

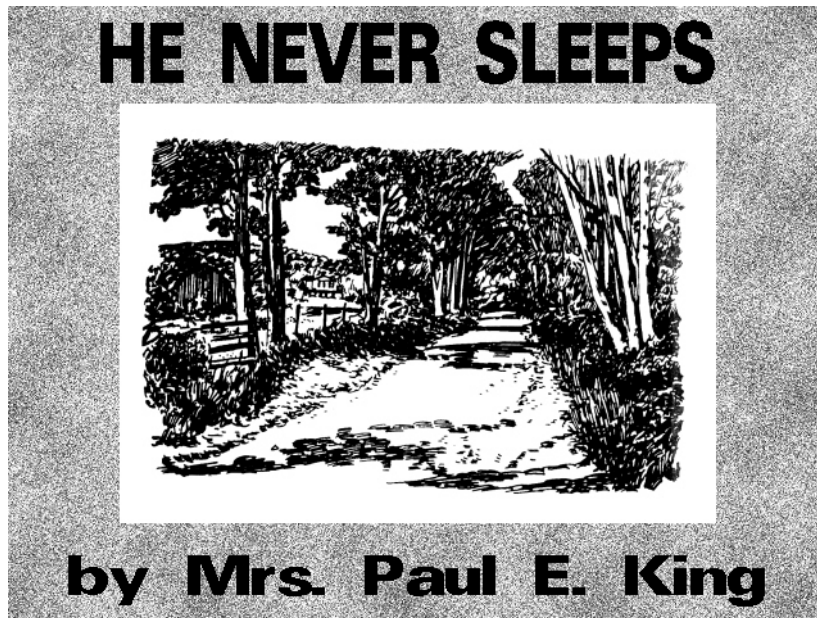
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HE NEVER SLEEPS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Carrie Matilda Twigsbee turned the lights off inside her small but neat and cozy cottage home just as the grandfather clock in the hallway chimed out ten deep, rhythmic and beautiful melodic chimes. Drawing her thin cotton robe a bit more tightly around her slender body, she slipped through the front doorway to the latticed porch outside. Her felt-slipped feet made scarcely any noise as she walked across the porch to where the swing hung from the

porch roof . . . one of the many things Ezra had built for them while he was still alive, active and prosperous in carpentry. Like everything he made and fashioned, the swing was strong and sturdy, built with durability in mind.

The night was sultry-hot and the slight breeze that hopscotched through the baby clematis vine as it climbed along the homemade trellis behind the swing was much appreciated and welcome. Unconsciously the woman's hand wandered across the swing seat in search of her beloved's hand, but there was no responding touch, no warm pressure upon her fingers -- nothing: only emptiness, and a vacancy and longing which, after fifty-six years of togetherness, left her feeling frustrated and much as she was sure an orphaned child must feel.

A tear slid past her eyelashes and plopped onto her small wrinkled hand; quickly she wiped it on her much-worn robe. She must not weep; Ezra asked her not to; Heaven was a beautiful place, a joyful and happy place; her companion was Home. Home! And somewhere, sometime, down the journey of life, she too would come to the end of her road. Then -- oh blissful thought -- the angels would come after her also, just as they had done for Ezra. Softly, she began singing:

"O think of the Home over There;
By the side of the river of Life . . .
Where the saints all immortal and fair
Are clothed in bright garments of white. . . ."

The song was one of her favorites. She and her husband had sung it hundreds of times during their married life.

From a nearby mock orange bush a night bird warbled a softly-sweet and beautiful song. Carrie smiled and peered through the darkness toward where the symmetrical bush grew tall and round, its snowy-white blossoms scenting the night air with the sweetest smelling perfume ever. A toad, calling its mate from the petunia bed along the house, was rewarded by an answering song from somewhere near the lilac bush, while down near the marshy vacant lot the frogs seemed to be singing a Hallelujah Chorus. Never, in all her many years, could Carrie remember having heard such a volume of beautiful song as came from the throats of the tiny creatures this night.

She yawned quietly and sighed contentedly, every fiber and part of her being reveling in the beauty of the night -- the fragrance of flowers, the glory of a star-sprinkled heaven and the soul-stirring chorus of night creatures presenting a completely unrehearsed but flawless recital.

The loud roar of a car racing through the deserted streets of the small hamlet broke the spell of magic and beauty. Carrie shook her head in vehement disapproval, recalling vividly her first encounter with the "steel monster," as her father had dubbed the car. They lived deep in the heart of the country -- her father and mother and their large family of twelve children. A fifteen-acre field separated the big farmhouse and barn from the "main" road, which knew nothing of either concrete or asphalt but which was, spring and summer "dragged" by as fine a team of splendidly great Percherons as ever walked on four legs.

It was on a hot summer day much like this night was, Carrie thought -- while she and her sisters were swinging on the wide front gate, that a cloud of dust approached from down the road. Forgetting their glee of swinging on the gate, they stood motionless in open-mouthed astonishment and fear as out of the dust cloud emerged a conveyance propelled without horses. It rattled and thundered along; within it was a man sitting high on a seat grappling with a wheel. Two figures sat behind, their heads enveloped in veils against the enormous cloud of dust that swept around them. A man, yelling for all he was worth for everyone to stay out of the way of this brand new but unpredictable thing called a motorcar, hurried ahead of the vehicle, waving a flag like he was ready for a bull fight.

When the frightful thing was lost to the woods road beyond their farm, they raced into the security of the kitchen where their mother, who had observed the noisy "monster" from behind the screen door, stood as one dumb, wondering if perhaps the end of the age wasn't a whole lot closer than most people were aware of as she quoted softly but reverently aloud, ". . . many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4).

A smile played across Carrie's face in remembering. How times had changed, she thought, recalling the pleasant days of her childhood and feeling suddenly very sleepy and tired.

Inhaling deeply of the fragrant mock orange blossoms, she got to her feet and went inside, locking the door behind her, a thing unheard of when

Ezra and she had begun their life together. But times were different now, she reasoned factually. Especially was it unsafe to keep one's doors unlocked since the Ransdowns had moved into their ordinarily peaceful and quiet hamlet more than ten months ago. The teen-age boy -- Larry, they said his name was -- seemed not to know what it was to spend an evening at home. He preferred driving his noisy, souped-up car around on the streets until the wee hours of the morning. Nor was he alone in his nightly noisemaking; some of Brandon Ridge's vulnerable young people had become partaker of the boy's "fun." It was creating quite a problem for the townspeople, as well as a furor against the Ransdowns.

Carrie sighed tiredly now. Removing the cotton robe and laying it carefully at the foot of her bed, she knelt down and prayed, including the Wilson Ransdowns in her prayer and asking the Lord to save their souls. She knew full well that salvation would change not only the lives of the older Ransdowns, but also that of their seventeen-year-old son, as well.

She lay for a long time, staring up at the ceiling, wanting to sleep but unable to do so. It was strange, she thought, as she changed positions and squeezed her eyes shut tight in hopes that this would induce the much-needed rest for which her body longed. She must have dozed, for when she opened her eyes again it was with a start. Something had awakened her. What was it?

For a long while she grappled with fear and a horror such as she had never before experienced; someone was inside her house; she knew it instinctively. If only Ezra were here!

Despite her nearly eighty-four years and her slightly-arthritic knees, Carrie was out of bed in a single bound. A quick push of the finger and her entire cottage-home was bathed in beautiful light. In the bedroom doorway stood a man.

"Larry! Larry Ransdown!" she exclaimed, hurrying toward the youth and shaking her index finger in utter disbelief. "What are you doing here, Son?" she asked, tears glistening in her faded-blue eyes in whose depth liquid pools of pity, love and compassion were registered.

"I'm not alone!" came the belligerently quick retort. "One of your fine citizens is with me. . . ."

"Stepping aside, Larry drew Andrew Fitzsimmons into the frame of the doorway. Carrie gasped. "Andy!" she exclaimed. "I . . . I can't believe it. Do . . . does your father know? But of course he doesn't!" Andy's face flushed scarlet-hot under the penetrating eyes and unwavering gaze of the diminutive but powerful woman who scrutinized him carefully.

"Ah, I can tell your father knows nothing of your doings!" Carrie said. "You stole out of the house, Andy, right? After family devotions, and when everyone was asleep? Shame, shame on you, Son. You should know better than to do that; sin will always find you out. But tell me," Carrie said, drawing the cotton robe around her ample gown, "why did you break in here? How did you get in?"

Larry looked at Andy; Andy looked at Larry.

"Go on, Andy; tell her," Larry ordered, giving Andy's ribs a sound whack with his elbow.

"It was your idea!" Andy exclaimed hotly.

"But I wouldn't have known about Ezra Twigsbee's carpentry tools if you hadn't told me," Larry mocked, a smug smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"I didn't tell you. . . ."

"Inadvertently you did."

Illumination dawned on Andy. "So-o," he replied suddenly. "So-o-o. That's the reason you kept probing who did the work on our house; on the Batters' house; the Carrs' -- and just about every other house here in Brandon Ridge. You weren't proud of the work at all, like we all are; you wanted Ezra Twigsbee's fine saw and his tools so you could sell them to that gang in. . . ."

"Shut up!" Larry shouted, slapping Andrew hard across the mouth.

For all her smallness, Carrie was strong. Quickly she stepped between the youths. With a strength born of necessity she pushed them apart.

Shoving Larry onto a chair, she asked, "And you planned to steal Mr. Twigsbee's tools?"

"After I had robbed you." The statement came out quickly. Hotly "If my foot hadn't hit that stool the job would have been done by now."

Andy gasped. "You . . . you didn't tell me that," he said with a look of horror in his eyes. "You said we'd have a little fun . . . scare Mrs. Twigsbee; that was all. . . ."

"Fool! Fool!" Larry answered, his face wearing a sardonic smile "If it hadn't been for that stool. . . ."

Carrie Twigsbee smiled. "I think you've bypassed and overlooked the most important thing of all, Larry . . ." she said, speaking softly. "It was that stool!"

"No, no; it was God, Son. He never sleeps nor slumbers. His eyes 'run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him' II Chron. 16:9. Yes, dear boy,' . . the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death . . .' Psalm 33:19. And, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him' Psalm 34:7-8."

Larry got to his feet and started toward the door. Carrie's powerful but small hand grabbed him quickly and pushed him down into the chair "No need rushing, Son," she said kindly; "I'm not through with you yet."

The color drained from the boy's face. "You . . . you . . . you're not going to call the police . . .?"

"What do you think I should do?"

"Please, Mrs. Twigsbee!" Andy pleaded, his eyes wide with fear and panic "Please, don't! It . . . will kill Mother; her heart. . . ."

"You don't suppose you're killing her slowly but surely by not getting saved, Andy? Your folks are carrying a tremendous burden for you. . . ."

Andy's lips quivered and trembled; tears welled up in his eyes and cascaded unashamedly down his ruddy cheeks. "I'll never, never sneak out of the house at night again; I promise! Just don't tell my folks, please! And I'll never pal around with Larry again. . . ."

"No problem there!" the other exclaimed. "I don't want you; you're a sissy. A square."

"Enough," Carrie commanded sternly "You're the sissy -- the misfit -- Larry. God decreed that man should work for his daily needs; you choose to go contrary to His decree, and to obtain your wants by theft and robbery, all of which God strongly forbids and hates."

"Don't get preachy, sister," Larry retorted, setting his jaw in a tight line"

"That's exactly what I'm going to do, Larry. You need a good sermon. You won't come to church to hear one so I'll act as preacher and tell you what the Book says. . . ."

"Hey, Mrs. Twigsbee! You all right?" a voice called through the open window "Open the door. It's me . . . Al Kenney. I was making my rounds and saw your house all bright with light . . . thought I'd better check. . . ."

In a single bound, Larry reached the back door and darted out into the night.

Al's persistent knocking made Carrie hurry to the door.

"All right, Andy," the burly policeman said, "you come with me."

"But . . . but. . . ."

"Please, Al," Carrie intervened, "let me explain

"No need for that," the man said, smiling understandingly. "I'll take Andrew home. He's learned his lesson, I'm sure. We heard everything through the open windows."

"We?" Carrie queried

"Yes, we; Sam and I. He's got Larry, I'm sure. Was waiting for him at the back door. It's too bad. Too bad. We trailed the boys here. I tried to help that boy, Carrie, I did. I did! But he's a rebellious one. . . . Well, come on, Andy. It's home and into bed for you. No squealing on you this time, but there better never be another time!"

"Don't worry, Mr. Kenney! I'm going to do what I should have done long ago: get saved and sanctified wholly. You'll never have another problem with me; that's a promise. I'll be as harmless as Mrs. Twigsbee.

"If everybody had what she has," the police officer said reverently, "we'd need no police force. Well, Andy, we'd better be moving. Good night, Carrie. Say a special prayer for the youth who's mixed up in the biggest ring of contraband for miles around. He's going to need it."

Contraband? So that's what was happening! Larry really was in deep -- with the wrong crowd. After a season of thankful praying to God and of fervent prayer for the delinquent, Carrie crawled between the silky-smooth sheets, more conscious than ever of her Divine Protector's presence. This time she slept.