DEAREST AUNT MAY,

You will never guess what happened to me yesterday, which was Ascension Day, besides being my birthday! I met our new postman at the front door and collected your 'Now you are 11' birthday card -- thanks awfully! He was a young man with very long hair, and wanted to know what the card meant. So I told him. Then he asked if I was acquainted with the foreign family Esk. I said 'No, but show me the letters, please!' and they were all for Father, ten of them -- 'William Smith, Esq' -- the postman had had them for a week! So we were both very pleased. Then I mentioned that Señor Colom was taking me to the bullfight for a birthday treat, and his face lighted up like a Chinese lantern. I asked: 'Are they brave bulls?' and he said: 'Daughter, they are an escandal!' and I asked: 'How an escandal?' And he explained that Poblet, the senior matador, had written to his friend Don Ramón, who had a bull farm near Jerez and was supplying the six bulls for the fight, to send him under-weight ones, because he wasn't feeling very well after grippe and neither were the two other matadors, Calvo and Broncito; and he'd pay Don Ramón well and arrange things quietly with the Bull Ring Management. So everything was fixed; until the new Captain-General of Majorca, who's President of the Ring and very correct, went to see the bulls as they came ashore. He took one look and said: 'Weigh them!' So they put them on the scales and they weighed about half a ton less than the proper weight. So he said: 'Send them back at once and telephone for more.' The second lot had just arrived by steamer. The new postman told me that they were a disaster, and looked like very especial dangerous insects.

My friend Señor Colom is really a music critic, but that position is worth nothing, only a few pesetas a week; he gets his living from being a bull critic. A regular matador earns about two or three thousand pounds a fight, so his agent can afford to pay the critics well to say how much genius and valour he has, even if he hasn't. Señor Colom writes exactly what he really thinks about concerts, but bullfights are different; he makes the agent himself write the review, then reads it over for grammar-faults and puts in a few extra bits, and signs it. That is the custom.

Anyhow, Señor and Señora Colom and I went, and the U.S.A. fleet was in port and two American sailors sat next to us. It seems that the Captain-General had measured the bulls' horns himself and told the herdsman: 'When these beasts are dead I will measure their horns again. If they have been shortened and re-pointed, someone will go to prison.' Then he had checked the pics to see that they didn't have longer points than is allowed, and also sent a vet to see that nobody gave the bulls a laxative to

make them weak. So it was going to be fun to watch.

The Captain-General was in the President's box and after the march-past he waved his handkerchief and the trumpets blew and the first bull was let loose. He was a great cathedral of a bull, and rushed out like the Angel of Death. But when the cape-men came out and began to cape him, there was a sudden growl and loud protests and everyone shouted 'Bizgo! Bizgo!' which meant that the bull was squint-eyed and wouldn't answer to the cape. So the Captain-General sent the bull away, and Poblet, who should have fought it, gave a nasty grin, because there were no substitute bulls. One had got drowned when he slipped off the gangplank of the steamer, and another had got horned by a friend. The Captain-General looked furious.

The next bull was very fierce, and the cape-men ran for their lives behind the shelters. One of them couldn't quite get there, so he dashed for the wooden wall and shinned up and escaped into the passage behind. The bull jumped right over the wall after him and broke a news-photographer's camera and spectacles, and gave him an awful fright. The crowd laughed like anything. Then the trumpets blew again and 'in came the cavalry' as Señor Colom always calls the picadors. The bull went smack at the first horse, before the peon who led it had got it into position, and knocked all the wind out of its body. The picador was underneath kicking with his free boot at the bull's nose. One of the two American sailors fainted, and his friend had to carry him out. Four more American sailors fainted in different parts of the ring; they are a very sensitive class of people.

This bull was Broncito's.

Broncito is a gipsy and engaged to Calvo's sister. He is very superstitious, and that morning had met three nuns walking in a row, and told Calvo he wouldn't fight. Calvo said: 'Then you will never be my brother-in-law. Would you disgrace me before the public? Would you have me kill your bulls for you as well as my own? I don't like them any more than you do.' So Broncito promised to fight. Well, the picador wasn't hurt, they never are. The cape-men drew the bull away and the peons got the horse up again, and it seemed none the worse. And the picadors did their work well and so did the banderilleros. But Broncito was trembling. He made a few poor passes, standing as far away as he could, and then offered up a prayer to the Virgin of Safety, the one who saves matadors from death by drawing the bull away with a twitch of her blue cape. The bull happened to be in the right position, standing with his legs apart, so Broncito lunged and actually killed it in one. The public was furious because he hadn't played the bull at all, hardly, and the play is what they pay to see.

The third bull was Calvo's, and Calvo was terribly valiant because he was so ashamed of Broncito. He made dozens of beautiful passes, high and low, also veronicas and some butterfly passes which everyone but Señor Colom thought wonderful. He had known the great Marcial Lalanda who first perfected them and said that Calvo's were

both jerky and ungenial; though, of course, he couldn't write that for his paper. Calvo killed after two tries and was rewarded with both ears. His chief peon cut off the tail too, and gave it to him, but the Captain-General had signalled only for the ears, so the peon got fined 500 pesetas for presumption.

After the interval, with monkey-nuts and mineral water, it was Poblet's turn again. His bull came wandering in very tranquilly, had a good look round and then lay down in the middle of the ring. After a lot of prodding and taunting of which he took no notice, they had to send for a team of white and black oxen, with bells, who came gambolling into the ring and coaxed him out again. Do you know the story of Ferdinand the Bull? It ends all wrong. Bulls like Ferdinand don't go back to the farm to eat daisies. I'm afraid they get shot outside the ring by the Civil Guard, like deserters in battles.

The public was getting impatient. It booed and cat-called like anything, but the fifth bull (Broncito's again) was a supercathedral; soap-coloured and with horns like an elephant's tusks. Broncito was sick with horror, and when both the horses had been knocked down before the picadors could use their pics, and only one banderillero had been tall enough to plant his pair of darts well, he went white as a sheet. He pretended to play the bull but it chased him all over the place and the crowd roared with laughter and made rude jokes. So he shook his fist at them and called for the red muleta and sword and then, guess what! He murdered the bull, with a side-pass into his lungs instead of properly between the shoulder-blades. There was an awful hush from the Spaniards, who couldn't believe their eyes -- it was like shooting a fox; but tremendous cheers came from the American sailors who thought Broncito had been very clever. Then of course the cheers were drowned by a most frantic booing, and the Captain-General sprang to his feet and cursed terribly. The next thing was that two guardias arrested Broncito and marched him off to prison.

The last bull was easily the best of the six and Calvo was more anxious than ever to show off. He wanted both ears and the tail and the foot (which is almost never given) and when he came to play the bull he dedicated it to the public and did wonderful, wonderful, fantastic things. There's a sort of ledge running round the wooden wall which helps cape-men when they scramble to safety. He sat down on it, to allow himself no room to escape from a charge, and did his passes there. Afterwards he knelt and let the bull's horns graze the gold braid on his chest. And did several estupendous veronicas and then suddenly walked away, turning his back to the bull, which was left looking silly. Calvo had waved all his cape-men far away and the crowd went wild with joy. But some idiot threw his hat into the ring, which took the bull's attention from the muleta, and Calvo got horned in the upper leg and tossed up and thrown down. Then the bull tried to kill him. I don't know how many more sailors fainted; I was too busy to count.

Suddenly an espontáneo in grey uniform with long hair simply hurled himself into the ring and grabbed Calvo's sword and red muleta and drew the bull off. It was our

sloppy new postman! And while the peons carried Calvo to the surgery, he played the bull very valiantly and got apotheosistical cheers, louder even than Calvo's, and the Captain-General himself applauded although the postman was committing a crime. Everyone expected Poblet to enter and finish off the bull, but Poblet had now also been arrested for insulting the Lieutenant of the Civil Guard for insulting Broncito; so there was no other proper matador left. But Calvo petitioned that the postman should be allowed to finish off the bull, for having saved his life. The Captain-General consented and, when I waved madly, the postman recognized my yellow frock and rededicated the bull to me -- me, Aunt May! Because it was my birthday and because of the Esq. And though the poor boy was rustic and quite without art, as Señor Colom said (and wrote), he managed to kill his enemy at the second try.

Then, of course, he was arrested too. All espontáneos are.

But the Captain-General let him off with a caution and a big box of real Havana cigars.

Ever your loving niece,

Margaret