



# The RIVER

## EDNA H. AIKEN

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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 enigma to 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 Gerty 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 learns 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 fall. "I can't see it finished."

**CHAPTER VII**—Innes is discovered in her garden. She tries to cheer up Hardin, who is furious against Rickard.

**CHAPTER VIII**—A family luncheon of the Hardins which throws light on them.

**CHAPTER IX**—Hardin discovers that Rickard is planning a levee to protect Calexico and puts him down as incompetent. Gerty thinks her lord jealous.

**CHAPTER X**—The Hardin dinner to Rickard discloses further the family characteristics. Hardin is surly and sulky. Innes is hardly polite. Gerty plans a "progressive ride" in Rickard's honor.

Innes looked up for Tom's answer. His face was ugly with passion. "Danger! It's a bluff, a big show of activity here because he's buffaloed; he doesn't know how to tackle the job out there."

It had begun to look that way to more than one. It was talked over at Coulter's store; in the outer office of the D. R. company where the engineers foregathered; among the chair tilers who idled in front of the Desert hotel. "The man does not know how to tackle his job!" A levee, and the gate held up! What protection to the towns would be that toy levee if the river should return on one of its spectacular sprees? A levee, and the intake itself not guarded? He was whispered of as incompetent; one of Marshall's clerks. He was given a short time to blow himself out. A bookman, a theorist.

"As well put sentinels a few miles from prison and leave the jail doors open!" This was Wooster's gibe. All saw the Colorado as a marauder at large. "And a little heap of sand stacked up to scare it off! It's a scream!"

Mrs. Hardin found it difficult to meet with diplomacy the confidences which inevitably came her way. As Hardin's wife she was expected to enjoy the universal enmity the new man was acquiring. Gerty's light touches, too slight for championship, passed as a sweet charity. Her own position those days was trying. She did not yet know her diplomatic lesson.

Apparently unaware of the talk, Rickard spent the greater part of his time superintending the levee. He could trust no one else to do it, no one unless it were Estrada, who was rushing his steel rails through to the front and was needed there.

Things were moving under his constant goading. The extra pay was showing results. He should be at the heading now, he kept telling himself, but he was convinced that the instant he turned his back, the work on the levee would stop; and all the reasons excellent! Some emergency would be cooked up to warrant the withdrawal of the hands. Chafe as he might at the situation, it was to be guerrilla warfare. Not a fight in the open, he knew how to meet that, but that baffling resistance, the polite silence of the office when he entered—"Well, they'll be doing my way pretty soon, or my name isn't Rickard. That's flat."

He was fretting to be at work, to start the wheels of the O. P., its vast machinery toward his problem. He knew that that organization, like well-drilled militia, was ready for his call. The call lagged, not that he did not need men, but there was no place ready for them. The camp, that was another rub. There was no camp! It was not equipped for a sudden inflation of men. The inefficiency of the projectors of this desert scheme had never seemed so criminal as when he had surveyed the equipment at the intake. "Get ready first; your tools, your stoves, your beds." That was the training of the good executive, of men like Marshall and MacLennan. Nothing to be left to chance; to foresee emergencies, not to be taken by them un-

aware. The reason of Hardin's downfall was his silphob habits. How could he be a good officer who had never drilled as a soldier? There was the gap at the intake, Hardin's grotesque folly, widened from one hundred feet to ten times the original cut; widening every day, with neither equipment nor camp adequate to push through a work of half the original magnitude. Cutting away, moreover, was the island, Disaster island; it had received apt christening by the engineers, its baptismal water the Colorado. The last floods had played with it as though it were a bar of sugar. There was no rock at hand; no rock on the way, no rock ordered. Could anyone piece together such recklessness?

Rickard knew where he would get his rock. Already he had requisitioned the entire output of the Tacna and Patagonia quarries. He had ordered steam shovels to be installed at the quarry back of old Hamlin's. That rock pit would be his first crutch, and the gravel bed—that was a find! As he paced the levee west of the towns, he was planning his campaign. Porter was scouring Zacatecas for men; he himself had offered, as bait, free transportation; the O. P. he knew would back him. He was going to throw out a spur-track from the heading, touching at the quarry and gravel pit, on to the main road at Yuma. Double track most of the way; sidings every three miles. Rock must be rushed; the trains must be pushed through. He itched to begin. It never occurred to him that, like Hardin, he might fail.

"Though it's no pink tea," he told himself, "it's no picnic." At Tucson he knew that the situation was a grave one, but his talk with Brandon, who knew his river as does a good Indian, made the year a significant, eventful one. Matt Hamlin, too, whose shrewd eyes had grown river-wise, he, too, had had tales to tell of the tricky river. Maldonado, the half-breed, had



Maldonado Had Confirmed Their Portents.

confirmed their portents while they sat together under his oleander, famous throughout that section of the country. And powerfully had Cor'nel, the Indian who had piloted Estrada's party across the desert, whom Rickard had met at the Crossing, deeply had he impressed him. The river grew into a malevolent, mocking personality; he could see it a dragon of yellow waters, dragging its slow, sluggish length across the baked desert sands; deceiving men by its inertness; luring the explorer by a mild mood to rise suddenly with its wild fellow, the Gila, sending boat and boatmen to their swift doom.

Rickard was thinking of the half-breed, Maldonado, as he inspected the new stretch of levee between the towns. He had heard from others besides Estrada of the river knowledge of this descendant of trapper and squaw, and had thought it worth while to ride the twenty miles from down the river to talk with him. The man's snavity, his narrow slits of eyes, the lips thin and facile, deep lines of cruelty falling from them, had repelled his visitor. The mystery of the place followed him. Why the "dobe wall" which completely surrounded the small, low dwellings? Why the cautious admittance, the atmosphere of suspicion? Rickard had seen the wife, a frightened shadow of a woman; had seen her flinch when the brute called for her. He had questioned Cor'nel about the half-breed. He was remembering the wrinkles of contempt on the old Indian's face as he delivered himself of an oracular grunt.

"White man? No. Indian? No! Coyote!"

Though he suspected Maldonado would lie on principle, though it might

be that two-thirds of his glib talk was false, yet a thread of truth coincident with the others, Brandon and Hamlin and Cor'nel, might be pulled out of his romantic fabric.

"When the waters of the Gila run red look out for trouble!" He doubted that they ever ran red. He would ask Cor'nel. He had also spoken of a cycle, known to Indians, of a hundredth year, when the Dragon grows restless; this he had declared was a hundredth year.

Following his talk with Maldonado and the accidental happy chance meeting with Cor'nel at the Crossing Rickard had written his first report to Tod Marshall. Before he had come to the heading he had expected to advise against the completion of the wooden headgate at the Crossing. Hamlin had given him a new viewpoint. There was a fighting chance. And he wanted to be fair. Next to being successful he wanted to be fair.

"It's time to be hearing from Marshall," Rickard was thinking, as he walked back to the hotel. "I wonder what he will say." He felt it had been fair to put it up to Marshall; personally, he would like to begin with a clean slate—begin right. Clumsy work had been done, it was true, yet there were urgent reasons now for haste; and the gate was nearly half done! He had gone carefully over the situation. The heavy snowfall, unprecedented for years, a hundred, according to the Indians—on the Wind Rover mountains—the lakes swollen with ice, the Gila restless, the summer floods yet to be met; perhaps, he now thought, he had been overcautious in emphasizing the arguments for the headgate. For the hundred feet were now a thousand feet—yet he had spoken of that to Marshall! "Calculate for yourself the difference in expense since the flood widened the break. It is a vastly different problem now. Disaster island, which they figured on for an anchor, is a mere pit of corroding sugar in the channel. An infant Colorado could wash it away. However, a lot of work has already been done, and a lot of money spent. There is a fighting chance. Perhaps the bad year is all Indian talk."

A guess, at best, whatever they did! It was pure gamble what the tricky Colorado would do. Anyway, he had given the whole situation to Marshall. In his box at the hotel was a telegram which had sent over from the office—from Tod Marshall. "Take the fighting chance. But remember to speak more respectfully of Indians."

"Marshall all over," laughed his subordinate. "Now it's a case of hustle! But dollars to doughnuts, as Junior says, we don't do it!"

### CHAPTER XII.

#### Hardin's Luck.

Two days later there was a shock of earthquake, so slight that the lapping of the water in Rickard's bath was his intimation of the earth's uneasiness. In the dining room later he found everyone discussing it. "Who could remember an earthquake in that desert?" "The first shake!"

During the morning, unfathered, as rumors are born, the whisper of disaster somewhere spread. Their own slight shock was the edge of the convulsion which had been serious elsewhere, no one knew quite where, or why they knew it at all. The men who were shoveling earth on the levee began to talk of San Francisco. Someone said that morning that the city was badly hurt. No one could confirm the rumor, but it grew with the day.

Rickard met it at the office late in the afternoon. He went direct to the telegraph operator's desk.

"Get Los Angeles, the O. P. office. And be quick about it."

In ten minutes he was talking to Babcock. Babcock said that the damage by the earthquake to that city was not known, but it was dire. San Jose had confirmed it. Oakland had reported the flames creeping up the residence hills of that gay Western city. Cinders were already falling in the transbay town.

Rickard dropped the receiver. "Where's Hardin?"

Tom Hardin emerged from a knot of men who were talking in a corner by the door.

"Where's that machinery?"

"What machinery?"

Rickard saw the answer to his question in the other's face.

"The dredge machinery. Did you attend to that? Did you send for it?"

"Oh, yes, that's all right. It's all right."

"Is it here?"

Hardin attempted jocularity. "I didn't know as you wanted it here. I ordered it sent to Yuma."

"Is it at Yuma?"

Hardin admitted that it was not yet at Yuma; it would be there soon; he had written; oh, it was all right.

"When did you write?"

Hardin reddened under the catechism of questions. He resented being held up before his men. The others felt the electricity in the air. Hardin and his successor were glaring at each other like belligerents.

"I asked when did you write?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday!" Rickard ripped out an oath. "Yesterday. Why at all, I'd like to know? Did you understand that you were ordered to get that here? Now, it's gone."

"Gone?" The others crowded up.

"San Francisco's burning." He walked into his inner office, mad clear through. He was not thinking of the ruin of the gay young city; not a thought yet did he have of the human tragedies enacting there; of homes, lives, fortunes swept into that huge bonfire. As it affected the work at the river, the first block to his campaign, the catastrophe came home to him. He

had a picture of tortured, twisted iron, of ruined machinery, the machinery for his dredge. He saw it lying like a spent Laocoon, writhing in its last struggle. He blamed himself for leaving even such a small detail as the hastening of the parts to Hardin's care, for Hardin wasn't fit to be trusted for anything. No one could tell him now the man was unlucky; he was a fool. A month wasted, and days were precious. A month? Months. Hardin's luck. Oh, hell!

Then he began to speculate as he cooled over the trouble up yonder. A whole city burning? They would surely get it under control. He began to think of the isolation; the telegraph wires all down. That might happen anywhere! He walked to the door and looked thoughtfully at the company's big water tower. That wasn't such a bad idea! He picked up his hat, and went out.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### The Wrong Man.

Mrs. Hardin heard from every source but the right one that Rickard had returned. Each time her telephone rang, it was his voice she expected to hear. She began to read a meaning into his silence. She could think of nothing else than the strange coincidence that had brought their lives again close. Or was it a coincidence? That idea sent her thoughts far afield.

She was thinking too much of him, for peace of mind, those days of waiting, but the return of the old lover had made a wonderful break in her



She Spent Most of Her Days at the Sewing Machine.

life. Her eyes were brighter; her smile was less forced. She spent most of her days at the sewing machine. A lot of lace was whipped onto lingerie frocks of pale colors. She was a disciple of an Eastern esthete. "Women," he had said, "should buy lace, not by the yard, but by the mile."

As her fingers worked among the laces and soft muslin, her mind roved down avenues that should have been closed to her, a wife. She would have protested, had anyone accused her of infidelity in those days, yet day by day, she was straying farther from her husband's side. She convinced herself that Tom's gibes and ill-humor were getting harder to endure.

It was inevitable that the woman of harem training should relive the Lawrence days. The enmity of those two men, both her lovers, was pregnant with romantic suggestion. The drama of desert and river centered now in the story of Gerty Hardin. Rickard, who had never married! The deduction, once unveiled, lost all its shyness. And every one saw that he disliked her husband!

She knew now that she had never loved Tom. She had turned to him in those days of pride when Rickard's anger still held him aloof. How many times had she gone over those unreal hours! Who could have known that his anger would last? That hour in the honeysuckles; his kisses! None of Hardin's rougher kisses had swept her memory of her exquisite delight—delirious as was her joy, there was room for triumph. She had seen herself clear of the noisy boarding house. Herself, Gerty Holmes, the wife of a professor; able to have the things she craved, to have them openly; no longer having to scheme for them.

It was through Rickard's eyes that she had seen the shortcomings of the college boarding house. She had acquired a keen consciousness of those quizzical eyes. When they had isolated her, at last, appealing to her sympathy or amusement, separating her from all those boisterous students, her dream of bliss had begun.

In those days, she had seen Hardin through the eyes of the young instructor, younger by several years than his pupil. Her thud of disappointed anger, of dislike, when the face of Hardin peered through the leny screen! To have waited, prayed for that moment, and to have it spoiled like that! There had been days when she had wept because she had not shown her anger! How could she know that everything would end there; end, just beginning! Her boarding-house training had taught her to be civil. It was still vivid to her, her anxiety, her treachery—treachery with Hardin talking forever of a play he had just seen; Rickard growing stiffer, angrier, refusing to look at those lips still warm with his kisses!

And the next day, still angry with her. Ah, the puzzled desolation of those weeks before she had saved her hurt; with pride, and then with love!

Those days of misery before she could convince herself that she had been in love with love, not with her feeling lover! Hardin was there, eager to be noticed. That affair, she could see now, had lacked finesse.

Rickard had certainly loved her, or why had he never married? Why had he left so abruptly his boarding house in midwinter? Doesn't jealousy confess love? Some day, he would tell her; what a hideous mistake hers had been! She ought not to have rushed into that marriage. She knew now it had always been the other. But life was not finished, yet!

The date set for her summer "widowhood" had come, but she lingered. Various reasons, splendid and sacrificial, were given out. There was much to be done.

"I wish she would be definite," Innes' thoughts complained. She was restless to make her own plans. It had not yet occurred to her that Gerty would stay in all summer. For she never had so martyrized herself. "Some one must be with Tom. It may spoil my trip. But Gerty never thinks of that." She believed it to be a simple matter of clothes. It always took her weeks to get ready to go anywhere.

"But I won't wait any longer than next week. If she does not go then, I will. Absurd for us both to be here." It was already fiercely hot.

Gerty, meanwhile, had been wondering how she could suggest to her sister-in-law that her trip be taken first. Without arousing suspicions! Terribly loud in her ears sounded her thoughts those days.

Her husband flung a letter on the table one evening. "A letter to you from—Casey."

She tried to make the fingers that closed over the letter move casually. She could feel them tremble. What would she say if Tom asked to see it?

It was addressed to her in her husband's care. Hardin had found it at the office in his mail. And she going

each day to the postoffice to prevent it from falling into his hands! She gave it a quick offhand glance.

"About the drive, of course, my sister's getting cold. Look at that envelope. Don't wait to wash up. It will be like leather."

When she had finished her meal, she read her letter with a fine show of indifference. "He sets a date for the drive." She put the letter carelessly into her pocket before her husband could stretch out his hand. It would never do for jealous Tom to read that "Your letter was received two weeks ago. Pardon me for appearing to have forgotten your kindness."

"The nerve," growled Tom again, his mouth full of Gerty's omelette. "To take you up on an invitation like that. I call that pretty raw."

"You must remember we are old friends," urged his wife. "I knew I meant it seriously."

"Just the same, it's nerve," growled Hardin, helping himself to more of the omelette, now a flat ruin in the center of the Canton platter. His resentment had taken on an edge of hatred since the episode of the dredge machinery. "To write to anyone in my house! He knows what I think of him; an ineffectual ass, that's what he is. Blundering around with his little levees, and his fool work on the water tower!"

"The water tower?" demanded his sister. "What's he doing with that?"

"Oh, I don't know," rejoined Tom, largely, his lips protruding. He had been itching to ask some one what Rickard was up to. Twice, he had seen him go up, with MacLennan and Estrada. Once, there a large flare of light. But he wouldn't ask! Some of his fool tinkering!

(To be continued next week.)

Chauncey Depew says that light public speaking is an antidote for old age. It sometimes tends to age the hearers, though.

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