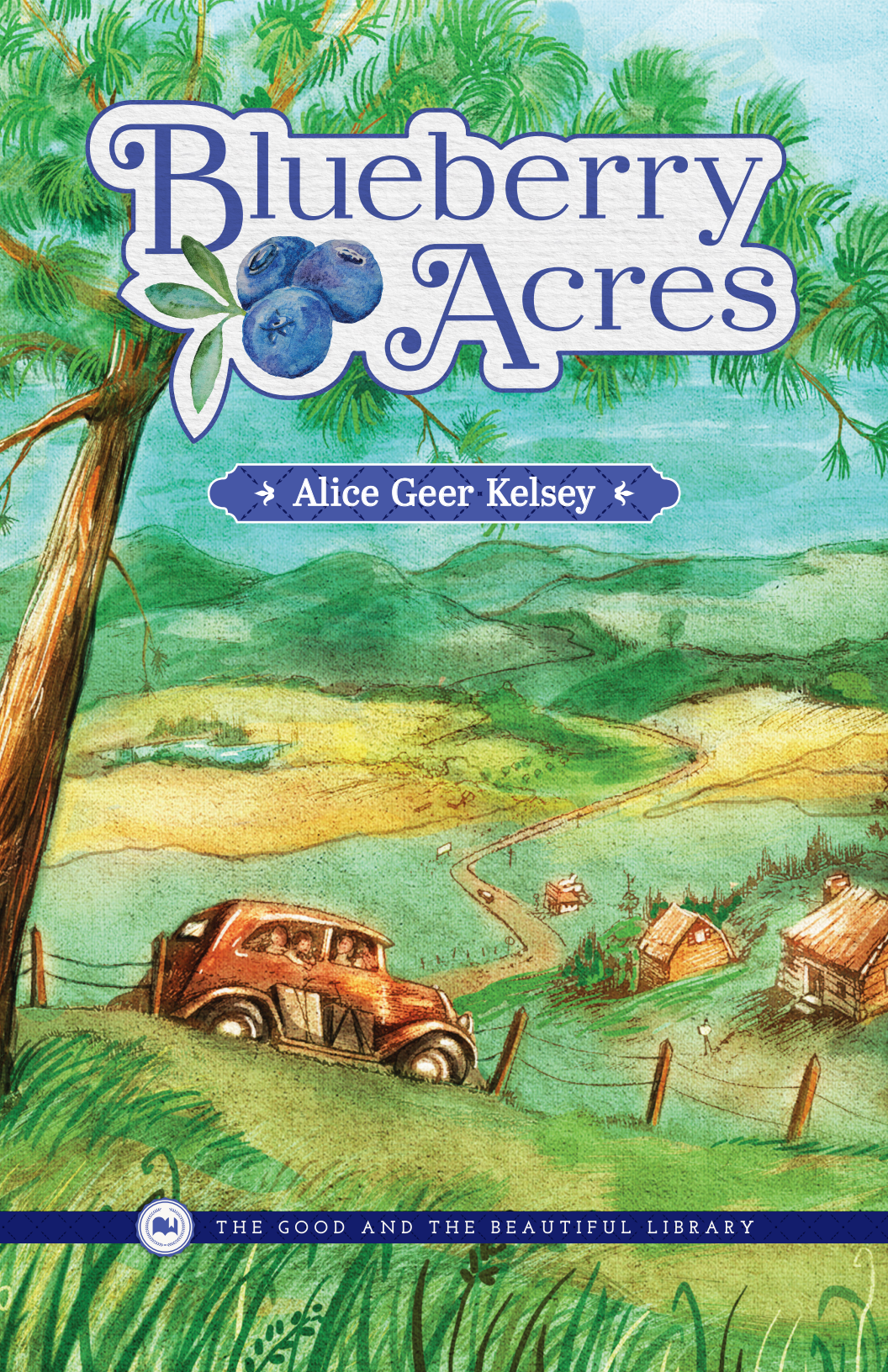
Blueberry Acres
Alice Geer Kelsey
THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

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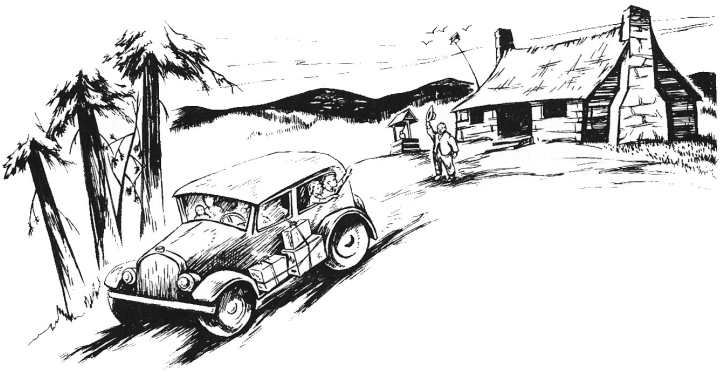

CHAPTER 1

Goodbye to the Ozarks

"I DON'T AIM to go!" Jamesy dug bare toes into the hard soil in front of his cabin door. He glared defiantly at his father who was sitting at the wheel of the battered old car. Though new to the Hunters, it had already chugged over the steep roads of the Ozark Mountains for five years after a long life on easier roads. Jamesy's blue eyes blazed in his lean, freckled face. "I ain't a-fixing to leave my kin and go traipsing way off yonder!"

"Me neither!" Truella plumped herself down beside Jamesy and peered from behind her shaggy yellow bangs. "It's bad up yonder. The outlanders will treat us mean for certain."

"Maudie May and me don't aim to go neither," said Lonnie, as the two younger children joined their older brother and sister. "We don't aim to have no outlanders knock us around and call us hillbillies."

Mrs. Hunter stopped in the dogtrot, which was an open porch between the two rooms of their weathered log cabin. Her tired arms were full of kettles and tin dishes to load into the car. She stared at the children and then at her husband, sitting tall and stern at the steering wheel. She had heard the children's talk about wanting to stay all summer in their own cabin on the mountainside, but she had been too busy to pay any attention to it. She had not even thought it worth mentioning to their father.

"What do you-all mean?" There was no twinkle for once in Mr. Hunter's blue eyes as he asked, "What do you-all mean, not aiming to go? We can't live any longer on what we earn on this farm. What's the matter with us a-going north to earn some money?"

"Plenty's the matter!" Jamesy, because he was twelve, answered for them all. "Didn't you hear what Uncle Matt said about the time he went north to pick berries?"

"He lived with a heap of other people in a leaky shelter that didn't have no wall on one side," Truella took over. "He did a sight of work but didn't earn as much as they'd promised him he would. And the Boss Man kept most of his pay till it was time to come home again."

"Everyone called Uncle Matt a 'dirty migrant,'" Jamesy went on, "and acted as if he wasn't fitten

to walk on the streets up yonder, or buy things in their stores, or sit in their churches."

"And they talked strange," added Lonnie.

"So, it's Uncle Matt's stories you-all've been a-hearing." The laughing wrinkles were back at the corners of Mr. Hunter's blue eyes. "I've heard those stories nigh a hundred times in the past fifteen years. I don't listen to them no more. I pay attention to the stories of people who were up north last year or the year before. They say things are different for pickers now. The people in the churches got together and talked about the hard time the pickers were having. Then they began to do things about it. When the church people led the way, the government and the farmers and the storekeepers followed along."

"It's still hard, they say, but the living up yonder is sure enough better than it was a few years ago." Mrs. Hunter wedged the kettles into the few empty spots in the bulging trunk of the old car. "Come, bring up a turn of water, Jamesy, so that we can all have one last drink of our own mountain well before we go."

"I—don't—aim—to—go," repeated Jamesy slowly in time to his bending as he pumped the water from the well into the pail.

"Unless"—Truella had an idea of her own—"unless we could take Cotton Ball. We'll be awful lonesome without any of our pets."

Maudie May ran after the white cat and brought it towards the car. “I’ll go if we can take Cotton Ball.” Maudie May’s round freckled face crinkled into a grin.

“And could we take Dick?” Jamesy moved towards his pet raccoon, sleeping in a low branch of a maple tree.

Dick had been named from Jamesy’s favorite detective, whose adventures came over the old battery radio set. It had seemed to the boy that an animal that went prowling about at night would make a good detective. “I’ll go if we can take Cotton Ball and Dick.”

Mr. Hunter shook his head in the way that meant there was no use to argue. “Cotton Ball would be a pest on the trip, and that coon could be even worse.

I reckon you young'uns don't know what it's a-going to mean to drive eight hundred miles in a car that goes like a balky mule. No room for pets! The farmers wouldn't want them up yonder, anyway."

"You know Grandy is a-going to live here all summer," Mrs. Hunter reminded them. "He'll tend Cotton Ball and the mule till we come back in the fall. The coon can take care of itself."

"All packed? Time to mosey along!" Mr. Hunter started the motor of the old car, but the four children stood their ground stubbornly. Mrs. Hunter climbed in beside her husband, baby Liddy Ann in her arms. Grandy waved from the dogtrot between the two rooms of the cabin. The car gave a loud sputter.

"Wait for me!" wailed Maudie May, climbing into the back seat.

"Wait for me!" screamed Lonnie, following close behind.

Jamesy and Truella looked at each other. They saw their father's hand on the gearshift. Truella gave a last, long pat to Cotton Ball and climbed slowly into the back seat among bundles, boxes, blankets, and children. But Jamesy had one more battle to fight. He darted into the house and came out staggering under the bulky old-fashioned radio, a hand-me-down present from some folks in the valley.

"I'll go if I can take this," Jamesy announced.

"There's not room for another thing in this car!" His mother was beginning to lose her patience.

"But how'll I know what happens to the Lone Ranger or Dick Tracy or Superman if we don't have no radio?" asked Jamesy. He might have added, "How'll I learn how to be a radio actor?" but that was something he never talked about to anyone but Truella.

"This car ain't no truck," snapped his father. "Put that thing back in the house and get in the car!"

Jamesy knew when he had to give in. He put the radio back on its shelf and wriggled into the few inches left for him on the back seat.

The Hunters waved goodbye to Grandy, who followed to the rail fence of their dooryard to watch

the car out of sight.

Down the winding mountain road, they jolted under the warm May sun. Every tree and every rock was familiar to them. Neighbors stopped their hoeing to call to them and wish them a good journey.

Soon they were on the smooth road leading to the village where they had walked many a time to school or church or stores. Beyond the village was country that was new to them and roads that were strangely wide and straight. There had been no time, nor gasoline, for trips in the few days since Mr. Hunter bought the old car to carry them north.

Through hills, across level fields, and beside brown rivers they rode, across parts of four states—their own Arkansas, then Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana.

Maudie May watched for cats and thought of Cotton Ball. Lonnie was so excited by what he saw that he forgot to be afraid. Jamesy and Truella noticed everything and chattered about it.

"See all those people jammed into a truck! Where do you s'pose they're a-going?" asked Truella.

"A-going north to work—just like us." Jamesy remembered the family from Texas that had camped near them the night before.

"See all those men and women a-working in that field! They can't all belong to one farm."

"They must be pickers—just like us—a-working on other people's farms."

"What would these farmers do if we didn't come up from the South to work for them summers?" asked Truella.

"The farmers sure enough need us, don't they?" Jamesy was beginning to feel important after days of riding north.

"They do for certain," answered Mrs. Hunter. "So do the people who eat food all over the world."

"We could might nigh be proud of being pickers," said Truella, almost in a whisper.

"We could for certain," said Mr. Hunter.

"I wish we could begin work right soon," said Jamesy. "I'm tired of riding."

"Almost there, son," said Mr. Hunter. "Have you noticed the road markers? We're in Michigan already."

As the red sun colored the clouds over great Lake Michigan, Mr. Hunter began stopping his car to ask the way to a town where he had heard that strawberry pickers were needed. Whenever the car stopped, the children had time to gaze out over the vast gray-blue lake. It seemed to go on and on forever, with its dancing whitecaps far out and its white surf near the shore. But the land was almost as wonderful to them as the water. The Hunters, used to farming a steep mountainside, could

Blueberry Acres

Life in the Ozarks is all the Hunter children have ever known, so when Mother and Father move the family north to work in fields as pickers, the children are certain that life will be miserable. They have heard stories of people from the North and how they treat pickers from the South. However, as the family begins work at Blueberry Acres, they soon discover that goodness can be found in all parts of the country when you have people who care and come together, no matter their circumstances.

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