

THE BUILDING OF THE DAM

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passed civil service examinations over which practical men had broken their knees—had come and had gone. One had been incompetent; several had been unable to handle men; others had broken down under the strain of incessant labour in the broiling sun, the typhoid epidemic that had decimated the force, the strikes, the maddening delays in the arrival of material, the endless convolutions of red tape. Only two remained, and these had been with him for only the last few quiet months—not long enough to prove their worth.

Stevens, resident engineer, looked down at the tiny stream that trickled sluggishly through the sluices in the foot of the masonry dam. Nightly it rose and daily the thirsty sun drank it up again. It seemed incredible that it could ever fill the gorge, much less the great basin flooded by twenty-five square miles of burning sands.

But Stevens was not deceived. He knew well the habit of Arizona streams in general and of the Gila in particular. He knew those yellow sands were eighty feet deep and were filled with water to the brim; that a few cloudy days would see the river shoulder itself high against the barrier he had flung across its course. He had followed the river to its source on the high rocky plateaus that shed water like a roof; for six years he had watched it and measured it—surface flow and underflow alike he knew to an acre-foot its maximum and its minimum and its total flow in those years. Three times he had seen it come down with a rush, bank full, 25 feet deep and 1,000 feet wide. Once, in the early days, it had caught him unready, and swept away several months' labour. It would come again, he knew; would come with the Fall rains or the melting snows of Spring—might come any day if a cloud happened to burst in the right place over the gorges in the mountains two hundred miles away.

Stevens, however, was not uneasy. No flood was to be expected for two months and in two months his work would be finished and he would be in the East—with Her.

He had known her all his life, but had never realized her until he had seen her on a hurried trip to Washington that Spring. Hardly could he believe her the girl he had known before. Either she had changed or he had—perhaps both; years work quick magic in women, and the solitude of the desert—even the man-peopled solitude—arouses primal passions in men. Stevens had been East for only one busy week, yet when he left for Arizona, only the assurance that to speak would be madness had restrained him from asking her to marry him then and there. As it was, he had told her, in everything short of the bare words, that he would come back for her in the Fall when his work was done. His meaning was unmistakable, but he asked nothing in return; she was free to wait or not, as she saw fit.

II

STEVENS, resident engineer, came out of his day-dreams with a start as an engine and two cars came swinging around the curve of the five-mile spur that the Santa Fe had built from the main line to the reservoir.

"That's a private car," he grumbled. "Who in thunder have I got to show around now?"

But of course it was She.

"I've come on business," she declared when the greetings were over. "I want information on a matter of grave importance. Of course I might have written, but I hate writing, and so I got Cousin Jack to lend me his private car and just came myself. Behold in me the man of the family."

Stevens smiled. "Oh! the man of the fam-

ily, are you?" His glance took in the many feminine touches in the well-appointed car. "You don't look it," he laughed, "and your surroundings are hardly in keeping. But I suppose I must take your word for it. So—take off your hat; have a cigar?"

Miss Winthrop laughed. "You horrid boy," she exclaimed. "You men are so proud of your superiority. But, really, Mr. Stevens, I have come on business. I want your advice."

"It's yours for the asking. But why the 'Mr.?' It used to be John."

"That was when we were younger. Besides this is a business interview, you know."

"Oh, I forgot. Well! Tell me all about it. I need hardly assure you,—and so forth."

The girl's face grew serious. "Thank you John," she replied. "This is really serious. You see, if father were alive, I could follow my own inclinations and trust to him to see that I made no mistake. But, as it is, I must try to be judicial, and weigh things as father would have weighed them. Marriage is such an important step."

Steven's face paled and his hand trembled slightly.

"It is, indeed," he returned in a voice out of which all the fun had suddenly disappeared. "You mean—you mean—"

"I mean that I am not going into anything like a romantic girl. He seems very nice and clever, and he is undoubtedly a gentleman and all that, but—well, I know father would insist on knowing more about his ability and prospects, and so I came to ask you about him."

"About him? About whom?" Intense anxiety spoke in Stevens' tone.

"Dear me! Didn't I say? About Mr. Simpson."

"Simpson?"

"Yes. You know him, of course. He got a post in the Reclamation Service last Spring, and they sent him out here to help you. Surely, you know him!"

Simpson! The latest cub-assistant sent from Washington to the Gila! Stevens' brow grew dark. Without excuse he rose and walked to the far end of the car, where he stood staring blindly into the gathering darkness.

"Why should he have her?" he muttered to himself. "He can't love her as I do. What does a boy like him know of love? And she comes to me—to me of all the people in the world—to ask about him." He paused with a short laugh. "And I've got to praise him to her!"

He stopped again and his face grew flushed.

"But have I?" he resumed. "By Heavens, it's too much to ask! Why should I help him to win her when a word from me—she can't care for him very much, after all, or she wouldn't trust anything but her own intuitions. She'll get over it in time—oh! It's easy enough. Villainy always is."

He turned and walked back to where the girl sat waiting.

"I regret to tell you," he began abruptly, "that—"

He broke off as a man pushed in at the car-door and hurried towards him.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Stevens," he gasped. "But this telegram's just come, and Mr. Simpson said to get it to you quick as—I beg your pardon, ma'am."

Stevens tore open the envelope:

"Heavy rains on the San Carlos reported. Gila in flood. Cloudburst on the Verde. Should reach you by midnight. Looks bad."

Miss Winthrop had watched his face.

"Is anything wrong,?" she asked.

"Everything!" responded the engineer, shortly. "A flood is coming and will reach us by midnight. Heavy rains on the San Carlos and a cloudburst on the Verde have joined hands to test the dam two months before they should have come. Your visit was well timed, Miss Winthrop. You will see the coming of a great flood."

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CANADA'S FOOD RESOURCES



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—The Canadian Fisherman.