

account for. I enjoyed strolling about, but was beginning to think of a train back to Boston, when a turn of the road, a quarter of a mile from the mill, brought me face to face with a young girl who was approaching slowly with a book in her hand, which she read as she walked.

She was not a beautiful girl, and not at all what is understood by a "brilliant" girl; yet at the very first look she excited my interest, as Stansby village itself had done. In every outline and motion she showed perfect health; her clear color was tonic to the eye; her deep brown hair, at the same time that it gave a restful look to her forehead, added something of fervency to her general aspect. In sympathy with the beautiful day, she had taken off her hat (which she carried on one arm), disclosing a spray of fresh lilacs in her hair. She was very simply, though not poorly, dressed. All this, and more, I was able to observe without disturbing her absorption in her book; but just as I was trying to decide whether the firm, compressed corners of her mouth only meant interest in the reading, or indicated some peculiar hardness of character, she glanced up and saw my eyes bent upon her.

Then, for an instant, there came into her own a look of eager search; no softly inquiring gaze, such as would be natural to most women on a casual meeting of this sort, but a full, energetic, self-reliant scrutiny. I don't think the compression about her lips was softened by her surprise at seeing me; but that keen, level look from her eyes brought a wonderful change over her face, so that from being interesting it became attractive, and I was fired by a kind of enthusiasm in beholding it. Involuntarily I took off my hat and paused at the side of the highway. She bent her head again—perhaps with some acknowledgment of my bow, but not definitely for that purpose, because she continued reading as she passed me.

But now came the strangest part of the episode. This girl disappeared around the bend of the road, and after her two young fellows drew near, whom I recognized as Vibbard and Silverthorn. It happened that Silverthorn, as on the very first day I had ever seen him, carried a sprig of lilac. Happened? No; the lilac in the girl's hair was too strong a coincidence to be overlooked, and I was not long in guessing that there was some tender meaning in it.

"Hullo! Ferguson."

"Did you know we were here?"

These exclamations were made with some confusion, and Silverthorn blushed faintly.

"No," said I. "Do you come often?"

They looked at each other confidentially.

"We have, lately," Vibbard admitted.

"Then perhaps you can tell me who that girl is that I just passed."

"Oh, yes," said Silverthorn, at once. "That's Ida Winwood, the daughter of the superintendent here at the mills."

"She is a very striking girl," I said. "You know her, of course?"

"A little."

Vibbard enlarged upon this: it was a curious habit they had fallen into, of each waiting for the other to explain what should more properly have been explained by himself.

"Thorny's father, you know," said Vibbard, "was a great machinist, and so they had acquaintances around at mills in different parts of the State. She—that is, Ida, you know—is only sixteen now, but Thorny first saw her when he was a boy and came here once or twice with his father."

Silverthorn nodded his head corroboratively.

"But it seems to me," I said, addressing him, "that you treat her rather distantly for an old acquaintance; or else she treats *you* distantly. Which is it?"