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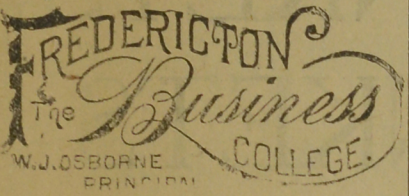
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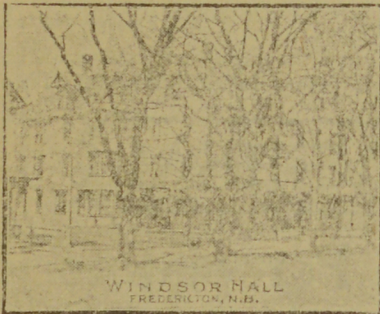
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A GIRL  
OF THE  
LIMBERLOST

By

GENE STRATTON-PORTER

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(Continued)

It was 10 o'clock when the chickens,  
pigs and cattle were fed, the turnips  
hoed and a heap of bean vines was  
stacked by the back door.

Wesley Sinton walked down the road  
a half mile and turned in at the lane  
leading to his home. His heart was  
hot and filled with indignation. He had  
told Elnora he did not blame her mother,  
but he did. His wife met him at the  
door.

"Did you see anything of Elnora,  
Wesley?" she questioned.

"Most too much, Maggie," he an-  
swered. "What do you say to going  
to town? There's a few things has  
to be got right away."

"Where did you see her, Wesley?"

"Along the old Limberlost trail, my  
girl, torn to pieces sobbing. Her cou-  
rage always has been fine, but the thing  
she met today was too much for her.  
We ought to have known better than  
to let her go that way. I ought to  
have gone in and seen about this  
school business. I'm no man to let a  
fatherless girl run into such trouble.  
Don't cry, Maggie. Get me some sup-  
per and I'll hitch up and see what we  
can do now."

"What can we do, Wesley?"

"I don't just know. But we've got  
to do something. Kate Comstock will  
be a handful, while Elnora will be two,  
but between us we must see that the  
girl is not too hard pressed about  
money and that she is dressed so she  
is not ridiculous. She's saved us the  
wages of a woman many a day. Can't  
you make her some decent dresses,  
Maggie?"

"Well, I'm not just what you call  
expert, but I could beat Kate Com-  
stock all to pieces. I know that skirts  
should be plaited to the band instead  
of gathered and full enough to sit in  
and short enough to walk in. I could  
try. There's patterns for sale. Let's  
go right away, Wesley."

"Well, set me a bite of supper while  
I hitch up."

They drove toward the city through  
the beautiful September evening, and  
as they went they planned for Elnora.  
The only trouble was not whether  
they were generous enough to get what  
she needed, but whether she would ac-  
cept what they got and what her moth-  
er would say.

They went to a large dry goods store,  
and when a clerk asked what they  
wanted to see neither of them knew,  
so they stepped to one side and held a  
whispered consultation.

"What had we better get, Wesley?"

"Blest if I know!" exclaimed Wes-  
ley. "I thought you would manage  
that. I know about some things I'm  
going to get."

At that instant several schoolgirls  
came into the store and approached them.

"There!" exclaimed Wesley breath-  
lessly. "There, Maggie! Like them!  
That's what she needs! Buy like they  
have!"

Before she knew it Margaret was  
among them.

"I beg your pardon, girls, but won't  
you wait a minute?" she asked.

The girls stopped with wondering  
faces.

"It's your clothes," explained Mrs.  
Sinton. "You look just beautiful to  
me. You look exactly as I should have  
wanted to see my girls. They both  
died of diphtheria when they were lit-  
tle. If they had lived they'd been near  
your age now, and I'd want them to  
look like you. I know a girl who  
would be just as pretty as any of you  
if she had the clothes, but her mother  
does not think about her, so I got to  
mother her some myself."

"She must be a lucky girl," said one  
girl.

"Oh, she loves me," said Margaret.  
"and I love her. I want her to look  
just like you do. Please tell me about  
your clothes. Are these the dresses  
and hats you wear to school? What  
kind of goods are they and where do  
you buy them?"

The girls began to laugh and cluster  
around Margaret. Wesley Sinton strode  
down the store with his head high in  
pride of her, but his heart was sore  
over the memory of two little faces  
under Brushwood sod. He inquired  
his way to the shoe department.

"Why, every one of us have on ging-  
ham or linen dresses," they said, "and  
they are our school clothes."

For a few moments there was a  
babel of laughing voices explaining to  
the delighted Margaret that school  
dresses should be bright and pretty,  
but simple and plain and until cold  
weather they should wash.

"I'll tell you," said Ellen Brownlee,  
"my father owns this store. I know  
all the clerks. I'll take you to Miss  
Hartley. You tell her just how much  
you want to spend and what you want  
to buy, and she will know how to get  
the most for your money."

"That's the very thing," agreed Mar-  
garet. "But before you go tell me  
about your hair. Elnora's hair is  
bright and wavy, but yours is silky  
as blacked flax. How do you do it?"

"Elnora?" asked four girls in con-

"Yes; Elnora is the name of the girl  
I want these things for."

"Did she come to the high school to-  
day?" questioned one of them.

"Was she in your classes?" demand-  
ed Margaret without reply.

Four girls stood silent and thought  
fast. Had there been a strange girl  
among them, and had she been over-  
looked and passed by with indiffer-  
ence because she was so very shabby?  
If she had appeared as much better  
than they as she had looked worse  
would her reception have been the  
same?

"There was a strange girl from the  
country in the freshman class today,"  
said Ellen Brownlee, "and her name  
was Elnora."

"That was the girl," said Margaret.  
"Are her people so very poor?" ques-  
tioned Ellen.

"No, not poor at all, come to think  
of it," answered Margaret. "It's a pe-  
culiar case. Mrs. Comstock had a  
great trouble, and she let it change  
her whole life and make a different  
woman of her. She used to be lovely,  
but all she does now is droop all day  
and walk the edge of the swamp half  
the night and neglect Elnora. If you  
girls would make life just a little  
easier for her it would be the finest  
thing you ever did."

All of them promised they would.  
"Now tell me about your hair," per-  
sisted Margaret Sinton.

So they took her to a toilet counter  
and she bought the proper hair soap,  
also a nail file and cold cream for use  
after windy days. Then they left her.

with the experienced clerk, and when  
at last Wesley found her she was load-  
ed with bundles, and the glint of other  
days was in her beautiful eyes.  
Wesley carried some packages also.

"Come on, now, let's get home," he  
said.

## CHAPTER III.

Wherein Elnora Procures Her Books  
and Finds Means of Earning Money.

ALL the way home Wesley and  
Margaret Sinton discussed how  
they should give Elnora their  
purchases and what Mrs. Com-  
stock would say.

"I am afraid she will be awful  
mad," said Margaret Sinton tremu-  
lously.

"She'll just rip," replied Wesley  
graphically. "But if she wants to  
leave the raising of her girl to the  
neighbors she needn't get fractious if  
they take some pride in doing a good  
job. From now on I calculate Elnora  
shall go to school, and she shall have  
all the clothes and books she needs, if  
I go around on the back of Kate Com-  
stock's land and cut a tree or drive off  
a calf to pay for them. Why I know  
one tree she owns that would put El-  
nora in heaven for a year. Just think  
of it, Margaret! It's not fair. One-  
third of what is there belongs to El-  
nora by law, and if Kate Comstock  
raises a row I'll tell her so and see  
that the girl gets it. You go to see  
Kate in the morning, and I'll go with  
you. Tell her you want Elnora's pat-  
tern, that you are going to make her  
a dress for helping us. And sort of  
hint at a few more things. If Kate  
balks I'll take a hand and settle her.  
I'll go to law for Elnora's share of that  
and then she can take her share."

"Why, Wesley Sinton, you're perfect-  
ly wild."

"I'm not! Did you ever stop to think  
that such cases are so frequent there  
have been laws made to provide for  
them? I can bring it up in court and  
force Kate to educate Elnora and  
board and clothe her till she's of age,  
and then she can take her own share."

"Wesley, Kate would go crazy!"

"She's crazy now. The idea of any  
mother living with as sweet a girl as  
Elnora and letting her suffer till I find  
her crying like a funeral! It makes  
me fighting mad!"

When Wesley came from the barn  
Margaret had four pieces of crisp ging-  
ham, a pale blue, a pink, a gray with  
green stripes and a rich brown and  
blue plaid. On each of them lay a  
yard and a half of wide ribbon to  
match. There were handkerchiefs and  
a brown leather belt. In her hands she  
held a wide brimmed tan straw hat  
having a high crown banded with vel-  
vet strips, each of which fastened with  
a tiny gold buckle.

"It looks kind of bare now," she ex-  
plained. "It had three quills on it  
here. The price was two and a half  
for the hat, and those things were a  
dollar and a dollar and a half apiece.  
I couldn't pay that."

"It does seem considerable," admit-  
ted Wesley, "but will it look right  
without them?"

"No, it won't!" said Margaret. "It's  
going to have quills on it. Do you re-  
member those beautiful peacock wing  
feathers that Phoebe Simms gave me?  
Three of them go on just where those  
came off, and nobody will ever know  
the difference. They match the hat to  
a moral, and they are just a little  
longer and richer than the ones that I  
had taken off. I was, wondering  
whether I better sew them on tonight  
while I remember how they set or  
wait till morning."

"Don't risk it!" exclaimed Wesley  
anxiously. "Don't you risk it! Sew  
them on right now!"

"Open your bundles, while I get the  
thread," said Margaret.

Wesley set out a pair of shoes. Mar-  
garet took them up and pinched the  
leather and stroked them.

"My, but they are pretty!" she cried.

"What else did you get?"

"Well, sir," said Wesley, "I saw  
something today. You told me about  
Kate getting that tin pail for Elnora  
to carry to high school, and you said  
you told her it was a shame. So I just  
inquired around till I found this, and  
I think it's about the ticket. Decent  
looking and handy as you please. See  
here, now."

(To be Continued)

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