Paine Albert Bigelow

The Lucky Piece: A Tale of the North Woods

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Содержание

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PROLOGUE

There is a sharp turn just above the hill. The North Elba stage sometimes hesitates there before taking the plunge into the valley below.

But this was late September. The morning was brisk, the mountains glorified, the tourists were going home. The four clattering, snorting horses swung into the turn and made straight for the brow – the stout, ruddy-faced driver holding hard on the lines, but making no further effort to check them. Then the boy in the front seat gave his usual "Hey! look there!" and, the other passengers obeying, as they always did, saw something not especially related to Algonquin, or Tahawus, or Whiteface – the great mountains whose slopes were ablaze with autumn, their peaks already tipped with snow – that was not, indeed, altogether Adirondack scenery. Where the bend came, at the brink, a little weather-beaten cottage cornered – a place with apple trees and some faded summer flowers. In the road in front was a broad flat stone, and upon it a single figure – a little girl of not more than

eight – her arm extended toward the approaching stage, in her hand a saucer of berries.

The tourists had passed a number of children already, but this one was different. The others had been mostly in flocks – soiled, stringy-haired little mountaineers, who had gathered to see the stage go by. The smooth, oval face of this child, rich under the tan, was clean, the dark hair closely brushed – her dress a simple garment, though of a fashion unfavored by the people of the hills. All this could be comprehended in the brief glance allowed the passengers; also the deep wistful look which followed them as the stage whirled by without stopping.

A lady in the back seat (she had been in Italy) murmured something about a "child Madonna." Another said, "Poor little thing!"

But the boy in the front seat had caught the driver's arm and was demanding that he stop the stage.

"I want to get out!" he repeated, with determination. "I want to buy those berries! Stop!"

The driver could not stop just there, even had he wished to do so, which he did not. They were already a third of the way down, and the hill was a serious matter. So the boy leaned out, looking back, to make sure the moment's vision had not faded, and when the stage struck level ground, was out and running, long before the horses had been brought to a stand-still.

"You wait for me!" he commanded. "I'll be back in a second!" Then he pushed rapidly up the long hill, feeling in his pockets

as he ran.

The child had not moved from her place, and stood curiously regarding the approaching boy. He was considerably older than she was, as much as six years. Her wistful look gave way to one of timidity as he came near. She drew the saucer of berries close to her and looked down. Then, puffing and panting, he stood there, still rummaging in his pockets, and regaining breath for words.

"Say," he began, "I want your berries, you know, only, you see, I – I thought I had some money, but I haven't – not a cent – only my lucky piece. My mother's in the stage and I could get it from her, but I don't want to go back." He made a final, wild, hopeless search through a number of pockets, looking down, meanwhile, at the little bowed figure standing mutely before him. "Look here," he went on, "I'm going to give you my lucky piece. Maybe it'll bring luck to you, too. It did to me – I caught an awful lot of fish up here this summer. But you mustn't spend it or give it away, 'cause some day when I come back up here I'll want it again. You keep it for me – that's what you do. Keep it safe. When I come back, I'll give you anything you like for it. Whatever you want – only you must keep it. Will you?"

He held out the worn Spanish silver piece which a school chum had given him "for luck" when they had parted in June. But the little brown hand clung to the berries and made no effort to take it.

"Oh, you must take it," he said. "I should lose it anyway. I always lose things. You can take care of it for me. Likely I'll be

up again next year. Anyway, I'll come some time, and when I do I'll give you whatever you like in exchange for it."

She did not resist when he took the berries and poured them into his cap. Then the coin was pushed into one of her brown hands and he was pressing her fingers tightly upon it. When she dared to look up, he had called, "Good-bye!" and was halfway down the hill, the others looking out of the stage, waving him to hurry.

She watched him, saw him climb in with the driver and fling his hand toward her as the stage rounded into the wood and disappeared. Still she did not move, but watched the place where it had vanished, as if she thought it might reappear, as if presently that sturdy boy might come hurrying up the hill. Then slowly – very slowly, as if she held some living object that might escape – she unclosed her hand and looked at the treasure within, turning it over, wondering at the curious markings. The old look came into her face again, but with it an expression which had not been there before. It was some hint of responsibility, of awakening. Vaguely she felt that suddenly and by some marvelous happening she had been linked with a new and wonderful world. All at once she turned and fled through the gate, to the cottage.

"Mother!" she cried at the door, "Oh, Mother! Something has happened!" and, flinging herself into the arms of the faded woman who sat there, she burst into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER I
BUT PALADINS
RIDE FAR BETWEEN

Frank rose and, plunging his hands into his pockets, lounged over to the wide window and gazed out on the wild March storm which was drenching and dismaying Fifth Avenue. A weaving throng of carriages, auto-cars and delivery wagons beat up and down against it, were driven by it from behind, or buffeted from many directions at the corners. Coachmen, footmen and drivers huddled down into their waterproofs; pedestrians tried to breast the rain with their umbrellas and frequently lost them. From where he stood the young man could count five torn and twisted derelicts soaking in gutters. They seemed so very wet – everything did. When a stage – that relic of another day – lumbered by, the driver on top, only half sheltered by his battered oil-skins, seemed wetter and more dismal than any other object. It all had an art value, certainly, but there were pleasanter things within. The young man turned to the luxurious room, with its wide blazing fire and the young girl who sat looking into the glowing depths.

"Do you know, Constance," he said, "I think you are a bit hard on me." Then he drifted into a very large and soft chair near her, and, stretching out his legs, stared comfortably into the fire as if

the fact were no such serious matter, after all.

The girl smiled quietly. She had a rich oval face, with a deep look in her eyes, at once wistful and eager, and just a bit restless, as if there were problems there among the coals – questions she could not wholly solve.

"I did not think of it in that way," she said, "and you should not call me Constance, not now, and you are Mr. Weatherby. I do not know how we ever began – the other way. I was only a girl, of course, and did not know America so well, or realize – a good many things."

The young man stirred a little without looking up.

"I know," he assented; "I realize that six months seems a long period to a – to a young person, and makes a lot of difference, sometimes. I believe you have had a birthday lately."

"Yes, my eighteenth – my majority. That ought to make a difference."

"Mine didn't to me. I'm just about the same now as I was then, and – "

"As you always will be. That is just the trouble."

"I was going to say, as I always had been."

"Which would not be true. You were different, as a boy."

"And who gave you that impression, pray?"

The girl flushed a little.

"I mean, you must have been," she added, a trifle inconsequently. "Boys always are. You had ambitions, then."

"Well, yes, and I gratified them. I wanted to be captain of my

college team, and I was. We held the championship as long as I held the place. I wanted to make a record in pole-vaulting, and I did. It hasn't been beaten since. Then I wanted the Half-mile Cup, and I won that, too. I think those were my chief aspirations when I entered college, and when I came out there were no more worlds to conquer. Incidentally I carried off the honors for putting into American some of Mr. Horace's justly popular odes, edited the college paper for a year, and was valedictorian of the class. But those were trivial things. It was my prowess that gave me standing and will remain one of the old school's traditions long after this flesh has become dust."

The girl's eyes had grown brighter as he recounted his achievements. She could not help stealing a glance of admiration at the handsome fellow stretched out before her, whose athletic deeds had made him honored among his kind. Then she smiled.

"Perhaps you were a pillar of modesty, too," she commented, "once."

He laughed – a gentle, lazy laugh in which she joined – and presently she added:

"Of course, I know you did those things. That is just it. You could do anything, and be anything, if you only would. Oh, but you don't seem to care! You seem satisfied, comfortable and good-naturedly indifferent; if you were poor, I should say idle – I suppose the trouble is there. You have never been poor and lonely and learned to want things. So, of course, you never learned to care for – for anything."

Her companion leaned toward her – his handsome face full of a light that was not all of the fire.

"I have, for you," he whispered.

The girl's face lighted, too. Her eyes seemed to look into some golden land which she was not quite willing to enter.

"No," she demurred gently. "I am not sure of that. Let us forget about that. As you say, a half-year has been a long time – to a child. I had just come from abroad then with my parents, and I had been most of the time in a school where girls are just children, no matter what their ages. When we came home, I suppose I did not know just what to do with my freedom. And then, you see, Father and Mother liked you, and let you come to the house, and when I first saw you and knew you – when I got to know you, I mean – I was glad to have you come, too. Then we rode and drove and golfed all those days about Lenox – all those days – your memory is poor, very poor, but you may recall those October days, last year, when I had just come home – those days, you know – "

Again the girl's eyes were looking far into a fair land which queens have willingly died to enter, while the young man had pulled his chair close, as one eager to lead her across the border.

"No," she went on – speaking more to herself than to him, "I am older, now – ages older, and trying to grow wise, and to see things as they are. Riding, driving and golfing are not all of life. Life is serious – a sort of battle, in which one must either lead or follow or merely look on. You were not made to follow,

and I could not bear to have you look on. I always thought of you as a leader. During those days at Lenox you seemed to me a sort of king, or something like that, at play. You see I was just a schoolgirl with ideals, keeping the shield of Launcelot bright. I had idealized him so long – the one I should meet some day. It was all very foolish, but I had pictured him as a paladin in armor, who would have diversions, too, but who would lay them aside to go forth and redress wrong. You see what a silly child I was, and how necessary it was for me to change when I found that I had been dreaming, that the one I had met never expected to conquer or do battle for a cause – that the diversions were the end and sum of his desire, with maybe a little love-making as a part of it all."

"A little – " Her companion started to enter protest, but did not continue. The girl was staring into the fire as she spoke and seemed only to half remember his existence. For the most part he had known her as one full of the very joy of living, given to seeing life from its cheerful, often from its humorous, side. Yet he knew her to be volatile, a creature of moods. This one, which he had learned to know but lately, would pass. He watched her, a little troubled yet fascinated by it all, his whole being stirred by the charm of her presence.

"One so strong – so qualified – should lead," she continued slowly, "not merely look on. Oh, if I were a man I should lead – I should ride to victory! I should be a – a – I do not know what," she concluded helplessly, "but I should ride to victory."

He restrained any impulse he may have had to smile, and

presently said, rather quietly:

"I suppose there are avenues of conquest to-day, as there were when the world was young. But I am afraid they are so crowded with the rank and file that paladins ride few and far between. You know," he added, more lightly, "knight-errantry has gone out of fashion, and armor would be a clumsy thing to wear – crossing Broadway, for instance."

She laughed happily – her sense of humor was never very deeply buried.

"I know," she nodded, "we do not meet many Galahads these days, and most of the armor is make-believe, yet I am sure there are knights whom we do not recognize, with armor which we do not see."

The young man sat up a bit straighter in his chair and assumed a more matter-of-fact tone.

"Suppose we put aside allegory," he said, "and discuss just how you think a man – myself, for instance – could set the world afire – make it wiser and better, I mean."

The embers were dying down, and she looked into them a little longer before replying. Then, presently:

"Oh, if I were only a man!" she repeated. "There is so much – so many things – for a man to do. Discovery, science, feats of engineering, the professions, the arts, philanthropy – oh, everything! And for us, so little!"

A look of amusement grew about the young man's mouth. He had seen much more of the world than she; was much older in a

manner not reckoned by years.

"We do not monopolize it all, you know. Quite a few women are engaged in the professions and philanthropy; many in the arts."

"The arts, yes, but I am without talent. I play because I have been taught, and because I have practiced – oh, so hard! But God never intended that the world should hear me. I love painting and literature, and all those things. But I cannot create them. I can only look on. I have thought of the professions – I have thought a great deal about medicine and the law. But I am afraid those would not do, either. I cannot understand law papers, even the very simple ones Father has tried to explain to me. And I am not careful enough with medicines – I almost poisoned poor Mamma last week with something that looked like her headache drops and turned out to be a kind of preparation for bruises. Besides, somehow I never can quite see myself as a lawyer in court, or going about as a doctor. Lawyers always have to go to court, don't they? I am afraid I should be so confused, and maybe be arrested. They arrest lawyers don't they, sometimes?"

"They should," admitted the young man, "more often than they do. I don't believe you ought to take the risk, at any rate. I somehow can't think of you either as a lawyer or a doctor. Those things don't seem to fit you."

"That's just it. Nothing fits me. Oh, I am not even as much as I seem to be, yet can be nothing else!" she burst out rather incoherently, then somewhat hastily added: "There is

philanthropy, of course. I could do good, I suppose, and Father would furnish the money. But I could never undertake things. I should just have to follow, and contribute. Some one would always have to lead. Some one who could go among people and comprehend their needs, and know how to go to work to supply them. I should do the wrong thing and make trouble – "

"And maybe get arrested – "

They laughed together. They were little more than children, after all.

"I know there *are* women who lead in such things," she went on. "They come here quite often, and Father gives them a good deal. But they always seem so self-possessed and capable. I stand in awe of them, and I always wonder how they came to be made so wise and brave, and why most of us are so different. I always wonder."

The young man regarded her very tenderly.

"I am glad you are different," he said earnestly. "My mother is a little like that, and of course I think the world of her. Still, I am glad you are different."

He leaned over and lifted an end of log with the tongs. A bright blaze sprang up, and for a while they watched it without speaking. It seemed to Frank Weatherby that nothing in the world was so worth while as to be there near her – to watch her there in the firelight that lingered a little to bring out the rich coloring of her rare young face, then flickered by to glint among the deep frames along the wall, to lose itself at last amid the heavy hangings. He

was careful not to renew their discussion, and hoped she had forgotten it. There had been no talk of these matters during their earlier acquaintance, when she had but just returned with her parents from a long sojourn abroad. That had been at Lenox, where they had filled the autumn season with happy recreation, and a love-making which he had begun half in jest and then, all at once, found that for him it meant more than anything else in the world. Not that anything had hitherto meant a great deal. He had been an only boy, with a fond mother, and there was a great deal of money between them. It had somehow never been a part of his education that those who did not need to strive should do so. His mother was a woman of ideas, but this had not been one of them. Perhaps as a boy he had dreamed his dreams, but somehow there had never seemed a reason for making them reality. The idea of mental and spiritual progress, of being a benefactor of mankind was well enough, but it was somehow an abstract thing – something apart from him – at least, from the day of youth and love.

CHAPTER II
OUT IN THE BLOWY WET WEATHER

The room lightened a little and Constance rose and walked to the window.

"It isn't raining so hard, any more," she said. "I think I shall go for a walk in the Park."

The young man by the fire looked a little dismayed. The soft chair and the luxurious room were so much more comfortable than the Park on such a day as this.

"Don't you think we'd better put it off?" he asked, walking over beside her. "It's still raining a good deal, and it's quite windy."

"I said that *I* was going for a walk in the Park," the girl reiterated. "I shall run, too. When I was a child I always loved to run through a storm. It seemed like flying. You can stay here by the fire and keep nice and cozy. Mamma will be glad to come in and talk to you. She will not urge you to do and be things. She thinks you well enough as you are. She says you have repose, and that you rest her – she means, of course, after a session with me."

"I have the greatest regard for your mother – I might even say sympathy. Indeed, when I consider the serene yet sterling qualities of both your parents, I find myself speculating on the

origin of your own – eh – rather unusual and, I hasten to add, wholly charming personality."

She smiled, but he thought a little sadly.

"I know," she said, "I am a trial, and, oh, I want to be such a comfort to them!" Then she added, somewhat irrelevantly, "But Father made his fight, too. It was in trade, of course, but it was a splendid battle, and he won. He was a poor boy, you know, and the struggle was bitter. You should stay and ask him to tell you about it. He will be home presently."

He adopted her serious tone.

"I think myself I should stay and have an important talk with your father," he said. "I have been getting up courage to speak for some time."

She affected not to hear, and presently they were out in the wild weather, protected by waterproofs and one huge umbrella, beating their way toward the Fifty-ninth Street entrance to Central Park. Not many people were there, and, once within, they made their way by side paths, running and battling with the wind, laughing and shouting like children, until at last they dropped down on a wet bench to recover breath.

"Oh," she panted, "that was fine! How I should like to be in the mountains such weather as this. I dream of being there almost every night. I can hardly wait till we go."

Her companion assented rather doubtfully.

"I have been in the mountains in March," he said. "It was pretty nasty. I suppose you have spent summers there. I believe

you went to the Pyrenees."

"But I know the mountains in March, too – in every season, and I love them in all weathers. I love the storms, when the snow and sleet and wind come driving down, and the trees crack, and the roads are blocked, and the windows are covered with ice; when there's a big drift at the door that you must climb over, and that stays there almost till the flowers bloom. And when the winter is breaking, and the great rains come, and the wind, – oh, it's no such little wind as this, but wind that tears up big trees and throws them about for fun, and the limbs fly, and it's dangerous to go out unless you look everywhere, and in the night something strikes the roof, and you wake up and lie there and wonder if the house itself won't be carried away soon, perhaps to the ocean, and turn into a ship that will sail until it reaches a country where the sun shines and there are palm trees, and men who wear turbans, and where there are marble houses with gold on them. And in that country where the little house might land, a lot of people come down to the shore and they kneel down and say, 'The sea has brought a princess to rule over us.' Then they put a crown on her head and lead her to one of the marble and gold houses, so she could rule the country and live happy ever after."

As the girl ran on, her companion sat motionless, listening – meanwhile steadying their big umbrella to keep their retreat cozy. When she paused, he said:

"I did not know that you knew the hills in winter. You have seen and felt much more than I. And," he added reflectively, "I

should not think, with such fancy as yours, that you need want for a vocation; you should write."

She shook her head rather gravely. "It is not fancy," she said, "at least not imagination. It is only reading. Every child with a fairy-book for companionship, and nature, rides on the wind or follows subterranean passages to a regal inheritance. Such things mean nothing afterward. I shall never write."

They made their way to the Art Museum to wander for a little through the galleries. In the Egyptian room they lingered by those glass cases where men and women who died four thousand years ago lie embalmed in countless wrappings and cryptographic cartonnage – exhibits, now, for the curious eye, waiting whatever further change the upheavals of nations or the progress of an alien race may bring to pass.

They spoke in subdued voice as they regarded one slender covering which enclosed "A Lady of the House of Artun" – trying to rebuild in fancy her life and surroundings of that long ago time. Then they passed to the array of fabrics – bits of old draperies and clothing, even dolls' garments – that had found the light after forty centuries, and they paused a little at the cases of curious lamps and ornaments and symbols of a vanished people.

"Oh, I should like to explore," she murmured, as she looked at them. "I should like to lead an expedition to uncover ancient cities, somewhere in Egypt, or India, or Yucatan. I should like to find things right where they were left by the people who last saw them – not here, all arranged and classified, with numbers

pasted on them. If I were a man, I should be an explorer, or maybe a discoverer of new lands – places where no one had ever been before." She turned to him eagerly, "Why don't you become an explorer, and find old cities or – or the North Pole, or something?"

Mr. Weatherby, who was studying a fine scarab, nodded.

"I have thought of it, I believe. I think the idea appealed to me once. But, don't you see, it takes a kind of genius for those things. Discoverers are born, I imagine, as well as poets. Besides" – he lowered his voice to a pitch that was meant for tenderness – "at the North Pole I should be so far from you – unless," he added, reflectively, "we went there on our wedding journey."

"Which we are as likely to do as to go anywhere," she said, rather crossly. They passed through the corridor of statuary and up the stairway to wander among the paintings of masters old and young. By a wall where the works of Van Dyck, Rembrandt and Velasquez hung, she turned on him reproachfully.

"These men have left something behind them," she commented – "something which the world will preserve and honor. What will you leave behind you?"

"I fear it won't be a picture," he said humbly. "I can't imagine one of my paintings being hung here or any place else. They might hang the painter, of course, though not just here, I fancy."

In another room they lingered before a painting of a boy and a girl driving home the cows – Israel's "Bashful Suitor." The girl contemplated it through half-closed lids.

"You did not look like that," she said. "You were a self-possessed big boy, with smart clothes, and an air of ownership that comes of having a lot of money. You were a good-hearted boy, rather impulsive, I should think, but careless and spoiled. Had Israel chosen you it would have been the girl who was timid, not you."

He laughed easily.

"Now, how can you possibly know what I looked like as a boy?" he demanded. "Perhaps I was just such a slim, diffident little chap as that one. Time works miracles, you know."

"But even time has its limitations. I know perfectly well how you looked at that boy's age. Sometimes I see boys pass along in front of the house, and I say: 'There, he was just like that!'"

Frank felt his heart grow warm. It seemed to him that her confession showed a depth of interest not acknowledged before.

"I'll try to make amends, Constance," he said, "by being a little nearer what you would like to have me now," and could not help adding, "only you'll have to decide just what particular thing you want me to be, and please don't have the North Pole in it."

Out in the blowy wet weather again, by avenues and by-ways, they raced through the Park, climbing up to look over at the wind-driven water of the old reservoir, clambering down a great wet bowlder on the other side – the girl as agile and sure of foot as a boy. Then they pushed toward Eighth Avenue, missed the entrance and wandered about in a labyrinth of bridle-paths and footways, suddenly found themselves back at the big bowlder

again, scrambled up it warm and flushed with the exertion, and dropped down for a moment to breathe and to get their bearings.

"I always did get lost in this place," he said. "I have never been able to cross the Park and be sure just where I was coming out." Then they laughed together happily, glad to be lost – glad it was raining and blowing – glad, as children are always glad, to be alive and together.

They were more successful, this time, and presently took an Eighth Avenue car, going down – not because they especially wanted to go down, but because at that time in the afternoon the down cars were emptier. They had no plans as to where they were going, it being their habit on such excursions to go without plans and to come when the spirit moved.

They transferred at the Columbus statue, and she stood looking up at it as they waited for a car.

"That is my kind of a discoverer," she said; "one who sails out to find a new world."

"Yes," he agreed, "and the very next time there is a new world to be discovered I am going to do it."

The lights were already coming out along Broadway, this gloomy wet evening, and the homing throng on the pavements were sheltered by a gleaming, tossing tide of umbrellas. Frank and Constance got out at Madison Square, at the Worth monument, and looked down toward the "Flat-iron" – a pillar of light, looming into the mist.

"Everywhere are achievements," said the girl. "That may not

be a thing of beauty, but it is a great piece of engineering. They have nothing like those buildings abroad – at least I have not seen them. Oh, this is a wonderful country, and it is those splendid engineers who have helped to make it so. I know of one young man who is going to be an engineer. He was just a poor boy – so poor – and has worked his way. He would never take help from anybody. I shall see him this summer, when we go to the mountains. He is to be not far away. Oh, you don't know how proud I shall be of him, and how I want to see him and tell him so. Wouldn't you be proud of a boy like that, a – a son or – a brother, for instance?"

She looked up at him expectantly – a dash of rain glistening on her cheek and in the little tangle of hair about her temples. She seemed a bit disappointed that he was not more responsive.

"Wouldn't you honor him?" she demanded, "and love him, too – a boy who had made his way alone?"

"Oh, why, y-yes, of course – only, you know, I hope he won't spend his life building these things" – indicating with his head the great building which they were now passing, the gusts of wind tossing them and making it impossible to keep the umbrella open.

"Oh, but he's to build railroads and great bridges – not houses at all."

"Um – well, that's better. By the way, I believe you go to the Adirondacks this summer."

"Yes, Father has a cottage – he calls it a camp – there. That is, he had. He says he supposes it's a wreck by this time. He hasn't

seen it, you know, for years."

"I suppose there is no law against my going to the Adirondacks, too, is there?" he asked, rather meekly. "You know, I should like to see that young man of yours. Maybe I might get some idea of what I ought to be like to make you proud of me. I haven't been there since I was a boy, but I remember I liked it then. No doubt I'd like it this year if – if that young man is there. I suppose I could find a place to stay not more than twenty miles or so from your camp, so you could send word, you know, any time you were getting proud of me."

She laughed – he thought a little nervously.

"Why, yes," she admitted, "there's a sort of hotel or lodge or something, not far away. I know that from Father. He said we might have to stay there awhile until our camp is ready. Oh, but this talk of the mountains makes me want to be there. I wish I were starting to-night!"

It seemed a curious place to discuss a summer's vacation – under a big wind-tossed umbrella, along Broadway on a March evening. Perhaps the incongruity of it became more manifest with the girl's last remark, for her companion chuckled.

"Pretty disagreeable up there to-night," he objected; "besides, I thought you liked all this a few minutes ago."

"Yes, oh, yes; I do, of course! It's all so big and bright and wonderful, though after all there is nothing like the woods, and the wind and rain in the hills."

What a strange creature she was, he thought. The world was so

big and new to her, she was confused and disturbed by the wonder of it and its possibilities. She longed to have a part in it all. She would settle down presently and see things as they were – not as she thought they were. He was not altogether happy over the thought of the young man who had made his way and was to be a civil engineer. He had not heard of this friend before. Doubtless it was some one she had known in childhood. He was willing that Constance should be proud of him; that was right and proper, but he hoped she would not be too proud or too personal in her interest. Especially if the young man was handsome. She was so likely to be impulsive, even extreme, where her sympathies were concerned. It was so difficult to know what she would do next.

Constance, meanwhile, had been doing some thinking and observing on her own account. Now she suddenly burst out: "Did you notice the headlines on the news-stand we just passed? The bill that the President has just vetoed? I don't know just what the bill is, but Father is so against it. He'll think the President is fine for vetoing it!" A moment later she burst out eagerly, "Oh, why don't you go in for politics and do something great like that? A politician has so many opportunities. I forgot all about politics."

He laughed outright.

"Try to forget it again," he urged. "Politicians have opportunities, as you say; but some of the men who have improved what seemed the best ones have gone to jail."

"But others had to send them there. You could be one of the noble ones!"

"Yes, of course, but you see I've just made up my mind to work my way through a school of technology and become a civil engineer, so you'll be proud of me – that is, after I've uncovered a few buried cities and found the North Pole. I couldn't do those things so well if I went into political reform." Then they laughed again, inconsequently, and so light-hearted she seemed that Frank wondered if her more serious moods were not for the most part make-believe, to tease him.

At Union Square they crossed by Seventeenth Street back to Fifth Avenue. When they had tacked their way northward for a dozen or more blocks, the cheer of an elaborate dining-room streamed out on the wet pavement.

"It's a good while till dinner," Frank observed. "If your stern parents would not mind, I should suggest that we go in there and have, let me see – something hot and not too filling – I think an omelette soufflé would be rather near it, don't you?"

"Wonderful!" she agreed, "and, do you know, Father said the other day – of course, he's a gentle soul and too confiding – but I heard him say that you were one person he was perfectly willing I should be with, anywhere. I don't see why, unless it is that you know the city so well."

"Mr. Deane's judgment is not to be lightly questioned," avowed the young man, as they turned in the direction of the lights.

"Besides," she supplemented, "I'm so famished. I should never be able to wait for dinner. I can smell that omelette now. And

may I have pie – pumpkin pie – just one piece? You know we never had pie abroad, and my whole childhood was measured by pumpkin pies. May I have just a small piece?"

Half an hour later, when they came out and again made their way toward the Deane mansion, the wind had died and the rain had become a mild drizzle. As they neared the entrance of her home they noticed a crouching figure on the lower step. The light from across the street showed that it was a woman, dressed in shabby black, wearing a drabbled hat, decorated with a few miserable flowers. She hardly noticed them, and her face was heavy and expressionless. The girl shrank away and was reluctant to enter.

"It's all right," he whispered to her. "That is the Island type. She wants nothing but money. It's a chance for philanthropy of a very simple kind." He thrust a bill into the poor creature's hand. The girl's eye caught a glimpse of its denomination.

"Oh," she protested, "you should not give like that. I've heard it does much more harm than good."

"I know," he assented. "My mother says so. But I've never heard that she or anybody else has discovered a way really to help these people."

They stood watching the woman, who had muttered something doubtless intended for thanks and was tottering slowly down the street. The girl held fast to her companion's arm, and it seemed to him that she drew a shade closer as they mounted the steps.

"I suppose it's so, about doing them harm," she said, "and I don't think you will ever lead as a philanthropist. Still, I'm glad you gave her the money. I think I shall let you stay to dinner for that."

CHAPTER III
THE DEEP WOODS OF ENCHANTMENT

That green which is known only to June lay upon the hills. Algonquin, Tahawus and Whiteface – but a little before grim with the burden of endless years – rousing from their long, white sleep, had put on, for the millionth time, perhaps, the fleeting mantle of youth. Spring lay on the mountain tops – summer filled the valleys, with all the gradations between.

To the young man who drove the hack which runs daily between Lake Placid and Spruce Lodge the scenery was not especially interesting. He had driven over the road regularly since earlier in the month, and had seen the hills acquire glory so gradually that this day to him was only as other days – a bit more pleasant than some, but hardly more exciting. With his companion – his one passenger – it was a different matter. Mr. Frank Weatherby had occupied a New York sleeper the night before, awaking only at daybreak to find the train puffing heavily up a long Adirondack grade – to look out on a wet tangle of spruce, and fir, and hardwood, and vine, mingled with great bowlders and fallen logs, and everywhere the emerald moss, set agleam where the sunrise filtered through. With his curtain raised a little, he had watched it from the window of his berth,

and the realization had grown upon him that nowhere else in the world was there such a wood, though he wondered if the marvel and enchantment of it might not lie in the fact that somewhere in its green depths he would find Constance Deane.

He had dressed hurriedly and through the remainder of the distance had occupied the rear platform, drinking in the glory of it all – the brisk, life-giving air – the mystery and splendor of the forest. He had been here once, ten years ago, as a boy, but then he had been chiefly concerned with the new rod he had brought and the days of sport ahead. He had seen many forests since then, and the wonder of this one spoke to him now in a language not comprehended in those far-off days.

During the drive across the open farm country which lies between Lake Placid and Spruce Lodge he had confided certain of his impressions to his companion – a pale-haired theological student, who as driver of the Lodge hack was combining a measure of profit with a summer's vacation. The enthusiasm of his passenger made the quiet youth responsive, even communicative, when his first brief diffidence had worn away. He had been awarded this employment because of a previous knowledge acquired on his father's farm in Pennsylvania. A number of his fellow students were serving as waiters in the Lake Placid hotels. When pressed, he owned that his inclination for the pulpit had not been in the nature of a definite call. He had considered newspaper work and the law. A maiden aunt had entered into his problem. She had been willing to supply certain

funds which had influenced the clerical decision. Perhaps it was just as well. Having thus established his identity, he proceeded to indicate landmarks of special interest, pointing out Whiteface, Colden and Elephant's Back – also Tahawus and Algonquin – calling the last two Marcy and McIntyre, as is the custom to-day. The snow had been on the peaks, he said, almost until he came. It must have looked curious, he thought, when the valleys were already green. Then they drove along in silence for a distance – the passive youth lightly flicking the horses to discourage a number of black flies that had charged from a clump of alder. Frank, supremely content in the glory of his surroundings and the prospect of being with Constance in this fair retreat, did not find need for many words. The student likewise seemed inclined to reflect. His passenger was first to rouse himself.

"Many people at the Lodge yet?" he asked.

"N-no – mostly transients. They climb Marcy and McIntyre from here. It's the best place to start from."

"I see. I climbed Whiteface myself ten years ago. We had a guide – an old chap named Lawless. My mother and I were staying at Saranac and she let me go with a party from there. I thought it great sport then, and made up my mind to be a guide when I grew up. I don't think I'd like it so well now."

"They have the best guides at the Lodge," commented the driver. "The head guide there is the best in the mountains. This is his first year at the Lodge. He was with the Adirondack Club before."

"I suppose it couldn't be my old hero, Lawless?"

"No; this is a young man. I don't just remember his last name, but most people call him Robin."

"Um, not Robin Hood, I hope."

The theological student shook his head. The story of the Sherwood bandit had not been a part of his education.

"It doesn't sound like that," he said. "It's something like Forney, or Farham. He's a student, too – a civil engineer – but he was raised in these hills and has been guiding since he was a boy. He's done it every summer to pay his way through college. Next year he graduates, and they say he's the best in the school. Of course, guides get big pay – as much as three dollars a day, some of them – besides their board."

The last detail did not interest Mr. Weatherby. He was suddenly recalling a wet, blowy March evening on Broadway – himself under a big umbrella with Constance Deane. She was speaking, and he could recall her words quite plainly: "I know one young man who is going to be an engineer. He was a poor boy – so poor – and has worked his way. I shall see him this summer. You don't know how proud I shall be of him."

To Frank the glory of the hills faded a little, and the progress of the team seemed unduly slow.

"Suppose we move up a bit," he suggested to the gentle youth with the reins, and the horses were presently splashing through a shallow pool left by recent showers.

"He's a very strong fellow," the informant continued, "and

handsome. He's going to marry the daughter of the man who owns the Lodge when he gets started as an engineer. She's a pretty girl, and smart. Her mother's dead, and she's her father's housekeeper. She teaches school sometimes, too. They'll make a fine match."

The glory of the hills renewed itself, and though the horses had dropped once more into a lazy jog, Frank did not suggest urging them.

"I believe there is a young lady guest at the Lodge," he ventured a little later – a wholly unnecessary remark – he having received a letter from Constance on her arrival there, with her parents, less than a week before.

The youth nodded.

"Two," he said. "One I brought over yesterday – from Utica, I think she was – and another last week, from New York, with her folks. Their names are Deane, and they own a camp up here. They're staying at the Lodge till it's ready."

"I see; and did the last young lady – the family, I mean – seem to know any one at the Lodge?"

But the youth could not say. He had taken them over with their bags and trunks and had not noticed farther, only that once or twice since, when he had arrived with the mail, the young lady had come in from the woods with a book and a basket of mushrooms, most of which he thought to be toadstools, and poisonous. Once – maybe both times – Robin had been with her – probably engaged as a guide. Robin would be apt to know about

mushrooms.

Frank assented a little dubiously.

"I shouldn't wonder if we'd better be moving along," he suggested. "We might be late with that mail."

There followed another period of silence and increased speed. As they neared the North Elba post-office – a farmhouse with a flower-garden in front of it – the youth pointed backward to a hill with a flag-staff on it.

"That is John Brown's grave," he said.

His companion looked and nodded.

"I remember. My mother and I made a pilgrimage to it. Poor old John. This is still a stage road, isn't it?"

"Yes, but we leave it at North Elba. It turns off there for Keene."

At the fork of the road Frank followed the stage road with his eye, recalling his mountain summer of ten years before.

"I know, now," he reflected aloud. "This road goes to Keene, and on to Elizabeth and Westport. I went over it in the fall. I remember the mountains being all colors, with tips of snow on them." Suddenly he brought his hand down on his knee. "It's just come to me," he said. "Somewhere between here and Keene there was a little girl who had berries to sell, and I ran back up a long hill and gave her my lucky piece for them. I told her to keep it for me till I came back. That was ten years ago. I never went back. I wonder if she has it still?"

The student of theology shook his head. It did not seem likely.

Then he suggested that, of course, she would be a good deal older now – an idea which did not seem to have occurred to Mr. Weatherby.

"Sure enough," he agreed, "and maybe not there. I suppose you don't know anybody over that way."

The driver did not. During the few weeks since his arrival he had acquired only such knowledge as had to do with his direct line of travel.

They left North Elba behind, and crossing another open stretch of country, headed straight for the mountains. They passed a red farmhouse, and brooks in which Frank thought there must be trout. Then by an avenue of spring leafage, shot with sunlight and sweet with the smell of spruce and deep leaf mold, they entered the great forest where, a mile or so beyond, lay the Lodge.

Frank's heart began to quicken, though not wholly as the result of eagerness. He had not written Constance that he was coming so soon. Indeed, in her letter she had suggested in a manner which might have been construed as a command that *if* he intended to *come to the Adirondacks at all* this summer he should wait until they were settled in their camp. But Frank had discovered that New York in June was not the attractive place he had considered it in former years. Also that the thought of the Adirondacks, even the very word itself, had acquired a certain charm. To desire and to do were not likely to be very widely separated with a young man of his means and training, and he had left for Lake Placid

that night.

Yet now that he had brought surprise to the very threshold, as it were, he began to hesitate. Perhaps, after all, Constance might not be overjoyed or even mildly pleased at his coming. She had seemed a bit distant before her departure, and he knew how hard it was to count on her at times.

"You can see the Lodge from that bend," said his companion, presently, pointing with his whip.

Then almost immediately they had reached the turn, and the Lodge – a great, double-story cabin of spruce logs, with wide verandas – showed through the trees. But between the hack and the Lodge were two figures – a tall young man in outing dress, carrying a basket, and a tall young woman in a walking skirt, carrying a book. They were quite close together, moving toward the Lodge. They seemed to be talking earnestly, and did not at first notice the sound of wheels.

"That's them now," whispered the young man, forgetting for the moment his scholastic training. "That's Robin and Miss Deane, with the book and the basket of toadstools."

The couple ahead stopped just then and turned. Frank prepared himself for the worst.

But Mr. Weatherby would seem to have been unduly alarmed. As he stepped from the vehicle Constance came forward with extended hand.

"You are good to surprise us," she was saying, and then, a moment later, "Mr. Weatherby, this is Mr. Robin Farnham – a

friend of my childhood. I think I have mentioned him to you."

Whatever momentary hostility Frank Weatherby may have cherished for Robin Farnham vanished as the two clasped hands. Frank found himself looking into a countenance at once manly, intellectual and handsome – the sort of a face that men, and women, too, trust on sight. And then for some reason there flashed again across his mind a vivid picture of Constance as she had looked up at him that wet night under the umbrella, the raindrops glistening on her cheek and in the blowy tangle about her temples. He held Robin's firm hand for a moment in his rather soft palm. There was a sort of magnetic stimulus in that muscular grip and hardened flesh. It was so evidently the hand of achievement, Frank was loath to let it go.

"You are in some way familiar to me," he said then. "I may have seen you when I was up this way ten years ago. I suppose you do not recall anything of the kind?"

A touch of color showed through the brown of Robin's cheek.

"No," he said; "I was a boy of eleven, then, probably in the field. I don't think you saw me. Those were the days when I knew Miss Deane. I used to carry baskets of green corn over to Mr. Deane's camp. If you had been up this way during the past five or six years I might have been your guide. Winters I have attended school."

They were walking slowly as they talked, following the hack toward the Lodge. Constance took up the tale at this point, her cheeks also flushing a little as she spoke.

"He had to work very hard," she said. "He had to raise the corn and then carry it every day – miles and miles. Then he used to make toy boats and sail them for me in the brook, and a playhouse, and whatever I wanted. Of course, I did not consider that I was taking his time, or how hard it all was for him."

"Miss Deane has given up little boats and playhouses for the science of mycology," Robin put in, rather nervously, as one anxious to change the subject.

Frank glanced at the volume he had appropriated – a treatise on certain toadstools, edible and otherwise.

"I have heard already of your new employment, or, at least, diversion," he said. "The young man who brought me over told me that a young lady had been bringing baskets of suspicious fungi to the Lodge. From what he said I judged that he considered it a dangerous occupation."

"That was Mr. Meelie," laughed Constance. "I have been wondering why Mr. Meelie avoided me. I can see now that he was afraid I would poison him. You must meet Miss Carroway, too," she ran on. "I mean you *will* meet her. She is a very estimable lady from Connecticut who has a nephew in the electric works at Haverford; also the asthma, which she is up here to get rid of. She is at the Lodge for the summer, and is already the general minister of affairs at large and in particular. Among other things, she warns me daily that if I persist in eating some of the specimens I bring home, I shall presently die with great violence and suddenness. She is convinced that there is just one

kind of mushroom, and that it doesn't grow in the woods. She has no faith in books. Her chief talent lies in promoting harmless evening entertainments. You will have to take part in them."

Frank had opened the book and had been studying some of the colored plates while Constance talked.

"I don't know that I blame your friends," he said, half seriously. "Some of these look pretty dangerous to the casual observer."

"But I've been studying that book for weeks," protested Constance, "long before we came here. By and by I'm going to join the Mycological Society and try to be one of its useful members."

"I suppose you have to eat most of these before you are eligible?" commented Frank, still fascinated by the bright pictures.

"Not at all. Some of them are quite deadly, but one ought to be able to distinguish most of the commoner species, and be willing to trust his knowledge."

"To back one's judgment with one's life, as it were. Well, that's one sort of bravery, no doubt. Tell me, please, how many of these gayly spotted ones you have eaten and still live to tell the tale?"

CHAPTER IV
A BRIEF LECTURE AND SOME INTRODUCTIONS

The outside of Spruce Lodge suggested to Frank the Anglo-Saxon castle of five or six hundred years ago, though it was probably better constructed than most of the castles of that early day. It was really an immense affair, and there were certain turrets and a tower which carried out the feudal idea. Its builder, John Morrison, had been a faithful reader of Scott, and the architecture of the Lodge had in some manner been an expression of his romantic inclination. Frank thought, however, that the feudal Saxon might not have had the long veranda facing the little jewel of a lake, where were mirrored the mountains that hemmed it in. With Constance he sat on the comfortable steps, looking through the tall spruces at the water or at mountain peaks that seemed so near the blue that one might step from them into the cloudland of an undiscovered country.

No one was about for the moment, the guests having collected in the office for the distribution of the daily mail. Robin had gone, too, striding away toward a smaller cabin where the guides kept their paraphernalia. Frank said:

"You don't know how glad I am to be here with you in this wonderful place, Conny. I have never seen anything so splendid

as this forest, and I was simply desperate in town as soon as you were gone."

She had decided not to let him call her that again, but concluded to overlook this offense. She began arranging the contents of her basket on the step beside her – a gay assortment of toadstools gathered during her morning walk.

"You see what *I* have been doing," she said. "I don't suppose it will interest you in the least, but to me it is a fascinating study. Perhaps if I pursue it I may contribute something to the world's knowledge and to its food supply."

Frank regarded the variegated array with some solemnity.

"I hope, Conny, you don't mean to eat any of those," he said.

"Probably not; but see how beautiful they are."

They were indeed beautiful, for no spot is more rich in fungi of varied hues than the Adirondack woods. There were specimens ranging from pale to white, from cream to lemon yellow – pink that blended into shades of red and scarlet – gray that deepened to blue and even purple – numerous shades of buff and brown, and some of the mottled coloring. Some were large, almost gigantic; some tiny ones were like bits of ivory or coral. Frank evinced artistic enthusiasm, but a certain gastronomic reserve.

"Wonderful!" he said. "I did not suppose there were such mushrooms in the world – so beautiful. I know now what the line means which says, 'How beautiful is death.'"

There was a little commotion just then at the doorway of the Lodge, and a group of guests – some with letters, others

with looks of resignation or disappointment – appeared on the veranda. From among them, Mrs. Deane, a rather frail, nervous woman, hurried toward Mr. Weatherby with evident pleasure. She had been expecting him, she declared, though Constance had insisted that he would think twice before he started once for that forest isolation. They would be in their own quarters in a few days, and it would be just a pleasant walk over there. There were no hard hills to climb. Mr. Deane walked over twice a day. He was there now, overseeing repairs. The workmen were very difficult.

"But there are *some* hills, Mamma," interposed Constance – "little ones. Perhaps Mr. Weatherby won't care to climb at all. He has already declared against my mushrooms. He said something just now about their fatal beauty – I believe that was it. He's like all the rest of you – opposed to the cause of science."

Mrs. Deane regarded the young man appealingly.

"Try to reason with her," she said nervously. "Perhaps she'll listen to you. She never will to me. I tell her every day that she will poison herself. She's always tasting of new kinds. She's persuaded me to eat some of those she had cooked, and I've sent to New York for every known antidote for mushroom poisoning. It's all right, perhaps, to study them and collect them, but when it comes to eating them to prove that the book is right about their being harmless, it seems like flying in the face of Providence. Besides, Constance is careless."

"I remember her telling me, as reason for not wanting to be

a doctor, something about giving you the wrong medicine last winter."

"She did – some old liniment – I can taste the stuff yet. Constance, I do really think it's sinful for you to meddle with such uncertain subjects. Just think of eating any of those gaudy things. Constance! How can you?"

Constance patted the nervous little lady on the cheek.

"Be comforted," she said. "I am not going to eat these. I brought them for study. Most of them are harmless enough, I believe, but they are of a kind that even experts are not always sure of. They are called *Boleti*– almost the first we have found. I have laid them out here for display, just as the lecturer did last week at Lake Placid."

Miss Deane selected one of the brightly colored specimens.

"This," she began, with mock gravity and a professional air, "is a *Boletus*– known as *Boletus speciosus*– that is, I think it is." She opened the book and ran hastily over the leaves. "Yes, *speciosus*– either that or the *bicolor*– I can't be certain just which."

"There, Constance," interrupted Mrs. Deane, "you confess, yourself, you can't tell the difference. Now, how are we going to know when we are being poisoned? We ate some last night. Perhaps they were deadly poison – how can we know?"

"Be comforted, Mamma; we are still here."

"But perhaps the poison hasn't begun to work yet."

"It should have done so, according to the best authorities,

some hours ago. I have been keeping watch of the time."

Mrs. Deane groaned.

"The best authorities? Oh, dear – oh, dear! Are there really any authorities in this awful business? And she has been watching the time for the poison to work – think of it!"

A little group of guests collected to hear the impromptu discussion. Frank, half reclining on the veranda steps, ran his eye over the assembly. For the most part they seemed genuine seekers after recreation and rest in this deep forest isolation. There were brain-workers among them – painters and writer folk. Some of the faces Frank thought he recognized. In the foreground was a rather large woman of the New England village type. She stood firmly on her feet, and had a wide, square face, about which the scanty gray locks were tightly curled. She moved closer now, and leaning forward, spoke with judicial deliberation.

"Them's tudstools!" she said – a decision evidently intended to be final. She adjusted her glasses a bit more carefully and bent closer to the gay collection. "The' ain't a single one of 'em a mushroom," she proceeded. "We used to have 'em grow in our paster, an' my little nephew, Charlie, that I brought up by hand and is now in the electric works down to Haverford, he used to gather 'em, an' they wa'n't like them at all."

A ripple of appreciation ran through the group, and others drew near to inspect the fungi. Constance felt it necessary to present Frank to those nearest, whom she knew. He arose to make acknowledgments. With the old lady, whose name, it

appeared, was Miss Carroway, he shook hands. She regarded him searchingly.

"You're some taller than my Charlie," she said, and added, "I hope you don't intend to eat them tudstools, do you? Charlie wouldn't a et one o' them kind fer a thousand dollars. He knew the reel kind that grows in the medders an' pasters."

Constance took one of Miss Carroway's hands and gave it a friendly squeeze.

"You are spoiling my lecture," she laughed, "and aiding Mamma in discrediting me before the world. I will tell you the truth about mushrooms. Not the whole truth, but an important one. All toadstools are mushrooms and all mushrooms are toadstools. A few kinds are poisonous – not many. Most of them are good to eat. The only difficulty lies in telling the poison ones."

Miss Carroway appeared interested, but incredulous. Constance continued.

"The sort your Charlie used to gather was the *Agaricus Campestris*, or meadow mushroom – one of the commonest and best. It has gills underneath – not pores, like this one. The gills are like little leaves and hold the spores, or seed as we might call it. The pores of this *Boletus* do the same thing. You see they are bright yellow, while the top is purple-red. The stem is yellow, too. Now, watch!"

She broke the top of the *Boletus* in two parts – the audience pressing closer to see. The flesh within was lemon color, but almost instantly, with exposure to the air, began to change, and

was presently a dark blue. Murmurs of wonder ran through the group. They had not seen this marvel before.

"Bravo!" murmured Frank. "You are beginning to score."

"Many of the *Boleti* do that," Constance resumed. "Some of them are very bad tasting, even when harmless. Some are poisonous. One of them, the *Satanus*, is regarded as deadly. I don't think this is one of them, but I shall not insist on Miss Carroway and the rest of you eating it."

Miss Carroway sent a startled glance at the lecturer and sweepingly included the assembled group.

"Eat it!" she exclaimed. "Eat that? Well, I sh'd think not! I wouldn't eat that, ner let any o' my folks eat it, fer no money!"

There was mirth among the audience. A young mountain climber in a moment of recklessness avowed his faith by declaring that upon Miss Deane's recommendation he would eat the whole assortment for two dollars.

"You'd better make it enough for funeral expenses," commented Miss Carroway; whereupon the discussion became general and hilarious, and the extempore lecture ceased.

"You see," Constance said to Frank, "I cannot claim serious attention, even upon so vital a subject as the food supply."

"But you certainly entertained them, and I, for one, have a growing respect for your knowledge." Then, rising, he added, "Speaking of food reminds me that you probably have some sort of midday refreshment here, and that I would better arrange for accommodations and make myself presentable. By the way,

Constance," lowering his voice, "I saw a striking-looking girl on the veranda as we were approaching the house a while ago. I don't think you noticed her, but she had black eyes and a face like an Indian princess. She came out for a moment again, while you were talking. I thought she rather looked as if she belonged here, but she couldn't have been a servant."

They had taken a little turn down the long veranda, and Constance waited until they were well out of earshot before she said:

"You are perfectly right – she could not. She is the daughter of Mr. Morrison, who owns the Lodge – Edith Morrison – her father's housekeeper. I shall present you at the first opportunity so that you may lose no time falling in love with her. It will do you no good, though, for she is going to marry Robin Farnham. The wedding will not take place, of course, until Robin is making his way, but it is all settled, and they are both very happy."

"And quite properly," commented Frank with enthusiasm. "I heard something about it coming over. Mr. Meelie told me. He said they were a handsome pair. I fully agree with him." The young man smiled down at his companion and added: "Do you know, Conny, if that young man Farnham were unencumbered, I might expect you to do some falling in love, yourself."

The girl laughed, rather more than seemed necessary, Frank thought, and an added touch of color came into her cheeks.

"I did that years ago," she owned. "I think as much of Robin already as I ever could." Then, less lightly, "Besides, I should not

like to be a rival of Edith Morrison's. She is a mountain girl, with rather primitive ideas. I do not mean that she is in any sense a savage or even uncultured. Far from it. Her father is a well-read man for his opportunities. They have a good many books here, and Edith has learned the most of them by heart. Last winter she taught school. But she has the mountains in her blood, and in that black hair and those eyes of hers. Only, of course, you do not quite know what that means. The mountains are fierce, untamed, elemental – like the sea. Such things get into one's blood and never entirely go away. Of course, you don't quite understand."

Regarding her curiously, Frank said:

"I remember your own hunger for the mountains, even in March. One might almost think you native to them, yourself."

"My love for them makes me understand," she said, after a pause; then in lighter tone added, "and I should not wish to get in Edith Morrison's way, especially where it related to Robin Farnham."

"By which same token I shall avoid getting in Robin Farnham's way," Frank said, as they entered the Lodge hall – a wide room, which in some measure carried out the Anglo-Saxon feudal idea. The floor was strewn with skins, the dark walls of unfinished wood were hung with antlers and other trophies of the chase. At the farther end was a deep stone fireplace, and above it the mounted head of a wild boar.

"You see," murmured Constance, "being brought up among these things and in the life that goes with them, one is apt to

imbibe a good deal of nature and a number of elementary ideas, in spite of books."

A door by the wide fireplace opened just then, and a girl with jetty hair and glowing black eyes – slender and straight as a young birch – came toward them with step as lithe and as light as an Indian's. There was something of the type, too, in her features. Perhaps in a former generation a strain of the native American blood had mingled and blended with the fairer flow of the new possessors. Constance Deane went forward to meet her.

"Miss Morrison," she said cordially, "this is Mr. Weatherby, of New York – a friend of ours."

The girl took Frank's extended hand heartily. Indeed, it seemed to the young man that there was rather more warmth in her welcome than the occasion warranted. Her face, too, conveyed a certain gratification in his arrival – almost as if here were an expected friend. He could not help wondering if this was her usual manner of greeting – perhaps due to the primitive life she had led – the untrammeled freedom of the hills. But Constance, when she had passed them, said:

"I think you are marked for especial favor. Perhaps, after all, Robin is to have a rival."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.