THE day began with many disappointments for the hunter confided to the skill and experience of Sangoneria.

Before daybreak, as he was fastening his shelter, the prudent bourgeois was compelled to beg the help of some boatmen, who had a good laugh when they saw the vagabond's new occupation.

With the agility of long habit they drove three stakes into the muddy bottom of the Albufera and placed upon them the huge compartment that was to serve as the hunter's refuge. Afterwards they surrounded the place with reeds so as to deceive the birds into approaching the spot in all confidence, taking it for a clump in the middle of the lake. In order to increase this deception, some bots floated about the scene: a few dozen decoy ducks and coots, made of cork, which, with the undulations of the lake, moved about on the surface. From a distance they looked like a flock of birds floating peacefully near the reeds.

Sangoneria, quite content to have spared himself all this work, invited his employer to take up his position. He would row off in the boat at a certain distance, so as not to frighten away the game, and when the employer had shot a few coots, all he had to do was shout, and the assistant would quickly gather them from the water.

"So long! . . . Good luck, Don Joaquín!"

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The tramp spoke so humbly and showed such eagerness to be of help, that the good huntsman felt all vexation at previous derelictions disappear. Very well; he would call as soon as he should shoot a bird. And lest the assistant should feel bored while waiting, he might take a bite from the provisions in the boat. His wife had provided him with as great abundance as if he were to make a tour around the world.

He indicated three carefully covered, huge pots, and in addition, loaves of bread, a basket of fruit and a large wine-skin. Sangonera’s face was excited at beholding such a treasure-house confided to his care, after it had been tempting him in the prow all night long. Tonet had not deceived him when he had spoken of the customer’s generosity. Thanks, Don Joaquín! Since he was so good and invited him to have a bite, he would permit himself a little nibble, to pass the time. Just a snack; nothing more.

And rowing away from the post, he took up a position within hearing distance of the hunter, afterward stretching out on the bottom of the boat.

It was now day and the shots resounded all over the Albufera country, magnified by the echoes around the lake. No sooner would a flock of birds be sighted against the gray sky than they would raise flight, scattered by the thunder of the discharges. And no sooner did they descend somewhat in their rapid flight, in search of the water, than at once a shower of lead would fall around them.

When Don Joaquín was left alone in his place he could not help feeling a slight fear. Here he was, all alone in the middle of the Albufera, inside of a heavy barrel, with
Reeds and Mud

No support other than a few stakes, and he feared to stir, lest the entire aquatic catafalque go toppling down with him, burying him in the mire. The water, with gentle undulations, came lapping against the edge of the wood, about at the height of the hunter's chin, and its continuous chap-chap made him shudder. If this contrivance should sink, thought Don Joaquín, no matter how soon the boatman would arrive, he would be at the bottom, with all the weight of his gun, his cartridges and those huge boots that pinched him so atrociously, sunken in the rice straw with which the barrel was stuffed. His legs were burning, while his hands were chilled by the cool of dawn and the glacial cold of the gun. And this was what folk called having a good time? . . . He began to find little diversion in so costly a pleasure.

And the birds? Where were those birds that his companions were hunting by the dozen? There was a moment in which he had impetuously whirled about in his revolving seat; raising his gun to his cheek with trembling emotion. There they were! . . . They were floating nonchalantly about the post. While he had been day-dreaming, almost put to sleep by the coldness of dawn, they had arrived by the dozens, fleeing the distant shots, and were swimming close to him with the confidence inspired by a haven of refuge. All he had to do was aim blindly! . . . Sure game! But as he was about to fire, he recognized the decoys,—the whole flock of cork birds that he had forgotten, because of his inexperience. He lowered his gun and looked around, fearful of discovering the jesting eyes of his friends in the solitude.

His hopes revived. What the deuce were those hunters shooting at that their guns unceasingly disrupted the
calm of the lake? . . . Shortly after sunrise Don Joaquín was at last able to discharge his virgin weapon. Three birds flew by almost on a level with the water. The novice huntsman fired at them tremulously. They looked like huge, monstrous birds to him,—veritable eagles,—magnified by his nervousness. The first shot merely made them fly the harder, but at once the second rang out, and the coot, folding its wings, fell after several somersaults and remained motionless on the water.

Don Joaquín jumped up with such a bound that he made his shooting-blind tremble. At that moment he considered himself superior to every other man in creation: he admired himself, having discovered within him a heroic prowess that he had never suspected.

“Sangonera! . . . Boatman!” he shouted in a voice tremulous with emotion. “There’s one! . . . We’ve got one already!”

He was answered by an almost unintelligible grunt: a full, stuffed mouth, that could scarcely allow room for the words to come out. . . . All right! He’d come and gather them when there’d be a few more.

The hunter, well content with his exploit, hid himself anew behind the curtain of reed grass, certain that he alone could bring down every bird that flew over the lake. All morning long he spent shooting, and the intoxication of the powder, the pleasure of destruction, grew upon him. He shot in this direction and that, without regard to distances, greeting with his gun every bird that came into sight, even though it were flying near the clouds. Christ! This was sport indeed! And in these blind discharges he would at times hit some unfortunate birds, who would fall, fated to be the victims of an unskilled hand,
after having escaped the guns of more expert huntsmen unharmed.

In the meantime Sangonerá remained invisible, at the bottom of the boat. What a day, by God! The archbishop of Valencia couldn't be having a better time of it than he in that skiff, seated upon the straw, with a slice of bread in his hand and a pot pressed between his knees. Let nobody speak to him of the abundance in Cañamelé's place! That was mere poverty and pretense that could dazzle only the eyes of the poor! Leave it to the city gentlemen to treat themselves well! . . .

He had begun by passing in review the three pots, which were carefully covered by thick cloths fastened around the rim. Which should be first? . . . He chose at random, and as he opened it his nose dilated voluptuously with the perfume of cod and tomato. That was cooking for you! The cod was floating in the red juicy tomato, so gently, so appetizingly, that when Sangonerá swallowed his first mouthful it seemed that a sweeter nectar was flowing down his gullet than the draught in the wine-vessels which had tempted him so sorely during his days as a sacristán. This was enough! No need of going any farther. He wished to respect the mystery of the other two pots; not to banish the illusions aroused by their sealed mouths, behind which he divined the presence of great surprise. Now to get down to business! And placing the odorous pot between his legs, he began to gulp down the contents in wise peacefulness, as one who had the whole day before him and knew that there would be plenty to occupy him. He ate so slowly, but with such skill, that when he introduced his hunk of bread into the vessel of wine, the level of the liquid would lower consid-
erably. The enormous chunk would fill his mouth and swell his cheeks. His jaws would grind away powerfully, with the regularity of a mill-wheel, and in the meantime his eyes would be fixed upon the pot, exploring its depths, calculating the number of trips that his hand would yet have to make before the entire contents had been transported to his mouth.

From time to time he would rouse himself from this contemplation. Christ! An honest, hard-working man must not forget his obligations amidst his pleasures. He looked out of the boat, and seeing the birds approach he would shout his directions:

"Don Joaquín! Over toward Palmar! ... Don Joaquín! Over toward Saler!"

After indicating to the huntsman the direction from which the birds were coming, he would feel fatigued with such ardent effort, and would grasp the wine-bag firmly, renewing his mute dialogue with the pot.

His employer had brought down some three faches, when Sangonera laid aside the almost empty pot. At the bottom, stuck to the earthenware walls, there remained a few stray bits of food. The tramp felt the call of his conscience. What was going to be left for his employer if he ate everything? He must be content with a bite, and no more. And placing the pot beneath the prow, carefully covered, he was impelled by his curiosity to open the second.

Good God in heaven, what a surprise! Pork loin, choice pork sausages stuffed with the best; all cold, but with an appetizing, meaty odor that inspired the vagabond. How long past it was since his stomach, habituated to the white, tasteless meat of the eels, had enjoyed the
solidity of the good dishes that were made in the inland town! . . . Sangonera told himself sagely that it would be a mark of great disrespect toward his employer to scorn that second pot. It would be tantamount to declaring that he, a vagrant starveling, refused to surrender to the excellent dishes prepared in Don Joaquin's home. Surely the huntsman would not get angry over one morsel more or less.

And once again he made himself comfortable at the bottom of the boat, with his legs crossed and the pot snug between them. Sangonera quivered with voluptuous pleasure as he swallowed these morsels: he closed his eyes, the better to appreciate their slow descent into his stomach. What a day, Lord, what a great day! . . . It seemed that he was only now beginning to eat, for the first time that morning. Now he looked disdainfully at the first pot, cast under the prow. That had been all very well as an amusement, to deceive his stomach and give his jaws a little fun. But this was the real thing; blood pudding, pork sausage, the appetizing pork loin that melted between his teeth, leaving such a taste that his mouth sought another slice, and yet another, never having enough.

Noting the ease with which the second pot had been emptied, Sangonera was filled with a desire to help his employer, fulfilling his duties most minutely, and while he still kept his jaws going, he looked in every direction, uttering cries that seemed roars:

"Over there toward Saler! . . . Yonder near Palmar!"

Lest a stopper should form in his throat, he gave little rest to the wine-skin. He drank and drank that wine, which was much better than Neleta's; and the red liquor seemed to excite his appetite, opening new chasms in his
bottomless stomach. His eyes burned with the fires of a happy intoxication; his face took on a violet hue, and noisy belching shook him from head to foot. With a happy smile he tapped his swollen stomach.

“Well, how’s the boy? How do you feel down there, hey?” he asked his stomach, as if it were a friend, patting it affectionately.

And his intoxication became sweeter than ever before: the intoxication of the well-fed man who drinks on a full stomach: not the sad, lugubrious guzzling he was wont to do on an empty stomach, pouring glass after glass into it at the expense of the men he found on the banks of the lake,—fellows who always invited him to drink, but who never offered him a crust of bread.

He gave himself up to this smiling spree, without on that account ceasing to eat. The Albufera looked a rosy hue to him. The sky, of luminous blue, seemed to be parted in a smile such as once had caressed him on the road of the Dehesa. The only dark object before him now, with all the lugubriousness of a tomb, was the pot that he held pressed between his knees. He had emptied it of its contents. Not a trace was left of the meal.

For a moment he paused as if terrified by his own voracity. But soon his immense appetite struck him funny, and in order to drown out his remorse, he took a long drink from the wine-bag.

He laughed uproariously at thought of what folks would say in Palmar when they learned of his exploit, and eager to finish the job, sampling everything Don Joaquín had brought with him, he uncovered the third pot.

Lord! Two stuffed capons between those clay walls, their skins golden and tastefully greasy: two adorable
creatures of the Lord, headless, with their thighs fastened to their bodies by thread wound around them and their breasts as prominent and white as those of a maiden. If he didn't lay hands upon this, he was no man! Even if Don Joaquin sent a bullet through him! ... How long it was since he had feasted upon such dainties! He hadn't eaten meat since the time he had served as Tonet's dog, when they had poached in the Dehesa. But as he thought of the hard, thready meat of the lake fowl, his pleasure at devouring the white meat of the capons, the golden skin, which crunched between his teeth as the juice ran down the corners of his lips, increased enormously.

He ate like an automaton, eagerly bent upon swallowing, swallowing everything in sight, gazing anxiously into the bottom of the pot, as if he were eating on a bet.

From time to time he would be seized with childish whims: the caprices of a drunkard,—to raise a racket and play pranks. He grabbed apples from the fruit-basket and threw them at the birds that were flying far away, as if he could hit them.

He was filled with great tenderness and affection toward Don Joaquín, in return for the happiness he had given him; he wished that the man were close by, that he might embrace him; he addressed him familiarly, with calm insolence, and although not a bird could be seen against the horizon, he blared out in endless roars:

"Chimo! Chimo! ... Fire. ... there they come!"

In vain did the huntsman turn about and stare in every direction. Not a bird was to be seen. What did that madman want? He ought rather to get busy gathering the dead coots that were floating about the place. But Sangonera again crouched at the bottom of the boat, not
stirring to obey orders. He’d come over later! He preferred to have his employer kill a great many birds first! . . . In his eagerness to sample everything he now began to uncork the bottles, soon tasting rum and pure absinthe, while the lake of Albufera began to grow dark in full sunlight, and his legs seemed to be nailed to the boards of the boat, utterly lacking strength to stir.

At noon, Don Joaquín, hungry and wishing to leave that barrel compartment which had compelled him to stand motionless for so long, called to his boatman. In vain did his voice echo amid the silence.

"Sangonera! . . . Sangonera!"

The tramp, his head thrust above the gunwale, was looking at him fixedly, repeating that he was coming directly; but he remained motionless, as if nobody were calling him. When the hunter, red with so much shouting, threatened to shoot him, he made an extraordinary effort, staggered to his feet, looked all over the boat for the pole, though it lay at his very hands, and at last began slowly to draw near.

Don Joaquín jumped into the skiff and stretched his legs, which had become swollen with so many hours of rigid watching. The boatman, at his orders, began to gather the dead birds: but he did so gropingly, as if he could not see them, casting his body over the gunwale so violently that more than once he would have fallen into the water were it not for his employer.

"You cursed scoundrel!" exclaimed the hunter. "Are you drunk?"

Very soon he beheld the explanation, as he examined his provisions before Sangonera’s stupid gaze. The pots empty; the wine-bag wrinkled and hollow; the bottles
open; only a few crumbs of bread, and the fruit-basket might have been turned upside down above the lake without fear of anything dropping out!

Don Joaquín's first impulse was to strike his boatman with the butt of the gun, but his initial rage having blown over, he contemplated the scene with amazement. Had this fellow done all this havoc unaided? ... That was a fine way of taking a bite! Where had he put it all? ... Could a human stomach contain so much? ...

But Sagononera, listening to the infuriated hunter call him scoundrel and shameless wretch, could only answer in a whining voice:

"Oh, Don Joaquín! ... I'm sick! Awful sick! ..."

He was indeed sick. All one had to do was look at his yellowish face, at his eyes which struggled in vain to keep open, his legs that could not stand straight.

The huntsman, in a rage, was about to strike Sagononera, when the latter fell to the bottom of the boat, his nails grasping his sash as if he wished to open his stomach. He rolled into a ball, with painful convulsions that contracted his countenance, while his eyes turned glassy.

He groaned and at the same time writhed in agonizing contortions, struggling to cast forth from his body the prodigious amount of food he had eaten, which seemed to choke him with its weight.

The hunter did not know what to do, and once again he was sorry that he had come to the Albufera. After a half-hour of oaths, just when he had made up his mind that he would have to take the pole himself and make his own way back to Saler as best he could, several farmers who were hunting in the vicinity took pity on him.

They recognized Sagononera and guessed his trouble.
This was a case of gluttony that spelled death. The tramp was fated to meet such an end.

Moved by that fraternal spirit of country people which impels them to lend aid even to the most humble, they placed Sangonera in their boat and carried him off to Palmar, while one of them remained with the hunter, content to serve him as boatman in exchange for the privilege of using his gun.

At mid-afternoon the women of Palmar saw the vagabond fall upon the canal bank, as inert as a bale.

"Rogue! . . . Some drunken spree!" they all cried.

But the kind men who had done him the charity of bearing him aloft like a corpse to his wretched hovel, shook their heads sadly. It was not drunkenness alone, and if the vagrant ever escaped this attack, then he had a dog's hide indeed. They told the tale of that prodigious feast which had now placed him at death's door, and the people of Palmar laughed with astonishment, proud that one of their own should have such a fabulous stomach.

Poor Sangonera. The news of his illness circulated all over town, and the women came in groups to his door, daring to look into this cave which formerly all had avoided. Sangonera, stretched out in the straw, his glassy eyes fixed upon the roof and his face the color of wax, lay quivering, roaring with pain, as if his entrails were being torn out.

"How do you feel, Sangonera?" they asked from the door.

And the sick man answered with a painful groan, changing his position so as to turn his back upon them, vexed by the town's visitation.

Other women, more courageous than their sisters, en-
tered the shanty and knelt beside him, feeling his abdomen and asking where it hurt him. They discussed among themselves all the appropriate remedies they knew, recalling those that had been effective in their own family experience. Then they sought out certain hags to whom many cures had been credited, and who enjoyed more respect than the poor doctor of Palmar. From mysterious hiding-places in their cabins they brought forth herb poultices, while others came with a pot of hot water, asking the sick man to swallow it at a gulp. Their opinion was unanimous. The poor fellow’s meal had stopped at the entrance to his stomach, and it must be loosened. . . . Lord, what a pitiable fellow! His father had died of a spree, and there was he now, stretched out by a glutinous orgy! What a family!

Nothing so revealed to Sangonera the seriousness of his condition as the solicitude of the women. He mirrored himself in the commiseration of these folk as in a looking-glass, and he realized his danger when he saw himself attended to by the selfsame women who on the previous day were poking fun at him, scolding their husbands and children if they found them in his company.

“The poor fellow! The poor fellow!” they all murmured.

And with that courage of which only woman is capable in the face of misfortune, they surrounded him. They knew very well what this was: he had a knot in his bowels; and with maternal caresses they got him to open his jaws, which were compressed with pain, inducing him to swallow every manner of miraculous liquid, which very soon he vomited back.

At nightfall they left him. They had to cook supper
at home, and the sick man remained alone in his hut, motionless beneath the reddish light of a barn-lantern that the women had stuck in a crevice. The town dogs thrust their noses in through the open door, and for a long time gazed out of their deep eyes at the sick man, afterward withdrawing with a mournful howl.

During the night it was the men who visited the cabin. At Cañamèl's tavern the matter was the general topic of conversation, and the boatmen, amazed at Sangonera's deed, wished to see him for the last time.

They entered the place with hesitant step, for the most of them were drunk as a result of having eaten with the hunters.

"Sangonera! ... Old boy! How are you?"

But at once they recoiled, repelled by the stench from the filth about him. Some of them, a little braver than the others, went so far as to jest with him in brutal irony, inviting him to drink his last glass at Cañamèl's tavern; but the sick man replied only with a weak groan, and closed his eyes, sinking anew into his stupor, which was interrupted by fits of trembling and vomiting. At midnight he was left alone.

Tonet did not wish to see his former companion. He had returned to the tavern, after a long sleep in the boat; a deep, brutish sleep, interrupted now and then by nightmares and accompanied by the lullaby of the 'hunters' shots, which reverberated in his brain like endless rolls of thunder.

On entering he was surprised to see Neleta seated before the casks, as pale as wax, but without the slightest uneasiness in her eyes, as if she had spent the night peace-fully. Tonet was amazed at his sweetheart's courage.
They exchanged a look full of meaning, like wretches who are united more closely than ever by the bonds of complicity.

After a long pause, she dared to question him. She wished to know how he had carried out his errand. And he replied, with bowed head and averted eyes, as if the whole town were watching him. . . . Yes; he had left it in a safe place. Nobody would ever discover it.

After these words, which were exchanged very rapidly, the two remained in silence, pensive: she, behind the counter, he seated at the door, his back to Neleta, so as not to see her. They seemed overwhelmed, as if there weighed upon them an immense burden. They feared to speak to each other, for the sound of their voices seemed to arouse recollections of the previous night.

They had liberated themselves from their difficult pass: there was no more danger. Spirited Neleta was amazed at the ease with which the whole matter had been arranged. Weak and sick as she was, she still found the strength and spirit to remain in her place, so that nobody should suspect what had occurred during the night, and yet the lovers felt themselves suddenly estranged. Something between them had broken forever. The void that the little infant had left upon disappearing grew immensely, separating and isolating the two wretched plotters. They both thought that in the future they would have no greater intimacy than the glance they would exchange in remembrance of their great crime. And Tonet’s disquietude grew even greater when he recalled that she did not know the real fate of the infant.

When night came the tavern was filled with boatmen and hunters returning from the lands of the Ribera, ex-
hibiting the bunches of birds they had caught, strung together through the beaks. A fine hunt! They all drank, commenting upon the fortune of various hunters and on Sangonera's beastly exploit. Tonet went from group to group, eager to take his mind off his thoughts, discussing and drinking at every table. His intention to forget in drunkenness made him drink continuously, with enforced gaiety, and his friends celebrated the Cubano's good humor. They had never seen him so merry.

Tío Paloma entered the tavern and his piercing eyes were fixed upon Neleta.


Neleta made vague reference to a headache that had kept her awake all night, while the old fellow blinked maliciously, connecting this bad night with the inexplicable flight of his grandson. He had made him ridiculous in the eyes of that Valencian gentleman. His conduct was unworthy of a boatman of the Albufera. For less reason he had cuffed more than one fellow in his prime. It could have occurred only to a wretch like him to convert Sangonera into a boatman, and as a result the tramp had gorged himself to death as soon as he was left alone.

Tonet proffered excuses. There was time for him to serve that gentleman. Within two weeks would come the feast of Santa Catalina, and Tonet would lend his services as boatman. Tío Paloma, his anger soothed by his grandson's explanation, said that he had already invited Don Joaquín to a hunt on the lake. He was to come the following week, and he and Tonet would be the man's boatmen. He must give these Valencian gentlemen satisfaction, so that the Albufera would always have plenty of
patronage. Otherwise, what was to become of the lake
people?

That night Tonet got drunk, and instead of going up
to Neleta's room he remained snoring before the fireplace.
Neither sought the other. They shunned each other, finding a certain solace in their isolation. They feared that
there would be revived the memory of that creature who
had passed between them, the wail of a life which had
been immediately stifled.

The next day Tonet got drunk again. He did not dare
to be alone with his conscience: he needed to stultify him-
self with alcohol so as to keep it quiet and asleep.

New tidings about Sangonera's condition came to the
tavern. He was in a hopeless condition, dying. The men
had returned to their work and the women who entered
the tramp's hovel recognized the futility of their cures.
The oldest of them explained the illness in their own man-
nner. The food stopper that shut the mouth of his stomach
had rotted in him. All you had to do was look at his
abdomen.

The doctor from Sollana arrived on one of his weekly
visits, and they took him to Sangonera's shanty. The
day-laborer of the profession shook his head negatively.
There was nothing to do. It was a mortal appendicitis:
the result of so extraordinary an abuse that it filled even
the doctor with astonishment. And all over town the
word, appendicitis was repeated, the women finding fun
in pronouncing a word that sounded so strange to them.

The vicar, Don Miguel, considered that the moment
had arrived for entering this renegade's cabin. There
was nobody like him for despatching folk promptly and
frankly.
“Well!” he cried from the doorway. “Are you a Christian?”

Sangoñera gazed at him in surprise. Was he a Christian? And as if scandalized by the question, he looked at the roof of his hovel, caressing with ecstasy and hope the patch of blue sky that could be seen through the rents.

Very well then; there was no need of beating around the bush with men, continued the vicar. He must confess himself, for he was going to die... That was it exactly. This gun-carrying priest used no circumlocutions with his parishioners.

The vagabond’s eyes flashed with an expression of terror. His existence, which had been so replete with misery, now appeared to him in all the charm of boundless freedom. He saw the lake with its shining waters; the Dehesa, murmurous amid its perfumed thickets, dotted with wild flowers, and even Cañamél’s counter, before which he had dreamed, seeing life in rosy hues through the wine glasses... And he must leave all that!... The tears began to roll from his glassy eyes. There was no help for it: his hour of death had come. He would see more clearly in the next world that celestial smile of infinite compassion which had one night caressed him by the lake.

And with a sudden tranquillity, amid attacks of nausea and writhing, he confessed to the vicar in a low voice all the thefts he had committed against the fishermen,—so numerous that he could recall them only in bulk. Together with his sins he revealed his hopes: his faith in Jesus Christ, who would return to earth to save the poor; his mysterious meeting on a certain night by the shores of the lake. But the vicar rudely interrupted him:
"Sangonera, less of your stories. You’re raving! . . .
The truth . . . tell the truth."

He had already told the truth. All his sins had consisted in avoiding work, since he believed it contrary to the commandments of the Lord. Once he had resigned himself to being like the rest, and to lend his hand to man, placing himself in contact with wealth and comforts, and ay, he was paying for this inconsistency with his life!

All the women of Palmar were touched by the vagabond’s end. After his flight from the church he had lived like a heretic, but he was dying like a Christian. His illness did not permit him to receive the Lord, and the vicar administered the last sacrament not without soiling his soutane.

There entered the cabin only certain brave old women who gave themselves up, through abnegation, to laying out all the village dead. The people spoke mysteriously and in terror of Sangonera’s agony.

The sick man died on the third day, his stomach swollen, his face drawn, his hands contracted by suffering, and his mouth stretched from ear to ear by his final convulsions.

The wealthiest women of Palmar, who regularly visited the presbytery, felt a tender compassion for that unfortunate fellow who had been reconciled with the Lord after a dog’s life. They wished him to set out on his last voyage in a worthy manner, and they took a trip to Valencia to purchase the necessary outfit, spending more money than Sangonera had ever seen in all his life.

They garbed him in a religious habit, inside of a white coffin rimmed with silver braid, and the entire vicinity passed by the vagabond’s corpse.
His former companions rubbed their bleary eyes, repressing the laughter aroused by the sight of their crony so clean, in a special coffin, dressed like a friar. Even his death was something of a joke. Farewell, Sangonera! ... No more would the *mornells* be emptied before the arrival of the owners; no longer would he bedeck himself with the flowers that grew on the banks, like a drunken pagan! He had lived free and happy, without the fatigue of labor, and even at his death he was wily enough to go off to the other world dressed like a wealthy man, at the expense of others.

At midnight they placed the coffin on the "eel cart," among the fishbaskets, and the sacristan of Palmar, together with three friends, took the corpse to the cemetery, pausing at every tavern on the road.

Tonet did not fully realize that his friend had died. He lived in a sort of darkness, continuously drinking, and the drunkenness made him deeply silent and uncommunicative. Fear restrained his talkativeness, for he was afraid of saying too much.

"Sangonera is dead! Your companion!" they told him in the tavern.

He replied with grunts, drinking and dozing off again, while the customers attributed his silence to the grief over his companion’s death.

Neleta, white and sad, as if a spectre passed before her eyes at all hours, tried to keep her lover from drinking.

"Tonet, don’t drink any more," she would say gently. And she would be frightened at the rebellious gesture, the curbed anger with which the drunken fellow would reply. She understood that her rule over the man’s will had vanished. Sometimes she would detect in his eye a
nascent hatred,—the animosity of the slave who has determined to rise against his former oppressor and do away with him.

He paid no attention to Neleta, and he filled his glass at every cask in the house. When sleep would surprise him, he would stretch out in any corner at all, and there he would lay as if dead, while Centella, with the tender instinct of dogs, would lick his face and his hands.

Tonet did not wish his thoughts to wake. As soon as his drunkenness commenced to evaporate, he would feel a painful restlessness. The shadows of those who came into the tavern, as they crossed the floor, would cause him to raise his head in alarm, as if he feared the appearance of someone who would disturb his dreams with the shudder of terror. He felt that he must at once get drunk again, and never wake from his stupor, which engulfed his soul and deadened all his feelings.

Through the veils in which drunkenness wrapped his thought, everything seemed distant, vague, confused. He imagined that many years had gone by since that night he had spent on the lake; the last night of his existence as a man, the first in a life of shadows, which he went through gropingly, his brain dulled and darkened by alcohol. The recollection of that night caused him to tremble as soon as he would find himself approaching sobriety. Only when drunk could he bear that memory, beholding it dimly, like one of those distant shames whose recollection pains us less because it is lost in the haze of the past.

His grandfather came to surprise him in this sottish state. On the following day Tio Paloma expected Don Joaquín for a hunt on the lake. Would his grandson keep his word? Neleta insisted that he accept. He was
ill, he needed a change, he hadn’t been out of the tavern for a week. The Cubano was attracted by the prospect of a day’s activity. His hunting enthusiasm was revived. Was he going to dwell forever estranged from the lake?

He spent the day loading cartridges, cleaning Cañamel’s magnificent rifle; and as a result of this occupation he drank less. Centella frisked and bounded about him, barking with joy to behold the preparations.

On the following morning Tio Paloma came all ready, bringing Don Joaquín in his skiff, together with that gentleman’s entire, gaudy hunting outfit.

The old man was impatient and hurried his grandson. He wished to stop only long enough for the gentleman to have a bite, and then off to the hunt. They must take full advantage of the morning.

In a little while they left: Tonet in front, with Centella in his skiff like a figurehead at the prow, and behind, Tio Paloma’s boat, where Don Joaquín was examining— with great admiration the old man’s gun,—that famous weapon with so many repairs in it, of which so many deeds were recounted among the lake dwellers.

The two boats sailed into the lake of Albufera. Tonet, seeing that his grandfather was heading toward the left, asked where he was going. The old man was surprised at the question. They were going to the Bolodró, the largest mata near the town. In that spot there were more cocks and coots than anywhere else. Tonet wished to go farther out, toward the center of the lake. And a hot discussion arose between the two boatmen. But the old man’s will finally prevailed, and Tonet was forced to follow him, shrugging his shoulders resignedly.

The two boatmen entered a narrow lane of water amid
the tall reed grass. Bulrushes grew in abundance amid the senills; the reeds and rushes blended, and the rambling plants, with their white and blue bells, twined around this aquatic vegetation, forming garlands. The confused network of roots gave an appearance of solidity to the dense reeds. At the bottom of the water could be seen strange vegetation that rose to the surface, and at times it could hardly be said whether the boats were sailing along or whether they were being drawn over verdant fields covered by a thin film of glass.

The silence of the morning was deep in this corner of the Albufera, which looked more wild than ever in the sunlight: from time to time a bird’s shrill call would sound from the growth; there would be a bubbling noise in the water, revealing the presence of hidden creatures amid the slimy depths.

Don Joaquín prepared his gun, waiting for the birds to fly from one side to the other of the thick plantation.

“Tonet, take a turn about,” ordered the old man.

And the Cubano poled vigorously, sending his skiff around the mata, stirring the reeds so as to frighten the birds into flying up over the plantation.

It took him more than ten minutes to sail around. When he had returned to his grandfather’s side Don Joaquín had already fired at some birds, which, frightened by Tonet’s maneuver, had risen in flight, changing quarters. The coots looked out upon the part of the waters bare of reeds, which would expose them. For a moment they hesitated to take the chance, but at last, some of them flying and others swimming, they crossed the open space, and at the same moment they were fired upon by the hunter.
In this narrow limit the shooting was certain, and Don Joaquin enjoyed all the satisfaction of a great hunter, seeing how easily he brought the game down. Centella would dive from the boat, swim over to the birds, which were still alive, and fetch them with a triumphant expression to the hands of the hunter. Tío Paloma’s gun was by no means quiet. The old fellow enjoyed flattering his customer, according to custom. When he saw a bird ready to escape, he would shoot, making the bourgeois imagine that it was he who had hit the game.

An excellent duck came swimming by, and despite the swift bullet that both Don Joaquin and Tío Paloma sent after it, it disappeared amongst the reeds.

“She’s hit!” shouted the old boatman.

The hunter was vexed. What a pity! She would die among the reeds, and they wouldn’t be able to get her. . . .

“Look for her, Centella! . . . Go look for her!” shouted Tonet to his setter.

Centella left the boat and dashed into the reeds with a great noise as he thrust them aside in his search.

Tonet smiled, certain of the outcome: the dog would bring that bird back. But his grandfather revealed a certain incredulity. You could wound those birds in one corner of the Albufera, and once they made the reeds, they’d go off to die on the other side. Besides, the dog was as old as he himself. In other days, when Cañamél had purchased him, he had been good for something, but there was no trusting his scent now. Tonet, scoffing at his grandfather’s opinions, simply replied:

“Ya vorá vostél . . . You’ll see!”

The dog could be heard splashing about in the mire, now near, now far, and in the silence of the morning the
men followed her endless wandering, guided by the snapping of the reeds and the noise of the twigs breaking before the vigorous animal's advance. After a few minutes' waiting they saw her come out, her countenance dispirited, her eyes sad, her mouth empty.

The old boatman smiled triumphantly. What had he said? . . . But Tonet, feeling himself in a ridiculous position, shouted at the dog, threatening her with his fist to keep her from getting near the boat.

"Go look for her! . . . Look for her!" he cried to the poor animal, imperiously.

And once again she went back to the reeds, wagging her tail diffidently.

She would find the bird. Tonet asserted that confidently, for he had seen her do far more difficult things. Again the splashing of the dog was heard in the aquatic forest. She was going hither and thither uncertainly, every moment changing track, without confidence in any of her aimless scents, not daring to admit defeat, for as soon as she turned toward the boats, showing her head between the reeds, she would see her master's fists and hear his "Look for her!" which was equivalent to a threat.

Several times she returned to the scent, and at last wandered so far off in her invisible hunt that the men could no longer hear the sound of her paws.

A distant bark, repeated several times, caused Tonet to smile. How about that? His old setter might be slow, but nothing escaped her.

The dog continued to bark, far, far off, with a desperate sound, yet without coming nearer. The Cubano whistled.

"Here, Centella, here! . . ."
Once more the dog's splashing was heard, coming gradually nearer. On its path it snapped reeds aside, trod over plants and splashed noisily in the water, swimming with great effort.

"Here, Centella, here! . . ." Tonet continued to shout.

She drew close to the grandfather's boat, and the huntsman suddenly brought his hands to his eyes as if a lightning flash had blinded him.

"Mare de Deus! Mother of God!" he howled in terror, as his gun fell from his hands.

Tonet arose with a mad look in his eyes, trembling from head to foot, as if his lungs had suddenly felt need of air. Beside his boat he saw a bundle of rags, and inside something livid and gelatinous, squirming with leeches: a swollen infant's head, deformed, blackish, with its eye-sockets empty, and the ball of the eye hanging from one of them: all of it so repellent, so ill-smelling, that it seemed of a sudden to darken the water and the surrounding landscape, causing night to fall over the lake in the midst of bright day.

He raised his pole with both hands, and dealt the dog such a tremendous blow that the animal's skull cracked as if it were broken, and the poor creature, uttering a pitiable howl, sank with its prey into the eddying waters.

Then he stared with bulging eyes at his grandfather, who had not realized the meaning of it all, and at poor Don Joaquín, who seemed overwhelmed by terror. Rowing by sheer instinct, he shot like an arrow across the water, as if the spectre of remorse that had been slumbering for a week had all at once arisen, and was pursuing him, scratching his back with its implacable claws.