

A Young Frontiersman Tells About the First New Madrid Earthquake

by Charles Semones

I was roused out of sleep by the bed shaking. Hell, I thought to myself, what's going on here? A man's bed don't shake unless he's screwing in it. But I tell you it was, and it got worse. By the little firelight left in the room, I could see the two lamps trembling on the mantelpiece like they was going to topple over and shatter on the hearth most any minute, and Saranora's trinkets she kept lined up on our best table quivered like somebody with their nerves unstrung. I could barely make out the clock. Its hands told me it was a little after two. I couldn't say for certain if Saranora was awake or not, though I didn't see how she couldn't be. So I got up the grit to ask her was the bed shaking like I thought it was, or had my mind gone round the bend. She answered that it was the bed, sure enough, and us not doing nothing—well, you know what I mean, we wasn't doing *that*. Saranora keeps her talk churchy-like and proper. She'll do it in the dark like a cat crazed in heat but she won't give no name to it. I think it's her Bible-spouting mama's raising in her makes her that way. The bed was shaking like it had the ague, and I was laying there with my bladder about to bust. But I knowed if I got up to make water I'd be hard put to keep my balance with the floor dancing under my feet. It was a quare thing all right, me and Saranora clinging to each other under the covers when it seemed like everything in the room was spinning around like one of them whirligigs. I found my tongue again and said to Saranora, you don't think the Lord's done come and passed us by like we wasn't good enough to sleep on a feather bed in heaven instead of our old cornshuck mattress, do you? Hush, she said, he'll hear you trying to puzzle out the riddle of his ways if he ain't already.