

Fishin'.

Van was glad to see the first signs of spring - skunk cabbage unfolding down in the swamp. When the red maples started to flower Van got out his fishing tackle, and when April 15th came he was ready.

The hermit told him that the brook running through his farm was a good trout stream and invited him to try it. When Van reached the backwoods farm he found the lower meadow alive with red-wings blackbirds. The hermit was sunning himself out on the low porch.

"Do you feel equal to fishing?" asked Van.

"No, I guess not. My fishing days

are over. I haven't fished for two years or more. It's a wonder Clare isn't here. She always gets up here bright and early the first day the season opens, and here she comes now."

Clare whizzed up the lane, jumped out of the car and came toward them laughing.

"Good for you!" she said to Sam. "Now I'll have company, and I'll show you the best pools." She was good to look at in her sport clothes, khaki short skirt, Norfolk jacket, high rubber boots, and carrying her fishing tackle. Kazia lifted a big basket filled to the brim, out of the car, and with a nod made for the kitchen door. 93.

"Come on," said Clare to Van.

"We'll catch some trout for dinner," and she strode rapidly down the hill.

They followed the brook till they reached a pool. "The best in the stream," said Clare, except one a few yards down, you'd better take that

They didn't see each other for almost two hours, then Clare walked down to where Van was just fetching in his third good-sized trout.

"I've got two," said Clare, -

"that's enough for one day - with your three we'll have a feast, unless you want to take yours home."

"No need," said Van. "Sike was off at daybreak. Joe will cook his catch for supper." 94

They sat down on a sloping rock above the brook to rest.

"While I have the chance," said Clare, "I want to tell you how much I appreciate your visits to father. You know what a lonely old man he is, and he doesn't encourage anyone to visit him, but he likes you, and I know your visits to him are welcome. He has shut himself so away from people they call him the hermit. He likes to be by himself with his thoughts of mother. You know they were married sixty years, and never a cross word to each other. Sounds impossible, doesn't it, but father said so, and he never says anything

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but the truth. They were bound up in each other. Life here was simple to them, and their love was simple too. They loved each other always. They hadn't counted on me butting in - They didn't want me. I was a surprize package," then her laugh pealed out merry and long. "You look so surprized! They liked me all right, and were good to me - father let me tag at his heels wherever he went, but they could have got along very well without me."

Van looked at Clare with admiration in his eyes. "A natural woman," he thought.

When they reached the house the hermit was dozing in his rocking
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chair, and Kazia was preparing dinner. Something that smelled good was bubbling in a big kettle, and Kazia was measuring out the coffee.

Vom cleaned the trout. Kazia fried it, and they all ate heartily.

The next week Clare and Vom went fishing again. "And this is the last time for a while. I have some house cleaning to do," said Clare.

"And I have a garden to plant," said Vom.

Vom would never forget that first spring on his farm, watching the budding flowers and the return of spring birds. At the time the pussywillows came out, the spicebushes by the brook budded the bloodroot sprang up. By the

end of April, hepaticas raised their pretty heads. On the north side of a wooded hill above a running brook Van found patches of trailing arbutus. He found a meadow full of blooming marsh-marigolds, and picked the green leaves for Zoe to cook.

When the old apple orchard was in full bloom, the catbirds, house-wrens, wood-thrushes and chewinks came back, and a Phoebebird built her nest under the eaves of his cabin.

And now the Nurserymen arrived to set out the fruit trees Van had ordered - apples, pears, peaches, plums, cherries; fine healthy young trees that he could watch grow the rest of his life.

When Van planted his garden, Zoe and Sike teased him about its size.

"Big enough," said Van. "The only reason I'm planting potatoes is to see how many I'll get in each hill when I dig them."

He planted three rows of corn. "That," he said, "is for the boys when they come up to camp. About Decoration Day I'll set out a few tomato plants."