

## *The Birth of Spring*

As the earth, kissed by the vernal sun, slowly awoke like a Sleeping Beauty, smelling of warmed, natural perfumes and fecund loins, stretching her dazed limbs, smiling up at the clear skies, everything around her came to life as well. Bird couples swooped and fluttered in delight as they gathered the materials for their new nests. Insects began to buzz, hiss, stridulate, crawl, swarm, and march with the energy of new life. Children scurried like cooped-up puppies let free to run. Young people fell in love or into infatuations to them indistinguishable from that more august emotion. Dotagers, remembering their own earlier insanities, felt vicarious thrills when they watched these young people.

The fever seized Skylar as forcefully as anyone. A magnolia tree had stood in the front yard of his childhood home on Mayfield and fond recollections of that lovely growth accentuated the awe he now felt for those of its species glorifying the campus. For Beatrix must have been an admirer of the subfamily Magnolioideae: her progeny included not only the numerous Saucer, Kobus, Southern, Anise, and Star magnolias on campus but their sisters in the subfamily, the tulip trees, as well.

For the Ohioan, no better proof existed of the spirit of love tickling the subtle impulses responsible for material creation than an exuberantly flowering saucer magnolia. When blooming, these slender, fifteen-to-twenty-foot trees displayed such a profusion of flowers that they reminded Skylar of a painter's-model nymph of sixteen, so graced with charms that she seems overloaded with them, almost too fragile and immature to carry her load of blessings.

Blooms burst forth all over these trees, covering every bare branch space. They were six-petaled and goblet shaped and exhibited a graded wash of color along their outside surfaces ranging from light-orchid-purple at the base to deep rose, flamingo, mallow, and finally pinkish-white at the tips. Tulip-like when they first opened, the flowers soon became cups of such rarefied beauty that one imagined a tiny crowned fairy prince would appear at any moment to spread his anther-sized hands palms up and cock his head as if to ask, "What more could you wish for?"

The insides of the petals had the color of barely blushing eggshells. As the waxy, obovate tepals fell to the ground they mixed with the grass to form magic carpets of deeper and lighter color and appealing design. A sweet, pungent, spicy scent with an undertone of citrus perfumed the trees, so that being in their vicinity raptured one's olfactory as well as one's visual sense.