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The Finial

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The Finial

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Ben, her husband, had his job. He could leave for the day and forget, but Ida had no escape. Ben hardly noticed when Peter's sand castles had changed to rock castles and taken possession of her garden, their steeples pointing an accusing finger at the skies and at her. And although he pointed no fingers, Ben seemed to assume it was her fault, as if she'd humored the boy, because she would not consent to commit him to a State institution."

Cover Page Footnote

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The Finial

by Lida Bell Lunt

Ben, her husband, had his job. He could leave for the day and forget, but Ida had no escape. Ben hardly noticed when Peter's sand castles had changed to rock castles and taken possession of her garden, their steeples pointing an accusing finger at the skies and at her. And although he pointed no fingers, Ben seemed to assume it was her fault, as if she'd humored the boy, because she would not consent to commit him to a State institution.

Once Peter had only been the fat little boy whose pockets bulged with cookies, but suddenly he was a mangy, animal-like man whose shuffling footfalls echoed through the house, and hopelessness had grown with the endless visits to doctors and psychiatrists, until only despair was left.

Ben was hard-headed. A businessman. He tried to reason with her. "Write him off. A lamebrain, that's what he is. Be better off with others of his kind where they'd know how to handle him." But the thought of her own flesh and blood, *their* flesh and blood, in an institution was impossible for her to accept. She couldn't consent to it, not even when Ben said angrily, "What about us, what about our life? Don't we count?" But after a time they even stopped quarreling about Peter. Ben came home later, had two or three drinks before din-

ner and a couple of brandies afterwards, so that by the time she came to bed, he was asleep and she lay there, rigid, counting her heartbeats, feeling her pulse trapped like she was in her arteries.

From the beginning children stayed away from Peter, and so his playmates became animals of all descriptions. He could talk to them, and they responded with dumb affection. Welcoming every stray that passed the house, he developed a miniature zoo, first outdoors, then gradually they crept into the house until she and Ben moved upstairs to their bedroom and locked the door for privacy.

As each animal died or disappeared, Peter had no wish to replace it. At first Ida took this to be a good sign, but instead of live things, his new companions became rocks. He would coax, argue and even become angry until either she or Ben would drive him around the countryside to gather his "specimens." The floorboards of the car creaked under their weight and soon the stone menagerie moved ever nearer to the house. Ida imagined she saw them following her, and when she'd wake out of a sound sleep, they would be there, crouching between the beds. The rocks began to resemble Peter, or he them, no faces, no eyes, only round, stony heads. Someday she would knock them over, one by one, but she feared they would cry out and plead for help, her help.

There were only a few houses on the street; it was a dead end. The house nearest to theirs had been vacant for some time, and she was pleased one day to see a family by the name of Hingham moving into it. They had three teen-age sons nearly Peter's age. Peter didn't act interested, although she urged him to speak to the boys and ask them over. Whether he did or not, she did not know, but one day a clatter drew her to the window — catcalls, then screaming. She saw Peter running, the Hingham boys in pursuit. No wild animal could have looked more terrified than Peter, gasping for breath, eyes bulging. He sank to the floor at her feet. "They're after me. They're going to kill me. They call me crazy! Crazy!"

Ida knelt beside him. "You're not crazy. Fight back, Peter. Don't let people frighten you." She put her arms around him.

Before the day ended, Ida made a neighborly call on Mrs. Hingham. Hunchbacked from overwork, the woman greeted her as one would another frustration in an already impossible day. "So, what the boys been up to now?" she asked, never suggesting that Ida come in and sit down.

"I don't mean to complain, but my son is overly shy. I did hope they would be friends."

"Friends! The kids tell me your boy's a kook. What's he doing with all them rocks in your yard?"

Lida Bell Lunt, a native of Cincinnati and mother of five daughters, is a poet and short-story writer.

"He collects rocks, Mrs. Hingham. He's no kook. He wanted to make friends with your boys."

What more could she say? Her pleading would not make Peter more popular. He had to do it himself, but he wouldn't or couldn't.

All through the year Ida had counted the days and knew she could endure if she could last until vacation time. Then Peter, Ben and she could drive away, leaving the grotesque figures to guard the house, and for a while forget. What a relief, again to breathe fresh air, sit in the sunlight while Ben took Peter fishing and exploring. Then Ben and she would feel young again. They would laugh.

A day or so before the time to leave, Ida sat with Peter at breakfast. He listened to her describe the itinerary before he casually remarked, "I'm not going."

Was this another attention-getting ruse, just to pinch the pleasure out of her moment? I'll not let him know he's upset me. That's his game. He wants me to scream at him like a maniac. "You're kidding?"

"No," he said. "Can't leave them." He shuffled over to the kitchen chair and straddled it like a horse. Ida forced herself to look deep into his eyes, to find the little boy of long ago. Their hostile blankness mirrored nothing. Who was this monster she'd conceived, this gross pudding of flesh? The chairs squeaked, groaning under his weight. His buttocks overhung the sides.

Ashamed, she heard the whine edging her voice, "But we've been looking forward to it."

He turned to look out of the window. A lock of blond hair covered his eyes. He whistled his favorite tune: "Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's off to work we go." He knew she hated it.

Ida put her hands on his shoulders and forced him to look at her. "Talk to me! Don't look out the window at those damned rocks. Your father and I need a rest. We've been looking forward to this."

"O.K., go! Never asked anything from you. What have you done for me anyway?" He shrugged her hands away and rose to his feet. He stood up tall. She drew back, alarmed. He waved his fist. "Go! Go!"

She ran upstairs to her room. The walls closed in like a prison. She felt sorry for herself. When Ben came home, she'd tell him. Poor Ben, more tired every day. (How much could he stand? A sick son and a complaining wife.) She hated to bother him.

Could it be me? She wondered. Am I the impatient one? Perhaps Peter sensed how she felt. Yes, sometimes she hated him, this unkempt man whose shirtfront bore evidence of his last meal, whose long nails clawed at tabletops, and whose eyes only lit up when he had provoked her to distraction. He was her son.

After dinner, when Ben and Ida retreated to their sanctuary, she broke the news. She tried not to show how much she cared, but instead began to sob.

Ben took her in his arms. "You're going to get your trip, Peter or not. I'll ask my sister Ella to stay with him until we return."

If Peter was surprised, he didn't show it. Ida began to wonder if he'd really taken it all in. No matter. She was relieved. She would soon be released, for a while.

Ella arrived on the scheduled day. She was a kindly woman, a widow of only a year. She wanted to be of help but trembled, nevertheless, when she first saw Peter. Whatever Ella thought, it didn't come out in words.

Ida kissed Peter, who pretended not to notice, and then closed her mind. Until they were out on the road and alone, she didn't think. And then Ben put his arm around her shoulders, held her against him. It felt good.

But how had she thought to escape? Wishful thinking. They had only been gone a few days, days that seemed more a honeymoon than the one they'd had when they were married. They stayed long in bed during the mornings, canoed on the lake and enjoyed the green mountains during the afternoons, dined at little inns and restaurants that provided not only good food but the sense of privacy and refuge. And, except for wine at dinner, Ben didn't take a drink. She knew that if only she could prolong their stay, she would re-knit something inside

of her that had been frayed almost beyond repair. And they were able at long last to talk; they talked about everything, silly things and grand, about crepes suzette as well as the possibilities for the United Nations, talked as if they cared about what they were saying and what they were listening to—only she could not bring herself to talk to Ben about Peter.

Then the call came. Ella. She talked to Ben.

"Is Peter all right?"

"Get your things together. We'll talk as we drive."

In the car, he continued. "They've taken Peter to the hospital."

"The hospital?"

"Yes. Ella said the neighbors complained. After we left, the Hingham boys stole into our yard and threw his rocks around. Peter went berserk, chased them home and scared the family. They called the police. Ella is very much upset."

The walls closed in around her.

The house seemed strange and quiet without Peter, yet his presence was everywhere. Here and there she saw that Ella had made a few inroads in the housekeeping disaster. "I tried to tidy up his room, but when he saw me, he became violent. You'd have thought I was destroying something valuable."

"They were to him," Ida acknowledged wearily.

"I did the best I could, Ida."

"I know you did. Thank you."

Ida sat down at the kitchen table and stared at the empty chair.

After Ella left, they hurried to the State Hospital. It stood, a mass of fortress-like buildings, back from the road. Often, in passing, Ida had seen someone pacing up and down on the long porch or hands stretched out between the barred windows. Today it became more real. The admitting nurse said Dr. Ames expected them. Down the dark hallway they followed her and huddled together on a wooden bench. Now and then one of the patients walked by, muttering to himself. "Waiting to see a doctor?" a middle-aged man asked. "Long wait. Not enough doctors. Or nurses. We never see anyone but ourselves. Will you give me a light?"



Ben lit a match and handed it to the man.

Ida trembled. The man's striped cotton trousers, tied with a rope at the waist, matched the iron stripes barring the tall windows. Someone had written an obscene word on the wall, and at her feet long, triangular stains spattered the tile floor. A door opened at the end of the hall and a stooped little man fluttered toward them, his head turned from side to side as if he were afraid he was being followed.

"Mr. and Mrs. Townsend?"

"Yes," they answered together.

"Dr. Ames. Come with me."

He led them back down the hall to a small office. No pictures, nothing to distract a patient. Ida sat on one side of him and Ben on the other. She kept saying over and over to herself, the doctor must be made to realize that we are good parents, not neurotic, not to blame. In her lap, she knotted and unknotted her handkerchief.

"Your son Peter was brought into the hospital yesterday." He looked at Ida and smiled. "It took a lot of doing, Mrs. Townsend. He weighs about 300 pounds. We had to give him a hypo."

Ben spoke up. "Was it necessary to bring him in?"

"Absolutely. He was threatening your neighbors. They reported he'd always been a strange boy, and they only objected when he came into their yard."

Ida interrupted. "Nonsense, the Hingham boys have teased and frightened Peter. They knocked over his rock pile. He thinks no one

likes him. He is very sensitive, more and more in himself."

"Mrs. Townsend, we are not entirely sure what happened to your son, probably brain damage at birth. The pattern is distinctly schizophrenic."

Schizophrenia. Ida's legs knocked together.

"And what can be done, Doctor?" Ben asked. "He's been to psychiatrists and doctors before. They were never sure. He'd been a bright lad in school, then he changed. He's our only child. I was afraid to have another."

"He's a man now." Dr. Ames brought out a pipe and sucked on it.

Even the doctor needs a pacifier, Ida thought.

They waited.

"At the moment, your son has regressed, withdrawn into himself, his own world, to escape reality. We expect he'll come out of it with treatment and patience. Do you want to see him?"

"He's our son," Ida said.

A shadow of confusion filtered across the smiling face. Only the lips smiled, not the eyes. He paused. "You must not be shocked at what you see. At the moment Peter is walled in by his disease."

"He's our child. We want him to know we haven't deserted him," Ida replied.

"That's good. He may know you. They often know more than they let on."

Again they followed the doctor down the hall to a locked door. There was a window at the top;

a sad face peered out. The doctor pulled out a ring of keys and slipped one into the lock. The door opened, noise and confusion.

"This is the day room," Dr. Ames explained.

The room was large, the walls painted baby blue, and some enterprising nurse or patient had pasted large paper flowers here and there to give it a garden-like appearance. There was a strong odor of tobacco and urine. Men sat bolt upright or swayed in rocking chairs, mumbling to themselves or looking out into space. In the corner a large TV blared, turned up to the highest volume. Some men watched it, their faces masklike. In the corner, a man lay on the floor, asleep.

A hand brushed Ida's skirt, then a man pressed his head close to hers. "I want to go home, lady." He grinned. His mouth was all gums, no teeth.

"Yes, yes," she answered and hurried on.

They passed a large lavatory without doors. There were more men, some lying on the floor, others pacing up and down, all half-dressed. At the farther end they entered a large dormitory with beds a hand's reach apart. There, a crumpled mountain, Peter. Ben steadied her.

Dr. Ames leaned over the bed. "Your parents are here, Peter."

Peter's head rested on his knees, in the fetal position. Ida touched him. She stroked the hair out of his eyes. Even then, he was her son. Flesh of her flesh. She loved him.

Dr. Ames led them back through

the inferno of dazed half-humans, and the door clanged shut on their son in this other world. When Ida reached home, she vomited until she lay exhausted on the bathroom floor. She heard Ben downstairs in the kitchen. A glass fell to the floor. Soon he would come upstairs and be asleep.

Each visit Peter showed remarkable improvement. No longer in bed, he walked about the ward and even gained permission to stroll on the grounds, begging to be taken home. To their surprise, Dr. Ames was just as anxious to discharge Peter as Peter was to leave. The hospital, he told them, was very much overcrowded.

The day came. Ida had cleaned Peter's room, yet carefully allowed his precious objects to remain in place. She tried to be happy. This was what she had wanted. She promised herself never to leave him again. She would try to accept him as he was, be more patient and understanding.

Days became endless. Again she became the querulous, fretful mother whose words made no impression upon Peter, who had returned to his old world.

The Hinghams had moved away. People said they feared Peter would take revenge upon them. They need not have worried; he was more frightened of them than they ever would be of him. Now he never left the yard, and no matter how Ida tried to reassure him that the Hinghams had left, he'd shake his head. "I saw them last night. They tried to come in and break down my temple."

"But Peter, they have gone," Ida would say.

"No, they'll never go. They're inside my head. At night they hammer and try to hurt me."

All she could do was change the subject. If it weren't for this wild obsession, she might have believed that Peter was better. He made monthly visits to Dr. Ames, who advised them not to force school until Peter became more stable, and so they coasted along until one night they saw lights in the Hingham house.

A family had moved into the house for a few months. Peter took little notice of the new neighbors.

After the recent impasse with the Hinghams, Ida delayed making a neighborly call. If the family were renting from the Hinghams, they might have been forewarned about Peter.

It was a fall afternoon, the air smarting with the odor of burning leaves, when she picked her way up the path around the various cenotaphs and into the road. The Hingham's bouse looked oddly deserted. The garage door swung open, no car in sight. Hopefully, Ida thought she'd leave a note and let them know she had called. Ringing the bell just in case, she dropped a card in the mailbox and turned to leave. In the distance she heard a child's cry, slow footsteps; the door opened, a tall girl squinted into the daylight.

"I'm Mrs. Townsend. I live down the street. I called to say hello and ask if I could do anything for you."

A child's head appeared. She pulled on the older girl's skirt.

"Hush, Tinka," the older girl said. "I'm sorry I can't ask you in. My aunt is away. She told me not to let anyone in."

"She's right. You can't be too careful. I'll come back sometime when your aunt's home."

The door opened wider. The girl was plain in a well-scrubbed way, features large, only the eyes small, and seemed to be so nearsighted that her forehead wrinkled with the effort of seeing. As Ida moved closer to her, she noticed the limp. The girl picked the child up in her arms. "Will you sit down on the step? My aunt is with her mother, who is very ill. I tend the baby."

She wondered what the accent was, yet the diction was perfect. In the stronger light, the girl's skin had a brownish tinge, as if she'd been out in the sun and wind. She had long, strong hands that could work. Her aunt had chosen well. This girl could be trusted to follow instructions.

"Yes, I'd like to sit down," Ida said and rested on one of the porch steps.

"My name is Rebecca. We come from Israel."

Ida smiled. "You do have a different accent, but it's pleasant. I hope you like it here."

Rebecca limped across the porch and put the child down next to Ida. The child leaned closer. She picked her up and held her in her arms. It felt good.

Propped against the railing, Rebecca's large frame looked out of place, uncomfortable. She was not accustomed to sitting, Ida thought. "My aunt, Mrs. Klein, is a nurse, and when she heard her mother had a short time to live, she got permission to come here for a few months to take care of her. My uncle is on military duty, so he could not accompany us. I came to care for Tinka."

"They are fortunate to have you."

"Mrs. Townsend," she began, gaining confidence as she continued, her hands open and imploring in her lap. "Could Tinka and I come into your garden and see the rocks?" In a gulp of enthusiasm, she added, "I've always loved rocks, and these are so beautiful!"

"My son Peter collects them and makes all sorts of monuments and objects out of them. They have a meaning to him. I must say I don't understand."

Rebecca's eyes narrowed, her lips smiled. "They're beautiful. We'll come soon."

There was little else to say. Ida relinquished the child, who cried softly and waved bye-bye as she went down the walk. She wiped a tear from her eyes. She shrugged. How foolish could a middle-aged woman be, crying because she'd held someone else's baby in her arms?

She meant to tell Peter about the meeting and the girl who wanted to see his rocks, but he was nowhere about, and she soon forgot. It came as a shock when she heard his agitated call and found him trembling at the foot of the stairs.

"What has happened?"

She hurried down and there, on her hands and knees before one of the grotesque piles of rock, knelt Rebecca. She ran her hands over the face of the stones as if blessing them. Her face reflected a look of awe and wonder. The child played nearby. What could Ida do? She put her hand on Peter's arm and felt him shaking. "Peter, she's the young girl who's staying at the old Hingham house. She loves rocks and asked if she could come in and see them. Don't send her away."

"She's evil. She'll destroy my monuments."

"Come meet her. Talk to her. She is kind."

Bowing his head, he covered his eyes. "Get rid of her."

"All right. I'll speak to her."

Just then a wail broke into the conversation. The child lay on the ground, her head bleeding. Rebecca clambered to her feet and went to her, dragging her lame foot behind her, her face stricken. Ida bolted past Peter and in a minute reached the pair, took the child in her arms and carried her into the house. Rebecca followed.

The child quieted. It felt good to hold a child again. In the bathroom with Rebecca, they washed off the cut, no larger than a scratch.

"Thank you, lady. My aunt would be very cross if I let Tinka hurt herself."

"It's all part of growing up. Come, let's sit at the table and eat a cookie."

Tinka cooed and gurgled, the hurt forgotten. She crumbled the cookie in her hands and smeared it over her face.

Rebecca wiped it off with a tissue from her pocket. "You have a clown face. Tinka, the clown." She laughed. She, too, seemed surprised at the sound. "I'm sorry we were a bother. I forgot Tinka, everything. The rocks, they spoke to me. All my life I've wanted to collect specimens like these, and they are arranged so artistically by shape and size."

Ida noticed that Peter was crowded into the niche behind the doorway.

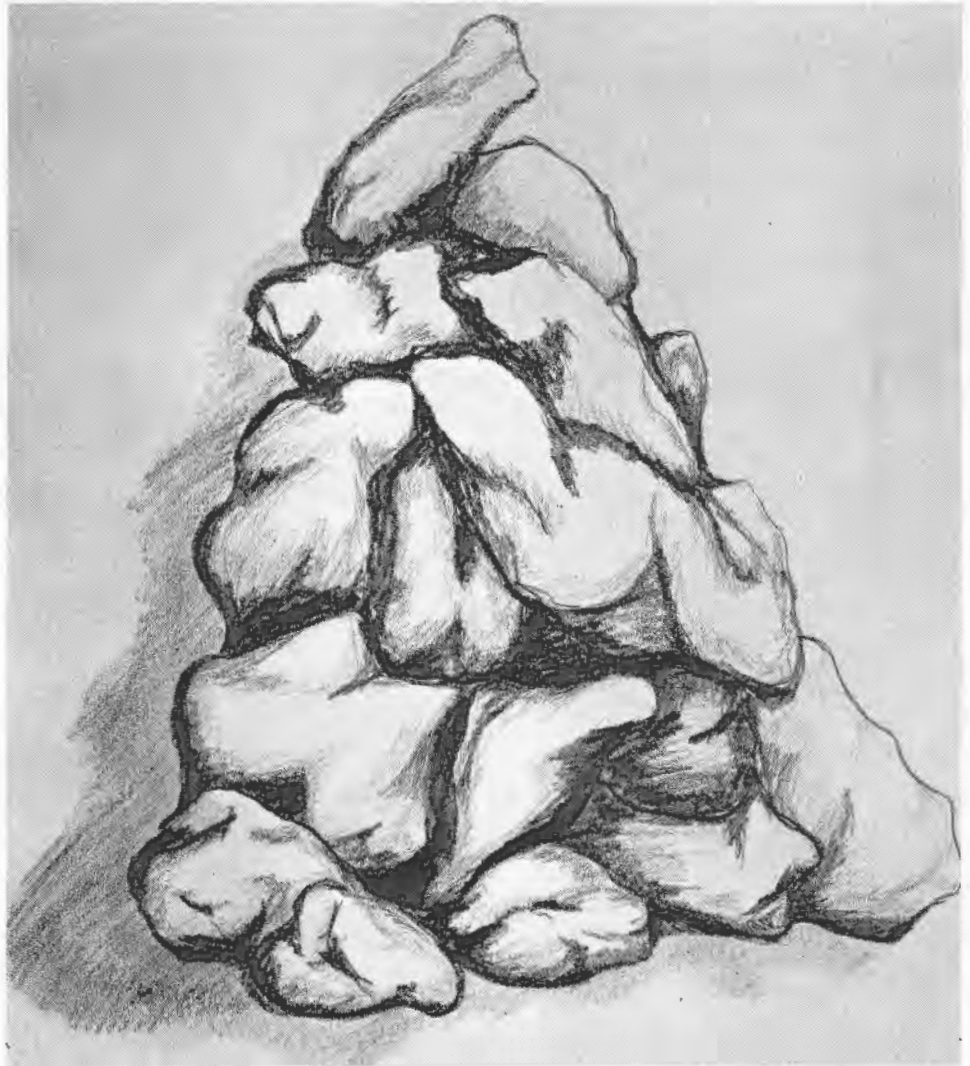
"I'm sorry, Rebecca. In the confusion, I forgot to introduce my son Peter. That is his rock collection."

Dragging her lame foot Rebecca moved closer and bowed her head before him as if she were paying tribute to some deity. "So you are the one I must thank. They are like sculptures, Greek gods, angels and creatures from another world."

Peter did not move. At last he spoke, so faintly that Ida could barely hear the words. "You see them, too. They are all there, and the demons."

With a cry, the baby started to fret. Rebecca hurried to pick her up. "We've stayed long enough. May we come again?"

"Peter and I are alone together



too much, but it is Peter's garden. You will have to ask him."

Awkwardly swinging herself around, she stood in front of Peter, a misshapen statue herself. "May we come again, please?"

There was a long pause before he answered. "Come. Yes, come."

The fall days stretched out, and both Ida and Peter looked forward to the afternoons when they could see Rebecca and Tinka coming down the road.

When Ida asked Rebecca about her aunt, Rebecca shook her head sadly, saying that her mother was worse and not expected to live much longer.

Peter had changed. Dr. Ames shared the family's delight. Ida told him of the friendship, and he considered it the best medicine for

Peter. "It's bringing him out into the open," he said. Peter took more care of his appearance. After the clock struck two, his eyes brightened, as he watched for Rebecca and her small charge. This brought Ida two blessings, Peter's happiness and Tinka. She loved having her and justified this by saying she didn't want the child to have any more falls among the jagged stones. They played, she sang the old nursery rhymes, patty-caked, and all the while, in the distance, she caught glimpses of Rebecca and Peter talking and touching the rockpiles, she saw him stand aside as Rebecca arranged some formation in another grouping. She could hardly believe it. From the beginning no one but he could touch or move the rocks. Once she had

impatiently kicked a boulder aside that had fallen in the path of her car, and screams had burst from the house. Never again did she so much as lay a hand on his prize possessions.

In November the snow fell, lightly coating the mounds, making the garden a silent cemetery. Ida felt frozen and alone. Soon winter would close them in even more. Ida heard knocking at the front door, and to her surprise saw Rebecca. She did not have to speak. Something had happened. The girl's long face drooped as if all support had given way and tears smudged her cheeks. Ida called Peter. He came stumbling as fast as he could, one step at a time, and faced Rebecca. With his head on one side, like a bird, his eyes questioned her, bewildered and frightened. "What, what is it, Rebecca?" The words dragged along slowly.

The girl's shoulders shook. "I've come to say good-bye. My aunt's mother died last night. We're leaving after the mourning period."

Peter started pacing back and forth, back and forth, muttering to himself.

Rebecca straightened herself, conscious now of Peter. She wiped her eyes.

"Peter, Peter," she called to him, her hands reaching.

The marching stopped. He stood before her, his head up straight.

"I'll never let you go. I want to marry you."

Rebecca whimpered and dropped her hands, her eyes frozen to his face.

"Marry you, Peter? If I only could!"

They clung to each other.

"Marry me. Marry me. Then you won't have to go away."

"I'd be so happy if I could stay with you, in your peaceful garden forever. I'll speak to my aunt."

Ida stood watching.

"I will go back and speak to my aunt," Rebecca repeated.

Ida and Peter watched as she hobbled up the driveway and disappeared in the distance. Longing to shield him, Ida put her arm round Peter's shoulders. What could she say to make it hurt less? "Peter, you know this is impossible. You've been ill. It wouldn't be fair to Rebecca."

Mother. We should be together. She understands me."

It must have been just enough time for Rebecca to speak to her aunt when the two of them trundled down the road. Mrs. Klein led the parade with her arms gesticulating, hair loosened around her face, followed by Rebecca, limping as fast as she could, and in her arms, Tinka. Ida dreaded what was ahead. She opened the door before Mrs. Klein had a chance to knock. The woman plummeted into the room and waved her fist in Ida's face.

"What's the idea? Playing tricks behind my back. Conniving and fixing up my niece with your half-witted son."

"Please, Mrs. Klein." Ida tried to keep her voice calm. "Let me explain. I called on you when you first arrived. Rebecca, Tinka and I became friends. She enjoyed Peter's garden, and it has meant a great deal to Peter and me to have them here. I have been here all the time. No harm has come to anyone. I've grown to love Tinka ... I'm sorry about your mother."

"Sorry, yes, that it is too late, it's now Rebecca. She has ideas about your crazy son."

As usual, Ida found herself defending Peter, even talking for him in her anger. He stood in the same spot without moving, his eyes only on Rebecca's face. Of all of them, he was the most calm.

"Mrs. Klein, my mother is right. Rebecca has been a friend to me. She has meant more than that. She understands me, my 'craziness,' as you call it. I love her. She loves me. We want to get married."

Mrs. Klein reeled. Ida thought she might faint. She dropped into a chair, beating her head with her fist.

"Married. Married! Who would marry you, or Rebecca, either? We should never have taken that accursed house. Mrs. Hingham warned me, but I was desperate for a place to stay. Maybe we're all crazy. Trouble, trouble. I have trouble and now you bring this for your aunt." She turned on Rebecca.

The baby nuzzled her head against Ida's neck. She patted her, but she watched Rebecca. The girl had control of herself. She stood next to Peter, touching his arm, but her words were for her aunt. "Peter

told the truth. I love him. He needs me. I need him. I want to stay with him whether we marry or not."

Mrs. Klein's eyes rolled back in her head. "A dimwit girl. A dimwit boy. You want each other. Better you're dead. Even if this was possible, your visa is up. You have to go back."

We could not argue with that.

Peter and Rebecca faced each other, everyone else forgotten. He leaned over and whispered in her ear. She nodded.

Kneading herself together like a lump of soft dough, Mrs. Klein struggled to her feet and took the child out of Ida's arms. Tinka whimpered.

Rebecca said, "Good-bye, Mrs. Townsend." She touched her hand with her lips. "Thank you."

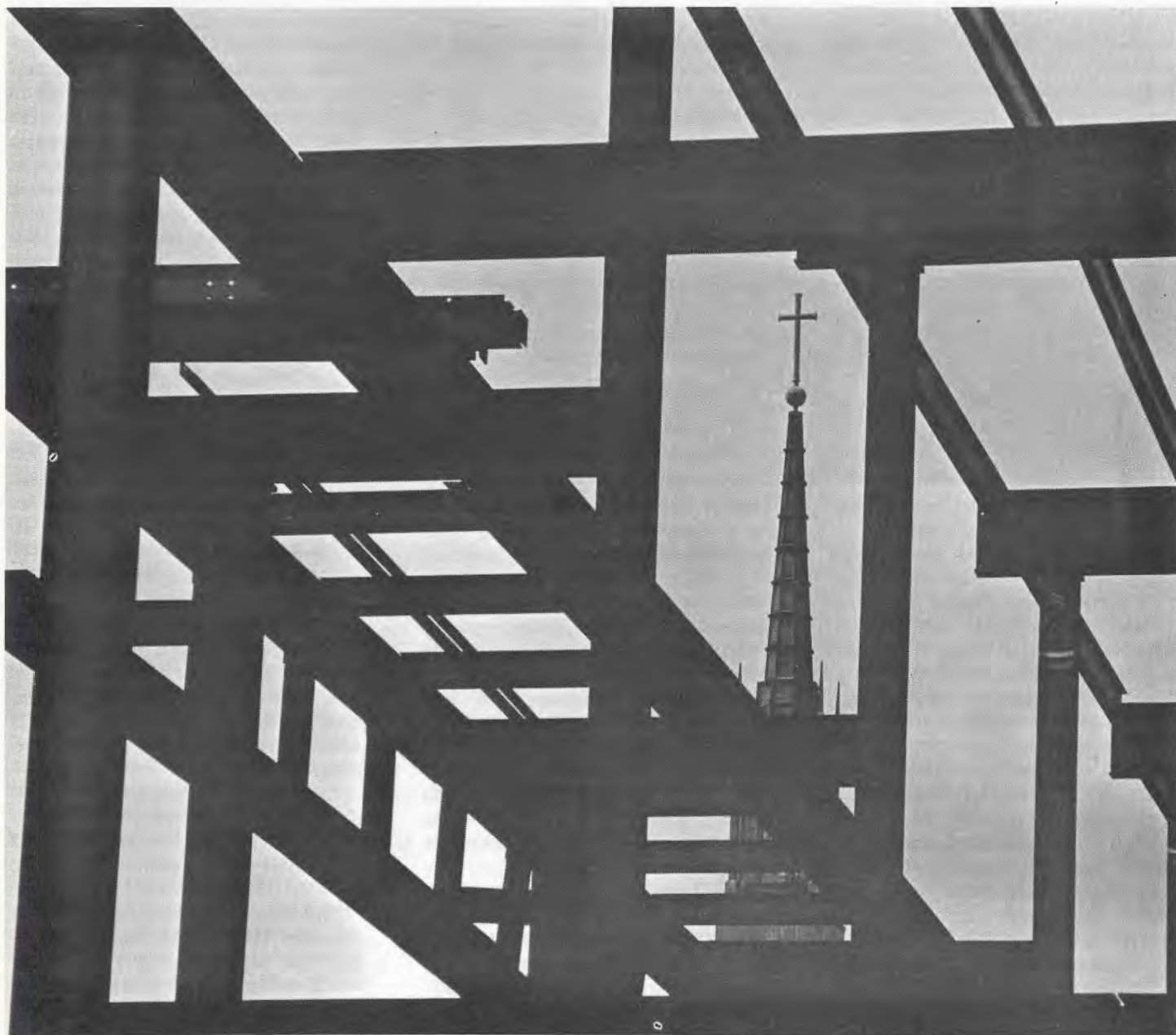
Tears came to Ida's eyes.

Out of the door they clumped and went up the driveway. Rebecca lingered, now and then looking back at each monolith of stone.

Ida tried to busy herself with the ironing, taking long, hard sweeps up and down the board. But more and more she found herself drawn to the window. In the distance, Peter pulled the wheelbarrow here and there, passing now and then to stack it full of rocks. She'd never seen him dismantle the mounds before, but he worked as if he had a plan. As she watched, he brought them all to one focal point then stacked them higher and higher into one large obelisk. It grew so tall she wanted to cry out, for fear it would fall and bury him under it.

Ben, Peter and Ida made little conversation during dinner. They retired to their rooms early. The house itself had an awesome stillness. Even Peter's radio was quiet. Ida walked past his room. The door was open. No Peter. She hurried down the stairs. No one in the front room. The light from the full moon slithered across the floor. As her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she saw Peter's obelisk. Two figures stood in front of it, one tall and lopsided as she leaned against the shoulder of the grotesque man. Their lips moved. Ida drew back. She bowed her head and left them to their God or gods.

When Ida awoke, Ben had gone. The Hingham house stood lonely and deserted. Upstairs, Peter's heavy feet scraped across the floor.



"Peter," she called, "are you ready for breakfast?"

Her back was toward him as he entered the kitchen. She turned slowly. He was still Peter. His face was unlined, vacant like little Tinka's. The morning passed, and as the day drew out, Ida thought now he will surely miss Rebecca. Her eyes wandered up the road, arms aching for the child.

After luncheon, Peter walked into the garden. Like a shrine, the obelisk remained as before, tall and bleak in the center of the garden. He walked directly to it, stood quietly, his head jerking, as though he were

hauling the wheelbarrow about, filling and refilling it with the remaining rocks scattered about on the ground. One by one he dumped them near the wall. Following a well-planned route, he carefully skirted the obelisk, but as he passed it, he would pause a moment.

As the day wore on, his work increased in intensity.

Towards evening, Ida stepped outside.

"Are you taking away the stones, Peter?"

He paused, looked at her with surprise, "Not stones, Mother, demons."

"But what about this?" She pointed to the obelisk.

"That stays forever."

When Ben returned from work, Ida asked him to follow her into the garden. He looked tired.

"What now?" he sighed.

Around them the garden stretched, barren and strange, and in its center the obelisk rose up alone and deserted, the evening sun highlighting the rocks with a fierce glow. From its base the rocks, carefully selected, graduated until they reached the finial at the top, each rock a monument to the agony of Peter's past. Now assembled, they were beautiful, almost a work of art.