

PART 1

STATE OF GEORGIA
COUNTY OF LUMPKIN

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF
FRANCIS HEARTY WITHERS

I, FRANCIS HEARTY WITHERS, of said State and Lumpkin County, do make and publish this my Last (and Only) Will and Testament.

ITEM I

(a) I wish my body to be buried on the site I have chosen on the grounds of Withers Village. I desire and instruct that a funeral service be held at Witherston Baptist Church. The costs of my funeral service and burial shall be paid out of my estate. My casket has already been purchased.

(b) All of my due and payable debts shall be paid out of my estate as soon as is practicable.

ITEM II

I give and bequeath the sum of ONE BILLION DOLLARS (\$1,000,000,000) to the municipality of WITHERSTON.

ITEM III

I give and bequeath the sum of ONE BILLION DOLLARS (\$1,000,000,000) to the present LEGAL RESIDENTS OF WITHERSTON to be divided equally among them in appreciation of their support of the Senextra factory.

ITEM IV

I give and bequeath the remainder of my estate, including my home on 1 Withers Hill Road, the contents of said home, the 40 acres designated as tax map/parcel 184 001H on which the home stands, and the 31.7 acres designated as tax map/parcel 182B 007T on Founding Father's Creek in Lumpkin County to BIOSENECTA for use in the construction of a Senextra factory on the site.

If BioSenecta should not use the property for construction

of a Senextra factory, the remainder of my estate shall go to the municipality of Witherston.

ITEM V

(a) I hereby appoint RICHARD RATHER as Executor of this Will.

(b) If for any reason Richard Rather should be unable to fulfill this responsibility, I appoint DR. NEEL KINGFISHER, JR., Director of Withers Village, as Successor Executor of this Will.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal to this my Will, this 20th day of May, 2015.

Francis Hearty Withers
FRANCIS HEARTY WITHERS
1 Withers Hill Road, Witherston GA 30534

Signed, sealed, published and declared by FRANCIS HEARTY WITHERS as his Last Will and Testament in our presence. We, at his request and in his presence, and in the presence of each other, have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses the day and year above set out.

WITNESSES/ADDRESSES:

GRANT HEMMINGS GRIGGS:
Grant Hemmings Griggs47
Pine Street, Witherston GA 30534

GEORGE FOLSOM, MD:
George Folsom, MD
3300 Mountain Pass, Witherston GA 30534

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WITHERSTON ON THE WEB

Friday, May 22, 2015

LOCAL NEWS

At 4:30 pm today, on the steps of Witherston Baptist Church, Mr. Francis Hearty Withers will celebrate his hundredth birthday. He is expected to make an announcement regarding his will. The event is free and open to the public. Witherston Baptist Church members will provide food.

Dr. Martin Payne, CEO of BioSenecta Pharmaceuticals, will come from Atlanta to honor Mr. Withers, who is the majority shareholder of BioSenecta stock and a member of its Board of Directors.

Dr. Payne will reveal the construction timetable for the planned BioSenecta plant in Witherston. BioSenecta manufactures the experimental drug Senextra, which has been developed to prolong healthy life.

~ Catherine Perry, Reporter

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

By Charlotte Byrd

On Monday, May 22, 1899, Witherston celebrated the completion of Founding Fathers' Covered Bridge, which crossed Founding Father's Creek two miles downstream from Witherston. Like Elder's Mill Covered Bridge in Watkinsville, upon which it was modeled, Founding Father's Covered Bridge spanned 100 feet.

After the covered bridge burned on July 4, 1910, the narrow bridge was rebuilt "uncovered," as it presently stands. Unable to support the weight of automobiles, Founding

Father's Bridge is used today primarily by hikers, picnickers, and fishermen.

POLICE BLOTTER

Wetherston Police Officers were called to Rosa's Cantina at 8:15 pm yesterday to stop a fight between two underage men over a scantily clad young woman. The three were arrested for underage drinking and taken to jail. The bartender said he hadn't realized that the woman was scantily clad because he was concentrating on his job.

CHAPTER 1

Friday, May 22, 2015, Labor Day weekend, Witherston, Georgia:

Old Withers is gonna make us all rich!”
“I heard he plans to give everybody in Witherston a million dollars!”
“But that’s when he dies. And he looks pretty healthy to me.”
“He turns a hundred today. He’ll be dying soon!”

“Oh my God! Georgia’s beauty queen Rhonda Rather looks pregnant! Isn’t she a bit long in the tooth to be carrying a foal?”

“She must be over fifty! God in Heaven! I didn’t know that Mayor Rather—I’ve always called him Rotund Rather—was such a stud.”

“Dear Rhonda doesn’t want to be pregnant, and her daughter Sandra does. I heard that Sandra and Phil are getting fertility treatments.”

“Faith Folsom has a bulge in her belly too, and she’s older than dirt. Do you all think she’s pregnant?”

“Probably. She doesn’t have the sense God gave geese.”

“Oh but she does.”

“Jesus God, I pray it doesn’t happen to me.”

“Honey, bless your heart and don’t get me wrong but you are way too old, way, way too old! You’re almost old enough to go to Withers Village!”

“But they don’t accept girls there.”

“Lottie, come here! Look at Francis Hearty Withers all dressed up on stage acting holier than the High and Mighty just because he’s going to bless us with his unearned money. He thinks we’ll clap for him when Scorch unveils his statue.”

“Gretchen, did you know he paid Scorch \$50,000 to make that statue?”

“I’m not giving Withers a single clap. The old geezer is an environmental criminal. He thinks he can use our town and our creek and our land for *his* toxin-producing Senextra factory.”

“Who’s that hunk in the blue suit?”

“The man talking to Dr. Folsom? He’s the CEO of BioSenecta, Dr. Martin Payne.”

“Well, good gracious, I’ll be darned! He’s sure easy on the eyes!”

“Francis Hearty Withers talked him into building a Senextra factory here.”

Detective Emma Evelyn Arroyo, “Mev” to her friends, heard these conversations as she walked through the crowd. She was on duty until 5:00, and her assignment was crowd control on the front lawn of Witherston Baptist Church. Rumors abounded that today Witherston’s local billionaire would announce the construction of a pharmaceutical factory on Founding Father’s Creek upstream from Witherston and that Witherston’s KEEP NATURE NATURAL environmentalists would protest. The Witherston Police Department, for which she worked, was on alert.

Mev spotted a group of teenagers wearing KEEP NATURE NATURAL T-shirts.

“Ladies and Gentlemen!” Mayor Rather bellowed into the microphone. “It’s 4:30 and time for a grand and glorious party! We’re here to celebrate the hundredth birthday of Witherston’s most famous citizen, actually Lumpkin County’s most famous citizen, Francis Hearty Withers. Thanks to all you folks for turning out for the occasion. Let’s give a big hand to Mr. Withers, the last of five generations of Withers residing on Founding Father’s Creek.”

Mev was relieved to hear only clapping, polite and restrained as it was. She was too preoccupied with her own immediate problem to share in her fellow Witherstonians’ excitement.

“Fellow citizens, I didn’t hear you. Let’s give a big, big, big hand to—let me drop a hint—Witherston’s most generous benefactor.”

More clapping.

Francis Hearty Withers sat smiling on stage in his navy Armani suit with his aqua Salvatore Ferragamo silk tie, holding his ivory-inlaid mahogany cane. He was flanked on one side by the tall, solemn, well-dressed Dr. Neel Kingfisher, who stood, and on the other by the overall-clad Scorch Ridge, a giant of a man, who also stood.

“Now let us sing ‘Happy Birthday!’”

Mayor Rather led the crowd of some three hundred men, women, and children in a spirited version of the song, which included the second verse usually sung for the very young:

“How old are you?
How old are you?
How old, how old
How old are you?”

Mr. Withers stood up and raised both arms in triumph. “I’m one hundred years old, and going strong!”

“Congratulations, Mr. Withers!” exclaimed Mayor Rather. “We’re so glad you are still with us. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for honoring us with your presence on this special day. In just a moment we will unveil our monument to you, a statue created by our own Witherston sculptor Scorch Ridge. Then we will partake of the green beans, blackeyed peas, ham, fried chicken, and cole slaw that the fine ladies of Witherston, Georgia, have prepared. Plus cold beer, the hot dogs that our fine gentlemen are grilling, and—need I say it?—the best birthday cakes known to mankind. But first, Mr. Withers, I understand you have an announcement to make.”

Withers quickly approached the microphone, barely leaning on his cane. He looked healthy, and not a day older than eighty.

“Hello, dear friends of Witherston,” he said, opening the black loose leaf binder that held his prepared speech and putting on a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. “In my lifetime I have accumulated great wealth. Now I want to make it yours.”

Withers paused as if awaiting applause. Hearing none, he turned back to his script.

“But you will inherit not only my money. You will inherit the mission of our great civilization. And if you accept my gift, you must accept responsibility for advancing this mission.”

“We will,” said Mayor Rather. “We will make you proud.”

Withers went on reading. “So what is the mission of our great civilization? It is to bring mankind power over his destiny. It is to bring order to wilderness and discipline to wildness. The land we stand upon today was once wilderness, occupied by animals and Indians. It was once wildness, where nature ruled the lives of animals and Indians alike. The land we stand upon today remained unchanged for ten thousand years until our ancestors brought civilization to this place. What did the Indians do who lived and died here during those ten thousand years, who inhabited the woods like animals, who left no permanent mark upon the world? Not much.”

“Whoa!” cried Gretchen Hall Green, whom Mayor Rather usually called as Gretchen Whole Grain. But then she referred to him as Mayor Rather Round.

Withers glanced momentarily at Gretchen and asked her, “Will you permit me to continue?”

Gretchen said nothing.

Mev looked at Neel Kingfisher. He was scowling.

Withers continued. “What did the Europeans do? A lot. Our ancestors developed writing and mathematics. Built the printing press, the steam engine, the telephone, the phonograph, the light bulb, the train, the automobile, the airplane, the computer. Created cathedrals, symphonies, novels, newspapers. Discovered penicillin, vaccines, and other drugs to overcome the diseases that would have killed us too young. To achieve all this, our ancestors acquired wealth and used it wisely. Witherstonians will acquire wealth too and will have the chance to use it equally wisely.”

“You forgot to mention the atomic bomb, Mr. Withers!” shouted Gretchen. “And you forgot to mention DDT and asbestos!”

“And bullets!” shouted Lottie Byrd.

Withers held up one finger. He continued to read. “And now, in the twenty-first century, we—BioSenecta Pharmaceuticals, to be specific—have developed the drug Senextra, the most life-changing achievement for the individual in the history of mankind. Senextra exemplifies our civilization’s mission: to control nature for the benefit of humanity. And that is the mission I ask you to carry out.

“For the past five years I have been kept alive and healthy by Senextra. And I thank BioSenecta for the privilege to test Senextra on myself. For the past four years the twenty-three residents of Withers Village, all of whom happily signed on to the FDA-approved pilot study, have also been kept alive and healthy by Senextra. We are grateful to Dr. George Folsom for conducting the pilot study.

“So on my hundredth birthday, I announce the date of our groundbreaking ceremony for a BioSenecta factory on my land in Witherston. It’s July 30. I’ve hired loggers to begin clear-cutting the site on June 15.”

Withers grew more and more enthusiastic. “My mission, my own personal mission, is to give every citizen of the United States the same opportunity for longevity that I have had.”

Withers paused for applause. A good number of people clapped.

Withers continued. “Now I will disclose my gift to you. Just last Wednesday, on May 20, 2015, I signed my will—I confess, the only will I have ever made—bequeathing each of you citizens of Witherston an equal portion of \$1 billion. I will read to you from my will.

“I give and bequeath the sum of ONE BILLION DOLLARS (\$1,000,000,000) to the present LEGAL RESIDENTS OF WITHERSTON to be divided equally among them in appreciation of their support of the Senextra factory.”

“I’ve filed my will at the Dahlenega courthouse, and I’ve appointed your mayor, Mr. Richard Rather, to be my executor representing both the town of Witherston and the residents of Witherston.”

The Witherstonians gathered on the lawn roared with pleasure, or at least two thirds of them did.

A third did not. Gretchen Green held up her hand-made sign: *SENEXTRA VIOLATES MOTHER NATURE*. Lottie Byrd held up hers: *KEEP SENEXTRA OUT OF OUR SYSTEM!*

Lottie Byrd was Mev’s favorite aunt and her next-door neighbor. She was also Mayor Rather’s nemesis. Lottie was fearless in expressing her environmental opinions publicly.

Gretchen, owner of Gretchen Green’s Green Grocery and president of Eat Locally, was Lottie’s accomplice. Gretchen’s rescued Great Dane, whom she’d named Gandhi, was at her side, as usual.

Lottie and Gretchen were the founders and funders of KEEP NATURE NATURAL.

“In addition to the \$1 billion I am bequeathing to the citizens of Witherston,” Withers hastened to say in his baritone voice, “I’ve also bequeathed \$1 billion to the municipality of Witherston for your support of the Senextra factory. Witherston will become world famous as the home of Senextra.”

Cheering erupted: “We love you, Mr. Withers!” and “Bless you, Mr. Withers.”

But suddenly other signs popped up: *SENEXTRA = SENILITY; DON’T FELL TREES TO BUILD FACTORIES; WE DON’T NEED MORE OLD MEN.*

Mev smiled when she saw *THIS LAND’S NOT OUR LAND, THIS LAND’S NOT YOUR LAND, THIS LAND IS CHEROKEE LAND*. Her Cherokee friend Gregory Bozeman would love it.

Mev watched Withers sit down. He looked old, tired, and confused. The anger she'd always seen on his face returned.

Ignoring the protest, Mayor Rather took the mic and shook Withers's hand. "Thank you, thank you, Mr. Withers, for your extraordinary generosity! Thank you! You are Witherston's gift from God. You are a great American. We will put your wealth to good use. And now it's time to unveil the sculpture that is our tribute to you! Please pull the cord, Mr. Ridge."

Amid the shouting Scorch Ridge moved to the podium, yanked a cord, and unveiled a ten-foot-high Elberton marble statue of a handsome, much younger Withers with his right arm outstretched.

A teenage girl wearing a pink *KEEP NATURE NATURAL* T-shirt threw an egg at the statue and splattered yoke across the forehead. Other KNN members chanted "*Withers must go!*"

A middle-aged man in a suit and tie yelled, "Eat mud, KNN!"

Another yelled, "Go back underground, you moss lovers!"

Suddenly everybody was yelling something at someone.

Mev chased the egg-thrower into the woods behind the church, while Witherston's three policemen blew their whistles, ordered the crowd to disperse, and arrested one young KNN protester, who went limp when cuffed, forcing two of the three to drag him to their car.

Withers returned to the mic. "What's wrong with you people?" he asked. "I thought you'd be happy. I've given each of you an opportunity to be rich, to do something good for the world. And I've given your town an opportunity to be famous, to advance the mission of civilization."

Someone hollered, "We don't want your drug factory in Witherston!"

Another hollered, "Or your drugs in our bodies!"

"Or your civilization in our nature!"

Withers's demeanor changed. He struck the ground with his cane. "Whose side are you on, young man? Our great civilization? Or this...this...this *nature*." He spat out the word "nature" and pointed angrily at the woods behind the church.

"Okay, young man, you *won't* get my drugs." Withers was yelling into the mic. "You won't get a Senextra factory here to make Witherston prosperous. I'll change my will. You'll have your wish. But you won't have your precious nature. I will log every tree in my woods. I will clear-cut my land, the thirty-one acres on the creek and the forty acres where my house stands. It's my land! Mine! To use as I please. It's not your land! And it's not the damned Cherokees' land!"

Withers seemed to lose control. He punctuated his remarks with his raised cane. "And you won't get my money! I will change my will. I will change my will immediately. Not a one of you Witherstonians will ever see a penny of my fortune. You have destroyed Witherston's future."

Mayor Rather grabbed the microphone. He was beside himself with fury. "You protesters have killed Witherston!" he bellowed. "You want to keep nature natural? You want to keep Witherston in the nineteenth century? You want to live like Indians, padding through the woods in moccasins, paddling up the creek in canoes? You want a life span of thirty years? Without modern medicine? Well, that's where you're taking us!"

Withers descended the stairs leaning heavily on his cane, walked slowly down to Hickory Street, climbed into the driver's seat of his long black Chrysler, and drove away. Harry, his Chow Chow, peered out the back window.

"God damn it. This can't be happening!" said George Folsom, Withers's doctor. "Damn it, damn it, damn it! How can those aging hippies defeat an idea whose time has come? Won't someone stop them? Won't someone stop Withers? We can't let him change his will! Not now, not ever!"

"Those aging hippies won't defeat anything," said Grant Griggs, Withers's lawyer. George and Grant were watching the police disperse the crowd. "They are on the wrong side of history, the wrong side of the law, and the wrong side of God. They are blocking our town's progress, depriving us of prosperity. Trust me, they won't escape punishment for their actions."

“What do you think Withers will do?”

“Probably change his will, like he said. He’s a cantankerous, stubborn old man, Harvard-educated and intelligent but stubborn, and motivated by one hundred years of resentment.”

“You’ve got to talk him out of it, Grant. Witherston’s future and your future and mine depend upon the execution of his will, this will, the will you wrote for him.”

“Trust me, George. This will will be Withers’s only will.

Professor Charlotte Byrd—Lottie to her friends and relatives—saw George huddle with Grant. She discerned their distress, and she felt their rage against the KNN protesters, Gretchen, and her. Their rage was not new. Like some other folks of her acquaintance, George and Grant viewed environmentalism as an attack on capitalism and hence on their way of life. For them it was either/or. Either capitalism or environmentalism. Either cars or trees. Either Christianity or atheism. Never neither. Never both. Never anything in between.

Why did some people, like George and Grant, get so angry at advocates for a clean environment? They needed a clean environment for their health just as much as the environmentalists needed it for theirs. But with an either/or outlook, the anti-environmentalists saw the world as a zero-sum game in which humans and Earth were in competition. They must be afraid that advocates for a human-friendly Earth might take away their stuff.

Well, how well would they do without a human-friendly Earth?

Lottie was aware of what George and Grant thought of her. Behind her back they called her Hickory Nut. She took it as a compliment. She loved hickory trees, especially when their leaves turned bright gold in October. Hickories surrounded her house.

Lottie thought back on the afternoon. Withers too seemed full of anger and fear. That was odd. What did that billionaire have to fear? Not poverty. Not starvation. Not homelessness. Not loss of health insurance. Not unemployment—he’d never been employed but he’d never needed to be.

Not loss of an only child gone off to war. Not the everlasting pain a child’s death inflicted upon his parent, and the guilt over things said and unsaid. Lottie feared nothing. At the age of sixty-four she’d probably never fear anything again. She’d already faced what she’d feared the most. She’d already lost what she’d loved the most.

Evidently Withers had not. So what could he fear? From Lottie’s perspective, Withers was standing atop a pyramid of assets and power obtained at the expense of others. He possessed more than his share of Earth’s bounty. Did he feel guilt? He should. He probably did. His billions protected him from want but not from guilt. Had he wanted to assuage that guilt today? Or had he wanted to extend his power beyond his death?

Lottie knew Georgia’s past. She knew that the wealth Withers had offered Witherstonians had been built upon a theft. A theft committed by her state against the Cherokees less than two hundred years ago.

But then, wasn’t much private wealth in these parts built upon original thefts? Thefts of land and gold from the Cherokees and labor from the Africans. Lottie knew about these thefts. She was an historian of the South.

Lottie was suddenly sure that Withers’s anger arose from guilt, guilt he’d inherited with his wealth, guilt that the land he owned had been stolen, that the gold that was the source of his wealth had been stolen. And the guilt was accompanied by fear, fear that the injustice his forebears had perpetrated would be avenged.

Gretchen put down her sign and leaned against a church pillar. She felt she’d been protesting all her life. She’d held her first sign—*MAKE LOVE NOT WAR*—in a demonstration against the Vietnam War with her mother when she was eight, after her father, Sergeant Keith Hall, had been killed in the battle of

Khe Sanh on January 31, 1968. She'd never forget the arrival of the Army officers at their home in Fort Benning to inform her mother of his death. The officers' refusal to provide details turned her mother against the war. Her mother, whom Gretchen had always called Ann, got a job in a Columbus book store, read everything she could about the war, and taught Gretchen a life lesson: that the powerful will always act to perpetuate their power.

On April 22, 1970, her tenth birthday, Gretchen and her mother went to Athens for the first Earth Day celebration. Gretchen learned from the teach-ins at the University of Georgia that humans were polluting the planet and upsetting the balance of nature. When she returned to Columbus she told her friends she'd become an environmentalist.

In 1973, Gretchen demonstrated with her mother in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment in Atlanta. When she returned to Columbus she told her friends she'd become an eco-feminist.

She remembered a conversation her mother had with her Uncle Hodge over the dinner table one evening.

Uncle Hodge asked her mother, "Well, Rachel, if you favor the ERA you must think that women are superior to men."

Her mother had answered sweetly, "No."

"Then you admit that men are superior to women."

"No, just different."

"Then if men and women are different from each other," Uncle Hodge asked impatiently, "who is superior?"

As a teenager, Gretchen realized that some folks, like her Uncle Hodge, ranked everything. They thought that if you were different from someone you were either superior or inferior. And if you were the superior one, you got to dominate the inferior one. Eventually she saw that humans mistreated Earth out of their assumption of superiority to other species.

In 1981, the same year her mother died of lung cancer, probably from smoking, Gretchen had married Smithfield Green, whom she'd met in a journalism class at the University of Georgia. Her love for him was born in loneliness but was nonetheless real, for a while. When Smitty got the offer to edit the *Wetherston Weekly*, Wetherston's short-lived print newspaper, she and Smitty came to Wetherston, where they'd stayed, but not with each other. They divorced amicably the next year, and Smitty had remarried. Gretchen had not, and she'd never quite buried her sadness over not having borne a child.

"A dollar for your thoughts," said Martin Payne.

"Hello," Gretchen said, surprised that the good-looking CEO of BioSenecta had approached her.

"I am Martin Payne, of BioSenecta," Payne said. "I noticed you among the protesters."

"I'm Gretchen Green. What did you think of my sign?" she asked him.

"What did you mean by nature?" Payne responded.

Dr. Neel Kingfisher headed up the Wetherston Highway on foot. He had walked the two miles from Withers Village to the church, and he would walk back. He thought about Withers's speech.

Neel couldn't dispute Withers's argument that Western civilization had exceeded his own civilization in its lasting achievements. His own civilization had not produced symphonies or cathedrals or novels. But was Withers's civilization inherently superior to his? What did superiority mean, anyway? Did the achievements of Withers's civilization give it the right to dominate all other civilizations?

Withers had mocked the Cherokee civilization's ten thousand years of living in the woods and not leaving their mark upon the land. But the woods had lasted ten thousand years. Was that not an achievement of his people? They'd sustained their culture—their way of life, their care for each other, their reverence for nature, and their environment—for ten thousand years. Was that not worthy of respect?

Withers's people no longer intimidated the Cherokee with bullets. They no longer considered the Cherokee an enemy. Instead, Withers's people absorbed the Cherokee into their midst and instilled in them their Western values.

Withers's people had conquered the Cherokee by integration, assimilation, conversion. Just as they'd conquered nature, by converting land into asphalt and steel, and drugs. Withers's people's lifestyle would destroy the planet for everybody. Their lifestyle was not sustainable. The human species would go extinct, because humans would foul the nature that supported them. Humans would then become one, once again, with the valleys and the rivers, the seas and the deserts, the soil, the rocks, the clouds, and the vegetation as their bones disintegrated, fossilized, vaporized. Their civilization's achievements—the symphonies, the cathedrals, the novels—would vanish in the cycles of time.

Contemplating Earth's future, Neel felt no sorrow.

Earth would survive, because Earth did not exist for humans. Ten thousand years from now, a hundred thousand years from now, a million years from now, who would populate the planet? Not humans.

Neel was lonely. He had acquired education in philosophy and training in medicine. He was successful by Western civilization's measure of success: money. But he'd lost all that he'd ever loved. Perhaps that was why he pondered the crime Withers's forefathers had committed against his people.

Perhaps that was why he contemplated revenge.

Now off-duty, Mev wandered through the crowd in search of her family. A light rain was falling on the uneaten green beans, the untouched cakes. She wanted to be with her husband and children. Late yesterday she'd gone to see her doctor, Jim Lodge, her gynecologist and obstetrician, to examine the lump she'd found in her left breast. With obvious distress, Jim told her she likely had breast cancer. His office made an appointment for her to see a Gainesville physician on Tuesday.

Jim, one of the few African Americans in Witherston, was the beloved husband of Lumpkin County probate judge Lauren Lodge, Mev's best friend. Their handsome son Beau, who resembled his dark-skinned father more than his blonde mother, was Mev's fourteen-year-old twins' best friend.

Mev found her boys Jaime and Jorge and her husband Paco drinking cokes with Jon and Gregory in rocking chairs on the porch of Scissors.

Jon Finley, a cosmetologist, and Gregory Bozeman, an ecologist retired from the Environmental Protection Agency in Athens, owned the hair salon.

They'd been life partners for sixteen years. Renoir, their white Standard Poodle, lay on the bench.

Jon and Gregory were not fans of Francis Hearty Withers, nor was Paco. Nor were Jaime and Jorge, who had turned into environmental activists under the influence of her Aunt Lottie. Jorge was wearing his green KEEP NATURE NATURAL T-shirt.

"Would you like a coke?" Gregory asked, getting out of his rocking chair.

"Thanks so much, Gregory," she replied, "but I'm all tuckered out and I need to take my family home to dinner. We'll see you all soon." She felt tuckered out indeed.

As they walked home, Mev commented: "I bet old Mr. Withers will be dead by Tuesday."

"Mom!" said Jaime. "Why do you say that? He looks like he works out. He's healthy!"

"Unfortunately," muttered Jorge.

"Because," Mev continued, "he can't change his will till Tuesday, since Monday is Memorial Day. If he dies before he changes his will, the 4,000 residents of Witherston will inherit more money than they've ever seen in one place. About \$250,000 each. If he dies after he changes his will, nobody here will get anything."

"I don't care," Jorge said. "I don't want a Senextra factory on Founding Father's Creek."

"Me neither," Jaime said.

Francis Hearty Withers opened the carved mahogany door reluctantly.

"I thought you might show up tonight," he said to his visitor.

"Hello, Mr. Withers. I know how distressed you are. Let's talk. Talking will make you feel better."

"I don't want to feel better. Or to talk. Now's not a good time for you to pay me a visit. Not a professional visit, not a personal visit. I want to be alone."

"Very well. I'll be back tomorrow."

After shutting the door Francis Hearty Withers uncorked a bottle of 2011 Syrah from Terry Hoage Vineyards to eat with the perfectly broiled steak the maid set before him. He ate in silence, as he had for decades. He used the time to think.

After dinner he went upstairs to his bedroom, sat down at his computer, and began to compose a new will. He wrote:

I, Francis Hearty Withers, wish to rescind my will of May 20, 2015. Instead of bequeathing the amount of \$1,000,000,000 to the citizens of Witherston, I would like every penny of my estate to go to—

Then his phone rang. He answered it.

"Mr. Withers, this is Abby Ridge. Are you still up? I've made a rhubarb pie for you. May I bring it now?"

"Yes, Mrs. Ridge. I'm still up."

He went downstairs and sat in his favorite chair. In a few minutes the maid showed Abby into the living room, took the pie she'd brought to the kitchen, and then disappeared up the staircase. "You saw those environmentalists insult me, Mrs. Ridge. You did, didn't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Withers."

"You were there for the whole riot?"

"Yes, I was there for all of it. I felt bad for you. That's why I baked you the pie."

"I have lived on this hill my entire life. My great grandfather founded this town. I deserve respect. I got none today."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Withers."

"I'd planned to give a lot of money to Witherston. A lot. I'd planned to give a lot of money to every one of you residents of Witherston. I wanted to make Witherston famous as the home of Senextra. My father thought I'd never do anything important in my life. But he was mistaken. He underestimated me. I made more money than he did, and he was pretty wealthy. I was going to give it away to you people, to be remembered in history for my generosity. Now I won't."

"Mr. Withers, most of us respect you very much. Only a few carried signs today."

"Enough to make me a laughing stock. I won't be an object of ridicule for ungrateful people. I'm changing my will. I'm leaving everything to BioSenecta for a foundation in my name. BioSenecta will get my money, and they can do with it what they will. Let Witherston watch."

Back in his study at Withers Village, Dr. Neel Kingfisher wrote in his journal:

What should I have expected? That Mr. Francis Hearty Withers would change his view of the Cherokees after one hundred years of contempt for my people? He speaks of advancing the mission of civilization. Civilization to Mr. Francis Hearty Withers means HIS civilization, as if there were no other. And what is the mission of his civilization?

To judge by its achievements—the automobile, the plane, the computer, and drugs like Senextra—I say it's to engineer nature for the benefit of humans. Engineer nature. For humans. And what is the goal? To control all of nature, as he sees it. Well, imagine taking on that responsibility! The Cherokee civilization, and I will always call it a civilization, had no such

ambition. I guess that's why we were defeated by Mr. Francis Hearty Withers's civilization.

Mr. Francis Hearty Withers assumes there's only one right way to live, his own; only one right way to think, his own; only one right culture, his own. Is there no room on this planet for multiple ways of living, multiple ways of thinking?

Mr. Francis Hearty Withers does not deserve a long life.

That night after the boys had gone to bed, Mev told Paco about her visit with Jim. They held each other for a long time.

"*Te quiero más que nunca,*" Paco said. "I love you more than ever. We'll get through this together. And we'll tell the boys tomorrow morning."