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Editor's note on the cover photograph:

The past few years I have been on a great many book tours, mostly in the South, and whenever possible, I take my truck—that way I always have my books with me, so that if a bookstore doesn't get a shipment in or (I wish) they sell out, I will have stock with me. And when I travel, I look for stories for my newspaper column, *Ruffin-It*, which appears in several papers in Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama.

One morning a couple of years ago, while driving around between gigs, I was snooping through the ruins of an old home site not far from Jackson, Mississippi, when I stumbled across the most amazing thing. About me lay the scorched remnants of an old foundation, with rusted shells of appliances and odds and ends left from a total burning, including the cast iron plate from a piano that would never make music again. The leaves had already fallen, and everything was winter-smitten, brown and gray.

As I was making my way back toward the truck through the underbrush, a spot of green off to my right caught my eye. I walked over to it and could not believe what I was seeing. There on a carpet of dead leaves lay a large light bulb, the kind used outdoors (maybe four inches in diameter at the widest point), and inside it was a fern. I blew away some leaves that were lying on and about it and kneeled down and inspected it more closely.

The brass base (the threaded part that screws into a socket) had broken away, and a fern tendril had made its way inside the bulb, found warmth there, and flourished. The rest of the fern had long since been blasted by frost, but that tendril had burgeoned and filled the bulb. It had its own little greenhouse to protect it from the cold. What a wonderful symbiotic fusion of the natural and manmade worlds.

—Paul Ruffin