



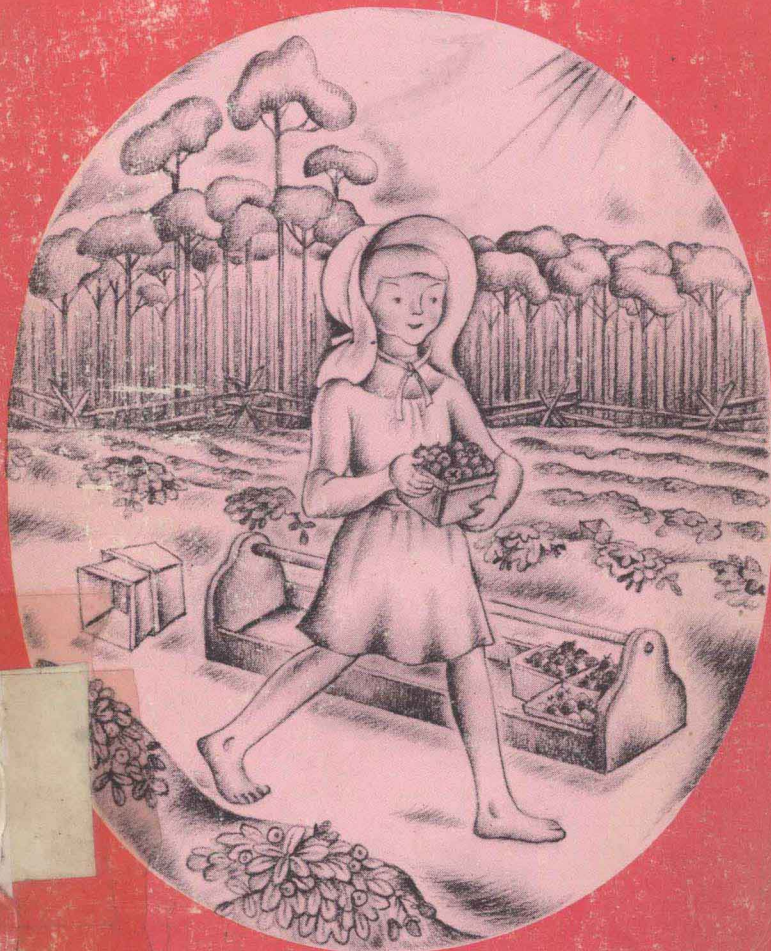
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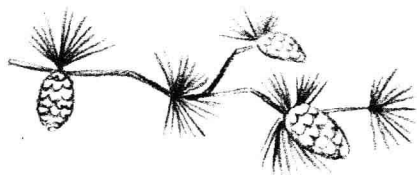
# STRAWBERRY GIRL



Lois Lenski



# Strawberry Girl



written and illustrated

by

LOIS LENSKE

A YEARLING BOOK



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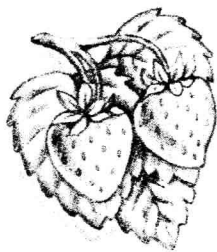
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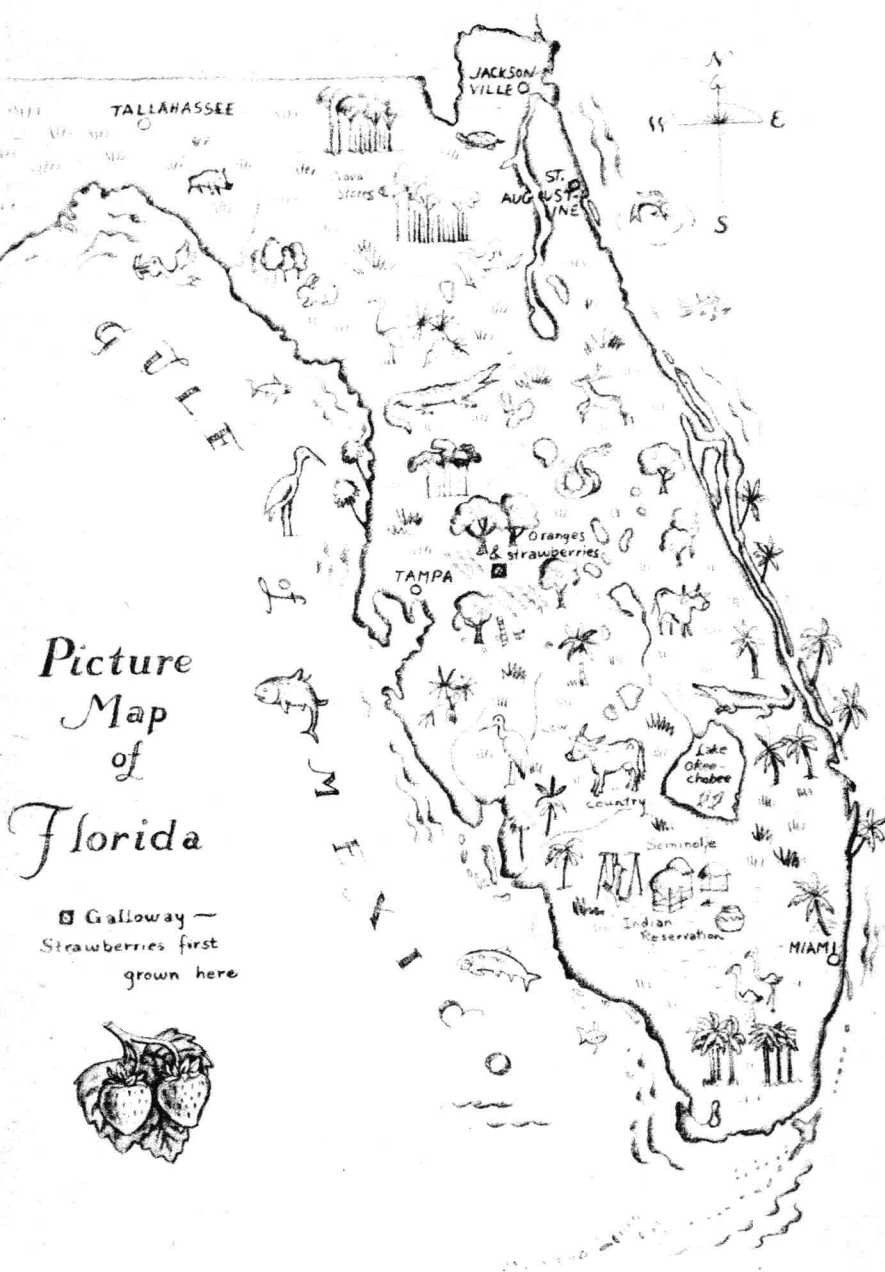
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*For*  
*two little Florida friends,*  
*Betty Anne King*  
*and*  
*Barbara Smith*





## FOREWORD

*FEW people realize how new Florida is, or that, aside from the early Indian and Spanish settlements, Florida has grown up in the course of a single man's lifetime. In the early 1900's, the date of my story, Florida was still frontier country, with vast stretches of unexplored wilderness, woodland and swamp, and her towns were frontier towns thirty and forty years later than the same frontier period in the Middle West.*

*After the Seminole War, 1835-1842, Anglo-Saxons from the Carolinas, Georgia and West Florida drifted south and took up land in the lake region of Florida. Then began a bitter struggle with the environment. Their descendants, in the second and third generation, were, in 1900 and the following decade, just prior to the coming of the automobile, living in a frontier community, with all its crudities, brutalities and cruelties. The "Crackers" lived a primitive life, an endless battle went on—a conflict with nature, with wild life, and with their fellow men. Their life was replete with drama, and being people of character and dignity, they lived it, and still live it, with vigor.*

## FOREWORD



*Like their antecedents in the Carolina mountains, the Florida Crackers have preserved a flavorsome speech, rich in fine old English idiom—word, phrase and rhythm. Many old customs, folk songs and superstitions have been handed down along with Anglo-Saxon purity of type, shown in their unusual beauty of physical feature, and along with their staunch integrity of character.*

*Here then, in the Florida backwoods, a world exists, which few people, town residents or northern tourists, see, realize or even suspect. Many who see it fail sadly to understand it. Here is a real and authentic corner of the American scene, a segment of American life.*

*In this series of regional books for American children, I am trying to present vivid, sympathetic pictures of the real life of different kinds of Americans, against authentic backgrounds of diverse localities. We need to know our country better; to know and understand people different from ourselves; so that we can say: "This then is the way these people lived. Because I understand it, I admire and love them." Is not this a rich heritage for our American children?*

*My material has been gathered personally from the Crackers themselves, and from other Floridians who know and understand them. I have visited in Cracker homes. I have made many sketches of people, animals, the natural surroundings, their homes—plans, furnishings and details. I have come to know, understand and respect many of these people, and to number them among my friends. All the characters in my book are imag-*

## FOREWORD



*inary, but practically all incidents used were told to me by people who had experienced them. Many were too dramatic for my purpose and had to be softened; some had to be altered to fit into my plot. To merit the confidence these people spontaneously placed in me has been a rich experience indeed.*

*I have consulted the WPA Florida Guide Book; The History of Polk County; Florida in the Making by Stockbridge and Perry; Palmetto Country by Stetson Kennedy; Four Centuries of Florida Ranching and other volumes.*

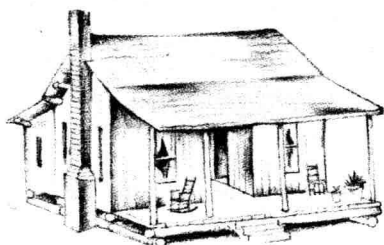
*I wish to extend my thanks to many Florida friends, among them members of the Sorosis Club in Lakeland, for their generous help.*

*Lois Lenski*

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*Fall of 1944*

*S*TRAWBERRY *G*IRL





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## PROLOGUE

### *Trouble*

**T**HAR goes our cow, Pa!" said the little girl.

"Shore 'nough, that do look like one of our cows, now don't it?"

The man tipped his slat-backed chair against the wall of the house. He spat across the porch floor onto the sandy yard. His voice was a lazy drawl. He closed his eyes again.

"She's got our markin' brand on her, Pa. A big S inside a circle," said Essie.

The man, Sam Slater, looked up. "Shore 'nough, so she has."

"She's headin' right for them orange trees, Pa," said Essie.

"Them new leaves taste mighty good, I reckon," replied her father. "She's hungry, pore thing!"

A clatter of dishes sounded from within the house and a baby began to cry.

"You'd be pore, too, did you never git nothin' to eat," said the unseen Mrs. Slater.

There was no answer.

The sun shone with a brilliant glare. The white sand in the

## STRAWBERRY GIRL

yard reflected the bright light and made the shade on the porch seem dark and cool.

"She might could go right in and eat 'em, Pa," said the little girl. Her voice was slow, soft and sweet. Her face, hands and bare legs were dirty. At her feet lay some sticks and broken twigs with which she had been playing.

Pa Slater did not open his eyes.

"Pa," Essie went on in a more lively tone, "iffen that cow laps her tongue around the new leaves, she'll twist the bark loose and pull it off. Do we not stop her, she might could eat up all them orange trees."

The man spat, then resumed his dozing position. "I don't reckon so," he said slowly.







"Iffen she goes in that orange grove, them new folks will . . ."

The legs of the man's chair came down on the porch floor with a thump. He opened his eyes. "What new folks?"

"Them new folks what moved in the ole Roddenberry house," said Essie.

"New folks in that big ole house? Who tole you?" His staring gray eyes fixed themselves on the pale blue ones of his daughter.

"Jeff done tole me," said Essie. Although she was only seven, she was not afraid of her father. "They been here most a month already. They come in a big wagon. They moved in while you was away, Pa. We watched 'em unload."

"You did, eh?" growled Pa Slater. "You let 'em see you?"

"No." Essie smiled knowingly. "We hid in the palmettos, Pa. We got us a tunnel to hide in."

Her father grinned back at her. "Who be they?"

"Jeff says . . ."

Mrs. Slater, within, interrupted. "Name's Boyer. The man's a Carolyn feller."

"Why ain't you done tole me?"

"'Cause you been gone away for so long."

"Got kids?" asked Slater.

"Regular strawberry family, jedgin' from the size of it—six or seven young uns, I reckon."

Mrs. Slater's reply was followed by the clatter of dishes and the crying of the baby. A smaller girl, about five, came out and climbed up on her father's lap.