The coffee pot stopped perking. She lit a cigarette. Already she could see shapes out the window. A little shape that was the corncrib, the big hulking barn. The silence fell like snow, thickly. It was cold. Yesterday she had almost heard it, the small trickle of water inside the secretly rotting heaps of snow. The trickle that would get louder and louder until April when the snow would lie in clots on the swollen muddy ground. Water running in the ditches, water dripping from the eves. Soon. She poured coffee into her thick white mug. No, the snow was not the same, it was losing its power.

And too yesterday the bees had come out. She had checked just to see when she went back to look for the rhododendrons. Through layers of wood she heard their drone. The one bee had drifted out into the pale sunlight and made a vague circle around her head. Cleaning out the hive she thought. She waited to see it safely back in the hole.

The rhododendron was gone -- a stick in the snow. They always ate her special things, the deer. They had found the spearmint she had hidden under layers of old bark. She imagined their black noses rooting in the snow. They had scratched their backs on the few white pines until the bark peeled away leaving white raw wood exposed. They never touched the scotch or jack pines bristling with healthy green fur like well fed tamed animals. Only the rarer things. Their tracks followed her paths, the cloven hoof prints always ahead of her feet. Sometimes there was a large oval space where one had hollowed out a shallow snow cave with its body resting, feet tucked under. Les had found a fawn once in a bed of tall grass when he was mowing in the summer. It hadn't moved but watched him with dark quiet eyes. "They can't leave," he told her. "They have to wait for the doe wherever she leaves them."

Someone had told her he saw one -- one of the people that came to buy her trees at Christmas. People who moved in her woods as though they were stepping around furniture in a living room.

Next year, she thought, I won't let anyone cut their own anymore. I'll just stack them in the barn.

She bit at her thumb now, thinking of trees that must be planted, others that must be trimmed and dewormed in the summer. She glanced at the stack of seed catalogues on the shelf next to the cookbooks and the arrow-head and the jar of pussy willow.

She had cut the pussy willow yesterday. The first buds were open, their grey fur like wet new born mice, down by the salt lick. While she cut the branches with her knife, she felt the eyes. She always felt them by the salt lick. She wondered how she must look to them, an awkward shape in red -- no, they couldn't see colors. One evening after dark she heard snorts on the path behind her. They had stopped when she got to the lane. Even then she had hurried, coming out of breath into the lit house. Les had laughed and said her eyes were big as eggs. But when she was a little girl, there had been a red haired uncle who told a story about being attacked by a deer. He shot it in the end, to save himself. The badger slashed through her mind again.

Usually she liked feeling their eyes on her, unseen watchers. Yesterday she had walked on the North side. She hadn't been there in years; not since she was first alone, and couldn't stand to be in the house. Then every night around ten she had walked there to hear the trees creak in the wind. It was dangerous to go there when the wind was strong. The elms dropped branches casually like fingernail cuttings. And the peat looked solid but there were black places in the ice. Whole trees fell over, their roots clutching chunks of reddish peat with white shell shapes in it. She read it took three hundred years to make a foot of muck. She went as close as she dared around the black holes to look at the ancient musk on the bottoms of the trees. In two months it would be all swamp, buzzing