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No Bargain At 25c

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FRED GAULZETTI

No Bargain At 25c

Don was one of the many government financed tourists who were willingly dispatched to the beautiful Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. He was considerably self-centered and handsome, and as an amiable opportunist, soon won the exotic friendship of many people on the island. By way of a prominent physician and his wife, Jack's Club, the Normandie, the Contado Beach Hotel, and a tour around the island were all easy marks for Don and no expense to himself. The China Doll, the Two Dice Club, and the Chicago Bar saw more of Don though, for they were inclined to be his natural habitat. But still more important than his power of social oscillation, (and he would have it no secret) Don was a lover, and of the international sort.

Overjoyed with this climate, Don was really living. He was happy as a pig; the prostitutes were no match for his unconquerable and inexhaustible charm. There was no end to the thrill he felt in expressing body-gestured answers to hip-rolling questions of gold-toothed ladies darting out of waterfront alleys. But Don was no fool; he was elusive and enjoyed being playfully shrewd.

"There's more than this and better," he mused, only to wonder seriously a few moments later if he hadn't made a mistake and should reconsider and go back. No, Don was never unlucky in love. He was a diplomat who continued to "knock 'em dead."

Every day, Don was right in there challenging "the best." At last his chance came. Object sighted, he calculated that his best approach would be to first bolster his courage and then turn the situation over

to the strategy of his id. Blaring juke boxes, noisy would-be lovers on slippery floors wet with beer or something, health inspectors, frequent offers of love, and several other often pleasant and humorous distractions never steered Don off course. He knew what he must do and at 3:00 a.m. he was on the first leg of victory as he and his objective slipped out—she for the seventeenth time, he for the first. The lover smiled smugly.

“Hey, mira, taxi!”

Her lips were sore and tired and weary after the long and busy day, but he remarked to himself first and then told her how soft and moist and sweet they were. Her beautiful darkskinned breasts were painful ecstasy.

“Stay donn, Shore Patrol!” she warned.

“O.K., you get op now,” she said and broke the short silence.

“Cuanto dinero?”

“Dos pesos,” said the cabbie with a tired frown and an apethetic shrug of his shoulders.

The brilliant moon sprayed its image on the sleepy sea.

“Donn here,” she whispered. Quickly they ran, almost dangerously, down the rocky hillside path to where she slept. Throbbing silence ushered Don and his hostess into the shack. Her home, on stilts which kept it dry at unusually high tides, was a flimsy cubicle in a row of flimsy cubicles extending out over the tide beds.

It contained nothing but a corner full of tightly packed, tightly worn clothes which hung from the broomstick angled across the beams, an orange crate bureau for cosmetics and jewels, a beat up bed, and a pan under it.

Freedom-giving darkness forced them together and pushed them onto the bed. With sheer delight the lover had his victory.

Then a noise, a tinny clatter and a splash that would shatter even a peaceful sleep, came through the cardboard wall and woke them. He forced his eyes open and stared into the darkness.

“Sssshhh,” she hissed, making the international sign for silence, “Somebody pushy-pushy.”

Startled and dazed, with thoughts that did much to lessen his pride, the conqueror rose, dressed, and dashed out of the windowless “chicken coop.” The sun’s sharp rays stabbed his eyes. The breakers roared in his ears and their noisy rhythm lagged far behind his quickening heart-beat. Scrambling, tripping, chased by the sun, the waves, and his own thoughts, he ran up the slippery overgrown rock path and onto the street.

No life, no cars, nothing but hostile doors, sneering glassless windows, and curious scrawny cats and dogs, all kept the frightened and immoral tactician hurrying in the middle of the dusty street. Then the eerie shade and the clammy walls of a viaduct offered a hiding place. Don breathed cool air for a moment but was just as quickly kicked out again into the hot and naked light. As he hurried by a cemetery of shallow graves, he wondered at the cement slabs that imprisoned the bodies which were near and yet so hard to reach. There was no time for more than just a passing glance and thought.

Then came the piercing noises. Don was discovered. Seven or eight small children, still young enough to be innocent, but well schooled in finance, came running and yelling behind him, trying to catch the fleeing lover. There was no escaping. As quickly as he would glance over his shoulder, see his plight, and hasten his step, (he resolved not to run from little boys) the children poured on their glare and double-timed after him.

Thumping hearts and panting breaths finally ended the chase. Don, the Lover, was caught. With a fearful worried look, he quickly fumbled for and tossed a quarter into the air over the boys. Noisier now than ever, they turned and ran away shouting and laughing with glee. Don turned and ran.

a timeless debt

JAMES ALBERT

To begin, and then, to realize,
What scope the gathered sense
Holds; waiting till
The boy turns man,
Within few lives.

Like replacing stolen wine
With water,
Return the stolen time
Within the hour.