



The RIVER

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CHAPTER I.

Marshall Sends for Rickard.

The large round clock was striking nine as "Casey" Rickard's dancing step carried him into the outer office of Tod Marshall. The ushering clerk, content and vestless in expectation of the third hot spring day, made a critical appraisal of the engineer's get-up before he spoke. Then he stated that Mr. Marshall had not yet come.

For a London tie and a white silk shirt belted into white serge trousers were smart for Tucson. The clerks in the employ of the Overland Pacific and of the Sonora and Yaqui railroads had stared at Rickard as he entered; they followed his progress through the room. He was a newcomer in Tucson. He had not yet acquired the apathetic habits of its citizens. He wore belts, instead of suspenders. His white trousers, duck or serge, carried a newly pressed crease each morning.

The office had not reached a verdict on the subject of K. C. Rickard. The shirt-sleeved, collarless clerks would have been quick to dub him a dandy were it not for a page of his history that was puzzling them. He had held a chair of engineering in some eastern city. He had resigned, the wind-tossed page said, to go on the road as a fireman. His rapid promotion had been spectacular; the last move, a few years ago, to fill an office position in Tucson. The summons had found him on the west coast of Mexico, where the Overland Pacific was pushing its tracks.

"You can wait here," suggested the clerk, looking covertly at the shoes of the man who a few years before had been shoveling coal on a Wyoming engine. "Mr. Marshall said to wait."

"Ribbons, instead of shoe laces!" carped the human machine that must ever write letters which other men sign. "And a blue pin to match his tie! I call that going some!"

It would never have occurred to Rickard, had he thought about it at all that morning as he knotted his tie of dark, brilliant blue silk, that the selection of his lapin pin was a choice; it was an inevitable result, an instinctive discretion of his fingers. It warped, however, the suspended judgment of Marshall's men, who had never seen him shoveling coal, disfigured by a denim jumper. They did not know that they themselves were slovens, ruined by the climate that dulls vanity and wits collars.

"Give him a year to change some of his fine habits!" wagged Smythe, the stoop-shouldered clerk, as the door of the inner office closed.

"To change his habits less!" amended the office wit. And then they fell to speculating what Marshall was going to do with him. What pawn was he in the game that everyone in Tucson followed with eager self-interested concern? Marshall's was the controlling hand in Arizona politics; the maker of governors, the arbiter of big corporations; president of a half-dozen railroads. Not a move of his on the board that escaped notice.

On the other side of the door Rickard was echoing the office question. This play job, where did it lead to? He had liked his work, under Stratton. There had been some pretty problems to meet—what did Marshall mean to do with him?

The note had set the appointment for nine. Rickard glanced at his watch and took out his Engineering Review. It would be ten before that door opened on Tod Marshall!

He knew that, on the road, Marshall's work began at dawn. "A man won't break from overwork or rust from underwork if he follows the example of the sun," Rickard had once heard him expound his favorite theory. "It is only the players, the sycophants, who can afford to pervert the arrangement nature intended for us." But in Tucson, controlled by the wife's solicitude of his Claudia, he was coerced into a regular perversion. His office never saw him until the morning was half gone.

A half-hour later Rickard finished reading a report on the diversion of a great western river. The name of Thomas Hardin had sent him off on a tangent of memory. The Thomas Hardin whose efforts to bring water to the desert of the Colorado had been so spectacularly unsuccessful was the Tom Hardin he had known! The sister had told him so, the girl with the odd bronze eyes; opal matrix they were, with glints of gold, or was it green? She herself was as unlike the raw boop of his memory as a mountain lily is like the coarse rock of its background. Even a half-sister to Hardin, as Marshall, their host at dinner the week before, had explained it—no, even that did not explain it. That any of the Hardin blood should be shared by the veins of that girl, why it was incredible! The name "Hardin" suggested crudity, loud

mouthed bragging; conceit. He could understand the failure of the river project since the sister had assured him that it was the same Tom Hardin who had gone to college at Lawrence; had married Gerty Holmes. Queer business, life, that he should cross, even so remotely, their orbits again. That was a chapter he liked to skip.

He walked over to the windows, shielded by bright awnings, and looked down on the city where the



He Walked to the Window.

next few years of his life might be caught. Comforting to reflect that an engineer is like a soldier, never can be certain about tomorrow. Time enough to know that tomorrow meant Tucson! What was that threadbare proverb in the Overland Pacific that Tod Marshall always keeps his men until they lose their teeth? That defined the men who made themselves necessary!

His eyes were resting on the banalities of the modern city that had robbed "old town" of its flavor. Were it not for the beauty of the distant hills, the jar and rattle of the trains whose roar called to near-by pleasure cities, twinkling lights and crowded theaters, stretches of parks and recreation grounds, he, who loved the thrill and confinement of an engine, who had found excitement in a desert, a charter of adventure in the barrancas of Mexico, would stifle in Tucson! American progress was as yet too thin a veneer on Mexican indifference to make the place endurable—as a city.

"I'm good for a lifetime here, if I want it," his thoughts would work back to the starting place. "If I knuckle down to it, let him grow to depend on me, it's as good as settled that I am buried in Tucson!" Hadn't he heard Marshall himself say that he "didn't keep a kindergarten—that his office wasn't a training school for men!" He wanted his men to stay! That, one of the reasons of the great man's power; detail rested on the shoulders of his employees. It kept his own brain clear, receptive to big achievements.

"Perhaps as the work unrolls, as I see more of what he wants of me, why he wants me, I may like it, I may get to shout for Tucson!" It was impossible enough to smile over! Child's work, compared to Mexico.

The distinction of serving Marshall well certainly had its drawbacks. He wanted to sweep on. Whether he had a definite terminal, a concrete goal, had he ever stopped to think? Specialization had always a fascination for him. It was that which had thrown him out of his instructorship into the firebox of a western engine. It had governed his course at college—to know one thing well, and then to prove that he knew it well! Contented in the Mexican barranca, here he was chasing, restive, after a few weeks of Tucson. For what was he getting here? Adding what scrap of experience to the rounding of his profession?

Retrospectively engineering could hardly be said to be the work of his choice. Rather had it appeared to choose him. From boyhood engineers had always been, to him, the soldiers of modern civilization. To conquer and subdue mountains, to shackle wild rivers, to suspend trestles over dizzy heights, to throw the tracks of an advancing civilization along a newly blazed trail, there would always be a thrill in it for him. It had changed the best quarterback of his high school into the primmest of students at college. Only for a short time had he let his vanity sidetrack him, when the honor of teaching what he had learned stopped his own progress. A rut! He remembered the day when it had burst on him, the realization of the rut he was in. He could see his Lawrence schoolroom, could see yet the face under the red-haired mop belong-

ing to Jerry Matson—queer he remembered the name after all those years! He could picture the look of consternation when he threw down his book and announced his desertion.

He had handed in his resignation the next day. A month later and he was shoveling coal on the steep grades of Wyoming.

"Marshall keeps his men with him!" The engineer's glance traveled around the fleckless office. A stranger to Marshall would get a wrong idea of the man who worked in it! Those precise files, the desk, orderly and polished, the gleaming linoleum—and then the man who made the negro janitor's life a proud burden! His clothes always crumpled—spots, too, unless his Claudia had had a chance at them! Black string ties askew, all the outward visible signs of the southern gentleman of assured ancestry. Not even a valet would ever keep Tod Marshall up to the standard of that office. What did he have servants for, he had demanded of Rickard, if it were not to jump after him, picking up the loose ends he dropped?

Curious thing, magnetism. That man's step on the stair, and every man-jack of them would jump to attention, from Ben, the colored janitor, who would not swap his post for a lecture so long as Tod Marshall's one lung kept him in Arizona, to Smythe, the stoop-shouldered clerk, who had followed Marshall's cough from San Francisco. It was said in Arizona—he himself had met the statement in Tucson—that any man who had ever worked for Tod Marshall would rather be warmed by the reflection of his greatness than be given posts of personal distinction.

Was it office routine Marshall intended him for? He admired without stint Tod Marshall, but he preferred to work by the side of the other kind, the strong men, without physical handicap, the men who take risks, the men who live the life of soldiers. That was the life he wanted. He would wait long enough to get Marshall's intention, and then, if it meant this! he would break loose. He would go back to the front where he belonged—back to the firing line.

As the hands of the round clock in the outer office were pointing to ten the door opened and Marshall entered. His clothes, of indefinite blackish hue, would have disgraced an eastern man. His string tie had a starboard list, and his hat was ready for a rummage sale. But few would have looked at his clothes. The latent energy of the dynamic spirit that would frequently turn that quiet office into a maelstrom gleamed in those Indian-black eyes. Beneath the shabby cloth one suspected the daily polished skin; under the old slosh hat was the mouth of purpose, the lips that no woman, even his Claudia, had kissed without the thrill of fear.

Marshall glanced back at the clock, and then toward his visitor.

"On time!" he observed.

Rickard, smiling, put his book in his pocket.



"I Am Going to Send You Down to the Break."

face, as the Chinese say. I may tell you that it was a case of fring. He'd made a terrible fluke down there."

"I know," murmured Rickard. It was growing more difficult, more distasteful. If Marshall wanted him to supplant Hardin! It had been incredible, that man's folly! Reckless gambling, nothing else. Make a cut in the banks of a wild river, without putting in head gates to control it; a child would guess better! It was a problem now, all right; the writer of the report he'd just read wasn't the only one who was prophesying failure. Let the river cut back, and the government works at Laguna would be useless; a piekie Hardin had made.

Still to gain time he suggested that Marshall tell him the situation. "I've followed only the engineering side of it. I don't know the relationship of the two companies."

"Where the railroad came in? The inside of that story? I'm responsible—I guaranteed to Faraday the closing of that break. There was a big district to save, a district that the railroad tapped—didn't I tell you that later?" He was leisurely puffing blue, perfectly formed rings into the air, his eyes admiring them.

"Perhaps you've heard how Estrada, the general, took a party of men into the desert to sell a mine he owned. After the deal was made he decided to let it slip. He'd found something bigger to do, more to his liking than the sale of a mine. Estrada was a big man, a great man. He had the idea Powell and others had, of turning the river, of saving the desert. He dreamed himself of doing it. If sickness hadn't come to him the Colorado would be meekly carrying water now instead of flooding a country. Pity Eduardo, the son, is not like him. He's like his mother—you never know what they are dreaming about. Not at all alike, my wife and Estrada's."

Then it came to Rickard that he had heard somewhere that Marshall and General Estrada had married sisters, famous beauties of Guadalajara. He began to piece together the personal background of the story.

"It was a long time before Estrada could get it started, and it's a long story. As soon as he began he was knocked down. Other men took hold. You'll hear it all in the valley. Hardin took a day to tell it to me! He sees himself as a martyr. Promoters got in; the thing swelled into a swindle, a spectacular swindle. They showed oranges on Broadway before a drop of water was brought in. Hardin has lots of grievances! He'd made the original survey. So when he sued for his back wages he took the papers of the bankrupt company in settlement. He's a grim sort of ineffectual bulldog. He's clung with his teeth to the Estrada idea. And he's not big enough for it. He uses the optimistic method—gives you only half of a case, half of the problem, gets started on a false premise. Well, he got up another company on that method, the Desert Reclamation company, tried to whitewash the desert project; it was in bad odor then, and he managed to bring a few drops of water to the desert."

"It was Hardin who did that?"

"But he couldn't deliver enough. The cut silted up. He cut again, the same story. He was in a pretty bad hole. He'd brought colonists in already; he'd used their money, the money they'd paid for land with water to make the cuts. No wonder he was desperate."

It recalled the man Rickard had disliked, the rough-shod, loud-voiced student of his first class in engineering. That was the man who had made the flamboyant carpets of the Holmes' boarding house impossible any longer to him. He had a sudden disconcerting vision of a large unfinished face peering through the honeysuckles at a man and a girl drawing apart in confusion from their first and last kiss. He wanted to tell Marshall he was wasting his time.

"Overwhelmed with lawsuits," Marshall was saying. "Hardin had to deliver water to those colonists. It was then that he ran over into Mexico, so as to get a better gradient for his canal, and made his cut there. You know the rest. It ran away from him. It made the Salton sea."

CHAPTER II.

A Bit of Oratory.

Marshall threw his hat on a chair, the morning paper on his desk. He aimed his burned-out cigar at the nearest cuspidor, but it fell foul, the ashes scattering over Sam's lately scoured linoleum. Instantly there was appearance of settled disorder. Marshall emptied his pockets of loose papers, spreading them out on his flat-top desk.

"Sit down!"

Rickard took the chair at the other side of the desk.

Marshall rang a bell. Instantly, the shirt-sleeved clerk entered.

"I shall not see anyone," the chief announced. "I don't want to be interrupted. Take these to Smythe."

His eyes followed the shutting of the door, then turned square upon Rickard. "I need you. It's a h—l of a mess!"

The engineer wanted to know what kind of a "mess" it was.

"That river. It's running away from them. I'm going to send you down to stop it."

"The Colorado!" exclaimed Rickard. "It was no hose to be turned, simply, off from a garden bed."

"Of course you've been following it! It's one of the biggest things that's happened in this part of the world. Too big for the men who have been trying to swing it. You've followed it?"

"Yes." Queer coincidence, reading that report just now! "I've not been there. But the engineering papers used to get to me in Mexico. I've read all the reports."

His superior's question was uncharacteristically superfluous. Who had not read with thrilled nerves of that wild river which men had been trying to put under work harness? Who, even among the stay-at-homes, had not followed the newspaper stories of the failure to make a meek servant and water carrier of the Colorado, that wild steed of mountain and desert? What engineer, no matter how remote, would not "follow" that spectacular struggle between men and Titans?

"Going to send me to Salton?" he inquired. The railroad had been kept jumping to keep its feet dry. His job to be by that inland sea which last year had been desert!

"No. Brainerd is there. He can manage the tracks. I am going to send you down to the break."

Rickard did not answer. He felt the questioning eyes of his chief.

The break—where those Hardins were—how in thunder was he going to get out of that, and save his skin? Marshall liked his own way—

"We'll consider it settled, then."

"Who's in charge there?" Rickard was only gaining time. He thought he knew the name he would hear, Marshall's first word surprised him.

"No one. Up to a few months ago it was Hardin, Tom Hardin. He was general manager of the company. He was allowed to resign, to save his

"Did he ever give you any reason," frowned Rickard reminiscently, "any reasonable reason why he made that cut without any head gate?"

"No money!" shrugged Marshall, getting out another cigar. "I told you he's a raw dancer, always starts off too quick, begins on the wrong foot. Oh, yes, he has reasons, lots of them, that fellow, but, as you say, they're not reasonable. He never waits to get ready."

Why was it that the face of the half-sister came to Rickard then, with that look of sensitive high breeding and guarded reserve? And she a Hardin! Sister to the loud-spilling mouth! Queer cards nature deals! And pretty cards Marshall was trying to deal out to him. Go down there and finish Hardin's job, show him up to be the fumbler he was, give him orders, give the husband of Gerty Holmes orders—!

"It was Hardin who came to me, but not until he'd tried everything else. They'd worked for months trying to dam the river with a few lace handkerchiefs, and perhaps a chiffon veil!" Marshall was twinkling over his own humor. "Hardin did put up a good talk. It was true, as he said; we'd had to move our tracks three, no, four times at Salton. It was true that it ought to be one of the richest districts tapped by the O. P. But he clenched me by a clever bait—to put out a spur in Mexico which would keep any other railroad off by a fifty-mile parallel, and there the sandhills make a railroad impossible."

"The government must eventually come to the rescue. Their works at Laguna hang on the control of the river down at the heading. Once, he told me—I don't know how much truth there was in it—the service, reclamation service, did try to buy up their plant for a paltry sum. He wouldn't sell. The short job, I recommended long-sighted assistance to Faraday. I promised to turn that river, save the district. We expected before the year was out to have the government take the responsibility off our hands."

Rickard made an impatient shrug. A nice problem Marshall had taken onto himself. He wanted none of it. Hardin—the thing was impossible.

He met sagaciously Marshall's story. He heard him say: "Agreed with Faraday. The Desert Reclamation company was as helpless as a swaddled infant. We made the condition that we reorganize the company. I was put in Hardin's place as president of the corporation, and he was made general manager. Of course we had to control the stock. We put up two hundred thousand dollars—Hardin had estimated it would cost us less than half that! It's cost us already a million. Things haven't been going right. Faraday's temper burst out, and Hardin a while back was asked to resign."

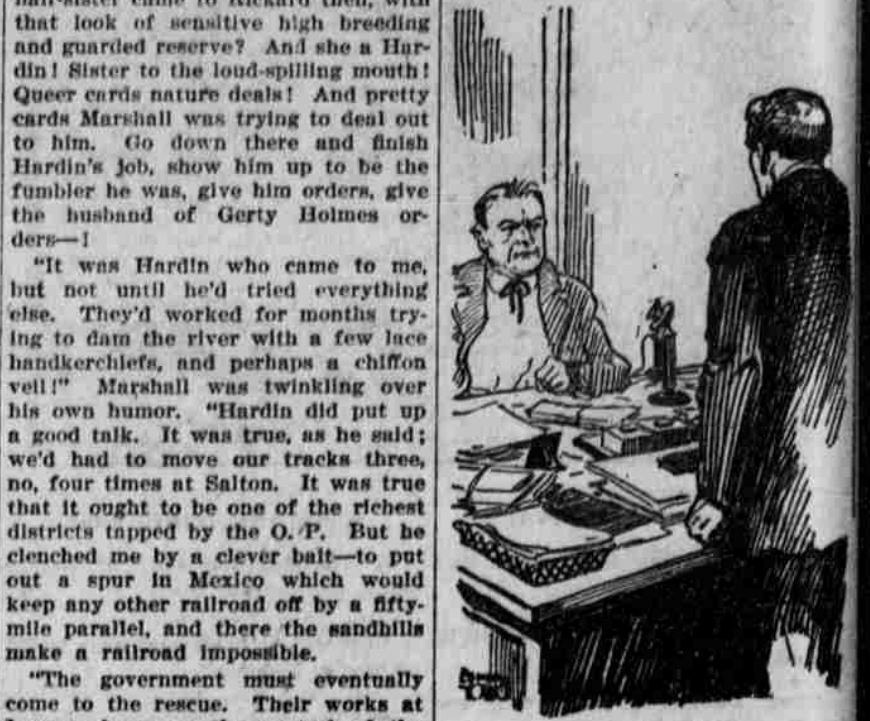
"And it is Hardin's position that you want me to fill?" His voice sounded queer to himself—dry, mocking, as if anyone should know what an absurd thing he was being asked to do. He felt Marshall's sharp Indian eyes on him, as if detecting a pettiness. Well, he didn't care how Marshall interpreted it. That place wasn't for him.

"I want you in control down there," Rickard knew he was being appraised, balanced all over again. It made no difference—

"I'm sorry," he was beginning, when Marshall cut in.

"Good Lord, you are not going to turn it down?"

He met Marshall's incredulous stare. "It's a job I'd jump at under most circumstances. But I can't go, sir."



"Just Stop That River!"

play of feature. "Take your time," he said. "Don't answer too hastily. Take your time."

He was playing the fool, or worse, before Marshall, whom he respected, whose partisanship meant so much. But he couldn't help it. He couldn't tell that story—he knew that Marshall would brush it aside as a child's episode. He couldn't make it clear to the man whose stare was balancing him why he could not oust Tom Hardin.

"Is it a personal reason?" Marshall's gaze had returned to his ring making.

Rickard admitted it was personal.

"Then I don't accept it. I wouldn't be your friend if I didn't advise you to disregard the little thing, to take the big thing. Maybe you are going to be married." He did not wait for Rickard's vigorous negative. "That can wait. The river won't. There's a river running away down yonder, ruining the valley, ruining the homes of families men have carried in with them. I've asked you to save them. There's a debt of honor to be paid. My promise. I have asked you to pay it. There's history being written in that desert. I've asked you to write it. And you say 'No—'"

"No! I say yes!" slipped Rickard. The Marshall oratory had swept him to his feet.

The dramatic moment was chilled by their Anglo-Saxon self-consciousness. An awkward silence hung. Then:

"When can you go?"

"Today, tomorrow, the first train out."

"Good!"

"Any instructions?"

"Just stop that river!"

"The expense?" demanded the engineer. "How far can I go?"

"I—on the expense!" cried Tod Marshall. "Just go ahead."

(To be continued next week.)

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