



Chapter 8: Lone

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The way was narrow, the turn sharp, but 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. "Can't spell word pool," she murmured. The one wrapped in a sheet, most likely ^{Eight} not much schooling there. But "Early" was correct and not ^{Eight} 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 gawped and smiled. Now she had to figure ^{not} 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 peddled 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.

The way was narrow, the turn sharp, but 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. "Can't spell worth poot," she murmured. 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 ^{out} ~~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 sky'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 ^{watched} ~~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 red and gold 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, once when she was young, Connie as well. 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 any place left worth travelling 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 red dust up and down tractor trails for weeks, she had no place to go. Her patients let her poke and ^{keep}examine, but for the ^Ibaby's delivery they traveled hours (if they could make it) to the hospital in Demby for the cool hands of whitemen. Now at eighty-six 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 sofas to rock irritable children, nodded in their kitchens after braiding their daughters' 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 county 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 ^{away}stomachs with sweet oil for 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~~ ^{has maternity wards.} 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 ^{for which} she was trained ^{couldn't help loving} for. One of the mothers told her that she ~~simply~~ loved the week of rest, the serving tray, the thermometer, the blood pressure tests; ^{adored} ~~loved~~ the doze of daytime and the pain pills, but mostly she said she loved ^{how} ~~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 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 gathering medicinal herbs, flitting from one church to another to receive a Helping Hand collection, and surveying the fields which she ^{enjoyed} ~~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. The problem was whether to notify the law or not. Not, it was

invited her

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 ^{behind the Oven} ~~at the stream bank~~; encouraged her to look for the medicine best picked dry at night.

The streambed was dry; the coming rain would remedy that even as it softened the two-legged root. She had 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 cut shafts on bodies, faces, hands and what they carried. Without a murmur, the couples left but the men didn't. Leaning ² ~~againt~~ the Oven's walls, ¹

squatting on their haunches they clustered in darkness. Lone they shrouded her own flashlight with her apron and would have moved invisibly to the rear of Holy Redeemer where her car was parked had she not remembered the other events she had ignored or heard misunderstood: the Lenten buzzards; Apollo's new handgun. She clicked herself back into darkness and sat on the grass. 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 topic was not new, but it had none of the delight that dressed the theme when delivered from a pulpit. Reverend Cary had captured the subject in a sermon so well received he included a version of it every Sunday.

"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?"

"Tell us, Reverend. Say it."

"I'll tell you what." Reverend Cary chuckled.

"Yes, sir."

"Go ahead, now."

Reverend Cary had lifted his right hand straight in the air and curled it into a fist. then, one finger at a time, began to list what the congregation had deprived itself of.

"Television."

The congregation snickered.

"Disco."

They laughed, merrily shaking their heads.

"The Oklahoma Post and The New York Times"

They roared with laughter.

"Movie shows, filthy music." He continued with fingers from his left hand. "Wickedness in the streets, theft in the night, murder in the morning. Liquor for lunch and dope for dinner. That's what you have given up."

Each item drew sighs and moans of sorrow. Suffused with gratitude for having refused and escaped the sordid, the cruel the unGodly, all of the up-to-date evils disguised as pleasure, each member of the congregation could feel his and her heart swell with pity for those who wrestled with those "sacrifices."

But there was no pity here. Here men spoke of the ruination that was upon them; how Ruby was changing in intolerable ways and in order to fix it, they did not think to extend a hand in fellowship or love. They mapped defense instead and honed the evidence of its need 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 the devil 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. Sounded to her like little 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 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 stillborn. 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 old 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 any 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 if 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 haven'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. *sisters. To explain how it happened that* So, Lone thought, the fangs and the tail are somewhere else. Out yonder all slithery in a house full of women. Not real convent and women locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose

themselves for

~~their own~~ company. 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, chewing on the rag end of truth and wondering aloud 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? But he would be thinking how much less his outlay would be if he owned the Convent land, and how, if the 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 lower the 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, ^{made} had one of his ^{younger} 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 some 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 ~~ange~~ 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 ^{curse} ~~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 into nervous digestion carrying on 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 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 off the bus. Ha ha. He's a daddy now of a ^{four}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 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 girl whose name he now scandalized he had 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. 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 (maybe?) had surely been hurt or destroyed in that place. It was a floating blister in his blood stream 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 ^{and poisoning} 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 verberna. 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 sullyng his personal history with their street walker's clothes and whore's appetites; 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 their sons that froze her, but the mess she was swallowing still, given to 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 and the flashlights had revealed the equipment. 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 the 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're gone to Muskogee. Why?"

"They? They who?"

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

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 Sut DuPres could see, even smell the rainfall, but they could not hear it so soft, so downy were the drops.

to rush out and intercept
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 in a huff to find somebody who didn't talk to her as if she were a child unable to wake from a nightmare. Anna Flood 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 Morgan wouldn't be in town. She thought about Kate but knew she would not go up against her father. It seemed best to find men she thought truly righteous on farms and ranches beyond. Working windshield wipers were an unavailable blessing so Lone, rolling gum slowly ^oarund in her mouth, concentrated on being 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 Morgan'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, especially at the Convent where thick white clover and scotchbroom colonized every place but the garden. Mavis and Pallas, aroused from sleep by its redolence rushed to tell Consolata, Grace and Seneca that the longed for rain had finally come. Gathered in the kitchen door 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 pour 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 places where rain is light the thrill is almost erotic. But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain. They would

have laughed had enchantment not been so deep. If there were any recollections of a recent warning or intimations of harm, the irresistible rain washed them away. Seneca embraced and finally let go a dark morning in state housing. Grace witnessed the successful 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 delicate son, held him close while the rain rinsed away a scarey woman on an escalator and all fear of black water. Consolata, wholly inhabited by the god who sought her out in the garden, was the more furious dancer, Mavis the most elegant.

Seneca and Grace danced together then parted. Pallas, smoothing raindrops from her baby's head, swayed like a frond.

Naturally Lone sought out a DuPres. She had been raised in that family, rescued then taught by one of the daughters. More than that she knew of what they were made. Pious DuPres, son of Booker DuPres and nephew to the famous Juvenal DuPres, was her first choice. Like the Morgans and Blackhorses they were proud to be descendents of men who had governed in state houses, but unlike them they were more keenly pleased by righteousness. They did not

always know what it was, but they spent a lot of time trying to find out. Supper conversation focussed on the problems each member was having, how each and all could handle or help. And always the turn was on the morality of a deed, the clarity of motives, the benefit to ^{His} God's glory and His trust. The actions of Brood and Apollo had stunned and outraged them; Wisdom Poole was brother to their daughter-in-law and in his presence in a group intent on hurting women--for whatever reason--they would quickly see the monster's handiwork. And so they did. When Lone told them all she had heard and what she knew, Pious wasted no time. He instructed his wife Melinda to get over to the Beauchamps place; tell Ren and Luther to meet him. He himself would get to Deed Sands and Aaron Poole. Melinda said they ought to notify Dovey but they could not agree on how to do that if Steward was there. Lone didn't know if they had already started for the convent or were waiting for sunrise but said she would risk it and inform Dovey who could let Soane know what was going on.