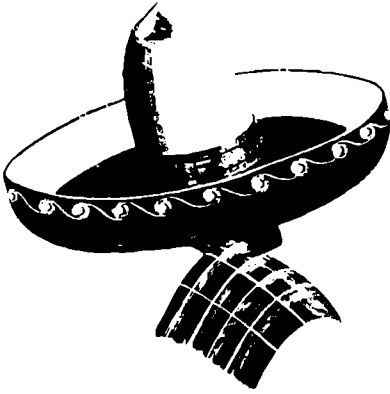


THEY WRITE...



B. TRAVEN:

Editor's Note: B. Traven is probably the most mysterious literary figure since Ambrose Bierce disappeared into Mexico many years ago. He has been variously described: from "a leper forced to live apart from the rest of the world to a disillusioned American Negro." Even his agent knows only that he lives in Mexico, and that his books have sold millions of copies in many languages. His literary accomplishments, however, are easily identified. He usually writes with a savagely bitter pen, coloring the pages with an occasional broad stroke of humor. "The Third Guest" is an excellent example of his unique talent.

fantastic

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THE THIRD GUEST

By
B. TRAVEN

Homo Sapiens comes up with some pretty weird symbols for happiness. The guy next door is all in a sweat over getting a musical horn for his car; Mrs. H'wamoo, seventh wife of an African chief, can't rest until she gets that new ring for her nose. Foolishness! Happiness comes from within, from peace of mind and lofty ideals. (Of course, we're miserable without an electric typewriter, but that's different.)

B. Traven, the man nobody knows (see inside cover), here tells the story of a simple Mexican woodchopper whose dream of happiness was to eat an entire roast turkey, sharing it with nobody. One day his dream came true . . . and the resulting complications make for great fantasy, as well as forming one of the most searching commentaries on human nature we've ever read.

Illustrator: Tom O'Sullivan



MACARIO, the village wood-chopper, had one overwhelming desire which he had nourished for fifteen years.

It was not riches he wanted, nor a well-built house instead of that ramshackle old hut in which he lived with his wife and his eleven children who wore rags and were always hungry. What he craved more than anything in this world — what he might have traded his very soul for — was to have a roast turkey all for himself combined with the opportunity to

eat it in peace, deep in the woods unseen by his ever-hungry children, and entirely alone.

His stomach never fully satisfied, he would leave home before sunrise every morning in the year, weekday and Sunday alike, rain or shine. He would disappear into the woods and by nightfall bring back a load of chopped wood carried on his back.

That load, meaning a full day's job, would sell for one bit, sometimes even less than that. During the rainy season, though, when competition was slow, he would get as much as two bits now and then for his load of fuel.

Two bits meant a fortune to his wife, who looked even more starved than her husband, and who was known in the village as the Woman with the Sad Eyes.

Arriving home after sunset, Macario would throw off his pack with a heavy groan, stagger into his hut and drop with an audible bump upon a low crudely-made chair brought to the equally crude table by one of the children.

There he would spread both his arms upon the table and say with a tired voice: "Oh, Mother, I am tired and hungry, what have we for supper?"

"Black beans, green chile, tortillas, salt and lemon tea," his wife would answer.

It was always the same menu with no variation whatever. Knowing the answer long before he was

home, he merely asked so as to say something and, by so doing, prevent his children from believing him merely a dumb animal.

When supper was set before him in earthen vessels, he would be profoundly asleep. His wife would shake him: "Father, supper's on the table."

"We thank our good Lord for what he allows us poor sinners," he would pray, and immediately start eating.

Yet hardly would he swallow a few mouthfuls of beans when he would note the eyes of his children resting on his face and hands, watching him that he might not eat too much so that they might get a little second helping since the first had been so very small. He would cease eating and drink only the tea, brewed of *zacate de limon*, sweetened with a little chunk of *piloncillo*.

Having emptied the earthen pot he would, with the back of his hand, wipe his mouth, moan pitifully, and in a prayerful voice say: "Oh, dear Lord in heaven, if only once in all my dreary life I could have a roast turkey all for myself, I would then die happily and rest in peace until called for the final reckoning, Amen."

Frequently he would not say that much, yet he would never fail to say at least: "Oh, good Lord, if only once I could have a roast turkey all for myself."

His children had heard that

lamentation so often that none of them paid attention to it any longer, considering it their father's particular way of saying Grace after supper.

He might just as well have prayed that he would like to be given one thousand doubloons, for there was not the faintest likelihood that he would ever come into the possession of roast chicken, let alone a heavy roast turkey whose meat no child of his had ever tasted.

His wife, the most faithful and the most abnegating companion a man would wish for, had every reason to consider him a very good man. He never beat her; he worked as hard as any man could. On Saturday nights only he would take a three-centavo's worth nip of mezcal, and no matter how little money she had, she would never fail to buy him that squeeze of a drink. She would buy it at the general store because he would get less than half the size for the same money if he bought the drink in the village tavern.

Realizing how good a husband he was, how hard he worked to keep the family going, how much he, in his own way, loved her and the children, the wife began saving up any penny she could spare of the little money she earned doing odd jobs for other villagers who were slightly better off than she was.

Having thus saved penny by penny for three long years, which had seemed to her an eternity, she at last could lay her hands on the heaviest turkey brought to the market.

Almost exploding with joy and happiness, she took it home while the children were not in. She hid the fowl so that none would see it. Not a word she said when her husband came home that night, tired, worn-out and hungry as always, and as usual praying to heaven for his roast turkey.

The children were sent to bed early. She feared not that her husband might see what she was about, for he had already fallen asleep at the table and, as always, half an hour later he would drowsily rise and drag himself to his cot upon which he would drop as if clubbed down.

If there ever was prepared a carefully selected turkey with a true feeling of happiness and profound joy guiding the hands and the taste of a cook, this one certainly was. The wife worked all through the night to get the turkey ready before sunrise.

Macario got up for his day's work and sat down at the table for his lean breakfast. He never bothered saying *Good Morning* and was not used to hearing it said by his wife or anybody in the house.

If something was amiss on the

table or if he could not find his machete or the ropes which he needed for tying up the chopped wood, he would just mumble something, hardly opening his lips. As his utterings were few and these few always limited to what was absolutely necessary, his wife would understand him without ever making a mistake.

Now he rose, ready to leave.

He came out, and while standing for a few seconds by the door of his shack looking at the misty gray of the coming day, his wife placed herself before him as though in his way. For a brief moment he gazed at her, slightly bewildered because of that strange attitude of hers. And there she handed him an old basket in which was the roast turkey, trimmed, stuffed and garnished, all prettily wrapped up in fresh green banana leaves.

"There now, there, dear husband, there's the roast turkey you've been praying for during so many long years. Take it along with you to the deepest and densest part of the woods where nobody will disturb you and where you can eat it all alone. Hurry now before the children smell it and get aware of that precious meal, for then you could not resist giving it to them. Hurry along."

He looked at her with his tired eyes and nodded. *Please* and *Thanks* were words he never used. It did not even occur to him to let his wife have just one little bite

of that turkey because his mind, not fit to handle more than one thought at a time, was at this instant exclusively occupied with his wife's urging to hurry and run away with his turkey lest the children get up before he could leave.

He took his time finding himself a well-hidden place deep in the woods and as he, because of so much wandering about, had become sufficiently hungry by now, he was ready to eat his turkey with genuine gusto. He made his seat on the ground very comfortable, washed his hands in a brook near by, and everything was as perfect as it should be at such a solemn occasion — that is, the fulfillment of a man's prayer said daily for an almost uncountable number of years.

With a sigh of utter happiness, he leaned his back against the hollow trunk of a heavy tree, took the turkey out of the basket, spread the huge banana leaves before him on the ground and laid the bird upon them with a gesture as if he were offering it to the gods. He had in mind to lie down after the meal and sleep the whole day through and so turn this day, his Saint's day, to a real holiday — the first in his life since he could think for himself.

On looking at the turkey so well prepared, and taking in that sweet aroma of a carefully and skillfully

roasted turkey, he muttered in sheer admiration: "I must say this much of her, she's a great and wonderful cook. It is sad that she never has the chance to show her skill."

That was the most profound praise and the highest expression of thanks he could think of. His wife would have burst with pride and she would have been happy beyond words had he only once in his life said that in her presence. This, though, he would never have been able to do, for in her presence such words would simply refuse to pass his lips.

Holding the bird's breast down with his left hand, he firmly grabbed with his right one of the turkey's thick legs to tear it off.

And while he was trying to do so, he suddenly noted two feet standing right before him, hardly two yards away.

He raised his eyes up along the black, tightly fitting pants which covered low riding boots as far down as the ankles and found, to his surprise, a Charro in full dress, watching him tear off the turkey's leg.

The Charro wore a sombrero of immense size, richly trimmed with gold laces. His short leather coat was adorned with the richest gold, silver and multi-colored silk embroidery one could imagine. To the outside seams of the Charro's black trousers and reaching from

the belt down to where they came to rest upon the heavy spurs of pure silver, a row of gold coins was sewn on. A slight move the Charro would make now and then while he was speaking to Macario caused these gold coins to send forth a low, sweet-sounding tinkle. He had a black moustachio, the Charro had, and a beard like a goat's. His eyes were pitch black, very narrow and piercing so that one might virtually believe them needles.

When Macario's eyes reached his face, the stranger smiled, thin-lipped and somewhat malicious. He evidently thought his smile a most charming one, by which any human, man or woman, would be enticed beyond help.

"What do you say, friend, about a fair bite of your tasty turkey for a hungry horseman," he said in a metallic voice. "See, friend, I've had a long ride all through the night and now I'm nearly starved and so, please, for hell's sake, invite me to partake of your lunch."

"It's not lunch in the first place," Macario corrected, holding on to his turkey as if he thought that bird might fly away at any moment. "And in the second place, it's my holiday dinner and I won't part with it for anybody, whoever he may be. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't. Look here, friend, I'll give you my heavy silver

spurs just for that thick leg you've grabbed," the Charro bargained, moistening his lips with a thick dark red tongue which, had it been forked, might have been that of a snake.

"I have no use for spurs whether they are of iron, brass, silver or gold trimmed with diamonds all over, because I have no horse to ride on." Macario judged the value of his roast turkey as only a man would who had waited for that meal almost eighteen years.

"Well then, friend, if it is worth that much to you, I'll cut off all these gold coins which you see dangling from my trousers and I'll give them to you for a half breast of that turkey of yours. What about that?"

"That money would do me no good. If I spent only one single coin they'd clap me in jail right away and there torture me until I'd tell them where I stole it, and after that they'd chop off one hand of mine for being a thief. What could I, a wood chopper, do with one hand less when, in fact, I could use four if only the Lord had been kind enough to let me have that many."

Macario, utterly unconcerned over the Charro's insistence, once more tried to tear off the leg and start eating when the visitor interrupted him again: "See here, friend, I own these woods, the whole woods and all the woods around here, and I'll give you

these woods in exchange for just one wing of your turkey and a fistful of the fillings. All these woods, think of it."

"Now you're lying, stranger. These woods are not yours, they're the Lord's, or I couldn't chop in here and provide the villagers with fuel. And if they were your woods and you'd give them to me for a gift or in payment for a part of my turkey, I wouldn't be any richer anyhow because I'd have to chop then just as I do now."

Said the Charro: "Now listen, my good friend —"

"Now you listen," Macario broke in impatiently. "You aren't my good friend and I'm not your good friend and I hope I never will be your good friend as long as God saves my soul. Understand that. And now go back to hell where you came from and let me eat my holiday dinner in peace."

The Charro made a horribly obscene grimace, swore at Macario and limped off, cursing the world and all mankind.

Macario looked after him, shook his head and said to himself: "Who'd expect to meet such funny jesters in these woods? Well, I suppose it takes all kinds of people and creatures to make it truly our Lord's world."

He sighed and laid his left hand on the turkey's breast as he had done before and with his right grasped one of the fowl's legs.

And again he noted two feet standing right before him at the same spot where, only a half minute earlier, the Charro had been standing.

Ordinary huaraches, well-worn as though by a man who has wandered a long and difficult road, covered these two feet. Their owner was quite obviously very tired and weary, for his feet seemed to sag at the arches.

Macario looked up and met a very kind face, thinly bearded. The wanderer was dressed in very old, but well washed, white cotton pants and a shirt of the same stuff, and he looked not very different from the ordinary Indian peasant of the country.

The wanderer's eyes held Macario's as though by a charm and Macario became aware that in this pilgrim's heart were combined all the goodnesses and kindnesses of earth and heaven, and in each of the wanderer's eyes he saw a little golden sun, and each little golden sun seemed to be but a little golden hole through which one might crawl right into heaven and see Godfather Himself in all His glory.

With a voice that sounded like a huge organ playing from a distance far away, the wanderer said: "Give unto me, my good neighbor, as I shall give unto you. I am hungry, very hungry indeed. For see, my beloved brother, I have come a long way. Pray, let



me have that leg which you are holding and I shall truly and verily bless you for it. Just that leg, nothing else. It will satisfy my hunger and it will give me new strength, for very long still is my way before reaching my father's house."

"You're a very kind man, wanderer, the kindest of men that ever were, that are today, and that are to come," Macario said, as though he was praying before the image of the Holy Virgin.

"So I beg of you, my good neighbor, give me just one half of the bird's breast, you certainly will not miss it much."

"Oh, my beloved pilgrim," Macario explained as if he were speaking to the archbishop whom he had never seen and did not know but whom he believed the highest of the highest on earth. "If you, my Lord, really mean to say that I won't miss it much, I shall answer that I feel terribly hurt in my soul because I can't say anything better to you, kind man, but that you are very much mistaken. I know I should never say such a thing to you for it comes close to blasphemy, yet I can't help it, I must say it even should that cost me my right to enter heaven because your eyes and your voice make me tell the truth.

"For you see, your Lordship, I must not miss even the tiniest little morsel of this turkey. This

turkey, please, oh please, do understand, my Lord, was given me as a whole and was meant to be eaten as a whole. It would no longer be a whole turkey were I to give away just a little bit not even the size of a fingernail. A whole turkey — it was what I have yearned for all my life, and not to have it now after a life-time of praying for it would destroy all the happiness of my good and faithful wife who has sacrificed herself beyond words to make me that great gift. So, please, my Lord and Master, understand a poor sinner's mind. Please, I pray you, understand."

And the wanderer looked at Macario and said unto him: "I do understand you, Macario, my noble brother and good neighbor, I verily do understand you. Be blessed for ever and ever and eat your turkey in peace. I shall go now, and on passing through your village I shall go near your hut where I shall bless your good wife and all your children. Be with the Lord. Goodbye."

Not once while he had made these speeches to the Charro and to the Wanderer had it occurred to Macario, who rarely spoke more than fifty words a day, to stop to think what had made him so eloquent — why it was that he, in the depths of the woods, could speak as freely and easily as the minister in church, and used

words and expressions which he had never known before. It all came to him without his realizing what was happening to him.

He followed the pilgrim with his eyes until he could see him no longer.

He shook his head sadly.

"I most surely feel sorry about him. He was so very tired and hungry. But I simply could do nothing else. I would have insulted my dear wife. Besides, I cannot spare a leg or part of the breast, come what may, for it would no longer be a whole turkey then."

And again he seized the turkey's leg to tear it off and start his dinner when, again, he noted two feet standing before him and at the same spot the others had stood a while ago.

These two feet were standing in old-fashioned sandals, and Macario thought that the man must be a foreigner from far-off lands, for he had never seen sandals like these before.

He looked up and stared at the hungriest face he had ever believed possible. That face had no flesh. It was all bone. And all bone were the hands and the legs of the visitor. His eyes seemed to be but two very black holes hidden deep in the fleshless face. The mouth consisted of two rows of strong teeth, bared of lips.

He was dressed in a faded blu-

ish-white flowing mantle which, as Macario noted, was neither cotton nor silk nor wool nor any fabric he knew. He held a long staff in one hand for support.

From the stranger's belt, which was rather carelessly wound around his waist, a mahogany box, scratched all over, with a clock ticking audibly inside, was dangling on a bit of a string.

It was that box hanging there instead of the hour-glass which Macario had expected that confused him at first as to what the new visitor's social standing in the world might be.

The newcomer now spoke. He spoke with a voice that sounded like two sticks clattering one against the other.

"I am very hungry, compadre, very, very hungry."

"You don't need to tell me. I can see that, compadre," Macario asserted, not in the least afraid of the stranger's horrible appearance.

"Since you can see that and since you have no doubt that I need something substantial in my stomach, would you mind giving me that leg of the turkey you are holding?"

Macario gave forth a desperate groan, shrugged and lifted up his arms in utter helplessness.

"Well," he said, with mourning in his voice, "what can a poor mortal do against fate? I've been caught at last. There's no way out

any more. It would have been a great adventure, the good God in heaven knows it, but fate doesn't want it that way. I shall never have a whole turkey for myself, never, never and never, so what can I do? I must give in. All right, compadre, get your belly's fill; I know what hunger is like. Sit down, hungry man, sit down. Half the turkey's yours and be welcome to it."

"Oh, compadre, that is fine, very fine," said the hungry man, sitting down on the ground opposite Macario and widening his row of teeth as if he were trying to grin.

Macario could not make out for sure what the stranger meant by that grin, whether it was an expression of thanks or a gesture of joy at having been saved from a sure death by starvation.

"I'll cut the bird in two," Macario said, in a great hurry now lest another visitor might come up and make his own part a third only. "Once I've cut the bird in two, you just look the other way and I'll lay my machete flat between the two halves and you tell which half you want, that next to the edge or that next to the back. Fair enough, Bone Man?"

"Fair enough, compadre."

So they had dinner together. And a mighty jolly dinner it was, with much clever talking on the part of the guest and with much

laughter on the side of the host.

"You know, compadre," Macario presently said; "at first I was slightly upset because you didn't fit in the picture of you I had in my mind. That box of mahogany with the clock in it which you carry hanging from your belt, confused me quite a bit and made it hard for me to recognize you promptly. What has become of your hour-glass, if it isn't a secret to know?"

"No secret at all, no secret at all. You may tell the world if it itches you to do so. You see, it was like this. There was a big battle in full swing somewhere around Europe, which is the fattest spot on earth for me next to China. And I tell you, compadre, that battle kept me on the run as if I were still a youngster. Hither and thither I had to dart until I went nearly mad and was exhausted entirely. So, naturally, I could not take proper care of myself as I usually do to keep me fit. Well, it seems a British cannon ball fired in the wrong direction by a half-drunken limey smashed my cherished hour-glass so completely that it could not be mended again by old smith Pluto who likes doing such odd jobs. I looked around and around everywhere, but I could not buy a satisfactory new one, since they are made no longer save for decorations on mantelpieces and, like all such silly knick-knacks, useless.

I tried to swipe one in museums, but to my horror I discovered that they were all fakes, not a genuine instrument among them."

A chunk of tender white meat which he chewed at this instant let him forget his story for a while. Remembering that he had started to tell something without finishing it, he now asked: "Oh, well, where was I with my tale, compadre?"

"The hour-glasses in all the museums were all fakes wherever you went to try one out."

"Right. Yes, now isn't it a pity that they build such wonderful great museums around things which are only fakes? Coming back to the point: there I was without a correctly adjusted hour-glass, and many mistakes were bound to happen. Then it came to pass not long afterwards that I visited a captain sitting in his cabin of a ship that was rapidly sinking away under him and with the crew all off in boats. He, the captain I mean, having refused to leave his ship, had hoisted the Union Jack and was stubbornly sticking by his ship whatever might happen to her, as would become a loyal British captain. There he now sat in his cabin, writing up his log-book.

"When he saw me right before him, he smiled at me and said: 'Well, Mr. Bone Man — Sir, I mean, seems my time is up.' 'It is, skipper,' I confirmed, also smiling

to make it easier for him and make him forget the dear ones he would leave behind. He looked at his chronometer and said: 'Please, sir, just allow me fifteen seconds more to jot down the actual time in my log-book.' 'Granted,' I answered. And he was all happiness that he could write in the correct time. Seeing him so very happy, I said: 'What about it, Cap'n, would you mind giving me your chronometer? I reckon you can spare it now since you won't have any use for it any longer, because aboard the ship you will sail from now on you won't have to worry about time at all. You see, Cap'n, as a matter of fact my hour-glass was smashed by a British cannon ball fired by a drunken British gunner in the wrong direction, and so I think it only fair and just that I should have in exchange for my hour-glass a British-made chronometer.'"

"Oh, so that's what you call that funny-looking little clock — a chronometer. I didn't know that," Macario broke in.

"Yes, that's what it is called," the hungry man admitted with a grin of his bared teeth. "The only difference is that a chronometer is a hundred times more exact in telling the correct time than an ordinary watch or a clock. Well, compadre, where was I?"

"You asked the ship's master for the chro . . ."

“...nometer. Exactly. So when I asked him to let me have that pretty time-piece he said: ‘Now, you are asking for just the very thing, for it happens that this chronometer is my personal property and I can dispose of it any way it damn pleases me. If it were the company’s I would have to deny you that beautiful companion of mine. It was perfectly adjusted a few days before we went on this rather eventful voyage and I can assure you, Mr. Bone Man, that you can rely on this instrument a hundred times better than on any of your old-fashioned glasses.’ So I took it with me on leaving the rapidly sinking ship. And that’s how I came to carry this chronometer instead of that shabby out-dated hour-glass I used to have in by-gone days.

“And I can tell you one thing, compadre, this British-made gadget works so perfectly that, since I got hold of it, I have never yet missed a single date, whereas before that many a man for whom the coffin or the basket or an old sack had already been brought into the house, escaped me. And I tell you, compadre, escaping me is bad business for everybody concerned, and I lose a good lot of my reputation whenever something of this sort happens. But it won’t happen anymore now.”

So they talked, told one another jokes, dry ones and juicy

ones, laughed a great deal together, and felt as jolly as old friends meeting each other after a long separation.

The Bone Man certainly liked the turkey, and he said a huge amount of good words in praise of the wife who had cooked the bird so tastily.

Entirely taken in by that excellent meal he, now and then, would become absent-minded and forget himself, and try to lick his lips which were not there with a tongue which he did not have.

But Macario understood that gesture and regarded it as a sure and unmistakable sign that his guest was satisfied and happy in his own unearthly way.

“You have had two visitors before today, or have you?” the Bone Man asked in the course of their conversation.

“True. How did you know, compadre?”

“How I know? I have to know what is going on around the world. You see, I am the chief of the secret police of — of — well, you know the Big Boss. I am not allowed to mention His name. Did you know them — those two visitors, I mean?”

“Sure I did. What do you think I am, a heathen?”

“The first one was what we call our main trouble.”

“The devil, I knew him all right,” Macario said confidently.

"That fellow can come to me in any disguise and I'd know him anywhere. This time he tried looking like a Charro, but smart as he thinks he is, he had made a few mistakes in dressing up, as foreigners are apt to do. So it wasn't hard for me to see that he was a counterfeit Charro."

"Why didn't you give him a small piece of your turkey then, since you knew who he was. That hop-about-the-world can do you a great deal of harm, you know."

"Not to me, compadre. I know all his tricks and he won't get me. Why should I give him part of my turkey? He had so much money that he had not pockets enough to put it in and so had to sew it outside on his pants. At the next inn he passes he can buy if he wishes a half dozen roast turkeys and a couple of young roast pigs besides. He didn't need a leg or a wing of my turkey."

"But the second visitor was — well, you know Whom I refer to. Did you recognize Him?"

"Who wouldn't? I am a Christian. I would know him anywhere. I felt awfully sorry that I had to deny Him a little bite, for I could see that He was very hungry and terribly in need of some food. But who am I, poor sinner, to give our Lord a little part of my turkey. His father owns the whole world and all the birds because He made everything. He

may give His Son as many roast turkeys as the Son wants to eat. What is more, our Lord, who can feed five thousand hungry people with two fishes and five ordinary loaves of bread all during the same afternoon, and satisfy their hunger and have still a few dozens of sacks full of crumbs left over — well, compadre, I thought that He Himself can feed well on just one little leaf of grass if He is really hungry. I would have considered it a really grave sin giving Him a leg of my turkey. And another thing, He Who can turn water into wine just by saying so, can just as well cause that little ant walking here on the ground and picking up a tiny morsel, to turn into a roast turkey with all the fillings and trimmings and sauces known in heaven.

"Who am I, a poor wood-chopper with eleven brats to feed, to humiliate our Lord by making Him accept a leg of my roast turkey touched with my unclean hands? I am a faithful son of the church, and as such I must respect the power and might and dignity of our Lord."

"That's an interesting philosophy, compadre," the Bone Man said. "I can see that your mind is strong, and that your brain functions perfectly in the direction of that human virtue which is strongly concerned with safeguarding one's property."

"I've never heard of that,

compadre." Macario's face was a blank.

"The only thing that baffles me now is your attitude toward me, compadre." The Bone Man was cleaning up a wing bone with his strong teeth as he spoke. "What I would like to hear is why did you give me half of your turkey when just a few minutes before you had denied as little as a leg or a wing to the devil and also to our Lord?"

"Ah," Macario exclaimed, throwing up both his hands to emphasize the exclamation. And "Ah," he said once more, "that's different; with you that's very different. For one thing, I'm a human being and I know what hunger is and how it feels to be starved. Besides, I've never heard as yet that you have any power to create or to perform miracles. You're just an obedient servant of the Supreme Judge. Nor have you any money to buy food with, for you have no pockets in your clothes. It's true I had the heart to deny my wife a bite of that turkey which she prepared for me with all her love put in for extra spices. I had the heart because, lean as she is, she doesn't look one-tenth as hungry as you do. I was able to put up enough will power to decline my poor children, always crying for food, a few morsels of my roast turkey. Yet, no matter how hungry my

children are, none of them looks one-hundredth as hungry as you do."

"Now, compadre, come, come. Don't try to sell me that," the dinner guest clattered, making visible efforts to smile. "Out with the truth. I can bear it. You said, 'For one thing' when you started explaining. Now tell me the other thing as well. I can stand the truth."

"All right then," Macario said quietly. "You see, compadre, I realized the very moment I saw you standing before me that I would not have any time left to eat as little as one leg, let alone the whole turkey. So I said to myself, as long as he eats too, I will be able to eat, and so I made it fifty-fifty."

The visitor turned his deep eye-holes in great surprise upon his host. Then he started grinning and soon he broke into a thundering laughter which sounded like heavy clubs drumming a huge empty barrel. "By the great Jupiter, compadre, you are a shrewd one, indeed you are. I cannot remember having met such a clever and quick-witted man for a long time. You deserve, you truly and verily deserve to be selected by me for a little service, a little service which will make my lonely existence now and then less boresome to me. You see, compadre, I like playing jokes on men now and then as my mood

will have it. Jokes that don't hurt anybody, and they amuse me and help me to feel that my job is, somehow, less unproductive, if you know what I mean."

"I guess I know how you mean it."

"Do you know what I am going to do so as to pay honestly for the dinner you offered me?"

"What, compadre? Oh, please, sir, your lordship, don't make me your assistant. Not that, please, anything else you wish, but not your helper."

"I don't need an assistant and I have never had one. No, I have another idea. I shall make you a doctor, a great doctor who will outwit all those haughty learned physicians and super-specialists who are always playing their nasty little tricks with the idea that they can put one over on me. That's what I am going to do: make you a doctor. And I promise you that your roast turkey shall be paid for a million-fold."

Speaking thus he rose, walked some twenty feet away, looked searchingly at the ground, at that time of the year dry and sandy, and called back: "Compadre, bring your *guaje* bottle over here. Yes, I mean that bottle of yours which looks as though it were of some strange variety of pumpkin. But first pour out all the water which is still in it."

Macario obeyed and came close to where his guest waited for him.

The visitor spat seven times upon the dry ground, remained quiet for a few minutes and then, all of a sudden, crystal-clear water sputtered out of that sandy soil.

"Hand me your bottle," the Bone Man said.

He knelt down by the little pool just forming and with one hand spooned up the water and poured it into Macario's *guaje* bottle. This procedure took quite some time, for the mouth of the bottle was extremely small.

When the bottle, which held about a quart, was full, the Bone Man, still kneeling by the pool, tapped the soil with one hand and the water immediately disappeared from view.

"Let's go back to our eating place, compadre," the visitor suggested.

Once more they sat down together. The Bone Man handed Macario the bottle. "This liquid in your bottle will make you the greatest doctor known in the present century. One drop of this fluid will cure any sickness, and I include any sickness known as a fatal and as an incurable one. But mind, and mind well, compadre, once the last drop is gone, there will be no more of that medicine and your curing power will exist no longer."

Macario was not at all excited over that great gift. "I don't know if I should take that present

from you. You see, compadre, I've been happy in my own way. True it is that I've been hungry always all through my life; always I've been tired, always been struggling with no end in view. Yet that's the way with people in my position. We accept that life because it was given us. It's for that reason that we feel happy in our way — because we always try making the best of something very bad and apparently hopeless. This turkey we ate together today has been the very peak of my life's ambition. I never wanted to go up higher in all my desires than to have one roast turkey with all the trimmings and fillings all for myself, and be allowed to eat it in peace and all alone with no hungry children's eyes counting every little bite going into my hungry stomach."

"That's just why. You didn't have your roast turkey all by yourself. You gave me half of it, and so your life's ambition is still not accomplished."

"You know, compadre, that I had no choice in that matter."

"I suppose you are right. Anyway, whatever the reason, your one and only desire in this world has not yet been satisfied. You must admit that. So, if you wish to buy another turkey without waiting for it another fifteen or twenty years, you will have to cure somebody to get the money with which to buy that turkey."

"I never thought of that," Macario muttered, as if speaking to himself. "I surely must have a whole roast turkey all for myself, come what may, or I'll die a most unhappy man."

"Of course, compadre, there are a few more things which you ought to know before we part for a while."

"Yes, what is it, tell me."

"Wherever you are called to a patient you will see me there also."

On hearing that, unprepared as he was for the catch, Macario got the shivers.

"Don't get frightened, compadre, no one else will see me; and mind you well what I am going to tell you now. If you see me standing at your patient's feet, just put one drop of your medicine into a cup or glass of fresh water, make him drink it, and before two days are gone he will be all right again, sane and sound for a good long time to come."

"I understand," Macario nodded pensively.

"But if," the Bone Man continued, "you see me standing at your patient's head, do not use the medicine; for if you see me standing thus, he will die no matter what you do and regardless of how many brilliant doctors attempt to snatch him away from me. In that case do not use the medicine I gave you because it

will be wasted and be only a loss to you. You must realize, compadre, that this divine power to select the one that has to leave the world — while some other, be he old or a scoundrel, shall continue on earth — this power of selection I cannot transfer to a human being who may err or become corrupt. That's why the final decision in each particular case must remain with me, and you must obey and respect my selection."

"I won't forget that, sir," Macario answered.

"You had better not. Well, now, compadre, let us say good-bye. The dinner was excellent, exquisite I should call it, if you understand that word. I must admit, and I admit it with great pleasure, that I have had an enjoyable time in your company. By all means, that dinner you gave me will restore my strength for another hundred years. Would that when my need for another meal is as urgent as it was today, I may find as generous a host as you have been. Much obliged, compadre. A thousand thanks. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, compadre."

Macario spoke as though he were waking from a heavy dream, yet immediately he realized that he had not been dreaming.

Before him on the ground were the well-picked bones of that half turkey which his guest had eaten

with so much delight.

Mechanically he cleaned up all the morsels which had dropped and stuffed them into his mouth, so that nothing should be wasted, all the while trying to find the meaning of the several adventures that were crammed into the limited space of his mind.

The thing most difficult for him to understand was how it had been possible for him to talk so much and talk what he believed was very clever as, in his opinion, only a learned man could do. But then he knew that when in the woods he always had very clever thoughts; only at home in the presence of his wife and children he had no thoughts whatever and his mouth was as if glued and it cost him much labor to get out of it one full sentence.

Soon he got tired and presently lay down under a tree to sleep the rest of the day, as he had promised himself that he would after his holiday dinner.

No fuel did he bring back that night.

His wife had not a red cent in the house with which to buy food the next day.

Yet she did not reproach him for having been lazy, as in fact she never criticized anything he did or did not. The truth was that she felt immensely happy to be alive. For, during the day, and about noon, when she was busy in the yard washing the children's

rags, a strange golden ray which, so it appeared, came not from the sun, but from an unknown source, had touched her whole body, while at the same time she had heard inside her heart a sweet music as if played by a huge organ from far, far above the earth.

From that moment on and all the whole day she had felt as though lifted from the ground, and her mind had been at peace as she could not remember having ever felt before. Nothing of this phenomenon did she tell her husband. She kept it to herself like a very sacred property all her own.

When she served supper there was still some reflection of that golden ray visible on her face.

Even her husband noted it on giving her a casual glance. But he said nothing, for he was still heavily occupied with his own fortunes of the day.

Before he went to sleep that night, later than usual, for he had slept well during the day out in the woods, his wife asked him timidly: "How was the turkey, dear husband?"

"What do you think was the matter with it since you ask me how it was? What do you mean? Was there something wrong with it? It was quite all right as far as I could judge, with the little experience I've had eating roast turkey."

With not a single word did he mention his visitors.

When he had turned about to go to his cot, she looked at him, watching his face sidewise and thoughtfully. Something was new in him, something had come over him. Never before had he talked that much to her at one breath.

Next day was a hungry one for the whole family. Their breakfast, including that of Macario's, was always lean. Yet this morning his wife had to make it smaller still, for it had to be stretched into two more meals.

Soon Marcario was through with the few mouthfuls of black beans seasoned with green chile and a pot of *atole* for a drink. Complain he did not because he realized that the blame was on him.

He took up his machete, his ax and his ropes and stepped out into the misty morning.

Considering the way he went about his usual hard task of chopping wood, he might as well have forgotten about the precious medicine and all that went with it.

Only a few paces had he gone when his wife called after him: "Husband, your water bottle."

This reminded him like a flash that the whole adventure of the day before might after all not have been a dream but reality. Last night, on thinking of the happenings, he had reached the

conclusion that it might have been but sort of an imagination caused by a stomach not used to being filled up by a half roast turkey.

"It's still full of water," the wife said, bringing the *guaje* bottle out and shaking it. "Shall I pour the old water out and put in fresh water?" she asked, while playing with the cork cut from a corn cob.

"Yes, I know, woman, it's still full," Macario answered, not a bit afraid that his wife might be too hasty and spill the miraculous liquid away. "Yesterday I drank from the little brook. Just give me the bottle full as it is. The water is good; I got it out there in the woods."

On his way to work and some fair distance away from his hut which was the last at this side of the village, he hid the bottle in the dense brushes, partly covering it with soil.

That night he brought home one of the biggest loads of heavy fine dry fuel such as he had not delivered for many months. It was sold at three bits, a price unheard of, and was sold that same night on the first call the older boy made. So the family felt like having come into a million.

Next day Macario went about his job as usual.

On the night before he had told his wife casually that he had broken his *guaje* bottle because a heavy trunk had dropped upon it, and she had to give him an-

other one of the several they kept in the house. These bottles cost them nothing, for the older boys discovered them growing wild in the bush somewhere.

Again he brought home that night a good load of chopped wood, yet this time he found his family in a pitiful distress.

His wife, her face swollen, her eyes red from long crying, rushed at him the moment he came in. "Reginito is dying, my poor little baby, Regino, will be gone in a half hour," and she broke into a heart-breaking lamentation, tears streaming down her face.

Helpless and stupidly he looked at her the way he always looked if something in the house happened which was out of the gloomy routine by which this home of his was run. When his wife stepped aside, he noted that there were present several neighbors, all women, partly standing, partly squatting close to the cot on which the child had been bedded.

His was the poorest family in the village, yet they were among the best liked for their questions, their honesty, their modesty, and because of that unearned virtue that the poor are always liked better than the rich anywhere and by everybody.

Those women, in their neighborly zeal to help the so very poor Macario, and on hearing of the

child's being sick, had brought with them all sorts of herbs, roots, bits of bark as used by the villagers in cases of sickness. The village had no doctor and no drug store and for that reason, perhaps, it also had no undertaker.

Every woman had brought a different kind of medicinal herb or remedy. And every one of the women made a different suggestion as to what should be done to save the child. For hours that little creature had been tortured with scores of different treatments and had been given teas brewed from roots, herbs and ground snake-bones mixed with a powder obtained from charred toads.

"He ate too much," one woman said, seeing his father coming to the child's bed.

"His bowels are all twisted up, there's no help," another one corrected the first one.

"Wrong, compadre, it's an infection of the stomach, he is done for."

The one next to her observed: "We've done everything possible, he can't live another hour. One of our kids died the same way. I know it. I can see by his little shrunken face that he is winged already for his flight to heaven, little angel, poor little angel." She broke into a loud sob.

Not in the least minding the women's chatter, Macario looked at his little son whom he seemed

to love best of all as he was the youngest of the bunch. He liked his innocent smile and felt happy in his way when the little tyke would now and then sit on his lap for a few minutes and play with his tiny fingers upon the man's face. Often it occurred to Macario that the only reason for being alive rested with the fact that there always would be a little baby around the house, smiling at him innocently and beating his nose and cheeks with his little fists.

The child was dying; no doubt of that. The mirror held by a woman before the baby's mouth showed no mark of breath. His heartbeat could practically no longer be noted by one or the other woman who would press her ear upon the child's chest.

The father stood there and gazed at his baby without knowing whether he ought to step closer, still and touch the little face or remain where he was, or say something to his wife or to one of the other women, or talk to the children who were timidly crowded into one corner of the room where they all sat as if they were guilty of the baby's misfortune. They had had no dinner and they felt sure there would be no supper tonight as their mother was in a horrible state of mind.

Macario turned slowly about, walked to the door and went out

into the darkness of the night.

Not knowing what to do or where to go since his home was all in a turmoil, tired as he was from his very hard day's labor, and feeling as though he were to sink down on his knees, he took, as if automatically, the path which led to the woods — his realm where he was sure to find the quiet of which he was so badly in need.

Arriving at the spot where, in the early morning, he had buried the *guaje* bottle, he stopped, searched for the exact place, took out the bottle, and quickly as he had not moved in many years, ran back to his hut.

"Give me a cup filled with fresh clean water," he ordered in a loud and determined voice on opening the door.

His wife hurried as if given new hope, and in a few seconds she brought an earthen cup of water.

"Now, folks, you leave the room. Get out of here, all of you, and leave me alone with that son of mine. I'll see what I can do about it."

"No use, Macario, can't you see he has only a few minutes left? You'd better kneel down and say the prayers with us while he is breathing his last, so that his soul may be saved," one of the women told him.

"You heard what I said and you do as you've been advised," he said, sharply cutting off any further protest.

Never before had his wife heard him speak in such a harsh, commanding manner. Almost afraid of him, she urged the women out of the hut.

They were all gone.

Macario closed the door behind them, turned to the cot, and when he looked up he saw his bony dinner guest standing opposite him, the cot with the child in it between the two.

The visitor stared at him out of his deep dark holes he had for eyes, hesitated, shrugged, and slowly, as though still weighing his decision, moved toward the baby's feet, remaining there for the next few seconds while the father poured a generous dose of the medicine into the cup filled with water.

Seeing his partner shaking his head in disapproval, Macario remembered that only one drop would have sufficed for the cure. Yet, it was too late now, and the liquid could not be returned to the bottle, for it was already mixed with fresh water.

Macario lifted the baby's head, forced the little mouth open and let the drink trickle into it, taking care that nothing was spilled. To his great joy he noted that the baby, once his mouth had been moistened, started to swallow voluntarily. Soon he had taken the whole to its last drop.

Hardly could the medicine have

reached his stomach when the child began to breathe freely. Color returned slowly but visibly to his pale face, and he moved his head in search of better comfort.

The father waited a few minutes longer, and seeing that the baby was recovering miraculously fast, he called in his wife.

Only one look did the mother give her baby when she fell to her knees by the cot and cried out loud: "Glory be to God and the Holy Virgin. I thank you, my Lord in Heaven; my little baby will live."

Hearing the mother's excited outburst, all the women who had been waiting outdoors rushed in, and seeing what had happened while the father had been alone with his son they crossed themselves, gasped and stared at Macario as if noting his existence for the first time and as though he were a stranger in the house.

One hour later the whole village was assembled at Macario's to see with their own eyes whether it was true what the women, running about the village, were telling the people.

The baby, his cheeks rosy, his little fists pressed close to his chin, was profoundly asleep, and anybody could see that all danger was past.

Next morning Macario got up at his usual time, sat down at the table for his breakfast, looked for

his machete, ax and ropes and, taciturn as always, left home to go out to the woods and there chop fuel for the villagers. The bottle with the medicine he took along with him and buried at the same spot from which he had taken it the night before.

So he went about his job for the next six weeks when one night, on returning home, he found Ramiro waiting for him. Ramiro asked him, please, to come around to his place and see what he might do about his wife who had been sick for several days and was now sinking fast.

Ramiro, the principal storekeeper and merchant of the whole community and the richest man in the municipality, explained that he had heard of Macario's curing powers and that he would like him to try his talents on his young wife.

"Fetch me a little bottle, a very little glass bottle from your store. I'll wait for you here and think over what I perhaps could do for your wife."

Ramiro brought the bottle, a medicine bottle, holding one ounce of fluid.

"What are you going to do with the bottle, Macario?"

"Leave that to me, Ramiro. You just go home and wait for me. I have to see your wife first before I can say whether or not I can save her. She'll hold on all right until I come, don't worry over

that. In the meantime, I will go out in the fields and look for some herbs which I know to be good medicine."

He went into the night, searched for his bottle, filled the little crystal flask half full with the precious liquid, buried the bottle again and walked to Ramiro's who lived in one of the three one-story brick houses the village boasted.

He found the woman rapidly nearing her end, and she was as close to it as had been his little son.

Ramiro looked at Macario's eyes. Macario shrugged for an answer. After a while he said: "You'd better go out now and leave me alone with your wife."

Ramiro obeyed. Yet, extremely jealous of his young and very pretty wife, pretty even now when near her death, he peeped through a hole in the door to watch Macario's doings.

Macario, already close to the door, turned abruptly with the intention to ask for a glass of fresh water.

Ramiro, his eyes still pressed to the door, was not quick enough in getting away and so, when Macario, by a resolute pull, opened the door, Ramiro fell full length into the room.

"Not very decent of you, Ramiro," Macario said, comprehending what the jealous man had been about. "Just for that I

should decline giving your young wife back to you. You don't deserve her, you know that, don't you?"

He stopped in great surprise.

He could not understand himself what had come over him this very minute. Why he, the poorest and humblest man in the village, a common wood-chopper, had dared to speak to the haughtiest and richest man, the millionaire of the village, in a manner which the judge at the county court would hardly have risked. But seeing Ramiro, that mighty and powerful man, standing before him humiliated and with the gesture of a beggar trembling with fear that Macario might refuse to heal his wife, Macario had suddenly become aware that he had become a great power himself, a great doctor of whom that arrogant Ramiro expected miracles.

Very humble now, Ramiro begged Macario's forgiveness for having spied upon him, and in the most pitiful way he pleaded with him to save his wife, who was about to give him his first child in less than four months.

"How much would you ask for giving her back to me sane and healthy like she was before?"

"I do not sell my medicine for prices, I do not set prices. It's you, Ramiro, who have to make the price. Only you can know what your wife is worth to you. So name the price yourself."

"Would ten doubloons do, my dear good Macario?"

"That's what your wife is worth to you? Only ten doubloons?"

"Don't take it that way, dear Macario. Of course she means far more to me than all my money. Money I can make again any day that God will allow me to live. But once my wife is gone where would I find another one like her? Not in this world. I'll make it one hundred doubloons then, only, please, save her."

Macario knew Ramiro well, only too well did he know him. Both had been born and raised in that village. Ramiro was the son of the richest merchant of the village as he himself was the richest man today — whereas Macario was the son of the poorest day laborer in the community as he himself was now the poorest wood-chopper with the biggest family of the whole village to support. And as he knew Ramiro so very well, nobody would have to tell him that, once the merchant's wife was cured, her husband would try to chisel down on the one hundred doubloons as much as he possibly could and if Macario did not yield there would be a long and nasty fight between the two men for many years to come.

Realizing all that, Macario now said: "I'll take the ten doubloons which you offered me first."

"Oh, thank you, Macario, I thank you, indeed I do, and not

for cutting down on the price but that you're willing to cure her. I shall never forget what you have done for us, I'm sure, I shall never forget it. I only hope that the unborn will be safe also."

"It surely will," Macario said, assured of his success since he had seen his bony dinner companion standing where he liked best to see him.

"Now, bring me a glass of fresh water," he told Ramiro.

The water was brought and Macario counseled the merchant: "Don't you dare peep in again for, mind you, if you do I might fail and it will be all your fault. So remember, no spying, no peeping. Now, leave me alone with the patient."

This time Macario was extremely careful in not spending more than exactly one drop of the valuable liquid. As hard as he could he even tried to cut that one drop into two halves. By his talk with Ramiro he had suddenly understood how much his medicine was really worth if such a proud and rich man as Ramiro would humble himself before the wood-chopper for no other reason than that his wife might be cured by the poor woodman's medicine.

In realizing that, he visioned what his future might be like if he would forget about his wood-chopping and stick by his medicine exclusively. Naturally enough,

the quintessence of that future was an unlimited supply of roast turkeys any time he wanted them.

His one-time dinner guest, seeing him cutting the one drop in half, nodded approvingly when Macario looked at him for advice.

Two days after Ramiro's wife had recovered fully, she told her husband that she was positively sure that the baby had not been hurt in the least by her sickness, as she could feel him all right.

Ramiro in his great joy handed Macario the ten gold pieces, not only without prattling over that high price but with a hundred thanks thrown in. He invited the whole Macario family to his store where everyone, husband, wife, and all the children, was allowed to take as much home as everybody could carry in his arms. Then he threw a splendid dinner to which the Macarios were invited as his guests of honor.

Macario built a real house now for his family, bought some pieces of good land and began cultivating them, because Ramiro had loaned him one hundred doubloons at very low interest.

Ramiro had done so not solely out of gratitude. He was too shrewd a businessman to loan out money without thinking of fat gains. He realized that Macario had a great future ahead of him, and that it would be a very sound investment to keep Macario in the village and make people come

here to see him, rather than have him take up his residence in a city. The more visitors the village would have on account of Macario's fame, the more important would grow Ramiro's business. In expectation of this development in the village's future, Ramiro added to his various lines in business that of banking.

He gambled fast on Macario and he won. He won far beyond his most fantastic dreams.

It was he who did all the advertising and all the propaganda to draw attention to Macario's great gift. Hardly had he sent out a few letters to business friends in the city, than sick people flocked to the village in the hope of being cured of their maladies, many having been declared incurable by learned physicians.

Soon Macario could build himself a mansion. He bought up all the land around and converted it into gardens and parks. His children were sent to schools and universities as far as Paris and Salamanca.

As his one-time dinner guest had promised him, so it came to pass. Macario's half turkey was paid for a million-fold.

Regardless of his riches and his fame, Macario remained honest and uncorrupted. Anyone who wanted to be cured was asked how much his health was worth to him. And as Macario had done

in his first case, so he did ever after in all other cases — that is, the patients or their relatives would decide the price.

A poor man or woman who had no more to offer than one silver peso or a pig or a rooster, he would heal just as well as the rich who, in many instances, had made prices as high as twenty thousand doubloons. He cured men and women of the highest nobility, many of whom had crossed the ocean and had come from Spain, Italy, Portugal, France and other countries and who had come for no other reason than to see him and consult him.

Whoever came to consult him would be told frankly that he could do nothing to save him, if Macario saw the Bone Man stand at the patient's head. Nothing did he charge for that consultation.

People, whoever they were, accepted his final verdict without discussion. No longer would they try arguing with him, once he had told them that they were beyond help.

More or less half the people consulting him were saved; the other half were claimed by his partner. It happened often for weeks at a time that he would not meet one patient whom he could cure, because his dinner guest would decide differently. Such weeks the people in the land

called "his low-power periods".

While at the beginning of his practice he was able to cut a drop of his precious medicine into two, he soon learned to cut each drop into eight. He acquired all devices known then by which a drop might be divided up into practically an infinite number of mites. Yet, no matter how much he cut and divided, regardless of how cleverly he administered each dose to make it as small as possible and yet retain its effectiveness, the medicine had frightfully fast become scarcer and scarcer.

He had drained the *guaje* bottle during the first month of his practice, once he had observed the true value of the liquid. He knew that a *guaje* bottle will not only soak into its walls a certain amount of any fluid it may hold, but worse, the liquid will evaporate, and rather fast, through the bottle's walls. It is for that reason that water kept in a *guaje* bottle of the kind natives use will stay always cool even should the day be very hot.

So he had taken out the medicine and poured it into bottles of dark glass, tightly sealed.

The last little bottle had been opened months ago, and one day Macario noted to his horror that there were only about two drops left. Consequently, he decided to make it known that he would retire from practice and cure nobody any longer.



THE THIRD GUEST

By now he had become really old and felt that he had a right to spend the last few years of his life in peace.

These last two drops he meant to keep for members of his family exclusively, and especially for his beloved wife, whom he had had to cure already two times during the last ten years and whom he was afraid he might lose — a loss which would be very difficult for him to bear.

Just about that same time it so happened that the eight-year-old son of the viceroy, don Juan Marquez de Casafuerte, the highest personage of New Spain, fell sick.

The best doctors were called for help. None could do anything for the boy. The doctors admitted frankly that this boy had been stricken by a sickness not known to medical science.

The viceroy had heard of Macario. Who hadn't? But he owed it to his dignity, education and high social and political position to consider Macario a quack, the more so since he was called thus by every doctor who had a title from an accredited university.

The child's mother, however, less given to dignity when the life of her son was at stake, made life for the viceroy so miserable that finally he saw no other way out of his dilemma than to send for Macario.

Macario disliked traveling and rarely left his village, and then only for short trips. Yet, an order given by the viceroy himself had to be obeyed under penalty of death.

So he had to go.

Brought before the viceroy he was told what was expected of him.

The viceroy, still not believing in the so-called miracles which Macario was said to have performed, spoke to him in the same way as he would have spoken to any native wood-chopper.

"It was not I who called you, understand that, my good man. Her Highness, la Marquesa, insisted on bringing you here to save our son whom, so it appears, no learned medico can cure. I make it quite clear to you that in case you actually save our child, one-fourth of the fortune which I hold here in New Spain shall be yours. Besides, you may ask anything you see here in my palace, whatever it is that catches your fancy and whatever its value. That will be yours also. Apart from all that, I personally will hand you a license which will entitle you to practice medicine anywhere in New-Spain with the same rights and privileges as any learned medico, and you shall be given a special letter with my seal on it which will give you immunity for life against any arrest

by police or soldiers, and which will safeguard you against any unjustified court action. I believe, my good man, that this is a royal payment for your service."

Macario nodded, yet said nothing.

The viceroy went on: "What I promised you in the case that you save our son follows exactly the suggestions made by Her Highness, la Marquesa, my wife, and what I promise I always keep."

The Marquesa stopped for a few seconds, as if waiting for Macario to say something.

Macario, however, said nothing and made no gesture.

"But now, listen to my own suggestions," the viceroy continued. "If you should fail to save our son, I shall hand you over to the High Court of the Inquisition, charging you with the practice of witchcraft under pact with the devil, and you shall be burned alive at the stake on the Alameda and in public."

Again the viceroy stopped to see what expression his threat had made upon Macario.

Macario paled, but still said nothing.

"Have you understood in full what I have said?"

"I have, Your Highness," Macario said briefly, trembling slightly as he attempted to make an awkward bow.

"Now, I personally shall show

you to our sick child. Follow me."

They entered the boy's room where two nurses were in attendance, merely watching the child's slow decline, unable to do anything save keep him comfortable. His mother was not present. She had, by the doctor's order, been confined to her room as she was close to a complete breakdown.

The boy was resting in a bed becoming his age, a light bed made of fine wood, though not looking rich.

Macario went close and looked around for a sign of his dinner guest.

Slightly, so as not to make his gesture seem suspicious, he touched a special little pocket in his trousers to be sure he had the crystal flask with the last two drops of medicine about him.

Now he said: "Will you, Your Highness, I pray, leave this room for one hour, and will Your Highness, please, give orders that everybody else will leave, too, so that I may remain alone with the young patient?"

The Marques hesitated, evidently being afraid that this ignorant peasant might do his son some harm if left alone with him.

Macario, noting that expression of uneasiness shown by the viceroy, recalled, at this very instant, his first cure of a patient not of his own family, that is, Ramiro's young wife in his native village. Ramiro had hesitated in a similar

way when told to leave the room and let Macario alone with the young woman in bed.

These two cases of hesitation had been the only ones he had ever experienced during his long practice. And Macario wondered whether that might carry some significance in his destiny, that perhaps today, with only two little drops of his medicine left, he beheld the same expression of hesitancy in a person who wanted a great service done but did not trust the man who was the only one who could render that service.

He was now alone with the boy.

And suddenly there appeared his partner, taking his stand at the boy's head.

The two, Macario and the Bone Man, had never again spoken one to the other since they had had a turkey dinner together. Whenever they would meet in a sick room, they would only look at each other, yet not speak.

Macario had never asked of his partner any special favor. Never had he claimed from him any individual whom the Bone Man had decided to take. He even had let go two grandchildren of his without arguing his dinner guest's first claim.

This time everything was different. He would be burned alive at the stake as a witch doctor convicted of having signed a pact with the devil. His children, now

all of them in highly honored positions, would fall into disgrace, because their father had been condemned by the Holy Inquisition to suffer the most infamous death a Christian could die. All his fortune and all his landed property, which he had meant to leave to his children and grandchildren, would be confiscated and given to the church. He did not mind losing his fortune. It had never meant much to him personally anyhow.

What he did mind above all was the happiness of his children. But more still than of his children he was, in this most terrible moment of his whole life, thinking of his beloved wife.

She would go crazy with grief on learning what had happened to him in that strange, vast city so far away from home, and she would be unable to come to his aid or even comfort him during his last hours on earth. It was for her sake, not for his own, that this time he decided to fight it out with the Bone Man.

"Give me that child," he pleaded, "give him to me for old friendship's sake. I've never asked any favor of you, not one little favor for the half turkey you ate with so much gusto when you needed a good dinner more than anything else. You gave me voluntarily what I had not asked you for. Give me that boy, and I'll

pour out the last drop of your medicine and break the bottle, so that not even one little wet spot be left inside to be used for another cure. Please, oh please, give me that boy. It isn't for my sake that I ask you this. It is for my dear, faithful, loyal and beloved wife's. You know, or at least you can imagine, what it means for a Christian family if one of its members is burned at the stake alive and in public. Please, let me have the boy. I shall not take or touch the riches offered me for curing him. You found me a poor man and I was happy then in my own way. I don't mind being poor again, as I used to be. I'm willing to chop wood again for the villagers as I did when we met for the first time. Only, please, I pray, give me that boy."

The Bone Man looked at him with his deep black holes for a long time. If he had a heart he was questioning it at this moment. Now he looked down before him as though he were deliberating this case from every angle to find the most perfect solution. Obviously, his orders were to take the child away. He could not express his thoughts by his eyes or his face, yet his gestures clearly showed his willingness to help a friend in dire need, for by his attitude he tried to explain that, in this particular case, he was powerless to discover a

way out which would meet half-way the problems of both.

Again, for a very long while, his look rested upon the boy as though judging more carefully still Macario's plea against the child's fate, destined before he was born.

And again he looked at Macario as if pitying him and as though he felt deeply distressed.

Presently he shook his head slowly as might someone in great sadness who finds himself utterly helpless in a desperate situation.

He opened his fleshless jaws, and with a voice that sounded like heavy wooden sticks clubbed on a board he said: "I am sorry, compadre, very sorry, but in this case I can do nothing to help you out of that uncomfortable pool you have been put into. All I can say is that in few of my cases I have felt sadder than in this, believe me, compadre. I can't help it, I must take that boy."

"No, you mustn't. You mustn't. Do you hear me, you must not take that child." Macario yelled in great despair. "You must not, you cannot take him. I won't let you."

The Bone Man shook his head again, but said nothing.

And now, with a resolute jerk, Macario grabbed the boy's bed and quickly turned it round so that his partner found himself standing at the boy's feet.

Immediately the Bone Man

vanished from sight for two short seconds and, like a flash, appeared at the boy's head once more.

Quickly Macario again turned the bed so that the Bone Man would stand at the feet, and again the Bone Man disappeared from the child's feet and stood at the boy's head.

Macario, wild with madness, turned the bed round and round as if it were a wheel. Yet, whenever he stopped for taking a breath, he would see his dinner guest standing at the boy's head, and Macario would start his crazy game again by which he thought that he might cheat the claimant out of his chosen subject.

It was too much for the old man, turning that bed round and round without gaining more than two seconds from eternity.

If, so he thought, he could stretch these two seconds into twenty hours only and leave the capital under the viceroy's impression that the boy was cured, he might escape that horrible punishment which he had been condemned to suffer.

He was so tired now that he could not turn the bed once more. Touching, as if by a certain impulse, the little pocket in his trousers, he discovered that the crystal flask with the last two drops of the precious medicine in

it had been smashed during his wild play with the bed.

Fully realizing that loss and its significance, he felt as if he had been drained of the last spark of his life's energy and that his whole life had become empty.

Vaguely, he gazed about the room as though coming out of a trance in which he had been for an uncountable number of years, centuries perhaps. He recognized that his fate was upon him and that it would be useless to fight against it any longer.

So, letting his eyes wander around the whole room, they came to touch the boy's face and he found the boy gone.

As if felled he dropped to the floor, entirely exhausted.

Lying there motionless, he heard his one-time dinner guest speaking to him, softly this time.

He heard him say: "Once more, compadre, I thank you for the half turkey which you so generously gave me and which restored my strength, then waning, for another hundred years of tedious labor. It certainly was exquisite, if you understand that word. But now, coming to where we are at this hour, see, compadre, I have no power to save you from being burned at the stake on the Alameda and in public, because that is beyond my jurisdiction. Yet, I can save you from being burned alive and from being publicly defamed. And this, compadre, I

shall do for old friendship's sake, and because you have always played fair and never tried to cheat me. A royal payment you received and you honored it like a royal payment. You have lived a very great man. Good-bye, compadre."

Macario opened his eyes and, on looking backwards, he saw his one-time dinner guest standing at his head.

Macario's wife, greatly worried over her husband's not coming home, called all the men of the village next morning to help her find Macario, who might be hurt somewhere deep in the woods and unable to return without help.

After several hours of searching, he was discovered at the densest part of the woods in a section far away from the village, so far that nobody would ever dare go there alone.

He was sitting on the ground, his body comfortably snuggled in the hollow of a huge tree trunk, dead, a big beautiful smile all over his face.

Before him on the ground banana leaves were spread out, serving as a table-cloth, and on them were lying the carefully cleaned bones of a half turkey.

Directly opposite, separated by a space of about three feet, there also were, in a like manner, banana leaves spread on which the

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The Third Guest

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very clean bones of the other half turkey were piled up in a meticulous fashion, which could only have been done by somebody who had enjoyed his meal with the profoundest of delight and the very greatest of satisfaction.

Looking at these two piles of cleaned turkey bones, Macario's wife, thick tears welling out of her sad eyes, said: "I wonder — I just wonder who he had for dinner. Whoever he was, he must have been a fine and noble and very gentle person, or Macario wouldn't have died so very, very happy."