



The RIVER

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—K. C. Rickard, an engineer of the Overland Pacific, is called to the office of President Marshall in Tucson, Ariz. "Casey" is an engineer in the office force; he wears "duke" clothes, but he had resigned a chair of engineering in the East to go on the road as a fireman and his promotion had been spectacular. While waiting for Marshall Rickard reads a report on the ravages of the Colorado, despite the efforts of Thomas Hardin of the Desert Reclamation company. This Hardin had been a student under Rickard and had married Gerry Holmes, with whom Rickard had fancied he was in love.

CHAPTER II—Marshall tells Rickard the Overland Pacific has got to step in to save the Imperial Valley and sends him to the break. Rickard declines because he does not want to supplant Hardin, but is won over. "Stop the river; damn the expense," says Marshall.

CHAPTER III—Rickard journeys to Calexico, sees the irrigated desert and casts much about Hardin and his work.

CHAPTER IV—At the hotel he meets Mr. and Mrs. Hardin and Innes Hardin, Hardin's half sister. Disappointed in her husband and an incorrigible coquette, Mrs. Hardin sets her cap for her former lover and invites him to dinner.

CHAPTER V—Rickard visits the company's offices and takes control. He finds the engineers loyal to Hardin and hostile to him. Estrada, a Mexican, son of the "Father of the Imperial Valley," tells him of the general situation.

CHAPTER VI—Rickard attends a meeting of the directors and asserts his authority. Hardin rages. Estrada tells Rickard of his foreboding that his work will fail. "I can't see it finished."

The working force was informally discussed. Hardin said they could depend on hobo labor. Rickard agreed that they would find such help, but it would not do to rely on it. The big sewer system of New Orleans was about completed; he had planned to write there, stating the need. And there was a man in Zacatecas, named Porter—

"Frank Porter?" sneered Hardin, "that—murderer?"

"His brother," Rickard answered pleasantly. "Jim furnishes the men for the big mines in Sonora and Sinaloa. He'll send us all the labor we want, the best for our purpose. When it gets red-hot, there's no one like a peon or an Indian."

"You'll be infringing on the international contract law," suggested MacLean.

"No. The camp is on the Mexican side," laughed Casey. "I'd thought of that. We'll have them shipped to the nearest Mexican point, and then brought to the border. Mr. Estrada will help us."

The meeting had already adjourned. They were standing around the fat-top desk. Estrada invited them all to lunch with him, in the car on the siding. MacLean said that he had to get back to Los Angeles. Mr. Babcock was going to take him out to Grant's heading in the machine. He had never been there. They had breakfasted late. He looked very much the colonel to Rickard, his full chest and stiff carriage made more military by his trim uniform of khaki-colored cloth.

"May I speak to you about your boy, Mr. MacLean?"

Hardin caught a slight that was not intended. He pushed past the group at the door without civility or ceremony.

The steady grave eyes of the big frame looked at Rickard inquiringly. "He wants to stay out another year. I hope you will let him. It's not disinterested. I shall have to take a stenographer to the heading this summer. There is a girl here; I couldn't take her, and then, too, I'm old-fashioned; I don't like women in offices. My position promises to be a peculiar one. I'd like to have your son to rely on for emergencies; a stenographer could not cover."

MacLean's grave features relaxed as he looked down on the engineer, who was no small man himself, and suggested that his son was not very well up in stenography.

"That's the least of it."

"I hope that he will make a good stenographer! Good morning, gentlemen."

At table, neither Estrada nor his guest uncovered their active thought which revolved around Hardin and his hurt. Instead, Rickard had questions to ask his host on river history. As they talked, it came to him that something was amiss—Estrada was accurate; he had all his facts. Was it enthusiasm, sympathy, he lacked? Presently he challenged him with it.

Estrada's eyes dreamed out of the window, followed the gorge of the New river, as though out there, somewhere, the answer hovered.

"Do you mean, do you doubt it?" exclaimed Rickard, watching the melancholy in the beautiful eyes.

Estrada shook his head, but without decision. "Nothing you'd not laugh at. I can laugh at it myself, sometimes."

Rickard waited, not sure that anything more was coming. The Mexican's dark eyes were troubled; a puzzle brooded in them. "It's a purely negative sense that I've had, since I was a child. Something falls between me and a plan. If I said it was a veil, it would be—something!" His voice fell

to a ghost of tunelessness. "And it's—nothing. A blank—I know then it's not going to happen. It is terribly final! It's happened, often. Now, I wait for that—well. When it fails, I know what it means."

"And you have had that—sense about this river business?"

Estrada turned his pensive gaze on the American. "Yes, often. I thought, after father's death, that that was what it meant. But it came again. It kept coming. I had it while you were all talking, just now. I don't speak of this. It sounds chicken-hearted. And I'm in this with all my soul—my father—I couldn't do it any other way, but—"

"You think we are going to fail?"

"I can't see it finished," was Estrada's mournful answer. He turned again to stare out of the window.

"Who are the river men in the valley?" demanded the newcomer. "I want to meet them, to talk to them."

"Cornel, he's an Indian. He's worth talking to. He knows its history, its legends. Perhaps some of it is history."

"Where's he to be found?"

"You'll run across him! Whenever anything's up, he is on hand. He senses it. And then there's Matt Hamlin."

"I'll see him, of course. Has he been up the river?"

"No, but I'll tell you two who have. Maldonado, a half-breed, who lives some twenty miles down the river from Hamlin's. He knows the Gila as though he were pure Indian. The Gila's tricky! Maldonado's grandfather was a trapper, his great-grandfather, they say, a priest. The women were all Indian. He's smart. Smart and bad."

Estrada's Japanese servant came back into the car to offer tea, freshly leed.

"That's what I want, smart river men, not tea!" laughed Rickard. "I want river history."

"There's another man you ought to meet. He was with the second Powell expedition. He's written the best book on the river. He knows it, if any man does. You wanted these maps." Estrada was gathering them together.

"Thank you. And you can just strangle that foreboding of yours, Mr. Estrada. For I tell you, we're going to govern that river!"

Estrada's pensive smile followed the dancing step of the engineer until it carried him out of sight. Perhaps? Because he was the son of his father, he must work as hard as if conviction went with him, as if success awaited at the other end of the long road. But it was not going to be. He would never see that river shackled—

CHAPTER VII.

A Garden in a Desert.

His dwelling leaped into sight as Hardin turned the corner of the street. There was but one street running through the twin towns, flanked by the ditches of running water. The rest were ditches of running water edged by footpaths. Scowling, he passed under the overhanging bird cages of the Desert hotel without a greeting for the longers, whose chairs were drawn up against the shade of the brick walls. The momentum slackened as Hardin neared the place he called his home. An inner tenderness diluted the sneer that disfigured his face. He could see Innes as she moved around in the little fenced-in strip that surrounded her desert tent. She insisted on calling it a garden, in spite of his rallery.

"Gerty's in bed, I suppose," thought Tom. He had a sudden vivid picture of her accusing martyrdom. His mouth hardened again. Innes, stooping over a rose, passed out of his vision.

It came to Hardin suddenly that a man has made a circle of failure when he dreads going to his office and shrinks from the reproaches at home.

"A 'has-been' at forty!" he mused. Where were all his ships drifting?

Innes, straightening, waved a gay hand.

"She's raising a goodly crop of barrels." His thought mocked and caressed her. Her garden devotion was a tender joke with him. He loved the Hardin trait in her, the persistence which will not be daunted. An occupation with a Hardin was a dedication. He would not acknowledge the Innes blood in her. Like that fancy mother of hers? Innes was a Hardin through and through!

"It's in the blood," ran his thought. "She can't help it. All the Hardins work that way. The Hardins always make fools of themselves!"

Innes, lifting her eyes from a crippled rose, saw that the black devils were consuming him again.

"Will you look at this wreck!" she cried.

The windstorm the previous week had made a sickening devastation of her labors. The morning glories alone were senseless. A pink oleander drooped many broken branches from which miracles of perfect flowers were unfolding. The prettiest blossom to Hardin was the gardener herself. She was vivid from eager toil. Hardin looked at her approvingly. He liked her khaki suit, simple as a uniform with its flowing black tie and leather belt. She looked more like herself to day. She had bleached out, in Tucson. She had been letting herself get too tanned, running around without hats. Sunburn paled the value of those splendid eyes of hers. He could always tease her by likening them to topazes.

His eyes ran over the pink and purple lines of cord-trained vines which made floral screens for her tent. Free of the strings overhead, they fluted over the ramada, the second roof, of living boughs. He acknowledged their beauty. They gave grace to hate necessity; they denied the panting thirsty desert just beyond.

He remembered his own ramada. Gerty had hated it, had complained of it so bitterly when she came home from New York that he had had it pulled down and replaced by a V roof of pine boards, glaring and ugly. Gerty was satisfied, for it was clean; she no longer felt that she lived in a squaw house. Let the Indians have ramadas; there was no earthly reason she should. He had urged that the desert dwellers had valuable hints to give them. But what was a ramada to him, or anything else? Hardin turned to leave.

She did not want him to go so soon. She pointed out a new vine to him. She had brought it from Tucson; "Kudzu," they called it; a Japanese vine. And there was another broken rose, quite beyond the help of stripped handkerchiefs and mesquit spittles.

He followed her around the tent, her prattle falling from his grim mood. He was not thinking of her flowers except as a soothing parallel. The desert storm had made a havoc of his garden—a sorry batch of his life. He and Innes had been trying to make a garden out of a desert; the desert had flouted them. It was not his fault. Something had happened; something quite beyond his power. Luck was turning against him.

Innes, why, she was playing us with a toy. It was the natural instinct of a woman to make things pretty around her. But he had sacrificed his youth, his chance. His domestic life, too—he should never have carried a dainty little woman like Gerty into the desert. He had never reproached her for leaving him, even last time when he thought it was for good. The word burned his wound. Whose good? His or Gerty's? Somehow, though they wrangled, he always knew it would turn out all right; life would run smoothly when they left the desert. But things were getting worse; his mouth puckered over some recollections. Yet he loved Gerty; he couldn't picture life without her. He decided that it was because there had never been anyone else. Most fellows had had sweethearts before they married; he had not, nor a mistress when she left him, though God knows, it would have been easy enough. His mouth fell into sardonic lines. Those half-breed women! No one, even when a divorce had hung over him. Oh, he knew what their friends made of each of Gerty's lengthened flights; he knew! But that had been spared him, that vulgar grisly spectacle of modern life when two people who have been lovers drag the carcass of their love over the grimy floor of a curious gaping court. He shuddered. Gerty loved him. Else, why had she come back to him? Why had she not kept her threat when he refused to abandon his desert project and turn his abilities into a more-profitable dedication? He could see her face as she stared flushing up into his that nipping cold day when he had run into her on Broadway. He remembered her coquetry when she suggested that there was plenty of room in her apartment! His wife! She spoke of seeing his pictures in the papers. "He had grown to be a great man!"

That poignant meeting, the week following had been the brightest of his life. He was sure then that Gerty loved him. The wrangles were only their different ways of looking at things. Of course, they loved each other. But Gerty couldn't stand pioneer life. She had loved him, or she would not so easily have been persuaded to try it over again. She yearned to make him comfortable, she said. So she had gone back, and pulled down his ramada, and put his clothes in the lowest bureau drawer!

"It wasn't either of our faults," he ruminated. "It was the fault of the institution. Marriage itself is a failure. Look at the papers, the divorce courts. A man's interests are no longer his wife's. Curious that it should be so. But it's a fact. It is the modern discontent. Women want different careers from their husbands."

Yet, how could he help throwing his life into his work? He had committed himself; it was an obligation. If it were not for that indefinable something, his allegiance to the cause which mocked at reasons and definitions; oh, he knew!—he had tilted with Gerty and been worsted!—he would have resigned from his company, his company which had dishonored him. Why should he stay to get more stabs, more wounds? And the last blow, this pet of Marshall's! Hardin gave a scantling in his path a vicious kick.

The girl's prattle had died. She walked with him silently.

At the door of her tent, she stopped, looking at him wistfully. She wished he could hide his hurt. If he had only some of Innes' pride!



He Loved the Hardin Trait in Her.

"How are things?" She used their fond little formula.

"Oh, rotten!" growled Hardin, flinging away. The gate slammed behind him.

(To be continued next week.)

NAVY BANDS WILL SPUR PATRIOTISM IN VICTORY DRIVE

Mare Island Commandant Offers Marines and Jackies to Aid Fifth Loan

Captain Edward L. Beach, commandant of Mare Island Navy Yard, Mare Island, Cal., who was in command of the United States dreadnaught New York in the North Sea at the time the German navy was turned over under the terms of the armistice, has offered three of the crack service bands stationed at Mare Island for use during the Victory drive.

One of the bands will travel on the trophy train which will tour all of the seven states in the Twelfth District and the other two bands will be used in cities within a day's journey of Mare Island. One of these bands is the famous sixty-piece Marine Band and the other is the forty-piece Jackie Band.

Paymaster Ralph Phelps, U. S. N., has been placed in charge of the itinerary to be mapped out for the two bands which will not travel on the train and any local committee desiring to make use of either of these two bands during the drive should communicate with him.

HE ESCAPED INFLUENZA.

"Last spring I had a terrible cold and gripe and was afraid I was going to have influenza," writes A. A. McNeese, High Point, Ga. "I took Foley's Honey and Tar. It was a sight to see the phlegm I coughed up. I am convinced Foley's Honey and Tar saved me from influenza." Contains no opiates. Good for children. Sold by Reed Brothers.



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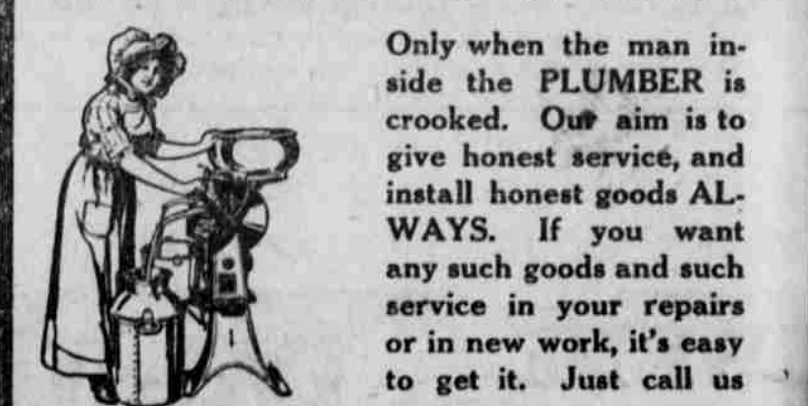
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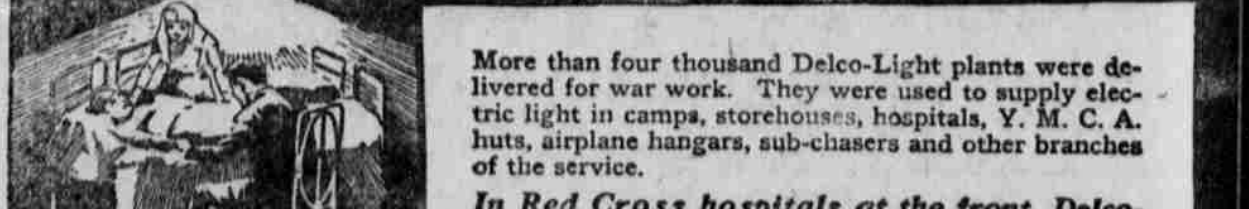


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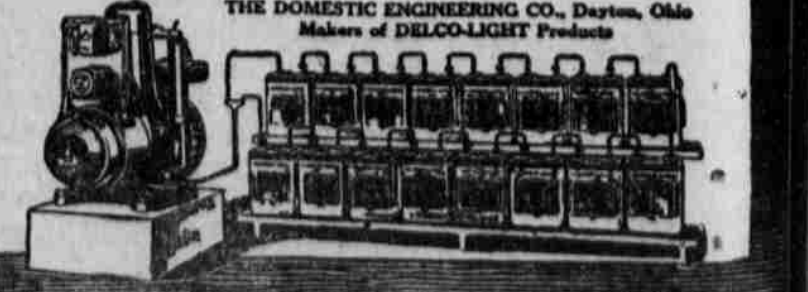
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