

Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Signature Page	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Epigraph	v
*The Lady of the Loom	1
*Diviner	2
The Cavern	3
*Someone's Underground River	6
A Day on Someone's Island	8
*'Write on My Back, Please'	11
At Lake Lorelei	12
*Twin Beds	20
The Stone Hunters	21
*Fingers	54
The Peachstone	55
*Bow and Arrow	62
Five Visions of Caesar	63
*Imagine:	66

* Denotes poetry

"And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come.

And I looked and, behold, a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."

Revelation 6: 7 & 8
Scofield Reference Edition
The Holy Bible

The Lady of the Loom

The bourdon beat
deep in the heart
falls.
In the diastolic pause
a hushed coo releases.

A tiny bird bathing in the aorta
shakes delicate drops of blood from its wingtips.
A tiny dove rolls into focus
answering the call of its mate.
It can enter the skull
it can enter the spine
it lodges in the lumbar region.
Cartilage cracks.
The pinned dove wrenches its legs free.
Its beak tugs the sciatic root
releasing the bubbles of pain.
They float quietly to the brain.

The lady of the loom
stands in the skull.
Her mirror gathers all
as the expanding bubbles
trickle to the glass floor.
At each hushed tap
she weaves a wide knot
into her tapestry.
She has caught it all:
the hushed coo
the drops of blood
the tap of pain.
Her mirror casts the bubbles
trickling down her cheeks.

She has caught it all:
she weeps
she weaves
she weeps.

Diviner

Sand grains rattle in a blind man's skull,
a gourd of bone for seeds of thought.
He shakes his head from side to side.

His fingers test a crooked twig
as cartilage cracks on wooden thoughts.
His hand contracts on bits of bark.

His parchment mouth holds autumn dust
as hands of trees hold leaves of thought.
His tongue extracts the grit of sand.
The hollow twig dips down to bone.

The Cavern

The senses awaken. There is a tingling in my nose, and I'm aware of a hint of incense. Low scratchings, murmurings, reach my ears with a hollow sound. There is the distant lap of water. I open my eyes and note that a dark procession moves along a narrow ledge. Phosphorescent water undulates below it. The seven hooded figures in the procession carry each a candle. The candles project shadows onto the wet granite surface of the cavern. As the procession moves along the wall, the shadow mural moves with it. Each hand-held taper becomes in turn, a sword, a crucifix, a phallus. A moment of pause, a heartbeat in length, attracts my attention to my own presence here. I am suspended in a transparent coffin. I am aware of flutterings in my chest. One tiny bird bathes in my heart shaking delicate drops of blood from its wing-tips. Suddenly, a priest hovers at the side of the coffin, a pigeon cradled in his hand. He twists the bird's neck back. I watch the down ruffle as the neck cracks. Blood oozes out. One feather falls free, drifts in the air. With a slow overhand gesture, the priest tosses the bird into the pool below. There is no splash. The bird slides beneath the surface, leaving a black hole in the undulating phosphoros. There are no more flutterings in my chest.

The procession begins to carry me along the ledge. I can feel the movement from within the coffin. No hands touch it. Its undulation seems without direction and I am almost lulled to sleep. Suddenly, the mouth of the cave bursts into white light. The sky is ether and can be seen evaporating in wide-flung fingers drawn to the sun. I glance at my own fingers. They trail through the coffin into the arabesque sky of movement.

The procession reaches the churchyard and stops. There is a row of yew trees to my left, a marble basin to my right, at my feet a church, at my head an open grave. The leaves of the yew trees dangle like fingers. The marble basin is white and holds no water. A bird is bathing there, shaking reflected sunlight from its wingtips. The flutterings in my chest return. The church spires above me, all white stone and quartz. A slender cross peaks the spire, while at its base a gargoyle perches on a narrow ledge. The beak is open and I note that it has an udder. A hooded figure kneels, milking the stone sculpture. Some of the milk has spilled and run down the wall as long slender fingers gripping the face of the church. The windows are without glass. All are barred.

Suddenly, a solitary horse pounds into the churchyard. The hoofs are silent, caught in slow motion, and strain toward a distant fountain. The fountain is moss-laden but dry. Beside the fountain stands my child, as yet unborn, but standing there with half my features, holding his mother's hand. She is a stranger yet quite familiar. The vision distorts behind a flurry of fine powder. The priest has returned scattering incense on the glass of the coffin. I watch as I am lowered into the grave. Incense continues to fall on the coffin and some of it begins to sift through. It drifts into my nose and throat and I can gather no saliva to swallow it away. The priest steps forward, his hands clutching a white crucifix high above his head. It is caught between my vision and the line of the sun. The Christ, pinned there in the light, begins to melt like candlewax. The figure droops to one side, twisted as though by a stroke, then slowly dissolves, leaving the cross naked. With it, the priest strikes.

The glass does not shatter. The shaft has punched through and hangs above my face like a spigot. I am in darkness. There is only the shaft before my face and flutterings in my chest. Through the shaft of the cross water begins to flow, filling the coffin. I do not swallow it. I relax. The water rises above my face and dissolves the coffin. A phosphorescence glows near the surface. A pigeon drifts to my side and from its open beak bubbles stream to the surface. The face of a child appears to my left and his hand flutters weakly as his body passes by. The flutterings in my chest are gone. My mouth opens and I exhale. The water explodes and there is a rush of cool air that draws me into the undulations of the sky. The scent of ether is stronger as the sun nears. Poised above its surface, my body curls into a ball and plunges into the bright pool of sleep.

Someone's Underground River

Someone
has tunneled
an underground river
somewhere.

The walls are rectangular
and are covered with dark glass mirrors.
The river has a strong current
and the someone has placed
a small punt in the pull of the stream,
and set a man inside the boat.
The man has not been given oars.
The man as well has not been told
that the river ends just ahead,
drops down to a lower level
through a small pipe,
and that he is speeding
in his small punt
toward the dark glass wall
at the end.

7

Suddenly,
the man in the boat
sees the end of the tunnel,
and at the same time
sees the two images
projected onto the end mirror -
both images human
himself
and the someone.

The man in the boat
rises to greet them,
but the current crashes
the boat into the mirror.
The mirror shatters,
revealing a solid wall of rock and dirt.
The shock stops the speeding punt.
It also throws the man
into the bottom of the boat,
dazed but only slightly cut.

Clearly,
the mirror fragments
will never be joined
will never be found
not even by the someone.
They have probably gone
down the pipe
somewhere.

A Day on Someone's Island

Discovery

Someone has built an island somewhere. The island is crafted in the shape of a shoe - low at one end, high at the other. The someone has also placed a man on the island. He is alone and sits on the beach. The man's eyes are running, a result of the salt air, he thinks. The man notes that a swarm of flies is gathering on the horizon - he thinks perhaps it's a storm. He discovers the kit-bag on his back, opens it, takes out the toothbrush and polishes his teeth.

Morning

The man locates a tent, one with canvas that has rotted through. He determines this to be a result of the island's salt air. Here, he finds as well, the beans that have been prepared for breakfast. Consequently, he shaves, combs his hair, and puts on a tie. He decides the time has come to explore the hill. He sets the alarm clock. The man follows the seashore to the foot of the hill. Here, he spies a small crab scuttling between the rocks. He steps on it. The man becomes aware that a cave has been hollowed near the top of the hill. He scampers to the entrance. Inside the man notes that beads of moisture dribble down the walls. He is satisfied. Consequently, he rummages in his kit-bag, extracts a brush, and cleans his shoes. He sees that the laces are worn.

Noon

The man is frantic. He has lost his toothbrush. He spies the lookout above the cave, and scuttles the last few feet up the hill to reach it. Sure enough, the toothbrush is lying on a large flat rock. He remembers to look for shoelaces, and finds a pair of flying goggles. These keep the salt from his eyes. The man scans the horizon, but can see only the swelling cloud of flies. He decides it is time to return to his cave for lunch. He checks the clock. Then he removes his kit-bag, extracts two brushes - one for his teeth, one for his shoes.

Afternoon

The man is huddled in a corner of his cave, watching the rain. A canvas curtain has been hung across the entrance. This keeps out the water. The man thinks he recognizes the cloth of his old tent. He has not as yet begun to examine the back of the cave. There is a deep pit there, cut into the floor. Whisperings begin to come from the pit. The man hears and concludes it is time to explore. He checks the clock. He picks up the flashlight and walks to the back of the cave. The whisperings grow louder, become a buzz. The man concludes that he has stumbled on a large hive of bees. He soon discovers the true source of the noise - water rising in the pit. A result of the storm he thinks. The water continues to rise until it covers the floor ankle deep. The man realizes the time has come for him to adjourn to the lookout. He checks the clock. He then opens his kit-bag, removes a comb, and tidies his hair.

Evening

The man sits on the lookout rock. He has discovered that there was no storm. He had mistaken the cloud of flies for rain. The goggles as well have begun to chafe behind his ears. He removes them, preferring to blink out the salt. The man takes out his kit-bag, extracts a knife, and scrapes the mud from his shoes. He notices a small crab scuttling by his feet. He steps on it. Next, his teeth are brushed, his hair is combed, he ties the new shoelaces into his boots. He waits patiently for the expected supper. Unfortunately, the man falls asleep. The someone then switches the island for a rowboat, placing the man inside, without oars. The someone now departs. The alarm clock is set to wake the man. He will find that nothing remains, except himself, the alarm clock, the ocean, the rowboat, and the cloud of flies gathering on the horizon.

'Write on My Back, Please'

Scrawl the letters with a pin
shadow arms reach through the blinds
the slate is always always clean.

A wedding dress hangs on the door
above a back bare on the bed
scrawl the letters with a pin.

Red swirls make the words that fade
the shadow lines are written
the slate is always always clean.

A negligee lies on the bed
shadow arms reach through the blinds
scrawl the letters with a pin.

Menstrual spots have stained the cloth
red swirls make the words that fade
the slate is always always clean.

The shadow lines lie on the cloth,
the shadow thought lies on the back
and scrawls the letters with a pin.
The slate is always always clean.

At Lake Lorelei

First customer of the day, Matthew could sense no puzzlement behind the hardware store owner's impassive face. He'd brought his purchases to the pinewood counter: two pulleys; a ball of medium gauge twine; a bicycle tube; a galvanized tin bucket; and a box of thirty-thirty shells. Under his arm he carried a football helmet. The store owner grunted "Morning," and began to ring up the sale on the mechanical cash register. Matthew noted the yellow wedding band on the man's left hand. It was worn and dull as if the man were in the habit of fingering it in a nervous gesture. Remnants of the pebbled design were still evident near the edges. The tic in Matthew's left eye began again. The register drawer opened with a clang. Round one, he thought, and passed over two twenty dollar bills. He received a handful of coins in return, and as the store owner placed the purchases into two brown paper sacks, Matthew took note of the baroque scroll work ornamenting the sides of the register. Tarnished nickle cherubs peered modestly from behind vine leaves. Matthew was certain he caught a wanton smile on one of the faces. He reached across the counter and took the crackling paper sacks, swung about, and limped down the center aisle. He knew the owner's eyes were following him all the way to the front door, and Matthew caught the grunted "Come again," as the door closed, its bell tinkling behind him.

Matthew eased himself down the three yellow wooden steps in front of the building, his left ankle paining him. He reached the concrete slab that supported the bottom of the steps, and spied a knot of wood lying in the grass. He turned and saw the hole in the

back of the second step where the knot had been knocked loose. He bent down and peered through the hole at the cement foundation of the store. Green moss had attached itself to much of the stucco. The hollow under the stairs resonated as the owner walked to the front of the store. Matthew straightened. "Your foundation is cracking," he offered and limped to his Ford pick-up, not waiting for the answering grunt. The passenger door screamed open and Matthew placed his purchases on the black vinyl floor mats. The football helmet he set carefully on the seat. He slammed the door shut, his attention diverting as the glass in the window rattled. He glanced back once more at the front door of the hardware store, then limped around to the driver's side and heaved himself up behind the wheel. As he reached out to pull the door shut, he observed through the front windshield a teenage couple on their way to the community beach. They were arm in arm and Matthew saw one of the boy's hands inch its way downward until the fingers disappeared beneath the rim of the girl's green bathing suit. Matthew followed the movement of her swinging buttocks for a moment, and then swung the door to. His left eye twitched.

The pick-up bounced its way down the dirt road around the lake, the gravel clattering against the underside of the body. A large crow settled on the cross tree of a telephone pole, something in its beak. The lake was in the background on the left, and the sun fired shafts of light from the wavetops. He was thankful that his studio was round the far side of the lake, almost two miles in fact beyond the nearest cottage. He was sure that no one would bother him on such a perfect day. Though he rode slowly on, it seemed no time at all before he was backing the pick-up down the grade to his studio. He enjoyed

this moment. The grade was steep and the dirt drive curved in the shape of an S. Even at the bottom, the lane was still forty feet above the lake and if he allowed a wheel to catch in the soft dirt on the shoulders, he knew the truck could well plunge that forty feet. Matthew had never come close to making that mistake, not even now when his approach was almost careless. He put on the handbrake, gathered the parcels and the helmet and stepped from the cab. Matthew glanced back up the lane to the cross-tree of the telephone pole just visible above the poplar trees. He always backed the truck down. It was so much easier to drive it out afterward. Anyone could do it.

A narrow set of wooden stairs descended to the lake, and there was a guardrail on his left. He'd painted the stairs green in the spring, but the constant scuffing of the grit carried in the treads of his shoes had sandpapered the wood in the center of the steps white again. He gripped the rail and started down, the football helmet swinging on its chinstrap about his left arm, the two brown sacks crushed under his right. This was always the most difficult part of the journey, especially when he was carrying something, for his left ankle tended to throw him off balance. He'd fallen more than once through the summer. Standing now on the cracked concrete dock at the bottom of the stairs, he could feel his heart pounding, and he paused to catch his breath. A tiny green and black garden snake slid across the end of the dock and into the growth beneath the stairs. Matthew's eye began to twitch and he glanced once more up the flight of stairs. He placed the packages on the dock and went to stare at the water.

The lake had stilled and sunlight glanced from the surface in broad bursts. The quiet was shattered now and then by the slap of

a hungry fish. Like a rifle shot, he mused, a thirty-thirty trout hunting flies for breakfast. He watched the surface of the lake shiver as from an underwater recoil when the fish jumped a second time, and Matthew followed the spreading rings on the surface of the water. Grass rustled to his right and a brown head plashed into the water and headed to a nearby island. Matthew sat on the edge of the dock, ignoring the stab of pain from his left ankle, and dangled the fingers of one hand in the water. The minnows were there, looking for food, and they examined his fingers from a distance. One small flick of his hand sent them scurrying two yards down the shore where they flitted about in the reed shallows. The locomotive bell boomed across the lake. Matthew began looking for the small green rowboat he knew would appear in response. The retired C.P.R. fireman had hung the bell in the kitchen window of his cottage and now his wife used it to call him back from fishing. This time, a motorboat whined down the lake. The two men in the boat waved, but Matthew's attention was on the girl in the green bikini skiing behind them. He continued to stare as the ski-boat moved off toward the undeveloped end of the lake. Suddenly, the wake rushed the side of the dock and began to pound the reed shallows. The minnows left. Matthew, aware of the slap of the cold water against his wrist, stood up, coins clinking in his pocket. He took a deep breath to steady his tic and turned toward the house.

There were seventeen canvases in the main room, stacked haphazardly about the walls. The subjects were all the same, a man and a woman, sometimes painted separately, sometimes together, always nude. Matthew decided to take care of these first. From the seventeen paintings, he selected two. It did not take long. He'd known for weeks

which two he wanted preserved. They weren't his best, one was even unfinished, but with them he'd come the closest. In the first, the woman was sprawled across the edge of the bed, her legs spread, her body twisted and the trunk elongated to distort it. Her face was contorted, her hair flung back, and her mouth open. It was the mouth that had given him the trouble. He'd never finished it. Something belonged inside, something in the shadow, something vaguely defined, but the idea had never come. Now the mouth was just a gaping hole. The head of a snake protruded from the woman's vagina. He had caught the sheen on its skin perfectly. The snake's mouth too was open. On the second canvas, he had painted the man and the woman coupled together, the man on top, their legs entwined. They were stretched out on a horizontal white cross and a spike had been driven through both of their necks, pinning them there. A green and black snake encircled their feet, a yellow leaf clenched between its jaws. These were the two paintings he wanted, and he carried them over to the door leading to the bathroom. He set them down there and returned to the other canvases. Matthew broke each of them in two.

The fireplace dominated the main room. The oak mantle was head high, and the fireplace itself constructed of fieldstone and mortar. Some of the mortar had cracked. The mantle and the main stones in the chimney above, it were stained with smoke-black. There were no windows in this wall, but as Matthew stacked the broken frames and canvases in the fireplace, he was aware that just outside where the back garden should have been, the stairs rose up the hill to the lane and his pick-up. The tic began under his left eye, and Matthew straightened himself abruptly. He poured paint thinner from a gallon can

into the fireplace, and watched as some of the paint on the canvases began to dissolve. He struck a match and flipped it. The flames exploded at once, and he found himself taken aback by the odor of charring canvas and paint. He watched the flames for a moment as the figures seemed to writhe in agony. It was time to gather the packages from the dock and begin.


Beads of water glistened on the bath tiles as he stepped from the shower and reached for a towel. The bathroom was large, large enough in fact to double as a guest room. There was a cot against the far wall, and the naked mattress had leaf-shaped rust spots on it from the damp.

He noticed his previous preparations. They were almost complete. The chair was in place near the door and faced across the room to the bathtub. The football helmet was on the floor near the chair. He had carefully drilled a one inch hole in the front of the football helmet, just where his forehead would fit. He saw that the two pulleys were in place, the first attached to the ceiling above the showerhead, the second attached to the tiles above the soap dish, both held in place by togglebolts. An old pinewood sawhorse stood midway between the bathtub and the chair. Each of the four legs stood in a large flower pot of hardened concrete. A vise had been attached to the top of the sawhorse, and a worn thirty-thirty carbine was clamped in it, the barrel pointing at the chair. Matthew dressed in his white bathrobe and carefully combed his hair. He examined his image in the mirror. A faint cross-hatching of scars ran under his left eye and across the bridge of his nose. He focused on the small hairs that grew in a clump just inside the nostrils, hairs that would twist if he did

not keep them well-trimmed. He picked up the manicure scissors from the soap dish over the basin and trimmed the hairs again. His image loomed large and distorted. The job complete, he dropped the scissors with a clatter into the basin, and as he turned caught a glimpse in the mirror of the rusty cot against the far wall. There was very little left to do.

Matthew gathered the footstool from the main room and the two paintings he had previously left in the doorway, and brought them into the bathroom. He swung the door closed behind him. The footstool he placed near the chair, the two paintings he set against the white side of the bathtub. He then picked up the galvanized tin bucket and tied to it the strip of rubber that he'd cut from the bicycle tube. He tied the free end of the rubber strip to the shower-head. He pulled down on the bucket stretching the rubber strip slightly and then released it. The bucket jumped wildly, and then gradually bobbed to a rest. Matthew knotted the end of a length of twine to the handle of the bucket, threaded the twine through the first pulley in the ceiling, then down through the second pulley above the soap dish, thence to the trigger of the carbine. He cocked the hammer. He turned on the cold water faucet and opened the shower cock slightly so that water began to drip from the head. Each drop hit the bottom of the bucket with a clang. Matthew started to count. He placed himself in the armchair facing the carbine. There was a brace on the back of the armchair that allowed him to position the football helmet so that the hole in the front was lined up with the muzzle of the gun. The water drops had begun to splash as well as clang in the bucket, and Matthew noted that the rubber strip was already stretching. He eased

his left ankle onto the footstool and willed the leg to relax. He stared at the two paintings that leaned against the bathtub, and gradually his attention came to focus on the unfinished mouth of the woman. Something in shadow, something vague, began to take on definition. "Matthew had made a random guess that the weight of three thousand and one drops would be required to give the bucket sufficient weight to break the rubber strip. He eyed the stretching rubber and realized that his guess had been generous. Matthew sat, his left eye twitching, counting the plashes.



Twin Beds

Twin sleepers -

You:

Left side foetal curl
Left leg under cover
Right leg over -
scissor fashion,

Me:

Right side foetal curl
Right leg under cover
Left leg over -
scissor fashion.

Sometimes in sleep
I slip one leg
toward you
sometimes in sleep
slip one leg
toward me
twin sleeper.

Twin sleepers.

Twin beds.

The Stone Hunters

The yellow bulldozer paused at the Blair driveway, then with a clash of gears began to claw its way through the entrance. The metal tracks barely cleared the two stone pillars. Susan, watching, from the cool shadows of the front porch, glanced at her watch. Seven o'clock, Letourneau was on time for a change. The bulldozer cleared the entranceway and swung to follow the curving lane. Susan heard the loud crack above the clatter of the engine as their Hydro pole canted sideways. Letourneau twisted about in the driver's cab to see what had happened, then eased his way down from the cab and sauntered over to view the damage. He tightened his belt as he went. And keep it that way, Susan thought.

The fractured stump sat in its rock cradle, rooted like a broken tooth. The upper pole hung on the power cables, while the ground beneath it was littered with white splinters. Susan watched Letourneau and knew he was aware of her attention. He leaned against the side of the scoop and massaged his thick neck. She tried the porch switch for the spotlights. The power was still on. Letourneau scuffed the ground with one foot moving the splinters about, and then reached into the breast pocket of his red-checked hunting shirt to pull out a package of Export A. He pushed a cigarette between his lips and reached into the back pocket of his work jeans for a wooden match. He scraped the head against the zipper of his fly, casually lit the cigarette, and snapped the match in two, flipping it onto the grass border of the driveway. Bravo, Susan thought, and avoided his stare by working at a hangnail. She heard his footsteps as the gravel

crunched beneath his workboots. Susan held her ground on the front veranda, one hand resting on a white vertical support. Bugger off, she thought.

Letourneau halted at the foot of the veranda. Three steps above him, Susan waited. One boot came to rest on the first stair with a thud. He did not speak. She was aware of the large hands as the right one brought the cigarette slowly to his lips. She took note of the black lines in his fingers, and the thick tufts of hair that covered the back of his hands. Out with it ape-man, she thought, and her fingers tapped on the support. Letourneau began to scrape the side of his thumbnail across the pebbled design on his wedding ring. His voice rumbled, "il faut téléphoner au Hydro tout de suite." He drew heavily on the cigarette and blew the smoke past her face. As she waved the smoke away, she glared. Letourneau dropped the remains of the cigarette onto the gravel and crushed it beneath the heel of his boot. "Eh bien? Le téléphone?"

"Dans la cuisine."

Letourneau's bulk eased past her and through the front door. The spring banged it behind him. Susan held her back turned to Letourneau's suggestive, "ça serait mieux dans la chambre à coucher."

A gust of air blew against the plaque that hung from the eaves of the veranda and the board squeaked on the rusty hinges. Les Pins, how appropriate, Susan reflected as she drew a deep breath of the pine scented air. The crack of a twenty-two came from the sandpit. So her brother was across the road, shooting at beer cans again. A second crack came from the pit, followed closely by a clack as a bullet found a tin can. The whine of a ricochet echoed through the

pine trees as Florian came around the side of the cottage, carrying a trowel.

Florian eyed the bulldozer with obvious apprehension. Susan smiled at the diminutive figure, noting the spots of dirt that clung to the blade of the trowel and the two damp stains on the knees of his workpants. Only Florian would use coarse tweeds as summer workpants. The oversize workgloves gave him a comic air. He knelt and began to brush away dead leaves from the clumps of asters and celosia. Susan remembered Gordon's objection when she'd first started on the garden in the spring. It'll hide the foundation, he'd reasoned, never see if any cracks appear until it's too late. She'd planted the garden anyway. Now the celosia was mature and the long feathery plumes of gold, copper, and scarlet, seemed to be tongues of fire licking at the base of the house. Susan came down to meet Florian on the driveway. She examined an old bud on the blue spruce that shaded the veranda, pretending to check for budworm. Florian would speak first.

"Les Reine Marguerites will soon bloom, Madame Blair." He gave the asters their French name. He rose slowly to his feet as if he were a weight lifter pushing out of a deep squat. Susan nodded. Florian slipped his hands out of the heavy workgloves. He placed the trowel at his feet. The gloves followed. She watched the delicate fingers produce an old leather pouch and a packet of rolling papers, from the baggy tweeds. They expertly fashioned a cigarette. The worn aluminum Zippo appeared huge in Florian's hand as his thumb spun the wheel against the flint. The top clacked shut. The smoke drifted from his nostrils and he sighed, "Oui." Florian picked the tobacco shreds from his tongue. Susan waited.

"Monsieur Blair will be here today?" Florian's eyes were again on the bulldozer.

"No, Florian. Gordon called a few minutes ago to say he won't be up before noon tomorrow. He said for you to carry on, and that he'll settle the account when he gets here."

Susan smiled at Florian's quaint method of presenting his accounts. Florian kept them in a black notebook. Not once had they ever received a bill. Each Christmas Florian gave them a small home-made item for the cottage. Last year, it was a lamp. He did the same for all his clients. If a present failed to appear, the client would suddenly remember an unsettled account. Now, the top of the black book poked from his shirt pocket. Susan was glad that Gordon always paid Florian promptly. One winter, Florian had even made their pinewood dining room set. It had scarcely cost them the price of the wood.

"Oui." The top of the Zippo began to go click-clack rhythmically in Florian's left pocket. "It would be better for Monsieur Blair to be here for the digging."

"Why, Florian?"

"I don't like this concrete." Florian's hand made emphatic circles with the cigarette.

"Why?" The screendoor banged shut and Letourneau's heavy boots thudded across the veranda and down the stairs.

"Eh Florian, elle préfère le téléphone dans la cuisine."

"Oui." Florian's eyes fell to the workgloves at his feet, and he bent to pick them up. Susan glared and Letourneau looked away.

"Would you like me to wash the trowel, Madame Blair? The pine is planted by the patio."

"Thank you Florian. Just leave the trowel. Perhaps you could get Monsieur Letourneau started."

"C'est ca nabet. Montre-moi le trou." Letourneau's hand reached for his shirt pocket and the package of Export A. "Donne-moi de feu." The Zippo clicked once more as Florian reached up with the flame, and then gestured with his head. The two men moved off toward the corner of the cottage. Another shot echoed from the pit, and along with it came Theodore's excited barking. Susan's mouth tightened in an angry grimace. It sounded as if William had shot something. She bent to pick up the trowel and noticed that Letourneau had stepped on it. She felt a little sick.

Susan watched the two men through the frame of the kitchen window, as she cradled the cup of coffee in her hands. She sat at the enameled table under the window. The coffee was cold. The sand path from the driveway passed by the window, then on downhill and into the pine trees for another hundred feet to the lake. Susan gazed at the rocks that outlined the borders of the path. She had collected the rocks from the lake's edge the previous summer and had painted each one white. Gordon had kept passing by her with his wheelbarrow, carrying sand from the pit to where he'd wanted the beach. He had covered the stones with a foot of sand. Gordon had worked at it for the entire weekend, just so that she could sunbathe in comfort. Susan remembered the amazed look on Gordon's face the day they'd

arrived to open up the cottage for the summer. The spring run-off had carried his beach into the lake. She had expected him to call Florian. Instead, he'd hunted out the wheelbarrow and spent the day rebuilding his beach. Susan hadn't had the heart to point out the obvious problem. Now, her white border stones near the kitchen window had been scattered. Four wooden stakes had been driven into the earth, to outline the area where the bulldozer would dig a pit for the well. Letourneau's arm caught her attention as it gestured angrily at the tree-line. Florian's hands replied with a measured chopping of the air. Susan pushed back her chair. Florian would protect the trees.

Susan carted the breakfast dishes from the table to the sink. She switched on the stove as she went. As she scraped the streaks of dried egg yolk and ketchup from the two plates, she felt the nausea again. She rinsed the plates quickly under the kitchen tap. Then, she filled the blue speckled cauldron with water from the tap and struggled it over to the stove. A trail of water glistened behind her on the yellow linoleum. She set the cauldron on the burner to heat. The pump in the back porch clicked, and began to refill the pressure tank, drawing the water up the long black hose from the lake. She felt a twinge in her side and leaned over the stove for a moment to rest. "The doctor's right," she murmured as she straightened up, "Gordon should do the heavy stuff." Outside the window she saw Florian standing alone in the area marked by the stakes. In the background she heard the clatter of gears as Letourneau began to move the bulldozer.

Susan sat again at the white enameled breakfast table to

finish the cold coffee. She watched as the bulldozer crept around the side of the house. Its two tracks just fitted outside the parallel borders of white stone. A large yellow slug ingesting my stones, she imagined, and shook her head at the strangeness of her own thoughts. Florian walked backwards in front of the raised blade, his two hands upright in the air directing Letourneau. Florian's right hand chopped emphatically but the bulldozer swung late. The yellow blade skinned a pine tree, leaving a wet-looking gash on the trunk. Susan winced. He's an animal, she thought. The glass in the window panes began to rattle as the bulldozer moved closer. It faced the first two wooden stakes. The coffee shivered in the cup as the metal table vibrated. The left track rode directly over one stake and ground it into the earth. She saw Florian's gesture of disgust. The bulldozer had now crossed the box outlined by the stakes, and the gears clattered once more. Letourneau let the engine idle. The rear scoop was poised over the box, its four steel teeth pointing at the sky. The front blade fell to the ground. Susan carried the coffee cup to the sink. She pressed the rubber plug into the drain outlet and turned toward the steaming cauldron on the stove. She heard Letourneau rev the engine of the bulldozer.

"Hey Sue, look!"

The spring banged the screen door shut, William held the bird up by its neck. The grey head flopped to one side, and the symmetrical hole in the bird's breast gazed back like a red furred eye.

"Dumb bird jumped from a bush back of the pit not five feet in front of me. I just cracked off two shots. Oh, got him clean through the breast. See."

"Take it outside, Willie."

"But I was going to clean it in the sink. The breast meat will be good fried up with some trout."

"Outside!" The wild game scent pressed into the air of the kitchen.

"Alright, Sue. Alright. I'll clean it down at the lake."

"Get it out of here." The steam from the cauldron rose into the air and mingled with the wild scent of the bird. Through the window she saw the inverted teeth scoot toward the ground. My god, she thought, what's happening to me? She heard the spring on the screen door creak.

"Willie? Take me for a row later?" Susan saw the boyish face light up. Only seventeen, and the shoulders already broader than Gordon's.

"Sure Sue. Maybe we could do some fishing. The lake's really calm."

The yellow scoop rose past the window, and the house shuddered as the vibrations from the bulldozer's engine increased. Dark moist earth trickled from the teeth of the scoop. She steadied herself.

"I'll come down when I've finished the dishes."

William grinned as he carried the bird out inverted like a trophy. The steam rose steadily from the cauldron, and Susan wished she'd remembered to ask her brother to carry it to the sink. She lifted the boiling pot; strained under its weight to the edge of the sink, and tilted the water out. As it struck the cold porcelain, clouds boiled into the air. She set the pot on the floor and reached for the green detergent bottle.

Susan frothed the water with her free hand. The bubbles

hissed softly as they popped, releasing the scent of pine. The fragrance soon smothered the clinging odor of game. Her fingers tingled in the hot water as she held them there, and relaxed. She withdrew her left hand and watched the cluster of bubbles that had gathered about the diamond in her ring. She stared, mesmerized by the iridescent sheen, as one by one they popped. She picked up the sponge and began with the first plate. They'd begun with the kitchen. She'd chosen the color scheme. A sunny yellow paint now hid the old turquoise walls. Gordon had worked a full day matching the roll of lemon linoleum to the outlines of the plywood floor. He still called the room her canary cage. She'd made the café curtains in the city and together they'd hung them over the window. Then they'd made love. Theodore's barking sounded above the din outside. She glanced out the window to see the dog prancing about furiously, barking at the bulldozer. Letourneau was grinning. Susan threw the sponge into the dishwasher, and went outside through the back porch. Florian met her.

"Betail!" The hands fluttered and Susan strained to hear his voice above the background din. "The dog was scratching for scent in the new dirt. Letourneau dropped some more beside it."

The dog was obviously alright, quartering the bulldozer from a safe distance. Susan nodded through tight lips.

"Ca va, Florian."

The small man turned back to the staked area, his fingers automatically searching for the leather tobacco pouch. She glared at Letourneau, who raised a jaunty hand and slammed the scoop into the ground. Susan swallowed. Already the staked-out area lay deeply exposed. A musty smell exuded from the widening pit. Susan felt a

rough wetness on the back of her hand. She looked down as the tawny shape squirmed his way between her calves, the fur soft and warm. The dog carried the evergreen scent of the forest and particles of black earth clung to his haunches. Susan stroked the soft head and pressed it to her knee. The dog squatted and Susan smiled at his posture. He sat on his left haunch, the hips splayed. That was how two years ago she'd come to name him Theodore. The pup reminded her of the stuffed tan dog she'd cuddled to sleep as a child. Gordon had wanted to name the dog Beaver, claiming the pup's posture reminded him of an old woman sitting spread-kneed on a bench. The dog stirred under her hand.

"Would you like to go fishing, Theo?"

The dog's tail began to brush the earth and the right paw came up. She wondered at Theodore's vocabulary. She watched as he launched himself across the path and into the trees, heading in a straight line for the beach and the rowboat. As Susan moved to follow, she waved to Florian. His attention was on the pit. White smoke plumed about his head as he puffed at the cigarette. It was Letourneau who replied with an upraised thumb. A cascade of earth fell from the raised scoop.

Susan walked barefoot down the path. The morning sun had already heated the surface sand, and she enjoyed the warmth. A few clouds had gathered in the west. William's shouted "Fly, Theo, fly," drifted through the screen of trees. Susan shook her head. The fly business was true enough. They'd trained the pup with a rolled newspaper. Unfortunately, Gordon had used the same technique on the black flies and now Theodore covered whenever a fly came near. A

yellow jacket buzzed past her head on its way to the garden by the veranda. Except for bees, she mused, perhaps because they were slow and he could snap at them. A good thing he was slower than the bees. The sand under her feet was suddenly cool as she entered the shadows of the treeline.

The large pine tree on the edge of the stand canted toward the house, its root system exposed in the air. A two foot depression had been left scooped out of the ground. The tree had been partly uprooted during a storm. The upper branches had tangled with the nearby trees and it hadn't toppled all the way to the ground. It might have fallen on the back porch. Gordon had braced the tree with a length of clothesline tied to another trunk. He intended to chop the pine down and cord its wood for the winter - as soon as he got a chance. It would undoubtedly be another job for Florian. Now the reddish roots reminded Susan of gnarled fingers trying to claw their way back into the ground. She wondered if Gordon would bother to fill in the hole. Probably not, and she walked on down the shadowed path. The air was too cool in the shade and heavy with the odor of the needles. The noise of the bulldozer echoed between the line of trees.

Susan walked briskly around the bend in the path where it angled to the sandy beach. The downgrade was steeper and her toes scuffed sand ahead of her as she checked her weight with each step. William's "Hey, Susan," met her on the path. She waved in return. The sand in the open light of the beach ahead of her seemed white in contrast to the damp mocha under her feet. She watched William bend to pick a fist-sized stone from the beach. He had stripped to his bathing suit in the sun. She watched a tanned arm stretch back, then snap

forward hurling the stone in a high arc over the lake. My curly-headed brother, the Greek God, Susan thought and smiled at the triteness of her own image. The stone landed, throwing a column of water into the air; a column that seemed to hang motionless for an instant before disintegrating into a cascade. She watched the concentric swells ripple away from the point of impact. Susan reached the edge of the beach, staring into the expanding eye of the lake.

William was laughing. "You're a dumb dog, Theodore. Find the stick. Find the stick."

The dog was paddling hard for the center of the eye, snorting water as he panted through his nostrils. Susan remembered the near death of her first dog, a small black spaniel named Albert. The dog had loved to swim, and Susan invented a game. She'd found an old water-ski float, and would sit on the edge of the dock at her parent's cottage, tossing the red and white float into the lake for Albert to retrieve. The game had gone on all summer. Then late in August her father had sunk a concrete block out in the lake as an anchor to keep the boat from rocking against the side of the dock. He'd then attached a length of chain to the block. He'd used the old ski-float as a buoy to keep the end of the chain on the surface of the water. No one had thought anything of it, not even Susan, until she'd watched as her father dove fully clothed into the water. The spaniel spied the red and white float out where Susan usually threw it and had begun the game. Albert had latched onto the float and made for the dock. Each time he reached the limit of travel, the chain pulled the dog under. Albert never let up. Susan remembered her dad wrestling with the dog in the deep water, and then his heavy arms, handing a coughing

Albert to Susan on the dock. Her dad had lined the dock with old rubber tires, and let the chain sink to the bottom of the lake. No doubt the rusted links were there now, still attached to the block of concrete. William threw another stone,

"No!"

William froze, his hand half hidden beneath the sand in its search for another stone. The dog was already swimming toward the center of the second eye.

"Take it easy Sue. I don't throw the rocks anywhere near him." He straightened, a third rock in his fist. White sand flowed back to fill the hole the stone had left in the beach.

"He'll chase the rocks until he drowns."

"Don't be stupid Susan, he'll come back when he's tired. Look he's coming in now." The dog's body had turned to the shore, and he was swimming hard. A V of water was thrust back from the muzzle and the long fur tail trailed out behind him. He neared the shore and Susan knelt on one knee to greet him. Theodore paused at the water's edge to shake himself once, then dashed into the trees weaving through the concentric circles of his drying ritual. The wild dashings never carried him beyond the uprooted pine. Susan stood as he began rolling himself dry in the needle-strewn earth. She stared at the water. The eyes of the lake had closed.

"Come on Sue, move that fat ass into the boat."

"It's not fat." She pushed her feet quickly through the sand to the beached rowboat. William extended his hand.

"Just teasing. Come on, over the side and into the prow seat . . . if you can squeeze in."

Susan smacked him across the midriff, and stepped onto the plywood bottom of the boat. Her bare foot trod on the cork handle of a fishing rod.

"Easy, that's my favourite rod."

"And that's my favourite foot. Where do you want to go?"

"Out by the culvert. The fish should be biting in the shade."

"Where's Theo?" Susan sat on the wet seat.

"Aw, no way. He won't sit still."

"I'll hold him." A gentle breeze blew across the lake and Susan shook back her hair to catch it.

"For how long?"

The rowboat began to grate along the sand. The muscles in William's shoulders bulged and the boat was free. He splashed in the water near Susan and then stepped over the side. A cascade of drops fell on her.

"What about the dog?" Theodore had not reappeared on the beach.

"Oh, he's probably chasing flies. Look if he really wants to come he'll follow us along the shore and we'll pick him up later. OK?"

Susan nodded as her brother swung the oars into position. She watched the blades cut into the lake. William's heavy strokes pulled the boat swiftly away from the beach. She listened to the bubble of the boat's wake, and stared back at the shore. The dog still did not appear. The small pine at the edge of the patio caught her eye. It was the one Florian had moved out of the bulldozer's path. A shadow to the left of the tree suddenly resolved itself into a

fresh hump of black earth.

"Willie, what did you do with the partridge?"

"Oh, I buried it beside the patio. Don't worry I dug the hole deep enough." He grinned sheepishly. "I just didn't feel like cleaning it out." Susan laughed, reached over the side of the boat and let a hand trail for a moment in the lake, then splashed the water at her brother. The drops glistened in the sun on his cheek. He grinned and wiped his cheek on his shoulder.

"OK?"

"OK, brother."

Angry barking erupted on the dwindling white beach. Theodore was dashing back and forth at the edge of the lake. Susan shouted across the water and the dog's head snapped up.

"Oh Christ, now you've done it, Susan."

The dog splashed into the shallows, paused, judging the distance, then launched itself into the lake. An oar blade slipped, showering Susan with water, and the boat slid broadside to the shore. She closed her eyes to the image of a red and white ski-float, and gripped the gunwhales with both hands.

"Your bloody dog's a pain in the ass, Susan."

The wake behind the boat began to bubble again as William bent hard against the oars. Susan's eyes snapped open.

"Stop, you bastard!"

The oars froze in the air. Water dripped from the blades into the lake. A series of lake eyes drifted past the boat.

"He'll soak us both, Susan."

"He'll drown."

"Don't be stupid Susan, he'll turn back when he tires. Look."

The dog had given up. Susan watched as Theodore swung about in one last reproachful circle, and then headed for the shore. She closed her eyes and leaned back, letting her hands trail in the lake.

"Susan?"

The cool water seemed to enter her fingertips and run up the veins in her arms. She let her gaze open on the question in her brother's dark eyes. She forced an answer.

"OK Willie, row. You know what they say about pregnant women."

"What?" He grinned, and the oarblades cut into the lake once more.

Susan ignored him and turned her attention to the shore. Her eyes found the dog scratching at the edge of the patio. William began to hum under his breath. She recognized the melody but refused to rise to the bait. She closed her eyes once more. Her hands were still in the water and she curled her fingers under the boat. The plywood was rough where it had been scored by the sand and rocks. She felt the water pulling along the bottom of the boat in steady heartbeats and she felt for a moment as if the lake itself, and not William, was pressing them toward the culvert.

"Row, row, row, your boat." William slipped a phrase into the melody and continued humming. Once more Susan refused the bait. Two even caws floated in the still air. Susan opened her eyes. The humming stopped as William's attention shifted to watch the large crow glide overhead toward the shore. The bird landed on the cement culvert. Susan remembered Gordon and his wheelbarrows of sand. Each

spring, in spite of the culvert, the road washed out. Each year a road crew replaced the fill. Now, the conduit's black eye gaped at the lake.

Susan leaned against the prow of the boat, and listened to the splash of the oars. Now and then a spray of water fell on her and cooled her skin. She wondered if it was deliberate. The sun pressed against her closed eyelids and its after-image floated against a pink background. The coolness in her veins had reached her shoulders. She relaxed. She imagined the arc of William's fishing rod, as the lead weight carried the hook and bait high through the air to finally plunge in the lake. She could imagine the red and white bobber floating in the lake's expanding pupil. Susan smiled. The sun was too high. Even in the shadow of the concrete culvert the fish wouldn't be biting. The forward motion ceased and she heard the inboard clatter of the oars. The lake rocked against the boat, and Susan felt drowsy from the cradle-like motion. She heard William clattering in his tackle-box. Not today, brother dear, she thought, not today. There was the whiz of a reel, and a moment later a distant splash. The boat rocked for a moment as if the lake had shuddered. A steady breeze began to blow from under the clouds in the west.

Susan poured the tea from the frosted pitcher. The ice cubes clinked as they fell into the tumblers. Florian had been waiting in the shade of the front veranda when she'd returned on foot from the culvert. William had stayed with the boat to continue fishing. She hadn't noticed that the bulldozer had gone, until she'd seen Florian

staring at its track marks in the lawn. Now, he cradled his tumbler between his thumb and three fingers, the little one curled beneath his glass. They both watched as the frost on the pitcher melted, gathering as drops of water. A ring of wet began to collect about the bottom of the container.

"C'est conclu, Madame Blair."

He paused to examine a lemon pip floating in the glass, then rattled the ice cubes. Susan waited.

"C'est la glaise."

"What's that?"

"A clay, like glue."

"In the well?"

"Oui. The brass point won't work." Florian held his two hands in the air as though he were gripping a large ball between them.

"When the pump sucks, the clay will stick on the brass screen."

The imaginary ball collapsed as his fingers bound together for emphasis.

"What can be done, Florian?"

"C'est dommage."

His fingers brought out the leather pouch. Susan watched while they worked on the tobacco and paper. His pink tongue slipped from his lips and moistened the glue, then he stroked the edges together around the tobacco.

"Letourneau wants to dig deeper next Monday and put in a reservoir of concrete. The water would not be sweet, Madame Blair. You could always taste the lime."

She imagined the concrete stare waiting for her each day at the side of the house.

"Florian, I don't want a concrete well."

His fingers tapped the unlit cigarette on the table.

"Oui." Suddenly, he rose from the pine chair. "Je reviendrai demain, Madame Blair. J'ai une autre idée. Merci pour la thé." And he left, easing the door shut behind him.

Neither of them had touched the tea. Susan picked up the two tumblers and the pitcher. She heard Theodore barking down by the beach and knew her brother had returned. She looked out a window. Thunderheads were gathering in the sky.

Rain beat against the bay window. Susan pressed her face to the glass and watched the lightning flicker across the black sky. One fork stabbed into the dark lake and for an instant the water was suffused with a purple glow. Susan watched the fingers of water as they weaved down a pane in the window. More lightning outlined the canted pine tree and she imagined its roots clawing for the ground. She turned from the window and paused at her reflection in the living room mirror. The purple circles under her eyes stared back at her. I must get to bed early, she thought, and sat in the armchair by the grey Evans heater. The worn stuffing exuded an odor of must into the damp air. Goosebumps gathered along her arms.

"Willie? Put on the heater. The air is damp."

"Mmm."

William set down the novel he had been reading, and without looking at Susan, moved toward the space heater. The Stone Hunter. The red capitals arched over a grey monolith. Two human faces, one

male, one female, were carved on the sides of the stone and gazed at opposite sides of the book. A large purple eye stared at the reader from the center of the stone. Charming, thought Susan, and watched William as he fiddled with the valves on the heater. The pilot door clanged open. He slid back the glass shield and reached for the wick.

"Shit."

"What's the matter?"

"Where are the new wicks?" He held up the feeder wire. A burnt scrap of wick fell from its tip.

"In the drawer beside the sink."

Her brother's steps echoed in the closed cottage. She listened to the roll of thunder and the staccato hiss of rain on the roof. In the kitchen, William rattled about in the utensil drawer.

The pit would be filling with water. The vision unfolded in slow motion across the inside of her closed eyelids. The drops of rain as miniature bullets riddled into the earthen sides. The tiny drops slammed into single particles of dirt ingesting them, and then rolled and spun as a cascade of ballbearings, sluicing the earth to the bottom of the pit. The ballbearings froze and the pit became a giant snow cone filling with ice crystals. The crystals spilled over the top of the cone as its center unfolded as a lush tropical blossom.

On the blossom's anther lay a wet tawn rat. The round black eye of the style gaped at it. Susan sat upright.

"Theo!"

The dog came padding from the bedroom, just as William entered.

"Out of my way Theo."

Her brother moved toward her. She felt the tremors filling her veins.

"You don't look well, Sue."

She shook her head, and gripped the arms of the chair tightly.

"Cold?"

Susan nodded, and felt the warm moist breath as the dog poked his head into her lap.

"I'll get the fire going in a second."

She stroked the tawny head. Theodore's tongue licked the inside of her wrist. Susan settled back in the armchair. The rasp of a wooden match reached Susan's ears as he struck it across the galvanized stove pipe and held the burning tip to a wad of Kleenex.

"Sorry about this. I couldn't find another wick."

Susan let a fleeting smile cross her lips. He grunted and she heard the clang as the pilot door shut.

"It'll warm in a second, Sue. Want some tea?"

"Yes." The tremors were emptying from her veins. What a hell of a way to break a mood. A craving for tartness pulled at the back of her tongue. "Slice some lemon into it, too?"

"No problem."

Susan felt the plywood floor tremble under William's steps. The expanding metal in the heater began to clang in spasms. Theodore turned away and thudded to the floor in front of the heater, as warmth squeezed into the air. She heard the rattle of cutlery on the table and the scrape of a chair as her brother settled, waiting for the kettle to boil. She took a deep breath as the warm air pressed beyond her into the room. The fire muttered and the flue pipes creaked. She

turned her attention to the baywindow. A flicker of lightning cast its purple at the lake. The power failed.

The darkness flung itself in through the windows. The dog jumped to its feet and Susan felt the warm muzzle nestle into her lap. A chair grated across the linoleum on the kitchen floor.

"Susan, where's that goddamned lantern?"

"The shelf above the pump."

Her brother stumbled through the kitchen door and onto the thin planking of the back porch. She scratched the soft ears in her lap. The walls of the cabin snuggled close. Susan imagined she could reach through them and lay her fingertips against the wet exterior sides. The electric current would flow from the sky into her veins. She felt her midriff contract as if to store the charge. A cold blue haze spread into the room. William entered behind the eye of the storm lantern.

"Well Sue, I can't see the local Hydro boys out in this mess."

William's hands, pallid in the garish light, followed the lantern to the table by the couch. The blue haze pressed the walls of the cabin back into place.

"Let's hit the sack, Sue. I'm tired anyway. Mind if I take the light upstairs with me?"

Susan could see her brother's head scraping the low beams of the dormitory.

"Go ahead. Just wait till I'm in the bedroom."

The dog squatted back on its haunches as Susan pushed herself out of the chair. A low whistle emanated from the lantern's neon tube and the dog's ears twitched. The dog cocked its head and the dark eyes

were tense as he watched her. Susan slapped her hand on her thigh and the dog sprang to his feet. She heard the soft clicking of claws as she turned about and the dog followed her through the muzzy light into the bedroom. She drew the bamboo curtain behind her. Its wheels rattled in the overhead track. She was breathing deeply.

The blue light oozed between the bamboo slats. Susan sat on the bed and faced the groping light. She kicked off her sandals and pushed her toes against the bedroom carpet. Gordon had wanted linoleum.

"OK, Willie."

The dog thumped to the floor at the foot of the bed. The bedroom window rattled in its loose frame. The springs in the couch creaked and William's feet thumped on the plywood floor. The cold blue eye gaped through the bamboo curtain as her brother paused at the foot of the staircase outside her bedroom.

"No sleepwalking tonight, Sis. You fall in the pit, you're on your own." The brunal eye swelled further into the room and she shivered as the frigid stare seemed to tingle on her forehead.

"Susan?"

Snap out of it. "Upstairs, brother, you're spoiling my beauty sleep." She pulled the green sweater over her head.

"As if you needed it."

The neon eye faded as William clumped up the stairs. Susan smiled at the unexpected compliment.

"Don't damage the beams with that hard head of yours."

Willie answered by blowing air between pursed lips.

"Goodnight to you too, brother."

Willie laughed and she followed the tread of his footsteps

across the ceiling of her bedroom. She heard the creaking of springs as he lowered himself onto a cot. Two shoes thudded above her head. How odd, she thought, both Gordon and William sleep with their clothes on. She slipped out of her jeans, and reached under the pillow for her beige nightgown. She stood and wriggled the flannel garment over her head. She drew the bamboo curtain back and moved past the staircase to the Evans heater.

"Problem?" Her brother's voice sounded hollow through the ceiling.

"No. Just turning down the stove. Goodnight, Willie."

"Goodnight."

Her hand avoided the oil valve and went instead to the pilot door in the side of the heater. She eased it open. The glow of the oil fire spread through the protective glass shield into the room and Susan found her way back into the bedroom. Yes, she thought, tonight was not a night for sleepwalking.

The down comforter was cold in Susan's hand as she held it up and slipped under. She pulled the comforter right over her head, a trick she'd learned as a child in the chill of August nights at her parent's cottage. Her breath quickly warmed the bed. She curled onto her right side, poked her head into the open air, and stared at the flickering light from the oil stove. The shadows wavered across the living room walls, moving to the inaudible rhythm of the flames. She listened to the muffled throb of the thunder and felt safe in the beating ventricle of the storm.

"Hey Susan, did you send Theodore up here?"

She heard the dog stir at the foot of the bed at the mention

of his name. "No. He's here with me."

"Well, something is scuffling around up here."

Suddenly, the power came on, the yellow light exploding through the rooms in the house. She shut her eyes against the intruding pain. Nuts, she thought, we forgot to turn off the switches. She sat up.

"Jesus Shit!" The alarm in her brother's voice brought Susan to her feet. The ceiling cracked as William dashed to the head of the staircase.

"What, Willie? What's happened?" Susan reached her bedroom door in time to see her brother launch himself down the stairs two at a time.

"There's a goddamned bat up there!" He leaped the last three steps and landed with a thud. A black shadow flitted past him into the living room. The bat darted wildly about in the confusion of furniture and light. She imagined the sharp claws clinging to her hair as it beat its wings about her head. She slammed the bamboo curtain shut.

"Hey! What the hell are you doing? What about the bat?"

Susan held tight to the curtain, the goosebumps breaking out along her arms. "Catch it! Catch it!"

"Just how am I supposed to do that?"

"Get rid of it!"

"Big hero."

William turned from the curtain muttering, and Susan leaned her forehead against the door frame. One by one, the lights went out as her brother moved through the house.

"Turn off the light in your room, Susan."

His tense voice came to her from the bathroom. She reached for the switch with her left hand and brought the light back into the room. She let her shaking fingers rest on the switch. A faint glow came through the bedroom window. The porch lights were still on. Susan heard her brother move across the dining room floor and the spring on the screen door stretch. She noticed that faint streaks of light were leaking under the bamboo curtain. She imagined the bat squeezing through the crack and hissing at her like a snake, the red mouth expanding as it opened. She choked back the scream that rose in her throat. The screen door slammed and William's voice came through the curtain.

"OK. It's gone."

Susan's fingers snapped the harsh light back into the room.

"Oh. My Stone Hunter." The nausea was rising in her throat.

"What?"

The curtain slid open rattling across its track. William's face loomed inches from hers, outlined in the light pouring from her bedroom. The dog brushed past her, moving warily into the dining room. His ears cocked forward and his nose shifted for scent. Susan vomited on the linoleum floor.

Susan waited, pail in hand, beside the small stand of silver birch. Three fresh stumps jutted from the soil like broken cuspids. She watched a fish jump out on the water. The lake opened its eye to the morning. Susan felt a fluttering in her abdomen and wondered if it was the child kicking. She couldn't shake the dream. First

the sense of swaying underneath a giant earlobe clinging only by her two hands. The struggle to climb to safety, the rubber skin of the ear pliant as she squeezed her fingers for handholds. Then the open tunnel of the ear canal gaping, as she pressed forward into the semi-darkness. Stalactites and stalagmites hung like canines to slash at her as she moved warily between them. Pools of sticky wax caught at her feet. She'd pulled them from one viscid trap to another. Then she'd seen Gordon in the light at the end of the tunnel. She'd tried to call out, then noticed he was building a web. It wasn't Gordon at all. It was a hairy, black spider.

A breeze blew in from the lake raising goosebumps on her arms. She shivered. A fish jumped again and William was beside her.

"Beavers!" He kicked at a protruding stump. The twenty-two was held in the crook of his arm. "Jesus, this does it. Soon there won't be a tree left on the place."

"Somehow I doubt that, Willie."

"Three damn trees gone in one night." He kicked at the ground with his foot.

Susan bent and picked up a stripped branch that had been left behind. The wet wood was sweet and white. It reminded her of sugar cane. "They eat this don't they?"

"Ya. That's what they're after this time of year." The lever action of the gun clicked open and shut in William's hands. "I guess maybe I'll row over to their dam."

"That's not necessary, Willie. Besides what if there are young ones? Florian told me to wrap wire around the trunks of the trees and the beavers won't bite through."

"It's more fun just to shoot beaver, as your husband would say."

Susan spun about and marched back to the sand path. The pail swung in her right hand. Her brother stayed behind.

The rhythmical clank of 'la masse' came from the patio. Florian was hard at work driving the brass point into the earth. Susan watched the sinews in the short arms as they raised the heavy home-made hammer. Even Gordon had been impressed with 'la masse', a long steel shaft welded to the center of a car wheel. She watched as Florian released the suspended weight, and the shaft plunged into the open pipe of the point, with a clank. She felt the tremors where she stood. He lifted 'la masse' again, and once more it plunged. Her midriff contracted to the soft shudder of the earth. Then Florian stopped to add another length of pipe to the point. Susan left.

The roots of the broken pine were still wet from the storm. Water floated in the shallow depression. A drop slid from a root finger and landed with a plop in the pool. She watched until the ripples touched the sides of the hollow. Barking came from the beach as she turned and walked quickly to the side of the house. She could no longer feel the trembling under her feet, though the clank of metal hung in the still air. Susan halted at the well pit.

Letourneau had chopped a birch down and cut it into four white poles. Each rested on a cinder block and formed a low barrier around the pit. Sap had congealed on the cut ends of the logs. Susan pressed her shins to the barrier. The rain water had not yet drained away. In the center floated the swollen carcass of a brown field mouse. The exposed roots along the sides of the cavity groped out of

the soil. The downpour of the storm had cut furrows in the mound of earth beside the pit. One side was already drying in the morning sun. A deer fly buzzed in the air around her head. Susan batted at it and the pail slipped from her hand to land with a clatter on the far side of the pit. She moved carefully around the barrier to retrieve it. She had promised Gordon fresh raspberry jam.

The pail had rolled against one of her white border rocks. She stooped to grasp the handle, and heard a truck strain up the hill in low gear. She straightened. A grey Hydro truck braked to a halt beside their broken power pole. A sharp stone cut into Susan's bare foot as she walked along the gravel of the driveway. She moved onto the grass border, and watched as three men stepped from the truck. The tallest of the three wore red work gloves. The pole leaned in its temporary bracing. A new pole, strapped to a cage on the back end of the truck, angled at the sky. Susan could smell tar as she drew near. The three men examined the temporary bracings. A pair of red work gloves tested one of the struts. Susan felt the bore of six eyes on her as she walked past the grey truck to the edge of the sand pit. She began to inch her way down the steep sides.

Yellow sand cascaded down the grade ahead of her. She stepped cautiously around the nettles that clung to the sides of the slope. The tiny teeth pointed in all directions. William's targets lay scattered across the bottom of the pit. Susan edged by each of the rusted containers, noting the circular holes and gashes in the metal. She came to a row of three cans with blue labels. The sun glinted on the new metal. A symmetrical hole in the center of each label peered at her. Her brother was getting better. She reached the milkweeds on the

far border of the pit and brushed through them. A monarch butterfly fluttered from one of the stalks. She watched its meandering circle as it came back to land behind her. She looked up at the arms of the raspberry bushes stretching above her on the slope. A myriad of red globes gleamed in the foliage.

Susan plucked the first berry and squashed it between her fingers. She stuck them in her mouth to taste the juice. The ripe scent teased her nostrils. The bush quivered as she plucked a second berry. She heard Florian's masse in the background as she placed the fuzzy seed ball in the bottom of the pail. She stared, until it became the faceted eye of a giant deer fly, breaking her into a thousand images. A yellow jacket buzzed past her head.

"Bang," William yelled. "That pail's an inviting target."

Susan turned slowly to face her brother. He stood on the far lip of the pit next to the Hydro truck, the rifle resting along his arm. She heard the angry barking of the dog and Theodore's head appeared at the top of the slope. The dog dashed down to greet her. He pranced in circles about her, scuffling the sand with his paws. Susan squinted against the glare of the sun.

"Hey Sue, Florian's got water in the pipe. He's hooking up a hand pump now."

Susan waved, and began to step back through the milkweed. The single berry in the pail moved with her. Theodore's ears cocked forward, and she heard a car straining up the grade in the road. The Hydro men were lowering the broken pole. It was suspended in a web of ropes against the sky.

"Hey, Sis. It's Gordon."

William beckoned to her and moved behind the truck. Theodore launched himself up the slope dodging rapidly between the clumps of nettles. She heard the car pull into the driveway and its door open, then slam, as she began to climb. The sand gave way beneath her feet as she struggled upwards. The broken pole was suspended above her like a giant stalactite. She stepped over the rim of the pit and walked around the end of the truck. The rope web was behind her and Gordon was waiting at the entrance of their driveway. The gravel roadbed hurt her feet as she moved to greet him.

"Hey, sweetheart! Good to see you. What a week I've had in the city." His arm went around her shoulders as he peered into the pail. "One berry? A hell of a lot of jam that's going to make."

"Oh, I'd just started."

"How've you been feeling this week?"

"OK. I guess, and you?"

He grinned and reached into the bucket to pick out the berry. He popped it into his mouth. Susan watched the muscles in his throat work as he swallowed. His teeth glimmered whitely for a second as he picked a pip from behind a tooth.

"Best jam you ever made, Sue"

Susan felt his arm lead her toward the house. She kept her eyes on the varnished sign hanging above the veranda, where William waited with Theodore. It seemed as though a bubble of gas trickled around her womb.

Florian worked the green handle with vigorous strokes. The

pump clanked dryly. With his free hand he poured water from the jam jar into the opening in the top of the pump. The machine began to gurgle and suck. Suddenly, brown water erupted from the spout in steady bursts.

"Nous avons de l'eau! Nous avons de l'eau!" Florian's toothless grin sought her face as he worked the handle.

"Son of a bitch!" said Gordon, in wonder and placed his hands in the stream of water. "It's cold Florian, but look at the colour."

"Il faut nettoyer la pointe."

Gordon grunted and stared back at the cottage. "So now Letourneau's got to dig a trench from here to the house and then bury the pipe?"

"Oui."

Susan watched the small hands work the handle. The water was already clearer.

"He can fill in the other pit at the same time. Well, we've got our water. When you're finished here Florian come on up to the house and we'll settle the account."

"Oui."

Florian was beginning to tire and Susan watched the chest work beneath his plaid shirt. Gordon stepped around the pool of water collecting under the spout and began to move toward the path.

"So, Bill my boy, you spent the day shooting beaver?" Gordon's arm was around Willie's shoulders, and they laughed.

"Yeah, but no damn luck."

"Don't sweat it. Maybe we'll row over tomorrow."

Florian stopped working the handle. The flow of water stopped too. He began to remove the hand pump. Susan heard the suction break and the water gurgle back down into the point. His attention was held by the empty mouth of the pipe. The dog came bounding from the beach, a clump of feathers in his mouth.

"Hey! He's dug up my partridge."

"What partridge?"

"I shot one yesterday behind the pit."

"With a twenty-two? Lucky shot. That reminds me, I ran over a rabbit on the way up. I want to check the underside for dents." Her husband turned and smiled. "Hey there, Sue, think you could find the time to feed a couple of starving men?"

Susan nodded and began to follow them up the path. Ahead of her, Gordon pointed at the canted pine tree.

"Bill, do you think you could help me cut that down?"

"Sure, Gord. How do you figure to get those beavers?"

"Shoot them." They both chuckled and moved on.

Susan followed slowly. So another rabbit's dead, she thought, and imagined a fish jumping from the eye of the lake. She wondered if her child already had gills. She reached the barrier at the edge of the pit. The rain water had seeped away and the brown carcass lay on its back in one corner, the white-tipped legs splayed in the air. Root ends drooped toward them. The screen door on the veranda slammed shut. Susan turned toward the lake. Above it, the sun was fuzzy round the edges. She blinked. Its after-image bounced like a pink ball. Florian was coming up the path toward her, the green pump swinging at his side. It was time for the settling of accounts.

Fingers

Outside:

the oak tree's branches
are gnarled fingers
clawing at the sky.

Inside:

my grandmother's fingers
clutched the bedsheets
the night she died.

Outside:

the oak tree's branches
are gnarled fingers
clawing at the sky.

Inside:

my grandfather reading,
rocking in his rocker.
His fingers are knotted
along the edges of the newspaper.

The Peachstone

Pink strings of meat lay curled on the arborité counter. Alice set the grinder on its side and began to knead the mound of beef and pork into a loaf. She brushed a strand of hair from her forehead and glanced at the kitchen clock. Its worn mechanism ticked loudly, reminding her it needed winding. Ross would be home in an hour. She rubbed the itch beside her nose and paused to look at the back of her hand. Her knuckles were as red as the meat. Her fingers picked a peachstone out of the sink and took it to the combination stove. She opened the side door of its coal burner and tossed in the pit. She glanced at the telephone on the stand in the corner. Ross would mind Tommy while she went to the hospital. Her ears tuned to the sounds in the living room of their two storey tenement house. She nodded, and blew the stray hair away from her forehead. Tommy was safely babbling to his panda. The sweet smell of the ground meat cloyed at her nose as both hands returned to their work.

The telephone rang. Alice brought her head up, and felt her heart beats quicken. She closed her eyes and did not open them again until the dull ache in her chest forced her to release her breath. The kitchen window had clouded with mist in the steamy kitchen air. The coal fire hissed, and a pot of water boiled on a gas ring. Not again, not now, she thought and reached for the telephone. The receiver slipped for an instant in her wet hand. The black mouth-piece felt cool against her lips, as she stood unable to speak.

"Mrs. Johnson?" came the calm voice of Dr. Williams. The line hummed. She strained to pick up the noises in the room at the other end.

"Yes Dr. Williams," she replied. Perhaps Mrs. Round would look after Tommy.

"I'm afraid it's your father again. He's taken a turn for the worse. He hasn't much strength left after last night's attack. I think you should come down." The last words were spaced evenly.

"I see." No, Mrs. Round had gone with Ed to pick up her glasses. There was nothing to do then but take Tommy along.

"I shouldn't think there's more than two or three hours left now until the end." The line hummed again in the awkward pause. "Will you be able to get a cab?"

"Yes, thank you. I'll be there shortly." First she must leave a note for Ross, and then put the meat loaf on.

"Fine then. Just drop by the office on your way up and I'll see you in."

"I will, and thank you, Dr. Williams, for the call."

"Think nothing of it, Mrs. Johnson. We'll see you later, then, Goodbye."

"Goodbye." The line clicked once and then buzzed in her ear. She pressed the telephone tight against the side of her head to hold in the noise. Alice bit her lower lip and took in a deep breath through her nose. Well, she thought, no sense in standing here. She set the receiver back on its cradle and noticed the flecks of meat that clung to the handle. I must remember to wipe that, she thought. Her nails dug into her palms as she turned back to the steamy kitchen.

Tommy's head jerked at the sound of the telephone. He didn't like it. He edged toward the dining room table. There he could watch

his mother working in the kitchen. He dragged Panda with him. Panda tripped over a table leg and landed on his side. Tommy plumped down beside him and set him straight again. A grey lint ball lay under the table leg and Tommy rolled it into a string with his fingers. He heard his mother hang up the telephone. She went to the sink and opened the water faucet. Tommy's eyes widened for a second as his mother wiped her hands on the green dishcloth, and then walked across the room to wipe the telephone. He knew what the telephone was for. His mother often let him talk to grandfather. Tommy hadn't been allowed to see him for a long time. He could still remember the large hands, that carved whistles out of sticks. Tommy grabbed Panda by the ear and pulled him close. His mother was putting something in the oven. He watched her bend down with a match and then close the door. She picked the big brass key from the shelf on top of the stove and Tommy watched as she stood on a chair to place the key in the center of the clock-face. He liked to see the key stuck there, two ears sticking out of the clock's nose.

"Tommy?"

He heard his mother's footsteps. He took his arm from around Panda and waited.

"Right Tommy, let's get dressed for outside." Alice lifted the boy to his feet. She must remember to leave that note for Ross.

"Where we going Mommy?" They climbed the stairs to the bedroom. The boy dragged the panda behind him.

"Just outside for a ride in a taxi. Won't you like that?"

Alice didn't offer to hold the boy's hand. His comfort toy bumped up each stair.

"Where?"

"To see Grandpa." Alice clenched her hand, wondering how to answer the question she knew was coming next.

"But you said I can't see him no more." Alice watched a frown develop on the small forehead. "His heart's sick. Broke."

"I know Tommy, but Grandpa's not going to be sick anymore."

Alice bit the inside of her cheek.

"Good. Then we can play whistles again." The panda slipped from Tommy's grasp and bounced down the stairs. Tommy went down to pick it up. Alice checked the impulse to hurry him. The telephone rang.

"Tommy, be a good boy and wait for Mommy in the bedroom. I won't be long." Tommy stood there, thumb in mouth, his arms wrapped around the toy. He nodded to her. Alice touched him briefly on the head and hurried downstairs to the ringing telephone.

Panda sat on the bed. The glass eyes stared at the perfume bottle on the dresser. Tommy stared at it too. His mother had been shaking. He heard her answer the telephone. He sighed and sat at the side of the bed. He picked at the pink bandaid on the back of his finger. He'd fallen yesterday trying to climb the open drawers in his bureau. He stared again at the perfume bottle and leaned back against the side of the mattress. Panda fell on him. Tommy patted the soft head and hugged him. His mother liked perfume. He sat Panda carefully near the side of the bed and then began to pull open the two bottom drawers of the dresser. This time he didn't

open the bottom drawer so far.

The bureau teetered slightly as Tommy reached for the bottle. He missed and the bottle fell on its side. He listened for a moment. His mother was still talking on the telephone. He wiped one hand across the front of his jersey and reached again. This time he felt the bottle tight in his hand. He carefully dropped it into the open bottom drawer and then eased his way down to the floor. He retrieved the bottle and turned to Panda. The rest was easy. He opened the bottle and poured the perfume on Panda's head. A wet spot spread on the fur of one ear. Tommy sneezed twice, and listened. A chair creaked in the kitchen. He dragged Panda by the dry ear toward the staircase.

"Would you like me to have the drugstore send something over, Mrs. Johnson?"

"No, I'll be fine, Dr. Williams."

"We'll see you later then, about the papers. And once again, I'm sorry."

"Thank you. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

The earpiece clicked. Alice continued to sit beside the telephone, staring. Tilted pepper shakers spilled brown flecks down the wallpaper. She didn't like the pattern. A buzz came from her right hand, where her knuckles showed white above the curled fingers. Alice set the receiver back on its cradle, then steadied her hands on the edge of the table. She must call the pastor and arrange the cremation. Ross would be home soon. Alice leaned forward to rest her forehead

on the cool wood. Sobs came, then shudders. The water continued to boil on the stove. The odor of the cooking meat loaf came from the oven.

"Mommy."

Not like this she thought, and kept her head down. There was a small tug at her dress. She wiped her eyes on the inside of her sleeves.

"Mommy."

The boy was waiting. She tried a smile and failed. She tried again and lifted her head. She caught the odor of perfume. She would have to order the flowers.

"Smell Panda Mommy."

The comfort toy was thrust under her nose. She gagged. Hospital corridors surged at her and she struck at the upheld hand. The picture of the pink bandaid stayed with her as she rushed to the stove and thrust the panda into the coal burner. Ross appeared in the kitchen doorway.

"For God's sake Allie, what's going on?"

Tommy heard his father's voice, but the flames in the open burner held his attention. They went black around the edges just as his mother slammed the door. He stared at the grey metal and listened to the fire.

"He's dead, Ross. He's dead."

Tommy watched his father lead his mother away from the stove. His

arm was around her. His mother was crying. Tommy turned back to stare at the grey metal door. The water on the stove had boiled dry. An odor rose from the scorched pan. The meat loaf simmered in the oven.

* * *

It was dark. Tommy paused in the hall outside the closed door of his parent's bedroom. He could just hear the voice of his father. The night light was on at the head of the staircase and Tommy watched his shadow shrink as he edged down the stairs. It had faded by the time he reached the bottom. From the hallway, he turned into the dark kitchen. The clock ticked in the still room, and Tommy crinkled his nose at the heavy odor in the air. He'd had to eat supper with Mrs. Round. He could just see the outline of the stove and moved to it. The metal door was cold in his hand as he tugged it open. The ashes felt warm as his fingers searched through them for Panda's heart. They closed on something hard, and he withdrew it. Tommy carefully wiped the ashes from its rough, warm sides. He eased the metal door shut and followed the night light out of the kitchen. Tommy made his way back up the staircase, his fingers closed over Panda's heart. He paused outside his parent's bedroom. His father's voice came softly through the closed door.

Bow and Arrow

Imagine for a moment
that two identical hills stand near each other
on an open infinite plain.

On top of one hill is a giant bow.
On top of the other hill is a giant arrow.
The arrow is poised, the bow is taut.

When the sun reaches its apex
it splits into two equal parts.
Each part moves down the sky in opposition
such that the shadows of the bow and arrow
begin to move toward each other across the plain.

When the moment in time and space is achieved
when the shadow of the arrow is poised on the shadow of the bow
when the system is charged and ready for direction

who is capable of releasing the tension?
who is capable of hitting the target
of the ever-fleeing horizon?

Five Visions of Caesar

Stay. I was corporeal once, as was Pompey. And the Truth? The Rubicon was hardly more than a brook and Ariminum a city already half deserted.

Vision One: Thessaly

I lay in my tent exhausted. The army, tired from the recent battle with Pompey and the forced march into Thessaly, suffered badly from boils. The first vision came to me then and I dreamed of the men as shadows in the midst of a masque, dancing round a statue of Bacchus. Wine ran steadily from the stone penis, and one by one the men showered in the red stream. The masque went on most of the night until the last man passed out. The boils burst, and the men lay about in pools of wine and puss. I saw it then for the first time; curled round the statue's waist grinning at me.

Vision Two: Pharsalus

I had spoken to the men and they had urged me into battle with Pompey. I sacrificed to the gods and the soothsayer promised good fortune for three days. Still, I was uneasy and the evening before the battle went to the top of a nearby rise to overlook Pompey's camp. I stood beside the trunk of a fallen tree and surveyed the campfires below. The second vision came to me then, for the stars seemed to fling themselves out of the sky and fall upon Pompey's fires. A conflagration burst out, purging the camp, and the stars slipped back into the sky. Pompey alone stood surveying the afterglow of a deserted and smoking encampment. I glanced at my feet and saw it again, grinning, coiled round the trunk of the fallen tree.

Vision Three: Tralles

I stood alone at noon before my statue in the Temple of Victory in Tralles, with my face blistered from the hot Thessalian sun. The third vision occurred then. The flagstone paving cracked on each side of the statue and in less than the speed of a minute, a palm and an olive tree twisted up from the soil. The branches threw shade upon the statue. I saw the serpent slide then from the branches of the palm tree and loop itself grinning about the statue's neck.

Vision Four: Alexandria

I lay in bed in a castle at Alexandria thinking of the recent discourtesies shown me by Pothinus, the Egyptian King's eunuch. The thought of the evening's banquet that had been served on earthen dishes, threw me into a fit of anger and I commanded a centurion to bring Cleopatra to my bed. From a tower window I watched the shadowed castle gate as the centurion wrapped Cleopatra in a Persian rug and bound her there with a leather thong. And later, I flung the thong aside and unbundled my soon carnal queen. And when we lay exhausted, my anger against the Egyptian King gone, I noticed the serpent grinning where the leather thong had been thrown.

Vision Five: Rome

In the final vision, Brutus and I locked wrists in friendship, and strode the steps to the senate. A flock of ravens fell upon me, slashing and hacking at my body while Brutus, always slow with his sword, drew and passed it through my groin. I tumbled down the white marble steps as both he and the ravens slipped away. I glanced up to see that I had

fallen at the base of the statue of Pompey I had ordered erected the day Theodotus presented me with Pompey's head. I saw too that the stone lips of the statue were drawn back in a grin. Just then, when I thought the vision to be over, I saw another Caesar, muscles sagging, and bald, ease his way down the senate steps to pause at my statue. From his bloated stomach, burst a loud belch.

Stay. It has been said by some that I once leaped from the fire in the great library of Alexandria, and threw myself into the sea clutching a valuable book. They say I outswam an Egyptian trireme, saved myself and the book, returning to defeat Ptolemy in battle. And the truth? I defeated the king. I proclaimed Cleopatra Queen of Egypt. She presented me with a son. As for the rest? Perhaps others suffer from visions.

