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 **AMAZING GHOST MOTOR CAR OF LA BREA**

 DRIVER WHO `STEERS’

 ALL DAY

 PRAYERS OFFERED TO

 LAY THE SPECTRE

 By IRVING GREENIDGE

Throwing in irreproachable gears, tooting seductive horns, negotiating corners with impeccable grace, and clinging resolutely to his extreme left, Mano Gonzales, alias ‘Mahal,’ driver of Trinidad’s ghost motor car, has been steering his invisible vehicle about La Brea from Friday afternoon to the consummate approval of juvenile taste, and the abiding pity of balanced adults.

 Breathlessly making interminable rounds, Mahal has no respite but in a compassionate hold-up from some friendly soul. He pulls up his car, carefully transfers the switch key to his pocket, and faithfully reproduces all the evolutions of getting out of an automobile.

 Stopped in this way, the little brown Spanish-caste man becomes himself again.

 Calmly, and in passable English, he related to me yesterday, his story [...] at San Fernando of Venezuelan parents both of whom are now dead, of his school days.

 Poor, seedy, barefooted, unshaven Mahal, just on the other side of twenty-seven, was a dashing taxi-cab driver on the Mahal line of omnibuses only five years ago.

 HIS OBSESSION

 Somehow, upon his word, supported by popular attestation, the outbreak of his strange affliction coincides with his having stood Crown’s evidence to a notorious South Trinidad murder trial, and Mahal is obsessed with the belief that he is under the influence of diabolical agency directed by the parties whom he gave away.

 Under interrogation his behaviour is puzzlingly rational. He accepts food, clothes and money offerings with the regret that he must live on charity though master of a trade, and perfectly willing to earn his bread. Food gifts he shares with his invisible mentor, whose part of the repast he casts upon the ground with the reproach: “you always more hungry than me!”

 Dismissed, the obsession promptly re-transforms him. He repairs to the exact location on which he had stalled his car, climbs into it, taking care not to strike his head against the hood, bangs the door after him, whizzes a charmingly responsive self-starter, zooms the requisite gears, and doggedly grasping the wheel, is off neck or nothing on the sisyphean drive.

 PRAYERS OFFERED

 Far into night you can hear him playing his grotesque role, to succumb at last in balmy sleep upon the handiest doorstep!

 Up with the morning Angelus, he resolutely hies him to the identical spot on which he had parked his car for the night; realising that exposure in the elements has run his engine cold, he neglects the self-starter for a vigorous crank, and is off on his rounds again!

 Much prayer has had no power to exorcise Mahal’s tormentor. Vain Masses have been offered to this end in different churches by his friends. Kind sympathisers have even taken him to Mount St. Benedict where it is claimed miraculous cures have been effected—all to no avail!

 He can give no undertaking as regards the duration of his sojourn in La Brea. “Maybe another day, or maybe three months,” he vaguely says.

 Meanwhile he exists upon the charity of sympathising folks, and sleeps “under his cap,” as he wittily told me here today, drawing wondering children after him like the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Note

Mahal was one of the great legendary street characters of Trinidad, and is still referred to today. The explanation given here for his behaviour is still the most common. Mount St. Benedict is a Benedictine monastery located in the hills north of St. Augustine in north-western Trinidad.