The Riverman

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

[CONTINUED.]

Chapter 14

ON his return home late Monday afternoon Grandma Orde informed the river boss with a shrewd twinkle that she wanted him surely at home the following evening.

"I've asked three or four of the young people for a candy pull," said she.

"Who, mother?" asked Orde.

"Your crowd—the Smiths, Collinses, Jane Hubbard and Her," said Grandma Orde.

The young people straggled in at an early hour after supper. Orde stepped into the hall to help them with their wraps. He was surprised as he approached Carroll Bishop to lift her cloak from her shoulders to find that the top of her daintily poised head, with its soft, fine hair, came well below the level of his eyes. Somehow her poise, her slender grace of movement and of attitude, had lent her the impression of a stature she did not possess.

"Oh, it is so quaint and delightful," Carroll exhaled slowly, "this dear old house with its low ceilings and its old

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pictures and queer, unexpected things that take your breath away."

"It is one of the oldest houses in town," said Orde, "and I suppose it is picturesque. But, you see, I was brought up here, so I'm used to it."

"Wait until you leave it," said she. "Then all these things will come back to you to make your heart ache for them."

After the company had gone Orde stood long by the front gate looking up into the infinite spaces. Somehow, and vaguely, he felt the night to be akin to her elusive spirit. Farther and farther his soul penetrated into its depths, and yet other depths lay beyond, other mysteries, other unguessed realms. And yet its beauty was the simplicity of space and dark and the stars.

The next time he saw her was at the house of the friend she visited. Orde was lucky enough to find the girls home and alone. Jane made an excuse and went out. They talked with a considerable approach toward intimacy. Not until nearly time to go did Orde stumble upon the vital point of the evening. He had said something about a plan for the week following.

"But you forget that by that time I shall be gone," said she.

"Gone!" he echoed blankly. "Where?"

"Home," said she. "Don't you remember I am to go Sunday morning?"

"I thought you were going to stay a month."

"I was, but I—certain things came up that made it necessary for me to leave sooner."

"Will you write me occasionally?" he begged.

"As to that"—she began—"I'm a very poor correspondent. I do not make it a custom to write to young men."

"Oh!" he cried, believing himself enlightened. "Will you answer if I write you?"

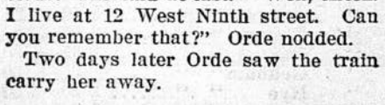
She began gently to laugh, quite to herself, as though enjoying a joke entirely within her own personal privilege.

"What is your address in New York?" demanded Orde.

She sank into a chair near by with a pretty uplifted gesture of despair.

"I surrender!" she cried, and then she laughed until the tears started from her eyes. "Oh, you are delicious!" she said at last. "Well, listen. I live at 12 West Ninth street. Can you remember that?" Orde nodded.

Two days later Orde saw the train carry her away.



Chapter 15

THE new firm plunged busily into pressing activities. Orde constantly interviewed men of all kinds—rivermen, mill men, contractors, boat builders, hardware dealers, pile driver captains, builders, wholesale grocery men, cooks, axmen, chore boys—all a little world in itself.

Downstream eight miles, below the mills, and just beyond where the drawbridge crossed over to Monrovia, Duncan McLeod's shipyards steamed and bent and bolted away at two tugboats.

The spring burst into leaf and settled into summer. Orde was constantly on the move. As soon as low water came with midsummer he departed to Redding. Here he joined a crew which Tom North had collected and went to the head of the river. Far back on the headwaters he built a dam. The gate operated simply and could be raised to let loose an entire flood. And, indeed, this was the whole purpose of the dam. It created a reservoir from which could be freed new supplies of water to eke out the dropping spring freshets.

The crew next moved down ten miles to where the river dropped over a rapids full of bowlders. Here were built a row of stone filled log cribs in a double row downstream to define the channel and to hold the drive in it and away from the shallows. At the falls twenty-five miles below Orde purposed his most elaborate bit of rough engineering. The falls, only about fifteen feet high, fell straight to a bed of sheer rock. This had been eaten by the eddies into potholes and crannies until a jagged irregular scoop hollow had formed immediately underneath the fall.

In flood time the water roared through this obstruction in a torrent. The logs plunged end on into the scoop hollow, hit with a crash and were spewed out below more or less battered. Sometimes, when the drive brought down a hundred logs together, they failed to shoot over the barrier of the ledge. Then followed a jam, a bad jam, difficult and dangerous to break.

This condition of affairs Orde had determined, if possible, to obviate.

"If," said he to North, "we could carry an apron on a slant from just under the crest and over the potholes it would shoot both the water and the logs off a better angle."

"Sure," agreed North, "but you'll have fun placing your apron with all that water running through. Why, it would drown us!"

"I've got a notion on that," said Orde.

Into the forest went the axmen. The straightest trees they felled, trimmed and dragged down travoy trails they constructed, on sleds they built for the purpose, to the banks of the river. Here they bored the two holes through either end to receive the bolts when later they should be locked together side by side in their places. As fast as they were prepared men with canthooks rolled them down the slope to a flat below the falls.

After the trees had been cut in sufficient number Orde led the way back upstream a half mile to a shallows, where he commanded the construction of a number of exaggerated sawhorses with very wide spread slanting legs. When the sawhorses were completed Orde directed the picks and shovels to be brought up.

Orde set his men to digging a channel through the bank. It was no slight job, as the slope down into a swamp began only at a point forty or fifty feet inland; but, on the other hand, the earth was soft and free from rocks. When completed the channel gave passage to a rather feeble streamlet from the outer fringe of the river.

Next Orde assigned two men to each of the queer shaped sawhorses and instructed them to place the horses in a row across the shallowest part of the river and broadside to the stream. This was done. The men, halfway to their knees in the swift water, bore

"Why, it would drown us!"

down heavily to keep their charges in place. Other men laid heavy planks side by side perpendicular to and on the upstream side of the horses. The weight of the water clamped them in place. Big rocks and gravel shoveled on in quantity prevented the lower ends from rising. The wide slant of the legs directed the pressure so far downward that the horses were prevented from floating away, and slowly the bulk of the water, thus raised a good three feet above its former level, turned aside into the new channel and poured out to inundate the black ash swamp beyond.

A good volume still poured down to the fall, but it was so far reduced that work became possible.

"Now, boys!" cried Orde. "Lively while we've got the chance!"

The twenty-six foot logs were placed side by side, slanting from a point two feet below the rim of the fall to the ledge below. They were bolted together top and bottom through the four holes bored for that purpose. The task finished, they pried the flash boards from the improvised dam, piled them neatly beyond reach of high water, rescued the sawhorses and piled them also for a possible future use and blocked the temporary channel. The river, restored to its immemorial channel by these men who had so nonchalantly turned it aside, roared on. Orde and his crew tramped back to the falls and gazed on their handiwork with satisfaction. Instead of plunging over an edge into a turmoil of foam and eddies, now the water flowed smoothly, almost without a break, over an incline of thirty degrees.

"Logs 'll slip over that slick as a gun barrel," said Tom North.

Quite cheerfully they took up their long, painstaking journey back down the river.

The trail led the crew through many minor labors, all of which consumed time. At Reed's mill Orde entered into diplomatic negotiations with old man Reed, whom he found singularly amenable. The skirmish in the spring seemed to have taken all the fight out of him, or perhaps, more simply, Orde's attitude toward him at that time had won him over to the young man's side. Orde's crew built a new sluiceway and gate far enough down to assure a good head in the pond above.

In September the crew had worked down as far as Redding, leaving behind them a river harnessed for their uses. Remained still the forty miles between Redding and the lake. Orde here paid off his men. A few days' work with a pile driver would fence the principal shoals from the channel.

He stayed overnight with his parents and took the train for Monrovia to meet Newmark.

"Hello, Joe!" greeted Orde, his teeth flashing in contrast to the tan of his face. "I'm done. Anything new since you wrote last?"

Newmark had acquired his articles of incorporation and sold his stock. Perhaps his task had in it as much of difficulty as Orde's taming of the river. Certainly he carried it to as successful a conclusion. The bulk of the stock he sold to log owners. Some blocks even went to Chicago. His own little fortune of twenty thousand he paid in for the shares that represented his half of the majority retained by himself and Orde. The latter gave a note at 10 per cent for his proportion of the stock. Newmark then borrowed fifteen thousand more, giving as security a mortgage on the company's newly acquired property—the tugs, booms, buildings and real estate. Thus was the financing determined. It left the company with obligations of $1,500 a year in interest, expenses which would run heavily into the thousands and an obligation to make good outside stock worth at par exactly $49,000. In addition Orde had charged against his account a burden of $2,000 a year interest on his personal debt. To offset these liabilities, outside the river improvements and equipments, which would hold little or no value in case of failure, the firm held contracts to deliver about 100,000,000 feet of logs. After some discussion the partners decided to allow themselves $2,500 apiece by way of salary.

"The only point that is at all risky to me," said Newmark, "is that we have only one season contracts. If for any reason we hang up the drive or fail to deliver promptly we're going to get left the year following, and then it's b-u-s-t—bust."

Chapter 16

ORDE'S bank account, in spite of his laughing assertion to Newmark, contained some $1,100.

After a brief but comprehensive tour of inspection over all the works then forward he drew a hundred of this and announced to Newmark that business would take him away for about two weeks.

At Redding, whither he went to pack his little sole leather trunk, he told Grandma Orde the same thing. She came and stood by the man leaning over the trunk.

"Speak to her, Jack," said she quietly. "She cares for you."

Orde looked up in astonishment, but he did not pretend to deny the implied accusation as to his destination.

"Why, mother," he cried, "she's only seen me three or four times! It's absurd—yet."

"I know," nodded Grandma Orde wisely; "I know. But you mark my words—she cares for you."

She placed her hand for an instant on his shoulder and went away. The Ordes were not a demonstrative people.

The journey to New York was at that time very long and disagreeable, but Orde bore it with his accustomed stoicism. He had visited the metropolis before, so it was not unfamiliar to him. He made his way to a small hotel just off Broadway.

Orde ate, dressed and set out afoot in search of Miss Bishop's address. He arrived in front of the house a little past 8 o'clock and after a moment's hesitation mounted the steps and rang the bell.

The door swung silently back to frame an impressive manservant dressed in livery. To Orde's inquiry he stated that Miss Bishop had gone out to the theater. The young man left his name and a message of regret. At this the footman, with an irony so subtle as to be quite lost on Orde, demanded a card. Orde scribbled a line in his notebook, tore it out, folded it and left it.

He retired early and arose early, as had become his habit. At the office the clerk handed him a note:

My Dear Mr. Orde—I was so sorry to miss you that evening because of a stupid play. Come around as early as you can tomorrow morning. I shall expect you. Sincerely yours,

CARROLL BISHOP.

Orde glanced at the clock, which pointed to 7. He breakfasted and started leisurely in the direction of West Ninth street. He walked slowly. At University place he was seized with a panic and hurried rapidly to his destination. The door was answered by the same man who had opened it the night before. To Orde's inquiry he

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stated, with great brevity, that Miss Bishop was not yet visible and prepared to close the door.

"You are mistaken," said Orde. "I have an engagement with Miss Bishop. Tell her Mr. Orde is here."

The man departed, leaving Orde standing in the gloomy hall. That young man, however, parted the curtains leading into a parlor and sat down in a spindle legged chair.

For quite three quarters of an hour he waited without hearing any other indications of life than muffled sounds. Occasionally he shifted his position, but cautiously, as though he feared to awaken some one. Three oil portraits stared at him with all the reserved aloofness of their painted eyes. He began to doubt whether the man had announced him at all.

Then, breaking the stillness with almost startling abruptness, he heard a clear, high voice saying something at the top of the stairs outside. A rhythmical swish of skirts, punctuated by the light pat-pat of a girl tripping downstairs, brought him to his feet. A moment later the curtains parted, and she entered, holding out her hand.

He stood holding her hand, suddenly unable to say a word, looking at her hungrily. A flood of emotion, of which he had had no prevision, swelled up within him to fill his throat.

"It was good of you to come so promptly," said she. "I'm so anxious to hear all about the dear people at Redding."

The sounds in the next room increased in volume, as though several people must have entered that apartment. In a moment or so the curtains to the hall parted to frame the servant.

"Mrs. Bishop wishes to know, miss," said that functionary, "if you're not coming to breakfast."

Orde sprang to his feet.

"Haven't you had your breakfast yet?" he cried, conscience stricken.

"Didn't you gather the fact that I'm just up?" she mocked him. "I assure you it doesn't matter. The family has just come down."

"But," cried Orde, "I wasn't here until 9 o'clock. I thought, of course, you'd be around. I'm mighty sorry"—

"Oh, la, la!" she cried, cutting him short.

Orde was for taking his leave, but this she would not have.

"You must meet my family," she negatived, "for if you're here for so short a time we want to see something of you. Come right out now."

Orde thereupon followed her down a narrow, dark hall to a door that opened slantwise into the dining room. With her back to the bow window sat a woman well beyond middle age, but with evidently some pretensions to youth. She was tall, quick in movement. Dark rings below her eyes attested either a nervous disease, a hysterical temperament or both. Immediately at her left sat a boy of about fourteen years of age, his face a curious contradiction between a naturally frank and open expression and a growing sullenness. Next him stood a vacant chair, evidently for Miss Bishop. Opposite lolled a young man,

"Mrs. Bishop wishes to know if you're not coming to breakfast."

holding a newspaper in one hand and a coffee cup in the other. He was very handsome, with a drooping black mustache, dark eyes, underlashes almost too luxuriant and a long, oval face, dark in complexion and a trifle sardonic in expression. The vis-a-vis to Mrs. Bishop was the gray haired General Bishop, Carroll's father. Miss Bishop performed the necessary introductions. General Bishop arose and grasped his hand.

Gerald Bishop cast an ironically amused glance across at Orde, and the mother would barely notice the sunburned, ungainly looking riverman.

Carroll Bishop appeared quite unconscious of an atmosphere which seemed to Orde strained, but sank into her place at the table and unfolded her napkin. The silent butler drew forward a chair for Orde and stood looking impassively in Mrs. Bishop's direction.

"You will have some breakfast with us?" she inquired. "No? A cup of coffee at least?"

She began to manipulate the coffeepot without paying the slightest attention to Orde's disclaimer. The general puffed out his cheeks and coughed a bit in embarrassment.

"A good cup of coffee is never amiss to an old campaigner," he said to Orde. "It's as good as a full meal in a pinch. I remember when I was a major in the Eleventh, down near the City of Mexico, in '48, the time Hardy's command was so nearly wiped out by that viaduct"— He half turned toward Orde, his face lighting up, his fingers reaching for the fork with which, after the custom of old soldiers, to trace the chart of his reminiscences.

Mrs. Bishop rattled her cup and saucer with an uncontrollably nervous jerk of her slender body. "Spare us, father," she said brusquely. "Will you have another cup of coffee?"

The old gentleman looked a trifle bewildered, but subsided meekly.

Orde, overwhelmed by embarrassment, discovered that none of the others had paid the incident the slightest attention. Only on the lips of Gerald Bishop he surprised a fine, detached smile. The butler brought a letter for Mrs. Bishop. The contents seemed to vex her.

She began to abuse the writer, a seamstress, for a delay in the finishing of an altar cloth and then transferred the blame to her children. It was a painful test for Orde. He finally rose. "I must be going," said he.

"Well," Carroll conceded, "I suppose I'd better see if I can't help mother out. But you'll come in again. Come and dine with us this evening. Mother will be delighted."

Mrs. Bishop departed from the room. Orde bowed to the other occupants of the table.

Orde was immediately joined on the street by young Mr. Bishop, most correctly appointed.

"Going anywhere in particular?" he inquired. "Let's go up the avenue, then. Everybody will be out."

They walked for some distance.

"Your father was in the Mexican war?" said Orde.

"He was a most distinguished officer."

"What command had he in the civil war? I fooled around that a little myself."

"My father resigned from the army in '54," replied Gerald.

"That was too bad; just before the chance for more service," said Orde.

"Army life was incompatible with my mother's temperament," stated Gerald. "You are from Redding, of course. My sister is very enthusiastic about the place. You are in business there?"

Orde gave the latter a succinct idea of the sort of operations in which he was interested.

"And you," he said at last—"I suppose you're either a broker or lawyer."

"I am neither," stated Gerald. "I have sufficient income to make business unnecessary. There is plenty to occupy one's time. I have my clubs, my gymnasium, my horse and my friends. That is my gymnasium," pointing to a building on a side street. "Won't you come in with me? I am due now for my practice."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]