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Day 10: The Town Under the Water



When They Tried to Erase Your People Forever

It's day ten, and I'm still carrying the weight of yesterday's truth. Viola's courage is still echoing in my chest. It's unbelievable how she gave everything to stand beside those fighting for what was right. And just when I thought I'd heard the worst of what the evil of this country has done to people who look like me, I come across a story that pulls me even deeper.

Picture this: You're floating on a boat, drink in hand, sun on your face, somewhere on Lake Lanier, Georgia's vacation jewel. Kids are laughing, jet skis are flying by, and everything feels like peace.

But sixty feet below your boat... lies a cemetery that no one ever visits. The bones of children, the ruins of churches, the shattered dreams of families who once called this place home. A whole Black town that was thriving, beautiful, and successful. It is now drowned and forgotten. Or so they thought.

This isn't fiction. This is Oscarville. And the water can't wash away what really happened here. Not the lynchings. Not the racial cleansing. Not the stolen land or the stolen futures.

Today, we're diving beneath the surface. And I promise you, what we find down there is going to change the way you see this country, and maybe even yourself.

Picture this with me: You're floating on a pontoon boat on Lake Lanier, Georgia's most popular vacation spot. The sun is shining, families are laughing, and jet skiers are racing across

the crystal-clear water. It's picture-perfect, right? Now let me blow your mind with what's really beneath those beautiful waters.

Sixty feet down, in the murky depths where the sunlight can't reach, sit the bones of churches where your ancestors praised God. The foundations of homes were built by Black families, who built generational wealth. The remnants of a school where children learned to read despite a world that wanted to keep them ignorant. And scattered throughout the lake bed are unmarked graves. This is a disheartening final resting place of people whose names were deliberately forgotten.

I'm about to tell you a story that's gonna make you see that peaceful lake in a different light. This is the story of Oscarville, Georgia. Oscarville was a thriving Black town that was literally erased from existence, not once, but twice. First by racial terror in 1912, then by government flooding in the 1950s. (Historical documentation: *Blood at the Root* by Patrick Phillips)

This isn't just history. This is the story of what happens when your people build something beautiful, and a racist system decides it's too threatening to let it stand.

Get yourself comfortable, because this journey is gonna take us to some dark places. But I promise you, by the end, you're gonna understand something powerful about the resilience that runs through your bloodline.

When Black Excellence Was Too Much to Bear

Let's go back to 1900, to the rolling hills of north Georgia, about an hour northeast of Atlanta. Picture this scene with me: The Civil War ended 35 years ago, Reconstruction is over, and in this beautiful area called Oscarville, something remarkable is happening.

Your ancestors are doing the impossible. They're not just surviving; again, they're thriving.

By 1911, around 58 Black families owned their own land in and around Oscarville. Not sharecropping, not working on someone else's land. They OWNED it. We're talking about roughly 1,100 Black residents total, and these folks weren't just getting by; they were building something extraordinary. (Community details documented in *Blood at the Root*)

A Community of Excellence

Now let me tell you what this looked like in real life. These weren't just farmers scratching out a living. We're talking about skilled craftsmen and blacksmiths who could shape iron like artists. They were carpenters who built homes that stood for generations. Also, bricklayers whose work was so fine that white folks had to hire them even if they hated doing it.

Your ancestors had their own churches, multiple churches, where they worshiped freely. They had a school where their children learned to read and write at a time when most of the South was trying to keep Black folks illiterate. They had local businesses that served the community and brought money into Black hands.

But here's the part that's gonna make you proud and angry at the same time: These farmers were so innovative, so successful, that while the rest of Georgia was struggling with agricultural problems, Oscarville was absolutely flourishing. When the boll weevil was destroying cotton crops across the South, the farmers in Oscarville figured out how to fight it off. When other areas were going broke, Oscarville was making money.

Meet the Man Who Built a Legacy

Let me tell you about one man whose story is gonna break your heart and inspire you at the same time. His name was Byrd Oliver, and he represents everything beautiful about what your ancestors built in Oscarville.

Picture Byrd with me: He's a pastor and a farmer, a man who works with his hands during the week and speaks the word of God on Sundays. He's got a wife and seven children, and they're living the American dream that America says isn't meant for people who look like them. Byrd owns his own land, not a little plot, but enough to make a real living. His family has a house, stability, and hope for the future.

Now here's what's important about Byrd's story: He's not unusual in Oscarville. He's the norm. This is what Black excellence looked like when your people had the chance to build without constant interference. This is what your ancestors created when they had even a small taste of freedom.

But success, especially Black success, has always made certain white folks nervous. And in 1912, that nervousness was about to turn into something much more dangerous.

The Spark That Lit the Fire

Now I need to take you to September 1912, and I'm warning that this part of the story is gonna make you angry. But I need you to hear it because it shows you exactly what your ancestors were up against.

A 19-year-old white woman named Mae Crow is found beaten and unconscious in the woods near Oscarville. She dies from her injuries. Now, any decent human being would want justice for this young woman. But what happens next isn't about justice, it's about using tragedy as an excuse for racial terrorism. (Incident details from Patrick Phillips' research and Barnes & Noble interview)

Picture this scene with me: Before any real investigation happens, before any evidence is gathered, white folks in Forsyth County immediately blame the Black community. No logic. No due process. Just a pure, racist assumption.

The First Murder

Here's how fast this escalated, and I want you to feel the terror your ancestors felt: A Black man named Rob Edwards gets arrested as a suspect. Before he can even get a trial, an angry white mob drags him from the jail, beats him with crowbars, and lynches him right there on the courthouse square in Cumming, Georgia.

But y'all, it didn't stop there. It got worse.

Two Black teenagers, and I need you to really hear this because these were somebody's babies, 16-year-old Ernest Knox and 17-year-old Oscar Daniel, were arrested. Under extreme duress, we're talking physical torture and threats of