

The Reader's Companion to
THE RECLUSE

The Siege of the Fortress

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How The Novel Works

A Note on This Part

These essays try to name what the novel is doing. A reader hearing both registers simultaneously, or understanding why the flashbacks arrive through a hinge and not through a date, will find more in the novel the second time through. Name the mechanism. Put it back in the reader's hands.

The Dual Register: How the Novel Hears Itself

The novel operates on two frequencies simultaneously. The first is forensic: cold, material, evidence-based, the register of a trained investigator who has arrived at an abandoned house with a tape recorder and a professional obligation. The second is sacramental: theological, covenantal, the register of a world in which objects can carry more than their physical weight and a man's preserved record can constitute a form of witness.

These two registers are not modes the reader switches between. They are not chapters in the forensic voice followed by chapters in the sacramental voice. They run simultaneously in every scene. The forensic reader receives the story. The sacramental reader receives the same story at another depth.

How to Hear the Shift

The two registers announce themselves at the sentence level, if you listen for it.

Forensic passages run lean and declarative. Short sentences. Material description. Measurements. Listen to the novel reading the kitchen floor: *8¾ inches wide. Worn nearly black at the edges.* The syntax moves quickly because the investigator is moving quickly, cataloging, noting, assessing.

Sacramental passages lengthen. Here is the novel reading the same floor: *thirty years of a man's covenant with a place, pressed into the pine boards of a house he refused to leave.* Subordinate clauses accumulate. The syntax slows to match the weight of what is being witnessed.

The shift often arrives before it is named. The register is carried in the rhythm of the sentences themselves.

The G-Sharp Hinge

The novel's most precise deployment of the dual register is the hinge on the Fortress front door.

In the forensic register: it is a worn brass pintle on a Victorian house, introduced in Chapter 1 with its acoustic signature — a G-sharp cry, measured and noted, cataloged in the investigation record. A physical fact. Interesting acoustics.

The hinge's history is built across eight chapters. Its first appearance gets full acoustic treatment because the reader needs to know this sound. Its appearances in the flashbacks are calibrated — abbreviated in 1958, reduced to a phrase in 1960 — because the reader's growing familiarity with the sound is itself a measure of how deeply Elias has entered the house's history. By Chapter 9, Elias identifies the G-sharp, traces it, and discovers that the Grinnell piano inside the house has a dead zone: D above middle C through G-sharp one octave above cannot be played. Chapter 10 reveals the cause: Samuel opens the piano action with a flashlight and finds Ben East's manuscript — *The Witness*, six hand-sewn ledgers — physically lodged inside the instrument, wedged between the hammer rail and the back of the action stack, blocking the hammers in exactly that span. Donald placed it there in October 1978 because the composition ledgers were too rigid to fit the flue. He chose the piano because it was what the house offered.

In the sacramental register: the house plays the pitch its own instrument cannot produce. The door announces what the interior cannot achieve. And the reason the interior cannot achieve it is that the act of covenant-keeping — Donald preserving the record of what the ridge held — is physically inhabiting the mechanism. The physical facts require no interpretation: the hinge produces G-sharp, the piano cannot play it, and the manuscript is why. The second reading is licensed by those facts rather than imposed

on them.

The G-sharp hinge remains a hinge before it becomes anything else.

Why Both

The hinge cries G-sharp. The piano cannot play it. Both facts are true. The house plays the pitch of its own incompleteness.

Narrative Technique in *The Recluse*: How the Novel Moves Through Time

How the Flashbacks Arrive

The flashbacks in *The Recluse* do not announce themselves. There is no chapter break, no date stamp, no authorial signal that the narrative is about to move backward in time. The transitions happen through the body — through a sound, a smell, a texture — and the reader crosses time without being told to.

The hinge screams in the cold of February 1983, and the same acoustic signature opens into October 1958. The stiff paper of a map held too long in one position gives its dry complaint, and the reader is in the 1960 kitchen where the same map is being unfolded for the first time. The wintergreen smell in the cold parlor — wrong for February, wrong for a cold room, a summer smell, a working smell — dissolves the present into July 1978.

This technique has a name: sensory analepsis. The term just means that the movement back in time is triggered and marked by something physical rather than by a narrative instruction. The reader learns it within the first chapter and never needs to be taught it again. After that, the sensory bridge is enough: feel the thing, follow it back.

This is also the technique's deeper argument. The house is not a storage facility for memories. It is the memories — pressed into the floor, embedded in the acoustic signature of a worn hinge, preserved in a tin on a spice shelf. The flashbacks arrive the way they do because this is how the house actually holds what happened in it. The method belongs to the house.

The Nested Memory (Chapter 2)

Chapter 2 contains the novel's most formally precise temporal structure. Elias is in the Holly library, unfolding

the Primerose Estates plan map. The paper cracks open with a dry complaint. He records a note about the sound. Then the same sound opens the 1960 kitchen, where John has brought this same map to Donald.

Inside the 1960 scene, the northwest draft finds the gap under the back-room door — a cold Donald knew by name, “the same northwest wind hunting the gaps in this house for a hundred years, finding the same marrow it had found in 1910.” That cold, felt in 1960, opens a third layer: February 1910, their father three years dead, the two boys pressed against the warm chimney stack.

The descent runs through three layers: 1983, then 1960, then 1910.

Most nested flashbacks in fiction collapse the intermediate layer on the return — cutting from the deepest memory straight back to the present. Here, both layers are held and exited in the precise inverse order of entry. The 1910 scene closes, and the reader returns to the 1960 kitchen. Only now, with 1910 active, does the weight of what Donald says land fully: “*Give me until January.*” He sets the folded map toward John rather than pushing it. The distinction between a refusal and an assault. Then the 1960 scene closes and Elias lifts his palms from the map edges in 1983.

The ascent mirrors it exactly: 1910, then 1960, then 1983. The structure is symmetric.

What 1910 carries back up through the layers: “Hold the wall, Johnnie. Hold the wall and it holds you back.” That sentence is present in the 1960 kitchen whether it is spoken or not. Donald knows exactly what he and his brother have held together, and what it cost. The motion is the record of it: setting the map toward John rather than at him.

The Wintergreen Structure (Chapter 5)

Chapter 5 contains the novel's most complex temporal movement. It is not symmetric, and it does not re-

solve cleanly. Its outer flashback is a two-year multi-episode narrative arc; its nested flashback interrupts that arc mid-sequence; and the governing sensory instrument — wintergreen — carries ironic weight that only becomes fully visible in retrospect.

The entry is a smell. Gloria has found a tin of wintergreen salve on Lizzie's spice shelf and brought it to the parlor: "The wintergreen smell was in the parlor now. Wrong for February. Wrong for a cold room. It was a summer smell, a July smell, a working smell." In the cold room, the smell brings July back. The 1983 present dissolves into July 1978: Donald hauling water in the heat, a woman standing at the gate, her hands closing over the bucket handle.

The outer flashback covers approximately twenty months: Mae's approach, her care of Donald's knee, the slow progression of visits, her request to use the summer kitchen, the van's arrival, and Donald's incremental displacement through the house's rooms until he is reduced to a canvas cot in the log hull of the 1850 summer kitchen — the first room, the original structure, the beginning of everything.

Midway through, as Mae applies the salve and the wintergreen smell fills the 1978 kitchen, the novel drops deeper: "*The smell went back further than Mae.*" The 1920 layer: the grain harvest, the bay mare's kick, Donald dropped into the cut stubble. Lizzie clears the table in three movements, opens the cherry cabinet, returns with a tin and a length of flannel. The wintergreen smell fills the kitchen, sharp and clean and medicinal.

The nested layer is brief. Then the outer flashback continues.

What the mid-sequence interruption achieves: it recontextualizes the outer layer without resolving it. When the reader returns to 1978 and continues through Mae's displacement of Donald, the 1920 layer is active. Mae used the

same remedy Lizzie used. She moved through the kitchen the way Lizzie moved through it. The care was real. It was also the opening move of a takeover that would end with Donald on a cot in the summer kitchen. The betrayal and the maternal echo are simultaneous — and the wintergreen smell makes them simultaneous. The reader can only feel this irony at full weight once the 1920 scene has placed the smell in Lizzie's hands.

The Corrected Reconstruction (Chapters 9–10)

In Chapter 9, Elias discovers the oilcloth bundle sealed in the dead north flue of the dining room chimney. He reconstructs what Donald must have done in October 1978: gathered the photographs, the land patent, the letters, and sealed them against the wall. The reconstruction is coherent. It accounts for the physical evidence.

In Chapter 10, Samuel extracts a second bundle from inside the piano keyboard panel — six hand-sewn composition ledgers, the Ben East manuscript. This contradicts the first reconstruction. The manuscript is too large for the flue. Donald used two hiding places, not one.

Elias must revise his mental model. The October 1978 night has to be re-imagined with the new fact inserted.

Most flashbacks in fiction are authoritative — the narrator shows you what happened. Here, the version of events is provisional. The past is uncertain until the physical evidence resolves it. This is the dossier method applied to memory itself: the hypothesis is subject to cross-examination by the physical record. The reader revises alongside Elias rather than receiving the correct version from the outset.

The manuscript discovery adds a further layer. Inside the front cover of *The Witness* is the \$10,000 Surface Damages check — “the bad paper marking the Word.” Donald did not cash it. He placed it inside the manuscript. That de-

tail closes a thread seeded in Chapter 7, where the check's absence from the summer kitchen wall had already been noted. The reader, like Elias, understood that the check was gone but not where. The corrected reconstruction doesn't merely revise one scene — it completes a chain of evidence that runs across multiple chapters.

The Witness as Literary Object

The companion identifies *The Witness* as six hand-sewn composition ledgers recovered from the piano action in Chapter 10. What the companion has not addressed is what the manuscript does as prose — because what East does in those ledgers is the novel's clearest demonstration of a method that stands in deliberate contrast to Elias's.

The Witness operates in two registers. The first is the working notes: first-person, direct address to Donald, self-correcting, accompanied by pencil margin sketches. These notes are almost forensic in their honesty — East annotates his own failures of accuracy, states what he is trying to hold and why it keeps escaping him. A note on Donald: “*he was not yet the man he became. At six he was still loose in the body, still quick... You may disagree with this reading, Donald, if you are reading this. But I was watching from outside.*” A note on his father: “*He is not the villain of this story and I will not write him as one. He was worn through. The farm did that.*” East is working toward precision the way Elias works toward precision — except that the precision he is after is not evidentiary. It is emotional and moral. He is trying to render what the event cost, not what it was.

The second register is the formal prose of the narrative itself: third-person, omniscient, reaching for the interior of an event in a way that Elias's tape recorder never can. Donald at six — “*loose in the body, still quick, given to the kind of joy that turns all labor into contest*” — is available to Ben East's prose in a way he is not available to Elias's in-

vestigation. Elias can read the wear path on the floor, the man's hands in the 1920 harvest photograph, the inscription on the back of a porch portrait. He cannot write "*Donald was not yet the man the gravity of his life would make him.*" That sentence requires a witness who was there in the body, in the field, watching.

East's note to himself about the dragon stone's loss says it exactly: "*The image I need is the clack — the sound the stone makes when it hits the pile and disappears among the common granite. That is the whole chapter. I haven't found a way to say it without saying it. The sound has to carry it.*" This is the writer's problem stated with precision: the event's moral weight is concentrated in a physical sound, and no amount of description can substitute for the reader hearing it. When the formal prose arrives at the stone's loss — *Clack. It struck the granite and went into the upper third of the heap* — the sentence East said he couldn't write has been written. The working notes and the formal prose are one document: the record of a man finding out how to say the thing he had not yet found a way to say.

Elias's method withholds interpretation and accumulates evidence. East's method reaches toward felt truth directly — not instead of the material record, but through it. *The Witness* is not a better document than Elias's dossier. It is a different instrument applied to the same ground. Donald understood this before Elias arrived. On the same October afternoon in 1978 he sealed the documentary record — the photographs, the patent, the letters — in the dead north flue, and lodged East's literary testimony in the piano. Two different kinds of document, two different hiding places, one night. The record and the witness. The evidence and the cost.

The Scene Seen Twice (Chapter 7 / Coda)

In Chapter 7, Gloria leaves at 8:40 AM on Sunday, February 13, 1983. The scene is present-tense dialogue. There is no retrospective narration, no authorial commentary on what the departure means. It is experienced in real time by a 1983 Elias who does not yet know what it signifies.

In the Coda, set in late 2025, old Elias revisits that departure. The same scene is re-encountered forty-two years later, seen through the accumulated weight of everything that followed. The memory is accurate; nothing factual has changed. What has changed is the meaning.

In Chapters 9–10, the revision was factual: the reconstruction was wrong, new evidence corrected it. Here, the revision is interpretive: the memory is correct, but what it costs has only become visible with time. These are two different kinds of not-knowing — not knowing what happened, and knowing what happened but not yet knowing what it meant.

The reader who arrives at *The Recluse* having already read Vol. I carries a third layer into this scene: they know what old Elias became before they opened Vol. II. The Coda's re-seeing of Gloria's departure is not only Elias looking back at himself — it is the reader watching him look back at a moment they have been carrying since before the novel opened.

The re-seen departure is not the Coda's only work. Before it arrives, the Coda delivers what forty-two years of investigation could not: the name Clara, spoken aloud in the Fortress kitchen. Elias visits Sarah in early October 2025 and gives her the names on the photographs, one by one, until he arrives at the porch portrait and stops. He says the name. Samuel had given it to Sarah in 2001; Elias is now confirming what the record always withheld. The shadow in the photograph remains a shadow. The name gives it weight.

The Coda's structural revelation is the attic panel. Elias carried that knowledge since February 14, 1983 — forty-two years — and on that October evening in the Fortress hallway, he set it into Sarah's hands: the access panel at the east face of the center chimney stack, the walnut box and the Gardner bugle behind it, sealed there since the last night of the investigation. The investigation that appeared to close at the end of Day 8 did not close. It was held open for four decades by the keeper of one specific fact, waiting until the conditions for delivery were met. The record is not finished when it is assembled. It is finished when it reaches the right reader.

The Coda closes on the water meditation. Iron fixes. Stone records. Water carries and dissolves, keeping no record of its passage, and what iron and stone require, water provides: the medium through which the fixed and the recorded are released, slowly, back into what preceded them.

Donald VanDeusen: Known Through What He Left

Donald VanDeusen is the central subject of *The Recluse*. He is alive in 1983 — in Plant City, Florida — and never walks into a room with Elias. He never speaks in a scene set in the primary narrative. For the full span of the investigation, the novel's central figure is physically absent.

His characterization is built through five instruments.

The flashbacks. Donald is fully rendered: his interior accessible, his speech direct, his physical movements precise. The reader sees him in 1910 (eleven years old, pressed against the chimney, holding his brother's weight), in 1960 (setting the map toward John rather than at him), in 1978 (opening his hands on the bucket handle for the first and only time in his life). These are dramatized scenes with full interior access.

Physical artifacts. The wear path: 8¾ inches wide,

worn nearly black at the edges. The stopped clock: mechanism destroyed, setting knob removed, covered with a dishcloth folded in thirds. The sealed flue: the oilcloth bundle placed on the brick ledge and painted over, a man ensuring the record outlasted him.

Other witnesses. Samuel Walker's three-generation knowledge of the property. Art Garrison's direct contact with Donald in the final years. Between them, they triangulate a man neither fully knew.

Found documents. The Rose Vistas prospectus, November 1968. Donald's response, in carpenter's pencil: *I already have a house. It's built of the ground I stand on.* One sentence. His refusal, his theology of the ordinary, the ground and the house as inseparable — all in eleven words.

The Chapter 13 letter. Present-Donald speaks once. He confirms the fixed points and asks Elias to give the Dragon Stone to Ben East — not knowing the stone is already sealed in the house.

The unified technique — flashback, artifact, testimony, document, letter — is characterization by archaeological inference. The reader builds Donald the way Elias builds his case: from the record, working backward. He was here for eighty years and then he was gone, and the record is what remains.

The Open Thread: Clara and the Limit of the Investigation

Every investigation has a terminus — the point at which the evidence runs out and the method can go no further. In *The Recluse*, that terminus has a face.

She appears in Chapter 9, in the porch photograph at the bottom of the oilcloth bundle: a woman standing in the gap between Donald and another man on the north steps, her hands resting on both men's shoulders, her face half-visible in the shadow of the overhang. Three lines on the reverse, in

three distinct hands. Lizzie's schoolteacher Palmer Method at the top: *The Family. Oct 1927*. Below it, Donald's carpenter's pencil, written sometime around 1948: *The weight of the silence*. And below that, a third hand — softer pencil, letters formed one at a time, the hand near the end of its practice — written in October 1978, fifty-one years after the photograph: *I really miss her*.

The two 1927 letters in the bundle address her obliquely. Adelaide Hadley's letter — December 1927 — knows something and is sealing the record: the formal language of someone who has decided what will not be said. Ben East's letter — postmarked Grand Rapids, winter 1927 — says he heard late, through the city, and that he saw enough before he left in the spring of 1926 to understand what that autumn cost. Neither letter names her. Neither letter explains her. Both letters are acts of witness to something they will not transcribe.

This is as far as the investigation can go. Elias has the photograph, the inscriptions, the two letters, and Samuel's summary of the township's knowledge: *something happened in 1927 that didn't get said out loud. Whatever it was, it stayed inside this house*. The dossier method, which has been adequate to Donald's entire moral history — the lease, the well, the sealed flue, the canvas cot in the summer kitchen — encounters here something the method cannot reach. There is no artifact that names her. There is no document that resolves her. There is a photograph in which she is half-visible, and three lines in which a man measured his grief across thirty years of silence, and two letters from people who knew more than they were willing to put in writing.

The novel does not present this as a failure of investigation. It presents it as the nature of the record. Some things stayed inside the house and the house did not give them up. The forensic reader receives: unknown woman, 1927, signifi-

cance unresolved. The sacramental reader receives the same information and understands that certain kinds of grief leave no documentation — only weight. Samuel said it in a sentence: *whatever she was to him*. The investigation cannot improve on that sentence, and does not try to.

Sarah will find the same photograph in 2000, among the eight low-quality copies left on a library closet shelf after the Noveks took the originals. She will find the same face, the same gap between the two men, the same shadow on the overhang. She will not find Clara. Some things the house holds without releasing. The record of Donald's grief for this woman is in the object; who she was is not. The investigation found what could be found. What remains is the weight of the silence, which Donald named and which the novel preserves intact.

The Interregnum: Chapters 14 and 15

The question of stewardship does not stop when Elias's investigation ends. It runs for seventeen more years, through two occupancies, and it makes its case through negative example.

Chapter 14 gives the Bowens — Edna in particular — as a study in adequate reading. She sees the wear path on her first morning alone in the kitchen and files it. She cleans carefully around the charred base of the walnut doors without touching the char, understanding that whatever happened there is not hers to erase. She finds the copper-sealed well cap in the south yard — the iron cap fused with solder oxidized to verdigris — and covers it with topsoil and plants grass over it. She knows the bear cage is behind the summer kitchen and deliberately does not go to look at it. She recovers the tall case clock and the chandelier from the Holly shops where the bank had let them go. She does all of this, and then she leaves, and the sentence the novel gives her on the way out accounts for her limitation: *she had been a*

careful reader of this house, not its keeper. A reader returns the book. The G-sharp hinge sounds once as she pulls the door shut, and she never crosses the threshold again. It is a recognition of a real line.

Chapter 15 gives what happens when the instrument is wrong for the thing it is applied to. Greg Novek is twenty-eight, a CPA, and he approaches the Fortress with a book about load-bearing walls and a spreadsheet on costs. He is not negligent and not cruel. He is working from the wrong register: *the accountant's method, not the craftsman's*. He is already in the finished room in his mind before he engages with what is in front of him. In November 1985, nailing Masonite paneling to the dining room chimney face, he positions a two-inch common nail at the center of the east wall, sets the point against the panel, and strikes. The nail passes through the hardboard, through Donald's grey paint, through the twenty-four-gauge tin flue cover, and strikes the mason jar. The glass does not crack. It shatters. From behind the panel, a dry, glassy clatter — something rolling, something finding new positions in a confined space — and then silence. Greg listens for three or four seconds. Then he drives another nail six inches to the left. In the chimney shaft, six feet below the ledge: the Dragon Stone and the lightning whelk, in the packed ash of the last fire Donald burned in 1948. They do not rebound. They stay there.

The Dragon Stone's arc is complete: discovered by two boys in 1905, lost in the fieldstone heap the same afternoon, recovered by Elias and Samuel on February 14, 1983, interred in the mason jar the same evening, destroyed by a nail six inches off-center in November 1985. Permanently inaccessible. The archive that Elias spent eight days assembling is undone in the duration of a hammer stroke and three seconds of listening. The irony is not dramatic — no one in the scene understands what they have done. That is the point. The Dragon Stone does not require a villain. It

requires only someone arriving with the wrong instrument, unable to see past the solution already planned.

What Chapter 15 also demonstrates — as a structural principle — is that ruinous intervention and inadvertent preservation are often the same act. The Masonite paneling that buries the chimney face also locks the air around the original plaster behind it. The cellulose insulation blown into the attic by a Waterford contractor covers the access panel John M. Gardner built into the joists near the center chimney stack, and with it the walnut Story Box and the Gardner bugle — sealed in the dark under eighteen inches of insulation for the next thirteen years. The Noveks never find them. Neither do any of the buyers who walk through over the following year. The wrong wall, poured on top of the right record, keeps it. The preservation reader will recognize this instantly: *bad alterations can inadvertently save what they fail to destroy*. This is not a consolation. It is the novel's unsentimental assessment of how the record actually survives — not through foresight or institutional care, but through the dense indifference of one layer of material laid on top of another.

The Network Already in Frame

Chapter 3, February 10, 1983: Elias and Samuel, driving Hensell Road in Samuel's Scout, stop to help a young man — about twenty-one, heavy jacket, a Triumph Spitfire with a burned wire harness — get his engine running on jury-rigged alligator clips. The encounter takes fifteen minutes. They never exchange names. The Spitfire pulls onto Hensell Road and disappears.

Chapter 16, August 2000: Samuel meets Luke for the first time inside the restored Fortress. He holds Luke's face a moment longer than an introduction requires. Luke goes still. "*The Spitfire. Hensell Road. February 1983.*" Luke: "*You were one of the two men in the Scout.*"

Luke is the man who will buy the house, haul creek water from Buckhorn for the failed well, re-point the north chimney, fit the walnut chair rail sections back to the dining room walls where Greg Novek had removed them. He drove past the Fortress on a February detour while Elias and Samuel were running the investigation a mile away. He was already in the frame before anyone knew whose frame it was. The network of obligation extends further than any single act of attention can map — not because the novel is arranging coincidences, but because a landscape and its people are connected in ways that precede the investigation and survive it.

The Invented Word

A Small Vocabulary

The Recluse introduces three coinages — words that arrive in the text as though they always existed. They appear without definition, without ceremony, in the registers where they belong.

Wearing (*noun*)

The accumulated emotional and physical imprint left by long habitation — the trace a person's repeated presence leaves in a place. Not the wear path itself (that is a visible groove in the floor), but the invisible record of all the mornings that made it.

The word is not invented from nothing. It is a grammatical pivot: the gerund *wearing* — the act of wearing — shifted quietly to a standalone noun. The thing worn into a place. This is what makes it nearly invisible. A reader encounters it and does not register it as unusual, only as exact.

It appears in Chapter 14. Edna Bowen, the new owner, on her first morning alone in the kitchen, finds the wear path near the stove. She runs the side of her foot along it:

The floor still carried their wearing.

No gloss. No explanation. Thirteen chapters of that kitchen — its pine boards, its worn center, the single man's path between stove and table — have prepared the reader to receive the word without being told what it means. By the time it arrives, the reader already knows the thing it names.

The settle (*noun, condition*)

The accumulated gravity of habitation, grief, silence, and memory in a place. Not a feeling the visitor brings. A condition already present, laid down by years of living and loss, that the visitor walks into. Heavier than atmosphere. Less visible than architecture. Somewhere between

the two.

This word is harder to define, which is precisely the point. Its meaning is learned by accumulation, the way real folk language works — heard in the right mouth, in the right room, until the reader understands it not by definition but by recognition.

It belongs to Samuel Walker, the surveyor whose family has known this property for three generations. He does not explain it. He would not.

It appears in Chapter 16. Sarah has restored the house. Samuel comes to see it. He looks at the rooms and says:

“The settle’s still in it.”

One line. The word carries everything the novel has built — every flashback, every artifact, every silent room — and drops it into a single folk noun that no dictionary contains. The reader, having spent sixteen chapters in this house, knows exactly what it means. They felt it before Samuel named it.

Dead-settled (*adjective*)

A structure, post, or root mass that has stopped moving because it has been in place long enough to become part of the ground. The “dead” means *finished settling* — arrived at permanent state, not dying. It is a trade term, the kind farmers and surveyors carry without noticing they carry it.

Art Garrison uses it in Chapter 7, about the walnut roots along the Hensell Road frontage:

“Dead-settled,” he said. “Root mass is bigger than the tree by now.”

He does not pause on it. It is not a thesis statement. It is the word for the thing, used by a man who has always had it. The reader receives it the same way.

You carry these words now. *Wearing. The settle. Dead-settled.* The first two will find you — you will feel the first when you return to a place after years away, and you will walk into the second without knowing you have entered it. The third you will use without ceremony, the way tradespeople do, and not remember where you learned it.