NOBODY could say just how Tonet returned to Cañamèl’s tavern.

The customers saw him one morning seated before a little table, playing at cards with Sangonera and other town idlers, and nobody thought it strange. It was natural that Tonet should frequent a place that belonged exclusively to Neleta.

The Cubano again spent his entire time there, abandoning anew his father, who had placed faith in his total conversion. But now there was no longer that confidence between him and the tavern-keeper’s wife that had so scandalized Palmar with its suspiciously fraternal intimacy. Neleta, garbed in mourning, stood behind the counter, protected by a certain air of authority. She seemed to have grown taller upon finding herself rich and free. She jested less with the customers; she revealed a most rigid virtue; she would frown and bite her lips at the jests to which the customers were habituated, and should some drinker so much as brush against her bare arms as he took his glass, Neleta would show her claws and threaten to throw him through the door.

The patronage grew after the disappearance of the swollen, ailing spectre of Cañamèl. The wine served by the widow seemed to taste better, and once again the little taverns of Palmar were deserted.

Tonet did not dare to look at Neleta, as if he feared
REEDS AND MUD

the comments of the public. La Samaruca's tongue was wagging enough as it was, seeing him once more in the tavern! He played, he drank, he would take a seat in a corner, as Cañamèl had done in other days, and he seemed to be fascinated, dominated from a distance by that woman who looked at everybody except him.

Tio Paloma, with his habitual cunning, understood his grandson's situation. He was always there so as not to displease the widow, who wished to have him under her eye and exercise boundless authority over him. Tonet "was mounting guard," as the old man put it, and although from time to time he felt very much like leaving for the lake and doing some hunting, he would be silent and remain in his place, doubtless fearing Neleta's recriminations when they should be left alone.

She had suffered much indeed recently, compelled to endure the dying Cañamèl's whims, and now that she was wealthy and free she was revenging herself, making Tonet feel the weight of her authority.

The poor young man, astonished at the celerity with which death had arranged everything, could not yet believe his good fortune whenever he found himself in Cañamèl's house, free of all fear that the infuriated tavern-keeper would appear at any moment. Gazing upon this abundance, of which Neleta was the sole proprietor, he obeyed every order of the widow.

She watched over him with exacting affection, resembling somewhat the severity of a mother.

"Don't drink any more," she would say to Tonet, who, incited by Sangonera, would venture to ask for more at the bar.

Tio Paloma's grandson, as obedient as a child, would
refuse to drink and would remain motionless in his seat, respected by all, for none was unaware of his relations with the owner of the establishment.

The customers, who had witnessed their intimacy during Cañamél's days, found it logical that there should be an understanding between the two. Hadn't they been sweethearts? Hadn't they been so much in love that they had excited Tío Paco's jealousy? ... Now they would marry, as soon as the months of waiting required of the widow should pass, and the Cubano would put on the airs of the legitimate owner behind that counter which he had appropriated as a lover.

The only ones who refused to accept this solution were La Samaruca and her relatives. Neleta would not marry: they were positive. That woman with the honeyed tongue was too wicked to do things as God ordains. Rather than make the sacrifice of yielding to the first wife's relatives that which was their rightful share, she would prefer to live clandestinely with the Cubano. That was nothing new for her. Cañamél had seen stranger things than that before he died! ...

Spurred on by the testament that held out to them the possibility of becoming rich, and by the conviction that Neleta was certainly not going to make the road clear for them by marrying, La Samaruca and her folk carried on a close espionage of the lovers.

At night, in the small hours, when the tavern had already been closed, the fierce virago, wrapped in her shawl, would spy upon the customers as they came out, seeking Tonet among them.

She would see Sangonera staggering off to his hovel. His companions would follow him with their jests, asking
him whether he had met the Italian scissors-grinder again. And in the midst of his drunkenness he would for a moment grow clear in mind. ... Sinners! It seemed impossible that men like them, who professed to be Christians, should make fun of that meeting! ... The Omnipotent would come in due time, and their punishment would be not to recognize Him, not to follow Him, thus being deprived of the felicity reserved for the elect.

Sometimes, when Sangonera would be left standing alone before his shanty, La Samarucu would accost him, looming forth from the darkness like a witch. Where was Tonet? But the vagabond would smile maliciously, guessing the intentions of the termagant. Trying to sound him, was she! And waving his arms about in a vague gesture, as if he wished to encompass all of the Albufera, he would answer:

"Tonet? Per lo mon; per lo mon. Somewhere about. Somewhere."

La Samarucu was indefatigable in her investigations. Before daybreak she would already have taken up her place before the cabin of the Palomas, and when La Borda opened the door, the witch would start a conversation with the girl, in the meantime casting avid glances into the dwelling to see if Tonet were inside.

Neleta's implacable enemy became certain that the young man spent his nights in the tavern. What a scandal! And only a few months after Cañamèl had died! But what irritated her most about this audacious love affair was that the tavern-keeper's testament should be left unfulfilled and that half of his property should continue to remain in the widow's power, instead of reverting to the relatives of the first wife. La Samarucu made trips to
Valencia: she made inquiries of persons who had the law at their finger-tips, and spent the time in continuous agitation, hovering for nights in the vicinity of the tavern, accompanied by relatives who were to serve as her witnesses. She would wait for Tonet to leave the tavern just before dawn, thus proving his relations with the widow. But the doors of the tavern did not open during the whole night: the house remained dark and silent, as if all within its walls slept the sleep of virtue. In the morning, when the tavern opened, Neleta would appear calmly behind the counter, smiling, fresh, looking everybody straight in the eye, as one who has an untroubled conscience; much later, Tonet would appear as if by magic, and the customers could not say for sure whether he had come in through the street door or the rear-door that faced the canal.

It was difficult to catch that couple. La Samaruca despaired, realizing Neleta’s cunning. In order to avoid the possibility of tales being told, Neleta had discharged the tavern servant, replacing her by her aunt,—that old, spineless woman who was resigned to everything, and who felt a certain respect not unmixed with fear before her niece’s violent temper and the wealth of her widowhood.

The vicar, Don Miguel, who had learned of La Samaruca’s underhanded work, more than once collared Tonet, sermonizing him on the wise course of avoiding a scandal. They ought to marry: any day at all they might be surprised by the provisional beneficiaries of the will, and all Albufera would ring with the gossip. Even if it meant that Neleta should lose part of the inheritance, was it not better to live as God ordains, without subter-
fuges and lies? The Cubano shrugged his shoulders. He was eager for the marriage, but she was the one that had the say. Neleta was the only woman in Palmar who, with her accustomed sweet ways, dared to confront the vicar; for this reason she grew indignant upon hearing his re-buke. It was all a pack of lies! She lived a blameless life. She needed no men. All she required was a helper in the tavern and she had selected Tonet, her childhood chum. . . . Was there anything wrong in her choosing, in a house like hers, bearing an appreciable investment, the person whom she thought most worthy of confidence? She knew well enough that all this was the work of La Samarucu's slanderous tongue, so that Neleta should give her the rice fields of her late husband; the half of a fortune to the accumulation of which she had contributed as an honest, industrious wife. But if that witch imagined she was going to get the inheritance, she had better guess again! Sooner would the whole lake of Albufera dry up!

The greed of the rural woman revealed itself in Neleta, with a fiery determination capable of the wildest acts. There awoke in her the instinct of several generations of wretched fisherfolk in the clutches of poverty, who had enviously glowered upon the riches of those who possessed fields and sold wine to the poor, slowly getting possession of their money. She recalled her hungering childhood; the days of abandonment when she would stand humbly at the door of the Palomas waiting for Tonet's mother to take pity upon her; the efforts she had made to win her husband and to endure him during his illness; and now that she was the richest woman in Palmar, was she, because of a few scruples, to share her fortune with persons who had always done her harm? She
felt capable of committing a crime rather than giving a pin to her enemies. The possibility that La Samaruca might own a part of the rice lands that she cultivated with such passion made her see red with anger, and her fingers would contract with the same fury that had sent her flying upon her enemy in Ruzafa.

The possession of wealth transformed her. She was exceedingly fond of Tonet, but as between him and her fortune, she was never in doubt as to sacrificing her lover. If she were to abandon Tonet he would return sooner or later, for his existence was forever linked to her own; but if she relinquished the tiniest portion of her heritage, she would never see it again.

It was for this reason that she received so indignantly the timid proposals which Tonet would advance at night in the silence of the tavern's upper story.

The Cubano was dissatisfied with this life of flight and concealment. He wished to be the legal owner of the tavern; to dazzle the populace with his new dignity, to mingle as man to man with the folk that had despised him. Besides (and this he concealed carefully from her), as Neleta's husband he would fear her domineering character less,—the despotism of the rich woman who can throw her lover through the door and abuse her power. Since she loved him, why did they not marry?

But as Tonet would utter these suggestions in the gloom of the bedroom the corn straw of the mattress would rustle with Neleta's impatient movements. Her voice grew hoarse with rage. . . . He, too? . . . No, my boy; she knew what she had to do, and she was asking no advice. Things were well enough as they were. Did he lack anything? Did he not have the use of everything as
if he were the owner? Why, then, let Don Miguel marry them, only to be forced, after the ceremony, to give up half the fortune into the filthy hands of La Samaruca? Sooner would she let her arm be cut off than amputate her inheritance. Besides, she knew the world; she used to leave the lake regions now and then, she went to the city, where the grand gentlemen admired her pertness, and she hadn’t failed to notice that what was considered a fortune in Palmar was not even respectable poverty outside of the Albufera. She was ambitious. She wasn’t always going to stand behind a bar filling glasses and dealing with drunkards; she wished to end her days in Valencia, in a house of her own, like a lady who lives on her income. She would lend out her money with greater business ability than Cañamèl. She would use her wits to see that the fortune should reproduce with tireless fecundity, and when she should have become truly rich, she would perhaps decide to reach an agreement with La Samaruca, giving over to that witch what she would then look upon as a mere pittance. When such a time should come, he might speak to her about marriage, if he continued to behave and obeyed her without causing any trouble. But as for the present,—No, recordóns!—no marrying and no giving any money to anybody.

And she expressed herself so energetically that Tonet did not dare to reply. Besides, he, the youth who had tried to impose himself upon the rest of the town by his bravery, felt himself dominated by Neleta, and was afraid of her, seeing that he was not so securely established in her affections as he had at first believed.

It was not that Neleta had grown weary of their love. She loved him, but her wealth gave her a great advantage
over him. Besides, mutual possession during the endless winter nights, in the closed tavern without any risk of discovery, had blunted in her the excitement of danger, the quivering voluptuousness that thrilled her during Cañamél's time, when they would kiss behind the doors or have their hasty meetings in the suburbs of Palmar, always exposed to some surprise.

After four months of this almost marital life, with no other obstacle than La Samaruca's vigilant but easily eluded surveillance, Tonet thought for a moment that his matrimonial desires might be realized. Neleta appeared preoccupied and worried. The vertical wrinkle between her brows betrayed painful thoughts. On the slightest pretext she would quarrel with Tonet; she would insult him, repel him and complain of his love, cursing the moment of weakness in which she had opened her arms to him; but afterward, impelled by the desires of the flesh, she would accept him anew, giving herself over completely, as if the grief that burdened her were irreparable.

Her uneven and nervous humor would transform their nights of love into agitated meetings, during which caresses would alternate with recriminations, and it needed but little for the mouths that had shortly before been joined in a kiss to snap and bite at each other. At last, one night, Neleta, in words that flamed with rage, revealed the secret of her condition. She had kept silent up to then, being in doubt as to her misfortune; but now, after two months of observation, she was certain. She was to become a mother... Tonet was terrified and content at the same time, while she continued to rail. That would have all been very well had it taken place without any danger while Cañamél was still alive. But the devil, who doubt-
REEDS AND MUD

less had his hand in this, had considered it better to have
the obstacles arise in difficult moments, when she was
interested in concealing her love affair so as to deprive
her enemies of advantage.

Tonet, after the first moment of surprise had passed,
asked her timidly what she intended to do. In the tremor
of his voice she divined her lover’s hidden thoughts, and
she burst into raucous, ironic laughter, which revealed the
temper of her soul. Ah! Did he imagine that for such
a little thing she was going to marry him? He did not
know her. He could rest assured that she would sooner
kill herself than surrender to her enemies. What was
hers belonged to her in every detail, and she would de-
defend her property. Not on this account was Tonet to be
married, for there’s a remedy for everything in this
world!...

This explosion of rage at the trick Nature had played,
surprising them at the moment when they felt most se-
cure, blew over; Neleta and Tonet continued their lives
as if nothing had occurred, shunning any mention of the
barrier that had arisen between them, growing familiar
with it, easy in the thought that its realization was still
far in the future and trusting vaguely in some unforeseen
circumstance that should intervene to save them.

Neleta, without mentioning it to her lover, sought
means to rid herself of the new life that she felt pulsing
in her bosom, like a threat against her greed.

Her aunt, frightened by Neleta’s communication, spoke
of powerful remedies. She recalled her conversations
with the old women of Palmar as they would lament the
rapidity with which families grow amidst poverty. On
the advice of her niece, she went to Ruzafa or to the city
to consult herb-doctors who enjoyed a shady reputation among the lowest social strata, returning with mysterious remedies composed of nauseating ingredients that upset the stomach.

Tonet many a night encountered on Neleta’s body evil-smelling plasters in which she placed the greatest faith: poultices of wild plants, which lent to their nights of love a certain atmosphere of sorcery.

But all these cures in time revealed their inefficacy. The months passed and Neleta, in great despair, realized the futility of her efforts.

As her aunt said, that hidden creature had a good hold on her, and it was in vain that Neleta strove to do away with it.

The meetings of the lovers during the night were stormy. It seemed that Cañamél was avenging himself, rising between them and thrusting one against the other.

Neleta wept with despair, accusing Tonet of her misfortune. He was to blame: it was his fault that her future was now threatened. And when, in the nervous tension of her condition, she wearied of heaping insults upon the Cubano, she would fix her furious eyes upon her abdomen, which, freed of her oppression to which it was subject during the day in order to deceive the curiosity of strangers, seemed each night to increase monstrously. Neleta hated with a savage fury that hidden being which stirred in her womb, and with closed fist she would strike herself brutally, as if she wished to crush it within its warm folds.

Tonet, too, hated it, seeing in it a menace. Infected with Neleta’s greed, he thought with terror of the loss
of part of that heritage which he considered his own. He brought to mind all the remedies that he had heard mentioned in a vague way during the free-spoken conversations among the boatmen, and advised his paramour to use them. These were brutal attempts, assaults against Nature, that caused one's hair to stand on end, or else ridiculous remedies that would cause a smile. But Neleta's health mocked everything. That body, which was apparently so delicate, was strong and solid, and continued in silence to fulfill the most serious function of Nature, nor could any evil desires obstruct or delay the sacred work of fecundity.

The months passed. Neleta had to make great efforts, to suffer intense pain in order to hide her condition from the whole town. In the morning she would tighten her corset in such a cruel manner that she made Tonet shiver. Many a time she would lack the strength to restrain this expansion of maternity.

"Pull. ... pull!" she would say, giving her lover the strings of her corset with a wild look, compressing her lips to hold back the groans.

And Tonet would pull, feeling a cold sweat break out on his forehead, trembling at the will displayed by this little woman, who stifled her moans and swallowed the tears of her torture.

She would paint her face and deluge herself with cheap perfume so that she might appear as fresh and beautiful as ever in the tavern, and prevent anybody from reading in her face the symptoms of her condition. La Samarucan, who sniffed like a setter about the house, scented something unusual as she would cast her rapid glances into
the place when she passed by the door. The other women, with the experience of their sex, guessed what was happening to the tavern proprietress.

An atmosphere of suspicion and vigilance seemed to spring up around Neleta. There was much whispering in the cabin doors. La Samaruca and her relatives disputed with the women who refused to accept her assertions. The gossipy women, instead of sending their little ones to the tavern for wine or oil, would plant themselves in person before the counter, seeking with various pretexts to make the proprietress rise from her chair, to make her move, while they would follow her with a devouring glance, surveying the lines of her tightened figure.

“She certainly is,” some would say in triumph when they met their neighbors.

“She’s not,” shouted others. “Tot son mentires. It’s all lies.”

And Neleta, who guessed the cause of all this coming and going, would receive the inquisitive gossips with a scoffing smile. . . . Such welcome visitors! What fly had bitten them that they could not get along without seeing her? . . . . It seemed as if there were a jubilee in her house! . . . .

But this insolent merriment, and the audacity with which she would confront the curiosity of the women, would evaporate at night, after a day of asphyxiating torment and forced serenity. When she would release herself from the cuirass of whalebone, her courage would suddenly vanish, like that of the soldier who has outdone himself in a heroic exploit and can do no more. She would be attacked by despair as soon as her swollen abdomen was relieved from oppression. She would think
with terror of the torture she would be compelled to suffer the next day in order to conceal her condition.

She was at the end of her powers. She, who was so strong, herself admitted it to Tonet during the silence of one of those nights which were no longer given up to love, but to worry and doleful confidences. Cursed health! How she envied those sickly women in whose womb life may never germinate!...

During these dispirited moments she spoke of flight, of leaving the tavern in charge of her aunt, taking refuge in some remote section of the city until she should get out of her difficult pass. But on thinking it over she would see at once how useless such flight would be. The vision of La Samarucá rose before her. To flee would be equivalent to confessing to what was until now merely a suspicion. Where could she go without being followed by Cañamél’s ferocious sister-in-law?...

Besides, it was the end of summer. She was about to gather the harvest of her rice-fields, and the entire town’s curiosity would be aroused by such an unjustified absence in the case of a woman who was known to watch over her interests so zealously.

She would stay. She would face the danger: if she remained in her place she would be watched less closely, she thought with terror of the birth,—a painful mystery that seemed all the more gloomy, engulfed as it was for her in the shadows of the unknown, and she tried to forget her fear by busying herself with the matters of the harvest, haggling with the hired hands over the price of their labor. She scolded Tonet, who had been sent by her to watch over the day-workers, but who, instead, would always carry along in the boat Cañamél’s gun and
his faithful hound, Centella, giving himself up more to hunting game than to counting the sheaves of rice.

Some afternoons she would leave the tavern in charge of her aunt and go off to the thrashing-floor, a square of hardened mud in the middle of the water of the fields. These trips served to calm her in her painful situation.

Hidden behind the sheaves she would loosen her corset with a wracked expression and sit down beside Tonet, upon the huge heap of rice straw, which scattered a pungent odor. At her feet the horses would be turning about in their monotonous task of threshing, and before them the lake of Albufera stretched its vast sheet of green, reflecting the red and bluish mountains that girded the horizon.

These serene afternoons calmed the disquietude of the two lovers. They felt happier than in the cooped-up bedroom, whose darkness was peopled with terror. The lake smiled gently as it cast forth from its entrails the yearly harvest; the songs of the threshers and the crews of the large boats laden with rice seemed to lull the mother Albufera to sleep after that birth which assured life to the children on its shores.

The afternoon calm softened Neleta's irritated temperament, filling her with renewed confidence. She counted on her fingers the course of the months and the end of the gestation that was taking place within her. But little time remained for the painful event that might change her entire life. It would be the following month, November, perhaps during the celebration of the great holidays in honor of San Martín and Santa Catalina. As she counted, she recalled that it was not yet a year since Cañamèl had died; and in her perverse, unconscionable
way, eager to arrange her life in harmony with her own happiness, she regretted not having given herself to Tonet months before. Thus she would have been able to reveal her condition without fear, attributing the paternity of the new creature to her husband.

The possibility that death might intervene in her plight reawakened her hopes. Who could tell whether after so many tortures and terrors the creature would not be born dead? It would not be the first case of the kind. And the lovers, deceived by this illusion, spoke of the dead child as of a certain, inevitable occurrence, and Neleta watched closely every movement in her womb, greatly content when the hidden creature showed no signs of life. It would die! That was certain. That good luck which had ever companioned her was not going to foresake her now.

The end of the harvest diverted her mind from these worries. The sacks of rice were heaped up in the tavern. The harvest occupied all the inner rooms of the house, and the sacks were heaped up even close to the counter, taking away room from the customers; some had to be placed in Neleta’s bedroom. She gloated at the riches enclosed in these sacks, and was intoxicated by the pungent fumes of the fine, astringent dust. And to think that half of that treasure might have gone to La Samaruka!... At the mere thought Neleta felt her strength return with her anger: She was suffering intensely with the painful concealment of her condition, but sooner death than to resign herself to such robbery.

And she had sore need of these energetic resolutions. Her condition was getting worse. Her feet were swelling, and she felt an irresistible desire to remain motionless, to
lie abed; but despite this she appeared behind the counter every day as usual, for the pretext of illness might kindle suspicions. She moved slowly when the customers obliged her to get up, and her forced smile was a painful contraction that caused Tonet to shudder. Her clamped figure seemed on the point of bursting through the powerful enclosure of whalebone.

"I'm worn out!" she would groan, falling in a heap, across the bed.

The two lovers, in the silence of the bedroom, would talk, struck with terror, as if they could see the menacing spectre of their guilt rise before them. . . . And suppose the child were not born dead? . . . Neleta was sure that it wouldn't be. She could feel it stir in her womb with a strength that banished her criminal hope.

Her rebellion, that of a greedy woman incapable of confessing her sin to her material detriment, filled her with the bold resolution of great criminals.

She would not hear of taking the child to a town in the vicinity of Albufera, and seeking a faithful woman to bring it up. She would have always to be fearing the nurse's indiscretion, the williness of her enemies, and even the parents' own lack of prudence, for they would take a natural liking to the creature and finally betray themselves. Neleta reasoned with a terrifying coldness, gazing at the sacks of rice heaped up in her bedroom. Neither could they consider concealing it in Valencia. La Sama-ruca, once on the track, would seek out the truth in hell itself.

Neleta fixed her green eyes upon her lover; they seemed to bulge with the anguish of her pain and the danger of their situation. They must abandon the infant as soon, as
it would be born, no matter how. He must take heart. It is in such dangers that men reveal their worth. He would carry it off at night to the city, would abandon it on some street, at the door of a church, anywhere at all: Valencia is a big place. . . . And let anybody guess who the parents were!

The harsh woman, after proposing the crime, tried to find excuses for her wickedness. Perhaps this abandonment would prove a boon to the child. If it died, all the better for it; and if it were saved, who knew in what hands it might fall! Perhaps riches awaited it: stranger tales were told. And she recalled the stories she had heard in her childhood, all about the children of kings abandoned in forests, or shepherds' illegitimate offspring, who, instead of being devoured by the wolves, rose to positions of power.

Toneti listened in terror. He tried to oppose her, but Neleta's glance chained fear to his will, which had never been strong. Besides, he, too, was corrupted by greed: he considered all Neleta's property his own, and he grew indignant at the prospect of having to share his beloved's heritage with their enemies. His indecision made him shut his eyes to everything, and he trusted to the future. The affair was by no means in a desperate state: he would arrange everything yet. Perhaps by some stroke of good luck the dilemma would be resolved at the last moment.

And he enjoyed a momentary tranquillity, letting the time go by without giving a thought to Neleta's criminal proposals.

He was united to her forever: she was his entire family. The tavern was already his only home. He had broken with his father, who, having got wind of the town gossip
about the youth's marital life with the proprietress, and seeing that the weeks and months went by without the son sleeping a single night in the cabin, had a stormy, painful interview with him. What Tonet was doing was dishonor to the Palomas. He could not bear to have as his son a man who publicly lived at the expense of a woman who was not his wife. Since he wished to live in dishonor, away from his family and unwilling to help it... let it be as if they did not know each other! He was now without a father: he could have him back again only when he should recover his honor. And Tío Tóni, after this explanation, continued with La Borda's faithful aid the filling-in of his fields. Now that the vast enterprise was nearing completion, he felt discouraged: he asked himself sadly who there would be to thank him for all his efforts, and only his habitual toiler's tenacity kept him plugging ahead at his task.

There came the season of the great hunting celebrations: San Martín and Santa Catalina,—the fiestas of Saler.

At all the meetings of the boatmen there was enthusiastic talk about the great number of birds that there were this year in the lake of Albufera. The guards, who from a distance spied upon the spots and the thickets where the coots would gather, noticed their rapid increase. They formed large black patches on the surface of the water. Whenever a boat passed by close to them they would open their wings and fly in a triangular group to a position somewhat farther off, like a cloud of locusts, hypnotized by the sheen of the lake and unable to abandon the waters in which death awaited them.

The news had spread through the province, and the
hunters would be more numerous than in previous years. The great hunting-expeditions of La Albufera stirred every Valencian gun. These were ancient festivities, the origin of which had been learned by Tio Paloma at the time when he kept the Warden’s documents. He would relate it to his tavern friends.

When Albufera belonged to the monarchs of Aragón, and only the royal house was permitted to hunt there, King Don Martin had desired to grant the citizens of Valencia a holiday, and he chose that of his birthday saint. Afterwards, the hunt was repeated similarly on Santa Catalina’s day. During these two holidays all the people could freely enter the lake with their cross bows and hunt the innumerable birds of the reed grass, and the privilege, converted into a tradition, had continued through the centuries. Now the free hunting privileges were preceded by two days of preliminaries, during which the lessee of Albufera was paid for the privilege of choosing the best locations, and hunters from all the towns of the province flocked there for the drawing.

There were not enough boats or boatmen to serve all the hunters. Tio Paloma, known for so many years by the sportsmen, was at a loss how to meet all his orders. For a long time previous he had made arrangements to serve a wealthy gentleman who paid very handsomely for his long experience with conditions in the Albufera. Yet despite this the hunters continued to address themselves to the dean of the boatmen, and Tio Paloma went here and there seeking skiffs and men to act as guides for all the persons who wrote to him from Valencia.

On the eve of the drawing, Tonet saw his grandfather enter the tavern. The old man was coming for him. That
year the Albufera was going to have more guns than birds. He was at his wits’ end for boatmen. All those of Saler, of Catàroràja and even of Palmar were already hired: and now an old customer whom he could refuse nothing, had asked him to provide a man and a boat for a friend of his who was going hunting for the first time in the Albufera. Would Tonet be that man, and thus get his grandfather out of a predicament? The Cubano refused. Neleta was ill. In the morning she had left the counter, unable to stand the pain. The moment so long feared would perhaps arrive very soon, and he must be in the tavern.

But his laconic negative was interpreted by his grandfather as an insult, and the old man became furious. Because he was now rich he permitted himself to scorn his poor grandfather, leaving him in such a ridiculous position! He could tolerate everything: he had suffered from the boy’s laziness when they were working the redoli; he had closed his eyes to his conduct with the tavernkeeper’s wife,—doings that had not brought much honor to the family; but to desert him in a plight that he considered a matter of honor? Christ! What would his city friends say when they saw that in Albufera, where they believed him to be master, he could not find a man to serve them? And his gloom was so great, so visible, that Tonet was seized with remorse. To deny his aid during the great hunting-holidays was to Tío Paloma an insult to his prestige and at the same time something like a betrayal of that country of reeds and mud where he had been born.

The Cubano resignedly yielded to his grandfather’s entreaty. It seemed to him, moreover, that Neleta could
wait. For some time past she had been alarmed by de-
ceptive pains, and the present crisis would pass like the
others.

Tonet arrived in Saler at nightfall. As one of the
boatmen, it was his duty to be present at the demandà,
witnessing the distribution of posts together with his
huntsman.

The village of Saler (which was at some distance from
the lake, at the end of a canal in the direction of Val-
encia) presented an extraordinary appearance because of
the hunting holidays.

In that broad opening of the canal which was called
the Port, the black skiffs bumped against each other by
the dozen, without any room in which to stir, their thin
gunwales creaking against each other and quivering with
the weight of the huge, wooden, barrel-like structures
that were to be fixed on the next day to stakes planted in
the mud. Inside these barrels the hunters would lay in
hiding to shoot at the birds.

Between the houses of Saler some pretty girls of the
city had set up their tables of toasted beans and mouldy
nougats, lighted by candles protected by paper cones. In
the doors of the cabins the women were heating the coffee-
pots, offering glasses flavored with liquor, in which there
was more liquor than coffee; and a swarming populace
bustled in the town, swelled every moment by the carts
and the yans that came from the city. These were citi-
zens of Valencia, with their high gaiters and large felt
hats, like warriors of the Transvaal, proudly strutting
about and showing off their blouses with their innumera-
able pockets, whistling to their dogs and exhibiting their
modern guns inside the yellow cases that hung from their
shoulders; wealthy farmers of the provincial towns, in bright cloaks and with their cartridge belts over their sashes, some with their kerchief rolled up in the shape of a mitre, others wearing it like a turban, or letting it float down over their necks,—all of them revealing by their head-dress just what corner of Valencia they came from.

The gun seemed to level all the hunters. They treated one another with the fraternity of companions in arms, thrilling at the thought of the coming holiday; and they spoke of English powder, of Belgian guns, of the excellency of centre-fire cartridges, trembling with the fierce voluptuousness of Arabs, as if the smoke of the discharge rose from their very words. The dogs,—huge, silent creatures, with their instinctively keen glances,—went from group to group sniffing the hands of the hunters, until they stopped at the side of their master. In all the cabins, which were now converted into inns, the women were preparing supper with the activity characteristic of holidays that brought in enough to live on for most of the year.

Tonet saw the house called The Royal Children,—a low stone structure, with a high tile roof cut by several dormer-windows; an old eighteenth-century edifice which had gradually been crumbling to ruins since the hunters of royal blood had ceased to visit the Albufera, and which at present was occupied by a tavern. Opposite was the house of the Demaná, a two-story building, which seemed gigantic amidst the cabins, revealing in its defaced walls various grilled fanlights and above the roof a bell to summon the huntsmen to the distribution of posts.

Tonet entered this house, casting a glance at the hall of the lower story, where the ceremony took place. A huge
lantern shed a dim light about the table and the chairs of the lessees of Albufera. The platform was separated from the rest of the room by an iron railing.

Tío Paloma was there, as the dean of the boatmen, jesting with the noted huntsmen, fanatic lovers of the lake whom he had known for half a century. These were the aristocracy of the hunt. There were rich and poor among them: some were wealthy proprietors and others butchers from the city or modest farmers from the nearby towns. They did not see each other or seek each other during the rest of the year, but when they met in the Albufera of a Saturday, at the minor drawings, or assembled in the great annual ones, they would approach one another with brotherly affection, offering one another tobacco, cartridges, and listening without blinking to stupendous tales of hunting expeditions in the mountains during the summer. Community of tastes and fondness for telling lies joined them in fraternal bonds. Almost all of them bore on their bodies signs of the risks incurred in this sport, which was their chief delight in life. Some, as they waved their hands in the excitement of their story, revealed fingers amputated by an explosion of their guns; others had cheeks furrowed by the scar of a powder flash. The oldest of them, the veterans, suffered from rheumatism as a result of a youth spent in exposure to all sorts of weather, but during the great hunting holidays they could not remain quiet at home, and they came, in spite of their ailments, to complain of the awkwardness of the new hunters.

The meeting broke up. The boatmen arrived with the announcement that supper was ready, and the men left in groups, entering the various illuminated cabins whose
red open doorways stood out above the mud soil. The air was filled with the strong smell of alcohol. The hunters were afraid of the water of the Albufera; they could not drink the lake water, as the natives did, fearing the fevers; so they brought along a considerable supply of absinthe and rum, which, on being uncorked, saturated the atmosphere with pungent aromas.

Tonet, seeing Saler so full of animation, as if an army were encamped there, recalled his grandfather’s tales: the orgies formerly organized by the rich huntsmen of the city, with women who ran about naked, pursued by the dogs; the fortunes that had been lost in the cabins during long nights of gambling, between one hunt and another: all the stupid pleasures of a bourgeoisie that had got rich quickly, and which, finding itself far from its families, in an almost savage spot, excited by the sight of blood and the smell of powder, felt reborn in its bosom the primal human bestiality.

Tío Paloma sought out his grandson to introduce him to the huntsman he was to guide. The latter was a stout fellow, of good-natured, peaceful appearance; an industrial business man of the city who, after a life of toil, thought that the time had come for him to amuse himself like the rich folk, and was aping the pleasures of his new friends. He seemed to be uncomfortable and scared with his terrifying outfit: the hunting bags, the gun, the high boots,—all of them new and recently purchased,—troubled him exceedingly. But as his glance fell upon the cartridge-belt that crossed his chest like a bandoleer, he smiled beneath his huge felt hat, considering himself the image of one of those Boer heroes whose pictures he
admired in the newspapers. This was the first time he was hunting on the lake, and he trusted to his boatman's experience to choose his site when his number came around.

The three supped in a cabin together with other hunters. At such meals as these the table was very noisy. Rum was poured out by the tumblers-full, and around the table, like hungry dogs, would gather the towns-people, laughing at the gentlemen's jokes, accepting whatever was offered, and one alone drinking up what the hunters considered plenty for all.

Tonet scarcely ate, hearing as in a dream the shouts and laughter of these people, and the guffaw of protests that greeted the pretended exploits of the bragging huntsmen. He was thinking of Neleta; he could see her, in his mind's eye, crouching with pain in the upper story of the tavern, rolling over the floor, stifling her cries, without being able to scream for relief from her suffering.

Outside came the ringing of the bell on the roof of the Demaná, with the quivering notes of a hermitage bell.

"Two," said Tio Paloma, counting strokes with close attention, more fearful of arriving late at the demandá than of missing a mass.

When the bell sounded for the third time, hunters and boatmen left the table, all hastening to the place where the posts were to be allotted.

The light of the lantern had been added to by that of two lamps placed upon the platform table. Behind the railing were the lessees of the Albufera, and behind them, reaching to the back wall, were the hunters who were perpetual subscribers to the lake, and who occupied this
position in their own right. On the other side of the grating, filling the doorway and overflowing into the street, were the boatmen, the poor hunters, and the train of lesser folk that flocked to all the drawings. A stench of moist cloaks, of mud-stained trousers, of brandy and bad tobacco rose from the folk that pressed against the grating. The waterproof blouses of the huntsmen brushed against the bodies of their neighbors with a creak that set one's teeth on edge. Through the large shadowy frame of the open door could be seen like indecisive forms the white walls of the nearby cabins.

Despite this large gathering there was no disturbance of the silence that seemed to dominate everyone as soon as the threshold was crossed. One could note the same mute anxiety that reigns in court-rooms when the fate of a man hangs in the balance, or at drawings when fortunes are decided. If anyone spoke it was in a soft voice, in a timid whisper, as if in a sick room.

The principal lessee arose:

"Caballers... Gentlemen..."

The silence became deeper still. They were about to proceed to the claiming of places.

At each side of the table, as rigid as heralds of the lake's authority, stood the two oldest guards of the Albufera: two slim men, swarthy, of undulating gesture and aquiline countenance; two eels dressed in smocks, who seemed to dwell at the bottom of the lake and to appear only during the great, solemn hunt functions.

A guard read the list to know whether all the places would be occupied in the following day's hunt.

"One!... Two!..."

They went in turn, according to the size of the annual
fee and to age. The boatmen, on hearing the number of their employers called, would answer for them:

“Here! Present!”

After the roll-call came the solemn moment, the demanó, the naming of the site which every boatman, in agreement with the huntsman or at his own discretion as being more experienced, chose for the hunt.

“Three!” said one of the guards.

And at once the holder of that number uttered the name he had prepared. “The Lord’s bush...” “The rotten hulk”... “The corner of Antina.” And thus they continued to name the locations of the Albufera’s whimsical geography; places christened by the taste of the boatmen; many of the titles were of a kind that could not be repeated before women, or which would turn one’s stomach were they named at table; yet despite this, they were pronounced at this function with the utmost solemnity, causing not the trace of a smile.

The second guard, who had a voice like a trumpet, on hearing the sites named by the boatmen would raise his head, and with his eyes shut and his hands resting upon the railing, would shout at the top of his lungs, with a head-splitting cry that spread broadcast over the silence of the night:

“Three goes to the Lord’s bush... Four goes to the corner of San Rôch... Five to the — of the barber.”

The designation of the posts lasted almost an hour, and while the guards were leisurely singing the assignments, a boy wrote them down in a large book upon the table.

After the assignments were over, licenses were issued to the lesser folk for hunting about at random: privileges that cost only two duros and that permitted the farmers
to sail about the entire lake of Albufera, at a certain distance from the regular assignments, killing the birds that escaped the fire of the wealthy.

The chief huntsmen separated with hearty handshakes. Some wished to sleep in Saler so that they could go to their places as soon as day broke; others, more spirited still, left at once for the lake, desirous of seeing for themselves the installation of the huge tank in which they were to spend the day. "Vayal . . . bona sort y divertirse! So long! . . . Good luck and a fine time!" And each one called to his boatman to make sure that nothing had been overlooked.

Tonet by this time was out of Saler. During the silence of the ceremony he had been seized with a great anxiety. Before his eyes rose the vision of Neleta writhing in her agony, alone yonder in Palmar, rolling on the floor, without a soul to help her or console her, threatened by the vigilance of her enemies.

He could not resist his anxiety and left the house of the Demaná, intending to return at once to Palmar, even if it should mean a break with his grandfather. Near the house named The Royal Children, where the tavern now was, he heard his name called. It was Sangonera. He was hungry and thirsty; he had hovered about the tables of the wealthy huntsmen without receiving the merest scrap; the boatmen had eaten everything.

Tonet thought of sending the vagabond as his substitute; but the son of the lake was surprised that anyone should suggest sailing a boat to him; it astonished him more than if the vicar of Palmar were to ask him to deliver the Sunday sermon. He wasn't made for that; besides, he didn't care to row for anybody. And Tonet
knew his opinion of the matter: work was an invention of the devil.

But Tonet, impatient and anxious, was in no mood to listen to Sangonera’s silly talk. No refusals, or he would still the tramp’s hunger and thirst by kicking him into the canal.” Friends are meant for saving each other from such plights as his. He could row somebody else’s skiff well enough when he went to sink his claws into the nets of the redolis; stealing the eels! Besides, if he were hungry, he could replenish himself as never before with the provisions that this gentleman had brought from Valencia. Seeing that Sangonera hesitated now, attracted by the prospects of a sated appetite, he decided the vagabond with several powerful shoves, dragging him to the boat of the hunter and explaining all the preparations. When the huntsman should come, he could tell him that the other man had fallen ill and had sought him out as substitute.

Before the distracted Sangonera had finished staggering, Tonet had already jumped into his light skiff and begun his trip, rowing like a madman.

It was a long voyage ahead of him. He had to cross the whole lake of Albufera to get to Palmar, and no wind was blowing. But Tonet was spurred on by fear, by uncertainty, and his boat shot like a shuttle over the dark tissue of the waters, which were dotted by the reflections of the stars.

It was past midnight when he arrived at Palmar. He was exhausted, his arms were broken by the desperate voyage, and he hoped to find the tavern quiet so that he could fall like a log into bed. As he moored his boat before the house, he saw that it was shut and quiet, like all
the other houses of the town, but the grating of the doors stood out against a reddish light.

Neleta’s aunt opened the door and as she recognized him she cautioned him with a gesture, indicating with the corners of her eyes several men seated before the fireplace. They were farmers from Sueca who had come to the celebration: old customers who owned fields near Saler and who could not be refused accommodations without arousing suspicions. They had supped in the tavern and were slumbering by the fire, so that they might get into their boats an hour before daybreak and sail about the lake, waiting for the birds that escaped the better sites unharmed.

Tonet greeted them all, and after exchanging a few words about the celebration of the next day he went up to Neleta’s bedroom.

She was in her chemise, pale, her features distorted, pressing her loins with both hands, a mad light in her eyes. Her pain had caused her to banish all prudence, and she was uttering shrieks that frightened her aunt.

“They’ll hear you!” the old woman cried.

Neleta, conquering her agony, thrust her fists into her mouth or bit her bedclothes to choke back her groans.

Following her advice, Tonet went down to the tavern. He could do nothing by remaining upstairs. By keeping the men company, on the other hand, and engaging their attention with his conversation, he might prevent them from hearing anything that would rouse their suspicions.

More than an hour Tonet spent warming himself by the embers of the fireplace, speaking with the farmers about the past harvest, and the fine hunting there was going to be. There was a momentary lull in the conversation.
All at once there was heard a piercing, savage cry: a shriek like that of a person being assassinated. But Tonet's calm manner tranquillized them.

"The owner isn't feeling very well," he said.

And they continued their talk, without paying any attention to the hurried steps of the old woman above, as she hurried about making the ceiling shake. After a half-hour, when Tonet imagined that they had all forgotten the incident, he went up to the bedroom again. Some of the men's heads were wavering, overcome by sleep.

Neleta was stretched out in bed, white, pale, motionless, with no other signs of life than the gleam of her eyes.

"Tonet... Tonet!" she said, feebly.

Her lover could guess from her voice and her glance what she wished to say to him. It was an order, an inflexible command. The fierce determination that had so awed Tonet now reappeared despite the weakness following upon the overwhelming crisis.

Neleta spoke slowly, with a voice as weak as a distant sigh. The hardest part was already past: now it was his turn. Let it be seen whether he would have the necessary courage.

The aunt, trembling, confused, without realizing what she was doing, gave Tonet a package of clothes, within which writhed a tiny being, filthy, ill-smelling, its flesh livid.

Neleta, beholding the newly born child near her, made a gesture of terror. She did not wish to see it: she feared to gaze upon it! She was afraid of herself, certain that if for an instant she looked at the child, the mother within her would be born anew and she would lack the courage to let them carry it away.
“Tonet! . . . At once! . . . Take it away!”

The Cubano gave his instructions rapidly to the old woman and he went down to take leave of the farmers, who were already asleep. Outside, at the rear, facing the canal, the old woman handed him the living bundle through a window on the lower floor.

When the window closed and Tonet was left alone in the darkness of the night, he suddenly felt all his courage leave him. The bundle of clothes and of soft flesh that he bore under his arm filled him with fear. It seemed that all at once a strange nervousness had arisen in him that sharpened all his senses. He could hear every noise in the town, even the most insignificant sounds, and it seemed to him that the stars were taking on a red hue. The wind swayed a dwarf olive near the tavern, and the rustling of the leaves made Tonet run, as if everybody in town had awakened and were approaching him, asking him what he was carrying under his arm. He imagined that La Samarucha and her relatives, alarmed by Neleta’s absence during the day, had been hovering about the tavern as formerly, and that the wild witch would appear at any moment on the canal bank. What a scandal if anyone surprised him with that bundle! . . . What despair would not Neleta feel! . . .

He put the bundle of clothes quickly into the bottom of his boat; a desperate, furious wailing began to come from it, and seizing the pole he worked down the canal with mad swiftness. He poled wildly, as if goaded on by the cries of the newborn child and fearing that he would see the windows of the houses lighted up, and the shadows of the curious would ask him where he was going.
Soon he left behind him the silent dwellings of Palmar and entered the lake proper.

The calm of the waters, the darkness of a quiet, starry night seemed to infuse new courage into him. Above, the dark blue of the sky; below, the whitish blue of the water, stirred by mysterious ripples that made the reflections of the stars dance in its depths. The birds chirped in the reed grass and the water purled with the plashing of fishes in pursuit of each other. From time to time the furious crying of the newborn infant was mingled with these sounds.

Tonet, wearied by that night of continuous traveling, continued to pole along, sending the boat in the direction of Saler. His body was numb with fatigue; but his mind, wide awake and sharpened by the presence of danger, worked far more actively than his arms.

He was already some distance from Palmar, but it was still more than an hour’s journey to Saler. From there to the city meant another two long hours of travel. Tonet looked at the sky: it must be about three. Before two hours it would be dawn and the sun would already be on the horizon when he arrived at Valencia. Besides, he thought with terror of the long walk through the outskirts of Ruzafa, always so closely watched by the civil guard,—of the entrance into the city, in full gaze of the excise officials, who would want to examine the package he was carrying under his arm,—of the folk who rose before dawn and would meet him on the road and recognize him. And that scandalous, desperate wailing that grew stronger every moment and constituted a danger even in the solitude of the Albufera!...
Tonet beheld before him an endless road, infinite, and he felt his strength abandon him. He would never reach the streets of the city, which were deserted at dawn,—the portals of the church, where infants were abandoned like a troublesome burden. It was easy enough in Palmar, in the silence of the bedroom, to say: "Tonet, do this and that." But after setting out, reality loomed large with its insuperable obstacles.

Even on the lake the danger grew momentarily greater. On other nights he might have sailed from one shore to the other without meeting anybody, but on this night the Albufera was densely populated. In each *mata*, in every direction there was noted the work of invisible men, preparing for the hunt.

An entire town went to and fro in the black boats. In the silence of the Albufera, which transmitted sounds across a vast distance, one could hear the mauls hammering in the stakes at the huntsmen's positions, and the bunches of burning plants by the light of which the boatmen were concluding their preparations burned on the surface of the waters like red stars. How could he continue on his way among people that knew him, accompanied by the squalling of the baby, a wailing that was incomprehensible on the lake? He passed a boat at a distance, but within hailing distance. Doubtless the occupants had wondered where the strange wailing was coming from.

"Comrade," shouted a distant voice, "what are you carrying there?"

Tonet made no reply, but he felt that all strength to continue the voyage had left him; he sat down at one end of the boat, laying the pole aside. He would like to stay there, even if dawn overtook him. He was afraid to
go on, and gave himself up to the languor of the straggler who sinks to the ground, knowing that he is to die. He saw clearly that he lacked the resolution to fulfil his promise. Let them surprise him, let everybody know what had happened, let Neleta lose her legacy! ... He was at the end of his rope!

But scarcely had he adopted this desperate resolution, than an idea began to glimmer in his brain, seeming to burn him with its contact. At first it was a spark, then a red-hot coal, then a flame, until at last it burst into a terrible conflagration that swelled his head, threatening to make it explode, while a cold sweat distilled on his forehead as if it were the steam of this boiling idea.

Why proceed any farther? ... Neleta's wish was to have this evidence of her sin disappear, so that she should not lose any part of her fortune; to abandon it, since its presence could compromise the peace of them both, and for such a purpose there was no place like the lake of Albufera, whose waters had often concealed men who were being sought by justice, rescuing them from ever-vigilant pursuit.

He shuddered at the thought that the lake would not preserve the existence of that feeble, newborn little body; but was the life of the infant any better assured if he should abandon it in some city lane? "The dead do not return to compromise the living." And Tonet, thinking this thought, felt revive within him the hardness of the old Palomas, the cruelty of his grandfather, who had seen his children die without a tear, with the egotistic thought that death is a boon in the poor man's family, since it leaves more bread for those who survive.

- During a lucid interval, Tonet grew ashamed of his
wickedness, of the indifference with which he considered the death of the being at his feet, and which was now silent, as if exhausted by its furious wailing. He had looked at it for an instant, yet the sight of it produced no emotion in him. He recalled its livid face, its pointed cranium, its bulging eyes, its huge mouth, which contracted, spreading from ear to ear. A ridiculous toad’s head that had left him cold, unmoved by the feeblest sentiment. And yet this was his son!

In order to explain this coldness to himself, Tonet recalled what he had often heard his grandfather say. Only mothers feel an instinctive, deep tenderness for their children from the moment of birth. The fathers do not at once love them; time must pass, and only when the little one grows up do they feel any affection arise through continuous association,—a reflective, serious affection.

He thought of Neleta’s fortune, of the integrity of that heritage which he considered his own. His harsh feelings, those of the lazy fellow who beholds the problem of existence solved forever were aroused, and his egoism asked itself whether it were prudent to compromise such good fortune for the sake of preserving the life of a tiny, ugly creature, just like all the other newborn babes, who didn’t rouse the slightest emotion in him.

His disappearance would work no evil upon the parents; and if he lived, they would have to surrender to hateful persons half the bread that they carried to their mouths. Tonet, confusing cruelty and bravery, with that blindness characteristic of criminals, reproaching himself for his indecision, which held him as if nailed to the stern, letting time fly.

The darkness became gradually less dense. Day was
REEDS AND MUD

approaching. Across the gray sky of dawn there passed, like trickling drops of ink, a few flocks of birds. In the distance, off toward Saler, sounded the first shots. The infant began to whine, suffering from hunger and the cold of the morning.

“Hey, Cubano! . . . Is that you?”

Tonet thought he could hear this greeting from a distant boat.

Fear of being recognized caused him to jump to his feet and seize the pole. His eyes gleamed with a strange spark, similar to that which at times illuminated Neleta’s green glance.

He shot his boat in among the reed grass, following the tortuous lanes of water that opened through the reeds. He pushed along at hazard, going from one clump to another, redoubling his efforts as if he were being pursued. The prow of the boat cleft the grasses, breaking them. The tall reed grass opened to make way for the skiff, and the mad thrusts of the pole sent him gliding almost on to dry land, upon the dense roots of the reeds which formed thick meshes.

He fled without knowing from whom, as if his criminal thoughts were rowing directly behind in pursuit. Several times he bent over, stretching a hand toward that bundle of clothes from which the furious crying came, and at once withdrew it. But as the boat became snagged among some roots, the wretched fellow, as if he wished to relieve the boat of an immense burden, seized the bundle and threw it with all his might over his head as far as he could into the reeds that surrounded him.

The bundle disappeared amid a creaking of broken reeds. For an instant the clothes in which it was wrapped
fluttered in the gloom of the dawn, like the wings of a white bird that had fallen in the mysterious depths of the waters.

Once again the wretch felt the necessity of flight, as if someone were close at his heels. He poled the boat desperately through the sedge until he struck a channel of water; he followed it in all its windings among the high bushes, and as he entered the lake of Albufera proper, with his boat free of all burdens, he breathed with relief, contemplating the blue rim of the dawn.

Then he stretched himself out in the bottom of the boat and slept that profound sleep of the dead which follows upon great nervous crises and almost always follows on the heel of committing a crime.