

NOSTALGIA

Season after season the old car barn squatted like a watchful sentinel on the hill-top. High above the river it sat in absolute solitude. Each sagging door, held by a single hinge, swayed and banged with the vagaries of the wind. Its weathered wood had turned a silvery gray. Sun and rain had helped to make the grain with its light and dark swirls look like a virtuoso performance of nature's paint brush. Around the stone foundation grasses grew at random forming a frieze of shaded greens.

The hill-top in this time of transition between winter and summer was most beautiful. Soft warm rains of spring blurred the wild crab apple blossoms until they looked like wet silk. Migrant warblers announced their arrival with darting flashes of yellow that streaked through the branches. The meadow lark with its soft brown feathers and melancholy song returned. The brilliant orange of the oriole vied with the bright blue of the saucy jay. Mourning doves, all in gray, started their first family of the season. The faithful robin, struggling to pull a long fat worm from the ground, leaned back and showed his rust-colored vest to full advantage. The exhilarating scarlet of the cardinal searching for building materials brought a dissonance of color.

Spring had come softly. Suddenly the hill was covered with an avalanche of wild flowers. Bloody noses pushed their dark red buds up through the moist ground. Jack-in-the-pulpits and mayapples, hiding under their own broad leaves, popped into bloom. Blue-bells with a tinge of lavender in their throats grew thick under the trees. Violets came up everywhere. The lovely dog-tooths made splashes of white in the variegated carpet of the blues and purples. Seemingly dead branches turned into boughs of delicately scented blossoms. From the blue sky above to the ground below, the colors sang.

Clouds, feather light and fluffy white, drifted close. Below the bluff, the river reflected the drifts. Breezes that rippled the grasses on the hill stirred small sparkling waves below.

Between the tracks leading into the old barn, wild geraniums and leggy buttercups grew in profusion. Inside stood the ancient street car, weary, but still proud in its faded yellow paint. If you closed your eyes and listened, you could almost hear it start out of the barn. And if you really listened, you could hear it go down the hill, its

wheels grinding over the tracks, screeching as they crossed the switch point at the bottom where it would turn to head into town. You would surely hear the clang of the motorman's bell as it rounded the double curve at Broadway. If you really let your imagination take hold, you could hear the rumble of farm wagons, the scraping of horses' hooves on the big bricks and the rattle of harness. Here at Broadway the big drinking fountain with its green patina stood as tall as the horses. Water flowed continually from the four lion mouths and three teams could drink at one time without lowering their heads.

Day in and day out the old car went from one end of town to the other. It passed the little grocery store where the candy counter held untold penny delights. It rattled through the street of old mansions and seemed to slow in respect to their dignified appearance. It passed through the avenue of elms that formed a tunnel of green coolness on hot summer days. It skirted the edge of the oak grove where families with picnic baskets spread blankets under the trees.

Sometimes small school girls, hurrying down to the town's dry goods store for free paper dolls, would try to race with the old car. Sometimes a lucky boy was able to pay for a ride; and then the family dog would run barking along side.

Sometimes the warm days of summer made their appearance before spring had fairly started. They hurried migrating birds on their way north and pushed the new leaves on the trees to their full growth. Blossoms gave way to small berries and wild crab apples. Their warmth sent into oblivion the wilting violets and drooping jack-in-the-pulpits. The mayapples, too, faded in the hot sun. Blue sailor took over the hard earth other flowers avoided. Bees droned through the long warm days and the sweet fragrance of clover filled the hill-top.

Summer would slip into fall. Leaves would turn golden hues, fade and drop to the ground. Dreary fall days would take their toll of the flowers. Birds would leave and the migrants, hurrying south, would once more stop for a brief rest. Once again the snow would cover the hill-top and the doors of the old barn would bang with the winds. The skies would turn gray and the waters beneath turn drab in the sunless days.

Now barges fill the river. Cars crowd the streets. A trailer court sprawls through what is left of the oak grove. Old mansions were turned into apartment houses with

crooked window shade and disheveled shrubbery. Only a few school children hunting flowers for may-baskets would come this way hoping to find a short cut to the river. Then slipping and sliding, they would try to scramble down the steep face of the bluff. Few, if any, would give a second look at the old street car. It had been there a long, long time. Few would give a second look at the old car barn or the delightful swirls in its silvery wooden sides.

Seasons come and go, for days pass swiftly on silent feet. Only nature's changes have been beautiful.