

***O DOLCE AMORE:* A Louisiana Weekend**

by

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circa 1970
New Orleans



Saint Catherine of Genoa

Canto I. SATURDAY MORNING

“Windows up!” alerts Emory Boudreaux, shifting a brand-new four-wheel-drive Ford Bronco into screeching overdrive, plunging into viscous Louisiana mud for a spin and splatter. In front and back, his young kinfolk grip their seats.

Nora Jo, Stafford, and the little ones, Emma Trent and Jeffry Lee, are whirled 27° to the right, 43° left, 128° right, 52° left. With quickened hearts, the cousins squeal with joy as the Bronco ascends to solid palmettoed earth. “Well, Hell! I’ve been through scarier mudding than that!” brags little Jeffry Lee as they scoot through gray-mossed oaks to gumbo-lunch at Grandma’s house.

Canto II. SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Shadows bloom through the churchyard gate. Pious, yet eager, Father Anthony meticulously dries his supper plate and retires early for his sunset devotions. In the privacy of his rectory’s small courtyard, he closes his eyes and joins Saint Catherine of Genoa for fun and games.

They play hide-and-seek in forbidden places. Finding each other, they giggle and cover their faces, beside themselves in such a state of joy as to be beyond thought or comprehension. He prays to her: “Thou art in me and I in thee, sealed together as One and the Same Thing. I desire only thee, *O Dolce Amore*.”

His devotion to Saint Catherine follows the Catholic Degrees of Ardent Love: a progressive surrender of selfhood to *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*. Not for him a lover with the headstrong passion which landed Saint Teresa of Avila before an Inquisition tribunal.

Canto III. SATURDAY EVENING

Father Anthony dozes in his courtyard chair as night creatures trespass his *al fresco sanctum sanctorum*. He is mizzled to consciousness by the mosquitoed-scratch of his arm, the quick brush-away of a gnat, the irritated-swat of a midge, the subliminal-bite of a redbug.

He opens up his eyes. Lightning-bugs beacon desire in the heat-waved air. Luna moths dance in the lurid flickering of candlelight. Jasmine and moonflower vines encircle him and pollinate unrestrained. Surrounding fluff-balled cottonwoods jettison their white seed upon him.

He perks up his ears. Cicadas, katydids, crickets, bullfrogs, and even alligators send out erotic night-sounds in a syncopated chorus.

He sits up straight. All the winged, legged, and leaved denizens of the bayous mock his chaste love for Saint Catherine in an unholy chant:

“O DOLCE AMORE! o DOLCE AMORE! O DOLCE AMORE!”

Canto IV. SUNDAY MORNING

“In Louisiana,” Father Anthony solemnly preaches in a homily to his parishioners, “the penetration of theology by natural science results from the overwhelming primacy of sensate experience.”

“Is that what they call Papal Bull?” snickers little Jeffry Lee to his cousin Emma Trent in their pew as they play tic-tac-toe on the back of a tri-fold church program.