

Had my grandfather been a decent and law-abiding citizen, he would have died in the early hours of April 18, 1906. Robert J. “Dick” Dickson was a sturdy, energetic boy who left Milwaukee for California around the turn of the century. He began in the oil fields, but by 1906, Dick was the twenty-six year-old manager of a small workingman’s hotel in San Francisco. The night before, however, he had been out of the hotel at a poker game that went on, and on. The game was still going at 5:15 a.m. when the earth shook. Chasms ripped down cobbled streets; buildings collapsed onto early passers-by; cable car tracks twisted and rose; water mains burst; cook fires spilled onto wooden floors; and in one small and seedy hotel south of Market, the brick chimney came crashing down through the room and floors, coming to rest directly upon the bed where a sober Christian young man would have been fast asleep.

Instead, a life of cards, drink, and dissipation paid out rich rewards, and Dick spent the next few days helping dig out the less fortunate.

In the meantime, on the other side of town, a considerably younger citizen of The City was tumbled from her own bed. Florence Frances Adderley—little “Flossie”—was a native San Franciscan, seven years old when the house near Taraval leapt up and down on its foundations. Flossie and her family—mother, father, and two maiden aunts—ended up out on the glass- and debris-strewn street watching the smoke billow up from the downtown area until it choked the sky. They gathered what they could and walked north, and soon occupied a tent in Golden Gate Park alongside friends, neighbors, and utter strangers.

One morning her cousin Alice (whose mother had chosen an unfortunate time to come visiting from New York) woke Flossie up early and led her outside. The two girls played for a while,



Flossie and Dick, Sacramento Delta, 1922

ending up at a heap of salvaged furniture. In the stillness of early dawn they sat at the bench of an upright piano and raised the lid. In seconds, every nerve-jangled refugee within earshot was up and outraged, a satisfying conclusion that no doubt set Flossie on her life of good times, musical parties, and mischief.

Dick and Flossie later met, and married in 1921. The following year Flossie gave birth to a daughter, Mary: Cousin Alice was the godmother. Mary’s own daughter, a third generation native Californian, has now written **Locked Rooms**, a novel set in part during that quake and fire.

It is dedicated to Dick and Flossie.

—Laurie R. King