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PAVANE FOR A DEAD PICARO

by STORNOWAY

(Conclusion)

«I've forgotten. I had it written down,» Ma said. She went back to the bar counter, fumbled for her spectacles and rummaged in a drawer, presently to return with a small scrap of paper with an address on it. «Did you try the Bar *Ingles y Americano*?» She gave him the paper. So far as he could remember he had not been there.

«There's something else, too,» she said. «This.»

She gave him a small gold cross with a red stone in each arm, and with a broken chain.

«That's Rico's,» Gonzales said excitedly. «How did you get this, Ma?»

«The last time I saw him in here. He looked sick, but more sick from fear than from sickness. He said I was to keep it for his *amigo* Gonzales, the Englishman, if he ever came again.»

«But didn't he tell you anything? That he was in trouble or anything?»

«No. He just said he was going away. He had one drink, very quickly, and gave me this and went away. All the time he was nervous, looking over his shoulder, to see who came in here.»

«Thanks Ma. I reckon you've told me all you know. I'll go to that bar, and try to find the girl.» Gonzales pressed the old woman's hand. «But I'll come back again.» He slipped the gold cross into his pocket and went out.

He found the bar *Ingles y Americano* with some difficulty, for it was not in the usual quarter. It was of average standard, for drinking and dancing, and seemed to cater more for the *gauchos* who came to town from the provinces rather than for the sailor trade. The manager was young, sleek haired, and affable.

«Can I help you *senor*?» he asked.

«I'm looking for a girl named Carnacion.»

«Carnacion? Yes, but she is occupied. There are others. »He waved his hand towards a group of girls around a table. «Those are not occupied. Take your pick.»

«It must be Carnacion. No other.»

«How long you want her for? I don't know how long she is engaged.»

«About ten minutes. Just to talk, but I must see her.»

The young man frowned. «The girls are here to entertain, *senor*, not just to talk.»

«Listen, this is important,» Gonzales insisted. «Ten minutes will be enough, and I'll pay her for her time.»

The man shrugged. «I'll see,» he said, and went away. Gonzales ordered a drink and the man came back. «Maybe an hour, maybe longer.» He noticed that Gonzales was drinking an expensive imported whisky and his attitude changed. «I'll make sure her man does not overstay his time. These *gauchos*, you know.» He lifted his hands expressively. «They want value for their money. Not easily satisfied like sailors. You are a sailor, *senor*?»

«Yes.»

«American?»

«English.»

«If you want to dance, or anything else, there are other girls. I'll see that Carnacion is free for you.»

«I'll wait.»

Gonzales watched the dancing without interest. It was a well run place, and the girls did not bother the men. He found it hard to control his impatience. He had had several drinks when, about two hours later, a girl perched herself on a stool beside him. She was dark and she wore a flower in her hair. Only her eyes were sad.

«You want me, *senor*?» she asked.

Gonzales looked hard at her before he recognised her. It was the girl, but she looked much older.

«Yes. You are Carnacion. You are the one I want,» he said.

She looked at him closely. «I don't understand. *senor*.»

«We've met before. You remember?»

«I'm sorry, *senor*. Not recently.»

«About a year ago. I've come to you for news of Rico Cajal.»

He could have been mistaken, but he thought a look of fear came into her eyes at the mention of the name.

«I'm sorry,» he said. «I was forgetting. What will you drink?»

«Whisky, *gracias*. What you are drinking.»

«Where is Rico now?»

«I know nothing of any Rico. You must be mistaken *senor*.»

«You must know a lot of men named Rico.»

«Maybe, but not the Rico you want. It is a common name.»

«How do you know you don't know him?»

«I must go, *senor*. I have to entertain here. Thank you for the drink.» She made as if to slip down from the bar stool but his cold, heavy lidded eyes held her. «You'll have another drink.»

«No *senor*, please. It is not necessary,» she said, but she accepted the one the bartender poured for her.

From his pocket Gonzales took the gold cross with the broken chain and put it on the bar counter. «You recognise this?» he asked.

The girl went white. She picked up the cross and let it lie in her hand.

«Where did you get this?»

«From Ma Grady. He gave it to her, for me.»

She passed it back to him and he returned it to his pocket.

«There are many like it,» she said.

«Yes, but this was Rico's.»

«What do you want of me.»

«Just to tell me what you know of him. Where he is. If he's alive or dead.»

«I don't know anything. The police took him away. I think he is dead. I hope he is.»

«Why?»

«Because he was bad. Because he was evil. I know you now. He brought you to me once.» She laughed. «You were his latest man lover.»

Gonzales felt uncomfortable. «Oh no. I'm not like that,» he protested.

«No need to pretend, señor. He boasted of his latest conquest, the English sailor, the one they called the snake. I think I know why.»

The contempt in her voice stung him so that he wanted to hit her. Instead, he tried to pass it off lightly. «And you did not like the idea of Rico having a man lover?»

«You weren't the only one. There were many. I did not mind. Sometimes it is a relief for girls like me to meet men like that, but it was an evil day when I met Rico.»

«You loved him though.»

«At first. He could always make women love him, with his gay laugh and his money. Then the women would hate him, for it was they who gave him the money. He always had plenty. I worked for him. I gave him all I had, to spend on you and others like you. He was an animal, as men are all animals. And his stinking politics. That's what finished him. That's why they took him away. And I'm glad, I tell you. Glad, but I wish he were alive, so that he could die again.»

She was becoming hysterical and Gonzales could see the manager moving in. Gonzales made no attempt to detain her when she left the bar and fled to the back quarters.

«You have upset her señor,» the man said coldly. «She will be of no use tonight, not any more.»

«I'm sorry.»

The man glanced casually at the pile of chits in front of Gonzales and apparently was satisfied.

«You were speaking of Rico Cajal?»

«Yes,» Gonzales said eagerly. «Did you know him?»

«Yes. He was a handsome swine, and a pervert. He lived on women. Carnacion was only one of them.»

«Is it a crime to live on women?» Gonzales asked coldly. «Don't you, for instance?»

The man laughed. «Of course. Why not, *amigo*? Now you will have a drink with me. I insist. It was not so much that Cajal lived on women. It was his other nasty habits that made him a man to be despised. He would bring his men here, and entertain them with the money that Carnacion, and other women, had given him. Then he would have them make love to her while he watched, or he would make love to them and make her watch. Were you one of them?» he asked, with a sneer.

«No,» Gonzales said. He felt like slamming his fist into the smug face of this smooth bastard but he restrained himself. «It was not like that with me.»

«Then why are you so anxious to find him?»

«Because he was a friend. He was kind to me when I was here before.»

«He was rotten, the worst type of *pícaro*.»

«I did not know him like that.»

«There were times when he had his better moments, like when one of the girls had tuberculosis, and he sent her to the sanatorium and said he would pay all her expenses. He did for a week, until they took him away. But *he* was not paying. The girls were.»

«Why did they take him?»

«I don't know for sure. Politics is always an excuse here. Perhaps someone just wanted him out of the way. Or perhaps one of the girls he lived on had a friend in high places. I don't know. I was not interested enough to inquire.»

«Is there anyone could help me?» Gonzales said desperately. «It's important to me to know.»

«You *were* one of his men, weren't you?» the man asked.

«Yes, if you must know, I was,» Gonzales almost shouted. «But I did not know that he was living on women, or that he did the things you say he did. When I knew him, it was not like that.»

«It was allways like that, with Rico. There was a priest, Father Pereira, he used to go to for confession.» The man laughed. «He must have enough penances to keep him going for a thousand years, if he's still alive.»

«Do you know the address of this priest?»

«He has a church in the slums of La Boca. The Church of the Angels, I think.»

«I'll find it.»

«It might not be wise to make too many enquiries. Someone might want to know what was your association with him. Remember he was a dirty rotten swine, and anyone who knew him, suffered for it.»

«The girl with tuberculosis did not suffer.»

«She did, too. He was arrested soon after she went to take the cure. All he really did was give her hope. She died.»

Gonzales paid for his drinks, and pushed a folded note into the man's hand. «Give this to the girl,» he said. The man unfolded the bill and saw it was for five hundred pesos. He smiled as he pocketed it. Gonzales went out.

*

It was late the next afternoon when Gonzales found the small grey-stone church in the slums around La Boca.

«You are Father Pereira?» he asked in Spanish, of the old priest who was just leaving the church.

The old man stared at him. «Yes, but it is too late to hear a confession. I have just finished.» He made as if to walk away, but something in Gonzales' face arrested him. «Unless it is urgent,» he added.

«No father,» Gonzales said. «It's not a confession, but it's urgent, for me, anyhow. I need help.»

«You'd better come in.» The priest led the way into the dark church and Gonzales followed him into the vestry.

«How can I help you?» the priest asked, not unkindly.

«It's about Enrico Cajal,» Gonzales said.

The priest suddenly seemed to be uneasy. «Enrico Cajal? What do you want of him? And who are you?»

Gonzales told his name. «I just want to know where he is, or if he is dead, as they tell me he might be.»

«Are you a good Catholic?»

«I'm sorry father. I'm not a Catholic at all.»

«Yet your name is Gonzales? It is a Catholic name.»

«I know, but I'm English.»

«There are English Catholics my son. The church would welcome you.»

«It's not the church I have come to talk about, father. I want to know about Rico Cajal. They said you might help me.»

«Why do you want to know?»

«Because he was my friend. I've come to Buenos Aires to find him.»

«It is good to know that Enrico Cajal had one friend,» the priest said dryly. «He seemed to have many enemies, more enemies than friends.»

«Yes father,» Gonzales said impatiently. «But where is he? Is he alive or dead?»

The old priest made the sign of the cross. «He is dead. God rest his soul.»

From what he had previously learned, the news should not have shocked Gonzales, but it did. He knew he could believe this old man. «But how? Why?» he asked.

«He died in prison. I do not know why he was there. He sent for me. I heard his last confession. All I know is that he died.»

«Then they must have shot him, or hanged him, or whatever they do here.»

«He died, anyhow. His grave is in the prison grounds. A nameless grave.»

Gonzales was crying now, openly. His hand was clutched tightly over Rico's gold cross.

«It is well not to ask too much my son,» the priest said kindly. «It is best not to know too much.»

«He was my friend,» Gonzales said. «He was not bad, not evil like they make him out to be.»

«He was misguided, my son. There is nothing else I can tell you. We live in difficult times.»

He rose from his chair, and Gonzales rose too. Silently they walked back to the church door, where the priest left him.

«The true church has much comfort to offer, my son,» the old man said.

«You've been kind, and thank you,» Gonzales answered, as he walked blindly into the street. Ma Grady's bar was not far away. He decided to go there.

He accepted the priest's statement that Rico was dead and he did not want to know any more. Whether he had been killed for political or criminal reasons did not seem to matter. The Rico Gonzales had known and loved was not the Rico that other people had known and hated. It would be a relief to sail back to England in a few days time.

Ma Grady's bar was full. Ma, behind the bar, was her old gay self. There was no sign of Dolores, busy, no doubt, in the back room. Sykes, Jansen and Halligan were all three there. This was unusual, for Sykes and Jansen usually sought out the brighter spots, and Halligan automatically followed. It must be that they were short of money, for it did not take long to go through the cash advance paid on arrival in Buenos Aires. Gonzales knew that Sykes was temporarily out of action for health reasons, the consequence of his first night's escapades ashore, and apart from

Dolores, Ma's bar had no temptation to offer. Gonzales nodded to them but did not speak. He sat at the bar counter alone.

«Well me darlin',» Ma said softly, as she served him a drink. «What did ye find out now?»

«He's dead Ma. Father Pereira told me. He said he did not know why.»

«God rest his soul,» Ma said piously, «and yours too, me darlin'.»

«But I'm not dead yet Ma,» Gonzales protested.

«No me darlin', but ye'll always be unlucky. Ye have that kind of face, God help you.»

She went off to serve some customers who were waiting. Sykes joined him at the bar. «Ain't you going to join your mates, Cobra?» he asked.

«Not tonight Alfie. I'll buy you a beer though.»

«Going to have a bash at Dolores? Half a dollar's worth?»

«Not even that.»

«Good show. Women are beasts, ain't they? If I could see the dirty slut that landed me with this lot, I wouldn't half bash her one. Strewth, look what's come in. Just Jansen's cup of tea. Mind how you go.» With a leer Sykes went back to his table.

A young man, flamboyantly dressed, with thin gold rings in his ears took up a position next to Gonzales. Through his open shirt Gonzales could see a gold cross on a thin chain, just like Rico's.

«A drink with me, senior?» the young man asked.

Gonzales accepted. They had several drinks together. There was no mistaking the young man's intentions. He was a local, and made no secret of what he wanted. Gonzales knew that Sykes, Jansen and Halligan were watching him closely. Through his half closed eyes he stared back at them. Gonzales knew that had Rico been alive he would have resumed the old relationship without hesitation or fear. He had wanted Rico enough not to care for the consequences. Until he could meet someone who could mean as much to him as Rico had, during the short time he had known him, then anyone who cared to could act as a substitute. The old priest was right. To know how or why Rico died would gain him nothing. Death to Gonzales, meant little. He too would die one day, and so would Sykes and Jansen and Ma Grady and all the priests and the police and the prostitutes and the men who ran them and everybody else.

«I have a Lambretta,» the young man said softly. «Will you come for a ride. I'll show you Buenos Aires.»

Gonzales finished his drink. «If you like,» he said.

He followed the young man into the street. His three shipmates leered at him as he passed them. Gonzales' face was without expression as he made a rude gesture with his thumb. It was a gesture of defiance. What they thought of his habits did not matter any more. What he thought of his own habits did not seem to matter either, now that Rico was dead.

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Der Kreis

Säumige Zahler in der Schweiz

erhalten nur noch das Augustheft. Wir bitten also um Begleichung des noch ausstehenden Beitrages für das II. Halbjahr 1967 und sind Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie uns Kontrolle und Buchhaltung erleichtern.

Les abonnés de Suisse

ayant négligé d'effectuer le versement requis ne recevront plus que le No d'août. Nous prions donc les retardataires de s'acquitter de leur abonnement pour le II semestre 1967 et sommes reconnaissants envers ceux qui ainsi faciliteront contrôle et comptabilité.

Ein Register für Freundespaare

Vorschläge eines Abonnenten (in gekürzter Form), die uns erreichten.

Seit Juli 1966 bin ich Mitglied des Kreis. Ich habe mir vorgestellt (zur Registrierung bestehender Freundschaften), dass darüber ein Register geführt wird, so als Nebenabteilung des Kreis (Mitgliedschaft müsste doch nicht Bedingung sein) und dass sich dann die jeweiligen Partner (welche von der richtigen Entscheidung überzeugt sind, selbstverständlich) gegen eine Gebühr (zur Deckung der Unkosten) in dieses Register eintragen können, als feste Freundespaare. Selbstverständlich müsste dann dieses Register auch in den jeweiligen Clubs der andern Länder geführt werden. Ich hoffe, dass dadurch Ordnung in unsere Kreise kommt und dass sich ein Freund weniger mit einem Partner einlässt, der im Register als «geschieden» vermerkt ist. . . . Es wäre zur Trennung immerhin der Schritt zum Registeramt zu tun und: ich glaube, dass man sich das eher nochmals überlegen würde, schon deshalb, weil eine eventuelle *zweite* Eintragung nicht vorgenommen werden dürfte. . . . Ich würde mich diesbezüglich dafür allzeit zur Verfügung stellen, um diese Sache ins Laufen zu bringen. Meine Freizeit würde ich also dafür opfern und falls ich dann meinen richtigen Freund gefunden habe (was ich zur Zeit hoffe) uns als erstes Musterpaar in das Register eintragen zu lassen. . . . Sehr gut wäre es, wenn du meine Zuschrift in unserer Monatsschrift veröffentlichen könntest, dann wären schon viele über meine Idee orientiert.

Abonnent 1607, an den wir Aeusserungen zu diesen Ausführungen gerne weiterleiten.