

A Girl of the Lumberlost.

[Continued from page 6, Col. 4.]
ferred to give her lessons if she would play to pay for them, so her progress was rapid in technical work. But from the first day the instrument became hers, with perfect faith that she could play as her father did, she spent half her practice time in imitating the sounds of all outdoors and improvising the songs her happy heart sang.

So the first year went, and the second and third were a repetition; but the fourth was different, for that was the close of the course, ending with graduation and all its attendant ceremonies and expenses. To Elnora these appeared mountain high. She had hoarded every cent, thinking twice before she parted with a penny, but teaching natural history in the grades had taken time from her studies in



She Drew the Bow Across Them in Whispering Measure.

school which must be made up outside. She was a conscientious student, ranking first in most of her classes and standing high in all the branches. Her interest in her violin had grown with the years.

Three years had changed Elnora from the girl of sixteen to the very verge of womanhood. She had grown tall, round and her face had the loveliness of perfect complexion, beautiful eyes and hair and an added touch from within that might have been called comprehension.

She was so absorbed in her classes and her music that she had not been able to gather specimens as usual. When she realized this and hunted assiduously, she soon found that changing natural conditions had affected such work and specimens were scarce.

All the time the expense of books, clothing and incidentals had continued. Elnora added to her bank account whenever she could and drew out when she was compelled, but she omitted the important feature of calling for a balance. So one early spring morning in the last quarter of the fourth year she almost fainted when she learned that all her funds were gone. Commencement, with its extra expense, was coming. She had no money and very few cocoons to open in June, which would be too late. She had one collection for the Bird Woman complete to a pair of Imperialis moths, and that was her only asset. On the day she added these big yellow Emperors she would get a check for \$300, but she would not get it until these specimens were secured. She remembered that she never had found an Emperor before June.

Moreover, that sum was for her first year in college. Then she would be of age, and she meant to sell enough of her share of her father's land to finish. She knew her mother would oppose her

bitterly in that, for Mrs. Comstock had clung to every acre and tree that belonged to her husband. Her land was almost complete forest where her neighbors owned cleared farms dotted with wells that every hour sucked oil from beneath her holdings, but she was too absorbed in the grief she nursed to know or care. The taxes for the Brushwood road and the redredging of the great Lumberlost ditch had been more than she could pay from her income, and she had trembled before the wicket as she asked the banker if she had funds to pay it and wondered why he laughed as he assured her she had, for Mrs. Comstock had spent no time on compounding interest and never added the sums she had been depositing through nearly twenty years. Now she thought her funds were almost gone, and every day she worried over expenses. She could see no reason in going through the forms of graduation when pupils had all in their heads that was required to graduate. Elnora knew she had to have her diploma in order to enter the college she wanted to attend, but she did not dare utter the word until high school was finished, for instead of softening, as she hoped her mother had begun to do, she seemed to remain very much the same.

When the girl reached the swamp she sat on a log and thought bitterly over the absolute expense she was

compelled to meet. Every member of her particular set was having an expensive photograph taken to exchange with the others. Elnora loved these girls and boys, and to say she could not have their pictures to keep was more than she could bear. Each one would give to all the others a handsome graduation present. She knew they would prepare gifts for her whether she could make a present in return or not. Then it was the custom for each graduating class to give a great entertainment and use the funds to present the school with a statue for the entrance hall. Elnora had been cast for and was practicing a part in that performance. She was expected to furnish her dress and personal necessities. She had been told that she must have a green dress. And where was it to come from?

Every girl of the class would have three beautiful new frocks for commencement—one for the baccalaureate sermon, another, which could be plain, for graduation exercises, and a handsome one for the banquet and ball. Elnora faced the past three years and wondered how she could have spent so much money and not kept account of it. She did not realize where it had gone. She did not know what she could do now. She thought over the photographs and at last settled that question to her satisfaction. She studied longer over the gifts, ten handsome ones there must be, and at last decided she could arrange for them. The green dress came first. The lights would be dim in the scene and the setting deep woods. She could manage that. She simply could not have three dresses. She would have to get a very simple one for the sermon and do the best she could for graduation. Whatever she got for that must be made with a glimpse that could be taken out to make it a little more festive for the ball. But where could she get even two pretty dresses?

The only hope she could see was to break into her collection, sell some moths and try to replace them in June. But she knew that never would do. No June ever brought just the things she hoped. If she spent the college money she knew she could not replace it. If she did not the only way was to try for a room in the grades and teach a year. Her work there had been so appreciated that Elnora felt with the recommendation she knew she could get from the superintendent and teachers she could secure a position.

She wanted to start to college when the other girls were going. If she could make the first year alone she could manage the rest. But make that first year herself she must. Instead of selling any of her collection, she must hunt as she never before had hunted and find a yellow Emperor. She had to love it, that was all. Also, she had to have those dresses. She thought of Sinton and dismissed it. She thought of the Bird Woman and knew she could not tell her. She thought of every way in which she ever had hoped to earn money and realized that with the play, committee meetings, practicing and final examinations she scarcely had time to live, much less to do more work than the work required for her pictures and gifts. Again Elnora was in trouble, and this time it seemed the worst of all.

It was dark when she arose and went home. "Mother," she said, "I have a piece of news that is decidedly not cheerful. My money is all gone."

"Well, did you think it would last forever? It's been a marvel to me that it's held out as well as it has, the way you've dressed and gone."

"I don't think I've spent any that I was not compelled to," said Elnora. "I've dressed on just as little as I possibly could to keep going. I am heart-sick. I thought I had over \$50 to put me through commencement, but they tell me it's all gone."

"In my opinion you'd best bring home your books and quit right now," said Mrs. Comstock. "You can't be fixed like the rest of them. Don't be so foolish as to run into it. Just stay here and let these last few days go. You can't learn enough more to be of any account."

"I can't!" said Elnora desperately. "I've gone on too long. It would make a break in everything. They wouldn't let me have my diploma!"

"What's the difference? You've got the stuff in your head. I wouldn't give a rap for a scrap of paper. That don't mean anything!"

"But I've worked four years for it and I can't enter—I ought to have it to help me get a school when I want to teach. If I don't have my grades to show people will think I quit because I couldn't pass my examinations. I must have my diploma!"

"Then get it!" said Mrs. Comstock.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wherein Mrs. Comstock Hears Elnora Play on Her Father's Violin.

Elnora went upstairs and did not come down again that night, which her mother called pointing.

"I've thought all night," said the girl at breakfast, "and I can't see any way but to borrow the money of Uncle Wesley and pay it back from some that the Bird Woman will owe me, when I get one more specimen. But that means that I can't go to—that I will have to teach this winter, if I can get a city grade or a country school."

"Just you dare go dingling after Wesley Sinton for money," cried Mrs. Comstock. "You won't do any such thing!"

"I can't see any other way. I've got to have the money!"

"Quit, I tell you!"

"I can't quit—I've gone too far!"

"Well, then, let me get your clothes, and you can pay me back."

"But you said you had no money!"

"Maybe I can borrow some of the bank. Then you can return it when the Bird Woman pays you." "All right," said Elnora. "I don't have to have expensive things. It will be warm, so I can go bare-headed."

Then she started to school, but was so tired and discouraged she scarcely could walk. Four years' plans going in one day! For she felt that if she did not get started to college that fall she never would.

After that the days went so swiftly she scarcely had time to think, but several trips her mother made to town, and the assurance that everything was all right, satisfied Elnora. She worked very hard to pass good final examinations and perfect herself for the play. For two days she had remained in town with the Bird Woman in order to spend more time practicing and at her work.

Often Margaret had asked about her dresses for graduation, and Elnora had replied that they were with a woman in the city who had made her a white dress for last year's commencement and when she was a junior usher, and they would be all right. So Margaret, Wesley and Billy concerned themselves over what they would get her for a present. Margaret suggested a beautiful dress. Sinton said that would look to every one as if she needed dresses. The thing was to get a handsome gift like all the rest would have.

It was toward the close of the term when they drove to town one evening to try to settle this important question. They knew Mrs. Comstock had been alone several days, so they asked her to accompany them.

While they were searching the stores for something on which all of them could decide Mr. Brownlee met Wesley and stopped to shake hands.

"I see your boy came out finely," he said.

"I don't allow any boy anywhere to be finer than Billy," said Sinton.

"I guess you don't allow any girl to surpass Elnora," said Mr. Brownlee.

"She comes home with Ellen often, and my wife and I love her. Ellen says she is great in her part tonight. Best thing in the whole play. Of course you are in to see it. If you haven't reserved seats you'd best start pretty soon, for the high school auditorium only seats a thousand."

"Why, yes, of course," said the bewildered Sinton. Then he hurried to Margaret. "Say," he said, "there is going to be a play at the high school tonight, and Elnora is in it. Why hasn't she told us?"

"I don't know," said Margaret. "but I'm going."

"So am I," said Billy.

"Me, too," said Wesley, "unless you think for some reason she don't want us. Looks like she would have told us if she had. I'm going to ask her mother."

"Yes, that's what she's been staying in town for," said Mrs. Comstock.

"It's some sort of a swindle to raise money for her class to buy some silly thing to stick up in the schoolhouse hall to remember them by. I don't know whether it's now or next week, but there's something of the kind to be done."

"Well, it's tonight," said Wesley. "and we are going. It's my treat, and we've got to hurry or we won't get in. There's reserved seats, and we have none, so it's the gallery for us, but I don't care so long as I get to take one good peep at Elnora."

"Spose she plays?" whispered Margaret in his ear.

"Ah, tush! She couldn't!" said Wesley.

"Well, she's been doing it three years in the orchestra and working like a slave at it."

"Oh, well, that's different. She's in the play tonight. Brownlee told me so. Come on, quick! We'll drive and hitch closest place we can find to the building."

Margaret went in the excitement of the moment, but she was troubled. When they reached the building Wesley tied the team to a railing and Billy sprang out to help Margaret. Mrs. Comstock sat still.

"Come on, Kate," said Wesley, reaching his hand.

"I'm not going anywhere," said Mrs. Comstock, settling comfortably back against the cushions.

All of them begged and pleaded, but it was no use. Not an inch would Mrs. Comstock budge, so they left her.

They found seats near the door where they could see fairly well. Billy stood at the back of the hall and had a good view. By and by a great volume of sound veiled from the orchestra, but Elnora was not playing.

Out in the warm summer night a sour, grim woman nursed an aching heart and tried to justify herself. The effort irritated her intensely. She leaned back, closed her eyes and tried to make her mind a blank, to shut out even the music, when the leading violin began a solo. Mrs. Comstock bore it as long as she could and then slipped from the carriage and fled down the street.

She did not know how far she went or how long she stayed, but everything was still save an occasional raised voice when she wandered back. She stood looking at the building. Slowly she entered the wide gates and followed up the walk. Elnora had been coming here for almost four years. When Mrs. Comstock reached the door she went inside. The entrance to the auditorium was packed with people and a crowd was standing outside. When they noticed a tall woman with white face and hair and black dress one by one they stepped a little aside, so that Mrs. Comstock could see the stage. It was covered with curtains and no one was doing anything. Just as she turned to go a sound so faint that everyone leaned forward and listened drifted down the auditorium. It was

difficult to tell just what it was; after one instant half the audience looked toward the windows, for it seemed only a breath of wind rustling freshly opened leaves, just a hint of stirring air.

Then the curtains were swept aside swiftly. The stage had been transformed into a lovely little corner of creation, where trees and flowers grew and moss carpeted the earth. A soft wind blew, and it was the gray of dawn. Suddenly a robin joined him, and then several orioles began talking at once. The light grew stronger, the dew drops trembled, flower perfume began to creep out to the audience; the air moved the branches gently and a rooster crowed. Then all the scene was shaken with a babel of bird notes and other sounds of nature. The voices died and soft, exquisite melody began to swell and roll. In the center of the stage, piece by piece the grasses, mosses and leaves dropped from an embankment, the foliage softly blew away, while plainer and plainer came the outlines of a lovely girl figure draped in soft clinging green. She played as only a peculiar chain of circumstances puts it in the power of a very few to play.

At the doorway a white faced woman bore it as long as she could and then fell senseless. The men nearest carried her down the hall to the fountain, revived her and then placed her in the carriage to which she directed them.

The girl played on and never knew.

That was Friday night. Elnora came home Saturday morning and went to work. Mrs. Comstock asked no questions, and the girl only told her that the audience had been large enough to pay for the piece of statuary the class had selected for the hall. Then she inquired about her dresses and was told they would be ready for her. She had been invited to go to the Bird Woman's

to prepare for both the sermon and commencement exercises. Since there was so much practicing to do, it had been arranged that she should remain there from the night of the sermon until after she was graduated. If Mrs. Comstock decided to attend she was to drive in with the Sintons.

It was almost time for Wesley to come to take Elnora to the city when, fresh from her bath, with shining, crisply washed hair and dressed to her outer garment, she stood with expectant face before her mother and cried, "Now my dress, mother."

Mrs. Comstock was pale as she replied, "It's on my bed. Help yourself."

Elnora opened the door and stepped into her mother's room with never a misgiving. She hurried to the bed to find only her last summer's white dress, freshly washed and ironed.

Somewhere a dainty lawn or mull dress simply must be hanging. But it was not. Elnora dropped on the chest because she felt too weak to stand. In less than two hours she must be in the church at Onnasha. At

last she opened the door. "I can't find my dress," she said. "Well, as it's the only one there I shouldn't think it would be much trouble."

"You mean for me to wear an old washed dress tonight?"

"It's a good dress. There isn't a hole in it! There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't wear it."

"Except that I will not," said Elnora. "Didn't you get me any dress for commencement, either?"

"If you sell that tonight I've plenty of time to wash it again."

Sinton's voice called from the gate.

"In a minute," answered Elnora.

[Continued next week.]

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