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# A WILDERNESS WOOING

## CHAPTER I

### A REBEL'S WEDDING

THERE is no stream with gentler charm than the little Rundle River in the month of May. That winding silvery ribbon, with the round-bosomed hills at its back and the shimmering green Channel to southward, and all around it the cool woods and the scented meadows open to the sun, makes such a picture as a man might carry in his mind through many lands and seas.

Arnold Firle, who sat in his boat and rowed up-stream with the tide, had been far enough away, and had seen wild enough work in the four years that had passed. There had been bloody, cruel business among the ruthless Frenchmen and the dogged Dutch in the Low Countries. Only three nights ago he had sailed out of the Scheldt, lit by a burning village, whose flames made dancing shadows upon the great brown sails that bore him seaward.

It seemed to him almost unreal that he was home again, that he sat here lazily pulling his oars amid the sweet peace of the south country, with the Rundle rippling under the little boat that bore him towards Westringfold. A bend of the stream hid the last view of the town at the river mouth, and of the fat Dutch fishing-craft that had brought him home. The tide was near the flood, carrying

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