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Fifty Cents



THE CASE OF THE INDECENT NUDES
A NEW STORY BY PIETRO DI DONATO
NEW ORLEANS: OLD WINE, NEW SPICE



ILLUSTRATION BY REESE BRANDT

the flesh, the devil and santiago

*The paesanos knew that something had to happen;
no man could bear the weight of such horns*

by **Pietro Di Donato**

SANTIAGO Mezzanotte's blacksmith shop was across the street from our tenement. It had been there long before he acquired it, for on the red clapboards above the entrance was a wooden figurehead of a horse and under it in faded lettering: Adolph Schotze . . . est. 1880. My earliest recollection was of certain rainy days when father had him forge out bricklayers' tools. I see the cindery dirt floor, iron-rimmed wagon wheels, the hooded forge and bellows, the shoeing bench and battered anvil, and still smell the horses' leavings, the acid coke and the callous-gelatin odor of hot horseshoes charring into hooves. The children called him

Zio Santiago; we used to fashion scooters with roller skates and wood, and racing cars from discarded perambulators and soap boxes. We brought our problems to him; he pretended they were complicated, and helped us with serious concern. Though past sixty and with a mane of white hair, he was proportioned like the Moses of Michelangelo. He had left Italy in his youth and toured the world with a circus, performing feats of strength, and had been known as Santiago The Great. He was slow-thinking and spoke whisperingly, and had an open, amazed face. Santiago showed us handbills of his circus days and of his first wife, Christina, the bareback rider; he grimacingly demonstrated how he wrestled and vanquished the Terrible Turk, and prided to display his tremendous muscles. In awe we would feel his coiling biceps that were hard as marble. "Become strong dear little ones," he would say in his hushing voice. "Match thy strength with gentleness and compassion, and injure not even the fly, for our almighty Father made him also as He made thee and me."

Partitioned from the shop was the stable; my huge bearded Garibaldian uncle, Barbarosso, who was a dynamiteer and

hauled blasted rock from foundations with his dump-wagon, kept his beloved white mule, Mazzini, in one of the stalls near some drayhorses and Santiago's ebony stud, Africano. Above the stable was the hayloft. Out in the court was the ammonia-steaming manure pit; to a side were carriages, wagons, and an obsolete horse-drawn tramcar—Bergenline Rapid Transist—in which we played, yanking brakes and clanging the tram gong. In the rear was Santiago's vine-veined Victorian house with upper and lower verandas and widow's walk atop the flat roof. There with him and his young wife Stella, lived Stella's mother, Luna Ciucanera, Santiago's foster son, Pasqualino, and Santiago's mother, Adalaida. Blind, senile Adalaida could find her way about the house and yard; each day she fed and watered the chickens and the greyhound, Arrigo, who was chained within the doorway of the stable. Adalaida would sit on the porch, taking snuff, and doing a monologue of Bible-quoting and laughter. Pasqualino was splay-footed as was his real father, Vincenzo (Charlie Chaplin) Passalacqua, but he was animalistically handsome, with thick

(Continued on next page)

black curly hair and a dark olive color. Working as a smithy with Santiago he had grown man-sized before his time.

I used to wonder about various things: How did it feel being a man, and just why was a man interested in a woman? Why were people different from each other? Why this? Why that? I had an uncontrollable compulsion to observe, listen and compare. Two incidents made me fear and hate Pasqualino: When the iceman's horse was dying of colic, Pasqualino picked me up and thrust me down upon the convulsing horse. And one afternoon as I was coming down the ladder from the hayloft he grabbed me and kicked me and said: "You li'l sonuvabitch if I catch you in the hayloft I'll break your goddam sneaky neck!"

I was on the tenement roof paddling tomato *purée* in vats so that the summer sun would render it to paste; below was the well of backyards with their teetering fences, litter, crooked washpoles and clotheslines running to each kitchen window. I heard the Artichoke's wife carol to Mother: "Annunziata . . . ! Know thee the new of it? The nephew of Padre Onorio, Friar Gian-carlo, tomorrow arrives from the Italy upon the Duca di Aosta!" "Conchettina, who apprised thee?" "Sebastiano, the garlic vendor, freshly from the rectory of San Rocco—Don Onorio was with Marconi message in hand."

Padre Onorio and Brother Gian-carlo bore the same surname as Mother, Cinquina, and we were related. This was an important occasion; Mother assisted by fat, crippled Rosa La Zoppa, housemaid to Padre Onorio, prepared dinner: *olives condite, caponata, provolone* cheese and *prosciutti, brodetta*, snail pie, stuffed octopus, roast head of goat, fennel, chestnuts, prickly pears, honey-balls, muscatel wine, *espresso* and anise-flavored *gelati*. Padre Onorio, Santiago and Father went to fetch Brother Gian-carlo. They left West Hoboken, maneuvered the steep road from the Palisades to Hoboken, boarded the ferry to New York and then to Ellis Island. Questing among the betagged immigrants, Padre Onorio found his nephew. "Bless thee, bless thee, dearest nephew and welcome to the America where with delighted heart kith, kin and kind receive thee." Our guests at dinner were Padre Onorio, Santiago's family, and Uncle Barbarosso. Mother had warned Uncle, "In front of the young priest I'll have no talk about thy boon companionship with Lucifer!"

Brother Gian-carlo wore a cassock buttoned from throat to ankles; he was tall and prematurely gray; he had a smallish head and spindly hands; his face was fleshy, his nose peaked, his mouth thin, his blue eyes sunken and his scrubbed skin had a monastic pallor. He stretched his fingers constantly and sat with a nervous deference that invoked uneasiness. "Was Vasto yet of surpassing Bellezza?" "Yes, very much so." "Did America seem alien from Vasto?" "Yes, very much so." Father whispered to Mother, "Our young 'undertaker' must be famished—bring food." Mother remarked *sotto voce*, "I'll gamble 'very much so' is going to be one to reckon with!" When Mother laid the table, Gian-carlo struggled to say, "Good cousin—it has been my usage to wash my own plate and utensils—is it permitted?" He excused himself and took his knife, fork and plate to the sink. He soaped and rinsed and wiped them again and again. He thanked Mother for each helping but declined the meat because Mother had cooked it in an aluminum pot, nor would he have wine.

Aside from the fact that Santiago was the sacristan of our church, Mother had invited him because my eldest sister Mary was smitten with his foster son, Pasqualino, his 'son of gold.' But when he brought his mother-in-law, Luna Ciucanera, Mother smiled ruefully and Father grinned. La Ciucanera breaking bread at their virtuous table—that was

America for you—and the end of the world! In Vasto decent women were not allowed near the person of La Ciucanera—that was for men and the night. Pasqualino was ten years old when Santiago's wife Christina died. Soon after, Luna Ciucanera and her daughter came to America; they were ostracized. Resourceful Ciucanera upon learning of the widower Santiago who was innocent of Vastese gossip and had house and *dennaro*, led her daughter Stella to the blacksmith shop and sat before him daily. She threw herself upon his mercy and offered Stella to him, convincing the simple *ferrier*, who was old enough to be the girl's father, that the Madonna had appeared in a dream to her. She was to tell him to marry Stella and merit God's reward for keeping spotless the souls of a mother and her virgin child. With the marriage Luna Ciucanera had vaulted into position amongst the *paesanos*. And now wouldn't she be lisping to Brother Gian-carlo how she had even considered the nunnery! With the *espresso* and brandy the men puffed La Contributor cigars; Santiago did not smoke, and neither did Gian-carlo, who was irritated and coughed. Mother, shrewdly perceptive, silently rolled pellets of bread; she did not push my sister Mary towards Pasqualino—as she put it: "There was the unique smell of carnality between Pasqualino and the woman of Santiago."

The *paesanos* came to greet Brother Gian-carlo; the Kaiser from the floor above with his speared mustaches, the Artichoke, Pass-water and his mate, Teresina the Meatball, from next door, and so many others that our railroad flat seemed a felicitous cattle car. Pasqualino's actual father, and brother to Pass-water, entered; properly he was Vincenzo Passalacqua, but he had been named Charlie Chaplin because of his antics. His wife, Gabriella, died giving birth to Pasqualino; Christina, the original wife of Santiago, took the infant to her babyless teats, and Santiago retained this son-through-milk. Charlie Chaplin took to the brothels and the stage of Zuccaro's saloon. Pasqualino dutifully arose and kissed his hand. Charlie Chaplin took Gian-carlo's measure and smirked, "Ah my boy, it can be said that at heart I am a bit of a monk." With salacious winks he paid the floweriest of compliments to Luna Ciucanera. The more sanguine adjourned with Charlie Chaplin to Pass-water's flat, and the rest went to the front-room to hear my sister play the piano. *The Burning of Rome* and *The Sunshine Of Your Smile* did not move them. But when Father sat at the piano, the room tremored as Uncle Barbarosso, Stella and Rosa La Zoppa sang *Bella Figlie Dell Amore*, and the *paesanos* were lachrymose with the sad throbbing of *O Terra Addio*.

Midnight was the hour of epos. The building of our church was told about in detail. How the early Vastese *paesanos* chose the comfort of San Rocco, patron of pilgrims, as they felt they were 'Roccini,' peregrinous: foreigners, travelers. Then their aspiration to build a brick church. The women had said, "The trowels that make bread shall also serve the edifice of God!" Padre Onorio had mused: "Solomon truly ruled that one special hair of woman can draw more than twenty team of oxen." Charlie Chaplin designed the structure—"una diadema"—the first floor square, the *campanile* octagonal and capped with a dome. The materials had been pilfered from the jobs, but blessed by Padre Onorio, such as Friday meat is turned into fish. The *paesanos*, of course, had to manifest their trowel-cunning, and our miniature Vatican had Pass-water's pinnacles, Dainty-dainty's arches, the *rondelles* of the Kaiser, and the Confessional of the Artichoke. The dome which was molded from the master hand of Charlie Chaplin was referred to as "Charlie Chaplin's ball."

(Continued on page 62)

THE FLESH, THE DEVIL AND SANTIAGO

(Continued from page 14)

Also told was how Pass-water's woman, Teresina the Meatball, though big with child, wore overalls, smoked a pipe and spread mortar for her man and sons. Boasted she, "Why should I not sling the trowel when from out of my belly have come bricklayers!" The belated child had to be born right on the scaffold—literally in a mortar-pan. "Finalmente!" cried Teresina. And according to Pass-water's wish, Padre Onorio immediately baptized the baby with the name Finalmente Rocco Passalacqua. The picture taken by Mastrobellangini, the photographer, on rooftop day was brought out. The children were ranged in the foreground. I wore a cowboy suit and brandished cap pistols, Head-of-Pig's son, Gigi, was doing a handstand, the Kaiser's brats were astride Uncle Barbarosso's mule, Whadda-you-want's children were piled in Padre Onorio's motorcycle and side-car, some kids sat in wheelbarrows and others dangled from the scaffolding in the background. Dainty-dainty stood fastidiously aloof wearing a white roll-neck sweater and gloves; Charlie Chaplin was the only *paesano* who ever possessed a raincoat and he was showing it off although the sun was shining; Uncle Barbarosso was in his cape, beaver hat and leather puttees holding a jug of wine to his lips as Garibaldi, his beagle, crouched at his feet; Pass-water wore his wife's shawl and held the swaddled baby, Finalmente, while his wife, the Meatball, pipe in mouth, was plumbing his head with level and hammer; Mother was seated on a stock of brick behind me; she was pregnant with my brother Giogio. Standing behind her, and holding a glass of wine, was Father, in a blue suit, pork-pie hat, wing collar and polka-dot bow tie; in a corner of his mouth was a Royal Bengal Tiger cheroot. The white-haired Santiago had one arm about the waist of Stella and the other lovingly about Pasqualino; in the center was Rosa La Zoppa handing Padre Onorio the rooftop, a potted fig plant. The mighty Santiago had lifted Padre Onorio, tree and all, and carried him upon his shoulders up the ladders to the top of the dome. It was Santiago on the day of consecration of San Rocco who had unmuffled the tongue of the bell in the tower; the bell was ancient, and had been sent as a gift from the diocese in Vasto. It had sung o'er the hearths of Vasto for generations into centuries gone by, and in West Hoboken its voice was newly rich and clear.

In Pass-water's kitchen, Charlie Chaplin, drinking strega, regaled, evoking guffaws. "Recall thee the house inside the gate of Vasto? Since Testament it has been the 'shrine of fornicari' and what sights its walls have seen! There was always a mother and daughter with public thighs. There the mystic ministry of the harlot was perpetuated, and there aboded Luna Ciucanera and her mother, Sola—a constellation of *puttana*. My sire, rest his soul, was serviced by Luna's mother. Whenever Luna and her mother vacationed, Vasto was afflicted with masculine distemper. I 'cut my teeth' on Luna. We thought she was the grand lady of Vasto: parasol, high heels, a hat big as a mortar-pan and laden with artificial flowers, long gloves, a red dress, perfume and a gallon of paint on her face. Saturday mornings she posted herself at the fork of the road, leading to Ortona; Don Peppino, the olive grower, would come by in his cart lugged by the little black donkey and take her with him—for ye know what—and thus we called her La Ciucanera—the lady of the black ass. One night, dark as debt, when Geremio and I visited her, Gigi, who was sentinel in the street below, shouted "I Carabinieri!" And didn't leap we out the window, with only the moon covering our tassels!"

Charlie Chaplin rolled his head. "How the wheel of fate

revolved—the lactal mother and woman of the ferrier who raised my Pasqualino dies. Luna Ciucanera and her delectable piece of a daughter come to America. The women held her at large—but Luna, like the gull flies forward into the wind, gives Stella to the wealthy Santiago. Ciucanera is a dessicated Maria Magdalena and her daughter is stepmother of my son." Drunken, drooling, he shook his finger and winked: "Like mother, like daughter; like father, like son! My colt has become a stallion; he will plant the horns and gallop back to me. Blood is stronger than milk!"

Stella Mezzanotte had sent me to the pharmacist. "Tell Dottore Caprio to give thee that certain article of female necessity. He will comprehend." I stood in the kitchen with the package. "I am in the room of the bed," she called. She was behind a glass-beaded curtain, wrapping on her corset. She asked me to come and hook her backstays. I had not forgotten the time I fell into the manure pit and how she bathed every part of me in the washtub. I did not know then just why I trembled with excitement. Stella was not stocky and buxom like most of the *paesano* women, whose bellies were ponderous and whose breasts were swollen udders. I fastened her corset and my eyes could not help seeking. She hugged me affectionately. A sweet fragrance came up into me and a twelve year old boy's first adoring love of woman burgeoned.

At night my pillow was Stella. By day I played in Santiago's yard, finding reasons to be near Stella, dreaming of being her slave. I would carry her shopping bag, hang washing and do other chores. When she noticed my gaping she would chuckle. She handed me a bundle of her clothes to throw away, but I took them to my hideaway in the hay-loft and smelled from them her womanly musk. Santiago and Pasqualino were working at the forge. From the hay-loft I aimed my cap pistol at Pasqualino and planned revenge for the whipping he had given me—torture like I had seen in the serials at the City Theatre.

Santiago looked at his watch; it was time for him to take his mother-in-law to visit Brother Gian-carlo; the three had become quite taken with one another. In the afternoons Luna would place herself in the grotto of the Madonna for passersby to witness her devotions, while Santiago worked the Rosarium, or played games of *bocci* with Gian-carlo. Before he could leave, Stella came in to complain about Pasqualino. "When thy fatherly presence is absent he is disrespectful." Pasqualino grunted he did not wish to be treated as a boy. "Calm, calm, my dear children," soothed Santiago, "this is not a thing tragic." "With regret I am not thy womb-spring," said Stella, "but as a lad thou wert as my own; of a sudden thou thinkest thyself man and art brute; thou needest wife, not mother." "Then 'tis not thy concern!" retorted Pasqualino. Santiago placed his massive arms about them. "In the household of Santiago I pray for love."

Santiago and Stella's mother left. Stella and Pasqualino did not move. After the horses clatter upon the cobblestones was gone Pasqualino said fiercely, "We're alone!" He embraced her, kissing her mouth and handling her intimately. He pulled her out of the shop. Stella called to Santiago's mother: "Adalaida, I go to the groceria . . ." They came into the stable and climbed the ladder. Within a few feet of my hiding place Pasqualino spread a horse-blanket upon a mat of hay. With graceful alacrity Stella removed her shoes, dress, petticoat and corset and lay on the blanket naked as Pasqualino fumblingly undressed. Pasqualino's swartheness

and Stella's pink-white petal blazoned before my eyes. He sprawled his rude length atop her and with violence wedged to her. They rolled and contorted. A sickening flowered in the pit of my stomach. The greyhound below began to bark. Adalaida came and quieted him. She called for Pasqualino, then said to the dog, "Do love-birds rustling hay infuriate thy envy?" Stella and Pasqualino passioned in a way that left no area unexplored. My throat swelled. I was suffocating. I told myself that I should not be spying. Prostrate and without shame, they lay relaxed in the sunlight that entered the gable window. I saw Stella's head with its tawny, low hair-line and high cheek-bones, the tiny ears, and beneath the green eyes the rose-cream of face, the large, straight nose and flaring nostrils, the intaglios at temple, in cheeks and under her lower lip, the black mole above the full-pouted lips, the flawless mamillated pendants, the shy belly, the long hypnotic legs. I could smell the smell of her, and see fine bubbles of sweat about her lips and the private titian jewels, and I wanted to reach through the slats of the crib.

Pasqualino stood up. "Vest thyself," he said nervously. "Fear always comes to me when we've done." She lazily put on her clothes. "Why should you fear when I am not afraid?" "And if Pappa came back and trapped us?" "What is to be will be." His face clouded. "Why did you wed my stepfather?" he demanded. She shrugged. "I hear you and he get into bed!—What do you do? How can you let him, an old man, touch you after being with me!" "Thou wert a boy when I married. . . and there is the love of night and the love of day." He slapped her face and in grinding muffled breath shouted: "Puttana! Puttana! I see his white head in bed with thee. I wish him dead! . . . and at times thee too!"

At a post-prandial discussion at our table, Padre Onorio said, "My nephew has a mania for hygiene—not once but twice daily he bathes in the wash-boiler letting forth with 'Hosannah! Hosannah!' He laves his linen in solutions of brown soap and bleach until he smells like a laundry. As for my pipe and decanter, he views them as abominations. But he possesses intellect beyond my ken; he reads books and writes notations; he remains up by lamp until dawn studying and every so often sends out a jubilant 'HOSANNAH!' that startles me from slumber. My nephew is in the cocoon of priestly enthusiasm, when he emerges, 'tis possible he may surprise us." "It is understood," said Mother, "the pot with tight lid generates great heat." The women, though earthy, were moral, and Gian-carlo had made an impression. "How



"Now then, if I may have my cards back . . ."

somber," said they. "He is austere and can outcountenance the blasphemy of our men." They were enthralled with celibate youth dedicated.

At the approach of Lent, Padre Onorio assigned Gian-carlo to supervise the pageant of the Passion Play. The women welcomed the rehearsals as it excused them from stove and cradle. They and their men were obedient under Gian-carlo's direction. He cast Stella as the Madonna, Pasqualino as the Messiah and Santiago as Longinus. Everyone clamored to be a good disciple, and no one would accept the roles of the accursed Caiphus, Pilate and Judas. "You look more of a Judas than I!" "I'd rather receive a fusillade of bullet-balls in my head than simulate the Caiphus!" "I wash my hands of Pilate!" Charlie Chaplin volunteered Judas as he contended the betrayal was Judas' rash hope of the Messiah proving Himself right there. It was then that Padre Onorio became ill from hot peppers, dashed on his motorcycle towards the drugstore for Pluto water, collided with a brewery wagon and smashed his rib cage. Brother Gian-carlo had to take over as pastor. In celebrating the Missa Gian-carlo was as majestic as a patriarch; when he mounted the pulpit he seemed taller, overpowering. He transfixed all with a searching gaze.

"SIN!!!" burst from him. "You know what a brick is; a crust of bread. . . know you what is SIN? Sin is transgression against Divine Law! Sin is that which alone can assassinate the soul! The adversary is sin! Whence came sin? From woman, which was Eve! The devil came into the intestine of her mind; he looked out of her eyes in the form of *desiderata* and the lust of her eye was followed by that act which gave birth to sin! Lust was the filth that spawned sin! Without the first sin of the flesh there could not have come into the world other sins! And what is thy bounden task? To resist sin with body, mind and soul! I shall tell thee of temptation. I was a boarding student with a family in Rome. One night the comely daughter of the house uninvited entered my room. She was distraught with desire. She removed her nightclothes before me and begged me to sink into the slime with her. I closed my eyes and began to pray. The room had become fetid with demons." Then pointing to the windows of Saint Justina. "To the wretched girl I said aloud, 'Saint Justina,' I implored, 'send the unicorn to guard this poor, weak girl from the devils of concupiscence!' The girl fell to weeping; she covered her shame and prayed with me. Then what said she? 'Brother Gian-carlo! I see him! He is here! The white unicorn has come and saved me!' The malodorous humors evaporated. 'Hosannah!' I shouted, 'Hosannah on high; Hosannah!' " Padre Gian-carlo brought a cataract of emotion to San Rocco. The women were transported. Father said wryly, "Padre Gian-carlo, when afield hunting sin with blunderbuss load, spares not even the lowly toad." Gian-carlo's influence upon the women exceeded their husbands' imagination: under his guidance they had a committee against coarse thoughts, the committee inveighing profanity, the committee for the pageant of the Passion Play, the committee governing all committees planning the observance of Lenten quarantine; it was Gian-carlo this and Gian-carlo that and rush rush to San Rocco. Masculine tempers fumed into choler. Pass-water shouted to his wife, "Led by that eunuch Gian-carlo and Luna Ciucanera, the town whore of Vasto, you would virginize thyself? You go to the job and lay bricks! Wear my pants and in it my man-thing! I'll put on bloomers, petticoats and suckle the babies!"

The knife of emasculation fell on the first day of Lent when Padre Gian-carlo announced that "hearkening to the

(Continued on next page)

voice of Heaven" the women would vow sexual continence for forty days. Father said, "This Gian-carlo now has thrown all our meat into his fire!" The men gathered at Succaro's saloon and swore to grow beards and go unwashed in reprisal. The women held firm. Charlie Chaplin championed the cause of the men and organized "mushroom expeditions." They left arm in arm with bottles, lunch and bags, Zuccaro driving them in his touring car, and they would return late, drunk and rowdy, and without mushrooms. One night Father came home from mushroom-hunting, wearied, pale, smelling of cheap perfume. Mother picked up the hatchet from the woodpile and chased him down into the street. He spent the night sleeping at the head of the hallway stairs.

The crib in the hayloft was my paradise. I could not stay away from it. One afternoon I had been in the crib for hours watching Stella and Pasqualino. Between loves they had talked: Santiago would not suspect as long as they kept up their pretended dislike for each other. Blind Adalaida, Santiago's old mother, probably knew but would never tell. Stella's mother Luna Ciucanera knew from the beginning and for all her reformation decoyed Santiago to San Rocco to cover Stella and would stand by her daughter in hell itself. Should Santiago find out, they would run away. But no one had a contract with life; if Santiago died that would be an end to subterfuge. To my consternation I learned that they intended to stay until morning, as Santiago had not taken Luna Ciucanera to San Rocco, but had left to pick up iron stock, and could not return that night. I heard the quitting whistles blow from the silk mills; dusk came, and night. I could not see Stella and Pasqualino, but I sensed them; they alternately loved and rested, their combined breathings coming harsh and raspy. Then blending long and soft. My insides were pressing for release. For me there was sin, fear and sound; the bell of San Rocco, the loud voices leaving Zuccaro's saloon, wagons and cars, the trolley on Spring street, mice and birds in the loft and the horses in the stable below. Far in the night I heard my father out in the street calling, "Pietro! Pietrino! Where art thou? Pietrinnno . . .!" Stella and Pasqualino were in exhausted sleep, and then there was nothing but Pasqualino's raucous snoring, and Arrigo the dog's low growling.

A wagon entered the courtyard. Footsteps approached the dog. It was Santiago. The dog stopped growling and whined happily and then was silent. Pasqualino's snoring vibrated the silence. Santiago struck a match. I saw the light coming up the ladder. His white-haired head appeared at the top of

the ladder. He held a candle. In its flickering glow he saw naked Stella, and Pasqualino with his leg flung over Stella's hip. He stared and sighed. In his staring, his eyes became burned out sulphurous chasms, and his granite face dissolved. He descended and left with his horse and wagon.

At daylight Luna Ciucanera came into the stable and called her daughter and Pasqualino to breakfast. My frantic parents had been up the night drinking coffee. Father thrashed me before I could explain. But after I revealed where I had been, what I had seen, and why I could not leave, he grinned and kissed me. But then Mother lambasted me. "Twelve years old! and you know now the bestial practice! You sought it!" She grabbed me by what I cannot name, and tugging, screamed, "Wouldst be like thy father? And this green wood itching for the blaze? Wouldst pleasure thy tickling giblets at twelve? Take that! and that! and quickly-quick to the physic of Confessional!"

Before the sun had set, the news had travelled from scaffold to scaffold, market to market, window to window, kitchen to kitchen, and every *paesano* knew of the enormous horns Stella and Charlie Chaplin's son Pasqualino had made for the ferrier. Behind his back Santiago was crowned 'Il Cornuto.' Charlie Chaplin thought it justice because of Luna Ciucanera's past and Santiago's age. At the saloon he entertained upon the subject of the behorned; bravoing his son's prowess. Santiago was passing the open door of the saloon and overheard Charlie Chaplin: "Santiago is old and without salt who will not injure a fly! I wouldst thank him for raising my son and tell to him he is honored by my son servicing the luscious fig of his wife!" Santiago relinquished his visits with Padre Gian-carlo; he left his forge cold and meandered about. When anyone greeted him he lowered his head. "Something must happen," said the *paesanos*. "Atlas himself could not bear the weight of such horns."

It was Sunday night at San Rocco. The pageant was to be given after Mass. The *paesanos* engaged in the play in Biblical costumes contrived of sheets, cement bags and sacking. Padre Gian-carlo stood in the pulpit, clenching his hands, smoldering, quivering. Santiago, Stella, Luna Ciucanera, Pasqualino and blind Adalaida were seated in the pew nearest the stained-glass window of Saint Justina and the Unicorn.

"Commandment Seven. God is more explicit against this vice than against any other. Against it He uttered His voice on Sinai, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery!' All the vices in the end cheat their dupes, but none with total disaster as this vice of impurity! If any of you possess this nameless shame then thy heart is the dwelling place of more than seven devils of uncleanness! Many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and that husband who condones his adulterous wife has been sucked into the lowest inferno wherein all goodness and all hope for him has been destroyed! I say more merciful would it be if adulterers had never been born!" Padre Gian-carlo pointed to the window of Saint Justina above Santiago. All eyes found the pew of Santiago. Luna Ciucanera had been smiling and nodding approvingly. Stella, dressed as the Madonna, kept her head high; Pasqualino was blanched and immobile. Beside him Santiago seemed a dazed mute. Beginning in a hardly audible voice and winding up to a thundering bolt, Padre Gian-carlo, said, "And I say that the foul antlers forged of lust must be destroyed by the chaste lance of the Unicorn!" With the closing service, crippled Rosa La Zoppa, Stella and Uncle Barbarosso sang the Ave Maria, which momentarily obliterated

(Concluded on page 67)



"Why, Red! Is it 1958 already?"

bility remains that the sounds are sweet to the lady's ears. It's no news that love is blind, so it must sometimes be deaf as well.

Among his minor flaws, a man's beard adds up to a million of them. These brazen bristles can inflict serious damage on his bedmate's sensitive skin and psyche. "If you loved me, you'd shave," is a cry heard round the globe. A smart man can put his stubble to good use as a bargaining point. For example, he might offer to scrape his face each night if his wife will refrain from slathering hers. Such a peace with honor could easily lead to a pleasant and productive *entente cordiale*.

There are quite a few bedroom areas in which both men and women misbehave. Take the simple act of undressing. In both sexes, there are shedders, peelers, puddlers and sowers. Men tend to drop what they're wearing in separate little pools or one rumpled sea of mixed B.V.D.s and socks and tweeds. Others shed instinctively, like trees, a leaf at a time, with the items floating off at oddly-spaced intervals.

The girls are inclined to scatter broadcast as they pursue their nightly chores. The distance championship is currently held by a young wife in Akron whose one nylon was found around the broken gauge of a water boiler in the basement, while the other turned up the following summer in an attic storage room whence she'd wandered to root out some extra blankets. But the most common type is the stripper, whose gyrations gave rise to a genuinely American art form.

If the stripper is young, beautiful, dimly bathed in a mysterious blue haze and backed by soft strings, she could conceivably be a joy to behold. But even if wife and boudoir are equipped with all the essentials, she'd be wise to remember that in a theater it's distance, inaccessibility and a man's own imagination that lend enchantment. And no burlesque queen in her right mind would come to grips with an honest-to-goodness girdle. Anyway, a sitting duck in the boudoir doesn't demand the same ammunition as a stag in the balcony.

Like all great adventures, going to bed is fun, fraught with just enough peril to keep it interesting. Almost anything can and has happened in the immediate vicinity of a mattress. We get more emotional as we tire; we feel everything more deeply and think more profoundly. It's a matter of court record that most love letters are written in the very late or very early hours. Murders of passion and superb philosophies of peace are equally products of the night. Throwing two people together at such a time increases the risks to each, but, on the other side of the sheet, the night can also breed incomparable rewards for both. □ □ □

THE FLESH, THE DEVIL AND SANTIAGO

(Continued from page 64)

the tensions caused by these trials of flesh.

We actors in the Passion Play received our final instructions from Padre Gian-carlo. I was a Hebrew beggar, Father was Peter; the unwanted parts had been settled; the convalescing Padre Onorio was Pilate, Gian-carlo as Caiaphus, Charlie Chaplin as Judas, Teresina the Meatball as Veronica and Santiago as the Centurion. The church was darkened except for the moonlight that filtered through the stained-glass windows. With the organ music hovering from the choir-loft Padre Gian-carlo introduced each tableau; the *personaggi* stood statue-still holding lighted candles as he narrated the incident. The scenes though crudely postured held the *paesanos* spellbound; to them Stella's face was really the Madonna's, and handsome Pasqualino was truly the Messiah. They commented, condemned and wept; they were there and it was actually happening. They were furious with Caiaphus, hissed Judas, admonished Peter for cowardly denial but applauded him when he struck off the Roman soldier's ear, pleaded with Pilate not to listen to the High Priests and were wrung with pity at the agonies of the Stations. The Crucifixion scene arrived. Pasqualino was roped to a semblance of a Cross; Stella as Mary was kneeling by; disciples, Jews and Romans, all but Santiago were in position. Padre Gian-carlo took Santiago by the arm and led him to his place before Pasqualino. Santiago, holding a lighted candle in his left hand and a long smithy's file representing a spear in his right hand, wavered as though ill. Through glazed eyes he peered at his wife and stepson. His lips twisted and foamed. A hush came over the *paesanos*. They held their breaths. They were not hearing Padre Gian-carlo's narration. The pageant was finished. Santiago did not move. The *paesanos* were congealed. Padre Gian-carlo came from out of the shadows to arouse Santiago. The instant he touched him, Santiago raised his file. Pasqualino screamed, "Forgive—" With one voice the *paesanos* cried, "No!!!" And Santiago with an anguished moan drove the file through Pasqualino's heart. A fountain of blood gushed from Pasqualino's breast and rained down upon Santiago's white head.

Charlie Chaplin reclaimed his son. He held the wake in Zuccaro's saloon. In his casket Pasqualino was a pretty boy sleeping. Delirious with grief and wine, Charlie Chaplin insisted upon entertaining the mourners with every role that flashed into his shocked mind; he lectured on the cosmos, religion, politics, and caricatured the *paesanos*; he sang and danced and his comedy only made our tears run faster. At the grave in the cemetery of San Rocco where Pasqualino was buried above his real mother, Charlie Chaplin threw himself upon Stella and shouted, "*Puttana di la morte!*"

Stella, thereafter designated as "*La Puttana*," bloomed more beautiful than ever. She carried herself proudly, and her defiance made her more desirable. Santiago, acquitted, was as a Lazarus retrieved and shunned to rot in his shroud. Before a year went by, he and his mother Adalaida passed away. Stella married a young, good-looking and jealous contractor. Brother Gian-carlo departed from San Rocco and went unnoticed to a monastery. And Padre Onorio resumed his homely, reasonable shepherdhood.

Throughout the many years since, I have cared not to dispel the dream of Stella, my first supreme goddess of beauty, who for me could do no wrong. But always piercing that idyll has been the vision of the ugly red-dripping horns of *Il Cornuto*. □ □ □



"Watch out for him, they say he understands women!"