

# The RIVER

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

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## HARDIN'S LUCK? HARDLY, THINKS RICKARD, AS HE FORESEES DISASTER FROM CARELESSNESS OF HIS PREDECESSOR.

**Synopsis.**—K. C. Rickard, an engineer of the Overland Pacific, is sent by President Marshall to stop the ravages of the Colorado river in the Imperial valley, a task at which Thomas Hardin, head of the Desert Reclamation company has failed. Rickard foresees embarrassment because he knows Hardin, who was a student under him in an eastern college, married Gerty Holmes, with whom Rickard once thought himself in love. At the company offices at Calexico Rickard finds the engineers loyal to Hardin and hostile to him. He meets Mr. and Mrs. Hardin and Innes Hardin, the former's half sister. Innes is bitter against Rickard for supplanting her brother. Hardin discovers that Rickard is planning a levee to protect Calexico and puts him down as incompetent. Gerty thinks her husband jealous. Gerty invites Rickard to dinner and there plans a "progressive ride" in his honor. Rickard 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.

#### Hardin's Luck.

Two days later there was a shock of earthquake, so slight that the lipping 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 a fact. 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 there? 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 rule 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 at 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 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 mulls, 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—delicious 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 third of disappointed anger, of dislike, when the face of Hardin peered through the leafy 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 tremulousness—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 married 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. Supper's getting cold. Look at that omelette. 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 such old friends," urged his wife. "He knew I meant it seriously."

"Just the same, it's nerve," grumbled 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 MacLean and Estrada. Once, there was a large flare of light. But he wouldn't ask! Some of his fool tinkering!

His sister's gaze rested on him with concern. He had too little to do. She guessed that his title, consulting engineer, was a mocking one, that his chief, at least, did not consult him. Was it true, what she had heard, that he had made a fluke about the machinery? He was looking seedy. He had been letting his clothes go. He looked like a man who has lost grip; who has been shelved.

She knew he was sleeping badly. Every morning now she found the couch rumpled. Not much pretense of marital congeniality. Things were going badly, there—

"Everybody has accepted," Gerty was saying. "They have been waiting for me to set the date."

"And you cater to him, let him dangle you all. I wonder why you do it, unless it's to hurt me."

"Hurt you, Tom," cried his wife, her deep blue eyes wide with dismay. "How can you say such a thing? But if it is given for him, how can I do anything else than let him arrange the day to suit himself? It would be funny for the guest of honor not to be present, wouldn't it?"

"I don't see why you want to make him a guest of honor," he retorted, covering his position.

Gently, Gerty expressed her belief that she was doing the best thing for her husband in getting up a public affair for his successor. She did think that Tom would see that it showed they had no feeling.

"I think it a fine idea," agreed Innes heartily. "I'm sure Tom will, too, when he thinks about it." But she did not give him any chance to express himself. "How are you going to manage it, Gerty? You said it was going to be progressive!"

"We shall draw for partners," said Mrs. Hardin. "And change every half a mile. The first lap will be two miles; that will give some excitement in cutting for partners." Easy, being the hostess, to withhold any slip she pleased, easy to make it seem accidental!

"When is this circus coming off?" inquired her husband.

"Mr. Rickard says he will be back

on the first; that he'll be free on the second."

"For half an hour, I'll listen to Mrs. Youngberg tell me how hard it is to have to do without servants, as she's never done it in her life before. For another half-mile, Mrs. Hatfield will flirt with me, and Mrs. Middleton will tell me all about 'her dear little kiddies.' Sounds cheerful. Why didn't you choose cards? No one has to talk then."

There was an interval when his wife appeared to be balancing his suggestion. "No, I think it will have to be a drive; for I've told every one about it."

"Well," remarked her husband, "I only hope something will happen to prevent it."

"Tom!" exclaimed Gerty Hardin. "What a dreadful thing to say. That sounds like a curse. You make my blood run cold."

"Shu!" said Hardin, picking up his hat. "That was no curse. You wouldn't go if it rained, would you?"

"Oh, rain!" She shrugged at that possibility.

"Well, you wouldn't go if the wind blows!" retorted Hardin, leaving the room.

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### The Dragon Takes a Hand.

The company's automobile honked outside. Hardin frowned across the table at his wife. "You're surely not going such a night as this?"

Gerty gave one of her light, elusive shrugs. No need to answer Tom when he was in one of his black moods. This was the first word he had spoken since he had entered the tent. She had warned Innes by a lifted eyebrow—they must be careful not to provoke him. Something had gone wrong at the office, of course! How much longer could she stand his humors, these ghastly silent dinners?

"The river on a rampage, and we go for a drive!" Jeered Hardin.

The flood was not serious—yet! Tom loved to cry "Wolf!" No one was alarmed in town—Patton, Mrs. Youngberg, would have told her. Of



Gerty's Pretty Lips Hardened.

course, one never knew what that dreadful river would do next, but if one had to wait always to see what the river's next prank would be, one would never get anywhere!

Innes was leaving the table. "Well, I suppose I should be lashing on my hat!" Gerty's pretty lips hardened as the girl left the tent. These Hardins always loved to spoil her enjoyment. They would like her to be a nun, a cloistered nun!

At the opening of the door, the wind tore the pictures from the piano. Gerty ran into her room, shutting herself in against further argument. She came back into the room, powdered and heavily veiled against the wind. A heavy winter ulster covered the new mull gown which she had not worn at supper, though Innes could have helped her with the books! But there was always so much talk about everything!

They had to face the gale as the machine swept down the wind-crazed street.

It was too bad to have a night like this! And all her work—Tom and his sister would have it go for nothing! She was made of stubborn stuff than that. Life had been dealing out mean hands to her, but she would not drop out of the game, acknowledge herself beaten—luck would turn, she would get better cards.

In the hall of the Desert hotel, the party was assembling. Mrs. Hardin's roving eye scanned the hall. Rickard was not there. Patton called her from the desk. Some one wanted her at the telephone. It was Rickard, of course, at the office; to say he had been detained. The fear which had been chilling her passed by.

It was not Rickard on the wire, but Mrs. Hatfield, loquacious and coquetish. She urged a frightful neuralgia,

and hoped that she was not putting her hostess to any inconvenience at this late moment. She wanted to prolong the conversation—had the guests all come? Were they really going? Then she must be getting old, for a night like this dismayed her! Gerty felt her good-night was rudely abrupt. But was she to stand there gabbling all night, her guests waiting?

She prayed that Rickard would be there when she returned. What a travesty if the guest of honor should disappoint her! Though he was not among the different groups, her confidence in his punctiliousness reassured her. She must hold them a little longer. She flitted gaily from one standing group to another. Her eyes constantly questioned the clock.

"How long are you going to wait for Mrs. Hatfield?" Her husband came up, protesting.

"Mrs. Hatfield," she explained distantly, "is not coming. We are waiting for Mr. Rickard."

"He didn't come in on that train; he's at the Heading," Hardin added something about trouble at the intake, but Gerty did not heed. Tom had known and had not told her when there was yet time to call it off!

"A pretty time to tell me!" Had he been looking at her, he would have been left no illusions. Her blue eyes flashed hate.

"I did not know it until we got here. There was a message from MacLean at the desk, waiting."

MacLean was not there, either!

"We are all ready," she cried. "Mrs. Hatfield and Mr. Rickard cannot come." Not for worlds would she give in to her desire to call the whole grim affair off; let them think she was disappointed, not she. Though the world blew away, she would go.

She found herself distributing slips of mangled quotations. The white slips went to the women; the green bits of pasteboard to the men. She held a certain green card in her glove: "Leads on to fortune." Rickard might come dashing in at the last moment, the ideal man's way; a special, perhaps; it did not seem credible that he would deliberately stay away without sending her word.

In a burst of laughter, the company discovered then that the guest of honor was also absent. Mrs. Hardin hurried them out to the waiting buggies.

Dreadfully, they drove down the flying street. The wind was at their backs, but it tore at their hats, pulled at their tempers. Their eyes were full of street dust.

A flash of light as they were leaving town brightened the thick dust clouds. "What was that?" cried Gerty. She was ready for any calamity now. "Not lightning?" Again, the queer light flashed across the obscured sky. Tom roused himself to growl that he hadn't seen anything. And the dreary farce went on.

Innes' partner was young Sutcliffe, the English janjero. He was in the quicksand of a comparison between English and American women, Innes mischievously coaxing him into deeper waters, when there was a blockade of buggies ahead of them.

"The A B C ranch," cried Innes, peering through the veil of dust at the queer unreal outlines of fences and trees. "It's our first stop."

"Oh, I say, that's too bad," began Sutcliffe. Innes was already on the road, her skirts whipped by the wind into clinging drapery.

Gerty's party found itself disorganized. Partners were trying to find or lose each other. "Get in here!" Innes heard the voice of Estrada behind her. He had a top buggy. She hailed a refuge.

"Splendid!" she cried. "What a relief!" Climbing in, she said: "I hope this isn't upsetting Gerty's arrangement."

"Arrangement! Look at them!" The women were hastening out of the dust swirl into any haven that offered. With little screams of dismay, they ran like rabbits to cover.

Gerty found herself with Blinn. At the next stop there was a block of buggies. "No use changing again!" She acknowledged herself beaten. "Let's go on. What are they stopping for?" Dismal farce it all was!

She was pushing back her disheartened curls when the beat of horses' hoofs back of them brought the blood back into her wind-chilled cheeks. "Rickard!" she thought. "He must have come in a special!" The gloom suddenly disgorged MacLean.

"Hardin! Where is he?"

"What's up?" yelled Blinn. "Is it the river?" MacLean's face answered him. His ranch scoured again—"God Almighty!"

"The river!" screamed the women. The men were surrounding MacLean, whose horse was prancing as if with the importance of having carried a Revere. "The levee!" called MacLean. "Where's Hardin?" He spurred his mare toward Hardin, who was blacker than Napoleon at Austerlitz.

"You're needed. They're all needed." The other voices broke in, the men pressing up. This threatened them all. Blinn's ranch lay in the ravaged sixth district. Nothing would save him. Youngberg belonged to water company number one; their ditches would go. Hollister and Wilson of the Palo Verde saw ruin ahead of them. Each man was visualizing the mad onward sweep of that destroying power. Like ghosts, the women huddled in the dust-blown road.

"Where is it now?" demanded Blinn. "It's here, right on us. You're all needed at the levee," bawled MacLean.

The levee! There was a dash for buggies, a scraping of wheels, the

whinnying of frightened horses. Some one recalled the flashes of light they had seen on leaving town. "What were those lights—signals?"

"From the water-tower," MacLean's voice split the wind. "The wires are all down between the Crossing and the towns. Colonel was on the tower—he got the signal from the Heading—he's been there each night for a week!" This was a great night—for his chief, Rickard!

Gerty Hardin caught the thrill of his hero-worship. How splendid, how triumphant!

Innes found herself in her brother's buggy. His horse, under the whip, dashed forward. Suddenly he pulled it back on its haunches, narrowly averting a jam. "Where's MacLean?"

The boy rode back. "Who's calling me?"

"Give me your horse," demanded Hardin. "You take my sister home."

Gerty Hardin's party was torn like a bow of useless string. Facing the wind now, no one could talk; no one wanted to talk. Each was thrashing out his own thoughts; personal ruin stared them in the face. Every man was remembering that reckless exposure of Hardin's; pinning their hope to that ridiculous levee. The horses broke into a reckless gallop, the buggies lurching wildly as they dodged one another. The axles creaked and strained. The wind tore away the hats of the women, rent their pretty chiffon veils.

The dusty road was peopled with dark formless shapes. The signals had spread the alarm; the desert world was flocking to the gorge of the New River, to the levee.

The women were dumped without ceremony on the sidewalk, under the screened bird cage of the Desert hotel. Shivering, her pretty teeth chattering, Gerty Hardin ushered them into the deserted hall. The Chinese cook snored away his vigil in an armchair by the open fire. The men had rushed away to the levee.

"Women must wait," Gerty's laugh was hysterical. "We can do no good down there." She threw herself, conscious of heroism, into the ordeal of her spirit entertainment.

It was always an incoherent dream to Innes Hardin, that wild ride home, the lurching scraping buggies, the apprehensive silence, this huddling of women like scared rabbits around a table that had also been gay. The women's teeth shivered over the leas. Their faces looked ghastly by the light shed by Gerty's green shades. She wished she were at the levee. She simply must go to the levee. "I'm going to get a wrap," she threw to Gerty as she passed. "I left it in the hall."

She stole through the deserted of fice, past the white and silver soda fountain, and out into the speeding blur of the night. Formless shapes soft-footed, passed her. As she sped past the French windows of the dining room she could get a view of the shattered party.

Innes made a dive into the darkness. There was a dim outline of hastening figures in front of her. She could hear some one breathing heavily by her side. They kept apace, stumbling occasionally, the moving gloom betraying their feet. A man came running back toward the town. "It's cutting back!" He cried. "Nothing but the levee will save the towns!"

The levee!

The harsh breathing followed her. As they passed the wretched hut of a Mexican gambler, a sputtering light shone out. Innes looked back. She saw the wrinkled face of Colonel, who had left his water tower. His black coarse hair was streaming in the wind, his mouth, ajar, was expressionless, though the fulfillment of the Great Prophecy was at hand. Beneath the cheek-splotches of green and red paint rested a curious dignity. The Indian was to come again into his own.

What was his own, she questioned as her feet stumbled over loosened boarding, a ditch crossing she had not seen. More corn, perhaps more fiery stuff to wash down the corn! More white man's money in the brows man's pocket—that, his happiness. Why should he not thank the gods! His gods were speaking! For whose the waters of the great river ran back to the desert, the long ago outraged gods were no longer angry. The towns might go, but the great Indian gods were showing their good will!

She joined a group at the levee, winding her veil over mouth and forehead. Dark shapes swayed near her. The wind was making havoc of the mad waters rushing down from the channel. The noise of wind and waters was appalling. Strange loud voices came through the din, of Indians, Mexicans; guttural sounds. Men ran past her, carrying shovels, pulling sacks of sand; lanterns, blown dim, flashed their pale light on her chilled cheeks.

Not even the levee, she knew then, would save the towns. This was the end.

What will Rickard think when he reaches the levee to find Hardin gone on a melodramatic, if useful, dash up the river, leaving the men fighting the rising river leaderless and disorganized? Innes grasps the situation and jumps into the breach. Don't miss the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

#### Seek Truth Even in Error.

There is no error so crooked but it hath in it some lines of truth, nor is any poison so deadly that it serveth not some wholesome use. Spurn not a seeming error, but dig below its surface for the truth.—Tupper.