



A Girl of the Limberlost

Gene Stratton-Porter

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Set amid Indiana's vast Limberlost Swamp, this treasured children's classic mixes astute observations on nature with the struggles of growing up in the early 20th century. Harassed by her mother and scorned by her peers, Elnora Comstock finds solace in natural beauty along with friendship, independence, and romance.

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Synopsis from Huffington Post: Cornfields, soy fields, alfalfa fields ? Indiana has long been seen as an agricultural plain. But to make it a lucrative farming state, much of the land had to be deforested, leaving behind devastated habitats. The Limberlost, a wetland in northern Indiana, was mostly destroyed by drainage, logging and oil production. Gene Stratton-Porter, an early 20th-century naturalist and novelist, captured the fading beauty of the swamp in books like *A Girl of the Limberlost*, a novel about a smart, ambitious girl who lives in the dwindling wetland with her mother and pays for school by collecting local moth specimens to sell to naturalists. The book isn't exactly an environmentalist tract, but it makes the case nonetheless: It celebrates the beauty and richness of the swampland, while showing how easily economic forces push landowners to strip it away.

A Girl of the Limberlost Details

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From Reader Review *A Girl of the Limberlost* for online ebook

Elaine says

My mother always wanted me to read this book, it was a favorite of hers. She probably read it in the 30s. Well, I've finally done it! Written in 1909, it is definitely an example of the writing style of that time. There are many things to interest modern readers, though, from young teen through mature adult.

The protagonist, Elnora, is a student of nature, and she specializes in moths. The descriptions of the moths, the birds, the flowers of the beautiful Indiana woodlands are glowing. We learn much about the life cycle of moths, and how to catch them and preserve them. The book traces Elnora from high school through the year after graduation. There are clear descriptions of high school of that time, and the clothing worn and coveted by a schoolgirl in the Edwardian age is lovingly detailed. The tale weaves through her relationships with her friends and neighbors, and with her difficult mother. Romance blossoms, but there are many stones in Elnora's path. She is an endearing character, and it is a pleasure to follow her through her days, for she always celebrates the beauty around her.

Kirk says

First and foremost, you ask, what is a Limberlost? My wife will tell you it's a fairly accurate description of my posture at my decrepit age, but however true that may be, it's irrelevant to Gene Stratton-Porter's most famous novel. The Limberlost is actually a famous forest area in eastern Indiana where the author and her husband made their initial wealth. Today a portion of it operates as a state historical site, with tourists able to tour the cabin, which looks like this:

Of course, by the time Porter died at 60, a millionaire off her writing, this house wasn't fit for a closet. Instead, she was building a massive Bel Air mansion while living in a "cottage" on Catalina Island, dictating her final words to a secretary because that's what a sweet life writing will get you. Until the streetcar plows into your chauffeured limo and kills you before you can move into your mansion, that is. Still, considering by that time you've written 5 of the only 55 novels ever to sell more than a million copies by 1924, you can probably say you've accomplished what you're going to in life.

We read this book for our opening week of a class on coming-of-age novels and youth-culture fiction. *GIRL* is a book that countless women remember fondly, mainly because of Elnora's struggle to overcome poverty and make her way in the world by collecting moths for a mysterious creature known as The Birdwoman (not of Alcatraz). "Poverty" is a misnomer here, because Elnora's mother has money, she's just a cheap, resentful hag who must outgrow her habitude to love her daughter the way Elnora deserves. Indeed, it's fair to say it's Kate Comstock and other characters in the book who must grow up, for Elnora's unerring goodness makes adults and other teens around her painfully aware of their shortcomings. We spent most of our class talking about Mama's psychology instead of Elnora's, which was a bit weird because this is a class about adolescents in fiction, not in wrinkly embittered mothers. The reality is Elnora's a bit of a cipher. She doesn't so much struggle with pride, greed, temptation, etc., as other Victorian and post-Victorian children must do; she's mainly here to romp in the woods, chase butterflies, and saw "Turkey in the Straw" on the fiddle so that those of us who didn't grow up in sylvan splendor can feel deprived. In other words, this is American

Pastoral without any hint of the American Berserk.

The weird thing is that this may be a naturalist novel, but it's not a conservationist novel as descriptions of it might seem. The Limberlost is here to be turned into money: Elnora reaps \$300 a pop for a Yellow Empress moth, and when Mama comes to her senses, she agrees to sell off part of her land and drill for oil so Elnora can have the pretty dresses a good middle-class girl is ordained to enjoy. I supposed I'd be out camphoring the little flutterbellies, too, for \$300---I've sold plasma for less than that---but it's a definite departure from Victoria children's fiction to have Elnora revel in all the goodies her money buys her, including lavish toiletries which only a couple of decades earlier would ensure she was on the road to Limberhell.

For me, the novel went off the rails about 4/5 of the way through in the obligatory romance plot where Elnora squares off against Edith Carr for the affections of one of the all-time wet noodle suitors, Phil Ammons. Actually, Elnora doesn't compete for Phil; she lets Edith show herself for the vain, silly fool she is and tells Phil to poo or get off the pot when it comes to picking his wife. She has better things to do, like deforest the American wilderness. The novel really gives readers a stiff case of whiplash when we suddenly leave Indiana and head for Petoskey MI--a tourist trap if there ever was one in the early 20th century---where Elnora is advised by the hero of Porter's previous bestseller, Freckles. Why a teenage girl would take advice from an adult male who calls himself Freckles is a question not even Nabokov could answer, but Freckles's advice is, naturally, as profound as anything Joel Osteen, Oprah, or Humbert Humbert could ever come up with: follow your heart. It's probably no mystery what happens at the end of the book. Go Ask Alice this is not.

Again, this book is fondly remembered by a lot of folks who read it in childhood, and it's not hard to understand why. Like a lot of pre-1920s youth fiction it grants young women an imaginative space where they can be adventurers, scientists, mother figures, and economically independent entrepreneurs without the necessity of depending on men---at least until the writer's publisher reminds her that a girl's book must end in marriage. (Once Porter made her millions, she unburdened herself of her dull druggist husband. While she was building her Bel Air mansion, he was living in a boardinghouse. NOTE TO MEN: It pays not to be jerks to women).

To me the most interesting character was the most dislikable: Edith Carr. As Janet Malcolm noted a few years ago in an NYRB essay, Edith seems a neurotic harbinger of Fitzgerald's flappers. So she's a good transition into our next week's read, *THIS SIDE OF PARADISE*. In the end, to me *GIRL* is a nice break from modern teenage angst, but I can't help but feel it's also an adult's idealization of what an adolescent should be: obedient, intuitively moral, and absolutely immune to the baleful influence of corrupted adults (including the creepy perv tramp who peeps into her bedroom window, only to feel instantly terrible about being a creepy perv and become her protector among the roving gangs of tramps). To put it another way, Elnora is a kid who can raise herself. Call me when you get out of high school, girl---I'll be on Catalina Island, dictating my next novel while chauffeured in my limo. Just let me finish my draft before that streetcar comes barreling.

Heidi says

A *Girl of the Limberlost* is one of those true treasures of the book world, one I personally never would have uncovered if it weren't for my notion to do *Booking It Across the US*. I was at a loss for an Indiana book, there weren't an abundance of titles that I recognized, but when I called on Twitter, Allison of *The Allure of Books* answered with Gene Stratton-Porter. I adore hidden classics (though I admit there are quite a few not-

so-hidden ones I really need to get to), and so I commenced to reading the free e-book version that is the delight of classic lovers everywhere (if you are unaware, out-of-copyright works are most often available in free e-formats). I fell in love. That special kind of book love that you know will last a lifetime and require many rereadings. I purchased a physical copy within 5 minutes of finishing the digital one—I had to have it. Reading *A Girl of the Limberlost* for the first time reminded me a bit of my first readings of Louisa May Alcott—only perhaps even more wonderful because while I'd seen movie versions of *Little Women* prior to reading that book I had no idea where *A Girl of the Limberlost* would lead me story-wise. I do love a girl who knows her heart and mind, and I find that in both Elnora and my dear Jo, they are a reminder that what is instinctual and what is necessary to be happy are not always one and the same.

In a way Elnora is admittedly a bit of a Mary Sue—before Mary Sues were really a thing. Which I suppose made her the admirable type for me rather than the eye-rolly one. Instead of being a character to scoff at, she becomes a heroine to aspire to. Gene Stratton-Porter creates this character whose heart is so large and desires only love and fulfillment, but never demands it at the cost of others. She is a hard worker, a devout learner and friend with ambitions that extend beyond what her meager upbringing would have normally been laid before her. The fact that she is so noble as to refuse the man she loves rather than be a second choice in his heart (don't you worry—there's a happy ending), the resilience and insistence that she be absolutely certain of everyone's coming out of a situation to the best advantage, her ability to forgive her mother years of misguided cruelty for a future of love—these are the qualities that make Elnora unforgettable.

In setting, Gene Stratton-Porter manages to enfold us in the Limberlost, making these Indiana woods and town feel more real and true to us than so many other books are able to manage. It's no small wonder that the author has exhibits commending her locally as she manages in a mere two novels to bring the Limberlost to the world. The enterprising young Elnora spends her days collecting and searching for the moths that populate the area, and in so doing we gain a picture of the woods as they are in day and in night, the beautiful and the unsavory.

I loved the notion of a young girl earning her own way through school and aspiring to college when her mother supports her neither monetarily or morally. While the first half of this novel could be admittedly slow, I still very much enjoyed following Elnora from a naive bright eyed girl to a woman rich in friendship, love, and knowledge. That said, it was the second half of the book (that'd be the half with the romantic bits), that really caught my heart. I can see myself picking this one up and reading from the chapter where Elnora and Philip first meet over and over again. I love that Gene Stratton-Porter doesn't make her romance easy, she makes it a downright health concern. For so many pages my heart was in my throat with worry and suspense, not knowing how this life would pan out for Elnora, Philip and his fiancée (oooh, see that—scandalous!) Edith. This book shows so clearly how we can be blinded by the affections of youth and begin to take our relationships for granted. It is a book full of heartache, desire, and a warmth for others that really know the heart of you far beneath the surface.

A Girl of the Limberlost is, in fact, a companion novel to Gene Stratton-Porter's earlier work, *Freckles*. You by no means have to read these two books in order (I didn't), however, if you are like me you will fall so deeply in love with Elnora and this place that you will want to read all about the man *Freckles* and his Angel that repeatedly save her. *A Girl of the Limberlost* is a beautiful representation of Indiana as place, and a book that the state should be (and is) proud of. If this unarguable hidden classic has slipped beneath your radar, I cannot stress more sincerely my hope that you pick it up. I am endlessly in awe of Gene Stratton-Porter's ability to represent these people in such a way that their life journeys seem timeless, their trials as near and true as any contemporary novel of today. It is a perfect example of the reality that times, traditions, and technologies may change, but human nature never will. This novel was easily my favorite pick of the entirety of *Booking It Across the US*, and one of my all time favorites to boot.

Original review posted at Bunbury in the Stacks.

Sara says

What a delightful book! Beautiful on its own it is a superior sequel to *Freckles*. It reminded me of *Anne of Green Gables* and *An Old Fashioned Girl* with scenes of *Pride and Prejudice* (think of Darcy's aunt visiting Lizzie). Unlike *Laddie*, this was gripping from the very start and like *Laddie* was rich with beautiful descriptions. An extremely well done story that will be revisited by me many times in the future.

Kellyn Roth says

[Is it Edith or Elnora already?!?! (hide spoiler)]

Jeana says

Although I believe this book was written before *Anne of Green Gables*, this read like a mediocre version of *Anne*. It wasn't that I disliked this book while I was reading it, but it just didn't ring true for me. Especially the part about Elnora's graduation when she was being such a brat about the dresses her mother wouldn't buy for her. *Anne of Green Gables* handled the lack of dresses she wanted so much more graciously than Elnora did. I didn't feel sorry for her anymore after that. And I lost all sympathy.

In fact, I felt like it really was two books: first, resolving the issue of the mother disliking her and being cruel; then the part where she falls in love and marries. It's like all the previous concerns were fixed with one little day. I don't think real life works quite like that.

The part I did like was the information about nature and moths. Having a "naturalist" (as her teacher says) as a daughter, I could see why she was interested in the *Limberlost* and the swamp and all the natural creatures there. That was by far my favorite part of this entire book. It reminded me of my childhood exploring the woods and creek behind my house.

I hate books that end with a moral, as this one did. And the problem here isn't that the moral was Elnora's; it was Edith's. The end was all like "You can never be as wonderful as Elnora and I can't be as great as Ammon, so we don't we mediocre people just be together"? The end did NOT work for me. Really, most of the book didn't work for me either.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

A weak 3 stars. I have some GR friends who are into old-timey books. I had great luck with their recommend of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, so when *A Girl of the Limberlost*, written in 1909, was also highly recommended, I

was all up for another delightful, old-fashioned experience. Anne Shirley, make way for Elnora Comstock . . . okay, Elnora was losing ground already with that name, but outdated names kind of come with the territory here, so I was still optimistic.

At the beginning of the book, Elnora is a 16 year old girl from the Limberlost swamp area. You might be forgiven for thinking that we're in the Louisiana bayous. *I* was certainly confused, thinking to myself, where are the Cajuns? *Where are the man-eating gators?* How come the only wildlife I'm hearing about is moths and butterflies? Well, it turns out the Limberlost swamp is in Indiana.

Personally I'd call wetlands rather than a swamp, but whatever. Semantics.

Anyway, Elnora's dearest wish is to continue with her schooling, so she convinces her mean, cruel mom (who won't let her buy any nice clothing, or books, or give her money for school tuition) to let her go to the high school in town, where all the girls make fun of her out-of-date clothing, clumpy shoes, ugly hair and countrified ways.

****some spoilers in the rest of this review****

But this being a Horatio Alger kind of story, Elnora finds a way to prevail, become ~~beautiful~~ gorgeous, and win over the Mean Girls, not to mention dangerous criminals who lurk in the swamp, local urchins, her hateful (literally) mother, and pretty much everyone else who crosses her path, whilst becoming valedictorian of the school and collecting rare moths to sell to collectors, to pay for her own schooling.

The elusive Yellow Empress moth (nka Golden Emperor)

After we've had enough of the high school scene, we quickly skip three years to when Elnora is graduating and thinking about going to college. She's still living by the swamp, but (because this is that sort of story) luckily a handsome, wealthy, intelligent and kind young man comes to the Limberlost to visit for the summer. He's pretty much perfect in every way . . . except he's engaged to the Most Beautiful Girl Ever. Who will Phillip choose: Elnora or the stunning socialite Edith? Far be it from me to spoil the story and ruin your fun. Go get a free copy on Project Gutenberg or somewhere!

I kid about the old-fashioned, predictable aspects of this story and the Mary Sue/Gary Stu characters (you get both! two for the price of one!), because, when it's done well, I actually love this sort of thing. But there's just not enough humor in *Girl of the Limberlost* for me, and the Victorian Age moralism gets tiresome: people waste away for the love of someone they can't have, and righteous self-sacrifice runs amok until I just wanted to slap some of these characters upside the head and tell them to quit being so idiotically dramatic and noble.

A Girl of the Limberlost is also dated in some ways I found more unsettling than usual. YAY! for drilling oil wells, cutting down trees and collecting and killing beautiful moths by the hundreds for collections; and ladies realizing that true happiness is found primarily in being a sweet, supportive wife and raising the children. I'm personally on the moderate/conservative side of the spectrum, but this was some pretty eyebrow-raising stuff even for me.

A few sample quotes:

"Any day you say the word you can sell six thousand worth of rare timber off this place easy. I'll see to clearing and working the fields cheap as dirt, for Elnora's sake. I'll buy you more

cattle to fatten. All you've got to do is sign a lease, to pull thousands from the ground in oil, as the rest of us are doing all around you!"

Moth collecting:

"I had over two hundred eggs," said Elnora, "but some of them didn't hatch, and some of the caterpillars died, but there must be at least a hundred perfect ones." . . .

"Young woman, that's the rarest moth in America," said the Bird Woman solemnly. "If you have a hundred of them, they are worth a hundred dollars according to my list. I can use all that are not damaged."

On the other hand, the author does acknowledge that these things have a cost:

Men all around were clearing available land. The trees fell wherever corn would grow. The swamp was broken by several gravel roads, dotted in places around the edge with little frame houses, and the machinery of oil wells . . . Wherever the trees fell the moisture dried, the creeks ceased to flow, the river ran low, and at times the bed was dry. With unbroken sweep the winds of the west came, gathering force with every mile and howled and raved; threatening to tear the shingles from the roof, blowing the surface from the soil in clouds of fine dust and rapidly changing everything. From coming in with two or three dozen rare moths in a day, in three years' time Elnora had grown to be delighted with finding two or three.

And here's the 1909 view of the proper role of women:

"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 . . . 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."

There is quite a bit of old-fashioned charm in *A Girl of the Limberlost*, but there are also some not-so-appealing parts. Whether they'll overwhelm the nostalgic charm depends on the person reading it.

Meredith Holley says

Childrens' books like *A Girl of the Limberlost* remind me of the instruction manuals that come with furniture that you have to assemble yourself. They are assembly instructions for morality. Life is so easy, and there are little stick people on the pages to show you how it is all done successfully. I adored *Little Women* when I was a kid, for example, but in recent years I've tried to re-read it a couple of times, and I can't get past the part where Marmie makes the girls give up their Christmas breakfast so that the starving German children won't die of cold and hunger. It's so simple! If we give up a little of what is ours and have kind of a crappy Christmas but pretend it's fun, our parents (and God, by association) will love us. It's not that I disagree with the message that unselfishness makes us better (and even happier) people, and I know if I ever have a daughter I will read her *Little Women*. I just think that the delivery is too simplistic to be very honest, and it kind of gives me the creeps. I had that same creepy and confused feeling reading *A Girl of the Limberlost*. I would not say I'm appalled at anyone who loves this book, and the person who recommended it to me is a

dear friend, but I can't let this reading pass without noting how uncomfortable it makes me.

This book was written 100 years ago - about a generation after Little Women. While Little Women is a quintessential example of American morality lessons, *A Girl of the Limberlost* is American capitalism through and through. The central struggle of the book is a basic Cinderella plot, wherein the beautiful Elnora has been caged in the Limberlost forest by her mother, who became bitter and mean after the death of Elnora's father. They own a huge amount of land and timber (note word choice), where Elnora catches moths and butterflies and communes with nature. Elnora, however, is basically a genius (on top of being the most naturally beautiful girl anyone has met), so she wants to go to high school in the nearby town, and her stingy mother will not buy her the clothes and books necessary to do so. All of this we know within the first few chapters of the book, and it's pretty obvious whose side we're on, right? Gotta go with Cinderella, not the evil mother.

Stratton-Porter makes it very obvious that the reader is intended to see how selfish and unreasonable the mother's argument is for not giving Elnora the fancy clothes she wants (no, sorry, *needs*), and Elnora is presented as a purely heroic character, without any intention of irony that I could detect. It was very conflicting, then to be 100% on the mother's side of the argument. I'll give you a selection of how the argument is characterized throughout the book to see if you agree. This is from a moment in which Elnora runs in a panic to her friend, the Bird Woman, because her mother didn't buy her a new dress for graduation:

"Elnora," she said, "Forgive me, but tell me truly. Is your mother so extremely poor as to make this necessary?"

"No," answered Elnora. "Next year I am heir to my share of over three hundred acres of land covered with almost as valuable timber as was in the Liberlost. We adjoin it. There could be dozens of oil wells drilled that would yield to us the thousands our neighbors are draining from under us, and the bare land is worth over one hundred dollars an acre for farming. She is not poor, she is - I don't know what she is. A great trouble soured and warped her..."

Kind of creepy, no? If you love your kids, you'll kill the forest. And this "Drill, baby, drill!" theme runs through the whole book. Elnora denudes the Limberlost of moths because she can sell them to pay for school. At the same time, she represents nature within the book because she loves the forest and knows everything about animals and plants. So, we learn, if we really love and understand nature, we use it to get us the stuff we want. I think there's a cartoon version of this story on Fox News starring Sarah Palin. It kind of makes me mad that a tree died to print this book. It was also a reality check for my own behavior (in the opposite way of what was intended) because it always seems vague to me when people talk about the ramifications of our behavior on people 100 years from now. This made it much more real because I kept wanting to get in my time machine (patent pending) and fly back to get this ridiculous girl not to replace the forest with farms and oil wells. I hope no one feels like that about me in 2109.

Aside from my problems with all of the basic messages of the book (and my problem with a side story that makes me *very* uncomfortable about a very Dickensian street urchin and his family), it had a fairly engaging plot. I'm a sucker for love stories to the point that even if I really dislike everything else, I still want to see the love story play out in a book. This one also had the bonus of every woman in the story learning that if she devoted her entire existence to her husband and kids, she would find true happiness. *shudder*

Sarah says

Elnora Comstock leaves deep in the Limberlost swamp of Indiana with her mother, who hates her, and a kindly childless couple next door. The year is (approximately) 1909, and fifteen-year-old Elnora is going to high school if she has to die trying. Her mother rails abuse at her, while Wesley and Margaret Sinton have to sneak behind her mom's back to help her.

At first Elnora sticks out terribly. The town kids bully her for her threadbare, hopelessly out-of-fashion old clothes and naïve manners. Not to mention she's too poor to even buy textbooks.

But, in the first of many brilliant decisions (and a few inexplicable stupid ones), Elnora decides to earn some money by trading moth specimens with a mysterious figure known as the Bird Woman. The Limberlost is fairly crawling with different kinds of moth. As she captures the little creatures, Elnora has no idea that those moths aren't just paying for her education—they will become the catalyst that turns her youth into her adulthood.

As she perseveres at school, she is alternately abused and admired by her mother, who has been bitter and paranoid about everything since the drowning of her husband, which happened on the very day that Elnora was born. The deceased Mr. Comstock is a mysterious presence in the book, with a negative legacy that is slowly destroying a local woman, and a positive one that flourishes in his daughter.

Elnora eventually makes friends among her schoolmates, and also takes pity on a starving child named Billy, who is stuck in the swamp with his raging alcoholic father and no food. Billy is eventually adopted by the Sintons, and while he starts out feral, he strives to be a little gentleman and please them.

After graduating high school, Elnora discovers that she lacks the funds to pay for college. Her mom is now on her side for good, and they spend all their time hunting for swamp moths to trade for cash. On one of these expeditions they cross paths with a handsome, rich young man from the city—Philip Ammon, who loves moths as much as Elnora does. It is inevitable and right that the two young people fall for each other, but in his pampered youth he made some bad judgment calls—namely, an engagement to a narcissistic and cruel society belle—that prevent an honorable union.

And that society belle, Edith Carr, is a veritable Fury from Hell when something gets in her way...

If you like L.M. Montgomery's novels, I think this book is a safe bet for you. Porter clearly had a deep love for the Limberlost region, which I had never even heard of before reading this book, and now it feels familiar to me. In this beloved landscape, lively and likable characters wander, making mistakes and learning from them, helping each other and honoring God.

Elnora, like many of her fellow *fin de siècle* heroines, is pretty and clever and skilled and may sometimes seem implausible. But (view spoiler) Overall, she's wonderful.

Philip is also a good kid, if maddeningly indecisive, and often oblivious to his own needs and changing feelings. Sometimes he slips over boundaries, but he always recovers, (view spoiler)

Mrs. Comstock is frightening for the first half of the book. She never bonded with her daughter, given the trauma of giving birth on the day that her husband died, and her only affection toward Elnora for the next seventeen years only manifested as paranoid, possessive, and apparently deranged outbursts. (view spoiler)

Edith Carr is also frightening, but in a completely different way. This spoiled creature, well aware of her own beauty and charisma, enjoys terrorizing and manipulating Philip, and is almost equally shameless with Hart Henderson, a mutual friend strung around her finger. Her belief in her own powers over men, particularly Philip, is well within the definition of hubris. The term narcissist gets tossed about casually these days, and applied to many fictional characters who don't deserve it, but Edith really does fit the criteria. The climactic confrontation between Edith and Elnora recalls Lady Catherine's ambush of Elizabeth near the end of *Pride & Prejudice*.

My only gripe with the book is that a few supporting characters are introduced, only to vanish into the mists of the swamp without accomplishing much. Billy has two siblings who are shuffled off to unseen families when their father dies, and never seen again. There's also a young man named Pete, a Stalker with a Crush on Elnora, who was implied to be tangled in some criminal enterprise. He never actually meets with the object of his affection, although he helps her mom collect moths on one occasion, before disappearing from the text, as if to make way for Philip. I'm not saying that there should have been yet another love triangle—Hart/Edith/Philip/Elnora was more than dramatic enough—but it was very strange that Pete should be introduced, with his dark circumstances and passion for the heroine, and wind up not being part of the plot at all.

There are some characters who show up toward the end—the singer Terence “Freckles” O'More and his wife, referred to as the Angel (I'm not getting gender-flipped *Phantom of the Opera* vibes from this at all, ahem) who apparently appeared in Porter's previous Limberlost book, *Freckles*. I want to read that one now, so I understand better why these two are so important.

This is a genuinely good book that will leave you feeling like you've eaten a wholesome and delicious meal. Warmly recommended for everybody, but especially teen girls and young women like myself.

Gloria says

This nostalgic story was written in 1906, but has rather surprising relevance to today's culture. Well crafted and unique, the issues covered include: bullying, parental neglect, extramarital affair, unhealthy grief, peer pressure, alcoholism, window peeping, depression, and class culture clashes. Elnora is a teenage girl with many factors making life difficult. In true American spirit, she rises above the odds and educates herself and teaches others how to treat her. She achieves not only an education, but becomes a musical virtuoso and esteemed local scientist ... and don't forget about finding true love.

Mandy Leins says

Well worth reading for an honest look at what life was like for a naturalist in the late 19th and early 20th century. While it is fiction, I would highly recommend reading this for what it tells you about all the things that are peripheral to the story. Also, do a little background reading on Gene Stratton-Porter. She's an amazing individual, and what she accomplished in her life is beyond belief (when you consider that, by law, her husband had to sign any legal documents *in her name* for them to be binding!).

Nina says

There is a line in this book that I carry on a card in my purse. "If you are Lazy and accept your lot, you may live in it. If you are willing to work you can write your name anywhere" Gene Stratton-Porter is a gifted writer that writes of her beloved Limberlost swamp and the people that around it. As with her other books, there are characters that have extreme hardship and rise above them to become better individuals. Elnora Comstock is an impoverished young girl that feels unloved, and earns much of her living by collecting rare moths from the Limberlost. You will want to start checking out books on the beauty of the swamp and all the natural resources therein. An amazing book that makes you wish for something more from this life, and a return to old fashioned values.

Nicola O. says

Read lots and lots of GSP when I was a kid-- *Girl of the Limberlost* remains my favorite. It's an engrossing coming-of-age story with elements of redemption and romance, set in rural Indiana, early 20th century (I would guess by the publication date). I think most adolescent girls can relate to Elnora's struggles with her mother, and the resolution of that is very satisfying. Elnora herself triumphs over adversity through courage, integrity, and hard work, but is not obnoxiously saintly. The author was also a naturalist and the setting and plot mechanics include fascinating details about Midwestern pre-strip-mall landscape. It's a wonderful read.

There is a cameo appearance by Freckles, the title character of a previous book, so purists might like to read *Freckles* first.

Charlotte says

What a joy it is to read Gene Stratton-Porter! I picked this book up at my daughter's orchestra concert - which I arrived at 45 min. early - and finding myself bookless, I asked her if she had anything in her locker I could read. She produced this book, which I hadn't read in quite a while; I got totally lost in it well before the concert started, and I couldn't put it down! I love the moral fiber of the characters, and how adversity shaped Elnora into the beautiful woman she became. Now I'm ready to go back and read my other Gene Stratton-Porter favorites, Laddie and Freckles!

Kim says

I might have liked this book better if I'd read it as a child. It's a bit old-fashioned and didn't have the humor and charm of other classic girls' stories. Plus, I'm not sure I liked Elnora all that much. Perhaps she was as kind and loving and honest and upright as the narrative kept telling me, but it was sometimes difficult to see it in her actions. Instead, she was often remarkably self-centered and unappreciative of what she was given. It became hard for me to admire her or to care about her romance with Philip (who seemed like such a sap most of the time). Elnora's rival, Edith Carr, may have been misguided, but she was a much more interesting character by far.

The *Anne of Green Gables* books leave no doubt of Anne Shirley's love of nature and the beauty of Prince Edward Island. It was disappointing not to get a similar feel for the Limberlost, and irritating that Elnora seemed to value it mostly as a source of rare timbers and beautiful insects to be harvested for money.

Duane says

It was a joy to read this book; such a good story, and what great characters. This style of writing, I would even call it a genre of its own, you just don't see anymore. It is probably lost and gone forever, gone with the likes of Louisa May Alcott, L.M. Montgomery, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and with this writer, Gene Stratton-Porter. In my opinion, this novel was her finest work and I count it as one of the hidden gems of literature.

Adam says

As a novel, this book has a lot of what I guess I'd consider more oddities and rough edges than flaws. It introduces conflicts over and over but either abandons them (as with the most serious danger) or simply resolves them abruptly and at odd moments. It's very much of its time, not just about its time, which means its moral worldview is prominent and emphatic. It's the sort of book that constantly affirms that characters who are good on the inside will be recognized and rewarded by a benevolent God, even if the author has to be God to make sure it all works out. Poverty and money are the central theme, and the general plot cycle is that a person is poor, but not in a way that makes them Bad, they demonstrate good character and hard work to earn money, and this is rewarded by the discovery that they were in fact already pretty rich all along. That's the main logic, though it takes some fairly strange contortions and weird liberal forms at other times (a kid's alcoholic dad dies in his sleep and it's the best thing that could have happened to him because he gets adopted by kindly middle-class folk).

All of which could feel a bit overbearing but in the event ends up more heartfelt and genuine than problematic in the ways it'd be framed today. Elnora is super charming, and the general sweetness of her and her friends kind of carries the book. Her mother is the only other interesting character, and despite some pretty awkward and abrupt transitions in her demeanor and motivation. Because of its tendency to resolve conflicts prematurely or abandon them altogether, it has to bring in new characters and new sources of conflict about every quarter mark, so while certain elements persist and build, it's more like a four-part episodic story leading to Elnora's happy domestic adulthood.

The thing that makes this all of interest to me of course is its focus on Midwest environmental history and entomology. It isn't just about this stuff incidentally, or in passing, but centrally, completely. Elnora gets practically everyone she knows to help her collect moth pupae and adults to sell to a biological illustrator called the Bird Woman and a network of collectors. Her father owned a patch of land that, for character reasons, has ended up as one of the few remaining patches of uncut forest. People make note of specific species of moths having declined in abundance in their lifetimes. Plot points involve entomological collecting fieldwork techniques and dangers. There's even a dress color coded to mimic a moth. All of which is to say, this would make a damn good slice-of-life anime, and makes a pretty solid template for the sort of historical ecological weird horror I'm interested in writing.

Kathryn Bundy says

Since I was able to download this childhood classic for free, I reread it for the first time since I was a girl. I have long held that it was one of my favorites from about the age of ten. It seemed mysterious and magical to me then. As I read it with the eyes of an adult five decades later, it reminded me of how many books from my grandparents' shelves were the morality tales that shaped my reading life and my worldview. It is a book of its time, in some ways more advanced than one would expect, but filled with admonitions toward hard work, plucky individualism, and charity.

I'm sure I did not enjoy it to the degree that I did in 1960, but I'm very glad I read it again, and I still wish I had the original edition that was on my Grandma's shelf for so many years.

Victoria Lynn says

This book. The feels. One of my favorites ever. The sensitivity and beauty of the human emotion as well as the stunning descriptions of God's beautiful Creation makes me want to cry tears of joy. I have read it more than seven times and it will remain a treasure on my shelf.

Lily says

This is one of the books that I have read probably 100 times. It is the story of Elnora Comstock, a poor farm girl that loved the outdoors, mainly the Libberlost swamp beside her home. All Elnora wants is to go to high school, but her mother disagrees and makes life incredibly difficult for Elnora. Through the story you see Elnora go from a socially sheltered girl to a confident and beautiful lady. Everytime I read this book, I want to visit Indiana to see if anything is left of the Limberlost swamp and the butterflies and night moths that used to call it home.
