

# THE GOLDEN BOOK\* MAGAZINE

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THE GOLDEN BOOK is indexed for ready reference in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature.

# Who's Who *in the* Golden Book



YOU WOULD NEVER SUSPECT that "S. Carleton," author of "The Clasp of Rank," was a woman. Certainly the story is everything that one expects a man's story to be, and yet there are plenty of adventure-loving women, like "S. Carleton" herself, who relish such striking tales of the North Woods.

Mrs. Susan Carleton Jones was a Nova Scotian, the wife of Maj. Gen. Guy Carleton Jones, C. M. G., a director of the Canadian Medical Service. Mrs. Jones wrote only a handful of stories. In America they appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* and created an immediate sensation. "The Clasp of Rank" was first printed in the *London Sketch* in 1926, the year in which Mrs. Jones died.



# The Clasp of Rank

By S. CARLETON

*S. Carleton*

**M**Y SOLITARY JOB in the winter bush was over. But, coming back over the high barrens to my metropolitan cabin—three miles from the dizzy centre that the priest's house, the Indian agent's, one trader's and a few shacks have labeled "settlement" on the maps—it struck me that it was still a far cry to spring.

The morning was bitter—so cold that the water froze in my eyes and the breath in my nostrils, though it was March, and there should have been some power in the sun. But it hung bleached and bleak over a world of snow, where even the distant spruce belt between me and my cabin stood gray and haggard as I made the shortest cut I could towards it. Once I reached it I was not far from home; say about twice the distance a man could throw a stone. I am particular, because I have since had reason to measure it. But I was not dreaming of that business then.

I bolted well into the shelter of my belt of spruce-trees, stopped to get my pipe lit—and ducked instinctively under the nearest tree. Something metallic and gleaming had arc-ed in the sombre boughs above me like a falling star. Like a star, too, I had not heard it drop, or I would have sworn some one had thrown a knife at me from behind, and missed. For half a breath I thought I heard the faint rasp of snowshoes running over the crusted snow of the open barrens I had just left. I had seen no one out there, but that said nothing, for between the cold and haste I had never looked anywhere but before my nose. I wheeled to peer through the thick spruces that shut me in like a fence, and laughed outright—for before I had half-faced about, my silly illusion had explained itself, and there was no need to be staring out over any barrens.

The knife that had sheered across my snow-dazzled eyes had been nothing but an icicle, and there was certainly no one running away, for my assailant was before me. There was a squaw crouching under the snow-clogged spruces between me and the barrens, among a mess of tree-icicles that had fallen on the snow. I guessed she had tried to attract my attention by throwing one of them at me, and then changed her mind about it—for she crouched oddly motionless on her hands and knees in the ice-spattered snow, as if she did not think she could be seen. Her face was turned from me, yet all the same I recognized her.

"Why, it's Anne Labrador; Labrador's wife!" I thought, astounded. Labrador was the Indian chief in my district; but he and Anne and their two little children lived forty miles off in a camp they never left, except to look after their lines of traps and their fur

*aches*. I always went to see them when I was over their way, and took some sugar and stuff for their funny brown babies, who could just lisp my name. "Kwa, Anne," I shouted in Indian. "What was that you threw at me just now? And where's Labrador and the children?"—for she never stirred without them.

Anne neither moved nor answered. It might have been my fancy that she stared detachedly into the spruces in front of her as though she would have drawn my gaze after hers, but it was certainly no fancy that there was an extraordinarily stiff and bloodless look about her. For a moment I could almost have doubted that it *was* Anne. She wore no silver clasp of rank as a chief's wife in the blue shawl over her breast; she had not spoken; and she was not even looking at me, her friend of many years.

Somehow the thing puzzled me into dead silence; and I made no step towards her, either, though she was not fifty feet off. I did turn my head and stare where she seemed to be staring, but I saw nothing—and when I glanced back again, she was gone! She must have shifted as stealthily as a wolf, to have vanished like that into the blue shadows beside her, and the stupid tension of wonder that had held me snapped and left me angry. It was Anne, without doubt, and this was no way for her to behave.

"Stop these fool tricks," I called out. "Come down to my cabin if you want to see me! It's too cold for you or anyone to be hanging round here."

**A**ND IT WAS; for as I strode angrily after the woman, I was shivering, and I shivered even when I brought up suddenly against an impenetrable thicket of brush that showed no sign of her, though I knew perfectly that she must somehow have slipped into it. As I checked in the first low bushes of it, something pricked my ankle viciously, but I was too preoccupied over Anne's idiotic disappearance even to stoop and see if a jagged stick had torn my new leggings. However she had managed it in the deep snow, she was gone; with no more trace than a stone leaves in water—though I might have persevered in looking for her tracks if I had not felt that I was being evaded, and some Indian trick being worked on me. I turned down the short cut that landed me at my own wood-pile; and as I kicked the snow off my leggings against it, I was unwarrantably upset. Anne and her husband were more than friends of mine, and for her to play hide-and-seek with me struck me as a very poor joke. When I got into my shut-up cabin it felt colder than

outside it, bar the wind; my fire would not burn; and I mislaid my tobacco. Altogether, everything went so crooked with me that it was with no surprise that I saw Lazier, the Indian agent, walk into my house that afternoon on an unexpected and unasked visit.

"Things seem cut in the piece today," I thought savagely, for he was the one man in the district I really disliked. He had never been in my house before, and I could not see why he had come now; it was absurd to say he wanted to hear my news. I said I had been in the bush and had heard no voice but my own for a month—which was strictly true. For Anne Labrador had certainly not spoken to me that morning, and, in any case, I had forgotten her.

"You're a lonely man, Devlin; but if there is any news, they say you are sure to hear it," Lazier assented drily. I did not know why it struck me that he had come to find out something; there was no curiosity in his face, and it might have been by chance that his eyes searched my bare room. I was not sorry when he suddenly said he must be going, if I saw less than ever why he had seen fit to come all the way from the settlement on such a day.

IT WAS COLDER THAN EVER, and the setting sun beat up from the snow in an intolerable glitter of colour as I watched him walk away from my door. The track he left across my clearing lay dead and blue between the crusted drifts of gold and rose and crimson, and it pleased me to think it the spirit and image of the way the man trod this world.

"Well, deliver me from any dealings with him!" said I, and banged my door. I may as well set down why I hated Lazier. He farmed his Indians; they never saw half of their Government allowance. He was always sniffing out their poor quarrels, and our district was getting a bad name. If a man took out a knife he was a murderer; if he borrowed a pair of moccasins he was a thief—and Lazier confiscated his flour and blanket money for a fine. No one was clever enough to catch him out on it, even if there had been anyone but the settlement priest and myself who cared. He had once tried to drag me into his thief-catching, and I was so angry at the memory that I forgot to throw any wood on my fire, and neither troubled to light my lamp nor close the shutters of my window. It was with a start that I saw my fire was out, and the new moon shining in on me. I stood up to close my shutter, and saw more than the moon.

Lazier had come back—and, at sight of him, I knew I had guessed right that afternoon! He had come to find out something, and when it was clear I did not know it, had returned to discover it

for himself. I opened my door soundlessly, and stood waiting to tell him it was no good, that I would have no liars or mischief-brewers in my house; and I must have stood ten minutes before I saw he was not coming in—was not thinking of me at all. He was looking for something in the snow. Sometimes he went on all fours to it; then he peered among the snow-choked spruces; then prowled into my clearing again and pounced at one place and another in the snow.

He was not a pleasant sight as he flitted in and out of the silent bush between me and the moon, and sheer disgust kept me from shouting to know what he wanted in my clearing. But whatever it was, I thought suddenly that he must have found it, for he stood still; so near me that I heard him cough with relief before he vanished into the bush, at a round trot for the settlement. I stared after him, raging that for the second time that day I had missed ordering him off my place.

IT WAS THE COLD that brought me to my senses and the knowledge that I was making a fool of myself; if the man had lost anything in the afternoon, he had a perfect right to come and look for it in the evening. Only I did not believe he had lost anything! It swept over me with a sudden trouble, and with no earthly reason, that it was a strange track he looked for where no one but he and I had walked all day. I hunted, uselessly, for that or anything else he might have been seeking, and ended flatly enough at my woodpile to gather bark to rekindle my forgotten fire. As I carried an armful into my dark house, I thought something fell from it with a ring like metal, but it was not till I knelt in the heartening leap of a four-foot blaze that I turned to look—and I kept on looking.

The thing at my feet was not what Lazier had lost. The only Indian property he owned was a crooked knife with a round handle, of a kind never used in our district. And on my floor lay what never would

have been given to him, and even he would not have dared to take—a squaw's *miskaman*, or clasp of rank. They are slightly convex discs of native silver, with a round hole in the middle, through which the two ends of a shawl are pushed, secured by a hinged pin the size of a two-inch nail, but flattened to the point of a dagger. Held in a woman's hand with the pin upright, the clasp would give a nasty wound, but I never heard of one being used as a weapon. Those of the captains' wives in an Indian tribe are perforated in a design of which the motive is a long diamond—and pretty enough—but this was no badge of a captain's wife. It was the



From "This Smoking World" (Century).

clasp of a chief's wife, three inches in diameter, cut out in circles and half-circles; dear to the owner as her honour, and as hard to steal. More than that, it was a clasp I knew, for I had often handled it.

"Anne Labrador's!" said I; I remembered irrelevantly how Anne's two children had been wont to finger it where it shone on her breast. "She must have lost it before I met her this morning! But why on earth hasn't she come to look for it?"

**T**HE DULL SILVER of the thing held my eyes where it lay on the floor. I picked it up, wondering if I could be mistaken in it, and saw on it the symbol-writing Labrador himself had taught me how to read. There was only one character, of angles and uprights, that might have represented either a three-branched candlestick or a devil, only I knew it stood for a long word which means "my soul." Anne Labrador's own hand had engraved it there, and I knew the meaning she set to it. Oddly enough, it occurred to me for the first time that it was a terrible meaning. And then I laughed at my own folly, since while Anne was alive the engraving on her clasp meant nothing at all. For the superstition is this:

To cut the symbol of your own soul on your dearest belonging is to make it possible—if you so please, or happen to have earthly business a dead body cannot finish for you—that your spirit can enter into that belonging when you die, and put life into it till it can go where it chooses and work out the desire of the dead. Anne Labrador believed it, for she had often told me so. She never let her silver clasp out of her sight, either, which made it the more unaccountable for it to have been lying on my wood-pile. If she had dropped it, why had she not told me when I met her in the morning? I wondered what could be wrong with the woman to make her prow around my cabin in secret and run away when I spoke to her, but it is no use wondering where Indians are concerned—even those you know best. I put the clasp away till she chose to come to her senses and ask for it. And it was at that minute that the knock fell on my door.

"Here she is now," I thought crossly, for I wanted to go to bed. But it was not Anne at my door. It was an Indian, not a squaw, who brushed past me and stumbled over to my fire without speech or leave. I had words on my tongue till I saw the set of his mouth, and that the moccasins on his feet were frayed through. Even when he was fed he sat without speaking till I asked what he wanted with me, for he was not an Indian whom I knew.

"Nothing," he answered in English. "We come for the priest. Very bad news we bring. Our chief is killed."

"What chief?" said I stupidly. "Where?"

"Labrador—over there where he camps!"

"What? Anne's husband?" I stood like a fool, realizing that if Anne knew, it was no wonder she had not spoken to me that morning.

The Indian nodded. "Anne's husband. That man who spies always says his woman killed him," and I knew he meant Lazier. He rose, staggering, as the words tore out of him in the Indian tongue he had not

used before: "She is my sister, my sister that is younger than I, and he will hang her to a rope when he finds her. He says he saw her running from her dead, without her rank-clasp, that she threw away when she—she was a chief's wife no longer! He says she left her little children to the wolves that they might not weigh down her feet; he has their little shawls all torn and bloody. He says if she did not kill her man, why did she run—and where are the children? He says her rank-clasp, that was her honour, she has thrown away into the snow!"

"Anne killed Labrador! I don't believe it. And it's rot about the children—she adored them! As for the rest of the stuff about her rank-clasp and her running away"—I began hotly, and stopped, remembering Anne's face that morning, where she knelt in the snow without the children I had never known her to leave, and her rank-clasp that lay in my pocket. I dared not speak of either. I turned on her brother instead. "Why do you come to me?"

"*Too-ok*," he returned vacantly, which is the last word of an Indian when he does not know or will not say. "I could walk no longer to the priest, and I saw your light."

**M**Y MIND SPUN like a wheel. To the best of my belief, Anne was hidden by my very clearing. Innocent or guilty, she had certainly been there to leave her clasp—but I dared not say so even to her brother till I knew the rights of the story. Oddly enough, neither then nor till long after did I think of the shining thing I had seen arc over my head in my spruce trees, from a direction whence Anne could never have thrown it. Two other thoughts held me in a cold grip: the little bloodstained shawls of two children left to the wolves, and the unostentatious return of Lazier to quarter my clearing in the moonlight for a track. I turned on Anne's brother again. "Why does Lazier say Anne killed Labrador? Has he found her?"

"He looks for her—she is as good as found," dully. "I ran a long way round that he might not know I came to the priest for help. But what can the priest do?"

"Go and see!" But it stuck in my throat, remembering Anne's face as she crouched alone in the snow. What could any man do, if what that said were true? I stopped the Indian as he turned: "Tell me all you know first!"

"All I saw"—he changed the verb to a literal one—"was Labrador lying dead, very lonely in his house. And the little children's shawls where the wolves had left them. My sister no one saw."

"No one will." But I did not think it. I had seen her already, and Lazier had ways of his own in the district. He had used them to get Michael Paul hanged when we all knew he was crazy; and the Sheriff was his led captain.

I put Anne's brother out on his way to the priest, and came back with my mind spinning harder than ever. If Anne had not thrown away her clasp, which was equivalent to throwing away her rank and her people, why was it in my pocket? Unless she had killed her man, why had she crouched from me in



silence? And, above all, what in God's name had happened to her little children? I knew in my soul, furiously, that there Lazier was a liar. Anne was a passionately good mother; she would have fought to the death before she left her children to the wolves: there was some explanation of that somewhere, though all the rest was beyond me. But what was not beyond me was that it was a killing night for a woman to be out who dared not light a fire, and that, even if she had killed Labrador, my house could shelter her—it had sheltered worse. But, though I scoured the night till my blood chilled in me, I could not find Anne.

There was no sense in tearing out to her camp to look for her children—the whole settlement was doing that. Lazier told me so when he came up in the morning with a baby's torn shawl, that turned my stomach, in his hand. I did not throw him out of the house, for the sole reason that while he was there he could not be hunting my spruces for Anne, though I was furiously certain he had wormed out that her brother had been to me before he went to the priest, and had come up on the chance that I would let slip what the priest would hide. I expected Anne to be caught any minute, and Lazier to haul me into witnessing against her; how, I did not know, but somehow. Only those were not all the reasons that made me steal out of my shack the second Lazier had left me, and make a swift and devious departure into the tenantless barrens north of me. The others were an errand of my own, though I knew it was more like a crazy obsession, and a black fear that if I stayed Lazier would find Anne's clasp in my pocket. All the time he talked to me I could feel the thing against my breast, and knew what he would have thought if he had guessed it, which only luck had stopped. Therefore, before I crept out of my own house like a thief, and before dinner, I hid the clasp where no one could ever find it. At least I thought I did. Later, I was to know better.

TEN MILES SOUTH of the camp where Labrador was killed lay a district where he had always run a line of traps and kept a fur *cache* or two. A huge green meteorite marked its boundary, and with that crazy obsession of my own in my head I snowshoed all day to get there, and at sunset saw my landmark of the green boulder shining like a jewel under the golden sky.

"Praise be," said I, for I had had enough walking, but it was for something else, too. My real errand to the place had been nothing on earth but a hunt for Anne's children, that without rhyme or reason were in my head day and night, with their little brown



fingers that had burrowed in my pockets for sugar, and their friendly, confident eyes. I knew they had been killed by the wolves, and that it was useless to look for them; yet something inside me said passionately that I had to look for them, and that if there were any chance of finding them alive it was out here—by the green rock. I had a perfectly unfounded certainty that, even if she were a murderess, Anne must have taken her children with her in her desperate flight, that even her iron strength would be exhausted by alternately dragging and carrying the two little things till she *must* have stopped by the green rock, and nowhere else, to make a fire and feed them; perhaps hide them in some makeshift camp where they might still be alive. And when I say all

that was a crazy obsession, it was, for my own eyes had seen Lazier handling the babies' torn and blood-stained shawls, which was all the wolves had left. But crazy or not, I was so set on the thing that I was absolutely, starkly certain of seeing Anne's dead camp fire waiting for me on the other side of the rock, and Anne's camp built against it, with her children inside. I rounded the green boulder, and I checked with shock; checked till even my breath was still.

THERE WAS NO CAMP; there were no children. But the thing that downed me was that I stared at just the dead embers of a camp-fire that I had expected—only they had not been Anne's! They had not been any Indian's fire, but a white man's; the wide pile of half-burned wood told me that, for an Indian makes as small a fire as he can. Some stray trapper had been here not two days ago; but Anne—Anne had never been here, had never made any camp, and the story the children's shawls told was true!

I felt like a flat fool, but I felt sick, too. I was hurrying to blot out the deadly unexpectedness of those ashes with my own fire when I saw something shining in their blackness. I sweated as I looked at it, as a horse breaks out in the stable. Anne Labrador's clasp lay by that dead fire which had not been hers, and I had left that clasp safely stowed in my own house. I explained the thing to myself slowly, and out loud, because I was ashamed to feel as I did about it.

"You must have put something else in the hole in the back of your chimney! This has been in your pocket all the time, and dropped out when you stooped. Or else it's some other squaw's clasp that has been lost here!"

But I stammered on the lie. There was no other clasp of a chief's wife among the Indians, and I knew well that it was this one I had carried in from my woodpile and hidden later from Lazier. I had no

desire to touch it, but in spite of myself I looked for the three-branched candlestick on its back, that meant the soul of Anne Labrador. It was there. And it shone too blood-red in my new firelight for a thing I had left hidden at home. The insane thought that shook me was that if Anne dead could send her soul into the thing, Anne alive might also be able to make it sentient, intelligent; that it had *got out* of the hole in my chimney to follow me like a hunting dog, and that the quest it hounded me on was the search for Anne's children! I was out on that already, but I had no mind to be goaded by superstition or coincidence. I shut my eyes and flung the clasp away from me, into the spruce trees behind my fire, and I breathed easier when it was gone.

But I could not rest. All night long I dreamed of Anne Labrador's children; dreamed till I woke myself, certain I heard them crying. I knew it was nonsense, and that there was nothing round me but the silence of bitter cold, yet with the first gleam of daylight I started to tramp onward in my fool's hunt for them. Anne might have made a camp in some hiding-place and left them in it—though it was not a likely thing for a woman who was flying for her life. But tramp as I might I could find no Indian camp nor a sign of one, and suddenly—in the middle of the morning—I jerked up where I toiled through thickets and behind boulders. There again, in the snow at my feet, was the silver clasp!

**I**N THE SUNLIGHT I was ashamed of my last night's nonsense about it. But all the same, I could not see how I had thrown it miles away from those dead ashes under my fire! I wondered if Anne could possibly have rummaged the thing out of my house after I left it, and followed me in hope of help; afraid to call to me, but dropping the clasp to show me she was near at hand, and picking it up when I threw it away—or, for all I knew, flung it at her, for the spruces were thick. And suddenly I realized my thoughts were the thoughts of a fool. Anne had had no share in the business; it was my own hand that had thrown the clasp where it lay. All my tramping of that morning had been merely a circle back to the place where I had slept. The spruces round me were the spruces I had camped in the night before: I could see the green meteorite gleam through them as I stared.

It was stupidity fit for a man who had never seen the bush before. I was thankful no one would ever know about it, but as I was back at my camp I would eat my dinner there, and then go home. I had found no children and never would, and I was sick of Anne and the whole business. I put her clasp in my pocket for no better reason than that it seemed wasted trouble to throw it away any more, and sat down in the lee of the green rock to build a new cooking fire. And, with the match in my hand to light it, sat paralyzed. Somewhere, close by me, I heard the creak of snow under snowshoes, heard men's voices. The match burned out in my hand.

"Who in God's world?" I thought; and suddenly I knew. Anne must really have followed me out from

my shack, and men were on Anne's trail! I peered out from behind the green rock as a man peers when he is afraid, and my mind stopped in me, as a jar stops a clock. Lazier was coming towards me, with the Sheriff and two trappers!

**W**HAT POSSESSED ME I do not know. Not fifty Laziers could have dragged me into the hunting of Anne, but I was in a panic. I tore her clasp out of my pocket and flung it into the spruce thicket behind me, as I had flung it before—and once more I did not look to see where it went. The action took the blood from my heart, the rigidity from my mind. I knew instantly that I had been a fool to throw away the clasp, but I dared not go for it. I stood up and walked out to meet Lazier. The man stopped dead, with a face of the most appalling and blindest rage I ever saw. There was absolutely no expression in his eyes, and they seemed to have no pattern in the irises—you will understand me if you have ever looked straight into the eyes of a lunatic.

"You fool, Devlin," he said, before I could speak. "Get out of this bush and come home! That squaw's not out here, if that's why you came. And you couldn't help her if she was."

"I'd have a try at it," said I, in a passion. "I believe it's all a pack of lies about her."

But he did not see fit to answer me. He made a sharp gesture to the Sheriff and his men to stay where they were, and moved around the green rock to my unkindled fire, looking at me with those eyes.

"Come home," he said furiously, if it was under his breath. "Can't you see I came out to warn you that the Sheriff's after *you*—that he thinks you're hiding the woman?" He swung round at a sound behind him and saw the two trappers moving towards the spruce thicket. "Sit down where you are! You don't want to go for wood—Devlin's got a fire built here that we can eat by before we go back again," he shouted, and swung round on me again. "Can't you see I came to warn you?" he repeated. His lips looked stiff with cold; they barely moved.

"Why?" No more trenchant answer came to my tongue, for over Lazier's shoulders I could see the two trappers. They were no led captains like the Sheriff; they were walking over to the spruces as coolly as though Lazier had never shouted at them, only I knew it was no firewood they were after. One, or both of them, had seen the silver clasp flash as I threw it behind me, and meant to find out what I had flung away.

I knew just what they would think when they found it, but there was nothing I could do about it. I knelt down at Lazier's feet and lit my cooking fire—but, before the lowest chip had kindled, the trappers' voices sent me flying into the spruces. And the instant I stood in them I knew I had thrown the silver clasp to the right place at last, for I was looking at Anne Labrador.

She was on all fours on the crusted snow, stark on her hands and knees—exactly as I thought I had seen her forty-eight hours before and thirty miles away. Even now I could not believe that I had not seen her there, though my intelligence said it was impossible,



for she must have been dead two days where she crouched now. A round thing under her shawl broke the smoothness of it between her shoulders, but none of us touched it to see what it was, and none of us spoke. I did not, because I could see the woman's dark face, line for line, as I thought I had seen it in the spruces by my house, also the shining of silver on the snow below her breast. I was all abroad as to how I had ever flung her clasp so truly. And as I thought it, I forgot the clasp, Anne, everything.

"My soul," said I, "the children!" I leapt, galvanized, to what might have been the muffled whine of a dying hare.

IT WAS CLOSE BY, at my very side, that I found them, and so far my crazy obsession had been just plain common-sense. Only, they were in no makeshift camp, but underground, and piled over with rocks, in one of Labrador's fur *caches*, that I must have passed twice that very morning and had been too big a fool to think of searching, even with a child's cry in my ears all the night before. They were hungry and pitiful enough, but alive; even almost as warm among the smelling pelts that all but filled their poor expedient of safety as when they had been packed in by their dead mother outside. All their little clothes were on them, except the torn shawls with which Lazier had sickened me, and their mother's thick blue cloth petticoat was round them both. The forlorn things wailed as they clutched me, their one familiar friend among the strange faces round them. A trapper raced to my fire to boil up water and biscuit to feed them: the other two stood and swore, more or less appropriately. But the Sheriff laid a sudden hand on my arm, and nodded backwards at Anne Labrador.

"Poor soul, poor soul!" he said, and it was the first time I ever heard kindness off his tongue; "she done her best to save them."

"Soul?" Lazier broke in sharply. "Why do you say *soul*?" He had stood aloof through all the fuss about the children, and at his sneering voice the five-year-old I held opened its eyes on him and jerked in my arms.

"Keep him 'way!" it yelled. "Keep him 'way! Him hit my father—make my mother run!"

A trapper gave a flashlight glance at me. Neither of us spoke.

Lazier said contemptuously, "The child is demented!" He walked towards it from where he stood before the body of Anne Labrador, and slipped as he passed the rank-clasp lying on the snow. He put out a hand to save himself, but none of us realized that it was he who had screamed like an animal till he rolled in the snow like one, with Anne Labrador's clasp sticking fast to his palm. I saw the dagger pin of it showing through the back of his hand before he tore the thing out.

"How's that devil soul-clasp here!" he screamed. "I don't see how it's here! I threw it away miles off after the night I caught her here running to tell the priest I'd done for Labrador. But I caught her. After that there was no running. She knelt down."

I was knocked dead silent, though I knew enough

of the babbling collapse of the nerves that comes with a wound through the very middle of a man's palm. But the Sheriff blazed out furiously. "Lazier!" he shouted. "Lazier!"

But Lazier was past shouting at. He stood staring at Anne's clasp lying where it had fallen when he tore it out of his hand, a spot of concentrated white sunlight on the snow—stood staring as if he were hypnotized, and spoke as the hypnotized speaks.

"She knelt down," he repeated. "She said her soul would live—she would make me fear her soul! Her body did not matter. But I lit a fire by that green rock and stayed there till she was quiet. It was midnight when I started for home. I didn't know the children—I saw him wrench himself to lie, saw him stand powerless, unable to do it, his eyes still glued to the shining clasp at his feet. "Anyway, she'd buried them," he said gratingly. "I found their shawls that she'd forgotten. They'd got blood on them somehow, and I thought of that about the wolves. I found that clasp too, stuck in my sleeve, when I was passing Devlin's, on the other side of the barrens, and I threw it away into some spruces. Afterwards, I was afraid I'd thrown it into his clearing, and he'd find it. I went there twice that day to make certain he hadn't—though I never could have thrown the thing that far over his spruce trees."

NO ONE KNEW THAT BETTER than I did; but it was not by any will of my own that I remembered the shape I had called by the name of Anne Labrador. Yet that could not have thrown the clasp to my wood-pile where I must find it, when I had failed at the bidding of its eyes. For a dazed half-minute I wondered if it were true that a bit of beaten silver with the soul-sign on it could take life from its dead owner and go where it pleased—if it were the clasp itself that had found its way to my wood-pile—and I looked up and saw Lazier's face.

"Lazier and I," my mind flashed with cold, sane relief; "it was just Lazier and I who moved the thing from start to finish!"

For of course it was! Standing in my spruces that cold morning, I had really heard the drag of running feet on snow-shoes over the open barrens, and I knew now that it was Lazier—who had just thrown away Anne's clasp in the metallic flash I had seen arc among my trees. And it was I myself who unwittingly carried it to my wood-pile, by its long pin that had pricked my ankle and stuck in my leggings till I kicked the snow off them against my stacked wood. For the rest, I put the clasp in my chimney right enough, only once more its pin had caught in my clothing, this time in the back of my sleeve as I withdrew my arm; and from my sleeve it had dropped on the ashes of the fire Lazier had kindled by the green rock while he waited for a woman to die. As for my finding it again this very morning, it would have been a wonder if I had not, since I had merely circled back to the green rock, as I explained before. Every circumstance about the clasp was quite simple; there was nothing supernatural about any of them—and once more my eyes fell on Anne Labrador kneeling in-

humanly stiff and bloodless in the snow, finger for finger, as I had thought I saw her kneeling in my own spruces, thirty miles from the children I had just found: only this time my mind came down on the truth like a hammer on a nail.

"Oh, you fool!" I swore aloud. "There was nothing supernatural in that, either!"

Nor was there. I suppose even a poor squaw, dying agonized for her children, might think hard enough of the only man who could save them to bring her bodily image before that man's mind. Anyhow, Anne had brought hers before mine and I knew it, if telepathic vision would have been the right term. I took off my cap to the gallant soul of a dead mother and looked away, to see Lazier still talking and the Sheriff holding his arm.

"Stop it, Lazier!" he was shouting. "You dunno what you're saying!"

"I'm saying I was afraid of the clasp and the writing on it," Lazier returned evenly, as if he were reading out of a book. "I know it's an Indian lie that life goes into a thing you cut the soul-sign on, but I was afraid of it all the same, and that Devlin had it"—he spoke exactly as if I were not there; "I had to keep near him to feel safe. That's why I followed him out here. I thought——"

The dazzle off Anne's clasp made the Sheriff blink. He put out an absent foot and kicked it aside into the shadow of a spruce-bush. It lay there dead and dull as a slice of lead, and Lazier's speech broke off short, as if he had suddenly realized his own voice and the sense of what it said. I don't know why I stood silent; I had no pity for the man.

"You're crazy!" the Sheriff burst out. "You're talking foolishness! Nobody killed this woman. She's just dead." He wrenched away Anne's frozen-down shawl and recoiled in a kind of galvanized dumbness. The round lump under it, that had broken its smoothness between the squaw's shoulders, was the round handle of Lazier's crooked Indian knife—the one such knife in the district. The Sheriff gaped at it, missed Lazier's suddenly intelligent scowl at him, and spoke like a fool: "Why, that's yours, Lazier!"

Lazier made no answer. He looked at me, at Anne's children in my arms; at the changed, inimical faces of his two trappers; at the Sheriff; then at Anne Labrador. There were six of us alive and one dead who knew the thing that he had done, and I saw him weigh his chances of slipping free of it. He had them—the Sheriff was his satellite, the country wide. Whether he would have used them or not I cannot say. I do say he did not mean to do the thing he did. He always carried his revolver cocked and in the side pocket of his coat. He slid his hand into his pocket now, and I guessed he was going to hand his revolver over to the Sheriff ostentatiously, and make a play for injured innocence—and time—with him and the trappers, for he was no lightning shot who could have laid

us all with Anne Labrador. If he had looked at us, things might have been different; but his eyes were on the snow beyond him, where he stood a little turned away from us, and his revolver came out of his pocket just as the wheeling sunlight pierced the spruce-bush behind him and once more smote Anne's silver clasp into a burning star where the Sheriff had kicked it aside. The blinding dazzle of it flashed fair into Lazier's eyes. He jerked back from the stabbing white light, the hand at his side flew up—and his revolver snapped off like a whip with the muzzle jammed upwards under his chin, against the soft of his throat. That was all there was to it, except that he dropped full length, like a tree drops, beside Anne Labrador.

"Lazier!" yelled the Sheriff. He knelt over him, incredulous in spite of everything; knelt with his eyes goggling, a led-captain still. "He's shot himself," he said fatuously; "he's dead! He—it ain't true what he was telling us, is it? He couldn't have killed Labrador and then Anne—" he recoiled from the name, pointing to the crouching figure that did not look as if it had ever had one—"and then *her* for fear she'd tell—and left little children to starve in a fur *cache* to cover it! And what'd he mean about the rank-clasp—and bein' afraid?"

I looked at the rank-clasp with the sign that meant the soul of Anne Labrador carved deep on it.

"I don't know," said I. But I did know that it was the clasp alone that had made Lazier betray himself with his own lips; that—accident, coincidence, or whatever you like to call it—it was also nothing else but a simple sun-flash on it that had made his flung-up hand close convulsively on the trigger of his revolver: and I knew, too, that it was by no intention of mine that I had brought it from its *cache* at the back of my chimney nor pitched it to the very place where Anne Labrador had died.

"Do *you* see what he meant—about bein' afraid of the clasp?" the Sheriff yapped again.

I SAID NOTHING. It was not his business, nor any man's, that I was afraid of it too. The vision of Anne Labrador over in my spruces was a simple thing, and the mere wireless of one mind in tune with another. But the thought that I could not fight down, in spite of my plain knowledge that it was just Lazier and I who had carried the clasp from the green rock and back again, was that Anne's ordinary beaten silver rank-clasp had really done the desire of a dead mother for her lost and starving children—I left out the rest—and used me for its tool!

I was thankful, of course, to have found the children. But as I turned to carry them to the nearest shelter I had once more no desire to touch that silver clasp of a chief's wife. It was a trapper who fastened it where it belonged—on the dead breast of Anne Labrador.

