Outside the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan, nestled on a canal flowing from Lake St. Clair, sits a tiny cottage. So far removed is it from the bustle of that industrial city, so hidden by a maze of streets and lanes, that it is like many other retreats where muddy waters lick the edges of front yards. In such places the early morning has a fresh, damp chill that penetrates to the senses of feeling, smell, and taste. The steel grey waters roll slightly after each early fishing boat has moved languidly by. The far horizon is clear; the massive freighters have not yet left their berths to mar the flawless meeting of platinum water and sky. The dew sparkles on the green grass and white cottage, suggesting to the early sun that more colors ought to be brought into the world.

Too soon this dawnlike freshness is lost. The sun climbs. Its wavy light shows the canal waters like a mixture of coffee and milk, spotted with the silver bodies of fish that are no longer beautiful. The climbing sun laughingly evaporates the gullible dew, bleaching the grass the color of wax beans, making the house look like a tray covered with chalk dust. The sun works its mischief on the moisture from the dew and the murky waters, changing them into an oppressive haze that hangs heavily over the land, frying each person in his own little yellowish bubble of water. The lake laughs at the sun, though; its water turns a green-turquoise that suggests seahorses and flashing sunfish. The sky turns the rich blue of the poets, broken only by a rare cloud that is like a puff of white cotton candy. Dim, black silhouettes, infinitesimal parts of the whole ships, mark the thin line that separates the earthly from the heavenly.

But as the sun starts to lose its battle with the dark, the sky is streaked with pink and the waters with grey, like a badly blended water color. The freighter shapes turn smoke blue for a minute, then a dull steel, blending with the lake. As white lights first begin to pop on along the shore, the muddy waves become topped with foam like dirty lace. The first boats return to their night berths, further contaminating the water with their slicks of oil. As later boats slide into the canal, a darkness creeps up on this world, which forces the boats to display their red, green, and white lights and disguises the brown waters until the moon and stars flick their lights on twice, once in the sky and once in the wet mirror below. Across the water, the moon describes a pathway of golden light that leads to heaven. A sparkling coolness drifts over
the land as the waves gently lap the pilings at the sides of the canal. The stillness is broken only by the slapping waters and an occasional low murmur of a boat engine. The cottage sits quietly back as if watching for the sun and dew to bring it out of darkness, making it sparkle once again.