



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 engineer to the same force; he wears "dude" clothes, but he had resigned a chair of engineering in the East to go on the road as a man and his promotion had been expected. 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 of 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 bank. Rickard declines because he does not want to supplant Hardin, but is won over. "Stop the river; damn the Arizona," says Marshall.

CHAPTER III.—Rickard journeys to Calexico, sees the irrigated desert and hears 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.

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."

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 an 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 opposition of the company's engineers. He is told by the Indians that a cyclone when the Great Yellow Dragon, the Colorado, grows restless. He makes various preparations, pushes work on the levee and is ordered by Marshall to "take a fighting chance" on the completion of Hardin's pet project, a gate to shut the break in the river.

CHAPTER XII.—San Francisco is devastated by earthquake and fire, and dredge machinery which Rickard had ordered to be shipped, is burned through.

CHAPTER XIII.—Gerty Hardin decides the 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. 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 property. She leaves and the signal tower saves Calexico. The Rickard returns.

CHAPTER XVI.—Gerty Hardin begins to feel real interest 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 affection only serve to smolder Innes against Rickard.

CHAPTER XVIII.—The river washes away half of Calexico's Mexican town. 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 a big row and forces united action by all.

CHAPTER XX.—The scene shifts from Calexico to the construction camp at the break in the river bank where Rickard's forces are constructing Hardin's gate. Innes comes from Los Angeles to stay with the Hardins. Rickard's revelation.

CHAPTER XXI.—Estrada gives Innes a new viewpoint of her brother and Rickard. Gerty arranges for her family to eat in the mess tent and the two Hardins understand why.

CHAPTER XXII.—Rickard visits the home of Maldonado, a house of mystery.

CHAPTER XXIII.—Gerty Hardin gets permission from Rickard to direct Ling, the Chinese mess cook, Senora Maldonado betrays her husband through jealousy.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Ling says, "Woman who stay, Ling go." Rickard sides with Ling and makes a bitter enemy of Gerty Hardin. Hardin finds Senora Maldonado in Rickard's tent.

CHAPTER XXV.—Gerty hints to Innes of disgraceful relations between Rickard and the Mexican woman. Innes is much disturbed, but thinks it is entirely because she hates scandal.

CHAPTER XXVI.—A time of great activity and anxiety—will Hardin's gate stand? Gerty tries to get her husband to report the "scandal" to Marshall. He refuses and discovers he has lost his wife's love.

CHAPTER XXVII.—Rickard escorts Innes home from Marshall's private car; they find the Mexican woman in his tent. Innes goes on alone, furious with Rickard. The Maldonado woman has come to tell Rickard of her husband's murder.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—Innes is frightened by the Maldonado murderer and runs to Rickard. A great light bursts upon them both. Gerty Hardin watches her.

CHAPTER XXIX.—Godfrey, the world famous tenor, comes to visit the camp. He and Gerty Hardin are mutually attracted. Gerty begins to see "a way out."

CHAPTER XXX.—The Hardin gate goes out.

CHAPTER XXXI.—Spectacular strike of the Indian tribes on the work.

CHAPTER XXXII.—Godfrey sings in the moonlight with varying effects in various people.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—The final battle with the Colorado. Why Estrada couldn't see the flash.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—Godfrey and Gerty Hardin elope.

CHAPTER XXXV.—Casey and Innes.

up the bank toward the camp, Molly following.

The river was humping out yonder; the rolling mass came roaring, flank-on, against the dam.

"Quick, for God's sake, quick!" yelled Rickard. His signals sounded short and sharp. "Dump it on, throw the cars in!" Marshall was dancing, his mouth full of oaths, on the bank edge. Breathlessly all watched the rushing water fling itself over the dam. For several hushed seconds the structure could not be seen. When the foam fell a cheer went up. The dam was standing. Silent, it was supposed, was bringing in his train.

Above the distant jagged line of mountains rose a red ball. A new day began. And again the Dragon rose; a mountain of water came rolling damward.

Three trains ran steaming on the rails.

"Don't stop now to blast the big ones. Pour 'em on!" ordered Rickard.

There was a long wait before any rock fell. Marshall and Rickard waited for the pour. The whistles blew again. Then they saw what was wrong. The morning light showed a rock weighing several tons which was resisting the efforts of the pressing crew. Out of the gloom sprang other figures with crowbars. The rock tottered, fell. The river tossed it as though it were a tennis ball, sent it hurtling down the lower face of the dam.

Things began to go wild. The men were growing reckless. They were sagging toward exhaustion; mistakes were made. Another rock, as heavy as the last, was worked toward the edge. Men were thick about it with crowbars. They hurried. One concerted effort, drawing back as the rock toppled over the edge. One man was too slow, or too tired. He slipped. The watchers on the bank saw a flash of waving arms, heard a cry; they had a glimpse of a blackened face as the foam caught it. The waters closed over him.

There was a hush of horror; a halt.

"God himself couldn't save that poor devil," cried Marshall. "Have the work go on!"

Four rocks on that wretch down there? Pin him down? Never had it seemed more like war! "A man down? Ride over him! to victory!" Soberly Rickard signaled for the work to go on.

The rock-pour stuttered as if in horror. The women turned sick with fear. No one knew who it was. Some poor Mexican, probably.

"Who was it?" demanded Rickard, running down to the track.

"The young Mexican, Estrada. 'E tried to 'elp. 'E wasn't fit."

"Who was it?" Marshall had run down to see why the work paused.

Rickard turned shocked eyes on his chief. "Estrada!" The beautiful mournful eyes of Eduardo were on him, not Marshall's, horrified. Now he knew why Estrada had said, "I can't see it finished."

"Rickard!" The engineer did not recognize the quenched voice. "The work has got to go on."

It came to Rickard as he gave the orders that Eduardo was closer to Marshall than to him. "As near a son as he'll ever have." He turned a minute later to see his chief standing bareheaded. His own cap came off.

"We're burying the lad," said Marshall.

The minute of funeral had to be pushed aside. The river would not wait. Train after train was rushed on to the trestles; wave after wave hit them. But perceptibly the dam was steady. The rapid fire of rock was telling.

Another ridge of yellow waters rose. The roll of water came slowly, dwindling as it came; it broke against the trestle weakly. For the first time the trestle never shuddered. Workers and watchers breathed as a unit the first deep breath that night. There was a change. Every eye was on the river where it touched the rim of the dam. Suddenly a chorused cry rose. The river had stopped rising. The whistles screamed themselves hoarse.

And then a girl, sitting on the bank, saw two men grab each other by the hand. She was too far away to hear their voices, but the sun, rising red through the banks of smoke, fell on the blackened faces of her brother and Rickard. She did not care who saw her crying.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A Desertion.

When the afternoon waned and Godfrey did not call on her Gerty was roused to uneasiness. Had she angered him by refusing to make the definite promise? Could it be love, the sort of love she wanted, if he could stay away like this when they could have the camp to themselves, every one down at the break, no Hardins running in every minute? Their first chance and Godfrey slighting it!

He would surely come that evening, knowing that she would be alone! The little watch Tom had given her for an almost forgotten birthday set the pace for her resentment. Nine, ten, eleven! How dared he treat her so? She blew out the lamps when she found that she was shaking with anger and undressed in the dark. She could not see him, if he came now, her self-control all gone! But she could not go to bed. She stood in her darkened tent, shaken by her angry passions.

Suppose that he were only trifling with her? What was that paper he had thrust in her hand? With a candle she found the yellow paper. It was a copy of a telegram to Godfrey's lawyer. "Start divorce proceedings at once. Any grounds possible. Back soon. Godfrey."

questioning, not quite sure of her. She had worried him yesterday because she would not pledge herself to marry him if he sued for his divorce. She had told him to ask her that after the courts had set him free. She could not have him sure of her.

An exclamation from him recalled her. She found that he was no longer staring at her; his eyes were fixed on the trembling structure over which a "battleship," laden with rock, was creeping.

"I want to stay with you, you know that dearest. But it doesn't feel right to see them all working like niggers and me loafing here. You don't mind?"

Oh, no, Gerty did not mind! She was tired, anyway! She was going back to her tent!

He thrust a yellow paper into her hands. "I sent that off today. Perhaps you will be glad?"

She flung another of her inscrutable smiles at him, and went up the bank, the paper unread in her hands.

The long afternoon wore away. They were now dynamiting the largest rocks on the cars before unloading them. The heavy loads could not be emptied quickly enough. Not dribbled, the rock, but dumped simultaneously, else the gravel and rock might be washed down stream faster than they could be put together. Many cars must be unloaded at once; the din on Silent's train was terrific. His crew looked like devils, drenched from the spray which rose from the river each time the rock-pour began; blackened by the smoke from the belching engine. The river was ugly in its wrath. It was humping itself for its final stand against the absurdity of human intention; its yellow tail swished through the bents of the trestle.

The order came for more speed. Rickard moved from bank to raft; knee deep in water, screaming orders through the din; directing the gangs; speeding the rock trains. Hardin oscillated between the levee and dams, taking orders, giving orders. His energy was superb. It had grown dark, but no one yet had thought of the lights, the great Wells' burners stretched across the channel. Suddenly, the lights flared out brightly.

Not one of those who labored or watched would ever forget that night. The spirit of recklessness entered even into the stolid native. The men of the Reclamation forgot this was not their enterprise; the Hardin faction jumped to Rickard's orders. The watchers on the bank sat tense, thrilled out of recognition of aching muscles, or the midnight creeping chill. No one would go home.

To Innes, the struggle was vested in two men, Rickard running down yonder with that light foot of his, and Hardin with the fighting mouth tense. And somewhere, she remembered, working with the rest, was Estrada. Those three were fighting for the justification of a vision—an idea was at stake, a hope for the future.

Rickard passed and repassed her. And had not seen her! Not during those hours would he think of her, not until the idea failed, or was triumphant, would he turn to look for her.

Visibly, the drama moved toward its climax. Before many hours passed the river would be captured or the idea forever mocked. Each time a belching engine pulled across that hazardous track it flung a credit to the man-side. Each time the waters, slowly rising, hurried their weight against the creaking trestles where the rock was thin, a point was gained by the militant river. Its roar sounded like the last cry of a wounded animal in Innes' ear; the Dragon was a reality that night as it spent its rage against the shackles of puny men.

Molly Silent had seen her husband's train pull in. She watched for it to go out again. The whistle blew twice. Something was wrong. She left her place in time to see Silent, his face shining ghostly pale under the soot, pull himself up from the "battleship"



"God, Man, You Can't Go Like That!"

where he had been leading. Estrada, sent by Rickard to find out why the train did not pull out, saw him the same instant as did Molly. Silent swayed, waving them back unceasingly, like a man who is drunk.

"God, man, you can't go like that!" cried Estrada.

"Who's going?" demanded Silent, his tongue thick with thirst and exhaustion. The whistle blew again.

"I will!" The train moved out on the trestle, as the whistle blew angrily twice. Only Molly and Silent saw Estrada go. Silent staggered unceasingly

fell away. He could see now the step ahead that had been taken; the last trestle was done; the rock-pouring well on; he called that going some! He felt pleasantly languid, but not yet sleepy. His thought wandered over the resting camp. And then Innes Hardin came to him.

Not herself, but as a soft little thought which came creeping around the corner of his dreams. She had been there, of course, all day, tucked away in his mind, as though in his home waiting for him to come back to her, weary from the pricks of the day. The way he would come home to her, please God, some day. Not bearing his burdens to her, he did not believe in that, but asking her diversions. Contentment spread her soft wings over him. He fell asleep.

Rickard awakened as to a call. What had startled him? He listened, raising himself by his elbow. From a distance, a sweet high voice, unreal in its pitch and thrilling quality, came to him. It was Godfrey, somewhere on the levee, singing by the river. He brought him again to Innes Hardin. He pulled aside his curtain which hung over the screening of his tent and looked out into a moon-flooded world. Rickard's eyes fell on a little tent over yonder, a white shrine. "White as that fine, sweet soul of hers!"

Wandering into the night, Godfrey passed down the river, singing. His voice, the footlights, the listening great audiences were calling to him. To him, the moon-flooded levee, the glistening water, made a star-set scene. He was treading the boards, the rushing waters by the bank gave the orchestration for his melody—"La Donna e Mobile." He began it to Gerty Hardin; she would hear it in her tent; she would take it as the tender reproach he had teased her with that afternoon in the ramada.

He gave for encore a ballad long forgotten; he had pulled it back from the cobwebs of two decades; he had made it his own.

"But, my darling, you will be, ever young and fair to me."

It came, the soaring voice, to Tom Hardin, outside Gerty's tent on his lonely cot. He knew that song. Disdained by his wife, a pretty figure a man cuts! If his wife can't stand him, who can? He wasn't good enough for her. He was rough. His life had kept him from fitting himself to her taste. She needed people who could talk like Rickard, sing like Godfrey. People, other people, might misconstrue her preferences. He knew they were not flirtations; she needed her kind. She would always keep straight; she was straight as a whip. Life was as hard for her as it was for him; he could feel sorry for her; his pity was divided between the two of them, the husband, the wife, both lonely in their own way.

On the other side of the canvas walls, Gerty Hardin lay listening to the message meant for her. The fickle sex, he had called hers; no constancy in woman, he had declared, fondling her hair. He had tried to coax her into pledges, pledges which were also disavowals to the man outside.

Silver threads! Age shuddered at her threshold. She hated that song. Cruel, life had been to her; none of its promises had been kept. To be happy, why, that was a human's birthright; grab it, that was her creed! There was a chance yet; youth had not gone. He was singing it to her, her escape—

"Darling, you will be, ever young and fair to me."

Godfrey, singing to Gerty Hardin, had awakened the camp. Innes, in her tent, too, was listening.

"Darling, you will be, ever young and fair to me!"

So that is the miracle, that wild rush of certain feeling! Yesterday, doubting, tomorrow, more doubts—but tonight, the song, the night isolated them, herself and Rickard, into a world of their own. Life with him on any terms she wanted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Battle in the Night.

Gathering on the bank were the camp groups to watch the last stand of the river against the rock bombardment. Molly Silent had crept down from the Crossing, full of fears. Out there, somewhere on the trestles, on one of those rock cars, was her Jim. She sat on the bank by Innes and Mrs. Marshall.

Mrs. Hardin, floated by in her crisp muslins. A few feet behind stalked Godfrey, his eyes on the pretty figure by his side. Innes turned from his look, abashed as though she had been peering through a locked door.

Gaily, with a fluttering of ruffles Gerty established herself on the bank a trifle out of hearing distance. A hard little smile played on the lips accented with Parisian rouge. The childish expression was gone; her look accused life of having trifled with her. But they would see—

"Don't look so unhappy, dearest," whispered the man at her side. "I'm going to make you happy, dear!"

She flushed a brilliant, finished smile at him. Yes, she was proud of him. He satisfied her sense of romance, or would, later, when she was away from here, a dull pain pricking at her deliberate planning. Godfrey found her young, young and distracting. His life had been hungry, too; the wife, up there in Canada somewhere, had never understood him. Godfrey was ambitious, ambitious as she was. She would be his wife; she would see the cities of the world with him, the welcomed wife of Godfrey; she would share the plaudits his wonderful voice won.

His eyes were on her now, she knew,

"Call their bluff," grinned Casey, showing teeth tobacco had not had a chance to spoil. "Boycott them."

MacLean found Wooster at the riverbank with Tom Hardin. The two men were watching a pile-driver set a re-



He Found Wooster at the River Bank.

bellious pile. Two new trestles were to supplement the one which had been bent out of line by the weight of settling drift. Marshall's plan was being followed, though jeered at by reclamation men and the engineers of the D. R. company.

"Stop the mattress weaving and dump like hell!" had been his orders. "Boycott the Indians, well I'm blown," the beady eyes sparkled at Hardin. "Now he's cut his own throat."

"By the eternal!" swore Hardin. MacLean left the two engineers matching oaths.

There was an ominous quiet the next day. Not an Indian offered to work at the river. A few stolid bucks came to their tasks on Tuesday morning; they were told by Rickard himself that there was no work for them. Rickard appeared ignorant of the antagonism of the engineers.

An unfathered rumor started that Rickard was in with the Reclamation Service men; that he wanted the work to fail; to be adopted by the Service. MacLean broke a lance or two against the absurd slander. He was making the discovery that a man's friendship for a man may be deeper than a man's love for a woman. He was a Rickard man. He was made to feel the reproach of it.

Wednesday not an Indian reported. Coropel passed from camp to camp, his advice unpopular. Scouts sent out to watch the work on the river reported it was crippled. The white man would be sending for the Indian soon. The waiting braves sat on their haunches, grinning and smoking their pipes.

Saturday night the camp went gloomily to bed. On the Indian side there was no revel, no feasting or dancing.

Rickard did not turn in until after midnight, planning alternatives. He was sleeping hard when MacLean, at dawn, dashed into his tent.

"Quick, what does this mean?"

It was a splendid spectacle, and staged superbly. For background, the sharp-edged mountains flushing to pinks and purples against a one-hued sky; the river-growth of the old channel uniting them, blotting out miles of desert into a flat scene. On the opposite bank of the New river, five hundred strong, lined up formidably, their faces grotesque and ferocious with paint, were the seven tribes. The sun's rays glinted up from their firearms, shotguns, revolvers, into a motley of defiance! Cocopahs, with streaming hair, blanketed Navajos, short-haired Pimas, those in front reining in their silent pinto ponies, and all motionless, silent in that early morning light.

"What does it mean?" whispered MacLean. Rickard did not answer. He had one nauseous instant as he looked toward Innes' tent. Then he broke into laughter.

"See the white horse, no, in front—" "By jove," MacLean slapped his thigh. "Coronel! They had me buffaloed. What do you think it is?"

Rickard stepped out into the wash of morning air and waved a solemn salute across the river. Gravely it was returned by Coronel.

"What does it mean?" demanded MacLean.

"It means we've won," chuckled his chief, coming back into his tent.

An hour later Coronel led in a picked group of the tribes. If the white chief would recall the boycott the Monday strike was over. The white man's silver had won.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The White Night.

"Lord, I'm tired," groaned Rickard, stumbling into camp, wet to the skin. "Don't you say letters to me, Mac. I'm going to bed. Tell Ling I don't want any dinner. He'll want to fuss up something. I don't want to see food."

The day, confused and jumbled, burned across his eyeballs; a turmoil of bustle and hurry of insurrection. He had made a swift stand against that. He was to be minded to the last man Jack of them, or anyone would go, his threat including the engineers, Silent Irish, Wooster, Hardin himself. This was no time for factions, for leadership.

In bed, the day with its irritation

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." Placidly, 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 turning 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.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A Sunday Spectacle.

Trouble with the tribes was well grown before it was recognized. Disaffection was ripe; the bucks were heady, the white man's silver acting like wine. Few of the braves had dreamed of ever possessing sums of money such as they drew down each Sunday morning. Rickard began to suspect liquor again. In the Indian camp Sunday was a day of feasting, followed by a gorged sleep; the next day one of languor, of growing incohesion.

Rickard spoke of it to Coronel. "Like small baby," hunched the old shoulders. "Happy baby. Pretty soon stop."

With the next wages went a reprimand, then a warning. Still followed bad Mondays. Rickard then issued a formal warning to all the tribes.

"The situation with the Indians is serious," said Rickard to MacLean.

"They're getting liquor in here, some way, the Lord only knows how. Anyway, they're not fit for burning Monday morning. I've just sent them word by Coronel that it's got to quit, or they do."

"Suppose they do?" MacLean was startled. Not an Indian could be spared at that stage of the game.

"Bluff!" Rickard got up. "They won't take the chance of losing that money. I'm off now to the Crossing. I'll leave you in charge here."

The