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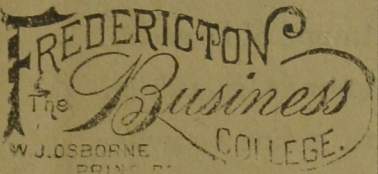
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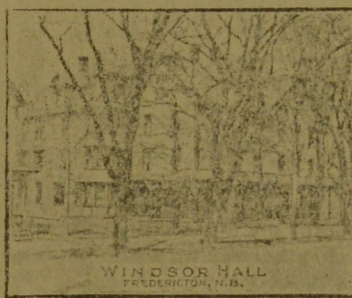
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A GIRL
OF THE
LIMBERLOST

By

GENE STRATTON-PORTER

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& Co.

(Continued)

CHAPTER IV.

Wherein Elnora Meets the Bird Woman
and the Sinton's Are Disappointed.

AT noon Elnora took her little parcel of lunch and started to the home of the Bird Woman. She must know about the specimens first, and then she would go out to the suburbs somewhere and eat a few bites. She dropped the heavy iron knocker on the door of the big red log cabin, and her heart thumped at the resounding stroke.

"Is the Bird Woman at home?" she asked of the maid.

"She is at lunch," was the answer.

"Please ask her if she will see a girl from the Limberlost about some moths?" inquired Elnora.

"I never need ask if it's moths," laughed the girl. "Orders are to bring any one with specimens right in. Come this way."

Elnora followed down the hall and entered a long room with high paneled wainscoting, old English fireplace with an overmantel and closets of peculiar china filling the corners. At a bare table of oak, yellow as gold, sat a woman Elnora often had watched and followed covertly around the Limberlost. The Bird Woman was holding out a hand of welcome.

"I heard!" she laughed. "A little pasteboard box or just the bare word 'specimen' passes you at my door. If it is moths I hope you have hundreds. I've been very busy all summer and unable to collect, and I need so many. Sit down and lunch with me while we talk it over. From the Limberlost, did you say?"

"I live near the swamp," replied Elnora. "Since it's so cleared I dare go around the edge in daytime, though we are still afraid at night."

"What have you collected?" asked the Bird Woman as she helped Elnora to luncheon.

"I am afraid I am bothering you for nothing and imposing on you," Elnora said. "That 'collected' frightens me. I've only gathered. I always loved everything outdoors, and so I made friends and playmates of them. When I learned that the moths die so soon, I saved them especially, because there seemed no wickedness in it."

"I have thought the same thing," said the Bird Woman encouragingly. Then because the girl could not eat until she learned about the moths the Bird Woman asked Elnora if she knew what kinds she had.

"Not all of them," answered Elnora. "Before Mr. Duncan moved away, he often saw me near the edge of the swamp, and he showed me the box he had fixed for Freckles and gave me the key. There were some books and things, so from that time on I studied and tried to take moths right, but I am afraid they are not what you want."

"Are they the big ones that fly mostly June nights?" asked the Bird Woman.

"Yes," said Elnora. "Great gray ones with reddish markings, pale blue, green, yellow with lavender and red and yellow."

"What do you mean by 'red and yellow'?" asked the Bird Woman so quickly that the girl almost jumped.

"Not exactly red," explained Elnora, with tremulous voice. "A reddish, yellowish brown with canary colored spots and gray lines on their wings."

"How many of them?" It was the same quick question.

"Well, I had over 200 eggs," said Elnora, "but some of them didn't hatch, and some of the caterpillars died, but there must be at least a hundred perfect ones."

"Perfect! How, perfect?" cried the Bird Woman.

"I mean whole wings, no down gone and all their legs and antennae," faltered Elnora.

"Young woman, that's the rarest moth in America," said the Bird Woman solemnly. "If you have 100 of them they are worth \$100, according to my list. I can use all that are whole."

"What if they are not pinned right?" quavered Elnora.

"If they are perfect that does not make the slightest difference. I know how to soften them so that I can put them into any shape I choose. Where are they? When may I see them?"

"They are in Freckles' old case in the Limberlost," said Elnora. "I could not carry many for fear of breaking them, but I could bring a few after school."

"You come here at 4," said the Bird Woman, "and we will drive out with some specimen boxes and a price list and see what you have to sell."

"Oh, I do need the money!" said Elnora.

"Do you live in that beautiful cabin at the northwest end of the swamp?"

"Yes," said Elnora.

"I remember the place and a story about it now. You entered the high school yesterday?"

"Yes."

"It was pretty bad?"

"Pretty bad!" echoed Elnora.

The Bird Woman laughed.

"You can't tell me anything about that," she said. "I once entered a city school straight from the country. My dress was brown calico and my shoes were quite heavy. What is your name, my girl?"

"Elnora Comstock," answered Elnora. "Yesterday on the board it changed to Comstock, and for a minute I thought I'd die, but I can laugh over that already."

The Bird Woman arose and kissed her. "Finish your lunch," she said, "and I will get my price lists and take down a memorandum of what you think you have, so I will know how many boxes to prepare. Never mind the calico dress and the coarse shoes. Dig into the books, and before long you will hear yesterday's tormentors boasting that they were once classmates of yours!"

She laughingly left the room and Elnora sat thinking, until she remembered how hungry she was, so she ate the food, drank the hot chocolate and began the process of getting a grip on herself.

Then the Bird Woman came back and showed Elnora a long printed slip giving a list of graduated prices for moths, butterflies and dragon flies.

"Oh, do you want them?" exclaimed Elnora. "I have a few and I can get more by the thousand, with every color in the world on their wings."

"Yes," said the Bird Woman. "I will buy them, also the big moth caterpillars that are creeping everywhere now, and the cocoons that they will spin just about this time. I have a sneaking impression that the mystery, wonder and the urge of their pure beauty are going to force me to picture and paint our moths and put them into a book for all the world to see and know. We Limberlost people must not be selfish with the wonders God has given to us. I will pay good prices for all the moths you can find, because, you see, I exchange them with foreign collectors. The banker will buy stone axes, arrow points and Indian pipes. There was a teacher from the city grade schools here today for specimens. There is a fund to supply the ward buildings. I'll help you get in touch with that. They want leaves of different trees, flowers, grasses, moths, insects, birds' nests and anything about birds."

Elnora's eyes were blazing. "Had I best go back to school or open a bank account and begin being a millionaire? Uncle Wesley and I have a bushel of arrow points gathered, a stack of axes, pipes, skin dressing tools, tubes and mortars. I don't know how I ever will wait three hours."

"You must go, or you will be late," said the Bird Woman. "I will be ready at 4."

After school closed Elnora, seated by the Bird Woman, drove to Freckles' old room in the Limberlost. One at a time the beautiful big moths were taken from the interior of the old black case. Not a fourth of them could be moved that night, and it was almost dark when the last box was closed, the list figured and into Elnora's trembling fingers were paid \$50.15. Elnora clasped the money closely.

"Oh, you beautiful stuff!" she cried. "You are going to buy the books, pay the tuition and take me to high school!"

Then because she was a woman she sat on a log and looked at her shoes. Long after the Bird Woman drove away Elnora remained. She had her problem, and it was a big one. If she told her mother would she take the money to pay the taxes? If she did not tell her how could she account for the books and things for which she would spend it? At last she counted out what she needed for the next day, placed the rest in the farthest corner of the case and locked the door. She then filled the front of her skirt from a heap of arrow points beneath the case and started home.

With the first streak of red above the Limberlost Margaret Sinton was busy with the gingham and the intricate paper pattern she had purchased. Wesley cooked the breakfast and worked until he thought Elnora would be gone, then he started to bring her mother.

"Now you be mighty careful," cautioned Margaret. "I don't know how she will take it."

"I don't either," said Wesley philosophically, "but she's got to take it some way. That dress has to be finished by school time in the morning."

Wesley had not slept well that night. By the time he reached the front gate and started down the walk between the rows of asters and lady slippers he was perspiring, and every plausible and convincing speech had died in his brain. Mrs. Comstock helped him. She met him at the door.

"Good morning," she said. "Did Margaret send you for something?"

"Yes," said Wesley. "She sent me for you. She's got a job that's too big for her, and she wants you to help."

"Of course I will," said Mrs. Comstock. It was no one's affair how lonely the previous day had been, or how the endless hours of the present would drag. "What is she doing in such a rush?"

Now was his chance.

"She's making a dress for Elnora," answered Wesley. He saw Mrs. Comstock's form straighten, and her face harden, so he continued hastily. "You see Elnora has been helping us at harvest time, butchering, and with unexpected visitors for years. We've made out that she's saved us a considerable sum, and as she wouldn't ever touch any pay for anything we just went to town and got a few clothes we thought would fix her up a little for the high school. We want to get a dress done today mighty bad, but Margaret is slow about sewing, and she never can finish alone, so I came for you."

(To be Continued)

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Lon McDonald is to spend a few days in Boston before going south from Indianapolis.

the road this winter.