

thing is absurd, isn't it? Dad says when he has finished the dam, he's going to retire and travel, so I suppose this time next year we'll be in Japan or India," and she looked at him demurely.

"About this time next year, I want you to break a bottle on the coping," said Haskell, and catching sight of Brent's advancing bulk: "I think your father wants to see me."

He steered his hand against the contractor's finger tips, otherwise he would have felt manually soldered to him:

"Will you come into the office, Mr. Brent? There are some papers I want you to see."

The big man clambered laboriously behind him. "What is it?" he puffed. "I'm not so young as I used to be. What is it? Specifications—more specifications?"

Haskell pretended not to hear him. His own breath came a little short, but not from lack of wind, and, reaching the door he motioned the contractor in—then took a folded sheet from his desk.

"It's not specifications; it's cement," his voice was low, but very clear-cut.

The shadow of a change sped over Brent's face.

"Cement; what's the matter with it?"

Haskell's level eyes looked like gray steel. "There are about sixty thousand bags here that won't go into this work. I think you could probably pick them out. I can't."

"Are you crazy, or am I? What are you talking about?"

The engineer was getting warm. "I'm talking about cement; it's used for bonding stone." The contractor watched him, fascinated at the transformation. "That's not what most of your cement is for. Some of it's good, but most of it's rotten. Look at the figures."

BEFORE the words were spoken, he realized his mistake—every diplomatic resolution had gone by the board, he knew he was but a hot-headed youth, and the reflection sobered him.

The elder man's face was a colorless mask, without a vestige of feeling, and Haskell felt a grudging admiration for his control.

"Your figures are wrong," said Brent, handing back the papers. "How do you know that you had fair average samples?"

Through the open window Haskell saw Helen with a leveled camera pointing at the rampart of cement. It all seemed so grim, so unnatural, that he almost shouted at her to stop; but when he turned to her father, his jaw was set and his face wrinkled with tense muscles.

"Mr. Brent, my figures are the only ones the commission will take. There may have been a mistake in manufacture; you may perhaps have got hold of a lower grade." He paused a moment; but, as the silent figure gave no sign, he went on very slowly and deliberately: "With that I have nothing to do. I am writing you to-night to remove that stuff and replace it with standard material, and, if not—"

"Well, if not, what then?" There was just a trace of impatience in the voice.

"If not, I shall notify the commission four days from this date."

"Yes, and put yourself into the biggest hole any young fool engineer ever occupied!" This time, Brent let go of himself, and Haskell saw the man revealed, naked and unashamed. "I'm something more than a contractor to be ordered about by a kid like you. I know every member of the commission; know 'em well, too. It wasn't only my figures that took this job. Write your letter, and see what comes of it, if you don't know already."

Stewart's words flashed into his assistant's mind: "Mr. Brent, I am a servant of the city. That's all there is to it. You have four days to make good."

"Then the city has a nickel-plated idiot for a servant!" As the words were in the air, Helen's shadows fell across the threshold.

"Dad, what is it? What's the matter?" Her voice was vibrant and high,



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