



*harbinger*  
**1987**

# HARBINGER

Stephens Magazine of the Creative Arts 1987



The 1987 HARBINGER staff dedicate this issue to

*Leslie Miller*  
*and*  
*Eleanor Bender,*

and in commemoration of the Stephens College Creative Writing Program  
and *Open Places*.

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**HARBINGER** is a magazine of the literary and visual arts, anthologizing the works of current Stephens College students. Published each spring, **HARBINGER** is edited and designed by students. Subscription rates are now \$5 for one year, \$10 for two years. Subscriptions, manuscripts and correspondence should be addressed to: The Editors, Box 2084, Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri 65215.

Manuscripts are accepted in the fall of each year for publication in the spring.

**HARBINGER** is printed by General Printing Service, Columbia, Missouri.

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## **CABBAGES**

Today I could not remember  
what my poetry is for  
because I started to write  
so I would have something  
to read in class but then  
I could not find anything  
to say for such a reason  
as that so I thought about  
my sister who moves away  
in two weeks and then I  
tried to write a poem  
about when we were little  
and she woke up in the middle  
of the night crying about  
spiders, how they crawled  
on her arms, legs, face,  
but I could not find  
the right words, maybe  
because I thought my sister  
would not appreciate me  
telling the world her bad  
dreams, or maybe because  
I was afraid of remembering  
it wrong, the spiders being  
hers after all, so I wrote  
nothing, just sat  
at my kitchen table  
and had a cold beer  
and held my cat  
for a while, wallowing  
in a bit of boring  
self-pity, which seems  
to me to be the plague  
of American poetry, maybe  
even America in general  
because we have seen far  
too many hamburger commercials,  
which is a plausible cause  
for self-pity, but also means  
the news about violence  
in Beirut, in London, in  
Johannesburg, where eight more

people were killed last week,  
this all comes across like  
just another sitcom,  
*Miami Vice* without music;  
so in the middle of all this  
my friend Claudia comes  
by my house and I say  
Claudia, I have not seen you  
in well over a year  
and what am I doing, well,  
I am here at my table,  
come in and have a beer  
because this self-introspection  
is getting me nowhere fast  
and perhaps you can shed  
some light on my present  
situation by telling me  
what is new with you,  
and Claudia says, Deb,  
it's weird, and I think,  
I couldn't agree with you  
more, and she tells me  
now that she and Sam  
are married they will move  
to a small town  
in southern Missouri  
where the people are  
poor but kind, maybe  
she and Sam can do some  
good down there, and I  
think, that's it, someone  
is doing something,  
these people have a grip  
on all this crazy business,  
what is needed is action,  
so when Claudia leaves  
I wander over to campus,  
thinking I will go ahead  
and type my half-done poem  
about my sister and the spiders  
because writing anything  
is better than having nothing  
at all to say, but instead  
I wander through the first  
open door I see which happens  
to be the dorm where my friends

live and there is this live  
broadcast, this somber, self-  
assured man talking about  
farm produce in Germany  
being destroyed because of  
radiation contamination  
from Chernobyl and some farmer  
who lost thousands of dollars  
in the last two days looks  
at the camera and cries  
and then they show his cabbages,  
heads and heads, pale green,  
carried away in a truck  
so no one will eat them  
and die, and there are shots  
of men wearing face masks,  
gangsters stealing vegetables;  
then the reporter reappears  
with a prediction on the politics  
of disaster, how the Green Party  
or maybe the Democratic Socialists  
are sure to win the next  
election because of rampant  
anti-nuclear sentiment and I am  
wondering who will be around  
to vote if there are no cabbages  
to eat, so I wander on out  
and over to the library,  
to the typewriter, decide  
if it's not for anything else,  
it's for me, that even if this  
is the very last moment, I want  
to say something, that if more  
heads are about to roll,  
then I will go out, thank you  
very much, putting words on  
paper, furious, furious words.

## **DESIRE IN MOTION**

Someone smells of cinnamon, carnation, spice in the heat.  
Black grapes in a round white bowl, the night is long.

The pine tree sways this way and that, wavers in the long breeze.  
Far away and kind, the cold moon, she remembers this from before.

Two hands pass through the air as through water, so slowly no one sees.  
Occasionally they touch, palm to palm, lie still while it rains.

Clean blue sheets billow in the wind, lift and fall back, shudder.  
When evening comes they cover the bed, they move like this again.

Movement to the west, thunder arouses the distance, the unquiet sky.  
Again the tall grass, the flower, this one wanted to stay with you.

**SESTINA: ART LIKE EARRINGS**

I drove to town with a tall, thin man  
who wore spiked, blonde hair.  
He and I went to a fair in a park  
to browse at the art.  
Together we bought a pair of earrings,  
each one a little bronze woman.

Each one for a different woman  
so neither was worn by this man.  
He gave one of the earrings  
to his girlfriend whose hair  
is colored blue, and who sells art  
at fairs in the park.

I have a friend who walks in the park.  
She is a fair-skinned woman,  
more devoted to art  
than ever to a man,  
She even cut her auburn hair  
so passersby could eye her earrings.

She's always worn earrings  
while walking in the park.  
Now, highlighted by short hair,  
everyone can see the little bronze woman,  
who hangs on without a man,  
dangling from her ear as art.

My fair friend loves her art  
that dangles like earrings.  
She'd make that clear to any man  
who wanted to walk in the park,  
for she is her own woman  
who would, if it weren't now so short, let down her hair.

But we don't care about hair;  
we're devoted to art,  
like the little bronze woman,  
just one of the earrings  
from the fair in the park,  
that I bought when I browsed with a man.

## COMPOSITION 76131

It's a greenish-black storm of light and dark. Collective powers of good sliding down to thrash at the feet of an ominous globe of fear, among other things that have been lurking at the back of the head since forever. I remember my nightmares, night terrors someone called them. And not much else. How we used to fight she and I. She never spoke to me, wouldn't touch me. Wouldn't look at me, if she could help it. My sister. Like Ntozake Shange, "Someone is trying to steal my things." Trying to leave me with nothing. She still does it. I saw myself through her eyes, and she soon began appearing in hideous forms. Mutant. Retarded. Psychopathic lesbian slasher. She came to me in Victorian petticoats. Hair ribbons flying and spattered with blood.

The last time I got drunk she had her uncle and her two brothers rape me while I watched a near perfect sculpture fragment into thousands of slivers and reform into an ugly lump of granite, pitch black and screaming. What have you done? Three blubbering idiots in bibbed overalls. My mother told me not to look at my stomach, but I did. A splintered shard of steering wheel slipping in and out of my belly. Everytime I breathed. Driving in a blackout. Pain of death? That was the night she finally killed me. Chased me up a hill and stabbed me 36 times, twice for every year. I slept for two days solid.

Giving in completely, I found myself engulfed, washed up in a sticky dead sea of rage. Fighting my will to be good. Rather, it fighting what has always been there in me. I painted my room grey to keep her out but every time the sun came through she closed the curtains. The walls were up if only to keep me in. Given to fits of self-destruction, I tried to kill her. Once. Tried to force her to love me with a knife. She wouldn't.

I don't remember what happened next but the turmoil persists. I'm told that five years have passed. All I can remember are the colors and the fear. The real pain comes when, once in a black moon, I remember that I loved myself. It does me no good. Doesn't help. The terror of knowing what I would have, myself in one piece, and knowing at the same time that it is unacceptable at this point. To have self-love shatter like so many Waterford chalices is unbearable, so I break them now. Myself. I don't believe that it is better to have loved and lost. It's safer not to know. Hurt's too much. I can say that I loved myself, but no one hears me. Not her. I know that I can no longer beat love out of her but I'm a masochist. I won't stop trying. I wanted whatever, but she with illusions gives nothing.

They tell me now that I'm all right. But still I want it all back. Valium. Codeine. Thorazine. To kill it. I walk around most days unaware, susceptible. My sister is still with me here, at school. Sometimes I forget her face. Sometimes her name. We've found that dead a hundred times is not enough, she's still in my dreams.

So isolated. So full of hatred, not only of myself, that anything I do or say is not enough. No amount of praise can displace the loathing or stop the dreams. The reclaimed sculpture shatters. Piece by piece. Day by day. Sometimes deludes me into thinking it's whole. I can't put them back together anymore. The pieces, my sister, so on; she sits. Rocks.



*Desiree Phillippe*

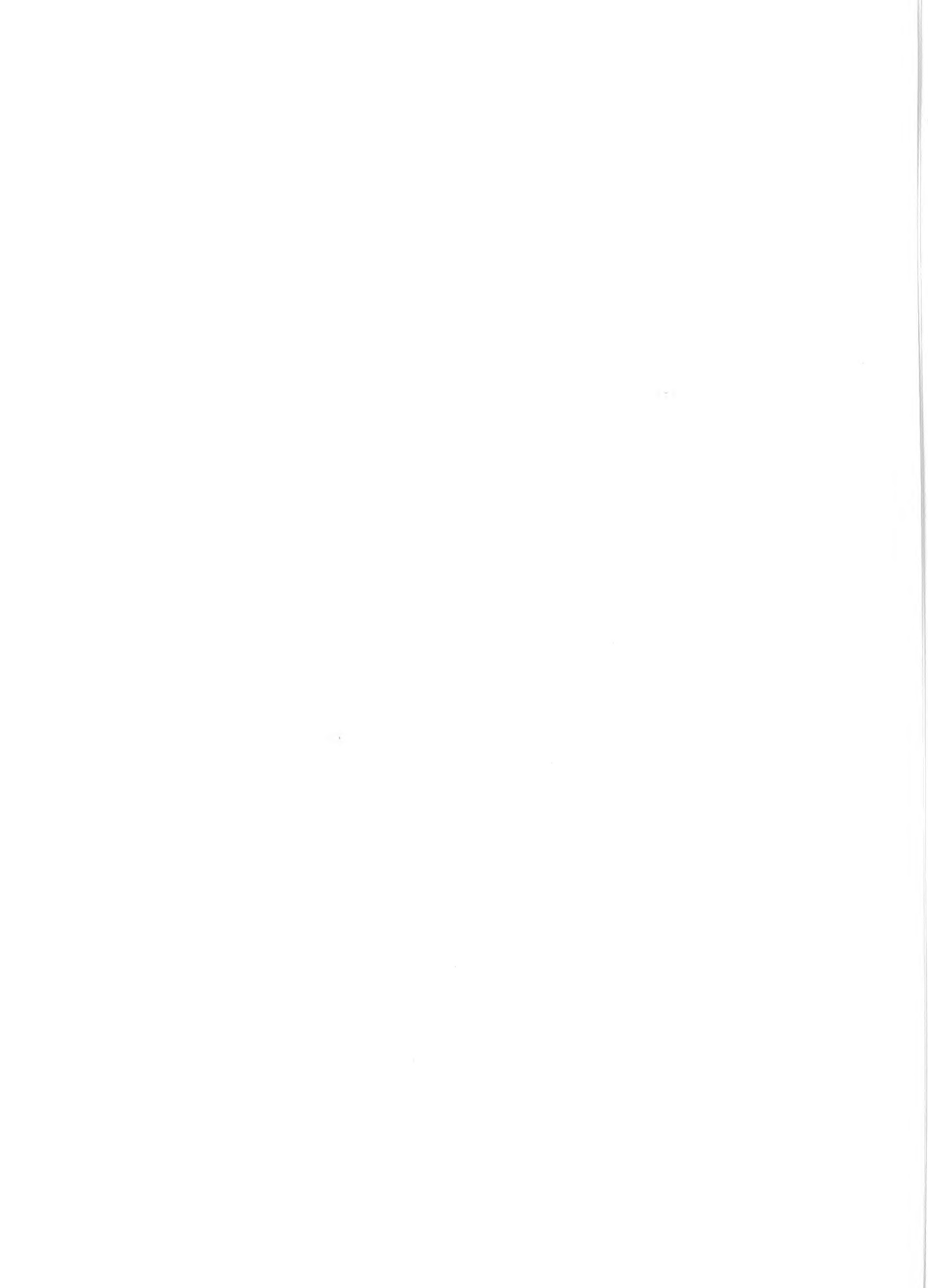


*Ann Schmidt*





*Lisa Cummings*



## A PARTY FOR THREE

A plant growing, erupting,  
Spewing life,  
Falls deadly to the floor.  
Breaking open the pot.  
Eve stands  
Nude, noting nothing,  
freely natural, clean.  
Hair kneedeep  
Clothing her perfect form.

Adam better than ever,  
Nude, noting nothing,  
Decisively accurate, fair.  
Loins unclothed,  
Nothing shameful.

Adam and Eve  
Falling, spiraling down  
To the Earth,  
Because of an Apple  
Delicious and rare.

**GHAZAL**

A girl imagines herself in silk, money green,  
pearls dangle to her waist and fall under her heels.

If they kill Charlie Manson, if they kill him,  
he will scream like a child in a toy store.

A woman giggles a hiccup, lipsticks herself,  
then gurgles with laughter at her own face.

A boy, upright in bed, rocks and whispers  
that he will get his marbles back, "I will get them!"

The girl touches herself in the mirror.  
Laughter behind his door stops and hangs in the dark.

## THE VIRGIN

With the apricot bedspread  
and the stairs that creak,  
candles in her room  
just for fun.  
She has that kind  
of tra-la-la and  
whoop-de-plop of attraction  
most girls rehearse.

## POEM FROM A PSYCHEDELIC ERA

Sometimes when the wind blows  
I can feel it blowing through us  
like we were a field of wheat.

I can feel the wind in everybody's hair  
besides mine, and I know  
that we are not really different from the wheat.

We tend to encase our roots in a pair  
of shoes rather than just stick them down  
in the dirt, but we aren't really different.

The wind blows by and our  
season passes, too, just like the wheat  
season passes.

We'd better do it  
while we're ripe before  
our season passes.

## MY GENERATION WITH NO QUESTIONS

and the red button  
as if it mattered that it is red  
and the moral issue  
and my dream last night of  
the library in my elementary school  
the baby I held  
I will name Kyray  
Kyray Kyray and tender and birds.

## A DIARY FOR MADMEN AND CHILDREN

2:38 pm Day 4

I have no concept of time, of night or day. I have no concept of color. All I see is a pillowy, soft, fluorescent white; it surrounds me as a cloud would. The only sound in this ambient white is my respiratory cycle. I am alive? My arms, which have been giving me a warm embrace, ride the inflation of my chest. I am a cripple? Handicapped?

1:13 am Day 5

Do I want a mirror? Do I want an image of myself? Society doesn't. I have been put into a womb to mature. There is heat inside. This must be an incubator.

9:44 am Day 5

I caught a glimpse of the sky last night. I felt ten years old again. Marco and I snuck out of the house after our parents were asleep. We sat on the dock over the river where we swim during the day. We soaked our feet in the black depths and sang of death. Later, as we were entering the house, Nancy saw us, but she won't tell Mommy or Daddy because she is one of us.

4:37 pm Day 7

I am desiring Chinese food. I have a friend in NYC, his name is Albert Yu. I remember the night he took me to his uncle's opium den. I was 23 and had gone to the Big Apple to lose my virginity. I caught the clap; but that is another story. Well, we smoked and smoked and reached a "Cocteau High." Albert and I walked through Soho in the rain. We read 5th Avenue. When I returned to my hotel, a Berkshire Classic, I picked up Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell and the Drunken Boat* and understood it.

I can clearly remember:

"I have swallowed a monstrous dose of poison. Thrice blessed by the counsel that came to me! My entrails are on fire. The violence of venom twists my limbs, deforms and prostrates me. I die of thirst, I suffocate, and cannot scream. It is hell, eternal punishment! See how the fire flares up again! How nicely I burn. Go to it, demon! . . ."

Ah, Night of Hell, that certainly was.

3:19 pm Day 8

I want to scratch my eyes out! There has been a murder.

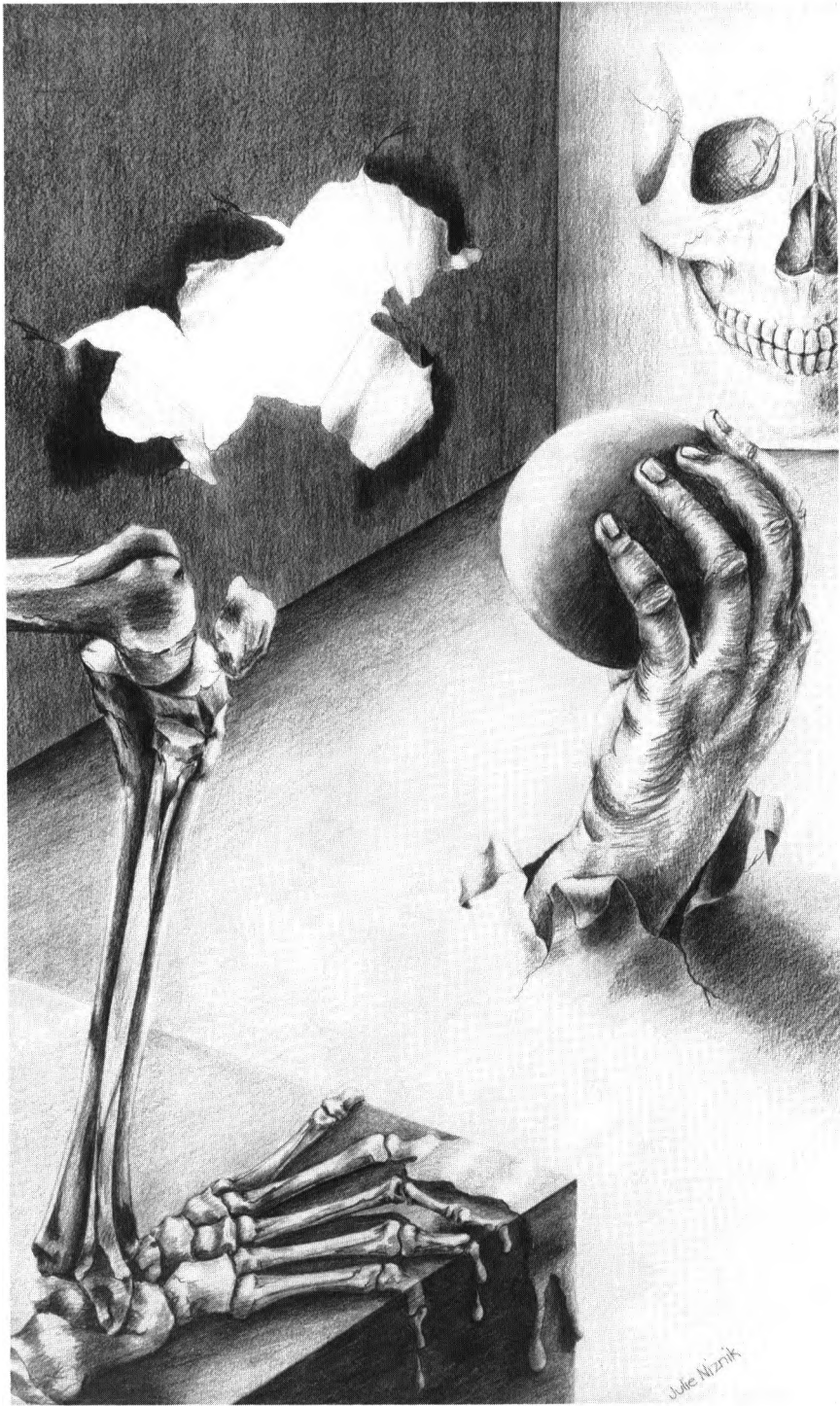
3:20 pm Day 8

I have concluded that I am a chicken embryo. The all-encompassing oval of purity has been taken on a journey to the store. I am not alone. There are the others who are going to be purchased. I just can't see them. We are in a Burlington Northern cargo car. I am being thrown against my shell! The tracks are clicking louder and faster. I am bruised. I can't stop from being thrown around. I am out of control! Let me hatch, God! I want to have color. Please, don't let me be bought and sold for money and then eaten by greedy, little children at 7:35 am before school. This can't be my destiny.

11:11 pm Day 10

I had a girlfriend. She was more than an appealing object of the opposite sex to me; she was going to be my wife. We had exhilarating, exciting sex together. I always wanted to write about her to *Playboy* or *Penthouse*. One month before our wedding, she threw herself in front of a subway train. I was standing next to her. There was no forewarning, not even a kiss good-bye. I had her buried in the Green Hills of Vermont. I remained in solitude for two years. A white solitude that seemed to last for eternity. When I was released, I brought her flowers and I brought a shovel for myself. I un-earthed my lover and held her skeletal figure next to me. I brought her home with me. It took almost a week to complete, but I finished the temple. Over my waterbed, I built a cave-like structure out of her bones. I lay down to sleep. Have I awakened?





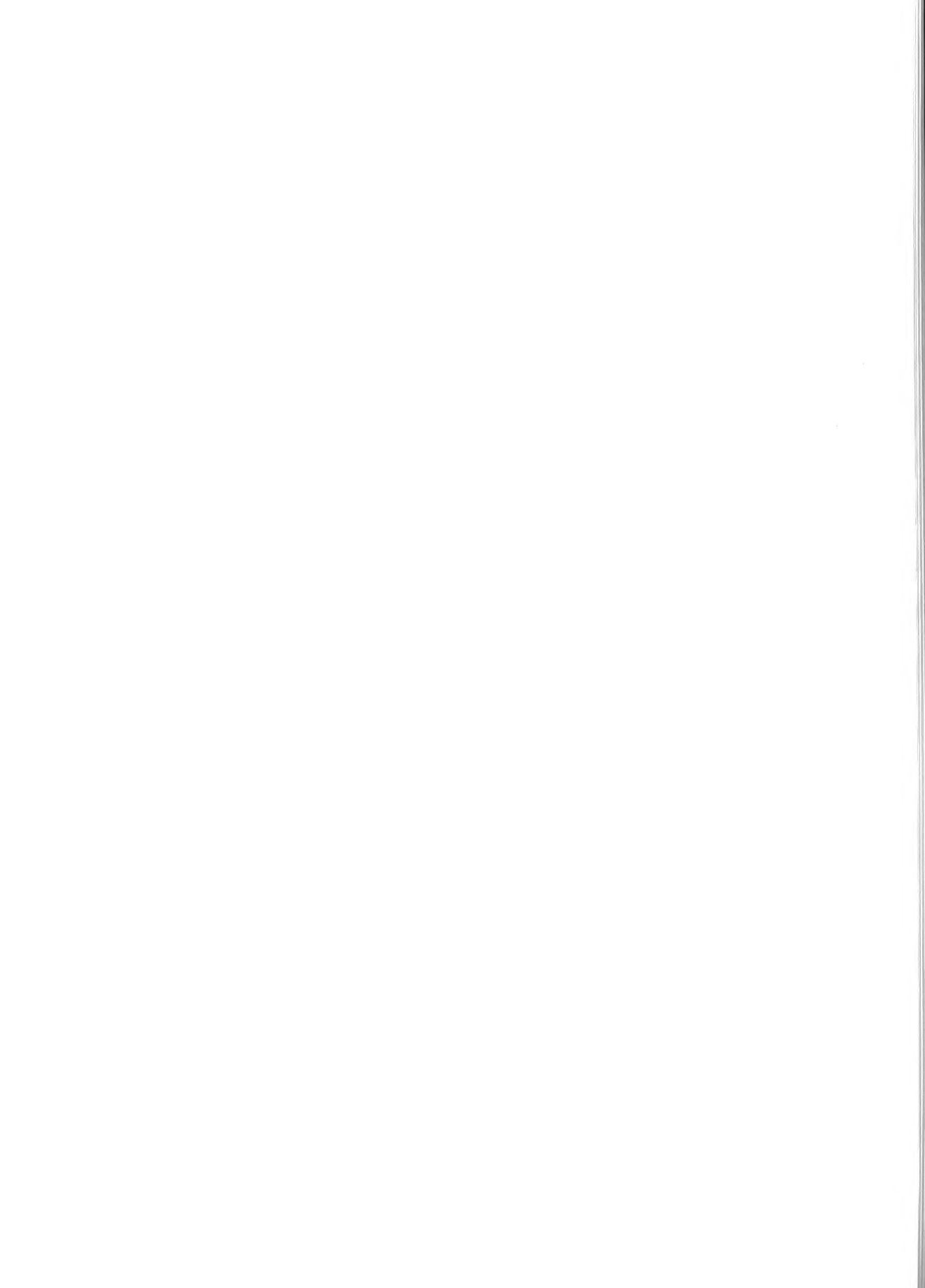
*Julie Niznik*



*Tracy Loenberg*



*Lori Moss*



## DESIGN FOR A MENU

A waitress colors the evening specials  
into the worn black of the chalkboard,  
reminding me to leave this job  
as I look to her reflection in the brass  
where she painfully stretches  
to outline each letter in soft pastel,  
suggesting dimension by the shadow in blue.  
I watch myself cut the rind of lime  
knowing in any moment  
I'll be the paid attraction:  
bartender in front of the brass  
this place is most famous for.  
I no longer take pride in its polishing,  
remembering I am a man  
who lives entirely on a set  
designed for a play—it steals  
the whole barroom away,  
with an orange light pasting the wall  
originally white, to keep the mind  
in *Summer*, as in *Suddenly Last*.  
And if I may,  
it was far too brief a play,  
ending in the torn remains  
of Sebastian, outside a restaurant  
where children went dark and hungry,  
while those who sat entertained  
averted their eyes from the window  
calling on their ordered drinks—  
one of which I'm about to serve myself  
with a twist before I hold the wall  
with a gaze where a window  
should have been placed years ago.

**MESA**

*Nowhere to go but out,  
Nowhere to come but back.  
Benjamin Franklin King, Jr.*

The paned arc of my house's face  
watches a man. I hang curtains  
to wall myself from the stamping work  
of his hammer, the thin strides  
that yield colored brows above a path  
walking into the throat of his home.

The past is level, now. Children  
open the necks of burlap sacks,  
crawl in and become grain forms,  
trying not to imagine their dirt-sweat bodies  
stitched in by the seams, trying not to imagine  
being loaded on the bed of a market truck.  
Because every child knows  
the first out is the loser.

My desk is the brown breast  
of earth; it is my *mesa*.  
October parts the cloth  
I have hung to keep it.  
I see the man, his back bent,  
silent as the binding of a book,  
over measured slants of ground  
he fills with concrete, the sun  
sketching his arms into boas of *tela*.

The wind cleats my face,  
and I breathe.

## UNION

*for Jim*

My sister drains orange from her dye-pot.  
There is a silence. She mixes,  
in that clay belly, a new color.

## AMORÍO

Crane's yellow linen women  
harden in me like gold  
blocking a vein of the earth  
where men dig to bejewel  
their wives. I am the soil  
of *La Feria*, tilled back  
into a crouch of chairs  
when the wife enters.

## FROM THE OTHER SIDE

*a Juan*

I watch him watch me. His teeth flatten  
a cigarette butt, widen to empty his glass.  
He rises into the smoke, comes through tables,  
his legs cut at the thighs by the wooden tops,  
takes the chair at my side. "My name," he says,  
"is Esteban." He waits. "My name," I say,  
"would be nothing more to you than a sound  
you cannot say." His legs cross, raw strands  
of dough. "Then I call you," he says,  
"*Blanquita*. Because you are a child  
if you don't know how white you are.  
I have seen you here, his coffee hand on you,  
mud on stone; but you know, the rain comes,  
and then even the stone is white, again."

I look away. You sing. The linen hips of women  
swing next to men like the *guirlandas* above us;  
their curling arms slice the pot-black of your hair.  
He rests his boney hand on my knee,  
grabs a corner of his blazer with the other.  
"The silkworms," he says, "did not give this cloth  
its color. Man can do this sort of thing.  
We can change what isn't born to us."  
His mouth is round as a construction yard peephole,  
your guitar a distant foundation that molds the dirt,  
then goes higher, higher than even the Moors  
could lay the great stones of *La Giralda*.

I let him fill my sherry glass. "You drink  
to me," he says. "I drink," I say;  
"In my country, they package Georgia soil,  
tie little, red ribbons around the plastic boxes  
and line them along the welcome center counter.  
Children take the peanut shaped lids off, dirty  
the back seats of their parents' cars. They like  
the feel, but haven't seen plowshares roll earth  
onto itself, haven't heard bushel wires twist

at harvest, the crate bottoms against a truck bed.  
You clap this three-beat rhythm, turn beside turns  
of women, but the music, his voice  
might as well come from a phonograph.  
You are stone. Water is water to you  
whether it comes from a spray-truck or the sky,  
while the dirt, the dirt does not stand  
in fixed perches, but drinks. To you,  
I am *Blanquita*; to him, the rain.”

He stands. “The rain,” he says, “can be caught  
in children’s cups, drunk for fun; the dirt,  
eaten during dare games. Men must work to yield stone.”

He walks. I see, in broken sight, the brown row  
of your cheek, a smooth edge of lips. Bodies pass:  
rail cars allowing slivers of light  
from the other side.

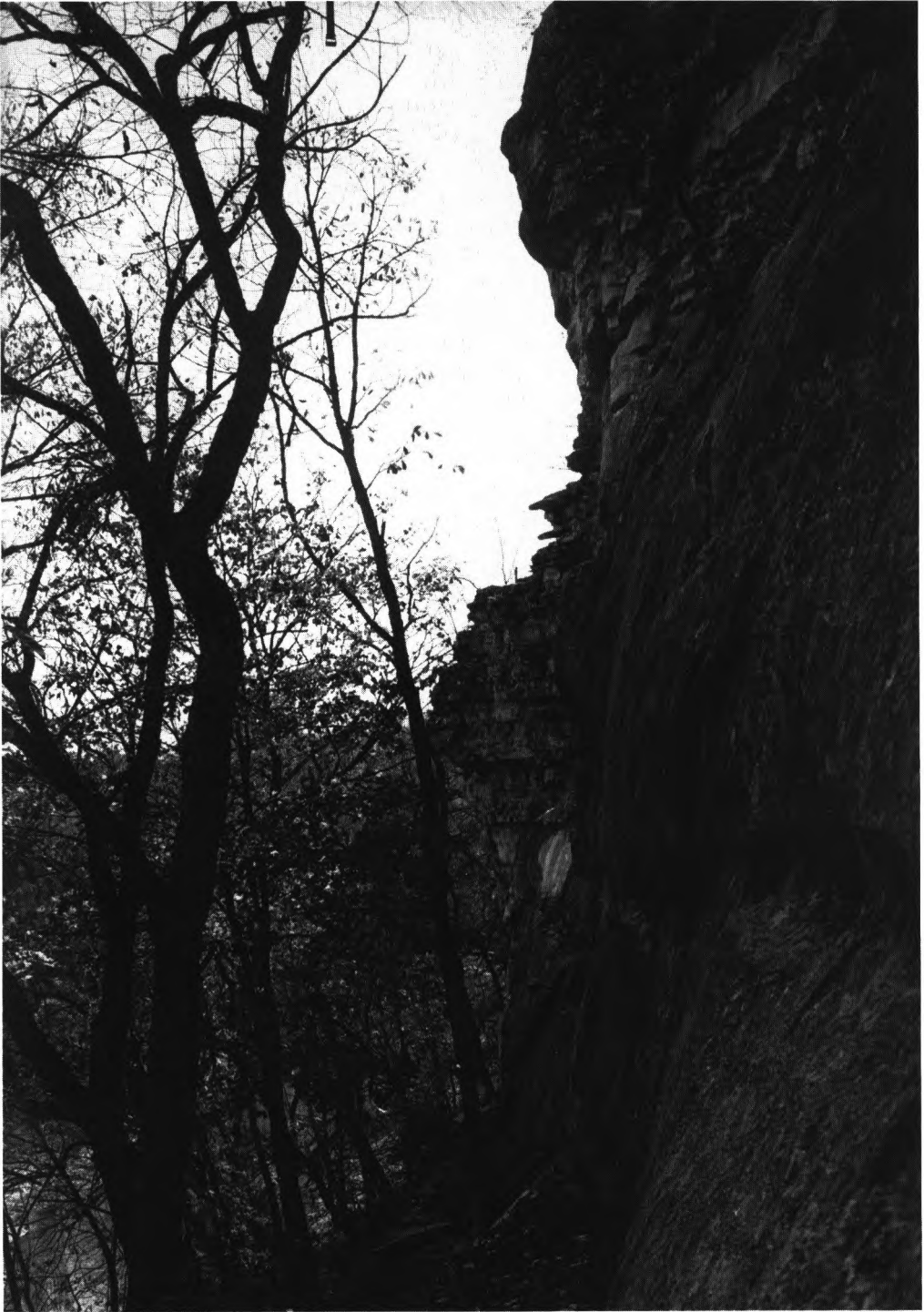
## INVESTIGATION

I hold the only source of light  
in my hand, at the entrance  
of the house that stands before me.  
I creep inside down mazes of hallways  
deteriorating, halos of thrown light  
like those from locked angels.  
Never opened mystery novels  
fill the closets, and many doors stand  
ajar, rooms embellished with silence.  
But I possess only a flashlight  
to guide my steps. I hope it doesn't  
fail me, for then I will have no sight  
in my large house of future days.





*Desiree Phillippe*



*Sidney Musgrove*

## THE GREENHOUSE MUTANT

Doctor Gregory Maucourt, the famed French-American Tour-de-France cyclist and author, demands that particular flowers are placed in every hotel suite in which he stays. Flowers whose scent penetrates all those who encounter it, especially the faceless young nymphettes who frequent the dark-haired doctor's chamber. Dimmed lights, Dom Perrignon, swelling French cabaret songs, but the ever constant focal point is Gregory's fetished flower, Florio Passionato. Florio Passionato, a rare flower, must live in hothouses though it is indigenous to the woodlands of northern Pennsylvania. It is prized around the world for its red blossom. The ground it is planted in must be loose and porous so its roots are able to explore the soil freely. When this exotic specimen is amidst any other plants, their stalks gravitate toward it. At night, it melancholily leans fully illuminated by the moon. With the shimmer of moonlight upon Florio's leaves, it resembles a downcast dog searching the soil for some essential element lacking in its diet of conservatory heat and specialized chemicals. However, the absent vitamin does not diminish Florio Passionato's virility. In fact, it mutantly regenerates parts of its stalk so prolifically that each new bud must be either aborted or transplanted as space in the conservatory permits. Because of this, the head gardener does not like Florio to remain in one area of the floral gardens for long. Many botanists rapaciously probe to understand its mysteries. But the only tangible impression they ever receive is the pronounced mark Passionato leaves upon their virgin-white skin. After the deflowering, after the last Marlboro, after the residual cognac, he sits alone in his leather wing chair and skims the Song of Solomon in his Gideon Bible as the radio drones "Are You Lonesome Tonight?"

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## JARRINGS TO THE CORE

A solitary life is like being a lone leaf  
On a nebulous sea with only  
Shadows of oak and cedar trees in the distance  
To guide you. Alone you hazard,  
Fighting the current, bearing the sharp  
Looks of the green-eyed grenadiers beneath the firmament.  
You battle on believing in the vision that  
Buys you across the catty waves.  
I wonder if commitment to my veiled vision  
Is worth the pain and alienation it brings?  
In weak moments, I too wish my heart could be at ease,  
Luxuriate, and enjoy snippy iced tea so chic at Uptown.  
But when I again inhabit the hearth of my heart,  
Its incandescence warms my quivering doubts.

**ODE TO LISZT AND THOSE WHO COME AFTER ME**

Vain attempts are played to resound  
Harmonic chords, bridges built  
In black on white sheets  
Through fingers and experience.  
There is no grey, but in the mind.

Discord threatens melodic stability  
While staccato conversation corrupts  
This Romantic interlude. Virgin to the solo stage,  
Spotlights blind me as I embark on the encore:  
Variations on *A Theme of Love*.

Trembling from transposition, minor rises to major,  
Tempo slows, the hands rest and lift,  
Barely touching. The curtain falls.  
After bright lights and dark images,  
There is no grey, but in the mind,

(As I wait for applause).

## INTRUSION ON JEFFERSON ROAD

The attic rattles with bats and abandoned history  
In an autumn storm, while the void of body  
Heat lays stagnant, muffling echoes  
Of military and dances and "I do's."  
Between the "I dare's" and stench of cracked leather  
My stomach wonts of fields and fresh cologne;  
But crumbling tuxedos, victims of trend and weather,  
Like the faded jerseys that once cheered with home  
Crowds, invite memories of youth  
And debonaire glances amid ballrooms  
And garden gazebos. In a marked trunk from school,  
I watch a West Point-er offer gold ring and dress buttons.  
So I take the dare and descend the spiral staircase  
From rites of passage and far away places.

## FATHER FLAGS ME DOWN

I read his words with trembling hands,  
and my eyes shift sprite to black.  
The sky is blue, then the sun sinks night,  
and I read what he thinks is right.  
On the envelope is an upside down stamp,  
it means love, but I read the letter.

Years of bitterness surface in his letter;  
as I reread, the clock moves its hands.  
Teeth grinding, down the stairs I stamp  
and into the woods where the trees are black.  
He says what he thinks is right;  
I must love him more than I do tonight.

Cars and clouds dream by, day and night,  
as I begin writing another letter.  
I must make him know what I think is right,  
but I can't hold a pen with fisted hands.  
The ink, the night, the words are black,  
as I study the flag printed stamp.

Upside down, as is the stamp,  
are my thoughts during the night.  
I struggle to warm myself under my black  
blanket; under the pillow, his letter.  
We think differently, we use different hands.  
I am not wrong, he is not right.

He tells me my choice is my right,  
that is what the flag stands for on the stamp.  
Through his words, he hands  
me his law. He must know I'll cry all night.  
I've tried all he wrote in his letter.  
The ink could have been blue, but it's black.

I strain to see through the black,  
so I can see what is right.  
I am here. I can only argue with his letter,  
on which he stamped his stamp.  
I long to go to him tonight  
and touch him with my daughterly hands.

## SONNETELLE

I blow the beards off elderly dandelions  
and sneeze at the goldenrod's threat.  
Black-eyed Susans submit to the wind.

White aspens wear black scars.  
Rough blades of grass cut at my feet  
as I blow the beards off elderly dandelions.

Magpies squawk and eye  
gray squirrels baring their teeth  
at black-eyed Susans who submit to the wind.

Snow thistle vines choke blue spruce  
and pine needles pierce the earth  
as I blow the beards off elderly dandelions.

Life against life, competing.  
My hummingbird is bleeding.



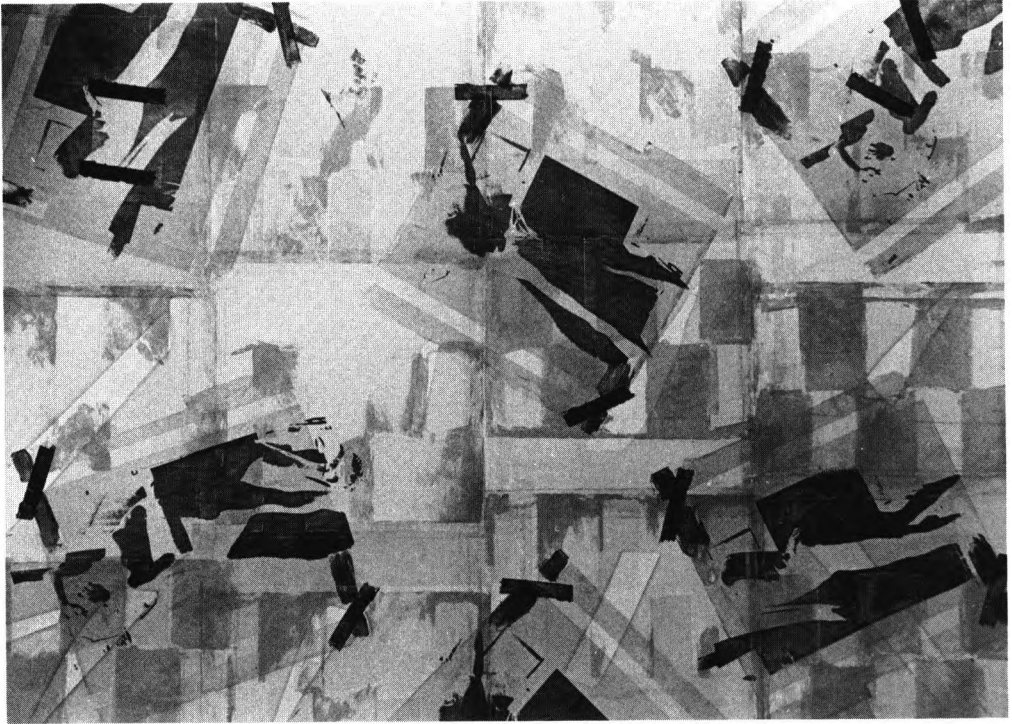


*Lisa Cummings*





*Leslie Maxtone-Graham*



*Tete Arauz*

## MADRE Y NIÑOS

We spend our evening  
in the dining room  
with the blazing candelabra,  
once your Grandmother's,  
between us, and the paintings  
you have not yet hung.  
Here you speak  
of your Mexican lover  
of her two children  
and the mountains  
that will keep her there—  
unable to accept your country.  
You have a present for the oldest—  
a music box of glass.  
I notice books not unpacked,  
your mother's jelly dish  
still in newsprint,  
wine from a friend.  
You hold each with a careful hand  
as if to say *These are mine*.  
You tell me that moving three times  
in three years is a bitch  
and perhaps you should throw  
half of it away  
or set the house aflame  
to start over. Clean.  
We both know you will do neither.  
You speak of Rivera.  
I apologize for not knowing.  
Your eyes return to the flame,  
*flor de la pascua*,  
the color of the Xalapa sunset  
where memories are possessions  
that cannot be held.

## **THE ATCHAFALAYA**

Barely held in the arms of a dying oak,  
a boy watches his grandfather  
reel in moon-colored catfish,  
then dump the basket of few onto soupy floors  
and wonder where they all went.  
Crammed in mud-bathed boats  
with golashes and whiskey-breath,  
they cast silver lines  
into the green of the Atchafalaya.  
They nudge gnarled pipes deep into grins  
to tell stories of dead Zulu Kings,  
while laughter shakes the cypresses  
that drown in the sucking of the bayou,  
and men who should have caught enough  
to last for years,  
fall overboard with flasks, and nets  
and muggy tears.

## **GREEN EYES BRIDGE**

In a mesh of scorched branches  
bows the Green Eyes Bridge of Pawhuska.  
Yellow stones and dying spiders  
make a trail where an old woman  
went off the bridge with a green-eyed hound.  
Lanterns circled black water  
until the Osage was found, blue hair swirling.  
Green eyes still search on the bridge  
through the screen of leaves  
for a dead companion.

## FOR THINKERS

I take Ogden Avenue to York Road,  
Right through downtown Hinsdale.  
Turning into the parking lot  
I already feel a bit more secluded.

The paved path  
Behind Graue Mill  
Is the only place  
Within a hundred miles  
Where I can forget  
That I am in the suburbs of Chicago.

When I start my jog  
I am running along the creek.  
But later on, the path  
Leaves the creek's edge,  
Only to circle back and across  
The creek at my bridge.  
My jogging stops.

This bridge is my bridge.  
It is not a bridge where two lovers  
Secretly meet from their own worlds,  
For this is a unique world.  
The water isn't shimmering,  
And there are no aromatic flowers blooming.  
The water is partially polluted.  
And when the summer days are hot  
There is even a stench.

## **THE CAITLIN GABEL SCHOOL**

In my old school,  
there was a very old clock.  
I guess you would call it  
a grandfather clock.  
I used to sit in a chair,  
which stood next to the clock,  
and watch the long, gold pendulum  
swing. It swung back and forth.  
Of course, you know that.

Anyway, I watched the  
thing a lot. Some days I  
was in a good mood,  
somedays bad. And it  
kept swinging. The damn  
thing always went back  
and forth. I couldn't stop  
it because I knew that the  
only way to stop it was  
to turn it off.





*Lisa Cummings*



*Elizabeth Hedges*



*Elizabeth Hedges*



## IN THE AFTERMATH

In the shadow of your laundry basket she sees a body  
crouched, waiting for the crack beneath  
the parents' door to become invisible. She hates  
the dark. She is afraid of you. When you love  
her she feels only the weight of your body forcing  
the air out of her lungs. She feels you inside  
her but she doesn't feel your love. She cannot breathe.  
She cannot move. You did not put the pillow over  
her face. You did not take without asking.  
When the two of you wrestle, she knows it's a game.  
You do not lie when you say you love her.  
But sometimes she forgets—sometimes she remembers.  
You know what happened; you are able to forgive.  
This frightens her: that you can ignore it.  
Does it make you one of them? Does it wipe out  
six years of suffering and hating the sight  
of her own body? She wants you to hate them.  
When she says she doesn't love you she lies.  
She is just afraid—really afraid—of being pinned down.

## WANDA

“That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me. All these months—telling me I’m too fat, I talk too much, I dress like a slob; now all of a sudden you go and say something like that, and it ruins everything. How am I supposed to take this? For months all I wanted was to hear something nice, to hear that I wasn’t a slob. I just wanted you to love me all this time. I just wanted you to love me. Yesterday I saw you at Fedora—you never took me there. How come you never took me there? I saw you and I saw her, too. She was real pretty. She had on a long, white coat and I’ll just bet it wasn’t possum hair either. The two of you were laughing and carrying on and eating green noodles and snails that weren’t even out of the shells yet. Hell, if I’d known you weren’t any more particular than that I’d have left the head on the catfish for you sometimes. I would have left the mold on the Velveeta, too. I felt so bad, like it was all my fault you were out cavortin’ with the likes of her. I went out and got my hair done, I signed up for an aerobics class, and I even put on my best dress for you tonight. The one you liked so much when we used to go to the discos, the one with all the jaggedy edges along the bottom and the little straps on the shoulders. You didn’t even notice. You walked by me to the kitchen and asked where dinner was. All you would’ve had to do was turn around and notice. Now you’re lying there bleeding and I know you’re gonna die. I’m sitting here next to you holding this gun—it really does smoke after you shoot—and you have to go and say something like that. You’ve ruined everything.”

**EZRALENA**

*after Virginia Woolf*

But while we stared at the ceiling and tried to think of an excuse to leave, we were aware, and indeed we had been dreading that evening for some weeks, of the boring speech she spouted at us. Ezralena, the health-food harpy, was always willing to share. It was true that only a few members of any gathering could stay awake through those sessions, but nevertheless, she spoke anytime she got a chance, to church groups, to Girl Scout troops, to folks in McDonalds food lines, scolding them all for their potluck suppers, their cookie sales and their French fries. Ezralena was a rather tall, rather domineering, rather ugly woman. She had a slight mustache and a taste for mustard sprouts. Nothing gooey, yummy or chocolatey was to her liking. And at every turn, the warnings came out of her mouth—no salt, no sugar, no butter—pleading and begging us to banish our bonbons, to forsake our fudge, to trash our truffles. She did her best. She tried very hard to convert us, but she asked too much. We had eaten peanut butter and jelly too long; we had eaten trick-or-treat candy Halloween through Christmas, sweets from our stockings Christmas through Easter, and droppings from the Easter bunny Easter through Halloween. She failed in her mission; she filled her backpack with granola and headed down Booneslick Trail. She took to eating dirt and weeds. She choked to death on a purple thistle.

## **DON'T GET FRESH WITH ME, YOU ANIMAL!**

I went on the last day of the animal fair to get my goat, which I had entered in the competition.

First, I walked past a dark horse. It and Charley horse got too close to me and I said to the attendant, "Please hold your horses."

Next my string of beads fell off in front of the pig pen. Someone told me not to cast pearls before swine.

I asked, "Why? Will they go hog wild?"

"Yes, and their ears will drop off."

"I always wanted to make silk purses from sows' ears."

"You can't."

"I wish I could. I'd be in hog heaven."

"Don't make a pig of yourself."

Then I went in the doghouse. I walked over to look at some of them and was told to let sleeping dogs lie. Someone was putting on the dog a blanket. It began to rain cats and dogs. A cat landed at my feet. I sweetened the kitty with some candy. Two dogs fell on my head.

I said, "Call off the dogs!"

The attendant said, "Love me, love my dog."

"I don't love you. You've gone to the dogs."

I walked on and saw a snake in the grass. I screamed and cried "Wolf!" as Tom Dick Harry Wolf was in charge of the fair. He rode in on the lam(b). He was wearing a sheepskin jacket.

I then saw a big frog in a little pond. I also saw a fish out of water and bent down to pick it up.

A voice said, "There are other fish to fry. There are plenty of fish in the sea."

I left mad as a wet hen brushed against my legs, and a chicken with its head cut off ran around.

As I walked out, a voice asked, "Why are you leaving so soon? Are you chicken?"

I replied, "I'm only human."

## THE S.S. WILLYS-KNIGHT

When Grandpa steered that boxy ship  
along the old dirt roads, everybody stared.  
On Sunday afternoons he let us go along  
to check his golden kingdom.  
Grandma sat up with the captain,  
Maxine and I astern.  
The gearshift was so stubborn  
that "Goddamned son of a bitch!"  
was what it took to make it move.  
As Grandpa growled those powerful words,  
Grandma tapped her feet and twitched her cheeks;  
Maxine always poked me.  
When it was nearly harvest tide,  
Grandpa let us wade into the wheatfield with him.  
Satisfied the gold was good,  
we all climbed back on board,  
then changed our course and went ashore  
down at the Fairmont store  
to order double-dip vanilla.  
For the last part of the voyage  
Grandpa used his magic words,  
and off we sailed for home  
in a summer sea of dust.

## NIGHT FIRE

In the middle of the night  
moaning sirens woke us.  
The side of the house down the street  
was a sheet of tangerine tongues.  
You said you had to find out why,  
and hurried into your shirt and jeans.  
I watched from the window.  
Three fire trucks rolled their big red eyes.  
Silhouetted, the couple two doors down  
stood in nightclothes, arms locked.  
I slid back into our warm bed  
and listened to the water throb through  
the heavy hoses, and dozed.  
I dreamed about the time as a child  
I saw a boy watering his yard with urine.  
I thought it was a little garden hose.  
You came into the dark bedroom, took off  
your boots and slick fireman's coat  
and said, "I'm here to put out the fire."





