



BONA VENTURE

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1929

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BY

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PUBLISHED BY
THE J. W. BURKE COMPANY
MACON, GA.
1929

PS3533
U68B6
1929

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SEP 23 1929

06/22/8
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IN MEMORY TO
MY FATHER
AN INSPIRING COMPANION
ALONG MANY GOOD ROADS

BONA VENTURE

CHAPTER I

ON the steps of a shabby house, in a street of shabby houses, a boy sat reading an adventure story, in the late afternoon of a warm August day. To the passerby Bert Ransom had only the appearance of an ordinary thirteen-year-old boy. But in imagination he was just now a stalwart man making his way through the jungles of the Amazon, seeing strange animals and trees, gorgeously-colored birds and flowers, enduring the heat and torrential rains of the tropics and risking unknown dangers, so that, with his comrades, he might bring back scientific knowledge which would benefit mankind.

But the light was growing dim, with clouds gathering over the sun, so closing the book, but still tingling with the thrill of it, he jumped from the top step, over a struggling rose-bush, and ran around to the backyard, where he set about the never-finished task of weeding the small garden. It is strange what vigorous weeds can grow in the poorest soil. But they must not interfere with the

three rows of lima beans and the tomato plants which Mother was counting on for another month at least. And where the peas and early carrots had been, Father had planted late cabbage which could be harvested, too, for winter use. Docks and pigweed were easier to pull if you pretended that each was a rare tropical specimen and were careful to get every bit of root out.

A trim path led along the fence where nasturtiums grew and a red geranium, and three tall sunflowers which were splendid to look at now, and would furnish seed for Mother to put on a little shelf outside the window where she sewed in winter, so the birds would come there. Even if they were mostly sparrows, she liked to watch them. And sometimes a junco or a winter wren came. Once last winter there was a snowflake for three successive days, and when he didn't come again, Mother sighed but said his feathers were already growing shabby in our smoke, so she hoped he had found a place where the air was clear and the snow was clean.

As Bart stretched his bent back and looked across the fences, he could see no other yard so nice as his own. But Father and Mother liked to work there and knew how to make things grow,

for they had lived in the country years ago. Only now Mother could not do so much, for leaning over made her cough so and she tired easily. Marian was in the kitchen now, helping with supper, and six-year-old Roger was running to the gate to be ready to meet Father, for the factory whistle was blowing.

By the time factory grease and garden dirt had been washed away, supper was steaming on the table with an appetizing savor. Father always had something interesting to tell about the day's experiences. One wouldn't have thought so many interesting things could happen inside the drab walls of a work shop. Today a man, whose name ranks high in the nation as president of a large manufacturing concern in a distant city, was visiting the plant, and as he was being shown through by two of the local officers, he stopped close to John Ransom's bench to tell them of a new machine which his firm was trying out, and of several important problems on which they were working, all of them very interesting.

After supper had been cleared away and they were all settled for an hour around the table, with the spicy fragrance of nasturtiums from the little bowl in the center, Roger brought from his toy-shelf a highly-colored automobile advertisement.

At the top was the caption, "It makes the world yours." Below were shiny sedans and touring cars gliding along smooth roads, with lakes and mountain scenery. "I found it on Mrs. Emerson's steps, and she said I could keep it. Wouldn't you like to ride so, Father?" But at the bottom of the sheet something had caught Father's eye, a box-like building on wheels, with small windows in the sides and steps at the rear. In a note underneath he read, "Fifty-four of these cars took families to Florida last winter. Comfortable accommodations for day and night."

All the next day while John Ransom worked at his factory bench his thoughts kept wandering. Before him was constantly a vision of Martha away from the cold and the smoke, growing well and strong again in clean air and sunshine. At moments the idea seemed preposterous, the cost, the uncertainty of finding work for himself and school for the children. But always the thought of a chance for Martha overbalanced all the rest. At night he wrote a letter to get the actual facts about the traveling house. Hope and fear alternated for three days. Then came an answer, not in a letter, but in a man, a local agent of a firm in another city. For two hours they talked and at the end of that time instead of a dream there was a plan.

CHAPTER II

NOVEMBER first was set for the start and a two-weeks' route was mapped out which would take them across their own Ohio, through Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia, and so to Jacksonville, Florida, where inquiries at the Chamber of Commerce might bring some information about the best sections of the state for work; or, if not, they must try their luck. At least there would be a roof over their heads, a mild climate, and a small nest-egg left in the bank, to be drawn on only in case of emergencies. John and Martha Ransom, brought up in the stern school of hard work and self-denial, had always refused to live up to their modest income, as many of their city friends were doing. So this opportunity found them ready, with sufficient savings to make the experiment which might mean so much in restored health for Martha and a valuable experience for them all. But there must be careful planning. An aunt in a small town only twenty-five miles away could store their furniture in her ample store-room and barn. Stout overalls for Father and the boys and easily ironed dresses for Mother and Marian were all the

clothes that need be bought. Last year's hats and wraps and Sunday apparel, with a little refurbishing, would serve nicely.

Wooden boxes were packed with such food-supplies as could be bought to best advantage in the city. Father's tool-chest and Mother's most necessary cooking utensils and sewing materials, and a few books and games for evenings were all packed in the smallest and most convenient form. A plan of the car made this easier, as all the dimensions of storage space were given.

The Public Library yielded a small selection of books about Florida and the states through which they would travel. They studied these and the atlas until the places seemed very real. Their neighbors and church friends and the children's teachers became interested, and bits of information and experience turned up here and there.

On the Saturday before their start the car arrived in town and Mr. Ransom spent his half-holiday learning all the details of its operation. Fortunately when the factory shut down for six weeks the year before, he had taken a job with a trucking company and had learned to run their heavy cars. At six o'clock he drove up in front of the house, and all ran out to see their new home. Al-

though bare-looking now, Mrs. Ransom was sure she could make it home-like with the scrim curtains she had made for the windows, the two rugs and the two small but comfortable chairs reserved for that use. The children would not mind the camp chairs which could be folded up when not needed. The beds, which folded too, proved wide enough for comfort, and the boys were delighted with their double-decks.

Ventilation was well arranged and there was an electric heater for cool mornings and evenings. This seemed the one real luxury, but proved its worth in comfort. The stove for cooking was in a corner and there were shelves and a folding table; but they would enjoy many meals out of doors. A surprising amount of space was left under the driver's seat for suit-cases and boxes.

How the neighbors crowded around, and what fun it was to explain everything to them. Suppers were late in Wren Street that night. But at half past seven Mr. Ransom drove the car to the garage, to come back on Monday morning for the final packing. That was accomplished by noon, and the van had started for Aunt Ann's. Mr. Ransom followed on the suburban trolley, to help unload and store the furniture. Mrs. Ransom had a good

rest at a friend's where she and Mr. Ransom and Roger would spend the night, while Marian and Bert each stayed with a school friend.

At eight o'clock the next morning they were all together again, with a group of friends to see them off. There were gifts of good things to eat to last for days. The men in Mr. Ransom's shop had given him a flashlight and a thermos bottle. The children had their gifts too, and all appreciated. Marian was especially delighted with the Brownie Kodak from her class at school, and the first picture taken was a group of the class and Miss Chester.

School books, pads and pencils had been stowed away in a convenient place and Mother had consulted with Bert's and Marian's teachers, and had carefully arranged lists of work for the weeks which might pass before they would have a settled abode again where they could attend school.

There had been much discussion over a name for the car, and a final decision in favor of Bona Venture, for such they hoped it would be. The children had wanted it emblazoned on the side of the car, but that was vetoed by Father's modesty, with the promise that sometime when they could find a good board and some paint, they would

make a small sign to fasten on somewhere. It was a surprise to them all when a neighboring painter brought over a neat little sign, the background just the shade of the car and the letters in green. It had rings and hooks by which it fastened on the side of the driver's seat, and seemed just the finishing touch needed.

CHAPTER III

AND so the goodbyes were said and they were off. Through the city streets people stopped to look at the unusual car, some, they were sure, with a touch of envy of the adventurers. Then a long, straight road led through a suburban residence district with broad lawns and fine houses, and for the rest of the morning through open country and small towns. At noon they stopped on the outskirts of a college town, and with appetites sharpened by the clear fall air, thoroughly enjoyed chicken and ham sandwiches, hot cocoa from the thermos bottle and, to top the repast, a fresh cranberry pie with juicy lattice crust. A pair of squirrels frisked in the dry leaves nearby and bluejays screamed from the tree tops. It was all thoroughly delightful, and they scattered a little feast of crumbs for hospitality.

While Mother and Marian washed the dishes, Father and Bert gave the Bona Venture a careful inspection to see that all was in perfect order. Then they locked up their house and went for a walk through the town. Pleasant old-fashioned houses were set well back from the street, with

broad green lawns, great oak trees with bronze leaves, and hardy chrysanthemums in the borders.

In the center of the town were the college buildings. Winding walks led through the campus. The gray stone walls were weathered by years of service, and the steps were hollowed by three generations of students. But ivy and sweetbrier covered scars and added charm to the simple dignity of the architecture. Groups of young men passed constantly from class to class, and once a track team ran by on their way to the athletic field for an hour's practice. Bert thought he could do as well, but soon found himself outdistanced and out of breath, with Roger panting along some distance behind.

As they came back toward the entrance, they sat down for a few minutes on a rustic bench which gave a lovely vista of the whole campus. The atmosphere seemed full of the beauty of nature and the dignity of knowledge. Across the green, rose the graceful tower of the Chapel. The hands of the great clock reached the hour and two deep tones sounded. Then chimes began, the clear notes rising and falling for a full minute. Instinctively they all rose, and only when the last note floated out across the campus, turned back toward the car.

Through the sunny afternoon mile after mile rolled away behind them, and at six o'clock they came in sight of the town where they were to spend the night. After supper they found their way to the boarding-house to which they had written; for Mother and Marian and Roger were to spend the nights indoors until the weather was warmer. After an hour in the living-room with its crackling wood fire, and a glance over the evening paper, Mr. Ransom and Bert returned to the Bona Venture and were glad of warm blankets, for the night was frosty.

At seven they were back, ready for a warm breakfast and an early start. The sun was just up and promised another clear day. The thermos was filled with steaming soup for lunch, and Roger had so won the landlady's heart that she insisted on his carrying a bag of fresh cookies, the particular kind her grand-children liked.

Another two days' journey brought them to the southern border of their own state, and early on Friday morning they drove down from the surrounding hills of Cincinnati, through Third Street with its heavy traffic, past wharves where machinery was piled high awaiting shipment on the big river boats, and so across the Ohio River into

Kentucky. It was the children's first trip outside their own state and held almost the thrill of entering a foreign country. They were really surprised that there was not more difference. But there were plenty of interesting sights. In the first town children were just starting for school and many stopped to look at the big brown car with its large glass window in front and its little curtained windows at the sides. And the Ransom children were ready to return every friendly wave.

Those first days it was hard for Marian and Bert to keep to their schedule of school work, but Mother insisted and agreed that Father should call them all whenever there was anything they ought not to miss.

The rolling country of central Kentucky, with its rounded hills, was still green from the fall rains, and they were often reminded that this was the Bluegrass section by the horses grazing in the pasture lands. There were cattle too, and occasional sheep. In the afternoon they stopped to watch men gathering a late crop of tobacco, piling the bundles of dark green leaves on a wagon, to be carried to the drying-house two miles distant. Fields of corn stalks bore witness to another of the state's main crops.

Certain indications that they were in the real south increased. Colored men and women passed them on the roads and were working in the fields. Unpainted cabins were scattered along the road or set back in the fields, usually under a big tree. All were set up from the ground on blocks, with no cellars under them. As the end of the day approached, the field laborers trudged homeward across the rough fields, their tin dinner pails catching the glint of the setting sun. Children played about the cabin dooryards and a column of smoke rose from each chimney. Soon they were at their destination and quite ready for their own supper and a long night's rest.

CHAPTER IV

DURING the next morning the first trouble with the car occurred, and Bert had to be excused from the last hour of school, to help Father. It was noon when they finished, and as the air was milder they picnicked in a wooded place a short distance from the road. When they were almost through, two brown-faced youngsters with a yellow dog at their heels, emerged from the woods, with a pailful of acorns, and gazed with wide-eyed surprise. They were bashful at first, but soon made friends, the compact sealed with red apples. A half-hour had to be spent enjoying Susie and Sam, with their real Kentucky twang and their droll way of rolling their eyes about. Susie, with her sunbonnet removed in the shade, revealed six tight little braids. Her pink dress was faded and patched, but clean and starched. Sam's teeth shone in a broad smile and he dug his brown toes into the dry leaves in an effort to express himself properly to his new acquaintances. The acorns, it seemed, were winter rations for the pig, and must be harvested as fast as possible, for there were other pigs in the neighborhood to demand a share, and oak trees were none too numerous.

It was almost dark when they drove into the outskirts of the town where they had planned to spend their first Sunday. As it promised to be a warmer night, all were to stay in the car. They soon found an unfenced space where they could drive out of the road and be in no one's way. The green portiers which had hung between the living-room and the dining-room at home, now served to partition off bed-rooms. Roger was so excited over Bert sleeping on a shelf over him that they had an uproarious time getting to bed, but the long day's drive and the quiet outdoors soon had their effect, and sleep was irresistible.

After breakfast Bert went out to scout for a Sunday School and reported four churches within a half-mile, and a boy who had invited him to his class. "He said I talked awful queer," Bert related, "and I said he talked awful queer. So we just had to laugh at each other, and now we're real good friends. His name's Wilson Allison and his father has a hardware store down on Main Street, and they live in a nice place just around the corner from the church, with big trees in the front yard and a swing. When I told him we were in a house car he said he sure would like to see it. So I told him to come around this afternoon and I'd show it to him."

As they came in sight of the church an hour later, Wilson was waiting at the corner. The superintendent gave them all a warm welcome, and in spite of a difference in accent, they found a Kentucky Sunday School and church much like an Ohio one, and enjoyed both.

On their return to the car Mrs. Ransom was delighted to find how well the fireless cooker had done its work in preparing dinner, which was quite as hot and savory as if they had been in their own dining-room at home. Marian had even found a bunch of red berries for the table.

Wilson's father walked over with him in the afternoon, and after they had looked over the car and asked many questions, they took Mr. Ransom and Bert for a long walk up a hillside where they could look off over the country where they would travel tomorrow. A silver line far to the south was the Cumberland River, and a short distance beyond they would cross the border into Tennessee.

Although they made an early start in the morning, Wilson was at the corner of his street to wave goodbye. Showers through the morning cleared as they approached the Cumberland River. Not very wide at this point, it was still an interesting river, coming from the mountain range to the east, with

many graceful curves through the foothills, on its long journey to the Mississippi. Before night they were well over the border into Tennessee. Here, near the mountains, it was cooler again, but a dry, bracing air. It was so clear that the sky seemed nearer than usual, and the stars were splendid. They all knew the Dipper and the North Star, and far toward the south shone the great golden orb of Jupiter. There was a bright star on either side of the Milky Way and one low in the northeast, but these they did not know by name.

Early the next morning they were aroused by Roger's shout, "It's been snowing," and looking from the windows, it certainly did appear as if Old Winter had shaken his mantle over just one field, while all the rest were brown. It took a full minute for even Father to realize that they were seeing their first field of cotton. They all ran across the road for a closer view and found long rows of small plants, their leaves dry and brown, but with the fluffy white boles almost ready to drop from the brown calyx. Inside of the soft white, one could feel the hard seeds, and Mother recalled the story of Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin and its revolutionary effect on southern agriculture.

All day they drove through rolling country where rounded green hills surrounded them on every side, and as they went farther south there were distant blue mountains. In the evening they brought out their American History and recalled the stirring events which made Chattanooga, Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain famous; for they would see all these tomorrow.

CHAPTER V

TWO hours drive the next morning, through steep roads, brought them to the Tennessee River, flowing west with curves about the bases of the steep, wooded banks, and so into the city of Chattanooga. To the east was the long line of Missionary Ridge, and the splendid wooded mountain to the south, which they had been watching for the past hour, was really Lookout Mountain.

After a short drive about the city, they went to the foot of the mountain, where a narrow gauge train carried them to the top. For children who had never before seen mountains, it was a thrilling experience, and when they reached the top, the view was really magnificent. An elderly man, pleased by their enthusiasm, pointed out interesting features and assured them that, in this clear atmosphere, they were actually looking into seven different states. They lunched at the foot of the mountain and started on, crossing another state line during the afternoon and coming into Georgia. And now the long mountain drive began to show its effect and some engine trouble developed. Mr. Ransom and Bert tinkered for a long time,

but were forced to decide that they needed expert advice this time.

The town where they had expected to spend the night was still far ahead, but as they turned a steep curve, there, below them, like a crescent on the side of the mountain, was the prettiest small village, looking like a bit of New England with its white-painted houses and barns, picket fences, great spreading trees, and vine-covered trellises. It had such a welcome look, with the slanting rays of sunlight resting on the roofs and glinting on a window here and there. As they drove slowly along the road which ran through the center of the crescent, a man standing at a gate on the upper side, raised his hand in friendly salute. Mr. Ransom drew up at the side of the road and went over to speak to him. It was a full twenty minutes before he came back to report.

The nearest garage was six miles distant. While he took the Bona Venture there Mrs. Ransom and the children would be welcome here at Hillside Farm; and in case he had to leave the car overnight a man on the place would be taking a load of potatoes into town later and could bring him back. There was a recently vacated cottage where they could spend the night. They hesitated to take ad-

vantage of such courtesy from a stranger, but when Mr. Wainwright was joined by his wife who was equally urgent, that they should stay, they accepted the kindness offered. Mr. Ransom drove on the six miles to the garage and returned later to report that the mechanic had located the trouble and would try to have the car ready by nine in the morning.

Mrs. Ransom had already learned that the Wainwrights, as well as most of their neighbors, were New Englanders, but had settled here in Northwestern Georgia some twenty years ago. In each family who came there had been someone for whom the rigors of the northern winters had become too severe. And here, while the climate was mild, there was a bracing quality in the mountain air which kept them all fit, both winter and summer.

Every house in the community had its own garden and chickens, and several people, like Mr. Wainwright had considerable farm land. A large part of his acreage was in peach trees, with some apples and two large fields of potatoes. During the summer he had a gardner to help him with the work, and it was he and his family who had just vacated the cottage to go farther south for winter

work. Mr. Wainwright and Hiram, who had come with him from the north, could take care of their work through the winter, chopping wood for the open fires and kitchen stove, feeding stock and chickens, and all the repairs that would put buildings, wagons and tools in readiness for the busy spring days.

The evening passed quickly and they set out for the nearby cottage, Mrs. Wainwright and Joan each with an armful of linen and blankets. While the girls made up the beds, and Roger tumbled into his as soon as it was ready, Mrs. Wainwright showed Mrs. Ransom about the pleasant little house. Bert and his father stayed outdoors awhile with Mr. Wainwright to watch the stars, for here was a chance to learn the names of the bright ones they did not know. Mr. Wainwright's years of country life and an inquiring mind had brought him an intimate knowledge of all nature's wonderland, and he talked about outdoor things in so interesting a way as to make others eager to learn too.

Mr. Ransom slipped out early in the morning, for he wanted to see this interesting place before he started on his six mile tramp to get the car. He went over the orchard and fields, had a view of

woodland stretching up a slope, stopped in the barn where Hiram was harnessing the mule, ready for the day's work of hauling firewood for winter use, and was back in time for breakfast. Mr. Wainwright offered to have Hiram drive him in to the garage, but Mr. Ransom insisted that, after so much sitting still in the car, six miles in this fine air and partly downhill, would be beneficial. After he had paid their board, assuring their host that they had received much for which they could not pay, they still lingered at the gate in apparently serious discussion. Then Mr. Ransom was off down the road past other pleasant homes with women in the door-yards and men with mules at work in the fields. The church stood back from the road, its white spire pointing high; and beyond was the school, a young man who acted as janitor just opening the doors for the day.

The mechanic had gone to work at an early hour and had almost finished the job. So by ten o'clock they were again on their way. All day the road was down a gradual slope from the higher mountains to the foothills, and at night they made their camp in the level country of central Georgia. A soft haze hung over the horizon where the setting sun left a pink glow and the air was warmer than at any time before.

All the next day they drove through pleasant towns and stretches of country with peach and pecan orchards and cotton fields already picked. Fine old Colonial homes, with pillared porticos, were set well back from the residence streets in the larger towns, with green lawns and magnolia trees. Roses were in bloom in the gardens and vines covered fences with luxuriant masses.

CHAPTER VI

SATURDAY morning they ran into the pine barrens of southeastern Georgia. Often as far as they could see on either side were tall slim trees, their rough trunks topped by clusters of long green needles. The ground was covered with dry brown grass and green scrub palmettos. In some sections small red pots were hung on the trees, with diagonal cuttings in the bark above them. These were to collect turpentine, as in the north the maples are tapped in the spring for their sweet sap.

It was almost dusk when they reached the St. Mary's River and crossed into Florida. In another hour they saw the lights of a large city only a few miles ahead and knew they were approaching Jacksonville. Here, for the first time, they were directed to a tourist camp. As it was early in the season, there was no crowd. A large dining-room was provided and tents for those who wished them. But they found a quiet corner for the Bona Venture and stayed there.

Sunday morning a street car line took them to church in the city and in the afternoon they drove

out to Atlantic Beach, where the children could have their first view of the ocean.

Monday they were off early, stopping at the Chamber of Commerce, where Mr. Ransom secured some information about the best locations for finding work and a supply of leaflets describing the attractions of various towns. Another interesting experience came in crossing the St. Johns River. The massive bridge swung across that great highway to the ocean gave a view of the docks where ocean liners lay, awaiting cargoes for various ports. In mid-stream one of the Clyde Line passenger boats was steaming out, bound for New York, and they could see the passengers on her deck still waving farewell to friends on the pier.

South Jacksonville and the smaller settlements along the way showed dooryards full of trees and flowers which had a distinctly tropical appearance, and they were constantly wondering what they were. Two hours brought them to St. Augustine, and here, at the oldest city in the United States, they must stop for a short time. Marian's kodak made records of the Sea Wall, the old city gates, Fort Marion, the narrow streets of the old city and the reproductions of Spanish architecture in the newer section. They visited the cathedral and

sat for a half-hour in the park to listen to a band concert.

The road southward led, for a time, through salt marshes covered with sedge grass, with spaces of water between. Farther on they came to a truck garden district, where men were hoeing and planting, preparing for the northern market's winter demand for potatoes, beans, celery and strawberries. Small settlements were scattered along the way, some looking quite new, with freshly painted square cottages set up on blocks, in lieu of the foundation and cellar so necessary in the north. Clusters of unpainted negroes' cabins were often gay with flowering plants in tin cans and boxes. In the back yards were big black pots, with women at work boiling clothes over a fire of pine sticks, or bending over nearby tubs, while lines of clean garments fluttered in the southeast breeze.

During the past two days they had seen an occasional orange tree, but now they began to see whole groves, the glossy leaves shining in the sun, and the fruit beginning to color. It was difficult to travel fast today, with so much that was new to see and to wonder about. They were always wanting to stop and ask questions about something. Mr. Ransom was already inquiring for work in

each place which looked at all promising. While there were some possibilities, none promised any permanent employment, so he decided to go on at least another day's journey. The night was spent in a charming town, an old Spanish settlement with landmarks of an earlier history. Here they were on the Indian River, with luxuriance of palm trees and moss-garlanded live oaks.

In the morning the sun rose clear and warm, and they made an early start. For long stretches the road ran near the river. Long-legged herons stood in the edge of the shallow water, with a wary eye for fish, while little sandpipers ran along the sand, picking up tidbits to their liking. And once, most thrilling of all, a great brown pelican flew circling over the water, swooping low wherever he suspected a fish. They knew him from the picture in Bert's Natural History, and had to stop and watch him until he turned and headed north.

They lunched on a bluff overlooking the river, which seemed miles wide at that point; but as they drove farther south it narrowed to about a mile. Opposite was a large island, and they knew from their maps that on the other side of that lay the ocean. Now mile after mile they followed a road which had once been an Indian trail. Sometimes

they were high above the shore and sometimes down beside it, where the afternoon breeze rolled in white-capped waves to ripple over the sand or break against the bank with a dash of spray. Curve after curve gave lovely views from one point to another across little bays. And always it was a palm-fringed shore, their fronds rustling in the breeze.

CHAPTER VII

LATE in the afternoon they stopped at a service station set back from the road, with a ridge of woodland behind it, and were glad to accept an invitation to park the Bona Venture in this lovely spot for the night. A long, narrow road leading west over the ridge was particularly inviting for a walk before dark. Great live oaks lined both sides, with Spanish moss hanging in garlands from the branches. Squirrels with sleek gray bodies and quizzical little faces peered down from the branches, and a bird somewhere ahead sounded a clear whistling note. When they reached the crest the sun was just setting, turning to gold the whole western sky, with tall, slender palmettos silhouetted against it. From the summit of the ridge they saw that the land back of it, sloping gently to the west, was in orange groves, hundreds of acres of fine trees. Then, turning, they exclaimed at the beauty of the scene to the east. Over the tops of the trees they had passed in coming up lay the broad expanse of the river, a soft pink along the further shore, with rose-flushed clouds above. They stayed to watch the brief southern after-glow, then returned for a late supper.

Afterward Mr. Ransom found the post office and general store. While making a few purchases he asked about work of any sort in this locality. The store-keeper had heard that men were wanted for road work in the back country some fifteen miles south. Mr. Ransom wrote down all the directions and was going out when an elderly gentleman joined him and asked casually from which state he had come. His own home was in Pennsylvania, but he had large groves here and had just come down for the winter, the sixteenth he and his wife had spent in this community. "There is nothing finer than this Indian River country for growing citrus fruits," he asserted, "but it requires constant care and considerable expense. Too many new-comers expect to buy a grove and sit down and watch it grow. Of course, they are disappointed with the result—small crops, poor quality and consequently low prices. Did I understand you were looking for work here?" Mr. Ransom explained that they had come to try the climate for his wife's health, and that while his experience for some years had been in machine shops, he had done farm work as a young man and would like to try anything that offered. They walked along in silence for a few moments; then Mr. Grant said,

“When I was in town this morning I met a friend who has a grove on the island. A man who had been with him for several years left to take a job across the state where his wife’s folks live; and the one who took his place isn’t up to it and thinks the work too hard, so he’s looking for another. He would probably want someone with experience in grove work, but you might go over and see him.” Mr. Ransom expressed his appreciation and walked up to Mr. Grant’s home where he wrote a note for him to take and gave him directions. Then he hurried back to the Bona Venture. The children were already asleep, but he and Mrs. Ransom sat out in front and talked it over. They felt like children themselves, as little thrills of anticipation ran through them. “Of course,” they reminded each other, “we probably won’t get it, but if we should!”

The sun was just rising over the island as they started, throwing slanting gold rays across the river and shining on several white boat houses on the other side. A few miles brought them to the business town of Dunstan. Running along past its docks and warehouses, they came to the long narrow bridge to the island. “A full mile,” the bridge-tender told them, as they paid their toll and rat-

tled across the draw. A few early fishermen had lines out waiting for a catch. At the east end the water was shallow, with long docks for small boats to land. A short distance from the bridge they turned north, driving slowly, so they might not miss the name on the gate-post. There were fine groves on both sides of the road, with an occasional uncleared space of pine trees, fragrant as they drove through it. It was a county road, narrow with grassy borders, wild flowers and underbrush where birds flew back and forth. Colored children ran out of their cabins to see the car, and women were already making fires under the big black pots, or hanging out clothes on the lines. And in time they came to a gate with the name that was on the letter, Cyrus F. Waite.

A long road led west between well-kept orange groves. As it was narrow they left the Bona Venture at one side of the main highway and all got out for a walk while Mr. Ransom went in. Entering at the back, he found a low rambling house facing the river, with great live oaks and hickory trees at the back and south side. He sent the letter in and waited on a sunny back veranda.

When Mr. Waite opened the letter he read as follows:

My dear friend:

The man I am sending to you, John Ransom by name, is known to me only through a half-hour's conversation this evening, when I met him at our store. He has brought his family south for his wife's health, traveling from Ohio in a house-car. Somehow I liked the man's quiet assurance and willingness to try his hand at whatever work he could find for the winter. I recalled my conversation with you this morning and suggested he see you. If he doesn't appeal to you, just dismiss him and put me down as a sentimental old fellow, but always

Your friend,

THOMAS GRANT.

John Ransom was examining the great twisted trunks of a vine which grew at one end of the veranda, when the door opened and a tall, gray-haired man stepped out. Clad in puttees and khaki suit, he was a sturdy figure, with sunburned face and keen gray eyes. After twenty minutes' conversation, his caller felt more ignorant than ever before in his life, but he still clung to the belief that he could learn the science of citrus culture and learn it quickly, if he were given the chance, and that the muscle developed over a factory bench would serve as well to wield a hoe.

In the end Mr. Waite admitted that, if he could get a man with experience, he would certainly take him, but it was late in the season to find anyone for so responsible a position. "Of course," he said "I've grown up in the work, done everything, planting, budding, pruning, fertilizing, spraying, picking and packing, and I've taught a dozen other men the job. But now I'm taking it easier. For four years I've had a good man who needed only advice and oversight. If I took you I'd have to get down to work again or, as like as not, my returns would be ten per cent. short next spring." Then he fired a volley of questions. "Ever supervised other men? Never even driven a mule, I expect. What about this family of yours? How many children, did you say, and how old? They couldn't be under foot all the time. Will they mind and stay where they are told? Yes, I'll take a look at them."

John Ransom found his family in a shady spot half way down the lane, starting school work, and the tall man striding along behind, overtook him. His bluntness softened a little before Mrs. Ransom and the three merry, but well-mannered children. In five minutes he had made his decision. "If I try you for two weeks, Ransom, can you live in

your car that long? There's a comfortable house across the road, but there would have to be extra beds for this bunch. The other man had no children. I didn't think I'd ever bother with one that had. They'll have to go to school, of course, across the river, but there's a bus to take them." This news was greeted with subdued thrills by Marian and Bert. Then Mr. Waite pinched Roger's rosy cheek and took them to pick their first oranges from an early tree. "They are nothing to what you will get six weeks from now—if you stay," he added. "This man of yours thinks he can do anything, but I'll have to see." Then he showed them a place where the car could be driven into the edge of a grove of tall pines, took a look over the interior, and told Mr. Ransom to report for work at twelve-thirty.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT night and the next three John Ransom went to bed with every muscle aching and his mind full of formulas for insecticides and fungicides and the proper diagnosis for white fly, citrus canker, cottony cushion scale and dry rot. But he still clung to his determination to stick to the job, and felt that he was purposely being put through a severe testing. How could he give up with Martha's cheeks growing pinker and her cough less troublesome in the pine-scented air? School had been held every morning, and in the afternoon Mrs. Ransom and the children had explored the neighborhood, finding among the trees and flowers both old friends and new acquaintances. They were already on intimate terms with mocking birds, cardinals and the small brown ground doves; and they caught glimpses of tiny birds who flitted about among the trees so rapidly it was hard to see their markings. The people they met on the road spoke pleasantly. They found a little white church a half-mile north and a general store, with one corner for the post-office about the same distance south. And at the side of it a lane led

down to the river, where one could sit and watch boats passing, and see the curving shore line on the other side, with its wooded banks.

On Sunday morning it seemed bliss to John Ransom to lie on a blanket under the pine trees, their clusters of dark green needles etched against the deep blue sky. But at half-past ten he was ready, with the others, for the walk to church. A bell in the spire was just ringing as they reached there, and the city-bred children were surprised to find a man in the vestibule was pulling it by a rope. It was odd to be sitting in church and hear a cardinal whistling in an orange tree just outside the open window. The service was simple but worshipful, and afterward the new-comers were made welcome by the minister and many others. An announcement had been made that the plan to organize a Sunday School was progressing, and all parents and children interested were invited to meet at four that afternoon at the home of Miss Lucia Wales. She gave the invitation to the Ransoms personally after service, saying that they would be so glad to have three more children, and they promised to come.

After dinner Mr. Ransom wrote a long letter to the friends with whom he had worked at home,

telling them of the trip in the Bona Venture, who had lived up to her name, of first impressions of Florida and hopes for the future, and assuring them of the comfort they had added to the trip by their thoughtful gifts.

Miss Wales' home was at the end of one of the long lanes which led from the highway to the river. They found the house, a rustic brown building, quite surrounded by trees and shrubbery, except a sunny space in front of the porch. Miss Wales came to meet them and introduced them to the dozen children already there, a few older people and her father and aunt. With some later arrivals it made quite a group, filling the porch and steps, while the minister stood on the ground in front and looked up at his audience instead of down. They sang the old familiar hymns which they knew without books, had prayer and scripture reading and a short talk, and decided to start a regular school next Sunday morning. As they closed, the setting sun was shining across the river, turning it to gold, and as they walked home clouds in the northwest were rosy with the afterglow.

On Monday Mr. Waite had business at the county seat. So he planned the work for the day and left Mr. Ransom in charge of three helpers.

After the constant oversight of the past week, this was a new experience, no easier work, but a chance to find himself and to practice what he had learned. On Tuesday Mr. Waite planned the work again and made occasional trips through the grove, making a correction here and there, and at the end of the day he said, "Well, Ransom, I guess you'll do. If you still want the job and can keep up this pace, I'm satisfied. Mrs. Waite will be home from Jacksonville tomorrow and will have the cottage put in order for you, and I'll make arrangements for the children at the Dunstan school.

Supper was in the nature of a celebration that night. Father forgot that his back ached, and nobody minded that a downpour of rain had begun. Mother thought of spreading out into a whole house again, and the children were eager for the fun of a ride across the river twice a day.

Wednesday morning Mrs. Ransom and the children set off for market, wondering what the meager supplies of the general store would offer for a Thanksgiving feast. They were cheered to see a box of cranberries out in front and some big red apples, quite reminiscent of the north. Mrs. Ransom had asked some days ago if a roasting

chicken could be had, and now the proprietor came out to say, "Well, ma'am, I ain't got no roasting chicken, but I got a fine fryin' hen." The two baskets were soon filled. Bert carried one, with frequent offers of assistance from Roger, and Mrs. Ransom and Marian took turns with the other. They laughed all the way home over the "fryin' hen" and made quite a lark over the preparations for the feast. In the midst of them Mrs. Waite called and found Bert on the steps, in a blue gingham apron, cracking nuts, while Marian was filling glasses with cranberry jelly, whose fragrance floated out through the open door. The two chairs were already outside, so Mrs. Ransom could sit there with her guest. Later they walked over to the cottage to see where the extra beds should be placed.

CHAPTER IX

ON Thanksgiving Day Mr. Ransom had some work in the grove, but was through before noon; so dinner was served promptly to give time for a ride in the afternoon. The fryin' hen proved delectable, sweet potatoes had a special southern flavor and the pie was quite like those back home.

For the ride they chose the road which led zig-zaging across the island to the ocean. Only three miles in a straight line, it was eight by the road, as there were large swampy areas to be avoided. Sometimes there were pine woods on both sides and long vistas of road ahead. Then they would come out into open spaces, where tall grasses waved in the breeze and stretches of water shone in the sunshine. Great blue herons stood knee-deep, watching for fish, or spread broad wings and flew low over the water, their long legs straight out behind. Once they saw a small white heron with graceful crest. A fish jumped from the water and came down with a splash, sending ripples in widening circles to the bank. They were driving slowly when Mr. Ransom gave a quick glance behind and put on the brake. Then, with a whis-

pered, "Watch over there," he backed cautiously a few feet. And there, across a narrow stretch of water, with his head on the mud bank and his body half under the water, lay a small alligator. His sleepy eyes looked disdainfully at the intruders and, as the children were unable to suppress shouts of delight at their first real live 'gator, he slid off the bank and disappeared. They crossed a short bridge, wound back and forth on the higher ground, and came in sight of a broad river with a long narrow bridge and a toll house. A dozen men and boys were fishing from the rail, the wet scales of their catch glistening in the sun. A mile farther on a causeway led across more water, and when they reached the top of the sand bluff beyond, there lay the ocean, deep blue-green, with combers rolling in.

There were people in bathing and sitting on the sand, but to their surprise there were also automobiles running along close to the water. When they drove down with the rest they found that this sand was so hard that the tires ran over it like asphalt, and so broad that six cars could travel abreast. It was splendid running along so, with the soft salt breeze on one's face. White sea gulls circled overhead and tiny brown sand-pipers ran along in the

edge of the water, their thin little legs reflected oddly in the wet sand. When they had gone some distance and were going to turn back, Marian said, "Father, can you see something tall way over there? It looks like a smoke-stack." They all looked in the direction in which she pointed, and one after the other discovered the tall, straight line dimly visible against the sky, and seeming to rise out of the ocean. A man who had left his car nearby came past, and they asked him about it. "Oh, that's Wayland Light," he explained. "The cape juts out there and its a very important light, keeps small craft from running ashore, and provides a harbor for even large boats in severe storms. You should go up and see it sometime, if you're staying about here. There's a fair road across the island, through Orville and Samara."

They drove south again and spent an hour hunting for shells on the beach. Roger was most successful, with a star fish to his credit. Then they built a sand castle which was so pretty they wished they could take it home. Once they saw a ship far out on the horizon. She was north-bound, with a trail of smoke in her wake, and each guessed for what port she was bound and what cargo she carried, and wondered which was nearest right. But

the sun was dropping toward the west and if they were to be home before dark they must start. The first holiday in Florida had been a success.

On Friday the cottage was made ready for them, and when Mr. Ransom came home he ran the car over close to it and they moved in. By Saturday night they were quite settled, with even a woodpile in the shed. There were big oak logs for the fire-place on cool days and smaller sticks of "fat pine" to start a blaze.

The new Sunday School started off well with twenty children, six native Floridians and the others from Georgia, North Carolina, New York, Connecticut and Ohio. Miss Wales taught the girls' class, Mr. Pinder the boys' and Mrs. Lloyd had a group of five little children. They closed fifteen minutes before church began, so there was time for a walk to the river and back before the bell called them in. As the afternoon was showery they read and wrote letters. By five o'clock it was only a light sprinkle, so Father and Marian and Bert took the letters to the post-office, as Mother was expecting a letter from her sister, and the mail from the north would be due. The man was just driving in as they reached there, with two bags of mail in a battered car, dignified with a card-

board sign "U. S. Mail." There was quite a crowd in front of the row of boxes, and the sorting took some time. But the letter from Aunt Alice was there and a picture postcard for Marian from a friend who had been away on a Thanksgiving trip; so they were glad they had come, and the fresh moist air was pleasant and made them hungry for the good tea Mother had ready for them. There was always a Sunday night "sing" before bed time, and that must be early tonight, with all the excitement of starting school tomorrow.

CHAPTER X

BERT was at the road a half-hour early to make sure that the bus stopped for them. Mother was going too, for this would be Roger's first day at school, and she wanted to see him well started. Sandwiches and cookies were packed in three small boxes, school books which might be of use were strapped together, and all were at the road when the long bus drew up for them. There were only four children from farther north, but others were waiting all along the way, and it was a merry crowd which drove across the bridge, rumbled over the planks of the draw, crossed the town, and drew up at a large low building with a flag flying over the door.

Mrs. Ransom met each of the teachers, talked over the courses the children would have and the new books needed, and spent an hour in the first grade room. By that time Roger seemed quite at home and interested in the lessons, as much play as work. There were various errands to be done, two rolls of film to be taken to the photographer, staple supplies to be ordered from the grocer, and more working clothes to buy for Mr. Ransom. So

the morning passed quickly, and at one o'clock she called for Roger. While they waited for the older children they sat on a bench by the river, where they could see boats passing and noticed a great flock of small black and white ducks. Later they learned that these were just making their fall migration from the northern states, through inland waterways for hundreds of miles, to winter on the Indian River.

By the end of the week they were all accustomed again to the regular routine. Mr. Ransom, too, was fitting into his new work, finding it less exhausting as he became used to it, and quite enjoying it. On Sunday afternoon he took them all for a walk through the grove and garden. Already oranges were coloring well and would soon be ready to use. Two large grapefruit trees made a perfect canopy when one stood under them, the great yellow fruit hanging thick overhead and bending the outer branches almost to the ground. When they lifted a branch with a cluster of four, they were surprised at the weight and at the elasticity of the small stalk which supported it. There were tangerines, smaller than the other oranges and deeper in color, and large King oranges, with rough skins, green now, with a bright spot on one

side which would spread over them later. Lemons and limes and tiny green kumquats on miniature trees were all interesting. At one side of the grove was a windbrake of banana trees, with here and there a bunch of fruit just starting. The large dark red blossom was heart-shaped and very heavy. As the stalk extended in length, this blossom hung downward, one thick leaf at a time turning back to disclose, under its smooth lining, a row of small yellow and white flowers. These, growing in length and circumference, soon took on the shape of bananas and formed one "hand" of the bunch. The fruit turned up from the stem instead of downward, as one sees them in the grocery store. Pawpaw trees grew wild with great, scalloped leaves spread far out, and yellow blossoms and green, melon-shaped fruit clinging close to the gray trunk.

In the garden back of the house the winter vegetables were starting, peas in blossom, beans, carrots, beets and cabbage and a row of bright green, curly parsley which looked like a hedge in its vigorous growth. Strawberries were small, circular plants, which produced no runners, but had to be set out each season. Along the south fence was a row of pineapples, two with deep red blossoms in

the center of the long spikes of foliage. A gorgeous mass of bougainvillea covered the garage and butterflies flitted from blossom to blossom. The lane which led to the house was bordered by poinsettias. Already the bright red blossoms gave a holiday air, although there was nothing in the weather to suggest the approach of Christmas.

They tried to make the gifts to relatives and friends as typically southern as possible. Mrs. Ransom found a neighbor who showed her how to make baskets from the brown pine needles which could be gathered all about them. She did not attempt elaborate designs, but made one large open one, with a cluster of pine-cones on one side and several smaller ones, using different colors of raffia to bind the bunches of needles.

Marian and Bert tried their hands at it too, and achieved very pretty tea pot stands. From the ripest orange and grapefruit drops a delicious marmalade was made, and another neighbor was glad to sell some of the guava juice she had canned in the summer for making jelly. At first the cost and risk of sending glass seemed a difficulty, but was solved by finding parafined paper containers. These, packed in moss, should carry well. In school Roger's class made calendars and blotters

with Christmas cards, and when the kodak pictures were finished, they decided to use those in the same way. Most of them proved very good and delightful reminders of the Bona Venture trip. There was Marian's class and the group of the Wren Street neighbors to bring memories of the home folks. There was the campus of the college town where they stopped the first day, and the chapel with its stately spire. They could almost hear the lovely tones of the chimes. There was the broad Ohio River and its shipping. There were Susie and Sam, with the pigtails and the smile and the yellow dog all there. There were lovely views of the Cumberland River, and scenes about Chattanooga, with some of the family and the Bona Venture figuring in most of them. And there was the Wainwright farm in Georgia, with Mr. and Mrs. Wainwright and Joan at the gate. Then came the first tropical scenes, palm trees, orange groves and live oaks; and last of all, views along the Indian River, Thanksgiving Day at the ocean beach, and the cottage with the pines at its back and vines and shrubbery in front, which was beginning to seem like home.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. RANSOM had often noticed a small house on one of the large grove properties a half-mile south, which seemed empty. When she passed the week before Christmas the door and windows were open, and she heard a baby crying inside. As she came back from the store a young woman was sitting on the steps with the baby, and a small boy was playing on the walk. The mother looked so young and so flushed and tired that Mrs. Ransom ventured to stop. They had come from across the state only two days before. Work was so scarce there, and her husband had heard of this place through a friend. But she had never lived away from her mother and sisters before, and the baby was so fretty after the long trip, and the stove smoked, and the steak for dinner was so tough, and if they could only have waited until after Christmas. It all tumbled out into the ears of the first sympathetic listener she had found.

When Mrs. Ransom left, the baby was asleep, the wicks of the oil stove were adjusted, and the young housekeeper had learned such a nice way to fix over for tomorrow the steak that had been too

tough for today, and how her husband could make kitchen cupboards out of empty boxes; and tranquility had settled over the little house. Whenever Mrs. Lester was lonely or discouraged now, she could remember that there was a friendly neighbor a half-mile up the road.

And so it happened that on Saturday, with Christmas only three days distant, the Ransoms voted to invite the newcomers to have Christmas dinner with them, and the invitation was promptly accepted. Saturday night they drove over to town for a few purchases, supplies for the feast and toys for the small guests.

On Christmas eve "the stockings were hung by the chimney with care," and by morning were bulging with interesting little packages, home-made candy and nuts, a toy mule for Roger, a roll of kodak film for Marian, a Bird Guide for Bert, an orange wood fork and spoon for Mother and a subscription to the local newspaper for Father. After breakfast came the opening of packages from relatives and friends in the north. They all seemed to have thought of such nice gifts, things which would add comfort and pleasure to the new home. The papers and ribbons and boxes were finally gathered up, the table set, and everything

ready when they saw their guests coming up the road. Three-year old Harold was shy at first, but soon won by the friendly Roger, and the baby, fresh from a long nap, was ready to laugh and play with anyone. Mr. Ransom found Mr. Lester an intelligent young man, anxious to make good in his new position until he could find something in their home town, where just now work was unusually scarce, but promised better in a year or two.

In spite of a bit of longing for the home folks and the home scenes on the part of both hosts and guests, they made a merry time of dinner. Bert and Marian found it great fun to astonish these southerners with tales of coasting and skating. As twilight was beginning, they sang Christmas carols, and the echo of the lovely words and melody floated with the guests down the road.

The week of vacation for the children passed quickly. Mr. Waite let Bert work in the grove three mornings, and he learned a great deal that was interesting and felt proud of the money earned. One afternoon Mrs. Waite asked them to the house for a holiday party she was giving for a nephew and niece who were visiting her. They played games under the great live oaks on the

river bank in front of the house, and had refreshments at a long table set beneath a pergola covered with vines. The mellow afternoon sunshine threw shadows of the leaves over the white cloth, and touched with sparkle the frosted bells and icicles on the little Christmas tree in the center.

On Saturday it rained hard, and by night the wind had shifted into the north and it was surprisingly cold. The fire on the hearth was lighted and a good pile of logs brought in. The "fat pine" made a splendid blaze, and they were reminded that in the mountain cabins of Georgia and North Carolina it often furnished the only source of artificial light. Sunday morning, although the sun was out again, the north wind was so strong and cold that they drove to church and were glad they were early when they found the minister carrying in wood, because no one else had thought of it. Mr. Ransom and Bert promptly relieved him of the task, and soon had a good fire started in the little stove in one corner of the room.

By New Years Day it had warmed up again, and they packed up their lunch and drove northeast across the island to the light-house. The drive itself was interesting, for one mile beside a backwater where pond-lilies grew and tall marsh

grasses. Several miles led through pine woods, the ground strewn with brown needles and cones, and the air fragrant. They gathered quantities of needles for basket work, for they had heard of a Woman's Exchange where they might be sold; and Mrs. Ransom, when housework was finished, had hours when she would be glad to have her fingers busy while she sat on the sunny porch or in the edge of the pine woods. Now and then they passed small settlements, with cleared land planted in groves, but there were miles without a house, and they met few cars.

It was almost noon when the tall gray tower came in sight and grew larger with every mile. The fragrance of pines was left behind and the salt ocean breeze blew across the downs. A straight road led down to the ocean, with the light-house on a promontory to the north, and long piers and warehouses to the south. They could see now what a sheltered harbor it was, and were told that, during the storm of Saturday night and Sunday nine boats of varying size and draft had taken refuge there. Lunch was enjoyed on the curve of beach below the light-house, and along the edge of the water they found exquisite little rainbow-colored shells, a pair of slender white "angel wings" and a variety of muscle shells.

Mr. Ransom and Marian and Bert climbed the winding flight of light-house stairs and were initiated into the mysteries of "tending the light," with enough stories of wrecks averted and rescues made to give them a vivid realization of the responsibility which rests upon the men who, through fair weather and foul, keep the lights burning along our hundreds of miles of coast. They looked out over the rolling Atlantic and back across the miles of island they had traversed, and Mother and Roger, waving to them from the beach below, looked very small.

Below the light-house, on the north, was the Life Saving Station, and there was a drill at half past two, when the tide was running high. An old two-masted schooner was anchored a quarter mile out, to represent a ship in distress. Three men rowed out to it and raised distress signals to the mast-head. Sharp orders were given on shore. The doors grated open, the life boat was pulled down the runway, manned by four men in oilskins, who bent to the oars as if lives really depended on their efforts. Then, as they approached the signalling ship, a line shot out across her decks, was hauled in by her crew and made fast. In surprisingly short time the breeches buoy was sent out over this, a

man climbed in and was brought safely to shore, followed in turn by each of the others.

When the breeches buoy came back with the last man, the captain of the crew, seeing Bert's eager interest in all the maneuvers, asked if he would like a ride in it. His Father's consent was readily gained and, to the astonishment of the rest of the family, he was soon dangling in mid-air over the Atlantic. It was quite the most thrilling experience of his life, and thoroughly enjoyed. When he came back, one of the crew was showing Mrs. Ransom and Marian through their snug little house, where they cooked and scrubbed and even darned their own stockings, and had to keep everything as clean and shiny as sailors on ship-board.

And so they started on their long ride home. The stars were shining and Roger was sound asleep when they reached there, but all agreed that it had been a splendid day.

CHAPTER XII

THE following weeks brought more cool days, but usually with bright sunshine, and although winter clothes and wood fires were comfortable night and morning, the middle of the day was warmer. Now the groves were beautiful, the branches of glossy leaves bending under the weight of golden fruit. Often Mr. Ransom brought home a basket of drops, sweet juicy oranges and big yellow grapefruit, with a pleasant acid flavor. One saw trucks of fruit crossing the bridge to the large packing houses, and small freight boats on the river with decks piled high with boxes.

On the fourteenth they began picking Mr. Waite's grove. The children ran over to see it all as soon as they came home from school. Tall ladders reached the tops of the older trees. Each picker was equipped with a pair of clippers—for a quarter inch of stem must be left on all picked fruit—and a canvas bag slung over his shoulder, into which the fruit was dropped. When this was full it was lifted off, the lower turned-up end loosened, and out tumbled the fruit into a field crate,

just enough to fill one side. When the second side was filled, the picker stuck in a colored ticket, which gave his number. The mule and wagon made constant trips to the road with the filled crates, while those nearest were carried on wheel-barrows. There they were loaded on an auto truck for the trip to the packing house. Mr. Ransom and the pickers' foreman shared the responsibility of keeping exact records of the number of field crates which went out. It was an animated scene, and most interesting. Marian's new roll of film, started at the light-house, was finished here.

When Mr. Waite noticed how interested the children were, he promised Mr. Ransom a half-day off later in the season, to take them through a packing house. This opportunity came the last week in January. Mr. and Mrs. Ransom met the children after school and found the long white building with one side facing the railroad tracks, where a siding was run in for loading the cars. On the other side trucks full of fruit were driving up and unloading at a long platform. Just inside the wide doorway each field crate was set on a stand and tipped so that the fruit rolled out onto a moving track where each orange was gently rolled about on a bristle brush while tiny sprays of water

played over it. This track moved slowly up an incline, and at the top entered a canvas enclosure where fans dried all moisture from the clean fruit. Then they rolled onto elevator shelves which carried them to the upper floor. Spreading out on a two foot moving platform they were carried past young women who deftly removed all culls. Then away they went, those hundreds of golden balls, down slanting troughs which carried them to the bins, the smallest falling through the narrow opening at the first bin, and so on until the very largest came to the last bin with its wide opening, the only one they could get through. Young women and men at the bins worked rapidly, placing each orange in a stamped tissue wrapper, giving a single twist to the corners, and placing them in the crates with such precision that there could be no moving about. When full, each crate was placed on a track which carried it to the strapping machine, where, with a few deft movements, the covers were put in place and made fast with metal straps. A man with a hand truck made constant trips with these finished crates to the pre-cooling rooms along the further side of the building. Here the temperature was kept at 38° , and they were left for some hours before loading into refrigerator

cars on the siding below, for their journey to the northern markets.

It was almost dark when they came out, so they took supper in town and did a few errands before starting home. How different it seemed driving across the bridge at night, with the row of lights along the side and the red ones at the draw. On the island the lights of houses twinkled here and there along the wooded shore, and behind them the little city was quite ablaze with street lamps and signs.

CHAPTER XIII

FEBRUARY had its cool days and cooler nights, with warm days between, and before the end of the month one could actually see Spring coming. For they found that even in Florida, where there were green trees and flowers all the year, there was a real springtime, if you watched for it. The oaks were beginning to drop some of their leaves as new ones started, and the ground was littered in places as it would be in early fall in the north. The water oaks were prettiest of all, with their bright green foliage taking the place of the duller winter leaves. And in the groves fresh light green shoots were appearing among the glossy darker green, and growing fast. On February 23rd, Mrs. Ransom found the first orange blossoms, just a spray of tiny round white buds. But each day they grew a little larger, and by the end of the week the trees were full of opening blossoms. At night, when the air was heavy with dew, the fragrance drifted in through open windows. They all spent hours in the grove, going from tree to tree, comparing orange and grapefruit, and lemon with its pink buds. As the petals

dropped, they watched the little round ball at the end of the pistil gradually swell and turn darker green, until it was a miniature orange, one of the crop to be picked next January.

One of the spring surprises was the fig tree in their own back yard. When they first saw it in November, they mistook it for a dead tree, among all the other green foliage, for it stood gaunt and gray with horizontal branches which spread far out from the trunk. Such a funny, knobby tree it was, with black scars where the leaves had fallen off. In March they discovered buds, at the ends of the stiff twigs, were pushing off their dry brown covering, and with the greatest suddenness, one morning, there was a tiny, deeply indented green leaf. By night there were a dozen. They seemed to expand hourly until, in a few days, the gray branches were hidden by layers of broad, spreading leaves. Before they had stopped marveling at the quickness of it all, Bert discovered a fig, a little pear-shaped green object, standing up on its stem in an angle between branch and leaf. In a day or two there were more of them. But the curious thing was they could never find a blossom. Finally, Mr. Ransom asked Mr. Waite, who explained

that the fig was one of the few trees whose blossom grows inside the fruit.

Mr. Waite wanted some nursery stock from a man at Vendor, thirty miles south on the mainland. As he had been delayed in sending it and the season was already late for planting, he asked Mr. Ransom to take the Ford truck and go down for them. Then, as an afterthought, he added, "Wait until Saturday, if you like, and take the family, if they're not too proud to ride in a truck." Indeed they were not. They fixed seats in the back for Marian and Bert, and Roger had a stool in front of his Mother. The morning was fine and the ride delightful. The road on the mainland ran curving along the river, with a rocky shore instead of Florida's usual low sand banks. Live oaks sent great branches straight across the road and palms bent over the river. Always as they rounded a point another came in sight, with curving bays between, some sheltered enough to form a bit of sand beach. Homes lined the roadway, with flowering vines and shrubbery everywhere. Behind them groves stretched away to the west. Cars were constantly passing. Some of the winter tourists were evidently starting north, perhaps to make many stops along the way. Others were doubtless

local people going from one town to another on business or pleasure.

At noon they had lunch in a cleared spot on the river bank. Across the road was a windbrake of palmettos and tangled vines, and back of that groveland. To the north was a small frame house set far back from the road, with flowers in the dooryard, and great oak trees and a path leading to the gate. As they lunched an elderly lady came out, raised her parasol, and started south along the road. When she had almost reached them a paper fluttered from her bag and Bert ran to pick it up. So she stopped in friendly country fashion to speak to them. Her soft southern voice and well-chosen English attracted Mrs. Ransom at once, and they were glad to answer her interested questions about their trip. Then the conversation turned to her first coming to Florida in a covered wagon from South Carolina fifty years ago, with her husband and a baby a year old. Those were pioneer times indeed, no railway within sixty miles, Indians in canoes skimming along the river, or appearing suddenly at one's door, but always friendly if treated so. A log cabin had been the first home, where the little frame house stood now, and her husband, with such casual help as he could get,

had cleared ten acres of land and planted them in oranges.

It was slow, tedious work in those days, budding and grafting and gradually increasing one's stock; for there were no nurseries to buy from, and no money for such buying if there had been. The first homestead was a government grant, and, as prosperity increased, they added to it until they had one hundred acres and could keep several men employed. Then came that first terrible experience of a freeze, and in forty-eight hours the work of years seemed undone. It took all the young trees and so injured the older ones that the crop was a total loss that year and small the next season. But they were young and strong, and in a few years were beginning to save again. Twice after that they went through the same experience, only less severe, but refused to be discouraged. Now, since her husband's death three years ago, two sons were managing the grove, one living at home with her and one married and not far away. The daughters were across the state, but home for occasional visits; and the little house could always expand somehow to welcome any number of grandchildren.

Her stories were so interesting they all forgot the time, but suddenly she remembered that she

had a mile to walk into town, and must not be late for the missionary meeting. "Usually," she explained, "a neighbor with a car calls for me, but she is away today and I didn't want to miss it. In the early days my children and housework and garden and sewing kept me so busy, there were few spare moments, but I always kept up the letters home to relatives and friends, and we always managed to have some good reading. Then, as the children grew up and the work was lighter, and the little town near us developed, I found new interests and places where I could help a bit. Life has been so interesting. When I read about these poor young people who turn criminals just to 'get a thrill,' I think if they could only get out and pioneer somewhere, they would find real life so good, hard work and sickness and sorrow, but through it all the deep real joys—family affection, friendship, success won through effort, and the beauty of the world about all lifting one up and making faith in the Heavenly Father so sure."

A half hour before they would have hesitated to ask this charming lady in her black silk gown to ride in their present equipage, but now they knew she would not mind. In ten minutes more they had left her at the church door, but were sure she was one they would always remember.

CHAPTER XIV

WHILE Mr. Ransom filled Mr. Waite's order at the nursery, the others went about, seeing the very beginnings of citrus culture. There were interesting flowering plants, too, with gorgeous tropical blossoms. At the west end of the citrus plantings they found three great loquat trees full of fruit, and the ground below strewn with it. As they were examining the stiff stalks of pinkish-yellow fruit, the owner came past and invited them to try it. Rather to their surprise, it was delicious, almost a cherry flavor and yet different, with two great shiny brown seeds in the center. They were urged to pick all they wanted, as the fruit was too tender for shipment and there was not much sale for it about here. By the time Mr. Ransom was ready to leave, they had gathered a large sack full. When everything was stowed into the truck Marian and Bert had just room enough and must watch that nothing jolted out along the way. They were glad the days were growing longer, but even so a great full moon was rising over the island before they reached the bridge, making a broad path of gold across the river.

April came with balmy breezes from the south-east. Migrant birds were flitting about the groves, stopping over on their long journey north. One day there was a swarm of white butterflies. They seemed to be passing all day, thousands of them, over land and river. After sunset every night they began to listen for the call of the whip-poor-will in the woods, but when they looked for him, they could never find him. Mulberries were ripe in many dooryards, great luscious ones, which made delectable pies. In the fields light blue wild lupin flowered in profusion. Mocking birds and cardinals sang in the ecstasy of mating and nest-building.

The school had an athletic meet. Marian was in the May-pole dance. Bert took honors in the broad jump, and even Roger showered himself with glory when his kite stayed up longer than any other.

They invited the little Sunday School, now grown to twenty-six members, for a Saturday afternoon picnic with them. They had games for the little children and other games for the older ones, and Mother told a story as only Mother could tell a story, so you listened with both ears and watched with both eyes so you wouldn't miss

the least little bit; and you felt just as if you were each of the people in the story and doing all the delightful things they were doing. And then it always ended better than you would ever have thought it could. When they had refreshments, in the center of the table was a big crepe paper orange with a strand of raffia running to each place, and when each child pulled one the orange divided into sections, with a little favor in each.

So the spring days went by and as April advanced, a languid warm breeze from the south made one feel less energetic, and sometimes glad when the big warm sun went down in the west. In the coolness and darkness they loved to watch the stars, and found that in six months they had learned to know them better than ever before. On moonlight nights it was like fairyland, with a silver shimmer over the river and the land. One strange thing about the southern moon was the way it would go right up almost to the middle of the sky, so you had scarcely any shadow at all unless you leaned over to look for it.

Mr. Ransom knew that the man who had been here before him had taken three months off each summer, after the June fertilizing was finished. The overseer on a nearby place could spend part

time at Mr. Waite's directing such spraying as was needed and seeing that all young trees were well watered in dry weather. The first of May Mr. Waite asked Mr. Ransom if he could make this same arrangement and return to him the first of October for another season, saying that they were welcome to use the cottage for the summer.

Three days later, while Mr. Ransom was wondering what he could find for a three months' job, a letter came from Mr. Wainwright, asking if he could help him for the summer. When they talked it over that night the thought of the charming little settlement of white houses set against a mountain slope of north-western Georgia, and of the hospitable family with whom they had spent one night in November was very alluring. Mr. Ransom was sure that a summer's work in the peach and apple orchards would more than cover the expense of the trip, besides giving them all another experience and the tonic of mountain air during the hot season. So it was decided and a letter was written, saying that they would be there early in June.

This time the packing was easy, for they knew the best place in the car for each thing. School closed at the end of May. There was good weather

for the grove work, and there was no delay in that.

And so, on an early June morning, the sun, rising over the pine woods, shone on the Bona Venture standing at the door, the bags being stowed away and the family finding their old accustomed seats. And as they rolled down the road, across the sparkling river, and turned north, it was with hope that the next venture would be as good as the first.

