

North of the Law

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Sons of the Tall Timber," "Christmas on Ice," etc.

Introducing Mrs. McGee's little boy, No-Shirt, in a brief appearance as deputy marshal—complete with guns, fists, and a couple of murders. This act is highly recommended as a rest cure

CHAPTER I

TIME OUT FOR TROUBLE

ME AND Bulldozer are settin' in our hotel room listenin' to the radio and all at once I turn it off. "What's eatin' on you, No-Shirt?" he growls. "That's our favorite program."

"It gets on my nerves," I tell him.

"Try readin' a book," he advises, "or a magazine. Have you looked at the evenin' paper yet?"

"Tried 'em all," I tell him, "but can't get interested."

He looks at me a long time. "If you was a young squirt," he says, "I'd say you was in love. Hey, you ain't been chasin' any widder wimmin have you?"

"Couldn't run fast enough to catch 'em if I did," I tell him. "But don't worry about me; I'm okay. Just off'n my feed."

He don't say anything more, which is bad itself. It proves he's thinkin' about the problem. The next mornin' around eleven o'clock he pops into the room. "Get dressed," he says, "we've got some partnership business to look after."

When I try to pin him down he hurries off and says it's too long to explain. A half hour later I meet him and we walk down the street a ways and enter a buildin'. We get off on the seventh floor and the first thing I know I'm in a doctor's office. "What the hell?" I ask.

"Havin' you in shape is partnership business," he says. "I could talk until hell froze over about you seein' a doctor and you wouldn't have listened, so I figgered to lure you up here, and if you try to leave I'll slap you down."

I have to grin as he borrows a phrase from one of my favorite radio characters. "Okay," I tell him, "I'll go through with it."

"You should've gone into drydock long ago," he says, "for a general overhaulin'."

"Yeah," I growl, "I suppose my ribs need new planks, my bottom should be painted, and maybe my whistle needs overhaulin'."

I know the doctor. He used to practice in Alaska and we spent many a night on the trail together. "Well! Well! No-Shirt," he says, "this is the happiest day of my life. Funds are low, you're in the money, I haven't the price of a bottle of whisky and for years I've longed to get a knife into you."

"Tryin' to stick me for the drinks, as usual," I tell him. Then he puts on his professional face and the first thing I know he's goin' over me from head to heels.

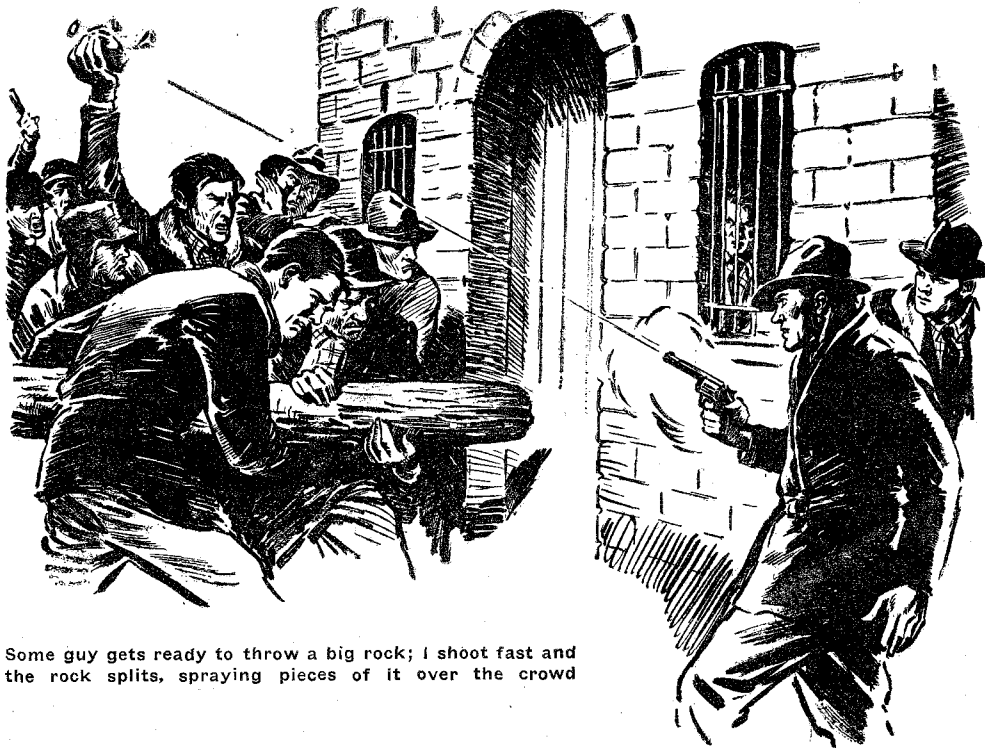
BULLDOZER is standin' there watchin'. He still figgers I may grab my clothes and leg it through the side door. "Can't you find anything wrong with the old coot, doc?" he asks.

"Not yet."

"Keep huntin' then," Bulldozer urges. "He don't listen to the radio, read, nor even turn and look at a ankle like he used to. Awhile back these short skirts would've drove him crazy."

"Shut up," I tell him.

After that the doc asks a lot of fool questions, which don't seem to add up, but somehow he gets a total. "No-Shirt," he says, "you've been under quite a strain lately. You had to go fooling around in



Some guy gets ready to throw a big rock; I shoot fast and the rock splits, spraying pieces of it over the crowd

the war zone in an old schooner. The shooting and bombing and all that naturally affected your nerves. You were keyed up at the time and still are."

"I had a lot of fun; and as usual you're wrong, doc; I haven't any nerves," I tell him. "I'm just off'n my feed."

"I don't see why you had to fool around in the war zone—a man of your years," he complains. "What did it get you?"

"It added to my store of knowledge," I tell him. "The more a man learns the better chance he has of winning out if he's in a tight place. Doc, experience is a wonderful thing."

He snorts. "I suppose what you learned in the war zone will help you as an Alaskan prospector?"

"You never can tell," I answer.

"Enough of this chatter," he says. "You are to stop all mining, logging, drinking, smoking—"

"What're you tryin' to do?" I interrupt, "make me commit suicide? No

minin', loggin', drinkin' or smokin'. A man's better off dead."

He looks at me coldly. "I want you to go north and visit around. Look up your old friends, talk about old times and adopt a don't-care attitude toward life for six months. If you'll do this I promise you you'll be your old time self. You'll turn your head when a pretty girl passes by."

"You can lead a horse to water, Doc," I tell him, "but you can't make him drink."

"No?" Bulldozer sneers. "You're one horse I'm goin' to lead to water, and you're goin' to drink if I have to hold your head under until you drown."

EXACTLY seven days later I'm settin' in front of the pioneer home at Sitka lookin' at old Russian cannon, listenin' to the bells of the Russian mission and talkin' to retired stampeders and pioneers. A hundred yards away Bulldozer is tryin' to talk Chinook to a young squaw who can speak better English than he can. Overhead the

bombers from the navy air station are roarin'.

I stay at Sitka a week, then move on to Juneau. Four weeks from the day Bulldozer hauls me into doc's office I'm at Shipwreck Harbor which is in the Arctic ocean.

We flew from Fairbanks to Nome and went the rest of the way on a tradin' schooner. Shipwreck Harbor is quite a place and was so named because the pack ice smashed several whalers there and left the Eskimos more wood and iron than they could use in a lifetime.

As soon as we land on the beach I yell at the first white man I see. "Where's Cam McKay?" He's the deputy United States marshal for the region. And in area it's bigger'n New England.

The white man turns out to be the school teacher. "Cam left five weeks ago," he says. "There's trouble of some kind in the Stormy Inlet country. A young fellow named Bill Mason went up there looking for gold—"

"There's no gold in that country," I tell him.

"That's where you're wrong," the school teacher answers, "along with plenty of others. Bill studied formations. He was sure a creek had once emptied into the inlet; that pressure of the ice pack when the storms were bad had pushed sand from the ocean floor and filled the creek bed to a depth of several feet; that the ice, forming a dam, had caused the creek to find a new channel, which naturally contained no gold."

The country's low and flat except for headlands at the inlet, and I can see how that's possible, as I wintered there once on a fur buyin' trip. Not only that, but when the break-up came I prospected the creek and found nothin', never dreamin' there could be an ancient channel. "Go on," I tell the teacher.

"It turns out Bill Mason is right," he says. "He started in where the old creek should've been according to his calculations and came within a hundred feet of it. Clam shells and walrus tusks proved the ice had dumped ocean floor material there. Then he struck gold."

"By golly, that's interestin'," I tell him. I can see Bulldozer's eyes are shinin', too. We're always pullin' for the cuss who has a idea nobody else has thought of. And especially we like to see him win when everybody's laughed at him.

"There are always buzzards waiting to pick the bones of some fellow with courage," the teacher continues, "and this was no exception. Bill Mason was having trouble with claim jumpers and he sent two Eskimo boys in a skin boat to Cam McKay. We saw the umiak off the harbor mouth and investigated. One native was dead and the other badly wounded. He told Cam what had happened. He's in the mission hospital now, recovering. And Cam has gone to arrest the guilty men if he can find them. Failing in that, he plans to supply the necessary protection."

"Cam's a old friend of mine," I tell the teacher. "It looks as if I'd have to go to Stormy Inlet to do my visitin'. What's the best way to get there?"

"The *Myrtle S* is the only vessel making even the slightest attempt to maintain a regular freight and passenger service in this part of the Arctic," the teacher explains. "She left three weeks ago. It'll be another three weeks before she's back."

"Then she'll be heading for Nome," I reflect. I know the *Myrtle S*. She's a small, steel steamer built to buck the ice and she's slow. Her speed is known and she is usually on time. "Three weeks is too long, and a Nome-bound steamer won't do us any good. We'll get a umiak and—"

"Oh no you don't," Bulldozer says. "There's excitement at Stormy Inlet—a brawl over mining claims. That means men, murder and mystery. Remember doctor's orders: no excitement. You're stayin' right here."

"And you'll go?" I ask, plenty hot under the collar.

"I'd sure like to see what's goin' on," Bulldozer admits, "but there'd be nobody to watch you. And you'd be mixin' into somethin' as soon as my back was turned."

"And why not?" I say. "I've had a month of this and I still don't turn my

head at the swish of a skirt. I ain't gettin' any better, so . . ."

"Rome wasn't built in a day," he says. "And the doc didn't expect a cure in a few weeks. You're stayin' right here."

CHAPTER II

YOUR TRICK, MCGEE

ME AND Bulldozer move into Cam's house and in a couple of days I see Bulldozer hangin' 'round a Eskimo queen. He's learnin' the Eskimo dialect, now.

"I may as well learn things about the country and people as long as I'm actin' as a he-nurse to you," he says. "And don't think I ain't watchin' you. I know you're figgerin' to give me the slip and get to Stormy Inlet, but it can't be done, brother. It can't be done."

It turns out he's right. Every time I try to bribe a native to take me to the inlet in his umiak it turns out he's a friend of Bulldozer's and won't do it. Speakin' the same language, I suppose, and I ain't punnin' either.

Ten days of this monotony is suddenly busted wide open by the arrival of a plane. It's a wheel job and it lands on the beach and a minute later the door pops open. Out steps a bundle of sweetness that leaves everybody goggle-eyed.

She's about five feet four and weighs exactly what a five-foot-four girl should weigh who has the right kind of curves in the right places. She's blond, blue-eyed, and the eyes look as if they'd shed a few tears in private. I've got a hunch if she hangs around long Bulldozer will start learnin' the English language—which same would be no mean feat.

"Is this Stormy Inlet?" she asks the pilot; then before he can answer she says, "It isn't. It's some other place. I see no creek nor mining operation."

"This is Shipwreck Harbor," the pilot says. "I told you we bucked head winds and are out of fuel. I couldn't chance it."

"I'd have chanced it," she storms. "What kind of a man are you? What— Oh, I'm sorry. But you see he's in danger—"

"Who's in danger?" Bulldozer demands. "If you need a hand, count on me."

"My fiancé," she says, "Bill Mason. I heard him talking on his short wave radio to a friend in Seattle. I have a receiving set, tuned in on his wave length. You see I simply had to know what was going on."

"That's the spirit," Bulldozer agrees.

"Some person named Les Brody insists he owns part of the ground Bill is working. Bill sent for the marshal, an old fellow. The man came and there was shooting and the marshal was killed or badly wounded, Bill wasn't sure which," she explains.

"This Les Brody organized a miner's meeting, or something, and had himself elected deputy marshal to preserve law and order. You can see it is a mess, and I'm worried sick over Bill, so I chartered a plane and flew to Fairbanks. Then I chartered another one, hoping to land in Stormy Inlet and—well, now I'm here."

"By golly, something is goin' to be done about it," I tell her. "I know Les Brody. He's one of the smooth kind. Lets others steal the cake then hogs down the biggest cut. You'd think he was the salt of the earth if you met him. He can charm a bird off'n a bush."

"He isn't going to charm me," she flares. "I'll fight him to the last ditch. The idea of him expecting to have any portion of the gold after Bill figuring out just where it was. The very idea." Her eyes blaze and me and Bulldozer moans, "Amen, sister!" at the same time. It sounds like a revival meetin'.

ABOUT this time, the pilot who is one of these quiet, capable boys says, "There is an umiak about fifteen miles from Shipwreck Harbor. I flew low, but couldn't make out the situation. It seemed to me a man was lying on the bottom and four natives were paddling. The umiak was fitted with an outboard motor, but they weren't using it."

"Coming from Stormy Inlet, would you say?" I ask.

"That's right," he answers.

Me and Bulldozer leg it down to the

beach and look over available craft. Some of the umiaks are ready to put to sea, but none of them have the well built in through which to lower a outboard motor.

"What do we do now?" Bulldozer asks.

"Chase around town," I tell him, "and get two outboards of the same horsepower. I've faced this problem before."

While he's gone I locate a heavy timber and lash it across the umiak a third of the way from the stern. By the time that's done Bulldozer is back with two outboards. We hang 'em on the timber and get 'em both turnin' over. Bulldozer is engineer and I steer with a paddle.

With both motors wide open we make the fifteen miles in less than a hour. "There's the umiak off to the left," Bulldozer says. "Say, No-Shirt, you shouldn't be doin' this. Doctor's orders."

"I'm here," I snap. "Shut off both motors and we'll come alongside."

The other umiak is waitin' for us. We come alongside and I go aboard. Old Cam is the man in the bottom of the umiak, sure enough. He's plenty wounded. "It's No-Shirt, Cam," I say.

He opens his eyes slowly and looks stupid. "Oh, it's you," he says. Then suddenly he realizes I ain't supposed to be so far north. "What're you doin' here?"

"Came up for my health," I tell him. "Now—what happened?"

"Tried to stop a riot," he answers, "and somebody shot me three times. That was six days ago. Was out a couple of days and the boys kept me hid."

He nods toward two serious-looking Eskimos who seemed to have authority over the others. "I told 'em to take me home. Bearin' burned out in the motor. Then they had to paddle again' headwinds."

"Let me have a look at those wounds," I tell him.

"Shift me to your umiak, No-Shirt," he says, "and go like hell. An hour or two more won't make no difference."

We get him to the hospital then I send Bulldozer back to pick up the exhausted Eskimos. They've been paddlin' day and night.

The doctor's a young one, but he knows his business. He cleans out the wounds and orders complete quiet. "I'll be quiet," Cam says, "but I've got a little business to 'tend to first. I ain't forgettin' I'm a peace officer."

"I can't be responsible—" the doctor begins, but Cam shuts him off. Then he turns to me.

"No-Shirt, you've been both deputy marshal and deputy sheriff in your checkered life in the north and west. Put up your hand and be sworn in as special deputy," he says.

He has the authority and I put up my hand and make the usual promises. "Now," he says, "light out for Stormy Inlet and bring about law and order." He has to rest a minute before he can finish. "Remember, while you can't prove it perhaps, Les Brody is behind everything that's goin' on."

"I'll never forget it," I promised; then I fixed up a commission for him to sign. When a man goes up against Les Brody he has to produce his authority.

Cam is still awake when I bring the commission to the hospital. He's restless and is runnin' a fever. The doctor don't like it, but he lets Cam sign my commission and the last words I hear as I leave the room is him wishin' me luck and claimin' I'm goin' to need it.

OUTSIDE I meet the plane pilot and ask him who the girl is. "Her name is Mary Kane," he says. "I call her Hurricane for short." He's kinda grim about it, but there's a smile of admiration around his lips as he looks at her.

"She's got some dough and backed Bill Mason. She's so in love with the cuss you like him, without seeing him, I'd have taken her through if I could."

"You've got to take me through," I tell him.

"I haven't the gasoline, and I couldn't land at the inlet anyway. She's blowing a gale," he says.

"There's gas here," I argue.

"Not plane gas," he answers.

"Now listen," I tell him, "in an emergency where the peace of a community is threatened, an officer can confiscate whatever he needs. And he can swear in whoever he thinks is necessary to restore order. I'll gamble on the local gasoline if you will. When we get over the inlet, you size up the situation. If you can land, okay. If you can't I'll parachute to the ground."

"You fool!" he yells. "Don't you realize parachute jumping is—"

"Is easy as fallin' off a log," I interrupt. "You open the door, fall out backwards, wait a few seconds, then pull the little ring. I know, because I done it once."

"That settles it, then," he says.

We round up the best of the local gasoline, strain it and fill the tanks. In the middle of it, Hurricane comes stormin' up. "You can't go without me," she says. "Bill may be hurt; he may need me." Then she starts climbin' into the plane.

She's a bundle of loveliness until I start draggin' her from the plane, then she seems to be full of claws. "Now listen," I argue. "I'm goin' to restore order. I may have to jump from the plane."

"I'll restore order for them," she snaps back. "And I'll jump from the plane, too."

"No you won't," I tell her. Then I get a couple of sourdoughs to hold her.

You'd think I'd had enough trouble with her, without more pilin' on. Before we can get away the umiak lands and Bulldozer comes runnin' up. I can't hear what he's sayin' because the motor makes too much noise; but I can tell from his lips he's yellin', "You can't do that, it's against doctor's orders. You'll kill yourself, you old goat."

As soon as we get into the air I write a note, which I give to the pilot to drop. It reads:

Bulldozer:

Load grub, gasoline and ammunition into the twin-motored umiak and meet me at Stormy Inlet.

*No-Shirt,
Deputy U. S. Marshal.*

We roar over and the message is dropped.

I see Bulldozer read it, then he shakes his fist at me, but I know he'll back my hand.

AS WE head for Stormy Inlet clouds press in around the plane and pretty soon the pilot climbs above them. When we're in bright sunshine he says, "I feel kind of sorry for old Cam McKay. This mess will mean the end of his job. You see he's getting old and several tinhorn politicians would like his job. He's in wrong with Les Brody and his gang because he wouldn't let them get away with several pretty raw deals."

"Brody draws plenty of water sometimes," I tell him. "And he can make a green man in office believe Brody and his friends elected him."

"He's sittin' pretty these days," the pilot says. "The mess at the Inlet, which you can be sure he engineered, is all that's needed to convince the powers that be that Cam is too old for the job. He'll be eased out, a Brody man eased in and then it'll be tough for a lot of honest traders, prospectors and trappers. Such is politics."

I spend the rest of the trip mutterin' in my beard and wonderin' how to handle the deal if and when I reach the Inlet all in one piece. In the end I conclude to let the situation show me what I'd better do.

We drop down through thick weather and just when I figger we're so low he'll have to climb again I catch a glimpse of the Arctic. It's streaked with white. "Plenty of wind down there," the pilot says. "To the north there's a big, black cloud rollin' over the water. He tries to go around it, but not a chance."

The glimpse the pilot caught of water and a headland was all he needed. He changes the course, flies ten minutes, then starts down again. This time he has to climb. He circles and says, "The camp is below us."

"Can't land, eh?" I feel a tightness in my manly bosom, and I'm wonderin' if the chute was packed right and will open.

"Can't land," he says, "and you're a fool if you jump."

"I'd jump several times if it'd help Cam McKay," I answer. I check on the straps and am ready. "Say when."

He nods and I go back and get the door open. It's a tough job again' the windstream. I push my stern through, hang on and watch the pilot. He nods. I set my teeth, pinch my eyes shut tight and fall backwards. I danged near yank the ring off as I jerk it.

A million years later the chute opens. So do my eyes.

I can't see a thing but fog pressin' in on all sides. I watch for the ground and suddenly there it is. I hit, relaxed, and go knee-deep in muck. The chute yanks me out, nearly pullin' me in half, then drags me along through tules and swamp muck. I cut loose and feel myself. I'm all in one piece. Then I listen. The wind is moanin' over the tundra and swamp in a way that makes a man feel the night will be a good one for a murder.

I work to hard ground, walk a half mile and come to a trail. Now I know where I am: a mile from the camp at Stormy Inlet.

I start to walk, then go into a run as I hear a sound a man never forgets once he's heard it; a mob demandin' blood. As I run I unlimber my forty-four and make sure there's no mud in the barrel. Also I pin on my badge, then button my coat so it won't show.

A short distance from the town I pass several Eskimo igloos of driftwood and sod, then the wooden buildin's Bill Mason put up for his men. Out of the corner of my eye I can see tailin' dumps.

Ahead there's a two-story buildin' made of heavy timbers which has been turned into a jail. Men are crowded around hollerin' and yellin'. A couple of 'em have ropes with hangman's knots.

It's almost dusk, but I can recognize Les Brody standin' with his back to the jail door. He's coverin' the crowd with a brace of automatic pistols and he's yellin', "Stand back, boys. I don't want to kill any of you, but I will if you don't get back."

I KNOW it don't mean a thing except that it'll make him look good if there's a investigation later on. He's buildin' his bridges right now.

I push through until I'm shoulder to shoulder with a Brody man. "Maybe we'd better clear out," I suggest, "before the shootin' starts."

The man is ginned up and talkative. "They got Bill Mason in jail for safe keepin'. He's supposed to have shot an old miner. He didn't do it, but it was all Les needed to throw him in the coop. Then Les Brody's right bower works up mob violence. Les will make a play at defendin' him. He'll shoot over our heads, then let hisself be overpowered and some of the boys will take Mason out and hang him." He grins. "Stick around and watch the fun. Good old Les is a artist."

Then he seems to get the idear I'm a stranger and he's been talkin' too much. "You bet good old Les is a artist at this business," I tell him. "I've seen him work before."

Somebody gets a timber for a batterin' ram and they smack the door with it. While they're backin' off for another blow I push through the space left by the ram. I keep my head down and don't look up until I'm at Les Brody's side; then I whirl and we're shoulder to shoulder.

"I'm takin' charge, Brody," I tell him.

"The hell you are," he snarls. "Bill Mason pulled some high-handed stuff here. Trouble started and Cam McKay was shot up. Some of us tried to restore order. We held a miners' meeting and I was elected deputy marshal until a regular marshal qualified."

"I qualified," I tell him. "And have the papers to prove it. If you think I'm bluffin', why just call me. And if you think I don't know your game you've another think comin', Brody. I know your history and you know I do."

While we're talkin' we're wavin' four guns at the crowd. Many of the stampeder who come into the country when Mason struck it are in the crowd. They ain't vicious, only watchin' the excitement. The

Brody men are waitin' for a signal from their leader. He ain't givin' signals—yet.

"How'd you get here, McGee?" he says suddenly. "Cam couldn't have made it to Shipwreck Harbor and sworn you in, and you couldn't have made it here so soon."

"So you knew the umiak motor would burn out eh, and delay him?" I say, hoppin' onto the slip. "A pilot spotted the umiak and I made a parachute jump less than a hour ago. Never mind the details in between."

I lift my voice. "Here's my authority, boys." I throw back my coat and let 'em see the badge. "And I ain't goin' through the motions of defendin' this prisoner. I'm carryin' out my duty as provided by law. And that includes shootin' if you keep comin'." This is for the Brody outfit's benefit.

"Aw go and buy yourself a shirt, McGee," a big cuss sneers. He's got a big rock in his hand and he draws it back to let fly. I shift my old forty-four and blaze away. The bullet shatters the rock and drones, too low for comfort, over the crowd. Flyin' bits of rock cut the man's hand and sting the faces of those near him.

I can see the Brody men don't like the game. Those in front commence to work back where they won't be recognized. This is the signal for those left in front to back up, also. It's the only trick of breakin' up a mob. I keep my eyes and guns movin' slowly back and forth and each man figgers he'll be the next target.

"Light out," I yell, "and don't come back."

"Your trick, McGee," Brody sneers. "But don't think you're going to take the pot."

CHAPTER III

HURRICANE'S GOLD

LES BRODY is a two-hundred-pounder who stands six feet two inches. He's handsome in a rugged kind of way and looks like a man folks want to tie to. He discovered the effect he had on people when he was a kid and he'd been cashin' in on it ever since. He was a good dancer, and

in a fight had the speed of a lightweight.

But he was physically yellow. The man who got in a good punch had the fight well in hand. He couldn't take it.

Knowin' that, I didn't have any trouble in takin' the play away from him. His role was to stay in the background, play the game, and let his pawns take the punishment and jail terms. I figgered the easy way he backed down was only the beginnin'. He was after Mason's gold and seein' he couldn't get it this way, he would work out another.

As soon as the crowd scatters I ask Brody for the keys. "Here they are, McGee," he says. "And I'm sorry I got tough with you. I felt as if you were grabbing the glory after I had done the dirty work." And that crack didn't fool me, either.

The first thing I do is to look at Bill Mason. He's a clean-cut, broad-shouldered young fellow with a fine-looking head. I've seen lads like him come into a country before. Usually they stayed to develop it. They're different from the type that strips a country then lights out for greener fields. They take root.

"I'm the new marshal, Mason," I tell him, holdin' out my hand. "The trouble's over. You're safe. Your gold is safe, so you can go ahead minin'."

He don't say a word, just sets there and gazes at me. I take him by the arm and lead him to a window where there's more light. His eyes are dead. He's a man in a trance. My foot steps on somethin' and I look down. It's a bullet. I pick it up and it's got fragments of hair and flesh in the lead, along with bits of wood.

There's a hole in the other window where the bullet entered, and a dented spot on the opposite wall where it hit. I look at Mason's head. There's a wound on it and blood is slowly tricklin' down the back of his neck.

Now that he's turned around I can see his wool outer and under shirts are soaked with blood. Somebody shot him while he was in the cell—prob'ly pacin' back and forth, or may be standin' still listenin' to the roar of the mob.

While I'm examinin' the wound somebody yells, "Let me in!"

I go to the front door, ready for more trouble. A thin-faced cuss with shifty eyes and clothes soiled by mine muck is standin' there. "I'm Luke Dexter," he says, "Bill Mason's night foreman. I come here for orders and—"

He looks beyond me and sees Mason slumped in a chair. "What happened?"

"Some rat shot him," I answer.

"Dead?" he asks.

"Not yet. I think he'll be okay in a few days. Just a crease," I tell him, "but sometimes such wounds turn bad."

"I'll watch him," he says, "and you get the camp doctor."

"Where was he durin' the riot?" I ask. "Why ain't he on the job?"

"He went off huntin' ducks," he answers. "Just got back. He didn't know anything about this. You'll find him at the end of the street."

I start to go, then change my mind. "May be you'd better find him," I suggest.

He leaves on the run and pretty soon he comes back with a tired-looking young man who sports a crushed mosquito moustache. As soon as he takes over Mason I know this doc understands his business. "This is serious," he says. "We better notify Stanton."

"Who's Stanton?" I ask.

"He's Bill Mason's superintendent," he answers. "You see Mason had a theory about formations and the pressure of pack ice. This led to his belief he would find gold here. He found it, but he lacked practical mining experience and he employed Stanton, and later Dexter."

"Stanton was with me on the duck-huntin' trip. He's pretty well exhausted. We got lost and had to work our way through a knee-deep area of swamp muck. He's a heavy man and kept breaking through. Luke, will you get Stanton, please?"

Dexter lights out once more.

THE fact Les Brody is on the job is all the proof I need the trouble was staged. But how well it was staged is proved by

the fact both the doctor and Stanton were away. And they're men who'd naturally be with Mason when trouble came.

Stanton came on the run. I liked him. He had minin' foreman written all over him. "I didn't even know there had been a riot until Dexter told me," he said. "I wouldn't have left if I had expected trouble. We had had some unrest among the boys and several of the newer men were nasty, but I thought I had smoothed things over."

"The newer men were probably planted in the force by Les Brody to make trouble," I tell him.

He nods and turns to Dexter. "Where were you when the boss was arrested?"

"I never believed he shot the old miner, even though the man did have it comin' to him," Dexter answers. "I figgered he'd be in jail a day or so and you'd fix things when you come back. Then all at once the mob forms. Brody is standin' 'em off. My first idear is to join Brody, then I figger a Mason man up there might make things worse. I hunt cover, the idear bein' a loose man in good health can do more than a dead or wounded hero." He laughs.

"That's right," Stanton agrees. We rig up a stretcher and carry Bill Mason to the little hospital.

"We'll leave this to you, doc," I tell him. "Stanton, I want to talk things over with you at the jail."

His eyes narrow. "Am I under suspicion?" he asks.

"Don't see why you should be," I answer.

"May be you had better suspect all men, me included," he says. "A lot of things that have puzzled me are beginnin' to make a picture since the riot and the shootin' of Bill Mason."

"What's the condition of the mine?" I ask.

"When the trouble started," he answers, "we wanted to make certain they couldn't get away with the gold. We pretended to cache it above ground. Actually it was hidden in a cross cut. We blew out the cribbin' later and the shaft filled in."

"How much will it total?"

"A ton! A ton of gold!" he says, and I get that cold-chill feelin' up and down the ribs.

"It was all concentrated in a small area as Mason figgered it would be," he explains.

"And men in the mine knew it," I suggest. "The word was passed along, Les Brody heard it and moved in with the other stampeder and the trouble started."

"I've heard about Brody," Stanton admits, "and I was watchin' him, here. But he didn't do a single suspicious thing. Well, what's the next move?"

"Open up the mine," I tell him, "and put a guard over the gold. I've a man in mind who'll make a good guard. A cuss named Bulldozer Craig."

"I've heard of him," Stanton says. "It'll take several days to open up the shaft. The sand sifts in."

I nodded. I've cussed and busted my heart and back over loose sand myself. "Have you a surveyor's transit I can borrow?"

"Yes. Bill Mason brought one in with him," he answers.

BILL ain't no better the next day and there's still plenty of excitement with Les Brody goin' around and makin' a fine show of calmin' down men I know are part of his gang. I get busy on the short wave radio and reach a plane flyin' north from Fairbanks. "Go to Shipwreck Harbor," I tell the pilot, "and drop a message to Mary Kane. Tell her to come to Stormy Inlet."

I got a hunch she'll do it any way, but I want to be sure. This out of the way, I set up the transit in the jail cell where Bill Mason was shot. Then I run a string from the bullet hole in the window to the place in the wall where the bullet made a dent. I place the transit beside the string and at the same angle, then I take a look-see.

There's a tundra-covered ridge above the town and I'm lookin' at a spot where there's a kind of notch. Whoever fired that bullet, I muse, was squattin' in that notch, or close by. I return the transit without anybody knowin' what I'd used it for.

That evenin' when the camp is quiet I take a walk to the notch. The tundra is tramped down, but I can't identify any footprints because the growth is too thick to leave a mark. There's one spot that catches my eye. Somebody has been down on his knees a long time while watchin' the jail window.

He's left mine muck on the vegetation—stuff that's rubbed off from his overalls. I get down on my own knees and study the ground. The man's knees has worked through the grass to muck and he's left a faint imprint of his overalls.

I can see what looks like a patch that's been sewed on with coarse stitches. Except for that, the cuss was pretty smooth. He didn't leave any cigaret butts nor empty shells to be used as exhibit A against him in case the finger of suspicion pointed his way.

I get back to camp and wander around with downcast eyes. I'm lookin' for a buzzard wearin' a patch on the right knee of his overalls. And I find him. But I don't make no arrests, nor am I surprised. He's just the kind of a hairpin who'd try and shoot a man in jail, if it looked like the prisoner wouldn't be lynched.

AT NOON the followin' day the wind dies down and the air is clear of flyin' clouds. As soon as the mists lift down on the inlet I can see Bulldozer and the twin-motored umiak approachin' at top speed.

He jumps ashore, lifts Mary Kane like she was a cork and sets her down on the sand. "Bulldozer offered to bring me," she said, "and there was no telling when I could get a plane." She looks around as if she expects to see Bill Mason, then asks, "How is he?" Her voice is tight.

I break the news and take her to the hospital. For a minute I think she's goin' to faint. Her face turns the color of wet ashes and she leans against the wall. "He's—lost his reason," she whispers. "Oh . . ." Then she does break.

I let her cry on my shoulder and the doc keeps sayin', "I'm sure this is a temporary condition, Miss Kane."

I've a hunch the kind thing to do is to give her somethin' to occupy her mind and I take her down to the jail office, which ain't much more'n a desk and three, four chairs. "I radioed a pilot to get in touch with you," I tell her. "And here's why. There's a ton of gold below ground. Somebody has to take charge. Bill can't. Now do I understand you're his legal pardner?"

"Yes. I backed his idea and we agreed to split fifty-fifty after all expenses had been paid," she says. "But I don't care about gold or anything. The thing to do is to fly Bill—"

"The thing to do is to let him be quiet," I tell her. "He can't be flown out of here yet. It's up to you to look after his interests. He'll appreciate it plenty when he's up and around. He's worked hard, used his head and taken plenty of chances to develop this mine."

"Of course you're right," she says. "What had I better do?"

"Tell Superintendent Stanton you're taking charge. When the gold is brought up give Bulldozer the job of guardin' it."

There's a knock and when I yell, "Come in," Les Brody opens the door. "I'm Les Brody," he says to Hurricane. "I'm sorry Mason was hurt. He's a fine man. I did what I could to save him from the mob."

"And I appreciate it," the girl says.

"I find myself in a very unpleasant situation," Brody says. "I have a claim against the gold. A portion of it was taken from the adjoining claim which I own."

"Oh, I didn't know that," she says, looking worried.

"Yes. Naturally I have to protect my interests, and, really I can't let you take any part of the gold away from the Inlet," he goes on to say, "until the matter is settled."

"But," she protests, "it must go out on the next boat, the *Myrtle S*, I believe it is."

"Not unless we come to some understanding," he says. And he's so blasted polite, and acts as if it hurt him all over, I get madder every minute. Hurricane is smart, but she don't see through Brody's game.

"This gold has caused a riot, an old miner

has been killed, a deputy marshal badly wounded," I say, "and on top of that Bill Mason is hurt. I'm goin' to impound the gold and keep possession until matters are settled by the law." I'm feelin' pretty good over this stand until I catch a glint in Brody's eyes, then I know I've done what he hoped I'd do.

"That will be satisfactory," Hurricane says. "I know of no safer place for gold than in a United States marshal's possession. You'll see that it goes to Nome, or some place, before the freeze-up?"

"Sure," I agree.

"I suggest," Les Brody says, "you give us a receipt for it, McGee. Just to have everything in order."

"Sure," I say again. "When the gold is turned over to me."

CHAPTER IV

MIND ON THE LOOSE

I SURE felt better when Bulldozer showed up. That is for a few minutes. "I got Cam McKay to swear me in, too," he says. "Now you can get shed of all this grief and excitement. Remember what the doctor said about excitement? You must've got a bad setback by this time."

"Don't try and run a whizzer on me," I tell him. "Get rested from the umiak trip. You've got bags under your eyes big enough to pack a mattress in. I'll bet Hurricane and the Eskimos took turns sleepin' while you stayed awake."

He admits somethin' like that had happened, then goes into the marshal's bedroom and flops down on a spare cot. Hurricane stays at the hospital most of the night, hopin' for a change in Bill Mason. There ain't none.

I make the rounds of the country durin' the next few days. It's pretty well blanketed with claims and most of the boys are punchin' holes down to bedrock, but none of 'em are gettin' better'n colors. The gold is all concentrated just where Bill Mason said it would be.

"You boys had better get out of the country before snow flies," I tell 'em. "This

ain't no place to spend the winter. You'll be hungrier than your minin' claims before spring comes."

In the days that follow they commence driftin' back to Nome. Even Les Brody's men pull their freight, which same surprises me. With three shifts workin', Stanton rebuilds the shaft down to bedrock. I'm one of the first to go down.

Stanton leads the way to the cross cut and uncovers a heap of gold stuffed into caribou skin pokes. Then we move on to the scene of operation. Bedrock has not only been swept, but it's been washed and scrubbed to get every bit of gold in the cracks. About two weeks' work is left before the concentration will be cleaned up.

He turns the flashlight on some untouched sand. It's yellow with gold. "You never saw anything like that before," he says.

"Only once. On the Klondike years ago," I answer. "It was the same there in certain pockets—more gold than sand."

The *Myrtle S.* drops anchor in the Inlet and discharges mail and supplies. I'm one of the first to go aboard. "I'm sendin' out a ton of gold," I tell the purser, "also several people, includin' one wounded man, Bill Mason."

"I'll accept the passengers and the gold," he answers. "I'll give the gold unusual care, but can't insure it, of course."

"I know. A ship operator can't afford to insure ship or cargo when it's in the Arctic," I tell him.

"Then it's understood," he says, "the responsibility of the gold is yours, McGee."

"The responsibility for loss between here and Nome is mine," I agree. "However you're to supply guards."

"Guards?" he asks, surprised. "No man's foolish enough to tackle a gold shipment on a steamer carrying United States mail. But . . . okay, I'll furnish you with guards."

"Not me," I point out; "the gold shipment."

Just as I'm ready to leave the *Myrtle S.*, Les Brody comes aboard. "I'll want space for myself and men," he said.

"I'm sorry," the purser answers. "I've

just given McGee what I have left. We can't carry more than the legal limit of passengers you know."

"Yes, I know," Brody answers impatiently. "Heavy fine, and all that. But if someone should cancel a reservation I want a shot at the space."

"You'll head the list," the purser promises.

"Who're you taking out, McGee?" he asks.

"Several people," I reply, "and one prisoner."

"Prisoner?" he says, and I can see he's surprised. "Didn't know you'd made any arrests."

"I haven't yet," I admit. "Well, s'long."

BULLDOZER is special guard of the gold and puts in most of his time in the mine. Each day they take dirt to the surface, run it through sluice boxes and send the gold down to the cache. When the final clean-up is finished there's a ton of gold sure enough: around twenty-four thousand ounces that'll run a little better'n thirty dollars a ounce.

That much gold is a invitation to murder in any man's language. That much gold, too, means plenty of explainin' when the murderer tries to get rid of it.

Les Brody has that angle all figured out, like as not. He's had plenty of time, because the *Myrtle S.* has been caught in pack ice and shows up at Stormy Inlet a week late. After I talk it over with the purser, we take the gold aboard in a umiak.

"Any space for me?" Brody asks again.

"I'm afraid not. People don't cancel reservations this time of the year," the purser answers. He turns to me. "We'll sail at ten o'clock tomorrow morning, McGee. Have your people aboard by nine-thirty, please."

"We can send Bill Mason aboard tonight," I tell him.

"He'll be more comfortable at the hospital," the purser says. "How's he getting along?"

"No change," I hate to admit. "I'll bring my prisoner aboard tonight."

I go back to shore, prowl about camp awhile, then tap Luke Dexter on the shoulder. "Come along, Dexter. I'm holdin' you for murderous assault with a rifle on Bill Mason. Anything you say will be used again' you."

Dexter's eyes narrow. He's cool enough now. "Have you gone crazy, McGee?" he asks.

"No. I've knowed you was my man right along," I tell him. "Got all the evidence needed to convict. Didn't arrest you before because I didn't want to be bothered with a prisoner."

"I'm goin' to sue you for false arrest, defamation of character and all the rest, McGee," he snarls. "You've made the mistake of your life."

"Instead of snarlin' at me," I tell him, "you might give some thought to the man higher up. You might wonder if he'll go to bat for you or leave you holdin' the bag. I'm mentionin' no names. Don't need to, but you can tie to this, Dexter; if he thinks he's riskin' his own skin, he won't lift a hand to help you."

He's worried now and has some trouble maintainin' a poker face. I don't help matters along any by goin' to his shack and takin' the overalls with the patched knee. "I need these," I tell him, "for exhibit A."

THE camp is full of excitement as soon as Dexter's arrest is known. I take him aboard the *Myrtle S.* and the mate locks him up in the steamer's brig, which is down below and has a porthole six inches wide with bars across.

When I'm back on the beach, Stanton is roarin' his head off. "Dexter didn't shoot Mason," he argues. "He's been with us from the start. One of the best men I ever had."

"He made you think so, Stanton," I tell him. "Dexter is one of Brody's boys. A shock, ain't it? But it shouldn't be if you sleep on it a night or two." I grin. "Better pack your duds, we sail tomorrow mornin' at ten."

My next place of call is the hospital. "Hurricane," I say to Mary Kane, "if you don't want to slow down to a gentle breeze

you've got to get sleep. Forget Bill tonight and rest, because you'll have him on your hands all the way to Nome."

"Can't we fly him there?" she asks. "The boat takes so long."

"Flying might take longer," I explain. "Bad weather sometimes grounds planes for days in this country, as you know from personal experience."

"I suppose you're right on both counts," she says thoughtfully. "After all Bill's quiet enough at night. Yes, I'll get a full night's sleep. It's a promise."

I turn in at eleven o'clock, havin' packed up what gov'ment property Cam McKay had brought in. At three o'clock I hear Hurricane calling, "No-Shirt McGee! Come quick!"

I pull on my pants and run outside, buttonin' up as I go. "What's wrong?"

"He's gone," she says in a agonized voice. "My Bill's gone. Wandered off."

"That's one thing you can't blame Luke Dexter for," Stanton says. He's dressin' too. Then Bulldozer joins us.

"No dirty cracks at No-Shirt," he growls at Stanton.

"None intended," Stanton answers. "But I hate to think a terrible mistake has been made."

We're all followin' Hurricane to the hospital as we talk. As we go inside the silence is so thick you can cut it with a knife. The young doc is starin' at the empty bed as if he expected Mason to suddenly materialize. "I looked in on him at midnight," he says, "and he was sleeping almost normally. In fact I thought he was beginning to regain his temporarily suspended mentality. Later he was gone. I noticed Miss Kane."

"We'll start a hunt, now," I tell him. "Take flashlights and see if we can pick up his tracks. The first man findin' them can signal by blinkin' his light."

Two minutes later me and Bulldozer are slowly circlin' the hospital, examin' the muck for naked footprints. At the same time we turn the light slowly back and forth, hopin' to see his white nightgown.

Dawn is a long time in comin' and we're

still huntin'. I make everybody go to the mine cookshack for a feed. Grub's low and the cook's goin' out on the steamer, but he manages flapjacks, coffee and bacon. Hurricane bolts her food and is off. Bulldozer follows and I scurry around camp linin' up reliable men to join in the hunt.

We spread, fan-like, from camp looking for Mason's trail. Bulldozer and Hurricane go along with me. I'm thinkin' of a lot of things. There's Hurricane, quiet and calm outside, but nearly crazy inside. There's Cam McKay, wounded and dependin' on me to hold down his job, and everything is goin' haywire.

The country is low and rollin' with plenty of little gulches that might hide a man, but there're no high ridges that we can climb to study the country. We're four miles from camp before Bulldozer yells, "There he is! See. Movin' over the tundra."

HURRICANE gives a glad little cry, then shakes her head. "That can't be Bill, Bulldozer. The man is dressed. Bill's clothes were all at the hospital. He'll be in his nightgown."

"That's right," Bulldozer agrees. "No-Shirt, why don't you swing towards him and find out if he's seen Bill. Me and Hurricane will go through that low spot, each'll take a gulch and we'll come out on the rise at the upper ends. If you bear towards us after talkin' to your man we'll all meet in three hours."

"You do have a good idea once in awhile," I answer. And with that I head towards the cuss. He's ploddin' steadily to the southwest and it takes me a couple of hours to get within a quarter mile of him. I cup my hands and yell, "Hey! Wait a minute!"

He turns, gives one look and starts runnin'. I drag out my old forty-four and fire a shot in the air. If he's got a gun he'll return the fire. If he's really innocent then he'll stop. If he's guilty of somethin' he'll run faster'n ever; then I can aim lower.

Well, he runs faster'n ever. I take a careful aim hopin' the lead'll carry that

far and stop, but not hurt him. The bullet should be pretty well spent.

He looks back again and I get a look at his face. I feel cold all over. He's Bill Mason, or his twin brother. What's he doin' in somebody else's clothes? And how'd he get way out here? Also how am I goin' to catch him? Sure he's a wounded man and he's put in a stretch in bed, but he was tough from hard work before he was hit, and he can out-run me, or lick me in a rough and tumble fight because I won't feel like hittin' him. Too much chance of makin' his head wound worse.

I shift, hopin' to drive him towards the point Bulldozer will reach. It don't work. He skirts the border of a swamp and I can see he's goin' to stick to the high ground. I cross the swamp, hoppin' from one solid spot to another, like Eliza crossin' the ice in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Every hundred yards or so I got knee deep in the muck. I have to swim the last fifty yards, but it puts me close to Mason. He should be just over the next ridge. I stamp around, shakin' off the muck and water and catchin' my breath, then I top the ridge which ain't more'n twenty feet above the swamp. He's in a low spot two hundred yards away.

I keep below the ridge, work in front of him and drop down. "Hello, Bill," I say. "How're things at the mine?"

He gives me a queer look and backs away. He's out of his head, but the instinct to defend hisself is still there. If anything his mental condition makes him more crafty. It's as if the escape trickery of his cave ancestors has bridged the years to help him out.

"If I could just break through the veil," I growl, "the rest would be easy." Then I think of my badge—it's the sign of the law. And it's a refuge for honest folks in trouble. He takes one look and starts runnin' again.

My first thought is that maybe he is guilty of some crime and his conscience is makin' him run. But the second thought is better. Somehow he associates the law with the plot to cheat him out of his mine. I talk and try and calm him, at the same

time followin' along. It don't work. He's younger and faster and he keeps out of reach.

I stop, find some half-dry grass on a high spot and build a fire. I kick away the surroundin' vegetation so it won't spread, then I heap on a lot of green stuff. This done I leave a note.

Bulldozer:

*The man turned out to be Bill Mason.
Still out of his head. I'm followin'.*

*No-Shirt,
Deputy U. S. Marshal.*

Bulldozer should see the smoke and come to it, I reason.

IT'S late afternoon before I get another chance to cut in ahead of Mason. He's slowed down a lot, but so've I. I crouch behind a bunch of low willows and when he's opposite I jump out and grab him.

"Easy Bill!" I warn. "You've got to listen to me talk. Nobody's goin' to hurt you, but you'll hurt yourself, wanderin' around like this."

He lashes out at me and I keep tryin' to grab his hand. In two minutes I'm arm weary and he hangs a punch on my jaw. If he'd been strong it would've killed me. As it was I'm staggered and have to cover up.

"I'll kill you," he pants. "You asked for it, you blasted crook of a marshal. I'll kill you." As he comes in, he's open and I put everything I have into a punch.

It's a wonder my brittle bones don't snap, but they stand up. He kinda spins, then goes down on his face. I turn him over, puttin' my coat under his head at the same time fearfully studyin' his head bandage to make sure it ain't bleedin'.

I suppose he commences to mutter in a couple of minutes or so, but it seems a lifetime to me. He says, "I don't know much about the practical side of mining, but I'm no fool. I can sense trickery and I can add two and two and get four. I didn't kill that old miner, so it follows somebody else did. Somebody out to frame me. And I didn't shoot the old marshal, either."

I wait, listenin'. This is the kind of talk the doc said we might expect when the fog cleared away.

"This miners' meeting to elect a temporary marshal carried out its business too smoothly," he mutters. "It was cut and dried. Engineered by Les Brody. He knows I'm suspicious of him. And now I'm in jail and he's supposed to defend me from the mob. But he won't. I'll be lynched and . . . poor Mary. Mary and her dreams and mine."

I get it all now. His head is clearin' and he's thinkin' over what was in his mind just before the bullet hit. I've knowed men who had spells who'd stop in the middle of a sentence when the spell hit 'em, then pick up where they'd left off.

Suddenly he sets up. "By God, they won't take me alive. I'll go out there and fight. Open the door! Damn it, Brody, open this door!" His hands clench like he was shakin' bars on a door and slowly he opens his eyes.

"Hello, Bill Mason," I say in a low tone. I'm holdin' my breath.

He looks at me a long time and I can see the deadness has gone from his eyes. They're now the eyes of a young man who can fight hard, play hard and love hard.

"Who are you?" he asks. Then he presses his fingers again' his eyes. "Everything is swimming. What am I doing here?" He keeps his eyes closed tight and his fingers again' 'em. "Where's Brody? Where's the mob?"

CHAPTER V

DEEP DOWN UNDER

I BUILD another fire and he asks what it's for. "To bring help," I tell him, then I explain what has happened from the time I parachuted to Stormy Inlet to date.

"And the gold and Dexter are aboard the *Myrtle S.*?" he asks.

"And we'll be aboard her, too, when she sails," I tell him. "There's one more thing. Mary Kane is here. She flew north, then came by umiak from Shipwreck Harbor."

"She would," he says in an admirin'

voice. "And she shouldn't. How is she?"
"Looks like a couple of million," I tell him.

"She's normal," he says.

"Do you know who put clothes on you and turned you loose?" I ask.

"I'm sorry, Mr. McGee," he answers, "but I can't recall a thing since the moment I was pacing my cell and insisting Brody let me out to fight."

That didn't surprise me any. It takes a half hour for Bulldozer and Hurricane to reach me. I hear them comin' and run out to meet 'em. "He's okay," I tell Hurricane, then I delay Bulldozer. "We're stayin' here five minutes," I tell him. We both stand there, hear her glad little cry and then its mighty still around the fire.

"It must be swell to be loved by a girl like her," Bulldozer says. "She'd make any man mend his ways. I fell for her like a ton of brick, then I got hold of myself—after a fashion. Say, how'd he get out of the hospital?"

"I think Les Brody slipped in and led him out," I answer. "He knew a man in a nightgown would be spotted at night. White shows up a long ways, so he brought old clothes."

"Even to boots so barefoot tracks wouldn't be left around for the searchers to follow," he says. "Brody's the most thorough man I've ever heard of. The idea was for him to get lost on the tundra and die. No-Shirt, ain't there some way of hangin' all this on Brody?"

"Yes," I answer, "If Luke Dexter cracks and talks."

We join the pair and she's settin' on the ground with her arms around him. "Let the world roll on," Bill Mason says. "I'm happy."

"We've got to help it roll," I tell him. "You go back on a stretcher tomorrow. We'll have to camp here tonight. There won't be much to eat. On the other hand even Bulldozer couldn't make it to the Inlet after dark. He'd get mired down in a swamp."

We dry out tundra and make a bed for Bill, then me and Bulldozer go prospectin'

for fuel. Anything that'll burn is hauled in. Sometimes it's dead tundra, again it's willows Bulldozer's pulled up by the roots. They hiss and steam, but in the end burn.

It's a long night and we start movin' at the first streaks of dawn. Bulldozer sets off at top speed and me, Hurricane and Bill Mason walk slow, with plenty of rest.

It's noon before Bulldozer shows up again. He's swingin' along, followed by a dozen men packin' a stretcher. With three crews of four men each to carry the load we should make good time.

Bulldozer's winded when he reaches us. "More hard luck, No-Shirt," he pants. "The steamer sailed ten o'clock last night. The skipper left word he'd waited as long as he dared. A wind was bringin' in a heavy Arctic fog and he had a hunch he might run into ice trouble. Besides, he figgers to make one more round trip before the breeze-up and every day counts. Les Brody and some of his men took the space you reserved for us. They're on their way out."

"With the gold," Bill says.

"But in the custody of a purser," I add. "Don't worry, Brody isn't fool enough to pull a holdup." But I'm wonderin' what he will do.

WE PUT Bill on the stretcher and start back. Camp is dark and gloomy when we arrive, but there's a light in the hospital and the young doc is still there. "I had to sock him one, doc," I explain, "and it cleared his head. He's back to normal."

"That sometimes happens," he answers. "But we'll keep him in bed a while. You missed the boat. What are your plans?"

"Send for a plane," Bill says. "We can be in Nome when the *Myrtle S.* arrives. I can stand bumpy weather in the air."

"That's best," Hurricane agrees. "I'll ask Mr. Stanton to radio Fairbanks or Nome, either one. There's a hospital at Nome, too."

The fog is almost black and everything it touches glazes over. It hangs on for days and all we can do is cuss and pray for a change in weather. No sense in trying to reach Nome or Shipwreck Harbor in bad

weather, by skin boat. Several times we hear a plane overhead.

After ten days we get a break in the fog and a hour later a wheel job lands on the beach after bouncin' all over the place. It's the same pilot that brought me in. "Glad to see you alive, McGee," he says. "As soon as we can smooth out the beach we'll take off."

"How many people can you carry?"

"Is Mason a stretcher case?"

"No. He can set up," I answer.

"Five, the weather and takeoff being what they are," he answers.

The passengers are Hurricane, Bill, me, Bulldozer and Stanton. We fly by instrument to Nome, punch a hole through the clouds and roll onto the landin' field. Boy, it's sure good to be on the ground again.

Bill stands the trip in fine shape and checks in at a hotel instead of the hospital. I make a bee line for the freight and passenger agent of the *Myrtle S*.

"She's missing," he says. "She reported by radio she was off Shipwreck Harbor in a dense fog, but was on her course. Then the routine reports stopped. We've checked with Coast Guard and other vessels in the Arctic, Bering Sea and Pacific. None received an sos call. Of course she may have struck a rock and gone down before the operator could send a message. Or the radio may be out of commission."

"Even so," I argue, "she should've been here by now." He nods and all I can think of is the *Myrtle S*. is missing with Les Brody and a ton of gold aboard.

AS SOON as the weather clears me and Bulldozer charter a seaplane and commence the search. "You're responsible for the gold," he says. "Can Bill and Hurricane sue you?"

"They can sue me or the steamer, I don't know which," I admit, "prob'ly me, because if the steamer's sunk there won't be much to collect. I'm in hopes she's aground."

"We didn't have much more trouble when we took the schooner through the war zone," he says.

The pilot goes back and forth, quarterin'

hundreds of square miles of water like a setter dog coverin' a field. He's just about to go back for fuel when Bulldozer spots somethin' through the binoculars. We head for it and pretty soon it proves to be a umiak full of people.

We land and I look at those aboard. There's a man with a captain's cap on his head; several others who look like sailors, and—Les Brody. "It's them," I tell Bulldozer. "Survivors of the *Myrtle S*."

Bulldozer draws a long breath. "And it's a cinch she ain't carryin' a ton of gold," he says. "She's got about two and a half ton of people, which puts her down to the water's edge."

The umiak comes sluggishly alongside. "If you've got any sick or hurt people," I yell at the captain, "we'll take 'em aboard. We'll fly back to Nome with 'em. The pilot has already reported to the Coast Guard. How many missing?"

"One," the skipper answers. "A prisoner, Luke Dexter. She went down so fast we couldn't get below in time to open the jail."

"Yeah?" Bulldozer softly jeers. "Damned queer Dexter would be the only one to die. The man you expected to crack and spill evidence again' Brody."

"It is," I agree. "But we won't mention it to outsiders. There's plenty of questions to be asked and answered. The ship's log should show where she sank, and from that we can figger the chances of salvage." I raise my voice. "I'll take you to Nome, Captain. Come aboard and bring your log book with you."

"The log book was lost, sir," he answers. "She went down so fast the engineer and firemen were nearly trapped. It was one o'clock in the mornin' and everybody was asleep."

"Come aboard," I repeat. "And you, too, Brody." I pick two others I want to question and as soon as they're in their seats we take off for Nome.

AT NOME I question each separately, startin' in on Brody. "I know very little," he says. "Naturally when you

weren't on hand to take up your space I asked for it. The purser gave it to me."

"Okay," I say. "Then what?"

"We were in a fog much of the time and I slept. I was asleep when she began going down," he says. "I was called, got into my clothes and just had time to reach the umiak they had launched. I lost all of my personal belongings."

"What about Dexter?"

"Poor devil was trapped below," he answers. "Nobody could reach him. She went down too fast."

"Did she hit a rock?"

"Not that I know of," he answers.

I let him go and send for the captain. He's a youngish cuss who's spent most of his life in the Arctic. He's worried. "Listen, McGee," he says before I can put a question, "I'm in a jam. I had a drink of whisky while I was on watch and I passed out."

"You did, eh?" I say. "Then you need another. And you ain't on watch, either."

I pour him a man-sized drink and take one myself. He hesitates, then downs it. I ask him about the Arctic and a lot of other unimportant questions, while waitin' for the whiskey to take effect. After a while I get to the point, "You took *one* drink and passed out?"

"Yeah," he admits. "I had an empty stomach, or something."

"You've just taken another drink on a empty stomach and you ain't passin' out," I tell him. "Who gave you the drink?"

"Nobody. It was my own private stuff. I kept it in a locker in the wheel house," he explains. "It gets pretty cold up there in those black fogs. A little snort helps at times."

"How come your quartermaster didn't call the mate when you passed out?" I ask.

"I was at the wheel, McGee," he admits. "You know how it is on small trading steamers. We have a small crew and sometimes when we've had to work all hands pretty hard, the mates, or even the skipper will stand a wheel watch along with his own."

"The quartermaster was below?"

"Yeah."

"What time did you take the drink?"

"I don't know," he answers. "I took over at eight o'clock, had the drink later on, and they tell me she began goin' down around midnight. You see, she's a tight steamer and she hadn't struck. Nobody was expecting a leak. The first thing the engineer on watch knew was when water spilled through a bulkhead door. He started the pumps and called the bridge. There was no answer so he called the chief."

"The chief, a mighty good friend, found me. He called the first mate, then went below. The water was pourin' in by that time. He ordered the fire pulled to prevent a explosion, then got his men on deck."

"Something queer about this," I tell him.

"I know it," he admits. "And maybe a ton of gold is back of it all."

I nod. "Where'd she go down?"

"It depends on what course the steamer took while I was out. She does twelve knots at full speed. And we were going that," he answers.

"In a fog?"

"Sure," he said. "We'd been slowed down for a long time, on account of navigation hazards. I took soundings and knew from the depth, temperature of the water and type of bottom we were in the clear. No other steamers in the Arctic and no ice, so full speed ahead was safe. We were ten miles off shore."

I SPREAD out a chart. "Trace in this red pencil, a line showing your position when you took the drink," I tell him, "and the point where she could've been when she went down."

"Here's where we were when I took the drink," he says. "After that she might've gone around in circles, straight ahead, or even headed north again. I can't tell. Everyone was asleep, so passengers and crew can't help."

"You got no bearings after she went down?"

"None until several days later and that was in the approximate position where you sighted us. We had been in freezing mists blown along by a stiff breeze," he says.

"You sighted us here." He makes a notation on the chart.

There is quite a lot of water between the point where he took a drink and where I sighted the umiak. It was reasonable to suppose the wreck was closer to the latter point. But even so they could've done a lot of driftin'.

"Have you anything in mind?" he asks. "Because if that wreck isn't located a lot of heads will fall. You'll lose everything, Cam McKay will be fired for appointing an incompetent man and—"

"I had in mind spottin' the wreck from the air," I said. "Or draggin' for it."

"You might spot it from the air," he says. "Is that a trick you learned in the war zone?"

"One of 'em," I admit. "The English were spotting submarines that way."

"You won't get far with dragging," he says. "Plenty of rocks on the bottom to foul your drag. As most of 'em aren't charted you'd have to make sure each time it was a rock and not the wreck. It might take a lifetime."

He stood up, heavily. "If you're through with me I might as well go. I've got to make a report to the government men, and when it's all over I'll prob'ly lose my ticket and be stranded on the beach."

"Cheer up," I tell him. "We may get out of this mess yet."

After he's gone I go over everything in my mind again and again, then I set down and write a letter, put a blank check inside of the envelope and a airmail stamp on the outside, then I go down to the post office and mail it.

CHAPTER VI

DEAD MAN'S STORY

ME AND Bulldozer are settin' in our room when he unloads this one on me. "A good bookkeeper balances his books every so often, No-Shirt."

"You heard that somewheres," I tell him. "What're you drivin' at?"

"This deputy marshal business," he answers. "You're a nervous wreck and you

come north to quiet down. Then you get into excitement up to your ears. What's it gettin' you?" He shakes his head dubiously. "Nothin'! And it's liable to cost you plenty dough, not to forget a fair to middlin' reputation."

"If it helps Cam McKay hold his job, I'm paid in full," I tell him.

"Right now it looks as if you're makin' the loss of his job a cinch," he says.

"That's true. But if I hang somethin' on Les Brody, I'm paid in full twice," I go on. "And if I give a hand to a pair like Bill Mason and Hurricane—"

"I know," he interrupts. "You'll be paid six times. We won't argue that. I like her and him so well I won't even make a play for her. What's next, Heaven's gift to squaws?"

"Them's fightin' words," I roar. He pushes me back in my chair and asks what we do tomorrow.

Well, we charter a plane and fly to Shipwreck Harbor, and find Cam McKay settin' up with a pillow at his back. He knows what's happened, but he ain't holdin' it again' me. He's all smiles, but in a off-guard moment I catch the worried look you see on old folks' faces when their job starts slippin'.

Next day we commence to fly back and forth over the water. I've got keen-eyed Eskimo kids as well as Bulldozer lookin' out of the plane, tryin' to spot the wreck. The pilot uses up all the fuel, goes back to Nome and flies in with a load. We keep at it, day after day. Fogs ground us, and winds ripple the water, but we have clear stretches and make the most of them.

"Wherever it is," the pilot says at last, "it's not visible from the air. Water's too deep, or is clouded by currents."

"I guess we might as well give up spotting it from the air," I tell him. "Fly back to Nome and if there's any big mail, bring it. Find out how Bill Mason and Mary Kane are getting along. Let me know if Les Brody is still hangin' 'round."

It's ten days before he comes back. He's got a package that came all the way from the East Coast by air mail. "That cost

plenty," he says. "By the way, Brody's at Nome and so are Mason and the girl."

The next mornin' me and Bulldozer take my package of air mail, buy a umiak and start sailin'. We've got plenty of grub and once a day we go ashore to a place where we've made a camp, and cook up a batch. We take turns at steerin' the canoe. Sometimes the man off duty sleeps, and sometimes he talks. We keep at it day and night.

The Eskimos think we're crazy, and sometimes I wonder if they ain't right. It don't make sense to them, this cruisin' back and forth, never stoppin' to harpoon a whale, nor shoot a walrus.

EARLY one mornin' I wake up Bulldozer. "Help me get the sail down," I tell him. At the same time I keep the umiak movin' around in a circle. When the sail's down he grabs a paddle and we both paddle slowly back and forth.

"Okay," I yell, "this is the spot." He drops a concrete block overboard and fifty feet of line follow it, then there's slack. I make a float fast, then we put up the sail again and go to camp.

Here we ship a outboard motor, several fathoms of wire and a drag. We cruise back and forth about the float, then suddenly the drag fouls. We haul in the wire until we're over the spot, then paddle back and forth huntin' for a angle that'll release it.

After a while it clears and we haul it up. Bulldozer looks at the hooks on the drag. "They've scraped hull paint," he said. "Look."

I look. The paint's the same color as that on the *Myrtle S.*'s hull. "No-Shirt," he says, "You've done the impossible—located the wreck."

We go back to Shipwreck Harbor and radio for a plane, and the next day it lands us in Nome. The first man I meet is Brody. "When you going south?" he asks.

"Don't know," I answer. "I'm still deputy marshal until Cam McKay is on his feet again."

"Cam McKay is going to be removed from office," he says. "I've seen to that. There's been plenty of unsolved crime re-

cently. I expect to take over the deputyship in that region."

"You'll work different," I say. "Instead of dog teams and such you'll use gas boats and planes."

He gives me a funny look. "What's the matter with gas boats?" he asks. "They travel in all kinds of weather."

"I think they're fine," I tell him.

He keeps lookin' at me with suspicion. "So I ain't goin' out for a while yet," I add. "I hear a mail is due, so I might as well lay over and take it to Shipwreck Harbor with me."

That night I make a dicker for a lighter, towboat and fully equipped diver. "Sail at midnight," I direct, "and keep all this confidential."

The boys do a good job of it, and when I'm at the post office the followin' afternoon, waitin' for the mail to be distributed there's plenty of gossip, but no mention made of the barge sneakin' out after dark.

I get the Shipwreck Harbor letters and fly to the harbor. "Cheer up, Cam," I tell the old deputy marshal, "plenty is goin' to happen you'll like."

"I'd resign my job and go to panhandlin' if I thought by doin' so I could send Les Brody over the road," he says. "The dirty slicker."

"He's smooth, but the best ones slip," I tell him, "and nobody should know that better than a old marshal."

WHEN the barge anchors over the wreck me and Bulldozer go out in the umiak. A diver goes down and reports it's the *Myrtle S.* and she's on a even keel. "Several of the lower deadlights are open," he says. "That's why she flooded so fast."

"Somebody opened them," I tell him. "They was all dogged down when she left Stormy Inlet. The skipper checked on 'em in person."

He's down a long time, then he comes up and the helmet is pulled off. "I've got to get warmed up and rest," he says. "Plenty cold down there. I located the gold and forced open the door. I went forward and below, to the jail. It wasn't hard, be-

cause I'm familiar with all boats running out of Nome. It pays when you have to go down to them. The door leading into the passage was locked. I forced it. Went on to the jail door and forced that."

"Was—" I began.

He nods. "Yeah. I found Luke Dexter's remains. And this bottle, jammed between the bars over his porthole. He tried to push the bottle through, hoping it would float ashore and be found. The bars were too close."

I break the bottle and read the scrawled paper inside. I read it aloud, then I get those present to initial it, so they can testify it's the real McCoy later on.

The diver don't go down again, but gets a night's rest and is ready the next day. He sends up the gold and it is stowed away aboard the tug, then he goes down once more and sends up Dexter's remains.

"I guess that's all," I tell the diver and barge skipper. "Just head for Nome. I'll join you before you get there. I've business in Shipwreck Harbor."

Me and Bulldozer make the trip in the umiak and I go to the deputy marshal's office, take out the official stationery and write out a report which says all recent murders in the region have been solved and arrests made. Then I take it over to Cam McKay. "Sign here," I order.

He signs, then says, "Hold on! My mother told me never to sign anything I hadn't read. This may be a petition to hang me for all I know." He reads it then snorts. "This won't go. I'm gettin' credit for all you've done. It ain't right."

"And you'd have been the goat if I failed," I argue. "The credit belongs to you. And I'd like to see anybody blast you out of your job now. Sure, you'll need a deputy awhile longer, and I may stick around; but you're the boss."

Then before he can argue more I yank the paper from his hands. "I won't mail it until I 'tend to a little business in Nome," I promise.

A couple of Eskimos with a umiak put us aboard the tug when it's halfway to Nome. We cross the bar after dark. Bull-

dozer stands guard while I make arrangements to take the gold to the bank, and Dexter's remains to the morgue.

THE news spreads like wildfire. Bill Mason and Hurricane look me up to find out if it's true. "But how did you locate the *Myrtle S.*?" he asks.

"It's a long story," I answer. "Oh, hello, Brody."

"I want to congratulate you on finding the wreck," he says. "I don't know how you did it, but you did." Depend on him to make a grandstand play of doin' the right thing.

"The gold was a incident," I tell him. "The important thing was my work as deputy marshal. I've cleared up the various killings and . . ."

Slowly his hand goes inside his coat. He's wonderin' if he can slip from the hotel, reach the airport and head south. Suddenly the gun comes out, then it's knocked to the floor and his nose is bleedin'. Bulldozer's hit him.

"You might listen to this, Brody," I tell him. "They claim dead men tell no tales. And that was your idea when you made sure Dexter would drown, but it didn't work out that way. Listen:

To Whoever Gets This:

The ports are open somewhere. I can hear the water coming in. A few minutes ago Les Brody came in. He made sure my cell door was locked, then he left and locked the passage door. I think the steamer's going to sink and he's making sure I die. He's after the gold, and has wanted it from the first. I think he figgers to sink the steamer and salvage it later. If he was marshal he could do it without being caught.

"What a calm fellow he was in the face of death," Bill Mason says, "I'd have never guessed it."

"Many a man will surprise you in the showdown," I tell him. Then continue:

Me and Brody have played the game together a long time. I told him if he ever crossed me I'd get even, but I'd play the game as long as he did. He planted his men in Mason's mine, and they made

trouble. I kept Stanton from firing them.

Brody killed the old miner and made it look as if Mason had done it. Brody shot Cam McKay. Just as No-Shirt McGee figgered, I shot Mason. I was to get him if the crowd didn't. When McGee took charge, I let Mason have it. I'm sure Brody was the one who took Mason from the hospital and turned him loose on the tundra.

The water's getting deeper in the cell. It won't be long. I'll try and force the bottle through the bars, and hope somebody will find it.

May be this ain't legal, but it's written by a man who knows he's going to die and who wants to go out clean.

Luke Dexter.

As I finish a murmur of rage goes through those standing around. "Come on, Brody," I order, "I'm going to lock you up before you get some of the dose you tried to hand Bill Mason. You won't admit it, but I think you got the skipper's bottle, slipped in a Mickey Finn then took over. I think, too, you headed for water shallow enough for a diver to operate, yet deep enough so that a plane wouldn't spot the wreck from the air."

He don't say a word, but I know I'm right, and that was the reason me and Bulldozer sailed back and forth over water between eight and twelve fathoms deep. It was the only answer to the whole mystery, and when you've only one answer it's well to look into it.

We lock him up, then I mail Cam McKay's report. After that we go to the hotel.

THE END

Bill Mason and Hurricane have to thank us again—and ask questions.

"How'd you finally locate the wreck?" he asks.

"Figgerin' Brody would sink it in shallow, protected water near shore," I explain, "I cruised back and forth in such places and passed up the rest. That saved time. The wreck, by the way, is in a good position, and her owners can raise her and make Brody pay the damages."

"But how'd you spot her?"

"Oh, I can't take credit for that," I answer. "It was a trick I learned when I was in the war zone. Over there they had magnetic mines. When a steel ship passed over, the needle tipped up and made contact. I figgered if a ship was below, a compass needle would dip down, so I had a special compass made and shipped, airmail, from the East Coast. And, sure enough, the needle tipped down when we passed the *Myrtle S.*"

I get up and stifle a yawn. "I'm tired. Goodnight folks. See you in the mornin'."

"Goodnight, No-Shirt," Hurricane answers and starts for the stairs. I suddenly jerk my head around for another look. By golly, she's got as well turned a ankle as ever I did see.

"Come on, Heaven's gift to squaws," Bulldozer says, jammin' his thumb between my ribs. "I can see you're gettin' better, but you still need plenty of sleep. Doctor's orders."

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Dr. Kildare's Crisis

By MAX BRAND



A little fleck of blood showed in the corner of Lamont's mouth. Kildare knew that his first guess had been right

Start now this engrossing story of the hardest problem young Jimmy Kildare ever had to face—and the way he solved it

NOW, when it seems that there will never be time enough to do the things that he must do, DR. JIMMY KILDARE is brought up short by a man on fire—a man burning with an idea for saving the world.

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Everyone comes to Kildare for advice and help—like JOE WEYMAN, the ambulance driver, who has been hitting the liquor hard and is beginning to ask the doc for pick-me-ups. Fond as he is of Joe, Kildare turns him down; warns him that the ambulance job is getting him, and that he ought to quit.

Then there is Nurse MARY LAMONT, Jimmy's fiancée—lucky when she can steal a minute from the thoughts of this young doctor whom she pretty despairingly adores.

But this time Kildare must listen: because it is DOUGLAS LAMONT, Mary's brother, who comes to him in a frenzy of enthusiasm for his project. And there is something in that frenzy that holds Jimmy's keen diagnostic eye.

Something wrong. . . .

This story began in last week's Argosy