

THE RIVER....



By EDNAH AIKEN

(Continued From Last Friday)

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 Welcomed Her Stiffly.

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 irony with a smile.

Gerty was stealing a pleased 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!" Innes' exclamation was rueful. "I didn't bring anything but khakis. Oh, yes! 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 the time to be getting

ready."

Later, Tom flatly refused to accompany them.

"I thought as much," Gerty shrugged an airy 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 dimples. 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 to change her opinion of Tom's sister. Boys, she had to concede, the younger men, might find her attractive, boyishly congenial; older men would fail to see a charm!

The arrangement at table annoyed Gerty. The boss, MacLean explained gaily, would not be there for dinner. He might come in later. Two men from the Reclamation Service tried to entertain Mrs. Hardin.

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

The thought followed her that evening. Outside, where the moonlight was silencing the deck, and the quiet river lapped the sides of the dredge Jose's strings, and his "amigo's" throbbing 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-step ping 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 syncoating 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, conventionality, demanded it. But, instantly, she forgot her resentment, and forgot their awkward relation. It was his dancing, not Gerty's, then, 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, solating 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 so solemn. You'll find all the grime and you want if you look beneath the sur-

face." 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 ass?"

"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 Breck. 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. Gay 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 showers back of the white men's quarters, the mesquite-shaded kitchen. Gerty's elaborate settling was of a piece, it would seem, with the new management. House-keeping, not fighting, then, the new order of things!

Tom was afe 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, hot 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 methods. 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 Hardin's tents, and Mrs. Dowker'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 marched 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 mien. She waved her hand gaily at the two, cried, "How hot it is!" and passed on.

Innes saw Rickard at his long pine 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 steady head with surprise Gerty's announce-



She Waved Her Hand Gaily.

ment 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.

(To be Continued Friday.)

COMMENDS SUGGESTION.

Columbia, April 18.—"I wish to commend the suggestion made by the State Chairman of the Woman's Division, Mrs. F. S. Munsell, and to urge the churches in our State to have a special Victory thanksgiving on Easter Sunday," said Chas. H. Barron today.

"I recall," said Mr. Barron, "a certain other Sunday, nearly a year ago. How different all things then seemed! The Germans were coming and coming fast. In Flanders the gallant British had lost all of the terrain they had gained at Cambrai in their wonderful dash upon the extreme northern end of the German line. Here it appeared that the German onrush would be irresistible and that the brave British with their Scotch and Canadian and Australian and New Zealand fighting bands, would be driven back, back into the sea."

"Further South the Hun had started his desperate drive of March 21st. As the floods covered the earth in the days of the patriarchs, so did it seem that the Prussian flood would pour in upon Paris, inundating all of France in a wave of military death.

"It was while the fate of the world was so hanging in the balance, so delicately poised, that our great President called for a day of prayer.

It was ostensibly a prayer for the strength of our armies in France our grand navy that separated us from death from a malevolent foe; it was ostensibly a prayer for the strength of our army at home, our citizenship. But in truth it was a prayer for Deliverance. That was a gray day and sad.

"But the deliverance came. Can anyone doubt that God sent the 30th Division to Flanders and there broke the spirit of the German invader and held him and drove him back until the brave Allies could reform their shattered lines and come back to be in at the death? Can anyone doubt that God sent the marines and the regulars just in time to save Paris and all that France has become through the exaltation of suffering? South Carolinians who served thru that whirlpool of Hell have told me that when our divisions, green and unused, were rushed in to hold the line until the French could snatch a wring their hearts. For five days and nights the poilus had fought, giving back, giving back, fighting desperately but giving back. Five days and nights without sleep, without food, with scarcely a sup of water. Yet, fighting a horde of well nourished German legions, reckless and devilish through the deep potatoes of the wine in the French vil-

NOTICE TEACHERS' EXAMINATION

The Regular Spring Teachers' Examination will be held in the County Court House at Abbeville, on Saturday, May 3rd, between the hours of 9 a. m., and 4 p. m.

W. J. EVANS,
Co. Supt. of Education.

lages, which they had captured. The American soldiers' hearts were deeply touched as they saw the French soldiers, when relieved, fall in the mud in their very tracks and there sleep for hours in exhaustion.

"Can anyone doubt that it was God moving in his mysterious ways who performed these wonders, who made men of steel of these untried American troops and caused them to hurl the wretched Germans back and to put into their hearts the realization of defeat and the fear of God?"

"I therefore believe it most fitting

that in those drab days of death and the grave we asked for Deliverance, we should now give praise for the Victory. We should remember the boys who sleep on the poppy fields of France and among the lilies of Flanders. We should remember the boys of our own State who are yet on foreign soil, thousands of them, and we should in our acknowledging the source of Victory, remember that we must support our Government and bring them home to enjoy the Peace which they have helped to establish."

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