

Orpheus

*Over a dark and quiet empire
alone I fly...*

—Andrei Voznesensky

1.

In the beginning, the town of Redfern was a handful of wooden houses beside a shallow lake. After a while, it accumulated a gas station, a restaurant and a school for the blind. And then, over three decades: four churches, two gas stations, a handful of stores, more schools and a tower tall enough to be seen for miles across Southern Ontario. The tower and the school for the blind were the only things that brought outsiders. The tower had been built of stone hacked from quarries in the Middle East. It was a quarter of a mile wide and almost as high. It had been designed and financed by Samuel Tench at the turn of the 20th century. Mr. Tench, wealthy and odd, had been obsessed by the Bible since his childhood, obsessed in particular by the Old Testament, obsessed above all by the story of Babel. And so the tower was built and maintained, until Tench's fortune was squandered. After which Tench lived alone in his tower until he died, entombed on an upper floor, unmissed until his body was discovered by one of the young men for whom a night in the tower was a rite of passage: rum for Mr. Tench, no bedding, no pillows, just night, darkness and nerves.

When in 1957 the county decided to maintain the tower, to keep it clean for tourists, it was discovered that Mr. Tench, dead for some 30 years, had not quite vacated the premises. He presented himself to the first of the tower's caretakers and asked for milk and gin. The man fled, and so did the one hired after him, and the one hired after that, and so on until the death (*angina pectoris*) of the tower's last caretaker in 1975. After that, the tower's care was kept to a minimum: a small squadron of janitors, townspeople mostly, who worked at noon. From time to time young men (and, as the years passed, young women) still tried to spend a night in the tower, but no one went with pleasure, it being almost certain they would encounter the dead. The fortunate ones were kept from entering by the town's lone policeman who sometimes stood watch until midnight or 1 in the morning. The less fortunate suffered, each in his or her own way, from their meet-

ings with Mr. Tench and passed into adulthood more traumatized than they might otherwise have been.

So it was contrary to expectation when, in 1987, the county hired Marin Herbert as caretaker to the tower. It was unexpected because, first, Marin was young: 20 years old. Second, he was legally blind, a graduate from Redfern's school for the blind. He saw little more than a murky blur without the bottle-bottom-lensed glasses he had worn since he was old enough to wear glasses. Third, Marin was nobody's idea of robust. He was thin, his arms and legs like sticks pushed into the long bladder that was his torso. (He was handsome, certainly, but handsome as poets are handsome: darkly, his inner spirit suggesting pain and redemption and dreams of the Hellespont.) He was hired because his mother was on the committee to keep the tower clean, and Marin had been in and about the tower since he'd been old enough to accompany his mother on her rounds. So the place held no frights or terrors for him and its atmosphere, gloomy and ghost-ridden though it was, reminded him of childhood. Also, his uncle was county reeve, a man respected in Redfern, and he approved of Marin's desire to make himself useful. Marin would sweep up its many rooms, watch over the property and report any youths who tried to enter the place after dark. In exchange Marin would have lodgings in the tower (a bed, a table, an enamelled ewer and bowl, a bookcase) and \$200 a month. No one envied Marin, and no one suspected he would be at his post for long: a month or two at most, until he decided what he wanted to do with his life—that is, what he *really* wanted to do, because what Marin *thought* he wanted was to be a writer, a thing for which almost no one in Redfern had any use. In fact, Father Hayden, the Catholic priest, had spoken to him about it, gently proposing

—Look, Marin, you've got the Bible, source of all truth. Either you'll write the truth, which already exists in the Good Book, or you'll write falsehoods. And the world has enough lies, doesn't it?

—But Father, answered Marin, even the echo of our Lord's words is wonderful, isn't it?

—Umhmm, said Father Hayden. I recognize Satan's words when I hear them, you know.

Marin's first night in the tower was uneventful. He swept the top floor (the 33rd), ate the chicken his mother had left in a basket for him, wrote a dozen lines on his Braille typewriter, and then, suddenly exhausted, he barely made it to his narrow bed where he fell into a profound and dreamless sleep. His first seven days passed in much the same way: undisturbed by ghosts or apparitions, Marin would sweep one of the tower's floors, retire to his room, write a few lines of verse—lines which in the morning he inevitably found drab and prosaic—before falling into

deep, dreamless sleep which did not nourish him at all. In the mornings he was as tired as if he hadn't slept. And then on his eighth evening, as he was typing his day's complement of verse, he felt a presence, someone looking over his shoulder, and a voice spoke.

—Your poetry is terrible.

—I know, answered Marin.

And as if it were the most natural thing in the world, Marin and the presence with him discussed poetry. Marin's companion insisted that, being dead, she understood what poetry was about. She was inclined to think poetry was something the living did that could *only* be understood by the dead, the dead being the only ones with sufficient distance. Moreover, *his* poetry was 'off' because he had the wrong attitude.

—Words know when you're afraid of them, said Marin's companion.

—I see, answered Marin

who saw (in all senses of the word) very little. He felt and he heard, though, and when after an hour or so the presence left him, he fell asleep, erotically dreaming about an umbrella on a blue-linen bed. When he awakened in the morning, he was as tired as ever, but he found he had written lines that were not at all like his usual work:

We will wake bruised in the dew
glass-wet and gleaming...

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Now when had he written that, he wondered, and where did the lines lead? Whose poem was he writing if not his own? If he had been an intellectual, he might have stopped writing altogether until he could figure things out. But Marin went on in the knowledge that wherever the verses came from, they were more interesting than his own and, the following night, he followed his routine. He swept up, retired to write and for two hours, hours that passed as if they were minutes, he spoke with the presence that occupied the tower with him, a distinctly feminine presence, though he persisted in thinking of her as 'Sam.' And the following morning, he woke to find he had filled pages with verse:

I inhabit my body, as if I were a small visitor...

They were nothing to do with him, but he recognized his own handwriting and vaguely remembered *thinking* some of the words.

In the weeks that followed, Marin slept and had vivid dreams, but he woke in the morning as exhausted as he'd been the night before. He wrote reams of poetry: pages and pages of lyrics and sonnets expressing love for the world and anguish at time's passage, feelings he hadn't known he possessed. Also, his visitor began to spend longer

and longer sojourns with him. From the hour she had spent on her first night, she moved to two, to three, to six hours, staying with him, finally, the night long. Her conversation was elegant, informed and even seductive. So much so that after three months, Marin began to feel longing for a woman he knew to be dead. Naturally he found this strange, and found himself strange too. He was not alone. His mother became concerned at his refusals to leave the tower for more than an hour or so at a time, at his emaciation and pallor. Marin had always been slight, as if, she thought, he could not resolve himself to be part of this world. But these days it looked as though he had chosen the hereafter and was headed there. He was dangerously thin, and barely coherent when he wasn't silent. He visited his parents every Sunday, but his mother could tell he was anxious to return to his tower to write, though writing had never taken so much from him before. In distress she asked the town's only official (that is, published) writer if it were normal for writers to keep to themselves, ignore their families, write until they were pale and exhausted.

—Of course, the writer assured her. I was always exhausted before *I* was published.

This answer did not reassure her at all, however. It didn't resolve an important matter: Was her son a *real* poet or was Marin wearing himself out with gibberish? Without his permission, she took a handful of his poems and sent them off to a magazine in Toronto. She assumed his work would be rejected and that rejection would bring Marin to his senses. To her dismay, the poems were accepted and published, but when she told Marin what she'd done, sheepishly congratulating him for his talent, it was as if he couldn't have cared less.

Nor was Mrs. Herbert the only one to notice the change in him. The people of Redfern, most of whom had known Marin since his earliest childhood, were aghast and frightened by his appearance. The same people who had affectionately called him 'Stick' now discreetly crossed themselves as he passed. The more cruel called Marin 'Death,' but they too avoided him, crossing the street to escape his company. So whenever he walked into town to buy water, soda crackers and chicken soup—his regular diet—Marin was shunned.

He was as preoccupied in town as he was distracted in the tower, however, so Marin did not notice his ostracism.

2.

For months, much of Marin Herbert's life passed in anticipation of night. Though he was perpetually tired, he could not sleep during the day. An anxiety kept him awake, a fear he might miss the coming of

the spirit he loved. He swept the many rooms of the tower or reread the poetry he had written, but for the most part he sat at his desk looking out the window in his room, a window that faced the Bailargeons' cornfield which, in summer, was a green blur that moved in the wind like a rectangular sea. It reminded him of night. Everything reminded him of night, save night itself which brought dawn to mind. He would sit at his desk, waiting, and then it was as if the moon had entered and company was there. Marin's vision improved miraculously, to the point where he could see his surroundings clearly, though he was in darkness. He could catch the moths that entered his room to eat the linen of his bedding. More importantly, he could see his companion. She was a foot or two taller than he was, her body covered by a white robe that was loose enough to ripple over her body when the wind blew through the room. She did not smile. She did not seem capable of smiling, nor did she blink. Her stare was intimidating, a quality of attention some might have taken for predatory, but for her voice which was gentle. If he closed his eyes, she was perfectly seductive. No, it was more than that. She was arousing. Whether she spoke of poetry or listened to his words, he found himself overwhelmed by physical desire. And so Marin kept his eyes open, finding it less shameful to fear than to desire her.

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Curiously, this was very like the motive that moved Marin's Death as well. She was even more surprised than he to feel desire. As one who had accompanied countless souls from this world to the next, she had never felt anything like longing. And this was not just longing but something else for which there was no name. Not 'love' (that was not her province), not 'affection' (she felt affection for all those she'd accompanied), but rather a kind of flattered astonishment that Marin could, through his art, speak her name so clearly. She could not actually close her eyes—Death does not sleep—but, if she was not careful, she could lose herself in pleasure. That is, she could be seduced. And so, preferring vigilance to the mystery of seduction, Marin's Death kept her attention on him, moving away when he leaned in her direction. (Once—only once—she carelessly allowed his fingers to brush against the sleeve of her robe, and Marin began to cough as if his lungs had filled with fluid.)

One was wasting away, the other was not of this world. No basis for love, you might have thought. And yet Marin's Death began to feel precisely that: love. She began to find it painful to be away from him, though of course the longer she stayed with him, the more time she spent looking on him, the sooner his demise would come and, for the first time in eons, she was not indifferent to a body, not indifferent to breath, and did not long for the last line of the final poem. If it had

been his Death's will, Marin would have spoken her name over and again, endlessly.

One morning, distracted by her thoughts, Marin's Death left before he was unconscious. The first rays of sunlight were already on the neck of earth, and so it was time for her daily eclipse. She went down the steps of the tower and when she came to the last of the tower's steps a further set of stairs appeared, leading down into darkness. Following behind her, dazed, having no object but to remain with her until they had absolutely to part, was Marin himself. He scarcely noticed the change from this world to the next. He entered the underworld as might a man asleep, noticing nothing at first but the increasing darkness which he took for night. And then, after he'd noticed the dark, he felt the cold. And then, cold, he realized he had lost sight of his Death some time before. And with that, he woke completely and felt the beginning of terror.

No sooner did Marin feel panic, however, than his surroundings were illuminated. He was in a large room, a thousand feet square and a hundred feet tall, and he was not alone. On the far side of the room an old man sat in an armchair—or was it a stool? Actually, Marin could not tell what the man sat in because, when he tried to pay attention to whatever it was, it would change: from a bar stool to a Louis XIV love seat to a rocking chair, and so on. Nor was the chair the only thing that changed. Whenever Marin looked closely at any detail that detail mutated. The wall nearest him was, at first look, covered in blue wallpaper, then it was wooden, then plain brick, then brick with wainscotting, then...

The only stable thing, aside from Marin himself, was the old man who, having noticed Marin, approached cautiously. From the moment he rose from the thing that accommodated his arse to the moment he stood warily a foot or so from Marin, he was an (oddly familiar) old man.

—You're not dead, said the old man, as if he were aggrieved by Marin's existence.

—No, said Marin.

—Well, that's just not right, said the old man.

Marin apologized.

—No apology needed, son. It's just I've been trying to get back to my tower and I can't. So why should *you* be allowed in here?

—Where am I?

—You're in my antechamber. Not very pretty is it? Ah, but where are my manners? I haven't introduced myself. My name is Samuel Tench. And you are?

—Marin Herbert.

—You're familiar to me. Are you from Redfern?

—Yes. And you're the man who built the tower.

—That I am, lad. That I am, and I'm pleased to meet one of my fellow townsmen. But are you certain you didn't take a wrong step somewhere? My, my, the things that go on. How's my country, lad, and how are my countrymen? It's been some time since I was above ground myself. Not since Death herself decided to move into my home. I've been evicted. You'd expect better from an afterlife, wouldn't you, but there's no relief from suffering, son. I'm more unhappy dead than I was alive.

—Are we in Hell? asked Marin.

Samuel Tench nodded thoughtfully but, after reflection, said

—Not yet, son, but it's our common destination.

—Isn't there a heaven?

—No, that's just a rumour. Damnation's all there is. That's why I'm staying right here.

—Is there a way out?

—Oh, certainly. There's always a way out.

Pointing to a far corner of the room, Mr. Tench indicated a door Marin had not seen: a door, a portal, a hatch, a curtained exit.

—And this will take me home?

—Home? Yes, lad, it will take you home.

There was something in Tench's tone that should have sounded a warning. The man, or at least the spirit of what had once been a man, looked down at Marin as if Marin were a mouse and he an owl. He raised an eyebrow, smiled and again pointed to the door.

—There you go, son. Home.

But no sooner had he stepped through the door than Marin understood he was not home. The door closed behind him and would not open. It was immediately colder than he could have imagined, though his skin was warm. There was darkness, but it was palpable and could be parted so that a bluish light came through. And there were voices, a million of them, each one of which Marin could clearly hear if only he paid attention to it:

*—This morning, exhausted after a night's
furious round of fever dreams, I called...*

*—Children come and go, wickedly smiling as
they pass...*

Does everyone speak verse in Hell, Marin wondered. But he was not in Hell and he heard only what he wished to hear: poetry, his own poetry, though he did not yet recognize it as such. He wandered deeper and deeper into one of the trillion valleys of death, enchanted

by the sound of his own words. He was more than enchanted. He was enthralled and would willingly have wandered in the valley listening to his own poetry forever. That this did not happen was because Death came for him. Moving through the darkness like a wind through curtains, Marin's Death found him. She put a hand over his eyes and, holding him by the shoulder, led Marin back to the world, to morning and to life.

The morning light inaugurated what was to be, for Marin, the interminable end of his life. Waking in his narrow bed in the tower, Marin almost immediately noticed two things awry. First, he could not move his left arm. The point at which death had touched him, his left shoulder, had deadened. It felt as if his clavicle were driftwood. Second, he could see. His vision was, without his glasses, pure and clean. He could see the cracks and bumps in the tower's walls, could see a silverfish moving on the window ledge. His vision, in other words, had not simply improved. Its improvement erased the world he had known. Looking out his window at the Baillargeons' field, he could no longer see the rough green lake, but saw instead each of the stalks of corn, their soft ochre tufts.

Though he regretted the loss of his near-blindness, worse was to come. That evening, as he readied himself for his Death, her presence, he was interrupted by the ghost of Samuel Tench.

—How are you, lad? Tench asked, surprising Marin by his presence, his tone, and his appearance—naked, save for a stick-figure drawing of Satan that was pinned to his chest. No wonder Redfern's youths had been traumatized by the sight of him. Not traumatized, but unimpressed, Marin turned away from Tench's ghost and wrote. Through the night he wrote poetry and avoided conversation with Tench. A premonition of exile kept him mum.

In the months that followed, Marin wrote a thousand poems. He wrote sonnets, villanelles, ghazals, sestinas—all with death in mind and each more beautiful than the last. It was as if the dark of night passed through him and into words. Even his parents were now moved by Marin's poems. His father was discreetly proud. His mother, though, wept as she read the pages she collected from the floor of his room. Though she was distressed by Marin's unhappiness, she could hardly believe that her son, the boy whose nose she'd wiped, could write of longing so deep the reading of it brought inexpressible joy. How had her poor, frail son managed to see her soul so distinctly?

In fact, although Marin wrote what he thought of as varied hymns to his Death, wrote every word with her in mind, his work was taken

by all who read it as if it had been dedicated to life. Naturally, every reader saw in Marin's work his or her own shade of light, but light is what they saw and Marin was rewarded for it. His first five collections of poems, each a haphazard gathering of 50 poems, won all the prizes possible. Each sold as if it had been a novel written by some bungler with a hackneyed story. That is, they sold unspeakably well. And what an odd situation this created for Marin's peers. What were they to make of such bewildering financial and aesthetic success? Those who sought reputations instinctively loathed Marin and begrudged him the attention. Those who were not so much poets as they were politicians in verse claimed him for their own: Marin as exemplary sufferer. Those who worshipped poetry and language had no choice but to cherish the being through whom it made itself known. But whatever the case, whatever the inclination, each and every poet possessed of even a grain of sensibility read him and was moved.

Now you might think that money, fame and reputation would compensate for exile and loss—exile from Death's presence and the loss of his only love. They might, had Marin had any of those things in mind while he wrote. However, he did not. And though, for his mother's sake, he occasionally tried to find some happiness in his accomplishment, he most often failed. Worse: as time passed, he grew less and less interested in happiness, failure, success or defeat. Once the fifth volume of his verse was published, Marin refused to submit another word. In fact, he threatened to burn every page he had blackened, every page he would *ever* blacken, if even so much as a comma of his were published. This left his mother in difficult straits. *She* had submitted his work. *She* had taken care to save his money for him. *She* had become his agent. At his refusal to publish, she had to choose between the pride she felt as Marin's mother, the conviction her son should be compensated for his genius, and a fear of losing a sensibility to which she was herself devoted. After great consideration, she informed Marin's publisher that there would be no further collections. All the while, however, she surreptitiously published a poem here and there in small magazines, using pseudonyms she culled from a phonebook of Middlesex County: George Hesketh, Robert van Hie, Nicholas Jaco, and so on. In this way she fed a trickle of her son's work to the wanting world.

Far from bringing Marin peace or anonymity, his refusal to publish brought ever larger waves of people to Redfern. They came first on foot then by bicycle then by bus—men and women in search of the poet, tramping through Redfern, crowding into the rooms of Tench tower, disrupting the business of the town so much that it was forced to change. In short order, Redfern acquired a new hotel, an

old-style antique shop called Poet's Pickings, a tavern named From Bard to Verse, and a tearoom known as Herbert's Hideaway. The very people who had been frightened of him, crossing the street to avoid his bad spirit, now swore he had always been robust and manly, a scamp with an eye for the women, full-lipped, rouge-cheeked, altogether typical of Redfern. Nor did they want for audiences. The men and women who brought or bought handfuls of Marin's books hung on even the most ridiculous rumours: that Marin had sold his soul to the devil, for instance, shedding a drop of his blood on the Bail-largeons' cornfield in exchange for his devilish talent with words.

Marin himself was chased from the tower by the sheer number of visitors. He hid in his parents' basement, abandoning the tower to strangers and to the ghost of Samuel Tench. The tower was overrun by company and, night being the rumoured time to catch Marin while he was writing, the place was packed after midnight. Far from being frightened by a ghost with a stick figure drawing pinned to his chest, the fanatics who wanted any news or hint of Marin's life began to pester Tench for stories about Marin and his work. So persistent were they that after six months of pestering, and seeing he could no longer frighten anyone, Mr. Tench's ghost decided to take his chances in Gehenna and one night vanished from the face of earth forever. Had Marin been aware of it, this would have been another loss. Though he did not trust Tench's ghost, he had, in the months of nights they shared, grown accustomed to the ghost's company and, more, was dependent on the late Mr. Tench for proof there was another world, another world in which the one he loved waited for him.

Now, with Marin living in his parents' basement and with his frustrated followers roaming the streets of Redfern, resentment began to creep into relations between the townspeople and Marin's admirers. Marin's admirers—frenzied, calm, thoughtful, irrational, easily excited, word drunk, poetry mad, considerate, wanting nothing but a glimpse, a lock of hair, a piece of clothing, a moment, an hour, a lifetime—began to feel as if they had been misled. Here was the poet's land and town. Everyone swore Marin Herbert was about, but few could say for certain where he was because very few saw so much as a hair of the man. Some started milling about on the sidewalk outside his parents' house. Some left the town, bitterly disappointed that the man who had seen into their souls refused to speak with them. Others, more unbalanced, began to do damage: knocking post boxes from their stems, bending street signs, breaking windows at the school for the blind.

The townspeople were not entirely unsympathetic. Many of them also felt that Marin's unwillingness to show himself was, at best,

thoughtless and, at worst, insolent. Still, there's only so much petty destruction and general misbehaviour a community can take from its visitors. A barrier grew between the townspeople and Redfern's tourists. And amongst Redfern's youth this barrier was a spur. In the name of 'peacekeeping,' gangs of them rode around in trucks and cars. They rode around from early evening to late night, looking for outsiders who might be up to no good. They carried baseball bats and machetes for show, to intimidate, but as they were teenagers and drank beer while they drove about, they were at least as dangerous as the lovers of poetry sometimes were.

3.

Two years passed: snow, rain, sun, corn harvested, cows milked, calves pulled from the breech, butterflies eaten by birds, mice eaten by owls, death, life, more death, and more life.

The years were not good to Marin. From the moment he abandoned the tower, he felt like a man with a strange affliction. He went out at night, when most of the tourists had gone back to their hotels or bed and breakfast inns. He avoided the vicinity of the tower and so avoided most of those who were looking for him. The rest didn't recognize him because he went out dressed in a suit, tie, white shirt and cufflinks: nothing like the image of him most of his admirers held, and nothing like the Marin Herbert the people of Redfern had been used to.

For two years he did nothing much besides sleep, read, eat and stare at the furnace as if the answer to a mysterious question were inscribed on it. With the passage of time he became less and less able to write. His parents' home was simply not conducive to poetry and though his eyesight had improved, that too seemed to work against him: his world was not worth seeing clearly and the sight of it defeated words. Marin's mother encouraged him to write, to go out, to run or paint or anything that might cheer him up. However, in her soul, she found his morosity encouraging. From all she had read—lives of Byron and Pushkin, Baudelaire and Rimbaud—Marin was exactly what great poets were: miserable, unhappy, inconveniently alive. She did her best to comfort him, but she reckoned his discomfort part of his process and, in this, she was seconded by the town's other writer who, these days, spoke darkly of his own misery and, from time to time, tried to finagle an invitation to the Herbert's home to share his pain with Marin. However, as Marin had assured his mother the day would come when he would return to the world, if only he were left alone for a while, Mrs. Herbert never invited 'Redfern's other poet,' as

he was now known, though she did buy his books (*Good Going* and *Twilit Gardens*) and encouraged Marin to read them.

Without knowing it, Marin had in fact told his mother the truth. The day *did* come when he felt the pull of the world, the need to see the fields, to speak with Samuel Tench—whom Marin did not know was twice dead. Two years after his exile, after two years of solitude, grief and silence, and some six months after he'd last written a word, Marin got up from his cot beside the furnace, washed, shaved, dressed and resolved to go out into the world.

It was late spring, the perfect time to see the world after a bout of grief and loss, but by the time Marin walked out his front door it was 11 o'clock and dark. The moon was bright, the streetlamps were haloed by a cold mist, and there were two people waiting outside his home, a young woman and a man in his 60s, both of them dressed warmly, talking quietly. At the sight of Marin the woman stopped talking, stared as he approached and just managed to ask

—Marin?

before he passed them by.

—Yes? answered Marin.

—It's wonderful to meet you.

—Nice to meet you too, said Marin.

On hearing Marin's voice, realizing that this was the moment he had been waiting for, the man began to cry. He took Marin's hand, kissed it and, wracked with gratitude, said

—Your work has meant so much to me.

—Thank you, said Marin. Thank you for telling me.

Overwhelmed by emotion, the man and woman stood aside to let Marin pass. They watched as he walked down the tree-lined street, the lights of the houses making the cool spring night seem warmer than it was. Now, how was it that their language had chosen *this* man and *this* land on which or through which to flower? Really, language and ground were such inscrutable conspirators. And yet the man and woman stood quietly still, their eyes on Marin's back, until he and his black coat disappeared into the darkness.

Marin walked about town, passing the school for the blind, McGregor's greasy spoon, the Catholic church, the Anglican church, the tavern and Ted's Gas Station before heading to Tench Tower. There were still people about, townspeople and strangers, but no one troubled Marin as he walked, no one stopped him. He was relieved to discover there was no one at the tower: no streetlights, only darkness and moonlight. The tower was strangely blank, less like a building than an impressive heap of stones, but for Marin it was as if he were seeing home for the first time in decades, night making the tower as indistinct as it was in memory.

More: as he stood on the opposite side of the road, allowing his emotions to settle, he saw, moving toward him, his Death, her face pale, her eyes open, smiling sadly at him, as if no time had passed since he had unwittingly driven her away. How often over the years had Marin regretted his descent to the underworld and cursed Tench for showing him the door he should not have opened? But at the sight of his beloved, his spirits immediately lifted. The years of exile vanished from his mind and soul. In the instant he saw her, he conceived the first words of an elegy which came to him whole, as if pulled from deep water by its first line.

Ecstatic, filled with love, taking a step toward his Death which came to meet him, Marin Herbert was shattered and killed by the car that struck him.

Two girls and three boys, Redfernians all, stood at the side of the road looking down at Marin's broken and lifeless body.

—What the fuck? You ran over Marin Herbert.

They had been 'on patrol,' keeping the town safe from wanton tourists. This accident, though, was real trouble. What could you say after killing Marin Herbert? Difficult to answer, even if they hadn't been too drunk to think straight, which they were.

—I didn't know it was him. He stepped right in front of us. You saw it. Besides...besides, he hasn't written anything for years...

There was much back and forth on the matter. A good half hour was lost but, after a drunken while, having agreed that they had killed, at worst, the country's *second* best poet, they cut Marin's body to pieces with a machete and buried it in the Baillargeons' cornfield which, as luck would have it, had recently been ploughed, so the ground was soft and yielding.

The loss to Redfern was considerable, though not catastrophic. Days after his parents confirmed that Marin had disappeared, when fears for his life were most vivid, Marin's readers came to see if they could find or buy anything of Marin's in Redfern. Then, after six months or so, when it was clear Marin had gone and was, perhaps, dead, and police from all parts of Middlesex County were looking for him, the number of tourists dropped and dropped and dropped again until, a year after his disappearance, a quarter as many people came as had come the year before. Two years after his disappearance, all of his work was published by his mother in the hope that, were he still alive, he would be peeved enough to call, if only to give her grief—grief which, of course, would have been the sweetest thing imaginable. After that, even fewer tourists came but those who did were respectful, interested only in the monument to Marin erected in

the town centre and in Tench Tower. They did not stay in Redfern for long, but they stayed long enough to keep the tavern, the café and the bakery going for many years.

In the end, Marin's bones were never found. Every spring there was, when Mr. Baillargeon tilled his cornfield, at least a possibility the black ground would give up something of the man it had swallowed. That it did not, that it never did, was perhaps proof of jealousy or selfishness. The world above having Marin's words, the great ocean that was Baillargeons' cornfield kept his remains for itself.