

The City of Numbered Days

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.