

LITTLE STORIES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

How Irma Found Health

By AUNT JULIA



“WHY is Irma so pale and thin?” All her cousins asked when she arrived at the barrio.

“She has been eating very little,” Flery explained.

“You need our fresh milk and eggs,” Mering said.

“She needs exercise also, according to the doctor,” added Ernie. “But she is too lazy to perform her setting up exercises in the morning.”

“She should take long walks in our fields,” suggested Tinding.

“Long walks! Oh, I’ll die from fatigue,” Irma moaned.

Mering gave Irma a glass of foaming carabao’s milk early in the morning.

Tinding prepared eggs for her. Her cousin Jose brought home watermelons, the reddest and sweetest. But Irma ate her food without relish. She had no appetite.

One evening Nora called all the cousins together. They talked over plans by which they could make Irma take walks for exercise. “It is exercise she needs to whet her appetite,” Nora declared. After exchanging opinions, they hit on a plan.

“Have you been to the river?” Mering asked the city children when they got up in the morning.

“Our river is clear and just deep enough for you,” boasted Tinding.

“Where is the river? Is it far?” Irma asked with interest.

“Just beyond the bamboos that line our backyard,” Jose told his city cousins. “Just a few paces from those bamboos.”

“Let us go bathing this morning. I should like to learn to swim.” This from Ernie.

“Yes,” agreed Nora, “let us drink our hot milk now and eat the rest of our breakfast after the bath.”

“You will see big watermelons lying on the sand.” Mering informed them.

“Watermelons! May we pick some?” Flery asked, her eyes sparkling at the thought of big, red watermelons.

"As many as you can carry. They are ours," Tinding answered.

"Watermelon is the only thing I enjoy eating," Irma remarked.

"Then let us start right away," Ernie urged.

As everybody else got up, Irma found herself slipping on a bathing suit. Led by Jose who trotted on toward the bamboos, the children tripped along shouting merrily. Beyond the thick clumps of bamboo trees lay a seemingly endless expanse of sandy ground carpeted with green vines.

"Where is the river?" Irma asked.

"Just beyond that little ridge," answered Jose pointing to the west.

"Look!" shouted Tinding, "do you see the watermelons on the ground? Pick as many as you can carry and eat them while you bathe."

The children rushed forward elbowing one another.

"Do not step on the vines. You will kill the plant," Mering warned.

"Do you mean to say that these huge watermelons are borne by this frail vine?" Irma asked in an incredulous tone.

"Of course, they are. This sandy soil is rich and it is just what the watermelon likes," Jose explained.

"Do you fertilize it?" Ernie asked.

"No. The river overflows its banks in the rainy season and spreads a thin coating of slime over the land. After the flood, the soil is richer than ever."

Everybody carried two or three watermelons. Irma chose two of the biggest and carried one on each arm. She practiced stretching her arm with a watermelon on the palm and every time she succeeded, all her companions cheered and applauded. After walking a few yards, however, she squatted down on the sand with the watermelons on her lap.

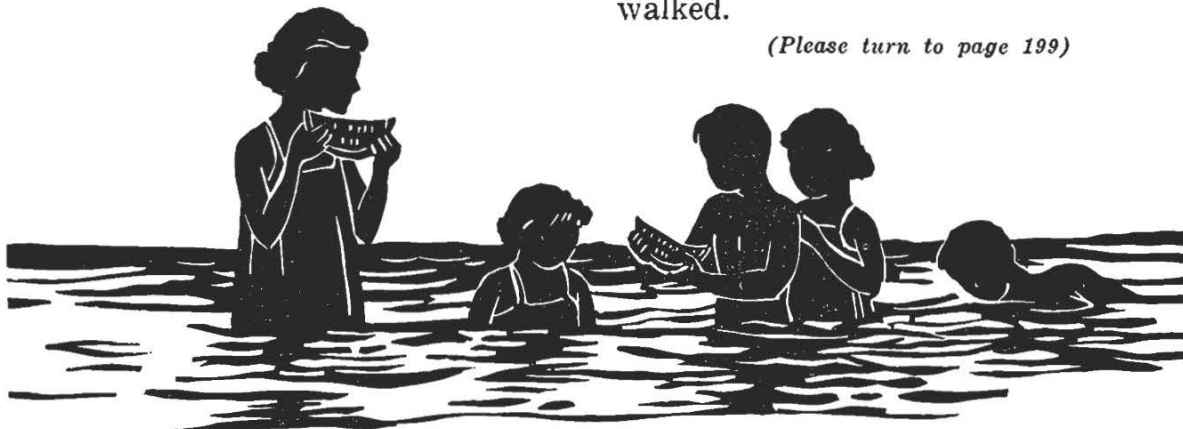
"I cannot go on anymore," she wailed.

"Let me carry your watermelons for you," offered Jose.

Mering broke open two watermelons and gave each child a piece. Then they all ran on toward the river taking care that Irma was not left behind. From the top of the knoll, the children could see the river, its water glinting in the morning sun. "How beautiful!" everybody exclaimed. Even Irma did not notice the wide sandy bank that had to be crossed to reach the river.

The children from the city were panting when they finally reached the river edge. Irma was most enthusiastic. She did not notice how far she had walked.

(Please turn to page 199)



HOW IRMA FOUND .

(Continued from page 171)

"How clear the water is!" she exclaimed. "Clear as crystal," she quoted. "Look at the pebbles at the bottom. Some are white and round."

The water on the side was only ankle-deep. The sand on the river bed tickled the sole and the children danced and yelled. They leaped and splashed at one another as they bit off mouthfuls of the juicy watermelon.

The sun was becoming warm and the children were beginning to feel hungry, still they were unwilling to go home. Only the thought of an inviting breakfast made them leave the river. Carrying melons and watermelons, they trotted home as fast as they could.

And how Irma relished the breakfast consisting of rice, *tinapa*, and tomatoes!

Every morning after that day, Irma got up earliest and roused the others. They raced to the watermelon plots, chose the roundest fruit, and ran to the river for their bath. The children's appetite grew keener and their endurance in running became greater.

At the close of the long vacation the children returned to the city. Irma's friends greeted her with surprise.

"Why, how plump you have grown!"

"And rosy in the cheeks!"

Irma would smile and say, "The race to the river did all these. "I do not call it exercise. It was just fun."