

Patient's Prologue

Eugh.

Godawful place to free-associate, if that's the deal...

What'd they do, graft that tree to grow lewd like that? Nothing like leading the witness...but way more subtle than an out-and-out Psyche in the buff. Probably snagged the topiary gardener:

—*Hey, Auguste, why'n'tcha prune us a giant nympho buried upside down to her navel, waving her legs in the air.*

—*Sorry, boss, no can do; but you getcha a smooth-barked, sinewy maple tree: one good graft and you gotcha a perfect crotch.*

—*Hot damn!; we've got neurotics and borderlines could use the view, not to mention a neurosurgical dispo case coming to free-associate while spongiform degeneration does 'er in...*

Yeah, well, no psycho-striptease for me. Rodin-the-garden-man's not putting words in *my* mouth. Not that someone couldn't be—cripes, can't tell *where* my words are coming from. But that's the whole filthy point: my brain's caseating, biopsies're done, and there's no frigging treatment in the works! They scooted me straight from Recovery to Psych 'cause the cores they got on biopsy were so stinking necrotic they didn't even need the pathologist to toll the bell. *Diagnosis: squash-rot. Treatment: pine box.* —*But say, fellas: this is a hot case for the Annals! Let's beef up the neuropsychiatric data, chart the progression of the dementia. But go for the prior history first, while she still remembers.*

Yeah, well, you better act fast. Some of those memories I could *stand* to lose—dull, ugly play-by-plays. If it's a question of storage space, I'm letting those go; I'll trash the first two-thirds of my life, just lop it out, to save room for what followed.

First eighteen years are empty anyway, just a length, a stalk. A long, hollow stalk creeping upwards and drooping down. Just a stalk that lost its crispness, lost the point of rising toward the sun. And heard the reedy parental sighs of *upward, onward* lose themselves in the swish of a striving multitude. And knew of no way to distinguish itself...

Well.

There's more to a stalk than it knows before it's cut.

Panpipes!

Satyr's-breath music,
cloven hooves—and mons—

moans, music of passion:

Pan. I have been played by Pan.