YELLOW JESSAMINE
by Constance Fenimore Woodson

In tangled wreaths, in clustered gleaming stars,
In floating, curling sprays,
The golden flower comes shining through the woods
These February days;
Forth go all hearts, all hands, from out the town,
To bring her gayly in,
This wild, sweet Princess of far Florida —
The yellow jessamine.

The live-oaks smile to see her lovely face
Peep from the thickets; shy,
She hides behind the leaves her golden buds
Till, bolder grown, on high
She curls a tendril, throws a spray, then flings
Herself aloft in glee,
And, bursting into thousand blossoms, swings
In wreaths from tree to tree.

The dwarf-palmetto on his knees adores
This Princess of the air;
The lone pine-barren broods afar and sighs,
"Ah! come, lest I despair;"
The myrtle-thickets and ill-tempered thorns
Quiver and thrill within,
As through their leaves they feel the dainty touch
Of yellow jessamine.

The garden-roses wonder as they see
The wreaths of golden bloom,
Brought in from the far woods with eager haste
To deck the poorest room,
The rich man's house, alike; the loaded hands
Give sprays to all they meet,
Till, gay with flowers, the people come and go,
And all the air is sweet.

The southern land, well weary of its green
Which may not fall nor fade,
Bestirs itself to greet the lovely flower
With leaves of fresher shade;

The pine has tassels, and the orange-trees
Their fragrant work begin:
The spring has come — has come to Florida
With yellow jessamine.
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 lusciousness of spring was to him only lusciousness. 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 saps 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 cypress'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

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**SWEET PRINCESS OF FAR FLORIDA**

**The Yellow Jessamine**

by Melanie Darst

Whether you call it "jessamine" or "jasmine," "Carolina" or "yellow," "evening trumpet-flower" or "poor man's rope," it still must be described with the same adjective - beautiful. **Wild Flowers of Florida** (Fleming, Genelle, and Long) says it belongs to the logania family, is a woody, evergreen perennial vine up to 20 feet long. [I have seen it climbing up to 50 feet to bloom in the tree tops. -Ed.]  

Yellow jessamine is described by R.K. Godfrey as a "lemon yellow"; J.K. Small says "deep-yellow." The Latin name is *Gelsemium sempervirens* (L.) Taume St. Hil. *Gelsemium* is a latinization of "gelsemino," the Italian name of jasmine. The common names are Carolina jessamine and yellow jessamine. J.K. Small in his *Manual of the Southeastern Flora* also lists Evening trumpet-flower. R.K. Godfrey and W.J. Wooten (Aquatic and Wetland Plants of Southeastern United States) have Poor-man's rope for another common name. *Gelsemium* is a genus with three species: one Asiatic, the other two found in the Southeast. *G. sempervirens* is more widespread. It is found from Florida to Virginia and Texas. *G. rankii* is commonly found growing in waterlogged soils. In Florida its range is from Escambia to Leon and Wakulla counties. In bloom the two are easily distinguished by fragrance, *G. rankii* having none. *G. sempervirens* is described as delicately fragrant by Godfrey. Not having any at hand to smell, I can't give you my opinion.

Along the fencerows, through the hammocks, slim dry vines are suddenly a mass of golden bloom, so fragrant that the initiate all but swoons. Like many tropical flowers, the jessamine is most potent in the 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 lusciousness of spring was to him only lusciousness. 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.

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**SPRING AT THE CREEK**

by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

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