

HARBINGER 1992



Stephens' Magazine of the Creative Arts

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Title Page and Cover Art
"Return to Sender"

Terrie M. Cooney

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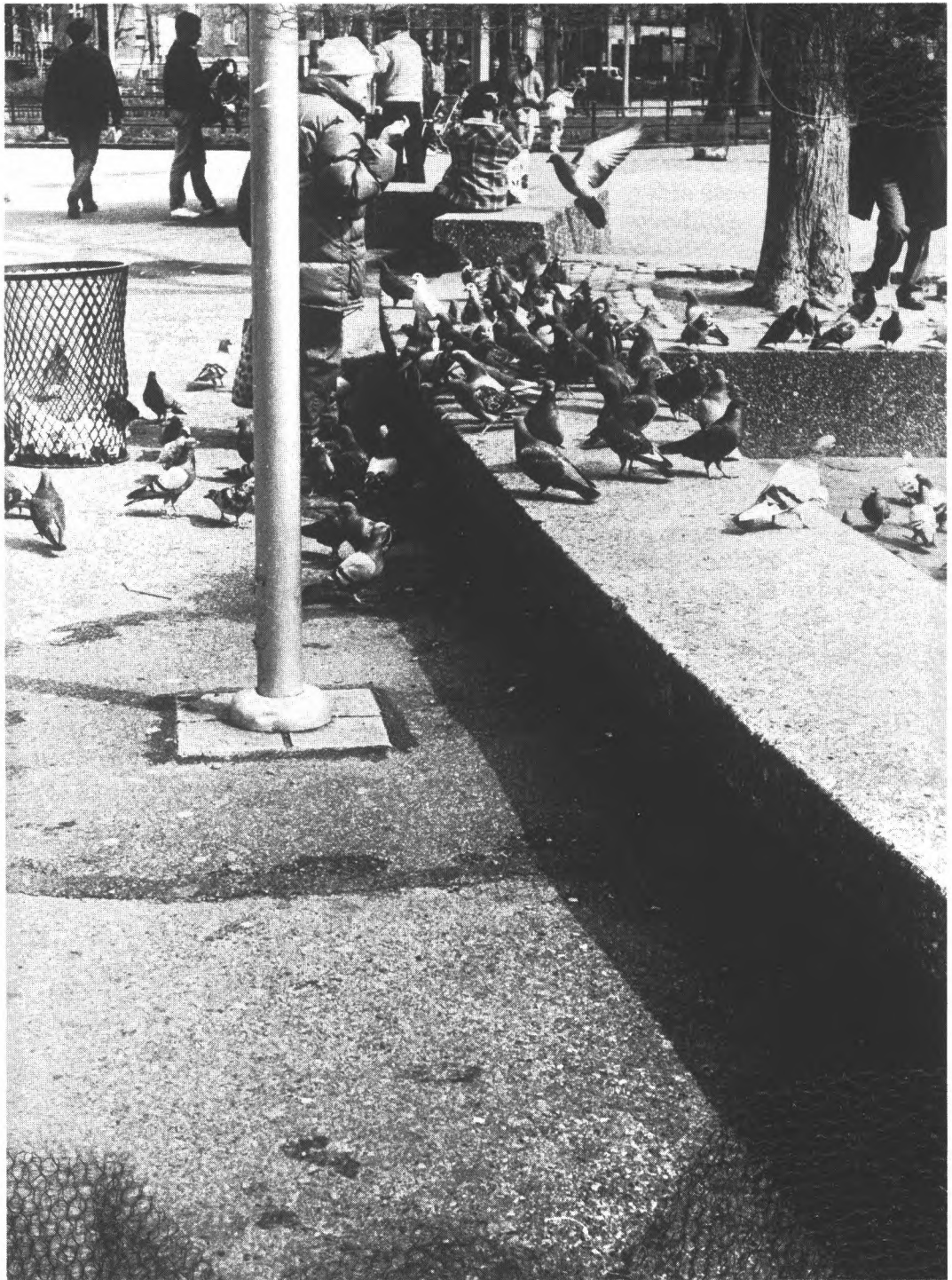
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Saratje Naef

Like a flash flood, a warm summer night
Breeze entered my house. I departed with
It as it flowed out my back door.

The moon burned like a thousand lightening
Bugs. The breeze of the night danced and
Caressed the trees.

I dropped to the ground. My arms stretched
Like a snake sun-bathing. Wild green grass
Absorbed my body. I felt the Earth around
My body, water slowly rising.

The sparkling Milky Way stared down at me.
Suddenly, one lone star, held in the
Blackness, began to fight. Fighting brighter
and brighter, it escaped, flying straight
Into my open arms. The closer it came, the
Faster it came, the more I struggled.
Plant's roots twisted around my wrist and
Ankles, holding tighter and tighter.

Embedded to the ground, I was part of the
Earth. Knowing I was going to be destroyed,
I closed my leafy eye lids and roared like
A timbering tree.

Drunkenly
your waves slosh
salty broth upon the shore
as if you tripped
over some broken pink shell
that forced you to stain
the sandy white carpet

Blue blood
in perpetual metamorphosis
a tangy liquid snake twisting through valleys
curling around volcanoes and mountains
blooming into a huge kaleidoscopic flower
finally diving into a grainy lop-sided glass
to be sold and served on some tropical island

After the storm
you toss and turn trying to sleep
drawing in sanddollars, jellyfish and starfish
to the slow sure rhythm of your heart
but they swim from your arms
and you repent and recede in sorrow
giving the shore back
as if it were a toy sail-boat
that you're too mature for

Upon your molded surface
dolphins skate and stumble
before they are swallowed up
in your dark wet embrace

Gathering at my ankles
you slap my eyes with salt water
blindly
I wish to walk barefooted
across your sculpted body
see your soapy locks uncurl
and gaze upon the majesty
of the other side of your face.

Midnight Rambling ————— Sandy Schaeffer

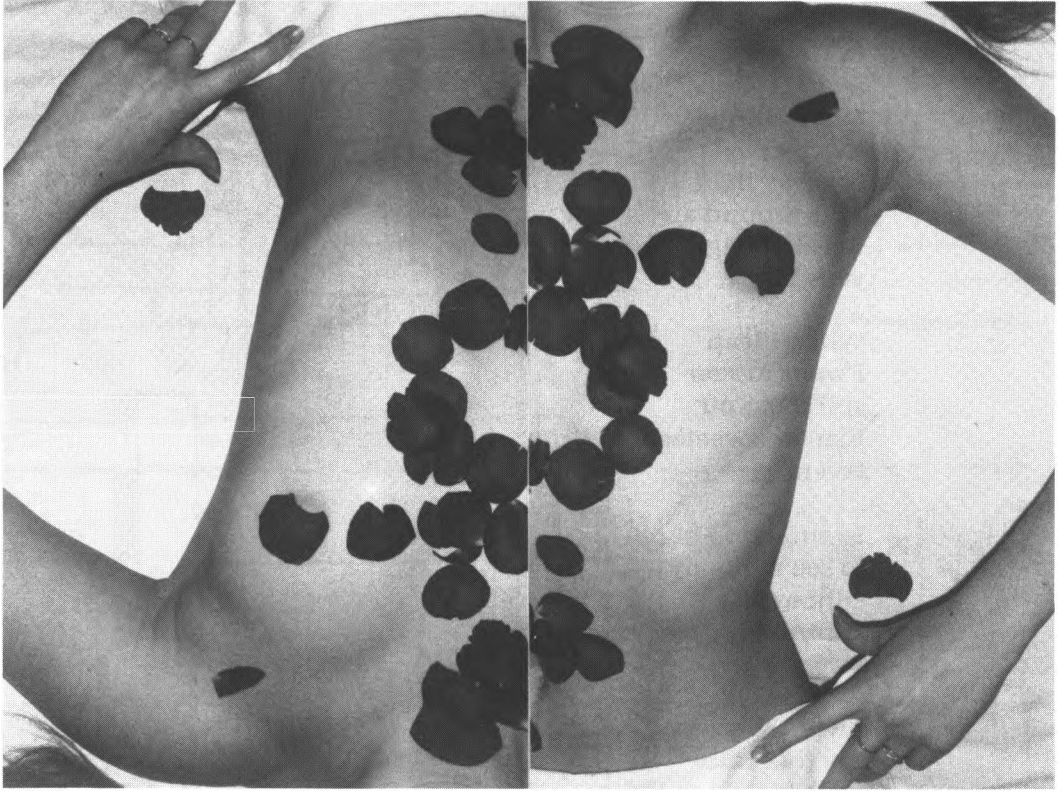
The ceiling fan spins
webs of hallucination
in its fine dead arms
like a nightmare settling
in the vanity mirror
radio stations stumble
into static sounding
vaguely like conga drums

A huge black iris
huddles around my bed
as the wind chimes
wrap fear in.

The streetlights nip
at the curtains
with their
scorching fire
before the chords
are severed and the
night's lips open wide

A stiff and numb mummy
I see only the inside
of my head
the leaves lull and totter
in the column of my neck
then jump to plaster
my brain like a leech
making my blood talk

In this stiff blood-soaked cocoon
the wildest thoughts and notions rise
the midnight rambling thins the black
the chilling charcoal train blows
gusts of soot on my face
as it scrambles with my heartbeat
tracking across my mind
toward smoke and burning lights
as the flakes and ashes
settle to cool



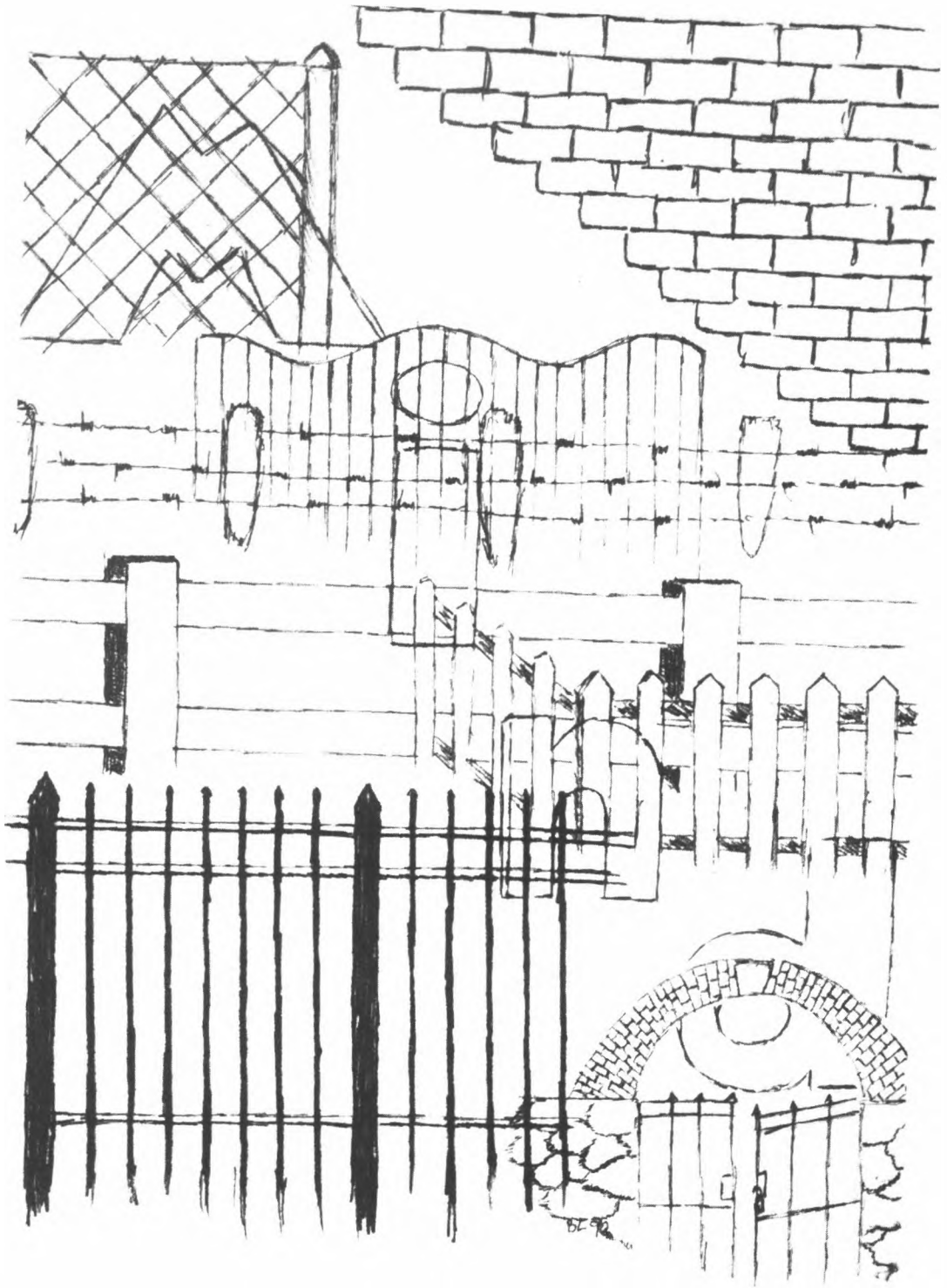
Terrie M. Cooney

Our dance is inert
yet I want to move
I want my legs
to stretch away
from my hips
and twirl twist
together
the way light
rolls around air
tightly stinging
your heart

When I leap
I want to soar
spiral to you
like the sweetest
lavender

I want you
to see my body
silhouetted
behind crushed
lace

I want to press
my toes into
your back
rip sheets of
satin with
my knees
somewhere in
the attic of
your memory



Beth Link

“I have never been free of
the fear of rape.” -Susan Griffin

Floats downstream
the current catches
and sweeps along
the body alabaster pale
as the inside of a clamshell
where pearls never grew;
colourless as the images thrown
from black and white television
into dark, stagnant rooms.
Bruises spot the leopard
that could not run quick enough,
blood black, royal purple.
Her dress in shreds
clings in desperation
to humid shape,
camouflaged by a
mud and filth disguise
shaken free from
the sides of the river
to clothe this stranger.
Stiff as his assaulting erection
rigor mortis sets in
when life washes away.
Transparent eyes stare placid
revealing the last plea
clear as jellyfish
Why didn't you save me?

The Politics of Body ————— Holly Kelso

—for A.H.

Something in the sky that day
moved the stars, rearranged
the air and the water,
a forecast for a saviour
who would rise like the sun
and fall like the moon
on the shore of the witness stand. Fine

breeding became a habit,
raised on a diet of eloquent words
and prestigious schools
you ascended like an angel
to the kingdom of the “Black Elite,”
rubbed elbows with oppression
disguised in 3-piece suits, no
hint of dialect in their hypocritical speech,
souls sold down the river
to be a part
of the white man’s game.

But once you arrived, glorified
it was too late to think about
what you had been denied
by their God.
That y-chromosome lost somewhere
in the ocean of your conception
stole the weapon to defend yourself
in the war of power politics.
Testosterone, penis,
and the genetic rebirth
of male supremacy
made you unfit to play their game.
And your breasts and speech
and the power he saw
between your legs
shaped you into the victim,
coloured you with his fear
that you would rise like Salome
cut off his John the Baptist,
all for your prurient delight.
Instead, he took the knife,

whittled away your pride,
and with the supportive cries
of his gang of brothers who fear you more
he raped your intelligence,
carved out the sex of your mind,
a psychological clitorodectomy.
And you were left defenseless,
helpless as your sisters who wake
in poisoned alleys,
steam rising from
uncovered manholes,
with semen from their attacker
hardening on their thighs.



Carmen Anderson

They moved about
the same room
over and over
as circles
refusing closure.

He speaks in French
the language of his movement;
she replies in Spanish
the sounds of her change.
The music of their voices rises
and is carried as harmony
on the wind.
Yet they do not understand
the other's words.

He curls under the blankets
as a victim in the snow
burying himself in ice
believing the legend
that this will keep him warm.
She throws open the windows,
flushes out the old
and forgotten,
needing air to cleanse
and to change
so she may live,
moving forward,
quicker than his crawl
into their past.

He takes in every food, bottomless
as if it would disappear
without his touch.
She will not eat
for days, wets
her teeth with the tip of her tongue,
says hunger is good
for the soul.

They circle the room.
He is breathless.
She is tired.
His eyes are wet now;
she cries, her body trembles now.
The windows are still open
and the wind is good,
they say, the breezes will blow
them together.
And the night's white light
enters fatally as knives.
The light makes
his body glow, she says.
The light is good, he says,
he wants to be warm.

The Promised Land—A Fiction ————— Holly Kelso

“If a man hasn’t discovered something
he will die for, he isn’t fit to live.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

I have a dream,
you said, ahead of your time
vision was your addiction.
And at night you twisted,
crawled into a cave where
vicariously you relived
your peoples’ past. Did
you imagine skin like your own
caramel smoothe branded,
singed as cattle and shiny leather
as their expensive purses
could have been sewn of your skin,
peeled away from your forgotten bones.
Or did you imagine the plight of your sister,

smell the sex blowing like wind
between your legs
to reach and tantalize the white man
who crawled onto you, encompassing
each imprisoned cell quivering.
And he owned you
nightly he ground you into soil
and planted his seed deep,
cultivated your womb
until you birthed a garden into slavery;
and given only the thorns
to prick and bleed, the
petals blew away, carried
on the wind of your dream
for equality.

And when you awoke
did your soul escape the confinement
of your colour,
outrun the race, the war
you were born to lead and fight
and win? Did you hear her cries
melodious as their spirituals,
songs of a savior who would

carry them away from
the promised land?

Your death was universal;
the shot heard around the world
killed the civil rights
that never arrived on the seats
of Montgomery buses,
never grew in the minds
of segregated children,
never grew strong enough to overcome,
drench the oppressive flames
of a white culture.
The fire is out now
but the smoke has settled,
permeates race and class
and smothers, strangles
the burgeoning desire for change—
the new minority.

You had a dream,
today you dream a nightmare
looking down on a country
imprisoning itself behind bars
of unacceptance. The tailspin now
chases us into war within our borders,
a rabid dog pursuing its own tail.
Smoke from your fire blinds us
as we wage war across the world
and close our eyes to the battle
we are not yet ready to wage
in our own minds,
our very own archaic thought.
And the promised land
of purple majesty and justice for all
sinks like Atlantis.
The history books are rewritten
in the language of this mythical
paradise. And we wake, Dr. King,
with your dream sweet on our lips
resounding
all men are not created equal.



Jenny Stout



Evelyn Bryant

Autumn night
rain fall
fall down cold
hitting broadside leaves red and gold
dropping to the ground.
Air smells like a burning candle
a flame through the rain.
I am so far from home
it is slipping from my sight
hitting broadside memories red and gold
dropping away.
Where do they go?
Lie on the sidewalk,
edges curled up,
to be peeled off by some child's hand
and born again.

Here it is
the way I feel about you
it makes me laugh.
This shirt I'm wearing still smells like your brown body.
Your presence makes me remember
everything about the summer.
Your eyes are the so pale it is clear river at the edges
and the so deep it is blue in the center
where your black like starless night pupils
grow wider in the dim light.
You are that sunset we saw
very alone and I can't, but want to
touch you
like those moths that land on the screen while the light is on.
And I have to say it is you,
that being with you makes my feet feel like they
are bare in wet grass.
Your breath and words are waking up on the cold hard
ground in the mountains without being stiff.
Everyone should see or touch something like you
so that all the time they are inside buildings and themselves
they are at least reminded if even they forget,
that God has made a sun.



Jennifer Pomerantz

Butch Womon --- Lyndell Moore

There was a time I didn't want to be a woman:

I wanted to have the nakedness of a man so that I may have
bared my chest to the summer evening sun as I gardened;
I wanted nudity so that I may sweat.

There was a time I didn't want to be a woman:

I wanted to have the muscle of a man so that I may have
moved grain, moved pipe, moved the confidence of my father.
I wanted muscle so that I may work.

There was a time I didn't want to be a woman:

I wanted to have the bangs of a man so that I have endured the shame of being
queer by flipping them out of my eyes; I wanted hair so that I may have
attitude.

There was a time I didn't want to be a woman:

I wanted to have the penis of a man so that I may have
looked into the eyes of my lover as she moved under me;
I wanted a penis so that I may love.

There was a time I didn't want to be a woman:

I wanted to have a cock of a man so that I may have
pulled out, walked away, left money in the porch mailbox;
I wanted a cock so that I may leave.

Our Love is Like a Hospital Visit ——— Lyndell Moore

I lie in a green room—
pimple green, with cold cement-block walls.
The futon is bunched under the
small of my back and the
sheets are twined around my right leg.

Suddenly it comes....

I do not like the sound—
I do not like the rush;
I do not like the sting or the
Abruptness of change that comes.
I do not like the hurt.

I lie in a green room—
snake-skinned, with cold cement floors.
Books scatter over
pieces of clothes;
tears squirm around my right eye.

Suddenly it ends—

The Liberating Effects of Masturbation — Lyndell Moore or, Duty

My fingers curl around a curve on me,
a curve which there are too many;
my fingertips seek the difference of texture on my breast.
I feel the hairs of my navel
which I shaved in junior high;
I look at their stark clackness lost on the sea of my abdomen.
I stroke the nodes of my breasts,
a node that is too large,
and my nails pinch the skin that is tender (where my chest begins.)
I wind my nipple like a watch,
an old, pendulous, ornamented clock;
I laugh because my nipples look like pine cones.

It is difficult to touch these breasts,
to be satisfied with them,
to orgasm in a silent bed sweaty with the labor of physical release
when I see a pimple on my tit.
It is difficult to touch this abdomen,
to be satisfied with it,
to orgasm in a silent bed tousled with exploration
when I see stretch marks on my belly.
It is difficult to touch this body,
to be satisfied with it,
to orgasm in a silent bed quivering with satisfaction
when I see the placated light in my eyes.

My fingers curl around a curve on me,
a curve of which there are too many,
and my fingertips seek the difference of texture on my lips.
I feel the hairs of my cheek,
which I waxed in junior high,
and I look at their stark blackness on the sea of my face.
I stroke the nodes of my breasts
and wind my nipples like a watch and
fuck myself because I have to

Not because of love.

Wishing Well: Stages of Falling ————— Lyndell Moore

“Will you give me a wish if I tell you what I want?
Will the price be no object?”
Bob Mould

Fewer than I thought, like
the breath before a majestic chord,
the waver before an insistent march,
the inhale of an itchy nose
before the tingle of manufactured fog.

I want it to be like falling:
Like the breath stopped in your throat
like swallowing a piece of bread-

I want it to be like hysteria:
Like your brain stepped on by a wind-up dinosaur
like a white-grey waffle iron unable to heat—

I want it to be like bathing:
Like the bumps on your skin
like miniature golf balls unable to fall out of flight—

It is like tea
as if it were tepid bathwater
as if it were buttered toast
staling as I watch.

It is like Shakespeare
as if he were Lear
as if he were Ophelia
Maddening and deafening.

he moves his head so she moves her head so I move my head so we move
our heads so he stands so she stands so I stand so we stand so he shouts so
you shout so she shouts so I shout so he sings so she sings so I sing so we
sing and sing and sing and sing....

Shyness,
Kindness,
Innocence.
All of me
when you took
a look
at the dark side.
There is no way back
from the track
you have taken.
Don't look for all of me
because I am not here.
Shy yet playful,
kind yet demanding,
innocent yet mature.
All of me has sprung
into glorious womanhood
with one foot in tomorrow
and the other in today.
All of me
must move to explore
successes and failures
and celebrate each experience.
Your spirit will live within me.
But I am no longer the same person.
The darkness has strengthened me
yet abducted you.
All of me will be forever changed,
but never weakened.
When the failures seem to prevail,
reflection into all of me is welcomed
and family and friends are constant
and supportive.
My heart aches
that you could not see
the love and joys of living.
Oh, how I am much wiser!
All of me
misses you.



Amy Farha

The word makes me think of garbage
and worms
deep, blood red-brown, long and
squirming
through my Grandpa's coffin
decompose
inside I scream to know he's cold
in dirt
how else to say he's dead?
and his spirit rose to Heaven the second he died
but my Grandpa is still
in the ground
After prodding the cows for sale
on the ground he lay in peace
his fist still clenching his chase stick
he laid with as much stillness as a broken watch
Grandma ran
my mother sped
we all cried
Grandpa died
After that cold morning my Grandpa never breathed again
never laughed again
but he smiled in his coffin
I have a rose from the coffin
I knelt in the dirt of his grave to take it
it still smells like a rose
but the worms don't care
how sweet my mother's dad was
they will just bore through
his coffin and flesh
to live in the hollows of his bones
to live— my loved Grandpa
they break him down.

Slowly they drown—
his resonant voice
could be more powerful
but he chooses to lull
lines of notes
melt the snow and ice
— in a river of molten passion

He stands in her
together a silhouette
streetlight forms a shadow
a window pane shadow
on the wall
two naked lovers stand

His eyes like
chocolates enameled
eat her emerald and
glassy gaze
that traces spidery
slowly sweeping over the
fruit-like hairs around
his ear

With forceful desire and
strength of soft palms
he pulls her head
back and away from his
chest and sweeps the hair
off her face and pulls her
near to meet her smile
and plunges into wetness
absorbed and innocent

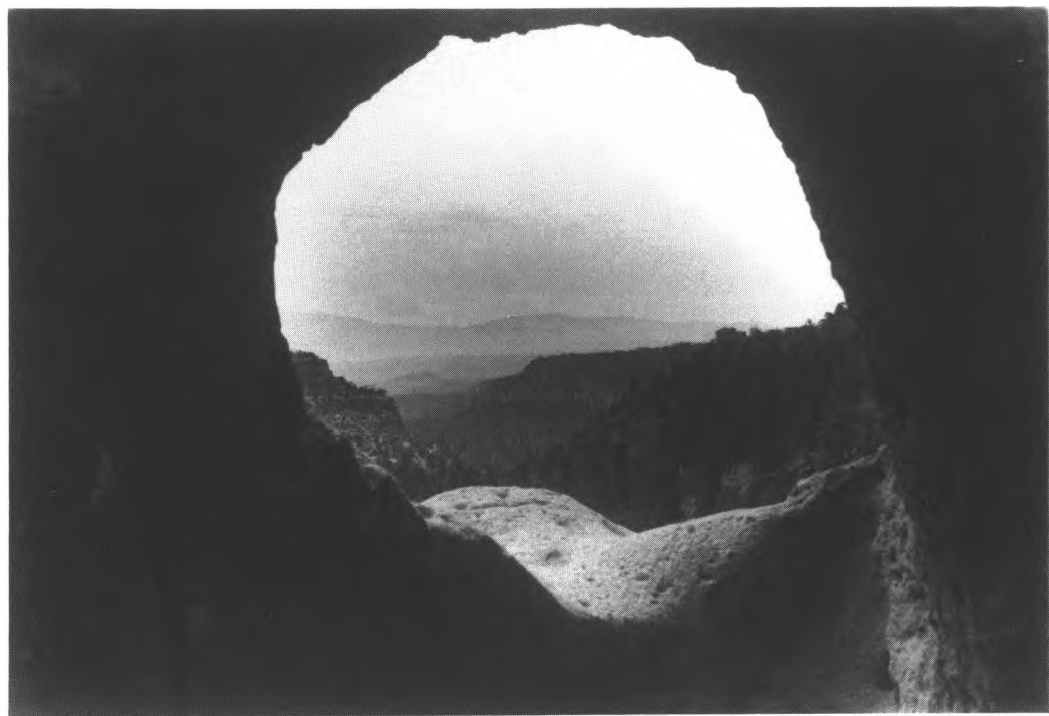
In history—
consumption had the weak
like these two lovers
are chained neck to neck
Their breasts are to
the stars to receive
the fire that kindles
their bound passion

From the deep
they slowly emerge
from soft blankets
peach and sage
— from an entangled
sprawling sleep.

Hate's hand crumbles
in the lines of my palm
like a cold leaf— brittle and frail.
Whitish streamers
leaves from tiny holes
from her face—dark holes and stale.
Later the decorations
fall I smell the waste
and feel them—like a strangling muzzle.
I want to
clean it up
A dog's barking— isn't always heard.
It's repetitious
Mother's breath
breathes in the seeds—of my palm.
Growing leaves
spewing and muffled
I saw mom's daughter—sitting pretty.
Learning to inhale
It is better
to zip up—the bag on my shoulder.
Carry it around
Like a dog's barking
than to let it—hang open and be able to.
Spill out
It doesn't do
any good—mom says she's tired of preaching.



Saratje Naef



Laura Sampson

Calloused and strong
Busily fidgeting
I intently watch
So powerful
Yet to touch
So gentle
I want to feel
Them against my face
They would linger
And ever so gently caress
My muscles relax
My spine softens
A warmth builds
Inside of me
But it is frozen as
I realize that
The touch is
A faint dream
A past moment
A lingering memory
Of a time
When I stole
His hand
Just for a moment



Susan Jackson

(You must be patient; we cannot slip back into each other
as though we'd never been apart.)

Try if you can
to change the course of her blood
make it flow backwards.
It will go past her eyes in a spattering stream
transverse arteries
blush her face in lieu of deference
and plane the soul's rough edge.
Tiring, it is.
To be taking up this space.
Back to her heart, trading soft
upon lips which tell no tales.
This is one she'll never spell out for you:
She must remember your pain
in order to forget hers.

- I. I was amazed at all your colors
As I had only one or two myself.
Amazed, yet never jealous. What for?
You deserved the dark red smoke-choke
Of your eyes
Every bit as much
As the clenched blue shiver
Of your back.
Above your cheekbones
Sleeping rains lie;
You were my umbrella.
- II. She gave her picture to you
So you could caress it
Melt it and quietly
Lap it up
Feel the cool of it sliding down into your corners.
Instead,
You swallowed it whole
Without even tasting,
And spilled it all over her.
She loved you too much to duck.
- III. You tripped over your desperation
Into your unconscious;
Awoke, ready to split them apart
Like peach halves.
Not a clean break like that of
Chalk and ivory
But wet and clinging
Like a child to the breast.
Who is clinging to whom?
This virtual reality is the only substitute
For the genuine article
As long as there are bees, peppermint,
And photographs
To fill in the blanks.

If you distrust the view so much
then kindly rise above it;
this paradigm waits for no man.
Not even apostles' breath
can heal a wound that deep.

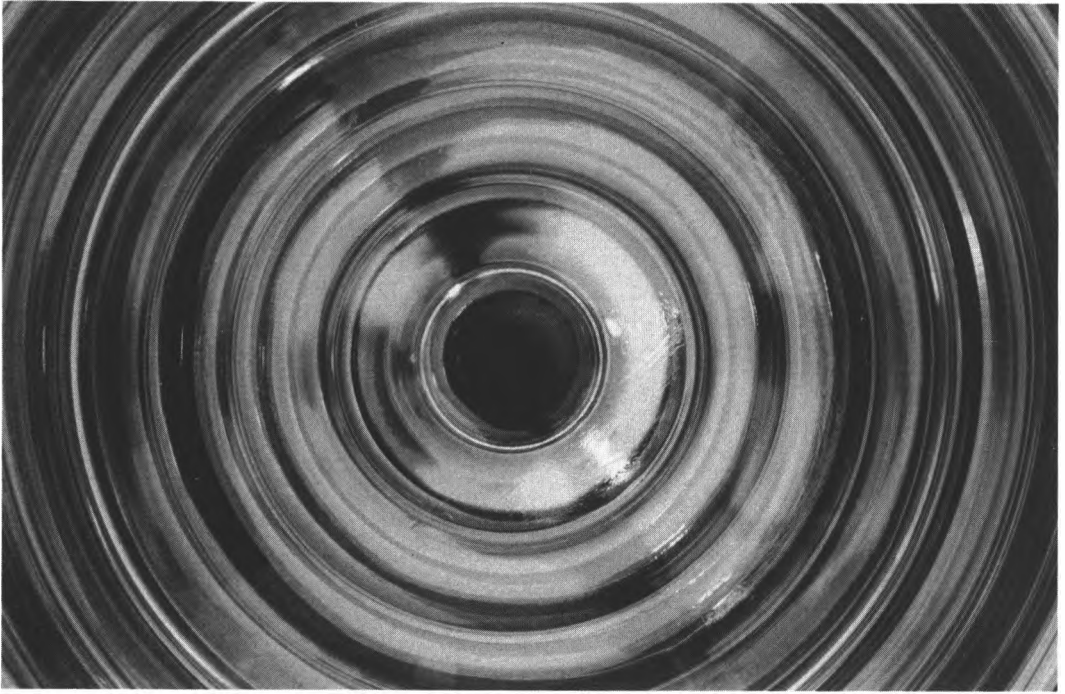
The modern primitives wait in the
breeding reed rush
blow glow of black faced boys
two-toned obviousness knifes the air;
aubergine rave-waves
line up in the streets
to take what punishment is offered.

Can't you scream any louder?
They feed you dust of poppies
that comes all the way from Harlem;
if the mills ground any smaller
I'd bet my life on yours
and to the devil with excess.

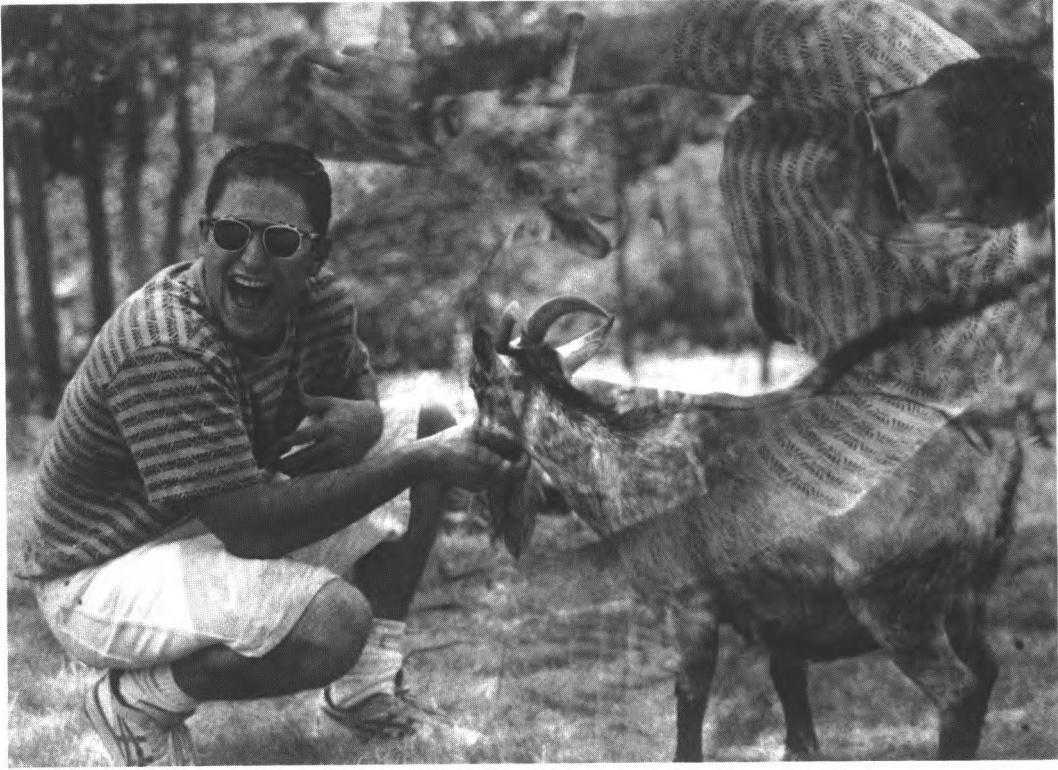
(last verse paraphrased from Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne")

When the old testaments you pledged
fade out of focus; and images
of butterfly effects
turn up again and again
ever still
in the peripheral night
in the afterlife
then you've pierced the flesh of memory
and the time will all run dry.

When the day fades down to umber
and our hair gathers up the embers
I'll toast the air and dodge the trees with you
and you
will bend like they do;
our breath will put out the dark.



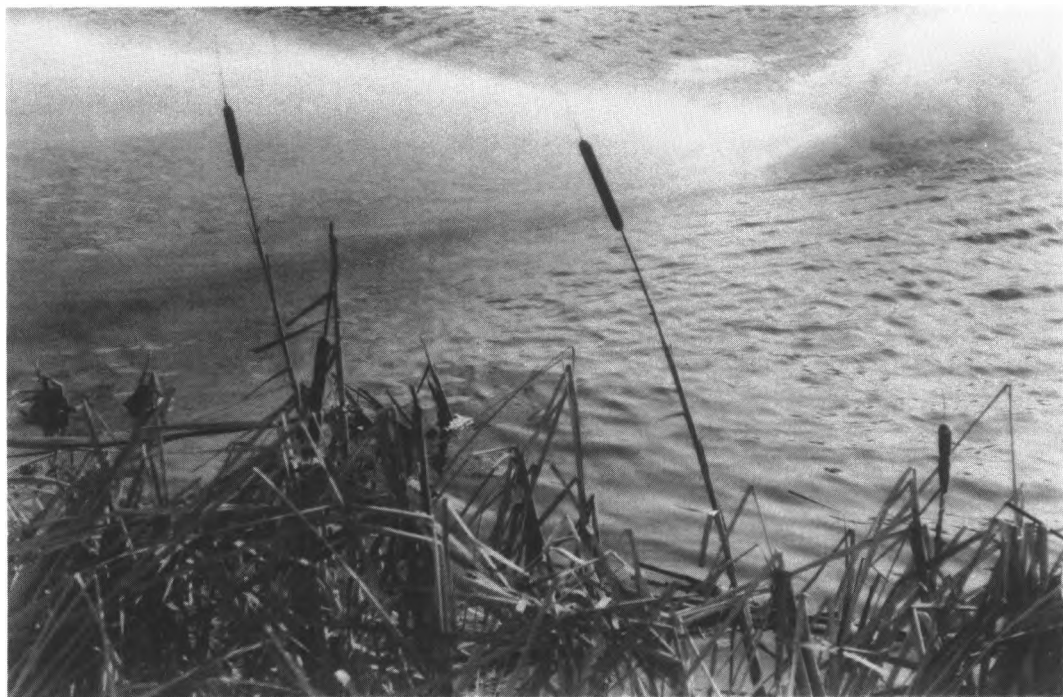
Evelyn Bryant



Amy Farha



Evelyn Bryant



Susan Jackson

The Captain ————— Tamara Anderson

I've done something wrong. What is happening . . . the things that are happening to me. . . I'm confused about something. . . something basic . . . something important. I'm writing it down so that I may get it straight.

I'm in love with one. I am engaged to another. I can't remember how this happened, when it was I made any choices. Sometimes . . . always . . . I don't know who they are, what their names are. . . I can't even tell them apart, and I have to listen as they speak to figure out our relationship, clandestine or formal, fervent or quiet. I've tried to explain this confusion to others. . . they always misunderstand. I can't clear my head; I cannot figure out what is right and true.

Such a jumble of beds and meeting places, and yet I do not make love with either of them. My lover, the man who loves me enough to make me think we must be in love, is more fervent but just as chaste as my fiance, who is decidedly distant. We arrange meetings without my ever registering which one it is I am to meet, and so I must always pause and gauge by his behavior which one it is and what sort of behavior is expected of me.

My lover has another woman. Sometimes when I see them walking I'll think it is my fiance who is with her, but I'm always unsure and pretend not to notice. When they walk past me unashamed, I know all is well. . . I must be dreaming or just confused.

We're staying on a resort island. There are a number of other people here, but not too many. It is a small island and it only has one resort where we all stay. People come and go, but I can't begin to keep track of them. I'm not exactly sure what the sleeping arrangements are supposed to be. I am afraid to ask. I sleep someplace different every night. I guess someone worked it all out ahead of time. No one else ever comments on it or asks any questions, so I do not.

At first I thought I'd write everything down so I could find the pattern, the reason. . . but I can't keep a thought in my head long enough to set it down properly. Perhaps there is nothing really to worry about. It's worked out all right so far.

My fiance and I never kiss or make love. We sleep in the same place together and are almost more surreptitious than my lover and I. That is how I tell them apart. If he kisses me when we meet, then he is my lover. I don't question him about his girl, though I long to. I'm not jealous, just curious. I want to know who knows what, but finding out is impossible. Sometimes they volunteer things, but then I forget who said it or if they said it to me, or if it was a dream.

I'm not sure what my name is because they don't call me by name. I'm almost always with just one other person. Sometimes I think knowing names can't be very important if I manage to function anyway, but then I'm certain it must be.

I'm never alone. If I were, I might be able to figure it out. Maybe I don't want to know. All this confusion has started to surround everyone with a haze of evil. I cannot trust them. How can they continue to function in this confusion, unless they are deliberately keeping something from me.

Today they were all sitting outside in low garden furniture, staring out across the lake. As I came through the sliding glass doors, the elderly gentleman asked me to turn on the porchlight.

A woman spoke up, "But Captain, it'll attract bugs and black out the stars. Do leave it off. . ."

The Captain. . . (I can remember this name! He looks like an old whaler. Long white whiskers, haggard face, soft watery eyes. . . Elegant clothes for a man who worked his youth away to afford them.) The Captain said "Come sit by me." He said a name, but I couldn't catch it. He said this without taking his eyes off the lake. After a long silence, he turned and looked around the group, and then he looked at me, questioningly. Not being sure if he meant me or if he was perhaps looking at me to see if I knew why the person he meant was not responding, I hesitantly said, "I'll sit by you, Captain." Everyone looked at me quickly, then turned away. He looked pained. Coming over to me, he took my hand and patted it. He thanked me and said I didn't have to humor him. I got the idea I shouldn't have called him Captain. I tried to relax a little and looked across the lake.

A few minutes past. A large group of vacationers were coming up from the lake. They had either been boating or swimming, perhaps both. My lover and the other woman and my fiance were among them. The other woman was the only one speaking. She was teasing my lover. "Arthur? Arthur Rimbaud?" She tousled his hair, grabbed him around the waist from behind. Suddenly he turned and grabbed her, "Don't call me that." That's who you think you are, ARTHUR!" He lifted her onto his shoulder; she screamed, delighted. Someone had left the sliding door open, and he took her inside. Everyone outside remained quiet while they wrestled on the couch.

The Captain took my hand again, patted it. "You shouldn't let him treat you like that." I looked at him, waiting for him to say more. My fiance set himself at a distance from the group, speaking to an elderly woman. He looked up at me and smiled. I smiled, and he turned back to the woman, occasionally glancing at me. The Captain patted my hand. I turned and looked at the old man. He smiled and looked away, still stroking my hand. I leaned back in the chair, contemplating the lake, tuning out conversations around me. I drifted off to sleep.

I got up and went into the bathroom to take a bath. One of them was already there. I smiled, and turned to go, but he held out his hand, laughing at me with his eyes. We kissed long and hard, and I relaxed. This was my lover.

We walked into the sitting room off the back porch. A lot of people were outside, but my fiance and his other were not. The Captain looked up from his newspaper, "They left half an hour ago. They couldn't find the two of you anywhere." My lover thanked him, squeezed my hand and gave me a peck on the cheek, then went back upstairs. No one looked at me. I just stood there for a while. Finally, the Captain harumphed, slapped down his newspaper, glared at the

others, stood up and offered me his arm, saying "I'll take you out." He led me down the long path to the water's edge and helped me into a rowboat. He rowed me around until the only light left was that lighting the path to the house and the lights of the house itself. As we docked and he helped me out, I looked up and saw my fiance and the other woman hand-in-hand walking up the path to the house. The Captain did not say anything. We went back up to the low garden furniture; I sank into my chair and fell asleep.

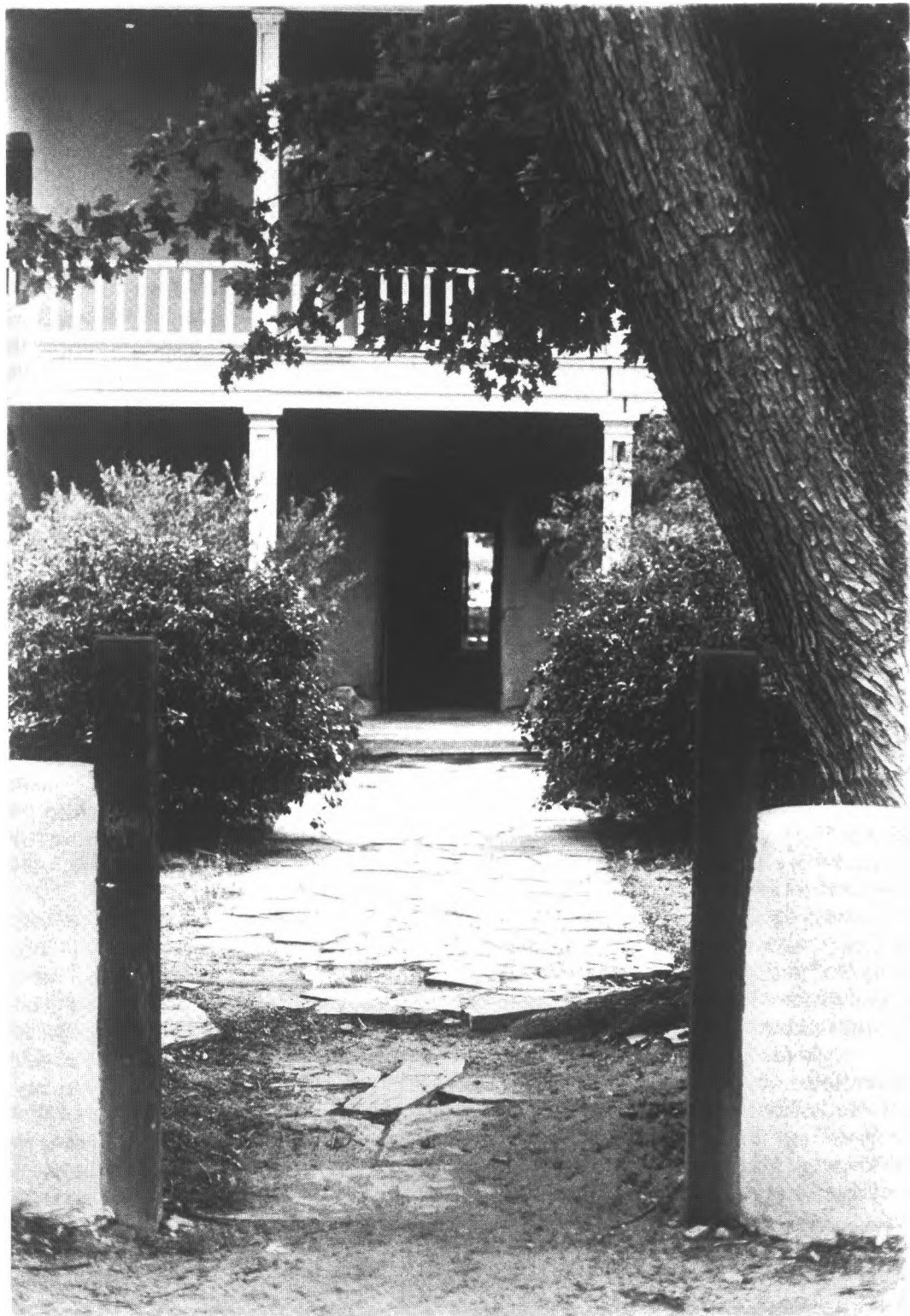
Someone was shaking me, "Wake up. Wake up or you'll be left behind!" The Captain was standing over me carrying a light. I looked out and saw lights hurrying down the path, saw them on the lake. I let him help me up and rush me along the path. When we got to the dock, my fiance beckoned to us from a boat that also carried another man. We rowed off, my fiance carrying the light, barking instructions to the other man, who was rowing. We trailed the other boats at some length.

When we finally reached the other island, the others had already set their lights up in the trees to shine into a clearing. They were all running around, playing some game. The Captain and the other man joined in right away. I started forward, but my fiance grabbed my hand. He pointed across the clearing to a small house at the other end. He kissed my hand fervently, then ran into the fray. I wandered around the edge of the clearing to the house and went inside.

In the front room of the house was a sofa from which the cushions had been removed and thrown around the room. I continued to the back part of the house. I opened a door and saw my lover and the other woman on a bed. I turned to go back to the front room. My fiance was behind me. He gave me a hug, put his arms around my shoulders and led me into the front room saying, "You shouldn't let him to that to you."

We slept on the sofa, and the next morning we rowed back over to the big house. Our rowboat was immediately claimed for luggage for some departing party. When I got back up to the house, the Captain was at the sliding doors, boys with suitcases rushing down the path. My fiance gave my arm to the Captain. The Captain patted it, kissed me gently on the lips and led me slowly down the path.

We are on a train. The Captain is my husband. I have three children, but I do not remember them. They are grown and living on their own. He answers my questions, but he will not volunteer anything. I am old. I do not feel old. I thought I was young. That means that I am crazy. But my husband protects me. He says I'll forget again, that I'll "go away" but he'll wait with me, wait for me to return, I ask him what is happening to me, but all he will say is that I am special and that sometimes I go away.



Laura Sampson

The Farm ————— Camille Steadman

I sit hunched over in the cramped back seat clutching a handkerchief and using it to wipe the occasional lingering tear. As we wind down the rough clay road, my father points out familiar landmarks: the ditch he drove his father's car into when he was sixteen, his favorite childhood hunting spot, and the frame where his grandfather hung the hogs after slaughtering them. I have heard my father recite his guided tour of this country road each time he have driven along it for the last nineteen years, but this time, the familiar schoolboy smirk that would creep across Dad's face as he reminisced is noticeably absent.

As we pass a field of cotton, my father points out that the cotton is much shorter now than it was in the days when he used to get out of school for a month in the fall to pick cotton. He speculates that it must be kept short because of the new machines that growers now use to strip the cotton from the plant.

Next we pass the 200-year-old log cabin that the Steadmans built when they first came to West Tennessee. My father notices that the new owners have torn down the front porch. A little further down the road sits a tiny white house. George and Robbie Lou, the couple who helped take care of the farm, lived here years ago, until George died. I wonder where Robbie Lou is now, and if she is even still alive. Funny, I never before noticed how small her house was, or close it was to the main house. When I was a child the walk to Robbie Lou's for a piece of sweet corn bread seemed to spread for miles.

As we pull into the driveway, I see that the rest of the family has already arrived. From the outside, the house exhibits all of the signs of a family reunion, but in the air somberness weighs heavily. This is a homecoming of sorts; we are bringing my grandmother home to Tennessee.

My aunt greets us as we crawl out of the car; I can tell that she has been crying. My mother suggests that we go inside together so that my father can talk to his sister. We wander inside and say hello, but the sadness in the room is overwhelming, so I slip out the back door to escape. As I step out into the backyard, cool air fills my lungs. I have never been to the farm in autumn; the crispness is a refreshing change from the hot, mosquito infested summers of years past.

I duck under the barbed wire fence and head across the pasture. I can barely see the silhouette of the barn on the horizon before me. As I begin to walk toward it, I almost expect the barn to look as it did ten years ago, when this farm was the home of some of the finest Tennessee walking horses in the state. Mares and foals grazed on acres and acres of lush pasture, and in the barn were the magnificent show horses that my uncle Emmett loved more than anything. I remember Emmett waking me up at three in the morning and carrying me out to the barn to watch his favorite mare give birth to her first foal. But when I slide open the heavy barn door, I am not greeted by the friendly nickers that I remember; horses do not hang their heads over stall doors and curiously glance down the long hallway. The brass bridal hooks that once gleamed are filthy, and cobwebs cover every inch of the walls and ceiling.

A few birds fly down from the loft, stirring up a cloud of dust, and the barn is filled with the stench of molded hay and uncleaned stalls. A glittering beam of light, from where the roof is beginning to collapse, shines down into one of the stalls. I see a halter laying in the manure in the far corner. I pick it up and wipe the dirt off of the brass nameplate. In small script letters it reads "Maid of Cotton." I close my eyes and see "Cotton" standing in her stall, nibbling at a carrot that she has just taken from me. Her lips tickled my palm as she gobbled up the treats I have brought for her, but she is gone now, just like the rest of them.

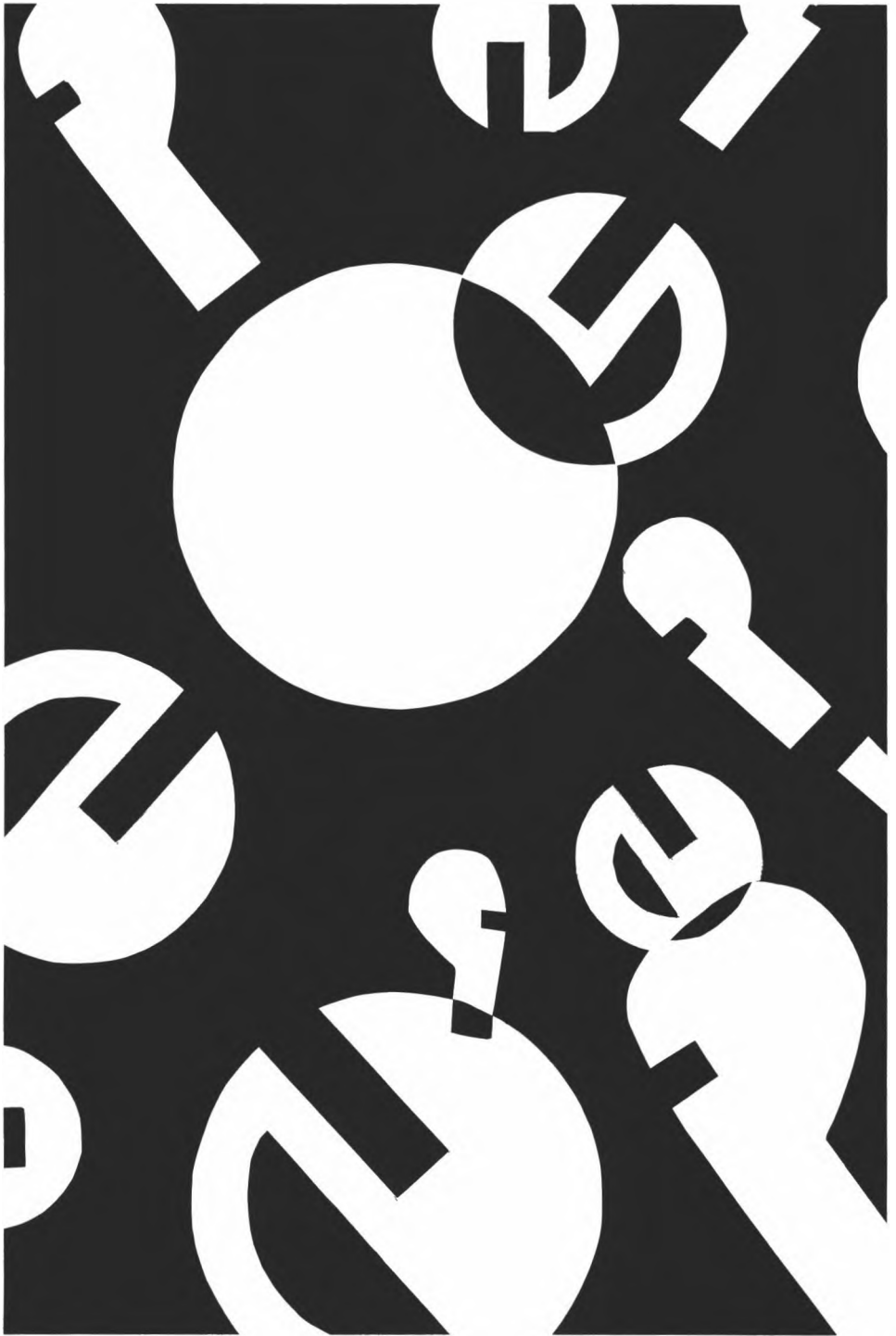
After Emmett died, no one really cared about the barn, and the horses were gradually sold, one by one. Now, as I close the barn door and begin to walk back across the pasture, I envision playful colts bucking and nipping at each other while their mothers prudently watch them. However, all that I really see are a few cows foolishly staring at me as they chew their cud. Cows are no substitute for horses, but no one else seems to notice.

I walk slowly back to the house, disillusioned and depressed by what I have seen today. Although I never actually lived here, the farm has come to represent my lost childhood. Here, in the cool, clear pond, my uncle Cal spent hours patiently teaching me how to fish. We would wade into the water barefooted and let the mud squish between our toes as we reeled our lines in and tossed them out again. Now the pond is no more than a murky mudhole infested with water moccasins and turtles. The woods where my cousins and I wandered for entire afternoons, pretending to be Indians or Civil War soldiers, have all been bulldozed to make room for more crops. As I crawl back through the fence, I notice that even the little tree house that sat atop a big oak tree in the back yard is gone.

I linger in the yard for moment thinking of how sadly different the entire farm is from what I remember, and I realize, for the first time, that I can never go back. The magical farm of my childhood exists only in my memories. When I used to visit the farm, I became my father as a young boy, my grandmother as a bride, my great uncle as a hard working farmer, and any of dozens of other Steadmans who once haunted the farm. I don't know why we call it THE FARM, as if it were the only farm on earth. It had always been the farm, a symbol that had united our family for generations. Now the romance and mystery is gone, and the state of the farm illustrates the collapse of the family.

I walk around the side of the house and see a group of my younger cousins breaking "Indian rocks" open and rubbing the brown dirt on their foreheads and noses, just as I did when I was their age. Then, I walk up the steps and open the side door that leads to the kitchen. As I peer into the smoke-filled room, I catch a glimpse of the past. The adults are all gathered around the table, drinking coffee and telling stories of who has most recently been declared an official Daughter of the Confederacy and what the latest crop prediction is for this year. The room looks just as it did ten years ago, right down to the hunting scene on the far wall, and the

mason jar of toothpicks on the top shelf of the glass cabinet. I remember Uncle Emmett. I see him sitting at the table, spinning the lazy susan around so that he can get a helping of the spicy, tender bar-b-que that Tennesseans have always prided themselves on. He casually glances at the pasture through the kitchen window as he narrates Southern lore and legends to my cousins and me in his husky storytelling voice. My aunt Camille stands over the stove, stirring banana pudding in a big double boiler and laughing at Emmett's stories although she has heard them hundreds of times. Emmett and Camille are gone now. But the memory of those who have passed on lingers above the kitchen, and though the faces are different, the atmosphere and conversation in this room have endured a decade of change, and this one room remains a sole reminder of the glorious past of the farm.



Jolene Hawes

Michelle “Mick” Cooper pressed harder on the tiny Corolla’s gas pedal. She was already going a steady eighty miles per hour, but she wanted—no needed—to go faster. She needed to go as fast as she could, without getting pulled over. Man, would that be the worst. She was lucky there was no traffic, but considering that 3:21 a.m. was hardly rush hour, she wasn’t really expecting any. Yes, it was now 3:21 a.m., and she hadn’t even reached the exit for Route 128 yet.

God, what if she had? What if she had been so concerned about being late, and watching for cops, she had driven right by her exit and was still racing up route 93 toward the New Hampshire state line?

She would look at the next road sign. That would tip her off as to if she had missed her exit that connected with Route 128 north.

The problem was that no road sign ever came.

“What the hell?” she whispered to herself, almost startling herself into an accident with the sound of her own voice. She reached for the radio, and turned down the blaring Madonna.

“Shit!” She was certain she had missed her exit now. Mick could not recall an area on the part of the highway she was familiar with that went on this long without one measly road sign.

She tried to remember the best she could. Maybe there was a stretch that had no road signs. She had driven this route so often, could it be that her brain was so conditioned to pick up her exit when, and only when, it approached? Had she never registered what else was in the surroundings, and what other signs, if any, marked her way?

Mick glanced down at the speedometer. She had slowed to sixty miles per hour. The time was 3:26 a.m. Almost 3:30 a.m., and she was now very unsure what to do; go back to see if she had passed her exit, or keep going and hope she hadn’t.

Mick began to feel foolish. A sign had to be coming soon, and when it did, she would know then. However, a small voice in her head reminded her that it had already been five full minutes since she had seen the last sign. That could not be possible. This was a very suburban, and settled area. She was in the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts, not Omaha, Nebraska.

Panic set in. Her step-father had adamantly stressed the necessity of always being on time! On time was midnight to him. It was not 3:30 a.m., and Mick fretted the beating waiting for her when she finally made it home. Every minute that ticked away, represented an increase in the beating’s intensity. From the usual exit, her home was another twenty minutes. She seemed, quickly to be adding on to that total.

She decided to drive two more minutes down the highway. If nothing clued her in on her exact whereabouts, then she was going back.

A car traveling south bound on the highway drove past her with its high beams glaring. Mick had to squint to keep focused with the road.

“Dick,” she muttered, her frustration-level mounting. Although she realized that it was the first car she had seen in awhile, she barely gave it a second thought.

At first, Mick was feeling nervous about being late, and upset about getting herself lost, but what she felt now was total, complete, and unadulterated terror. She had driven nearly ten minutes without seeing one sign or exit off-ramp, and her chances seemed slim of seeing one soon. What this meant now, she realized, was that it was impossible to turn around even if she wanted to.

This part of route 93 was an eight lane highway going north and south, with four lanes in each direction. Separating the two roads was a three and a half foot cement barrier that provided no place to cross the median to the other side by automobile. Without an exit off-ramp or a split in the cement macadam, her only option was to turn around in the north bound lanes, and drive down the wrong side of the highway.

Mick began to laugh.

“Oh that’s a great idea, just go ahead and get pulled over for cruising down the wrong side of the highway. The wicked step-father would love posting your bail for that,” Mick spoke aloud to herself.

Although there were no cars in sight at all and hadn’t been for nearly fifteen minutes, it was just too risky to drive south in the north bound lanes. Even if she drove at eight miles per hour in the breakdown lane, she would waste valuable time, and probably get arrested for drunk driving or something.

Mick became distracted by the radio. The station she had been listening to, began to lose its signal, and she couldn’t hear anything but the annoying crackle of distant voices. She leaned over and turned the radio off all together. She also happened to glance at the clock on her dashboard - 3:46 a.m. She slowed the car down and pulled over to the shoulder of the road. The car sat quietly in the deserted and abandoned night, illuminated brightly by the voluminous harvest moon above, and the eerie green glow of the dashboard lights.

“I’ve passed it, God damn it! No question now, I fucking missed my exit!” She ran her fingers through her hair. It was sticky from hairspray. The feel of it made her angry. Why had she insisted on going out at all tonight? So what if it was her 21st birthday; it wasn’t much of a birthday now. Tears were building inside of her.

“No! No, I will not cry. I’m an adult now, and I will deal with this as an adult.” She leaned over to the glove compartment and jerked it open. Inside she found a map, which until this day, has remained unused.

She was relieved to find that according to the AAA map, that if she continued on 93 North for about ten more minutes, she would meet up with route 495. It would take her out of her way, but she could get home, and more importantly, off this damn highway.

The problem she quickly identified, was that also according to the trusty AAA map, she should have met up with her exit fifteen minutes ago, as well as several others along this way. However, she saw no exits, no signs, no buildings, and only one car (an asshole with glaring high beams) going in the other direction. That meant, in reality, she would never come across the supposed exit for Route 495 at all.

“What the hell!” She decided to chance it anyway. She pulled out and onto the highway, slowly picking up speed, but keeping in close range of the speed limit. Funny how when we’re lost driving, we feel the need to turn off the radio and drive incredibly slowly, as if doing so will produce a little man with a sign of directions.

When ten minutes came and went, Mick admitted to herself that things were wrong. She was sure she was still on route 93, since those signs were the only ones that happened to mark her way. No, things were wrong in a different way, a strange way. Mick knew now that she could drive up and down this road as much as she wanted, and she would succeed in only running out of gas. She would find no exits, no signs, no buildings—nothing. If even she decided to drive back south in the north bound lanes, she could travel the estimated twenty-five miles back to Boston, and find there would be no Boston at all; no city to see. The road would just remain a deserted highway surrounded by trees, with no sign of civilization.

Mick came to a complete stop in the middle lane of the highway and began to cry.

She told herself if this was a normal crisis, she could possibly deal with it, but what was happening to her was something beyond. It was something supernatural, something on the flip side. She could not be expected to deal easily with this.

Mick was somewhat exhilarated by her situation, and how quickly she recognized it. She knew these things were possible, things like aliens, or underground beings, or other dimensions. Mick knew this because she had read all about it. All her life, Mick had been told to “be real, and see life as it really was.” Mick ignored these pleas by her mother and her friends, because deep down she knew that things were not always as they seemed on the surface. She had read about a flip dimension just last month in a Dean Koontz novel. Yea, Mick knew these things, and now she was having them proven to her. She wasn’t as scared now.

Mick had spent her life in a family where anything was better than so-called reality. She found solace away from her parents fighting with each other, and with her, by reading horror and sci-fi novels; books that reveled in the supernatural. If it was too much like reality, she avoided it. She created intricate worlds in her mind to escape feeling hurt and the aches and pains of the bruises her step-dad had so often inflicted.

So when she could no longer hang desperately onto the “what is supposed to” of her current situation, Mick was about to accept the unreality of it with more ease than most.

Her next move now had to be what to do. It was a fairly simple decision to make, now that she had accepted the fact that she was no longer in her old world, but in some other dimension or somewhere else just as fascinating.

Mick remembered that one sole car that had passed her nearly ten minutes after she entered “the other side.”

She decided to turn around and begin driving as fast as her car could go. She would drive until she caught the car, or until she ran out of gas. The gas gauge read half a tank, so she guessed she would catch the other car first. When she did, she would pass it, pull over ahead of it, run across the median to flag it down when it approached.

The driver had to be happy to see her...who wouldn't be? She needed to share in this crazy mystery with someone!

She started the car and turned it around. In twenty seconds, she was nearing 80 MPH, 85...90...95. Mick was closing in on 100 MPH and she felt liberated. A sudden thought urged her to roll down her windows. Now going 110 MPH, the small Corolla's top speed, and with brisk, fall air rushing to fill up the inside of the car, Mick reached for her cassettes that lay scattered across the passenger seat.

By the time the music was cranked and blaring, Mick felt completely released. She felt free! She was alone, but she was in control. She was breaking the rules of the conventional world without posing any danger to anyone, just to herself, maybe?

Glancing down to the clock, she was surprised to see the once digital face blank, and the mileage reading zeros across the board. Somehow she had outdriven her world, her life, and all her problems. she wasn't sure what to expect from this new world, all the sci-fi novels couldn't answer that. But it couldn't be as bad as the old one, could it?

Mick knew she was not alone in the world too—the passing car was a testament of that. The other car was getting close. She didn't see it yet, but she was sensing that she was about to experience some sort of oncoming revelation, and the car was a part of it.

Still speeding at 110 MPH, listening to loud, intoxicating Billy Joel, Mick felt happier now than she had in a long time. She was glad that it was her 21st birthday.

Yes, she was now 21; a woman, not a girl. She could even drink now legally. Earlier in the night, she had ordered her first beer in a popular Boston pub. Mick remembered the funny, tingly feeling she got when the cute bartender had placed the napkin down in front of her while wiping a spill off the counter with his other hand. He was so nonchalant, not even a second glance at her anticipating face. When he placed the bottle on the napkin, he faked a wan smile and mumbled something. In his book, she had every right to the beer and to be drinking it in this overcrowded bar. If her step-dad had known her real purpose for coming to Boston, he would have locked her in her room and kept her there for two days. If he knew that she sat comfortably in a smoke-filled room, mingling with stress releasing

college men who nearly always looked at her ass before making eye-contact, he would leave her no ass to look at, and eye-contact would be hard with one of the eyes bruised and swollen shut.

No, step-daddy would not dig this scene, but he would not find out. Mick liked this thought when it crossed her mind drinking in the pub, and she liked it even more now as she cruised along down the deserted highway.

Mick spotted the red tail lights of a car on the other side of the road. She could not prove it was the same car that had passed her nearly forty-five minutes earlier, but she had a feeling it was.

The surprise was that it was not moving. This would only make her job easier and she was happy. All she had to do was pull over, cross the median, and greet her fellow traveler.

She slowed the car as she got close. Mick could now tell it was a black car; a sporty style of some kind. A strange, but somewhat exciting thought crossed her mind. What if a gorgeous guy waited in the car? If so, she would be alone with a hunk, and he would love her, and protect her, and when they returned to their old world, he would take her away from her family, and away from her step-dad. There would be no more beatings “for your own good ‘cause I love you,” but only love “because I love you.” It was an interesting thought, and she was very anxious to get to get to the other car.

Mick came to a complete stop. She told herself not to get her hopes up, for it might also be a woman in the car as well. Whomever it was, Mick still felt a strong sense of hope. Could she and this other person be in this magic land for a certain purpose? Could they have been selected somehow, to be brought together here for some reason?

The first thing she noticed when she stepped outside her car was that the breeze that filled her Corolla when she was driving had left a permanent chill in her skin. It was cold. She noticed that in the air there was a familiar scent. Tangerines? Could she be smelling tangerines? The air was also a lot thicker than cold air was thought to be.

Mick looked up at the huge moon, feeling swallowed by the silvery reflection. Yes, this was a magic land. Only a magic land could hold such a massive and wonderful object and not feel the strain of it hovering over. Only a magic land could carry the fresh scent of tangerines during weather known to frost over such citrus fruits. Only a magic land could keep you warm in such cold air, with just your hands in your pockets.

Mick put her hands in her pockets and indeed she was warm. She crossed the macadam and noticed that the windows on the sports car were tinted black, and her sense of excitement increased. The thought occurred to her that the driver might not be inside. Maybe he had abandoned his car in panic and forgot to turn off his lights. She hoped not.

She hoped the driver would have seen her by now and at least opened the

door. The car sat silent, save for the soft ticking of the cooling engine.

Maybe he was hurt? Sleeping? These thoughts slithered through the tracks in her brain.

Then she noticed now slowly she was walking. Her body seemed heavy, sluggish, and very achy. As she got closer, the sensation increased. She told herself she was sore and stiff from driving. The problem with this, was that she could now pinpoint the aches and pains. The most sore was her ribs, and her left cheekbone. It really became unbearable. She rubbed her elbow almost unconsciously.

She reached the car.

Not quite knowing what to do next, and feeling suddenly foolish, Mick nearly turned and ran back to her car to rest her weary body and avoid the mystery driver in the black sports car. She didn't, and instead she told herself that facing the person in the car was necessary and important to her life. She had to face him in order to survive here, or anywhere else for that matter. She had to get off this highway.

Reaching out her hand slowly, she felt tears trying to escape. Her knuckles, now white from the unfelt cold, rapped the glass.

The window rolled down slowly. Mick drew in her breath, then fainted cold-out. Her step-dad's visage grinned from behind the dark glass.

...She awoke slowly, sensing that she was alone. Feeling the aches and sores even more so now. Her head throbbed with violent pulses—Mick swore it was her brains trying to make their escape. This made it nearly impossible to open her eyes even a little. She could feel the warm sun on her face. Not the moon, but the sun? Could it really be day already?

Things started to come back to her. She tried to lift herself up, but it was too hard and she just lay back down. As she remained that way, thinking about what had happened, the smell of tangerines tickled her nostrils. nothing, just her new hairspray. Yes, it was all coming back.

Now Mick knew she was not in some other dimension on Route 93. She was on her living room floor—just where her step-father had left her a few hours earlier.

He was probably at work now, standing in front of his students, rambling off algebraic equations, and finding pleasure in the difficulty they had understanding his wild principles. Her mom was most likely still asleep in their bedroom, doing what she could to ignore what had gone on in the wee hours of the morning. She always did, and Mick came to expect that sort of weak avoidance from her mother. To face her husband's actions would mean admitting that the family wasn't perfect, one of her mom's own long lasting fantasies.

As these thoughts bitterly poked at Mick's brain, she moaned when her hand rubbed her left cheekbone. Wow, it had been a bad one. One of the worst step-daddy had ever dished out. Her body felt like a small semi had run her down.

Quickly testing herself in her all-too-often routine, she surmised that she

suffered no broken bones—she never did. Mick guessed this was because when she mentally removed herself from the beatings, her body usually went limp. She read once where it was harder to break bones in such a relaxed state.

The mental picture was there now, set off by another touch of her hairspray residued hair. She got her beating as punishment for coming in from Boston at 3:45 a.m., whereas her curfew was adamantly set at midnight. Her step-dad was not happy when she walked in, and...is that alcohol on your breath?

Did he actually know she was drinking?

Did it really matter now?

Mick felt if actually did matter. This beating was a turning point. It was the last she would ever endure by that man. She remembered her fantasy, and she knew now that dealing with him was the first step in taking control over her life. She was no longer going to be the victim, a lost soul searching for an exit. She had found her exit.

Mick knew she wasn't out on Route 93 anymore, but she had found a way to get off the highway.

Sudden Fictions

(Traditionally, the *Harbinger* editorial staff has asked a member of the Stephens faculty for an essay on a particular subject for each issue. Our staff this year decided to try something different. We chose three faculty members from different departments and supplied each of them with the photograph below and asked them to write “sudden fictions.” The following are their creative and diverse responses.)



Terrie M. Cooney

We get along pretty well now.

At first I was a bit put off, thinking that she was doing a Blessed Virgin Mary thing on me with her halo. She must have sensed my discomfort, though, because one of the first stories she ever told me was about a four day LSD experience she had in 1965 which left her with permanently glowing hair. At the time, she was running with a gang of bikers out of Fresno after having walked out on her husband. She said the bikers were crude but non-judgemental, which was exactly what she needed then.

She's easy to talk with, although I admit that I probably do most of the talking. The first time we really got down was one day when I was tinkering with my truck in the backyard. It had been running rough at highway speeds and I was fooling with the vacuum advance. She had been working in her horseradish plot, but after a while came over and suggested that I check the fuel line filter. I'll be damned if she wasn't right! While we wrestled with that filter (and had a couple of beers afterward) we talked about god and change and death. It was an extraordinary afternoon, not because of anything she told me, but rather because she seemed so easily to understand my poorly expressed, self-contradictory, and ambivalent thoughts on these matters. We stared at the sunset for a while. Then, as she picked up her horseradish to return home, she said that in time I would understand.

Well, once you have talked openly with someone about god and change and death, the rest is easy. One day we were talking about some children in the neighborhood and I was surprised to learn that she had never had any. She said that there were already plenty. Another time I got to telling her about an art show I had seen recently at the College. She said that the difference between art and decoration is that decoration only has to be interesting, while art has to be magical.

I'll miss her when she leaves. The city is planning a new freeway and her house is scheduled for demolition in February. I got over a hundred signatures on a petition calling for a rerouting of the road, but she asked me not to submit it. She said that she had gotten a good price on a used Harley and she wanted to spend some time in the mountains.

She's better at change than I am.

—Andy Walker
Social and Cultural Studies

I saw Mavis out “housecleaning” as she calls. Her garden is very important so she makes sure after a storm to clean up the twigs and dead branches from the surrounding trees. Because she is such a frugal person she saves these to use as kindling for her stove in her house. It seems like everything is used for something in her house. The milk carton collects some food scraps and egg shells. These she puts on compost pile to make her “black gold,” the wonderful soil that just might be the cause of those big beautiful flowers that are the talk of the neighborhood. She works hard to keep the garden producing vegetables and flowers for herself and friends and seeds for the birds over the winter. She’s always talking to her friends in the garden: the plants, the weeds as she pulls them, the birds who come to eat the worms and inserts and even Milo, the neighborhood cat.

Mavis has such a welcoming smile and twinkle in her eye. We can always find something to talk about because she’s lived a long and varied life. She lets you know that she is more interested in the thoughts you might have about an experience than sometimes the actual experience itself. As she becomes more frail, she only concedes that it may take a little bit longer to weed or to move about. Her great-grandson helps in the spring with the heavy turning of the soil to make the planting beds ready for the seeds she will plant. Every spring is a new adventure for her to watch the garden grow and change. This past spring she planted some pear trees in the hopes of getting fruit in a few years. I hope I can grow to be like her in so many ways: her laughter, her hope, her feeling the rhythm of life in daily and yearly changes.

Markita Price
Math and Computer Science

Those shoes were so stubborn. Just couldn't be buttoned without the hook, and it was in the pocket of Mama's flour sack apron which was around Mama. She was weeding in the garden as she always did when she waited. It didn't matter if it was for the kettle to boil or for Papa to come home, Mama weeded and waited.

Today was what she called an "oh-so-special" waiting. At long last, Papa was to return from the Great War and times were to be once again filled with his tickly mustache kisses and giant boots carefully placed on the rag rug beside the front door.

I refused to weed while I waited. A lady of seven simply could not pull on those sticky brambles. One never knew what kind of squirming thing might suddenly appear. No, it was much nicer to walk the lines of the front hall tiles. Black and white diamonds filled the entryway and with strict concentration, I could tightrope from the front door to the kitchen and never step on one white tile.

Right now, however, I needed that button hook if I was going to finish dressing and appear to Papa as the "Little Princess" he had left two years ago. At five I had still been a baby, and hadn't truly understood that morning when he left that it would be so long before he returned, and how tired and pale Mama would become. I had been a good companion, I knew, but there were nights when her footsteps in the room next to mine would echo until morning. And now those days of just two were gone, and the house would bulge with the joy of three.

I simply could not wait any longer. Down the dark-stained stairs and across the diamond floor I skipped. When I opened the screen door, my hand automatically found the small hole by the handle and I felt the mesh give a bit more. By Fall, I bet that hold would be big enough for my whole hand to fit through.

I saw Mama still kneeling and pulling patiently at a stubborn weed. She didn't look up when I approached and as I went to demand that button hook, I saw the sweat on her face, or were they tears? And the yellow scrap of paper caught my eye. It was as if a breeze had blown it against the wild rose bush and impaled it there for all to see. Mama didn't look up, but just kept feverishly pulling at that dead stump.

I was to learn later the contents of the dreaded yellow message.

From that time on, I would occasionally go to the garden and help Mama weed...especially on hot summer afternoons, too young for some things...too old for others...taking up Mama's pattern of weeding while I waited...waiting to grow up, to get married, for the children to come home, for the grandchildren to visit.

Now, only I am here. Like Mama, I weed in my garden...and wait.

Beth Leonard
Performing Arts



Jennifer Pomerantz

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