

# SPRING AT THE CREEK

by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

I wonder what spring would mean to one who was encountering it, if such a thing were conceivable, for the first time. My notion is that it would mean nothing. Spring is beautiful because it is familiar. Its implications are stirring because we understand them. We know the cold that precedes it and the hot sun that will follow it. It is generally believed that the northern spring is more portentous than the tropical or sub-tropical spring, because the contrast between cold and warmth, between frozen sterility and hot fertility is more apparent. This is not true when, as in the sub-tropics at Cross Creek, spring is so well known that its coming is as important as a smile across a beloved face. A very clever poet, Wallace Stevens, ended a poem with saying, "But there is no spring in Florida." He came as a stranger, a traveller, to Florida, and the lushness of spring was to him only lushness. He could not differentiate among the shades of green, which at Cross Creek tell us when to plant and when to fertilize and when to cultivate. He did not know when the red-bird begins to sing again and when the cypress bursts from gray bareness into a dress of soft needles and the swamp maple puts out young passionate red leaves.

At the Creek, spring is as definite and as exciting as in Greenland. We have not had snow behind us, but we have had an ungrowing period, as have they, and life now stirs and sap

rises and the creatures mate and the snakes come out of their winter's lethargy. Because it is familiar and beloved, we watch every gradation. It is dear to us because knowledge of it is necessary to recognize its variations. There is no one sign of spring, but several spontaneous burstings. At the moment of the cypresses' needled sprouting and the swamp maples' glory of color, there bloom the yellow jessamine and the red-bud. The jessamine is at its height, spilling waterfalls of gold from high in the tallest trees, when the major miracle occurs. One evening there is the jessamine in the sunset, alone in a world of arrested color. The next morning there is a tinge of green across the gray Spanish moss, and infinitesimal rosy blossoms may be discovered along its strands, the distant hammock is emerald, and on the soft air floats a fragrance for which we have hungered the whole year through. The first orange blossoms have opened....For the seasons at the Creek are marked, not by the calendar, but by fruits and flowers and birds.

After a warm winter, the jessamine blooms in late January and the orange trees in early February. After an average winter, the jessamine blooms in early February and the oranges in the middle of the month. After a long winter with protracted cold, as this year, the jessamine waits wisely until the frost is over....

from Cross Creek