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A GIRL OF THE LIMBERLOST

BY GENE STRATTON PORTER

(Continued.)

"There was one tense breath, then—"I could try," said Elnora simply.

Ammon rushed to the rescue. "We must go to work," he said, and began examining a walnut branch for Luna moth eggs. Elnora joined him while Mrs. Comstock drew her embroidery from her pocket and sat on a log. She said she was tired; they could come for her when they were ready to go. She could hear their voices all around her until she called them at supper time.

When they came to her she stood waiting on the trail, the sewing in one hand, the violin in the other. Elnora became very white, but took the trail without a word. Ammon, unable to see a woman carry a heavier load than he, reached for the instrument. Mrs. Comstock shook her head. She carried the violin home, took it into her room and closed the door. Elnora turned to Ammon.

"If she destroys that I will die!" cried the girl.

"She won't," said Ammon. "You misunderstand her. She wouldn't have said what she did about the ovis if she had meant to. She is your mother. No one loves you as she does. Trust her! Myself—I think she's simply great!"

Mrs. Comstock returned with serene face, and all of them helped with the supper. When it was over Ammon and Elnora sorted and classified the afternoon's specimens and made a trip to the woods to paint and light several trees for moths. When they came back Mrs. Comstock sat in the arbor, and they joined her. She went into the cabin, but she returned almost instantly, laying the violin and bow across Elnora's lap. "I wish you would give us a little music," she said.

The violin played on until Elnora was so tired she scarcely could lift the

bow. Then Ammon went home. The women walked to the gate with him and stood watching him from sight.

"That's what I call one decent young man!" said Mrs. Comstock. "To see him fit in with us, you'd think he'd been raised in a cabin, but it's likely he's always had the very cream of the pot."

"Yes, I think so," laughed Elnora. "but it hasn't hurt him. I've never seen anything I could criticize. He's teaching me so much unconsciously. You know he graduated from Harvard and has several degrees in law. He's coming in the morning."

Next morning Ammon came early, and he and Elnora went at once to the fields and woods. Mrs. Comstock had come to believe so implicitly in him that she now stayed at home to complete the work before she joined them, and when she did she often sat sewing,



leaving them wandering hours at a time. It was noon before she finished, and then she packed a basket of lunch. She found Elnora and Philip near the violet patch, which was still in its prime. They lunched together. Then Mrs. Comstock carried the basket back to the cabin, and Ammon and Elnora sat on a log, resting for a few minutes.

"Do you remember your promise about these violets?" asked Ammon. "Tomorrow is Edith's birthday, and if I'd put them special delivery on the morning train she'd get them in the late afternoon. They ought to keep well that long. She leaves for the north next day."

"Of course you can have them," said Elnora. "We will quit long enough before supper to gather a great bunch. They can be packed so they will carry all right. They should be perfectly fresh, especially if we gather them this evening and let them drink all night."

Then they went back to hunt Catocton. It was a long and a happy search. Ammon came to Elnora at dusk faintly holding one by the body, its dark wings showing and its long, slender legs trying to clasp his fingers and creep from his hold.

Elnora studied the black wings intently. "I surely believe that's Sappho," she marveled. "The Bird Woman will be overjoyed."

"We must get the cyanide jar quickly," said Ammon. "I wouldn't lose her for \$100. Such a chase as she led me!"

Elnora got the jar and began gathering up paraphernalia.

"When you make a find like that," she said, "it's the right time to quit and feel glorious all the rest of that day. I tell you I'm proud. We will go now. We have barely time to carry out our plans before supper. Won't mother be pleased to see that we have a rare one?"

"I'd like to see anyone more pleased than I am!" said Philip Ammon. "I feel as if I'd earned my supper to-night. Let's go."

He took the greater part of the load and stepped aside for Elnora to precede him. She went down the path, broken by the grazing cattle, toward the cabin and nearest the violet patch she stopped, laid down her net, and the things she carried. Ammon passed her and hurried forward.

"Aren't you going to?" began Elnora.

"I'm going to get this moth home in a hurry," he said. "This cyanide has lost its strength, and it's not working well. We need some fresh in the jar."

He had forgotten the violets. Elnora stood looking after him, a curious expression on her face. One second so—then she picked up the net and followed. At the blue bordered pool she paused and half turned back, then she closed her lips firmly and went on. It was 9 o'clock when Ammon said goodby and started to town. His gay whistle floated to them from the farthest corner of the Limberlost. Elnora complained of being tired, so she went to her room and to bed. But sleep would not come. Thought was racing in her brain, and the longer she lay the wider awake she grew. At last she softly slipped from bed, lighted her lamp and began opening boxes. Then she went to work. Two hours later a beautiful birch bark basket, strongly and artistically made, stood on her table. She set a tiny alarm clock at 3, returned to bed and fell asleep instantly.

She was on the floor with the first tinkle of the alarm, and hastily dressing, she picked up the basket and a box to fit it, crept down the stairs and out to the violet patch. When the basket was filled to overflowing, she set it in the stout pasteboard box, packed it solid with mosses, tied it firmly and slipped under the cord a

note.

(To Be Continued.)

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