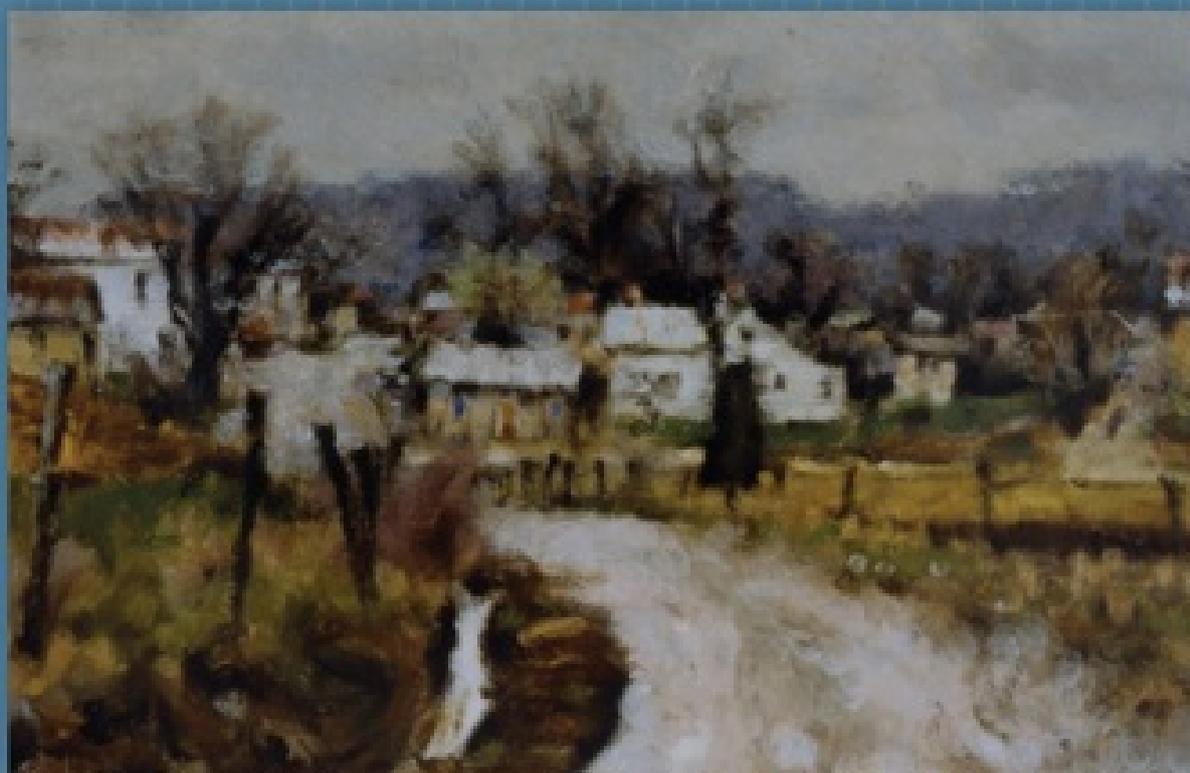


A PLACE IN TIME

TWENTY STORIES OF THE
PORT WILLIAM MEMBERSHIP



Wendell Berry

Author of Hannab Coulter and Jayber Crow

A Place in Time

WENDELL BERRY



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*Twenty Stories of the
Port William Membership*



COUNTERPOINT
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A Place in Time: Twenty Stories of the Port William Membership
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In memory of James Baker Hall,
who was the first friend
of the fiction of Port William



Contents

Acknowledgments

The Girl in the Window (1864)
Fly Away, Breath (1907)
Down in the Valley Where the Green Grass Grows (1930)
Burley Coulter's Fortunate Fall (1934)
A Burden (1882, 1907, 1941)
A Desirable Woman (1938–1941)
Misery (1943)
Andy Catlett: Early Education (1943)
Drouth (1944)
Stand By Me (1921–1944)
Not a Tear (1945)
The Dark Country (1948)
A New Day (1949)
Mike (1939–1950)
Who Dreamt This Dream? (1966)
The Requirement (1970)
An Empty Jacket (1974)
At Home (1981)
Sold (1991)
A Place in Time (1938–2008)



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There is as much in that little space within the heart, as there is in the whole world outside. . . .

What lies in that space, does not decay when the body decays, nor does it fall when the body falls.

The Ten Principal Upanishads,
Put into English by Shree Purohit
Swāmi and W. B. Yeats

Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

JOEL 1:3



A Place in Time



The Girl in the Window (1864)

They might as well all have been the same bunch, although they weren't. Sometimes there would be enough gray uniforms or uniform pieces among them to permit them to be identified (perhaps) as Rebels. Sometimes they would be more formally recognizable as Yankees because they would all be dressed in uniforms that would be blue. Sometimes, because of their unlikeness to one another and to any living thing ever before seen in Port William, you couldn't tell who they were. Whoever they were, the town shut itself against them like a terrapin closing its shell. From the yards and porches and storefronts along the single street, people withdrew behind doors. People who had ridden into town in a wagon or on horseback got themselves and their animals out of sight, if they could. Otherwise, they were apt to have to get away on foot, their mules or horses "requisitioned," and if the younger men could get away at all before being arrested or "recruited."

The Yankees would be looking for persons disloyal to the Union, a category not clearly defined, or for revenge against perpetrators of disloyal acts, which also were not well-defined or perhaps even definable. The Rebels would be on the lookout for recruits. The others, the self-described irregulars or guerillas, would be actuated, as like as not, by some local grudge going back a long time before the war. All of them, always, were looking for any livestock that could be ridden, worked, or eaten, *anything* that could be eaten, anything usable as a weapon, anything portable that was worth carrying away, any opportunity for amusing themselves by any of the cruelties available to those who had abjured, seemingly forever, the laws of kinship and friendship and neighborhood.

And Port William was isolated, beyond the reach of official help, too small and divided even to consider defending itself, both too Southern and too near the Ohio River.

Doing freely, beyond constraint or compunction, the things that it seemed men would do if they got the chance, they all were trouble, trouble when they were present, trouble when they were gone, no end of trouble. She feared them all, and therefore she hated them all.

She was Rebecca Dawe, daughter of Maxie and James John Dawe, sister of Galen Dawe who had been killed by a neighbor as he was leaving to join the Confederate

army at the start of the war. Her two older sisters were at home on the river bottom farm down by Dawe's Landing where their father had a store, and where the family and their handful of slaves provided more help in fact than was needed. She could be spared. And so she had come up to Port William to help her aunt Dicey, her mother's sister, with her young children, to help with the work of the household, for her greater safety as her parents saw it, and as she herself saw it for relief from isolation in the great space of the river valley and from her parents' grieving.

And Dicey needed her. Until Rebecca came, walking barefoot up from the river, carrying her shoes and extra clothing bundled in a shawl, Dicey had been alone with her three children, the oldest almost still a baby, and what she called her little dab of livestock: a milk cow, two shoats, and by now a bare dozen hens. Like some of the other houses in Port William, the Needlys' fronted a small farm, theirs going narrowly all the way back to the woods on the river bluff. Dicey's husband, Thomas Needly, the town's only blacksmith, was in the federal military prison in Louisville for an "act of disloyalty." One evening past dark, working mainly by feel, he had reset a shoe on a stranger's horse. He had charged nothing. The stranger, who was in a hurry, had not asked what he owed, and Thomas, in the circumstances and from experience, was afraid to name the price. But the stranger had been the wrong one to help out with such a favor. He was a wanted man. He was caught, and on his testimony Thomas Needly was charged with aiding him in his attempt to escape.

A small band of federal soldiers came in the night, arrested Thomas, and carried him away. Dicey did not know why they had taken him or where, or if he was alive, until she received a long-delayed letter somehow smuggled out of the prison. It was a letter much beyond Thomas's powers of writing, written for him in a determinedly beautiful flowing script by a fellow prisoner:

Mrs. Needley

dr. Madam:

Thos. Needley your houseband was put in here the fed. mil. jail at Louisvle on yesterday charged with aiding a Rebble. He says say he is well & alrite & fully abled of body & mind & send cloths, &c if poss.

a Friend

Dicey did send a packet of his clothes and a few other things that, not knowing, she thought might be of use. This he never received, nor did she hear from him again. Until the war ended nearly a year later, for all she knew, he had fallen off the edge of the world.

And it had been, she would think, a kind of world's edge that he had been to, for he had come back from the helplessness and powerlessness of the dead. When he stood again at his anvil in his strength, in the fierce heat and exactitude of his old work, he had, it seemed to her, the aspect of one who had returned from the grave.

In Thomas's absence, lacking his offering to the community of his needed work and its return of money, the household had become oversimplified and poor. Dicey, who had married late, was thirty, Rebecca just sixteen. They watched over the children. They

kept house sparely and neatly. They gardened and foraged and traded for food, and accepted gratefully the food sent up to them from the Dawe household down in the river valley, always in small amounts as a precaution against theft and because, even at the Dawes' place, food was hardly abundant.

The dab of livestock pertained to the two women and their household only conditionally. The two shoats, their ears notched, had been turned loose in the woods, and they were Dicey's own still if they were not caught or shot by some band of soldiers or bushwhackers, and if ever she could get them penned and slaughtered when the time came. The chickens, too easily stolen from the henhouse, had been allowed to go half wild, roosting in trees and hiding their nests in the weeds or the barn, at the mercy of predators. The cow they had saved from theft or slaughter, so far, by confining her in the farthest pasture. Thomas had built in a corner next to the woods a pen of split rails and a small shed where some hay could be stored. To this pen Rebecca carried the milk bucket every morning and every evening, the children following along. And then she carried home again enough milk to drink fresh and to keep them in cream and butter and clabber. "The cow," said Dicey, who liked to say things well, "is our luck and our luxury."

This was late in the summer of 1864, and their luxuries were in fact lucky, and rare. But they were living in what Rebecca was learning fast to recognize as the human condition, in which things are most clearly known by their opposites. She and the others were most touchingly and dearly living because Galen Dawe and so many others were dead, because so many boys even as young as Rebecca had been killed in battle, cut down like weeds. They were most movingly, most consciously and thoughtfully free, because Thomas and so many others were in prison. They ate with relish their frugal meals because of the lively possibility that even they, before the coming winter would be over, could be hungry. They were gathering in and preserving and putting away, even hiding, every surplus scrap of food. There would be stuff yet from the garden. In the fall they would gather walnuts and hickory nuts from the woods. They might, with help, catch and slaughter the two hogs. But the prospect was neither bounteous nor certain.

There were times when their thoughts were carried round and round by hope and fear, courage and resignation. Dicey said, "Lord, I reckon the pore human race has come to a many a fall such as this one. We'll make it, maybe, if those creatures don't steal the food right out of our mouths."

At the start of the war she had been openly in sympathy with the Confederacy, like the rest of her family. By now all the violent ones in their bunches she called, without distinction, "creatures." It was a vital, reverberant word when she said it, for as she acknowledged with frank reluctance the belonging of all creatures to God she pointedly refused to these the classification of "human." Even at the height of her resentment and indignation she did not curse them. But she made no distinction between them and the other creatures—"supposedly," as she would say, "lower"—who conducted themselves in bunches. The state was occupied officially by the Union army. She did not indulge herself by supposing that official occupation by the Confederate army would have been better or, for that matter, different. Power—and for

how long? —was the power of the bunch.

The bunches had been with them from the beginning. In the summer of 1861 a company of recruits of each side had drilled in Port William on the same day, and by their taunting back and forth had come close to a shooting scrape right there in the road. “It was almost history,” Dicey said. “It would have been known as the Battle of Port William.” If it had happened, it would have been as intimate an engagement almost as a family quarrel. No strangers would have been involved. Everybody in each company knew everybody in the other one. It would have been Port William’s own. The town and the countryside were divided most cruelly, for the division was not among strangers but among neighbors and kinfolk. That was why in the Port William neighborhood the violence peripheral to the official war was never entirely at rest. In addition to the almost routine recruiting or kidnapping, arresting and stealing, there were barn-burnings and other acts of vandalism. Threats were shouted from the darkness, or delivered openly to housewives standing in their doorways. And there were rumors, groundless as often as not, but grounded firmly nonetheless on experience.

The effort of the day was all but over, though the sun was still well up in the sky. Rebecca and the children had walked back to attend to the cow and walked home again with the milk, giving Dicey time to set the house to rights and have a little quiet. Rebecca then had come upstairs to her bedroom, for she loved the stillness of the ordered house at the day’s end, and she too needed her quiet. The house, especially the upstairs rooms, was warm beyond comfort, but she sat still by the open front window for the touch of a breeze that was there, and looked out as she liked to do. In a while they would have a supper of milk and cold biscuits and other leftovers from dinner, and then she and Dicey would sit on the front porch in the gathering dusk while the children played in the yard. By full dark all of them would be in bed—“to save light,” Dicey would say, meaning candles and lamp oil.

The shadows of the house and the trees beside it had reached all the way across the road to the Feltner house shut and quiet on the other side. And then the murmur of voices from down along the few storefronts of the town became briefly louder and then ceased altogether. She heard the hoofbeats of one horse galloping away along one of the paths that led out from the town into the fields. A shiver passed over her as shivers do when somebody has stepped on the place that will be your grave. She leaned in her chair to look, and saw coming down the hill from the schoolhouse, toward the stores and the bank and the church in the town’s middle, a little band of riders. They rode at a walk, looking around. When they came among the business places, now evidently shut and deserted, they stopped, bunching together, and then began riding erratically back and forth, leaning now and again from their saddles to test a latch or to pound a fist on a locked door. One of them fired a pistol into the air. They were well-armed, with holstered pistols and long guns scabbarded or lying across the saddle bows. One of them had a sheathed saber dangling at his side.

That the one had so reasonlessly fired his pistol suggested to Rebecca that they were there without a purpose, looking merely for whatever they might find. But watching them was in fact like watching creatures of another species, a flock of

blackbirds or a school of shad. Everything they had done seemed to her familiar and unsurprising, but she could not in the least anticipate what they would do next. It was this sense of their oddity, their utter strangeness, that made her afraid of them. Her fear was a palpable tremor inside her, but even though she was alone she did not allow any visible sign that she was afraid. She stayed as she was, quietly watching. The breeze bore up to her window the warm smells of horse sweat and dust, and now and again the voices of the riders.

She had no idea who they were. They clearly were not Yankees of the force of occupation. But there were several other possibilities. They could have been strayed Rebels or members of the so-called Home Guard or irregulars or bushwhackers, who could have been anybody with any cause or intention. In Port William the war had a lot of sides; it was hard to tell how many or which was which. Worse, it was sometimes hard to tell who in Port William was on which side. This had made the town cautious, and as a result far less talkative than it had been before the war and would come to be again years after it ended. During the war Port William found it hard to keep to its old way of talking to itself about itself. As nearly everybody seemed to know, there were great men at the top of the contending governments and armies who foresaw and even desired that eventually the war would have an official end, but at the bottom were men who did not care if it never ended.

She would remember all her life the threatful or wanton or heartless things she saw during the years of the war, and in fact during many years following—unofficial acts of violence as surely permitted by the war as if they had been determined by policy. The war also had given her two visions of such acts which she had not seen, but which she saw in her mind in such detail that she might as well have seen them with her eyes.

She could see, she would see all her life, her brother Galen on the bay gelding known as Rex, starting to a place near Smallwood where a company of Confederate volunteers was known to be gathering. He was senior to Rebecca by eleven years and therefore, to her, a mature man. But in her vision of him, as she grew older, he became younger, until the day when, in her never-finished sorrow, the realization would come: “He was just a boy!”

He sat well on his horse. He rode alone and—as she saw, as in her vision she increasingly understood—his face had a certain solemnity as if, the hesitance and effort of his decision now behind him, he felt himself a man fated to war—though not, surely, a man fated to be killed in that moment, before he could breathe again.

The family knew who did it, though there was no witness, no avowal, no evidence that was indisputable. And so the story she knew was not the story only of her brother, but in her vision he was alone, and when she heard the shot it surprised her. Every time the vision returned to her in the night or in the daytime when she sat alone the shot surprised her—for she saw each time that Galen anticipated nothing, was aware perhaps of nothing but himself and his horse passing on their way. It seemed to her that Galen did not hear the shot. He fell at once and cleanly from the saddle, delivered out of time without even a suspicion of the cause. The ones who happened upon his body found the horse nearby, grazing along the roadside.

The second vision was from the fall of 1863, more than two years after the first. Several slaves, five or six of them, both men and women, were cutting and shocking corn by moonlight out on the Bird's Branch Road, not far from the church. In her vision she saw them plainly, working steadily along to the rhythm that their corn knives hacked into the rustling of the dry corn. They were singing. They were singing, "Freedom! Oh, freedom!" That was all the song, but they sang it back and forth among themselves. Sometimes they would fall silent, and then the song continued unsung to the beat of the knives. And then a solitary voice would lift into the moonlight, "Oh, freedom!" and then they would all sing, "Freedom! Oh, freedom!" a cry that was old and creaturely and human. Later she would imagine that there had rarely been a time, and in Port William after slavery perhaps never again a time, when the word "freedom" had been so understandingly sounded. As the singers sang, they worked. As they worked, the rows of standing corn slowly became fewer and the rows of shocks increased. Over the striking of the knives and the steady rustling of the corn and the singing, the moonlight fell as if a greater silence were thus made visible.

And Rebecca saw too, following the narrow road up the rise from the church, another of the little bands of hostile men that in those years crisscrossed the neighborhood, leaving it each time, it seemed to her, worse than it had been before, just as they crisscrossed also her own mind, leaving it each time sadder and yet stronger and less to be fooled.

There was no question who these were, for the people of Port William had come by various ways to know for certain. These were Confederate cavalry, six men and an officer. Their presence was perhaps accountable by some minor event or accident of the war, and yet, to her own mind, it was factual without being explainable. They simply were there, alien and unbelonging, as they had been wherever they had come from, as they would be wherever they would go, like all the others who had been displaced by the unaiming destiny of the bunch.

As they came up along the corn rows and into the sound of the Negroes' singing and understood it, that word rising as if by nature out of bondage, the officer abruptly spurred his horse, put him to the rock fence beside the road, and neatly cleared it. He rode in among the crew of workers—they were scattering, running like quail into the standing corn. Drawing his pistol, he shot the eldest of them, a slave man named Tucker, point-blank in the side of the head.

It was no wonder that her time to marry came late for a young woman of Port William. It came when she was twenty-four, seven years after the formal, the "historical," ending of the war. The nighttime reprisals of vengeful men—the unofficial violence set loose and still nominally justified by official violence—were still terrorizing the country. Her own repugnance and disdain persisted in those years of official peace. She would not be wedded, she could hardly bear to be looked at, by the young men of her own place, every one of whom seemed to her to bear the taint of what she called ever after "that awfulness." She married instead an Irish immigrant who, to escape the bunch-violence that ruled his own land, had come to America and, hearing that a "shoe cobbler" was needed, finally to Port William.

Though she was old enough in that summer of 1864 for a Port William girl to be

married, the awfulness already had driven any thought of courtship or marriage from her mind. She had instead taken a defensive stand on the side merely of the helpless and the threatened. On their behalf she distrusted all the creatures of the bunches and the weapons. That was why she sat still in her fear and watched as the alien riders, in the absence or invisibility of the entire membership of the town, occupied and ruled over the empty road.

And then, seeing nothing easily to be taken or enjoyed, they began to give the place up. They gathered again in the road and formed raggedly a line, resuming the direction that would carry them on through the town and finally into the river valley.

Looking away then in the direction they were going to go, she saw hanging over the river a single small white cloud just touched by the gold of the weakening sun. And then she saw, as if wonder must now be added to the new normality of outrage, the figure of a walking man emerge into the open concavity of the road as it came up out of the valley and turned toward the town. She knew immediately who it was, as she might have recognized at a distance too far for reading the character of her own script. It was Eli, her mother's slave, with a split basket on his arm, bringing to her and Dicey, she supposed, some gift of food. Alone, old and ambling, visible against the bare horizon as the chimney of a burned house, he would be at the mercy of the riders, who had not yet seen him, though they would see him as soon as they looked. They would surround him on their horses. They would point their guns at him for the pleasure of seeing him frightened. They would demand the basket. Or worse. They could do worse. They could do as they pleased.

In her mind a thought like a prayer cried out: "Eli! Get out of sight!"

She looked quickly at the line of riders now coming up even with her window, and then quickly back at Eli. For another wonder, he had seen them first. Exactly as if he had heard her unspoken warning, he had vanished.

Relieved, she now looked only at the line of riders as one by one they straggled by. Their horses were fairly fit and of fairly good stock. The men in general rode them well enough, with an evident sense of their power, even maybe of pomp, and yet still she felt their strangeness, the strangeness of their ability now, in their bunch, to do as they pleased. They were like biting dogs. Emboldened by the fear they had caused, they longed for pursuit, but they had found as yet nobody to pursue.

They had almost gone by. She had almost relaxed her strict vigilance over her fear—her courage, though she had not called it so, that had kept her sitting and watching. She was ready to stand up, shake herself, and go to find Dicey and the children, when the last of the line of riders glanced up and saw her.

He stopped his horse, turned him to face the house, and sat looking up at her. Having recovered her stillness, pressing firmly downward within herself the physical tremor of her fright, she looked back at him. He was a young man with a curly, sand-colored beard. To somebody else, or in different circumstances, he might have seemed even, in his fashion, a handsome young man. But she feared him and she hated him, and without flinching she looked back at him.

She thought, and the thought was familiar to her, how easy it would have been, if she had had a gun, if she had placed herself a few feet back in the shadowy room, to

have shot him dead. And then she thought immediately, for this thought also was familiar, of the endlessness of such an act, or of its many ends multiplying unforeseeably forever. Maybe it was that thought that kept most people out of the way of such acts, when they could keep out of the way of them.

She knew she was daring him. She meant her facing him, her looking back, to be merely a refusal to be cowed by him. But she knew, she felt, the boldness even of so quiet a refusal. The deliberate impassivity of her face he would see as impudent. He would be challenged by it. He could, if he wished, shoot her and get clean away, unwitnessed, his shot not necessarily causing his companions even to look back.

His reprisal, though not violent, though it did not cause her to move or change expression, was nonetheless shocking to her, for it was just as unexpected as she expected it to be. He said without raising his voice, in perfect contempt, "Get your ugly face out of that window."

Though for some time she continued to watch him, defying him, for she trembled now with the knowledge that she gladly would have killed him, he went on and did not look back.

Finally she allowed herself to look away. She willed herself free of her anger and her fear. She allowed the familiar room and all the house, quiet and warm and shadowy, to come round her again. Old Eli, wherever he was out there in the dimming country, was safe. The household and the town still were silent. Chances were there would be no human sound again until morning.

She got up from her chair. She would go now to find the others. They would fix supper and eat. They would let another evening come upon them. They would sleep.

As she went by the mirror on her dresser, she paused a moment and looked in. Unlike her mother, but as her daughter Margaret would be in her turn, she was a young woman of principled modesty. She would not have liked to catch herself thinking of herself as beautiful, though she was. But she did think, articulating the words deliberately as if saying them aloud: "That is not an ugly face."



Fly Away, Breath (1907)

Andy Catlett keeps in his mind a map of the country around Port William as he has known it all his life and as he has been told about it all his life from times and lives before his. There are moments, now that he is getting old, when he seems to reside in that country in his mind even as his mind still resides in the country.

This is the country of his own life and history, fragmentary as they necessarily have been. It is his known country. And perhaps it differs also from the actual, momentary country insofar as time is one of its dimensions, as reckonable in thought as length and breadth, as air and light. His thought can travel like a breeze over water back and forth upon the face of it, and also back and forth in time along its streams and roads.

As in thought he passes backward into time, the country becomes quieter, and it seems to grow larger. The sounds of engines become less frequent and farther apart until finally they cease altogether. As the roads get poorer or disappear, the distances between places seem to grow longer. Distances that he can now travel in minutes in an automobile once would have taken hours and much effort.

But it is possible, even so, to look back with a certain fondness to a time when the sounds of engines were not almost constant in the sky, on the roads, and in the fields. Our descendants may know such a time again when the petroleum all is burnt. How they will fare then will depend on the neighborly wisdom, the love for the place and its genius, and the skills that they may manage to revive between now and then.

The country in Andy Catlett's mind has assuredly a past, which exists in relics and scraps of memory more or less subject to proof. It has presumably a future that will verify itself only by becoming the past. Its present is somewhat conjectural, for old Andy Catlett, like everybody else, cannot be conscious of the present while he is thinking of the past. And most of us, most of the time, think mostly of the past. Even when we say, "We are living now," we can mean only that we were living a moment ago.

Nevertheless, in this sometimes horrifying, sometimes satisfying, never-sufficiently-noticed present, between a past mostly forgotten and a future that we deserve to fear but cannot predict, some few things can be recalled.

In all the country from Port William to the river, one light shines. It is from a flame on the wick of an oil lamp, turned low, on a little stand table at the bedside of Maximilla Dawe in a large unpainted house facing the river in Glenn's Bottom between Catlett's Fork and Bird's Branch. The old lady lies somewhat formally upon the bed, seemingly asleep, in a long-sleeved flannel nightgown, clean but not new, the covers laid neatly over her. Her arms lie at her sides, the veined and gnarled old hands at rest. She is propped, in the appearance at least of comfort, on several pillows, for she is so bent by age and work that she could not lie flat.

She has been old a long time. Though "Maximilla" was inscribed in her father's will, by which he left her the farm in the river bottom, the family of "the slave woman known as Cat," and his stopped gold watch, and though it was signed in her own hand at the end of two or three legal documents, she was never well known even to herself by that name. Once upon a time she was "Maxie"—"Miss Maxie" to the Negroes and some whites. For at least as long, to herself as to all the neighborhood of Port William, she has been "Aunt Maxie." To her granddaughter, who was Andy Catlett's grandmother, she had always been "Granny Dawe," as to Andy she still is known.

Andy's grandmother, born Margaret Finley, now Margaret Feltner, sits by the bedside of Granny Dawe in that room in the dim lamplight in the broad darkness of the river valley in the fall of 1907, a hundred years ago. Margaret Feltner is a pretty woman—or girl, as the older women still would have called her—with a peculiar air of modesty, for she knows she is pretty but would prefer not to be caught knowing it. She is slenderly formed and neatly dressed, even prettily dressed, for her modesty must contend also with her knowledge that her looks are pleasing to Mat Feltner, her young husband.

With her are three other young women, also granddaughters of the old woman on the bed. They are Bernice Gibbs, and Oma and Callie Knole. Kinswomen who know one another well, they sit close together, leaving a sort of aisle between their chairs and the bed.

Their voices are low, and their conversation has become more and more intermittent as the night has gone on. The ancient woman on the bed breathes audibly, but slowly too and tentatively, so that they who listen even as they talk are aware that at any moment there may be one more breath, and then no more.

But she is dying in no haste, this Aunt Maxie, this Granny Dawe, who lived and worked so long before she began to die that she was the only one alive who still knew what she had known. She was born in 1814 in the log house that long ago was replaced by the one in which she now is dying. At the time of her birth, the Port William neighborhood was still in its dream of itself as a frontier, "the West," a new land. The chief artery of trade and transportation for that part of the country then was the river, as it would be for the next hundred years. When the time came, she bestowed her land, her slaves, and herself upon a man named James John Dawe, whose worldly fortune consisted of a singular knack for trade and the store and landing, the port of Port William, known as Dawe's Landing. He left the care of the farm to her. With the strength and the will and the determined good sense that have kept the farm and household in her own hands until now, she ruled and she served through times that were mostly hard.

The Civil War had its official realization in movements of armies and great battles in certain places, but in places such as Port William it released and licensed an unofficial violence also terrible, and more lasting. At its outset, Galen Dawe, on his way to join the Confederate army, was shot from his horse and left dead in the road, no farther on his way than Port William, by a neighbor, a Union sympathizer, with whom he had quarreled. And Maxie Dawe, with the help of a slave man named Punkin, loaded the dead boy onto a sled drawn by a team of mules. Looking neither right nor left at those who watched, she brought home the mortal body of her one son, which she washed and dressed herself, and herself read the great psalm over him as he lay in his grave.

The rest of her children were daughters, four of them. Her grief and her bearing in her grief gave her a sort of headship over daughters and husband that they granted without her ever requiring it. When a certain superiority to suffering, a certain indomitability, was required, she was the one who had it. Later, when a band of self-denominated "Rebel" cavalry hung about the neighborhood, she saved her husband, the capable merchant James John, from forcible recruitment or murder, they never knew which, by hiding him three weeks in a succession of corn shocks, carrying food and water to him after dark. By her cunning and sometimes her desperate bravery, she brought her surviving family, her slaves, and even a few head of livestock through the official and the unofficial wars, only to bury her husband, dead of a fever, at the end of the official one.

When the slaves were freed in Kentucky, when at last she had heard, she gathered those who had been her own into the kitchen. She told them: "Slavery is no more, and you are free. If you wish to stay and share our fate, you are free to stay, and I will divide with you as I can. If you wish to go, you are free to go."

There were six of them, the remaining family of the woman known as Cat, and they left the next morning, taking, each of them, what could be carried bundled in one hand, all of them invested with an official permission that had made them strange to everything that had gone before. They left, perhaps, from no antipathy to staying, for they arrived in Hargrave and lived there under the name of Dawe—but how could they have known they were free to go if they had not gone? Or so, later, Maxie Dawe would explain it, and she would add, "And so would I have, had it been me."

She and her place never recovered from the war. Unable to manage it herself, and needing money, she sold the landing. She hired what help she could afford. She rented her croplands on the shares. After her daughters married and went away, she stayed on alone. To her young granddaughters, and probably to herself as well, the world of the first half of her life was another world.

No more would she be "Maxie" to anybody. Increasingly she would be "Aunt Maxie." She was respected. By those who lacked the sense to respect her she was feared. She held herself strictly answerable to her necessities. She worked in the fields as in the house. Strange and doubtful stories were told about her, all of them perhaps true. She was said to have shot off a man's ear, only his ear, so he would live to tell it.

And now her long life, so strongly determined or so determinedly accepted by her, has at last submitted. It is declining gently, perhaps willingly, toward its end. It has been nearly a day and now most of a night since she uttered a word or opened her