

THE BUILDING OF THE DAM

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The girl ignored the last words. "The dam is safe? There is no danger?" she questioned anxiously.

"None! So far as man can foresee. But there is always a chance." He looked from the window at the gathering dusk. "The men are at supper now. I'll give them ten minutes more. Food is better than drink for the work tonight. You'll excuse me. I fear I can't come to dinner this evening. As for Simpson—I'll see you again."

With a bow, he was gone.

III

TEN minutes later Margaret Winthrop heard the shriek of a whistle, five times repeated, and an instant after a score of others echoed back the sound. The construction-engines, waiting on the sidings for the night-shift joined in the chorus, and the whistle of the electric light plant swelled the uproar. The thud of men running in the semi-darkness followed; the clatter of the tools caught up from the sheds; the rattle of the aerial trolley as it swung out from the farther bank; the fizz and sputter of the arc-lamps as they burst into light, and of the great searchlight as it skimmed along the dam, picking out the parts of the work one by one.

"Toot! Toot! Too—oo—oot! Toot! Toot!" signaled the whistle, and men swarmed down into the bed of the reservoir and began to remove everything that could be moved. All understood that never again were they to see the ground over which they had worked for so many months. Desperately the construction trains puffed, and incessantly the stone rumbled into the rock-fill, backing the core-walls and strengthening the dike. At the massive canal-gates the great crane toiled, lifting them one by one—their own machinery not yet being installed—so as to give vent to the water and lessen the pressure on the uncompleted dike.

Above these gates Stevens took his post. There, if anywhere, the dam would fail. For the masonry part he had no fear; buried eighty feet deep in sand and rooted in the living rock, it would withstand anything. Nor did the long rock-filled dike give him much concern. The gradual rise of the rocky floor toward the south gave it greater and greater resistance with every foot of distance. But where earth and masonry met—where the great canal began—the pressure would be greatest and the water would fight most fiercely.

The base of the canal was one hundred and forty feet above the bottom of the river and sixty feet below the top of the dike. Its floor, paved with jointed rubble laid in cement mortar, blended smoothly into the revetment of the dike, and the whole sloped for two hundred feet upstream, dipping down beneath the sand to the bed-rock. If the canal proved insufficient to carry off the waters, they could spill freely over the crest of the masonry dam to a depth of twenty feet before they would leap over the dike. Surely even the Gila aided by the San Carlos could never rise so high.

Still Stevens feared. For he had staked all honor, reputation, fortune—on the dam. If it should go out—

At one o'clock came the forerunner of the flood. By some little understood principle of transmitted pressure, the underflow in the bed of the gorge suddenly shouldered itself upward, the dry sand whispering as it rose.

Stevens saw it and caught at the telephone. "Clear out! clear out!" shrieked the warning whistle, and the men in the gorge dropped what they held and ran for their lives.

Not a moment too soon. The searchlight,

playing upstream, caught the front of the advancing Niagara, and a groan went up from the watchers.

"Sixty feet high!" gasped Stevens, as the water struck, battering-wise against the face of the dam and hurled itself bodily upward in a burst of slashing spray that swept clear over the two hundred-foot wall.

Then the river lifted itself bodily, foot by foot, fingering the rocks hungrily, teasing for an opening, a weak spot, where it might burrow and wreck this man-made obstacle across its path. Up it rose, till the gorge was filled and the water poured bank full through the canal gates! up! until gates had vanished, and only a swirl in the hungry water showed where they were buried.

As the night waned, came a new sound as the river reached the masonry dam and plunged, cataract-wise, on the apron beneath; and at dawn the watchers gasped.

"Yesterday it was a desert; to-day it is a lake," they murmured.

IV

STEVENS, resident engineer, sat on the headgates and waited. There was nothing to do but wait—and think—of Margaret and of his dam.

Painfully his mind went over his works inch by inch, wondering at what spot weakness would develop. Here it paused on an odd-shaped stone, there on a trowel of mortar, yonder on the face of a chance workman who had placed a particular stone on a particular day—chance memories, unrelated, that suddenly assumed enormous magnitude. Then it shifted to Margaret and his wrecked hopes. Then back again, in hopeless iteration.

Dinner and breakfast had been brought him successively, but he put them away untouched. Coffee, whisky, tobacco, he put aside. Never readily approachable, no one dared to force himself upon him in his hour of stress. Still he watched and thought, and still the water rose, driving him at last from the head-works to the top of the earthen dike. All the dam between him and the north shore was lost in smother of water. Only the long southward-pointing finger of the earth dam breasted the flood which was slowly creeping up its slope. Another ten feet of rise and it, too, would be buried and then—too well Stevens knew what would happen then.

A light touch on his arm roused him, and he turned to find Margaret beside him. Incredulously he looked at her, then at the foam between them and her train.

"You!" he exclaimed, raising his voice so as to be heard above the thunder of the fall. "You! How did you get here?"

Margaret pointed upward to the aerial trolley swinging in the wind.

"By that!" she laughed. "Oh! such a ride!" Then anticipating the rebuke in his eyes, "Don't scold me, John. I had to come. I came for you. You must come back with me. They tell me that you have not eaten or slept for twenty-four hours. Come, John."

Stevens shook his head. "I must stay here," he answered. "But you must go. You ought never to have come. That trolley may fall in another ten minutes. Please!" He turned toward the car.

But Margaret shook her head. "Not without you, John," she answered.

Stevens stifled an exclamation. "Do you know what will happen if the water rises ten feet more?" he demanded harshly.

Margaret measured the flood with her eye. "I can guess," she answered.

"Can you? Ten feet will bring the water over the crest of this dike—over the core-walls into the unfinished rock-fill. Once there, it will not take it ten minutes to scoop a way to

the foundations and then—Everything will go: Honor, reputation, hope for the future, fortune—and you. You don't want to die that way, Margaret?"

"Do you?"

Stevens laughed wildly. "Why not? Everything else will be gone. Why should I not go too?"

But the girl shook her head. "No, John," she answered, and her voice rang above the thunder of the water. "All will not go even if the dam does. A man will be left—a strong, brave man, a man who will rise again, a man who will not stay beaten, a true man—"

Stevens laughed aloud. "A true man?" he echoed. "A true man? No! not a true man, but a liar and a hypocrite. Listen! And then perhaps you will leave me to go down with my dam. Do you know what you did yesterday when you asked me about Simpson? You let the devil loose in me. For months I had been thinking of you—of nothing but you—hoping, longing for you with all my strength and heart and soul. I had begun to hope—Oh! what fools we men can be!—I had begun to hope when you came to tell me of your love for that boy—"

He paused, shaken by his emotion. Miss Winthrop started and was about to speak. But Stevens unheeding, swept on.

"It maddened me!" he cried. "Maddened me! I had always thought myself honest, but—I did not know. I did not know. At the first strong temptation, I fell. I opened my mouth to lie to you—to tell you evil things about the man you loved—when I was interrupted, as you know. But I lied in intention. It was only an accident that I did not lie in fact. I—Miss Winthrop! Permit me to inform you that Simpson is a capable and intelligent young man, the best assistant that I have had on this work. He is still inexperienced but is learning fast. Further, he is clean and honest; I myself know him to be a gentleman with all that that implies. He is in every way worthy of you, and I believe you will be happy with him. Now you know how 'true' I am! Good-bye!"

The girl raised her eyes to his with an expression that a woman wears for but one man—an expression that made Stevens grow pale.

"Don't you despise me?" he faltered.

"I think you are the bravest and truest and finest man in the world," she averred. "You have triumphed over yourself and that—but no matter! Bessie will be delighted to hear such good things of Mr. Simpson."

"Bessie!" Stevens echoed the name hoarsely.

"Of course! My sister Bessie! Why, you foolish fellow, did you think I was inquiring about Mr. Simpson for myself? Bessie and Mr. Simpson have been dreadfully in love with each other for a year or more."

Stevens caught the girl in his arms. "Margaret!" he gasped. "Tell me—"

"Oh! no! no! Not here! Oh! you great, wet, gaunt, hungry bear! Come back with me to dry land and—perhaps—"

Stevens turned toward the trolley, when loud above the roar of the water sounded the shriek of the steam-whistle.

"They are signalling! Listen!" he cried.

"Toot! Toot! Toot, toot! Toot, toot!" Stevens' face lighted up.

"Thank God!" he breathed. "The worst is over. That signal means that the water has begun to fall."

DON'T
"Hoch der Kaiser" at Meals!