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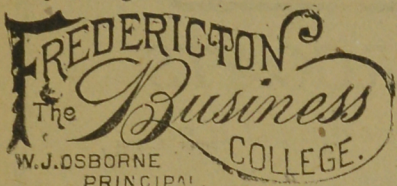
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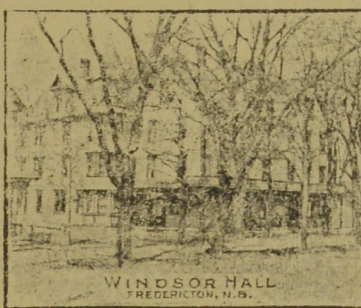
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WASHINGTON'S
CAFE
YORK STREETA GIRL
OF THE
LIMBERLOST

By

GENE STRATTON-PORTER

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(Continued.)

"And it's such a simple little matter, so dead easy, and all so between old friends like, that you can't look above your boots while you explain it," sneered Mrs. Comstock. "Wesley Sinton, what put the idea into your head that Elnora would take things bought with money when she wouldn't take the money?"

Then Sinton's eyes came up straight-
ly.

"Finding her on the trail last night sobbing as hard as I ever saw any one at a funeral. She wasn't complaining at all, but she's come to me all her life with her little hurts, and she couldn't hide how she'd been laughed at, twisted and run face to face against the fact that there was books and tuition unexpected, and nothing will ever make me believe you didn't know that, Kate Comstock."

"If any doubts are troubling you on that subject, sure I knew it! She was so anxious to try the world I thought I'd just let her take a few knocks and see how she liked it."

"As if she'd ever taken anything but knocks all her life!" cried Wesley Sinton. "Kate Comstock, you are a heartless, selfish woman. You've never allowed Elnora any real love in her life. If ever she finds out that thing you'll lose her, and it will serve you right."

"She knows it now," said Mrs. Comstock icily, "and she'll be home tonight just as usual."

"Well, you are a brave woman if you dared put a girl of Elnora's make through what she suffered yesterday and will suffer again today and let her know you did it on purpose. I admire your nerve. But I've watched this since Elnora was born, and I got enough. Things have come to a pass where they go better for her or I interfere."

"As if you'd ever done anything but interfere all her life! Think I haven't watched you? Think I, with my heart raw in my breast and too numb to resent it openly, haven't seen you and Mag Sinton trying to turn Elnora against me day after day? When did you ever tell her what her father meant to me? When did you ever try to make her see the wreck of my life and what I've suffered? No, indeed!"

"Kate Comstock, that's unjust," cried Sinton. "Only last night I tried to show her the picture I saw the day she was born. I begged her to come to you and tell you pleasant what she needed and ask you for what I happen to know you can well afford to give her."

"I can't!" cried Mrs. Comstock. "You know I can't!"

"Then get so you can!" said Wesley Sinton. "Any day you say the word you can sell \$10,000 worth of rare timber off this place easy. I'll see to clearing and working the fields cheap as dirt, for Elnora's sake. I'll buy you more cattle to fatten. All you've got to do is sign a lease to pull thousands from the ground in oil, as the rest of us are doing all around you."

"Cut down Robert's trees!" shrieked Mrs. Comstock. "Tear up his land! Cover everything with horrid, greasy oil! I'll die first!"

"You mean you'll let Elnora go like a beggar and hurt and mortify her past bearing. I've got to the place where I tell you plain what I am going to do. Maggie and I went to town last night, and we got what things Elnora needs most urgent to make her look a little like the rest of the high school girls. Now here it is in plain English. You can help get these things ready and let us give them to her as we want."

"She won't touch them!" cried Mrs. Comstock.

"Then you can pay us, and she can take them as her right!"

"I won't!"

"Then I will tell Elnora just what you are worth, what you can afford and how much of this she owns. I'll loan her the money to buy books and decent clothes, and when she is of age she can sell her share and pay me."

Mrs. Comstock gripped a chair back and opened her lips, but no words came.

"And," Sinton continued, "if she is so much like you that she won't do that I'll go to the county seat and lay complaint against you as her guardian before the judge. I'll swear to what you are worth and now you are raising her and have you discharged or have the judge appoint some man who will see that she is comfortable, educated and decent looking?"

"You wouldn't!" gasped Mrs. Comstock.

"I won't need to, Kate!" said Sinton, his heart softening the instant the hard words were said. "You won't show it, but you do love Elnora! You can't help it! You must see how she needs things. Come, help us fix them and be friends. Maggie and I couldn't live without her, and you couldn't either. You've got to love such a fine girl as she is. Let it show a little!"

"You can hardly expect me to love her," said Mrs. Comstock coldly. "But

for her a man would stand back of me now who would beat the breath out of your sneaking body for the cowardly thing with which you threaten me. After all I've suffered you'd drag me to court and compel me to tear up Robert's property. If I ever go they carry me. If they touch one tree or put down one greasy old oil well it will be over all I can shoot before they begin. Now, see how quick you can clear out of here!"

"You won't come and help Maggie with the dress?"

For answer Mrs. Comstock looked about swiftly for some object on which to lay her hands. Knowing her temper, Wesley Sinton left with all the haste consistent with dignity. But he did not go home. He crossed a field and in an hour brought another neighbor who was skillful with her needle. With sinking heart Margaret saw them coming.

"Kate is too busy to help today. She can't sew before tomorrow," said Wesley cheerfully as they entered.

That quieted Margaret's apprehension a little, though she had some doubts. Wesley prepared the lunch, and by 4 o'clock the pretty dress was finished as far as it possibly could be until it was fitted on Elnora.

CHAPTER V.

Wherein Mrs. Comstock Laughs the
First Time in Sixteen Years.

THE neighbor left, and Margaret packed their purchases into the big market basket. Wesley took the hat, umbrella and raincoat, and they went down to Mrs. Comstock's. As they reached the step Margaret spoke pleasantly to Mrs. Comstock, who sat reading just inside the door, but she did not answer.

Wesley Sinton opened the door and went in, followed by Margaret.

"Kate," he said, "you needn't take out your mad over our little racket on Maggie. I ain't told her a word I said to you or you said to me. She's not so very strong, and she's sewed since 4 o'clock this morning to get this dress ready for tomorrow. It's done and we came down to try it on Elnora."

"Is that the truth, Mag Sinton?" demanded Mrs. Comstock.

"You heard Wesley say so," proudly affirmed Mrs. Sinton.

"I want to make you a proposition," said Wesley. "Wait till Elnora comes. Then we'll show her the things and see what she says."

"How would it do to see what she says without bribing her?" sneered Mrs. Comstock.

"If she can stand what she did yesterday and will today she can bear 'most anything," said Wesley. "Put away the clothes if you want to till we tell her."

"Well, you don't take this waist I'm working on," said Margaret, "for I have to baste in the sleeves and set the collar. Put the rest out of sight if you like."

Mrs. Comstock picked up the basket and bundles, placed them inside her room and closed the door.

Margaret threaded her needle and began to sew. Mrs. Comstock returned to her book, while Wesley fidgeted and raged inwardly. He could see that Margaret was nervous and almost in tears, but the lines in Mrs. Comstock's impassive face were set and cold. So they sat and the clock ticked off the time—one hour, two, dusk, and no Elnora. Margaret long since had taken the last stitch she could. Occasionally she and Wesley exchanged a few words. Mrs. Comstock regularly turned a deaf ear and once arose and moved nearer a window. Just when Margaret and Wesley were discussing whether he had not best go to town to meet Elnora, they heard her coming up the walk. Wesley dropped his fidget chair and squared himself. Margaret gripped her sewing and turned pleading eyes to the door. Mrs. Comstock closed her book and grimly smiled.

"Mother, please open the door!" called Elnora.

Mrs. Comstock arose and swung open the screen. Elnora stepped in beside her, bent half nodding the whole front of her dress gathered into a sort of bag and with a heavy load and one arm in her high with books. In the dim light she did not see the Sintons.

"Please hand me the empty bucket in the kitchen, mother," she said. "I just had to bring these arrow points home, but I'm scared for fear I've soiled my dress and will have to wash it. I'm to clean them and take them to the bank in the morning, and oh, mother, I've sold enough stuff to pay for my books, my tuition and maybe a dress and some lighter shoes besides. Oh, mother, I'm so happy! Take the books and bring the bucket!"

Then she saw Margaret and Wesley. "Oh, glory!" she exclaimed. "I was just wondering how I'd ever wait to tell you, and here you are! It's too perfectly splendid to be true!"

"Tell us, Elnora," said Sinton.

"Well, sir," said Elnora, doubling down on the floor and spreading out her skirt, "set the bucket here, mother. These points are brittle and have to be put in one at a time. If they are chipped I can't sell them." And she told all that had happened.

Elnora laid the last arrow point in the bucket and arose, shaking leaves and bits of baked earth from her dress.

She reached into her pocket and produced her money and waved it before their wondering eyes.

"And that's the joy part!" she exclaimed. "Put it up in the clock till morning, mother. That pays for the books and tuition and"—Elnora hesitated, for she saw the nervous grasp with which her mother's fingers closed on the bills. Then she went on, but more slowly and thinking before she spoke.

(To Be Continued.)

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