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A ROMANY OF THE SNOWS

BEING A CONTINUATION OF THE PERSONAL HISTORIES OF "PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE" AND THE LAST EXISTING RECORDS OF PRETTY PIERRE

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 4.

LITTLE BABICHE AT POINT O' BUGLES THE SPOIL OF THE PUMA THE TRAIL OF THE SUN DOGS THE PILOT OF BELLE AMOUR

LITTLE BABICHE

"No, no, m'sieu' the governor, they did not tell you right. I was with him, and I have known Little Babiche fifteen years—as long as I've known you. . . . It was against the time when down in your world there they have feastings, and in the churches the grand songs and many candles on the altars. Yes, Noel, that is the word—the day of the Great Birth. You shall hear how strange it all was—the thing, the time, the end of it."

The governor of the great Company settled back in a chair, his powerful face seamed by years, his hair grey and thick still, his keen, steady eyes burning under shaggy brows. He had himself spent long solitary years in the wild fastnesses of the north. He fastened his dark eyes on Pierre, and said:

"Monsieur Pierre, I shall be glad to hear. It was at the time of Noel—yes?"

Pierre began: "You have seen it beautiful and cold in the north, but never so cold and beautiful as it was last year. The world was white with sun and ice, the frost never melting, the sun never warming—just a glitter, so lovely, so deadly. If only you could keep the heart warm, you were not afraid. But if once—just for a moment—the blood ran out from the heart and did not come in again, the frost clamped the doors shut, and there was an end of all. Ah, m'sieu', when the north clinches a man's heart in anger there is no pain like it—for a moment."

"Yes, yes; and Little Babiche?"

"For ten years he carried the mails along the route of Fort St. Mary, Fort O'Glory, Fort St. Saviour, and Fort Perseverance within the circle- just one mail once a year, but that was enough. There he was with his Esquimaux dogs on the trail, going and coming, with a laugh and a word for anyone that crossed his track. 'Good-day, Babiche' 'Good-day, m'sieu'.' 'How do you, Babiche?' 'Well, thank the Lord, m'sieu'.' 'Where to and where from, Babiche?' 'To the Great Fort by the old trail, from the Far-off River, m'sieu'.' 'Come safe along, Babiche.' 'Merci, m'sieu'; the good God travels north, m'sieu'.' 'Adieu, Babiche.' 'Adieu, m'sieu'.' That is about the way of the thing, year after year. Sometimes a night at a hut or a post, but mostly alone—alone, except for the dogs. He slept with them, and they slept on the mails—to guard: as though there should be highwaymen on the Prairie of the Ten Stars! But no, it was his way, m'sieu'. Now and again I crossed him on the trail, for have I not travelled to every corner of the north? We were not so great friends, for—well, Babiche is a man who says his aves, and never was a loafer, and there was no reason why he should have love for me; but we were good company when we met. I knew him when he was a boy down on the Chaudiere, and he always had a heart like a lion-and a woman. I had seen him fight, I had seen him suffer cold, and I had heard him sing.

"Well, I was up last fall to Fort St. Saviour. Ho, how dull was it! Macgregor, the trader there, has brains like rubber. So I said, I will go down to Fort O'Glory. I knew someone would be there—it is nearer the world. So I started away with four dogs and plenty of jerked buffalo, and so much brown brandy as Macgregor could squeeze out of his eye! Never, never were there such days—the frost shaking like steel and silver as it powdered the sunlight, the white level of snow lifting and falling, and falling and lifting, the sky so great a travel away, the air which made you cry out with pain one minute and gave you joy the next. And all so wild, so lonely! Yet I have seen hanging in those plains cities all blue and red with millions of lights showing, and voices, voices everywhere, like the singing of soft masses. After a time in that cold up there you are no longer yourself—no. You move in a dream. "Eh bien, m'sieu', there came, I thought, a dream to me one evening—well, perhaps one afternoon, for the days are short—so short, the sun just coming over a little bend of sky, and sinking down like a big orange ball. I come out of a tumble of little hills, and there over on the plains I saw a sight! Ragged hills of ice were thrown up, as if they'd been heaved out by the breaking earth, jutting here and there like wedges—like the teeth of a world. Alors, on one crag, shaped as an anvil, I saw what struck me like a blow, and I felt the blood shoot out of my heart and leave it dry. I was for a minute like a pump with no water in its throat to work the piston and fetch the stream up. I got sick and numb. There on that anvil of snow and ice I saw a big white bear, one such as you shall see within the Arctic Circle, his long nose fetching out towards that bleeding sun in the sky, his white coat shining. But that was not the thing—there was another. At the feet of the bear was a body, and one clawed foot was on that body—of a man. So clear was the air, the red sun shining on the face as it was turned towards me, that I wonder I did not at once know whose it was. You cannot think, m'sieu', what that was like—no. But all at once I remembered the Chant of the Scarlet Hunter. I spoke it quick, and the blood came creeping back in here." He tapped his chest with his slight forefinger.

"What was the chant?" asked the governor, who had scarce stirred a muscle since the tale began. Pierre made a little gesture of deprecation. "Ah, it is perhaps a thing of foolishness, as you may think—"

"No, no. I have heard and seen in my day," urged the governor.

"So? Good. Yes, I remember, you told me years ago, m'sieu'. . . .

> "The blinding Trail and Night and Cold are man's: mine is the trail that finds the Ancient Lodge. Morning and Night they travel with me; my camp is set by the pines, its fires are burning—are burning. The lost, they shall sit by my fires, and the fearful ones shall seek, and the sick shall abide. I am the Hunter, the Son of the North; I am thy lover where no man may love thee. With me thou shalt journey, and thine the Safe Tent.

"As I said, the blood came back to my heart. I turned to my dogs, and gave them a cut with the whip to see if I dreamed. They sat back and snarled, and their wild red eyes, the same as mine, kept looking at the bear and the quiet man on the anvil of ice and snow. Tell me, can you think of anything like it?—the strange light, the white bear of the Pole, that has no friends at all except the shooting stars, the

great ice plains, the quick night hurrying on, the silence—such silence as no man can think! I have seen trouble flying at me in a hundred ways, but this was different—yes. We come to the foot of the little hill. Still the bear not stir. As I went up, feeling for my knives and my gun, the dogs began to snarl with anger, and for one little step I shivered, for the thing seem not natural. I was about two hundred feet away from the bear when it turned slow round at me, lifting its foot from the body. The dogs all at once come huddling about me, and I dropped on my knee to take aim, but the bear stole away from the man and come moving down past us at an angle, making for the plain. I could see his deep shining eyes, and the steam roll from his nose in long puffs. Very slow and heavy, like as if he see no one and care for no one, he shambled down, and in a minute was gone behind a boulder. I ran on to the man—"

The governor was leaning forward, looking intently, and said now: "It's like a wild dream—but the north—the north is near to the Strangest of All!"

"I knelt down and lifted him up in my arms, all a great bundle of furs and wool, and I got my hand at last to his wrist. He was alive. It was Little Babiche! Part of his face was frozen stiff. I rubbed out the frost with snow, and then I forced some brandy into his mouth, good old H.B.C. brandy,—and began to call to him: 'Babiche! Babiche! Come back, Babiche! The wolf's at the pot, Babiche!' That's the way to call a hunter to his share of meat. I was afraid, for the sleep of cold is the sleep of death, and it is hard to call the soul back to this world. But I called, and kept calling, and got him on his feet, with my arm round him. I gave him more brandy; and at last I almost shrieked in his ear. Little by little I saw his face take on the look of waking life. It was like the dawn creeping over white hills and spreading into day. I said to myself: What a thing it will be if I can fetch him back! For I never knew one to come back after the sleep had settled on them. It is too comfortable—all pain gone, all trouble, the world forgot, just a kind weight in all the body, as you go sinking down, down to the valley, where the long hands of old comrades beckon to you, and their soft, high voices cry, 'Hello! hello-o!'" Pierre nodded his head towards the distance, and a musing smile divided his lips on his white teeth. Presently he folded a cigarette, and went on:

"I had saved something to the last, as the great test, as the one thing to open his eyes wide, if they could be opened at all. Alors, there was no time to lose, for the wolf of Night was driving the red glow-worm down behind the world, and I knew that when darkness came altogether—darkness and night—there would be no help for him. Mon Dieu! how one sleeps in the night of the north, in the beautiful wide silence! . . . So, m'sieu', just when I thought it was the time, I called, 'Corinne! Corinne!' Then once again I said, 'P'tite Corinne! P'tite Corinne! Come home! come home! P'tite Corinne!' I could see the fight in the jail of sleep. But at last he killed his jailer; the doors in his brain flew open, and his mind came out through his wide eyes. But he was blind a little and dazed, though it was getting dark quick. I struck his back hard, and spoke loud from a song that we used to sing on the Chaudiere— Babiche and all of us, years ago. Mon Dieu! how I remember those days—

"'Which is the way that the sun goes?
The way that my little one come.
Which is the good path over the hills?
The path that leads to my little one's home—
To my little one's home, m'sieu', m'sieu'!'

"That did it. 'Corinne, ma p'tite Corinne!' he said; but he did not look at me—only stretch out his hands. I caught them, and shook them, and shook him, and made him take a step forward; then I slap him on the back again, and said loud: 'Come, come, Babiche, don't you know me? See Babiche, the snow's no sleeping-bunk, and a polar bear's no good friend.' 'Corinne!' he went on, soft and slow. 'Ma p'tite Corinne!' He smiled to himself; and I said, 'Where've you been, Babiche? Lucky I found you, or you'd have been sleeping till the Great Mass.' Then he looked at me straight in the eyes, and something wild shot out of his. His hand stretched over and caught me by the shoulder, perhaps to steady himself, perhaps because he wanted to feel something human. Then he looked round slow-all round the plain, as if to find something. At that moment a little of the sun crept back, and looked up over the wall of ice, making a glow of yellow and red for a moment; and never, north or south, have I seen such beauty—so delicate, so awful. It was like a world that its Maker had built in a fit of joy, and then got tired of, and broke in pieces, and blew out all its fires, and left—ah yes—like that! And out in the distance I—I only saw a bear travelling eastwards."

The governor said slowly:

And I took My staff Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break
My covenant which I had made with all the people.

"Yes—like that." Pierre continued: "Babiche turned to me with a little laugh, which was a sob too. 'Where is it, Pierre?' said he. I knew he meant the bear. 'Gone to look for another man,' I said, with a gay look, for I saw that he was troubled. 'Come,' said he at once. As we went, he saw my dogs. He

stopped short and shook a little, and tears came into his eyes. 'What is it, Babiche?' said I. He looked back towards the south. 'My dogs—Brandy-wine, Come-along, 'Poleon, and the rest—died one night all of an hour. One by one they crawl over to where I lay in my fur bag, and die there, huddling by me—and such cries—such cries! There was poison or something in the frozen fish I'd given them. I loved them every one; and then there was the mails, the year's mails—how should they be brought on? That was a bad thought, for I had never missed—never in ten years. There was one bunch of letters which the governor said to me was worth more than all the rest of the mails put together, and I was to bring it to Fort St. Saviour, or not show my face to him again. I leave the dogs there in the snow, and come on with the sled, carrying all the mails. Ah, the blessed saints, how heavy the sled got, and how lonely it was! Nothing to speak to—no one, no thing, day after day. At last I go to cry to the dogs, "Come-along! 'Poleon! Brandy-wine!"—like that! I think I see them there, but they never bark and they never snarl, and they never spring to the snap of the whip.... I was alone. Oh, my head! my head! If there was only something alive to look at, besides the wide white plain, and the bare hills of ice, and the sun-dogs in the sky! Now I was wild, next hour I was like a child, then I gnash my teeth like a wolf at the sun, and at last I got on my knees. The tears froze my eyelids shut, but I kept saying, "Ah, my great Friend, my Jesu, just something, something with the breath of life! Leave me not all alone!" and I got sleepier all the time.

"'I was sinking, sinking, so quiet and easy, when all at once I felt something beside me; I could hear it breathing, but I could not open my eyes at first, for, as I say, the lashes were froze. Something touch me, smell me, and a nose was push against my chest. I put out my hand ver' soft and touch it. I had no fear, I was so glad I could have hug it, but I did not—I drew back my hand quiet and rub my eyes. In a little I can see. There stand the thing—a polar bear—not ten feet away, its red eyes shining. On my knees I spoke to it, talk to it, as I would to a man. It was like a great wild dog, fierce, yet kind, and I fed it with the fish which had been for Brandy-wine and the rest—but not to kill it! and it did not die. That night I lie down in my bag—no, I was not afraid! The bear lie beside me, between me and the sled. Ah, it was warm! Day after day we travel together, and camp together at night—ah, sweet Sainte Anne, how good it was, myself and the wild beast such friends, alone in the north! But to-day—a little while ago—something went wrong with me, and I got sick in the head, a swimming like a tide wash in and out. I fall down-asleep. When I wake I find you here beside me—that is all. The bear must have drag me here.'"

Pierre stuck a splinter into the fire to light another cigarette, and paused as if expecting the governor to speak, but no word coming, he continued: "I had my arm around him while we talked and come slowly down the hill. Soon he stopped and said, 'This is the place.' It was a cave of ice, and we went in. Nothing was there to see except the sled. Babiche stopped short. It come to him now that his good comrade was gone. He turned, and looked out, and called, but there was only the empty night, the ice, and the stars. Then he come back, sat down on the sled, and the tears fall. . . . I lit my spirit-lamp, boiled coffee, got pemmican from my bag, and I tried to make him eat. No. He would only drink the coffee. At last he said to me, 'What day is this, Pierre?' 'It is the day of the Great Birth, Babiche,' I said. He made the sign of the cross, and was quiet, so quiet! but he smile to himself, and kept saying in a whisper: 'Ma p'tite Corinne! Ma p'tite Corinne!' The next day we come on safe, and in a week I was back at Fort St. Saviour with Babiche and all the mails, and that most wonderful letter of the governor's."

"The letter was to tell a factor that his sick child in the hospital at Quebec was well," the governor responded quietly. "Who was 'Ma p'tite Corinne,' Pierre?"

"His wife—in heaven; and his child—on the Chaudiere, m'sieu'. The child came and the mother went on the same day of the Great Birth. He has a soft heart—that Babiche!"

"And the white bear—so strange a thing!"

"M'sieu', who can tell? The world is young up here. When it was all young, man and beast were good comrades, maybe."

"Ah, maybe. What shall be done with Little Babiche, Pierre?"

"He will never be the same again on the old trail, m'sieu'!"

There was silence for a long time, but at last the governor said, musing, almost tenderly, for he never had a child: "Ma p'tite Corinne!—Little Babiche shall live near his child, Pierre. I will see to that."

Pierre said no word, but got up, took off his hat to the governor, and sat down again.

AT POINT O' BUGLES

"John York, John York, where art thou gone, John York?"

"What's that, Pierre?" said Sir Duke Lawless, starting to his feet and peering round.

"Hush!" was Pierre's reply. "Wait for the rest. . . . There!"

"King of my heart, king of my heart, I am out on the trail of thy bugles."

Sir Duke was about to speak, but Pierre lifted a hand in warning, and then through the still night there came the long cry of a bugle, rising, falling, strangely clear, echoing and echoing again, and dying away. A moment, and the call was repeated, with the same effect, and again a third time; then all was still, save for the flight of birds roused from the desire of night, and the long breath of some animal in the woods sinking back to sleep.

Their camp was pitched on the south shore of Hudson's Bay, many leagues to the west of Rupert House, not far from the Moose River. Looking north was the wide expanse of the bay, dotted with sterile islands here and there; to the east were the barren steppes of Labrador, and all round them the calm, incisive air of a late September, when winter begins to shake out his frosty curtains and hang them on the cornice of the north, despite the high protests of the sun. The two adventurers had come together after years of separation, and Sir Duke had urged Pierre to fare away with him to Hudson's Bay, which he had never seen, although he had shares in the great Company, left him by his uncle the admiral.

They were camped in a hollow, to the right a clump of hardy trees, with no great deal of foliage, but some stoutness; to the left a long finger of land running out into the water like a wedge, the most eastern point of the western shore of Hudson's Bay. It was high and bold, and, somehow, had a fine dignity and beauty. From it a path led away north to a great log-fort called King's House.

Lawless saw Pierre half rise and turn his head, listening. Presently he, too, heard the sound-the soft crash of crisp grass under the feet. He raised himself to a sitting posture and waited.

Presently a tall figure came out of the dusk into the light of their fire, and a long arm waved a greeting at them. Both Lawless and Pierre rose to their feet. The stranger was dressed in buckskin, he carried a rifle, and around his shoulder was a strong yellow cord, from which hung a bugle.

"How!" he said, with a nod, and drew near the fire, stretching out his hands to the blaze.

"How!" said Lawless and Pierre.

After a moment Lawless drew from his blanket a flask of brandy, and without a word handed it over the fire. The fingers of the two men met in the flicker of flames, a sort of bond by fire, and the stranger raised the flask.

"Chin-chin," he said, and drank, breathing a long sigh of satisfaction afterwards as he handed it back; but it was Pierre that took it, and again fingers touched in the bond of fire. Pierre passed the flask to Lawless, who lifted it.

"Chin-chin," he said, drank, and gave the flask to Pierre again, who did as did the others, and said "Chin-chin" also.

By that salutation of the east, given in the far north, Lawless knew that he had met one who had lighted fires where men are many and close to the mile as holes in a sieve.

They all sat down, and tobacco went round, the stranger offering his, while the two others, with true hospitality, accepted.

"We heard you over there—it was you?" said Lawless, nodding towards
Point o' Bugles, and glancing at the bugle the other carried.

"Yes, it was I," was the reply. "Someone always does it twice a year: on the 25th September and the 25th March. I've done it now without a break for ten years, until it has got to be a sort of religion with me, and the whole thing's as real as if King George and John York were talking. As I tramp to the point or swing away back, in summer barefooted, in winter on my snowshoes, to myself I seem to be John York on the trail of the king's bugles. I've thought so much about the whole thing, I've read so many of John York's letters—and how many times one of the King's!—that now I scarcely know which is the bare story, and which the bit's I've dreamed as I've tramped over the plains or sat in the quiet at King's

House, spelling out little by little the man's life, from the cues I found in his journal, in the Company's papers, and in that one letter of the King's."

Pierre's eyes were now more keen than those of Lawless: for years he had known vaguely of this legend of Point o' Bugles.

"You know it all," he said—"begin at the beginning: how and when you first heard, how you got the real story, and never mind which is taken from the papers and which from your own mind—if it all fits in it is all true, for the lie never fits in right with the square truth. If you have the footprints and the handprints you can tell the whole man; if you have the horns of a deer you know it as if you had killed it, skinned it, and potted it."

The stranger stretched himself before the fire, nodding at his hosts as he did so, and then began:

"Well, a word about myself first," he said, "so you'll know just where you are. I was full up of life in London town and India, and that's a fact. I'd plenty of friends and little money, and my will wasn't equal to the task of keeping out of the hands of the Jews. I didn't know what to do, but I had to go somewhere, that was clear. Where? An accident decided it. I came across an old journal of my great-grandfather, John York,—my name's Dick Adderley,—and just as if a chain had been put round my leg and I'd been jerked over by the tipping of the world, I had to come to Hudson's Bay. John York's journal was a thing to sit up nights to read. It came back to England after he'd had his fill of Hudson's Bay and the earth beneath, and had gone, as he himself said on the last page of the journal, to follow the king's buglers in 'the land that is far off.' God and the devil were strong in old John York. I didn't lose much time after I'd read the journal. I went to Hudson's Bay house in London, got a place in the Company, by the help of the governor himself, and came out. I've learned the rest of the history of old John York—the part that never got to England; for here at King's House there's a holy tradition that the real John York belongs to it and to it alone."

Adderley laughed a little. "King's House guards John York's memory, and it's as fresh and real here now as though he'd died yesterday; though it's forgotten in England, and by most who bear his name, and the present Prince of Wales maybe never heard of the roan who was a close friend of the Prince Regent, the First Gentleman of Europe."

"That sounds sweet gossip," said Lawless, with a smile; "we're waiting."

Adderley continued: "John York was an honest man, of wholesome sport, jovial, and never shirking with the wine, commendable in his appetite, of rollicking soul and proud temper, and a gay dog altogether—gay, but to be trusted, too, for he had a royal heart. In the coltish days of the Prince Regent he was a boon comrade, but never did he stoop to flattery, nor would he hedge when truth should be spoken, as ofttimes it was needed with the royal blade, for at times he would forget that a prince was yet a man, topped with the accident of a crown. Never prince had truer friend, and so in his best hours he thought, himself, and if he ever was just and showed his better part, it was to the bold country gentleman who never minced praise or blame, but said his say and devil take the end of it. In truth, the Prince was wilful, and once he did a thing which might have given a twist to the fate of England. Hot for the love of women, and with some dash of real romance in him too, else even as a prince he might have had shallower love and service,—he called John York one day and said:

"'To-night at seven, Squire John, you'll stand with me while I put the seal on the Gates of Eden;' and, when the other did not guess his import, added: 'Sir Mark Selby is your neighbour—his daughter's for my arms to- night. You know her, handsome Sally Selby—she's for your prince, for good or ill.'

"John York did not understand at first, for he could not think the Prince had anything in mind but some hot escapade of love. When Mistress Selby's name was mentioned his heart stood still, for she had been his choice, the dear apple of his eye, since she had bloomed towards womanhood. He had set all his hopes upon her, tarrying till she should have seen some little life before he asked her for his wife. He had her father's Godspeed to his wooing, for he was a man whom all men knew honest and generous as the sun, and only choleric with the mean thing. She, also, had given him good cause to think that he should one day take her to his home, a loved and honoured wife. His impulse, when her name passed the Prince's lips, was to draw his sword, for he would have called an emperor to account; but presently he saw the real meaning of the speech: that the Prince would marry her that night."

Here the story-teller paused again, and Pierre said softly, inquiringly:

"You began to speak in your own way, and you've come to another way—like going from an almanac to the Mass."

The other smiled. "That's so. I've heard it told by old Shearton at King's House, who speaks as if he'd stepped out of Shakespeare, and somehow I seem to hear him talking, and I tell it as he told it last year

to the governor of the Company. Besides, I've listened these seven years to his style."

"It's a strange beginning—unwritten history of England," said Sir Duke musingly.

"You shall hear stranger things yet," answered Adderley. "John York could hardly believe it at first, for the thought of such a thing never had place in his mind. Besides, the Prince knew how he had looked upon the lady, and he could not have thought his comrade would come in between him and his happiness. Perhaps it was the difficulty, adding spice to the affair, that sent the Prince to the appeal of private marriage to win the lady, and John York always held that he loved her truly then, the first and only real affection of his life. The lady—who can tell what won her over from the honest gentleman to the faithless prince? That soul of vanity which wraps about the real soul of every woman fell down at last before the highest office in the land, and the gifted bearer of the office. But the noble spirit in her brought him to offer marriage, when he might otherwise have offered, say, a barony. There is a record of that and more in John York's Memoirs which I will tell you, for they have settled in my mind like an old song, and I learned them long ago. I give you John York's words written by his own hands:

"'I did not think when I beheld thee last, dearest flower of the world's garden, that I should see thee bloom in that wide field, rank with the sorrows of royal favour. How did my foolish eyes fill with tears when I watched thee, all rose and gold in thy cheeks and hair, the light falling on thee through the chapel window, putting thy pure palm into my prince's, swearing thy life away, selling the very blossoms of earth's orchards for the brier beauty of a hidden vineyard! I saw the flying glories of thy cheeks, the halcyon weather of thy smile, the delicate lifting of thy bosom, the dear gaiety of thy step, and, at that moment, I mourned for thy sake that thou wert not the dullest wench in the land, for then thou hadst been spared thy miseries, thou hadst been saved the torture-boot of a lost love and a disacknowledged wifedom. Yet I could not hide from me that thou wert happy at that great moment, when he swore to love and cherish thee, till death you parted.

"Ah, George, my prince, my king, how wickedly thou didst break thy vows with both of us who loved thee well, through good and ill report—for they spake evil of thee, George; ay, the meanest of thy subjects spake lightly of their king—when with that sweet soul secretly hid away in the farthest corner of thy kingdom, thou soughtst divorce from thy later Caroline, whom thou, unfaithful, didst charge with infidelity. When, at last, thou didst turn again to the partner of thy youth, thy true wife in the eyes of God, it was too late. Thou didst promise me that thou wouldst never take another wife, never put our dear heart away, though she could not—after our miserable laws—bear thee princes. Thou didst break thy promise, yet she forgave thee, and I forgave thee, for well we knew that thou wouldst pay a heavy reckoning, and that in the hour when thou shouldst cry to us we might not come to thee; that in the days when age and sorrow and vast troubles should oppress thee, thou wouldst long for the true hearts who loved thee for thyself and not for aught thou wudst give, or aught that thou wert, save as a man.

"'When thou didst proclaim thy purpose to take Caroline to wife, I pleaded with thee, I was wroth with thee. Thy one plea was succession. Succession! Succession! What were a hundred dynasties beside that precious life, eaten by shame and sorrow? It were easy for others, not thy children, to come after thee, to rule as well as thee, as must even now be the case, for thou hast no lawful child save that one in the loneliest corner of thy English vineyard—alack! alack! I warned thee George, I pleaded, and thou didst drive me out with words ill-suited to thy friend who loved thee.

"'I did not fear thee, I would have forced thee to thy knees or made thee fight me, had not some good spirit cried to my heart that thou wert her husband, and that we both had loved thee. I dared not listen to the brutal thing thou hintedst at—that now I might fatten where I had hungered. Thou hadst to answer for the baseness of that thought to the King of kings, when thou wentest forth alone, no subject, courtier, friend, wife, or child to do thee service, journeying—not en prince, George; no, not en prince! but as a naked soul to God.

"'Thou saidst to me: "Get thee gone, John York, where I shall no more see thee." And when I returned, "Wouldst thou have me leave thy country, sir?" thou answeredst: "Blow thy quarrelsome soul to the stars where my farthest bugle cries." Then I said: "I go, sir, till thou callest me again—and after; but not till thou hast honoured the child of thy honest wedlock; till thou hast secured thy wife to the end of her life against all manner of trouble save the shame of thy disloyalty." There was no more for me to do, for my deep love itself forbade my staying longer within reach of the noble deserted soul. And so I saw the chastened glory of her face no more, nor evermore beheld her perfectness.'"

Adderley paused once more, and, after refilling his pipe in silence, continued:

"That was the heart of the thing. His soul sickened of the rank world, as he called it, and he came out to the Hudson's Bay country, leaving his estates in care of his nephew, but taking many stores and great chests of clothes and a shipload of furniture, instruments of music, more than a thousand books, some good pictures, and great stores of wine. Here he came and stayed, an officer of the Company,

building King's House, and filling it with all the fine things he had brought with him, making in this far north a little palace in the wilderness. Here he lived, his great heart growing greater in this wide sinewy world, King's House a place of pilgrimage for all the Company's men in the north; a noble gentleman in a sweet exile, loving what he could no more, what he did no more, see.

"Twice a year he went to that point yonder and blew this bugle, no man knew why or wherefore, year in, year out, till 1817. Then there came a letter to him with great seals, which began: 'John York, John York, where art thou gone, John York?' There followed a score of sorrowful sentences, full of petulance, too, for it was as John York foretold, his prince longed for the 'true souls' whom he had cast off. But he called too late, for the neglected wife died from the shock of her prince's longing message to her, and when, by the same mail, John York knew that, he would not go back to England to the King. But twice every year he went to yonder point and spoke out the King's words to him: 'John York, John York, where art thou gone, John York?' and gave the words of his own letter in reply: 'King of my heart, king of my heart, I am out on the trail of thy bugles.' To this he added three calls of the bugle, as you have heard."

Adderley handed the bugle to Lawless, who looked at it with deep interest and passed it on to Pierre. "When he died," Adderley continued, "he left the house, the fittings, and the stores to the officers of the Company who should be stationed there, with a sum of money yearly, provided that twice in twelve months the bugle should be blown as you have heard it, and those words called out."

"Why did he do that?" asked Lawless, nodding towards the point.

"Why do they swing the censers at the Mass?" interjected Pierre. "Man has signs for memories, and one man seeing another's sign will remember his own."

"You stay because you like it—at King's House?" asked Lawless of Adderley.

The other stretched himself lazily to the fire and, "I am at home," he said. "I have no cares. I had all there was of that other world; I've not had enough of this. You'll come with me to King's House to-morrow?" he added.

To their quick assent he rejoined: "You'll never want to leave. You'll stay on."

To this Lawless replied, shaking his head: "I have a wife and child in England."

But Pierre did not reply. He lifted the bugle, mutely asking a question of Adderley, who as mutely replied, and then, with it in his hand, left the other two beside the fire.

A few minutes later they heard, with three calls of the bugle from the point afterwards, Pierre's voice: "John York, John York, where art thou gone, John York?"

Then came the reply:

"King of my heart, king of my heart, I am out on the trail of thy bugles."

THE SPOIL OF THE PUMA

Just at the point where the Peace River first hugs the vast outpost hills of the Rockies, before it hurries timorously on, through an unexplored region, to Fort St. John, there stood a hut. It faced the west, and was built half-way up Clear Mountain. In winter it had snows above it and below it; in summer it had snow above it and a very fair stretch of trees and grass, while the river flowed on the same, winter and summer. It was a lonely country. Travelling north, you would have come to the Turnagain River; west, to the Frying Pan Mountains; south, to a goodly land. But from the hut you had no outlook towards the south; your eye came plump against a hard lofty hill, like a wall between heaven and earth. It is strange, too, that, when you are in the far north, you do not look towards the south until the north turns an iron hand upon you and refuses the hospitality of food and fire; your eyes are drawn towards the Pole by that charm—deadly and beautiful—for which men have given up three points of the

compass, with their pleasures and ease, to seek a grave solitude, broken only by the beat of a musk-ox's hoofs, the long breath of the caribou, or the wild cry of the puma.

Sir Duke Lawless had felt this charm, and had sworn that one day he would again leave his home in Devon and his house in Pont Street, and, finding Pierre, Shon M'Gann, and others of his old comrades, together they would travel into those austere yet pleasant wilds. He kept his word, found Shon M'Gann, and on an autumn day of a year not so long ago lounged in this hut on Clear Mountain. They had had three months of travel and sport, and were filled, but not sated, with the joy of the hunter. They were very comfortable, for their host, Pourcette, the French Canadian, had fire and meat in plenty, and, if silent, was attentive to their comfort—a little, black-bearded, grey-headed man, with heavy brows over small vigilant eyes, deft with his fingers, and an excellent sportsman, as could be told from the skins heaped in all the corners of the large hut.

The skins were not those of mere foxes or martens or deer, but of mountain lions and grizzlies. There were besides many soft, tiger-like skins, which Sir Duke did not recognise. He kept looking at them, and at last went over and examined one.

"What's this, Monsieur Pourcette?" he said, feeling it as it lay on the top of the pile.

The little man pushed the log on the fireplace with his moccasined foot before he replied: "Of a puma, m'sieu'."

Sir Duke smoothed it with his hand. "I didn't know there were pumas here."

"Faith, Sir Duke—"

Sir Duke Lawless turned on Shon quickly. "You're forgetting again, Shon.
There's no 'Sir Dukes' between us. What you were to me years ago on the
wally-by-track and the buffalo-trail, you are now, and I'm the same also:
M'Gann and Lawless, and no other."

"Well, then, Lawless, it's true enough as he says it, for I've seen more than wan skin brought in, though I niver clapped eye on the beast alive. There's few men go huntin' them av their own free will, not more than they do grizzlies; but, bedad, this French gintleman has either the luck o' the world, or the gift o' that man ye tould me of, that slew the wild boars in anciency. Look at that, now: there's thirty or forty puma- skins, and I'd take my oath there isn't another man in the country that's shot half that in his lifetime."

Pourcette's eyes were on the skins, not on the men, and he did not appear to listen. He sat leaning forward, with a strange look on his face. Presently he got up, came over, and stroked the skins softly. A queer chuckling noise came from his throat.

"It was good sport?" asked Lawless, feeling a new interest in him.

"The grandest sport—but it is not so easy," answered the old man. "The grizzly comes on you bold and strong; you know your danger right away, and have it out. So. But the puma comes—God, how the puma comes!" He broke off, his eyes burning bright under his bushy brows and his body arranging itself into an attitude of expectation and alertness.

"You have travelled far. The sun goes down. You build a fire and cook your meat, and then good tea and the tabac. It is ver' fine. You hear the loon crying on the water, or the last whistle of the heron up the pass. The lights in the sky come out and shine through a thin mist— there is nothing like that mist, it is so fine and soft. Allons. You are sleepy. You bless the good God. You stretch pine branches, wrap in your blanket, and lie down to sleep. If it is winter and you have a friend, you lie close. It is all quiet. As you sleep, something comes. It slides along the ground on its belly, like a snake. It is a pity if you have not ears that feel—the whole body as ears. For there is a swift lunge, a snarl—ah, you should hear it! the thing has you by the throat, and there is an end!"

The old man had acted all the scenes: a sidelong glance, a little gesture, a movement of the body, a quick, harsh breath—without emphatic excitement, yet with a reality and force that fascinated his two listeners. When he paused, Shon let go a long breath, and Lawless looked with keen inquiry at their entertainer. This almost unnatural, yet quiet, intensity had behind it something besides the mere spirit of the sportsman. Such exhibitions of feeling generally have an unusual personal interest to give them point and meaning.

"Yes, that's wonderful, Pourcette," he said; "but that's when the puma has things its own way. How is it when these come off?" He stroked the soft furs under his hand.

The man laughed, yet without a sound—the inward, stealthy laugh, as from a knowledge wicked in its very suggestiveness. His eyes ran from Lawless to Shon, and back again. He put his hand on his mouth, as though for silence, stole noiselessly over to the wall, took down his gun quietly, and turned round. Then he spoke softly:

"To kill the puma, you must watch—always watch. You will see his yellow eyes sometimes in a tree: you must be ready before he springs. You will hear his breath at night as you pretend to sleep, and you wait till you see his foot steal out of the shadow—then you have him. From a mountain wall you watch in the morning, and, when you see him, you follow, and follow, and do not rest till you have found him. You must never miss fire, for he has great strength and a mad tooth. But when you have got him, he is worth all. You cannot eat the grizzly—he is too thick and coarse; but the puma—well, you had him from the pot to-night. Was he not good?"

Lawless's brows ran up in surprise. Shon spoke quickly:

"Heaven above!" he burst out. "Was it puma we had betune the teeth? And what's puma but an almighty cat? Sure, though, it wint as tinder as pullets, for all that—but I wish you hadn't tould us."

The old man stood leaning on his gun, his chin on his hands, as they covered the muzzle, his eyes fixed on something in his memory, the vision of incidents he had lived or seen.

Lawless went over to the fire and relit his pipe. Shon followed him. They both watched Pourcette. "D'ye think he's mad?" asked Shon in a whisper. Lawless shook his head: "Mad? No. But there's more in this puma-hunting than appears. How long has he lived here, did he say?"

"Four years; and, durin' that time, yours and mine are the only white faces he has seen, except one."

"Except one. Well, whose was the one? That might be interesting. Maybe there's a story in that."

"Faith, Lawless, there's a story worth the hearin', I'm thinkin', to every white man in this country. For the three years I was in the mounted police, I could count a story for all the days o' the calendar —and not all o' them would make you happy to hear."

Pourcette turned round to them. He seemed to be listening to Shon's words. Going to the wall, he hung up the rifle; then he came to the fire and stood holding out his hands to the blaze. He did not look in the least mad, but like a man who was dominated by some one thought, more or less weird. Short and slight, and a little bent, but more from habit —the habit of listening and watching—than from age, his face had a stern kind of earnestness and loneliness, and nothing at all of insanity.

Presently Lawless went to a corner and from his kit drew forth a flask. The old man saw, and immediately brought out a wooden cup. There were two on the shelf, and Shon pointed to the other. Pourcette took no notice. Shon went over to get it, but Pourcette laid a hand on his arm: "Not that."

"For ornamint!" said Shon, laughing, and then his eyes were arrested by a suit of buckskin and a cap of beaver, hanging on the wall. He turned them over, and then suddenly drew back his hand, for he saw in the back of the jacket a knife-slit. There was blood also on the buckskin.

"Holy Mary!" he said, and retreated. Lawless had not noticed; he was pouring out the liquor. He had handed the cup first to Pourcette, who raised it towards a gun hung above the fireplace, and said something under his breath.

"A dramatic little fellow," thought Lawless; "the spirit of his forefathers—a good deal of heart, a little of the poseur."

Then hearing Shon's exclamation, he turned.

"It's an ugly sight," said Shon, pointing to the jacket. They both looked at Pourcette, expecting him to speak. The old man reached to the coat, and, turning it so that the cut and the blood were hid, ran his hand down it caressingly. "Ah, poor Jo! poor Jo Gordineer!" he said; then he came over once more to the fire, sat down, and held out his hands to the fire, shaking his head.

"For God's sake, Lawless, give me a drink!" said Shon. Their eyes met, and there was the same look in the faces of both. When Shon had drunk, he said: "So, that's what's come to our old friend, Jo: dead—killed or murdered—"

"Don't speak so loud," said Lawless. "Let us get the story from him first."

Years before, when Shon M'Gann and Pierre and Lawless had sojourned in the Pipi Valley, Jo Gordineer had been with them, as stupid and true a man as ever drew in his buckle in a hungry land, or

let it out to munch corn and oil. When Lawless returned to find Shon and others of his companions, he had asked for Gordineer. But not Shon nor anyone else could tell aught of him; he had wandered north to outlying goldfields, and then had disappeared completely. But there, as it would seem, his coat and cap hung, and his rifle, dust-covered, kept guard over the fire.

Shon went over to the coat, did as Pourcette had done, and said: "Is it gone y'are, Jo, wid your slow tongue and your big heart? Wan by wan the lads are off."

Pourcette, without any warning, began speaking, but in a very quiet tone at first, as if unconscious of the others:

"Poor Jo Gordineer! Yes, he is gone. He was my friend—so tall, and such a hunter! We were at the Ding Dong goldfields together. When luck went bad, I said to him: 'Come, we will go where there is plenty of wild meat, and a summer more beautiful than in the south.' I did not want to part from him, for once, when some miner stole my claim, and I fought, he stood by me. But in some things he was a little child. That was from his big heart. Well, he would go, he said; and we came away."

He suddenly became silent; and shook his head, and spoke under his breath.

"Yes," said Lawless quietly, "you went away. What then?"

He looked up quickly, as though just aware of their presence, and continued:

"Well, the other followed, as I said, and—"

"No, Pourcette," interposed Lawless, "you didn't say. Who was the other that followed?"

The old man looked at him gravely, and a little severely, and continued:

"As I said, Gawdor followed—he and an Indian. Gawdor thought we were going for gold, because I had said I knew a place in the north where there was gold in a river—I know the place, but that is no matter. We did not go for gold just then. Gawdor hated Jo Gordineer. There was a half-breed girl. She was fine to look at. She would have gone to Gordineer if he had beckoned, any time; but he waited—he was very slow, except with his finger on a gun; he waited too long.

"Gawdor was mad for the girl. He knew why her feet came slow to the door when he knocked. He would have quarrelled with Jo, if he had dared; Gordineer was too quick a shot. He would have killed him from behind; but it was known in the camp that he was no friend of Gordineer, and it was not safe."

Again Pourcette was silent. Lawless put on his knee a new pipe, filled with tobacco. The little man took it, lighted it, and smoked on in silence for a time undisturbed. Shon broke the silence, by a whisper to Lawless:

"Jo was a quiet man, as patient as a priest; but when his blood came up, there was trouble in the land. Do you remimber whin—"

Lawless interrupted him and motioned towards Pourcette. The old man, after a few puffs, held the pipe on his knee, disregarding it. Lawless silently offered him some more whisky, but he shook his head. Presently, he again took up the thread:

"Bien, we travelled slow up through the smoky river country, and beyond into a wild land. We had bully sport as we went. Sometimes I heard shots far away behind us; but Gordineer said it was my guess, for we saw nobody. But I had a feeling. Never mind. At last we come to the Peace River. It was in the early autumn like this, when the land is full of comfort. What is there like it? Nothing. The mountains have colours like a girl's eyes; the smell of the trees is sweet like a child's breath, and the grass feels for the foot and lifts it with a little soft spring. We said we could live here for ever. We built this house high up, as you see, first, because it is good to live high—it puts life in the blood; and, as Gordineer said, it is noble to look far over the world, every time your house-door is open, or the parchment is down from the window. We killed wapiti and caribou without number, and cached them for our food. We caught fish in the river, and made tea out of the brown berry—it is very good. We had flour, a little, which we had brought with us, and I went to Fort St. John and got more. Since then, down in the valley, I have wheat every summer; for the Chinook winds blow across the mountains and soften the bitter cold.

"Well, for that journey to Fort St. John. When I got back I found Gawdor with Gordineer. He said he had come north to hunt. His Indian had left, and he had lost his way. Gordineer believed him. He never lied himself. I said nothing, but watched. After a time he asked where the gold-field was. I told him, and he started away—it was about fifty miles to the north. He went, and on his way back he come here. He say he could not find the place, and was going south. I know he lied. At this time I saw that Gordineer

was changed. He was slow in the head, and so, when he began thinking up here, it made him lonely. It is always in a fine land like this, where game is plenty, and the heart dances for joy in your throat, and you sit by the fire—that you think of some woman who would be glad to draw in and tie the strings of the tent-curtain, or fasten the latch of the door upon you two alone."

Perhaps some memory stirred within the old man, other than that of his dead comrade, for he sighed, muffled his mouth in his beard, and then smiled in a distant way at the fire. The pure truth of what he said came home to Shon M'Gann and Sir Duke Lawless; for both, in days gone by, had sat at camp-fires in silent plains, and thought upon women from whom they believed they were parted for ever, yet who were only kept from them for a time, to give them happier days. They were thinking of these two women now. They scarcely knew how long they sat there thinking. Time passes swiftly when thoughts are cheerful, or are only tinged with the soft melancholy of a brief separation. Memory is man's greatest friend and worst enemy.

At last the old man continued: "I saw the thing grew on him. He was not sulky, but he stare much in the fire at night. In the daytime he was differen'. A hunter thinks only of his sport. Gawdor watched him. Gordineer's hand was steady; his nerve was all right. I have seen him stand still till a grizzly come within twice the length of his gun. Then he would twist his mouth, and fire into the mortal spot. Once we were out in the Wide Wing pass. We had never had such a day. Gordineer make grand shots, better than my own; and men have said I can shoot like the devil—ha! ha!" He chuckled to himself noiselessly, and said in a whisper "Twenty grizzlies, and fifty pumas!"

Then he rubbed his hands softly on his knees, and spoke aloud again: "Ici, I was proud of him. We were standing together on a ledge of rock. Gawdor was not far away. Gawdor was a poor hunter, and I knew he was wild at Gordineer's great luck.... A splendid bull-wapiti come out on a rock across the gully. It was a long shot. I did not think Gordineer could make it; I was not sure that I could—the wind was blowing and the range was long. But he draw up his gun like lightning, and fire all at once. The bull dropped clean over the cliff, and tumbled dead upon the rocks below. It was fine. But, then, Gordineer slung his gun under his arm, and say: 'That is enough. I am going to the hut.'

"He went away. That night he did not talk. The next morning, when I say, 'We will be off again to the pass,' he shake his head. He would not go. He would shoot no more, he said. I understood: it was the girl. He was wide awake at last. Gawdor understanded also. He know that Gordineer would go to the south—to her.

"I was sorry; but it was no use. Gawdor went with me to the pass. When we come back, Jo was gone. On a bit of birch-bark he had put where he was going, and the way he would take. He said he would come back to me —ah, the brave comrade! Gawdor say nothing, but his looks were black. I had a feeling. I sat up all night, smoking. I was not afraid, but I know Gawdor had found the valley of gold, and he might put a knife in me, because to know of such a thing alone is fine. Just at dawn, he got up and go out. He did not come back.

"I waited, and at last went to the pass. In the afternoon, just as I was rounding the corner of a cliff, there was a shot—then another. The first went by my head; the second caught me along the ribs, but not to great hurt. Still, I fell from the shock, and lost some blood. It was Gawdor; he thought he had killed me.

"When I come to myself I bound up the little furrow in the flesh, and start away. I know that Gawdor would follow Gordineer. I follow him, knowing the way he must take. I have never forget the next night. I had to travel hard, and I track him by his fires and other things. When sunset come, I do not stop. I was in a valley, and I push on. There was a little moon. At last I saw a light ahead-a camp-fire, I know. I was weak, and could have dropped; but a dread was on me.

"I come to the fire. I saw a man lying near it. Just as I saw him, he was trying to rise. But, as he did so, something sprang out of the shadow upon him, at his throat. I saw him raise his hand, and strike it with a knife. The thing let go, and then I fire—but only scratched, I think. It was a puma. It sprang away again, into the darkness. I ran to the man, and raised him. It was my friend. He looked up at me and shake his head. He was torn at the throat.... But there was something else—a wound in the back. He was stooping over the fire when he was stabbed, and he fell. He saw that it was Gawdor. He had been left for dead, as I was. Nom de Dieu! just when I come and could have save him, the puma come also. It is the best men who have such luck. I have seen it often. I used to wonder they did not curse God."

He crossed himself and mumbled something. Lawless rose, and walked up and down the room once or twice, pulling at his beard and frowning. His eyes were wet. Shon kept blowing into his closed hand and blinking at the fire. Pourcette got up and took down the gun from the chimney. He brushed off the dust with his coat-sleeve, and fondled it, shaking his head at it a little. As he began to speak again, Lawless sat down.

"Now I know why they do not curse. Something curses for them. Jo give me a word for her, and say 'Well, it is all right; but I wish I had killed the puma.' There was nothing more. . . . I followed Gawdor for days. I know that he would go and get someone, and go back to the gold. I thought at last I had missed him; but no. I had made up my mind what to do when I found him. One night, just as the moon was showing over the hills, I come upon him. I was quiet as a puma. I have a stout cord in my pocket, and another about my body. Just as he was stooping over the fire, as Gordineer did, I sprang upon him, clasping him about the neck, and bringing him to the ground. He could not get me off. I am small, but I have a grip. Then, too, I had one hand at his throat. It was no use to struggle. The cord and a knife were in my teeth. It was a great trick, but his breath was well gone, and I fastened his hands. It was no use to struggle. I tied his feet and legs. Then I carried him to a tree and bound him tight. I unfastened his hands again and tied them round the tree. Then I built a great fire not far away. He begged at first and cried. But I was hard. He got wild, and at last when I leave him he cursed! It was like nothing I ever heard. He was a devil. . . I come back after I have carry the message to the poor girl—it is a sad thing to see the first great grief of the young! Gawdor was not there. The pumas and others had been with him.

"There was more to do. I wanted to kill that puma which set its teeth in the throat of my friend. I hunted the woods where it had happened, beating everywhere, thinking that, perhaps, it was dead. There was not much blood on the leaves, so I guessed that it had not died. I hunted from that spot, and killed many—many. I saw that they began to move north. At last I got back here. From here I have hunted and killed them slow; but never that one with a wound in the shoulder from Jo's knife. Still, I can wait. There is nothing like patience for the hunter and for the man who would have blood for blood."

He paused, and Lawless spoke. "And when you have killed that puma, Pourcette—if you ever do-what then?"

Pourcette fondled the gun, then rose and hung it up again before he replied.

"Then I will go to Fort St. John, to the girl—she is there with her father—and sell all the skins to the factor, and give her the money." He waved his hand round the room. "There are many skins here, but I have more cached not far away. Once a year I go to the Fort for flour and bullets. A dog-team and a bois-brule bring them, and then I am alone as before. When all that is done I will come back."

"And then, Pourcette?" said Shon.

"Then I will hang that one skin over the chimney where his gun is—and go out and kill more pumas. What else can one do? When I stop killing I shall be killed. A million pumas and their skins are not worth the life of my friend."

Lawless looked round the room, at the wooden cup, the gun, the bloodstained clothes on the wall, and the skins. He got up, came over, and touched Pourcette on the shoulder.

"Little man," he said, "give it up, and come with me. Come to Fort St. John, sell the skins, give the money to the girl, and then let us travel to the Barren Grounds together, and from there to the south country again. You will go mad up here. You have killed enough—Gawdor and many pumas. If Jo could speak, he would say, Give it up. I knew Jo. He was my good friend before he was yours—mine and M'Gann's here—and we searched for him to travel with us. He would have done so, I think, for we had sport and trouble of one kind and another together. And he would have asked you to come also. Well, do so, little man. We haven't told you our names. I am Sir Duke Lawless, and this is Shon M'Gann."

Pourcette nodded: "I do not know how it come to me, but I was sure from the first you are his friends. He speak often of you and of two others —where are they?"

Lawless replied, and, at the name of Pretty Pierre, Shon hid his forehead in his hand, in a troubled way. "And you will come with us," said Lawless, "away from this loneliness?"

"It is not lonely," was the reply. "To hear the thrum of the pigeon, the whistle of the hawk, the chatter of the black squirrel, and the long cry of the eagle, is not lonely. Then, there is the river and the pines—all music; and for what the eye sees, God has been good; and to kill pumas is my joy. . . . So, I cannot go. These hills are mine. Few strangers come, and none stop but me. Still, to-morrow or any day, I will show you the way to the valley where the gold is. Perhaps riches is there, perhaps not, you shall find."

Lawless saw that it was no use to press the matter. The old man had but one idea, and nothing could ever change it. Solitude fixes our hearts immovably on things—call it madness, what you will. In busy life we have no real or lasting dreams, no ideals. We have to go to the primeval hills and the wild plains for them. When we leave the hills and the plains, we lose them again. Shon was, however, for the valley of gold. He was a poor man, and it would be a joyful thing for him if one day he could empty ample gold

into his wife's lap. Lawless was not greedy, but he and good gold were not at variance.

"See," said Shon, "the valley's the thing. We can hunt as we go, and if there's gold for the scrapin', why, there y'are—fill up and come again. If not, divil the harm done. So here's thumbs up to go, say I. But I wish, Lawless, I wish that I'd niver known how Jo wint off, an' I wish we were all t'gither agin, as down in the Pipi Valley."

"There's nothing stands in this world, Shon, but the faith of comrades and the truth of good women. The rest hangs by a hair. I'll go to the valley with you. It's many a day since I washed my luck in a gold-pan."

"I will take you there," said Pourcette, suddenly rising, and, with shy abrupt motions grasping their hands and immediately letting them go again. "I will take you to-morrow." Then he spread skins upon the floor, put wood upon the fire, and the three were soon asleep.

The next morning, just as the sun came laboriously over the white peak of a mountain, and looked down into the great gulch beneath the hut, the three started. For many hours they crept along the side of the mountain, then came slowly down upon pine-crested hills, and over to where a small plain stretched out. It was Pourcette's little farm. Its position was such that it caught the sun always, and was protected from the north and east winds. Tall shafts of Indian corn with their yellow tassels were still standing, and the stubble of the field where the sickle had been showed in the distance like a carpet of gold. It seemed strange to Lawless that this old man beside him should be thus peaceful in his habits, the most primitive and arcadian of farmers, and yet one whose trade was blood—whose one purpose in life was destruction and vengeance.

They pushed on. Towards the end of the day they came upon a little herd of caribou, and had excellent sport. Lawless noticed that Pourcette seemed scarcely to take any aim at all, so swift and decisive was his handling of the gun. They skinned the deer and cached them, and took up the journey again. For four days they travelled and hunted alternately. Pourcette had shot two mountain lions, but they had seen no pumas.

On the morning of the fifth day they came upon the valley where the gold was. There was no doubt about it. A beautiful little stream ran through it, and its bed was sprinkled with gold—a goodly sight to a poor man like Shon, interesting enough to Lawless. For days, while Lawless and Pourcette hunted, Shon laboured like a galley-slave, making the little specks into piles, and now and again crowning a pile with a nugget. The fever of the hunter had passed from him, and another fever was on him. The others urged him to come away. The winter would soon be hard on them; he must go, and he and Lawless would return in the spring.

Prevailing on him at last, they started back to Clear Mountain. The first day Shon was abstracted. He carried the gold he had gathered in a bag wound about his body. It was heavy, and he could not travel fast. One morning, Pourcette, who had been off in the hills, came to say that he had sighted a little herd of wapiti. Shon had fallen and sprained his arm the evening before (gold is heavy to carry), and he did not go with the others. He stayed and dreamed of his good fortune, and of his home. In the late afternoon he lay down in the sun beside the camp-fire and fell asleep from much thinking. Lawless and Pourcette had little success. The herd had gone before they arrived. They beat the hills, and turned back to camp at last, without fret, like good sportsmen. At a point they separated, to come down upon the camp at different angles, in the hope of still getting a shot. The camp lay exposed upon a platform of the mountain.

Lawless came out upon a ledge of rock opposite the camp, a gulch lying between. He looked across. He was in the shadow, the other wall of the gulch was in the sun. The air was incomparably clear and fresh, with an autumnal freshness. Everything stood out distinct and sharply outlined, nothing flat or blurred. He saw the camp, and the fire, with the smoke quivering up in a diffusing blue column, Shon lying beside it. He leaned upon his rifle musingly. The shadows of the pines were blue and cold, but the tops of them were burnished with the cordial sun, and a glacier- field, somehow, took on a rose and violet light, reflected, maybe, from the soft-complexioned sky. He drew in a long breath of delight, and widened his line of vision.

Suddenly, something he saw made him lurch backward. At an angle in almost equal distance from him and Shon, upon a small peninsula of rock, a strange thing was happening. Old Pourcette was kneeling, engaged with his moccasin. Behind him was the sun, against which he was abruptly defined, looking larger than usual. Clear space and air soft with colour were about him. Across this space, on a little sloping plateau near him, there crept an animal. It seemed to Lawless that he could see the lithe stealthiness of its muscles and the ripple of its skin. But that was imagination, because he was too far away. He cried out, and swung his gun shoulderwards in desperation. But, at the moment, Pourcette turned sharply round, saw his danger, caught his gun, and fired as the puma sprang. There had been

no chance for aim, and the beast was only wounded. It dropped upon the man. He let the gun fall; it rolled and fell over the cliff. Then came a scene, wicked in its peril to Pourcette, for whom no aid could come, though two men stood watching the great fight—Shon M'Gann, awake now, and Lawless—with their guns silent in their hands. They dare not fire, for fear of injuring the man, and they could not reach him in time to be of help.

There against the weird solitary sky the man and the puma fought. When the animal dropped on him, Pourcette caught it by the throat with both hands, and held back its fangs; but its claws were furrowing the flesh of his breast and legs. His long arms were of immense strength, and though the pain of his torn flesh was great he struggled grandly with the beast, and bore it away, from his body. As he did so he slightly changed the position of one hand. It came upon a welt-a scar. When he felt that, new courage and strength seemed given him. He gave a low growl like an animal, and then, letting go one hand, caught at the knife in his belt. As he did so the puma sprang away from him, and crouched upon the rock, making ready for another leap. Lawless and Shon could see its tail curving and beating. But now, to their astonishment, the man was the aggressor. He was filled with a fury which knows nothing of fear. The welt his fingers had felt burned them.

He came slowly upon the puma. Lawless could see the hard glitter of his knife. The puma's teeth sawed together, its claws picked at the rocks, its body curved for a spring. The man sprang first, and ran the knife in; but not into a mortal corner. Once more they locked. The man's fingers were again at the puma's throat, and they swayed together, the claws of the beast making surface havoc. But now as they stood up, to the eyes of the fearful watchers inextricably mixed, the man lunged again with his knife, and this time straight into the heart of the murderer. The puma loosened, quivered, fell back dead. The man rose to his feet with a cry, and his hands stretched above his head, as it were in a kind of ecstasy. Shon forgot his gold and ran; Lawless hurried also.

When the two men got to the spot they found Pourcette binding up his wounds. He came to his feet, heedless of his hurts, and grasped their hands. "Come, come, my friends, and see," he cried.

He pulled forward the loose skin on the puma's breast and showed them the scar of a knife-wound above the one his own knife had made.

"I've got the other murderer," he said; "Gordineer's knife went in here.
Sacre, but it is good!"

Pourcette's flesh needed little medicine; he did not feel his pain and stiffness. When they reached Clear Mountain, bringing with them the skin which was to hang above the fireplace, Pourcette prepared to go to Fort St. John, as he had said he would, to sell all the skins and give the proceeds to the girl.

"When that's done," said Lawless, "you will have no reason for staying here. If you will come with us after, we will go to the Fort with you. We three will then come back in the spring to the valley of gold for sport and riches."

He spoke lightly, yet seriously too. The old man shook his head. "I have thought," he said. "I cannot go to the south. I am a hunter now, nothing more. I have been long alone; I do not wish for change. I shall remain at Clear Mountain when these skins have gone to Fort St. John, and if you come to me in the spring or at any time, my door will open to you, and I will share all with you. Gordineer was a good man. You are good men. I'll remember you, but I can't go with you—no.

"Some day you would leave me to go to the women who wait for you, and then
I should be alone again. I will not change—vraiment!"

On the morning they left, he took Jo Gordineer's cup from the shelf, and from a hidden place brought out a flask half filled with liquor. He poured out a little in the cup gravely, and handed it to Lawless, but Lawless gave it back to him.

"You must drink from it," he said, "not me."

He held out the cup of his own flask. When each of the three had a share, the old man raised his long arm solemnly, and said in a tone so gentle that the others hardly recognised his voice: "To a lost comrade!" They drank in silence.

"A little gentleman!" said Lawless, under his breath. When they were ready to start, Lawless said to him at the last: "What will you do here, comrade, as the days go on?"

"There are pumas in the mountains," he replied. They parted from him upon the ledge where the great fight had occurred, and travelled into the east. Turning many times, they saw him still standing

there. At a point where they must lose sight of him, they looked for the last time. He was alone with his solitary hills, leaning on his rifle. They fired two shots into the air. They saw him raise his rifle, and two faint reports came in reply. He became again immovable: as much a part of those hills as the shining glacier; never to leave them.

In silence the two rounded the cliff, and saw him no more.

THE TRAIL OF THE SUN DOGS

Swell, you see," said Jacques Parfaite, as he gave Whiskey Wine, the leading dog, a cut with the whip and twisted his patois to the uses of narrative, "he has been alone there at the old Fort for a long time. I remember when I first see him. It was in the summer. The world smell sweet if you looked this way or that. If you drew in your breath quick from the top of a hill you felt a great man. Ridley, the chief trader, and myself have come to the Fort on our way to the Mackenzie River. In the yard of the Fort the grass have grown tall, and sprung in the cracks under the doors and windows; the Fort have not been use for a long time. Once there was plenty of buffalo near, and the caribou sometimes; but they were all gone—only a few. The Indians never went that way, only when the seasons were the best. The Company have close the Post; it did not pay. Still, it was pleasant after a long tramp to come to even an empty fort. We know dam' well there is food buried in the yard or under the floor, and it would be droll to open the place for a day—Lost Man's Tavern, we called it. Well—"

"Well, what?" said Sir Duke Lawless, who had travelled up to the Barren
Grounds for the sake of adventure and game; and, with his old friend,
Shon M'Gann, had trusted himself to the excellent care of Jacques
Parfaite, the half-breed.

Jacques cocked his head on one side and shook it wisely and mysteriously. "Tres bien, we trailed through the long grass, pried open the shutters and door, and went in. It is cool in the north of an evening, as you know. We build a fire, and soon there is very fine times. Ridley pried up the floor, and we found good things. Holy! but it was a feast. We had a little rum also. As we talk and a great laugh swim round, there come a noise behind us like shuffling feet. We got to our legs quick. Mon Dieu, a strange sight! A man stand looking at us with something in his face that make my fingers cold all at once—a look—well you would think it was carved in stone—it never change. Once I was at Fort Garry; the Church of St. Mary is there. They have a picture in it of the great scoundrel Judas as he went to hang himself. Judas was a fool—what was thirty dollars!—you give me hunder' to take you to the Barren Grounds. Pah!"

The half-breed chuckled, shook his head sagely, swore half-way through his vocabulary at Whiskey Wine, gratefully received a pipe of tobacco from Shon M'Gann, and continued: "He come in on us slow and still, and push out long thin hands, the fingers bent like claws, towards the pot. He was starving. Yes, it was so; but I nearly laugh. It was spring— a man is a fool to starve in the spring. But he was differen'. There was a cause. The factor give him soup from the pot and a little rum. He was mad for meat, but that would have kill him—yes. He did not look at you like a man.

"When you are starving, you are an animal. But there was something more with this.—He made the flesh creep, he was so thin, and strange, and sulky—eh, is that a word when the face looks dark and never smiles? So. He would not talk. When we ask him where he come from, he points to the north; when we ask him where he is going, he shake his head as he not know. A man is mad not to know where he travel to up here; something comes quick to him unless, and it is not good to die too soon. The trader said, 'Come with us.' He shake his head, No. 'P'r'aps you want to stay here,' said Ridley loud, showing his teeth all in a minute. He nod. Then the trader laugh thick in his throat and give him more soup. After, he try to make the man talk; but he was stubborn like that dirty Whiskey Wine—ah, sacre bleu!"

Whiskey Wine had his usual portion of whip and anathema before Jacques again took up the thread. "It was no use. He would not talk. When the trader get angry once more, he turned to me, and the look in his face make me sorry. I swore—Ridley did not mind that, I was thick friends with him. I say, 'Keep still. It is no good. He has had bad times. He has been lost, and seen mad things. He will never be again like when God make him.' Very well, I spoke true. He was like a sun dog."

"What's that ye say, Parfaite?" said Shon—"a sun dog?"

Sir Duke Lawless, puzzled, listened eagerly for the reply.

The half-breed in delight ran before them, cracking his whip and jingling the bells at his knees. "Ah, that's it! It is a name we have for some. You do not know? It is easy. In the high-up country"—pointing north"— you see sometimes many suns. But it is not many after all; it is only one; and the rest are the same as your face in looking-glasses—one, two, three, plenty. You see?"

"Yes," said Sir Duke, "reflections of the real sun." Parfaite tapped him on the arm. "So: you have the thing. Well, this man is not himself—he have left himself where he seen his bad times. It makes your flesh creep sometimes when you see the sun dogs in the sky—this man did the same. You shall see him tonight."

Sir Duke looked at the little half-breed, and wondered that the product of so crude a civilisation should be so little crude in his imagination. "What happened?" he asked.

"Nothing happened. But the man could not sleep. He sit before the fire, his eyes moving here and there, and sometimes he shiver. Well, I watch him. In the morning we leave him there, and he has been there ever since—the only man at the Fort. The Indians do not go; they fear him; but there is no harm in him. He is old now. In an hour we'll be there."

The sun was hanging, with one shoulder up like a great red peering dwarf, on the far side of a long hillock of stunted pines, when the three arrived at the Fort. The yard was still as Parfaite had described it— full of rank grass, through which one path trailed to the open door. On the stockade walls grass grew, as though where men will not live like men Nature labours to smother. The shutters of the window were not open; light only entered through narrow openings in them, made for the needs of possible attacks by Indians in the far past. One would have sworn that anyone dwelling there was more like the dead than the living. Yet it had, too, something of the peace of the lonely graveyard. There was no one in the Fort; but there were signs of life—skins piled here and there, a few utensils, a bench, a hammock for food swung from the rafters, a low fire burning in the chimney, and a rude spear stretched on the wall.

"Sure, the place gives you shivers!" said Shon. "Open go these windows. Put wood on the fire, Parfaite; cook the meat that we've brought, and no other, me boy; and whin we're filled wid a meal and the love o' God, bring in your Lost Man, or Sun Dog, or whativer's he by name or nature."

While Parfaite and Shon busied themselves, Lawless wandered out with his gun, and, drawn on by the clear joyous air of the evening, walked along a path made by the same feet that had travelled the yard of the Fort. He followed it almost unconsciously at first, thinking of the strange histories that the far north hoards in its fastnesses, wondering what singular fate had driven the host of this secluded tavern —farthest from the pleasant south country, nearest to the Pole—to stand, as it were, a sentinel at the raw outposts of the world. He looked down at the trail where he was walking with a kind of awe, which even his cheerful common sense could not dismiss.

He came to the top of a ridge on which were a handful of meagre trees. Leaning on his gun, he looked straight away into the farthest distance. On the left was a blurred edge of pines, with tops like ungainly tendrils feeling for the sky. On the right was a long bare stretch of hills veiled in the thin smoke of the evening, and between, straight before him, was a wide lane of unknown country, billowing away to where it froze into the vast archipelago that closes with the summit of the world. He experienced now that weird charm which has drawn so many into Arctic wilds and gathered the eyes of millions longingly. Wife, child, London, civilisation, were forgotten for the moment. He was under a spell which, once felt, lingers in your veins always.

At length his look drew away from the glimmering distance, and he suddenly became conscious of human presence. Here, almost at his feet, was a man, also looking out along that slumbering waste. He was dressed in skins, his arms were folded across his breast, his chin bent low, and he gazed up and out from deep eyes shadowed by strong brows. Lawless saw the shoulders of the watcher heave and shake once or twice, and then a voice with a deep aching trouble in it spoke; but at first he could catch no words. Presently, however, he heard distinctly, for the man raised his hands high above his head, and the words fell painfully: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Then a low harsh laugh came from him, and he was silent again. Lawless did not move. At last the man turned round, and, seeing him standing motionless, his gun in his hands, he gave a hoarse cry. Then he stood still. "If you have come to kill, do not wait," he said; "I am ready."

At the sound of Lawless's reassuring voice he recovered, and began, in stumbling words, to excuse himself. His face was as Jacques Parfaite had described it: trouble of some terrible kind was furrowed

in it, and, though his body was stalwart, he looked as if he had lived a century. His eyes dwelt on Sir Duke Lawless for a moment, and then, coming nearer, he said, "You are an Englishman?"

Lawless held out his hand in greeting, yet he was not sorry when the other replied: "The hand of no man in greeting. Are you alone?"

When he had been told, he turned towards the Fort, and silently they made their way to it. At the door he turned and said to Lawless, "My name—to you—is Detmold."

The greeting between Jacques and his sombre host was notable for its extreme brevity; with Shon McGann for its hesitation—Shon's impressionable Irish nature was awed by the look of the man, though he had seen some strange things in the north. Darkness was on them by this time, and the host lighted bowls of fat with wicks of deer's tendons, and by the light of these and the fire they ate their supper. Parfaite beguiled the evening with tales of the north, always interesting to Lawless; to which Shon added many a shrewd word of humour—for he had recovered quickly from his first timidity in the presence of the stranger.

As time went on Jacques saw that their host's eyes were frequently fixed on Sir Duke in a half-eager, musing way, and he got Shon away to bed and left the two together.

"You are a singular man. Why do you live here?" said Lawless. Then he went straight to the heart of the thing. "What trouble have you had, of what crime are you guilty?"

The man rose to his feet, shaking, and walked to and fro in the room for a time, more than once trying to speak, but failing. He beckoned to Lawless, and opened the door. Lawless took his hat and followed him along the trail they had travelled before supper until they came to the ridge where they had met. The man faced the north, the moon glistening coldly on his grey hair. He spoke with incredible weight and slowness:

"I tell you—for you are one who understands men, and you come from a life that I once knew well. I know of your people. I was of good family—"

"I know the name," said Sir Duke quietly, at the same time fumbling in his memory for flying bits of gossip and history which he could not instantly find.

"There were two brothers of us. I was the younger. A ship was going to the Arctic Sea." He pointed into the north. "We were both young and ambitious. He was in the army, I the navy. We went with the expedition. At first it was all beautiful and grand, and it seemed noble to search for those others who had gone into that land and never come back. But our ship got locked in the ice, and then came great trouble. A year went by and we did not get free; then another year began. . . . Four of us set out for the south. Two died. My brother and I were left—"

Lawless exclaimed. He now remembered how general sympathy went out to a well-known county family when it was announced that two of its members were lost in the Arctic regions.

Detmold continued: "I was the stronger. He grew weaker and weaker. It was awful to live those days: the endless snow and cold, the long nights when you could only hear the whirring of meteors, the bright sun which did not warm you, nor even when many suns, the reflections of itself, followed it—the mocking sun dogs, no more the sun than I am what my mother brought into the world. . . . We walked like dumb men, for the dreadful cold fills the heart with bitterness. I think I grew to hate him because he could not travel faster, that days were lost, and death crept on so pitilessly. Sometimes I had a mad wish to kill him. May you never know suffering that begets such things! I laughed as I sat beside him, and saw him sink to sleep and die. . . . I think I could have saved him. When he was gone I—what do men do sometimes when starvation is on them, and they have a hunger of hell to live? I did that shameless thing—and he was my brother! . . . I lived, and was saved."

Lawless shrank away from the man, but words of horror got no farther than his throat. And he was glad afterwards that it was so; for when he looked again at this woful relic of humanity before him he felt a strange pity.

"God's hand is on me to punish," said the man. "It will never be lifted.
Death were easy: I bear the infamy of living."

Lawless reached out and caught him gently by the shoulders. "Poor fellow! poor Detmold!" he said. For an instant the sorrowful face lighted, the square chin trembled, and the hands thrust out towards Lawless, but suddenly dropped.

"Go," he said humbly, "and leave me here. We must not meet again. . .

I have had one moment of respite. . . . Go."

Without a word, Lawless turned and made his way to the Fort. In the morning the three comrades started on their journey again; but no one sped them on their way or watched them as they went.

THE PILOT OF BELLE AMOUR

He lived in a hut on a jutting crag of the Cliff of the King. You could get to it by a hard climb up a precipitous pathway, or by a ladder of ropes which swung from his cottage door down the cliff-side to the sands. The bay that washed the sands was called Belle Amour. The cliff was huge, sombre; it had a terrible granite moroseness. If you travelled back from its edge until you stood within the very heart of Labrador, you would add step upon step of barrenness and austerity.

Only at seasons did the bay share the gloom of the cliff. When out of its shadow it was, in summer, very bright and playful, sometimes boisterous, often idle, coquetting with the sands. There was a great difference between the cliff and the bay: the cliff was only as it appeared, but the bay was a shameless hypocrite. For under one shoulder it hid a range of reefs, and, at a spot where the shadows of the cliff never reached it, and the sun played with a grim kind of joy, a long needle of rock ran up at an angle under the water, waiting to pierce irresistibly the adventurous ship that, in some mad moment, should creep to its shores.

The man was more like the cliff than the bay: stern, powerful, brooding. His only companions were the Indians, who in summer-time came and went, getting stores of him, which he in turn got from a post of the Hudson's Bay Company, seventy miles up the coast. At one time the Company, impressed by the number of skins brought to them by the pilot, and the stores he bought of them, had thought of establishing a post at Belle Amour; but they saw that his dealings with them were fair and that he had small gain, and they decided to use him as an unofficial agent, and reap what profit was to be had as things stood. Kenyon, the Company's agent, who had the Post, was keen to know why Gaspard the pilot lived at Belle Amour. No white man sojourned near him, and he saw no one save now and then a priest who travelled silently among the Indians, or some fisherman, hunter, or woodsman, who, for pleasure or from pure adventure, ran into the bay and tasted the hospitality tucked away on a ledge of the Cliff of the King.

To Kenyon, Gaspard was unresponsive, however adroit the catechism. Father Corraine also, who sometimes stepped across the dark threshold of Gaspard's hut, would have, for the man's soul's sake, dug out the heart of his secret; but Gaspard, open with food, fire, blanket, and tireless attendance, closed like the doors of a dungeon when the priest would have read him. At the name of good Ste. Anne he would make the sacred gesture, and would take a blessing when the priest passed from his hut to go again into the wilds; but when pressed to disclose his mind and history, he would always say: "M'sieu', I have nothing to confess." After a number of years the priest ceased to ask him, and he remained with the secret of his life, inscrutable and silent.

Being vigilant, one would have seen, however, that he lived in some land of memory or anticipation, beyond his life of daily toil and usual dealing. The hut seemed to have been built at a point where east and west and south the great gulf could be seen and watched. It seemed almost ludicrous that a man should call himself a pilot on a coast and at a bay where a pilot was scarce needed once a year. But he was known as Gaspard the pilot, and on those rare occasions when a vessel did anchor in the bay, he performed his duties with such a certainty as to leave unguessed how many deathtraps crouched near that shore. At such times, however, Gaspard seemed to look twenty years younger. A light would come into his face, a stalwart kind of pride sit on him, though beneath there lurked a strange, sardonic look in his deep eyes—such a grim furtiveness as though he should say: "If I but twist my finger we are all for the fishes." But he kept his secret and waited. He never seemed to tire of looking down the gulf, as though expecting some ship. If one appeared and passed on, he merely nodded his head, hung up his glass, returned to his work, or, sitting by the door, talked to himself in low, strange tones. If one came near, making as if it would enter the bay, a hungry joy possessed him. If a storm was on, the joy was the greater. No pilot ever ventured to a ship on such rough seas as Gaspard ventured for small profit or glory.

Behind it all lay his secret. There came one day a man who discovered it.

It was Pierre, the half-breed adventurer. There was no point in all the wild northland which Pierre had not touched. He loved it as he loved the game of life. He never said so of it, but he never said so of the game of life, and he played it with a deep subterranean joy. He had had his way with the musk-ox in the Arctic Circle; with the white bear at the foot of Alaskan Hills; with the seal in Baffin's Bay; with the puma on the slope of the Pacific; and now at last he had come upon the trail of Labrador. Its sternness, its moodiness pleased him. He smiled at it the comprehending smile of the man who has fingered the nerves and the heart of men and things. As a traveller, wandering through a prison, looks upon its grim cells and dungeons with the eye of unembarrassed freedom, finding no direful significance in the clank of its iron, so Pierre travelled down with a handful of Indians through the hard fastnesses of that country, and, at last, alone, came upon the bay of Belle Amour.

There was in him some antique touch of refinement and temperament which, in all his evil days and deeds and moments of shy nobility, could find its way into the souls of men with whom the world had had an awkward hour. He was a man of little speech, but he had that rare persuasive penetration which unlocked the doors of trouble, despair, and tragedy. Men who would never have confessed to a priest confessed to him. In his every fibre was the granite of the Indian nature, which looked upon punishment with stoic satisfaction.

In the heart of Labrador he had heard of Gaspard, and had travelled to that point in the compass where he could find him. One day when the sun was fighting hard to make a pathway of light in front of Gaspard's hut, Pierre rounded a corner of the cliff and fronted Gaspard as he sat there, his eyes idling gloomily with the sea. They said little to each other— in new lands hospitality has not need of speech. When Gaspard and Pierre looked each other in the eyes they knew that one word between them was as a hundred with other men. The heart knows its confessor, and the confessor knows the shadowed eye that broods upon some ghostly secret; and when these are face to face there comes a merciless concision of understanding.

"From where away?" said Gaspard, as he handed some tobacco to Pierre.

"From Hudson's Bay, down the Red Wolf Plains, along the hills, across the coast country, here."

"Why?" Gaspard eyed Pierre's small kit with curiosity; then flung up a piercing, furtive look. Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"Adventure, adventure," he answered. "The land"—he pointed north, west, and east—"is all mine. I am the citizen of every village and every camp of the great north."

The old man turned his head towards a spot up the shore of Belle Amour, before he turned to Pierre again, with a strange look, and said: "Where do you go?"

Pierre followed his gaze to that point in the shore, felt the undercurrent of vague meaning in his voice, guessed what was his cue, and said: "Somewhere, sometime; but now only Belle Amour. I have had a long travel. I have found an open door. I will stay—if you please—hein? If you please?"

Gaspard brooded. "It is lonely," he replied. "This day it is all bright; the sun shines and the little gay waves crinkle to the shore. But, mon Dieu! sometimes it is all black and ugly with storm. The waves come grinding, booming in along the gridiron rocks"—he smiled a grim smile—"break through the teeth of the reefs, and split with a roar of hell upon the cliff. And all the time, and all the time,"—his voice got low with a kind of devilish joy,—"there is a finger—Jesu! you should see that finger of the devil stretch up from the bowels of the earth, waiting, waiting for something to come out of the storm. And then—and then you can hear a wild laugh come out of the land, come up from the sea, come down from the sky—all waiting, waiting for something! No, no, you would not stay here."

Pierre looked again to that point in the shore towards which Gaspard's eyes had been cast. The sun was shining hard just then, and the stern, sharp rocks, tumbling awkwardly back into the waste behind, had an insolent harshness. Day perched garishly there. Yet now and then the staring light was broken by sudden and deep shadows—great fissures in the rocks and lanes between. These gave Pierre a suggestion, though why, he could not say. He knew that when men live lives of patient, gloomy vigilance, they generally have something to watch and guard. Why should Gaspard remain here year after year? His occupation was nominally a pilot in a bay rarely touched by vessels, and then only for shelter. A pilot need not take his daily life with such brooding seriousness. In body he was like flexible metal, all cord and muscle. He gave the impression of bigness, though he was small in stature. Yet, as Pierre studied him, he saw something that made him guess the man had had about him one day a woman, perhaps a child; no man could carry that look unless. If a woman has looked at you from day to day, something of her, some reflection of her face, passes to yours and stays there; and if a child has

held your hand long, or hung about your knees, it gives you a kind of gentle wariness as you step about your home.

Pierre knew that a man will cherish with a deep, eternal purpose a memory of a woman or a child, when, no matter how compelling his cue to remember where a man is concerned, he will yield it up in the end to time. Certain speculations arranged themselves definitely in Pierre's mind: there was a woman, maybe a child once; there was some sorrowful mystery about them; there was a point in the shore that had held the old man's eyes strangely; there was the bay with that fantastic "finger of the devil" stretching up from the bowels of the world. Behind the symbol lay the Thing what was it?

Long time he looked out upon the gulf, then his eyes drew into the bay and stayed there, seeing mechanically, as a hundred fancies went through his mind. There were reefs of which the old man had spoken. He could guess from the colour and movement of the water where they were. The finger of the devil—was it not real? A finger of rock, waiting as the old man said—for what?

Gaspard touched his shoulder. He rose and went with him into the gloomy cabin. They ate and drank in silence. When the meal was finished they sat smoking till night fell. Then the pilot lit a fire, and drew his rough chair to the door. Though it was only late summer, it was cold in the shade of the cliff. Long time they sat. Now and again Pierre intercepted the quick, elusive glance of his silent host. Once the pilot took the pipe from his mouth, and leaned his hands on his knees as if about to speak. But he did not.

Pierre saw that the time was ripe for speech. So he said, as though he knew something: "It is a long time since it happened?"

Gaspard, brooding, answered: "Yes, a long time—too long." Then, as if suddenly awakened to the strangeness of the question, he added, in a startled way: " What do you know? Tell me quick what you know."

"I know nothing except what comes to me here, pilot,"—Pierre touched his forehead," but there is a thing—I am not sure what. There was a woman— perhaps a child; there is something on the shore; there is a hidden point of rock in the bay; and you are waiting for a ship—for the ship, and it does not come—isn't that so?"

Gaspard got to his feet, and peered into Pierre's immobile face. Their eyes met.

"Mon Dieu!" said the pilot, his hand catching the smoke away from between them, "you are a droll man; you have a wonderful mind. You are cold like ice, and still there is in you a look of fire."

"Sit down," answered Pierre quietly, "and tell me all. Perhaps I could think it out little by little; but it might take too long—and what is the good?"

Slowly Gaspard obeyed. Both hands rested on his knees, and he stared abstractedly into the fire. Pierre thrust forward the tobacco-bag. His hand lifted, took the tobacco, and then his eyes came keenly to Pierre's. He was about to speak. . . . "Fill your pipe first," said the half-breed coolly. The old man did so abstractedly. When the pipe was lighted, Pierre said: "Now!"

"I have never told the story, never—not even to Pere Corraine. But I know, I have it here"—he put his hand to his forehead, as did Pierre— "that you will be silent." Pierre nodded.

"She was fine to see. Her eyes were black as beads; and when she laugh it was all music. I was so happy! We lived on the island of the Aux Coudres, far up there at Quebec. It was a wild place. There were smugglers and others there—maybe pirates. But she was like a saint of God among all. I was lucky man. I was pilot, and took ships out to sea, and brought them in safe up the gulf. It is not all easy, for there are mad places. Once or twice when a wild storm was on I could not land at Cap Martin, and was carried out to sea and over to France. . . . Well, that was not so bad; there was plenty to eat and drink, nothing to do. But when I marry it was differen'. I was afraid of being carried away and leave my wife—the belle Mamette—alone long time. You see, I was young, and she was ver' beautiful."

He paused and caught his hand over his mouth as though to stop a sound: the lines of his face deepened. Presently he puffed his pipe so hard that the smoke and the sparks hid him in a cloud through which he spoke. "When the child was born—Holy Mother! have you ever felt the hand of your own child in yours, and looked at the mother, as she lies there all pale and shining between the quilts?"

He paused. Pierre's eyes dropped to the floor. Gaspard continued: "Well, it is a great thing, and the babe was born quick one day when we were all alone. A thing like that gives you wonder. Then I could not bear to go away with the ships, and at last I said: 'One month, and then the ice fills the gulf, and there will be no more ships for the winter. That will be the last for me. I will be pilot no more-no.' She

was ver' happy, and a laugh ran over her little white teeth. Mon Dieu, I stop that laugh pretty quick—in fine way!"

He seemed for an instant to forget his great trouble, and his face went to warm sunshine like a boy's; but it was as sun playing on a scarred fortress. Presently the light faded out of his face and left it like iron smouldering from the bellows.

"Well," he said, "you see there was a ship to go almost the last of the season, and I said to my wife, 'Mamette, it is the last time I shall be pilot. You must come with me and bring the child, and they will put us off at Father Point, and then we will come back slow to the village on the good Ste. Anne and live there ver' quiet.' When I say that to her she laugh back at me and say, 'Beau! beau!' and she laugh in the child's eyes, and speak—nom de Dieu! she speak so gentle and light—and say to the child: 'Would you like go with your father a pretty journey down the gulf?' And the little child laugh back at her, and shake its soft brown hair over its head. They were both so glad to go. I went to the captain of the ship. I say to him, 'I will take my wife and my little child, and when we come to Father Point we will go ashore.' Bien, the captain laugh big, and it was all right. That was long time ago—long time."

He paused again, threw his head back with a despairing toss, his chin dropped on his breast, his hands clasped between his knees, and his pipe, laid beside him on the bench, was forgotten.

Pierre quietly put some wood upon the fire, opened his kit, drew out from it a little flask of rum and laid it upon the bench beside the pipe. A long time passed. At last Gaspard roused himself with a long sigh, turned and picked up the pipe, but, seeing the flask of rum, lifted it, and took one long swallow before he began to fill and light his pipe. There came into his voice something of iron hardness as he continued his story.

"Alors, we went into the boat. As we travelled down the gulf a great storm came out of the north. We thought it would pass, but it stayed on. When we got to the last place where the pilot could land, the waves were running like hills to the shore, and no boat could live between the ship and the point. For myself, it was nothing—I am a strong man and a great swimmer. But when a man has a wife and a child, it is differen'. So the ship went on out into the ocean with us. Well, we laugh a little, and think what a great brain I had when I say to my wife: 'Come and bring the child for the last voyage of Gaspard the pilot.' You see, there we were on board the ship, everything ver' good, plenty to eat, much to drink, to smoke, all the time. The sailors, they were ver' funny, and to see them take my child, my little Babette, and play with her as she roll on the deck—merci, it was gran'! So I say to my wife:

"'This will be bon voyage for all.' But a woman, she has not the mind like a man. When a man laugh in the sun and think nothing of evil, a woman laugh too, but there come a little quick sob to her lips. You ask her why, and she cannot tell. She know that something will happen. A man has great idee, a woman great sight. So my wife, she turn her face away all sad from me then, and she was right—she was right!

"One day in the ocean we pass a ship—only two days out. The ship signal us. I say to my wife: 'Ha, ha! now we can go back, maybe, to the good Ste. Anne.' Well, the ships come close together, and the captain of the other ship he have something importan' with ours. He ask if there will be chance of pilot into the gulf, because it is the first time that he visit Quebec. The captain swing round and call to me. I go up. I bring my wife and my little Babette; and that was how we sail back to the great gulf.

"When my wife step on board that ship I see her face get pale, and something strange in her eyes. I ask her why; she do not know, but she hug Babette close to her breast with a kind of fear. A long, low, black ship, it could run through every sea. Soon the captain come to me and say: 'You know the coast, the north coast of the gulf, from Labrador to Quebec?' I tell him yes. 'Well,' he say, 'do you know of a bay where few ships enter safe?' I think a moment and I tell him of Belle Amour. Then he say, ver' quick: 'That is the place; we will go to the bay of Belle Amour.' He was ver' kind to my face; he give my wife and child good berth, plenty to eat and drink, and once more I laugh; but my wife—there was in her face something I not understan'. It is not easy to understan' a woman. We got to the bay. I had pride: I was young. I was the best pilot in the St. Lawrence, and I took in the ship between the reefs of the bay, where they run like a gridiron, and I laugh when I swing the ship all ver' quick to the right, after we pass the reefs, and make a curve round—something. The captain pull me up and ask why. But I never tell him that. I not know why I never tell him. But the good God put the thought into my head, and I keep it to this hour, and it never leave me, never—never!"

He slowly rubbed his hands up and down his knees, took another sip of rum, and went on:

"I brought the ship close up to the shore, and we go to anchor. All that night I see the light of a fire on the shore. So I slide down and swim to the shore. Under a little arch of rocks something was going on. I could not tell, but I know from the sound that they are to bury something. Then, all at once, it come to me—this is a pirate ship! I come closer and closer to the light, and then I see a dreadful thing.

There was the captain and the mate, and another. They turn quick upon two other men—two sailors—and kill them. Then they take the bodies and wound them round some casks in a great hole, and cover it all up. I understan'. It is the old legend that a dead body will keep gold all to itself, so that no one shall find it. Mon Dieu!"—his voice dropped low and shook in his throat—"I give one little cry at the sight, and then they see me. There were three. They were armed; they sprang upon me and tied me. Then they fling me beside the fire, and they cover up the hole with the gold and the bodies.

"When that was done they take me back to the ship, then with pistols at my head they make me pilot the ship out into the bay again. As we went they make a chart of the place. We travel along the coast for one day; and then a great storm of snow come, and the captain say to me: 'Steer us into harbour.' When we are at anchor, they take me and my wife, and little child and put us ashore alone, with a storm and the bare rocks and the dreadful night, and leave us there, that we shall never tell the secret of the gold. That night my wife and my child die in the snow."

Here his voice became strained and slow. "After a long time I work my way to an Injin camp. For months I was a child in strength, all my flesh gone. When the spring come I went and dug a deeper grave for my wife, and p'tite Babette, and leave them there, where they had died. But I come to the bay of Belle Amour, because I knew some day the man with the devil's heart would come back for his gold, and then would arrive my time—the hour of God!"

He paused. "The hour of God," he repeated slowly. "I have waited twenty years, but he has not come; yet I know that he will come. I feel it here"—he touched his forehead; "I know it here"—he tapped his heart. "Once where my heart was, there is only one thing, and it is hate, and I know—I know—that he will come. And when he comes—" He raised his arm high above his head, laughed wildly, paused, let the hand drop, and then fell to staring into the fire.

Pierre again placed the flask of rum between his fingers. But Gaspard put it down, caught his arms together across his breast, and never turned his face from the fire. Midnight came, and still they sat there silent. No man had a greater gift in waiting than Pierre. Many a time his life had been a swivel, upon which the comedies and tragedies of others had turned. He neither loved nor feared men: sometimes he pitied them. He pitied Gaspard. He knew what it is to have the heartstrings stretched out, one by one, by the hand of a Gorgon, while the feet are chained to the rocking world.

Not till the darkest hour of the morning did the two leave their silent watch and go to bed. The sun had crept stealthily to the door of the but before they rose again. Pierre laid his hand upon Gaspard's shoulder as they travelled out into the morning, and said: "My friend, I understand. Your secret is safe with me; you shall take me to the place where the gold is buried, but it shall wait there until the time is ripe. What is gold to me? Nothing. To find gold—that is the trick of any fool. To win it or to earn it is the only game. Let the bodies rot about the gold. You and I will wait. I have many friends in the northland, but there is no face in any tent door looking for me. You are alone: well, I will stay with you. Who can tell—perhaps it is near at hand—the hour of God!"

The huge hard hand of Gaspard swallowed the small hand of Pierre, and, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, he answered: "You shall be my comrade. I have told you all, as I have never told it to my God. I do not fear you about the gold—it is all cursed. You are not like other men; I will trust you. Some time you also have had the throat of a man in your fingers, and watched the life spring out of his eyes, and leave them all empty. When men feel like that, what is gold—what is anything! There is food in the bay and on the hills.

"We will live together, you and I. Come and I will show you the place of hell."

Together they journeyed down the crag and along the beach to the place where the gold, the grim god of this world, was fortressed and bastioned by its victims.

The days went on; the weeks and months ambled by. Still the two lived together. Little speech passed between them, save that speech of comrades, who use more the sign than the tongue. It seemed to Pierre after a time that Gaspard's wrongs were almost his own. Yet with this difference: he must stand by and let the avenger be the executioner; he must be the spectator merely.

Sometimes he went inland and brought back moose, caribou, and the skins of other animals, thus assisting Gaspard in his dealings with the great Company. But again there were days when he did nothing but lie on the skins at the hut's door, or saunter in the shadows and the sunlight. Not since he had come to Gaspard had a ship passed the bay or sought to anchor in it.

But there came a day. It was the early summer. The snow had shrunk from the ardent sun, and had swilled away to the gulf, leaving the tender grass showing. The moss on the rocks had changed from brown to green, and the vagrant birds had fluttered back from the south. The winter's furs had been

carried away in the early spring to the Company's post, by a detachment of coureurs de bois. There was little left to do. This morning they sat in the sun looking out upon the gulf. Presently Gaspard rose and went into the hut. Pierre's eyes still lazily scanned the water. As he looked he saw a vessel rounding a point in the distance. Suppose this was the ship of the pirate and murderer? The fancy diverted him. His eyes drew away from the indistinct craft—first to the reefs, and then to that spot where the colossal needle stretched up under the water. It was as Pierre speculated. Brigond, the French pirate, who had hidden his gold at such shameless cost, was, after twenty years in the galleys at Toulon, come back to find his treasure. He had doubted little that he would find it. The lonely spot, the superstition concerning dead bodies, the supposed doom of Gaspard, all ran in his favour. His little craft came on, manned by as vile a mob as ever mutinied or built a wrecker's fire.

When the ship got within a short distance of the bay, Pierre rose and called. Gaspard came to the door. "There's work to do, pilot," he said. Gaspard felt the thrill of his voice, and flashed a look out to the gulf. He raised his hands with a gasp. "I feel it," he said: "it is the hour of God!"

He started to the rope ladder of the cliff, then wheeled suddenly and came back to Pierre. "You must not come," he said. "Stay here and watch; you shall see great things." His voice had a round, deep tone. He caught both Pierre's hands in his and added: "It is for my wife and child; I have no fear. Adieu, my friend! When you see the good Pere Corraine say to him—but no, it is no matter—there is One greater!"

Once again he caught Pierre hard by the shoulder, then ran to the cliff and swung down the ladder. All at once there shot through Pierre's body an impulse, and his eyes lighted with excitement. He sprang towards the cliff. "Gaspard, come back!" he called; then paused, and, with an enigmatical smile, shrugged his shoulders, drew back, and waited.

The vessel was hove to outside the bay, as if hesitating. Brigond was considering whether it were better, with his scant chart, to attempt the bay, or to take small boats and make for the shore. He remembered the reefs, but he did not know of the needle of rock. Presently he saw Gaspard's boat coming. "Someone who knows the bay," he said; "I see a hut on the cliff."

"Hello, who are you?" Brigond called down as Gaspard drew alongside.

"A Hudson's Bay Company's man," answered Gaspard.

"How many are there of you?"

"Myself alone."

"Can you pilot us in?"

"I know the way."

"Come up."

Gaspard remembered Brigond, and he veiled his eyes lest the hate he felt should reveal him. No one could have recognised him as the young pilot of twenty years before. Then his face was cheerful and bright, and in his eye was the fire of youth. Now a thick beard and furrowing lines hid all the look of the past. His voice, too, was desolate and distant.

Brigond clapped him on the shoulder. "How long have you lived off there?" he asked, as he jerked his finger towards the shore.

"A good many years."

"Did anything strange ever happen there?" Gaspard felt his heart contract again, as it did when Brigond's hand touched his shoulder.

"Nothing strange is known."

A vicious joy came into Brigond's face. His fingers opened and shut.
"Safe, by the holy heaven!" he grunted.

"'By the holy heaven!'" repeated Gaspard, under his breath.

They walked forward. Almost as they did so there came a big puff of wind across the bay: one of those sudden currents that run in from the ocean and the gulf stream. Gaspard saw, and smiled. In a moment the vessel's nose was towards the bay, and she sailed in, dipping a shoulder to the sudden foam. On she came past reef and bar, a pretty tumbril to the slaughter. The spray feathered up to her sails, the sun caught her on deck and beam; she was running dead for the needle of rock.

Brigond stood at Gaspard's side. All at once Gaspard made the sacred gesture and said, in a low tone, as if only to himself: "Pardon, mon capitaine, mon Jesu!" Then he turned triumphantly, fiercely, upon Brigond. The pirate was startled. "What's the matter?" he said.

Not Gaspard, but the needle rock replied. There was a sudden shock; the vessel stood still and shivered; lurched, swung shoulder downwards, reeled and struggled. Instantly she began to sink.

"The boats! lower the boats!" cried Brigond. "This cursed fool has run us on a rock!"

The waves, running high, now swept over the deck. Brigond started aft, but Gaspard sprang before him. "Stand back!" he called. "Where you are you die!"

Brigond, wild with terror and rage, ran at him. Gaspard caught him as he came. With vast strength he lifted him and dashed him to the deck. "Die there, murderer!" he cried.

Brigond crouched upon the deck, looking at him with fearful eyes. "Who- are you?" he asked.

"I am Gaspard the pilot. I have waited for you twenty years. Up there, in the snow, my wife and child died. Here, in this bay, you die."

There was noise and racketing behind them, but they two heard nothing. The one was alone with his terror, the other with his soul. Once, twice, thrice, the vessel heaved, then went suddenly still.

Gaspard understood. One look at his victim, then he made the sacred gesture again, and folded his arms. Pierre, from the height of the cliff, looking down, saw the vessel dip at the bow, and then the waters divided and swallowed it up.

"Gaspard should have lived," he said. "But—who can tell! Perhaps
Mamette was waiting for him."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Have you ever felt the hand of your own child in yours
Memory is man's greatest friend and worst enemy
Solitude fixes our hearts immovably on things
When a man laugh in the sun and think nothing of evil

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A ROMANY OF THE SNOWS, VOL. 4 ***

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