

Text 13

She is tall and slender, perhaps seventy, silver-haired, soigné, neither black nor white, a pale golden rum colour. She is a Martinique aristocrat who lives in Fort de France but also has an apartment in Paris. We are sitting on the terrace of her house, an airy, elegant house that looks as if it was made of wooden lace: it reminds me of certain old
5 New Orleans houses. We are dinking iced mint tea slightly flavoured with absinthe. Three green chameleons race one another across the terrace; one pauses at Madame's feet, flicking its forked tongue, and she comments : "Chameleons. Such exceptional creatures. The way they change colour. Red. Yellow. Lime. Pink. Lavender. And did you know they are very fond of music ?" She regards me with her fine black eyes. " You don't
10 believe me?"

during the course of the afternoon she had told me many curious things. How at night her garden was filled with mammoth night-flying moths. That her chauffeur, a dignified figure who had driven me to her house in a dark green Mercedes, was a wife-poisoner who had escaped from Devil's Island. And she had described a village high in nothern
15 mountains that is entirely inhabited by albinos: "Little pink-eyed people white as chalk. Occasionally one sees a few on the streets of Fort de France."

"Yes, of course I believe you."

She tilts her silver head. "No, you don't. But I shall prove it."

so saying, she drifts into her cool Caribbean salon, a shadowy room with gradually
20 turning ceiling fans, and poses herself at a well-tuned piano. I am still sitting on the terrace, but I can observe her, this chic, elderly woman, the product of varied bloods. She begins to perform a Mozart sonata.

Eventually the chameleons accuulated : a dozen, a dozen more, most of them green, some scarlet, lavender. They skittered across the terrace and scampered into the salon,
25 a sensitive, asorbed audience for the music played. And then not played, for suddenly my hostess stood and stamped her foot, and the chameleons scattered like sparks from an exploding star.

Truman Capote, Music For Chameleons, 1980