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GENERAL AGENTS FOR CANADA.

The Price of Failure

(Continued from page 9.)

and knelt by the bed, taking the hands of the sleeping baby in her own, clasping them so, the four hands together. She said no word, but she felt vaguely that the clasped hands, her own and little Bob's, were crying aloud to God the prayer her lips could not frame.

It was a long time before the telephone rang. She was at the foot of the stairs when Mary lifted down the receiver.

"Yes, speaking."

"Yes, Mrs. Wilcox."

"Surely not!"

"Have they stopped trying to save it?"

"Why didn't Bob telephone?"

"Oh, what are they doing?"

"Do they really think there is danger for the bridge?"

"Yes, of course, he would know best."

"Oh, are they—are the men working in the dark?"

"Oh."

"Yes."

"Thank you for 'phoning."

"Not until morning, he said? Thanks, Mrs. Wilcox."

"A big loss for you, I'm afraid, and for the town. I'm so sorry. Goodbye."

Gracia came forward.

"They have stopped trying to save the big dam," Mary said. "Twas Mrs. Wilcox. Our boys are both at the bridge. The electric lights are all out, because part of the dam is swept away. The men are working with lanterns. But, she said, nobody except Jeff thought the bridge could possibly go."

"Mary," breathed Gracia, "is Jeffrey—is he—all right?"

"Yes, both of them," Mary answered reassuringly. "Don't worry, Gracia, Bob said he would come back this morning. Let's both try to sleep now."

Gracia went back upstairs. An hour later she came down again to the deserted kitchen. There was no light save that of the dying fire, and she crouched in front of it, trying to shut out from her thoughts the steady beat of the rain.

Morning—grey twilight—brought Bob alone. It was Gracia who met him first, her eyes questioning.

"Everybody all right," he said, gayly. "Have you two women been worrying? And mother, too? That is a shame. I should think you would have known better, mother, at your age." He stooped to kiss her.

"No, Jeff won't be back till later; said to tell you he was all right. No, he isn't; really, Gracia. There is no danger. No! Of course not! What would Jeff say to me if I took you out in this? And there isn't anything to do—or to see."

"I'd like just to watch—Jeff. Oh, I know you think I'm foolish—but out here I'm so afraid. If I was just there I feel as if nothing could happen to him. You have all, each other; but I have nobody but Jeffrey—"

She turned away to the window.

"Let the child go, Bob," said his mother. "Let her go. Once she has seen it all she'll be less anxious."

So an hour later Gracia stood on the rain-drenched bank looking down at the busy scene below. She was one of a crowd of village people who, undeterred by the rain, had chosen this point of vantage to watch the efforts toward saving the new bridge. As Mrs. Wilcox said, no one except the engineer seemed to think there was any great danger. The big cement abutments seemed strong enough to withstand any force which even the Charteris might hurl against it. And apparently the Charteris was doing its worst.

Lying piled against the abutment at the further bank lay much of the debris of both dams, mixed with big timbers washed out from the upper bridges and from the dams themselves. Part of the big cement dam above the bridge, almost half, remained intact; and around this the river foamed, tearing furiously into the opposite bank. Already it had worn deeply into its bed. The standing portion of the dam was high above it, and, deflected by the opposition which this offered, the river was cutting for itself a new channel close to the left bank and sweeping directly down on the great abutment of the new bridge.

Efforts had been made to turn the waters to their old channel by building out a sort of breakwater; but though at first success had seemed to crown these efforts, the force of the flood and the shock of the huge timbers sweeping down against it had finally carried away the puny obstruction. Big timbers, caught against the abutment and jammed there, were holding back the great mass of debris—broken blocks of cement washed out from the foundation of the dam, huge bridge timbers, stumps swept out from the flats above, the great pile-driver that had been used in building the upper dam, saw-logs stranded since last spring on the river banks, the remains of Widow Emmons' little cottage—the river flung them all ruthlessly in one great heap, wedged and jammed against the huge abutment.

Gracia looked at it with growing excitement—the plunging waters racing past below her, the shouts of the men barely heard above their menacing roar, the whirling driftwood carried so rapidly past or tossed to the great pile. A moment before she had seen Jeffrey standing on the bank giving directions; now he had gone, she could not see him.

"Hello, Gracia!"

He was wet and tired-looking, and lines of anxiety marked his face. But he came up from his night's work, unsuccessful, yet undismayed, finding in her presence the new courage, the new energy that he needed. He shoved his wet cap back from his forehead.

"Just a minute to see you in," he said. "Hawkins has gone for dynamite. We're going to try to break up the jam by blasting—a small charge, of course, just enough to move it."

It was characteristic of their comradeship that he broke immediately into the subject uppermost in his mind. He had accepted her presence as a matter of course.

"No, it's not the abutment; it's the rock itself—the foundation—we are afraid for. There's quicksand underneath and with this added weight—we don't dare to let it stay. There comes Hawkins now. You'll be quite safe here from flying timbers when the charge is exploded; you need not move."

GRACIA watched him making his way down the bank to the men below, watched him clamber out on the mass of debris with Hawkins; the mass as she watched seemed to give and sink slightly in on itself. The men rose from their crouching position, turned and came hastily to the bank. Even as she reflected how quickly the charge had been laid the whole mass seemed to tip and move toward the river centre, and at the same time the huge abutment swayed unsteadily, then with a resounding roar and a crash of splintering timbers fell far outward toward the centre of the stream. The straining steel and timbers of the bridge snapped under the stress. The great Charteris River Bridge was down.

Connelly sat at the desk in the dismal little city office, papers pushed aside, and gazed fixedly at the space of blank wall against which its windows opened. The roar of traffic came up from the street below like the Charteris in flood. He found himself speculating again as to any possible chances of saving his bridge. Such a catastrophe could have happened only once. If he had had the wisdom to foresee the breaking of the big dam—if—

He roused himself to meet a newcomer, warned by footsteps approaching heavily along the corridor, and as the door swung open sprang to his feet, holding out his hands in a boyish gesture of greeting.

"McKilligen!" he cried. "You! I thought you were in British Columbia."

"So I am. I'm here for two days or more, just."

He glanced the younger man over with keen eyes.

"Sit down, Pat."

The two men sat down at the desk, McKilligen noting as he did so the wearied droop of Connelly's whole figure.

"I got your bad news on the car comin' in," he said. "We'd been hearin' about your bridge. The Main an' Crompt-