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Dying, the Reverend Burden Recalls Leading a Rescue Party

by Robert Cooperman

Oh, how I've fallen off!
Now, I lie broken for my sins;
once a good man. Ask Jack Manion,
who never failed to thank me
for saving his life, his soul.

Snow fell so satanically that year,
I feared to ring the Sabbath bell,
lest we'd be buried in drifts.
Between blizzards, a lone ride
gasp'd a tale of gold pilgrims
trapped on Perdition Pass.

I ordered a rescue party.
"They're dead, and we'll be too,"
Sheriff Dennehy gulped down whiskey:
my gaze determined as a hawk,
its wings catching the glory
of God's dawn.

Finally, we spotted five men.
As I helped Jack Manion down
the mountain—his toes frost-black
as rotted potatoes—he confessed
he'd shot a doomed soul
who'd drawn cannibal's short twig.
"He'll haunt me in Hell," he trembled.

"God forgives all," I assured.

He'll not forgive me, plotting
to have my inconvenient wife erased.

