

Synopsis
of
JOHNSTOWN

Gliding up the Little Conemaugh River in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, circa 1889, the new bridge ahead dissolves into the present dilapidated structure being torn down.

A worker at the top of a coffer dam keeping back the river notices a sparkle in the muddy river bottom and calls to the company owner. They find it's a diamond in a ring on the finger of a skeleton. The owner summons an archeologist to recover the skeleton and as they wait, he mentions that his great-grandparents were caught in the 1889 flood but escaped, luckily for him, and they speculate on who was this unfortunate young woman with the still sparkling diamond engagement ring...

...sparkling on the finger of a woman with her hand in moving water. The lovely Victoria 'Vickie' Donnelson is trailing her hand in a pristine mountain lake as she's being rowed across it by her fiancé of two weeks, Guy Mansley, both of them dressed in elaborate Victorian clothes of 1889, a picnic hamper and blanket in the boat.

On the shore behind them are the elaborate summer homes and large clubhouse of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, the millionaire's retreat in the mountains east of Johnstown. At the far end of the lake is the dam that formed the lake and which will fail in a storm to create the flood that devastates the city and kills over 2,000 people.

In the woods, Guy kisses her and wants more, Vickie reluctant, when a bear sends them running and Vickie falls into a long disused quarry. Guy runs to get the rope from the boat to rescue her, but the bear finds her before he returns.

A canoe on the lake pulls up to their rowboat with a young man who works weekends at the exclusive club, Sean Patrick, finding out from Guy what's happening. He races up to the quarry and jumps into to confront the bear, Vickie refusing to leave him as she throws stones and he holds off the bear with a branch. He then cleverly uses her silk blouse and static electricity to blind the bear while they run past it. At the rowboat, Vickie's gratitude towards Sean for saving her life grates on Guy.

Sean leaves and rows back to the other shore, followed by Vickie and Guy. Sean looks back towards her as he climbs ashore, but he saw her engagement ring and, anyway, she's a rich girl out of his league. He collects his pay from the foreman at the dam and walks

down the mountain to the small town on the Conemaugh River where he catches a ride in the engine of the train heading into Johnstown.

Sean is at work with his friend Will in the Cambria Iron Works in Johnstown where his knowledge of the new science of electricity has won him the job of overseeing the installation of the new technology. When Vickie's wealthy father, owner of the Pittsburgh Theatre, comes to thank him for saving his daughter's life. Sean shows him the new electric hoist he's constructing and Vickie's father is impressed with his courage and his skills, inviting him to have dinner at the family's lake house the next weekend.

At the lake club, Sean is working, installing a grate in front of the spillway at the dam to keep the stocked fish from being washed away when Vickie rides up on a horse to talk with him. Sean shrugs off her compliments and is puzzled when she rides off in something of a huff. The foreman warns him about getting involved with a member's daughter who's engaged, the other worker's ribbing him.

At dinner in the Donnelson's vacation home, Vickie and he are obviously attracted to one another to her mother's concern. Vickie's father offers Sean a job installing the new art of electricity in his theatre, impressed when Sean is reluctant due to his loyalty to his bosses at both his jobs. Sean also has reservations as he lives with his widowed mother and two young sisters, but Donnelson tells him he'll

clear the way with Sean's bosses, double his salary, and provide his private train for their move. Sean accepts if his bosses have no objections to his leaving.

Sean tells his mother and sisters about the job, one sister not wanting to go, the younger one wondering if they could go on a boat to Pittsburgh. Sean's mother is thrilled for him, but is going to stay in Johnstown, Sean to go on his own.

Sean rides the Donnelson private train into Pittsburgh where he's met by Vickie who takes him to a rooming house that houses a number of the unattached at her father's theatre. It's obvious to everyone except maybe Sean that Vickie is attracted to him. Starting work at the plant, Sean finds that Guy is an executive for Vickie's father. When Vickie turns up at the boarding house to invite Sean to a weekend fox hunting party at the family's estate, Guy watches from up the street and is not pleased.

At the fox hunt, Sean demonstrates his riding skill (his late father having raised steeplechase horses) by capturing and saving the fox from the hunt while showing up Guy who falls trying to keep up with Sean. Vickie realizes that Sean secretly saved the fox which she finds endearing. At the garden party following the hunt, Sean and Vickie walk and talk, Guy away at the doctor's to tend to his injuries from his fall. Vickie's father introduces Sean to George Westinghouse and they

talk electricity. Then Vickie asks Sean to be her escort at a party her father is throwing for a European opera star as Guy will be away visiting his parents. Sean agrees.

As Sean works on the installation of electric lighting at the theatre, Guy observes Sean's handiwork closely, obviously not happy about Sean going to the party with Vickie and mocking him, Sean ignoring the jibes much as he'd like to pummel Mansley.

Vickie, with her extraordinarily beautiful singing voice, does a duet with the opera star at the party then spirits Sean away to do something she's wanted to try. They ride the new invention of bicycles, first ending up in the pond and then, more to their liking, in each other's arms, kissing. They're more than just friends, Vickie expressing her doubts about the wisdom of having accepted Guy's proposal.

Gus is having his own assignation, with a prostitute in a brothel, where he arranges for her and another prostitute to carry out his plan against Sean.

At the theatre, Guy is humble as he gets Sean to agree to meet him after work at a local bar. As they have drinks, Guy tells him he knows Vickie doesn't love him and he's going to break off their engagement, Sean the better man. But he's actually arranged for

Sean's drinks to be spiked, the two prostitutes at another table waiting as Sean staggers to the men's room, his head spinning.

A few hours later, Guy is driving with Vickie in his cabriolet when they just happen to run across an unconscious Sean being pawed over by two prostitutes who offer Vickie a chance to join them to her disgust and dismay. One of the prostitutes tells Vickie where she can find her if she ever changes her mind, Guy secretly gleeful as he drives off with the devastated Vickie.

After Guy drops off Vickie, he goes to the theatre and sabotages Sean's electric lighting for the test run the next day.

Guy is the picture of innocence as a disheveled Sean shows up late for the test run, Mr. Donnelson not pleased. After getting the generator running and switching on the lights, smoke comes from the basement of the theatre, the building on fire, all of them helping the fire brigade battle the blaze, Sean in despair.

Sean goes to Vickie's estate to talk with her, but she won't see him and he's escorted away being warned not to return. Having lost Vickie and his job with her father, Sean is back in Johnstown deep in depression, his mother and sisters worried about him.

Vickie is as disconsolate as she stops her carriage during the fierce storm to graciously offer a ride to Sean's former landlady. A chance remark the landlady makes that Sean never left the rooming

house in the evenings except when he saw Vickie makes her suspicious as the prostitutes claimed he was always with them.

At his mother's urging, Sean heads off in the rain to try to get back his job at the lake, hoping he'll see Vickie again.

Vickie locates the prostitute Guy hired and the scorned woman reveals Guy's machinations.

Donnelson finds Guy at work and tells him Vickie has gone to Johnstown to find Sean, sending Guy in his private train to intercept her.

At the lake, Sean finds all the workers frantically trying to take out the grate they put in over the spillway as the water is about to overflow the poorly built dam which will burst, Sean jumping in to help.

Vickie arrives in Johnstown and goes to Sean's house and meets his mother and sisters.

Mansley arrives in Johnstown on the Donnelson train and takes the carriage Donnelson arranged to take him to Sean's house.

Realizing they won't save the dam, Sean grabs the foreman's horse and leaps across the gap of the missing bridge and gallops for the rail line to warn Johnstown of the danger.

Vickie sees her father's train at the station and learns from the steward about Guy chasing her. She orders the train up the line to the lake to find Sean.

Sean intercepts the passenger train heading away from Johnstown and commandeers the engine to race back to Johnstown to give the warning. The dam has burst, releasing the lake's water down into the valley, and Sean finds the flood on his heels as it grows to a blackened rolling waterfall of wood, metal and stone, carrying the living and the dead.

Vickie is halted on the Donnelson train by washed out tracks on the far side of Johnstown.

Sean is almost caught by the flood, but cuts across an ox-bow on a bridge while the flood follows the looping course of the river.

Guy finds Vickie on the train and tells her a pack of lies, but she's no longer buying his act, trying to give him back her engagement ring, Guy stopping her as he implores her to believe him.

Sean, racing ahead of the flood, is stopped by the washed out tracks and runs to spread the alarm. He's shocked to see the Donnelson train and rushes to it and the three are caught together in the maelstrom as it destroys everything in its path.

Sean and Vickie come up riding a raft of wreckage with Guy in the water and Sean saves him, being knocked from the raft in the

process. Vickie grabs Sean in the flood waters, imploring Guy to help her pull him in. Guy proves he's truly evil by taking her hand so she relies upon him, but then pulls off her engagement ring and lets go so she falls into the flood, putting the ring on his pinkie while he calls he had to do it.

Thinking he's saved his secret from being revealed, ironically he's assured his own death and saved them as a locomotive is flung up from the flood and crashes down on him, pushing Sean and Vickie towards the shore where they're pulled to safety, Vickie wondering if Sean is ever going to stop saving her life.

When a woman and her children fall into the flood from the wreckage they're clinging to, Sean and Vickie heroically jump in to rescue them. Sean gets back out with the woman and one child, but Vickie is swept away with the little girl she's trying to save.

After the flood has passed, Sean frantically searches for Vickie when he sees the little girl she was with and learns that Vickie is trapped in the now burning wreckage the flood has left piled against the brick railroad bridge by the Cambria Iron Works. He finds Vickie's rescuers leaving her to save others as she's pinned down in the debris by a beam too heavy to lift. Sean persuades his friend Will from the iron works to stay and help him get Vickie out, but it's hopeless until Sean remembers the new electric hoist he was building for the plant.

They rush to the factory and load the hoist on a wagon that his friend takes out onto the bridge while Sean strips the wiring from the building and runs it out to the hoist. The new and untried hoist powers up and Sean goes down into the wreckage to hook the cable to the beam to lift it off Vickie. She's freed, but then the wreckage collapses beneath Sean plunging him down into the dark, debris-filled river.

Vickie unhesitatingly jumps into the black chasm after Sean while his friend watches helplessly from above. He sees nothing, no movement, for a long while, but then Vickie bursts to the surface of the river out from the debris pile pulling the unconscious Sean with her. The friend rushes down and they pull Sean onto the bank and desperately work to revive him. Finally, he comes to, and Sean's friend tells him Vickie saved his life. She says, "A couple of more times and we'll be even." They kiss...

...they are kissing at the conclusion of their wedding in the yard of her family's estate. Then there is the ominous rumble of dark clouds, rain begins to patter down, and everyone rushes inside, traumatized by memories of the flood. The rain begins to pool in the soil in the garden...

...water has pooled around the finger of the skeleton in today's river bed, the archeologist summoned revealing that the diamond ring

isn't on its ring finger but its pinkie. They've uncovered the remains of Guy Mansley.

The owner of the construction company asks how long it will take before they can get back to work and the archeologist addresses him as Mr. Patrick – he's the great grandson of Sean and Vickie.

The End