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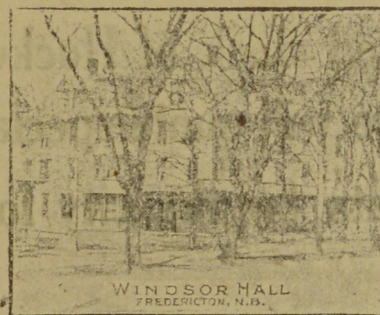
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## PROLOGUE.

It was in the woods that the girl of the Limberlost found her education, her love, her happiness and other good things, so, rightly, the air of the trees is in this story of her life. Here is a tale for lovers of the woods and for others who like a simple story well told by one who knows the forest, can tell about "home folks" and can find the interest in everyday lives. Through these pages flutter the brilliant butterfly of tangled romance, the more sober butterfly, no less beautiful, of noble, quiet lives, well lived, and the gray moth of sorrow borne needlessly for many years. And if you listen closely you may hear the buzz of the little, busy existence of Billy, a youngster worth your knowing.

## CHAPTER I.

Wherein Elnora Goes to High School.

"Elnora Comstock, have you lost your senses?" demanded the angry voice of Katharine Comstock as she glared at her daughter.

"Why, mother?" faltered the girl.

"Don't you 'why mother' me!" cried Mrs. Comstock. "You know very well what I mean. You've given me no peace until you've had your way about this going to school business. I've fixed you good enough, and you're ready to start. But no child of mine walks the streets of Onabasha looking like a play actress woman. You wet your hair and comb it down modest and decent and then be off or you'll have no time to find where you belong."

Elnora gave one despairing glance at the white face, framed in a most becoming riot of reddish brown hair, which she saw in the little kitchen mirror. Then she untied the narrow black ribbon, wet the comb and plastered the waving curls close to her head, bound them fast, pinned on the skimpy black hat and started for the back door.

Mrs. Comstock watched the girl down the long walk to the gate and out of sight on the road in the bright sunshine of the first Monday of September.

"I bet a dollar she gets enough of it by night!" Mrs. Comstock said positively.

Elnora walked by instinct, for her eyes were blinded with tears. She left the road where it turned south at the corner of the Limberlost, climbed a snake fence and entered a path worn by her own feet. Dodging under willow and scrub oak branches, she at last came to the faint outline of an old trail made in the days when the precious timber of the swamp was guarded by armed men. This path she followed until she reached a thick clump of bushes. From the debris in the end of a hollow log she took a key that unlocked the padlock of a large weather beaten old box, inside of which lay several books, a butterfly apparatus and an old cracked mirror. The walls were lined thickly with gaudy butterflies, dragon flies and moths. She set up the mirror, and, once more pulling the ribbon from her hair, she shook the bright mass over her shoulders, tossing it dry in the sunshine. Then she straightened it, bound it loosely and replaced her hat. She tugged vainly at the low brown calico collar and gazed despairingly at the generous length of the narrow skirt. She lifted it as she would have liked it to be cut if possible. That disclosed the heavy leather high shoes, at sight of which she looked positively ill and hastily dropped the skirt. Locking the case again, she hid the key and hurried down the trail.

She followed it around the north end of the swamp and then struck into a footpath crossing a farm in the direc-

tion of the spires of the city to the northeast. Again she climbed a fence and was on the open road. For an instant she leaned against the fence, staring before her, then turned and looked back. Behind her lay the land on which she had been born to drudgery and a mother who made no pretense of loving her. Before her lay the city, through whose schools she hoped to find means of escape and the way to reach the things for which she cared. When she thought of how she looked she leaned more heavily against the fence and groaned. When she thought of turning back and wearing such clothing in ignorance all the days of her life she set her teeth firmly and went hastily toward Onabasha.

She approached the great stone high school building, entered bravely and inquired her way to the office of the superintendent. There she learned that she should have come the week before and arranged for her classes.

"I finished last spring at Brushwood school, district No. 9," said Elnora. "I have been studying all summer. I am quite sure I can do the first year work if I have a few days to get started."

"Of course, of course," assented the superintendent. "Almost invariably country pupils do good work. You may enter first year, and if you don't fit we will find it out speedily. Your teachers will tell you the list of books you must have, and if you will come with me I will show you the way to the auditorium. It is now time for opening exercises. Take any seat you find vacant." He was gone.

Elnora stood before the entrance and stared into the largest room she ever had seen. The floor sloped down to a yawning stage, on which a band of musicians, grouped around a grand piano, were tuning their instruments. Every one else was seated, but no one paid any attention to the white faced girl stumbling half blindly down the aisle next the farthest wall. So she went on to the very end facing the stage. No one moved, and she could not summon courage to crowd past others to several empty seats she saw. At the end of the aisle she paused in desperation as she stared back at the whole forest of faces, most of which were now turned upon her.

In one burning dash came the full realization of her scanty dress, her pitiful little hat and ribbon, her big, heavy shoes, her ignorance of where to go or what to do, and from a sickening wave which crept over her she felt she was going to become very ill. Then out of the mass she saw a pair of big brown boy eyes three seats from her, and there was a message in them. Without moving his body he reached forward and with a pencil touched the back of the seat before him. Instantly Elnora took another step, which brought her to a row of vacant front seats.

She heard the giggle behind her. The knowledge that she wore the only hat in the room burned her. Every matter of moment and some of none at all cut and stung. She had no books. Where should she go when this was over? What would she give to be on the trail going home!

Before she realized what was coming every one had risen and the room was emptying rapidly. Elnora hurried after the nearest girl and in the press at the door touched her sleeve timidly. "Will you please tell me where the freshmen go?" she asked huskily.

The girl gave her one surprised glance and drew away.

"Same place as the fresh women," she answered, and those nearest her laughed.

Elnora stopped praying suddenly, and the color swept into her face. "I'll wager you are the first person I meet when I find it," she said and stopped short. "Not that! Oh, I must not do that!" she thought in dismay. "Make an enemy the first thing I do—oh, not that!"

She followed with her eyes as the young people separated in the hall, some climbing stairs, some disappearing down side halls, some entering

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The past year has shown a remarkable advance in sanitation and has awakened a new interest in the General Public. Consequently it has been a busy year for us and thank you for your past business.

1913 augurs well and with our Happy New Year goes the hope that we may still count you as our Friends and Customers.

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MISS SMITH,  
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doors near by. She saw the girl overtake the brown eyed boy and speak to him, and he glanced back at Elnora, and now there was a scowl on his face. Then she stood alone in the hall.

Presently a door opened and a young woman came out and entered another room. Elnora waited until she returned and hurried to her. "Would you tell me where the freshmen are?" she panted.

"Straight down the hall, three doors to your left," was the answer as the girl passed.

"One minute, please—oh, please!" begged Elnora. "Do I knock or just open the door?"

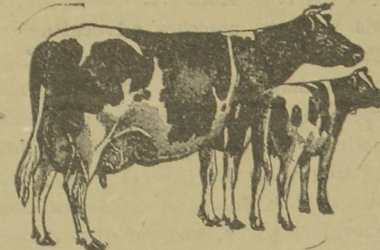
"Go in and take a seat," replied the teacher.

"What if there aren't any seats?" asked Elnora.

(To be Continued)

Mr. A. Colton McKee, who has been in the west for some time, has arrived here on a visit to his parents Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton McKee.

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## WEST END DAIRY

Master Gabriel, famed for his Buster Brown and Little Nemo roles, has been engaged for Mrs. Burnett's play of "Racketty-Packetty House." His part will be that of a doll called Peter Piper.