

# **Cold Mountain**

**CHARLES FRAZIER**

**Level 5**

**Retold by Mary Tomalin**

**Series Editors: Andy Hopkins and Jocelyn Potter**

## Introduction

Inman shaved in front of a metal mirror. The eyes that looked back at him had a look that he did not remember, a look that was more than just food hunger. It was a killer face, with eyes that looked at you sideways. But Inman tried to believe that this face was not him in any true way, and that it could in time be changed for a better one. It is the time of the American Civil War (1861–65), and the northern states are winning the war against the southern states. A wounded soldier, Inman, has deserted from the southern army and is trying to return to his home in the Appalachian Mountains and the woman he loves. The journey home is long and dangerous, and Inman doesn't know if he will return alive. The war has done terrible things to people, and he witnesses great poverty, cruelty, and violence. He sees himself as a killer, a desperate man. Can he save his soul, or will he turn into the animal that others have become? *Cold Mountain* is a novel of many levels. It combines a story of war and its effects on the men and women involved in it, a story of love between a soldier and the girl he left at home to wait for him, and a story of a great journey, full of moral and physical dangers and choices. The American Civil War was a terrible four-year struggle between the north and the south of the United States. The rich southern states had a slave-based agriculture, growing cotton and rice. The northern states had a growing industrial system and believed that the use of slaves in the south was cruel and shameful. When Lincoln, a northern politician and a strong voice against slavery, was elected President in 1860, some of the southern states decided to leave the Union and govern themselves. A year later, there was civil war. Thousands of men on both sides fought and died in bitter battles. Finally, in 1865, the south was forced to surrender. A few days later, Lincoln was shot dead in a theater. The hero of this novel, Inman, comes from North Carolina, one of the southern states, but from a poor, mountainous region of small farms and simple people who had very few slaves. He has joined the southern army at the start of the war and has spent almost four long years fighting and killing. He is sick and ashamed of his actions in the war. Seriously injured, he lies in a hospital, thinking of all the horrors he has seen. He decides that he cannot face them again, and leaves one night to walk back to the peace and quiet of his home in the mountains. Inman is like Odysseus, King of Ithaca, in Homer's *Odyssey*, a book that Frazier had in his mind when he began to write this novel. Odysseus, after a long war against the Trojans, starts a long and dangerous journey home to his waiting wife, Penelope. He faces many difficulties, and meets helpers and dangerous enemies. Inman, too, must struggle with many dangers on his way back to his home and Ada. Ada is the other main character in the novel. Born and brought up in Charleston, a big city in the wealthy state of South Carolina, Ada is a well-educated young city woman, smart and beautiful. She can speak foreign languages, play music, draw and paint, and

discuss literature. Unfortunately, when she has to live alone on a farm in the mountains of North Carolina, this kind of education is of no use at all. She suffers a slow, hard education, but with the help of a local girl, Ruby, she learns to understand nature, to grow and use plants— not just draw and paint them. She becomes strong and independent. When their men go away to war, the women who are left behind have to change— to do all the work and make decisions themselves to keep themselves alive. The women of this novel are almost all strong characters— much finer than the men, many of whom are criminals, thieves, and drunks. Vonnegut's journey is similar in many ways to the journey of Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, a seventeenth century religious work by John Bunyan. The book can be read as a moral story. Inman (a typical man) travels to Cold Mountain with its Shining Rocks as a place of peace, love, and spiritual healing, a kind of heaven. But these places actually exist, and W P Inman was a real man, the author's great-great-uncle, who fought in the Civil War and walked home to Cold Mountain at the end. Cold Mountain is a real mountain in the Smoky Mountains in North Carolina near the border with Tennessee. Frazier based the novel's hero on information that he had about W P Inman and about his great-grandfather, who, with his brother, also fought in the war. Charles Frazier was born in 1950 and grew up in the mountains of North Carolina. He taught English literature at American universities. He tried some writing in his youth, but without much success. Then at the age of forty he suddenly wanted to write again, and he started to study the history and stories of the southern Appalachian Mountains. Two or three years later, he took the story of W P Inman's walk home as the main subject of his book, and began to write. He described his speed of writing as "a page a day," but after six years the book, his first novel, was finished and it was an immediate success. It won two national book prizes. In 2003 a movie of the novel appeared. It was directed by Anthony Minghella and starred Jude Law as Inman and Nicole Kidman as Ada. In 2004, Renée Zellweger was voted the Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her playing of Ruby. Charles Frazier quickly became famous. He stopped teaching and began work on his second novel, *Thirteen Moons*, which appeared in 2006. He was given \$8 million to write it. He now lives with his wife, Catherine, on a farm in North Carolina, where he writes and raises horses.