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Author: Florence Crannell Means

Illustrator: Janet Smalley

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E-text prepared by Meredith Minter Dixon (dixonm@pobox.com)



Across the Fruited Plain

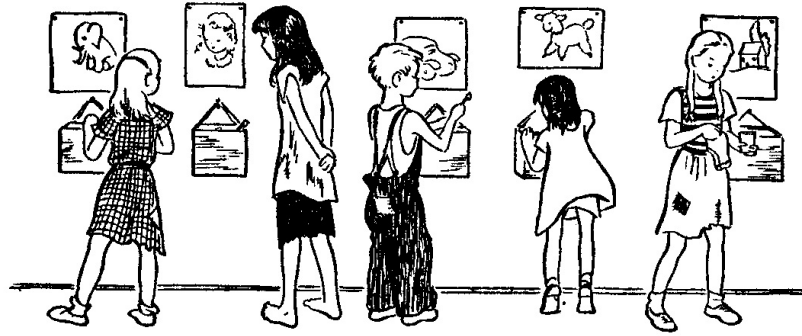
by Florence Crannell Means
with illustrations by Janet Smalley
New York : Friendship Press, c1940



Plans and procedures for using Across The Fruited Plain will be found in "A Junior Teacher's Guide on the Migrants," by E. Mae Young. Photographs of migrant homes and migrant Centers will be found in the picture story book Jack Of The Bean Fields, by Nina Millen.

This book is dedicated to a whole troop of children "across the fruited plain": Tomoko,

Willie May, Fei-Kin, Nawamana, Candelaria and Isabell, and to the newest child of all--our little Mary Margaret.



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FOREWORD

Dear Mary and Bonnie and Jack and the rest of my readers:

Maybe you've heard about the migrants lately, or have seen pictures of them in the magazines. But have you thought that many of them are families much like yours and mine, traveling uncomfortably in rattly old jalopies while they go from one crop to another, and living crowded in rickety shacks when they stop for work?

There have always been wandering farm laborers because so many crops need but a few workers part of the year and a great many at harvest. A two-thousand-acre peach orchard needs only thirty workers most of the year, and one thousand seven hundred at picking time. Lately, though, there have been more migrants than ever. One reason is that while in the past we used to eat fresh peas, beans, strawberries, and the like only in summer, now we want fresh fruits and vegetables all year round. To supply our wants, great quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables must be raised in the warm climates where they will grow.

Another reason is that more farm machinery is used now, and one tractor will do as much work as several families of farm laborers. So the extra families have taken to

migrating or wandering about the country wherever they hope to find work.

A further cause of the wandering is the long drought which turned part of our Southwestern country where there had been good farming into a dry desert that wouldn't grow crops any more. The people from the Dust Bowl, as the district is called, had to migrate, or starve. A great many of them went to the near-by state Of California, which grows much fruit and vegetables. There are perhaps two hundred thousand people migrating to California alone each year.

Of course there isn't nearly enough work for them all, and there aren't good living places for those who have work. That means that the children--like you--don't have the rights of young American citizens--like you. A great many of them can't go to school, and are growing up ignorant; and they don't have church, with all it means to us. They don't have proper homes or food, so they haven't good health; and because they are not in their home state or county, they cannot get medical and hospital care.

You may think we have nothing to do with them when you sometimes pass a jalopy packed inside with a whole family, from grandma to baby, and outside with bedding and what-not.

But we have something to do with them many times a day. Every time we sit down at our table we have something to do with them. Our sugar may come from these children's work; our oranges, too, and our peas, lettuce, melons, berries, cranberries, walnuts . . . ! Every time we put on a cotton dress, we accept something from them.

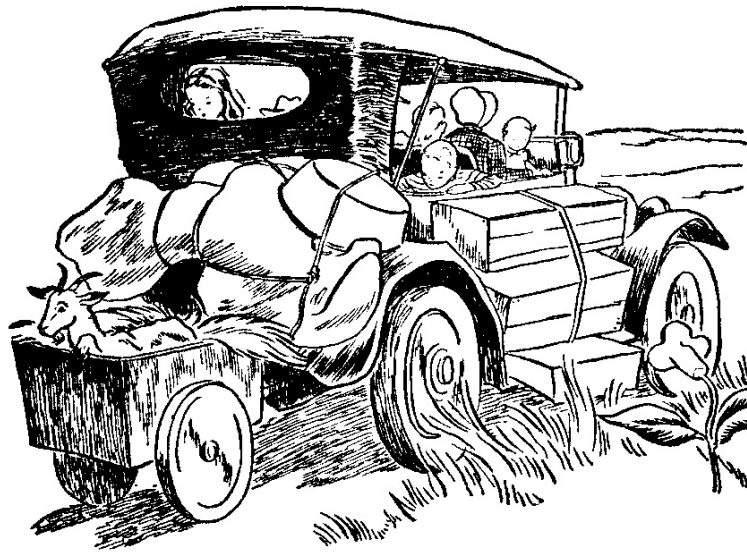
For years no one thought much of trying to help these wanderers. No one seemed to notice the unfairness of letting some children have all the blessings of our country and others have none. By and by, the counties and states and Federal government tried to help the migrant families. In a few places the government has set up comfortable camps and part-time farms such as this story describes. The church has tried to do something, also.

About twenty years ago, the Council of Women for Home Missions, made up of groups of women from the different churches, began to make plans for helping. They opened some friendly rooms where they took care of the children who were left alone while their parents worked. The rooms were often no more than a made-over barn, but in these "Christian Centers," as they were called, the children were given cleanliness, food, happiness and the care of a nurse, and were taught something about a loving Father God. The children who worked in the fields and the older people were also helped. From the seven with which a beginning was made, the number of Centers has grown to nearly sixty.

There is a great deal more to do in starting more Centers, and in equipping those we have, and we can do part of it. With our church school classes, we can give CleanUp and Kindergarten Kits like Cissy's and Jimmie's and our leaders will tell us other things we can do, such as collecting bedding and clothing and toys and money. Best of all, we can give our friendship to these homeless people.

For they're just children like you. When you grow up, perhaps you may help our country become a place where no single child need be homeless.

Florence Crannell Means
Denver, Colorado



ACROSS THE FRUITED PLAIN

THE HOUSE OF BEECHAM

"Oh, Rose-Ellen!" Grandma called.

Rose-Ellen slowly put down her library book and skipped into the kitchen. Grandma peppered the fried potatoes, sliced some wrinkled tomatoes into nests of wilting lettuce, and wiped her dripping face with the hem of her clean gingham apron. The kitchen was even hotter than the half-darkened sitting room where crippled Jimmie sprawled on the floor listlessly wheeling a toy automobile, the pale little baby on a quilt beside him.

Grandma squinted through the door at the old Seth Thomas dock in the sitting room. "Half after six! Rose-Ellen, you run down to the shop and tell Grandpa supper's spoiling. Why he's got to hang round that shop till supper's spoilt when he could fix up all the shoes he's got in two-three hours, I don't understand. 'Twould be different if he had anything to do. . . ."

Rose-Ellen said, "O.K., Gramma!" and ran through the hall. She'd rather get away before Grandma talked any more about the shop. Day after day she had heard about it. Grandma talked to her, though she was only ten, because she and Grandma were the only women in the family, since last winter when Mother died.

As Rose-Ellen let the front door slam behind her, she saw Daddy coming slowly up the street. The way his broad shoulders drooped and the way he took off his hat and pushed back his thick, dark hair told her as plainly as words that he hadn't found work that day. Even though you were a child, you got so tired--so tired--of the grown folks'

worrying about where the next quart of milk would come from. So Rose-Ellen patted him on the arm as they passed, saying, "Hi, Daddy, I'm after Grampa!" and hop-skipped on toward the old cobbler shop. Before Rose-Ellen was born, when Daddy was a boy, even, Grandpa had had his shop at that corner of the city street.

There he was, standing behind the counter in the shadowy shop, his shoulders drooping like Daddy's. He was a big, kind-looking old man, his gray hair waving round a bald dome, his eyes bright blue. He was looking at a newspaper. It was a crumpled old paper that had been wrapped around someone's shoes; the Beechams didn't spend pennies for newspapers nowadays.

The long brushes were quiet from their whirling. On the rack of finished shoes two pairs awaited their owners; on the other rack were a few that had evidently just come in. Yet Grandpa looked as tired as if he had mended a hundred pairs.

He looked up when the bell tinkled. "Oh, Ellen-girl! Anything wrong?"

"Only Gramma says please come to supper. Everything's getting spoiled."

Grandpa glanced at his old clock. It said half-past five. "I keep tinkering with it, but it's seen its best days. Like me."

He took off his denim apron, rolled down his sleeves, put on his hat and coat, and locked the door behind them. But not before he had looked wistfully around the little place, with its smell of beeswax, leather and dye, where he had worked so long. Its walls were papered with his favorite calendars: country scenes that reminded him of his farm boyhood; roly-poly babies in bathtubs; a pretty girl who looked, he said, like Grandma--a funny idea to Rose-Ellen. Patched linoleum, doorstep hollowed by thousands of feet--Grandpa looked at everything as if it were new and bright, and as if he loved it.

Starting home, he took Rose-Ellen's small damp hand in his big damp one. The sun blinded them as they walked westward, and the heat struck at them fiercely from pavement and wall, as if it were fighting them. Rose-Ellen was strong and didn't mind. She held her head straight to make her thick brown curls hit against her backbone. She knew she was pretty, with her round face and dark-lashed hazel eyes; and that nobody would think her starched short pink dress was old, because Grandma had mended it so nicely. Grandma had darned the short socks that turned down to her stout slippers, too; and Grandpa had mended the slippers till the tops would hardly hold another pair of soles.

"Hi, Rosie!" called Julie Albi, who lived next door. "C'm'out and play after supper?"

"Next door" was the right way to say it. This Philadelphia street was like two block-long houses, facing each other across a strip of pavement, each with many pairs of twin front doors, each pair with two scrubbed stone steps down to the sidewalk, and two bay windows bulging out upstairs, so that they seemed nearly to touch the ones across the narrow street. Rose-Ellen and Julie shared twin doors and steps; and inside only a thin wall separated them.

At the door Dick overtook Grandpa and Rose-Ellen. Dick was twelve. Sometimes Rose-Ellen considered him nothing but a nuisance, and sometimes she was proud of his tallness, his curly fair hair and bright blue eyes. He dashed in ahead when Grandpa turned the key, but Grandpa lingered.

Rose-Ellen said, "Hurry, Grampa, everything's getting cold." But she understood. He was thinking that their dear old house was no longer theirs. Something strange had happened to it, called "sold for taxes," and they were allowed to live in it only this summer.

Grandma blamed the shop. It had brought in the money to buy the house in the first place and had kept it up until a few years ago. It had put Daddy through a year in college. Now it was failing. Once, it seemed, people bought good shoes and had them mended many times. Then came days when many people were poor. They had to buy shoes too cheap to be mended; so when the soles wore out, the people threw the shoes away and bought more cheap ones. No longer were Grandpa's shoe racks crowded. No longer was there money even for taxes. All Grandpa took in was barely enough for

food and shop rent. But what else besides mending shoes and farming did he know how to do? And who would hire an old man when jobs were so few?

Even young Daddy had lost his job as a photograph finisher, and had brought his wife and three children home to live with Grandpa and Grandma. There Baby Sally was born; and there, before the baby was a month old, Mother had died. Soon after, the old house had been sold for taxes.

Grandma went about her work with the strong lines of her square face fixed in sadness. She was forever begging Grandpa to give up the shop, but Grandpa smashed his fist down on the table and said it was like giving up his life. . . . And day after day Daddy hunted work and was cross because he could find none.

For Dick and Rose-Ellen the summer had not been very different from usual. Dick blacked boots on Saturdays to earn a few dimes; Rose-Ellen helped Grandma with the "chores." They had long hours of play besides.

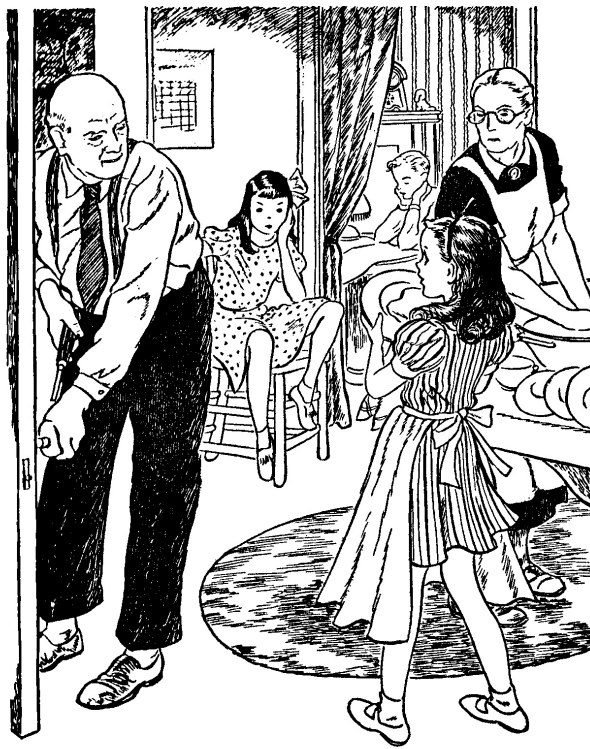
But the hot summer had been hard for nine-year-old Jimmie and the baby. They drooped like flowers in baked ground. Since Jimmie's infantile paralysis, three years before, he had been able to walk very little, and school had seemed out of the question. Unable to read or to run and play, he had a dull time.

Grandpa and Rose-Ellen went through the clean, shabby hall to the kitchen, where Grandma was rocking in the old rocker, Sally whimpering on her lap.

"Well, for the land's sakes," said Grandma, "did you make up your mind to come home at last? Mind Baby, Rose-Ellen, while I dish up."

After supper, Daddy sat hopelessly studying the "Help Wanted" column in last Sunday's paper, borrowed from the Albis. Jimmie looked at the funnies, and Grandma and Rose-Ellen did the dishes. Julie Albi, who had come to play, sat waiting with heels hooked over a chair-rung.

The shabby kitchen was pleasant, with rag rugs on the painted floor and crisp, worn curtains. The table and chairs were cream-color, and the table wore an embroidered flour-sack cover. Grandpa pottered with a loose door-latch until Grandma wrung the suds from her hands and cried fiercely, "What's the use doing such things, Grampa? You know good and well we can't stay on here. Everything's being taken away from us, even our children. . . ."



Grandma cried fiercely, "What's the use of doing such things!"

"Miss Piper come to see you, too?" Grandpa groaned.

"Taken away? Us?" gasped Rose-Ellen.

"What's all this?" Daddy demanded. He stood in the doorway staring at Grandpa and Grandma, and his bright dark eyes looked almost as unbelieving as they had when Mother slipped away from him. "You can't mean they want to take away our children?"

Dick came to the door with half of Jimmie's funnies, his mouth open; and Jimmie hobbled in, bent almost double, thin hand on crippled knee. Julie slipped politely away.

Then the news came out. The woman from the "Family Society" had called that day and had advised Grandma to put the children into a Home. When Grandma would not listen, the woman went on to the shop and talked with Grandpa.

"Her telling us they wasn't getting enough milk and vegetables!" Grandma scolded, wiping her eyes with one hand and smoothing back Rose-Ellen's curls with the other. "Saying Jimmie'd ought to be where he'd get sunshine without roasting. Good as telling me we don't know how to raise children, and her without a young-one to her name."

Grandpa blew his nose. "Well, it takes money to give the kids the vittles they ought to have."

"I won't go away from my own house!" howled Jimmie.

Rose-Ellen and Dick blinked at each other. It was one thing to scrap a little and quite another to be entirely apart. And the baby. . . .

"Would Miss Piper take . . . Sally?" Rose-Ellen quavered.

Grandma nodded, lips tight.

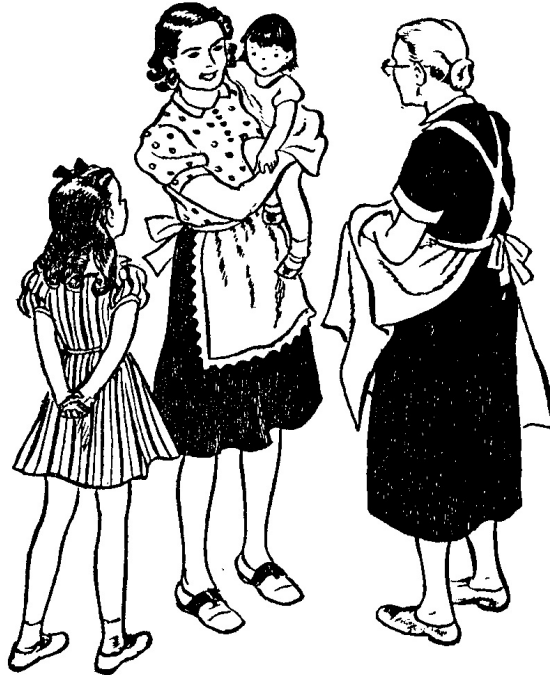
"They shan't!" Rose-Ellen whispered.

"Nonsense!" Daddy said hoarsely, his hands tightening on Jimmie's shoulder and Rose-

Ellen's. "It's better for families to stick together, even if they don't get everything they need. Ma, you think it's better, don't you?"

He looked anxiously at his parents and they looked pityingly at him, as if he were a boy again, and before they knew it the whole family were crying together, Grandpa and Daddy pretending they had colds.

Then came a knock at the door, and Grandma mopped her eyes with her apron and answered. Julie's mother stood there, a comfortable brown woman with shining black hair and gold earrings, the youngest Albi enthroned on her arm. Mrs. Albi's eyebrows had risen to the middle of her forehead, and she patted Grandma's shoulder plumply.



"Now, now, now, now!" she comforted in a big voice. "All will be well, praise God. Julie, she tell me. All will be well."

"How on earth can all be well?" Grandma protested. "I don't see no prospects."

"This summer as you know," said Mrs. Albi, "we went into Jersey. For two months we all pick the berries. Enough we earn to put-it food into our mouth. And the keeds! They go white and skinny, and they come home, like you see it, brown and fat." Her voice rose and she waved the baby dramatically. "Not so good the houses, I would not lie to you. But we make like we have the peekaneeka. By night the cool fresh air blow on us and by day the warm fresh air. And vegetables and fruit so cheap, so cheap."

"But what good will that do us, Mis' Albi?" Grandma asked flatly. "It's close onto September and berries is out."

"The cranberry bog!" Mrs. Albi shouted triumphantly. "Only today the padrone, he come to my people asking who will pick the cranberry. And that Jersey air, it will bring the fat and the red to these Jimmie's cheeks and to the bambina's!" Mrs. Albi wheezed as she ran out of breath.

The Beechams stared at her. Many Italians and Americans went to the farms to pick berries and beans. The Beechams had never thought of doing so, since Grandpa had his cobbling and Daddy his photograph finishing.

"Well, why shouldn't we?" Daddy fired the question into the stillness.

"But school?" asked Rose-Ellen, who liked school.

Mrs. Albi waved a work-worn palm. "You smart, Rosie. You ketch up all right."

"That's okeydoke with me!" Dick exclaimed, yanking his sister's curls. "You can have your old school."

Sally woke with a cry like a kitten's mew and Rose-Ellen lugged her out, balanced on her hip. Mrs. Albi's Michael was the same age, but he would have made two of Sally. Above Sally's small white face her pale hair stood up thinly; her big gray eyes and little pale mouth were solemn.

"Why," Grandma said doubtfully, "we . . . why, if Grandpa would give up his shop--just for the cranberry season. We got no place else to go."

Grandpa sighed. "Looks like the shop's give me up already. We could think about it."

"All together!" whooped Dick. "And not any school!"

"Now, hold your horses," Grandma cautioned. "Beechams don't run off nobody knows where, without anyway sleeping over it."

But though they "slept over" the problem and talked it over as hard as they could, going to the cranberry bogs was the best answer they could find for the difficulty. It seemed the only way for them to stay together.

"Something will surely turn up in a month or two," Daddy said. "And without my kids"--he spread his big hands--"I haven't a thing to show for my thirty-two years."

"The thing is," Grandpa summed it up, "when we get out of this house we've got to pay rent, and I'm not making enough for rent and food, too. No place to live, or else nothing to eat."

Finally it was decided that they should go.

Now there was much to do. They set aside a few of their most precious belongings to be stored, like Grandma's grandma's painted dower chest, full of treasures, and Grandpa's tall desk and Rose-Ellen's dearest doll. Next they chose the things they must use during their stay in Jersey. Finally they called in the second-hand man around the corner to buy the things that were left.

Poor Grandma! She clenched her hands under her patched apron when the man shoved her beloved furniture around and glanced contemptuously at the clean old sewing machine that had made them so many nice clothes. "One dollar for the machine, lady."

Rose-Ellen tucked her hand into Grandma's as they looked at the few boxes and pieces of furniture they were leaving behind, standing on stilts in Mrs. Albi's basement to keep dry.

"It's so funny," Rose-Ellen stammered; "almost as if that was all that was left of our home."

"Funny as a tombstone," said Grandma. Then she went and grabbed the old Seth Thomas clock and hugged it to her. "This seems the livingest thing. It goes where I go."

At last, everything was disposed of, and the padrone's agent's big truck pulled up to their curb. Two feather beds, a trunk, pots, pans, dishes and the Beechams were piled into the space left by some twenty-five other people. The truck roared away, with the neighbors shouting good-by from steps and windows.

Grandma kept her eyes straight ahead so as not to see her house again. Grandpa shifted Jimmie around to make his lame leg more comfortable, just as they passed the cobbler's shop with "TO LET" in the window. Grandpa did not lift his eyes.

"I hope Mrs. Albi will sprinkle them Bronze Beauty chrysanthemums so they won't all die off," Grandma said in a choked voice.

THE CRANBERRY BOG

The truck rumbled through clustering cities, green country and white villages. All the children stared in fascination until Jimmie grew too tired and huddled down against Grandma's knees, whining because he ached and the sun was hot and the truck was crowded.

Grandpa kept pointing out new things-holly trees; muskrat houses rising in small stick-stacks from the ponds; farms that made their own rain, with rows and rows of pipes running along six feet in air, to shower water on the vegetables below.

It was late afternoon, and dark because of the clouds, when the truck reached the bogs. These bogs weren't at all what Rose-Ellen and Dick had expected, but only wet-looking fields of low bushes. There was no chance to look at them now, for everyone was hurrying to get settled.

The padrone led them to a one-room shed built of rough boards and helped dump their belongings inside. Grandma stood at the door, hands on hips, and said, "Well, good land of love! If anybody'd told me I'd live in a shack!"

Rose-Ellen danced around her, shrieking joyously, "Peekaneeka, Gramma! Peekaneeka!"

Grandma's face creased in an unwilling smile and she said, "You'll get enough peekaneeka before you're done, or I miss my guess."

"Got here just in time, just in time!" chanted Dick and Rose-Ellen, as a sudden storm pounded the roof with rain and split the air with thunder and lightning.

"My land!" cried Grandma. "S'pose this roof will leak on the baby and Seth Thomas?"

For an hour the Beechams dashed around setting up campkeeping. For supper they finished the enormous lunch Grandma had brought. After that came bedtime.

Rose-Ellen lay across the foot of Grandpa and Grandma's goosefeather bed, spread on the floor. After the rain stopped, fresh air flowed through the light walls.

Cranberry-picking did not start next morning till ground and bushes had dried a little. Grandpa and Daddy had time first to knock together stools and a table, and to find on a dumpheap a little old stove, which they propped up and mended so Grandma could cook on it.

"The land's sakes," Grandma grumbled, "a hobo contraption like that!"

While they washed the breakfast dishes and straightened the one room, the grown-ups discussed whether the children should work in the bog.

Their Italian neighbor in the next shack had said, "No can maka da living unless da keeds dey work, too. Dey can work. My youngest, he four year and he work good."

"Likely we could take Baby along, and Jimmie could watch her while we pick," Grandma said dubiously. "But my fingers are all thumbs when I've got them children on my mind.--Somebody's at the door."

A tall young girl with short yellow curls stood tapping at the open door. Grandma looked at her approvingly, her blouse was so crisply white.

"Good morning," said the girl. "I've come from the Center, where we have a day nursery for the little folks." She smiled down at Jimmie and Sally. "Wouldn't you like us to take care of yours while the grown-ups are working?" She made the older children feel grown-up by the polite way she looked at them.

"I've heard of the Centers," Grandma said, leaning on her broom. "But I never did get much notion what you did with the young-ones there."

"Well, all sorts of things," said the girl. "They sing and make things and learn Bible verses. And in the afternoon they have a nap-time. It's loads of fun for them."

"They take their lunch along?" Grandma inquired.

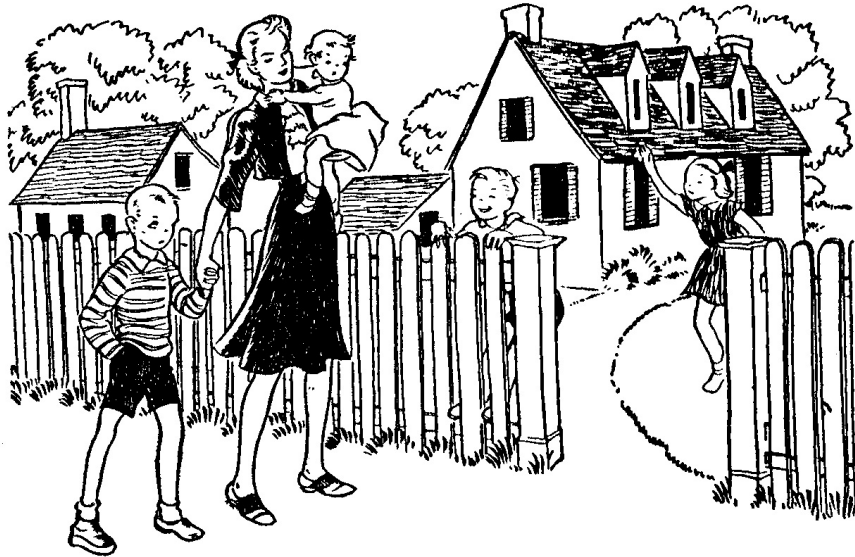
"Oh, no! A good hot lunch is part of the program."

"But, then, how much does it cost?"

"A nickel apiece a day."

"Come, come, young lady, that don't make sense," Grandpa objected. "You'd lose money lickety-split."

The girl laughed. "We aren't doing it for money. We get money and supplies from groups of women in all the different churches. The owner of the bog helps, too. But we'll have to hurry, or your row boss will be tooting his whistle." Her eyes were admiring children and shack as she talked. Though not like Grandma's lost house, this camp was already clean and orderly.



So the three went to the Center, the girl carrying Sally, and Jimmie hobbling along in sulky silence.

Jimmie had stayed so much at home that he didn't know how to behave with strangers. Because he didn't want anyone to guess that he was bashful, he frowned fiercely. Because he didn't want anyone to think him "sissy," he had his wavy hair clipped till his head looked like a golf ball. He was a queer, unhappy boy.

He was unhappier when they reached the big, bright, shabby house that was the Center. Could it be safe to let Sally mingle with the ragged, dirty children who were flocking in, he wondered?

His anxiety soon vanished. The babies were bathed and the bigger children sent to rows of wash-basins. In a jiffy, clean babies lay taking their bottles in clean baskets and clean children were dressed in clean play-suits.

Besides the yellow-haired girl (her name was Miss Abbott, but Jimmie never called her

anything but "Her" and "She"), there were two girls and an older woman, all busy. When clean-up time was past and the babies asleep, the older ones had a worship service with songs and stories.

After worship came play. Outdoors were sandpiles and swings. Indoors were books and games. Jimmie longed for storybooks and reading class; but how could he tell Her that he was nine years old and couldn't read? He huddled in a corner, scowling, and turned pages as if he were reading.

Meanwhile the rest of the family had answered the whistle of the row boss, and were being introduced to the cranberries. Dick and Rose-Ellen were excited and happy, for it was the first fruit they had ever picked. Though the wet bushes gave them shower baths, the sun soon dried them. Since the ground was deep in mud, they had gone barefoot, on the advice of Pauline Isabel, the colored girl in a neighboring shack. The cool mud squashed up between their toes and plastered their legs pleasantly.

The grown folks had been given wooden hands for picking--scoops with finger-like cleats! At first they were awkward at stripping the branches, but soon the berries began to drop briskly into the scoops. The children, who could get at the lower branches more easily, picked by hand; and before noon all the Beecham fingers were sore from the prickly stems and leaves. In the afternoon they had less trouble, for an Italian family near by showed them how to wrap their fingers with adhesive tape.

But picking wasn't play. The Beechams trudged back to their shack that night, sunburned and dirty and too stiff to straighten their backs, longing for nothing but to drop down on their beds.

"Good land of love!" Grandma scolded. "Lie down all dirty on my clean beds? I hope I ain't raised me up a mess of pigs. You young-ones, you fetch a pail of water from the pump, and we'll see how clean we can get. My land, what wouldn't I give for a bathtub and a sink! And a gas stove!"

"Peekaneeka, Gramma!" Dick reminded her, squeezing her.

"Picnic my foot! I'm too old for such goings-on."



"Lie down all dirty on my clean beds?
You fetch a pail of water!"

Though Grandma's rheumatism had doubled her up like a jack-knife, she scrubbed herself with energy and soon had potatoes boiling, pork sizzling, and tea brewing on the rickety stove. Daddy brought Jimmie and Sally from the Center. After supper they felt a little better.

Jimmie wouldn't tell about the Center, but from inside his blouse he hauled a red oilcloth bag, and emptied it out on the table. There were scissors, crayons, paste, pencil, and squares of colored paper. And there was a note which Jimmie smoothed out and handed to Daddy.

"From Jimmie Brown," he read, "Bethel Church, Cleveland."

"We-we were s'posed to write thank-you letters!" Jimmie burst out miserably. "She sat us all down to a table and gave us pens and paper."

"And what did you do, Son?" Daddy asked, smoothing the bristly little head. "I said could I take mine home," Jimmie mumbled, fishing a tight-folded sheet of paper from his pocket.

"I'll write it for you," Rose-Ellen offered. She sat down and began the letter, with Jimmie telling her what he wanted to say.

"But the real honest thing to do will be to tell her you didn't write it yourself," Grandma said pityingly.

"They have stories and games at night," Jimmie said, changing the subject. "She said to bring Dick and Rose-Ellen."

Dick and Rose-Ellen were too tired for stories and games that night. They tumbled into bed as soon as supper was done, and had to be dragged awake for breakfast. Not till a week's picking had hardened their muscles did they go to the Center.

When they did go--Jimmie limping along with his clipped head tucked sulkily between his shoulders as if he were not really proud to take them--they found the place alive with fun. Besides the three girls and the woman, there was a young man from a nearby university. He was organizing ping-pong games and indoor baseball for the boys and girls and even volleyball for some grown men who had come. Everyone was busy and everyone happy.

"It's slick here, some ways," Dick said that night.

"For a few weeks," Daddy agreed.

"If it wasn't for the misery in my back, it wouldn't be bad," Grandma murmured. "But an old body'd rather settle down in her own place. Who'd ever've thought I'd leave my solid oak dining set after I was sixty! But I'd like the country fine if we had a real house to live in."

"I'm learning to do spatter prints--for Christmas," said Rose-Ellen, brushing her hair before going to bed.

"Jimmie, why on earth don't you take this chance to learn reading?" Daddy coaxed.

"Daddy, you won't tell Her I can't read?" Jimmie begged.

Yet, as October passed, something happened to change Jimmie's mind.

As October passed, too, the Beechams grew skillful at picking. They couldn't earn much, for it took a lot of cranberries to fill a peck measure--two gallons--especially this year, when the berries were small; and the pickers got only fifteen cents a peck. The bogs had to be flooded every night to keep the fruit from freezing; so every morning the mud was icy and so were the shower-baths from the wet bushes. But except for Grandma, they didn't find it hard work now.

"It's sure bad on the rheumatiz," said Grandma one morning, as she bent stiffly to wash clothes in the tub that had been filled and heated with such effort. "If we was

home, we'd be lighting little kindling fires in the furnace night and morning. And hot water just by lighting the gas! Land, I never knew my own luck."

"But I like it here!" Jimmie burst out eagerly. "Do you know something? I'm going to learn to read! I colored my pictures the neatest of anyone in the class, and She put them all on the wall. So then I didn't mind telling her how I never learned to read and write and how Rose-Ellen wrote my letter to Jimmie Brown in Cleveland."

He beamed so proudly that Grandpa, wringing a sheet for Grandma, looked sorrowfully at him over his glasses. "It's a pity you didn't tell her sooner, young-one," he said. "The cranberries will be over in a few more days, and we'll be going back."

"Back to Philadelphia?" Rose-Ellen demanded. "Where? Not to a Home? I won't! I'd rather go on and shuck oysters like Pauline Isabel and her folks. I'd rather go on where they're cutting marsh hay. I'd rather--"

"Well, now," Grandpa's words were slow, "what about it, kids? What about it, Grandma? Do we go back to the city and-and part company till times are better? Or go on into oysters together?"

The tears stole down Jimmie's cheeks, but he didn't say anything. Daddy didn't say anything, either. He picked Sally up and hugged her so hard that she grunted and then put her tiny hands on his cheeks and peered into his eyes, chirping at him like a little bird.

"I calculate we'll go on into oysters," said Grandpa.

SHUCKING OYSTERS

This picnic way of living had one advantage; it made moving easy. One day the Beechams were picking; the next day they had joined with two other families and hired a truck to take them and their belongings to Oystershell, on the inlet of the bay near by.

Pauline Isabel's family were going to a Negro oystershucking village almost in sight of Oystershell. "It's sure nice there!" Pauline assured them happily. "I belong to a girls' club that meets every day after school; in the Meth'dis' church. We got a sure good school, too, good as any white school, up the road a piece."

The Beechams said good-by to Pauline's family, who had become their friends. Then they said good-by to Miss Abbott. That was hard for Jimmie. He butted his shaven little head against Her and then limped away as fast as he could.

The ride to Oystershell was exciting. Autumn had changed the look of the land. "God has taken all the red and yellow he's got, and just splashed it on in gobs," said Rose-Ellen as they traveled toward the seashore.

"What I like," Dick broke in, "is to see the men getting in the salt hay with their horses on sleds."

The marshes were too soft to hold up anything so small as a hoof, so when farmers used horses there, they fastened broad wooden shoes on the horses' feet. Nowadays, though, horses were giving place to tractors.

The air had an increasingly queer smell, like iodized salt in boiling potatoes. The Beechams were nearing the salt-water inlets of the bay, where the tides rose and fell like the ocean-of which the inlets were part.

The tide was high when they drove down from Phillipsville to the settlement of Oystershell. The rows of wooden houses, the oyster-sheds and the company store seemed to be wading on stilts, and most people wore rubber boots.

Grandma said, "If the bog was bad for my rheumatiz, what's this going to be?"

A man showed the Beechams a vacant house in the long rows. "Not much to look at," he acknowledged, "but the rent ain't much, either. The roofs are tight and a few have running water, case you want it bad enough to pay extra."

"To think a rusty pipe and one faucet in my kitchen would ever be a luxury!" Grandma muttered. "But, my land, even the humpy wall-paper looks good now."

It was gay, clean paper, though pasted directly on the boards. The house had a kitchen-dining-sitting room and one bedroom, with walls so thin they let through every word of the next-door radio.

"That's going to be a peekaneeka, sure," Grandma said grimly.

Children were not allowed to work in the oysters, but Grandma was going to try. The children could tell she was nervous about it, by the way her foot jerked up and down when she gave Sally her bottle that night; but she said she expected she wasn't too dumb to do what other folks could.

The children were still asleep when the grown-ups went to work in the six o'clock darkness of that November Saturday. When they woke, mush simmered on the cookstove and a bottle of milk stood on the table. It took time to feed Sally and wash dishes and make beds; and then Dick and Rose- Ellen ran over to the nearest long oyster-house and peeked through a hole in the wall.

Down each side, raised above the fishy wet floor, ran a row of booths, each with a desk and step, made of rough boards. On each step stood a man or woman, in boots and heavy clothes, facing the desk. Only instead of pen and paper, these people had buckets, oysters, knives. As fast as they could, they were opening the big, horny oyster shells and emptying the oysters into the buckets.

Next time, Dick stayed with Sally, and Rose- Ellen and Jimmie peeked. They were startled when a big hand dropped on each of their heads.

"You kids skedaddle," ordered a big man. "If you want to see things, come back at four."

By four o'clock the grown folks were home, tired and smelling of fish; Dick and Rose- Ellen were prancing on tiptoe to go, and even Jimmie was ready.

"This is what he is like," said Rose- Ellen, "the man who said we could." She stuck in her chin and threw out her chest and tried to stride.

"That's the Big Boss, all right," Daddy said, laughing. "Guess it's O.K. But mind your p's and q's."

"And stick together. Specially in a strange place." Grandma wearily picked up the baby.

The Big Boss saw them as soon as they tiptoed into the oyster-house. "Ez," he called, "here's some nice kids. Show 'em around, will you?"

Ez was opening clams with a penknife, and spilling them into his mouth. "Want some?" he asked.

The children shook their heads vigorously.

He closed his knife and dropped it into his pocket.

"Well, now first you want to see the dredges come in from the bay." He took them through the open front of the shed to the docks outside. The boats had gone out at three o'clock in the morning, he said, in the deep dark. They were coming in now heavily, loaded high with horny oysters, and Ez pointed out the rake-set iron nets with which the shellfish were dragged from their beds. "Got 'em out of bed good and early!"

"I'd hate to have to eat 'em all," Jimmie said suddenly in his husky little voice.

Everyone laughed, for the big rough shells were traveling into the oyster-house by thousands, on moving belts. Some shells looked as if they were carrying sponges in

their mouths, but Ez said it was a kind of moss that grew there. Already the pile of unopened oysters in the shed was higher than a man. The shuckers needed a million to work on next day, Ez said.



"I'd hate to have to eat 'em all," said
Jimmie.

When the children had watched awhile, and the boatmen had asked their names, and how old they were and where they came from, Ez took them inside the shed to show them the handling of the newly shucked oysters. First the oysters were dumped into something that looked like Mrs. Albi's electric washer, and washed and washed. Then they were emptied into a flume, a narrow trough along which they were swept into bright cans that held almost a gallon each. The cans were stored in ice-packed barrels, and early next morning would go out in trains and trucks to all parts of the country.

"How many pearls have they found in all these oysters?" Dick demanded in a businesslike voice. "Not any!" Ez said.

"Why can't you eat oysters in months that don't have R in them?" asked Rose-Ellen.

"You could, if there wasn't a law against selling them. It's only a notion, like not turning your dress if you put it on wrong side out. Summer's when oysters lay eggs. You don't stop eating hens because they lay eggs, do you? But now scram, kids. I got work to do."

They left, skipping past the mountains of empty shells outside.

Next day the children went to church school alone. The grown folks were too tired. And on Monday Dick and Rose-Ellen went up the road to the school in the little village.

It was strange to be in school again, and with new schoolmates and teachers and even new books, since this was a different state. Rose-Ellen's grade, the fifth, had got farther in long division than her class at home, and she couldn't understand what they were doing. Dick had trouble, too, for the seventh grade was well started on United States history, and he couldn't catch up. But that was not the worst of it. The two children could not seem to fit in with their schoolmates. The village girls gathered in groups by themselves and acted as if the oyster-shuckers' children were not there at

all; and the boys did not give Dick even a chance to show what a good pitcher he was. Both Rose-Ellen and Dick had been leaders in the city school, and now they felt so lonesome that Rose-Ellen often cried when she got home.

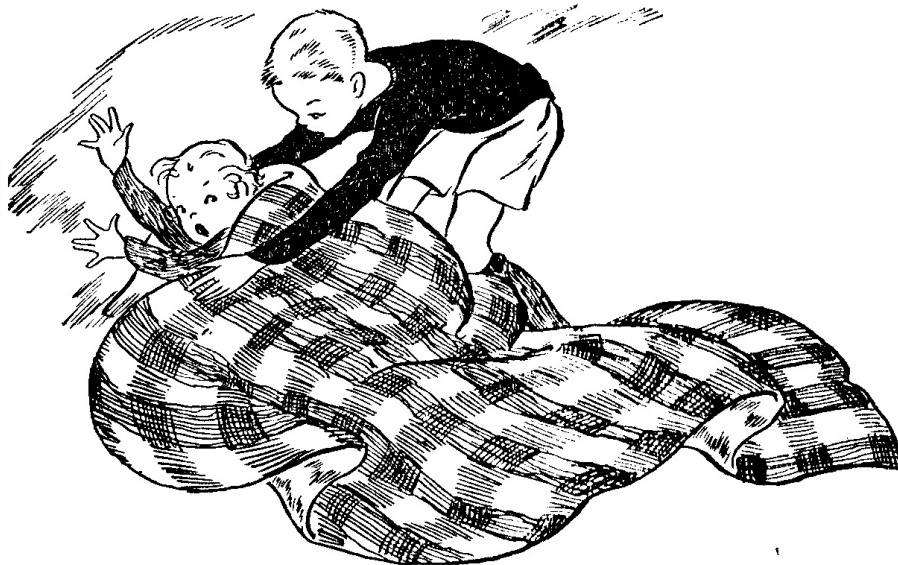
It was too long a walk for Jimmie, who begged not to go anyway. Besides, he was needed at home to mind Sally.

Of course the grown folks wanted to earn all they could. The pay was thirty cents a gallon; and just as it took a lot of cranberries to make a peck, it took a lot of these middle-sized oysters to make a gallon. To keep the oysters fresh, the sheds were left so cold that the workers must often dip their numb hands into pails of hot water. All this was hard on Grandma's rheumatism; but painful as the work was, she did not give it up until something happened that forced her to.

It was late November, and the fire in the shack must be kept going all day to make the rooms warm enough for Sally. She was creeping now, and during the long hours when the grown folks were working and the older children at school, she had to stay in a chair with a gate across the front which her father had fixed out of an old kitchen armchair. Grandma cushioned it with rags, but it grew hard and tiresome, and sometimes Jimmie could not keep her contented there.

One day Sally cried until he wriggled her out of her nest and spread a quilt for her in a corner of the room as Grandma did. There he sat, fencing her in with his legs while he drew pictures of oyster-houses. He was so busy drawing roofs that he had forgot all about Sally until he was startled by her scream. He jerked around in terror. Sally had clambered over the fence of his legs and crept under the stove after her ball. Perhaps a spark had snapped through the half-open slide in the stove door; however it had happened, the flames were running up her little cotton dress.

Poor Baby Sally! Jimmie had never felt so helpless. Hardly knowing why he did it, he dragged the wool quilt off Grandma's bed and scooted across the floor in a flash. While Sally screamed with fright, he wrapped the thick folds tightly around her and hugged her close.



When the grown folks came from work, just ahead of the school children, they found Jimmie and Sally white and shaky but safe. The woolen quilt had smothered out the flames before Sally was hurt at all; and Jimmie had only a pair of blistered hands.

"If I hadn't put a wool petticoat on her, and wool stockings," Grandma kept saying,

while she sat and rocked the whimpering baby. "And if our Jimmie hadn't been so smart as to think of the bedclothes. . . ."

"Not all children have been so lucky," Daddy said in a shaky voice, crouching beside Grandma and touching Sally's downy head.

"But I hadn't ought to have left her with poor Jimmie," Grandma mourned. "If only they had a Center, like at the bogs. I don't believe I can bear it to stay here any longer after this. Maybe we best go back to the city and put them in a Home."

Daddy objected. "We'll not leave the kids alone again, of course; but we're making a fair living and the Boss says there'll be work through April, and then Pa and I can go out and plant seed oysters if we want."

"Where's the good of a fair living if it's the death of you?" Grandma's tone was tart. "No, sir, I ain't going to stay, tied in bowknots with rheumatiz, and these poor young-ones. . . ."

Grandpa made a last effort, though he knew it was of little use when Grandma was set. "I bet we could go to work on one of these truck farms, come summer."

Grandma only rocked her straight chair, jerking one foot up and down.

"One of these padrones," Daddy said slowly, "is trying to get families to work in Florida. In winter fruits."

Grandma brightened. "Floridy might do us a sight of good, and I always did hanker after palm trees. But how could we get there?"

"They send you down in a truck," said Daddy. "Charge you so much a head and feed and lodge you into the bargain. I figure we've got just about enough to make it."

South into summer!

"That really would be a peekaneeeka!" crowed Rose-Ellen.

PEEKANEEKA?

That trip to Florida surprised the Beechams, but not happily.

First, the driver shook his head at featherbeds, dishes, trunk. "I take three grown folks, three kids, one baby, twenty-eight dollars," he growled. "No furniture."

Argument did no good. Hastily the family sorted out their most needed clothing and made it into small bundles. The driver scowled at even those.

"My featherbeds!" cried Grandma, weeping for once.

Hurriedly she sold the beds for a dollar to her next-door neighbor. The clock she would not leave and it took turns with the baby sitting on grown-up laps.

At each stop the springless truck seats were crowded tighter with people, till there was hardly room for the passengers' feet. The crowding did help warm the unheated truck; but Grandma's face grew gray with pain as cold and cramp made her "rheumatiz tune up."

And there was no place at all to take care of a baby.

When they had traveled two hours they wondered how they could bear thirteen hundred miles, cold, aching, wedged motionless. All they could look forward to was lunchtime, when they could stretch themselves and ease their gnawing stomachs; but the sun climbed high and the truck still banged along without stopping.

The children could hear a man in front angrily asking the driver, "When we get-it--the dinner?"

The driver faced ahead as if he were deaf.

"When we get-it--the grub?" roared the man, pounding the driver's shoulder.

"If we stop once an hour, we don't get there in time for your jobs," the driver growled, and drove on.

Not till dark did they stop to eat. Grandpa, clambering down stiffly, had to lift Grandma and Sally out. Daddy took Jimmie, sobbing with weariness. Dick and Rose- Ellen tumbled out, feet asleep and bodies aching. When they stumbled into the roadside hamburger stand, the lights blurred before their eyes, and the hot steamy air with its cooking smells made Rose- Ellen so dizzy that she could hardly eat the hamburger and potato chips and coffee slammed down before her on the sloppy counter. Jimmie went to sleep with his head in his plate and had to be wakened to finish.

Still, the food did help them, and when they were wedged into their seats again, they could begin to look forward to the night's rest. Grandpa said likely they wouldn't drive much after ten, and Grandma said, "Land of love, ten? Does he think a body's made of leather?"

On and on they went, toppling sleepily against each other, aching so hard that the ache wakened them, hearing dimly the same angry man arguing with the driver. "When we stop to sleep, hah? I ask you, when we stop to sleep?"

They didn't stop at all.

Rose- Ellen was forever wishing she could wake up enough to pull up the extra quilt which always used to be neatly rolled at the foot of her bed. Once, through uneasy dreams, she felt Daddy shaking her gently, and while she tried to pull away and back into sleep, Grandpa's determinedly cheerful voice said, "Always did want to see Washington, D. C., and here we are. Look quick and you'll see the United States Capitol."

From the rumbling truck, Rose- Ellen and Dick focused sleep-blurred eyes with a mighty effort and saw the great dome and spreading wings, flooded with light.

"Puts me in mind of a mother eagle brooding her young," Grandpa muttered.

"Land of love, enough sight of them eaglets is out from under her wings, finding slim pickin's," Grandma snapped.

"Looks like white wax candles." Rose- Ellen yawned widely and went to sleep again.

When gray morning dawned, she did not know which was worse--the sleepiness or the hunger. The angry man demanded over and over, "When we stop for breakfast?"

They didn't stop.

Grandma had canned milk and boiled water along, and with all the Beechams working together, they got the baby's bottles filled. Poor Sally couldn't understand the cold milk, but she was so hungry she finally drank it, staring reproachfully at her bottle.

Not till he had engine trouble did the driver halt. Fortunately the garage where he stopped had candy and pop for sale. Grandpa had his family choose each a chocolate bar and a bottle. He wanted to get more, for fear they would not stop for the noon meal, but in five minutes all the supplies were sold.

Rose- Ellen tried to make her chocolate almond bar last; she chewed every bite till it slid down her throat; and then, alas, she was so sick that it didn't stay down.

Grandpa and Daddy talked with others about making the driver give them rest and food; but there was nothing they could do: the padrone, back in Philadelphia, already had their money for the trip.

The children walked about while they waited. It was not cold, but the dampness chilled them. It was queer country, the highway running between swamps of black water, where gray trees stood veiled in gray moss. Gray cabins sat every-which-way in the clearing, heavy shutters swinging at their glassless windows.

A pale, thin girl talked to Rose-Ellen. She was Polish, and her name was Rose, too. When Rose-Ellen asked her if she had ever heard of such a dreadful trip, she shrugged and said she was used to going without sleep.

Last year, in asparagus, she and her parents and two brothers cared for twenty-two acres, and when it grew hot "dat grass, ooop she go and we work all night for git ahead of her." Asparagus, even Rose-Ellen knew could grow past using in a day.

The Polish Rose said that they got up at four in the morning and were in the fields at half-past; and sometimes worked till near midnight.

"Mornings," she said, "I think I die, so bad I want the sleep. And then the boss, he no give us half our wages. Now most a year it has been."

Curiously Rose-Ellen asked her about school.

"No money, no time, no clo'es," said Polish Rose.

The truck-driver shouted to his people to pile in and the truck went on. By noon the Beechams were seeing their first palm trees and winter flowers. Grandpa and Daddy tried to tell the children about the things they were passing, but the children were too sleepy and sickish to care. Grandma's mouth was a thin line of pain and the baby wailed until people looked around crossly, though there were other crying babies.

The truck reached its destination late on the second evening and piled out its passengers at a grapefruit camp. Rose-Ellen had been picturing a village of huts like those at the bogs, or bright-papered shacks like the oystershuckers'. Though the featherbeds were gone, it would be delicious to lie on the floor, uncrowded, and sheltered from the night.

But no such shelter awaited them. Instead, they were pointed to a sort of hobo camp with lights glimmering through torn canvas. A heavy odor scented the darkness.

Grandpa said, "They can't expect decent folks . . . !"

Grandma said, "We've got to stretch out somewheres. Even under a tree. This baby. . . ."

Sally was crying a miserable little cry, and an Italian woman who reminded Rose-Ellen of Mrs. Albi peered out of a patched tent and said, "Iss a bambina! Oooh, the little so-white bambina! Look you here, quick! The people next door have leave these tent. You move in before some other bodies."

"These tent" was a top and three walls of dirty canvas. "If you'd told me a Beecham would lay down in a filthy place like this. . . ." Grandma declared. Rose-Ellen did not hear the end of the sentence. She was asleep on the earth floor.

Next day when the men and Dick were hired to pick grapefruit, Grandpa asked the boss about better living quarters.

"He said there wasn't any," Grandpa reported later.

"My land of love, you mean we've got to stay here?" Grandma groaned.

Grimly she set to work. The Italian neighbor had brought her a pot of stew and some coffee, but now Grandma and Rose-Ellen must go to the store for provisions. They brushed their clothes, all wrinkles from the long trip, and demanding the iron Grandma did not have. They combed their hair and washed. They set out, leaving the baby with Jimmie.

"Shall I send these?" the grocer asked respectfully, when they had given their order. "You're new here, aren't you?" Mussed as they were, the Beechams still looked respectable.

Grandma flushed. She hated to have anyone see that flapping canvas room, but the heap of supplies was heavy. "Please. We're working in the grapefruit," she said.

The grocer's face lost its smile. "Oh, we don't deliver to the camps," he snapped. "And it's strictly cash."

Grandma handed him the coins, and she and Rose-Ellen silently piled their purchases into the tub they had bought. They had to set it down many times on their way back.



Next Grandma made a twig broom and they swept the dirty ground. Mrs. Rugieri, next door, showed Grandma her beds, made of automobile seats put together on the ground. That night the Beecham men went to the nearest dumps and found enough seats to make a bed for Grandpa and Grandma and the baby. Fortunately it was not cold; coats were covering enough.

On the dump Daddy found also an old tub, from which he made a stove, cutting holes in it, turning it upside down, and fastening in a stovepipe.

"I don't feel to blame folks so much as I used to for being dirty," Grandma admitted, when they had done their best to make the shelter a home. "But all the same, I want for you young-ones to keep away from them. I saw a baby that looked as if it had measles."

"If only there was a Center," Rose-Ellen complained, "or if they even had room for us in school. I feel as if I'd scream, staying in this horrid tent so much."

"I didn't know," said Daddy, "that there was a place in our whole country where you couldn't live decent and send your kids to school if you wanted to."

It was pleasant in the grapefruit grove, where the rich green trees made good-smelling aisles of clean earth, and the men picked the pale round fruit ever so carefully, clipping it gently so as not to bruise the skin and cause decay. It hardly seemed to belong to the same world as the ill-smelling pickers' camp of rags, boards, and tin.

Dick lost his job after the first few days. He had been hired because he was so tall and strong; but the foreman said he was bruising too much fruit. At first Grandma said she was glad he was fired, for he had been making himself sick eating fruit. But she was soon sorry that he had nothing to do.

"And them young rascals you run with teach you words and ways I never thought to see in a Beecham," Grandma scolded.

But if camp was hard for them all, it was hardest for Grandma and Jimmie and Sally, who seemed always ailing.

"We've got to grit our teeth and hang on," said Grandma.

Then came the Big Storm.

All day the air had been heavy, still; weatherwise pickers watched the white sky anxiously. In the middle of the night, Rose-Ellen woke to the shriek of wind and the crack of canvas. Then, with a splintering crash, the tent-poles collapsed and she was buried under a mass of wet canvas.

At first she could hear no voice through the howling wind and battering rain. Then Sally's wail sounded, and Grandma's call: "Rose-Ellen! Jimmie! Dick! You all right?"

Until dawn the Beechams could only huddle together in the small refuge Daddy contrived against the dripping, pricking blackness. When day came, the rain still fell and the wind still blew; but fitfully, as if they, too, were tired out. The family scurried around putting up the tent and building a fire and drying things out before the men must go to the grove. Rose-Ellen and Dick and even Jimmie felt less dismal when they steamed before the washtub stove and ate something hot.



The family scurried about, putting up the tent.

Grandma and Sally felt less relief. Sally's cheeks were hot and red, and she turned her head from side to side, crying and coughing. Grandma was saying, "My land, my land, I'd give five years of my life to be in my own house with this sick little mite!" when a smooth gray head thrust aside the tent flap and a neighborly voice said, "Oh, mercy me!"

Then without waiting for invitation, a crisp gingham dress followed the gray head in. "Is she bad sick? Have you-all had the doctor? I'm Mrs. King, from town."

"And you really think we're humans?" Grandma demanded, her cheeks as red as Sally's. "If you do, you're the first since we struck this place. You'll have to excuse me," she apologized, as the children stared at her with astonished eyes. "Seems like we've lost our manners along with everything else."

"I don't wonder. I don't wonder a bit. Our preacher telephoned this morning that there was a heap of suffering here in the camp, or like enough we'd not have ought of it, and us church folks, too. Now I got my Ford out on the road; you tote the baby and we'll take her to my doctor."

Mrs. King's doctor gave Sally medicine and told Grandma about feeding her orange juice and chopped vegetables and eggs as well as milk. Grandma sighed as she wondered how she would get these good things for the sick baby. However, Sally did seem to be somewhat better when they returned. Mrs. King and Grandma were talking over how to get supplies when the men came back to the tent.

"Laid off," said Grandpa wearily, not seeing the caller. "Storm's wrecked the crop so bad he's laying off the newest hired. Says it's like to ruin him."

Grandma sat still with the baby whining on her lap. "My land of love," she said, "what will we do now?"

CISSY FROM THE ONION MARSHES

"Well, I should think you'd be glad to get clear of this," cried their visitor. "Florida camps ain't all so bad."

"We've no money to move, ma'am," Grandpa said bluntly. "It took near all we'd earned to get here, and now no job!"

"This Italian next door says they're advertising for, cotton pickers in Texas," Daddy said, cradling Sally in one arm while he held her little clawlike hand in his, feeling its fever.

"We haven't got wings, to fly there," Grandma objected.

Mrs. King looked thoughtfully around the wretched shelter. A few clothes hung from corner posts; a few tin dishes were piled in a box cupboard. The children were clean as children could be in such a place. But the visitor's glance lingered longest on the clock.

"Your clock and mine are like as two peas," she observed. "Forty years ago I got mine, on my wedding day."

"Mine was a wedding present, too. And my feather beds that I had to let go at fifty cents apiece. . . ." Grandma quavered.

"These are queer times." Mrs. King shook her head. "I do wish I had the means to lend a hand like a real neighbor. There's this, though--my mister took in a big old auto on a debt, and he'll leave you have it for what the debt was--fifteen dollars, seems like."

"You reckon he will?" Grandpa demanded.

"He better!" said Mrs. King.

"Even fifteen dollars won't leave us scarcely enough to eat on," Grandpa muttered.

"But we've got to get to a place where there's work," Daddy reminded him.

They went to see the car, and found it a big, strong old Reo, with fairly good tires. So they bought it.

Grandma had one piece of jewelry left, besides her wide gold wedding ring--a cameo brooch. She traded it for a nanny goat. On the ever useful dump the men found a wrecked trailer and they mended it so that it would hold the goat, which the children named Carrie. Later, Grandma thought, they might get some laying hens, too.

Two days after the Big Storm, they set out for the Texas cottonfields. Mrs. King stuck

a big box of lunch into the car, and an old tent which she said she couldn't use.

"I hope I'll be forgiven for never paying heed to fruit tramps--fruit workers--before," she said soberly. "From now on I aim to. Though I shan't find none like you-all, with a Seth Thomas clock and suchlike."



They set out for the cottonfields
of Texas.

After the truck ride from Jersey even a fifteen-dollar automobile was luxury, with its roomy seats and two folding seats that let down between.

Grandma joked, in her tart way, "I never looked to be touring the country in my own auto!"

Rose-Ellen jiggled in the back seat. "Peekaneeka, Gramma!" she said.

When it rained, the children scurried to fasten the side curtains and then huddled together to keep warm while they played tick-tack-toe or guessing games. For meals they stopped where they could milk Carrie and build a small fire. At night they put up the tent, unless a farmer or a policeman ordered them to move on.

At first it seemed more of a peekaneeka than any of their adventures thus far. They met and passed many old cars like their own, and the children counted the strange things that were tied on car or trailer tops while Grandma counted license plates--when Sally was not too fussy. There was always something new to see, especially when they were passing through Louisiana. Daddy said Louisiana was the one state in the country that had parishes instead of counties, and that that was because it had been French in the early days. Almost everything else about it seemed as strange to the children--the Spanish moss hanging in long streamers from the live oak trees; the bayous, or arms of the river, clogged with water hyacinths; the fields of sugar cane; and the Negro cabins, with their glassless windows and their big black kettles boiling in the back yards.

"But the funniest thing I saw," Rose-Ellen said later, "was a cow lying in the bayou, with purple water hyacinths draped all over her, as if it was on purpose."

After a few days, though, even this peekaneeka grew wearisome to the children; while

Daddy and Grandpa grew more and more anxious about an angry spat-spat-spat from the Reo. So they were all glad to reach the cotton fields they had been steering toward.

But there they did not find what they had hoped for. There were too many workers ahead of them and too little left to do. Tractors, it seemed, were taking the place of many men, one machine driving out two to five families.

Though the camp was a fairly comfortable one, it proved lonesome for the children for there was no Center, and it did not seem worth while for them to start to school for so short a time. It was doubtful, anyway, whether the school had room for them.

Grandma was too lame to work in the cotton. When she bent over, she could hardly straighten up again; so she stayed home with Jimmie and the baby, and Dick and Rose- Ellen picked. Rose- Ellen felt superior, because there were children her age picking into small sacks, like pillow-slips, and she used one of the regular long bags, fastened to her belt and trailing on the ground behind.

At first cotton-picking was interesting, the fluffy bolls looking like artificial roses and the stray blossoms strangely shaped and delicately pink. Sometimes a group of Negro pickers would chant in rich voices as they picked. "Da cotton want a-pickin' so ba-ad!" But it was astonishing to the Beechams to find how many aches they had and how few pounds of cotton when the day's picking was weighed.

Tired and achy as they were at night, though, they were glad to find children in the next shack.

"Queer ones," Grandma called them.

"It's their talk I can't get the hang of," Grandpa added. "It may be English, but I have to listen sharp to make it out."

Daddy trotted Sally on his foot and laughed. "It's English all right--English of Shakespeare's time, likely, that they've used for generations. They're Kentucky mountaineers, and as the father says, 'a fur piece from home'."

It was through the eldest girl that the children became acquainted: the girl and her toothbrush.

Rose- Ellen was brushing her teeth at the door, and Dick was saying, "I ain't going to. Nobody brushes their teeth down here," when suddenly the girl appeared, a toothbrush and jelly glass in her hand, and a younger brother and sister following her.

"This is the way we brush our teeth," sang the girl and while her toe tapped the time, two brushes popped into two mouths and scrubbed up and down, up and down--"brush our teeth, brush our teeth!"

She spied Rose- Ellen. "Did you-uns larn at the Center, too?" she asked eagerly. "First off, we-uns allowed they was queer little hair-brushes; but them teachers! Them teachers could make 'em fly fast as a sewing machine. We reckoned if them teachers was so smart with such comical contraptions, like enough they knowed other queer doings. And they sure did."

Thus began the friendship between the Beecham children and Cissy, Tom and Mary--with toddling Georgie and the baby thrown in. Cissy was beautiful, like Grandma's old cameo done in color, with heavy, loose curls of gold-brown hair. Long evening, visits she and Rose- Ellen had, when they were not too tired from cotton-picking. Little by little Rose- Ellen learned the story of Cissy's past few years. Always she would remember it, spiced with the queer words Cissy used.

They had lived on a branch--a brook--in the Kentucky hills. Their house was log, said Cissy, with a fireplace where Maw had her kettles and where the whole lot of them could sit when winter nights were cold, and Paw could whittle and Maw weave a coverlet.

"Nary one of us could read," Cissy said dreamily, sitting on the packing-box doorstep with elbows on knees and chin on palms. "But Paw could tell purty tales and Maw

could sing song-ballads that would make you weep. But they wasn't no good huntin' no more, and the kittles was empty. So we come down to the coal mines, and when the mines shut down, we went on into the onions."

These were great marshes, drained like cranberry bogs and planted in onions. Whole families could work there, planting, weeding, pulling, packing.

("I've learned a lot!" thought Rose-Ellen. "I used to ask the grocer for a nickel's worth of dry onions, and I never did guess how they came to be there.")

The first year was dreary. Maw took the baby (Mary, then) and laid her on a blanket at the end of the row she was working, with Tom to watch her. Cissy worked along with the grown folks, or some days stayed home and did the washing and minded Tom and Mary.

"I shore didn't know how to wash good as I do now." She patted her faded dress, pretty clean, though not like the clothes of Grandma's washing.

There was one thing about it, Cissy said; after a day in onions, with the sun shining hot on her sunbonnet and not much to eat, she didn't care if there wasn't any play or fun at night; she was glad enough to drop down on the floor and go to sleep as soon as she'd had corn pone and coffee. Sometimes she was sick from the sun beating down on her head and she had to crawl into the shade of a crate and lie there.

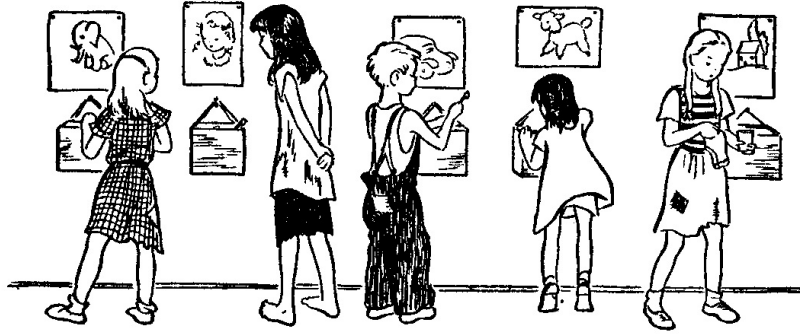
The second year was different. Next summer, early, when the cherries had set their green beads and the laylocks had quit blooming, there came two young ladies. They came of an evening, and talked to Paw and Maw as they sat on the doorsill with their shoes kicked off and their bare toes resting themselves.

First Paw and Maw wouldn't talk to them because why would these pretty young ladies come mixing around with strangers? Paw and Maw allowed they had something up their sleeves. But the ladies patted Georgie, the baby then, and held him; and Cissy crept closer and closer, because they smelled so nice. And then they asked Maw if they couldn't take Cissy in their car and pay her as much as she earned picking. She was to help them invite the children to a place where they could be safe and happy while their grown folks worked.

Cissy couldn't hardly sense it; but Maw let her go, because she was puny. The teachers got an old schoolhouse to use; and church folks came to paint the walls; and P.W.A. workers made chairs and tables; and the church ladies made curtains. The teachers got icebox, stove, and piano from a second-hand store.

Yet, at first, it was hard to get people to send their children even to this beautiful place. They'd rather risk locking them in at home, or keeping them at the end of the onion row. That first morning, the teachers gathered up only nine children. Those nine told what it was like, and next day there were fifteen, and by the end of the summer "upwards of forty-five."

Cissy told about the Center as she might tell about fairyland. Across one wall were nails, with kits sent by children from the different churches. The kits held tooth brushes, washcloths, combs. Above each nail was a picture by which the child could know his own toilet equipment.



"Mine was the purtiest little gal with shiny hair. But it wasn't colored," she added, regretfully. "Tommie's was a yaller automobile."

"Why'd you have pictures?" asked Jimmie.

"I were going on eleven, but I couldn't read," Cissy confessed.

Rose-Ellen patted Jimmie stealthily and didn't tell Cissy that he was going on ten and couldn't read either.

Cissy went on with her tale of the Center. There was toothbrush and wash-up drill. There were clean play-suits that churches had sent from far cities. Every morning there was worship. The children had helped make an altar--a box with a silk scarf across and a picture of Jesus above and a Bible and two candles. They all sang hymns and heard Bible stories and prayed. Oh, yes, Cissy said, back in the mountains they went to meetin'--when there was meetin'--but God wasn't the same in Kentucky, some way. The teachers' God loved them so good that it hurt him to have them steal or lie or be any way dirty or mean. He had to love them a heap to send the Center people to help them the way he did.

After worship came play and study, outdoors and in, with the clean babies comfortably asleep in the clothesbaskets, their stomachs full of milk from shiny bottles. The older ones sat down to the table and prayed, and drank milk through stems, and ate carrots and greens and "samwidges." And after the table was cleared, they lay down on the floor and Teacher maybe played soft music and they went to sleep.

Once they had a real party. They were invited to a near-by church by some of the children of that church. The tables were trimmed with flowers and frilled paper and there were cakes and Jello. The children played games together at the end of the party.

The big girls, when rain kept them from working, learned to cook and sew and take care of babies; and even the little girls learned a heap and made pretties they could keep, besides. From the bottom of their clothes-box, Cissy brought a paper-wrapped scrapbook of Bible pictures she had cut and pasted. Tom had made a table out of a crate, but there wasn't room to fetch it.

"I got so fat and strong," boasted Cissy, punching her thin chest with a bony fist. "For breakfast, Maw didn't have no time to give us young-uns nothing but maybe some Koolade to drink, and a slice of store bread; but at the Center us skinny ones got a hull bottle of milk to drink through a stem after worship."

"Are you going back there?" Rose-Ellen asked.

Cissy nodded, her hands folded tight between her knees. "And maybe stay all winter, and me and Tommie go to school. Because Paw and Maw feel like the teachers was kinfolk, since what happened to Georgie."

"What happened to Georgie?"

Six children huddled on the doorstep now, shivering in the chilly dark. "One Sunday night," Cissy said, "Georgie took to yelling, and went all stiff and purple, and we couldn't make out what ailed him. Only that his throat hurt too bad to swallow; so Maw tied up his topknot so tight it near pulled it out: that was to lift his palate, because dropped palates make sore throats.

"Georgie didn't get any better. When the teachers come Monday morning to tote us to the Center, they begged to take Georgie to the doctor. Maw was might' nigh crazy by then, and she got into the Ford without her head combed, Georgie in her lap. Maw said she never had ridden so fast. She thought her last-day was come, with the fences streaking past her lickety-split. And when they come to the doctor he looked Georgie over and said, 'Could this child have got hold of any lye?' And Maw said, real scairt, well, she did have a bottle of lye water, and somebody might have set it on the floor.

"So every day the rest of the summer them teachers toted Georgie to the Center and the doctor cured Georgie up till now he can eat purty good. So that's how come we're shore going back to the onions next summer."

AT THE EDGE OF A MEXICAN VILLAGE

Cotton-picking was over, and the Beechams tided themselves over with odd jobs till spring came and they could move on to steadier work. This time they were going up into Colorado to work in the beets.

"And high time!" said Grandma. "We've lived on mush and milk so long we're getting the color of mush ourselves; and our clothes are a caution to snakes."

"But we'll be lucky if the brakebands of the auto last till we get over the mountains," said Daddy.

The spring drive up through Texas was pleasant, between blossoming yellow trees and yuccas like wax candles and pink bouquets of peach trees and mocking birds' songs.

The mountain pass between New Mexico and Colorado was beautiful, too, and exciting. In places it was a shelf shoved against the mountain, and Jimmie said it tickled his stomach to look down on the tops of other automobiles, traveling the loop of road below them. Even Carrie, riding haughtily in her trailer, let out an anguished bleat when she hung on the very edge of a curve. And the Reo groaned and puffed.

Up through Colorado they chugged; past Pike's Peak; through Denver, flat on the plain with a blue mountain wall to its west; on through the farmlands north of it to the sugar-beet town which was their goal.

Beyond the town stood an adobe village for beetworkers on the Lukes fields, where the Beechams were to work.

"Mud houses," Dick exclaimed, crumbling off a piece of mud plaster thick with straw.

"Like the bricks the Israelites made in Egypt," said Grandpa; "only Pharaoh wanted them to do without the straw."

"It's a Mexican village," observed Grandma. "I'd feel like a cat in a strange garret here. And not a smidgin of shade. That shack off there under the cottonwood tree looks cooler."

"It's a chicken-coop!" squealed Rose-Ellen as they walked over to it. "Gramma wants to live in a chicken-coop!"

"It's empty. And it'd be a sight easier to clean than some places where humans have lived," Grandma replied stoutly.

So the Beechams got permission to live in the farmer's old chicken-coop. It had two rooms, and the men pitched the tent beside it for a bedroom. They had time to set up "chicken-housekeeping," as Rose-Ellen called it, before the last of May, when beet work began. They made a pretty cheerful place of this new home; though, of course, it had no floor and no window glass, and sun and stars shone in through its roof, and the only running water was in the irrigation ditch. Even under the glistening cottonwood tree it was a stifling cage on a hot day.

They were all going to work, except Jimmie and Sally. It would take all of them, new hands that they were, to care for the twenty acres they were to work. Mr. Lukes said that children under sixteen were not supposed to be employed, but of course they could always help their parents. Daddy said that was one way to get around the Child Labor Law.

So the Beechams were to thin the beets and hoe them and top them, beginning the last of May and finishing in October, and the pay would be twenty-six dollars an acre. The government made the farmers pay that price, no matter how poor the crop was.

"Five hundred and twenty dollars sounds like real money!" Daddy rejoiced.

"Near five months, though," Grandma reckoned, "and with prices like they are, we're lucky to feed seven hungry folks on sixty dollars a month. And we're walking ragbags, with our feet on the ground. And them brakebands--and new tires."

"Five times sixty is three hundred," Rose-Ellen figured.

"You'll find it won't leave more than enough to get us on to the next work place," Grandpa muttered.

It was lucky the chicken-coop was in sight of their acres. Before she left home in the early morning, Grandma saw to it that there was no fire in the old-new washtub stove, and that Sally's knitted string harness was on, so that she could not reach the irrigation ditch, and that Carrie was tethered.

The beets, planted two months ago, had come up in even green rows. Now they must be thinned. With short-handled hoes the grown people chopped out foot-long strips of plants. Dick and Rose-Ellen followed on hands and knees, and pulled the extra plants from the clumps so that a single strong plant was left every twelve inches.

The sun rose higher and hotter in the big blue bowl of sky. Rose-Ellen's ragged dress clung to her, wet with sweat, and her arms and face prickled with heat. Grandma looked at her from under the apron she had flung over her head.

"Run and stretch out under the cottonwood awhile," she said. "No use for to get sunstroke."

Rose-Ellen went silently, thankfully. It was cooler in the shade of the tree. She looked up through the fluttering green leaves at the floating clouds shining in the sun. Jimmie hobbled around her, driving Sally with her knitted reins, but they did not keep their sister awake. The sun was almost noon-high when she opened her eyes, and she hurried guiltily back to the beets.

She had never seen such a big field, its green and brown stripes waving up and down to the skyline. It made her ache to think that five Beechams must take out these extra thousands of three-inch plants; and after that, hoe them; and after that. . . .

Her knees were so sore that night that Grandpa bought her overalls. He got her and Dick big straw hats, too, though it was too late to keep their faces from blistering. All the Beechams but Grandma wore overalls. She couldn't bring herself to it. That night she made herself a sunbonnet out of an old shirt, sitting close to a candle stuck in a pop bottle.



Grandpa got big straw hats for Rose-Ellen and Dick.

"I clean forgot to look over the beans and put them to soak," she said wearily, from her bed.

Rose-Ellen scooped herself farther into her layer of straw. She ought to offer to get up and look over those beans, but she simply couldn't make herself.

"It seems like I can't stay up another ten minutes," Grandma excused herself, "after the field work and redding up and such. But we're getting like all the rest of them, buying the groceries that we can fix easiest, even though they cost twice as much and ain't half as nourishing. And when you can't trade at but one place it's always dearer. . ."

Mr. Lukes had guaranteed their account at the store, because of the pay due them at the end of the season. So they went on buying there, even though its prices were high and its goods of poor quality, because they did not have money to spend anywhere else.

When the thinning was done, they must begin all over again, working with the short-handled hoes, cutting out any extra plants, loosening the ground. By that time they were more used to the work; and in July came a rest time, when all they needed to do was to turn the waters of the big ditch into the little ditches that crinkled between the rows. It was lucky there was irrigation water, or the growing plants would have died in the heat, since there had been little rain.

Rose-Ellen loved to watch the water moving through the fields as if it were alive, catching the rosy gold of sunset in its zigzag mirrors. She missed the Eastern fireflies at night; otherwise the evenings were a delight. Colorado sunsets covered the west with glory, and then came quick coolness. Dry as it was, the cottonwood leaves made a sound like refreshing rain, and the cicadas hummed comfortably. All the Beechams stayed outside till far into the night, for the chicken-house was miserably hot at the end of every day.

"The Garcias' and Martinezes' houses are better if they are mud and haven't any shade," Rose-Ellen told Grandma. "The walls are so thick that inside they're like cool caves."

She and Dick had made friends in the Mexican village with Vicente Garcia and her brother Joe, and with Nico Martinez, next door to the Garcias', and her brothers. Even when they all picked beans in the morning, during the vacation from sugar beets, there were these long, cool evenings for play.

Grandma complained. "I don't know what else to blame for Dick's untidy ways. Hair sticking up five ways for Christmas, and fingernails in mourning and the manners of a heathen. I'm afraid that sore on his hand may be something catching. Those Garcias and Martinezes of yours . . . !"

"The Garcias maybe, but not the Martinezes," Rose-Ellen objected. "Gramma, you go to their houses sometime and see."

One evening Grandma did. Jimmie had come excitedly leading home the quaintest of all the babies of the Mexican village, Vicente Garcia's little sister. He had found her balancing on her stomach on the bank of the ditch. Three years old, she was, and slim and straight, with enormous eyes and a great tangle of sunburned brown curls. Her dress made her quainter still, for it was low-necked and sleeveless, and came to her tiny ankles so that she looked like a child from an old-fashioned picture.

Grandma and Rose-Ellen and Jimmie walked home with her, and Grandma's eyes widened at sight of the two-roomed Garcia house. Ten people lived and slept, ate and cooked there, and it looked as if it had never met a broom or soapsuds.

The Martinez home was different, perfectly neat, even to the scrubbed oilcloth on the table. Afterwards Grandma said the bottoms of the pans weren't scoured, but she couldn't feel to blame Mrs. Martinez, with five young ones besides the new baby to look after. When the Beechams went home, Mrs. Martinez gave them a covered dish of enchiladas.

Even Grandma ate those enchiladas without hesitation, though they were so peppery that she had to cool her mouth with frequent swallows of water. They were made of tidily rolled tortillas (Mexican corn-cakes, paper-thin), stuffed with meat and onion and invitingly decorated with minced cheese and onion tops. They looked, smelled and tasted delicious.

In turn, Grandma sent biscuits, baked in the Dutch oven Grandpa had bought her. Grandma had always been proud of her biscuits.

In July the Mexican children took Dick and Rose-Ellen to the vacation school held every summer in one of the town churches. The Beechams were not surprised at Nico's dressed-up daintiness when she called for them. Grandma said she was perfect, from the ribbon bows on her shining hair to the socks that matched her smart print dress. But it was surprising to see Vicente come from the cluttered, dirty Garcia rooms, almost as clean and sweet as Nico, though with nails more violently red.

The Beechams found it a problem to dress at all in their chicken-apartment. Dick tried to get ready in one room and Rose-Ellen in the other, and everything she wanted was in his room and everything he wanted in hers. Their small belongings had to be packed in boxes, and all the boxes emptied out to find them. Clean clothes--still unironed, of course--had to be hung up, and they could not be covered well enough so flies and moth-millers did not speck them.

"I do admire your Mexican friends," Grandma admitted grudgingly, "keeping so nice in such a hullabaloo."

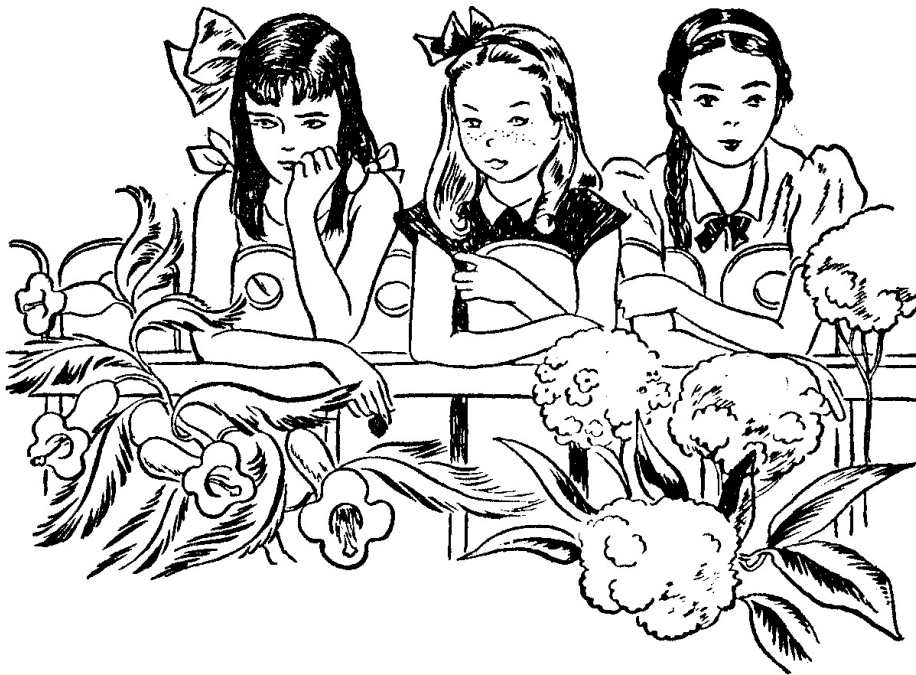
"They are admire-able in lots of ways," Rose-Ellen answered. "I never knew anyone I liked much better than Nico. And the Mexicans are the very best in all the art work at the vacation school. I think the Japanese learn quickest."

"Do folks treat 'em nice?" asked Grandma.

"In the school," Rose-Ellen told her. "But outside school they act like even Nico had smallpox. They make me sick!"

Rose-Ellen spoke both indignantly and sorrowfully. That very day the three girls had come out of the church together, and had paused to look over the neat picket fence of

the yard next the church. It seemed a sweet little yard, smelling of newly cut grass and flowers. Trees rose high above the small house, and inside the fence were tall spires of delphinium, bluer than the sky.



"The flowers iss so pretty," said Nico.

"And on the porch behind of the vines is a chicken in a gold cage," cried Vicente.

Rose-Ellen folded her lips over a giggle, for the chicken was a canary.

Just then a head popped up behind a red rosebush. The lady of the house was gathering flowers, and she held out a bunch to Rose-Ellen.

"Don't prick yourself," she warned. "Are you the one they call Rose-Ellen?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Rose-Ellen, burying her nose in the flowers.

"I had a little sister named Rose-Ellen," the woman said gently. "You come play on the grass sometime, and we'll pick flowers for your mother."

"And can Nico and Vicente come, too?" Rose-Ellen asked. "They're my best friends."

The woman looked at Nico and Vicente with cold eyes. "I can't ask all the children," she answered.

"Thank you, ma'am," Rose-Ellen stammered. When they were out of sight down the road, she threw the roses into the dust. Nico snatched them up again.

"I wouldn't go there--I wouldn't go there for ten dollars," Rose-Ellen declared. Vicente looked at her with wise deep eyes. "I could 'a' told you," she said, shrugging. "American ladies, they mostly don't like Mexican kids. I don't know why."

October came. It was the time for the topping of the beets. The Martinez family went back to Denver for school. The Garcias stayed; their children would go into the special room when they returned, to have English lessons and to catch up in other studies--or rather, to try to catch up.

"But me, always I am two years in back of myself," Vicente regretted one day, "even

with specials room. Early out of school and late into it, for me that makes too hard."

Now Farmer Lukes went through the Beechams' acres, lifting the beets loose by machine. Rose-Ellen could not believe they were beets-great dirt-colored clods, they looked. Not at all like the beets she knew.

Topping was a new job. With a long hooked knife the beet was lifted and laid across the arm, and then, with a slash or two, freed of its top. The children followed, gathering the beets into great piles for Mr. Lukes's wagon to collect.

Vicente and Joe did not make piles; they topped; and Joe boasted that he was faster than his father as he slashed away with the topping knife.

"It looks like you'd cut yourself, holding it on your knee like you do!" Grandma cried as she watched him one day.

"Not me!" bragged Joe. "Other kids does." The beet tops fell away under his flashing knife.

From the beet-dump the beets were taken to the sugar factory a few miles away, where they were made into shining white beet sugar. ("And that's another thing I never even guessed!" thought Rose-Ellen. "What hard work it takes to fill our sugar bowls!")

Sometimes at night now a skim of ice formed on the water bucket in the chicken-house. Goldenrod and asters were puffs of white; the harvest moon shone big and red at the skyline, across miles of rolling farmland; crickets fiddled sleepily and long-tailed magpies chattered. One clear, frosty night Grandpa said, "Hark! the ducks are flying south. Maybe we best follow."

THE BOY WHO DIDN'T KNOW GOD

Handbills blew around the adobe village, announcing that five hundred cotton-pickers were wanted at once in Arizona. The Reo, full of Beechams and trailing Carrie, headed south.

The surprisingly large grocery bill had been paid, a few clothes bought, Daddy's ulcerated tooth pulled, and the Reo's patched tires replaced with better used ones. The result was that the Beecham pocketbooks were as flat as pancakes.

"Yet we've worked like horses," Daddy said heavily. "And, worse than that, we've let Gramma and the kids work as I never thought Beechams would."

"But we can't blame Farmer Lukes," said Grandpa. "With all the planting and digging and hauling he's done, he says he hasn't a cent to show for it, once he's paid for his seed. It's too deep for me."

Down across Colorado, where the names were Spanish, Daddy said, because it used to be part of Mexico. Down across New Mexico, where the air smelled of cedar; where scattered adobe houses had bright blue doors and strings of scarlet chili peppers fringing their roofs; where Indians sat under brush shelters by the highway and held up pottery for sale. Down into Arizona, where Grandma had to admit that the colors she'd seen on the picture postcards of it were not too bright. Here were red rocks, pink, blue-gray, white, yellow, purple; and the morning and evening sun set their colors afire and made them flower gardens of flame. Here the Indian women wore flounced skirts and velvet tunics and silver jewelry. They herded flocks of sheep and goats and lived in houses like inverted brown bowls.

"We've had worse homes, this year," Grandma said. "I'd never hold up my head if they knew back home." Along the road with the Reo ran an endless parade of old cars and trailers. There were snub-nosed Model T's, packed till they bulged; monstrous Packards with doors tied shut; yellow roadsters that had been smart ten years ago,

jolting along with mattresses on their tops and young families jammed into their luggage compartments. Once in a while they met another goat, like Carrie, who wasn't giving as much milk as before.

"All this great country," Grandma marveled some more, "and no room for these folks. Half a million of us, some say, without a place to go."

Dick said, "The kid in that Oklahoma car said the drought dried up their farm and the wind blew it away. Nothing will grow in the ground that's left."

"He's from the Dust Bowl," Grandpa assented. "Thousands of these folks are from the Dust Bowl."

The parade of old cars limped along for two weeks, growing thicker as it drew near the part of Arizona where the pickers had been called for. The Beechams saw more and more signs on fences and poles: FIVE HUNDRED PICKERS WANTED!

"They don't say how much they pay," Grandma noticed.

"Ninety cents a hundred pounds is usual this year, and a fellow can make a bare living at that," said Daddy.

Soon the procession turned off the road, the Beechams with it. The place was swarming with pickers.

"How much are you paying?" Daddy asked.

"Fifty cents a hundred."

"Why, man alive, we'd starve on that pay," Daddy growled, the corners of his jaws white with anger.

"You don't need to work if you don't want to," the manager barked at him. "Here's two thousand folks glad to work at fifty cents."

Leaving Jimmie to mind Sally in the car, the Beechams went to picking at once. Grandma had saved their old cotton sacks, fortunately, since they cost a dollar apiece.

Rose-Ellen's heart thumped as if she were running a race. Everyone was picking at top speed, for there were far too many pickers and they all tried to get more than their share. The Beechams started at noon. At night, when they weighed in, Grandpa and Daddy each got forty cents, Grandma twenty-five, Dick twenty, and Rose-Ellen fifteen.

When he paid them, the foreman said, "No more work here. All cleaned up."

"Good land," Grandma protested, her voice shaking, "bring us from Coloraydo for a half day's work?"

"Sorry," said the foreman. "First come, first served."

In a blank quietness, the Beechams went on to hunt a camp. And here they were fortunate, for they came upon a neat tent city with a sign declaring it a Government Camp. Tents set on firm platforms faced inward toward central buildings, and everything was clean and orderly. They drove in. Yes, they could pitch their tent there, the man in the office said; there was one vacant floor. The rent was a dollar a week, but they could work it out, if they would rather, cleaning up the camp. Grandpa said they'd better work it out, since it might be hard to find jobs near by.

Even Rose-Ellen, even Dick and Jimmie, were excited over the laundry tubs in the central building, and more interested in the shower baths. Twice a day they washed themselves, and their clothes were kept fresher than they had been for a long time. Neighbors came calling, besides; and there were entertainments every week, with the whole camp taking part.

"Seems like home," said Grandpa. "If only we could find work."

The nurse on duty found that the sore on Dick's hand was scabies--the itch--picked up in some other camp, and she treated and bandaged it carefully.

Every day the men went out hunting jobs, taking others with them to share the cost of gasoline; and every day they came back discouraged. Even in the fine camp, money leaked out steadily for food. At last the Beechams gave up hope of finding work. They set out for California, the fairyland of plenty, as they thought.

At first California looked like any other state, but soon the children began naming their discoveries aloud. "Lookit! Oranges on trees!" "Roses! And those red Christmas flowers growing high as the garage!" "Palm trees--like feather dusters stuck on telegraph poles!"

"Little white houses and gardens!" crooned Grandma.

Soon, too, they saw the familiar posters: PICKERS WANTED; and the Reo followed the signs to the fields.

They were pea-fields, this time, but Grandma, peering at the pea-pickers' camp, cried, "My land, if this ain't Floridy all over again!"

"Maybe the owner ain't got the cash to put up decent chicken-coops for folks to live in," Grandpa sputtered, "but if I was him I'd dig ditches for a living before I'd put humans into piggens like these."

"Let's go a piece farther," Grandma urged.

Grandpa fingered his old wallet. "Five dollars is the least we can keep against the car breaking down. We've got six-fifty now."

So for long months they worked in the peas and lived in the "jungle" camp, pitching their tent at the very edge of its dirt and smell.

Shacks of scrap tin, shingled with rusty pail covers, stood next to shacks made of burlap and pasteboard cartons. Ragged tents huddled behind the shacks, using the same back wall. Mattresses that looked as if they came from the dump lay on the ground with tarpaulins stretched above them as roofs, and these were the only homes of whole families who lived and slept and ate in swarms of stinging flies.

One of the few pleasant things was the Christian Center not very far away. Every morning its car chugged up to the jungle and carried off a load of children. Jimmie and Sally were always in the load. The back seat was crowded, and a helper sat in front with the driver and held Sally, while Jimmie sat between. He liked to sit there, for the driver looked like Her! Only short instead of tall, and plump instead of thin, and with curly dark hair, but with the same kind smile.

Here in California the other children were supposed to pick only outside school hours; but the school was too far from the camp and there was no bus. So Dick and Rose- Ellen picked peas all day with their elders.

"The more we earn," Dick said soberly, "the sooner we can get away from this place."

"The only trouble is," Rose- Ellen answered, "we get such an appetite that we eat more than we earn, except when we're sick."

The sun blistered Dick's fair skin until he was ill from the burn; and Rose- Ellen sometimes grew so sick and dizzy with the heat that she had to crawl into her pea hamper for shade instead of picking. There was much sickness in this camp, anyway. There was only one well, and it was not protected from filth. The flies were everywhere. Grandma boiled all the water, but she could not keep out the germ-laden flies. The family took turns lying miserably sick on an automobile-seat bed and wishing for the end of the pea-picking.

But after the early peas, they must wait for the February peas; and before they were picked, Jimmie complained that his throat felt sore. Next day he and Sally both broke out with measles.

Grandma had her hands full, keeping the toddler from running out into sunshine and rain; but it was Jimmie who really worried her, he was so sick. And when he had stopped muttering and tossing with fever, he woke one night with an earache.

"Mercy to us!" Grandma cried distractedly. "We ain't even got salt enough for a hot salt bag, or carbolic and oil to drop in his poor blessed ear!"

Indeed that night seemed to all of them like a dark cage, shutting them away from any help for Jimmie.

Next morning, Miss Pinkerton, the nurse at the Center, came to see Jimmie. She looked grave as she examined him. "If you belonged in the county, I could get him into a county hospital," she said. "But we'll do our best for him here."



Nursing in a tent was a bad dream for patient and nurses. Grandma kept boiling water to irrigate his ear and sterilize the utensils, Rose-Ellen told stories, shouting so he could hear. At night Daddy held him in strong, tired arms and sang funny songs he had learned in his one year of college. Grandma tempted Jimmie's appetite with eggs and sugar and vanilla beaten up with Carrie's milk, and with little broiled hamburgers and fresh vegetables--food such as the Beechams hadn't had for months.

The rest of them had no such food even now. Carrie was giving less milk every day, so that there was hardly enough for Sally and Jimmie. Grandma said she'd lost her appetite, staying in the tent so close, and she was glad to reduce, anyway. Grandpa said there was nothing like soup; so the kettle was kept boiling all the time, with soupbones so bare they looked as if they'd been polished, and onions and potatoes and beans. That soup didn't make any of them fat.

But Jimmie grew better, and one shining morning Miss Pinkerton stopped and said, "Jimmie's well enough to go with me on my daily round. He needs a change."

After she had carted two or three loads of children to the Center, she went to visit the sick ones in the camps for miles around. First they went to another "jungle," one where trachoma was bad. Here she left Jimmie in the car; but he could watch, for the children came outdoors to have the blue-stone or argyrol in their swollen red eyes. The treatment was painful, but without it the small sufferers might become blind.

The next camp had an epidemic of measles, and in the next, ten miles away, Miss Pinkerton vaccinated ten children.

By this time, the sun was high, and Jimmie began to think anxiously of lunch. Miss Pinkerton steered into the orchard country, where there was no sign of a store. He was relieved when she nosed the car in under the shade of a magnolia tree and said, "My clock says half-past eating time. What does yours say?"

First Miss Pinkerton scrubbed her hands with water and carbolic-smelling soap, and then she unwrapped a waxed-paper package and spread napkins. For Jimmie she laid out a meat sandwich, a jam sandwich, a big orange-colored persimmon, and a cookie: not a dull store cookie, but a thick homemade one. The churches of the neighborhood took turns baking them for the Center. Jimmie ate every crumb.

In the next camp--asparagus--was a Mexican boy with a badly hurt leg. He had gashed it when he was topping beets, and his people had come on into cotton and into peas, without knowing how to take care of the throbbing wound. When Miss Pinkerton first saw it, she doubted whether leg or boy could be saved. It was still bad, and the boy's mother stood and cried while Miss Pinkerton dressed it, there under the strip-of-canvas house.

Miss Pinkerton saw Jimmie staring at that shelter and at the helpless mother, and she whispered, "Aren't you lucky to have a Grandma like yours, Jimmie-boy?"

When the leg was all neatly rebandaged, the boy caught at Miss Pinkerton with a shy hand. "_Gracias_ --thank you," he said, "but why you take so long trouble for us, Lady, when we don't pay you nothing?"

"I don't think there's anything so well worth taking trouble for as just boys and girls," Miss Pinkerton said.

The boy frowned thoughtfully. "Other peoples don't think like that way," he persisted. "For why should you?"

"Well, it's really because of Jesus," Miss Pinkerton answered slowly. "You've heard about Jesus, haven't you?"

"Not me," the boy said. "Who is he?"

"He was God's Son, and he taught men to love one another. He taught them about God, too."

"God? I've heard the name, but I ain't never seen that guy either."

"Like to hear about him?" Miss Pinkerton asked.

The boy dropped down on the running board with his bandaged leg stretched out before him. Other children came running. Sitting on the running board, too, Miss Pinkerton told them about Jesus, how he used his life to help other people be kinder to each other. The camp children listened with mouths open, and brushed the rough hair from their eyes to see the pictures she took from the car. The boy's mother stood with her arms wrapped in her dirty apron and listened, too.



The boy sat breathless until the story was done.

But it was the boy who sat breathless till the story was done. Then he scrubbed a ragged sleeve across eyes and nose and spoke in a choked, angry voice. "I wish I'd been there. I bet them guys wouldn't-wouldn't got so fresh with--with him. But listen, Lady!" His dark eyes were fiercely questioning. "Why ain't nobody told us? It sure seems like we ought to been told before."

All the way home Jimmie sat silent. As the car stopped, he got his voice. "Miss Pink'ton, did he mean, honest, he didn't know about God and Jesus?"

Miss Pinkerton nodded. "He--he didn't know he had a Heavenly Father."

"And no Gramma either," Jimmie mumbled. "Gee."

THE HOPYARDS

Through February, March, and part of April, the Beecham family picked peas in the Imperial Valley.

"Peas!" Rose-Ellen exploded the word on their last night in the "jungle" camp. "I don't believe there are enough folks in the world to cat all the peas we've picked."

"And they aren't done with when they're picked, even," added Daddy. "Most of them will be canned; and other folks have to shell and sort them and put them into cans and then cook them and seal and label the cans."

"What an awful lot of work everything makes," Dick exclaimed.

"It was different in my Gramma's time." Grandma pursed her lips as she set a white patch in a blue overall knee. "Then each family grew and canned and made almost everything it used."

"Now everybody's linked up with everybody else," agreed Grandpa, cobbling a shoe with his little kit. "We use' to get along in winter with turnips and cabbage and such, and fruit the womenfolks canned. Of course it's pretty nice to have garden vegetables and fruit fresh the year round, but. . . ."

Grandma squinted suddenly over her spectacles. "For the land's sakes! I never thought of it, but it's turned the country upside down and made a million people into 'rubber

tramps'--this having to have fresh green stuff in winter."

"The owners couldn't handle their crops without the million workers coming in just when they're ready to harvest," Daddy continued the tale. . . .

"But they haven't anything for us to do the rest of the time; and how they do hate the sight of us 'rubber tramps,' the minute we've finished doing their work for them," Dick ended.

Next morning they started up the coast to pick lettuce. The country was beautiful. Rounded hills, soft looking and of the brightest green, ran down toward the sea, with really white sheep pastured on them. Grandpa said it put him in mind of heaven. Grandma said it would be heaven-on-earth to live there, if only you had a decent little house and a garden. The desert places were as beautiful, abloom with many-colored wildflowers; and there were fields of artichokes and other vegetables, with Chinese and Japanese tending them. Those clean green rows stretched on endlessly.

"They make me feel funny," Rose-Ellen complained, "like seeing too many folks and too many stars."

"They've got so many vegetables they dump them into the sea, because if they put them all on the market, the price would go down. But there's not enough so that those that pick them get what they need to eat," said Grandpa. "Sometimes too much is not enough."

The lettuce camp housed part of its workers in a huge old barn. The Beechams had three stalls and used their tent for curtains. They cooked out in the barnyard, so it was fortunate that it was the dry season. From May to August the men and Dick picked, trimmed, packed lettuce; but during most of that time the barn-apartment was in quarantine. All the children who had not had scarlet fever came down with it.

It was even hotter than midsummer Philadelphia, and the air was sticky, and black with flies besides, and sickening with odor. Grandma's cushiony pinkness entirely disappeared; she was more the color of a paper-bag, Rose-Ellen thought.

"But land knows," Grandma said, "what I'd have done if the Lord hadn't tempered the wind to the shorn lamb. What with no Center near here and only the public health nurse looking in once in a while, it was lucky the young-ones didn't have the fever bad."

In August they were all well and peeled. Grandma heated tub after tub of water and scrubbed them, hair and all, with yellow laundry soap, and washed their clothes and put the automobile-seat beds into the hot sun. Then they went on up the coast, steering for the hopyards northeast of San Francisco.

It seemed too bad to hurry through San Francisco without really seeing it--that beautiful city crowded steeply by the sea. But the Reo had had to have a new gas-line and a battery, and little money was left to show for the long, sizzling months of work. It was best to stay clear of cities.

The Sacramento Delta region was the strangest the Beechams had ever seen. The broad river, refreshing after months without real rivers, was higher than the fields. Beside the river ran the highway. The Beechams looked down at pear orchards, tule marshes and ranch houses. Everything was so lushly wet that moss grew green even on tree trunks and roofs. Like Holland, Daddy said, it had dikes to keep the water out.

One day they stopped at a fish cannery between highway and river and asked for work. The Reo was having to have her tires patched twice a day, and slow leaks were blown up every time the car stopped for gasoline. The family needed money.

Peering into the cannery, they saw men and women working in a strong-smelling steam, cleaning and cutting up the fish that passed them on an endless belt, making it ready for others to pack in cans. At the feet of some of the women stood boxes with babies in them; and other babies were slung in cloths on their mothers' backs.

There was no work for the Beechams, and they climbed into the Reo once more and stared down on the other side of the road, where the foreman had told them his

packers lived. Even from that distance it was plain that this was a Chinese village, not American at all.

"The little babies were so sweet, with their shiny black eyes. But, my gracious, they don't get any sun or air at all!" Rose-Ellen squeezed Sally thankfully. Even though the baby was underweight and had violet shadows under her blue eyes, she looked healthier than most babies they saw.

The hops were queer and interesting, unlike any other crops Rose-Ellen had met with. The leaves were deep-lobed, shaped a little like woodbine, but rough to touch. The fruits resembled small spruce cones of pale yellow-green tissue paper. The vines were trained on wires strung along ten-foot poles; they formed aisles that were heavy with drowsy fragrance.

The picking baskets stood almost as high as Rose-Ellen's shoulder, and she and Dick were proud of filling one apiece, the first day they worked. These baskets held sixty pounds each--more when the weather was not so dry--and sixty pounds meant ninety cents. School had not started yet, so the children worked all day. Sometimes Rose-Ellen could not keep from crying, she was so tired. And when she cried, Grandma's mouth worked over her store teeth in the way that meant she felt bad.

"But we've got to get in under it, all of us," she scolded, to keep from crying herself. "We've got to earn what we can. I never see the beat of it. If we scabble as hard as we can, we just only keep from sliding backwards."

Here in the hopyards the Beechams did not get their pay in money. They were given tickets marked with the amount due them. These they could use for money at the company store.

"And the prices there are sky-high!" Grandma wrathfully told Grandpa, waving a pound of coffee before his eyes. "Thirty-five cents, and not the best grade, mind you! Pink salmon higher than red ought to be. Bread fifteen cents a loaf! Milk sky-high and Carrie plumb dry!"

The living quarters were bad, too: shacks, with free straw on the floor for beds, and mud deep in the dooryards where the campers emptied water. Over it all hung a sick smell of garbage and a cloud of flies.

It was no wonder that scores of children and some older people were sick. The public health nurses, when they came to visit the sick ones, warned the women to cover food and garbage, but most of the women laughed at the advice.

"Those doctor always tell us things," the Beechams' Italian neighbor, Mrs. Serafini, said lightly. She was dandling a sad baby while the sad baby sucked a disk of salami, heavy with spices. "And those nurse also are crazy. Back in asparagus I send-it my kids to the Center, and what you think? They take off Pepe's clothes! They say it is not healthy that she wear the swaddlings. I tell Angelina to say to them that my madre before me was dressed so; but again they strip the poor angel."

"And what did you do then?" Rose-Ellen inquired.

"No more did I send-it my kids to the Center!" Mrs. Serafini cried dramatically.

"I'd think myself," Grandma observed dryly, "your baby might feel better in such hot weather if she was dressed more like Sally."

Mrs. Serafini eyed Sally's short crepe dress, worn over a single flour-sack undergarment. "We have-it our ways, you have-it yours," was all she would say.



"We have-it our ways, you have-it yours,"
said Mrs. Serafini.

While the elders talked, Jimmie had been staring at Pepe's next brother, Pedro. Seven years old, Pedro might have been, but he could move about only by sitting on the ground and hitching himself along. He was crippled much worse than Jimmie.

"I wonder, couldn't I show Pedro my scrapbook?" he whispered, nudging Grandma.

"To be sure; and I always said if you'd think more about others, you wouldn't be so sorry for yourself," Grandma replied.

Jimmie scowled at the sermon, but he went in and got his books, and the two boys sat up against the shack wall till dark, Jimmie telling stories to match the pictures. It was a week before they could repeat that pleasant hour. Next day both were ill with the fever that was sweeping the hop camp.

Next time the nurses came they had medicines and suggestions for Grandma. They liked her, and looked smilingly at the clock and approvingly at Carrie and at the covered garbage can and at the food draped with mosquito netting.

"We're going to have to enforce those rules," they told Grandma. "There wouldn't be half the sickness if everyone minded as you do."

That evening people from all parts of the camp gathered to discuss the renewed orders: Italians, Mexicans, Americans, Indians.

"They says to my mother," a little Indian girl confided to Rose-Ellen, "You no cover up your grub, we throw him out!" She laughed into her hands as if it were a great joke.

"They do nothing but talk," said Angelina.

Next day the camp had a surprise. Along came the nurses and men with badges to help them. Into shack after shack they went, inspecting the food supplies. Rose-Ellen, staying home with sick Jimmie, watched a nurse trot out of the Serafini shack, carrying long loaves of bread and loops of sausage, alive with flies, while Mrs. Serafini shouted wrathfully after her. Into the garbage pail popped the bread and sausage and back to the shack trotted the nurse for more.

That night the camp buzzed like a swarm of angry bees, with threats of what the

pickers would do to "them fresh nurses."

Grandpa, resting on his doorsill, said, "You just keep cool. They got the law on their side; we couldn't do a thing. Besides, if you'll hold your horses long enough to see this out, you may find they're doing you a big kindness."

The people went on grumbling, but they covered their food, since they must do so or lose it. And they had to admit that there was much less sickness from that time on.

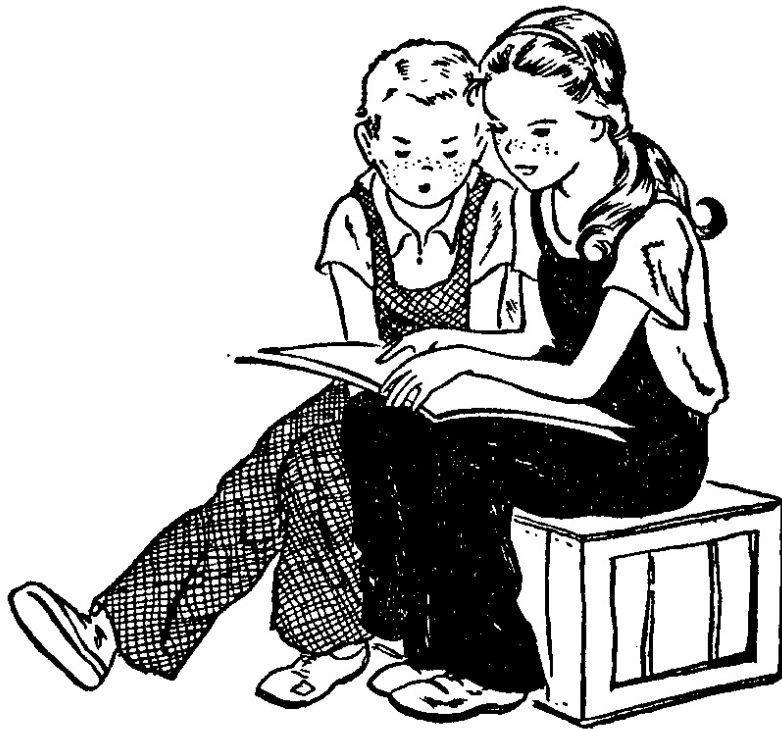
"Foolishness!" Mrs. Serafini persisted, unwilling to give in.

Yet Rose-Ellen, playing with Baby Pepe, discovered that her hot old swaddlings had been taken off at last. Perhaps Mrs. Serafini was learning something from the nurses after all.

"If you could show me the rest of my aflabet, Rose-Ellen," Jimmie begged, "I could teach Pedro."

"But, goodness!" Rose-Ellen exclaimed. "You never would let us teach you anything, Jimmie. What's happened to you?"

"Well, it's different. I got to keep ahead of Pedro," he explained, and every night he learned a new lesson.



Of all the family, though, Jimmie was the only contented one. Most of the trouble centered round Dick. He was fourteen now, and not only his voice, but his way, was changing. Through the day he picked hops, but when evening came, he was off and away.

"He's like the Irishman's flea," Grandma scolded, "and that gang he's running with are young scalawags."

"Dick hasn't a lick of sense," Daddy agreed worriedly. "I'll have to tan him, if he keeps on lighting out every night. That gang set fire to a hop rack last week. They'll be getting into real trouble."

"Dick thinks he's a man, now he's earning his share of the living," Grandpa reminded them. "When I was his age I had chores to keep me busy, and when you were his age you had gym, and the Y swimming pool. Here there's nothing for the kids in the evening except mischief."

"Well, then," Grandma suggested, "why don't we pull up stakes and leave?"

"They don't like you to leave till harvest's over," Daddy said. "But it would be great to get into apples in Washington, for instance. We'll have to get the boss to cash our pay tickets first."

There came the trouble. The tickets would be cashed when harvest was done, not before. Grandma sagged when she heard. "I ain't sick," she said, "but I'm played out. If we could get where it was cooler and cleaner. . . ."

"Well, we haven't such a lot of pay checks left." Grandpa looked at her anxiously. "Looks like, with prices at the company store so high, if we stayed another month we'd owe them instead of them owing us. We might cash our tickets in groceries and hop along."

"Hop along is right," agreed Daddy. "Those tires were a poor buy. We haven't money for tires and gas both."

"We'll go as fast as we can, and maybe we can get there before the tires bust," said Grandpa, trying to be gay.

Jimmie didn't try. "I liked it here," he mumbled. "I bet Pedro'll cry if we go away. He can print his first name now, but how's he ever going to learn 'Serafini'?"

SETH THOMAS STRIKES TWELVE

At once Daddy and Grandpa set to work on the Reo. It was an "orphan" car, no longer made, and its parts were hard to replace; so the men were always watching the junkyards for other old Reos. They had learned a great deal about the car in these months, and they soon had it on the road again.

"Give you long enough," said Grandma, "and you'll cobble new soles on its tires and patch its innards. Looks like it's held together with hairpins now."

Daddy drove with one ear cocked for trouble, and when anyone spoke to him he said, "Shh! Sounds like her pistons--or maybe it's her vacuum. Anyway, as soon as there's a good stopping place, we'll. . . ."

But it was the tires that gave out first. Bang! Daddy's muscles bulged as he held the lurching car steady. One of the back tires was blown to bits. "Now can we eat?" Dick demanded. Daddy shook his head as he jumped out to jack up the car. "Got to keep moving. This is our last spare, and there isn't a single tire we can count on."

Sure enough, they hadn't gone far before the familiar bumping stopped them. That last spare was flat.

"Now," Daddy said grimly, "you may as well get lunch while I see whether I can patch this again."

Grandma had been sitting silent, her hand twisted in Sally's little skirt to keep her from climbing over the edge. "Well," she said, "you better eat before your hands get any blacker. Dick, you haul that shoe-box from under the seat. Rose-Ellen, fetch the crackers from the trailer. Sally, do sit still one minute."

"Crackers?" asked Rose-Ellen, when she had scrambled back. "I don't see a one, Gramma."

"Land's sakes, child, use your eyes for once!" Rose-Ellen rummaged in the part that

was partitioned off from Carrie. "I don't see any groceries, Gramma."

Grandpa came back to help her, and stood staring. "Dick!" he called. "Did you tie that box on like I said?"

Dick dropped a startled lip. "Gee whiz, Grampa! It was wedged in so tight I never thought."

"No," said Grandpa, "I reckon you never did think." Silently they ate the scanty lunch in the shoe-box, and as silently the men cut "boots" from worn-out tires and cemented them under the holes in the almost worn-out ones. Silently they jogged on again, the engine stuttering and Daddy driving as if on egg-shells.

"Talk, won't you?" he asked suddenly. "My goodness, everyone is so still--it gets on my nerves."

Sally said, "Goin' by-by!" and leaned forward from Grandma's knees to give her father a strangling hug around the neck. Sally was two and a half now, and lively enough to keep one person busy. The pale curls all over her head were enchanting, and so was her talk. She had learned Buenos dias, good day, from a Mexican neighbor; bambina bella, pretty baby girl, from the Serafinis, and Sayonara, good-by, from a Japanese boss in the peas.

Rose-Ellen pulled the baby back and gave her a kiss in the hollow at the back of her neck. Then she tried to think of something to say herself. "Maybe they'll have school and church school at this next place for a change."

"Aw, you're sissy," Dick grumbled in his new, thick-thin voice. "If church was so much, why wouldn't it keep folks from being treated like us? Huh?"

Grandma roused herself from her limp stillness. "Maybe you didn't take notice," she said sharply, "that usually when folks was kind, and tried to make those dreadful camps a little decenter, why, it was Christian folks. There wouldn't hardly anything else make 'em treat that horrid itch and trachoma and all the catching diseases--hardly anything but being Christians."

"Aw," Dick jeered. "If the church folks got together and put their foot down they could clear up the whole business in a jiffy."

"We always been church folks ourselves," Grandma snapped. "It isn't so easy to get a hold."

"Hush up, Dick," Grandpa ordered with unusual sharpness. "Can't you see Gramma's clean done out?"

Grandma looked "done out," but Rose-Ellen, glancing soberly from one to the other, was sorry for Dick, too--his blue eyes frowned so unhappily.

Rose-Ellen tried to change the subject. "Apples!" she said. "I love oranges and ripe figs, and those big persimmons that you sort of drown in--but apples are homiest. I'd like to get my teeth into a hard red one and work right around."

That wasn't a good subject, either. "I'm hungry!" Jimmie bellowed.

And just then another tire blew out.

The old Reo had bumped along on its rim for an hour when Grandma said in a thin voice, "Next time we come to any likely shade, I guess we best stop. I'm . . . I'm just beat out."

With an anxious backward glance at her, Daddy stopped the car under a tree.

"I reckon some of you better go on to that town and get some bread and maybe weenies and potatoes," Grandma said faintly.

Grandpa and Daddy pulled out the tent and set it up under the tree, so that Grandma could lie down in its shelter. Then they bumped away, leaving the children to mind Sally and lead Carrie along the edge of the highway to graze, while Grandma slept.



They left the children to mind Sally while
Carrie grazed beside the road.

"I never was so hungry in all my days," Jimmie kept saying.

All the children watched that strip of pavement with the hot air quivering above it, but still the car did not come.

Suddenly Rose-Ellen clutched Dick's arm. "Those two men look like . . . look like. . . They are Grampa and Daddy. But what have they done with the car?"

"Where's the car?" Dick shouted, as the men came up.

"W'ere tar?" Sally echoed, patting her hands against the bulging gunnysack her father carried.

"Here's the car," Daddy answered, pointing to the sack.

"You . . . sold it, Dad?" Dick demanded. "How much?"

"Five dollars." Daddy's jaw tightened. "They called it junk. Well, the grub will last a little while. . . ."

"And when Gramma's rested, we can pull the trailer and kind of hike along toward them apples," Grandpa said stoutly.

But Grandma looked as if she'd never be rested. She lay quite still except for the breath that blew out her gray lips and drew them in again, and her closed eyes were hollow. The other six stood around and gazed at her in terror. Anyone else could be sick and the earth went on turning, but . . . Grandma!

They were too intent to notice the car stopping beside them until a man's voice said, "Sorry, folks, but you'll have to move on. Against regulations, this is."

"We're Americans, ain't we?" Grandpa blustered, shaken with anxiety and anger. "You can't shove us off the earth."

"Be on your way in twenty-four hours," the man said, pushing back his coat to show the star on his vest. "I'm sorry, but that's the way it is."

"Americans?" Daddy said harshly, watching the sheriff go. "We're folks without a country."

"May as well give the young-ones some of the grub we bought," Grandpa said patiently.

It was while they were hungrily munching the dry bread and cheese that another car came upon them and with it another swift change in their changing life.

Two young women stepped out of the chirpy Ford sedan. Neither of them looked like Her, nor even Her No. II--yet Jimmie whispered excitedly to Rose-Ellen, "I bet you a nickel they're Christian Centerers!"

And they were. Sent by the churches, like the Center workers in the cranberries, in the peas and in Cissy's onions, they went out through the country to help the people who needed them. The sheriff, it seemed, had told them about the Beechams when he met them a few minutes ago.

First they looked in at Grandma, still asleep with the Seth Thomas ticking beside her. "Why, I've heard of you from Miss Pinkerton," said one young woman. "She said you were the kind of people who deserved a better chance. Maybe I can help you get one." Then they talked long and earnestly with Grandpa and Daddy.

Grandpa had flapped his hands at the children and said, "Skedaddle, young-ones!" So the children could hear nothing of the talk except that it was all questions and answers that grew more and more brisk and eager. It ended in hooking the trailer, which carried the tent and Carrie, to the sedan, into which was helped a dazed Grandma. The rest of the family was packed in and off they all rattled to town.

There the "Centerers" left the Beechams in a restaurant, but only to come back in a few minutes, beaming.

"We got them on long distance, and it's all right!" they told Grandpa and Daddy.

"What's all right?" asked Grandma, beginning to be more like her old self once more.

"A real nice place to stay in the grape country," Grandpa said quickly. "And Miss Joyce here, she's going to take us down there tomorrow. Down in the San Joaquin Valley."

Next morning Miss Joyce came to the tourist camp where they had slept and breakfasted. She looked long at Carrie. Was Carrie worth taking? Did she give much milk?

Jimmie burst into tears. "Well, even if she doesn't, she does the best she can," he sobbed. "Isn't she one of the family?"

Miss Joyce patted his frail little shoulder and said "Oh, well . . . !"

So Carrie was fastened into her trailer again, and the sedan rattled southward all day, through peach orchards and vineyards where the grapevines were fastened to short stakes so that they looked like bushes instead of vines.

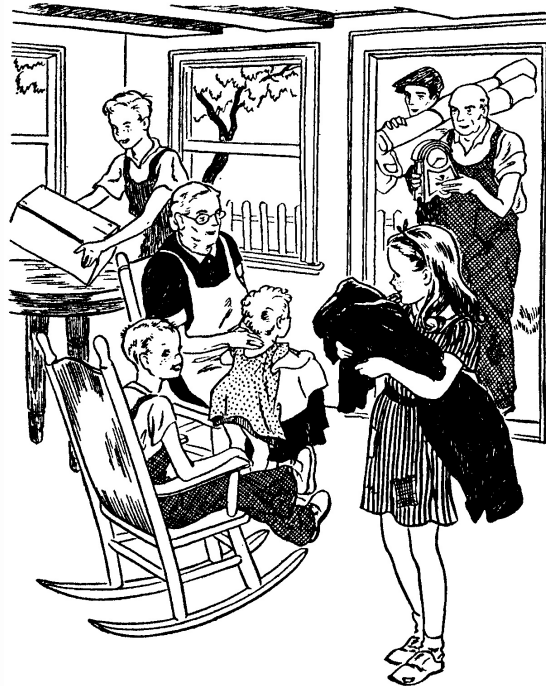
"It's . . . real sightly country," said Grandma, who felt much better after her rest. "If only a body could settle down, I can't figure any place much nicer. Them trees now, with the sun slanting through.--We ain't stopping here?"

Yes, the sedan, with the trailer swaying after it, was banging into a tiny village of brown and white cottages, with green gardens between them and stately eucalyptus trees shading them, while behind them stretched evenly spaced young fruit trees. Before the one empty cottage the sedan stopped. The Beechams and Miss Joyce went in.

There was little furniture in the clean house, but Grandma, dropping down on a wooden chair, looked around her with bright eyes. "A sitting room!" she said. "A sitting room! Seems like we were real folks again, just for a little while. Grampa, you

fetch in the clock and set it on that shelf, will you?"

Grandpa brought in the old Seth Thomas, its hands pointing to half-past three. "Tick-tock! Tick-tock!" it said, as contentedly as if it had always lived there.



Grandpa brought in the old Seth Thomas clock.

The children went tiptoeing, hobbling, rushing through the clean, bare rooms, their voices echoing as they called back their news. "Gramma, there's a real bathroom!" "Gramma, soon's you feel better you can bake a pie in this gas stove!" "Gramma, here's an e_lec_tric refrigerator! And a washing machine! And a screened porch with a table to eat at!"

Good California smells of eucalyptus trees and, herbs and flowers drifted through open doors and windows, together with the chuckling, scolding, joyous clamor of mocking birds.

"I . . . I wish we didn't have to move on again!" Grandma said.

"It's a pretty good set-up," Grandpa agreed. "Good school over yonder; and a church--and big enough garden for all our garden sass and to can some." He was ticking off the points on his fingers. "And a chicken-house, and then this here cooperative farm where the folks all work together and share the profits."

Jimmie flung himself down on the floor, sobbing. "I don't want to go on anywhere," he hiccupped. "I want to stay here."

But Dick was looking from Grandpa to Miss Joyce and then to Daddy who had come, smiling, in at the back door. "You mean. . . ." The words choked Dick. "You mean we might settle here? But how? Who fixed it?"

"The government!" Grandpa said triumphantly. "Mind you, this place is the government's fixing, to give migrants a chance to take root again. It's an experiment they are trying, and we are having the chance to work with them. We can buy this place and pay for it over a long term of years. We've got the Christian Center and the government to thank."

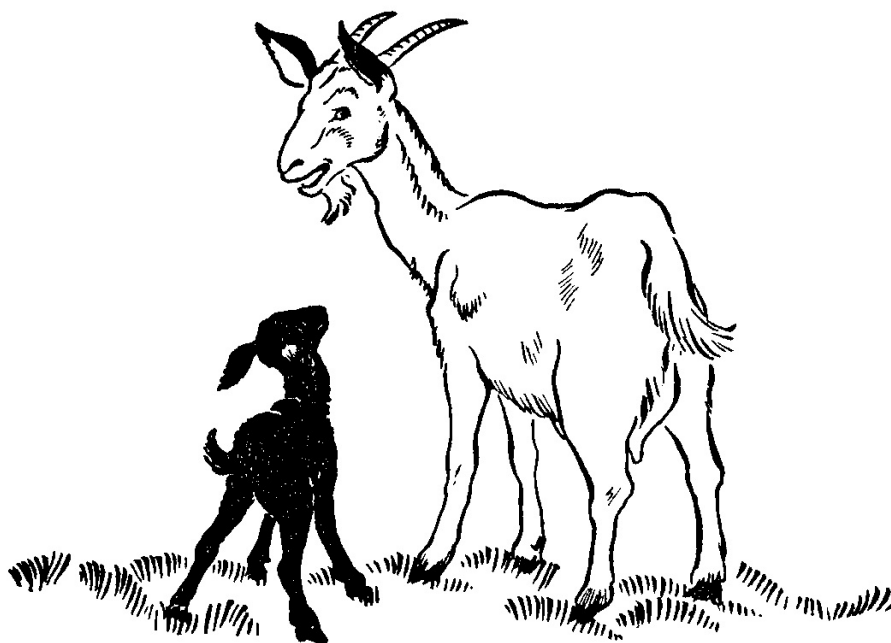
"Why, maybe after a while we could even send for the goods we stored at Mrs. Albi's!" Grandma cried dazedly.

"You mean this is home? Home?" shrieked Rose-Ellen.

"Carrie thinks so," Daddy, said with a smile. "Run along and see if she doesn't. Run along!"

The children rushed past him into the backyard. There stood Carrie, still a moth-eaten-looking white goat. But now she had a new gleam in her amber eyes, and at her feet a tiny, curly kid, as black as coal.

"Maaaaaaa!" Carrie said proudly. From within the brown and white cottage Seth Thomas pealed out twelve chimes--eight extra--as if he, too, were shouting for joy.



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