

This episode contains: references to war, gunfire, one extended scene of mass murder including presumed infanticide, bodily transformation.

THE SILT VERSES
SEASON 2, CHAPTER 1

HOUSE IN THE HILLS, EXT, DAY

SFX: Desert cicadas. An approaching car speeds past. A crow caws, startled by the noise, and flies away.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

There comes a bright morning in the late summer when a politician journeys out to our house in the high hills and asks my sibling Gage and I to kill a god.

We're still sleeping when they arrive.

Two black vans kicking up trails of dust in the light of the late morning. Pulling up to an abrupt halt, just outside the gates of the compound.

We stroll out to watch them in our dressing-gowns and our slippers.

Gage folds luxuriantly into the chair on the porch. I lean against the open doorway.

A moment later, the van doors slide open and they come jumping out, one after the other like clowns from a clown car - a dozen mean-looking professionals in the same cheap suit, who line up with their hands crossed over their crotches, firearms visible in their shoulder holsters, making no move towards the house.

Hard just to say yet whether that means they can see the bear-traps we've laid to keep out intruders, buried in the dust just a few fragile paces ahead of them. Or perhaps they're just lucky.

And the politician from the Legislatures comes stepping out after them, wiping the sweat from their brow.

Perhaps they're not so watchful, or they're not so lucky, because they take a step forwards, hands on hips, as if to show us that they're the one in charge of all this.

The politician says something stupid like-

SHRUE:

(Nervously, distant)

Uh...good morning.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

People often don't know what to make of Gage and I.

They start thinking - can we really be as young as we look? Young, wild, gangly things, ragged and filthy, living amongst the bones.

Shouldn't we be in school, maybe college? Shouldn't someone be taking care of us? What, precisely, **happened** to the people who were supposed to be taking care of us?

They don't know whether to condescend to us or stand well clear of us.

SHRUE:

(Distant)

My name is Shrue. I'm the Adjudicator for this territory.

Landslide election, as it happens.

I've come to secure your services.

I'm, um... I'm told you can hunt just about anything.

GAGE:

(Narrating)

We're not interested, not yet.

Government contractors pay well, but they have a lot of rules they want you to follow, and the quarry is always dull, offering unworthy trophies for the Beast That Stalks In The Long Grass - a wild pig or a short-faced bear or a desperate poacher that's been picking off deer in one of their properties.

But we are, at least, **entertained**.

SHRUE:

(Distant)

Will you come out and speak with me?

GAGE:

We can hear you fine from here.

SHRUE:

(Distant)

I **said**, I heard you can hunt-

MERCER:

(Impatiently)

-yes, that's true, politico.

If it walks, swims or flies, Gage and I can track it for you. If it bears skin and flesh, we can bring you its pelt.

You've got eyes, don't you? Look at the trophies over the gate.

SHRUE:

(With faint disgust, attempting to sound impressed)

Oh...yes, very fine.

MERCER:

(Muttering to GAGE)

Think the politician's about to vomit.

GAGE:

(Muttering back)

I might put the coffee on. Sure we'll get to the point in an hour or two.

SHRUE:

(Urgently)

My friends! My friends!

I hear...

I hear you can hunt gods.

MERCER:

A god's no different from any other thing that feeds. In principle.

You lure it or you goad it. You find the right place to drive the blade in.

And the wounds you make, they split and bleed and fester, even though they're made of people.

GAGE:

Might not see a pelt, though.

MERCER:

We've not hunted a god for a Government client before.

And hunting god means killing man, as an inevitability. What are the terms of the contract?

SHRUE:

I have the authority to negotiate payment on your terms.

I - I was told you'd be expensive.

GAGE:

(Muttering to MERCER)

First sharp thing that's been said all day.

SHRUE:

As well as financial compensation, I can offer you munitions and resources to meet your needs.

A platoon of Legislature soldiers, under your command.

If you succeed on your first contract, the arrangement can be extended.

MERCER:

(To GAGE)

Hear that? We get our own toy soldiers.

SHRUE:

So long as you prove yourselves useful, there's almost nothing that we can't be amenable to.

Would you like some time to discuss this between yourselves?

GAGE:

(Calmly)

No. No, there's no need.

My sister and I are of one mind.

I'll take Mercer's opinion.

MERCER:

Hm. Well, you've done it with every other damn thing. May as well privatise your killing.

SHRUE:

Splendid!

I'm truly looking forward to-

SFX: The snap of a bear-trap. Shrue cries out and falls.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

The politician takes a step forwards - and the bear-trap erupts, kicking up dust, its feet snapping shut on nothing.

They tumble back into the dirt, shrieking and gasping, eyes wide with abject and clownish terror as their people come rushing forwards to retrieve them.

And Gage and I?

Our laughter splits the sky.

VILLAGE, EXT, DAY

SFX: The low rumble of army jeeps. The clip-clop of a pair of horses riding out.

The whistle of a low winter wind.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

Summer passes. And winter comes. And it's snowing across the Peninsula, for the first time in a decade.

Hell of a sight.

This...incredible, drifting white snow set against the polluted violet sky.

And my sibling Gage and me, we're riding into this peat-cutters' town-
(Thinking)

What was it called? I suppose it doesn't matter any more.

Low hillock-houses of grey brick, stooped into the bog flats to protect
against the strong winds.

A town hall. A kind of hunched church, crouching amongst the grand and
twisted roots of a crimson lantern-tree.

A place that's survived and grown hardy here for a very long time, without
ever once beginning to thrive.

The soldiers lead the approach, three armoured jeeps packed full.

Our platoon were polished - once.

Our bad habits have worn off on them, during our time together.

But despite their shabbiness, despite the hunting-trophies hung about
their throats and shoulders and the black mark of the Beast That Stalks In
The Long Grass upon their helmets, these soldiers, they...still give off a
certain grand impression.

Like a parade coming in.

GAGE:

(Narrating)

Mercer and I, we ride along behind them on our horses, long rifles slung
across our saddles.

Lazy and unkempt, like the jesters following the king's procession.

We dress in the things we kill, in sallow bone and in bloodied rough fur.

We accept the Beast That Stalks, with gratitude, into ourselves.

Mercer's hood is topped with a goat skull; mine with the skull of a dog.

SFX: Air raid sirens in the distance.

GAGE:

(Narrating)

And as we get close, the old air raid sirens begin to howl - and the townsfolk come running out from their homes, in from the peat-fields, to wave and goggle and shout hurrah at the troops' procession as it comes rolling in.

They must think that the war has started, or maybe they assume we're simply marching through this inconsequential place to get to somewhere that matters.

There's a maypole in the centre of the village, a stout carved thing topped with the icon of a thick, waddling mass, its peat-skin carving off into ribbons, and as the jeeps pull in and Sergeant Kipuros shouts for the men to assemble, an old priest comes running out in thick robes cowed with sheets of turf, bidding us welcome in the name of the Mire Hag.

SFX: Low crowd murmur. The laughter of children.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

Kipuros will pretend that he's conducting some kind of official census. He takes notes from the priest - *how many farmers are there on the village's outskirts? Are there any worshippers who've left home?*

Gage and I, we don't bother trying to talk to these people.

What would we even have to say to them?

That a senior member of the local courts, a key ally of Adjudicator Shrue, intends to use these lands for grouse-shooting - and to cultivate grouse you need to burn the peat, and to burn the peat you need a god of fire to work its will unimpeded and without contest?

How would they be able to understand that position?

Besides, it isn't really about what they believe.

It's about what they remember.

When Kipuros is satisfied, he walks back towards us. Gives us an assenting nod.

The troops line quickly up in two long rows across the village square.

We stay where we are - on the outskirts, watching from the saddle.

Gage carries a bone flute.

I carved it for them.

They heft it to their lips - and blow.

SFX: The sound of a flute being blown - a slow, rising scale.

Silence for a moment.

Then an eruption of gunfire. Screaming. A panicked crowd.

The sound of running feet.

GAGE:
(Calmly)
First runner.

MERCER:
Mine.

SFX: Gunshot.

GAGE:
Mine.

SFX: Gunshot.

MERCER:
Mine.

SFX: Gunshot.

MERCER:
Mine again.

SFX: One final echoing gunshot.

And then silence.

GAGE:
(Narrating)
We're good shots, Mercer and I. We hunt clean.

It doesn't take longer than it has to.

(With rising concern)

But a moment later, it's our own soldiers in the village square who begin to shout, in panic and in anger, because the old priest has somehow scampered back into the safety of his church in all the confusion - locking himself in from the inside.

They begin hammering on the doors with their boot-heels and the butts of their rifles, because whatever he's gone in there to do, it'd be in all of our interests to stop him before it's too late.

MERCER

(Narrating)

They're too late.

SFX: The unearthly cry of the PEAT-SAINT.

The sound of a door shattering. Cries of terror and gunfire.

Heavy, inhuman footsteps.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

When the mire-priest comes out, he comes out changed.

Bursting out through the church doors, shattering the wood to smithereens.

Stooping through the threshold, a vast and cumbersome shape: his skin darkening and rippling like ancient peat bursting forth beneath a cutter's turskill, veins of rancid sphagnum moss pulsing about his bulging arms.

A human face still visible, wide-eyed and no longer in control, from deep within his chest.

SFX: Cry of the PEAT-SAINT. Gunfire.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

As the Peat-Saint walks, its footsteps shed dirt.

It picks up one soldier in a colossal hand - Timps, his name was.

SFX: Gunfire and screaming.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

He struggles, briefly - a few gasps, a couple of feeble kicks - as the molten peat flows outwards, oozing over his skin, searing and burning as it goes.

He dies quickly.

But when the body falls, it's as wrinkled and tanned and haggard as any corpse that's lain beneath a bog for a thousand years.

The Peat-Saint marches on.

SFX: Cry of the PEAT-SAINT. Inhuman footsteps.

GAGE:

(Narrating)

Mercer and I reach for our satchels. We find the bottle-grenades, slopping with thick liquid.

Another man is already screaming and writhing beneath the beast's embrace.

Our anniversary lighters come alive with flame.

We light the stuffed rags.

And we charge.

SFX: Galloping hooves.

The shatter of glass and the roar of flame.

The PEAT-SAINT cries unhappily.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

The Peat-Saint flails, and stampedes, and burns.

Our soldiers scurry back and forth to places of safety in the village square, avoiding its increasingly clumsy and desperate movements.

We circle it, and light our bottles, and we torch it again.

SFX: Galloping, the sound of a Molotov cocktail being thrown.

The cries of the PEAT-SAINT as it dies.

MERCER:

(Narrating)

Eventually it falls, still blazing.

Its vast form crumbles, losing its shape, collapsing into earth.

After that, there's nobody left to stop us - and we can begin the work at our leisure.

GAGE:

(Narrating)

We've killed maybe a dozen gods at this point - illegal deities, forsaken deities, and merely the unfortunate.

The movements come easy by now.

We hack down the maypole. Splinter the carvings into fragments.

We torch the texts.

Smash the stained-glass windows inside the church.

Where there are prayer-marks carved into stone, we extinguish their meanings, scraping our own meandering lines and shapes to obscure the original pattern.

Nobody who comes this way will be able to make sense of this.

The homes and the bodies, we burn until there's nothing left but trophies and carrion.

And then, once all memory of the Mire-Hag has been removed from existence, we make our own marks.

Mercer and I daub the quarry-blood across each other's faces. Our teeth bright and our eyes laughing as we praise our god and claim his prizes.

After that, we move on.

SFX: The sound of rolling jeeps and horse's footsteps.

The cries of gulls.

GAGE:
These are the Silt Verses.

And I name our disciples thus.

MERCER:
Daphne Nitsuga.

GAGE:
JV Hampton Van-Sant.

MERCER:
Sarah Griffin.

GAGE:
Jamie Stewart.

MERCER:
And B. Narr.

GAGE:
Written by Jon Ware and Muna Hussen. Audio design by Sammy Holden.

GAGE'S TENT, INT, DAY

SFX: Gage, snoring.

The sound of the tent flap opening.

MERCER:
Hey. Hey, Gage - wake up.

GAGE:
(Groggily)
What time is it?

MERCER:

Nearly dawn.

Just had a call come in from Shrue. We need to head east. We're wanted for another job.

GAGE:

We just finished the last one. We're owed a proper break.

MERCER:

We won't be getting it.

It's a fresh quarry, Gage. Something we haven't hunted before.

GAGE:

(Mumbling and turning back over)

It can wait.

MERCER:

(Sweetly, but insistently)

It can't. Rouse yourself.

This one's going to be fun, I promise you.

We're going to kill a river-god.

THE GULCH - TEMPLE ROOM, INT, DAY

SFX: A gong sounds.

The chatter of a crowd.

MASON:

Brethren. Brethren.

To order, please.

SFX: MASON claps as the noise dies down.

MASON:

(Praying)

Trawler-man of Tide and Flesh. Father in the Water.

You are the Mouth Devouring and the Mouth Returning,

You stand tall at the High Tide and crawl on your belly at the Low Tide.
Upon this day, we, your chosen faithful, offer you body and spirit
In the hope of your mercy and your favour,
In the hope of the bountiful catch, and the cleansing current.
From the wellspring to the sea.

CHORUS:
From the wellspring to the sea.

MASON:
For the benefit of our newest arrivals - welcome. My name is Katabasian
Mason, and I have the privilege of overseeing our disciples in the field.

If you are fortunate, and if you prove yourselves, you may one day be
picked to join them.

(More lightly)

There's always one brave soul who leaves a bottle of vintage schnapps
upon my desk to win my favour in this matter, and while I appreciate the
gesture, I'm sorry to say that I cannot be swayed.

(Jokingly)

But please do feel free to try your luck, of course.

SFX: Chuckling.

MASON:
For today's lesson, I'd like to try and convey a little about the history of
this place.

The Paraclete's Gulch was, after all, built as a haven some four hundred
years ago.

Her corridors and stairways buried deep into the side of the canyon,
hidden from sight, her lowest basements dipping into the waters of the
Trawler-man's river.

This place is a fortress, carved out of rock over the course of long
centuries by the sacred tides themselves.

A meaningful reconsecration, our coming here, given how our numbers
have grown these past few months.

Some of you have joined us as fresh converts.

Others have come seeking refuge, victims of the fresh indignities carried out by the lawful authorities against our kin.

They cannot stand our victories against them. Pride and spite drive them on to persecute us.

They will not stop.

Hard times are coming for all of us.

But we must remember that the Trawler-man has provided us with miracles countless times before, in our very moment of need - and he will provide again.

I will reiterate. Anyone caught listening to the news broadcasts will be severely punished-

SFX: Loud booming knocking at the far door.

MASON:
-as will latecomers to my sermons.
(Calling out)
Wait outside! I'll deal with you once I'm finished.

SFX: A second set of knocks.

MASON:
(Calling out)
Who stands without?

SFX: A third set of knocks.

MASON:
(Unnerved)
Who's there, I said?

SFX: The doors creaking open.

The sound of a staff clacking on the ground.

FAULKNER:
(In a tired but performative voice)
Brother Faulkner, disciple of the Parish of Tide and Flesh, prophet of the Trawler-man. Bearer of the Wither Mark.

I apologise for my intrusion, Katabasian Mason.

But I have travelled a long road to get here, and I am weary, and my feet no longer have the strength to carry me.

SFX: FAULKNER collapses. His staff rattles on the floor.

MASON:

(Startled, but keeping his cool.)

As I said, my friends - the Trawler-man is a god of wonders.

Brother Faulkner, safely returned to us.

(Snapping orders)

Brethren - call for the doctor.

See to him.

Bring him to my study just as soon as he's fit to stand.

FADE OUT.

MASON'S STUDY, INT, DAY

SFX: A door closes.

MASON sits with a sigh.

MASON:

Well, you sold me a faulty product, my boy.

FAULKNER:

(Innocently)

What's that?

MASON:

(Just barely concealing his frustration)

The Wither Mark. It didn't work.

We sent a disciple out into the field months ago, to test it in person. He tried a dozen variations based on your instructions.

Nothing happened.

FAULKNER:
(Pretending to be surprised)
Hm. And you're...**certain** in his faith?

A long silence as MASON stares him down.

FAULKNER:
(Still a little smug)
It's possible I might have misremembered the finer details of the prayer.

Silence as MASON considers.

MASON:
Do you think you might remember again, given time and sufficient space to reflect?

FAULKNER:
Again, it's possible.

Silence.

MASON:
(Suddenly benevolent)
You know, the last time we spoke, Faulkner - I don't know if you remember this - the phone cut out.

FAULKNER:
(A little shaken by the audacity of this lie)
Cut out?

MASON:
(Smoothly lying)
Yes, it was a very bad line, and it cut out unexpectedly.

I remember that it deeply upset me at the time, our conversation ending so prematurely, because we'd just begun to discuss your future here at the Parish. A very bright and certain future. Those were my words.

You were, as I remember it, about to tell me what you wanted.

FAULKNER:
(Snatching at the opportunity)
I...I want a seat at the inner table.

I want to be named as a Katabasian - with everything that entails.

MASON:

At your age? With your inexperience?

(Feigning reluctance)

It's quite unprecedented.

FAULKNER:

So am I. As a prophet of the river.

MASON:

You know, when you catch your breath, you'll have to tell me precisely what that means.

Silence.

MASON:

It's not a comfortable place, that inner table.

(Gently threatening)

There have been some - in the past - who achieved the Katabasian's rank before they were ready, mistaking their own clumsy, temporary good fortune for talent.

Invariably they came to a very bad end.

Silence.

MASON:

(Relenting)

Perhaps an honorary seat would be appropriate. Given your achievements in the field.

FAULKNER:

And my own clutch to serve under me.

MASON:

Initiates will be assigned to you. Once everything's been officially confirmed and once the vote has passed.

FAULKNER:

(Over-reaching in his excitement)

And- I want a good room, too. I'm not sharing again.

MASON:

You'll have your own private chambers, of course.

In fact, we can see to that now, if you're ready. I'm sure you're exhausted by all of the excitement.

(Getting to his feet)

Come. Follow me.

The Gulch can be difficult to navigate. I'm certain we've lost more than one meandering acolyte in these stairwells.

FAULKNER'S CHAMBER, INT, DAY

SFX: A door creaks open.

MASON:

(Ushering FAULKNER inside)

There should be towels in the bathroom, and hot water as well. I'll have breakfast sent up as soon as it's ready. There's an intercom on the far wall if you need anything else.

Oh - and there's a radio, if you want to hear what's going on in the outside world.

You'll also have a visit from a transcriptionist shortly.

FAULKNER:

(Overwhelmed by it all)

A...sorry, did you say 'transcriptionist'?

MASON:

Naturally. To record your achievements in the field, to be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the Verses.

(As if only just remembering it)

I really should have asked. What precisely became of Sister Carpenter?

I know we both had some worries about her.

Silence.

FAULKNER:

(Lying on CARPENTER's behalf)

She died loyal.

MASON:

(Apparently satisfied)

Good. She came from a storied line of our people. It would have been quite embarrassing if she'd strayed.

I'll leave you to it.

SFX: The door closes.

Silence.

SFX: FAULKNER turns the radio on.

DIANE STONE:

(On the radio)

-speculation continues to grow that the Linger Straits were, in fact, involved not just with the atrocities at Bellwethers, but the attacks on Greater Glottage Radio earlier this y-

SFX: FAULKNER turns the radio off again.

Footsteps.

The sound of a shower turning on.

FAULKNER:

Hahahahahahahahaha!

Made it. I made it.

I made it!

(To the Trawler-man)

Thank you.

(Yelling excitedly)

Thank you, thank you!

THE GULCH (THE DREAMING POOLS), INT, DAY

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

And so I win.

When breakfast comes, it's grander than I could have expected, a broad bowlful of steaming kedgerree - piping hot and the choice parts of the fish, all flesh and no skin.

To test the limitations of my welcome here, I call them up afterwards and tell them I want chocolate, chocolate bars like the ones back home, and there's not even a moment of hesitation before they tell me, 'Yes, of course, Brother. We can do that for you.'

SFX: FAULKNER chuckles.

FAULKNER:

When the transcriptionist comes to my chambers - an old bespectacled woman hauling a massive and no doubt sacred notebook upon her back, with biros tucked into her sleeves - she takes her seat amongst the discarded wrappers.

She listens to the beginning of the story the way I tell it, and nods respectfully, and then reads it right back.

I am asked to deliver a sermon upon the next Day of the Dead Saint. My performance is halting, even I know that, but they invite me back again, and again, and over time the nerves begin to drift away.

I am assigned people to fetch and carry when I tell them to fetch and carry.

It's made very clear to me that I'm going to have everything I need from this moment on.

(With sudden uncertainty)

It's lonely, still.

A different kind of loneliness.

The young disciples in their pauper's shifts bow deep and clasp their hands when they see me - and then they hurry away as fast as seems polite.

There are eyes always upon me, from every corner of the stairwell and every vaulted window of the Gulch.

And then, months later...he sends for me again.

SFX: Echoing footsteps.

The distant gurgle of water.

FAULKNER:
(Calling out, his voice echoing)
Mason?

Katabasian Mason?

MASON:
(Distantly)
This way, Faulkner.

SFX: FAULKNER's footsteps echo on.

FAULKNER:
Dark down here.

MASON:
It needs to be. You'll see why presently.

FAULKNER:
What is this place? A shrine?

MASON:
A sacrificial chamber - and an experiment.

Quite a unique one, really.

The river washes in through the sluice-gates, feeding these
drowning-tanks.

After we moved back in here, Katabasian Phegg had the idea of installing
furnaces to heat the currents as they flow inwards. Salt-water filters.

His thought was that we might be able to alter the composition of the
sacred waters, to see the isolated impact upon the sacrifices that were
made here.

Come close and watch. We just put in a fresh one this morning.

FAULKNER:

(Narrating)

The vast tank glints faintly in the darkness.

It reflects Mason's rounded spectacles as he watches me.

I take a step forward, uncertain - and for a moment it occurs to me that I have surely been brought here to be drowned.

And then, before us, something strange and wondrous drifts into view.

The sacrifice's body is limp and shrunken. Its boots, still wrapped in heavy chains, kick faintly against the glass.

Above it, guiding it through the water, is a great glowing blue bell of flesh, tendrils dangling beneath it, emitting an uncanny violet light.

The jellyfish turns on itself as it drifts in the water, and that's when I see the human face, stretched and taut and flattened, its eyes still goggling, across the surface of the bell.

Sacred hooks have been driven through the luminescent tissue here and there.

Its mouth is still opening and closing, the water seeping in and out, faintly whispering familiar words of prayer.

FAULKNER:

It's a...man-of-war.

An ocean saint?

MASON:

It's a radical thought, isn't it? And yet it's also incredibly apt.

All waters are one water, the Silt Verses teach us.

In time, perhaps our river's reach could stretch across the seas themselves.

FAULKNER:

Does this manner of experimentation not, uh, risk diluting our understanding of the Trawler-man? What he is, what he stands for?

MASON:

We grow or we die, Faulkner. There is no third option.

FAULKNER:

Who was he?

MASON:

(With a slight chuckle)

Don't worry.

Not one of us.

(Casually)

No sign of the Wither Mark yet?

FAULKNER:

(A little flustered)

I've been in recovery all this time.

Recovering well.

MASON:

Mm. Well, perhaps these simply aren't the right conditions for you to remember.

Silence.

MASON:

The record-keepers were kind enough to share the first draft of your submission with me. It's very good.

SFX: Pages turning.

MASON:

(Reading aloud - a little hammy)

'And at the water's edge, Carpenter turned to her companion.

"Leave me now, Faulkner," she cried. "Bear our message home to the Trawler-man's people. They must hear that the river has answered our prayers and served you and I with sacred truth.

"Bear that message hence - and I shall bear our god's wrath down upon these long-forsaken souls."

I have to confess, I'm a little jealous. I knew poor Sister Carpenter from a very young age, and yet I don't ever recall her speaking to me with such grandiloquence.

FAULKNER:

(Caught out and a little abashed)

It's...a special kind of knowing someone, isn't it?

When you're stuck on the road together for those long days and nights.

MASON:

Oh, believe me, I know. I've carried out my fair share of pilgrimages into the lost territories.

None quite as successful as yours, however.

Our numbers have swelled since the miracle at Bellwethers, it's true, but in other ways we've lost nearly as much.

Ground. Resources. Inside intelligence. These things take a toll.

But there is, I have to say, a real change in the air since you arrived here, a kind of excited anticipation.

A great many eyes are upon you - and as your patron, a great many eyes upon me, as well.

FAULKNER:

(Nervous)

I'm glad to hear it.

MASON:

There are other - false-faith - gods of the water worshipped across the Peninsula.

Sea-gods like the Brine-Soaked Wreck. Rain-gods like the Endless Drear.

If we are going to withstand the renewed assaults upon our faith by the lawful authorities - assaults which have come fairly directly as a result of your heroic efforts upon the road with Sister Carpenter - we will need additional bodies.

We'll require these misguided souls to understand that their so-called gods are merely minor aspects of our own, since our power is so demonstrably greater than theirs.

We must claim them as allies for the Trawler-man, in other words.

(Sweetly)

So I'm sending you back out into the field. Isn't that good news?

You and your new clutch - you can meet them as soon as you're ready.

They're eager, but green, as you once were, and I'm sure they can learn from your example.

Together, you'll visit the haunts of these false-faiths, and you'll show them that their attentions would be far better turned towards our god's embrace.

FAULKNER:

(Flat and disbelieving)

You want me to go back out into the world and...convert the faithless.

MASON:

Correct.

FAULKNER:

What about...what about the Katabasian's rank?

MASON:

It'll be ready and waiting for you. Just as soon as you return.

FAULKNER:

(Protesting)

Katabasian Mason, I-

MASON:

(Enthusiastic, or pretending to be)

There's no-one better suited. You're an inspiration to our people, Faulkner. A miracle-maker.

A prophet.

The Trawler-man has acted through you, spoken through you. He delivered the Wither Tide to you, didn't you?

Which means he'll do it again, when the moment is right.

I have absolute faith in him.

Silence.

MASON:

It could be, of course, that there's some trivial element from your story which you'd like to recant.

FAULKNER lies.

FAULKNER:

No.

Not a thing.

MASON:

Then it's settled. I'll make the arrangements.

Come - schnapps for us both.

SFX: The pop of a bottle. The glug of liquor being poured out.

MASON:

May you continue to prove yourself to us, dear boy.

And let us pray that dear, loyal Sister Carpenter has found that final peace, in the Garden below the waters, which she always lacked in life.

SFX: The clink of glasses.

CARPENTER'S DREAM

SFX: The CAIRN MAIDEN's whispers, rising and falling.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating, with panic)

Drowning in earth is different to drowning in water.

You don't drift. You can't truly struggle.

You're hemmed in, caught in place as the dirt packs in around you.

You feel the immense weight of it hemming you in on all sides, and every time you push upwards, there's a fleeting glimpse of hope, an instant of lightness, of pressure giving way - before more dirt piles in to fill the space that was left behind.

And then, quite unexpectedly - that great weight is lifted.

And as I open my eyes and the dazzling white light fills my vision, I can just make out a figure, vague and shifting, the very picture of that same looming, veiled spectre that wrapped me up in its long fingers, thrust me downwards, and buried me deep beneath the soil.

I don't hesitate.

I punch it in the face.

SFX: A thwack - and a very human cry from STEWARDESS ACANTHA as she tumbles back into her own cupboard of glassware.

A long silence.

CARPENTER:
(Realising what she's done)
...Oh.

END OF EPISODE.