

50 M

ng as you stay out of the way, it, you're welcome." Hewitt ne, I want checks on the men en minutes. This ought to be a od test of your pills. Good-by, at." Pascal said. Then, when ou of earshot, he looked at r with a faint smile. "To get my question, Lane, what could g with this blast?" Pascal's pretty hard to say," Lane said. tell you how it works. The drill- done, you understand. They'll r of the holes with more than a dynamite. Attached to the top the dynamite are blasting caps. k like small firecrackers. Wires t them to the tops of the holes. holes are packed with wet sand, from the hole, anything to tamp mite in solid, so it'll blow out up. When the holes are all nd packed, they test each blast- with a galvanometer. Then—" t's a galvanometer?" Pascal

e gadget about the size of a mera," Lane said. "It's a device ng electric circuits. You hook s from the blasting cap onto the meter, and it shows you whether it is closed and ready for a blast, her it's open, due to faulty con-, or broken wires, or short cir- ou've got to make sure all your ions are right, because if one of s didn't blow you'd have a tricky gerous job to take care of later." ould think there'd be danger of off be blast with the galva- i generates an electric cur- Pascal said.

shook his head. "They use a chloride cell in it," he said. "It s only about a tenth enough set off a blasting cap." ve've checked the holes," Pascal

n they run a connecting wire to noles," Lane said, "so they'll all nce, you understand. They check nnecting wire with the galva- r. If the circuit's properly closed, ey run a long lead wire back to sting machine, get everyone out vay, and let her go." witt will do the checking himself?" asked. son'll check, and Tiller, the superintendent, and Hewitt." n he's right," Pascal said. "Noth- go wrong."

took a pencil and a small black k from his pocket. "I'll feel bet- n it's over," he said. "Excuse me ment. I've got to check with my pigs." He walked away toward n who were handling the dyna-

l sat down on a rock. Hewitt was e told himself. It was absurd for e be there, knowing as little as he ne. Explanation had been clear l. on the face of it, triple- d by three experts, there didn't be any room for a planned acci- any kind. then Pascal saw one of the crew

approaching the nearest hole to him with a stick of dynamite. Very casually the man held it over the hole and dropped it. Pascal's stomach did a flip-flop and his reflexes yanked him to his feet.

Someone behind Pascal chuckled. "Take it easy, Lieutenant. It takes a lot more than that to set off dynamite."

Pascal turned to confront a ruddy-faced, broad-shouldered man in a worn tweed jacket and slacks. He had a white, friendly smile. "My name's Benson," he said. "I'm the powder company expert. Doc Lane told me about you."

"Thanks for explaining," Pascal said. "Maybe I can swallow my heart now."

"They drop the sticks that way so they'll pack tighter," Benson said. "When they lower the last one with the blasting cap attached, that's something else. Kid-glove job."

Pascal studied him thoughtfully. This was the man whose advice had cost Tom Anderson his quarry. "Since you know why I'm here, Benson, maybe you'll give me your opinion of the sabotage that's been pulled here in the quarry."

Benson shrugged. "Not much doubt about the source," he said.

"Tom Anderson?" "Who else?" Benson said. "He imagines he has a grievance."

"Imagines?" Pascal said.

Color mounted in Benson's cheeks. "I know the gossip, Lieutenant," he said. "That I deliberately gave Tom bad advice. That I was really working for Hewitt, and helped force Tom out of business so Hewitt could get the quarry."

"Is it true?" Pascal's voice was casual.

"Of course not. There are always unforeseeable risks," Benson said. "In this case there was something in the strata of the stone itself, way below the surface that kept the dynamite from blowing the stone out from the face of the quarry the way it should. It couldn't have been foreseen. It was bad luck for Anderson, and it could have been bad luck for me if Hewitt hadn't hired me to do this job. His show of confidence in me has probably saved me my career."

"But you're not using the same method you advised Anderson to use?"

"Of course not," Benson said. He was still flushed. "Why should we? It proved unsuccessful."

"Don't take offense," Pascal said. "I'm just trying to catch up on things. And I'm not concerned with technical errors. Dr. Lane has suggested something may go wrong with this blast, something deliberately planned by someone. Something that might result in the loss of life. That's what interests me."

"Anderson might like to see us all blown to kingdom come," Benson said. "But how? Every step of the process is being triple-checked. The galvanometer tests our circuits over and over again. What could anyone do?"

"You're the expert," Pascal said. "You should have the answer—if there is one."

"There isn't," Benson said. "This thing is foolproof. I promise you."

Pascal watched the loading of the holes for an hour or more and then he went back down to the floor of the

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