What Happened to Nell

By
Mary Louise Colvin

"Yes, stranger, it is a nice little town we got. Up and comin', too, since they built the new county school here. It's about the biggest building in these parts, fer nigh on to twenty miles. Yes, those are perty grounds. A good site, I'd say, what with all them trees and everything. Funny thing about that, though. You see, this ground around here al'lus was barren; things wouldn't grow good. A'course now that they've got so many new-fangled fertilizers on the market, and all the ground's been ditched fer miles around, there haint been much trouble with growin' stuff. I kin remember though, I cal'late thutty years ago, when there jest warn't no farmin', 'cept for truck patches and pasture. A man was doin' good if he could get enough vittles out of the soil to feed his family.

"Do you see that tree yonder, growin' right north of the school? That tallest one with the big trunk. Well sir, that tree has a story. At one time it was the only livin' thing besides a little grass and weeds, fer miles around. If ya' got time to spare, I'll tell you 'bout it.

"Well, Si Lance's daughter, Nellie, was about the pertiest little critter fer miles around when I was a boy. That was a long time ago, too. She was a gentle, timid little thing who was a good, obedient girl until Herb Carewe came to this town. I knowed Herb, knowed him well, and he were a wild 'un. One day him and Nellie met up, and, pshaw, just like that they was gone on each other. Understand, he warn't a bad lookin' feller, and he could lie with ease. That sweet li'l gal trusted him as far as the ends of the earth. A' course she didn't know he was a' hidin' out because of hoss-stealin', and other law-breakin'. Why, they was combin' the state fer him. Anyway, he and Nellie got engaged and were about ready to git married when the law caught up with Herb. You can see he was in a spot, what with his gal believin' he was a travelin' salesman, and never thinkin' he'd done any wrong. I think he had a good spark in him after all, though, 'cause he got the sheriff not to tell anyone what he'd done so he could spare Nell. I guess he did love her, as well as he could. Well, he told her he had to go away for a while, but would be back in about a year. A'course he knew he wouldn't be. It would-a' broke your heart to see that pore girl a-weepin'. She almost died, though. when she got a letter that Herb had somebody write, sayin' he'd been killed in a train-wreck near Chicago. She never dreamed it were a lie, or that he was alive all the time.

"Well sir, bein' a sentimental little cuss, she planted a little tree in the graveyard, 'cause she said it made her feel that Herb's spirit was near, and that was his memorial. After a while I think she went out of her head. I don't know. but anyhow, she didn't live longerin' six months. They found her dead one day, under that little maple she had watched so keerful-like. Well, everybody expected that tree to die after she passed away, 'cause it wouldn't get no waterin' or no carin' for. Funny thing, though. Do you know, that tree thrived and grew twice as fast as trees generally do? Its leaves were just as green and healthy, and it lital'ly flew up, like it was goin' to hit the sky.

"A couple years ago, when they decided on buildin' the new school, they was a-goin' to cut down that thar
maple to make room, but folks around here allus remembered Nellie, so they got up a petition and had the schoolhouse put over far enough so that the tree could remain a standin’. Thar’s a lot of sentiment and romance in that old maple. It’s a right pretty thought, hain’t it? Well, I got to get my milkin’ done. Hope to see you again if you ever come around these parts.

The tall, silent stranger turned to the old farmer. In a scarcely audible voice, came the answer. “I guess you clon’t remember me. I’m Herb Carewe.”

Night Life on the River

By Jane Colsher

A great chasm of black separated us from the multi-colored glow of the city—a gigantic dragon guarding its treasure. A chain of flickering lights made a feeble attempt to span the darkness, and lone red and green orbs sparkled here and there among the white ones like tiny rubies and emeralds giving opulence to the mighty river’s crown. We plunged ahead toward the city with its illuminated skyscrapers and silhouetted towers; suddenly a giant network of steel and cement loomed ahead of us, barely discernible against the evening sky. Another moment and we were a part of the Mississippi’s regal splendor.

Above the locomotives roaring into the distance and the dirty freighters chugging upstream, we heard the rush and gush of the turbulent muddy water. Like eternity the river stretched beneath us—bottomless. Who would trust those treacherous depths for life and livelihood? Yet, a colony of miserable houseboats, enlivened by occasional lanterns, huddled near the bank, keeping faith in God’s protection.

Street lights shot wavering gleams far out into the broadening stream. The glints and sparkles of night cast eerie reflections on the ripples, while weird lights played on the warehouse windows.

Suddenly, with an incandescent blaze of glory, the pleasure steamer, “J. S.,” appeared against the still, black night and slithered toward her dock. The waters gleamed and flashed; the sky was shot with color, and the air was rent with the blaring strains of a jazz orchestra and the riotous laughter of life that has had another thrill. The levee became alive with honking horns, flashing lights, and clattering crowds. A cock on a nearby boat decided it was morning and began to crow; a sleeping hound stirred lazily on his mat; and a weary watchman shuffled swiftly on his rounds.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the joyous influence of the steamer disappeared. The lights were darkened; the crowd had passed on its way, and the gaiety was gone. Silent night took possession of the waterfront, and life resumed its usual course. Without warning we became a part of the multi-colored glow of the city; we had conquered the great black chasm.

Fog at Midnight

By Aliceruth Johnson

A deserted city street. Midnight. Fog pressing against my eyes. The echoing clank of my heels on the hard pavement. I peer into the gloom, strain ing to assemble the blending shades of gray into some familiar object. Behind that dark and clammy curtain—what? I wave my hand, hoping to rend and tear it away. I glance about furtively, to catch some illusive shadow before it dissolves into the gloom. Heat surges up into my body and ends in a chill shudder. I open my mouth...