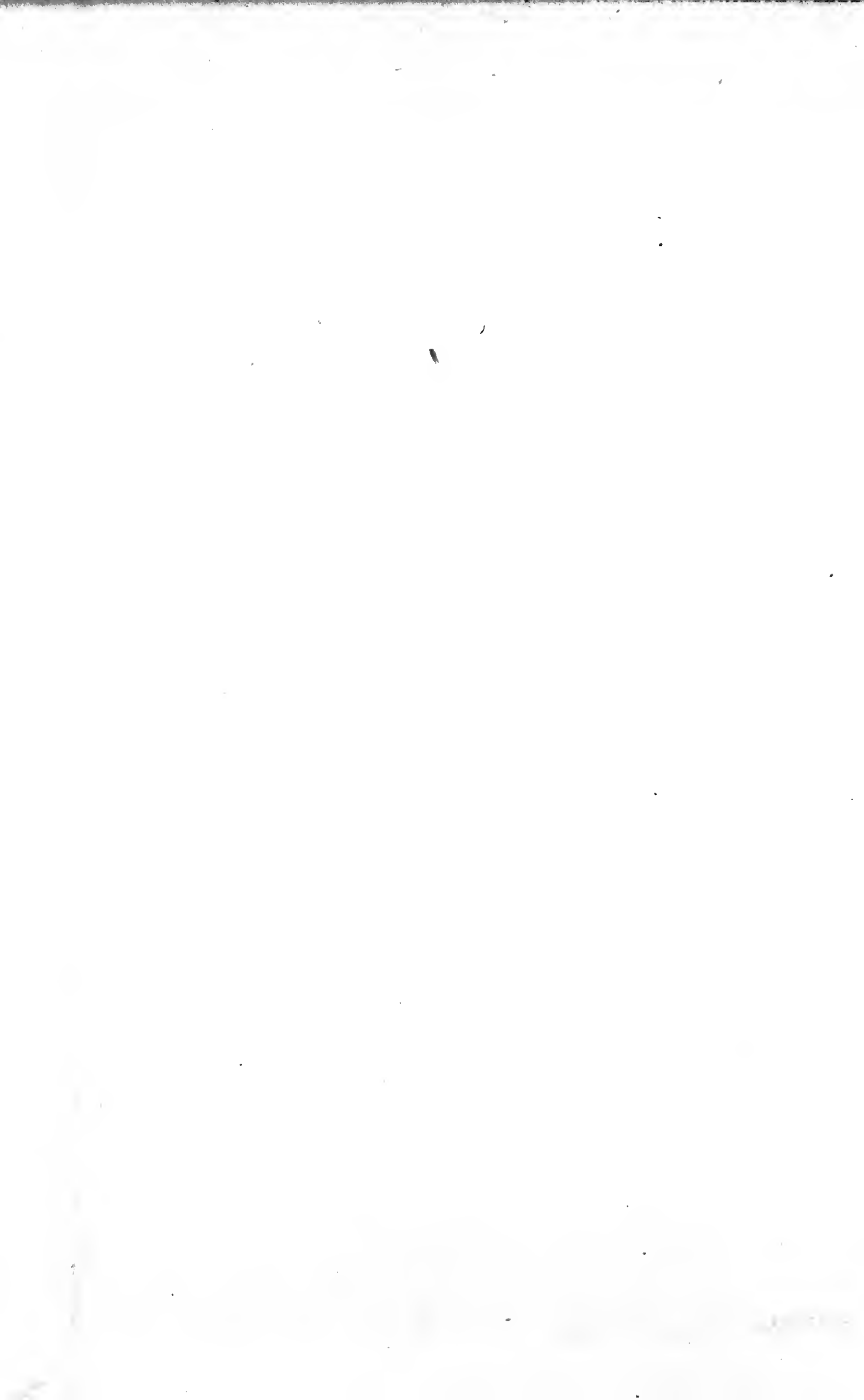
TAKE TO THE HILLS

Marguerite Lyon



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TAKE TO THE HILLS

Take to the Hills

A Chronicle of the Ozarks

by

MARGUERITE LYON

("Marge of Sunrise Mountain Farm")

With Illustrations by

RONALD BEAN

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TO

June Provines

WHO TRANSPLANTED SUNRISE MOUNTAIN
FARM TO THE CITY, I GRATEFULLY
DEDICATE THIS BOOK

MARGE LYON

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED A FARM?

YOUR answer to that question, I am sure, is *yes!* In fact, the Jedge and I have come to believe that America is made up of two classes of people, those who want a *big* farm, and those who want just any kind of a farm.

Throughout the five years that we have owned Sunrise Mountain Farm, we have been amazed at the number of people who had a farm urge! The butcher, baker, doorman, window-washer, banker, taxi-driver . . . all had that yearning for a place in the country.

Their reasons for wanting a farm gave us endless amusement: A place to putter with flowers. Nearer to a golf course. More space for the children to play. A place to keep a dog. Better air! Fresh eggs.

We had to answer the oddest questions, too.

Did we have movies near us? Could we get good help? Did we have electricity? Were the roads good? It seemed to us that everyone wanted a farm without foregoing any of the urban luxuries.

Suddenly, within the past year, these questions have taken a more serious turn! With the world rocking on its heels, with the very air filled with talk of decentralizing population, rumors of mysterious attacks, and vague internal and international complications, people seem to be turning to Mother Earth as the only real, substantial thing left to humanity.

Now we are asked what one feeds a cow, how many

eggs each day does a hen lay, and what sort of income crops one could plant on a farm. The Man on the Street now seems to feel that a farm is the only genuine security if . . . well, if Things get Worse.

This book is not intended to present this matter of city-folks-going-to-the-country in an authoritative manner. Every family has its personal problems that must be worked out in an individual manner, whether it be in the city or on a farm. It just happens that the Ozarks suit us . . . and we get a kick out of talking about our farm in the hills.

Ronnie Bean, who has drawn the pictures, spent considerable time at our farm before he drew so much as a blade of grass. Even the whiskers are authentic.

What you will read in this book—you have my word—is the absolute truth. Down here in the hills, truth may not be stranger than fiction, but in many instances it's a lot funnier! That's why we'll

TAKE TO THE HILLS

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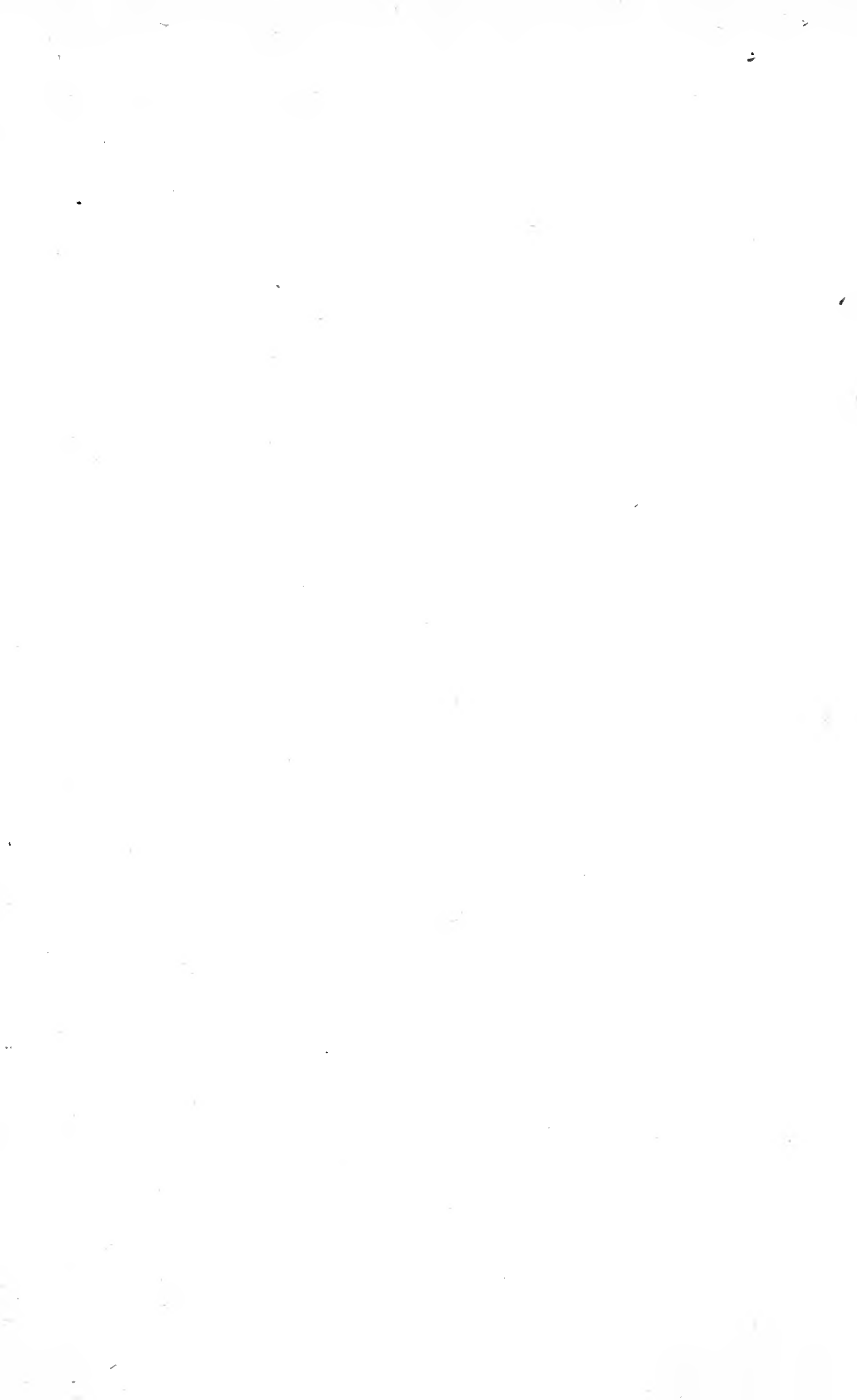


CHAPTER ONE

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

FLAMES race to the top of the great pine tree at the southeast corner of Sunrise Mountain Farm, making it a fiery torch. Then, topped by towering twisting clouds of smoke, a wall of fire moves into the thick underbrush at the base of the tree and comes on with terrifying intent. The tall sassafras pole, topped with a fluttering striped pennant that marks the sixth hole of our golf course, burns like a kindling splinter.

What we have so greatly feared has come upon us. Forest fire!

It is the law of the hills here in the Ozarks that farmers notify their neighbors before they begin to burn off the tall dry grass and dead leaves prior to the spring growing season. But we have had no such warning. Perhaps the fire has escaped from the control of a far-distant farmer. Perhaps it was started by someone who does not care

what happens to the other fellow's farm. But this is no time to wonder where this fire originated. It is here on Sunrise Mountain Farm! And it is up to us to save our buildings and livestock.

With feed bags sopped in pails of pond water, we flail with might and main at the flames as they creep into the clearing of the forty acres on which our home and main outbuildings are located. Tongues of flame are moving across the clearing that serves as golf course, sheep pasture, picnic ground, and our evening sitting-out place. To me, they seem like great fingers, tipped with blood-red claws, grappling onward, clutching and crumbling dry feathery grasses, brittle seed pods, and the brown, tinder-dry leaves of the jack-oak clumps. The roar of the fire is as the roar of a cyclone. Flying sparks sting and burn. Smoke hides the morning sun and burns our eyes. On moves the fire, faster than a walking pace, over a mile-wide front.

So swiftly have the flames come through the forests south and east of our farm that even the guinea hen, that inveterate fraidy-cat, gave us no warning. She's making up for lost time now! The geese are honking and hissing at our feverish activity. Hens are cackling nervously. We scream at one another above the roar of the flames.

"There's another pail in the cave-house!"

"You'll find more feed bags in that hamper in the pantry!"

Then we fall silent, working desperately to fight back the flames.

We have no fire equipment. But even the best equipment would be useless without more water and man power. We have no hose and no way of getting water

through it. At Sunrise Mountain we have only a hand pump in our big well and a windlass in our cistern. The water, even in these early spring days, is limited in quantity. For our fire department we have only the Jedge, now hoarsely shouting commands, Roy, our faithful hired man, Willard Jones, who happened to be here cutting wood, and myself.

At last we abandon the flailing. We find the flames creeping beyond us at unprotected points! We race back to the buildings at the top of the hill, flames snapping at our heels and sending stinging sparks ahead to taunt us. The Jedge looks the situation over! I know he is seeing, as I do, that the barns, with the wide sheep wings extending at each side, will be the first to go, if, or when, the flames reach the hilltop. Twenty feet from the corral fence he puts a lighted match into the dry grass. It is the start of our backfire that will, like a tiny David, go out to meet the Goliath of flames now racing up the hillside.

Already the fire has leaped the rocky ravine and moved on to the giant hickory tree that grows the biggest hickory nuts in the Ozark Mountains. We see the sputtering sparks in the pall of smoke, where hundreds of dry nuts, left under the trees for the squirrels, are now burning. We see the flames move on and ignite the protecting fence around the hotbed. Roy rushes to put a pail of our precious water on it and comes back nursing a scorched hand. He has worked so hard to grow tomato plants bigger and better than any others in the hills. His "incubator babies," we have called them. Now their incubator is a seething inferno. Soon the fire will reach the outdoor fireplace. I measure the distance with my eyes and know it must be stopped here! . . . Or else! . . .

The backfire moves onward. The men watch for even the tiniest flame that dares to burn backward toward the corral fence and pounce on it with moistened feed bag.

I want to scream, to weep, to rage at fate. We've worked so hard for our farm. Must we see our buildings ruined by fire here on this sunny March morning? But this is no time for heroics. The Jedge is shouting my orders. Get the car out of the garage! Load it with things we will need if we have to abandon the house! (Oh, dear God, surely our house won't go!) Put the dogs in the dining room, where we can get them instantly. Where's the cat? Put her in the pantry. Bring out bedclothes! Sop them in the pond and hang them on the wooden fences.

I obey as in a trance! The dogs and cat come first . . . they are soon inside the house. I understand why the Jedge had told me to put them in definite rooms, instead of allowing them to roam through the house as always. In a last moment of panic, they might hide under beds or in corners where they would be difficult to find.

As I put the cat in the pantry, I look for a moment from the breakfast nook windows. The rolling billows of smoke have taken on new fury! Now they have moved into our scenic Stone Terrace Hill, the home of myriads of soft, feathery and furry wild things that have lived secure under our protection these past four years. I suddenly recall the saucy little fox that had trotted into those woods with a flick of his bushy tail toward me and the dogs and a N'ya N'ya look on his bright little face long before Kay Kyser put the words into his mouth. I remember the soft baby quail that had flown directly to the Jedge's finger in a startled moment, and each had

looked at the other with the same wonderment. I think of the possums which climbed the twin persimmon trees at the edge of the clearing each frosty night last autumn, leaving sleekly polished seeds, bright as varnished mahogany, under the trees as a remembrance of their feast. Are they racing, all these little wild things, with their pounding hearts and stricken eyes, before that wall of flame?

"Hurry with those bedclothes!" shouts the Jedge. "Bring out the stuff you would want to take with you! Leave the car at the back gate! I'm going for the sheep! If the whole farm burns, we can drive them out on the highway."

Without a qualm, I tear from beds and chests the treasured patchwork quilts made by my mother and grandmother. Moth balls scatter over the floor like white marbles as I bring out precious hand-quilted satin comforters filled with fine white wool from our own sheep. Out, too, come fleecy blankets in pastel colors, relics of pre-depression days. Roy comes in, grimy and smoke-blackened, to help carry them out. Soon they hang sopping, with muddy pond water dripping from satin bindings and handmade borders, on the corral fence and the gates.

In the distance, I hear the Jedge calling the sheep. Or rather, one sheep. Alice! Alice was a bottle-raised lamb and still answers our call! If she comes, the others will follow.

Loading the car for fleeing is another matter. What, I wonder, does a refugee take? For an instant, I know something of the agony of civilians in warring countries. I, too, have the heartbreak that comes from parting with

beloved possessions, the terror of an uncertain future. I rush aimlessly from room to room. They are so bright and clean, so carefully tended. Only an hour ago, I suddenly recall, I was terribly concerned over the warp of that living room wood box lid. In another hour . . . but I refuse to think even for a moment what might be in store for this house.

In a fury of activity, I seize heavy coats and shoes and stack them on the floor in the kitchen. Sweaters, leather jackets, wool socks go into the pile. I try to think of other essentials. My best dress . . . those silk stockings out of that drawer . . . the Jedge's newest suit . . . and that old brown flannel suit he loves so dearly. I can't take much. We must leave room in the car for the dogs and cat.

The Jedge's steel file cabinet comes next. This, too, must go with us! I wonder about our deeds, our insurance papers! Are they in our safety deposit box at the bank in the village? Why are people so careless about such things? I resolve never again to be so negligent.

As I pass through the living room, planned to meet our own particular needs, I grab from the long china shelves a single red plate. Surely one sentimental gesture is permissible. We started housekeeping with that bright red tea set, unpacking two of these plates from their original wrappings of Chinese newspapers, for the first meal in our new home. I put the plate in the front seat of the car when I take out the next load of clothing.

On my way back to the house, I pick up Ronnie and Barbara, the pet Bantams, and put them with the dogs in the dining room. They are too little, too defenseless, to be left in the path of the flame. Judy is shivering in

That which we have so greatly feared . . .

the warm room. It is the first time I have ever seen this stout-hearted little Boston terrier frightened. Punch, the shepherd, has his head in a corner, his usual thunderstorm position. I shut the door to keep out as much of the smoke as possible and go back to the backfire.

The Jedge is bringing up the sheep, with Alice in the lead, the tinkling bell at her throat a strangely peaceful note in this unpeaceful hour. Roy hurries to close the east gate of the lane before the sheep get to it. Robert (he is my husband and the Jedge I've been talking about) closes the west gate when the last straggler has been hustled inside, and the sheep are left in their narrow smoky haven, milling about and baa-ing reproaches.

With parched lips, aching throats, and blackened faces streaked with tears, we fight to keep the backfire moving forward. At last, a stone's throw from the corral fences and the honeysuckle-covered arch of the back-yard fence, it meets the oncoming wall of flame, and . . . thank God . . . it holds. Unless the fire comes from another front, we have saved our barn and house.

But only a moment of respite we know. The fire moves on the Saunders farm north of us, skirting the big pond and barely missing the tiny building that houses the geese. Then long fingers of flame begin to creep through the grass toward the new jelly kitchen on the hilltop.

Another backfire must be built. Again we flail desperately to keep it from creeping back toward the building it was meant to save. Again the bedding is dipped in the pond and swathed over the end of the building, like a badly arranged booth at a church bazaar. We watch the flames roll through our struggling young orchard . . .

the orchard bought with the money I earned teaching in night school one whole winter in Chicago. Then the fire sweeps on to wriggle like a flaming serpent along the stake-and-rider rail fence at the Saunders farm. But again, a stone's throw from the new building, our backfire meets the wall of flame and holds. Encouraged by two victories, we turn to the third front, the southern boundary of our farm.

Thank goodness, our long vegetable garden is barren of rubbish, ready for the plow! It is our line of defense on the south. But the flames have now reached the forty acres adjoining our Home Forty on the west. We must protect the house from that direction. The fire sweeps through the dry oak leaves. In another moment it will reach the valley west of us. We must save the cabin and other buildings acquired when we bought this forty-acre piece of land, known as the Arnold Forty. We need that big barn and corncrib! And we hope we shall need the funny little unoccupied cabin for many more honeymooners, as we have needed it in the past. Backfires are hastily set and flailing is wearily begun.

Neighbors come at last to help us. Aunt Mealie Saunders, despite the misery in her knee, hurries down from her home to the north of us to see if the fire is likely to reach her home. She has left dear old Uncle Pete, convalescing from pneumonia, in that ramshackle little cabin which would burn like tinder. The Jedge calls to Willard Jones to take another man and go up to backfire around the Saunders' buildings. They hurry away, and we work all the harder to make up for them.

Hour after hour goes by. Time and food are forgotten. Fortunately, a forty-foot stock well and shallow

pond near the cabin in the valley hold water for sopping the feed bags, with which we flail the flames. Pailful after pailful is carried through tangled thickets of wild blackberry bushes and up rocky hillsides, crossed and crisscrossed with narrow sheep trails! The spring, where clear, sparkling, icy water seeps into a twelve-foot rocky basin, becomes an added blessing when the well gives up its last drop!

There are many breath-taking incidents!

Once the outdoor toilet at the cabin catches fire. Roy races up with a pailful of water and dashes out most of the flame, kicking out the last tiny blaze on the charred corner with the toe of his dusty shoe.

It is impossible to stop the spread of the fire. It sweeps through the remainder of our land to the west. Then, late in the afternoon, a tall dead tree, flaming to its tip, falls across the road, carrying the fire to our North Forty. We see the flames scamper up the dry, grassy clearing on the hillside and head straight for the Saunders home beyond.

Our fire-fighting crew is now divided, half remaining to finish the job of protecting our buildings, the other half going up to save the Saunders home. Up there, the men and women (for women too have come to help us) must work in silence. There can be no loud shouting and calling as at our farm. Uncle Pete must not know his home is threatened.

The Jedge tells me to open the lane gates, so he can get the car through without letting the sheep out. He will take the car up the hill and keep it there in readiness for Uncle Pete if the Saunders house can't be saved. As I close the second gate behind him, he shouts orders about

keeping the road clear of fallen trees, so he can get Uncle Pete back to our house. Through the breaks in the cloud of smoke, I see our clothes bouncing on the back seat as he hits the ruts on the hill. Those clothes will be a soft bed in the car for Uncle Pete, if the fire takes his home. But all our bedcovers, I suddenly remember, are still on the corral fences, smoke-stained and dripping wet.

The whole mountain is on fire. I think of the homes of neighbors in the path of the flames, which are sweeping northwest toward the river. None of these neighbors has come to help us. I know they are backfiring to save their homes. At least, I think thankfully, they have more warning of the fire than we had.

We seem to have been in this smoking, blazing furnace for a lifetime. We are bruised, scratched, ragged, grimy, and tired beyond words. But when a person is fighting for the dearest thing in life, home, he cannot count the cost. I lower another pail into the spring and haul up more water. Another fire fighter comes up and wearily takes it away.

At last, near ten o'clock at night, we can see that our buildings in the valley, as well as our home and buildings on the hilltop, are safe. The Saunders home, too, has been saved. Not by a miracle, but by the heroic, back-breaking work of our neighbors. Uncle Pete is told there is a fire in the distance, to explain the smoky air, and has gone peacefully to sleep. Roy takes the car to drive some of the fire fighters home. The Jedge and I stumble along the road toward home, the smoke hanging thickly about our heads in the chill quiet of the mountain night. The darkness of the countryside is punctured by hundreds of tiny fires . . . not friendly bonfires . . . but evil flames

burning dead trees and down-timber that would have made honest, home-warming fires all winter. Every muscle aches, and bruises and scratches are beginning to make themselves felt under thick coats of smoky grime.

We release the dogs from their dining-room prison; the cat is brought from the pantry. The Bantams are detached from a rung on a Windsor chair and taken to the chicken house beside the barn. Before we prepare our own suppers, we go out to feed the sheep and put them in their corrals. There in the lane, among the crowded, frightened, bleating sheep, we find a tiny new lamb, born that day in the midst of sound and fury. He's a strong, sturdy little fellow, with a sooty black face and legs. We laugh . . . our first laugh in that awful day . . . and promptly name him Little Smoky.

Somehow Little Smoky brings us hope and courage. To us, he seems the symbol of Life in the midst of Death and Destruction. Or, perhaps, the promise of spring, gay, frisky, and carefree, after a winter of grief and anxiety. Spring will bring new life to our blackened trees and bald pastures. Spring will bring rain water in which I can wash my precious bedding, now so black and soiled. Spring may even help me forgive the person who started that fire.

CHAPTER TWO

BALANCING UP

I CAN'T call our fire at Sunrise Mountain Farm a blessing in disguise. If that's a blessing, I don't care for any, thank you, either disguised or right out in the open. I will concede, however, that it may have one good point.

Right now, we think more of our farm than ever before. It's always that way when you come close to losing something you own. When you find your umbrella leaning against the remnant counter exactly where you left it ten minutes earlier, or realize that your husband isn't actually in love with his secretary, your affection for umbrella, or husband, always zooms.

Today, I can readily understand the feeling of the Ozark man who, it is reported, returned from a year in Kansas and actually fell on his face and kissed the stony earth of our hills. The Jedge would think me nuts if I did that! But just the same, I see he has taken the pruning

shears in hand and is working among the grapevines. Only a tremendous upheaval in emotions would send him, personally, out to work in anything that comes out of the soil. He knows care is essential for trees, vines, pasture lands, and farm crops. But when any of this work is to be done, he sends Roy, our faithful man of all work, to do it.

Actually, I can't get my husband to repot a tulip plant for the living room without an argument. However, he will spend thirty sleepless nights in succession helping the sheep and their lambs, in the lambing season, or tending a sick dog. Even the cat knows that he will provide unfailing sympathy as well as food. During the twelve hours before each batch of kittens arrives, she expects to lie on the Jedge's lap and have her stomach rubbed.

In this burst of new enthusiasm for our farm, I shall assemble those tales of our neighbors and ourselves that we tell our city friends.

This won't be a book that can be used as a textbook in agricultural circles. We are just two city people who really got that farm most city couples merely talk about!

You know how it is if you've ever mentioned a farm in a gathering of married couples. Whoops! They're off! Every husband, every wife, immediately tells how he or she has been trying to talk his or her mate into buying a farm "for their old age." We've learned to listen for that line when we visit the city. And it isn't limited to our friends, by any means. Bankers, shoe clerks, taxi drivers, policemen, elevator operators, hotel clerks, all wistfully tell us they have always wanted farms, and now, "with things as they are," they "want a farm" more than ever! Sometimes we wonder if every rent-paying couple in the

city spends the non-movie evenings planning how they might buy a farm and pay off the mortgage by raising chickens.

Perhaps some of them make that dream come true. But we don't advise any couple to come fresh from the city and try to make not only a living, but actual cash payments, on a farm. Here and there, a couple may have divine agricultural inspiration. Or the farm they choose may bring in loads of cash from fruit, poultry, or other produce readily marketable. But these are rare. Even men and women who are born to farm life often find the going tough and lose the farms on which they have made a down payment.

Our advice to city couples who really are serious about owning a farm is this: Buy your farm and pay for it out of earnings on that city job. Select your farm out of next Sunday's want ads and start negotiations. In a couple of weeks, you may be a farm owner. Then you'll find that farm ownership is very much like getting married. It's not the original cost that counts; it's the upkeep!

I never recommend that couples wait to buy a farm until they have the money to pay for it. With the farm still a hazy incident far ahead in your future life, the present need of a new fur coat may seem far greater. But when you have to meet a payment on that farm, about which you are already boasting to your friends, and on which you have planted the yellow rose bush or the red maple tree you have wanted all your life, you're quite willing to wear the old fur coat. And some day, that farm, debt-free, may be heaven for you and yours, security for all the years ahead.

If you have a mania for bookkeeping and records, it

will be a comfort in your old age to look back over the expenditures in the years when you were buying the farm and getting it established in running order. If you're like us, you'll consider it a headache that can be avoided by keeping no records. If our lives depended upon it, we couldn't tell how much Sunrise Mountain Farm has cost us in time, money, and effort during the four years we have owned it. Our answer to that question would be "lots." But since amounts of time, money, and effort are relative, what may seem a lot to us may seem very little to someone else with more time, money, or energy.

Our farm has been very dear to us, and we have made many sacrifices for it. We're still making them, as every farm owner does. I have never known any farmer to have money enough to do all the things he wants to do at any given time. He's always planning what he will do "next year." Perhaps that's part of the fun.

Don't, for your own sake, use this book as a guidepost to your own farm ownership. Let it serve, rather, as one of those old-fashioned signposts we used to see at the railroad crossings, when people actually had time to "Stop! Look! Listen!" If your temperaments are like ours, if you are just average folks with a sense of humor, liking animals and unusual characters, and making the most of each day, then you may wish to do as we have done with Sunrise Mountain Farm. If you have a more serious temperament, or a gayer one, then it's up to you to work out your own salvation. And may heaven bless you, my children.

As I write this, I still have my job in Chicago, writing

copy for an advertising agency. We haven't reached the point where we can say that the farm is complete, just as we would have it. My earnings are helping toward that end. I spend every possible week end, vacation, and holiday period at the farm. The Jedge spends most of his time at the farm, with occasional visits to the city to look after business interests. This isn't an ideal arrangement, perhaps, but for us it is a practicable one.

We find it difficult to make any accurate estimates of profit and loss in our farm operations. When we need sheep feed in the winter, we just go get it! And usually we forget to write it down in that ledger we bought at the dime store. When we sell the wool which we shear from the sheep in the spring, and when we send those dear little lambs to market, we often wonder if we have "come out even" on their feed. If our hazy recollections show an obvious loss, we point with pride to the way our flock has been built up by the ewe lambs, on which we place an extravagant value. And we probably add that the sheep required more feed last winter, because the cold weather hung on so long. Alibi Ikes!

It's the same way when we buy chicken feed. We had heard that chickens in the Ozarks will forage for their own food the year round. Perhaps some do. But ours have a way of gathering expectantly around the feed-room door, come sunup, and who could deny them those few scoopsful of grain? Not softies like us, that's certain! If we get an idea that our eggs are costing us too much, we gloat over the tremendous satisfaction of having all the fresh eggs we want, even for such extravagances as angel cake.

As for the fowl other than chickens, each pays its way in some peculiar manner.

Donny, the pet duck, for instance, pays his board by catching bits of bread or grains of corn in his bill when you toss them to him. It's a good trick, and he is never temperamental about doing it for company. In fact, it's so good that we are willing to keep a mate for him, so he will have his own web-footed companion.

The four geese, Cheerio, Junior, and Love and Hisses, have an engaging way of spreading their wings wide, and running on tiptoe in a long line over the mountaintop, like a group of Rockettes dancing down to the edge of the stage. It's a spectacular sight that we would miss if we destroyed them.

Since goose eggs are decidedly strong in flavor, we use them only in cooking food for the dogs, or to send in well-packed boxes to our city friends at Easter time. It's amazing how many city people have never seen a goose egg . . . except on the Cubs' scoreboard.

As a matter of fact, the geese were purchased to become immediate holiday feasts. But by the time the holiday season rolled around, we couldn't have beheaded one short of starvation. And although they are definitely unpleasant by nature, with a habit of twisting a sharp beak in the flesh of an opponent, at the same time flogging the unfortunate victim with stout, wide-spread wings, they will probably be with us to the end of their lives . . . unless one of them makes the mistake of attacking Judy, the Boston terrier, as they have attacked sheep, hens, and even Punch, upon one occasion. The Jedge says the mountain air will be filled with guts, feathers,

and moccasin tracks if that ever happens, for Judy is a scrapper, and she doesn't like geese anyway!

We might make a little profit from the geese if we could pluck them. They have great soft downy shirt fronts of palest gray and cloudy white. However, all the pictures of geese plucking show it as a hand job, with the goose being held under the left arm with his head extending toward the rear and his feathers being plucked with the right hand. We goose owners are warned against occasional "green feathers," which apparently cause the goose considerable pain if one tries to pluck them. I have seen the lengths to which our geese can stretch their necks when doing nothing more than hissing a warning to shy little blonde Bantam Barbara. I'd certainly hate to have one of them under my arm, with his head extending rearward, when I accidentally plucked a "green" feather.

When we bought our sheep, we had visions of killing a lamb now and then to have roast or barbecue lamb. But do we? Indeed not. As a matter of fact, lamb or mutton is never even served at Sunrise Mountain Farm. Not since we sold Johnny three years ago. Johnny was a bottle-fed lamb who had to go to market when he began to take undue notice of those cute little ewe lambs. Johnny didn't have the pedigree that makes a buck lamb eligible to head the flock, but he was a most engaging youngster. He had a fanatical interest in rubber soles. At sight of us, he would gallop across the pasture to sniff ecstatically at the rubber soles of our shoes. It was a sad day when he had to go to market. To this day, when a leg of lamb, dressed up with the mint sauce and other

trimmings that hostesses love to serve, is brought to the table where we are guests, the Jedge and I give each other a warning look. Our hostess must never know that each of us turns faintly ill at the thought that it might be Johnny's leg!

It's not quite so bad with guinea hens. We eat them quite readily, for they are wild, scary things that never seemed to be part of our farm life. However, one of our first group is a farm fixture. She earns her keep at the farm by sounding a hysterical warning on the slightest provocation. It may be a snake in the lane, a stray dog crossing the pasture, a hawk flying low, or a carful of visitors. Her warning is always the same. Once I had come home and built a fire in the outdoor fireplace before she returned from a visit to her nest down in the woods. She practically went into convulsions, calling upon heaven and earth to witness the destruction that was taking place. It's quite safe to say that Speckie will be with us to the end of her days, viewing with alarm each new move we make.

We never eat one of our old hens when we want chicken for dinner. They are like fat, friendly old ladies. We buy hens from the neighbors, and usually they are the foraging kind that have developed muscles like a boxer's through chasing the elusive grasshoppers and June bugs.

Spring fryers are different! They haven't been on the farm long enough to seem one of us. And what a thrill it is to sit down to a heaping platterful of crisply fried pieces of chicken, served with cream gravy, hot biscuits, and garden "sass." Here, we say, are the fruits of farm life, and how good they are!

Once we were prepared to enjoy this springtime treat, but not a bite of the fried chicken was touched. The Jedge unfortunately remarked after he sat down at the table:

"Wasn't this the rooster that always seemed to be saying 'Hap-py New Year' when he crowed?"

CHAPTER THREE

DARK DESPAIR

WE WOULDN'T try to tell you that the the Ozark Mountain region is the only place in the United States where a couple-in-search-of-a-farm should locate. Actually, the fact that our farm is located in the Ozarks is sheer accident. Given our choice of locations, several years ago, we would have said, "Michigan!" Now we feel that our Guardian Angel was right on the job when we were directed here. Although you might point out many obvious disadvantages in living down here, we just say: "We'll take the Ozarks!"

Like other city couples, we had always talked about buying a farm. My grandparents had been country folks, and my grandmother had taught me to see beauty in the low hills around their Iowa home. I had loved the farm animals, even the broad-backed work horses that I rode with my Uncle Irl, and the big shaggy dogs that

never knew a leash. My husband, however, had the typical country-gentleman idea. He didn't, he said, want a place where one eternally grubbed in the dirt! And since I couldn't imagine a rural home without considerable dirt grubbing, our plans had struck a snag.

The depression had lingered longer than anticipated, but we kept thinking it would end next month, or next season, or next year! Then surely Robert could get another really decent job, even if he had to come down to a mere ten-thousand-dollar-a-year job. This silly stuff about not hiring men over forty would be out, we agreed, when boards of directors found they needed substantial, level heads directing sales and advertising. Remember how often this was said back in the 'thirties!

In the meantime, we were doing all right. Our combined incomes enabled us to pay our rent regularly, contribute a bit to the support of certain relatives, buy food and simple clothing, and even put a little money in the bank now and then.

Then came Labor Day, 1935. To the rest of the people in Chicago, it was merely one of those unfortunate holidays when the weatherman does his darnedest. I shall always remember it as the time when I reached the depths of despair.

Just before we started our annual Labor Day trip to the town in Iowa where my parents live, one of my co-workers received a note. It was one of those polite notes, such as bosses' stooges must often write, saying that certain changes in clients demanded certain changes in personnel, and the enclosed check was being given in place of the usual two weeks' notice. This note brought to my consciousness the terrific insecurity of my job . . . or

any job, for that matter. Our happiness, our health, our very lives, depended upon my salary check. What if I should find one of those notes on MY desk next month! Robert was still frail after a severe operation. Even if he could get a decent job, in spite of that ridiculous prejudice against men over forty, would he be able to hold it?

In this state of mind, I flopped into the car and we started for Iowa! At that exact moment the heavens opened and the rain poured down. It beat on the windows, splashed on the windshield, and throughout the entire five hundred miles, oozed a thick, wet blanket of gloom through the ventilating cracks. Or maybe it was my personal gloom that filled the car. I imagined our furniture thrown out in the street in such a rain, water streaming over the tilt-top table with the piecrust edge and my favorite chair with the flowery cover. My wails were loud and long. To add to my misery, I caught a heavy cold! It didn't occur to me, in this orgy of Mental Agony, that it would be possible for me to get another job. Or that I had never seen a move nor heard a word that hinted at the loss of my present position.

Robert invariably reflects my mood, and he developed a fit of gloom that matched my own. All the way to Iowa, in that chilly gray autumn rain, we talked dejectedly of the narrow margin that lies between peaceful security and bitter want. We traced, in imagination, a heartbreaking routine for our future. Here we were with adequate weekly salary, a pleasant apartment, and money in our pocket. By the stroke of a pen, all might be changed. With my job gone, we would watch carefully hoarded pennies go, clothes become unpresentable, shoes

wear out! Then some day, we gloomily prophesied, we would come home from our futile searches for work, tired, hungry, and discouraged, and find our furniture out in rain . . . like this! I often wonder how we kept from driving right into the Mississippi River in such a mood!

But we kept pushing ahead in the rain, looking the Four Horsemen of Poverty, Hunger, Despair, and Loss of Pride right in the eye every step of the way. And we didn't like them at all.

When we reached Iowa, it was still raining. We dragged our weary selves in and distributed clammy kisses among our cheerful, welcoming relatives. Not even my mother's cooking could lift our spirits. But my sister, Lucile, had a plan . . . a plan that she had saved to tell us in person, because it was too marvelous to put into a letter.

Lucile and her husband, Clair, had just returned from the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas, where they had gone to buy a truckload of peaches to sell in Iowa towns. They had fallen head over heels in love with the wooded hills of the Ozarks. They talked of the Ozark region as the Land of Milk and Honey . . . the place where the climate is forever mild and pleasant, where chickens and sheep can find their food the year round, where millions of cords of wood can be had for the cutting, where taxes are too small to talk about, and where you can buy a farm for practically nothing. They were eager, yes, *wild*, to get back there to a farm and live forever in the hills.

In our state of mind, we were push-overs for the Ozark idea.

There, we said, was the answer to our problem of

keeping soul and body together through the coming years. We'd buy a farm, move our household stuff down there, and let Lucile and Clair live on the place until I lost my job. Then, we'd all sit on an Ozark the rest of our lives and let the rest of the world go by! And where it went, we wouldn't give a hang!

CHAPTER FOUR

SO WE BOUGHT A FARM

SUNRISE MOUNTAIN FARM was purchased sight unseen . . . a pig in a poke, if there ever was one. Clair and Lucile had seen this particular forty-acre farm, with a log cabin, cellar, and barn, on their trip to Arkansas. They went back to the owner of the farm, after our Labor Day trip to Iowa, and told him a Chicago couple had given them a thousand dollars with which to buy a farm in the Ozarks. They would, if he didn't mind, like to look at his farm with an eye to buying it. Strangely enough, the price he wanted for his farm was exactly one thousand dollars. So the deal was made. The farm was paid for, since we had told them we would abide by their choice, the deed recorded, and our household goods moved down from Chicago into the log house. We moved into a furnished apartment. On my vacation in June, we went down to see our new holdings.

I'd like to tell the world we fell in love with our farm the minute we saw it. But this is a truthful record. I had recovered from my cold. The sun was shining. My job was secure (secure as any job could be in this changing world). I loved Chicago. I wondered how in the world our Labor Day hysteria had led us to throw our thousand precious dollars away on such a worthless hunk of land and an old log shack. I imagine many a city couple will have a similar reaction when they go down to the Ozarks with their hearts set on buying a farm where land is cheap. They will find waterless uplands, rocky soil, and steep hillsides burning under a hot noonday sun in July and August. And very likely, they will sadly shake their heads and say:

"It is better to ask for relief in the city than to try this."

Perhaps they will be right.

My sister tried her best to arouse renewed enthusiasm in us for the Ozarks. She tried to make me understand that it was a drought year; that I should have seen the Ozarks *last year!* I said I had heard that one before! She would stop the car so we could overlook a wide valley, where the trees were so thick a person might believe he could walk on their tops. But they were not our trees. She took us to crystal-clear, ice-cold Jack's Forks, a mile from our house. It was nice, but it didn't run through our farm. She repeated the tradition of the hills. If you take a drink of water from Jack's Forks, you will always come back to the Ozarks no matter how far you roam. I took a big gulp of water and laughed ironically. I'd show up their lame-brain tradition. Here was one city person, so help me, who was never coming back.

When we drove away from the log house on the hilltop, in the early hours of a late June morning, I leaned out of the car and took a long, last, lingering look at it. I would never see it again. And a clear mental image of a thousand-dollar mistake might keep us from jumping the track again. Home, James! And don't spare the horses.

But perhaps there is something to that Jack's Forks tradition. By the time we reached St. Louis, I had a more tolerant attitude toward our farm.

"We have our choice of two moves," I said, after a long silence. "We can add more land to our farm and make a real place of it, with a better house. Or, we can give it back to the Indians."

"Any self-respecting Indian," said my husband, "would throw that farm back in your face!"

There the matter rested until we reached Chicago.

If you remember your politics, you will remember we had a presidential campaign in 1936. Immediately after our return to Chicago, Robert heard men were needed to make forceful, intelligent political speeches. Well, forceful anyway! He went down to the National Republican Headquarters in Chicago and offered himself as a speaker, at whatever the current rate for speakers might be.

He was, he told them, a farmer from the Ozark Mountains. And since his farm was in the southern central part of Missouri, he would like to do his speaking down there.

He considered it a tribute to his salesmanship and pleasant personality that he was welcomed with open arms, installed in a great sound truck, with a staunch, brawny Swede named Dick to act as driver and engineer,

and headed south with the blessings of headquarters. When he reached Missouri, he learned the truth. He was probably the only Republican farmer headquarters had ever seen. In fact, few people have seen Republican Ozarkian farmers. Missouri is definitely a Democratic stronghold.

But that didn't daunt our hero! He campaigned like mad, his heart and soul in his work. During the campaign he made one hundred and ninety-six speeches in behalf of every Republican candidate from Alfred M. Landon down to the local aspirant for office of county coroner.

Dick would drive their big shiny sound truck into an Ozark town. It would be parked on Main Street or alongside the city park. The mechanism would be adjusted and the power turned on. Then an ear-splitting burst of music would literally startle the swallows out of the chimneys and curdle the milk. The townspeople would think Gabriel was blowing his trumpet. Or that a medicine show had arrived. In a few minutes they would be assembled, waiting for the doctor to come out of the truck with his banjo and start talking about the merits of his snake oil. Instead, out would come Robert, who would square away before a microphone and give the Democrats both barrels. In many places, the portable microphone was a novelty, and the listeners stayed around to see how it worked. Or perhaps they had hopes that Robert's viewing-with-alarm and pointing-with-pride oration was merely an unexciting prologue, and that the doctor with the snake oil would presently emerge to give them some real entertainment. It is Robert's proud boast that he never lacked an audience. He proudly

asserts that he led thousands of Democrats to water, even if he couldn't make them drink.

The speeches on this sound-truck crusade had been scheduled by Republican Headquarters. Frequently one of the county or local candidates would accompany the sound truck. He, too, would give his all in a stirring speech. Very often, the arrival of the sound truck was a carefully planned part of a rousing political rally in the courthouse square. Again, the sound truck would be driven off the main highway, down a twisting, steep little byroad, until it reached a tiny settlement of a store and a handful of houses. By the time three or four records had been played, a crowd of two hundred or more people would have gathered. Robert still wonders where they came from.

Democratic candidates did not take kindly to this magnificent truck, roaring through the hills and gathering crowds to listen to loud, enthusiastic praise of Mr. Landon, et al.

In one town, a group of men walked soberly toward the sound truck when it was halted. One man spoke briefly:

"Get this hack goin'! 'R we'll tip it over!"

My husband replied that he had come there to speak for the Republican party, and speak he would, come hell, high water, or Democrats. He opened the truck door and set out the microphone. He glanced up at his driver. Dick, the big Swede from Minneapolis, had taken a six-shooter from the pocket of the car, and was nonchalantly polishing it with his handkerchief, apparently not seeing a thing that was going on. The men eased back to the sidewalk. The preliminary music was

started. Another group of men walked out to the car.

"We're American Legionnaires, Buddy," they said to my husband. "Go ahead and make your talk. We ain't fer yuh, but we'll see that no one lays a hand on this wagon!"

With his self-appointed guard, and with Dick lounging on the seat of the truck, or casually leaning against a fender, twirling the revolver in true movie bad-man style, Robert told the pop-eyed villagers how greatly this country needed a Republican president.

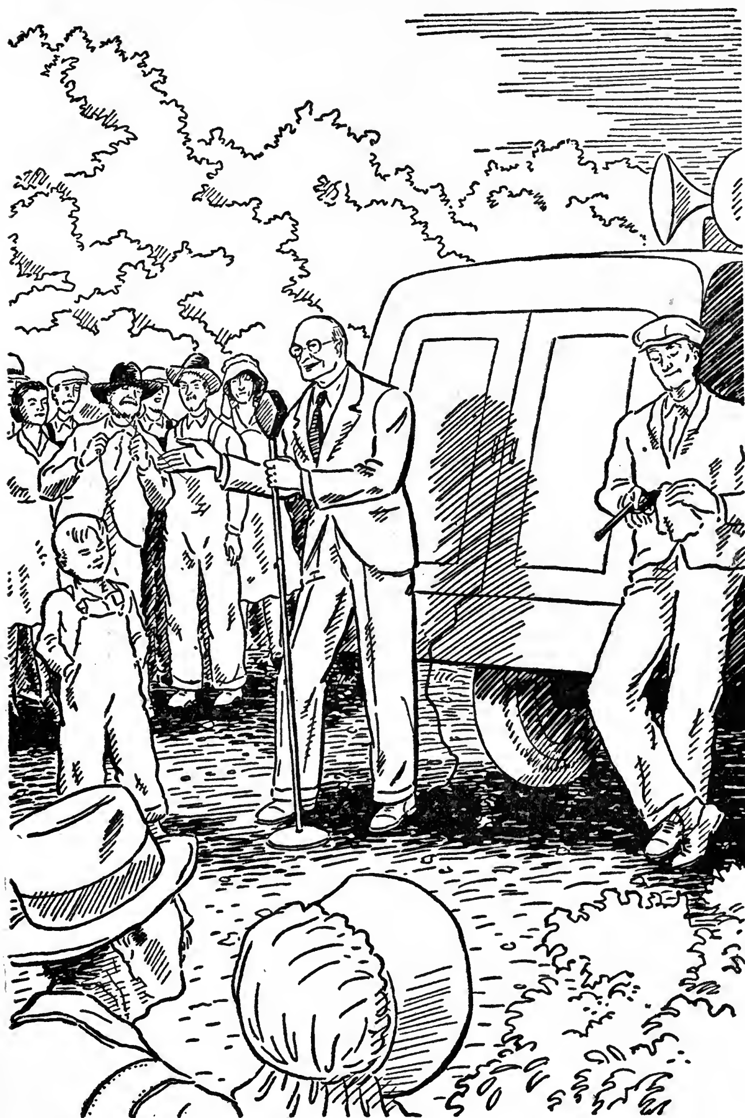
I had strongly believed that the men were "just fooling" until I read the War between the States record* of our Missouri community, written by Colonel William Monks, grandfather of Judge Will H. D. Green, of West Plains, Missouri.

Col. Monks wrote as follows:

> "The writer wants to say that there was not a Union man nor a single Union family left at home, from Batesville, Arkansas, to Rolla, Missouri, a distance of two hundred miles. The writer especially wants to speak for Howell County, Missouri. The rebels took quite a number of Union men from their homes and shot them, some of them being old men. One of them was Morton R. Langston, the father of T. J. and S. J. Langston, shot while he was hauling wood. Jeff Langston, one of the firm of Langston Bros., was riding on the wood at the time his father was shot. I asked a leading rebel after the war why they shot Langston. His reply was: 'He talked too much!' "

When the speaking tour ended, Robert returned to

* *A History of Southern Missouri and Northern Arkansas,* by William Monks. West Plains Journal Co.



. . . speak he would, come hell, high water, or Democrats.

Chicago, confident that Missouri would do her share in sweeping the Republican party to victory. Practically all the Missourians who had drunk in his golden words of political wisdom and prophecy did exactly as they had always done. They voted the straight Democratic ticket.

However, the long weeks in Missouri had done two things for Robert.

First: He had seen the Ozarks at their very loveliest . . . in their autumn dress. He had seen hills so thickly covered with trees that they became great tapestries of crimson and gold, shot through with emerald green, accented with purple shadows, and high-lighted with silver mist. He had seen the glorious pageant of autumn, not as it comes to the city . . . in a sudden wave of dark dresses and drab coats that will not show dirt . . . but with all the glory and magnificence that nature gives to autumn where the earth is uncluttered by humanity. He had been entranced by the Ozarks.

Second: He had earned enough money to pay for one hundred and twenty acres of land adjoining our farm.

No matter what disappointment the political campaign brought to Alfred M. Landon, it brought happiness to us. It gave us Sunrise Mountain Farm.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HAUNTED WELL

LIFE in a Chicago apartment hotel was utterly impossible after those months in the Ozarks. Robert was stifled by the narrow rooms, annoyed by the dirt and roar of the city, and bored to death by the inactivity. Then, too, Lucile and her husband were becoming restless at our farm. The novelty of country life had worn off. They had other plans brewing and asked to be released from their promise to live on our farm, come spring.

Within a week after Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1936 landslide, Robert decided he would go down to the farm in the hills, live in the valley cabin which we had acquired along with our new land, buy some sheep, and get our flock started. At the same time, he could personally superintend the building of fences and other improvements. I would remain on my job in the city, for money was essential to this project.

Neither of us had ever been on a farm in winter, but we had seen pictures of farmers in winter outfits. And Robert remembered vividly how farmers in his native Wisconsin dressed to keep warm when snows were higher than fence posts. We bought him a winter outfit that he could have worn on an Antarctic expedition. Tall boots, lacing to the knee, thick breeches, wool socks (knee length), flannel shirts, wool underwear reaching to wrist and ankles, sheepskin-lined vests, fur-lined gloves, caps with ear flaps, rubber boots, and slicker outfit, including helmet, such as park policemen wear.

It was decided that he would take Judy, then a year old, along with him. Judy had to have a winter outfit, too, we decided. Her regular bed with its canopy top was padded and upholstered like a miniature igloo. She had thick woolen comforters for night sleeping and lighter-weight woolen squares on which she might snuggle for a nap. Her going-away wardrobe consisted of two heavy woolen sweaters, a belted blanket coat, and a set of leather dog shoes that she hated from the moment she laid eyes on them.

The back seat of the car was filled with their belongings when we drove down from the city at Thanksgiving time. We were amazed to find the weather bright and warm at the farm, with the sun shining on still-colorful autumn leaves. My sister and her husband practically split their sides laughing over the winter equipment we had brought down for Robert and Judy. All the neighbors came in to see it. In a region where a sweater is practically the only cold-weather garment added to the year-round overalls, that array was like having the mail

order catalogue come to life. Many had never seen such outdoor clothing. However, in the years that have followed that first autumn trip, all those garments have come in handy at some time. After all, city men cannot endure cold weather nearly so well as dyed-in-the-wool farmers can.

Our autumn visit was far happier than the one in June. We planned immediate improvements for the cabin, nestling picturesquely in a little clearing in the heavy woods that crept right up to the farmhouse lawn. We tramped up and down the hill between the farmhouse and cabin to see how far Robert would have to walk to his meals and how long it would take him. We decided it was a mere appetite builder.

Since I must return to Chicago by train, we drove into town on Saturday to look up timetables. It was our first experience with trains in the Ozarks. I understood then why someone wrote something called: *On a Slow Train Through Arkansaw.* I found that it would take nearly twenty-four hours to get to Chicago, if I took a train at our local station. I would have to ride on strange combination trains that ran hither and yon, making connections at weird hours in small stations.

As an alternative, we learned, we could drive to Rolla, Missouri, eighty miles north of our town, where I could catch the Blue Bonnet special to St. Louis. From there, either the Alton or Illinois Central Railroad would get me to Chicago by dinnertime. This was the plan decided upon, and we have held to it ever since. It isn't at all unpleasant on beautiful spring mornings, but many times a bridge is out, heavy rains have flooded the "hollers," or

the WPA workers have moved in on the road, necessitating detours of five to fifty miles. And since we must allow time for breakfast at the hotel in Rolla before catching the train at eight-ten A.M., it means leaving the farmhouse long before dawn.

It seemed indeed a long trip, and a sad one, when I came back to Chicago, leaving Robert and Judy at the farm. But money was needed for our farm improvements.

The cost of making the cabin comfortable for our city tenderfeet, man and dog, was around $125. A sound new hardwood floor was put in, along with sliding windows and glass door. Walls and ceiling were lined with Celotex. A double bed, grass rugs, a set of sea-grass furniture, and big desk made the room comfortable. A small sheet-iron wood-burning stove gave excellent heat and endless amusement. Heat waves reflected from its fat sides in the sunlight made it appear to be dancing a merry jig every time the fire was replenished.

It was a busy winter at the farm. Fence posts were cut from the woods on our farm at the cost of two cents each for the cutting. Corner posts, stout enough for the cornerstone of a skyscraper, were ten cents apiece. Just how many it took, we never recorded. A "lot of them," we would say, for the entire farm was fenced and cross-fenced, with the exception of the eastern boundary. On that side, a brush fence, common in the Ozarks, was retained to separate our land from the farm of Ambrose Thomas. This brush fence was burned to the last twig in our recent forest fire.

In addition to fence building, repairing the cabin, and

fixing up the barn, Robert had his first experience with sheep. Early in January, he bought the twenty-five ewes and the ram that formed the nucleus of the flock which is our pride today.

But the Thrill of the Season, Robert will tell you, was the Haunted Well at the cabin.

In the Ozark Mountains there is widespread belief in witches and ghosts. Even quite strong-minded people will tell you that a horse's hoofs can be heard walking down a certain Ozark church aisle in the dead of night, after which a body can be heard to drop from the horse's back, before the altar. Then the horse can be heard to amble slowly down the aisle and out of the church. Yet no one can see either the horse or its burden. Tom Moore's *Mysterious Legends of the Ozarks** relates this story and many more hair-raisers.

Naturally we scoffed at such things. But when strange sounds began to come from the deep well at the cabin, Robert began to wonder if perhaps he hadn't been too brash.

The cabin well was not used for drinking purposes. The spring near by supplied fresh, crystal-clear drinking water. The well from which the sounds issued was simply a forty-foot hole in the earth located at the very edge of a shallow pond, which held a thick growth of cattails and bulrushes, and from which the well was filled as the pond overflowed. Due to the heavy fall rains, the well was filled to the top when Robert and Judy took possession of the cabin. A substantial platform of boards was laid

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* *Mysterious Tales and Legends of the Ozarks,* by Tom Moore. Dorrance and Company.

across the top of the well to keep the dog from falling into the water, but nothing could keep out the strange, unearthly sound that came out of the well regularly as the hours rolled around. It would start with a low, throaty gurgle, then rise to a piercing crescendo, and end with a shattering shower of notes, sounding for all the world like a woman's wild, hysterical laughter.

Once each hour, day and night, that nerve-shaking cry broke the stillness of our Ozark valley. It was not like the croak of a frog. It was louder and fiercer than the whistle or drumming of any insect. It could not have been a bird or beast, for water came to the top of the well. The boards were disarranged time after time in an effort to find the "laugher."

One night, Robert was returning to the house with the dog at his heels and his gun under his arm after investigating a strange sound at the sheep barns. He was within a few feet of the Haunted Well when the sound poured forth in all its fury. The dog cowered and shivered. Without hesitation, Robert lifted his gun and sent a full charge of buckshot plunk into the well and its covering. The sound ceased instantly.

"There, Judy," said Robert, "we're through with that."

But this proved only wishful thinking! In another hour, the loud, ringing laughterlike cry was heard again. Actually, the source of that cry was never determined.

We delight in telling our guests this tale of the Haunted Well. It is fun to lead them on to various speculations as to the origin of the cry, as we sit around the fireplace in the cheerful farmhouse living room. Then when we see

them off to the guest cottage, flashlight in hand, we always say:

"Oh, we forgot to mention something! The Haunted Well is just at the corner of your cottage. But don't be nervous if you hear the witch laughing. She won't hurt you!"

CHAPTER SIX

LAMBIN' TIME

WHEN Robert decided to buy sheep, he began talking to farmers throughout the neighborhood, asking questions about care and feeding. No two farmers agreed on anything, except that sheep eat grass. And then they couldn't agree on the kind of grass or the quantity. This meager information, Robert decided, was not only worthless, but downright harmful. He remembered the old gag about "writing to your congressman." Therefore, he sat himself down and wrote to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., asking for literature on sheep raising. The response was speedy and highly gratifying. Many of the leaflets were free; some cost a few cents. All were well written, practical in application, and extremely wide in scope. In fact, these booklets have been an infallible guide.

Considering that Robert has disapproved of practically everything else that has come out of Washington

since the New Deal's beginning, he is often twitted about his respect for these government leaflets. He invariably replies that they were probably written back in Mr. Hoover's administration.

When Robert felt that he had absorbed enough information about sheep to try his hand with them, he went to a farm several miles away to look at some reported for sale. He found they measured up to what the government leaflets had said about ordinary, mixed-breed animals, and, with their owner, he went into the house to dicker about the price in true Ozark fashion. The farmer's wife was mixing a batch of biscuits. Robert was introduced to her, and she was told that he had come to buy their sheep. The woman promptly put dough-covered hands over her face and burst into tears. The farmer apologized for her behavior, telling my husband that many of the sheep had been bottle-raised and were pets that would come at her call. Robert listened in open-mouthed amazement. To him, the sheep had seemed mere animated hunks of wool, and there wasn't a line in the books that told him one actually grew to love the beasts. He stood by while the farmer tried to comfort the weeping woman. Obviously, greatly embarrassed, the husband patted his wife's shoulder and told her that it would be better to sell the sheep because the drought had ruined their crops and they had no money to buy feed, whereas "this city feller" had good barns for them and was in a position to buy good feed for them! It was like arguing with a mother that the rich man in the next block should be allowed to adopt her child because he might give the youngster a better education. The woman retired to another room, still weeping.

Months later, this farmer and his wife came to our house, dressed in good clothes and driving a good car. They had come to tell us that the cash we had paid for the sheep had enabled them to buy a used car and take up a country route selling vanilla, spices, and supplies for other country household needs. It had been a paying venture from the start, and a happy one, too. The wife was literally having the time of her life, visiting farm homes throughout her husband's territory.

That tearful moment, however, had established forever Robert's own feeling toward sheep. They could never again be just dumb, silly animals to him. Hadn't someone loved them?

When the sheep, looking very much like the assorted breeds of dogs in a city dog pound, were delivered by truck to the farm, Robert took them over as a sacred trust. He promptly gave them individual names. The Duchess, that was the sheep with the haughty manner. Lola, the one with beautiful eyes. "Like eyes of a chorus girl," said Robert. Old Haggy, that was the shaggy, unlovely one. Pride of the Hills, that was the main bell sheep. Frieda, Jeanie—I didn't know my husband knew so many girls.

One big sheep with a determined manner and long, silky wool was named Orrena. Orrena is my middle name. Robert says to this day that he gave her that name because her long wool reminded him of the long hair I had when he first met me. But sometimes I wonder if her manner wasn't responsible. At any rate, Orrena has turned out to be a star of the flock. For three successive years, she gave us strong, sturdy daughters who have her same assured calmness and long silky wool. This spring,

Orrena's lamb is a fine buck, the son of a pedigreed Shropshire ram. Although his blood is not the bluest of the blue, he will be raised to maturity and passed on to someone who wants a really good ram.

The five sheep bells that came with the flock are genuine Scottish sheep bells, each with its distinctive tone. They sound alike to me, but Robert can sit in the living room and say, when he hears a sheep bell tinkling in the lane, "That's Merribelle, bringing up her lamb for a special handout!"

Sure enough. A crafty ewe and a big buck lamb will be baa-ing at the back gate, impatiently waiting for a late afternoon lunch of grain.

The ram was named Dempsey.

Dempsey was quite a character. He had a goatlike appearance and a disposition to match. It was a great surprise to Robert to find that rams really bunt, just as in the funny papers. And it was a greater surprise to find that a ram would bunt *him*. Vicious dogs may bite others, but they never lay a tooth on Robert. They fawn on him as though trying to tell him how misunderstood they are. But Dempsey was different. He would watch out of the corner of his eye until Robert's back was turned, then quicker than a wink give him a bunt that would send him winding. Usually Robert was able to ward off these attacks by the simple process of never turning his back on the gentleman.

But one day he forgot to be cautious.

When the fence around the Turner Forty was finished, Robert decided it would be a good idea to put the sheep up there to crop the early spring grass. However, the sheep simply refused to enter the new gate. They would

go up to it, turn, and go back to the feeding grounds with which they were familiar. At last, Robert hit on the plan of coaxing them through the gate. He went back to the barn, picked up an armload of lespedeza hay, and carried it toward the gate. The sheep fell into line behind him. Possibly they wanted the hay. Probably, like all the other mountain natives, they were "jist a-wonderin' what that dang fool city feller was a-goin' to do next."

They followed him patiently for considerable distance. He had almost reached the gate, when Dempsey apparently decided he had been kidded long enough. He stepped out of line, lowered his head, and without even a gentlemanly bleat of warning, charged at Robert, hitting him just at the knees. Robert went sprawling on his face, and the hay was scattered far and wide. Dempsey, taking no notice of his fallen shepherd, fell to eating the scattered hay.

But that was the last clean hit Dempsey ever scored. Judy had seen this affront to her master. Some long dormant instinct was aroused in her loyal little heart. Boston terriers are descendants of the dogs used in England years ago as "bull baiters." They harassed the bulls by biting their tender noses instead of their tough legs, as other dogs did.

The next time Dempsey lowered his head and started for Robert, Judy flew at him like a sleek little hornet and bit his nose. Robert praised and petted her. Thereafter, whenever he was working among the sheep he would say, "Judy! Watch Dempsey!"

He could then turn his back and attend to his work without fear of a knockdown bunt. Even the most bel-

. . . one day he forgot to be cautious.

ligerent ram can't get up much interest in bunting when a little four-legged, lightning-fast whirlwind darts in and bites his tender nose every time he lowers his head for a socko.

Along in February the lambs began to come! Orrena's was first, a big ewe baby that was promptly named Orrena II. There were big lambs, little lambs, white lambs, and spotted lambs. Motherhood was rampant. Maternity wards were built in the snug, warm barn, and each new baby and his mother had a private room for several days before they were turned into the flock. The weather was mild and pleasant that first winter, and the flock, with the exception of the newest arrivals and their mothers, went out on range each day. Around four o'clock, they would be brought up to the barn for feeding. Then they would browse on a hillside south of the barn for an hour or so before returning to the barn for the night.

One night, a big mother ewe returned from such a browse without her baby lamb. Robert spoke sternly to her, ordering her to get right back out to that pasture and bring in that baby. She simply went over to her accustomed spot and flopped with the air of one too weary to be bothered by minor details such as lambs! Robert was scandalized. He hadn't expected such faithlessness in a mother sheep. The government book hadn't told him that would happen.

He went out in the wintry twilight to look for the baby.

Although a comparatively new shepherd, Robert had learned that a mother sheep will park her baby beside a

log or rock when the youngster becomes tired. He takes a nap while she grazes over a wide area. Later she will call to the lamb, who answers and meets her halfway in a headlong dash. Or the mother will come back to the baby and give him a come-on shove.

Just where the ewe had parked the lost baby was definitely problematical. A tracer of lost lambs was needed, rather than a shepherd of decidedly amateur standing. The hillside where the sheep had been grazing was wide and steep. The valley where she might have taken him was carpeted knee deep with dead leaves. Dozens of fallen trees, stumps, and rocks seemed made to order as hiding places for a baby lamb. Robert searched until darkness fell. He went into the cabin, built a fire, heated water, and perked a pot of coffee. Taking his flashlight, he went out into the cold winter night, tramping up and down through the leaves, peering behind stumps and rocks for a shivering lost lambie.

At best, it was only eight dollars' worth of lamb chops that he was seeking. But that never occurred to him. He was thinking only of the fright and cold the little fellow must be enduring. The search went on, with intermittent trips back to the cabin to keep the fire going. At last, at three o'clock in the morning, he found him. He was curled up in a tight, little woolly ball behind a fallen tree trunk. Robert picked him up and carried him into the house in his arms, soothingly saying:

"Poor little tyke! Your silly mother left you at the depot."

Inside the cabin, Robert gave the little fellow a bottleful of warm milk and wrapped him in a steaming hot

towel until he was warm and alert. Then he put him into a cozy boxful of warm hay which he hastily retrieved from the barn.

Next morning, he took the lamb out to his faithless mother. But she made it quite plain that she was through with babies . . . at least for that year. She would have nothing to do with her offspring, pretending that he was a stranger taking improper liberties, and told him off in sheep language, good and proper!

So little lost Johnny became Robert's first bottle-fed lamb. In a few days, another mother sheep refused to acknowledge her new-born twin ewes. She must have had her heart set on a boy! The twin little girl lambs were named Raye and Alice, after the twin daughters of Chicago friends.

While the little ewe twins were still very young, my sister snapped a photograph of Robert holding them in his arms and sent it to me in Chicago. He had a strangely familiar harassed expression on his face. Suddenly I recalled where I had seen that look before. Why, it was exactly the way our friends had looked when taking care of their twin daughters, born after eighteen years of childless married life.

Unfortunately, our little Raye lived but a short time. Johnny and Alice grew like weeds, and Robert became an experienced nursemaid. The lambs had to be bottle-fed every four hours. They could tell the time to the second! If the bottle didn't appear at the exact moment, they would stamp their tiny hoofs and baa-a-a like everything.

My husband learned, too, that lambs are just as par-

ticular about their feeding as a fussy human baby. The bottles must be scalded thoroughly. The milk must be sweet and just the right temperature. If there is a hint of "sourness" or a trace of soap in the milk, if it is too hot or too cold, the lamb will refuse his bottle and go into a tantrum, mad as all get out!

He learned, too, that lambs have individualities from the start. Johnny was calm, placid, a biddable baby from the start. Alice was willful, disobedient, and downright ornery. In fact, the lane fence alongside our farm lawn had to be built on account of Alice. She would never go quietly along the driveway like other sheep. She would dash across the lawn and gallop through the garden, kicking up her heels in the strawberry bed and among the treasured hollyhocks.

At market time, sex decided their fate. Johnny, the well-beloved, had to be sent to slaughter. Alice stayed with the flock. She is still willful and disobedient. But she has one redeeming feature. She has never forgotten that the call, "Al-ISS," once meant a nice warm bottle of milk. We can call to her across the pasture, and though she may toss her head disdainfully, she will come to us or head the flock to the home barns.

On the day of the fire, Alice made up for all the trouble she had caused us! She led the flock to the lane when she came at Robert's call.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HORSES, WILD AND OTHERWISE

During the first winter at the farm, our brother-in-law said we should have a team of horses. Horses, he said, are essential to a farm, come planting time. That was one of the things we had overlooked, in planning our expenses. Little things like teams of horses or new roofs are always bobbing up to confuse the budgeteer.

Our brother-in-law had heard of a young team that could be acquired for the modest price of seventy-five dollars.

"What's the matter with them?" asked Robert.

He was told that they were Grade A, fat and sassy.

Both Clair and Robert went over to look at the horses next day. They were out on pasture, but the owner finally got one corralled and came riding bareback to my husband's side. The horse had teeth, he seemed sound of body and limb, and my husband said it was a deal if

the other one was as good. On the next visit, the other horse was brought up. Aside from a sore place on the animal's flank, which we were assured had recently appeared and would probably heal within a couple of days, he seemed to be okeh. Both were purchased. I had visions of myself, in trim jodhpurs, riding gracefully up and down the country lanes.

A small wagon, capable of holding a cord of wood, was next purchased. Harness, too, had to be bought. When everything had been assembled at the farm, we decided to hitch the horses to the wagon and take a look at the outfit. Clair, who worked on a ranch one winter and considered himself an authority on horseflesh thereafter, did the hitching job with the help of a man hired to cut fence posts.

The horses seemed to be a bit skittish, but we said that was quite natural. They had been eating their heads off in the barn while we shopped for a wagon and harness. Clair got into the wagon, standing up in approved farmer style. He clucked to the horses and shook the lines. They started quietly, then, with one accord, stood on their hind legs and waved their front feet in the air. After this, they lunged forward, and despite all the line pulling and seesawing Clair could do, they ran away. It had been years since I had seen an old-fashioned runaway, but there it was . . . just like in the good old days. The horses ran madly down the lane, manes and tails streaming, the careening wagon just missing the big apple tree by a hair.

By a miracle, they made the gate and turned the corner, the wagon on one wheel. They sighted the main gate at the farm entrance and made for it like a shot, the

wagon lurching in their wake. When they went through the gate and tore wildly up the hill, past the North Forty, my sister quietly fainted.

Fainting was fashionable in the days of runaways, so time was definitely marching backward that morning at the farm.

I had just succeeded in bringing my sister back to consciousness when Clair returned with the team and wagon, still in one piece. Somewhere near the Harlow Schoolhouse he had succeeded in slowing the horses down and turning them around. Here they were, glaring defiance and stepping sideways, as though ready, by gosh, to do it all over again if given half a chance. To spare my sister's shaken nerves, they were promptly unhitched and driven no more that day.

The next time they were hitched up, they ran off again. Only by attaching a hobble to their harness could they be driven at all. Then they were used only when it was necessary to haul wood up the hillside.

Robert was annoyed to find that the sore place on the horse's flank grew no better. He treated it carefully for some time, but could note no improvement. Strangely enough, the horse would permit handling and petting. Robert was glad of this. He believed a closer acquaintance with the horses would cure them of their runaway habit. He spent hours taking care of the unpleasant place on the horse's flank. At last, he phoned the veterinarian at Summersville, asking him to come over and take a look at the horse.

The vet probed in the wound and felt a hard substance. In another instant he had brought out a twig from a tree, as big as a man's thumb and several inches in length. It

had pierced the horses flank, broken off, and been allowed to remain for months, probably.

Robert was furious at this evidence of neglect.

"There!" he said. "That's the cause of all the trouble. This horse will be gentle as a lamb when his flank heals!"

Tender care was given to the horse for many weeks.

During those weeks, Lucile and Clair left the farm, according to earlier arrangements. Robert moved from the cabin into the farmhouse, hiring a neighbor woman to come in each day to clean up the house, do the laundry, and cook his meals. He also hired a man, who lived near by, to help with the sheep and farm work.

Spring came. With it came planting time. Clair had been right. We did need a team. However, they were used on alternate days, allowing each to work a day, then rest a day, since our farm equipment was the one-horse variety. Everything was going smoothly. Then, one day in Chicago, I received this letter from my husband:

> "Dear Marge: I am having difficulty typing this letter because my finger got pinched in one of those darn folding lawn chairs. Since I was busy fixing the corral fence, I didn't see the sort of cyclone cloud coming up. Consequently they were blowing all over the yard when I got to them. I am not a very good fence-fixer, but Clem couldn't repair it because he had gone to the doctor to see if his arm is broken or merely sprained. His arm was hurt when he was thrown off a load of fence posts as the horses ran away. They jumped the corral fence, tearing down two sections, and went to hell-and-gone down the hill of the Home Forty. Clem brought them back and unhitched them before he left."

Just a nice quiet afternoon on the farm!

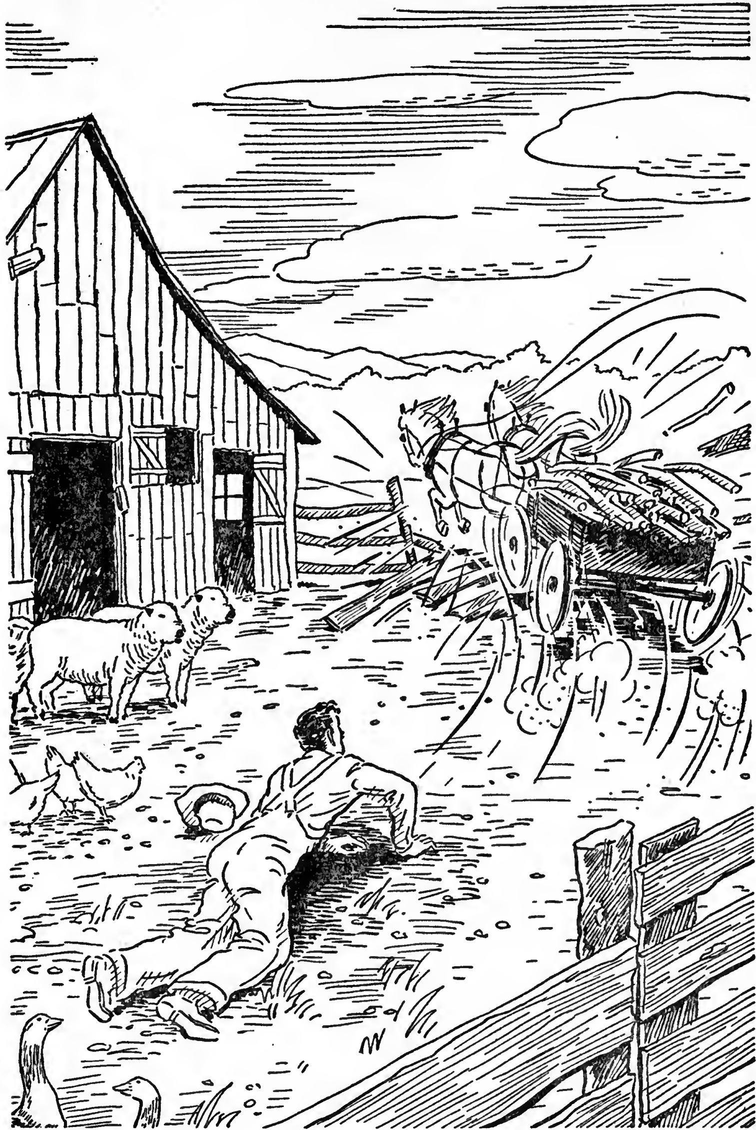
Robert, who had argued all the time that the horses were not bad at heart, but merely full of high spirits, had to give in. In time, he might have made good citizens of them, but with hired help on the farm, they were a menace. Quite soon after the pinched-finger letter, Robert traded the handsome, butter-fat, sleek and shiny horses for a big old sway-backed white mare, named Coalie, plus a single wagon and harness.

About that time, too, Clem left us, and Roy Johnson took his place as our man about the farm. Roy is still with us. Coalie was with us three years, and her gentle, motherly spirit will never be forgotten. She would amble through the corral, stepping over sleeping lambs and around frolicking dogs like a patient grandmother. And wise! That old girl could have passed any equine I. Q. with highest rating. She would hide behind a bush in the pasture, peering at us to see if we were merely taking a walk or if we had a bridle in hand. Now and then she would be hitched to the wagon to haul wood. In the spring, she dragged a cultivator between rows of garden truck and kaffir corn, walking more and more slowly as though the effort were almost too great. I have seen her stop at the end of a row and look inquiringly back at Roy, as though asking if they couldn't call it a day right then!

"One more row, Coalie," he would say. "Then we'll go in and have a cup of coffee!"

She would obligingly lift her big feet and set them into motion again.

She had a private wing of the barn for her home, warm in winter and cool in summer. She was fed oats and hay, and she grazed on lush green grass and lespedeza over the



"... and went to hell-and-gone ..."

entire farm. She grew fat and sleek, and although we knew she was no longer young, we felt that she was good for the very maximum number of years of a horse's life.

Last autumn, while Robert was in Chicago, Coalie came up to the barn at the farmhouse, apparently ill. She toppled over. Roy raced to get Aunt Mealie and Uncle Pete to help him treat her. In an hour, however, he was writing us that Coalie was gone.

"It must of been something she et," he wrote.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SATURDAY SALE

After that first winter in the Ozarks, Robert began to feel that we were real citizens of Mountain View, our nearest town. You couldn't truthfully say that Mountain View (pop. 600) is ever a bustling place. Ozark folks don't bustle. But on Saturday, with the farm trade in town, it almost approaches a bustling stage.

The farmers and their families come in a-foot and a-wheel. Many walk almost incredible distances, carrying not only babies and next-sizes, but pails of cream, eggs, or berries. Others are in cars that clatter along with ingenious repairs. Many more ride to town in Ozark station wagons. These weird vehicles are made by the simple process of fastening a wagon-box on the chassis of a defunct automobile, stuffing the tires with hay or grass, then hooking on a tongue or shafts for the mules or mule that will haul the contrivance. The adult pas-

sengers sit on bare boards placed across the wagon box. Children bounce on patchwork quilts on the bare floor. All seem to be having an excellent time, enjoying the thrill of going to town.

In town, the women drift from store to store, buying groceries, tomato plants, and flour, quieting crying babies, admonishing two-year-olds, and gossiping with friends and kinfolks. The men stand on the sidewalk and talk crops and fishing. The Young Men About Town line up in front of the barber shop, which has the alluring title of Squirrel Hunters' Barber Shop, where a stock of "git-tar" strings is kept on hand.

Come noontime, the more prosperous families buy bologna and crackers and retire to their cars for lunch. The others haul cold biscuits and fried chicken from under the wagon seats and eat their fill.

Robert and I eat our Saturday lunch in style at the Commercial House. We get the local rate, thirty-five cents. Traveling men have to pay fifty cents. Lunch, or dinner, as it is called in the hills, is served at a long table, family style. This has a good feature. You need the exercise gained by passing things to your neighboring diners. There is constant coming and going at the table, a sort of a here's-where-I-came-in touch, that is quite exciting. As each late-comer arrives, the earlier arrivals welcome him heartily and begin handing him great bowls and platters of food, recommending this and that with heart and soul. Presently, the poor fellow finds himself sitting there with a platter in each hand and more coming at him from all sides, and he's literally embarrassed pink! It's an old Ozark gag!

As I write this, five days have passed since I last ate at

the Commercial House, and my memory may have skipped a few dishes. However, I distinctly recall boiled beef, stewed chicken and noodles, cold slaw, home-clabbered cottage cheese, pickled beets, creamed carrots, creamed corn, butter beans, boiled navy beans, fresh mustard greens, mashed potatoes, candied sweet potatoes, wilted leaf lettuce, green onions, radishes, olives, corn bread, hot soda biscuits, clover-leaf rolls, hot apple sauce, plum butter, blackberry jam, coffee, iced tea, banana cream pie, home-canned peaches, chocolate cake. And the landlady will give you a slip from a begonia plant, or a geranium, to take home with you. If you feel equal to the job of carrying it after a meal like that.

No planned fashion show enlivens the day in town. But every time one of the young moderns comes out of the beauty parlor with a new permanent, there's a fashion parade that would put State Street to shame. Two movies hold matinees. The ice-cream parlors do a rushing business on Dixie cups and ice-cream cones.

The great attention-getter of the day is the Saturday Sale. Missourians dearly love to match wits in any kind of a trade, and this Saturday Sale is an outlet for anyone's trade emotion, if you know what I mean. The sale is held in an alley between two buildings, where large counters are permanently placed for things that can be carried. At the rear there is an open place for horses, cows, and hogs. I have even seen a shaggy black dog with a bobbed tail and a wire around his neck for a leash being offered for sale. This was very strange, since practically no one ever buys a dog in the Ozarks. One just acquires them (plural).

No household item is too small, or too trivial, to be

brought to the sales alley. There's always a box of broken china and a stack of old magazines, carefully tied. Old dresses, long-since out of style, funny stocking caps, men's long underwear, circular dining tables, broken rockers, Morris chairs, stoves, and baking pans, all showing marks of long usage, are mixed, higgledy-piggledy, on those long counters. Around ten o'clock, a leather-lunged auctioneer, with a Floyd Gibbons speaking rate, begins the auction. Each item is sold separately . . . except where there is a box of china, or odds and ends, as he calls them, including old can lids and the stuff that accumulates in a kitchen cupboard drawer.

If it's a fairly large item, such as a chair, the price is usually started by the owner, who will keep on bidding the item up, even if he has to accept it at the end. If he has his heart set on a certain price, he would rather take the item back home and bring it to another sale, when the crowd may be more responsive. However, I doubt if many return home with the things they have brought to sell. I believe they enjoy seeing how near they can come to getting their "askin' price." It's just a game.

I am a steady customer at the sales. I always seem to like the things others throw away. One Saturday last fall I went down to the alley just in time to see a tiny heating stove being put up for sale. Down here in this wood-burning country, stoves are important, and we have a sufficient number. However, this was the pearl of all stoves. Just about knee high, with two tiny lids on top, on which one could heat a pot of water for tea, and a little door, swinging open at the front across a tiny hearth. The unusual proportions and the quaint, old-fashioned look of the little stove were accented by stiff

little bas-relief flowers around the side, exactly like the flowers embroidered on peasant aprons. Actually, I could see a room built around that stove, a tiny room where I could read and write without dogs, lambs, cats, husband, hired help, or visitors barging in. I wanted that stove. Others appeared to want it, too.

The bidding started at the amazingly high price of fifty cents. It is usually a dime, no matter what the auctioneer holds up. Then there were spirited bids of sixty cents, seventy cents, and so on up to a dollar and a half. Then I took up the bidding, and soon the price reached the tremendous sum of two dollars. The crowd became so still you could have heard a pin drop. I craned my neck to see who was bidding against me. It was a bleary-eyed, whiskery old chap whom I had never seen before. He matched me bid for bid, ten cents at a time, up to $2.90. I hesitated. Something told me I was being taken for a ride. I could feel the crowd holding its collective breath. The auctioneer looked at me. I nodded. Without waiting for a bid from the old gentleman, the auctioneer cried:

"SOLD! For three dollars!"

Probably everyone in the crowd, except myself, knew the old fellow who bid against me was simply a stooge either for the auctioneer, who gets a percentage of his sales, or the stove's owner. They were enjoying the thrill of seeing a fool throw away her money, yet they were hoping I'd back down, and that the stove would go to the old man. Had that occurred, it would have been put up for auction again an hour later, and all those early bidders who stopped at a dollar and a half would have had another chance at it. Apparently the owners had set a top

price of three dollars on the stove, and when I was willing to pay it, the auctioneer stopped the bidding at once.

My enjoyment of the stove was not lessened one bit by the farm woman who turned to me and said tartly:

"Well! You-ens must 'a wanted that stove powerful bad to a-paid twicet what it's worth!"

Another Saturday I went to the end of the sales alley and climbed up on the counters to take a picture of the crowd assembled around the auctioneer. While I was taking readings with my light meter and adjusting my camera, I heard the auctioneer sell something for fifteen cents. I thought of all the miserable junk that had turned up at the auction that day. I wondered who was sucker enough to squander even fifteen cents on such trash.

When I climbed down from the table and went back to the crowd, Robert met me half way. Under his arm he had a little wooden box, such as two pounds of cheese come in, and was smiling broadly.

"Look!" he said. "See what I got! They're pets! They'll sit on my finger!"

I looked in the box. It held a pair of Bantams, a handsome little cockerel with iridescent dark red feathers and a small blonde hen.

"Two more mouths to feed," I said gloomily.

Apparently he didn't hear me.

"They cost just fifteen cents!" he was gloating.

Some day, I hope, I shall find what I've always been seeking at these Saturday sales. A large iron kettle, and

"Better thump it, Ma'am."

I mean *big!* The kind in which Grandma used to make soap.

Only once has such a kettle shown up at the Saturday sale. There it was, flanked by a broken plow and an antique sewing machine. I presumed the overalled man lounging near by was the owner.

I asked what he wanted for the iron kettle.

He wa'nt the owner, he said, but he would find him and ask the price. I waited until he returned.

"He wants two dollars f'r the pot, ma'am."

Then he whispered guardedly: "Better thump it, ma'am."

Thump an iron pot? I had never heard of such a thing. One thumps watermelons. Why should a pot be thumped?

Lowering his head, he explained confidentially: "Sometimes these here pots freeze and bust, but you cain't see no crack. You jis' thump 'em!"

I thumped.

"Hear that!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "I'm a-tellin' you, hit's cracked! Like as not, it'd bust wide open first time you put it on the f'ar!"

Of course I didn't want a cracked pot. I was so disappointed I didn't even stay for the auction.

An hour later, my shopping finished at Roy Charles' grocery, meat, dry goods, and handmade furniture emporium, I was carrying my packages across the street to the car, when my way was blocked for a moment. It was one of the Ozark station wagons, drawn by a flea-bitten white mule. I looked up at the driver, who grinned widely and flourished a sassafras buggy whip. He was

my friend of the sales alley, the man who had taught me to thump. I waved back. But I didn't grin.

In the back end of the homeward-bound wagon, snugly bedded in straw, along with four tow-headed youngsters, was the big, black iron kettle.

CHAPTER NINE

SEEIN' SNAKES

WHENEVER friends and neighbors get together in the Ozarks to "visit," the conversation invariably turns to snakes. Snake stories are legion, for we do have snakes in the Ozarks. That is to be expected, for there are miles of timbered lands where man or beast seldom set foot. There snakes breed, and if some of their more venturesome children wriggle into farmyard clearings, to lurk around doorways and barns, it is only natural.

Blacksnakes are most common. They grow to huge length. They climb trees and lie along the limbs, waiting for a chance to rob a bird's nest or drop on some unsuspecting person's head. Perhaps they are as startled as the person, since they are not a vicious snake given to attacking without provocation. The bite is not poisonous. But it would be doggone frightening, I'm sure.

Copperheads are the feared snakes of the region.

"Hit'll kill you, I'm a-tellin' you," the neighbors say. Copperheads are treacherous devils, too. They lie in wait under stones and behind clumps of grass, ready to dart out and nip you if you come within reach.

Blue racers are fairly common. They are pretty, too, bluish black, with bright eyes. One day last summer, I was picking up golf balls on our driving range. (We keep a hundred balls, which we drive down the hill toward marked stakes. Then we pick them up and drive them again. Some fun!) Suddenly, there was a blue racer before me.

"Look!" I said. "With a million acres here in the Ozarks, why do you have to come over here!"

The snake stopped, lifted his head, and looked at me with what I'd swear was a polite, friendly expression. I kept on talking to him, interspersing my remarks with loud calls to Robert to "come kill this great big sna-a-a-ke!" The snake stayed right there, listening to me, until Robert came and killed him. Then I was conscience-stricken. I felt that I had double-crossed a trusting stranger.

Spread-heads, or spreading adders, are disliked for their habit of inflating their cheeks when angry, making them look unbelievably fierce.

Last week I saw a truck stop over on the road that runs between our North Forty and Arnold Forty. The driver got out of the cab and threw rocks at a spot alongside the road for fully five minutes. When he drove up to the farmhouse, I said:

"I saw you kill a snake. Was it a copperhead?"

"Naw," he replied. "Only a spread-head. But he was an ugly son of a gun!"

Snakes are frequently found in the houses in the Ozarks. The story is told of one woman who opened her cupboard, and there, lying coiled among her dishes, was a big blacksnake. He had been carried in when one of the boys had scooped up a basket of chips at the woodpile. One of the first things taught me in the Ozarks was that habit of scattering chips before filling my basket.

Then, too, snakes frequently get into houses through bad floors. In the Ozarks, houses are built close to the ground, without basements. Usually there are only joists, then single floors, which develop cracks and knotholes as the wood ages. I have been told that a snake can crawl through an unbelievably small hole. I am taking my neighbor's word for it. Since the original log cabin still forms part of our farmhouse, there are strips of tin nailed over every existing crack and knothole in the flooring. The job is not very neat, but it is very, very thorough. I trusted no one else with this work. I did it myself.

We frequently hear of mountain people being bitten by snakes. But we never hear of anyone's dying from snake bite in this region. The remedy isn't what you think, either. It is kerosene (coal oil, we call it in the hills). If the snake bite is on the arm or leg, where it can be thrust into a pail of coal oil, I am told you can see the poison come right out and float in a greenish scum on the top of the oil. If the bite is on some portion of the body that cannot be immersed in the pail, then applications of the coal oil are made.

We know this will work with animals.

One hot summer day last year, Robert was at the cabin barn looking over some sheep that had come up to

lie in the shade. Suddenly he heard a peculiar bleat from Jimmy, the ram who replaced Dempsey. Jimmy is the pride and joy of our farm, a pedigreed Shropshire, the son of an English champion and International Stock Show prize winner. Added to that, he is a mighty likable personality, dignified and courteous . . . a real English gentleman. A bleat from Jimmy is sufficient to put the whole household on its ear.

Robert turned quickly.

Jimmy stood holding up his left front leg. Wriggling away from him, with its bright coppery head gleaming like a new penny, was a big snake. Our Jimmy had been bitten by the feared copperhead! Robert killed the snake with a rock. Then he raced up the hill to the farmhouse, grabbed a clean, hand-embroidered tea towel hung out strictly for show, and soaked it with kerosene from a lamp, while he yelled to Roy to run out the car. They tore back down the hill, applied the sopping cloth to Jimmy's injured leg, loaded him in the back seat of the car, and brought him up to a cool, sheltered stall in the barn. Fresh applications of kerosene were applied at frequent intervals, day and night. The leg swelled to alarming proportions, but in three days it began to decrease. At the end of a week, Jimmy was out in the pasture, good as new.

For snake stories that literally curdle one's blood, we nominate Aunt Mealie as the storyteller.

One day last June she came down to the farmhouse looking very tired and worn. We inquired if she were ill.

"Naw," she said. "I hain't sick. But there was a snake in my bedroom last night!"

We were horrified.

"Yep," she said. "He waked me up, kinda shufflin' like along some wallpaper that was tore loose and a-hangin' from the wall. Reckon he must 'a come in from the roof som'ers, but he was too heavy, must 'a bin, f'r the paper, and I hearn him fall. Time I called Pete, and we'uns got the light lit, Mister Snake had hid hisself!"

Hidden himself! Somewhere in her bedroom! Would she move out? No! She wouldn't move out.

"I'll take the gun to bed with me tonight, and effen he shows up agin, I'll blow him clean to Kingdom Come."

We stayed awake practically all night, listening for Aunt Mealie's gun.

To this day, she hasn't found out where that snake hid. Every time she brings out a long-unopened box of quilt blocks or knickknacks from that bedroom, I think:

"Heavens! This may be the snake's hide-out!"

But all snake stories become pale in comparison with the one Aunt Mealie tells about the king snake and the copperhead.

Like all other mountain people, she had always heard that a king snake is a real asset to a farmer. Quite harmless, he will not only rid a barn lot of rats and mice but actually keep poisonous snakes away. However, Aunt Mealie had never seen a king snake doing his good deeds, and she was just a mite skeptical. When a big king snake moved on to her farm and made himself at home under her woodpile, she accepted him as a friendly neighbor but resolved to keep her eye on him.

One golden autumn day, when Aunt Mealie was on her way to the tomato patch, she had her chance to see him put to test. She saw, coming toward her on the right,

the neighborly king snake. His gaze, however, seemed to be directed toward something beyond her. She turned to the left, and there was a copperhead snake, practically the same size as the king snake.

Aunt Mealie, with a snake to the right of her and a snake to the left of her, didn't shriek for help as you or I would have done. She knew this was her big chance . . . she'd find out if that king snake was all that had been said of him or not. She backed up a few feet and, as she puts it, stayed around to see what would happen.

Both snakes advanced until they were directly in front of her. Then both stopped, practically nose to nose. The copperhead apparently made no effort to get away. From the moment he saw the king snake he acted as though hypnotized. The king snake reared his head and waved it back and forth in front of the limp, motionless copperhead. Then he advanced slowly but with deadly certainty, and right in front of Aunt Mealie's astounded eyes, began swallowing the copperhead snake. He swallowed him head first, not just at one gulp, but slowly, inch by inch, as one might suck in a long piece of macaroni. The effort was considerable, since both snakes were so nearly the same size.

First, the bright, copper-colored head, which gives the snake its name, disappeared. Then an inch of the body. The king snake rested. Minutes passed. Then another inch disappeared. This went on for more than two hours, the king snake alternately swallowing and resting.

At last Aunt Mealie realized that she must go into the house and bake the biscuits and warm up the beans for supper. She picked up a long stick, and carefully lifted the king snake into the garden. His job was almost done.

He had only about three inches of the copperhead's tail dangling from his mouth. His reputation was made secure forever. He was not, Aunt Mealie decided, just a phony with a good press agent.

Mary Burchet, who lives over by Jack's Forks, complains bitterly of the snakes that crawl into her chicken house and eat the eggs. One evening, when she reached into a nest to gather the eggs, she saw what might have been a big black bowl there. It was a big blacksnake coiled in the nest. She called her husband, who came and slew the serpent! As Mr. Burchet pitched the body over into the pigpen, Mary noticed a peculiar bulge in the snake's long trim lines.

"I'll bet that's one of our eggs," she scolded.

When the snake landed in the pigpen, an old sow promptly bit him in two, right close to the bulge. Out popped a china nest egg.

No wonder the snake had lingered in the nest. He probably had a terrible stomach-ache.

Mary let the china nest egg lie in the barn lot until after the next rain. Then she picked it up and put it back in a nest in the chicken house.

The biggest blacksnake I have ever seen was at the fish hatcheries at Thayer, Missouri, when we visited Mammoth Springs. As we entered the hatcheries, Robert was annoyed to find a large placard in front of the buildings, bearing the name of the New Deal cabinet member who, at that time, had jurisdiction over the national fish hatcheries.

"Look at that!" he grumbled. "Taking credit for something the Republicans built!"

I shushed him.

We had a hot but instructive tour of the fish ponds. As we returned to our car, we saw a group of visitors staring in awe at something on the lawn. There, crossing the green velvety grass in front of the brightly painted white buildings, was positively the biggest blacksnake I have ever seen. He glistened in the sunshine, sleek and shiny, his eyes bright as jewels. He wasn't hurrying, but he wasn't loitering. He was humping himself along like a retired farmer going down to the post office to get the new mail-order catalogue.

The visitors, obviously tourists, said:

"Did you ever see anything like that? Right here on the open lawn! Shall we kill it?"

I looked around for a rock.

Robert stepped briskly forward. He laughed pleasantly.

"That? Oh, that's a pet blacksnake. He belongs here. I see him around here all the time. They think a lot of him!"

The tourists lost no time getting into their cars, with many ohs, ahs, and did-you-EVERS, and drove away. We got into our car and left the lawn to the snake, who was by then humping across the walk that led up to the veranda.

"You never saw that snake before," I said accusingly. "Shame on you for telling a great big story!"

Robert stepped on the starter and said, evenly:

"Let the Democrats kill their own snakes!"

CHAPTER TEN

THE JEDGE

By THE time we had owned Sunrise Mountain Farm two years, Robert had begun to play an important part in the life of our hills. He became the first president of the Chamber of Commerce which was organized in Mountain View. As this is written, he is still president.

The chief benefit, so far as I can see, is that he gets cordially written invitations to come up to St. Louis each spring to see the St. Louis Cardinals play their first ball game. It is a nice gesture made by the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce to the presidents of other Missouri Chambers of Commerce.

To Robert, that annual invitation is the official beginning of spring. It is equivalent to throwing out the first ball, as the president does for the newsreels. He can sit back all summer and listen to the games over the radio, remembering that first one.

During his second year at the farm, he also became justice of the peace . . . the Jedge! This great honor came about through Oscar Simms, one of our good neighbors. Oscar was a member of the township board and had it within his power to appoint someone to fill out a vacant term. Robert was appointed. Then later he was elected to the same office. The election was a real test. It is stated on good authority that Robert is the first Republican to be elected to any office in Date Township, Missouri, for more than sixty years. Since Robert rides no fences in announcing his party preferences, it can be assumed that the community really wanted him for a justice of the peace, whether or not he is a danged Republican.

The Jedge takes his official duties seriously. He makes little if any money out of the job, for the fees are small, and he settles many troubles by talking the parties into reason, instead of permitting them to bring suit.

One day not long ago, one of our neighbors came out to the road and hailed Robert as he was passing in his car. There was the usual exchange of talk about the weather, the crops, and Uncle Pete's illness. Ozarkers always approach a subject by the most devious route. Then, when the conversation got around to the health of the neighbor's hogs, the farmer inquired, cautiously:

"How can a feller bring suit against a gol-dang speeder f'r killin' a hawg?"

There it was. A motorist had killed a pig, and vengeance was desired. Yes, you might even say, demanded!

Robert explained that he would have to swear out a warrant, which would be turned over to the constable, who would then arrest the guilty party. Was the motorist known? He was.

Then the party would be brought to trial, and the value of the hog would be demanded. If the motorist could establish an alibi, then he would be freed of the charge, and the cost of the trial, the constable's service, and so forth, would be paid by the plaintiff. "How much would that be?" the farmer asked.

The Jedge thought a minute and made it high.

"Six dollars! How much was the pig worth?"

The neighbor immediately launched into a spirited description of the pig. It was about so high . . . and so long. It had spots on its back, and a tail with the "purtiest" curl you ever laid eyes on. Robert was insistent. He said he realized no ordinary pig ever got killed. It is always the pride of the litter! But . . . how much was it worth?

"Three dollars," replied the bereaved owner.

Robert tried to tell the neighbor how foolish it would be to start a six-dollar lawsuit for a three-dollar pig. He said that since the motorist was known, it would be a good idea to go to him and just settle the difficulty in man-to-man fashion. He was sure, he said, that the party who had snuffed out the life of the porker would be more than willing to pay a just price for it.

"But I don't have to take what he offers me, do I?" inquired our neighbor.

This matter of pigs on the highway is a great annoyance to Robert. In much of Missouri, including Texas County, where our farm is located, "free range" is allowed. We thought, when we first saw this phrase on highway signs, that it meant a near-by free camp site, with one of those funny stoves such as are set up in many tourist camps. But, unfortunately, it has nothing to do

with cooking. It means that farmers may turn their stock out on the highways to graze where they will, finding water when and if their instincts lead them to it, and sleeping out in all kinds of weather. It also means that the animals have the right of way at all times.

As a lover of animals, Robert is violently opposed to this business of free range. He considers it cruelty to expose animals to suffering, hunger, and thirst!

I do not agree with him. Knowing the poverty of some barren pasture lands and the dearth of water in the hills during the dry season, I like to think that cattle, horses, hogs, sheep, and goats are free to find their way to Jack's Forks and other streams where they may graze along the banks green with mountain herbage and drink the cool spring water that comes from far back in the hills. I have been wading when thirsty cattle have come down to Jack's Forks to drink. I have seen the eagerness with which they plunge their soft, velvety noses into the crystal clear water, drinking long slupping swallows until it would seem they might burst.

Many other people are with me in preferring open range. At any rate, it was carried by a large majority when it was put to vote at the last election. This, in spite of the fact that Robert carried a great banner on his car and put up hundreds of placards, advising everyone to vote against free range.

Now he takes delight in hearing me fume when I have to slam on the brakes on a long sweeping downhill curve to let a motherly hog and six little squealing piglets cross the road. Or when I must wait patiently while a youngish heifer with a gleam in her eye stands stock still in the midst of the pavement and makes up her mind whether

to go on home like a good girl, or see what is meant by all that bellerin' on the other side of the mountain.

Watch for the signs FREE RANGE when you come to the Ozarks. It's an old Ozark custom.

After Robert had become president of the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce and justice of the peace, some of the neighbors intimated they would like to have him become school commissioner. Since we have no children in school, Robert was not particularly interested. The neighbors said they would like to see him get in, for he could become the balance of power necessary to insure the hiring of a certain young woman as teacher in our one-roomed Harlow Schoolhouse. She had all the qualifications of a good teacher, they assured him. But one of the commissioners was dead set on putting in someone else, and that girl happened to be kin to the proposed commissioner. If he got in, she would get the job. Robert said it was a tossup to him whether Effie Howe or Mabel Manley got the job, but since Effie lived on our side of Jack's Forks, he would do what appeared to be right.

School election is held in the Harlow Schoolhouse, on an appointed day, when the neighbors meet and vote by vocal aye and nay. Having given his word, Robert began to think of himself as school commissioner. In fact, he began making plans for school improvement. He was distressed to find the rain pouring on election day. That, he said, would cut down the voting attendance. He took our hired man and his wife to the schoolhouse when he took me. The road past Aunt Mealie's is lined with trees that hold the moisture, and the mud was terrible. But the instant he had deposited us at the schoolhouse, he whirled

the car and went slipping and sliding down the road to gather up more people. He triumphantly returned with eight more voters.

There was little speech making and less ballyhoo. The facts were stated and the nominations made. One of the nominees was Robert, the other the anticipated opponent. The voting came. Almost half the audience voted for Robert. The hands were counted. The opponent's name was given. Hands were again raised. This time there were exactly eight more hands in the air. These were the hands of the eight persons Robert had risked neck and car to bring to the voting.

He hadn't known they were kinfolks of Mabel Manley.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A WIDDER'S DEFENSE

Here in the hills, justice-of-peace cases are held in the home of the judge, since no offices are provided. On court days, we must be up at the crack of dawn, putting the house in apple-pie order. In addition, we must bring all the small rugs into the new living room and place them over the varnished floor. We have learned by experience that many of the spectators will have nails in their shoes, which leave small pockmarks on bare floors. We have buckets of water for drinking. Once we made the mistake of putting ice in the drinking water on a hot day. No one drank it. Ice water is so unknown in the hills that it is not even regarded as a luxury. I keep a kettle of water boiling, too. I make tea for many a defeated party-of-the-second-part whose plight has touched my heart.

By far the most important case we have had at our

house was the case of Virgil Crum vs. Pinky Waters. The prominence of the lawing parties brought out a record crowd. The entire countryside overflowed our living room, dining room, and kitchen, with a whole passel of babies being put to bed on my best counterpane in the downstairs bedroom. The older children sat in a neat row on the long step in the living room, with anxious mothers watching to see they did not jar the china on the lower shelf of the cabinet behind them.

Everyone expected Virgil Crum to win out in the trial, and every woman who could get to our house made the trip in hopes of being on hand when Pinky Waters got "druv out of the country."

Pinky Waters is a wiry, dark-haired widow who lives in a dark little cabin with shuttered windows, far down in the woods over toward Wolf Creek. Men are seen going there at all hours, and on a clear night sounds of revelry can be heard as far as Mary Burchet's house, on the edge of Jack's Forks.

Pinky is given to boasting of her boy friends. One day she dropped in at the home of one of my neighbors to borrow a teaspoonful of vanilla. The neighbor stoutly refused to let her have it, hoping to discourage her from another visit. Summoning up all her courage, she said:

"Of course, it's none of my business, Mrs. Waters! But why do you let all those men come to your house? The government gives you and your children enough to live on. You don't need them!"

Pinky said not a word. She grinned widely . . . and slowly winked a bright brown eye.

That is the only heart-to-heart conversation (if you can call it that) I have ever known any woman to have

with Pinky. Country women carrying their eggs or wild dewberries to town, six miles away, never walk with Pinky and her little girl and half-grown boy. And if a kindly husband slows the family car to give them a lift, there's a sharp nudge from the straight-lipped woman in the back seat, who looks stonily ahead as the car slips past the trudging trio. Naturally these women attended a trial where they hoped to see Pinky get what was coming to her, through Virgil Crum.

Virgil Crum is a highly respected young man who has kept house here in the hills for his father, Cy Crum, for the past two years. For several years prior to this, Virgil worked in Detroit, and his father "batched." Then Cy, although vigorous and active for one of his years, had been found doing "odd things." For instance, he went down to the spring by the Columbia Schoolhouse one day to fill his drinking pail. Halfway up the mountainside, he stopped to chat with Mr. Wookey. When the visit ended, Cy forgot that he had filled his pail and walked all the way back down to the spring again. When this, and other evidences of Cy's mental aberration were reported to Virgil, he came home to take care of his father.

However, everyone in the hills had known a month ago that Virgil had grown restless and was going to leave his father again. He was going back to Detroit to see if he could get his old job. The neighbors thought that quite all right. After all, opportunities are limited here, and a young man like Virgil has a right to better himself, it was said in the hills. Everyone knew he meant to do right by his father, too. Didn't he ask Wayne Garber to look after Cy and to write him, care of General Delivery, Detroit, once a week, telling how Paw was get-

ting along? But even before Wayne posted that first card, we knew it would bring Virge back home fast as a hitchhiking thumb could bring him.

"Pinky Waters," the card read, "cum over to yore house and took yore paw over to her house. She took the furnicher, raddio, and chickens, too. We ain't shore if yore paw has still got his old aige penshun."

It was the truth. Pinky had waited until the mail carrier had left Cy's old-age pension at his house. Then, driving a borrowed team hitched to a wagon, she went over to the Crum cabin. Furniture, radio, and chickens, along with Cy and his old-age pension check for sixteen dollars, were moved to her shuttered cabin.

As everyone expected, Virgil came tearing back to the hills. Mad as hops, he came right over to the Jedge to learn how he might recover his property, including, of course, Cy and the old-age pension check. The Jedge pored over those law books he inherited along with his commission. With many a to wit and whereas and party of the second part, he dished up this judicial bill of fare.

Pinky Waters should be given twelve hours in which to return the property in question. If she didn't get it back to the Crum cabin in that time, a writ of replevin would be sworn out. An officer of the law would go get the stuff, using force if necessary to retrieve it. Then it would be necessary for Virgil Crum to come into court to face Pinky Waters and prove that the property taken from her was his own.

Before any action would be taken, Virgil would have to sign a bond guaranteeing the costs of the trial if Pinky *did* not or *could* not pay them.

Virgil signed the bond. Notice was given. Twelve

hours passed, with nothing happening. Therefore a writ of replevin was made out, and a constable was sent for the Crum possessions.

Pinky turned over everything. That is, almost everything. She gave up the furniture, a bit haggard from its ride in the wagon over the stony Wolf Creek road through the hills. She gave up the radio, which Virgil declared was plumb shot to hell because some enterprising mountain Thomas Edison had hooked it to the battery of a car and then run it through hours and hours of merrymaking. She also returned Cy, well fed and wearing, among other things, a well-washed shirt which Virgil had never seen before. The Crum chickens and the pension were missing.

"The chickens!" said Cy, with his vague manner and foolish smile, when questioned about the missing articles. "I reckon they jis' wandered away!"

He was more emphatic about the pension check. He didn't remember a thing about it, and he didn't want to be pestered no more!

Virgil was hot under the collar. He talked to all who would listen. And all who listened talked to their friends and kinfolks. The community seethed and bubbled like a pot of apple butter. The news of Virgil Crum's "legal trial" with "that Pinky Waters" was the most important happening since the last feud ended. It spread like a woods fire after a dry summer. Over quilting frames and cold-pack kettles, Pinky was orally condemned and sentenced to a hundred hangings. It was just what one could expect of that hussy, they said. It was quite plain poor old foolish Cy was just "took advantage of."

Virgil went around with a list of the things that he

was sore about written in pencil on a sheet of ruled writing paper. "Chickens." "Leg offen table!" "Paw's penshun!" "Maw's water pitcher and three plates broke!" All these and many more Virgil ticked off a dozen times a day as he talked with sympathetic friends and neighbors.

In fact, he talked so much that he became more and more aggrieved. At last he went to a village lawyer, Art Trisler, who can serve only in justice court because he never was admitted to the bar, and hired him to appear in court for him when he met Pinky Waters. The fee was five dollars. Virgil promised to pay it in cash, or work five full days for the lawyer, cutting wood or shucking corn.

Pinky was not entirely quiet during this time. However, since Pinky's friends did not go about openly championing her cause, we did not hear what propaganda she was spreading. The night before the case was called, a car was driven into our lane. It honked importantly. The Jedge went out. There were Pinky and two stalwart hill men.

"I want to know what's a-goin' to happen to me tomorry!" Pinky demanded.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Mrs. Waters," replied my husband. "You will have to see what comes up in court!"

"Well," said Pinky defiantly. "I'm a-goin' to demand a jury trial. And furthermore, I'm a-goin' to bring my own jury!"

The men said not a word. The car was backed out of the lane and driven away.

I was apprehensive. It's all right for mountain men to defend such fair womanhood as Pinky represented, but

I didn't want trouble strewn all over my clean house.

However, I worried without cause. None of the friends who made merry at Pinky's cabin appeared at her trial. Not even the two men who had brought her to our gate. There were only men and women who liked Virgil—enough men and women and children of all ages to fill our house until the sides were fairly bulging. Even the kitchen was filled with women who ran envious fingers over our metal cupboards and the white stainproof tops of our kitchen tables. They were there in the kitchen when the lawyer arrived, and they saw him pause on the kitchen stoop long enough to take a long swig from the bottle he carried in his pocket. Court opened immediately after he entered the living room.

The Jedge, in his opening remarks, explained that it was necessary to establish the ownership of the property which had been taken from Mrs. Pinky Waters by means of writ of replevin and the constable's wagon.

A tenseness which would have done credit to a famous murder mystery trial developed when Mrs. Waters was called to the witness stand. Small, slender, neat as a new pin in her well-worn, spotlessly clean white dress, she was startlingly remindful of the heroine in that long-ago picture, *Valiant Is the Word for Carrie*. She was demure as a Christmas angel and logical as a supreme court judge.

She was sworn in. And before anybody had time to interrupt her, or direct her conversation, she began talking. She spoke quietly and well. Every ear was bent to hear her. Probably everyone was getting a long-desired glimpse into another sort of life. I know that was my feeling.

"A widder with two young 'uns has a hard time gittin'

"A widder has a tough row to hoe."

along—anywheres," said Pinky. "And hyer in the hills, it's twicet as hard. A widder has a tough row to hoe. Folks is allus gossipin' about her. Talkin' about her. She ain't got no friends. Wimmin is agin her. Menfolks don't dast speak out, 'r their wimminfolks'd kick up a fuss.

"When I seen pore old Mr. Crum over there alone in his cabin, I seen a way where I could help someone. I like to help folks, but seems like most folks don't want me to help 'em."

Her story was going over like Juliet's balcony scene at a girls' school.

"I said to myself that I'd jis' go over and git pore old Mr. Crum and bring him over to my house, where he could have room and board. I'd take care o' him, same's I would o' one o' my own kinfolks. I'd do his washin', and tend to him, and he could pay me a little. He'd have a good home, and I'd have some money that God knows I ain't got now."

The Jedge and I exchanged glances. We knew what was coming. Pinky's clear, soft voice went on:

"O' course Mr. Crum brung his furniture and his radio. He couldn't leave 'em alone in his cabin, could he? You know, Jedge, what happens to cabins in the hills when folks leaves 'em. The winders is took out and the furniture is missin', and maybe they is burned to the ground. And what if he did bring them over to my house? Ain't them things Mr. Crum's much as they is Virgil's? When Virgil went away, didn't he leave that cabin and ever'thing in his Paw's care? And who wuz they to say that Mr. Crum couldn't take 'em and do anything he pleased with 'em? Who wuz they to say Mr.

Crum couldn't come over to my house to room and board? They's a lot of talk in the hills that Mr. Crum ain't jes' right in the head, but the' ain't no doctor never said nothin' about it. They ain't been no lawin' to send him away. Ain't this a free country? Ain't Mr. Crum free, white, and twenty-one so's he can go any place he wants to?"

The argument was sound as a dollar.

The Jedge asked a question.

"What became of the chickens and pension check?"

Pinky swore she had never seen "airy" one of them. They must have been taken away from Mr. Crum before he went over to her house.

The Jedge spoke again:

"Mrs. Waters! If your motives were as upright as you claim, why didn't you return the Crum furniture when you were given twelve hours' notice?"

Pinky was ready for that one.

"I'll tell you why, Jedge. That's a two-horse wagon I got, but I only got one horse. I have t' borry a horse ever' time I want a team. It jes' happened that the feller who loans me a horse was using him cultivatin' that day. If you'd'a give me one more day, I could'a got that furniture back to Virgil without no trouble!"

The mention of the furniture suddenly roused Virgil's lawyer to his legal duties. He cleared his throat.

"Mrs. Waters! Do you acknowledge that the furniture taken away from your house on September twenty-sixth belongs to Virgil Crum?"

"O' course it was Virgil's. I've been a-sayin' that all along!" answered Pinky.

"That's all we want to know," said the lawyer. "Okay,

Jedge. She said the stuff was his'n. We'll waive damages!"

With that, he arose, stepped over two dogs, a cat, and three creeping babies, and was out of the door and engaged in taking another swig out of his bottle on the back stoop before we could catch our breaths.

The case was over! We sat in stunned silence. Virgil, inarticulate as most hill folks, sat fingering the list of damages he had not been allowed to present. Abandoned by his lawyer, he simply sat with his mouth open, a limp, dejected young man who had been done wrong.

His chickens gone, his furniture broken, his father's pension check gone, his radio ruined, and owing five dollars or five days' work to a lawyer who had walked out on him. Life was black indeed.

And it was to grow still blacker.

Before the Jedge came to the subject of court costs, he read the riot act to poor Virgil, censuring him severely for leaving his poor old father, who was known to be "not quite right," alone and unprotected, an easy prey to anyone.

Poor Virgil. Insult was added to injury by this public reproof. He sat with bowed head.

After telling Pinky she would have to pay the court costs of sixteen dollars and ninety-five cents, the Jedge adjourned court. The crowd began to file out.

Pinky edged up to the Jedge.

"I can't pay no sixteen dollars and ninety-five cents, Jedge!" she said.

"You'll have to pay it, Mrs. Waters," he returned. "If you don't, we'll have to take possession of something you own and sell it to get the costs. That's the law!"

Pinky was ready for that one, too.

"The law in Missouri gives a widder three hundred dollars exemption. I'm a-livin' on land that belongs to some feller up at Kansas City, and all the things I own don't amount to more'n three hundred dollars!"

A path was opened through the crowd. With head high, she passed out of the door.

A visible shudder passed through Virgil's skinny frame. He knew as well as everyone else in the courtroom that Pinky's total assets wouldn't bring one hundred dollars even if sold to the highest bidder. And if she didn't pay the court costs, he would have to pay them. There was that bond he had signed!

He arose and staggered from the room, a beaten man indeed.

Cy, still smiling his silly vacant smile, arose and followed his son. Single file, they went down the lane. Outside the big gate, Virgil plodded ahead toward Aunt Mealie's. Cy followed a few steps, then lagged behind. I watched him from the dining-room window. I saw him straighten his shoulders in that well-washed white shirt that Virgil had never bought for him and cautiously backtrack to the corner. He peered down the West Road. Far in the distance, a white dress on a slim, wiry figure could be seen among the trees.

Cy gave a low, clear whistle. The figure in white stopped. A slim, browned hand was gaily waved to Cy, who hurried forward. At the path that leads through Wild Rufe's place to that little shuttered cabin over on Wolf Creek, a landlady waited for her star boarder.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HOME REMEDIES

Little Noma was getting her ten-o'clock feeding in her play pen in the kitchen one late winter morning, when someone knocked at the door. When I took the bottle away from her soft, warm, little mouth, she stamped her foot petulantly. But winter visitors are too infrequent to be kept waiting. When the door was opened, in walked Idavee Milton, one of the neighborhood glamour girls. Normally this would have caused no surprise. Idavee and I often put our heads together over the latest mail-order catalogue.

But for many days, word had come that Idavee was "awful bad off" with sore throat. In fact, we had heard that the Miltons might have to call a doctor. This, at Jack's Forks, where home remedies are used until life is practically extinct, is equivalent to city oxygen tents and blood transfusions.

At the sight of Idavee, well and happy, I started to exclaim over her miraculous recovery. Just in time, I remembered that one never comes directly to the point in the Ozarks.

While Idavee removed her wraps, I resumed my feeding of Noma, my fingers clamped tightly on the base of the nipple to keep her from sucking it off the bottle and choking herself. Idavee said it was a "turrible chore" to raise a "bottle lamb." I agreed, but explained that Noma's mother, a pedigreed Shropshire ewe, was unable to feed her, and Noma was too valuable an infant to be abandoned. It happened to be true, but we would have taken the same care of any orphan lamb. The feeding over, Noma curled up on a feed bag and went to sleep, looking like an Easter cake covered with coconut.

As I crumbled the yolks of two hard-boiled eggs for Annette, Marie, Cecile, Yvonne, and Emilie, who were waiting in a sweater-shrouded box behind the cookstove until the rest of their brothers and sisters hatched, Idavee and I discussed the relative merits of old hens and incubators. Still no mention of that recent illness.

I put a stick of wood into the stove to keep the beans baking in the oven, and we went out to the barns to see the twenty frisky new lambs. I pointed out little Stormy Joe, born in the midst of our blizzard, little Al Fresco, who was born in the pasture when his mother took an ill-timed walk to the old cabin site, and Orrena's new baby son and granddaughter in adjoining maternity wards. Idavee said enough complimentary things to please even the Jedge and me. We went back into the house.

Over our teacups and saucers of beans spooned from

the bake pot, we talked about the winter, the longest and hardest any old-time Ozarkian could recall. Then we spoke of neighborhood illnesses. At long last, I could ask her about her own amazing recovery.

"It was this a-way," she explained. "I got plumb sick o' feelin' so porely. So yesterday, I up and yanked that flannel rag offen my throat and went out and hefted the ax. And in no time a-tall, I'd busted up a cord 'n a half o' heatin' stove wood! Now I'm a-feelin' fine!"

This isn't the only home remedy that has met my startled eyes. The hills are full of them.

It was later in the spring when Aunt Mealie wiped the mud off her shoes on the rag rug at the kitchen door, plunked down in the rocking chair, untied her sunbonnet, and mopped perspiration from her brow.

"I'm plumb tuckered out," she said fretfully. "But Pete needs new blood."

Of course, I knew her husband, Uncle Pete, had been ill. Heavens, hadn't the whole neighborhood chopped their wood and milked their cow for weeks? But surely Aunt Mealie hadn't been tramping the hills looking for someone to supply blood for a transfusion! I was greatly concerned.

"I wa'n't a-lookin' for blood," she said. "I was a-lookin' for dandelion greens. They'll make new blood all through him!"

Down here in the Ozark Mountains, where money is scarce, and doctors even scarcer, hill people have a touching faith in things that grow in the woods and pastures. Some of this faith, I fear, is only wishful thinking. Some of it, however, is founded on fact.

For instance, many an Ozarkian will tell you how bad

sprains may be relieved and the "swellin' took down" by the application of thick, whitish, furry-looking mullein leaves or leaves from the sycamore tree. The leaves are simply "het up" in hot water and then slapped on the sprain as "hot as you-ens can stand it."

In the southwest corner of Sunrise Mountain Farm, Aunt Mealie frequently points out a low-growing plant which she calls the "sink weed." It is similar in appearance to the wild strawberry plant, except that its blossoms are yellow instead of white. If I ever run a nail in my foot, she tells me in all seriousnes, I must run to this plant, snatch up a handful of the leaves, mash them to a pulp, and bind them on the wound to draw out the poison. It is easier, I find, to avoid nails.

Slippery elm bark, say my Ozark neighbors, is good for poultices, and it is given credit for being a mighty powerful physic. Chewing this bark also "fills you up" if you get hungry out in the woods.

Teas are legion! When a child is suspected of having worms, his mother brews a pot of catnip tea and the youngster either drinks it or keeps his worms. A fifty-fifty choice, I would say.

Horehound does not come in candy form here in the hills. The leaves are made into a tea and fed to the man, woman, or child who is suffering from a cold. Another tea is made from the leaves of the peppermint plant and fed to anyone who complains of a "stomach-ache." Kidney-trouble sufferers get a vile-smelling brew of horsemint leaves or bulrushes.

In the early spring, every true Ozarkian drinks a tea made from the bark of the root of the sassafras shrub. I like mine very hot and with two lumps, please. Aunt

Mealie says sassafras tea thins the blood and gets you ready for summer. It is made here in the hills by boiling a joint of the root until the tea takes on a rich, brownish-red hue; then the root is taken out and saved for another boiling. If you don't like your sassafras tea strong, a finger-length of root may serve for a dozen brews.

Pennyroyal leaves are used externally. You crush them and rub them on arms and legs to ward off mosquitoes.

For a potent laxative, Aunt Mealie will tell you to chew a j'int of the root of the May apple. "But," she warns, "be sure it's a she-plant!" If identification of the male and female plants baffles you, as it did me, she will take you to an orchard of May apples and tell you that the plant with the two green leaves branching from the main stem is the female plant. The male has only one leaf.

I often tell Aunt Mealie, teasingly, that mountain people don't get well because of their home remedies, but in spite of them. But nothing can shake her faith.

Seriously, I think Mary Elizabeth Mahnkey, whose *Ozark Lyrics* touches beautifully on so many phases of Ozark life, has the right idea of the home remedy belief. Her poem, "The Old Nurse," might well refer to many of my neighbors:

The Old Nurse

Granny was humming an old, old tune
In her sweet voice, broken and thin,
Busily making small shapely bags
And tying up seeds within.
"When Ruth Box's young'un gits took down

Straight away she sends for me,
She knows I can drive one's fever out
With my good old pumpkin seed tea.
Onc't when Dr. Ralph had been called
An' left not a powder ner pill,
While Jake Stevens galloped off to town
With Doc's perscripshun to fill
I saved the Stevenses baby's life
Frying onions in polecat grease,
Bindin' 'em hot to her little throat,
An' soon she was sleepin' in peace."

Watermelon seed and saffron,
Witch hazel bark and rue,
The lining of chicken gizzards,
And toasted eggshells, too;
I knew that catnip and other herbs
Hung in the attic above;
"Just notions," her smiling daughter said,
But I smiled and said: "Just love!"*

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* *"Ozark Lyrics,"* Published by The School of the Ozarks, Point Lookout, Missouri.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GOOD FUN

WHEN I drove up to Aunt Mealie's gate to announce that I was giving my second annual wiener roast, come Friday night, she promptly accepted the invitation. The first wiener roast had been turned down. I found out later that Aunt Mealie had said she had lived sixty-eight years without going to one of them things, and she wasn't going to start now! The truth of the matter was that she thought we might "play cards," and that, in her opinion, is a sin second only to murder.

If I could ever hit on a night when the rain didn't pour, I'm sure we could have a lovely wiener roast. We have an outdoor fireplace, which my sister and I built with our own hands, and we can move tables, chairs, rugs, and trays up on the hilltop beside it and have a lot of fun. Unfortunately, the rain always comes pouring down just about the time the coffeepot is being circulated the

second time. Then there is a mad dash for the house, with everyone trying to keep the buns and store cookies covered and dry.

Inside the house, I wrack my brain to think of parlor games that my guests will enjoy.

Quiz games, in which one must know advertising slogans, names of streamline trains, and other sophisticated knowledge, have no place at an Ozark party. We take our games simple, but robust.

One favorite game consists of passing a potato around the room. The potato, incidentally, is passed from and received on the toe of one's shoe.

Another game that is invariably played on a newcomer, male or female, is the "mop-up game." The stranger is seated on the bare floor or linoleum rug which all of us have in our homes. His feet are stretched, wide apart, straight ahead. He is given a handkerchief, and told to wipe up water as it is poured drop by drop from a dipper. The water is dribbled at a point somewhere between his knees, drop by drop, slowly at first, then faster and faster, until the stranger is concentrating furiously on his mopping. Then the remainder of the water is suddenly dumped on the spot. At the same instant, another stalwart guest, who has taken no part in the game up to this point, seizes the unsuspecting stranger's heels and drags him through the puddle, *derrière* first!

Another game that we all like is the "apple game."

In this, two captains are chosen. Each captain chooses two members for his "side." A bowlful of apples and two paring knives are brought into the room. One member of each side peels apples, the second member cores them, and the third member, or captain, eats them. The side

that can consume the most apples in a given time wins the prize.

At our party, one of our captains was Doris, my young neighbor; the other was a tall, raw-boned young man in the spotless white shirt and faded overalls habitual to farm youths. Doris chose as the members of her group two of her young friends. The tall youth looked the guests over and said, cannily:

"I'll take Maw and Paw!"

Maw's gnarled, work-worn hands peeled apples with an agility born of a lifetime of kitchen work. Paw quartered and cored apples with the same skill with which he would shuck corn. Son ate with the speed and capacity known only to a youngster who is "holler to his heels."

The old Ozark tradition of kinfolks hanging together was upheld once more. The little family group walked away with the prize, a bright red-apple satin pincushion, saved for just such an emergency.

We shall always treasure another gay memory of an autumn party. Warmed by the flickering firelight, the hot coffee, and the gay laughter of a jolly crowd, Aunt Mealie arose and began a funny little dance step.

We whooped until the rafters rang.

"Go on, Aunt Mealie, give us a dance!"

The Jedge began whistling *Turkey in the Straw.* And to my open-mouthed amazement, Aunt Mealie forgot the misery in her knee and executed a buck and wing dance. To use a theatrical expression, it brought down the house. With becoming modesty, Aunt Mealie shrugged off our compliments.

"I could 'a did better," she said, "effen I'd 'a had on my shoes, 'stead o' my galoshes."

Since we do not have young people in our house, we have never held one of the square dances that are frequently enjoyed in our neighborhood. But we attend them at other homes. One of these real country dances was held at a neighboring home a few weeks ago!

We heard the hoarse, throaty voice of the caller and the rhythmic thump of the dancers' feet as we drove up to the gate and parked our car. We had arrived just at the moment when the caller was shouting:

"Take your lady by the wrist,
Then around the lady
With the grapevine twist."

We recognized the tune, *Walk Along, John,* and rightly guessed it was being played by a violin and two "git-tars." We opened the door without knocking and were fairly smothered by the sound and heat that poured out. A good time was definitely being had by all!

It was a better-than-average mountain home, with two rooms at the front and two at the rear. The room we entered was the family living room, with the children's eighth-grade certificates in frames on the walls. It was filled with women and girls, clean as new pins, in neat wash dresses. The younger girls milled about the glowing heating stove, whispering and giggling as the boys paraded through the rooms to congregate out on the porch in the frosty air. There was no drinking. In the hills, at parties, church, or other affairs, the men always group together and the women stay by them-

selves. This holds true, to a great extent, even at a dance.

Along the wall, on the family chairs and a long bench, sat the older women. One nursed a tiny baby. She explained she had no one with whom she could leave him at home, and there was no one to come to the dance with her daughter. She had solved the problem neatly by bringing both son and daughter, whose ages differed by sixteen years.

In the room beyond, small fry played on a bed piled high with wraps. In the corner, a half dozen middle-aged men, in overalls, sat about a big round table, playing pitch with grim tenseness. Non-players and boys who were not dancing at the moment clustered around them, kibitzing like mad.

In the second front room, the dancing went on with sound and fury.

"Round the gent in the same old way,
Circle four
In the middle of the floor.
Dough see dough,
Right and left . . ."

The room was small, with pink walls, pink curtains, and a sky-blue ceiling. It was utterly bare of furniture. Two beds, I learned, had been moved out to make room for the dancers. The orchestra, the fiddler, and two guitarists sat in the double-door entrance to the room scraping away endlessly, it seemed to me, on the same tune. Over and over they played it, while the dancers kept time with nodding heads and thumping heels.

The dancers made a spectacular sight. They seemed veiled in mist as their dancing feet beat dust from the

Over and over they played it . . .

ancient wood floor. A kerosene lamp, placed out of the way on the floor in a far corner, set hugely magnified shadows whirling over the pink walls as the dancers circled and promenaded. It gave the room an unearthly perspective, as though one were looking at a great hall in which monstrous dream people mingled with pleasant-faced country folks, bowing and circling.

"Circle eight
On the floor,
First man breaks his neck . . ."

Ralph Bellows, in a blue shirt and new overalls, was calling heavily and dancing lightly. Two other dancers were in overalls and caps such as oil-station attendants wear. A fourth young man, tall, dark, and handsome, wore a wide studded belt with dark trousers and white shirt and topped off his ensemble with a wide-brimmed sombrero. I had looked at a similar hat and belt in the mail-order catalogue last fall and wondered how the Jedge would look in them. The girls who were dancing wore print dresses, some silk, some cotton.

Boys and girls alike were surprisingly graceful and pleasing to the eye.

One girl, with straight blonde hair and a Petty-girl figure, was a dancing star. She was, Doris told me, thirteen years old.

One set ended! Another came on the floor. The calling began again:

"First couple
Out by the right,
In by the wrong.
Cut a little dido,
Two feet long . . ."

This time, two white-haired men were in the set, dancing the intricate figures as gracefully and smoothly as the youngsters. I was introduced to many about me. The names might have come from one of Dickens' novels, so English they were. I counted noses and found there were sixty-six in the tiny house.

Simple fun? Yes . . . but very clean!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SOME DO AND SOME DON'T

GUESTS in the Ozarks are utterly unpredictable. The person whom you expect to react to country life like a schoolboy is likely to be thoroughly annoyed at the outdoor toilet and community wash basin. On the other hand the young sophisticate, male or female, may take to the country like a duck takes to water. You never can tell.

Take, for instance, the visit of Wibb Smart, art director of a Chicago advertising agency, collector of fine music records, art connoisseur, and young man-about-Evanston. He had never spent a night on a farm, but we invited him to spend Thanksgiving at our Ozark place in an impulsive moment after he had listened with rapt attention to stories about our farm. Every owner of a country place knows how that can happen! And then how panicky you grow at having asked someone who may look with scorn on the land you love!

The visit of Mr. Smart proved to be one of our happiest experiences at Sunrise Mountain Farm. For one thing, he had the right sort of clothes. Not the dudish things that a city-bound department-store buyer thinks one should wear in the country, but substantial flannel shirts, corduroy trousers, leather jacket, and stout leather shoes. Except for his city pallor, he might have passed for one of our own mountain folks.

We tramped the hills and dales of Sunrise Mountain Farm, knocking pine cones from the top of the great pine tree for him to take back to Chicago, hunting rocks for paperweights for Chicago friends, shaking persimmons from the tall trees in the Arnold Forty, eating roast turkey and guinea hen à la Maryland, and lounging with cups of coffee or glasses of cider and books before the blazing fire.

Aunt Mealie, who always makes it a point to meet our guests, came down to see "that young city feller." In her funny old stocking cap, her ragged, shapeless sweater and worn shoes, her calico dress and big white apron, she was brought into the living room, and Mr. Smart was presented to her. He was as polite as if she had been the wife of an important client. (That's the height of politeness in advertising circles.) Aunt Mealie bloomed.

Like old friends, they chatted over wedges of pumpkin chiffon pie. And somehow the conversation drifted to talk of the Bible and our various interpretations of heaven and hell.

"Now, Aunt Mealie," said Wibb, "you don't honestly believe there is a real hell, do you?"

"Yes, siree, I do!" she replied emphatically. "I know because I've seen it!"

"What! You've seen hell? You mean, in a delirium?"

"No, 'twas this way!"

We were in for a story, I could see. I love the stories she tells, but how would a city chap like them? I glanced at our guest. He had leaned forward in his chair. He liked stories, too!

" 'Twas this way. Pete kept a-wantin' to go fishin' at night. So me 'n him, 'n the McDowells, we went fishin' one night. Down to Jack's Forks, o' course. And whilst we wuz a-walkin' along, we seen a lantern a-comin' over the pasture. It was Brad Evans, a-goin' fishin' too, and a-carryin' a lantern. Well, Pete and Mac guyed him about his lantern, but he said he was a-goin' to need it when he got down in them hollers where the shadders is so thick you cain't see nothin' even in daytime. So we all went along together.

" 'N when we got down to the crick, there we wuz, a-slippin' and a-slidin' on them slippery banks, and a-stumblin' over the rocks and the roots o' them big sycamores and willers, and the lantern light a-flickerin' hither 'n yon. It was kinda hard goin', but Pete had his heart set on fishin' up to that thar big hole which they don't know how deep it is . . . the Sally Hole, you know, Margit! Brad was a-gittin' t'red o' that hard walkin' and pretty soon that lantern o' his'n showed up a dark spot out in the water that looked all level 'n nice! He thought it was a islan', you know, stickin' up out'n the water. So he stepped over on it.

" 'N it wan't no land a-tall! It was nothin' but a big patch o' ol' dead leaves a-layin' there a-rottin' on the water!"

She paused dramatically.

"... a-burnin' with a sort of blue light."

We asked breathlessly if he drowned.

"Oh, no, he didn't drowned. But right there we saw hell!"

We gasped! Actually hell!

"Yes'm, *hell!* You see, they's a sort o' gas comes from leaves a-rottin' like that. 'N when Brad fell through them leaves his lantern set that gas on fire. So there it was, a-burnin' and a-burnin' with a sort of blue light. 'N the leaves that was dry on top was a-burnin' with a red light. And in that light we could jis' make out Brad's head and shoulders, and him with his arms stretched out, a-hollerin' and a-beggin' us to git him out'n that mess! I knowed right then, that's jis' the way hell actcherly looks!"

We sat silent, realizing that Hollywood would perhaps portray hell in just such a manner. Aunt Mealie finished her story:

" 'N I wish that what's-his-name that's causin' all that fightin' across the water was in it!"

Apparently this talk about sinners and hell reminded Aunt Mealie of another object of her visit! She reached into her apron pocket and brought out a tin box, similar to a tin of shoe polish. Turning to our guest she said:

"Wouldn't you-ens like to have some o' Brother Ellars' salve? He makes it hisself, over to Pleasant Valley!"

Wibb took the tin from her hand. Opening it, he sniffed the contents. The salve looked and smelled like the stuff workmen use to mend cracks in paving. While Aunt Mealie launched into her sales talk about the salve being good for "cuts, burns or sores on man 'r beast," which ended in a sale, for charity's sake, I examined the

weather and found that the sun had come out! Those delayed snapshots could be taken!

Aunt Mealie, who loves to have her picture taken, stayed until the last one was shot. Then she "reckoned she'd better be gittin' home." At the gate, she turned to ask:

"Ain't you-ens a-comin' up tonight?"

I was trying to think of a good reason for not going, but before I could open my mouth, Wibb had accepted the invitation. There was nothing I could do about it! We had supper promptly so we could make our visit early.

Even as we trooped up the road in the silver moonlight, with the dogs sniffing at rabbit tracks along the stake-and-rider fence and the Jedge pointing out to Wibb the old stagecoach road and the Jesse James well, there was grave doubt in my mind. It was one thing for our guest to meet a strange, unlettered character in our home . . . it was quite another to see such characters in their own surroundings. What would this young man from Evanston, serenely confident in his youth and good looks, his financial success and cultured background, think of the Ozark cabin of Aunt Mealie and Uncle Pete? Worst of all, would he offend those dear souls with a hint of snootiness?

Suddenly it was too late to turn back! Before us was the bobbing light of the lantern carried by Uncle Pete as he shut the calf in the barn lot. Immediately, our two dogs and the Saunders dog burst into a chorus of throaty curses, with every dog in the hills taking sides. I knew that ears were being cocked in a dozen cabins and more

than one person was taking a pipe out of his (or her) mouth and saying:

"Sounds like the Jedge's dawgs. Reckon that young city feller is a-bein' took up to the Saunderses'!"

So functions the mountain wireless!

Then, above the tumult, Aunt Mealie's welcoming call came from the dark lean-to kitchen.

We skirted the stone well with the windlass chain looped above the big oaken bucket, climbed the steep stone steps, and were in the kitchen. We steered our guest around a tub of water, drawn ready for the next morning's wash, and entered the main room.

In the flurry of introductions, I saw our guest taking stock of the room. His friendly, easy smile told me that all was well. Even an Evanstonian had to be impressed by the simple charm of that room, with its two old-fashioned rockers, its double bed, worn into twin hollows, and its square table with the big silver-clasped Bible lying beside stacks of quilt blocks. The whole room was bathed in the red-gold light from the great fireplace, the glowing flames high-lighting the Anglo-Saxon planes of Uncle Pete's face, the clean tea towel spread over the bread dough set to "riz" on the hearth, and the armload of wood stacked handily along the wall. The gaudy God Bless Our Home motto took on real meaning in a cabin so filled with warmth and cheer.

The two rockers, according to mountain custom, were promptly offered to (and accepted by) the men who came with me. Straight chairs were brought from the kitchen for the rest of us. And then we talked the simple gossip of the hills: the light burning at midnight at Bert McDowell's because they had company, Mrs. Moore's

broken leg, the preachin' at Ferndale, and Wild Rufe's latest spell.

We told the stranger in our midst the great Ozark mystery . . . the tale of the old Indian Chief who had returned to our neighborhood every year for a half century to seek a cave of silver buried there by his tribe when he was a little boy. Rumor has it that the burial place is the Simms' farm, along Jack's Forks.

Then, at my suggestion, Aunt Mealie showed our guest her newest quilts . . . the fan, double wedding ring, cobblestone, crazy quilt, and many other familiar patterns . . . exquisite with tiny stitches and color harmony. And because the guest's sincere enthusiasm warmed her heart, Aunt Mealie brought out from its sacred hiding place the box of trinkets that she holds most dear. Blowing the dust from the box cover, she went over them one by one with him. Postal cards sent to her when Uncle Pete went to Indiany in 1911, a handkerchief from someone away off in Chicago, and old photographs that brought a wistful look to her faded blue eyes.

At long last, good-bys were said, and we were again in the silver moonlight.

"I wish Aunt Mealie and Uncle Pete were not so poor," I remarked.

"Poor!" exclaimed the young man from Evanston. "They have the true riches of this earth!"

With our small-town background, the Jedge and I find it difficult to understand the complete bewilderment of born-and-bred city folks in the country. Considering the speed with which they "catch on" to any new wrinkle in the city, from automatic elevators to drinking fountains with foot pedals, we feel their keen minds

would help them out in the country. But you'd be surprised!

There was our bridal pair, for example. For years, Helen has been my friend. I love her as dearly as though she were my own sister. I was the first to know she and Jack were planning on being married in June. I was also told they intended to drive in the picturesque part of the Ozarks around Branson, Missouri, for their honeymoon.

"And of course you'll spend a couple of days at our farm," I said.

Of course they would!

The wedding was to take place in St. Louis at the home of Helen's grandparents. On the day after the wedding, the young couple would drive down to Sunrise Mountain Farm, spend the night and following day, and then go on to Branson.

Weeks ahead, plans were made for them at the farmhouse. My widowed sister, Pauline, was with us at the time, and that anticipated visit of the bridal couple was the high light of the whole spring season. Work was rushed on the new living room of the farmhouse. The last curtain was hung and the last new slip cover put in place the day before the wedding.

To make their visit simply perfect for the newlyweds, we prepared the cabin in the valley as a honeymoon retreat. The floor was scrubbed until it shone. We hung yellow curtains at the windows and went all the way to West Plains to find wallpaper to go with the curtains. The best match we could find had little boats with yellow sails bobbing up and down on cream-colored water. We bought that. The boats looked a bit out of place in an

Ozark valley, but the paper was clean and fresh . . . and mostly yellow!

Doris, Pauline, and I did the papering, exulting in the new look it gave to the cabin. The old furniture in the room was discarded . . . it didn't look gay enough. We brought a double bed and other good furniture from the farmhouse, made a cute little dressing table shelf with its triple mirror, and spread rugs on the floor. When we had put in the great bouquets of flowers, snowballs, bridal wreath, mock orange blossoms, roses, and iris contributed by neighbors, the cabin looked like something Hollywood might have done.

We were up at dawn on the day our bridal couple was expected! Aunt Mealie came down early and squinted up at the sky!

"They's rain in them mares' tails," she said.

And so there was! The most drenching, wickedly muddying rain I had ever seen. When I baked the bride's cake, the kitchen chimney was leaking so badly that rain actually spattered on the stove, sizzling and scampering like drops of water on a hot pancake griddle. To make matters worse, the roof of the new living room began to leak at the point where it had been joined to the farmhouse roof. We had a dishpan and two cooking kettles stationed under the leaks, and the rain fell so steadily they actually became filled, and had to be emptied now and then.

It was almost noon when I happened to remember Aunt Mealie's promise to get ferns for me. Darn it, that rain would keep her from going! I needed those ferns to complete my dramatic dining-room setting. I was, to

use a trite expression, fit to be tied. No wonder the cake fell!

However, I hadn't reckoned on Aunt Mealie's indomitable courage. Shucks, no rain could daunt her! About one o'clock, while Pauline was putting the chickens in to bake and I was writing the names of the bridal couple on the cake with colored icing and making little wreaths of forget-me-nots and daisies around them, Aunt Mealie came in. She was drenched from head to foot . . . her long woolen skirt sagging soppingly around her feet and her shapeless sweater hanging in sodden scallops almost to her knees. In her arms she bore a great bouquet of her choicest blossoms. And high over her head, like a flaunting green banner, nodded the great fronds of ferns.

Here in our highlands we do not have many ferns! I knew where Aunt Mealie had gathered those ferns. The only spot that grows them is at least a mile away through the deep woods. In this rain, those woods would be like an icy swamp.

"I told you I'd be a-gittin' 'em f'r you, and here they be!" she said, as gaily as though she had gathered them in our own lane.

When I tried to tell her she should have remembered that misery in her knee, she "shushed" me and said she'd just sit down in the kitchen rocker to drink a cup of tea and "dry off." Knowing the Ozark reticence, I shushed.

Somehow, the whole world became brighter because of Aunt Mealie! The raindrops dancing merrily on the hot stove were merely amusing incidents in Ozark life. The leaks in the living room were not uncommon to new rooms. Besides, we could put masses of ferns in those kitchen utensils and no one would ever know the roof

was leaking. The chickens had begun to send out tantalizing odors. And what if the cake had fallen! It looked like something out of a Michigan Avenue caterer's window with my colored frostings and the little bride and groom figures on it! No one expects a cake that handsome to be *good,* too!

Aunt Mealie admired the dining table, festooned with streamers of green and white crepe paper, under the big white wedding bell. She peered at the lovely new living room, with its bright fire burning cheerfully on the hearth, and clucked sympathetically over the leaks in the roof. Then she came back to the rocker in the kitchen and accepted the cup of tea Pauline had made for her. She drank the tea, licked the cake frosting from the decorator points waiting to be washed, and we talked the usual neighborhood gossip. We went on to things I had read.

At that time King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were visiting in this country, and I told her what I had been reading of them. The rain led me to remember that the queen had been obliged to make more than one appearance in heavy rain. I told Aunt Mealie how the queen had to bow and smile, no matter how uncomfortable she might have been. Suddenly, Aunt Mealie sneezed.

"Drat it," she said, "I knowed I took off my long underwear too soon." There was a moment's pause. She added, "I hope the queen brang her'n!"

After Aunt Mealie had gone back up the slippery hillside to her own home, we began to look out of windows for the guests. Suddenly Pauline said:

"Which lamp shall we send down to the cabin?"

Lamp? It suddenly occurred to me that Helen and

Jack had probably never seen a kerosene lamp! They had no idea that a wick must be turned just so to keep the lamp from smoking! Or that a lamp chimney must be tenderly protected from draughts and moisture. I recalled that the favorite story of Helen's family was entitled: "Helen Started a Fire in a Canadian Cabin."

The point of the story is that Helen arose early at a Canadian roadside cabin where they were stopping, and decided to start a fire in the big wood cookstove to warm up the place. In a few minutes, smoke came pouring out from the most unexpected places in the stove. Helen's mother arose, choking, thinking the cabin on fire. Helen's father and fiancé, who were occupying another cabin, saw smoke pouring out of the windows and came tearing in. Helen was wringing her lovely hands, exclaiming: "I just started a fire in the stove!" The fiancé strode to the stove, yanked open a door, and the truth was out. Out all over the floor! Helen had built her fire in the oven!

Give a girl like that a kerosene lamp? Not in our cabin! We'll let them use flashlights, we agreed. And just about the time we had all the flashlights in the house and barn assembled, someone called:

"Here they come!"

And here they were! The big shining car that had taken me so many pleasant places in Chicago was now plastered with Ozark mud. Helen and Jack, in identical slacks, sneakers, and shirts, flung themselves out of the car, and Sunrise Mountain rang with the rousing welcome we gave them. At the same instant, as though peeping through the clouds to see what all the shouting was for, there came the sun! It was a feeble gleam, to be sure, but the rain stopped long enough for the guests to see the

new living room without the drip, drip, drip of rain coming through the roof! They could exclaim over the quaint kitchen without seeing raindrops hissing on the cookstove. Also, the break in the weather gave us time to take them and their overnight bags down the path to their own little cabin in the valley. They loved it.

Then we scampered back up the hillside to dish up the early supper. The rain began again, but we didn't care! Inside the farmhouse were light, warmth, good food, and happy friends. For hours after supper we sat in the light of the fire, talking and laughing. At last, Judy, the Boston terrier, got into Helen's chair, scooted her way behind her, and shoved at our guest with her four sturdy little legs. It's her way of telling company to go on home now and let us go to bed.

Our guests took the hint, and we began getting raincoats for them to wear down to the cabin. Helen peered out of the French doors at the rainy blackness outside.

"It looks awfully dark out there among those trees! Are there any *mice* in the woods?" she asked in a small voice.

We told her truthfully that we had never, in all our lives, seen a mouse in the woods. And besides, didn't she have a big, brave husband now to protect her from mice? She gave her bridegroom a doubtful look.

I understood her fear of the dark woods. I had it, too, when I first came to the hills. To overcome it, I bought for myself a big kerosene lantern. Furthermore, I painted the lantern a bright sunshiny yellow, just for the psychological effect. During the day this lantern hangs on a special nail driven into the kitchen wall to accommodate it. At dusk it is brought down and lighted, along with

the lamps. Wherever I go, after dark, its cheerful yellow glow goes right along with me. My childish fear of the dark is thus conquered. For that night, for the ones I loved, I made the supreme sacrifice. I said:

"Here, you may take my lantern to the cabin!"

It was like lending my right arm—or my eyes.

Jack took the lantern from my hand. He tipped it until it was almost at right angles.

"Oh, it has plenty of oil in it," I said quickly. "I filled it just this morning!"

"It isn't that," he said. "I was just wondering if we shouldn't have something that throws a light directly on the ground!"

I assured him that a lantern really gets its light on the ground when it is out in the darkness.

Realizing that he knew nothing of a lantern, the Jedge told him how to light it. He showed him the little lever on which to set a firm thumb and push in order to raise the chimney, how the lever is latched, the match applied to the wick, and the chimney lowered. Helen was given a big flashlight.

We told them to follow the path that makes its steep, stony way down the hillside from the farmhouse to the cabin . . . the same path we had traveled earlier in the evening. Even though it is not clearly defined like a city street, and although the trees crowd closely at each side, it is wide enough for a car and seems, to us, unmistakable even on the darkest night. We stood in the door and watched the two wavering lights that marked the slow progress of probably the most reluctant newlyweds that ever started toward a honeymoon cabin. The rain came down in a slow drizzle.

Pauline went upstairs to her room. The Jedge went into our room. Judy went to her basket. I lingered in the living room to set things to rights and empty ash trays into the still glowing fire. I was plumping the cushions on the davenport when I happened to glance through the French doors toward the lawn. I gasped and called my husband. In the woods beyond the lawn, the same two wavering lights that had disappeared only a few minutes before were returning. I went out on the terrace and called:

"What's wrong?"

"The river's out!" came Helen's frightened little voice.

"What river?" I shouted. "There's no river between here and the cabin!"

Jack took up the long-distance argument.

"Well, there's a lot of water. We can't step across it or jump across it! And we can't go around it. It looks like it might be ten feet deep."

Helen's voice came again, with quivers in it.

"It looks to me like there's a lot of mice around here. We're going to sleep in the car, up here in your lane."

The Jedge came out on the terrace.

"That brook always rises like that after a rain," he shouted soothingly. "It looks deep, but it really isn't. You can wade it!"

"Oh, I couldn't!" wailed Helen. "I just know there are mice in that water! It's awfully black!"

"We'll sleep in the car," said Jack firmly.

"Nonsense," I returned tartly. "You're going right back to that cabin!"

"Indeed you are," agreed my sister, who had come out with slickers and boots.

Darn it, after we had spent days fixing up a Love Nest for them, they were going to stay in it!

Finally Pauline had an idea that settled the argument. She suggested that the bridal pair get into their car. She would take the wheel and drive them down the hill, through the water, and right to the door of the cabin. She turned to me:

"You can carry the lantern and wade through the water ahead of the car, so we won't be in danger of getting in too deeply!"

We had seen our grandfather do this in Iowa, when Grand River was out of its banks! But Grandpa had been wearing hip boots and I had on canvas sport shoes. I wanted to remind her of that . . . but didn't.

The newlyweds got into the car. I heard Helen's sigh of relief. There were no mice, she knew, in that comfortable car. I strode out of the gate and down the path, lantern in hand, grateful that the sandy, rocky soil of our mountainside does not hold moisture as black dirt does. Halfway down the hill there was a rustle in the bushes at the side of the road. My heart came into my throat. A big shadowy form leaped out into the road ahead of me and raced back toward me. It was Punch, our shepherd dog! Apparently he had been so interested in the party's getting into the car that he hadn't seen me starting through the woods alone. When he had heard me he had cut corner-wise through the woods to catch up with me! I was grateful for his companionship . . . and I had an idea!

"Come on, Punch. Let's go down to the cabin," I said. He trotted ahead of me, keeping within the circle of my lantern light.

. . . the car behind me had halted . . .

Just as I reached the valley, the slowly driven car arrived, too. There was the water . . . and there was a lot of it! A stream twelve feet wide, I judged, running with decided current, and terribly black and frightening in the darkness, with the trees swishing wetly overhead. I would have reconnoitered a moment, but the car behind me had halted, and I knew three pairs of eyes were glued on my back.

Punch saved the day! Good old Punch! When he came to the water he stepped into it without slackening his speed. When I saw him go into the dark water with that confident air, I stepped into it right behind him and walked through it with splashing, carefree abandon. My bravery appeared terrific.

I hoped Pauline wouldn't give me away!

We both knew Punch hated water and was never known to enter even a puddle of water more than two inches deep.

His instinct was right in this instance. The water was just at the top of my canvas shoes . . . cold as ice and very wet, but no longer scary.

The car followed me through and stopped beyond the water. There was laughter and shouting again! I handed over the lantern, my sister stepped out of the car, and we waded through the stream once more on our way back up to the farmhouse.

Our honeymooners drove their car to the very door of the cabin and parked it there, ready to shove off instantly if a mouse showed its dastardly nose.

The next morning the sun shone brightly, the sky was azure blue, the fleecy white lambs looked like toys from a Christmas tree, and the frightening stream in the valley

had become a friendly little mountain brook of step-over width. God was in his heaven and all was decidedly well with our world.

That night, after the guests had departed to finish their honeymoon tour and Roy had brought the farmhouse things up from the cabin, I took up my precious lantern and prepared to light it.

I learned that hostesses, like murderers, always overlook one thing. I hadn't taught our city guests how to blow out the lantern light. They had tried to extinguish it by the city method of "turning it out." But lantern lights are stubborn. They had found it necessary to turn the wick all the way down into the oil compartment before darkness came to Honeymoon Cabin.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RED BURR-AYS

If we were good bookkeepers, able to tell you in dollars and cents how much a couple can earn (or lose) on a farm, this chapter would begin this way:

On such-and-such a day, two sheep shearers came to Sunrise Mountain Farm and sheared so-many sheep, which yielded so-many pounds of wool. This wool was kept a certain number of days and then sold at so-much per pound.

Next year, when we keep those records which we have been intending to keep each year, we shall be able to tell you.

In regard to last year's wool (our regular yearly shearing has not taken place as this is written) we can speak only in general terms. The yield was something over a hundred pounds, and we got thirty-five cents per pound for it. This wasn't enough to feed the sheep through the

winter. But last winter was an unusually long, hard winter, necessitating a longer feeding period!

However, we didn't find the wool business very far on the losing side. The cat made a comfortable bed in the wool for her four kittens, so it was put to use long before it was worn on human backs.

And, of more importance, there were the lambs that came to bless (and burn) us. You'd burn, too, if you tried to herd those little rascals through the gate of the North Forty when they felt inclined to romp up and down the highway. They look mighty cute in springtime pictures, gamboling over the advertisements for Easter hats and spring suits. But when that gamboling is done in front of the gate through which they are supposed to pass like little ladies and gentlemen, you would take your lamb on the half-page from that time on. Our flock is being built up by these "little girl" lambs of better breeding.

And then there are the memories of the sheep shearers, memories that have lingered with us all winter. Last spring was very rainy. The sheep shearers were expected day after day, but they didn't come and they DIDN'T COME! The sheep needed to be sheared. The oil had come up in the wool nicely, and it was high time for it to be clipped. The book from Washington told that wool is likely to fall out if it isn't sheared, since nature has a way of taking care of those things. Indeed, some of the sheep had begun to lose handfuls of wool, making them look ragged and moth-eaten. For weeks I hadn't been able to take a picture of the sheep, for the shaggy ones invariably hog the camera. Then our friends in the city look at our snapshots and say:

"So that's the way sheep look in the Ozarks! Now down at the International Stock Exhibition, we saw etc., etc!"

Whenever I take a picture of our sheep head-on, Jimmy, the prize Shropshire ram, and his high-hat wives are invariably at the end of the line. I understand now why there are so many paintings of sheep. It's easier to imagine sheep in just the idyllic position one would want them in a picture. Our flock of sheep always reminds me of quicksilver breaking up into little droplets, then flowing in a long thin line, and breaking up again, just when I want to get them into a nicely composed group under fleecy clouds, with blossoming trees in the background.

As the days went on and the sheep shearers still stayed away, we became quite concerned. I remarked to the Jedge that I could see only one way of getting the wool off those sheep. He could go out and play strip poker with them!

He said that if his usual luck at cards persisted, Jimmy, the ram, would be wearing a shirt and pants inside of an hour.

Then one morning a metallic clattering and clanking and shrieking of brakes in the lane shortly after breakfast told us one thing! The sheep shearers had come at last. The Jedge ran out to call the sheep. They seemed utterly bewildered at being brought back to the corral so soon after being put out to pasture and milled around the back gate, baa-ing their protests.

Roy ran to help the two browned, overalled men untie a weird machine from the back of their antique car. I ran to look over the larder. The chicken, dressed the night before for the day's dinner, was promptly hung

back in the well. Chicken is too common in the Ozarks to be set before the guests, and besides, one chicken wouldn't be a drop in the bucket for that day's dinner. The Jedge, his sheep sorted and driven in the corrals, was dispatched to town for meat loaf and bakery buns . . . "boughten" food that would show our proper respect.

The shearing was a triumph of Ozark ingenuity. One of the shearers turned the crank of a spidery machine that operated in some mysterious manner the clippers wielded by his partner.

Roy took each fleece as it came from the sheep, and, with the aid of a homemade box with four hinged sides and yards of string, tied it into a neat, four-square bundle, which was weighed and stowed in the barn loft. I went up to the barn to see the work, but the perspiring shearers, stripped to their bib overalls, were so painfully embarrassed at being seen shirtless that poor Mildred, a bell sheep who was being de-fleeced at the moment, got a nick in her pink tummy. I departed in haste.

Dinner was served promptly at noon. Meat loaf, string beans, and mashed potatoes disappeared like magic. Bakery buns melted away, one shearer almost meeting the record set by a ten-year-old-mountain lad who accompanied the wood cutters last fall. He had eaten eleven at one sitting.

Bowls of crisp radishes and green onions were quickly emptied. The salad didn't fare so well. The garden lettuce was all right, but our guests eyed the cucumber with suspicion. Cucumbers here are always served weak and limp, swimming in vinegar along with slices of onion! French dressing was refused . . . only "furriners" from the city, they implied, would eat that red stuff. One

shearer tried an experimental bite of mayonnaise on his lettuce and ate just exactly the one bite.

However, a steaming casserole, prepared in an inspired moment to make up for the lack of the mountaineer's beloved white gravy, went over big. Each took two generous helpings, and I *do* mean generous. At the second helping, one of the men remarked: "Dang good, f'r city vittles!"

Then I brought on the pie, made with fresh gooseberries and served piping hot with sirupy pink juice oozing from the jade green filling. This was finished along with more coffee.

I thought the meal was ended, but the Jedge saw a look directed at that casserole of "city vittles." Instantly he caught it up and said:

"Here, boys, finish this. I'll have to eat it tomorrow if you don't!"

There was not even a murmur of dissent. The "boys" quickly divided the remaining food in the casserole and ate it as the delectable conclusion of their meal. It was cheese and macaroni!

After dinner, while the sheep shearers smoked their pipes, the Jedge and I told them about the sheep shearing we had seen at Chicago's International Live Stock Exhibition. We told how those amazing experts had each sheared a sheep with electric clippers, while riding around the arena on a truck, with the band playing a beautiful waltz number. They accepted the news with surprising calmness. City folks do strange things, nohow! Then we told how the men were dressed . . . in snowy white, with bright red berets! Berets? I brought out the mail-order catalogue to show what they were.

"Them things! Hell! Them's baby caps!"

" 'N you say growed men wore 'em! And bright red?"

The laughter was long and loud.

Then shearing was resumed, and throughout the long afternoon the bleat of anguished lambs made the farm a bedlam. Poor, hungry babies! They didn't recognize their mothers without those heavy woolen overcoats and ran baa-ing about the pasture. Mother sheep added their annoyed bleats to the general confusion, proving that everyone was thoroughly unhappy about the whole thing. The shearer who cranked the strange machine to operate the clippers turned faster and faster as the shadows lengthened. The whir of the machine sounded like the monotonous hum of an oversized insect above the song he sang as he busily turned the crank:

> "Oh, he said he'd be there,
> But there's still one vacant chair-r-r-r!"

The rhyme, however, was always a bit off, because Ozarkians pronounce "chair" as "cheer."

I began to wonder if mountain hostesses got supper for sheep shearers. Or did the men go home to their beans and biscuits and tell the Little Woman how good home cooking tasted after eating out? The pet ducks came to the garden and muttered unmistakable hints about food. I fed them; also the dogs, cat, chickens, geese, bottle-fed lambs, and caged flying squirrels. Then with a suddenness that was startling, the whir of the shearing machine stopped. I heard the weary call: "All done!"

In the gathering dusk we helped the men tie that funny shearing machine to the back of the rattly car.

The Jedge paid the shearing bill: eight cents a head for the sheep sheared, adding the two cents per head that he had promised if the men took care about nicks. We're softies about any hurt to an animal. The car was cranked and our shearers were off with a clattering spurt.

Suddenly, halfway down the lane, the car came to an abrupt halt. A browned, grinning face poked through the flapping curtains at each side.

"Say," we heard them call, "reckon we'd a-been done long ago if we'd a-had some of them *red burr-ays!*"

And their hearty laughter at "city foolishment" came floating back to us long after the car had rattled over the hill on the Ferndale road.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DORIS, CHILD OF THE OZARKS

To Doris, my blonde, lanky "neighbor girl," go my heartfelt thanks for the companionship and teaching that she has given me. Doris was thirteen when we came to the Ozarks. She is seventeen now. In another year, perhaps, she will be married. And I shall miss her more than I have ever missed anyone who has gone out of my life.

Doris is a typical Child of the Ozarks. The aesthetic aspects of nature are lost upon her. A rainbow or sunset must be pointed out; she never hears a bird song; and the breathtaking sight of a hundred black butterflies fluttering about tall spikes of wild blue larkspur in a shaded valley will invariably remind her of a blue and black dress in the mail-order catalogue.

In the quaint, humorous, and practical lore of the hills, Doris revels! She knows how to make a very good grade of pink, red, and brown ink from crushed sumac

berries and the balls that grow on scrub oaks. She knows that chewing slippery elm satisfies hunger during a long walk in the woods. I've seen her shake a persimmon tree on a frosty moonlit night and pick up a hatful without getting a puckery one. She knows to the drop how much rain must fall to flood Barn Holler to swimming depth, or to bring Jack's Forks over the new WPA bridge. She will stoop to touch one leaf of a lacy plant bearing pink ball-shaped blossoms, then laugh gaily as each leaf closes like tiny hands clasped in prayer. (It always brings a lump to my throat.) She will steer me clear of poison oak and poison ivy and the next moment point out a dozen plants that would make good greens for the cooking pot.

Doris knows nature's jokes, too! Once I trustingly ate a moist green leaf she plucked at the water's edge, and then drank quarts of the icy spring water, in which we were wading, to cool my burning mouth. It was, she admitted between giggles, the leaf of the wild red pepper plant.

She constantly cautions me to watch for copperheads, which, she says, strike without warning or provocation. She taught me that blue racers will stop if I stop, or run after me if I foolishly run from them. (They do!) She scolded me soundly one day for being afraid of a huge, but harmless, king snake! The next day at the river, when I admired a brown baby snake with tan markings, she shrieked: "Water moccasin!" and killed the youngster with one well-aimed rock.

She knows that sassafras branches, being green and juicy, make the best sticks for toasting marshmallows; which tree bears the biggest hickory nuts; where the first

wild blackberries ripen and the juiciest wild grapes grow. In fact, "Ask Doris" has been a familiar expression in our home for four years!

I don't believe Doris knows the meaning of the word "fear." Through the mile of deep woods that lies between her home and ours, she will run at any hour of the day or night. She never carries a flashlight or lantern. She says if anything or anybody wanted to "git" her she would be a lot easier to find if she were carrying a light! She will stay at our house, toasting marshmallows in the fireplace, popping corn, or making candy until the whole mountainside is dark and the stillness is broken only by the far-off baying of hounds and the stealthy rustling of leaves as little woods creatures come out. Then she will say, "I've got to go home! G'night!"

To get to her house, Doris must go down a steep hillside, pass through heavy woods in the midst of which she must cross a stream that, more often than not, overflows its stepping stones. Then she must cross a clearing and climb their hill, skirting a deep pond. It's all very simple to Doris. She can cross a swollen stream on a down-log as gracefully and skillfully as a squirrel. She can slip through a fence as bonelessly as a cat.

When we first came to the hills, I was amazed to find that youngster making the mile-long trip home through the dark woods alone. She laughed at my silly fears. At last, seeing my seriousness, one night she promised to stand outside her door and call "Yoo-hoo!" to let me know she had reached home safely. In the stillness of the mountain night one can easily hear a call at that distance. At going-home time she called "G'night!" and ran down the path of lamplight toward the dark woods.

I put on a coat and sat on the south door stoop waiting for her call. It was very dark and frightening outside my lantern light, even though I could touch the side of our own house. Minutes passed and I grew shivering cold. More minutes! Surely she was home . . . or else! Or else? Good heavens, had I let that child walk into some terrible danger? I felt every hair rise up on my head.

I heard the clock strike eleven. It had been forty-five minutes since that slim blonde youngster had left our home. I went to the bedroom window and called my husband, who had retired early.

"Robert! Get up!" I said. "I know something *terrible* has happened to Doris. It's been almost an hour since she left . . . and she isn't home yet!"

"Nertz!" he said. "That kid could find her way from one end of the Ozarks to the other! Blindfolded!"

But, with me at the window holding my lantern so that its beams fell on his face and arousing Judy, who always retires when her master does, his resistance was soon worn down. He got up and dressed. We went down the clearing into our woods. My teeth were chattering. I began flashing my lantern about, looking for signs of evil doings. In the shadowy darkness every stump and fallen log looked like a body! Every swirl of wind-blown leaves appeared to show signs of a desperate struggle. We crossed the creek on the stepping stones. I wondered if Doris might have lost her way and tumbled into the deep hole far up the creek.

"You and your imagination," said my husband bitterly!

On through more woods! Heavens, all this space, and people living like sardines in cities! On to the clearing

beside Doris' home! Should we call and arouse her family?

"Certainly!" said Robert. "If anything has happened to her, we'll have to get her brother out to help beat the woods!"

I shuddered from head to foot. Quaveringly I called, "Yoo-hoo!" in a small voice.

Instantly from two windows came a frightened response. Doris and her mother asked in unison:

"What's the matter, Mrs. Lyon?"

"Did you get home, Doris?" It was a foolish question.

"Shore did!" replied Doris.

"But you said you'd call, and I waited and waited!"

"Oh," she laughed. "I plum f'rgot."

"You oughta be ashamed of yourself," I heard her mother say.

Doris kept me informed on all the activities of the Harlow School when she attended there. I was amazed at the scope of learning which one young girl teacher could impart to a roomful of students of all ages and all temperaments. When Doris came to our house looking for magazines from which she could clip furniture pictures for her interior decoration notebook, I was practically bowled over!

Our pretty little country school, painted snowy white, has the neighborhood graveyard beside it, for the schoolhouse also serves as a church. But the school lawn is wide and deep, with great hickory nut trees shading it. In the autumn I have seen the hickory nuts, delicious and hunger-satisfying, lying by the bushel on the ground beneath the trees. Hickory nuts are so plentiful no child would take the trouble to pick them up.

It was Doris who told me of the "feuding cousins" in her school. It was necessary, she said, for the teacher to dismiss one family five minutes earlier than the other. This gave one set of youngsters time enough to get out of the way of the other set, which was either bigger and stronger, or had one more member, as a balance of power!

But four years make a big difference in the lives of children. Now the "feuding cousins" are reconciled, and all of them are going on to Summersville High School.

Doris, too, has attended Summersville High School three years. The domestic science courses have done wonders for her. She has learned to sew, and smart little blouses and attractive summery dresses have come from her needle. She has learned to cook, too. Fortunately she did, for throughout the past year she has roomed in Summersville and has done her own cooking.

Doris pays a dollar and a quarter a month for her room, which holds a bed, dresser, chair, table, and tiny wood stove on which she can do her cooking. That price includes no firewood. She has to take her firewood, tied up in a gunny sack, all the way from home. In another sack she carries her foodstuffs . . . canned corn, beans, home-baked light bread, wild blackberry jelly, milk, and now and then some cake. Her "boy friend," who has also gone to school at Summersville, picks up the girl and her two sacks each Sunday night and drives her over to the school town. Then on Friday night the school bus stops at our gate, and an instant later Doris comes loping up the lane, with her laundry bag over her shoulder, taking that well-worn path through our woods to her home.

In another sack her foodstuffs . . .

She has gained twenty much-needed pounds in the year passed and has grown to five feet six inches. In slacks she looks like Marlene Dietrich. Her blonde skin is fairer now. The hours of school work have bleached the leathery tanned look from her face. Her hair has a hint of gold in the sunshine. She has learned, too, how to turn a good-looking profile and speak more precisely. During the past year she has studied dramatics and acted in all the high-school plays. Next year, she says, she is going to learn to play the drums and trumpet and study all the music and related subjects available in the mountain high school.

Doris *hopes* to become a member of a famous all-girl radio orchestra.

But at graduation time next year a big, white, cushiony mountain moon will be showering a silver light on every mountain cabin. Flowers will be a-bloom everywhere in the hills. A square dance will be in the planning stage. And I have heard that the mother of Doris' boy friend never "borned" any foolish children. I am sure he will think of some way to keep our Doris in the hills.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

OZARK VITTLES

NATURE helps set the table in the Ozarks in many ways. The squirrels and rabbits that grow in prolific abundance make eating par excellence for man and beast. Even Judy has learned this. When she catches a rabbit, she brings it proudly to the house, her head high and eyes shining. She sits near while the Jedge skins and cleans it. When he brings it into the house and puts it on the fire, she watches every move. At last, with the fire going and the rabbit simmering, she goes to her basket and snoozes peacefully! When the rabbit is done she comes out to the kitchen, sniffing the appetizing fragrance. For hours after the feast she will be running a pink tongue over her lips as though enjoying the last lingering taste. Squirrels are a rarer treat for her, since they are harder to catch, and the Jedge will not shoot one.

Hickory nuts are more plentiful than black walnuts,

but there are enough of each to supply every family in the Ozarks.

Of course, recipes for using nuts are as common as cookbooks. But for a real Ozark recipe I went to Verna Springer, whose writings have received national recognition. Mrs. Springer, who also writes mystery stories and novels in the hours when she isn't cooking, canning, or writing about food, is a real Ozarkian, with her lifelong home in Mountain View. A charming person . . . Mrs. Springer would add to the prestige of any locality. And can she cook!

Here is the recipe for the Harvest Moon Hickory Nut Cake Mrs. Springer prefers:

Ingredients:

2/3 cup butter
2 scant cups sugar
3 cups flour
1 cup water
4 egg whites
1 teaspoon vanilla
3 level teaspoons baking powder

Cream butter and sugar. Measure flour after sifting once, then sift four times with baking powder. Add flour and water alternately to butter and sugar until all is added. Add vanilla. Last, fold in egg whites. Bake in moderate oven 25 to 30 minutes.

Icing:

1 cup sugar
1/4 cup water
Whites two eggs
1/4 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup hickory nut meats, cut not too fine

Beat sugar, water, egg whites together. Cook in a double boiler for 7 minutes, stirring constantly with rotary beater until it stands in peaks. Add vanilla. Fold in hickory nut kernels.

Almost anything, from soup to cookies, is better for the addition of a handful of black walnut "goodies." Just try them in fruit salad sometime. As for candies, even the simplest taffy is given a lift by black walnut meats. In fact, many of the candies eaten in cities contain black walnuts gathered and gleaned in the Ozarks. A waitress in a boarding house at Galena, Missouri, told me last week that she sent a hundred pounds of black walnut meats to a candy concern in Kansas City. She received thirty cents a pound.

A World War veteran near Branson, Missouri, makes necklaces, belts, and bracelets of cross sections of black walnuts and butternuts. These accessories, intricate as carved wood and rugged as our Ozarks, are sold at gift shops in our hills. His four youngsters reap an income from the by-product, the meats of the nuts, which are sold to another candy manufacturer.

Mrs. Springer's favorite use of black walnuts is in drop cookies, called, appropriately, Ozark Treats.

2 cups brown sugar
1 scant cup coffee
2 cups raisins
2 scant tablespoons cocoa
1 cup butter or lard
3 cups flour
1 cup black walnuts
1 teaspoon soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
2 eggs
1 teaspoon cinnamon
pinch of nutmeg

Cream butter (or lard) and sugar, add coffee, beaten eggs, and sifted dry ingredients. Add raisins. Mix cupful of black walnut meats, broken in generous pieces, into dough last of all. Drop by spoonfuls on greased baking sheet. This recipe yields a hundred good-sized cookies.

Persimmons are another proof that the god of good eating smiled on the Ozarks. When I found we had thirty-six bearing persimmon trees on our farm, I had much the same thrill that would have been mine had we found oil or a gold mine. Because the trees grow widely scattered, some in the open where the frost gets them early, and others in sheltered valleys, we can pick persimmons from the first frost to long after Thanksgiving.

My favorite persimmon source is a pair of twin trees growing at the edge of the clearing in the Home Forty. I like to go down there in early morning, when there's an exhilarating tang to the air and the icing of frost on the metal roof of the sheep shed shows a long, darkly moist triangle as the first finger of sunshine strikes it. The dead grasses are long and cold about my ankles as I cross the clearing, bucket in hand. Long before the tree is reached, the grayish bark of the smooth trunks and the deep yellow globules hanging thickly on the bare branches make the trees stand out in sharp relief against the purple brown of the oak leaves in the background.

When I reach the trees, I always look up for an instant just to imprint anew on my memory the sight of those dark gray branches, hung with frosty, golden fruit, silhouetted against the blue of the morning sky.

Then I shake the tree, not too hard! Plop, plop, plop, all about me, and very often down my neck, drop heavy ripe persimmons, whose rounded sides bear a frosty sheen. They are so soft that some are crushed by their own weight as they fall, but the carpet of leaves protects most of them. Before I put any into my pail, I eat my fill of the fruit, sweet yet tangy, and rich with luscious pulp and nectar. I see evidences, too, that possums have

feasted on our persimmons throughout the night. Our four-legged guests have left hundreds of the flat oval persimmon seeds, shining as sleekly as polished mahogany, under the trees.

One frosty morning Pauline went with me to gather a pailful of persimmons for a pudding. She vigorously shook the twin tree on the right. Down came a great sprawling branch, laden with persimmons, landing squarely on her head. We examined the end of the branch where it had broken from the tree and found that it had been girdled as neatly as though human hands and a sharp knife had done the job. Evidently a big fat possum, tired of climbing the tree for his feast, had decided to lop off a branch so he could eat his persimmons on the ground. Or perhaps he had intended to take it home to Mrs. Possum! At any rate, he had nibbled his neat way around the branch until it was almost severed. We regretted that dawn, or our coming, had frightened him away when he had only a half dozen more bites to go! We left the broken branch, with persimmons untouched, on the ground beside the tree. Next morning it was gone!

By the way, my persimmon pudding was made from Mrs. Bruce Hunt's recipe. Here it is, as she gave it to me:

> Rub 1 quart ripe persimmons through colander and mix with 1 pint sweet milk and 1 pint water. Cream ½ cup butter, 1½ cups sugar. Add to persimmon mixture. Sift 3 cups flour with 1 teaspoon cinnamon, ½ teaspoon soda, ¼ teaspoon each nutmeg and cloves, 1 teaspoon each allspice and ginger, and ½ teaspoon salt. Mix well with persimmon mixture and add 3 well-beaten eggs. Bake in slow oven. Serve with whipped cream, slightly sweetened and flavored with ginger. I use flakes of candied ginger.

Try as I will, I can find only one approved method for putting down persimmons for winter use. This is to place alternate layers of clean, dead-ripe persimmons and granulated sugar in Mason jars. The fruit resembles preserves, and a tangy, flavorful syrup, suitable for fruit cocktails or ice-cream topping, is formed. But all too soon the mixture spoils and must be thown out.

Nature showed her usual wisdom in making persimmons a perishable fruit that must be eaten on the spot. They form one of the silken cords that forever draw the native back to the hills.

And what Ozarkian can ever forget the tempting taste of the greens that make up such a large part of Ozark eating?

As the weather grows warmer and the wild flowers begin to bloom, Aunt Mealie comes down the hill on typical gold and azure mornings, with paring knife and basket in hand. I ask no questions. I simply grab my own paring knife, sunbonnet, and sugar sack, and we are off to hunt . . . not wild flowers . . . but greens and mushrooms.

In the North Forty we find dozens of mushrooms, growing around stumps and under brush heaps, where they are protected from sheep. Aunt Mealie cautions me for the hundredth time to leave some of the stem in the ground, so another mushroom will grow on it. And I must always be careful to cut each mushroom I look at, since a mushroom, according to Ozark lore, that is once looked upon by human eyes will not grow "nary other inch." Shaped like fat little artificial Christmas trees, with convolutions that make them practically solid, our favorite mushrooms grow as large as one's fist. We pick

both gray and dubonnet-colored ones. I marvel, as always, that they are icy cold to the touch, although the sun is high and hot. Both types will be cooked the same way, sliced, dipped in batter, and fried in butter.

Then our paring knives are busy with greens. Poke is the favorite. We select many tender young green stalks, about the size of one's thumb. These will be soaked, then cooked in salted water, and sealed in hot spicy vinegar for delicious pickles. The leaves, tiny and brilliantly green in their new growth, are picked for greens. Later the plant will grow head high, with long narrow leaves strangely tropical in appearance. Then we find rock lettuce with scalloped leaves, wild lettuce with plain leaves, sour dock, wild cabbage, wild onions, and the two sorrel sisters, one with lavender flowers and the other with yellow flowers. Aunt Mealie knows them all and tells me which goes with what, and which ones to avoid.

Farther along, where great blackened rocks mark the side of an ancient fireplace, we find tender blackberry sprouts, dandelion greens, plantain, and mouse-ear.

The sun grows warmer, but what hunter ever wished to stop when game was plentiful? We trudge on and find wild beet, wild sweet potato, and "fuzzy britches." Aunt Mealie reminds me to look for pink in the cut stem or "turn 'em loose." I slyly throw all three away. They may not be pink enough. Then, in the area that was once a tended garden, we find an abundance of lamb's-quarters, a beautiful, low-growing plant with a mild flavor. Near it is a sturdy growth of wild mustard. I tell Aunt Mealie I need some horse-radish leaves and then it's home for me. In the next bend of the creek we find them. A few tender horse-radish leaves, in my opinion, are a

mighty tasty addition to our favorite greens combination of poke, lamb's-quarters, sour dock, and wild mustard.

Tired, but happy as any successful hunter who ever bagged a deer, we return home through the North Forty. Close to the old well, where Jesse James used to water his horse, we stop in the shade of the honey locust trees. With paring knife a bit grimy from Ozark soil, I cut the sprawling branch of wicked-looking thorns over my head and place it tenderly on the greens, careful not to blunt the points. We never knew how delightful our pet phonograph records could sound until one day, in a frenzy born of desperation, we substituted these long, sharp, honey locust thorns for the regulation needles. Now we use them through preference.

Yes . . . Mother Nature is kind to her children in the Ozarks.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A MAN'S WORLD

In our second year at Sunrise Mountain Farm we began to plan repairs and remodeling for our farmhouse. The Jedge, of course, was inclined toward simplicity that bordered on the primitive. In winter, he planned a tight little room with one window. In summer, he held out for a sun room, or maybe just a new front porch. I had tricky ideas gleaned from magazines that show the simple little homes of movie stars and eastern millionaires.

We called two village carpenters out to the farm to give estimates and advice on plans. The day we set for their coming chanced to coincide with the opening of the bass season at Jack's Forks. They came the next day, languid with heat and disgusted at the ways of furriners who didn't know that the first day of bass fishing supersedes all other activities. I laid my plans before them! I stepped blithely from room to room . . . here we want this, and there we want that!

Suddenly I noticed that something was wrong with the picture. I wasn't getting the whole-souled co-operation a woman intent on spending real money would get from a city contractor or architect. The carpenters stared moodily. My enthusiasm didn't do a nose dive exactly, but it trailed off like the tail of sparks from an unenthusiastic Roman candle.

I stopped speaking, and all was quiet for a moment. One of the carpenters spoke, with the air of one weary of childish prattle:

"Now, Mr. Lyon, how air yuh a-aimin' to fix this?"

Yes, indeed, the Ozarks are a man's world, a place where the male of the species is boss! At least, in public. But I learned fast! In the months that were to follow that visit, when Sunrise Mountain resounded with hammering and the click of the trowel ladling concrete between native stones, I learned what it means to be the Power behind the Throne, the Silent Partner, and Little Jack Horner. I sat in my corner and told the Jedge what to tell the carpenters. When the Jedge developed streaks of "it-can't-be-done-ness" I enlisted the aid of Roy, who proved to have surprising executive ability.

As a result, we have a comfortable farm home that suits our needs precisely. The original logs were covered with weatherboarding, making thick, well-insulated, and good-looking walls. The windows were replaced and new frames installed. The grubby screened back porch became part of the kitchen, permitting a breakfast nook with three windows that catch the sunrise over the ridges far to the east. There's also a small room, now a pantry, but destined to be a bathroom when we get a deeper well and electricity.

Our new living room, built of stone, mainly flint from the fields of our own farm, has won for the carpenters a reputation as workmen of the highest skill and achievement. As for the Jedge, he has forgotten that I had anything to do with the planning and building of this room. I don't care! It's a lovely room, with six French doors along the front to bring the outdoors right inside on a summer day. My greatest joy is the little door that opens from outdoors directly into the big woodbox, at the left of the fireplace. Roy can fill the box without tracking barnyard muss into the room. And if you think it didn't take a battle to get that little door, you don't know your Ozarkians. Or the Jedge!

The slogan of home builders in the Ozarks seems to be: "That's good enough!"

One neat log cabin that we pass whenever we go to visit Ray and Mary Burchet gives me the screaming "meenies." The front of the cabin shows a door in the center of the wall, with a window at each side. The men who built the house didn't take the trouble necessary to make the windows plumb. The result is that each window slants sharply inward at the bottom. So there sits a poor, dear little cross-eyed house!

In another home where I frequently visit, the walls of the living room are papered with fairly new, rather colorful paper. But whoever papered the room didn't bother to trim the paper first. At regular intervals about the room you see vertical stripes, with arrows and printed inscriptions saying: "Match here." The name and address of the wallpaper manufacturer, and the name of the paper, are repeated at least a hundred times. In addition, the stems of the flowers on the east wall point downward,

instead of upward as in the rest of the room. The paper hangers had finished papering up to the east wall, apparently, before they realized that wallpaper usually has an up and down to it.

And what do the women say about this? They complain, of course. But "Paw" is the boss, and usually he doesn't "give a dang" how the house looks.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WELL WITCHING

COUNTRY life is probably no more difficult in the Ozarks than in other parts of the United States. Life is much the same wherever there is no running water, no electricity, no gas, no bathtub, no refrigerator. The weather, we think, gives us a break. Here we do not have the deep snows and long cold winters that make the North difficult for men, women, children, and animals.

For most of our winter the weather is mild. Then, when cold rain or big, soft, blobby snowflakes come . . . well, there's nothing so urgent that it can't be put off until nicer weather!

Speaking of household conveniences, a housewife never knows how much she can get along WITHOUT until she tries it.

Take electricity, for instance. With a wind-charger on top of the house for the radio, and pump-up lights in

the living room, you don't care, really, whether or not you have electricity. At least, we thought we didn't care. But now that electricity will soon be available at the farm, we can hardly wait for it.

We don't need a vacuum cleaner! We consider bare floors, linoleums, or scatter rugs the only thing for a farmhouse. We don't need a toaster! Just show us toast better than that made in the oven of our wood cookstove.

But just let me get my hands on an electric iron here on the farm! I'll iron for two whole days, without stopping. How I hate sad irons heated on the stove!

The Jedge is looking forward to an electric refrigerator. We can now keep butter solid and meat fresh overnight by suspending them in glass jars in the cistern. In fact, I can even make a good imitation of iced tea by preparing my tea early in the day and suspending it in the cistern. During the winter our storm cellar, a deep, rock-walled cavern dug in the back yard, keeps vegetables, canned fruits, and fruit juices from freezing or spoiling. During fairly warmish days it is cool enough too. But when hotter weather comes, it is less efficient.

And there's another reason why I'm willing to give up the cellar idea. On hot days snakes love to go into the cellar and lie on a step, where you do not see them until you have one foot poised in mid-air, just ready to be lowered to the step Mr. Serpent is occupying at the moment. One experience like that (and I had just one) is enough to make any expatriated city woman long for the comforting presence of a big white frosty refrigerator in her kitchen, with room enough for a couple of watermelons, the morning's milk, a cooked ham, and a bucketful of eggs.

The wood cookstove is a necessity here in winter. It heats the kitchen at the same time that it cooks your food. But for summertime, a good kerosene stove, or a stove that will burn the new bottled gas, is infinitely preferable. When you buy your farm in the Ozarks, bring such a stove or rearrange your cooking routine, eliminating all those recipes that read: "Stir constantly!" By the time you have stirred a pudding constantly for fifteen minutes over a wood-burning cookstove on a hot summer day, you begin to wonder why you ever left the city . . . or why you hadn't planned to serve strawberries and cream for dessert.

The lack of a bathtub, with running water, is no excuse for not keeping clean. There's always the washtub! And if water is scarce, a person intent on cleanliness can do wonders with a big sponge, a bar of soap, and a wash pan full of water. Even lack of a kitchen sink, with its convenient faucets, is not a life-and-death matter, by any means. Any Ozark housewife who has gone through a drought is so thankful for water in the cistern that she doesn't kick on carrying it into the house. As for the taste of rain water . . . well, it seems odd at first, but one gets accustomed to it. As a matter of fact, chlorine-treated city water is practically unbearable to us now!

Not long ago, a home economist who couldn't bake a pan of biscuits without a laboratory full of thermometers, oven regulators, and other scientific paraphernalia, was driving to Sunrise Mountain Farm with us. Somewhere in southern Illinois, in the early morning, we passed a farmhouse. The housewife was just coming out on the porch, with a water pail in her hand.

Our guest spoke scornfully:

"Probably going out to get the rain water to make the morning coffee!"

"Don't be so upstage," I said. "You may be doing that yourself tomorrow morning!"

Believe it or not, I arrived at the farm with the flu, and our guest had to turn to and get meals on a wood-burning cookstove and carry cistern water for coffee, for two days.

Cisterns are vitally important in the lives of Ozarkians. Men in the hills discuss the types of cisterns they own, just as men in the city talk about oil burners or stokers. Most in favor is the jug type. Ours, however, is merely a deep straight well, with so many eaves troughs leading to it that we catch every drop of water that falls on our house. A chain and pulley lower a bucket to the water. Then we haul up the filled pail by heaving on the wet slippery chain. I never knew until I went to the Ozarks that a special bucket is made for cistern use. It is a long narrow pail with a loop on the high-arched handle through which a person can pass a rope or latch a chain. Our cistern is paved with pails that have dropped from the latch on the end of our cistern chain. Even this special cistern pail came to rest there. I am torn between wishing that we could get them all back, and hoping that the cistern will always be so full of water that they can't be reached with a twenty-foot pole.

Our cistern is close to the kitchen door, but our well is at the top of the mountain. I would have chosen another spot for it, but the man who witches for water decided otherwise. He came with his forked hazel twig and walked solemnly about in the back yard, each hand grasping a fork of a small unimportant-looking switch, with

the straight end of the branch pointing directly ahead. Nothing happened. He went up on the mountaintop and out around the barn lot, getting farther away from the house every minute, I noted with dismay. Suddenly the hazel branch bent downward.

"There," he said exultantly, "is your water!"

No one but me questioned his decision. My arguments were thrust aside as prejudiced. It was known that I wanted the well nearer the house.

A fifty-foot well was partially dug, but mainly blasted out of the rock with dynamite. It is ten feet across and has concrete walls most of the way down. Two buildings, with metal roofs, have eaves troughs which drain into this well. Apparently the Jedge didn't rely wholly on the well-witching. But whether the size of the well enables it to hold a tremendous supply of rain water, or whether the well actually taps a vein of underground water, we do not know. It has not been dry in three years, and one of these a drought year. The water is always crystal clear, and very "hard."

Getting the water into the farmhouse is the woman's job. It comes in by the pailful, then stands on the end of a wash bench or table. And here is another strange phenomenon of family life in the Ozarks. The man of the house washes his hands in a washbasin. In the same cleaning-up interlude he combs his hair in the mirror which invariably hangs over that wash pan. Occasionally he shaves there. And always, believe it or not, the kitchen water bucket stands near that wash basin, for the convenience of the man who washes his face not more than twice a day and shaves once a week. To keep flying hair out of "the vittles," the wash bench is naturally located as far

as possible from the stove and cooking table. And a thousand times a day, the woman of the house treks across the room to put water over the potatoes, to get a dipperful of water for the soup, to fill the teakettle, or get Junior a drink. So general is this custom that even I put up with this awkward, ill-arranged planning for two years before it dawned on me that I was walking extra miles every day.

Even though there is no running water, a summer wash day here in the Ozark Mountains would be one of your happiest days.

The first duty is to light a wood fire between those two big stones in the back yard. Then clear, cold rain water is drawn up from the cistern, the pulley creaking rhythmically as the cool, wet chain is guided through your fingers. The wash boiler is quickly filled and lifted onto the stones over a rousing fire. Next, a generous amount of Ma Perkins' famous soap powder is poured in and stirred vigorously. Into this cold suds go pillowcases, lunch cloths, sheets . . . all, in fact, of the white things that can be packed in. The boiler lid is clamped down, the fire poked, and wash day is off to a good start.

When the contents of the boiler bubble, the clothes are lifted out and carried to the tub in the shade of the tall hickory tree for the lazy rubbing that will bring out the last hint of soil. Another stick of seasoned oak wood is put on the fire, and another boilerful of clothes is put to simmering.

You say you're going to hurry this washing, but shucks, no one ever hurries in the Ozarks! You watch the sun rise higher and higher over the mountaintop, glinting at last on the stones of the old well in the North Forty.

You watch the sheep go down the lane to pasture, the Shropshire lambs as fleecy and white as the puffy white clouds in the blue sky overhead. You happily note that the Scotch sheep bells make an off-stage accompaniment to the brilliant performance of the mockingbird doing his routine in the treetop high above you. Just for fun you count his imitations. One, two, three . . . more than a dozen! Listen to them! Cardinal, wren, robin's rain song, mourning dove, blue jay, catbird . . . and something that sounds like "pretty girl." The flatterer! You suggest to the dogs, Punch and Judy, that they nap on something less treasured than your best seersucker dress, even if it is on top of the wash heap.

Then more cold water is drawn from the cistern, and the rinsing is done, the contrast of icy water on your arms and hot sun on your back reminding you of Chicago beaches.

Almost before you know it, it's time to hang the clothes in the glorious mid-morning sunshine. Their clean, fresh fragrance seems akin to that of the pink and white honeysuckle at the gate arch and the sweet winey odor of wild grape blossoms along the lane.

You look upward as you put a snowy sheet on the line, and, glimpsing those hazy high wooded ridges far in the distance, into your mind come the words: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help . . ."

In your heart, you will have only pity for those city women who do their washing by pushing a button in the basement.

CHAPTER TWENTY

KNEE-DEEP RINSIN'

THERE are times here in the Ozarks when private wash-day pleasure is not possible. These are the times when a long drought dries up ponds and exhausts cisterns, and the mountain uplands lie dry, hot, and dusty beneath a bitter yellow sun.

Last summer, during the drought, our Big Pond and deep well furnished water for animals, cooking, and scanty bathing, but not one drop would the Jedge spare for washing clothes. At last, when there were no more clean towels and pajamas, something had to be done.

At daybreak one morning we loaded soap, washboard, washtubs, boiler, wringer, and a mountain of laundry into the two-wheeled trailer, hitched it to the back of the car, and went down to Jack's Forks to wash. By the time our first boilerful was bubbling over a fire kindled between two stones, other families began to arrive, each with its soiled laundry and washing equipment. The

. . . and waded knee-deep . . .

Sophus Hegginses came in their strange family carryall, a wagon box mounted on an antique Ford chassis, with the rubber tires stuffed with hay. The Milt Badgerows were in their wood wagon, driving their big raw-boned mule, named (heaven knows why) Jackson Banner. The Fred Bethardses were resplendent in a new 1935 car. The Barn Holler folks rode standing in a big wagon with side-boards.

Wash day became a glorified picnic. As we worked we laughed, joked, and sang. The cliffs along the river bend resounded with the old hymn:

"Yes, we'll ga-ther at the Ri-ver-r-r-r-r . . .
The be-yew-tiful, the be-yew-ti-fu-u-u-ul Ri-ver!
Gather with the Sa-aints at the Ri-i-i-ver . . .
That flows by the Throne o-of God!"

When the clothes had been well scrubbed on wash-boards, we pinned our dresses high and waded knee-deep into the crystal-clear spring waters of Jack's Forks to do our rinsing. The hot golden sun beat on our aching backs and the icy water numbed our feet and legs! But we were so glad to get our clothes clean once more, there were no complaints. We watched keenly for snakes, turtles, and crawdads; we made way for free-range stock coming down for long sipping drinks; and we splashed to the rescue when the youngest Bethards fell into the river and made the hills echo with his yells.

At last the washings were done and hung in re-vealing candor on lines stretched between the oaks, wil-lows, and sycamores along the river bank. While they dried in the noonday sun, we brought out our simple lunches, and the Jedge set a big pot of coffee to boiling

over the embers of our smaller washing fire. We ate our fill and drank the strong, scalding hot coffee.

Then, as we lounged, relaxed and weary, on the dry brown grass, we heard a sound that we had almost forgotten. Thunder! An instant later, a great black cloud darkened the sky.

Lines of still-moist clothes were quickly yanked down! Children and dogs were hastily thrust into cars and wagons! Fires were extinguished (in case the rain failed to come). And away we went to close open doors and windows, calling gay good-bys in high excitement.

That night the outside world was on the brink of chaos, but here in the hills all was well. Our stock and fowl, well-fed and well-watered, were snug in their various barns. Within the farmhouse there was the blissful consciousness of clothes clean and fragrant once more. In the far corner of the room the tall Victorian lamp, with the chrysanthemums on its globe shade, shed its mellow glow. Both dogs, the cat, and the Jedge blinked drowsily before the crackling fire in the big white stone fireplace. The battery radio set was still. Far sweeter than any mortal music was the beat of precious, welcome rain on the roof, and that metallic murmur of water racing down eaves troughs to fall with a hollow gurgle into the cistern by the kitchen door.

Wells and cisterns everywhere in the hills were filling that night. Parched pastures were being revived. Ponds were catching gallons of clear, cold water for thirsty animals. The Jedge spoke quietly:

"There *is* a God . . . and He is very good!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE BIRDS...AND VALENDA

It was a sunny spring morning, when Aunt Mealie came down the hill and promptly made an important announcement:

"I'm a-goin' over to Pleasant Valley to church Sunday."

"Wonderful!" I said. "Is someone coming for you?"

"I dunno yit," she replied. "But I know I'm a-goin' to git there! I hearn a whippoorwill a-hollerin' from over yander in the south, all night long!"

"Now, what on earth does a whippoorwill have to do with your going to church," I asked.

"Ever'thin'," she said. "When you hear a whippoorwill's first holler in the springtime, why, wherever he's a-hollerin' from, that's where you're a-goin' to travel!"

And, sure enough, Sunday morning, one of Aunt Mealie's church brethren drove by, picked her up in his car, and drove her to church, thirty miles away. It's the

church Aunt Mealie attended years ago, even before she lived in Barn Holler, and to her, no other church has ever been so dear. For the next week, she went around praising the unknown whippoorwill that had brought her that blessing. Personally, I felt that the bird had nothing to do with it. The combination of a springtime driving urge and good roads was entirely responsible.

Other traditions which my neighbors have concerning birds include a death, "shore as yo're born," if a bird flies into the house or if a mourning dove hoots on your roof.

It is only natural that many superstitions in the hills would be linked with birds. Birds are so numerous, so colorful, and so tuneful that they become an important part of our life here.

When we came here, we had the usual city idea that birds, except for the spring robin that always gets his mention on Page One, were just something that people kept in cages and bought seed for. It was some time before we achieved a more intimate acquaintance with what the nature books call "our feathered friends."

My first real feeling for a bird, and through him, for birds in general, came during our first spring at the farm. It was the night before Easter, a chilly, gray dusk, with a cold sliver of moon shining faintly down on the farmhouse, and a few scattered stars beginning to peer through the slate-gray sky. The Jedge and I went out to lock the sheep shed, and look after the lambs, when we heard a faint twittering in the hickory tree. We stopped to listen! Then from the topmost branch of the tree, came the oriole's song, in muted tones . . . so low that it might have been the last fading echo of a song sung

during the previous summer. Then there was that happy twittering again, and an instant later the robin's rain song, in the same softly muted tones.

"Our mockingbird is back!" whispered the Jedge. "Now we know it's spring!"

All through the night, the bird sang softly and happily until the notes seemed to fall over the farmhouse like a golden shower. He was at home and all was well.

For those first two years we couldn't find the nest of our mockingbirds. The third year, they chose the cedar tree, only ten feet from our terrace, and built their nest in branches hardly more than five feet from the ground. It always seemed to me that they had chosen the spot the year before. I could almost hear them saying to each other:

"That tree there in the humans' front yard would be a good nesting place, I'm sure! They don't pick anything off it, so they won't be around much. And those two dogs that lie in its shade can't climb trees!"

And so the nest was built, and before long, they had five little birds in it. Probably they had been so busy establishing a home, they hadn't noticed that we had acquired a cat while they were down south . . . a very nice, clean, black-and-white cat, who would deign to look at us when we called "Mr. Chips" and held out bowls of cream, but snootily disregard us the rest of the time. When the young mockingbirds were hatched, the parent birds became terribly aware of Mr. Chips, with or without reason.

Every time the cat came out to sun himself, the father mockingbird would make a long swooping flight down from the sycamore tree and, with bright eyes snapping

with rage, would fly within a scant yard of the cat's nose . . . and claws . . . calling a shrill "CHEEP." And it didn't require any knowledge of bird language to know that Mr. Mockingbird wasn't calling the cat "Nellie Gray." Even the cat understood that, and would slink under the house. There he would stay for an hour, while the bird perched on a branch close to the house and called his stout-hearted warning over and over again. Even though they have been linked with a great deal of sentimental twaddle, they're no sissies, these mockingbirds.

They proved their persistence by building their nest in the same tree again last summer! But Mr. Chips had been replaced by Mrs. Chips, who never ventured near the birds' tree after the Jedge spanked her out of it soon after the nest was built. The birds raised two lively broods in the tree during the summer.

It seems to me that the songs and poems about mockingbirds lead most of us to expect an entirely different sort of bird . . . perhaps one with a lot of blue, yellow or rose color in his feathers. I know it was a let-down to me to find him a very conservative dresser, gray above and white below, with large white patches showing on wings and tail when he flies.

Perhaps the mockingbird, however, is like one of those persons who interest you so tremendously you forget to notice what they are wearing. I often think of this when I watch him about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, feeding at the top of the tallest tree. He perches on the tiptop branch and sings with all his might, giving us a bright lilting song that he has picked up from some of his neighbors. Then he will flutter his wings, rise gracefully into the air, perhaps a dozen feet, then settle again

on the same branch and go into another spirited imitation. This finished, he again rises into the air, and again settles, keeping this up through a routine of a dozen or more imitations. This has all the appearance of a gifted performer graciously taking a bow before the applause of an enthusiastic audience. Actually, I presume, he is flying into the air after a particularly luscious bug that is drifting lazily by.

Perhaps I had expected the mockingbird to have the physical appearance of the towhee, the Lucius Beebe of the Ozark birds. The entire head and upper parts of the towhee are black, and he wears a white vest to show off his bright reddish orange sides. When the male bird flies, he looks as if he had put on his dress suit and were going to the king's garden party. Even his call, in our locality, has a lot of class consciousness. He has a way of perching in our apple tree, facing our front yard, and calling loudly: "Dir-tee! Dir-tee!"

He'd better stay out of that apple tree!

One day last summer, the Jedge was sitting on the terrace when he heard a terrific commotion among a family of blue jays who lived in the apple tree. He tore out to the fence, looked up in the tree, and saw a big blacksnake in the very act of swallowing one of the young birds while the parent birds flew wildly about, screaming and pecking at him. It took the Jedge only a moment to knock Mr. Snake out of the tree, and render him harmless to birds for all time to come. Then as the snake's body lay in the lane, the parent birds flew down to it, and pecked wildly at the bump that was their little one, as though trying to get him out. The Jedge has often wondered if the bird might have been rescued, like a

feathered Jonah, if he had bisected the snake, then and there.

In a few minutes the older birds remembered they had three other babies. Although the youngsters had not reached flying age, the parents promptly coaxed or pushed them from the nest to the ground. Then, throughout the long summer afternoon, they coaxed them along, a few hops at a time, through the grass of the lawn, and under the fence, until at last they reached the woods. We saw them no more . . . and from that day to this, all bluejays shun the apple tree in the lane.

However, we do not lack for "blues" in our nearest bird neighbors. Bluebirds always nest in the cherry tree in our lawn. And always, that glorious blue color, which shows up so beautifully against the red-brown bark and glistening green leaves of the cherry tree, gives my spirits a lift! I can readily understand why the bluebird, with his rosy vest, has long been the emblem of happiness, good luck, springtime, and Valentine love notes!

The cardinal is another of my favorites, and I like him all the better because he stays with us the year around. He seems such a proud fellow, with his crest, and his air of you-tend-to-your-business-and-I'll-tend-to-mine, that I have never sought to pry into his private affairs. Usually, I see him as a streak of flame, flitting across my path, and I always wish he would alight near me, so I could gaze at his brilliant beauty to my heart's content.

One day last summer, I thought I would have just that longed-for opportunity. In the woods, just beyond our front lawn fence, I saw a spot of flaming-red color, instead of the usual streak. It was fairly close to the ground, in a small bush.

"Ah-ha, a cardinal. What on earth is he doing?" was my excited thought. I sat quietly on the terrace. Perhaps the bird was picking out a nesting site, and I wouldn't disturb him for the world. The Jedge came out on the terrace. I shushed him, motioned to keep Judy back in the house, and pointed out the bright red spot in the bush. I wished desperately for my field glasses, but feared to move, thinking I might frighten my bird away. We sat for ten minutes.

"I think that's the bird off Nellie's hat, if you ask me," said the Jedge, in a hoarse whisper.

I began to get worried. The bird might be bound with string, or a toe might be caught between two branches. I had heard of such things. Inch by inch, I began creeping across the wide lawn, hoping to get close enough to see the black patch around his bill. At last I was within a few feet of the small bush. I raised my head and looked at it over the spirea bush. The spot of bright color was a brilliant red hollyhock, which had just burst into bloom on a stray stalk growing near the little bush.

Well, hollyhocks are nice, too!

After this incident, I began carrying my field glasses more regularly, and was well rewarded on my next trip to the mail box. Within a short distance, I saw an indigo bunting, as blue as its name indicates, a goldfinch, yellow as butter, and a summer tanager, a beautiful rose-red color. The three primary colors right there on our farm.

"Now," I said to Judy, who was tagging at my heels, "we have something to tell Valenda Cartwright."

By one of those strange coincidences, I found in the mailbox a letter from Valenda. It brought the good news that Valenda's Aunt Harriet had come up from southern

Arkansas. That meant Valenda could "get out a little" while her aunt remained with her invalid mother. If I would come over, she had written, we could walk through the woods to see some of her birds.

The next day, I hurried through my ironing and was on my way to Valenda's Bee Creek home shortly after noon. As always, the mere thought of Valenda made me more bird-conscious, and I watched carefully for birds all the way. Aside from a black-capped chickadee preening his black bib, as he sat on a low branch of an oak tree, and the usual sparrows, the birds seemed to be avoiding the road.

Possibly Valenda's intimate knowledge of local birds and their ways makes me more keenly aware of bird-life, when I am near her! Or, it may be Valenda's own resemblance to a trim, busy little wren. She is a slim, quick-moving little person, with thin features and such tiny bones I often say I wouldn't trust her with Sally Rand's fans. She would certainly take wing and fly off into the blue beyond. She just laughs her soft, musical laughter, that somehow recalls birds settling down for the night, and tells me to remind her to "juke" her head when she flies under that lowest branch of the sycamore in their front yard.

Valenda has apparently taken her hard life with magnificent unconcern. Most women no older than twenty-six would be shrieking about "frustration" if they were tied to the bedside of a crochety old lady and to the routine duties of a farmhouse far back in the hills. There's money enough in the Cartwright family to hire help, but here in the hills, hired help isn't obtained if there is a woman in the family able to do the work. As

Valenda goes about her daily chores, she expresses her gratitude for two great blessings: the fact that her mother's illness didn't "come on" until after she had finished high school and that she was born on a farm that birds like.

I strongly suspect that birds began to like that farm better after Valenda had grown old enough to look after them. A banquet of dairy feed, suet, peanuts, cracked hickory nuts, and kaffir corn is spread daily for them during the winter months. There, on the back porch, where Valenda's bright brown eyes can study them, while she remains within earshot of the querulous old lady, they eat their daily rations in stormy weather. And when warm weather comes, they stay close to the farmhouse to reward her with their summer songs and beauty. With friends like these, it is not surprising that Valenda grows a bit more shy and reticent in the presence of humans, as the years go by.

Probably I would have lived in the hills for years without becoming acquainted with this delightful woman if I hadn't gone into the town butcher shop early one winter morning. A neat little person in a brown wool skirt and a jacket made by hand from pieces of leather of many different colors was buying, with frugal concern, a small piece of beef. She asked for a piece with plenty of suet! A moment later, I asked for an identical piece of meat! As she was putting her package of meat into a shopping bag with other purchases, I turned to her and said: "I'd like to make a suet pudding with this, if I could get a certain blue jay filled up for once!"

"I hope we aren't feeding the same bird," she replied. "I'm feeding a glutton, too!"

If a certain jaunty blue jay, who was "holler to his heels," was commuting that winter between Bee Creek and Sunrise Mountain, eating his head off at both places, he paid his winter's board bill then and there. He made it possible for me to meet Valenda on grounds that led to lasting friendship. From talk of the blue jay, it was just a step to talking of Valenda's pet wild canary, which she had raised from a tiny, injured fledgling. And then, in that butcher shop, down here in the hills, I told her of the trained canaries which haul tiny carts and climb miniature ladders before wide-eyed audiences in a Chicago State Street Dime Store, as an advertisement for bird supplies, and how thrilled I was to hear the trainer call the smartest bird "Margie"! Since that meeting, Valenda and I enjoyed many visits together.

When I drove into the Cartwright yard, Valenda was sitting on the front porch shelling peas. Blondie, her pet wild canary, was sitting on her shoulder, twittering softly, and occasionally nipping the nearest ear. We went into the house, so I could speak to Valenda's mother and aunt. Then I had to see Blondie's new trick. Valenda held a book in reading position, and Blondie flew to a comfortable perch on the page. When Valenda turned the page, Blondie fluttered to its edge, and slid down the other side, as it was turned.

"So you've taken to spending your life reading," I said.

"Indeed, I haven't," she replied. "I've been roaming the woods looking for new birds."

Aunt Harriet confirmed the statement.

"And I've made a great discovery," continued Valenda. "I want to show you the most wonderful bird I've ever seen! Come along!"

When Valenda says "come along" it may mean that you'll find yourself swimming the deepest river or climbing the highest mountain to see a bird she has discovered. Having expected something of the sort, I had worn my boots. If a mean old copperhead is going to stick out his forked tongue at me, just because I happen to walk past the rock under which he is snoozing, he'll get at least one fork of it bent against a good stout shoe. Valenda was wearing her boots and overalls, and as we started out, she picked up her rifle, and put some ammunition in her pocket, saying I would be fully protected against "varmints."

For a time we walked along the well-worn path that led to their pond, then Valenda swerved sharply to the left and we plunged into the forest. For at least a half hour we traveled into the heart of the woods.

We scrambled down hillsides over slippery rocks. We sank halfway to our knees in rotted leaves, in deep, moist valleys. We climbed over fallen tree trunks. We crossed and re-crossed a busy little stream that gurgled over clean, smooth stones. Then we climbed a steep bank and sat down to rest, taking care not to lean against a tree that might have ticks on it!

I wiped the perspiration from my face, and said:

"This bird had better be good!"

"He is!" said Valenda confidently. "Hear him!"

I listened. A short distance away, where the trees were thick, I could hear a loud call that would have made a leather-lunged drill sergeant envious.

"Is that a bird? Good heavens! He sounds like Robert the time I forgot to get gas in town, and the car died at the lane gate!"

Valenda was in no mood for trivial stories. The light of bird discovering gleamed in her eyes. "Come on! Let's go! He's a great ranger and may be gone for hours if he flies away now! I saw him about ten miles from here the other day when my brother and I drove over to West Plains!"

"Imagine knowing birds like that!" was my comment. "Don't you leave these fellows any private life at all?"

By that time she was far ahead of me, and I had to hurry to catch up. A moment later, she stopped, beckoned me to come close, and pointed straight ahead. I crept up and blinked my eyes! Surely that bird had escaped from a zoo. He was about the size of a crow, with a brilliant red crest, and peculiar white markings on the sides of his shining black head, down his throat and along the edges of his wings. Nowhere had I seen a similar bird. And rarely in the Ozarks had I seen so much industry. He was digging holes with such energy that dead leaves and moss were flying into the air. Apparently, he was searching for grubs or bugs that live in the ground, and either his luck had been bad that day, or he had been particularly hungry, for the ground was pockmarked with the big holes he had made in the dead leaves.

"Don't tell me!" I said. "Let me guess! He's a reincarnated shovel-leaner condemned to a life of personal digging."

"He's a pileated woodpecker," said Valenda, proud of her knowledge. "I discovered him last year, but never knew what he was until I saw a picture of one in last Sunday's paper. Isn't he a beauty?"

Beauty? A bird of such magnificent size and plumage deep in the heart of the woods, would bring a feeling of

genuine amazement to any person whose knowledge of birds has been largely limited to city sparrows. We stood for several minutes, watching this handsome fellow dig with might and main. Then suddenly he went zooming to a tree, exposing white linings on the fore part of his black wings, and began a loud "Thock! Thock! Thock!" on the tree trunk with his long bill. Finding the tree slim pickin's he went dipping from one tree to another, until he was out of sight.

"Now, there's something else I want you to see," said Valenda. "Have you ever heard of the crested flycatcher?"

"Well, I cut a folded newspaper into fringe and tacked it at our south door yesterday. It is a flycatcher, but without the crest!"

Valenda knew I was simply throwing a smoke screen about my ignorance. She explained, as we walked along, that the crested flycatcher is well worth seeing . . . but today, we would only see his home. I protested that it was too hot a day to be rambling all over the Ozarks to see a last year's bird nest! Valenda assured me it wasn't a last year's nest . . . the birds had vacated it only a short time before. We kept on walking.

At last we reached the tree where the nest was located. It looked to me almost the same as other nests, as we peered at it from the ground. Then Valenda scrambled up the tree, with all the agility of a small boy, finding footholds where I would have sworn none existed, and brought down the nest. I peered inside and was reminded of homes that startle a guest with some wholly unexpected bit of decor. Inside that bird nest was a small piece of discarded pine snakeskin, the original bands still

faintly visible. I knew, of course, that snakes shed their skins once a year, for I had frequently found them, lying empty and rounded, like newly washed gloves blown wide for drying. But I had no idea a use was ever found for them!

"Mrs. Flycatcher must have been reading Women's Wear," I commented. "Maybe she was going to run herself up some snakeskin shoes some quiet evening at home!"

"Or perhaps a raincoat," laughed Valenda. "But this isn't at all unusual. Crested flycatchers always put a piece of snakeskin in their nests!"

"Why?" I asked.

"You'll have to ask someone who knows more about birds than I do," replied Valenda. "I've never heard it explained. I haven't checked enough flycatchers' nests to be sure, but I have a hunch they put that snakeskin in the nest on the windward side, just to shut out draughts!"

"Oh, I see! That's the original insulation idea . . . and our human home-builders are just getting around to learning it! Perhaps birds have always had a lot of such tricks up their wings, and we smart aleck humans are just beginning to discover them!"

"My brother and I were talking about that very thing the other day," said Valenda. "We saw a killdeer walking over our ploughed field, and Bill said he bet automobile engineers got their idea of knee-action from him. Watch a killdeer next time you see one! He can walk across the roughest field, and keep his body as even as though he were walking on glass!"

"The Jedge says a flock of cowbirds could teach army airplane pilots a thing or two," I contributed.

"I should say they could!" exclaimed Valenda. "I think there's no grander sight in the hills than a hundred of these birds flying in close formation! Did you ever hear that whistling noise their wings make. And did you watch them bank and wheel and circle, just as though they were getting signals from a leader?"

Of course I had . . . and we were still wondering whether the leader flew in front, or in the center, when Valenda stopped and studied the woods intently.

"It was just about in here," she began, "that I saw that tufted titmouse on a nest. Those eggs should be hatched by now!"

Several minutes were spent in searching, but at last, a frightened mother bird, smaller than a sparrow, drab taupe in color but with a perky crest on her head, flew out of a wild crabapple tree and circled about, scolding bitterly. Valenda found the nest without difficulty and held the branches apart so I could see in it. Four of the cutest little birdlings I had ever seen were looking at us with big, bright inquisitive eyes. On the top of each fledgling's head was a tiny tuft that would some day be a crest, but just now it was a downy patch that gave each baby titmouse the appearance of a tousled youngster, waking from a nap and looking expectantly for a frolic.

"I'm glad you had a chance to see these cute babies," said Valenda. "When we get back to the pond, I'm going to show you the homeliest ones ever hatched."

On the way back through the woods, Valenda stopped time after time, to point out different birds, to call my attention to different bird calls, and to show me where birds were nesting, had nested, or would nest! I began to feel terribly dumb . . . why hadn't I been able to find out

all these things. Then my self-confidence returned. I saw a curious, sacklike nest suspended from a high branch of a tree! I knew what that was! . . . An oriole's nest! And I began calling "Shoo! Scat!" when I saw a small olive-green bird, with a yellowish vest, entering the nest!

"Look!" I said. "I know an oriole! He's brilliant orange and black. That bird's a burglar!"

"So you'd keep a lady out of her own house," scoffed Valenda! "Don't you remember that it's the male of the species who has the glamour among birds?"

That's one of the difficult things about studying bird life, I told her. So often the female does not resemble her gaudy spouse. And just when you have the male pegged so you know him, the seasons change and he takes on different colors. But by the time I was well into my argument, Valenda had ceased to listen to me. She was watching a small bird with a white breast and blue-gray back, who was busily picking bugs from the bark of the tree with his long bill.

"Do you know what that is?" she asked me.

"Certainly," I said. "He's the upside-down-cake of the bird world!"

"Don't go poking fun at him," said Valenda. "He's a respectable member of the nuthatch family. These birds always go down tree trunks headfirst!"

"I hope I'm never around when one of them slips and breaks his silly neck, doing a trick like that!" I told her.

At last after much dawdling along the way, we arrived at the pond. A green heron, with three half-grown youngsters, was resting at the edge of the pond. The mother bird saw us first, and instantly shot up a long thin neck, like one of the pop-out tricks that practical

jokers spring on unsuspecting victims! A ragged, rough-looking crest rose belligerently on the top of her head, and she uttered a croaking cry of warning to her children. Instantly, these half-feathered apparitions shot out their own scrawny, telescopic necks. Then without waiting for further orders, they fell into line behind their mother and went marching to the far end of the pond, each long neck dropping to force the head forward in perfect rhythm with the bird's awkward, stalking step. The four birds, humping along, one after another, in perfect unison, looked like one long moving object, such as the Caterpillar Tunnel at the Century of Progress.

"There they are," said Valenda. "The kind of babies that only a mother could love."

"Their mother . . . and you!"

"Well, I'd just as soon these didn't move in on us. They eat the tadpoles that make the frogs that eat the mosquitoes that give me the bites that make me squirm!"

We laughed at her complaint.

"Why don't you try your shootin' eye on them?" I asked.

"Oh, I couldn't do that—" She broke off her thought, to point excitedly to the edge of the woods at some distance beyond, where a terrific commotion was under way. As we watched, a half-dozen crows came out of the woods and got away with all possible speed, cawing loudly.

"A kingbird is after them," shouted Valenda. "Look at that nervy little chap!"

In the distance, this altercation recalled pictures of a pursuit plane attacking an enemy bomber, for the king-

bird was only a fraction of the size of his enemies. But there was no doubt that he was in full command of the situation. The crows were beating a hasty and flapping retreat. But even so, they weren't fast enough to suit the thoroughly annoyed kingbird. He quickly overtook the least agile of the six ebony sinners and actually seemed to hitchhike on his enemy's back for several unpleasant seconds. Evidently he was pecking like fury at his unwilling host's head and back with his large bill. At last they disappeared in the distance, and we sat down on the grassy bank beside the pond.

For several minutes, we talked about the exciting battle in the skies and wondered if the mechanical airplane battles aren't much the same. Presently, we noted a huge bird high overhead, gliding easily apparently without moving a wing, as he wheeled above the pasture.

"Oh, I know that one," I said. "That's a turkey buzzard! Nasty thing! Always hunting dead things to eat!"

Valenda promptly rose to his defense.

"He's our flying garbage man," she said. "Too bad the vulture, or turkey buzzard, has such an unsavory reputation. He's very useful to the farmer. Right now he probably has his eye on that smelly dead rabbit we saw back there by the path."

The appearance of this great bird, which might have been a troop transport plane in comparison to the bomber crows, brought thoughts of the current war to our minds. We discussed it earnestly, not in the vague and unconcerned manner of most Ozarkians but with a more personal and local application. What would we do if war came to this country? What if parachute troops began

to descend on this very field, floating down out of the skies like cottonwood fluffs.

"I'd just up and shoot them!" declared Valenda.

"I hope you can load that gun fast!" I commented.

"I can!" she boasted.

With deft, lightning-fast fingers she loaded the gun, cocked it, raised it to her shoulder, and fired into the sky. The report of the gun, and her scream, came at the same instant.

"The buzzard! I hit him!" she cried.

We had forgotten all about the big bird circling overhead. I looked up in time to see the bird execute a wobbly wing-over, and then, on his back, with his great limp wings trailing forlornly above him, plummet to earth. A few solitary feathers came floating gently and waveringly down, long after he landed at the far edge of the pond with a loud plop. We ran to him. He was not a pretty sight, with his funny neck, and turkey-pink head, bare of feathers, its small size out of all proportion to the great body. His wings were crumpled and distorted, with the gray underwing feathers that had helped keep him soaring exposed to full view.

"Look at those wings!" I said, awed by the sight of this great bird at close range. "They must spread a good six feet!"

"I didn't mean to hit him," said Valenda, sobbing. "He was really our friend!" Tears were streaming down her face! "And . . . he was so FREE!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

BEAUTIFYING THE UNBEAUTIFUL

WHAT the Ozarks need, we have often remarked, is another Chic Sale, who will specialize in toilet designing. The WPA affairs are quite all right, but they are terribly standardized. Furthermore, most Ozark families use them as chicken houses and keep right on trekking to the woods, as usual.

When we bought our farm in the Ozarks the outdoor toilet was typical of those in the hills. The door swung on one hinge, the floor boards were rotted and warped, and a general air of decrepitude hovered about the whole thing. Then, when we began to make improvements at the farm as time and our city salary went on, there came a change in the privy. When we built our new building to include tool house, chicken house, and garage, one corner became a toilet. It was about five feet square, with neat walls and a door that really closed. Aside from

the fact that the local carpenter cut the holes twenty-four inches across, which gave the seat the terrifying appearance of twin wells, it was quite satisfactory.

During the time this building was being leisurely constructed, in true Ozark manner, the old privy was still in use. Then came a day when work was speeded up to a terrific pitch. Word was received at the farm that Charlotte Voge and Leone Grandland, our very nearest and dearest city friends, would drive down from Chicago to spend Thanksgiving with us. Certainly we wanted that new building finished so it could be shown to our guests. And so it was . . . the day before the guests arrived. To hide all traces of the ancient privy, the dismal old building was promptly set on fire; the vault was filled in, leveled over, and sodded. Not a trace remained.

Then came Thanksgiving! It was a beautiful sunny autumn day . . . with leaves still showing traces of purple and crimson and persimmons still hanging on the trees. Our guests had arrived in the night, and they were entranced by the setting of our farm.

They were delighted, too, with the Ozark neighbors whom we had invited for dinner. And with the guests of our guests who had come unannounced to "surprise" their hosts, and, according to Ozark good manners, were brought along to our Thanksgiving dinner. The guests also brought great pans of baked beans, hickory nut cakes, platters of fried chicken, cold slaw, spiced peaches, and loaves of homemade bread to add to our turkey and other Thanksgiving fixin's. The table fairly groaned.

The table, by the way, was improvised from long boards laid on trestles covered with paper tablecloths and napkins brilliant with autumn colors and strutting gob-

blers . . . and, when laden with all the good foods loving hands could prepare, it represented the true spirit and traditions of Thanksgiving. Come dinnertime, twenty-odd guests gathered around to feast their fill.

After the dinner, little Abbie May Bethards, a frequent visitor at our farmhouse, tore out of the back door and through the back gate, her ash-blonde hair flying in the autumn breeze. No one paid any attention to her hasty exit, we were so busy clearing away the debris on the dinner table. But we knew she was returning long before she reached the house. We heard loud wails of anguish out in the back yard. Someone went to the rescue and the youngster was brought in, tears streaming down her face and deep sobs heaving her little chest.

"They tore it DO-OW-NNNN!" she wailed at the top of her voice.

It was not the loss of the familiar old toilet that caused her weeping. She knew what was in store for her unless she could make the alibi plenty good! For the next hour she had to lie quietly on the davenport, covered with the afghan, while out on the clothesline a pair of little checked gingham panties dried in the autumn sunshine.

In two more years, the buildings at Sunrise Mountain Farm were again under consideration. I was in Chicago when the Jedge decided that new building plans made it necessary to change the location of garage and chicken house. Letters flew back and forth, and finally the Jedge made the trip to Chicago to talk things over. With a hastily drawn map of the farm before us, we decided where these buildings would be reconstructed. Then with the manner of the Kingfish slipping a fast one over on Andy, my husband said:

"We'llputthetoiletdownhere."

The toilet! Heavens! I'd forgotten all about it. I repeated all the things I had always said about that horribly obvious building cluttering up a country landscape. But the Jedge insisted that it should be located at some distance from the other buildings, and remained adamant. Grudgingly giving in, I said:

"Well, if we *must* have an outdoor toilet, it's got to be photogenic!"

"Listen!" replied the Jedge. "This is a farm, not a Hollywood setting!"

I might have been able to plan a city bathroom, with tile floors and built-in cabinets; but designing an outdoor toilet, which would be quite practical, yet handsome enough to look well in Kodachromes . . . well, that was too much of an architectural feat for me. I gave it up as a bad job and went for help.

Spenc Franc, art director in an advertising agency on Michigan Avenue, practically fainted when I dropped into his swanky office and asked him to design a toilet for our farm down in the Ozark Mountains.

"I've done a lot of things in my time," he said, "but this is the first time I've ever been asked to become Privy Counselor!"

However, inside of an hour he was in my office with the design completed.

"Look!" he said. And indeed his sketch was worth a look.

"In every outdoor privy I was ever in," he began, "there's always a wasp's nest. Now I figure that if you put a special little gable up here in front, on the OUT-

SIDE, the dear little wasps will build their nest in it, and won't come inside." There was the gable.

"Also," he pointed out, "some folks like crescents, but some like stars! So . . . in the door I've arranged for a panel that can be slipped in and out. Here on the wall I've put a rack to hold panels with different designs. Now when a guy goes in he can take out the panel he doesn't like, and slip into the door the one he *does* like . . . dog, cat, star, crescent, diamond, circle, or whatever. Check?"

I checked!

"Furthermore, the building should face the south . . . so it will be pleasant in the early morning. And it should have a halfway lattice before the door, so one can look out over the landscape! Check?"

I checked.

"Then, just to make it look like what it ain't, I've put a little chimney up here on the roof! And here at this corner, I'd suggest a twisted rod to look like a lightning rod . . . you know, just for the looks of the thing."

There it was . . . a two-compartment affair, with its little gable, simulated chimney, and twisted lightning rod. The Jedge took the plans back to the hills with him. And from time to time, word came regarding the progress of the building.

I began to talk about the toilet wherever I went. And to my great surprise, I learned something new about city people. Beneath even the most sophisticated urban exterior lurks a desire to improve the outdoor privy situation. Everyone had an idea!

Charlotte and Leone told me to come over to their studio and choose wallpaper. Not just ordinary wall-

paper, but paper of such character and beauty that it would raise the tone of any building, any place.

Marion Roe, a young secretary who handles a millionaire's finances, contributed another bright idea. She suggested that we put a blackboard in each "apartment." Then the first caller each morning would write a Thought for the Day. For instance, on a sunny day he could quote Shakespeare:

"Jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountaintops."

Or, if it were raining cats and dogs, he could write:

"A toast to him who's happy,
A fig to him who frets . . .
It is not raining rain to me,
It's raining violets!"

Wibb Smart went to the trouble of looking up a half-dozen puzzles, such as "How Many Articles Can You Find In This Picture That Begin With B?" and other simple eye catchers. He had these photostated to gigantic proportions and mounted on heavy cardboard. Then he sent them down to the farm, ready to tack on the toilet walls.

At Kroch's Bookstore I told the young saleswoman, Madeleine Johnson, the Story of the Ozark Toilet and How It Grew. She promptly came through with another good idea. I should, she said, put an illustrated map of the world in each compartment. Then the toilet-caller could look at the map, pick out the spot where he or she would like to be, and while away a pleasant half hour imagining himself . . . or herself . . . in Timbuktu, Alaska,

Hawaii, or Chicago. The trouble with that idea was that no one in the Ozarks has any desire to be any place else.

Spurred by insistence that the completed toilet must be exactly like the artist's plan, the carpenters really did a noble job. When I arrived at the farm, a beautiful building, twelve feet square, with gabled roof and twisted lightning rod, met my eyes. Painted white with green trim, to match the other buildings on the farm, it fits into the landscape with complete harmony. It is sound of floor, walls, and roof . . . a building that can be shown with pride to anyone who visits the farm. But quite probably it will work toward our undoing in the hills.

Roy's wife went to town soon after the new toilet was completed. (Roy is our hired man, in case you just tuned in.) While shopping at Charles' Grocery and Meat Market she met a friend who lives in the country far on the other side of Mountain View. There were cordial greetings. Then the friend asked:

"Is your husband still workin' for the Lyonses?"

Mrs. Johnson said he was.

"Well, then you orter be able to tell me what I want to know! *Is it true that they've built a hundred-dollar privy?*"

Mrs. Johnson said she believed the cost would run that high, counting materials and labor, and the concrete for apron and step.

"Well, I declare!" humphed the friend. "I've allus thought furriners wuz crazy! Now I know it!"

So that's a fair indication of what is being thought in the hills. Even though the Jedge hands down legal decisions as wise as Solomon's, even though we make our farm blossom like the rose, we will probably be known

for generations to come as the "city folks that paid a hundred dollars for a privy!"

About the time the friend from "yon" side of town was quizzing Mrs. Johnson, I was down at the mailbox getting the wallpaper and paint sent from Chicago by our two interior decorator friends.

Next day an orgy of decoration began, with paint brushes flying over seat, window casings, doors, and floors! No one, except Aunt Mealie, who can never be kept from seeing and knowing everything, was allowed to see paper or color scheme! It was to be a big surprise to everyone! It grew in beauty. Voile curtains, rose-pink for one compartment, pale green for the other were run up on the sewing machine. Then, when Mrs. Johnson could help me, we put the paper on the walls. And if you think that wasn't a job, just be on hand next time we do it.

It's one thing to paper a room inside a house, where you can have long tables on which to spread the paper for pasting and cutting. But it's quite another thing to paper two six-foot cubicles, where there isn't room for spreading out even one length of paper. We solved the problem as best we could by having a long bench carried to the front of the building. Spreading the paper face down on the seat of the bench, and weighting it down with rocks to keep the wind from blowing it away, we would apply paste with more zest than success. The rocks, of course, would have to be moved to allow the paste to cover each square inch. During the pasting operation a playful gust of wind would invariably dance across the pasture and attempt to wrest the paper from our hands. To make matters still worse, the paper

chosen for one side had to be put on horizontally instead of vertically. We decided we would like it better if the garlands of pink roses ran round and round on the blue ground, instead of up and down.

I haven't any idea how a real paper hanger would put such paper on a wall . . . but with no one to counsel us we just went ahead and did it. And trying to put paste on strips of paper over eighteen feet long, laid out on a bench just one-third as long and one-half the width of the paper, with mountain zephyrs blowing from all directions, and Aunt Mealie scornfully protesting that she'd "never hearn of anything so crazy as paperin' a privy," was a task that put gray in our hair. However, we finished it! And surprisingly few paste spots on the paper and only two torn places, which wouldn't be seen unless the visitor is terribly nosey, remained to distress us.

Papering the other compartment was far less complicated. For one thing, the paper was a happier choice . . . a vigorous pattern of bamboo in brown, tan, and crimson on a pale tan background. It was easy to match the bamboo leaves, and we were really proud of the job. Because of the small size of the room and the strength of the design, the effect was amazing. The tall stalks of bamboo, with long graceful leaves, extended from floor to ceiling. With the floor painted dark green, pale green curtains at the window, and the bamboo crowding around, the atmosphere created the illusion of being alone in the midst of a bamboo forest.

Tired, but feeling mighty proud of ourselves, we called the Jedge.

"Now," we told him, "you can come and see what we've done!"

Curiosity had almost got the better of him! There was no lagging when we gave the come-on signal.

He gave the "blue room" sincere and heart-warming praise. Then he peered into the other side, where the bamboo stalks lined the walls.

"For the love of Mike!" he said, forgetting to close his mouth.

I could have wept.

"What's the matter? Don't you like it?"

"Look!" he said, pointing at the forest of bamboo. "Did you forget that I nearly died of dysentery in the Philippine Islands?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

WOMEN-FOLKS IN THE HILLS

THE weaker sex! That phrase always gives me a laugh when I think of its being applied to Ozark women.

Life for Ozark men may be one long holiday, broken with a bit of plowing, cultivating, and harvesting at various seasons. But for Ozark women, life means a lot of hard work and long hours. Cooking is a real job anywhere! And when it's done in and on a wood cookstove, with the cook probably rushing out to chop the wood as each stick burns out, it is something more than a mere job. Even getting the food may be largely up to her . . . perhaps she had to tramp miles gathering greens or mushrooms. Maybe each forkful of beans has meant hours of garden work. More than likely, she set the eggs and raised that chicken you're eating, rushing out in the rain to bring it (and its brothers and sisters) into the coop and feeding it cornmeal mush heavily seasoned with pepper when it looked "droopy."

Preparing a meal, with the groceries delivered to the kitchen, and the fire operated by turning a switch, would seem like a picnic to a woman in the Ozarks. And as for washing the dishes, she would never believe that any city woman hates dishwashing when nothing more is required than turning the faucet. Good heavens! Mrs. Ozark Mountain may have walked a mile, not for a cigarette, but for a bucket of spring water. Or she may have run out in the rain to turn the drainpipe from the eaves trough into the cisterm when the roof was thoroughly washed off by the first shower. Now she proudly sinks a bucket into the well and draws up an overflowing pail of clean, cold rain water for her cooking. And for your drinking!

Perhaps the hardships that make up a woman's life in the Ozarks are good for her! At any rate, she seems to develop a sturdiness of character that makes her a credit to her sex.

Take Mary Burchet, for example. Mary's first baby was expected late in May. All spring Mary had tended to little chickens and planted flowers and done the cooking and housework. Only two concessions to her condition were made during the entire season.

One was when her husband set the cookstove up on four blocks of wood to enable her to cook without stooping over so far. The stove had been ordered from a mail-order catalog which didn't specify sizes! When it arrived, it was just about big enough for a good-sized five-year-old child's play kitchen.

The other concession was when she didn't have to get the mail. One day when Mary was walking to the mailbox, a mile from the house through the woods, she met

a blue racer snake smack in the path. She turned around and ran back toward home. The blue racer, curious as his type always is, promptly wriggled after her. She didn't go to the mailbox that day.

Then one beautiful morning in mid-May, when the daisies were blooming in the pasture in front of their home, Mary laid down the pancake turner and slid the griddle to the back of the cookstove.

"I think you'd better go for Lucy," she said to her husband.

It took a few minutes to start the car! Another precious minute was wasted in turning the car around and heading it out through the gate. Then it roared over the bumpy woods road past Pinky Waters' shuttered house and on to the main road. With puffs, pants, gurgles, and squeaks, it raced down the road to a home that boasts a telephone. To this day, Ray doesn't remember what he told the doctor . . . but his voice must have had the hurry note that doctors learn to recognize early in their careers.

Then he got into the car again, and with horn squawking madly, went on to Lucy Conwell's. When he reached her gate, Lucy, with her dark hair in two braids, a coat thrown over her shoulders, and her own little two-year-old daughter in her arms, was just coming out of the door. That squawking horn had told her all. She had flung a dress into a grocery bag, grabbed her baby, and was ready to climb into the Burchet car.

Back they raced over the bumpy woods road, where great trees thrust out gnarled roots as though trying to trip them, and the car chugged into deep gullies worn by years of rain. When they arrived at the little white farm-

house behind the daisy field, far in advance of the doctor, and the roar of the motor was stopped, a new sound was filling the air. It was the crying of a brand new baby.

It was all of an hour later, Lucy told us afterward, when the doctor had come and gone, before Ray was told that he could go into the bedroom to see his wife and child. Probably he wanted to tell Mary how wonderful she was, and how the doctor had praised her for wrapping her newborn baby in a pillow slip, the only fabric she could reach, when the morning breeze blew chill upon them, and no one was there to help her. But hill men are ever inarticulate.

He could only murmur, brokenly:

"Mary! Mary! Are you all right?"

His young wife opened her blue eyes and smiled.

"Oh, yes!" she breathed softly. "And so happy . . . happier than ever in my whole life. We'll call her . . . Joyce!"

No story of feminine staunchness here in the hills would be quite complete without recalling the time Aunt Mealie rescued her dog. It happened three years ago . . . when Badger was not the sober, level-headed fellow he is now. And when Aunt Mealie's misery in her knee was a shade less distressing than it is these days.

It was early afternoon on a hot summer day . . . a day when one could fairly see little waves of heat rising from the parched earth. Aunt Mealie was busy in her lean-to kitchen when she heard the rattlety-bang of an approaching Model T.

And above the noise of the car, she heard the whooping and hollering of a "passel" of rowdyish young folks.

Badger, snoozing at the foot of the steep stone steps at

the kitchen door, heard the noise, too. He started up, listened a moment, and then tore to the front gate, barking loudly.

The dilapidated car, without top or windshield, clattered and rattled up the hill from the Thomases. Aunt Mealie peered out of her window. She saw that the car contained four passengers, two boys and two girls with wet stringy hair. Obviously, the quartet had been swimming in Jack's Forks and were on their way home. One of them, the driver of the car, she recognized as the no-good son of a family living about four miles south of Mountain View.

"Give it to 'em, Badger," she muttered. "Sech goin's-on! Effen I was them gals' mothers . . ." She stopped short! An amazing scene was taking place before her horrified eyes.

The car had come to a clattering stop just as the frantically barking dog reached the edge of the roadway. The tall young chap in the back seat flung a leg over the car door and landed on the ground! In the twinkling of an eye he grabbed up the dog and tossed him onto the back seat beside the shrieking, laughing girl! Then, in less time than it takes to tell it, he flung himself into the car again, the driver let in the clutch, and the ancient car was off with a jerk. Before Aunt Mealie could collect her wits, the car, dog and all, had raced down the hill, skittered around the corner, and headed for town, six miles away. The silence was terrifying. The absence of Badger was like a missing tooth. There he had been, sleeping peacefully one minute, and the next minute he was gone as completely as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him.

It was one of the darkest moments in Aunt Mealie's life. Uncle Pete, the only one who could coax their ramshackle car into motion, was fishing down at the Forks. The mule was in the pasture in the valley. It would take an hour to find him and get him hitched to the wagon. There was no telephone with which to call the sheriff. And besides, the sheriff was away over at the county seat. The thought that Badger was just a dog, and could be replaced the next time one of the neighbors' dogs had puppies, never entered Aunt Mealie's head. In her sixty-seven years she had never had a dog she liked so well as Badger.

With one motion, she plucked her sunbonnet from the nail on the kitchen wall and her rifle from the corner. She paused only long enough to see that the gun was loaded, then set out down the hot dusty road.

She came first to our house. We were away and had the car with us. Roy refused to hitch up the horse and take out after the dognapers' car. His excuse was that he had been told to stay at the farm. Aunt Mealie trudged on.

She passed the homes of Mary Day and the preacher and went on to the next neighbor who owned a car. She told him her story, but again she met with blunt refusal. He saw the fire in Aunt Mealie's faded blue eyes and noted the businesslike way in which she clung to her rifle. He didn't want to get mixed up in any bloody battle. Wisely, he counseled her not to do anything rash.

"Wait until Pete comes home from fishing," he urged. "He'll get Badger back for you!"

At last he suggested the Law.

"The Law!" snorted Aunt Mealie. "I'm a-goin' after my Badger my own self!"

The car came to a clattering stop.

Cradling her rifle in her right arm, she plunged into the deep woods.

Only the God of the Ozarks knows how Aunt Mealie crossed deep ravines and gullies, dry and rocky, or running full of icy water from the springs back in the hills. How she climbed steep stony hillsides with the slippery rocks sliding under her feet or sending piercing gashes through her broken shoes. How she found her way through trackless woods and thick, thorny underbrush. How she evaded the dangers of the woods, the poison ivy, poison oak, and the feared copperheads that lurk beside stones and strike without provocation or warning. But the sun was still high when she reached the south road not far from the home of the young fellow who was driving the car.

Just why Aunt Mealie suspected that the ramshackle car would loiter in the village is a mystery to me! She will never tell whether she had lingered awhile in the bushes beside the road or whether she was on her way to the home of the boy she knew, to demand her dog at the point of a gun. At any rate, just as the four dognappers, near sundown, filled with hamburgers and "sody pop," rattled around the corner within sight of the boy's home, Aunt Mealie stepped out of the bushes. She shuffled into the middle of the road, pushed back her sunbonnet and leveled the rifle. The car came to a clattering stop. Aunt Mealie aimed her rifle at the driver's heart, the glint on the steel of the gun repeating the glint in the blue eye back of the sight.

"Put down my dawg!" Aunt Mealie commanded in a tone that one might hear on doomsday.

The boy in the back seat was a mountain lad. He knew

guns are not mere threats in the hills. He gingerly put his hands under the cowering brown dog and boosted him level with the car door.

" 'N put 'im down *easy!*" came Aunt Mealie's stern voice, shrewdly foreseeing any spiteful intention of throwing the dog out.

Badger was cautiously slithered over the car door! He jumped softly to the ground and raced to Aunt Mealie. She lowered her rifle and, with chin high and the dog at her side, moved to the edge of the road. The car slid past her, without a word from its four frightened young passengers.

Never will they forget a summer evening when they faced Death wearing a brown slat sunbonnet.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MEN-FOLKS IN THE HILLS

WE DRANK cups of scalding coffee by the light of the kerosene lamp and huddled close beside the little flat-topped heating stove in the dining room. Outside, the gray dawn showed the ground covered with frost, the thick, heavy mountain frost that can be scraped off like snow. It was the kind of a morning that calls for pancakes and sausages. But we had no time for a real country breakfast. The Jedge had to catch the Bluebonnet Special at Rolla at eight-ten. Taking the new detour into consideration, Rolla was, at that moment, one hundred miles away.

Roy had come over to drive the car back from Rolla, and at the last moment my sister and I decided to go along and do some shopping. We piled into the chilly car.

Even the car seemed "slowed down" by the cold. On the jolting road through the woods, where the brown leaves hung thickly on the tall oak trees, it sputtered fit-

fully. Finally after we turned the corner, it breathed its last.

A short, decisive conference was held. The car, we said, had not been warmed up sufficiently on that bumpy road and couldn't make the hill while it was still cold. We'd simply push it to the top of the rise, a matter of a mere hundred yards, and give it a start down the hill with the Jedge at the wheel. The engine would undoubtedly start somewhere on the run downhill.

Roy, Pauline, and I got out. The Jedge took over the wheel, and the pushing began. If you ever want to get your blood into quick circulation, just try pushing a heavy car up an Ozark hill at dawn on a frosty winter morning. It can bring out more perspiration than a summer tennis game.

We pushed with might and main, putting rocks under the rear wheels at each inch gained. But when we reached the abrupt rise that led to the crown of the hill we had to give up. We simply weren't able to get over the hump.

We held another conference, with our breath making smoky puffs! Roy would tinker with the car's "innards," hoping against hope that he might stumble onto the trouble, while I went to the nearest house to get help.

I didn't look upon the errand with favor. I tried to get the Jedge to go. But he had on his going-away clothes and shoes, and he wouldn't get all muddy and Spanish-needly going through the woods—not, by George, if he sat there all day!

The nearest neighbor at that point happened to be Wild Rufe.

"What if Wild Rufe is having one of his spells?" I said.

"If he's having a spell on a morning like this," said the Jedge, "then I *know* he's crazy!"

Wild Rufe's spells have long been the neighborhood disgrace. Probably scientists have a name for his malady, but here in the hills we just say he is "took with spells." The spells do not imperil Rufe's life, unless, as I hinted, he might be having one that frosty morning. He will be plowing, or hoeing, or maybe walking along the road, when all at once he will stop, take off all his clothes, hang them on a convenient tree or fence post, and then resume his work or his walking. Suddenly he will come out of the spell, discover his embarrassing condition, and run like mad for his clothes—or cover. The theory is that Rufe was shell-shocked in the war. Privately, the Jedge and I believe that he was Paris-shocked. But his spells, whatever the cause may be, have made Rufe a social outcast in the Ozarks.

Through the frosty woods I tramped to Wild Rufe's little log house, the thick carpet of leaves rustling under my feet and tiny crisp branches breaking with the noise of a thousand popguns. Rufe's little terrier heard me coming and barked dire threats! But dogs don't scare me. I went close enough to the house to see the thick, white frost on the galvanized iron roof and halloed until Rufe answered. I shouted our plight and told him he was needed! Would he please come and help us *P U S H!* He said he would. Then I waited . . . and waited . . . and WAITED! Inside the tiny cabin I could hear a commotion. It sounded as though Rufe were brushing a Sunday suit. I wondered if his spells had gone into reverse.

At last he appeared, looking, as always, as though he had just stepped out of a cartoon in *Esquire*. There was

the high forehead under the slouch hat and the great bush of black whiskers, thick and long, beneath dark piercing eyes. There were the flapping overalls held up by one gallus under a buttonless denim jacket! As we hurried through the woods I explained the trouble and told him the Jedge simply had to get to that train!

Roy's tinkering, as expected, had failed. But with Roy and Rufe pushing, the car was soon at the top of the rise, then running down the road. We watched anxiously. No sight of smoke came from the exhaust to show that the engine had started. Down the long hill went the Jedge at breakneck speed. Across the valley. The momentum of the car was starting it up the next hill. Yes, there it goes! Look! What's that? The exhaust! Sure enough, halfway up the hill, the engine coughed, sputtered, and then started humming its own cheerful tune as though it had just wakened from a nap and found itself with work to be done.

I fished a half dollar out of my purse and handed it to Wild Rufe. As I did so, I suddenly recalled that long wait in the woods!

"Listen, Rufe," I said. "I don't want to be personal, but why did it take you so long to dress back there at the house?"

He shuffled a bit, and the part of his face above his bushy beard turned purplish-red.

"Well, you see, ma'am," he said earnestly, "I ain't had time to git me no underwear, and these pants is powerful cold in the mornin'. I was jest a-rubbin' em together to git 'em kinda warmed up!"

Our acquaintance with Wild Rufe dates back to an-

other frosty morning three years ago. My husband was busy with the sheep when Rufe, whiskers and all, appeared at the corral fence.

There was the usual Ozarkian beating around the bush before Rufe stated his errand. He had come to ask if he might borrow a dollar.

"What's wrong?" asked my husband, scenting some extraordinary difficulty. "Need some groceries?"

"I shore do," said Rufe quietly. "F'r three days now I been eatin' pancakes made out o' chicken feed, and I'm dang tired of 'em!"

The Jedge promptly put him in the car and drove him to town for groceries. On the way, he inquired into Rufe's affairs.

"Did you ever get your bonus for being in the service?" he queried.

"What bonus?" asked Rufe.

On that very trip to town the Jedge took Rufe into the bank and started the wheels rolling to get his bonus. With surprising promptness Rufe received a check for $600, the long overdue bonus.

Rufe disposed of his chickens at once, got someone to keep his dog, and went to Kansas. A month or more later he returned with a pair of horses, fat, sleek, handsome strawberry roans, new harness, new wagon, and new overalls. With a team, he told the Jedge, he could really do some farming.

Unfortunately, Rufe had forgotten that horses must eat to keep their sleekness and plumpness. Within a year they were roaming up and down the roadsides, seeking their own food, gradually getting the grizzled, bony look of most Ozark animals. The final touch of degradation,

in our opinion, was a cowbell tied around each horse's neck. The bell, of course, enabled Rufe to find the animals, for they rarely wandered far enough from home to be beyond sound of the bell. To see such noble animals brought down to a cowbell existence was distressing beyond words to the Jedge. At last one of the horses died, the victim of malnutrition, exposure, and lice. The other one was sold when a guardian was appointed to take care of Rufe's pension.

Now Rufe lives on a little forty-acre farm over in Howell County. But someday he'll come moseying home . . . for Rufe has drunk from the clear, sparkling waters of Jack's Forks! Everyone in the hills confidently expects him. That's why no hill family will move into the little log house with the tin roof at the edge of the woods. Wild Rufe may come back in one of his spells.

It was early in April last year when we heard the news. We had a new neighbor. Aunt Mealie came down the hill fairly breathless with excitement. The new neighbor had moved into the Ben Boluss cabin on the hill back of her house. He was not unknown to the community. He had, we knew, served a term in the penitentiary and at that moment was out on probation. His name was Sam Ganter.

I had only one encounter with the gentleman in the time he lived near us. Doris and I were taking a short cut through the woods over the hill to get to Jack's Forks.

Suddenly this neighbor appeared before us with jack-in-the-box suddenness. He literally popped up from behind a thicket of bushes with a rifle cradled easily in one

arm. We stopped so quickly Judy's cold little nose bumped against my legs. We said nothing. I don't think I could have spoken, with my mouth hanging open as it was. The apparition spoke just five words:

"These is my woods now!"

I apologized for our trespassing. Mr. Boluss was a good friend of ours, I told him, and had allowed us to cut across his land. But we . . . we . . . wouldn't do it any more, I finished lamely. One doesn't wisecrack about being thrown out of better places when a rifle is within touching distance. We hurried out and went to the river the long way.

Next day, the Jedge asked Mr. Boluss if he had sold that piece of woods up there on the hill. Mr. Boluss denied it stoutly.

"Furthermore, by cracky, I'm plumb sorry I rented that place to that feller," he complained. "The son of a gun hadn't been there more'n a week afore he borried Maw's wash boiler, and danged if he's brung it back. Jes' keeps on a-sayin' he's still a-usin' it!"

Summer with all its joys and sorrows, its work and play, came and went. Now and then we heard unpleasant rumors about our neighbor and his motherless young 'uns, retrieved from various kinfolks where they had been farmed out during his term in prison. But his unfriendly behavior that day in the woods was enough to keep me from going beyond Aunt Mealie's house.

Came school time in the fall, and we heard that the youngsters had been dispersed again. And even the big black walnut trees in the rented portion of Mr. Boluss' farm couldn't lure me there again. The neighbor was almost forgotten.

Then one chilly autumn evening, when we sat before the fireplace in our living room, both Punch and Judy pricked up their ears, listened a moment, and rushed to the door in a frenzy of barking. I let them out, just in time to see an unusual sight on the highway at the end of the lane. Three cars, almost bumper to bumper, were turning the corner and heading up the hill toward the Harlow Schoolhouse.

Three cars, so close together after dark on the Harlow Schoolhouse road, mean Something is Happening. It may be a wedding, a party, preachin' at the schoolhouse, or trouble! And whatever it is, any true hill person wants to know where, why, and what. I stepped out on the chilly terrace and listened after the dogs had raced to the main gate. I heard the cars come to a stop at a point not far from Aunt Mealie's.

Was something wrong at Aunt Mealie's? I started in for a wrap and my lantern. Wait a minute, what's that? There was the sound of many feet trampling through the woods beyond Aunt Mealie's. The Jedge came out on the terrace and shrewdly guessed.

"Something going on up at that Boluss cabin!"

Almost immediately there were loud calls, pounding on doors, breaking of glass, and much confusion. After that, there was the sound of metallic pounding for several minutes. The Jedge said it sounded like the "Anvil Chorus" being done in the kitchenware department of a dime store. We heard more trampling in the underbrush, and a moment later the three cars came back around the corner and streaked for town as fast as they could over the rutty, bumpy mountain road.

Sleep would be impossible, I said, if we didn't find out

what had happened. We slipped into coats and, taking the lantern and dogs, went up the hill to Aunt Mealie's. Aunt Mealie and Uncle Pete knew exactly what had happened.

"Sam Ganter," they said, "was jis' took away by revenooers!"

The four of us went up the hill to the cabin where our unneighborly neighbor had lived. We were not the first. There stood Mr. Boluss looking down at a battered mass . . . the remains of a homemade still.

"Gol dang it," he said. "Look at Maw's good copper wash boiler! Them revenooers smashed it plumb to hell!"

Then his eyes brightened and his beard bristled.

"Mealie, lemme borry a couple o' pails offen you. I ain't a-goin' to be outdone. I'll take this mash home to my hawgs!"

Not all men in the Ozarks are quaint, laughable characters. You'll find delightful, likable personalities here, as everywhere. Take Roy Charles, for instance.

Back in 1917, Roy Charles, now our local lumberman, furniture designer and manufacturer, grocer, and hunter extraordinary, was working in his sawmill on the Ambrose Thomas farm. The tallest, staunchest walnut trees in this region of the Ozarks were being cut down and sawed into planks which later became gun stocks, revolver handles, and other accessories for wartime supplies. Suddenly, a plank of amazing beauty came through the saws. Roy recognized it at once as the queen of all walnut planks. Twelve inches wide, two inches thick, six feet long, superbly grained, and perfect in every pore . . . here was a plank seldom, if ever, equaled. Roy

ran admiring fingers across the smooth, beautiful wood. He looked across the wooded Ozark ridges, swathed in the blue haze of late summer. It was all so peaceful, so quiet, it seemed hard indeed to believe men were killing each other Over There!

Roy set his jaw with characteristic Missouri stubbornness.

"They'll not have this plank," he muttered. "It's too good for war. Someday I'll find a better use for it!"

Years passed! The sawmill passed into oblivion. Roy's liking for wood led him to designing and making furniture. His need for making a living for his family made him start a grocery store. As a side line, he squares railroad ties from native lumber and cuts timber. For this reason we went to Roy Charles when we wanted a mantel for the fireplace of our new living room.

We asked for a thick walnut plank.

Roy hesitated a full minute before he answered.

"I have a plank you may have," he said quietly. From its hiding place at the back of his lumber yard, he brought out the Queen of Planks that had come through his saws twenty-two years ago.

"Here," he said, "you may have this! I think that will be a good place for it!"

Instead of the fury of battle and the poppies of Flanders Field, this beautiful plank, stained and polished with loving attention, has known soft yellow firelight below green bowls of dogwood blossoms in springtime and mounds of pine boughs at Christmas. It has heard the "cheep" of newly hatched chickens and the plaintive baa-a of newborn lambs brought indoors for their first few hours in this strange world. It has heard the friendly

click of teacups and the ambitious planning of newlyweds. It has even known the tempting fragrance of beans simmering in an iron pot on the crane. That mantel is the very heart of our home.

I think Joyce Kilmer would have liked Roy Charles.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

READING MATTER

KNOWING that all Missourians dearly love trading, the Chamber of Commerce devised a weekly auction sale in which "stage money" took the place of real money. To obtain this stage money a person had to buy merchandise from the local stores! If he bought two dollars' worth of groceries or ten dollars' worth of fence or lumber, he was given a sum of stage money equivalent to the real money paid out. At the end of the week, merchants donated merchandise equal in value to the amount of stage money given out to customers.

This hodgepodge of merchandise, varying from bolts of bias tape to washtubs, was auctioned off on Saturday afternoon. Since it was paid for with stage money, prices were ridiculously inflated. A country woman who rarely had a dollar for herself could save her stage money through many weeks and spend six dollars for a length of

colorful dress goods, the cistern bucket she had long desired, or window curtains for the front window.

Aunt Mealie's scanty purchases netted her very little stage money. But at last, one Friday afternoon when she came down the hill to have me read her favorite comic strip, Little Abner, to her, she told me the good news. She had saved up nine dollars' worth of stage money. And come tomorrow, she was going to the auction and get something she had wanted "fer y'ars and y'ars." In spite of my wheedling, she refused to tell what it was. Even after I had read about Little Abner's woes of the moment, which she takes in deadly seriousness, she refused to come out and tell me what she wanted.

"I'll bet you're going to get a dozen lead pencils and learn to write," I teased.

"Naw, I hain't," she said. "I tried to learn to write one time! All them little curleycues got me so narvis I had to give it up!"

I didn't mention reading. Aunt Mealie is always a bit embarrassed by not knowing how to read. She always says she "cain't see them tiny letters," even when they are on a signboard.

The next day we heard the clatter of an antique Model-T passing our corner. I stepped outside to wave to Aunt Mealie and Uncle Pete. Aunt Mealie, all dressed up in her best orchid sunbonnet and the Big Apple smock I brought to her from Chicago, waved gaily.

For weeks afterward I was to hear about that trip. How the car had broken down and been mended by a piece of wire clipped from the fence along the road. And how the holler at Columbia Schoolhouse had been flooded deeper than usual, and how Aunt Mealie had waded

across, barefooted, carrying her shoes and her precious stage money.

Just before milking time, we heard them clattering home again. I wasted no time getting up the hill to see what Aunt Mealie had brought home. Was it a bright new dress? Was it a new stewing kettle? Was it some wallpaper for the smoke-blackened walls of her "big room"? No, it was none of these. Aunt Mealie's suppressed desire to appear "eddicated" had won out!

It was a year's subscription to the Mountain View newspaper.

Not all families in the hills take reading so seriously. One night a family of visitors sat with us before our outdoor fireplace. They watched me start a fire, using a crumpled newspaper to get the blaze started quickly.

Suddenly my neighbor asked:

"Margit, have you got any newspapers you can spare?"

I said I was afraid I didn't have that day's paper because I had accidentally put it under the new linoleum rug in the dining room. But I was sure I could find yesterday's paper, if she was interested in the current St. Louis murder trial.

"Oh, no, it hain't that!" she said. "Our subscription to the county paper has run out, and I do miss a paper to start the f'ar with!"

If you lived in the Ozarks, you would realize that this neighbor's lack of interest in the outside world is entirely normal. In fact, you would suddenly wake up some bright day and find you didn't give a hang about some gangster's body being found riddled with bullets in a city alley. Because, at that moment, you have discovered that

your cistern is getting awfully low, and if those clouds on the other side of the ridge don't bring rain, you'll be hauling water this time tomorrow. Believe me, you'll find yourself watching those clouds instead of reading the day's paper.

You'll be horrified, of course, to learn from a headline that some dictator-driven army is making life hell for thousands of refugees. But you haven't time to read about it because three of your ewes are "borning" lambs up at the sheep barn!

And what interest does a garden party at an eastern estate hold for you, if the Ferndale Church is giving an ice-cream sociable that night? Your angel-food cake must be better than Orrie Green's, or you'll never be able to lift your head in the hills again. An elopement in Hollywood stirs no interest, when you can nod your head knowingly at news of a shotgun wedding over at Wolf Creek.

News of the outside world may be of absorbing interest to people who live narrow, circumscribed little lives in city apartments. But here in the hills, we *live life,* not merely read about it. We have drama, romance, comedy, suspense, and pathos mingled into our everyday lives like the warp threads in a piece of weaving on my loom.

However, there are homes in the Ozarks, contrary to general opinion, where good literature is as necessary as food. Perhaps more necessary. In one of these homes dwell the Driskills.

Even the narrow, rocky mountain road from our house to the Driskill farm takes on an eerie quality. Dark and shadowy, because of the crowding woods on

each side, it dips to sparkling spring-fed brooks that meander wilfully across the roadway. Then, abruptly, it climbs to such heights that you can look across a carpet of treetops spread in majestic glory across the Ozark hills. Suddenly that rocky ribbon turns sharply to the left, you whisk around a little white church nestled at the edge of deep woods, then two hills beyond you come upon the Driskill farm. And you know how Dorothy felt in the Land of Oz, when the three Driskill sisters and their deaf bachelor brother, Clem, come out of the tiny houses to greet you.

The houses stand side by side. The sisters' house has a tiny lean-to kitchen. Clem's dwelling has a deep basement under it for the housing of gladioli bulbs. These strange gentle people, the sisters so tiny and birdlike, the brother so dark and fearfully shy, seem to have a definite understanding with flowers. No other farm in this land of rocky hills grows such great red roses, heavy with perfume, and gay dancing bachelor buttons, or such forests of hollyhocks, larkspur, and delphiniums. In addition, the Driskills eke out their slender income by growing gladioli bulbs, which are shipped to many cities.

To walk with these quaint, soft-voiced little women and their dark, silent brother through acres of gladioli blossoms as brilliant as a technicolor background always gives me a weird feeling of intrusion. I seem to have strayed into another world, where my normal size and faculties are out of place.

Inside the sisters' house this sensation increases. Everything is so spotlessly clean and miniature in size. The tiny dining table in the doll-sized kitchen is always set with four plates, four cups, and four tiny bowls, three for the

sisters and one for Clem, who always eats in his sisters' home.

The sisters are excellent cooks. Many a cake, thick, velvety-textured, and delicious, finds its way to my house, and there are always big flat sugar cookies in the cookie jar. There are no hurried jumbled meals in the home of these three sisters. They believe in preparing meals far enough in advance to do them well. I often find the birdlike portions of morning cereal already dished up when the supper dishes are done.

Inside the bedroom three narrow beds stand in a row down the middle of the floor, each with its pink counterpane and tiny chest of drawers. Inside the living room there are straight little chairs, a cot, a checker table set up for Clem's nightly game of checkers with one of the sisters. And most startling of all, the walls are lined with shelves filled with books, and a table is strewn with magazines.

Sister Lydia is largely responsible for those magazines, since she is the "writer" of the family. The others proudly tell you that she once wrote a poem for which a farm magazine paid four dollars. Another sister has earned several dollars by making up crossword puzzles for certain magazines. It takes at least two weeks to make up a really good one, and the pay, a dollar and a half, isn't worth it, she feels. I suspect Lydia still writes, but it costs money to buy envelopes and stamps; and too, rejection slips hurt worse when one cannot laugh them off with other hopeful writers.

In the evenings, one of the sisters reads aloud to the other two. All the modern books they are able to buy are eagerly read, then they go back to the books of their girl-

hood, *Little Women, The Mill on the Floss,* and others with an earlier-day charm.

As in any home where books and good reading are loved, there's a constant craving for more! We were discussing that desire for more good books and magazines, Sister Lydia and I. She named the magazines she had been able to buy this year, sighing that they were so few and so ordinary in character.

"I wish that just once in my life," she said in a fierce whisper, "I could be an *extravagant* reader!"

"Extravagant?" I was frankly puzzled.

"Yes! Extravagant! I'd like to have so many magazines that I could *read just the pages I want to read,* and then," she threw her arms wide in a gesture of reckless abandon, *"just skip the rest!"*

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

WOLF AT OUR DOOR

MARKET DAY is our annual day of mourning at Sunrise Mountain Farm. Early in the morning a great red truck roars up the lane! It goes up in front of the barn, turns around, then stops in the gateway of the lane, and a ramp is let down from the back end. We are always mighty proud of our lambs as they race up that ramp. They are sturdy and round of quarter, just as the book from Washington says they should be. We can imagine some inspector up there in St. Louis saying: "Here's a fine flock of lambs, Bill! Where are they from?" And then perhaps our name is written down in a great golden-edged book as farmers with superlatively fine stock.

But that is scant comfort when the truck has roared its way out of the lane and down the highway. We suddenly realize that those playful youngsters, looking so much alike in their woolly coats, but actually so differ-

ent in character, are gone forever. We remember so many things about them . . . how they loved to romp over the top of the cyclone cellar and the hard, steep bank of the pond. We are glad that we didn't yield to the winter's seed catalogue inspiration and landscape those two unsightly spots. In our memory we can still hear the pounding of tiny hooves on that packed bare earth as the lambs played their rowdy evening games. We wonder if they recalled their beloved playground on that last long ride to St. Louis.

Perhaps, we think, little Al remembered. He was one of the older lambs and a natural-born leader. His faintest bleat could send every lamb-baby racing pell-mell down the highway, instead of walking demurely through the open gateway into the North Forty. We are sorry now that we often wished we could wring his stubborn little neck.

We're sorry, too, for scolding little Tough Guy, the hand-raised lamb with the exasperating habit of bunting his bottle and squirting milk all over his shepherdess' clean apron. Little Tough Guy is gone now . . . he was squeezed into that roaring truck beside quiet little Saltine, who had an inordinate fondness for salt. We hope Saltine wasn't thirsty on that last long ride.

Gone, too, we suddenly remember, is Starlight, the lamb born in the corral one warm spring morning just before dawn, when bright stars lighted our Ozark mountaintop with their silver radiance. Even Alice's baby went out in that great red truck, with his bright eyes peering back at us from between the slits in the end gate. Alice, you remember, was a bottle-fed lamb, and when her first baby was to arrive, she ran bleating to the garden

gate, wildly calling her Humans, the strange two-legged woolless creatures who had never failed her. Every day thereafter, in true young mother fashion, she proudly led her wobbly legged son close to us, apparently enjoying the extravagant praise we heaped upon him. She will miss him, just as the Duchess will miss her stalwart son.

Motherhood made the Duchess surprisingly crafty. Each morning she slyly left the flock and brought her big buck lamb back to the barnyard for a special handout of grain when the fowl were called to breakfast.

And what about that mother who had what is known over quilting frames and bridge tables as "a terrible time"? Did the excitement and glory of seeing her son going away in a great red truck to see the world make her forget that ghastly spring morning? Or was that her voice raised high above the wailings of other anguished sheep mothers? She paid so dearly for her son and had him so short a time!

Even the arrival of the mail carrier bringing newspapers and magazines brought no solace on Market Day this spring! Those pictures of boyish soldiers brought our own sorrow closer than ever! Everywhere, it seemed, lambs were being driven to slaughter!

The book from Washington will tell you about the danger of murderous, sheep-killing dogs. I doubt if it will mention wolves. After all, wolves are too scarce to be accorded space in any book written for national distribution. However, if you are thinking of buying a farm in the Ozarks, it would be wise for you to look into the subject of both dogs and wolves as sheep killers.

That wild jangling of sheep bells in the North Forty one afternoon last winter was a terrifying warning. Something was after the sheep. We tore down the lane to the gate, just as the sheep came over the top of the North Forty hill with noisy bells and wild baa-ings upsetting the gray calm of the day. We counted woolly backs as they came through the gate. Two were missing. On the other side of the hill we found them, one hobbling along with a badly bitten thigh, the other very dead, and partially eaten. Death had struck with bloody fangs.

By the time we had taken the injured sheep into the barn and had given it first aid, Aunt Mealie arrived.

"It war' a wolf, I'm a-tellin' you," she said decisively. "Mel Worden said he seen the varmint a-skulkin' along the ridge yestiddy!"

And having been frightened away from its kill, according to mountain lore, the wolf would come back to his mutton feast in twelve hours. That would be three o'clock in the morning.

"I'll meet him there," said the Jedge with tense jaws.

We slept fitfully until one o'clock . . . then arose, dressed in our warmest clothes, and prepared for our rendezvous with the wolf. Punch was told to keep quiet for once in his headlong, impulsive life. Judy was put into her sweater. I remarked that any self-respecting wolf would sit down and split his sides laughing if he saw himself being pursued by a pint-sized dog in a red sweater.

"He may recognize her," said the Jedge. "This may be the wolf that sat outside our door in Chicago during the depression!"

I didn't like to be reminded of that.

A short altercation developed when I wanted to take my big yellow kerosene lantern.

"This is a wolf hunt, not a wiener roast!" said the Jedge. He decreed flashlights, and these to be used *only* in emergency.

"No lights!" I shrieked. "Why, in a book, I saw a picture of people driving along with horses that had a big arch over their backs! They had lights all over the carriage . . . and *still* the wolves came right along." It was a good argument. But I lost.

We let ourselves out of the back door, closing it softly. In the velvety darkness of the mountain night the Jedge detoured by way of the woodpile, coming back with the ax.

"I may need this," he remarked quietly, "in case we have hand-to-hand combat!"

The mental picture of a snarling wolf, with long fangs dripping blood, within reach of an ax, set my teeth to chattering.

We tiptoed down the lane. The Jedge sternly rebuked me when I slipped into a rut, bringing down a clattering shower of small pebbles. We crossed the road and let ourselves into the North Forty.

Up the steep hill, through the shrubs set out by some beauty-loving woman around a cabin long since gone! Over the hill! Then down into the valley beyond. It was a cold, dark, exciting walk. We paused just above the ravine in which lay the remains of Angela Mia and sat down on a heap of cold, frosty leaves. I held Judy in my lap. The Jedge sat with one arm around the quivering, excited Punch, a hand on the gun beside him. The

ax between us, catching a gleam from the stars, looked like some ancient battle weapon.

I started to hum: "Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad . . ."

The Jedge squelched me.

I reached into my pocket and brought out a waxed-paper package. I opened it and attacked a large square of spice cake.

"Eating!" snorted the Jedge. "You *would* turn a wolf hunt into a picnic. Give me a hunk of that!"

Presently I began to grumble in a low mutter that I had never liked the North Forty, sticking out from the rest of our farm like a sore thumb. In whispers we discussed what we would like to do with it.

Sell it and run the risk of having near neighbors whom we wouldn't like? The answer was *no!*

Give it to someone back in Chicago?

Swell! But to whom? The Pritchards? Wilds? Ferrins? Etiennes? We'd toss a coin.

I began to compose the letter we would send with the deed: "Dear Friends: Enclosed you will find . . ."

"Too trite!" said the Jedge. "Make it read like this: 'Dear Suckers: In spite of our long friendship, we are bestowing upon you, etc., etc.!' "

"I have an idea!" I whispered with all the enthusiasm one can put into a whisper. "We'll make these forty acres a Haven for Advertising People Who Want to Get Away from It All!"

We began to plan. A big dining room here. Fine! A dormitory there. Dormitory? Advertising people never sleep! Let's put a combination library-bar-and-poker-room up there by the Jesse James well. That, I contended, had all the earmarks of a dirty dig.

It was very cold. Dark, too! The moon might have been shining somewhere, but definitely not on Sunrise Mountain. I began to wonder about Osa Johnson and Mary Hastings Bradley. What did they ever see in big-game hunting? No one could ever say I took it up. It was thrust upon me. Still, it would be nice to hear visitors exclaiming over a great, thick wolf fur rug flung nonchalantly before the wide hearth with a wing chair touching it on one side and the davenport on the other. It would give unity to the fireplace setting. Too, I would get a kick out of flipping a careless hand toward it and saying with a shrug of my shoulders, "Oh, just a little thing we picked up in the North Forty!"

More minutes passed. Judy grew cold and began to shiver. I started back to the house with her. The Jedge called softly through the darkness.

"Bring back a thermos bottle of coffee!"

In the house, the teakettle on the fireplace crane was still hot, even though the fire was dying down. While the coffee dripped, I ate a cold chicken wing and two pickled peaches.

With the thermos bottle under my arm I went back into the darkness, crunching branches beneath my feet.

"Stop that noise," hissed my lord and master.

"Noise won't scare a wolf," I returned. "Why, the people were actually yelling in that picture where the horses had an arch over their backs . . ."

"This," interrupted the Jedge, "is where I came in. Shut up and give me some of that coffee!"

I was just handing him the metal top full of scalding coffee, when we heard It! A stick broke, and dead leaves rustled near the body of the sheep. Instantly,

Punch, with his master's restraining hand lifted, raised his voice in his deep-toned bark and hurled himself toward the sound. The Jedge tore after him, forgetting ax and gun in his haste.

"Hey, Mr. Buck . . ." I called.

Grabbing up the ax and carrying my lighted flashlight, I ran toward the clamor now at some distance beyond the valley. Judging from the barking, crashing, and cracking of branches and bushes, the wolf was putting up a terrific battle!

In a cleared spot, I found them. The Jedge was puffing wildly. Punch was clawing at a log.

"Do wolves hide in logs?" I asked through chattering teeth. The Jedge didn't know! But he'd soon find out, he said, taking the ax from my hand. I flung myself on the ground and threw my arms around the excited Punch. The darned fool would have no more sense than to rush right into the jaws of a cornered snarling wolf.

The Jedge brought the ax down with a mighty whack. The log split open! A tiny furry ball shot out of the log, as though propelled by a gun! A thoroughly frightened rabbit raced away to safety.

"What did you say about that wolf splitting his sides laughing?" inquired the Jedge. "He's doing just that! Or else he's been scared over into Howell County by this noise!"

Two days later, while we were curing our colds, we learned that a big dog had been summarily executed when Oscar Simms caught him in the very act of killing a sheep. That was "our wolf."

Anyhow, we were just as scared as if we had been hunting a real wolf.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE JEDGE'S GREAT IDEA

It is difficult to believe that our thriving business of making jams and jellies from Ozark Mountain fruits and berries sprang from such a minor detail as Judy's puppies.

At the time, however, those puppies were considered anything but a minor incident in our farm life. They were highly illegitimate, and none of us referred to them as a "blessed event." In fact, all of us, including Judy, were downright annoyed.

Since veterinarians are few and far between in the hills, and it is doubtful if any of them have ever been called to attend a "dawg," it was decided that Robert should take Judy to Chicago for the birth of her puppies. There she spent several days in the dog hospital maintained by Dr. Tinkham, who has made a special study of Boston terriers. When her quintuplets, with Boston terrier heads and long "houn' dawg" tails, had finally arrived, the

Jedge could give a thought to the city. He discovered that men in the city wore socks and shirts, and even neckties, on weekdays. At least that's the way he tells it. And down to the store of Carson, Pirie, Scott & Company he went to do a little personal shopping. When noontime came, he went up to the tearoom to have his lunch.

As the Jedge sat in Carson's tearoom, looking around the pleasant rooms with the eager appreciation that only a visiting farmer could know, his glance fell on the bakery counter! He told me afterward that he could see a dozen cakes and other pastries that I would like, but he knew I would pooh-pooh the jams and jellies they had for sale. In our cellar at the farm, we had at least a hundred glasses of jams and jellies made from wild plums, wild dewberries, wild blackberries, and wild grapes, most of which had grown on our own land. He remembered, too, that I had been greatly distressed by the fact that more than a hundred gallons of dewberries had gone to waste, because none of the neighbors needed them. It had been a bumper crop year for dewberries.

And suddenly, all at once, his Great Idea came!

Why not make jams and jellies at our farm for Carson's to sell right there?

But having an idea and putting it into execution are two different things. Throughout the following days there was conference after conference with Miss Kathleen Vaughn, manager of the tearoom, and S. P. Carson, one of the store executives. As a result of those conferences, when the Jedge came back to the farm he brought not only a sadder-and-wiser Judy but an order for several thousands of glasses of jams and jellies to be put up at berry time the following summer.

How many hours we spent in planning! Neither of us had any idea that a simple little glass of jelly, which one can buy for a few cents, involves so many problems. Even the eye appeal of the container became a matter of great importance. It was decided, finally, that the old-fashioned jelly glass, with the rounded base, was best after all! It's the sort that Mother always used, and since these were to be truly home-style jams and jellies, anything else would be out of harmony. Furthermore, to keep the homey tradition, a hand-written label would be pasted on the side, and over the metal top would be a neat paper cover held down with a red string tied in a bow.

With these details finally ironed out, the Jedge settled down to a winter of fingernail gnawing. He tried to find out if anyone in the hills was able to determine beforehand which of the many native fruits and berries would be most plentiful. Everyone shrugged shoulders and made vague gestures indicating the futility of trying to guess anything about nature. However, it wa'n't likely, he was told, that there'd be many dewberries, since most berries had a good crop only every other year! This disturbed the Jedge terribly, for he had sold dewberries hard!

He decided to take matters into his own hands.

One bright crisp wintry day, when the wind was blowing toward the farm-to-market road, the Jedge went out to the great pasture, where most of our dewberry vines were growing, and set it on fire. The fire, he reasoned, would burn off the old stalks, and the new stalks that would come up from the roots would bear great masses of luscious dewberries, thus thwarting the old tradition of alternate-year crops. When the fire had burned the pas-

ture clean, Aunt Mealie came down the hill and told him that berries never grow on a burned-over piece of land for at least two years! It was a bad evening for the Jedge!

At last, however, spring came to the Ozarks, and at Sunrise Mountain Farm every bursting bud was given a rousing welcome. Spring came to the city, too. And in Carson's own publication appeared an announcement concerning forthcoming jams and jellies made from wild fruits and berries grown in the Ozark Mountains. Orders began pouring in. Everyone seemed to have a nostalgic longing for wild fruit products and was depending on Carson's to supply these treats. Miss Vaughn was soon holding hundreds of orders for jams and jellies that were, as yet, beautiful blossoms.

The Jedge took to talking to himself and spending hours before thermometer and barometer. A sudden frost, too much rainfall, too little rainfall, a late snow, a spell of freezing weather, a hailstorm . . . any one of a hundred things might happen to keep those jams and jellies from materializing. But not one of them did happen! The sun shone. Showers, soft and gentle and warm, came at just the right intervals. Berries formed everywhere, and before long the blackberries, which are red when they are green, began to turn, and soon it was time to get to work in dead earnest.

The cabin in the valley was selected as the cooking site, since it was clean as a new pin and well screened. Two of our neighbor women, who had been making Ozark fruit jellies from girlhood, were hired to do the cooking and canning, with another helper in the kitchen of the farmhouse, washing jars and sorting berries. To Roy, the Jedge's faithful helper, went the job of packing our

glasses and hauling the cases into town for shipment. The Jedge spent most of his time weighing and paying for berries and fruits as they were brought in to the Farmers' Exchange in Mountain View. The rest of the time he roamed the country, wheedling and cajoling men, women, boys, and girls into picking the fruits and berries that grew wild throughout the woods and pastures. True to Aunt Mealie's prophecy, not a dewberry grew on our land.

The products decided upon, and sold, that first year still make up the bulk of our output:

Wild Blackberry Jelly
Wild Blackberry Jam
Wild Plum Butter
Wild Plum Jelly
Wild Dewberry Jam
Wild Grape Butter
Wild Grape Jelly
Peach Preserves
Wild Dewberry Jelly

Last year we added:

Strawberry Preserves
Pear Honey
Gingered Pears
Spiced Wild Grape Jam
Spiced Wild Grape Jelly

The two women hired to make our jam and jelly didn't realize that they held the future of our business literally in a measuring cup. They had never worked for wages before, and the prospect of getting money for doing something that had always been a routine part of mountain homemaking was considered just a stroke of good luck. They went about their work in the same casual manner with which they would make jams and jellies at home. If they lost track of the number of cups of sugar

they were putting into a kettle of berries, they just put in an extra cupful, or maybe two or three, just to make sure they had enough. And when the six-quart kettles proved to be "onhandy" to wash, they switched to four-quart kettles which they could get into a dishpan, although the larger kettles had been brought for the express purpose of allowing the fruit to reach the essential full rolling boil.

The wonder is that these two women turned out several thousands of glasses of perfect jam and jelly. If, by chance, a glassful a bit on the runny side reached a customer, we never heard of it. It is possible that the very imperfection of some of our products had its homey appeal. Everyone remembers a bitter day when Mother had bad luck with her jam or the jelly didn't jell.

The uncertainty of supply, which we face each spring, plus our slow methods, will keep our jam and jelly business from growing to great heights. But it is gratifying, indeed, to put into the hands of many worthy people, women particularly, a great deal more money than they have ever had before!

We find our women employees proud to be known as makers of Sunrise Mountain Farm products. Even to the little woman who caps the glasses with a foot-pedal machine. She says, "One laig has growed six inches longer'n t'other one." But she's mighty proud that the glasses she caps stay capped.

Now, the fruits and berries which grow wild in the Ozark woods and clearings can provide an income for those who wish to gain one. These mountain delicacies are picked while still dew-wet by men, women, and children who go out at dawn to get them. Fruits and berries

can be promptly traded for cash at the Farmers' Exchange, if they can be toted into Mountain View. Or, if word can be sent to the Jedge, he or Roy will pick up the day's picking at some designated corner, paying for it on the spot and hauling it home in a trailer attached to the car. Many a new dress, mattress, schoolbook, or permanent wave is paid for out of this "pickin' money." Many a movie ticket, and many a gallon of gasoline to help along a bit of courting, comes from this money, too, as well as long-to-be-remembered holiday pleasures.

When the Jedge strikes a WPA or relief snag—"We-uns hain't a-goin' to pick no berries! The guv'ment gives us all we-uns need"—he puts up posters urging the people to earn money for some special purpose. For instance, last year he put up posters throughout the countryside urging the hill people to "EARN SOME FOURTH OF JULY MONEY."

The alternate abundance and scarcity of wild fruits bring another problem in picking. If a new shotgun or permanent wave is in mind, the picker naturally waits for the bumper crop before setting out to earn the required money. And that's readily understood. If you had been waiting for something ten years, you wouldn't go after it this week, when next month you could get it with half the effort. It just isn't human nature!

When blackberries were plentiful, the Jedge worked out a scheme to insure that the person who yearned for a new shotgun or a permanent wave would have to get out and hunt up some dewberries and wild plums, even though it meant considerable trekking through the woods, in order to get in on the easy blackberry money. His posters read:

WANTED!
DEWBERRIES
and
WILD PLUMS
Must be clean and
delivered the day they
are picked.
HIGHEST CASH PAID
We will also buy blackberries
from those who supply us with
DEWBERRIES AND PLUMS

Women and girls make excellent berry pickers. And they are almost as good as the men when it comes to other fruits.

One day, during the grape-picking season, the Jedge was scheduled to pick up grapes at a certain corner on the Ferndale Road at noon. When he arrived, there were several baskets of freshly picked wild grapes waiting for him. But there were no grape pickers in sight. He got out of the car and called: "Hello, everybody!"

From high up in a tree, a feminine voice called: "Hello, Jedge! I'll be right down!" And down from the top of the tree scrambled the overalled leader of the singing at Ferndale Church. She had been climbing trees all morning to get the tangy little wild possum grapes that grew far beyond the reach of a person standing on the ground.

Our first hint that there was more than one type of wild grapes came from Aunt Mealie! She and Uncle Pete appeared early one morning, greatly disheveled, and uncomfortably warm. It was quite apparent that they had started out while the morning was still cool, for Aunt

Mealie was wearing her usual fall costume of stocking cap and sweater, along with her calico dress and muslin apron. Between them they were carrying a heaped basket of wild grapes, which strewed clusters of the tiny juicy fruit along the path.

"We brang you-ens some wild grapes!" said Aunt Mealie. "They's possum grapes, coon grapes, and fox grapes, all mixed up!"

"That doesn't make any difference . . . they'll all be used together," we told her.

"Well, you-ens had better be a-knowin' there's a difference, 'r ye'll sp'il the whole mess o' jell."

Here was something new. Right then and there, with the world waiting for wild grape jelly, we learned about grapes from Aunt Mealie. Shorn of her picturesque language, the facts can be boiled down to three simple differences.

Possum grapes are small, round, and black, while the fox and coon grapes have a bluish cast. The possum grapes, too, are great climbers, and as Aunt Mealie put it, "You-ens has got to have men-folks to climb after them dratted possum grapes." The coon grapes and fox grapes grow closer to the ground. "They's f'rever a-lookin' f'r a' ol' rail fence, seems like! Leastways, that's where you-ens can find 'em, if they's any in the hills," she said.

" 'N don't go a-mixin' them possum grapes with coon grapes 'r fox grapes," was her final admonition. "Them possums won't be a-likin' it, and they's shore to pay you-ens back. They jis' won't jell!"

And indeed they won't! But given exclusive handling, possum grapes make jelly as delicious and as perfectly tex-

. . . a feminine voice called: "Hello, Jedge!"

tured as the other two varieties. And we chalked up another non-understandable lesson from the hills . . . a lesson that native-born people probably learn as children. We often wonder, as we pack our wild grape jelly for city tables, if that delicate flavor will be recognized by men and women who picked wild grapes as youngsters. We wonder if it will bring back memories of great stacks of pancakes or squares of corn bread liberally spread with just such amethyst jelly, and eaten when appetites were made keen by exciting searches for straying calves or colts.

When the first Ozark pears were brought in for our gingered pears and pear honey, the Jedge picked one up and tossed it to me, saying "Catch!" I'm not very good at catching, and it landed on my wrist. It took him several minutes to convince me that he hadn't thrown a rock at me! We wondered if this type of pear is always so hard, or if these had taken on the character of the Ozark rocks among which they grew. We debated whether to try to work them into something edible or just donate them to the fruit store dealers in Chicago, who might ask their customers to pinch these, instead of soft fruits, when they were in a pinching mood. We tried peeling them by hand, but the knives dulled, and we cut our fingers. We sent to a mail order house for an apple peeler, and that proved to be a waste of money. We finally solved the problem by spreading the pears on papers on the floor of the cabin in the valley, leaving the door unlocked in hopes that someone would go in and steal them. There they stayed for three weeks. By that time, they had softened enough to permit peeling, and we ran them through the food grinder to make pear honey.

For gingered pears, they were cored and finely sliced, then cooked a long time with practically continuous stirring.

Ozark peaches are small, sweet as honey, and delicious in flavor. Preserves made of these peaches take on a deep amber color, due to the dark yellow color of the peaches themselves.

Wild plums are one of the scarcest fruits of the hills. But through a strange coincidence we have practically all we can use. Mopsy, a half-witted boy who has spent his unfortunate life roaming the hills, brings them to us from heaven only knows what distances! We were at a loss to understand his interest in us until Pauline guessed it.

It dated back to a time when I was in Chicago and Pauline was keeping house at the farm. Because she has a great liking for handkerchiefs and other accessories with her name on them, when I am in the city I always keep watch for such little trinkets as I go about the stores. Whenever I find anything with the name "Pauline" embroidered, engraved, stamped, or printed on it, I always buy it and send it to her.

One day, when she went down to the mailbox after the mailman had passed by, she found a letter from Chicago for herself. Its thickness indicated that it held more than the usual letter. Without waiting to take it to the house, she put the other mail on the ground and promptly tore it open. Inside the envelope was a large-sized chiffon handkerchief, in a particularly lovely American Beauty shade, with her name embroidered in black. She tucked the envelope into her apron pocket and stood there for several minutes, holding up that brilliant red handkerchief and, in her excitement, exclaiming aloud over its

beauty and wondering how someone else can always find things with her name on them when she never runs across them. At last it dawned on her that she must be making quite a spectacle of herself, standing there by the side of the road, waving a red handkerchief and talking to herself. She hastily looked around to see if she had been overheard. About twenty feet away stood Mopsy, his lower lip drooping as usual, his long, bristling yellow hair in its usual sunburned tangle, but with more of an understanding look in his vacant blue eyes than anyone had ever seen before. Pauline grabbed up the mail and went tearing up the lane to the farmhouse! In telling of the incident to the Jedge, she remarked: "I'll bet he thinks I'm nuttier than he is!"

We can guess that, in his addled wits, he considered her a kindred soul. A few weeks later, when he brought basketful after basketful of wild plums to the house and we asked where he got them, he only pointed to my sister and said: "She know!" Apparently, he believed that the cunning to find fruits deep in the woods where others miss them, is given only to such simple souls as himself. And who are we to say it isn't!

This protective feeling for our interests extended even to the posters which the Jedge wished to distribute around town. Seeing Mopsy in town, he explained to him that he wanted one poster put in each store window in the village. He put one in a Charles Store window to show how it was to be done. Mopsy comprehended. He made a tour of the town, imperiously sweeping out signs concerning merchandise or sale to put our berry posters in the exact spot indicated by the Jedge at the Charles window. When dealers remonstrated with him, he simply

At last it dawned on her . . .

said: "Man says!" and went serenely ahead, putting in posters and making them like it!

The Conlon family, being tall and rangy, are our best blackberry pickers, while the Regers, short and stout, are faithful dewberry pickers. It might seem strange that physical peculiarities would have any bearing on one's ability to pick berries, but it's quite understandable here! Blackberries grow on long waving stalks that bend gracefully to form arches higher than one's head. A tall person can reach to the peak of those arches, just as a thin person has less difficulty fighting his way through the tangle formed by the intertwined stalks. Time after time, my slim neighbor, Doris, has slipped through just such dense thorny tangles as smoothly as a shadow, while I have become hopelessly enmeshed and been obliged to call her to help me out.

Dewberries, however, grow close to the ground, sending out long creepers that seem to take delight in tripping the unwary, or making jagged scratches across bare shins. Shorties like the Regers, and myself, find berries on such vines easy pickings, since we do not have to stoop so far as our taller neighbors. And here in the hills, one learns to follow the path of least resistance. Even the dewberry vines themselves seem to adhere to that plan. They seem to prefer an abandoned field where the stones have been loosened as their growing place. As the Jedge says, "Just give a dewberry bush an old abandoned field, keep fire away from it, and watch it go to town!"

The wild dewberries and wild blackberries here in the hills might be confused by someone unfamiliar with them. Both grow as large as one's thumb, and both are black as can be. However, the dewberries have the glis-

tening shiny blackness of patent leather shoes, or a gigolo's hair, while the blackberries have the dull velvety blackness of a mountain midnight. The hot sunshine of our late spring and early summer is counteracted by the heavy dews and cool nights, which retard ripening, until these Ozark berries attain a peculiar lusciousness all their own. The seeds are small, and the great berry becomes heavy with rich, flavorful juice that makes superb jellies. For the jam, the seeds are extracted by means of a fine sieve, and the pulp is prepared as a thick, blobby spread. Both of these berries come in June, just about the time the strawberry season ends.

Our strawberry jam is made from strawberries grown in the vicinity of Bald Knob, Arkansas. Soon, we hope, strawberries will be planted on many farms around Mountain View. Then all our "berry money" will go to our friends and neighbors. The Bald Knob berries, however, will be hard to equal. They are marvelous—very often four and a half to five inches in circumference, perfectly solid, and with a zestful flavor that puts real distinction into strawberry jam. One of our customers recently told us that these mountain-grown jams, jellies, and preserves remind her of those her mother used to put up in Ireland and which she had never before found equaled in this country. We treasure that as our finest compliment, since the Irish fruits, particularly strawberries, are famous the world over.

At our farm, every precaution possible is taken to safeguard the Arkansas strawberries. They are hauled to our farm at night to avoid possible drying out in the hot sun. And the paved route is taken, even though it is many miles longer, to save the berries from jostling.

Last May, the Jedge and I drove down to Bald Knob to make arrangements for the strawberries we would need. We arrived there on the first day of the picking season to find the entire community seething with activity. Bald Knob and its neighboring town, Searcy, are the very heart of the Arkansas strawberry-growing region, and to these towns had come buyers from all over the Middle West. These men were talking glibly of carload lots, making our comparatively small orders, which would be trucked to the farm every other night, look like small potatoes indeed.

The Jedge had had considerable correspondence with Ross Pullen, one of the growers of that region, but it was like looking for a needle in a haystack to seek him in that crowd of milling farmers and shrewd-eyed buyers. We waited for him for some time at the Strawberry Market, watching the farmers bringing their loads to the huge tin-roofed building, where the berries would be sold through the auspices of the Strawberry Growers' Association. No one seemed to be at all annoyed that the building was only half completed, with the typical Ozark disregard of time limits, and dozens of strawberry-filled wagons disgorged their rosy loads on platforms as yet unroofed.

Time after time we were told that someone "had jis' saw" Ross, but we couldn't quite catch up with him. We were at further disadvantage because we had never seen him, and the description given of him, "kinda short, and got on overalls and a straw hat," fitted nearly every farmer in town. Finally deciding to drive out to the Pullen home, we asked a typical man-on-the-street how to get there. He proved to be the rural mail carrier, so

for once we had clear directions concerning a country road.

The shadows of the pines about the Pullen farm were long when we finally crossed the shallow creek bed outside the yard and drove through the gate. In the wide grassy plot at the left of the house, shaded by tall sycamores and oaks, a dozen or more people lounged on quilts or sat in native ladder-back chairs. A couple of great iron pots steamed pleasantly over wood fires laid between stones, and wisps of gray wood smoke came from the chimneys of various small buildings scattered around the grassy plot. The people were pleasant-faced and clean: the men in overalls and light shirts, the women in neat cotton prints, and the children in the usual overalls. I thought it was a church picnic.

When Mrs. Pullen came to the door, we told her we were sorry to bother her when she had all that company, but we had come to see Mr. Pullen about strawberries.

Company? She was plainly surprised! She had no company, she told us.

I motioned toward the crowd, practically within spitting distance, and asked:

"Am I seeing things?"

Mrs. Pullen laughed heartily.

"Oh, they're the hands!"

"Strawberry pickers, of course!" my husband completed the explanation.

Up to that moment, it hadn't occurred to me to wonder how the berries were picked in that frantic ripening rush of a few weeks. It took a moment for me to understand that I was actually seeing a whole group of the people about whom so much had been written . . . the

migratory fruit pickers who come each spring from some vague place known as "down yonder" to pick Arkansas strawberries and then gradually work their way north with the ripening of the fruit crops, until they wind up at frost time picking apples in Michigan. They were so much cleaner, so much more like "our kind of folks" than I had dreamed. I stood staring at them in open-mouthed wonder, while the Jedge and Mrs. Pullen carried on a spirited conversation about "gettin' a-hold" of Mr. Pullen. If we were anxious to see him, we would probably meet him driving back to the farm with his empty strawberry wagon. It would be easy to recognize him, we were told, for he was driving one brown mule and one dun-colored one, and the running gears of his wagon had been freshly painted bright green. Or, if we were less anxious, we could come into the parlor and sit until he got home. When the Jedge, who had seen enough brown and dun mules for one day, decided to wait in the parlor, I made a beeline through the gate into the grassy plot, camera in hand.

If I had expected sullenness and unfriendly manners, I was most happily surprised. One young woman in a pink sunbonnet was painfully shy, probably because she was barefooted, but the others posed willingly in groups or singly. When I told them the pictures would be in color, just as I saw them through the camera, they all wanted to see how things looked through that little hole that you "helt up to yore eye!" The camera was passed around from hand to hand, and everyone looked at me through it.

In my abysmal ignorance, I asked if any pickers were still at work in the strawberry patch, explaining that I

wanted pictures of people actually picking berries. They didn't laugh. They explained politely that the picking had all been done in about two hours that morning. However, they would all go up and "hunker down" by the plants and make like they were picking berries. Leaving the grassy plot, they trooped gaily up the hill to the strawberry patch that covered many acres. More hands came pouring out of a tiny cottage and other buildings, until there were about thirty men, women, and children in the patch. I felt like the director of a mob scene, and not a very well-informed director, at that. Each of my "actors" seized a prop that was totally unfamiliar to me, a shallow box, rectangular in shape, with a high arched handle. I asked what it was and was informed that it was a "carrier." Twelve empty strawberry boxes are put into this carrier as the hand starts to pick in the morning. The berries are taken direct from the plants and put into the empty boxes. When the boxes are filled, they are taken to the "shanty" at the edge of the patch, where the hand is given credit on his work sheet and his carrier is again filled with empty boxes. Therefore, the carrier is as necessary to a true strawberry-picking picture as the hand himself.

Then, suddenly, the sun had set, and I could take no more pictures. We went back to the grassy plot, and I learned how migratory strawberry pickers live.

About the time the first berries ripen, whole families come into the strawberry region. They register at a central point, then the growers can go to that point and get as many hands as they need. At Bald Knob, the Arkansas Free State Employment Bureau had established a trailer where registrations were being made. Through

that trailer registration bureau, all of these hands had been hired by Mr. Pullen and directed out to his farm the previous day.

It is the law of the region that the farmer must furnish places for the hands to sleep, eat, and cook their food. They buy their own food.

The manner in which the thirty-odd hands were housed at the Pullen farm certainly followed no pattern. Nine persons were living in the tool shed, a good-sized building whose weathered oak walls had withstood Ozark storms for at least a half century. Their pallets, spread on the floor, made a sort of crazy-quilt rug. In the barn, a family with two children, one less than a year old, occupied one room. Another room in the barn had three people in it. Two couples lived in the smokehouse, where two double beds, a big wood range, and table and benches made the place habitable. I took a photograph of the interior of this room and was much surprised to find two bright spots, about the size of pinheads, showing up in my Kodachrome, while the entire room was in dim, shadowy darkness. I finally figured out what those bright dots were! Knotholes!

One lone man lived in a tent, four in a harness room or feed room back of the tool shed, and the rest, I presume, in the tiny cottage near the patch.

Not one word of complaint did I hear . . . no one tried to get me off to one side and whine a dismal tale in my ear. Everyone seemed to be cheerful as crickets. They told me how good the berries were and how easy it was to pick the Pullen patch, where the rows were free from grass or weeds.

If it were possible to pick berries steadily all day, a

good strawberry picker might be able to make a fair wage at the usual picking price of two cents a box. But berries do not ripen that fast. The daily crop of ripe berries can be picked in a few hours' time . . . which gives the grower time to get them to town the day they are picked.

One of the prettiest girls in the group, who told me she was nineteen and had left a nineteen-month-old baby at home with its grandmother, was highly pleased with her day's accomplishment. It was her first day of berry picking, for this was the first time she had accompanied her husband and brother on the summer's tour, yet she had picked thirty-one quarts, earning sixty-two cents.

There were several really pretty girls in the group who, in their slacks and overalls, would have rated a second look anywhere. Some of the young men were extremely good looking, particularly one barefooted young chap called Jack. He had been one of my camera subjects in the berry-picking pictures, and soon after we came down from the patch he appeared with his "git-tar" and began tuning it up.

"Gittin' ready for the singin'," I was told! And everyone joined in urging me to stay and sit with them under the sycamores in the cool of the evening to sing until bedtime. I told them I'd love to stay, but Mr. Pullen had long since arrived, and he and my husband had practically completed their transaction.

"And besides," I added, "I know only one song in the world and that's *Poor Butterfly!*"

It was really the truth . . . the fact that I never seem able to remember the words or tune of any song except *Poor Butterfly* has been one of our family jokes for years!

Usually that statement promptly excuses me from any singing venture. But not in that crowd. They didn't know who Poor Butterfly was, but the name fitted right in with their doleful folk ballads, in which someone is invariably done wrong!

At any rate, they immediately set up a loud clamor for me to sing my song then and there, and promptly flopped into comfortable sitting positions on the grass before me, looking me in the eye with an expectant air.

I was glad the Jedge called at that moment to tell me he and Judy were ready to start back to town. By the time we left, many of the women had gone into their various "lodgings" to get supper. As we rode out of the gate and crossed the ditch, the fragrance of wood smoke and frying hominy and johnny cakes was filling the air. Those who were still outside in the soft, warm twilight waved cheery good-bys, and even the musical plink-plink of the "git-tar" was stilled when Jack raised his handsome face to smile and wave his tanned hand.

For a long moment we drove in silence. Then I said to the Jedge:

"I'll bet many a millionaire would gladly give up his wealth just to be young again and spend this beautiful month of May picking strawberries down here in Arkansas!"

He commented dryly:

"If any millionaire makes a trade like that, I hope he makes the powers that be throw in something else!"

"Something else? What else could he need?" I asked.

The Jedge replied: "The ability to pick a mean guitar!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

HUMAN INTEREST

It had rained steadily here in the Ozarks for more than twenty-four hours. Finally I put on my boots and slicker and slithered up the hill to see how Aunt Mealie and Uncle Pete were faring. I found Aunt Mealie making quilt blocks in the only dry spot in the cabin, within scorching distance of the roaring fire in the fireplace. She was as mad as a wet hen!

"Pete heerd the fish wuz a-bitin', so off he went," she grumbled, " 'n left me a-settin' hyer in the rain."

And indeed she was sitting in the rain! Through the ceiling came more than a dozen leaks, some a mere drop at measured intervals, others almost a steady stream. Around her were tin cans of all sizes, from little sardine cans to great big oil containers and water pails, set to catch the dripping water. Each of these, like instruments in an orchestra, contributed its staccato ping-ping-ping,

or stately plop-pause-plop, to unite with the beat of the rain on the soft old soaked shingles and become a veritable symphony under the baton of J. Pluvius.

Aunt Mealie's cabin roof has been leaking in just that way for more than twelve years. At every rain Uncle Pete vows he will fix the roof, by doggies, as soon as it clears up. But when sunshine comes again he is so "danged glad to git out" that he goes fishing to celebrate. And somehow the roof is forgotten.

Throughout the winter, when we have most of our rains, Aunt Mealie keeps twenty-odd tin cans of assorted sizes standing beside the fireplace. When a rain cloud threatens, she grabs up an armload of cans and begins putting them in place, a little one here, a big one there, a middle-sized one somewhere else. So long has the roof been leaking that she knows exactly where the leaks will be and just how much water will come through at any particular spot. She can actually put the cans in place when the rain cloud first comes over the ridge and never have to rearrange them.

In addition, she keeps a big greenish-black umbrella with a crooked handle hanging on a nail on the wall. When the rain is unusually severe, this umbrella is raised to stretch its batlike wings over Aunt Mealie's greatest treasure, her *new* sewing machine.

Time after time, as we have sat in her cabin with the rain pouring, she has told me the story of that sewing machine. Rain always revives the memories that surround it.

Thirty years ago, when Aunt Mealie and Uncle Pete lived in Barn Holler, she bought a sewing machine on the installment plan. Penny by penny, month after month,

She was as mad as a wet hen!

she managed to meet those installments. She was only twenty dollars away from owning the machine when tragedy struck.

A spring flood forced them to run for their lives in the muddy darkness of a torrential downpour one night. When the water went down, Aunt Mealie's cabin, cookstove, canned fruit, and all other household belongings had been swept away.

The Red Cross provided food and shelter. And some understanding soul paused to ask the reason for Aunt Mealie's hysterical weeping. He learned that her tears were not for cabin, cookstove, or canned fruit, but for her precious sewing machine which had gone down the river. He learned, too, that she was faced with another installment, and now she had neither money nor sewing machine.

Aunt Mealie knows exactly what happened. Her sympathetic listener sent a letter to one of "them air" big men of the sewing machine company. And miracle of miracles, he sent her another sewing machine, permitting her to take up the payments where they had been interrupted on the original machine.

I wish the executive who sent that duplicate machine could know what that generous deed has meant to Aunt Mealie. She still refers to her *new* sewing machine, although she has used it twenty-nine years. In a severe rain the pillows or mattress of her bed may be soaked by the leaks in the roof, but the big old umbrella is never used for this protection. It is saved for the new sewing machine!

"Spare the rod and spoil the child" is still the motto in

most Ozark homes. Youngsters still say "yes m'am" and "no m'am" to their elders and have a healthy respect for authority. Even at picnics, where children are expected to break loose, I have seen youngsters wait patiently on the fringes of the crowd until someone spied them and urged them to come forward and help themselves before the green tomato mincemeat pie and fried chicken were all gone.

One day on an errand beyond Mountain View we ran into a bit of Ozark child training. We lost our way on the Devil's Washboard in that part of the country and stopped at a neat log house on a hilltop to ask which turn we should take. The housewife gave us surprisingly clear directions, indicating that she was thoroughly familiar with that part of the country. As we turned to leave, she said:

"Effen you see two little boys with yaller hair, tell 'em their paw is boilin' mad. He's a-goin' to lambast the daylights outen 'em effen he has to go down to their grammaw's after 'em agin. Their names is Delmer and Ernest!"

Two miles along the road we caught up with two little blond boys, pattering along the road so swiftly that little puffs of dust were sent up by their bare heels. They were dressed in faded blue overalls and ragged little shirts, such as one sees on all little boys in the hills. Each carried over his thin little shoulder a bandanna bundle tied to the end of a long stick. We drew alongside them and stopped.

"Are you Delmer and Ernest?" asked the Jedge.

"Naw!" said the eight-year-old importantly.

"We're Pete and Bill!" added the seven-year-old.

"Oh, excuse me," said the Jedge. "Then you really aren't running away!"

"Naw," was the answer. "We got jobs!"

"We're goin' to work for our grammaw," added the younger. "She lives down in the crick bottom."

"There's millyuns of fish in the crick," said the older. "She needs us to ketch 'em f'r her. She's too old to ketch fish!"

" 'N she needs us to eat her johnnycake," added his brother. "She can't eat much, 'thout no teeth. 'N johnnycake's too good f'r the ole chickens!"

We stoutly agreed that under the circumstances Grandma undoubtedly needed two good hired hands.

"But just in case you two run across Delmer and Ernest, will you please tell them to go right back home or they'll get the daylights lambasted out of them?"

"Shore, we'll tell 'em," they said.

Several hours later, our errand completed, we were again on our way home. The road wound through a creek bottom, crossing and recrossing a little stream that hustled busily over rocks or rested quietly in deep, purplish pools. We wondered if the "grammaw" of Pete and Bill lived in one of the little cabins nestled in the woods along the stream, and if she were inside making johnnycake for her hired hands!

Around the bend in the road and up the hill, we caught up with a quaint little parade. The two little yaller-haired boys, alias Pete and Bill, were dog-trotting along the dusty road, still carrying their bundles on the sticks. But this time they were headed in the opposite direction and they were not laughing and chattering. They were wailing at the tops of their voices, punctuat-

ing their wails with a loud "Yow!" at regular intervals. Behind them strode a young man with taffy-colored hair, dressed like the boys in faded overalls and denim shirt. Every now and then he would reach out and rap a pair of little hurrying legs with a sassafras switch.

. . . Being toothless, Granny is probably no raving beauty. But men leave home for her!

Every trip in the Ozarks has its amusing moments. Around the next bend, beyond that big sloping hill, on the other side of the big bridge, you may meet the person, or the situation that will give you a store of chuckles to last through life.

When we stopped to pick up a trio of hitchhikers, early one morning last summer, it wasn't with any thought of amusing ourselves. It was really done "out of the goodness of our hearts," as our neighbors would put it.

They were such an amazing trio, a man, woman, and baby, with a battered telescope valise, and a flour sack half full and self-knotted. The Jedge was the first to see them, sitting under the pine tree at the side of the dusty road.

"Good heavens! A baby hitchhiker!" He stopped the car with a loud screeching of brakes, leaned out of the window and called to them to come along. I stood on my knees to lift the dog from the rear seat to a spot between us on the front seat. I really didn't see our guests until they climbed into the car, the man first, with the luggage, the woman next, with the baby. The man had young eyes, but his face was mostly hidden from view by at least a three months' beard and an old soft felt

hat, pulled low over his forehead. His tattered sweater, with the sleeves hacked off at the elbows, and his grimy trousers, literally hanging on his hip bones, made him look like an ambling scarecrow. The woman was a half-head taller than the man, and was young, buxom, and quite good-looking, with a tangle of brown hair. Her dress of faded blue cotton lace, had obviously been purchased when she was considerably slimmer, for it cupped in all the wrong places. The baby, in a welter of soiled white dress and faded blankets, was milk-white, with deep circles under its blue eyes. On its head, was a funny little cap, made like an old-fashioned dust cap, with a ruffle all the way around.

As our new friends were seating themselves in the car, disposing of valise and flour sack, Judy, our Boston terrier, lifted her nose in the air and sniffed several times, then rolled her eyes at me. I knew quite well what was going on in her mind at the moment. I put my own nose out of the car window into the rush of clean mountain air and told myself sternly that these were our guests and I must be polite to them!

By that time, the Jedge had introduced us, and had learned that they were Delbert and Esther Owens. He had also learned that their baby, Alpharetta, was "in her second summer."

"Pore little thing! She's been sick since Thursday!" said the child's mother chattily. "Here it is Monday, and she don't seem to git no better. She's our second 'un. 'Tother one died about a year ago. I told Delbert this mornin', it'd be terrible if anythin' happened to this 'un before we had ary other 'un!"

The baby cried fretfully. The young father fished a brown beer bottle, capped with a nipple, and half full of milk, out of the flour sack. The mother wiped the nipple on her sleeve, and thrust it between the baby's blue little lips. No more was heard from the youngster throughout the hundred-mile trip.

"Then you've been on the road since last week," commented the Jedge.

"Naw!" replied Delbert. "We've been a-livin' over yon' side o' Bee Crick, 'n we made up our minds to go visit her kinfolks!"

"Visiting! With a sick baby!"

"Aw, all her kinfolks got babies. They'll take keer o' her! They jis' live over 'cross the state line . . . we'll be there by t'morry night!"

The wife suddenly spoke. "We hain't had no trouble a-tall, hitchin' rides, since we got this baby! Reckon ever'buddy's right good to a baby."

Then it was our turn to be questioned.

"Where're you-ens from!"

My husband told them we had a farm at some distance from that point, and that we had come from Chicago, several years earlier.

"Chicago!" exclaimed the young father. "That's the purtiest place I was ever in, in all my borned days!"

"Oh, you've been in Chicago? Go up to the Fair?"

"Nope! I went through there on my way to The C's! It was at night, and all them lights wuz a-burnin', and I said to myself then, that's the purtiest place I ever seen!"

Here in the hills, the CCC camps, always referred to as The C's, are prestige raisers, indeed. Mothers speak of

their sons being in The C's with all the pride of a mother speaking of a son at Annapolis or West Point!

"Did you like The C's?" asked the Jedge.

"Well, they fed us good," replied the young man. "But us fellers from down here hadn't orter be sent so fur north!"

The Jedge asked where he had been located.

The young man named a camp in a northern state.

"When it got to be forty below, I told the feller up there I jis' cain't stand that much cold. I told him when it gits to be that cold, I most giner'ly always leave out. 'N that night, I put out f'r home!"

This brought on a dissertation from the Jedge on The C's being all right, fundamentally, but full of errors in management.

It might have lasted until the end of the trip, but suddenly the mother of the baby shrieked: "My hat!"

The Jedge brought the car to a sudden stop.

"Did your hat blow out of the car window?"

"Naw! I jis' remembered it! It blowed off while we wuz a-settin' under that tree. It lit in a bush a little ways off, and I figgered I'd git it when some'un come along and picked us up! It'd save gittin' up a' extry time! Then you-ens come along, 'n I was in sich a hurry to git in the car, I plumb fergot about it! Hain't used t' wearin' a hat, nohow. Figgered though, I orta have one, a-goin' to visit my kinfolks!"

I was full of sympathy. Should we go back?

"Naw! 'Tain't wuth it! I jis paid a quarter f'r it!"

The car was started again.

Having become better acquainted during this little excitement about the hat, Mrs. Owens proved to be an

excellent conversationalist. She answered questions, and asked them, with equal ease.

We learned that the young couple and their baby lived in one of the cabins that had been built for woodcutters, and later abandoned when the timber was cut. They were simply squatters, no rent was paid!

We learned that they had owned six old hens, but they "had et 'em" one by one, the last one having been consumed the day before!

"Didn't have no taters to go with it, though," she added. "Taters ain't good f'r a baby in its second summer. But this 'un loves 'em so she cries f'r 'em if they're on the table. So we ain't a-eatin' 'em, either!"

We learned, too, that she "wa'n't a-goin' to let Paw give this 'un any terbacker, like he did my little sister."

"Sis was on'y four years old, when Paw give her her first chaw. Now she chaws terbacker jis' like a man! Smokes a pipe, too!"

"How old is she now?" I asked.

"Fourteen," was the reply.

We learned, too, that her "Paw was always a-jawin' her maw, 'cause she wa'n't no good cook.

"Fin'ly Maw got plumb sick 'n ta'red of it! She told Paw she'd be a dang good cook if he'd git 'er somethin' to cook, and somethin' to cook it on!"

The miles were being eaten up!

At last, the Jedge asked the question he had been aching to ask! "How are you voting this fall?"

"Votin'!" exclaimed the young man. "I hain't thought nuthin' about it!"

Ah! Virgin soil for the Jedge's arguments! He began by asking if they had ever voted.

Yes, Delbert had voted once. That was four years before, when he was twenty-two.

His wife answered for herself.

"I cain't vote. I'm jis' nineteen."

The Jedge promptly shifted his political arguments to Delbert! Delbert agreed vocally with everything the Jedge said . . . with, I suspected, plenty of mental reservations.

At last the talkative Esther spoke up.

"I git swimmy-headed, hearin' about all this votin'. 'Cross the state line, Paw's allus talkin' about it. 'N that year we was a-livin' there on relief, when we had t'other baby, we-uns all voted."

"What's that?" I asked. "If you are only nineteen now, how could you have voted three or four years ago?"

"Well, a feller there, he wuz a-runnin' f'r somethin', 'n he told me how to mark that big sheet with all them names on it! So I jis' tuk m' baby 'n went, and they never ast me no questions!"

The Jedge turned to me.

"Hear that?" he exclaimed bitterly. "Those Democrats will have eighth-grade pupils voting at the next election!"

"He wa'n't no Democrat. He wuz a Republican," came that cheerful feminine voice from the rear seat! " 'N he wuz a' awful nice man. Paw said in all his hull life, he never got more'n fifty cents f'r votin', but that man gived *me* a DOLLAR 'N A HALF!"

"... that man gived *me* a DOLLAR 'N A HALF!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

"WE'RE A-TELLIN' YOU-ENS!..."

THIS chapter is not intended for anyone who says, "Well, a farm is all right for those who like the sticks, but give me an apartment right here in town."

Here I shall try to answer briefly some of those questions that really serious farm-minded city people ask us when we talk about our farm in the Ozarks. Please remember that our answers apply only to our own community. Conditions elsewhere in the hills may differ in many respects, because of nearness to a city or a body of water that attracts tourists.

How much would we have to pay for an Ozark farm?

When our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Don Gardner (Jill Edwards), came to the Ozarks, they paid five thousand dollars for a cattle farm of two hundred acres, with good house, cattle and goat barns and five springs. But farms can be obtained far more cheaply.

You can get a farm of forty acres with a two- or three-room log or native timber house and barn (such as it is) for five hundred to a thousand dollars. I know of one with twenty acres and a very nice little house for six hundred dollars. I know of another farm with one hundred and sixty acres and a fair-minus house for which the owners ask fifteen hundred dollars. And still another with twenty acres and a better-than-average house that is priced at nine hundred dollars. All of these farms have woodlands on them, in addition to more or less cleared pasture land. No farm is ever entirely cleared of its timber.

All of the farms I have mentioned are on good highways or farm-to-market roads.

Don't buy an Ozark farm without coming down to see it! And by all means, investigate the water supply. Don't put any faith in the real estate dealer who tells you, "This spring hasn't been dry since the Indians lived in the Ozarks," unless you are there at the tail end of a long drought and find the spring running full tilt.

Is it possible to make a living on the average Ozark farm?

Before we answer that question, we always ask the inquirer what he considers a living. If he has in mind an income that will permit him to dash up to the city now and then to stay at a top-notch hotel and take in a few theaters and night clubs, we sadly shake our heads. If, however, his ideas of a living are reduced to the essentials, food, shelter, and fuel, we can be more encouraging. We can say it is being done!

The Jedge joins me in insisting that anyone who comes to the Ozarks from the ctiy must be able to pay cash for

his farm. We have seen city carpenters or other workmen lured to the hills by cheap land, only to lose that down payment in the first drought year.

SHELTER: If you are a handy man, given to tinkering with hammer and saw, you can do wonders with your house without help. And you'll have it more nearly to your liking than if you entrust the job to even the most capable Ozark carpenter. However, four or five years later you'll be converted to Ozark simplicity, and you'll wish you had let the carpenters have their way!

FUEL: I doubt if there is a farm in the Ozarks that doesn't have plenty of firewood to last out the lifetime of even a cold-blooded person. It's a bit on the messy side to burn wood, for there are ashes to clean out, and every stick of wood brought into the house leaves its little sifting of sawdust and litter, but the fire is quick and hot. If you're given to exercise, you may enjoy the work. If, like the Jedge, you say: "Oh, my operation!" when anyone mentions woodcutting, then you'll look around for woodcutters. At Sunrise Mountain Farm, Roy hauls up down-timber, or dead trees, whenever the spirit moves him. Then once a year the Jedge hires a sawing contraption, fearfully and wonderfully made and operated by a man who was once a sidewalk lounger along Halsted and Madison Streets in Chicago. They have a marvelous time recalling memories of Chicago . . . the sawmill man slept in some of the best parks, and Robert walked a dog in them . . . and somehow the wood gets sawed into three lengths for cookstove, dining-room heater, and living-room fireplace. Then, later, Roy splits the wood, usually a dozen sticks ahead of the current demand.

While on the subject of firewood and heating, I would suggest that anyone building a fireplace in the Ozarks should look into the matter thoroughly. It must be smokeless, for our houses seem to be draughty here in the hills, and very often a fire is kindled in the evening when doors are open elsewhere in the house. Or perhaps our love of an open fire is greater than yours. I would most certainly advise the fireplace forms which have heat ducts on the sides. They do away with blunders on the part of the local stonemasons, and they certainly produce more efficient heating. Our thirty-foot living room, with six French doors opening onto the terrace and a bay window, was heated entirely by the fireplace last winter and was quite comfortable, even when the thermometer did a nose dive to zero and made an unprecedented stay there for several days.

FOOD: Let's reduce food to the essentials, meat, milk, butter, eggs, and vegetables so you will not interpret my discussion of food as truffles, seafood, or French pastry.

Meat on most farms is mainly limited to chicken and ham, except during the butchering season when everyone revels in fresh pork. If the homemaker is a good canner (and you can take it from me, you'd better be one), the meat situation can be handled more efficiently. Fried chicken is canned just when the chickens reach frying age, so tender they practically melt in your mouth. This saves feeding the chickens until you are ready to eat them. Veal may be canned, too, and makes delicious eating. Rabbits are canned also, to permit speedy meals when there isn't time to go out and shoot a bunny. Canned frog legs, too, are likely to be served when you are invited out to dinner, and if you can black

bass, you will be following the plan of many a hill woman who has efficient fishermen in her family.

At butchering time, you will make lard. One of my neighbors has thirty-three and a half pounds, the product of a single fat hog, stowed in a stone jar for her year's baking and doughnut frying. You will also can, from your own butchered hogs, hearts, liver, sausage, ribs, tenderloin, and backbones. Of course you will cure hams, as everyone does, by the slow, hickory smoke method, and if the hams you cure are less than fifteen to twenty pounds, they will be considered hardly worth the effort. Six to eight hams are considered the family quota in well-managed homes. These hams can be eaten all through the summer, as a change from chicken.

Milk is an important article of diet anywhere, and there's little reason for anyone's being without generous glasses of milk here in the Ozarks. Cows cost around fifty dollars, but you can buy a heifer calf of weaning age for twenty dollars. A baby heifer, which must be raised on a bottle, can be had for three to five dollars. In two years she will have a calf of her own, and then you will have cream in your coffee.

If you are thinking of selling milk or cream to make an income, you'd better think twice if you are not a dairyman by birth or training. Such a profession demands considerable capital for buildings and equipment, a great amount of hard work, efficient hired help, and a number of cows.

The chicken-raising business is another bubble that soon bursts in our community. But it could be done, if one established city connections for marketing eggs, broilers, or ducklings. Local prices have such startling

ups and downs, chiefly downs, that the disillusioned poultry raiser is likely to say: "Aw, to heck with it!" and fry one of her best pullets for supper! But there's no doubt about it, a home flock of chickens is a wonderful help to a farm cook. That bucket of big clean white eggs, with here and there a wisp of golden straw clinging to the waxy surface, is a welcome sight when you want to make an omelet or bake an angel-food cake! And I never cease to marvel that we get our bucket of eggs on Sundays as well as weekdays!

Vegetables grow splendidly in the springtime. Then, when the hot weather of July and August comes, they have hard going. It pays to get your garden in early, but not too early, for we have frosts. But then these are garden problems that are fairly universal. All Ozark families, with any pretense to thrift, plant excellent gardens, with the vegetables in rows, so the farmer can get in with a mule and plow to cultivate them.

One of my neighbors was showing me her great garden one spring evening. There were rows of beets, carrots, cabbages, tomatoes, onions, radishes, lettuce, spinach . . . and many others . . . at least two hundred feet long. She said:

"When I planted these rows, I saw they were gettin' a little bit crookedy. But I says to myself, I can get more in 'em that-a-way, so I went right ahead!"

In the matter of vegetables, Ozark families follow the saying popularized during the first World War! "You eat what you can, and what you can't, you can!"

One day last fall, I called at the home of a family of four, two adults and two children, which represents the best traditions of Ozark homemaking. The man of the

house told me one time that if they had two hundred dollars in "cash money" throughout the year, they felt that they were right on top of the world. I could understand why so little money was required when I was taken down cellar to see "Mom's" canned stuff. Over seven hundred jars of fruits and vegetables were stored in that little cellar where the smell of age-old rocks and good clean earth was mingled with the fragrance of winter apples. Just for the benefit of my city friends who consider ten glasses of orange marmalade a year's canning feat, I made a list of the items of those shelves:

Peach Butter		Tomatoes
Baked Apples		Peas
Watermelon Pickles		14-day Pickles
Sweet Corn		(takes 14 days to
Sauerkraut		make them, but
Green Beans		time means little
Beets		in the Ozarks)
Dill Pickles		Peaches
Grapes in Syrup		Grape Butter
Strawberry Preserves		Blackberry Jelly
Applesauce		Plum Jelly
Tomato Preserves		Plums
Tomato Juice		Sweet Peppers
Pumpkin	3 in 1	Apples
Grape Marmalade	3 in 1	Peaches
Green Tomato Mincemeat	3 in 1	Sugar
Apple Butter	4 in 1	Tomatoes
Spiced Carrots	4 in 1	Peaches
Corn Relish	4 in 1	Pineapple
Succotash	4 in 1	Sugar

In addition to the winter apples; potatoes, and turnips in the bins under the canned-stuff shelves, there were a five-gallon jug of sorghum and a gunny sack full of peanuts for winter eating. Upstairs in a little room off the kitchen, safe from even the mildest of chills, were strings of green and red peppers, bags of dried sweet corn, several bushels of popcorn, a number of squash and pumpkins, and a couple of tubsful of sweet potatoes. Except for the pineapple in the four-in-one, all these fruits and vegetables, as well as the grain, had been produced on the farm. Out in the pen a fat pig waited for the inevitable butchering day! Behind him, in the pasture, a yellowish cow chewed her cud, and everywhere speckled hens were busily scratching the rocky, sandy soil.

In many Ozark homes, this array of canned stuffs would have included more than a dozen varieties of wild greens, beginning with kale, poke and lambs'-quarters, as well as many quarts of wild fruits and berries. My neighbor excused this lack by saying she hadn't been very well all summer and hadn't been able to get out and pick the wild things! When she had any spare time, she said, she had worked on quilts for her married children and growing grandchildren. And of course loving care and attention had been given to the two little girls of her "second family" . . . the term applied to children of second marriages.

What grains could we grow in the Ozarks?

Corn, wheat, and oats are grown sparingly. Most fields of these grains are small and are apparently planted to provide rations sufficient only for the farmer's own animals. Our soil is too light to produce corn comparable

to Iowa's, and the production of other grains is problematical. Cane crops, such as sorghum and kaffir, grow splendidly. Sorghum cane is ground in mills and boiled down to make molasses for the family table. We call it Ozark Maple Syrup. The cane not used for this purpose is fed as fodder to the cattle and horses. Kaffir grows heavy heads of grain used extensively as chicken feed. Sheep, horses, and hogs also find kaffir both palatable and nutritious.

Can we grow fruits in the Ozarks?

Indeed you can! But you should be familiar with the modern methods of fruit growing. If you've been a bookkeeper or a floorwalker, don't think you can become a peach king or an apple magnate just by the simple process of setting out trees, any old place. Know where these fruits do best, and buy your farm accordingly. Then learn how the fruits should be tended, and follow authoritative information to the letter. Within a hundred miles of us are peach and apple orchards almost as extensive as one finds in Michigan. Why there are none nearer us, no one can tell me! Almost every farm has a few fruit trees that seem to bear surprisingly good crops. Cherries, particularly, do well, and we are tremendously pleased by the growth of our two Heavenly Gate cherry trees, planted to remind us of the years when Washington had time to pause and admire the delicate beauty of blossoming cherry trees. Berries, too, grow nicely. But due to the wealth of wild berries, few tame ones are planted.

Even though you plan on growing only enough fruit to supply your household needs, you should learn the rudiments of fruit raising. Particularly so if you are like

the Chicago stenographer who typed my order for fruit trees one January day. In the midst of her typing, she suddenly raised her head and said:

"Oh, Marge, these trees sound just heavenly. May I come down during my summer vacation and pick fruit from them?"

It takes two or three years before you can begin to hope to pick fruit from your own trees. Even when the beautiful seed catalogues tell you about trees that "will begin bearing next year," don't start buying fruit jars for canning your surplus cherries or peaches.

You would probably be like the city friends who have a farm near ours.

We were calling on them one Sunday afternoon in May, when they proudly led us out to look at their cherries!

There was a tiny tree with six cherries on it.

Our hosts began wailing:

"There were *seven* cherries here this morning! Now what do you suppose could have happened to that other cherry?"

For many minutes they combed the grass beneath the tree to see if the cherry had dropped off its branch. We didn't find it, but a robin was singing near by. I think he could have told why it was missing.

If we wanted to raise sheep in the Ozarks, what kind of a farm should we buy? And what kind of sheep?

First, send for the sheep books you can get from the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Learn all you can about sheep. It will be a lot . . . but even that won't be enough when you actually begin taking care of sheep. Experience is the best teacher.

Your farm should be more extensive than if you were going to attempt any other farming business. Sheep eat the grass and herbage quite closely, so they should be put on various pasture lands in rotation. The land should be high and dry, without swamps. Actually you find so few swamps in the Ozarks, however, you run little chance of getting a swampy farm.

Your choice of the variety of sheep should be guided largely by the sort of wool you wish to market. Did you know that wools differ greatly? We prefer the Shropshire wool, but for some reason we found our thoroughbred Shropshire sheep did not take kindly to our hills. For one thing, Shropshires are not great foragers . . . they seem to prefer to have their food served to them in the barn, rather than scramble over hill and dale to nibble it off the stem. (And who can blame them?) Or it may be that our particular sheep had this temperament because they and their ancestors had been owned by a northern millionaire who believed in feeding his sheep that way. We still like the four-square appearance of the Shropshires, but if we were starting our flock again we would lean toward a rangier, better-foraging breed.

Do you plant pasturage for sheep?

Yes! Although the native grasses seem to be popular, a hot, dry season may ruin the pasturage. For that reason, the Jedge has turned our clearings, except for a small plot of kaffir which helps keep the fowl through the winter, into lespedeza pasture. All the wooded lands, as fast as they are cleared sufficiently to allow the sun to shine on the ground, are also seeded with this grazing plant, which can stand the dry, hot summer better than any other pasture sowing we have found. Lespedeza hay

is also cut on farms where it is not eaten as it grows. The Jedge buys this for winter. Alfalfa hay is also purchased from farmers who have it to sell.

Is it possible to get more income from wool by selling woolen articles?

Yes, of course. But the idea of starting a "wool business" must be looked at from all angles. Distance from market, dependable sources, labor problems, etc. must all be considered.

Three years ago we received an order for one hundred and twenty handmade quilted woolen comforters. We had our wool made up into cheesecloth-covered wool batts, so light and soft it was like sleeping under a cloud to have one of them on the bed! Yet these batts were warm as toast. We hunted the hills to find women who quilted most beautifully. Many were on relief or had husbands on WPA, and the prospects of getting a paying job seemed like a blessing straight from heaven. We had selected silk, colors, and quilting patterns! Then came the wages and hours law which sent the cost of making each hand-quilted comforter close to fifty dollars. By the time the dealer would add his necessary profit, the comforters would be beyond the reach of the average consumer. So this business died a-borning! And the most disappointed ones were the women who had hoped to get jobs.

The one hundred and twenty wool batts filled one of our two upstairs rooms for weeks. Then we sent to John Morrell & Co., Ottumwa, Iowa, makers of Red Heart Dog Food, a wool comforter we had made for our dog, Judy. It was about forty inches square, covered with scarlet and black cotton plaid, bound with red, and

hand-tied after the manner of old-fashioned comforters. They promptly ordered all the wool dog comforters we could make from our wool batts. These were given away as prizes for pet stories read by Doggy Dan (WMAQ—Chicago) and Mary Margaret McBride as Martha Deane (WOR—New York) on their respective radio programs. So four hundred and eighty city dogs and cats acquired soft, warm, cuddly comforters when their owners wrote prize-winning stories about them. And one mountain girl earned money making the comforters. We didn't make any money on our wool that year. But we like dogs and cats . . . and mountain girls!

What sort of trees grow in the Ozarks?

The "timber" is largely made up of oak trees. Pines are scattered here and there, and in some sections you will find extensive pine woods. Sycamores and elms also grow freely, and of course you will find willows along the streams. Maples are less frequent. Locust trees grow fairly plentifully and are prized for fence posts. Hickory trees are found in abundance, and walnut trees are still present, but the high prices offered for walnut lumber in the past twenty-five years have cut down their number tremendously.

How are the hunting and fishing in the Ozarks?

Fine! You can hunt quail, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, possums, fox, and even wild turkeys. But not at Sunrise Mountain Farm. Ours is one of the few posted farms.

You can fish for bass, trout, bluegills, and other pan fish that are delicious beyond comparison. Practically all the streams have fish in them, and the size is usually governed by the size of the stream itself. Streams are fished pretty heavily, for the Ozarkians love their fish-

ing. Personally, I have never seen any large fish that have come out of Jack's Forks, although I have heard some large fish stories.

Your Ozark neighbor will probably tell you a fish story that has you on the edge of your chair. He will relate at great length how the big fellow fought, and lunged, and ran under a log, and how the pole bent, and the line tangled . . . but he finally got him, yes, siree, and here the catch is! You will be expecting a muskie, no less, but the fish he holds up will most likely be a limp little duffer about the size of your hand. The Jedge never fishes. He used to fish in Wisconsin and Michigan, where the fish match the stories the fishermen tell about them . . . if they get away.

How are the main roads in the Ozarks?

Excellent! You may do a lot of twisting and turning, with hairpin curves, for the roads largely follow the ridges. But highways are gravel, asphalt, or cement. The farm-to-market roads which are being put in throughout the country to feed the highways are also good. This work is being done by WPA labor mainly.

Many features of these roads receive severe criticism from natives, who know their hills, but perhaps mistakes would happen in any great undertaking of this sort. The chief criticism comes from the fact that whoever plans the roads and bridges in the Ozarks does not always remember that even a little rainfall back in the hills may change a trickling little brook into a raging torrent for anywhere from two hours to two weeks. Some say the bridge over Jack's Forks, sturdy and handsome though it is, is inundated if there is a heavy dew back in the hills. But it isn't quite that bad . . . a day and night of rainfall

are required before it is under water. At Barn Holler the road was built without even a culvert at a point where we go swimming after a rainy spell. But the plans were corrected and the road was rebuilt the next summer.

The by-roads, or off-the-beaten-path roads, are muddy and rutty as all get out in wet weather. And they are rutty in dry weather, for road grading back in the hills is not up to the standard it is in many other states. If you are driving in these back roads when a sudden storm makes the roads muddy, remember to drive in the ruts. Don't try to run your car along on the humps, as you would run it on street-car tracks. There's a sound, solid bottom, probably rock, in those ruts, and certainly there's less danger of sliding into the ditch. Just pray that your car is built high enough to clear the middle hump. When we were new to the Ozarks and didn't know about such things, a local automobile dealer once traded us a make of car that set so low it got hung up on humps. We wondered at the time we bought it how we happened to get it at such a bargain!

What kind of rocks are in the Ozarks?

Chiefly limestone or soft rocks that break when you pound them. However, we had no trouble finding enough flint rocks on our own farm to build our new living room, with walls fourteen to sixteen inches thick. Almost every rock in this part of our house will strike fire when struck with a knife. Here in the hills we find rocks of every color, shape, and size. They are a never ending source of interest to me, even though I have no knowledge of geology.

In the hills, I was told to break open each round rock I ran across. I might, the natives said, find an agate! I

have broken open dozens and dozens of these rocks . . . some as tiny as a robin's egg, others resembling small cantaloupes in size. Many of them contained what might be taken for an unpolished agate.

I saved these broken rocks carefully, and one time when I went up to Chicago I took along about a dozen. By looking in the 'phone book, I found the name of a lapidarist and I took my rocks over to get his expert opinion! He squinted at them through his eyeglass and polished up a broken edge of one on a wheel. Then he turned to me:

"Do you have a lot of these?"

Practically breathless, I said:

"Oh, yes! I can find them by the millions on our farm!"

"That's good," he said. "They will come in mighty handy if you ever want to fill up a hole in the ground!"

We also sent a box of rocks to the School of Mines at Rolla, Missouri, when our big well was dug, thinking we had run into a silver mine. The school sent back a highly technical explanation of the rocks, which boiled down to the simple fact that we had only wasted our money paying express charges.

Any farm you might buy in our community will furnish rock for your house, barns, and fireplace. And when you're all finished with your building, there'll be, apparently, as many rocks on the land as before. Each plowing, each season, each rainfall, brings up a new crop of them.

We tried picking up all the rocks on our Home Forty, so we could have a golf course that was fairly decent. But although we hired a crew of men and boys for days

and days to pile them into great mounds here and there, there still seemed to be as many rocks on the ground as before. So we just left the rocks and painted the golf balls orange and yellow.

It seems to me that surely, sometime, the rocks on Sunrise Mountain Farm might furnish tons of a valuable mineral. But then I'm an incurable optimist.

Are taxes high on Missouri farms?

They haven't been. Our farm taxes last year were under thirty dollars.

Are fire insurance rates high?

Yes! That can be expected where wood stoves are used and where the buildings are made of highly inflammable materials.

Could a couple with a regular income of fifty to a hundred dollars a month live comfortably on a small farm in the Ozarks?

You could be the Financial Class in our community! If you didn't want to buy a farm, you could rent one at unbelievably low prices. Our hired man and his wife pay three dollars a month for a forty-acre farm less than a mile from Sunrise Mountain Farm. I know of a lovely house at the edge of Mountain View, with electricity and running water and ten acres of land for garden, chickens, and cow, that rents for ten dollars a month. In fact, the Ozarks can give you that blissful home to which everyone looks forward when a pension or an annuity relieves the necessity of working. It can be the home that you build up for your old age by intelligent planning and hard work.

CHAPTER THIRTY

SUNRISE AND TWILIGHT

MORNING and evening are the loveliest times of the day here in the hills. Morning comes to Sunrise Mountain Farm when the dusk-to-dawn call of the whippoorwill is replaced by the softly muttered quacks of our pet duck beneath the bedroom window. He is standing guard at the door of the doghouse, while his mate, who obviously believes in getting her day's work done early, deposits a triple-sized egg on Punch's soft, warm straw bed.

A brisk fire is soon roaring in the kitchen cookstove, a welcome buffer to the chill of the early morning. Five freshly scalded nursing bottles are quickly filled with rich warmed milk and topped with sterilized nipples. These are for the five bottle-fed lambs that are being raised by hand.

The kitchen door looking out toward the mountaintop is opened, and the moist morning air is rent by a

tumult of sound as the lambs spy their bottles. They crowd to the fence, bleating to high heaven. As we hold the bottles for these yanking, bunting woolly babies, the sun peeps over the ridge far to the east. It's time for the flock to be put out to pasture. The empty bottles are set on the wash bench under the hickory tree, and the Jedge goes up to the corrals to let the sheep out. It's my job to scurry down the gravelly lane and across the highway to the North Forty, to open the two gates and prop them back with rocks. Then, with a long sassafras stick in each hand, I take my position in the middle of the Harlow Schoolhouse road to head off the straying lambs.

I watch the sheep come down the hillside, planting their little hoofs carefully on the stony gravel. They remind me of dainty little old ladies cautiously crossing State Street on unaccustomed high heels. But no sound on State Street was ever so poignantly pleasing as the silvery cadence of the tinkling Scotch sheep bells. Closer and closer comes this pastorale as the adult sheep of the flock cross the road and head straight as an arrow through the open gate into the lush green pasture of the North Forty.

"A goodly flock," I think . . . and wonder where I have heard that phrase.

But there's trouble afoot! The fifty lambs, headed by Orrena's son, born Valentine's Day, are definitely problem children. They flatly refuse to enter the gate. Down the road they go, jumping stiff-legged across ditches, bunting the mailbox post, shoving their mates, and kicking up their heels in the sheer joy of youth and morning and springtime. Their mothers are torn between parental

responsibility and the natural sheep instinct of following the flock. They bleat frantically about the gate for a moment, then set off in single file over the hill with the rams and yearling ewes who have not yet attained the joys and trials of motherhood. The calls of these anxious mothers grow fainter and fainter.

The lambs, a mashie shot down the road, appear to understand. They wheel and, in mass formation, rush pell-mell back to the gate. But, suddenly perverse again, they pass it on the dead run and head up the hill. I wave my sassafras branches and the Jedge, who has just come down, helps me shoo them back. Again they pass the gate and go tearing down the west road. However, at long last, they heed our shouts and the far-away baa-ing of their mothers and march soberly through the gate. Angels with dirty faces, indeed.

We close the gate and chat a moment with Floyd Elliott, a passing neighbor who is walking the six-mile road to town. His car, he tells us, "took out" on him last night. As we sympathize with him, Aunt Mealie comes down the hill on her way over to the Mullinses for tomato plants. She stops for a word with us and we tell her how nice she looks in her fresh calico dress and apron. Her forearms are bare, so we know spring has indeed come to Sunrise Mountain. Aunt Mealie has taken off her long underwear!

She has on her jewels, too. A Landon-Knox button, given to her by the Jedge during the 1936 campaign, is pinned to one side of her apron bib. The other side is pinned up with a badge bearing a picture of Woodrow Wilson. As always, I shamelessly try to wheedle the

Wilson button away from her. And as always, she tells me that "she orta give it to me to keep me from a-wearin' them sprangly iron bugs and flowers, but she hain't a-goin' to do it!" She goes on down the road chuckling to herself. We start up the lane toward the house, watching the soft pearly wood smoke from the kitchen chimney rising straight against a cobalt sky.

Along the way we pause to admire the drifted beauty of wild blackberry and wild dewberry bushes in full bloom, looking for all the world like a June wedding party, with white tulle and hooped white organdy, marching down the church aisle. We come to a lingering stop before a spider web, intricately woven in a square of the wire fence. It is hung so closely with dewdrops that it might be a filigree of pearls woven for a Juliet's cap. We hunt the spider and finally find her, a tiny gray ball, hunched at the far corner of her glorified web waiting for the fly that will make her breakfast.

We see a cardinal flash across the lane into the deep woods to join his waiting mate. At the cherry tree a bluebird pauses at the mouth of his nest to chirp a greeting to his hungry brood. Each papa bird seems more hurried and flurried than in those spring courting days. Exactly like many a human father!

For the millionth time we thrill to the airy grace and musical accomplishments of our beloved mockingbird, doing his imitations at the very tip of the hickory tree. This morning he is trying a new one. It sounds like "Heeee-re, Juuuuuuuu-dy!" Can it be that he is mocking me? He begins to alternate between the plaintive feline "meouw-meouw" of the catbird and a trilling wild canary warble. The Cat and the Canary, we laugh softly.

Overhead the silent majesty of the mountain stars . . .

We pass the house and stroll up to the Big Pond through the dew-wet grass. We see a knobby head rising above water far out in the pond! From its width we judge that we are being surveyed by the oompah-oompah of last night's frog concert. We search the thick, bushy wild plum trees at the water's edge and rejoice at finding thousands of tiny plums . . . the promise of many glasses of ruby jelly as tart and tangy as Spanish wines. We admire the reflection of the plum trees in the sparking ripples, and as we watch, a tiny curved white feather is blown into the water. Fanned by the morning breeze, it goes scudding across the pond like a dainty elfin sailboat.

We are brought back to reality by the unmistakable breakfast hints of the white chickens, speckled guinea hen, Donny and Mrs. Duck, and the three geese, Cheerio and his consorts, Love and Hisses, and the gosling, Junior. We go back to the feed room to bring out grain for them. Then, while I carry food to the old hens and little chickens that must be kept in their coops until the sun has dried the heavy dew, the Jedge holds out a canful of kaffir into which the two ducks dip their broad bills, gobbling with terrific speed and obvious delight. We laugh at the appropriate inscription on their improvised breakfast pan. It reads: "Good to the Last Drop."

Suddenly from the house comes the clear, resonant striking of the big banjo clock over the fireplace.

Heavens, it's six o'clock! Where HAS the morning gone?

Evening here in the Ozarks begins with a livelier tinkling of sheep bells in the valley. All day we can hear

them, if we listen, tinkling musically, now near, now far, as the bell sheep nibble over the grassy pastures or take their naps in the cool, shaded stream bed in the valley. Now that the shadows are lengthening, they are collecting their lambs and falling into line to make their homeward trip to the mountaintop.

Soon we see them coming up, treading one after another in the narrow trail made by their sharp hoofs. Then, while the old ones take a bedtime snack of the rich, new lespedeza that carpets the pasture around the corrals, the lambs have their nightly gambol on the banks of the Big Pond. We never miss this show. Supper inside the farmhouse is hurried to the table, exactly as it is in many city apartments. Only we aren't concerned with getting to the show before the prices change! We want to get to the show before the actors get tired and sleepy. The lambs play exactly like children. Tag! Follow the leader! Even a recognizable version of cops and robbers! Then there are the acrobatics that come from sheer exuberance of youthful spirits! Straight-leg jumping! Jumping with a half turn in the air! Mock fights and much bunting. Occasionally a youngster is knocked down and goes baa-ing to his mother.

Then, as the sun goes down, other sheep mothers come up to collect their youngsters! Slowly they seek their usual sleeping places in the corrals or straw-floored barns with the dogs, glad of the chase, bringing up stragglers.

As the twilight deepens, I carry our deck chairs to the outdoor fireplace and kindle a fire against the evening's chill. The Jedge closes the gates, giving good-night pats to his pet Shropshires and that final handout to Donny,

the pet duck, who always insists on a bedtime snack. Donny looks like a fat little ghost in the gathering darkness, waddling with cheerful little mutterings back to the coop that was his home when he was a bachelor, and which he has never given up.

At last, side by side in our long chairs, the Jedge and I sit before the crackling wood fire to watch the ridges about us become ragged black silhouettes against the ultramarine sky. Judy snores in her master's lap. Punch, the shepherd, lies beside my chair with one eye on the cat prowling over the woodpile. In the woods the whippoorwill sets up his lonely evening call. The sheep bells tinkle softly and intermittently as Merribelle, Alice, the Duchess, and other bell sheep nod in their sleep! A thousand throaty little frogs set up a jam session to drown out the huge bullfrog who reigns over the Big Pond.

Overhead the silent majesty of the mountain stars thrills us anew. Millions of them are so close, so bright; and other millions, too far away ever to be glimpsed through city smoke, powder the sky with a faint glowworm glimmer.

Only two pinpoints of lamplight compete with the light of the stars. One, on the next ridge, winks and disappears as we watch it. That means Uncle Pete has read his evening chapter in the big Bible with the silver clasps. Aunt Mealie has set her bread, and they have retired under the China Platter quilt and the mail-order blanket. Far across the valley we see the other light blink, disappear, and then blink again. That means a kerosene lamp has been carried from kitchen to bedroom!

The fire burns low as the lazy fat moon slowly rises over the mountain, and a sleepy little murmur comes from the ground sparrow's nest near by. I reach for my husband's hand, and, in the heart of our beloved Ozarks, we sit quietly . . . knowing the peace that passeth all understanding.

THE END