WIGGIN KATE SMITH

ROSE O' THE RIVER

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Содержание

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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.

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.

"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.

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.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.