

# The Ballad of Mad Maggie

## By Kaitlyn Lonnee

*There are some who say that the break of day  
Brings with it a sort of respite  
From the things in the snow that the locals know  
Like to stalk in the dead of the night;  
Those same ones tell of a demon from hell  
That drowns its unfortunate prey,  
And I saw her at dawn by the River Yukon—  
That Mad Ol' Maggie McCrae.*

Now the winter that year was the coldest I fear that Dawson ever did see;  
It was sixty below, and the moon's silv'ry glow threw light upon tree after tree.  
Myself, I holed up with my flask and my cup while the chill wind howled and moaned,  
Warm in my nest for a long winter's rest as the cabin walls shuddered and groaned.

The heart of the fire, a sight to inspire, blazed as the storm swept the peaks;  
The snow was nonstop and continued to drop day and night during those lonely weeks.  
But my warm hideaway became stifling and grey as the infamous fever took hold—  
The kind that unwinds the string of men's minds and mimics the spell of the gold.

Have you ever been caught by a feeling of rot, by a visceral sickness of soul,  
When your spirit's distressed because deep in your chest all that's there is a black yawning hole?  
You feel like you're numb, like your heart's been struck dumb, like you're cornered within your own skin,  
As an aura of gloom keeps you locked in its tomb, and a terrible panic creeps in.

When the blizzard is all you can hear through the walls, have you ever felt stuck in your head?  
With the strange Northern Lights on those long polar nights filling your belly with dread...  
There are tales on the trails of those with the ails—I know I ain't the first one,  
And I won't be the last to consider a blast from the welcoming mouth of a gun.

So before I went mad, I got myself clad in the thick heavy furs of the North,  
And I harnessed the hounds, and I did a few rounds before brazenly I started forth.  
Oh, the freedom I felt! as my fever did melt while the stars overhead scattered dust,  
And I urged the dogs on till the first streak of dawn just to sate my insane wanderlust.

On raw Arctic nights, your flesh the wind bites till your face feels flayed straight to the bone.  
It's as cold as the grave, and the Devil will rave, "At least it is warm in my home!"  
For the Devil won't go out at night in the snow when the real horrors come out to play  
Because some of them prowl under watch of the owl and one is Mad Maggie McCrae.

On the Waterfront Trail, many tell of a wail that can pierce a man's heart through with fear,  
And you'll wish, and you'll pray, and you'll cry in dismay 'cause you'll know that Ol' Maggie is near.  
This grim ghost of death will steal all of your breath! you can fight with your brains and your brawn,  
But she'll hold you down and she'll laugh while you drown—never to see a new dawn.

True, thoughts such as these and their marks of unease were admittedly far from my mind;  
In the crisp twilit air, I had not a care, simply gladdened to not be confined.  
That was until, with a sudden grim thrill, I heard an odd echoing cry;  
It wasn't a bird or like nothing I'd heard—a shrill shriek that said danger was nigh.

As I mushed o'er the trail, the dogs tried to turn tail, their eyes rolling madly with fright;  
When we rounded a bend, I fell hard from the sled, left for dead in the dark of the night.  
How long I laid in the snow and prayed I know not while I regained my breath,  
But my heart froze with fear when slow footsteps crunched near, and I gazed at the pale face of Death.

I thought I was dreaming or that the moon's gleaming was playing its tricks from the skies—  
She was cloaked in the dark with insanity's spark burning a hole in her eyes.  
Though I lived to tell of the woman from hell and how I faced ruin that day,  
I still wake in cold sweat 'cause I'll never forget the sight of Mad Maggie McCrae.

She latched onto my arm while I screamed in alarm, fighting with tooth and with nail,  
And she let out a growl, her breath rotted and foul, as I struggled to no great avail.  
Her black lips aquiver, she made for the river and dragged me out into the centre;  
Then she pulled from her hip an old miner's ice pick, and the ice there the sharp end did enter.

Ice chips flew from the ground with a shattering sound as she started to make a large hole;  
Her mad godless laughter would haunt my dreams after and cling to the walls of my soul.  
Now you'll have to remember Dawson froze in November, so the ice there was nice and thick,  
But it didn't take long—she was savagely strong—and the waters I saw running quick.

Her frostbitten skin next stretched wide in a grin, and I knew then that she'd have me drowned—  
It was my final chance, and without backward glance, I tackled her down to the ground.  
We rolled in the snow, dealing blow after blow, as I fought like a fiend for my life,  
And she twisted and squirmed like a monstrous old worm while I wished for my steel hunting knife.

But then with a yell like the peal of a bell, I shoved her—a good, solid throw—  
And she fell through the crack like a dense gunny sack into the river below.  
Those waters run swift—they pull, and they drift—and the bottom is jagged and craggy;  
The sun rose with the dawn, but the River Yukon had swallowed up Mad Ol' Maggie.

Catching my breath from my close brush with death, I stumbled half-frozen to town  
And recounted my tale from the Waterfront Trail, half on the verge of breakdown.  
Though some scoffed, I now know not to mush through the snow when the moon is especially bright  
'Cause sometimes I swear that in the chill air... I can still hear her wail in the night.

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