As juggler and tumbler I might have been counted among acrobats, but as a bullman not even among joeys. I was barely above ponypunks and dogboys in the circus dungeon, while Eileen hovered among clouds drifting past turrets and towers. Each of us did flips and tumbles, but mine were on the broad back of Hero, the blackest elephant in the world, and hers on the thundering rump of her Andalusian, Andromache, the difference between performing in the middle of a plain and the middle of an earthquake—and differences there were more and plenty. For starters, she was a celebrity, flashed on the posters, tycoons gave her diamonds, beer barons gave parties in her honor. I couldn’t compete.

As luck would have it I didn’t have to compete. She knew better what to do with coals smoldering in the basement than I did. She invited me into her trailer one lazy Sunday afternoon in Wilmington, Delaware (we played different towns every day of the week, resting on Sundays). I lacked grace, I lacked gravity, I lacked authority; I lacked emeralds and other glittering flowers; I lacked the means to make them available; but though my face was as smooth as a girl’s my appetite was more rapacious than that of the most heavily bearded man, my stamina that of a stallion. I marveled at my fortune, the girth of her thighs, each thick as a hydrant. I appeared and disappeared at her pleasure, asked no questions, and said little, not because I had little to say but because I didn’t want to reveal how little I knew about the world, how littlesuited we might be for each other.