

# The Work That Stayed

*A story from the Woodard line*

*This is historical fiction. The public facts — pensions, a deed, a will, censuses, a death certificate — are as the records give them. The rooms, the weather, and what people said to one another are imagined. Winnifred's first husband is not named here, because the papers never named him.*

## 1

*Surry County, August 1777*

The fire had to be built before the men left, or it would have to be built after, and Winnifred would rather have it done. She was seventeen and already tired of the kind of morning that asked you to choose between watching and working. She chose both. She laid the kindling the way her mother had taught her, small to large, and she kept one eye on the yard, where Jesse was checking a girth as if a girth could keep a man from Georgia.

Last summer the Cherokee war had burned through the mountains. People still talked in the low voices they used for fire. The smoke of those cabins had been a weather of its own. Surry was only six years old, cut from Rowan the same year the Regulators broke at Alamance, and people still said “the old county” when they meant a time before companies started forming in yards. The courthouse was a day’s ride if the creeks were kind. The regular army was a rumor with a flag. Muster was the government that reached you.

Their mother had been dead a year, or nearly, depending on how you counted the months after a burying. Winnifred had taken up the work that stayed. That was the phrase she did not yet have. She would have it later, when she had buried more people than she had words for.

Willoughby Broughton came in from the lot with the look he used on a field that might make or might not. He was not a man who wasted speech. He set his hat on the peg and looked at the pot as if it might confess something.

“They will want to start before the heat,” he said.

“They will start when Jesse is finished looking at that strap,” Winnifred said.

Almost a smile. Then it was gone. “You keep the little ones from the road.”

“I know.”

“You keep the salt in the house. Not the shed.”

“I know that too.”

He nodded once, which was as close as he came to saying she had become the woman of the place. Then he went back out, because a leaving required a man in the yard even if the man had nothing useful left to do.

The yard was packed dirt and chicken scratch. The house was small enough that you could hear a pot lid from the fence. Beyond the cleared ground the woods began the way woods always began in Surry: suddenly, as if the county had run out of courage. A jay screamed once from the tree line, offended or merely a jay.

Jesse had his lieutenant’s face on, which was only his ordinary face held still. Thomas Williams stood a little behind him, already enlisted as a minute man for Georgia, two years, the way men said two years when they still believed a war had a length. Other men were gathering with that loose shape companies have before they become a line: kin, neighbors, a boy too young,

a man too old, a joke that died halfway out of someone's mouth. Someone had a fiddle and thought better of it. Powder horns knocked softly against belts.

Winnifred brought Jesse a gourd of water. He drank and wiped his mouth with the back of his wrist, the same gesture he had used since he was twelve.

"You remember he enlisted," Jesse said, tipping his head at Williams, as if she were a ledger. "Two years. Georgia. You hear me say it."

"I hear you."

"If they ask."

"Who will ask?"

Jesse almost smiled. "Somebody always asks, Winny. After."

Williams said nothing. He had a quiet that was not shyness. Winnifred would stay acquainted with him for the rest of a long life. She would swear in 1833 that she had never heard it disputed he served his full term, would sign that paper with a mark because writing was not her work. This morning she only nodded, because a girl at a leaving does not make speeches.

A younger Broughton — there was always a younger Broughton — stood at the fence with a stick, practicing being a soldier until Willoughby told him to put the stick down. Job, who was already more fence than boy, watched the horses the way he would later watch a deed. The dust in the yard lifted and settled and lifted again.

"You keep your powder dry," Willoughby told Jesse, which was what he had instead of a blessing.

"I will write if there is writing," Jesse said, and they both knew there would not be.

They started south. The dust hung in the August air as if it did not know how to fall. Winnifred watched until the last hat was a dark spot and then not even that. Then she went back to the fire, because the fire did not care about Georgia.

The rest of that day was the day that always followed a leaving. Water from the spring. Corn to stir. The child with the stick to be told, again, not to follow the road. In the afternoon she sat in the doorway with a shirt of Jesse's that he had not taken, and she did not sew it. She only held it, which was not useful and therefore felt like a sin. A bee worked the last of something in the gourd vine. The pot lid ticked. Somewhere a cowbell made the sound of an ordinary afternoon, which was an insult and a mercy at once.

At dusk Willoughby came in from the lot and said, "He is gone, then," as if it needed confirming.

"He is gone."

"We will make the crop."

"Yes."

They ate what there was. Afterward she hung the shirt back on the peg. It held the shape of a shoulder for a while. She left it hanging until the smell of him was gone. Then she took it down

and cut it for patches, which was the only prayer she trusted.

News came the way news came: in a rider's mouth, half of it true. Georgia. Florida even, some said, as if Florida were a county you could point to. Winnifred believed half of what she heard and hid the salt anyway. She thought of Williams's silence and Jesse's ledger voice. She did not know, that August, that she would be a widow Woodard before she was twenty-five. She did not know the name she would carry into a magistrate's yard in South Carolina. She knew the pot needed stirring and the woods began suddenly, and that a war could take a brother without taking the day.

## 2

*The waiting, 1778*

Winter was wood and the thin months. The shirt was patches by then. Winnifred spun when there was wool, which was not often enough, and she learned the particular patience of a household that has sent its best back out the gate. Willoughby spoke less than before, which had not seemed possible. Job grew into his hands.

In March a man came through from the south with a story about Savannah and another about a fever, and Willoughby gave him cornbread and did not ask the questions Winnifred wanted asked. After the man had gone she said, "He might have seen Jesse."

"If he had seen Jesse he would have said Jesse," Willoughby said. "Men say the name if they have it."

She thought about that for a long time. Names were a kind of proof. The absence of a name was a kind of weather.

That spring she first understood that she would not stay a girl in her father's yard forever. There were men enough, even with the companies taking them, and a Broughton daughter was not invisible. She does not come down to us in a courtship. No bond survives for the marriage that made her a Woodard. What survives is the later fact of the widowhood, and so this story will not invent a preacher or a date or a given name. It will only say that there was a time when the work that stayed included a second person in the doorway, and that she remembered, years after, the weight of him there.

Whether she married in Surry or already on the road south, the papers will not say. People moved then the way water moved: toward an opening. Ninety-Six was an opening if you did not mind that it was also a wound. Land, or the rumor of land. Kin already gone. A war that had eaten the quiet in North Carolina and was chewing harder in South Carolina. She went the way people went — behind a household, behind a hope, behind a man whose name the pension would never bother to keep.

She took a small iron kettle that had been her mother's. She took the habit of hiding salt. She did not take Jesse's patches. Those stayed in Surry, sewn into other people's clothes, which was a kind of remaining.

## 3

*Ninety-Six District, 1780*

They called it Ninety-Six because a trader had guessed the miles to Keowee. By the time Winnifred was there it was twelve roads and a jail and court twice a year, and then it was none of that. It was neighbors shooting neighbors.

The village had a stockade and a star of earthworks people were already calling the Star Fort, though she did not yet know those words would outlive the people who dug them. Traders' paths came in like spokes. Cherokee country was not a rumor here; it was a direction. The first land battle of the war south of New England had been fought in that same village in November of '75, before she had any reason to care about a South Carolina crossroads. After Charleston fell in May of 1780 the district became a war among kitchens.

She came south the way people came. Whether she was already married when she crossed into the district, the papers will not say. Later trees would give her a husband named John and kill him in a North Carolina county that did not exist yet. Macon would not be a county until 1828. What she knew, and what Elizabeth Johnston would remember, was simpler. She was Winneford Woodard, a widow.

The man is a gap in this story because he is a gap in the record. She remembered the weight of him in a doorway. She remembered a winter when he was gone to some duty or some hiding and the corn was thin and she counted kernels as if counting could multiply them. She remembered a morning he did not come back, and the way the district did not stop to make a probate of it. Courts barely ran. Men died on roads. Ordinary books went unwritten. A young husband with little land left exactly what the later searchers would find: nothing in a book.

If there was a child — a boy who would one day buy two tracts on Ivy and name a son Isham Davis Woodard — she did not write his birth down. People in that country marked children by teeth and harvests. A widow with a small child hoed if she could stand, lived under a kinsman's roof if she could not, and learned which roads to avoid.

The first year of the deep war the district became a country of rumors with guns. You heard Kings Mountain as a shout and then as a list of names. You heard Cowpens in January as if a door had opened somewhere to the north. None of it put meat in the pot. What put meat in the pot was a hog you had hidden and a neighbor who had not yet decided you were the wrong kind of neighbor.

Winnifred learned faces. She learned which smoke meant a cabin and which smoke meant a cabin that had been a cabin yesterday. She learned to keep a child quiet when riders came, if there was a child to keep quiet. She learned that Loyalist and Whig were words men used for a grudge that had been in the county before anyone had heard of a king.

Isham Davis she knew first as a drafted man, which was how you knew most men if you knew them at all. He had gone out in '79 under Williamson and Hammond. He had been marched about, stationed at the Bull Pen, called out on the Edisto, put under Pickens when Williamson was done. He had the look of a man who had been "in readiness" so long that readiness had become his rest. He was from the Pee Dee, born in the Cheraws in '58, a long way from the river of his birth. He did not talk as if the distance were a story. He talked as if the next muster were the only tense that mattered.

On a day without a battle there was still no reliable mail. News arrived in a rider's mouth. Food was what you had put up or what you could hide. A militia company on the move ate whatever it found; so did a Loyalist troop. Winnifred buried the small iron kettle behind the shed once, and felt foolish, and left it there until the frost, and then dug it up and made hominy in it as if nothing had happened. The kettle did not comment.

She thought, sometimes, of Jesse's leaving, of the dust, of Williams's silence. She did not know if Jesse was alive. Willoughby's later will would speak of Jesse's heirs, which is how a father says a son is gone. She did not have that will yet. She had a gap where a husband had been and a mouth to feed and a district that had forgotten how to be a district.

## 4

*The siege summer, 1781*

In May and June the siege of the Star Fort was the weather.

Greene's army, a thousand men, against five hundred and fifty in the works. The longest field siege of the war, people said afterward, as if length were a kind of honor. Winnifred did not see the Maham tower or the failed assault. She saw the emptying of roads and the filling of them. She saw dust that was not farm dust. She heard, from a woman who had it from a man who had it from a boy, that they had tried to burn the abatis and the green wood would not take. She believed half of that and hid the salt anyway.

The district held its breath. Holding your breath is also a kind of work. You do not plant the same. You do not sleep the same. You listen for a sound that is not a cowbell.

Isham was pulled toward Eutaw Springs in August and made a sergeant on the way. He was on the left wing under a major named Tutt, or so he later said, in the way men later said such things: as if a wing were a place you could still point to. Afterward they chased Cunningham and did not catch him. When he came through the neighborhood again he was thinner and he had the sergeant still in his shoulders.

"You are back," she said, because someone had to say the obvious or the obvious would become another gap.

"I am in readiness," he said, and almost smiled, and then did not.

When the British left the fort anyway, later that summer, no one she knew called it winning. They called it quieter. Quieter was not peace. Quieter was a pot you could set on without looking at the road every third breath.

November brought Cloud's Creek. Cunningham. Massacre. Names she knew and names she did not. People drove stock into the woods and came back to cabins that might still be standing. A boy down the branch was told not to speak to riders. He spoke anyway. That was how you found out who had been killed.

The morning her husband did not come back was not a battle morning. That is what she would have said, if anyone had asked her to put it on an oath. It was an ordinary road and an ordinary absence that refused to end. She waited a day, which was hope. She waited three, which was the beginning of knowledge. She did not have a body to bury that this story can swear to. She had a name that stopped being said in the present tense, and then, because the district had no time for monuments, stopped being said at all.

A magistrate did not come. A clerk did not open a book. If there was a debt, someone swallowed it. If there was a hog, she kept it if she could. Widow was a word you put on like a shawl in weather that had already arrived.



Elizabeth Johnston, who would remember her as Winneford Woodard, a widow, was already the kind of neighbor who kept other people's facts when other people were too busy staying alive to keep them. That is a form of love the later pensions would mistake for evidence. It was both.

## 5

*Twelve miles from Edgefield, 19 September 1783*

Aquilla Miles had the dry hands of a man who had written too many things that might not hold. He was a magistrate. The courthouse, such as it was, had not yet become Edgefield in the way later people would say Edgefield. The district was still the district. Peace had been signed in a city none of them would see. The shooting had thinned. The work had not.

On the nineteenth of September, about twelve miles from the place later people would call Edgefield Court House, he married them.

There was no church feast that anyone afterward bothered to describe. Isham stood in his decent clothes. Winnifred stood in hers. She was about twenty-three. He was twenty-five. A few people stood in the yard because a few people always stand in a yard. Elizabeth Johnston was among those who knew them; she would swear to it as an old woman in Pickens, and that sentence would outlive nearly everything else from the day.

Miles said the custom of the country, or words that meant that. The custom of the country was: you said the words, you went back to work, you hoped the next rider was not bringing a troop.

Winnifred looked at Isham's hands while Miles spoke. They were a sergeant's hands still, though the sergeant had been mustered out of everything except habit. She thought, without bitterness, that she had already been a wife and that this was a different kind of promising. The first promising had not been written down either. This one would live because a widow needed a witness sixty years later, and because Isham's service would become a file of sixty-three pages that cared more about months than about the names of babies.

"You understand you are man and wife," Miles said, not as a question.

"We understand," Isham said.

Winnifred said, "Yes."

Afterward Isham said, not unkindly, "We will make a crop."

"We will make a crop," she said.

They stood a moment in the September light, which was the same light that had fallen on other September days when men were still dying for reasons that had already been decided elsewhere. Then they walked back to whatever house they had, and she set the kettle on — the same small iron kettle, dented now, unburied for good — and he looked at the lot as if measuring it for a life.

That night the district made the sounds a district makes when it is trying to remember how to be ordinary: a dog, a cowbell, someone laughing too loud because they still could. She lay awake and thought of Jesse's shirt on the peg. She thought of a doorway and a weight that was not this weight. Then she slept, because a new household is also a fire that has to be kept.

They made a crop. They made eight children. The oldest would be about sixty in 1846. She never put their names in the pension, or the clerk did not ask, or the asking got lost in a file that wanted proof of Eutaw Springs more than it wanted the name of a baby born in a year without a battle. The war had taught her that paper was a kind of weather. Sometimes it came. Sometimes it did not.

They stayed in the district a few years, the way he later told it. The British were gone. The Star Fort was a shape in the ground that cattle already did not respect. Hundreds of Ninety-Six people took the mountain road north. Isham said one evening, looking at the same lot he had measured on their wedding day, "This country has too many graves in it for the living it kept."

"The mountains have graves," she said.

"Not these graves."

She understood. Some ground you can hoe. Some ground you can only leave.

They went north. County after county, the map changing under their feet the way it would change under their children's feet. Surry, if they passed that way, was not the Surry of 1777. Willoughby would die in Pendleton in November of 1804 and leave his youngest daughter Winefret Davis a dollar and a half, and would not mention a Woodard. She would not take that omission as an insult. A will is a list, not a history. Jesse's heirs would be in it. She would be Winefret Davis in it. The gap would remain a gap.

By the middle nineties they were in the Ivy country of a Buncombe County that was still almost the entire North Carolina mountain west. She was Wineford Davis by then, in every mouth that mattered. The other name she kept the way she had kept the kettle: not on the shelf. Under it.

## 6

*Ivy country, about 1796*

Buncombe was five years old and still felt like a dare. The legislature had carved it from Burke and Rutherford in '91. Cherokee ground, newly ceded in pieces, not empty, not safe, not yet a park. Moravian missionaries were talking with Cherokee leaders about schools. Enslaved people were already on some of the new farms. The drovers' road ran through the place they were beginning to call Asheville, though some still said Morristown. Hogs and cattle walked out of Tennessee toward the lowcountry, and men walked with them, and the dust of that walking was the county's other crop.

Ivy lay north, toward the Blacks. Creek. Forks. New fences. Old paths. A shout would carry if the wind was right. A burial might not be known for a day.

Elizabeth — the Elizabeth who would later swear an affidavit as Elizabeth Woodard of Buncombe — first came to know Isham and Wineford Davis as neighbors that year, or near it. She was young. The years smear when you are old and a magistrate is waiting. What she kept, fifty years on, was this: they lived as man and wife with a string of children, six or eight, and the neighborhood was the same neighborhood, and it had been that way since about 1796.

William was in that neighborhood too.

He was a young man then, twenty-two or so, already looking at land the way some men look at a river: as a thing you might belong to if you were careful. Whether Wineford was his mother he did not announce. In that country you did not announce such things. You named a child Isham Davis Woodard later, and you bought land from Job Broughton, and you let the neighborhood do the arithmetic.

William could not write his name and did not experience that as a lack. He could count. He could remember a line tree. He could tell a sound horse from a pretty one. He had come into the mountains the way the Davises had come, or had been brought, or had simply appeared in the way young men appear in a new county: already able to work, already looking at forks of creeks.

Wineford saw him in a yard one afternoon and felt the old ledger-feeling Jesse had taught her. Somebody always asks, Winny. After. She did not ask. She set him a plate if he was there at a meal. She watched him handle a hoe and thought, without saying it, that the work had stayed in the shoulders.

Isham, who had been a sergeant and was now a man making another crop in another county, treated the young man as the neighborhood treated him: as a fact. "That Woodard boy will take up land," he said once, as if taking up land were a weather that could be forecast.

"He will if Job has any say," Wineford said.

"Job has say about fences. Land has its own say."

She let that stand. She had learned not to put more words on a thing than the thing would carry.

The days on Ivy were the old days with a different ridge. Feed before light. Wood every morning of the year. Corn in all its forms. Hogs on mast until the pen. Fence, or the woods ate the field. Women cooked in iron and spun when they had wool and kept children out of the creek and in it, depending on the fever and the heat. Isolation was real and was not solitude. It was a small world with long distances.

William learned that world as if he had been born to it, which perhaps he had. He stood in the creek in February and felt the cold sit there like a fact, and he thought: a man could run a fence true here. A man could stay.

## 7

*Shoats Fork, February 1801*

The cold sat in the creek like a fact.

Job Broughton had two tracts and a price. One hundred pounds. William had the pounds, or the promise of them, or the kin-credit that served as pounds in a county where specie was a rumor. They stood with the witnesses in a wind that came down off the Blacks without asking permission. The paper would say Jobe Braughton, because clerks write what they hear. The land would say Shoats Fork of Ivy, two parcels, a hundred pounds, the twenty-fifth of February in the year of Jefferson's beginning.

"You will run your fence true," Job said.

"I will run it true."

Job looked at him a long time, the Broughton look, checking a resemblance he would not name. Job's wife was Mary Lewis, which later people would get wrong, hanging a Woodward on her out of a wish. Job did not hang wishes. He hung fences.

"Your people are well?" Job said, which was as close as he would come.

"They are in the same country as us. Near enough."

"Near enough is a kind of kin," Job said, and that was as close as the deed would ever come to nephew.

William waited to see if more would be said. More was not said. They acknowledged it at April court. The clerk wrote what clerks write. No one wrote nephew. No one wrote son of. The land was the sentence.

Betsy was already the other half of the household, or became so that year. Elizabeth, later called Caroll Gibbs in family talk that never produced a bond. No courthouse kept their names together in a marriage register that has come down. Their oldest known child, Mary, arrived on the thirteenth of May in 1802, so the neighborhood did the arithmetic the way neighborhoods do. A marriage about 1801 in Buncombe is a fair guess and this story will leave it a guess.

Betsy had a way of standing at a table that made the table into a government. She did not raise her voice. She set things where they belonged and expected the world to take the hint. William, who could read a horse and a line tree, learned to read that too.

"You have bought a great deal of work," she said, the first evening they stood on the fork and called it theirs.

"I have bought the work that stays," he said, not knowing he was borrowing a phrase from a woman who might have been his mother. "The creek will not leave."

"Creeks flood."

"Then we will move the hog pen."

She almost smiled. "You have an answer for the water. We will see what you have for the stones."

The stones were many. He moved them. She planted between what he could not move. Mary came in May and filled the house with the particular sound a first child makes, which is larger than the child. Then Catherine. Then, about 1808, John — this line — in a season when some of the neighborhood went to Kentucky and came back, chasing salt or cheaper ground, a side-trip the family would remember as a story and not a deed. Then Isham Davis Woodard, the name that was a history if you knew how to hear it. Then Winney.

A year on that farm turned like a wheel with four heavy spokes.

Spring: breaking ground with a plow a horse could pull, planting when the slope dried, putting in a garden that had to last until the next garden. The soil on the fork was honest if you were honest with it. William was honest with it in the way a man is honest who cannot write and therefore keeps his accounts in the field.

Summer: hoeing and laying-by, the long middle when the corn either made or did not. Children went barefoot and brown. The woods pressed the fence and the fence pressed back. Cicadas made a sound like heat given a voice.

Fall: hog-killing weather, smokehouse, drovers' season. Surplus walked toward market on its own feet. Men walked with it and came back with salt, iron, powder, coffee if there was money, stories if there was not.

Winter: wood, repair, the thin months. Clothing made or made over. After 1833, court week in a new county called Yancey — a long ride, shorter than Asheville. The house smelled of grease and wet wool. Someone was always mending something that had already been mended.

Neighbors swapped work at house-raising and hog-killing. Kin lived close enough to hear a shout. Isolation was real and was not solitude.

The house was not only them.

Charlotte's days were the same hours and a different law. Jarrett. Isaac. Polly. Jack. Jenny. Sally. They carried water and wood and children and the crop. William did not think of this as a moral fact. He thought of it as how a place ran. Betsy thought of it as the kitchen and the yard and the sound of someone already awake when she woke. The White children grew up in that order the way they grew up with the creek: as given.

Charlotte had a way of standing in a door that made a room decide what it was for. She did not waste speech either. Once, when young John had a fever that made his eyes too bright, she was simply there, and then the fever was less, and no one wrote that down because no one wrote such things down. She wrung cloths in a basin and the basin ticked against the bench, and Betsy, who was not a woman who asked for help with her mouth, let the help stand. Years later William would try, in the only language a will allowed, to keep Charlotte from being sold. It would not be freedom. It would be the most the paper of 1837 could do.

He bought more land as the years went. He appeared on the census in 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, same neighborhood, Morgan, Ivy, the names shifting as clerks shifted. He served on road juries and ordinary juries. He watched Yancey get cut out of Buncombe and Burke in '33 and did not move his fence. He watched, from a distance, the talk of a treaty at New Echota and did not yet know that talk would become a trail of people walking west off land his children would one day farm under new county names.

Wineford and Isham were in the same country, near enough. Near enough is a kind of kin. When Isham Davis Woodard was put into Betsy's arms in 1810, Wineford, if she was there, would have heard her second husband's name on a Woodard child and would have said nothing, or would have said, "It is a good name," which is what you say when a name is doing more work than a name should have to do.

William was a man of the place. The place did not ask him to be more.



## 8

*A Sunday on Ivy, about 1812*

Meeting was the other government.

They went when the weather and the horse allowed. The house was logs and a door that did not hang true until someone — William, or Jarrett under instruction — made it hang true. A Baptist preacher stood where the light came in and talked about Jordan as if Jordan were a fork of Ivy. Perhaps it was. The songs were the songs. Children sat until they could not and then were taken out and did not consider this a failure.

Betsy listened with her hands in her lap, which was how she prayed when she was not working, which was almost never. William sat and did not pretend to follow every turn of the sermon. He followed the sense: there was a debt, there was a mercy, there was a day of accounting. He understood accounts.

Afterward in the yard the news moved faster than any paper. Who was down. Who was marrying. Who had gone to Kentucky and written, or not written. A man said the war with the British had started again, or was about to, and someone else said that was an eastern war and the mountains had corn to think about. William thought of Jesse Broughton, whom he had not known, and of a leaving in a Surry yard he had not seen, and of Wineford's face when the talk turned to Georgia. He did not put those thoughts in a line. He let them sit, the way he let a field sit after laying-by.

John, who was four or so, held his mother's skirt and stared at a horse he intended, someday, to be equal to. Isham Davis Woodard was still a bundle. Winney had not yet arrived, or had just arrived, the years smearing even as they happened. Mary already had the look of a girl who would become a Ramsay and live in the will as a first daughter with a first daughter's portion.

Charlotte waited at a little distance with the patience of a person who is required to wait. When they started home she walked behind or beside, depending on the width of the path and the custom of the day, and the White children did not think about that custom because thinking about it was not asked of them.

That night William stood in the lot after dark and heard the creek. He could not have written the sound. He did not need to. He knew which rock it went over in July and which rock it went over in January. That was a kind of literacy the later searchers would not find in a courthouse, and it was the only kind he required.

## 9

*Yancey County, January 1837*

He was not well, and he was well enough.

The house smelled of winter grease and wood. Betsy sat near the fire with her hands in her lap, which meant she was afraid. McMahan had come to write. A will needed a man who could make letters. William could make a mark.

Outside, Yancey was four years old and already behaved as if it had always been there. The county seat was a long ride and a shorter one than Asheville. The Treaty of New Echota was two years behind them; the talking had become a removal that had not yet reached its worst walking. William's fence still stood on Shoats Fork. The creek did not care what the legislature named the ground it cut.

"I am in my right mind," he said, because that was how these things started.

McMahan wrote it. The fire popped. Somewhere in the lot a cow made the sound cows make when they would like the world to be otherwise.

He gave Betsy the mansion house — the dwelling, the word that later people would mishear as grandeur — and the outbuildings and as much of the farm as she thought proper for her support. Charlotte. Jarrett. Her choice of horse. Three cows. Six killing hogs. The sow and pigs. The furniture. The tools. He could see the place as he named it. He could see her in it after he was not.

Mary was to have Isaac and Polly. Catherine the half of the land, and her boy William after her. John the other half, the two of them to pick men to divide it when their mother was gone. Isham — Jack and Jenny. Winny already had Sally; she would have Jarrett when Betsy was done with this world.

"And Charlotte," he said, and stopped.

McMahan waited, pen up. Betsy looked at the fire. In the next room, or the same room divided by a curtain, someone shifted a pot. The house was listening with the particular attention a house gives a last accounting.

"At the death of her mistress she shall have the liberty to live about among her children and my children, wherever pleases. It is not my will that my children shall sell her."

He had not practiced the sentence. It came out like a fence he had already built in his head. McMahan wrote it. The mark William made looked like a post. He had bought Shoats Fork with such a mark. He would be dead before spring court, or by it.

After McMahan left, Betsy sat still for a long time. Then she said, "You have left me a great deal of work."

"I have left you the work that stays. The rest I cannot keep."

She put her hand on his. Her hand was a working hand. The knuckles were a map of thirty-six years of iron pots and wet wool and children. "John will do right."

"John will do as he can. Catherine has a head. Isham has a name that will take him somewhere if he lets it."

"And Winny."

"Winny has Sally already," he said, and almost smiled. "She always did take what was hers early."

He looked at the fire and saw, for a moment, not the fire but a February creek and Job's face and a hundred pounds that had been a life. He saw a young woman who might have been his mother setting a plate. He saw Charlotte in a door. He did not see a written name for himself. He had never needed to.

"You will keep the horse you want," he said. "Not the one they tell you is best."

"I know which horse," she said.

He died before April. They proved the will at spring term. The county was four years old. The creek was not.

The sale of what was to be sold happened the way those sales happen: men walking the lot, assessing a life in tools and stock, Betsy standing on the porch with her mouth set. Charlotte and Jarrett remained, as the paper said they would remain. The rest of the names in the will became, for a day, prices. John did not stay for all of it. He walked up the fork until the voices thinned, and then he came back, because walking away from a sale does not stop a sale.

Betsy kept the house and as much land as she needed. She directed Charlotte and Jarrett. She watched the rest go. In January of 1846 she went, or was taken, into Buncombe and swore before Thomas Deaver that she had known Isham and Wineford Davis fifty years and more, same neighborhood, man and wife, six or eight children, the eldest then about sixty. She did not say, in the affidavit, that Wineford was her husband's mother. She did not say she was William's widow. She said what the magistrate needed. The rest she kept, the way women in that family kept fire.

Wineford applied for Isham's pension in Macon County in April of 1843, eighty-two years old, a mark for a signature, Jesse's leaving still in her mouth after sixty-six years. She thought it was August. She thought it was 1777. She had never heard it disputed that Williams served his term. She died about 1847 or 1848. The war had been sixty years behind her. The work had not changed as much as the county names.

# 10

## *The preacher's daughter*

John, the son who took half the land with Catherine, was born about 1808, while the family was still on Ivy. He grew up in a yard where enslaved people were part of the daily order and church was the other government. He married Elizabeth Blackwell, daughter of Rev. David Blackwell, one of the Baptist preachers already stitching congregations along the creeks. That marriage put this line inside a world that would still be naming deacons in Clay County a century later.

Elizabeth Blackwell brought church into the house the way other women brought a clock. Meeting on Sunday. Grace over corn. A belief that days had a grain and that a man ought to follow it. John was less sure about grain in the spiritual sense. He was sure about corn.

"You sit like a man who is being measured," she said to him once, early, after a sermon that had gone long.

"I am being measured," he said. "That is what meeting is for."

"It is also for mercy."

He looked at her. She had her father's mouth when she said mercy, and his own mother's way of standing, and he understood that he had married a government he would not be able to outwait. "Then I will take the mercy if it comes with the measuring."

They had children the way that country had children: close together, named for kin and presidents and the Bible. William W. David. James. Harriet, who would be a Franks. John Tyler. Samuel Fleming, about January of 1840, who would be Flem in every mouth that loved him and Feming in a census taker's ear.

The map kept changing. Haywood had already been cut from Buncombe. Macon in '28. Yancey in '33. Cherokee County in '39, on ground the Cherokee had been walked off of. Jackson in 1851, from Haywood and Macon, named for the president whose policy had opened the land the county sat on. John farmed a creek-bottom place where Sylva and Webster were new words. The railroad was still a story they told about other people's counties. Asheville itself would not get rails until 1880.

A day in that country was the Ivy day without quite the same household. Men cleared new ground and split rails. Women cooked on wood, sewed, put up food, and bore children close together. Children hoed as soon as they could lift a hoe. Saturday might mean a wagon to the county seat. Sunday was meeting. School, when a subscription school or a short public term existed, yielded to the crop.

Flem was a quiet boy with a laugh that arrived late and stayed. He liked the wagon. He liked the particular problem of a wheel that sat almost true. Elizabeth said he had his grandfather's hands, meaning William's, meaning the hands that could remember a line tree. John said he had anybody's hands who was put to work early, but he was not unhappy.

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When Jackson County was created Flem was eleven. When North Carolina left the Union he was twenty-one. The paper does not yet say what he did with those years. This story will not invent a muster roll.

## 11

*Jackson County, winter 1864*

John was in his fifties and tired in a way that was not only years.

Salt was scarce. Men were scarcer. Western North Carolina was not the plantation South. Small farms, few enslaved people relative to the east, and a strong Unionist streak produced divided companies and ugly local violence. Jackson sent boys both ways. Thomas's Legion took highlanders and Cherokee into Confederate service. Other neighbors slipped north or hid from the conscript men. In February there had been a fight at Deep Creek. Small, as battles went. Large if it was your road.

This family had held people in 1837. Charlotte. Jarrett. The others. John did not speak of that in the yard. The war was taking the institution apart whether a mountain county had loved it or not. What remained was the work and not enough hands.

Elizabeth mended by a low fire until her eyes failed the needle. The house at night was that fire and the sound of wind in a gap. John sat and did not whittle, because whittling was what men did when they had a future they wanted to shape. He had a present he wanted to survive.

"They will come up this cove if they want meat," Elizabeth said.

"Then we will have less meat."

"That is not a plan."

"It is the only plan left. We make a crop. We keep the children. We do not make speeches."

She looked at him as her father the preacher might have looked at a stubborn deacon. "Speeches are how men end up in the ground."

"Yes," he said.

Flem, from the doorway, twenty-four or nearly, of the age that vanished into companies: "If they come for me—"

"If they come for you," John said, "you will not be standing in my doorway announcing it."

The boy — the man — shut his mouth. Elizabeth's mouth twitched. Whether Flem served, hid, or was passed over, the paper has not said. Some nights he was still under the roof, and that was a kind of luck John did not examine.

In the morning there was still corn to hoe in the mind, even in winter, because a farm is a thing you rehearse when you cannot do it. They ate thin. They counted the hogs the way Winnifred had once counted kernels. A neighbor came with news of Deep Creek that was already three versions old. A woman down the creek had not heard from a son since autumn. Another woman had heard, which was not always better.

Elizabeth read, when she could get a Testament near the light, and prayed as if prayer were a fence. Sometimes John believed her. Sometimes he believed only the fence.

They made a crop in '64 and it was a poor one. Rain in the wrong week. Hands in the wrong county. A field does not care why it was neglected. In '65 the labor that had once been willed like cattle was gone, and the county was poor even by mountain measure. Freedom arrived as a legal fact and as an empty cabin and as a White household that had to learn, late, what it had always asked other people to know: that a place runs on someone's back.

John did not make a speech about that either. He split more rails. Elizabeth put up less and made it last more. Flem, if he had been gone, was back, or had never left in a way the later searchers can prove. The work that stayed had a different color in the yard and the same weight.

John lived another eleven years. Elizabeth Blackwell was gone by then; a death in 1863 is often hung on her and should not be trusted without a later census, but the house needed a woman in it again, which is a kind of evidence. He married Eleanor Knight in 1872, late, the way men did when a kitchen could not be left to chance. He died on the twenty-seventh of March, 1876, about sixty-eight. No one filed a state certificate. North Carolina did not ask for those yet. The farm went on. That was the certificate.

# 12

*Macon County, September 1868*

Three years into the hard peace, Flem stood up with Martha C. Franks in Macon County. Mary Ann in some records. The courthouse had the look of a place that had been used for too many kinds of business. There was no cash to speak of and a great deal of weather still to come.

Martha had a laugh that arrived on time, which was a change for him. She looked at his hands when the words were said, the way Winnifred had once looked at Isham's, though neither of them knew that story as a story. They knew it as the shape of a day.

"We will make a crop," he said afterward, because that was what men in his family said when they meant we will try to live.

"We will make a house," she said, which was the same sentence from the other side of the table.

They raised a large family in Jackson County. Isom came first, the first of August, 1869. Then Johnie, William Wesley, Betsy, Mary, Dicey, Matthew, John Henry, Samuel, Elbert. A household of that size ran on the work of every age. The cabin, then the better house, then the yard worn bare by feet, then the sound of someone always crying or laughing or both.

Martha's days were fire and wash and births close together. Flem's were the field and the timber and the wagon to town when there was a reason. On Sundays they went to meeting, which was still the newspaper and the courthouse of people who did not live near either. Isom sat on the bench and learned the songs before he learned why a man might need them.

Flem watched the boy the way Job had once watched a deed. Not for resemblance only. For whether the fence would run true.



## 13

*Sylva Township, 1880*

The census taker came on a day that was already hot at breakfast. He had ink and a book and the particular courtesy of a man who is about to reduce a life to marks. He wrote “Feming” because that is what he heard, and “Ilom” because that is what he heard, and “farm laborer” beside the twelve-year-old because that is what the boy was.

Isom did not think of himself as a laborer. He thought of himself as a person who could already lift what needed lifting. He stood in the yard while the man asked ages and places of birth and whether anyone had been married within the year. Martha wiped her hands on her apron and gave the names in the order she kept them, which was not always the order of birth and was always the order of the house.

“This one works,” the man said, not unkindly, tipping his chin at Isom.

“They all work,” Martha said.

The man wrote farm laborer. It was not a clerk’s flourish. It was how the place ate.

After the book had gone down the road, Flem put the reins of the mule into the boy’s hands.

“You mind him.”

“I mind him.”

“You mind him like he can kill you, because he can.”

Isom minded him. The mule flicked an ear, which was as close as a mule comes to a contract. They moved a stone boat ten feet, then twenty. The sun stood in the middle of the sky and refused to negotiate. Dust rose and powdered the boy’s hair until he looked older than twelve and exactly twelve.

At noon Martha brought cornbread and a jar of something that had been beans. She had a child on her hip and another in the doorway. She looked at Isom’s hands.

“He has your father’s knuckles,” she said to Flem.

“He has anybody’s knuckles who works,” Flem said, but he was not unhappy.

The railroad had reached Asheville that year, a miracle in a place that still moved by mule. People talked about it as if rails were a kind of grace. Jackson remained corn, hogs, timber, and church. School, when it sat, sat short. Laying-by was longer. Isom went to letters enough to get what he needed and to the field enough to get what the house needed, and the house won, as houses did.

He liked broken things. A wagon tongue that had split. A hinge that would not. He would stand and look until he saw why. Flem watched him once, in the shed, the boy’s hands on a piece of iron that had no business coming true again, and said, “There is money in that, if this county ever has money.”

“This county has mules,” Isom said.

“Same thing,” Flem said.

On Sundays the heat in the meeting house rose and sat against the ceiling. Isom joined the church at sixteen, the way a boy stepped into a current that had already been running through his great-grandfather’s marriage to a preacher’s daughter. He did not know he would be a deacon for twenty-five years. He knew the songs and the way old women looked at boys who might turn out, and he knew that a door that did not hang true was an offense he could fix.

He married Maryann Isabel Cope in Jackson County on the fifteenth of October, 1889. She had a quiet that was not emptiness. She looked at a room and saw what the room required. Frederick Lee came on the twenty-third of January, 1892. Oma after. A son who would not live, a gap the later newspaper would mention in a single clause, as if an infant could be filed with the church offices. By 1900 Isom headed his own household in Savannah Township. The century turned. The work did not.

Flem would be named on a death certificate in 1928 as if a father were a fact that outlasted geography. Whether he died in Jackson or, as later talk had it, in Palatka, Florida, the boy in the mule lot did not need to know. Wintering or dying in Florida was already a mountain habit for families who could manage it. He reached at least seventy if he lived to 1910, and nearly ninety if he lived to 1928. The paper has not yet chosen. This story will not choose for it.

## 14

*Tusquittee, 1902*

They moved west when Isom was already a married man with a mechanic's hands and a farmer's debts. Clay County was the state's southwestern corner, against Georgia, created in February 1861 as North Carolina stumbled toward secession, named for Henry Clay, seated at Hayesville for the legislator who had promised a county. Isolated. Agricultural. A short railroad later, the Peavine, more hope than highway. Baptist churches for news.

Tusquittee lay under Tusquittee Bald. A cove. You could be farmer and mechanic and deacon and never need a city. Isom became all three.

The wagon that brought them held what a wagon holds when a family decides a county has given what it will give: beds, tools, a stove if you are lucky, children, a dog that will get down and walk the last miles. Maryann held the baby of that year and watched the ridges change their names. Frederick, ten, sat on the tail and watched the road unwind as if he intended to remember it in case they needed it in reverse.

The first winter the wind came down the bald as if it had been stored there since the Cherokee left. Maryann stood in the doorway of the house they had taken, or raised, or patched into being, and said, "It is a different wind."

"It is the same wind," Isom said. "It has farther to fall."

A Tusquittee day still started with stock. Then the field or the shop. People found him the way people find a man who can see why a thing is broken. A wagon tongue. A mill that balked. Later, a Ford that had no business in a cove and every business, because the century was coming whether the county was ready or not. He liked the shop in a way he did not say. A broken thing had a reason. A field had weather, which was not a reason so much as a verdict.

Maryann cooked on wood, washed at a kettle, put up beans and apples, kept children in the rhythm of the place. School terms were short. Laying-by and hog-killing were longer. Doctors rode, when they rode.

Sundays he was at the meeting-house doors. He had been a member since sixteen. He became Sunday-school superintendent and held it twenty years. He became a deacon and held it twenty-five. If the house needed a new sill, he was there on a Saturday with the same hands he used on a wagon. In Clay County that was how a man held the world together: corn, bolts, and the church book. The church raised money, buried the dead, watched the young, and carried news faster than the paper.

Frederick grew up in that rhythm and did not leave it. He had his mother's mouth and his father's way of looking at a hinge. He learned the bald by walking it. He learned the shop by handing tools before he was asked. He learned meeting by sitting still longer than he wanted and then, later, by meaning it.

“You could go to town,” a boy said to him once, meaning Hayesville, meaning a clerk’s stool, meaning not this.

“I am in town,” Frederick said, and then, because that was not quite true, “I am where the work is.”

The boy did not understand. Frederick did not explain. Explaining is a kind of leaving.

## 15

*Hayesville, 1917*

The card was a small piece of the government's mind.

Frederick stood in Hayesville on a day that smelled of dust and horse and the particular nervousness of men who are being written down. He was twenty-five. He had married Cora Lee Eller on the twentieth of October, 1912. The house was already filling. The clerk, or the registrar, or whoever held the pen, took him down like a horse: farmer, employed by himself, at home, wife and two children dependent, medium build, slender, blue eyes, light hair. Exemption claimed as a farmer with dependents.

He wrote his name. He could write his name. That fact sat in him strangely, as if he had borrowed it from a century that had not quite arrived on Tusquittee. His people had made marks. He made letters. The crop did not care.

Cora's days were the older mountain woman's days with more mouths. Cooking. Washing. Births close together. Sickness in a room without a hospital. Ten children in twenty-six years is not a statistic on a draft card. It is a house that is never empty and a table that is never set for two. She had a way of standing at a stove that was Betsy's way and Martha's way and Maryann's way, which is to say the way the line kept the hours when the road took the rest.

Claude Davis Woodard was born in Tusquittee on the fifth of May, 1917, into the same year as the card. Frederick held him in the evening and thought, without guilt, that he would not go to France if he could help it. The crop was a kind of service. No one would give it a pension. He could live with that.

"He has your eyes," Cora said.

"He has a name with Davis in it," Frederick said.

"That is your choosing."

"It is an old choosing." He did not say Isham. He did not say a will on Ivy. He said, "It will do."

Isom came to see the baby and stood with his hat in his hands, a deacon even in a kitchen. He looked tired in a new way. Maryann had begun to watch him climb the lot. Dr. D. B. Killian of Hayesville had begun to stop more often. A heart that leaked. They did not use that phrase yet in the house. They said he needed to sit. He sat, and then he got up, because sitting was not how a meeting-house door got hung.

The influenza of 1918 went through the coves as it went through every poor rural county. Vinegar and fear in the house. Windows shut or open according to whose aunt was believed. This story will not invent a death it cannot document. It will only say that the ones who lived went back to the mule, and that a baby born in 1917 came through a year that killed better-documented people in better-documented rooms.

The 1920s farm slump arrived early in a county that had never boomed. Prices fell. The Peavine did what a short line can do, which is not enough. Isom still farmed. He still opened the shop when he could stand. He still held the door. Maryann measured his breath the way she measured flour.

## 16

*Tusquittee, October 1928*

He had been dying for months and farming anyway.

Leakage of heart, Killian wrote, which was a doctor's way of saying the pump would not hold. Valvular, congestive, the period phrase sitting on the certificate like a plain stone. Isom was fifty-nine years and two months. Farmer and mechanic. Born 1 August 1869, Jackson County. Son of Fleming Woodard and Martha Franks. Informant: Mrs. I. D. Woodard. Died at home, Tusquittee, the thirtieth of October, a farm-slump year, a year before the men in cities discovered that money could vanish. Clay County had known that already.

Maryann sat with him in the afternoons when the shop was closed because he could not stand in it. The room was the room of a man who had worked with his hands: a chair that knew him, a window that looked at the lot, a Bible that had been opened and closed on a thousand Sundays. Frederick came from his own place, light hair gone a little dull, Cora's latest still on her hip at home. Iona. The church women brought food as if food could shore a valve.

"You rest," Maryann said.

"I am resting," he said, which was a lie they both required.

He thought, not in words, of the mule lot in 1880, of the first wagon tongue he had spliced in Clay, of the meeting-house doors in winter when the wood pulled away from the latch, of a boy named Fred with a draft card in his pocket and a baby named Claude who had Davis in the middle like a kept promise. He did not think of Ninety-Six or Ivy. Those were other people's memories now, thinned to a name on a child: Isham Davis Woodard, an uncle gone to Gilmer County, Georgia, and then Arkansas, a story without a house.

Once he said, "Tell Fred the Ford in the shed is the linkage. Not the tank."

"I will tell him," Maryann said.

"He will find it anyway."

"Then I will tell him you said so, which is different."

He almost smiled. A deacon's smile is a small thing and has to be. He looked at the window and saw the bald, or the idea of the bald, and he was pleased, in a modest way, that the last thing he might see was a ridge that had not asked anything of him but standing.

Then he was quiet, and the quiet lasted, and Killian, who had been coming for ten years, wrote the date and the cause and went back down the road to Hayesville.

They buried him Wednesday at Moss Baptist. Wagons and a few cars. Dinner at the house. A grave in ground the family already knew. The Clay County News put it on the front page the next week, the ninth of November, beside Hoover's face and a turkey sale and a card of thanks from Mrs. I. D. Woodard and family. Ison Davis Woodard, of Tusquittee, several months' illness, member since sixteen, superintendent twenty years, deacon twenty-five. Survived by his widow,

Fred L. Woodard, Iona Woodard, and a son who had died in infancy. The rest of the kinship did not need to be listed. They were already in the yard.

Frederick stood after the others had gone to the food and looked at the bald, which did not look back. He was thirty-six. He had a house that was never empty. He had a father in the ground and a linkage in a shed that he would find, and he would hear his mother's voice saying, He said so, which is different.

Maryann took the food that was brought and gave the food that was needed and did not cry where the yard could use it as news. At night, when the house had thinned, she sat in his chair and felt the shape of him still in it, and then she got up, because a chair is not a life, and a fire still had to be kept.



## 17

*Hiwassee, 1933*

The Depression did not arrive in Clay County so much as take off its hat and sit in a chair that had been waiting for it.

Frederick farmed. Cora put up what there was. The children hoed and milked and went farther to school than he had gone, which he allowed without making a speech about progress. Claude, sixteen that year, had the restlessness of a boy who has seen a catalog and a ridgeline and has not yet decided which is the truer document.

“There is nothing here,” Claude said one evening, not cruelly.

“There is the place,” Frederick said.

“The place does not pay.”

“The place eats. Paying is a town word.”

Cora, at the stove: “Both of you will eat what is on the table and leave the century out of it until the plates are clean.”

They left the century out of it. After supper Claude went to the lot and Frederick followed, because some arguments require a mule as a third party. The mule breathed. The stars were the old stars.

“I am not ashamed of this,” Claude said.

“I did not say you were.”

“I will not stay only because you stayed.”

Frederick put his hands in his pockets. “I did not stay because my father stayed. I stayed because I am not finished with the ground.”

Claude did not answer. A boy who will leave needs to keep a sentence for the road. Frederick knew that. He had not taken a road, but he had watched enough people take one.

Some of the ten children would stay. Some would go. That was already beginning to be the weather.

## 18

*Hiwassee, 1940*

The bulb hung in the kitchen like a small, arrogant star.

Cora stood and looked at it as if it might take offense. Frederick had his hands in his pockets, which was what he did when a thing was new and he refused to be impressed. The children made the sound children make when the world has performed a trick. Even the ones who were nearly grown made it.

“It is only a lamp,” he said.

“It is not only a lamp,” she said.

He knew she was right. A lamp you carried. This thing stayed and made the evening into a kind of day. The children read longer. The shop could be used after supper. A radio, later, would bring voices that were not neighbors. The mule was still the mule. The well would wait a while. But the century had come into the room without asking the county’s permission.

The river that drained them had become a government river. They were finishing a dam west in Cherokee County — Hiwassee Dam, TVA, a wall across a name the Cherokee had left in the water. Men talked about electric light the way their grandfathers had talked about the railroad in Asheville. Rural lines. Allotment checks, soon enough, when the next war took the next boys. That was the new conscription: wages.

Frederick walked out after the bulb had been admired enough and stood in the lot. The kitchen window was a yellow square that had never been there before. He thought of Isom, who had died by lamp, and of a meeting-house door hung true by daylight, and of William on Ivy who had made a mark because letters were not his work. A bulb was a kind of letter. It said: the outside world can reach you now. It said: you may still refuse to go out.

Claude, who had been the 1917 baby, was a man now, with the Depression in his bones and a restlessness that was not quite disloyalty. Western North Carolina was beginning to send its people out. Atlanta. Detroit. The plants.

“You could come,” Claude said once, not pushing, standing in that same lot with the new light at their backs.

“I am come,” Frederick said, meaning: I am already where I was going.

Claude nodded. He had his sentence for the road. Frederick had his for the ground. They were, for a moment, not in disagreement so much as in two different tenses of the same family.

The war came. Boys left. Checks came back. Cora read the paper when there was a paper and the church when there was not. Frederick made crops through another war as he had sat out the fighting of the first, a farmer with dependents who became a farmer with grandchildren. He never became a townsman. The censuses kept him in Clay, then Hiwassee and Shooting Creek, still in Hiwassee Township in 1950. The contents of the day shifted around him without changing the

county.

Electricity changed the evening first and then the work, slowly: a well, a shop light, a radio. A pickup where a wagon had been. The mule, at last, a memory that still knew how to bite. Tourism and summer people came later, a different kind of drovers' road, people walking into the mountains instead of hogs walking out.

From mule and springhouse to pickup and electric well, same ridges. He would die on the thirty-first of August, 1983, ninety-one years old, the longest life the line can date, and they would bury him in Hayesville. A clerk in Murphy would write a cause on a certificate that this story has not opened. The life was the document.

## 19

*Hayesville, and Atlanta, 1960*

Claude Davis Woodard had been born the year of the draft and had grown up in the Depression in a county with almost no payroll. He knew the old day as ordinary and the new day as a door. He was a father in the weather of leaving.

In January of 1960 a boy was born in Atlanta and later adopted as Peter Allen Jensen. The cove did not hold him. The ridges remained in the people who had walked them.

Frederick, sixty-eight that year and not yet finished with the ground, heard the news the way mountain news still traveled when it wanted to: late, and with the important parts intact. A boy. Atlanta. He stood in a kitchen that had been electric for twenty years and tried to imagine a city birth as a kind of crop. He could not quite. He could imagine a child. He had imagined ten.

“He will not know the bald,” Cora said.

“He will know whatever they tell him,” Frederick said. “If they tell him.”

They told him, later, enough. Not everything. No one ever tells everything. What there was to tell was not a diary. There was never a diary.

Years after, that son would gather a pension, a deed, a will, a newspaper, a death certificate, and a Y-chromosome, and try to make a single road out of them. He would sit with papers in a room that had electric light as a birthright, and he would look for a name the pension never gave.

He would find Winnifred and not the name of her first husband. He would find William on Ivy and a mark instead of a signature. He would find a twelve-year-old already listed as labor, a deacon’s leaking heart, a draft card with blue eyes and light hair. He would find Job Broughton selling two tracts for a hundred pounds and not calling anyone nephew. He would find Winefret Davis in a father’s will at a dollar and a half. He would find Charlotte, who was not to be sold. He would find the gap where a John was compiled and not proved.

If he had asked the people in this story what they were doing, they would not have said they were making a line. They would have said they were making a crop. They would have said the mule, the meeting-house door, the child with a fever, the road that took Jesse and did not bring him back the same. They would have said Tuesday.

What there was, if you stood in a Tusquittee dusk and knew how to look, was the work that stayed. Men left for Georgia, for Ninety-Six, for conscript camps, for Atlanta. The fire had to be kept. The mule had to be minded. The meeting-house door had to be hung true. Someone — Winny, Betsy, Elizabeth Blackwell, Martha, Maryann, Cora — kept the hours when the road took the rest.

The boy in Atlanta would call that genealogy. The people in this story would have called it the day after Jesse left, and the day after that, and the day the bulb came on, and the day the heart gave out, and the day a magistrate said the custom of the country, and the day a man marked a

will because he could not write the names of the people he was trying, in the only way he knew, not to lose.

Claude would die in Hayesville on the eleventh of June, 1994, seventy-seven years old, a child of one war and a young man of the Depression and a father in the years when the cove learned to empty. The medical cause is on a certificate this story has not opened. Frederick had already been in the ground eleven years by then. The bald did not look back at either of them. It had not looked back at Isom, or at John, or at William. It had not looked back at Winnifred when she stood in a Surry yard in August and watched a hat become a dark spot and then not even that.

The fire, somewhere, was still being kept. That was never in the papers. That was the only thing that had ever been the point.

## Author's note

This story is fiction built on the records gathered for The Woodards of Ivy, Jackson, and Clay. Dialogue, weather, rooms, and private thought are invented. Public facts are not.

Winnifred remembered Jesse Broughton and Thomas Williams leaving for Georgia, she thought in August 1777 (Thomas Williams pension S7933, affidavit of Winny Davis, 21 June 1833). She was a widow Woodard when she married Isham Davis on 19 September 1783, about twelve miles from Edgefield Court House, before Aquilla Miles; Elizabeth Johnston remembered “Winneford Woodard, a widow” (Isham Davis widow’s pension W6970). The first husband is left unnamed because the pension left him unnamed. No matching Woodard estate has been found in the Ninety-Six Ordinary or early Edgefield probate. Willoughby Broughton’s will, 28 October 1804, proved 5 November 1804, Pendleton–Anderson, left Winefret Davis a dollar and a half and did not mention a Woodard grandchild.

Job Broughton sold William Woodard two tracts on Shoats Fork of Ivy on 25 February 1801 (Buncombe Deed Book 5:213–214). The deed does not say nephew. Elizabeth Woodard of Buncombe swore in January 1846 that she had known Isham and Wineford as neighbors for fifty years or more. William named a son Isham Davis Woodard. William marked his will on 24 January 1837; it was proved at Yancey spring term (Wills 1:24–25). He could not write. The will names Charlotte and directs that she not be sold.

John died 27 March 1876 in Jackson County. No North Carolina death certificate exists; statewide registration began in 1913. Samuel Fleming married Martha C. Franks in Macon County on 17 September 1868. Isom appears as a farm laborer, age twelve, in the 1880 Jackson County census (the clerk wrote “Ilom”). Isom married Maryann Isabel Cope on 15 October 1889. The family was in Clay County by the early 1900s. Frederick Lee Woodard registered for the World War I draft from Hayesville in 1917: blue eyes, light hair, farmer, wife and two children, exemption claimed. Claude Davis Woodard was born 5 May 1917 in Tusquittee. Isom died at home on 30 October 1928, aged fifty-nine years and two months, of leakage of heart (Clay County death certificate; Clay County News, 9 November 1928). Frederick died 31 August 1983, aged ninety-one. Claude died 11 June 1994, aged seventy-seven. Their causes have not been read for this story.

A boy was born in Atlanta on 26 January 1960 and later adopted as Peter Allen Jensen.

What the paper will not support has been left open: a given name for Winnifred’s first husband, a proved father for William of Ivy, a service record for Flem, a Florida death for Fleming, a cause for Frederick and for Claude. The rest — a siege they lived near and did not write down, a farm bought the year Jefferson became president, a will marked in a four-year-old county, a twelve-year-old already listed as labor, a deacon’s death from a leaking heart, a Clay County life that ran from mule to electric well on the same ground — is the work that stayed.