

11/13 x 28 Janson

New title --  
A Wider River

*My notes*  
Strike happy keep this  
Strike reach  
Strike missed  
roots

2- Voice of the Alapaha

Now that he is ninety-some-odd years old and can no longer  
 lumber down the banks of the Alapaha, he has to scooch low and back  
 like a brittle old turtle. Down and down the root ladder set in  
 packed gray dirt to the dais of roots below <sup>under</sup> a broad tupelo, and a  
 cypress older than he is. Still, the cypress is sprouting tender  
 green needles, and ~~the~~ <sup>(young shoots)</sup> tupelo branches <sup>reach</sup> out over the slow water.  
~~Cloudy flocked shadows like smoke under glass.~~ Cypress knees, like  
 pagan idols, stand in the eddy along the edge, <sup>with</sup> ~~where now and then a~~  
 gray-pied moccasin <sup>can be seen braided from base to tip.</sup> ~~around some of them.~~ The  
 buzz of crickets and locusts <sup>join with</sup> and a hawk crying over the banks of inward-  
 leaning birches, ~~a spring trilling downriver and seeping clear and~~  
~~insignificant into the forever flow to the sea.~~ <sup>The</sup> Felled heart  
 cypress and pine along the unsunned banks <sup>are</sup> ~~the~~ fish-roe tint of  
 Dump Sanders, who, in <sup>his</sup> ~~can~~ patched khaki, ~~can~~ blend right in while he  
 fishes.

On the platform of roots, he stands, cranking his backbone to  
 straight position -- he will fish now -- then <sup>reaches</sup> for his cane pole  
 in the wattle of bamboos growing along the bank. <sup>Old</sup> pole has  
 caught many a jack <sup>and</sup> more mudcats that he can count. He practically

*[Handwritten scribbles]*

*[Handwritten scribbles]*

lives on fish. Has raised a big family on fish caught out of this hole. That, and the corn and peas and such he grew on halves, plus coons he trapped in the muddy slews and hammocks of Swanoochee County. Unwinding the line of his pole, he listens for sounds that belong the river's rilling, a crow's sore-throated caw-sorting them from sounds that don't belong like the clank of wood on metal, which likely means somebody is fishing from a boat upriver.

He goes dead still, his ~~keen~~ shadow merging with the shadows of maple switches on the sun-spotted water. As he gazes upriver, his cataracted eyes pick up the blur of boat and man spiriting from the tea-tinted shallows toward the smoky drop-off of Dump's fishing hole.

In a minute, the boat will pass, and in another minute Dump will bait up with that worm he can't yet see on that nearby red-stemmed maple branch. In spring, you don't have to bring bait. A smart fisherman can find bait a smart fisherman can whittle cork from the driftwood washed aground like Indian canoes. Helps when you're old and poor and on your own.

The boat trolls right into Dump's fishing space, not two feet from him, but blocked from view by the wall-like tupelo. Metal sides scrubbing against the curb of cypress roots. Scaring off the fish. While the man fishes, Dump listens. Phoof! Tab on a can of cola or beer. Sounds of swigging. A plastic tackle box snaps open and clacks shut. Then some cursing the bite of a hook maybe. A red-and-white cola can tumbles downstream, the stern of the boat scrubs along the cypress knee boundary and hugging the tree trunk, Dump sidles north along the bank of snaky roots, careful not to trip,

careful not to pry his shadow from the shadow of the tupelo now falling across the bow of the boat.

The man's fishing line sings, snaps <sup>1</sup> ~~"Sonofabitch!"~~ <sup>2</sup> ~~"Sonofabitch!"~~ <sup>3</sup> ~~"Sonofabitch!"~~

Dump draws back as if ~~he's been~~ <sup>he's been</sup> stung by a yellow jacket. He knows that voice <sup>1</sup> that harpy, gruff boom <sup>1</sup> a voice he hates. <sup>2</sup> ~~Fears~~ <sup>3</sup> ~~Fears~~ that <sup>the</sup> voice is all in his head. <sup>4</sup> ~~Fears that~~ <sup>5</sup> ~~because~~ he hears it so often <sup>6</sup> ~~in his head,~~ waking and sleeping, he might <sup>7</sup> ~~be~~ <sup>8</sup> ~~only~~ conjuring it from nothing now, <sup>9</sup> ~~he~~ might be losing his mind.

"When you get done turning under that back field, go on over to the old Watson place and fertilize that corn. Rain's on its way."

But it's sundown now, Dump would say to himself, tipping the sweat-sopped brim of his hat and peering west/southwest toward the Gulf <sup>1</sup> ~~Peter's Mudhole:~~ No clouds scrolling up, just a butchered sun leaking blood onto the pipeline (he never said that to Pender, never talked back to any of the men he farmed for). But of course sundown was the whole point: keeping Dump on a job that would carry over into the night and stall him from returning home <sup>2</sup> ~~home~~ being a small, green, dogtrot house that Dump could call his own only as long as he sharecropped for Pender <sup>3</sup> ~~until~~ <sup>4</sup> ~~Pender could do what he had in mind to do with certain other shared property~~ <sup>5</sup> ~~(Dump never let on he knew what that was either).~~

Dump waits now till he hears the boat rising along with the current, then peeps through the bole of the tupelo at Boss Pender's padded back and silver head gliding in and out of the broomed willow shadows downriver. Though Dump believes he'll have to wait another hour or so before his fish will come back, he tips to the maple tree, left of the tupelo, and plucks a couple of worms, <sup>6</sup> ~~and~~

~~Not a single dam~~

Boss Pender. Dump

Pender used to say

ital

and  
6

Deposits them in the Prince Albert can in his shirt pocket. Then he perches on <sup>the</sup> a bench of tree roots <sup>and waits</sup> ~~above the cauldron of fish slime steeping into the roky damp.~~

Sunday <sup>is</sup> the worst day of the week for running into <sup>others</sup> fellows fishing the Alapaha. Seems like Dump spends the better part of his days dodging them. They don't go to church, <sup>but</sup> Dump doesn't blame them. Church is here. God is here. <sup>On</sup> this sunny morning. A breeze ruffles the tree tops, then wrinkles the surface of the water like silk.

Suddenly Dump hears the boat come banging back <sup>o</sup> oar on metal, oar on metal <sup>and</sup> then it shows in the sun-blared strip of black water off the far bank. Too late <sup>for him</sup> to get up and hide <sup>keep</sup> ~~still.~~ Riding high and heavy on the jacked-up seat, Pender clanks his paddle to the bottom of the boat, grunts himself forward, and feeds up a rope tied to the bow from the mangle of tackle boxes, <sup>and</sup> rods, and a ~~snowy ice chest and what looks like a brown paper sack~~ <sup>s</sup> of ~~snacks.~~ Dump is so still, he's barely breathing; <sup>so</sup> ~~still,~~ he can feel the pain festering in his joints, <sup>but</sup> His mind never strays <sup>far</sup> ~~from his body.~~ Shoulders tucked, knees crossed, shrunken, he watches his shadow on the burnished bower of roots, barely thicker than the cane pole in his right hand.

Pender swivels left in the elevated seat and wraps the rope around a cypress knee, swivels right and picks up a rod, rears and casts <sup>and</sup> a glittery red and blue split-tail plastic worm ploops into the water <sup>almost</sup> at Dump's feet. Boss Pender is squinting into the sun now, face red as a ripe tupelo berry, <sup>his</sup> Silver hair shining like sun on frost.

Dump has just about decided that Boss can't see him because of the sun in his eyes, or maybe because Dump, ~~burnished the tint of the roots his brogans rub everyday,~~ <sup>so well</sup> blends into the background.

Then Pender reels in and casts again, this time downstream of the tupelo, ~~then~~ <sup>and</sup> shades his eyes with his hand, gazing right at Dump:

"Hey," he hollers, "you wouldn't happen to know a man goes by the name of Dump Sanders, would you?"

Dump clears his throat, spits <sup>1</sup>/<sub>M</sub> he's been dying to spit for God knows how long <sup>1</sup>/<sub>m</sub> "Can't say as I do," he calls back.

"Well," says Pender, shifting and bracing one hand on his bloated waist, "I'm from the IRS. Been looking for a feller owes us some money." His great haunches spread on the boat seat, his gut settles on his lap.

Dump tee-hees into his hand.

Boss laughs. "How you, Dump?"

"Ain't no good," says Dump, <sup>5</sup> and wipes his mouth with the back of his hardened hand, then crosses his wrists on his crossed thighs. ~~The way a woman would sit.~~

"Come by here a second ago, didn't see you," says Pender. No mention of fishing in <sup>what everyone knows is</sup> Dump's hole.

"I been right here," says Dump.

The tip of Pender's rod dips, <sup>thin</sup> bends, <sup>and</sup> creaks, <sup>as</sup> he <sup>starts to</sup> reel in, watching the water dash and <sup>as his</sup> ~~dart~~ and the ~~great~~ fish lunge and wallow <sup>5</sup>, then sull <sup>5</sup> on its side for Pender to wench it <sup>into</sup> to the boat.

"Old mud <sup>1</sup>/<sub>f</sub> fish," says Pender. "You want him?"

"Can't say as I do," says Dump. When his wife was living she would make mud <sup>1</sup>/<sub>f</sub> fish balls <sup>1</sup>/<sub>m</sub> Dump loved them <sup>1</sup>/<sub>m</sub> fried brown.

Pender lifts the fish by its bottom lip, yanks the hook free, and drops the fish flapping to the bottom of the boat. Poles and cans ringing and knocking. "Old mammy fish like that'll eat up all your bass," he says.

<sup>Bass rifles through</sup> ~~He rifles~~ in his tackle box <sup>until he</sup> finds his pocket knife, thumbnails a blade to open position, and gets a good grip on the handle in his right fist. Then he rams the blade into the flouncing fish, rinses the knife in the water, and puts it back in his tackle box. <sup>Hardly missing a beat</sup> He picks up his rod, ~~and~~ checks his glittery ~~red~~ <sup>and blue</sup> plastic worm, and casts it upriver <sup>to</sup> Dump's side. The line swings down <sup>ing</sup> to Dump's hole as if <sup>the hook is pulled by</sup> a magnet, ~~is drawing the hook.~~

"Been catching much this spring?" asks Pender.

"None to speak of."

Pender's rod bends, goes straight. Silence. Then, "Sears is got a lil' ole trolling motor I been looking at. I ain't much for all this paddling and it getting hot." He squints up at the sun, <sup>then</sup> ~~showing down~~ at Dump posing in the shade <sup>as if</sup> ~~like~~ he's been planted there.

"Course my knees in the shape they in," says Pender, "won't be many more trips for me. That old gout! Can't hardly put in and take out no more."

He reels in, changes lures <sup>to</sup> this time a yellow plastic worm with a green head and bead eyes <sup>to</sup> and swings it out, watching water rings form ~~from the bull's eye~~. He has cast <sup>to</sup> midriver, halfway between him and Dump. "That oughta do it," he says, <sup>leans back</sup> and ~~leans~~ till the boat seat groans. "I had to put in up there at the bridge this time. My landing washed out last winter when the river come up."

Dump knows <sup>and</sup> suspects Pender knows he know<sup>s</sup> that Pender no longer owns a boat landing, no longer owns even the land the landing was on.

<sup>Pender</sup> He waits, reels in a bit. "Looks like this old river's getting wider, don't it?" He rests one hand on his tree-trunk thigh, staring up and down the ~~creek-width~~ river.

"Yessir, it do." Dump has been watching the river widen for ~~the past~~ many years <sup>current</sup> skiving away the sandy banks and lashing at the tiers of trees till the treeline that used to stand mid<sup>bank</sup> has stepped up to the edge to meet its doom, naked roots anchoring to the riverbottom. He's been watching the river change, just as he's been watching Boss Pender change, from rich man to poor man. All that farm and timber ~~land~~ in the seventies, dwindling to nothing. Over<sup>taxed</sup>, under<sup>valued</sup>, lost. Not that Dump could gloat over Pender and the others losing their inherited farms; without them <sup>and</sup> their land, Dump was out of work, out of house, out of money <sup>not</sup> pride, since he couldn't lose what he never had. But ~~losing out~~ <sup>it</sup> himself had almost been worth <sup>his losses to see</sup> ~~it~~ ~~watching~~ Pender lose it all. Watching Pender grow fat and feeble and foolish <sup>after years of being so</sup> ~~lean~~ lean and mean and proud.

"Hate like the devil, Dump, to have to leave you with next to nothing, <sup>Pender well know</sup> right here at the end of the year and Christmas coming. You with that big drove of younguns to buy Santy Claus for. But you know how it is <sup>I</sup>—I got that fertilizer bill to pay. Seed bill and what-have-you. Looks like farming's going to nothing. Maybe next year <sup>././.</sup>"

roman

*strike wildly, freely, carefully, water pours*  
Pender's rod bends, his line sings, and he reels with the

leisure of a satisfied fat man. A ten-~~to twelve~~ pound bass shines silver beneath the umber surface, streaks left then right, flips from the churning water with its sleek body arched, then belly=  
*toward* flops ~~to~~ the riverbottom. The line whips ~~and~~ Pender lurches ~~forward~~. The boat rocks, balances *ing* itself like scales. ~~He~~ *Pender* grins, laughs, whoops, holds *his* the line tight and high, and trawls the big fish in. "I got you, boy!" he says ~~and~~ *(leaps)* reaches into the water, and lifts *out* the fish with its notched tail furling. He lowers it *carefully* into the boat. ~~Rattle of cans, rattle of tackle boxes, rattle of paper sack.~~

Both hands spread on his knees now, Pender presents his gleeful face to Dump. "Man, I'm burning up," he says. The fish writhes and drums on the boat bottom, sounds vibrating across the ~~bothered~~ river.

*might keep* "Reckon I'll mosey on in," says Pender ~~and~~ *just* swivels *ing* his seat ~~back~~ and reaches *ing* for the rope wound around the cypress knee. ~~He~~ *Suddenly* yelps, ~~yanks~~ *jerks* back, ~~stands, rocking the boat,~~ *and jumps up,* and ~~clutches~~ his right hand with his left. The boat pitches ~~side to side,~~ *will* Pender now ~~lunging and~~ *clutching* spraddles *ing* his legs, trying to steady it. Too late. One more pitch of the stern, and water ~~streams~~ *freely* into the boat, ~~now leaning toward~~ *pour* Dump ~~bank,~~ where ~~he~~ watches Pender tilt, sidelong, hollering "Snake!" in that voice that counts in Swanoochee County, then gurgling as he goes under. ~~His~~ *His* silver ~~head parting the blackish water~~ and ~~his~~ hair streaming over his red open face, he bobs among the scatter of tackle boxes and ice chest, rods and empty cola cans, and ~~sinking~~ *releasing* brown paper sacks ~~dumping~~ cellophane-wrapped ~~moonpies~~ *#* and saltine crackers, ~~tinned sardines and petted meat.~~ The bloody carcass of



the mud fish ~~sinks~~ white belly up, <sup>adds its marbling to the river</sup> ~~marbling the brown water red~~  
~~water as the darts~~ water-darts from the freed bass point toward Dump's hole.

✓ Don  
# can't read

Dump, on his feet now <sup>but</sup> stiff and silent, watches as Pender dog paddles to the other bank, downriver from the snake-wrapped cypress knee, and drags <sup>himself up</sup> ~~up to~~ and onto a toppled cypress, panting and gasping. He just hangs there over the water-polished cypress, ~~crisscrossing tupelo roots, drenched body~~ half-in, half-out of the water. "Old moccasin got me," he yells, ~~almost apologetically,~~ or as if in explanation, for looking the fool. "What you do 'bout that?" He is eyeballing his right hand like <sup>it's</sup> a fascinating rock.

"They say if you got ery knife," yells Dump, "cut it and suck the pysin."

Still clinging to the cypress with one arm, Pender digs into his right pocket, then gazes downstream at his tackle box <sup>floating</sup> ~~garing~~ <sup>cast</sup> ~~aground~~ a sand bar.

"You got your knife on you?" he calls.

"Yessir," says Dump, and fishes his jackknife from his pants pocket. "Got one right here I'll loan you."

"How bout bringing it on over here."

"Can't swim a lick," says Dump. He can <sup>1</sup>/<sub>M</sub> or used to could <sup>1</sup>/<sub>M</sub> but he's not going to.

"Don't know if I can make it over there," says Pender, wrenching round to look at the far bank. "I'm just about whipped."

Dump's heart starts pumping hard, as if the snake venom is pumping from Pender's blood stream to his. "Want me to run up to the commissary for help?"

~~Signatures~~

"I reckon," says Pender, ~~and~~ <sup>rests</sup> his head on the cypress trunk.

"Hate to leave you like that." ~~Pender says~~

"I hate for you to," says Pender, and checks his hand <sup>now swollen</sup> ~~again~~ and stiff as a tarry work glove.

"It's a good piece there and back," Dump calls, as if to keep talking is the best medicine. "You gone be awright?"

"I don't know," says Pender, ~~and~~ <sup>still on</sup> his head to the log ~~again~~

"I'll be on back," says Dump and starts his slow progress up the bank, looking around now and then <sup>back</sup> at Boss Pender, ~~draped half-~~ ~~body over the log~~

"Man that old and fat ain't got no business. ./. ./.," Dump says to himself, Halfway up the bank ~~is~~

"Hey, Dump," yells Pender, "I don't think you oughta go yet."

"How come's that?" Dump yells back.

"I don't want to die/. ./. be/. ./. by myself."

"What you say?"

No answer.

~~What was that, Pender?~~

No answer. #the#

"You ok?" Dump is scooting down <sup>the</sup> bank again. He'll just have to try swimming, try to help.

"I ain't ok," says <sup>Pender</sup> Boss. "Ain't ok atall. Think it's my heart."

Dump's foot slips from the rooty ledge, and he slides on his belly to the platform below. He grunts. On his knees, he crawls around till he can spot the bloated body through the warp of heat. "I done fell over here," he calls, "broke something."

No answer, no movement from the log, just water lights spiraling up the trees on the west bank.

"You ain't pulling my leg, are you?" ~~Dump~~

4 Dump, who never saw the snake, can imagine Boss Pender and his fox<sup>hunting</sup> buddies at the commissary teasing him later about rushing around trying to get help for Pender, who most likely is playing a prank on him, ~~then sliding like an otter down the bank.~~

They do it all the time. Once, Dump's coon dog leaped off the tailgate of his pickup and hung himself by his leash, and Dump didn't find the dog, dragging behind the truck like a butchered hog, till he coasted in at the commissary for gas and saw them all on the porch laughing. And then ~~of course~~, there was that other time: all of them gathered to josh and lie and laugh about Pender sending Dump out to work at night so ~~his~~ Pender could be with ~~his~~ {Dump's} oldest daughter, who by rights should have been ruined but instead went on to college<sup>1</sup>/<sub>M</sub>—paid her own way!<sup>1</sup>/<sub>M</sub>—and became a school teacher. A good daughter. Dump can depend on her to bring him home-cooked food and take him to the doctor<sup>1</sup>/<sub>M</sub>—been twice in his life—<sup>and she</sup> who even gives him Father's Day cards which he doesn't deserve because he never said, "Stop <sup>that</sup> ~~here~~, Pender; don't you mess with my daughter no more." "I don't need your work to keep my family ~~in groceries.~~" He never said that<sup>1</sup>/<sub>M</sub>. Not even to his wife, who likewise went along to the fields at night, to open the fertilizer

sacks and dump them into the ~~fertilizer~~ hopper. Both of them knowing, but neither of them saying, just eyeing one another from where she stood by the truck <sup>(C)</sup> load of fifty-pound sacks with Dump on the tractor, the chut-chut-chut of the engine scuttling across the emerald rows of marching corn and rising in marl and potash dust to the star-pricked sky. Dump's hand <sup>had been</sup> on the switch key, threatening to cut the sound so his wife could hear clear what he had to say, that she'd best be getting on to the house <sup>M</sup> "Stay there where you belong, Woman, and see to the younguns." But he <sup>had</sup> never said that either. <sup>^</sup>

"You better say something," <sup>Dump</sup> he calls to Pender. "I'm gone if you don't."

The slow water rills <sup>the</sup> ~~the spring trickles~~ <sup>the</sup> a hawk lifts over the river, crying.