

The River

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

By
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CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Discovery.

The murder of Maldonado shook the camp next morning. Three ruroles, in brilliant trappings, rode up to Rickard's ramada. The leader, entering the office, announced that they were on the track of a criminal, the murderer of a rurole, Maldonado. He was an Indian named Felipe. He repeated the story Rickard had heard before. Would the senior give his respected permission for notices to be posted about the camp? A description of the Indian, a reward for his capture; the favor would be inestimable.

Rickard saw the notice later that day. It was nailed to the back platform of the Palmyra. He was on Marshall's trail, his chief having failed to keep an appointment with him. They were to test the gate that afternoon; Marshall was returning soon to Tucson.

Rickard turned back toward camp, deep in thought; so intent that a sharp cry had lost its echo before the import came to him. He stopped, hearing running steps behind him. Innes Hardin was loping up the bank like a young deer, with terror in her eyes.

"Mr. Rickard!" she cried. "Mr. Rickard!"

She was trembling. Her fright had flushed her; check to brow was glowing with startled blood. He saw an odd flash of startling beauty, the veil of tan torn off by her emotion. The wave of her terror caught him. He put out his hand to steady her. She stood recovering herself, regaining her spent breath. Rickard remembered that this was the first time he had seen her since the murder of Maldonado, since the meeting with the Mexican woman at his tent. "What was it frightened you?"

"The Indian, the murderer. Just as they describe him on those notices. I must have fallen asleep. I'd been reading. I heard a noise in the brush and there was his face staring at me." Her breath was still uneven. "I screamed and ran. Silly to be so scared."

He started toward the willows, but she grabbed his sleeve. "Oh, don't." She flushed, thinking to meet the quizzical smile, but his eyes were grave. He, too, had had his fright. They stood staring at each other. "I'm afraid—" she completed. How he would despise her cowardice! But she could not let him know that her fear had been for him!

He was looking at her. Suppose anything had happened to her! He had a minute of nausea. If that brute had hurt her—and then he knew how it was with him!

He looked at her gravely. Of course, he had known it a long time. It was true. She was going to belong to him. If that brute had hurt her!

She shrank under his gravity; this was something she did not understand. They were silent, walking toward the encampment. Rickard did not care to talk. It was not the time; and he had been badly shaken. Innes was tremulously conscious of the palpitating silence. She fluttered toward giddy speech. Her walk that day, Mr. Rickard! She had heard that water had started to flow down the old river bed; she had wanted to see it, and there was no one to go with her. Her sentence broke off. The look he had turned on her was so dominant, so tender. Amused at her giddiness, and yet loving her! Loving her! They were silent again.

"You won't go off alone, again." He had not asked it, at parting. His infection demanding it of her, was of ownership. She did not meet his eyes.

Later, when she was lying on her bed, face downward, roused, she tried to analyze that possessive challenge of his gaze, but it eluded words. She summoned her pride, but the meaning called her, sense and mind and soul of her. It cried to her: "I, Casey Rickard, whom your brother hates, once the lover of Gerty Holmes, I am the mate for you. And I'm going to come and take you some day. Some day, when I have time!"

Oh, yes, she was angry with him; she had some pride. "Why didn't he tell me then?" she cried in a wail; to tell her pillow. "For I would have given him his answer. I had time, ample time, to tell him that it was not true." For she wanted a different sort of lover, not a second-hand discard; but one who belonged all to herself; one who would woo, not take her with that strange sure look of his. "You'll be waiting when I come." Ah, she would not, indeed! She would show him!

And then she lay quite still with her hand over her heart. She would be waiting when he came for her! Because, though life had brought them together so roughly, so tactlessly had

muddled things, yet she knew. She would be waiting for him!

Before he had left her, Rickard had followed a swift impulse. Those bronze tapers averted still? Was she remembering—last night? No mistake like that should rest between them. He must set that straight. That much he allowed himself. Until his work was done. But she knew—she had seen—how it was with him!

"I wonder if you would help me, Miss Hardin? Would you do something for that poor crazed woman? I wanted to ask Mrs. Hardin, but for some reason I've got into her black books. Just the little kindness one woman can give another. A man finds it difficult. And these Mexican women don't understand a man's friendship."

Her eyes met his squarely. His tantalizing smile had gone. He was making a demand of her—to believe him, his request his defense. The glances, of "elbow eyes and gray, met with a shock, and the world was changed for both. Life, with its many glad voices, was calling to sense and spirit, the girl's still rebellious, the man's sure.

Rickard put out his hand. "Good-night!" To both. It carried the sound of "I love you!" She put her hand in his, then tore her fingers away, furious with them for clinging. Where was her pride? When he had time! She fled into her tent.

Neither of them had seen Gerty Hardin watching them from her tent door.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A Glimpse of Freedom.

The siding was deserted. The Palmyra had run out to Tucson. Marshall had gone without apprehension. They did not expect now to have setbacks, to have to extend the time set for the ultimate diversion. The days were flowing like oil. The encampment was filling up with visitors, newspaper men who came to report the spectacular capture of the river.

Rickard's day badly begun, piled up with vexations. By sundown, he was wet to the skin, and mad as a sick Arizona cat.

In this jaundiced juncture, MacLean, Jr., brought down his dispatches to the river. He read of the burning of a trainload of railroad ties. Rickard swore.

"Anything else pleasant?"

"A letter from the governor—from dad." MacLean read that his father begged a small favor of Rickard.

"Godfrey, the celebrated English tenor, is on my hands. His doctors have been advising outdoor occupation. I am sending him to you, asking you to give him any job you may have. He is willing to do anything. Put him at something to keep him occupied."

MacLean saw Rickard's face turn red. "Suffering cats! A worn-out opera singer! What sort of an opera does he think we're giving down here? Why doesn't he send me a fur coat, or a pair of girl twins? Give the tenor a role! Anything else? Pile it all on."

"Oh, and one from Godfrey himself. He's in Los Angeles. He says he'll be here tomorrow." He did not wait for his chief's reply.

At the supper table, Rickard, dry and in restored humor, alluded to the invasion of high notes. "Pity the parts are all assigned! The only vacancy is in the kitchen. I wonder how he would like to be understudy to Ling!"

The next day when the incident had been forgotten, and while Rickard was up at the Crossing on the concrete gate, Godfrey blew into camp. He



Godfrey Blew into Camp.

was like a boy out on a lark. His brown eyes were dancing over the adventure. He explored the camp and came back bubbling.

"It's the biggest I ever saw. But say, Junior, that's what they call you, isn't it? I'm the only idle man here. Can't you give me something to do? I'll do anything. I'd like the boss to find me busy when he comes in."

MacLean softened the offer. Perhaps until Mr. Godfrey learned the ropes he could be of general use. They were short-handed the present moment—there was another hesitation—in the kitchen! Ling, the Chinese cook, was overcrowded—so many visitors—

"Great," crowed Godfrey, slapping him on the shoulder. "I don't want to feel in the way. I want to earn my board. Lead me to the cook!"

That evening, the dinner was helped

on its way by the best-paid singer of England. In an apron, bogrowed of Ling, he was "having the time of his life." Ling, pretending to scold, had been won immediately. Rickard, hearing of the jolly advent, forgot his vexation, and immediately on his return made his way to the mesquit inclosure—to greet the friend of George MacLean.

After dinner, MacLean carried off his prize to the Delta, where Godfrey earned his welcome. Gerty Hardin forgot to flirt with the engineers; she had discovered a new sensation. The wonderful voice twisted her heart-strings; it told her that the heart that has truly loved never forgets, and she knew that she could never have really loved, yet, because the youth in her veins was whispering to her that she could still forget. Godfrey saw a mobile plaintive face turned up to the gibbous moon; he swept it with thrills and flushes. She was a wonderful audience; she was also his orchestra, the woman with the plaintive eyes. He toyed on her expressions as though she were a harp.

Later, he was presented to Mrs. Hardin. She told him that the camp would no longer be dull; that she and ten every afternoon in her canon. She convicted him archly of British blood. "She knew he must have his tea!"

"You American women are the wonders of the world! Nothing daunts you. In the desert, and you give afternoon teas. I'll be there every day!"

He gave her open admiration; she looked young and wistful in her soft flowing maids, the moonlight lighting her. She fell into a delicious ditty of nerves and excitement. Later, she wandered with him from a rude zapping world into a heaven of silvered decks and gleaming waters. He told her of himself, of his loneliness; his music had dropped him to self-pity.

Gerty Hardin heard her bars drop behind her. She snatched her first glimpse of freedom.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Dragon Scores.

The Palmyra was once again on its siding. Marshall was at the front again; having made another of his swift dashes from Tucson. This time he expected officially to close the gate. Claudia was with him. She never left the car, unless it were to step out to the platform to see what she could from there of the river work.

Hardin and Rickard had been devoting anxious weeks. A heavy rainfall and cloudburst in the mountains of northern Arizona had swollen the feeders of the Gila river which roared down to the Colorado above Yuma. The eroding streams carried mountains in solution which settled against the gate, a scour starting above and below it. Relief had to be given on the jump. A spur track was rushed across the by-pass above the gate, as the closing of the ill-fated gate with the flashboards was no longer possible. A rock-fill was the only means of closure. In the distant quarries men were digging out rock to fill the call from the river.

Marshall came down to see the completed spur. Before he reached the intake, the first rock train had moved onto the spur track. The trestle had settled, the train had been thrown from the rails and wrecked.

Marshall came in from the damaged trestle, bringing Rickard and Crothers. Mrs. Marshall had invited Innes Hardin to dine with them. Innes fell to flushing, and chilling, as a lithe-muscled figure came directly to her. His eyes—where was the look she had feared, of possessive tenderness? The quizzical gleam was gone. On guard! A solemn business, loving, when you know that it means—life! On guard, though, to her! She pulled her fingers from his strong lingering clasp, and joined Mrs. Marshall.

Rickard had his soldier look on. She was watching him covertly as he talked with his host and Crothers, as though she were not there; as though something were not waiting for him to claim. How could he be talking, oblivious of everything else in the world except the river? Was that—loving? Could she think of anything else when he was in the same room with her? He was a soldier of the modern army. It came to her, a sort of tender divination, that he would not divide his thoughts, even with her, with love, until his battle was won. Well, couldn't she understand that? What her accusation against Gerty? Sex honor—keep off the track! Wasn't that her own notion? Oughtn't she to be proud of him?

She had brought a nest of waspish thoughts tumbling about her ears, Gerty! He had loved Gerty. He couldn't love her, if his thoughts had ever lingered, with that same seriously solemn look on the false little face of her sister-in-law.

After dinner they were standing in the shade of the Palmyra. It was a soft still afternoon. The fierceness of the savage desert had melted to her days of lure. Beyond, the turbid waters of the Colorado bore a smiling surface. There was nothing to hint of treachery.

It was a minute of pleasant lassitude, snatched from the turmoil. Rickard had succumbed to the softness of the day and his mood. He was enjoying the thought of Innes' nearness, though she kept her face turned from him. He knew by the persistence of those averted eyes that she was so acutely conscious of his presence as he was, restfully, of hers. Deliberately, he was prolonging the instant.

A stir on the river had caught the alert eye of Tod Marshall. He swore a string of picturesque Marshallian oaths. Rickard's eyes jumped toward

the by-pass. The placid waters had suddenly buckled. Majestically the gate rose and went out. Months of work swept away! The gate drifted a hundred feet or more. Some unseen obstruction caught it there, to mock at the labors of man.

Innes, aghast, turned toward Rickard. His face was expressionless. There was a babel of excited voices behind them, Bodefeldt, MacLean, Tony, Crothers, Bangs, all talking at once. Her eyes demanded something of Rickard. A fierce resentment rose against his calmness. "He knew it," she rebelled. "He's been expecting this to happen. It's no tragedy to him!" There was a stab as of physical pain; she was visualizing the blow to Tom.

She heard Marshall's voice, speaking to Rickard. "Well, you're ready for this." She did not hear the answer, for already Rickard was heading



Rickard Was Heading for the By-Pass.

for the by-pass. Marshall and the young engineers followed him.

To Innes that wreck down yonder was worse than failure; it was ruin. It involved Tom's life. It was his life. This would be the final crushing of his superb courage—her thoughts released from their paralysis were whipped by sudden fear. She must find him, be with him. The next instant she was speeding toward the encampment.

Estrada met her on the run. Had Gerty heard? The pity that she must know! She would not be tender to Tom; her pride would be wounded. She must ask her to be tender, generous. Her footsteps slackened as she came in sight of the tents.

She heard voices in the ramada, a man's clear notes mingling with Gerty's childish treble. "Godfrey!" Her mind jumped to other tete-a-tetes. Of course! So that was what was going on. And she not seeing! If not one man, then another! Horrid little clandestine affairs!

The meeting was awkward. Speedily Innes got rid of the news. Mrs. Hardin shrugged. "I believe I'll go out." Plaintively, she made the announcement, as though it were just evolved. "Now, the camp will be horrid. Everybody will be cross and everybody will be working."

As she left the tent beyond, Innes could hear the vibrant voice of Godfrey persuading Mrs. Hardin to stay there a few weeks longer. She could hear him say, "This will delay the turn-

ing of the river at the most but a few weeks. Rickard told me so a week ago. And think what it would be here without you!"

"They were all expecting it!" resisted Innes Hardin. She turned back toward the river. She must find Tom. (To be continued next week.)

Statesmen differ. At the banquet recently given at Paris to the president of Brazil, President Wilson gave the toast and the Brazilian replied. But we could detect in their speeches no resemblance whatever to the well-known exchange of opinion between the Governor of North Carolina and the Governor of South Carolina.

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