FROM TREE TO TREE

by

Ina Virginnia Robertson

(pen name, Peg Brennan)

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Department of English (and Creative Writing)

The University of British Columbia,
Vancouver 8, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Under every intention the disease lies curled up, as it does under every leaf on the tree. If you bend down to see it, and it feels itself discovered, it leaps up — the thin, dumb malignance — and instead of being squashed, it wants to be fertilized by you.

The moonlight dazzled us. Birds shrieked from tree to tree. There was a buzzing and whizzing in the fields.
We crawled through the dust, a pair of snakes.

—Franz Kafka

This thesis consists of a number of original stories and poems. The works attempt, in experimental forms, to portray certain basic human dilemmas in order to communicate their social, political, psychological or philosophical aspects.

"The Butternut Tree" deals with different sets of relationships, some severed forcefully though desired, others forced to continue past the point of endurance. In "The Tamarack", deprivation forces one faction of society
into robbery, then atrocities, then cannibalism. "Big Orchard is intended to be the expression of the transition, or progress, from one condition, or level to another. In "Yesterday We Prayed" the condition of blind faith is presented in the moment before it is to be proved absurd. "The Panel" describes an obstacle which, having been created by a small misunderstanding, subsequently disallows any kind of successful relationship or progress.

In this thesis an attempt has been made to reinforce and objectify meaning through form. In "The Butternut Tree" the form is designed to correspond to the kinds of consciousness expressed by the two narrators — one a very young child, the other a naive insect — and to suggest the back and forth movement from inside to outside. Poetry gives way to prose in "The Tamarack" as the action quickens and becomes more immediate to the narrator. Speeches are juxtaposed on the page in "The Panel" to give the words the appearance of having been forced to a stop by an invisible barrier.

Objects of nature, particularly trees, suggested ideas for form and provide the vehicle for the various levels of meaning. Trees also serve to connect, thematically, the various items.
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I like the way the bark of the tree is so rough. I can put my hands on it and look right up the trunk to the sky and it is rough all the way to the top which is not covered with leaves like the two trees beside the house but has bare limbs that reach out into the sky. It is the biggest tree in the yard and it belongs to me. And the rope with its big hairy knot belongs to me. And the ground where it is so smooth belongs to me too.
This tree would be the most desirable home in the world with its cool powdery dust and its sweet smell of rotted wood. I, or anyone, could be perfectly happy here. It is a place where one could live quietly, secure from all enemies, dry and cool when there is heat outside, yet warm and comfortable when the wind is loud and the rain makes its splashing noise against the walls. Enough can be found to eat without stirring from the tree, for water oozes through the bark where some of the branches go out from the trunk, and here succulent lichens grow inward. They need the darkness in order to grow and there is darkness in abundance. There are several varieties, some fibrous and acrid, others soft and sweet. If one were able, which I am not, it
would be possible to plant gardens of these lichens in the long corridors made by the larger branches which are hollow. If small holes were drilled through the bark, the crop could easily be tended. But there is enough food and I do not have to guard against the approach of enemies. Yes, it could be a most desirable home.

I like the rope because it keeps me with the tree. There is just the rope and the tree and me. I go around the tree with my feet on the hard smooth ground. The rope goes around too but the knot always stays on this side of the tree. I go around with the knot and the tree is smooth where the rope makes a path on the bark like the path my feet make around the tree on the ground. The rope comes out from my stomach and the straps go over my shoulders. The rope goes straight out to the tree and holds me so I can lean back and look up the tree. Now I hear them coming out of the house. They go past me and the tree. Nanna says Hi Ricky but she does not look at me. Kenneth says Atta boy Rick with a funny kind of grin on his face. The man looks at me real hard with his arm around Nanna and then says Isn't that kid ever going to get rid of those scabs in
his hair? They are dragging shovels and rakes and they walk to the other end of the yard. Down there the ground is green in places. It is a long way to the other end of the yard and I have never been down there but I can hear them when they talk. The man is telling them where to dig. He used to come just in the mornings but ever since the day Grandpa yelled and banged the door and went down the lane with his suitcase under his arm and the dog trotting after him the man stays all the time. I can hear his voice louder than the rest saying Here Useless, come behind me with the rake. That is not his name but the man calls him that all the time. His real name is Kenneth. But even when Nanna is there with them she does not tell him to say Kenneth. They are bent over and dig at the ground.

I do not have to guard against the approach of enemies here in the cool darkness. As far as I know there is only one entrance through the bark. It is the hole that was made when a small limb left the tree, probably because of a great wind. The hole is high up the trunk and it lets in a little light on bright days. There is no lichen growing near it. I know because I have
been there, although only once, for I am unable to move about easily. But I was there once and I looked out. I could see nothing for the brightness. I guess it is fortunate that I do not live outside for I am sure that no food can grow there. At least here it is possible to eat enough to keep alive even though it is hardly possible for me to move about. How I could enjoy my existence if only things were different.

Kenneth is digging again. He grunts when he turns the ground over with the shovel. Nanna and the man are further away leaning together and looking at the yard. They point at the fence and the ground and talk to each other. They are talking very quietly and I cannot hear what they are saying. They are leaning together like the two trees by the house that flutter their branches when the wind blows hard. Their branches are mixed up together and even when they try to bend away from each other they are still together. I am glad my tree is alone. Its branches never get mixed up and it hardly moves at all when the wind blows. I like the smoothness of the tree where
the rope goes around and I like the feel of the ground under my toes. There is rough bark above the rope right up to the sky and below it right down to the ground. When I lean against the tree the bark scratches my shoulders. But I forget that the bark is scratching me when I taste the cool bumps. When they get wet they taste warm so I keep my mouth there. When the bark is warm between my teeth I forget about everything else. The ground is cool and the tree feels warm against my stomach.

I am the only inhabitant of the tree, yet when I stand in the coolness, I am conscious that it is never completely quiet. No matter how still I keep myself, even when I stop my breathing, there is often some noise near me. It is not one of the noises which come from outside the tree — those I have long ago accepted as things not concerning me — but a strange small noise very close to me, a noise so near that it could almost be part of me. But it is there even when I hold myself completely still and do not take a breath. Sometimes it is
a noise not unlike the sound of breathing; sometimes it is a strange rasping noise as though I were moving one of my legs against the dry interior of the tree. Whenever I hear the rasping noise, I carefully lift my legs, one at a time, and listen. I hold each one still, in turn, but the noise continues. When the noise is still there after I have done this with all my legs, then I know that it is not me who is making it. I am not afraid, for I know there is no enemy within the tree, but I have enough to bear already without having to worry about these strange noises.

Sometimes I hold the knot in my hands when I lean against the tree and it presses into my stomach when my mouth is on the bumps. Every day they come out of the house and the screen door bangs behind them. The man is looking at me. I go to the other side of the tree. Then he says to Nanna Is that kid scared of everybody? How come he's out here all the time anyway? Where's his mother? Nanna takes hold of his hand and pulls at him and she starts to talk. She's upstairs lying down. A Caesarean's no cinch you know. She'll probably be
feeling better in a couple of days, but she has to be careful this close. The man comes around the tree and looks at me again. His eyes are little dark slits. God! she can't look after this one, never mind having another. When I think of that bastard! And then they go to the other end of the yard. Kenneth has his hands in his pockets and is kicking at the dirt. He stops when Nanna and the man get near. Come on Useless, get all that part raked level. It's time somebody fixed up this place for your mother. If he'd been teaching you how to work instead of up there fooling around with your sister, things might be a little different around here. But I'm here now and we're going to have this whole yard cleaned up and planted in grass by this time next week. So hop to it boy. Every day they are closer than they were the day before. They turn the ground over with the shovels and then rake the lumps smooth. They throw the rocks over by the fence. I sit on the smooth ground and watch them.

Besides the noises, there is something else which bothers me. I can not forget it for very long at a time. It is the feeling that there is something besides myself in the tree. Sometimes it is just a vague uneasiness as when I hear the no
ises. At other times it is a certainty that I am not alone. For one thing, I cannot move wherever or whenever I please. If I try to move ahead suddenly, I feel myself held from behind. If I try to go to the side, I lose my balance for my tail seems to be firmly anchored. I cannot back up at all as there is something always behind me in the way. Every movement I make, unless it is very slow and cautious, causes me a great deal of pain. If my eyes were set differently in my head, perhaps I could see what is the matter, but the only way possible for me to see what is behind me is to turn completely around. I have done this — although it is a most painful process — once or twice. There was nothing there and oh what pain. It is no wonder that I am unable to travel more than a short distance each day and that I find it so difficult to obtain
enough to eat even though the lich ens are plentiful.

Now when they dig I can smell the earth and hear every scrape of the shovels. I go around the tree and the rope comes with me and I sit on the ground. I can see the rocks when they come by the tree from where Kenneth is raking. The man says Doesn't she ever change that kid? You can smell the stink of him from here. Don't you ever... and then Nanna sounds kind of mad and says As long as she keeps him outside, I'm not going to bother with him. It's her baby. Hers and his. And the man says Oh, for Christ's sake. Not that I blame you. I don't know how you can even let her stay. But it's not the kid's fault. Once even, but twice! How can you stand having her around? And Nanna says Well, what can I do? She is my daughter. And he's always over here right on the first with money for their board. He never misses. And anyway, I can't let her live with him. And the man keeps asking her questions and she keeps answering. Does he support you too? No, I won't take it. Except for Kenneth. How do you feel when you see him? How can you even talk to him? I never see him. He gives the money to Kenneth, or to her. I have some saved for myself. Doesn't it bother you? For God's sake Arch! Nanna is crying now and her voice is very squeaky. Of course it bothers me. It bothers me just about out of my head. Why do you have to keep asking me and asking me? It is quiet for a long time. When I look around the tree the man is holding a handkerchief out to
Nanna. Come on now girl. I guess I shouldn't be asking you all the time but if you'd just tell me once how it was. I won't leave you or anything. But, a guy kind of wonders. I know it couldn't have been your fault. Of course it was my fault — just as much as it was anybody's. We just went on, for years and years and years, hating the sight of each other. Do you know what that can be like? And no grounds for divorce. You know there's only one way to get a divorce in this country. And so I thought once the kids were grown up I'd maybe leave or... What about what you said about you and that trucker? That was later. Away later. Nanna blows her nose again and looks around to where Kenneth is raking. Now her voice is quieter. I just tried to give him grounds so we could get divorced but he just said he wouldn't give me a bad name to everybody. When I saw it wouldn't work and that I'd done that for nothing I thought maybe I could make it so he would have to give me grounds. Nanna's voice is still squeaky and she is crying harder but it is coming out softer. I didn't care about him having a bad name or about the kids knowing. But how was I to know that he'd go to her instead of to another woman? I just wanted a chance. I wanted to be free. And now everything's ruined. The man has his arm around her and they are swaying together like the two trees beside the house. But you have your chance now. You can't say that kid's not grounds enough! My God! Come on girl. It'll be all right. No it won't! Do you think I could ever let out a thing like that? Another woman I could have told about and have everybody know. But not this. Never! She
tries to move away but he puts his other arm around her too. It's okay Baby, it's okay. You got old Arch now to look after you and you don't hate the sight of me, do you? A rock comes by the tree. You just let me look after you from now on. Nanna and the man lean together and the man's hand moves up and down her back. Well, it does make me feel better to have told you. His fingers make her dress move in little jerks all the way to the bottom. She laughs and jumps away with a kind of whisper. Remember Kenneth, he's still just a boy. But the man grabs her again and says You don't have to worry about him after all he's seen up there. There won't be much he doesn't know after hearing his old man in action every night. Another rock comes by the tree. Atta boy, Useless. You'll be planting grass seed by tomorrow at the rate you're going.

Sometimes it is just an ache as when I try to edge ahead slowly. As I know from experience that great pain results from any sudden movement, I am very careful and always move very slowly. Sometimes though, there is a sudden blinding pain even when I have been perfectly still for some time. I have learned that when the pain strikes, the only way to ease it at all is to immediately move backwards, a fact I
cannot explain or even understand. Often I have the sensation of actually being pulled backwards. When I begin going backwards, I must continue in that direction, for to stop would only be to invite a return of the terrible pain, while to move sideways or forwards would be unthinkable. Thus are my days spent. Moving slowly and cautiously ahead when I am able, and easing myself (or allowing myself to be pulled) backwards, in order to avoid pain. And even when there is no pain, when I am perfectly still, there are the noises. Is it any wonder that I do not enjoy my home?

When the straps hurt where the rope is joined to me I put my mouth on the bumps on the tree. The bark tastes like the smell of the ground when it rains. The screen door bangs. Sure, beat it around to the other side. I've never seen a kid so scared of everybody. Guess it's no wonder though. Does she leave him out here every single day of the year? Nanna is holding the door open for Kenneth. He has a hotdog in one hand and a bottle of pop in the other. Just
don't bother about him. He'll be okay. If he isn't it's her lookout. The screen door slams behind Kenneth. Well, whether it's for his good, or for ours, or for the neighbours' dog, this old dead tree should come down. It's dangerous don't you think? Nanna says Yes, I guess so. I've never really thought about it. It's been dead for a long time. The man is walking around me and the tree. What kind is it anyway? and Nanna says Butternut. At least I think this is the one we used to get the nuts from. It was somewhere in this part of the yard. Then the man says Well, it sure won't be having any more. Not even leaves. I say it comes down. Let's see. If I work it just right I should be able to place her right about there. Hey Useless. Get me the axe. Kenneth puts the last of the hotdog into his mouth. Might as well bring the crosscut out of the shed too, so you can give me a hand. Can't have her fall that way. If I undercut her just right...Say, you'd better tie this kid somewhere else. Come on kid, nobody's going to hurt you. God, look at the groove he's worn with that rope. Nanna moves toward me and the tree and puts her hand on the knot. Okay Ricky, Nanna's just going to move you to a safer place. Gosh, he sure does smell, doesn't he? Just let me untie you. This damn rope. He's got it so wound up. Here Arch, you'll have to see if you can get this knot undone. She stands back. Let me at it then. Can't you make him stand still? God, I can't get it either, he's got it too tight... Anybody that'd leave a kid tied out here... I'll have to use my knife. Stand still now. There you are. Free as a bird. Take him away Maw.
It is enough that I am hampered in my movements and must spend a life in which pain is my constant companion. At least I have always felt fortunate in having so good a home even if I have not been able to enjoy it fully. It is true, I have not cultivated lichens as I have always dreamed of doing. But still, the tree has kept me safe. But what is happening to it now? There is a terrible noise coming from the outside. It is a noise so great and so different from anything I have heard before that I am certain that it concerns me and my home. If only I could move about with ease I could climb up to the hole and look outside. But that is impossible. I can do nothing but wait to see what is going to happen. The noise is so terrifying that I cannot even think properly. However, since it is above me, I may be safe for awhile. At least I am sa
fer here than further up the trunk. It must be a terrible enemy which is attacking the tree to make it shudder and reverberate in such a manner. If whatever it is succeeds in entering the tree, I must be out of sight. I must move as far down the tree as I can. Even if I have to go backwards, I must go down. Down into the small fibrous passages at the bottom of the hollow part.

The man is hitting the tree with the axe and Nanna and Kenneth are watching him. The rope is still around the tree and the knot is on this side. But I have a different knot tying me to one of the trees by the house. The bark on the two leaning trees is smooth all over and all the way up to the green flutter of leaves that is at the top instead of the sky. When the axe hits the knot the rope falls on the ground but I can still see its path around the bark. Well, that should be enough. Grab ahold of that saw, Ken, and we'll finish her off. When I sit on the grass it feels cold and wet and I look up the smooth trunk at the green sky. My throat hurts. The sawdust is piling high on the ground but the knot is around my

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throat and the bark is smoother and the saw is louder and the rope is tighter. MAMA-A-A — Good christ! That's the first time I ever heard him yell for her. What's wrong with him? Nanna is crouched beside me. I don't know. That's the first time he has ever cried. I guess the sawing scares him or else he just doesn't like being moved. She stands up again. Well, look out everybody. Just a couple more times and... Stand back Ken! HERE SHE COMES! At first they all run in different directions and then Nanna runs over to where the man is.

When I try to crawl down into the narrow passages, the pain is so terrible that I must stop and ease backwards. Even in the face of such great danger, I am not allowed to follow my instincts and burrow down to safety. It is as though I am being pulled back into the very danger. I try desperately to turn around, in spite of the pain which accompanies such a manoeuvre, in order to back into one of the passages. This too is impossible. I seem now to be pushed from behind. The pain is unbearable. I am bein
g pushed toward the very noise that I am trying to escape. The noise now is even more frightening than it was at first. Instead of the heavy intermittent sound which made the whole tree shudder, there is now an incessant whining which echoes throughout the tree making every fibre tremble. The noise. The pain. Sudden deafening noise, a tremendous ripping. Sudden blinding light. The tree about me is gone. The terrible light. The rush of air. The pain. Silence.

The tree is on the ground. My throat hurts and hurts. The path on the ground goes around the short jagged stump. The rope is twisted into a little pile in the sawdust. When they all come back Nanna is holding onto the man's arm. There she is! Well look at that. The whole thing was hollow. Sure a good thing we got her down. Would have crashed by herself in no time. How's that for placing her eh? Didn't touch a thing. Well, let's get to work on her. Nanna says What are you going to do with it, now that it's down? and he says We'll have to saw her up in lengths. I can maybe sell the biggest stuff. We can burn the rest or haul it to the dump. The old stump's
pretty solid yet. We must have cut her off right at the bottom of the dry rot. Hey, look at this will you? The man is looking down at the top of the stump. For gosh sakes! Nanna and Kenneth move close to him and look at the stump too. Nanna screams and jumps away. Hey, you don't have to screech like that. It won't hurt you. Come on back here. But Nanna moves further away. No sir! It's a centipede and I'm not going near it. They give me the willies with all those legs. The man laughs. Some centipede. Can you see any hundred legs on that? Ken, you come and have a look at it. See? in there. Kenneth moves closer. Is it alive? The man picks up a piece of branch that snapped off when the tree fell. Yeah...I think so. It looks like a kind of lizard. No, it's an insect. Hey, there's two of them. Look at the size! Stand back now. I'll see if I can flip one out on the ground. There it goes. Well I'll be damned. They both went. The man and Kenneth both crouch down on the ground by the stump. Look at that! They're joined together! Nanna comes back and puts her hand on the man's shoulder. They all look at the ground. I try to see but the rope is holding me to the tree. The man stands up and Nanna and Kenneth stand up too. There is something moving on the end of the branch. The man puts his face close. Two bloomin insects. A goddamn Siamese. Look at all those legs. It's a bloody freak! Nanna is standing a little behind the man. Do you think they can come apart? And the man says I don't know. What's that old saying about what God has joined together? He keeps looking at the end of the branch and nobody says anything.
I

It has been a long winter
the red-throated warbler
spent all morning
pecking willow leaves
from their buds

II

When I walk under spring trees
I want to push my head up hard against them
but the thought of hair
hanging from the branches
stops me
it is nothing
for the lizard
to shed his skin

he sloughs off the old
easily
knowing that beneath it
the new
,perfectly formed,
already covers him

but
if he had to scurry the rocks
the sand
to find the new one
hung ready
on a high branch

then
how would he manage
that moment of nakedness?
I am the only one who escaped

The snow was deep and the grey sky was stretched taut
over the sinews of our country
Cold settled on the hills and in the valley
The river stopped moving, the animals disappeared
The fish were deep under the ice
Only the grey birds
caught by the early storm
remained
and they were starving in thousands
Trees were stripped of every berry
of every nut and cone and seed
All was desolation

The birds walked the bleakness
flapping their wings
and the crusted white of the valley
was pitted grey by their beaks

They shrieked their starvation
through the valley
walked its floor on frozen feet
flapped over dead feathers
moved from tree to tree
searching

Up the sweep of the valley
they came
    examining
        with eyes, beaks, feet
    every inch of it

And then they found the old tamarack.
It stood in a wrinkle of the hill
    hidden from the valley
        (except for its very top branches)
hoarding its seed for spring

"Tree of deceit!"
    Their sudden voices reached it
    ricocheted thunder
        "not evergreen,
            and yet conifer!
            Deceit! Deceit!"
Their anger shuddered the hill
    the valley floor
shook loose the tamarack cones
dotting the snow
Black manna!

Beaks opened
snapped up cones
struck at other snapping beaks
They mobbed the snow
devouring black
while dripping red.

Over us —
the clotted feathers
and shrieking eyes
and feet, and beaks

And I was the only one who escaped.

Dropped from the very top of the tree
straight into a crack in the snow at the base of the trunk
I was not seen
and the trampled snow closed over me.

I am the only one who knows what happened:
There was silence for awhile. The birds looked carefully
through the trampled snow, each sure he would find one more cone. Then there was a sound. A kind of angry murmuring which grew louder and louder. The yell of, "Deceit! Deceit!" began again and was taken up by the thousands. It was a great chorus behind all the other angry shouts. "Is that all there is?" "You're holding out on us!" "You can never trust a tamarack." "Yeah. A tree that goes to that much trouble to pass for an evergreen, growing needles and cones, must be trying to hide something." "The truth comes out in the fall though, doesn't it?"

The taunts became worse and worse. The birds formed a circle around the trunk, then another circle around that and another and another until they covered the sides of the hill and spilled out into the valley again. They raised their beaks to the tree and the chorus, "Deceit! Deceit!" rang across the country. But the tamarack stood aloof, swaying its spindly, knobbed branches slowly through the air.

Then a bird called out, "There are still some cones in the top branches! I can see them!" Not all the birds heard the shout, so the chorus kept on repeating, "Deceit, deceit," but as soon as the news spread, all the circles dissolved.

The few birds who were still able to fly a little, made it to the lowest branches and, by the laborious process of flying upward one branch at a time, they reached the top of the tree. There, the few cones the old tamarack had tried to save for spring seed were fought over. Some were knocked off, and where they fell, other
fights began. The birds who could not fly watched the ones in the branches. When no more cones fell, they attacked the trunk of the tamarack. They pecked and clawed at the bark. They were joined by others. They pulled the bark off in long pieces, leaving the trunk stripped in the cold air. Behind them, others fought over the bark on the ground.

Even when all the cones were gone, the birds in the trees continued to fight and to push at each other. One was knocked out of the tree. The birds on the ground pounced on it and fought over it. And just as though it were a huge cone, or a big piece of bark, they pecked it to pieces and ate it. Other birds were knocked out of the tree. They were devoured. Even the ones who were able to fly down by themselves, were eaten up. When there were no birds left in the tree, the ones on the ground began attacking one another. It was not a battle in which groups of birds took sides and fought one another. Each bird simply fought the bird next to him and if he won, went on to the next and then the next, until he was finally beaten himself.

When it was all over, all the grey bodies, blotched with red, were heaped around the yellow, peeled trunk. At first some of them moved a little. But soon the cold stiffened the bodies into one still mound, and then the only movement was that of the wind rippling the grey feathers.

Now it is warm
Long ago, the snow disappeared into the earth
The birds went with it

I am the only one left
and something strange has happened to me

I have not left the ground
and yet I am slowly beginning to move upward
like the birds
who flew from branch to branch.
This dark, high-crowned woman
holding her crescent jar
under the point of one dark breast
is a kneeling handle
dark fingers carved her
from some African tree
stroked her face, her thighs, her back
and held her firm
in the completing
marks of the knife are on her
behind the ears
at the corners of the mouth
under the breast
But at the bend of the ankle
between unmeeting strokes
shreds of wood stick out
one flick of a fingernail
could have perfected her
and dropped his identity
to a dark lap
The old man was dizzy again. He stepped to a larger branch in the centre of the tree and wrapped his arms around the trunk, face pressed against the bark, eyes closed. Duchess, Greening, Jonathon, McIntosh. He opened his eyes. Branches blurred in front of him. He closed them again. Newton, Rome Beauty, Russet, Spartan, Spy. No, Snow comes before Spy. He looked around, blinking. He moved back out the branch to where he could reach the suckers with his pruners. Prune out all the useless twigs, leaves, branches. They're no good, might as well be out of the way. Only take from the tree. Use up the food. Bound to reduce the yield. Prune them out. Just clutter up the tree, no good for anything. Unless you're interested in looks, lots of green foliage. Nothing to do with production. Snip them off. Drop them to the ground.

Hey old man!
Who's that?
They sent me to get you.
What for?
The other orchard.
You don't mean the big one?
Yeah. Come on down.
You know, I was expecting that'd happen some day. Hardly ever thought it'd be this soon though.

They told me to bring you right away.

Okay. I'll just finish this tree.

No, you're to come right now. Leave it the way it is.

Will I be able to come back and finish it?

That depends whether or not they keep you in the other orchard. But there'll be someone else to do it. They want you right now so come on down. I'll hold the ladder for you. Where is it anyway?

I've never used a ladder yet, young fellow. Stand out of the way! Here I come!

Hey! Be careful! You'll break a leg leaping out of the tree like that.

When the time comes for me to have to use a ladder Son, it'll be time to quit altogether.

Well now, listen. Just don't go telling them that you don't use a ladder. It may go against you.

I don't see how I'll have a chance to tell them anything. I've worked in this orchard ever since I can remember and I've never laid eyes on them yet.

I've got orders to take you to them today.

What for?

I don't know. I guess they want to ask you a few questions, find out how much you know about your work, to
make sure you're really ready for the other orchard.

About my work? What kind of things can they ask about that?
I don't know what they want to know. I am never told.
Oh.
I am given orders and take people to them but I have never seen them either, you know.

I wonder what they could want? They'll probably just ask me what kinds of apples grow best in this soil. That'll be easy. Or how to get the most production out of a tree. I can tell them that. Or what's the best way to get rid of the coddling moth. You know, there hasn't been a worm in one of my apples for over fifty years now. I guess you can't blame them for wanting to find out about a few things like that before they really promote me. Just routine, don't you think?
I don't know.

It'll be good to get it over with anyway. And I'm sure looking forward to the big orchard. Is it really true that they're able to grow every kind of apple over there? And that there's never any need to prune or spray?
I don't know.

That's what I've always heard. And they say you'd never believe the size of the apples. But come to think of it, I've never talked to anyone who's actually been there.
Do you think it's just a rumour?

No, it must be real all right because they tell me to bring people to them and they call them Big Orchard candidates.

Where is it anyway? I've always just thought of it as 'over there' somewhere. How do I get to it?

I've never been told that either, and no one ever seems to get sent back so there's no way of finding out. But I guess they'll take you there, or give you directions at least.

Well, it's a real honour anyway, I suppose. And I've done a lot of work here getting ready for it.

Yes, it's common knowledge, the wonders you've done in this orchard. I hope you're as successful in the next. We don't know about the other one but I guess all orchards are pretty much the same. Well, here's where I'm to leave you. That's the door you're to go in. Good luck.

The old man stood alone before a doorway so low that he had to stoop to reach the handle. For a moment he leaned his forehead against the frame, eyes closed. Duchess, McIntosh, Russet, Spy, Transparent, Winesap, Wolfe River Red. Forget any that time? Greening, Jonathon, Spartan. Oh please give me the sense to say the right things. Rome Beauty, Snow, Tolmin Sweet. I've seen this building so many times through the trees of the orchard and yet it looks different somehow. It doesn't seem to have any windows. Funny I didn't notice
that before. And that's a strange shape for a roof. How is it that I've never even wondered about what kind of a building it is or what it is for? It's so large and yet I've never seen anyone going in or coming out. This seems to be the only door. I guess I was always too busy with my apple trees to give it much thought. I've never even wondered what it's like inside.

Duchess, Jonathon, Wolfe River Red. He turned the handle and, stooping even lower, went in. Steps led down from the doorway. As he began to descend, the door closed behind him. It was rather dark but he was able to make out each step as he came to it. The stairway was short and at the bottom a hallway went forward toward what would be the centre of the building. At the end of the hallway there was a small square room with a large panelled door on the far side of it. On the door in large letters was a sign:

Enter only after leaving
ALL belongings (except the clothes you are wearing)
HERE

and an arrow pointed to the left where a small table stood. The old man laid his pruners on the table. It must be right about the orchard if I don't need these over there.

There was no handle on the door but as he turned to it the panel slid open sideways. It's an elevator! Well, guess
they must have offices up above. Hope I can find the right one. I should have asked that young fellow more about it.

He stepped in, watched the door close slowly, then felt himself rising. The movement stopped almost immediately and the elevator door opened again. He stepped out and the door closed quietly behind him. He heard the elevator going down again. He stood in the centre of one gigantic room the size of an arena and, except for the elevator shaft, there was absolutely nothing in it. There was no sound. It was very bright in spite of the lack of windows, and the light which filtered through the seemingly transparent walls covered everything with a strange reddish glow. The walls rose to a great height then curved in curiously to form the ceiling which dropped down again in the middle to a point which joined the elevator shaft. The shaft itself was strangely formed. The old man stepped back and looked up at it. It ran straight up from the floor, and straight down from the point of the ceiling, but in between, like a huge spool with a spindle on each end, was a strange cylindrical formation. It looked vaguely familiar to the old man but he could not remember what it reminded him of. The spool part seemed to be made up of vertical cubicles each of which jutted out into a point. He moved closer and walked around the elevator shaft, looking up. There were five of these cubicles pointing out from the spindle and as he looked up he thought that perhaps the
formation reminded him of some flower with five pointed petals. But he knew that was not quite it. He moved out further into the arena and walked in a larger circle trying to remember whatever it was that he could not quite grasp. The whole length of the spool was about half the distance from the ceiling to the floor, the other half being taken up by the spindle of the elevator shaft above and below. On the face of each elongated cubicle a vertical seam ran from bottom to top as though each cubicle were a compartment with its two curved walls meeting at the point, the point of the petal as he had seen it in cross-section from below. As he looked, the seam appeared to open slightly, not unlike the movement of a clam shell. He felt himself becoming dizzy again. He blinked his eyes. Duchess, Greening, Jonathon. The dizziness passed. His eyes cleared and he saw that the seam was one straight line.

There's no one here. This can't be the place I was supposed to come to. It's too big anyway for whatever business they have with me. It must be a kind of assembly hall. There aren't any chairs though. That young fellow didn't seem very sure of himself. Probably left me at the wrong door. Maybe there's someone outside I can ask. I'll go back down the elevator.

Well, old man.

The voice boomed out from above him. From one of the
compartments. He stood still, looking up. The seam of the cubicle above him had opened slightly.

Well old man, you are here are you?

Yes. I was sent for.

Yes. It is time for you to go to the big orchard. And since it is our custom to interview everyone who has satisfactorily completed all the requirements in the smaller orchards, we welcome you. You do not have to be afraid. There will be only a short interrogation.

I'm not afraid, but I might as well be honest and tell you right now that I've forgotten a lot of the stuff I used to know pretty well.

And why have you allowed yourself to forget it?

Well, whatever I didn't use every day in my work, just left me. Maybe I can remember some of it.

We know that your work has been well done and that, although you had no idea when your stay was to terminate, you left your orchard in near-perfect order. We congratulate you.

Well, thanks. I'm glad that you're pleased.

As the old man talked, he looked to the cubicle directly above him from which the voice came. The seam remained gaping a little but he could see nothing inside. While he watched, however, the whole formation began to rotate in a clockwise motion until the next cubicle was above him. Then it stopped. A different voice began to speak.
Since you have devoted your life to *Malus sylvestris*—

*Malus* what? What do you mean? Oh yes, the apple tree, yes. Yes I have devoted my life to it.

Then you can state to what family the *Malus sylvestris* belongs?

I've never really thought about that. No, I don't really know. I'd say it just belongs to the fruit-tree family.

And how long has the *Malus sylvestris* been cultivated?

I can't give you any date on that. But, let's see. The Romans had apples, or further back even, the Greeks. But, oh what am I thinking about? There were apples in the Garden of Eden. That means they've been cultivated from the beginning of the world.

The old man's dizziness returned. He did not see the rotation of the formation the second time but a third voice began to speak over his head.

There are many species of apple—

Yes! Duchess, Gravenstein, Greening, Jonathon—

No, no. It is not necessary that you list them. We want merely to know which is your favourite and why?

My favourite? I don't really know. I've never really thought about it. Well, you see, I seldom eat apples because I've been too busy with the spraying and the pruning and...

The formation moved again and another cubicle stopped over him.
This will be the last question. Can you tell us the meaning of this place which you have seen today for the first time?

No. No, I can't really. It looks kind of familiar but I can't say what it is. I don't even know why I have to be here, and why you sit up there in your little cubicles or whatever they are. Why can't you just come out and face a man if you have to ask all those questions?

There was silence above but the fifth cubicle swung slowly into position over his head. The old man felt nauseated now as well as dizzy. He lowered himself carefully and sat on the floor. His head ached. After a very long silence, a fifth voice, one deeper and more kindly than the other four, began to speak.

We have decided to allow you to continue to the big orchard. It has been no decision really, since your work has been excellent and we could therefore keep you in the small orchard no longer. However, we want to point out to you that there are important details which you have overlooked. Details which you should examine more closely yourself if you wish to have success in the big orchard. We did not have to question you on practical matters because we are already aware of your capabilities. However, you have failed to make some very important relationships between your work and the rest of the world. For instance, consider the first question.
Ask yourself what is the significance of the fact that *Malus sylvestris* does indeed belong to the rose family and that it has been cultivated since prehistoric times. Also, try to determine your preference in apples for, as trivial as this question may seem, it reveals the extent of your interest in connection with the rest of the plant kingdom. As for the last question, I cannot give you the answer to that for it is an answer which you must somehow find for yourself. The full meaning of this place should be immediately clear to anyone who has spent any time at all in a small orchard. If you just step into the elevator you may go to the big orchard now. We wish you luck.

The old man jumped to his feet. I don't want to go to any big orchard. I want to go back to my own. I didn't ask to be given this phoney honour or promotion or whatever it is. Do you hear me? How do I get back? How do I get out of this phoney place?

But the seams of all the cubicles had snapped shut. There was no movement, no sound. The elevator door was open wide. I know more about everything than you think! Why did you have to ask such stupid questions?

He stepped into the elevator. It'll be good to get out of here. Anyway, I don't have to go where they tell me. I'll just get back to my own orchard and stay there. The door closed quietly. The elevator began moving. He felt
the upward motion. Let me out of here! I want to go down! I want to go back! He pounded on the door and on the walls but the elevator climbed steadily.

The door opened and there was only space around him. Holding tightly to the door, he looked down and saw that the elevator shaft came up like a thin round chimney through the inverted point of the roof. A narrow walk led across from the elevator door to the higher circular hump of the roof. The old man backed away, dizzy and angry. He tried to make the door close again. I want to go down! Take me back! But the elevator did not move. There were no visible controls. Finally he stepped out to the walk. The door closed immediately behind him. From the other end of the walk he saw the big orchard stretching out before him. So that was why he had never seen it before. It was up here. He stopped and looked back. He saw that the elevator shaft continued upward for some distance above the door he had just left, and that near the top it began to curve to one side. It looked just like a stem. A stem! That's it! He ran back to the door, pounding and yelling. Let me come back! I can answer your question! It's all clear to me now! Let me back in!

But there was no sound except that of the elevator on its way down. He turned and went across the walk into the big orchard.
ADDICTION

If she stands
in a certain place
    where shadows are darkest
at a certain time:
    Friday noon,
the oak will touch her shoulder
    — Contact.
Every Friday
    she goes

Now
she has forgotten why
knows only
that to stay away
would be to die

But the oak will grow
too tall to touch her.
Then
will she
be free?
YESTERDAY WE PRAYED

Yesterday we met and prayed. We all stood in rows deep under the roots of an old stump, waving our tail fins and dorsal fins to hold ourselves still in the water. We prayed separately, then we prayed together. When it was over we swam away slowly, each certain that the Great Fish had heard our prayers and that soon He would send help.

Ours is a terrible plight. It used to be a simple, free life in our fast-moving river. But that was before the dam. After the dam was put on the river, the waters rose higher and higher up the wooded hillsides until this great lake stretched across the valley. At first it was amusing to chase each other through the dark forest, swimming fast from tree to tree and flipping over or under the green branches in our new games of tag. Even later when the surface of the lake was dense with floating needles and leaves, we enjoyed leaping up through the debris and flopping back into the water, for each time we left two clear spots where the light could shine through.

But things grew worse. It was not long before all the trees died and began dropping their branches one by one into the water. It was no longer safe to swim near the surface. Gradually the lake became more and more open as the trees became barer and barer. It was this openness, and the fact of the tall trees themselves, which attracted the birds of prey.

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For not only did the trees offer a myriad of resting places and lookouts, but also, they cut out the sky reflection so that the keen eyes could pierce the water to greater depths than would have been possible on a treeless lake.

First came the crane — flapping in slowly from the south and stopping to rest among the logs along the shore. Then came the osprey — hunched on a high snag, eyes quick and bright. Then the kingfisher, shrieking from tree to tree in his low splashing sweeps over the water. And always the loon, with hardly enough room to swim among the trees — watching below him with listening eyes.

We dared not forget for one moment that we were under constant surveillance. There were no more times of enjoyment when we could abandon ourselves to happy games. We swam slow and deep, not daring to go to the surface to feed for we were conscious always of the peril.

And so, yesterday we prayed
And the Great Fish heard
Today help arrived. We are saved.

First there was a great noise over the lake. We were very frightened. But when we saw the loon dive straight down from the surface, not in pursuit of one of us, but in sheer terror of the noise, we remembered that the Great Fish manifests Himself in strange ways. And when we made quick investigatory
darts to the surface and saw that the crane was in high flight; that the osprey's tree was empty, and that the kingfisher had disappeared, we knew we had been saved. We swam together in circles rejoicing, even though the noise came closer and closer.

And then we saw him. He was floating over the water, in and out among the dead tree trunks, on a great wooden raft. The noise was coming from the far end of the raft and seemed to be making it move, for the water was all churned up there. He was sprawled magnificently at the back of the raft. Since we were not afraid now to stay at the surface, we watched him, and some of us jumped out of the water in order to see him better. Then he headed over toward us. We were still not completely sure. But when he made the noise stop, we knew that it had been merely a device to rout our enemies. He glided noiselessly over to the very place where we were, and stopped the raft.

Not only has he routed our enemies, but now he has given us the raft for protection. We all crowd under it even though we know there is no need to fear an attack from the birds. We have been too long afraid and hungry. It will not be long before we forget our fear. Even now the larger and braver fish are jumping gleefully out of the water to pay him homage. And they tell us that he has brought food with him which he is preparing for our use.
OLD DOG

that old dog lying in the gully
down flat in the wet dark
dark hair  wet-flat
long grass straggling
down the sides of the ravine
short straight grass
blows on the hilltop
the old dog sleeps
or dies

It's only when he moves it hurts
How was it that day when we left the edge of town and the sun was sitting high in the sky and we walked across the fields, that we could both feel so happy with this beginning? We walked the fields and I helped you over the stone fences. Some were crumbled down and all I had to do was steady your arm as you stepped over, stone after stone. But some were solid high ones covered over with brambles. And it was not easy to get you up. You stood and waited — silent and with that new sad look on your face while I picked at the thimbleberry branches, one by one, and laid them carefully aside as though I were training strawberry runners along the ground. When a way was cleared, I hefted myself up and then had to lie on my stomach on the wide top of the fence so I could reach down for you. It's a good thing you're not very heavy because I practically had to lift you all the way up. I wondered what the reason could be that would make you so reluctant to climb up. But once you were there it was so difficult to persuade you to go down the other side. When you cat-curled on the warm stones, blinking into the sun, it seemed a shame to make you move, but we did have to keep going. And I figured you were afraid to stay there alone so I started down and sure enough you uncurled in a moment — crept on your hands and knees, peering over the edge. Even then I had to
go slowly for once you got turned around I had to steady you from behind and place your feet in the spaces between the stones, taking most of your weight as you shifted from one foot to the other. It wasn't easy but once we were on the ground your old jaunty way returned and on we went to the next fence.

I was happy that day, happier than I had ever been. For so many years I had dreamed the dream — always the same — the walk over the fields, through the bush, to the clearing where the place waited. My place, left to me by my grandfather — a place I hadn't seen since it became mine, vowing not to approach my place until it could be our place — but waiting, waiting for the partner of "our" — moving to the town to be near but not going there, taking no one else where I would not even trust my own presence for fear of negating the very possibility. And then you — and I knew (at once) and you were so sure there in town when I told you about our place and how long you had been a part of it. And you cried then — but softly — you had never had anything saved especially for you, never been so a part of anyone else. And you told me how I was also a part of your dream. How you had waited for someone always. Someone tall, straight, lean (you said I was all that), the exact strength you needed.

And so that day we were both happy, starting off from town. You leaned against me as we walked the level fields
smooth from generations of ploughing and crops. No stones there. They had all gone into the fences. Not that the stones had been used to build the fences so much as the fences were built to use up the stones. And the lilacs in bloom at the door, and the creek grooved through the yard from the pond at the back, the quiet, the alone, and the lilacs bursting the air with colour. We would get a dog, the kind you had always wanted, and keep horses, and have fires on the water, and eat watercress and you would hang clothes billowed in the wind, and inside, a candle we would light somewhere in the dark and the smell of fresh sheets. Until the fences...

...until the fences. But you were light and I (as you phrased it) was "magnificently strong". So we crossed the fences and walked the fields between, fields smooth and level, with lilac bloom and creek and fire, wind candle dark, until you stopped. "You didn't tell me about the wood."

"Of course I did. Don't you remember my darling? I told you about the trail and—"

"No. You didn't tell me about the wood. You said the trail went through a bush, or around it, or something."

And my laugh. "A bush. Of course. By bush I meant all this, all this that you call wood I guess."

"You said bush, and bush is just one tree, a little tree, with lots of branches maybe close to the ground, but just a
little tree, just one. That's what you said." And the new sad look was back and your eyes were afraid.

"It's just a little misunderstanding," I said then and tried to take your hand and make you see. "It's a stand of trees, let's call it that. But no matter how we call it, it's here and it's on the way to the place so we have to go through it. There's a real good trail."

You pulled your hand away. "I don't want to go in there," you said.

"But why? It's cool and shaded and perfectly safe. I've always thought it the nicest part of the walk."

"It's too dark," you said and sat down on the ground in the sun.

"But how are we going to get to the place? There's no other way."

"Do we really have to go all the way?" You dug the heel of your shoe into the short grass. "It's so nice here in the field, and it's warm in the sun."

"But the lilacs. You want to smell the lilacs and they don't last very long."

"You didn't tell me about this bush. You didn't say we'd have to go through all these trees to get there."

"Well, I did really. I certainly wasn't trying to keep anything from you. We just have different meanings for that one word. You'll enjoy the trees once we get into them. And
one thing you'll like, there aren't any more fences."

"I liked the fences." The way you kept twisting your heel into the ground, the grass got squashed aside so there was a little patch of dark soil showing. "Anyway, you helped me with the fences."

"And I'm still here to help you." I put out my hand to you. "But you just won't need any help in the trees. It's simple walking and it's impossible to lose the trail." You put your hand out then and I helped you to your feet. But you stood still, looking at the ground. You placed one foot squarely on the bare patch and jumped up and down on it.

"The trees are so tall," you said. You packed the soil hard and smooth in that one spot in the grass. "If I'd known the trees were so tall I wouldn't have come. You should have told me they were so tall."

What did I feel then? I don't know. All I wanted to do was to persuade you to go on. The excitement to reach the place was high in me. I knew that it was easy to walk through the bush. I knew that it was so easy to get to the clearing where the place was. I thought you were just being foolish even though I knew that you were genuinely afraid. All that was necessary was that I persuade you to go on and you would soon agree with me that there had been no need to hesitate. And I was gentle with you. "Yes, the trees are tall," I told you, "but actually that is an advantage for the branches are
all high up and therefore it is quite open in there. And it's amazing how much light gets through. All we have to do is walk between the trunks for there is no underbrush. The trail is clearly marked. In no time we will be out in the clearing and the lilacs will be waiting for you and there'll be frogs in the pond."

You looked up from the ground finally and raised your face to the trees. "Well, all right then, I'll go," you said and you put your hand into mine, "but you won't leave me will you? Don't leave me for anything."

"Of course not." I kissed you then. You turned and looked at the fields again before we moved into the trees.

How long did we walk before you began to feel at ease? How long before you noticed the moss on the tree trunks, the clumps of ferns at the side of the trail, the mottled patterns the light made on the bark? Soon you let go my hand and ran ahead down the trail, laughing. You picked up leaves and held them in your hand. You raised your face to the light. You pressed your cheek against the rough bark. You were everywhere. A part of everything. You ran back to me smiling and we walked together again, pressed close. The smell of lilacs around us, the noise of frogs and fire leaped and dog horses candle sheets while the trees stood tall and we walked together.

"Darling, you said never to leave you, did you mean not even...?"
And you laughed shaking your head. "Of course not. I was so silly. You go ahead. I'll wait right here." And you dropped to the ground, your back against a tree, your legs stretched out across the trail. And you were smiling and I kissed you didn't I? stooping low to reach your mouth? And how long was I gone? Just out of sight, my thoughts along the trail down into the gully, around the stumps at the bottom, up the other side, the level part that led right out into the clearing and then I was back to you. And you were the same, only standing now, smiling. Looking at me, smiling.

"That wasn't long was it?" And me so happy, excited, right up to the last second. "Did you miss me my love? but there wasn't time even for that was there my love?"

And there was no answer only smiling And me, "My love?"

(stopped now) "What is it?"

"What's the matter?" eyebrows arch in surprise and stopped suddenly by what? in the middle of the trail. Hard against my shoulder. I pushed. Used my fists. Other shoulder or kicking

Darling darling, what have you done? (dropping now to the ground at the foot of it. Sobbing) Let me through.

(chin lifted to light and voice far away) It's nice in the trees.
(pounding again with my fists)

Oh Sonya! Can you hear me?

Sonya for God's sake!

(voice faint) Of course I can hear you. But what's the matter with you? You don't have to shout. Why are you so upset? It's nice in here. I like it. Doesn't that make you happy? (but not moving)

Sonya, there's something here on the trail. I can't get through it. Come and help me.

What did you do while I was gone?

Don't be silly. What do you mean, something on the trail? I don't see anything on the trail.

Why don't you come over to me

If you're so sure? Come to this side and you'll see what I mean. Please, Sonya.

I like it right here where I am. I don't know why I was ever afraid of your bush. I could walk through here all alone. Even at night it wouldn't bother me.

And you stood there, not smiling now but looking annoyed.

Frowning across at me. Then you walked further away, touching the trees, picking at the trunks with your fingernail. I was still on my knees on the trail but you did not look at me.

Your footsteps sounded muffled. I pressed forward but was
unable to move across the trail. I got to my feet, moved along a few steps and tried again. It was the same. I ran back the way we had come and hurled myself toward the trail only to be brought up suddenly. I was aware of vague pains in my shoulders and forehead where I had been hitting. I walked slowly back along the trail, leaning into it. There was a solid something all the way. I slid my hand down. Solid right to the ground. I moved it up. Solid as far as I could reach. I looked across to where you were walking back and forth among the trees. You were not looking at me.

Suddenly I had a thought. It was the middle of the day, the sun was directly overhead. If there were any hope of seeing this invisible wall it was now. I lay down along the trail, pushed my cheek against the solid, and squinted upward. Yes, the light was reflecting off it just enough to show that it actually existed. A solid panel of glass reached from the ground upward to at least the tops of the trees for it disappeared into the green of the leaves. And how far each way? I twisted around, still close, and saw it stretching ahead as far as I could see, and the same behind, along the way we had come.

But just glass. And thin too. I had a hard time finding anything but finally a broken-off branch was in my hands and we ran flailing at the panel hitting and hitting. then
kicking. branch thrown down.
feet and fists and (sobbing)
I want to get through.

If you could just act
more grown-up you
might be more success-
ful. Why do you carry
on like that?

I had not seen you move toward the trail and when I heard
your voice, even though it seemed so far away, I was over-
joyed.

Oh Sonya thank you (kneeling
again, face against the glass)

Thank me? What are you thank-
ing me for? (looking away)
I didn't do anything.

But you came back to me

(aloof) I wasn't away. I was
here all the time.

But the panel. Oh please
don't leave me. Please stay
close. I can't bear for you
to go away. At least talk to
me

What is there to talk about?
And why don't you get up?
That's such a ridiculous
position. (turns away)
Don't go away. Oh please.
please stay near me. Talk to
me. Why have you done this to
me?

(snappishly) I haven't done
anything to you. Whatever you
seem to think is wrong you must
have brought on yourself. Why
don't you stand up at least?

But Sonya. You've never been
like this before. (getting to
feet) I know I'm carrying on
but this panel was such a
shock and I feel so helpless.
What can we do?

Do? Just carry on as usual.
Nothing's changed, except you
maybe. I don't know what all
the complaining's about. You
were the one who wanted me to
come into this bush and now that
I'm here (and I was actually
beginning to not mind it) you
start complaining, which was bad
enough without getting down on
your knees and begging me.

But I wasn't at all

What were you doing then?

It's the panel

Oh panel, panel. I'm sick of
your ideas about a panel.
Where did you get such a fant­
tastic notion? Why don't you
straighten up? You're all
slumped over.
I'm sorry. I'm suddenly so tired

It's not just because you're tired. You always bend over like that and after all, I want someone I can be proud of. I need someone tall and straight.

But you said I was

I don't know how I could have said anything like that. Or if I did, it was because you used to stand straighter. Anyway, your shoulders are all humped over now and it makes your stomach stick out too. You've got a big stomach.

(drawing shoulders back, stomach in) Is that better?

A little.

It's just that I'm so tired, Sonya. Honest. This panel gave me such a shock and I guess I've been battering away at it. Please forgive me and come closer. I'll be strong for you again, I promise. I love you Sonya, so much

You look fat.

(looks at self) I couldn't suddenly get fat, and have drooping shoulders, and a big stomach. (shouting and beating
fists against panel) I haven't changed! It's this damned glass! Come and feel it if you don't believe me!

I don't have to do anything of the kind. There's nothing there and you know it. Do I look any different to you?

No. No you don't. You're changed somehow but you look the same. You were always so nice to me, so gracious. Now you seem so snappy and so far away. I can hardly hear you when you talk.

That just proves that it's all in you. You're probably going deaf too. (moving away) I don't have any trouble hearing you.

Sonya Sonya Sonya
(beating with whole forearms)

(sharply) What do you want now?

Oh please please don't be like this. Please love me. What about the lilacs, and the horses?

and the fires pond frogs candle wind sheets? (laughs) I can get along without all that.

What are you going to do?
Oh, there are things to do.

Who will love you? Who will love you?

Oh, there are people.

Sonya you'll never find anyone who'll love you like I do. Anyone who'll give you what I have. You know everyone is just interested in money and houses and big cars

Well, maybe I am too. (face almost against panel) Yes, maybe I am too. Maybe I don't want to be all wrapped up in lilac petals from the other side of this bush. (peering) Do you know you've got dandruff?

I have not. How can you say such a thing? (sadly) Sonya, this isn't you at all

Well, you have. It's flaking all over the front of you.

(brushing at shoulders and chest) It must be some nervous condition then. It's this damn panel (beats fists) Damn damn damn (sinking to ground again) What can I do? Oh god god god

(disdainfully) Oh get up. Don't make such a fool of yourself. It's embarrassing just to see you. I don't know
I rolled away then, away from the panel and from you. somehow I got up and stumbled off through the trees. all I wanted was to get out of your sight. my chest was tight with pain. I wanted to hide. I crashed away, up the hill. the trees were lower there. cedars. I crept into them. huddled on the ground. was suddenly conscious of the sounds I was making. I tried to stop but the howl-wail was something apart from me. filling the bush with itself. free of my control. How long did you listen, scoffing? Then how long did you listen, not scoffing? Then how long was there silence in your wood before you moved? I was standing against a cedar when you came soft-voiced and frightened, your hand curling like bird's wing into mine. "Oh my darling," you said. "My poor darling. What have I done to you?" cooing and stroking and patting with tears. "My dear dear love. My only only. Come back to me please. Please." tugging and cooing and stroking and smiles.

I resisted you didn't I? For how long was I silent? And what did I say first? "How did you get through?"

"Through? What do you mean, through?"

"How did you get through the panel?" And then it was on your face. I knew there was no need to ask any more but I did. "The trail. How did you get across the trail?"
And still the look, bewilderment. "I don't know what you mean. I just walked across. How else would I, well, what do you mean?"

And there was nothing more to say except maybe what you said. "Let's go back to the trail my love. We still have a long way to go." We went back to the trail but I approached it slowly. I stopped at the side and put one foot forward gently. It kept going. I stepped to the other side. Not believing, I turned and did the same thing with the other foot and stepped back again. "What on earth are you doing?" you said at my elbow. "Come on. Run with me," and you were tugging at my arm.

"No. Just a minute, Sonya. Tell me, do you love me?"

"Of course I do. Don't pay any attention to what I said before. I didn't really mean it. I'm sorry. Please forgive me." And you put your arm through mine.

"Sonya, what do I really look like to you?"

"Look like? Well, you look nice. What do you mean?"

"Do I look fat?"

"Fat?" You threw your head back laughing. "You couldn't be fat if you tried." Then you stopped laughing and burrowed your head into my arm. "Please, please. Don't pay any attention. No matter what happens, just know that I love you and everything will turn out all right in the end. I'll just make it turn out right."
But it hasn't turned out all right has it? Or is it just not the end yet? Or do you mean it will be all right again and again and again, after each time that it isn't all right?

We continued along the trail, me only uneasy now, the pain gone, the joy back although not the same. Was it going into the gully? or no it was at the bottom of the gully because I turned to tell you to be careful of the stumps and to suggest that we rest before starting up again. I hadn't even left you this time. I turned to touch your arm. I was as unprepared as I had been the first time. My hand hit hard. As unprepared, but that was all. No surprise. No fist beating. No crying. Just dejection. You eyed me coolly as you moved away through the trees. I turned into the trees on my side and sat down and waited. I still wanted to wait. How did you come back? I had fallen asleep I think. I must have, because you were there suddenly and I hadn't heard you come. You were merely quiet and curled softly about my arm. We got up and went back toward the trail. The sun was lower and I could tell before we got there that it was not reflecting off anything.

We got out of the gully didn't we? It was on the slope on the other side that you suddenly began to cry. I reached for you but you lurched to the side. My arm was stopped. Your crying was soft and lost in your great side of the wood.
I stayed on the trail, on the half that was left. Now I needed the place, whether ours or mine or just anybody's I needed to get there. Not even the lilacs or the candle, just the place or not even the place any more, just the water. the pond or the creek either one. just a drink of water. Then your voice was calling me. "Wait, please wait." And when I turned you were just stepping through the panel. The first time I actually saw you do it. My hand darted out at once. The glass was gone.

Why did that make me so angry? "Just what the hell are you trying to do?" I shouted at you didn't I? "You can step through that goddamned panel at will can you? What kind of a story have you been handing me? Pretending you don't know what the hell I'm talking about. God, I'll give you something to talk about if you're ever able to talk again." But you were gone. I pounded the glass that time didn't I? anger fists and anger eyes mad mad kicking raving oathing swore swore you you oh god you damn you and spent crumpled half-trail me. But you didn't leave me that time did you? You came back gleeful to the glass.

now that's the kind of man for me foaming strong and tall and lean except he's fat and bald now and his stomach's too big for my taste and droop shoulders heavy I guess with dandruff and can't stand up further than his knees thinks he's from long ago when women went for that I guess
bugger off and leave me then

leave the best entertainment
I've had in a lifetime? leave
fat man (short now too) when
he's down? no no I stick around
and help you help yourself when
you decide to get up need help
to keep standing if you ever get
to your feet

why do you stay? you put me
here then stay and watch. what
do you want anyway go go
before I

before you get up? no this I
gotta see. fat man get up when
belly so big it gets in way of
feet and weighs down shoulders
dandruffed shoulders

leave me alone leave me
leave me

"Oh my poor darling. Where have you been? Come on my
love, my love." cooing petting stroking. no tears. "My
love you are back. You're safe with me now. We're right at
the trail and I think I can even smell the lilacs. Come my
love, let me help you up."

"No Goddamn it! No!" I yelled at you didn't I? didn't
I? didn't I? And I shook you off then and I got to my feet
by myself didn't I? And I refrained even from hitting you
didn't I? Well, didn't I? And I went along my side of the
trail and where were you then? Gone gone gone and I'm in the
level part by myself and I'll soon be drinking water and I see the panel now AT LEAST I can see it now and it stretches out into the clearing or at least that's where the clearing used to be but it's all dark up there so I couldn't see it anyway but the sun's gone and the lilacs won't be there and the horse no dog pond and what about the candle not even candle but maybe wind or sheets I can sleep but water creek or pond or pond or creek it doesn't matter as long as I get water and the panel into darkness no candle no water either unless I see you even if it's dim dim no water unless I see you stepping through