

Romany Of The Snows, v1

Gilbert Parker

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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

To SIR WILLIAM C. VAN HORNE.

MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

To the public it will seem fitting that these new tales of "Pierre and His People" should be inscribed to one whose notable career is inseparably associated with the life and development of the Far North.

But there is a deeper and more personal significance in this dedication, for some of the stories were begotten in late gossip by your fireside; and furthermore, my little book is given a kind of distinction, in having on its fore-page the name of one well known as a connoisseur of art and a lover of literature.

Believe me,

DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

Sincerely yours,

GILBERT PARKER.

7 PARK PLACE.
ST. JAMES'S.
LONDON. S. W.

INTRODUCTION

It can hardly be said that there were two series of Pierre stories. There never was but one series, in fact. Pierre moved through all the thirty–nine stories of Pierre and His People and A Romany of the Snows without any thought on my part of putting him out of existence in one series and bringing him to life again in another. The publication of the stories was continuous, and at the time that Pierre and His People appeared several of those which came between the covers of A Romany of the Snows were passing through the pages of magazines in England and America. All of the thirty–nine stories might have appeared in one volume under the title of Pierre and His People, but they were published in two volumes with different titles in England, and in three volumes in America, simply because there was enough material for the two and the three volumes. In America The Adventurer of the North was broken up into two volumes at the urgent request of my then publishers, Messrs. Stone Kimball, who had the gift of producing beautiful books, but perhaps had not the same gift of business. These two American volumes succeeding Pierre were published under the title of An Adventurer of the North and A Romany of the Snows respectively. Now, the latter title, A Romany of the Snows, was that which I originally chose for the volume published in England as An Adventurer of the North. I was persuaded to reject the title, A Romany of the Snows, by my English publisher, and I have never forgiven myself since for being so weak. If a publisher had the infallible instinct for these things he would not be a publisher he would be an author; and though an author may make mistakes like everybody else, the average of his hits will be far higher than the average of his misses in such things. The title, An Adventurer of the North, is to my mind cumbrous and rough, and difficult in the mouth. Compare it with some of the stories within the volume itself: for instance, The Going of the White Swan, A Lovely Bully, At Bamber's Boom, At Point o' Bugles, The Pilot of Belle Amour, The Spoil of the Puma, A Romany of the Snows, and The Finding of Fingall. There it was, however; I made the mistake and it sticks; but the book now will be published in this subscription edition under the title first chosen by me, A Romany of the Snows. It really does express what Pierre was.

Perhaps some of the stories in A Romany of the Snows have not the sentimental simplicity of some of the earlier stories in Pierre and His People, which take hold where a deeper and better work might not seize the general public; but, reading these later stories after twenty years, I feel that I was moving on steadily to a larger, firmer command of my material, and was getting at closer grips with intimate human things. There is some proof of what I say in the fact that one of the stories in A Romany of the Snows, called The Going of the White Swan, appropriately enough published originally in Scribner's Magazine, has had an extraordinary popularity. It has been included in the programmes of reciters from the Murrumbidgee to the Vaal, from John O'Groat's to Land's End, and is now being published as a separate volume in England and America. It has been dramatised several times, and is more alive to–day than it was when it was published nearly twenty years ago. Almost the same may be said of The Three Commandments in the Vulgar Tongue.

It has been said that, apart from the colour, form, and setting, the incidents of these Pierre stories might have occurred anywhere. That is true beyond a doubt, and it exactly represents my attitude of mind. Every human passion, every incident springing out of a human passion to–day, had its counterpart in the time of Amenhotep. The only difference is in the setting, is in the language or dialect which is the vehicle of expression, and in race and character, which are the media of human idiosyncrasy. There is nothing new in anything that one may write, except the outer and visible variation of race, character, and country, which reincarnates the everlasting human ego and its scena.

The atmosphere of a story or novel is what temperament is to a man. Atmosphere cannot be created; it is not a matter of skill; it is a matter of personality, of the power of visualisation, of feeling for the thing which the mind sees. It has been said that my books possess atmosphere. This has often been said when criticism has been more or less acute upon other things; but I think that in all my experience there has never been a critic who has not credited my books with that quality; and I should say that *Pierre and His People* and *A Romany of the Snows* have an atmosphere in which the beings who make the stories live seem natural to their environment. It is this quality which gives vitality to the characters themselves. Had I not been able to create atmosphere which would have given naturalness to *Pierre* and his friends, some of the characters, and many of the incidents, would have seemed monstrosities melodramatic episodes merely. The truth is, that while the episode, which is the first essential of a short story, was always in the very forefront of my imagination, the character or characters in the episode meant infinitely more to me. To my mind the episode was always the consequence of character. That almost seems a paradox; but apart from the phenomena of nature, as possible incidents in a book, the episodes which make what are called "human situations" are, in most instances, the sequence of character and are incidental to the law of the character set in motion. As I realise it now, subconsciously, my mind and imagination were controlled by this point of view in the days of the writing of *Pierre and His People*.

In the life and adventures of *Pierre* and his people I came, as I think, to a certain command of my material, without losing real sympathy with the simple nature of things. Dexterity has its dangers, and one of its dangers is artificiality. It is very difficult to be skilful and to ring true. If I have not wholly succeeded in *A Romany of the Snows*, I think I have not wholly failed, as the continued appeal of a few of the stories would seem to show.

ACROSS THE JUMPING SANDHILLS

"Here now, Trader; aisy, aisy! Quicksands I've seen along the sayshore, and up to me half-ways I've been in wan, wid a double-and-twist in the rope to pull me out; but a suckin' sand in the open plain aw, Trader, aw! the like o' that niver a bit saw I."

So said Macavoy the giant, when the thing was talked of in his presence.

"Well, I tell you it's true, and they're not three miles from Fort O'Glory. The Company's [Hudson's Bay Company] men don't talk about it what's the use! Travellers are few that way, and you can't get the Indians within miles of them. Pretty *Pierre* knows all about them better than anyone else almost. He'll stand by me in it eh, *Pierre*?"

Pierre, the half-breed gambler and adventurer, took no notice, and was silent for a time, intent on his cigarette; and in the pause Mowley the trapper said: "*Pierre*'s gone back on you, Trader. P'raps ye haven't paid him for the last lie. I go one better, you stand by me my treat that's the game!"

"Aw, the like o' that," added Macavoy reproachfully. "Aw, yer tongue to the roof o' yer mouth, Mowley. Liars all men may be, but that's wid wimmin or landlords. But, *Pierre*, aff another man's bat like that aw, Mowley, fill your mouth wid the bowl o' yer pipe."

Pierre now looked up at the three men, rolling another cigarette as he did so; but he seemed to be thinking of a distant matter. Meeting the three pairs of eyes fixed on him, his own held them for a moment musingly; then he lit his cigarette, and, half reclining on the bench where he sat, he began to speak, talking into the fire as it were.

"I was at Guidon Hill, at the Company's post there. It was the fall of the year, when you feel that there is nothing so good as life, and the air drinks like wine. You think that sounds like a woman or a priest? Mais, no. The seasons are strange. In the spring I am lazy and sad; in the fall I am gay, I am for the big things to do. This matter was in the fall. I felt that I must move. Yet, what to do? There was the thing. Cards, of course. But that's only for

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times, not for all seasons. So I was like a wild dog on a chain. I had a good horse Tophet, black as a coal, all raw bones and joint, and a reach like a moose. His legs worked like piston-rods. But, as I said, I did not know where to go or what to do. So we used to sit at the Post loafing: in the daytime watching the empty plains all panting for travellers, like a young bride waiting her husband for the first time."

Macavoy regarded Pierre with delight. He had an unctuous spirit, and his heart was soft for women so soft that he never had had one on his conscience, though he had brushed gay smiles off the lips of many. But that was an amiable weakness in a strong man. "Aw, Pierre," he said coaxingly, "kape it down; aisy, aisy. Me heart's goin' like a trip-hammer at thought av it; aw yis, aw yis, Pierre."

"Well, it was like that to me all sun and a sweet sting in the air. At night to sit and tell tales and such things; and perhaps a little brown brandy, a look at the stars, a half-hour with the cattle the same old game. Of course, there was the wife of Hilton the factor fine, always fine to see, but deaf and dumb. We were good friends, Ida and me. I had a hand in her wedding. Holy, I knew her when she was a little girl. We could talk together by signs. She was a good woman; she had never guessed at evil. She was quick, too, like a flash, to read and understand without words. A face was a book to her.

"Eh bien. One afternoon we were all standing outside the Post, when we saw someone ride over the Long Divide. It was good for the eyes. I cannot tell quite how, but horse and rider were so sharp and clear-cut against the sky, that they looked very large and peculiar there was something in the air to magnify. They stopped for a minute on the top of the Divide, and it seemed like a messenger out of the strange country at the farthest north the place of legends. But, of course, it was only a traveller like ourselves, for in a half-hour she was with us.

"Yes, it was a girl dressed as a man. She did not try to hide it; she dressed so for ease. She would make a man's heart leap in his mouth if he was like Macavoy, or the pious Mowley there."

Pierre's last three words had a touch of irony, for he knew that the Trapper had a precious tongue for Scripture when a missionary passed that way, and a bad name with women to give it point. Mowley smiled sourly; but Macavoy laughed outright, and smacked his lips on his pipe-stem luxuriously.

"Aw now, Pierre all me little failin's aw!" he protested.

Pierre swung round on the bench, leaning upon the other elbow, and, cherishing his cigarette, presently continued:

"She had come far and was tired to death, so stiff that she could hardly get from her horse; and the horse too was ready to drop. Handsome enough she looked, for all that, in man's clothes and a peaked cap, with a pistol in her belt. She wasn't big built just a feathery kind of sapling but she was set fair on her legs like a man, and a hand that was as good as I have seen, so strong, and like silk and iron with a horse. Well, what was the trouble? for I saw there was trouble. Her eyes had a hunted look, and her nose breathed like a deer's in the chase. All at once, when she saw Hilton's wife, a cry came from her and she reached out her hands. What would women of that sort do? They were both of a kind. They got into each other's arms. After that there was nothing for us men but to wait. All women are the same, and Hilton's wife was like the rest. She must get the secret first; then the men should know. We had to wait an hour. Then Hilton's wife beckoned to us. We went inside. The girl was asleep. There was something in the touch of Hilton's wife like sleep itself like music. It was her voice that touch. She could not speak with her tongue, but her hands and face were words and music. Bien, there was the girl asleep, all clear of dust and stain; and that fine hand it lay loose on her breast, so quiet, so quiet. Enfin, the real story for how she slept there does not matter but it was good to see when we knew the story."

The Trapper was laughing silently to himself to hear Pierre in this romantic mood. A woman's hand it was the game for a boy, not an adventurer; for the Trapper's only creed was that women, like deer, were spoils for the hunter. Pierre's keen eye noted this, but he was above petty anger. He merely said: "If a man have an eye to see

behind the face, he understands the foolish laugh of a man, or the hand of a good woman, and that is much. Hilton's wife told us all. She had rode two hundred miles from the south-west, and was making for Fort Micah, sixty miles farther north. For what? She had loved a man against the will of her people. There had been a feud, and Garrison that was the lover's name was the last on his own side. There was trouble at a Company's post, and Garrison shot a half-breed. Men say he was right to shoot him, for a woman's name must be safe up here. Besides, the half-breed drew first. Well, Garrison was tried, and must go to jail for a year. At the end of that time he would be free. The girl Janie knew the day. Word had come to her. She made everything ready. She knew her brothers were watching her three brothers and two other men who had tried to get her love. She knew also that they five would carry on the feud against the one man. So one night she took the best horse on the ranch and started away towards Fort Micah. Alors, you know how she got to Guidon Hill after two days' hard riding enough to kill a man, and over fifty yet to do. She was sure her brothers were on her track. But if she could get to Fort Micah, and be married to Garrison before they came; she wanted no more.

"There were only two horses of use at Hilton's Post then; all the rest were away, or not fit for hard travel. There was my Tophet, and a lean chestnut, with a long propelling gait, and not an ounce of loose skin on him. There was but one way: the girl must get there. Allons, what is the good? What is life without these things? The girl loves the man: she must have him in spite of all. There was only Hilton and his wife and me at the Post, and Hilton was lame from a fall, and one arm in a sling. If the brothers followed, well, Hilton could not interfere he was a Company's man; but for myself, as I said, I was hungry for adventure, I had an ache in my blood for something. I was tingling to the toes, my heart was thumping in my throat. All the cords of my legs were straightening as if I was in the saddle.

"She slept for three hours. I got the two horses saddled. Who could tell but she might need help? I had nothing to do; I knew the shortest way to Fort Micah, every foot and then it is good to be ready for all things. I told Hilton's wife what I had done. She was glad. She made a gesture at me as to a brother, and then began to put things in a bag for us to carry. She had settled all how it was to be. She had told the girl. You see, a man may be what is it they call me? a plunderer, and yet a woman will trust him, comme ca!"

"Aw yis, aw yis, Pierre; but she knew yer hand and yer tongue niver wint agin a woman, Pierre. Naw, niver a wan. Aw swate, swate, she was, wid a heart a heart, Hilton's wife, aw yis!"

Pierre waved Macavoy into silence. "The girl waked after three hours with a start. Her hand caught at her heart. 'Oh,' she said, still staring at us, 'I thought that they had come!' A little after she and Hilton's wife went to another room. All at once there was a sound of horses outside, and then a knock at the door, and four men come in. They were the girl's hunters.

"It was hard to tell what to do all in a minute; but I saw at once the best thing was to act for all, and to get all the men inside the house. So I whispered to Hilton, and then pretended that I was a great man in the Company. I ordered Hilton to have the horses cared for, and, not giving the men time to speak, I fetched out the old brown brandy, wondering all the time what could be done. There was no sound from the other room, though I thought I heard a door open once. Hilton played the game well, and showed nothing when I ordered him about, and agreed word for word with me when I said no girl had come, laughing when they told why they were after her. More than one of them did not believe at first; but, pshaw, what have I been doing all my life to let such fellows doubt me? So the end of it was that I got them all inside the house. There was one bad thing their horses were all fresh, as Hilton whispered to me. They had only rode them a few miles they had stole or bought them at the first ranch to the west of the Post. I could not make up my mind what to do. But it was clear I must keep them quiet till something shaped.

"They were all drinking brandy when Hilton's wife come into the room. Her face was, mon Dieu! so innocent, so childlike. She stared at the men; and then I told them she was deaf and dumb, and I told her why they had come. Voila, it was beautiful like nothing you ever saw. She shook her head so innocent, and then told them like a child

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that they were wicked to chase a girl. I could have kissed her feet. Thunder, how she fooled them! She said, would they not search the house? She said all through me, on her fingers and by signs. And I told them at once. But she told me something else that the girl had slipped out as the last man came in, had mounted the chestnut, and would wait for me by the iron spring, a quarter of a mile away. There was the danger that some one of the men knew the finger-talk, so she told me this in signs mixed up with other sentences.

"Good! There was now but one thing for me to get away. So I said, laughing, to one of the men. 'Come, and we will look after the horses, and the others can search the place with Hilton.' So we went out to where the horses were tied to the railing, and led them away to the corral.

"Of course you will understand how I did it. I clapped a hand on his mouth, put a pistol at his head, and gagged and tied him. Then I got my Tophet, and away I went to the spring. The girl was waiting. There were few words. I gripped her hand, gave her another pistol, and then we got away on a fine moonlit trail. We had not gone a mile when I heard a faint yell far behind. My game had been found out. There was nothing to do but to ride for it now, and maybe to fight. But fighting was not good; for I might be killed, and then the girl would be caught just the same. We rode on such a ride, the horses neck and neck, their hoofs pounding the prairie like drills, rawbone to rawbone, a hell-to-split gait. I knew they were after us, though I saw them but once on the crest of a Divide about three miles behind. Hour after hour like that, with ten minutes' rest now and then at a spring or to stretch our legs. We hardly spoke to each other; but, *nom de Dieu!* my heart was warm to this girl who had rode a hundred and fifty miles in twenty-four hours. Just before dawn, when I was beginning to think that we should easy win the race if the girl could but hold out, if it did not kill her, the chestnut struck a leg into the crack of the prairie, and horse and girl spilt on the ground together. She could hardly move, she was so weak, and her face was like death. I put a pistol to the chestnut's head, and ended it. The girl stooped and kissed the poor beast's neck, but spoke nothing. As I helped her on my Tophet I put my lips to the sleeve of her dress. Mother of Heaven! what could a man do she was so dam' brave.

"Dawn was just breaking oozy and grey at the swell of the prairie over the Jumping Sandhills. They lay quiet and shining in the green-brown plain; but I knew that there was a churn beneath which could set those swells of sand in motion, and make glory-to-God of an army. Who can tell what it is? A flood under the surface, a tidal river-what? No man knows. But they are sea monsters on the land. Every morning at sunrise they begin to eddy and roll and who ever saw a stranger sight? Bien, I looked back. There were those four pirates coming on, about three miles away. What was there to do? The girl and myself on my blown horse were too much. Then a great idea come to me. I must reach and cross the Jumping Sandhills before sunrise. It was one deadly chance.

"When we got to the edge of the sand they were almost a mile behind. I was all sick to my teeth as my poor Tophet stepped into the silt. Sacre, how I watched the dawn! Slow, slow, we dragged over that velvet powder. As we reached the farther side I could feel it was beginning to move. The sun was showing like the lid of an eye along the plain. I looked back. All four horsemen were in the sand, plunging on towards us. By the time we touched the brown-green prairie on the farther side the sand was rolling behind us. The girl had not looked back. She seemed too dazed. I jumped from the horse, and told her that she must push on alone to the Fort, that Tophet could not carry both, that I should be in no danger. She looked at me so deep ah, I cannot tell how! then stooped and kissed me between the eyes I have never forgot. I struck Tophet, and she was gone to her happiness; for before 'lights out!' she reached the Fort and her lover's arms.

"But I stood looking back on the Jumping Sandhills. So, was there ever a sight like that those hills gone like a smelting-floor, the sunrise spotting it with rose and yellow, and three horses and their riders fighting what cannot be fought? What could I do? They would have got the girl and spoiled her life, if I had not led them across, and they would have killed me if they could. Only one cried out, and then but once, in a long shriek. But after, all three were quiet as they fought, until they were gone where no man could see, where none cries out so we can hear. The last thing I saw was a hand stretching up out of the sands."

There was a long pause, painful to bear. The Trader sat with eyes fixed humbly as a dog's on Pierre. At last Macavoy said: "She kissed ye, Pierre, aw yis, she did that! Jist betune the eyes. Do yees iver see her now, Pierre?"

But Pierre, looking at him, made no answer.

A LOVELY BULLY

He was seven feet and fat. He came to Fort O'Angel at Hudson's Bay, an immense slip of a lad, very much in the way, fond of horses, a wonderful hand at wrestling, pretending a horrible temper, threatening tragedies for all who differed from him, making the Fort quake with his rich roar, and playing the game of bully with a fine simplicity. In winter he fattened, in summer he sweated, at all times he ate eloquently.

It was a picture to see him with the undercut of a haunch of deer or buffalo, or with a whole prairie-fowl on his plate, his eyes measuring it shrewdly, his coat and waistcoat open, and a clear space about him for he needed room to stretch his mighty limbs, and his necessity was recognised by all.

Occasionally he pretended to great ferocity, but scowl he ever so much, a laugh kept idling in his irregular bushy beard, which lifted about his face in the wind like a mane, or made a kind of underbrush through which his blunt fingers ran at hide-and-seek.

He was Irish, and his name was Macavoy. In later days, when Fort O'Angel was invaded by settlers, he had his time of greatest importance.

He had been useful to the Chief Trader at the Fort in the early days, and having the run of the Fort and the reach of his knife, was little likely to discontinue his adherence. But he ate and drank with all the dwellers at the Post, and abused all impartially. "Malcolm," said he to the Trader, "Malcolm, me glutton o' the H.B.C., that wants the Far North for your footstool Malcolm, you villain, it's me grief that I know you, and me thumb to me nose in token. "Wiley and Hatchett, the principal settlers, he abused right and left, and said, "Wasn't there land in the East and West, that you steal the country God made for honest men you robbers o' the wide world! Me tooth on the Book, and I tell you what, it's only me charity that kapes me from spoilin' ye. For a wink of me eye, an' away you'd go, leaving your tails behind you and pass that shoulder of bear, you pirates, till I come to it sideways, like a hog to war."

He was even less sympathetic with Bareback the chief and his braves. "Sons o' Anak y'are; here today and away to-morrow, like the clods of the valley and that's your portion, Bareback. It's the word o' the Pentytok in pieces you go, like a potter's vessel. Don't shrug your shoulders at me, Bareback, you pig, or you'll think that Ballzeboob's loose on the mat. But take a sup o' this whisky, while you swear wid your hand on your chest, 'Amin' to the words o' Tim Macavoy."

Beside Macavoy, Pierre, the notorious, was a child in height. Up to the time of the half-breed's coming the Irishman had been the most outstanding man at Fort O'Angel, and was sure of a good-natured homage, acknowledged by him with a jovial tyranny.

Pierre put a flea in his ear. He was pensively indifferent to him even in his most royal moments. He guessed the way to bring down the gusto and pride of this Goliath, but, for a purpose, he took his own time, nodding indolently to Macavoy when he met him, but avoiding talk with him.

Among the Indian maidens Macavoy was like a king or khan; for they count much on bulk and beauty, and he answered to their standards especially to Wonta's. It was a sight to see him of a summer day, sitting in the shade of a pine, his shirt open, showing his firm brawny chest, his arms bare, his face shining with perspiration, his big

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voice gurgling in his beard, his eyes rolling amiably upon the maidens as they passed or gathered near demurely, while he declaimed of mighty deeds in patois or Chinook to the braves.

Pierre's humour was of the quietest, most subterranean kind. He knew that Macavoy had not an evil hair in his head; that vanity was his greatest weakness, and that through him there never would have been more half-breed population. There was a tradition that he had a wife somewhere based upon wild words he had once said when under the influence of bad liquor; but he had roared his accuser the lie when the thing was imputed to him.

At Fort Ste. Anne Pierre had known an old woman, by name of Kitty Whelan, whose character was all tatters. She had told him that many years ago she had had a broth of a lad for a husband; but because of a sharp word or two across the fire, and the toss of a handful of furniture, he had left her, and she had seen no more of him. "Tall, like a chimney he was," said she, "and a chest like a wall, so broad, and a voice like a huntsman's horn, though only a b'y, an' no hair an his face; an' little I know whether he is dead or alive; but dead belike, for he's sure to come rap agin' somethin' that'd kill him; for he, the darlin', was that aisy and gentle, he wouldn't pull his fightin' iron till he had death in his ribs."

Pierre had drawn from her that the name of this man whom she had cajoled into a marriage (being herself twenty years older), and driven to deserting her afterwards, was Tim Macavoy. She had married Mr. Whelan on the assumption that Macavoy was dead. But Mr. Whelan had not the nerve to desert her, and so he departed this life, very loudly lamented by Mrs. Whelan, who had changed her name with no right to do so. With his going her mind dwelt greatly upon the virtues of her mighty vanished Tim: and ill would it be for Tim if she found him.

Pierre had travelled to Fort O'Angel almost wholly because he had Tim Macavoy in his mind: in it Mrs. Whelan had only an incidental part; his plans journeyed beyond her and her lost consort. He was determined on an expedition to capture Fort Comfort, which had been abandoned by the great Company, and was now held by a great band of the Shunup Indians.

Pierre had a taste for conquest for its own sake, though he had no personal ambition. The love of adventure was deep in him; he adored sport for its own sake; he had had a long range of experiences some discreditable and now he had determined on a new field for his talent.

He would establish a kingdom, and resign it. In that case he must have a man to take his place. He chose Macavoy.

First he must humble the giant to the earth, then make him into a great man again, with a new kind of courage. The undoing of Macavoy seemed a civic virtue. He had a long talk with Wonta, the Indian maiden most admired by Macavoy. Many a time the Irishman had cast an ogling, rolling eye on her, and had talked his loudest within her ear-shot, telling of splendid things he had done: making himself like another Samson as to the destruction of men, and a Hercules as to the slaying of cattle.

Wonta had a sense of humour also, and when Pierre told her what was required of her, she laughed with a quick little gurgle, and showed as handsome a set of teeth as the half-breed's; which said much for her. She promised to do as he wished. So it chanced when Macavoy was at his favourite seat beneath the pine, talking to a gaping audience, Wonta and a number of Indian girls passed by. Pierre was leaning against a door smoking, not far away. Macavoy's voice became louder.

"'Stand them up wan by wan,' says I, 'and give me a leg loose, and a fist free; and at that '"

"At that there was thunder and fire in the sky, and because the great Macavoy blew his breath over them they withered like the leaves," cried Wonta, laughing; but her laugh had an edge.

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Macavoy stopped short, open-mouthed, breathing hard in his great beard. He was astonished at Wonta's raillery; the more so when she presently snapped her fingers, and the other maidens, laughing, did the same. Some of the half-breeds snapped their fingers also in sympathy, and shrugged their shoulders. Wonta came up to him softly, patted him on the head, and said: "Like Macavoy there is nobody. He is a great brave. He is not afraid of a coyote, he has killed prairie-hens in numbers as pebbles by the lakes. He has a breast like a fat ox," here she touched the skin of his broad chest, "and he will die if you do not fight him."

Then she drew back, as though in humble dread, and glided away with the other maidens, Macavoy staring after her, with a blustering kind of shame in his face. The half-breeds laughed, and, one by one, they got up, and walked away also. Macavoy looked round: there was no one near save Pierre, whose eye rested on him lazily. Macavoy got to his feet, muttering. This was the first time in his experience at Fort O'Angel that he had been bluffed and by a girl; one for whom he had a very soft place in his big heart. Pierre came slowly over to him.

"I'd have it out with her," said he. "She called you a bully and a brag."

"Out with her?" cried Macavoy. "How can ye have it out wid a woman?"

"Fight her," said Pierre pensively.

"Fight her? fight her? Holy smoke! How can you fight a woman?"

"Why, what do you fight?" asked Pierre innocently.

Macavoy grinned in a wild kind of fashion. "Faith, then, y'are a fool. Bring on the divil an' all his angels, say I, and I'll fight thim where I stand."

Pierre ran his fingers down Macavoy's arm, and said "There's time enough for that. I'd begin with the five."

"What five, then?"

"Her half-breed lovers: Big Eye, One Toe, Jo-John, Saucy Boy, and Limber Legs."

"Her lovers? Her lovers, is it? Is there truth on y'r tongue?"

"Go to her father's tent at sunset, and you'll find one or all of them there."

"Oh, is that it?" said the Irishman, opening and shutting his fists. "Then I'll carve their hearts out, an' ate thim wan by wan this night."

"Come down to Wiley's," said Pierre; "there's better company there than here."

Pierre had arranged many things, and had secured partners in his little scheme for humbling the braggart. He so worked on the other's good nature that by the time they reached the settler's place, Macavoy was stretching himself with a big pride. Seated at Wiley's table, with Hatchett and others near, and drink going about, someone drew the giant on to talk, and so deftly and with such apparent innocence did Pierre, by a word here and a nod there, encourage him, that presently he roared at Wiley and Hatchett:

"Ye shameless buccaneers that push your way into the tracks of honest men, where the Company's been three hundred years by the will o' God if it wasn't for me, ye Jack Sheppards "

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Wiley and Hatchett both got to their feet with pretended rage, saying he'd insulted them both, that he was all froth and brawn, and giving him the lie.

Utterly taken aback, Macavoy could only stare, puffing in his beard, and drawing in his legs, which had been spread out at angles. He looked from Wiley to the impassive Pierre. "Buccaneers, you callus," Wiley went on; "well, we'll have no more of that, or there'll be trouble at Fort O'Angel."

"Ah, sure y'are only jokin'," said Macavoy, "for I love ye, ye scoundrels. It's only me fun."

"For fun like that you'll pay, ruffian!" said Hatchett, bringing down his fist on the table with a bang.

Macavoy stood up. He looked confounded, but there was nothing of the coward in his face. "Oh, well," said he, "I'll be goin', for ye've got y'r teeth all raspin'."

As he went the two men laughed after him mockingly. "Wind like a bag," said Hatchett. "Bone like a marrow-fat pea," added Wiley.

Macavoy was at the door, but at that he turned. "If ye care to sail agin' that wind, an' gnaw on that bone, I'd not be sayin' you no."

"Will to-night do at sunset?" said Wiley.

"Bedad, then, me b'ys, sunset'll do an' not more than two at a time," he added softly, all the roar gone from his throat. Then he went out, followed by Pierre.

Hatchett and Wiley looked at each other and laughed a little confusedly. "What's that he said?" muttered Wiley. "Not more than two at a time, was it?"

"That was it. I don't know that it's what we bargained for, after all." He looked round on the other settlers present, who had been awed by the childlike, earnest note in Macavoy's last words. They shook their heads now a little sagely; they weren't so sure that Pierre's little game was so jovial as it had promised.

Even Pierre had hardly looked for so much from his giant as yet. In a little while he had got Macavoy back to his old humour.

"What was I made for but war!" said the Irishman, "an' by war to kape thim at peace, wherever I am." Soon he was sufficiently restored in spirits to go with Pierre to Bareback's lodge, where, sitting at the tent door, with idlers about, he smoked with the chief and his braves. Again Pierre worked upon him adroitly, and again he became loud in speech, and grandly patronising.

"I've stood by ye like a father, ye loafers," he said, "an' I give you my word, ye howlin' rogues "

Here Bareback and a half-dozen braves came up suddenly from the ground, and the chief said fiercely: "You speak crooked things. We are no rogues. We will fight."

Macavoy's face ran red to his hair. He scratched his head a little foolishly, and gathered himself up. "Sure, 'twas only me tasin', darlins," he said, "but I'll be comin' again, when y'are not so narvis." He turned to go away.

Pierre made a sign to Bareback, and the Indian touched the giant on the arm. "Will you fight?" said he.

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"Not all o' ye at once," said Macavoy slowly, running his eye carefully along the half-dozen; "not more than three at a toime," he added with a simple sincerity, his voice again gone like the dove's. "At what time will it be convaynyint for ye?" he asked.

"At sunset," said the chief, "before the Fort." Macavoy nodded and walked away with Pierre, whose glance of approval at the Indians did not make them thoroughly happy.

To rouse the giant was not now so easy. He had already three engagements of violence for sunset. Pierre directed their steps by a roundabout to the Company's stores, and again there was a distinct improvement in the giant's spirits. Here at least he could be himself, he thought, here no one should say him nay. As if nerved by the idea, he plunged at once into boisterous raillery of the Chief Trader. "Oh, ho," he began, "me freebooter, me captain av the looters av the North!" The Trader snarled at him. "What d'ye mean, by such talk to me, sir? I've had enough we've all had enough of your brag and bounce; for you're all sweat and swill-pipe, and I give you this for your chewing, that though by the Company's rules I can't go out and fight you, you may have your pick of my men for it. I'll take my pay for your insults in pounded flesh Irish pemmican!"

Macavoy's face became mottled with sudden rage. He roared, as, perhaps, he had never roared before: "Are ye all gone mad-mad-mad? I was jokin' wid ye, whin I called ye this or that. But by the swill o' me pipe, and the sweat o' me skin, I'll drink the blood o' ye, Trader, me darlin'. An' all I'll ask is, that ye mate me to-night whin the rest o' the pack is in front o' the Fort but not more than four o' ye at a time for little scrawney rats as y'are, too many o' ye wad be in me way." He wheeled and strode fiercely out. Pierre smiled gently.

"He's a great bully that, isn't he, Trader? There'll be fun in front of the Fort to-night. For he's only bragging, of course eh?"

The Trader nodded with no great assurance, and then Pierre said as a parting word: "You'll be there, of course only four av ye!" and hurried out after Macavoy, humming to himself

"For the King said this, and the Queen said that,
But he walked away with their army, O!"

So far Pierre's plan had worked even better than he expected, though Macavoy's moods had not been altogether after his imaginings. He drew alongside the giant, who had suddenly grown quiet again. Macavoy turned and looked down at Pierre with the candour of a schoolboy, and his voice was very low:

"It's a long time ago, I'm thinkin'," he said, "since I lost me frinds ages an' ages ago. For me frinds are me inimies now, an' that makes a man old. But I'll not say that it cripples his arm or humbles his back." He drew his arm up once or twice and shot it out straight into the air like a catapult. "It's all right," he added, very softly, "an', Half-breed, me b'y, if me frinds have turned inimies, why, I'm thinkin' me inimy has turned frind, for that I'm sure you were, an' this I'm certain y 'are. So here's the grip av me fist, an' y'll have it." Pierre remembered that disconcerting, iron grip of friendship for many a day. He laughed to himself to think how he was turning the braggart into a warrior. "Well," said Pierre, "what about those five at Wonta's tent?"

"I'll be there whin the sun dips below the Little Red Hill," he said, as though his thoughts were far away, and he turned his face towards Wonta's tent. Presently he laughed out loud. "It's many along day," he said, "since "

Then he changed his thoughts. "They've spoke sharp words in me teeth," he continued, "and they'll pay for it. Bounce! sweat! brag! wind! is it? There's dancin' beyant this night, me darlins!"

"Are you sure you'll not run away when they come on?" said Pierre, a little ironically.

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"Is that the word av a frind?" replied Macavoy, a hand fumbling in his hair.

"Did you never run away when faced?" Pierre asked pitilessly.

"I never turned tail from a man, though, to be sure, it's been more talk than fight up here: Fort Ste. Anne's been but a graveyard for fun these years."

"Eh, well," persisted Pierre, "but did you never turn tail from a slip of a woman?"

The thing was said idly. Macavoy gathered his beard in his mouth, chewing it confusedly. "You've a keen tongue for a question," was his reply. "What for should anny man run from a woman?"

"When the furniture flies, an' the woman knows more of the world in a day than the man does in a year; and the man's a hulking bit of an Irishman bien, then things are so and so!"

Macavoy drew back dazed, his big legs trembling. "Come into the shade of these maples," said Pierre, "for the sun has set you quaking a little," and he put out his hand to take Macavoy's arm.

The giant drew away from the hand, but walked on to the trees. His face seemed to have grown older by years on the moment. "What's this y'are sayin' to me?" he asked hoarsely. "What do you know av av that woman?"

"Malahide is a long way off," said Pierre, "but when one travels why shouldn't the other?"

Macavoy made a helpless motion with his lumbering hand. "Mother o' saints," he said, "has it come to that, after all these years? Is she tell me where she is, me frind, and you'll niver want an arm to fight for ye, an' the half av a blanket, while I have wan!"

"But you'll run as you did before, if I tell you, an' there'll be no fighting to-night, accordin' to the word you've given."

"No fightin', did ye say? an' run away, is it? Then this in your eye, that if ye'll bring an army, I'll fight till the skin is in rags on me bones, whin it's only men that's before me; but woman and that wan! Faith, I'd run, I'm thinkin', as I did, you know when Don't tell me that she's here, man; arrah, don't say that!"

There was something pitiful and childlike in the big man's voice, so much so that Pierre, calculating gamester as he was, and working upon him as he had been for many weeks, felt a sudden pity, and dropping his fingers on the other's arm, said: "No, Macavoy, my friend, she is not here; but she is at Fort Ste. Anne or was when I left there."

Macavoy groaned. "Does she know that I'm here?" he asked.

"I think not. Fort Ste. Anne is far away, and she may not hear."

"What what is she doing?"

"Keeping your memory and Mr. Whelan's green." Then Pierre told him somewhat bluntly what he knew of Mrs. Macavoy.

"I'd rather face Ballzeboob himself than her," said Macavoy. "An' she's sure to find me."

"Not if you do as I say."

"An' what is it ye say, little man?"

"Come away with me where she'll not find you."

"An' where's that, Pierre darlin'?"

"I'll tell you that when to-night's fighting's over. Have you a mind for Wonta?" he continued.

"I've a mind for Wonta an' many another as fine, but I'm a married man," he said, "by priest an' by book; an' I can't forget that, though the woman's to me as the pit below."

Pierre looked curiously at him. "You're a wonderful fool," he said, "but I'm not sure that I like you less for that. There was Shon M'Gann but it is no matter." He sighed and continued: "When to-night is over, you shall have work and fun that you've been fattening for this many a year, and the woman'll not find you, be sure of that. Besides " he whispered in Macavoy's ear.

"Poor divil, poor divil, she'd always a throat for that; but it's a horrible death to die, I'm thinkin'." Macavoy's chin dropped on his breast.

When the sun was falling below Little Red Hill, Macavoy came to Wonta's tent. Pierre was not far away. What occurred in the tent Pierre never quite knew, but presently he saw Wonta run out in a frightened way, followed by the five half-breeds, who carried themselves awkwardly. Behind them again, with head shaking from one side to the other, travelled Macavoy; and they all marched away towards the Fort. "Well," said Pierre to Wonta, "he is amusing, eh? so big a coward, eh?"

"No, no," she said, "you are wrong. He is no coward. He is a great brave. He spoke like a little child, but he said he would fight them all when "

"When their turn came," interposed Pierre, with a fine "bead" of humour in his voice; "well, you see he has much to do." He pointed towards the Fort, where people were gathering fast. The strange news had gone abroad, and the settlement, laughing joyously, came to see Macavoy swagger; they did not think there would be fighting.

Those whom Macavoy had challenged were not so sure. When the giant reached the open space in front of the Fort, he looked slowly round him. A great change had come over him. His skin seemed drawn together more firmly, and running himself up finely to his full height, he looked no longer the lounging braggart. Pierre measured him with his eye, and chuckled to himself. Macavoy stripped himself of his coat and waistcoat, and rolled up his sleeves. His shirt was flying at the chest.

He beckoned to Pierre.

"Are you standin' me frind in this?" he said. "Now and after," said Pierre.

His voice was very simple. "I never felt as I do since the day the coast-guardsmin dropped on me in Ireland far away, an' I drew blood an every wan o' them fine beautiful b'ys they looked stretchen' out on the ground wan by wan. D'ye know the double-an'-twist?" he suddenly added, "for it's a honey trick whin they gather in an you, an' you can't be layin' out wid yer fists. It plays the divil wid the spines av thim. Will ye have a drop av drink cold water, man near, an' a sponge betune whiles? For there's manny in the play makin' up for lost time. Come on," he added to the two settlers, who stood not far away, "for ye began the trouble, an' we'll settle accordin' to a, b, c."

Wiley and Hatchett were there. Responding to his call, they stepped forward, though they had now little relish for the matter. They were pale, but they stripped their coats and waistcoats, and Wiley stepped bravely in front of

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Macavoy. The giant looked down on him, arms folded. "I said two of you," he crooned, as if speaking to a woman. Hatchett stepped forward also. An instant after the settlers were lying on the ground at different angles, bruised and dismayed, and little likely to carry on the war. Macavoy took a pail of water from the ground, drank from it lightly, and waited. None other of his opponents stirred. "There's three Injins," he said, "three rid divils, that wants showin' the way to their happy huntin' grounds. . . . Sure, y'are comin', ain't you, me darlins?" he added coaxingly, and he stretched himself, as if to make ready.

Bareback, the chief, now harangued the three Indians, and they stepped forth warily. They had determined on strategic wrestling, and not on the instant activity of fists. But their wiliness was useless, for Macavoy's double-and-twist came near to lessening the Indian population of Fort O'Angel. It only broke a leg and an arm, however. The Irishman came out of the tangle of battle with a wild kind of light in his eye, his beard all torn, and face battered. A shout of laughter, admiration and wonder went up from the crowd. There was a moment's pause, and then Macavoy, whose blood ran high, stood forth again. The Trader came to him.

"Must this go on?" he said; "haven't you had your fill of it?"

Had he touched Macavoy with a word of humour the matter might have ended there; but now the giant spoke loud, so all could hear.

"Had me fill av it, Trader, me angel? I'm only gittin' the taste av it. An' ye'll plaze bring on yer men four it was for the feed av Irish pemmican."

The Trader turned and swore at Pierre, who smiled enigmatically. Soon after, two of the best fighters of the Company's men stood forth. Macavoy shook his head. "Four, I said, an' four I'll have, or I'll ate the heads aff these."

Shamed, the Trader sent forth two more. All on an instant the four made a rush on the giant; and there was a stiff minute after, in which it was not clear that he was happy. Blows rattled on him, and one or two he got on the head, just as he tossed a man spinning senseless across the grass, which sent him staggering backwards for a moment, sick and stunned.

Pierre called over to him swiftly: "Remember Malahide!"

This acted on him like a charm. There never was seen such a shattered bundle of men as came out from his hands a few minutes later. As for himself, he had but a rag or two on him, but stood unmindful of his state, and the fever of battle untameable on him. The women drew away.

"Now, me babes o' the wood," he shouted, "that sit at the feet av the finest Injin woman in the North, though she's no frind o' mine and aren't fit to kiss her moccasin, come an wid you, till I have me fun wid your spines."

But a shout went up, and the crowd pointed. There were the five half-breeds running away across the plains.

The game was over.

"Here's some clothes, man; for Heaven's sake put them on," said the Trader.

Then the giant became conscious of his condition, and like a timid girl he hurried into the clothing.

The crowd would have carried him on their shoulders, but he would have none of it.

"I've only wan frind here," he said, "an' it's Pierre, an' to his shanty I go an' no other."

"Come, mon ami," said Pierre, "for to-morrow we travel far."

"And what for that?" said Macavoy.

Pierre whispered in his ear: "To make you a king, my lovely bully."

THE FILIBUSTER

Pierre had determined to establish a kingdom, not for gain, but for conquest's sake. But because he knew that the thing would pall, he took with him Macavoy the giant, to make him king instead. But first he made Macavoy from a lovely bully, a bulk of good-natured brag, into a Hercules of fight; for, having made him insult and be insulted by near a score of men at Fort O'Angel, he also made him fight them by twos, threes, and fours, all on a summer's evening, and send them away broken. Macavoy would have hesitated to go with Pierre, were it not that he feared a woman. Not that he had wronged her; she had wronged him: she had married him. And the fear of one's own wife is the worst fear in the world.

But though his heart went out to women, and his tongue was of the race that beguiles, he stood to his "lines" like a man, and people wondered. Even Wonta, the daughter of Foot-in-the-Sun, only bent him, she could not break him to her will. Pierre turned her shy coaxing into irony that was on the day when all Fort O'Angel conspired to prove Macavoy a child and not a warrior. But when she saw what she had done, and that the giant was greater than his years of brag, she repented, and hung a dead coyote at Pierre's door as a sign of her contempt.

Pierre watched Macavoy, sitting with a sponge of vinegar to his head, for he had had nasty joltings in his great fight. A little laugh came crinkling up to the half-breed's lips, but dissolved into silence.

"We'll start in the morning," he said.

Macavoy looked up. "Whin you plaze; but a word in your ear; are you sure she'll not follow us?"

"She doesn't know. Fort Ste. Anne is in the south, and Fort Comfort, where we go, is far north."

"But if she kem!" the big man persisted.

"You will be a king; you can do as other kings have done," Pierre chuckled.

The other shook his head. "Says Father Nolan to me, says he, 'tis till death us do part, an' no man put asunder'; an' I'll stand by that, though I'd slice out the bist tin years av me life, if I niver saw her face again."

"But the girl, Wonta what a queen she'd make!"

"Marry her yourself, and be king yourself, and be damned to you! For she, like the rest, laughed in me face, whin I told thim of the day whin I "

"That's nothing. She hung a dead coyote at my door. You don't know women. There'll be your breed and hers abroad in the land one day."

Macavoy stretched to his feet he was so tall that he could not stand upright in the room. He towered over Pierre, who blandly eyed him. "I've another word for your ear," he said darkly. "Keep clear av the likes o' that wid me. For I've swallowed a tribe av divils. It's fightin' you want. Well, I'll do it I've an itch for the throats av men, but a fool I'll be no more wid wimin, white or red that hell-cat that spoilt me life an' killed me child, or "

A sob clutched him in the throat.

"You had a child, then?" asked Pierre gently.

"An angel she was, wid hair like the sun, an' 'd melt the heart av an iron god: none like her above or below. But the mother, ah, the mother of her! One day whin she'd said a sharp word, wid another from me, an' the child clinging to her dress, she turned quick and struck it, meanin' to anger me. Not so hard the blow was, but it sent the darlin's head agin' the chimney–stone, and that was the end av it. For she took to her bed, an' agin' the crowin' o' the cock wan midnight, she gives a little cry an' snatched at me beard. 'Daddy,' says she, 'daddy, it hurts!' An' thin she floats away, wid a stitch av pain at her lips."

Macavoy sat down now, his fingers fumbling in his beard. Pierre was uncomfortable. He could hear of battle, murder, and sudden death unmoved it seemed to him in the game; but the tragedy of a child, a mere counter yet in the play of life that was different. He slid a hand over the table, and caught Macavoy's arm. "Poor little waif!" he said.

Macavoy gave the hand a grasp that turned Pierre sick, and asked: "Had ye iver a child av y'r own, Pierre–iver wan at all?"

"Never," said Pierre dreamily, "and I've travelled far. A child a child is a wonderful thing. . . . Poor little waif!"

They both sat silent for a moment. Pierre was about to rise, but Macavoy suddenly pinned him to his seat with this question: "Did y' iver have a wife, thin, Pierre?"

Pierre turned pale. A sharp breath came through his teeth. He spoke slowly: "Yes, once."

"And she died?" asked the other, awed.

"We all have our day," he replied enigmatically, "and there are worse things than death. . . . Eh, well, mon ami, let us talk of other things. To–morrow we go to conquer. I know where I can get five men I want. I have ammunition and dogs."

A few minutes afterwards Pierre was busy in the settlement. At the Fort he heard strange news. A new batch of settlers was coming from the south, and among them was an old Irishwoman who called herself now Mrs. Whelan, now Mrs. Macavoy. She talked much of the lad she was to find, one Tim Macavoy, whose fame Gossip had brought to her at last.

She had clung on to the settlers, and they could not shake her off. "She was comin'," she said, "to her own darlin' b'y, from whom she'd been parted manny a year, believin' him dead, or Tom Whelan had nivir touched hand o' hers."

The bearer of the news had but just arrived, and he told it only to the Chief Trader and Pierre. At a word from Pierre the man promised to hold his peace. Then Pierre went to Wonta's lodge. He found her with her father alone, her head at her knees. When she heard his voice she looked up sharply, and added a sharp word also.

"Wait," he said; "women are such fools. You snapped your fingers in his face, and laughed at him. Bien, that is nothing. He has proved himself great. That is something. He will be greater still, if the other woman does not find him. She should die, but then some women have no sense."

"The other woman!" said Wonta, starting to her feet; "who is the other woman?"

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Old Foot—in—the—Sun waked and sat up, but seeing that it was Pierre, dropped again to sleep. Pierre, he knew, was no peril to any woman. Besides, Wonta hated the half—breed, as he thought.

Pierre told the girl the story of Macavoy's life; for he knew that she loved the man after her heathen fashion, and that she could be trusted.

"I do not care for that," she said, when he had finished; "it is nothing. I would go with him. I should be his wife, the other should die. I would kill her, if she would fight me. I know the way of knives, or a rifle, or a pinch at the throat she should die!"

"Yes, but that will not do. Keep your hands free of her."

Then he told her that they were going away. She said she would go also. He said no to that, but told her to wait and he would come back for her.

Though she tried hard to follow them, they slipped away from the Fort in the moist gloom of the morning, the brown grass rustling, the prairie—hens fluttering, the osiers soughing as they passed, the Spirit of the North, ever hungry, drawing them on over the long Divides. They did not see each other's faces till dawn. They were guided by Pierre's voice; none knew his comrades. Besides Pierre and Macavoy, there were five half—breeds Noel, Little Babiche, Corvette, Josh, and Jacques Parfaite. When they came to recognise each other, they shook hands, and marched on. In good time they reached that wonderful and pleasant country between the Barren Grounds and the Lake of Silver Shallows. To the north of it was Fort Comfort, which they had come to take. Macavoy's rich voice roared as of old, before his valour was questioned and maintained at Fort O'Angel. Pierre had diverted his mind from the woman who, at Fort O'Angel, was even now calling heaven and earth to witness that "Tim Macavoy was her Macavoy and no other, an' she'd find him the divil and darlin', wid an arm like Broin Borhoime, an' a chest you could build a house on if she walked till Doomsday!"

Macavoy stood out grandly, his fat all gone to muscle, blowing through his beard, puffing his cheek, and ready with tale or song. But now that they were facing the business of their journey, his voice got soft and gentle, as it did before the Fort, when he grappled his foes two by two and three by three, and wrung them out. In his eyes there was the thing which counts as many men in any soldier's sight, when he leads in battle. As he said himself, he was made for war, like Malachi o' the Golden Collar.

Pierre guessed that just now many of the Indians would be away for the summer hunt, and that the Fort would perhaps be held by only a few score of braves, who, however, would fight when they might easier play. He had no useless compunctions about bloodshed. A human life he held to be a trifle in the big sum of time, and that it was of little moment when a man went, if it seemed his hour. He lived up to his creed, for he had ever held his own life as a bird upon a housetop, which a chance stone might drop.

He was glad afterwards that he had decided to fight, for there was one in Fort Comfort against whom he had an old grudge the Indian, Young Eye, who, many years before, had been one to help in killing the good Father Halen, the priest who dropped the water on his forehead and set the cross on top of that, when he was at his mother's breasts. One by one the murderers had been killed, save this man. He had wandered north, lived on the Coppermine River for a long time, and at length had come down among the warring tribes at the Lake of Silver Shallows.

Pierre was for direct attack. They crossed the lake in their canoes, at a point about five miles from the Fort, and, so far as they could tell, without being seen. Then ammunition went round, and they marched upon the Fort. Pierre eyed Macavoy measured him, as it were, for what he was worth. The giant seemed happy. He was humming a tune softly through his beard. Suddenly Jose paused, dropped to the foot of a pine, and put his ear to it. Pierre understood. He had caught at the same thing. "There is a dance on," said Jose, "I can hear the drum."

Pierre thought a minute. "We will reconnoitre," he said presently.

"It is near night now," remarked Little Babiche. "I know something of these. When they have a great snake dance at night, strange things happen." Then he spoke in a low tone to Pierre.

They halted in the bush, and Little Babiche went forward to spy upon the Fort. He came back just after sunset, reporting that the Indians were feasting. He had crept near, and had learned that the braves were expected back from the hunt that night, and that the feast was for their welcome.

The Fort stood in an open space, with tall trees for a background. In front, here and there, were juniper and tamarac bushes. Pierre laid his plans immediately, and gave the word to move on. Their presence had not been discovered, and if they could but surprise the Indians the Fort might easily be theirs. They made a detour, and after an hour came upon the Fort from behind. Pierre himself went forward cautiously, leaving Macavoy in command. When he came again he said:

"It's a fine sight, and the way is open. They are feasting and dancing. If we can enter without being seen, we are safe, except for food; we must trust for that. Come on."

When they arrived at the margin of the woods a wonderful scene was before them. A volcanic hill rose up on one side, gloomy and stern, but the reflection of the fires reached it, and made its sides quiver the rock itself seemed trembling. The sombre pines showed up, a wall all round, and in the open space, turreted with fantastic fires, the Indians swayed in and out with weird chanting, their bodies mostly naked, and painted in strange colours. The earth itself was still and sober. Scarce a star peeped forth. A purple velvet curtain seemed to hang all down the sky, though here and there the flame bronzed it. The Indian lodges were empty, save where a few children squatted at the openings. The seven stood still with wonder, till Pierre whispered to them to get to the ground and crawl close in by the walls of the Fort, following him. They did so, Macavoy breathing hard too hard; for suddenly Pierre clapped a hand on his mouth.

They were now near the Fort, and Pierre had seen an Indian come from the gate. The brave was within a few feet of them. He had almost passed them, for they were in the shadow, but Jose had burst a puffball with his hand, and the dust, flying up, made him sneeze. The Indian turned and saw them. With a low cry and the spring of a tiger Pierre was at his throat; and in another minute they were struggling on the ground. Pierre's hand never let go. His comrades did not stir; he had warned them to lie still. They saw the terrible game played out within arm's length of them. They heard Pierre say at last, as the struggles of the Indian ceased: "Beast! You had Father Halen's life. I have yours."

There was one more wrench of the Indian's limbs, and then he lay still.

They crawled nearer the gate, still hidden in the shadows and the grass. Presently they came to a clear space. Across this they must go, and enter the Fort before they were discovered. They got to their feet, and ran with wonderful swiftness, Pierre leading, to the gate. They had just reached it when there was a cry from the walls, on which two Indians were sitting. The Indians sprang down, seized their spears, and lunged at the seven as they entered. One spear caught Little Babiche in the arm as he swung aside, but with the butt of his musket Noel dropped him. The other Indian was promptly handled by Pierre himself. By this time Corvette and Jose had shut the gates, and the Fort was theirs an easy conquest. The Indians were bound and gagged.

The adventurers had done it all without drawing the attention of the howling crowd without. The matter was in its infancy, however. They had the place, but could they hold it? What food and water were there within? Perhaps they were hardly so safe besieged as besiegers. Yet there was no doubt on Pierre's part. He had enjoyed the adventure so far up to the hilt. An old promise had been kept, and an old wrong avenged.

"What's to be done now?" said Macavoy. "There'll be hell's own racket; and they'll come on like a flood."

"To wait," said Pierre, "and dam the flood as it comes. But not a bullet till I give the word. Take to the chinks. We'll have them soon."

He was right: they came soon. Someone had found the dead body of Young Eye; then it was discovered that the gate was shut. A great shout went up. The Indians ran to their lodges for spears and hatchets, though the weapons of many were within the Fort, and soon they were about the place, shouting in impotent rage. They could not tell how many invaders were in the Fort; they suspected it was the Little Skins, their ancient enemies. But Young Eye, they saw, had not been scalped. This was brought to the old chief, and he called to his men to fall back. They had not seen one man of the invaders; all was silent and dark within the Fort; even the two torches which had been burning above the gate were down. At that moment, as if to add to the strangeness, a caribou came suddenly through the fires, and, passing not far from the bewildered Indians, plunged into the trees behind the Fort.

The caribou is credited with great powers. It is thought to understand all that is said to it, and to be able to take the form of a spirit. No Indian will come near it till it is dead, and he that kills it out of season is supposed to bring down all manner of evil.

So at this sight they cried out the women falling to the ground with their faces in their arms that the caribou had done this thing. For a moment they were all afraid. Besides, as a brave showed, there was no mark on the body of Young Eye.

Pierre knew quite well that this was a bull caribou, travelling wildly till he found another herd. He would carry on the deception. "Wail for the dead, as your women do in Ireland. That will finish them," he said to Macavoy.

The giant threw his voice up and out, so that it seemed to come from over the Fort to the Indians, weird and crying. Even the half-breeds standing by felt a light shock of unnatural excitement. The Indians without drew back slowly from the Fort, leaving a clear space between. Macavoy had uncanny tricks with his voice, and presently he changed the song into a shrill, wailing whistle, which went trembling about the place and then stopped suddenly.

"Sure, that's a poor game, Pierre," he whispered; "an' I'd rather be pluggin' their hides wid bullets, or givin' the double-an'-twist. It's fightin' I come for, and not the trick av Mother Kilkevin."

Pierre arranged a plan of campaign at once. Every man looked to his gun, the gates were slowly opened, and Macavoy stepped out. Pierre had thrown over the Irishman's shoulders the great skin of a musk-ox which he had found inside the stockade. He was a strange, immense figure, as he walked into the open space, and, folding his arms, looked round. In the shadow of the gate behind were Pierre and the halfbreeds, with guns cocked.

Macavoy had lived so long in the north that he knew enough of all the languages to speak to this tribe. When he came out a murmur of wonder ran among the Indians. They had never seen anyone so tall, for they were not great of stature, and his huge beard and wild shock of hair were a wonderful sight. He remained silent, looking on them. At last the old chief spoke. "Who are you?"

"I am a great chief from the Hills of the Mighty Men, come to be your king," was his reply.

"He is your king," cried Pierre in a strange voice from the shadow of the gate, and he thrust out his gun-barrel, so that they could see it.

The Indians now saw Pierre and the half-breeds in the gateway, and they had not so much awe. They came a little nearer, and the women stopped crying. A few of the braves half-raised their spears. Seeing this, Pierre instantly

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stepped forward to the giant. He looked a child in stature thereby. He spoke quickly and well in the Chinook language.

"This is a mighty man from the Hills of the Mighty Men. He has come to rule over you, to give all other tribes into your hands; for he has strength like a thousand, and fears nothing of gods nor men. I have the blood of red men in me. It is I who have called this man from his distant home. I heard of your fighting and foolishness: also that warriors were to come from the south country to scatter your wives and children, and to make you slaves. I pitied you, and I have brought you a chief greater than any other. Throw your spears upon the ground, and all will be well; but raise one to throw, or one arrow, or axe, and there shall be death among you, so that as a people you shall die. The spirits are with us. . . . Well?"

The Indians drew a little nearer, but they did not drop their spears, for the old chief forbade them.

"We are no dogs nor cowards," he said, "though the spirits be with you, as we believe. We have seen strange things" he pointed to Young Eye "and heard voices not of men; but we would see great things as well as strange. There are seven men of the Little Skins tribe within a lodge yonder. They were to die when our braves returned from the hunt, and for that we prepared the feast. But this mighty man, he shall fight them all at once, and if he kills them he shall be our king. In the name of my tribe I speak. And this other," pointing to Pierre, "he shall also fight with a strong man of our tribe, so that we shall know if you are all brave, and not as those who crawl at the knees of the mighty."

This was more than Pierre had bargained for. Seven men at Macavoy, and Indians too, fighting for their lives, was a contract of weight. But Macavoy was blowing in his beard cheerfully enough.

"Let me choose me ground," he said, "wid me back to the wall, an' I'll take thim as they come."

Pierre instantly interpreted this to the Indians, and said for himself that he would welcome their strongest man at the point of a knife when he chose.

The chief gave an order, and the Little Skins were brought. The fires still burned brightly, and the breathing of the pines, as a slight wind rose and stirred them, came softly over. The Indians stood off at the command of the chief. Macavoy drew back to the wall, dropped the musk-ox skin to the ground, and stripped himself to the waist. But in his waistband there was what none of these Indians had ever seen a small revolver that barked ever so softly. In the hands of each Little Skin there was put a knife, and they were told their cheerful exercise. They came on cautiously, and then suddenly closed in, knives flashing. But Macavoy's little bulldog barked, and one dropped to the ground. The others fell back. The wounded man drew up, made a lunge at Macavoy, but missed him. As if ashamed, the other six came on again at a spring. But again the weapon did its work smartly, and one more came down. Now the giant put it away, ran in upon the five, and cut right and left. So sudden and massive was his rush that they had no chance. Three fell at his blows, and then he drew back swiftly to the wall. "Drop your knives," he said, as they cowered, "or I'll kill you all." They did so. He dropped his own.

"Now come on, ye scuts!" he cried, and suddenly he reached and caught them, one with each arm, and wrestled with them, till he bent the one like a willow-rod, and dropped him with a broken back, while the other was at his mercy. Suddenly loosing him, he turned him towards the woods, and said: "Run, ye rid divil, run for y'r life!"

A dozen spears were raised, but the rifles of Pierre's men came in between: the Indian reached cover and was gone. Of the six others, two had been killed, the rest were severely wounded, and Macavoy had not a scratch.

Pierre smiled grimly. "You've been doing all the fighting, Macavoy," he said.

"There's no bein' a king for nothin'," he replied, wiping blood from his beard.

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"It's my turn now, but keep your rifles ready, though I think there's no need."

Pierre had but a short minute with the champion, for he was an expert with the knife. He carried away four fingers of the Indian's fighting hand, and that ended it; for the next instant the point was at the red man's throat. The Indian stood to take it like a man; but Pierre loved that kind of courage, and shot the knife into its sheath instead.

The old chief kept his word, and after the spears were piled, he shook hands with Macavoy, as did his braves one by one, and they were all moved by the sincerity of his grasp: their arms were useless for some time after. They hailed as their ruler, King Macavoy I.; for men are like dogs they worship him who beats them. The feasting and dancing went on till the hunters came back. Then there was a wild scene, but in the end all the hunters, satisfied, came to greet their new king.

The king himself went to bed in the Fort that night, Pierre and his bodyguard by name Noel, Little Babiche, Corvette, Jose, and Parfaite its only occupants, singing joyfully:

"Did yees iver hear tell o' Long Barney,
That come from the groves o' Killarney?
He wint for a king, oh, he wint for a king,
But he niver keen back to Killarney
Wid his crown, an' his soord, an' his army!"

As a king Macavoy was a success, for the brag had gone from him. Like all his race he had faults as a subject, but the responsibility of ruling set him right. He found in the Fort an old sword and belt, left by some Hudson's Bay Company's man, and these he furbished up and wore.

With Pierre's aid he drew up a simple constitution, which he carried in the crown of his cap, and he distributed beads and gaudy trappings as marks of honour. Nor did he forget the frequent pipe of peace, made possible to all by generous gifts of tobacco. Anyone can found a kingdom abaft the Barren Grounds with tobacco, beads, and red flannel.

For very many weeks it was a happy kingdom. But presently Pierre yawned, and was ready to return. Three of the half-breeds were inclined to go with him. Jose and Little Babiche had formed alliances which held them there besides, King Macavoy needed them.

On the eve of Pierre's departure a notable thing occurred.

A young brave had broken his leg in hunting, had been picked up by a band of another tribe, and carried south. He found himself at last at Fort O'Angel. There he had met Mrs. Whelan, and for presents of tobacco, and purple and fine linen, he had led her to her consort. That was how the king and Pierre met her in the yard of Fort Comfort one evening of early autumn. Pierre saw her first, and was for turning the King about and getting him away; but it was too late. Mrs. Whelan had seen him, and she called out at him:

"Oh, Tim! me jool, me king, have I found ye, me imp'ror!"

She ran at him, to throw her arms round him. He stepped back, the red of his face going white, and said, stretching out his hand, "Woman, y'are me wife, I know, whatever y' be; an' y've right to have shelter and bread av me; but me arms, an' me bed, are me own to kape or to give; and, by God, ye shall have nayther one nor the other! There's a ditch as wide as hell betune us."

The Indians had gathered quickly; they filled the yard, and crowded the gate. The woman went wild, for she had been drinking. She ran at Macavoy and spat in his face, and called down such a curse on him as, whoever hears,

be he one that's cursed or any other, shudders at till he dies. Then she fell in a fit at his feet. Macavoy turned to the Indians, stretched out his hands and tried to speak, but could not. He stooped down, picked up the woman, carried her into the Fort, and laid her on a bed of skins.

"What will you do?" asked Pierre.

"She is my wife," he answered firmly.

"She lived with Whelan."

"She must be cared for," was the reply. Pierre looked at him with a curious quietness. "I'll get liquor for her," he said presently. He started to go, but turned and felt the woman's pulse. "You would keep her?" he asked.

"Bring the liquor." Macavoy reached for water, and dipping the sleeve of his shirt in it, wetted her face gently.

Pierre brought the liquor, but he knew that the woman would die. He stayed with Macavoy beside her all the night. Towards morning her eyes opened, and she shivered greatly.

"It's bither cold," she said. "You'll put more wood on the fire, Tim, for the babe must be kept warrum."

She thought she was at Malahide.

"Oh, wurra, wurra, but 'tis freezin'!" she said again. "Why d'ye kape the door opin whin the child's perishin'?"

Macavoy sat looking at her, his trouble shaking him.

"I'll shut the door meself, thin," she added; "for 'twas I that lift it opin, Tim." She started up, but gave a cry like a wailing wind, and fell back.

"The door is shut," said Pierre.

"But the child the child!" said Macavoy, tears running down his face and beard.

THE GIFT OF THE SIMPLE KING

I

Once Macavoy the giant ruled a tribe of Northern people, achieving the dignity by the hands of Pierre, who called him King Macavoy. Then came a time when, tiring of his kingship, he journeyed south, leaving all behind, even his queen, Wonta, who, in her bed of cypresses and yarrow, came forth no more into the morning. About Fort Guidon they still gave him his title, and because of his guilelessness, sincerity, and generosity, Pierre called him "The Simple King." His seven feet and over shambled about, suggesting unjointed power, unshackled force. No one hated Macavoy, many loved him, he was welcome at the fire and the cooking-pot; yet it seemed shameful to have so much man useless such an engine of life, which might do great things, wasting fuel. Nobody thought much of that at Fort Guidon, except, perhaps, Pierre, who sometimes said, "My simple king, some day you shall have your great chance again; but not as a king as a giant, a man voila!"

The day did not come immediately, but it came. When Ida, the deaf and dumb girl, married Hilton, of the H.B.C., every man at Fort Guidon, and some from posts beyond, sent her or brought her presents of one kind or another. Pierre's gift was a Mexican saddle. He was branding Ida's name on it with the broken blade of a case-knife when

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Macavoy entered on him, having just returned from a vagabond visit to Fort Ste. Anne.

"Is it digging out or carvin' in y'are?" he asked, puffing into his beard.

Pierre looked up contemptuously, but did not reply to the insinuation, for he never saw an insult unless he intended to avenge it; and he would not quarrel with Macavoy.

"What are you going to give?" he asked.

"Aw, give what to who, hop-o'-me-thumb?" Macavoy said, stretching himself out in the doorway, his legs in the sun, head in the shade.

"You've been taking a walk in the country, then?" Pierre asked, though he knew.

"To Fort Ste. Anne: a buryin', two christ'nin's, an' a weddin'; an' lashin's av grog an' swill-aw that, me button o' the North!"

"La la! What a fool you are, my simple king! You've got the things end foremost. Turn your head to the open air, for I go to light a cigarette, and if you breathe this way, there will be a grand explode."

"Aw, yer thumb in yer eye, Pierre! It's like a baby's, me breath is, milk and honey it is aw yis; an' Father Corraine, that was doin' the trick for the love o' God, says he to me, 'Little Tim Macavoy,' aw yis, little Tim Macavoy, says he, 'when are you goin' to buckle to, for the love o' God?' says he. Ashamed I was, Pierre, that Father Corraine should spake to me like that, for I'd only a twig twisted at me hips to kape me trousies up, an' I thought 'twas that he had in his eye! 'Buckle to,' says I, 'Father Corraine? Buckle to, yer riv'rince?' feelin' I was at the twigs the while. 'Ay, little Tim Macavoy,' he says, says he, 'you've bin 'atin' the husks av idleness long enough; when are you goin' to buckle to? You had a kingdom and ye guv it up,' says he; 'take a field, get a plough, and buckle to,' says he, 'an' turn back no more' like that, says Father Corraine; and I thinkin' all the time 'twas the want o' me belt he was drivin' at."

Pierre looked at him a moment idly, then said: "Such a tom-fool! And where's that grand leather belt of yours, eh, my monarch?"

A laugh shook through Macavoy's beard. "For the weddin' it wint: buckled the two up wid it for better or worse an' purty they looked, they did, standin' there in me cinch, an' one hole left aw yis, Pierre."

"And what do you give to Ida?" Pierre asked, with a little emphasis of the branding-iron.

Macavoy got to his feet. "Ida! Ida!" said he. "Is that saddle for Ida? Is it her and Hilton that's to ate aff one dish together? That rose o' the valley, that bird wid a song in her face and none an her tongue. That daisy dot av a thing, steppin' through the world like a sprig o' glory. Aw, Pierre, thim two! an' I've divil a scrap to give, good or bad. I've nothin' at all in the wide wurruld but the clothes an me back, an' thim hangin' on the underbrush!" giving a little twist to the twigs. "An' many a meal an' many a dipper o' drink she's guv me, little smiles dancin' at her lips."

He sat down in the doorway again, with his face turned towards Pierre, and the back of his head in the sun. He was a picture of perfect health, sumptuous, huge, a bull in beauty, the heart of a child looking out of his eyes, but a sort of despair, too, in his bearing.

Pierre watched him with a furtive humour for a time, then he said languidly: "Never mind your clothes, give yourself."

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"Yer tongue in yer cheek, me spot o' vinegar. Give meself! What's that for? A purty weddin' gift, says I? Handy thing to have in the house! Use me for a clothes-horse, or shtand me in the garden for a fairy bower- aw yis, wid a hole in me face that'd ate thim out o' house and home!"

Pierre drew a piece of brown paper towards him, and wrote on it with a burnt match. Presently he held it up. "Voila, my simple king, the thing for you to do: a grand gift, and to cost you nothing now. Come, read it out, and tell me what you think."

Macavoy took the paper, and in a large, judicial way, read slowly:

"On demand, for value received, I promise to pay to . . . IDA HILTON . . . or order, meself, Tim Macavoy, standin' seven foot three on me bare fut, wid interest at nothin' at all."

Macavoy ended with a loud smack of the lips. "McGuire!" he said, and nothing more.

McGuire was his strongest expression. In the most important moments of his career he had said it, and it sounded deep, strange, and more powerful than many usual oaths. A moment later he said again "McGuire!" Then he read the paper once more out loud. "What's that, me Frinchman?" he asked. "What Ballzeboob's tricks are y'at now?"

Pierre was complacently eyeing his handiwork on the saddle. He now settled back with his shoulders to the wall, and said: "See, then, it's a little promissory note for a wedding-gift to Ida. When she says some day, 'Tim Macavoy, I want you to do this or that, or to go here or there, or to sell you or trade you, or use you for a clothes-horse, or a bridge over a canyon, or to hold up a house, or blow out a prairie-fire, or be my second husband,' you shall say, 'Here I am'; and you shall travel from Heaven to Halifax, but you shall come at the call of this promissory."

Pierre's teeth glistened behind a smile as he spoke, and Macavoy broke into a roar of laughter. "Black's the white o' yer eye," he said at last, "an' a joke's a joke. Seven fut three I am, an' sound av wind an' limb an' a weddin'-gift to that swate rose o' the valley! Aisy, aisy, Pierre. A bit o' foolin' 'twas ye put on the paper, but truth I'll make it, me cock o' the walk. That's me gift to her an' Hilton, an' no other. An' a dab wid red wax it shall have, an' what more be the word o' Freddy Tarlton the lawyer?"

"You're a great man," said Pierre with a touch of gentle irony, for his natural malice had no play against the huge ex-king of his own making. With these big creatures he had connived with several in his time he had ever been superior, protective, making them to feel that they were as children beside him. He looked at Macavoy musingly, and said to himself: "Well, why not? If it is a joke, then it is a joke; if it is a thing to make the world stand still for a minute sometime, so much the better. He is all waste now. By the holy, he shall do it. It is amusing, and it may be great by and by."

Presently Pierre said aloud: "Well, my Macavoy, what will you do? Send this good gift?"

"Aw yis, Pierre; I shtand by that from the crown av me head to the sole av me fut sure. Face like a mornin' in May, and hands like the tunes of an organ, she has. Spakes wid a look av her eye and a twist av her purty lips an' swaying body, an' talkin' to you widout a word. Aw motion motion motion; yis, that's it. An' I've seen her an tap av a hill wid the wind blowin' her hair free, and the yellow buds on the tree, and the grass green beneath her feet, the world smilin' betune her and the sun: pictures pictures, aw yis! Promissory notice on demand is it anny toime? Seven fut three on me bare toes but Father o' Sin! when she calls I come, yis."

"On your oath, Macavoy?" asked Pierre; "by the book av the Mass?"

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Macavoy stood up straight till his head scraped the cobwebs between the rafters, the wild indignation of a child in his eye. "D'ye think I'm a thafe to stale me own word? Hut! I'll break ye in two, ye wisp o' straw, if ye doubt me word to a lady. There's me note av hand, and ye shall have me fist on it, in writin', at Freddy Tarlton's office, wid a blotch av red an' the Queen's head at the bottom. McGuire!" he said again, and paused, puffing his lips through his beard.

Pierre looked at him a moment, then waving his fingers idly, said, "So, my straw-breaker! Then tomorrow morning at ten you will fetch your wedding-gift. But come so soon now to M'sieu' Tarlton's office, and we will have it all as you say, with the red seal and the turn of your fist yes. Well, well, we travel far in the world, and sometimes we see strange things, and no two strange things are alike no; there is only one Macavoy in the world, there was only one Shon McGann. Shon McGann was a fine fool, but he did something at last, truly yes: Tim Macavoy, perhaps, will do something at last on his own hook. Hey, I wonder!" He felt the muscles of Macavoy's arm musingly, and then laughed up in the giant's face. "Once I made you a king, my own, and you threw it all away; now I make you a slave, and we shall see what you will do. Come along, for M'sieu' Tarlton."

Macavoy dropped a heavy hand on Pierre's shoulder. "'Tis hard to be a king, Pierre, but 'tis aisy to be a slave for the likes o' her. I'd kiss her dirty shoe sure!"

As they passed through the door, Pierre said, "Dis done, perhaps, when all is done, she will sell you for old bones and rags. Then I will buy you, and I will burn your bones and the rags, and I will scatter to the four winds of the earth the ashes of a king, a slave, a fool, and an Irishman truly!"

"Bedad, ye'll have more earth in yer hands then, Pierre, than ye'll ever earn, and more heaven than ye'll ever shtand in."

Half an hour later they were in Freddy Tarlton's office on the banks of the Little Big Swan, which tumbled past, swelled by the first rain of the early autumn. Freddy Tarlton, who had a gift of humour, entered into the spirit of the thing, and treated it seriously; but in vain did he protest that the large red seal with Her Majesty's head on it was unnecessary; Macavoy insisted, and wrote his name across it with a large indistinctness worthy of a king. Before the night was over everybody at Guidon Hill, save Hilton and Ida, knew what gift would come from Macavoy to the wedded pair.

II

The next morning was almost painfully beautiful, so delicate in its clearness, so exalted by the glory of the hills, so grand in the limitless stretch of the green-brown prairie north and south. It was a day for God's creatures to meet in, and speed away, and having flown round the boundaries of that spacious domain, to return again to the nest of home on the large plateau between the sea and the stars. Gathered about Ida's home was everybody who lived within a radius of a hundred miles. In the large front room all the presents were set: rich furs from the far north, cunningly carved bowls, rocking-chairs made by hand, knives, cooking utensils, a copy of Shakespeare in six volumes from the Protestant missionary who performed the ceremony, a nugget of gold from the Long Light River; and outside the door, a horse, Hilton's own present to his wife, on which was put Pierre's saddle, with its silver mounting and Ida's name branded deep on pommel and flap. When Macavoy arrived, a cheer went up, which was carried on waves of laughter into the house to Hilton and Ida, who even then were listening to the first words of the brief service which begins, "I charge you both if you do know any just cause or impediment " and so on.

They did not turn to see what it was, for just at that moment they themselves were the very centre of the universe. Ida being deaf and dumb, it was necessary to interpret to her the words of the service by signs, as the missionary read it, and this was done by Pierre himself, the half-breed Catholic, the man who had brought Hilton and Ida

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together, for he and Ida had been old friends. After Father Corraine had taught her the language of signs, Pierre had learned them from her, until at last his gestures had become as vital as her own. The delicate precision of his every movement, the suggestiveness of look and motion, were suited to a language which was nearer to the instincts of his own nature than word of mouth. All men did not trust Pierre, but all women did; with those he had a touch of Machiavelli, with these he had no sign of Mephistopheles, and few were the occasions in his life when he showed outward tenderness to either: which was equally effective. He had learnt, or knew by instinct, that exclusiveness as to men and indifference as to women are the greatest influences on both. As he stood there, slowly interpreting to Ida, by graceful allusive signs, the words of the service, one could not think that behind his impassive face there was any feeling for the man or for the woman. He had that disdainful smile which men acquire who are all their lives aloof from the hopes of the hearthstone and acknowledge no laws but their own.

More than once the eyes of the girl filled with tears, as the pregnancy of some phrase in the service came home to her. Her face responded to Pierre's gestures, as do one's nerves to the delights of good music, and there was something so unique, so impressive in the ceremony, that the laughter which had greeted Macavoy passed away, and a dead silence; beginning from where the two stood, crept out until it covered all the prairie. Nothing was heard except Hilton's voice in strong tones saying, "I take thee to be my wedded wife," etc.; but when the last words of the service were said, and the newmade bride turned to her husband's embrace, and a little sound of joy broke from her lips, there was plenty of noise and laughter again, for Macavoy stood in the doorway, or rather outside it, stooping to look in upon the scene. Someone had lent him the cinch of a broncho and he had belted himself with it, no longer carrying his clothes about "on the underbrush." Hilton laughed and stretched out his hand. "Come in, King," he said, "come and wish us joy."

Macavoy parted the crowd easily, forcing his way, and instantly was stooping before the pair for he could not stand upright in the room.

"Aw, now, Hilton, is it you, is it you, that's pluckin' the rose av the valley, snatchin' the stars out av the sky! aw, Hilton, the like o' that! Travel down I did yesterday from Fort Ste. Anne, and divil a word I knew till Pierre hit me in the eye wid it last night and no time for a present, for a wedding-gift no, aw no!"

Just here Ida reached up and touched him on the shoulder. He smiled down on her, puffing and blowing in his beard, bursting to speak to her, yet knowing no word by signs to say; but he nodded his head at her, and he patted Hilton's shoulder, and he took their hands and joined them together, hers on top of Hilton's, and shook them in one of his own till she almost winced. Presently, with a look at Hilton, who nodded in reply, Ida lifted her cheek to Macavoy to kiss Macavoy, the idle, ill-cared-for, boisterous giant. His face became red like that of a child caught in an awkward act, and with an absurd shyness he stooped and touched her cheek. Then he turned to Hilton, and blurted out, "Aw, the rose o' the valley, the pride o' the wide wurruld! aw, the bloom o' the hills! I'd have kissed her dirty shoe. McQuire!"

A burst of laughter rolled out on the clear air of the prairie, and the hills seemed to stir with the pleasure of life. Then it was that Macavoy, following Hilton and Ida outside, suddenly stopped beside the horse, drew from his pocket the promissory note that Pierre had written, and said, "Yis, but all the weddin'-gifts aren't in. 'Tis nothin' I had to give-divil a cent in the wurruld, divil a pound av baccy, or a pot for the fire, or a bit av linin for the table; nothin' but meself and me dirty clothes, standin' seven fut three an me bare toes. What was I to do? There was only meself to give, so I give it free and hearty, and here it is wid the Queen's head an it, done in Mr. Tarlton's office. Ye'd better had had a dog, or a gun, or a ladder, or a horse, or a saddle, or a quart o' brown brandy; but such as it is I give it ye I give it to the rose o' the valley and the star o' the wide wurruld."

In a loud voice he read the promissory note, and handed it to Ida. Men laughed till there were tears in their eyes, and a keg of whisky was opened; but somehow Ida did not laugh. She and Pierre had seen a serious side to Macavoy's gift: the childlike manliness in it. It went home to her woman's heart without a touch of ludicrousness, without a sound of laughter.

III

After a time the interest in this wedding-gift declined at Fort Guidon, and but three people remembered it with any singular distinctness Ida, Pierre, and Macavoy. Pierre was interested, for in his primitive mind he knew that, however wild a promise, life is so wild in its events, there comes the hour for redemption of all I O U's.

Meanwhile, weeks, months, and even a couple of years passed, Macavoy and Pierre coming and going, sometimes together, sometimes not, in all manner of words at war, in all manner of fact at peace. And Ida, out of the bounty of her nature, gave the two vagabonds a place at her fireside whenever they chose to come. Perhaps, where speech was not given, a gift of divination entered into her instead, and she valued what others found useless, and held aloof from what others found good. She had powers which had ever been the admiration of Guidon Hill. Birds and animals were her friends she called them her kinsmen. A peculiar sympathy joined them; so that when, at last, she tamed a white wild duck, and made it do the duties of a carrier-pigeon, no one thought it strange.

Up in the hills, beside the White Sun River, lived her sister and her sister's children; and, by and by, the duck carried messages back and forth, so that when, in the winter, Ida's health became delicate, she had comfort in the solicitude and cheerfulness of her sister, and the gaiety of the young birds of her nest, who sent Ida many a sprightly message and tales of their good vagrancy in the hills. In these days Pierre and Macavoy were little at the Post, save now and then to sit with Hilton beside the fire, waiting for spring and telling tales. Upon Hilton had settled that peaceful, abstracted expectancy which shows man at his best, as he waits for the time when, through the half-lights of his fatherhood, he shall see the broad fine dawn of motherhood spreading up the world which, all being said and done, is that place called Home. Something gentle came over him while he grew stouter in body and in all other ways made a larger figure among the people of the West.

As Pierre said, whose wisdom was more to be trusted than his general morality, "It is strange that most men think not enough of themselves till a woman shows them how. But it is the great wonder that the woman does not despise him for it. Quel caractere! She has so often to show him his way like a babe, and yet she says to him, Mon grand homme! my master! my lord! Pshaw! I have often thought that women are half saints, half fools, and men half fools, half rogues. But Quelle vie! what life! without a woman you are half a man; with one you are bound to a single spot in the world, you are tied by the leg, your wing is clipped you cannot have all. Quelle vie what life!"

To this Macavoy said: "Spit-spat! But what the devil good does all yer thinkin' do ye, Pierre? It's argufy here and argufy there, an' while yer at that, me an' the rest av us is squeezin' the fun out o' life. Aw, go 'long wid ye. Y'are only a bit o' hell and grammar, annyway. Wid all yer cuttin' and carvin' things to see the internals av thim, I'd do more to the call av a woman's finger than for all the logic and knowalogy y' ever chewed an' there y'are, me little tailor o' jur'sprudince!"

"To the finger call of Hilton's wife, eh?"

Macavoy was not quite sure what Pierre's enigmatical tone meant. A wild light showed in his eyes, and his tongue blundered out: "Yis, Hilton's wife's finger, or a look av her eye, or nothin' at all. Aisy, aisy, ye wasp! Ye'd go stalkin' divils in hell for her yerself, so ye would. But the tongue av ye but, it's gall to the tip."

"Maybe, my king. But I'd go hunting because I wanted; you because you must. You're a slave to come and to go, with a Queen's seal on the promissory."

Macavoy leaned back and roared. "Aw, that! The rose o' the valley the joy o' the wurruld! S't, Pierre " his voice grew softer on a sudden, as a fresh thought came to him "did y' ever think that the child might be dumb like the mother?"

Romany Of The Snows, v1

This was a day in the early spring, when the snows were melting in the hills, and freshets were sweeping down the valleys far and near. That night a warm heavy rain came on, and in the morning every stream and river was swollen to twice its size. The mountains seemed to have stripped themselves of snow, and the vivid sun began at once to colour the foothills with green. As Pierre and Macavoy stood at their door, looking out upon the earth cleansing itself, Macavoy suddenly said: "Aw, look, look, Pierre her white duck off to the nest on Champak Hill!"

They both shaded their eyes with their hands. Circling round two or three times above the Post, the duck then stretched out its neck to the west, and floated away beyond Guidon Hill, and was hid from view.

Pierre, without a word, began cleaning his rifle, while Macavoy smoked, and sat looking into the distance, surveying the sweet warmth and light. His face blossomed with colour, and the look of his eyes was that of an irresponsible child. Once or twice he smiled and puffed in his beard, but perhaps that was involuntary, or was, maybe, a vague reflection of his dreams, themselves most vague, for he was only soaking in sun and air and life.

Within an hour they saw the wild duck—again passing the crest of Guidon, and they watched it sailing down to the Post, Pierre idly fondling the gun, Macavoy half roused from his dreams. But presently they were altogether roused, the gun was put away, and both were on their feet; for after the pigeon arrived there was a stir at the Post, and Hilton could be seen running from the store to his house, not far away.

"Something's wrong there," said Pierre.

"D'ye think 'twas the duck brought it?" asked Macavoy.

Without a word Pierre started away towards the Post, Macavoy following. As they did so, a half-breed boy came from the house, hurrying towards them.

Inside the house Hilton's wife lay in her bed, her great hour coming on before the time, because of ill news from beyond the Guidon. There was with her an old Frenchwoman, who herself, in her time, had brought many children into the world, whose heart brooded tenderly, if uncouthly, over the dumb girl. She it was who had handed to Hilton the paper the wild duck had brought, after Ida had read it and fallen in a faint on the floor.

The message that had felled the young wife was brief and awful. A cloud—burst had fallen on Champak Hill, had torn part of it away, and a part of this part had swept down into the path that led to the little house, having been stopped by some falling trees and a great boulder. It blocked the only way to escape above, and beneath, the river was creeping up to sweep away the little house. So, there the mother and her children waited (the father was in the farthest north), facing death below and above. The wild duck had carried the tale in its terrible simplicity. The last words were, "There mayn't be any help for me and my sweet chicks, but I am still hoping, and you must send a man or many. But send soon, for we are cut off, and the end may come any hour."

Macavoy and Pierre were soon at the Post, and knew from Hilton all there was to know. At once Pierre began to gather men, though what one or many could do none could say. Eight white men and three Indians watched the wild duck sailing away again from the bedroom window where Ida lay, to carry a word of comfort to Champak Hill. Before it went, Ida asked for Macavoy, and he was brought to her bedroom by Hilton. He saw a pale, almost unearthly, yet beautiful face, flushing and paling with a coming agony, looking up at him; and presently two trembling hands made those mystic signs which are the primal language of the soul. Hilton interpreted to him this: "I have sent for you. There is no man so big or strong as you in the north. I did not know that I should ever ask you to redeem the note. I want my gift, and I will give you your paper with the Queen's head on it. Those little lives, those pretty little dears, you will not see them die. If there is a way, any way, you will save them. Sometimes one man can do what twenty cannot. You were my wedding—gift: I claim you now."

Romany Of The Snows, v1

She paused, and then motioned to the nurse, who laid the piece of brown paper in Macavoy's hand. He held it for a moment as delicately as if it were a fragile bit of glass, something that his huge fingers might crush by touching. Then he reached over and laid it on the bed beside her and said, looking Hilton in the eyes, "Tell her, the slip av a saint she is, if the breakin' av me bones, or the lettin' av me blood's what'll set all right at Champak Hill, let her mind be aisy aw yis!"

Soon afterwards they were all on their way all save Hilton, whose duty was beside this other danger, for the old nurse said that, "like as not," her life would hang upon the news from Champak Hill; and if ill came, his place was beside the speechless traveller on the Brink.

In a few hours the rescuers stood on the top of Champak Hill, looking down. There stood the little house, as it were, between two dooms. Even Pierre's face became drawn and pale as he saw what a very few hours or minutes might do. Macavoy had spoken no word, had answered no question since they had left the Post. There was in his eye the large seriousness, the intentness which might be found in the face of a brave boy, who had not learned fear, and yet saw a vast ditch of danger at which he must leap. There was ever before him the face of the dumb wife; there was in his ears the sound of pain that had followed him from Hilton's house out into the brilliant day.

The men stood helpless, and looked at each other. They could not say to the river that it must rise no farther, and they could not go to the house, nor let a rope down, and there was the crumbled moiety of the hill which blocked the way to the house: elsewhere it was sheer precipice without trees.

There was no corner in these hills that Macavoy and Pierre did not know, and at last, when despair seemed to settle on the group, Macavoy, having spoken a low word to Pierre, said: "There's wan way, an' maybe I can an' maybe I can't, but I'm fit to try. I'll go up the river to an aisy p'int a mile above, get in, and drift down to a p'int below there, thin climb up and loose the stuff."

Every man present knew the double danger: the swift headlong river, and the sudden rush of rocks and stones, which must be loosed on the side of the narrow ravine opposite the little house. Macavoy had nothing to say to the head-shakes of the others, and they did not try to dissuade him; for women and children were in the question, and there they were below beside the house, the children gathered round the mother, she waiting waiting.

Macavoy, stripped to the waist, and carrying only a hatchet and a coil of rope tied round him, started away alone up the river. The others waited, now and again calling comfort to the woman below, though their words could not be heard. About half an hour passed, and then someone called out: "Here he comes!" Presently they could see the rough head and the bare shoulders of the giant in the wild churning stream. There was only one point where he could get a hold on the hillside the jutting bole of a tree just beneath them, and beneath the dyke of rock and trees.

It was a great moment. The current swayed him out, but he plunged forward, catching at the bole. His hand seized a small branch. It held him an instant, as he was swung round, then it snapt. But the other hand clenched the bole, and to a loud cheer, which Pierre prompted, Macavoy drew himself up. After that they could not see him. He alone was studying the situation.

He found the key-rock to the dyked slide of earth. To loosen it was to divert the slide away, or partly away, from the little house. But it could not be loosened from above, if at all, and he himself would be in the path of the destroying hill.

"Aisy, aisy, Tim Macavoy," he said to himself. "It's the woman and the darlins av her, an' the rose o' the valley down there at the Post!"

Romany Of The Snows, v1

A minute afterwards, having chopped down a hickory sapling, he began to pry at the boulder which held the mass. Presently a tree came crashing down, and a small rush of earth followed it, and the hearts of the men above and the woman and children below stood still for an instant. An hour passed as Macavoy toiled with a strange careful skill and a superhuman concentration. His body was all shining with sweat, and sweat dripped like water from his forehead. His eyes were on the keyrock and the pile, alert, measuring, intent. At last he paused. He looked round at the hills—down at the river, up at the sky—humanity was shut away from his sight. He was alone. A long hot breath broke from his pressed lips, stirring his big red beard. Then he gave a call, a long call that echoed through the hills weirdly and solemnly.

It reached the ears of those above like a greeting from an outside world. They answered, "Right, Macavoy!"

Years afterwards these men told how then there came in reply one word, ringing roundly through the hills the note and symbol of a crisis, the fantastic cipher of a soul:

"M'Guire!"

There was a loud booming sound, the dyke was loosed, the ravine split into the swollen stream its choking mouthful of earth and rock; and a minute afterwards the path was clear to the top of Champak Hill. To it came the unharmed children and their mother, who, from the warm peak sent the wild duck "to the rose o' the valley," which, till the message came, was trembling on the stem of life. But Joy, that marvellous healer, kept it blooming with a little Eden bird nestling near, whose happy tongue was taught in after years to tell of the gift of the Simple King; who had redeemed, on demand, the promissory note for ever.