

The Silt Verses

Chapter I: Let Me Speak First Of Revelations

MARSHLAND, EXT.

The first thing we hear is a pair of boots, sloshing with difficulty through muddy water.

CARPENTER, and more faintly, FAULKNER, are wading through the marshes of the great river at dawn. It's still dark, and they're some distance apart - which is why they're calling out to each other at intervals.

FAULKNER:

(Distantly)

Marco!

CARPENTER:

(Nearer)

Polo.

FAULKNER:

(Distantly)

Marco!

CARPENTER:

(With increasing reluctance)

Polo.

We continue to hear CARPENTER wading through the marshland.

After a moment, we hear her internal monologue. She's contained and calm, as she speaks to us directly.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

I have spent my life in the shadow of this great and winding river.

I have always dwelt in the shadow of my god.

FAULKNER:

(Distantly)

Marco!

CARPENTER:

(Distracted)

Uh - polo.

She continues to wade onwards.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

My Nana Glass, who knew the straits and sacred tides of the lower delta better than any fisherman I ever met, would tell me that there were people who'd been born to the land, and there were people who'd been born to the water.

And the people born to the land (who were grasping, controlling; clinging to life and wealth as a sapling clings to the dead soil) would never understand what it meant to belong, as Nana and I did, body and spirit...

...to the water.

FAULKNER:

(Urgently and distantly)

Carpenter!

CARPENTER:

(Without thinking)

Polo!

(Catching herself)

I mean-

(Calling out)

Faulkner?!

MARSHLAND, EXT.

We hear the sound of CARPENTER'S boots sloshing, at pace, towards us.

FAULKNER has found what he's looking for.

FAULKNER:

He's dead.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

The kneeling man who's been bound to a post here in the depths of the mudflats, votive hooks cut into the flesh of his throat and ears, his skin baked and dried by a dozen sunrises and his facial features

eroded away into a sheet of curved white bone by a dozen high tides...

...is indeed dead.

We've been on the road for sixteen days and I am beginning to wonder if I can stand Faulkner at all.

FAULKNER:

(A little proud of himself)

He was well hidden. Almost missed him in the reeds.

Silence. CARPENTER isn't paying attention to him - instead, she's examining the body.

FAULKNER:

What, um - what are you looking at?

CARPENTER:

The ropework's sloppy. He almost got free. Anything in his pockets?

FAULKNER:

(Now definitely proud of himself)

Already checked. No wallet. No phone.

CARPENTER continues to examine the corpse.

CARPENTER:

There's a prayer-mark etched into the post, close to the bottom. Three vertical lines. A crossed circle.

FAULKNER:

I don't recognise that one.

CARPENTER:

Me neither - probably it's a regional sign of worship. Under the circumstances, an oblique mark.

FAULKNER:

A sacrifice.

CARPENTER:

Exactly.

This all feels a little like a detective show - but something is off. They're too calm. Too casual.

And when FAULKNER next speaks, his voice is full of quiet awe.

FAULKNER:
I shall praise him.

And next FAULKNER begins to quote religious verse.

FAULKNER:
(Half under his breath)
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.
We, your chosen faithful, acknowledge your sign
And await further revelations in patience and in grace.
For we know that when the river rises and the flood comes-

CARPENTER:
(Interrupting him)
They never came here.

FAULKNER:
(Put out)
I'm sorry?

CARPENTER:
(Still examining the corpse)
The birds got to his eyes. There's no bloating in the stomach. This
was a natural death.

Someone made a sacrifice, but the angels never came.

FAULKNER:
Wh- Why not?

CARPENTER:
(Absent-mindedly; she's thinking about something else)
Great are the Trawler-Man's mysteries, Brother Faulkner. And greater
still are the territories he has to cover.
(Decisively)
Come on. Let's get back up on the road. See if we can find
somewhere to stop for breakfast.

FAULKNER:
(Hesitant, but putting forward something he truly believes in)
I...shouldn't we untie him?

We can push the body out into the mud. Let the high tide carry him out into the river.

He was an offering. It's only right to see that he's taken.

CARPENTER:

(Disagreeing)

If we push him out into the river, odds are good he'll end up washing up in some fisherman's pots further downstream. And then the police will get involved.

If he stays where he is, it's more likely they'll never find him - and they'll never know we were here, either.

It's the least we can do for whoever made the sacrifice. We leave no trace that can't be swallowed up in white silt and black water.

We hear her squelching feet recede.

Silence. We hear FAULKNER sigh as he remains where he is, gazing down at the sacrifice.

CARPENTER:

(Calling back, jokingly)

Come on! I want a goddamned cappuccino!

MINI-VAN, INT.

A gentle engine thrum can be heard throughout this scene.

Every so often, we hear a pair of windscreen wipers squeak softly back and forth.

After a moment or two of this, we hear CARPENTER speak to us again.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

A god must feed.

A god must *be* fed.

This is a fact agreed upon across every territory of the Peninsula. And so, really, the only point of difference between the people born to the water and the people born to the land...

...is the precise nature of the sacrifice we need to make.

For Nana Glass there was never any doubt. She'd lived all of her life in the great flat floodplains of the White Gull River's lower delta.

She'd grown up amongst the lobster-catchers and the ferrymen - great bearded men, the picture of virility and hearty male arrogance - and she'd watched the river swallow them up one by one. Fathers and sons.

Over the long years, she pierced her ears and cheeks and lips with seventeen barbed hooks of varying shapes and sizes in devotion to the Trawler-man, and she wore them proudly out in public without concern that any of our neighbours would dare to rat her out to the lawful authorities.

Nana Glass feared nothing that walked in this world.

But she also knew what it meant to fear the thing you loved.

That was why she sang, as she waded out to the bottom of her garden, where the marshland flowed into the water.

On the first day of every new year, without fail, there'd be some poor delivery boy or surveyor or drifting vagrant bound and chained at the posts that marked the tideline.

Sackcloth tugged over their faces. The prayers of invitation etched across the wood and their foreheads. Mud swimming up over their waists and around their throats. Blood trickling down from the barbs of the little silver hooks.

And Nana Glass would sing the songs of our faith aloud, in kindness and in sympathy, so that our sacrifices would hear the words and understand that their drawn-out deaths had meaning beyond the mundane.

So that the Trawler-man would know that life was being offered, and send a fresh flood tide lapping up through the shallows of our garden.

So that his dripping angels, in their crawling and chitinous hunger, would know it was time to be fed.

Terrifying, cruel, unforgettable Nana Glass.

When the police cars finally did come roaring through the narrow lanes to Nana's house on the edge of the river, tipped off by some

neighbour or other who'd finally plucked up the courage (we never did find out which one)...

...when death came to Nana's house, she kept on singing.

We could hear her crooning, my brother Em and me, from our hiding spot behind the tumble-dryer in the basement of the old house.

Her heavy waders clunking back and forth on the boards, as she sang.

*I'll forget who I was,
When the tide comes home.*

*I'll forget what I did,
When the tide comes home.*

*There'll be no more need
For hurt, word or deed
For counsel or creed
For sorrow or seed,*

When the tide comes home.

Then all at once a megaphone barked from somewhere outside, telling her to give herself up, and we could hear Nana Glass crack open a window and she began to holler her discordant song towards the distant figures huddled fearfully behind the four police cruisers that were parked in our front yard.

Firing off her hunting rifle through the open window at the end of each verse like a kind of obscene punctuation.

And even when, as we learnt later, they broke down the front door with a handheld battering ram and Nana dropped her rifle and ran out onto the wooden jetties at the bottom of her garden - a frail figure in white fleeing but also, magically, dancing a path, down the boardwalk and through the reeds...

...even when a blast of shotgun pellets struck her in the shoulder from behind, and another blast twisted her broken face right around on its bird-like neck...

...I am certain that Nana Glass kept on singing right to the end.

Calling out to the Trawler-man, as she bore him her life's last offering.

A heavy sigh. She lets the emotion and tiredness into her voice for the first time.

Our van is packed with birdwatching equipment. Binoculars, cameras.
Books about the oystercatchers of the lower delta.

Hidden in the compartment beneath the passenger seat are the items
which cannot be explained away.

One dilapidated Keymark's Special revolver, one packet of bullets.
One prayer chalkboard, to help us practice the Trawler-man's sacred
marks.

One tattered copy of the Silt Verses.

The Parish has given us enough cash to pay for another week or two
of hotel rooms. After that, we'll need to make our own way onwards.

Brother Faulkner and I have been on the road for sixteen days, in
search of revelations.

And I am already so very tired.

OPENING CREDITS.

We hear the sound of the van radio being tuned.

*After a few seconds of static and screeching, the noise settles into a gentle background
hum. We can hear an angelic choir, singing softly.*

We hear the voice of MASON, deep and sonorous, crackling faintly.

*We're listening to a radio broadcast. This is a sermon on an illegal radio broadcast...and it's
the opening credits to our show.*

MASON:

'Ease away my grateful skin, Trawler-Man,
I will rejoice at skin reshaped in silt,
And my fragments will swim in the currents of the abyss.

Fill my eyes and mouth with thick and choking mud, Trawler-man;
I will exult in the death of sight, sensation, and noise.

Bear me away into black depths, Trawler-man;
I will forget my pain and the name I once wore.

Rise like a dark river in my throat, Trawler-man.
And my drowning lungs will sing of Tides and Flesh.'

These are The Silt Verses, First Chapter. And I name its disciples
thus, in order of their arrival.

Méabh de Brún, as Carpenter.
B. Narr, as Faulkner.
Jamie Stewart, as Mason
David S Dear, as Sid Wright
Calder Dougherty, as Stanton.

Created by Jon Ware and Muna Hussen,
Audio production by Espii Proctor.

MASON goes on to read out the character credits.

Once MASON is done, the radio screeches and squeaks once more. It's being retuned.

VAN, INT.

After a moment, we hear the unctuous voice of Sid Wright, crackling in and out of hearing.

We're still in Faulkner and Carpenter's van.

We can still hear the gentle rumble of the engine and windscreen wipers slicking back and forth.

SID WRIGHT:
...performing her latest hit single.

Are you hearing me loud and clear? A smooth and sinuous voice in
your stereo?

Then let's give a very special thanks and praise to the Saint Electric,
because I know she is with me today, and I hope she's with you too.
Whether your daily Grind is coming to its end or just beginning, you
know a cup of the good brown joy is the only thing that's going to pick
you back up.

Stick with us, because after these messages, we're going to be
listening to Erin Sands playing one of her best-loved classics,
Suddenly, Upon A Ceaseless Night Outside Of Time.

This is Sid Wright, this is the Grindinlord's 24-Hour Cool Cruising Mix, and we're starting your day right with a-

(Radio cuts out momentarily.)

-finest tunes on a-

(Radio cuts out entirely.)

A click as FAULKNER reaches out and turns off the radio.

FAULKNER:

The prayer stamp on the radio's rubbing away.

(Hesitantly; complaining doesn't come naturally to him.)

They should have given us a new van.

One with working wipers and a working radio.

CARPENTER:

(Taunting)

I didn't realise you were so eager to listen to the enemy's voice,
Brother Faulkner.

Do you possess in your heart a secret yearning for the songs of the
Saint Electric? Should I watch my back?

FAULKNER:

(Hurt and genuinely defensive)

That's...not *funny*.

We need to be able to listen for traffic reports, police bulletins.

It's vital to our mission that we can see and hear-

CARPENTER:

Forget it. I'm just trying to rile you up.

(To fill the uncomfortable silence)

It isn't the radio. We're nearly a hundred miles from Glottage.

Soon there'll be no more iron towers.

The uncomfortable silence endures between them.

The windscreen wipers squeak.

FAULKNER:

(Stiffly)

We just passed a sign for a diner. We can stop and get you that coffee, if you like.

CARPENTER:

Hm. What's it called? The Riverside Cafe?

FAULKNER:

You know it?

CARPENTER:

Out here in the marshes, if it isn't a Riverside Cafe, it's a Waterside View.

(Dreamily)

I grew up somewhere like this, you know?

The engine roars as FAULKNER accelerates, then fades away.

STING.

DINER, INT.

Fade into the sound of a busy rural diner. Background chatter. The sound of cutlery clinking against plates. Perhaps soft music playing from a jukebox.

CARPENTER and FAULKNER are occupying a booth.

FAULKNER:

(As if glancing around)

Lot of fishing crews in here.

CARPENTER:

(Not paying attention; excited as she peruses the menu)

Bait on hooks - they have pancakes.

FAULKNER:

How many of these people do you think are...with us?

CARPENTER:

I'm not with you.

(Lightly)

Could you catch the waitress' eye?

FAULKNER:

(Insisting)

I'm talking about the faithful. These people have grown up by the sacred waters of the river. They're not like city folk.

Some of them will be on our side, if only we could recognise one another. If only we could talk to them-

CARPENTER:

(Dismissive)

Do you want to stand up and ask them? There's a policeman in the far corner, too.

Maybe let's, uhh, see if you can convert him before he unholsters his revolver?

(Tiredly and scornfully)

People don't hold to our faith around here any more, Faulkner. They have fisher-gods and money-gods and fryer-gods and lanterns-in-darkness.

If you want to know what they believe, go drop a coin in the Jolly King Kipper's all-singing-all-dancing blessing machine out back.

(To the waitress, brightly)

Yes, hello! I'll have a cappuccino.

And the pancakes...are they thick or, um, crepes, because I really like them thick...?

I'll have the pancakes with, um, hash browns and extra syrup.

FAULKNER:

(A little stiffly)

I'll have a green juice. Thanks.

CARPENTER:

(Questioning his decision)

They have *pancakes*.

FAULKNER:

(Sulky)

I read the menu. I just don't want them.

Silence. CARPENTER has lowered her menu and is staring at FAULKNER.

CARPENTER:

Are you *sulking*, Faulkner?

FAULKNER:

You shouldn't taunt me. I know I'm wet-behind-the-ears. I know you don't care about anything I have to think or say.

But you don't need to be so...offensively blatant about it.

CARPENTER:

How else would I make it clear that I don't care about anything you have to think or say?

A long, hostile silence.

CARPENTER:

I was joking.

FAULKNER:

This is a holy mission, Sister. This is pilgrimage up the sacred river.

My first pilgrimage.

And you keep *sneering* at me, as if none of this means anything.

CARPENTER:

All right. I'm sorry.

FAULKNER:

(Taken aback)

You're-

CARPENTER:

(Changing the subject)

So. We should discuss finding accommodation in the next town over, which I think is-

FAULKNER:

(Fascinated and delighted)

I'm sorry, no. Could you go back to saying you're sorry?

CARPENTER:

Did you just sorry my sorry?

FAULKNER:

Please. I need closure on that sorry-

They're batting back and forth with each other more comfortably now.

CARPENTER:

(Taking a breath.)

Listen to me, Faulkner. I've been travelling up and down this river for seven years in pursuit of the Trawler-Man's signs.

I've served the faith in ways great and small. I've hidden in the deep mud as police convoys roared on past.

I've carved his prayer-marks into the walls of our enemy's churches, while alarms flared and men yelled out that they would find me and shoot me dead.

So I can tell you from experience that the 'holy mission' part comes later on, when we deliver our report and the High Katabasian blesses a successful pilgrimage and we reflect in private on how it all didn't go to hell.

This part, when we're on the road? This is just co-existence, and we need to make it as comfortable for ourselves as possible. If I mock you, it's because I need you to mock me back.

It's a kind of trust exercise.

They're genuinely opening up to each other now.

FAULKNER:

That's acknowledged.

And I apologise if I've been putting too much pressure on you.

(Candidly)

Honestly, Sister, after the stories I've heard...I think I was a little in awe of you.

CARPENTER:

Was?

FAULKNER:

(As if trying the joke on for size)

Now I just hate you.

CARPENTER:

That's acknowledged.

FAULKNER:

My point is, I'd...I'd genuinely like to know more about you, Sister Carpenter.

(Earnest)

I'd like us to get to know one another, in the hope of becoming friends.

Silence for a moment. CARPENTER is thinking, 'Is this guy for real...?'

CARPENTER:

(Kindly)

That's a fine hope.

(Bringing it on.)

Ask me anything you like.

A moment as FAULKNER considers.

FAULKNER:

What's Katabasian Mason really like?

CARPENTER:

What's your read on him?

FAULKNER:

He frightens me.

CARPENTER:

Not a bad read. Is that your only question?

FAULKNER:

They say he was present for the Sodden March in 9.03. Is that true?

CARPENTER:

How old do you think I am? Not a clue.

This is fun. Hit me again.

FAULKNER:

Were you in the room when the wreck of the Gulfwalker was displayed?

CARPENTER:

I was.

FAULKNER:

And did you see them? The symptoms of the Wither Tide? The river's rise?

CARPENTER:

(She's avoiding a straight answer, but it shouldn't be obvious on first listen)

I saw the same as every person in that room.

Any more?

FAULKNER:

If you don't mind me asking, how did you come into the faith?

CARPENTER:

Um, what do you mean?

FAULKNER:

I mean, how were you called?

A slight silence. Actually, CARPENTER isn't entirely comfortable with this line of questioning.

CARPENTER:

Well, I was born into the faith. I grew up with my grandmother, who was a local priestess of sorts.

After she died, I went into foster care and eventually found my way back to my people.

FAULKNER:

I actually meant it on more of a personal level.

When did you first find your faith? As in, what caused it?

CARPENTER:

Like I said. I was born into it.

So there's your answer.

FAULKNER:

(Chuckling uncertainly)

That's not really an answer.

CARPENTER:

It'll do for now.

FAULKNER:

(Taken aback)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry.

You...*did* say I could ask you anything.

CARPENTER:

And I already regret it. Let's go back to the jokes. I liked those better.

FAULKNER:

I just wanted to know, what was the moment of revelation?

When did you know-

CARPENTER:

Back to the jokes, Faulkner.

Silence. They're staring at each other.

FAULKNER:

(Growing frustrated)

I don't understand what's so embarrassing about that.

CARPENTER:

I don't need you to.

The silence between them has grown hostile again.

After a moment, CARPENTER gets to her feet.

CARPENTER:

I'm going to ring home.

(Getting one final dig in)

Drink your green juice.

DINER, INT.

As she walks through the diner, we hear CARPENTER's thoughts once more.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

Children and adults hold different forms of faith.

In Nana Glass's old and crumbling house by the delta, our faith was both an existential certainty and life's grandest, most raucous game.

Em and I would run and play for hours in the waterlogged garden, dancing amongst the sweetgrass. Leaping over the bobbing buoys of the lifeless, sackcloth-covered heads that bobbed in rows along the shallows.

Whenever one of us tripped and fell, the other one would shout, 'Trawler-man, life has been offered!' 'Trawler-man, take your prize and leave a gift behind!'

And the fallen sacrifice would leap up, squealing, and we'd run back to the solid ground that was a place of safety, away from the river that was the Trawler-man's crawling, sodden garden.

Once you were back on the dry land, we told ourselves - that meant he couldn't get you.

(A dry chuckle.)

I *do* remember when I was called.

In the Little Angels of Mending reform house, a squat brick compound with high walls and barred windows in the southern reaches of Glottage. Two or three years after the fateful day when the police came for Nana Glass.

I was living there amongst a gaggle of other orphans from the endless religious wars of the western territories, all of us subsisting on a steady syllabus of lessons that I would later come to understand were called 'deprogramming.'

We were taught the names of safe, sterile modern gods. We thanked the Saint Electric for the gift of light and our working television. We praised Augustus, our back yard's pond god, for trickling so sweetly and keeping the gentle goldfish swimming in his waters.

For a time I would sneak out of our dormitory room at night, descend into the garden in my bare feet, and balefully call upon Augustus to rise up and drown the hateful reform house in black flood and thick silt, on behalf of his greater master, the Trawler-man of Tide and Flesh.

But Augustus never showed me more than a docile, steady dribble from his fountain spout, and soon enough I gave up on religion altogether.

And eventually, the new songs I had been taught were the only ones I remembered.

They tried to keep it from me, what had happened to Em.

He was too old for his own good; he was, the courtroom concluded, an accessory to the multiple crimes of Nana and quite likely a co-conspirator, while I, a genuine innocent, had simply been under both of their spells.

They say he was a model prisoner, within the dusty walls of Fenford Maximum Security Confinement.

He took writing classes, which must have been how he stole the chalk. He laboured in the compound kitchen on Tuesdays and Fridays, which would have been how he secured the knife.

And the guards came to trust his polite, country-boy manners, which I can only imagine was why they weren't paying close attention to him as he stood up in the exercise yard one sunlit morning, strode across to a fellow prisoner by the name of Cook who was sweatily attempting a deadlift, and jammed the stolen blade into the man's throat, and yanked it free to unleash a torrent of blood as Cook swayed and staggered and tried to stem the flow and finally fell and kicked and expired there upon the sand.

'Hence the flood,' was all Em said.

The authorities aren't stupid.

They keep a security camera trained on any prisoner thrown into the sealed and soundproof solitary confinement cells, no matter how much that prisoner has been bullied or beaten raw.

But they are money-strapped, which is why there was only a single camera peering down at the uppermost corner of Em's cramped cell. And it's why nobody bothered to come and check in on him.

This left him one wall to work on, unobserved, over the next week.

When the flood came, it broke open the taps in the prison kitchen, and it drenched the floor of the warden's private bathroom from an overflowing toilet, and it made the general population cry out in laughter and irritation combined as the sprinklers opened up over their heads.

The guards ran back and forth with buckets; and once the warden's toilet had been rescued - and then later, once they'd got to everything else - it was hours afterwards before anyone thought to check the security cameras and realised that the sprinklers had also activated in

the tiny, sealed solitary confinement cells that stood deep in the bowels of the prison.

There were five bodies bobbing in the water, their horrified, hallowed faces bouncing gently against the camera before floating away.

Em was only one of them.

Once the cells had been drained and the grotesque corpses cleared away, the guards realised what he had done, although the scratches on the wall were now faint and smeared and impossible to read.

My brother had covered the wall in prayer-marks.

The Second Circle of Silt. The Rime Submerged, The Lock-Keeper's Canticle.

The secret marks of our faith that signified invitation, and sacrifice.

I don't know why or how our god responded, when the river was so very far away and there are a thousand comrades still locked down in prisons across the peninsula, scratching marks into walls with no hope of ever being answered.

Perhaps Em's faith was particularly strong, or his prayers had been written in exactly the fashion that was required of him, or perhaps the Trawler-man only intervenes when it makes him laugh.

But whatever the reason, Em's faith had been rewarded.

He'd summoned the flood in to join him, and the flood had answered.

I didn't know any of this at the time.

I simply strolled into the communal dining area of the reform house early one morning to see my fellow orphans already dressed, and clustered excitedly around the television which was brightly announcing the deaths of five dangerous religious fanatics within the walls of Fenford Maximum Security Confinement.

At that moment, I knew which name the newscaster was going to read next. I knew it, with a certainty that I cannot explain.

And as my brother's name was read, and his sullen mugshot appeared upon before me the screen, that was when the other

children glanced incuriously around to look at me, their smiles glib and uncomprehending, as if they were waiting for me to smile in turn.

‘Aren’t we all glad to hear this news? Won’t Teacher be glad to know that such aberrations of humanity have been wiped away?’

I turned and ran.

I ran out through the kitchens, into the fresh and freezing dew of the reform home’s garden, out into the world and towards nothing in particular, and all I could think through hot and angry tears was that Em had been struck down for my disloyalty; that the Trawler-Man had seen my faith’s collapse and had taken my brother to punish me.

And as I stood there alone on the empty lawn, crying and sobbing with my hands clenching...

...that morning I looked down into the depths of our pond and I saw that the goldfish were dead.

Bobbing absurdly on the surface of the water, upon their sides. Their black rolling eyes staring upwards towards me. Shiny and still.

Like five hallowed corpses floating in sealed cells.

And an inexplicable, smooth tide rolled out from the water’s heart, slopping over the sill of the pond and soaking my trainers.

The Silt Verses teach us that all rivers are one river. And all currents, sooner or later, find their way to the same silent garden beneath the waves.

This was the first miracle my god showed me. There have been more since, over the years.

But that moment...alone, in the grey dawn, before a pondful of dead fish, knowing that I was seen, and understanding that all things in this world were connected?

That was the first time in my life I knew what terror really was.

The first time I truly believed in you, my river.

The sound of an old-fashioned rotary phone being dialled.

We hear it ring. The sound of the receiver being picked up on the other end.

CARPENTER:
It's me, Uncle.

A long, thoughtful silence.

MASON:
(On the phone)
I'm going through a tunnel. I'll ring you back.

Click. She hangs up.

We hear CARPENTER replace the phone - and then, a second later, it rings, alarmingly loud.

We hear CARPENTER pick it up.

Throughout this conversation between CARPENTER and MASON, they speak casually, acting their parts well as family members. It wouldn't be obvious to anyone but us that they're speaking in code.

MASON:
(On the phone)
How's the holiday, sweetheart?

CARPENTER:
No birds yet, but we've seen their few tracks here and there.

We might have more luck upriver, so I'm not ready to call it quits just yet.

MASON:
(On the phone)
And your eldest?

CARPENTER considers her next word carefully.

CARPENTER:
Enthusiastic.

MASON:
(On the phone)
How about the weather?

CARPENTER:
Oh, fine. Nice and bright.

MASON:

(On the phone)

Well, the forecast says the skies may yet open up. So be careful and keep your eyes in the rear-view if it gets slippery.

I worry there might be a bad motorist tailing you up one of those narrow country roads.

This is meaningful. She's suggesting that there might be someone following them.

CARPENTER:

Of course. We're both reliable drivers.

Silence for a moment. MASON does not respond.

CARPENTER:

...wouldn't you agree?

MASON:

(On the phone)

Of course, darling. You know I just worry about you both.

The young lad in particular.

CARPENTER:

I'll keep an eye on him. You don't need to worry about either of us.

MASON:

(On the phone)

All right. Well, keep me updated, sweetheart.

Lots of love.

CARPENTER:

Lots of love.

A clunk as CARPENTER puts the phone back on its hook.

A long, thoughtful silence.

STING.

DINER, INT.

As CARPENTER slides back into the booth, FAULKNER is ready to pick up their conversation.

FAULKNER:

While you were gone, I spoke to some of the fishing folk.

CARPENTER:

(Scornful)

Did you give them our pamphlets?

FAULKNER:

There's a town just north of here. Marcel's Crossing. Most of them work off the quays there.

He's feeling proud of himself again - and it's enough to make CARPENTER hesitate.

CARPENTER:

Go on.

FAULKNER:

A week ago, there was a storm upon the river. A big one. Boats were capsized, catches lost. And one dinghy - the Intrepid, a crew of five - disappears.

The police have been combing the river up and down for the past few days. They couldn't find a trace.

(Asserting himself)

I would suggest we head down there ourselves and ask some questions. It could be that this was another offering.

Silence as CARPENTER digests this.

CARPENTER:

...all right, good work.

Anything else?

FAULKNER:

You were right. These people would not count themselves amongst the faithful.

They spat when they spoke of the river. They hate going out on the water. They hate their own reliance upon it.

They're so...fearful. I don't understand it.

CARPENTER:

(Distracted)

Too many bad catches. Too many drowned sons and daughters.

Too many other options.

(Getting to her feet)

Come on. Let's see this town for ourselves.

STING.

MOTEL, EXT.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

At a certain point I have to consider whether Nana Glass's favourite maxim needs to be reworked, because the inhabitants of Marcel's Crossing seem to belong neither to the land nor to the water, but rather to be trapped between the two, their spindly stilted homes and sinking quays clustered awkwardly between the black water and the empty plains.

There's a long, rambling high street with butcher's shops and tourist tat for desperate anglers and lost hikers.

And at the very end of town, an illuminated pier, just a ramshackle boardwalk that leads out to a promontory packed with a dozen neon-lit shrines where you can drop a coin in and get a blessing.

The people look unhappy. Resentful of our stares, keeping their heads bowed, turning their faces away from the water even as they launch their dinghies out upon it.

Faulkner and I stop off at the town diner, we explain that we are a pair of avid birdwatchers looking to finally track down a great-crested shrike, and we begin to learn more about the missing fishing crew.

Dyer, Slater, Smith, and Butcher, it seems, will all be deeply missed (although Fuller, not so much).

The Intrepid, an elegant little crabbing dinghy with a striking periwinkle hull, was an object of much admiration up and down this stretch of the water.

The river-storm in which the boat vanished was grim and frightful enough that the sailors who did survive it are greeted with a smatter of

applause and free shots of schnapps when they enter either one of the town's two bars.

Nobody in Marcel's Crossing seems to doubt that the missing crew are dead, and nobody seems to believe that the police will find any bodies, which makes me suspect that disappearances on this stretch of water, like the seasons, are simply a fact of life.

The sacred river is wide here, and much of it is hidden from human sight.

Wild and unseen things coo and cackle from their nests amongst the thick fields of cat-tails.

When you toss a pebble into the water's depths, the sound is dull and soft, and the ripples vanish in a heartbeat or less.

I'm loathe to admit it to Faulkner, but this is exactly the sort of place where our god might lie in wait.

We spend the afternoon scratching covert prayers of illumination in hidden places along the deserted waterfront, hoping for a sign to be revealed - any sign - to show us whether the Trawler-man was here.

And I keep thinking to myself...

...but why were there five of them? Why five?

STING.

MOTEL, INT

We hear the motel reception bell ding insistently.

STANTON, slovenly, apathetic and faintly annoyed, appears at the desk.

STANTON:
What?

CARPENTER:
Do you have empty rooms here?

STANTON:
You came from the car park, didn't you? How many do you want?

CARPENTER:

Two rooms for two people. Single beds. We can pay you cash.

STANTON:

It's twelve regular for a single room. Twelve-and-ten for a room with a consecrated mattress, praise the Jolly King Kipper.

CARPENTER:

What does the consecration do?

STANTON:

(Uncertain)

Uh-

(Reaching under the desk)

Hang on, I've got a pamphlet-

CARPENTER:

It doesn't matter. Two single rooms.

STANTON:

Give me five minutes to go up and clean them out.

A creak of his chair. Silence as they wait for STANTON to leave.

FAULKNER:

So what now?

CARPENTER:

We take to the water ourselves.

If there was a miracle here, we need to give the Trawler-man a chance to reveal it to us.

If not, we get back in the van and we keep driving in search of something better. We've still got plenty of upriver ahead of us.

FAULKNER:

(A slight edge of anxiety in his voice)

So to be clear, we're talking about chartering a motorboat?

CARPENTER:

Unless you've got money stashed away that I don't know about, we're talking about stealing a rowboat.

Something light and small that makes as little noise as possible.

We can take it out onto the tributaries - see if we can find anything the searchers might have missed.

FAULKNER does not respond - or perhaps he makes a slight, unhappy noise.

CARPENTER:

(Sweetly)

Brother Faulkner, how well can you swim?

FAULKNER:

(Stammering defensively)

There are students of the faith who hold that learned swimming is an insult to the Trawler-man: blasphemous arrogance in seeking to deter the instant of our own sinking in silt-filled water.

And I grew up in the Whisper Plains, where the canals were unhygienic and polluted-

CARPENTER:

Some day you must *really* tell me how you were called.

(Scathing and sweet)

Don't worry about giving yourself up to the river too soon, Brother.

We can always find you a life-jacket.

STING.

RIVER, EXT.

The gentle background sound of water flowing past a canoe. Perhaps the occasional chirrup of locusts or the splash of oars.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

Co-existence isn't working out between Faulkner and I.

He's too young in his every expression and every instinct; too accustomed to the bargaining humiliations of adolescence, too quick to blusteringly leap in and defend his every choice and feeling and utterance, undercutting himself wherever he goes.

And he brings out the worst in me, as well: I catch myself slapping his suggestions down before they're even out of his mouth. He keeps giving me these anxious, searching glances, wondering if he's said

something idiotic, and I'm already smirking unpleasantly as if to confirm that, yes, he has.

He's begun to irritate me. There's no other way of putting it.

That night, as we steal down to the town quays, unmoor a long canoe, and push it out into the current, I listen to him crash and splash behind me, straining to propel his own torso into the boat without tipping us both up - and I curse my luck that I am not alone in the darkness, amongst the gentle currents, venturing up the river of my god in peaceful silence.

Instead it's as if I'm being trailed by my own drunk and clumsy shadow.

For a moment we just listen to the river.

FAULKNER:

(Softly)

The first tributary is up ahead. It's hidden, just past that inlet. What do you think, Sister?

CARPENTER ignores him.

FAULKNER:

(Softly)

It should take about forty minutes to get all the way up to the old distillery on the eastern bank. Once we're close, the reeds fall back, and there's nowhere to hide. Then we turn around.

By my estimate, we can explore the first three tributaries in full, and make it back to the town while it's still dark.

He's clearly angling for conversation or affirmation - but she continues to ignore him.

FAULKNER:

I'm going to whisper a hymn, as we go.

Silence.

FAULKNER:

Here goes.

Still silence.

FAULKNER:

(Under his breath, as if not to disturb her)

Sweet dark mouth, all peoples of the world emerged from your great dark depths.

Sweet dark mouth, you shall widen again.

Swallow twisted thoughts and empty desires,

Flood the towns, the villages, quench the fires

Of falsehood in thought, o sweet dark mouth.

CARPENTER:

(Narrating)

We shouldn't have come out here. That's what I'm thinking.

It's a waste of our time, and an unnecessary risk...and I'd be much better off getting a good night's sleep.

And a moment later I check myself.

Why should I, who have witnessed the sodden miracles of my river for myself, suddenly be so sceptical about the idea that he might reveal himself to us out here?

Am I losing my way?

Have I forgotten what happened to Em?

No, I'm not losing my faith. I simply lack any in Faulkner.

I don't genuinely believe that my Trawler-man, my faint whisper in the night, my divine terror that leaves me awake at three in the morning in every sodden hotel room, sweating and gasping, my eyes wide after each new visit to his deep and drowning garden...

...I don't believe that my god would speak to this sulky boy, as they speak to me.

I don't believe that any idea that Faulkner could come up with could lead us to anything divine.

Soon enough, I'm proven wrong.

(Pause)

Suddenly, we hear a faint and gentle creaking.

FAULKNER:
...Carpenter.

CARPENTER:
I don't have any song requests.

FAULKNER:
(Annoyed)
Carpenter!

Listen.

The creaking grows louder. There's a faint rustling, like a mast blowing in the wind.

CARPENTER:
(Sobered)
Grab the lamp.

FAULKNER:
There's someone out here with us. Do you think it's-

CARPENTER:
(Snapping)
Just grab the lamp, Faulkner. Don't turn it on until I say so.

Stand up with me. Carefully. Don't fall in. Keep one hand on my shoulder if you have to.

We hear a low clunk and some gentle splashing as they both get to their feet, rocking the canoe. And then-

CARPENTER:
(Almost falling)
Shit-

FAULKNER:
Are you all right?

CARPENTER:
Did you feel that?

FAULKNER:
Like a wave.

CARPENTER:
I'm going to look ahead. You look back.

Yell out the second you see anything.

For a long, chilling moment, there's only silence.

Then FAULKNER whispers-

FAULKNER:
I see it, Carpenter.

CARPENTER:
What?

FAULKNER:
(With quiet awe)
In the moonlight. In the reeds. I...can see it.
(Half-mad with terror and exultation)
CARPENTER, I CAN SEE IT!

TWIN MOUTHS AGAPE! TWIN MOUTHS AGAPE!

CARPENTER:
(Narrating, with rising dread and restrained disgust)
And then the lamp flickers to life in his hands...

...and I see it too.

The Trawler-Man, when he slicks back his oilskin hat to show you his own true self, has two faces, and two mouths.

One mouth that devours.

And one mouth that returns.

All raw material which is swallowed up in the belly of the river, altered and recreated in its currents, is washed up again in a second form.

In our faith, nothing is wasted.

The lost fishing boat, the Intrepid, is drifting gently down the tributary towards us upon a rolling and inexplicable downriver tide.

Brushing up against the reeds, bouncing lazily against the boundary walls of the water before reasserting its course.

Its crew are still onboard.

It takes us time, in the dark, in the moonlight, to see just how thoroughly they have been changed.

In the dark, in the moonlight...for a moment it seems as if the five fisherfolk have simply frozen in place, playing a great and extended joke upon the two of us; posing in various positions of flight around the boat.

One is attempting to scramble up the mast.

Another is bent halfway over the prow on his back, his mouth hanging open upside-down like an awful inverted figurehead.

In these eternal, fixed positions, the raw material of their bodies has been twisted and stretched out in every direction, like rope and tarpaulin, conjoining with jib and mainsail. Their insides and their outsides merging and curving about the contours of the vessel. Their heads lolling loose from these great netted sheets of flesh.

This boat has been draped in a festive tapestry of skin and everything that is hidden beneath.

And across this wet, sluicing canvas, the Trawler-Man's mindless, minor cherubim - the grey hermit-crabs and crawling eyeless things and limbless, sucking rock-limpets of the river - have gathered in their thousands: writhing in ecstasy, engorged and still feeding upon the fisherfolk's plentiful meat; a sea of life caught in a net of death.

It drifts towards us with intent, a new singular composed of the many, watching us through sunken and sightless eyes, and for a moment I feel that reality itself is adrift, and the Trawler-Man's garden must be rising up in the reflected waters to meet us from below.

I catch hold of myself. Correct my balance in the rowing boat. Reassert my own stable reality, as firmly as I can.

This is something tangible.

Something new and worshipful, comprised of many bodies, and as it drifts towards us its many frightened eyes gape apart, and its several mouths open, and it begins to moan an organ-pipe psalm of rejoicing from its several throats.

An Immortal Saint.

We stand there, in the shared terror of our silence, gazing out at what is unquestionably a miracle.

And then Faulkner falls to his knees in the rocking coracle, and he begins to rejoice.

He praises the Trawler-Man for life returned from the abyss.

For life reshaped in current and silt.

For tangible proof of the changes that are to come upon us all on that great and final day when the river rises at last.

He rejoices in the fact that we two have been chosen - no, blessed - to witness this grand wonder of trans-substantiation, the great and undeniable harm that is the fishing boat of bone and flesh, sent to us upon a sacred tide.

A moment of silence.

CARPENTER
And I do too, of course.

I rejoice.

But we can hear the unhappy hesitation - the lie - in that final word.

OUTRO.

END OF EPISODE.