

sioners, talking to Brent. The contractor looked up as Haskell was announced; his eyes narrowed to a slit, his face like a mask, and beside him sat Horton with an acid contentment on his countenance. The chairman motioned the engineer to a seat; then rose, and, after briefly recounting the last session, said:

"Gentlemen, the representative of Mr. Peter Stewart is here, and, without further delay, I will read the report of the expert appointed to investigate the matter in dispute."

He had not repeated more than a few lines when Haskell started in astonishment. It was monstrous—incredible—Horton had taken one hundred samples, and they were all good. He shot an indignant glance in that direction, but the expert was stroking the tip of a black mustache and looking at him out of the tail of his eye. There was a stir among the other commissioners as the smooth statement unfolded itself, and the engineer's every accusation was wiped out by this independent evidence. Brent's face wore an air of modest humility when the chairman voiced the concluding paragraph:

It is patent, therefore, that a mistake has been made by your engineer. After a careful and thorough examination of the cement in question and an elaborate series of physical tests, I find it in every way suitable and safe for the work for which it is intended.

Haskell's blood was pumping in his ears, and his fingers had disappeared, gripping the soft leather arms of the chair. He leaned forward, his eyes blazing and riveted on the chairman. The latter took off his glasses and rubbed them delicately, then spoke in a small, clear voice that seemed like the voice of fate:

"It is a matter of regret to the board that this unfortunate affair has occurred. We hesitate to think that Mr. Brent would knowingly stultify his contract, and trust he will see that the only motive of our engineer has been a desire to serve the city as best he could."

The last words bit into Haskell's brain, but he mastered himself, for the end was not yet.

"A mistake has been made a mistake due, probably, to lack of experience—we are taking steps to provide against this happening again, and trust that the contractor will be uninfluenced by what has taken place and will push the work to a rapid and successful issue." He gathered his fellow-commissioners into a glance. "In this I think I express the wish of all the members of the board."

A murmur of approval sounded as he sat down, and then a silence, which was broken as Brent arose.

NEVER had he seemed so confident, never had the impervious armour plate of his manner seemed so unassailable. He spoke quietly, with an air of calm assumption that maddened the helpless Haskell, and bent on his accuser an eye mellow with benignant charity.

"Gentlemen, I thank you—and I understand. There are no bones broken, and I bear no grudge against Mr. Haskell. These things happen to the best of us." He paused for a moment, thinking rapidly. "I hope you won't make any change. Mr. Haskell has the work at his fingers' ends, and you have every reason to know that he is more than honest. Pardon the liberty I take."

"We appreciate the very handsome way you look at this," said the chairman, rising, "but I am forced to reply that, although you may have every confidence in Mr. Haskell, this board has not." Then, looking not unkindly at the young man: "Do you wish to say anything?"

All the blood in the engineer's body seemed to rush into his face, and across his eyeballs burned little red lines of fire. The truth—the truth—he knew the truth, and could not prove it, except by another examination which he knew would not be granted. The ghastly hopelessness of it all hit him in the face, and left him speechless. He felt the curious glances, he recoiled from the thought of their thoughts, and then, when it was at



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