

THE CITY OF NUMBERED DAYS



By FRANCIS LYNDE



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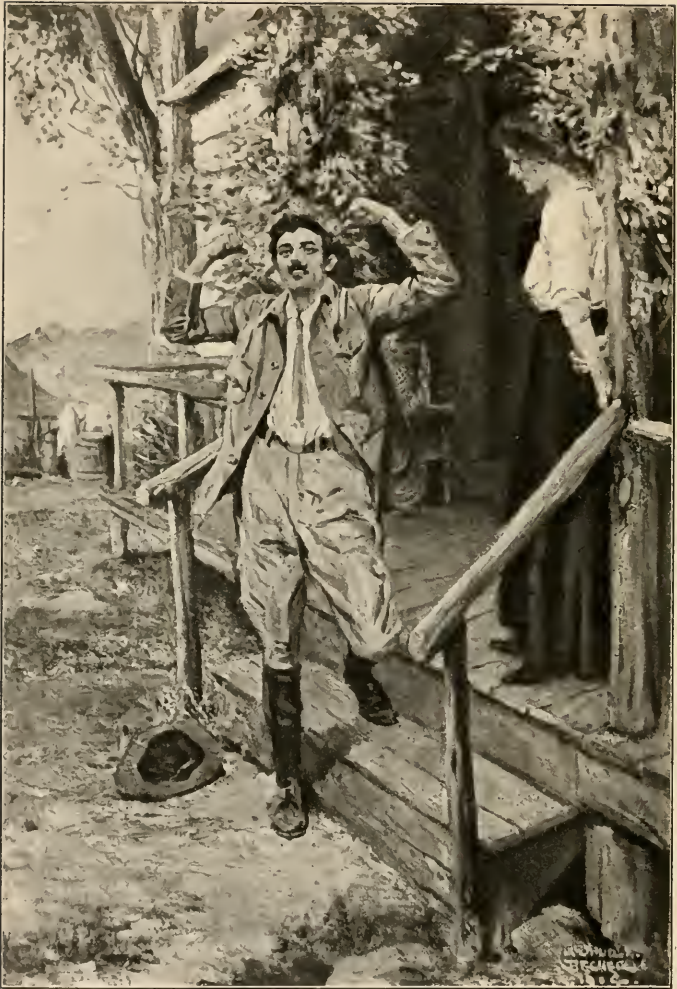
BOOKS BY FRANCIS LYNDE

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THE CITY OF NUMBERED DAYS

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“What would I do? A number of things.”

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The
City of Numbered Days

BY
FRANCIS LYNDE

ILLUSTRATED BY
ARTHUR E. BECHER

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TO MY WIFE

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I

The Heptaderm

IT was not characteristic of Brouillard—the Brouillard Grislow knew best—that he should suffer the purely technical talk of dams and reservoirs, bed-rock anchorages, and the latest word in concrete structural processes to languish and should drift into personal reminiscences over their first evening camp-fire in the Niquoia.

Because the personalities were gratefully varying the monotonies, and also because he had a jocose respect for the unusual, Grislow was careful not to discourage the drift. There had been a benumbing surfeit of the technical talk dating from the day and hour when the orders had come from Washington giving Brouillard his step up and directing him to advance with his squad of Reclamation-Service pioneers upon the new work in the western Timanyonis. But, apart from this, the reminiscences had an experimental value. Grislow's one unamiable leaning manifested itself

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in a zest for cleverly turning the hidden facets of the human polygon up to the light; and if the facets chose to turn themselves of their own accord, as in Brouillard's case, why, so much the better.

"As you were saying?" he prompted, stretching himself luxuriously upon the fragrant banking of freshly clipped spruce tips, with his feet to the blaze and his hands locked under his head. He felt that Brouillard was merely responding to the subtle influences of time, place, and encompassments and took no shame for being an analytical rather than a sympathetic listener. The hundred-odd men of the pioneer party, relaxing after the day-long march over the mountains, were smoking, yarning, or playing cards around the dozen or more camp-fires. The evening, with a half-grown moon silvering the inverted bowl of a firmament which seemed to shut down, lid-like, upon the mountain rim of the high-walled valley, was witchingly enchanting; and, to add the final touch, there was comradely isolation, Anson, Griffith, and Leshington, the three other members of the engineering staff, having gone to burn candles in the headquarters tent over blue-prints and field-notes.

"I was saying that the present-day world slant is sanely skeptical—as it should be," Brouillard

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went on at the end of the thoughtful pause. "Being modern and reasonably sophisticated, we can smile at the signs and omens of the ages that had to get along without laboratories and testing plants. Just the same, every man has his little atavistic streak, if you can hit upon it. For example, you may throw flip-flaps and call it rank superstition if you like, but I have never been able to get rid of the notion that birthdays are like the equinoxes—turning-points in the small, self-centred system which we call life."

"Poodle-dogs!" snorted the one whose attitude was both jocose and analytical, stuffing more of the spruce branches under his head to keep the pipe ashes from falling into his eyes.

"I know; being my peculiar weakness instead of your own, it's tommy-rot to you," Brouillard rejoined good-naturedly. "As I said a few minutes ago, I am only burbling to hear the sound of my own voice. But the bottoming fact remains. You give a screw twist to a child's mind, and if the mind of the man doesn't exhibit the same helical curve——"

"Suppose you climb down out of the high-browed altitudes and give it a plain, every-day name?" grumbled the staff authority on watersheds.

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“It’s casting pearls before swine, but you’re a pretty good sort of swine, Grizzly. If you’ll promise to keep your feet out of the trough, I’ll tell you. Away back in the porringer period, in which we are all like the pin-feathered dicky-birds, open-mouthed for anything anybody may drop into us, some one fed me with the number seven.”

“Succulent morsel!” chuckled Grislow. “Did it agree with you?”

Brouillard sat back from the fire and clasped his hands over his bent knees. He was of a type rare enough to be noteworthy in a race which has drawn so heavily upon the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic stocks for its build and coloring: a well-knit figure of a man, rather under than over the normal stature, but bulging athletically in the loose-fitting khaki of the engineer; dark of skin, even where the sun had not burned its rich mahogany into the olive, and owning a face which, with the upcurled mustaches, the brooding black eyes, and the pure Gallic outline of brow and jaw, might have served as a model for a Vierge study of a fighting *franc-tireur*.

“I don’t remember how early in the game the thing began,” he resumed, ignoring Grislow’s joking interruption, “but away back in the dimmest

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dawnings the number seven began to have a curious significance for me. From my earliest recollections things have been constantly associating themselves with seven or some multiple of it. You don't believe it, of course; but it is true."

"Which means that you have been sitting up and taking notice when the coincidences hit, and have forgotten the millions of times when they didn't," scoffed the listener.

"Probably," was the ready admission. "We all do that. But there is one set of 'coincidences,' as you call them, that can't be so easily turned down. Back in the pin-feather time that I mentioned somebody handed me a fact—the discovery of the physiologists about the waste and replacement that goes on in the human organism, bringing around a complete cellular change about once in every seven years. Are you asleep?"

"Not yet; go on," said the hydrographer.

"It was a long time ago, and I was only a little tad; but I surrounded the idea and took it in literally, in the sense of a sudden and sort of magical change coming at the end of each seven-year period and bound to occur at those particular fixed times. The notion stuck to me like a cocklebur, and sometimes I wonder if it isn't still sticking."

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“Bugs!” ranted Grislow, in good-natured ridicule, and Brouillard laughed.

“That is what I say to myself, Murray, every time the fatal period rolls around. And yet——”

“There isn’t any ‘and yet,’” cut in the scoffer derisively. “This is merely your night for being batty. ‘Fatal period’—suffering humanity!”

“No, hold on: let me tell you, Murray—I’d like to get it out of my system if I can. Up to my seventh birthday I was a sickly child, puny and only about half alive. I recollect, as if it were only yesterday, how the neighbor women used to come in and condole with my mother, ignoring me, of course, as if I hadn’t any ears. I can remember old Aunt Hetty Parsons saying, time and again: ‘No, Mis’ Brouillard; you’ll never raise that boy the longest day you live!’”

“I’m waiting for the ‘and yet,’” put in Grislow, sitting up to relight his pipe with a blazing splinter from the fire.

“It came—the change, I mean—when I was seven years old. That was the year of our removal to Vincennes from the country village where I was born. Since that time I haven’t known what it means to be sick or even ailing.”

“Bully old change!” applauded Grislow. “Is that all?”

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“No. What the second period spent on my body it took out of my mind. I grew stouter and stronger every year and became more and more the stupidest blockhead that ever thumbed a school-book. I simply couldn't learn, Murray. My mother made excuses for me, as mothers will, but my father was in despair. He was an educated man, and I can imagine that my unconquerable doltishness went near to breaking his heart.”

“You are safely over that stage of it now, at all events,” said the hydrographer in exaggerated sarcasm. “Any man who can stare into the fire and think out fetching little imaginations like these you are handing me——”

“Sometimes I wish they were only imaginings, Grizzy. But let me finish. I was fourteen to a day when I squeezed through the final grammar grade; think of it—fourteen years old and still with the women teachers! I found out afterward that I got my dubiously given passport to the high school chiefly because my father was one of the best-known and best-loved men in the old home town. Perhaps it wasn't the magic seven that built me all over new that summer; perhaps it was only the change in schools and teachers. But from that year on, all the hard things were

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too easy. It was as if somebody or something had suddenly opened a closed door in my brain and let the daylight into all the dark corners at once.”

Grislow sat up and finished for him.

“Yes; and since that time you have staved your way through the university, and butted into the Reclamation Service, and played skittles with every other man’s chances of promotion until you have come out at the top of the heap in the Construction Division, all of which you’re much too modest to brag about. But, say; we’ve skipped one of the seven-year flag-stations. What happened when you were twenty-one—or were you too busy just then chasing the elusive engineering degree to take notice?”

Brouillard was staring out over the loom of the dozen camp-fires—out and across the valley at the massive bulk of Mount Chigringo rising like a huge barrier dark to the sky-line save for a single pin-prick of yellow light fixing the position of a solitary miner’s cabin half-way between the valley level and the summit. When he spoke again the hydrographer had been given time to shave another pipe charge of tobacco from his pocket plug and to fill and light the brier.

“When I was twenty-one my father died, and”—he stopped short and then went on in a tone which

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was more than half apologetic—"I don't mind telling you, Grislow; you're not the kind to pass it on where it would hurt. At twenty-one I was left with a back load that I am carrying to this good day; that I shall probably go on carrying through life."

Grislow walked around the fire, kicked two or three of the charred log ends into the blaze, and growled when the resulting smoke rose up to choke and blind him.

"Forget it, Victor," he said in blunt retraction. "I thought it was merely a little splashing match and I didn't mean to back you out into deep water. I know something about the load business myself; I'm trying to put a couple of kid brothers through college, right now."

"Are you?" said Brouillard half-absently; and then, as one who would not be selfishly indifferent: "That is fine. I wish I were going to have something as substantial as that to show for my wood sawing."

"Won't you?"

"Not in a thousand years, Murray."

"In less than a hundredth part of that time you'll be at the top of the Reclamation-Service pay-roll—won't that help out?"

"No; not appreciably."

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Grislow gave it up at that and went back to the original contention.

"We're dodging the main issue," he said. "What is the active principle of your 'sevens'—or haven't you figured it out?"

"Change," was the prompt rejoinder; "always something different—radically different."

"And what started you off into the memory woods, particularly, to-night?"

"A small recurrence of the coincidences. It began with that hopelessly unreliable little clock that Anson persists in carrying around with him wherever he goes. While you were up on the hill cutting your spruce tips Anson pulled out and said he was going to unpack his camp kit. He went over to his tent and lighted up, and a few minutes afterward I heard the clock strike—seven. I looked at my watch and saw that it lacked a few minutes of eight, and the inference was that Anson had set the clock wrong, as he commonly does. Just as I was comfortably forgetting the significant reminder the clock went off again, striking slowly, as if the mechanism were nearly run down."

"Another seven?" queried Grislow, growing interested in spite of a keen desire to lapse into ridicule again.

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"No; it struck four. I didn't imagine it, Murray; I counted: one—two—three—four."

"Well?" was the bantering comment. "You couldn't conjure an omen out of that, could you? You say there was a light in the tent—I suppose Anson was there tinkering with his little tin god of a timepiece. It's a habit of his."

"That was the natural inference; but I was curious enough to go and look. When I lifted the flap the tent was empty. The clock was ticking away on Anson's soap-box dressing-case, with a lighted candle beside it, and for a crazy half second I had a shock, Murray—the minute-hand was pointing to four and the hour-hand to seven!"

"Still I don't see the miraculous significance," said the hydrographer.

"Don't you? It was only another of the coincidences, of course. While I stood staring at the clock Anson came in with Griffith's tool kit. 'I've got to tinker her again,' he said. 'She's got so she keeps Pacific time with one hand and Eastern with the other.' Then I understood that he had been tinkering it and had merely gone over to Griffith's tent for the tools."

"Well," said Grislow again, "what of it? The clock struck seven, you say; but it also struck four."

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Brouillard's smile tilted his curling mustaches to the sardonic angle.

"The combination was what called the turn, Grizzy. To-day happens to be my twenty-eighth birthday—the end of the fourth cycle of seven."

"By George!" ejaculated the hydrographer in mock perturbation, sitting up so suddenly that he dropped his pipe into the ashes of the fire. "In that case, according to what seems to be the well-established custom, something is due to fall in right now!"

"I have been looking for it all day," returned Brouillard calmly, "which is considerably more ridiculous than anything else I have owned to, you will say. Let it go at that. We'll talk about something real if you'd rather—that auxiliary reservoir supply from the Apache Basin, for example. Were the field-notes in when you left Washington?" And from the abrupt break, the technicalities came to their own again; were still holding the centre of the stage after the groups around the mess fires had melted away into the bunk shelters and tents, and the fires themselves had died down into chastened pools of incandescence edged each with its beach line of silvered ashes.

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It was Murray Grislow who finally rang the curtain call on the prolonged shop-talk.

“Say, man! do you know that it is after ten o’clock?” he demanded, holding the face of his watch down to the glow of the dying embers. “You may sit here all night, if you like, but it’s me for the blankets and a few lines of ‘tired Nature’s sweet restorer, balmy’— Now, what in the name of a guilty conscience is *that?*”

As it chanced, they were both facing toward the lower end of the valley when the quotation-breaking apparition flashed into view. In the deepest of the shadows at the mouth of the gorge, where the torrenting Niquoia straightened itself momentarily before entering upon its plunging race through the mountain barrier, a beam of white light flickered unsteadily for a fraction of a second. Then it became a luminous pencil to trace a zigzag line up the winding course of the river, across to the foot-hill spur where the camp of the Reclamation-Service vanguard was pitched, and so on around to the base of Chigringo. For certain other seconds it remained quiescent, glowing balefully like the eye of some fabled monster searching for its prey. Then it was gone.

Grislow’s comment took the form of a half-startled exclamation.

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“By Jove! wouldn’t that give you a fit of the creepies?—this far from civilization and a dynamo?”

“It wasn’t an electric,” returned Brouillard thoughtfully, apparently taking Grislow’s suggestion literally. “It was an acetylene.”

“Supposing it was—what’s the difference? Aren’t we just as far from a carbide shop as we are from the dynamo? What are you calling it?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” was the half-absent reply. Brouillard was still staring fixedly at the distant gulf of blackness where the mysterious light had appeared and disappeared.

“Then I’ll make it and go to bed,” said the hydrographer, rising and stretching his arms over his head. “If it had come a couple of hours ago we should have called it the ‘spot-light,’ turned on to mark the end of your fourth act and the beginning, auspicious or otherwise, of the fifth. Maybe it is, anyway; maybe the property-man was asleep or drunk and forgot to turn it on at the spectacular instant. How will that do?”

Brouillard had got upon his feet and was buttoning his many-pocketed shooting-coat.

“It will do to put you into the Balaam saddle-beast class, Grizzy,” he said, almost morosely. Then he added: “I’m going to take a little hike

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down yonder for investigative purposes. Want to come along?"

But the mapper of watersheds was yawning sleepily. "Not on your tintype," he refused. "I'm going to 'cork it orf in me 'ammick.' Wake me up when you come back and tell me what the fifth act is going to do to you. The more I think of it the more I'm convinced that it *was* the spotlight, a little overdue, after all." And he turned away chuckling.

It was only a short mile from the camp on the inward slopes of the eastern foot-hills to the mouth of the outlet gorge, across which Brouillard could already see, in mental prevision, the great gray wall of the projected Niquoia dam—his future work—curving majestically from the broken shoulder of Chingringo to the opposing steeps of Jack's Mountain. The half-grown moon, tilting now toward the sky-line of the western barrier, was leaving the canyon portal in deepest gloom. As Brouillard swung along he kept a watchful eye upon the gorge shadows, half expecting a return of the mysterious apparition. But when he finally reached the canyon portal and began to seek for the trail which roughly paralleled the left bank of the stream the mystery was still unexplained.

From its upper portal in the valley's throat to

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the point where the river debouches among the low sand-hills of the Buckskin Desert the canyon of the Niquoia measures little more than a mile as the bird flies, though its crookings through the barrier mountains fairly double the distance. Beginning as a broken ravine at the valley outlet, the gorge narrows in its lower third to a cliff-walled raceway for the torrent, and the trail, leaving the bank of the stream, climbs the forested slope of a boundary spur to descend abruptly to the water's edge again at the desert gateway, where the Niquoia, leaping joyously from the last of its many hamperings, becomes a placid river of the plain.

Picking his way judiciously because the trail was new to him, Brouillard came in due time to the descending path among the spruces and scrub-pines leading to the western outlook upon the desert swales and sand-hills. At the canyon portal, where the forest thinned away and left him standing at the head of the final descending plunge in the trail, he found himself looking down upon the explanation of the curious apparition.

None the less, what he saw was in itself rather inexplicable. In the first desert looping of the river a camp-fire of piñon knots was blazing cheerfully, and beside it, with a picnic hamper for a

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table, sat a supper party of three—two men and a woman—in enveloping dust-coats, and a third man in chauffeur leather serving the sitters. Back of the group, and with its detachable search-light missing, stood a huge touring-car to account for the picnic hamper, the dust-coats, the man in leather, and, doubtless, for the apparitional eye which had appeared and disappeared at the mouth of the upper gorge. Also it accounted, in a purely physical sense, for the presence of the picnickers, though the whim which had led them to cross the desolate Buckskin Desert for the dubious pleasure of making an all-night bivouac on its eastern edge was not so readily apparent.

Being himself a Bedouin of the desert, Brouillard's first impulse was hospitable. But when he remarked the ample proportions of the great touring-car and remembered the newness and rawness of his temporary camp he quickly decided that the young woman member of the party would probably fare better where she was.

This being the case, the young engineer saw no reason why he should intrude upon the group at the cheerful camp-fire. On the contrary, he began speedily to find good and sufficient reasons why he should not. That the real restraining motive was a sudden attack of desert shyness he would

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not have admitted. But the fact remained. Good red blood with its quickenings of courage and self-reliance, and a manful ability to do and dare, are the desert's gifts; but the penalty the desert exacts in return for them is evenly proportioned. Four years in the Reclamation Service had made the good-looking young chief of construction a man-queller of quality. But each year of isolation had done something toward weakening the social ties.

A loosened pebble turned the scale. When a bit of the coarse-grained sandstone of the trail rolled under Brouillard's foot and went clattering down to plunge into the stream the man in chauffeur leather reached for the search-light lantern and directed its beam upon the canyon portal. But by that time Brouillard had sought the shelter of the scrub-pines and was retracing his steps up the shoulder of the mountain.

II

J. Wesley Cræsus

MEASURED even by the rather exacting standards of the mining and cattle country, Brouillard was not what the West calls "jumpy." Four years of field-work, government or other, count for something; and the man who has proved powder-shy in any stage of his grapple with the Land of Short Notice is customarily a dead man.

In spite of his training, however, the young chief of construction, making an early morning exploration of the site for the new dam at the mouth of the outlet gorge while the rank and file of the pioneer force were building the permanent camp half-way between the foot-hills and the river, winced handsomely when the shock of a distance-muffled explosion trembled upon the crisp morning air, coming, as it seemed, from some point near the lower end of the canyon.

The dull rumble of the explosion and the little start for which it was accountable were disconcerting in more ways than one. As an industry captain busy with the preliminaries of what promised

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to be one of the greatest of the modern salvages of the waste places, Brouillard had been assuring himself that his work was large enough to fill all his horizons. But the detonating crash reminded him forcibly that the presence of the touring party was asserting itself as a disturbing element and that the incident of its discovery the night before had been dividing time pretty equally with his verification of the locating engineer's blue-print mappings and field-notes.

This was the first thought, and it was pointedly irritating. But the rebound flung him quickly over into the field of the common humanities. The explosion was too heavy to figure as a gunshot; and, besides, it was the closed season for game. Therefore, it must have been an accident of some sort—possibly the blowing up of the automobile. Brouillard had once seen the gasoline tank of a motor-car take fire and go up like a pyrotechnic set piece in a sham battle.

Between this and a hurried weighting of the sheaf of blue-prints with his field-glass preparatory to a first-aid dash down the outlet gorge, there was no appreciable interval. But the humane impulse doubled back upon itself tumultuously when he came to his outlook halting place of the night before.

J. Wesley Crœsus

There had been no accident. The big touring-car, yellow with the dust of the Buckskin, stood intact on the sand flat where it had been backed and turned and headed toward the desert. Wading in the shallows of the river with a linen dust robe for a seine, the two younger men of the party were gathering the choicest of the dead mountain trout with which the eddy was thickly dotted. Coming toward him on the upward trail and climbing laboriously to gain the easier path among the pines, were the two remaining members of the party—an elderly, pudgy, stockily built man with a gray face, stiff gray mustaches and sandy-gray eyes to match, and the young woman, booted, gauntleted, veiled, and bulked into shapelessness by her touring coat, and yet triumphing exuberantly over all of these handicaps in an ebullient excess of captivating beauty and attractiveness.

Being a fisherman of mark and a true sportsman, Brouillard had a sudden rush of blood to the anger cells when he realized that the alarm which had brought him two hard-breathing miles out of his way had been the discharge of a stick of dynamite thrown into the Niquoia for the fish-killing purpose. In his code the dynamiting of a stream figured as a high crime. But the two on the trail had come up, and his protest was forestalled by

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the elderly man with the gray face and the sandy-gray eyes, whose explosive "Ha!" was as much a measure of his breathlessness as of his surprise.

"I was just telling Van Bruce that his thundering fish cartridge would raise the neighbors," the trail climber went on with a stout man's chuckle. And then: "You're one of the Reclamation engineers? Great work the government is undertaking here—fine opportunity to demonstrate the lifting power of aggregated capital backed by science and energy and a whole heap of initiative. It's a high honor to be connected with it, and that's a fact. You *are* connected with it, aren't you?"

Brouillard's nod was for the man, but his words were for the young woman whose beauty refused to be quenched by the touring handicaps. "Yes, I am in charge of it," he said.

"Ha!" said the stout man, and this time the exclamation was purely approbative. "Chief engineer, eh? That's fine, *fine!* You're young, and you've climbed pretty fast. But that's the way with you young men nowadays; you begin where we older fellows leave off. I'm glad we met you. My name is Cortwright—J. Wesley Cortwright, of Chicago. And yours is——?"

Brouillard named himself in one word. Stran-

J. Wesley Croesus

gers usually found him bluntly unresponsive to anything like effusiveness, but he was finding it curiously difficult to resist the good-natured heartiness which seemed to exude from the talkative gentleman, overlaying him like the honeydew on the leaves in a droughty forest.

If Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright's surprise on hearing the Brouillard surname was not genuine it was at least an excellent imitation.

"Well, well, well—you don't say! Not of the Brouillards of Knox County, Indiana?—but, of course, you must be. There is only the one family that I ever heard of, and it is mighty good, old *voyageur* stock, too, dating 'way back to the Revolutionary War, and further. I've bought hogs of the farmer Brouillards hundreds of times when I was in the packing business, and I want to tell you that no finer animals ever came into the Chicago market."

"Yes?" said Brouillard, driving the word in edgewise. "I am sorry to say that I don't know many of the farmers. Our branch of the family settled near Vincennes, and my father was on the bench, when he wasn't in politics."

"What? Not Judge Antoine! Why, my dear young man! Do you know that I once had the pleasure of introducing your good father to my

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bankers in Chicago? It was years ago, at a time when he was interested in floating a bond issue for some growing industry down on the Wabash. And to think that away out here in this howling wilderness, a thousand miles from nowhere, as you might say, I should meet his son!"

Brouillard laughed and fell headlong into the pit of triteness.

"The world isn't so very big when you come to surround it properly, Mr. Cortwright," he asserted.

"That's a fact; and we're doing our level best nowadays to make and keep it little," buzzed the portly man cheerfully, with a wave of one pudgy arm toward the automobile. "It's about a hundred and twenty miles from this to El Gato, on the Grand Canyon, isn't it, Mr. Brouillard? Well, we did it in five hours yesterday afternoon, and we could have cut an hour out of that if Rickert hadn't mistaken the way across the Buckskin. Not that it made any special difference. We expected to spend one night out and came prepared."

Brouillard admitted that the touring feat kept even pace with the quickening spirit of the age; but he did not add that the motive for the feat was not quite so apparent as it might be. This

J. Wesley Croesus

mystery, however, was immediately brushed aside by Mr. Cortwright, speaking in his character of universal ouster of mysteries.

“You are wondering what fool notion chased us away out here in the desert when we had a comfortable hotel to stop at,” he rattled on. “I’ll tell you, Mr. Brouillard—in confidence. It was curiosity—raw, country curiosity. The papers and magazines have been full of this Buckskin reclamation scheme, and we wanted to see the place where all the wonderful miracles were going to get themselves wrought out. Have you got time to ‘put us next’?”

Brouillard, as the son of the man who had been introduced to the Chicago money gods in his hour of need, could scarcely do less than to take the time. The project, he explained, contemplated the building of a high dam across the upper end of the Niquoia Canyon and the converting of the inland valley above into a great storage reservoir. From this reservoir a series of distributing canals would lead the water out upon the arid lands of the Buckskin and the miracle would be a fact accomplished.

“Sure, sure!” said the cheerful querist, feeling in the pockets of the automobile coat for a cigar. At the match-striking instant he remembered a

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thing neglected. "By George! you'll have to excuse me, Mr. Brouillard; I'm always forgetting the little social dewdabs. Let me present you to my daughter Genevieve. Gene, shake hands with the son of my good old friend Judge Antoine Brouillard, of Vincennes."

It was rather awkwardly done, and somehow Brouillard could not help fancying that Mr. Cortwright could have done it better; that the roughly informal introduction was only one of the component parts of a studied brusquerie which Mr. Cortwright could put on and off at will, like a well-worn working coat. But when the unquenchable beauty stripped her gauntlet and gave him her hand, with a dazzling smile and a word of acknowledgment which was not borrowed from her father's effusive vocabulary, he straightway fell into another pit of triteness and his saving first impressions of Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright's character began to fade.

"I'm immensely interested," was Miss Cortwright's comment on the outlining of the reclamation project. "Do you mean to say that real farms with green things growing on them can be made out of that frightful desert we drove over yesterday afternoon?"

Brouillard smiled and plunged fatuously. "Oh,

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yes; the farms are already there. Nature made them, you know; she merely forgot to arrange for their watering." He was going on to tell about the exhaustive experiments the Department of Agriculture experts had been making upon the Buckskin soils when the gentleman whose name had once figured upon countless thousands of lard packages cut in.

"Do you know what I'm thinking about, Mr. Brouillard? I'm saying it over soft and slow to myself that no young man in this world ever had such a magnificent fighting chance as you have right here," he averred, the sandy-gray eyes growing suddenly alert and shrewd. "If you don't come out of this with money enough to buy in all those bonds your father was placing that time in Chicago—but of course you will."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand what you mean, Mr. Cortwright," said Brouillard, with some inner monitor warning him that it would be better not to understand.

The portly gentleman became suddenly facetious.

"Hear him, Gene," he chuckled, sharing the joke with his daughter; "he says he doesn't understand!" Then to Brouillard: "Say, young man; you don't mean to tell me that your father's son

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needs a guardian, do you? You know exactly where these canals are going to run and all the choice spots they are going to irrigate; what's to prevent your getting in ahead of the rush and taking up a dozen or so of those prime quarter-sections—homesteads, town sites, and the like? Lack of money? Why, bless your soul, there are plenty of us who would fall all over ourselves running to back a proposition like that—any God's quantity of us who would fairly throw the working capital at you! For that matter, I don't know but I'd undertake to finance you alone."

Brouillard's first impulse sprang full-grown out of honest anger. That any man who had known his father should make such a proposal to that father's son was a bald insult to the father's memory. But the calmer second thought turned wrath into amused tolerance. The costly touring-car, the idle, time-killing jaunt in the desert, the dynamiting of the river for the sake of taking a few fish—all these were the indices of a point of view limited strictly by a successful market for hog products. Why should he go out of his way to quarrel with it on high moral grounds?

"You forget that I am first of all the government's hired man, Mr. Cortwright," he demurred. "My job of dam building will be fully big enough

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and strenuous enough to keep me busy. Aside from that, I fancy the department heads would take it rather hard if we fellows in the field went plum picking."

"Let them!" retorted the potential backer of profitable side issues. "What's the odds if you go to it and bring back the money? I tell you, Mr. Brouillard, money—bunched money—is what talks. A good, healthy bank balance makes so much noise that you can't hear the knockers. If the Washington crowd had your chance—but never mind, that's your business and none of mine, and you'll take it as it's meant, as a good-natured hint to your father's son. How far is it up to where you are going to build your dam?"

Brouillard gave the distance, and Mr. Cortwright measured the visible trail grades with a deprecatory eye.

"Do you think my daughter could walk it?" he asked.

Miss Genevieve answered for herself: "Of course I can walk it; can't I, Mr. Brouillard?"

"I'll be glad to show you the way if you care to try," Brouillard offered; and the tentative invitation was promptly accepted.

The transfer of view-points from the lower end of the canyon to the upper was effected without

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incident, save at its beginning, when the father would have called down to the young man who had waded ashore and was drying himself before the camp-fire. "Van Bruce won't care to go," the daughter hastened to say; and Brouillard, whose gift it was to be able to pick out and identify the human derelict at long range, understood perfectly well the reason for the young woman's hasty interruption. One result of the successfully marketed lard packages was very plainly evident in the dissipated face and hangdog attitude of the marketer's son.

Conversation flagged, even to the discouragement of a voluble money king, on the climb from the Buckskin level to that of the reservoir valley. The trail was narrow, and Brouillard unconsciously set a pace which was almost inhospitable for a stockily built man whose tendency was toward increasing waist measures. But when they reached the pine-tree of the anchored blue-prints at the upper portal, Mr. Cortwright recovered his breath sufficiently to gasp his appreciation of the prospect and its possibilities.

"Why, good goodness, Mr. Brouillard, it's practically all done for you!" he wheezed, taking in the level, mountain-enclosed valley with an appraisive eye-sweep. "Van Bruce and the

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chauffeur came up here last night, with one of the car lamps for a lantern, but of course they couldn't bring back any idea of the place. What will you do?—build your dam right here and take out your canal through the canyon? Is that the plan?"

Brouillard nodded and went a little further into details, showing how the inward-arching barrier would be anchored into the two opposing mountain buttresses.

"And the structure itself—how high is it to be?"

"Two hundred feet above the spillway apron foot."

The lard millionaire twisted his short, fat neck and guessed the distance up the precipitous slopes of Chingingo and Jack's Mountain.

"That will be a whale of a chunk of masonry," he said. Then, with businesslike directness: "What will you build it of?—concrete?"

"Yes; concrete and steel."

"Then you are going to need Portland cement—a whole world of it. Where will you get it? And how will you get it here?"

Brouillard smiled inwardly at the pork packer's suddenly awakened interest in the technical ways and means. His four years in the desert had taken him out of touch with a money-making

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world, and this momentary contact with one of its successful devotees was illuminating. He had a growing conviction that the sordid atmosphere which appeared to be as the breath of life to Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright would presently begin to make things taste coppery, but the inextinguishable charm of the veiled princess was a compensation. It was partly for the sake of seeing her with the veil abolished that he recovered the paper-weighting field-glass and gave it to her, showing her how to focus it upon the upper reaches of the valley.

“We are in luck on the cement proposition,” he told the eager money-maker. “We shall probably manufacture our own supply right here on the ground. There is plenty of limestone and an excellent shale in those hills just beyond our camp; and for burning fuel there is a fairly good vein of bituminous coal underlying that farther range at the head of the valley.”

“H’m,” said the millionaire; “a cement plant, eh? There’s money in that anywhere on the face of the globe, just now. And over here, where there is no transportation—Gad! if you only had somebody to sell cement to, you could ask your own price. The materials have all been tested, I suppose?”

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“Oh, yes; we’ve had experts in here for more than a year. The material is all right.”

“And your labor?”

“On the dam, you mean? One advantage of concrete work is that it does not require any great proportion of skilled labor, the crushing, mixing, and placing all being done by machinery. We shall work all the Indians we can get from the Navajo Reservation, forty-odd miles south of here; for the remainder we shall import men from the States, bringing them in over the Timanyoni High Line—the trail from Quesado on the Red Butte Western. At least, that is what we shall do for the present. Later on, the railroad will probably build an extension up the Barking Dog and over War Arrow Pass.”

Mr. Cortwright’s calculating eye roved once more over the attractive prospect.

“Fuel for your power plant?—wood I take it?” he surmised; and then: “Oh, I forgot; you say you have coal.”

“Yes; there is coal, of a sort; good enough for the cement kilns. But we sha’n’t burn it for power. Neither shall we burn the timber, which can be put to much better use in building and in false- and form-work. There are no finer lumber forests this side of the Sierras. For power we

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shall utilize the river. There is another small canyon at the head of the valley where a temporary dam can be built which will deliver power enough to run anything—an entire manufacturing city, if we had one.”

Mr. Cortwright made a clucking noise with his tongue and blew his cheeks out like a swimmer gasping for breath.

“Julius Cæsar!” he exploded. “You stand there and tell me calmly that the government has all these resources coopered up here in a barrel?—that nobody is going to get a chance to make any money out of them? It’s a crime, Mr. Brouillard; that’s just what it is—a crime!”

“No; I didn’t say that. The resources just happen to be here and we shall turn them to good account. But if there were any feasible transportation facilities I doubt if we should make use of these native raw materials. It is the policy of the department to go into the market like any other buyer where it can. But here there are no sellers, or, rather, no way in which the sellers can reach us.”

“No sellers and no chance for a man to get the thin edge of a wedge in anywhere,” lamented the money-maker despairingly. Then his eye lighted upon the graybeard dump of a solitary

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mine high up on the face of Mount Chingingo. "What's that up there?" he demanded,

"It is a mine," said Brouillard, showing Miss Cortwright how to adjust the field-glass for the shorter distance. "Two men named Massingale, father and son, are working it, I'm told." And then again to Miss Genevieve: "That is their cabin—on the trail a little to the right of the tunnel opening."

"I see it quite plainly," she returned. "Two people are just leaving it to ride down the path—a man and a woman, I think, though the woman—if it is a woman—is riding on a man's saddle."

Brouillard's eyebrows went up in a little arch of surprise. Harding, the topographical engineer who had made all the preliminary surveys and had spent the better part of the former summer in the Niquoia, had reported on the Massingales, father and son, and his report had conveyed a hint of possible antagonism on the part of the mine owners to the government project. But there had been no mention of a woman.

"The Massingale mine, eh?" broke in the appraiser of values crisply. "They showed us some ore specimens from that property while we were stopping over in Red Butte. It's rich—good and

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plenty rich—if they have the quantity. And somebody told me they had the quantity, too; only it was too far from the railroad—couldn't jack-freight it profitably over the Timanyonis."

"In which case it is one of many," Brouillard said, taking refuge in the generalities.

But Mr. Cortwright was not to be so easily diverted from the pointed particulars—the particulars having to do with the pursuit of the market trail.

"I'm beginning to get my feet on bottom, Brouillard," he said, dropping the courtesy prefix and shoving his fat hands deep into the pockets of the dust-coat. "There's a business proposition here, and it looks mighty good to me. That was a mere nursery notion I gave you a while back—about picking up homesteads and town sites in the Buckskin. The big thing is right here. I tell you, I can smell money in this valley of yours—scads of it."

Brouillard laughed. "It is only the fragrance of future Reclamation-Service appropriations," he suggested. "There will be a good bit of money spent here before the Buckskin Desert gets its maiden wetting."

"I don't mean that at all," was the impatient rejoinder. "Let me show you: you are going to

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have a population of some sort, if it's only the population that your big job will bring here. That's the basis. Then you're going to need material by the train load, not the raw stuff, which you say is right here on the ground, but the manufactured article—cement, lumber, and steel. You can ship this material in over the range at prices that will be pretty nearly prohibitory, or, as you suggest, it can be manufactured right here on the spot."

"The cement and the lumber can be produced here, but not the steel," Brouillard corrected.

"That's where you're off," snapped the millionaire. "There are fine ore beds in the Hophras and a pretty good quality of coking coal. Ten or twelve miles of a narrow-gauge railroad would dump the pig metal into the upper end of your valley, and there you are. With a small reduction plant you could tell the big steel people to go hang."

Brouillard admitted the postulate without prejudice to a keen and growing wonder. How did it happen that this Chicago money king had taken the trouble to inform himself so accurately in regard to the natural resources of the Niquoia region? Had he not expressly declared that the object of the desert automobile trip was mere

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tourist curiosity? Given a little time, the engineer would have cornered the inquiry, making it yield some sort of a reasonable answer; but Mr. Cortwright was galloping on again.

“There you are, then, with the three prime requisites in raw material: cement stock, timber, and pig metal. Fuel you’ve got, you say, and if it isn’t good enough, your dummy railroad can supply you from the Hophra mines. Best of all, you’ve got power to burn—and that’s the key to any manufacturing proposition. Well and good. Now, you know, and I know, that the government doesn’t care to go into the manufacturing business when it can help it. Isn’t that so?”

“Unquestionably. But this is a case of can’t-help-it,” Brouillard argued. “You couldn’t begin to interest private capital in any of these industries you speak of.”

“Why not?” was the curt demand.

“Because of their impermanence—their dependence upon a market which will quit definitely when the dam is completed. What you are suggesting predicates a good, busy little city in this valley, behind the dam—since there is no other feasible place for it—and it would be strictly a city of numbered days. When the dam is completed and the spillway gates are closed, the

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Niqoyastcàdje and everything in it will go down under two hundred feet of water.”

“The—what?” queried Miss Cortwright, lowering the glass with which she had been following the progress of the two riders down the Buckskin trail from the high-pitched mine on Chingringo.

“The Niqoyastcàdje—‘Place-where-they-came-up,’ ” said Brouillard, elucidating for her. “That is the Navajo name for this valley. The Indians have a legend that this is the spot where their tribal ancestors came up from the underworld. Our map makers shortened it to ‘Niquoia’ and the cow-men of the Buckskin foot-hills have cut that to ‘Nick-wire.’ ”

This bit of explanatory place lore was entirely lost upon Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright. He was chewing the ends of his short mustaches and scowling thoughtfully out upon the possible site of the future industrial city of the plain.

“Say, Brouillard,” he cut in, “you get me the right to build that power dam, and give me the contracts for what material you’d rather buy than make, and I’ll be switched if I don’t take a shot at this drowning proposition myself. I tell you, it looks pretty good to me. What do you say?”

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“I’ll say what I said a few minutes ago,” laughed the young chief of construction—“that I’m only a hired man. You’ll have to go a good few rounds higher up on the authority ladder to close a deal like that. I’m not sure it wouldn’t require an act of Congress.”

“Well, by George, we might get even that if we have to,” was the optimistic assertion. “You think about it.”

“I guess it isn’t my think,” said Brouillard, still inclined to take the retired pork packer’s suggestion as the mere ravings of a money-mad promoter. “As the government engineer in charge of this work, I couldn’t afford to be identified even as a friendly intermediary in any such scheme as the one you are proposing.”

“Of course, I suppose not,” agreed the would-be promoter, sucking his under lip in a way ominously familiar to his antagonists in the wheat pit. Then he glanced at his watch and changed the subject abruptly. “We’ll have to be straggling back to the chug-wagon. Much obliged to you, Mr. Brouillard. Will you come down and see us off?”

Brouillard said “yes,” for Miss Cortwright’s sake, and took the field-glass she was returning to put it back upon the sheaf of blue-prints. She

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saw what he did with it and made instant acknowledgments.

“It was good of you to neglect your work for us,” she said, smiling level-eyed at him when he straightened up.

He was frank enough to tell the truth—or part of it.

“It was the dynamite that called me off. Doesn’t your brother know that it is illegal to shoot a trout stream?”

She waited until her father was out of ear-shot on the gorge trail before she answered:

“He ought to know that it is caddish and unsportsmanlike. I didn’t know what he and Rickert were doing or I should have stopped them.”

“In that event we shouldn’t have met, and you would have missed your chance of seeing the Niqoyastcàdje and the site of the city that isn’t to be—the city of numbered days,” he jested, adding, less lightly: “You wouldn’t have missed very much.”

“No?” she countered with a bright return of the alluring smile which he had first seen through the filmy gauze of the automobile veil. “Do you want me to say that I should have missed a great deal? You may consider it said if you wish.”

He made no reply to the bit of persiflage, and

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a little later felt the inward warmth of an upflash of resentment directed not at his companion but at himself for having been momentarily tempted to take the persiflage seriously. The temptation was another of the consequences of the four years of isolation which had cut him off from the world of women no less completely than from the world of money-getting. But it was rather humiliating, none the less.

“What have I done to make you forget how to talk?” she wished to know, five minutes further on, when his silence was promising to outlast the canyon passage.

“You? Nothing at all,” he hastened to say. Then he took the first step in the fatal road of attempting to account for himself. “But I have forgotten, just the same. It has been years since I have had a chance to talk to a woman. Do you wonder that I have lost the knack?”

“How dreadful!” she laughed. And afterward, with a return to the half-serious mood which had threatened to reopen the door so lately slammed in the face of temptation: “Perhaps we shall come back to Niqo—Niqoy—I simply *can't* say it without sneezing—and then you might relearn some of the things you have forgotten. Wouldn't that be delightful?”

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This time he chose to ignore utterly the voice of the inward monitor, which was assuring him coldly that young women of Miss Cortwright's world plane were constrained by the accepted rules of their kind to play the game in season and out of season, and his half-laughing reply was at once a defiance and a counter-challenge.

"I dare you to come!" he said brazenly. "Haven't you heard how the men of the desert camps kill each other for the chance to pick up a lady's handkerchief?"

They were at the final descent in the trail, with the Buckskin blanknesses showing hotly beyond the curtaining of pines, and there was space only for a flash of the beautiful eyes and a beckoning word.

"In that case, I hope you know how to shoot straight, Mr. Brouillard," she said quizzically; and then they passed at a step from romance to the crude realities.

The realities were basing themselves upon the advent of two new-comers, riding down the Chingingo trail to the ford which had been the scene of the fish slaughtering; a sunburnt young man in goatskin "shaps," flannel shirt and a flapping Stetson, and a girl whose face reminded Brouillard of one of the Madonnas, whose name and painter

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he strove vainly to recall. Ten seconds farther along the horses of the pair were sniffing suspiciously at the automobile, and the young man under the flapping hat was telling Van Bruce Cortwright what he thought of cartridge fishermen in general, and of this present cartridge fisherman in particular.

“Which the same, being translated into Buckskin English, hollers like this,” he concluded. “Don’t you tote any more fish ca’ttridges into this here rese’vation; not no more, whatsoever. Who says so? Well, if anybody should ask, you might say it was Tig Smith, foreman o’ the Tri’-Circ’ outfit. No, I ain’t no game warden, but what I say goes as she lays. *Savez?*”

The chauffeur was adjusting something under the upturned bonnet of the touring-car and thus hiding his grin. Mr. Cortwright, who had maintained his lead on the descent to the desert level, was trying to come between his sullen-faced son and the irate cattleman, money in hand. Brouillard walked his companion down to the car and helped her to a seat in the tonneau. She repaid him with a nod and a smile, and when he saw that the crudities were not troubling her he stepped aside and unconsciously fell to comparing the two—the girl on horseback and his walking mate of the canyon passage.

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They had little enough in common, apart from their descent from Eve, he decided—and the decision itself was subconscious. The millionaire's daughter was a warm blonde, beautiful, queenly, a finished product of civilization and high-priced culture; a woman of the world, standing but a single remove from the generation of quick money-getting and yet able to make the money take its proper place as a means to an end.

And the girl on horseback? Brouillard had to look twice before he could attempt to classify her, and even then she baffled him. A rather slight figure, suggestive of the flexible strength of a silken cord; a face winsome rather than beautiful; coils and masses of copper-brown hair escaping under the jaunty cow-boy hat; eyes . . . it was her eyes that made Brouillard look the third time: they were blue, with a hint of violet in them; he made sure of this when she turned her head and met his gaze fearlessly and with a certain calm serenity that made him feel suddenly uncomfortable and half embarrassed. Nevertheless, he would not look aside; and he caught himself wondering if her cow-boy lover—he had already jumped to the sentimental conclusion—had ever been able to look into those steadfast eyes and trifle with the truth.

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So far the young chief of construction had travelled on the road reflective while the fish-slaughtering matter was getting itself threshed out at the river's edge. When it was finally settled—not by the tender of money that Mr. Cortwright had made—the man Smith and his pretty riding mate galloped through the ford and disappeared among the barren hills, and the chauffeur was at liberty to start the motor.

“*Au revoir*, Mr. Brouillard,” said the princess, as the big car righted itself for the southward flight into the desert. Then, when the wheels began to churn in the loose sand of the halting place, she leaned out to give him a woman's leave-taking. “If I were you I shouldn't fall in love with the calm-eyed goddess who rides like a man. Mr. Tri'-Circ' Smith might object, you know; and you haven't yet told me whether or not you can shoot straight.”

There was something almost heart-warming in the bit of parting badinage; something to make the young engineer feel figuratively for the knife with which he had resolutely cut around himself to the dividing of all hindrances, sentimental or other, on a certain wretched day years before when he had shouldered his life back-load.

But the warmth might have given place to a



Brouillard had to look twice before he could attempt to classify her, and even then she baffled him.

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disconcerting chill if he could have heard Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright's remark to his seat companion, made when the canyon portal of the Niquoia and the man climbing the path beside it were hazy mirage distortions in the backward distances.

“He isn't going to be the dead easy mark I hoped to find in the son of the old bankrupt hair-splitter, Genie, girl. But he'll come down and hook himself all right if the bait is well covered with his particular brand of sugar. Don't you forget it.”

III

Sands of Pactolus

IF Victor Brouillard had been disposed to speculate curiously upon the possibilities suggested by Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright on the occasion of the capitalist's brief visit to the Niquoia, or had been tempted to dwell sentimentally upon the idyllic crossing of orbits—Miss Genevieve's and his own—on the desert's rim, there was little leisure for either indulgence during the strenuous early summer weeks which followed the Cortwright invasion.

Popular belief to the contrary notwithstanding, it is not precisely true that all government undertakings are dilatory industrial imitations, designed, primarily, to promote the even-handed cutting of some appropriation pie, and, secondarily, to provide easy sinecures for placemen and political heelers. Holding no brief for the government, one may still say without fear of contradiction that *laissez-faire* has seldom been justly charged against the Reclamation Service. Fairly confronting his problem, Brouillard did not find him-

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self hampered by departmental inertia. While he was rapidly organizing his force for the constructive attack, the equipment and preliminary material for the building of the great dam were piling up by the train load on the side-tracks at Quesado; and at once the man- and beast-killing task of rushing the excavating outfit of machinery, teams, scrapers, rock-drilling installations, steam-shovels, and the like, over the War Arrow trail was begun.

During the weeks which followed, the same trail, and a little later that from the Navajo Reservation on the south, were strung with ant-like processions of laborers pouring into the shut-in valley at the foot of Mount Chigringo. Almost as if by magic a populous camp of tents, shelter shacks, and Indian tepees sprang up in the level bed-bottom of the future lake; camp-fires gave place to mess kitchens; the commissary became a busy department store stocked with everything that thrifty or thriftless labor might wish to purchase; and daily the great foundation scorings in the buttressing shoulders of Jack's Mountain and Chigringo grew deeper and wider under the churning of the air-drills, the crashings of the dynamite, and the rattle and chug of the steam-shovels.

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Magically, too, the life of the isolated working camp sprang into being. From the beginning its speech was a curious polyglot; the hissings and bubblings of the melting-pot out of which a new citizenry is poured. Poles and Slovaks, men from the slopes of the Carpathians, the terraces of the Apennines, and the passes of the Balkans; Scandinavians from the pineries of the north, and a colony of railroad-grading Greeks, fresh from the building of a great transcontinental line; all these and more were spilled into the melting-pot, and a new Babel resulted. Only the Indians held aloof. Careful from the first for these wards of the nation, Brouillard had made laws of Draconian severity. The Navajos were isolated upon a small reservation of their own on the Jack's Mountain side of the Niquoia, a full half mile from the many-tongued camp in the open valley; and for the man caught "boot-legging" among the Indians there were penalties swift and merciless.

It was after the huge task of foundation digging was well under way and the work of constructing the small power dam in the upper canyon had been begun that the young chief of construction, busy with a thousand details, had his first forcible reminder of the continued existence of Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright.

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It came in the form of a communication from Washington, forwarded by special post-rider service from Quesado, and it called a halt upon the up-river power project. In accordance with its settled policy, the Reclamation Service would refrain, in the Niquoia as elsewhere, from entering into competition with private citizens; would do nothing to discourage the investment of private capital. A company had been formed to take over the power production and to establish a plant for the manufacture of cement, and Brouillard was instructed to govern himself accordingly. For his information, the department letter-writer went on to say, it was to be understood that the company was duly organized under the provisions of an act of Congress; that it had bound itself to furnish power and material at prices satisfactory to the Service; and that the relations between it and the government field-staff on the ground were to be entirely friendly.

“It’s a graft—a pull-down with a profit in it for some bunch of money leeches a little higher up!” was the young chief’s angry comment when he had given Grislow the letter to read. “Without knowing any more of the details than that letter gives, I’d be willing to bet a month’s pay

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that this is the fine Italian hand of Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright!"

Grislow's eyebrows went up in doubtful interrogation.

"Ought I to know the gentleman?" he queried mildly. "I don't seem to recall the name."

Brouillard got up from his desk to go and stand at one of the little square windows of the log-built office quarters. For some reason which he had not taken the trouble to define, even to himself, he had carefully refrained from telling the hydrographer anything about the early morning meeting with the automobilists at the edge of the desert basin; of that and of the subsequent visit of two of them to the site of the dam.

"No; you don't know him," he said, turning back to the worker at the mapping table. "It was his motor party that was camping at the Buckskin ford the night we broke in here—the night when we saw the search-light."

"And you met him? I thought you told me you merely went down and took a look—didn't butt in?"

"I didn't—that night. But the next morning——"

The hydrographer's smile was a jocose grimace.

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"I recollect now; you said that one of the motorists was a young woman."

Brouillard resented the implication irritably.

"Don't be an ass, Murray," he snapped; and then he went on, with the frown of impatience still wrinkling between his eyes. "The young woman was the daughter. There was a cub of a son, and he fired a stick of dynamite in the river to kill a mess of trout. I heard the explosion and thought it might be the gasoline tank of the car."

"Naturally," said Grislow guilelessly. "And, quite as naturally, you went down to see. I'm not sure that I shouldn't have done it myself."

"Of course you would," was the touchy retort. "When I got there and found out what had happened, I meant to make a second drop-out; but Cortwright and his daughter were coming up the trail, and he hailed me. After that I couldn't do less than the decent thing. They wanted to see the valley, and I showed them the way in. Cortwright is the multimillionaire pork packer of Chicago, and he went up into the air like a lunatic over the money-making chances there were going to be in this job. I didn't pay much attention to his chortlings at the time. It didn't seem remotely credible that anybody with real

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money to invest would plant it in the bottom of the Niquoia reservoir.”

“But now you think he is going to make his bluff good?”

“That looks very much like it,” said Brouillard sourly, pointing to the letter from Washington. “That scheme is going to change the whole face of Nature for us up here, Grislow. It will spell trouble right from the jump.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” was the deprecatory rejoinder. “It will relieve us of a lot of side-issue industries—cut ’em out and bury ’em, so far as we are concerned.”

“That part of it is all right, of course; but it won’t end there; not by a hundred miles. We’ve started in here to be a law to ourselves—as we’ve got to be to handle this mixed multitude of brigands and ditch diggers. But when this new company gets on the ground it will be different. There will be pull-hauling and scrapping and liquor selling, and we can’t go in and straighten things out with a club as we do now. Jobson says in that letter that the relations have got to be friendly! I’ll bet anything you like that I’ll have to go and read the riot act to those people before they’ve been twenty-four hours on their job!”

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Grislow was trying the point of his mapping-pen on his thumb nail. "Curious that this particular fly should drop into your pot of ointment on your birthday, wasn't it?" he remarked.

"O suffering Jehu!" gritted Brouillard ragefully. "Are you never going to forget that senseless bit of twaddle?"

"You're not giving me a chance to forget it," said the map-maker soberly. "You told me that night that the seven-year characteristic was change; and you're a changed man, Victor, if ever there was one. Moreover, it began that very night—or the next morning."

"Oh, damn!"

"Certainly, if you wish it. But that is only another proof of what I am saying. It's getting on your nerves now. Do you know what the men have named you? They call you 'Hell's-Fire.' That has come to be your word when you light into them for something they've done or haven't done. No longer ago than this morning you were swearing at Griffith, as if you'd forgotten that the boy is only a year out of college and can't be supposed to know as much as Leshington or Anson. Where is your sense of humor?"

Brouillard laughed, if only to prove that his sense of humor was still unimpaired.

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“They are a fearful lot of dubs, Grizzy,” he said, meaning the laborers; “the worst we’ve ever drawn, and that is saying a good deal. Three drunken brawls last night, and a man killed in Haley’s Place. And I can’t keep liquor out of the camp to save my soul—not if I should sit up nights to invent new regulations. The Navajos are the best of the bunch and we’ve managed to keep the fire from spreading over on their side of the Niquoia, thus far. But if the whiskey ever gets hold in the tepees, we’ll have orders to shoot Chief Nicagee’s people back to their reservation in a holy minute.”

Grislow nodded.

“Niqoyastcàdje — ‘Place-where-they-came-up.’ It will be ‘Place-where-they-go-down’ if the tin-horns and boot-leggers get an inning.”

“We’ll all go to the devil on a toboggan-slide and there is the order for it,” declared the chief morosely, again indicating the letter from Washington. “That means more human scum—a new town—an element that we can neither chase out nor control. Cortwright and his associates, whoever they are, won’t care a rotten hang. They’ll be here to sweat money out of the job; to sweat it in any and every way that offers, and to do it quick. All of which is bad enough, you’d say,

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Murray; but it isn't the worst of it. I've just run up against another thing that is threatening to raise merry hell in this valley."

"I know," said the hydrographer slowly. "You've been having a *séance* with Steve Massingale. Leshington told me about it."

"What did he tell you?" Brouillard demanded half-angrily.

"Oh, nothing much; nothing to make you hot at him. He happened to be in the other room when Massingale was here, and the door was open. He said he gathered the notion that the young sorehead was trying to bully you."

"He was," was the brittle admission. "See here, Grizzly."

The thing to be seen was a small buckskin bag which, when opened, gave up a paper packet folded like a medicine powder. The paper contained a spoonful of dust and pellets of metal of a dull yellow lustre.

The hydrographer drew a long breath and fingered the nuggets. "Gold—placer gold!" he exclaimed, and Brouillard nodded and went on to tell how he had come by the bag and its contents.

"Massingale had an axe to grind, of course. You may remember that Harding talked loosely about the Massingale opposition to the building

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of the dam. There was nothing in it. The opposition was purely personal and it was directed against Harding himself, with Amy Massingale for the exciting cause."

"That girl?—the elemental brute!" Grislow broke in warmly. He knew the miner's daughter fairly well by this time and, in common with every other man on the staff, not excepting the staff's chief, would have fought for her in any cause.

Brouillard nodded. "I don't know what Harding did, but Smith, the Triangle-Circle foreman, tells me that Steve was on the war-path; he told Harding when he left, last summer, that if he ever came back to the Niquoia, he'd come to stay—and stay dead."

"I never did like Harding's sex attitude any too well," was the hydrographer's definitive comment; and Brouillard went back to the matter of the morning's *séance* and its golden outcome.

"That is only a little side issue. Steve Massingale came to me this morning with a proposal that was about as cold-blooded as a slap in the face. Naturally, for good business reasons of their own, the Massingales want to see the railroad built over War Arrow Pass and into the Niquoia. In some way Steve has found out that

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I stand in pretty well with President Ford and the Pacific Southwestern people. His first break was to offer to incorporate the 'Little Susan' and to give me a block of the stock if I'd pull Ford's leg on the Extension proposition."

"Well?" queried Grislow. "The railroad over War Arrow Pass would be the biggest thing that ever happened for our job here. If it did nothing else, it would make us independent of these boomers that are coming in to sell us material at their own prices."

"Exactly. But my hands are tied; and, besides, Massingale's offer was a rank bribe. You can imagine what I told him—that I could neither accept stock in his mine nor say anything to influence the railroad people; that my position as chief engineer for the government cut me out both ways. Then he began to bully and pulled the club on me."

Again Grislow's smile was jocose.

"You haven't been tumbling into the ditch with Leshington and Griffith and the rest of us and making love to the little sister, have you?" he jested.

"Don't be a fool if you can help it," was the curt rejoinder. "And don't give yourself leave to say things like that about Amy Massingale."

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She is too good and sweet and clean-hearted to be dragged into this mix-up, even by implication. Do you get that, Murray?"

"Oh, yes; it's only another way of saying that I'm one of the fools. Go on with the Stephen end of it."

"Well, when I turned him down, young Masingale began to bluster and to say that I'd have to boost the railroad deal, whether I wanted to or not. I told him he couldn't prove it, and he said he would show me, if I'd take half an hour's walk up the valley with him. I humored him, more to get quit of him than for any other reason, and on the way past the camp he borrowed a frying-pan at one of the cook shacks. You know that long, narrow sand-bar in the river just below the mouth of the upper canyon?"

Grislow nodded.

"That is where we went for the proof. Masingale dipped up a panful of the bar sand, which he asked me to wash out for myself. I did it, and you have the results there in that paper. That bar is comparatively rich placer dirt."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the map-maker. "Comparatively rich, you say?—and you washed this spoonful out of a single pan?"

"Keep your head," said Brouillard coolly.

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“Massingale explained that I had happened to make a ten-strike; that the bar wasn’t any such bonanza as that first result would indicate. I proved that, too, by washing some more of it without getting any more than a few ‘colors.’ But the fact remains: it’s placer ground.”

It was at this point that the larger aspect of the fact launched itself upon the hydrographer.

“A gold strike!” he gasped. “And we—we’re planning to drown it under two hundred feet of a lake!”

Brouillard’s laugh was harsh.

“Don’t let the fever get hold of you, Grislow. Don’t forget that we are here to carry out the plans of the Reclamation Service—which are more far-reaching and of a good bit greater consequence than a dozen placer-mines. Not that it didn’t make me grab for hand-holds for a minute or two, mind you. I wasn’t quite as cold about it as I’m asking you to be, and I guess Massingale had calculated pretty carefully on the dramatic effect of his little shock. Anyway, he drove the peg down good and hard. If I would jump in and pull every possible string to hurry the railroad over the range, and keep on pulling them, the secret of the placer bar would remain a secret. Otherwise he, Stephen Massingale, would give

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it away, publish it, advertise it to the world. You know what that would mean for us, Murray.”

“My Lord! I should say so! We’d have Boomtown-on-the-pike right now, with all the variations! Every white man in the camp would chuck his job in the hollow half of a minute and go to gravel washing!”

“That’s it precisely,” Brouillard acquiesced gloomily. “Massingale is a young tough, but he is shrewd enough, when he is sober. He had me dead to rights, and he knew it. ‘You don’t want any gold camp starting up here in the bottom of your reservoir,’ he said; and I had to admit it.”

Grislow had found a magnifying-glass in the drawer of the mapping table, and he was holding it in focus over the small collection of grain gold and nuggets. In the midst of the eager examination he looked up suddenly to say: “Hold on a minute. Why is Steve proposing to give this thing away? Why isn’t he working the bar himself?”

“He explained that phase of it, after a fashion—said that placer-mining was always more or less of a gamble and that they had a sure thing of it in the ‘Little Susan.’ Of course, if the thing had

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to be given away, he and his father would avail themselves of their rights as discoverers and take their chance with the crowd for the sake of the ready money they might get out of it. Otherwise they'd be content to let it alone and stick to their legitimate business, which is quartz-mining."

"And to do that successfully they've got to have the railroad. Say, Victor, I'm beginning to acquire a great and growing respect for Mr. Stephen Massingale. This field is too small for him; altogether too small. He ought to get a job with some of the malefactors of great wealth. How did you settle it finally?"

"Massingale was too shrewd to try to push me over the edge while there seemed to be a fairly good chance that I would walk over of my own accord. He told me to take a week or two and think about it. We dropped the matter by common consent after we left the bar in the Quadjenã bend, and on the way down the valley Massingale pitched in a bit of information out of what seemed to be sheer good-will. It seems that he and his father have done a lot of test drilling up and down the side of Chigringo at one time and another, and he told me that there is a bed of micaceous shale under our south anchorage,

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cautioning me not to let the excavation stop until we had gone through it.”

“Well! That was pretty decent of him.”

“Yes; and it shows that Harding was lying when he said that the Massingales were opposing the reclamation project. They are frankly in favor of it. Irrigation in the Buckskin means population; and population will bring the railroad, sooner or later. In the matter of hurrying the track-laying, Massingale is only adopting modern business methods. He has a club and he is using it.”

Grislow was biting the end of his penholder thoughtfully.

“What are you going to do about it, Victor?” he asked at length. “We can’t stand for any more chaos than the gods have already doped out for us, can we?”

Brouillard took another long minute at the office window before he said: “What would you do if you were in my place, Murray?”

But at this the map-maker put up his hands as if to ward off a blow.

“No, you don’t!” he laughed. “I can at least refuse to be that kind of a fool. Go and hunt you a professional conscience keeper; I went out of that business for keeps in my sophomore year.

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But I'll venture a small prophecy: We'll have the railroad—and you'll pull for it. And then, whether Massingale tells or doesn't tell, the golden secret will leak out. And after that, the deluge."

IV

A Fire of Little Sticks

TWO days after the arrival of the letter from Washington announcing the approaching invasion of private capital, Brouillard, returning from a horseback trip into the Buckskin, where Anson and Griffith were setting grade stakes for the canal diggers, found a visitor awaiting him in the camp headquarters office.

One glance at the thick-bodied, heavy-faced man chewing an extinct cigar while he made himself comfortable in the only approach to a lounging chair that the office afforded was sufficient to awaken an alert antagonism. Quick to found friendships or enmities upon the intuitive first impression, Brouillard's acknowledgment was curt and business-brusque when the big man introduced himself without taking the trouble to get out of his chair.

"My name is Hosford and I represent the Ni-quoia Improvement Company as its manager and resident engineer," said the loungee, shifting

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the dead cigar from one corner of his hard-bitted mouth to the other. "You're Brillard, the government man, I take it?"

"Brouillard, if you please," was the crisp correction. And then with a careful effacement of the final saving trace of hospitality in tone or manner: "What can we do for you, Mr. Hosford?"

"A good many things, first and last. I'm two or three days ahead of my outfit, and you can put me up somewhere until I get a camp of my own. You've got some sort of an engineers' mess, I take it?"

"We have," said Brouillard briefly. With Anson and Griffith absent on the field-work, there were two vacancies in the staff mess. Moreover, the law of the desert prescribes that not even an enemy shall be refused bread and bed. "You'll make yourself at home with us, of course," he added, and he tried to say it without making it sound too much like a challenge.

"All right; so much for that part of it," said the self-invited guest. "Now for the business end of the deal—why don't you sit down?"

Brouillard planted himself behind his desk and began to fill his blackened office pipe, coldly refusing Hosford's tender of a cigar.

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“You were speaking of the business matter,” he suggested bluntly.

“Yes. I’d like to go over your plans for the power dam in the upper canyon. If they look good to me I’ll adopt them.”

Brouillard paused to light his pipe before he replied.

“Perhaps we’d better clear away the underbrush before we begin on the standing timber, Mr. Hosford,” he said, when the tobacco was glowing militantly in the pipe bowl. “Have you been given to understand that this office is in any sense a tail to your Improvement Company’s kite?”

“I haven’t been ‘given to understand’ anything,” was the gruff rejoinder. “Our company has acquired certain rights in this valley, and I’m taking it for granted that you’ve had the situation doped out to you. It won’t be worth your while to quarrel with us, Mr. Brouillard.”

“I am very far from wishing to quarrel with anybody,” said Brouillard, but his tone belied the words. “At the same time, if you think that we are going to do your engineering work, or any part of it, for you, you are pretty severely mistaken. Our own job is fully big enough to keep us busy.”

“You’re off,” said the big man coolly. “Some-

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body has bungled in giving you the dope. You want to keep your job, don't you?"

"That is neither here nor there. What we are discussing at present is the department's attitude toward your enterprise. I shall be exceeding my instructions if I make that attitude friendly to the detriment of my own work."

The new resident manager sat back in his chair and chewed his cigar reflectively, staring up at the log beaming of the office ceiling. When he began again he did not seem to think it worth while to shift his gaze from the abstractions.

"You're just like all the other government men I've ever had to do business with, Brouillard; pig-headed, obstinate, blind as bats to their own interests. I didn't especially want to begin by knocking you into line, but I guess it'll have to be done. In the first place, let me tell you that there are all kinds of big money behind this little sky-rocket of ours here in the Niquoia: ten millions, twenty millions, thirty millions, if they're needed."

Brouillard shook his head. "I can't count beyond a hundred, Mr. Hosford."

"All right; then I'll get you on the other side. Suppose I should tell you that practically all of your bosses are in with us; what then?"

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“Your stockholders’ listings concern me even less than your capitalization. We are miles apart yet.”

Again the representative of Niquoia Improvement took time to shift the extinct cigar.

“I guess the best way to get you is to send a little wire to Washington,” he said reflectively. “How does that strike you?”

“I haven’t the slightest interest in what you may do or fail to do,” said Brouillard. “At the same time, as I have already said, I don’t wish to quarrel with you or with your company.”

“Ah! that touched you, didn’t it?”

“Not in the sense you are imagining; no. Send your wire if you like. You may have the use of the government telegraph. The office is in the second shack north of this.”

“Still you say you don’t want to scrap?”

“Certainly not. As you have intimated, we shall have to do business together as buyer and seller. I merely wished to make it plain that the Reclamation Service doesn’t put its engineering department at the disposal of the Niquoia Improvement Company.”

“But you have made the plans for this power plant, haven’t you?”

“Yes; and they are the property of the depart-

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ment. If you want them, I'll turn them over to you upon a proper order from headquarters."

"That's a little more like it. Where did you say I'd find your wire office?"

Brouillard gave the information a second time, and as Hosford went out, Grislow came in and took his place at the mapping table.

"Glad you got back in time to save my life," he remarked pointedly, with a sly glance at his chief. "He's been ploughing furrows up and down my little potato patch all day."

"Humph! Digging for information, I suppose?" grunted Brouillard.

"Just that; and he's been getting it, too. Not out of me, particularly, but out of everybody. Also, he was willing to impart a little. We're in for the time of our lives, Victor."

"I know it," was the crabbed rejoinder.

"You don't know the tenth part of it," asserted the hydrographer slowly. "It's a modest name, 'The Niquoia Improvement Company,' but it is going to be like charity—covering a multitude of sins. Do you know what that plank-faced organizer has got up his sleeve? He is going to build us a neat, up-to-date little city right here in the middle of our midst. If I hadn't made him believe that I was only a draughtsman,

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he would have had me out with a transit, running the lines for the streets.”

“A city?—in this reservoir bottom? I guess not. He was only stringing you to kill time, Grizzly.”

“Don’t you fool yourself!” exclaimed the map-maker. “He’s got the plans in his grip. We’re going to be on a little reservation set apart for us by the grace of God and the kindness of these promoters. The remainder of the valley is laid off into cute little squares and streets, with everything named and numbered, ready to be listed in the brokers’ offices. You may not be aware of it, but this palatial office building of ours fronts on Chingringo Avenue.”

“Stuff!” said Brouillard. “What has all this bubble blowing got to do with the building of a temporary power dam and the setting up of a couple of cement kilns?”

Grislow laid his pen aside and whirled around on his working-stool.

“Don’t you make any easy-going mistake, Victor,” he said earnestly. “The cement and power proposition is only a side issue. These new people are going to take over the sawmills, open up quarries, build a stub railroad to the Hophra mines, grade a practicable stage road over the

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range to Quesado, and put on a fast-mule freight line to serve until the railroad builds in. Wouldn't that set your teeth on edge?"

"I can't believe it, Murray. It's a leaf out of the book of Bedlam! Take a fair shot at it and see where the bullet lands: this entire crazy fake is built upon one solitary, lonesome fact—the fact that we're here, with a job on our hands big enough to create an active, present-moment market for labor and material. There is absolutely nothing else behind the bubble blowing; if we were not here the Niquoia Improvement Company would never have been heard of!"

Grislow laughed. "Your arguing that twice two makes four doesn't change the iridescent hue of the bubble," he volunteered. "If big money has seen a chance to skin somebody, the mere fact that the end of the world is due to come along down the pike some day isn't going to cut any obstructing figure. We'll all be buying and selling corner lots in Hosford's new city before we're a month older. Don't you believe it?"

"I'll believe it when I see it," was Brouillard's reply; and with this the matter rested for the moment.

It was later in the day, an hour or so after the serving of the hearty supper in the engineers'

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mess tent, that Brouillard was given to see another and still less tolerable side of his temporary guest. Hosford had come into the office to plant himself solidly in the makeshift easy-chair for the smoking of a big, black, after-supper cigar.

"I've been looking over your rules and regulations, Brouillard," he began, after an interval of silence which Brouillard had been careful not to break. "You're making a capital mistake in trying to transplant the old Connecticut blue laws out here. Your working-men ought to have the right to spend their money in any way that suits 'em."

Brouillard was pointedly occupying himself at his desk, but he looked up long enough to say: "Whiskey, you mean?"

"That and other things. They tell me that you don't allow any open gambling, or any women here outside of the families of the workmen."

"We don't," was the short rejoinder.

"That won't hold water after we get things fairly in motion."

"It will have to hold water, so far as we are concerned, if I have to build a stockade around the camp," snapped Brouillard.

Hosford's heavy face wrinkled itself in a mirthless smile. "You're nutty," he remarked. "When

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I find a man bearing down hard on all the little vices, it always makes me wonder what's the name of the corking big one he is trying to cover up."

Since there was obviously no peaceful reply to be made to this, Brouillard bent lower over his work and said nothing. At every fresh step in the forced acquaintance the new-comer was painstakingly developing new antagonisms. Sooner or later, Brouillard knew, it would come to an open rupture, but he was hoping that the actual hostilities could be postponed until after Hosford had worn out his temporary welcome as a guest in the engineers' mess.

For a time the big man in the easy-chair smoked on in silence. Then he began again:

"Say, Brouillard, I saw one little girl to-day that didn't belong to your workmen's-family outfit, and she's a peach; came riding down the trail with her brother from that mine up on the south mountain—Massingale's, isn't it? By Jove! she fairly made my mouth water!"

Inasmuch as no man can read field-notes when the page has suddenly become a red blur, Brouillard looked up.

"You are my guest, in a way, Mr. Hosford; for that reason I can't very well tell you what I

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think of you." So much he was able to say quietly. Then the control mechanism burned out in a flash of fiery rage and he cursed the guest fluently and comprehensively, winding up with a crude and savage threat of dissection and dismemberment if he should ever venture so much as to name Miss Massingale again in the threatener's hearing.

Hosford sat up slowly, and his big face turned darkly red.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he broke out. "So you're *that* kind of a fire-eater, are you? Lord, Lord! I didn't suppose anything like that ever happened outside of the ten-cent shockers. Wake up, man; this is the twentieth century we're living in. Don't look at me that way!"

But the wave of insane wrath was already subsiding, and Brouillard, half ashamed of the momentary lapse into savagery, was once more scowling down at the pages of his note-book. Further along, when the succeeding silence had been undisturbed for five full minutes, he began to realize that the hot Brouillard temper, which he had heretofore been able to keep within prudent bounds, had latterly been growing more and more rebellious. He could no longer be sure of what he would say or do under sudden provoca-

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tion. True, he argued, the provocation in the present instance had been sufficiently maddening; but there had been other upflashes of the murderous inner fire with less to excuse them.

Hosford finished his cigar, and when he tossed the butt out through the opened window, Brouillard hoped he was going. But the promoter-manager made no move other than to take a fresh cigar from his pocket case and light it. Brouillard worked on silently, ignoring the big figure in the easy-chair by the window, and striving to regain his lost equilibrium. To have shown Hosford the weakness of the control barriers was bad enough, but to have pointed out the exact spot at which they were most easily assailable was worse. He thought it would be singular if Hosford should not remember how and where to strike when the real conflict should begin, and he was properly humiliated by the reflection that he had rashly given the enemy an advantage.

He was calling Hosford "the enemy" now and making no ameliorating reservations. That the plans of the boomers would speedily breed chaos, and bring the blight of disorder and lawlessness upon the Niquoia project and everything connected with it, he made no manner of doubt. How was he to hold a camp of several hundred

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men in decent subjection if the temptations and allurements of a boomers' city were to be brought in and set down within arm's reach of the work on the dam? It seemed blankly incredible that the department heads in Washington should sanction such an invasion if they knew the full meaning of it.

The "if" gave him an idea. What if the boomers were taking an unauthorized ell for their authorized inch? He had taken a telegraph pad from the desk stationery rack and was composing his message of inquiry when the door opened and Quinlan, the operator, came in with a communication fresh from the Washington wire. The message was an indirect reply to Hosford's telegraphed appeal to the higher powers. Brouillard read it, stuck it upon the file, and took a roll of blue-prints from the bottom drawer of his desk.

"Here are the drawings for your power installation, Mr. Hosford," he said, handing the roll to the man in the chair. And a little later he went out to smoke a pipe in the open air, leaving the message of inquiry unwritten.

V

Symptomatic

FOR some few minutes after the gray-bearded, absent-eyed old man who had been working at the mine forge had disappeared in the depths of the tunnel upon finishing his job of drill pointing, the two on the cabin porch made no attempt to resume the talk which had been broken by the blacksmithing. But when the rumbling thunder of the ore-car which the elder Massingale was pushing ahead of him into the mine had died away in the subterranean distances Brouillard began again.

“I do get your point of view—sometimes,” he said. “Or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that I have had it now and then in times past. Civilization, or what stands for it, does have a way of shrinking into littleness, not to say cheapness, when one can get the proper perspective. And your life up here on Chigringo has given you the needful detached point of view.”

The trouble shadows in the eyes of the young

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woman who was sitting in the fish-net hammock gave place to a smile of gentle derision.

“Do you call *that* civilization?” she demanded, indicating the straggling new town spreading itself, map-like, in the valley below.

“I suppose it is—one form of it. At least it is civilization in the making. Everything has to have some sort of a beginning.”

Miss Massingale acquiesced in a little uptilt of her perfectly rounded chin.

“Just the same, you don’t pretend to say that you are enjoying it,” she said in manifest deprecation.

“Oh, I don’t know. My work is down there, and a camp is a necessary factor in it. You’d say that the more civilized the surroundings become, the less need there would be for me to sit up nights to keep the lid on. That would be the reasonable conclusion, wouldn’t it?”

“If you were really trying to make the fact fit the theory—which you are not—it would be a sheer, self-centred eye-shutting to all the greater things that may be involved,” she continued. “Don’t you ever get beyond that?”

“I did at first. When I learned a few weeks ago that the boomers had taken hold of us in earnest and that we were due to acquire a real

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town with all the trimmings, I was righteously hot. Apart from the added trouble a wide-open town would be likely to give us in maintaining order in the camp, it seemed so crudely unnecessary to start a pigeon-plucking match at this distance from Wall Street."

"But now," she queried—"now, I suppose, you have become reconciled?"

"I am growing more philosophical, let us say. There are just about so many pigeons to be plucked, anyway; they'd moult if they weren't plucked. And it may as well be done here as on the Stock Exchange, when you come to think of it."

"I like you least when you talk that way," said the young woman in the hammock, with open-eyed frankness. "Do you do it as other men do?—just to hear how it sounds?"

Brouillard, sitting on the top step of the porch, leaned his head against the porch post and laughed.

"You know too much—a lot too much for a person of your tender years," he asserted. "Which names one more of the charming collection of contradictions which your father or mother or somebody had the temerity to label 'Amy,' sweetest and most seraphic of diminutives."

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“If you don’t like my name—” she began, and then she went off at another tangent. “Please tell me why I am a ‘collection of contradictions.’ Tig never says anything like that to me.”

“‘Tig,’ ” said Brouillard, “‘Tig’ Smith. Speaking of names, I’ve often wondered how on earth our breezy friend of the Tri’-Circ’ ever got such a handle as that.”

“It’s his own name—or a part of it. His father was a country preacher back in Tennessee, and I imagine he had the Smith feeling that the surname wasn’t very distinctive. So he named the poor boy Tiglath-Pileser. Just the same, it is not to laugh,” she went on in friendly loyalty. “Tig can’t help his name, and, anyway, he’s the vastest possible improvement on those old Assyrian gentlemen who were the first to wear it.”

Brouillard’s gaze went past the shapely little figure in the string hammock to lose itself in the far Timanyoni distances.

“You are a bundle of surprises,” he said, letting the musing thought slip into speech. “What can you possibly know about the Assyrians?”

She made a funny little grimace at him. “It was ‘contradictions’ a moment ago and now it is ‘surprises.’ Which reminds me, you haven’t told me why I am a ‘collection.’ ”

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“I think you know well enough,” he retorted. “The first time I saw you—down at the Nick-wire ford with Tig, you remember—I tried to recall which Madonna it is that has your mouth and eyes.”

“Well, did you succeed in placing the lady?”

“No. Somehow, I haven’t cared to since I’ve come to know you. You’re different—always different, and then—oh, well, comparisons are such hopelessly inadequate things, anyway,” he finished lamely.

“You are not getting on very well with the ‘contradictions,’ ” she demurred.

“Oh, I can catalogue them if you push me to it. One minute you are the Madonna lady that I can’t recall, calm, reposeful, truthful, and all that, you know—so truthful that those childlike eyes of yours would make a stuttering imbecile of the man who should come to you with a lie in his mouth.”

“And the next minute?” she prompted.

“The next minute you are a witch, laughing at the man’s little weaknesses, putting your finger on them as accurately as if you could read his soul, holding them up to your ridicule and—what’s much worse—to his own. At such times your insight, or whatever you choose to call

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it, is enough to give a man a fit of 'seeing things.' ”

Her laugh was like a school-girl's, light-hearted, ringing, deliciously unrestrained.

“What a picture!” she commented. And then: “I can draw a better one of you, Monsieur Victor de Brouillard.”

“Do it,” he dared.

“It'll hurt your vanity.”

“I haven't any.”

“Oh, but you have! Don't you know that it is only the very vainest people who say that?”

“Never mind; go on and draw your picture.”

“Even if it should give you another attack of the 'seeing things'?”

“Yes; I'll chance even that.”

“Very well, then: once upon a time—it was a good while ago, I'm afraid—you were a very upright young man, and your uprightness made you just a little bit austere—for yourself, if not for others. At that time you were busy whittling out heroic little ideals and making idols of them; and I am quite sure you were spelling duty with a capital 'D' and that you would have been properly horrified if a sister of yours had permitted an unchaperoned acquaintance like—well, like ours.”

“Go on,” he said, neither affirming nor denying.

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“Also, at that time you thought that a man’s work in the world was the biggest thing that ever existed, the largest possible order that could be given, and the work and everything about it had to be transparently honest and openly above-board. You would cheerfully have died for a principle in those days, and you would have allowed the enemy to cut you up into cunning little inch cubes before you would have admitted that any pigeon was ever made to be plucked.”

He was smiling mirthlessly, with the black mustaches taking the sardonic upcurve.

“Then what happened?”

“One of two things, or maybe both of them. You were pushed out into the life race with some sort of a handicap. I don’t know what it was—or is. Is that true?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll hazard the other guess. You discovered that there were women in the world and that there was something in you, or about you, that was sufficiently attractive to make them sit up and be nice to you. For some reason—perhaps it was the handicap—you thought you’d be safer in the unwomaned wilderness and so you came out here to the ‘wild and woolly.’ But even here you’re not safe. There is a passable trail

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over War Arrow Pass and at a pinch an automobile can cross the Buckskin."

When she stopped he nodded gravely. "It is all true enough. You haven't added anything more than a graceful little touch here and there. Who has been telling you all these things about me?"

She clapped her hands in delighted self-applause.

"You don't deny them?"

"I wouldn't be so impolite."

In the turning of a leaf her mood changed and the wide-open, fearless eyes were challenging him soberly.

"You *can't* deny them."

He tried to break away from the level-eyed, accusing gaze—tried and found it impossible.

"I asked you who has been gossiping about me; not Grizzy?"

"No, not Murray Grislow; it was the man you think you know best in all the world—who is also the one you probably know the least—yourself."

"Good Heavens! am I really such a transparent egoist as all that?"

"All men are egoists," she answered calmly. "In some the ego is sound and clear-eyed and strong; in others it is weak—in the same way that pas-

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sion is weak; it will sacrifice all it has or hopes to have in some sudden fury of self-assertion."

She sat up and put her hands to her hair, and he was free to look away, down upon the great ditch where the endless chain of concrete buckets linked itself to the overhead carrier like a string of mechanical insects, each with its pinch of material to add to the deep and wide-spread foundations of the dam. Across the river a group of hidden sawmills sent their raucous song like the high-pitched shrilling of distant locusts to tremble upon the still air of the afternoon. In the middle distance the camp-town city, growing now by leaps and bounds, spread its roughly indicated streets over the valley level, the yellow shingled roofs of the new structures figuring as patches of vivid paint under the slanting rays of the sun. Far away to the right the dark-green liftings of the Quadjenäi Hills cut across from mountain to river; at the foot of the ridge the tall chimney-stacks of the new cement plant were rising, and from the quarries beyond the plant the dull thunder of the blasts drifted up to the Chigringo heights like a sign from the mysterious underworld of Navajo legend.

This was not Brouillard's first visit to the cabin on the Massingale claim by many. In the ear-

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liest stages of the valley activities Smith, the Buckskin cattleman, had been Amy Massingale's escort to the reclamation camp—"just a couple o' lookers," in Smith's phrase—and the unconventional altitudes had done the rest. From that day forward the young woman had hospitably opened her door to Brouillard and his assistants, and any member of the corps, from Leshington the morose, who commonly came to sit in solemn silence on the porch step, to Griffith, who had lost his youthful heart to Miss Massingale on his first visit, was welcome.

Of the five original members of the staff and the three later additions to it, in the persons of the paymaster, the cost-keeper, and young Altwein, who had come in as Grislow's field assistant, Brouillard was the one who climbed oftenest up the mountain-side trail from the camp—a trail which was becoming by this time quite well defined. He knew he went oftener than any of the others, and yet he felt that he knew Amy Massingale less intimately and was far and away more hopelessly entangled than—well, than Grislow, for example, whose visits to the mine cabin came next in the scale of frequency and whose ready wit and gentle cynicism were his passports in any company.

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For himself, Brouillard had not been pointedly analytical as yet. From the moment when Amy and Smith had reined up at the door of his office shack and he had welcomed them both, it had seemed the most natural thing in the world to fall under the spell of enchantment. He knew next to nothing of the young woman's life story; he had not cared to know. It had not occurred to him to wonder how the daughter of a man who drilled and shot the holes in his own mine should have the gifts and belongings—when she chose to display them—of a woman of a much wider world. It was enough for him that she was piquantly attractive in any character and that he found her marvellously stimulating and uplifting. On the days when the devil of moroseness and irritability possessed and maddened him he could climb to the cabin on high Chigringo and find sanity. It was a keen joy to be with her, and up to the present this had sufficed.

“Egoism is merely another name for the expression of a vital need,” he said, after the divagating pause, defining the word more for his own satisfaction than in self-defense.

“You may put it in that way if you please,” she returned gravely. “What is your need?”

He stated it concisely. “Money—a lot of it.”

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“How singular!” she laughed. “I need money, too—a lot of it.”

“You?”

“Yes, I.”

“What would you do with it? Buy corner lots in Niqoyastcàdjeburg?”

“No, indeed; I’d buy a farm in the Blue-grass—two of them, maybe.”

“What an ambition for a girl! Have you ever been in the Blue-grass country?”

She got out of the hammock and came to lean, with her hands behind her, against the opposite porch post. “That was meant to humiliate me, and I sha’n’t forget it. You know well enough that I have never been east of the Mississippi.”

“I didn’t know it. You never tell me anything about yourself.”

Again the mood shutter clicked and her smile was the calm mask of discerning wisdom.

“Persons with well-developed egos don’t care to listen to folk-stories,” she rejoined, evading the tentative invitation openly. “But tell me, what would you do with your pot of rainbow gold—if you should find it?”

Brouillard rose and straightened himself with his arms over his head like an athlete testing his muscles for the record-breaking event.

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“What would I do? A number of things. But first of all, I think, I’d buy the privilege of telling some woman that I love her.”

This time her laugh was frankly disparaging. “As if you could!” she said, with a lip curl that set his blood afire—“as if any woman worth while would care two pins for your wretched pot of gold!”

“Oh, I didn’t mean it quite that way,” he hastened to explain. “I said: ‘Buy the privilege.’ If you knew the conditions you would understand me when I say that the money must come first.”

She was silent for so long a time that he looked at his watch and thought of going. But at the deciding instant she held him with a low-spoken question.

“Does it date back to the handicap? You needn’t tell me if you don’t want to.”

“It does. And there is no reason why I shouldn’t tell you the simple fact. When my father died he left me a debt—a debt of honor; and it must be paid. Until it is paid—but I am sure you understand.”

“Quite fully,” she responded quickly, and now there was no trace of levity in the sweetly serious tone. “Is it much?—so much that you can’t——”

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He nodded and sat down again on the porch step. "Yes, it is big enough to go in a class by itself—in round numbers, a hundred thousand dollars."

"Horrors!" she gasped. "And you are carrying that millstone? Must you carry it?"

"If you knew the circumstances you would be the first to say that I must carry it, and go on carrying it to the end of the chapter."

"But—but you'll *never* be free!"

"Not on a government salary," he admitted. "As a matter of fact, it takes more than half of the salary to pay the premiums on—pshaw! I'm boring you shamelessly for the sake of proving up on my definition of the eternal ego. You ought not to have encouraged me. It's quite hopeless—the handicap business—unless some good angel should come along with a miracle or two. Let's drop it."

She was looking beyond him and her voice was quick with womanly sympathy when she said: "If you could drop it—but you can't. And it changes everything for you, distorts everything, colors your entire life. It's heart-breaking!"

This was dangerous ground for him and he knew it. Sympathy applied to a rankling wound may figure either as the healing oil or the madden-

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ing wine. It was the one thing he had hitherto avoided, resolutely, half-fearfully, as a good general going into battle marches around a kennel of sleeping dogs. But now the under-depths were stirring to a new awakening. In the ardor of young manhood he had taken up the vicarious burden dutifully, and at that time his renunciation of the things that other men strove for seemed the lightest of the many fetterings. But now love for a woman was threatening to make the renunciation too grievous to be borne.

“How did you know?” he queried curiously. “It does change things; it has changed them fiercely in the past few weeks. We smile at the old fable of a man selling his soul for a ready-money consideration, but there are times when I’d sell anything I’ve got, save one, for a chance at the freedom that other men have—and don’t value.”

“What is the one thing you wouldn’t sell?” she questioned, and Brouillard chose to discover a gently quickened interest in the clear-seeing eyes.

“My love for the—for some woman. I’m saving that, you know. It is the only capital I’ll have when the big debt is paid.”

“Do you want me to be frivolous or serious?”

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she asked, looking down at him with the grimacing little smile that always reminded him of a caress. "A little while ago you said 'some woman,' and now you say it again, making it cautiously impersonal. That is nice of you—not to particularize; but I have been wondering whether she is or isn't worth the effort—and the reservation you make. Because it is all in that, you know. You can do and be what you want to do and be if you only want to hard enough."

He looked up quickly.

"Do you really believe that? What about a man's natural limitations?"

"Poof!" she said, blowing the word away as if it were a bit of thistle-down. "It is only the woman's limitations that count, not the man's. The only question is this: Is the one only and incomparable she worth the effort? Would you give a hundred thousand dollars for the privilege of being able to say to her: 'Come, dear, let's go and get married'?"

He was looking down, chiefly because he dared not look up, when he answered soberly: "She is worth it many times over; her price is above rubies. Money, much or little, wouldn't be in it."

"That is better—much better. Now we may

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go on to the ways and means; they are all in the man, not in the things, 'not none whatsoever,' as Tig would say. Let me show you what I mean. Three times within my recollection my father has been worth considerably more than you owe, and three time she has—well, it's gone. And now he is going to make good again when the railroad comes."

Brouillard got up, thrust his hands into the pockets of his working-coat, and faced about as if he had suddenly remembered that he was wasting the government's time.

"I must be going back down the hill," he said. And then, without warning: "What if I should tell you that the railroad is not coming to the Niquoia, Amy?"

To his utter amazement the blue eyes filled suddenly. But the owner of the eyes was winking the tears away and laughing before he could put the amazement into words.

"You shouldn't hit out like that when one isn't looking; it's wicked," she protested. "Besides, the railroad *is* coming; it's got to come."

"It is still undecided," he told her mechanically. "Mr. Ford is coming over with the engineers to have a conference on the ground with—with the Cortwright people. I am expecting him any day."

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“The Cortwright people want the road, don’t they?” she asked.

“Yes, indeed; they are turning heaven and earth over to get it.”

“And the government?”

“The department is holding entirely aloof, as it should. Every one in the Reclamation Service knows that no good can possibly come of any effort to force the region ahead of its normal and natural development. And, besides, none of us here in the valley want to help blow the Cortwright bubble any bigger than it has to be.”

“Then you will advise against the building of the Extension?”

Instead of answering her question he asked one of his own.

“What does it mean to you—to you, personally, and apart from the money your father might make out of it, Amy?”

She hesitated a moment and then met the shrewd scrutiny of his gaze with open candor.

“The money is only a means to an end—as yours will be. You know very well what I meant when I told you that three times we have been obliged to come back to the mountains to—to try again. I dreaded the coming of your camp; I dread a thousand times more the other changes

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that are coming—the temptations that a mushroom city will offer. This time father has promised me that when he can make his stake he will go back to Kentucky and settle down; and he will keep his promise. More than that, Stevie has promised me that he will go, too, if he can have a stock-farm and raise fine horses—his one healthy ambition. Now you know it all.”

He reached up from the lower step where he was standing and took her hand.

“Yes; and I know more than that: I know that you are a mighty brave little girl and that your load is heavier than mine—worlds heavier. But you’re going to win out; if not to-day or to-morrow, why, then, the day after. It’s written in the book.”

She returned his hand-grip of encouragement impulsively and smiled down upon him through quick-springing tears.

“You’ll win out, too, Victor, because it’s in you to do it. I’m sure of it—I *know* it. There is only one thing that scares me.”

“Name it,” he said. “I’m taking everything that comes to-day—from you.”

“You are a strong man; you have a reserve of strength that is greater than most men’s full gift; you can cut and slash your way to the thing you

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really want, and nothing can stop you. But—you'll forgive me for being plain, won't you?—there is a little, just the least little, bit of desperation in the present point of view, and——”

“Say it,” he commanded when she hesitated.

“I hardly know how to say it. It's just a little shudder—inside, you know—as you might have when you see a railroad train rushing down the mountain and think what would happen if one single, inconsequent wheel should climb the rail. There were ideals in the beginning; you admitted it, didn't you? And they are not as distinct now as they used to be. You didn't say that, but I know. . . . Stand them up again, Victor; don't let them fall down in the dust or in the—in the mud. It's got to be clean money, you know; the money that is going to give you the chance to say: ‘Come, girl, let's go and get married.’ You won't forget that, will you?”

He relinquished the hand of encouragement because he dared not hold it any longer, and turned away to stare absently at the timbered tunnel mouth whence a faint clinking of hammer upon steel issued with monotonous regularity.

“I wish you hadn't said that, Amy—about the ideals.”

“Why shouldn't I say it? I *had* to say it.”

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"I can't afford to play with too many fine distinctions. I have accepted the one great handicap. I may owe it to myself—and to some others—not to take on any more."

"I don't know what you mean now," she said simply.

"Perhaps it is just as well that you don't. Let's talk about something else; about the railroad. I told you that President Ford is coming over to have a wrestle with the Cortwright people, but I didn't tell you that he has already had his talk with Mr. Cortwright in person—in Chicago. He hasn't decided; he won't decide until he has looked the ground over and had a chance to confer with me."

She bridged all the gaps with swift intuition. "He means to give you the casting vote? He will build the Extension if you advise it?"

"It is something like that, I fancy; yes."

"And you think—you feel——"

"It is a matter of absolute indifference to me, officially. But in any event, Ford would ask for nothing more than a friendly opinion."

"Then it will lie in your hand to make us rich or to keep us poor," she laughed. "Be a good god-in-the-car, please, and your petitioners will ever pray." Then, with an instant return to

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seriousness: "But you mustn't think of that—of course, you won't—with so many other and greater things to consider."

"On the contrary, I shall think very pointedly of that; pointedly and regretfully—because your brother has made it practically impossible for me to help."

"My brother?" with a little gasp.

"Yes. He offered to buy my vote with a block of 'Little Susan' stock. That wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't talked about it—told other people what he was going to do. But he did that, as well."

He felt rather than saw that she had turned quickly to face the porch post, that she was hiding her face in the crooking of an arm. It melted him at once.

"Don't cry; I was a brute to say such a thing as that to you," he began, but she stopped him.

"No," she denied bravely. "The truth may hurt—it *does* hurt awfully; but it can't be brutal. And you are right. Stevie *has* made it impossible."

An awkward little silence supervened and once more Brouillard dragged his watch from its pocket.

"I'm like the awkward country boy," he said with quizzical humor. "I really must go and I

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don't know how to break away." Then he went back to the closed topic. "I guess the other thing was brutal, too—what I said about your brother's having made it impossible. Other things being equal——"

Again she stopped him.

"When Mr. Ford comes, you must forget what Stevie said and what I have said. Good-by."

.

An hour later, when the afternoon shadow of Jack's Mountain was lying all across the shut-in valley and pointing like the angle of a huge gnomon to the Quadjenäi Hills, Brouillard was closeted in his log-built office quarters with a big, fair-faced man, whose rough tweeds and unbrushed, soft hat proclaimed him fresh from the dust-dry reaches of the Quesado trail.

"It is your own opinion that I want, Victor," the fair-faced man was saying, "not the government engineer's. Can we make the road pay if we bring it here? That is a question which you can answer better than any other living man. You are here on the ground and you've been here from the first."

"You've had it out with Cortwright?" Brouillard asked. And then: "Where is he now? in Chicago?"

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“No. He is on his way to the Niquoia, coming over in his car from El Gato. Says he made it that way once before and is willing to bet that it is easier than climbing War Arrow. But never mind J. Wesley. You are the man I came to see.”

“I can give you the facts,” was the quiet rejoinder. “While the Cortwright boom lasts there will be plenty of incoming business—and some outgoing. When the bubble bursts—as it will have to when the dam is completed, if it doesn’t before—you’ll quit until the Buckskin fills up with settlers who can give you crops to move. That is the situation in a nutshell, all but one little item. There is a mine up on Chigringo—Massingale’s—with a good few thousand tons of pay ore on the dump. Where there is one mine there may be more, later on; and I don’t suppose that even such crazy boomers as the Cortwright crowd will care to put in a gold reduction plant. So you would have the ore to haul to the Red Butte smelters.”

A smile wrinkled at the corners of the big man’s eyes.

“You are dodging the issue, Victor, and you know it,” he objected. “What I want is your personal notion. If you were the executive committee of the Pacific Southwestern, would you, or

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would you not, build the Extension? That's the point I'm trying to make."

Brouillard got up and went to the window. The gnomon shadow of Jack's Mountain had spread over the entire valley, and its southern limb had crept up Chigringo until its sharply defined line was resting upon the Massingale cabin. When he turned back to the man at the desk he was frowning thoughtfully, and his eyes were the eyes of one who sees only the clearly etched lines of a picture which obscures all outward and visual objects . . . the picture he saw was of a sweet-faced young woman, laughing through her tears and saying: "Besides, the railroad *is* coming; it's *got* to come."

"If you put it that way," he said to the man who was waiting, "if you insist on pulling my private opinion out by the roots, you may have it. *I'd* build the Extension."

VI

Mirapolis

DURING the strenuous weeks when Camp Niquoia's straggling street was acquiring plank sidewalks and getting itself transformed into Chigringo Avenue, with a double row of false-fronted "emporiums" to supplant the shack shelters, Monsieur Poudrecaulx Bongras, late of the San Francisco tenderloin, opened the camp's first counter-grill.

Finding monsieur's name impossible in both halves of it, the camp grinned and rechristened him "Poodles." Later, discovering his dual gift of past mastership in potato frying and coffee making, the camp gave him vogue. Out of the vogue sprang in swift succession a café with side-tables, a restaurant with private dining-rooms, and presently a commodious hotel, where the food was excellent, the appointments luxurious, and where Jack—clothed and in his right mind and with money in his hand—was as good as his master.

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It was in one of Bongras's private dining-rooms that Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright was entertaining Brouillard, with Miss Genevieve to make a harmonizing third at the circular table up to the removal of the cloth and the serving of the cigars and a second cold bottle.

The little dinner had been a gustatory triumph; Miss Genevieve had added the charm of lightness at moments when her father threatened to let the money clink become painfully audible; and the cigars were gold-banded. Nevertheless, when Miss Cortwright had gone up-stairs, and the waiter would have refilled his glass, Brouillard shook his head.

If the millionaire saw the refusal he was too wise to remark it. Altogether, Brouillard was finding his first impressions of Mr. Cortwright re-adjusting themselves with somewhat confusing rapidity. It was not that there was any change in the man. Charactering the genial host like a bachelor of hospitality, he was still the frank, outspoken money-maker, hot upon the trail of the nimble dollar. Yet there was a change of some kind. Brouillard had marked it on the day, a fortnight earlier, when (after assuring himself morosely that he would not) he had gone down to the lower canyon portal to see the Cortwright

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touring-car finish its second race across the desert from El Gato.

“Of course, I was quite prepared to have you stand off and throw stones at our little cob house of a venture, Brouillard,” the host allowed at the lighting of the gold-banded cigars. “You’re the government engineer and the builder of the big dam; it’s only natural that your horizons should be filled with government-report pictures and half-tones of what’s going to be when you get your dam done. But you can’t build your dam in one day, or in two, and the interval is ours. I tell you, we’re going to make Mirapolis a buzz-hummer while the daylight lasts. Don’t you forget that.”

“‘Mirapolis’?” queried Brouillard. “Is that the new name?”

Cortwright laughed and nodded. “It’s Gene’s name—‘Miracle City.’ Fits like the glove on a pretty girl’s arm, doesn’t it?”

“It does. But the miracle is that there should be any money daring enough to invest itself in the Niquoia.”

“There you go again, with your ingrained engineering ideas that to be profitable a scheme must necessarily have rock-bottom foundations and a time-defying superstructure,” chuckled the host. “Why, bless your workaday heart, Brouillard,

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nothing is permanent in this shuffling, growing, progressive world of ours—absolutely nothing. Some of the biggest and costliest buildings in New York and Chicago are built on ground leases. Our ground lease will merely be a little shorter in the factor of time.”

“So much shorter that the parallel won’t hold,” argued Brouillard.

“The parallel does hold; that is precisely the point. Every ground-lease investment is a gamble. The investor simply bets that he can make the turn within the time limit.”

“Yes; but a long term of years——”

“There you are,” cut in the financier. “Now you’ve got it down to the hard-pan basis: long time, small profits and a slow return; short time, big profits and a quick return. You’ve eaten here before; what do you pay Bongras for a reasonably good dinner?”

Brouillard laughed. “Oh, Poodles. He cinches us, all right; four or five times as much as it’s worth—or would cost anywhere else.”

“That’s it. He knows he has to make good on all these little luxuries he gives you—cash in every day, as you might say, and come out whole before you stop the creek and drown him. Let me tell you something, Brouillard; San Francisco brags

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about being the cheapest city in the country; they'll tell you over there that you can buy more for your money than you can anywhere else on earth. Well, Mirapolis is going to take the trophy at the other end of the speedway. When we get in motion we're going to have Alaska faded to a frazzle on prices—and you'll see everybody paying them joyfully.”

“And in the end somebody, or the final series of somebodies, will be left to hold the bag,” finished Brouillard.

“That's a future. What is it the Good Book says? ‘Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.’ That's philosophy, and it's good business, too. Not that I'm admitting your pessimistic conclusions for a single minute; don't mistake me on that point. There needn't be any bag holders, Brouillard. Let me put it in a nutshell: we're building a cement plant, and we shall sell you the output—at a good, round price, I promise you, but still at a lower figure than you're paying for the imported article now, or than you will pay even after the railroad gets in. When our government orders are filled we can afford to wreck the plant for what it will bring as junk. We'll be out of it whole, with a nice little profit.”

“That is only one instance,” objected the guest.

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“Well, Bongras, here, is one more,” laughed the host. “He gets a piece of his investment back every time anybody looks over his *menu* card. And our power plant is another. You made your little kick on that to Washington—you thought the government ought to control its own power. That was all right, from your point of view, but we beat you to it. Now the Reclamation Service gets all the power it needs at a nominal price, and we’re going to sell enough more to make us all feel happy.”

“Sell it? To whom?”

Mr. Cortwright leaned back in his chair and the sandy-gray eyes seemed to be searching the inner recesses of the querying soul.

“That’s inside information, but I don’t mind taking you in on it,” he said between leisurely puffs at his cigar. “We’ve just concluded a few contracts: one with Massingale—he’s going to put in power drills, electric ore-cars, and a modern equipment generally and shove the development of the ‘Little Susan’; one with a new mining syndicate which will begin operations at once on half a dozen prospects on Jack’s Mountain; and one with a lumber combination that has just taken over the sawmills, and will install others, with a planing-mill and sash factory.”

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Brouillard nodded. The gray eyes were slowly hypnotizing him.

“But that isn’t all,” continued the promoter. “We are about to reincorporate the power plant as the Niquoia Electric Power, Lighting, and Traction Company. Within a fortnight we’ll be lighting Mirapolis, and within a month after the railroad gets in we’ll be operating trolley-cars.”

The enthusiast paused to let the information sink in, also to note the effect upon the subject. The noting was apparently satisfactory, since he went on with the steady assurance of one who sees his way clearly.

“That brings us down to business, Brouillard. I don’t mind admitting that I had an object in asking you to dine with me this evening. It’s this: we feel that in the reorganization of the power company the government, which will always be the largest consumer, should be represented in some effective way; that its interests should be carefully safeguarded. It is not so easy as it might seem. We can’t exactly make the government a stockholder.”

“No,” said Brouillard mechanically. The under-depths were stirring again, heaving as if from a mighty ground-swell that threatened a tidal wave of overturnings.

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“We discussed that phase of it in the directors’ meeting this morning,” continued the hypnotist smoothly, “and I made a suggestion which, as president of the company, I was immediately authorized to carry out. What we need, and what the government needs, is a man right here on the ground who will be absolutely loyal to the government’s interests and who can be, at the same time, broad enough and honorable enough to be fair to us.”

Brouillard roused himself by a palpable effort.

“You have found your man, Mr. Cortwright?”

A genial smile twinkled in the little gray eyes.

“I didn’t have very far to go. You see, I knew your father and I’m not afraid to trust his son. We are going to make you the government director, with full power to investigate and to act. And we’re not going to be mean about it, either. The capital stock of the company is ten millions, with shares of a par value of one hundred dollars each, full paid and non-assessable. Don’t gasp; we’ll cut a nice little melon on that capitalization every thirty days, or my name isn’t Cortwright.”

“But I have no money to invest,” was the only form the younger man’s protest took.

“We don’t need your money,” cut in the finan-

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cier with curt good nature. "What we do need is a consulting engineer, a man who, while he is one of us and identified with us, will see to it that we're not tempted to gouge our good Uncle Samuel. It will be no sinecure, I warn you. We're all pretty keen after the dollar, and you'll have to hold us down good and hard. Of course, a director and a consulting officer must be a stockholder, but we'll take care of that."

Brouillard smoked in silence for a full minute before he said: "You know as well as I do, Mr. Cortwright, that it is an unwritten law of the Service that a civilian employee of the government shall not engage in any other business."

"No, I don't," was the blunt reply. "That rule may be good enough to apply to senators and representatives—and it ought to; outside jobs for them might influence legislation. But in your case it would not only be unjust to apply it; it would be absurd and contradictory. Supposing your father had left you a hundred thousand dollars to invest instead of a debt of that amount—you see, I know what a load your keen sense of honor is making you carry—suppose you had this money to invest, would your position in the Reclamation Service compel you to lock it up in a safety vault?"

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“Certainly not. But——”

“Very good. Your objection to taking part in our project would be that a man can’t be strictly impartial when he has a stake in the game; some men couldn’t, Mr. Brouillard, but you can; you know you can, and I know it. Otherwise you wouldn’t be putting half of your salary and more into life-insurance premiums to secure a debt that isn’t even constructively yours.”

“Yes; but if the department should learn that I am a stockholder in a company from which it buys its power——”

“There wouldn’t be a word said—not one single word. They know you in Washington, Brouillard, better, perhaps, than you think they do. They know you would exact a square deal for the department even if it cost you personal money. But this is all academic. The practical facts are that you’ll come in as consulting engineer and that you’ll hold us strictly up to the mark on the government power contract. It’s your duty and part of your job as chief of construction. And we’ll leave the money consideration entirely out of it if you like. You’ll get a stock-certificate, which you may keep or tear up and throw into the waste-basket, just as you please. If you keep it and want to realize on it at any time before

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you begin to put the finishing forms on the dam, I'll do this: I'll agree to market it for you at par. Now let's quit and go and find Gene. She'll think we've tiddled ourselves under the table."

"One moment," said Brouillard. "You have a way of taking a man off his feet, Mr. Cortwright; a rather pleasant way I'm bound to admit. But in this thing which you are proposing there are issues involved which——"

"You want time to think it over? Take it, man; take all the time you need. There's no special hurry."

Brouillard felt that in accepting the condition he was potentially committing himself. It was a measure of the distance he had already travelled that he interposed a purely personal obstacle.

"I couldn't serve as your engineer, Mr. Cortwright, not even in a consulting capacity. Call it prejudice or anything you please, but I simply couldn't do business in an associate relation with your man Hosford."

Cortwright had risen, and he took his guest confidentially by the buttonhole.

"Do you know, Brouillard, Hosford gets on my nerves, too? Don't let that influence you. We'll let Hosford go. We needed him at first to

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sort of knock things into shape; it takes a man of his calibre in the early stages of a project like ours, you know. But he has outlived his usefulness and we'll drop him. Let's go up-stairs."

It was quite late in the evening when Brouillard, a little light-headed from an after-dinner hour of purely social wit-matching with Miss Genevieve, passed out through the café of the Metropole on his way to his quarters.

There were a few late diners at the tables, and Bongras, smug and complacent in evening regalia, was waddling about among them like a glorified head waiter, his stiffly roached hair and Napoleonic mustaches striving for a dignity and fierceness which was cruelly negated by a round, full-fledged face and an obese little body.

"Ze dinnare—she was h-all right, M'sieu' Brouillard?" he inquired, holding the engineer for a moment at the street door.

"As right as the price you're going to charge Mr. Cortwright for it," joked Brouillard.

"*Sacré!*" swore the amiable one, spreading his hands, "if you could h-only know 'ow eet is cost to bring dose dinnare on dis place! Two dollare de 'undred pounds dat mule-freightare is charge me for bringing dose chip-pest wine from Quesado! Sommtime ve get de railroad, *n'est-ce pas*, M'sieu'

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Brouillard? Den ve make dose dinnare moz risson-able.”

“Yes, you will!” Brouillard scoffed jocosely. “You’ll be adding something then for the uniqueness—for the benefit of the tourists. It’ll be a great ad, ‘The Hotel Metropole, the Delmonico’s of the Lake Bottom. Sit in and dine with us before the heavens open and the floods come.’”

“I’ll been wanting to h-ask you,” whispered the Frenchman with a quick-flung glance for the diners at the nearest of the tables, “doze flood—when she is coming, M’sieu’ Brouillard?”

“When we get the dam completed.”

“You’ll bet money h-on dat?—h-all de money you got?”

“It’s a sure thing, if that’s what you’re driving at. You can bet on it if you want to.”

“I make my bet on de price of de dinnare,” smiled Bongras. “*Mais*, I like to know for sure.”

“Why should you doubt it?”

“*Moi*, I don’t doubt nottings; I make de grass to be cut w’ile de sun is shine. But I’ll been hearing somebody say dat maybe-so dis town she grow so fas’ and so beeg dat de gover’ment is not going drown her.”

“Who said that?”

“I don’t know; it is *bruit*—what you call

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rumaire. You hear it h-on de Avenue, in de café, h-anyw'eres you go."

Brouillard laughed again, this time with his hand on the door-latch.

"Don't lower your prices on the strength of any such rumor as that, Poodles. The dam will be built, and the Niquoia will be turned into a lake, with the Hotel Metropole comfortably anchored in the deepest part of it—that is, if it doesn't get gay enough to float."

"Dat's juz what I'll been thinking," smiled the little man, and he sped the parting guest with a bow that would have graced the antechamber of a *Louis le Grand*.

Out in the crisp night air, with the stars shining clear in the velvet sky and the vast bulks of the ramparting mountains to give solidity and definiteness to the scheme of things, Brouillard was a little better able to get his feet upon the stable earth.

But the major impulse was still levitant, almost exultant. When all was said, it was Mr. Cortwright's rose-colored view of the immediate future that persisted. "Mirapolis!" It was certainly a name to conjure with; an inspiration on the part of the young woman who had chosen it.

Brouillard saw the projected streets pointing

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away into the four quarters of the night. It asked for little effort of the imagination to picture them as the streets of a city—lighted, paved, and busy with traffic. Would the miracle be wrought? And if it should be, was there any possibility that in time the building of the great dam and the reclamation of the Buckskin Desert would become secondary in importance to the preservation of Mirapolis?

It seemed highly incredible; before the little dinner and the social evening Brouillard would have said it was blankly impossible. But it is only fools and dead men who cannot admit a changing angle in the point of view. At first Brouillard laid it to the champagne, forgetting that he had permitted but a single refilling of his glass. Not then, nor for many days, did he suspect that it was his first deep draught of a far headier wine that sent the blood laughing through his veins as he strode down Chigringo Avenue to his darkened office quarters—the wine of the vintner whose name is Graft.

VII

The Speedway

IT was in the days after he had found on his desk a long envelope enclosing a certificate for a thousand shares of stock in the Niquoia Electric Power, Lighting, and Traction Company that Brouillard began to lose his nickname of "Hell's-Fire" among his workmen, with the promise of attaining, in due time, to the more affectionate title of "the Little Big Boss."

At the envelope-opening moment, however, he was threatened with an attack of heart failure. That Mr. Cortwright and his fellow promoters should make a present of one hundred thousand dollars of the capital stock of the reorganized company to a mere government watch-dog who could presumably neither help nor hinder in the money-making plans of the close corporation, was scarcely believable. But a hastily sought interview with the company's president cleared the air of all the incredibilities.

"Why, my dear Brouillard! what in Sam Hill do you take us for?" was the genial retort when

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the young engineer had made his deprecatory protest. "Did you think we were going to cut the melon and hand you out a piece of the rind? Not so, my dear boy; we are not built on any such narrow-gauge lines. But seriously, we're getting you at a bargain-counter price. One of the things we're up against is the building of another dam higher in the canyon for an auxiliary plant. In taking you in, we've retained the best dam builder in the country to tell us where and how to build it."

"That won't go, Mr. Cortwright," laughed Brouillard, finding the great man's humor pleasantly infectious. "You know you can hire engineers by the dozen at the usual rates."

"All right, blot that out; say that I wanted to do the right thing by the son of good old Judge Antoine; just imagine, for the sake of argument, that I wanted to pose as the long-lost uncle of the fairy-stories to a fine young fellow who hasn't been able to draw a full breath since his father died. You can do it now, Victor, my boy. Any old time the trusteeship debt your father didn't really owe gets too heavy, you can unload on me and wipe it out. Isn't it worth something to realize that?"

"I guess it will be, if I am ever able to get down

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to the solid fact of realizing it. But I can't earn a hundred thousand dollars of the company's stock, Mr. Cortwright."

"Of course you can. That's what we are willing to pay for a good, reliable government brake. It's going to be your business to see to it that the Reclamation Service gets exactly what its contract calls for, kilowatt for kilowatt."

"I'd do that, anyhow, as chief of construction on the dam."

"You mean you would try to do it. As an officer of the power company, you can do it; as an official kicker on the outside, you couldn't feaze us a particle. What? You'd put us out of business? Not much, you wouldn't; we'd play politics with you and get a man for your job who wouldn't kick."

"Well," said the inheritor of sudden wealth, still matching the promoter's mood, "you won't get me fired now, that's one comfort. When will you want my expert opinion on your auxiliary dam?"

"On *our* dam, you mean. Oh, any time soon; say to-morrow or Friday—or Saturday if that hurries you too much. We sha'n't want to go to work on it before Monday."

Being himself an exponent of the modern the-

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ory that the way to do things is to do them now, Brouillard accepted the hurry order without comment. Celerity, swiftness of accomplishment that was almost magical, had become the Mirapolitan order of the day. Plans conceived overnight leaped to their expositions in things done as if the determination to do them had been all that was necessary to their realization.

“You shall have the report to-morrow,” said the newly created consulting engineer, “but you can’t go to work Monday. The labor market is empty, and I’m taking it for granted that you’re not going to stampede my shovellers and concrete men.”

“Oh, no,” conceded the city builder, “we sha’n’t do that. You’ll admit—in your capacity of government watch-dog—that we have played fair in that game. We have imported every workman we’ve needed, and we shall import more. That’s one thing none of us can afford to do—bull the labor market. And it won’t be necessary; we have a train load of Italians and Bulgarians on the way to Quesado to-day, and they ought to be here by Monday.”

“You are a wonder, Mr. Cortwright,” was Brouillard’s tribute to the worker of modern miracles, and he went his way to ride to the

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upper end of the valley for the exploring purpose.

On the Monday, as President Cortwright had so confidently predicted, the train load of laborers had marched in over the War Arrow trail and the work on the auxiliary power dam was begun. On the Tuesday a small army of linemen arrived to set the poles and to string the wires for the lighting of the town. On the Wednesday there were fresh accessions to the army of builders, and the freighters on the Quesado trail reported a steady stream of artisans pouring in to rush the city making.

On the Thursday the grading and paving of Chigringo Avenue was begun, and, true to his promise, Mr. Cortwright was leaving a right of way in the street for the future trolley tracks. And it was during this eventful week that the distant thunder of the dynamite brought the welcome tidings of the pushing of the railroad grade over the mountain barrier. Also—but this was an item of minor importance—it was on the Saturday of this week that the second tier of forms was erected on the great dam and the stripped first section of the massive gray foot-wall of concrete raised itself in mute but eloquent protest against the feverish activities of the miracle-

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workers. If the protest were a threat, it was far removed. Many things might happen before the gray wall should rise high enough to cast its shadow, and the shadow of the coming end, over the miraculous city of the plain.

It was Brouillard himself who put this thought into words on the Sunday when he and Grislow were looking over the work of form raising and finding it good.

“Catching you, too, is it, Victor?” queried the hydrographer, dropping easily into his attitude of affable cynicism. “I thought it would. But tell me, what are some of the things that may happen?”

“It’s easy to predict two of them: some people will make a pot of money and some will lose out.”

Grislow nodded. “Of course you don’t take any stock in the rumor that the government will call a halt?”

“You wouldn’t suppose it could be possible.”

“No. Yet the rumor persists. Hosford hinted to me the other day that there might be a Congressional investigation a little further along to determine whether the true *pro bono publico* lay in the reclamation of a piece of yellow desert or in the preservation of an exceedingly promising and rapidly growing young city.”

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“Hosford is almost as good a boomer as Mr. Cortwright. Everybody knows that.”

“Yes. I guess Mirapolis will have to grow a good bit more before Congress can be made to take notice,” was the hydrographer’s dictum. “Isn’t that your notion?”

Brouillard was shaking his head slowly.

“I don’t pretend to have opinions any more, Grizzy. I’m living from day to day. If the tail should get big enough to wag the dog——”

They were in the middle of the high staging upon which the puddlers worked while filling the forms and Grislow stopped short.

“What’s come over you, lately, Victor? I won’t say you’re half-hearted, but you’re certainly not the same driver you were a few weeks ago, before the men quit calling you ‘Hell’s-Fire.’”

Brouillard smiled grimly. “It’s going to be a long job, Grizzy. Perhaps I saw that I couldn’t hope to keep keyed up to concert pitch all the way through. Call it that, anyway. I’ve promised to motor Miss Cortwright to the upper dam this afternoon, and it’s time to go and do it.”

It was not until they were climbing down from the staging at the Jack’s Mountain approach that Grislow acquired the ultimate courage of his convictions.

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“Going motoring, you said—with Miss Genevieve. That’s another change. I’m beginning to believe in your seven-year hypothesis. You are no longer a woman-hater.”

“I never was one. There isn’t any such thing.”

“You used to make believe there was and you posed that way last summer. Think I don’t remember how you were always ranting about the dignity of a man’s work and quoting Kipling at me? Now you’ve taken to mixing and mingling like a social reformer.”

“Well, what of it?” half-absently.

“Oh, nothing; only it’s interesting from a purely academic point of view. I’ve been wondering how far you are responsible; how much you really do, yourself, and how much is done for you.”

Brouillard’s laugh was skeptical.

“That’s another leaf out of your psychological book, I suppose. It’s rot.”

“Is it so? But the fact remains.”

“What fact?”

“The fact that your subconscious self has got hold of the pilot-wheel; that your reasoning self is asleep, or taking a vacation, or something of that sort.”

“Oh, bally! There are times when you make me feel as if I had eaten too much dinner, Grizzly!

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This is one of them. Put it in words; get it out of your system."

"It needs only three words: you are hypnotized."

"That is what you say; it is up to you to prove it," scoffed Brouillard.

"I could easily prove it to the part of you that is off on a vacation. A month ago this city-building fake looked as crazy to you as it still does to those of us who haven't been invited to sit down and take a hand in Mr. Cortwright's little game. You hooted at it, preached a little about the gross immorality of it, swore a good bit about the effect it was going to have on our working force. It was a crazy object-lesson in modern greed, and all that."

"Well?"

"Now you seem to have gone over to the other side. You hobnob with Cortwright and do office work for him. You know his fake is a fake; and yet I overheard you boosting it the other night in Poodles's dining-room to a tableful of money maniacs as if Cortwright were giving you a rake-off."

Brouillard stiffened himself with a jerk as he paced beside his accuser, but he kept his temper.

"You're an old friend, Grizzy, and a mighty

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good one—as I have had occasion to prove. It is your privilege to ease your mind. Is that all?”

“No. You are letting Genevieve Cortwright make a fool of you. If you were only half sane you’d see that she is a confirmed trophy hunter. Why, she even gets down to young Griffith—and uses him to dig out information about you. She——”

“Hold on, Murray; there’s a limit, and you’ll bear with me if I say that you are working up to it now.” Brouillard’s jaw was set and the lines between his eyes were deepening. “I don’t know what you are driving at, but you’d better call it off. I can take care of myself.”

“If I thought you could—if I only thought you could,” said Grislow musingly. “But the indications all lean the other way. It would be all right if you wanted to marry her and she wanted you to; but you don’t—and she doesn’t. And, besides, there’s Amy; you owe her something, don’t you?—or don’t you? You needn’t grit your teeth that way. You are only getting a part of what is coming to you. ‘Faithful are the wounds of a friend,’ you know.”

“Yes. And when the Psalmist had admitted that, he immediately asked the Lord not to let

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their precious balms break his head. You're all right, Grizzy, but I'll pull through." Then, with a determined wrenching aside of the subject: "Are you going up on Chigringo this afternoon?"

"I thought I would—yes. What shall I tell Miss Massingale when she asks about you?"

"You will probably tell her the first idiotic thing that comes into the back part of your head. And if you tell her anything piffous about me I'll lay for you some dark night with a pick handle."

Grislow laughed reminiscently. "She won't ask," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because the last time she did it I told her your scalp was dangling at Miss Genevieve's belt."

They had reached the door of the log-built quarters and Brouillard spun the jester around with a shoulder grip that was only half playful.

"If I believed you said any such thing as that I'd murder you!" he exploded. "Perhaps you'll go and tell her that—you red-headed blastoderm!"

"Sure," said the blastoderm, and they went apart, each to his dunnage kit.

VIII

Table Stakes

THERE were a dozen business blocks under construction in Mirapolis, with a proportional number of dwellings and suburban villas at various stages in the race toward completion, when it began to dawn upon the collective consciousness of a daily increasing citizenry that something was missing. Garner, the real-estate plunger from Kansas City, first gave the missing quantity its name. The distant thunder of the blasts heralding the approach of the railroad had ceased between two days.

There was no panic; there was only the psychoplastic moment for one. Thus far there had been no waning of the fever of enthusiasm, no slackening of the furious pace in the race for growth, and, in a way, no lack of business. With money plentiful and credit unimpaired, with an army of workmen to spend its weekly wage, and a still larger army of government employees to pour a monthly flood into the strictly limited pool

Table Stakes

of circulation, traffic thrived, and in token thereof the saloons and dance-halls never closed.

Up to the period of the silenced dynamite thunderings new industries were projected daily, and investors, tolled in over the high mountain trails or across the Buckskin in dust-encrusted automobiles by methods best known to a gray-mustached adept in the art of promotion, thronged the lobby of the Hotel Metropole and bought and sold Mirapolis "corners" or "insides" on a steadily ascending scale of prices.

Not yet had the time arrived for selling before sunset that which had been bought since sunrise. On the contrary, a strange mania for holding on, for permanency, seemed to have become epidemic. Many of the working-men were securing homes on the instalment plan. A good few of the villas could boast parquetry floors and tiled bath-rooms. One coterie of Chicagoans refused an advance of fifty per cent on a quarter square of business earth and the next day decided to build a six-storied office-building, with a ground-floor corner for the Niquoia National Bank, commodious suites for the city offices of the power company, the cement company, the lumber syndicate, and the water company, and an entire floor to be set apart for the government engineers

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and accountants. And it was quite in harmony with the spirit of the moment that the building should be planned with modern conveniences and that the chosen building material should be nothing less permanent than monolithic concrete.

In harmony with the same spirit was the enterprise which cut great gashes across the shoulder of Jack's Mountain in the search for precious metal. Here the newly incorporated Buckskin Gold Mining and Milling Company had discarded the old and slow method of prospecting with pick and shovel, and power-driven machines ploughed deep furrows to bed-rock across and back until the face of the mountain was zigzagged and scarred like a veteran of many battles.

In keeping, again, was the energy with which Mr. Cortwright and his municipal colleagues laid water-mains, strung electric wires, drove the paving contractors, and pushed the trolley-line to the stage at which it lacked only the rails and the cars awaiting shipment by the railroad. Under other conditions it is conceivable that an impatient committee of construction would have had the rails freighted in across the desert, would have had the cars taken to pieces and shipped by mule-train express from Quesado. But with the railroad grade already in sight on the bare shoulders

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of the Hophra Hills and the thunder-blasts playing the presto march of promise the committee could afford to wait.

This was the situation on the day when Garner, sharp-eared listener at the keyhole of Opportunity, missing the dynamite rumblings, sent a cipher wire of inquiry to the East, got a "rush" reply, and began warily to unload his Mirapolitan holdings. Being a man of business, he ducked to cover first and talked afterward; but by the time his hint had grown to rumor size Mr. Cortwright had sent for Brouillard.

"Pull up a chair and have a cigar," said the great man when Brouillard had penetrated to the nerve-centre of the Mirapolitan activities in the Metropole suite and the two stenographers had been curtly dismissed. "Have you heard the talk of the street? There is a rumor that the railroad grading has been stopped."

Brouillard, busy with the work of setting the third series of forms on his great wall, had heard nothing.

"I've noticed that they haven't been blasting for two or three days. But that may mean nothing more than a delayed shipment of dynamite," was his rejoinder.

"It looks bad—devilish bad." The promoter

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was planted heavily in his pivot-chair, and the sandy-gray eyes dwindled to pin-points. "Three days ago the blasting stopped, and Garner—you know him, the little Kansas City shark across the street—got busy with the wire. The next thing we knew he was unloading, quietly and without making any fuss about it, but at prices that would have set us afire if he'd had enough stuff in his pack to amount to anything."

Brouillard tried to remember that he was the Reclamation Service construction chief, that the pricking of the Mirapolitan bubble early or late concerned him not at all,—tried it and failed.

"I am afraid you are right," he said thoughtfully. "We've had a good many applications from men hunting work in the past two days, more than would be accounted for by the usual drift from the railroad camps."

"You saw President Ford after I did; what did he say when he was over here?"

"He said very little to me," replied Brouillard guardedly. "From that little I gathered that the members of his executive committee were not unanimously in favor of building the Extension."

"Well, we are up against it, that's all. Read that," and the promoter handed a telegram across the desk.

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The wire was from Chicago, was signed "Ackerman," and was still damp from the receiving operator's copying-press. It read:

"Work on P. S-W.'s Buckskin Extension has been suspended for the present. Reason assigned, shrinkage in securities and uncertainty of business outlook in Niquoia."

Brouillard's first emotion was that of the engineer and the economist. "What a bunch of blanked fools!" he broke out. "They've spent a clean million as it stands, and they are figuring to leave it tied up and idle!"

Mr. Cortwright's frown figured as a fleshly mask of irritability.

"I'm not losing any sleep over the P. S-W. treasury. It's our own basket of eggs here that I'm worrying about. Let it once get out that the railroad people don't believe in the future of Mirapolis and we're done."

Brouillard's retort was the expression of an upflash of sanity.

"Mirapolis has no future; it has only an exceedingly precarious present."

For a moment the sandy-gray eyes became inscrutable. Then the mask of irritation slid aside, revealing the face which Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright ordinarily presented to his world—the face of imperturbable good nature.

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“You’re right, Brouillard; Mirapolis is only a good joke, after all. Sometimes I get bamfoozled into the idea that it isn’t—that it’s the real thing. That’s bad for the nerves. But about this railroad fizzle; I don’t relish the notion of having our little joke sprung on us before we’re ready to laugh, do you? What do you think?”

Brouillard shook himself as one who casts a burden.

“It is not my turn to think, Mr. Cortwright.”

“Oh, yes, it is; very pointedly. You’re one of us, to a certain extent; and if you were not you would still be interested. A smash just now would hamper the Reclamation Service like the mischief; the entire works shut down; no cement, no lumber, no power; everything tied up in the courts until the last creditor quits taking appeals. Oh, no, Brouillard; you don’t want to see the end of the world come before it’s due.”

It was the consulting engineer of the power company rather than the Reclamation Service chief who rose and went to the window to look down upon the morning briskness of Chigringo Avenue. And it was the man who saw one hundred thousand dollars, the price of freedom, slipping away from him who turned after a minute or two of the absent street gazing and said:

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“What do you want me to do, Mr. Cortwright? I did put my shoulder to the wheel when Ford was here. I told him if I were in his place I’d take the long chance and build the Extension.”

“Did you?—and before you had a stake in the game? That was a white man’s boost, right! Have another cigar. They’re ‘Poodles’s Pride,’ and they’re not half bad when you get used to the near-Havana filler. Think you could manage to get Ford on the wire and encourage him a little more?”

“It isn’t Ford; it is the New York bankers. You can read that between the lines in your man Ackerman’s telegram.”

The stocky gentleman in the pivot-chair thrust out his jaw and tilted his freshly lighted cigar to the aggressive angle.

“Say, Brouillard, we’ve got to throw a fresh piece of bait into the cage, something that will make the railroad crowd sit up and take notice. By George, if those gold hunters up on Jack’s Mountain would only stumble across something big enough to advertise——”

Brouillard started as if the wishful musing had been a blow. Like a hot wave from a furnace mouth it swept over him—the sudden realization that the means, the one all-powerful, earth-moving

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lever the promoter was so anxiously seeking, lay in his hands.

“The Buckskin people, yes,” he said, making talk as the rifleman digs a pit to hold his own on the firing-line. “If they should happen to uncover a gold reef just now it would simplify matters immensely for Mirapolis, wouldn’t it? The railroad would come on, then, without a shadow of doubt. All the bankers in New York couldn’t hold it back.”

Now came Mr. Cortwright’s turn to get up and walk the floor, and he took it, tramping solidly back and forth in the clear space behind the table-topped desk. It was not until he had extended the meditative stump-and-go to one of the windows that he stopped short and came out of the inventive trance with a jerk.

“Come here,” he called curtly, with a quick finger crook for the engineer, and when Brouillard joined him: “Can you size up that little caucus over yonder?”

The “caucus” was a knot of excited men blocking the sidewalk in front of Garner’s real-estate office on the opposite side of the street. The purpose of the excited ones was not difficult to divine. They were all trying to crowd into the Kansas City man’s place of business at once.

Table Stakes

"It looks like a run on a bank," said Brouillard.

"It is," was the crisp reply. "Garner has beaten everybody else to the home plate, but he couldn't keep his mouth shut. He's been talking, and every man in that mob is a potential panic breeder. That thing has got to be nipped in the bud, right now!"

"Yes," Brouillard agreed. He was still wrestling with his own besetment—the prompting which involved a deliberate plunge where up to the present crisis he had been merely wading in the shallows. A little thing stung him alive to the imperative call of the moment—the sight of Amy Massingale walking down the street with Tig Smith, the Triangle-Circle foreman. It was of the death of her hopes that he was thinking when he said coolly: "You have sized it up precisely, Mr. Cortwright; that is a panic in the making, and the bubble won't stand for very much pricking. Give me a free hand with your check-book for a few minutes and I'll try to stop it."

It spoke volumes for the millionaire promoter's quick discernment and decision that he asked no questions. "Do it," he snapped. "I'll cover you for whatever it takes. Don't wait; that crowd is getting bigger every minute."

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Brouillard ran down-stairs and across the street. It was no part of his intention to stop and speak to Amy Massingale and the ranchman, but he did it, and even walked a little way with them before he turned back to elbow his way through the sidewalk throng and into Garner's dingy little office.

"You are selling Mirapolis holdings short today, Garner?" he asked when he had pushed through the crowd to the speculator's desk. And when Garner laughed and said there were no takers he placed his order promptly. "You may bid in for me, at yesterday's prices, anything within the city limits—not options, you understand, but the real thing. Bring your papers over to my office after banking hours and we'll close for whatever you've been able to pick up."

He said it quietly, but there could be no privacy at such a time and in such a place.

"What's that, Mr. Brouillard?" demanded one in the counter jam. "You're giving Garner a blank card to buy for your account? Say, that's plenty good enough for me. Garner, cancel my order to sell, will you? When the chief engineer of the government water-works believes in Mirapolis futures and bets his money on 'em, I'm not selling."

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The excitement was already dying down and the crowd was melting away from Garner's sidewalk when Brouillard rejoined Mr. Cortwright in the second-floor room across the street.

"Well, it's done," he announced shortly, adding: "It's only a stop-gap. To make the bluff good, you've got to have the railroad."

"That's the talk," said the promoter, relighting the cigar which the few minutes of crucial suspense had extinguished. And then, without warning: "You're carrying something up your sleeve, Brouillard. What is it?"

"It is the one thing you need, Mr. Cortwright. If I could get my own consent to use it I could bring the railroad here in spite of those New Yorkers who seem to have an attack of cold feet."

Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright's hesitation was so brief as to be almost imperceptible. "I suppose that is your way of saying that your share in the table stakes isn't big enough. All right; the game can't stop in the middle of a bet. How much is it going to cost us to stay in?"

"The cost isn't precisely in the kind of figures that you understand best, Mr. Cortwright. And as to my share in the profits . . . well, we

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needn't mince matters; you may remember that you were at some considerable pains to ascertain my price before you made the original bid—and the bid was accepted. You've just been given a proof that I'm trying to earn my money. No other man in Mirapolis could have served your turn over there at Garner's as I did a few minutes ago. You know that."

"Good Lord, man, I'm not kicking! But we are all in the same boat. If the railroad work doesn't start up again within the next few days we are all due to go to pot. If you've got the odd ace up your sleeve and don't play it, you stand to lose out with the rest of us."

The door was open into the anteroom where the stenographers' desks were, and Brouillard was staring gloomily into the farther vacancies.

"I wonder if you know how little I care?" he said half musingly. Then, with sudden vehemence: "It is altogether a question of motive with me, Mr. Cortwright; of a motive which you couldn't understand in a thousand years. If that motive prevails, you get your railroad and a little longer lease of life. If it doesn't, Mirapolis will go to the devil some few weeks or months ahead of its schedule—and I'll take my punishment with the remainder of the fools—and the knaves."

Table Stakes

He was on his feet and moving toward the door of exit when the promoter got his breath.

“Here, hold on, Brouillard—for Heaven’s sake, don’t go off and leave it up in the air that way!” he protested.

But the corridor door had opened and closed and Brouillard was gone.

Two hours later Mirapolis the frenetic had a new thrill, a shock so electrifying that the rumor of the railroad’s halting decision sank into insignificance and was forgotten. The suddenly evoked excitement focussed in a crowd besieging the window of the principal jewelry shop—focussed more definitely upon a square of white paper in the window in the centre of which was displayed a little heap of virgin gold in small nuggets and coarse grains.

While the crowds in the street were still struggling and fighting to get near enough to read the labelling placard, the *Daily Spot-Light* came out with an extra which was all head-lines, the telegraph-wires to the East were buzzing, and the town had gone mad. The gold specimen—so said the placard and the news extra—had been washed from one of the bars in the Niquoia.

By three o’clock the madness had culminated in the complete stoppage of all work among the

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town builders and on the great dam as well, and gold-crazed mobs were frantically digging and panning on every bar in the river from the valley outlet to the power dam five miles away.

IX

Bedlam

IT was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon of the day in which Mirapolis went plucer mad when word came to the Reclamation-Service headquarters that the power was cut off and that there were no longer men enough at the mixers and on the forms to keep the work going if the power should come on again.

Handley, the new fourth assistant, brought the news, dropping heavily into a chair and shoving his hat to the back of his head to mop his seamed and sun-browned face.

"Why the devil didn't you fellows turn out?" he demanded savagely of Leshington, Anson, and Grislow, who were lounging in the office and very pointedly waiting for the lightning to strike. "Gassman and I have done everything but commit cold-blooded murder to hold the men on the job. Where's the boss?"

Nobody knew, and Grislow, at least, was visibly disturbed at the question. It was Anson

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who seemed to have the latest information about Brouillard.

“He came in about eleven o’clock, rummaged for a minute or two in that drawer you’ve got your foot on, Grizzy, and then went out again. Anybody seen him since?”

There was a silence to answer the query, and the hydrographer righted his chair abruptly and closed the opened drawer he had been utilizing for a foot-rest. He had a long memory for trifles, and at the mention of the drawer a disquieting picture had flashed itself upon the mental screen. There were two figures in the picture, Brouillard and himself, and Brouillard was tossing the little buckskin sack of gold nuggets into the drawer, where it had lain undisturbed ever since—until now.

Moreover, Grislow’s news of Brouillard, if he had seen fit to publish it, was later than Anson’s. At one o’clock, or thereabout, the chief had come into the mapping room for a glance at the letters on his desk. One of the letters—a note in a square envelope—he had thrust into his pocket before going out.

“It looks as if the chief had gone with the crowd,” said Leshington when the silence had grown almost portentous, “though that wouldn’t

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be like him. Has anybody found out yet who touched off the gold-mounted sky-rocket?"

Grislow came out of his brown study with a start. "Levy won't tell who gave him those nuggets to put in his window. I tried him. All he will say is that the man who left the sample is perfectly reliable and that he dictated the exact wording of the placard that did the business."

"I saw Harlan, of the *Spot-Light*, half an hour ago," cut in Anson. "He's plumb raving crazy, like everybody else, but there is something faintly resembling method in his madness. He figures it that we government people are out of a job permanently; that with the discovery of these placers—or, rather, with the practically certain rediscovery of them by the mob—Mirapolis will jump to the front rank as a gold camp, and the Reclamation Service will have to call a halt on the Buckskin project."

Leshington's long, plain-song face grew wooden. "You say 'practically certain.' The question is: Will they be rediscovered? Bet any of you a box of Poodles's Flor de near Havanas that it's some new kind of a flip-flap invented by J. Wesley and his boomers. What do you say?"

"Good Lord!" growled Handley. "They

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didn't need any new stunts. They had the world by the ear, as it was."

"That's all right," returned Leshington; "maybe they didn't. I heard a thing or two over at Bon-gras's last night that set me guessing. There was a piece of gossip coming up the pike about the railroad pulling out of the game, or, rather, that it had already pulled out."

Once more silence fell upon the group in the mapping room, and this time it was Grislow who broke it.

"I suppose Harlan is getting ready to exploit the new sensation right?" he suggested, and An-son nodded.

"You can trust Harlan for that. He's got the valley wire subsidized, and he is waiting for the first man to come in with the news of the sure thing and the location of it. When he gets the facts he'll touch off the fireworks, and the world will be invited to take a running jump for the new Tonopah." Then, with sudden anxiety: "I wish to goodness Brouillard would turn up and get busy on his job. It's something hideous to be stranded this way in the thick of a storm!"

"It's time somebody was getting busy," snarled Handley. "There are a hundred tons of fresh concrete lying in the forms, just as they were

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dumped—with no puddlers—to say nothing of half as much more freezing to solid rock right now in the mixers and on the telphers.”

Grislow got up and reached for his coat and hat.

“I’m going out to hunt for the boss,” he said, “and you fellows had better do the same. If this is one of Cortwright’s flip-flaps, and Brouillard happened to be in the way, I wouldn’t put it beyond J. Wesley to work some kind of a disappearing racket on the human obstacle.”

The suggestion was carried out immediately by the three to whom it was made, but for a reason of his own the hydrographer contrived to be the last to leave the mapping room. When he found himself alone he returned hastily to the desk and pulled out the drawer of portents, rummaging in it until he was fully convinced that the little buckskin bag of nuggets was gone. Then, instead of following the others, he took a field-glass from its case on the wall and went to the south window to focus it upon the Massingale cabin, standing out clear-cut and distinct in the afternoon sunlight on its high, shelf-like bench.

The powerful glass brought out two figures on the cabin porch, a woman and a man. The woman was standing and the man was sitting on

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the step. Grislow lowered the glass and slid the telescoping sun tubes home with a snap.

“Good God!” he mused, “it’s unbelievable! He deliberately turns this thing loose on us down here and then takes an afternoon off to go and make love to a girl! He’s crazy; it’s the seven-year devil he talks about. And nobody can help him; nobody—unless Amy can. Lord, Lord!”

X

Epochal

AT the other extremity of the trajectory of Grislow's telltale field-glass Brouillard was sunning himself luxuriously on the porch step at the Massingale house and making up for lost time—counting all time lost when it spelled absence from the woman he loved. But Miss Massingale was in a charmingly frivolous frame of mind.

“That is the fourth different excuse you have invented for cutting me out of your visiting list, not counting the repetitions,” she gibed, when he had finally fallen back upon the time demands of his work to account for his late neglect of her. “If I wanted to be hateful I might insist that you haven't given the true reason yet.”

“Perhaps I will give it before I go,” he parried. “But just now I'd much rather talk about something else. Tell me about yourself. What have you been doing all these days when I haven't been able to keep tab on you?”

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“Flirting—flirting desperately with Tig, with Lord Falkland, with Mr. Anson, and Mr. Grislow, and that nice boy of yours, Herbert Griffith, and with—no, *not* with Mr. Leshington; he scares me—makes a face like a wooden image and says: ‘Little girl, you need a mother—or a husband; I haven’t made up my mind which.’ When he *does* make up his mind I’m going to shriek and run away.”

“Who is Lord Falkland?” demanded Brouillard, ignoring the rank and file.

“O-o-h! Haven’t you met him? He is Tig’s boss. He isn’t a real lord; he is only a ‘younger son.’ But we call him Lord Falkland because he has no sense of humor and is always trying to explain. ‘Beg pawdon, my *deah* Miss Massingale, but I’m *not* Lord Falkland, don’t y’ know. The—er—title goes with the—er—entail. I’m only the Honorable Pawcy Grammont Penbawthy Trevawnnion.’” Her mimicry of the Englishman was delicious, and Brouillard laughed like a man without a care in the world.

“Where does the Honorable All-the-rest keep himself?” he wished to know.

“He stays out at the ranch in the Buckskin with Tig and the range-riders most of the time, I think. It’s his ranch, you know, and he is im-

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mensely proud of it. He never tires of telling me about the cattle on a thousand hills, or the thousand cattle on one hill, I forget which it is."

"And you flirt with this—this alphabetical monstrosity!" he protested reproachfully.

"Honestly, Victor, I don't; that was only an amiable little figure of speech. You simply *can't* flirt with a somebody who is almost as brilliant as a lump of Cornish tin ore and, oh, ever so many times as dense."

"Exit Lord Falkland, who isn't Lord Falkland," said Brouillard. "Now tell me about the 'Little Susan'; is the Blue-grass farm looming up comfortably on the eastern edge of things?"

In a twinkling her frivolous mood vanished.

"Oh, we are prosperous, desperately prosperous. We have power drills, and electric ore-cars, and a crib, and a chute, and a hoist, and an aerial tramway down to the place where the railroad yard is going to be—all the improvements you can see and a lot more that you can't see. And our payroll—it fairly frightens me when I make it up on the Saturdays."

"I see," he nodded. "All going out and nothing coming in. But the money is all here, safely stacked up in the ore bins. You'll get it all out when the railroad comes."

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“That is another thing—a thing I haven’t dared tell father and Stevie. When I was in Mirapolis this morning I heard that the railroad wasn’t coming, after all; or, rather, Tig had heard it and he told me. We were digging for facts when you met us on Chigringo Avenue—trying to find out if the rumor were true.”

“Did you find out?” he asked.

“Not positively. That is why I left the note at your office begging you to come up if you could spare the time. I felt sure you would know.”

“It means a great deal to you, doesn’t it?” he said evasively.

“It means everything—a thousand times more now than it did before.”

His quick glance up into the suddenly sobered eyes of the girl standing on the step above him was a voiceless query and she answered it.

“We had no working capital, as I think you must have known. Once a month father or Stevie would make up a few pack-saddle loads of the richest ore and freight them over the mountains to Red Butte. That was how we got along. But when you sent me word by Tig that the railroad company had decided to build the Extension, there was—there was—a chance——”

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“Yes,” he encouraged.

“A chance that the day of little things was past and the day of big things was come. Mr. Cortwright and some of his associates had been trying to buy an interest in the ‘Little Susan.’ Father let them in on some sort of a stock arrangement that I don’t understand and then made himself personally responsible for a dreadful lot of borrowed money.”

“Borrowed of Mr. Cortwright?” queried Brouillard.

“No; of the bank. Neither Stevie nor I knew about it until after it was done, and even then father wouldn’t explain. He has been like a man out of his mind since Mr. Cortwright got hold of him—everything is rose-colored; we are going to be immensely rich the minute the railroad builds its track to the mine dump. The ore is growing richer every day—which is true—and the railroad will let us into the smelters with train loads of it. He is crazy to build more cribs and put on night shifts of miners. But you see how it all depends upon the railroad.”

“Not so much upon the railroad now as upon some other things,” said Brouillard enigmatically. “You say your father has borrowed of the bank—is Mr. Cortwright mixed up in the loan in any way?”

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“Yes; he arranged it in some way for father—I don’t know just how. All I know is that father is responsible, and that if the railroad doesn’t come he will lose everything.”

Brouillard gave a low whistle. “I don’t wonder that the quitting rumor made you nervous.”

“It was, and is, positively terrifying. Father has taken one of the new houses in town and we are to move down next week in spite of all I can do or say. That means more expense and more temptations. I can’t tell you how I hate and dread Mirapolis. It isn’t like any other place I have ever known; it is cynical, vicious, wicked!”

“It is,” he agreed soberly. “It couldn’t well be otherwise. You tell a dozen men they’ve got a certain definite time to live, and the chances are that two or three of them will begin to prepare to get ready to be sorry for their sins. The other nine or ten will speed up and burn the candle right down into the socket. We shall see worse things in Mirapolis before we see better. But I think I can lift one of your burdens. What you heard in town this morning is a fact: the railroad people have stopped work on the Buckskin Extension. Don’t faint—they are going to begin again right away.”

“Oh!” she gasped. “Are you sure? How *can* you be sure?”

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“I’ve given the order,” he said gravely. “An order they can’t disregard. Let’s go back a bit and I’ll explain. Do you remember my telling you that your brother had tried to bribe me to use my influence with Mr. Ford?”

“As if I should ever be able to forget it!” she protested.

“Well, that wasn’t all that he did—he threatened me—took me to one of the bars in the Niquoia, and let me prove for myself that it was tolerably rich placer ground. The threat was a curious one. If I’d say the right thing to President Ford, well and good; if not, your brother would disarrange things for the government by giving away the secret of the gold placers. It was ingenious, and effective. To turn the valley into a placer camp would be to disorganize our working force, temporarily at least, and in the end it might even stop or definitely postpone the building of the dam.”

She was listening eagerly, but there was a nameless fear in the steadfast eyes—a shadow which he either missed or disregarded.

“Naturally, I saw, or thought I saw, a good reason why he should hesitate to carry out his threat,” Brouillard went on. “The placer find, with whatever profit might be got out of it, was

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his only so long as he kept the secret. But he covered that point at once; he said that the 'Little Susan'—with the railroad—was worth more to him and to your father than a chance at the placer-diggings. The ore dump with its known values was a sure thing, while the sluice mining was always a gamble."

"And you—you believed all this?" she asked faintly.

"I was compelled to believe it. He let me pan out the proof for myself; a heaping spoonful of nuggets and grain gold in a few panfuls of the sand. It pretty nearly turned my head, Amy; would have turned it, I'm afraid, if Steve hadn't explained that the bar, as a whole, wouldn't run as rich as the sample."

"It is dreadful—dreadful!" she murmured. "You believed him, and for that reason you used your influence with Mr. Ford?"

"No."

"But you did advise Mr. Ford to build the Extension?"

"Yes."

"Believing that it was for the best interests of the railroad to come here?"

"No; doubting it very much, indeed."

"Then why did you do it? I *must* know; it is my right to know."

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He got up and took her in his arms, and she suffered him.

“A few days ago, little girl, I couldn’t have told you. But now I can. I am a free man—or I can be whenever I choose to say the word. You ask me why I pulled for the railroad; I did it for love’s sake.”

She was pushing him away, and the great horror in her eyes was unmistakable now.

“Oh!” she panted, “is love a thing to be cheapened like that—to be sinned for?”

“Why, Amy, girl! What do you mean? I don’t understand——”

“That is it, Victor; *you don’t understand*. You deliberately sacrificed your convictions; you have admitted it. And you did it in the sacred name of love! And your freedom—how have you made a hundred thousand dollars in these few weeks? Oh, Victor, is it clean money?”

He was abashed, confounded; and at the bottom of the tangle of conflicting emotions there was a dull glow of resentment.

“The ‘sacrifice,’ as you call it, was made for you,” he said, ignoring her question about the money. “I merely told Mr. Ford what I should do if the decision lay wholly with me. That is what he asked for—my personal opinion. And he got it.”

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“Yes; but when you gave it . . . did you say: ‘Mr. Ford, there is a girl up at the “Little Susan” mine on Chigringo Mountain who needs your railroad to help her out of her troubles. Because I love the girl’——”

“Of course I didn’t say any such suicidal thing as that! But it is too late to raise the question of culpability in the matter of giving Ford what he asked for. I did it, as I say—for love of you, Amy; and now I have done a much more serious thing—for the same good reason.”

“Tell me,” she said, with a quick catching of her breath.

“Your brother put a weapon in my hands, and I have used it. There was one sure way to make the railroad people get busy again. They couldn’t sit still if all the world were trying to get to a new gold camp, to which they already have a line graded and nearly ready for the steel.”

“And you have——?”

He nodded.

“I had Levy put the spoonful of nuggets in his window, with a placard stating that it was taken out of a bar in the Niquoia. When I left the office to come up here the whole town was blocking the street in front of Levy’s.”

She had retreated to take her former position,

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leaning against the porch post, with her hands behind her, and she had grown suddenly calm.

“You did this deliberately, Victor, weighing all the consequences? Mirapolis is already a city of frenzied knaves and dupes; did you realize that you were taking the chance of turning it into a wicked pandemonium? Oh, I can’t believe you did!”

“Don’t look at me that way, Amy,” he pleaded. Then he went on, with curious little pauses between the words: “Perhaps I didn’t think—didn’t care; you wanted something—and I wanted to give it to you. That was all—as God hears me, it was all. There was another thing that might have weighed, but I didn’t let it weigh; I stood to lose the money that will set me free—I could have lost it without wincing—I told Cortwright so. You believe that, Amy? It will break my heart if you don’t believe it.”

She shook her head sadly.

“You have thrown down another of the ideals, and this time it was mine. You don’t understand, and I can’t make you understand—that is the keen misery of it. If this ruthless thing you tried to do had succeeded, I should be the most wretched woman in the world.”

“If it had succeeded? It has succeeded.

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Didn't I say just now that the town was crazy with excitement when I left to come up here?"

The girl was shaking her head again.

"God sometimes saves us in spite of ourselves," she said gravely. "The excitement will die out. There are no placers in the Niquoia. The bars have been prospected again and again."

"They have been?——"

Brouillard turned on his heel and choked back the sudden malediction that rose to his lips. She had called Mirapolis a city of knaves and dupes; surely, he himself was the simplest of the dupes.

"I see—after so long a time," he went on. "Your brother merely 'salted' a few shovelfuls of sand for my especial benefit. Great Heavens, but I was an easy mark!"

"Don't!" she cried, and the tears in her voice cut him to the heart—"don't make it harder for me than it has to be. I have told you only what I've heard my father say, time and again: that there is no gold in the Niquoia River. And you mustn't ask me to despise my brother. He fights his way to his ends without caring much for the consequences to others; but tell me—haven't you been doing the same thing?"

"I have," he confessed stubbornly. "My love

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isn't measured by a fear of consequences—to myself or others."

"That is the hopeless part of it," she returned drearily.

"Yet you condone in your brother what you condemn in me," he complained.

"My brother is my brother; and you are—Let me tell you something, Victor: God helping me, I shall be no man's evil genius, and yours least of all. You broke down the barriers a few minutes ago and you know what is in my heart. But I can take it out of my heart if the man who put it there is not true to himself."

Brouillard was silent for a little space, and when he spoke again it was as one awaking from a troubled dream.

"I know what you would do and say; you would take me by the hand and tell me to come up higher. . . . There was a time, Amy, when you wouldn't have had to say it twice—a time when the best there was in me would have leaped to climb to any height you pointed to. The time is past, and I can't recall it, try as I may; there is a change; it goes back to that day when I first saw you—down at the lower ford in the desert's edge. I loved you then, though I wouldn't admit it even to myself. But that

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wasn't the change; it was something different. Do you believe in Freiborg's theory of the multiple personality? I saw his book in your hammock one day when I was up here."

"No," she said quite definitely. "I am I, and I am always I. For the purposes of the comedy we call life, we play many parts, perhaps; but back of the part-playing there is always the same soul person, I think—and believe."

"I know; that is common sense and sanity. And yet Freiborg's speculations are most plausible. He merely carries the idea of the 'dual personality—the Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde notion—a step farther along. You may remember how he compares the human being to a ship changing commanders at every port. One captain makes her a merchantman; another makes her a tramp; a third turns her into a slaver or a pirate; under a fourth she becomes a derelict."

"That is a terribly dangerous theory, if you take it seriously," was her comment.

"I don't want to take it seriously. But facts are stubborn things. I am not the same man I was a few years or even a few months ago. I have lost something; I have not the same promptings; things that I used to loathe no longer shock me. New and unsuspected pitfalls open for me

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every day. For example, I am not naturally hot-headed—or rather, I should say, I am quick-tempered but have always been able to control myself. Yet in the past few months I have learned what it means to fly into a rage that fairly makes me see red. And there is no cause. Nothing different has broken into my life save the best of all things—a great love. And you tell me that the love is unworthy.”

“No, I didn’t say that; I only meant that you had misconceived it. Love is the truest, finest thing we know. It can never be the tool of evil, much less the hand that guides the tool. Given a free field, it always makes for the wider horizons, the higher planes of thought and action; it may even breathe new life into the benumbed conscience. I don’t say that it can’t be dragged down and trampled in the dust and the mire; it can be, and then there is nothing more pitiful in a world of misconceptions.”

Again a silence came and sat between them; and, as before, it was the man who broke it.

“You lead me to a conclusion that I refuse to accept, Amy; that I am dominated by some influence which is stronger than love.”

“You are,” she said simply.

“What is it?”

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“Environment.”

“That is the most humiliating thing you have said to-day. Is a man a mere bit of driftwood, to be tossed about in the froth of any wave that happens to come along, as Freiborg says he is?”

“Not always; perhaps not often. And never, I think, in the best part of him—the soul ego. Yet there is a mighty power in the wave, in the mere drift. However much others may be deluded, I am sure you can see Mirapolis in its true light. It is frankly, baldly, the money-making scheme of a few unscrupulous men. It has no future—it can have none. And because it is what it is, the very air you breathe down there is poisoned. The taint is in the blood. Mr. Cortwright and his fellow bandits call it the ‘Miracle City,’ but the poor wretches on lower Chigringo Avenue laugh and call it Gomorrah.”

“Just at the present moment it is a city of fools—and I, the king of the fools, have made it so,” said Brouillard gloomily. From his seat on the porch step he was frowning down upon the outspread scene in the valley, where the triangular shadow of Jack’s Mountain was creeping slowly across to the foot of Chigringo. Something in the measured eye-sweep brought him to his feet with a hasty exclamation:

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“Good Lord! the machinery has stopped! They’ve knocked off work on the dam!”

“Why not?” she said. “Did you imagine that your workmen were any less human than other people?”

“No, of course not; that is, I—but I haven’t any time to go into that now. Is your telephone line up here in operation?”

“No, not yet.”

“Then I must burn the wind getting down there. By Jove! if those unspeakable idiots have gone off and left the concrete to freeze wherever it happens to be——”

“One moment,” she pleaded, while he was reaching for his hat. “This new madness will have spent itself by nightfall—it must. And yet I have the queerest shivery feeling, as if something dreadful were going to happen. Can’t you contrive to get word to me, some way—after it is all over? I wish you could.”

“I’ll do it,” he promised. “I’ll come up after supper.”

“No, don’t do that. You will be needed at the dam. There will be trouble, with a town full of disappointed gold-hunters, and liquor to be had. Wait a minute.” She ran into the house and came out with two little paper-covered cylin-

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ders with fuses projecting. "Take these, they are Bengal lights—some of the fireworks that Tig bought in Red Butte for the Fourth. Light the blue one when you are ready to send me my message of cheer. I shall be watching for it."

"And the other?" he asked.

"It is a red light, the signal of war and tumults and danger. If you light it, I shall know——"

He nodded, dropped the paper cylinders into his pocket, and a moment later was racing down the trail to take his place at the helm of the abandoned ship of the industries.

There was need for a commander; for a cool head to bring order out of chaos, and for the rare faculty which is able to accomplish Herculean tasks with whatever means lie at hand. Brouillard descended upon his disheartened subordinates like a whirlwind of invincible energy, electrifying everybody into instant action. Gassman was told off to bring the Indians, who alone were loyally indifferent to the gold craze, down from the crushers. Anson was despatched to impress the waiters and bell-boys from the Metropole; Leshington was sent to the shops and the bank to turn out the clerks; Grislow and Handley were ordered to take charge of the makeshift concrete handlers as fast as they materialized, squadding

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them and driving the work of wreck clearing for every man and minute they could command, with Gassman and Bender to act as foremen.

For himself, Brouillard reserved the most hazardous of the recruiting expedients. The lower Avenue had already become a double rank of dives, saloons, and gambling dens; here, if anywhere in the craze-depopulated town, men might be found, and for once in their lives they should be shown how other men earned money.

“Shove it for every minute of daylight there is left,” he ordered, snapping out his commands to his staff while he was filling the magazine of his Winchester. “Puddle what material there is in the forms, dump the telpher buckets where they stand, and clean out the mixers; that’s the size of the job, and it’s got to be done. Jump to it, Grizzly, you and Handley, and we’ll try to fill your gangs the best way we can. Leshington, don’t you take any refusal from the shopkeepers and the bank people; if they kick, you tell them that not another dollar of government money will be spent in this town—we’ll run a free commissary first. Anson, you make Bongras turn out every man in his feeding place; he’ll do it. Griffith, you chase Mr. Cortwright, and don’t quit till you find him. Tell him from me that we’ve got to

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have every man he can give us, at whatever cost.”

“You’ll be up on the stagings yourself, won’t you?” asked Grislow, struggling into his working-coat.

“After a bit. I’m going down to the lower Avenue to turn out the crooks and diamond wearers. It’s time they were learning how to earn an honest dollar.”

“You’ll get yourself killed up,” grumbled Leshington. “Work is the one thing you won’t get out of that crowd.”

“Watch me,” rasped the chief, and he was gone as soon as he had said it.

Strange things and strenuous happened in the lower end of the Niquoia valley during the few hours of daylight that remained. First, climbing nervously to the puddlers’ staging on the great dam, and led by near-Napoleon Poodles himself, came the Metropole quota of waiters, scullions, cooks, and porters, willing but skillless. After them, and herded by Leshington, came a dapper crew of office men and clerks to snatch up the puddling spades and to soil their clothes and blister their hands in emptying the concrete buckets. Mr. Cortwright’s contribution came as a dropping fire; a handful of tree-cutters from

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the sawmills, a few men picked up here and there in the deserted town, an automobile load of power-company employees shot down from the generating plant at racing speed.

Last, but by no means least in numbers, came the human derelicts from the lower Avenue; men in frock-coats; men in cow-boy jeans taking it as a huge joke; men with foreign faces and lowering brows and with strange oaths in their mouths; and behind the motley throng and marshalling it to a quickstep, Brouillard and Tig Smith.

It was hot work and heavy for the strangely assorted crew, and Brouillard drove it to the limit, bribing, cajoling, or threatening, patrolling the long line of staging to encourage the awkward puddlers, or side-stepping swiftly to the mixers to bring back a detachment of skulkers at the rifle's muzzle. And by nightfall the thing was done, with the loss reduced to a minimum and the makeshift laborers dropping out in squads and groups, some laughing, some swearing, and all too weary and toil-worn to be dangerous. "Give us a job if we come back to-morrow, Mr. Brouillard?" called out the king of the gamblers in passing; and the cry was taken up by others in grim jest.

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“Thus endeth the first lesson,” said Grislow, when the engineering corps was reassembling at the headquarters preparatory to a descent upon the supper-table. But Brouillard was dumb and haggard, and when he had hung rifle and cartridge-belt on their pegs behind his desk, he went out, leaving unbroken the silence which had greeted his entrance.

“The boss is taking it pretty hard,” said young Griffith to no one in particular, and it was Leshington who took him up savagely and invited him to hold his tongue.

“The least said is the soonest mended—at a funeral,” was the form the first assistant’s rebuke took. “You take my advice and don’t mess or meddle with the chief until he’s had time to work this thing out of his system.”

Brouillard was working it out in his own way, tramping the streets, hanging on the outskirts of arguing groups of newsmongers, or listening to the bonanza talk of the loungers in the Metropole lobby. Soon after dark the gold-seekers began to drop in, by twos and threes and in squads, all with the same story of disappointment. By nine o’clock the town was full of them, and since the liquor was flowing freely across many bars, the mutterings of disappointment soon swelled to a

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thunder roar of drunken rage, with the unknown exhibitor of the specimen nuggets for its object. From threats of vengeance upon the man who had hoaxed an entire town to a frenzied search for the man was but a step, and when Brouillard finally left the Metropole and crossed over to his office quarters, the mob was hunting riotously for the jeweller Levy and promising to hang him—when found—to the nearest wire pole if he should not confess the name and standing of his gold-bug.

The shouts of the mob were ringing in Brouillard's ears when he strode dejectedly into the deserted map room, and the cries were rising with a new note and in fresher frenzies a little later when Grislow came in. The hydrographer's blue eyes were hard and his voice had a tang of bitterness in it when he said: "Well, you've done it. Three men have just come in with a double handful of nuggets, and Mirapolis makes its bow to the world at large as the newest and richest of the gold camps."

Brouillard had been humped over his desk, and he sprang up with a cry like that of a wounded animal.

"It can't be; Grizzly, I tell you it can't be! Steve Massingale planted that gold that I washed

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out—played me for a fool to get me to work for the railroad. I didn't know it until—until——”

“Until Amy Massingale told you about it this afternoon,” cut in the map-maker shrewdly. “That's all right. The bar Steve took you to was barren enough; they tell me that every cubic foot of it has been washed over in dish pans and skillets in the past few hours. But you know the big bend opposite the Quadjenäi Hills; the river has built that bend out of its own washings, and the bulletin over at the *Spot-Light* office says that the entire peninsula is one huge bank of gold-bearing gravel.”

At the word Brouillard staggered as from the impact of a bullet. Then he crossed the room slowly, groping his way toward the peg where the coat he had worn in the afternoon was hanging. Grislow saw him take something out of the pocket of the coat, and the next moment the door opened and closed and the hydrographer was left alone.

Having been planned before there was a city to be considered, the government buildings enclosed three sides of a small open square, facing toward the great dam. In the middle of this open space Brouillard stopped, kicked up a little mound of earth, and stood the two paper cylinders on it, side by side.

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The tempered glow from the city electrics made a soft twilight in the little plaza; he could see the wrapper colors of the two signal-fires quite well. A sharp attack of indecision had prompted him to place both of them on the tiny mound. With the match in his hand, he was still undecided. Amy Massingale's words came back to him as he hesitated: "Light the blue one when you are ready to send me my message of cheer. . . ." On the lips of another woman the words might have taken a materialistic meaning; the miraculous gold discovery would bring the railroad, and the railroad would rescue the Massingale mine and restore the Massingale fortunes.

He looked up at the dark bulk of Chigringo, unrelieved even by the tiny fleck of lamplight which he had so often called his guiding star. "Take me out of your mind and heart and say which you will have, little girl," he whispered, sending the words out into the void of night. But only the din and clamor of a city gone wild with enthusiasm came to answer him. Somewhere on the Avenue a band was playing; men were shouting themselves hoarse in excitement, and above the shouting came the staccato crackling of pistols and guns fired in air.

He struck the match and stooped over the blue

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cylinder. "This is your message of cheer, whether you take it that way or not," he went on, whispering again to the silent void. But when the fuse of the blue light was fairly fizzing, he suddenly pinched it out and held the match to the other.

Up on the high bench of the great mountain Amy Massingale was pacing to and fro on the puncheon-floored porch of the home cabin. Her father had gone to bed, and somewhere down among the electric lights starring the valley her brother was mingling with the excited mobs whose shoutings and gun-firings floated up, distance-softened, on the still, thin air of the summer night.

Though there was no pause in the monotonous pacing back and forth, the girl's gaze never wandered far from a dark area in the western edge of the town—the semicircle cut into the dotting lights and marking the site of the government reservation. It was when a tiny stream of sparks shot up in the centre of the dark area that she stopped and held her breath. Then, when a blinding flare followed to prick out the headquarters, the commissary, and the mess house, she sank in a despairing little heap on the floor, with her face hidden in her hands and the quick

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sobs shaking her like an ague chill. It was Brouillard's signal, but it was not the signal of peace; it was the blood-red token of revolution and strife and turmoil.

XI

The Feast of Hurrahs

MIRAPOLIS the marvellous was a hustling, roaring, wide-open mining-camp of twenty thousand souls by the time the railroad, straining every nerve and crowding three shifts into the twenty-four-hour day, pushed its rails along the foot-hill bench of Chigringo, tossed up its temporary station buildings, and signalled its opening for business by running a mammoth excursion from the cities of the immediate East.

Busy as it was, the city took time to celebrate fittingly the event which linked it to the outer world. By proclamation Mayor Cortwright declared a holiday. There were lavish displays of bunting, an impromptu trades parade, speeches from the plaza band-stand, free lunches and free liquor—a day of boisterous, hilarious triumphings, with, incidentally, much buying and selling and many transfers of the precious “front foot” or choice “corner.”

Yielding to pressure, which was no less imperative from below than from above, Brouillard had

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consented to suspend work on the great dam during the day of triumphs, and the Reclamation-Service force, smaller now than at any time since the beginning of the undertaking, went to swell the crowds in Chigringo Avenue.

Of the engineering staff Grislow alone held aloof. Early in the morning he trudged away with rod and trout-basket for the upper waters of the Niquoia and was seen no more. But the other members of the staff, following the example set by the chief, took part in the hilarities, serving on committees, conducting crowds of sight-seers through the government reservation and up to the mixers and stagings, and otherwise identifying themselves so closely with the civic celebration as to give the impression, often commented upon by the visitors, that the building of the great dam figured only as another expression of the Mirapolitan activities.

For himself, Brouillard vaguely envied Grislow the solitudes of the upper Niquoia. But Mr. Cortwright had been inexorable. It was right and fitting that the chief executive of the Reclamation Service should have a part in the rejoicings, and Brouillard found himself discomfortingly emphasized as chairman of the civic reception committee. Expostulation was useless. Mr. Cort-

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wright insisted genially, and Miss Genevieve added her word. And there had been only Grislow to smile cynically when the printed programmes appeared with the chief of the Buckskin reclamation project down for an address on "Modern City Building."

It was after his part of the speechmaking, and while the plaza crowds were still bellowing their approval of the modest forensic effort, that he went to sit beside Miss Cortwright in the temporary grand-stand, mopping his face and otherwise exhibiting the after effects of the unfamiliar strain.

"I didn't know you could be so convincing," was Miss Genevieve's comment. "It was splendid! Nobody will ever believe that you are going to go on building your dam and threatening to drown us, after this."

"What did I say?" queried Brouillard, having, at the moment, only the haziest possible idea of what he had said.

"As if you didn't know!" she laughed. "You congratulated everybody: us Mirapolitans upon our near-city, the miners on their gold output, the manufacturers on their display in the parade, the railroad on its energy and progressive spirit, and the visitors on their perspicuity and good

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sense in coming to see the latest of the seven wonders of the modern world. And the funny thing about it is that you didn't say a single word about the Niquoia dam."

"Didn't I? That shows how completely your father has converted me, how helplessly I am carried along on the torrent of events."

"But you are not," she said accusingly. "Deep down in your inner consciousness you don't believe a little bit in Mirapolis. You are only playing the game with the rest of us, Mr. Brouillard. Sometimes I am puzzled to know why."

Brouillard's smile was rather grim.

"Your father would probably tell you that I have a stake in the game—as everybody else has."

"Not Mr. Grislow?" she said, laying her finger inerrantly upon the single exception.

"No, not Grizzly; I forgot him."

"Doesn't he want to make money?" she asked, with exactly the proper shade of disinterest.

"No; yes, I guess he does, too. But he is—er—well, I suppose you might call him a man of one idea."

"Meaning that he is too uncompromisingly honest to be one of us? I think you are right."

Gorman, Mr. Cortwright's ablest trumpeter in

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the real-estate booming, was holding the plaza crowd spellbound with his enthusiastic periods, rising upon his toes and lifting his hands in angel gestures to high heaven in confirmation of his prophetic outlining of the Mirapolitan future.

In the middle distance, and backgrounding the buildings on the opposite side of the plaza, rose the false work of the great dam—a standing forest of sawed timbers, whose afternoon shadows were already pointing like a many-fingered fate toward the city of the plain. But, though the face of the speaker was toward the shadowing forest, his words ignored it. “The snow-capped Timanyonis,” “the mighty Chigringo,” and “the golden-veined slopes of Jack’s Mountain” all came in for eulogistic mention; but the massive wall of concrete, with its bristling parapet of timbers, had no part in the orator’s flamboyant descriptive.

Brouillard broke the spell of the grandiloquent rantings, and came back to what Miss Genevieve was saying.

“Yes, Murray is stubbornly honest,” he agreed; adding: “He is too good for this world, or rather for this little cross-section of Pandemonium named Mirapolis.”

“Which, inasmuch as we are making Mirap-

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olis what it is, is more than can be said for most of us," laughed Miss Cortwright. Then, with a purposeful changing of the subject: "Where is Miss Massingale? As the original 'daughter of the Niquoia' she ought to have a place on the band-stand."

"She was with Tig Smith and Lord Falkland when the parade formed," rejoined the engineer. "I saw them on the balcony of the Metropole."

"Since you are the chairman of the reception committee, I think you ought to go and find her," said Miss Genevieve pointedly, so pointedly that Brouillard rose laughing and said:

"Thank you for telling me; whom shall I send to take my place here?"

"Oh, anybody—Lord Falkland will do. By the way, did you know that he *is* Lord Falkland now? His elder brother died a few weeks ago."

"No, I hadn't heard it. I should think he would want to go home."

"He does. But he, too, has contracted Mirapolitis. He has been investing any number of pounds sterling. If you find him send him to me. I want to see how the real, simon-pure American brand of oratory affects a British title."

Brouillard went, not altogether unwillingly. Loving Amy Massingale with a passion which,

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however blind it might be on the side of the higher moralities, was still keen-sighted enough to assure him that every plunge he made in the Mirapolitan whirlpool was sweeping him farther away from her; he found himself drifting irresistibly into the inner circle of attraction of which Genevieve Cortwright was the centre.

Whether Miss Cortwright's influence was for good or for evil, in his own case, or was entirely disinterested, he could never quite determine. There were times, like this present instant of blatant rejoicings, when she was brightly cynical, flinging a mocking jest at all things Mirapolitan. But at other times he had a haunting conviction that she was at heart her father's open-eyed ally and abettor, taking up as she might the burden of filial loyalty thrown down by her brother Van Bruce, who, in his short summer of Mirapolitan citizenship, had been illustrating all the various methods by which a spoiled son of fortune may go to the dogs.

Brouillard faced the impossible brother and the almost equally impossible father when he thought of Genevieve Cortwright. But latterly the barriers on that side had been crumbling more and more. Once, and once only, had he mentioned the trusteeship debt to Genevieve, and on

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that occasion she had laughed lightly at what she had called his strained sense of honor.

The laugh had come at a critical moment. It was in the height of the madness following the discovery of the placers, in an hour when Brouillard would have given his right hand to undo the love-prompted disloyalty to his service, that Cortwright, whose finger was on everybody's pulse, had offered to buy in the thousand shares of power company's stock at par. Brouillard had seen freedom in a stroke of the millionaire's pen; but it was a distinct downward step that by this time he was coming to look upon the payment of his father's honor debt as a hard necessity. He meant to pay it, but there was room for the grim determination that the payment should forever sever him from the handicapped past.

He had transferred the stock, minus a single share to cover his official standing on the power company's board, to Cortwright and had received the millionaire's check in payment. It was in the evening of the same eventful day, he remembered, that Genevieve Cortwright had laughed, and the letter, which was already written to the treasurer of a certain Indianapolis trust company, was not mailed. Instead of mailing it he had opened an account at the Niquoia

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National, and the ninety-nine thousand nine hundred dollars had since grown by speculative accretions to the rounded first eighth of a million which all financiers agree in calling the stepping-stone to fortune.

He had regarded this money—was still regarding it—as a loan; his lever with which to pry out something which he could really call his own. But more and more possession and use were dulling the keen edge of accountability and there were moments of insight when the grim irony of taking the price of honor to pay an honor debt forced itself upon him. At such moments he plunged more recklessly, in one of them taking stock in a gold-dredge company which was to wash nuggets by the wholesale out of the Quadjenäi bend, in another buying yet other options in the newest suburb of Mirapolis.

What was to come of all this he would not suffer himself to inquire; but two results were thrusting themselves into the foreground. Every added step in the way he had chosen was taking him farther from the ideals of an ennobling love and nearer to a possibility which precluded all ideals. Notwithstanding Grislow's characterization of her as a trophy hunter, Genevieve Cortwright was, after all, a woman, and as a woman she

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was to be won. With the naïve conceit of a man who has broken into the heart of one woman, Brouillard admitted no insurmountable obstacles other than those which the hard condition of being himself madly in love with another woman might interpose; and there were times when, to the least worthy part of him, the possibility was alluring. Miss Cortwright's distinctive beauty, her keen and ready wit, the assurance that she would never press the ideals beyond the purely conventional limits; in the course of time these might happily smother the masterful passion which had thus far been only a blind force driving him to do evil that good might ensue.

Some such duel of motives was fighting itself to an indecisive conclusion in the young engineer's thoughts when he plunged into the sidewalk throngs in search of the Englishman, and it was not until after he had found Falkland and had delivered Miss Genevieve's summons that the duel paused and immediate and more disquieting impressions began to record themselves.

With the waning of the day of celebrations the temper of the street throngs was changing. It is only the people of the Latinized cities who can take the carnival spirit lightly; in other blood liberty grows to license and the thin veneer

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of civilized restraints quickly disappears. From early dawn the saloons and dives had been adding fuel to the flames, and light-heartedness and good-natured horse-play were giving way to sardonic humor and brutality.

In the short faring through the crowded street from the plaza to the Metropole corner Brouillard saw and heard things to make his blood boil. Women, those who were not a part of the unrestrained mob, were disappearing from the streets, and it was well for them if they could find shelter near at hand. Twice before he reached Bongras's café entrance the engineer shouldered his way to the rescue of some badgered nucleus of excursionists, and in each instance there were frightened women to be hurriedly spirited away to the nearest place of seclusion and safety.

It was in front of Bongras's that Brouillard came upon the Reverend Hugh Castner, the hot-hearted young zealot who had been flung into Mirapolis on the crest of the tidal wave of mining excitement. Though Hosford—who had not been effaced, as Mr. Cortwright had promised he should be—and the men of his clique called the young missionary a meddlesome visionary, he stood in the stature of a man, and lower Chigringo Avenue loved him and swore by him; and sent for him now and then

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when some poor soul, hastily summoned, was to be eased off into eternity.

When Brouillard caught sight of him Castner was looking out over the seething street caldron from his commanding height of six feet of athletic man stature, his strong face a mask of bitter humiliation and concern.

“Brouillard, this is simply hideous!” he exclaimed. “If this devils’ carnival goes on until nightfall we shall have a revival of the old Roman Saturnalia at its worst!” Then, with a swift blow at the heart of the matter: “You’re the man I’ve been wanting to see; you are pretty close in with the Cortwright junta—is it true that free whiskey has been dealt out to the crowd over the bar in the Niquoia Building?”

Brouillard said that he did not know, which was true, and that he could not believe it possible, which was not true. “The Cortwright people are as anxious to have the celebration pass off peaceably as even you can be,” he assured the young missionary, trying to buttress the thing which was not true. “When riot comes in at the door, business flies out at the window; and, after all, this feast of hurrahs is merely another bid for business.”

But Castner was shaking his head.

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"I can't answer for Mr. Cortwright personally. He and Handley and Schermerhorn and a few of the others seem to stand for respectability of a sort. But, Mr. Brouillard, I want to tell you this: somebody in authority is grafting upon the vice of this community, not only to-day but all the time."

"The community is certainly vicious enough to warrant any charge you can make," admitted Brouillard. Then he changed the topic abruptly. "Have you seen Miss Massingale since noon?"

"Yes; I saw her with Smith, the cattleman, at the other end of the Avenue about an hour ago."

"Heavens!" gritted the engineer. "Didn't Smith know better than to take her down there at such a time as this?"

The young missionary was frowning thoughtfully. "I think it was the other way about. Her brother has been drinking again, and I took it for granted that she and Smith were looking for him."

Brouillard buttoned his coat and pulled his soft hat over his eyes.

"I'm going to look for her," he said. "Will you come along?"

Castner nodded, and together they put their

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shoulders to the crowd. The slow progress northward was nearly a battle. The excursion trains returning to Red Butte and Brewster were scheduled to leave early, and the stream of blatant, uproarious humanity was setting strongly toward the temporary railroad station.

Again and again the engineer and his companion had to intervene by word and blow to protect the helpless in the half-drunken, gibe-flinging crush, and in these sallies Castner bore his part like a man, expostulating first and hitting out afterward in a fashion that left no doubt in the mind of his antagonist of the moment.

So, struggling, they came finally to the open square of the plaza. Here the speechmaking was concluded and the crowd was thinning a little. There was a clamorous demonstration of some sort going on around the band-stand, but they left it behind and pushed on into the less noisy but more dangerous region of the lower Avenue.

In one of the saloons, as they passed, a sudden crackling of pistol-shots began, and a mob of terrorized Reclamation-Service workmen poured into the street, sweeping all obstacles before it in a mad rush for safety.

“It was little less than a crime to turn your laborers loose on the town on such an occasion

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as this," said Castner, dealing out his words as frankly and openly as he did his blows.

Brouillard shrugged.

"If I hadn't given them the day they would have taken it without leave. You'll have to pass the responsibility on to some one higher up."

The militant one accepted the challenge promptly.

"It lies ultimately at the door of those whose insatiate greed has built this new Gomorrah in the shadow of your dam." He wheeled suddenly and flung a long arm toward the half-finished structure filling the gap between the western shoulders of Chigringo and Jack's Mountain. "There stands the proof of God's wisdom in hiding the future from mankind, Mr. Brouillard. Because a little section of humanity here behind that great wall knows the end of its hopes, and the manner and time of that end, it becomes demon-ridden, irreclaimable!"

At another time the engineer might have felt the force of the tersely eloquent summing up of the accusation against the Mirapolitan attitude. But now he was looking anxiously for Amy Mas-singale or her escort, or both of them.

"Surely Smith wouldn't let her stay down here a minute longer than it took to get her away," he

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said impatiently as a pair of drunken Cornishmen reeled out of Haley's Place and usurped the sidewalk. "Where was it you saw them, Castner?"

"They were in front of 'Pegleg John's', in the next block. Miss Massingale was waiting for Smith, who was just coming out of Pegleg's den shaking his head. I put two and two together and guessed they were looking for Stephen."

"If they went there Miss Amy had her reasons. Let's try it," said Brouillard, and he was half-way across the street when Castner overtook him.

There was a dance-hall next door to Pegleg John's barrel-house and gambling rooms, and, though the daylight was still strong enough to make the electric lights garishly unnecessary, the orgy was in full swing, the raucous clanging of a piano and the shuffle and stamp of many feet drowning the monotonous cries of the sidewalk "barker," who was inviting all and sundry to enter and join the dancers.

Castner would have stopped to question the "barker"—was, in fact, trying to make himself heard—when the sharp crash of a pistol-shot dominated the clamor of the piano and the stamping feet. Brouillard made a quick dash for the open door of the neighboring barrel-house, and

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Castner was so good a second that they burst in as one man.

The dingy interior of Pegleg John's, which was merely a barrel-lined vestibule leading to the gambling rooms beyond, staged a tragedy. A handsome young giant, out of whose face sudden agony had driven the brooding passion of intoxication, lay, loose-flung, on the sawdust-covered floor, with Amy Massingale kneeling in stricken, tearless misery beside him. Almost within arm's-reach Van Bruce Cortwright, the slayer, was wrestling stubbornly with Tig Smith and the fat-armed barkeeper, who were trying to disarm him, his heavy face a mask of irresponsible rage and his lips bubbling imprecations.

"Turn me loose," he gritted. "I'll fix him so he won't give the governor's snap away! He'll pipe the story of the Coronida Grant off to the papers?—not if I kill him till he's too dead to bury, I guess."

Castner ignored the wrestling three and dropped quickly on his knees beside Stephen Massingale, bracing the misery-stricken girl with the needed word of hope and directing her in low tones how to help him search for the wound.

But Brouillard hurled himself with an oath upon young Cortwright, and it was he, and neither

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the cattleman nor the fat-armed barkeeper, who wrenched the weapon out of Cortwright's grasp and with it menaced the babbling murderer into silence.

XII

Quicksands

A SHORT week after the Reclamation Service headquarters had been moved from the log-built offices on the government reservation to the commodious and airy suite on the sixth floor of the Niquoia Building Brouillard received the summons which he had been expecting ever since the night of rioting and lawlessness which had marked the close of the railroad celebration.

"Mr. Cortwright would like to see you in his rooms at the Metropole," was the message the office boy brought, and Brouillard closed his desk with a snap and followed the boy to Bongras's.

The shrewd-eyed tyrant of Mirapolis was in his shirt-sleeves, busily dictating to two stenographers alternately, when the engineer entered the third room of the series; but the work was suspended and the stenographers were sent away as soon as Brouillard was announced.

"Well," was the millionaire's greeting, "you waited to be sent for, didn't you?"

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“Why not?” said Brouillard shortly. “I have my work to do and you have yours.”

“And the two jobs are at opposite ends of the string, you’d say. Never mind; we can’t afford to throw each other down, and just now you can tell me a few things that I want to know. How is young Massingale getting along?”

“As well as could be expected. Carruthers—the doctor—says he is out of danger.”

“H’m. It has been handed in to me two or three times lately that the old man is out gunning for Van Bruce or for me. Any truth in that?”

“I think not. Massingale is a Kentuckian, and I fancy he is quite capable of potting either one or both of you for the attack on his son. But so far he has done nothing—has hardly left Steve’s bedside.”

Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright flung himself back in his luxurious swing chair and clasped his pudgy hands over the top of his head where the reddish-gray hair was thinning reluctantly.

“I’ve been putting it off to see which way the cat was going to jump,” he admitted. “If young Massingale is out of danger, it is time to get action. What was the quarrel about, between him and Van Bruce?”

“Why do you ask me?” queried Brouillard.

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“Because you are pretty thick with the Massingales, and you probably know,” was the blunt accounting for the question.

“It occurs to me that your son would be a better source of information,” said Brouillard, still evading.

“Van Bruce has told me all he remembers—which isn’t much, owing to his own beastly condition at the time. He says young Massingale was threatening something—something in connection with the Coronida Grant—and that he got the insane idea into his head that the only way to stop the threat was by killing Massingale.”

The sandy-gray eyes of the millionaire promoter were shifting while he spoke, but Brouillard fixed and held them before he said: “Why should Massingale threaten your son, Mr. Cortwright?”

“I don’t know,” denied the promoter, and he said it without flinching a hair’s-breadth.

“Then I can tell you,” was the equally steady rejoinder. “Some time ago you lent David Massingale, through the bank, a pretty large sum of money for development expenses on the ‘Little Susan,’ taking a mortgage on everything in sight to cover the loan.”

“I did.”

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“Massingale’s obligation was in short-time, bankable paper, which he expected to take up when the railroad should come in and give him a market for the ore which he has already taken out of the mine.”

“Yes.”

“But when the railroad was an assured fact he learned that the Red Butte smelters wouldn’t take his ore, giving some technical reason which he knew to be a mere excuse.”

Mr. Cortwright nodded. “So far you might be reading it out of a book.”

“In consequence of these successive happenings, David Massingale finds himself in a fair way to become a broken man by the simplest of commercial processes. The bank holds his notes, which will presently have to be paid. If he can’t pay, the bank comes back on you as his indorser, and you fall back on your mortgage and take the mine. Isn’t that about the size of it?”

“It is exactly the size of it.”

Brouillard laughed quietly. “And yet you said a moment ago that you didn’t know why young Massingale should threaten your son.”

“And I don’t know yet,” blustered the magnate. “Is it my fault that Massingale can’t pay his debts?”

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The engineer had stopped laughing when he said definitely and decidedly: "It is."

It was the promoter's turn to laugh.

"What sort of a bug have you got in your cosmos this morning, Brouillard? Why, man, you're crazy!"

Brouillard rose and relighted his cigar.

"If that is your last word, Mr. Cortwright, I may as well go back to my office. You don't need me."

"Oh, hold on; don't go off in a huff. You're too thin-skinned for any common kind of use. I was only trying you to see how far you'd carry it. Let it stand. Assume, for the sake of argument, that I *do* want the 'Little Susan' and that I've got a good friend or two in the Red Butte smelters who will help me get it. Now, then, does that stand the band-wagon upon its wheels again?"

Brouillard's black eyes were snapping, but his voice was quite steady when he said: "Thank you; now we shall go on better. You want the 'Little Susan,' and Massingale naturally thinks you're taking an unfair advantage of him to get it. Quite as naturally he is going to make reprisals if he can. That brings us down to the mention of the Coronida Grant and Stephen Massingale's threat—which your son can't remember."

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“Right-o,” said Mr. Cortwright, still with predetermined geniality. “What was the threat?”

“I don’t know, but the guessing list is open to everybody. There was once a grant of many square miles of mountain and desert somewhere in this region made to one Don Estacio de Montarriba Coronida. Like those of most of the great Spanish land grants, the boundaries of this one were loosely described and——”

Mr. Cortwright held up a fat hand.

“I know what you’re going to say. But we went into all that at Washington before we ever invested a single dollar in this valley. As you may or may not know, the Reclamation Service bureau tried to choke us off. But when it came down to brass tacks, they lacked a witness. We may be in the bed of your proposed lake, but we’re safely on Coronida land.”

“So you say,” said Brouillard quietly, “and on the strength of that you have been guaranteeing titles.”

“Oh, no,” protested the millionaire. “We have merely referred purchasers to the record. There is a clause in every deed.”

“But you have caused it to be believed that your title was good, that the government’s claim to the land will not hold.”

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trip at your expense. Wouldn't that be rather awkward?"

The mayor of Mirapolis brought his hands together, fist in palm, and for a fitting instant the young engineer saw in the face of the father the same expression that he had seen in the face of the son when Van Bruce Cortwright was struggling for a second chance to kill a man.

"Damn you!" said the magnate savagely; "you always know too much! You're bargaining with me!"

"Well, you have bargained with me, first, last, and all the time," was the cool retort. "On each occasion I have had my price, and you have paid it. Now you are going to pay it again. Shall I go over to the *Spot-Light* office and tell Harlan what I know?"

"You can't bluff me that way, Brouillard, and you ought to sense it by this time. Do you suppose I don't know how you are fixed?—that you've got money—money that you used to say you owed somebody else—tied up in Mirapolis investments?"

Brouillard rose and buttoned his coat.

"There is one weak link in your chain, Mr. Cortwright," he said evenly; "you don't know men. Put on your coat and come over to Har-

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lan's office with me. It will take just about two minutes to satisfy you that I'm not bluffing."

For a moment it appeared that the offer was to be accepted. But when he had one arm in a coat sleeve, Brouillard's antagonist in the game of hardihood changed his tactics.

"Forget it," he growled morosely. "What do you want this time?"

"I want you to send a wire to Red Butte telling the smelter people that you will be glad to have them handle the 'Little Susan' ore."

"And if I do?"

"If you do, two things otherwise due to happen adversely will go over to your side of the market. I'll agree to keep out of the way of the sham Washington delegation, and I think I can promise that Harlan won't make a scare-head of the facts concerning the Coronida land titles."

Mr. Cortwright thrust the other arm into the remaining coat sleeve and scowled. But the rebound to the norm of brusque good-nature came almost immediately.

"You are improving wonderfully, Brouillard, and that's no joke. I have a large respect for a man who can outbid me in my own corner. You ought to be in business—and you will be, some time. I'll send the wire, but I warn you in

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advance that I can't make the smelter people take Massingale's ore if they don't want to. All I can do is to give the old man a free field."

"That is all he will ask—all I'll ask, except one small personal favor: don't rub your masquerading Washington delegation into me too hard. A fine quality of non-interference is about all you are buying from me, and——"

The interruption came in the form of a tap at the door opening into the hotel corridor, and Brouillard, at a sign from the master of the precincts, turned the knob. It was Miss Genevieve who entered, bringing the sweet breeziness and audacity of youth and beauty and health with her.

"How fortunate!" she exclaimed, with the charming smile that accorded so perfectly with her fresh, early-morning radiance. And while the hand of greeting still lay in Brouillard's: "I have just been up to your office, and they told me they hadn't the smallest idea where you could be found. Are you going to be *very* busy this afternoon?"

Brouillard gave the required denial, and she explained her quest of him. There was to be an auto party to the newly opened casino at the upper power dam. Would he go, if he might have the post of honor behind the pilot-wheel of the new sixty-horse, seven-passenger flyer? *Please!*

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Mr. Cortwright leaned heavily upon his desk while the asking and answering went on, and the shrewd, gray eyes were busy. When his daughter went out and Brouillard was about to follow her, the genial web spinner stopped him.

"Tell me one thing, Brouillard: what is your stake in the Massingale game? Are you a silent partner in the 'Little Susan'?"

"No."

"Then why are you so anxious to make old David a rich man at my expense? Are you going to marry the girl?"

The engineer did not resent the question as he would have resented it a few weeks earlier. Instead he smiled and said: "A little while ago, Mr. Cortwright, I told you that you didn't know men; now I'll add that you don't know women."

"I know Gene," said the web spinner cryptically, and this was the word that Brouillard took with him when he went back to his offices in the Niquoia Building.

XIII

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PUBLIC opinion, skilfully formed upon models fashioned in Mayor Cortwright's municipal laboratory, dealt handsomely with the little group of widely heralded visitors—the "Congressional committee"—penetrating to the Wonder City, not by special train, to be sure, but still with creditable circumstance in President Ford's private car "Nadia," attached to the regular express from Brewster.

For example, when it was whispered about, some days before the auspicious arrival, that the visiting lawmakers wished for no public demonstration of welcome, it was resolved, both in the city council and in the Commercial Club, that the wish should be rigidly respected.

Later, when there filtered out from the same secret source of information a hint to the effect that the committee of investigation, for the better forming of an unbiassed opinion, desired to be regarded merely as a body of representative citizens

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and the guests of Mayor Cortwright, and not as national legislators, this desire, too, was respected; and even Harlan, itching to his finger-tips for something definite to print in the *Spot-Light*, denied himself the bare, journalistic, bread-and-butter necessity of interviewing the lawmakers.

Safeguarded, then, by the loyal incuriosity of an entire city, the visitors went about freely, were fêted, dined, banqueted, and entertained as distinguished citizens of the Greater America; were personally conducted over the government work, and were autoed to the Quadjenäi placers, to the upper valley, and to the canal diggers' camps in the Buckskin, all without prejudice to the official incognito which it was understood they wished to preserve.

Hence, after the farewell banquet at the Commercial Club, at which even the toasts had ignored the official mission of Mayor Cortwright's guests, when the "Nadia," reprovisioned and tastefully draped with the national colors, was coupled to the outgoing train in the Chigringo yards, tingling curiosity still restrained itself, said nothing and did nothing until the train had stormed out on the beginning of its steep climb to War Arrow Pass. Then the barriers went down. In less than half an hour after the departure of the vis-

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itors, the *Spot-Light* office was besieged by eager tip hunters, and the Metropole café and lobby were thronged and buzzing like the compartments of an anxious beehive.

Harlan stood the pressure at the newspaper office as long as he could. Then he slipped out the back way and prevailed upon Bongras to smuggle him up to Mr. Cortwright's rooms. Here there was another anxious deputation in waiting, but Harlan's card was honored at once.

"News!" gasped the editor, when he had broken into the privacies. "They're about to mob us over at the office, and the town will go crazy if it can't be given at least a hint of what the committee's report is likely to be. I tell you, Mr. Cortwright, it's panic, or the biggest boom we ever dreamed of!"

"Sit down, Harlan," said the great man calmly, pushing the open box of cigars across the desk to the editor; "sit down and get a fresh grip on your nerves. There will be no panic; of that you can be absolutely certain. But, on the other hand, we mustn't kick the fat into the fire when everything is going our way. Naturally, I am under bonds to keep my mouth shut until after the committee has made its report. I can't even give you the hint you want. But I will say this—and

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you can put it in an interview if you like: I'm not refusing anything in the shape of Mirapolis realty at ruling prices. That's all I can say at present."

Harlan was hustled out, as he had been hustled in, half dazed and wholly in despair. There was a light in Brouillard's office on the sixth floor of the Niquoia Building, and thither he went, hoping against hope, for latterly the chief of the Reclamation Service had been more than usually reticent.

"What do you know, Brouillard?" was the form his demand took when, finding that the elevator had stopped, he had dragged himself up the five flights of stairs. "I'm up against it good and hard if I can't print something in tomorrow's paper."

"Go to Cortwright," suggested the engineer. "He's your man."

"Just come from him, and I couldn't get a thing there except his admission that he is buying instead of selling."

"Well, what more do you want? Haven't you any imagination?"

"Plenty of it, and, by Gad, I'm going to use it unless you put it to sleep! Tell me a few correlative things, Brouillard, and I'll make a noise like

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going away. Is it true that you've had orders from Washington within the past few days to cut your force on the dam one half?"

The engineer was playing with the paper-knife, absently marking little circles and ellipses on his desk blotter, and the ash on his cigar grew a full quarter of an inch before he replied:

"Not for publication, Harlan, I'm sorry to say."

"But you have the order?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the reason why it was given?"

"I do."

"Is it a good reason?"

"It is a very excellent reason, indeed."

"Does the order cover more than the work on the dam?"

"Yes; it extends to the canal diggers in the Buckskin."

"Good. Then I'll ask only one more question, and if you answer it at all I know you'll tell me the truth: are you, individually, buying or selling on the Real Estate Exchange? Take your time, Brouillard, but, for God's sake, don't turn me down."

Brouillard did take time, plenty of it. Over and over the point of the paper-knife traced the creased circles and ellipses, and the ash on the

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slowly burning cigar grew longer. Harlan was a student of men, but his present excitement was against him. Otherwise he could not have stared so long and so intently at Brouillard's face without reading therein the record of the soul struggle his final question had evoked. And if he had read, he would have interpreted differently the quick flinging down of the paper-cutter, and the sudden hardening of the jaw muscles when Brouillard spoke.

"I'm buying, Harlan; when I sell it is only to buy again."

The newspaper man rose and held out his hand.

"You're a man and a brother, Brouillard, and I'm your friend for life. With only a fraction of your chance at inside information, I've stayed on the up-hill side, straight through, myself. And I'll tell you why. I've banked on you. I've said to myself that it was safe for me to wade around in the edges if you could plunge out in the sure-enough swimming-hole. I'm going to stay until you give me the high sign to crawl out on the bank. Is that asking too much?"

"No. If the time ever comes when I have anything to say, I'll say it to you. But don't lose sight of the 'if,' and don't lean too hard on me. I'm a mighty uncertain quantity these days,

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Harlan, and that's the truest thing I've told you since you butted in. Good-night."

Mirapolis awoke to a full sense of its opportunities on the morning following the departure of its distinguished guests. Though the *Spot-Light* was unable to say anything conclusively definite, Harlan had made the most of what he had; and, trickling in from a dozen independent sources, as it seemed, came jubilant confirmation of the *Spot-Light's* optimistic editorials.

In such a crisis all men are liars. Now that the visiting delegation was gone, there were scores of witnesses willing to testify that the Honorable Tom, Dick, or Harry had dropped the life-giving word; and though each fictionist knew that his own story was a fabrication, it was only human to believe that of the man with whom he exchanged the whispered confidence.

To the lies and the exaggerations was presently added a most convincing truth. By ten o'clock it was the talk of the lobbies, the club, and the exchanges that the Reclamation Service was already abandoning the work on the great dam. One half of the workmen were to be discharged at once, and doubtless the other half would follow as soon as the orders could come from Washington.

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Appealed to by a mob of anxious inquirers, Brouillard did not deny the fact of the discharges, and thereupon the city went mad in a furor of speculative excitement in comparison with which the orgy of the gold discoverers paled into insignificance. "Curb" exchanges sprang into being in the Metropole lobby, in the court of the Ni-quoia Building, and at a dozen street corners on the Avenue. Word went to the placers, and by noon the miners had left their sluice-boxes and were pouring into town to buy options at prices that would have staggered the wildest plunger elsewhere, or at any other time.

Brouillard closed his desk at one o'clock and went to fight his way through the street pandemonium to Bongras's. At a table in the rear room he found David Massingale, his long, white beard tucked into the closely buttoned miner's coat to be out of the way of the flying knife and fork, while he gave a lifelike imitation of a man begrudging every second of time wasted in stopping the hunger gap.

Brouillard took the opposite chair and was grimly amused at the length of time that elapsed before Massingale realized his presence.

"Pity a man has to stop to eat on a day like this, isn't it, Mr. Massingale?" he laughed; and

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then: "I wouldn't hurry. There's another day coming; or if there isn't, we'll all be in the same boat. How is Steve?"

Massingale nodded. "The boy's comin' along all right now; he allows to be out in another week 'r two." Then the inevitable question: "They're sayin' on the street that you're lettin' out half o' your men—that so?"

Brouillard laughed again.

"I've heard it so often that I've come to believe it myself," he admitted, adding: "Yes, it's true." After which he asked a question of his own: "Have you been doing something in real estate this morning, Mr. Massingale?"

"All I could," mumbled the old man between mouthfuls. "But I cayn't do much. If it ain't one thing, it's another. 'Bout as soon as I got that tangle with the Red Butte smelter straightened out, the railroad hit me."

"How was that?" queried Brouillard, with quickening interest coming alive at a bound.

"Same old song, no cars; try and get 'em to-morruh, and to-morruh it'll be next day, and next day it'll be the day after. Looks like they don't *want* to haul any freight *out* o' here."

"I see," said Brouillard, and truly he saw much more than David Massingale did. Then: "No

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shipments means no money for you, and more delay; and delay happens to be the one thing you can't stand. When do those notes of yours fall due?"

"Huh?" said Massingale. He was a close-mouthed man, by breeding and by habit, and he was quite sure he had never mentioned the "Little Susan" entanglement to the young engineer.

Brouillard became more explicit. "The notes covering your indebtedness to the bank for the money you've been putting into development work and improvements—I asked when they would become due."

The old man's heavy white eyebrows bent themselves in a perplexed frown.

"Amy hadn't ort to talk so much," he objected. "Business is business."

Brouillard's smile was a tacit denial of the implication.

"You forget that there were several other parties to the transaction and that any man's business is every man's in this crazy town," he suggested. "But you haven't answered my question about the due date. I didn't ask it out of idle curiosity, I assure you."

Massingale was troubled, and his fine old face showed it plainly.

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“I ain’t much of a man to holler when I’ve set the woods afire myself,” he answered slowly. “But I don’t know why I shouldn’t yip a little to you if I feel like it. To-day is the last day on them notes, and I’d about made up my mind that I was goin’ up the spout on a sure thing for the fourth time since I hit the mount’ins, when this here new excitement broke out.”

“Go on,” said Brouillard.

“I saw a chance—about a one-to-a-hundred shot. I’d been to see Hardwick at the bank, and he gave me the ultimaytum good and cold; if I couldn’t lift the paper, the bank’d have to go back on my indorser, John Wes. I had a little over five thousand left out o’ the borray, and I took it and broke for the Real Estate Exchange. Been there for three solid hours, turnin’ my little stake over like a flapjack on a hot griddle; but it ain’t any use, I cayn’t turn it fast enough, ’r often enough, betwixt now and three o’clock.”

One of Bongras’s rear-room luxuries was a portable telephone for every group of tables. Brouillard made a sign to the waiter, and the desk set was brought to him. If David Massingale recognized the number asked for, he paid no attention; and, since a man may spend his life digging holes in the ground and still retain the instincts of a

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gentleman—if he happens to have been born with them—he was equally oblivious to the disjointed half of the telephone conversation he might have listened to.

“Hello! Is that Boyer—Niquoia National? . . . This is Brouillard. Can you give me my present figure? . . . Not more than that? . . . Oh, yes; you say the Hillman check is in; I had overlooked it. All right, thank you.”

When the waiter had removed the desk set, the engineer leaned toward his table companion:

“Mr. Massingale, I’m going to ask you to tell me frankly what kind of a deal it was you made with Cortwright and the bank people.”

“It was the biggest tom-fool razzle that any livin’ live man out of a lunatic ’sylum ever went into,” confessed the prisoner of fate. “I was to stock the ‘Susan’ for half a million—oh, she’s worth it, every dollar of it; you might say the ore’s in sight for it right now”—this in deference to Brouillard’s brow-lifting of surprise. “They was to put in a hundred thousand cash, and I was to put in the mine and the ore on the dump, just as she stood.”

The engineer nodded and Massingale went on.

“I was to have two thirds of the stock and they was to have one third. The hundred thousand

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for development we'd get at the bank, on my notes, because I was president and the biggest stockholder, with John Wes. as indorser. Then, to protect the bank accordin' to law, they said, we'd put the whole bunch o' stock—mine and their'n—into escrow in the hands of Judge Williams. When the notes was paid, the judge'd hand the stock back to us."

"Just a moment," interrupted Brouillard. "Did you sign those notes personally, or as president of the new company?"

"That's where they laid for me," said the old man shamefacedly. "We made the money turn before we *was* a company—while we was waitin' for the charter."

"Of course," commented Brouillard. "And they rushed you into it on the plea of saving time. But you say the stock was to be released when the notes were paid—what was to happen if they were not paid?"

"Right there is where John Wes.'s ten-dollar-a-bottle sody-pop stuff we was soppin' up must 'a' foolished me plumb silly; I don't just rightly recollect *what* the judge was to do with the stock if I fell down. I know it was talked all 'round Robin Hood's barn, up one side and down the other, and they made it look like I couldn't

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slip up if I tried to. And they made the borroway at the bank look fair enough, too."

"Well, why wasn't it fair?" Brouillard wanted to know.

"Why, sufferin' Moses! don't you see? It hadn't ort to 've been needed. *They* was to put in a hundred thousand, and they wasn't doin' it. It figgered out this-a-way in the talk: they said, what's the use o' takin' the money out o' one pocket and puttin' it into the other? Let the bank carry the development loan and let the mine pay it. Then we could even up when it come to the dividends."

"So it amounts to this: you have given them a clean third of the 'Susan' for the mere privilege of borrowing one hundred thousand dollars on your own paper. And if you don't pay, you lose the remaining two thirds as well."

"That's about the way it stacks up to a sober man. Looks like I needed a janitor to look after my upper story, don't it? And I reckon mebbly I do."

"One thing more," pressed the relentless querist. "Did you really handle the hundred-thousand-dollar development fund yourself, Mr. Massingale?"

"Well, no; not exactly. Ten thousand dollars

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of what they called a 'contingent fund' was put in my name; but the treasurer handled most of it—nachurly, we bein' a stock company."

"Who is your treasurer?"

"Feller with just one share o' stock—Parker Jackson."

"Humph! Cortwright's private secretary. And he has spent ninety thousand dollars on the 'Little Susan' in sixty days? Not much! What has your pay-roll been?"

"'Bout five hundred a week."

"That is to say between three and four thousand dollars for the two months—call it five thousand. Now, let's see—" Brouillard took out his pencil and began to make figures on the back of the *menu* card. He knew the equipment of the "Little Susan," and his specialty was the making of estimates. Hence he was able to say, after a minute or two of figuring:

"Thirty thousand dollars will amply cover your new equipment: power drills, electric transfers, and the cheap telpherage plant. Have you ever seen any vouchers for the money spent?"

"No. Had I ort to?"

"Well, rather—as president of the company."

Massingale tucked the long white beard still farther into the buttoned coat. "I been tellin'

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you I need a mule-driver to knock a little sense into me," he offered.

"It's a bad business any way you attack it," said Brouillard after a reflective pause. "What you have really got for yourself out of the deal is the ten-thousand-dollar deposit to your personal account, and nothing more; and they'll probably try to make you a debtor for that. Taking that amount and a fair estimate of the company's expenditures to date—say thirty-five thousand in round numbers, which is fairly chargeable to the company's assets as a whole—they still owe you about fifty-five thousand of the original hundred thousand they were to put in. If there were time—but you say this is the last day?"

"The last half o' the last day," Massingale amended.

"I was going to say, if there were time, this thing wouldn't stand the light of day for a minute, Mr. Massingale. They wouldn't go within a hundred miles of a court of law with it. Can't you get an extension on the notes?—but of course you can't; that is just the one thing Cortwright doesn't want you to have—more time."

"No; you bet he don't."

"That being the case, there is no help for it; you'll have to take your medicine and pay the

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notes. Do that, take an iron-clad receipt from the bank—I'll write it out for you—and get the stock released. After that, we'll give them a whirl for the thirty-three and a third per cent they have practically stolen from you."

The old man's face, remindful now of his daughter's, was a picture of dismayed incertitude.

"I reckon you're forgettin' that I hain't got money enough to lift one edge o' them notes," he said gently.

Brouillard had found a piece of blank paper in his pocket and was rapidly writing the "iron-clad" receipt.

"No, I hadn't forgotten. I have something over a hundred thousand dollars lying idle in the bank. You'll take it and pay the notes."

It was a bolt out of a clear sky for the old man tottering on the brink of his fourth pit of disaster, and he evinced his emotion—and the tense strain of keyed-up nerves—by dropping his lifted coffee-cup with a crash into his plate. The little accident was helpful in its way,—it made a diversion,—and by the time the wreck was repaired speech was possible.

"Are you—are you *plumb* sure you can spare it?" asked the debtor huskily. And then: "I cayn't seem to sort o' surround it—all in a bunch,

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that way. I knowed J. Wesley had me down; knowed it in less 'n a week after he sprung his trap. He wanted the 'Little Sue,' wanted it worse 'n a little yaller dog ever wanted his supper. Do you know why? I can tell you. After you get your dam done, and every dollar of the make-believe money this cussed town's built on has gone to the bottom o' the Dead Sea, the 'Susan' will still be joggin' along, forty dollars to the ton. It's the only piece o' real money in this whole blamed free-for-all, and J. Wes. knows it."

Brouillard looked at his watch. "When you're through we'll go around to the bank and fix it up. There's no hurry. I've got to ride down to the Buckskin camps, but I don't care to start much before two."

Massingale nodded, but his appetite was gone, and speech with it, the one grateful outburst having apparently drained the well. But after they had made their way through the excited sidewalk exchanges to the bank, and Brouillard had written his check, the old man suddenly found his voice again.

"You say you're goin' down to the Buckskin right away? How 'm I goin' to secure you for this?"

"We can talk about that later on, after I come

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back. The thing to do now is to get those notes cancelled and that stock released before bank-closing time."

Still David Massingale, with the miraculously sent bit of rescue paper in his hand, hesitated.

"There's one other thing—and I've got to spit it out before it's everlastedly too late. See here, Victor Br'uillard—Amy likes you—thinks a heap of you; a plumb blind man could see that. But say, that little girl o' mine has just natchurly *got* to have a free hand when it comes to pairin' up, and she won't never have if she finds out about this. You ain't allowin' to use it on her, Victor?"

Brouillard laughed.

"I'll make a hedging bet and break even with you, Mr. Massingale," he said. "That check is drawn to my order, and I have indorsed it. Let me have it again and I'll get the cash for you. In that way only the two of us need know anything about the transaction; and if I promise to keep the secret from Miss Amy, you must promise to keep it from Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright. Will you saw it off with me that way?—until you've made the turn on the ore sales?"

David Massingale shook hands on it with more gratitude, colored this time with a hearty imprecation. "Dad burn you, Victor Br'uillard, you're

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a man—ever' single mill-run of you!" he burst out. But Brouillard shook his head gravely.

"No, Mr. Massingale, I'm the little yellow dog you mentioned a while back," he asserted, and then he went to get the money.

The check cashed and the transfer of the money made, Brouillard did not wait to see Massingale astonish the Niquoia National cashier. Nor did he remark the curious change that came into the old man's face at the pocketing of the thick sheaf of bank-notes. But he added a word of comment and another of advice before leaving the bank.

"The day fits us like a glove," was the comment. "With all the money that is changing hands in the street, Hardwick won't wonder at your sudden raise or at my check." Then he put in the word of warning: "I suppose you'll be dabbling a little in Mirapolis options after you get this note business out of the way? It's all right—I'd probably do it myself if I didn't have to leave town. But just one word in your ear, Mr. Massingale: buy and *sell*—*don't hold*. That's all. Good-by, and good luck to you."

Left alone in the small retiring room of the bank where the business had been transacted, David Massingale took the sheaf of bank-notes

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from his pocket with trembling hands, fondling it as a miser might. The bills were in large denominations, and they were new and stiff. He thumbed the end of the thick packet as one runs the leaves of a book, and the flying succession of big figures seemed to dazzle him. There was an outer door to the customers' room giving upon the side street; it was the one through which Brouillard had passed. Twice the old man made as if he would turn toward the door of egress, and the light in his gray-blue eyes was the rekindling flame of a passion long denied. But in the end he thrust the tempting sheaf back into the inner pocket and went resolutely to the cashier's counter window.

Expecting to have to do with Hardwick, the brusque and business-like cashier, Massingale was jarred a little aside from his own predetermined attitude by finding Schermerhorn, the president, sitting at the cashier's desk. But from the banker's first word the change seemed to be altogether for the better.

"How are you, Mr. Massingale? Glad to see you. How is the boy getting along? First rate, I hope?"

Massingale was looking from side to side, like a gray old hawk disappointed in its swoop. It

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would have been some satisfaction to buffet the exacting Hardwick with the fistful of money. But with Schermerhorn the note lifting would figure as a mere bit of routine.

"I've come to take up them notes o' mine with John Wes.'s name on 'em," Massingale began, pulling out the thick sheaf of redemption money.

"Oh, yes; let me see; are they due to-day?" said the president, running over the note portfolio.

Massingale nodded.

"H'm, yes, here they are. Brought the cash, did you? The 'Little Susan' has begun to pan out, has it? I didn't know you had commenced shipping ore yet."

"We haven't." David Massingale made the admission and regretted it in one and the same breath.

"You've borrowed to meet these notes?" queried the president, looking up quickly. "That won't do, Mr. Massingale; that won't do at all. We can't afford to lose an old customer that way. What's the matter with our money? Doesn't it look good to you any more?"

Massingale stammered out something about Cashier Hardwick's peremptory demand of a few hours earlier, but he was not permitted to finish.

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“Of course, that is all right from Hardwick’s point of view. He was merely looking out for the maturing paper. How much more time will you need to enable you to get returns from your shipments? Sixty days? All right, you needn’t make out new notes; I’ll indorse the extension on the back of these, and I’ll undertake to get Cortwright’s approval myself. No; not a word, Mr. Massingale. As long as you’re borrowing, you must be loyal and borrow of us. Good afternoon. Come again when we can help you out.”

David Massingale turned away, dazed and confused beyond the power of speech. When the mists of astoundment cleared he found himself in the street with the thick wad of bank-notes still in his pocket. Suddenly, out of the limbo into which two years of laborious discipline and self-denial had pushed it stalked the demon of the ruling passion, mighty, overpowering, unconquerable. The familiar street sights danced before Massingale’s eyes, and there was a drumming in his ears like the fall of many waters. But above the clamor rose the insistent voice of the tempter, and the voice was at once a command and an entreaty, a gnawing hunger and a parching thirst.

“By Gash! I’d like to try that old system o’ mine jest one more time!” he muttered. “All

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it takes is money enough to foller it up and *stay*. And I've *got* the money. Besides, didn't Br'uillard say I was to get an extension if I could?"

He grabbed at his coat to be sure that the packet was still there, took two steps toward the bank, stopped, turned as if in the grasp of an invisible but irresistible captor, and moved away, like a man walking in his sleep, toward the lower Avenue.

It was the doorway of Haley's Place, the Monte Carlo of the Niquoia, that finally halted him. Here the struggle was so fierce that the bartender, who knew him, named it sickness and led the stricken one to a card-table in the public bar-room and fetched him a drink. A single swallow of whiskey turned the scale. Massingale rose, tossed a coin to the bar, and passed quickly to the rear, where a pair of baize doors opened silently and engulfed him.

XIV

The Abyss

IT was at early candle-lighting in the evening of the day of renewed and unbridled speculation in Mirapolis "front feet" that Brouillard, riding the piebald range pony on which he had been making an inspection round of the nearer Buckskin ditchers' camps, topped the hill in the new, high-pitched road over the Chingingo shoulder and looked down upon the valley electrics.

The immediate return to Mirapolis was no part of the plan he had struck out when he had closed his office in the Niquoia Building at one o'clock and had gone over to Bongras's to fall into the chance encounter with David Massingale. He had intended making a complete round of all the ditch camps, a ride which would have taken at least three days, and after parting from Massingale at the bank he had left town at once, taking the new road which began on the bench of the railroad yard. But almost immediately a singular thing had happened. Before he had gone a mile a strange reluctance had begun to beset him.

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At first it was merely a haunting feeling of loss, as if he had left something behind, forgetting when he should have remembered; a thing of sufficient importance to make him turn and ride back if he could only recall what it was. Farther along the feeling became a vague premonition of impending disaster, growing with every added mile of the Buckskin gallopings until, at Overton's Camp, a few miles short of the Triangle-Circle Ranch headquarters, he had yielded and had set out for the return.

If the curious premonition had been a drag on the outward journey it became a spur to quicken the eastward faring. Even the piebald pony seemed to share the urgency, needing only a loose rein and an encouraging word. Across the yellow sands of the desert, through the lower ford of the Niquoia, and up the outlet gorge the willing little horse tossed the miles to the rear, and at the hill-topping moment, when the electric lights spread themselves in the valley foreground like stars set to illuminate the chess-board squares of the Wonder City, a record gallop had been made from Overton's.

Brouillard let the pony set its own pace on the down-hill lap to the finish, and it was fast enough to have jolted fresh road weariness into a less

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seasoned rider than the young engineer. Most curiously, the premonition with its nagging urgency seemed to vanish completely as soon as the city's streets were under hoof. Brouillard left the horse at the reservation stables, freshened himself at his rooms in the Niquoia Building, and went to the Metropole to eat his dinner, all without any recurrence of the singular symptoms. Further, when he found himself at a table with Murray Grislow as his *vis-à-vis*, and had invented a plausible excuse for his sudden return, he was able to enjoy his dinner with a healthy wayfarer's appetite and to talk over the events of the exciting day with the hydrographer with few or none of the abstracted mental digressions.

Afterward, however, the symptoms returned, manifesting themselves this time in the form of a vague and undefined restlessness. The buzzing throngs in the Metropole café and lobby annoyed him, and even Grislow's quiet sarcasm as applied to the day's bubble-blowing failed to clear the air. At the club there was the same atmosphere of unrest; an exacerbating overcharge of the suppressed activities impatiently waiting for another day of excitement and opportunity. Corner lots and the astounding prices they had commanded filled the air in the lounge, the billiard room, and

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the buffet, and after a few minutes Brouillard turned his back on the hubbub and sought the quiet of the darkened building on the opposite side of the street.

He was alone in his office on the sixth floor and was trying, half absently, to submerge himself in a sea of desk-work when the disturbing over-thought suddenly climaxed in an occurrence bordering on the supernatural. As distinctly as if she were present and at his elbow, he heard, or seemed to hear, Amy Massingale say: "Victor, you said you would come if I needed you: I need you now." Without a moment's hesitation he got up and made ready to go out. Skeptical to the derisive degree of other men's superstitions, it did not occur to him to doubt the reality of the mysterious summons, or to question in any way his own broad admission of the supernatural in the prompt obedience.

The Massingale town house was one of a row of stuccoed villas fronting on the main residence street, which beyond the city limits became the highroad to the Quadjenäï bend and the upper valley. Brouillard took a cab at the Metropole, dismissed it at the villa gate, and walked briskly up the path to the house, which was dark save for one lighted room on the second floor—the room

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in which Stephen Massingale was recovering from the effects of Van Bruce Cortwright's pistol-shot.

Amy Massingale was on the porch—waiting for him, as he fully believed until her greeting sufficiently proved her surprise at seeing him.

“You, Victor?” she said, coming quickly to meet him. “Murray Grislow said you had gone down to the Buckskin camps and wouldn't be back for two or three days!”

“Grizzly told the truth—as it stood a few hours ago,” he admitted. “But I changed my mind and came back. How is Steve this evening?”

“He is quite comfortable, more comfortable than he has been at all since the wound began to heal. I have been reading him to sleep, and when the night nurse came I ran down to get a breath of fresh air in the open.”

“No, you didn't come down for that reason,” Brouillard amended gravely. “You came to meet me.”

“Did I?” she asked. “What makes you think that?”

“I don't think; I *know*. You called me, and I heard you and came at once.”

“How absurd!” she protested. “I knew, or thought I knew, that you were miles away, over in the Buckskin; and how could I call you?”

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Brouillard pulled out his watch and scanned its face by the light of the roadway electric.

"It is exactly twenty minutes since I left my office. What were you doing twenty minutes ago?"

"As if I could tell! I don't believe I have looked at a clock or a watch all evening. After Stevie had his supper I read to him—one of the creepy Kipling stories that he is so fond of. You would say that 'Bimi' would be just about the last thing in the world to put anybody to sleep, wouldn't you? But Stevie dropped off, and I think I must have lost myself for a minute or two, because the next thing I knew the nurse was in the room."

"I know what happened," said Brouillard, speaking as soberly as if he were stating a mathematical certainty. "You left that room upstairs and came to me. I didn't see you, but I heard you as plainly as I can hear you now. You spoke to me and called me by name."

"What did I say? Can you remember the words?"

"Indeed I can. The room was perfectly still, and I was working at my desk. Suddenly, and without any warning, I heard your voice saying: 'Victor, you said you would come if I needed you: I need you now.'"

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She shook her head, laughing lightly.

“You have been overwrought about something, or maybe you are just plain tired. I didn’t say or even think anything like that; or if I did, it must have been the other I, or one of the others, that Herr Freiborg writes about—and I don’t believe in. This I that you are talking to doesn’t remember anything about it.”

“You are standing me off,” he declared. “You are in trouble of some sort, and you are trying to hide it from me.”

“No, not exactly trouble; only a little worry.”

“All right, call it worry if you like and share it with me. What is it?”

“I think you know without being told—or you will know when I say that to-day was the day when the big debt to the bank became due. I am afraid we have finally lost the ‘Little Susan.’ That is one of the worries and the other I’ve been trying to call silly. I don’t know what has become of father—as if he weren’t old enough to go and come without telling me every move he makes!”

“Your father isn’t at home?” gasped Brouillard.

“No; he hasn’t been here since nine o’clock this morning. Murray Grislow saw him going

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into the Metropole about one o'clock, but nobody that I have been able to reach by 'phone seems to have seen him after that."

"I can bring the record down to two o'clock," was the quick reply. "He ate with me at Bongras's, and afterward I walked with him as far as the bank. And I can cure part of the first worry—all of it, in fact; he had the money to take up the Cortwright notes, and when I left him he was on his way to Hardwick's window to do it."

"*He had the money? Where did he get it?*"

Brouillard put his back against a porch post, a change of position which kept the light of the street electric from shining squarely upon his face.

"It has been another of the get-rich-quick days in Mirapolis," he said evasively. "Somebody told me that the corner opposite Poodles's was bought and sold three times within a single hour and that each time the price was doubled."

"And you are trying to tell me that father made a hundred thousand dollars just in those few hours by buying and selling Mirapolis lots? You don't know him, Victor. He is totally lacking the trading gift. He has often said that he couldn't stand on a street corner and sell twenty-dollar gold pieces at nineteen dollars apiece—nobody would buy of him."

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“Nevertheless, I am telling you that he had the money to take up those notes,” Brouillard insisted. “I saw it in his hands.”

She left him abruptly and began to pace back and forth on the porch, with her hands behind her, an imitative trait unconsciously copying her father in his moments of stress. When she stopped she stood fairly in the beam of the street light. The violet eyes were misty, and in the low voice there was a note of deeper trouble.

“You say you saw the money in father’s hands; tell me, Victor, did you see him pay it into the bank?”

“Why, no; not the final detail. But, as I say, when I left him he was on his way to Hardwick’s window.”

Again she turned away, but this time it was to dart into the house. A minute later she had rejoined him, and the minute had sufficed for the donning of a coat and the pinning on of the quaint cowboy riding-hat.

“I must go and find him,” she said with quiet resolution. “Will you go with me, Victor? Perhaps that is why I—the subconscious I—called you a little while ago. Let’s not wait for the Quadjenäi car. I’d rather walk, and we’ll save time.”

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They set out together, walking rapidly townward, and there was no word to go with the brisk footing. Brouillard respected his companion's silence. That the thing unspeakable, or at least unspoken, was something more than a woman's undefined fears was obvious; but until she should see fit to tell him what it was, he would not question her.

From the moment of outsetting the young woman's purpose seemed clearly defined. By the shortest way she indicated the course to the Avenue, and at the Metropole corner she turned unhesitatingly to the northward—toward the region of degradation.

As was to be expected after the day of frantic speculation and quick money changing, the lower Avenue was ablaze with light, the sidewalks were passes of peril, and the saloons and dives were reaping a rich harvest. Luckily, Brouillard was well known, and his position as chief of the great army of government workmen purchased something like immunity for himself and his companion. But more than once he was on the point of begging the young woman to turn back for her own sake.

The quest ended unerringly at the door of Haley's Place, and when David Massingale's

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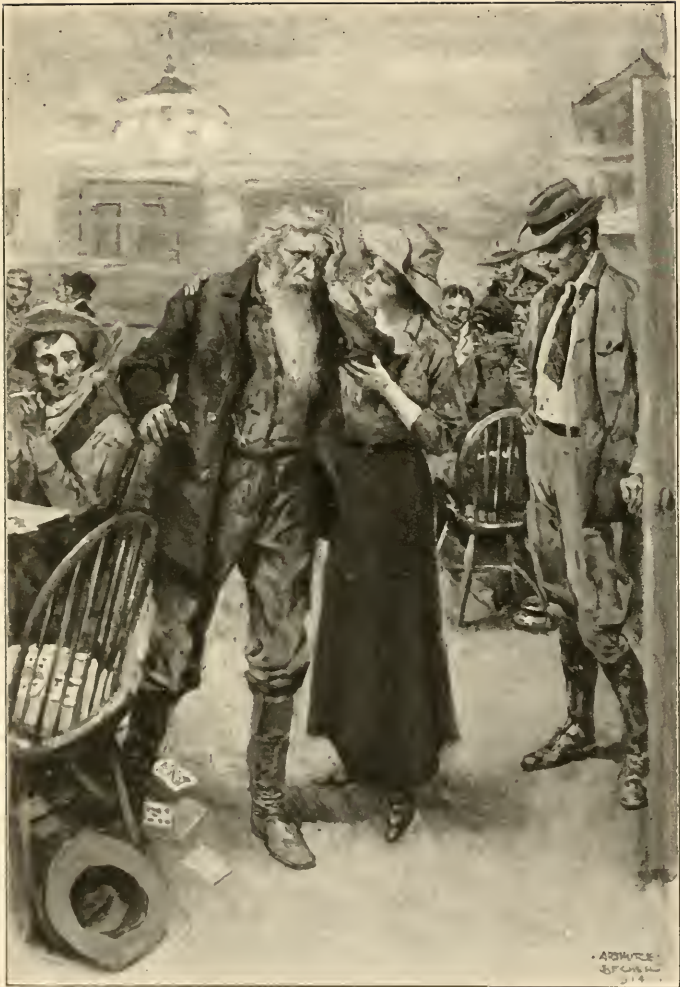
daughter made as if she would go in, Brouillard protested quickly.

"No, Amy," he said firmly. "You mustn't go in there. Let me take you around to the Metropole, and then I'll come back alone."

"I have been in worse places," she returned in low tones. And then, with her voice breaking tremulously: "Be my good friend just a little longer, Victor!"

He took her arm and walked her into the garishly lighted bar-room, bracing himself militantly for what might happen. But nothing happened. Dissipation of the Western variety seldom sinks below the level of a certain rude gallantry, quick to recognize the good and pure in womankind. Instantly a hush fell upon the place. The quartets at the card-tables held their hands, and a group of men drinking at the bar put down their glasses. One, a Tri'-Circ' cow-boy with his back turned, let slip an oath, and in a single swift motion his nearest comrade garroted him with a hairy arm, strangling him to silence.

As if guided by the same unerring instinct which had made her choose Haley's out of a dozen similar hells, Amy Massingale led Brouillard swiftly to the green baize doors at the rear of the bar-room. At her touch the swinging doors gave inward, and her goal was reached.



"It's all gone, little girl; it's all gone!"

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Three faro games, each with its inlaid table, its impassive dealer, its armed "lookout," and its ring of silent players, lay beyond the baize doors. At the nearest of the tables there was a stir, and the dealer stopped running the cards. Somebody said, "Let him get out," and then an old man, bearded, white-haired, wild-eyed, and haggard almost beyond recognition, pushed his chair away from the table and stumbled to his feet, his hands clutching the air like those of a swimmer sinking for the last time.

With a low cry the girl darted across the intervening space to clasp the staggering old man in her arms and draw him away. Brouillard stood aside as they came slowly toward the doors which he was holding open for them. He saw the distorted face-mask of a soul in torment and heard the mumbling repetition of the despairing words, "It's all gone, little girl; it's all gone!" and then he removed himself quickly beyond the range of the staring, unseeing eyes.

For in the lightning flash of revelation he realized that once again the good he would have done had turned to hideous evil in the doing, and that this time the sword thrust of the blind-passion impulse had gone straight to the heart of love itself.

XV

The Setting of the Ebb

CONTRARY to the most sanguine expectations of the speculators—contrary, perhaps, even to those of Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright—the upward surge in Mirapolis values, following the visit of the “distinguished citizens,” proved to be more than a tidal wave: it was a series of them.

The time was fully ripe for the breaking down of the final barriers of prudence and commonplace sanity. Day after day the “curb” markets were reopened, with prices mounting skyward; and when the news of how fortunes could be made in a day in the Miracle City of the Niquoia got abroad in the press despatches there was a fresh influx of mad money hunters from the East, and the merry game of buying and selling that which, inferentially at least, had no legal existence, went on with ever-increasing activity and an utterly reckless disregard of values considered as a basis for future returns on the investment.

Now, if never before, the croaker was wrathfully shouted down and silenced. No one ad-

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mitted, or seemed to admit, the possible impermanence of the city. So far from it, the boast was made openly that Mirapolis had fairly outstripped the Reclamation Service in the race for supremacy, and that among the first acts passed by Congress on its reassembling would be one definitely annulling the Buckskin Desert project, or, at any rate, so much of it as might be threatening the existence of the great gold camp in the Niquoia Valley.

To the observer, anxious or casual, there appeared to be reasonable grounds for the optimistic assertion. It was an indubitable fact that Brouillard's force had been cut down, first to one half, and later to barely enough men to keep the crushers and mixers moving and to add fresh layers of concrete to the huge wall of sufficient quantities to prevent the material—in technical phrase—from “dying.”

True, in the new furor of buying and selling and booming it was not remarked that the discharged government employees uniformly disappeared from the city and the valley as soon as they were stricken from the time rolls. True, also, was the fact that Brouillard said nothing for publication, and little otherwise, regarding the successive reductions in his working force. But

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in such periods of insanity it is only the favorable indications which are marked and emphasized. The work on the great dam was languishing visibly, as every one could see. The Navajos had been sent home to their reservation, the tepees were gone, and two thirds of the camp shacks were empty.

Past these material facts, plainly to be seen and weighed and measured by any who would take the time to consider them, there was a strictly human argument which was even more significant. It was known to everybody in the frenzied marketplace that Brouillard himself was, according to his means, one of the most reckless of the plungers, buying, borrowing, and buying again as if the future held no threat of a possible *débâcle*. It was an object-lesson for the timid. Those who did not themselves know certainly argued that there must be a few who did know, and among these few the chief of the Reclamation Service must be in the very foremost rank.

“You just keep your eye on Brouillard and steer your own boat accordingly,” was the way Editor Harlan put it to one of the timid ones. “He knows it all, backward and forward, and from the middle both ways; you can bet your final dollar on that. And you mustn’t expect

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him to talk. In his position he can't talk; one of the things he is drawing his salary for is to keep his mouth shut. Besides, what a man may say doesn't necessarily count for much. It is what he does."

Thus Harlan, speaking, as it were, in his capacity of a public dispenser of the facts. But for himself he was admitting a growing curiosity about the disappearing workmen, and this curiosity broke ground one evening when he chanced to meet Brouillard at the club.

"Somebody was telling me that you let out another batch of your Buckskin ditch diggers to-day, Brouillard," he began. And then, without any bush beating, the critical question was fired point-blank: "What becomes of all these fellows you are dropping? They don't stay in town or go to the mines—not one of them."

"Don't they?" said Brouillard with discouraging brevity.

"You know mighty well they don't. And they don't even drift out like other people; they go in bunches."

"Anything else remarkable up your sleeve?" was the careless query.

"Yes; Conlan, the railroad ticket agent, started to tell me yesterday that they were go-

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ing out on government transportation—that they didn't buy tickets like ordinary folks; started to tell me, I say, because he immediately took it back and fell all over himself trying to renege.”

“You are a born gossip, Harlan, but I suppose you can't help it. Did no one ever tell you that a part of the government contract with these laborers includes transportation back to civilization when they are discharged?”

“No, not by a jugful!” retorted the newspaper man. “And you're not telling me so now. For some purpose of your own you are asking me to believe it without being told. I refuse. This is the closed season, and the fish are not biting.”

Brouillard laughed easily.

“You are trying mighty hard to make a mountain out of a mole-hill. You say the men clear out when they are discharged—isn't that about what you'd do if you were out of a job?”

“Not with such unfailing unanimity if there were several hundred of me. Mirapolis isn't such an infernally good place to go away from—not yet.”

Brouillard's smile matched the easy-going laugh which had been its forerunner.

“You are a most persistent gadfly, Harlan. If I tell you one small, trifling, and safely unin-

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flammable fact, can I trust you not to turn it into a house afire in the columns of the *Spot-Light?*”

“You know well enough you can!” was the eager protest. “When have I ever bleated when I should have kept still?”

“Well, then, the fact is this: the men leaving the Niquoia are not discharged from the service. They are merely transferred to the Escalante project, which the department is trying to push through to completion before the northern winter sets in and freezes the concrete in the mixers.”

“Ah!” said Harlan with a quick indrawing of his breath. “That brings on more talk—about a thousand miles of it, doesn’t it?”

“For example?” suggested the engineer.

“To put it baldly, is the government really quitting on the Niquoia project, or is it merely transferring its force from a job that can wait to one that can’t wait?”

Brouillard smiled again. “You see,” he said; “it is second nature for you pencil-pushers to try to make two facts grow where only one grew before. Honestly, now, Harlan, what do you think about it yourself? You don’t need any kindergartner or a construction man to help you solve a little problem like that, do you?”

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“I’m doing a little sum in simple equations,” was the thoughtful answer—“putting this bit of information which you have just given me against what I have been believing to be a pretty straight tip from Washington.”

“What is your tip?”

“It’s this: that Congress does really propose to interfere in behalf of Mirapolis.”

“How can any one predict that when Congress is not in session?”

“The tip asserts that the string-pulling is all done. It will be a quiet bit of special legislation smuggled through, I suppose, like the bills for private relief. All it will need will be the recommendation and backing of a handful of Western members and senators. Nobody else is very vitally interested, outside of your own department, and there are always plenty of clubs at hand for killing off department opposition—threats of cutting down the appropriations and so on. Properly engineered, the Mirapolis bill will go through like a greased pig under a gate. You know it will.”

“You say nobody else is vitally interested—that’s a mistake big enough to be called a crime,” said Brouillard with emphasis. “The reclamation of the Buckskin Desert is a matter of mo-

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ment to the entire nation. Its failure would be a public disaster.”

Harlan laughed derisively.

“You are talking through your hat now—the salaried government engineer’s hat. Let your topographers go out and find some other stream to dam up. Let them hunt up some other desert to reclaim. The supply of arid lands isn’t exhausted yet by a good bit.”

Brouillard appeared to be silenced even if he were not fully convinced. After a time, however, he dropped in another query.

“How straight is your tip, Harlan?”

“So straight that I’d print it in to-morrow’s *Spot-Light* if I wasn’t afraid of queering the deal by being too previous. The necessary backing has been secured, and the bill is already prepared. If you don’t believe it, ask your own big bosses in Washington.”

“You are certain that your information didn’t originate right here in Mirapolis—in Mr. Cortwright’s office, to locate it more exactly?”

“It didn’t; it came from a purely personal source and direct from Washington.”

“And the source couldn’t possibly have become contaminated by the Cortwright germs?”

Harlan’s smile was the face-wrinkling of seasoned wisdom.

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“You are pushing me too hard,” he protested. “I know that there are wheels within wheels. You’d say it would be a foxy move to have the local newspaper in Mirapolis get such a tip from a strictly unprejudiced source. I’ll have to admit that myself.”

Brouillard looked at his watch and reached for his hat.

“It’s all right, Harlan,” he said at the leave-taking. “Believe as much as you like, but take my advice in just one small matter. Don’t buy Mirapolis dirt to hold; buy it to sell—and sell the minute you see your profit. I told you I’d give you a pointer if I didn’t forget; you’ve got it.”

For the better part of a fortnight the tidal waves of prosperity, as evinced by increasing speculative values, kept on rolling in, each one apparently a little higher than its immediate predecessor. Then the flood began to subside, though so slowly that at first it was only by a careful comparison of the daily transfers that the recession could be measured.

Causes and consequences extraneous to the city itself contributed to the almost imperceptible reactionary tendency. For one, the Buckskin Mining and Milling Company reluctantly abandoned its pastime of ploughing barren furrows on

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Jack's Mountain, and a little later went into liquidation, as the phrase ran, though the Eastern bondholders probably called it bankruptcy. About the same time the great cement plant, deprived of the government market by the slackening of the work on the dam, reduced its output to less than one fourth of its full capacity. Most portentous of all, perhaps, was the rumor that the placers at Quadjenäi were beginning to show signs of exhaustion. It was even whispered about that the two huge gold dredges recently installed were not paying the expenses of operating them.

Quite naturally, the pulse of the Wonder City beat sensitive to all these depressive rumors and incidents, responding slowly at first but a little later in accelerated throbbings which could no longer be ignored by the most optimistic bidder at the "curb" exchanges.

Still there was no panic. As the activities in local sales fell off and the Mirapolitans themselves were no longer crowding the curbs or standing in line at the real estate offices for their turn at the listings, the prudent ones, with Mr. Cortwright and his chosen associates far in advance of the field, were placing Mirapolis holdings temptingly on view in distant markets; placing them and selling them with a blazonry of adver-

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tising worthy of the envy of those who have called themselves the suburb builders of Greater New York.

It was after this invasion of the distant market was fully in train that Cortwright once more sent for Brouillard, receiving the engineer this time in the newest offices of the power company, on the many-times-bought-and-sold corner opposite Bon-gras's.

"Hello, Brouillard!" said the magnate jocosely, indicating a chair and the never-absent open box of cigars in the same gesture. "You're getting to be as much of a stranger as a man might wish his worst enemy to be. Gene says you are neglecting her shamefully, but she seems to be making a pretty good Jack-at-a-pinch of the English lord."

"You sent for me?" Brouillard broke in tersely. More and more he was coming to acknowledge a dull rage when he heard the call of his master.

"Yes. What about the dam? Is your work going to start up again? Or is it going off for good?"

Brouillard bit his lip to keep back the exclamation of astoundment that the blunt inquiry threatened to evoke. To assume that Mr. Cortwright did not know all there was to be known was to credit the incredible.

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“I told you a good while ago that I was only the government’s hired man,” he replied. “You doubtless have much better information than any I can give you.”

“You can tell me what your orders are—that’s what I want to know.”

The young chief of construction frowned first, then he laughed.

“What has given you the impression that you own me, Mr. Cortwright? I have often wondered.”

“Well, I might say that I have made you what you are, and——”

“That’s true; the truest thing you ever said,” snapped Brouillard.

“And, I was going to add, I can unmake you just as easily. But I don’t want to be savage with you. All I’m asking is a little information first, and a little judicious help afterward. What are your orders from the department?”

Brouillard got up and stood over the stocky man in the office chair, with the black eyes blazing.

“Mr. Cortwright, I said a moment ago that you have made me what I am, and you have. I am infinitely a worse man than you are, because I know better and you don’t. It is no excuse for me that I have had a motive which I haven’t

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explained to you, because, as I once told you, you couldn't understand it in a thousand years. The evil has been done and the consequences, to you, to me, and to every one in this cursed valley are certain. Facing them as I am obliged to face them, I am telling you—but what's the use? You can't make a tool of me any longer—that's all. You must cook your meat over your own fire. I'm out of it."

"I can smash you," said the man in the chair, quite without heat.

"No, you can't even do that," was the equally cool retort. "No man's fate is in another man's hands. If you choose to set in motion the machinery which will grind me to a small-sized villain of the county-jail variety, it is I myself who will furnish every foot-pound of the power that is applied."

He was moving toward the door, but Cortwright stopped him.

"One more word before you go, Brouillard. It is to be war between us from this on?"

"I don't say that. It would be awkward for Miss Genevieve. Let it be armed neutrality if you like. Don't interfere with me and I won't interfere with you."

"Ah!" said the millionaire. "Now you have

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brought it around to the point I was trying to reach. You don't want to have anything more to do with me, but you are not quite ready to cash in and pull out of the game. How much money have you got?"

The cool impudence of the question brought a dull flush to the younger man's face, but he would give the enemy no advantage in the matter of superior self-control.

"That is scarcely a fair question—even between armed neutrals," he objected. "Why do you want to know?"

"I'm asking because you have just proposed the non-interference policy, and I'd like to know how fairly you mean to live up to it. A little while back you interfered in a small business matter of mine very pointedly. What became of the one hundred thousand dollars you gave old David Massingale?"

"How do you know I gave him a hundred thousand dollars?"

"That's dead easy," laughed the man in the pivot chair, once more the genial buccaneer. "You drew a check for that amount and cashed it, and a few minutes later Massingale, whose account had been drawn down to nothing, bobs up at Schermerhorn's window with exactly the

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same amount in loose cash. What did he do with it—gamble it?”

“That is his own affair,” Brouillard countered briefly.

“Well, the future—next month’s future—is my affair. If you’ve got money enough to interfere again—don’t. You’ll lose it, the same as you did before. And perhaps I sha’n’t take the second interference as good-naturedly as I did the first.”

“Is that all you have to say?” Brouillard asked impatiently.

“Not quite. I don’t believe you were altogether in earnest a minute ago when you expressed your desire to call it all off. You don’t want the Mirapolis well to go dry right now, not one bit more than I do.”

“I have been trying pretty hard to make you understand that it is a matter of utter indifference to me.”

“But you haven’t succeeded very well; it isn’t at all a matter of indifference to you,” the magnate insisted persuasively. “As things are shaping themselves up at the present speaking, you stand to lose, not only the hundred thousand you squandered on old David, but all you’ve made besides. I keep in touch—it’s my business to

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keep in touch. You've been buying bargains and you are holding them—for the simple reason that with the present slowing-down tendency in the saddle you can't sell and make any money."

"Well?"

"I've got a proposition to make that ought to look good to you. What we need just now in this town is a little more activity—something doing. You can relieve the situation if you feel like it."

"How?"

"If I tell you, you mustn't go and use it against me. That would be a low-down welcher's trick. But you won't. See here, your bureau at Washington is pretty well scared up over the prospect here. It is known in the capital that when Congress convenes there is going to be a dead-open-and-shut fight to kill this Buckskin reclamation project. Very well; the way for you fellows to win out is to hurry—finish your dam and finish it quick, before Congress or anybody else can get action."

For a single instant Brouillard was puzzled. Then he began to understand.

"Go on," he said.

"What I was going to suggest is this: you prod your people at Washington with a hot wire; tell

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'em now's the time to strike and strike hard. They'll see the point, and if you ask for an increase of a thousand men you'll get it. Make it two thousand, just for the dramatic effect. We'll work right along with you and make things hum again. We'll start up the cement plant, and I don't know but what we might give the Buckskin M. & M. folks a small hypodermic that would keep 'em alive while we are taking a few snapshot pictures of Mirapolis on the jump again."

"Let me get it straight," said Brouillard, putting his back against the door. "You fully believe you've got us down; that eventually, and before the water is turned on, Congress will pass a bill killing the Niquoia project. But in the meantime, to make things lively, you'd like to have the Reclamation Service go ahead and spend another million or so in wages that can be turned loose in Mirapolis. Is that it?"

"You've surrounded it very neatly," laughed the promoter. "Once, some little time ago, I might have felt the necessity of convincing your scruples, but you've cut away all that foolishness. It's a little tough on our good old Uncle Samuel, I'll admit, but it'll be only a pin-prick or so in comparison to the money that is thrown away every time Congress passes an appropria-

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tion bill. And, putting it upon the dead practical basis, Brouillard, it's your own and only salvation—personally, I mean. You've *got* to unload or go broke, and you can't unload on a falling market. You think about it and then get quick action with the wire. There is no time to lose."

Brouillard was looking past Cortwright and out through the plate-glass window which commanded a view of the great dam and its network of forms and stagings.

"It is a gambler's bet and a rather desperate one," he said slowly. "You stand to win all or to lose all in making it, Mr. Cortwright. The town is balancing on the knife-edge of a panic at this moment. Would it go up, or down, with a sudden resumption of work on the dam?"

"The careless thinker would say that it would yell 'Fire!' and go up into the air so far that it could never climb down," was the prompt reply. "But we'll have the medicine dropper handy. In the first place, everybody can afford to stay and boost while Uncle Sam is spending his million or so right here in the middle of things. Nobody will want to pull out and leave that cow unmilked. In the second place, we've got a mighty good antidote to use in any sure-enough

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case of hydrophobia your quick dam building may start."

"You could let it leak out that, in spite of all the hurrah and rush on the dam, Congress is really going to interfere before we are ready to turn the water on," said Brouillard musingly and as if it were only his thought slipping into unconscious speech.

"Precisely. We could make that prop hold if you were actually putting the top course on your wall and making preparations to drop the stop-gate in your spillway."

"I see," was the rejoinder, and it was made in the same half-absent monotone. "But while we are still on the knife-blade edge . . . a little push . . . Mr. Cortwright, if there were one solitary righteous man left in Mirapolis——"

"There isn't," chuckled the promoter, turning back to his desk while the engineer was groping for the door-knob—"at least, nobody with that particular brand of righteousness backed by the needful inside information. You go ahead and do your part and we'll do the rest."

XVI

The Man on the Bank

BROUILLARD, walking out of Mr. Cortwright's new offices with his thoughts afar, wondered if it were by pure coincidence that he found Castner apparently waiting for him on the sidewalk.

"Once more you are just the man I have been wanting to see," the young missionary began, promptly making use of the chance meeting. "May I break in with a bit of bad news?"

"There is no such thing as good news in this God-forsaken valley, Castner. What's your grief?"

"There is trouble threatening for the Cortwrights. Stephen Massingale is out and about again, and I was told this morning that he was filling himself up with bad whiskey and looking for the man who shot him."

Brouillard nodded unsympathetically.

"You will find that there is always likely to be a second chapter in a book of that sort—if the first one isn't conclusive."

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"But there mustn't be this time," Castner insisted warmly. "We must stop it; it is our business to stop it."

"Your business, maybe; it falls right in your line, doesn't it?"

"No more in mine than in yours," was the quick retort.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" said the engineer pointlessly, catching step with the long-legged stride of the athletic young shepherd of souls.

"Not if you claim kinship with Cain, who was the originator of that very badly outworn query," came the answer shot-like. Then: "What has come over you lately, Brouillard? You are a friend of the Massingales; I've had good proof of that. Why don't you care?"

"Great Heavens, Castner, I do care! But if you had a cut finger you wouldn't go to a man in hell to get it tied up, would you?"

"You mean that I have brought my cut finger to you?"

"Yes, I meant that, and the rest of it, too. I'm no fit company for a decent man to-day, Castner. You'd better edge off and leave me alone."

Castner did not take the blunt intimation. For the little distance intervening between the

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power company's new offices and the Niquoia Building he tramped beside the young engineer in silence. But at the entrance to the Niquoia he would have gone his way if Brouillard had not said abruptly:

"I gave you fair warning; I'm not looking for a chance to play the Good Samaritan to anybody—not even to Stephen Massingale, much less Van Bruce Cortwright. The reason is because I have a pretty decent back-load of my own to carry. Come up to my rooms if you can spare a few minutes. I want to talk to a man who hasn't parted with his soul for a money equivalent—if there is such a man left in this bottomless pit of a town."

Castner accepted the implied challenge soberly, and together they ascended to Brouillard's offices. Once behind the closed door, Brouillard struck out viciously.

"You fellows claim to hold the keys of the conscience shop; suppose you open up and dole out a little of the precious commodity to me, Castner. Is it ever justifiable to do evil that good may come?"

"No." There was no hesitation in the denial. Brouillard's laugh was harshly derisive.

"I thought you'd say that. No qualifications

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asked for, no judicial weighing of the pros and cons—the evil of the evil, or the goodness of the good—just a plain, bigoted ‘No.’ ”

Castner ran a hand through his thick shock of dark hair and looked away from the scoffer.

“Extenuating circumstances—is that what you mean? There are no such things in the court of conscience—the enlightened conscience. Right is right and wrong is wrong. There is no middle ground of accommodation between the two. You know that as well as I do, Brouillard.”

“Well, then, how about the choice between two evils? You’ll admit that there are times——”

Castner was shaking his head. “That is a lying proverb. No man is ever compelled to make that choice. He only thinks he is.”

“That is all you know about it!” was the bitter retort. “What can you, or any man who sets himself apart as you do, know about the troubles and besetments of ordinary people? You sit on the bank of the river and see the water go by; what do you know about the agonies of the fellow who is fighting for breath and life out in the middle of the stream?”

“That is a fallacy, too,” was the calm reply. “I am a man as other men, Brouillard. My coat makes no difference, as you have allowed at other

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times when we have been thrown together. Moreover, nobody sits on the bank in these days. What are your two evils?"

Brouillard tilted back in his chair and pointedly ignored the direct question.

"Theories," he said half contemptuously. "And they never fit. See here, Castner; suppose it was clearly your duty, as a man and a Christian and to subserve some good end, to plant a thousand pounds of dynamite in the basement of this building and fire it. Would you do it?"

"The case isn't supposable."

"There you are!" Brouillard broke out impatiently. "I told you you were sitting on the bank. The case is not only supposable; it exists as an actual fact. And the building the man ought to blow to high heaven contains not only a number of measurably innocent people but one in particular for whose life and happiness the man would barter his immortal soul—if he has one."

The young missionary left his chair and began to walk back and forth on his side of the office desk.

"You want counsel and you are not willing to buy it with the coin of confidence," he said

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at length, adding: "It is just as well, perhaps. I doubt very much if I am the person to give it to you."

"Why do you doubt it? Isn't it a part of your job?"

"Not always. I am not your conscience keeper, Brouillard. Don't misunderstand me. I may have lived a year or so longer than you have, but you have lived more—a great deal more. That fact might be set aside, but there is another: in the life of every man there is some one person who knows, who understands, whose word for that man is the one only fitting word of inspiration. That is what I mean when I say that I am not your conscience keeper. Do I make it clear?"

"Granting your premises—yes. Go on."

"I will. We'll paste that leaf down and turn another. Though I can't counsel you, I can still be your faithful accuser. You have committed a great sin, Brouillard, and you are still committing it. If you haven't been the leader in the mad scramble for riches here in this abandoned city, you have been only a step behind the leaders. And you were the one man who should have been like Cæsar's wife, the one whose example counted for most."

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Brouillard got up and thrust out his hand across the desk.

“You are a man, Castner—and that is better than being a priest,” he asserted soberly. “I’ll take back all the spiteful things I’ve been saying. I’m down under the hoofs of the horses, and it’s only human nature to want to pull somebody else down. You are one of the few men in Mirapolis whose presence has been a blessing instead of a curse—who hasn’t had a purely selfish greed to satisfy.”

Again Castner shook his head. “There hasn’t been much that I could do. Brouillard, it is simply dreadful—the hard, reckless, half-demoniac spirit of this place! There is nothing to appeal to; there is no room or time for anything but the mad money chase or the still madder dissipation in which the poor wretches seek to forget. I can only try here and there to drag some poor soul out of the fire at the last moment, and it makes me sick—sick at heart!”

“You mustn’t look at it that way,” said Brouillard, suddenly turning comforter. “You have been doing good work and a lot of it—more than any three ordinary men could stand up under. I haven’t got beyond seeing and appreciating, Castner; truly I have not. And I’ll say this: if I

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had only half your courage . . . but it's no use, I'm in too deep. I can't see any farther ahead than a man born blind. There is one end for which I have been striving from the very first, and it is still unattained. I'm past help now. I have reached a point at which I'd pull the whole world down in ruins to see that end accomplished."

The young missionary took another turn up and down the room and then came back to the desk for his hat. At the leave-taking he said the only helpful word he could think of.

"Go to your confessor, Brouillard—your real confessor—and go all the more readily if that one happens to be a good woman—whom you love and trust. They often see more clearly than we do—the good women. Try it; and let me help where a man can help."

For a long hour after Castner went away Brouillard sat at his desk, fighting as those fight who see the cause lost, and who know they only make the ruin more complete by struggling on.

Cortwright's guess had found its mark. He was loaded to break with "front feet" and options and "corners." In the latest speculative period he had bought and mortgaged and bought again, plunging recklessly with the sole object of wringing another hundred thousand out of the

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drying sponge against the time when David Massingale should need it.

There seemed to be no other hope. It had become plainly evident after a little time that Cortwright's extorted promise to lift the smelting embargo from the "Little Susan" ore had been kept only in the letter; that he had removed one obstacle only to interpose another. The new obstacle was in the transportation field. Protests and beseechings, letters to traffic officials, and telegrams to railroad headquarters were of no avail. In spite of all that had been done, there was never an ore-car to come over the range at War Arrow, and the side-track to the mine was as yet uncompleted. Brouillard had seen little of Massingale, but that little had shown him that the old miner was in despair.

It was this hopeless situation which had made Brouillard bend his back to a second lifting of the "Little Susan's" enormous burden. At first the undertaking seemed easily possible. But with the drying of the speculative sponge it became increasingly difficult. More and more he had been compelled to buy and hold, until now the bare attempt to unload would have started the panic which was only waiting for some hedging seller to fire the train.

Sitting in the silence of the sixth-floor office he

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saw that Cortwright had shown him the one way out. Beyond doubt, the resumption in full force of the work on the dam would galvanize new life into Mirapolis, temporarily, at least. After that, a cautious selling campaign, conducted under cover through the brokers, might save the day for David Massingale. But the cost—the heaping dishonor, the disloyalty of putting his service into the breach and wrecking and ruining to gain the one personal end. . . .

The sweat stood out in great drops on his forehead when he finally drew a pad of telegraph blanks under his hand and began to write a message. Painstakingly he composed it, referring often to the notes in his field-book, and printing the words neatly in his accurate, clearly defined handwriting.

When it was finished he translated it laboriously into the department code. But after the copy was made and signed he did not ring at once for a messenger. Instead, he put the two, the original and the cipher, under a paper-weight and sat glooming at them, as if they had been his own death-warrant—was still so sitting when a light tap at the door was followed by a soft swishing of silken skirts, a faint odor of crushed violets, and Genevieve Cortwright stood beside him.

XVII

The Circean Cup

WHILE one might count ten the silence of the upper room remained unbroken, and neither the man nor the woman spoke. It was not the first time by many that Genevieve Cortwright had come to stand beside the engineer's desk, holding him with smiling eyes and a charming audacity while she laid her commands upon him for the afternoon's motoring or the evening's bridge party or what other social diversion she might have in view.

But now there was a difference. Brouillard felt it instinctively—and in the momentary silence saw it in a certain hard brilliance of the beautiful eyes, in the curving of the ripe lips, half scornful, half pathetic, though the pathos may have been only a touch of self-pity born of the knowledge that the world of the luxury-lapped has so little to offer once the cold finger of satiety has been laid upon the throbbing pulse of fruition.

“You have been quarrelling with father again,”

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she said, with an abruptness that was altogether foreign to her habitual attitude toward him. "I have come to try to make peace. Won't you ask me to sit down?"

He recalled himself with a start from his abstracted study of the faultless contour of cheek and chin and rounded throat and placed a chair for her, apologizing for the momentary aberration and slipping easily from apology into explanation.

"It was good of you to try to bring the wine and oil," he said. "But it was scarcely a quarrel; the king doesn't quarrel with his subjects."

"Now you are making impossible all the things I came to say," she protested, with a note of earnestness in her voice that he had rarely heard. "Tell me what it was about."

"I am afraid it wouldn't interest you in the least," he returned evasively.

"I suppose you are punishing me now for the 'giddy butterfly' pose which you once said was mine. Isn't there a possibility, just the least little shadow of a possibility, that I don't deserve to be punished?"

He had sat down facing her and his thought was quite alien to the words when he tried again.

"You wouldn't understand. It was merely a

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disagreement in a matter of—a matter of business.”

“Perhaps I can understand more than you give me credit for,” she countered, with an upflash of the captivating eyes. “Perhaps I can be hurt where you have been thinking that the armor of frivolity, or ignorance, or indifference is the thickest.”

“No, you wouldn’t be hurt,” he denied, in sober finality.

“How can you tell? Can you read minds and hearts as you do your maps and drawings? Must I be set down as hopelessly and irreclaimably frivolous just because I have chosen to laugh when possibly another woman might have cried?”

“Oh, no,” he denied again. Then he tried to meet her fairly on the new ground. “You mustn’t accuse yourself. You are of your own world and you can’t very well help being of it. Besides, it is a pleasant world.”

“But an exceedingly shallow one, you would say. But why not, Mr. Brouillard? What do we get out of life more than the day’s dole of—well, of whatever we care most for? I suppose one ought to be properly shocked at the big electric sign Monsieur Bongras has put up over the entrance to his café: ‘Let us eat, drink, and be

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merry, for to-morrow we die.' He meant it as a cynical gibe at the expense of Mirapolis, of course; but do you know it appeals to me—it makes me think."

"I'm listening," said Brouillard. "Convert me if you can."

"Oh, I don't know how to say it, or perhaps even how to think it. But when I see Monsieur Bongras's cynical little fling I wonder if it isn't the real philosophy, after all. Why should we be always looking forward and striving and trying foolishly to climb to some high plane where the air is sure to be so rare that we couldn't possibly breathe it?"

Brouillard's smile was a mere eye-lifting of grave reminiscence when he said: "Some of us have quit looking forward—quit trying to climb—and that without even the poor hope of reaping the reward that Poodles's quotation offers."

Miss Cortwright left her chair and began to make an aimless circuit of the room, passing the blue-prints on the walls in slow review, and coming finally to the window looking out over the city and across to the gray, timber-crowned wall of the mighty structure spanning the gap between the Niquoia's two sentinel mountains.

"You haven't told me yet what your disagree-

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ment with father was about," she reminded him at length; and before he could speak: "You needn't, because I know. You have been getting in his way—financially, and he has been getting in your way—ethically. You are both in the wrong."

"Yes?" said Brouillard, neither agreeing nor denying.

"Yes. Father thinks too much of making money—a great deal too much; and you——"

"Well?" he prompted, when the pause threatened to become a break. "I am waiting to hear my indictment."

"You puzzle me," she acknowledged frankly. "At first I thought you were going to be a thirsty money hunter like all the others. And—and I couldn't quite understand why you should be. Now I know, or partly know. You had an object that was different from that of the others. You wanted to buy some one thing—not everything, as most people do. But there is something missing, and that is what puzzles me. I don't know what it is that you want to buy."

"There have been two things," he broke in. "One of them you know, because I spoke of it to you long ago. The other——"

"The other is connected in some way with the

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Massingales; so much I have been able to gather from what father said.”

“Since you know part, you may know all,” he went on. “David Massingale owes your father—technically, at least—one hundred thousand dollars, which he can’t pay; which your father isn’t going to let him pay, if he can help it. And if Massingale doesn’t pay he will lose his mine.”

“You interested yourself? Would you mind telling me just why?” she asked.

“That is one of the things you couldn’t understand.”

She turned a calmly smiling face toward him.

“Oh, you are mistaken, greatly mistaken. I can understand it very well, indeed. You are in love with David Massingale’s daughter.”

Once more he neither denied nor affirmed, and she had turned to face the window again when she went on in the same unmoved tone:

“It was fine. I can appreciate such devotion even if I can’t fully sympathize with it. Everybody should be in love like that—once. Every woman demands that kind of love—once. But afterward, you know—if one should be content to take the good the gods provide. . . .” When she began again at the end of the eloquent little pause there was a new note in her voice, a note

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soothingly suggestive of swaying poppies in sunlit fields, of ease and peace and the ideal heights receding, of rose-strewn paths pleasant to the feet of the weary wayfarer. "Why shouldn't we take to-day, the only day we can be sure of having, and use and enjoy it while it is ours? Money?—there is money enough in the world, God knows; enough and to spare for anything that is worth the buying. I have money, if that is all—money of my own. And, if I should ask him, father would give me the 'Little Susan' outright, to do with it as I pleased."

Brouillard was leaning back in his chair studying her faultless profile as she talked, and the full meaning of what she was saying did not come to him at once. But when it did he sprang up and went to stand beside her. And all the honesty and manhood the evil days had spared went into what he said to her.

"I was a coward a moment ago, Miss Genevieve, when you spoke of the motive which had prompted me to help David Massingale. But you knew and you said the words for me. When you love as I do you will understand that there is an ecstasy in the very madness of it that is more precious than all the joys of a gold-mounted paradise without it. I must go on as I have begun."

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“You will marry her?” she asked softly.

“There has never been any hope of that, I think; not from the very beginning. While I remained an honest man there was the insurmountable obstacle I once told you of—the honor debt my father left me. And when I became a thief and a grafter for love’s sake I put myself out of the running, definitely and hopelessly.”

“Has she told you so?”

“Not in so many words; there was no need. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness.”

Miss Cortwright’s beautiful eyes mirrored well-bred incredulity, and there was the faintest possible suggestion of lenient scorn in her smile.

“What a pedestal you have built for her!” she said. “Has it never occurred to you that she may be just a woman—like other women? Tell me, Mr. Brouillard, have you asked her to marry you?”

“You know very well that I haven’t.”

“Then, if you value your peace of mind, don’t. She would probably say ‘yes’ and you would be miserable forever after. Ideals are exceedingly fragile things, you know. They are made to be looked up to, not handled.”

“Possibly they are,” he said, as one who would

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rather concede than dispute. The reaction was setting in, bringing a discomforting conviction that he had opened the door of an inner sanctuary to unsympathetic eyes.

Followed a little pause, which was threatening to become awkward when Miss Cortwright broke it and went back to the beginning of things.

“I came to tender my good offices in the—the disagreement, as you call it, between you and father. Can’t you be complaisant for once, in a way, Mr. Brouillard?”

Brouillard’s laugh came because it was summoned, but there was no mirth in it.

“I have never been anything else but complaisant in the little set-tos with your father, Miss Genevieve. He has always carried too many guns for me. You may tell him that I am acting upon his suggestion, if you please—that the telegram to Washington is written. He will understand.”

“And about this Massingale affair—you will not interfere again?”

Brouillard’s jaw muscles began to set in the fighting lines.

“Does he make that a command?” he asked.

“Oh, I fancy not; at least, I didn’t hear him say anything like that. I am merely speaking as

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your friend. You will not be allowed to do as you wish to do. I know my father better than you do, Mr. Brouillard.”

“What he has done, and what he proposes to do, in Massingale’s affair, is little short of highway robbery, Miss Genevieve.”

“From your point of view, you mean. He will call it ‘business’ and cite you a thousand precedents in every-day life. But let it go. I’ve talked so much about business that I’m tired. Let me see, what was the other thing I came up here for?—oh, yes, I remember now. We are making up a party to motor down to the Tri’-Circ’ Ranch for a cow-boy supper with Lord Falkland. There is a place in our car for you, and I know Sophie Schermerhorn would be delighted if you should call her up and tell her you are going.”

She had turned toward the door and he went to open it for her.

“I am afraid I shall have to offer my regrets to you, and to Miss Schermerhorn as well, if she needs them,” he said, with the proper outward show of disappointment.

“Is it business?” she laughed.

“Yes, it is business.”

“Good-by, then. I’m sorry you have to work

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so hard. If Miss Massingale were only rich—but I forgot, the ideals would still be in the way. No, don't come to the elevator. I can at least do that much for myself, if I am a 'giddy butterfly.' ”

After she had gone Brouillard went back to the window and stood with his hands behind him looking out at the great dam with its stagings and runways almost deserted. But when the westering sun was beginning to emphasize the staging timbers whose shadow fingers would presently be reaching out toward the city he went around to his chair and sat down to take the Washington telegram from beneath its paperweight. Nothing vital, nothing in any manner changeful of the hard conditions, had happened since he had signed his name to the cipher at the end of the former struggle. Notwithstanding, the struggle was instantly renewed, and once more he found himself battling hopelessly with the undertow in the tide-way of indecision.

XVIII

Love's Crucible

FOR half an hour after the motor-cars of the Falkland supper party had rolled away from the side entrance of the Hotel Metropole, Brouillard sat at his desk in the empty office with the momentous telegram before him, searching blindly for some alternative to the final act of treachery which would be consummated in the sending of the wire.

Since, by reason of Cortwright's tamperings with the smelter people and the railroad, the "Little Susan" had become a locked treasure vault, the engineer, acting upon his own initiative, had tried the law. As soon as he had ascertained that David Massingale had been given sixty days longer to live, solely because the buccaneers chose to take his mine rather than his money, Brouillard had submitted the facts in the case to a trusted lawyer friend in the East.

This hope had pulled in two like a frayed cord. Massingale must pay the bank or lose all. Until he had obtained possession of the promissory

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notes there would be no crevice in which to drive any legal wedge. And even then, unless some pressure could be brought to bear upon the grafters to make them disgorge, there was no chance of Massingale's recovering more than his allotted two thirds of the stock; in other words, he would still stand committed to the agreement by which he had bound himself to make the grafters a present, in fee simple, of one third of his mine.

Brouillard had written one more letter to the lawyer. In it he had asked how David Massingale could be unassailably reinstated in his rights as the sole owner of the "Little Susan." The answer had come promptly and it was explicit. "Only by the repayment of such sums as had been actually expended in the reorganization and on the betterments—for the modernizing machinery and improvements—and the voluntary surrender, by the other parties to the agreement, of the stock in dispute," the lawyer had written; and Brouillard had smiled at the thought of Cortwright voluntarily surrendering anything which was once well within the grasp of his pudgy hands.

Failing to start the legal wedge, Brouillard had dipped—also without consulting Massingale—into the matter of land titles. The "Little

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Susan" was legally patented under the land laws, and Massingale's title, if the mine were located upon government land, was without a flaw. But on a former reclamation project Brouillard had been brought in contact with some of the curious title litigation growing out of the old Spanish grants; and in at least one instance he had seen a government patent invalidated thereby.

As a man in reasonably close touch with his superiors in Washington, the chief of construction knew that there was a Spanish-grant involvement which had at one time threatened to at least delay the Niquoia project. How it had been settled finally he did not know; but after the legal failure he had written to a man—a college classmate of his own—in the bureau of land statistics, asking for data which would enable him to locate exactly the Niquoia-touching boundaries of the great Coronida Grant. To this letter no reply had as yet been received. Brouillard had cause to know with what slowness a simple matter of information can ooze out of a department bureau. The letter—which, after all, might contain nothing helpful—lingered on the way, and the crisis, the turning-point beyond which there could be no redemption in a revival of the speculative craze, had arrived.

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Brouillard took up the draught of the Washington telegram and read it over. He was cooler now, and he saw that it was only as it came from the hand of a traitor, who could and would deliberately wreck the train of events it might set in motion, that it became a betrayal. Writing as the commanding officer in the field, he had restated the facts—facts doubtless well known in the department—the probability that Congress would intervene and the hold the opposition was gaining by the suspension of the work on the dam. If the work could be pushed energetically and at once, there was a possibility that the opposition would become discouraged and voluntarily withdraw. Would the department place the men and the means instantly at his disposal?

“If I were the honest man I am supposed to be, that is precisely the message I ought to send,” he mused reflectively. “It is only as the crooked devil in possession of me will drive me to nullify the effort and make it of no effect that it becomes a crime; that and the fact that I can never be sure that the Cortwright gang hasn't the inside track and will not win out in spite of all efforts. That is the touchstone of the whole degrading business. I'm afraid Cortwright has the inside track. If I could only get a little clear-sighted daylight on the damnable tangle!”

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Obeying a sudden impulse, he thrust the two copies of the telegram under the paper-weight again, sprang up, put on his hat, and left the building. A few minutes later he was on the porch of the stuccoed villa in the Quadjenäi road and was saying gravely to the young woman who had been reading in the hammock: "You are staying too closely at home. Get your coat and hat and walk with me up to the 'Little Susan.' It will do you good."

The afternoon was waning and the sun, dipping to the horizon, hung like a huge golden ball over the yellow immensities of the distant Buckskin as they topped the final ascent in the steep trail and went to sit on the steps of the deserted home cabin at the mine.

For a time neither spoke, and the stillness of the air contributed something to the high-mountain silence, which was almost oppressive. Work had been stopped in the mine at the end of the previous week, Massingale declaring, morosely, that until he knew whose ore he was digging he would dig no more. Presumably there was a watchman, but if so he was invisible to the two on the cabin step, and the high view-point was theirs alone.

"How did you know that I have been wanting

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to come up here once more before everything is changed?" said the girl at length, patting the roughly hewn log step as if it were a sentient thing to feel the caress.

"I didn't know it," Brouillard denied. "I only knew that I wanted to get out of Gomorrah for a little while, to come up here with you and get the reek of the pit out of my nostrils."

"I know," she rejoined, with the quick comprehension which never failed him. "It is good to be out of it, to be up here where we can look down upon it and see it in its true perspective—as a mere little impertinent blot on the landscape. It's only that, after all, Victor. See how the great dam—your work—overshadows it."

"That is one of the things I hoped I might be able to see if I came here with you," he returned slowly. "But I can't get your point of view, Amy. I shall never be able to get it again."

"You did have it once," she asserted. "Or rather, you had a better one of your own. Has Gomorrah changed it?"

"No, not Gomorrah. I could shut the wastegates and drown the place to-morrow for all that Mirapolis, or anything in it, means to me. But something has changed the point of view for me past mending, since that first day when we sat

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here together and looked down upon the beginnings of the Reclamation construction camp—before Gomorrah was ever thought of.”

“I know,” she said again. “But that dreadful city is responsible. It has robbed us all, Victor; but you more than any, I’m afraid.”

“No,” he objected. “Mirapolis has been only a means to an end. The thing that has changed my point of view—my entire life—is love, as I have told you once before.”

“Oh, no,” she protested gently, rising to take her old place, with her back to the porch post and her hands behind her. And then, still more gently: “That is almost like sacrilege, Victor, for love is sacred.”

“I can’t help it. Love has made a great scoundrel of me, Amy; a criminal, if man’s laws were as closely meshed as God’s.”

“I can’t believe that,” she dissented loyally.

“It is true. I have betrayed my trust. Cortwright will make good in all of his despicable schemes. Congress will intervene and the Niquoia project will be abandoned.”

“No,” she insisted. “Take a good, deep breath of this pure, clean, high-mountain air and think again. Mirapolis is dying, even now, though nobody dares admit it. But it is. Tig Smith hears

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everything, and he told father last night that the rumor about the Quadjenäi placers is true. They are worked out, and already the men have begun to move up the river in search of new ground. Tig said that in another week there wouldn't be a dozen sluice-boxes working."

"I have known about the Quadjenäi failure for the past two weeks," Brouillard put in. "For at least that length of time the two steam dredges have been handling absolutely barren gravel, and the men in charge of them have had orders to go on dredging and say nothing. Mirapolis is no longer a gold camp; but, nevertheless, it will boom again—long enough to let Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright and his fellow buccaneers loot it and get away."

"How can you know that?" she asked curiously.

"I know it because I am going to bring it to pass."

"You?"

"Yes, I. It is the final act in the play. And my part in this act is the Judas part—as it has been in the others."

She was looking down at him with wide-open eyes.

"If any one else had said that of you . . .

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but I can't believe it! I know you, Victor; I think I must have known you in the other world—the one before this—and there we climbed the heights, in the clear sunlight, together."

"There was one thing you didn't learn about me—in that other world you speak of," he said, falling in with her allegory. "You didn't discover that I could become a wretched cheat and a traitor for love of you. Perhaps it wasn't necessary—there."

"Tell me," she begged briefly; and, since he was staring fixedly at the scored slopes of Jack's Mountain, he did not see that she caught her lip between her teeth to stop its trembling.

"Part of it you know: how I did what I could to bring the railroad, and how your brother's teaspoonful of nuggets was made to work a devil's miracle to hurry things along when the railroad work was stopped. But that wasn't the worst. As you know, I had a debt to pay before I could say: 'Come, little girl, let's go and get married.' So I became a stockholder in Cortwright's power company, knowing perfectly well when I consented that the hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock he gave me was a bribe—the price of my silence and non-interference with his greedy schemes."

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"But you didn't mean to keep it; you knew you *couldn't* keep it!" she broke in; and now he did not need to look to know that her lips were trembling piteously.

"I did keep it. And when the time was fully ripe I sold it back to Cortwright, or, rather, I suppose, sold it through him to some one of his wretched gulls. I meant to pay my father's debt with the money. I had the letter written and ready to mail. Then the tempter whispered that there was no hurry, that I might at least keep the money long enough to make it earn something for myself. Also, it struck me that this same devil was laughing at the spectacle of a man so completely lost to a decent sense of the fitness of things as to be planning to pay an honor debt with graft money. And so I kept it for a while."

She dropped quickly on the step beside him and a sympathetic hand crept into his.

"You kept it until the unhappy day when you gave it to my father, and he—and he threw it away." She was crying softly, but his attempt to comfort her was almost mechanical.

"Don't cry about the money. It had the devil's thumb-prints on it, and he merely claimed his own and got it." Then he went on as

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one determined to leave nothing untold. "Cortwright had bought me, and I served him as only a man in my position could serve him. I became a promoter, a 'booster,' with the others. There have been times when a word from me would have pricked the bubble. I haven't said the word; I am not saying it now. If I should say it I'd lose at a single stroke all that I have been fighting for. And I am not a good loser, Amy."

For once the keen, apprehending perception failed.

"I don't understand," she said, speaking as if she were groping in thick darkness. "I mean I don't understand the motive that could——"

He turned to her in dumb astonishment.

"I thought I had been making it plain as I went along. There has been but the one motive—a mad passion to give, give, never counting the cost. Love, as it has come to me, seems to have neither conscience nor any scruples. Nothing is too precious to be dragged to the sacrifice. You wanted something—you needed it—therefore it must be purchased for you. And the curious part of the besetment is that I have known all along that I was killing your love for me. If it wasn't quite dead before, it will die now—now

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that I have told you how I am flinging the last vestiges of uprightness and honor to the winds.”

“But how?” she queried. “You haven’t told me.”

“You said a few minutes ago that Mirapolis is dying. That is true; and it is dying a little too soon to suit the purposes of the Cortwright gang. It must be revived, and I am to revive it by persuading the department to rush the work on the dam. You would say that this would only hasten the death of the city. But the plot provides for all the contingencies. Mirapolis needs the money that would be spent here in the rushing of the government work. That was the real life-blood of the boom at first, and it could be made to serve again. Am I making it plain?”

She nodded in speechless disheartenment, and he went on:

“With the dam completed before Congress could intervene, Mirapolis would, of course, be quite dead and ready for its funeral. But if the Cortwright people industriously insist that the spending of another million or two of government money is only another plum for the city and its merchants and industries, that, notwithstanding the renewed activities, the work will still stop short of completion and the city will

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be saved by legislative enactment, the innocent sheep may be made to bleed again and the wolves will escape."

She shuddered and drew a little apart from him on the log step.

"But your part in this horrible plot, Victor?" she asked.

"It is as simple as it is despicable. In the first place, I am to set the situation before the department in such a light as to make it clearly a matter of public policy to take advantage of the present Mirapolitan crisis by pushing the work vigorously to a conclusion. After thus turning on the spigot of plenty, I am expected to crowd the pay-rolls and at the same time to hold back on the actual progress of the work. That is all—except that I am to keep my mouth shut."

"But you can't, you *can't!*" she cried. Then, in a passionate outburst: "If you should do such a thing as that, it wouldn't kill my love—I can't say that any more; but it would kill me—I shouldn't want to live!"

He looked around at her curiously, as if he were holding her at arm's length.

"Shall I do what you would have me do, Amy? Or shall I do what is best for you?" The oppos-

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ing queries were as impersonal as the arm's-length gaze. "Perhaps I might be able to patch up the ideals and stand them on their feet again—and you would pay the penalty all your life in poverty and privation, in hopes wrecked and ruined, and I with my hands tied. That is one horn of the dilemma, and the other is . . . let me tell you, Amy, it is worse than your worst fears. They will strip your father of the last thing he has on earth and bring him out in debt to them. There is one chance, and only one, so far as I can see. Let me go on as I have begun and I can pull him out."

The tears had burned out of the steadfast eyes which were resting, with the shining soul looking out through them, upon the crimsoning snow peaks of the distant Timanyonis.

"How little you know the real love!" she said slowly. "It neither weighs nor measures, nor needs to; it writes its own law in the heart, and that law can make no compromise with evil. It has but one requirement—the best good of the beloved. If the way to that end lies through sacrifice—if it asks for the life itself—so let it be. If you knew this, Victor, you would know that I would gladly lose all—the mine, my father's chance of his reward for the years of toil, even

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my brother's better chance for reformation—and count myself happy in having found a love that was too great to do evil that good might come.”

He got up stiffly and helped her to her feet and together they stood looking down upon the city of the plain, lying now under the curved, sunset shadow cast by the mighty, inbending sweep of the great dam.

“I don't know,” he said after a time. “Once, as I told you a few weeks ago, the best there was in me would have leaped up to climb the heights with you. But I've gone far since the going began. I am not sure that I could find my way back if I should try. Let's go down. I mustn't keep you out on the mountain after dark. I haven't happened to meet her, but I suppose there is a Mrs. Grundy, even in Gomorrah.”

She acquiesced in silence and they made the descent of the steep trail and walked across in the growing dusk from the foot of Chingingo to the stuccoed villa in the suburb, misers of speech, since there were no deeper depths to which the spoken word could plunge. But at the villa steps Brouillard took the girl in his arms and kissed her.

“Put me out of your mind and heart if you can,” he said tenderly, repeating the words which

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he had once sent across the distances to her in another moment of despair, and before she could answer he was gone.

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Monsieur Poudrecaulx Bongras, rotund, smiling, and roached and waxed to a broad burlesque of Second-Empire fierceness, looked in vain among his dinner guests that evening for the chief of the Reclamation Service, and Brouillard's absence held a small disappointment for the Frenchman. Rumor, the rumor which was never quiet and which could never be traced conclusively to its source, was again busy with exciting hints of a new era of prosperity about to dawn, and Bongras had hoped to drop his own little plummet of inquiry into the Reclamation Service chief.

The chance did not materialize. The lights in a certain upper office in the Niquoia Building were still turned on long after M. Poudrecaulx had given up the hope of the deep-sea sounding for that night. Some time after the lobby crowd had melted, and before the lower avenue had begun to order small-hour suppers of Bongras, the two high windows in the Niquoia Building went dark and a few minutes later the man who had spent half the night tramping the floor or sitting

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with his head in his hands at the desk in the upper room came out of the street archway and walked briskly to the telegraph office across the plaza.

"How is the line to-night, Sanford—pretty clear?" he asked of the night manager, killing time while the sleepy night receiving clerk was making his third attempt to count the words in the closely written, two-page government cipher.

"Nothing doing; a little A. P. stuff drizzling in now and then," said the manager; adding: "But that's like the poor—always with us."

"All right; there is no particular rush about this matter of mine, just so it is sure to be in the secretary's hands at the opening of business in the morning. But be careful that it goes straight—you'd better have it checked back before it is put on the through wire from Denver."

"Sure, Mr. Brouillard. What you say in this little old shack goes as it lays. We'll look out and not bull your message. Good-night."

XIX

The Sunset Gun

NOTWITHSTANDING the preliminary rumors which Bongras and many others had sought so anxiously to verify, the Mirapolitan awakening to a realization that once more the tide had turned to bring new billows of prosperity tumbling into the valley of the Niquoia came with a sudden and triumphant shock.

The first of the quickening waves fell upon the government reservation. Between sunrise and nightfall, on a day when the cloud of depression had grown black with panic threatenings, the apathy which had lately characterized the work on the great dam disappeared as if by magic. The city found its bill-boards posted with loud calls for labor; the idle mixers were put in commission; the quarries and crushers began to thunder again; and the stagings once more shook and trembled under the feet of a busy army of puddlers.

While the revival was as yet only in the embryonic period, fresh labor began to come in

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gangs and in car loads and presently by special trains. Swarming colonies of Greeks, Italians, and Bulgarians were dumped upon the city through the gate of the railroad station, and once more Chigringo Avenue at night became a cheerful Midway answering to the speech of all nations.

Change, revivification, reanimation instantly became the new order of the day; and again Mirapolis flung itself joyously into the fray, reaping where it had not sown and sowing only where the quickest crop could be gathered. For now the dullest of the reapers saw that the government work was really the Mirapolitan breath of life. Neither the quickening of the city's industries nor the restarting of the gold dredges in the Quadjenàï canals, the reopening of the Real Estate Exchange nor the Buckskin Company's sudden resumption of the profitless prospecting on Jack's Mountain served to obscure the principal fact—that without the money the Reclamation Service was disbursing the new prosperity structure would collapse like a house of cards.

This new and never-mentioned conviction wrought an eager change in men and in methods. Credit vanished and spot cash was tacitly acknowledged to be the only way to do business in a live community. Fortunes changed hands

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swiftly, as before, but now there was little bargaining and, with hot haste for the foreword, little time for it. To the Western motto of "Go to it and get the money" was added: "And don't come back without it." It was said with a laugh, but behind the laugh there was a menace.

Among the individual transformations wrought by the new conditions, the young chief of the Reclamation Service afforded the most striking example. From the morning when he had summarily cancelled the lease for the offices in the Niquoia Building and had returned his headquarters to the old log buildings on the government reservation and thence had issued his first series of orders for the resumption of full-force work on the dam and canals, those who had known him best discovered that they had not known him at all. Even to Grislow and the men of his staff he was curt, crisply mandatory, almost brutal. For one and all there was rarely anything beyond the shot-like sentence: "Drive it, men; drive it; that's what you're here for—*drive it!*"

The time he took to eat his hurried meals at Bongras's could be measured in minutes, and what hours he gave to sleep no man knew, since he was the last to leave the headquarters at night

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and the first on the work in the morning. Twice, after the renewed activities on the great wall had become a well-ordered race against time, and the concrete was pouring into the high forms in steady streams from the ranked batteries of mixers, Mr. Cortwright had sent for Brouillard, and on each occasion the messenger had gone back with the brief word: "Too busy during working hours." And when a third messenger came to inquire what Mr. Brouillard's working hours were, the equally blunt answer returned was: "All the time."

In the face of such discouragements Mr. Cortwright was constrained to pocket his dignity as mayor, as the potentate of the exchanges, and as the unquestionable master of the surly young industry captain who refused to come when he was called, and to go in person. Choosing the evening hour when he had been assured that he was likely to find Brouillard alone and at work, he crossed the boundaries of the sacred reservation and made his way to the door of the log-built mapping room.

"I came around to see what is eating you these days," was the pudgy tyrant's greeting for the young man sitting under the shaded desk lamp. "Why don't you drop in once in a while and give me the run of things?"

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"I gave your clerk the reason," said Brouillard laconically. "I'm too busy."

"The devil you are!" snapped the great man, finding the only arm chair in the room and dropping heavily into it. "Since when?"

"Since the first time you sent for me—and before."

Mr. Cortwright recovered his working geniality only with a palpable effort.

"See here, Brouillard, you know you never make any money by being short with me. Let's drop it and get down to business. What I wanted to say is that you are overdoing it; you are putting on too much steam. You've brought the boom, all right, but at the pace you're setting it won't last long enough. Are you catching on?"

"I'm listening," was the non-committal reply.

"Well, enough's enough, and too much of a good thing scalds the hog before you're ready to dress it and cut it up. It's all right for you to run men in here by the train load and scatter 'em out over your scaffolding—the more the merrier, and it's good for the town—but you needn't sweat the last shovelful of hurry out of them the way you're doing. It won't do to get your job finished too soon."

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“Before Congress convenes, you mean?” suggested Brouillard.

“That’s just what I mean. String it out. Make it last.”

Brouillard sat back in his pivot chair and began to play with the paper-knife.

“And if I don’t choose to ‘string it out’—if I even confess that I am straining every nerve to do this thing that you don’t want me to do—what then, Mr. Cortwright?”

The quiet retort jolted the stocky man in the arm chair as if it had been a blow. But he recovered quickly.

“I’ve been looking for that,” he said with a nervous twinkling of the little gray eyes. “You’ve no business being out of business, Brouillard. If you’d quit puddling sand and cement and little rocks together and strike your gait right in ten years you’d be the richest man this side of the mountains. I’ll be open-handed with you: this time you’ve got us where we can’t wiggle. We’ve *got* to have more time. How much is it going to cost us?”

Brouillard shook his head slowly.

“Odd as it may seem to you, I’m out of your market this time, Mr. Cortwright—quite out of it.”

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“Oh, no, you’re not. You’ve got property to sell—a good bit of it. We can turn it for you at a figure that will——”

“No; you are mistaken,” was the quick reply. “I have no property in Mirapolis. I am merely a squatter on government land, like every one else in the Niquoia valley.”

“For Heaven’s sake!” the promoter burst out. “What’s got into you? Don’t you go around trying to stand that corpse on its feet; it’s a dead one, I tell you! The Coronida titles are all right!”

“There are no Coronida titles. You have known it all along, and I know it—now. I have it straight from the bureau of land statistics, in a letter from a man who knows. The nearest boundary of the old Spanish grant is Latigo Peak, ten miles south of Chigringo. The department knows this and is prepared to prove it. And in the very beginning you and your associates were warned that you could not acquire homestead or other rights in the Niquoia.”

“Let it go!” snapped the gray-eyed king of the pack. “We’ve got to get out alive and we’re going to get out alive. What’s your price?”

“I have answered that question once, but I’ll make it a little plainer if you wish. It is be-

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yond your reach; if you should turn your money-coining soul into cash you couldn't pay it this time, Mr. Cortwright."

"That's guff—boy-talk—play-ranting! You want something—is it that damned Massingale business again? I don't own the railroad, but if you think I do, I'll sign anything you want to write to the traffic people. Let Massingale sell his ore and get the money for it. He'll go gamble it as he did yours."

Brouillard looked up under the shaded electric globe and his handsome face wrinkled in a sour smile.

"You are ready to let go, are you?" he said. "You are too late. Mr. Ford returned from Europe a week ago, and I have a wire saying that to-night's through freight from Brewster is chiefly made up of empty ore-cars for the 'Little Susan.'"

The sandy-gray eyes blinked at this, but Mr. Cortwright was of those who die hard.

"What I said still holds good. Massingale or his son, or both of them, will gamble the money. And if they don't, we've got 'em tied up in a hard knot on the stock proposition."

"I was coming to that," said Brouillard quietly. "For a long time you have been telling me what I should do and I have done it. Now

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I'll take my turn. You must notify your associates that the 'Little Susan' deal is off. There will be a called meeting of the directors here in this room to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, and——”

“Who calls it?” interrupted the tyrant.

“The president.”

“President nothing!” was the snorted comment. “An old, drunken gambler who hasn't got sense enough to go in when it rains! Say, Brouillard, I'll cut that pie so there'll be enough to go around the table. Just leave Massingale out of it and make up your mind that you're going to sit in with us. We've bought the mine and paid for it. I've got the stock put away where it's safe. Massingale can't touch a share of it, or vote it, either.”

Brouillard shook his head.

“You are stubbornly hard to convince, Mr. Cortwright, but I'll try one more time. You will come here to-morrow evening, with your confederates in the deal, prepared to take the money you have actually spent in betterments and prepared to release the stock. If you fail to do so you will get nothing. Is that explicit enough?”

“You're crazy!” shouted the promoter. “You talk as if there wasn't any law in this country!”

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“There isn’t—for such men as you; you and your kind put yourselves above the law. But that is neither here nor there. You don’t want to go into court with this conspiracy which you have cooked up to beat David Massingale out of his property. It’s the last thing on earth you want to do. So you’d better do the other thing—while you can.”

Mr. Cortwright sat back in his chair, and once more Brouillard saw in the sandy-gray eyes the look which had been in the son’s eyes when the derelict fought for freedom to finish killing Stephen Massingale.

“It’s a pretty dangerous thing to try to hold a man up unless you’ve got the drop on him, Brouillard,” he said significantly. “I’ve got you covered from my pocket; I’ve had you covered that way ever since you began to buck and rear on me a couple of months ago. One little wire word to Washington fixes you for good and all. If I say the word, you’ll stay on your job just as long as it will take another man to get here to supersede you.”

Brouillard laughed.

“The pocket drop is never very safe, Mr. Cortwright. You are likely to lose too much time feeling for the proper range. Then, too,

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you can never be sure that you won't miss. Also, your assumption that I'm taking an unarmed man's chance is wrong. I can kill you before you can pull the trigger of the pocket gun you speak of—kill you so dead that you won't need anything but a coroner's jury and a coffin. How long would it take you to get action in the Washington matter, do you think?"

"I've told you; you'd have just about a week longer to live, at the furthest."

"I can better that," was the cool reply. "I have asked you to do a certain thing to-morrow night. If you don't do it, the *Spot-Light* will print, on the following morning, that letter I spoke of—the letter from my friend in the bureau of land statistics. When that letter is printed everybody in Mirapolis will know that you and your accomplices are plain swindlers, amenable to the criminal law, and from that moment there will never be another real-estate transfer in the Niquoia valley."

The promoter rose slowly out of his chair and stood leaning heavily with his fat hands, palms downward, on the flat-topped desk. His cheeks were puffed out and the bitten mustaches bristled like the whiskers of a gray old leader of the timber-wolves.

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“Brouillard,” he grated huskily, “does this mean that you’re breaking with us, once for all?”

“It means more than that; it means that I have reached a point at which I am ashamed to admit that there was ever anything to break.”

“Then listen: you’ve helped this thing along as much as, or more than, anybody else in this town; and there are men right here in Mirapolis—plenty of ’em—who will kill you like a rat in a hole if you go back on them as you are threatening to. Don’t you know that?”

The younger man was balancing the paper-cutter across his finger.

“That is the least of my worries,” he answered, speaking slowly. “I am all sorts of a moral coward, I suppose; I’ve proved that often enough in the past few months, God knows. But I’m not the other kind, Mr. Cortwright.”

“Then I’ll take a hand!” snarled the tyrant at bay. “I’ll spend a million dollars, if I have to, blacklisting you from one end of this country to the other! I’ll fix it so you’ll never build anything bigger than a hog-pen again as long as you live! I’ll publish your record wherever there is a newspaper to print it!” He pounded on the desk with his fist—“I’ll do it—money can do it!

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More than that, you'll never get a smell of that Chigringo mine—you nor Dave Massingale!"

Brouillard tossed the paper-knife into a half-opened drawer and squared himself at the blotting-pad.

"That is your challenge, is it?" he said curtly. "So be it. Start your machinery. You will doubtless get me, not because you have money, but because for a time I was weak enough and wicked enough to climb down and stand on your level. But if you don't hurry, Mr. Cortwright, I'll get you first. Are you going? One thing more—and it's a kindness; get your son out of town before this Massingale matter comes up for adjustment. It will be safer."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Pretty nearly all, except to tell you that your time is growing short, and you and those who are in with you had better begin to set your houses in order. If you'll come over here at eight o'clock to-morrow night prepared to do the square thing by David Massingale, I'll withhold the publication of that letter which will stamp you and your associates as criminals before the law; but that is the only concession I shall make."

"You've got to make at least one more!" stormed the outgoing magnate. "You don't have

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to set any dates or anything of that kind for your damned drowning act!"

"In justice to a good many people who are measurably innocent, I shall have to do that very thing," returned the engineer firmly. "The notice will appear in to-morrow's *Spot-Light*."

It was the final straw in the stocky promoter's crushing wrath burden. His fat face turned purple, and for a second or two he clawed the air, gasping for breath. Brouillard sat back in his chair, waiting for the volcanic upheaval. But it did not come. When he had regained a measure of self-control, Mr. Cortwright turned slowly and went out without a word, stumbling over the threshold and slamming the door heavily as he disappeared.

For a time after the promoter's wordless departure Brouillard sat at his desk writing steadily. When the last of the memorandum sheets was filled he found his hat and street coat and left the office. Ten minutes later he had penetrated to the dusty den on the second floor of the *Spot-Light* office where Harlan was grinding copy for his paper. Brouillard took a chair at the desk end and laid the sheets of pencilled government paper under the editor's eyes.

Harlan's lean, fine-lined face was a study in

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changing emotions as he read. But at the end there was an aggrieved look in his eyes, mirroring the poignant regret of a newsman who has found a priceless story which he dares not use.

"It's ripping," he sighed, "the biggest piece of fireworks a poor devil of a newspaper man ever had a chance to touch off. But, of course, I can't print it."

"Why 'of course'?"

"For the same reason that a sane man doesn't peek down the muzzle of a loaded gun when he is monkeying with the trigger. I want to live a little while longer."

Brouillard looked relieved.

"I thought, perhaps, it was on account of your investments," he said.

"Not at the present writing," amended Harlan with a grin. "I got a case of cold feet when we had that little let-up a while back, and when the market opened I cleaned up and sent the sure-enough little round dollars home to Ohio."

"And still you won't print this?"

"I'd like to; you don't know how much I'd like to. But they'd hang me and sack the shop. I shouldn't blame 'em. If what you have said here ever gets into cold type, it's good-by Mirapolis. Why, Brouillard, the whole United States

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would rise up and tell us to get off the map. You've made us look like thirty cents trying to block the wheels of a million dollars—and that is about the real size of it, I guess.”

“Then it is your opinion that if this were printed it would do the business?”

“There isn't the slightest doubt about it.”

“Thank you, Harlan, that is what I wanted to find out—if I had made it strong enough. It'll be printed. I'll put it on the wires to the Associated Press. I was merely giving you the first hack at it.”

“Gee—gosh! hold on a minute!” exclaimed the newsman, jumping up and snapping his fingers. “If I weren't such a dod-gasted coward! Let me run in a few ‘It is alleged's’, and I'll chance it.”

“No; it goes as it lies. There are no allegations. It is merely a string of cold facts, as you very well know. Print it if you like, and I'll see to it that they don't hang you or loot the office. I have two hundred of the safest men on my force under arms to-night, and we'll take care of you. I'm in this thing for blood, Harlan, and when I get through, this little obstruction in the way of progress that Cortwright and his crowd planned, and that you and I and a lot of other

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fools and knaves helped to build, will be cooling itself under two hundred feet of water."

"Good Lord!" said the editor, still unable to compass the barbaric suddenness of it. Then he ran his eye over the scratch sheets again. "Does this formal notice that the waste-gates will be closed three weeks from to-morrow go as it stands?" he inquired.

"It does. I have the department's authority. You know as well as I do that unless a fixed day is set there will be no move made. We are all trespassers here, and we've been warned off. That's all there is to it. And if we can't get our little belongings up into the hills in three weeks it's our loss; we had no business bringing them here."

The editor looked up with the light of a new discovery in his eyes. "You say 'we' and 'our.' That reminds me; Garner told me no longer ago than this afternoon that you are on record for something like a hundred thousand dollars' worth of choice Mirapolis front feet. How about that?"

Brouillard's smile was quite heart-whole.

"I've kept my salary in a separate pocket, Harlan. Besides that—well, I came here with nothing and I shall go away with nothing. The rest of it was all stage money."

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“Say—by hen!” ejaculated the owner of the *Spot-Light*. Then, smiting the desk: “You ought to let me print that. I’d run it in red head-lines across the top of the front page. But, of course, you won’t. . . . Well, here goes for the fireworks and a chance of a soaped rope.” And he pushed the bell button for the copy boy.

Late as it was when he left the *Spot-Light* office, Brouillard waited on the corner for a Quadjenâï car, and, catching one, he was presently whisked out to the ornate villa in the eastern suburb. There was a light in the hall and another in a room to the rear, and it was Amy who answered his touch of the bell-push.

“No, I can’t stay,” he said, when she asked him in. “But I had to come, if it was only for a minute. The deed is done. I’ve had my next-to-the-last round-up with Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright, and to-morrow’s *Spot-Light* will fire the sunset gun for Mirapolis. Is your father here?”

“No. He and Stevie are up at the mine. I am looking for them on every car.”

“When they come, tell your father it’s time to hike. Are you all packed?”

She nodded. “Everything is ready.”

“All right. Three of my teams will be here by midnight, at the latest. The drivers and helpers

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will be good men and you can trust them. Don't let anything interfere with your getting safely up to the mountain to-night. There'll be warm times in Gomorrah from this on and I want a free hand—which I shouldn't have with you here."

"Oh, I'm glad, glad!—and I'm just as scared as I can be!" she gasped with true feminine inconsistency. "They will single you out first; what if I am sending you to your death, Victor! Oh, please don't go and break my heart the other way across by getting killed!"

He drew a deep breath and laughed.

"You don't know how good it sounds to hear you say that—and say it in that way. I sha'n't be reckless. But I'm going to bring J. Wesley and his crowd to book—they've got to go, and they've got to turn the 'Little Susan' loose."

"They will never do that," she said sadly.

"I'll make them; you wait and see."

She looked up with the violet eyes kindling.

"I told you once that you could do anything you wanted to—if you only wanted to hard enough. I believed it then; I believe it now."

"No," he denied with a smile that was half sorrowful, "I can't make two hills without a valley between them. I've chased down the back track like a little man,—for love's sake, Amy,—

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and I've burned all the bridges behind me as I ran; namely, the sham deeds to the pieces of reservoir bottom I'd been buying. But when it is all over I shall be just where I was when we began—exactly one hundred thousand dollars short of being able to say: 'Come, girl, let's go and get married.'"

"But father owes you a hundred thousand dollars," she said quickly.

"Not in a hundred thousand years, O most inconsistent of women! Didn't we agree that that money was poisoned? It was the purchase price of an immortal soul, and I wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs. That is why your father couldn't use it; it belonged to the devil and the devil wanted it back."

"Father won't take that view of it," she protested.

"Then you'll have to help me to bully him, that's all. But I must go and relieve Grizzly, who is doing guard duty at the mixers. . . . Tell your father—no, that isn't what I meant to say, it's this—" and his arms went suddenly across the hundred-thousand-dollar chasm.

.
A little deeper in the night, when he was tramping back through the sleeping town and up to

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the mixers on the high bench of Jack's Mountain, Brouillard knew well enough that he was walking over a thin-crustcd crater of volcanic possibilities. But to a man in the seventh heaven of love acknowledged without shame, and equally without shame returned,—nay, with the first passionate kiss of the love still tingling on his lips,—volcanic possibilities, or even the volcanoes themselves, figure lightly, indeed.

XX

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IN the Yellowstone National Park there is an apparently bottomless pit which can be instantly transformed into a spouting, roaring Vesuvius of boiling water by the simple expedient of dropping a bar of soap into it.

The *Spot-Light* went to press at three o'clock. By the earliest graying of dawn, and long before the sun had shown itself above the eastern Timanyonis, Brouillard's bar of soap was melting and the Mirapolitan under-depths were beginning to heave. Like wild-fire, the news spread from lip to lip and street to street, and by sunrise the geyser was retching and vomiting, belching débris of cries and maledictions, and pouring excited and riotous crowds into Chigringo Avenue.

Most naturally, the *Spot-Light* office was the first point of attack, and Harlan suffered loss, though it was inconsiderable. At the battering down of the doors the angry mob found itself confronting the young Reclamation Service chief

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and four members of his staff, all armed. Brouillard spoke briefly and to the point.

“I am the man who wrote that article you’ve been reading, and Mr. Harlan printed it as a matter of news. If you have anything to say to me you know where to find me. Now, move on and let Mr. Harlan’s property alone or somebody will get hurt.”

Nobody stayed to press the argument at the moment. An early-morning mob is proverbially incoherent and incohesive; and, besides, loaded Winchesters in the hands of five determined men are apt to have an eloquence which is more or less convincing.

But with the opening of business the geyser spouted again. The exchanges were mobbed by eager sellers, each frenzied struggler hoping against hope that he might find some one simple enough to buy. At ten o’clock the bank closed—“Temporarily,” the placard notice said. But there were plenty to believe that it would never open again.

By noon the trading panic had exhausted itself a little, though the lobby and café of the Metropole were crowded, and anxious groups quickly formed around any nucleus of rumor or gossip in the streets.

Between one and two o’clock, while Brouillard,

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Leshington, and Anson were hastily eating a luncheon sent over to the mapping room from Bongras's, Harlan drifted in.

"Spill your news," commanded Leshington gruffly. "What's doing, and who's doing it?"

"Nobody, and nothing much," said Harlan, answering the two queries as one. "The town is falling apart like a bunch of sand and the get-away has set in. Two full trains went east this forenoon, and two more are scheduled for this afternoon if the railroad people can get the cars here."

"Good-by, little girl, good-by," hummed Grislow, entering in time to hear the report of the flight.

But Leshington was shaking his big head moodily. "Laugh about it if you can, but it's no joke," he growled. "When the froth is blown away and the bubbles quit rising, there are going to be some mighty bitter settlings left in the bottom of the stein."

"You're right, Leshington," said Harlan, gravely. "What we're seeing now is only the shocked surprise of it—as when a man says 'Ouch!' before he realizes that the dog which has bitten him has a well-developed case of rabies. We'll come to the hydrophobic stage later on."

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By nightfall of this first day the editor's ominous prophecy seemed about to reach its fulfillment. The Avenue was crowded again and the din and clamor was the roar of a mob infuriated. Brouillard and Leshington had just returned from posting a company of the workmen guard at the mixers and crushers, when Grislow, who had been scouting on the Avenue, came in.

"Harmless enough, yet," he reported. "It's only some more of the get-away that Harlan was describing. Just the same, it's something awful. People are fairly climbing over one another on the road up the hill to the station—with no possible hope of getting a train before some time tomorrow. Teamsters are charging twenty-five dollars a load for moving stuff that won't find cars for a week, and they're scarce at the price."

Leshington, who was not normally a profane man, opened his mouth and said things.

"If the Cortwright crowd had one man in it with a single idea beyond saving his own miserable stake!" he stormed. "What are the spellbinders doing, Grizzy?"

The hydrographer grinned. "Cortwright and a chosen few left this afternoon, hotfoot, for Washington, to get the government to interfere.

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That's the story they'd like to have the people believe. But the fact is, they ran away from Judge Lynch."

"Yes; I think I see 'em coming back—not!" snorted the first assistant. Then to Brouillard: "That puts it up to us from this out. Is there anything we can do?"

Brouillard shook his head. "I don't want to stop the retreat. I've heard from President Ford. The entire Western Division will hustle the business of emptying the town, and the quicker it is done the sooner it will be over."

For a tumultuous week the flight from the doomed city went on, and the overtaxed single-track railroad wrought miracles of transportation. Not until the second week did the idea of material salvage take root, but, once started, it grew like Jonah's gourd. Hundreds of wrecking crews were formed. Plants were emptied, and the machinery was shipped as it stood. Houses and business blocks were gutted of everything that could be carried off and crowded into freight-cars. And, most wonderful of all, cars were found and furnished almost as fast as they could be loaded.

But the second week was not without incidents of another sort. Twice Brouillard had been shot at—once in the dark as he was entering the

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mapping room, and again in broad day when he was crossing the Avenue to Bongras's. The second attempt was made by the broker Garner, whom excitement or loss, or both, had driven crazy. The young engineer did nothing in either case save to see to it that Garner was sent to his friends in Kansas City. But when, two nights later, an attempt was made to dynamite the great dam, he covered the bill-boards with warning posters. Outsiders found within the Reclamation Service picket-lines after dark would be held as intentional criminals and dealt with accordingly.

"It begins to look a little better," said Anson on the day in the third week when the army of government laborers began to strip the final forms from the top of the great wall which now united the two mountain shoulders and completely overshadowed and dominated the dismantled town. "If the Avenue would only take its hunch and go, the agony would be over."

But Brouillard was dubious. The Avenue, more particularly the lower Avenue, constituted the dregs. Bongras, whom Brouillard had promised to indemnify, stayed; some of the shopkeepers stayed for the chance of squeezing the final trading dollar out of the government employees; the saloon-keepers stayed to a man, and the dives

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were still running full blast—chiefly now on the wages of the government force.

“It will be worse before it is better,” was the young chief’s prediction, and the foreboding verified itself that night. Looting of a more or less brazen sort had been going on from the first, and by nine o’clock of the night of prediction a loosely organized mob of drink-maddened terrorists was drifting from street to street, and there were violence and incendiarism to follow.

Though the property destruction mattered little, the anarchy it was breeding had to be controlled. Brouillard and Leshington got out their reserve force and did what they could to restore some semblance of order. It was little enough; and by ten o’clock the amateur policing of the city had reduced itself to a double guarding of the dam and the machinery, and a cordoning of the Metropole, the Reclamation Service buildings, and the *Spot-Light* office. For Harlan, the dash of sporting blood in his veins asserting itself, still stayed on and continued to issue his paper.

“I said I wanted to be in at the death, and for a few minutes to-night I thought I was going to be,” he told Brouillard, when the engineer had posted his guards and had climbed the stair to the editorial office. Then he asked a question:

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“When is this little hell-on-earth going to be finally extinguished, Victor?”

Instead of answering, Brouillard put a question of his own: “Did you know that Cortwright and Schermerhorn and Judge Williams came back this evening, Harlan?”

“I did,” said the newspaper man. “They are registered at the Metropole as large as life. And Miss Genevieve and Lord Falkland and Cortwright’s ugly duckling of a son came with them. What’s up?”

“That is what I’d like to know. There’s a bunch of strangers at the Metropole, too, a sheriff’s posse, Poodles thinks; at least, there is a deputy from Red Butte with the crowd.”

Harlan tilted back in his chair and scanned the ceiling reflectively. “This thing is getting on my nerve, old man. I wish we could clean the slate and all go home.”

“It is going to be cleaned. Notices will be posted to-morrow warning everybody that the waste-gates will be closed promptly on the date advertised.”

“When is it? Things have been revolving too rapidly to let me remember such a trivial item as a date.”

“It is the day after to-morrow, at noon.”

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The owner of the *Spot-Light* nodded. "Let her go, Gallagher. I've got everything on skids, even the presses. *Au revoir*—or perhaps one should say, *Au reservoir*."

Fresh shoutings and a crackling of pistols arose in the direction of the plaza, and Brouillard got up and went to a window. The red glow of other house burnings loomed against the sombre background of Jack's Mountain.

"Senseless savages!" he muttered, and then went back to the editor. "I don't like this Cortwright reappearance, Harlan. I wish I knew what it means."

"Let's see," said the newsman thoughtfully; "what is there worth taking that they didn't take in the *sauve qui peut*? By Jove—say! Did old David Massingale get out of J. Wesley's clutches before the lightning struck?"

"I wish I could say 'Yes', and be sure of it," was the sober reply. "You knew about the thieving stock deal, or what you didn't know I told you. Well, I had Massingale, as president, call a meeting of directors—which never met. Afterward, acting under legal advice, he went on working the mine, and he's been working it ever since, shipping a good bit of ore now and then, when he could squeeze it in between the get-

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away trains. Of course, there is bound to be a future of some sort; but that is the present condition of affairs."

"How about those notes in the bank? Wasn't Massingale personally involved in some way?"

Brouillard bounded out of his chair as if the question had been a point-blank pistol-shot.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed. "To-day's the day! In the hustle I had forgotten it, and I'll bet old David has—if he hasn't simply ignored it. That accounts for the reunion at the Metropole!"

"Don't worry," said Harlan easily. "The bank has gone, vanished, shut up shop. At the end of the ends, I suppose, they can make David pay; but they can't very well cinch him for not meeting his notes on the dot."

"Massingale doesn't really owe them anything that he can't pay," Brouillard asserted. "By wiring and writing and digging up figures, we found that the capitalizing stockholders, otherwise J. Wesley Cortwright, and possibly Schermerhorn, have actually invested fifty-two thousand dollars, or, rather, that amount of Massingale's loan has been expended in equipment and pay-rolls. Three weeks ago the old man got the smelter superintendent over here from Red Butte,

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and arranged for an advance of fifty-two thousand dollars on the ore in stock, the money to be paid when the first train of ore-cars should be on the way in. It was paid promptly in New York exchange, and Massingale indorsed the draft over to me to be used in the directors' meeting, which was never held."

"Well?" said the editor.

Brouillard took a pacing turn up the long, narrow room, and when he came back he said: "I guess I'm only half reformed, after all, Harlan. I'd give a year or so out of my natural life if I had a grip on Cortwright that would enable me to go across to Bongras's and choke a little justice out of him."

"Go over and flash Massingale's fifty-two thousand dollars at 'em. They'll turn loose. I'll bet a yellow cur worth fifteen cents that they're wishing there was a train out of this little section of Sheol right now. Hear that!"

The crash of an explosion rattled the windows, and the red loom on the Jack's Mountain side of the town leaped up and became a momentary glare. The fell spirit of destruction, of objectless wreck and ruin, was abroad, and Brouillard turned to the stairway door.

"I'll have to be making the rounds again," he

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said. "The Greeks and Italians are too excitable to stand much of this. Take care of yourself; I'll leave Grif and a dozen of the trusties to look after the shop."

When he reached the sidewalk the upper Avenue was practically deserted. But in the eastern residence district, and well around to the north, new storm-centres were marked by the increasing number of fires. Brouillard stopped and faced toward the distant and invisible Timanyonis. A chill autumn breeze was sweeping down from the heights and the blockading wall of the great dam turned it into eddies and dust-pillared whirls dancing in the empty street.

Young Griffith sauntered up with his Winchester in the hollow of his arm.

"Anything new?" he asked.

"No," said Brouillard. "I was just thinking that a little wind would go a long way to-night, with these crazy house-burners loose on the town." Then he turned and walked rapidly to the government headquarters, passed the sentry at the door of the mapping room; and out of the fire-proof vault where the drawings and blue-print duplicates were kept took a small tin despatch-box.

He had opened the box and had transferred a

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slip of paper from it to the leather-covered pocket field book which served him for a wallet, when there was a stir at the door and Castner hurried in, looking less the clergyman than the hard-working peace-officer.

“More bedlam,” he announced. “I want Gassman or Handley and twenty or thirty good men. The mob has gone from wrecking and burning to murdering. ‘Pegleg’ John was beaten to death in front of his saloon a few minutes ago. It is working this way. There were three fires in the plaza as I came through.”

“See Grislow at the commissary and tell him I sent you,” said the chief. “I’d go with you, but I’m due at the Metropole.”

“Good. Then Miss Amy got word to you? I was just about to deliver her message.”

“Miss Massingale? Where is she, and what was the message?” demanded Brouillard.

“Then you haven’t heard? The ‘Little Susan’ is in the hands of a sheriff’s posse, and David Massingale is under arrest on some trumped-up charge—selling ore for his individual account, or something of that sort. Miss Amy didn’t go into particulars, but she told me that she had heard the sheriff say it was a penitentiary offence.”

“But where is she now?” stormed Brouillard.

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“Over at the hotel. I supposed you knew; you said you were going there.”

Brouillard snatched up the despatch-box and flung it into the fire-proof. While he was locking the door Castner went in search of Grislow, and when Brouillard faced about, another man stood in the missionary's place by the mapping table. It was Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright.

The gray-faced promoter had lost something of his old-time jaunty assurance, and he was evidently well shaken and unnerved by the sights and sounds of the night of terror. The sandy-gray eyes advertised it as well as the fat hands, which would not keep still.

“I didn't think I'd have to ask a favor of you again, Brouillard, but needs must when the devil drives,” he began, with an attempted assumption of the former manner. “We didn't know—the newspapers didn't tell us anything about this frightful state of affairs, and——”

Brouillard had suddenly lost his desire to hurry.

“Sit down, Mr. Cortwright,” he said. “I was just coming over to see you—to congratulate you and Mr. Schermerhorn on your return to Mirapolis. We have certainly missed the mayor, not to mention the president of the common council.”

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“Of course—yes,” was the hurried rejoinder. “But that’s all over. You said you’d get us, and you did. I don’t bear malice. If you had given me one more day I’d have got you; the stuff that would have broken your neck with the Washington people was all written and ready to put on the wires. But that’s past and gone, and the next thing is something else. There is a lot of money and securities locked up in the Niquoia Bank vault. We’ve come to clean up, and we brought a few peace officers along from Red Butte for a guard. The miserable scoundrels are scared stiff; they won’t stir out of the hotel. Bongras tells me you’ve got your force organized and armed—can’t you lend us fifty or a hundred huskies to keep the mob off while we open that bank vault?”

Brouillard’s black eyes snapped, and the blood danced in his veins. The opportunity for which he would have bartered Ormus treasure had come to him—was begging him to use it.

“I certainly can,” he admitted, answering the eager question and emphasizing the potentiality.

“But will you? that’s the point. We’ll make it worth your while. For God’s sake, don’t say no, Brouillard! There’s pretty well up to a million in that vault, counting odds and ends and

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left-overs. Schermerhorn oughtn't to have left it. I thought he had sense enough to stay and see it taken care of. But now——”

“But now the mob is very likely to wreck the building and dynamite the vault, you were going to say. I think it is more than likely, Mr. Cortwright, and I wonder that it hasn't been done before this. It would have been done if the rioters had had any idea that you'd left anything worth taking. And it would probably wreck you and Mr. Schermerhorn if it should get hold of you; you've both been burned in effigy half a dozen times since you ran away.”

“Oh, good Lord!” shuddered the magnate. “Make it two hundred of your men, and let's hurry. You won't turn us down on this, Brouillard?”

“No. It is no part of our duty to go and keep the mob off while you save your stealings, but we'll do it. And from the noise they are making down that way, I think you are wise in suggesting haste. But first there is a question of common justice to be settled. An hour ago, or such a matter, you sent a part of your sheriff's posse up to seize the ‘Little Susan’ and to arrest David Massingale——”

“It's—it's a lie!” stammered Cortwright.

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"Somebody has been trying to backcap me to you!"

Brouillard looked up, frowning.

"You are a good bit older man than I am, Mr. Cortwright, and I sha'n't punch your head. But you'll know why I ought to when I tell you that my informant is Miss Amy Massingale. What have you done with old David?"

The man who had lost his knack of bluffing came down and stayed down.

"He—he's over at the hotel," he stammered.

"Under guard?"

"Well—y-yes."

Brouillard pointed to the telephone on the wall.

"Go and call up your crowd and get it here. Tell Judge Williams to bring the stock he is holding, and Schermerhorn to bring the Massingale notes, and your man Jackson to bring the stock-book. We'll have that directors' meeting that was called, and wasn't held, three weeks ago."

"Oh, good Heavens!" protested the millionaire, "put it off—for God's sake, put it off! It will be wasting time that may be worth a thousand dollars a minute!"

"You are wasting some of the thousand-dollar minutes right now," was the cool reply, and the engineer turned to his desk and squared himself

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as if he were going to work on a bunch of foremen's reports.

It was a crude little expedient, but it sufficed. Cortwright tramped to the 'phone and cursed and swore at it until he had his man at the other end of the wire. The man was the lawyer, as it appeared, and Cortwright abused him spitefully.

"You've balled it—balled it beautifully!" he shouted. "Come over here to Brouillard's office and bring Schermerhorn and the stock and the notes and Jackson and the secretary's books and Massingale and your infernal self! Get a move, and get it quick! We stand to lose the whole loaf because you had to butt in and sweep up the crumbs first!"

When the procession arrived, as it did in an incredibly short time, Brouillard laid down the law.

"We don't need these," he said curtly, indicating the two deputies who came to bring David Massingale. And when they were gone: "Now, gentlemen, get to work and do business, and the less time you waste the better chance there will be for your bank salvage. Three requirements I make: you will turn over the stock, putting Mr. Massingale in possession of his mine, without encumbrance; you will cancel and surrender his

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notes to the bank; and you will give him a document, signed by all of you, acknowledging the payment in full of all claims, past or pending. While you are straightening things out, I'll ring up the yards and rally your guard."

Cortwright turned on the lawyer. "You hear what Brouillard says; fix it, and do it suddenly."

It was done almost before Brouillard had made Leshington, in charge at the yards, understand what was wanted.

"Now a note to your man at the mine to make him let go without putting us to the trouble of throwing him over the dump," said the engineer, when he had looked over the stock transfers, examined the cancelled notes, and read and witnessed the signatures on the receipt in full.

Cortwright nodded to the lawyer, and when Williams began to write again the king of the promoters turned upon Brouillard with a savage sneer.

"Once more you've had your price," he snarled bitterly. "You and the old man have bilked us out of what we spent on the mine. But we'll call it an even break if you'll hurry that gang of huskies."

"We'll call it an even break when it is one," retorted Brouillard; and after he had gathered

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up the papers he took the New York check from his pocketbook, indorsed it, and handed it to Cortwright. "That is what was spent out of the hundred thousand dollars you had Mr. Massingale charged with, as nearly as we can ascertain. Take it and take care of it; it's real money."

He had turned again to the telephone to hurry Leshington, had rung the call, and was chuckling grimly over the collapse of the four men at the end of the mapping table as they fingered the slip of money paper. Suddenly it was borne in upon him that there was trouble of some sort at the door—there were curses, a blow, a mad rush; then. . . . It was Stephen Massingale who had fought his way past the door-guarding sentry and stood blinking at the group at the far end of the mapping board.

"You're the houn' dog I'm lookin' for!" he raged, singling out Cortwright when the dazzle of the electrics permitted him to see. "You'll rob an old man first, and then call him a thief and set the sheriff on him, will you——?"

Massingale's pistol was dropping to the firing level when Brouillard flung away the telephone ear-piece and got between. Afterward there was a crash like a collision of worlds, a whirling, dancing medley of colored lights fading to gray and

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then to darkness, and the engineer went down with the avenger of wrongs tightly locked in his arms.

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After the period of darkness had passed and Brouillard opened his eyes again upon the world of things as they are, he had a confused idea that he had overslept shamefully and that the indulgence had given him a bad headache.

The next thought was that the headache was responsible for a set of singular hallucinations. His blanket bunk in the sleeping shack seemed to have transformed itself into a white bed with pillows and snowy sheets, and the bed was drawn up beside an open window through which he could look out, or seem to look out, upon a vast sea dimpling in the breeze and reflecting the sunshine so brightly that it made his headache a darting agony.

When he turned his face to escape the blinding glare of the sun on the sea the hallucinations became soothingly comforting, not to say ecstatic. Some one was sitting on the edge of the bed; a cool hand was laid on his forehead; and when he could again see straight he found himself looking up into a pair of violet eyes in which the tears were trembling.



Brouillard got between.

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“You are Amy—and this is that other world you used to talk about, isn’t it?” he asked feebly.

The cool hand slipped from his forehead to his lips, as if to warn him that he must not talk, and he went through the motions of kissing it. When it was withdrawn he broke the silent prohibition promptly.

“The way to keep me from talking is to do it all yourself; what happened to me last night?”

She shook her head sorrowfully.

“The ‘last night’ you mean was three weeks ago. Stevie was trying to shoot Mr. Cortwright in your office and you got between them. Do you remember that?”

“Perfectly,” he said. “But it still seems as if it were only last night. Where am I now?—not that it makes any difference, so long as I’m with you.”

“You are at home—our home; at the ‘Little Susan.’ Mr. Leshington had the men carry you up here, and Mr. Ford ran a special train all the way from Denver with the doctors. Stevie’s bullet struck you in the head, and—and we all thought you were going to die.”

“I’m not,” he asserted, in feebly desperate determination. “I’m going to live and get to

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work and earn a hundred thousand dollars, so I can say: 'Come, little girl——'"

Again the restraining hand was laid upon his lips, and again he went through the motions of kissing it.

"You *mustn't* talk!" she insisted. "You said you'd let me." And when he made the sign of acquiescence, she went on: "At first the doctors wouldn't give us any hope at all; they said you might live, but you'd—you'd never—never remember—never have your reason again. But yesterday——"

"Please!" he pleaded. "That's more than enough about me. I want to know what happened."

"That night, you mean? All the things that you had planned for. Father got the mine back, and Mr. Leshington and the others got the riot quelled after about half of the city was burned."

"But Cortwright and Schermerhorn—I promised them——"

"Mr. Leshington carried out your promise and helped them get the money out of the bank vault before the mob sacked the Niquoia Building and dynamited it. But at the hotel they were arrested on the order of the bank examiner, and everything was taken away from them. We

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haven't heard yet what is going to be done with them."

"And Gomorrah?" he asked.

She slipped an arm under his shoulders and raised him so he could look out upon the mountain-girt sea dimpling under the morning breeze.

"There is where it was," she said soberly, "where it was, and is not, and never will be again, thank God! Mr. Leshington waited until everybody had escaped, and then he shut the waste-way gates."

Brouillard sank back upon the pillows of comfort and closed his eyes.

"Then it's all up to me and the hundred thousand," he whispered. "And I'll get it . . . honestly, this time."

The violet eyes were smiling when he looked into them again.

"Is she—the one incomparable she—worth it, Victor?"

"Her price is above rubies, as I told you once a long time ago."

"You wouldn't let pride—a false pride—stand in the way of her happiness?"

"I haven't any; her love has made me very humble and—and good, Amy, dear. Don't laugh: it's the only word; I'm just starving and thirst-

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ing after righteousness enough to be half-way worthy of her.”

“Then I’ll tell you something else that has happened. Father and Stevie have reorganized the ‘Little Susan’ Mining Company, dividing the stock into four equal parts—one for each of us. You must take your share, Victor. It will break father’s heart if you don’t. He says you got it back for him after it was hopelessly lost, and that is true.”

He had closed his eyes again, and what he said seemed totally irrelevant.

“‘And after the man had climbed the fourth mountain through all its seven stages, he saw a bright light, and it blinded him so that he stumbled and fell, and a great darkness rose up to make the light seem far beyond his reach. Then the light came near, and he saw that it was Love, and that the darkness was in his own soul.’ . . . Kiss me, Amy, girl, and then go and tell your father that he is a simple-hearted old spendthrift, and I love him. And if you could wire Castner, and tell him to bring a license along——”

“O boy—foolish boy!” she said. “Wait: when you are well and strong again. . . .”

But she did not make him wait for the first of the askings; and after a healing silence had fallen

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to show the needlessness of speech between those who have come through darkness into light, he fell asleep again, perhaps to dream that the quieting hand upon his forehead was the touch of Love, angel of the bright and shining way, summoning him to rise up and go forward as a soul set free to meet the dawning day of fruition.

THE END

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