

McGee & Co.: Trouble-Shooters

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From barroom brawls to battle with the elements No-Shirt McGee and Bulldozer Craig take on calamity in ten-ton deliveries. A complete short novel of hardrock men and high water

CHAPTER I

CREAMPUFF CRAIG

THE trouble was, me and Bulldozer had been hangin' around that hotel too long. It didn't bother me so much because the days when No-Shirt McGee was happiest dinin' on assorted iron nails is in the past; I'm old enough now to take a little luxury without wincin'. But with Bulldozer Craig it's different. At first he'd done a good job of enjoyin' hisself around the town nights and then stayin' in bed most of the day, but lately he'd gone stale.

For days he'd been mutterin' about goin' soft and how he wasn't fit to take

care of himself any more. He claimed he'd turned so weak that he had trouble gettin' his feet over a door-sill. I didn't pay much attention to this because I've seen Bulldozer practically pick a tractor up and cart it around under one arm. But I could see he was worried.

Then one day when I was lookin' for him, the starter out in front of the hotel told me he'd gone down to Nellie's Hut. "It's a tough joint down on the waterfront," the starter says.

I take a cab down there and arrive just in time to hear an uproar like I haven't heard comin' from a barroom in ten years. Then, before I can get out of the cab, Bulldozer's stern parts the bat-wing doors of Nellie's Hut, and he lands

in the street. He looks like a couple of his own tractors has been walkin' over him. Me and the driver load him into the cab, and I see a reporter named O'Neill makin' notes.

On the way back to the hotel Bulldozer acts like he's goin' to break down and cry. It seems this Nellie's Hut is full of tough mugs, and Bulldozer has gone in there to find out what shape he's in. What he found out don't please him none.

"Civilized life is softenin' me up," he moans. "There was a time I could lick three men and not work up a sweat. Now I'm a creampuff. What I need is a job with hair, horns and claws on it to get me in shape." He says plenty more like that.

When we're gettin' out of the cab at the hotel, a bulb explodes and a camera man gets our pictures. This reporter O'Neill is on the spot, and starts askin' Bulldozer questions. Bulldozer is so sore at himself that he starts singin' his song again, about bein' soft and needin' a job with claws on it.

The next afternoon the paper comes out with the picture and a funny story by this O'Neill about Bulldozer needin' a tough job to get in shape. "I'm glad it come out," Bulldozer says after he reads the piece. "Maybe somebody's got a job that'll fix me up."

Five minutes later the telephone rings and the slickest voice I ever heard says, "I am Marta Latimer and my father, Jeff Latimer, recognized your picture in the paper with Creampuff Craig's. Dad wants to talk over old times with you. And there's a chance he can offer Mr. Craig something to help him get into shape again."

I'm feelin' fine at the prospect of chewin' the rag with an old friend until Marta gives his address, which is a hospital. Then I'm down in the mouth. "Get your hat and coat, Bulldozer," I say, "we're goin' callin'."

When we go into the hospital room I don't know which to look at first, Jeff

Latimer propped up in bed, or his daughter. She's blond, has curves in the right places, plenty of courage in her face and a smile that'd make a totem pole bust out in a warm glow. "No-Shirt McGee!" Jeff yells at me. "You old billy goat. Marta, I want you to meet a good friend. The first time I saw the cuss, him and a squaw had blacked up and won a cakewalk in Dawson. I helped him eat the cake."

"You damned crook," I yell back, "you mean you traded ten cents worth of jelly beans to the squaw for her half, then shook dice with me for my half and ended up eatin' the whole cake. And a fresh cake was somethin' to talk about in them days."

"I suppose this tame moose starin' at Marta is Bulldozer Craig?" Jeff says. "Shake hands, Bulldozer. You're the man I'm lookin' for."

"I accept the job if it's a tough one," Bulldozer says, shakin' hands with Jeff and lookin' at his daughter. That shows what a girl can do to an ordinarily cautious man.

MY OWN mind went back to the days when Jeff Latimer and Teabone Brown met on Chilkoot Pass. They was a great pair, always plannin' for the future. They even agreed their kids, if they ever married and had any, should marry each other. I don't suppose they figgered the kids might have somethin' to say about it.

After they struck it they went back home, had a double weddin' and the next thing I knew the Latimer-Brown Loggin' Company was gettin' out spruce for the gov'ment durin' the World War.

Jeff told me he'd lost his wife a few years ago, and that Teabone Brown had lost both his wife and his health and was now in California buildin' hisself up. Teabone had a son, Jerry, who was tryin' to keep things goin', but without much luck. I could almost hear Bulldozer moan when he learned there was a man in the case.

"Last Spring a log rolled on me," Jeff

says, "crushed bones and nerves, and I've been laid up ever since. Tanner-Clayton, a rival loggin' outfit, tossed a lawsuit at us, murdered our two key witnesses and won the suit. That started us on the skids. We mortgaged to the hilt to pay the judgment."

"Murdered your key witnesses?" I ask, amazed.

"Their bodies was found under a log-jam," Jeff explains. "It looked like they'd been drowned fishin'. Only they never fished, and neither man owned a rod such as was found on the jam."

"Where do I come in?" Bulldozer asks, lookin' at Marta.

"For several years the government has been tryin' to build a jetty at Lee Bay," Jeff answers. "Protected, the bay'll be handy for submarines and seaplanes, but there's bad water, and every contractor's gone broke so far. The government engineers are calling for bids again. We've locomotives and standard-gage track; plenty of flat cars; and all the granite we need on Bald Mountain. If we can build that jetty, we'll be out of the red. If we don't get the contract, or if we get it and fail, Tanner-Clayton will own the Latimer-Brown Loggin' Company, lock, stock and bar'l. Can you build a jetty?"

"If I can't," Bulldozer answers, "I can hire men who can." And he's still restin' his eyes on Marta Latimer.

"One thing you should know, Bulldozer, my daughter Marta will represent me in all deals. You won't mind that?" I could see Bulldozer wouldn't. "And Jerry Brown will be your assistant. You won't mind that?" I knowed Bulldozer would mind that, plenty.

"That'll be fine," Bulldozer agrees. "But I think I'll have a look at the jetty, your rollin' stock and Bald Mountain right away. Then maybe I'll know what it's all about."

We shake hands all around and depart. "Ain't Marta a honey?" Bulldozer asks as soon as we're outside. "A custom job, built to specifications."

"Now don't go fallin' in love again," I warn, "and gettin' your heart busted."

MARTA drives us down the next day and the ocean looks peaceful enough. There's a long finger of rock stickin' into the blue water. Already silt is pilin' up, but full protection for Lee Bay from northwesterners is a long ways ahead. We find a lot of rusty rail sidin's, busted down machinery, tar-paper shacks and a first-rate house for the boss to live in.

It don't need no soothsayer to tell Lee Bay will develop into a lumber port once the jetty is completed. There's a fine stand of virgin timber behind it. We walk out on the jetty and there's plenty of warnin' of grief to come—trestle timbers smashed to matchwood and heavy steel rails tied in bow-knots. High seas had done that.

A native who'd seen several contractors come and go showed up and told us a few things. "When weather's bad," he says, "the sea'll wipe out trestle work as fast as you can build it. That costs money." He points to a drift tree four feet thick at the butt and a hundred and fifty long, layin' on busted rails. "The sea tossed that up there," he drawls, "and knocked a locomotive into the water."

Bulldozer sets down and does some tal thinkin'. "We'll have to fight the set," he says. "Got to figger a way to beat it."

"And while you're fightin' it," I warn, "Tanner-Clayton will be hittin' you from behind."

"The jetty is supposed to end where you see them masts stickin' up," the native says. "Them's the *Sadie Lake*'s masts. The wreck's slowly sinkin' in the sands."

We telephone the Tremont Loggin' Company and they send down a speeder. Tremont owns the loggin' road runnin' from the bay to their camp. Tanner-Clayton is after them, too, and they're friendly to Latimer-Brown.

"A gravity haul will help some," Bull-

dozer says, "but you'll have to have your equipment in fine shape or a trainload of stone may run away with you."

The boundary between Tremont and the Latimer-Brown timber land is Deep Gulch, spanned by an old bridge. We crawl across, get on good rails again, and inspect loggin' camps, rails, bridges, equipment and Bald Mountain.

"The setup is perfect," Bulldozer exclaims. "Run a short spur to Bald Mountain and we'll have enough stone for a hundred jetties."

We get a picture now of what Tanner-Clayton is up to. If they can get hold of Latimer-Brown timber and camps, then Tremont will be like takin' milk from a baby. Tanner-Clayton will own a timber empire and have a private port as soon as the jetty is built. And the gov'ment pays for buildin' the jetty.

"No-Shirt," Bulldozer says, "we've got a bunch of our tin money loafin' in the bank." He watches cables strung between two spar trees carry a fifteen-ton log nearly a quarter of a mile through the air, then continues: "Suppose we take that money and buy the best mill site on Lee Bay and get the jump on Tanner-Clayton?"

"Okay by me," I answer, "but you'll have to build the jetty to make the mill site worth anything."

"I ain't forgettin' that," he answers, "and before we buy any mill sites I want to see that jetty in a storm." He stirs his big form into action, his eyes still on the high lead rig swingin' logs through the air. "Let's go back down to the jetty and wait for a storm."

CHAPTER II

THREE MASKED MEN

WE HANG around the jetty a week, but the weather stays calm. Bulldozer reverts to childhood. He pushes tall sticks into the sand, supports 'em with clothesline guy-ropes anchored to rocks, then watches the waves wash around 'em. I keep the two of us supplied with food.

The eighth day he gets tired of his kids' play and says, "Let's go up, buy the mill site and figger out a bid on the jetty."

When we get back to Seattle we find the mill-site owner is tickled to death to sell. He's sold it to every jetty contractor that's tackled the job. Then he buys it back for a song when the contractor goes broke. The turnover on the site has put five daughters through the university. And you know what it costs to put one girl through. We pay him sixty thousand, then go to the Latimer-Brown office.

There's a good lookin' cuss of twenty-three settin' at the desk talkin' to Marta. He's tall, weighs around a hundred and sixty pounds, has dark, curly hair and blue eyes. He's the spit and image of Teabone Brown when he was twenty-three. "I'm Jerry Brown," he says, shakin' hands. The way he shakes hands gets under my skin. It's like a drownin' man grabbin' a straw.

"Glad to know you, Jerry," I says, "but why so down in the mouth?"

"The bank that was to finance us in the jetty deal has withdrawn its support," he answers. "We're licked unless we can raise the money."

That shouldn't have surprised me. I'd seen that game worked enough times in minin' deals. But it showed me Tanner-Clayton had plenty of power and was tryin' to block other bidders. "Where do we go from here, Bulldozer?" I ask.

"Money's a curse," he answers. "It's made a creampuff out of me. I'm in favor of borrowin' all we can on our tin stock and mill site. We form the McGee Construction Company. We put up the money and Latimer-Brown puts up the equipment and supplies the timber and rock we need. We split the profits, if any, fifty-fifty."

"We hired you as a trouble-shooter," Marta protests, "and it's hardly fair for you to have to finance the proposition as well."

"It's a cold-blooded business deal," Bulldozer says. "You need to get out of

a jam, I need to toughen up. Don't argue."

It takes time to get the company organized, but while the lawyer is makin' out the papers, me and Bulldozer get bid blanks from the engineer and start our figgerin'. The idea is to put in a high enough bid to make money and cover unexpected costs, but low enough to beat out Tanner-Clayton.

Every night Marta takes Bulldozer somewhere. And once he comes home well drammed, singing like a lark and the hotel detective comes up and talks to us. "I've got a right to sing," Bulldozer argues. "I've met the swellest girl in the world. Listen officer, was you ever in love?"

"I'm married and have seven children," the dick answers, "and you ask me if I was ever in love. Now go easy, brother."

I know Marta ain't suddenly fell in love with Bulldozer. She's takin' him around to get a line on him under all conditions. She's already got a line on Jerry Brown. He's a weaklin'—no nerve. And she figgers I'm too old to be much good in a fight.

The day bids are to be submitted me and Bulldozer arrive at the office early. Jerry's there, slightly corned. "Listen, Bulldozer," he says, "you've got to quit taking my girl around or there'll be trouble."

That's no way to talk to Bulldozer. "Why you halfbaked—" Bulldozer starts for him. But I head him off.

"He's only a sappy kid, Bulldozer," I explain, "don't pay no attention to him."

"That's the way it's always been," Jerry says bitterly, "everybody thinks I'm a sappy kid. Nobody's ever given me a chance to tackle a tough job. I'm always shoved aside. If I ever had a chance—"

HE BREAKS off, his face dead white, and slowly he shoves his hands into the air. Three masked men are comin' through the doorway, and the leader's got his gun on my wishbone. I've looked into gun barrels before, but never one held as steady as that.

"Open that safe, Brown," the leader orders.

"Tell him to go to hell," Bulldozer rasps, "and make 'em blow it." But the leader's a massive cuss and Jerry starts to reach for the safe dial, when Bulldozer grabs him by the throat. "Make 'em blow it," he snarls.

As the leader rushes in to gun-whip him, Bulldozer whirls and knocks the gun aside. It goes off with a bang that leaves my ears ringin' like I had a hangover. It's my signal to move in and keep 'em off'n Bulldozer's back. A noble idear, but a fist knocks me across the room before I can strike a blow. Lights dance, there's a mighty roarin' in my head, then blackness. I think some birds sang, too.

When I open my eyes again, Jerry's tied up, Bulldozer's dead to the world and papers are scattered from hell to breakfast. "They made me open the safe," Jerry moans, "then slugged me in the stomach and on the jaw."

Bulldozer gets up and shakes his head like a mad bull. "Couldn't lick three men," he groans, "even with help. I'm about as tough as a graveyard stew." Which is milktoast in case you don't know. Suddenly he begins pawin' around the papers. "The bid. That's what they was after."

Pretty soon he finds the bid all safe and sound. We check over and find nothin' n issin'. It's a mystery all right. We wash up in a hurry and take the bid to the gov'ment engineer's office. There're a dozen men hangin' 'round and Bulldozer asks Jerry, "Is Pete Clayton amongst 'em? I had a hunch he was the leader. I tried to leave my trade mark on his face just before another clipped me on the head with a gun butt," he explains to me.

"There was blood on his mask," Jerry answers. "But I never got a look at his face. Clayton isn't here."

There's a hush comes over the group when a clerk says he'll open the bids. Curs is on top. "McGee Construction Company," he says, "six hundred thousand dollars."

Me and Bulldozer almost faint. It's been raised a hundred thousand on us. "They opened our bid, raised the price, sealed it and left it," Bulldozer mutters. "That means Tanner-Clayton can put one at at five hundred and fifty thousand and get the job."

Hall Granite Company put's one in fifty thousand above ours, then the clerk says, "Tanner-Clayton Company, seven hundred thousand."

We leave the office in a daze. The bid is hiked a hundred thousand and still we're low. It don't make sense. We go back to the office and tell Marta everything that happened except about Jerry turnin' yellow.

"I can't for the life of me see why anyone should risk the pen to give us an extra hundred thousand, unless— I've got it," she says. "Pete Clayton is confident he can make us go broke on the job. He'll then take over our unfinished contract. And with that in mind, he changed our bid to give himself an extra hundred thousand."

Before Bulldozer answers he picks up the telephone and calls Clayton's office. "Oh, Mr. Clayton is out?" he repeats. "Where can I get him? It is important. Oh, that's too bad. I'll call later." When Bulldozer hangs up he's grinnin' like a cat that's just et a bird. "That was Clayton who raided the office all right," he says. "He's over at the dentist's office, gettin' some front teeth pulled. He claims to have run into a truck and knocked his teeth lose against his steerin' wheel. The steerin' wheel was my fist, I'll betcha."

WHILE the four of us are talkin' the door opens and a big, red-headed cuss comes into the room. He's as polite as a count rushin' an heiress until he sees Bulldozer then he roars, "So I caught up with you." He throws his hat down on the floor and the two of 'em start sluggin'. Me and Jerry pull off the redhead and Marta drags Bulldozer away.

"Gentlemen, please . . ." Marta pleads.

"You must be runnin' for senator or

somethin', lady," the redhead says. "First time I ever heard Bulldozer called a gentleman."

"Just who are you to drop in on us like a bomb?" Marta asks.

"He ain't no bomb, Marta," Bulldozer says. "He's a ladyfinger firecracker."

"I'm Torchy O'Leary, the best damn man that ever went before the face of a stone. Hardrock is my line and I hear you just got the jetty contract." The redhead's voice fills the room.

"I hate to admit he's good at anything," Bulldozer says, "but Torchy O'Leary is the best hardrock man I've ever known. I suppose the worst bums have some good in 'em."

"I can do anything with powder," Torchy announces. "I can blow the leg off'n your chair and not powder-mark your socks."

"Bulldozer Craig is general manager," Marta informs him, "Mr. No-Shirt McGee is pinch-hitter."

Torchy snorts in disgust as he looks at me. "Listen you old goat, don't give me no orders. That goes for you, too, Bulldozer. Just point out the mountain and say 'bust it up' and leave the rest to me," he says. Then just as I'm gettin' mad, he grins and I like the cuss.

"What size do you break 'em into?" Bulldozer asks.

"Forty-five percent must be six tons or bigger," he answers. "Thirty-five percent must be from one to six tons, and the rest can run from twenty-five pounds to a ton each."

"Go down to our lawyer," Bulldozer says, "and get your contract drawed up." He turns to Jerry who's been an outsider as usual. "The Deep Gulch bridge isn't strong enough to hold up heavy equipment. Take a bridge crew, build a new one, and renew the rails connecting our steel with the Tremont Logging Company's rails."

Jerry's mouth pops open. It's the first time he's ever been given a responsible job. And he wasn't expecting Bulldozer to give him a chance to prove his worth.

He's as tickled as a kid with a new top and the look he flashes at Marta tells plenty. And Marta smiles at Bulldozer and there's plenty of gratitude in it.

I meet Jerry out in the hall a few minutes later. He's had time to think things over. "I get it," he said, his eyes narrowin'. "He figures I'll fail. He wants to show me up."

"If you think that's his game, son," I answer, "I'd do somethin' about it."

Bulldozer's head is still achin' late that afternoon so he heads for the hotel, leavin' me with Marta. "It's been a full day," she says. "Bulldozer knocked Clayton's teeth loose; we landed a job at a price a hundred thousand higher than we bid; Bulldozer in a harsh manner started Jerry bridge-building and a strange person named Torchy O'Leary asked for the quarry job and got it. Let's go up and tell dad about it. It'll help him get well."

JEFF LATIMER is all smiles as Marta tells what's happened. "But I don't think I'm going to care for Bulldozer Craig," she concludes. "He gave Jerry a tough job to humiliate him. And I don't like people who humiliate others."

"I've an idea you've found a man who won't yes you," Jeff says. I can tell he's feelin' fine over that, too. When we leave he seems dead certain he's found a man who'll not only build the jetty, but build it on time. Personally I ain't quite so happy. I keep thinkin' of the penalty we're goin' to pay if we don't finish it on time.

A few days later we take a trip to Bald Mountain to see how things are gettin' along. "Hello, coyote-bait," Torchy yells at me. "I suppose you've come up here to show me how to handle powder. Let's see you handle this." And he tosses me a stick. I sweat blood, but I catch it and toss it back. By golly, that cuss is tough.

He's got a portable generator supplying juice to electric drills. The toughest men I've ever seen are swarmin' over the rock. "Come up here in a couple of weeks,"

Torchy says, "and watch some rock move."

Me and Bulldozer ride to Deep Gulch and find Jerry's got a bridge crew at work. We cross the bridge and follow the Tremont road down to Lee Bay. They're hittin' the ball, too. They've got crews ballastin' the roadbed. A crew Bulldozer's sent down is drivin' piles for a new section of trestle that'll extend the jetty. I look at the Pacific. It's smilin' and peaceful in the sunshine, but it ain't foolin' us none.

Rome wasn't built in a day and it takes time to get things rollin'. We clean and repair the big house on Lee Bay, turn the parlor into an office and move in; then get the old sidin's in shape. Several days later we get a call from Bald Mountain spur. "Come up here," Torchy says, "and watch the rock move."

As we roll up to the Deep Gulch bridge, Jerry comes out grinnin' like a kid that's passed his examinations. "The bridge is done," he says. The shine in his eyes kinda gets me. I'm half expectin' Bulldozer to toss him a word of praise. He done a good job. But the big cuss takes it in stride. "Okay," is all he says. "Send your crew to the jetty, and come along with us."

"All right," Jerry growls. He's mad clean through, and I see Marta givin' Bulldozer a hard look. I get the idear she's spent most of her young life boostin' Jerry along.

Everything is ready at Bald Mountain. "Hang onto Bulldozer's hand, Miss Latimer," Torchy bellows down at us. "He's liable to wander into trouble."

Bulldozer grits his teeth. "Some time I'm goin' to take that fresh cuss apart," he growls.

We all get behind a shoulder of granite and Torchy slams down the lever of a firin' machine. The mountain shudders and Torchy fires the second string of shots. The whole side of the mountain tumbles out and ten ton rocks roll clean down to the spur track. Before the smoke has drifted clear a locomotive shunts a

string of flat cars to the sidin'. A portable derrick commences loadin' stone.

As we're gettin' on the speeder to go back to Lee Bay, Torchy yells, "The first trainload goes down tomorrow mornin'. Maybe I'd better come along with it and show Bulldozer how to build a jetty."

"You come down there," Bulldozer says wrathfully, "and I'll break you in two." Bulldozer admires the redheaded cuss; even likes him, but Torchy sure can get under his hide.

We're all hangin' around the office the followin' afternoon, wonderin' why the train load of stone don't arrive, when the telephone rings. Bulldozer answers it. "What! Listen, Torchy, if you're kiddin' I'll run you off'n the job. Oh, you ain't. Well ain't that double-barreled hell! We'll be up right away."

"Bulldozer," Marta asks in a scared voice. "What has happened?"

"The Deep Gulch bridge caved in," Bulldozer answers. "The stone train's wrecked."

I can see she's sick, but she flashes a understandin' glance at Jerry Brown. We roar up there on a speeder, and there ain't a word spoken on the way. The bridge is a crumpled mess of timbers, busted cars and ten-ton rocks. The train came down with the locomotive pushin' the flat cars, so it didn't wreck.

"Who built that bridge?" Torchy jeers.

"I did," Bulldozer snaps. Marta gives him a grateful look.

"No you didn't," Jerry cuts in with a show of spirit. "I built it." Torchy don't say a word for a minute, then he wants to know if he'll lay off his crew.

"Let the rock pile up," Bulldozer orders, "we'll use it fast enough when we get things rolling." He slides down the bank to the wreckage and we follow.

"Poor Jerry," Marta says to me. "Because he's the only male heir to the Latimer-Brown interests, rival outfits have been sniping away at him since he was seventeen. Poor fellow, he's never won a battle. And nothing he's done has ever stood up."

"Come down here, Jerry," Bulldozer orders. He's under a mass of rock and timber. "Your bridge was all right. Somebody put jacks against the bottoms of your uprights and forced them off'n their bases. Naturally everything collapsed under weight. It looks as if Pete Clayton had won the first round. But try and prove it."

When he crawls out he sends Jerry down to keep the jetty pile-driver and trestle construction crews workin' and takes over the wrecked bridge himself. He gives me a list of stuff he's goin' to need and tells me to light out for Seattle and get it.

"Stop in at Tremont's camp one," he yells at me as I start, "tell 'em to send up a wrecker. I plan to repair the bridge, then let the locomotive pull the cars across with a cable, one at a time. We'll reinforce the piers later. The thing to do right now is keep rock movin'."

CHAPTER III

GIVE US ROCK

AN HOUR after I arrive in Seattle a knock comes on my hotel door and when I open it there's a human moose smilin' and shovin' out his hand. "I'm Pete Clayton," he says. "And this is Abner Tanner, my pardner." Clayton's got a short neck and sorrel hair. His nose is flat and I see he's wearin' store teeth in front. He's got scarred fists as big as hams hangin' from his coat sleeves.

Tanner looks like somethin' dug up from a grave and given the breath of life. His thin face is the color of old cheese. He's got unblinkin' blue eyes set in bony sockets and his flarin' nostrils tremble when he breathes. I invite 'em in and Tanner starts talkin' when they set down.

"There's a Chinese saying, Mr. McGee," he says, "'When monkeys fight they scatter dirt, when tigers fight, one is hurt.' You are mixing in a tiger fight. I'm here to buy your interest in the McGee Construction Company."

"Me and Bulldozer don't run out on our pardners when the goin' gets tough," I tell him. "We ain't been hurt yet, but we can take it when it comes. So far the bridge builders are the ones that profited. You, Clayton, had to have a bridge built in your mouth and we're buildin' one down at Deep Gulch."

I almost bust out laughin' at that crack. I caught Clayton off'n his guard, so I make the most of it. "We know it was you who busted into the office and hiked up our bid. And you know it was Bulldozer's fist that knocked your upper teeth loose. When a fight gets goin' that strong, nobody can back out until they get damned well licked."

"And that's what you're going to get," he says.

I take the whole business as a compliment to Bulldozer. Is it possible the combination of Bulldozer and Torchy has Tanner-Clayton worried?

It takes me several days to get the things Bulldozer needs and when I head toward the coast there are storm warnin's flyin' from the weather station. I drive for miles over a concrete road built through a fir forest and the roar of the gale through the tree tops is like surf hittin' the beach, only steadier.

As I break through the forest surroundin' Lee Bay I can see the sea is breakin' over Shipwreck Shoal. Spray goes clean over the masts of the old wreck; and closer in, the sea is smashin' away at the new trestle work.

I hike out on the trestle to have a look at things. Jerry's worried and uncertain. He's wishin' Bulldozer was around and sometimes when he looks at the force of the sea, a scared look comes over his face. He's got two forces inside of him, one tryin' to make him stay and fight, the other tellin' him to run.

He must've read my thoughts because suddenly he snarls, "Some of these days I hope to find myself in a place where there's no escape—where I can't turn and run."

A big sea drenches the pile-driver and

I'm wonderin' if he hadn't better send for a locomotive to pull it off before the storm gets so bad they can't send out a locomotive. While I'm still thinkin' about it I hear a speeder's flanges scrapin' the rails. It's Bulldozer. His clothes are dirty, his eyes bloodshot and his face is covered with stubble.

"I got to worryin' about the trestle," he says, "and came down for a look. We've got to get a load of rock down here pronto. Keep that driver workin' as long as it's safe, Jerry. But don't wait too long and lose it. The decision is yours."

"How about running a cable out to it and dragging it across the same way you've been taking stone-cars over the weak trestle?" Jerry asks.

"Fine." Bulldozer says. "And they told me you didn't have brains."

We all went back to the office and Bulldozer telephones Torchy O'Leary. "Get a trainload down here as soon as you can," he orders. "I think the Deep Gulch bridge will stand up now. Hit it easy, though. I'll be up there."

"Better stay here and get some sleep," I advise.

"I'll get it at the bridge," he says, and away he goes on the speeder.

THE storm gets worse every hour. At ten o'clock that night it's roarin' so we hardly hear the train of stone as it comes out of the timber. The train almost crawls. The air's full of drivin' rain, but I can see Bulldozer settin' on the first car of stone. It comes up easy, couples onto a flat-car with a power shovel, then inches out onto the trestle.

You don't dump ten-ton rocks off'n a car by pryin' with a crowbar. It's a shovel job and that's where Bulldozer shines. The train comes to a stop on that swayin', sea-drenched trestle and Bulldozer gets the shovel goin'. It's almost as wide as a flat-car. And one slip would send it into the boilin' surf.

Bulldozer grins cheerfully, but the rest of us are thrilled and chilled as the shovel crawls along, stops, tips a rock

into the sea, then moves on to the next. Every few minutes the train moves out, so most of the rock can be dumped at the weakest point.

Bulldozer comes into the office, swills down a lot of hot coffee and grabs the telephone. "We've got to have more rock," he says. "If we can save that section, we can save the rest." He fumes awhile, then hangs up.

"Line's dead! Jerry, tell 'em to warm up a speeder. I've got to light out for Bald Mountain and build a fire under Torchy. We've gotta have rock."

Five minutes later he's speedin' into the forest with the throttle wide open. I go to bed all tuckered out. At daybreak screamin' flanges wake me up. The house is rockin' under the gale, and there's another trainload of stone rumblin' onto the jetty. I dress and run out. Torchy O'Leary, dead on his feet, comes reelin' toward the house. "Where's Bulldozer?" he demands. "He was supposed to tell me what he needed."

"The telephone line was dead," I answer, "and he lit out last night on a speeder."

"He never got there," Torchy snaps. "Somethin's wrong." He whirls on Jerry. "Man that power shovel, Jerry, and empty them cars. As soon as they're empty send 'em back for another load."

I can see Jerry go white at the prospect of runnin' the shovel, but I don't wait to see what happens. Me and Torchy pile onto a speeder and start back up the road. He looks to the right and I look to the left for signs of Bulldozer's remains, or his speeder. We go all the way to Deep Gulch and don't find a thing.

"Speeders don't vanish into thin air," Torchy says. "We've got to go back."

We crawl along this time, and we stop at each bridge and look into the water. At the Trout Creek bridge I spot a film of oil on a pool of dead water. "There's the speeder, upside down in that pool," I yell.

We get down on our hands and knees

and make sure Bulldozer ain't underneath, then walk downstream to a log-jam. Water sucks through a tangle of logs, and many of 'em have snags waitin' to catch and hold a man. A man stunned by a fall wouldn't have a chance. Just the same we look between the logs, then move on downstream, searchin' the smaller jams, pools and shallows.

"Hell," Torchy says, "his body must be under the first jam. We'll get the Tremont outfit to send a cherry picker up here and move the logs." A cherry picker is a derrick mounted on a flat-car, designed to pick up logs along the right of way and load 'em.

The bridge ain't on a curve so I look around to see why the speeder jumped the track. Pretty soon I find a pole somebody's tossed into the thick brush. It's covered with crankcase grease on one side.

"The rats," Torchy snarls. "They stuck that pole between the rails and when the speeder hit the pole it rode along it a few feet and spilled into the pool."

"It's murder," I growl. "The last time Latimer-Brown men was killed, it was made to look like a fishin' accident. And now they try to make Bulldozer's murder look like an accident."

"You stay here," Torchy says, "I'll have Tremont send up the cherry picker."

It takes a couple of hours for 'em to reach Trout Creek, but when they do I stand below the jam, ready to jump in if Old Bulldozer's remains come floatin' past.

They clean out the jam to the last log, and nothin' happens. And all the while the storm is ragin', but I don't give a damn if the trestle and jetty go out or not. Old Bulldozer is gone.

I'm ice all over.

"We can't break up every log-jam in the stream, No-Shirt," Torchy says sadly, "so you might as well give it up. Bulldozer is on his last trail. Tough, too. He never did get the wife and the home he used to dream about. I'll miss him and the fights we had."

I CAN'T bring myself to leave the spot, but pretty soon Torchy drops his big hand on my shoulder and says, "No-Shirt, we've got a jetty to build."

"The hell with it," I answer. It's funny what you think about at a time like this. I'm thinkin' Bulldozer never licked his three men and got hisself into shape again. It makes me uneasy and I have the feelin' Bulldozer must be uneasy in his grave, wherever it is.

Torchy kinda forces me along and pretty soon I'm on a speeder and he's drivin' me down to the jetty. I look at the flat-cars, wonderin' if they've been unloaded. They haven't. Jerry didn't have the nerve to handle the power shovel. A hundred feet of trestle is tilted over and the sea is poundin' it to pieces.

Marta comes out of the office on the run. "Any news of Bulldozer?" she asks anxiously. Then she looks at my face and her eyes kinda mist up a little. "I'm so sorry," she says gently. Then, "No trace?"

"None at all," Torchy says.

I walk into the office and step up to Jerry Brown. "You rat," I snarl, "a good man died tryin' to help you out of a jam. And you let him down."

He takes it for a minute or two, then says, "If it wasn't for your age, McGee, I'd—"

"Oh no you wouldn't," I cut in. "You're just tryin' to save your face in your own mind. Well, you may be foolin' yourself, but the rest of us are wise to you."

I don't sleep much that night. The next mornin' the storm's gone down some. Torchy looks things over and shakes his head. "We can't dump the rock where it'll do the most good now," he growls, "and we can't keep the equipment tied up. Might as well dump it where we can." He runs the shovel onto the flat-car, then sends for Jerry Brown.

Jerry shows up, lookin' sullen and uneasy. He's taken a big snort of whisky to brace hisself up. He knows every man on the job is lookin' at him, and he knows what they're thinkin'. "Make up your mind, Brown," Torchy says, "run

that shovel or else take a good beatin'."

For a second I thought Jerry was goin' to make somethin' out of it, but he only shrugs his shoulders and climbs onto the shovel. After all, he should take the risk instead of some man workin' for wages. Though we could prob'ly find plenty of men willin' to take a chance amongst bulldozers and shovel men. They're a tough lot.

TORCHY highballs the engineer and the train crawls slowly over the trestle. Spray drenches the rock and the shovel cab, but Jerry just scowls. Torchy signals the engineer to stop, and stand by, ready to haul off the train.

Jerry's handled the shovel plenty of times on good, solid earth. He knows what to do and how to do it. Now if he can just imagine he's still on hard ground he'll get away with it. He takes the first rock, then the second and third. They're all big boys. He crawls slowly ahead and onto the next car.

It's piled high with stuff runnin' from twenty-five to a thousand pounds. Jerry goes through with it fast. He's gettin' madder and madder, I can see that. He didn't mind Bulldozer tellin' him what to do, but he resents Torchy. He ain't got sense enough to know Torchy's tryin' to keep things movin', with the hope the winter storms will be delayed long enough to finish the bad stretch.

He's still mad when he reaches the fifth car. He starts liftin' the rock and the shovel almost quits on him. "Can't you get out rocks of the right size, O'Leary?" he snarls. "This goes over ten tons and you know it."

"Too much for you, eh?" Torchy sneers.

Jerry gets another hold on it, and turns on the power. It kinda resists, and he gives it full power. I can see he's mad. I'm just about to let out a yell of warnin' when somethin' gives. It's the shovel. And with power wide open, the least little give speeds up the engine. It has a flyin' start when the rock holds its ground.

That shovel tips over before Jerry can shut off. He leaps clear of the cab and lands flat 'on his stomach in the roarin' sea. The shovel hits a split second later and disappears.

Torchy yanks off his boots and dives in. I get a rope and throw down. Torchy grabs Jerry first, gets a good grip on him, then takes the line.

"I can't take you up here," I yell down, "the surf will smash you again't the trestle." Torchy nods that he understands and I commence to work my way back over the cars. When I reach the locomotive the engineer commences to back up slow. He can watch the two men in the water and judge the speed. It takes some sweet throttle work on his part.

We find a calm spot behind the old jetty, run down and pull the two out of the water. Jerry's pretty groggy from landin' flat on the water, but he's all right except bein' sick at the stomach.

"Yank the cars off'n the trestle," Torchy tells the engineer, "and get a wrecker from Tremont Logging Company. Maybe we can get some chains wrapped around the shovel bucket and haul the wreck to the surface." Torchy's voice is kinda weary, like a man who's wonderin' what's goin' to happen next.

We know Pete Clayton was behind wreckin' the Deep Gulch Bridge and spillin' Bulldozer and the speeder into the creek, but this latest trouble comes because one of the men in our own outfit lost his head. "While they're gettin' the shovel out," Torchy says, "I'm goin' to take some of my men and search every jam and pool in Trout Creek from the bridge to the sea. And then I'm goin' to search the beach."

"I'll go with you," I tell him.

"No," he says, "you stay here. Maybe you can keep some crazy thing from happenin'. I'm expectin' most anything now."

Jerry just stands there, starin' and not sayin' a word. I look at his eyes and suddenly I know he's a heap sorer at hisself than we are.

CHAPTER IV

OPEN THROTTLE FOR DISASTER

NOTHIN' happens. The Tremont wrecker gets the shovel out of the water and drops it on a sidin' to be repaired. Jerry goes around without lookin' me in the eyes. Marta drives up to Seattle to see her father. I've a hunch she can't breathe the same air as Jerry.

Torchy O'Leary comes back in three days. They've searched the creek and blowed up several big jams without findin' a trace of Bulldozer's remains.

There follows a long stretch of good weather. Jerry goes back to buildin' his trestle again. We train a couple of husky lads to handle the shovel on the rock train and everybody keeps drivin' away.

It's a great day when Jerry's trestle reaches the bad area. Torchy has been holdin' up the heavier rock at the quarry for this very place. The light stuff he's been dumpin' wherever it was needed.

As a yard locomotive pulls the pile-driver off'n the trestle, we have a little get-together—Marta, Jerry, Torchy and me. It's nearly a mile from the shore to the old wreck where the present jetty is to end. The first stretch is jetty put in by the old contractors. Next there's a short section we've built. After that there's a stretch of trestle, then another short section we've built. It's supposed to tame Shipwreck Shoal. After that comes another section of trestle. It's at the end of this we'll have our worst trouble.

If we can get a thousand yard area filled in before the first big storm, we can continue the job to the shipwreck, and do it in almost any kind of weather unless it is a bad blow. And that shouldn't wreck our trestle, just slow us up.

"You see, Marta," Jerry explains. "If we can build the tough parts of the jetty now, the government won't be too hard on us."

"I understand," Marta answers, "but I'm not going to think it is in the bag until the work is done. Pete Clayton has been too quiet to suit me."

When Torchy goes up to the quarry for the load of big stone, me and Jerry go along with him. We ain't takin' chances of anything happening to that train on the way back. We stop at each bridge and examine the piers to make sure there's been no dirty work at the crossroads.

Me and Jerry and Torchy ride on the front car. The locomotive is sometimes visible and sometimes is around a curve. It whistles every little while to let the wild animals know we're comin' I guess, because there ain't no automobile roads crossin' it until we get almost to the jetty.

"Here's the last bridge," Torchy says as it comes into sight. We get ready to drop off, but the train moves faster if anything.

"What the hell?" Torchy says. By that time we've hit the bridge and are rumblin' across it. "If that bridge had been weakened we'd be checkin' in on Saint Peter about now."

I stand up to give the engineer a dirty look, and he ain't in his cab. Then I catch a glimpse of him swingin' a spanner wrench. Our car shoots around a curve and I can't see a thing. "There's something wrong back there," I yell at Torchy.

We commence to scramble over the rocks. It is slow work because the cars are swayin' back and forth and it's hard to hang on and some of the rocks are so wide they hang over a little on both sides.

We roar into a short, straight stretch and can see the locomotive again. The engineer tumbles backward out of the cab, and he's as limp as a rag. Somebody's knocked him cold. The firemen's already gone and I can see two backs turned toward us.

"One of 'em belongs to Pete Clayton," I yell at Torchy. Then we shoot around a turn. I feel the train move faster. They've got the throttle wide open.

"Clayton's opened the throttle and jumped," Torchy bellows. "Pick yourself a soft spot," he advises.

I take a look and decide to stick with the train. There're logs, boulders and

stumps on both sides of the roadbed and if I jump I'll bust up my legs and maybe my head. And us McGees can't stand too many blows on the head.

Torchy commences to race for that locomotive and I'm right behind him. Maybe the whole works will spill over the end of the trestle and into the sea. Maybe only part of 'em will go. But it's a cinch the nearer we are to the locomotive the better the chance we've got.

My car rolls as it goes around a sharp turn. You can hear the wheel flanges screamin' against the rails two miles off. A small slab of rock skids off and drives two feet into a clay bank. It stays there, stickin' out like a shelf.

The roar is tremendous. It's like thunder, with all them heavily loaded wheels turnin' 'round faster'n they was ever intended to turn.

We flash around a curve and shoot across the narrow highway. Two cars are standin' there. One's partly in the ditch and I can see the white-faced driver. He's just missed pilin' into the train. A minute later we're racin' across the switches and passin' a long rusty sidin' that marks the yard at the jetty. Marta's standin' in the middle of her backyard, starin'.

I catch a glimpse and that's all as I'm too busy tryin' to get over a twelve-ton rock and reach the locomotive. Then the water goes flashin' by the corner of my eye and I can feel the trestle swayin' under me. The cars jerk and take up the slack as Torchy gets into the locomotive cab and closes the throttle. He gives her the air and brakes commence to scream and grind.

He eases up and gives the air another yank. There're goin' to be some flat wheels on that train. I reach the locomotive and get a good hand hold. I'm ready to jump if I have to.

UP AHEAD I hear a mighty crash. The front cars are goin' over the end of the trestle, spillin' like water over a falls. The sea is boilin'. Seven cars

remain. Then six, then five. The air goes on again and two more go over. I get set. It looks a long ways down to the water and I never was much of a diver. Another car goes over and the next hangs up.

"Wow! What a close shave," Jerry Brown mutters.

"Uncouple, No-Shirt," Torchy yelled. "Then pile on."

I uncouple and Torchy waits just long enough for me to join him. We don't even take a look at the damage, but run back as fast as the roadbed will let us. At that it looks as if we're goin' to jump the track a couple of times. We find the engineer in a heap by the track.

I feel him over carefully to see if I can find any broken bones. Not findin' any, we lift him to the tender and lay him on the water tank. We move on a couple of hundred yards and find the firemen settin' on a log. He's dazed, but he'll do anything we tell him. As soon as he's aboard, Torchy crowds on the steam until we get to Tremont's main camp. They've got a little hospital there.

In about an hour the engineer's head has cleared and he can talk. "I stopped so you could inspect the bridge," he says, "and the fireman got out, climbed a bank and looked ahead to get the brakeman's signal. Three men must have been waiting in the brush at that point. I imagine they climbed onto the tender as soon as we started. Both the fireman and I were lookin' ahead. He looked back just as the locomotive crossed the bridge and said, 'Where did you boys come from? And what's the gap?'"

"I look, and there're three masked lads. Each has a stone in the toe of a sock. One of 'em hits the fireman before he can raise his hands.

"As he goes down, two of 'em toss him off'n the locomotive," the engineer continues. "I grabbed a big spanner and went after 'em. I got a medium-sized cuss and was reachin' out for the big one, when the little one swung his sock about his head a couple of times and let go. It

struck me on top of the head, just as I ducked. It left me groggy. Then the big cuss moves in and I don't remember a thing until I woke up here."

"You didn't get a glimpse of their faces?" Torchy asks.

"No, they wore masks made out of small towels or big handkerchiefs," the engineer answers. "Even their ears were covered up."

Torchy swore. "I hate a bonehead," he growled. "And that's what I am. I should've knowed they might jump the engine crew when the rest of the train was out of sight."

"You can't be expected to think of everything," I told him.

"It's about time we was winnin' a fight," Torchy growls. "First they wreck the Deep Gulch Bridge. Next Bulldozer is dumped into the creek. And now they've put most of our equipment into the sea."

"We'll get a diver," I suggest.

"Diver—hell," he explodes. "That equipment ain't worth bringin' up. There was twelve-ton stones fallin' on most of it. We won't be able to build trestle over the spot; we'll have to construct a shoo-fly around it. No-Shirt, I ain't got the heart to break the news to Marta Latimer, but you're as good as busted right now. If you spend another dollar you'll be throwin' good money after bad, because the storms will wipe out everything you do."

"It looks that way, but to repeat a remark you made when I was feelin' low about Bulldozer: 'We've got a jetty to build.'"

"I get you," Torchy says, "you either want to clean up big or go broke. You're no penny-ante contractor. That's all right with me. I've saved up a little money and if Jerry here wants to sell his stock, I'll buy it." We both look at Jerry Brown.

Jerry shakes his head. "I stand to win or lose more'n any of you. I am hanging onto my stock," he says.

I feel kinda sorry for Jerry right then. If he don't answer real quick, he's sunk.

CHAPTER V

ON QUEER STREET

WE GO back to the jetty on a speeder. I'm thinkin' maybe the financial loss will be money well spent if it makes somethin' out of Jerry Brown. At least he didn't unload his stock when Torchy offered to buy some of it. No, I ain't kickin' about goin' broke again. I've been busted before. But no matter how Jerry turns out it won't be worth the loss of old Bulldozer.

The tide's out when we reach the end of the trestle. We can see rock, busted cars and wheels down in the clear water. One of the cars is above the surface. The rock spread itself around in a big pile.

"This'll be the widest spot on the whole jetty," Torchy says kinda grim like. "I hope it don't get into the newspapers. The bankers may get worried about the money they loaned you, No-Shirt, and that'd be tough."

"What had I better do tomorrow?" Jerry asks.

"Start drivin' trestle around the big rock pile," Torchy answers. "And hope bad weather holds off. Put on three crews and drive 'em. I'll keep gettin' the rock out, and you, No-Shirt, had better make a deal for more flat-cars. Try some of the loggin' outfits that've gone busted. You might pick up somethin' cheap."

When we get to Marta's home, she's got a hot feed waitin' for us. Somethin' tells me she's had to keep it warm in the oven too long, but just the same it hits the spot. "Want to drive me up to Seattle tomorrow?" I ask. "I'm goin' shoppin' for flat-cars."

"Yes, of course," the girl answers. "I do hope this doesn't get into the newspapers. Dad'll read about it then."

"Tell him some reporter let his imagination get away from him," I advise.

She smiles. "The most imaginative reporter couldn't describe the roar of that rock train as it ran through the forest. It must have been going sixty miles an hour when it crossed the road. Sparks

were flying from the brake-shoes and it seemed to leap down the trestle and into the sea. I'll never forget it."

None of the rest of us will for that matter. The rest of the evenin' incidents kept poppin' into our minds. When I get up the next day Jerry Brown is already on the job. He starts a crew onto the trestle.

Me and Marta don't say much on the way to Seattle. I know she's pretty sick over the setbacks, but she's too game to squawk about it. She drops me off at the hotel about one o'clock and goes on to the hospital. I buy a noon edition of the afternoon paper, set down in my room and look at the headlines. There's one that says the police are makin' war on gamblers.

That headline has been used twice a year for fifty years that I know of. Another headline says there's been a big battle in China. I look over it, knowin' the Japs will claim ten thousand Chinese was killed while they lost five hundred; and that the Chinese will claim twelve thousand Japs was killed and they lost eight hundred. I'm about to toss the paper aside when I notice another. It reads:

MADMAN WHIPS FIVE**Subdued After Struggle**

Breaking away from four policemen and a traveling guard sent to escort him to the state insane hospital, a madman beat them and would have escaped early yesterday, but for the assistance of bystanders. The maniac, a physical giant, insists that he doesn't want to wear a shirt. Again and again he muttered, "no shirt."

There was some more to the article, but I hardly remember what it is. The mention of the words, no shirt, makes me feel funny in the stomach for some reason. There's a small line sayin' his picture is on page 5.

I turn to page 5 and my blood runs cold. The man looks like Bulldozer Craig. Then suddenly I say, "My God! It is Bulldozer." His face is thin, and he looks as if he'd been through hell, but it's Bull-

dozer. For some reason I feel like blubberin'.

While I'm still tryin' to get a hold of myself the telephone rings and a voice says, "Mr. McGee, this is Mr. Renfro at the bank. May I see you sometime before three o'clock?"

"I'm mighty sorry, Mr. Renfro, I've got something pretty important to tend to. It just came up."

"Really, Mr. McGee," he says gently, but there is plenty of edge in his voice, "nothing is as important as what I have in mind. Say, two-thirty o'clock, shall we?"

"Ten o'clock tomorrow mornin', Mr. Renfro," I insist.

"I shall expect you at two-thirty," he says, and hangs up.

"The hell with you," I growl into the dead phone. I grab my hat, go out and rent a for-hire car. This is goin' to cost me plenty, but it can't be helped.

"Take me to the state hospital," I tell the driver. "Yes, I know it isn't in the city. And that it's a long ways off, but get me there quicker'n hell can skin a liver. Here's part of your money in advance."

"It's all of it," he says.

TWO hours and three state highway patrolman later I'm standin' in the medical superintendent's office at the state hospital. "He's John Doe on the records," I tell him, "but his real name is Bulldozer Craig. The poor devil kept calling No-Shirt. That's my nickname and everybody thought that he was complainin' about wearin' a shirt. That's what gets under my hide—him tryin' to reach me, and nobody understandin' him."

"We'll see what can be done."

In a few minutes the attendant in charge of Bulldozer's ward comes for me. He takes me down a little hall, unlocks a door and tells me to go in. There's sixty or seventy mental cases movin' around the ward, or settin' on heavy benches just starin' at nothin'. I look into one man's eyes. They're vacant.

Several patients are pullin' some kind of heavy floor polishers. They're blocks of wood, covered with pieces of blanket. One or two men pull on a rope fastened to the handle. Another steers the thing with the handle. Their feet shuffle drearily.

I see a man squattin' on his haunches and whenever a fly goes past he grabs it out of the air and drops it down on the floor. He looks at me and says, "Hold on, game warden, I ain't shootin' ducks out of season."

"Okay," I answer. "But don't get more'n the limit or I'll take you in." The man is happy, at that. So're most of 'em, queer as it may seem.

The attendant stops before a cell-like room and opens the door. Bulldozer is settin' on the edge of a bed. They've got his hands in a heavy leather muff. A belt keeps him from strikin' out with the muff. "He's a violent case," the attendant says. "We have to restrain him from hurting himself or others."

I take a deep breath and say, "Hello, Bulldozer, old-timer. How are you?"

He looks at me a long time and I feel sick. He don't know me. "No no no no shirt," he says. He stutters and the words come out as if it was hard for him to make his brain telegraph 'em to his lips.

"I'm No-Shirt," I tell him. "You remember me, No-Shirt McGee. I'm your pardner."

His eyes are vacant. He mutters "No no no no shirt." I set down and try and talk to him. It don't do no good. I mention tractors, bulldozers, the tin mine, old friends and it don't do no good.

"I saw a man who licked you the other day. His name is Torchy O'Leary," I tell him. "He says he can lick you any day in the week."

The attendant says, "I'm afraid it won't do any good, Mr. McGee. He is in a fog."

I step closer. There's a scar on his head—an ugly one, like you see on wounds that healed themselves without any attention. "Isn't there anything I can do?" I yell. My voice is strained. I don't recognize it.

"Not at present," the attendant says. "What's the history of the case?" I ask him. "He was thrown from a speeder and landed maybe on his head in a pool, or on a log or rock. That's all we know."

"We know little more," the attendant said. "He was found on a highway in bad shape. His clothing was covered with devil's club thorns and carried bits of clay, black swamp muck, red soil, loam and . . . well, he had covered a lot of country. There was no way of telling what he had eaten."

"It's been weeks," I tell him. "I'd say he was thirty pounds under weight. Now what had I better do?"

"If you can arrange for his care in a private hospital," the man suggested, "special attention could be given his case and recovery possibly hastened."

"You think he'll get well soon?" I ask.

"I'm not a doctor, Mr. McGee, so I can't speak with authority, but I've been in this work a long time. Some patients improve rapidly, others remain the same," he answers.

I leave the hospital determined to get old Bulldozer back on his feet again as soon as possible and to hell with the cost. By nine o'clock that night I've made a deal to have him transferred. I turn in, but don't sleep much. At eleven o'clock there comes a call from Marta. She's just heard about Bulldozer. I tell her what's been done and ask her to drop around and see Bulldozer as he should be in the private hospital late the followin' afternoon.

THE next mornin' I remember the ten o'clock date with the banker. At eight-thirty there's a knock on my door and Pete Clayton is standin' there. I'm ready to murder him, but now ain't the time nor place.

I get a hold on myself and say, "Come in, Clayton. A lot of water has run under the bridge since I last saw you. You heard about Bulldozer Craig, of course. Chances are you knowed it was him they'd picked up, but didn't send word to me . . ."

He looks in the bathroom to make sure

I haven't anybody cached there listenin' in. Then he comes back. "You've run into a lot of hard luck, McGee," he says roughly.

"You manufactured it," I answer. "It's been a dirty fight. Don't deny you haven't been back of it. I've been on the frontier too long not to read the signs when I see 'em. Sure, I haven't a thing on you, can't prove you wrecked the Deep Gulch bridge, nearly murdered Bulldozer and wrecked a trainload of stone. I can't prove it, but I know you're back of it."

"Through talkin'?" he asks.

"Yeah," I answer.

"I'd have given you fifty thousand dollars for your interest when I was here before," he says. "I know the bank is crowdin' you. That wreck scared 'em, and they want to get out from in under. I know you've put up every share of stock you own to carry on the work. And I know it's goin' to take time and money to straighten out Craig. Here's a check for ten thousand dollars. I'll get the whole works in a few months, but I'm in a hurry to carry out certain plans. It's worth ten thousand to get a toehold right now."

"No dice," I answer.

"Huh?" he sneers. "And you're supposed to be loyal to Craig. You won't make sure of his gettin' proper care because it means a sacrifice—"

"Shut up, Clayton," I tell him. "Bulldozer can have everything I've got if it'll help. But if he gets his senses back and finds out I've sold out to you, he'll never forgive me. I'm stringin' with Jerry Brown, Marta Latimer and—Bulldozer Craig."

"Your bullheadedness, McGee, is going to cost both of us money," he says. And when he leaves the room he's fightin' mad.

Well, he's got nothin' on me. He's big, powerfully built and young, and he could murder me in a rough and tumble fight, but he'll never know how near I come to lightin' into him. In fact I'm scared stiff when I think about it.

I put on my best bib and tucker and head for the bank. Mr. Renfro greets me with a icy stare when I show up. It's ex-

actly ten o'clock. "I am afraid you are too late, Mr. McGee," he says, "the appointment was yesterday afternoon."

"I'm sorry," I says, "but I couldn't get here until now. But if I'm too late, I'm too late." So with that I turn around and start for the door.

"Just a moment," he says, "I wish to serve certain papers on you." He acts like he's holdin' the whip hand. "Yesterday we would have given you time to put up additional collateral—"

"Now you get this," I snort, knowin' tears never moved a banker, "you've got a vault full of bum local improvement bonds and whatnot. You won't cash in on 'em for years, if ever. My security for the loan is somethin' you can go out and sell for a hundred and twenty cents on the dollar. Now if you want to do that, hop to it, but you'll have a sweet damage suit on your hands. Why don't you come out in the open and admit Pete Clayton is puttin' the pressure on?"

SOMETIMES when us McGees get mad, we raise our voices. But this ain't one of 'em. If you insult a man in a low tone of voice he'll sometimes take it and profit by the insult. Where if you proclaim it to the world, his pride's hurt and he hits back.

Mr. Renfro gets red, but that's all. He thinks I'm a curly wolf, snarlin' back, with plenty of dust in the poke to back up my words. He don't know I'm a cornered coyote.

"We'll have some other little accidents," I conclude, "and lose a few dollars worth of equipment before the job's done. But whenever you get worried call me in and I'll pay you off in full. All I need is twenty-four hours' notice. And one more thing, the McGee Construction Company will probably have a bigger balance with you a year from now than Tanner-Clayton."

My legs don't cave in on me until I get back to the hotel, then they're like putty. I dang near have a cold chill. It's the biggest bluff I ever run. Whenever the

telephone rings I nearly jump out of my skin; I'm sure it's Renfro lettin' me know he's callin'. And me with my pants down.

The next day Marta calls me up and wants to know when I'll be goin' back to the job. "Any time you say," I tell her.

"Suppose I pick you up tomorrow mornin'. We'll pay a visit to Bulldozer and drive down in the afternoon?" she says.

"Fine!" I tell her.

"Look at the stock market report," she says just before hangin' up. "Tanner-Clayton is up a dollar a share."

Well, I open the paper to the little column listin' local stocks and sure enough it's gone up. Evidently the smart money lads figger it's a cinch we'll go busted and Tanner-Clayton will take over everything. Late that afternoon a rumor gets around the gov'ment's goin' to cancel our contract.

When Marta picks me up the next mornin' she stops in front of a stock broker's office. "Run in and get the latest quotation on Tanner-Clayton," she says, "while I drive around the block."

A brisk young feller is just chalkin' up a new figger when I reach the board. The stock's jumped another dollar. That has a greater effect on me than Pete Clayton's big talk, and Renfro's threats to close us out. It suggests somethin' is goin' on behind the scenes that we don't know nothin' about.

When, I tell Marta, she's serious, too. But neither of us talks about it, because we don't want to worry each other. She drives out to the private hospital where they're keepin' Bulldozer. We both go in and pretty soon they bring him down to the reception room.

He ain't wearin' the big leather muffs, but I notice two burly attendants are with him—one on each side, ready to grab his arms in case he gets rough. "Rest up, Bulldozer," I say, "and then come back to the job. You're lookin' fine."

He looks at me in that blank way and says, "No no no no shirt." And that's all he says. I hear Marta turn quick, and leave the room. I follow her out. She

breaks down and cries all over my shoulder. It's pretty tough on both of us to see old Bulldozer actin' as if his address would be on Queer Street for a long time to come.

CHAPTER VI

STORM SIGNALS FLYING

JERRY BROWN is burnin' the midnight oil when we arrive at the jetty. We can hear the bangin' of the pile-driver hammer and see the ghostly forms of men movin' around in the floodlights. It don't seem real.

Jerry sees our headlights and comes off the trestle on a speeder to meet us. "Any grief in Seattle?" he asks.

We tell him about Bulldozer. He's glad he's alive, but looks pretty glum when he hears he is on Queer Street. It's evident he'd hoped Bulldozer would pull hisself together and get us out of the jam.

"And what's the grief down here," we ask, "if any?"

"Torchy O'Leary left this mornin' suddenly," he answers. "Word came that his hardrock crew had quit their jobs. Most of them have worked under him for years, but Clayton planted troublemakers in the crew and convinced the boys we were going broke and they wouldn't get their pay. I've never known any one who can throw as many punches as Pete Clayton."

"Dad warned us, remember?" Marta said. "He said we can expect a little of everything."

"Well, I'm goin' to bed," I tell 'em. If I didn't have somethin' new to worry about every night I wouldn't sleep well.

The next mornin', when I go out onto the trestle and look at the crew, I can see a difference. They're afraid a sudden storm may come up and catch 'em out there. Every man amongst 'em feels he's playin' tag with the undertaker. Those big swells come rollin' in, lick at the trestle, and move on. But at high tide a real big one could sweep over the whole works and carry off any man who wasn't pretty well lashed.

They're workin' with one eye and watchin' the sea with the other and it's cuttin' down their efficiency.

"If they was wise," one of 'em said, meanin' the McGee Construction Company, "they'd make the best possible deal with the government and knock off for a year. Sure, they'd go broke, but at least us men would be sure of our pay as long as we work. As it is now, if a storm comes along and wipes out the trestle, we'll be holdin' the sack. Anybody can see they can't finish before the big storms. Anybody knows no trestle will stand up again' a northwester."

He's talkin to me and my mind goes back to the day when I mentioned somethin' along the same line to Bulldozer. He just grinned and said, "I've got that figured out, too, if worse comes to worse and we have to work this winter."

A week passes before we hear anything from Torchy O'Leary, then a train load of stone comes rumblin' out of the timber and rolls onto the trestle. It crawls around the shoo-fly built around the heap of stone and equipment that marks the spot of the wreck, then inches its way onto the trestle. A shovel crew commences dumpin' the rock into the sea.

Jerry Brown comes into the room. He's dog tired and he flops into a chair near the stove. Marta is settin' at her desk, writin' out pay checks on a bank account that's vanishin' like sand in a wind storm. There's a pot of hot coffee on the stove and it smells good. A cook is fryin' somethin' out in the kitchen.

"We're dumping stone again, Marta," Jerry says. "If bad weather holds off and we keep two jumps ahead of it we may convince the government we are entitled to a little something on account. Have you figured how much the wrecks have cost us?"

"Repairing the Deep Gulch bridge," Marta answered, "plus the value of the rock and equipment that went off the end of the trestle runs the loss up to about sixty thousand dollars. And that doesn't approach the real loss—the delay in time,

the value of Bulldozer's services and his personal damage."

"No," I agree, "it don't. Bulldozer had it all figgered out to beat the sea one way or another."

"If we were sure we could beat the game," Jerry says, "I know a way of collecting that loss—and then some."

"How?" Me and Marta both ask.

"Sell Tanner-Clayton stock short," he answers. "It's goin' to drop plenty as soon as the smart money lads believe we are going to make the grade. The high price is based solely on the market's conviction that we will fail and that Tanner-Clayton will take over Latimer-Brown and then force the Tremont Logging company to sell out on their own terms."

"But where in the devil are we goin' to raise the money?" I ask.

"That is what I want to know," Marta chimes in. "Any loose change we have is needed to keep the jetty job going."

"I sure wish old Bulldozer was back on the job," I moan. "He had some kind of a short cut or somethin' in mind."

WE GO ahead, week after week, gettin' touches of nasty weather, but pushin' the trestle toward the old wreck. I chase up to Seattle to see Bulldozer whenever I get the chance, but I can't see any mental change. He's still tryin' to say something to No-Shirt. Physically he's his old self. They've given him the right kind of grub and he's filled out. He likes to work, so they let him dig around in the back yard, buildin' a rockery.

When we get another stretch of bad weather I decide to spend two or three days with Bulldozer. "Just what is the trouble now, Doc?" I ask. "Does he need a head operation, or—what?"

"It is difficult to explain, Mr. McGee. We'll take a Forest Service telephone line, for example. Grounding of the wire hampers communication, lessens the effectiveness. All the physical properties for normal operation are there, but a foreign element intrudes and we have partial and sometimes complete failure."

"Have you cleared up Bulldozer's grounded wires?" I ask.

"X-ray photographs show the clot on the brain, caused when his head struck a rock or something, has dissolved," the doctor answers. "But we can't seem to arouse him. He is like a man in deep slumber—I might say a drugged man. We can't awaken him. We may never awaken him. I feel I should be frank with you."

"I suppose you think I'm crazy. Bulldozer has always been a man of action. Fightin' nature, fightin' other men," I explain. "Do you suppose if he was tossed into a fight of some kind, he'd snap out of it? Or am I nuts?"

"Not at all," the doctor says, "sometimes a little thing will straighten a man out and start him on the right track again—a familiar face, or situation; a critical problem in which he must make a sudden effort to save his life, or—"

"Doc," I interrupt, "lemme take Bulldozer down on the job. Is he violent any more?"

"Not since his head pains ceased," he answers. "If you'll remember, during the violent period he was constantly putting his hands to his head, as if it were about to burst. When his hands were in restraint, he would rub his head against the leather muff and groan. That is over with, definitely. I think you might take him, accompanied, of course, by two guards. They would remain in the background, but would be available, instantly, should something go wrong."

"By golly, let's try it," I insist.

Ridin' with Bulldozer down to the jetty is like ridin' with a stranger. Even worse because strangers will talk and try to get acquainted. They'll meet you half way. Bulldozer says nothin' and mighty little of that.

Even Marta don't interest him, and he'd fell for her like a ton o' brick the first time he laid eyes on her. She might have been one of them clothes horses in a department-store window. When we get there we transfer to a speeder and go out front to the end of the trestle.

It's the first time I've been out there since the trestle's got so long. You can see the green waves leapin' at you. They go smoothly under the trestle, makin' a suckin' and gurglin' sound as they eddy around the piles. I look back to shore and see smoke comin' from the bunkhouse and shops and I suddenly realize they're on safe, solid ground, while I'm on a few timbers stuck in the ground. It makes a man feel lonely and . . . well, kinda afraid inside. I feel like the odds was all again' me. And that's the truth, too.

I take Bulldozer to the shovel that's movin' over a string of cars dumpin' rock into the sea. I'm holdin' my breath as I watch him. The man handles the shovel kinda awkward and not with the sureness Bulldozer always shows when he gets hold of anything with tractors under it. I'm expectin', yes prayin', he'll get up there and take over the shovel.

BUT nothin' happens. The shovel don't interest Bulldozer. He just stares at the sea, like it's somethin' he's seen before somewheres, but he can't just remember when or where. He looks at the stubs of masts stickin' up out of the wreck and scratches his head. He seems to be thinkin'. "What do you make of it, Bulldozer?" I ask. It seems like there's a faint light burnin' in his eyes.

"No no no no shirt," he mutters. "I—I . . ." Then the light fades from his eyes and when he looks at the sea again the wreck don't mean nothin'.

I stay on the job twelve hours a day and I keep Bulldozer with me. Sometimes we're at the quarry; sometimes on the train, and a lot of time on the jetty. If anything develops that's liable to stir up his interest, I want him to be around. Early in the second week we let him wander about to suit himself. That means me and the guards trail him.

He goes down to the jetty a lot, and sometimes the train has to stop and let him get aboard to keep from knockin' him off'n the trestle. That wreck means somethin' to him.

In the midst of all this the gov'ment engineer comes down, talks to the inspectors on the job, then goes into a huddle with me, Jerry and Marta. He don't say so, but we know pressure is bein' put on him to order the contract forfeited.

"I don't see a chance in the world of your completing the contract," he says finally. "We are into the stormy season now and the sea will take out trestle as fast as you build it."

"Then we'll keep on building it," Jerry says. It's surprisin' spirit for him to show and I see Marta give him a quick look. She's pleased. "Give us time and we'll pull out of the hole."

The engineer shakes his head and says, "I like you people personally. You saw disaster ahead of you and you didn't hunt cover as so many would have done—saved what you could from the wreckage. You kept on driving ahead. With Craig on the job to take advantage of the shortcuts, I'm not sure but what you would have finished the contract and made a little money. But . . ."

"The weather has given us a break," Jerry says, "maybe it will continue to do so. Perhaps we'll have a mild winter and—"

"I'd like to believe that," the engineer interrupts, "but weather statistics show otherwise."

"And you engineers are hell for statistics," Jerry growls. "I'm not complainin'. If you didn't go into them you would meet with no end of grief. Will you do this, if you can do so in fairness to yourself, will you proceed with the foreclosure measures in a leisurely manner?"

"I'll think about that," the engineer says, and there is a twinkle in his eyes. "I'll want to consider all angles before I initiate canceling contract measures. It would never do to jump at a conclusion."

We breathe easier after he's gone. Maybe good weather will hold out. Twenty-four hours after he leaves, the weather-bureau boys telephone that Alaska is sendin' down a man-sized storm.

Jerry goes down to the bunkhouse and

posts a notice to get all loose equipment off'n the jetty and trestle. When that's done, the notice explains, they can knock off for three or four days.

The way they got that equipment to a safe place, then changed into their best clothes would open your eyes. In almost no time their cars was roarin' over the highway to the nearest big towns. I couldn't blame 'em. When a man flirts with death all day long he's entitled to let down his hair when he has time to hisself. Them tough babies would raise hell and put a block under it before they got back.

"I only hope Torchy's hardrock men don't join them," Marta says, "because the two outfits are liable to stage a free-for-all."

WWE SETTLE down around the stove when the storm hits. The wind rocks the house and rain rattles so hard against the windows I think it's hail at first. None of us say much as the boom of the surf on the jetty gets louder and louder. We know we're goin' to lose some trestle before it's over with.

Bulldozer stares at the window and says nothin'. "Bulldozer," Jerry says, hopin' to arouse him, "if you'd just tell us how you intended to build jetty during bad weather, we could sell Tanner-Clayton stock short and make some pin money."

Bulldozer looks at him, blank at first, then interested.

"Pin money?" Bulldozer says. "What's pin money?"

Marta almost jumps out of her skin. It's the first intelligent question he's asked in weeks. The wind screamin' and moanin' around the house, the roar of the storm and the danger we can feel in the very air seems to do somethin' to the big cuss.

"Pin money," Marta says, and for a moment she can't seem to straighten her thoughts out enough to answer, "is small change. If you had five dollars, the nickels would be pin money."

"Pin money!" Bulldozer says it over and over again. Then he mutters "no no

no no shirt," and goes back into a daze. When he's like that the words he wants to use won't come and he just stutters.

"Bulldozer," Marta says sharply, "do you realize if this storm wipes out our trestle, we won't even have pin money?"

She says it three or four times, then a faint light comes into his eyes. "We'll go broke, Bulldozer. Lose our shirts. Understand? We'll lose our shirts."

Jerry and me lean forward, studyin' his face. We think we see a change, but we're afraid to say anything about it, each thinkin' our opinion is caused by hope.

"No no no no shirt," he says, "sky sky line. I . . . I . . . can't wake up. I . . . I . . ." Then he drops his head into his arms and sobs.

Marta drops to her knees beside him and pulls his head to her shoulder. She talks in a low, soothin' tone, tryin' to calm him. The guards come in from the next room, standin' there, ready to give us help if it's needed.

I'm all choked up inside. It's as if Bulldozer has knowed his condition right along and has tried his damndest to break free and he never can quite get away. And when you remember he never quit in a fight, it makes you hurt all the worse because you know the terrible odds he must have faced all this time.

Maybe if Marta and Bulldozer had been in love with each other a long time she could have helped him break loose. As it was she just calmed him. But I'm here to tell you it was all mighty eerie, with a big man tryin' to cross the border of insanity, and the storm screamin' around the house, the rattle of rain, the boom of surf and them two guards standin' like shadows in the background.

After awhile the guards say, "Come on, Bulldozer, let's turn in. We're all tired."

Bulldozer gets up like a child and follows 'em into the wing that's been their quarters since they came. The rest of us turn in and sleep fitfully.

Then, sometime in the small hours, one of the guards yells, "Everybody up. Bulldozer's gone."

CHAPTER VII

OUT FRONT TO THE RESCUE

I DRESS in record time and hurry into the wing. "How'd Bulldozer get away?" I ask one of the guards.

"Search me," he answers. "He's slept sound every night, and even when he turned over in his sleep we woke up instantly. We're trained to wake up when a patient is restless. Maybe it was the storm that muffled his movements. I never heard a thing. I woke up just now, checked and he was gone."

We break out some five-cell flashlights, which same are young searchlights on a black, stormy night. We get into oilskins and sou'westers and step outside.

Right off'n the bat I spot Bulldozer's bootprint in the mud. It's on a little rise of ground where there's no chance of water drainin' into it, yet it's half filled with water. That means he's been gone some time.

"What do you make of it?" Marta asks.

"He's headed for the jetty," I answer. "Do you know, I think he's had the jetty on his mind right along. He seemed almost his old self when he was out there once. There was more light in his eyes. Now maybe this storm made some kind of a dent on his subconscious mind and he thinks he'd better do somethin' about the jetty."

"It's all pretty deep to me," Marta answers, "but I've read of people who were subconsciously guided in an emergency. I know this much, the storm has had its effect on me. I can't explain just what it does to me, but I feel different."

A squall staggers us and a deluge of rain falls on our shoulders and bent backs. I move slow, pickin' up his tracks here and there. They lead onto the jetty, and they don't come back. Me, Marta and Jerry huddle together behind a buildin'.

"If he's out there," Jerry says, "he's a goner. The wind will blow a man right off of the trestle. And if the wind didn't get a man, the sea would. Spray's going

clear over it. There's a dozen rails in the scrap dump that the sea twisted into pretzels."

"I'm goin' out," I tell him. "If I can't walk I can crawl. And one thing's sure—the wind can't blow out a flashlight. I've got sharp calks in my boots. I can dig in and hang on."

"No, you can't," Jerry argues. "Besides, you might slip on the ties and fall between 'em." I can see by the reflection of my light his face is pale when it should've been ruddy. Marta is watchin' him. She knows he's arrived at another crossroads and she's wonderin' if he's goin' to take the wrong turn again.

There's another angle that comes to me. The storm will wear a man down from the effort of pushin' into it. Then when he weakens and relaxes for a minute, it'll get him.

"We'd better take the speeder," I tell him. "It won't fall between the ties, and it can take the brunt while we save our stren'th."

"No-Shirt, we haven't a chance," he yells at me.

"Me and the guards will go," I tell him. The guards are still prowlin' around, but I know they'll go along when the time comes.

"The speeder will blow off. That happened two years ago. Three men were lost," Jerry warns me. "I've been going over the old records."

There're several short lengths of railroad iron. I pile 'em up on the speeder's footboards and lash 'em with wire. I lash a tarp over the motor cowl to keep water from getting in. If the spark plugs get wet, we're stuck. There's a good headlight on the speeder and I turn it on. I take several coils of rope along, then I yell at the guards.

While they're comin' I talk like a Dutch uncle to Jerry. "You once said you wished you'd find yourself in a spot where you'd have to fight or go under. It's out there on the trestle. You might be surprised at the stuff you've got in you if you gave it a chance to develop."

He starts for the speeder, but his legs are like lead. He stops. "I wish somebody would knock me in the head and toss me aboard," he snarls. It's queer what a man needs inside of him to make him do certain things.

"Nobody's goin' to crook a little finger to get you on," I tell him. The guards come, and I start, leavin' him standin' there. We've gone a hundred feet when I hear him comin', his calks bitin' into the wet ties. He lands on the back of the speeder and I don't even look around.

I CRAWL along, lookin' for Bulldozer. He may be crawlin' back for all we know. We pass clear of the protectin' bluffs and onto the jetty. Waves are pilin' up, and spray's goin' across it in solid sheets. I lick my lips and taste the salt. It gets into my eyes and stings 'em. The torrents of rain wash away the salt taste. Ahead we can hear a deeper boom and the groan of timbers under a heavy strain. Somethin' cracks like the report of a gun and I turn the flashlight onto the sea below. A pile is driftin' away.

"Get ready to jump, boys," I tell 'em, "if you feel the world droppin' away under your tails."

Jerry Brown starts to get off—play safe—then he changes his mind. He's makin' hisself go through with it. Maybe it's imagination, but it seems as if the trestle sags when we pass over the weak spot. I wonder if the rails will be spannin' a gap when we come back, or will be gone altogether.

Near the end of the trestle I suddenly jam on the brake. One rail's gone, and the other is saggin' on a stringer. I can't tell whether the rail's holdin' up the stringer, or the stringer supportin' the rail. The crests of big waves are just lickin' the stringer as they pass. In the bright light I can see the feathery water fallin' back from the crest of each wave. A few rods beyond, they break.

I move the speeder light up and down, pickin' out the wrecked part of the trestle and tryin' to see what's beyond. Jerry's

eyes are better'n mine. "Hey!" he yells. "Give me that!"

He takes hold of the light and shifts it. The longer finger stabs through the darkness and seems to tremble. We can see the rain slantin' through it.

"There's somebody," Jerry says, "sprawled out on the track."

"It's Bulldozer!" I yell.

The wind whips the words out of my mouth, the next wave breaks again' the trestle and all we can see is spray ahead. It blots out everything and leaves the salt water spillin' from the trestle in cascades. Bulldozer is still there. But the wave shifted his body some. "It looks like he fell down, Jerry," I said.

"We've got to get him," Jerry says. "I don't know how, but we've got to. There comes another of those hellish waves."

We can see a white line comin' out of the night. It smothers everything and thunders on.

"What's the tide doin'?" I ask Jerry.

"It's getting higher," he answers. He's pale and his face is wet from spray and rain. He's fightin' a battle inside of him as he looks through the night at Bulldozer. Another wave comes and he yells out, like he was in pain. He gazes intently at the water spillin' between the ties. Bulldozer's shifted again.

"The next one will take him," he yells. His voice ain't natural. There's a wild note in it. He looks at the sea, waits for another wave to go by, then he starts crawlin' along that saggin' rail.

He stops when he sees he can't make it, wraps arms and legs around the rail and let's the foaming crest of a passin' wave pluck at him. The instant it's gone, he continues the scramble. He makes it across just as the next wave hits. When the spray's out of the air we can see he's reached Bulldozer and is lashin' him to the rail.

Fifteen minutes pass before there's any more movement. Two green waves sweep over them. They break just before they hit our section of the trestle and we get a deluge of spray and water. Bulldozer is

movin' about, crawlin' toward us on his hands and knees. He ain't savin' hisself, he's just doin' as he's told. And Jerry's tellin' him to wrap his arms and legs around that stringer and rail and inch his way across.

We hold our breath when a wave breaks a hundred feet off. It smashes over all of us and when I look, Jerry's all that's left. He's yellin' somethin', then I see he's holdin' a line snubbed around a rail and Bulldozer's danglin' from the end of it. The big cuss gets a hand on the rail and that's all he needs. He hauls his body, with the extra weight of water, to the stringer and keeps on crawlin'. Me and one of the guards pull him to safety. The other guard gives Jerry a hand.

"It was a damned good thing you had a rope on Bulldozer," I said, "or he'd have been a goner."

"I lashed him before we started," he answers. "I keep slack in the line until I saw a wave coming, then I snubbed the line and hung on."

"You've got plenty of head, son, and plenty of nerve," I tell him. He stares at me, and doggoned it's only then he realizes what he's done. In a real showdown, the man inside of him took command. And that man was all wool and a yard wide.

"I've hit my pace," Jerry mutters. And he's talkin' to hisself. In this moment there's no room for outsiders. Then the next second I can see he's scared that he won't be able to keep it up.

We're just pilin' onto the speeder when one of the guards roars a warnin'. Day's beginnin' to break now and we can see a wave comin'. It's so big it seems painted again' the slate gray sky. There's a broad band of tumblin' breakin' white. Then she hits.

A THOUSAND fingers tear at me. The water roars and pounds in my ears. My hands are clutchin' the rail, but the rest of me is flappin' around like a dish towel in a wind. My whole body's bein' pounded again' the trestle. I hold my breath until it seems my lungs must bust

and my eyes pop out of their sockets. Then the wave's gone on.

We're all together, but the speeder's off the track. Only them rails on the foot boards kept it anchored. I whirl suddenly on Bulldozer. He's been through a lot of excitement and danger. He's fought the sea and he's alive. He's marchin' along like the rest of us. Danger has made us more alert mentally, and I figger he's the same way. So I take a long chance that I hope will keep him marchin'.

"Bulldozer, we're lost! Tell us what to do." I commence to run around in circles, like I was in a panic. You can't do much runnin' on a trestle. "You've got to save us, Bulldozer."

"What the hell's the matter here?" he says thickly.

"The speeder's off'n the track," I moan. "We'll all be washed off the trestle."

"Get her on the track, you fools," he roars. He grabs a hold and starts heavin'. The rest of us join in. With them rails on the footboard it makes it doubly hard, but there ain't time to take 'em off.

I look at a guard. "He's out of it," he says in my ear. "It is a type of hysteria, but he's shook it off."

Bulldozer gets the motor goin', and we move toward land. The motor splutters a lot and sometimes the speeder almost stops, then it catches again and we limp along. There's a lone figure standin' in the rain as we rumble onto a sidin'. Marta's seen the last of it—the wave that moved the speeder off'n the track, the fight to get it back on again. And she's got an idear of what prob'ly happened in the darkness. The first man she looks at is Jerry. Then she looks at Bulldozer.

I jump off'n the speeder and join her. "Get into the house quick, yank the calendar off'n the wall and hide the newspapers. I don't want Bulldozer to know how many weeks he's missed. I've got a theory on what happened to him tonight. It's somethin' about the jetty bein' on his mind all the time, but I'll tell you about it later."

She streaks it into the house. And when

we come in there're no papers around. Bulldozer drops into a chair. "Damned cold for this time of the year," he says. "How can we build a jetty if they toss storms at us the tailend of summer?"

"Just a little hard luck," I tell him. "Let's turn in and get some sleep. We'll have damage to repair and plenty of night work when the blow is over."

Bulldozer turns in, but I don't. I'm too excited and uncertain over the future. Will he be his old self when he wakes up, or will he slip back during his sleep? Maybe I should go in right now, wake him up, and make him explain why he played with a toy jetty months ago, and what his plan is to beat the storms. If he slips back he'll forget it. But I decide to let him sleep. Marta and the others go around on their tiptoes and the hours drag.

About three o'clock Bulldozer comes into the kitchen and asks for a cup of coffee. While Marta is getting it, he turns on the radio and the first thing we hear is, "What a punt! McAdams standing on his own goal-line kicked that ball eighty yards . . ."

"What the hell!" Bulldozer roars. "They don't play football in late summer. Hey, No-Shirt. Did I go on a bat! Wait, I'm gettin' it now. I was ridin' the speeder through the night, and it struck somethin' just as I was crossin' a bridge. I remember goin' through the air, then a roar—"

He jumps to the window and looks at the trestle. "That's been pushed way out. It's taken weeks, months to do that. It's—No-Shirt, come clean. What happened?"

So I come clean and tell him everything. He keeps noddin' his head. "I must've been close to snappin' out of it several times," he says, "I thought I was kinda dreamin'. I kept tryin' to say No-Shirt, but couldn't seem to get it out. And I was worried about the jetty. Somethin' was wrong and we couldn't seem to build it. I kept thinkin' we'd lose everything and Clayton would clean up."

"And that was on your mind last night," I explain, "and you snuck out there to see what you could do to save the jetty.

The roarin' storm and the sense of responsibility stirred you. It's a wonder you wasn't killed. You must've had a bad fall because there's a cut on your forehead and when we first saw you you was lyin' between the rails."

"Let's go out and have a look at things," he says, "then tell me how we're gettin' along with the gov'ment and that bum, Torchy O'Leary."

CHAPTER VIII

TIGER FIGHT

THE storm is easin' up and we ride out on the speeder and look at the damndest mess you ever saw. The sea has made free with our trestle and track and some of them steel rails look like a Vassar daisy chain.

"Tomorrow Pete Clayton's stock makes another jump," Jerry says. "If we could be sure we'll pull out of this we could clean up big by selling the stock short."

"Then hop to it," Bulldozer says. "It's in the bag—I think. We'll hock our shirts and when it's all over we'll be in the money or else walk off'n the job naked from the waist up. Now here's my plan." He talks like a Dutch uncle to us for ten minutes, with much pointin' at the water and the jetty.

"You always was a gambler," I say, shakin' my head.

"By golly, I'm going to gamble on his gamble," Jerry says.

After he'd gone Bulldozer turns to me. "What in thunder happened to him? The last thing I knowed he was as yellow as a new borned chicken and didn't have no get up and get."

"And that wasn't all," I think to myself, "you figgered he was all that stood between you and Marta Latimer." But aloud I say, "You started makin' him over and the job was finished last night when he shinned across that stringer and rail and took care of you. That's when he found hisself."

All of us get into Marta's car that afternoon and drive to Seattle. The next

mornin' I hock what stocks and bonds I've got left and turn the money over to Jerry. In the meantime him and Marta's done the same.

While we'd been drivin' to Seattle a newspaper photographer had been drivin' to the jetty to get pictures of the wrecked trestle. There was a story with 'em in the paper tellin' about the storm's might. And what that done to Clayton's stock would surprise you.

It jumped three dollars because the smart boys figgered we was all through. Then it was Jerry moves in and sells it short. I liked to died laughin' when I learn Clayton's the lad who bought. You get the situation, don't you? Jerry's sold stock he ain't got on hand to deliver. He's got to buy it and turn it over to Clayton. Now if Clayton and all the small fry that's in with him hang onto their stock, it's goin' to be hard to find.

Brother Renfro at the bank has saved a few honest dollars and he's bought Clayton stock on the side. It looks mighty good to him. Before we go back we drop in on Jeff Latimer.

The old boy breaks into a smile. "Things are better at last, Marta," he says. "I can tell looking at you. Oh, you always smiled when you came here, but that was the trouble—you smiled too much. Are you goin' to lick 'em now?"

"To a frazzle," Marta answers.

THE day after we get back to the jetty, the gov'ment engineer shows up. With him are Tanner and Clayton. Renfro gets out of his car a few minutes later. Maybe he figgered it would look too raw if he come with 'em.

Bulldozer is all for destroyin' Pete Clayton, but I calm him down. Clayton studies Bulldozer curiously as we join the party. He can see the big cuss is hisself again, and he's got plenty of respect for Bulldozer's cleverness in his own line.

"The Tanner-Clayton people claim you have abandoned the work," the engineer tells us, "and have offered to continue at the price you bid. We are here to survey

the situation. And there will be no unpleasantness, of course. I understand there is bitterness between you."

"Well, you might call it a funny taste," Bulldozer says, "but it ain't bitter yet. Pete Clayton ain't got the full dose jammed down his throat."

"Take it easy," I warn Bulldozer.

"It appears," the engineer said, "you have abandoned the work." He waves his hand towards the deserted trestle. "If that is true, I shall have to take action immediately."

"We haven't," I tell him. "We expect to work all winter long. We have—er—perfected a new and cheaper way of buildin' the jetty."

The engineer perks up, but he also looks doubtful, too. "Let's me and you take a walk," Bulldozer says.

They walk down the jetty a ways, with Bulldozer waxin' eloquent and the engineer shakin' his head. Fin'ly Bulldozer stops dead in his tracks. "I tell you we can handle ten-ton stones that way."

"And I say you can't," the engineer says.

"Now, listen," Bulldozer argues. And I notice he's studyin' Clayton out of the corner of his eye. "Give me a chance to prove it. Have you got a bath tub in your house?"

"Of course I have," the engineer snorts.

"Fine. I'll prove it in your own bath tub," Bulldozer promises. "And if I do, will you give us a month to prove it down here? If we don't, then we'll walk off under your terms and won't squawk."

"Very well," the engineer agrees.

"How about callin' at your house next Friday night at nine o'clock?" Bulldozer suggests. "I'll have everything with me. It won't take long."

"Very well then," the engineer says, "Friday night, nine o'clock at my home."

"I can't pack a ten-ton granite slab in my pocket," Bulldozer says as they join us, "so naturally it'll have to be done on a small scale."

That evenin' he telephones several contractors and gets a couple of floatin' pile-

drivers lined up. While he's waitin' for different parties I notice he keeps lookin' at Jerry Brown and Marta Latimer. But I feel sorry for the big guy. The weeks he could have been on the job sparkin' her he was out of his head. I know Marta got to thinkin' he was pretty special. If he lands her now he's sure got to move fast. But then, Bulldozer always was a fast mover.

The last man he calls is Torchy O'Leary. I can hear Torchy's boomin' voice. "Hell, have you snapped out of it? That's bad news. And besides that I'm out a lot of sympathy I wasted on you. Why couldn't you have stayed normal—a mental case."

"Listen you squaw's nightmare, meet me in Seattle Friday evenin' at eight o'clock and I'll buy you a drink," Bulldozer says. "Huh? Never mind what's up. Just meet me there. Huh? Sure, I know you should stay on the job. You've got that kind of a organization. The minute your back is turned things go to pieces."

Bulldozer hangs up, grinnin'. "That last crack got under his hide. He says he'll be there."

"I'm going up tomorrow," Jerry says. "I'm going to circulate rumors that new methods of handling rock will permit the McGee Construction Company to work in the worst weather. And watch Tanner-Clayton stock take a nose-dive."

FRIDAY evenin' at eight o'clock Torchy O'Leary comes into the room and Bulldozer breaks out a bottle of whisky. He sets up four water glasses and fills each half full of liquor. "Here's to the destruction of our enemies," he says.

"Just a minute," I yelp. "I can't take all this straight." I make a dive for the bathroom faucet and Jerry is at my heels. I put plenty of water in my glass. Jerry pours out half of his and adds plenty of water.

"And you call yourself a sourdough, No-Shirt," Bulldozer sneers. "There's some excuse for Jerry, though a real logger never spoils good whisky with water."

They toss off their liquor neat. I cough on mine and tears come into my eyes. It's very distressin', because Bulldozer's watchin' me.

"How about a chaser, Torchy, or can't you hardrock men take it?" Bulldozer asks.

"We can take it better'n any one-horse tractor man," Torchy says. So they chase down the first drink with a half a glass of straight whisky.

Torchy brings the palms of his hands together with a mighty report. "Hah!" he exclaims. "That's put me in fightin' trim. Let's find a war somewheres. And if we can't find one, let's go out and chase a cop. Say, how about Nellie's Hut? You was throwed out of there and that's a blot on your escutcheon."

"What's a blot on my escutcheon? It ain't anything that good soap and water and a wire brush won't wash off, is it?" Bulldozer asks.

"I think it's something them old knights used to pack around with 'em, and if it got a blot on it, they fought," Torchy says. "I wish I'd lived in them days. I'd have stormed your castle and stole your women."

"Nobody ever stole a Craig's women," Bulldozer snorts. Then he remembers. "I've got to see that gov'ment engineer at nine o'clock and you're coming along. Jerry, you're drivin' the car."

"If it's safe for me to drive," Jerry says.

"What?" Torchy and Bulldozer yell in unison. "Do you mean to say that little snort you took makes you a drunken driver. Baaaah! Let's go."

Jerry and Bulldozer set on the front seat. Me and Torchy get in the back. "Now kinda hunch down so you won't be noticed," Bulldozer orders. "Mrs. Astorbilt might be in Seattle and I don't want to be seen with the likes of you."

All of a sudden I get the idear there's purpose in everything Bulldozer's done, 'specially invitin' Torchy to go along. We drive along Sand Point Way, which is the naval air-station road, then he tells Jerry

to turn into Windermere. It's a new district on the lake. There's a bunch of new homes scattered around, and also a lot of cut-over land growed up with alders and brush.

We swing along a half dark road and all of a sudden a big car cuts in ahead of us. Jerry has to jam on the brakes sudden to keep from crashin'.

"Get down, you buzzards," Bulldozer says to me and Torchy. "Unless my guardian angel's two-timin' on me, Pete Clayton's walked into somethin'."

Six men spill out of the car and there ain't a runt in the lot. I feel in my pocket for somethin' solid to hit with, and there ain't nothin'. So I take off my shoe, which is a old sailor trick.

"Come out of there, Craig," a heavy voice orders, "and take your beatin'. And you, too, Brown."

Before Jerry has a chance to argue, two thugs jerk open the door and yank him to the pavement. Bulldozer is right after him, and me and Torchy break our necks to follow.

THEM bums ain't surprised to see me comin' out of the back seat, but Torchy's somebody they ain't expectin'. For a minute they act as hurt as a farmer's daughter who's been deceived by a drummer.

"You take the cripple," Pete Clayton says, noddin' toward me. With one shoe on and the other off it makes me limp.

A tall cuss comes at me, and I take a swipe at his face with my shoe and nearly shift his nose off'n its base. He howls and I swing again. I miss him and the shoe flies out of my hand, so I start in with my fists. It's Tanner. He's come along to see his thugs beat up Bulldozer, maybe murder him, and he's walked into a free-for all.

I swing from the knees and connect on the jaw. His knees sag, then he lets me have a wallop in the stomach that it'll take more'n a teaspoonful of soda in a cup of warm water to settle.

He tangles and I yank off his mask,

just to make sure it's Tanner. He tries to gouge out an eye, but I run the heel of my shoe—the shoe with a foot in it—down his shin bone and he moans like he was bleedin' internally.

I bust out laughin' and he wipes the laugh off'n my face with a little honest work with his knee. I find all this very annoyin' because I can't see the main event. Me and Tanner fightin' is like monkeys scatterin' dirt as the Chinese say. The tiger fight is goin' on thirty feet away.

I'm gettin' winded and my arms are heavy as lead. I put everything into four punches. The first and third miss, the second and fourth connect and Tanner goes down. He drags me down with him, but I land on top, twist around and look for Bulldozer. I don't see him, because Jerry Brown and a tame ape are indulgin' in a sluggin' match. Neither of 'em's got any science.

This is Jerry's first fight and I'm wonderin' how he'll stand up to it. His instincts will have to tell him what to do. But if he's inherited any of his old man's fight there'll be no stoppin' him.

I see a fist explode again' his eye. It knocks him flatter'n a flounder. He gets right up off'n the ground and tears into the thug. *Bang!* He gets it again. When he gets up this time the thug gets discouraged. Jerry steps inside the next blow—provin' he's learnin' the hard way—and down they go. From the howls of pain comin' from the bushes I know there's a lot of dirty work goin' on.

Right beyond them Torchy O'Leary and the biggest man in the lot are playin' a little game of their own. And it ain't ping pong. I can't see much except Torchy's broad back movin' slowly to the right, then to the left. He reminds me of a surgeon performin' an operation. And from the other cuss' howls Torchy is shreddin' his ribs.

After awhile he breaks loose and goes for a walk. He runs into alders and tumbles over brush, but anything seems better than where he's been. And all the

time he's mutterin' to hisself and moanin'. Torchy drags his knees under him and manages to get onto his feet. He stumbles toward Bulldozer who's fightin' three men.

"Keep away," Bulldozer roars, "this is a private fight." He's got two men down and is just measurin' Pete Clayton. *Smack!* He cracks Clayton square in the mouth. The big bull moose goes down so hard his head bounces. Bulldozer lands on him like a ton of brick. Clayton sets his teeth into Bulldozer's thumb.

Bulldozer groans mightily, but when he's in pain he thinks fastest. He crooked up his thumb and yanks out Clayton's gold bridge.

"I've got me a nugget charm," he pants. Then he smashes his fist again' Clayton's jaw and gets up to his feet in time to face the other two.

The three of 'em got down, one of 'em puttin' the boot to Bulldozer's ribs. "Let me at 'em!" Torchy yells.

I rap Tanner on the head with my shoe and then grab Torchy. "Keep out of it or you'll break Bulldozer's heart."

Out of the mess on the ground squirms Bulldozer. He's got a head in each hand, clutchin' 'em by the hair. He smashes 'em together once, then looks over the scene.

"I guess that's all took care of," he says. "Clayton, I knowed we'd have a hard time catchin' you dead to rights, so I told the engineer in a loud tone of voice the time I'd meet him, figgerin' you'd jump me. Well, I was right."

We get into the car and drive on to the engineer's house. He opens the door and Bulldozer says, "Get your women and children out of sight."

"You look like you'd been run through a meat-grinder, all of you," the engineer says. "I'll take your word on the success of your plan, Craig. But you've got just ten days to prove it is sound."

"That's fair enough," Bulldozer says. "Come on, boys, let's go back to the hotel and toss off a few snorts of corn."

"If you don't mind, Bulldozer," Jerry says, "I'll excuse myself. What with the

whisky I drank, and the punches I absorbed before I beat my man, I'm so dizzy, I'm liable to—"

"Bunk!" Bulldozer snorts. "Tonight you passed the tests and become a thirty-third degree he-man. All you've got to do is to cultivate a little hair on your chest. And the best way to make hair grow is to put lots of whisky underneath."

"But Bulldozer, I've got spots now."

"We'll take care of that," Bulldozer promises. "You're a blood brother and you've got to learn to drink these one-bottle sissies under the table. We're goin' to make a two-bottle man out of him, ain't we, Torchy?"

"Amen, brother!" Torchy booms.

I'm feelin' the weight of my years, and sneak out of my room when nobody's lookin'. Jerry looks like he'd fell into the hands of the Philistines.

The next mornin' when I show up in the lobby, the manager gives me a sour look. "We had to call the patrol wagon at five o'clock," is all he says.

CHAPTER IX

HAIL THE HIGH-LEAD

I DROP around to the skookum house to get my pardners out of pawn. Bulldozer and Torchy look fit as fiddles, but Jerry's eyelids are twitchin' and he looks like a stretcher case. I'm all for gettin' 'em out of town, but Jerry's finer instincts rise to the surface.

"Let's look at the price of Tanner-Clayton stock," he says.

I've got a mouse on my left eye as a result of last night's brawl. The others are much worse. None of us is fit to look at a stock broker's board so Jerry uses the telephone.

"Buy! Buy!" I hear him yell. "And cover our short sales. Then hold off until we test out Bulldozer's crazy scheme. If it works Tanner-Clayton will go still lower. We may want to buy more, then." He comes back in high glee. "Bulldozer you sure put the skids under Tanner-Clayton. You evidently impressed the en-

gineer with your plan. Anyway the timid fellows got wind of the fact and commenced to unload. That started the stampede."

"Just a minute," Bulldozer says, "I ain't got too many brains. You sold short at the high prices and are now makin' delivery at the low price. Does that commence to cover what Clayton's cost us?"

"Yes, and thirty-five or forty thousand dollars besides," he answers.

Bulldozer can hardly wait until we arrive at the jetty. He charts a small tug-boat and cruises along the shore of Lee Bay. Fin'ly he spots what he's lookin' for—a couple of fir trees that stand nearly two hundred feet high. He goes back to the jetty, picks up a tractor, cables, saws, wedges, hammers and the like, and steams back. When the tide goes out the tug strands and Bulldozer runs the tractor down a couple of gangplanks to the beach, then drives it into the forest.

He spends a couple of hours sizin' up them firs, then with me helpin' out he makes a undercut on one and starts sawin'. When the tree hits the big lug stands there with his eyes shut.

"You done a perfect job," I answer. We drop the second tree without damage, cut off the top and the branches, then hook a cable onto it. We snake it out of the woods to the beach, then go back and bring out the other. The next day we finish the trimmin' job, get the logs into the water and tow 'em to the jetty. There's a couple of tugs anchored in the bay with pile-drivers they've towed in. The water's flat for a change and Bulldozer boards one of the tugs and cruises around off'n the old wreck. Every once in awhile he drops a buoy. The tugs tow the drivers out to the buoys and commence to drive clusters of piles.

Bulldozer's got another gang settin' up shear logs made of young firs, on the end of the jetty and on the wreck. While this is goin' on a bunch of the boys come down from the Latimer-Brown loggin' camp with a small trainload of high-lead equipment. Bulldozer's got a small motor

boat and he keeps runnin' 'round in circles.

Several times a day Marta telephones the weather bureau to find out if a storm's comin'. The whole gang works a thirty-six hour stretch, gets eight hours' rest then goes at it again.

There must be a couple of hundred people on the jetty the day Bulldozer has one of them big spar trees towed to the wreck. It's a hundred and eighty-five feet long, and he's got the guy-wire rings, blocks and guy wires on the small end. They get the big end again' the wreck, run lines through the shear legs blocks and then start heavin' away with a tug-boat. Slowly the big end slides down the hull of the wreck to the bottom.

While the spar tree is still at an angle, other tugs pick up the guy wires, carry 'em to the clusters of piles and make 'em secure, leavin' plenty of slack. A loud cheer goes up from the crowd when the spar tree is finally standin' upright. Bulldozer don't lose no time, but rushes in a pile-driver to drive a cluster of piles around the spar tree to keep the lower end from slippin' away through the sand.

When they've finished, that tree is just as secure as if it was rooted in the forest. The tugs are puffin' around, takin' up the slack in the guy wires and makin' the setup ship-shape. The tree will settle in the sand, but that won't make any difference as long as they keep takin' up the slack in the wires.

Bulldozer puts on his spurs, climbs the tree and checks up on the ring and blocks, then he gets the heavy wire ropes rove through and a tug takes the runnin' ends to the jetty. The next day it starts blowin' a little, but it don't stop the work on the jetty end. They get that spar tree up without much trouble and a couple of days later they've got a skyline rig in operation—the same kind of a rig they use for handlin' logs in the big timber.

A COUPLE of days before the test is to be made a strange face shows up in camp. Jerry points him out to me. "That's Flannel-mouth Jim Snead, Pete

Clayton's last card," he says. "He knows how to beat the law if it can be beaten. And he's here to swing into action if Bulldozer's scheme fails. There will be writs, injunctions and demands for specific performance and whatnot. Keep an eye out."

And that's just what I do. Sooner or later I see Flannel-mouth corner Torchy O'Leary. I drift over that way without bein' noticed. Snead's got a smooth line of talk. His voice is pleasin' and he don't waste words. "Suppose Craig's high-lead rig isn't successful," he suggests, "then what will happen?"

"Cancel the contract," Torchy says shortly.

"Will the rig carry a ten-ton stone that distance? It is nearly a half mile between the spar poles."

"Bulldozer says it will."

"But fifteen-ton stones would cause too much sag, wouldn't they?"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this. A fifteen-ton stone would be so heavy and sag the line so much that it would strike the ground midway between the spar poles," Flannel-mouth explains.

"Sure," Torchy admits.

"What do you want to deliver fifteen-ton stones for the test, Mr. O'Leary?"

"Are you offerin' me a bribe?"

"No. No, I'm hiring you to assist me in carrying out an experiment in the interests of science, shall we say?"

"Okay, I'll work for you for a day. What'll you pay?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"Come again," Torchy says bluntly.

"A thousand dollars, payable when the cars arrive on the jetty with the stone."

"If you ain't on hand with it you'll be surprised how fast them cars will go back to the quarry," Torchy says.

THERE'S quite a gatherin' on the big day. Gov'ment engineers swarm around the jetty; there's a rumor Tanner, Clayton and a bunch of his men are in the woods watchin' things through binoculars; and the Tremont crowd comes down

and stands around bitin' their finger nails. If Clayton pulls the fat out of the fire, they're sunk. Marta is a nervous wreck.

Then the locomotive pushes five cars of rock out of the timber and spots 'em on the end of the trestle.

"Them rocks weigh fifteen ton if they weigh an ounce," Bulldozer mutters. I see Flannel-mouth slip Torchy a wad of money.

Bulldozer's men slip a trick sling around the biggest boulder and take up the slack. It's silent, then I hear a voice say, "The span's too great, that rock will be dragging on the ground before it reaches the middle. When he let's go, the sudden release of fifteen tons will make those cables whip. I'm going to stand back—the spar pole may snap in two."

Bulldozer takes over the controls of a big loggin' donkey. He opens the throttle a bit and the cables and guy wires tighten under the strain. He lifts the rock from the car and it swings over the water.

The donkey turns over slowly and the rock commences to move over the water. We can hear the heavy blocks creakin' under the strain. The span line supportin' the load commences to sag lower and lower. The rock dips into the water and the crowd groans. Torchy shifts his wad of snoose to the other side of his lip. Then he spits. Bulldozer opens the throttle wider and the perpendicular line holdin' the rock knives steadily through the water.

"It'll drag any moment now," Flannel-mouth says in a low voice. "It's got to. I had an engineer figure out what a fifteen ton log would do on that length of span. He said it would hit the ground."

We wait, holdin' our breaths. The rock is in the exact center and it hasn't stranded yet. Pretty soon it appears near the other spar tree. Bulldozer holds it a few seconds so everybody can see it, then he pulls a lever and it disappears.

When the cables are slack, he pulls another lever which winds in a line that's followed the rock. It trips the hooks on the rock and pretty soon they come out

of the water. There's a cheer that you can hear clean back to the mill site me and Bulldozer bought and mortgaged.

The gov'ment engineers are all smiles and Jerry starts pumpin' my hand, and Torchy's slappin' Bulldozer on the back and Marta's kissin' all of us.

Bulldozer don't let up until every stone is dumped, then we climb onto the train and ride back to the camp. Flannel-mouth comes stormin' up. He's licked, but he thinks he can start a fight between Bulldozer and Torchy and maybe bust things wide open.

"Craig," he yells hoarsely, "O'Leary sold you out. He loaded fifteen ton stones on that train because I paid him to."

"Yeah, he told me about it," Bulldozer says cheerfully. "You played him for a sucker. You asked your engineer if a fifteen ton log, supported by a span of this length, would drag, didn't you?"

"Yes, and he told me it would, blast him," Flannel-mouth roared. "He's incompetent and I'll get his job."

"If you had come clean and told him it was a fifteen-ton rock instead of a log," Bulldozer said, "he would have told you when the line sagged and submerged the rock, the strain on the line would then be reduced from fifteen tons to around nine tons because of the water it displaced."

ME and Bulldozer is settin' in the parlor, listenin' to the fire crackle and lookin' through the window at the

jetty, the spar trees and the masts of the old wreck. Slowly Jerry and Marta walk into the picture.

I look at Bulldozer and say, "It seems like you're lucky fightin', but unlucky in love. And Marta is a sweet girl."

"Yeah," Bulldozer says, "but I saw the handwritin' on the wall as soon as I got my bearin's. She's been in love with Jerry a long time and had never lost faith that he had the stuff in him, so I figgered I'd pay for some of my past sins by lendin' a hand."

"And that just about winds us up here," I tell him.

"Yeah, after we get the jetty finished, then do you know what?"

"What?"

"I'd like to see if we couldn't raise that old wreck, put it in condition and use it to haul lumber in," Bulldozer answers.

He lights a cigarette and relaxes. "But there's nothin' ahead right now except Torchy is goin' to throw us a thousand-dollar party with the money he got from Flannel-mouth. Until then, brother, I'm goin' to do nothin' but sleep and eat."

He gulps in sudden surprise and almost swallows the cigarette, then he reaches for his hat and coat. "There's one thing I ain't done yet, No-Shirt."

"What is it?" I ask.

"I've got to go up to Nellie's Hut in Seattle and toss out three tough guys singlehanded," he says, "In Nellie's eyes there's still a blot on my escutcheon."

Help 15 Miles Of Kidney Tubes

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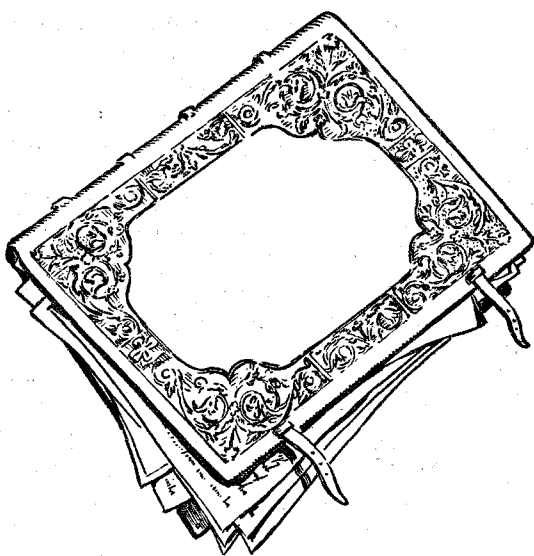
Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 Miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

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Fast and Loose

By
MARCO PAGE

Not since Mr. and Mrs. Thin Man have two such engaging and hilarious characters romped into popular acclaim. Here are Joel and Garda Sloane in their latest adventure, neck-deep in Shakespeare manuscripts and California mayhem. Start now this great story by the man who wrote the prize-winning, "Fast Company."

JOEL and Garda Sloane are nearly at the end of their financial rope when Christopher Oates, the cheerfully wool-witted chain-store tycoon, offers Joel a life-saving commission. Joel is a young and spasmodically successful rare-book dealer who, since solving a series of murders resulting from the theft of priceless volumes, fancies himself as a brilliant and invincible criminologist. His only other vice is Garda.

Oates engages Joel as an agent in the purchase of the only existent Shakespeare manuscript in the world—two tattered pages covered with an almost indecipherable scrawl, and as valuable as the Hope diamond. The owner of the manuscript, a California millionaire, named Nicholas Torrent, is forced to sell his treasure because of financial pressure.

Oates is firm in his decision that Garda shall not accompany Joel and him to the Coast. "When you're around," he announces petulantly, "Joel can't keep his mind on his work."

BUT when they arrive in California, they discover that Garda is waiting to receive them. Oates takes them to a hotel and

commands Garda to stay there while he and Joel drive to the Torrent home in Santa Barbara to close the deal.

Garda refuses flatly to be out of things; she discovers that Henry Durant, who also is determined to buy the Torrent manuscript, is in the hotel, and strikes up an acquaintance with him. When she has supersaturated him with dry Martinis, she triumphantly delivers him to a sanitarium where he will be confined for at least two weeks.

Meanwhile, Joel receives a visit from Joe Hilliard, Great Western insurance trouble-shooter, who is relieved to learn that Joel will be at the Torrents' to keep an eye on the manuscript, which is underwritten by his company. He tells Joel that Torrent's son, Gerald is a pampered young no-good known to have run up a huge gambling debt to Lucky Nolan, gambling king of the coast. In the past Gerald has not been above lifting a stray volume or two from his father's collection, secretly disposing of them through George Clifford, a crooked book-dealer.

Grateful for Garda's success in getting rid of Durant, Oates consents to take her along to the Torrents' palatial home, which

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