

A Girl of the Lumberlost.

[Continued from page 6, Col. 4.] "I want to see me!" he demanded.

"How long until supper, Margaret?" asked Sinton. "You are going to keep him for supper?" she asked.

"Sure!" said Sinton. "That's what I brought him for. It's likely he never had a good square meal of decent food in his life. He's starved to the bone."

Margaret arose deliberately, removed the white cloth from the supper table and substituted an old red one she used to wrap the bread. She put away the pretty dishes they commonly used and set the table with old plates for pies and kitchen utensils. But she fried the chicken and was generous with milk and honey, snowy bread, gray, potatoes and fruit.

Sinton repainted the scratched wheel. He mended the fence, with Billy holding the nails and handing the pickets. Then he filled the old hole, dug a new one and set the hitching post.

Billy hopped on one foot at his task of holding the post steady as the earth was packed round it. There was not the shadow of trouble on his little freckled face. Sinton threw in stones and pounded the earth solid around the post. The sound of a gulping sob attracted him to Billy. "The tears were rolling down his cheeks. 'If I'd a known you'd have to get down in a hole and work so hard I wouldn't 'a' hit the horses," he said.

"Never you mind, Billy," said Sinton. "You will know next time, so you can think over it and make up your mind whether you really want to be before you strike."

Sinton went to the barn to put away the tools. He thought Billy at his heels, but the boy lagged on the way. A big, snowy turkey gobbler resented the small intruder in his especial preserves, and with spread tail and dragging wings came at him threateningly. If that turkey gobbler had known the sort of things with which Billy was accustomed to holding his own he never would have issued that challenge. Billy accepted instantly. He danced around with stiff arms at his sides and imitated the gobbler. Then came his opportunity and he jumped on the big turkey's back. Wesley heard Margaret's scream in time to see the flying leap and admire its dexterity. The turkey tucked its tail and scampered. Billy slid from its back and as he fell he clutched wildly, caught the folded tail and instinctively hung on for life. The turkey gave one scream and relaxed its muscles. Then it fled in disgraced defeat to the haystack. Billy scrambled to his feet holding the tail, and his eyes were bulging.

"Why, the blasted old thing came off!" he said to Sinton, holding out the tail in amazed wonder. Sinton, caught suddenly, forgot everything and roared. Seeing which, Billy thought a turkey tail of no account and flung that one high above him, shouting with childish laughter as the feathers scattered and fell.

Margaret, watching, burst into tears. Wesley had gone mad. For the first time in her married life she wanted to tell her mother. When Wesley had waited until he was so hungry he could wait no longer he invaded the kitchen to find a cooked supper baking on the back of the stove, while Margaret with red eyes nursed a pair of demoralized white kittens.

"Is supper ready?" he asked. "It has been for an hour," answered Margaret. "Why didn't you call us?" That "us" had too much comradeship in it. It irritated Margaret. "I supposed it would take you even longer than that to fix things decent again. As for my turkey and my poor little kittens they don't matter."

"I am mighty sorry about them, Margaret, you know that. Billy is very bright, and he will soon learn." "Soon learn?" cried Margaret. "Wesley Sinton, you don't mean to say that you think of keeping that creature here for some time?"

"No; I think of keeping a decent, well behaved little boy." Margaret set the supper on the table. Seeing the old red cloth, Wesley stared in amazement. Then he understood. Billy capered around in delight. "Ain't that pretty?" he cooed. "I wish Jimmy and Belle could see. We, why, we let out of our hands or off a old drygoods box, and when we fix up a lot we have newspaper. We ain't ever had a nice red cloth like this."

Wesley looked straight at Margaret, so intently that she turned away, her face flushing. He stacked the dictionary and the geography of the world on a chair and lifted Billy beside him. He heaped a plate generously, cut the food, put a fork into Billy's little fist and made him eat slowly and properly. Billy did his best. Occasionally greed overcame him, and he used his left hand to pop a bite into his mouth with his fingers. These lapses Wesley patiently overlooked and went on with his general instructions. Luckily Billy did not spill anything on his clothing or the cloth. After supper Wesley took him to the barn until he finished the night work. Then he went and sat by Margaret on the front porch. Billy appropriated the hammock and swung by pulling a rope tied around a tree. The very energy with which he went at the work of swinging himself appealed to Wesley.

"Mercy, but he's an active little body!" he said. "There isn't a lazy bone in him. See how he works to pay for his fun."

"There goes his foot through it!" cried Margaret. "Wesley, he shall not ruin my hammock."

"Of course he shan't!" said Wesley. "Wait, Billy; let me show you."

Thereupon he explained to Billy that ladies wearing beautiful white dresses sat in hammocks, so little boys must not put their dusty feet in them. They must just sit in them and let their feet hang down. Billy immediately sat and allowed his feet to swing.

"Margaret!" said Sinton after a long silence on the porch. "Isn't it true that if Billy had been a half starved sore cat, dog or animal of any sort that you would have pitied and helped care for it and been glad to see me get any pleasure out of it I could?"

"Yes," said Margaret coldly. "But because I brought a child with an immortal soul there is no welcome. 'That isn't a child. It's an animal.' 'You just said you would have welcomed an animal.'"

"Not a wild one. I meant a tame beast." "Billy is not a beast," said Wesley hotly. "He is a very dear little boy. Margaret, you've always done the church going and Bible reading for this family. How do you reconcile that 'suffer little children to come unto me' with the way you are treating Billy?"

Margaret arose. "I haven't treated that child. I have only let him alone. I can barely hold myself. He needs the side tanned about off him."

"If you'd cared to look at his body you'd know that you couldn't find a place to strike without cutting into a raw spot," said Sinton. "Besides, Billy has not done a thing for which a child should be punished. He is only full of life, no training and with a boy's love of mischief. He is just a bully little chap, and I love him."

"Oh, good heavens!" cried Margaret, going into the house as she spoke.

CHAPTER XI.

Wherein Mrs. Comstock and Mrs. Sinton Clash Over Billy.

SINTON sat still. At last Billy, tired of the swing, came to him and leaned his slight body against the big knee.

"Am I going to sleep here?" he asked. "Sure you are," said Sinton. "Where can he sleep?" he asked Margaret. "I'm sure I don't know," she answered.

"Oh, I can sleep in any place," said Billy, "on the floor or anywhere. Home I sleep on pa's coat on a store box, and Jimmy and Belle they sleep on the store box too. I sleep between them so's I don't roll off and crack my head. Ain't you got a store box and a old coat?"

Sinton arose and opened a folding lounge. Then he brought an armload of clean horse blankets from a closet. "These don't look like the nice white bed a little boy should have, Billy," he said, "but we'll make them do. This will beat a store box all hollow."

Billy took a long leap for the lounge. When he found it bounced he proceeded to bounce until he was tired. By that time the blankets had to be re-folded. Wesley had Billy take one end and help, while both of them seemed to enjoy the job. Then Billy lay down and curled up in his clothes like a little dog. But sleep would not come. Finally he sat up. He stared around restlessly. Then he arose, went to Sinton and leaned against his knee. Sinton picked up the boy and folded his arms around him. Billy sighed in rapturous content.

"That bed feels so lost like," he said. "Jimmy always jabbed me on one side and Belle on the other, and so I knew I was there."

Billy slid from Sinton's arms and walked toward Margaret until he reached the middle of the room. Then he stopped and at last sat on the floor. Finally he lay down and closed his eyes. "This feels more like my bed; if only Jimmy and Belle was here to crowd up a little so it wasn't so alone like."

"Won't I do, Billy?" asked Sinton in a husky voice. Billy moved restlessly. "Seems like—seems like—toward night as if a body got kind o' lonesome for a woman person—like her."

Billy indicated Margaret. "You don't like boys, do you?" he questioned. "I like good boys," said Margaret. "Billy was at her knee instantly. 'Well, say, I'm a good boy,' he announced joyously."

"I do not think boys who hurt helpless kittens and pull out turkeys' tails are good boys."

"Yes, but I didn't hurt the kittens," explained Billy. "They got mad 'bout ist a little fun and scratched each other. I didn't s'pose they'd act like that. And I didn't pull the turkey's tail. I ist held on to the first thing I grabbed and the turkey pulled." He turned to Sinton. "You tell her. Didn't the turkey pull? I didn't know 'e tail was loose, did I?"

"I don't think you did, Billy," said Sinton. Billy stared into Margaret's cold face. "Sometimes at night Belle sits on the floor and I lay my head in her lap. I could pull up a chair and lay my head in your lap—like this, I mean." Billy pulled up a chair, climbed on it and laid his head on Margaret's lap. Then he shut his eyes again. Margaret could have looked little more repulsed if he had been a snake.

Billy was soon up. "My, but your lap is hard," he said. "And you are a good deal fatter 'n Belle, too." He slid from the chair and came back to the middle of the room.

"Oh, but I wist my pa wasn't dead!" he cried. The food broke and Billy screamed in desperation.

Out of the night a soft, warm young figure flashed through the door and with a swoop caught him in her arms. She dropped into a chair, nestled him closely and drooped her fragrant brown head over his little bullet eyed red one and rocked softly as she crooned over him:

"Billy, boy, where have you been? Oh, I have been to seek a wife. She's the joy of my life. But, then, she's a young thing, and she can't leave her mammy!"

Billy gripped her with a death grip. Elnora wiped his eyes, kissed his face, swayed and sang:

"Do you love me tight as that?" he questioned blissfully. "Yes, bushels and bushels," said Elnora. "Better than any little boy in the whole world."

Billy looked at Margaret. "She don't!" he said. "She don't want me here 't all."

Elnora smothered his face against her breast and rocked. "You love me, don't you?" he said. "I will if you will go to sleep."

"Every single day you will give me your dinner for the bologna, won't you?" said Billy.

"Yes, I will," replied Elnora. "But you will have as good lunch as I do after this. You will have milk, eggs, chicken, all kinds of good things, little pies and cakes, maybe."

Billy shook his head. "I am going back home soon as it is light," he said. "She don't want me. She thinks I'm a bad boy. She's going to whip me—if he lets her. She said so. I heard her. Oh, I wish he hadn't died! I want to go home." Billy shrieked again.

[Continued next week.]

Robbery in New York. Saturday—The room of Mrs. Jim Jones in the Perazza hotel was robbed last night of jewelry worth \$300.00.

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