



CHEERFULNESS is what greases the axles of the world: a little applied will smooth every difficulty.—Lysen.

Rose of Old Harpeth

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CHAPTER I.

ROSE MARY OF SWEETBRIAR

WHY, don't you know nothing in the world compliments a loaf of bread like asking for a fourth slice," laughed Rose Mary, as she reached up on the stone shelf above her head and took down a large crusty loaf and a long knife. "Thick or thin?" she asked as she raised her lashes from her blue eyes for a second of hospitable inquiry.

"Thin," answered Everett promptly, "but two with the butter sticking 'em together. Please be careful with that weapon! It's as good as a juggler's show to watch you, but it makes me slightly—solicitous." As he spoke he seated himself on the corner of the wide stone table as near to Rose Mary and the long knife as seemed advisable. A ray of sunlight fell through the door of the milk-house and cut across his red head to lose itself in Rose Mary's close black braids.

"Make it four," he further demanded over the table.

"Indeed, and I will," answered Rose Mary delightedly. And as she spoke she held the loaf against her breast and drew the knife through the slices in a fascinatingly dangerous manner. At the intentness of her regard the color rose up under the lashes that veiled her eyes, and she hugged the loaf closer with her left hand. "Would you like six?" she asked innocently, as the fourth stroke severed the last piece.

"Just go and slice it all up," he answered. "I'd rather watch you than eat."

"Wait till I butter these for you, and then you can eat—and watch me—me finish working the butter. Won't that do you as well? Think what an encouragement your interest will be to me! Really, nothing in the world places a woman's work like a man looking on, and if he doesn't stop her she'll drop under the line. Now, you have your bread and butter and you can sit over there by the door and help me turn off this ten pounds in no time."

As she had been speaking, Rose Mary had spread two of the slices with the yellow butter from a huge bowl in front of her, clapped on the tops of the sandwiches and then, with a smile, handed them in a blue plate to the man who lounged across the corner of her table. She made a very gracious and lovely picture, did Rose Mary, in her light-blue homespun gown against the cool gray depths of the milk-house, which was fern-lined along the cracks of the old stones and mysterious with the trickling gurgle of the spring that flowed into the long stone troughs, around the milk crocks and out under the stone door-sill. From his post by the door Everett watched her as she drove her paddle into the

hard golden mound in the blue bowl in front of her, and, with a quick turn of her strong, slender wrist, slapped and patted chunk after chunk of the butter into a more compressed form. The sleeves of her dress were rolled almost to her shoulders and under the white, moist flesh of her arms the fine muscles



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showed plainly. The strong curves of her back and shoulders bent sprang under the graceful sweep of her arms, and her round breasts rose and fell with quickened breath from her energetic movements.

"Now, you're making me work too hard," she laughed; and she panted as she rested her hand for a second against the edge of the bowl and looked up at Everett from under a black tendril curl that had fallen down across her forehead.

"Miss Rose Mary Alloyay, you are one large, husk-witch," calmly remarked the hungry man as he finished disposing of the last half of one of the thin bread and butters. "Here I sit enchanted by—a butter-paddle, when you and I both

know that not two miles across the meadows there runs a train that ought to put me into New York in a little over forty-eight hours. Won't you, won't you let me go—back to my frantic and imploring employers?"

"Why no, I can't," answered Rose Mary as she pressed a yellow cake of butter on to a blue plate and deftly curled it up with her paddle into a huge yellow sunflower. Uncle Tucker captured you roaming loose out in his fields and he trusts you to me while he is at work, and I must keep you safe. He's fond of you and so are the Aunties and Stonewall Jackson and Shoofly and Sniffer and—"

"And anybody else?" demanded Everett, preparing to dispose of the last bite.

"Oh, everybody most along Providence Road," answered Rose Mary, enthusiastically, though not raising her eyes from the manipulation of the third butter flower. "Can't you go out and dig up some more rocks and things? I feel sure you haven't got a sample of all of them. And there may be gold and silver and precious jewels just one inch deep than you have dug. Are you certain

any of us like the smell of coal oil, and it gives Aunt Viney a pain. It would be awfully disagreeable to have wells of it right here on the place. They'd be so ugly and smelly."

"But oil-wells mean—mean a great deal of wealth," ventured Everett.

"I know, but just think of the money Uncle Tucker gets for this butter I make from the cows that graze on the meadows. Wouldn't it be awful if they should happen to drink some of the coal-oil and make what we send down to the city taste wrong, and spoil the Sweetbriar reputation? I like money enough, most awfully, and I want some right now. I want to—"

"Mary of the Rose, stop right there!" said Everett as he came over from his post by the door and again seated himself on the corner of the table. "I will not listen to you prevent to the national craving. I will hold on to the illusion of having found one unmercenary human being, even if it is a child in the depths of Harpeth Valley to keep her so." There was banter in Everett's voice and a smile on his lips, but a bitterness lay in the depths of his keen dark eyes and an ugly trace of cynicism filtered through the tones of his voice.

"And wasn't it funny for me to count the little well-chickens before they were even hatched?" laughed Rose Mary. "That's the way of it, get together even a little flock of dollars in prospect and they go right to work hatching out a brood of wants and needs; but it's not wrong of me to want these false teeth so bad, because it's such a trial to have your mouth all sink in and not be able to talk plain and—"

"Help, woman! What are you talking about? I never saw anything as you have in all my life. One dash of them would put a beauty show out of business and—"

"Oh, no, not for myself!" Rose Mary hastened to exclaim, and she turned the whole artillery of the treasures upon him in mirth at his mistake. "It's Aunt Viney I want them for. She only has five left. She says she didn't mind so long as she had any two that hit, but the hitten to all are gone now and she is distressed. I'm saving up to take her down to the city to get a brand new set. I have eleven dollars now and two little lull calves to sell, though it breaks my heart to let them go, even if they are of the wrong persuasion. I always love them better than I do the little heifers, because I have to give them up. I don't like to have things I love go away. You see you've just think of going to New York until the spring is all over and summer comes for good," she continued, with the most delightful ingenueness, as she shaped the last of the ten flowers and glanced from her work at her uncle with the most solicitous concern. "Of course, you feel as if the smash your lung got in that awful rock slide has healed all up, and I know it has, but you'll have to do as the doctor tells you about not raining any rinks with New York spring gales, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose I will," answered Everett, with a trace of restlessness in his voice. "I'm just as sound as a dollar now and I'm wild to get with that rang the firm is sending up into British Columbia to thrash out that copper question. I know the counted on me for the final tests. Some other fellow will find it and get the fortune and the credit, while I—"

He stared moodily out of the door of the milk-house and down Providence Road that wound its calm, even way from across the ridge down to the green valley. Rose Mary's milk house was nestled between the breast

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