

WEB OF STEEL

By CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY and CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY, Jr. Author and Clergyman Civil Engineer

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THE FAMOUS ENGINEER LEARNS THAT HE MADE THE BIG MISTAKE OF HIS LIFE AND MANY LIVES MUST PAY THE PENALTY.

The Martlet Construction company is putting up a great international bridge planned by Bertram Meade, Sr., famous engineer.

CHAPTER VI.

The Failure.

In spite of himself and his confidence in the bridge, Abbott felt a little uneasy the next morning.

Although it involved a hard and somewhat dangerous climb downward and took upwards of a half hour of his valuable time...

Abbott, as he stood by the member and surveyed it throughout its length, could easily see that it had buckled, although the deviation was slight...

But he was a conscientious man, so he pursued his investigations further.

He noticed, by getting down on his face and surveying the lacing bars closely, a number of fine hair-line cracks in the paint...

He climbed up to the floor of the bridge and spent the next half hour inspecting the progress of the work.

The whistle was just blowing for the commencement of work when he got back to the bridge floor.

Wilchings, the chief erecting foreman, knew about the lumber. It had got so bad that he had to stop.

hold up the earth with that strut. You didn't find out anything, did you?"

"Not a thing except some hair-line cracks in the paint around the rivets."

"You'll often find those where there's a heavy load to take up. This bridge will stand long after you and I and every man on it has quit work for good."

Now Wilchings was a man of experience and ability, and if Abbott had needed any confirmation of his opinion this careless expression would have served.

Late in the afternoon, without saying anything to Wilchings, who had resumed his regular work, or to anybody in fact, Abbott went down to look at the member again.

He climbed back to the floor of the bridge and spent the next half hour inspecting the progress of the work.

Those who worked by the day were already laying aside their tools, and preparing for their departure.

He made another careful examination. The rivets, which were supposed to be tight, were found to be loose.

Abbott had been standing near the outer end of the cantilever and he turned and walked toward the bank.

swinging steel grating against steel, clanking of trucks, grinding of wheels, the deep breathing of locomotives, mingled in an unharmonious diapason of horrid sound.

Abbott was right above the pier head now. He looked down at it through the struts and floor beams and braces, fastening his gaze on the questioned member.

Every sound of work ceased after the briefest of intervals, except here and there a few riveters driving home a final rivet kept at it for a few seconds, but only for a few seconds.

It seemed to Abbott that it had never been so silent on the bridge before.

Abbott found himself waiting in strained and unwanted suspense for the next second or two, his eyes fixed on the member.

The idle workmen, just beginning to laugh and jest, heard a great cry: "Off the bridge, for God's sake!"

Two or three, among them Wilchings, who happened to be within a few feet of the landward end, without understanding why, but impelled by the agony, the appeal, the horror in the great shout of the master builder, leaped for the shore.

Wilchings, and the few men safe on the shore, stood trembling, looking at the bare pier head, at the awful tangled mass of wreckage on the shore between the pier and the bank.

They had seen body after body hurled through the air from the outward end, and as they gazed fearfully in horror here and there dark figures floated to the surface of the water.

Meade had been right. Abbott had begged in him a kind of conviction of omniscience, a belief in his own infallibility, had for a man.

CHAPTER VII.

For the Son.

The message was received in ghastly silence. No one spoke for a moment. None moved. Colonel Illingworth's face was fiery red.

The girl moved first. Her father and the young engineer were the two most deeply touched.

"We are ruined," gasped the colonel, tugging at his collar.

"No, I tell you," thundered the younger man. "For I'll proclaim my own responsibility. The fault is all mine and I'll publish the fact from one end of the world to the other."

"The ruin of a great establishment like the Martlet," added Doctor Severance.

"The dishonor to American engineering," said Curtis.

"And the awful loss of life," continued the colonel.

"I assume them all," protested the young man, forcing his lips to speak, although the cumulative burdens set forth so clearly and so mercilessly bade fair to crush him.

"It was only a mistake," protested Helen Illingworth, drawing closer to her lover's side, and with difficulty resisting a temptation to clasp him in her arms.

"A mistake!" exclaimed her father bitterly.

"You said yourself," urged the woman, turning to the chief engineer, "that you didn't know whether the designs would work out, that nobody could know, but you were convinced that they would."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think I'd let my daughter marry a man who had ruined me, an incompetent engineer by his own confession, a—"

"It is just," said Meade. "I have nothing further to do here, gentlemen. I must go to my father."

"Just or not," cried Helen Illingworth. "I can't allow you to dispose of me in that way, father. If he is as blamable as he says he is, and as you say he is, now is the time above all others for the woman who loves him to stand by him."

"Miss Illingworth, you don't know what you are saying," said Meade, forcing himself into a cold formality he did not feel.

"Just or not," cried Helen Illingworth. "I can't allow you to dispose of me in that way, father. If he is as blamable as he says he is, and as you say he is, now is the time above all others for the woman who loves him to stand by him."

She turned and went out of the room without a backward look or another word, no one detaining her. Now it happened that by hurrying down the hill in the station wagon, Meade had just caught a local train, which made connections with the Reading express some twenty miles away, and Helen Illingworth in her car reached the station platform just in time to see it depart.

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too late that his later achievement had begun in him a kind of conviction of omniscience, a belief in his own infallibility, had for a man.

Again came that strange feeling of pride, the only thing which could in any way alleviate his misery or lighten his despair.

"Whom the gods destroy they first make mad." Well, he had been mad enough. If he had only listened to the boy. And now there was nothing he could do but wait.

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He turned resolutely away and walked doggedly out of the room. Helen Illingworth made a step to follow him.

"Helen," interposed her father, catching her almost roughly by the arm in his anger and resentment, "if you go out of this door after that man, I'll never speak to you again."

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Ordinarily he was the quietest and most unobtrusive of men. There was something soft and subtle about his movements.

"The International bridge," answered the other, and the secretary noticed the strangeness of his voice more and more.

"As we sit here, maybe, it is falling," he added somberly in a sort of dull, impersonal way.

"Don't say that, sir. You have never failed in anything. There must be some means."

"The secretary leaned back against the doorjamb, put his hand over his face, and shook like a leaf. The old man eyed him.

"Mr. Meade," burst out the other man, "you don't know what it means to me. A failure myself, I have gloried in you. I—you have been everything to me, sir. I can't stand it."

"I know," said Meade kindly. He rose and walked over to the man, laid his hand on his shoulder, took his other hand in his own.

"The patron saint of birds and squirrels is happy. And though he is sixty years old and has been a patient of the state hospital for the feeble-minded for 36 years, his hair is brown and wavy, his eyes are bright and sparkling and his health is good.

"Last year I picked 27,500 butter-nuts for my squirrels," he said. "I need just that many to feed them each. They get so hungry in the winter time, I make so many of them happy. I must be here always to care for them."

Albert Gentle has forgotten the world, says the Milwaukee Sentinel. He was entered in the hospital in 1896 because he loved the small animals and food of the forests. He has been there since, spending most of his time gathering nuts or communing with nature, never expressing the slightest desire to get back to the outside world.

"Last year I picked 27,500 butter-nuts for my squirrels," he said. "I need just that many to feed them each. They get so hungry in the winter time, I make so many of them happy. I must be here always to care for them."

He said it quietly, with dignity, indignantly he somehow emerged from the character of an old simpleton, clothed in an absurd, rusty frock coat, trousers of another day and general appearance of Washington Irving's schoolmaster and became the sanctified keeper of a great trust.

"Most people do not know how important it is that we should always think of the tiny bits of life that God has put on this earth," he said slowly. "Often they do not think of each other."

Europe's Largest Dam. The largest dam in Europe has just been completed near Barcelona, Spain. It is built across the chasm through which the Noguera Pallars river flowed.

Greatest Coal Production. Coal production records were smashed in 1916, when the output was around 597,500,000 tons, compared with 570,000,000 tons, the previous high record established in 1913.

Approval. The nod of an honest man is enough. Proverb.

WOMAN SICK TWO YEARS

Could Do No Work. Now Strong as a Man.

Chicago, Ill.—"For about two years I suffered from a female trouble so I was unable to walk or do any of my own work."

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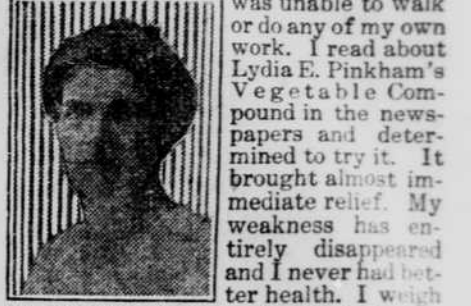
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