

SILT VERSES CHAPTER 8

CAR TRUNK, INT

We hear the roar of PAIGE's car, driving along.

And then the sound of PAIGE, struggling with the trunk's locked handle.

PAIGE:

(Narrating, anxiously, in a half-whisper)

I'm in a trunk.

My own trunk, in my own stolen car.

I can't see anything. I don't know how to unlock the door from the inside. I can't seem to kick it out.

But I **can** hear my captors, over the roar of the engine and the screech of tarmac, and I remember what the company guidance told us during the two-day workshop on self-defence and mitigation efforts in case of kidnapping and/or ritual sacrifice.

'Listen to everything they say, in case it's something that the authorities can use to find you.'

From here, it sounds like they're...

(Uncertainly)

...squabbling.

CAR, INT

And then we hear FAULKNER and CARPENTER, arguing in the front seat of the car. Their voices are muffled for a moment, as if we're still in the trunk - then they become clear.

They are both furious.

CARPENTER:

-you should have just killed the man!

FAULKNER:

(Defensively)

He knew who we were, he'd been going through our bags! I was looking out for us.

You're the one who was, was...chattering away to some policeman-

CARPENTER:

(Scornful)

Oh, don't try me. That's not why you hallowed the poor bastard.

You did it because for all your piety and your balking airs, you're a, a frothing fanatic just like the rest of them and that makes you reckless.

FAULKNER:

(Furious)

You and I are **meant** to be on the same side, Carpenter.

But it seems to me like whenever it comes to taking action, whenever it comes to striking a blow against the enemies of our faith, your preference is to stand back with a faint sneer on your face - sure, just like the one you're giving me right now.

You want to be able to claim your place in our faith while keeping yourself distant from everything that means.

And that doesn't make you better than me. Bait and flesh, it does **not**.

It makes you a coward.

A very long and angry silence.

We listen to them driving.

CARPENTER:

(Matter-of-factly)

Pull over at that verge. We'll get the girl out of the boot.

I can sit in the back. Keep an eye on her so she doesn't try anything.

FAULKNER:

(Uncertainly)

What, you thinking it'll be less suspicious if we're stopped?

CARPENTER:

No, I'm just sick of talking to you. Hopeful she'll make for better company.

The car swerves and pulls up.

The handbrake parks. FAULKNER is fuming.

FAULKNER:

(Spitefully)

Carpenter, I think it's only fair you should know the truth: that Katabasian Mason asked me to accompany you on this mission for precisely this reason.

In all honesty, he believed you might be straying from our path.

It was his opinion that we might no longer be able to trust you. That you needed someone steadfast alongside you to keep an eye on you.

(Perhaps going too far)

He told me I might need to go to the *police*-

CARPENTER:

(Genuinely angry and unsettled)

That's a lie. A *lie*.

Mason told me to take you with me because nobody else wanted you. Nobody wanted to have to swaddle you, comfort you, clean up after you.

I've been building this faith back up to something worth anything with the best of them in the ditches and the rotting cellars for the past thirteen years.

My Nana Glass kept the fires burning when nobody else would dare to try. When our god had nobody to whisper his name in the silent places.

And you - a child with no sense and no talent - you think you can tell me how I'm seen?

You have the gall to tell me I haven't earned the trust of Mason, and the Katabasians, and the rest of them? That I haven't given everything to this?

FAULKNER:

(Hurt)

I, I have talent-

CARPENTER:

(Mocking)

Oh, I'd say fucking up is more your vocation than your talent, isn't it?

FAULKNER:

(Furious)

You cannot begin to understand what I've done to get to this point, Carpenter.

You don't know what I'm capable of - and you do *not* want to test whether our god loves you more than he loves me, because I can see you flinch away from him every time you think he might be drifting close.

We hear CARPENTER open the car door.

CARPENTER:

(Very coldly)

You didn't interest me before, Faulkner. You certainly don't frighten me now.

The distant sound of the trunk opening.

The car door opens again as PAIGE is shoved into the back seat.

PAIGE:

What are you-

CARPENTER:

Get in.

The door slams.

The engine starts up again as FAULKNER continues to drive.

CARPENTER:

What did you say your name was?

PAIGE:

(Very uncertainly)

Paige.

An awkward silence.

CARPENTER:

I'm sorry if things are awkward in the car, Paige.

PAIGE:

That's all right.

CARPENTER:

My colleague and I are having some compatibility issues.

PAIGE:

I see.

An awkward silence.

CARPENTER:

And obviously you can't contribute much to the conversation, since you are a hostage.

PAIGE:

(Half-joking, to try and make herself feel better)

I actually attended a workplace seminar on conflict mediation once, I don't know if-

CARPENTER:

(Sharply)

No need to trouble yourself, Paige.

PAIGE:

...okay.

The awkward silence holds for a moment. Until-

FAULKNER:

(Watching the road; to CARPENTER)

That's the turning, up ahead.

No cars on the road behind us. I'd say we're safe to go in.

CARPENTER:

I'm sure you know best.

PAIGE:

(Narrating, nervously)

They aren't looking at each other. The younger one with the kind eyes and the older one who looks like a crow.

It's...like they're **sulking**, these renegades who've kidnapped me and hijacked my car.

Like I'm eight years old again and sitting in the back seat as my dad and my mum snipe at each other over the sound of the radio.

I almost want to laugh.

And now, as we pull up in front of a house, a thick pair of iron gates half-buried in the winding grass, they still refuse to meet one another's eye.

Through the twisted bars of the gates, you can just make out a dirt track rolling onwards.

A painted sign hangs by the entrance. 113 Longray Mansions.

And beyond that, the battered and sunken roof of a dilapidated bungalow.

FAULKNER:
Looks quiet.

CARPENTER:
Could be. I'm going to take a look around inside. You - wait here with the girl.

(To Paige)

And you - you'd better not try anything with my friend here.

(Sardonically)

He can't be swayed from his sense of duty, you know, he can't be bargained with. He's steadfast in his faith.

(Directed at FAULKNER)

Like a...really thick rock.

We hear the door open.

FAULKNER:
(Pushing back at CARPENTER)
You've got ten minutes. Then I'm coming in after you.

CARPENTER:
Hnh.

We hear the door slam and the crunch of gravel as CARPENTER leaves (we should hear her limping if possible). The creak of the iron gates.

Silence.

PAIGE and FAULKNER are now sitting in the car together.

PAIGE:

So...what's in there, exactly?

FAULKNER ignores her.

PAIGE:

(Testing the waters)

You might as well tell me - you're probably going to kill me anyway, aren't you?

(Pause)

Are you robbing the place?

(Pause)

This is a company car, honestly. You can take it if you like. I'm very happy to walk if you let me go.

FAULKNER:

(A little hurt)

You shouldn't say that.

PAIGE:

...which part?

FAULKNER:

(Growing emotional)

Talking about how we're 'going to kill you anyway'. Gods, I don't **know** that, and I don't want to know that, but I don't want to promise anything to you either about how it's all going to be fine, because who knows what's going to happen?

Who knows what kind of sacrifice might be demanded of us when we set foot in this place? And did you ever think that you might have been brought to us for a reason?

Silence.

PAIGE:

(Lightly)

You're right. How unfair of me.

FAULKNER calms down.

FAULKNER:

(Answering her initial question)

This place...belonged to a disciple. A fellow of the faith. We're looking for someone who called up a miracle further downriver, and we're thinking it might have been him.

PAIGE:

OK, so you and your friend-

FAULKNER:

We're not friends.

PAIGE:

Right. So you and your colleague, you're looking for this man.

(Kindly, observing the house)

It...looks like he's long gone.

FAULKNER:

They say there were radiant churches up and down the river's edge, a generation ago. Bright and alive with marsh-lanterns and laughter and when the Trawler-Man brought you his truth in offerings returned, you gazed upon it together.

Now we're scrapping in ruins. Chasing shades.

She's been doing this for thirteen years, she tells me. And we're still scattered, and we're still no closer to the river's rise, and yet she wants to hold that over me.

(Almost to himself)

When I joined this church, when I first came to it - alone, in my hour of need - I thought that was it for me.

I'd be among people who would truly know me, people who would truly understand me.

Instead it's more of this. More of her. And I'm still alone out here.

PAIGE:

It's hard, isn't it?

It takes long enough figuring out how to live with yourself, and then you have to figure out how to live with others.

(Undercutting herself with a joke)

That's from a three-day corporate cohesion workshop. I go on a lot of these.

FAULKNER:

(A little melancholy)

Are you thinking I'll let you go if you talk to me kindly enough?

PAIGE:

It'd be a happy outcome. But I think I'm mostly just talking because I'm nervous.

FAULKNER:

That's fine. You can keep talking. I don't mind - unlike some.

And here she comes now.

We hear the gates squeak.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

The crow is back, limping out along the gravel track. She squeezes through the iron gates, glancing once back behind her.

My companion in the driver's seat frowns.

His foot revs softly on the accelerator, just for a second, his hand briefly lingering over the handbrake, as if he's considering something dramatic.

Then she swings the gates wide, gesturing at us to come on through.

And we roll on in.

The rattle as the car presses forward down the driveway.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

There's something watching us from over the tall grass.

A great eyeless sculpture, a rounded mass of polished brass upon six towering stilt-legs, set into the ground some distance across the fields. Wobbling softly as the wind carries it, but remaining upright.

To my right, a moment later, I spot another, and another, silhouetted in the distance. Each piece twisted and shaped differently, but always the same construction.

Six tall spider-legs. One shapeless, twisted form at the top.

Like variations on a theme. Or, more likely, given the shattered, legless statuary that appears piled up at intervals along the track, we're looking at frustrated efforts towards a single state of completion.

The bungalow, as it comes fully into view over the horizon, is even stranger.

Because it, too, is on legs: four thick wooden stilts rising high over the reeds below, with a rickety ladder leading up to the front door.

The wood of the stilts looks warped. A glittering tide of limpets clings to the base, swarming upwards, a motion frozen in flight.

We're deep in the flood plain, wherever we are now.

The car door opens.

CARPENTER:

Well, it's definitely the right place. There's marks of protection daubed across the thresholds.

(Briskly)

Come on. Let's take a look around.

PAIGE:

(Reluctantly)

Um, I don't need to go, do I? You could just...handcuff me to the steering wheel or something.

CARPENTER:

Well, I hope you brought your own handcuffs, because we're pretty lightly equipped as far as that goes.

PAIGE:

I just feel very strongly that if you're going to murder me and bury me out in the reeds, I'd rather not go willingly.

If that's OK with you.

CARPENTER:

(Losing patience)

I mean...again, the question there would be 'did you bring your own shovel?'. Because I'm not digging by hand.

FAULKNER:

Just...leave her alone.

(To PAIGE)

We just want to take a look inside the house, that's all. I promise we're not going to hurt you.

The car doors open as they step out.

CARPENTER:

(Under her breath)

Oh, he's all softness, isn't he? Wonder what revelation brought that on.

Mind yourself on the ladder, now.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

The rungs are blackened with silt; slippery with the residue of a thousand rolling high tides. Something with many legs scuttles away as I place my hand gingerly up, test my weight, and begin to climb.

BUNGALOW KITCHEN, INT.

The creak of the bungalow's front door as it opens. We hear the whipping of wind for a moment before it closes again.

The clunk of feet upon floorboards.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

Light floods into the bungalow as my companions and I shuffle forward over the threshold.

Tall paintings and smaller frames hang from the walls and rest in a heap across the kitchen table, all of them depict the same base concept: swimming tides of black ink, rising from the bottom of the canvas upwards, swallowing murky watercolour landscapes and unhappy human portraits alike.

Spider-legged sculptures of copper and limestone crouch in the murky corners and watch us from above the rotting kitchen cabinets.

Garbage is littered across the floor of the room. Pots of inks and withered brushes.

It stinks in here.

FAULKNER:

Looks abandoned.

CARPENTER:

Not necessarily.

Some folks get deep enough into their gods, they start to forget about taking care of anything else.

Check the taps in the sink.

The squeak of water running as FAULKNER turns the taps on.

CARPENTER:
Came easy, didn't it?

They've forgotten their argument. Both of them are excited.

FAULKNER:
Someone was here recently.

CARPENTER:
I think so, yes. Come on, let's check out the other rooms.

PAIGE:
(Narrating)
There's a painting in the corridor. Unlike the others, it's clearly finished; neatly hung and contained in a simple wooden frame.

A silver-haired, long-faced man, his eyes rolling over white, his mouth wide open in an expression of shock or sudden understanding.

The black tide of ink is seeping comfortably up around his throat.

A pair of crawling crab-legs are emerging tentatively from his open mouth.

As I pass it, I have the uncomfortable sensation that I'm looking at the bungalow owner's one and only self-portrait.

BUNGALOW - STUDIO ROOM, INT

The thump of footsteps.

FAULKNER:
Carpenter!

More footsteps as CARPENTER and PAGE come through.

All three of them are staring at something.

FAULKNER:
It's...a tape recorder.
(Uncertainly)
Maybe we shouldn't touch it?

CARPENTER:
(Sarcastic)
What, you think it's an exploding tape recorder?

FAULKNER:
You don't think it's strange, just...left in the middle of the room like this?

CARPENTER:
No, you're right.

It feels like an invitation.

All three of them continue to watch the tape-recorder suspiciously for a moment.

CARPENTER:
Well...to hell with it.

There's a click as CARPENTER turns the tape on.

Silence. Scratchy noises.

And then we hear the slow, sonorous, bitter voice of ROAKE.

ROAKE:
(On tape)
Well, now. You've found me. My name is Augustus Roake.

And this is my statement, I suppose.

FAULKNER:
It's him.

CARPENTER:
I know.

FAULKNER:
(Excitedly)
It's Roake. He's the one I was told about, the one we've been looking for out here.

CARPENTER:

I know, I know. Just - listen -

ROAKE:

(On tape)

Or perhaps a sermon. Yes, I think it's best if you consider it a sermon, because I am going to make you listen, and I fully intend to preach.

Try to answer me honestly now, my intruder. Do you recall when you were last happy, truly happy, for longer than a passing instant?

Myself, I cannot, and I remember even as an infant feeling unable to recall a time when I had been happy.

And yet it must have existed, once, mustn't it, this state of prior happiness? Otherwise how would we know that we're looking for it? How would we feel its absence?

I have always felt this way, that happiness appears in our minds fully-formed as a place we remember, a grand house we must once have walked in our childhoods long ago, but which remains utterly alien to us, as if the very idea of it was implanted in us by some meddling dabbler or whispered into our ears by a diabolical voice.

But I find that stating as much to other people on the street or in coffee bars causes first confusion, then distress, then a desire to move away from me at all costs.

'Paint the world as you see it,' they said, when I first picked up my sketching-pad and began to draw.

Well, I painted this world in drowning hues of violet and black and they told me that was wrong. I'd put people off, that there was no audience for what I was making. My sensibilities were too cruel and cold for anyone to truly enjoy.

'Create for your own self,' they told me. So I locked my study door and I painted what I saw, and I took lonely pleasure in it.

'No, no,' they said, the next day, when they came knocking. 'You have to put yourself out there. What's the use of a voice if it goes unheard?'

But my would-be collaborators flinched away from me, and the creative houses shut their doors to the visions I had to offer.

I can accomplish nothing alone - that's the truth. But there's no consolation to be had in other people.

We hear PAIGE's voice interrupting the flow. Her voice is thoughtful and tense.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

The older one - Carpenter - is leaning by the windowsill, staring out over the empty flood-plain fields.

Faulkner is on his knees. His eyes tightly shut, in devotion.

This is probably when I should try to escape, isn't it?

ROAKE:

(On tape)

We are uniquely unhappy, I believe, because we are uniquely unfinished.

This is the ultimate pain of our condition, and no god can relieve it, whatever promises they make to us.

This is the only message worth delivering, no matter how deaf the ears I try to reach.

We drift helpless in a sea of monstrous changes beyond our control.

We suffer, half-complete things that we are, because we cannot progress and we cannot retreat.

So, then, what's left to us, lost as we are in this dreadful landscape, caught at the waystation upon the endless road of ourselves, unable to go forwards, unable to go back?

We do not know what would be waiting for us, if we could go forwards.

The only certainty is what lies behind, and thus the only safe move is retreat back into the depths.

I have always watched the nomad-barnacles and grey lobsters of the city canals with an unhappy envy; I have waded into the polluted waters to chart their pointless and erratic movements this way and that way, longing to achieve their skittering clarity of purpose.

Since my very childhood, my Muse has whispered to me, in the lonely places, of the need to turn back the tide within myself.

I have sought to embody this message through furious action, but in vain. When I went out to the pond in our local park and buried my head into the water, seeking communion with the things that lived beneath, seeking to return to the water, it was my parents who caught me.

They dragged me back out, before the last air bubbles had fled from my throat. Told me something must be wrong, not with our mutual condition, but with me, personally.

The gall of it.

So I stopped trying to live what I believed. And I painted instead.

FAULKNER:

I feel like we should be writing this down. This could be part of the new scripture. A fresh chapter in the Verses.

CARPENTER:

(Cynically, but half-heartedly so)

I hope they cut down on the guff.

The classic parables are a little more to the point, that's all I'm saying.

Back to PAIGE, who has crept across to the other side of the room.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

I move casually to the farthest corner of the room, and take up position by the window there.

It's a long way down. Too far to jump.

From this angle I can see the river again, a black and turgid shape amongst the drifting reeds.

A small dirt path cuts through the tall grass below; the black silhouettes of three tall spider-crab statues loom by a broken wooden jetty overlooking the water.

There's a rowboat bound to the post down there, bobbing softly in the currents.

This could be something, I think.

ROAKE:

(On tape)

But the more I painted the sworls and shapes of the skittering things that walked upon the tideline, the more I began to understand them; there was a pattern in the marks they left behind in the mud with their churning pincer-legs, in the cracks upon their moss-coated carapaces.

My Muse of the Prior Happiness, like any god that walked above the water, had a language all of its own.

And the more I drew, the closer it drew to me.

I'd swear at certain times, when I whispered the right words and I daubed the shapes well enough, I could feel its breath upon the back of my neck.

I slipped these signs, these marks of the Muse, into my paintings wherever I could, into commissioned sketches and family portraits, and I delighted in handing them over to my clients to hang in their living rooms, never once realising just what they were letting into their stuffy and tedious lives.

I have made an infrequent but pleasurable habit, across the course of my life, of using the power of this secret language to take my revenge - here and there over the years, where I could - on those who doubted my way of seeing things.

Those who could not appreciate what I had made, but were too embarrassed not to accept a gift when I offered it to them.

I'd read in the newspaper that such-and-such a curator had drowned, or such-and-such a critic had mysteriously vanished, and I'd smile and sip at my coffee with the happy thought that my art had made a connection with someone.

But there were always more of these enemies waiting to strike against me, I found, so long as I kept living, and the Prior Happiness of the crawling things continued to elude me.

And in time I understood that I had to flee, for I could not drown the world in its entirety, and this was fast becoming the only acceptable option left to me.

I had read that there were others, once, in the west of the Peninsula, who thought as I did.

A lost faith, a dark faith, a hated purpose. A longing to be engulfed, and reshaped, and returned to prior forms.

I drove out to the river where these people had congregated. I purchased this old place, with the last of my money.

I was disappointed.

The Parish, as the locals called it, had all but vanished from these territories. Its disciples had fled into the hills or died, and what scraps of the faith I could find were not the truth as I saw it.

There were primitive aspects to it, calling upon a kind of fishing deity as avatar of the waters who did not resemble the many-legged Muse which had spoken to me. I could not claim kinship with these witless worshippers, although their marks and their outcomes appeared crudely similar to my own.

And the river itself, I found dull and lifeless.

FAULKNER:

(Upset)

Blasphemy.

CARPENTER:

Let him talk.

ROAKE:

(On tape)

Worse yet, my enquiries and tentative, strictly experimental efforts at sacrifice were enough to draw the attention of a number of locals in the village of Marcel's Crossing, who came to understand me as something both unwelcome and in a more fundamental sense, highly welcome - a reminder of their bygone battles with the Parish. An outcast to be persecuted.

Day after day, with rising frequency and intensity, I suffered harm to myself. Humiliation.

I purchased dogs, to drive away the intruders, but these poor dumb creatures became merely another weapon for my tormentors to harm me with.

Soon, I could no longer keep a light on in my own house without drawing their attention.

I retreated, as I have always done.

Left the bungalow locked. Abandoned the car out on the roads. Gave every impression that I had fled.

And for days and nights and eventually weeks, I lived amongst the reeds, muddied and soiled, catching the crabs in my bare hands, letting them scratch and nip me, breaking their shells open to devour their soft flesh, willing myself to shed my sorrow and revert at last to the Prior Happiness of the crawling things.

But I did not.

My Muse did not answer me, although its insects bit at me and its mud choked my gullet.

As I shivered, alone in the wilderness, I began to consider that I had made a mistake in coming to this place.

And then one night, as I slept in the cold mud in amongst the rushes, everything changed.

My grandest vision came to me in my sweating and tumultuous dreams, in the gentle gurgling rush of the dark waters around my slumbering form, in the trails of water running down my brow and my cheeks.

I had been mistaken.

My Muse had something to show me, here, now that I had the eyes to see it.

The final revelation.

A dream of swarming and feasting things that came upon me as I lay at the water's edge, tearing flesh and skin rapturously asunder - and as they withdrew from me, they left only bones, and those bones were more in number than could belong to any one man, and those bones shifted and crawled themselves into a pattern, into a mark which I did not recognise but which was instantly familiar, and as I gazed upon them, I heard bells ringing out in awful celebration.

I knew as soon as I woke what I had gazed upon, what I had borne witness to.

The last word of the secret language which I had been called upon to share with an unwilling world.

A way of turning the tide back for all of us.

I traced its shape upon the morning air. I practiced its movements back and forth, back and forth, with a finger drawn like an empty paintbrush, and I felt the thrilling power of its potential.

But I did not draw my secret word.

I did not complete it, not yet.

Because once I touched ink to paper, once I marked charcoal to wood and finished the shape, I knew I would bring the truth of the vision down upon myself.

And, I rationalised, there were so many others across the face of this earth who should discover the shape of crawling certainty, that great and lasting Prior Happiness, within themselves, besides just me.

What's the use of a voice if it goes unheard?

And even though everything had changed, even though I was alive with fire and eagerness to begin, I committed myself once more to patience. I continued to live amongst the reeds.

I nested amongst the crawling things, swallowing them as I liked, letting them feed off me as they liked. I dreamt of what's to come for us all, once we roll back the tide within ourselves.

And I prepared myself for my life's great and final purpose. My return to the Prior Happiness.

I simply needed to find the right place to begin.

Not the town to the south, ungrateful and spiteful as it is.

The fishermen have maps and charts, and they gossip about the towns and villages they have visited or refuse to visit.

I became their nightmare thief as I swam silently through the water, clambering up onto their quays and jetties, stealing into their cabins, eavesdropping upon their conversations.

FAULKNER interrupts excitedly over the top of these next few lines.

FAULKNER:

This is incredible. His was a self-made faith.

(With pride)

The Trawler-Man spoke with him direct, like me-

CARPENTER:

I know. I heard him-

ROAKE:

(On tape)

Whenever I happened to catch one of them alone in the reeds, I gave him that long-awaited happiness that I'd been denied myself.

And eventually my patience was rewarded; one cool dusk, as I slipped through the waters beside an idling pair of anglers in their coracle, I learnt of the very place I'd been looking for.

The perfect canvas for my final design.

There's a town to the north, one angler told his friend as they waited and idled by their nets, a town by the name of Bellwethers.

FAULKNER:

And we've been led right to it - what he said right there, it's the mark of the Wither Tide, just as it was written.

This is our chance, Carpenter, this is how we fight back.

We need to find this town-

CARPENTER:

(Snapping)

Just listen for a moment, would you-

ROAKE:

(On tape)

A small, quiet place, upon the borderlands. Caught between two states, belonging to neither.

A place, unlike Marcel's Crossing, where the gentle touch of the high tide has never been known and its signs would not be recognised until it was too late.

A pretty place, the angler told his friend, with a tall clocktower, and bells that ring out upon the hour, and I'll be going up there someday

soon, with a girl who thinks kindly of me, and I'll take her to listen to the bells and hope she kisses me.

Bells, I thought, and I felt as enchanted as the angler did when he thought of his sweetheart.

Bells. Just as I'd dreamt of them.

And so I am here again, back in my bungalow.

This morning is a day like any other, a grey and fog-swallowed day upon the endless rolling flood plains, and it is the morning I set off on my great and final journey.

I have cleaned the mud from my skin. I have dressed in my old mildewed but still presentable, still human clothes.

I have assembled my inks, the full range, neatly ordered in their pots. I have cleaned my brushes, made them pure.

I already know the car I'm going to steal.

And I will leave one final work of art before I leave for my friends in Marcel's Crossing, a small and wicked sign, for those who hated me.

A taste of what's to come, in Bellwethers, when I arrive.

But you know this, don't you?

Unless you stumbled into this bungalow by chance, you've come from there already, some detective or investigator who's seen what Augustus Roake grew, and you've come to his old home now in search of answers.

If that's true, I hope it was as beautiful to you as I imagine it will be to me.

And if you can't understand where I've got to, well...perhaps you never will.

There is malice now, in Roake's voice.

ROAKE:

(On tape)

I'm sure you thought this was too good to be true, didn't you? A murderous heretic's confession, all caught on tape.

Left for you to find. Such a convenience.

Stories are snares, someone told me once. And by now mine will be tightening.

By now...my sentinel will have caught your scent. It will have woken from its slumbering place by the water.

I was so hurt when those thugs came to my house in search of violence.

When they butchered my poor dogs, my gentle pets, since they could not kill me.

I was so **inspired** when my Muse breathed life back into the carcasses I laid to rest down in the mud of the low tide.

Can you hear it coming for you, intruder?

If you're from the police, I regret that you could not have chosen a kindlier profession.

And if you're from Marcel's Crossing...die slow, I beseech you.

The tape cuts out.

There's a moment of silent, sudden dread between the three people in the room.

Then CARPENTER takes charge.

CARPENTER:
Get on your feet, Faulkner.

You, Paige. Check the other window. I want to know what you can see out there.

PAIGE:
Like what?

CARPENTER:
(*Impatiently*)
Anything.

We hear her rush across to the far side of the room.

CARPENTER:
(Checking)
Nothing on this side.

PAIGE:
(Calling back)
Nothing moving here either.

CARPENTER:
(With some relief)
OK. Let's-

PAIGE:
(Realising something, with increased concern.)
But...

...there were three statues down by the riverside before.

CARPENTER:
I'm sorry?

PAIGE:
Three statues. I counted them. Now there's two.

CARPENTER:
What do you mean, there's-

We hear a sudden, ominous creaking.

And then, above, the sound of mandibles clacking.

The creaking goes on.

Something very large, on stilt-like legs, is walking over the house.

PAIGE:
(In a whisper)
Is there something on the roof?

CARPENTER:
(In another whisper, very worried)
It's not on the roof. It's walking over the house.

FAULKNER:
(Half in awe, half in terror)
A saint.

PAIGE:

(Narrating, with sudden shock)

We stand there, uncertain of ourselves, gazing upwards...

...and then the leg comes through the roof.

And then we hear the violent, terrifying sound of the CRASH.

Yells of surprise and horror from all.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

A vast, pink, chitinous pincer, crashing down through the ceiling, splitting the tape recorder in two as it lands, the thing's vast leg driving through the floorboards and making the entire bungalow shiver as it strikes the ground far below.

And then the leg rises up again, slowly retreating back through the roof and out of view, and as it ascends I can see the bristles of river-water glistening across its armour. Smaller, frenzied crabs swarming back and forth across its surface like workers.

The light from outside is eclipsed as a vast, ungainly head peers in through the window.

It has its own eyes, set on stalks, but the twisted snouts and pleading stares of dogs can be seen here and there across its shell, picked out and flattened in speckled swirls and patterns.

It's looking at us.

Quite suddenly, we hear the Sentinel, screeching violently like an owl. It's a hideous sound.

CARPENTER:

(Yelling)

Back into the house!

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

We turn, and run.

Behind us, we hear the colossal pincer-leg come slicing through the window, shattering glass, striking at nothing but floorboards.

The bungalow tips, and tilts, and we stumble in turn.

The self-portrait of August Roake, in the corridor, goes crashing to the floor as we dash past it, back into the kitchen.

BUNGALOW KITCHEN, INT

We hear CARPENTER rushing to the window and drawing the blinds as the trio returns to the kitchen.

A long silence.

Then we hear the creaking sound of the sentinel, moving over the house, faintly receding. But no more crashes, no more violence.

Everyone speaks in a watchful whisper.

FAULKNER:
All right, what now?
(Pause)
Carpenter?

CARPENTER:
How the hell should I know?

FAULKNER:
Well, you always seem to know what you're doing.

CARPENTER:
(Exasperated)
Faulkner. I have never *once* known what I'm doing.

FAULKNER:
(Uncertainly)
Maybe...maybe it won't hurt us. The river angels serve the Trawler-Man in his garden below, don't they?

It might recognise us as the fellow faithful, if we step out to meet it.

CARPENTER:
(Mocking him)
Grand. You go first.

FAULKNER hesitates.

CARPENTER:

Didn't think so.

(Taking charge)

Look, that thing's between us and the car. We need to, um, lure it back to the river somehow.

(To PAIGE)

Page. Any ideas?

PAIGE:

(Shocked)

I'm...your hostage.

CARPENTER:

So listen to me when I tell you this is an **open forum**.

FAULKNER:

(More certainly)

Carpenter, I'm telling you, this is an angel of the faith-

CARPENTER:

(Snapping)

And I'm telling you I don't want to hear it, Faulkner.

You both stay here and keep an eye on it. I'll go around the back, see if there's another safe way down.

A creak of the door as she leaves.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

He looks at me.

The young one, Faulkner.

Like he's been slapped.

FAULKNER:

Don't say anything to her. Please.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

He grabs a set of ink-pots from the kitchen cabinet. Snatches up a brush, and an abandoned, empty canvas.

He begins to draw, in neat, flourishing strokes.

It's an ornate, complex sigil. A prayer-mark.

Once he's done, he begins to daub the same mark across his skin.
Over his forearms. On the palms of his hands.

He looks up at me - and beams.

FAULKNER:

(Breathlessly explaining himself)

It thinks we're intruders. It doesn't realise we're friends.

That's the problem. So - we need to make sure we're speaking the same language.

Wait up here. I'm going to try and clear the way for us.

PAIGE is not convinced.

PAIGE:

You...think that's going to work?

FAULKNER:

(Simply)

I have a god that listens to me. I know that.

Even if **she** doesn't.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

As he hefts the canvas upwards, the taps begin to creak in the sink.
The pipes begin to knock, as if the water is straining from within.

Faulkner glances back, as if acknowledging the sound - and then he opens the door and steps out into the sunlight.

We hear the creak of the door as FAULKNER leaves.

And then, a moment later, the sound of CARPENTER's voice as she returns.

CARPENTER:

No joy on another way out, but there are some bedsheets in the linen-

She stops, entering an empty room to find PAIGE but not FAULKNER.

CARPENTER:

(Accusatory)

Where is he?

PAIGE:

I, um-

CARPENTER:

(Furiously)

Oh, **come on**.

BUNGALOW, EXT

We hear the wind whipping up again as the bungalow door opens.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

She rushes to the bungalow door. Flings it open.

And the two of us stare down at the tiny figure below, walking back out along the dirt track, a painted canvas held aloft over its head.

Beyond, the sentinel is striding back and forth on its six tall stilt-legs, pacing through the grass, probing curiously at the shape of my car.

It turns. Its globe-eyes extend perceptibly towards Faulkner.

And it begins to advance.

CARPENTER:

(Hissing)

Run, you fool. Just drop everything and run.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

He doesn't run. Just keeps walking out to meet it. And now...he's calling out.

And, in fact, we catch a few drifting phrases faintly on the wind as FAULKNER speaks.

FAULKNER:

-come to you in a spirit of fellowship-

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

The Sentinel is almost upon him, kicking up great clouds of dust as it charges.

Its foreleg is lifted, as if to skewer him. Its mindless eyes are twisting furiously upon its stalks.

Then, incredibly - it stops in its tracks, almost skidding in a clatter of limbs, right before the tiny figure of Faulkner.

It seems to stoop, gazing down at the mark daubed across the canvas for a single, agonising moment.

And then it crouches, or perhaps kneels, folding those long pincer-limbs in upon themselves in a spectacularly ungainly fashion, settling its vast body in the dust of the track.

Faulkner stands his ground. He turns his head very slightly back towards us, but says nothing.

A moment of thoughtful silence.

CARPENTER:

(Utterly flabbergasted)

Well, I'll be fucked.

(To PAiGE)

All right, get down the ladder. Fast as you can. Go on, now.

The sound of scrambling as PAiGE and CARPENTER climb down the ladder.

We can hear the Sentinel's mandibles clacking, softly and happily.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

When we reach the ground, the two figures ahead of us have still not moved - neither of them.

We race up the dirt track towards them.

The sentinel is breathing softly as it kneels in the dust ahead of us, its carapace gently shifting up and down over twisted flesh. Its stalk-eyes are fixed upon the canvas in Faulkner's hands. Its mandibles clack peaceably.

Faulkner is sweating, but standing firm.

It's only when we're right upon them that he finally allows himself to glance away from the kneeling monstrosity, looking back at us with a flushed but genuine smile, as if to say - 'See? I told you so.'

This is a mistake.

He fumbles the canvas.

It slips in his hands. He tries to catch it.

And then it falls. Hits the dust, face-down.

CARPENTER:
(Suddenly panicked)
Go, go, go!

We hear a sudden, furious SCREECH from the Sentinel.

PAIGE:
(Narrating)
The Sentinel's fore-leg swings out. It catches Faulkner in the chest in a single swift motion.

He goes flying back into the dust.

And then the vast thing is attempting to rise before us, flailing furiously, its legs toppling against one another.

CARPENTER:
(Yelling)
I've got him. Just go, get to the car!

CAR, INT

We hear the sound of rushing footsteps - PAIGE is ahead of CARPENTER, who's struggling to carry FAULKNER as well.

The distant screech of the Sentinel, still struggling to get up.

The car doors open.

CARPENTER:
(To PAIGE, urgently)
You need to drive. I'll try and staunch the bleeding.

PAIGE:
But I-

CARPENTER:

I don't have time to threaten you, Paige. Just get in there and **drive!**

The car doors slam. The noise of the engine starting up.

PAIGE:
(Narrating)
So I drive.

My foot on the accelerator, as behind us the Sentinel gets to its feet and begins to advance upon us in great loping steps.

We skid, the car wheeling about in the dust and my two passengers toppling to one side in the back seat -

-and then we blast through the gates and out onto the road, and the horrible thing comes to an abrupt halt behind us at the boundary-line, staring after us and clacking its jaws angrily in the air.

FAULKNER:
(Faintly)
Carpenter, I'm sorry-

CARPENTER:
Just - try to stay still.
(With grudging gentleness)
Drown me and drag me, but...you did all right, Faulkner.

You did all right back there.

The roar of the engine rises as the car speeds away.

And then, after a moment of silence, we hear ROAKE's voice. Crackling, on tape.

ROAKE:
(On tape)
These were the Silt Verses, and, now fleeing the scene, these were our disciples, in order of their arrival.

Lucille Valentine.
Méabh de Brún.
B. Narr.
And Jon Ware.

Written by Jon Ware and produced by Muna Hussen.

Audio production by Sammy Holden.

The tape clicks off.

END OF EPISODE.