

A lotus garden.

It was filled with sunshine, the honeyed and languid sunshine of summer afternoons, and the air was still. Lotus petals floated in a reflection pool, beneath an enormous and ancient statue of a man—a sun.

But the longer she stood there, listening to the ripple of the pool and the glorious silence of the garden, she realized the pool did not consist of water but black blood.

She stepped back and the garden was no longer silent but a cacophony of indistinguishable shouting, clashes of swords and deafening explosions of gunpowder. She had to run, she had to leave, she had to find the monopteros with the statue of Apollo—

But the lotus garden was a maze, endless and echoing with the bloodshed of a thousand years, and as her search became more frantic her breaths came shorter and shorter, her lungs fit to burst with lotus petals.

*Where was it? Where was it?* If she could find the moonlit and verdant forest of living trees she'd seen before even that would be better than this—

There was nothing. It was a circle. She was following the worn path that continued back to where she'd been before. *Stop it stop it stop it—*

With herculean effort, she lifted her ankle boot from the path.