

The City of Numbered Days

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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SYNOPSIS.

Brouillard, chief engineer of the Niquola 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 impetuous to him from the farmer, who tells Genevieve that the engineer "will come down and look himself if the dam is well covered."

Do you believe there is as much grafting going on among our government officials, including congressmen, as muck-raking critics have frequently charged? Who's to blame in this story?

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

During the weeks which followed, the same trail, and a little later that from the Navajo reservation on the south, were strung with antlike processions of laborers pouring into the abut-in valley at the foot of Mount Chigringo. Almost as if by magic a populous camp of tents, shelter shacks and Indian teepees sprang up in the level bed-bottom of the future lake; campfires gave place to mess kitchens; the commissary became a busy department store stocked with everything that drifts or driftless labor might wish to purchase; and daily the great foundation scorings in the buttressing shoulders of Jack's mountain and Chigringo grew deeper and wider under the churning of the air-drills; the crashings of the dynamite and the rattle and cluck of the steam shovels.

It was after the huge task of foundation digging was well under way and the work of constructing the small power dam in the upper canyon had been begun that the young chief of construction, busy with a thousand details, had his first foreboding reminder of the continued existence of Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright.

It came in the form of a communication from Washington, forwarded by special post-rider service from Quezada, and it called a halt upon the up-river power project. In accordance with its settled policy, the reclamation service would refrain, in the Niquola as elsewhere, from entering into competition with private citizens; would do nothing to discourage the investment of private capital. A company had been formed to take over the power production and to establish a plant for the manufacture of cement, and Brouillard was instructed to govern himself accordingly. For his information, the department letter writer went on to say, it was to be understood that the company was duly organized under the provisions of an act of congress; that it had bound itself to furnish power and material at prices satisfactory to the service; and that the relations between it and the government holdstaff on the ground were to be entirely friendly.

"It's a graft—a pull-down with a profit in it for some bunch of money leeches a little higher up!" was the young chief's angry comment when he had given Grislow the letter to read. "Without knowing any more of the details than that letter gives, I'd be willing to bet a month's pay that this is the fine Italian hand of Mr. J. Wesley Cortwright!"

Grislow's eyebrows went up in doubtful interrogation.

"Ought I to know the gentleman?" he queried mildly. "I don't seem to recall the name."

"No, you don't know him. It was his motor party that was camping at the Buckskin ford the night we broke in here—the night when we saw the searchlight."

"And you met him? I thought you told me you merely went down and took a look—didn't but in?"

"I didn't—that night. But the next morning they wanted to see the valley, and I showed them the way in. Cortwright is the multimillionaire pork packer of Chicago, and he went up into the air like a lunatic over the money-making chances there were to be in this job. I didn't pay much attention to his chortlings at the time. It didn't seem remotely credible that anybody with real money to invest would plant it in the bottom of the Niquola reservoir."

"But now you think he is going to make his bluff good?"

"That looks very much like it," said Brouillard sourly, pointing to the letter from Washington. "That scheme is going to change the whole face of nature for us up here, Grislow. It will spell trouble right from the jump."

"Oh, I don't know," was the deprecating rejoinder. "It will relieve us of a lot of side-issue industries—cut 'em out and bury 'em, so far as we are concerned."

"That part of it is all right, of course; but it won't end there; not by a hundred miles. Jobson says in that letter that the relations have got to be friendly! I'll bet anything you like that I'll have to go and read the riot act to those people before they've been twenty-four hours on their job!"

Grislow was trying the point of his

mapping pen on his thumb nail. "Curious that this particular fly should drop into your pot of ointment on your birthday, wasn't it?" he remarked.

"O suffering Jehu!" grunted Brouillard ragedly. "Are you never going to forget that senseless bit of twaddle?"

"You're not giving me a chance to forget it," said the mapmaker soberly. "You told me that night that the seven-year characteristic was changed, and you're a changed man, Victor, if ever there was one. Moreover, it began that very night—or the next morning."

Brouillard laughed. "All of which is bad enough, you'd say, Murray; but it isn't the worst of it. I've just run up against another thing that is threatening to raise merry hell in this valley."

"I know," said the hydrographer slowly. "You've been having a seance with Steve Massingale. Leshington told me about it."

"What did he tell you?" Brouillard demanded half angrily.

"Oh, nothing much; nothing to make you hot at him. He said he gathered the notion that the young sorehead was trying to bully you."

"He was," was the brittle admission. "See here, Grizzy."

The thing to be seen was a small buckskin bag which, when opened, gave up a paper packet folded like a medicine powder. The paper contained a spoonful of dust and pellets of metal of a dull yellow luster.

The hydrographer drew a long breath and fingered the nuggets. "Gold—placer gold!" he exclaimed, and Brouillard nodded and went on to tell how he had come by the bag and its contents.

"Massingale had an ax to grind, of course. You may remember that Harding talked loosely about the Massingale opposition to the building of the dam. There was nothing in it. The opposition was purely personal, and it was directed against Harding himself, with Amy Massingale for the exciting cause."

"That girl—the elemental brute!" Grislow broke in warmly. He knew the miner's daughter fairly well by



"You're Brouillard, the Government Man, I Take It!"

this time, and in common with every man on the staff, not excepting the staff's chief, would have fought for her in any cause.

Brouillard nodded. "I don't know what Harding did, but Smith, the Triangle-Circle foreman, tells me that Steve was on the warpath; he told Harding when he left, last summer, that if he ever came back to Niquola, he'd come to stay—and stay dead."

"I never did like Harding any too well," was the hydrographer's definitive comment, and Brouillard went back to the matter of the morning's seance and its golden outcome.

"That is only a little side issue. Steve Massingale came to me this morning with a proposal that was about as cold-blooded as a slap in the face. Naturally, for good business reasons of their own, the Massingales want to see the railroad built over War Arrow pass into the Niquola. In some way Steve has found out that I stand pretty well with President Ford and the Pacific Southwestern people. His first break was to offer to incorporate the 'Little Susan' and to give me a block of the stock if I'd pull Ford's leg on the extension proposition."

"Well?" queried Grislow.

"Exactly. You can imagine what I told him. Then he began to bully and pulled the club on me."

Again Grislow's smile was jocose. "Well, when I turned him down, young Massingale began to bluster and to say that I'd have to boost the railroad deal, whether I wanted to or not. I told him he couldn't prove it, and he said he would show me, if I'd take half an hour's walk up the valley

with him. You know that long, narrow sandbar in the river just below the mouth of the upper canyon?"

Grislow nodded. "That is where we went for the proof. Massingale dipped up a panful of the bar sand, which he asked me to wash out for myself. I did it, and you have the results there in that paper. That bar is comparatively rich placer dirt."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the mapmaker. "Comparatively rich, you say—and you washed this spoonful out of a single pan?"

"Keep your head," said Brouillard coolly. "Massingale explained that I had happened to make a tenstrike; that the bar wasn't any such bonanza as that first result would indicate. I proved that, too, by washing some more of it without getting any more than a few 'coloreds.' But the fact remains: it's placer ground."

It was at this point that the larger aspect of the fact launched itself upon the hydrographer.

"A gold strike!" he gasped. "And we—we're planning to drown it under two hundred feet of a lake!"

Brouillard's laugh was harsh.

"Don't let the fever get hold of you, Grislow. Don't forget that we are here to carry out the plans of the reclamation service—which are more far-reaching and of a good bit greater consequence than a dozen placer mines. Massingale drove the peg down good and hard. If I would jump in and pull every possible string to hurry the railroad over the range, and keep on pulling them, the secret of the placer bar would remain a secret. Otherwise, he, Stephen Massingale, would give it away, publish it, advertise it to the world. You know what that would mean for us, Murray?"

"My Lord! I should say so! We'd have Boomtown on the pike right now, with all the variations! Every white man in the camp would check his job in the hollow half of a minute and go to gravel washing!"

"That's it precisely," Brouillard acquiesced gloomily. "Massingale is a young tough, but he is shrewd enough, when he is sober. He had me dead to rights, and he knew it. You don't want any gold-camp starting up here in the bottom of your reservoir, he said; and I had to admit it."

Grislow had found a magnifying glass in the drawer of the mapping table, and he was holding it in focus over the small collection of grain gold and nuggets. In the midst of the eager examination he looked up suddenly to say "Hold on a minute. Why is Steve proposing to give this thing away? Why isn't he working the bar himself?"

"He explained that phase of it, after a fashion—said that placer mining was always more or less of a gamble, and that they had a sure thing of it in the 'Little Susan.' Of course, if the thing had to be given away he and his father would avail themselves of their rights as discoverers and then their chance with the crowd for the sake of the ready money they might get out of it. Otherwise they'd be content to let it alone and stick to their legitimate business, which is quartz mining."

"And to do that successfully they've got to have the railroad. How did you settle it finally?"

"He told me to take a week or two, and think about it."

Grislow was biting the end of his penholder thoughtfully.

"What are you going to do about it, Victor?" he asked at length. "We can't stand for any more chaos than the gods have already doped out for us, can we?"

Brouillard took another long minute at the office window before he said "What would you do if you were in my place, Murray?"

But at this the mapmaker put up his hands as if to ward off a blow.

"No, you don't!" he laughed. "I refuse to be that kind of a fool. But I'll venture a small prophecy. The golden secret will leak out. And after that, the deluge."

"What has all this bubble blowing got to do with the building of a temporary dam and the setting up of a couple of cement kilns?"

Grislow laid his pen aside and whirled around on his working stool.

"Don't you make any easy-going mistake, Victor," he said earnestly. "The cement and power proposition is only a side issue. These new people are going to take over the sawmills, open up quarries, build a stub railroad to the Hepha mines, grade a practicable stage road over the range to Quezada, and put on a fast-mail freight line to serve until the railroad builds in. Wouldn't that set your teeth on edge?"

"How will Brouillard get rid of Hoasford, who seems bent on making trouble? Or will he get rid of him at all?"

"My name is Hoasford, and I represent the Niquola Improvement company as its manager and resident en-

gineer," said the lounge, shifting the dead cigar from one corner of his hard-bitted mouth to the other. "You're Brouillard, the government man, I take it?"

"Brouillard, if you please," was the crisp correction. And then with a careful effacement of the final saving trace of hospitality in tone or manner: "What can we do for you, Mr. Hoasford?"

"A good many things, first and last. I'm two or three days ahead of my outfit, and you can put me up somewhere until I get a camp of my own. You've got some sort of an engineer's mess, I take it?"

"We have," said Brouillard briefly. "You'll make yourself at home with us, of course," he added, and he tried to say it without making it sound too much like a challenge.

"All right; so much for that part of it," said the self-invited guest. "Now for the business end of the deal—why don't you sit down?"

Brouillard planted himself behind his desk and began to fill his blackened office pipe, coldly refusing Hoasford's tender of a cigar.

"You were speaking of the business matter," he suggested bluntly.

"Yes. I'd like to go over your plans for the power dam in the upper canyon. If they look good to me I'll adopt them."

"I am very far from wishing to quarrel with anybody," said Brouillard, but his tone belied the words. "At the same time, if you think we are going to do your engineering work, or any part of it, for you, you are pretty severely mistaken. Our own job is fully big enough to keep us busy."

"You're off," said the big man coolly. "Somebody has bungled in giving you the dope. You want to keep your job, don't you?"

"That is neither here nor there. What we are discussing at present is the department's attitude toward your enterprise. I shall be exceeding my instructions if I make that attitude friendly to the detriment of my own work."

The new resident manager sat back in his chair and chewed his cigar reflectively, staring up at the log beam of the office ceiling.

"You're just like all the other government men I've ever had to do business with, Brouillard, pig-headed, obstinate, blind as bats to their own interests. I don't especially want to begin by knocking you into line, but I guess it'll have to be done. I guess the best way to get you is to send a little wire to Washington. How does that strike you?"

"I haven't the slightest interest in what you may do or fail to do," said Brouillard.

"But you have made the plans for this power plant, haven't you?"

"Yes, and they are the property of the department. If you want them I'll turn them over to you upon a proper order from headquarters."

"That's a little more like it. Where did you say I'd send your wire off?"

Brouillard gave the information, and as Hoasford went out Grislow came in and took his place at the mapping table.

"Did you get back in time to save my life?" he remarked pointedly, with a shy glance at his chief. "I've been plowing furrows up and down my little potato patch all day."

"Thought I'd bring for information, I suppose," granted Brouillard.

"Just that, and he's been getting it, too. Not out of me, particularly, but out of everybody. Also, he was willing to impart a little. We're in for the time of our lives, Victor."

"I know it," was the crabbed rejoinder.

"You don't know the tenth part of it," asserted the hydrographer slowly. "It's a modest name, The Niquola Improvement company, but it is going to be the sharpest—covering a multitude of sins. Do you know what that plunk-headed organizer has got up his sleeve? He is going to build us a neat, up-to-date little city right here in the middle of our midst. If I hadn't made him believe that I was only a draftsman he would have had me out with a transit, running the lines for the streets."

"A city—in this reservoir bottom? I guess not. He was only straining you to kill time, Grizzy."

"Don't you fool yourself!" exclaimed the mapmaker. "He's got the plans in his grip. We're going to be on a little reservation set apart for us by the grace of God and the kindness of those promoters. The remainder of the valley is laid off into cute little squares and streets, with everything named and numbered, ready to be listed in the brokers' offices. You may not be aware of it, but this palatial office building of ours fronts on Chigringo avenue."

"Stuff!" said Brouillard. "What has all this bubble blowing got to do with the building of a temporary dam and the setting up of a couple of cement kilns?"

Grislow laid his pen aside and whirled around on his working stool.

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(TO BE CONTINUED)