

The Mantis

My goal was absolute memory — to be filled with everything bitter, but to be like an infinite ocean always clean.

And seeking things to cherish — losses, forgotten beings, I recalled the mantis which as children we found and kept in a bottle.

It was our god. We wanted it near us, perhaps to punish if it worked no signs.

Who knows how to care for a god? Did it eat the leaves we shredded, enjoy the air that circulated through pin holes?

Its gaze, so attentive in a head like a pyramid overturned. Its postures, so suddenly assumed and graceful. Its continual silent listening.

We wanted to befriend this thing which had walked over our hands as if they were twigs and stems.

All day the animals we saw seemed one family, belonging to the mantis. The raccoon, the muskrat, the catfish and hornet: his wife, son, brother- and sister-in-law.

Then we forgot, and some mornings later found the mantis stiff in the jar. His limbs easily came away from his body.

The opened bottle gave off the stench which later we knew again in zoological laboratories — a by-product of exact knowledge.

This had been the mantis's only work, most difficult to perform for immortals — to die.

To die to its life among the grasses which my memory, still holding the mantis, has never known, cannot recall.

A. F. Moritz