



Old Burnside (Memoir of a Southern Girlhood)

Harriette Simpson Arnow

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In the early years of this century, Burnside, Kentucky, was a bustling community perched on and above the floodplain formed by the Cumberland River and the South Fork. It was a center for shipping by rail and steamboat packet, and its lumber mills sent their products all over the world. The lower part of the town—once the heart of its economic being—now lies beneath the waters of Lake Cumberland, and the remaining streets above no longer resound with the clatter and roar of older and busier times.

Harriet Simpson Arnow moved to Burnside with her parents and sisters in 1913, a few months before her fifth birthday. She recreates for us the sights and sounds of the town as she sets her childhood memories against the history of the region from the days of early settlers until Wolfe Creek Dam was built, creating the hundred-mile-long Lake Cumberland. Arnow charms the reader with her account of what it was like to be child in such a place and time, describing the fascination of the general stores of the town, the grand sight of the Seven Gables Hotel, the excitement of school, and the ever-interesting river and railroad traffic, all of which lent diversion to a life that sometimes seemed overburdened with household chores and errand running.

Though much of old Burnside has disappeared, the way of life Arnow describes is an important part of the fabric of the history of Kentucky and the nation. Evoking vivid scenes of river and railroad, lumber mill and country store, Arnow recreates for us with great artistry a long-vanished place and time.

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