

This one has far more dash. Frankly, you can keep your big blonde. I don't mind telling you, that day in Juan, when I signed that register in that little vestry there, well –

(He sees FLORENCE and stops, abashed.)

FLORENCE You were saying – when you signed that register?

MERLUCHE Oh, nothing! Just talking to myself. I was referring to my wife . . .

FLORENCE Really? Tell me about her. What is she like?

MERLUCHE Well now – er . . . big, she was, and fair, and a bit puffed up with herself.

FLORENCE And where did you marry her?

MERLUCHE *(wildly)* Juan.

FLORENCE Juan? How nice. And what's become of her?

MERLUCHE I don't know.

FLORENCE Really? You don't know?

MERLUCHE No . . .

FLORENCE *How very sad. (To DANIEL.)* Have you been using the telephone, darling?

DANIEL No.

FLORENCE Why is it on the floor, then?

DANIEL *(scared)* I don't know.

(FLORENCE replaces the telephone.)

FLORENCE *(to MERLUCHE)* Are you two pleased with your morning's work? I mean, how is the portrait progressing?

MERLUCHE Slow, slow. He fidgets the whole time.

FLORENCE *(looking at the drawing, ironically)* Oh, marvellous. A great success. Bursting with talent, aren't you?

MERLUCHE Can you tell already? I've only just started.

FLORENCE Oh, yes, one can tell. Do you make a living from your drawing?

- MERLUCHE Yes – well . . . that depends.
- FLORENCE I suppose you've had exhibitions in Juan?
- MERLUCHE Well, no.
- FLORENCE How much do you get for a portrait?
- MERLUCHE It's like the weather, it's variable.
- FLORENCE Yes, but does it depend on the kind of paper you use, or who the sitter happens to be?
- MERLUCHE Both.
- FLORENCE (*incisively*) You mean, when you've done work for somebody before – either a painting or some other service, say – then you make a special price, for old time's sake. Is that it?
- MERLUCHE Yes.
- FLORENCE It's fun doing that, isn't it? It brings back the past, the good old days . . .
- MERLUCHE Yes.
- FLORENCE (to DANIEL) Darling, why do you keep ^{looking} ~~look~~ at your watch? Are you expecting someone?
- DANIEL No.
- MERLUCHE I don't want to intrude if you're expecting company. I haven't shaved yet. I'll be back tomorrow.
- FLORENCE Yes. Good-bye. See you soon.
- DANIEL We're not expecting anyone! Don't go! Sit down!
- MERLUCHE But . . .
- DANIEL (*desperately*) Don't go?
- FLORENCE Look, darling, you can't force a creative artist to work. Inspiration comes and goes. You must let him leave if he wants to. I'll say good-bye now.
- MERLUCHE That's right. See you tomorrow. See you soon.
- DANIEL (*stopping him*) Merluche is a very old friend of mine. Sit down.
- FLORENCE An old friend? Really? You kept him very dark. Wait a minute! Why. I recognise you now. Why didn't you

tell me before? You were a witness at our wedding in Juan!

MERLUCHE No. Not me. I've never seen you before in my life.

FLORENCE Think carefully. I can assure you it's worth your while.

MERLUCHE I don't know you.

FLORENCE Memory can play tricks, you know.

MERLUCHE *(to DANIEL)* The lady I witnessed for was a blonde.

FLORENCE Yes, that was me. My hair was dyed then.

MERLUCHE Get away. I'm not a complete fool.

FLORENCE *(icily)* That's your bad luck then. Intelligent people sometimes get in the way.

(Enter FATHER MAXIMIN.)

MAXIMIN Am I intruding? I'm sorry. I see you have a visitor.

MERLUCHE Ah, your Reverence! Take my seat, I'm just going.

DANIEL *(holding him back)* He's no priest, he's a fraud!

MERLUCHE What?

MAXIMIN Pay no attention to him. Tell me, who are you?

MERLUCHE Merluche. Portrait artist.

FLORENCE Yes. Quite a surprise. M. Merluche, portrait artist, and occasional witness at weddings in Juan.

DANIEL You've had it, both of you. This man saw Elizabeth. He's going to describe her to the Inspector.

MERLUCHE What's going on? I don't like this.

DANIEL Don't be afraid, they won't touch you.

MERLUCHE All the same . . .

(A car draws up outside.)

DANIEL The police!

MERLUCHE About time, too.

(MAXIMIN takes a knife from his pocket. DANIEL turns in order to protect MERLUCHE, who thus has