the social world of Cuna appeared to be vending crosses, or "Pilgrims' medals" in imitation "bronze," this afternoon, upon the kerb. At the corner of Valdez Street, across the way, Countess Katty Taosay (*née* Soderini), austere in black with Parma violets, was presiding over a depot festooned with nothing but rosaries, that "professed" themselves, as they hung, to the suave trade wind.

"Not a light:
Not a bite!
What a——"

Edna softly hummed, shading her eyes with a big feather fan.

It was an evening of cloudless radiance; sweet and mellow as is frequent at the close of summer.

"Oh, ki, honey! It so cleah I can see de lil iluns ob yalleh sand far away b'yond de Point!

"Dearest!" he inattentively murmured, recognising on the Avenue the elegant cobweb wheels of his mother's Bolivian buggy.

Accompanied by Eurydice Edwards, she was driving her favourite mules.

"An' de shipwreck off de coral reef, oh, ki!"

"Let me find you the long-glass, dear," he said, glad for an instant to step inside.

Leaning with one foot thrust nimbly out through the balcony-rails towards the street, she gazed absorbed.

Delegates of agricultural guilds bearing banners, making for the Cathedral square (the pilgrims' starting-point), were advancing along the avenue amidst applause: fruit-growers, rubber-growers, sugar-growers, opium-growers, all doubtless wishful of placating Nature that redoubtable Goddess by showing a little honour to the Church. "O Lord, *not* as Sodom," she murmured, deciphering a text attached to the wind-screen of a luxurious automobile.

"Divine one, here they are."

"T'anks, honey, I see best widdout," she replied, following the Bacchic progress of two girls in soldiers' forage-caps, who were exciting the gaiety of the throng.

"Be careful, kid; don't lean too far. . . ."

"Oh, ki, if dey don't exchange kisses!"

But the appearance of the Cunan Constabulary, handsome youngsters, looking the apotheosis themselves of earthly lawlessness, in their feathered sun-hats and bouncing kilts, created a diversion.

"De way dey stare up; I goin' to put on a tiara!"

"Wait, do, till supper," he entreated, manipulating the long-glass to suit his eye.

Driving or on foot, were the usual faces.

Seated on a doorstep, Miss Maxine Bush, the famous actress, appeared to be rehearsing a smart society rôle, as she flapped the air with a sheet of street-foul paper, while, rattling a money-box, her tame monkey, "Jutland-ho," came as prompt for a coin as any demned Duchess.

"Ha-ha, Oh, hi-hi!" Edna's blasted catches.

"Bless her," he exclaimed, re-levelling the glass. Perfect. Good lenses these; one could even read a physician's doorplate across the way: "Hours 2-4, Agony guaranteed"—obviously, a dentist; and the window-card, too, above, "Miss—? Miss—? Speciality: Men past thirty."

Four years to wait. Patience.

Ooof! There went "Alice" and one of her boys. Bad days for the ballet! People afraid of the Operahouse . . . that chandelier . . . and the pictures on the roof. . . . And wasn't that little Lady Bird? running at all the trousers: "*have* you your crucifix! . . . ? ?"

"Honey. . . ."

She had set a crown of moonstones on her head, and had moonstone bracelets on her arms.

"My queen."

"I hope Mimi look up at me!"

"Vain one."

Over the glistening city the shadows were falling, staining the white-walled houses here and there as with some purple pigment.

"Accordin' to de lates' 'ticklers, de Procession follow de Paseo only as far as de fountain."

"Oh. . . ."

"Where it turn up thu Carmen Street, into de Avenue Messalina."

Upon the metallic sheen of the evening sky she sketched the itinerary lightly with her fan.

And smiling down on her uplifted face, he asked himself whimsically how long he would love her. She had not the brains, poor child, of course, to keep a man for ever. Heigho. Life indeed was often hard. . . .

"Honey, here dey come!"

A growing murmur of distant voices, jointly singing, filled liturgically the air, just as the warning salute, fired at sundown from the heights of the fort above the town, reverberated sadly.

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"Oh, la, la," she laughed, following the wheeling flight of some birds that rose startled from the palms.

"The Angelus. . . ."

"Hark, honey: what is dat dey singin'?"

*A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.*

Led by an old negress leaning on her hickory staff, the procession came.

Banners, banners, banners.

"I hope Mimi wave!"

Floating banners against the dusk. . . .

"Oh, honey! See dat lil pilgrim-boy?"

*Time like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.*

"Mimi, Mimi!" She had flung the roses from her dress. "Look up, my deah, look up."

But her cry escaped unheard.

*They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies——*

The echoing voices of those behind lingered a little.

"Edna."

She was crying.

"It noddin'; noddin' at all! But it plain she refuse to forgib me!"

"Never."

"Perspirin', an' her skirt draggin', sh'o, she looked a fright."

He smiled: for indeed already the world was perceptibly moulding her. . . .

"Enuff to scare ebbery crow off de savannah!"

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"And wouldn't the farmers bless her."

"Oh, honey!" Her glance embraced the long, lamp-lit avenue with suppressed delight.

"Well."

"Dair's a new dancer at de Apollo to-night. Suppose we go?"

Havana—Bordighera.

CONCERNING
THE ECCENTRICITIES OF
CARDINAL PIRELLI

I

HUDDLED up in a cope of gold wrought silk he peered around. Society had rallied in force. A christening—and not a child's.

Rarely had he witnessed, before the font, so many brilliant people. Were it an heir to the DunEden acres (instead of what it *was*) the ceremony could have hardly drawn together a more distinguished throng.

Monsignor Silex moved a finger from forehead to chin, and from ear to ear. The Duquesa DunEden's escapades, if continued, would certainly cost the Cardinal his hat.

“And ease my heart by splashing fountains.”

From the choir-loft a boy's young voice was evoking Heaven.

“His hat!” Monsignor Silex exclaimed aloud, blinking a little at the immemorial font of black Macæl marble that had provoked the screams of pale numberless babies.

Here Saints and Kings had been baptized, and royal Infantas, and sweet Poets, whose high names thrilled the heart.

Monsignor Silex crossed his breast. He must gather force to look about him. Frame a close report. The Pontiff, in far-off Italy, would expect precision.

Beneath the state baldequin, or Grand Xaymaca, his Eminence sat enthroned ogled by the wives of a dozen grandees. The Altamissals, the Villarasas (their grandee-ships' approving glances, indeed, almost eclipsed their wives'), and Catherine, Countess of Constantine, the most talked-of beauty in the realm,

looking like some wild limb of Astaroth in a little crushed "toreador" hat round as an athlete's coit with hanging silken balls, while beside her a stout, dumpish dame, of enormous persuasion, was joggling, solicitously, an object that was of the liveliest interest to all.

Head archly bent, her fine arms divined through darkling laces, the Duquesa stood, clasping closely a week-old police-dog in the ripple of her gown.

"Mother's pet!" she cooed, as the imperious creature passed his tongue across the splendid uncertainty of her chin.

Monsignor Silex's large, livid face grew grim.

What,—disquieting doubt,—if it were her Grace's offspring after all? Praise heaven, he was ignorant enough regarding the schemes of nature, but in an old lutrin once he had read of a young woman engendering a missel-thrush through the channel of her nose. It had created a good deal of scandal to be sure at the time: the Holy Inquisition, indeed, had condemned the impudent baggage, in consequence, to the stake.

"That was the style to treat them," he murmured, appraising the assembly with no kindly eye. The presence of Madame San Seymour surprised him; one habitually so set apart and devout! And Madame La Urench, too, gurgling away freely to the four-legged Father: "No, my naughty Blessing; no, not now! . . . By and by, a *bone*."

Words which brought the warm saliva to the expectant parent's mouth.

Tail awag, sex apparent (to the affected slight confusion of the Infanta Eulalia-Irene), he crouched, his eyes fixed wistfully upon the nozzle of his son.

Ah, happy delirium of first parenthood! Adoring pride! Since times primæval by what masonry does it knit together those that have succeeded in establishing here, on earth, the vital bonds of a family's claim?

ECCENTRICITIES OF CARDINAL PIRELLI

Even the modest sacristan, at attention by the font, felt himself to be superior of parts to a certain unproductive chieftain of a princely House, who had lately undergone a course of asses' milk in the surrounding mountains—all in vain!

But, supported by the Prior of the Cartuja, the Cardinal had arisen for the act of Immersion.

Of unusual elegance, and with the remains, moreover, of perfect looks, he was as wooed and run after by the ladies as any *matador*.

"And thus being cleansed and purified, I do call thee 'Crack'!" he addressed the Duquesa's captive burden.

Tail sheathed with legs "in master's drawers," ears cocked, tongue pendent. . . .

"Mother's mascot!"

"Oh, take care, dear; he's removing all your rouge!"

"*What?*"

"He's spoilt, I fear, your roses." The Countess of Constantine tittered.

The Duquesa's grasp relaxed. To be seen by all the world at this disadvantage.

"Both?" she asked, distressed, disregarding the culprit, who sprang from her breast with a sharp, sportive bark.

What rapture, what freedom!

"Misericordia!" Monsignor Silex exclaimed, staring aghast at a leg poised, inconsequently, against the mural-tablet of the widowed duchess of Charona—a woman who, in her lifetime, had given over thirty million pezos to the poor!

Ave Maria purissima! What challenging snarls and measured mystery marked the elaborate recognition of father and son, and would no one then forbid their incestuous frolics?

In agitation Monsignor Silex sought fortitude from

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the storied windows overhead, aglow in the ambered light as some radiant missal.

It was Saint Eufraxia's Eve, she of Egypt, a frail unit numbered above among the train of the Eleven Thousand Virgins: an immaturish schoolgirl of a saint, unskilled, inexperienced in handling a prayer, lacking the vim and native astuteness of the incomparable Theresa.

Yes; divine interference, 'twixt father and son, was hardly to be looked for, and Eufraxia (she of Egypt) had failed too often before. . . .

Monsignor Silex started slightly, as, from the estrade beneath the dome, a choir-boy let fall a little white spit.

Dear child, as though *that* would part them!

"Things must be allowed to take their 'natural' course," he concluded, following the esoteric antics of the reunited pair.

Out into the open, over the Lapis Lazuli of the floor, they flashed, with stifled yelps, like things possessed.

"He'll tear my husband's drawers!" the duquesa lamented.

"The duque's legs. Poor Decima." The Infanta fell quietly to her knees.

"Fortify . . . asses . . ." the royal lips moved.

"Brave darling," she murmured, gently rising.

But the duquesa had withdrawn, it seemed, to repair her ravaged roses, and from the obscurity of an adjacent confessional-box was calling to order Crack.

"Come, Crack!"

And to the Mauro-Hispanic rafters the echo rose.

"Crack, Crack, Crack, Crack. . . ."

FROM the Calle de la Pasión, beneath the blue-tiled mirador of the garden wall, came the soft brooding sound of a seguidilla. It was a twilight planned for wooing, unbending, consent; many, before now, had come to grief on an evening such. "It was the moon."

Pacing a cloistered walk, laden with the odour of sun-tired flowers, the Cardinal could not but feel the insidious influences astir. The bells of the institutions of the *Encarnacion* and the Immaculate Conception, joined in confirming Angelus, had put on tones half-bridal, enough to create vague longings, or sudden tears, among the young patrician boarders.

"Their parents' daughters—convent-bred," the Cardinal sighed.

At the Immaculate Conception, dubbed by the Queen, in irony, once "The school for harlots," the little Infanta Maria-Paz must be lusting for her Mamma and the Court, and the lilac carnage of the ring, while chafing also in the same loose captivity would be the roguish *niñas* of the pleasure-loving duchess of Sarmiento, girls whose Hellenic ethics had given the good Abbess more than one attack of fullness.

Morality. Poise! For without temperance and equilibrium—— The Cardinal halted.

But in the shifting underlight about him the flushed camellias and the sweet night-jasmines suggested none; neither did the shape of a garden-Eros pointing radiantly the dusk.

"For unless we have balance——" the Cardinal murmured, distraught, admiring against the elusive nuances of the afterglow the cupid's voluptuous hams.

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It was against these, once, in a tempestuous mood, that his mistress had smashed her fan-sticks.

"Would that all liaisons would break as easily!" his Eminence framed the prayer: and musing on the appalling constancy of a certain type, he sauntered leisurely on. Yes, enveloping women like Luna Sainz, with their lachrymose, tactless "mys," how shake them off? "My" Saviour, "my" lover, "my" parasol—and, even, "my" virtue. . . .

"Poor dearie."

The Cardinal smiled.

Yet once in a way, perhaps, he was not averse to being favoured by a glimpse of her: "A little visit on a night like this." Don Alvaro Narciso Hernando Pirelli, Cardinal-Archbishop of Clemenza, smiled again.

In the gloom there, among the high thickets of bay and flowering myrtle. . . . For, after all, bless her, one could not well deny she possessed the chief essentials: "such, poor soul, as they are!" he reflected, turning about at the sound as of the neigh of a horse.

"Monseigneur. . . ."

Bearing a biretta and a silver shawl, Madame Poco, the venerable Superintendent-of-the-palace, looking, in the blue moonlight, like some whiskered skull, emerged, after inconceivable peepings, from among the leafy limbo of the trees.

"Ah, Don Alvaro, sir! Come here."

"Pest!" His Eminence evinced a touch of asperity.

"Ah, Don, Don, . . ." and skimming forward with the grace of a Torero lassoing a bull, she slipped the scintillating fabric about the prelate's neck.

"Such nights breed fever, Don Alvaro, and there is mischief in the air."

"Mischief?"

"In certain quarters of the city you would take it almost for some sortilege."

ECCENTRICITIES OF CARDINAL PIRELLI

"What next?"

"At the *Encarnacion* there's nothing, of late, but seediness. Sister Engracia with the chicken-pox, and Mother Claridad with the itch, while at the College of Noble Damosels, in the Calle Santa Fé, I hear a daughter of Don José Illescas, in a fit of caprice, has set a match to her coronet."

"A match to her what?"

"And how explain, Don Alvaro of my heart, these constant shots in the Cortès? Ah, *sangre mio*, in what times we live!"

Ambling a few steps pensively side by side, they moved through the brilliant moonlight. It was the hour when the awakening fireflies are first seen like atoms of rosy flame floating from flower to flower.

"Singular times, sure enough," the Cardinal answered, pausing to enjoy the transparent beauty of the white dripping water of a flowing fountain.

"And ease my heart by splashing—tum-tiddly-um-tum," he hummed. "I trust the choir-boys, Dame, are all in health?"

"Ah, Don Alvaro, no, sir!"

"Eh?"

"No, sir," Madame Poco murmured, taking up a thousand golden poses.

"Why, how's that?"

"But few now seem keen on Leapfrog, or Bossage, and when a boy shows no wish for a game of Leap, sir, or Bossage——"

"Exactly," his Eminence nodded.

"I'm told it's some time, young cubs, since they've played pranks on Tourists! Though only this afternoon little Ramón Ragatta came over queazy while demonstrating before foreigners the Dance of the Arc, which should teach him in future not to be so profane: and as to the acolytes, Don Alvaro, at least half

of them are absent, confined to their cots, in the wards of the pistache Fathers! ”

“ To-morrow, all well, I’ll take them some melons.”

“ Ah, Don, Don!! ”

“ And, perhaps, a cucumber,” the Cardinal added, turning valedictionally away.

The tones of the seguidilla had deepened and from the remote recesses of the garden arose a bedlam of nightingales and frogs.

It was certainly incredible how he felt immured.

Yet to forsake the Palace for the Plaza he was obliged to stoop to creep.

With the Pirelli pride, with resourceful intimacy he communed with his heart: deception is a humiliation; but humiliation is a Virtue—a Cardinal, like myself, and one of the delicate violets of our Lady’s crown. . . . Incontestably, too,—he had a flash of inconsequent insight, many a prod to a discourse, many a sapient thrust, delivered *ex cathedrâ*, amid the broken sobs of either sex, had been inspired, before now, by what prurient persons might term, perhaps, a “frolic.” But away with all scruples! Once in the street in mufti, how foolish they became.

The dear street. The adorable Avenidas. The quickening stimulus of the crowd: truly it was exhilarating to mingle freely with the throng!

Disguised as a cabellero from the provinces or as a matron (disliking to forgo altogether the militant bravoura of a skirt), it became possible to combine philosophy, equally, with pleasure.

The promenade at the Trinidades seldom failed to be diverting, especially when the brown Bettita or the Ortiz danced! *Olé*, he swayed his shawl. The Argentina with Blanca Sanchez was amusing too; her ear-tickling little song “Madrid is on the Manzan-

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ares," trailing the "'ares" indefinitely, was sure, in due course, to reach the Cloisters.

Deliberating critically on the numerous actresses of his diocese, he traversed lightly a path all enclosed by pots of bergamot.

And how entrancing to perch on a bar-stool, over a glass of old golden sherry!

"Ah Jesus-Maria," he addressed the dancing lightning in the sky.

Purring to himself, and frequently pausing, he made his way, by ecstatic degrees, towards the mirador on the garden wall.

Although a mortification, it was imperative to bear in mind the consequences of cutting a too dashing figure. Beware display. Vanity once had proved all but fatal: "I remember it was the night I wore ringlets and was called 'my queen.'"

And with a fleeting smile, Don Alvaro Pirelli recalled the persistent officer who had had the effrontery to attempt to molest him: "Stalked me the whole length of the Avenue Isadora!" It had been a lesson. "Better to be on the drab side," he reflected, turning the key of the garden tower.

Dating from the period of the Reformation of the Nunneries, it commanded the privacy of many a drowsy patio.

"I see the Infanta has begun her Tuesdays!" he serenely noted, sweeping the panorama with a glance.

It was a delightful prospect.

Like some great guitar the city lay engirdled ethereally by the snowy Sierras.

"Foolish featherhead," he murmured, his glance falling upon a sunshade of sapphire chiffon, left by Luna: "'my' parasol!" he twirled the crystal hilt.

"Everything she forgets, bless her," he breathed, lifting his gaze towards the magnolia blossom cups

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that overtopped the tower, stained by the eternal treachery of the night to the azure of the Saint Virgin. Suspended in the miracle of the moonlight their elfin globes were at their zenith.

“Madrid is on the Manzan-ares,” he intoned.

But “Clemenza,” of course, is in white Andalucia.

III

AFTER the tobacco-factory and the railway-station, quite the liveliest spot in all the city was the cathedral-sacristia. In the interim of an Office it would be besieged by the laity, often to the point of scrimmage: aristocrats and mendicants, relatives of acolytes—each had some truck or other in the long lofty room. Here the secretary of the chapter, a burly little man, a sound judge of women and bulls, might be consulted gratis, preferably before the supreme heat of day. Seated beneath a sombre study of the Magdalen waylaying our Lord (a work of wistful interest ascribed to Valdés Leal), he was, with tactful courtesy, at the disposal of anyone soliciting information as to “vacant dates,” or “hours available,” for some impromptu function. Indulgences, novenas, terms for special masses—with flowers and music? Or, just plain; the expense, it varied! Bookings for baptisms, it was certainly advisable to book well ahead; some mothers booked before the birth—; ah-hah, the little Juans and Juanas; the angelic babies! And arrangements for a corpse’s lying-in-state: “Leave it to me.” These, and such things, were in his province.

But the secretarial bureau was but merely a speck in the vast shuttered room. As a rule, it was by the old pagan sarcophaguses, outside the vestry-door, “waiting for Father,” that *aficianados* of the cult liked best to foregather.

It was the morning of the Feast of San Antolin of Panticosa, a morning so sweet, and blue and luminous, and many were waiting.

“It’s queer the time a man takes to slip on a frilly!”

the laundress of the Basilica, Doña Consolacion, observed, through her fansticks, to Tomás the beadle.

"Got up as you get them. . . ."

"It's true, indeed, I've a knack with a rochet!"

"Temperament will out, Doña Consolacion; it cannot be hid."

The laundress beamed.

"Mine's the French."

"It's God will *whatever* it is."

"It's the French," she lisped, considering the silver rings on her honey-brown hands. Of distinguished presence, with dark matted curls at either ear, she was the apotheosis of flesh triumphant.

But the entry from the vestry of a file of monsignore imposed a transient silence—a silence which was broken only by the murmur of passing mule bells along the street.

Tingaling, tingaling: evocative of grain and harvest the sylvan sound of mule bells came and went.

Doña Consolacion flapped her fan.

There was to be question directly of a Maiden Mass.

With his family all about him, the celebrant, a youth of the People, looking childishly happy in his first broidered cope, had bent, more than once, his good-natured head, to allow some small brothers and sisters to inspect his tonsure.

"Like a little, little star!"

"No. Like a *perra gorda*."

"No, like a little star," they fluted, while an irrepressible grandmother, moved to tears and laughter, insisted on planting a kiss on the old "Christian" symbol. "He'll be a Pope some day, if he's spared!" she sobbed, transported.

"Not he, the big burly bull." Mother Garcia of the Company of Jesus addressed Doña Consolacion with a mellifluent chuckle.

Holding a bouquet of sunflowers and a basket of eggs she had just looked in from Market.

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"Who knows, my dear?" Doña Consolacion returned, fixing her gaze upon an Epitaph on a vault beneath her feet. "'He was a boy and she dazzled him.' Heigh-ho! Heysey-ho . . .! Yes, as I was saying."

"Pho: I'd like to see him in a Papal tiara."

"It's mostly luck. I well recall his Eminence when he was nothing but a trumpery curate," Doña Consolacion declared, turning to admire the jewelled studs in the ears of the President of the College of Noble Damosels.

"Faugh!" Mother Garcia spat.

"It's all luck."

"There's luck and luck," the beadle put in. Once he had confined by accident a lady in the souterrains of the cathedral, and only many days later had her bones and a diary, a diary documenting the most delicate phases of solitude and loneliness, *a woman's contribution to Science*, come to light; a piece of carelessness that had gone against the old man in his preferment.

"Some careers are less fortunate than others," Mother Garcia exclaimed, appraising the sleek silhouette of Monsignor Silex, then precipitantly issuing from the Muniment-Room.

It was known he was not averse to a little stimulant in the bright middle of the morning.

"He has the evil Eye, dear, he has the evil Eye," Doña Consolacion murmured, averting her head. Above her hung a sombre Ribera, in a frame of elaborate, blackened gilding.

"Ah, well, I do not fear it," the Companion of Jesus answered, making way for a dark, heavy belle in a handkerchief and shawl.

"Has anyone seen Jositto, my little José?"

Mother Garcia waved with her bouquet towards an adjacent portal, surmounted, with cool sobriety,

by a long, lavender marble cross. "I expect he's through there."

"In the cathedral?"

"How pretty you look, dear, and what a very gay shawl!"

"Pure silk."

"I don't *doubt* it!"

Few women, however, are indifferent to the seduction of a Maiden Mass, and all in a second there was scarcely one to be found in the whole sacristia.

The secretary at his bureau looked about him: without the presence of *las mujeres* the atmosphere seemed to weigh a little; still, being a Holiday of Obligation, a fair sprinkling of boys, youthful chapter hands whom he would sometimes designate as the "lesser delights," relieved the place of its austerity.

Through the heraldic windows, swathed in strawmats to shut out the heat, the sun-rays entered, tattooing with piquant freckles the pampered faces of the choir.

A request for a permit to view the fabled Orangery in the cloisters interrupted his siestose fancies.

Like luxurious cygnets in their cloudy lawn, a score of young singing-boys were awaiting their cue: Low-masses, cheapness, and economy, how they despised them, and how they would laugh at "Old Ends" who snuffed out the candles.

"Why should the Church charge *higher* for a short *Magnificat* than for a long *Miserere*?"

The question had just been put by the owner of a dawning moustache and a snub, though expressive, nose.

"Because happiness makes people generous, stupid, and often as not they'll squander, boom, but unhappiness makes them calculate. People grudge spending much on a snivel—even if it lasts an hour."

"It's the choir that suffers."

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"This profiteering . . . The Chapter . . ." there was a confusion of voices.

"Order!" A slim lad, of an ambered paleness, raised a protesting hand. Indulged, and made-much-of by the hierarchy, he was Felix Ganay, known as Chief-dancing-choir-boy to the cathedral of Clemenza.

"Aren't they awful?" he addressed a child with a very finished small head. Fingering a score of music he had been taking lead in a mass of Palestrina, and had the vaguely distraught air of a kitten that had seen visions.

"After that, I've not a dry stitch on me," he murmured, with a glance towards the secretary, who was making lost grimaces at the Magdalen's portrait.

A lively controversy (becoming increasingly more shrill) was dividing the acolytes and choir.

"Tiny and Tibi! Enough." The intervention came from the full-voiced Christobal, a youngster of fifteen, with soft, peach-textured cheeks, and a tongue never far away. Considered an opportunist, he was one of the privileged six dancing-boys of the cathedral.

"Order!" Felix enjoined anew. Finely sensitive as to his prerogatives, the interference of his colleague was apt to vex him. He would be trying to clip an altar pose next. Indeed, it was a matter of scandal already, how he was attempting to attract attention, in influential places, by the unnecessary undulation of his loins, and by affecting strong scents and attars, such as Egyptian Tahetant, or Long flirt through the violet Hours. Himself, Felix, he was faithful to Royal Florida, or even to plain *eau-de-Cologne*, and to those slow Mozarabic movements which alone are seemly to the Church.

"You may mind your business, young Christobal," Felix murmured, turning towards a big, serious, melancholy boy, who was describing a cigarette-case he had received as fee for singing "Say it with Edelweiss" at a society wedding.

"Say it with what?" the cry came from an oncoming-looking child, with caressing liquid eyes, and a little tongue the colour of raspberry-cream—*so bright*. Friend of all sweets and dainties, he held San Antolin's day chiefly notable for the Saint's sweet biscuits, made of sugar and white-of-egg.

"And you, too, Chicklet. Mind your business, can't you?" Felix exclaimed, appraising in some dismay a big, bland woman, then descending upon the secretary at his desk, with a slow, but determined, waddle.

Amalia Bermudez, the fashionable Actress-manageress of the Teatro Victoria Eugenia, was becoming a source of terror to the chapter of Clemenza. Every morning, with fatal persistence, she would aboard the half-hypnotised secretary with the request that the Church should make "a little christian" of her blue chow, for unless it could be done it seemed the poor thing wasn't *chic*. To be *chic* and among the foremost vanward; this, apart from the Theatre, meant all to her in life, and since the unorthodox affair of "the DunEdens," she had been quite upset by the chapter's evasive refusals.

"If a police-dog, then why not a chow?" she would ask. "Why not my little Whisky? Little devil. Ah, believe me, Father, she has need of it; for she's supposed to have had a snake by my old dog Conqueror! . . . And yet you won't receive her? Oh, it's heartless. Men are cruel. . . ."

"There she is! Amalia—the Bermudez": the whisper spread, arresting the story of the black Bishop of Bechuanaland, just begun by the roguish Ramón.

And in the passing silence the treble voice of Tiny was left talking all alone.

" . . . frightened me like Father did, when he kissed me in the dark like a lion ":—a remark that was greeted by an explosion of coughs.

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But this morning the clear, light laugh of the comedienne rang out merrily. "No, no, *hombre*," she exclaimed (tapping the secretary upon the cheek archly with her fan), "now don't, don't stare at me, and intimidate me like that! I desire only to offer 'a Mass of Intention,' fully choral, *that the Church may change her mind.*"

And when the cannon that told of Noon was fired from the white fortress by the river far away she was still considering programmes of music by Rossini and Cimarosa, and the colour of the chasubles which the clergy should wear.

I V

At the season when the oleanders are in their full perfection, their choicest bloom, it was the Pontiff's innovation to install his American type-writing apparatus in the long Loggie of the Apostolic Palace that had been in disuse since the demise of Innocent XVI. Out-of-doorish, as Neapolitans usually are, Pope Tertius II was no exception to the rule, preferring blue skies to golden ceilings—a taste for which indeed many were inclined to blame him. A compromise between the state-saloons and the modest suite occupied by his Holiness from choice, these open Loggie, adorned with the radiant frescoes of Luca Signorelli, would be frequently the scene of some particular Audience, granted after the exacting press of official routine.

Late one afternoon the Pontiff after an eventful and arduous day was walking thoughtfully here alone. Participating no longer in the joys of the world, it was, however, charming to catch, from time to time, the distant sound of Rome—the fitful clamour of trams and cabs, and the plash of the great twin-fountains in the court of Saint Damascus.

Wrapped in grave absorption, with level gaze, the lips slightly pinched, Pope Tertius II paced to and fro, occasionally raising a well-formed (though hairy) hand, as though to dismiss his thoughts with a benediction. The nomination of two Vacant Hats, the marriage annulment of an ex-hereditary Grand Duchess, and the “scandals of Clemenza,” were equally claiming his attention and ruffling his serenity.

He had the head of an elderly lady's-maid, and an expression concealed by layers of tactful caution.

"Why can't they all behave?" he asked himself plaintively, descrying Lucrezia, his prized white squirrel, sidling shyly towards him.

She was the gift of the Archbishop of Trebizond, who had found her in the region of the Coelian hill.

"Slyboots, slyboots," Pope Tertius exclaimed, as she skipped from reach. It was incredible with what playful zest she would spring from statue to statue; and it would have amused the Vicar of Christ to watch her slip and slide, had it not suggested many a profound moral metaphor applicable to the Church. "Gently, gently," he enjoined; for once, in her struggles, she had robbed a fig-leaf off a "Moses."

"Yes, why can't they all behave?" he murmured, gazing up into the far pale-blueness.

He stood a brief moment transfixed, as if in prayer, oblivious of two whispering chamberlains.

It was the turn-in-waiting of Baron Oschatz, a man of engaging exquisite manners, and of Count Cuenca, an individual who seemed to be in perpetual consternation.

Depositing a few of the most recent camera portraits of the Pontiff requiring autograph in a spot where he could not fail but see them, they formally withdrew.

It had been a day distinguished by innumerable Audiences, several not uninteresting to recall. . . .

Certainly the increasing numbers of English were decidedly promising, and bore out the sibylline predictions of their late great and sagacious ruler—Queen Victoria.

"The dear *santissima* woman," the Pontiff sighed, for he entertained a sincere, if brackish, enthusiasm for the lady who for so many years had corresponded with the Holy See under the signature of *the Countess of Lostwaters*.

"Anglicans . . . ? Heliolatries and sun-worshippers," she had written in her most masterful hand, "and

your Holiness may believe us," she had added, "when we say especially our beloved Scotch."

"I shouldn't wonder enormously if it were true," the Pope exclaimed, catching through a half-shut door a glimpse of violet stockings.

Such a display of old, out-at-heel hose could but belong to Cardinal Robin.

There had been a meeting of the Board for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, and when, shortly afterwards, the Cardinal was admitted he bore still about him some remote trace of faction.

He had the air of a cuttle-fish, and an inquiring voice. Inclined to gesture, how many miles must his hands have moved in the course of the sermons that he had preached!

Saluting the sovereign Pontiff with a deep obeisance, the Cardinal came directly to the point.

"These schisms in Spain . . ."

"They are ever before me," His Holiness confessed.

"With priests like Pirelli, the Church is in peril!" the Cardinal declared, with a short, abysmal laugh.

"Does he suppose we are in the times of Baal and Moloch?" the Pope asked, pressing a harassed hand to his head. A Neapolitan of Naples (O Bay of Napoli. See Vesuvius, *and die*), he had curly hair that seemed to grow visibly; every few hours his tonsure would threaten to disappear.

The Cardinal sent up his brows a little.

"If I may tender the advice of the secret Consistory," he said, "your Holiness should Listen-in."

"To what end?"

"A snarl, a growl, a bark, a yelp, coming from the font, would be quite enough to condemn . . ."

"Per Bacco. I should take it for a baby."

" . . . condemn," the Cardinal pursued, "this Pirelli for a *maleficus pastor*. In which case, the earlier, the better, the unfrocking. . . ."

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The Pontiff sighed.

The excellent Cardinal was as fatiguing as a mission from Salt Lake City.

"Evidently," he murmured, detecting traces of rats among the papyrus plants in the long walk below.

"They come up from the Tiber!" he exclaimed, piloting the Cardinal dexterously towards a flight of footworn steps leading to the Court of Bramante.

"It's a bore there being no lift!" he commented (the remark was a Vatican cliché), dismissing the Cardinal with a benediction.

"A painful interview," the Holy Father reflected, regarding the Western sky. An evening rose and radiant altogether. . . .

Turning sadly, he perceived Count Cuenca.

A nephew of the Dean of the Sacred College, it was rumoured that he was addicted, in his "home" above Frascati, to the last excesses of the pre-Adamite Sultans.

"A dozen blessings, for a dozen Hymens—but only eleven were sent," he was babbling distractedly to himself. He had been unstrung all day, "just a mass of foolish nerves," owing to a woman, an American, it seemed, coming for her Audience in a hat edged with white and yellow water-lilies. She had been repulsed successfully by the Papal Guard, but it had left an unpleasant impression.

"How's that?" the Vicar of Christ exclaimed: he enjoyed to tease his Chamberlains—especially Count Cuenca.

The Count turned pale.

"—," he replied inaudibly, rolling eyes at Lucrezia.

Baron Oschatz had "deserted" him; and what is one Chamberlain, alas, without another?

"The photographs of your Holiness are beside the

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bust of Bernini! ” he stammered out, beating a diplomatic retreat.

Pope Tertius II addressed his squirrel.

“ Little slyboots,” he said, “ I often laugh when I’m alone.”

V

BEFORE the white façade of the DunEden Palace, commanding the long, palm-shaded Paseo del Violôn, an array of carriages and limousines was waiting; while, passing in brisk succession beneath the portico, like a swarm of brilliant butterflies, each instant was bringing more. Dating from the period of Don Pedro *el cruel*, the palace had been once the residence of the famous Princesse des Ursins, who had left behind something of her conviviality and glamour. But it is unlikely that the soirées of the exuberant and fanciful Princesse eclipsed those of the no less exuberant Duquesa DunEden. It was to be an evening (flavoured with rich heroics) in honour of the convalescence of several great ladies, from an attack of "Boheara," the new and fashionable epidemic, diagnosed by the medical faculty as "hyperæsthesia with complications"; a welcoming back to the world in fact of several despotic dowagers, not one perhaps of whom, had she departed this life, would have been really much missed or mourned! And thus, in deference to the intimate nature of the occasion, it was felt by the solicitous hostess that a Tertulia (that mutual exchange of familiar or intellectual ideas) would make less demand on arms and legs than would a ball: just the mind and lips . . . a skilful rounding-off here, developing there, chiselling, and putting-out feelers; an evening dedicated to the furtherance of intrigue, scandal, love, beneath the eager eyes of a few young girls, still at school, to whom a quiet party was permitted now and then.

Fingering a knotted scapular beneath a windy arch,

Mother Saint-Mary-of-the-Angels was asking God His will. Should she wait for Gloria and Clyte (they might be some time) or return to the convent and come back again at twelve? "The dear girls are with their mother," she informed her Maker, inclining respectfully before the Princess Aurora of the Asturias, who had just arrived attended by two bearded gentlemen with tummies.

Hopeful of glimpsing perhaps a colleague, Mother Saint-Mary moved a few steps impulsively in their wake. It was known that Monseigneur the Cardinal-Archbishop himself was expected, and not infrequently one ecclesiastic will beget another.

The crimson saloon, with its scattered group of chairs, was waxing cheery.

Being the day it was, and the social round never but slightly varying, most of the guests had flocked earlier in the evening to the self-same place, i.e. the Circus, or *Arena Amanda*, where it was subscription night, and where, at present, there was an irresistibly comic clown.

"One has only to think of him to——!" the wife of the Minister of Public Instruction exclaimed, going off into a fit of wheezy laughter.

"What power, what genius, what——!" The young wife of the Inspector of Rivers and Forests was at a loss. Wedded to one of the handsomest though dullest of men, Marvilla de Las Espinafre's perfervid and exalted nature kept her little circle in constant awe, and she would be often jealous of the Forests (chiefly scrub) which her husband, in his official capacity, was called upon to survey. "Don't lie to me. I know it! You've been to the woods." And after his inspection of the aromatic groves of Lograno, Phædra in full fury tearing her pillow with her teeth was nothing to Marvilla. "Why, dear? Because you've been *among the Myrtles*," was the ex-

planation she chose to give for severing conjugal relations.

"Vittorio forbids the circus on account of germs," the wife of the President of the National Society of Public Morals murmured momentarily.

"Really, with this ghastly Boheara, I shall not be grieved when the time comes to set out for dear Santander!" a woman with dog-rose cheeks, and puffed, wrinkled eyes, exclaimed, focusing languishingly the Cardinal.

"He is delicious in handsomeness to-night!"

"A shade battered. But a lover's none the worse in my opinion for acquiring technique," the Duchess of Sarmento declared.

"A lover; what? His Eminence . . . ? ?"

The duchess tittered.

"Why not? I expect he has a little woman to whom he takes off his clothes," she murmured, turning to admire the wondrous *Madonna of the Mule-mill* attributed to Murillo.

On a wall-sofa just beneath, crowned with flowers and aigrettes, sat Conca, Marchioness of Macarnudo.

"*Que tal ?*"

"My joie de vivre is finished; still, it's amazing how I go on!" the Marchioness answered, making a corner for the duchess. She had known her "dearest Luiza" since the summer the sun melted the church bells and their rakish, pleasure-loving, affectionate hearts had dissolved together. But this had not been yesterday; no; for the Marchioness was a *grandmother* now.

"Conca, Conca: one sees you're in love."

"He's from *Avila*, dear—the footman."

"What!"

"Nothing *classic*—but, *oh!*"

"Fresh and blonde? I've seen him."

"Such sep . . ."

"Santiago be praised!"

The Marchioness of Macarnudo plied her fan.

"Our hands first met at table . . . yes, dear; but what I always say is, one spark explodes the mine!" And with a sigh she glanced rhapsodically at her fingers, powdered and manicured and encrusted with rings. "Our hands met first at table," she repeated.

"And . . . and the rest?" the duchess gasped.

"I sometimes wish, though, I resembled my sister more, who cares only for amorous, 'delicate' men—the Claudes, so to speak. But there it is! And, anyway, dear," the Marchioness dropped her voice, "he keeps me from thinking (ah perhaps more than I should) of my little grandson. Imagine, Luiza . . . Fifteen, white and vivid rose, and ink-black hair. . . ." And the Marchioness cast a long, pencilled eye towards the world-famous Pietà above her head. "Queen of Heaven, defend a weak woman from *that!*" she besought.

Surprised, and considerably edified, by the sight of the dowager in prayer, Mother Saint-Mary-of-the-Angels was emboldened to advance: The lovely, self-willed donkey (or was it a mule?) that Our Lady was prodding, one could almost stroke it, hear it bray. . . .

Mother Saint-Mary-of-the-Angels could have almost laughed.

But the recollection of the presence of royalty steadied her.

Behind pink lowered portières it had retired, escorted by the mistress of the house. She wore a gown of ivory-black with heavy golden roses and a few of her large diamonds of ceremony.

"I love your Englishy-Moorishy cosy comfort, Decima, and I love——" the Princess Aurora had started to rave.

"An hyperæsthesia injection? . . . a beaten egg?" her hostess solicitously asked.

"*Per caritad!*" the Princess fluted, stooping to

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examine a voluptuous small *terre cuite*, depicting a pair of hermaphrodites amusing themselves.

She was looking like the ghost in the Ballet of Ghislaine, after an unusually sharp touch of Boheara; eight-and-forty hours in bed, and, scandal declared, not alone.

"A Cognac? . . . a crème de Chile? . . ."

"Nothing, nothing," the Princess negligently answered, sweeping her long, primrose trailing skirts across the floor.

It was the boudoir of the Winterhalters and Isabeys, once the bright glory of the Radziwollowna collection, which, after several decades of disesteem, were returning to fashion and favour.

"And I love——" she broke off, nearly stumbling over an old blind spaniel, that resided in a basket behind the "supposed original" of the *Lesbia of Lysippus*.

"Clapsey, Clapsey!" her mistress admonished. The gift of a dear and once intimate friend, the dog seemed inclined to outlive itself and become a nuisance.

Alas, poor, fawning Clapsey! Fond, toothless bitch. Return to your broken doze, and dream again of leafy days in leafy Parks, and comfy drives and escapades long ago. What sights you saw when you could see; fountains, and kneeling kings, and grim beggars at Church doors (those at San Eusebio were the worst). And sheltered spas by glittering seas: Santander! And dark adulteries and dim woods at night.

"And I love your Winterhalters!"

Beneath one of these, like a red geranium, was Cardinal Pirelli.

"Oh, your Eminence, the utter forlornness of Society! . . . Besides, (oh, my God!) to be the *one* Intellectual of a Town . . ." a wizened little woman, mistaken, not infrequently, for "Bob Foy," the jockey, was exclaiming plaintively.

"I suppose?" Monseigneur nodded. He was looking rather Richelieu, draped in ermines and some old lace of a beautiful fineness.

"It's pathetic how entertaining is done now. Each year meaner. There was a time when the DunEdens gave balls, and one could count, as a rule, on supper. To-night, there's nothing but a miserable Buffet, with flies trimming themselves on the food; and the champagne that I tasted, well, I can assure your Eminence it was more like foul flower-water than Mumm."

"Disgraceful," the Cardinal murmured, surrendering with suave dignity his hand to the lips of a pale youth all mouchoir and waist.

These kisses of young men, ravished from greedy Royalty, had a delicate savour.

The One Intellectual smiled obliquely.

"Your Eminence I notice has several devout salve-stains already," she murmured, defending her face with her fan.

"Believe me, not all these imprints were left by men!"

The One Intellectual glanced away.

"The poor Princess! I ask you, has one the right to look *so* dying?"

"Probably not," the Cardinal answered, following her ethereal transit.

It was the turn of the tide, and soon admittance to the boudoir had ceased causing "heartburnings."

Nevertheless some few late sirens were only arriving.

Conspicuous among these was Catherine (the ideal-questing, God-groping and insouciant), Countess of Constantine, the aristocratic heroine of the capital, looking half-charmed to be naked and alive. Possessing but indifferent powers of conversation—at Tertulias and dinners she seldom shone—it was yet she who had coined that felicitous phrase: *Some men's eyes are sweet to rest in.*

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Limping a little, since she had sprained her foot, alas, while turning backward somersaults to a negro band in the Black Ballroom of the Infanta Eulalia-Irene, her reappearance after the misadventure was a triumph.

"Poor Kitty: it's a shame to ask her, if it's not a ball!" the Inspector of Rivers and Forests exclaimed, fondling the silvery branches of his moustache.

But, at least, a Muse, if not musicians, was at hand.

Clasping a large bouquet of American Beauty-roses, the Poetess Diana Beira Baixa was being besieged by admirers, to "give them something; just something! *Anything* of her own." Wedded, and proclaiming (*in vers libres*) her lawful love, it was whispered she had written a pæan to her husband's "... " beginning *Thou glorious wonder!* which was altogether too conjugal and intimate for recitation in society.

"They say I utter the cry of sex throughout the Ages," she murmured, resting her free hand idly on a table of gold and lilac lacquer beside her.

The Duchess-Dowager of Vizeu spread prudishly her fan.

"Since me maid set me muskito net afire, I'm just a bunch, me dear, of hysterics," she declared.

But requests for "something; just something!" were becoming insistent, and indeed the Muse seemed about to comply when, overtaken by the first alarming symptoms of "Boheara," she fell with a long-drawn sigh to the floor.

VI

REPAIRING the vast armholes of a chasuble, Madame Poco, the venerable Superintendent-of-the-palace, considered, as she worked, the social status of a Spy. It was not without a fleeting qualm that she had crossed the borderland that divides mere curiosity from professional vigilance, but having succumbed to the profitable proposals of certain monsignori, she had grown as keen on her quarry as a tigress on the track.

"It's a wearing life you're leading me, Don Alvaro; but I'll have you," she murmured, singling out a thread.

For indeed the Higher-curiosity is inexorably exacting, encroaching, all too often, on the hours of slumber and rest.

"It's not the door-listening," she decided, "so much as the garden, and, when he goes awenching, the Calle Nabuchodonosor."

She was seated by an open window, commanding the patio and the gate.

"*Vamos, vamos!*" Madame Poco sighed, her thoughts straying to the pontifical supremacy of Tertius II, for already she was the Pope's Poco, his devoted Phœbe, his own true girl: "I'm true blue, dear. True blue."

Forgetful of her needle, she peered interestedly on her image in a mirror on the neighbouring wall. It was a sensation of pleasant novelty to feel between her skull and her mantilla the notes of the first instalment of her bribe.

"Earned, every *perra gorda*, earned!" she exclaimed, rising and pirouetting in elation before the glass.

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Since becoming the courted favourite of the chapter, she had taken to strutting-and-languishing in private before her mirror, improvising occult dance-steps, semi-sacred in character, modelled on those of Felix Ganay at White Easter, all in the flowery Spring. Ceremonial poses such as may be observed in storied-windows and olden *pietas* in churches (Dalilaesque, or Shulamitish, as the case might be) were her especial delight, and from these had been evolved an eerie "Dance of Indictment."

Finger rigid, she would advance ominously with slow, Salomé-like liftings of the knees upon a phantom Cardinal: "And thus I accuse thee!" or "I denounce thee, Don Alvaro, for," etc.

"*Dalila!* You old sly gooseberry," she chuckled, gloating on herself in the greenish-spotted depth of a tall, time-corroded glass.

Punch and late hours had left their mark.

"All this Porto and stuff to keep awake make a woman liverish," she commented, examining critically her tongue.

It was a Sunday evening of *corrida*, towards the Feast of Corpus, and through the wide-open window came the near sound of bells.

Madame Poco crossed and recrossed her breast.

They were ringing "Paula," a bell which, tradition said, had fused into its metal one of the thirty pieces of silver received by the Iscariot for the betrayal of Christ.

"They seem to have asked small fees in those days," she reflected, continuing her work.

It was her resolution to divide her reward between masses for herself and the repose and "release" (from Purgatory) of her husband's soul, while anything over should be laid out on finery for a favourite niece, the little Leonora, away in the far Americas.

Madame Poco plied pensively her needle.

She was growing increasingly conscious of the physical demands made by the Higher-curiosity upon a constitution already considerably far-through, and the need of an auxiliary caused her to regret her niece. More than once, indeed, she had been near the point of asking Charlotte Chiemsee, the maid of the Duchess of Vizeu, to assist her. It was Charlotte who had set the duchess's bed-veils on fire while attempting to nip a romance.

But alone and unaided it was astonishing the evidence Madame Poco had gained, and she smiled, as she sewed, at the recollection of her latest capture—the handkerchief of Luna Sainz.

"These hennaed heifers that come to confess! . . ." she scoffed sceptically. For Madame Poco had some experience of men—those brown humbugs (so delicious in tenderness)—in her time. "Poor soul! He had the prettiest teeth . . ." she murmured, visualising forlornly her husband's face. He had been coachman for many years to the sainted Countess of Triana, and he would tell the story of the pious countess and the vermin she had turned to flowers of flame while foraging one day among some sacks before a second-hand-clothes shop. It was she, too, who, on another occasion, had changed a handful of marsh-slush into fine slabs of chocolate, each slab engraved with the insignia of a Countess and the sign of the Cross.

"Still, she didn't change *him*, though!" Madame Poco reflected dryly, lifting the lid to her work-box.

Concealed among its contents was a copy of the gay and curious *Memoirs of Mlle. Emma Crunch*, so famous as "Cora Pearl";—a confiscated bedside-book once belonging to the Cardinal-Archbishop.

"Ps, ps!" she purred, feeling amorously for her scissors beneath the sumptuous oddments of old church velvet and brocade that she loved to ruffle and ruck.

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"Ps."

She had been freshening a little the chasuble worn last by his Eminence at the baptism of the blue-eyed police-pup of the Duquesa DunEden, which bore still the primrose trace of an innocent insult.

"A disgraceful business altogether," Madame Poco sighed.

Not everyone knew the dog was christened in *white menthe*. . . .

"Sticky stuff," she brooded: "and a liqueur I never cared for! It takes a lot to beat aniseed brandy; when it's old. Manzanilla runs it close; but it's odd how a glass or two turns me muzzy."

She remained a moment lost in idle reverie before the brilliant embroideries in her basket. Bits of choice beflowered brocade, multi-tinted, inimitably faded silks of the epoca of Theresa de Ahumada, exquisite tatters, telling of the Basilica's noble past, it gladdened the eyes to gaze on. What garden of Granada could show a pink to match that rose, or what sky show a blue as tenderly serene as that azure of the Saint Virgin?

"*Vamos*," she exclaimed, rising: "it's time I took a toddle to know what he's about."

She had last seen the Cardinal coming from the orange orchard with a dancing-boy and Father Fadrique, who had a mark on his cheek left by a woman's fan.

Her mind still dwelling on men (those divine hum-bugs), Madame Poco stepped outside.

Traversing a white-walled corridor, with the chasuble on her arm, her silhouette, illumined by the splendour of the evening sun, all but caused her to start.

It was in a wing built in the troublous reign of Alfonso the Androgyne that the vestments were kept. Whisking by a decayed and ancient painting, representing "Beelzebub" at Home, she passed slowly through

a little closet supposed to be frequented by the ghosts of evil persons long since dead. Just off it was the vestry, gay with blue azulejos tiles of an admirable lustre.

They were sounding Matteo now, a little bell with a passionate voice.

"The pet!" Madame Poco paused to listen. She had her "favourites" among the bells, and Matteo was one of them. Passiaflora, too—but Anna, a light slithery bell, "like a housemaid in hysterics," offended her ear by lack of tone; Sebastian, a complaining, excitable bell, was scarcely better,—“a fretful lover!” She preferred old "Wanda" the Death-bell, a trifle monotonous, and fanatical perhaps, but "interesting," and opening up vistas to varied thought and speculation.

Lifting a rosary from a linen-chest, Madame Poco laid the chasuble within. It was towards this season she would usually renew the bags of bergamot among the Primate's robes.

"This espionage sets a woman all behindhand," she commented to Tobit, the vestry cat.

Black as the Evil One, perched upon a Confessional's ledge, cleansing its belly, the sleek thing sat.

It was the "ledge of forgotten fans," where privileged Penitents would bring their tales of vanity, infidelity and uncharitableness to the Cardinal once a week.

"Directing half-a-dozen duchesses must be frequently a strain!" Madame Poco deliberated, picking up a discarded mitre and trying it absently on.

With a plume at the side or a cluster of balls, it would make quite a striking toque, she decided, casting a fluttered glance on the male effigy of a pale-faced member of the Quesada family, hewn in marble by the door.

"*Caramba!* I thought it was the Cardinal; it gave

me quite a turn," she murmured, pursuing lightly her way.

Being a Sunday evening of *corrida*, it was probable the Cardinal had mounted to his aerie, to enjoy the glimpse of Beauty returning from the fight.

Oh, mandolines of the South, warm throats, and winged songs, winging . . .

Following a darkened corridor with lofty windows closely barred, Madame Poco gained an ambulatory, terminated by a fresco of Our Lady, ascending to heaven in a fury of paint.

"These damp flags'll be the death of me," she complained, talking with herself, turning towards the garden.

Already the blue pushing shadows were beguiling from the shelter of the cloister eaves the rueful owls. A few flittermice, too, were revolving around the long apricot chimneys of the Palace, that, towards sunset, looked like the enchanted castle of some sleeping Princess.

"Bits of pests," she crooned, taking a neglected alley of old bay-tree laurels, presided over by a plashing fountain comprised of a Cupid sneezing. Wary of mole-hills and treacherous roots, she roamed along, preceded by the floating whiteness of a Persian peacock, mistrustful of the intentions of a Goat-sucker owl. Rounding a sequestered garden seat, beneath an aged cypress, the bark all scented knots, Madame Poco halted.

Kneeling before an altar raised to the cult of Our Lady of Dew, Cardinal Pirelli was plunged in prayer.

"Salve. Salve Regina. . . ." Above the tree-tops a bird was singing.

VII

THE College of Noble Damosels in the Calle Santa Fé was in a whirl. It was "Foundation" day, an event annually celebrated with considerable fanfaronade and social éclat. Founded during the internecine wars of the Middle Age, the College, according to early records, had suffered rapine on the first day of term. Hardly, it seemed, had the last scholar's box been carried upstairs than a troop of military had made its appearance at the Pension gate demanding, with "male peremptoriness," a billet. "I, alone," the Abbess ingeniously states, in relating the poignant affair in her unpublished diary: "I alone did all I was able to keep them from them, for which they (the scholars) called me 'greedy.'" Adding, not without a touch of modern socialism in disdain for titles, that she had preferred "the staff-officers to the Field-Marshal," while as to ensigns, in her estimation, why, "one was worth the lot."

Polishing urbanely her delicate nails, the actual President, a staid, pale woman with a peacock nose, recalled the chequered past. She hoped his Eminence when he addressed the girls, on handing them their prizes, would refer to the occasion with all the tactfulness required.

"When I think of the horrid jokes the old Marqués of Illescas made last year," she murmured, bestowing a harrowed smile on a passing pupil.

She was ensconced in a ponderous fauteuil of figured velvet (intended for the plump posterior of Royalty) beneath the incomparable "azulejos" ceiling of the Concert-room, awaiting the return of Madame

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Always Alemtejo, the English governess, from the printers, in the Plaza de Jesus, with the little silver-printed programmes (so like the paste-board cards of brides!), which, as usual, were late.

"Another year we'll type them," she determined, awed by the ardent tones of a young girl rehearsing an aria from the new opera, *Leda*—"Gaze not on Swans."

"Ah, gaze not so on Swan-zzz! . . ."

"Crisper, child. Distinction. Don't exaggerate," the President enjoined, raising a hand to the diamonds on her heavy, lead-white cheeks.

Née an Arroyolo, and allied by marriage with the noble house of Salvaterra, the head mistress in private life was the Dowager-Marchioness of Pennisflores.

"*Nosotros*, you know, are not candidates for the stage! Bear in mind your moral," she begged, with a lingering glance at her robe of grey georgette.

The word "moral," never long from the President's lips, seemed, with her, to take on an intimate tinge, a sensitiveness of its own. She would invest the word at times with an organic significance, a mysterious dignity, that resembled an avowal made usually only in solemn confidence to a doctor or a priest.

The severity of my moral. The prestige of my moral. The perfection of my moral. She has no dignity of moral. I fear a person of no positive moral. Nothing to injure the freshness of her moral. A difficulty of moral. The etiquette of my moral. The majesty of my moral, etc., etc.—as uttered by the President, became, psychologically, interesting *dicta*.

"Beware of a facile moral!" she added, for the benefit of the singer's accompanist, a young nun with a face like some strange white rock, who was inclined to give herself married airs, since she had been debauched, one otiose noon, by a demon.

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"Ah, Madame Always." The President swam to meet her.

British born, hailing from fairy Lisbon, Madame Always Alemtejo seemed resigned to live and die in a land of hitches.

"The delay is owing to the Printers' strike," she announced. "The Plaza's thronged: the Cigar factory girls, and all the rag-tag and bobtail, from the Alcazaba to the Puerta del Mar, are going out in sympathy, and——"

"The tarts?"

"The t's from Chamont are on the way."

It was the President's custom to lay all vexations before Nostra Señora de los Remedios, the college's divine Protectress, with whose gracious image she was on the closest footing.

Consulting her now as to the concert-programmes, the President recalled that no remedy yet had been found for Señorita Violeta de las Cubas, who had thrown her engagement ring into a place of less dignity than convenience and refused to draw it out.

"Sapphires, my favourite stones," the President reflected, wondering if she should ask "la Inglesé" to recover it with the asparagus-tongs.

But already a few *novios*, eager to behold their *novias* again, were in the Patio beneath the "Heiresses' Wing," exciting the connoisseurship of a bevy of early freshness.

"You can tell *that* by his eyebrows!" a girl of thirteen, and just beginning as a woman, remarked.

"*Que barbaridad.*"

"Last summer at Santander Maria-Manuela and I bathed with him, and one morning there was a tremendous sea, with *terrific* waves, and we noticed unmistakably."

"I can't explain; but I adore all that mauvishness about him!"

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"I prefer Manolito to Gonzalito, though neither thrill me like the Toreador Tancos."

Assisted by Fräulein Pappenheim and Muley, the President's negress maid, they were putting the final touches to their vestal frocks.

"Men are my raging disgust," a florid girl of stupendous beauty declared, saturating with a flacon of *Parfum cruel* her prematurely formed silhouette.

"Nsa, nsa, señorita," Muley mumbled. "Some know better dan dat!"

"To hell with them!"

"Adios, Carlo. Adios, Juan. Join you down dah in one minute." The negress chuckled jauntily.

"Muley, Muley," Fräulein chided.

"What wonder next I 'bout to hear?"

Delighting in the tender ferocities of Aphrodite, she was ever ready to unite the *novio* to the *novia*. For window-vigils (where all is hand play) few could contrive more ingeniously than she those fans of fresh decapitated flowers, tuberoses punctuated with inebriating jasmine, so beloved in the East by the dark children of the sun. Beyond Cadiz the blue, the beautiful, in palm-girt Marrakesh, across the sea, she had learnt other arts besides. . . .

"Since seeing Peter Prettylips on the screen the Spanish type means nothing to me," Señorita Soledad, a daughter of the first Marqués of Belluga, the greatest orange-king in the Peninsula, remarked.

"How low. She is not noble."

"I *am* noble."

"Oh no; you're not."

"Cease wrangling," Fräulein exclaimed, "and enough of that," she added sharply, addressing a *novioless* little girl looking altogether bewitching of naughtiness as she tried her ablest to seduce by her crude manœuvres the fiancé of a friend. Endowed with the lively temperament of her grandmother,

Conca, Marchioness of Macarnudo, the impressionable, highly amative nature of the little Obdulia gave her governesses some grounds for alarm. At the Post Office one day she had watched a young man lick a stamp. His rosy tongue had vanquished her. In fact, at present, she and a class-chum, Milagros, were "collecting petals" together—and much to the bewilderment of those about them, they might be heard on occasion to exclaim, at Mass, or in the street: "Quick, did you see it?" "No." "Santissima! I did!"

"Shrimp. As if Gerardo would look at her!" his *novia* scoffed. "But let me tell you, young woman," she turned upon the shrinking Obdulia, "that social ostracism, and even, in certain cases" (she slapped and pinched her), "*assassination* attends those that thief or tamper with another's lover! And Fräulein will correct me if I exaggerate."

Fräulein Pappenheim was a little woman already drifting towards the sad far shores of forty, with no experience of the pains of Aphrodite caused by men; only at times she would complain of stomach aches in the head.

"Dat is so," Muley struck in sententiously for her. "Dair was once a young lady ob Fez——"

But from the Patio the college chaplain, Father Damien Forment, known as "Shiny-nose," was beckoning to the heiresses to join their relatives in the reception-hall below.

Since that sanguinary period of Christianity, synchronising with the foundation of the institution of learning in the Calle Santa Fé, what changes in skirts and trousers the world has seen. Alone unchanging are women's ambitions and men's desires.

"Dear child. . . . She accepts him . . . but a little à contre-cœur," the President was saying to the Marchioness of las Cubas, an impoverished society

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belle, who went often without bread in order to buy lip-sticks and rouge.

"With Violeta off my hands . . . Ah, President, if only Cecilio could be suitably *casada*."

"In my little garden I sometimes work a brother. The heiresses' windows are all opening to the flowers and trees. . . . The boy should be in polo kit. A uniform interests girls," the President murmured, turning with an urbane smile to welcome the Duquesa DunEden.

She had a frock of black kasha, signed Paul Orna, with a cluster of brown-and-pink orchids, like sheep's-kidneys, and a huge feather hat.

"I'm here for my God-girl, Gloria," she murmured, glancing mildly round.

Incongruous that this robust, rich woman should have brought to the light of heaven no heir, while the unfortunate Marchioness, needy, and frail of physique, a wraith, did not know what to do with them!

The President dropped a sigh.

She was prepared to take a dog of the daughterless Duquesa. A bitch, of course. . . . But let it be Police, or Poodle! It would lodge with the girls. A cubicle to itself in the heiresses' wing; and since there would be no extra class-charge for dancing or drawing, no course *in belli arti*, some reduction of fees might be arranged. . . . "We would turn her out a creature of breeding. . . . An eloquent tail-wave, a disciplined moral, and with a reverence moreover for house-mats and carpets." The President decided to draw up the particulars of the prospectus by and by.

"Your Goddaughter is quite one of our most promising exhibitors," she exclaimed, indicating with her fan some water-colour studies exposed upon the walls.

"She comes of a mother with a mania for painting,"

the Duquesa declared, raising a lorgnon, critically, before the portrait of a Lesbian, with dying, fabulous eyes.

"Really?"

"A positive passion," the Duquesa answered, with a swift, discerning glance at an evasive "nude," showing the posterior poudrederizé of a Saint.

"I had no idea," the President purred, drawing attention to a silvery streetscape.

"It's the Rambla from the back of Our Lady of the Pillar! It was rare fun doing it, on account of the *pirapos* of the passers-by," the artist, joining them, explained.

"Dear child, I predict for her a great deal of admiration very soon," the President murmured, with a look of reproach at a youthful pupil as she plied her boy-Father with embarrassing questions: "Who are the chief society women in the moon? What are their names? Have they got motor-cars there? Is there an Opera-House? Are there bulls?"

The leering aspect of a lady in a costume of blonde Guadalmedina lace and a hat wreathed with clipped black cocks' feathers arrested her.

Illusion-proof, with a long and undismayed service in Love's House (sorry brutes, all the same, though, these men, with their selfishness, fickleness and lies!) the Marchioness of Macarnudo with her mysterious "legend" (unscrupulous minxes, all the same, though, these women, with their pettiness, vanity and . . .!), was too temperamentally intriguing a type to be ignored.

"Isn't that little Marie Dorothy with the rosebuds stuck all over her?" she asked her granddaughter, who was teasing her brother on his moustache.

"To improve the growth, the massage of a *novia's* hand," she fluted, provoking the marchioness to an involuntary nervous gesture. Exasperated by resistance,

struggling against an impossible infatuation, her Spanish ladyship was becoming increasingly subject to passing starts. Indeed only in excitement and dissipation could her unsatisfied longings find relief. Sometimes she would run out in her car to where the men bathe at Ponte Delgado, and one morning, after a ball, she had been seen standing on the main road to Cadiz in a cabuchon tiara, watching the antics of some nude muleteers: *Black as young Indians*—she had described them later.

"My sweet butterfly! What next?" she exclaimed, ogling Obdulia, whose elusive resemblance to her brother was really curiously disturbing.

Averting a filmy eye, she recognised Marvilla de las Espinafres, airing anti-patriotic views on birth control, her arms about an adopted daughter. "Certainly not; most decidedly *no*! I should scream!" she was saying as from the Concert-room the overture began thinning the crowd.

"It's nothing else than a national disaster," the marchioness declared to her grandson, "how many women nowadays seem to shirk their duty!"

"Well, the de las Cubas hasn't, anyway," he demurred.

"Poor thing. They say she jobs her mules," the marchioness murmured, exchanging a nod with the passing President.

Something, manifestly, had occurred to disturb the equilibrium of her moral.

"Such a disappointment, *Nostra Señora*!" she exclaimed. "Monseigneur, it seems, has thrown me over."

"Indeed; how awkward!"

"I fear though even more so for his chapter."

"He is not ill?"

"*Cardinal Pirelli has fled the capital!*"

VIII

STANDING amid gardens made for suffering and delight is the disestablished and, *sic transit*, slowly decaying monastery of the Desierto. Lovely as Paradise, oppressive perhaps as Eden, it had been since the days of the mystic Luigi of Granada a site well suited to meditation and retreat. Here, in the stilly cypress-court, beneath the snowy sierras of Santa Maria la Blanca, Theresa of Avila, worn and ill, though sublime in laughter, exquisite in beatitude, had composed a part of the *Way of Perfection*, and, here, in these same realms of peace, dominating the distant city of Clemenza and the fertile plains of Andalucia, Cardinal Pirelli, one blue mid-day towards the close of summer, was idly considering his Defence. "*Apologia*, no; merely a defence," he mused: "merely," he flicked the ash-tip of a cigar, "a defence! I defend myself, that's all! . . ."

A sigh escaped him.

Divided by tranquil vineyards and orange-gardens from the malice and vindictiveness of men it was difficult to experience emotions other than of forgiveness and love.

"Come, dears, and kiss me," he murmured, closing consentingly his eyes.

It was the forgetful hour of noon, when Hesperus from his heavens confers on his pet Peninsula the boon of sleep.

"A nice nap he's having, poor old gentleman." Madame Poco surveyed her master.

Ill-at-ease and lonely in the austere dismantled house, she would keep an eye on him at present almost as much for company as for gain.

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As handsome and as elegant as ever, his physiognomy in repose revealed a thousand strange fine lines, suggestive subtleties, intermingled with less ambiguous signs, denoting stress and care.

"He's growing almost huntedish," she observed, casting a brief glance at the literature beside him—The Trial of Don Fernando de la Cerde, Bishop of Barcelona, defrocked for putting young men to improper uses; a treatise on The Value of Smiles; an old volume of Songs, by Sà de Miranda; The Lives of Five Negro Saints, from which escaped a bookmark of a dancer in a manton.

"Everything but his Breviary," she commented, perceiving a soutaned form through the old flowered ironwork of the courtyard gateway.

Regretting her better gown of hooped watered-silk, set aside while in retreat (for economy's sake), Madame Poco fled to put it on, leaving the visitor to announce himself.

The padre of Our Lady of the Valley, the poor padre of Our Lady, would the Primate know? Oh, every bird, every rose, could have told him that: the padre of Our Lady bringing a blue trout for his Eminence's supper from the limpid waters of Lake Orense.

Respecting the Primate's rest Father Felicitas, for so, also, was he named, sat down discreetly to await his awakening.

It was a rare sweetness to have the Cardinal to himself thus intimately. Mostly, in the city, he would be closely surrounded. Not that Father Felicitas went very much to town; no; he disliked the confusion of the streets, and even the glories of the blessed basilicas made him scarcely amends for the quiet shelter of his hills.

The blessed basilicas, you could see them well from here. The giralda of Saint Xarifa, and the august

twin towers of the cathedral, and the azulejos dome of Saint Eusebio, that was once a pagan mosque; while of Santissima Marias, Maria del Carmen, Maria del Rosario, Maria de la Soledad, Maria del Dolores, Maria de las Nieves, few cities in all the wide world could show as many.

"To be sure, to be sure," he exclaimed absently, lifting his eyes to a cloudlet leisurely pointing above the lofty spur of the Pico del Mediodia. "To be sure," he added, seeking to descry the flower-like bellcot of Our Lady of the Valley just beneath.

But before he had discovered it, half concealed by trees, he was reminded by the sound of a long-drawn, love-sick wail, issuing out of the very entrails of the singer, of the lad left in charge of his rod by the gate.

"On the Bridge to Alcantara."

With its protracted cadences and doleful, vain-yearning reaches, the voice, submerged in all the anguish of a Malagueña, troubled, nostalgically, the stillness.

God's will be done. It was enough to awaken the Primate. Not everyone relished a Malagueña, a dirgeful form of melody introduced, tradition said, and made popular in the land, long, long ago, beneath the occupation of the Moors.

Father Felicitas could almost feel the sin of envy as he thought of the flawless choir and noble triumphal organ of the cathedral yonder.

Possessed of no other instrument, Our Lady of the Valley depended at present on a humble guitar. Not that the blessed guitar, with its capacity for emotion, is unworthy to please God's listening ear, but Pepe, the lad appointed to play it, would fall all too easily into those Jotas, Tangos, and Cuban Habaneiras, learnt in wayside fondas and fairs. Some day, Father Felicitas did not doubt, Our Lady would have an organ, an organ with pipes. He had prayed for it so

often; oh, so often; and once, quite in the late of twilight while coming through the church, he had seen her, it seemed, standing just where it should be. It had been as though a blinding whiteness.

"A blinding whiteness," he murmured, trembling a little at the recollection of the radiant vision.

Across the tranquil court a rose-red butterfly pursued a blue. "I believe the world is all love, only no one understands," he meditated, contemplating the resplendent harvest plains steeped in the warm sweet sunlight.

"My infinite contrition!" The Cardinal spoke.

A rare occurrence in these days was a visitor, and now with authority ebbing, or in the balance at least, it was singular how he felt a new interest in the concerns of the diocese. The birth-rate and the death-rate and the super-rate, which it was to be feared that the *Cortès*—

Sailing down the courtyard in her watered-silken gown, Madame Poco approached with Xeres and Manzanilla, fresh from the shuttered snowery or nieveria.

"And I've just buried a bottle of champagne, in case your Eminence should want it," she announced as she inviolably withdrew.

"As devoted a soul as ever there was, and loyal to all my interests," the Primate exclaimed, touched.

"God be praised!"

"An excellent creature," the Cardinal added, focusing on the grey high road beyond the gate two youths on assback, seated close.

"Andalucians, though of another parish."

"I should like much to visit my diocese again; it's some while since I did," the Cardinal observed, filling the Padre's glass.

"You'd find up at Sodr  a good many changes."

"Have they still the same little maid at the Posada de la Melodia?"

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"Carmencita?"

"A dainty thing."

"She went Therewards about the month of Mary."

"America? It's where they all go."

"She made a ravishing corpse."

"Ahi."

And Doña Beatriz too had died; either in March or May. It was she who would bake the old Greek Sun-bread, and although her heirs had sought high and low no one could find the receipt.

The Cardinal expressed satisfaction.

"Bestemmia," he breathed; "and I trust they never may; for on the Feast of the Circumcision she invariably caused to be laid before the high-altar of the cathedral a peculiarly shaped loaf to the confusion of all who saw it."

And the Alcalde of Ayamonte, Don Deniz, had died on the eve of the bachelors' party he usually gave when he took off his winter beard.

"Ahi; this death . . ."

Ah, yes, and since the delicacies ordered by the corpse could not well be countermanded they had been divided among Christ's poor.

Left to himself once more Cardinal Pirelli returned reluctantly to his Defence.

Half the diocese it seemed had gone "Therewards," while the rest were at Biarritz or Santander. . . .

"A nice cheery time this is!" he murmured, oppressed by the silent cypress-court. Among the blue, pointing shadows, a few frail oleanders in their blood-rose ruby invoked warm brief life and earth's desires.

"A nice cheery time," he repeated, rising and going within.

The forsaken splendour of the vast closed cloisters seemed almost to augur the waning of a cult. Likewise the decline of Apollo, Diana, Isis, with the gradual

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downfall of their Temples, had been heralded, in past times, by the dispersal of their priests. It looked as though Mother Church, like Venus or Diana, was making way in due turn for the beliefs that should follow: "and we shall begin again with intolerance, martyrdom and converts," the Cardinal ruminated, pausing before an ancient fresco depicting the eleven thousand virgins, or as many as there was room for.

Playing a lonely ball game against them was the disrespectful Chicklet.

"Young vandal," the Cardinal chided, caressing the little acolyte's lustrous locks.

"Monseigneur? . . ."

"There: run along; and say a fragrant prayer for me, Child."

Flinging back a shutter drawn fast against the sun, the boundless prospect from the balcony of his cell recalled the royal Escorial. The white scattered terraces of villas set in dark deeps of trees, tall palms, and parasol-pines so shady, and, almost indistinguishable, the white outline of the sea, made insensibly for company.

Changing into a creation of dull scarlet crêpe, a cobweb dubbed "summer-exile," Cardinal Pirelli felt decidedly less oppressed. "Madrid is on the Manzanares," he vociferated, catching sight of the diligence from Sodré. Frequently it would bring Frasquito, the postman—a big tawny boy, overgiven to passing the day in the woods with his gun and his guitar.

"The mail bag is most irregular," he complained, fastening a few dark red, almost black, roses to his cincture. It was Cardinal Pirelli's fancy while in retreat to assume his triple-Abraham, or mitre, and with staff in hand to roam abroad as in the militant Springtide of the Church.

"When kings were cardinals," he murmured quietly as he left the room.

It was around the Moorish water-garden towards shut of day he liked most to wander, seeking like some Adept to interpret in the still deep pools the mirrored music of the sky.

All, was it vanity? These pointing stars and spectral leaning towers, this mitre, this jewelled ring, these trembling hands, these sweet reflected colours, white of daffodil and golden rose. All, was it vanity?

Circling the tortuous paths like some hectic wingless bird, he was called to the refectory by the tinnabulation of a bell.

In the deep gloominous room despoiled of all splendour but for a dozen old Zurbarans flapping in their frames, a board, set out with manifest care, was prepared for the evening meal.

Serving both at Mass and table, it was the impish Chicklet who, with a zealous napkin-flick (modelled on the *mozos* of the little café-cum-restaurant "As in Ancient Andalucia" patronised by rising toreadors and *aficianados* of the Ring), showed the Primate to his chair.

Having promised José the chef a handsome indulgence, absolved him from bigamy, and raised his wages, Cardinal Pirelli, in gastronomy nothing if not fastidious, had succeeded in inducing him to brave the ghostly basements of the monastery on the mount.

Perhaps of the many charges brought against the Primate by his traducers, that of making the sign of the cross with his left foot at meals was the most utterly unfounded—looking for a foot-cushion would have been nearer the truth.

Addressing the table briefly in the harmonious Latin tongue, his Eminence sat down with an impenetrable sigh.

With vine-sprays clinging languorously to the candle-stands, rising from a bed of nespoles, tulips, and a species of wild orchid known as Devil's-balls,

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the Chicklet, to judge from his floral caprices, possessed a little brain of some ambition, not incapable of excess.

"I thought you were tired of jasmine, sir, and th'orange bloom's getting on," he chirruped, coming forward with a cup of cold, clear consommé, containing hearts, coronets and most of the alphabet in vermicelli.

"I'm tired, true, child; but not of jasmine," the Primate returned, following a little contretemps of a marqués' crown, sinking amid a frolicsome bevy of O's.

"I hope it's right, sir?"

"Particularly excellent, child—tell José so."

"Will I bring the trout, sir?"

"Go, boy," the Cardinal bade him, opening a volume by the menu-stand formed of a satyr sentimentalising over a wood-nymph's breasts.

While in retreat it was his fancy, while supping, to pursue some standard work of devotion, such as Orthodoxy so often encourages or allows: it was with just such a golden fairy-tale as this that he had once won a convert: Poor woman. What had become of her? Her enthusiasm, had it lasted? She had been very ardent. Perfervid! "Instruction" would quite wear it out of them. Saint Xarifa's at fall of day; . . . an Autumn affair! Chrysanthemums; big bronze frizzlies. A Mrs. Mandarin Dove. American. Ninety million sterling. Social pride and religious humility, how can I reconcile? The women in Chicago. My God!!! My little step-daughter. . . . Her Father, fortunately. . . . Yes, your Eminence, he's dead. And, oh, I'm *glad*. Is it naughty? And then her photograph à la Mary of Magdala, her hair unbound, décolletée, with a dozen long strands of pearls. "Ever penitently yours, Stella Mandarin Dove."

"I'd rather have had the blonde Ambassadors to the Court of St. James," he reflected, toying with the

fine table-glass of an old rich glamour. A fluted bell cup sadly chipped provoked a criticism and a citation from Cassiodorus on the "rude" ways of boys.

Revolving around an austere piece of furniture that resembled a Coffin-upon-six-legs, the Chicklet appeared absorbed.

"I hear it's the Hebrew in heaven, sir. Spanish is seldom spoken," he exclaimed seraphically.

"Tut, dear child. Who says so?" the Primate wondered, his eyes wandering in melancholy towards the whitest of moons illumining elusively the room—illumining a long, sexless face with large, mauve, heroic lips in a falling frame, and an "apachey," blue-cheeked Christ, the Cardinal noticed.

"Who, sir? Why, a gentleman I was guide to once!"

The Cardinal chuckled comprehensively.

"I should surmise, dear child, there was little to show."

"What, not the crypt, sir? Or the tomb of the beautiful Princess Eboli, the beloved of Philip the Second, sir?"

"Jewel boy. Yum-yum." The Cardinal raised his glass.

"And the bells, sir? Last night, I'll tell you, sir, I thought I heard old 'Wanda' on the wind."

"Old Wanda, boy."

"She rings for deaths, sir."

"Nonsense, child; your little ears could never hear as far," the Cardinal answered, deliberating if a lad of such alertness and perception might be entrusted to give him a henna shampoo: it was easy enough to remove the towels before it got too red. The difficulty was to apply the henna; evenly everywhere; fair play all round; no favouring the right side more than the left, but golden Justice for each grey hair. Impartiality: proportion! "Fatal, otherwise," the Primate reasoned.

"Are you ready for your Quail, sir?"

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"Quail, quail? Bring on the *dulces*, boy," his Eminence murmured, regarding absently through the window the flickering arc-lights of Clemenza far away. Dear beckoning lamps, dear calling lamps; lamps of theatres, cinemas, cabarets, bars and dancings; lamps of railway-termini, and excessively lit hotels, *olé* to you, enchantress lights!"

"And, after all, dears, if I did," the Cardinal breathed, tracing a caricature of his Holiness upon the table-cloth lightly with a dessert-fork. ("Which I certainly deny" . . .), he brooded, disregarding the dissolving Orange ice *à la* Marchioness of Macar-nudo."

"Had you anything in the Lottery, sir?"

"Mind your business, boy, and remove this ball-room nastiness," the Primate snapped.

It was while lingering, after dinner, over some choice vintage, that he oftenest would develop the outline of his Defence. To escape the irate horns of the Pontiff's bull (Die, dull beast) he proposed pressing the "Pauline Privilege," unassailable, and confirmed A.D. 1590 by Pope Sixtus V, home to the battered beauty of the Renaissance hilt. "With the elegance and science," he murmured, "of a *matador*."

"I have the honour to wish you, sir, a good and pleasant night."

"Thanks, boy."

"And if you should want me, sir" . . . the youthful acolyte possessed the power to convey the un-uttered.

"If?? . . . And say a fragrant prayer for me, child," the Cardinal enjoined.

Resting an elbow among the nespoles and tulips (dawn-pink and scarlet, awakening sensitively in the candle-glow), he refilled reflectively his glass.

"God's providence is over all," he told himself, considering dreamfully a cornucopia heaped with

fruit. Being just then the gracious Autumn, a sweet golden-plum called "Don Jaime of Castile" was in great perfection. It had been for the Southern orchards a singularly fertile year. Never were seen such gaily rouged peaches, such sleek, violet cherries, such immensest white grapes. Nestling delectably amid its long, deeply-lobed leaves, a pomegranate (fruit of joy) attracted the Cardinal's hand.

Its seeds, round and firm as castanets, evoked the Ortiz. "Ah, Jesus-Maria. The evening she waved her breasts at me!" he sighed, attempting to locate the distant lights of the Teatro Trinidades. Interpreting God's world, with her roguish limbs and voice, how witching the child had been but lately in *The Cistus of Venus*. Her valse-refrain "Green Fairy Absinthe" (with a full chorus in tights) had been certainly, theatrically (if, perhaps, not socially), the hit of the season.

"The oleanders come between us," he deliberated, oppressed by the amative complaint of some sweet-throated, summer night-bird.

"It's queer, dears, how I'm lonely!" he exclaimed, addressing the ancient Zurbarans flapping austerely in their frames.

The Archbishop of Archidona, for all his air of pomposity, looked not unsympathetic, neither, indeed, did a little lady with a nimbus, casting melting glances through the spokes of a mystic wheel.

"It's queer—; you'd be surprised!" he murmured, rising and setting an oval moon-backed chair beside his own.

As usual the fanciful watch-dogs in the hills had begun their disquieting barking.

"The evenings are suicide," he ruminated, idly replenishing his glass.

Sometimes, after the fifth or sixth bumper, the great Theresa herself would flit in from the garden. Long had her radiant spirit "walked" the Desierto, seeking, it

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was supposed, a lost sheet of the manuscript of her *Way of Perfection*. It may have been following on the seventh or even the eighth bumper that the Primate remarked he was not alone.

She was standing by the window in the fluttered moonshine, holding a knot of whitish heliotropes.

"Mother?"

Saint John of the Cross could scarcely have pronounced the name with more wistful ecstasy.

Worn and ill, though sublime in laughter, exquisite in tenderness she came towards him.

". . . Child?"

"Teach me, oh, teach me, dear Mother, the Way of Perfection."

I X

VERIFYING private dates, revising here and there the cathedral list of charges, Don Moscosco, the secretary of the chapter, seated before his usual bureau, was at the disposal of the public. A ministerial crisis had brought scattered Fashion home to town with a rush, and the pressure of work was enormous. "Business" indeed had seldom been livelier, and chapels for Masses of special intention were being booked in advance as eagerly as opera-boxes for a première, or seaside-villas in the season.

"If the boys are brisk we might work in Joseph," he mused, consulting with closely buttoned lips his Tarifa and plan; "although I'd rather not risk a clash."

Unknown to double-let like his compères on occasion outside, the swarthy little man was a master organiser, never forgetting that the chapter's welfare and prestige were inseparable from his own. Before allotting a chapel for a mass of Intent, it was his rule to analyse and classify the "purity" of the intention (adding five per cent. where it seemed not altogether to be chaste, or where the purpose was "obscure").

"I see no inconvenience," he murmured, gauging delicately the motif of a couple of great ladies of the bluest blood in Spain who were commissioning masses for the safety of a favourite toreador in an approaching *corrida*.

"Five hundred flambeaux, at least, between them," the secretary, negligently, spat.

It was the twenty-first day of September (which is the Feast of Saint Firmin), and the sacristia, thronged with mantons and monsignori, resembled some vast shifting parterre of garden-flowers. Having a little

altercation together, Mother Mary of the Holy Face and Mother Garcia of the Company of Jesus, alone, seemed stable. In honour of Saint Firmin the door of Pardon (closed half the year) had just been thrown open, bringing from the basilica an odour of burning incense and the strains of a nuptial march.

How many of the bridal guests knew of the coffin installed in the next chapel but one? the little man wondered, rising gallantly to receive a client.

She wore no hat, but a loose veil of gold and purple enveloped her hair and face.

"I fear for him!"

"There, there. What is it?"

"I fear for him"—a man and the stars, nights of sweet love, oleander flowers were in her voice.

By her immense hooped earrings, as large as armlets, he knew her for the Adonira, the mistress of the toreador Tancos.

"Come to me after the Friday miserere," the official objected: "let me entreat an appointment."

"No. Now."

"Well."

"I want a Mass."

"The intention being . . .?" The secretary sent up his brows a little.

"His safety."

"Whose?"

"My lover's."

"But, señorita, it's all done! It's all *done*, dear lady," the words were on Don Moscosco's lips. Still, being the pink of chivalry with *las mujares* and a man of business, he murmured: "With what quantity of lights?"

"Two. Just for him and me."

"Tell me how you would prefer them," he exclaimed, glancing whimsically towards the canvas of the Magdalen waylaying our Lord.

"How I would——" she stammered, opening and closing the fansticks in her painted, love-tired hands.

"You would like them long and, I dare say, gross?"

"The best," she breathed, almost fainting as though from some fleeting delicious vision in the air.

"Leave it to me," Don Moscosco said, and dropping expressively his voice he added: "Come, señorita; won't you make a date with me?"

"A date with you?"

"Ah-hah, the little Juans and Juanas; the charming cherubs!" the secretary archly laughed.

Returning however no answer she moved distractedly away.

"Two tapers! *Two*. As many only as the animal's horns. It's amazing how some women stint," he reflected, faintly nettled.

The marriage ceremony was over. From the summit of the giralda, volley on volley, the vibrant bells proclaimed the consummation.

"It was all so quick; I hope it's valid?" Madame la Horra, the mother of the "Bride," looked in to say. With a rose mole here and a strawberry mole there, men (those adorable monsters) accounted her entirely attractive.

"As *though* we should hurry, as *though* we should clip!"

"Eh?"

"As though we were San Eusebio, or the Pilar!"

"Forgive me, I came only to—I, . . . I, . . . I, . . . I think I cried. The first spring flowers looked so beautiful."

A mother's love, and contrition, perhaps, for her own shortcomings, the secretary brooded. "I shall knock her off five per cent."

Lost in bland speculation Don Moscosco considered the assembly collected outside the curtained *camarin* of the Virgin, where the gowns of the Image were dusted and changed.

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For Firmin she usually wore an osprey or two and perfumed ball-gloves of Cordoba, and carried a spread fan of gold Guadalmedina lace. Among devotees of the sacristia it was a perpetual wonder to observe how her costumes altered her. Sometimes she would appear quite small, dainty and French, at others she would recall the sumptuous women of the Argentine and the New World, and aficionados would lament their fairy isle of Cuba in the far-off Caribbean Sea.

Traversing imperiously the throng, Don Moscosco beheld the Duquesa DunEden.

Despite the optimism of the gazettes it looked as though the Government must indeed be tottering, since the Duquesa too was up from her country quinta.

"I have a request to make," she began, sinking gratefully to a chair.

"And charmed, in advance, to grant it."

"I suppose you will have forgotten my old spaniel, Clapsey?"

"Ah, no more dogs!"

"She is passing-out, poor darling; and if the Church could spare her some trifling favour——"

"Impossible."

"She is the first toy tail for my little cemetery!"

"Quite impossible."

"Poor pet," the Duquesa exclaimed undaunted: "she has shared in her time my most intimate secrets: she stands for early memories; what rambles we'd go together, she and I, at Santander long ago! I remember Santander, Don Moscosco (imagine), when there was not even a hotel! A little fishing-village, so quiet, so quiet; ah, it was nicer, far, and more exclusive then. . . ."

"I dare say."

"You know my old, blind and devoted friend was a gift from the king; and this morning I said to her: 'Clapsey! Clapsey!' I said: 'where's Carlos? Car-los . . . ?' And I'll take my oath she rallied."

THE WORKS OF RONALD FIRBANK

Don Moscosco unbent a shade: "A token, is she, of royalty?"

"He also gave me 'Flirt'!"

"Perhaps a brief mass . . ."

"Poor dearest: you'll keep it quiet and black?"

"We say all but the Black."

"Oh?"

"One must draw the line somewhere!" Don Moscosco declared, his eye roving towards a sacristan piloting a party of travel-stained tourists, anxious to inspect the casket containing a feather from the Archangel Gabriel's wing.

"I know your creative taste! I rely on you," the Duquesa rose remarking.

Nevertheless, beneath the routine of the sacristia the air was surcharged with tension. Rival groups, pro- or anti-Pirellian, formed almost irreconcilable camps, and partisanship ran high. Not a few among the cathedral staff had remained true to his Eminence, and Mother Sunlight, a charwoman, (who sometimes performed odd jobs at the Palace) had taught her infant in arms to cry: "Long live Spain and Cardinal Pirelli!"

Enough, according to some extreme anti-Pirellians, to be detrimental to her milk.

"I'm told the Pope has sent for him at last," the laundress of the Basilica, Doña Consolacion, remarked to Sister June of the Way Dolorous.

"Indeed, indeed; it scarcely does to think!"

"Does anyone call to mind a bit of a girl (from Bilbao she was) that came once to stop as his niece?"

"Inclined to a moustache! Perfectly."

"Phœbe Poco protests she wasn't."

"Ah, well; a little *Don Juanism* is good," the laundress said, and sighed.

"She declares . . ."

"She tells the truest lies, dear, of anyone I know!"

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"Be that as it may it's certain he's getting increasingly eccentric. But Sunday last, entertaining his solicitor, it seems he ordered coffee after the merienda to be served in two chamber-pots."

"Shameful—and he in his sunset years!" Mother Mary of the Holy Face commented, coming up with Tomás the beadle.

"It wouldn't surprise me," he declared, drowsily shaking a heavy bouquet of keys, "if the thread of his life was about to break."

"*Hombre . . .*" The laundress expressed alarm.

"Often now, towards Angelus, as I climb the tower, I hear the bell Herod talking with old Wanda in the loft. Eeeeeeee! Eeeeeeee! Horrible things they keep saying. Horrible things they keep saying."

"Nonsense," Doña Consolacion exclaimed, bestowing a smile on Monsignor Cuxa. Old, and did-did-dodderly, how frail he seemed beside Father Fadrique, the splendid swagger of whose chasuble every woman must admire.

"Sent for to Rome; ah, sangre mio, I wish someone would send for me," a girl, with a rose in the hair beautifully placed, sighed romantically.

"Be satisfied with Spain, my dear, and remember that no other country can compare with it!" Doña Generosa, an Aunt of one of the cathedral dancing-boys (who drew a small pension as the widow of the late Leader of applause at the Opera-house), remonstrated.

"I've never travelled," Doña Consolacion blandly confessed: "but I dare say, dear, you can't judge of Egypt by *Aida*."

"Oh, can't I, though?" Doña Generosa sniffed, as the Father of an acolyte raised his voice.

"Spain!" he exclaimed, exalted, throwing a lover's kiss to the air, "Spain! The most glorious country in God's universe, His admitted masterpiece, His gem,

His——” He broke off, his eloquence dashed by the sad music of Monsignor Cuxa’s hæmorrhage.

An office in the Chapel of the Crucifix was about to begin, recalling to their duties the scattered employees of the staff.

Hovering by the collection-box for the Souls in Hades, the Moorish maid from the College of Noble Damosels, bound on an errand of trust as ancient as the world, was growing weary of watching the people come and go.

“I must have missed him beneath the trees of the Market Place,” she ruminated, straightening on her head a turban wreathed in blossoms.

It was the matter of a message from Obdulia and Milagros to the radiant youth whose lips they were so idyllically (if perhaps somewhat licentiously) sharing.

“Fo’ sh’o dis goin’ to put dose heiresses in a quandry,” she deliberated, oppressed by her surroundings.

Eastern in origin like the Mesquita of Cordoba, it was impossible to forget that the great basilica of Clemenza was a Mosque profaned.

Designed for the cult of Islam, it made her African’s warm heart bleed to behold it now. Would it were reconverted to its virginal state, and the cry of the muezzin be heard again summoning men to Muhammad’s house! Yes, the restitution of the cathedral to Allah was Muley’s cherished dream, and it consoled her, on certain days when she was homesick, to stand before the desecrated mihrab in worship, her face turned towards Africa, and palm-girt Marrakesh across the sea.

“I almost inclined to slip across to de Café Goya,” she breathed, moving aside for a shuffling acolyte, bearing a crucifix on a salver.

Led by the pious sisters of the noble order of the Flaming-Hood, the Virgin was returning to her niche.

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She was arrayed as though bound for the Bull-ring, in a robe of peacock silk, and a mantilla of black lace.

"*Santissima! . . .*"

"*Elegantissima!*" Devotees dropped adoring to the floor.

Alone, the African remained erect.

"Muhammad mine, how long?" she sighed, turning entreating eyes to the cabbalistic letters and Saracenic tracings of the azulejos arabesques.

X

MIDNIGHT had ceased chiming from the Belfry tower, and the last seguidilla had died away. Looking fresh as a rose, and incredibly juvenile in his pyjamas of silver-grey and scarlet (the racing colours of Vittoria, Duchess of Vizeu), the Cardinal seemed disinclined for bed.

Surveying in detachment the preparatives for his journey (set out beneath an El Greco Christ, with outspread, delicate hands), he was in the mood to dawdle.

"These for the Frontier. Those for the train," he exclaimed aloud, addressing a phantom porter.

Among the personalia was a passport, the likeness of identity showing him in a mitre, cute to tears, though, essentially, orthodox; a flask of Napoleon brandy, to be "declared" if not consumed before leaving the Peninsula; and a novel, *Self-Essence*, on the Index, or about to be.

"A coin, child, and put them for me on the rack," he enjoined the wraith, regarding through the window the large and radiant stars.

The rhythmic murmur of a weeping fountain filled momentarily the night.

Its lament evoked the Chicklet's sobs.

"Did I so wrong, my God, to punish him? Was I too hasty?" the Primate asked, repairing towards an ivory crucifix by Cano; "yet, Thou knowest, I adore the boy!"

He paused a moment astonished by the revelation of his heart.

"It must have been love that made me do it," he

smiled, considering the incident in his mind. Assuredly the rebuff was unpremeditated, springing directly from the boy's behaviour, spoiling what might have been a ceremony of something more than ordinary poignance.

It had come about so.

There had been held previously during the evening, after the Basilica's scheduled closing hour, a service of "Departure," fastidiously private, in the presence only of the little Ostensoir-swinging "Chicklet," who, missing all the responses, had rushed about the cathedral after mice; for which the Cardinal, his sensitiveness hurt by the lad's disdain and frivolity, had afterwards confined him alone with them in the dark.

"Had it been Miguilito or Joaquin, I should not have cared a straw for their interest in the mice! But somehow this one——" the Cardinal sighed.

Adjusting in capricious abstraction his cincture, he turned towards the window.

It was a night like most.

Uranus, Venus, Saturn showed overhead their wonted lights, while in the sun-weary cloisters, brightly blue-drenched by the moon, the oleanders in all their wonder—(how swiftly fleeting is terrestrial life)—were over, and the bougainvillæas reigned instead.

"It must have been that," he murmured, smiling up at the cathedral towers.

Poor little Don Wilful. The chapter-mice, were they something so amusing to pursue? "I've a mind, do you know, to join you, boy; I declare I feel quite rompish!" he told himself, gathering up, with a jocund pounce, a heavy mantle of violet cloth-of-gold.

"Tu-whit, tu-whoo."

Two ominous owls answered one another across the troubled garden.

"I declare I feel——" his hand sought vaguely his heart: it went pit-a-pat for almost nothing now! "The strain of the diocese," he breathed, consulting a pier-glass of the period of Queen Isabella "the Ironical."

"The Court may favour Paul Orna, but in my opinion no one can rival Joey Paquin's 'line'; I should like to see him 'tailor' our Madonna; one of the worst and most expensively dressed little saints in the world," his Eminence commented, folding toga-wise the obedient tissues about his slender form.

An aspect so correctly classic evoked the golden Rome of the Imperial Cæsars rather than the so tedious Popes.

Repeating a sonorous line from Macrobius, the Cardinal measured himself a liqueur-glass of brandy.

Poor little Don Bright-eyes, alone in the obscurity. It was said a black dervish "walked" the Coro—one of the old habitués of the Mosque.

"Jewel boy. Yum-yum," he murmured, setting a mitre like a wondrous mustard-pot upon his head. *Omnia vanitas*; it was intended for Saint Peter's.

"Tu-whit, tu-whoo!"

Grasping a Bishop's stave, remotely shepherdessy, his Eminence opened softly the door.

Olé, the Styx!

Lit by Uranus, Venus and Saturn only, the consummate tapestries on the stairs recording the Annunciation, Conception, Nativity, Presentation, Visitation, Purification and Ascension of the Virgin made welcome milestones.

". . . Visitation, Purification." The Primate paused on the penultimate step.

On a turn of the stair by the "Conception," a sensitive panel, chiefly white, he had the impression of a wavering shadow, as of someone following close behind.

Continuing, preoccupied, his descent, he gained a

postern door. A few deal cases, stoutly corded for departure, were heaped about it. "His Holiness, I venture to predict, will appreciate the excellence of our home-grown oranges, not to be surpassed by those of any land," the Primate purred, sailing forth into the garden.

Oh, the lovely night! Oh, the lovely night! He stood, leaning on his wand, lost in contemplation of the miracle of it.

"Kek, kek, kex."

In the old lead aqua-butt, by the Chapter-house, the gossiping bull-frogs were discussing their great horned and hoofed relations. . . .

"There was never yet one that didn't bellow!"

"Kek, kek, kex."

"*Los toros*, forsooth!"

"A blessed climate. . . ." The Primate pursued his way.

It was in the face of a little door like the door of a tomb in the cathedral's bare façade (troubled only by the fanciful shadows of the trees) that he presently slipped his key.

Olé, the Styx!

He could distinguish nothing clearly at first beyond the pale forked fugitive lightning through the triple titanic windows of the chancel.

"Sunny-locks, Don Sunny-locks?" the Cardinal cooed, advancing diffidently, as though mistrustful of meeting some Charwoman's pail.

Life had prepared him for these surprises.

Traversing on his crozier a spectral aisle, he emerged upon the nave.

Flanked by the chapels of the Crucifix, of the Virgin, of the Eldest Son of God, and of divers others, it was here as bright as day.

Presumably Don April-showers was too self-abashed to answer, perhaps too much afraid. . . . "If

I recollect, the last time I preached was on the theme of Flagellation," the Primate mused, considering where it caught the moon the face of a fakir in ecstasy carved amid the corbels.

"A sermon I propose to publish," he resolved, peering into the chapel of Santa Lucia. It was prepared, it seemed, in anticipation of a wedding, for stately palms and branches of waxen peach-bloom stood all about. "Making circulation perilous," the Primate mused, arrested by the determined sound of a tenacious mouse gnawing at a taper-box.

"An admirable example in perseverance!" he mentally told himself, blinking at the flickering mauve flowers of light in the sanctuary lamps.

Philosophising, he penetrated the engrailed silver doors connecting the chapel of the Magdalen.

The chapel was but seldom without a coffin, and it was not without one now.

Since the obsequies of the brilliant Princess Eboli it had enjoyed an unbroken vogue.

Besides the triumphal monument of the beloved of Philip II, the happy (though, perhaps, not the happiest) achievement of Jacinto Bisquert, there were also mural tablets to the Duchesses of Pampeluna (*née* Mattosinhos), Polonio (*née* Charona), and Sarmento (*née* Tizzi-Azza), while the urn and ashes of the Marchioness of Orcasitas (*née* Ivy Harris) were to be found here too, far from the race and turmoil of her native New York.

"Misericordia! Are you there, boy?" the Cardinal asked, eyeing abstractedly the twin-hooded carytides that bore the fragile casket white as frozen snow containing the remains of the all-amiable princess.

Folded in dainty sleep below, he perceived the lad.

Witching as Eros, in his loose-flowing alb, it seemed profane to wake him!

ECCENTRICITIES OF CARDINAL PIRELLI

" . . . And lead us not into temptation," the Primate murmured, stooping to gaze on him.

Age of bloom and fleeting folly: Don Apple-cheeks!

Hovering in benison he had almost a mind to adopt the boy, enter him for Salamanca or, remoter, Oxford, and perhaps (by some bombshell codicil) even make him his heir.

"How would you like my Velasquez, boy? . . ."
His Eminence's hand framed an airy caress. "Eh, child? Or my Cano Crucifix? . . . I know of more than one bottle-nosed dowager who thinks she'll get it! . . . You know my Venetian-glass, Don Endymion, is among the choicest in Spain. . . ."

There was a spell of singing silence, while the dove-grey mystic lightning waxed and waned.

Aroused as much by it as the Primate's hand, the boy started up with a scream of terror.

"Ouch, sir!"

"Olé, boy?"

The panic appeared to be mutual.

"Oufarella! . . ." With the bound of a young faun the lad was enskied amid the urns and friezes.

The heart in painful riot, the Primate dropped to a chair.

Ouching, Oléing and Oufarellaing it, would they never have done? Paternoſtering Phœbe Poco (shadowing her master) believed they never would. "Old ogre: why can't he be brisk about it and let a woman back to bed?" she wondered.

Thus will egotism, upon occasion, eclipse morality outright.

"And always be obedient, dear child," the Cardinal was saying; "it is one of the five things in Life that matter most."

"Which are the others, sir?"

"What others, boy?"

"Why, the other four!"

"Never mind now. Come here."

"Oh, tral-a-la, sir." Laughing like some wild spirit, the lad leapt (Don Venturesome, Don Venturesome, his Eminence trembled) from the ledge of A Virtuous Wife and Mother (Sarmiento, *née* Tizzi-Azza) to the urn of Ivy, the American marchioness.

"You'd not do that if you were fond of me, boy!" The Cardinal's cheek had paled.

"But I *am* fond of you, sir! Very. Caring without caring: don't you know?"

"So you do care something, child?"

"I care a lot! . . ."

Astride the urn of Ivy—poised in air—the Chicklet pellucidly laughed.

"Tell me so again," the Cardinal begged, as some convent-bell near by commenced sounding for office before aurora.

For behind the big windows the stars were fading.

"It's to-day they draw the Lottery, sir."

"Ah; well, I had nothing in it. . . ."

"ooojo—that's me!"

The Cardinal fetched a breath.

"Whose is it, boy?" He pointed towards the bier.

"A Poet, sir."

"A Poet?"

"The name though he had escapes me. . . ."

"No matter then."

"Where would his soul be now, sir?"

"Never mind, boy; come here."

"In the next world I should like to meet the Cid, and Christopher Columbus!"

"Break your neck, lad, and so you will."

"Pablo Pedraza too. . . ."

"Who's that, boy?"

"He was once the flower of the ring, sir; superior even to Tancos; you may recollect he was tossed and ruptured at Ronda; the press at the time was full of it."

"Our press, dear youth, our press!!! . . ." the Primate was about to lament, but an apologetic sneeze from a chapel somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Eldest Son of God arrested him.

It seemed almost to confirm the legend of old, Mosque-sick "Suliman," said to stalk the temple aisles.

The Cardinal twirled challengingly his stave—*Bible* v. *Koran*; a family case; cousins; Eastern, equally, each; hardy old perennials, no less equivocal and extravagant, often, than the ever-adorable *Arabian Nights*! "If only Oriental literature *sprawled* less, was more concise! It should concentrate its roses," he told himself, glancing out, inquiringly, into the nave.

Profoundly soft and effaced, it was a place full of strange suggestion. Intersecting avenues of pillared arches, upbearing waving banners, seemed to beckon towards the Infinite.

"Will you be obliged to change, sir; or shall you go straight through?"

"Straight through, boy."

"I suppose, as you cross the border, they'll want to know what you have to declare."

"I have nothing, child, but myself."

"If 00050 is fortunate, sir, I hope to travel, too—India, Persia, Peru! . . . Ah, it's El Dorado, then."

"El Dorado, boy?" The Cardinal risked an incautious gesture.

"Oh, tral-a-la, sir." Quick as Cupid the lad eluded him on the evasive wings of a laugh; an unsparing little laugh, sharp and mocking, that aroused the Primate like the thong of a lash.

Of a long warrior line, he had always regarded disobedience (in others) as an inexcusable offence. What would have happened before the ramparts of Zaragoza, Valladolid, Leon, Burgos, had the men commanded by Ipolito Pirelli in the Peninsular War refused to

obey? To be set at defiance by a youngster, a mere cock-robin, kindled elementary ancestral instincts in the Primate's veins.

"Don't provoke me, child, again."

From pillared ambush Don Prudent saw well, however, to effect a bargain.

"You'd do the handsome by me, sir; you'd not be mean?"

"Eh? . . ."

"The Fathers only give us texts; you'd be surprised, your Greatness, at the stinginess of some!"

" . . . ?"

"You'd run to something better, sir; you'd give me something more substantial?"

"I'll give you my slipper, child, if you don't come here!" his Eminence warned him.

"Oufarella. . . ."

Sarabandish and semi-mythic was the dance that ensued. Leading by a dozen derisive steps Don Light-of-Limb took the nave. In the dusk of the dawn it seemed to await the quickening blush of day like a white-veiled negress.

"Olé, your Purpleship!"

Men (eternal hunters, novelty seekers, insatiable beings), men in their natural lives, pursue the concrete no less than the ideal—qualities not inseldom found combined in fairy childhood.

"Olé."

Oblivious of sliding mantle the Primate swooped.

Up and down, in and out, round and round "the Virgin," over the worn tombed paving, through Saint Joseph, beneath the cobweb banners from Barocco to purest Moorish, by early Philip, back to Turân-Shâh—"Don't exasperate me, boy"—along the raised tribunes of the choristers and the echoing coro—the great fane (after all) was nothing but a cage; God's cage; the cage of God! . . .

ECCENTRICITIES OF CARDINAL PIRELLI

Through the chancel windows the day was newly breaking as the oleanders will in spring.

Dispossessed of everything but his fabulous mitre, the Primate was nude and elementary now as Adam himself.

"As you can perfectly see, I have nothing but myself to declare," he addressed some phantom image in the air.

With advancing day Don Skylark *alias* Bright-eyes *alias* Don Temptation it seemed had contrived an exit, for the cathedral was become a place of tranquillity and stillness.

"Only myself." He had dropped before a painting of old Dominic Theotocópuli, the Greek, showing the splendour of Christ's martyrdom.

Peering expectantly from the silken parted curtains of a confessional, paternostering Phœbe Poco caught her breath.

Confused not a little at the sight before her, her equilibrium was only maintained by the recollection of her status: "I'm an honest widow; so I know what men are, bless them!" And stirred to romantic memories she added: "Poor soul, he had the prettiest teeth. . . ."

Fired by fundamental curiosity, the dame, by degrees, was emboldened to advance. All over was it, with him, then? It looked as though his Eminence was far beyond Rome already.

"May God show His pity on you, Don Alvaro of my heart."

She remained a short while lost in mingled conjecture. It was certain no morning bell would wake him.

"So." She stopped to coil her brier-wood chaplet about him in order that he might be less uncovered. "It's wonderful what us bits of women do with a string of beads, but they don't go far with a gentleman."

THE WORKS OF RONALD FIRBANK

Now that the ache of life, with its fevers, passions, doubts, its routine, vulgarity, and boredom, was over, his serene, unclouded face was a marvelment to behold. Very great distinction and sweetness was visible there, together with much nobility, and love, all magnified and commingled.

"*Adios*, Don Alvaro of my heart," she sighed, turning away towards the little garden door ajar.

Through the triple windows of the chancel the sky was clear and blue—a blue like the blue of lupins. Above him stirred the wind-blown banners in the Nave.

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