

Chapter 12

Pierre's Camp

With Lightfoot agreeing to accompany them, Susan's grandfather relented. All six of them, a dwarf and bat, grandfather and granddaughter, troll and Indian, set out in a larger rowboat offered them by the dwarves, one with metal gunwales and reinforced sockets for the oar pins. They made their way downstream to the swampy bayou region between Stone City and New Delta, to the camp of a friend of the dwarves and others, Pierre. He walked like a barrel chested Paul Bunyan down to the small wharf with pier that jutted into the river.

Susan and her grandfather walked from the boat to the ramshackle cabin where Pierre had pointed. Inside they heard violins and guitars, and saw hands and feet moving to the music. They entered through the open door onto a brightly lit scene of happy people rhythmically prancing around the floor, as the musicians sat at one end on rocking chairs and played the lively music. One person was pounding on all sorts of kitchen and washroom gear. Susan wanted to join in the dance, and tugged on her grandfather's hand to pull him to the dance floor. But he was too tired, and apologized to her as he found his way to a chair on the side of the room.

Then Susan noticed Babu sitting with the band, pounding and scraping the percussion instruments in time to the music. He had the biggest smile on his face she had ever seen. As she started toward Babu, Lightfoot walked in the door

Although the people in the room had ignored Babu, they turned and looked at the young Indian who now stood framed by the door. Their looks were friendly and appreciative, and a group of women started to approach him. But as he saw them coming, he waved to them with a smile and walked over to Susan.

"May I have this dance?" asked Lightfoot.

Susan looked up at Lightfoot, aghast but very pleasantly surprised. She looked over at her grandfather, who nodded and waved his hand toward the floor.

"I don't know how" said Susan, looking at her feet, hoping he wouldn't take back his request.

"Either do I" said Lightfoot, "but shall we try?"

And so they did. Susan was slightly embarrassed, and realized everyone was watching them. At first she stepped on Lightfoot's mocassins, and almost fell over once when she bumped into another couple, but they finally guessed at enough of the steps to begin enjoying themselves. Babu kept smiling as he hid on stage with the band, and Susan's grandfather was soon fast asleep in his chair, his head nodding in time with the music.

The next day Susan and her grandfather went for a walk along the backwater bayous. At a grassy shaded spot they sat down to rest and throw twigs in the water. Susan did most of the throwing and retrieving of twigs, but her grandfather set a few

of his own sailing, watching them for a little while with wistful eyes. When they rose to continue, Susan's grandfather stumbled, momentarily reached for his heart, then kneeled down on the ground. "Get Pierre" he said through clenched teeth, and Susan, quite scared, ran off through the trees.

Halfway there she saw Lightfoot paddling through the hanging trees, talking to Babu who sat in the bow with a somewhat glazed look in his eyes. For just a second Susan thought of their peace, and hesitated to shatter it. But then the kind of necessity that had been motivating the whole trip took over, and she quickly asked Lightfoot to go get Pierre and the troll to come with her.

When the two of them made it back to Susan's grandfather, they found him lying on his back with his arm over his forehead, moaning slightly. Too nervous or scared to think, she talked incessantly until her grandfather reached out and held her hand with a firm grip. Babu calmly went about gathering leaves to cushion and comfort the old man, and found a dish-like rock to bring him water. Shortly the whole camp arrived, on foot and water, and those with more experience took over his care, but the three friends sat nearby watching and hoping.

The next morning Susan's grandfather woke up in the bed they had carried him too, and smiled at the old ladies who had spent the night in constant attendance. Susan had fallen asleep, been carried to another bed, and slept well all night. She awoke not at all confused, and made her way to her grandfather's bedside, where he gave her a big smile, kiss, and hug.

"They say I'll be ok. I've got to get you back your parents, don't I? But you're going to have to get Babu home."

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