

The Girl of the Limberlost

(Conclusion.)

Henderson shot a swift glance toward the boat. Terrence O'More just had stepped from the gangplank, escorting a little daughter, so like him, it was comical. There followed a picture not easy to describe. The Angel in the full flower of her beauty, richly dressed, a laugh on her cameo face, the setting sun glinting on her gold hair, escorted by her eldest son, who held her hand tightly and carefully watched her steps. Next came Elnora, dressed with equal richness, a trifle taller and slenderer, almost the same type of coloring, but with different eyes and hair, facial lines and expression.

As the crowd pressed around the party an opening was left beside the fish sheds. Edith ran down the dock. Henderson sprang after her, catching her arm and assisting her to the street. "Help me!" she cried, clinging to him. He put his arm around her, almost carrying her out of sight into a little cove walled by high rocks at the back, where there was a clean floor of white sand, and logs washed from the lake for seats. He found one of these with a back rest, and hurrying down to the water he soaked his handkerchief and carried it to her. She passed it across her lips, over her eyes.

"Hart, what makes you?" she said wearily. "My mother doesn't care. She says this is good for me. Do you think this is good for me, Hart?"

"Edith, you know I would give my life if I could save you this," he said, and could not speak further. He held her carefully, softly fanning her. She was suffering almost more than either of them could bear.

"I wish your boat was here," she said at last. "I want to sail fast with the wind in my face."

"There is no wind. I can get my motor around in a few minutes."

"Then get it."

"Lie on the sand. I can phone from the first booth. It won't take but a little while."

Edith lay on the white sand and Henderson covered her face with her hat. Then he ran to the nearest booth and talked imperatively. Presently he was back, bringing a hot drink that was stimulating. Shortly the motor ran close to the beach and stopped. Henderson's servant brought a row-boat ashore and took them to the launch.

Hour after hour the boat ran up and down the shore. The moon arose and the night air grew very chilly. Henderson put on an overcoat and piled more covers on Edith.

"You must take me home," she said at last. "The folks will be uneasy."

He was compelled to take her to the cottage with the battle still raging. He went back early the next morning, but already she had wandered out over the island. Instinctively Henderson felt that the shore would attract her. There was something in the tumult of rough little Huron's waves that called to him. It was there he found her, crouching so close the water foam was dampening her skirts.

"May I stay?" he asked.

"I have been hoping you would come," she answered. "It's bad enough when you are here, but it is a little easier than bearing it alone."

"Of course you know there is something I have got to do. Hart! Will you go with me?"

"Of course."

"I might as well give up and get it over," she faltered.

That was the first time in her life that Edith Carr ever had proposed to give up anything she wanted.

"Help me, Hart!"

Henderson started around the beach, assisting her all he could. Finally he stopped.

"Edith, there is no sense in this! You are too tired to go. You know you can trust me. You wait in any of these lovely places and send me. You will be safe, and I'll run. One word is all that is necessary."

"But I've got to say that word myself, Hart!"

"Then write it and let me carry it. The message is not going to prove who went to the office and sent it."

"That is quite true," she said dropping wearily, but she made no movement to take the pen and paper he offered.

"Hart, you write it," she said at last.

Henderson turned away his face. He gripped the pen, while his breath sucked between his dry teeth.

"Certainly!" he said when he could speak. "Mackinac, Aug. 27. Phillip Ammon, Lake Shore hospital, Chicago." He paused with suspended pen and glanced at Edith. Her white lips were working, but no sound came.

"Miss Comstock is at Terrence O'More's, on Mackinac island," prompted Henderson.

Edith nodded.

"Signed, Henderson," continued the big man.

Edith shook her head.

"Say, 'She is well and happy,' and sign, Edith Carr!" she panted.

"Not on your life!" flashed Henderson.

She nodded, and, pulling his hat lower over his eyes, Henderson ran around the shore. In less than an hour he was back. That evening they were sailing down the straits before a stiff breeze and Henderson was busy with the tiller when she said to him, "Hart, I want you to do something more for me. I want you to go away."

"Very well," he said quietly, but his face whitened visibly.

"You say that as if you had been expecting it."

"I have. I knew from the beginning that when this was over you would dislike me for having seen you suffer. Does it make any difference to you where I go?"

"I want you where you will be loved and good care taken of you."

"Thank you," said Henderson, smiling grimly. "Have you any idea where such a spot might be found?"

"It should be with your sister at Los Angeles. She always has seemed very fond of you."

"That is quite true," said Henderson, his eyes brightening a little. "I will go to her. When shall I start?"

"At once."

Henderson began to tack for the landing, but his hands shook until he scarcely could manage the boat. Edith Carr sat watching him indifferently, but her heart was throbbing painfully.

"Why is there so much suffering in the world?" she kept whispering to herself. Inside her door Henderson took her by the shoulders almost roughly.

"For how long is this, Edith, and how are you going to say goodby to me?"

She raised tired, pain filled eyes to his.

"I don't know for how long it is," she said. "If peace ever comes and I want you I won't wait for you to find it out yourself—I'll cable—Marconi-graph—anything."

Henderson studied her intently.

"In that case we will shake hands," he cried. "Goodby, Edith. Don't forget that every hour I am thinking of you and hoping all good things will come to you soon."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Wherein Phillip Finds Elnora.

"I need my own violin," cried Elnora. "This one may be a thousand times more expensive and much older than mine, but it wasn't inspired and taught to sing by a man who knew how."

The guests in the O'More music room laughed appreciatively.

"Why don't you write your mother to come for a visit and bring yours?" suggested O'More.

"I did that three days ago," acknowledged Elnora. "I am half expecting her on the noon boat. That is one reason why this violin gets worse every minute. There is nothing at all the matter with me."

Elnora laid away the violin. "Come along, children," she said. "Let's race to the playhouse."

With the brood at her heels Elnora ran, and for an hour lively sounds stole from the remaining spot of forest on the island, which lay beside the O'More cottage. Then young Terry went to the playroom to bring Alice her doll. He came racing back, dragging it by one leg and crying, "There's company! Some one has come that mamma and papa are just tearing down the house over. He's sick. I saw through the window."

Before Elnora missed her, Alice, who had gone to investigate, came flying across the shadows and through the sunshine waving a paper. She thrust it into Elnora's hand.

"There is a man person—a stranger person!" she shouted. "But he knows you! He sent you that! You are to be the doctor! He said so! Oh, do hurry! I like him heaps!"

Elnora read Edith Carr's telegram to Phillip Ammon and understood that he had been ill; that she had been located by Edith, who had notified him. In so doing she had acknowledged defeat. At last Phillip was free. Elnora went to him with a radiant face.

"Are you sure, at last, runaway?" asked Phillip Ammon.

"Perfectly sure!" cried Elnora.

"Will you marry me now?"

"This instant! That is, any time after the noon boat comes in."

"Why such unnecessary delay?" demanded Ammon.

"It is almost September," explained Elnora. "I sent for mother three days

ago. We must wait until she comes, and we either have to send for Uncle Wesley and Aunt Margaret or go to them. I couldn't possibly be married properly without those dear people."

"We will send," decided Ammon. "The trip will be a treat for them. O'More, would you get off a message at once?"

Every one met the noon boat. They went in the motor because Ammon was too weak to walk so far. As soon as people could be distinguished at all Elnora and Phillip sighted an erect figure, with a head like a snowdrift. When the gangplank fell the first person across it was a lean, red haired boy of eleven, carrying a violin in one hand and an enormous bouquet of yellow marigolds and purple asters in the other. He was beaming with broad smiles until he saw Ammon. Then his expression changed.

"Aw, say!" he exclaimed reproachfully. "I bet you Aunt Margaret is right. He is going to be your beau?"

Elnora stooped to kiss Billy as she caught her mother.

Mrs. Comstock shook out her skirts, straightened her hat and came forward to meet Phillip, who took her into his arms and kissed her repeatedly. He passed her along to Freckles and the Angel, to whom her greetings were mingled with scolding and laughter over her wind blown hair. Then the O'More children came crowding to meet Elnora's mother.

"Before you think of something more give me your left hand, please," said Phillip to Elnora.

Elnora gave it gaily and the ring slipped on her finger. Then they went together into the forest to tell each other all about it and talk it over.

"Have you seen Edith?" asked Ammon.

"No," answered Elnora. "but she must be here, or she may have seen me when we went to Potosky a few days ago. Her people have a cottage over on the bluff, but the Angel never told me until today. I didn't want to make that trip, but the folks were so anxious to entertain me and it was only a few days until I intended to let you know myself where I was."

"And I was going to wait just that long, and if I didn't hear then I was getting ready to turn over the country. I can scarcely realize yet that Edith sent me that telegram."

"No wonder! It's a difficult thing to believe. I can't express now I feel for her."

"Let us never again speak of it," said Ammon. "It is done. We will forget it."

"I scarcely think I shall," said Elnora. "It is the sort of thing I like to remember. How suffering must have changed her! I would give a great deal to bring her peace."

"Henderson came to see me at the hospital a few days ago. He's gone a pretty wild pace, but if he had been held from youth by the love of a good woman he might have lived differently. There are things about him one cannot help admiring."

"I think he loves her," said Elnora softly.

Edith Carr went to her room after her goodby to Henderson, lay on her bed and tried to think why she was suffering as she was.

"It is all my selfishness, my unstrained temper, my pride in my looks, my ambition to be first," she said. "That is what has caused this trouble. No one really cares for me but Hart. I've sent him away, so there is no one—no one."

Edith pressed her fingers across her burning eyes and lay still.

"He is gone," she whispered at last. "He would go at once. He would not see me again. Oh, these dreadful days to come, alone! I can't bear it. Hart, Hart!" she cried aloud. "I want you! No one cares but you. No one understands but you. Oh, I want you!"

She sprang from her bed and felt her way to her desk.

"Get me some one at the Henderson cottage," she said to central and waited shivering.

After a time the sleepy voice of Mrs. Henderson answered.

"Has Hart gone?" panted Edith Carr.

"No! He came in late and began to talk about starting to California. He hasn't slept in weeks to amount to anything. I put him to bed. There is time enough to start to California when he wakes. Edith, what are you planning to do next with that boy of mine?"

"Will you tell him I want to see him before he goes?"

"Yes, but I won't wake him."

"I don't want you to. Just tell him in the morning."

"Very well."

Hart was not gone. Edith fell asleep. She arose at noon the next day, took a cold bath, ate her breakfast, dressed carefully, and leaving word that she had gone to the forest she walked slowly across the leaves. She was thinking hard and fast.

Henderson came swiftly down the path. A long sleep, food and Edith's message had done him good. He had dressed in new light flannels that were becoming. Edith met him.

"Let us walk in the forest," she said.

They passed the old Catholic graveyard and went back into the deepest wood of the island. There Edith seated herself on a mossy old log and Henderson studied her. He could detect a change. She was still pale and her eyes tired, but the dull, strained look was gone. He wanted to hope, but he did not dare.

"What have you thought of that you wanted yet, Edith?" he asked lightly as he stretched himself at her feet.

"You!"

Henderson lay tense and very still.

"Well, I am here."

"Thank heaven for that! I didn't want you to go away."

"Not at all?"

"Not at all; not ever; not unless you take me with you, Hart. I can't honestly say that I love you with the love you deserve. My heart is too sore. It's too soon to know. But I love you some way. You are necessary to me. You are my comfort, my shield. If you want me, as you know me to be, Hart, you can consider me yours."

Henderson kissed her hand passionately. "Don't, Edith," he begged. "Don't say those things. I can't bear it. I understand. Everything will come right in time. Love like mine must bring a reward. You will love me some day. I can wait. I am the most patient fellow."

"But I must say it," cried Edith. "I— I think, Hart, that I have been on the wrong road to find happiness. I planned to finish life as I started it with Phil, and you see how glad he was to change. He wanted the other sort of girl far more than he ever wanted me. And you, Hart, honest, now—I'll know if you don't tell me the truth—would you rather have a wife as I planned to live life with Phil or would you rather have her as Elnora Comstock intends to live with him?"

"Edith," cried the man, "Edith!"

"Of course, you can't say it in plain English," said the girl. "You are far too chivalrous for that. You needn't say anything. I am answered. If you could have your choice you wouldn't have a society wife, either. In your heart you'd like the smaller home of comfort, the furtherance of your ambitions, the palatable meals regularly served and little children around you. I am sick of all we have grown up to, Hart. When your hour of trouble comes there is no comfort for you. I am tired to death. You find out what you want to do and be, that is a man's work in the world, and I will plan our home with no thought save your comfort. I'll be the other kind of a girl as fast as I can learn. I can't correct all my faults in one day, but I'll change as rapidly as I can."

Henderson was not talking then, so they sat through a long silence. At last Henderson heard Edith draw a quick breath, and lifting his head he looked where she pointed. Up a fern stalk climbed a curious looking object. They watched breathlessly. By lavender feet hung a big, purplish, lavender spotted, yellow body. Yellow and lavender wings began to expand and take on color. Every instant great

[Continued on page 7, Col. 1.]

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