

Excerpt from Chapter 8

The man guided the horse to the bank, but the horse was hesitant. Greg, Onofre, Kevin, and James pushed it down the bank and into the water. As they did so the horse bucked and started to rear. When it realized the men would not relent it resigned itself to its task and waded out into the fast flowing river one more time. Part way across it spooked for a second time. Onofre's man tried to control the horse and keep it heading for the far bank, but the frightened horse twisted and thrashed, turning its head back towards the way it had come. Seeing this, the men on the far shore pulled the bridle line to try to keep the horse moving towards them, but they pulled too hard. The horse lost its balance and, for a second, horse, rider, and passenger all slipped below the surface of the fast flowing river.

As they did so Cynthia was swept off the back of the horse by the force of the rushing water. Onofre's man, who had also begun to slip from the saddle, tried to hold onto it with one hand while reaching out to grab Cynthia with the other, but the river carried her off before he could reach her. The men on the far bank tugged on the horse again and it righted itself and lurched towards them, pulling Onofre's man with it as he clung tightly to the saddle's horn.

The strong flow washed Cynthia swiftly down-river. As it did so, she managed to pull her head and hands up above the water in time to catch the downstream safety rope Onofre had slung across the water earlier. The others stood watching helplessly as she pulled herself onto the safety rope, with the exception of Greg who ran downstream, grabbed onto the rope, and plunged himself into the river to help her. Clinging onto the safety rope he quickly waded out into the river, hoping she could hold on until he got there. Seeing him wade out into the fast flowing river, she struggled to keep her grip on the wet rope as the torrent buffeted her relentlessly. When he reached her, she threw one hand about his shoulders while clinging to the rope with the other. As soon as he was sure she had a hold of him he turned back to the near bank, pulling on the rope hand over hand until the two of them were close enough for Onofre, Kevin, and the others to reach down and pull them up the steep embankment and out of the water.

"Are you okay?" Greg asked her as he threw himself down on the muddy bank huffing and out of breath.

"I'm fine," she said, also breathless from her struggle with the river. She breathed hard in and out for a few moments, catching her breath and calming herself. Then she turned to Greg and kissed him full on the lips saying, "That was the bravest thing I've ever seen anyone do." Greg stammered, not knowing what to say, then he hugged her close to his chest.

The two of them sat there, clinging to each other on the muddy banks of the river for a few minutes, until Kevin, who was still standing over them after having helped pull them from the river, cleared his throat. Recalling his surroundings, and suddenly embarrassed at his actions, Greg quickly pulled himself away from her, stood up, and said to no one in particular, “We’d better finish getting the rest of us across.”