

THE CITY OF NUMBERED DAYS

BY FRANCIS LYNDE

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SYNOPSIS.

Brouillard, chief engineer of the Niouola irrigation dam, goes out from camp to investigate a strange light and finds an automobile party camped at the canyon portal. He meets J. Wesley Cortwright and his daughter, Genevieve, of the auto party and explains the reclamation work to them. Cortwright sees in the project a big chance to make money. Brouillard is impervious to hints from the financier, who tells Genevieve that the engineer "will come down and hook himself if the bait is well covered." Cortwright organizes a company and obtains government contracts to furnish power and material for the dam construction. A busy city springs up about the site. Steve Massingale threatens to start a gold rush if Brouillard does not influence President Ford to build a railroad branch to the place, thus opening an easy market for the ore from the "Little Susan" mine. Brouillard and the company's promoter clash.

If you were in love with a girl and a beast of a man, who had the power to get you fired from your job, made a smirking remark about her to you, would you smash him in the jaw and kick him out of your office—even if the act caused an indefinite postponement of your wedding?

CHAPTER V—Continued.

"I can't believe it, Murray. It's a leaf out of the book of Bedlam! Take a fair shot at it and see where the bullet lands: this entire crazy fake is built upon one solitary, lonesome fact—the fact that we're here, with a job on our hands big enough to create an active, present-moment market for labor and material. There is absolutely nothing else behind the bubble blowing; if we were not here the Niouola Improvement company would never have been heard of!"

Grislow laughed. "Your arguing that twice two makes four doesn't change the iridescent hue of the bubble," he volunteered. "If big money has seen a chance to skin somebody, the mere fact that the end of the world is due to come along down the pike some day isn't going to cut any obstructing figure. We'll all be buying and selling corner lots in Hosford's new city before we're a month older. Don't you believe it?"

"I'll believe it when I see it," was Brouillard's reply; and with this the matter rested for the moment.

It was later in the day, an hour or so after the serving of the hearty supper in the engineers' mess tent, that Brouillard was given to see another and still less tolerable side of his temporary guest. Hosford had come into the office to plant himself solidly in the makeshift easy chair for the smoking of a big, black after-supper cigar.

"I've been looking over your rules and regulations," Brouillard, he began, after an interval of silence which Brouillard had been careful not to break. "You're making a capital mistake in trying to transplant the old Connecticut blue laws out here. Your workmen ought to have the right to spend their money in any way that suits 'em."

Brouillard was pointedly occupying himself at his desk, but he looked up long enough to say: "Whisky, you mean?"

"That and other things. They tell me you don't allow any open gambling or any women here outside of the families of the workmen."

"We don't," was the short rejoinder. "That won't hold water after we get things fairly in motion."

"It will have to hold water as far as we are concerned, if I have to build a stockade around the camp," snapped Brouillard.

Hosford's heavy face wrinkled itself in a mirthless smile. "You're nutty," he remarked. "When I find a man bearing down hard on all the little vices, it always makes me wonder what's the name of the corking big one he is trying to cover up."

Since there was obviously no peaceful reply to be made to this, Brouillard bent lower over his work and said nothing. At every fresh step in the forced acquaintance the newcomer was painstakingly developing new antagonisms. Sooner or later, Brouillard knew, it would come to an open rupture, but he was hoping that the actual hostilities could be postponed until after Hosford had worn out his temporary welcome as a guest in the engineers' mess.

For a time the big man in the easy chair smoked on in silence. Then he began again:

"Say, Brouillard, I saw one little girl today that didn't belong to your workmen's family outfit, and she's a peach; came riding down the trail with her brother from that mine up on the south mountain—Massingale, isn't it? By Jove! she fairly made my mouth water!"

Inasmuch as no man can read field-notes when the page has suddenly become a red blur, Brouillard looked up.

"You are my guest, in a way, Mr. Hosford; for that reason I can't very well tell you what I think of you." So much he was able to say quietly. Then the control mechanism burned out in a flash of fiery rage and he cursed the guest fluently and comprehensively, winding up with a crude and savage threat of dismemberment if he should ever venture so much as to name Miss Massingale again in the threatener's hearing.

Hosford sat up slowly, and his big face turned darkly red.

"Well!" he broke out. "So you're that kind of a fire-eater, are you? I didn't suppose anything like that ever happened outside of the ten-cent shockers. Wake up, man; this is the twentieth century, we're living in. Don't look at me that way!"

But the wave of insane wrath was already subsiding, and Brouillard, half

ashamed of the momentary lapse into savagery, was once more stowing down at the pages of his notebook when the door opened and Quinlan, the operator, came in with a communication fresh from the Washington wire. The message was an indirect reply to Hosford's telegraphed appeal to the higher powers. Brouillard read it, stuck it upon the file, and took a roll of blueprints from the bottom drawer of his desk.

"Here are the drawings for your power installation, Mr. Hosford," he said, handing the roll to the man in the chair. And a little later he went out to smoke a pipe in the open air, leaving the message of inquiry he had intended to send unwritten.

CHAPTER VI Symptomatic

For some few minutes the two on the cabin porch made no attempt to talk, but when the rumbling thunder of the ore-car which the elder Massingale was pushing ahead of him into the mine had died away in the subterranean distances Brouillard began again.

"I do get your point of view—sometimes," he said. "Civilization, or what stands for it, does have a way of shrinking into littleness, not to say cheapness, when one can get the proper perspective. And your life up here on Chigringo has given you the useful detached point of view."

The trouble shadows in the eyes of the young woman who was sitting in the fishnet hammock gave place to a smile of gentle derision.

"Do you call that civilization?" she demanded, indicating the straggling new town spreading itself, maplike, in the valley below.

"I suppose it is—one form of it. At least it is civilization in the making. Everything has to have some sort of a beginning."

Miss Massingale acquiesced in a little uplift of her perfectly rounded chin.

"Just the same, you don't pretend to say you are enjoying it," she said in manifest deprecation.

"Oh, I don't know. My work is down there. A few weeks ago I was right-

nesses, putting your finger on them as accurately as if you could read his soul, holding them up to your ridicule and—what's much worse—to his own. At such times your insight, or whatever you choose to call it, is enough to give a man a fit of 'seeing things.'"

Her laugh was like a schoolgirl's, light-hearted, ringing, deliciously unrestrained.

"What a picture!" she commented. And then: "I can draw a better one of you, Monsieur Victor de Brouillard."

"Do it," he dared.

"Very well, then: Once upon a time—it was a good while ago, I'm afraid—you were a very upright young man. You would cheerfully have died for a principle in those days, and you would have allowed the enemy to cut you up into cunning little inch cubes before you would have admitted that any pigeon was ever made to be plucked."

He was smiling mirthlessly, with the black mustaches taking the sardonic upcurve.

"Then what happened?"

"One of two things, or maybe both of them. You were pushed out into the life race with some sort of a handicap. I don't know what it was—or is. Is that true?"

He nodded gravely. "It is all true enough. You haven't added anything more than a graceful little touch here and there. Who has been telling you all these things about me? Not Grizzly?"

"No, not Murray Grislow; it was the man you think you know best in all the world—who is also probably the one you know the least—yourself."

"Good heavens! Am I really such a transparent egotist as all that?"

"All men are egotists," she answered calmly. "In some the ego is sound and clear-eyed and strong; in others it is weak—in the same way that passion is weak; it will sacrifice all it has or hopes to have in some sudden fury of self-assertion."

She sat up and put her hands to her hair, and he was free to look away, down upon the great ditch where the endless chain of concrete buckets added to the deep and widespread foundations of the dam. Across the river a group of hidden sawmills sang their raucous song. In the middle distance the camp-town city spread its roughly indicated streets over the



"I Can't Believe It, Murray. It's a Leaf Out of the Book of Bedlam!"



"But Tell Me, What Would You Do With Your Pot of Rainbow Gold?"

ously hot. It seemed so crudely unnecessary to start a pigeon-plucking match at this distance from Wall Street.

"But now," she queried—"now, I suppose, you have become reconciled?" "I am growing more philosophical, let us say. There are just about so many pigeons to be plucked, anyway; they'd molt if they weren't plucked. And it may as well be done here as on the stock exchange, when you come to think of it."

"I like you least when you talk that way," said the young woman in the hammock, with open-eyed frankness. "Do you do it as other men do?—just to hear how it sounds?"

Brouillard, sitting on the top step of the porch, leaned his head against the porch post and laughed.

"You know too much—a lot too much for a person of your tender years," he asserted. "Which names one more of the charming collection of contradictions which your father or mother or somebody had the temerity to label 'Amy,' sweetest and most seraphic of diminutives."

"If you don't like my name—" she began, and then she went off at another tangent. "Please tell me why I am a 'collection of contradictions.'"

Brouillard's gaze went past the shapely little figure in the string hammock to lose itself in the far Timanoy distances.

"You are a bundle of surprises," he said, letting the musing thought slip into speech. "What can you possibly know about my thoughts?"

She made a funny little grimace at him. "It was 'contradictions' a moment ago and now it is 'surprises.' Which reminds me, you haven't told me why I am a 'collection.'"

"Oh, I can catalogue them if you push me to it. One minute you are the Madonna lady that I can't recall, calm, reposeful, truthful, and all that, you know—so truthful that those child-like eyes of yours would make a stuttering imbecile of the man who should come to you with a lie in his mouth."

"And the next minute?"

"The next minute you are a witch, laughing at the man's little weak-

valley level, the tall chimney stacks of the new cement plant were rising, and from the quarries beyond the plant the dull thunder of the blasts drifted up.

This was not Brouillard's first visit to the cabin on the Massingale claim by any means. In the earliest stages of the valley activities Smith, the Buckskin cattleman, had been Amy Massingale's escort to the reclamation camp—"just a couple of lookers," in Smith's phrase—and the unconventional attitudes had done the rest. From that day forward the young woman had hospitably opened her door to Brouillard and his assistants, and any member of the corps, from Leshington the morose, who commonly came to sit in solemn silence on the porch step, to Griffith, who had lost his youthful hair to Miss Massingale on his first visit, was welcome.

CHAPTER VII A Turn in the Trail

For Brouillard it had seemed the most natural thing in the world to fall under the spell of enchantment. He knew next to nothing of the young woman's life story; he had not cared to know. It had not occurred to him to wonder how the daughter of a man who drilled and shot the holes in his own mine should have the gifts and belongings—when she chose to display them—of a woman of a much wider world. It was enough for him that she was piquantly attractive in any character and that he found her marvelously stimulating and uplifting. On the days when the devil of moroseness and irritability possessed and maddened him he could climb to the cabin on high Chigringo and find sanity. It was a keen joy to be with her, and up to the present this had sufficed.

"Egotism is merely another name for the expression of a vital need," he said after the divagating pause, defining the word more for his own satisfaction than in self-defense.

"You may put it in that way if you please," she returned gravely. "What is your need?" He stated it concisely. "Money—a lot of it."

"How singular!" she laughed. She got out of the hammock and came to lean, with her hands behind her, against the opposite porch post. "But tell me, what would you do with your pot of rainbow gold—if you should find it?"

Brouillard rose and straightened himself with his arms over his head like an athlete testing his muscles for the record-breaking event.

"What would I do? A number of things. But first of all, I think, I'd buy the privilege of telling some woman that I love her."

She was silent for so long a time that he looked at his watch and thought of going. But at the deciding instant she held him with a low-spoken question.

"Does it date back to the handicap? You needn't tell me if you don't want to."

"It does. And there is no reason why I shouldn't tell you the simple fact. When my father died he left me a debt—a debt of honor; and it must be paid. Until it is paid—but I am sure you understand."

"Quite fully," she responded quickly, and now there was no trace of levity in the sweetly serious tone. "Is it much?—so much that you can't—"

He nodded and sat down again on the porch step. "Yes, it is big enough to go in a class by itself—in round numbers, a hundred thousand dollars."

"Horrors!" she gasped. "And you are carrying that millstone? Must you carry it?"

"If you know the circumstances you would be the first to say that I must carry it, and go on carrying it to the end of the chapter."

"But—but you'll never be free!"

"Not on a government salary," he admitted. "As a matter of fact, it takes more than half of the salary to pay the premiums on—pshaw! Let's drop it."

She was looking beyond him and her voice was quick with womanly sympathy, when she said: "If you could drop it—but you can't. And it changes everything for you, distorts everything, colors your entire life. It's heart-breaking!"

This was dangerous ground for him and he knew it. In the ardor of young manhood he had taken up the vicarious burden dutifully, and at that time his renunciation of the things that other men strove for seemed the lightest of the many fetterings. But now love for a woman was threatening to make the renunciation too grievous to be borne.

"How did you know?" he queried curiously. "It does change things. I'd sell anything I've got, save one, for a chance at the freedom that other men have—and don't value."

"What is the one thing you wouldn't sell?" she questioned, and Brouillard chose to discover a gently quickened interest in the clear-seeing eyes.

"My love for the—for some woman. I'm saying that, you know. It is the only capital I'll have when the big debt is paid."

"Do you want me to be frivolous or serious?" she asked, looking down at him with the grimacing little smile that always reminded him of a caress. "I have been wondering whether she is or isn't worth the effort—and the reservation you make. Because it is all in that, you know. You can do and be what you want to do and be if you only want to hard enough."

He was looking down, chiefly because he dared not look up, when he answered soberly: "She is worth it many times over; her price is above rubies. Money, much or little, would be in it."

"That is better—much better. Now we may go on to the ways and means; they are all in the man, not in the things, 'not none whatsoever,' as Tim would say. Let me show you what I mean. Three times within my recollection my father has been worth considerably more than you owe, and three times he has—well, it's gone. And now he is going to make good again when the railroad comes."

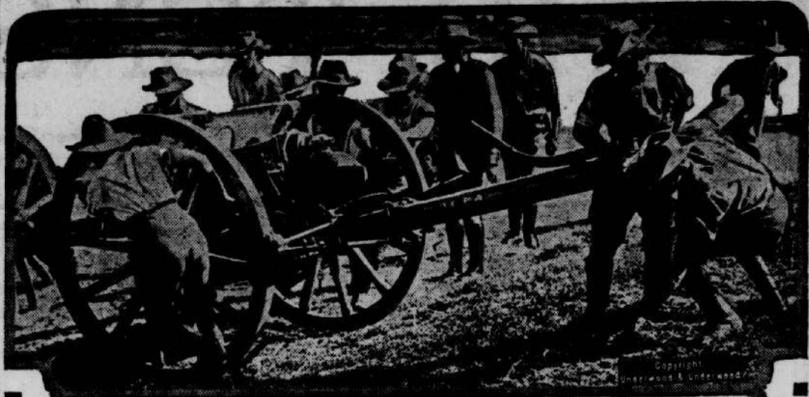
Brouillard got up. "I must be going back down the hill," he said. And then, without warning: "What if I should tell you that the railroad is not coming to the Niouola, Amy?"

Do you think that Amy will conduct a little flirtation with the despised Hosford, in order to aid her father, if she finds out that Hosford can bring the railroad to Niouola or keep it away?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Tribulations of a Volunteer. Richard de Gunpowder was an enthusiast. He was so enthusiastic that he enlisted in the Harvard Hundreds. Moreover, he was so very enthusiastic that he enlisted twice. Then matters became confused, for he was assigned to two different regiments. In some way, however, he managed to persuade his superior officers that he would rather be wholly and entirely in one company than partly in two. So one of his enlisted selves joined the other in the same squad. But now he was absolutely beside himself; every time he turned around he hit himself in the back; whenever he was out of step he trod on his own heels; every time he—what should—what could he do? But the captain was cleverer than you. He selected one of Richard's enlisted selves and made him an officer. So now Sergeant de Gunpowder once more has complete command of himself.—Harvard Lampoon.

AUSTRALIAN TROOPS THAT ARE NOW IN FRANCE



These are some of the soldiers that Australia has sent to France recently to re-enforce the armies of the allies. They are seen, above, practicing the handling of artillery, and, below, digging trenches for the guns.

MOBILIZING OF THE TEXAS NATIONAL GUARD



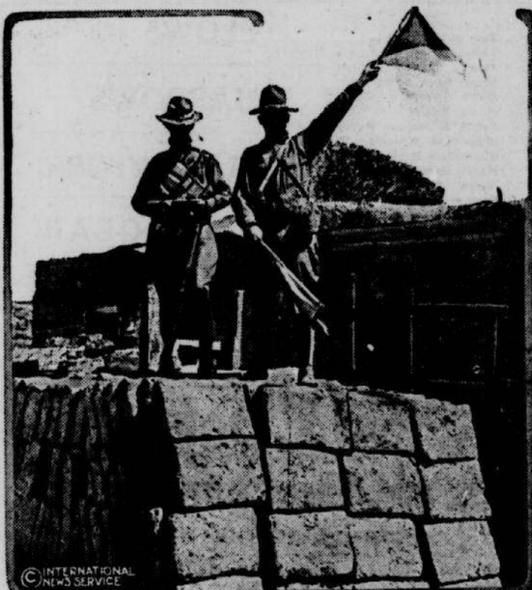
Raising the tents for the members of the Texas National Guard at Fort Sam Houston. It will be noticed that many of the men are without uniforms.

KAISER'S FRIEND ARRESTED



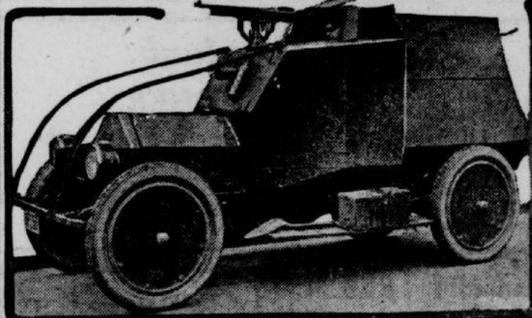
Countess Maria Labbia, a singer, has been arrested at Milan, Italy, on a charge of espionage. The countess made her debut in Germany under the patronage of the kaiser, whose interest in her created a sensation in court circles.

WIGWAGGING "SOMEWHERE" IN MEXICO



United States signalmen stationed "somewhere" in Mexico sending a wigwag message from the top of a pile of adobe bricks.

DEMONSTRATES PREPAREDNESS CAR



Private William H. Forrest, Eighth Massachusetts infantry, is on his way to the Pacific coast in an armored car to preach the doctrine of preparedness. He called on the president while in Washington with a letter of introduction from Governor McCall of Massachusetts. His car contains rapid-fire guns and an assortment of other weapons.

Why Boys Hate Cats.

Tracing back the hatred of boys for cats, it may be supposed that it originated in the cat's treatment of a captured mouse. A boy likes a fair play and hates duplicity.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

For Ailing Plants.

As an antidote for fungous diseases as well as scabicide, lime mixed with a little sulphur and stirred into the soil about plants is excellent. This should be used frequently and when the soil is rather dry.

Mean.

"I inherited a great name from my ancestors," he boasted. "Too bad they couldn't will you the ability to keep it," was the unkind retort.

A Good Foil.

"She gets plenty of invitations to house parties and the like." "Yes, and she is so homely that every girl who sees her wants her to come and spend a week or two."

Coal Deposits in Nigeria.

Nigeria has been added to the lands in which valuable deposits of coal have been discovered in recent years.