

The Diviners

FIRST ELEGY

(A dulcimer plays "Amazing Grace" as the lights rise. There are two pin spots: one isolating BASIL and the other on DEWEY. The farmer and farmhand speak directly to the audience but not to each other; they speak as if they know the people in the theatre the way a man knows his neighbors. The dulcimer fades into the story:)

BASIL. Now. Just before Buddy Layman passed beyond us there was a storm to the sky like no other. I was workin' out to the back fields, down along the crick there, when I first felt the air start to changin'. I looked at the clouds. I heard the wind blowin'. And I says to myself, "Basil," I says, "Don't stand out here like a fool to the field. Get the tools to the barn fore the storm hits!"

DEWEY. And I run like the wind right after the boy died. Callin' all over town for his father. I fly by the Dry-Goods and on through the Diner, lookin' clean over Zion to find him.

BASIL. So I set the tools down and I turned my head to see the air all in motion above me. I'm standin' there, near the barn there for shelter, and the clouds're as dark as the land is long—circlin' and swirlin' like a fire to the sky!

DEWEY. And I looked!

BASIL. And I seen it!

DEWEY. And I hollered!

BASIL. And I knew!

DEWEY. I says, "Ferris! Ferris! He's dead now for certain." *(A moment. Then quietly:)* Buddy Layman . . . he's passed on beyond us.

BASIL. *(Softly.)* And like a slate wiped clean or a fever washed away where there was fire to the sky now there's nothin'. Where there was clouds there's just blue and the sun.

DEWEY. His only son gone and it's me who brings the word when Ferris comes to his door in the mornin'. I seen him there like he's a wood stick carvin' in the wood frame door and they're welded together in grievin'. I says, "Ferris . . . I'm sorry." And he don't move and don't speak. I says, "Yor son, he's passed on beyond us." *(DEWEY'S light fades. He exits. Moonlit night as BASIL speaks:)*

BASIL. The idiot boy is dead, don't you see? Buddy Layman's gone. There's no tellin' the weather. When he said it would rain we layed our fields in rows and we knew it would be a good season. You see, a man works, a man waits, and he hopes and he plans, but it was the boy who told us the weather. And that boy . . . he was somethin'. Somethin' else for a fact. He couldn't talk for two cents or take the time to tie his shoes, but he seemed to know things you figured nobody knew. Without drillin' rigs or men with machines—without nothin' but a willow rod in his hands—Buddy Layman came onto my land in late spring and he set himself to witchin' a well. Call it vein-fandin', water-witchin', smellin', seekin' or divinin', . . . the boy had a touch and a feel for water.