

By the Brandy Still

IVO ANDRIC

MORE THAN eleven years had passed since that afternoon in Rome when Fra Marko, a student of divinity from Bosnia, was led out with other students for a walk on the Via Nomentana. They were to be shown the catacombs of St. Agnes. It was an afternoon in the feverish and sultry Roman spring, full of dust, the scent of pines, and stark light. Fruit trees were in bloom, and Fra Marko yearned more than ever for his native Bosnia and for his own people.

One entered the catacombs through the church itself, which was moldy and poor. The lay brother who acted as their guide was sullen, for he could expect no tips. The catacombs were much smaller and more run down than the great catacombs of St. Callisto on the Via Appia. Yet they too held cleverly arranged surprises that fascinated the visitor. In one of the empty tombs there burned, above some crossed bones, a tiny antique lamp of red clay that threw a clear light on a golden medallion the size of a ducat. On the medallion was the head of a young man, with his name engraved underneath, and all around the head, like an aureole, was written in clear,

graven letters: *Semper in pace gaudet* ("He rejoices in eternal peace"). Fra Marko tarried by the grave so long that the guide had to call after him, and even scold him.

He never forgot that face in the catacombs. Returning to the city that afternoon and watching the pale lights flicker on in the houses and *trattorias*, ushering in a night life that was unknown to him, he shivered at the thought that those people were unaware of the small underground light and that very probably this same evening they would lose forever the joyous, the only true life of eternity. For several days afterwards he could not eat, he slept badly, his fellow monks struck him as malingerers and slackers, the world at large as abandoned to itself and to all manner of temptations. He even forgot his beloved Bosnia. Later he calmed down somewhat, but there remained within in him a powerful longing—one destined never to leave him again—for all men to realize and feel the disparity between the shortness of life and the eternity of death, as he himself had felt it before the illuminated face of the young man in the catacombs.

Before long, Fra Marko was sent back to Bosnia. Years came and went. Thanks partly to a life filled with hard work and partly to disappointments that came thick and fast, which were bound to mellow even as headstrong a nature as his, Fra Marko's zeal grew, if not tepid, at least less noticeable. In his mind he saw clearly, just as he had on that afternoon on the Via Nomentana, two kinds of life and light—one great and everlasting, and the other small and fleeting; even today, he could still relive that sense of horror at the thought of millions of people who were losing the only real and true life for the sake of this brief and puny one with its wretched delights and possessions. Even now, he still almost choked with the urge to call out to people, to help, to save. Often enough these days as he cast a glance through the window of his cell and saw the fields and the roofs of houses bathed in moonlight under the early frost, there would appear to him, in the place of quiet fields, the whole of God's earth in her breadth and length, her face covered by a rash of towns that were like spots of fire and brands of the Devil. He had seen only Rome, Ancona, and his own Travnik in Bosnia, but he knew well that the earth was full of such towns and his mind's eye seemed to encompass them all at once, to the most distant ones whose names he didn't know. In all of them alike, souls were bent on damnation and men on ruin.

Standing by the window and reluctant to light the candles as yet, Fra Marko lost sight of the darkened hamlets and fields of Kreševo and let his eyes wander instead over the great cities of the world with their streets, gardens, and houses, containing all that the Devil had built as a snare to the vanity, greed, and corruption of men. He compared his own strength with the strength that would be needed to wipe it all from the face of God's earth, from Travnik and Sarajevo to that nameless town that glowed and winked somewhere at the bottom of Europe or of loathsome Asia, where the Devil felt at home. It was a moment in which Fra Marko's yearning to save mankind swelled past all bounds and threatened his peace of mind, when this vicar of Kreševo, forgetting who

he was, settled accounts between the two worlds, one of all creatures and things, the other of their Creator. He was so overcome by compassion that he identified himself completely with the man from the cities who sinned and destroyed himself, and turned against Him who permitted this to happen. The terrible thought occurred to Fra Marko—not for the first time either—that the Devil's and God's own were not clearly and fairly divided, that it was impossible to know, indeed that no one could tell, how great was the power of either or where exactly was the boundary between them.

HE SHUT HIS EYES, in which the fires of all the world's cities were still blazing and turning into angry and helpless tears. Little by little, the thought that had begun as a reproach and a protest weakened and became transformed into prayer. Fra Marko ardently implored God to draw the line between Himself and the Devil, to show Himself more distinctly to man, who otherwise was bound to perish among the snares.

Besides such nights when Fra Marko was racked by doubts and ended by seeking comfort in prayer, there were others—much more frequent—when, exhausted by the day's labors, he would flop onto his bed with an utterly empty mind and instantly fall asleep like a child after his bath. For side by side with his secret desire to save mankind, which was uppermost in his thoughts and emotions and which, given his kind of innocence, was a substitute for those hundreds of petty and deep cravings, longings, and ambitions which preoccupied other people, there also burned in Fra Marko the farmer's passion for land and gainful work, and this drove him irresistibly to maintain and expand the monastery lands, to use cunning when necessary, to short-change the Turkish authorities and dicker with peasants over their erratic tithe. In his absorption with these things, days, months, and years slipped by imperceptibly. The plums yielded a crop on an average of every other year; corn and wheat were a thing of chance; potatoes did well only every third season. There were some years that Fra Marko would long

remember either because they were exceptionally fruitful or exceptionally poor, and afterwards when another very good or very bad year came around he would start confusing it with the last similar one. And so everything finally became



indistinguishable in this struggle with the soil and its fruit. Since the soil was greater, mightier, and more enduring than a man's life, he increasingly steeped and lost himself in it.

THE LAST few years, however, had not been lucky for Fra Marko. Mishaps and disappointments, little and big, seemed to multiply. The year just passed had ended with a hail, and with his imprisonment at the hands of Fazul, the Vizier's deputy at Travnik. Earlier this year, he had gone up the mountain to receive a strange and disturbing confession from a dying bandit. And during this summer yet another thing had happened to unsettle him and leave him bemused for months to come.

The daughter of one Marko Barbarez from Sarajevo had decided to become a convert to Islam in order to marry a Turk. Not the protests and tears of her parents nor the concerted efforts of the Sarajevo brothers could budge her from her decision. On the eve of the day when the girl was supposed to appear before the local Turkish judge and declare that she wished to become a Muslim of her own free will, the brothers, in connivance with the parents, packed her into a carriage and, by trick and force, bundled her off to Kreševo, where the Turks would not look for her. Two men and an old woman all but carried the girl into the monastery. Brother Superior did not wish to see her.

Some of the other brothers tried to dissuade her from converting but even threats availed them nothing.

The girl stood in a corner in the small, thick-walled room on the ground floor that housed old books, saddles, and monastery tools. With her hands clasped in front of her, her gaze fixed on the floor, her face mottled with the flush of excitement, she listened unmoved to the arguments, advice, promises, and threats of the brothers, who harangued her in turn or sometimes in teams of two or three. Hoarse with anger at such obstinacy, Fra Peter shouted: "Call Fra Marko! Let him thrash the she-dog until he gets through to her soul!"

A little later Fra Marko barged into the room carrying a dry dogwood switch in his hand. When he saw the girl, he halted in astonishment. Having heard the brothers discuss this would-be Turk the day before, and recalling what they had said a moment ago when they summoned him to come and "talk sense" to her in his own way, he had imagined her to be a tall woman, burly and fierce. Now he saw before him a slender and frail young girl with hands meekly crossed in front of her, but her head held high. The most striking feature of her face were the eyelids, steadfastly lowered, a little slanting and of unequal shape, like two big leaves of slightly different size. He would have felt easier had she been hefty and insolent as he had pictured her.

FRA PETER began once more to urge her to give up the Turk and not bring disgrace upon her parents and her faith, but she remained adamant.

"Look into my eyes, you heathen wretch!" thundered Fra Peter a couple of times, hoping in this way to rattle and humble her more quickly. Each time she raised her lids and fixed her bright young gaze, boldly and without flinching, on the eyes of the blustering yet at heart good-natured Fra Peter. In fact, she did not look into his eyes but at his Venetian reading glasses, whose metal temples were broken and tied on both sides, right above the ear, with a thread. It was to this green thread that her look was directed.

"So now you want a Turk, do

you?" yelled Fra Peter, disconcerted by her stare and not really expecting an answer to his question.

"Yes, only him," she replied in a quiet and cool voice that was unusual for a girl of her years and in her present situation. It was almost as if another person were speaking through her.

"What? What! You want to become a Muslim too?"

"Yes."

At a loss for words and breathing heavily, Fra Peter was beside himself.

"Fra Marko, let her have it! She's yours!"

The girl put up no resistance; it was as if the whole thing was only a game in which she was an unwilling participant. Her tiny waist disappeared in Fra Marko's great paws. He laid her over his left knee like an unruly child. At the first few stripes she kicked her legs and jerked her head, but then she grew rigid and remained like that, suffering the lashes without a murmur or movement. Had she screamed or struggled, Lord knows how much longer Fra Marko might have whipped her; but now, taken aback by her strange behavior, he dropped his hand and his eyes wheeled uncertainly around the room as if in search of an explanation. The girl lay in his hands like a dead fish. It was only then that he came to himself and became aware of something he had not realized before: the small, hard-nippled breast in his left palm and, under the fingers of his right hand, the girl's belly, flat and hard, unrounded as yet.

HORRIFIED, he pushed her away and ran out of the room, forgetting his dogwood switch and avoiding the eyes of the other brothers. The girl picked herself up slowly and returned to her corner. There she stood quietly, exactly as before save for the twitching of her eyelids, behind which tears must have welled even though her face showed no trace of weeping or contriteness or fear.

She caused the brothers a great deal of trouble. The very next morning her Turkish boy friend arrived and, together with a judge and a constable, led her out of the monastery. Later, at the courthouse, she was asked in front of the judge and Brother Superior whether she was

embracing Islam of her own will, and she answered quietly, "Of my own free will."

When they asked her if she wanted to take the young Turk for a husband, she simply, without a word, placed her small hand on his forearm and looked evenly at the judge and at Brother Superior, as though waiting for the next question, unable to understand how they could possibly query her about something so undeniable and so apparent to the whole world. She never told the Turks that she had been whipped in the monastery, and bore herself proudly and well, although she trembled from exhaustion, lack of sleep, and from the beating she had received.

The brothers were ordered to pay a fine; and what was worse, the young bridegroom, to spite them, decided to marry her right away and to hold the wedding celebration there in Kreševo. Next evening, the brothers could see the kindling of festive bonfires on the other bank of the stream and hear the music and cheers of the wedding guests.

Fra Marko closed the window shutters in his cell and lay down on the bed fully dressed, his cowl pulled over his head. But he couldn't help hearing the wedding pipes and tambours, which seemed to throb to the rhythm of the veins in his own temples. All these things spelled only one thing to him: how mighty and hard to understand evil was, how one could sense it everywhere, even in places one would never expect it. How often God forsook his people and abandoned them to evil chance. Here Fra Marko's reveries stopped short and he lay without prayer or thought, waiting till the heathen pipes and drum tattoo spent themselves.

Next day, and for many days afterwards, the monastery was busy with the harvest and Fra Marko found oblivion in work; he no longer speculated about the origin of the world's evil, nor wondered about the hidden mysteries of woman, as he did that night long ago, but was now haunted by a faint and uneasy sense of tolerance, which he had never known before. He slept because he was tired out, and he lost himself in work, but he could not conceal to himself and before the others that

he was bewildered and shaken to the bottom of his soul.

The world was without doubt full of evil, and this evil was stronger than he had suspected. Perhaps the evil was every bit as strong as good; possibly even stronger. Here he usually faltered and stoutly pushed such thoughts away. But sometimes they crept back to vex him even when he was at work, when he was least ready for them. He might, for instance, be emptying a sack of plums into a vat and, while still bending over it, freeze suddenly and become lost in thought, then quickly cross himself and flip a helpless hand at this earthly evil, muttering under his breath: "Well, there's as much of it as the Lord saw fit to send down. What can I do about it!"

THE AUTUMN turned out well. The monastery was at ease. Fra Peter was finally made Superior. With his love of jokes and hard work, and his knack for blending goodness with banter, cheerfulness with industry, he conducted the business of the monastery with great skill and success. Writing to the Superior of the Fojnica Monastery, with the request that he send him nine hundred and fifty groschen, which was the portion of the fine incurred by his own establishment in recent weeks, he concluded: "This, Your Reverence, is the net amount of our present damage. We had to pay up to avoid worse evil. Therefore please rush this money, as things are wearing thin at this end. As for your question about Fra Marko, he is alive and in good health. He got over his argument with that Fazul in Travnik last year (true, he had to use compresses for a long time and kept sharpening a stone to kill him), but nowadays he is *valde confusus in animo* [greatly bewildered in his soul] on account of that fiasco of ours with the female Antichrist from Sarajevo. The poor fellow must have realized that not even his switch was of much help. I am worried about him and will try to send him to you on a visit, as *Turcae Cresevienses* [the Turks of Kreševo] seem to have it in for him."

However, Fra Marko would not hear of leaving the monastery and going to Fojnica now when there was so much to do. He spent long

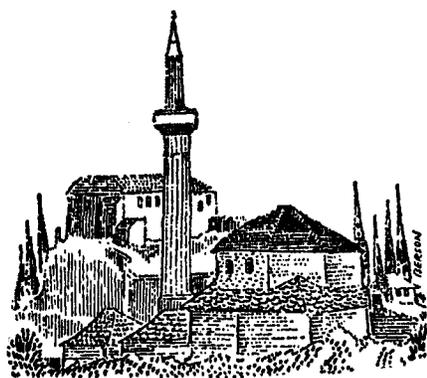
days in the fields or in the plum orchard, for the minute he came back to the monastery the brothers would tease him, pester him to tell them how he'd wanted to "dissuade" that Sarajevo female from embracing Islam, and he would get angry, call them loafers, and scamper away. The only one who interceded for him was Fra Stephen, an old man of eighty-five. Wized and in his dotage, without a tooth in his head, hardly more than skin and bone, Fra Stephen seemed to live on snuff alone. From his large chair at the far end of the refectory, he gave Fra Marko to understand, with his hands and eyes, that he was with him against those pranksters, and he even seemed to say something, only his words were drowned in the brothers' roar of laughter.

TOWARD the end of November Fra Marko set up the still and began to make the plum brandy, slivovitz. He had a special helper for the job, one Tanasije Hrišćanin from Visoko. Always sleepy and unwashed, this Tanasije was clumsy, heavy-footed, and a half-wit, but unusually deft with the still. He made plum brandy for everyone in the district, yet when Fra Marko would call him, he would drop everything and come. The friendship with Tanasije also made Fra Marko the butt of many jokes from the brothers. In reality, the pair of them hardly exchanged a civil word, but wrangled around the still from the first day to the last, through the smoke and the sparks, their eyes tearing, covered in soot, wet and dirty from the clay that was used to line the still retort. But they could not have done without each other.

As soon as the brandy stilling began, Turkish visits to the monastery became more frequent. The smell of the "twice burned" also attracted Kezmo, a janissary who had once escorted the Eighth Regiment of the Vizier's Mamelukes into town. For the last several years, this Kezmo had been getting ready to go to war, but in fact did all his fighting in the various inns and monasteries between Travnik and Sarajevo. Fat and bloated from drink, he could scarcely walk; when he sat down somewhere, he did not rise again until he was carried out. Lately, he'd been

keeping company with a certain Mehmedbeg, also a janissary but a true warrior. In his style of dress and in his bearing, which was that of a man who had gone to school and seen something of the world, he was a complete antithesis to the coarse and illiterate Kezmo. What drew them together was drink and wanderlust. In addition to plum brandy, Mehmedbeg also poisoned himself with hashish and poppy seed, which he took in candied fruit and orange peel. This made his hands tremble and gave his face a jaundiced look; the yellow face with its drooping eyelids contrasted strangely with his athletic body.

They asked for a chicken or turkey but contented themselves with a leg of lamb, which Tanasije cut into kebabs and grilled on the open fire beside the still. Having eaten and drunk, Kezmo withdrew into a corner and fell asleep propped against his saddlebag, with a stale chibouk at his side and an empty



brandy cup in his hand, while Mehmedbeg grew more and more wakeful and animated as the night wore on. Leaning on his knapsack, he stared fixedly at the fire, sipped slowly, and, after every other cup of brandy, took from a round copper box a morsel of his beloved drug in candied fruit.

IN VAIN did Fra Marko wait for Mehmedbeg to doze off too. After a while, having refilled the still with fresh plum mash, he sent Tanasije to sleep his turn till midnight, while he kept watch alone to see that the fire didn't go out. He was squatting opposite Mehmedbeg. As the retort had not cooked up yet, the cellar was so quiet that one could hear the soft whistling of Kezmo's

gap-toothed mouth in his sleep; Fra Marko began to despair of seeing the second man fall asleep. Mehmedbeg, on the contrary, grew more and more restless. At first he kept humming a mournful Turkish melody through his nose, over and over. (Ever since he had grown up and come into troubled contact with Muslims, Fra Marko had felt a particular hatred for this yen of theirs to hum and wail and whine for hours on end; he saw in it a distinct symptom, as it were, of their restiveness and damnation.) Later, with much flipping of his hands, the Turk began to philosophize and hold forth, like a man whose body was unsound but whose heart was brimming over, who must speak out on anything that strikes his fancy, just as he hums the first tune that comes into his head.

"Hey, padre, padre, you work so much and fuss over the still. And what is it? Just brandy—you drink it up, get a hangover, and that's that. No use slaving over it. Drink as long as you can, die when you have to, that's all there is to it."

To avoid getting into a conversation, Fra Marko set about kneading the wet clay for the next lot of mash. He worked on and didn't lift his head, yet couldn't restrain himself entirely and answered in a quiet voice, between pumping movements of his upper body:

"No use, eh? If I didn't slave over it, what would you drink and how would you let the world know of your wisdom?"

The Turk neither listened nor heard him, but went on.

"Padre, you don't know anything. You are ignorant, that's what. If you'd only feasted your eyes on beauty as I have! But how could you? You don't use your eyes except to lift a piece of food to your mouth and find a door."

"It's good to know you use them better. You've seen some marvels, I don't doubt."

"Don't get angry, friend, but that's how it is. With the Cross in front of your nose, what could you see? Cross, and more Cross. And there are things to see, my poor friend, I tell you."

Fra Marko cleared his throat and pummeled the clay irritably, clamping his jaws tight so as not

to emit a curse. The Turk softened his tone and went on in a kind of trance, speaking almost to himself.

"There's a garden up there in Belgrade, where you go down to the Danube from the Gate. I don't know the gardens of Paradise, but on this earth, I swear, no one has that kind of shade, those flowers, those fountains and brooks. There, my friend, lives a lonely old man with his widowed daughter. That old man carried the Sultan's medal around his neck five times in as many wars. And she . . . ? The doors of her house are closed to suitors. Her husband died in the war. Vanished, no less. Perished! And when they badger the old man to give her away, he tells them: 'It's her sorrow, let her say the word.' And do you know what her word is? Here!"

At that he pulled out from his leather belt some kind of a roll in which there was an embroidered handkerchief, and pointing at the fine work, described it to himself.

"Here—three lemons and a dead leaf. Meaning: 'I pine away because you don't come. O God! Better not come!' O padre, padre!"

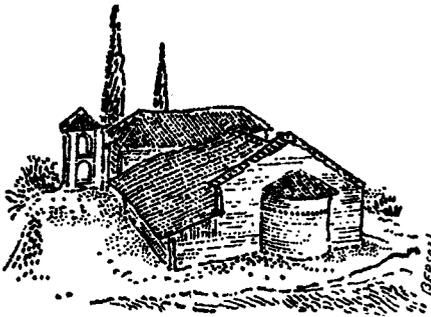
HIS HEAD thrown back, he kept repeating the last word and bit his lips as if trying to restrain his voice. His bare neck seemed to grow longer, swollen and yellow, unusually muscular and exactly as wide as his head. At last he fell silent, evidently realizing how improper it was to speak to these things, and before an infidel at that. Yet his urge to talk was stronger than he; and he started off again, only this time not about the woman.

"A dark thing, the Cross. All that makes the sign of the Cross is dark. For a thousand years you churn this darkness and still it's nothing. You never take your eyes off the Cross, so it serves you right. You're against God's bounty—against woman, a creature of God. What's one to do! Baptized folk, blind folk, blighted folk!" He said it slowly, almost sadly, not to Fra Marko but as if into the distance, as if looking at those who dragged the Cross behind them, blind to everything that was bright and worthwhile in this world.

Fra Marko involuntarily lifted his gaze from his work and studied the Muslim. That head thrown back, the

pasty face with its green shadows, the inflamed eyes, all put him in mind of something distant and exalted: of the head of a saint he had seen in a painting in one of the churches in Rome. No matter how much he tried to resist the comparison, which upset him, it came back to his mind and took hold of it irresistibly, like a temptation. It was the head of an unknown saint and martyr: the same rapture, the same burning eyes and expression of exalted pain. And to make the temptation complete, this head so reminiscent of a saint was now mouthing shameful, distressing, and blasphemous things. All this struck Fra Marko as a hideous dream full of contradictions.

He shut his eyes not to see him. In the crimson twilight in which



he suddenly found himself, a yellow pool swayed before him, like the glow of the taper in the catacombs, and the pool contained the blurred male profile around which he had tried in vain to decipher the halo-like legend. Bemused by that light, he forgot the two Turks beside him in the cellar, but as soon as he opened his eyes, he was again confronted with Mehmedbeg's powerful head. Watching it and hearing unwittingly what it was saying, Fra Marko felt lost, bewildered and small; if he had had to answer at that moment, he would not have dared or known how. The strange heathen would have had the last word.

The Turk went on talking like a man whose fancy was running away with him. His features, worn and sallow, looked even more bloodless in the strong light of the fire, his lips bluer, his mustache sparse and dull. But his eyes were round, wise, and profound, full of a glow, both from the still fire and from

another, more intense one that radiated out of him. On the other side of the room, illuminated no less brightly, shone Fra Marko's face, glistening with sweat, round-cheeked and redder than usual; his childish blue eyes, with barely a touch of dark in their pupils, pale and almost blended into his skin.

THEY SAT facing one another, each sunk in his own thoughts, the entranced Turk and the troubled brother, until Kezmo began to stir and cough fitfully. Yawning and blinking in bad humor, he got up and came to the still, then sat down and asked for water. He yawned on and on, his tongue and palate afire from spicy food and too much brandy. Sleep had apparently not sobered him. He lighted his chibouk and with the same tongs he had used to pick up the ember began to poke absently around the still, scraping the clay that lined the retort. Fra Marko glanced at him a few times out of the corners of his eyes, but Kezmo went on cracking the baked clay piece by piece. Fra Marko burst out, as only a man busy with his work can do:

"Leave it alone, man! Don't you see you'll make a leak and spoil all this mash!"

Whereupon the drunk, like a spiteful child, brandished the tongs and scraped one side of the lid clean of the clay. There was a hiss of steam from under the lid and at the same instant Fra Marko, whose blood had rushed to his head, yelled out:

"Son of a Vandal, do you want to ruin all the work and trouble I've put into it!"

Saying this, he picked up a raw, barely charred log of wood from his side of the fire, swung it up, and, in his rage apparently heedless of what he was doing, started toward Kezmo. The Turk, who still held the tongs in his left hand, reached with his right into his waist belt, pulled out a short-barreled rifle, a puny and insignificant-looking thing like a leg of spring lamb, and fired straight into Fra Marko's stomach. Hit at almost point-blank range, the monk jerked upright to his full height and shook his bushy head twice, as if motioning to someone in the back of the room; then all at once he

GUTTS

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collapsed with his whole weight against the still he had tried to protect. The mash poured out over the flames with a loud hiss and the fire began to gutter. Mehmedbeg, who had meanwhile come to himself, helped the bulky Kezmo to his feet. Fra Marko writhed on the ground and tore wordlessly at his habit so that the buttons snapped.

Thoughts flashed through his head with the speed of lightning. Evil was all-powerful. If only his tongue were not so numb, he might have shouted something, anything. But he couldn't. A pounding and a reddish half-light split his head. He kept thinking, O God, they've killed me! They struck me with all their force, here in the middle. The blow will ravage and burn everything. Into your hands, O Lord. It's the end of everything! Everything. What a terrible pity! And darkness invaded his mind with a rush.

The liquid from the still soon quenched the fire. The cellar grew darker and darker.

IT WAS quite some time before the brothers, awakened by the shooting, dared come into the cellar. The Turks had gone away. Fra Marko was dying. They all skipped around him, upset and horrified. In the middle of the floor stood Tanasije, who had run up after the shooting; awake at last, he rolled his big frightened eyes around him. The monks pushed past him; some went to fetch bandages and medicines, others tried to stanch the blood gushing out of the wounded man. Fra Peter was on his knees by Fra Marko's head; having slid his left hand under the latter's sweat-covered neck, he held his right hand with his own right. A lay brother was kneeling on the other side with a tall candle in his hand.

Fra Marko could not speak, for his mouth was full of blood, but his eyes stared in a kind of extreme and pained astonishment into the very pupils of Brother Superior. At a question from the Superior, he batted his eyes to signify that he was repenting his sins, then turned his worried gaze once more to the overturned still and the dead fire, and gave up his ghost.

For a long time after Fra Marko's death the monastery could not get

over its consternation and dread, nor resume its old life. Depending on their age and temperament, the brothers wept or cursed and ground their teeth, or else prayed with their heads buried in their hands.

Fra Ivan, who had once deputized for Fra Marko in Rome, noted in Latin in the Death Register—in which every brother's death and his main virtues were recorded—that on December 2 that year the monastery vicar, Fra Marko, had died a martyr's death, and that the killer was "a certain very bad Turk known as Kezmo." And since the departed had enjoyed no rank or honors in the order and had not been a scholar or a man of outstanding piety, and for that matter had not possessed

any special talents, Fra Ivan merely added: *Requiescat in pace!*

But old Fra Stephen, who hardly ever slept, was in the habit of getting up in the middle of the night and setting straight some things done in the daytime which went against his grain but which he was powerless to prevent or change. Although they had forbidden him to do it, and hid the books and papers from him, he found the Death Register one night as he prowled about the monastery. He crossed out the frosty Latin prose of Fra Ivan and with a shaky hand, in Old Church script, wrote in the margin of Fra Marko's obituary in barely legible letters:

"He loved the monastery as his own soul. Let that be known!"

Carmen Miranda

Backstage, eating bananas
with Carmen Miranda, she offers me
her hat. I thank her and take
a bunch of purple grapes, 3 hardboiled
eggs, a muskmelon and four
ears of corn. She says, Frank,

it wasn't always this way.
There were lean years in Madrid, Marseilles,
Cuernavaca, when dancing didn't pay
and my dear hats went unrefrigerated.
Fruit can be expensive to a poor girl . . .
Anyway, I danced as best I could
with pears, beans, and tangerines shaped
from wax or wood, but it wasn't
the same. You know what they say about
the heart that wears a false face
and vice versa, but why go into it?
It's enough to say I suffered
to dance with no hat at all. Better that
than a cheap imitation! Darling,
try a quince. Persimmons? Have a cumquat!
But, the disgrace of those days
forced me to sing as an escape. And now
my hats and I sing and dance, and do well.
Oh, there are times I feel the fruit
salad is, well, ridiculous; but it's the thing
I do best, if you know what I mean . . .

Before I left, I kissed her
on the cheek, and said, I'm no spokesman
but I think we'll always love you for it . . .
And back on the streets that night
I split the sky with cherry pits.

—FRANK POLITE