

# The River

When the Colorado  
Burst Its Banks and  
Flooded the Imperial  
Valley of California

By  
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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 "dude" clothes, but he has 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 Gerty. 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 rebelling and 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.

CHAPTER XI—Rickard encounters the insubordination of the company's engineers. He is stirred by the Indians' statement that this is the hundredth year of a cycle, when the Great Yellow Dragon, the Colorado, grows restless. He makes various preparations, pushes work on the Calexico levee and is ordered by Marshall to "take a fighting chance" on the completion of Hardin's pet project, a gate to shut the big break in the river.

CHAPTER XII—San Francisco is destroyed by earthquake and fire, and drainage machinery, which Rickard had ordered Hardin to have shipped, is burned through Hardin's neglect. Rickard secretly equips the big water tower as a signal station.

CHAPTER XIII—Gerty Hardin decides that Rickard still loves her and plans a campaign that promises trouble.

CHAPTER XIV—The progressive ride is begun under adverse conditions—wind and dust, with the guest of honor absent. Then MacLean, Rickard's secretary, brings word that the river is raging and every man is wanted on the levee.

CHAPTER XV—Hardin motors off with a load of dynamite, leaving everything in confusion on the levee. Innes, through a friendly engineer, issues orders in her brother's name, to save her brother's face. The levee and the signal tower save Calexico till Rickard's return.

CHAPTER XVI—Gerty Hardin begins to get really interested in Rickard. The wind blows a gale and the levee is in danger again.

CHAPTER XVII—Women as well as men work on the levee the second night. Innes finds Rickard and Gerty together and begins to suspect her sister-in-law. Her brother's wrongheadedness and Rickard's evident efficiency only serve to embitter Innes against Rickard.

CHAPTER XVIII—The river washes away half of Mexicali, Calexico's Mexican twin city, but Calexico still stands.

CHAPTER XIX—A stormy public meeting is held in which representatives of the settlers, the Overland Pacific and Mexico clash. A telegram from Rickard that the river has broken out again saves "big row" and forces united action by all.

Babeoek waves him on to Marshall. The audience was crying itself hoarse. Babeoek lost control of the meeting in that minute of turning. Hollister, of the Palo Verde, was striving to be heard; Babeoek's hammer sounded in vain. But Marshall's eye had caught a spark from the yellow sheet. He sprang forward, throwing the dispatch toward MacLean. His excitement caught the eye of the crowd. "The river!" There was a sudden hush. "The river's out again!" A groan swept through the house, there was a break toward the doors.

Marshall's voice halted them. "Men of the valley." The audience, swayed again, listened. "Hear me. The river's running away again down yonder. This is a message from Rickard. It's broken through the levee. It's started for the valley. Now, who's going to stop it? Can you? Where's your force, your equipment? Who can rush to that call but the company you are bounding? I gave you Faraday's message. His hand's on the table. Not another cent from him unless you withdraw those suits. You say you have given me your answer, Black's answer. Now the river plays a trick. It calls your bluff. Shall we stop the river, men of the valley? We can. Will you withdraw your suits? You can. What is your answer now, Imperial valley?"

The scene broke into beffam. Men jumped to their chairs, to the velvet rim of the boxes, all talking, screaming, gesticulating at once. The Yellow Dragon was never so fearfully visualized. Out of the chaos of men's voices came a woman's shriek, "For God's sake, save our homes." It pitched the

plaintive, "Save the valley! Stop the river!"

Marshall's Indian eyes were reading that mass of scared faces as though it were a sheet of typed paper. "Barton," he called through the din. "Where's Barton?"

Two men lifted Barton's puny figure upon their shoulders. His vibrant voice rolled above the shouting. "The valley withdraws its suits against the company."

"Then the company," yelled Marshall's oratory, "the company withdraws the river from the valley!" Pandemonium was loose. There were cheers, and the sound of women sobbing. Barton was carried out on the shoulders of his henchmen. Black led a crowd out, haranguing to the street.

On the street, Marshall fell back to MacLean. "That was a neat trick the river threw in our hands." His voice had dropped from oratory; the declaiming fire was gone from the black eyes. "It's only a break in the levee. Rickard says he can control it; estimates two weeks or so. It may cost the O. P. a few thousand dollars, but it saved them half a million. Now we'll have that game of poker, MacLean!"

In the balcony, Hardin was staring at Brandon.

"If that wasn't the devil's own luck!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### A Soft Nook.

Innes traveled, gleefully, in a caboose, from Hamlin Junction to the Heading. She could not stay away a day longer! Never before had Los Angeles been a discipline. Why had it fretted her, made her restless, homesick? Then she had discovered the reason; history was going on down yonder. Going on, without her. She knew that that was what was pulling her; that only!

The exodus of engineers had started riverward in July. Gerty went with Tom, and she had made it distinctly clear that it was not necessary for Innes to follow them. Ridiculous for two women to coddle a Tom Hardin! Unless Innes had a special interest!

Her pride had kept her away. But Tom did not write; Gerty's letters were social and unsatisfactory; the newspaper reports inflamed her. The day before she had wired Tom that she was coming. She had to be there at the end!

Gerty welcomed her stiffly. Assuming a conscientious hostess-ship, she caught fire at her waning enthusiasms.

Gerty looked younger and prettier. Her flush accentuated her childish features which were smiling down her annoyance over this uninvited visit.

"We have all the home comforts, haven't we? Why shouldn't we be comfortable when we are to be here for months? I'm going to brave it out—to the bitter end, even if I bake. It is my duty—" She would make her intention perfectly clear! "There ought to be at least one cozy place, one soft nook that suggests a woman's presence. We have tea here in the afternoon, sometimes. Mr. Rickard drops in." The last was a delicate stroke.

"Afternoon tea? At the Front? Is this modern warfare? The girl draped her brows with a smile.

Gerty was stealing a pensive survey in the mirror through the rough door that opened into the division called her bedroom. The sunburned, unconscious profile of Innes was close to her own. Pink and golden the head by the dark one. She looked younger even than Innes! Good humor returned to her.

"We are going to dine on the Delta tonight." She pinned up a "scolding lock," an ugly misnomer for her sunny clinging curls! The mirror was requisitioned again. "That's the name of the new dredge. It was christened three weeks ago, in champagne brought from Yuma."

"You said dine on the Delta. Do you mean they have meals there?"

"You should see it," cooed Gerty. "It's simply elegant. It's a floating hotel, has every convenience. The camp cook, Ling, has his hands full."

"Going to wear that?" They were standing now by the door of Gerty's dressing tent. Over the bed a white lingerie gown was spread.

"I live in them. It's so hot," shrugged Mrs. Hardin.

"I'll look like your maid, Gerty!" In-

nes' exclamation was puerile. "I didn't bring anything but khakis. Oh, oh! I remember throwing in, the last minute, two piques to fill up space."

"Why, we have dances on the Delta, and Sunday evening concerts. You know the work at Laguna dam is being held up? The government men of the Reclamation Service are down here all the time. But it's time to be getting ready."

Later, Tom flatly refused to accompany them.

"I thought as much," Gerty shrugged an altry irresponsibility. Innes could detect no regret.

They passed a cot outside the tent. "Who sleeps there?"

"Tom." The eyes of the two women did not meet.

Innes made no comment. "He finds the tent stuffy," Gerty's lips were prim with reserve. They walked toward the river in silence. As they reached the encampment, Gerty recovered her vivacity.

"That's Mr. Rickard's office, that ramada, isn't it quaint? And that's his tent; no, the other one, MacLean's is next; there's Junior, now."

But his eyes were too full of Innes to see Gerty's smiles. The difference in the quality of his greetings smote Gerty like a blow. And she had never considered Tom's sister attractive, as a possible rival. Yet, after a handshake, she saw that to MacLean, Jr., she did not exist.

Gerty was deeply piqued. Until now, the field had been hers. She might perhaps have changed her opinion of Tom's sister. Boys, she had to concede, the younger men might find her attractive. Hardly contemptible older men would fall to see a charmer!

The array of cot tables annoyed Gerty. The hard MacLean exclaimed gaily, would not be there for dinner. He might come to later. Two men from the reclamation Service tried to entertain Mrs. Hardin.

"It isn't a battle," Innes looked around the cot room. "It's a play!"

The thought followed her that evening, outside, where the moonlight was silencing the deck, and the quiet river leaped the sides of the dredge. Jose's strings, and his "amalgam" thumping from a dark corner, made the illusion of peace convincing. This was no battle. It was easy to believe herself again at Mare Island—the Delta a cruiser.

Later, Gerty passed her, two-stepping divinely. Before her partner turned his head, Innes recognized the stiff back and straight poised head and dancing step of Rickard. She admitted he had distinction, grudgingly. She could not think of him except comparatively; always antithetically, balanced against her Tom.

"I'm tired; let's rest here." Innes drew into the shadow of the great arm of the dredge. They watched the dancers as they passed, MacLean playing the woman in "Pete's" arms, Gerty with Rickard, two other masculine couples. The Hardins were the only women aboard.

It was because of Tom that Innes felt resentment when the uplifted appealing chin, the lace ruffles fluttered by. Tom, lying outside an unfriendly tent!

It was easy, in that uncertain light, to avoid Rickard's glance of recognition. Estrada, who had come aboard with the manager, sought her out, and then Crothers of the O. P. Again, she saw Rickard dancing with the lingerie gown. There seemed to be no attempt to cover Gerty's preference; for Rickard, she was the only woman there! Because she was Tom's sister, she had a right to resent it, to refuse to meet his eye. Small wonder Tom did not come to the Delta!

Going in with MacLean, Jr., to the messroom for a glass of water, she met Rickard, on his way out. She managed to avoid shaking hands with him. She wondered why she had consented to give him the next waltz.

"He'll not find me," she determined. MacLean followed her gladly to the dark corner of the deck where Jose's guitar was then synopating an accompaniment to his "amigo's" voice.

To her surprise, Rickard penetrated her curtain of shadows.

"Our dance, Miss Hardin? Give us 'Sobr' Las Olas,' again, Jose."

The hand that barely touched his arm was stiff with antagonism. She told herself that he had to dance with her—politeness, conventionally, demanded it. But, instantly, she forgot her resentment, and forgot their awkward relation. It was his dancing, not Gerty's, that was "superb." Anybody could find skill under the leadership of that irresistible step. And then the motion claimed her. She thought of nothing; they moved as one to the liquid falling beat.

The music dropped them suddenly, isolating them at the stern of the deck. The silence was complete. Rickard broke it to ask her what she thought of the camp.

Her resentments were recalled. She blundered through her impression of the lightness, the gaiety.

"A work camp does not have to be solemn. You'll find all the grimness you want if you look beneath the surface."

The guitars were tuning up. "Shall I take you back? I have this dance with your sister."

She thought of Tom—on his lonely cot outside his tent. She forgot that she had been asked a question. He was dancing again with Gerty! If that silly little woman had no scruples, no fine feeling, this man should at least guard her. If he had been her lover, he should be careful; he must see that people were talking of them. She had seen the glances that evening! The business relation between the two men should suggest tact, if not decency! It was outrageous.

Rickard stood waiting to be dismissed; puzzled. Through the uncertain light, her anger came to him. She looked taller, older; there was a flame of accusing passion in her eyes.

It was his minute of revelation. So that was what the camp thought! The wife of Hardin—Hardin! Why, he'd been only polite to her—they were old friends. What had he said to call down this sudden scorn? "Dancing—again—"

Had he been all kinds of an ape?

"My turn, Miss Innes!" demanded MacLean, Jr.

"Oh, yes," she cried, relief in her tone.

Rickard did not claim his dance with Mrs. Hardin. He stood where the girl had left him, thinking. A few minutes later, Gerty swept by in the arms of Brock. Later, came Innes with Junior; the two, thinking themselves unseen, romping through a two-step like two young children. He was never shown that side of her. Gerty as a young kitten, chatting merrily with MacLean! Should her eyes discover him, she would be again the haughty young woman!

He'd gone out of his way to be polite to the wife of Hardin. What did he care what they thought? He'd finish his job, and get out.

A minute later, he was being rowed back to camp.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A Complete Camp.

"Complete, isn't it?" Estrada was leading Innes Hardin through the engineers' quarters.

"Yes, it's complete!"

Her brother had told her at breakfast that morning how grandly they had been wasting time! She would not let herself admire the precision of the arrangements, the showy back of the white men's quarters, the mesquite-shaded kitchen. Gerty's elaborate setting was a piece of it, it would seem, with the new management. Home-keeping, not fighting, then, the new order of things!

Tom was able to get his gate done. She knew what it meant to him; to the valley. The flood waters had to be controlled. That depended, Tom had proved to her, on the gate. And the men dance and play house, as if they were children, and every day counting!

She thought she was keeping her accusations to herself, but Estrada was watching her face.

"We are here, you know, for a siege. There are months of work ahead, not months, hard months. The men have got to be kept well and contented. We can't lose any time by sickness—" He wanted to add "and dissensions." The split camp was painful to him, an Estrada. "Even after we finish the gate, if we do finish it—"

She wheeled on him, her eyes gleaming like deep yellow jewels. "You've never thought we could finish it!"

Estrada hesitated over his answer.

"You are a friend of Tom's, Mr. Estrada?"

"Surely! But I am also an admirer of Mr. Rickard, I mean of his method. I can never forget the levee."

She had to acknowledge that Rickard had scored there. And the burning of the machinery had left a wound that she still must salve.

"You have no confidence in the gate?"

"The conditions have changed," urged Estrada. "You've seen the mess tent? As it was planned, it was all right, a hurry-up defense. Marshall all along intended the concrete gate for the permanent intake. Have you seen the gap the Hardin gate is to close? Have you heard what the last floods did to it? It's now twenty-six hundred feet, and Disaster Island, which your brother planned to anchor to, swept away! If it can be done, it will, you can rest assured, with Rickard—" he saw the Hardin mouth then—"and your brother's zeal, and the strength of the railroad back of them."

The camp formed a hollow trapezium; the Hardins' tents, and Mrs. Dawker's, were isolated on the short parallel, Rickard's ramada and his tent were huddled with the engineers'. Across, toward the river, behind Ling's mesquites, began another polygon, the camp of foremen and white labor. Some of these tents were empty.

"Is this Mexico, or the States?" asked Innes.

"Mexico." She wondered why he halted so abruptly. She did not see, for the glare in her eyes, a woman's skirt in the ramada they approached.

Estrada smiled on.

Outside the ramada, the two women met. Gerty's step carried her past like a high-bred horse. Her high heels cut into the hard sand. There was a suggestion of prance in her gait. She waved her hand gaily at the two, cried, "How hot it is!" and passed on.

Innes saw Rickard at his long ping table used for a desk.

"I can see it all from here." Not for money would the sister of Tom Hardin go in!

At table, that evening, her family heard with surprise Gerty's announcement that they were to eat in the mess tent with the men. It was too hot to cook any longer; this had been one of the hottest days in the year.

She expected to hear a protest to the new arrangement from Tom. She was to see a new development—sullen resignation. If he would accept it, she must not argue. Both sister and brother knew why it was too warm to cook any longer.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A Visit to Maldonado.

Mrs. Hardin's descent on the office that afternoon was successful, but not satisfactory. She had found the man-

ager brief to outburst. She was given no excuse to linger. She traced Innes's manner to the presence of MacLean, and snatched at her cue. MacLean, too, could be businesslike and brief. Her errand was of business; her manner should recommend her!

Rickard had seen her making straight toward the ramada. It was not the first time; her efforts to liberate her nest had involved them all and often. But today, he was in a bad humor.

"For the Lord's sake," he groaned to MacLean as she approached.

MacLean's grin covered relief. He had never heard Rickard express himself on the subject before. "The dead-end Hardin's wife was making at Casey," was the choice gossip and speculation of the young engineers on the Delta. MacLean had a bet up on the outcome. He grinned more securely.

"I am not going to spare any more carpenters," growled Rickard. It was an auspicious day for Mrs. Hardin's visit. Things had gone wrong. Vexations were piling up. A tilt with Hardin that morning, a telegram from Marshall; he was feeling sore. Desperately they needed labor. Wooster had just reported, venomously, it appeared to Rickard's spleen, increasing drunkenness among the Indians.

Gerty's ruffles swept in. Her dress, the blue mill with the lace medallions, accented the hue of her eyes, and looked deliciously cool that glaring desert day. Her parasol, of pongee, was lined with the same baby hue. Her dainty fairness and childish affability should have made an oasis in that strenuous day, but Rickard's disintegration of temper was too complete. He rose stiffly to meet her, and his manner demanded her errand.

She told it to him, plaintively. Her eyes were appealing, infantile. Would it be too much to ask, would Mr. Rickard mind in the least, he must be perfectly frank and tell her if they would be in the way at all, but while this hot spell lasted, could they, the three of them, eat in the mess tent with the men?

"Surely!" Rickard met it heartily. She would find it rough, but if she could stand it, yes, he thought it a good idea.

And then there was nothing for her to do but go. Her retreat was graceful.

Maldonado showed three men in a locked shed, deep in drunken stupor. He thought the liquor was obtained somewhere back in the sandhills. He would find the place. But the men must be patient; his hands were so full.

Both men were glad to get away from the place and Maldonado. Obviously he was a brute; undoubtedly he was a liar.

full, without haste, dignified, she smiled a farewell at MacLean, who was watching the approach of Innes Hardin and Estrada. Rickard did not see the aborted entrance of Hardin's sister and the young Mexican. He was itching to be at his work.

He let out a groan when Mrs. Hardin was out of earshot.

"Shucks! What in Halifax do women come to a place like this for? There's Hardin—brings in two women to cook for him, and now, please may they all eat with the men?"

His secretary subdued a chuckle. He was visualizing a procession of boxes of choice Havanas—from Bodefeldt, Hamlin and the rest of the gang. He need not buy a smoke for a year.

Rickard threw himself back in his chair. "Take this letter, MacLean. To Marshall." Then his worry diverted him. "Who in thunder is selling liquor to my Indians?"

"Hold on; that letter can wait. You get the horses up, MacLean, and we'll ride down to Maldonado's. It's his place to stop this liquor business, not mine."

A few hours later they were approaching the adobe walls of Maldonado. They found the gate locked. A woman, whose beauty had faded into a tragic whisper, a ghastly twilight of suggestion, came to their knock, and unbarred the gate for the white strangers. Mystery hung over the enclosure like a pall.

Rickard told his errand. Maldonado sputtered and swore. By the mother of Mary the Virgin, that thing would be stopped. He showed to the men, with pride, his badge. He was a ruler; he was there to uphold the law. He had caught some of those drunken Indians on the road. He had brought them here.

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(To be continued next week.)



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