

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

Gilbert Parker

Table of Contents

<u>PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3</u>	1
<u>Gilbert Parker</u>	1
<u>SHON MCGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE</u>	1
<u>II</u>	8
<u>PERE CHAMPAGNE</u>	13
<u>THE SCARLET HUNTER</u>	17
<u>THE STONE</u>	26

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

Gilbert Parker

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- SHON McGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE
- II
- PERE CHAMPAGNE
- THE SCARLET HUNTER
- THE STONE

SHON McGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE

"Oh, it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise,
With the knees pressing hard to the saddle, my men;
With the sparks from the hoofs giving light to the eyes,
And our hearts beating hard as we rode to the glen!

"And it's back with the ring of the chain and the spur,
And it's back with the sun on the hill and the moor,
And it's back is the thought sets my pulses astir!
But I'll never go back to Farcalladen more."

Shon McGann was lying on a pile of buffalo robes in a mountain hut, an Australian would call it a humpey, singing thus to himself with his pipe between his teeth. In the room, besides Shon, were Pretty Pierre, Jo Gordineer, the Hon. Just Trafford, called by his companions simply "The Honourable," and Prince Levis, the owner of the establishment. Not that Monsieur Levis, the French Canadian, was really a Prince. The name was given to him with a humorous cynicism peculiar to the Rockies. We have little to do with Prince Levis here; but since he may appear elsewhere, this explanation is made.

Jo Gordineer had been telling The Honourable about the ghost of Guidon Mountain, and Pretty Pierre was collaborating with their host in the preparation of what, in the presence of the Law that is of the North– West Mounted Police was called ginger–tea, in consideration of the prohibition statute.

Shon McGann had been left to himself an unusual thing; for everyone had a shot at Shon when opportunity occurred; and never a bull's–eye could they make on him. His wit was like the shield of a certain personage of mythology.

He had wandered on from verse to verse of the song with one eye on the collaborators and an ear open to The Honourable's polite exclamations of wonder. Jo had, however, come to the end of his weird tale for weird it certainly was, told at the foot of Guidon Mountain itself, and in a region of vast solitudes the pair of chemists were approaching "the supreme union of unctuous elements," as The Honourable put it, and in the silence that fell for a moment there crept the words of the singer:

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

"And it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise,
And it's swift as an arrow and straight as a spear "

Jo Gordineer interrupted. "Say, Shon, when'll you be through that tobogan ride of yours? Aint there any end to it?"

But Shon was looking with both eyes now at the collaborators, and he sang softly on:

"And it's keen as the frost when the summer-time dies,
That we rode to the glen and with never a fear."

Then he added: "The end's cut off, Joey, me boy; but what's a tobogan ride, annyway?"

"Listen to that, Pierre. I'll be eternally shivered if he knows what a tobogan ride is!"

"Hot shivers it'll be for you, Joey, me boy, and no quinine over the bar aither," said Shon.

"Tell him what a tobogan ride is, Pierre."

And Pretty Pierre said: "Eh, well, I will tell you. It is like-no, you have the word precise, Joseph. Eh? What?"

Pierre then added something in French. Shon did not understand it, but he saw The Honourable smile, so with a gentle kind of contempt he went on singing:

"And it's hey for the hedge, and it's hey for the wall!
And it's over the stream with an echoing cry;
And there's three fled for ever from old Donegal,
And there's two that have shown how bold Irishmen die."

The Honourable then said, "What is that all about, Shon? I never heard the song before."

"No more you did. And I wish I could see the lad that wrote that song, livin' or dead. If one of ye's will tell me about your tobogan rides, I'll unfold about Farcalladen Rise."

Prince Levis passed the liquor. Pretty Pierre, seated on a candle-box, with a glass in his delicate fingers, said: "Eh, well, the Honourable has much language. He can speak, precise this would be better with a little lemon, just a little, the Honourable, he, perhaps, will tell. Eh?"

Pretty Pierre was showing his white teeth. At this stage in his career, he did not love the Honourable. The Honourable understood that, but he made clear to Shon's mind what toboganing is.

And Shon, on his part, with fresh and hearty voice, touched here and there by a plaintive modulation, told about that ride on Farcalladen Rise; a tale of broken laws, and fight and fighting, and death and exile; and never a word of hatred in it all.

"And the writer of the song, who was he?" asked the Honourable.

"A gentleman after God's own heart. Heaven rest his soul, if he's dead, which I'm thinkin' is so, and give him the luck of the world if he's livin', say I. But it's little I know what's come to him. In the heart of Australia I saw him last; and mates we were together after gold. And little gold did we get but what was in the heart of him. And we parted one day, I carryin' the song that he wrote for me of Farcalladen Rise, and the memory of him; and him

givin' me the word, I'll not forget you, Shon, me boy, whatever comes; remember that. And a short pull of the Three-Star together for the partin' salute,' says he. And the Three-Star in one sup each we took, as solemn as the Mass, and he went away towards Cloncurry and I to the coast; and that's the last that I saw of him, now three years gone. And here I am, and I wish I was with him wherever he is."

"What was his name"? said the Honourable.

"Lawless."

The fingers of the Honourable trembled on his cigar. "Very interesting, Shon," he said, as he rose, puffing hard till his face was in a cloud of smoke. "You had many adventures together, I suppose," he continued.

"Adventures we had and sufferin' bewhiles, and fun, too, to the neck and flowin' over."

"You'll spin us a long yarn about them another night, Shon"? said the Honourable.

"I'll do it now a yarn as long as the lies of the Government; and proud of the chance."

"Not to-night, Shon" (there was a kind of huskiness in the voice of the Honourable); "it's time to turn in. We've a long tramp over the glacier to-morrow, and we must start at sunrise."

The Honourable was in command of the party, though Jo Gordineer was the guide, and all were, for the moment, miners, making for the little Goshen Field over in Pipi Valley. At least Pretty Pierre said he was a miner.

No one thought of disputing the authority of the Honourable, and they all rose.

In a few minutes there was silence in the hut, save for the oracular breathing of Prince Levis and the sparks from the fire. But the Honourable did not sleep well; he lay and watched the fire through most of the night.

The day was clear, glowing, decisive. Not a cloud in the curve of azure, not a shiver of wind down the canon, not a frown in Nature, if we except the lowering shadows from the shoulders of the giants of the range. Crowning the shadows was a splendid helmet of light, rich with the dyes of the morning; the pines were touched with a brilliant if austere warmth. The pride of lofty lineage and severe isolation was regnant over all. And up through the splendour, and the shadows, and the loneliness, and the austere warmth, must our travellers go. Must go? Scarcely that, but the Honourable had made up his mind to cross the glacier and none sought to dissuade him from his choice; the more so, because there was something of danger in the business. Pretty Pierre had merely shrugged his shoulders at the suggestion, and had said:

"Nom de Dieu,' the higher we go the faster we live, that is something."

"Sometimes we live ourselves to death too quickly. In my schooldays I watched a mouse in a jar of oxygen do that;" said the Honourable.

"That is the best way to die," remarked the halfbreed "much."

Jo Gordineer had been over the path before. He was confident of the way, and proud of his office of guide.

"Climb Mont Blanc, if you will," said the Honourable, "but leave me these white bastions of the Selkirks."

Even so. They have not seen the snowy hills of God who have yet to look upon the Rocky Mountains, absolute, stupendous, sublimely grave.

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

Jo Gordineer and Pretty Pierre strode on together. They being well away from the other two, the Honourable turned and said to Shon: "What was the name of the man who wrote that song of yours, again, Shon?"

"Lawless."

"Yes, but his first name?"

"Duke Duke Lawless."

There was a pause, in which the other seemed to be intently studying the glacier above them. Then he said: "What was he like? in appearance, I mean."

"A trifle more than your six feet, about your colour of hair and eyes, and with a trick of smilin' that would melt the heart of an exciseman, and O'Connell's own at a joke, barrin' a time or two that he got hold of a pile of papers from the ould country. By the grave of St. Shon! thin he was as dry of fun as a piece of blotting paper. And he said at last, before he was aisy and free again, 'Shon,' says he, 'it's better to burn your ships behind ye, isn't it?'

"And I, havin' thought of a glen in ould Ireland that I'll never see again, nor any that's in it, said: 'Not, only burn them to the water's edge, Duke Lawless, but swear to your own soul that they never lived but in the dreams of the night.'

"'You're right there, Shon,' says he, and after that no luck was bad enough to cloud the gay heart of him, and bad enough it was sometimes."

"And why do you fear that he is not alive?"

"Because I met an old mate of mine one day on the Frazer, and he said that Lawless had never come to Cloncurry; and a hard, hard road it was to travel."

Jo Gordineer was calling to them, and there the conversation ended. In a few minutes the four stood on the edge of the glacier. Each man had a long hickory stick which served as alpenstock, a bag hung at his side, and tied to his back was his gold-pan, the hollow side in, of course. Shon's was tied a little lower down than the others.

They passed up this solid river of ice, this giant power at endless strife with the high hills, up towards its head. The Honourable was the first to reach the point of vantage, and to look down upon the vast and wandering fissures, the frigid bulwarks, the great fortresses of ice, the ceaseless snows, the aisles of this mountain sanctuary through which Nature's splendid anthems rolled. Shon was a short distance below, with his hand over his eyes, sweeping the semi-circle of glory.

Suddenly there was a sharp cry from Pierre: "Mon Dieu! Look!"

Shon McGann had fallen on a smooth pavement of ice. The gold-pan was beneath him, and down the glacier he was whirled-whirled, for Shon had thrust his heels in the snow and ice, and the gold-pan performed a series of circles as it sped down the incline. His fingers clutched the ice and snow, but they only left a red mark of blood behind. Must he go the whole course of that frozen slide, plump into the wild depths below?

"'Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!'" said Pretty Pierre, piteously. The face of the Honourable was set and tense.

Jo Gordineer's hand clutched his throat as if he choked. Still Shon sped. It was a matter of seconds only. The tragedy crowded to the awful end.

But, no.

There was a tilt in the glacier, and the gold-pan, suddenly swirling, again swung to the outer edge, and shot over.

As if hurled from a catapult, the Irishman was ejected from the white monster's back. He fell on a wide shelf of ice, covered with light snow, through which he was tunnelled, and dropped on another ledge below, near the path by which he and his companions had ascended. "Shied from the finish, by God!" said Jo Gordineer. "'Le pauvre Shon!'" added Pretty Pierre.

The Honourable was making his way down, his brain haunted by the words, "He'll never go back to Farcalladen more."

But Jo was right.

For Shon McGann was alive. He lay breathless, helpless, for a moment; then he sat up and scanned his lacerated fingers: he looked up the path by which he had come; he looked down the path he seemed destined to go; he started to scratch his head, but paused in the act, by reason of his fingers.

Then he said: "It's my mother wouldn't know me from a can of cold meat if I hadn't stopped at this station; but wurrawurra, what a car it was to come in!" He examined his tattered clothes and bare elbows; then he unbuckled the gold-pan, and no easy task was it with his ragged fingers. "'Twas not for deep minin' I brought ye," he said to the pan, "nor for scrapin' the clothes from me back."

Just then the Honourable came up. "Shon, my man . . . alive, thank God! How is it with you?"

"I'm hardly worth the lookin' at. I wouldn't turn my back to ye for a ransom."

"It's enough that you're here at all."

"Ah, 'voila!' this Irishman!" said Pretty Pierre, as his light fingers touched Shon's bruised arm gently. This from Pretty Pierre!

There was that in the voice which went to Shon's heart. Who could have guessed that this outlaw of the North would ever show a sign of sympathy or friendship for anybody? But it goes to prove that you can never be exact in your estimate of character. Jo Gordineer only said jestingly: "Say, now, what are you doing, Shon, bringing us down here, when we might be well into the Valley by this time?"

"That in your face and the hair aff your head," said Shon; "it's little you know a tobogan ride when you see one. I'll take my share of the grog, by the same token."

The Honourable uncorked his flask. Shon threw back his head with a laugh.

"For it's rest when the gallop is over, me men!
And it's here's to the lads that have ridden their last;
And it's here's "

But Shon had fainted with the flask in his hand and this snatch of a song on his lips.

They reached shelter that night. Had it not been for the accident, they would have got to their destination in the Valley; but here they were twelve miles from it. Whether this was fortunate or unfortunate may be seen later. Comfortably bestowed in this mountain tavern, after they had toasted and eaten their venison and lit their pipes,

they drew about the fire.

Besides the four, there was a figure that lay sleeping in a corner on a pile of pine branches, wrapped in a bearskin robe. Whoever it was slept soundly.

"And what was it like the gold-pan flyer the tobogan ride, Shon?" remarked Jo Gordiner.

"What was it like? what was it like"? replied Shon. "Sure, I couldn't see what it was like for the stars that were hittin' me in the eyes. There wasn't any world at all. I was ridin' on a streak of lightnin', and nivr a rubber for the wheels; and my fingers makin' stripes of blood on the snow; and now the stars that were hittin' me were white, and thin they were red, and sometimes blue "

"The Stars and Stripes," inconsiderately remarked Jo Gordiner.

"And there wasn't any beginning to things, nor any end of them; and whin I struck the snow and cut down the core of it like a cat through a glass, I was willin' to say with the Prophet of Ireland "

"Are you going to pass the liniment, Pretty Pierre?" It was Jo Gordiner said that.

What the Prophet of Israel did say Israel and Ireland were identical to Shon was never told.

Shon's bubbling sarcasm was full-stopped by the beneficent savour that, rising now from the hands of the four, silenced all irrelevant speech. It was a function of importance. It was not simply necessary to say How! or Here's reformation! or I look towards you! As if by a common instinct, the Honourable, Jo Gordiner, and Pretty Pierre, turned towards Shon and lifted their glasses. Jo Gordiner was going to say: "Here's a safe foot in the stirrups to you," but he changed his mind and drank in silence.

Shon's eye had been blazing with fun, but it took on, all at once, a misty twinkle. None of them had quite bargained for this. The feeling had come like a wave of soft lightning, and had passed through them. Did it come from the Irishman himself? Was it his own nature acting through those who called him "partner"?

Pretty Pierre got up and kicked savagely at the wood in the big fireplace. He ostentatiously and needlessly put another log of Norfolk- pine upon the fire.

The Honourable gaily suggested a song.

"Sing us 'Avec les Braves Sauvages,' Pierre," said Jo Gordiner.

But Pierre waved his fingers towards Shon: "Shon, his song he did not finish on the glacier. It is good we hear all. 'Hein?'"

And so Shon sang:

"Oh it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise."

The sleeper on the pine branches stirred nervously, as if the song were coming through a dream to him. At the third verse he started up, and an eager, sun-burned face peered from the half-darkness at the singer. The Honourable was sitting in the shadow, with his back to the new actor in the scene.

"For it's rest when the gallop is over, my men I
And it's here's to the lads that have ridden their last!

And it's here's "

Shon paused. One of those strange lapses of memory came to him which come at times to most of us concerning familiar things. He could get no further than he did on the mountain side. He passed his hand over his forehead, stupidly: "Saints forgive me; but it's gone from me, and sorra the one can I get it; me that had it by heart, and the lad that wrote it far away. Death in the world, but I'll try it again!

"For it's rest when the gallop is over, my men!
And it's here's to the lads that have ridden their last!
And it's here's "

Again he paused.

But from the half-darkness there came a voice, a clear baritone:

"And here's to the lasses we leave in the glen,
With a smile for the future, a sigh for the past."

At the last words the figure strode down into the firelight.

"Shon, old friend, don't you know me?"

Shon had started to his feet at the first note of the voice, and stood as if spellbound.

There was no shaking of hands. Both men held each other hard by the shoulders, and stood so for a moment looking steadily eye to eye.

Then Shon said: "Duke Lawless, there's parallels of latitude and parallels of longitude, but who knows the tomb of old Brian Borhoime?"

Which was his way of saying, "How come you here?" Duke Lawless turned to the others before he replied. His eyes fell on the Honourable. With a start and a step backward, and with a peculiar angry dryness in his voice, he said:

"Just Trafford!"

"Yes," replied the Honourable, smiling, "I have found you."

"Found me! And why have you sought me? Me, Duke Lawless? I should have thought "

The Honourable interrupted: "To tell you that you are Sir Duke Lawless."

"That? You sought me to tell me that?"

"I did."

"You are sure? And for naught else?"

"As I live, Duke."

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

The eyes fixed on the Honourable were searching. Sir Duke hesitated, then held out his hand. In a swift but cordial silence it was taken. Nothing more could be said then. It is only in plays where gentlemen freely discuss family affairs before a curious public. Pretty Pierre was busy with a decoction. Jo Gordineer was his associate. Shon had drawn back, and was apparently examining the indentations on his gold-pan.

"Shon, old fellow, come here," said Sir Duke Lawless.

But Shon had received a shock. "It's little I knew Sir Duke Lawless " he said.

"It's little you needed to know then, or need to know now, Shon, my friend. I'm Duke Lawless to you here and henceforth, as ever I was then, on the wallaby track."

And Shon believed him. The glasses were ready.

"I'll give the toast," said the Honourable with a gentle gravity. "To Shon McGann and his Tobogan Ride!"

"I'll drink to the first half of it with all my heart," said Sir Duke. "It's all I know about."

"Amen to that divorce," rejoined Shon.

"But were it not for the Tobogan Ride we shouldn't have stopped here," said the Honourable; "and where would this meeting have been?"

"That alters the case," Sir Duke remarked. "I take back the 'Amen,'" said Shon.

II

Whatever claims Shon had upon the companionship of Sir Duke Lawless, he knew there were other claims that were more pressing. After the toast was finished, with an emphasised assumption of weariness, and a hint of a long yarn on the morrow, he picked up his blanket and started for the room where all were to sleep. The real reason of this early departure was clear to Pretty Pierre at once, and in due time it dawned upon Jo Gordineer.

The two Englishmen, left alone, sat for a few moments silent and smoking hard. Then the Honourable rose, got his knapsack, and took out a small number of papers, which he handed to Sir Duke, saying, "By slow postal service to Sir Duke Lawless. Residence, somewhere on one of five continents."

An envelope bearing a woman's writing was the first thing that met Sir Duke's eye. He stared, took it out, turned it over, looked curiously at the Honourable for a moment, and then began to break the seal.

"Wait, Duke. Do not read that. We have something to say to each other first."

Sir Duke laid the letter down. "You have some explanation to make," he said.

"It was so long ago; mightn't it be better to go over the story again?"

"Perhaps."

"Then it is best you should tell it. I am on my defence, you know."

Sir Duke leaned back, and a frown gathered on his forehead. Strikingly out of place on his fresh face it seemed.

Looking quickly from the fire to the face of the Honourable and back again earnestly, as if the full force of what was required came to him, he said: "We shall get the perspective better if we put the tale in the third person. Duke Lawless was the heir to the title and estates of Trafford Court. Next in succession to him was Just Trafford, his cousin. Lawless had an income sufficient for a man of moderate tastes. Trafford had not quite that, but he had his profession of the law. At college they had been fast friends, but afterwards had drifted apart, through no cause save difference of pursuits and circumstances. Friends they still were and likely to be so always. One summer, when on a visit to his uncle, Admiral Sir Clavel Lawless, at Trafford Court, where a party of people had been invited for a month, Duke Lawless fell in love with Miss Emily Dorset. She did him the honour to prefer him to any other man at least, he thought so. Her income, however, was limited like his own. The engagement was not announced, for Lawless wished to make a home before he took a wife. He inclined to ranching in Canada, or a planter's life in Queensland. The eight or ten thousand pounds necessary was not, however, easy to get for the start, and he hadn't the least notion of discounting the future, by asking the admiral's help. Besides, he knew his uncle did not wish him to marry unless he married a woman plus a fortune. While things were in this uncertain state, Just Trafford arrived on a visit to Trafford Court. The meeting of the old friends was cordial. Immediately on Trafford's arrival, however, the current of events changed. Things occurred which brought disaster. It was noticeable that Miss Emily Dorset began to see a deal more of Admiral Lawless and Just Trafford, and a deal less of the younger Lawless. One day Duke Lawless came back to the house unexpectedly, his horse having knocked up on the road. On entering the library he saw what turned the course of his life." Sir Duke here paused, sighed, shook the ashes out of his pipe with a grave and expressive anxiety which did not properly belong to the action, and remained for a moment, both arms on his knees, silent, and looking at the fire. Then he continued:

"Just Trafford sat beside Emily Dorset in an attitude of say, affectionate consideration. She had been weeping, and her whole manner suggested very touching confidences. They both rose on the entrance of Lawless; but neither tried to say a word. What could they say? Lawless apologised, took a book from the table which he had not come for, and left."

Again Sir Duke paused.

"The book was an illustrated *Much Ado About Nothing*," said the Honourable.

"A few hours after, Lawless had an interview with Emily Dorset. He demanded, with a good deal of feeling, perhaps, for he was romantic enough to love the girl, an explanation. He would have asked it of Trafford first if he had seen him. She said Lawless should trust her; that she had no explanation at that moment to give. If he waited but Lawless asked her if she cared for him at all, if she wished or intended to marry him? She replied lightly, 'Perhaps, when you become Sir Duke Lawless.' Then Lawless accused her of heartlessness, and of encouraging both his uncle and Just Trafford. She amusingly said, 'Perhaps she had, but it really didn't matter, did it?' For reply, Lawless said her interest in the whole family seemed active and impartial. He bade her not vex herself at all about him, and not to wait until he became Sir Duke Lawless, but to give preference to seniority and begin with the title at once; which he has reason since to believe that she did. What he said to her he has been sorry for, not because he thinks it was undeserved, but because he has never been able since to rouse himself to anger on the subject, nor to hate the girl and Just Trafford as he ought. Of the dead he is silent altogether. He never sought an explanation from Just Trafford, for he left that night for London, and in two days was on his way to Australia. The day he left, however, he received a note from his banker saying that L8000 had been placed to his credit by Admiral Lawless. Feeling the indignity of what he believed was the cause of the gift, Lawless neither acknowledged it nor used it, not any penny of it. Five years have gone since then, and Lawless has wandered over two continents, a self-created exile. He has learned much that he didn't learn at Oxford; and not the least of all, that the world is not so bad as is claimed for it, that it isn't worth while hating and cherishing hate, that evil is half-accidental, half-natural, and that hard work in the face of nature is the thing to pull a man together and strengthen him for his place in the universe. Having burned his ships behind him, that is the way Lawless feels. And the story is told."

Just Trafford sat looking musingly but imperturbably at Sir Duke for a minute; then he said:

"That is your interpretation of the story, but not the story. Let us turn the medal over now. And, first, let Trafford say that he has the permission of Emily Dorset "

Sir Duke interrupted: "Of her who was Emily Dorset."

"Of Miss Emily Dorset, to tell what she did not tell that day five years ago. After this other reading of the tale has been rendered, her letter and those documents are there for fuller testimony. Just Trafford's part in the drama begins, of course, with the library scene. Now Duke Lawless had never known Trafford's half-brother, Hall Vincent. Hall was born in India, and had lived there most of his life. He was in the Indian Police, and had married a clever, beautiful, but impossible kind of girl, against the wishes of her parents. The marriage was not a very happy one. This was partly owing to the quick Lawless and Trafford blood, partly to the wife's wilfulness. Hall thought that things might go better if he came to England to live. On their way from Madras to Colombo he had some words with his wife one day about the way she arranged her hair, but nothing serious. This was shortly after tiffin. That evening they entered the harbour at Colombo; and Hall going to his cabin to seek his wife, could not find her; but in her stead was her hair, arranged carefully in flowing waves on the pillow, where through the voyage her head had lain. That she had cut it off and laid it there was plain; but she could not be found, nor was she ever found. The large porthole was open; this was the only clue. But we need not go further into that. Hall Vincent came home to England. He told his brother the story as it has been told to you, and then left for South America, a broken-spirited man. The wife's family came on to England also. They did not meet Hall Vincent; but one day Just Trafford met at a country seat in Devon, for the first time, the wife's sister. She had not known of the relationship between Hall Vincent and the Traffords; and on a memorable afternoon he told her the full story of the married life and the final disaster, as Hall had told it to him."

Sir Duke sprang to his feet. "You mean, Just, that "

"I mean that Emily Dorset was the sister of Hall Vincent's wife."

Sir Duke's brown fingers clasped and unclasped nervously. He was about to speak, but the Honourable said: "That is only half the story wait.

"Emily Dorset would have told Lawless all in due time, but women don't like to be bullied ever so little, and that, and the unhappiness of the thing, kept her silent in her short interview with Lawless. She could not have guessed that Lawless would go as he did. Now, the secret of her diplomacy with the uncle diplomacy is the best word to use was Duke Lawless's advancement. She knew how he had set his heart on the ranching or planting life. She would have married him without a penny, but she felt his pride in that particular, and respected it. So, like a clever girl, she determined to make the old chap give Lawless a cheque on his possible future. Perhaps, as things progressed, the same old chap got an absurd notion in his head about marrying her to Just Trafford, but that was meanwhile all the better for Lawless. The very day that Emily Dorset and Just Trafford succeeded in melting Admiral Lawless's heart to the tune of eight thousand, was the day that Duke Lawless doubted his friend and challenged the loyalty of the girl he loved."

Sir Duke's eyes filled. "Great Heaven! Just " he said.

"Be quiet for a little. You see she had taken Trafford into her scheme against his will, for he was never good at mysteries and theatricals, and he saw the danger. But the cause was a good one, and he joined the sweet conspiracy, with what result these five years bear witness. Admiral Lawless has been dead a year and a half, his wife a year. For he married out of anger with Duke Lawless; but he did not marry Emily Dorset, nor did he beget a child."

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

"In Australia I saw a paragraph speaking of a visit made by him and Lady Lawless to a hospital, and I thought "

"You thought he had married Emily Dorset and well, you had better read that letter now."

Sir Duke's face was flushing with remorse and pain. He drew his hand quickly across his eyes. "And you've given up London, your profession, everything, just to hunt for me, to tell me this you who would have profited by my eternal absence! What a beast and ass I've been!"

"Not at all; only a bit poetical and hasty, which is not unnatural in the Lawless blood. I should have been wild myself, maybe, if I had been in your position; only I shouldn't have left England, and I should have taken the papers regularly and have asked the other fellow to explain. The other fellow didn't like the little conspiracy. Women, however, seem to find that kind of thing a moral necessity. By the way, I wish when you go back you'd send me out my hunting traps. I've made up my mind to oh, quite so read the letter I forgot!"

Sir Duke opened the letter and read it, putting it away from him now and then as if it hurt him, and taking it up a moment after to continue the reading. The Honourable watched him.

At last Sir Duke rose. "Just "

"Yes? Go on."

"Do you think she would have me now?"

"Don't know. Your outfit is not so beautiful as it used to be."

"Don't chaff me."

"Don't be so funereal, then."

Under the Honourable's matter of fact air Sir Duke's face began to clear. "Tell me, do you think she still cares for me?"

"Well, I don't know. She's rich now got the grandmother's stocking. Then there's Pedley, of the Scots Guards; he has been doing loyal service for a couple of years. What does the letter say?"

"It only tells the truth, as you have told it to me, but from her standpoint; not a word that says anything but beautiful reproach and general kindness. That is all."

"Quite so. You see it was all four years ago, and Pedley "

But the Honourable paused. He had punished his friend enough. He stepped forward and laid his hand on Sir Duke's shoulder. "Duke, you want to pick up the threads where they were dropped. You dropped them. Ask me nothing about the ends that Emily Dorset held. I conspire no more. But go you and learn your fate. If one remembers, why should the other forget?"

Sir Duke's light heart and eager faith came back with a rush. "I'll start for England at once. I'll know the worst or the best of it before three months are out." The Honourable's slow placidity turned.

"Three months. Yes, you may do it in that time. Better go from Victoria to San Francisco and then overland. You'll not forget about my hunting traps, and oh, certainly, Gordineer; come in."

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

"Say," said Gordineer. "I don't want to disturb the meeting, but Shon's in chancery somehow; breathing like a white pine, and thrashing about! He's red-hot with fever."

Before he had time to say more, Sir Duke seized the candle and entered the room. Shon was moving uneasily and suppressing the groans that shook him. "Shon, old friend, what is it?"

"It's the pain here, Lawless," laying his hand on his chest.

After a moment Sir Duke said, "Pneumonia!"

From that instant thoughts of himself were sunk in the care and thought of the man who in the heart of Queensland had been mate and friend and brother to him. He did not start for England the next day, nor for many a day.

Pretty Pierre and Jo Gordineer and his party carried Sir Duke's letters over into the Pipi Valley, from where they could be sent on to the coast. Pierre came back in a few days to see how Shon was, and expressed his determination of staying to help Sir Duke, if need be.

Shon hovered between life and death. It was not alone the pneumonia that racked his system so; there was also the shock he had received in his flight down the glacier. In his delirium he seemed to be always with Lawless:

"'For it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise' It's share and share even, Lawless, and ye'll ate the rest of it, or I'll lave ye Did ye say ye'd found water Lawless water! Sure you're drinkin' none yourself I'll sing it again for you then 'And it's back with the ring of the chain and the spur' 'But burn all your ships behind you' 'I'll never go back to Farcalladen more!'"

Sir Duke's fingers had a trick of kindness, a suggestion of comfort, a sense of healing, that made his simple remedies do more than natural duty. He was doctor, nurse, sleepless nurse, and careful apothecary. And when at last the danger was past and he could relax watching, he would not go, and he did not go, till they could all travel to the Pipi Valley.

In the blue shadows of the firs they stand as we take our leave of one of them. The Honourable and Sir Duke have had their last words, and Sir Duke has said he will remember about the hunting traps. They understand each other. There is sunshine in the face of all a kind of Indian summer sunshine, infused with the sadness of a coming winter; and theirs is the winter of parting. Yet it is all done quietly.

"We'll meet again, Shon," said Sir Duke, "and you'll remember your promise to write to me."

"I'll keep my promise, and I hope the news that'll please you best is what you'll send us first from England. And if you should go to ould Donegal I've no words for me thoughts at all!"

"I know them. Don't try to say them. We've not had the luck together, all kinds and all weathers, for nothing."

Sir Duke's eyes smiled a good-bye into the smiling eyes of Shon. They were much alike, these two, whose stations were so far apart. Yet somewhere, in generations gone, their ancestors may have toiled, feasted, or governed, in the same social hemisphere; and here in the mountains life was levelled to one degree again.

Sir Duke looked round. The pines were crowding up elate and warm towards the peaks of the white silence. The river was brawling over a broken pathway of boulders at their feet; round the edge of a mighty mountain crept a mule train; a far-off glacier glistened harshly in the lucid morning, yet not harshly either, but with the rugged form of a vast antiquity, from which these scarred and grimly austere hills had grown. Here Nature was filled with

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

a sense of triumphant mastery the mastery of ageless experience. And down the great piles there blew a wind of stirring life, of the composure of great strength, and touched the four, and the man that mounted now was turned to go. A quick good-bye from him to all; a God-speed-you from the Honourable; a wave of the hand between the rider and Shon, and Sir Duke Lawless was gone.

"You had better cook the last of that bear this morning, Pierre," said the Honourable. And their life went on.

.....

It was eight months after that, sitting in their hut after a day's successful mining, the Honourable handed Shon a newspaper to read. A paragraph was marked. It concerned the marriage of Miss Emily Dorset and Sir Duke Lawless.

And while Shon read, the Honourable called into the tent: "Have you any lemons for the whisky, Pierre?"

A satisfactory reply being returned, the Honourable proceeded: "We'll begin with the bottle of Pommery, which I've been saving months for this."

The royal-flush toast of the evening belonged to Shon.

"God bless him! To the day when we see him again!"

And all of them saw that day.

PERE CHAMPAGNE

"Is it that we stand at the top of the hill and the end of the travel has come, Pierre? Why don't you spake?"

"We stand at the top of the hill, and it is the end."

"And Lonely Valley is at our feet and Whiteface Mountain beyond?"

"One at our feet, and the other beyond, Shon McGann."

"It's the sight of my eyes I wish I had in the light of the sun this mornin'. Tell me, what is't you see?"

"I see the trees on the foot-hills, and all the branches shine with frost. There is a path so wide! between two groves of pines. On Whiteface Mountain lies a glacier-field . . . and all is still." . . .

"The voice of you is far-away-like, Pierre it shivers as a hawk cries. It's the wind, the wind, maybe."

"There's not a breath of life from hill or valley."

"But I feel it in my face."

"It is not the breath of life you feel."

"Did you not hear voices coming athwart the wind? . . . Can you see the people at the mines?"

"I have told you what I see."

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

"You told me of the pine-trees, and the glacier, and the snow "

"And that is all."

"But in the Valley, in the Valley, where all the miners are?"

"I cannot see them."

"For love of heaven, don't tell me that the dark is fallin' on your eyes too."

"No, Shon, I am not growing blind."

"Will you not tell me what gives the ache to your words?"

"I see in the Valley snow . . . snow."

"It's a laugh you have at me in your cheek, whin I'd give years of my ill-spent life to watch the chimney smoke come curlin' up slow through the sharp air in the Valley there below."

"There is no chimney and there is no smoke in all the Valley."

"Before God, if you're a man, you'll put your hand on my arm and tell me what trouble quakes your speech."

"Shon McGann, it is for you to make the sign of the Cross . . . there, while I put my hand on your shoulder so!"

"Your hand is heavy, Pierre."

"This is the sight of the eyes that see. In the Valley there is snow; in the snow of all that was, there is one poppet-head of the mine that was called St. Gabriel . . . upon the poppet-head there is the figure of a woman."

"Ah!"

"She does not move "

"She will never move?"

"She will never move."

"The breath o' my body hurts me. . . . There is death in the Valley, Pierre?"

"There is death."

"It was an avalanche that path between the pines?"

"And a great storm after."

"Blessed be God that I cannot behold that thing this day! . . . And the woman, Pierre, the woman aloft?"

"She went to watch for someone coming, and as she watched, the avalanche came and she moves not."

"Do we know that woman?"

"Who can tell?"

"What was it you whispered soft to yourself, then, Pierre?"

"I whispered no word."

"There, don't you hear it, soft and sighin'? . . . Nathalie!"

"Mon Dieu! It is not of the world."

"It's facin' the poppet-head where she stands I'd be."

"Your face is turned towards her."

"Where is the sun?"

"The sun stands still above her head."

"With the bitter over, and the avil past, come rest for her and all that lie there."

"Eh, 'bien,' the game is done!"

"If we stay here we shall die also."

"If we go we die, perhaps." . . .

"Don't spake it. We will go, and we will return when the breath of summer comes from the South."

"It shall be so."

"Hush! Did you not hear?"

"I did not hear. I only see an eagle, and it flies towards Whiteface Mountain."

And Shon McGann and Pretty Pierre turned back from the end of their quest from a mighty grave behind to a lonely waste before; and though one was snow-blind, and the other knew that on him fell the chieffer weight of a great misfortune, for he must provide food and fire and be as a mother to his comrade they had courage; without which, men are as the standing straw in an unreaped field in winter; but having become like the hooded pine, that keepeth green in frost, and hath the bounding blood in all its icy branches.

And whence they came and wherefore was as thus:

A French Canadian once lived in Lonely Valley. One day great fortune came to him, because it was given him to discover the mine St. Gabriel. And he said to the woman who loved him, "I will go with mules and much gold, that I have hewn and washed and gathered, to a village in the East where my father and my mother are. They are poor, but I will make them rich; and then I will return to Lonely Valley, and a priest shall come with me, and we will dwell here at Whiteface Mountain, where men are men and not children." And the woman blessed him, and prayed for him, and let him go.

He travelled far through passes of the mountains, and came at last where new cities lay upon the plains, and where men were full of evil and of lust of gold. And he was free of hand and light of heart; and at a place called

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

Diamond City false friends came about him, and gave him champagne wine to drink, and struck him down and robbed him, leaving him for dead.

And he was found, and his wounds were all healed: all save one, and that was in the brain. Men called him mad.

He wandered through the land, preaching to men to drink no wine, and to shun the sight of gold. And they laughed at him, and called him Pere Champagne.

But one day much gold was found at a place called Reef o' Angel; and jointly with the gold came a plague which scars the face and rots the body; and Indians died by hundreds and white men by scores; and Pere Champagne, of all who were not stricken down, feared nothing, and did not flee, but went among the sick and dying, and did those deeds which gold cannot buy, and prayed those prayers which were never sold. And who can count how high the prayers of the feckless go!

When none was found to bury the dead, he gave them place himself beneath the prairie earth, consecrated only by the tears of a fool, and for extreme unction he had but this: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Now it happily chanced that Pierre and Shon McGann, who travelled westward, came upon this desperate battle-field, and saw how Pere Champagne dared the elements of scourge and death; and they paused and laboured with him to save where saving was granted of Heaven, and to bury when the Reaper reaped and would not stay his hand. At last the plague ceased, because winter stretched its wings out swiftly o'er the plains from frigid ranges in the West. And then Pere Champagne fell ill again.

And this last great sickness cured his madness: and he remembered whence he had come, and what befell him at Diamond City so many moons ago. And he prayed them, when he knew his time was come, that they would go to Lonely Valley and tell his story to the woman whom he loved; and say that he was going to a strange but pleasant Land, and that there he would await her coming. He begged them that they would go at once, that she might know, and not strain her eyes to blindness, and be sick at heart because he came not. And he told them her name, and drew the coverlet up about his head and seemed to sleep; but he waked between the day and dark, and gently cried: "The snow is heavy on the mountain . . . and the Valley is below. . . 'Gardez, mon Pere!' . . . Ah, Nathalie!" And they buried him between the dark and dawn.

Though winds were fierce, and travel full of peril, they kept their word, and passed along wide steppes of snow, until they entered passes of the mountains, and again into the plains; and at last one 'poudre' day, when frost was shaking like shreds of faintest silver through the air, Shon McGann's sight fled. But he would not turn back a promise to a dying man was sacred, and he could follow if he could not lead; and there was still some pemmican, and there were martens in the woods, and wandering deer that good spirits hunted into the way of the needy; and Pierre's finger along the gun was sure.

Pierre did not tell Shon that for many days they travelled woods where no sunshine entered; where no trail had ever been, nor foot of man had trod: that they had lost their way. Nor did he make his comrade know that one night he sat and played a game of solitaire to see if they would ever reach the place called Lonely Valley. Before the cards were dealt, he made a sign upon his breast and forehead. Three times he played, and three times he counted victory; and before three suns had come and gone, they climbed a hill that perched over Lonely Valley. And of what they saw and their hearts felt we know.

And when they turned their faces eastward they were as men who go to meet a final and a conquering enemy; but they had kept their honour with the man upon whose grave-tree Shon McGann had carved beneath his name these words:

"A Brother of Aaron."

Upon a lonely trail they wandered, the spirits of lost travellers hungering in their wake spirits that mumbled in cedar thickets, and whimpered down the flumes of snow. And Pierre, who knew that evil things are exorcised by mighty conjuring, sang loudly, from a throat made thin by forced fasting, a song with which his mother sought to drive away the devils of dreams that flaunted on his pillow when a child: it was the song of the Scarlet Hunter. And the charm sufficed; for suddenly of a cheerless morning they came upon a trapper's hut in the wilderness, where their sufferings ceased, and the sight of Shon's eyes came back. When strength returned also, they journeyed to an Indian village, where a priest laboured. Him they besought; and when spring came they set forth to Lonely Valley again that the woman and the smothered dead if it might chance so should be put away into peaceful graves. But thither coming they only saw a grey and churlish river; and the poppet-head of the mine of St. Gabriel, and she who had knelt thereon, were vanished into solitudes, where only God's cohorts have the rights of burial. . . .

But the priest prayed humbly for their so swiftly summoned souls.

THE SCARLET HUNTER

"News out of Egypt!" said the Honourable Just Trafford. "If this is true, it gives a pretty finish to the season. You think it possible, Pierre? It is every man's talk that there isn't a herd of buffaloes in the whole country; but this—eh?"

Pierre did not seem disposed to answer. He had been watching a man's face for some time; but his eyes were now idly following the smoke of his cigarette as it floated away to the ceiling in fading circles. He seemed to take no interest in Trafford's remarks, nor in the tale that Shangi the Indian had told them; though Shangi and his tale were both sufficiently uncommon to justify attention.

Shon McGann was more impressionable. His eyes swam; his feet shifted nervously with enjoyment; he glanced frequently at his gun in the corner of the hut; he had watched Trafford's face with some anxiety, and accepted the result of the tale with delight. Now his look was occupied with Pierre.

Pierre was a pretty good authority in all matters concerning the prairies and the North. He also had an instinct for detecting veracity, having practised on both sides of the equation. Trafford became impatient, and at last the half-breed, conscious that he had tried the temper of his chief so far as was safe, lifted his eyes, and, resting them casually on the Indian, replied: "Yes, I know the place. . . . No, I have not been there, but I was told—ah, it was long ago! There is a great valley between hills, the Kimash Hills, the hills of the Mighty Men. The woods are deep and dark; there is but one trail through them, and it is old. On the highest hill is a vast mound. In that mound are the forefathers of a nation that is gone. Yes, as you say, they are dead, and there is none of them alive in the valley which is called the White Valley where the buffalo are. The valley is green in summer, and the snow is not deep in winter; the noses of the buffalo can find the tender grass. The Injin speaks the truth, perhaps. But of the number of buffaloes, one must see. The eye of the red man multiplies."

Trafford looked at Pierre closely. "You seem to know the place very well. It is a long way north where ah yes, you said you had never been there; you were told. Who told you?"

The half-breed raised his eyebrows slightly as he replied: "I can remember a long time, and my mother, she spoke much and sang many songs at the campfires." Then he puffed his cigarette so that the smoke clouded his face for a moment, and went on, "I think there may be buffaloes."

"It's along the barrel of me gun I wish I was lookin' at thim now," said McGann.

"'Tiens,' you will go"? inquired Pierre of Trafford. "To have a shot at the only herd of wild buffaloes on the

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

continent! Of course I'll go. I'd go to the North Pole for that. Sport and novelty I came here to see; buffalo-hunting I did not expect. I'm in luck, that's all. We'll start to-morrow morning, if we can get ready, and Shangi here will lead us; eh, Pierre?"

The half-breed again was not polite. Instead of replying he sang almost below his breath the words of a song unfamiliar to his companions, though the Indian's eyes showed a flash of understanding. These were the words:

"They ride away with a waking wind, away, away!
With laughing lip and with jocund mind at break of day.
A rattle of hoofs and a snatch of song, they ride, they ride!
The plains are wide and the path is long, so long, so wide!"

Just Trafford appeared ready to deal with this insolence, for the half-breed was after all a servant of his, a paid retainer. He waited, however. Shon saw the difficulty, and at once volunteered a reply. "It's aisy enough to get away in the mornin', but it's a question how far we'll be able to go with the horses. The year is late; but there's dogs beyand, I suppose, and bedad, there y' are!"

The Indian spoke slowly: "It is far off. There is no colour yet in the leaf of the larch. The river-hen still swims northward. It is good that we go. There is much buffalo in the White Valley."

Again Trafford looked towards his follower, and again the half-breed, as if he were making an effort to remember, sang abstractedly:

"They follow, they follow a lonely trail, by day, by night,
By distant sun, and by fire-fly pale, and northern light.
The ride to the Hills of the Mighty Men, so swift they go!
Where buffalo feed in the wilding glen in sun and snow."

"Pierre," said Trafford, sharply, "I want an answer to my question."

"Mais, pardon, I was thinking . . . well, we can ride until the deep snows come, then we can walk; and Shangi, he can get the dogs, maybe, one team of dogs."

"But," was the reply, "one team of dogs will not be enough. We'll bring meat and hides, you know, as well as pemmican. We won't cache any carcasses up there. What would be the use? We shall have to be back in the Pipi Valley by the spring-time."

"Well," said the half-breed with a cold decision, "one team of dogs will be enough; and we will not cache, and we shall be back in the Pipi Valley before the spring, perhaps." But this last word was spoken under his breath.

And now the Indian spoke, with his deep voice and dignified manner: "Brothers, it is as I have said, the trail is lonely and the woods are deep and dark. Since the time when the world was young, no white man hath been there save one, and behold sickness fell on him; the grave is his end. It is a pleasant land, for the gods have blessed it to the Indian forever. No heathen shall possess it. But you shall see the White Valley and the buffalo. Shangi will lead, because you have been merciful to him, and have given him to sleep in your wigwam, and to eat of your wild meat. There are dogs in the forest. I have spoken."

Trafford was impressed, and annoyed too. He thought too much sentiment was being squandered on a very practical and sportive thing. He disliked functions; speech-making was to him a matter for prayer and fasting. The Indian's address was therefore more or less gratuitous, and he hastened to remark: "Thank you, Shangi; that's very good, and you've put it poetically. You've turned a shooting-excursion into a mediaeval romance. But we'll

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

get down to business now, if you please, and make the romance a fact, beautiful enough to send to the 'Times' or the New York 'Call'. Let's see, how would they put it in the Call? 'Extraordinary Discovery Herd of buffaloes found in the far North by an Englishman and his Franco-Irish Party Sport for the gods Exodus of 'brules' to White Valley!' and so on, screeching to the end."

Shon laughed heartily. "The fun of the world is in the thing," he said; "and a day it would be for a notch on a stick and a rasp of gin in the throat. And if I get the sight of me eye on a buffalo-ruck, it's down on me knees I'll go, and not for prayin' aither. Here's both hands up for a start in the mornin'!"

Long before noon next day they were well on their way. Trafford could not understand why Pierre was so reserved, and, when speaking, so ironical. It was noticeable that the half-breed watched the Indian closely, that he always rode behind him, that he never drank out of the same cup. The leader set this down to the natural uncertainty of Pierre's disposition. He had grown to like Pierre, as the latter had come in course to respect him. Each was a man of value after his kind. Each also had recognised in the other qualities of force and knowledge having their generation in experiences which had become individuality, subterranean and acute, under a cold surface. It was the mutual recognition of these equivalents that led the two men to mutual trust, only occasionally disturbed, as has been shown; though one was regarded as the most fastidious man of his set in London, the fairest-minded of friends, the most comfortable of companions; while the other was an outlaw, a half-heathen, a lover of but one thing in this world, the joyous god of Chance. Pierre was essentially a gamester. He would have extracted satisfaction out of a death-sentence which was contingent on the trumping of an ace. His only honour was the honour of the game.

Now, with all the swelling prairie sloping to the clear horizon, and the breath of a large life in their nostrils, these two men were caught up suddenly, as it were, by the throbbing soul of the North, so that the subterranean life in them awoke and startled them. Trafford conceived that tobacco was the charm with which to exorcise the spirits of the past. Pierre let the game of sensations go on, knowing that they pay themselves out in time. His scheme was the wiser. The other found that fast riding and smoking were not sufficient. He became surrounded by the ghosts of yesterdays; and at length he gave up striving with them, and let them storm upon him, until a line of pain cut deeply across his forehead, and bitterly and unconsciously he cried aloud, "Hester, ah, Hester!"

But having spoken, the spell was broken, and he was aware of the beat of hoofs beside him, and Shangi the Indian looking at him with a half smile. Something in the look thrilled him; it was fantastic, masterful. He wondered that he had not noticed this singular influence before. After all, he was only a savage with cleaner buckskin than his race usually wore. Yet that glow, that power in the face was he Piegan, Blackfoot, Cree, Blood? Whatever he was, this man had heard the words which broke so painfully from him.

He saw the Indian frame her name upon his lips, and then came the words, "Hester Hester Orval!"

He turned sternly, and said, "Who are you? What do you know of Hester Orval?"

The Indian shook his head gravely, and replied, "You spoke her name, my brother."

"I spoke one word of her name. You have spoken two."

"One does not know what one speaks. There are words which are as sounds, and words which are as feelings. Those come to the brain through the ear; these to the soul through sign, which is more than sound. The Indian hath knowledge, even as the white man; and because his heart is open, the trees whisper to him; he reads the language of the grass and the wind, and is taught by the song of the bird, the screech of the hawk, the bark of the fox. And so he comes to know the heart of the man who hath sickness, and calls upon someone, even though it be a weak woman, to cure his sickness; who is bowed low as beside a grave, and would stand upright. Are not my words wise? As the thoughts of a child that dreams, as the face of the blind, the eye of the beast, or the anxious

hand of the poor, are they not simple, and to be understood?"

Just Trafford made no reply. But behind, Pierre was singing in the plaintive measure of a chant:

"A hunter rideth the herd abreast,
The Scarlet Hunter from out of the West,
Whose arrows with points of flame are drest,
Who loveth the beast of the field the best,
The child and the young bird out of the nest,
They ride to the hunt no more, no more!"

They travelled beyond all bounds of civilisation; beyond the northernmost Indian villages, until the features of the landscape became more rugged and solemn, and at last they paused at a place which the Indian called Misty Mountain, and where, disappearing for an hour, he returned with a team of Eskimo dogs, keen, quick-tempered, and enduring. They had all now recovered from the disturbing sentiments of the first portion of the journey; life was at full tide; the spirit of the hunter was on them.

At length one night they camped in a vast pine grove wrapped in coverlets of snow and silent as death. Here again Pierre became moody and alert and took no part in the careless chat at the camp-fire led by Shon McGann. The man brooded and looked mysterious. Mystery was not pleasing to Trafford. He had his own secrets, but in the ordinary affairs of life he preferred simplicity. In one of the silences that fell between Shon's attempts to give hilarity to the occasion, there came a rumbling far-off sound, a sound that increased in volume till the earth beneath them responded gently to the vibration. Trafford looked up inquiringly at Pierre, and then at the Indian, who, after a moment, said slowly: "Above us are the hills of the Mighty Men, beneath us is the White Valley. It is the tramp of buffalo that we hear. A storm is coming, and they go to shelter in the mountains."

The information had come somewhat suddenly, and McGann was the first to recover from the pleasant shock: "It's divil a wink of sleep I'll get this night, with the thought of them below there ripe for slaughter, and the tumble of fight in their beards."

Pierre, with a meaning glance from his half-closed eyes, added: "But it is the old saying of the prairies that you do not shout dinner till you have your knife in the loaf. Your knife is not yet in the loaf, Shon McGann."

The boom of the trampling ceased, and now there was a stirring in the snow-clad tree tops, and a sound as if all the birds of the North were flying overhead. The weather began to moan and the boles of the pines to quake. And then there came war, a trouble out of the north, a wave of the breath of God to show inconsequent man that he who seeks to live by slaughter hath slaughter for his master.

They hung over the fire while the forest cracked round them, and the flame smarted with the flying snow. And now the trees, as if the elements were closing in on them, began to break close by, and one lurched forward towards them. Trafford, to avoid its stroke, stepped quickly aside right into the line of another which he did not see. Pierre sprang forward and swung him clear, but was himself struck senseless by an outreaching branch.

As if satisfied with this achievement, the storm began to subside. When Pierre recovered consciousness Trafford clasped his hand and said, "You've a sharp eye, a quick thought, and a deft arm, comrade."

"Ah, it was in the game. It is good play to assist your partner," the half-breed replied sententiously. Through all, the Indian had remained stoical. But McGann, who swore by Trafford as he had once sworn by another of the Trafford race had his heart on his lips, and said:

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

"There's a swate little cherub that sits up aloft,
Who cares for the soul of poor Jack!"

It was long after midnight ere they settled down again, with the wreck of the forest round them. Only the Indian slept; the others were alert and restless. They were up at daybreak, and on their way before sunrise, filled with desire for prey. They had not travelled far before they emerged upon a plateau. Around them were the hills of the Mighty Men austere, majestic; at their feet was a vast valley on which the light newly-fallen snow had not hidden all the grass. Lonely and lofty, it was a world waiting chastely to be peopled! And now it was peopled, for there came from a cleft of the hills an army of buffaloes lounging slowly down the waste, with tossing manes and hoofs stirring the snow into a feathery scud.

The eyes of Trafford and McGann swam; Pierre's face was troubled, and strangely enough he made the sign of the cross.

At that instant Trafford saw smoke issuing from a spot on the mountain opposite. He turned to the Indian: "Someone lives there"? he said.

"It is the home of the dead, but life is also there."

"White man, or Indian?"

But no reply came. The Indian pointed instead to the buffalo rumbling down the valley. Trafford forgot the smoke, forgot everything except that splendid quarry. Shon was excited. "Sarpints alive," he said, "look at the troops of thim! Is it standin' here we are with our tongues in our cheeks, whin there's bastes to be killed, and mate to be got, and the call to war on the ground below! Clap spurs with your heels, sez I, and down the side of the turf together and give 'em the teeth of our guns!" The Irishman dashed down the slope. In an instant, all followed, or at least Trafford thought all followed, swinging their guns across their saddles to be ready for this excellent foray. But while Pierre rode hard, it was at first without the fret of battle in him, and he smiled strangely, for he knew that the Indian had disappeared as they rode down the slope, though how and why he could not tell. There ran through his head tales chanted at camp-fires when he was not yet in stature so high as the loins that bore him. They rode hard, and yet they came no nearer to that flying herd straining on with white streaming breath and the surf of snow rising to their quarters. Mile upon mile, and yet they could not ride these monsters down!

Now Pierre was leading. There was a kind of fury in his face, and he seemed at last to gain on them. But as the herd veered close to a wall of stalwart pines, a horseman issued from the trees and joined the cattle. The horseman was in scarlet from head to foot; and with his coming the herd went faster, and ever faster, until they vanished into the mountain-side; and they who pursued drew in their trembling horses and stared at each other with wonder in their faces.

"In God's name what does it mean"? Trafford cried.

"Is it a trick of the eye or the hand of the devil"? added Shon.

"In the name of God we shall know perhaps. If it is the hand of the devil it is not good for us," remarked Pierre.

"Who was the man in scarlet who came from the woods"? asked Trafford of the half-breed.

"'Voila,' it is strange! There is an old story among the Indians! My mother told many tales of the place and sang of it, as I sang to you. The legend was this: In the hills of the North which no white man, nor no Injin of this time hath seen, the forefathers of the red men sleep; but some day they will wake again and go forth and possess all the land; and the buffalo are for them when that time shall come, that they may have the fruits of the chase, and that it

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

be as it was of old, when the cattle were as clouds on the horizon. And it was ordained that one of these mighty men who had never been vanquished in fight, nor done an evil thing, and was the greatest of all the chiefs, should live and not die, but be as a sentinel, as a lion watching, and preserve the White Valley in peace until his brethren waked and came into their own again. And him they called the Scarlet Hunter; and to this hour the red men pray to him when they lose their way upon the plains, or Death draws aside the curtains of the wigwam to call them forth."

"Repeat the verses you sang, Pierre," said Trafford. The half-breed did so. When he came to the words, "Who loveth the beast of the field the best," the Englishman looked round. "Where is Shangi"? he asked. McGann shook his head in astonishment and negation. Pierre explained: "On the mountain-side where we ride down he is not seen he vanish . . . 'mon Dieu,' look!"

On the slope of the mountain stood the Scarlet Hunter with drawn bow. From it an arrow flew over their heads with a sorrowful twang, and fell where the smoke rose among the pines; then the mystic figure disappeared.

McGann shuddered, and drew himself together. "It is the place of spirits," he said; "and it's little I like it, God knows; but I'll follow that Scarlet Hunter, or red devil, or whatever he is, till I drop, if the Honourable gives the word. For flesh and blood I'm not afraid of; and the other we come to, whether we will or not, one day."

But Trafford said: "No, we'll let it stand where it is for the present. Something has played our eyes false, or we're brought here to do work different from buffalo-hunting. Where that arrow fell among the smoke we must go first. Then, as I read the riddle, we travel back the way we came. There are points in connection with the Pipi Valley superior to the hills of the Mighty Men."

They rode away across the glade, and through a grove of pines upon a hill, till they stood before a log but with parchment windows.

Trafford knocked, but there was no response. He opened the door and entered. He saw a figure rise painfully from a couch in a corner, the figure of a woman young and beautiful, but wan and worn. She seemed dazed and inert with suffering, and spoke mournfully: "It is too late. Not you, nor any of your race, nor anything on earth can save him. He is dead dead now."

At the first sound of her voice Trafford started. He drew near to her, as pale as she was, and wonder and pity were in his face. "Hester," he said, "Hester Orval!"

She stared at him like one that had been awakened from an evil dream, then tottered towards him with the cry, "Just, Just, have you come to save me? O Just!" His distress was sad to see, for it was held in deep repression, but he said calmly and with protecting gentleness: "Yes, I have come to save you. Hester, how is it you are here in this strange place you?"

She sobbed so that at first she could not answer; but at last she cried: "O Just, he is dead . . . in there, in there! . . . Last night, it was last night; and he prayed that I might go with him. But I could not die unforgiven, and I was right, for you have come out of the world to help me, and to save me."

"Yes, to help you and to save you, if I can," he added in a whisper to himself, for he was full of foreboding. He was of the earth, earthy, and things that had chanced to him this day were beyond the natural and healthy movements of his mind. He had gone forth to slay, and had been foiled by shadows; he had come with a tragic, if beautiful, memory haunting him, and that memory had clothed itself in flesh and stood before him, pitiful, solitary, a woman. He had scorned all legend and superstition, and here both were made manifest to him. He had thought of this woman as one who was of this world no more, and here she mourned before him and bade him go and look upon her dead, upon the man who had wronged him, into whom, as he once declared, the soul of a cur

had entered, and now what could he say? He had carried in his heart the infinite something that is to men the utmost fulness of life, which, losing, they must carry lead upon their shoulders where they thought the gods had given pinions.

McGann and Pierre were nervous. This conjunction of unusual things was easier to the intelligences of the dead than the quick. The outer air was perhaps less charged with the unnatural, and with a glance towards the room where death was quartered, they left the hut.

Trafford was alone with the woman through whom his life had been turned awry. He looked at her searchingly; and as he looked the mere man in him asserted itself for a moment. She was dressed in coarse garments; it struck him that her grief had a touch of commonness about it; there was something imperfect in the dramatic setting. His recent experiences had had a kind of grandeur about them; it was not thus that he had remembered her in the hour when he had called upon her in the plains, and the Indian had heard his cry. He felt, and was ashamed in feeling, that there was a grim humour in the situation. The fantastic, the melodramatic, the emotional, were huddled here in too marked a prominence; it all seemed, for an instant, like the tale of a woman's first novel. But immediately again there was roused in him the latent force of loyalty to himself and therefore to her; the story of her past, so far as he knew it, flashed before him, and his eyes grew hot.

He remembered the time he had last seen her in an English country-house among a gay party in which royalty smiled, and the subject was content beneath the smile. But there was one rebellious subject, and her name was Hester Orval. She was a wilful girl who had lived life selfishly within the lines of that decorous yet pleasant convention to which she was born. She was beautiful, she knew that, and royalty had graciously admitted it. She was warm-thoughted, and possessed the fatal strain of the artistic temperament. She was not sure that she had a heart; and many others, not of her sex, after varying and enthusiastic study of the matter, were not more confident than she. But it had come at last that she had listened with pensive pleasure to Trafford's tale of love; and because to be worshipped by a man high in all men's, and in most women's, esteem, ministered delicately to her sweet egotism, and because she was proud of him, she gave him her hand in promise, and her cheek in privilege, but denied him though he knew this not her heart and the service of her life. But he was content to wait patiently for that service, and he wholly trusted her, for there was in him some fine spirit of the antique world.

There had come to Falkenstowe, this country-house and her father's home, a man who bore a knightly name, but who had no knightly heart; and he told Ulysses' tales, and covered a hazardous and cloudy past with that fascinating colour which makes evil appear to be good, so that he roused in her the pulse of art, which she believed was soul and life, and her allegiance swerved. And when her mother pleaded with her, and when her father said stern things, and even royalty, with uncommon use, rebuked her gently, her heart grew hard; and almost on the eve of her wedding-day she fled with her lover, and married him, and together they sailed away over the seas.

The world was shocked and clamorous for a matter of nine days, and then it forgot this foolish and awkward circumstance; but Just Trafford never forgot it. He remembered all vividly until the hour, a year later, when London journals announced that Hester Orval and her husband had gone down with a vessel wrecked upon the Alaskan and Canadian coast. And there new regret began, and his knowledge of her ended.

But she and her husband had not been drowned; with a sailor they had reached the shore in safety. They had travelled inland from the coast through the great mountains by unknown paths, and as they travelled, the sailor died; and they came at last through innumerable hardships to the Kimash Hills, the hills of the Mighty Men, and there they stayed. It was not an evil land; it had neither deadly cold in winter nor wanton heat in summer. But they never saw a human face, and everything was lonely and spectral. For a time they strove to go eastwards or southwards but the mountains were impassable, and in the north and west there was no hope. Though the buffalo swept by them in the valley they could not slay them, and they lived on forest fruits until in time the man sickened. The woman nursed him faithfully, but still he failed; and when she could go forth no more for food,

some unseen dweller of the woods brought buffalo meat, and prairie fowl, and water from the spring, and laid them beside her door.

She had seen the mounds upon the hill, the wide couches of the sleepers, and she remembered the things done in the days when God seemed nearer to the sons of men than now; and she said that a spirit had done this thing, and trembled and was thankful. But the man weakened and knew that he should die, and one night when the pain was sharp upon him he prayed bitterly that he might pass, or that help might come to snatch him from the grave. And as they sobbed together, a form entered at the door, a form clothed in scarlet, and he bade them tell the tale of their lives as they would some time tell it unto heaven. And when the tale was told he said that succour should come to them from the south by the hand of the Scarlet Hunter, that the nation sleeping there should no more be disturbed by their moaning. And then he had gone forth, and with his going there was a storm such as that in which the man had died, the storm that had assailed the hunters in the forest yesterday.

This was the second part of Hester Orval's life as she told it to Just Trafford. And he, looking into her eyes, knew that she had suffered, and that she had sounded her husband's unworthiness. Then he turned from her and went into the room where the dead man lay. And there all hardness passed from him, and he understood that in the great going forth man reckons to the full with the deeds done in that brief pilgrimage called life; and that in the bitter journey which this one took across the dread spaces between Here and There, he had repented of his sins, because they, and they only, went with him in mocking company; the good having gone first to plead where evil is a debtor and hath a prison. And the woman came and stood beside Trafford, and whispered, "At first and at the last he was kind."

But he urged her gently from the room: "Go away," he said; "go away. We cannot judge him. Leave me alone with him."

They buried him upon the hill-side, far from the mounds where the Mighty Men waited for their summons to go forth and be the lords of the North again. At night they buried him when the moon was at its full; and he had the fragrant pines for his bed, and the warm darkness to cover him; and though he is to those others resting there a heathen and an alien, it may be that he sleeps peacefully.

When Trafford questioned Hester Orval more deeply of her life there, the unearthly look quickened in her eyes, and she said: "Oh, nothing, nothing is real here, but suffering; perhaps it is all a dream, but it has changed me, changed me. To hear the tread of the flying herds, to see no being save him, the Scarlet Hunter, to hear the voices calling in the night! . . . Hush! There, do you not hear them? It is midnight listen!"

He listened, and Pierre and Shon McGann looked at each other apprehensively, while Shon's fingers felt hurriedly along the beads of a rosary which he did not hold. Yes, they heard it, a deep sonorous sound: "Is the daybreak come?" "It is still the night," came the reply as of one clear voice. And then there floated through the hills more softly: "We sleep we sleep!" And the sounds echoed through the valley "Sleep sleep!"

Yet though these things were full of awe, the spirit of the place held them there, and the fever of the hunter descended on them hotly. In the morning they went forth, and rode into the White Valley where the buffalo were feeding, and sought to steal upon them; but the shots from their guns only awoke the hills, and none were slain. And though they rode swiftly, the wide surf of snow was ever between them and the chase, and their striving availed nothing. Day after day they followed that flying column, and night after night they heard the sleepers call from the hills. The desire of the thing wasted them, and they forgot to eat and ceased to talk among themselves. But one day Shon McGann, muttering aves as he rode, gained on the cattle, until once again the Scarlet Hunter came forth from a cleft of the mountains, and drove the herd forward with swifter feet. But the Irishman had learned the power in this thing, and had taught Trafford, who knew not those availing prayers, and with these sacred conjurations on their lips they gained on the cattle length by length, though the Scarlet Hunter rode abreast of the thundering horde. Within easy range, Trafford swung his gun shoulder-wards to fire, but at that instant a

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

cloud of snow rose up between him and his quarry so that they all were blinded. And when they came into the clear sun again the buffalo were gone; but flaming arrows from some unseen hunter's bow came singing over their heads towards the south; and they obeyed the sign, and went back to where Hester wore her life out with anxiety for them, because she knew the hopelessness of their quest. Women are nearer to the heart of things. And now she begged Trafford to go southwards before winter froze the plains impassably, and the snow made tombs of the valleys. Thereupon he gave the word to go, and said that he had done wrong for now the spell was falling from him.

But she, seeing his regret, said: "Ah, Just, it could not have been different. The passion of it was on you as it was on us, as if to teach us that hunger for happiness is robbery, and that the covetous desire of man is not the will of the gods. The herds are for the Mighty Men when they awake, not for the stranger and the Philistine."

"You have grown wise, Hester," he replied.

"No, I am sick in brain and body; but it may be that in such sickness there is wisdom."

"Ah," he said, "it has turned my head, I think. Once I laughed at all such fanciful things as these. This Scarlet Hunter, how many times have you seen him?"

"But once."

"What were his looks?"

"A face pale and strong, with noble eyes; and in his voice there was something strange."

Trafford thought of Shangi, the Indian, where had he gone? He had disappeared as suddenly as he had come to their camp in the South.

As they sat silent in the growing night, the door opened and the Scarlet Hunter stood before them. "There is food," he said, "on the threshold food for those who go upon a far journey to the South in the morning. Unhappy are they who seek for gold at the rainbow's foot, who chase the fire-fly in the night, who follow the herds in the White Valley. Wise are they who anger not the gods, and who fly before the rising storm. There is a path from the valley for the strangers, the path by which they came; and when the sun stares forth again upon the world, the way shall be open, and there shall be safety for you until your travel ends in the quick world whither you go. You were foolish; now you are wise. It is time to depart; seek not to return, that we may have peace and you safety. When the world cometh to her spring again we shall meet." Then he turned and was gone, with Trafford's voice ringing after him, "Shangi! Shangi!"

They ran out swiftly, but he had vanished. In the valley where the moonlight fell in icy coldness a herd of cattle was moving, and their breath rose like the spray from sea-beaten rocks, and the sound of their breathing was borne upwards to the watchers.

At daybreak they rode down into the valley. All was still. Not a trace of life remained; not a hoofmark in the snow, nor a bruised blade of grass. And when they climbed to the plateau and looked back, it seemed to Trafford and his companions, as it seemed in after years, that this thing had been all a fantasy. But Hester's face was beside them, and it told of strange and unsubstantial things. The shadows of the middle world were upon her. And yet again when they turned at the last there was no token. It was a northern valley, with sun and snow, and cold blue shadows, and the high hills, that was all.

Then Hester said: "O Just, I do not know if this is life or death and yet it must be death, for after death there is forgiveness to those who repent, and your face is forgiving and kind."

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

And he for he saw that she needed much human help and comfort gently laid his hand on hers and replied: "Hester, this is life, a new life for both of us. Whatever has been was a dream; whatever is now" and he folded her hand in his "is real; and there is no such thing as forgiveness to be spoken of between us. There shall be happiness for us yet, please God!"

"I want to go to Falkenstowe. Will will my mother forgive me?"

"Mothers always forgive, Hester, else half the world had slain itself in shame."

And then she smiled for the first time since he had seen her. This was in the shadows of the scented pines; and a new life breathed upon her, as it breathed upon them all, and they knew that the fever of the White Valley had passed away from them forever.

After many hardships they came in safety to the regions of the south country again; and the tale they told, though doubted by the race of pale-faces, was believed by the heathen; because there was none among them but, as he cradled at his mother's breasts, and from his youth up, had heard the legend of the Scarlet Hunter.

For the romance of that journey, it concerned only the man and woman to whom it was as wine and meat to the starving. Is not love more than legend, and a human heart than all the beasts of the field or any joy of slaughter?

THE STONE

The Stone hung on a jutting crag of Purple Hill. On one side of it, far beneath, lay the village, huddled together as if, through being close compacted, its handful of humanity should not be a mere dust in the balance beside Nature's portentousness. Yet if one stood beside The Stone, and looked down, the flimsy wooden huts looked like a barrier at the end of a great flume. For the hill hollowed and narrowed from The Stone to the village, as if giants had made this concave path by trundling boulders to that point like a funnel where the miners' houses now formed a cul-de-sac. On the other side of the crag was a valley also; but it was lonely and untenanted; and at one flank of The Stone were serried legions of trees.

The Stone was a mighty and wonderful thing. Looked at from the village direct, it had nothing but the sky for a background. At times, also, it appeared to rest on nothing; and many declared that they could see clean between it and the oval floor of the crag on which it rested. That was generally in the evening, when the sun was setting behind it. Then the light coiled round its base, between it and its pedestal, thus making it appear to hover above the hill-point, or, planet-like, to be just settling on it. At other times, when the light was perfectly clear and not too strong, and the village side of the crag was brighter than the other, more accurate relations of The Stone to its pedestal could be discovered. Then one would say that it balanced on a tiny base, a toe of granite. But if one looked long, especially in the summer, when the air throbbed, it evidently rocked upon that toe; if steadily, and very long, he grew tremulous, perhaps afraid. Once, a woman who was about to become a mother went mad, because she thought The Stone would hurtle down the hill at her great moment and destroy her and her child. Indians would not live either on the village side of The Stone or in the valley beyond. They had a legend that, some day, one, whom they called The Man Who Sleeps, would rise from his hidden couch in the mountains, and, being angry that any dared to cumber his playground, would hurl The Stone upon them that dwelt at Purple Hill. But white men pay little heed to Indian legends. At one time or another every person who had come to the village visited The Stone. Colossal as it was, the real base on which its weight rested was actually very small: the view from the village had not been all deceitful. It is possible, indeed, that at one time it had really rocked, and that the rocking had worn for it a shallow cup, or socket, in which it poised. The first man who came to Purple Valley prospecting had often stopped his work and looked at The Stone in a half-fear that it would spring upon him unawares. And yet he had as often laughed at himself for doing so, since, as he said, it must have been there hundreds of thousands of years. Strangers, when they came to the village, went to sleep somewhat timidly the first

night of their stay, and not infrequently left their beds to go and look at The Stone, as it hung there ominously in the light of the moon; or listened towards it if it was dark. When the moon rose late, and The Stone chanced to be directly in front of it, a black sphere seemed to be rolling into the light to blot it out.

But none who lived in the village looked upon The Stone in quite the same fashion as did that first man who had come to the valley. He had seen it through three changing seasons, with no human being near him, and only occasionally a shy, wandering elk, or a cloud of wild ducks whirring down the pass, to share his companionship with it. Once he had waked in the early morning, and, possessed of a strange feeling, had gone out to look at The Stone. There, perched upon it, was an eagle; and though he said to himself that an eagle's weight was to The Stone as a feather upon the world, he kept his face turned towards it all day; for all day the eagle stayed. He was a man of great stature and immense strength. The thews of his limbs stood out like soft unbreakable steel. Yet, as if to cast derision on his strength and great proportions, God or Fate turned his bread to ashes, gave failure into his hands where he hugely grasped at fortune, and hung him about with misery. He discovered gold, but others gathered it. It was his daughter that went mad, and gave birth to a dead child in fearsome thought of The Stone. Once, when he had gone over the hills to another mining field, and had been prevented from coming back by unexpected and heavy snows, his wife was taken ill, and died alone of starvation, because none in the village remembered of her and her needs. Again, one wild night, long after, his only son was taken from his bed and lynched for a crime that was none of his, as was discovered by his murderers next day. Then they killed horribly the real criminal, and offered the father such satisfaction as they could. They said that any one of them was ready there to be killed by him; and they threw a weapon at his feet. At this he stood looking upon them for a moment, his great breast heaving, and his eyes glowering; but presently he reached out his arms, and taking two of them by the throat, brought their heads together heavily, breaking their skulls; and, with a cry in his throat like a wounded animal, left them, and entered the village no more. But it became known that he had built a rude hut on Purple Hill, and that he had been seen standing beside The Stone or sitting among the boulders below it, with his face bent upon the village. Those who had come near to him said that he had greatly changed; that his hair and beard had grown long and strong, and, in effect, that he looked like some rugged fragment of an antique world.

The time came when they associated The Man with The Stone: they grew to speak of him simply as The Man. There was something natural and apt in the association. Then they avoided these two singular dwellers on the height. What had happened to The Man when he lived in the village became almost as great a legend as the Indian fable concerning The Stone. In the minds of the people one seemed as old as the other. Women who knew the awful disasters which had befallen The Man brooded at times most timidly, regarding him as they did at first and even still The Stone. Women who carried life unborn about with them had a strange dread of both The Stone and The Man. Time passed on, and the feeling grew that The Man's grief must be a terrible thing, since he lived alone with The Stone and God. But this did not prevent the men of the village from digging gold, drinking liquor, and doing many kinds of evil. One day, again, they did an unjust and cruel thing. They took Pierre, the gambler, whom they had at first sought to vanquish at his own art, and, possessed suddenly of the high duty of citizenship, carried him to the edge of a hill and dropped him over, thinking thereby to give him a quick death, while the vultures would provide him a tomb. But Pierre was not killed, though to his grave unprepared as yet he would bear an arm which should never be lifted higher than his shoulder. When he waked from the crashing gloom which succeeded the fall, he was in the presence of a being whose appearance was awesome and massive an outlawed god: whose hair and beard were white, whose eye was piercing, absorbing, painful, in the long perspective of its woe. This being sat with his great hand clasped to the side of his head. The beginning of his look was the village, and though the vision seemed infinite the village was the end of it too. Pierre, looking through the doorway beside which he lay, drew in his breath sharply, for it seemed at first as if The Man was an unnatural fancy, and not a thing. Behind The Man was The Stone, which was not more motionless nor more full of age than this its comrade. Indeed, The Stone seemed more a thing of life as it poised above the hill: The Man was sculptured rock. His white hair was chiselled on his broad brow, his face was a solemn pathos petrified, his lips were curled with an iron contempt, an incalculable anger.

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

The sun went down, and darkness gathered about The Man. Pierre reached out his hand, and drank the water and ate the coarse bread that had been put near him. He guessed that trees or protruding ledges had broken his fall, and that he had been rescued and brought here. As he lay thinking, The Man entered the doorway, stooping much to do so. With flints he lighted a wick which hung from a wooden bowl of bear's oil; then kneeling, held it above his head, and looked at Pierre. And Pierre, who had never feared anyone, shrank from the look in The Man's eyes. But when the other saw that Pierre was awake, a distant kindness came upon his face, and he nodded gravely; but he did not speak. Presently a great tremor as of pain shook all his limbs, and he set the candle on the ground, and with his stalwart hands arranged afresh the bandages about Pierre's injured arm and leg. Pierre spoke at last.

"You are The Man"? he said. The other bowed his head.

"You saved me from those devils in the valley?" A look of impregnable hardness came into The Man's face, but he pressed Pierre's hand for answer; and though the pressure was meant to be gentle, Pierre winced painfully. The candle spluttered, and the hut filled with a sickly smoke. The Man brought some bear skins and covered the sufferer, for, the season being autumn, the night was cold. Pierre, who had thus spent his first sane and conscious hour in many days, fell asleep. What time it was when he waked he was not sure, but it was to hear a metallic click—click come to him through the clear air of night. It was a pleasant noise as of steel and rock: the work of some lonely stone—cutter of the hills. The sound reached him with strange, increasing distinctness. Was this Titan that had saved him sculpturing some figure from the metal hill? Click—click! it vibrated as regularly as the keen pulse of a watch. He lay and wondered for a long time, but fell asleep again; and the steely iteration went on in his dreams.

In the morning The Man came to him, and cared for his hurts, and gave him food; but still would speak no word. He was gone nearly all day in the hills; yet when evening came he sought the place where Pierre had seen him the night before, and the same weird scene was re—enacted. And again in the night the clicking sound went on; and every night it was renewed. Pierre grew stronger, and could, with difficulty, stand upon his feet. One night he crept out, and made his way softly, slowly towards the sound. He saw The Man kneeling beside The Stone, he saw a hammer rise and fall upon a chisel; and the chisel was at the base of The Stone. The hammer rose and fell with perfect but dreadful precision. Pierre turned and looked towards the village below, whose lights were burning like a bunch of fire—flies in the gloom. Again he looked at The Stone and The Man.

Then the thing came to him sharply. The Man was chiselling away the socket of The Stone, bringing it to that point of balance where the touch of a finger, the wing of a bird, or the whistle of a north—west wind, would send it down upon the offending and unsuspecting village.

The thought held him paralysed. The Man had nursed his revenge long past the thought of its probability by the people beneath. He had at first sat and watched the village, hated, and mused dreadfully upon the thing he had determined to do. Then he had worked a little, afterwards more, and now, lastly, since he had seen what they had done to Pierre, with the hot but firm eagerness of an avenging giant. Pierre had done some sad deeds in his time, and had tasted some sweet revenges, but nothing like to this had ever entered his brain. In that village were men who as they thought had cast him to a death fit only for a coward or a cur. Well, here was the most exquisite retaliation. Though his hand should not be in the thing, he could still be the cynical and approving spectator.

But yet: had all those people hovering about those lights below done harm to him? He thought there were a few and they were women who would not have followed his tumbril to his death with cries of execration. The rest would have done so, most of them did so, not because he was a criminal, but because he was a victim, and because human nature as it is thirsts inordinately at times for blood and sacrifice a living strain of the old barbaric instinct. He remembered that most of these people were concerned in having injured The Man. The few good women there had vile husbands; the few pardonable men had hateful wives: the village of Purple Hill was an ill affair.

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V3

He thought: now doubtfully, now savagely, now with irony.

The hammer and steel clicked on.

He looked at the lights of the village again. Suddenly there came to his mind the words of a great man who sought to save a city manifold centuries ago. He was not sure that he wished to save this village; but there was a grim, almost grotesque, fitness in the thing that he now intended. He spoke out clearly through the night:

"Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten righteous shall be found there."

The hammer stopped. There was a silence, in which the pines sighed lightly. Then, as if speaking was a labour, The Man replied in a deep, harsh voice:

"I will not spare it for ten's sake."

Again there was a silence, in which Pierre felt his maimed body bend beneath him; but presently the voice said, "Now!"

At this the moon swung from behind a cloud. The Man stood behind The Stone. His arm was raised to it. There was a moment's pause it seemed like years to Pierre; a wind came softly crying out of the west, the moon hurried into the dark, and then a monster sprang from its pedestal upon Purple Hill, and, with a sound of thunder and an awful speed, raced upon the village below. The boulders of the hillside crumbled after it.

And Pierre saw the lights go out.

The moon shone out again for an instant, and Pierre saw that The Man stood where The Stone had been; but when he reached the place The Man was gone. Forever!