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ROBERT GRAVES

TRÍN-TRÍN-TRÍN

-- TRíN-TRíN-TRíN!

-- Speak to me!

-- Is that the house of Gravés? Can one talk with Don Roberto?

-- At the apparatus! On behalf of whom?

-- I am Don Blas Mas y Mas. -

-- A thousand pardons, Don Blas. In consequence of the bad telephone connection I did not fix in my mind that it was you.

-- How do you find yourself, Don Roberto?

-- Very rickety well, thanks be to God!

-- I celebrate it. And your graceful spouse?

-- Regrettably she is a trifle catarrhed.

-- I much lament it. And the four beautiful children?

-- For the present, thanks be to the saints, well enough. I feel overwhelmed by your amicable inquiries. But you, Don Blas? How goes it with you?

-- A stupidity has occurred to me. I am speaking from my uncle's private clinic, having broken my arm in various places.

-- Ai, Ai, Ai! I feel it painfully... What a most disgraceful event! I wager that it somehow had relations with motor-bicycles.

-- Mathematically correct, Don Roberto!

-- Does the arm molest you so much as to prevent you from recounting me the accident?

-- Confiding it to so formal and sympathetic a friend as Don Roberto would be an

alleviation, although truly the wound is painful enough. Well, it began on San Antonio's festival when I was strolling along the Borne with that shameless robber Francisco Ferragut.

-- The celebrated racing cyclist who finished first of his class during the Tour of Majorca?

-- The identical one. As you know, Francisco is a formidable jokester and said to me there on the Borne: 'Come to watch me eat pastries!' I answered: 'Is that such a rare thing?' He explained that it was not the technique of eating that would be of interest, so much as the technique of eating without payment. Nothing! We went across the street and there he gazed into the display window of a travel agency. I asked: 'Are we obliged to fly to Sweden for your pastries?' 'Patience!' he answered. 'All fishermen have first to wait for a bite.' Presently a servant girl passed with a tray and entered the Widow Dot's pastry shop. Francisco said: 'There's a fish under that rock !'

PAUSE

-- Are you listening, Don Roberto?

-- Attentively. Continue, please!

-- And you remember what day that was?

-- You mentioned San Antonio, if I do not deceive myself.

-- Exact! Well, when the girl comes out, carrying her tray heaped with exquisite pastries, he stops her and says: 'Pretty girl, I recognize you, surely? You work in the house of Don Antonio... ? Don Antonio...? Caramba! What has happened to my memory today?' The girl murmurs helpfully: 'He calls himself Don Antonio Amaro,' and Francisco exclaims: 'What a fool I am! Of course: Don Antonio Amaro! Now, child, I have a most important message for Don Antonio -- please pay attention! Say that Doctor Eusebio Busquets after all regrets with much pain his inability to obsequiate Don Antonio on his name day according to the kind invitation handed him yesterday -- Doctor Eusebio Busquets, understand? -- but he is obliged to perform a critical throat operation at the precise hour named for the feast. Nevertheless, assure him that I have now taken the liberty of eating his health with one of these delicious pastries.' Then he seizes the largest and creamiest of the confections on the tray, crams it into his mouth, and says thickly: 'Now, don't forget the name, please -- Doctor Eusebio Busquets!'

-- I am a stupid Englishman, I do not see how your accident is related...

-- We are coming to that. Being ashamed to stand and watch Francisco play the same trick on two dozen or so innocent servant girls, who would be coming with trays from

all the big houses of the vicinity to collect pastries each for her own Don Antonio, I called a taxi and went after the girl...

-- Who was very pretty, a real salad? They always are in your histories.

-- She was no exception. And on overtaking her, I handed her a pastry which I had bought, of the identical class stolen, and explained that Don Francisco was a robber and a charlatan, etcetera, etcetera, and that I had chivalrously come to save her from playing a ridiculous part before her employers, and having three pesetas docked from her wages...

-- In short, you asked her what afternoon she would be free to come for a spin to Cas Catalá on the back of your new motor-bike?

-- You are not by any means so stupid as you pretend, Don Roberto.

-- And eventually you crashed with her on the pillion?

-- Little by little, please! No, no, that would have been a very vulgar and quotidian history.

-- Pardon me, dear Blas! Of course nothing quotidian or vulgar could ever happen to you in these amorous hazards.

-- Do not laugh at me, I am in great pain. But listen, it was a comedy! Three days later I met the girl by the Cavalry Barracks at about two o'clock; she climbed up behind and I set off. Well, we precipitated ourselves with a noise like a dawn bombardment down the Marine Drive, but as we reached the Hotel Mediterráneo, she said: 'Friend, excuse me, I must dismount for a moment !' I did not ask why, because that question might perhaps embarrass a simple girl; I merely stopped and let her get down. She crossed the street and, while pausing to light a cigarette, I suddenly heard the noise of a motor-bike starting up. I looked around casually to see what make it might be, and there was Francisco Ferragut with my sweetheart on the pillion of his racer roaring back to Palma, and she was waving goodbye at me.

-- O la, la, la! A trifle violent, such behaviour in simple girls, eh?

-- I grew cross, I confess it to you, and went in pursuit. Francisco had 100 metres start, but he's a smart boy and trusted in his bike to escape; it was more powerful than mine -- yet, on the other hand, he carried twice the weight. Then followed a transcendental chase through the streets of Palma, where there is a pretended speed limit of twenty kilometres an hour. We both drove forward magisterially, registering at least 140 and causing much emotion on both sides of the Avenue until we reached the Barón de Pinopar turning, where a khaki-coloured military auto cut in, caught my rear lamp and

sent me into an irrecoverable roll. These soldiers, they think the world is theirs! They always behave as if manoeuvring on the battlefield where civilians have no right to exist. In effect, the bicycle was shattered. I was thrown against a plane-tree, they continued their journey without a backward glance!

-- How infamous! Some people should be refused permission to hold a driving licence. And the girl? What?

-- Nothing... Nothing at all... I met her again five minutes later in the Mare Nostrum emergency ward. Francisco had shocked with an air force lorry half a minute later; he was rendered unconscious; she fractured only a rib or two. So, before he recovered his senses, I magnanimously arranged for her to be translated here with me to my uncle's clinic, and after a week of interesting convalescence we now understand each other divinely well. She loves me with madness and repudiates that it would ever have been possible for her to abandon me; she was merely about to lure Francisco far out into the country, and there be revenged on him for his love of sweet things by dropping a spoonful of sugar into his petrol tank. She and I are now securely affianced.

-- In a fortunate hour! I celebrate it...!

-- Now if you have a moment, my sweetheart insists on giving you a much fuller and incomparably more graphic version of these events. Hold on, I beg of you, dear friend...