



## Chapter 8: Lone

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leaves  
but  
cannot

THE MELONS

The way was narrow, the turn too sharp, but for the first time she managed to get the automobile off the dirt and onto the tarmac without knocking the sign down completely. Earlier, on the way in, with the darkness and the single headlight, Lone couldn't prevent the bumper from scraping it and now, leaving the Convent, its post leaned and the sign—Early Melons—was about to fall. One of them, she remembered, can't stand worth a post. The one dropped in a heap, most likely. Not much schooling in "lyrics" was correct and not just the letters. July not over and the Convent garden had melons already ripe for picking. Like in LONE

## CHAPTER 8

### LONE

inside but Lone were they thick. None of them would listen. The Convent was sleeping and refused to wake her and didn't believe a word Lone said. After driving out there in the middle of the night to tell them, were they, they just gawped and smiled. Now she had to figure carefully what else to do, otherwise the melons that got split would be their little heads.

The night air was hot and the rain she had been smelling was far

Gravel  
dirt  
farmac



EARLY MELONES!

The way was narrow, the turn <sup>g</sup>too sharp, but ~~for the first time~~ she managed to get the Oldsmobile off the dirt and onto the tarmac without knocking the sign down completely. Earlier, on the way in, with the darkness and the single headlight, Lone couldn't prevent the bumper from scraping it and now, leaving the Convent, its post leaned and the sign--Early Melones--was about to fall. One of them, she <sup>thought</sup> ~~murmured~~, can't spell worth poot. The one wrapped in a sheet, most likely. Not much schooling there. But "Early" was correct and not just the letters. July not over and the Convent garden had melons already ripe for picking. Like their heads. Smooth outside, sweet inside but Lord were they thick. None of them would listen. Said Connie was sleeping and refused to wake her and didn't believe a word Lone said. After driving out there in the middle of the night to tell them, warn them, they just yawned and smiled. Now she had to figure carefully what else to do, otherwise the melons that got split would be their bald heads.

The night air was hot and the rain she had been smelling was far

but still coming which is what she thought two hours ago when, hoping to collect mandrake while it was still dry, she padded around the stream bank near the Oven. Had she not been, she never would have heard the men or discovered the devilment they were cooking.

Clouds hid the night<sup>K</sup>ly's best jewelry but the road to Ruby was familiar as a pension check. She squinted, nevertheless, in case something or somebody scampered up ahead--beyond the Oldsmobile's single headlight. It could be possum, racoon, white tail deer, or even an angry woman since it was women who walked this road. Only women. Never men. For more than twenty years Lone had seen them. Back and forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost. Out here in a <sup>red</sup>gold and <sup>gold</sup>copper land cut through now and then with black rock or a swatch of green; out here under skies so star-packed it was disgraceful; out here where the wind handled you like a man, women dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians. Sweetie Fleetwood had walked it, Billie Delia too. And the girl called Seneca. Another called Mavis. Arnette too and more than once. And not just these days. They had walked this road from the very first. Soane Morgan, for



instance, and, when she was young, Consolata, ~~the white-eyed woman in the Convent~~. Many of the walkers Lone had seen; others she learned about. But the men never walked the road; they drove it, although sometimes their destination was the same as the women's: Sargeant, K.D., Roger, Menus. And the good Deacon himself of couple of decades back. Well, if she did not get somebody to fix the fan belt and plug the oil pan she would be walking it too, provided there was <sup>place left</sup> ~~anything useful left to do.~~ *worth traveling to.*

If ever there was a time for speeding, this was it, but the condition of the car precluded that. In 1960 the wipers, the air conditioning, the radio worked. Now a fierce heater was the only element reminiscent of the Oldsmobile's original power. In 1968, after it had two owners, Steward and then Dovey Morgan, Dovey asked her if she could use it. Lone screamed her joy. Finally at 79, unlicensed but feisty, she was going to learn to drive and have her own car too. No more hitching up the wagon, no more brakes squealing in her yard at all hours summoning her to emergencies that weren't or to stand-bys that turned into crises. She could follow her own mind, check on the mothers when she wished; tool on up to the house in her own car and, most important, leave when she wanted to.

But the gift came too late. Just as she became truly auto mobile,  
nobody wanted her craft. After having infuriated the hooved and  
terrified the clawed; having churned columns of <sup>red</sup> gold dust up and  
down tractor trails for weeks, she had no place to go. Her patients let  
her poke and examine, but for the baby's delivery they traveled two  
hours (if they could make it) to the hospital in Demby for the cool  
hands of white men. <sup>Now, at 86</sup> In spite of her never-fail reputation (which was  
to say, she never lost a mother as Fairy once had) they refused her  
their swollen bellies, their shrieks and grabbing hands. Laughed at  
her clean belly bands, her drops of mother's urine. Poured her pepper  
tea in the toilet. It did not matter that she had curled up on their  
<sup>to a (over)</sup> sofas, nodded in their kitchens, <sup>after</sup> braided <sup>into</sup> their <sup>daughters'</sup> children's hair, planted  
herbs in their gardens and gave good counsel for the past 25 years  
and for fifty more in Haven before being sent for. No matter she  
taught them how to comb their breasts to set the milk flowing; what  
to do with the afterbirth; what direction the knife under the  
mattress should point. No matter she searched the country to get  
them the kind of dirt they wanted to eat. No matter she had gotten  
in the bed with them, pressing the soles of her feet to theirs helping  
them push, push! Or massaged their stomachs with sweet oil for



Rock their irritable children



hours. No matter at all. She had been good enough to bring them into the world and when she and Fairy were summoned to continue that work in the new place, Ruby, the mothers sat back in their chairs, spread their knees and breathed with relief. Now that Fairy was dead, leaving one midwife for a population which needed and prided itself on families as large as neighborhoods, the mothers took their wombs away from her. But Lone believed that there was more to it than the fashion for Demby. She had delivered the Fleetwood babies and each of the defectives had stained her reputation as if she had *made* the babies, not simply delivered them. The suspicion that she was bad luck and the comforts of the Demby hospital combined to deprive her of the work she was trained for. One of the mothers told her that she simply loved the week of rest, the serving tray, the thermometer, the blood pressure tests; loved the doze of daytime and the pain pills, but mostly she said she loved the fact that people kept asking her how she felt. None of that was available to her if she delivered at home. There she'd be fixing the family's breakfast the second or third day and worrying about the quality of the cow's milk as well as her own. Others must have felt the same--the luxury of sleep and being away from home, the newborn taken away each night

for somebody else's care. And the fathers, well, Lone suspected they too were happier with closed doors, waiting in the hall, being in a place where other men were in charge instead of some toothless woman gumming gum to keep her gums strong. "Don't mistake the fathers' thanks," Fairy had warned her. "Men scared of us, always will be. To them we're death's handmaiden standing as between them and the children their wives carry." During those times, Fairy said, the midwife is the interference, the one giving orders, on whose secret skill so much depended and the dependency irritated them. Especially here in this place where they had come to multiply in peace. Fairy was right as usual, but Lone had another liability. It was said she could read minds, a gift from something that, whatever it was, was not God, and which she had used as early as two when she positioned herself to be found in the yard when her mother was dead in the bed. Lone denied it; she believed everybody knew what other people were thinking. They just avoided the obvious. Yet ~~at 85~~ she did know something more profound than Morgan memory or Pat Best's historybook. She knew what neither memory nor history can say or record: the "trick" of life and its "reason."

In any case, her livelihood over ( she had been called on twice in



the last eight years) Lone was dependent on the generosity of congregations and neighbors. She spent her time <sup>gathering</sup> ~~collecting~~ medicinal herbs, flitting from one church to another, <sup>to receive a Helping Hand collection</sup> ~~driving her collapsing~~ ~~Oldsmobile~~, and surveying the fields which she loved not because they were open but because they were full of secrets. Like the carfull of skeletons she'd found a few months ago. If she had been paying attention to her own mind instead of gossip, she would have investigated the Lenten buzzards as soon as they appeared--two years ago at spring thaw, March of 1974. But because they were seen right when the Morgan's and Fleetwoods' had announced the wedding, people were confused about whether the marriage was summoning the buzzards or protecting the town from them. Now everybody knew they had been attracted to a family feast of people lost in a blizzard. Arkansas plates. Harper Jury's label on some cough medicine. They loved each other, the family did. Even with the disturbance of birds of prey, you could tell they were embracing as they slept deeper and deeper into that deep cold.

At first she thought Sargeant must have known all about it. He raised corn in those fields. But there was no mistaking the astonishment on his face. Or on any of the others' when they heard.



to receive <sup>a</sup> ~~her~~ Helping Hand collection

The problem was whether to notify the law or not. Not, it was decided. Even to bury them would be an admission of something they had no hand in. When some of the men went to look, much of their attention was not on the scene at hand, but west on the Convent that loomed in their sightline. She should have known then what they were thinking. Had she been paying attention, first to the buzzards then to the minds of men, she would not be using up all her Wrigley's and gasoline on a mission she hoped would be her last. Eyesight too dim, joints too stiff, this was no work for a gifted midwife. But God had given her the task, bless His holy heart, and at thirty miles an hour on a hot July night she knew she was traveling in His time, not outside it. It was He who placed her at the stream bank; encouraged her to look for the medicine best picked dry at night.

The stream <sup>bed</sup> ~~level~~ <sup>was dry</sup>; the coming rain would remedy that even as it softened the two-legged root. She <sup>had</sup> heard light laughter and radio music traveling from the Oven. Young couples courting. At least they were in the open, she thought, not scrambling up into a hay loft or under a blanket in the back of a truck. Then the laughter and the music stopped. Deep male voices gave orders; flashlights <sup>cute</sup> slashed. Without a murmur, the couples left but the men didn't. <sup>Leaning</sup> ~~They sat~~

shafts on bodies, faces<sup>hands</sup>, and what they  
carried.



<sup>or</sup>  
~~and~~ <sup>squatted on their haunches</sup> they  
~~down~~, <sup>clustering</sup> together in darkness. Lone <sup>snapped off</sup> her own  
flashlight and would have <sup>tramped</sup> <sup>with her apron</sup> <sup>moved invisibly</sup> <sup>shrouded</sup> <sup>Holy Redeemer</sup> ~~along the bank~~ to where her car

was parked had she not remembered the other events she had  
ignored or misunderstood: the Lenten buzzards; Apollo's new  
handgun. She clicked herself back into darkness. <sup>And sat down on the grass.</sup> She had to stop  
nursing resentment at the townspeople's refusal of her services; stop  
stealing penny revenge by ignoring what was going on and letting evil  
go free. Playing blind was to avoid the language God spoke in. He did  
not thunder instructions or whisper messages into ears. Oh, no. He  
was a liberating God. A teacher who taught you how to learn, to see  
for yourself. His signs were clear, abundantly so, if you stopped  
steeping in vanity's sour juice and paid attention to His world. He  
wanted her to hear the men gathered at the Oven to decide and figure  
out how to run the Convent women off, and if He wanted her to  
witness that, He must also want her to do something about it. At  
first she didn't know what was going on, or what to do. But, as in the  
past when she was confused, she closed her eyes and whispered, "Thy  
will. Thy will." The voices rose then and she heard as clear as if she  
had been standing among them what they said to one another and  
what they meant. What they vocalized and what they did not.

There were nine of them. Some smoked, some sighed as one by one they began to speak. Much of what they said, Lone had heard before although without the rough scales the words grew as they snaked through the night air: the ruination that was upon them, <sup>(over)</sup> the ~~cause of which was clear~~. They honed the evidence till each piece fit an already sanded groove.

Remember how they scandalized the wedding? What you say? Uh huh and it was that very same day I caught them kissing on each other in the back of that nasty-looking Cadillac. Very same day and if that wasn't enough to please <sup>the devil</sup> ~~Satan~~ two more was fighting over them in the dirt. Right down in it. Lord I hate a nasty woman. Sweetie said they tried their best to poison her. I heard that too. Got caught in a snow storm out that way and took shelter with them. Should have known better. Well, you know Sweetie. Anyway said she heard noises coming from somewhere in that house. Sound to her like little <sup>ed</sup> babies crying. What in God's name little babies doing out there? You asking me? Whatever it is it ain't natural. Well it used to house little girls, didn't it? Yeah, I remember. Said it was a school. School for what? What they teaching out there? Sargeant, didn't you find marijuana growing in the middle of your alfalfa? Yep. sure did. That



be given for dessert - Each item drew sighs and ~~shorts~~ <sup>means</sup> I despair ~~then~~ <sup>followed by</sup> then  
gratitude for having escaped the sordid, the cruel the ~~un-Godly~~ <sup>of the men, aware</sup>  
that ~~they~~ <sup>that</sup> ~~they~~ <sup>they</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~changing~~ <sup>changing</sup> in intolerable ways, had come  
to map <sup>it</sup> a defense.  
The man did not rehearse Cary's sermon

Reverend Cary had delivered a sermon so well  
received, he included a version of it every time he  
preached. "What have you given up to live here?"  
He asked - hitting "up" like a soprano. "What sacrifice  
do you make every day to live here in God's beauty,  
His bounty, His peace?" The Congregation said  
~~uncontrollable~~ <sup>Children</sup> young;

"Tell us, Reverend. Say it" "I'll tell you  
what." He chuckled then.

"Yes, sir.

"Go ahead now

"Reverend Cary lifted ~~his right~~ <sup>his right</sup> straight in  
the air and curled ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> into a fist. Then, one  
finger at a time, began to list what the  
~~world elsewhere~~ <sup>Congregation had deepened itself of</sup> offered. Television  
(The Congregation snickered); ~~Disco~~ <sup>Disco</sup>  
(laughter): The New York Times (they roared  
with laughter) movie shows, filthy music,  
~~but for the left hand~~ <sup>but for the left hand</sup>, wickedness in the streets,  
theft in the night, murder in the morning, drugs for breakfast



don't surprise me. All I know is they beat Arnette up some when she went out there to confront them about the lies they told her. She thinks they kept her baby and told her it was still born. You believe it? I don't know but I wouldn't put it past them. What I do know is how messed up her face was. Aw, man. We can't have this. Roger told me that the Mother, you know, the <sup>old</sup> white one used to shop here sometimes? Well he said when she died she weighed less than fifty pounds and shone like sulphur. Jesus! Said the girl he dropped off there was openly flirting with him. That's the one half naked all the time? I knew something was wrong with her from the time she stepped off the bus. How she get a bus to come out here anyway? Guess, why don't you? You think they got powers? I *know* they got powers, question is whose power stronger. Why don't they just get on out, leave? Huh! Would you if you had a big old house to live in without having to work for it? Something's going on out there and I don't like <sup>any</sup> ~~none~~ of it. No men. Kissing on themselves. Babies hid away. Jesus! No telling what else. Look what happened to Billie Delia after she started hanging around out there. Knocked her mama down the stairs and took off for that place like a shoat looking for teat. I hear they drink like fish too. The old woman was always drunk when

I saw her and remember the first words out their mouths when they came to the wedding? Anything to drink is what they asked for and when they got a glass of lemonade, they acted like they'd been insulted and walked on out the door. I remember that. Bitches. More like witches. But look here, brother, the bones beat all. I can't believe a whole family died out there without nobody knowing it. They wasn't all that far away, know what I'm saying? Can't nobody tell me they left the road and got themselves lost in a field with a big old house less than two miles away, They would have seen it. Had to. The man would have got out and walked to it, see what I mean? He could reason, couldn't he and even <sup>if</sup> he couldn't reason he could see. How you going to miss a house that size out here in land flat as a nail head? You saying they had something to do with it? Listen, nothing ever happened around here like what's going on now. Before those heifers came to town this was a peaceable kingdom. The others before them at least had some religion. These here sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church and I bet you a dollar to a fat nickle they ain't thinking about one either. They don't need men and they don't need God. Can't say they ain't been warned. Asked first and then warned. If they stayed to themselves, that'd be something.



But they don't. They meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow, polluted and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families. We can't have it, you all. Can't have it at all.

So, Lone thought, the fanged head <sup>s and the tail are</sup> is somewhere else. Out yonder all <sup>slithery</sup> nicely packaged <sup>(over)</sup> in a house full of women. Lone shook her head and adjusted her doublemint. She was listening only half heartedly to the words; trying hard to divine the thoughts behind them. Some of it she got right away. Sargeant, she knew would be nodding at every shred of gossip and chewing on the rag end of truth, wondering <sup>aloud</sup> why this deliberately beautiful town governed by responsible men couldn't remain so: stable, prosperous, with no talk-back young people. Why would they want to leave and raise families (and customers) elsewhere? <sup>But</sup> And he would also be thinking how much less his outlay would be if he owned the Convent land and if the <sup>how</sup> women are gone from there, he would be in a better position to own it. Everyone knew he had already visited the Convent--to "warn" them, which is to say he offered to buy the place and when the response was an incomprehensible stare, he told the old woman to "think carefully and that other things could happen to lover the



Not real Convent women locked safely  
? away from men; but worse, women  
who chose their own company

price." Wisdom Poole would be looking for a reason to explain why he had no control anymore over his brothers and sisters. To explain how it happened that those who used to worship him, listen to him, were now strays trying to be on their own. The shooting last year between Brood and Apollo was over Billie Delia and would be enough reason for him to go galavanting off for the pleasure of throwing some women in the road. Billie Delia was friendly with those women, had one of his brothers drive her out there and it was after that that the trouble between Apollo and Brood turned dangerous. Neither one had followed Wisdom's orders ~~to~~ never speak to or look at that girl again. The result was Biblical--a man lying in wait to slaughter his brother. As for the Fleetwoods, Arnold and Jeff, well they've been wanting to blame somebody for Sweetie's children for a long time. Maybe it was the midwife's fault. Maybe it was the government's fault, but the midwife could only be dis-employed and the government was not accountable, and although Lone had delivered <sup>some</sup> ~~each~~ of Jeff's sick children long before the first woman arrived, they wouldn't let a little thing like that keep them from finding fault anywhere but in their own blood. Or Sweetie's. Menus, well, he'd be ripe for a raid on anybody. Spending those weeks out there drying out, you'd think



he'd be grateful. Those women must have witnessed some things, saw some things he didn't want ranging around in anybody's mind in case they fell out of their mouths. Or maybe it was just to erase the shame he felt at having let Harper and the others talk him out of marrying that woman he brought home. That pretty red bone girl they told him was not good enough for him; said she was more like a fast woman than a bride. He let out like he drank because of what Vietnam had done to him, but Lone thought the pretty redbone girl's loss was more to the point. He hadn't had the courage to leave and go on and live with her someplace else. Chose instead both to submit to his father's rule and charge him a neat price for it: undisturbed acceptance of his affliction. Getting rid of some unattached women who had wiped up after him, washed his drawers, removed his vomit, listened to his filthy cursing as well as his sobs might convince him for a while that he was truly a man unpolluted by his mother's weakness, worthy of his father patience and that he was right to let the red bone go. Lone could not count how many times she had sat in Holy Redeemer and heard his father, Harper, begin to testify, begin to examine his own sins and end up going on about loose women who could keep you from knowing who, what and where your children are.

He'd married a Blackhorse woman, Catherine, and worried her <sup>into</sup> ~~to~~ an <sup>indigestion</sup> ~~early grave~~ about what she was doing and who was she seeing and this and that and was she properly instructing their daughter Kate. Kate got married as fast as she could just to get out from under his hand. His first wife, Menus' mother, Martha, must have given him a bad time. So bad he never let their only son, ~~Menus~~, forget it. Then there was K.D., the family man. Talking about how strange one of those Convent girls was and how he knew it right away soon as he saw her get of the bus. Ha ha. He's a daddy now of a three-month old girl with all its fingers and toes and who knows maybe a full brain too courtesy of the doctor willing to treat black folks in Demby. So he and Arnette both sniffed their noses at ~~her~~, Lone, and however happy Arnette must be now and willing to pass her earlier "mistake" off on the Convent women tricking her, K.D. would have another grudge. The strange girl he was now <sup>making fun of</sup> ~~mocking~~ he'd stalked for years till she threw him out the door. Take a whole lot of healthy babies to make him forget that. He's a Morgan, after all, and they haven't forgotten a thing since 1789. <sup>with their mindless giggling, outraged the doctor</sup>

Lone understood these private thoughts and some of what Steward's and Deacon's motives might be: neither one put up with



what he couldn't control. But she could not have imagined Steward's rancor--his bile at the thought that his grandnephew <sup>maybe?</sup> (?) had surely been hurt or destroyed in that place. It was a floating blister in his blood <sup>stream</sup> ~~system~~ that neither shrank or came to a head. Nor could she have imagined how deep in the meat of his brain stem lay the memory of how close his brother came to breaking up his marriage to Soane. How off the course Deek slid when he was looking in those poison green eyes. For months the two of them had met secretly, for months Deek was distracted, making mistakes and just suppose the hussey had gotten pregnant? Had a mixed-up child? Steward seethed at the thought of that barely averted betrayal of all they owed and promised the Old Fathers. But a narrowly escaped treason against the fathers' law, the law of continuance and multiplication, was overwhelmed by the permanent threat to his cherished view of himself. The women in the Convent were for him a flaunting parody of the nineteen Negro ladies of his and his brother's youthful memory. They were the degradation of that moment of sunlit skin and verbena. They, with their mindless giggling, outraged the dulcet tones, the tinkling in the merry and welcoming laughter of the nineteen ladies who, scheduled to live forever in pastel shaded

dreams, were now doomed to extinction by this new and obscene breed of female. He could not abide them for sully<sup>personal history</sup>ing his ~~memory~~ with their street walker's clothes and whore's appetites; their mocking and desecrating the vision that carried him through a war, imbued his marriage and strengthened his efforts to build a town where the vision could flourish. He would never forgive them that and he would not tolerate this loss of charity.

Nor did Lone know the glacier that was Deacon Morgan's pride. Its hidden bulk, its accretion and unmovability. She knew about his long ago relationship with Consolata. But she could not have fathomed his personal shame or understood how important it was to erase both the shame and the kind of woman he believed was its source. An uncontrollable, gnawing woman who had bitten his lip just to lap the blood it shed, a beautiful, golden-skinned, outside woman with moss green eyes that entrapped a man, a Salome' from whom he had escaped just in time or she would have had his head on a dinner plate. That ravenous ground-fucking woman who had not left his life but had weasled her way into Soane's affections and, he suspected, had plied her with evil potions to make her less loving than she used to be and it was not the eternal grieving for <sup>e</sup>thir sons that froze her,



but the mess she was swallowing still, given to her her by the woman whose very name she herself had made into a joke and a travesty of what a woman should be.

Lone didn't, couldn't, know all, but she knew enough. <sup>(over)</sup>Stepping softly, she made her way along the edge of the creek toward her car. "Thy will. Thy will," she whispered convinced that what she had heard and surmised was no idleness. The men had not come there merely to rehearse, like boot camp recruits, like invaders preparing for slaughter, they were there to curse, to heat the blood or turn it icicle cold the better to execute a ~~deadly~~ mission.

"Where is Richard Misner?" Lone didn't bother to say hello. She had knocked on Misner's door, then entered his house to find it dark and empty. Now she had roused his closest neighbor, Frances Poole, from her sleep. Frances groaned.

"What in the world is going on with you, Lone?"

"Tell me where Misner is."

"They <sup>are</sup> gone to Muskogee. Why?"

"They? They who?"

"Reverend Misner and Anna. A Conference. What you need him

And the flashlights had revealed  
the equipment,



for this time of night?"

"Let me in," said Lone and stepped past Frances into the living room.

"Come on in the kitchen," said Frances.

"No time. Listen." Lone described the meeting saying "a whole passle of menfolk planning something against the Convent. Morgans, Fleetwoods and Wisdom's there, too. They going after those women out there."

"Lord, what kind of mess is this? They're going to scare them off in the middle of the night?"

"Woman, listen to me. Those men got guns with sights on them."

"That doesn't mean anything. I've never seen my brother go <sup>any</sup> nowhere minus his rifle, except church and even then it's in the car."

"They got rope too Frannie."

"Rope?"

"Two inch."

"What're you thinking?"

"We wasting time. Where's Sut?"

"Sleep."

"Wake him."

"I'm not going to disturb my husband for some wild---"

"Wake him, Frannie. I am not a crazy woman and you know it."

The first drops were warm and fat carrying the scent of white loco, paintbrush and cholla from regions north and west. They smashed into gentian, desert trumpets and slid from chicory leaves. Plump and slippery they rolled like mercury beads over the bare earth around the Oven and Anna's store. As they sat in kitchen light, Lone, Frances and <sup>the</sup> Sut DuPres could see, even smell the rainfall, but they could not hear it so soft, so downy were the drops.

Sut was unconvinced that Lone's demand for intervention was called for but he did agree to speak to Reverends Pulliam and Cary in the morning. Lone said morning might be too late and took off <sup>in a huff</sup> to find somebody who didn't talk to her as if she were a child <sup>unable to wake</sup> waking from a nightmare. Anna was gone; she couldn't go to Soane because of Deek; and since K.D. and Arnette had taken the house that Menus used to own, Dovey <sup>wouldn't be in town</sup> didn't spend nights there. She thought about Kate but knew she would not ~~want to~~ <sup>find the men on</sup> go up <sup>a</sup> against her father. It seemed best to ~~head out of town~~ to the farms and ranches beyond. Working windshield wipers would have been a gift but <sup>Lone</sup> ~~if she was determined~~

rolling gum slowly around in her mouth concentrated on being



rolling <sup>her</sup> gum slowly around in her mouth  
gathered ~~her~~ concentrated on being

rolling gum slowly around  
in her mouth concentrated on  
being

~~to be~~ careful. Driving past the deserted Oven, pleased she had gotten the mayapples in time, she noticed there were no lights at Anna place nor way back of it, in Deek Morgana's house. Lone squinted to negotiate the few miles of dirt ~~road~~ between Ruby's paved road and the county's. It could be a tricky stretch because the earth was absorbing the rain now, swelling the roots of thirsty plants and forming rivulets wherever it could. She drove slowly thinking if this mission was truly God's intention, nothing could stop her. Halfway to Aaron Poole's house the Oldsmobile halted in a roadside ditch.

The rain's perfume was stronger north of Ruby. Mavis and Pallas ~~the~~ <sup>surrounding 3 sides of the convent</sup> were delighted by it. There in the neglected yard white clover was <sup>over</sup> thick and scotchbroom grew tall all around the Convent. They rushed to tell Consolata, Grace and Seneca that the longed for rain had finally come. <sup>in the kitchen door</sup> The kitchen door was open and, gathered there, first they watched, then they stuck out their hands to feel. It was like lotion on their fingers so they entered in and let it <sup>pour</sup> fall like balm on their shaved heads and upturned faces. Consolata started it but the rest were quick to join her. There are great rivers in the world and on their banks and the edges of oceans children thrill to water. In



At the ~~every~~ place but the garden  
~~all around the C,~~ ~~on that side~~  
where mowing had not been in more than a  
year, white clover was thick and  
~~scotch~~ Scotch broom tall

Especially ~~abundant~~ at the C. where  
thick white clover ~~was thick~~ and Scotch broom ~~thick~~  
Colonized every place but the garden. Mavis  
and Tallas, ~~sleeping in hammocks~~  
~~were~~ <sup>from sleep</sup> around by its redolence,

places where rain is light the thrill is <sup>almost</sup> erotic. But those sensations bow  
to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain. If there  
were any recollections of a recent warning or intimations of harm,  
the irresistible rain washed them away. They would have laughed  
had enchantment not been so deep. Seneca embraced and <sup>finally</sup> escaped a  
dark morning in state housing. Grace witnessed the <sup>complete</sup> <sup>successful</sup> final cleansing of  
a white shirt that never should have been stained. Mavis moved in  
the shudder of rose of sharon petals tickling her skin. Pallas,  
delivered of a <sup>delicate daughter</sup> ~~son~~, held him close while the rain rinsed away a  
scarey woman on an escalator and <sup>all fear of black water</sup> ~~the last traces of vulnerability~~.  
<sup>enhoused?</sup> Consolata, ~~wholly~~ inhabited by the god who sought her out in the  
garden, was the more furious dancer, Mavis the most elegant.

~~But~~ Seneca and Grace danced together then parted.  
~~to feel the squish of mud on their~~ Pallas, smoothing  
raindrops from her baby's head swayed. Grace and  
Seneca clasped hands around them, circling till  
Mavis & C. J. made the circle wider.