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Shanghai Pierce: A Fair Likeness

Chris Emmett

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“I am Shanghai Pierce, Webster in Cattle, by God, Sir.” And, in truth, he was. Part rascal, part gentleman, part poseur, part just himself—of all the colorful Texas figures following the Civil War none was as loud, garish, and funny as Shanghai Pierce, who left Rhode Island penniless and became one of the Big Pasture Men of southern Texas.

At six foot, four, Shanghai Pierce was big, rich, and selfish, but he could also be kind. His cunning was seldom matched, and business, whether it involved a quarter-million-dollar loan or a twenty-five cent pair of socks, was his lifeblood.

In re-creating the life of Abel Head (“Shanghai”) Pierce, Chris Emmett unfolds the entire dramatic spectacle of the time and place in which Pierce lived. An arresting figure, Pierce was a symbol of his era. His statue, which he himself erected in Hawley, Texas, is still a perfect memorial to, and a reminder of, westward-moving America. Shanghai Pierce was a man who pulled up his roots and fled to the West, where he found there was ample room and opportunity.

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