

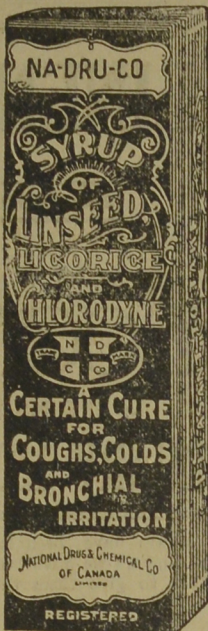
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(Continued.)

"They are what have paid for books, tuition and clothes for the last four years. They are what I could have started on to college. You've crushed the last one I needed before my face. You never have made any pretense of loving me. At last I'll be equally frank with you. I hate you! You are a selfish, wicked woman! I hate you!"

Elnora turned, went through the kitchen and out the back door. She followed the garden path to the gate and walked toward the swamp a short distance when reaction overtook her. She dropped on the ground and leaned against a big log. When a little child, desperate as now, she had tried to die by holding her breath.

As Elnora left the room Mrs. Comstock took one step after her.

"You little hussy!" she gasped.

But Elnora was gone. Her mother stood staring.

"She never did lie to me," she muttered. "I guess it was a moth and the only one she needed to get \$300, she said. I wish I hadn't been so fast. Pshaw! She can do another. Maybe moths are like snakes, where there's one there's two."

Mrs. Comstock took the broom and swept the moth out of the door. So it was from creatures like that Elnora had got her school money. In one sickening sweep there rushed into the heart of the woman a full realization of the width of the gulf which separated her from her child.

"We are nearer strangers with each other than we are with any of the neighbors," she muttered.

So one of the Almighty's most delicate and beautiful creations was sacrificed without fulfilling the law, yet none of its species ever served so glorious a cause. For at last Mrs. Comstock's

inner vision had cleared. She went through the cabin mechanically. Every few minutes she glanced toward the back walk to see if Elnora was coming. She knew arrangements had been made with Margaret to go to the city some time that day, so she grew more nervous and uneasy every moment.

Noon came, and she prepared dinner, calling, as she always did, when Elnora was in the garden, but she got no response, and the girl did not come. A little after 1 o'clock Margaret stopped at the gate.

"Elnora has changed her mind. She is not going," called Mrs. Comstock.

"You must be mistaken," said Margaret. "I was going on purpose for

her. She asked me to take her. I had no errand. Where is she?"

"I will call her," said Mrs. Comstock. She followed the path again and this time found Elnora sitting on the log. Her face was swollen and discolored and her eyes red with crying. She paid no attention to her mother.

"Marg Sinton is here," said Mrs. Comstock harshly. "I told her you had changed your mind, but she said you asked her to go with you, and she had nothing to go for herself."

Elnora arose, recklessly took a short cut through the deep swamp grasses and so reached the path ahead of her mother. Mrs. Comstock followed as far as the garden, but she could not enter the cabin. Margaret Sinton approached colorless and with such flaming eyes that Mrs. Comstock shrank back.

"What's the matter with Elnora's face?" demanded Margaret.

Mrs. Comstock made no reply.

"You struck her, did you?"

"I thought you wasn't blind!"

"I have been for twenty long years now, Kate Comstock," said Margaret Sinton, "but my eyes are open at last. What I see is that I've done you no good and Elnora a big wrong. I had an idea that it would kill you to know, but I guess you are tough enough to stand anything. Kill or cure, you get it now. You! The woman who don't pretend to love her only child, and all for a fool idea about a man who wasn't worth his salt!"

Mrs. Comstock picked up a hoe. "Go right on!" she said. "Empty yourself. It's the last thing you'll ever do."

"Then I'll make a tidy job of it," said Margaret. "You'll not touch me. When Robert Comstock shaved that quagmire out there so close he went in, he wanted to keep you from seeing where he was coming from. He'd been to see Elvira Carney. They had plans to go to a dance that night!"

"Close your lips!" said Mrs. Comstock in a voice of deadly quiet.

"You know I wouldn't dare open them if I was not telling you the truth. It was not in the woods, and I stopped at Carney's as I passed for a drink. Elvira's bedridden old mother heard me, and she was so crazy for some one to talk with I stepped in a minute. I saw Robert come down the path. Elvira saw him, too, and she ran out of the house to head him off. He brought her his violin and told her to get ready and meet him in the woods with it that night and they would go to a dance. She took it and hid it in the little loft to the wellhouse and promised she'd go."

"Are you done?" demanded Mrs. Comstock.

"No. I am going to tell you the whole story. You don't spare Elnora anything. I shan't spare you. I went to Elvira, told her what I knew and made her give me Comstock's violin for Elnora over three years ago. She's been playing it ever since. I won't see her slighted and abused another day on account of a man who would have broken your heart if he had lived. He was one of those men who couldn't trust himself, and so no woman was safe with him. Now, will you drop grieving over him and do Elnora justice?"

Mrs. Comstock gripped the hoe tighter, and, turning, she went down the walk and started across the woods to the home of Elvira Carney. With averted head she passed the pool, steadily pursuing her way. Elvira Carney, hanging towels across the back fence, saw her coming and went toward the gate to meet her. Twenty years she had dreaded that visit. Mrs. Comstock's face and hair were so white that her dark eyes seemed burned into their setting. Silently she stared at the woman before her a long time.

"I might have saved myself the trouble of coming," she said at last. "I see you are guilty as sin."

"What has Marg Sinton been telling you?" panted the miserable woman, gripping the fence.

"The truth," answered Mrs. Comstock succinctly. "Guilt is in every line of your face, in your eyes, all over your wretched body."

(To Be Continued.)

Shoe Sale

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