

A Girl of the Limberlost

A radio play by Carla Beard

based on the novel *A Girl of the Limberlost* by Gene Stratton-Porter

Text source: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/125/125-0.txt>



Limberlost State Historic Site, Geneva, Indiana

Voices needed

Female (9)

Elnora Comstock, age 15-20

Kate Comstock, late 30s, early 40s (Voice with an “edge” at first, softens toward the end)

Margaret (Maggie) Sinton, late 30s, early 40s

Edith Carr, early 20s, educated, sophisticated city gal

Bird Woman, age 40+

Ellen Brownlee, age 15

Clara – age 15

Anna – age 15

Sadie – age 15, haughty

Male (3)

Philip Ammon – 25-ish, educated city guy

Wesley Sinton – late 30s, early 40s

Hart Henderson – 25-ish, educated city guy

Male or Female (3)

Shopkeeper – late 30s, early 40s preferred but not required

Announcer – any age

Crowd – everyone together

Setting

Late 1890s, early 1900s, rural northeastern Indiana outside the town of Onabasha. The area is heavily forested and swampy, and oil has recently been discovered in the region. Residents have been selling trees and drilling rights for cash, and the region is thriving.

Characters

- **Elnora Comstock**, age 15 as the play opens, hardworking, kind, smart, and noble. She lives with her cold, unloving mother on the edge of the Limberlost swamp. She has grown up in poverty, close to nature, and she dreams of something more. She has a close relationship with the neighboring Sintons, Wesley and Margaret, who are close family friends and like parents to her. In her relationship with Philip, she adheres to Victorian standards of propriety.
- **Katharine (Kate) Comstock**, Elnora's widowed mother, hardworking, strict, and bitter over the loss of her husband, Robert. She saw him drowning in the swamp and couldn't rescue him because she was having labor contractions that would bring Elnora into the world. She has always held that against Elnora. Kate owns land that has trees that could be harvested and oil that could be drilled, but she refuses to sell any of it, saying it all belongs to Robert. She gardens and raises small livestock; it's all she can do to make ends meet.
- **Wesley Sinton**, farmer, husband of Margaret, kindhearted, hardworking, neighbor of the Comstocks. Elnora calls him "Uncle Wesley," but they're not related. He probably went to school through 8th grade, but he's nobody's fool.
- **Margaret (Maggie) Sinton**, wife of Wesley, kindhearted neighbor and second mother to Elnora. She and Wesley have lost 2 daughters to diphtheria, and Elnora is like the daughter they don't have.
- **Philip Ammon**, (Prince Charming), a likeable rich young man from Chicago. He's engaged to Edith Carr. He makes it clear that he's engaged and is entirely a gentleman while he's in Onabasha, but still, he develops feelings for Elnora, and she for him. He is probably about 5 years older than she is. In his relationship with Elnora, he adheres to Victorian standards of propriety. Until he doesn't.
- **Edith Carr**, a rich, spoiled, controlling young woman from Chicago, engaged to Philip Ammon.

- **Hart Henderson**, friend of Philip Ammon, a rich young man from Chicago who sincerely loves Edith Carr. (Why he loves her is perhaps the book's greatest mystery.)
- **Shopkeeper** – any age, male/female
- **Bird Woman** – kindly, grandmotherly woman who buys what Elnora brings from the swamp
- **Ellen Brownlee** – same age as Elnora, she will become Elnora's good friend
- **Clara** – same age as Elnora, friendly
- **Anna** – same age as Elnora, friendly
- **Sadie Reed** – same age as Elnora, mean girl
- **Crowd**

Music for Elnora

- Beginning violin: Pachelbel, Canon in D <https://youtu.be/wG0EtxjVGSc>
- Second year: Beethoven, Ode to Joy <https://youtu.be/l3Hw5adoiHE>
- Third year: J. S. Bach, Sonata No 1 in G minor for solo violin https://youtu.be/W_AE5gwN94o
- Fourth year: Scheherazade <https://youtu.be/uj0UBMgR2gk>
- Concert: Paganini piece <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2mTmi9tUaq> start at 34:46 for about a minutes

Other Music

- First choice for transition music, Saint-Saens, 0:22 to 0:35. <https://youtu.be/MMEmplyN6KY>
- Possible transition music (Joshua Bell) <https://youtu.be/myXOrVv-fNk?t=9>
- Possible transition music: <https://youtu.be/8Qy22ZNxJT0>
- Possible transition music : <https://youtu.be/LU0Ykpdqk0s>

Music	Theme for Richmond Radio Works
Announcer	<p>In the late 1800s, deposits of natural gas and crude oil were discovered in the forests of northeastern Indiana. The oil and gas were extracted; the maple, walnut, and cherry trees were harvested; and the swamps were drained to make farming more profitable. Families who lived on the land had to re-think who they were.</p> <p>Hoosier author Gene Stratton Porter wrote a series of novels set in those changing times. Tonight, Richmond Radio Works is proud to present a radio adaptation of <i>A Girl of the Limberlost</i>. The year is 1909.</p>
SFX	Theme music for “A Girl of the Limberlost” (violin). It fades out, fade in late afternoon birds singing and crickets chirping. These fade out as Elnora fades in.
Elnora	Sobbing.
SFX	Fade in: a horse-drawn wagon moving along a dirt road.
Wesley	Whoa, there!
SFX	Sound of horses, wagon stopping, horse snorts
Wesley	For pity's sake, Elnora, honey, what's the matter? Wasn't today your first day of high school? I thought you'd be happy.
Elnora	<p><i>(Chokes off sobs, sniffles a little ...)</i> Oh, Uncle Wesley, she didn't tell me!</p>
Wesley	Who?
Elnora	<p>Mother! She didn't tell me ANYTHING! I didn't know I was supposed to register last week! And I didn't know I have to buy my own books. And the superintendent told me that I have to pay tuition. <i>(She continues to cry through the next few lines.)</i></p>
Wesley	Tuition?
Elnora	Yes. It's hard enough to find money for books, but where am I going to find \$20 for a year's tuition? Mother should have told me!
Wesley	Oh, honey ...

Elnora	And then, the other girls ...
Wesley	What about the other girls?
Elnora	I saw them pointing at me and laughing. My skirt is too long, Uncle Wesley; it gets dirty when I walk these country roads. Just look at it!
Wesley	<i>(Unconvincingly, but sympathetically)</i> I think it's pretty.
Elnora	<i>(She doesn't really hear him.)</i> And no one else wears calico to school. The town girls have nice dresses. And these heavy leather shoes! They're good for walking in the woods, but they're not right for school. <i>(wailing)</i> Everyone just laughed at me!
Wesley	Now, Elnora, I don't know a whole lot about fashion. But your Aunt Maggie has been worried about you all day. Climb up in this wagon here, and I'll take you on home.
Elnora	<i>(Stops crying, sniffles a little.)</i> Thank you, Uncle Wesley.
SFX	Sound of wagon creaking as Elnora climbs aboard.
Wesley	She told me that you needed different shoes, and your skirt should have been pleated instead of gathered. <i>(Trying to lighten the moment)</i> I don't even know what that means! <i>(small laugh)</i>
Elnora	<i>(Still upset but not crying)</i> They wear nice clothes to school in Onabasha.
SFX	Sound of wagon moving along the road. Sound continues under next several lines.
Wesley	But your Aunt Maggie and me, we know you've got a way of holding your head up and getting through things, and we were sure you'd come out OK.
Elnora	Thank you, Uncle Wesley. You're right. Let the other girls make fun of me. Even that mean girl in Algebra class. I can be proud of who I am, no matter what I wear.
Wesley	That's right.

Elnora	<i>(Begins to cry again.)</i> But I need to buy my books by tomorrow. My teacher let me borrow one today, but everyone else has their own.
Wesley	Maybe your ma will ...
Elnora	<i>(Wails)</i> Oh, Mother won't pay a penny! She says we barely have enough to pay the property tax.
Wesley	If she would let them harvest some lumber from those 300 acres, you would easily have enough. More than enough.
Elnora	Well, you know what she says about that. She says all of those trees belong to Daddy, and she won't sell.
Wesley	She's still mourning a man who's been dead and gone 15 years now. She made an idol of Robert Comstock, she loved him so much. <i>(Remembering out loud, not really talking to Elnora)</i> I got there too late that night, but I saw what happened, there in the Limberlost Swamp. There was that oozy green hole, and two or three big bubbles that were the last breath of his body. She tried to reach him a great heavy branch, tried to save him. But the pains were too much.
Elnora	She was about to bring me into the world.
Wesley	<i>(Back in the present)</i> I can't ever forgive her for turning against you, and spoiling your childhood as she has, Elnora. She doesn't know the whole story about that day, the whole story about your daddy. I've held my tongue, but it might do her good to know the part she's missing.
Elnora	What do you mean? What's she missing?
Wesley	<i>(Realizing he has said too much)</i> Nothing. Nothing, honey. That was just one of them fool things a man says when he is trying his best to be wise. She loved your daddy mightily, she did. <i>(Trying to change subject)</i> Walking three miles from home to town isn't too bad in the morning when you're fresh, but it's a long walk home at the end of the day.

Elnora	Well, I can do this. Mother will want me to keep up all my chores at home, too. I'll find a way.
Wesley	Tell your ma what you need, honey, and ask her nice and kind to help you. If she won't, then come to me and your Aunt Maggie. You've helped us on the farm a fair bit, and we owe you for that. Ride to town with me in the morning and I'll draw it from the bank for you.
Elnora	I couldn't take money from you, Uncle Wesley! I owe you and Aunt Maggie for all the love I've ever known. I know how hard you work.
Wesley	Just a loan, just a loan for a little while until you can earn it and pay us back.
Elnora	There must be some way I can earn some extra money to pay for those things.
Wesley	Why, sure you can!
Elnora	I know! Ladies in town like to plant ferns in their yards. I could dig ferns from the Limberlost and sell them door-to-door in Onabasha.
Wesley	There you go!
Elnora	The black walnut trees are heavy with nuts, and they should start dropping in the next couple of weeks. I could gather those and sell them.
Wesley	We have two trees on our farm that you're welcome to harvest.
Elnora	And you know how rich people like to display collections of moths and butterflies? I have some already collected, and there's a lady in town who buys them. They call her the Bird Woman.
Wesley	Yes, I heard she pays a very fair price. Now, look, honey, you've named three ways that you could earn money for books and tuition in three minutes. That should be enough to start you. Let's stop worrying!
Elnora	You know my dream: I want to finish high school and work as a teacher in one of the county schools. I've already picked out the school I want – Brushwood School.

Wesley	You'll be the best teacher they ever hired. All the little ones will call you Miss Comstock!
Elnora	I just have to find my way. If mother will help me a little bit here at the beginning, maybe I could find second-hand books, and maybe they'll let me pay the tuition quarterly. <i>(Sudden change)</i> But the girls at school were so mean! I felt so lonely.
SFX	Wagon comes to a stop. Sound of birds. Horse snorts.
Wesley	Elnora, honey, you know we've got your back. Now here we are, home already.
Elnora	I know I can always count on you and Aunt Maggie, Uncle Wesley. Thank you.
SFX	Elnora climbs down from the wagon, collects her things
Kate	<i>(calling from a distance)</i> Elnora?
Elnora	Yes, Mother!
Wesley	<i>(calling)</i> Afternoon, Kate!
Kate	<i>(coming closer)</i> Hello, Wesley! Elnora, what kept you? I expected you an hour ago! Supper's ready.
Elnora	Yes, Mother. Thanks for the lift, Uncle Wesley!
Wesley	Any time, honey.
SFX	Wagon departs
Kate	Looks like you've been bawling.
Elnora	They laughed at me, Mama. I looked funny, and they laughed at me.
SFX	Gate creaks open, closes.

Kate	<i>(Full of herself and her worries, no concern for Elnora, these are complaints she has aired before.)</i> Well, I THOUGHT you'd get your fill of that school in a hurry. That's why I wouldn't help pay for anything. If we want to stay out of the poor-house, we'll have to cut the corners close. It's likely this road tax will eat up all our savings. I don't know how I'm going to pay the property tax this fall. That bill gets bigger every year. I just can't, that's all!
SFX	Screen door opens, closes.
Kate	We'll get up early in the morning and gather and hull the beans for winter, and put in the rest of the day hoeing the turnips. I'm glad you've got that silliness out of your head.
Elnora	Oh, no. I'm going back tomorrow.
Kate	<i>(Astonished. And disappointed.)</i> You're going back?
Elnora	The hardest part is over. Tomorrow I'll know what to expect. I am sorry to hear about the property tax. Is it really that much?
Kate	Yes. I got my notice today. I don't know as I can spare you, even if you are willing to be a laughing stock for the town. I need you to help out here.
Elnora	But, mother, listen to this ... the algebra teacher gave me a problem to solve, and he said that he never seen a better solution than mine. Even better than that one mean girl who made me look bad.
Kate	And that's enough to make you keep going? You little idiot! How are you going to pay your expenses?
Elnora	Well, that's what I was going to ask you. I didn't know I would need any money. I thought the city furnished the books, and there is an out-of-town tuition, also. I need ten dollars in the morning. Will you please let me have it?
Kate	Ten dollars! Why don't you say a hundred and be done with it! I told you not to ask for money!
Elnora	I didn't want to. I thought clothes were all I needed, and I could get by with what I have. I never knew about paying for books and tuition.

Kate	Well, I did! But you are so bull-dog stubborn, and so set in your way, I thought I would just let you try the world a little and see how you liked it!
Elnora	You knew! And you let me be embarrassed in front of the whole school?
Kate	Of course I knew you had to pay! Of course I knew you would come home blubbering! But I'm not giving you a penny! I don't have any extra money! Have your way if you are determined, but I think you will find the road somewhat rocky.
Elnora	<i>(angry)</i> I don't understand how you think! You can't possibly realize just what you made me go through today, but I'll tell you this: if you offered me that money now, I wouldn't touch it. I'll get it myself. I am going back tomorrow, and the next day, and the next.
Kate	Well, Missy, don't forget to hoe the turnips before you go to bed tonight. You've still got chores to do around here.
Elnora	I never said I wouldn't do my chores. Watch me.
SFX	Screen door slams. Transition music (violin?)
Margaret	You've had a long day, Wesley, dear. Sit here on the porch swing and tell me how things went in town.
Wesley	I sold the last cherry tree, that one on the far side of the farm. Got a good price for it, too. And on the way back home, I came across Elnora on the side of the road, crying her heart out.
Margaret	Oh, no. Things didn't go well for her at school?
Wesley	Maggie, we ought to have known better than to let her go like that. Her clothes were all wrong, just like you said they would be. But it wasn't just her clothes. She didn't know there were book fees and tuition.
Margaret	There must have been whispers and laughing.
Wesley	I've been a traitor to the memory of those two little girls of ours by not helping Elnora. I should have gone in and seen about this school business.

Margaret	If our girls had lived, they'd have been about her age now. Maybe we would have known. We could have helped.
Wesley	Well, we can start now by making sure she has the right clothes to wear. We still have time before the sun goes down. Maggie, let's go to town and get her some dresses.
SFX	Sound of steps on a wooden sidewalk. A small bell rings like one above the door when a customer enters a shop. The girls are chattering.
Ellen	<i>(Background)</i> Oh, isn't this just the cutest?
Clara	<i>(Background)</i> Look at the feathers on this hat.
Anna	<i>(Background)</i> I love this color!
Wesley	<i>(Foreground)</i> <i>(Some hesitation)</i> This is .. this is your department, Maggie.
Shopkeeper	Good evening. May I help you?
Margaret	Yes, I'm looking for dresses for ... will you excuse me for a moment? Girls, I wonder if I could ask you for some help.
Clara	Yes, ma'am?
Margaret	You girls look just beautiful to me. You look exactly as I would have wanted to see my girls. They both died of diphtheria when they were little. If they had lived, they'd be about your age now, and I'd want them to look like you.
Ellen	I'm sorry.
Clara, Anna	<i>(murmuring)</i> Yes, sorry.
Margaret	Thank you. Lately I've been kind of "mothering" a neighbor girl. She would be just as pretty as you girls are, but her mother doesn't care about her. She only gives her the basics, none of the special things a mother should.
Anna	That's so sad! <i>(Clara and Ellen murmur sympathetically.)</i>

Margaret	She went to school out in the county, and now she wants to go to high school in town. She's smart and has a very kind heart, and I want her to look just as nice as you do. Please tell me about your clothes. Where do you buy them?
Ellen	We like to shop here.
Clara	These dresses we're wearing – they're our school clothes.
Anna	We like gingham or linen, just anything bright and pretty. There are some over here.
Margaret	Oh, Elnora will like these!
Ellen	Did you say "Elnora"?
Margaret	Yes, Elnora Comstock. Do you know her?
Anna	There was a new girl at school today. Her name was Elnora.
Clara	Was that the new girl in the Freshman class?
Margaret	I expect it was.
Anna	<i>(Realization dawns on all three girls. They start whispering among themselves.)</i> That was the girl in that worn-out calico dress.
Clara	Oh ... her ... the one with the clunky shoes?
Anna	Yeah.... And that old hat.
Ellen	Remember? She wrote her name on the blackboard in algebra class, and Sadie Reed erased part of it.
Clara	And the teacher thought it said "Cornstalk" instead of "Comstock."
Anna	And everybody laughed at her.
Ellen	But the teacher said she nailed the proof of that problem. She must be smart.
Clara	Yeah ... it doesn't seem quite so funny now.
Anna	Let's help her out.
Clara	Yeah. Yeah, let's.

Ellen	<i>(To Margaret)</i> Are her people really so poor?
Margaret	It's complicated. Her mother lost her husband years ago and never really came to terms with it.
Clara	How awful!
Margaret	They have some beautiful trees on their land, but she won't let anyone harvest them, and she won't let anyone drill for oil or gas. She neglects Elnora, gives her only the barest minimum. Maybe you noticed that she wasn't dressed like the rest of the students.
Ellen	<i>(clearly lying)</i> Oh, I didn't notice anything. Did you, girls?
Clara	<i>(embarrassed)</i> No, no, I didn't see a thing. Did you?
Anna	No, I didn't.
Margaret	Now, if you girls would make life a little easier for her, it would be the finest thing you ever did.
Ellen Clara Anna	<i>(feeling guilty)</i> We will. Oh, yes. We'll help.
Margaret	Oh, thank you so much. Now, I think these two dresses will serve. Will you help me pick out some hair ribbons? Oh, and she'll need a hat, won't she?
Ellen, Clara, Anna	Murmuring agreement
SFX	Transition music (violin?)
SFX	Shop bell rings, door closes, steps on sidewalk.
Wesley	Maggie, I couldn't resist. While you were picking out clothes, I found some good school shoes, and look at this – a leather satchel to carry her things in!
Margaret	Kate is not going to be happy that we're doing all this for Elnora.
Wesley	Let's not worry about Kate.

Margaret	If she raises a fuss, I may have to give her a piece of my mind. I wonder if she'd be all high and mighty if she knew the real reason her husband was back by the swamp that night.
Wesley	Let's not get into that unless we have to. We have what we came for. We'll visit Elnora and Kate tomorrow to give them to her.
SFX	Sound of the horse-drawn wagon on the country road.
SFX	Transition music (violin?) Morning birds singing.
Kate	There's no sense in you leaving for school for another hour yet. Where are you going?
Elnora	I've shelled the beans and fed the chickens. I'm going to town early to see how much money I need for those books. I'm not going to find them lying along the road, wrapped up with my name on them.
Kate	They're just going to laugh at you again.
Elnora	Let them laugh. The best way to get an answer to prayer is to work for it.
SFX	Transition music Sounds of the city (Feet on sidewalks?)
Elnora	<i>(Reading sign)</i> WANTED: CATERPILLARS, COCOONS, BUTTERFLIES, MOTHS, ARROWHEADS, AND OTHER RELICS. HIGHEST SCALE OF PRICES PAID IN CASH
SFX	Door opens.
Bird Woman	May I help you?
Elnora	<i>(startled)</i> Oh, yes! This sign says that you're looking for ... I live on the edge of the Limberlost Swamp, and sometimes I see butterflies and other things. I could collect them for you.
Bird Woman	Do you know how to capture a specimen without damaging it?
Elnora	Yes, ma'am. I brought a few with me today. Would you like to see them?

Bird Woman	These are very nice, completely undamaged. And you're willing to sell them?
Elnora	Yes, ma'am. I want to go to high school. I found out today that they're letting me pay tuition quarterly, and my algebra teacher found me some used books, but still, well, I need to earn some money.
Bird Woman	I'll pay a dollar for each one that's in perfect condition. Bring me everything you find. I'm happy to help someone who's willing to work for what they want.
Elnora	Yes, ma'am. Thank you. I'll bring more tomorrow after school.
SFX	Door closes
Elnora	<i>(to herself)</i> A whole dollar for each one! How wonderful!
SFX	Old-style school bell rings.
Elnora	<i>(more enthusiastic)</i> A DOLLAR!
SFX	Transition music
SFX	Knocking on door Door opens
Kate	Good evening, Wesley, Maggie! What brings you by here? Elnora's not home yet. She's running late again.
Wesley	Well, Kate, we were wanting to talk to you about something before she got here. Last night Maggie and I picked up a few things for Elnora for school, and we're hoping you'll let us give 'em to her.
Kate	You think I'll let you encourage her?
Maggie	Kate, don't be like that.
Kate	You think I haven't watched you? You think I haven't seen you two trying to turn Elnora against me day after day?
Wesley	Kate, we're just showing her some love.

Kate	And who shows ME any love? My heart's still raw! When did you ever tell her what her father meant to me? When did you ever try to make her see the wreck of my life, and what I've suffered? No indeed! Always it's been "poor little Elnora," and candy and kisses and – now – new clothes, encouraging her to run to you every time she's hurt.
Wesley	Kate, that's not fair! I begged her to come tell you real nice-like what she needed, and ask you for what I happen to know you can well afford to give her.
Kate	I can't afford it! You know I can't!
Wesley	Then get so you can! Any day you say the word you can sell six thousand dollars' worth of rare timber off this place easy. And if you'd sign a lease, you could pull thousands more from the ground in oil. Look around, Kate. This is a great opportunity!
Kate	Cut down Robert's trees? Tear up his land? Cover everything with that horrid, greasy oil? I'll die first.
Maggie	You mean you'd let your daughter live like a beggar and be embarrassed in front of everyone. Listen, Wesley and I bought some things Elnora needs so she'll look a little like the rest of the high school girls. We hope you'll let us give 'em to her.
Kate	She won't take them! She wants to earn her way!
Maggie	Then YOU buy them from us and give them to her.
Kate	No.
Wesley	Then I'll tell Elnora just what you are worth, what you can afford, and how much of this land she owns. I'll lend her the money to buy books and decent clothes, and when she is of age, she can sell her share and pay me.
Kate	No ... no ...
Wesley	And if she is so much like you that she won't agree to that, then I'll go to the county seat and lay complaint against you as her guardian before the judge. I'll swear to how you are raising her, and have the judge appoint someone who will see to it that she is comfortable, educated, and decent looking!
Kate	<i>(Gasps)</i> You wouldn't!

Maggie	<i>(softer tone)</i> He won't need to, Kate. You won't show it, but you do love her! You can't help it! You must see how she needs things; come help us fix her up. You've got to love such a fine girl as she is; let it show a little!
Kate	<i>(Cold as ice)</i> You can hardly expect me to love her. If I hadn't been in labor with her, I could have rescued Robert, and he'd be here now. He'd beat the tar out of you for threatening to take her away from me. After all I've suffered, you'd drag me to court and force me to tear up Robert's property.
Wesley	Now, Kate ...
Kate	If they touch one tree, or put down one greasy old oil well, it will be all over. I've got his gun, and I know how to use it. Don't tell me how to raise my child.
SFX	Knocking on door
Elnora	<i>(breathless)</i> Mother, could you open the door, please?
SFX	Hinges creak as door opens.
Kate	Elnora, what on earth -- ?
Elnora	Can you get me the empty bucket in the kitchen, please?
SFX	Sound of arrowheads falling into metal bucket.
Elnora	<i>(Throughout the next several lines, she is excited at having found so much, knowing what they're worth.)</i> I have to clean these arrowheads tonight. There's a woman in town who wants to buy them.
Wesley	She buys arrowheads?
Elnora	Yes, and other things that I can collect.
Kate	Where did you find these?
Elnora	In the swamp. I had to get there before it got dark.
Wesley	How many do you have?
Elnora	I haven't counted them yet. She won't buy the chipped ones.

Maggie	What have you done to your skirt?
Elnora	Yes, Aunt Maggie, I'm afraid I'll have to wash it tonight to be ready for school tomorrow. But look! With any luck, there's enough there to pay for my tuition for this quarter!
Wesley	That's great!
Elnora	And my history teacher found me some used books that are much cheaper than the new ones. I'll be able to pay for those.
Kate	<i>(coldly)</i> I see.
Elnora	<i>(doesn't notice Kate's tone)</i> And if there's any left over, maybe I can afford some new shoes. These make such an awful sound on the floors at school.
Kate	<i>(She is lying)</i> I was going to get you some next month.
Elnora	<i>(Surprised, believes her)</i> Oh, you were? Thank you, Mother! Aunt Maggie, what do you have there?
Margaret	<i>(not sure how this will go)</i> Well, Elnora, we brought you some things for school.
SFX	Paper rustles as packages are brought out.
Elnora	<i>(surprised)</i> There's a dress and – is this another dress? And gloves ... and hair ribbons? Oh, they're so pretty! Are ALL of these for me?
Wesley	We wanted to help out a little.
Elnora	But this is so much! Wait – this one, too?
Margaret	Honey, they're all for you.
Elnora	<i>(protesting their generosity)</i> That's so sweet! But ... I can't take anything from you. I know how hard you work. I'll pay you back a little at a time, now that I have some income.
Wesley	You don't have to do that, Elnora. We love you.

Elnora	Oh, but I can't wear something I can't afford. That wouldn't be right. Aunt Maggie and Uncle Wesley, I already owe you so much!
Kate	<i>(realizing she needs to step up)</i> Well, let's do this, then. You pay for what you can with those arrowheads, and if we need to ... I'll sell the butcher a calf.
Elnora	<i>(Gasps)</i> You mean it?
Kate	Go ahead, now. Try those things on.
Margaret	Don't forget your hat!
Elnora	You got me a HAT?!
SFX	Paper rustles
Elnora	Oh, it's beautiful! Look, Mother – peacock feathers!
Kate	That must have cost a fortune.
Margaret	Not really. It came with different quills, and I had the store take them off. That lowered the price. And then I got the peacock feathers from Phoebe Simms. You know her, don't you Kate?
Kate	Yes. She lives on down the road.
Margaret	Yes, that's her.
Elnora	Mother, look how beautiful they are! I'd much rather have them than anything from the store.
Kate	You must go past Mrs. Simms and show her. She'll be happy to see them. Elnora, you go try those things on, and I'll fix us all a bite to eat. We'll work out how to pay for all this on a full stomach.
SFX	Transition music
SFX	Wagon on dirt road, continues under the next lines
Wesley	Well, I didn't think it would work, but she let Elnora have it all.
Margaret	I was a little surprised, too.

Wesley	<i>(chuckles)</i> I wouldn't be surprised if Kate starts going through the Limberlost herself, looking for arrowheads to help pay the property tax.
Margaret	I'll bet Elnora never wears cheap calico to school again.
SFX	Transition music.
SFX	School, voices of people talking – continue under until right after Sadie Reed enters.
Ellen	<i>(to her friends)</i> Oh, look, there she is!
Clara	<i>(to her friends)</i> That dress looks good on her.
Anna	<i>(to her friends)</i> What kind of feathers does she have on her hat? That's a pretty color! I can't see them from here.
Ellen	<i>(calling)</i> Elnora! Come and sit with us.
Elnora	<i>(uncertain. Are these mean girls?)</i> Good morning.
Clara	I'm Clara.
Anna	I'm Anna.
Ellen	I'm Ellen. Won't you join us?
Elnora	Thank you. I'm Elnora Comstock. I haven't had a chance to meet people much. Everyone in town seems to know each other, but I live on the edge of the Limberlost Swamp.
Ellen	Then let us be your first new friends.
Sadie Reed	<i>(Loudly, from a little distance)</i> Oh, look at the quills on this hat! They are perfection! I have to have some. Whose hat is this?
SFX	All conversation stops.
Elnora	<i>(after a pause)</i> It's mine. "Mz Cornstalk" from algebra class. Remember me?

SFX	Everyone laughs at Sadie.
Sadie Reed	<i>(Thinks they're laughing at Elnora.)</i> Well, they're beautiful quills. They are exactly what I want. Please tell me where you bought them.
Elnora	You can't buy quills like those at a store. My neighbor gathers them in her orchard as her peacocks shed them. I could get you some.
Sadie Reed	<i>(full mean girl mode)</i> Oh, never mind. I thought they were expensive. I want to put them on a \$20 velvet hat to match my new suit. But if she picks them up off the ground, I don't want them.
Elnora	Her peacocks are the only ones within miles of here, and they only moult once a year. If your hat only cost twenty dollars, it's not good enough for those quills.
SFX	Long, slow whistle at the burn. Laughter under the next two lines.
Anna	Ooooh!
Sadie Reed	Well!
SFX	Footsteps as she leaves.
Clara	<i>(laughing)</i> I guess you told her!
SFX	Transition music, a longer piece to indicate passage of time.
SFX	Screen door slams.
Kate	How was school today, Elnora?
Elnora	We had an assembly, and the orchestra played again. The music was so beautiful – it almost made me cry. Mother, I want to learn to play the violin. I can afford lessons if I gather some extra moths from the swamp before it freezes.
Kate	<i>(suddenly angry)</i> Hush! Never mention that to me again--never as long as you live!
Elnora	A violin?

Kate	They are a snare of the devil himself! They were made to lure men and women away from their homes and their honor. They are evil!
Elnora	But ...
Kate	If I ever see you with one in your hand, I will smash it to pieces! Now get changed out of your school clothes. The calves are hungry.
Elnora	Yes, ma'am.
SFX	Transition music
Margaret	A violin? Elnora, honey, have you talked this over with your mother?
Elnora	Well, yes, Aunt Maggie, and she didn't like the idea. But I never felt so strongly about anything, not even about going to school. I played a little bit on someone else's at school, and it was like it was made for me.
Margaret	<i>(to herself, mostly)</i> There's no sense in buying one. You should have your fa— <i>(Stops herself, but it's too late.)</i>
Elnora	My father's? My father had a violin? That must be why I can play one so easily! Where is it? Is it in our house?
Margaret	Elnora! Your mother will kill me!
Elnora	No, she won't. Mother loves music.
Margaret	Not when the man she loved chose music over her.
Elnora	What? <i>(no response)</i> Well, where is it? Does Mother have it?
Margaret	No. It wasn't at home when ... when your father died.
Elnora	Where is it, then?
Margaret	I ... I can't tell you. I know where it was the night he died. Let me check and see if it's still there. I'll get it if I can. But if your mother finds out, she'll never forgive me.
Elnora	I can't help it, Aunt Maggie. Something deep inside wants to play the violin.
Margaret	It was a beautiful instrument. He played it like a master.

Elnora	Tell me about him. Mother never tells me anything about him.
SFX	New violin music, dance or folk music, plays under Margaret's next words.
Margaret	His hair was red like yours, but a little curlier. He was tall, slim, and full of mischief. He joked and teased all day, but when he picked up that violin, he got serious. No one else could make you dance like he could. You couldn't be still; he loved to sweep a crowd around with that bow of his.
Elnora	Awwww ...
Margaret	He was inspired. I can see him now, his head bent, his cheeks red, his blue eyes snapping, and that bow going across the strings, and driving us like sheep. He loved to play. Sometimes he played when he should have been working. And sometimes he neglected your mother to go play somewhere; that's why she hated it — Elnora, what are you making me do?
Elnora	Why haven't you told me about him sooner? I almost feel like I know him, I can almost see him. Mother never talks about him.
Margaret	Your mother made me promise not to.
Elnora	But why? Why? Do he do something wrong?
Margaret	<i>(She's avoiding the question.)</i> Uh ... Maybe it was because she couldn't help him in the swamp. She wasn't entirely herself for several years afterward.
Elnora	I know. I used to wake up late at night and hear strange sounds. One night I looked out my window, and over by the edge of swamp, there was a light.
Margaret	Thieves, probably. The Limberlost is dangerous.
Elnora	No. It was mother. Every once in a while she goes back to the spot where he died and cries. I hear her calling, "Robert! Robert! Come back to me!" It's so sad, Aunt Maggie.
Margaret	She loved him, Elnora. She loved him more than he deserved.
Elnora	Tell me more about him.
Margaret	Just wait ... wait until I see if I can find the violin. I'll check tomorrow.

SFX	Transition music indicating the passage of time.
Elnora	Oh! It's beautiful!
SFX	Sound of Elnora plucking the violin strings
Margaret	Now, Elnora, your mother must never know that you have this. It would hurt her deeply.
Elnora	Aunt Maggie, I'll keep it at school. Maybe the music teacher will give me lessons, if I can pay for them. And in the summer, I'll keep it somewhere else. She'll never know. I promise!
SFX	Transition music – somehow indicating that 4 years pass. Suggestion: a few bars of violin clearly played by beginner, a few bars of a more sophisticated piece, a few more, a few more.
Clara	I can't believe that graduation is next week! High school has gone by so quickly!
Anna	I'm so excited! John and I are getting married in July, and we're moving up to Fort Wayne.
Ellen	I can't believe Mother and Father are sending me to London for a month. I'm going to meet my great-grandmother.
Anna	Oh, I hope you get to see the King!
Ellen	<i>(Girls giggle with excitement.)</i> That would be so wonderful! And then after I get back, I'm going to college in Ohio.
Clara	Elnora, what are you planning to do after graduation?
Elnora	I'm hoping to go to college, too. I've dreamed about it for as long as I can remember. If I can find one more pair of moths, a certain kind, I'll complete my collection. Then I can sell it and have enough money to get started.
Anna	You're so smart, Elnora – you'll do well in college!
Ellen	Your mother must be very proud.
Elnora	<i>(hesitantly)</i> Mother doesn't know. She thinks finishing high school is silly and a waste of money. I asked her to help me pay for my diploma, and she gave it to me, but she said I have to pay her back.

Anna	That's rough, that you can't share your dream with your mother.
Elnora	For four years, she has never liked the idea of my coming to school. I've done the best I can. I'm not sure how I'm going to tell her about college.
Clara	Are you ready for the concert tonight?
Elnora	Yes, I've been practicing extra.
Anna	I heard you at rehearsal the other night. It was really beautiful. It's like you were born to play the violin.
Elnora	Oh, Anna, thank you. That's so kind.
Ellen	I'll bet your mother never gets tired of listening to you practice. Surely she must be proud of you for that.
Elnora	Oh ... well ... she doesn't know I'm playing ...
Clara	<i>(clueless)</i> Oh, you mean the piece tonight is a surprise?
Elnora	Yes. It will be a surprise. A very big surprise.
SFX	Transition music
SFX	Audience in a full high school concert hall, waiting for the show to start.
Wesley	Here's some nice seats.
Margaret	Don't the students all look wonderful on the stage like that?
Kate	<i>(Snarky)</i> They've got their fancy clothes on. That's probably all they care about.
Wesley	Did you get a program, Kate?
Margaret	Well, look here. It says that Elnora's graduating first in her class. Did you know that, Kate?
Kate	What? She never said anything. Let me see.
Wesley	You should be proud of her, Kate. She's worked so hard, but she's not bragging about anything.
Kate	<i>(Coldly)</i> Don't tell me what to think about my own child.

Margaret	Shhh! The program's starting.
SFX	Crowd hushes, director taps on music stand. New violin music begins, continues under the next few lines.
Kate	<i>(whispering, incredulous)</i> Is that ... is that Elnora playing that violin?
Margaret	<i>(whispering)</i> Yes, that's Elnora.
Kate	<i>(whispering)</i> Where did she get a violin to play?
Margaret	<i>(whispering)</i> Um, the violin?
Kate	<i>(whispering)</i> Oh, listen! It's so beautiful! She plays like Robert did. It's the same grace, the same beauty. <i>(A beat, as music continues)</i> It's like he came back. It's like he's come back to me. <i>(whispers to herself)</i> Robert. Robert, come back. Robert, my love, come back to me ...
SFX	Music swells, ends. Audience applauds.
Margaret	Did you say something, Kate?
Kate	<i>(snaps out of it)</i> Oh! Uh, no. Let's go home. Elnora is going somewhere with her friends. She'll come home later.
SFX	Transition music
Kate	Elnora! Come here! Bring me a towel!
Elnora	Coming mother ...
Kate	This varmint is going to sting me. Get it!
Elnora	<i>(screams)</i> Oh, no! Don't hurt it! Don't, mother, don't!
Kate	Don't tell me what to do!

Elnora	I need that bug! No!
SFX	Sound of a bug being squashed
Kate	You may have your precious high school diploma, but you're not giving orders around here, Missy!
SFX	Sound of Kate smacking Elnora – hard! <i>(It leaves a bruise.)</i>
Elnora	<i>(Screams in pain. Stunned.)</i> That was the last moth I needed to complete the collection. It was worth \$300!
Kate	Why didn't you tell me?
Elnora	I told you to stop.
Kate	It's a moth – it's not worth \$300!
Elnora	<i>(upset)</i> How do you think I've been paying for high school all these years? I've gathered things from the Limberlost and sold them. That moth would have completed a whole collection. And you've ruined it!
Kate	You can get another one.
Elnora	<i>(upset)</i> No, I can't. They keep draining the swamp and cutting down trees, and the moths and birds and insects are leaving. I've been watching that cocoon, waiting for it to emerge. It's called a Yellow Emperor. I haven't seen any others this year.
Kate	Well, you don't need \$300.
Elnora	<i>(upset)</i> Mother, I want to go to college. That would have gotten me a good start on the first year. But you've ruined it! You've ruined everything! You are a selfish, wicked woman, and I hate you! I hate you!
SFX	Sound of Elnora stomping across the floor, going out the screen door. The door slams shut.
Kate	<i>(calling after her)</i> You ungrateful brat!
SFX	Wagon approaches on the road. Sound of horses stopping.

Margaret	Hello, Kate! Elnora asked me to stop by and take her into town with me today. Is she ready?
Kate	She's down by the swamp. I'll see if she still wants to go.
Elnora	I'm here, Aunt Maggie.
Kate and Margaret	<i>(surprised)</i> Oh! There you are!
Margaret	Elnora, what happened to your face? It's all red and swollen. It looks like ... <i>(a beat)</i> Did someone hit you? <i>(A beat.)</i> Kate, did you hit her?
Kate	<i>(angry, defensive)</i> You can see for yourself.
Margaret	<i>(also angry)</i> Yes, I can. Has it come to this? I've held my tongue long enough. Kate, it's time for you to know the truth. You've neglected your own daughter all these years, and now you've taken to abusing her, and all for the love of a man who wasn't worth your time!
Kate	Sure, Mags, you go ahead and say what you've been meaning to say. And then you get out of here and don't come back.
Margaret	Then you listen to this, and you listen good. Robert Comstock came home by the swamp road that night so you wouldn't know where he was coming home from.
Kate	Yeah? Where was he?
Margaret	He had been to see Elvira Carney. They had plans to go to a dance that night.
Kate	You liar! You shut up!
Margaret	I'm telling you the God's-honest truth, and I can prove it. I stopped by the Carneys' place to say hello to Elvira's mother, and I saw Robert come down the path.
Kate	That doesn't prove anything!
Margaret	Elvira ran out to talk to him. He gave her his violin, told her to get ready and meet him in the woods with it that night, and they'd go to a dance. She didn't know I saw.

Kate	Shut it!
Margaret	You were home by yourself, his baby was comin' any day, and he was off with another woman.
Kate	You are smearing a good man's name. You can't prove any of this!
Margaret	Yes, I can. When Elnora said she wanted to play the violin, I went over to Elvira's and fetched his. That's his violin she's been playing.
Kate	<i>(She knows it's true.)</i> <i>(A beat.)</i> No, no ...
Margaret	And I won't see her hurt another day on account of a man who would have broken your heart if he'd lived another six months. Everyone in town knew what kind of man he was. He didn't deserve you.
Kate	It's not true ... no ...
Margaret	And Elnora doesn't deserve any of this – not this poverty, not your indifference, and certainly not you hitting her!
Kate	I don't believe you....
Margaret	Kate, what will it take for you to come to your senses and do right by Elnora?
Kate	Get off my property! You get out of here!
Margaret	All right, I'm going. But you know I'm telling you the truth. Elnora, honey, do you want to come with me?
Elnora	<i>(stunned at what she's been hearing, still feeling the sting of her mother's slap)</i> Yes.
SFX	Creak of gate closing. Sound of wagon heading up the road.

Kate	<i>(angry with herself, tired)</i> What have I done? What have I done? ... Didn't I wonder why he was walking so close to the swamp that night? And then I heard him hollering, caught in the muck, and I couldn't save him, the baby was coming so hard and so fast ... I could only watch as you ... <i>(sobs)</i> Robert! Why would you do that to me? <i>(sobs)</i> All these years ... all these years I've worked myself to the bone just getting by, all by myself with your little girl, all these years grieving for you. I'm old before my time because of you. And I haven't been much of a mother to your daughter. I blamed her. <i>(takes a deep breath)</i> I've been a fool. I've been a gol-durned fool. Well, that stops now. <i>(thinking)</i> That stops now.
SFX	Sound of Kate walking across the floor, putting things into boxes. Sound continues under her next line.
Kate	<i>(Using the same voice that used to plead for Robert's return)</i> Elnora, come home ... forgive me and come home ... please come home ...
SFX	Sound of boxes being dragged across floor, screen door slamming shut.
Wesley	<i>(from a distance)</i> Kate?
Kate	<i>(hesitates, then answers)</i> I'm over here.
Wesley	<i>(hesitant)</i> Kate, Maggie told me what she did today. I've come by to make sure you're OK ... and to tell you I'm sorry.
Kate	<i>(briskly, bluntly)</i> You should be sorry. Why didn't you tell me he was cheating on me? You let me grieve for him all these years, you let me neglect Elnora, and you didn't tell me?
Wesley	<i>(Astonished. This is the last thing he expected to hear.)</i> Why didn't I tell you? <i>(He has no answer.)</i> Kate, nobody ever knows how to take you.
Kate	Well, never mind. Help me throw these boxes into the swamp. Watch your step! The water's high today.

Wesley	Sure. Whoa! These are heavy! What have we got here?
Kate	These are all Robert's things. I've kept his clothes and everything all these years, just like I've held on to him. Today, it's all going into the swamp. Here, give me a hand ... this one's the heaviest.
SFX	Sound of box being dropped into water.
Kate	<i>(satisfied)</i> There! That's the last of them. Now ... we start over. <i>(takes a deep breath)</i> When Elnora comes home.
SFX	Transition music
Elnora	So Mother and I had a long talk last night, Aunt Maggie, and she helped me understand what she's been trying to do all these years, keeping things the way she thought Father would have wanted. And she told me how sorry she is. She says she's going to do better.
Margaret	I'm so glad to hear this, Elnora.
Elnora	And this morning she put flowers on the table for breakfast. She never does that.
Margaret	What are you going to do now that you can't go to college in the fall?
Elnora	That's my OTHER news! The school has offered me a teaching job!
Margaret	Oh, that's wonderful!
Elnora	They call it "Lecturer in Natural History." I'll visit the classrooms in all the different schools and teach the children about the plants and animals of the Limberlost Swamp.
Margaret	No one could do that better than you!
Elnora	One year of teaching will pay enough to cover a whole year at college the next year. And the next year I'll be old enough to inherit my share of the land. I can harvest some trees, and that will pay the rest.
Margaret	You have certainly landed on your feet!

Elnora	I'll spend this summer collecting plants and tree leaves and insects to use in my lessons. Mother said she'd help.
Margaret	Well, good luck to you both!
SFX	Transition music Birds singing, other sounds of the swamp.
Elnora	I haven't been over here by Sleepy Snake Creek in a long time. I was hoping to find dragonflies or moths for school in the fall.
Kate	I was hoping to find some dandelion greens here, so we could fix a salad for lunch. But I haven't found anything yet.
Elnora	I'm going on up the creek. There might be some cocoons under that little bridge.
Kate	I'll look around some more over yonder.
SFX	Sounds of the creek flowing, birds singing. Sound of someone sloshing through the water, wading upstream.
Elnora	<i>(surprised)</i> Oh! Hello!
Philip	Hello! I didn't see you there!
Elnora	I'm trying to get this cocoon. It's pretty well stuck in the ground.
Philip	Here, let me dig around it with my knife. Will you hold my fishing pole? <i>(sound, like a little exertion)</i> It looks like a Cecropia. (<i>suh·krow·pee·uh</i>)
Elnora	Yes. It's cool here, so the moth hasn't emerged yet.
Philip	<i>(still digging)</i> Are you a collector?
Elnora	Yes. I'm going to be teaching in the fall, and I'll need as many specimens as I can find for my classes.
Philip	<i>(frees the cocoon)</i> Umf! Here you go.
Elnora	Thank you.

Philip	I'm Philip Ammon. I'm here from Chicago visiting my uncle, Dr. Ammon, in Onabasha.
Elnora	Elnora Comstock. Pleased to meet you.
Philip.	I've been fishing for trout all morning. I'm recovering from typhoid fever, and my uncle said the exercise would help me regain my strength.
Elnora	I'm sorry to hear you've been sick, and even sorrier that you thought you'd find trout here in Sleepy Snake Creek.
Philip	What, no trout?
Elnora	<i>(laughing lightly)</i> No, it's too far south for them. The water's too warm.
Philip	Well, that explains why I've waded 3 miles and never had a bite.
Elnora	You could sit on the bank and fish for perch or catfish.
Philip	<i>(friendly)</i> Sit on the bank? That isn't exercise.
Elnora	<i>(laughing lightly)</i> Well, if you just want some exercise, go right on fishing for trout. You'll have a creel full of invisible results every night.
Philip	Well, that's no fun. Can I help you hunt for moths instead?
Elnora	Have you hunted for moths before, Mr. Ammon?
Philip	Enough to know the common ones and how to catch them without hurting them. I used to collect them when I was a kid.
Elnora	You did?
Philip	Just for fun, you know. I thought they were pretty. One night a big one flew into my bedroom. I can still see it. It was huge, maybe 5 or 6 inches wide. Yellowish brown, with spots and gray lines on their wings.
Elnora	That must have been an Imperialis. I call it the Yellow Emperor. I was looking for one of those to complete my collection!
Philip	Did you find one?
Elnora	Not yet.

Philip	So ... can I hunt for one with you?
Elnora	Well ...
Philip	<i>(Teasingly)</i> Where do you live? If I can't get a "yes" from you, I'll go tell your mother who I am and ask her if I may help you. I'm warning you, I have a very effective way with mothers. They almost never turn me down.
Elnora	<i>(Laughing)</i> You haven't met MY mother. Come on.
SFX	Sound of walking through tall grass
Elnora	<i>(calling)</i> Mo--ther!
Kate	Over here, honey.
Elnora	Mother, this is Philip Ammon of Chicago. He's staying with Dr. Ammon in Onabasha while he recovers from typhoid fever.
Philip	How do you do, Mrs. Comstock? It's nice to meet you.
Kate	Mr. Ammon, hello.
Elnora	He came down the creek fishing and cut this cocoon from under the bridge for me. He thinks it would be better to hunt moths than to fish until he's feeling stronger. What do you think about it?
Kate	You do seem a little pale, Mr. Ammon. Sit down here and rest while I finish up these dandelion greens. Have you tried greens before? Here.
Philip	Mmmmm. After two months of hospital food, this is wonderful!
Elnora	You should try them boiled with bacon and served with mother's cornbread!
Kate	What do you do in Chicago, Mr. Ammon?
Philip	Call me Philip, please. I finished college about 3 years ago; I've been working in my father's law office ever since.
Kate	How long will you be staying here in Onabasha, then?

Philip	Right now, the plan is for six weeks of fresh air and exercise. At the end of that, we'll see.
Kate	Well, you are three miles from town but less than a mile from our house. Why don't you come home with us and rest a little? When it gets evening, someone will likely come along on the road and can give you a ride into town.
Philip	That's very kind of you, Mrs. Comstock. Thank you.
SFX	Transition music.
Philip	You have a beautiful home, Mrs. Comstock.
Kate	Thank you, Philip. Have a seat. You've walked a long way today.
Philip	Father used to take me to the museum to see the moth and insect collections there. I started a collection at home, but once I went to college, (<i>not unkindly</i>) Mother insisted that we get those "dead bugs" out of her house. I donated them to the museum.
Elnora	I'm glad they're being preserved somewhere. The Limberlost Swamp has changed so much these past few years that we might need a museum one day, too. We've harvested so many trees. The maples, walnuts, and cherries are all gone.
Philip	They make excellent furniture.
Elnora	Yes, they do. But we have fewer of the birds who lived in their branches. Birds eat insects, and now the farmers have to contend with more damage to their crops.
Philip	I never thought of that.
Elnora	And there are fewer moths every spring. Some of the common moths have remained, but ones like the <i>Imperialis</i> are harder and harder to find.
Philip	The Yellow Emperor. So beautiful! I hope to see one while I'm here.
Elnora	So life here in the Limberlost is changing. I'll teach the children about what we still have. I hope it doesn't ALL go away.
Kate	Elnora, why don't you get your violin out and play some music for us?

Philip	Oh, I'd love to hear you play!
SFX	New violin music
Philip	What a wonderful afternoon and evening this has been! May I have your permission to return tomorrow to help continue your search for specimens?
Elnora	That would be lovely!
Philip	I'll say good night, then.
Elnora	Good night, Philip.
Kate	Good night.
SFX	Sound of door closing
Kate	He seems like a nice young man.
Elnora	<i>(developing her first crush)</i> Oh, yes. Yes, he does.
SFX	Transition music
Philip	Good morning! Where are we going today?
Elnora	Down to the covered bridge. There are some violets I'd like to preserve for my classes next fall.
Philip	Oh, I see some here!
Elnora	You won't find anything like this in your city greenhouses.
Philip	You're right, I won't. These are gorgeous. They're the same color as Edith's eyes.
Elnora	Who's Edith?
Philip	My fiancée. Edith Carr.
Elnora	<i>(a beat)</i> Oh.
Philip	<i>(oblivious)</i> Her birthday's coming up soon. Could I gather some of these to send her?
Elnora	Of course. I have enough for my classes. Here, let me help you.
Philip	I'm so glad you showed me these!
Elnora	Does Edith hunt moths with you, too?

Philip	<i>(laughs heartily)</i> No. She says they're disgusting. She could never do what you're doing.
Elnora	<i>(perfectly polite)</i> Here, take these. What does she like to do?
Philip	She likes to go shopping and visit her friends. She goes to the theater and plays bridge and finds things to amuse herself.
Elnora	Is that all? She must surely do something useful, too.
Philip	Well, no. <i>(He never thought about it before.)</i> She's a little younger than I am, and this is her time to play. Once we're married and she has a home to maintain, I expect things'll be different.
Elnora	Well, I hope she likes these violets.
Philip	<i>(still oblivious)</i> I'm sure she will. Oh, look! Is that a Citheronia Regalis under that log? <i>(Sith-er-ON-ee-uh Re-GAL-us)</i>
Elnora	Oh! Yes!
Philip	Where's the butterfly net?
SFX	Transition music
Philip	Where are we going today?
Elnora	Not far. I want to dig up some ferns for my classroom. Did Edith like the violets you sent her?
Philip	Yes. She says it's very hot in Chicago this summer.
SFX	Transition music
Philip	Where are we going today?
Elnora	The grosbeak abandoned her nest yesterday. The baby birds are on their own now. Let's see if we can collect the nest without breaking it.
SFX	Transition music
Philip	Where are we going today?

Elnora	Walnuts are starting to fall. Let's gather some and see what other nuts are ready.
Philip	We've spent all summer searching the Limberlost. I feel very comfortable here. My uncle is lucky to live near here.
SFX	Transition music
Philip	Where are we going today?
Elnora	The sumac and sassafras have started to turn colors. Let's gather some leaves to display.
Philip	Isn't it early for leaves to change? Summer's only partway through.
Elnora	Well, it's the first of August. Sumac and sassafras generally start changing first. Sugar maples will be next.
Philip	I've lost track of the days, it has been so wonderful to be here. I'm almost completely recovered from typhoid.
SFX	Ringing of an old-fashioned dinner bell.
Elnora	Oh! Something's wrong! That's mother's bell!
Philip	Come on!
Elnora	<i>(calling)</i> Mother!
Philip	<i>(gasping)</i> Mrs. Comstock! Are you OK?
Elnora	<i>(gasping)</i> What's wrong? Are you ill?
Kate	Sit down a moment, both of you. Philip, this Western Union messenger has just arrived with an urgent message for you.
SFX	Sound of an envelope being torn open.
Philip	Oh, no.
Elnora	What's wrong?
Philip	My father is ill and I am needed in Chicago. I have to leave on the next train. Elnora, will you walk to the edge of the Limberlost with me?
Elnora	Of course.
SFX	Sound of gate closing

Elnora	I hope it's nothing serious. Is your father usually in good health?
Philip	Yes. I'm a little ashamed. I could have gone home a month ago and helped him. But I've enjoyed myself here so much that I didn't even think about him. This is all my fault.
Elnora	Everyone will be happy to see you again.
Philip	<i>(He has fallen in love, but he's "taken.")</i> Elnora, if I talked for hours, I couldn't make you understand what a wonderful girl I think you are. I never in all my life hated anything as I hate leaving you. I hope this summer has been good for you, too.
Elnora	<i>(She has fallen in love, but she knows he's "taken.")</i> They've been beautiful days, each one like a perfect dream to be thought over and over all my life. They've been the only really happy days I've ever known; these days rich with mother's love, and doing useful work with you. <i>(a beat)</i> Well, Philip, good-bye! You have a train to catch, and Miss Carr is waiting for you.
Philip	Elnora, before I go ...
Elnora	Yes?
Philip	Will you kiss me good-bye?
Elnora	<i>(She is shocked at this breach of Victorian propriety.)</i> Certainly not!
Philip	Just one kiss?
Elnora	You are engaged! It might not matter to you, but Miss Carr would not want your lips tomorrow if she knew they had touched mine today. Get out of here! Go!
Philip	Will you write to me?
Elnora	<i>(retreating from him)</i> No. There's nothing to say except "good-bye."
Philip	<i>(at a distance)</i> Elnora!
Elnora	Sobbing
Kate	He's engaged? When did you find THAT out?

Elnora	He told me on the second day he was here, when we were looking for violets. He has been a perfect gentleman, mother.
Kate	Why didn't you tell me?
Elnora	I was afraid you wouldn't let him visit any more. And ... and I SO wanted him to visit!
Kate	Oh, honey, I'm so sorry.
Elnora	He was so pleasant, and he had so much interest in what I was doing. He has more money than I've ever dreamed of, but he treated me like I was his equal. I loved hearing him laugh. But he's going to be married, and I'll never see him again! <i>(more sobbing)</i>
SFX	Transition music
Kate	Elnora, how is your collection coming along?
Elnora	If I can find two Yellow Emperor moths, I'll be finished. That collection will help my college fund for next year.
Kate	But summer's about over. School starts next week.
Elnora	I know. I'll have to try again next summer and hope to find them somewhere in the Limberlost. Meanwhile, I have my classes to prepare for.
SFX	City street sounds. 1900s, so some cars but also horses and carriages. Orchestra music faintly under the next lines.
Hart	Edith! You look lovely as ever!
Edith	Hart! <i>(quickly lowers voice)</i> Hart Henderson! What are you doing here?
Hart	Edith, I had to see you again.
Edith	It's over between us, Hart.
Hart	Is it? I heard you broke off your engagement to Philip twice this winter.
Edith	Well, I might have ...
Hart	Phil's a good man, Edith. Why did you break up with him?

Edith	He keeps talking about the birds and the moths and the flowers at that swamp where he was last summer. And some country girl. I don't think he cheated on me, but ugh! Who cares about bugs?
Hart	I have to be sure, Edith. Is there any hope for us?
Edith	<i>(laughs)</i> I've loved Philip Ammon all my life, but he'll never know it. I'll always keep him guessing.
Hart	You're going to toy with his affections for the rest of your life?
Edith	It's good for a man to be uncertain. <i>(laughs)</i> If you could see Philip's face every time I return his ring, you'd understand the fun of it.
Hart	Be careful, Edith. I've known Phil all my life. He's a good man, and he's devoted to you. But he has a limit. If you push him too far, you'll lose him.
Philip	Edith, you look so beautiful! I can't wait until we're married in October. I'll be the luckiest man in the world. Hello, Hart!
Edith	<i>(pouting)</i> Philip, you've been neglecting me. You left me here all alone.
Philip	Just making sure everything goes well for tonight's ball. You'll be the star, and I want everything to be perfect for you.
Edith	Do you like my dress? My dressmaker made it to look like that Yellow Emperor butterfly you talked about all winter.
Philip	You look just as lovely as a real Yellow Emperor. You're my Empress. When the ball begins, every woman present will envy you, and every man will envy me. Oh, look, mother just walked in. Hold on, darling. I'll be right back
Edith	<i>(pouting)</i> Don't be gone long. I'm getting impatient for the ball to start. I'm glad all the windows are open. It's hot in here.
Hart	Edith, if you ever need me, I'm here. I love you forever.
Edith	Don't be silly, Hart.
Philip	Everything is ready, Edith. Shall we go in?

CROWD	Murmuring of approval as everyone sees Edith (“What a beautiful gown!” “Don’t they look good together!” “What a cute couple!” etc.)
SFX	Music swells a little louder.
CROWD	<i>(As the Yellow Emperor moth flies in, people notice and respond. It’s a large, striking moth. Some will be fascinated; others, frightened.)</i> Murmuring: “What’s that?” “It’s beautiful!” “Ugh! Keep it away from me!” etc.
Edith	Wait – what’s this thing?
Philip	It’s a Yellow Emperor moth! Edith, excuse me, darling. Don’t swat it! I have to catch this!
Edith	No! Stay here with me! Who cares about some ugly bug!
CROWD	Crowd sounds, murmuring, “Catch it! It’s yellow. He wants it for Edith. Don’t hurt it!” etc.
Philip	Got it! It’s the last one Elnora needs for her collection. Edith, I’ll be right back!
SFX	The orchestra begins to play again. Music continues softly under the next lines.
Edith	Elnora? That’s his little summer romance. She’s ancient history. This is MY night!
Hart	Edith, while we’re waiting for Philip to return, may I have this dance?
Edith	<i>(angry)</i> I can’t believe he just walked off and left me here by myself!
Hart	He’ll be back in a minute. Come on, let’s dance.
Edith	<i>(angrier)</i> Oh, no. He left me here in the middle of the dance floor, and I’m staying here until he comes back. He’s sending that moth to that country girl that he flirted with last summer!
Hart	Oh, Phil told me about her. He said her family is really poor. She’s earning money so she can go to college. And really, I don’t think it was a romance. The way he talked about her, it was more like two botanists chasing bugs in a swamp. You’re the only woman in his heart, Edith.

Edith	Hmph! Is she more important than me tonight? This ball is to celebrate our engagement. He should be here with me.
Hart	He'll be right back. He's just trying to help her out. Look, here he comes now.
Edith	Well, we'll see what happens next!
Hart	Edith, don't do anything rash.
Philip	Thanks for waiting, Edith. Sorry I had to step out for a moment. I thought you might dance with Hart here while I was gone.
Edith	Dance with someone else on the night of my engagement ball? No, certainly not! You can take this ring back! I don't want it!
Philip	<i>(shocked)</i> Edith!
Hart	<i>(warning)</i> Edith!
Philip	Edith, darling, let me explain.
Edith	You left me alone on the night of our engagement party! Standing here all by myself while you went off to help some country girl. I see what you think of me!
Philip	<i>(pleading)</i> Edith, it was only for a couple of minutes. Please don't make a scene. Come on, put your ring back on, and let's dance.
Edith	Never!
Philip	<i>(pleading)</i> Edith ...
Edith	It's over!
Philip	<i>(Change. He's tired of the drama. Perhaps a sigh.)</i> Edith, do you really mean this?
Edith	Yes, I do. I'll never wear that ring again.
Philip	<i>(He's done with her.)</i> Well, all right. I accept your decision. Please excuse me.
Edith	Wait! Where are you going?

Hart	You've crossed the line, Edith! Quick! Go tell him you're sorry.
Edith	<i>(Stung but stubborn)</i> Hmpf! Nobody treats me like that. Dance with me, Hart.
Hart	Edith, it's not too late.
Edith	Dance with me.
SFX	Orchestra music swells, closes. Switch to sounds of countryside, birds, insects.
Kate	Elnora, someone's coming up the lane.
Elnora	Are you expecting a visitor, Mother? Who is it?
Kate	I can't quite see. Oh! Gracious!
Elnora	Who is it? <i>(Recognizes Philip)</i> Oh!
SFX	Knock at screen door
Kate	<i>(A little forced)</i> Well, of all the delightful surprises! Philip!
Philip	Thank you, Mrs. Comstock.
Elnora	<i>(A little cool)</i> It's good to see you again, Philip.
	<i>(Awkward silence for a beat)</i>
Kate	What brings you back to Limberlost Swamp, Philip? It doesn't look like you have typhoid again.
Philip	<i>(Stressed - he's had a long 24 hours.)</i> Elnora, if you were engaged to me, and we were at a ball, and I offended you very much and didn't even know I had done anything, and if I asked you to let me explain, to forgive me, to wait, would you get mad at me in front of everyone? Would you drop my ring on the floor and insult me repeatedly? Would you?
Elnora	Philip, are you feeling well?
Philip	I ... <i>(he stops)</i> I don't know ...

Kate	<i>(A beat.)</i> You know, I was just about to start supper. Elnora, you run out to the garden and pick some fresh tomatoes for us. I saw one 'way at the back that's ready. Philip, you remember how to split kindling, don't you?
Elnora	Yes, mother.
Philip	Yes, Mrs. Comstock
SFX	Sound of screen door slamming, a step on the porch.
Kate	<i>(complete change of tone. She is interrogating him.)</i> Now, Philip, suppose you tell me why you're here.
Philip	Mrs. Comstock, I've come to ask Elnora to marry me.
Kate	I see. Yesterday you were engaged to someone else. You two had a fight, and now you're here. You want to use Elnora to make your fiancée jealous, don't you? You'll go back to her and leave my daughter with a broken heart. Well, I'm not having it! You split that kindling, and you'll get your supper. And then you'd best be on your way.
Philip	Mrs. Comstock, let me explain.
Kate	I'd rather hear her side.
Philip	I wish you could have seen her last night. You'd be on my side if you had. I went home and had a long talk with my father, and he suggested that I come here.
Kate	Your father?
Philip	Yes, ma'am.
Kate	Well, as it happens, I've met your uncle's family frequently this winter. I've heard your Aunt Anna say that she didn't care for Miss Carr at all, and that your family secretly hoped that something would happen so that you didn't marry her. So if your father sent you here ... I'm listening.
Philip	They said that?
Kate	Yes.
Philip	So do I have your blessing?

Kate	This is much too sudden. It's up to her.
SFX	Sound of screen door.
Elnora	I found a couple of nice tomatoes.
Kate	<i>(changes tone)</i> Wash and slice them, then, honey. Philip, if you'll get the strawberries from the spring house, supper will be ready soon.
Philip	Yes, ma'am.
SFX	Transition music
Philip	This has been a wonderful evening, but it's time for me to head back to my uncle's house. Elnora, will you walk to the gate with me?
Elnora	Not tonight. But if you come back tomorrow, we'll go over to Sleepy Snake Creek and hunt moths.
Philip	Well, good night, then. I'll see you tomorrow.
Elnora	Good night.
SFX	Sound of screen door closing
Kate	Well?
Elnora	I dare not hope, Mother. We're only a few hours from Chicago. I figure she'll be here within a week to patch things up. We'll see what happens then.
SFX	Transition music. Sound of a Model-T style car on an unpaved road. Sound continues under the next few lines.
Edith	These roads are really awful!
Hart	We should tell Henry Ford to think about adding springs or something to handle these dirt roads.
Edith	How much longer before we get there?
Hart	It's not much farther. A couple of miles, maybe.
Edith	Could we stop for a moment? I'd like to freshen up a bit before I see him.
Hart	Of course. Here, let me pull over.

SFX	Car sounds stop, sound of doors slamming shut, sound of birds and insects under the next few lines or two
Hart	Let's sit here by the creek.
Edith	Hart, I've been doing a lot of thinking the last few days.
Hart	You have?
Edith	And I've come to see that I've been – really – very selfish. My whole life.
Hart	<i>(Noncommittal. Edith has never said anything like this before.)</i> Oh?
Edith	I only cared about trivial things. I thought that beauty and social status were the most important things in life. I never learned to control my temper. I always got my way. I thought that was the way it was supposed to be.
Hart	<i>(Cautious)</i> You did?
Edith	I had to be the prettiest one in the room, no matter what it cost. I had to have everyone's attention. And look where it's gotten me! This mess – this is all my fault.
Hart	Don't be so hard on yourself ...
Edith	If Elnora Comstock had been like me, Phil would have come back to me right away last summer. I can see how selfish I must seem to him, and how I must appear to you, too.
Hart	No, Edith ... Look. I told you all along not to treat Phil that way. But it's the first time in your life I ever thought you wrong about anything--and it's the only time I ever shall. I think you're the bravest, most beautiful woman on earth. I love you. I always will.
Edith	I am sick of what I've become, Hart. When your hour of trouble comes, there is no comfort for people like me. I'm sick of it all. I'm going to make some changes. I can't correct all my faults in one day, but I'll learn to be more agreeable, more thoughtful. Will you still want me then?
Hart	Always, Edith. But we're on our way to see Phil. What will you say to him?

Edith	I don't know ... I don't ... (<i>gasps</i>) Hart! Do you see that butterfly?
Hart	Where?
Edith	It's coming toward us. Look! Look at those yellow wings. Isn't that the same one that Philip caught that night at the party?
Hart	Yes, I think it is. Here – let me swat that bug out of here.
Edith	No! No, don't hurt it!
Hart	I thought you hated bugs.
Edith	Not this one! Philip said she needed two. He only sent her one. Hart, help me catch it. We'll take it to them.
Hart	You don't have to do that, Edith.
Edith	Don't have to? Of course I do! That's why it's here. I just said I was going to change. Well, here's my chance to prove it. If I can be unselfish enough to take this to her, maybe you can believe that there's some good in me.
Hart	You don't have to prove anything to me.
Edith	Then let me prove it to myself. Help me catch it.
SFX	Leaves rustle
Hart	Ooof! There! I've got it!
Edith	Don't hurt it! Here, put it in my hat, and we'll cover it with my handkerchief. It'll be safe there.
Hart	There we go.
Edith	Oh, let's go. I want to deliver this safely!
SFX	Car doors slam, Model-T engine cranks up, car continues down the road. Shift in perspective, now the car sounds far away.
Kate	Is someone coming up the lane?
Philip	That looks like my friend's car.
Elnora	Who's that with him?
Philip	I'm not sure ... Oh (<i>a beat</i>) it's Edith.

Elnora	<i>(not surprised, bracing herself)</i> Oh.
Kate	<i>(not surprised, protective of Elnora)</i> Oh.
SFX	Car stops. Doors slam shut.
Philip	<i>(formally)</i> Mrs. Comstock, Miss Elnora Comstock, may I introduce Miss Edith Carr?
Kate	How do you do?
Elnora	How do you do?
Edith	<i>(awkward)</i> How do you do? I'm very pleased to meet you. And may I introduce my fiancé, Hart Henderson?
Philip	Your fiancé? Hart?
Hart	<i>(embarrassed)</i> Yes.
Kate	<i>(surprised)</i> How do you do?
Elnora	<i>(surprised)</i> How do you do? I'm happy to meet you.
Hart	And I'm happy to meet you, too.
Elnora	Why don't we all move onto the porch and sit down?
Hart	Thank you.
SFX	Sound of people moving, steps on wooden porch
Edith	Philip, I've come to tell you that I'm sorry for the way I behaved. Really, I am. I apologize for being so childish.
Philip	<i>(Not sure what to think. He has heard some of this before.)</i> It's OK, Edith, I understand.
Edith	And I want to wish you well. If you'll look inside my hat, Miss Comstock, you'll see what I mean. We, ah ... we found this in the woods. I thought you might like to have it. It's the same as the one Philip sent you from Chicago, I think.
Elnora	Oh! It's a Yellow Emperor! It's the last one I need for my collection! I don't even know how to begin to thank you, Miss Carr! This makes everything perfect!

Philip	ALMOST perfect. (<i>a beat</i>) Elnora, I love you with all my heart. I love the way sun shines on your hair by the creek. I love the way the birds singing will make you smile. I love the way you listen to the trees and the flowers. Will you make me the happiest of men? Will you marry me?
Elnora	Yes, Philip. Yes, I will.
Philip	NOW it's perfect.
SFX	Concluding music.
Announcer	<p>You have been listening to Richmond Radioworks' production of <i>A Girl of the Limberlost</i>.</p> <p>Tonight's cast was... <<insert characters and people here>></p> <p>And featuring the talents of Sound effects by Sound engineering by</p> <p>Richmond RadioWorks is a collaboration of Richmond Civic Theatre, Earlham College, and WECL: Richmond's Public Radio.</p>