

THE SONG OF THE ICE.

Sing ho! sing ho! for the skater, oh!
For the flying feet and the winds that blow!
For the blood that runs to the cheek, to glow
Like the western sky!

CAP AND RINGLETS.



OW, Miss Frost, where's that 'ere soap to be put and the eggs to be got now, and ain't that 'ere puddin' most done?" screamed the bound girl from the wash-house, quite regardless of commas.

"I say, mother, I can't find a single shirt!" bawled Tommy, the second son of Reuben and Rachel Frost.

"Ma, tell Susie to let me be!" screamed, six-year-old Mary from an inner room.

"Rachel, where on earth have you looked up them 'ere tools?" queried the farmer himself, filling the doorway suddenly with his substantial form.

Mrs. Frost, who was dashing about her kitchen like a wild northeaster in cap and petticoats, brought herself up short by the dresser and put down the pitcher in her hands with an emphasis that made the tins and pudding dishes lance.

"Good gracious! is everybody gone mad, or do they want to make me so? Soap, eggs, pudding, shirt, Susie, tools! Any one would think there was only one pair of hands and eyes in the house, and them was mine. Yell, yell, yell after me wherever I go. I can't have a moment's rest. I declare to goodness if I don't have somebody here to help me before next week, Reuben Frost. I won't be worried and drove to death—there!"

Mrs. Frost talked but little, seldom scolded and only on great occasions "declared to goodness." When she did the matter was settled. So in due time came "help" in the shape of the Widow Patty. Now the excellent Rachel, upon writing to her sister in the city on the subject, had stipulated expressly for a widow. "Girls," she said, "are forever giggling and would all the time be sticking up their heads when George was round; and the dear knew she'd had trouble enough already about him, and that poor, proud, stuck up, soft dawder of a Lucy Ellis, to make her sick of billing and cooing for the rest of her life; and she didn't want no old maids, because they was always so despepit—they might marry George in spite of herself; but if Ann could find her a widow now—a respectable sort of person, and the more forlorn the better, because then she'd be contented to stay, perhaps."

But not one syllable had Mrs. Frost breathed on the item of "looks;" and Patty, though a widow, was abominably pretty. Rosy and soft-eyed, with black hair that continually revealed in waves and ripples, and here and there nutmied into an actual curl, spite of combs and a widow's cap, and lovely, pouting lips that occasionally parted as if to show the world what handsome teeth there could be in a woman's mouth.

It must be confessed that Mrs. Frost looked aghast, as, with the long, cool shadows of evening, and the fresh, rippling breeze, and the dying glow in the sky, and all the other good things of twilight, Father Daniels rattled up in his patriarchal carryall and set down on her doorstep this trim, smiling, self-possessed importation, just as if she had been a barrel of sugar, or a bag of corn, or a firkin of butter, instead of the undeveloped motive power that was to overturn and annihilate those venerable institutions, the family prejudices.

"Mercy! What could Ann have been thinking about?" parenthesized Rachel to her husband. "Why, she's worse than a dozen old maids. I know she's as artful as Delilah herself."

"You might be civil to the woman, anyhow?" growled the former, as the Yankee Delilah stood in the doorway, hesitating and looking as uncomfortable as a butterfly would coming out in January—always supposing a butterfly capable of such an indiscretion.

Rachel bridled until her very cap—a triumph and a wonder of clear starching—seemed to inflate itself and be filled with doubt about those rebellious little curls in the doorway.

"Walk in, mum," said Rachel. "Probably you are the Widow Patty?"

The curls assented with a timid nod, as if half-doubtful whether it were not a sin to be that individual.

"Take off your hat, mum," went on the cap.

"I s'pose you know what you are to do? Jest make yourself handy about the house. Dear knows there's need of somebody's being handy!"

Alas! for the inexorable and bristling virtue of a clear starched cap, with a handsome son! Alas! for those mutinous ripples and ringlets that, being on a head at once poor and widowed, should have been straight and were not! Father and children stood aghast as they heard Rachel Frost—one of the kindest women that ever made puddings or dazed stockings—tell that poor little, scared, weary woman to take off her hat and make herself handy about the house!

Patty herself, in whose mind was still fresh Sister Ann's verbal photograph of her new home, was half inclined to cry; only that three years of matrimony had taught her that tears can't mend a spoiled dinner, torn clothes or a brute of a husband; and, as they brought nothing but red eyes, swelled nose and a headache, were luxuries to be sparingly indulged in. Besides, she was a plucky little soul and not disposed to cry "quarter" even to a clear-starched cap. So, while untying her bonnet strings she took an observation. Due north—that is to say exactly in front of the fire—sat father and George, both in a state of temporary idiocy, from excess of astonishment at the unaccountable gyrations of "mother," who, since her dignified reception of the "help," was revolving around the kitchen very red in the face and in an aimless way that half distracted the bound girl, who was trying to set the table. Due east was the hopeful Tommy, whistling in an exasperative manner and staring at the widow, as though she was the "What is it?" and he had just paid his twenty-five cents to Barnum in person; while, opposite, Julie and Susie were quarreling about a book and practically giving dear old Dr. Watts the lie direct about the object for which "little hands" were made. Patty smoothed out the last crease in her shawl, and walked up to the combatants.

"Are you sisters?" she asked quietly.

The children hung their heads and dropped at once the book and each other's hair. Then Patty took the little golden head on her lap and nestled the brown head in her arm, and in five minutes led them off to Fairydom, where she kept them till they were safely in Dreamland. Master Tommy stopped his shrill whistle to listen. Mrs. Frost's nervous system being relieved, her senses came back to her, and three of her short sentences put father and George out of the way and restored the bound girl to her normal condition. In half an hour that kitcheh was so quiet that pussy got up from before the fire and walked around, mewing uneasily, thinking she had made a mistake and got into the house next door, where nobody lived but prim old Miss Gilett. But the cap never relaxed an atom of its severity.

"Just as I told you," insisted the prejudiced piece of muslin. "She is an artful little hussy. Never come across one of them low-spoken women with curls in my life that wasn't. She'll be making eyes at George soon. See if she don't!"

Fate, who seems to have a special spite against widows, obstructed her ringlets on the notice of another pair of unfriendly eyes, belonging to Lucy Ellis, George's first love.

Lucy, who was older than George and had no roses and some freckles, saw the dear little woman one day running after the children, laughing, panting and rosy with health and fun and took the alarm.

"What a bold, vulgar, disagreeable woman that is who lives at your mother's!" she said to George.

"Disagreeable!" echoed the astonished young man. "Why, she's one of the nicest little women I ever saw in my life; and as for being bold and vulgar, I don't see how you can say so, Lucy."

"Oh, of course not!" answered she. "You men always do like those horrid, brazen things. She's painted, if ever I saw paint! I'm sure she's thirty, and I'll bet anything her teeth and hair are false. If you like her, however, it's all the same to me. I'm sure I don't care if you make her Mrs. George Frost!"

Oh, foolish Lucy! When the simple youth didn't so much as see that forbidden tree, what ailed you to bump his head against it, because you fancied he had a hankering after the apples. If you did not wish him to watch the riotous blood that was continually deepening from peach bloom into the flush of the rosiest sea shell and fading back again in the widow's fair cheeks, why did you hint at paint? And, oh, idiotic muslin cap! that catching him in one of his secret eye inquiries must needs read him a lecture three times a week on the folly of falling in love, the vanity of the things called widows and the utter frivolity and worthlessness of this widow in particular. Under such circumstances, even if she had been as ugly as Hecate, what could the poor man do but fall in love with her? There was no help for him. He was only obeying a law that governs our sex.

Winter had merged into spring, gray and gloomy with mists and storms still, but with fresh odors in the air and occasional faint twitters from the orchard, and everywhere sounds of trickling water and the glad sight of the fresh green grass peering timidly up from patches of snow and mud. Without all was bustle, father, George and the men getting ready to start for the upper dam, that was hourly expected "to go" in the

freshet; within, Widow Patty going around in her usual sunshiny fashion and Mrs. Frost a little more northeasterly in her movements than ever and furiously out of patience with the "freshet." George, the widow, herself and everything about her. The widow being handy, and happening to look more provokingly pretty than usual, on her was poured out the vials of her wrath.

"Don't want to interrupt" (with immense stateliness), "but if you've done looking after the men" (withering emphasis), "I'll thank you for them eggs. The puddin's waiting."

Widow Patty, who had stopped a moment in the doorway to glance after the retreating wagons, started to cross the kitchen, but half way was almost knocked out of existence by the bound girl, who rushed in, breathless and comamless, as usual, exclaiming:

"Oh! Miss Frost! hurry! hurry! Be as quick as you can. Old Dan—the creek—bags—mill—flour—men—why don't you run?" all the time dancing about the kitchen and snatching down pots and pans of all descriptions, apparently with a vague intention of making herself useful in some inexplicable way.

Mrs. Frost turned up her nose and went on with her pudding.

"She was always simple and the bustle has set her crazy, and no wonder," said she. But Widow Patty thought different, and in the course of half an hour put the girl's half-uttered sentences together, thus: "The mill, then, was in danger, and if they wanted to save anything out of it no time was to be lost." It was Mrs. Frost's turn now to exclaim:

"The mill going! My goodness! and all them things stored in the loft there; and them great, lazy men off to the upper dam, like a parcel of fools, instead of staying to home and minding their business!"

"Here, you, Sally—but what's the use of talking to her? You (turning to Patty) come along with me. I'm going to save what I can, if only to shame the men."

"But the freshet—the danger!" exclaimed Patty. "Tae—"

"Oh, stay at home, if you like!" interrupted Rachel, contemptuously. "I want no cowards or lazybones along with me. If anything happens to me it won't be of much account, anyhow. Reuben can soon get a new wife, and if you're safe I s'pose George would think it all the better if I was out of the way."

Patty flushed deeply, but she was not the woman to let Rachel Frost go alone on such an errand, and the muslin cap had scarcely reached the first turning when the obnoxious ringlets were beside her. As may be imagined, they had little disposition to converse, but even if they had the roar of the creek, now a black, swollen torrent, and the grinding, crackling and crashing of the huge masses of logs and ice rushing by would have drowned anything softer than a speaking trumpet. A few moments of quick walking brought them to the mill (one of the red, shaky structures, perched on almost every respectable brook in the State), and Patty's heart beat fast as they entered it, partly at the thought of danger and partly with the conviction that the gauntlet had, at length, been thrown down and was commenced between herself and George's mother.

The goods of which Rachel had spoken were in the upper loft and consisted of clothing and furniture—for which Rachel had no room in the homestead—hardly worth, Patty thought, all this peril of life and limb; but she made no comment, obeying in silence the brief directions of her mistress, who worked with furious zeal, apparently careless or insensible of the fact that the whole building was quivering and trembling from base to summit. Suddenly came a rush and a gurgling. Patty started.

"Gracious! what is what? The stream is rising!"

"Stuff!" panted Rachel, as with her cap off, her hair down, her face covered with dust, she tugged at the huge chest in the corner. The stream won't raise this half hour. Come here and help me. I want to get out—"

She was interrupted by a second terrific roar. Then came a gurgling and heavy thuds, as it logs striking against the building, and a sniver and tremble and then a curious swaying motion—all the time the roaring, and grinding, and gurgling growing louder, as though in some inexplicable way they had come closer to it. Patty left the trunk and ran to the window.

"What is it?" asked Rachel, still tugging at the brass handle.

No answer, only a bowed head and a figure standing motionless, as if turned to stone.

Rachel got up and went toward her.

"What is it? Has the—" then as she glanced out of the window—"Oh, my God!"

The mill was moving down the stream. Down sank Rachel Frost. All her courage gone, every thought swallowed up in fear, wailing, moaning, groveling on the floor. Then life came back to the still figure by the window, and stooping down Patty wound her arms about Rachel's neck, and all her soft wealth of curls, escaping from the comb, fell down like a veil around her who had so long made them a taunt and sin.

"God is here!" whispered Patty.

"So is death!" shuddered Rachel. "Hear it thundering and rushing outside. How shall I meet God? Will He have mercy? I had none. I came here

full of wrath and bitterness against you, who had never injured me."

"Hark!" exclaimed Patty, and, stilling the very beating of their hearts, the two women listened breathlessly. Once more—above the dash, and the gurgle, and the grinding and cracking and thundering—came that faint, shrill sound. Patty sprang to the window and threw it wide.

"Saved! saved! They see us. They have boats—they are coming. On your knees—on your knees! I say, and thank God for His mercy!" And there, in the outpouring of that solemn thanksgiving, old prejudices melted away, old grievances were forgotten, and, clinging together, the women watched as with one heart and soul, the frail boat struggling to their rescue through huge floating masses that a hundred times would have crushed it into atoms had it not been for the skill and nerve of those who guided her.

But when, after an agony of suspense that seemed a lifetime, they were at last within hearing distance of the anxious watchers a new difficulty arose. How was it possible to transfer the women to the boat? To arrest the progress of the building drifting with that mad current was, of course, not to be thought of; to fasten the boat and let it drift, even for a moment, at the mercy of floating ice, equally impracticable. Precious moments were being wasted in discussion, when with one bold stroke George brought the boat close under the window at which the women stood. "Jump!" he shouted. "It is your only chance."

"Jump!" echoed Patty, pushing Rachel forward. "Be quick—the boat is swinging round already."

Rachel glanced fearfully out on the dark heaving mass of water and shrunk back.

"No; do you go first. If a life is to be lost let it be mine. I have but a few years more. What does it matter?"

Patty hesitated. Argument was useless with Rachel, whose terror was so extreme that if left to herself she would have perished in the mill rather than make the required exertion; and even the seconds were precious, fraught as they were with the chances of life.

"Jump!" shouted George once more. Patty was a little woman, but now she seized Rachel around the waist and pushed her through the window as if she had been a child, following herself with the quickness of thought. Rachel fell into her husband's arms—Patty lighted like a bird on one of the benches, and then what a shout went up from those who had crowded to the shore and witnessed the scene, breathless and motionless with anxiety! Not one word spoke Rachel Frost in all the toilsome row homeward—not a syllable of reply did she vouchsafe to all congratulations of friends or neighbors; not once did she open her mouth till fairly within her own doors. Then she suddenly walked up to the astonished Patty and dropped on her knees before her.

"Here, where I have sinned," said she, solemnly, "I ask pardon—of God first, then of you. For all my injustice and unreasonable prejudice, you good, noble, true hearted little woman, forgive me."

Just fancy how the neighbors, who had accompanied them home, and the bound girl stared! and how the story spread through the village with as many versions as there were narrators. Mrs. Frost knelt down and asked the Widow Patty's pardon, and the widow had boxed her ears. Mrs. Frost had gone on her knees to the Widow Patty not to marry her son George, and she had vowed she would marry him in spite of her; Mrs. Frost had begged the Widow Patty on her knees, to marry George, and Patty had said she would die first. Only on one point were they all clear and unanimous; that Mrs. Frost had knelt to Patty. Of another point they were equally sure a week after ward; that the Widow Patty had become Mrs. Frost—but it was reserved for the present day and for your humble servant to give the true and authentic version of the feud of the Cap and Ringlets.—New York Mercury.

Why We Laugh.

The theory of Herbert Spencer as to the reason why we laugh when pleased or amused is the one usually adopted. He argues that all highly wrought feeling, being nervous excitement, has to spend itself somewhere, and does, in fact, spend itself in muscular action. Thus, an angry person, frequently clenches his fist, or stamps his foot, as if to beat his adversary or tread him underfoot; but when, as in the case of the feeling produced by anything pleasing or ludicrous, no appropriate muscular action is pointed out, the pent up excitement vents itself through the readiest and easiest muscular channels.—Yankee Blade.

An Old Lady's Way.

A happy and vigorous old lady in New Hampshire gives these rules for the secret of the success of eighty years' living on this planet, which brings so much care and worry to many of her sisters: "I never allow myself to fret over things I cannot help. I take a nap, and sometimes two, every day of my life. I never take my washing, ironing or baking to bed with me, and I try to oil all the various wheels of a busy life with an implicit belief that there are a brain and a heart to this great universe, and that I can trust them both."—St. Louis Republic.

Latin Races in South America.

If North America is the adopted home of the Teutonic races, not less so is South America the goal for which the Latin peoples make. The great preponderance of English, Irish and Germans which we see in the northern continent has no existence in the southern. It is to Italy, Portugal and Spain that countries south of the equator look for their reinforcements. Twenty years ago the foreign-born Portuguese in Brazil were 49.8 per cent. of the whole, the Germans 18.8, but of late years the relative numbers have undergone a change.

The overflowing population of Italy has chosen Brazil for its settlements. From 1883 to 1887 the Italian immigrants were 33.5 per cent. of the whole number; the Portuguese come next, with 29.9, and the Germans have dropped to 5.9 per cent., being almost equaled by the Spaniards, with 4.7. In Argentine the Italian ascendancy is even more marked. From 1879 to 1888, 67.4 per cent. of the immigrants were Italians, 13.2 were Spaniards, 8.9 Frenchmen and but 1.7 Englishmen. In 1867 the population of 600,000 in round figures contained no less than 380,000 Italians, and in 1890 alone 39,122 were added to it.—Edinburgh Review.

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