Rose o' the River

by Kate Douglas Wiggin

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Title: Rose o' the River

Author: Kate Douglas Smith Wiggin

Release date: September 1, 1997 [eBook #1033] Most recently updated: October 29, 2024

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1033

Credits: Produced by Shanti Day and Roger Frank

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ROSE O’ THE RIVER ROSE O’ THE RIVER

Rose O’ the River BY KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WRIGHT

NEW YORK GROSSET & DUNLAP PUBLISHERS

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THE PINE AND THE ROSE

It was not long after sunrise, and Stephen Waterman, fresh from his dip in the river, had scrambled up the hillside from the hut in the alder-bushes where he had made his morning toilet.

An early ablution of this sort was not the custom of the farmers along the banks of the Saco, but the Waterman house was hardly a stone’s throw from the water, and there was a clear, deep swimming-hole in the Willow Cove that would have tempted the busiest man, or the least cleanly, in York County. Then, too, Stephen was a child of the river, born, reared, schooled on its very brink, never happy unless he were on

it, or in it, or beside it, or at least within sight or sound of it.

The immensity of the sea had always silenced and overawed him, left him cold in feeling. The river wooed him, caressed him, won his heart. It was just big enough to love. It was full of charms and changes, of varying moods and sudden surprises. Its voice stole in upon his ear with a melody far sweeter and more subtle than the boom of the ocean. Yet it was not without strength, and when it was swollen with the freshets of the spring and brimming with the bounty of its sister streams, it could dash and roar, boom and crash, with the best of them.

Stephen stood on the side porch, drinking in the glory of the sunrise, with the Saco winding like a silver ribbon through the sweet loveliness of the summer landscape.

And the river rolled on toward the sea, singing its morning song, creating and nourishing beauty at every step of its onward path. Cradled in the heart of a great mountain-range, it pursued its gleaming way, here lying silent in glassy lakes, there rushing into tinkling little falls, foaming great falls, and thundering cataracts. Scores of bridges spanned its width, but no steamers flurried its crystal depths. Here and there a rough little rowboat, tethered to a willow, rocked to and fro in some quiet bend of the shore. Here the silver gleam of a rising perch, chub, or trout caught the eye; there a pickerel lay rigid in the clear water, a fish carved in stone: here eels coiled in the muddy bottom of some pool; and there, under the deep shadows of the rocks, lay fat, sleepy bass, old, and incredibly wise, quite untempted by, and wholly superior to, the rural fisherman’s worm.

The river lapped the shores of peaceful meadows; it flowed along banks green with maple, beech, sycamore, and birch; it fell tempestuously over dams and fought its way between rocky cliffs crowned with stately firs. It rolled past forests of pine and hemlock and spruce, now gentle, now terrible; for there is said to be an Indian curse upon the Saco, whereby, with every great sun, the child of a paleface shall be drawn into its cruel depths. Lashed into fury by the stony reefs that impeded its progress,

the river looked now sapphire, now gold, now white, now leaden gray; but always it was hurrying, hurrying on its appointed way to the sea.

After feasting his eyes and filling his heart with a morning draught of beauty, Stephen went in from the porch and, pausing at the stairway, called in stentorian tones: “Get up and eat your breakfast, Rufus! The boys will be picking the side jams to-day, and I’m going down to work on the logs. If you come along, bring your own pick-pole and peavey.” Then, going to the kitchen pantry, he collected, from the various shelves, a pitcher of milk, a loaf of bread, half an apple-pie, and a bowl of blueberries, and, with the easy methods of a household unswayed by feminine rule, moved toward a seat under an apple-tree and took his morning meal in great apparent content. Having finished, and washed his dishes with much more thoroughness than is common to unsuperintended man, and having given Rufus the second call to breakfast with the vigor and acrimony that usually marks that unpleasant performance, he strode to a high point on the river-bank and, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed steadily down stream.

Patches of green fodder and blossoming potatoes melted into soft fields that had been lately mown, and there were glimpses of tasseling corn rising high to catch the sun. Far, far down on the opposite bank of the river was the hint of a brown roof, and the tip of a chimney that sent a slender wisp of smoke into the clear air. Beyond this, and farther back from the water, the trees apparently hid a cluster of other chimneys, for thin spirals of smoke ascended here and there. The little brown roof could never have revealed itself to any but a lover’s eye; and that discerned something even smaller, something like a pinkish speck, that moved hither and thither on a piece of greensward that sloped to the waterside.

“She’s up!” Stephen exclaimed under his breath, his eyes shining, his lips smiling. His voice had a note of hushed exaltation about it, as if “she,” whoever she might be, had, in condescending to rise, conferred a priceless boon upon a waiting

universe. If she were indeed a “up” (so his tone implied), then the day, somewhat falsely heralded by the sunrise, had really begun, and the human race might pursue its appointed tasks, inspired and uplifted by the consciousness of her existence. It might properly be grateful for the fact of her birth; that she had grown to woman’s estate; and, above all, that, in common with the sun, the lark, the morning-glory, and other beautiful things of the early day, she was up and about her lovely, cheery, heart-warming business.

SHE’S UP! “SHE’S UP!”

The handful of chimneys and the smoke spirals rising here and there among the trees on the river-bank belonged to what was known as the Brier Neighborhood. There were only a few houses in all, scattered along a side road leading from the river up to Liberty Centre. There were no great signs of thrift or prosperity, but the Wiley cottage, the only one near the water, was neat and well cared for, and Nature had done her best to conceal man’s indolence, poverty, or neglect.

Bushes of sweetbrier grew in fragrant little forests as tall as the fences. Clumps of wild roses sprang up at every turn, and over all the stone walls, as well as on every heap of rocks by the wayside, prickly blackberry vines ran and clambered and clung, yielding fruit and thorns impartially to the neighborhood children.

The pinkish speck that Stephen Waterman had spied from his side of the river was Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood on the Edgewood side. As there was another of her name on Brigadier Hill, the Edgewood minister called one of them the climbing Rose and the other the brier Rose, or sometimes Rose of the river. She was well named, the pinkish speck. She had not only some of the sweetest attributes of the wild rose, but the parallel might have been extended as far as the thorns, for she had wounded her scores,—hearts, be it understood, not hands. The wounding was, on the whole, very innocently done; and if fault could be imputed anywhere, it might rightly have been laid at the door of the kind powers who had made her what she

was, since the smile that blesses a single heart is always destined to break many more.

She had not a single silk gown, but she had what is far better, a figure to show off a cotton one. Not a brooch nor a pair of earrings was numbered among her possessions, but any ordinary gems would have looked rather dull and trivial when compelled to undergo comparison with her bright eyes. As to her hair, the local milliner declared it impossible for Rose Wiley to get an unbecoming hat; that on one occasion, being in a frolicsome mood, Rose had tried on all the headgear in the village emporium,—children's gingham "Shakers," mourning bonnets for aged dames, men's haying hats and visored caps,—and she proved superior to every test, looking as pretty as a pink in the best ones and simply ravishing in the worst. In fact, she had been so fashioned and finished by Nature that, had she been set on a revolving pedestal in a show-window, the bystanders would have exclaimed, as each new charm came into view: "Look at her waist!" "See her shoulders!" "And her neck and chin!" "And her hair!" While the children, gazing with raptured admiration, would have shrieked, in unison, "I choose her for mine."

All this is as much as to say that Rose of the river was a beauty, yet it quite fails to explain, nevertheless, the secret of her power. When she looked her worst the spell was as potent as when she looked her best. Hidden away somewhere was a vital spark which warmed every one who came in contact with it. Her lovely little person was a trifle below medium height, and it might as well be confessed that her soul, on the morning when Stephen Waterman saw her hanging out the clothes on the river bank, was not large enough to be at all out of proportion; but when eyes and dimples, lips and cheeks, enslave the onlooker, the soul is seldom subjected to a close or critical scrutiny. Besides, Rose Wiley was a nice girl, neat as wax, energetic, merry, amiable, economical. She was a dutiful granddaughter to two of the most irritating old people in the county; she never patronized her pug-nosed, pasty-faced girl friends; she made wonderful pies and doughnuts; and besides, small

souls, if they are of the right sort, sometimes have a way of growing, to the discomfiture of cynics and the gratification of the angels.

So, on one bank of the river grew the brier rose, a fragile thing, swaying on a slender stalk and looking at its pretty reflection in the water; and on the other a sturdy pine tree, well rooted against wind and storm. And the sturdy pine yearned for the wild rose; and the rose, so far as it knew, yearned for nothing at all, certainly not for rugged pine trees standing tall and grim in rocky soil. If, in its present stage of development, it gravitated toward anything in particular, it would have been a well-dressed white birch growing on an irreproachable lawn.

And the river, now deep, now shallow, now smooth, now tumultuous, now sparkling in sunshine, now gloomy under clouds, rolled on to the engulfing sea. It could not stop to concern itself with the petty comedies and tragedies that were being enacted along its shores, else it would never have reached its destination. Only last night, under a full moon, there had been pairs of lovers leaning over the rails of all the bridges along its course; but that was a common sight, like that of the ardent couples sitting on its shady banks these summer days, looking only into each other’s eyes, but exclaiming about the beauty of the water. Lovers would come and go, sometimes reappearing with successive installments of loves in a way wholly mysterious to the river. Meantime it had its own work to do and must be about it, for the side jams were to be broken and the boom “let out” at the Edgewood bridge.

OLD KENNEBEC

It was just seven o’clock that same morning when Rose Wiley smoothed the last wrinkle from her dimity counterpane, picked up a shred of corn-husk from the spotless floor under the bed, slapped a mosquito on the window-sill, removed all signs of murder with a moist towel, and before running down to breakfast cast a frowning look at her pincushion. Almira, otherwise “Mite,” Shapley had been in her

room the afternoon before and disturbed with her careless hand the pattern of Rose's pins. They were kept religiously in the form of a Maltese cross; and if, while she was extricating one from her clothing, there had been an alarm of fire, Rose would have stuck the pin in its appointed place in the design, at the risk of losing her life.

Entering the kitchen with her light step, she brought the morning sunshine with her. The old people had already engaged in differences of opinion, but they commonly suspended open warfare in her presence. There were the usual last things to be done for breakfast, offices that belonged to her as her grandmother's assistant. She took yesterday's soda biscuits out of the steamer where they were warming and softening; brought an apple pie and a plate of seed cakes from the pantry; settled the coffee with a piece of dried fish skin and an egg shell; and transferred some fried potatoes from the spider to a covered dish.

"Did you remember the meat, grandpa? We're all out," she said, as she began buttoning a stiff collar around his reluctant neck.

"Remember? Land, yes! I wish't I ever could forgit anything! The butcher says he's 'bout tired o' travelin' over the country lookin' for critters to kill, but if he finds anything he'll be up along in the course of a week. He ain't a real smart butcher, Cyse Higgins ain't.—Land, Rose, don't button that dickey clean through my epperdummis! I have to sport starched collars in this life on account o' you and your gran'mother bein' so chock full o' style; but I hope to the Lord I shan't have to wear 'em in another world!"

"You won't," his wife responded with the snap of a dish towel, "or if you do, they'll wilt with the heat."

Rose smiled, but the soft hand with which she tied the neck-cloth about the old man's withered neck pacified his spirit, and he smiled knowingly back at her as she took her seat at the breakfast table spread near the open kitchen door. She was a dazzling Rose, and, it is to be feared, a wasted one, for there was no one present to

observe her clean pink calico and the still more subtle note struck in the green ribbon which was tied round her throat,—the ribbon that formed a sort of calyx, out of which sprang the flower of her face, as fresh and radiant as if it had bloomed that morning.

“Give me my coffee turrible quick,” said Mr. Wiley; “I must be down the bridge ’fore they start dog-warpin’ the side jam.”

“I notice you’re always due at the bridge on churnin’ days,” remarked his spouse, testily.

“’Taint me as app’ints drivin’ dates at Edgewood,” replied the old man. “The boys’ll hev a turrible job this year. The logs air ricked up jest like Rose’s jackstraws; I never see’em so turrible ricked up in all my exper’ence; an’ Lije Dennett don’ know no more ’bout pickin’ a jam than Cooper’s cow. Turrible sot in his ways, too; can’t take a mite of advice. I was tellin’ him how to go to work on that bung that’s formed between the gre’t gray rock an’ the shore,—the awfullest place to bung that there is between this an’ Biddeford,—and says he: ‘Look here, I’ve be’n boss on this river for twelve year, an’ I’ll be doggoned if I’m goin’ to be taught my business by any man!’ ‘This ain’t no river,’ says I, ‘as you’d know,’ says I, ‘if you’d ever lived on the Kennebec.’ ‘Pity you hedn’t stayed on it,’ says he. ‘I wish to the land I hed, ’says I. An’ then I come away, for my tongue’s so turrible spry an’ sarcustic that I knew if I stopped any longer I should stir up strife. There’s some folks that’ll set on addled aigs year in an’ year out, as if there wan’t good fresh ones bein’ laid every day; an’ Lije Dennett’s one of ’em, when it comes to river drivin’.”

“There’s lots o’ folks as have made a good livin’ by mindin’ their own business,” observed the still sententious Mrs. Wiley, as she speared a soda-biscuit with her fork.

“Mindin’ your own business is a turrible selfish trade,” responded her husband loftily. “If your neighbor is more ignorant than what you are,—partic’larly if he’s as

ignorant as Cooper's cow,—you'd ought, as a Kennebec man an' a Christian, to set him on the right track, though it's always a turrible risky thing to do."

Rose's grandfather was called, by the irreverent younger generation, sometimes "Turrible Wiley" and sometimes "Old Kennebec," because of the frequency with which these words appeared in his conversation. There were not wanting those of late who dubbed him Uncle Ananias, for reasons too obvious to mention. After a long, indolent, tolerably truthful, and useless life, he had, at seventy-five, lost sight of the dividing line between fact and fancy, and drew on his imagination to such an extent that he almost staggered himself when he began to indulge in reminiscence. He was a feature of the Edgewood "drive," being always present during the five or six days that it was in progress, sometimes sitting on the river-bank, sometimes leaning over the bridge, sometimes reclining against the butt-end of a huge log, but always chewing tobacco and expectorating to incredible distances as he criticized and damned impartially all the expedients in use at the particular moment.

"I want to stay down by the river this afternoon," said Rose. "Ever so many of the girls will be there, and all my sewing is done up. If grandpa will leave the horse for me, I'll take the drivers' lunch to them at noon, and bring the dishes back in time to wash them before supper."

"I suppose you can go, if the rest do," said her grandmother, "though it's an awful lazy way of spendin' an afternoon. When I was a girl there was no such dawdlin' goin' on, I can tell you. Nobody thought o' lookin' at the river in them days; there wasn't time."

"But it's such fun to watch the logs!" Rose exclaimed. "Next to dancing, the greatest fun in the world."

"'Specially as all the young men in town will be there, watchin', too," was the grandmother's reply. "Eben Brooks an' Richard Bean got home yesterday with their doctors' diplomas in their pockets. Mrs. Brooks says Eben stood forty-nine in a class

o’ fifty-five, an’ seemed consid’able proud of him; an’ I guess it is the first time he ever stood anywheres but at the foot. I tell you when these fifty-five new doctors git scattered over the country there’ll be consid’able many folks keepin’ house under ground. Dick Bean’s goin’ to stop a spell with Rufe an’ Steve Waterman. That’ll make one more to play in the river.”

“Rufus ain’t hardly got his workin’ legs on yit,” allowed Mr. Wiley, “but Steve’s all right. He’s a turrible smart driver, an’ turrible reckless, too. He’ll take all the chances there is, though to a man that’s lived on the Kennebec there ain’t what can rightly be called any turrible chances on the Saco.”

“He’d better be ’tendin’ to his farm,” objected Mrs. Wiley.

HE’S A TURRIBLE SMART DRIVER “HE’S A TURRIBLE SMART DRIVER”

“His hay is all in,” Rose spoke up quickly, “and he only helps on the river when the farm work isn’t pressing. Besides, though it’s all play to him, he earns his two dollars and a half a day.”

“He don’t keer about the two and a half,” said her grandfather. “He jest can’t keep away from the logs. There’s some that can’t. When I first moved here from Gard’ner, where the climate never suited me”—

“The climate of any place where you hev regular work never did an’ never will suit you,” remarked the old man’s wife; but the interruption received no comment: such mistaken views of his character were too frequent to make any impression.

“As I was sayin’, Rose,” he continued, “when we first moved here from Gard’ner, we lived neighbor to the Watermans. Steve an’ Rufus was little boys then, always playin’ with a couple o’ wild cousins o’ theirn, consid’able older. Steve would scare his mother pretty nigh to death stealin’ away to the mill to ride on the ‘carriage,’ ’side o’ the log that was bein’ sawed, hitchin’ clean out over the river an’ then jerkin’ back ’most into the jaws o’ the machinery.”

“He never hed any common sense to spare, even when he was a young one,”

remarked Mrs. Wiley; “and I don’t see as all the ’cademy education his father throwed away on him has changed him much.” And with this observation she rose from the table and went to the sink.

“Steve ain’t nobody’s fool,” dissented the old man; “but he’s kind o’ daft about the river. When he was little he was allers buildin’ dams in the brook, an’ sailin’ chips, an’ runnin’ on the logs; allers choppin’ up stickins an’ raftin’ ’em together in the pond. I cal’late Mis’ Waterman died consid’able afore her time, jest from fright, lookin’ out the winders and seein’ her boys slippin’ between the logs an’ gittin’ their daily dousin’. She couldn’t understand it, an’ there’s a heap o’ things women-folks never do an’ never can understand,—jest because they air women-folks.”

“One o’ the things is men, I s’pose,” interrupted Mrs. Wiley.

“Men in general, but more partic’larly husbands,” assented Old Kennebec; “howsomever, there’s another thing they don’t an’ can’t never take in, an’ that’s sport. Steve does river drivin’ as he would horseracin’ or tiger-shootin’ or tight-rope dancin’; an’ he always did from a boy. When he was about twelve or fifteen, he used to help the river-drivers spring and fall, reg’lar. He couldn’t do nothin’ but shin up an’ down the rocks after hammers an’ hatchets an’ ropes, but he was turrible pleased with his job. ‘Stepanfetchit,’ they used to call him them days,—Stephanfetchit Waterman.”

“Good name for him yet,” came in acid tones from the sink. “He’s still steppin’ an’ fetchin’, only it’s Rose that’s doin’ the drivin’ now.”

“I’m not driving anybody, that I know of,” answered Rose, with heightened color, but with no loss of her habitual self-command.

“Then, when he graduated from errants,” went on the crafty old man, who knew that when breakfast ceased, churning must begin, “Steve used to get seventy-five cents a day helpin’ clear up the river—if you can call this here silv’ry streamlet a river. He’d pick off a log here an’ there an’ send it afloat, an’ dig out them that hed got

ketched in the rocks, and tidy up the banks jest like spring house-cleanin'. If he'd hed any kind of a boss, an' hed be'n trained on the Kennebec, he'd 'a' made a turrible smart driver, Steve would."

"He'll be drownded, that's what'll become o' him," prophesied Mrs. Wiley; "'specially if Rose encourages him in such silly foolishness as ridin' logs from his house down to ourn, dark nights."

"Seein' as how Steve built ye a nice pig pen last month, 'pears to me you might have a good word for him now an' then, mother," remarked Old Kennebec, reaching for his second piece of pie.

"I wa'n't a mite deceived by that pig pen, no more'n I was by Jed Towle's hen coop, nor Ivory Dunn's well-curb, nor Pitt Packard's shed-steps. If you hed ever kep' up your buildin's yourself, Rose's beaux wouldn't hev to do their courtin' with carpenters' tools."

"It's the pigpen an' the hencoop you want to keep your eye on, mother, not the motives of them as made 'em. It's turrible onsettlin' to inspeck folks' motives too turrible close."

"Riding a log is no more to Steve than riding a horse, so he says," interposed Rose, to change the subject; "but I tell him that a horse doesn't revolve under you, and go sideways at the same time that it is going forwards."

"Log-ridin' ain't no trick at all to a man of sperit," said Mr. Wiley. "There's a few places in the Kennebec where the water's too shaller to let the logs float, so we used to build a flume, an' the logs would whiz down like arrers shot from a bow. The boys used to collect by the side o' that there flume to see me ride a log down, an' I've watched 'em drop in a dead faint when I spun by the crowd; but land! you can't drownd some folks, not without you tie nail-kags to their head an' feet an' drop 'em in the falls; I 've rid logs down the b'ilin'est rapids o' the Kennebec an' never lost my head. I remember well the year o' the gre't freshet, I rid a log from"—

“There, there, father, that’ll do,” said Mrs. Wiley, decisively. “I’ll put the cream in the churn, an’ you jest work off some o’ your steam by bringin’ the butter for us afore you start for the bridge. It don’t do no good to brag afore your own women-folks; work goes consid’able better’n stories at every place ’cept the loafers’ bench at the tavern.”

And the baffled raconteur, who had never done a piece of work cheerfully in his life, dragged himself reluctantly to the shed, where, before long, one could hear him moving the dasher up and down sedately to his favorite “churning tune” of—

Broad is the road that leads to death, And thousands walk together there; But Wisdom shows a narrow path, With here and there a traveler.

THE EDGEWOOD “DRIVE”

Just where the bridge knits together the two little villages of Pleasant River and Edgewood, the glassy mirror of the Saco broadens suddenly, sweeping over the dam in a luminous torrent. Gushes of pure amber mark the middle of the dam, with crystal and silver at the sides, and from the seething vortex beneath the golden cascade the white spray dashes up in fountains. In the crevices and hollows of the rocks the mad water churns itself into snowy froth, while the foam-flecked torrent, deep, strong, and troubled to its heart, sweeps majestically under the bridge, then dashes between wooded shores piled high with steep masses of rock, or torn and riven by great gorges.

There had been much rain during the summer, and the Saco was very high, so on the third day of the Edgewood drive there was considerable excitement at the bridge, and a goodly audience of villagers from both sides of the river. There were some who never came, some who had no fancy for the sight, some to whom it was an old story, some who were too busy, but there were many to whom it was the event of events, a never-ending source of interest.

Above the fall, covering the placid surface of the river, thousands of logs lay quietly “in boom” until the “turning out” process, on the last day of the drive, should release them and give them their chance of display, their brief moment of notoriety, their opportunity of interesting, amusing, exciting, and exasperating the onlookers by their antics.

Heaps of logs had been cast up on the rocks below the dam, where they lay in hopeless confusion, adding nothing, however, to the problem of the moment, for they too bided their time. If they had possessed wisdom, discretion, and caution, they might have slipped gracefully over the falls and, steering clear of the hidden ledges (about which it would seem they must have heard whispers from the old pine trees along the river), have kept a straight course and reached their destination without costing the Edgewood Lumber Company a small fortune. Or, if they had inclined toward a jolly and adventurous career, they could have joined one of the various jams or “bungs,” stimulated by the thought that any one of them might be a key-log, holding for a time the entire mass in its despotic power. But they had been stranded early in the game, and, after lying high and dry for weeks, would be picked off one by one and sent down-stream.

In the tumultuous boil, the foaming hubbub and flurry at the foot of the falls, one enormous peeled log wallowed up and down like a huge rhinoceros, greatly pleasing the children by its clumsy cavortings. Some conflict of opposing forces kept it ever in motion, yet never set it free. Below the bridge were always the real battle-grounds, the scenes of the first and the fiercest conflicts. A ragged ledge of rock, standing well above the yeasty torrent, marked the middle of the river. Stephen had been stranded there once, just at dusk, on a stormy afternoon in spring. A jam had broken under the men, and Stephen, having taken too great risks, had been caught on the moving mass, and, leaping from log to log, his only chance for life had been to find a footing on Gray Rock, which was nearer than the shore.

Rufus was ill at the time, and Mrs. Waterman so anxious and nervous that processions of boys had to be sent up to the River Farm, giving the frightened mother the latest bulletins of her son's welfare. Luckily, the river was narrow just at the Gray Rock, and it was a quite possible task, though no easy one, to lash two ladders together and make a narrow bridge on which the drenched and shivering man could reach the shore. There were loud cheers when Stephen ran lightly across the slender pathway that led to safety—ran so fast that the ladders had scarce time to bend beneath his weight. He had certainly "taken chances," but when did he not do that? The logger's life is one of "moving accidents by flood and field," and Stephen welcomed with wildqq exhilaration every hazard that came in his path. To him there was never a dull hour from the moment that the first notch was cut in the tree (for he sometimes joined the boys in the lumber camp just for a frolic) till the later one when the hewn log reached its final destination. He knew nothing of "tooling" a four-in-hand through narrow lanes or crowded thoroughfares,—nothing of guiding a horse over the hedges and through the pitfalls of a stiff bit of hunting country; his steed was the rearing, plunging, kicking log, and he rode it like a river god.

HE HAD CERTAINLY 'TAKEN CHANCES' HE HAD CERTAINLY "TAKEN CHANCES"

The crowd loves daring, and so it welcomed Stephen with braves, but it knew, as he knew, that he was only doing his duty by the Company, only showing the Saco that man was master, only keeping the old Waterman name in good repute.

"Ye can't drownd some folks," Old Kennebec had said, as he stood in a group on the shore; "not without you tie sand-bags to'em an' drop 'em in the Great Eddy. I'm the same kind; I remember when I was stranded on jest sech a rock in the Kennebec, only they left me there all night for dead, an' I had to swim the rapids when it come daylight."

"We're well acquainted with that rock and them rapids," exclaimed one of the

river-drivers, to the delight of the company.

Rose had reason to remember Stephen's adventure, for he had clambered up the bank, smiling and blushing under the hurrahs of the boys, and, coming to the wagon where she sat waiting for her grandfather, had seized a moment to whisper: "Did you care whether I came across safe, Rose? Say you did!"

Stephen recalled that question, too, on this August morning; perhaps because this was to be a red-letter day, and sometime, when he had a free moment,—sometime before supper, when he and Rose were sitting apart from the others, watching the logs,—he intended again to ask her to marry him. This thought trembled in him, stirring the deeps of his heart like a great wave, almost sweeping him off his feet when he held it too close and let it have full sway. It would be the fourth time that he had asked Rose this question of all questions, but there was no perceptible difference in his excitement, for there was always the possible chance that she might change her mind and say yes, if only for variety. Wanting a thing continuously, unchangingly, unceasingly, year after year, he thought,—longing to reach it as the river longed to reach the sea,—such wanting might, in course of time, mean having.

Rose drove up to the bridge with the men's luncheon, and the under boss came up to take the baskets and boxes from the back of the wagon.

"We've had a reg'lar tussle this mornin', Rose," he said. "The logs are determined not to move. Ike Billings, that's the han'somest and fluentest all-round swearer on the Saco, has tried his best on the side jam. He's all out o' cuss-words and there hain't a log budged. Now, stid o' dog-warpin' this afternoon, an' lettin' the oxen haul off all them stubborn logs by main force, we're goin' to ask you to set up on the bank and smile at the jam. 'Land! she can do it!' says Ike a minute ago. 'When Rose starts smilin',' he says, 'there ain't a jam nor a bung in me that don't melt like wax and jest float right off same as the logs do when they get into quiet, sunny water.'"

Rose blushed and laughed, and drove up the hill to Mite Shapley's, where she put up

the horse and waited till the men had eaten their luncheon. The drivers slept and had breakfast and supper at the Billings house, a mile down river, but for several years Mrs. Wiley had furnished the noon meal, sending it down piping hot on the stroke of twelve. The boys always said that up or down the whole length of the Saco there was no such cooking as the Wileys', and much of this praise was earned by Rose's serving. It was the old grandmother who burnished the tin plates and dippers till they looked like silver; for crotchety and sharp-tongued as she was—she never allowed Rose to spoil her hands with soft soap and sand: but it was Rose who planned and packed, Rose who hemmed squares of old white tablecloths and sheets to line the baskets and keep things daintily separate, Rose, also, whose tarts and cakes were the pride and admiration of church sociables and sewing societies.

Where could such smoking pots of beans be found? A murmur of ecstatic approval ran through the crowd when the covers were removed. Pieces of sweet home-fed pork glistened like varnished mahogany on the top of the beans, and underneath were such deeps of fragrant juice as come only from slow fires and long, quiet hours in brick ovens. Who else could steam and bake such mealy leaves of brown bread, brown as plum-pudding, yet with no suspicion of sogginess? Who such soda-biscuits, big, feathery, tasting of cream, and hardly needing butter? And green-apple pies! Could such candied lower crusts be found elsewhere, or more delectable filling? Or such rich, nutty doughnuts?—doughnuts that had spurned the hot fat which is the ruin of so many, and risen from its waves like golden-brown Venuses.

"By the great seleckmen!" ejaculated Jed Towle, as he swallowed his fourth, "I'd like to hev a wife, two daughters, and four sisters like them Wileys, and jest set still on the river-bank an' hev 'em cook victuals for me. I'd hev nothin' to wish for then but a mouth as big as the Saco's."

"And I wish this custard pie was the size o' Bonnie Eagle Pond," said Ike Billings.

“I’d like to fall into the middle of it and eat my way out!”

“Look at that bunch o’ Chiny asters tied on t’ the bail o’ that biscuit-pail!” said Ivory Dunn. “That’s the girl’s doin’s, you bet women-folks don’t seem to make no bo’quets after they git married. Let’s divide ’em up an’ wear ’em drivin’ this afternoon; mebbe they’ll ketch the eye so’t our rags won’t show so bad. Land! it’s lucky my hundred days is about up! If I don’t git home soon, I shall be arrested for goin’ without clo’es. I set up’bout all night puttin’ these blue patches in my pants an’ tryin’ to piece together a couple of old red-flannel shirts to make one whole one. That’s the worst o’ drivin’ in these places where the pretty girls make a habit of comin’ down to the bridge to see the fun. You hev to keep rigged up jest so stylish; you can’t git no chance at the rum bottle, an’ you even hev to go a leetle mite light on swearin’.”

“BLASPHEMIOUS SWEARIN’”

“Steve Waterman’s an awful nice feller,” exclaimed Ivory Dunn just then. Stephen had been looking intently across the river, watching the Shapleys’ side door, from which Rose might issue at any moment; and at this point in the discussion he had lounged away from the group, and, moving toward the bridge, began to throw pebbles idly into the water.

“He’s an awful smart driver for one that don’t foiler drivin’ the year round,” continued Ivory; “and he’s the awfullest clean-spoken, soft-spoken feller I ever see.”

“There’s be’n two black sheep in his family a’ready, an’ Steve kind o’ feels as if he’d ought to be extry white,” remarked Jed Towle. “You fellers that belonged to the old drive remember Pretty Quick Waterman well enough? Steve’s mother brought him up.”

Yes; most of them remembered the Waterman twins, Stephen’s cousins, now both dead,—Slow Waterman, so moderate in his steps and actions that you had to fix a

landmark somewhere near him to see if he moved; and Pretty Quick, who shone by comparison with his twin.

“I’d kind o’ forgot that Pretty Quick Waterman was cousin to Steve,” said the under boss; “he never worked with me much, but he wa’n’t cut off the same piece o’ goods as the other Watermans. Great hemlock! but he kep’ a cussin’ dictionary, Pretty Quick did! Whenever he heard any new words he must ’a’ writ ’em down, an’ then studied ’em all up in the winter-time, to use in the spring drive.”

“Swearin’ ’s a habit that hed ought to be practiced with turrible caution,” observed old Mr. Wiley, when the drivers had finished luncheon and taken out their pipes. “There’s three kinds o’ swearin’,—plain swearin’, profane swearin’, an’ blasphemious swearin’. Logs air jest like mules: there’s times when a man can’t seem to rip up a jam in good style ’thout a few words that’s too strong for the infant classes in Sunday-schools; but a man hedn’t ought to tempt Providence. When he’s ridin’ a log near the falls at high water, or cuttin’ the key-log in a jam, he ain’t in no place for blasphemious swearin’; jest a little easy, perlite ‘damn’ is ’bout all he can resk, if he don’t want to git drownded an’ hev his ghost walkin’ the river-banks till kingdom come.

“You an’ I, Long, was the only ones that seen Pretty Quick go, wa’n’t we?” continued Old Kennebec, glancing at Long Abe Dennett (cousin to Short Abe), who lay on his back in the grass, the smoke-wreaths rising from his pipe, and the steel spikes in his heavy, calked-sole boots shining in the sun.

“There was folks on the bridge,” Long answered, “but we was the only ones near enough to see an’ hear. It was so onexpected, an’ so soon over, that them as was watchin’ upstream, where the men was to work on the falls, wouldn’t ’a’ hed time to see him go down. But I did, an’ nobody ain’t heard me swear sence, though it’s ten years ago. I allers said it was rum an’ bravadder that killed Pretty Quick Waterman that day. The boys hedn’t give him a ‘dare’ that he hedn’t took up. He seemed like

he was possessed, an' the logs was the same way; they was fairly wild, leapin' around in the maddest kind o' water you ever see. The river was b'ilin' high that spring; it was an awful stubborn jam, an' Pretty Quick, he'd be'n workin' on it sence dinner."

"He clumb up the bank more'n once to have a pull at the bottle that was hid in the bushes," interpolated Mr. Wiley.

"Like as not; that was his failin'. Well, most o' the boys were on the other side o' the river, workin' above the bridge, an' the boss hed called Pretty Quick to come off an' leave the jam till mornin', when they'd get horses an' dog-warp it off, log by log. But when the boss got out o' sight, Pretty Quick jest stood right still, swingin' his axe, an' blasphemin' so 't would freeze your blood, vowin' he wouldn't move till the logs did, if he stayed there till the crack o' doom. Jest then a great, ponderous log that hed be'n churnin' up an' down in the falls for a week, got free an' come blunderin' an' thunderin' down-river. Land! it was chockfull o' water, an' looked 'bout as big as a church! It come straight along, butt-end foremost, an' struck that jam, full force, so't every log in it shivered. There was a crack,—the crack o' doom, sure enough, for Pretty Quick,—an' one o' the logs le'p' right out an' struck him jest where he stood, with his axe in the air, blasphemin'. The jam kind o' melted an' crumbled up, an' in a second Pretty Quick was whirlin' in the white water. He never riz,—at least where we could see him,—an' we didn't find him for a week. That's the whole story, an' I guess Steve takes it as a warnin'. Any way, he ain't no friend to rum nor swearin', Steve ain't. He knows Pretty Quick's ways shortened his mother's life, an' you notice what a sharp lookout he keeps on Rufus."

"He needs it," Ike Billings commented tersely.

"Some men seem to lose their wits when they're workin' on logs," observed Mr. Wiley, who had deeply resented Long Dennett's telling of a story which he knew fully as well and could have told much better. "Now, nat'rally, I've seen things on

the Kennebec ”—

“Three cheers for the Saco! Hats off, boys!” shouted Jed Towle, and his directions were followed with a will.

“As I was sayin’,” continued the old man, peacefully, “I’ve seen things on the Kennebec that wouldn’t happen on a small river, an’ I’ve be’n in turrible places an’ taken turrible resks—resks that would ’a’ turned a Saco River man’s hair white; but them is the times when my wits work the quickest. I remember once I was smokin’ my pipe when a jam broke under me. ’T was a small jam, or what we call a small jam on the Kennebec,—only about three hundred thousand pine logs. The first thing I knowed, I was shootin’ back an’ forth in the b’ilin’ foam, hangin’ on t’ the end of a log like a spider. My hands was clasped round the log, and I never lost control o’ my pipe. They said I smoked right along, jest as cool an’ placid as a pond-lily.”

“Why’d you quit drivin’?” inquired Ivory.

“My strength wa’n’t ekal to it,” Mr. Wiley responded sadly. “I was all skin, bones, an’ nerve. The Comp’ny wouldn’t part with me altogether, so they give me a place in the office down on the wharves.”

“That wa’n’t so bad,” said Jed Towle; “why didn’t you hang on to it, so’s to keep in sight o’ the Kennebec?”

“I found I couldn’t be confined under cover. My liver give all out, my appetite failed me, an’ I wa’n’t wuth a day’s wages. I’d learned engineerin’ when I was a boy, an’ I thought I’d try runnin’ on the road a spell, but it didn’t suit my constitution. My kidneys ain’t turrible strong, an’ the doctors said I’d have Bright’s disease if I didn’t git some kind o’ work where there wa’n’t no vibrations.”

“Hard to find, Mr. Wiley; hard to find!” said Jed Towle.

“You’re right,” responded the old man feelingly. “I’ve tried all kinds o’ labor. Some of ’em don’t suit my liver, some disagrees with my stomach, and the rest of ’em has vibrations; so here I set, high an’ dry on the banks of life, you might say, like a

stranded log."

As this well-known simile fell upon the ear, there was a general stir in the group, for Turrible Wiley, when rhetorical, sometimes grew tearful, and this was a mood not to be encouraged.

"All right, boss," called Ike Billings, winking to the boys; "we'll be there in a jiffy!" for the luncheon hour had flown, and the work of the afternoon was waiting for them. "You make a chalk-mark where you left off, Mr. Wiley, an' we'll hear the rest to-morrer; only don't you forgit nothin'! Remember't was the Kennebec you was talkin' about."

"I will, indeed," responded the old man. "As I was sayin' when interrupted, I may be a stranded log, but I'm proud that the mark o' the Gard'ner Lumber Comp'ny is on me, so't when I git to my journey's end they'll know where I belong and send me back to the Kennebec. Before I'm sawed up I'd like to forgit this triflin' brook in the sight of a good-sized river, an' rest my eyes on some full-grown logs, 'stead o' these little damn pipestems you boys are playin' with!"

THE GAME OF JACKSTRAWS

There was a roar of laughter at the old man's boast, but in a moment all was activity. The men ran hither and thither like ants, gathering their tools. There were some old-fashioned pick-poles, straight, heavy levers without any "dog," and there were modern pick-poles and peaveys, for every river has its favorite equipment in these things. There was no dynamite in those days to make the stubborn jams yield, and the dog-warp was in general use. Horses or oxen, sometimes a line of men, stood on the river-bank. A long rope was attached by means of a steel spike to one log after another, and it was dragged from the tangled mass. Sometimes, after unloading the top logs, those at the bottom would rise and make the task easier; sometimes the work would go on for hours with no perceptible progress, and Mr. Wiley would

have opportunity to tell the bystanders of a “turrible jam” on the Kennebec that had cost the Lumber Company ten thousand dollars to break.

There would be great arguments on shore, among the villagers as well as among the experts, as to the particular log which might be a key to the position. The boss would study the problem from various standpoints, and the drivers themselves would pass from heated discussion into long consultations.

“They’re paid by the day,” Old Kennebec would philosophize to the doctor; “an’ when they’re consultin’ they don’t hev to be doggin’, which is a turrible sight harder work.”

Rose had created a small sensation, on one occasion, by pointing out to the under boss the key-log in a jam. She was past mistress of the pretty game of jackstraws, much in vogue at that time. The delicate little lengths of polished wood or bone were shaken together and emptied on the table. Each jackstraw had one of its ends fashioned in the shape of some sort of implement,—a rake, hoe, spade, fork, or mallet. All the pieces were intertwined by the shaking process, and they lay as they fell, in a hopeless tangle. The task consisted in taking a tiny pick-pole, scarcely bigger than a match, and with the bit of curved wire on the end lifting off the jackstraws one by one without stirring the pile or making it tremble. When this occurred, you gave place to your opponent, who relinquished his turn to you when ill fortune descended upon him, the game, which was a kind of river-driving and jam-picking in miniature, being decided by the number of pieces captured and their value. No wonder that the under boss asked Rose’s advice as to the key-log. She had a fairy’s hand, and her cunning at deciding the pieces to be moved, and her skill at extricating and lifting them from the heap, were looked upon in Edgewood as little less than supernatural. It was a favorite pastime; and although a man’s hand is ill adapted to it, being over-large and heavy; the game has obvious advantages for a lover in bringing his head very close to that of his beloved adversary. The jackstraws

have to be watched with a hawk's eagerness, since the "trembling" can be discerned only by a keen eye; but there were moments when Stephen was willing to risk the loss of a battle if he could watch Rose's drooping eyelashes, the delicate down on her pink cheek, and the feathery curls that broke away from her hair.

He was looking at her now from a distance, for she and Mite Shapley were assisting Jed Towle to pile up the tin plates and tie the tin dippers together. Next she peered into one of the bean-pots, and seemed pleased that there was still something in its depths; then she gathered the fragments neatly together in a basket, and, followed by her friend, clambered down the banks to a shady spot where the Boomshers, otherwise known as the Crambry family, were "lined up" expectantly.

It is not difficult to find a single fool in any community, however small; but a family of fools is fortunately somewhat rarer. Every county, however, can boast of one fool-family, and York County is always in the fashion, with fools as with everything else. The unique, much-quoted, and undesirable Boomshers could not be claimed as indigenous to the Saco valley, for this branch was an offshoot of a still larger tribe inhabiting a distant township. Its beginnings were shrouded in mystery. There was a French-Canadian ancestor somewhere, and a Gipsy or Indian grandmother. They had always intermarried from time immemorial. When one of the selectmen of their native place had been asked why the Boomshers always married cousins, and why the habit was not discouraged, he replied that he really didn't know; he s'vposed they felt it would be kind of odd to go right out and marry a stranger.

Lest "Boomsher" seem an unusual surname, it must be explained that the actual name was French and could not be coped with by Edgewood or Pleasant River, being something quite as impossible to spell as to pronounce. As the family had lived for the last few years somewhere near the Killick Cranberry Meadows, they were called—and completely described in the calling—the Crambry fool-family. A talented and much traveled gentleman who once stayed over night at the Edgewood

tavern, proclaimed it his opinion that Boomsher had been gradually corrupted from Beaumarchais. When he wrote the word on his visiting card and showed it to Mr. Wiley, Old Kennebec had replied, that in the judgment of a man who had lived in large places and seen a turrible lot o' life, such a name could never have been given either to a Christian or a heathen family,—that the way in which the letters was thrown together into it, and the way in which they was sounded when read out loud, was entirely ag'in reason. It was true, he said, that Beaumarchais, bein' such a fool name, might 'a' be'n invented a-purpose for a fool family, but he wouldn't hold even with callin' 'em Boomsher; Crambry was well enough for'em an' a sight easier to speak.

Stephen knew a good deal about the Crambrys, for he passed their so-called habitation in going to one of his wood-lots. It was only a month before that he had found them all sitting outside their broken-down fence, surrounded by decrepit chairs, sofas, tables, bedsteads, bits of carpet, and stoves.

"What's the matter?" he called out from his wagon. "There ain't nothin' the matter," said Alcestis Crambry. "Father's dead, an we're dividin' up the furnerchure."

Alcestis was the pride of the Crambrys, and the list of his attainments used often to be on his proud father's lips. It was he who was the largest, "for his size," in the family; he who could tell his brothers Paul and Arcadus "by their looks;" he who knew a sour apple from a sweet one the minute he bit it; he who, at the early age of ten, was bright enough to point to the cupboard and say, "Puddin', dad!"

Alcestis had enjoyed, in consequence of his unusual intellectual powers, some educational privileges, and the Killick schoolmistress well remembered his first day at the village seat of learning. Reports of what took place in this classic temple from day to day may have been wafted to the dull ears of the boy, who was not thought ready for school until he had attained the ripe age of twelve. It may even have been that specific rumors of the signs, symbols, and hieroglyphics used in educational

institutions had reached him in the obscurity of his cranberry meadows. At all events, when confronted by the alphabet chart, whose huge black capitals were intended to capture the wandering eyes of the infant class, Alcestis exhibited unusual, almost unnatural, excitement.

“That is ‘A,’ my boy,” said the teacher genially, as she pointed to the first character on the chart.

“Good God, is that ‘A’!” exclaimed Alcestis, sitting down heavily on the nearest bench. And neither teacher nor scholars could discover whether he was agreeably surprised or disappointed in the letter,—whether he had expected, if he ever encountered it, to find it writhing in coils on the floor of a cage, or whether it simply bore no resemblance to the ideal already established in his mind.

Mrs. Wiley had once tried to make something of Mercy, the oldest daughter of the family, but at the end of six weeks she announced that a girl who couldn’t tell whether the clock was going “forrards or backwards,” and who rubbed a pocket handkerchief as long as she did a sheet, would be no help in her household.

The Crambrys had daily walked the five or six miles from their home to the Edgewood bridge during the progress of the drive, not only for the social and intellectual advantages to be gained from the company present, but for the more solid compensation of a good meal. They all adored Rose, partly because she gave them food, and partly because she was sparkling and pretty and wore pink dresses that caught their dull eyes.

The afternoon proved a lively one. In the first place, one of the younger men slipped into the water between two logs, part of a lot chained together waiting to be let out of the boom. The weight of the mass higher up and the force of the current wedged him in rather tightly, and when he had been “pried” out he declared that he felt like an apple after it had been squeezed in the cider-mill, so he drove home, and Rufus Waterman took his place.

Two hours' hard work followed this incident, and at the end of that time the "bung" that reached from the shore to Waterman's Ledge (the rock where Pretty Quick met his fate) was broken up, and the logs that composed it were started down river. There remained now only the great side-jam at Gray Rock. This had been allowed to grow, gathering logs as they drifted past, thus making higher water and a stronger current on the other side of the rock, and allowing an easier passage for the logs at that point.

All was excitement now, for, this particular piece of work accomplished, the boom above the falls would be "turned out," and the river would once more be clear and clean at the Edgewood bridge.

Small boys, perching on the rocks with their heels hanging, hands and mouths full of red Astrakhan apples, cheered their favorites to the echo, while the drivers shouted to one another and watched the signs and signals of the boss, who could communicate with them only in that way, so great was the roar of the water.

The jam refused to yield to ordinary measures. It was a difficult problem, for the rocky river-bed held many a snare and pitfall. There was a certain ledge under the water, so artfully placed that every log striking under its projecting edges would wedge itself firmly there, attracting others by its evil example.

"That galoot-boss ought to hev shoved his crew down to that jam this mornin'," grumbled Old Kennebec to Alcestis Crambry, who was always his most loyal and attentive listener. "But he wouldn't take no advice, not if Pharaoh nor Boat nor Herod nor Nicodemus come right out o' the Bible an' give it to him. The logs air contrary to-day. Sometimes they'll go along as easy as an old shoe, an' other times they'll do nothin' but bung, bung, bung! There's a log nestlin' down in the middle o' that jam that I've be'n watchin' for a week. It's a cur'ous one, to begin with; an' then it has a mark on it that you can reco'nize it by. Did ye ever hear tell o' George the Third, King of England, Alcestis, or ain't he known over to the crambry

medders? Well, once upon a time men used to go through the forests over here an' slash a mark on the trunks o' the biggest trees. That was the royal sign, as you might say, an' meant that the tree was to be taken over to England to make masts an' yard-arms for the King's ships. What made me think of it now is that the King's mark was an arrer, an' it's an arrer that's on that there log I'm showin' ye. Well, sir, I seen it fust at Milliken's Mills a Monday. It was in trouble then, an'it's be'n in trouble ever sence. That's allers the way; there'll be one pesky, crooked, contrary, consarn'ed log that can't go anywheres without gittin' into difficulties. You can yank it out an' set it afloat, an' before you hardly git your doggin' iron off of it, it'll be snarled up agin in some new place. From the time it's chopped down to the day it gets to Saco, it costs the Comp'ny 'bout ten times its pesky valler as lumber. Now they've sent over to Benson's for a team of horses, an' I bate ye they can't git 'em. I wish I was the boss on this river, Alcestis."

"I wish I was," echoed the boy.

"Well, your head-fillin' ain't the right kind for a boss, Alcestis, an' you'd better stick to dry land. You set right down here while I go back a piece an' git the pipe out o' my coat pocket. I guess nothin' ain't goin' to happen for a few minutes."

The surmise about the horses, unlike most of Old Kennebec's, proved to be true. Benson's pair had gone to Portland with a load of hay; accordingly the tackle was brought, the rope was adjusted to a log, and five of the drivers, standing on the river-bank, attempted to drag it from its intrenched position. It refused to yield the fraction of an inch. Rufus and Stephen joined the five men, and the augmented crew of seven were putting all their strength on the rope when a cry went up from the watchers on the bridge. The "dog" had loosened suddenly, and the men were flung violently to the ground. For a second they were stunned both by the surprise and by the shock of the blow, but in the same moment the cry of the crowd swelled louder. Alcestis Crambry had stolen, all unnoticed, to the rope and had attempted to use his

feeble powers for the common good. When then blow came he fell backward, and, making no effort to control the situation, slid over the bank and into the water.

IN A TWINKLING HE WAS IN THE WATER IN A TWINKLING HE WAS IN THE WATER

The other Crambrys, not realizing the danger, laughed, audibly, but there was no jeering from the bridge.

Stephen had seen Alcestis slip, and in the fraction of a moment had taken off his boots and was coasting down the slippery rocks behind him in a twinkling he was in the water, almost as soon as the boy himself.

“Doggoned idjut!” exclaimed Old Kennebec, tearfully. “Wuth the hull fool family! If I hedn’t ’a’ be’n so old, I’d ’a’ jumped in myself, for you can’t drownd a Wiley, not without you tie nail-kegs to their head an’ feet an’ drop ’em in the falls.”

Alcestis, who had neither brains, courage, nor experience, had, better still, the luck that follows the witless. He was carried swiftly down the current; but, only fifty feet away, a long, slender, log, wedged between two low rocks on the shore, jutted out over the water, almost touching its surface. The boy’s clothes were admirably adapted to the situation, being full of enormous rents. In some way the end of the log caught in the rags of Alcestis’s coat and held him just seconds enough to enable Stephen to swim to him, to seize him by the nape of the neck, to lift him on the log, and thence to the shore. It was a particularly bad place for a landing, and there was nothing to do but to lower ropes and drag the drenched men to the high ground above.

Alcestis came to his senses in ten or fifteen minutes, and seemed as bright as usual: with a kind of added swagger at being the central figure in a dramatic situation.

“I wonder you hedn’t stove your brains out, when you landed so turrible suddent on that rock at the foot of the bank,” said Mr. Wiley to him.

“I should, but I took good care to light on my head,” responded Alcestis; a cryptic

remark which so puzzled Old Kennebec that he mused over it for some hours.

HEARTS AND OTHER HEARTS

Stephen had brought a change of clothes, as he had a habit of being ducked once at least during the day; and since there was a halt in the proceedings and no need of his services for an hour or two, he found Rose and walked with her to a secluded spot where they could watch the logs and not be seen by the people.

“You frightened everybody almost to death, jumping into the river,” chided Rose.

Stephen laughed. “They thought I was a fool to save a fool, I suppose.”

“Perhaps not as bad as that, but it did seem reckless.”

“I know; and the boy, no doubt, would be better off dead; but so should I be, if I could have let him die.”

Rose regarded this strange point of view for a moment, and then silently acquiesced in it. She was constantly doing this, and she often felt that her mental horizon broadened in the act; but she could not be sure that Stephen grew any dearer to her because of his moral altitudes.

“Besides,” Stephen argued, “I happened to be nearest to the river, and it was my job.”

“How do you always happen to be nearest to the people in trouble, and why is it always your ‘job’!”

“If there are any rewards for good conduct being distributed, I’m right in line with my hand stretched out,” Stephen replied, with meaning in his voice.

Rose blushed under her flowery hat as he led the way to a bench under a sycamore tree that overhung the water.

She had almost convinced herself that she was as much in love with Stephen Waterman as it was in her nature to be with anybody. He was handsome in his big

way, kind, generous, temperate, well educated, and well-to-do. No fault could be found with his family, for his mother had been a teacher, and his father, though a farmer, a college graduate. Stephen himself had had one year at Bowdoin, but had been recalled, as the head of the house, when his father died. That was a severe blow; but his mother's death, three years after, was a grief never to be quite forgotten. Rose, too, was the child of a gently bred mother, and all her instincts were refined. Yes; Stephen in himself satisfied her in all the larger wants of her nature, but she had an unsatisfied hunger for the world,—the world of Portland, where her cousins lived; or, better still, the world of Boston, of which she heard through Mrs. Wealthy Brooks, whose nephew Claude often came to visit her in Edgewood. Life on a farm a mile and a half distant from post-office and stores; life in the house with Rufus, who was rumored to be somewhat wild and unsteady,—this prospect seemed a trifle dull and uneventful to the trivial part of her, though to the better part it was enough. The better part of her loved Stephen Waterman, dimly feeling the richness of his nature, the tenderness of his affection, the strength of his character. Rose was not destitute either of imagination or sentiment. She did not relish this constant weighing of Stephen in the balance: he was too good to be weighed and considered. She longed to be carried out of herself on a wave of rapturous assent, but something seemed to hold her back,—some seed of discontent with the man's environment and circumstances, some germ of longing for a gayer, brighter, more varied life. No amount of self-searching or argument could change the situation. She always loved Stephen more or less: more when he was away from her, because she never approved his collars nor the set of his shirt bosom; and as he naturally wore these despised articles of apparel whenever he proposed to her, she was always lukewarm about marrying him and settling down on the River Farm. Still, to-day she discovered in herself, with positive gratitude, a warmer feeling for him than she had experienced before. He wore a new and becoming gray flannel shirt, with the soft turnover collar that belonged to it, and a blue tie, the color of his kind eyes. She

knew that he had shaved his beard at her request not long ago, and that when she did not like the effect as much as she had hoped, he had meekly grown a mustache for her sake; it did seem as if a man could hardly do more to please an exacting lady-love.

And she had admired him unreservedly when he pulled off his boots and jumped into the river to save Alcestis Crambry's life, without giving a single thought to his own.

And was there ever, after all, such a noble, devoted, unselfish fellow, or a better brother? And would she not despise herself for rejecting him simply because he was countrified, and because she longed to see the world of the fashion-plates in the magazines?

"The logs are so like people!" she exclaimed, as they sat down. "I could name nearly every one of them for somebody in the village. Look at Mite Shapley, that dancing little one, slipping over the falls and skimming along the top of the water, keeping out of all the deep places, and never once touching the rocks."

Stephen fell into her mood. "There's Squire Anderson coming down crosswise and bumping everything in reach. You know he's always buying lumber and logs without knowing what he is going to do with them. They just lie and rot by the roadside. The boys always say that a toad-stool is the old Squire's 'mark' on a log."

"And that stout, clumsy one is Short Dennett.—What are you doing, Stephen!"

"Only building a fence round this clump of harebells," Stephen replied. "They've just got well rooted, and if the boys come skidding down the bank with their spiked shoes, the poor things will never hold up their heads again. Now they're safe.—Oh, look, Rose! There come the minister and his wife!"

A portly couple of peeled logs, exactly matched in size, came ponderously over the falls together, rose within a second of each other, joined again, and swept under the bridge side by side.

“And—oh! oh! Dr. and Mrs. Cram just after them! Isn’t that funny?” laughed Rose, as a very long, slender pair of pines swam down, as close to each other as if they had been glued in that position. Rose thought, as she watched them, who but Stephen would have cared what became of the clump of delicate harebells. How gentle such a man would be to a woman! How tender his touch would be if she were ill or in trouble!

Several single logs followed,—crooked ones, stolid ones, adventurous ones, feeble swimmers, deep divers. Some of them tried to start a small jam on their own account; others stranded themselves for good and all, as Rose and Stephen sat there side by side, with little Dan Cupid for an invisible third on the bench.

“There never was anything so like people,” Rose repeated, leaning forward excitedly. “And, upon my word, the minister and doctor couples are still together. I wonder if they’ll get as far as the falls at Union? That would be an odd place to part, wouldn’t it—Union?” Stephen saw his opportunity, and seized it.

“There’s a reason, Rose, why two logs go down stream better than one, and get into less trouble. They make a wider path, create more force and a better current. It’s the same way with men and women. Oh, Rose, there isn’t a man in the world that’s loved you as long, or knows how to love you any better than I do. You’re just like a white birch sapling, and I’m a great, clumsy fir tree; but if you’ll only trust yourself to me, Rose, I’ll take you safely down river.”

Stephen’s big hand closed on Rose’s little one she returned its pressure softly and gave him the kiss that with her, as with him, meant a promise for all the years to come. The truth and passion in the man had broken the girl’s bonds for the moment. Her vision was clearer, and, realizing the treasures of love and fidelity that were being offered her, she accepted them, half unconscious that she was not returning them in kind. How is the belle of two villages to learn that she should “thank Heaven, fasting, for a good man’s love”?

And Stephen? He went home in the dusk, not knowing whether his feet were touching the solid earth or whether he was treading upon rainbows.

Rose's pink calico seemed to brush him as he walked in the path that was wide enough only for one. His solitude was peopled again when he fed the cattle, for Rose's face smiled at him from the haymow; and when he strained the milk, Rose held the pans.

His nightly tasks over, he went out and took his favorite seat under the apple tree. All was still, save for the crickets' ceaseless chirp, the soft thud of an August sweeting dropping in the grass, and the swish-swash of the water against his boat, tethered in the Willow Cove.

He remembered when he first saw Rose, for that must have been when he began to love her, though he was only fourteen and quite unconscious that the first seed had been dropped in the rich soil of his boyish heart.

"ROSE, I'LL TAKE YOU SAFELY" "ROSE, I'LL TAKE YOU SAFELY"

He was seated on the kerosene barrel in the Edgewood post-office, which was also the general country store, where newspapers, letters, molasses, nails, salt codfish, hairpins, sugar, liver pills, canned goods, beans, and ginghams dwelt in genial proximity. When she entered, just a little pink-and-white slip of a thing with a tin pail in her hand and a sunbonnet falling off her wavy hair, Stephen suddenly stopped swinging his feet. She gravely announced her wants, reading them from a bit of paper,—1 quart molasses, 1 package ginger, 1 lb. cheese, 2 pairs shoe laces, 1 card shirt buttons.

While the storekeeper drew off the molasses she exchanged shy looks with Stephen, who, clean, well-dressed, and carefully mothered as he was, felt all at once uncouth and awkward, rather as if he were some clumsy lout pitchforked into the presence of a fairy queen. He offered her the little bunch of bachelor's buttons he held in his hand, augury of the future, had he known it,—and she accepted them with a smile.

She dropped her memorandum; he picked it up, and she smiled again, doing still more fatal damage than in the first instance. No words were spoken, but Rose, even at ten, had less need of them than most of her sex, for her dimples, aided by dancing eyes, length of lashes, and curve of lips, quite took the place of conversation. The dimples tempted, assented, denied, corroborated, deplored, protested, sympathized, while the intoxicated beholder cudgeled his brain for words or deeds which should provoke and evoke more and more dimples.

The storekeeper hung the molasses pail over Rose's right arm and tucked the packages under her left, and as he opened the mosquito netting door to let her pass out she looked back at Stephen, perched on the kerosene barrel. Just a little girl, a little glance, a little dimple, and Stephen was never quite the same again. The years went on, and the boy became man, yet no other image had ever troubled the deep, placid waters of his heart. Now, after many denials, the hopes and longings of his nature had been answered, and Rose had promised to marry him. He would sacrifice his passion for logging and driving in the future, and become a staid farmer and man of affairs, only giving himself a river holiday now and then. How still and peaceful it was under the trees, and how glad his mother would be to think that the old farm would wake from its sleep, and a woman's light foot be heard in the sunny kitchen!

Heaven was full of silent stars, and there was a moonglade on the water that stretched almost from him to Rose. His heart embarked on that golden pathway and sailed on it to the farther shore. The river was free of logs, and under the light of the moon it shone like a silver mirror. The soft wind among the fir branches breathed Rose's name; the river, rippling against the shore, sang, "Rose;" and as Stephen sat there dreaming of the future, his dreams, too, could have been voiced in one word, and that word "Rose."

THE LITTLE HOUSE

The autumn days flew past like shuttles in a loom. The river reflected the yellow foliage of the white birch and the scarlet of the maples. The wayside was bright with goldenrod, with the red tassels of the sumac, with the purple frost-flower and feathery clematis.

If Rose was not as happy as Stephen, she was quietly content, and felt that she had more to be grateful for than most girls, for Stephen surprised her with first one evidence and then another of thoughtful generosity. In his heart of hearts he felt that Rose was not wholly his, that she reserved, withheld something; and it was the subjugation of this rebellious province that he sought. He and Rose had agreed to wait a year for their marriage, in which time Rose's cousin would finish school and be ready to live with the old people; meanwhile Stephen had learned that his maiden aunt would be glad to come and keep house for Rufus. The work at the River Farm was too hard for a girl, so he had persuaded himself of late, and the house was so far from the village that Rose was sure to be lonely. He owned a couple of acres between his place and the Edgewood bridge, and here, one afternoon only a month after their engagement, he took Rose to see the foundations of a little house he was building for her. It was to be only a story-and-a-half cottage of six small rooms, the two upper chambers to be finished off later on. Stephen had placed it well back from the road, leaving space in front for what was to be a most wonderful arrangement of flower-beds, yet keeping a strip at the back, on the river-brink, for a small vegetable garden. There had been a house there years before—so many years that the blackened ruins were entirely overgrown; but a few elms and an old apple-orchard remained to shade the new dwelling and give welcome to the coming inmates.

Stephen had fifteen hundred dollars in bank, he could turn his hand to almost anything, and his love was so deep that Rose's plumb-line had never sounded bottom; accordingly he was able, with the help of two steady workers, to have the roof on before the first of November. The weather was clear and fine, and by Thanksgiving clapboards, shingles, two coats of brown paint, and even the blinds

had all been added. This exhibition of reckless energy on Stephen's part did not wholly commend itself to the neighborhood.

"Steve's too turrible spry," said Rose's grandfather; "he'll trip himself up some o' these times."

"You never will," remarked his better half, sagely.

"The resks in life come along fast enough, without runnin' to meet 'em," continued the old man. "There's good dough in Rose, but it ain't more'n half riz. Let somebody come along an' drop in a little more yeast, or set the dish a little mite nearer the stove, an' you'll see what'll happen."

"Steve's kept house for himself some time, an' I guess he knows more about bread-makin' than you do."

"There don't nobody know more'n I do about nothin', when my pipe's drawin' real good an' nobody's thornin' me to go to work," replied Mr. Wiley; "but nobody's willin' to take the advice of a man that's seen the world an' lived in large places, an' the risin' generation is in a turrible hurry. I don' know how 't is: young folks air allers settin' the clock forrard an' the old ones puttin' it back."

"Did you ketch anything for dinner when you was out this mornin'?" asked his wife. "No, I fished an' fished, till I was about ready to drop, an' I did git a few shiners, but land, they wa'n't as big as the worms I was ketchin' 'em with, so I pitched 'em back in the water an' quit."

During the progress of these remarks Mr. Wiley opened the door under the sink, and from beneath a huge iron pot drew a round tray loaded with a glass pitcher and half a dozen tumblers, which he placed carefully on the kitchen table.

"This is the last day's option I've got on this lemonade-set," he said, "an' if I'm goin'to Biddeford to-morrer I've got to make up my mind here an' now."

With this observation he took off his shoes, climbed in his stocking feet to the

vantage ground of a kitchen chair, and lifted a stone china pitcher from a corner of the highest cupboard shelf where it had been hidden.

“This lemonade’s gittin’ kind o’ dusty,” he complained, “I cal’lated to hev a kind of a spree on it when I got through choosin’ Rose’s weddin’ present, but I guess the pig’ll he v to help me out.”

The old man filled one of the glasses from the pitcher, pulled up the kitchen shades to the top, put both hands in his pockets, and walked solemnly round the table, gazing at his offering from every possible point of view.

There had been three lemonade sets in the window of a Biddeford crockery store when Mr. Wiley chanced to pass by, and he had brought home the blue and green one on approval.

To the casual eye it would have appeared as quite uniquely hideous until the red and yellow or the purple and orange ones had been seen; after that, no human being could have made a decision, where each was so unparalleled in its ugliness, and Old Kennebec’s confusion of mind would have been perfectly understood by the connoisseur.

“How do you like it with the lemonade in, mother?” he inquired eagerly. “The thing that plagues me most is that the red an’ yaller one I hed home last week lights up better’n this, an’ I believe I’ll settle on that; for as I was thinkin’ last night in bed, lemonade is mostly an evenin’ drink an’ Rose won’t be usin’ the set much by daylight. Root beer looks the han’somest in this purple set, but Rose loves lemonade better’n beer, so I guess I’ll pack up this one an’ change it to-morrer. Mebbe when I get it out o’ sight an’ give the lemonade to the pig I’ll be easier in my mind.”

In the opinion of the community at large Stephen’s forehandedness in the matter of preparations for his marriage was imprudence, and his desire for neatness and beauty flagrant extravagance. The house itself was a foolish idea, it was thought, but there were extenuating circumstances, for the maiden aunt really needed a home,

and Rufus was likely to marry before long and take his wife to the River Farm. It was to be hoped in his case that he would avoid the snares of beauty and choose a good stout girl who would bring the dairy back to what it was in Mrs. Waterman's time.

All winter long Stephen labored on the inside of the cottage, mostly by himself. He learned all trades in succession, Love being his only master. He had many odd days to spare from his farm work, and if he had not found days he would have taken nights. Scarcely a nail was driven without Rose's advice; and when the plastering was hard and dry, the wall-papers were the result of weeks of consultation.

Among the quiet joys of life there is probably no other so deep, so sweet, so full of trembling hope and delight, as the building and making of a home,—a home where two lives are to be merged in one and flow on together, a home full of mysterious and delicious possibilities, hidden in a future which is always rose-colored.

Rose's sweet little nature broadened under Stephen's influence; but she had her moments of discontent and unrest, always followed quickly by remorse.

At the Thanksgiving sociable some one had observed her turquoise engagement ring,—some one who said that such a hand was worthy of a diamond, that turquoises were a pretty color, but that there was only one stone for an engagement ring, and that was a diamond. At the Christmas dance the same some one had said her waltzing would make her "all the rage" in Boston. She wondered if it were true, and wondered whether, if she had not promised to marry Stephen, some splendid being from a city would have descended from his heights, bearing diamonds in his hand. Not that she would have accepted them; she only wondered. These disloyal thoughts came seldom, and she put them resolutely away, devoting herself with all the greater assiduity to her muslin curtains and ruffled pillow-shams. Stephen, too, had his momentary pangs. There were times when he could calm his doubts only by working on the little house. The mere sight of the beloved floors and walls and

ceilings comforted his heart, and brought him good cheer.

The winter was a cold one, so bitterly cold that even the rapid water at the Gray Rock was a mass of curdled yellow ice, something that had only occurred once or twice before within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

It was also a very gay season for Pleasant River and Edgewood. Never had there been so many card-parties, sleigh rides and tavern dances, and never such wonderful skating. The river was one gleaming, glittering thoroughfare of ice from Milliken's Mills to the dam at the Edgewood bridge. At sundown bonfires were built here and there on the mirror like surface, and all the young people from the neighboring villages gathered on the ice; while detachments of merry, rosy-cheeked boys and girls, those who preferred coasting, met at the top of Brigadier Hill, from which one could get a longer and more perilous slide than from any other point in the township.

Claude Merrill, in his occasional visits from Boston, was very much in evidence at the Saturday evening ice parties. He was not an artist at the sport himself, but he was especially proficient in the art of strapping on a lady's skates, and murmuring—as he adjusted the last buckle,—"The prettiest foot and ankle on the river!" It cannot be denied that this compliment gave secret pleasure to the fair village maidens who received it, but it was a pleasure accompanied by electric shocks of excitement. A girl's foot might perhaps be mentioned, if a fellow were daring enough, but the line was rigidly drawn at the ankle, which was not a part of the human frame ever alluded to in the polite society of Edgewood at that time.

Rose, in her red linsey-woolsey dress and her squirrel furs and cap, was the life of every gathering, and when Stephen took her hand and they glided up stream, alone together in the crowd, he used to wish that they might skate on and on up the crystal ice-path of the river, to the moon itself, whither it seemed to lead them.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

But the Saco all this time was meditating of its surprises. The snapping cold weather and the depth to which the water was frozen were aiding it in its preparation for the greatest event of the season. On a certain gray Saturday in March, after a week of mild temperature, it began to rain as if, after months of snowing, it really enjoyed a new form of entertainment. Sunday dawned with the very flood-gates of heaven opening, so it seemed. All day long the river was rising under its miles of unbroken ice, rising at the threatening rate of four inches an hour.

Edgewood went to bed as usual that night, for the bridge at that point was set too high to be carried away by freshets, but at other villages whose bridges were in less secure position there was little sleep and much anxiety.

At midnight a cry was heard from the men watching at Milliken's Mills. The great ice jam had parted from Rolfe's Island and was swinging out into the open, pushing everything before it. All the able-bodied men in the village turned out of bed, and with lanterns in hand began to clear the stores and mills, for it seemed that everything near the river banks must go before that avalanche of ice.

Stephen and Rufus were there helping to save the property of their friends and neighbors; Rose and Mite Shapley had stayed the night with a friend, and all three girls were shivering with fear and excitement as they stood near the bridge, watching the never-to-be-forgotten sight. It is needless to say that the Crambry family was on hand, for whatever instincts they may have lacked, the instinct for being on the spot when anything was happening, was present in them to the most remarkable extent. The town was supporting them in modest winter quarters somewhat nearer than Killick to the centre of civilization, and the first alarm brought them promptly to the scene, Mrs. Crambry remarking at intervals: "If I'd known there'd be so many out I'd ought to have worn my bunnit; but I ain't got no bunnit, an' if I had they say I ain't got no head to wear it on!"

By the time the jam neared the falls it had grown with its accumulations, until it was

made up of tier after tier of huge ice cakes, piled side by side and one upon another, with heaps of trees and branches and drifting lumber holding them in place. Some of the blocks stood erect and towered like icebergs, and these, glittering in the lights of the twinkling lanterns, pushed solemnly forward, cracking, crushing, and cutting everything in their way. When the great mass neared the planing mill on the east shore the girls covered their eyes, expecting to hear the crash of the falling building; but, impelled by the force of some mysterious current, it shook itself ponderously, and then, with one magnificent movement, slid up the river bank, tier following tier in grand confusion. This left a water way for the main drift; the ice broke in every direction, and down, down, down, from Bonnie Eagle and Moderation swept the harvest of the winter freezing. It came thundering over the dam, bringing boats, farming implements, posts, supports, and every sort of floating lumber with it; and cutting under the flour mill, tipped it cleverly over on its side and went crashing on its way down river. At Edgewood it pushed colossal blocks of ice up the banks into the roadway, piling them end upon end ten feet in air. Then, tearing and rumbling and booming through the narrows, it covered the intervale at Pleasant Point and made a huge ice bridge below Union Falls, a bridge so solid that it stood there for days, a sight for all the neighboring villages.

This exciting event would have forever set apart this winter from all others in Stephen’s memory, even had it not been also the winter when he was building a house for his future wife. But afterwards, in looking back on the wild night of the ice freshet, Stephen remembered that Rose’s manner was strained and cold and evasive, and that when he had seen her talking with Claude Merrill, it had seemed to him that that whippersnapper had looked at her as no honorable man in Edgewood ever looked at an engaged girl. He recalled his throb of gratitude that Claude lived at a safe distance, and his subsequent pang of remorse at doubting, for an instant, Rose’s fidelity.

So at length April came, the Saco was still high, turbid, and angry, and the boys

were waiting at Limington Falls for the “Ossipee drive” to begin. Stephen joined them there, for he was restless, and the river called him, as it did every spring. Each stubborn log that he encountered gave him new courage and power of overcoming. The rush of the water, the noise and roar and dash, the exposure and danger, all made the blood run in his veins like new wine. When he came back to the farm, all the cobwebs had been blown from his brain, and his first interview with Rose was so intoxicating that he went immediately to Portland, and bought, in a kind of secret penitence for his former fears, a pale pink-flowered wall-paper for the bedroom in the new home. It had once been voted down by the entire advisory committee. Mrs. Wiley said pink was foolish and was always sure to fade; and the border, being a mass of solid roses, was five cents a yard, virtually a prohibitive price. Mr. Wiley said he “should hate to hev a spell of sickness an’ lay abed in a room where there was things growin’ all over the place.” He thought “rough-plastered walls, where you could lay an’ count the spots where the roof leaked, was the most entertainin’ in sickness.” Rose had longed for the lovely pattern, but had sided dutifully with the prudent majority, so that it was with a feeling of unauthorized and illegitimate joy that Stephen papered the room at night, a few strips at a time.

On the third evening, when he had removed all signs of his work, he lighted two kerosene lamps and two candles, finding the effect, under this illumination, almost too brilliant and beautiful for belief. Rose should never see it now, he determined, until the furniture was in place. They had already chosen the kitchen and bedroom things, though they would not be needed for some months; but the rest was to wait until summer, when there would be the hay-money to spend.

Stephen did not go back to the River Farm till one o’clock that night; the pink bedroom held him in fetters too powerful to break. It looked like the garden of Eden, he thought. To be sure, it was only fifteen feet square; Eden might have been a little larger, possibly, but otherwise the pink bedroom had every advantage. The pattern of roses growing on a trellis was brighter than any flower-bed in June; and the

border—well, if the border had been five dollars a foot Stephen would not have grudged the money when he saw the twenty running yards of rosy bloom rioting under the white ceiling.

Before he blew out the last light he raised it high above his head and took one fond, final look. “It’s the only place I ever saw,” he thought, “that is pretty enough for her. She will look just as if she was growing here with all the other flowers, and I shall always think of it as the garden of Eden. I wonder, if I got the license and the ring and took her by surprise, whether she’d be married in June instead of August? I could be all ready if I could only persuade her.”

At this moment Stephen touched the summit of happiness; and it is a curious coincidence that as he was dreaming in his garden of Eden, the serpent, having just arrived at Edgewood, was sleeping peacefully at the house of Mrs. Brooks.

It was the serpent’s fourth visit that season, and he explained to inquiring friends that his former employer had sold the business, and that the new management, while reorganizing, had determined to enlarge the premises, the three clerks who had been retained having two weeks’ vacation with half pay.

It is extraordinary how frequently “wise serpents” are retained by the management on half, or even full, salary, while the services of the “harmless doves” are dispensed with, and they are set free to flutter where they will.

THE SERPENT

Rose Wiley had the brightest eyes in Edgewood. It was impossible to look at her without realizing that her physical sight was perfect. What mysterious species of blindness is it that descends, now and then, upon human creatures, and renders them incapable of judgment or discrimination?

Claude Merrill was a glove salesman in a Boston fancy-goods store. The calling itself is undoubtedly respectable, and it is quite conceivable that a man can sell

gloves and still be a man; but Claude Merrill was a manikin. He inhabited a very narrow space behind a very short counter, but to him it seemed the earth and the fullness thereof.

When, irreproachably neat and even exquisite in dress, he gave a Napoleonic glance at his array of glove-boxes to see if the female assistant had put them in proper order for the day; when, with that wonderful eye for detail that had wafted him to his present height of power, he pounced upon the powder-sprinklers and found them, as he expected, empty; when, with masterly judgment, he had made up and ticketed a basket of misfits and odd sizes to attract the eyes of women who were their human counterparts, he felt himself bursting with the pride and pomp of circumstance. His cambric handkerchief adjusted in his coat with the monogram corner well displayed, a last touch to the carefully trained lock on his forehead, and he was ready for his customers.

“Six, did you say, miss? I should have thought five and three quarters—Attend to that gentleman, Miss Dix, please; I am very busy.”

“Six-and-a-half gray suede? Here they are, an exquisite shade. Shall I try them on? The right hand, if you will. Perhaps you’d better remove your elegant ring; I shouldn’t like to have anything catch in the setting.”

“Miss Dix! Six-and-a-half black glace—upper shelf, third box—for this lady. She’s in a hurry. We shall see you often after this, I hope, madam.”

“No; we don’t keep silk or lisle gloves. We have no call for them; our customers prefer kid.”

Oh, but he was in his element, was Claude Merrill; though the glamour that surrounded him in the minds of the Edgewood girls did not emanate wholly from his finicky little person: something of it was the glamour that belonged to Boston,—remote, fashionable, gay, rich, almost inaccessible Boston, which none could see without the expenditure of five or six dollars in railway fare, with the

added extravagance of a night in a hotel, if one would explore it thoroughly and come home possessed of all its illimitable treasures of wisdom and experience.

When Claude came to Edgewood for a Sunday, or to spend a vacation with his aunt, he brought with him something of the magic of a metropolis. Suddenly, to Rose's eye, Stephen looked larger and clumsier, his shoes were not the proper sort, his clothes were ordinary, his neckties were years behind the fashion. Stephen's dancing, compared with Claude's, was as the deliberate motion of an ox to the hopping of a neat little robin. When Claude took a girl's hand in the "grand right-and-left," it was as if he were about to try on a delicate glove; the manner in which he "held his lady" in the polka or schottische made her seem a queen. Mite Shapley was so affected by it that when Rufus attempted to encircle her for the mazurka she exclaimed, "Don't act as if you were spearing logs, Rufus!"

Of the two men, Stephen had more to say, but Claude said more. He was thought brilliant in conversation; but what wonder, when one considered his advantages and his dazzling experiences! He had customers who were worth their thousands; ladies whose fingers never touched dish-water; ladies who wouldn't buy a glove of anybody else if they went bare-handed to the grave. He lived with his sister Maude Arthurlena in a house where there were twenty-two other boarders who could be seated at meals all at the same time, so immense was the dining-room. He ate his dinner at a restaurant daily, and expended twenty-five cents for it without blenching. He went to the theatre once a week, and was often accompanied by "lady friends" who were "elegant dressers."

In a moment of wrath Stephen had called him a "counter-jumper," but it was a libel. So short and rough a means of exit from his place of power was wholly beneath Claude's dignity. It was with a "Pardon me, Miss Dix," that, the noon hour having arrived, he squeezed by that slave and victim, and raising the hinged board that separated his kingdom from that of the ribbon department, passed out of the store,

hat in hand, serene in the consciousness that though other clerks might nibble luncheon from a brown paper bag, he would speedily be indulging in an expensive repast; and Miss Dix knew it, and it was a part of his almost invincible attraction for her.

It seemed flying in the face of Providence to decline the attentions of such a gorgeous butterfly of fashion simply because one was engaged to marry another man at some distant day.

All Edgewood femininity united in saying that there never was such a perfect gentleman as Claude Merrill; and during the time when his popularity was at its height Rose lost sight of the fact that Stephen could have furnished the stuff for a dozen Claudes and have had enough left for an ordinary man besides.

April gave place to May, and a veil hung between the lovers,—an intangible, gossamer-like thing, not to be seen with the naked eye, but, oh! so plainly to be felt. Rose hid herself thankfully behind it, while Stephen had not courage to lift a corner. She had twice been seen driving with Claude Merrill—that Stephen knew; but she had explained that there were errands to be done, that her grandfather had taken the horse, and that Mr. Merrill's escort had been both opportune and convenient for these practical reasons. Claude was everywhere present, the centre of attraction, the observed of all observers. He was irresistible, contagious, almost epidemic. Rose was now gay, now silent; now affectionate, now distant, now coquettish; in fine, everything that was capricious, mysterious, agitating, incomprehensible.

One morning Alcestis Crambry went to the post-office for Stephen and brought him back the newspapers and letters. He had hung about the River Farm so much that Stephen finally gave him bed and food in exchange for numberless small errands. Rufus was temporarily confined in a dark room with some strange pain and trouble in his eyes, and Alcestis proved of use in many ways. He had always been Rose's slave, and had often brought messages and notes from the Brier Neighborhood, so

that when Stephen saw a folded note among the papers his heart gave a throb of anticipation.

The note was brief, and when he had glanced through it he said: “This is not mine, Alcestis; it belongs to Miss Rose. Go straight back and give it to her as you were told; and another time keep your wits about you, or I’ll send you back to Killick.”

Alcestis Crambry’s ideas on all subjects were extremely vague. Claude Merrill had given him a letter for Rose, but his notion was that anything that belonged to her belonged to Stephen, and the Waterman place was much nearer than the Wileys’, particularly at dinner-time!

When the boy had slouched away, Stephen sat under the apple tree, now a mass of roseate bloom, and buried his face in his hands.

It was not precisely a love-letter that he had read, nevertheless it blackened the light of the sun for him. Claude asked Rose to meet him anywhere on the road to the station and to take a little walk, as he was leaving that afternoon and could not bear to say good-by to her in the presence of her grandmother. “Under the circumstances,” he wrote, deeply underlining the words, “I cannot remain a moment longer in Edgewood, where I have been so happy and so miserable!” He did not refer to the fact that the time limit on his return-ticket expired that day, for his dramatic instinct told him that such sordid matters have no place in heroics.

Stephen sat motionless under the tree for an hour, deciding on some plan of action.

He had work at the little house, but he did not dare go there lest he should see the face of dead Love looking from the windows of the pink bedroom; dead Love, cold, sad, merciless. His cheeks burned as he thought of the marriage license and the gold ring hidden away upstairs in the drawer of his shaving stand. What a romantic fool he had been, to think he could hasten the glad day by a single moment! What a piece of boyish folly it had been, and how it shamed him in his own eyes!

When train time drew near he took his boat and paddled down stream. If for the

Finland lover's reindeer there was but one path in all the world, and that the one that led to Her, so it was for Stephen's canoe, which, had it been set free on the river by day or by night, might have floated straight to Rose.

He landed at the usual place, a bit of sandy shore near the Wiley house, and walked drearily up the bank through the woods. Under the shade of the pines the white stars of the hepatica glistened and the pale anemones were coming into bloom. Partridge-berries glowed red under their glossy leaves, and clumps of violets sweetened the air. Squirrels chattered, woodpeckers tapped, thrushes sang; but Stephen was blind and deaf to all the sweet harbingers of spring.

Just then he heard voices, realizing with a throb of delight that, at any rate, Rose had not left home to meet Claude, as he had asked her to do. Looking through the branches, he saw the two standing together, Mrs. Brooks's horse; with the offensive trunk in the back of the wagon, being hitched to a tree near by. There was nothing in the tableau to stir Stephen to fury, but he read between the lines and suffered as he read—suffered and determined to sacrifice himself if he must, so that Rose could have what she wanted, this miserable apology for a man. He had never been the husband for Rose; she must take her place in a larger community, worthy of her beauty and charm.

Claude was talking and gesticulating ardently. Rose's head was bent and the tears were rolling down her cheeks. Suddenly Claude raised his hat, and with a passionate gesture of renunciation walked swiftly to the wagon, and looking back once, drove off with the utmost speed of which the Brooks's horse was capable,—Rose waving him a farewell with one hand and wiping her eyes with the other.

THE TURQUOISE RING

Stephen stood absolutely still in front of the opening in the trees, and as Rose turned she met him face to face. She had never dreamed his eyes could be so stern, his

mouth so hard, and she gave a sob like a child.

“You seem to be in trouble,” Stephen said in a voice so cold she thought it could not be his.

“I am not in trouble, exactly,” Rose stammered, concealing her discomfiture as well as possible. “I am a little unhappy because I have made some one else unhappy; and now that you know it, you will be unhappy too, and angry besides, I suppose, though you’ve seen everything there was to see.”

“There is no occasion for sorrow,” Stephen said. “I didn’t mean to break in on any interview; I came over to give you back your freedom. If you ever cared enough for me to marry me, the time has gone by. I am willing to own that I over-persuaded you, but I am not the man to take a girl against her inclinations, so we will say good-by and end the thing here and now. I can only wish”—here his smothered rage at fate almost choked him—“that, when you were selecting another husband, you had chosen a whole man!”

Rose quivered with the scorn of his tone. “Size isn’t everything!” she blazed.

“Not in bodies, perhaps; but it counts for something in hearts and brains, and it is convenient to have a sense of honor that’s at least as big as a grain of mustard-seed.”

“Claude Merrill is not dishonorable,” Rose exclaimed impetuously; “or at least he isn’t as bad as you think: he has never asked me to marry him.”

“Then he probably was not quite ready to speak, or perhaps you were not quite ready to hear,” retorted Stephen, bitterly; “but don’t let us have words,—there’ll be enough to regret without adding those. I have seen, ever since New Year’s, that you were not really happy or contented; only I wouldn’t allow it to myself: I kept hoping against hope that I was mistaken. There have been times when I would have married you, willing or unwilling, but I didn’t love you so well then; and now that there’s another man in the case, it’s different, and I’m strong enough to do the right thing. Follow your heart and be happy; in a year or two I shall be glad I had the grit to tell

you so. Good-by, Rose!”

Rose, pale with amazement, summoned all her pride, and drawing the turquoise engagement ring from her finger, handed it silently to Stephen, hiding her face as he flung it vehemently down the river-bank. His dull eyes followed it and half uncomprehendingly saw it settle and glisten in a nest of brown pine-needles. Then he put out his hand for a last clasp and strode away without a word.

HIDING HER FACE AS HE FLUNG IT DOWN THE RIVER-BANK HIDING HER FACE AS HE FLUNG IT DOWN THE RIVER-BANK

Presently Rose heard first the scrape of his boat on the sand, then the soft sound of his paddles against the water, then nothing but the squirrels and the woodpeckers and the thrushes, then not even these,—nothing but the beating of her own heart.

She sat down heavily, feeling as if she were wide awake for the first time in many weeks. How had things come to this pass with her?

Claude Merrill had flattered her vanity and given her some moments of restlessness and dissatisfaction with her lot; but he had not until to-day really touched her heart or tempted her, even momentarily, from her allegiance to Stephen. His eyes had always looked unspeakable things; his voice had seemed to breathe feelings that he had never dared put in words; but to-day he had really stirred her, for although he had still been vague, it was easy to see that his love for her had passed all bounds of discretion. She remembered his impassioned farewells, his despair, his doubt as to whether he could forget her by plunging into the vortex of business, or whether he had better end it all in the river, as so many other broken-hearted fellows had done. She had been touched by his misery, even against her better judgment; and she had intended to confess it all to Stephen sometime, telling him that she should never again accept attentions from a stranger, lest a tragedy like this should happen twice in a lifetime.

She had imagined that Stephen would be his large-minded, great-hearted,

magnanimous self, and beg her to forget this fascinating will-o'the-wisp by resting in his deeper, serener love. She had meant to be contrite and faithful, praying nightly that poor Claude might live down his present anguish, of which she had been the innocent cause.

Instead, what had happened? She had been put altogether in the wrong. Stephen had almost cast her off, and that, too, without argument. He had given her her liberty before she had asked for it, taking it for granted, without question, that she desired to be rid of him. Instead of comforting her in her remorse, or sympathizing with her for so nobly refusing to shine in Claude's larger world of Boston, Stephen had assumed that she was disloyal in every particular.

And pray how was she to cope with such a disagreeable and complicated situation?

It would not be long before the gossips rolled under their tongues the delicious morsel of a broken engagement, and sooner or later she must brave the displeasure of her grandmother.

And the little house—that was worse than anything. Her tears flowed faster as she thought of Stephen's joy in it, of his faithful labor, of the savings he had invested in it. She hated and despised her self when she thought of the house, and for the first time in her life she realized the limitations of her nature, the poverty of her ideals.

What should she do? She had lost Stephen and ruined his life. Now, in order that she need not blight a second career, must she contrive to return Claude's love! To be sure, she thought, it seemed indecent to marry any other man than Stephen, when they had built a house together, and chosen wall-papers, and a kitchen stove, and dining-room chairs; but was it not the only way to evade the difficulties?

Suppose that Stephen, in a fit of pique, should ask somebody else to share the new cottage?

As this dreadful possibility came into view, Rose's sobs actually frightened the birds and the squirrels. She paced back and forth under the trees, wondering how she

could have been engaged to a man for eight months and know so little about him as she seemed to know about Stephen Waterman to-day. Who would have believed he could be so autocratic, so severe, so unapproachable! Who could have foreseen that she, Rose Wiley, would ever be given up to another man,—handed over as coolly as if she had been a bale of cotton? She wanted to return Claude Merrill's love because it was the only way out of the tangle; but at the moment she almost hated him for making so much trouble, for hurting Stephen, for abasing her in her own eyes, and, above all, for giving her rustic lover the chance of impersonating an injured emperor.

It did not simplify the situation to have Mite Shapley come in during the evening and run upstairs, uninvited, to sit on the toot of her bed and chatter.

Rose had closed her blinds and lay in the dark, pleading a headache.

Mite was in high feather. She had met Claude Merrill going to the station that afternoon. He was much too early for the train, which the station agent reported to be behind time, so he had asked her to take a drive. She didn't know how it happened, for he looked at his watch every now and then; but, anyway, they got to laughing and "carrying on," and when they came back to the station the train had gone. Wasn't that the greatest joke of the season? What did Rose suppose they did next?

Rose didn't know and didn't care; her head ached too badly.

Well, they had driven to Wareham, and Claude had hired a livery team there, and had been taken into Portland with his trunk, and she had brought Mrs. Brooks's horse back to Edgewood. Wasn't that ridiculous? And hadn't she cut out Rose where she least expected?

Rose was distinctly apathetic, and Mite Shapley departed after a very brief call, leaving behind her an entirely new train of thought.

If Claude Merrill were so love-blighted that he could only by the greatest

self-control keep from flinging himself into the river, how could he conceal his sufferings so completely from Mite Shapley,—little shallow-pated, scheming coquette?

“So that pretty Merrill feller has gone, has he, mother?” inquired Old Kennebec that night, as he took off his wet shoes and warmed his feet at the kitchen oven. “Well, it ain’t a mite too soon. I allers distrust that pink-an’-white, rosy-posy kind of a man. One of the most turrible things that ever happened in Gard’ner was brought about by jest sech a feller. Mothers hedn’t hardly ought to name their boy babies Claude without they expect ’em to play the dickens with the girls. I don’ know nothin’ ’bout the fust Claude, there ain’t none of ’em in the Bible, air they, but whoever he was, I bate ye he hed a deceivin’ tongue. If it hedn’t be’n for me, that Claude in Gard’ner would ’a’ run away with my brother’s fust wife; an’ I’ll tell ye jest how I contrived to put a spoke in his wheel.”

But Mrs. Wiley, being already somewhat familiar with the circumstances, had taken her candle and retired to her virtuous couch.

ROSE SEES THE WORLD

Was this the world, after all? Rose asked herself; and, if so, what was amiss with it, and where was the charm, the bewilderment, the intoxication, the glamour?

She had been glad to come to Boston, for the last two weeks in Edgewood had proved intolerable. She had always been a favorite heretofore, from the days when the boys fought for the privilege of dragging her sled up the hills, and filling her tiny mitten with peppermints, down to the year when she came home from the Wareham Female Seminary, an acknowledged belle and beauty. Suddenly she had felt her popularity dwindling. There was no real change in the demeanor of her acquaintances, but there was a certain subtle difference of atmosphere. Everybody sympathized tacitly with Stephen, and she did not wonder, for there were times

when she secretly took his part against herself. Only a few candid friends had referred to the rupture openly in conversation, but these had been blunt in their disapproval.

It seemed part of her ill fortune that just at this time Rufus should be threatened with partial blindness, and that Stephen's heart, already sore, should be torn with new anxieties. She could hardly bear to see the doctor's carriage drive by day after day, and hear night after night that Rufus was unresigned, melancholy, half mad; while Stephen, as the doctor said, was brother, mother, and father in one, as gentle as a woman, as firm as Gibraltar.

These foes to her peace of mind all came from within; but without was the hourly reproach of her grandmother, whose scorching tongue touched every sensitive spot in the girl's nature and burned it like fire.

Finally a way of escape opened. Mrs. Wealthy Brooks, who had always been rheumatic, grew suddenly worse. She had heard of a "magnetic" physician in Boston, also of one who used electricity with wonderful effect, and she announced her intention of taking both treatments impartially and alternately. The neighbors were quite willing that Wealthy Ann Brooks should spend the deceased Ezra's money in any way she pleased,—she had earned it, goodness knows, by living with him for twenty-five years,—but before the day for her departure arrived her right arm and knee became so much more painful that it was impossible for her to travel alone.

At this juncture Rose was called upon to act as nurse and companion in a friendly way. She seized the opportunity hungrily as a way out of her present trouble; but, knowing what Mrs. Brooks's temper was in time of health, she could see clearly what it was likely to prove when pain and anguish wrung the brow.

Rose had been in Boston now for some weeks, and she was sitting in the Joy Street boarding-house,—Joy Street, forsooth! It was nearly bedtime, and she was looking

out upon a huddle of roofs and back yards, upon a landscape filled with clothes-lines, ash-barrels, and ill-fed cats. There were no sleek country tabbies, with the memory in their eyes of tasted cream, nothing but city-born, city-bred, thin, despairing cats of the pavement, cats no more forlorn than Rose herself.

SHE HAD GONE WITH MAUDE TO CLAUDE'S STORE SHE HAD GONE WITH MAUDE TO CLAUDE'S STORE

She had "seen Boston," for she had accompanied Mrs. Brooks in the horse-cars daily to the two different temples of healing where that lady worshipped and offered sacrifices. She had also gone with Maude Arthurlena to Claude Merrill's store to buy pair of gloves, and had overheard Miss Dix (the fashionable "lady-assistant" before mentioned) say to Miss Brackett of the ribbon department, that she thought Mr. Merrill must have worn his blinders that time he stayed so long in Edgewood. This bit of polished irony was unintelligible to Rose at first, but she mastered it after an hour's reflection. She wasn't looking her best that day, she knew; the cotton dresses that seemed so pretty at home were common and countrified here, and her best black cashmere looked cheap and shapeless beside Miss Dix's brilliantine. Miss Dix's figure was her strong point, and her dressmaker was particularly skillful in the arts of suggestion, concealment, and revelation. Beauty has its chosen backgrounds. Rose in white dimity, standing knee deep in her blossoming brier bushes, the river running at her feet, dark pine trees behind her graceful head, sounded depths and touched heights of harmony forever beyond the reach of the modish Miss Dix, but she was out of her element and suffered accordingly.

Rose had gone to walk with Claude one evening when she first arrived. He had shown her the State House and the Park Street Church, and sat with her on one of the benches in the Common until nearly ten. She knew that Mrs. Brooks had told her nephew of the broken engagement, but he made no reference to the matter, save to congratulate her that she was rid of a man who was so clumsy, so dull and behind

the times, as Stephen Waterman, saying that he had always marveled she could engage herself to anybody who could insult her by offering her a turquoise ring.

Claude was very interesting that evening, Rose thought, but rather gloomy and unlike his former self. He referred to his grave responsibilities, to the frail health of Maude Arthurlena, and to the vicissitudes of business. He vaguely intimated that his daily life in the store was not so pleasant as it had been formerly; that there were "those" (he would speak no more plainly) who embarrassed him with undesired attentions, "those" who, without the smallest shadow of right, vexed him with petty jealousies.

Rose dared not ask questions on so delicate a topic, but she remembered in a flash Miss Dix's heavy eyebrows, snapping eyes, and high color. Claude seemed very happy that Rose had come to Boston, though he was surprised, knowing what a trial his aunt must be, now that she was so helpless. It was unfortunate, also, that Rose could not go on excursions without leaving his aunt alone, or he should have been glad to offer his escort. He pressed her hand when he left her at her door, telling her she could never realize what a comfort her friendship was to him; could never imagine how thankful he was that she had courageously freed herself from ties that in time would have made her wretched. His heart was full, he said, of feelings he dared not utter; but in the near future, when certain clouds had rolled by, he would unlock its treasures, and then—but no more to-night: he could not trust himself.

Rose felt as if she were assuming one of the characters in a mysterious romance, such as unfolded itself only in books or in Boston; but, thrilling as it was, it was nevertheless extremely unsatisfactory.

Convinced that Claude Merrill was passionately in love with her, one of her reasons for coming to Boston had been to fall more deeply in love with him, and thus heal some, at least, of the wounds she had inflicted. It may have been a foolish idea, but after three weeks it seemed still worse,—a useless one; for after several interviews

she felt herself drifting farther and farther from Claude; and if he felt any burning ambition to make her his own, he certainly concealed it with admirable art. Given up, with the most offensive magnanimity, by Stephen, and not greatly desired by Claude,—that seemed the present status of proud Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood.

It was June, she remembered, as she leaned out of the open window; at least it was June in Edgewood, and she supposed for convenience's sake they called it June in Boston. Not that it mattered much what the poor city prisoners called it. How beautiful the river would be at home, with the trees along the banks in full leaf! How she hungered and thirsted for the river,—to see it sparkle in the sunlight; to watch the moonglade stretching from one bank to the other; to hear the soft lap of the water on the shore, and the distant murmur of the falls at the bridge! And the Brier Neighborhood would be at its loveliest, for the wild roses were in blossom by now. And the little house! How sweet it must look under the shade of the elms, with the Saco rippling at the back! Was poor Rufus still lying in a darkened room, and was Stephen nursing him,—disappointed Stephen,—dear, noble old Stephen?

GOLD AND PINCHBECK

Just then Mrs. Brooks groaned in the next room and called Rose, who went in to minister to her real needs, or to condole with her fancied ones, whichever course of action appeared to be the more agreeable at the moment.

Mrs. Brooks desired conversation, it seemed, or at least she desired an audience for a monologue, for she recognized no antiphonal obligations on the part of her listeners. The doctors were not doing her a speck of good, and she was just squandering money in a miserable boarding-house, when she might be enjoying poor health in her own home; and she didn't believe her hens were receiving proper care, and she had forgotten to pull down the shades in the spare room, and the sun

would fade the carpet out all white before she got back, and she didn't believe Dr. Smith's magnetism was any more use than a cat's foot, nor Dr. Robinson's electricity any better than a bumblebee's buzz, and she had a great mind to go home and try Dr. Lord from Bonnie Eagle; and there was a letter for Rose on the bureau, which had come before supper, but the shiftless, lazy, worthless landlady had forgotten to send it up till just now.

The letter was from Mite Shapley, but Rose could read only half of it to Mrs. Brooks,—little beside the news that the Waterman barn, the finest barn in the whole township, had been struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Stephen was away at the time, having taken Rufus to Portland, where an operation on his eyes would shortly be performed at the hospital, and one of the neighbors was sleeping at the River Farm and taking care of the cattle; still the house might not have been saved but for one of Alcestis Crambry's sudden bursts of common sense, which occurred now quite regularly. He succeeded not only in getting the horses out of the stalls, but gave the alarm so promptly that the whole neighborhood was soon on the scene of action. Stephen was the only man, Mite reminded Rose, who ever had any patience with, or took any pains to teach, Alcestis, but he never could have expected to be rewarded in this practical way. The barn was only partly insured; and when she had met Stephen at the station next day, and condoled with him on his loss, he had said: "Oh, well, Mite, a little more or less doesn't make much difference just now."

"The rest wouldn't interest you, Mrs. Brooks," said Rose, precipitately preparing to leave the room.

"Something about Claude, I suppose," ventured that astute lady. "I think Mite kind of fancied him. I don't believe he ever gave her any real encouragement; but he'd make love to a pump, Claude Merrill would; and so would his father before him. How my sister Abby made out to land him we never knew, for they said he'd proposed to every woman in the town of Bingham, not excepting the wooden Indian

girl in front of the cigar store, and not one of 'em but our Abby ever got a chance to name the day. Abby was as set as the everlastin' hills, and if she'd made up her mind to have a man he couldn't wriggle away from her nohow in the world. It beats all how girls do run after these slick-haired, sweet-tongued, Miss Nancy kind o' fellers, that ain't but little good as beaux an' worth less than nothing as husbands."

Rose scarcely noticed what Mrs. Brooks said, she was too anxious to read the rest of Mite Shapley's letter in the quiet of her own room.

"Stephen looks thin and pale [so it ran on], but he does not allow anybody to sympathize with him. I think you ought to know something that I haven't told you before for fear of hurting your feelings; but if I were in your place I'd like to hear everything, and then you'll know how to act when you come home. Just after you left, Stephen plowed up all the land in front of your new house,—every inch of it, all up and down the road, between the fence and the front door-step,—and then he planted corn where you were going to have your flower-beds.

"He has closed all the blinds and hung a 'To Let' sign on the large elm at the gate. Stephen never was spiteful in his life, but this looks a little like spite. Perhaps he only wanted to save his self-respect and let people know, that everything between you was over forever. Perhaps he thought it would stop talk once and for all. But you won't mind, you lucky girl, staying nearly three months in Boston! [So Almira purled on in violet ink, with shaded letters.] How I wish it had come my way, though I'm not good at rubbing rheumatic patients, even when they are his aunt. Is he as devoted as ever? And when will it be? How do you like the theatre? Mother thinks you won't attend; but, by what he used to say, I am sure church members in Boston always go to amusements.

"Your loving friend, "Almira Shapley.

"P.S. They say Rufus's doctor's bills here, and the operation and hospital expenses in Portland, will mount up to five hundred dollars. Of course Stephen will be

dreadfully hampered by the loss of his barn, and maybe he wants to let your house that was to be, because he really needs money. In that case the dooryard won't be very attractive to tenants, with corn planted right up to the steps and no path left! It's two feet tall now, and by August (just when you were intending to move in) it will hide the front windows. Not that you'll care, with a diamond on your engagement finger!"

The letter was more than flesh and blood could stand, and Rose flung herself on her bed to think and regret and repent, and, if possible, to sob herself to sleep.

She knew now that she had never admired and respected Stephen so much as at the moment when, under the reproach of his eyes, she had given him back his ring. When she left Edgewood and parted with him forever she had really loved him better than when she had promised to marry him.

Claude Merrill, on his native Boston heath, did not appear the romantic, inspiring figure he had once been in her eyes. A week ago she distrusted him; to-night she despised him.

What had happened to Rose was the dilation of her vision. She saw things under a wider sky and in a clearer light. Above all, her heart was wrung with pity for Stephen—Stephen, with no comforting woman's hand to help him in his sore trouble; Stephen, bearing his losses alone, his burdens and anxieties alone, his nursing and daily work alone. Oh, how she felt herself needed! Needed! that was the magic word that unlocked her better nature. "Darkness is the time for making roots and establishing plants, whether of the soil or of the soul," and all at once Rose had become a woman: a little one, perhaps, but a whole woman—and a bit of an angel, too, with healing in her wings. When and how had this metamorphosis come about? Last summer the fragile brier-rose had hung over the river and looked at its pretty reflection in the placid surface of the water. Its few buds and blossoms were so lovely, it sighed for nothing more. The changes in the plant had been wrought

secretly and silently. In some mysterious way, as common to soul as to plant life, the roots had gathered in more nourishment from the earth, they had stored up strength and force, and all at once there was a marvelous fructifying of the plant, hardiness of stalk, new shoots everywhere, vigorous leafage, and a shower of blossoms.

But everything was awry: Boston was a failure; Claude was a weakling and a flirt; her turquoise ring was lying on the river-bank; Stephen did not love her any longer; her flower-beds were plowed up and planted in corn; and the cottage that Stephen had built and she had furnished, that beloved cottage, was to let.

She was in Boston; but what did that amount to, after all? What was the State House to a bleeding heart, or the Old South Church to a pride wounded like hers?

At last she fell asleep, but it was only by stopping her ears to the noises of the city streets and making herself imagine the sound of the river rippling under her bedroom windows at home. The back yards of Boston faded, and in their place came the banks of the Saco, strewn with pine needles, fragrant with wild flowers. Then there was the bit of sunny beach, where Stephen moored his boat. She could hear the sound of his paddle. Boston lovers came a-courting in the horse-cars, but hers had floated down stream to her just at dusk in a birch-bark canoe, or sometimes, in the moonlight, on a couple of logs rafted together.

But it was all over now, and she could see only Stephen’s stern face as he flung the despised turquoise ring down the river bank.

A COUNTRY CHEVALIER

It was early in August when Mrs. Wealthy Brooks announced her speedy return from Boston to Edgewood.

“It’s jest as well Rose is comin’ back,” said Mr. Wiley to his wife. “I never favored her goin’ to Boston, where that rosy-posy Claude feller is. When he was down here he was kep’ kind o’ tied up in a boxstall, but there he’s caperin’ loose round the

pastur'."

"I should think Rose would be ashamed to come back, after the way she's carried on," remarked Mrs. Wiley, "but if she needed punishment I guess she's got it bein' comp'ny-keeper to Wealthy Ann Brooks. Bein' a church member in good an' reg'lar standin', I s'pose Wealthy Ann'll go to heaven, but I can only say that it would be a sight pleasanter place for a good many if she didn't."

"Rose has be'n foolish an' flirty an' wrong-headed," allowed her grandfather; "but it won't do no good to treat her like a hardened criminile, same's you did afore she went away. She ain't hardly got her wisdom teeth cut, in love affairs! She ain't broke the laws of the State o' Maine, nor any o' the ten commandments; she ain't disgraced the family, an' there's a chance for her to reform, seein' as how she ain't twenty year old yet. I was turrible wild an' hot-headed myself afore you ketched me an' tamed me down."

"You ain't so tame now as I wish you was," Mrs. Wiley replied testily.

"If you could smoke a clay pipe 't would calm your nerves, mother, an' help you to git some philosophy inter you; you need a little philosophy turrible bad."

"I need patience consid'able more," was Mrs. Wiley's withering retort.

"That's the way with folks," said Old Kennebec reflectively, as he went on peacefully puffing. "If you try to indoose 'em to take an int'rest in a bran'-new virtue, they won't look at it; but they'll run down a side street an' buy half a yard more o' some turrible old shopworn trait o' character that they've kep' in stock all their lives, an' that everybody's sick to death of. There was a man in Gard'ner"—

But alas! the experiences of the Gardiner man, though told in the same delightful fashion that had won Mrs. Wiley's heart many years before, now fell upon the empty air. In these years of Old Kennebec's "anecdotage," his pipe was his best listener and his truest confidant.

Mr. Wiley's constant intercessions with his wife made Rose's home-coming

somewhat easier, and the sight of her own room and belongings soothed her troubled spirit, but the days went on, and nothing happened to change the situation. She had lost a lover, that was all, and there were plenty more to choose from, or there always had been; but the only one she wanted was the one who made no sign. She used to think that she could twist Stephen around her little finger; that she had only to beckon to him and he would follow her to the ends of the earth. Now fear had entered her heart. She no longer felt sure, because she no longer felt worthy, of him, and feeling both uncertainty and unworthiness, her lips were sealed and she was rendered incapable of making any bid for forgiveness.

So the little world of Pleasant River went on, to all outward seeming, as it had ever gone. On one side of the stream a girl's heart was longing, and pining, and sickening, with hope deferred, and growing, too, with such astonishing rapidity that the very angels marveled! And on the other, a man's whole vision of life an duty was widening and deepening under the fructifying influence of his sorrow.

The corn waved high and green in front of the vacant riverside cottage, but Stephen sent no word or message to Rose. He had seen her once, but only from a distance. She seemed paler and thinner, he thought,—the result; probably, of her metropolitan gayeties. He heard no rumor of any engagement, and he wondered if it were possible that her love for Claude Merrill had not, after all, been returned in kind. This seemed a wild impossibility. His mind refused to entertain the supposition that any man on earth could resist falling in love with Rose, or, having fallen in, that he could ever contrive to climb out. So he worked on at his farm harder than ever, and grew soberer and more careworn daily. Rufus had never seemed so near and dear to him as in these weeks when he had lived under the shadow of threatened blindness. The burning of the barn and the strain upon their slender property brought the brothers together shoulder to shoulder.

"If you lose your girl, Steve," said the boy, "and I lose my eyesight, and we both

lose the barn, why, it'll be us two against the world, for a spell!"

The "To Let" sign on the little house was an arrant piece of hypocrisy. Nothing but the direst extremity could have caused him to allow an alien step on that sacred threshold. The plowing up of the flower-beds and planting of the corn had served a double purpose. It showed the too curious public the finality of his break with Rose and her absolute freedom; it also prevented them from suspecting that he still entered the place. His visits were not many, but he could not bear to let the dust settle on the furniture that he and Rose had chosen together; and whenever he locked the door and went back to the River Farm, he thought of a verse in the Bible: "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken."

It was now Friday of the last week in August. The river was full of logs, thousands upon thousands of them covering the surface of the water from the bridge almost up to the Brier Neighborhood.

The Edgewood drive was late, owing to a long drought and low water; but it was to begin on the following Monday, and Lije Dennett and his under boss were looking over the situation and planning the campaign. As they leaned over the bridge-rail they saw Mr. Wiley driving down the river road. When he caught sight of them he hitched the old white horse at the corner and walked toward them, filling his pipe the while in his usual leisurely manner.

"We're not busy this forenoon," said Lije Dennett. "S'pose we stand right here and let Old Kennebec have his say out for once. We've never heard the end of one of his stories, an' he's be'n talkin' for twenty years."

"All right," rejoined his companion, with a broad grin at the idea. "I'm willin', if you are; but who's goin' to tell our fam'lies the reason we've deserted 'em! I bate yer we sha'n't budge till the crack o' doom. The road commissioner'll come along once a year and mend the bridge under our feet, but Old Kennebec'll talk straight on

till the day o’ jedgment.”

Mr. Wiley had one of the most enjoyable mornings of his life, and felt that after half a century of neglect his powers were at last appreciated by his fellow-citizens.

He proposed numerous strategic movements to be made upon the logs, whereby they would move more swiftly than usual. He described several successful drives on the Kennebec, when the logs had melted down the river almost by magic, owing to his generalship; and he paid a tribute, in passing, to the docility of the boss, who on that occasion had never moved a single log without asking his advice.

From this topic he proceeded genially to narrate the life-histories of the boss, the under boss, and several Indians belonging to the crew,—histories in which he himself played a gallant and conspicuous part. The conversation then drifted naturally to the exploits of river-drivers in general, and Mr. Wiley narrated the sorts of feats in log-riding, pickpole-throwing, and the shooting of rapids that he had done in his youth. These stories were such as had seldom been heard by the ear of man; and, as they passed into circulation instantaneously, we are probably enjoying some of them to this day.

They were still being told when a Crambry child appeared on the bridge, bearing a note for the old man.

Upon reading it he moved off rapidly in the direction of the store, ejaculating:

“Bless my soul! I clean forgot that saleratus, and mother’s settin’ at the kitchen table with the bowl in her lap, waitin’ for it! Got so int’rested in your list’nin’ I never thought o’ the time.”

The connubial discussion that followed this breach of discipline began on the arrival of the saleratus, and lasted through supper; and Rose went to bed almost immediately afterward for very dullness and apathy. Her life stretched out before her in the most aimless and monotonous fashion. She saw nothing but heartache in the future; and that she richly deserved it made it none the easier to bear.

Feeling feverish and sleepless, she slipped on her gray Shaker cloak and stole quietly downstairs for a breath of air. Her grandfather and grandmother were talking on the piazza, and good humor seemed to have been restored.

“I was over to the tavern to-night,” she heard him say, as she sat down at a little distance. “I was over to the tavern to-night, an’ a feller from Gorham got to talkin’ an’ braggin’ ’bout what a stock o’ goods they kep’ in the store over there. ‘An’,’ says I, ‘I bate ye dollars to doughnuts that there hain’t a darn thing ye can ask for at Bill Pike’s store at Pleasant River that he can’t go down cellar, or up attic, or out in the barn chamber an’ git for ye.’ Well, sir, he took me up, an’ I borrered the money of Joe Dennett, who held the stakes, an’ we went right over to Bill Pike’s with all the boys follerin’ on behind. An’ the Gorham man never let on what he was goin’ to ask for till the hull crowd of us got inside the store. Then says he, as p’lite as a basket o’ chips, ‘Mr. Pike, I’d like to buy a pulpit if you can oblige me with one.’

“Bill scratched his head an’ I held my breath. Then says he, ‘Pears to me I’d ought to hev a pulpit or two, if I can jest remember where I keep ’em. I don’t never cal’late to be out o’ pulpits, but I’m so plagued for room I can’t keep ’em in here with the groc’ries. Jim (that’s his new store boy), you jest take a lantern an’ run out in the far corner o’ the shed, at the end o’ the hickory woodpile, an’ see how many pulpits we’ve got in stock!’ Well, Jim run out, an’ when he come back he says, ‘We’ve got two, Mr. Pike. Shall I bring one of ’em in?’

“At that the boys all bust out laughin’ an’ hollerin’ an’ tauntin’ the Gorham man, an’ he paid up with a good will, I tell ye!”

“I don’t approve of bettin’,” said Mrs. Wiley grimly, “but I’ll try to sanctify the money by usin’ it for a new wash-boiler.”

“The fact is,” explained old Kennebec, somewhat confused, “that the boys made me spend every cent of it then an’ there.”

Rose heard her grandmother’s caustic reply, and then paid no further attention until

her keen ear caught the sound of Stephen's name. It was a part of her unhappiness that since her broken engagement no one would ever allude to him, and she longed to hear him mentioned, so that perchance she could get some inkling of his movements.

"AS LONG AS STEPHEN WATERMAN'S ALIVE, ROSE WILEY CAN HAVE HIM#8221; "AS LONG AS STEPHEN WATERMAN'S ALIVE, ROSE WILEY CAN HAVE HIM"

"I met Stephen to-night for the first time in a week," said Mr. Wiley. "He kind o' keeps out o' my way lately. He's goin' to drive his span into Portland tomorrow mornin' and bring Rufus home from the hospital Sunday afternoon. The doctors think they've made a success of their job, but Rufus has got to be bandaged up a spell longer. Stephen is goin' to join the drive Monday mornin' at the bridge here, so I'll get the latest news o' the boy. Land! I'll be turrible glad if he gets out with his eyesight, if it's only for Steve's sake. He's a turrible good fellow, Steve is! He said something to-night that made me set more store by him than ever. I told you I hedn't heard an unkind word ag'in' Rose sence she come home from Boston, an' no more I hev till this evenin: There was two or three fellers talkin' in the post-office, an' they didn't suspicion I was settin' on the steps outside the screen door. That Jim Jenkins, that Rose so everlastin'ly snubbed at the tavern dance, spoke up, an' says he: 'This time last year Rose Wiley could 'a' hed the choice of any man on the river, an' now I bet ye she can't get nary one.'

"Steve was there, jest goin' out the door, with some bags o' coffee an' sugar under his arm.

"'I guess you're mistaken about that,' he says, speakin' up jest like lightnin'; 'so long as Stephen Waterman's alive, Rose Wiley can have him, for one; and that everybody's welcome to know.'

"He spoke right out, loud an' plain, jest as if he was readin' the Declaration of

Independence. I expected the boys would everlastin'ly poke fun at him, but they never said a word. I guess his eyes flashed, for he come out the screen door, slammin' it after him, and stalked by me as if he was too worked up to notice anything or anybody. I didn't foiler him, for his long legs git over the ground too fast for me, but thinks I, 'Mebbe I'll hev some use for my lemonade-set after all.'"

"I hope to the land you will," responded Mrs. Wiley, "for I'm about sick o' movin' it round when I sweep under my bed. And I shall be glad if Rose an' Stephen do make it up, for Wealthy Ann Brooks's gossip is too much for a Christian woman to stand."

HOUSEBREAKING

Where was the pale Rose, the faded Rose, that crept noiselessly down from her room, wanting neither to speak nor to be spoken to? Nobody ever knew. She vanished forever, and in her place a thing of sparkles and dimples flashed up the stairway and closed the door softly. There was a streak of moonshine lying across the bare floor, and a merry ghost, with dressing-gown held prettily away from bare feet, danced a gay fandango among the yellow moonbeams. There were breathless flights to the open window, and kisses thrown in the direction of the River Farm. There were impressive declamations at the looking-glass, where a radiant creature pointed to her reflection and whispered, "Worthless little pig, he loves you, after all!"

Then, when quiet joy had taken the place of mad delight, there was a swoop down upon the floor, an impetuous hiding of brimming eyes in the white counterpane, and a dozen impassioned promises to herself and to something higher than herself, to be a better girl.

The mood lasted, and deepened, and still Rose did not move. Her heart was on its knees before Stephen's faithful love, his chivalry, his strength. Her troubled spirit,

like a frail boat tossed about in the rapids, seemed entering a quiet harbor, where there were protecting shores and a still, still evening star. Her sails were all torn and drooping, but the harbor was in sight, and the poor little weather-beaten craft could rest in peace.

A period of grave reflection now ensued,—under the bedclothes, where one could think better. Suddenly an inspiration seized her,—an inspiration so original, so delicious, and above all so humble and praiseworthy, that it brought her head from her pillow, and she sat bolt upright, clapping her hands like a child.

“The very thing!” she whispered to herself gleefully. “It will take courage, but I’m sure of my ground after what he said before them all, and I’ll do it. Grandma in Biddeford buying church carpets, Stephen in Portland—was ever such a chance?”

The same glowing Rose came downstairs, two steps at a time, next morning, bade her grandmother good-by with suspicious pleasure, and sent her grandfather away on an errand which, with attendant conversation, would consume half the day. Then bundles after bundles and baskets after baskets were packed into the wagon,—behind the seat, beneath the seat, and finally under the lap-robe. She gave a dramatic flourish to the whip, drove across the bridge, went through Pleasant River village, and up the leafy road to the little house, stared the “To Let” sign scornfully in the eye, alighted, and ran like a deer through the aisles of waving corn, past the kitchen windows, to the back door.

“If he has kept the big key in the old place under the stone, where we both used to find it, then he hasn’t forgotten me—or anything,” thought Rose.

The key was there, and Rose lifted it with a sob of gratitude. It was but five minutes’ work to carry all the bundles from the wagon to the back steps, and another five to lead old Tom across the road into the woods and tie him to a tree quite out of the sight of any passer-by.

When, after running back, she turned the key in the lock, her heart gave a leap

almost of terror, and she started at the sound of her own footfall. Through the open door the sunlight streamed into the dark room. She flew to tables and chairs, and gave a rapid sweep of the hand over their surfaces.

“He has been dusting here,—and within a few days, too,” she thought triumphantly.

The kitchen was perfection, as she always knew it would be, with one door opening to the shaded road and the other looking on the river; windows, too, framing the apple-orchard and the elms. She had chosen the furniture, but how differently it looked now that it was actually in place! The tiny shed had piles of split wood, with great boxes of kindlings and shavings, all in readiness for the bride, who would do her own cooking. Who but Stephen would have made the very wood ready for a woman’s home-coming; and why had he done so much in May, when they were not to be married until August? Then the door of the bedroom was stealthily opened, and here Rose sat down and cried for joy and shame and hope and fear. The very flowered paper she had refused as too expensive! How lovely it looked with the white chamber set! She brought in her simple wedding outfit of blankets, bed-linen, and counterpanes, and folded them softly in the closet; and then for the rest of the morning she went from room to room, doing all that could remain undiscovered, even to laying a fire in the new kitchen stove.

This was the plan. Stephen must pass the house on his way from the River Farm to the bridge, where he was to join the river-drivers on Monday morning. She would be out of bed by the earliest peep of dawn, put on Stephen’s favorite pink calico, leave a note for her grandmother, run like a hare down her side of the river and up Stephen’s, steal into the house, open blinds and windows, light the fire, and set the kettle boiling. Then with a sharp knife she would cut down two rows of corn, and thus make a green pathway from the front kitchen steps to the road. Next, the false and insulting “To Let” sign would be forcibly tweaked from the tree and thrown into the grass. She would then lay the table in the kitchen, and make ready the nicest

breakfast that two people ever sat down to. And oh, would two people sit down to it; or would one go off in a rage and the other die of grief and disappointment?

Then, having done all, she would wait and palpitate, and palpitate and wait, until Stephen came. Surely no property-owner in the universe could drive along a road, observe his corn leveled to the earth, his sign removed, his house open, and smoke issuing from his chimney, without going in to surprise the rogue and villain who could be guilty of such vandalism.

And when he came in?

Oh, she had all day Sunday in which to forecast, with mingled dread and gladness and suspense, that all-important, all-decisive first moment! All day Sunday to frame and unframe penitent speeches. All day Sunday! Would it ever be Monday? If so, what would Tuesday bring? Would the sun rise on happy Mrs. Stephen Waterman of Pleasant River, or on miserable Miss Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood?

THE DREAM ROOM

Long ago, when Stephen was a boy of fourteen or fifteen, he had gone with his father to a distant town to spend the night. After an early breakfast next morning his father had driven off for a business interview, and left the boy to walk about during his absence. He wandered aimlessly along a quiet side street, and threw himself down on the grass outside a pretty garden to amuse himself as best he could.

After a few minutes he heard voices, and, turning, peeped through the bars of the gate in idle, boyish curiosity. It was a small brown house; the kitchen door was open, and a table spread with a white cloth was set in the middle of the room. There was a cradle in a far corner, and a man was seated at the table as though he might be waiting for his breakfast.

There is a kind of sentiment about the kitchen in New England, a kind of sentiment not provoked by other rooms. Here the farmer drops in to spend a few minutes when

he comes back from the barn or field on an errand. Here, in the great, clean, sweet, comfortable place, the busy housewife lives, sometimes rocking the cradle, sometimes opening and shutting the oven door, sometimes stirring the pot, darning stockings, paring vegetables, or mixing goodies in a yellow bowl. The children sit on the steps, stringing beans, shelling peas, or hulling berries; the cat sleeps on the floor near the wood-box; and the visitor feels exiled if he stays in sitting-room or parlor, for here, where the mother is always busy, is the heart of the farm-house.

There was an open back door to this kitchen, a door framed in morning-glories, and the woman (or was she only girl?) standing at the stove was pretty,—oh, so pretty in Stephen's eyes! His boyish heart went out to her on the instant. She poured a cup of coffee and walked with it to the table; then an unexpected, interesting thing happened—something the boy ought not to have seen, and never forgot. The man, putting out his hand to take the cup, looked up at the pretty woman with a smile, and she stooped and kissed him.

Stephen was fifteen. As he looked, on the instant he became a man, with a man's hopes, desires, ambitions. He looked eagerly, hungrily, and the scene burned itself on the sensitive plate of his young heart, so that, as he grew older, he could take the picture out in the dark, from time to time, and look at it again. When he first met Rose, he did not know precisely what she was to mean to him; but before long, when he closed his eyes and the old familiar picture swam into his field of vision, behold, by some spiritual chemistry, the pretty woman's face had given place to that of Rose!

All such teasing visions had been sternly banished during this sorrowful summer, and it was a thoughtful, sober Stephen who drove along the road on this mellow August morning. The dust was deep; the goldenrod waved its imperial plumes, making the humble waysides gorgeous; the river chattered and sparkled till it met the logs at the Brier Neighorhood, and then, lapsing into silence, flowed steadily

under them till it found a vent for its spirits in the dashing and splashing of the falls.

Haying was over; logging was to begin that day; then harvesting; then wood-cutting; then eternal successions of plowing, sowing, reaping, haying, logging, harvesting, and so on, to the endless end of his days. Here and there a red or a yellow branch, painted only yesterday, caught his eye and made him shiver. He was not ready for winter; his heart still craved the summer it had missed.

Hello! What was that? Corn-stalks prone on the earth? Sign torn down and lying flat in the grass? Blinds open, fire in the chimney?

He leaped from the wagon, and, flinging the reins to Alcestis Crambry, said, “Stay right here out of sight, and don’t you move till I call you!” and striding up the green pathway, flung open the kitchen door.

A forest of corn waving in the doorway at the back, morning-glories clambering round and round the window-frames, table with shining white cloth, kettle humming and steaming, something bubbling in a pan on the stove, fire throwing out sweet little gleams of welcome through the open damper. All this was taken in with one incredulous, rapturous twinkle of an eye; but something else, too: Rose of all roses, Rose of the river, Rose of the world, standing behind a chair, her hand pressed against her heart, her lips parted, her breath coming and going! She was glowing like a jewel, glowing with the extraordinary brilliancy that emotion gives to some women. She used to be happy in a gay, sparkling way, like the shallow part of the stream as it chatters over white pebbles and bright sands. Now it was a broad, steady, full happiness like the deeps of the river under the sun.

“Don’t speak, Stephen, till you hear what I have to say. It takes a good deal of courage for a girl to do as I am doing; but I want to show how sorry I am, and it’s the only way.” She was trembling, and the words came faster and faster. “I’ve been very wrong and foolish, and made you very unhappy, but I haven’t done what you would have hated most. I haven’t been engaged to Claude Merrill; he hasn’t so

much as asked me. I am here to beg you to forgive me, to eat breakfast with me, to drive me to the minister's and marry me quickly, quickly, before anything happens to prevent us, and then to bring me home here to live all the days of my life. Oh, Stephen dear, honestly, honestly, you haven't lost anything in all this long, miserable summer. I've suffered, too, and I'm better worth loving than I was. Will you take me back?"

Rose had a tremendous power of provoking and holding love, and Stephen of loving. His was too generous a nature for revilings and complaints and reproaches.

The shores of his heart were strewn with the wreckage of the troubled summer, but if the tide of love is high enough, it washes such things out of remembrance. He just opened his arms and took Rose to his heart, faults and all, with joy and gratitude; and she was as happy as a child who has escaped the scolding it richly deserved, and who determines, for very thankfulness' sake, never to be naughty again.

DON'T SPEAK, STEPHEN, TILL YOU HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY DON'T SPEAK, STEPHEN, TILL YOU HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY

"You don't know what you've done for me, Stephen," she whispered, with her face hidden on his shoulder. "I was just a common little prickly rosebush when you came along like a good gardener and 'grafted in' something better; the something better was your love, Stephen dear, and it's made everything different. The silly Rose you were engaged to long ago has disappeared somewhere; I hope you won't be able to find her under the new leaves."

"She was all I wanted," said Stephen.

"You thought she was," the girl answered, "because you didn't see the prickles, but you'd have felt them sometime. The old Rose was a selfish thing, not good enough for you; the new Rose is going to be your wife, and Rufus's sister, and your mother's daughter, all in one."

Then such a breakfast was spread as Stephen, in his sorry years of bachelor

existence, had forgotten could exist; but before he broke his fast he ran out to the wagon and served the astonished Alcestis with his wedding refreshments then and there, bidding him drive back to the River Farm and bring him a package that lay in the drawer of his shaving-stand,--a package placed there when hot youth and love and longing had inspired him to hurry on the marriage day.

“There’s an envelope, Alcestis,” he cried, “a long envelope way, way back in the corner, and a small box on top of it. Bring them both, and my wallet too, and if you find them all and get them to me safely you shall be bridesmaid and groomsman and best man and usher and maid of honor at a wedding, in less than an hour! Off with you! Drive straight and use the whip on Dolly!”

When he reentered the kitchen, flushed with joy and excitement, Rose put the various good things on the table and he almost tremblingly took his seat, fearing that contact with the solid wood might wake him from this entrancing vision.

“I’d like to put you in your chair like a queen and wait on you,” he said with a soft boyish stammer; “but I am too dazed with happiness to be of any use.”

“It’s my turn to wait upon you, and I—Oh! how I love to have you dazed,” Rose answered. “I’ll be at the table presently myself; but we have been housekeeping only three minutes, and we have nothing but the tin coffee-pot this morning, so I’ll pour the coffee from the stove.”

She filled a cup with housewifely care and brought it to Stephen’s side. As she set it down and was turning, she caught his look,—a look so full of longing that no loving woman, however busy, could have resisted it; then she stooped and kissed him fondly, fervently.

Stephen put his arm about her, and, drawing her down to his knee, rested his head against her soft shoulder with a sigh of comfort, like that of a tired child. He had waited for it ten years, and at last the dream-room had come true.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ROSE O' THE RIVER ***

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