

she by the great flood were happily re-united.

CHAPTER XV.

Mrs. Somers first thought was of their friends in Johnstown.

"Send them word at once, Algonson. It will relieve them of such terrible suspense. I would have done it the first thing, but I had no money."

"Nor have I, for that matter," laughing. "What's the use of trying to get the property of the railway company. But it is impossible, for love or money, to get a private message through now. Hundreds are trying to and fail. There is very great confusion—chase—up in the country we came from."

"Then, and here, we will, resolutely, we will give them our message. We have to walk part of the way. I will go."

"And I am ready to go to the end of the world with you."

Then it happened that the strangely united couple set out immediately for Johnstown again.

"All I want is a pair of stout shoes," Mrs. Somers said.

After a long, returning, a gentleman sitting in the car near them, was explaining to another the cause of the calamity and the nature of the country.

"The accounts are misleading. Here, we will say, is the South Fork Dam, eight, not eighteen, miles from Johnstown. The water is now held back from the South Fork Dam, station of the railroad to the dam is one and one-fourth miles. Down here nearly a mile below the dam the railway people made a deep cut. Here is the viaduct. The creek sweeps around here like a horse-shoe, the cut ends in a wooded gully. Mineral Point lies near the cut. The houses are seven-homes standing there. I learn, it was a good-sized village. Here is another cut made by the railroad just below Mineral Point. This is known as bridge number six. Below this is East Conemaugh—say nine hundred and fifty yards. The cut is there. We have to walk Woodville, at least twenty-five hundred people. You see, we get thicker as we near Johnstown below the point. Here in Stony Creek running past Johnstown, harmless any stream. All along opposite Johnstown proper the valley is filled with houses. Kenerville. Below the junction of the creeks here is the powerful railway bridge.

"Now then. The entire valley is narrow, like a V. And bent in mind that the grade is least sixty feet to the mile—some places a great deal more. Say the line is five hundred feet above Johnstown. The valley is partly covered with verdure and trees, mountain undergrowth, and large rocks. The vast body of water gathered in South Fork dam is suddenly greatly augmented by unprecedented rains in one night. This vast body of water is suddenly freed. It flows down the valley. It cuts its way through it over rocks, every stick and stone, every blade of grass; it lifts the viaduct here, picks up bridge number six there, and tosses them up like corks. All the villages are swept as bars as your hand in one minute—less time. The only houses left are those built on the sides of the V-shaped valley.

"It leaps straight through the cut at the viaduct. Three friends are walking there. The water reaches them—they strive to save each other—one is swept away. The survivors say the water that swept him away was not as high as the water that leaped through the railway cut. Why? Because the first wave represented all the water that leaped through the railway cut. Some was checked. It rushed around the bend, and when the waters were united again, they seemed mountain high to the people who saw it coming. That's why I say the viaduct and the bridge number six."

"The water worked its revenge upon the railway people, then returned its old channel, and roared there until it wore away all the old landmarks.

"Say Johnstown lies between the thumb of my left hand and forefinger. It is a good-sized town, with a bridge over the river, the bridge had not reached the water that leaped down from the dam, with a front almost thirty feet high—a wall of water—it would have rushed straight down, and Johnstown would have been little the worse. At least the people carried away would have been carried to the mountains—hundreds could and would have been saved."

"But the bridge crashed it, and the wall suddenly swirled around here between my forefinger and thumb, until water ran up Stony Creek at the rate of forty miles an hour."

"The water was now over the bridge, the bridge had not reached the water that leaped down from the dam, with a front almost thirty feet high—a wall of water—it would have rushed straight down, and Johnstown would have been little the worse. At least the people carried away would have been carried to the mountains—hundreds could and would have been saved."

"It's all right. Hope shall find good news. No, I don't want no money from you folks—I'd rather let you have some. Here—here's a quarter—honest now."

"You know? It may be yours, Mrs. Verna. That's all there is."

"If there is only one in ten thousand I'll thank God. Where is the place? I must go there at once—now."

"Where in Verna?" Hope inquired of a man near her.

"Six or seven miles up the Allegheny.

"Where is there a train going?" asked Mrs. Verna.

"We must go at once."

The trueman looked at them. His face reddened. He spoke with deference, seeing he addressed two women in man's attire. It was not a new thing to him. Dozens of women had come from the Conemaugh in men's dress, they could not find any more daring than this.

"I'll put you aboard a train in a few minutes. You don't need any tags. We are carrying you free."

Presently he returned and led them to a car. Five minutes later they were on their way to Verna.

On the way Verna was alternately weeping and crying. Smiling with the hope that sprung up suddenly in her heart—crying when she thought of the thousand chances against her.

When they reached Verna she was in such a condition that she was afraid to go further. She wished Mrs. Somers would make inquiry if the babe found in the cradle was there; and, if so, it might be her own.

Mrs. Somers soon learned all that was to be discovered.

Then Mrs. Verna became more nervous, for clinging to her husband despairingly. Mrs. Somers had her. It would always be settled one way or the other.

They were approaching Jack Alward's house now. He was at home. He was shaking a baby up in the air, while his wife looked on. Some of their neighbors, who were never satisfied looking at the baby that came down in the flood, were now more than ever.

"Who knows? It may be yours, Mrs. Verna. That's all there is."

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