

HIS BANNER OVER ME

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

GREEN PASTURES

AFTER LESS than a year in our little honeymoon house, we moved to a farm near Olympia. A plain little unplastered house, with few conveniences, but it was surrounded by great oaks, reminiscent of the beloved farm of my youth. How the yellow violets bloomed for us that spring! The Scotch broom was a glory in every roadside and hedge.

The whole place became a modern Garden of Eden, where animals and humans dwelt together delightfully in mutual trust and companionship. Sensing my love of animals, the great field horses followed me about every chance they got, one time even coming onto the porch. I went about my work in the kitchen with a baby goose in each apron pocket, each sticking out an interested fuzzy head and commenting, "Peep peep" as it watched my activities.

One time when my husband and the hired man were busy fixing some harness in the dining room, I brought in Sister, a brown and white calf. Occasionally a roving cow poked her head through the open window and mooed into the startled ears of the hired man. A family of cats always sat hopefully beside the milker's stool till the thin, fine spray of warm milk was directed into their open mouths. Though the Airedales, Scout and Mr. O'Neal, chased the gray squirrels, it was all good, clean fun, and no one was hurt.

I begged Howard to let me drive the horses in the field . . . one of my precious memories, sitting there holding the reins, with the blackbirds calling overhead.

There was even a lake on the farm. Sometimes we slipped away from the work and paddled in the track of the moonlight. That moon never shone for another couple as it did for us. One night we couldn't get to sleep. The moon called and beckoned for us to come out. So, bewitched, we crawled through the window to avoid waking a house guest and the hired man. Down the road we walked in the very path of the moon, the soft silk-like dust under our bare feet, under the big oak, even a little way through the young wheat. I do not know how long we strolled from one lovely gilded spot to another. Finally quite drunk with moonlight, we crept through the window again. Until this day we never told of this little adventure.

How we needed that memory for the days to come! I was losing weight again, in spite of the milk and cream. More heavy colds. Another case of flu. A cough which would not heal. Then the familiar one-two-three-cough, one-two-three-cough, and the blue pencil . . .

We left the farm and we had six months together in the beloved old house on K Street. Father had meanwhile retired and moved to a little place in the country. It seemed wonderful that Howard could really stay there and not have to tear himself away at night and go down the long hill. But I got no better. The doctor decided I had better try California. The Lord opened the way for Howard to spend a year helping friends on their Southern California farm.

We wound up our affairs and on a certain day in March our train pulled out from the red station in Tacoma. Two excited travelers, hope high in our hearts, and in Howard's pocket a hammer to open Scout's crate at intervals. I bounced up and down on the green plush seats, unable to believe that we were actually on our way to California and sunshine. It was to be only for a year, so there was no excessive grief at parting from the family and friends.

Thus entered into my life its third farm. I wrote to my sisters, "California is not a tropical paradise so far. The farm is a low, flat huddle of shabby buildings on a low, flat plain."

But there were oranges falling off the trees and growing warm in the sunshine. There was a great tree of tangerines. Never would I have believed we could eat so many. There was milk, and a garden of fresh vegetables. And best of all, the sun.

Disappointments and trials came to us here, but this was the place God chose for our further teaching. There came to our hand a complete catalogue of the Western Book & Tract Company in Oakland. I fell onto it as a thirsty traveler falls on a pool in the desert. From this I learned the depths of my ignorance of the Word. I discovered what it was I had been longing to know.

We hadn't much money but we ordered dozens of books, all in paper covers. Then all day, while Howard worked, I studied. Evenings I shared with him what I had discovered. Sometimes I could not wait until evening. When the blessed truth of the eternal security of the believer was revealed to me, I dropped my books and ran out to find my husband. He was across the field, plowing. I started toward him on a run; panting, and stumbling and tripping over the rough ground. When he saw me he dropped the reins and ran towards me exclaiming, "What is the matter, darling?"

I gasped, "O Howard, we can never be lost!"

And there in the middle of the brown field we clasped each other close while God's verities were all about us, and His grace was revealed fresh to us.

Every day found us richer. I cannot understand why I had been slow about this matter. But I knew at last that I was really getting what I wanted. Philosophy, psychology, sociology—I had wasted so much time on them. Here was the immutable Word of God being unfolded, from imponderable depths to an amazing simplicity.

My health too began to improve. With the new knowledge of the Bible, and the improved health, I began to indulge in dreams of really working for the Lord I loved, Who had been so patient with my stupidity.

After more than a year we moved to Long Beach. It seemed plain to us that on account of my health we must permanently avoid the dampness of the lovely Puget Sound country. My husband found employment with the Shell Oil Company, where he remained for twenty-four years.

A trip to Tacoma to sell property and furniture, the dear furnishings of the honeymoon house. We kept only a few pieces and our books. It was hard to tell our dear ones good-bye, not knowing when we would see them again.

We purchased an equity in a little house in Long Beach. While there we attended as often as my health would allow, the Brethren Church at Fifth and Cherry, pastored by Dr. Louis S. Bauman. His sermons taught us much. Both he and Mrs. Bauman became firm friends through the ensuing years.

My housework kept me busy. There were five minor operations and some treatments. I was doing considerable writing of verse but I did nothing with them, just kept them in a drawer. One Christmas I fastened about twenty-five of them together with ribbon, called them WINGS AND SKY, a title I had chosen while still in school, and gave them to the Bauman's for Christmas. Dr. Bauman printed most of them from time to time in the church calendar. I was amazed as time went on, to learn that the verses were being copied by other calendars.

Yet during this period I was wasting my time.

Learning, yes, but doing nothing for the Lord and often out of fellowship. But great is His faithfulness. He had before the beginning of Time, chosen this frail little girl for a special task and He would not suffer her to drift away from Him.

Occasionally I recalled the afternoon that I had spent beside the great fallen oak in the pasture, when I was seventeen. I had given my life to God. But I realized I was doing nothing about that promise: I did not see how I could, when He had not restored to me what little health I ever had.

“And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16).

Even though I was blind, His ancient promise stood.

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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