

Harbinger  
2008

# Harbinger 2008

*a person or  
thing*

*that comes before*

*to announce or  
give an indication*

*of what follows*

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## Table of Contents

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|    |   |                       |
|----|---|-----------------------|
| 7  | Letter from the Editor                      | Janeka Ausmus         |
| 9  | Jesus Wore Dreads                           | Kat Thomas            |
| 10 | My Unruly Roots                             | Krysten Hill          |
| 11 | Enough                                      | Janeka Ausmus         |
| 11 | Past Impressions                            | Karolyn Gunter        |
| 12 | Italian Face                                | Angela LeVota         |
| 13 | Denial                                      | Cheri Cherry          |
| 17 | :Mother Earth:                              | Janeka Ausmus         |
| 18 | Little Brother                              | Juliana Jones         |
| 19 | Innocence                                   | Juliana Jones         |
| 20 | The Facilitator                             | Rachael Henney        |
| 30 | Broken Protection                           | Wynde Noel            |
| 31 | Interview with Leslie Adrienne Miller       | Janeka Ausmus         |
| 35 | Luminescent                                 | Terry Song            |
| 36 | My Cristos                                  | Terry Song            |
| 37 | Twenty Years of Dreams Have Been Like This: | Tina Parke-Sutherland |
| 41 | Simon                                       | Kristine Somerville   |
| 42 | Toward Bureaucratic Process: Part 1-A       | Kate Berneking Kogut  |
| 44 | Hefty Paychecks                             | Mackenzie Riggs       |
| 47 | The City                                    | Juliana Jones         |
| 48 | Italian Eyes                                | Angela LeVota         |
| 49 | Daddy's Girl                                | Kat Thomas            |
| 53 | Black and White Faces                       | Angela LeVota         |
| 54 | Autumn in Her Hair                          | Kim Bennett           |
| 55 | Immaculate Conception                       | Tiffany Turner        |
| 61 | Nineteen Hours                              | Cheri Cherry          |
| 62 | Wonder                                      | Jordan Lilienthal     |
| 63 | A Hundred Pieces                            | Cheri Cherry          |
| 64 | Stephens Woman                              | Rosario Chico         |
| 65 | Red Lace                                    | Kim Knaust            |
| 69 | Adaptation                                  | Krysten Hill          |
| 71 | Contributors' Notes                         |                       |

Welcome to the 2008 edition of Harbinger literary magazine. This year's staff included seven women with whom I am proud to have been in connection, for their opinions, inspiration, and persistence. I am excited to include an interview with poet and Stephens alum Leslie Adrienne Miller, and I thank her for her honest, kind words, and insight. We also feature pieces from our beloved Stephens faculty, four women who have personally inspired me. The poetry and prose included in this edition are of the most mature I have seen in my three years on staff. In the voices I hear an honest attempt to look at what we have lived and what we have been told, at how we push through what has been ingrained in us to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our work. The poems "My Unruly Roots" and "Enough" speak from different generations to the *finding* ourselves as women. Other works, such as the fiction pieces "Denial" and "Immaculate Conception," embrace *revelations* that wrestle with the personal and mass consumption of certain ideals and the question of how to live amidst that rubble. Perhaps, the answers we ache for lie, not only in the words but in the spaces between what we chose to say and what we didn't.

Janeka Ausmus  
*Editor-in-Chief*

## Jesus Wore Dreads

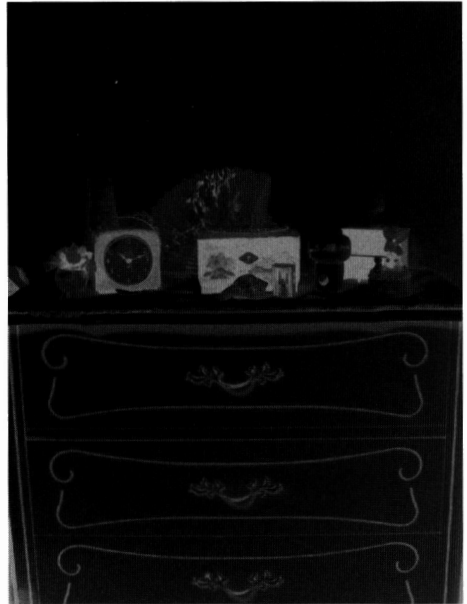
I imagine him  
walking somewhere hot,  
under a sun  
that should have turned his  
alleged porcelain skin  
to leather,  
long dreads  
falling  
down his back,  
speaking in a rhythm  
that could connect and anger people  
with the simple swing of a syllable.  
But rhythm wasn't what people  
thought they needed.  
It was something that got in the way  
of the routine they created.  
Maybe it was the dreads creeping down his back,  
contrasting with his white robes  
that really shocked people,  
because that meant  
he had been around for a bit.  
See, hair like that just doesn't get that long for no reason.  
It meant maybe he had lived a little,  
because  
you can't just walk around  
swinging your words  
and reaching people  
through the hum of each  
sweaty sentence,  
unless you've seen something first.

## **My Unruly Roots**

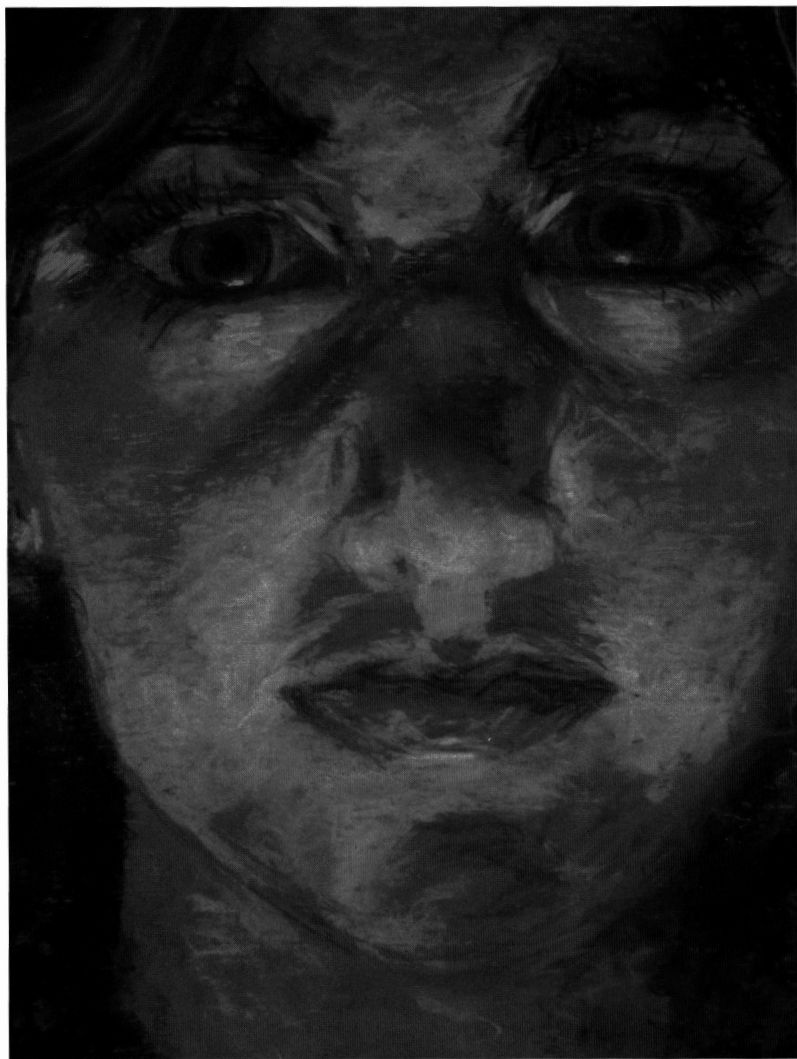
You don't know how I  
burned my edges for you.  
Dried out my locks,  
so you wouldn't have grease stains  
on your pillow covers. Spent hours  
suppressing my unruly roots between  
hot irons, so you could have something  
to safely run your fingers through.  
Think I let the chemicals stay in too long,  
got the scabs to prove  
I tried to give your illusion,  
an appearance of full body and shine.  
But baby,  
I'm finding all I got to show for it  
is a bunch of split ends.

## Enough

I imagine you sat  
like thousands of women did—  
1964, '65.  
Your children were not yet in school.  
One still nursed as you tried to read Adrienne  
Rich and Angela Davis.  
You felt guilty, because, really,  
you had everything you needed:  
a sterling washer, a fine house,  
enough tableware to invite friends over.  
But I imagine you thinking about your  
work, the woman you left behind, when you  
might have time for a walk.  
You must have asked who you  
were, besides Howard's wife, Jesse  
and Charlie's mom, a member  
of the local church.  
I can see you wondering  
if that was  
enough—  
when the petunias bloomed  
and the  
hummingbirds came for the  
first time  
that year, the way you knew  
they would.



*Past Impressions*



*Italian Face*

---

## Denial

She settled onto the porch swing scraping the mud-gripping soles of her boots with a brittle, breaking stick. Though the door was closed tight and the windows sealed for the coming winter, she could smell the distinct bitterness of boiling greens and turnips. She entered the house to the crackling of pork chops sizzling in a cast iron skillet, but all she could smell was the tangy aroma of the greens that seeped into every corner of the house. All of this—the overwhelming smells, the rare gesture of him cooking her favorite meal—made her forget for a moment her disgust with him. She intended to ask him where he'd been until 4 a.m. She meant to talk to him about her doctor's appointment earlier that day.

He turned to her smiling, singing, "I've got cornbread in the oven. I picked up some fresh honey from Mary's farm." He embraced her.

Weakened by his attention, she hugged him back tightly, burying her lips into his neck.

"You want me to make gravy?" she asked, in a voice more cheerful than she intended. She winced a little.

"You know I loooove your gravy, baby, mmm mmmm."

With that, she broke the embrace, broke his grip on her rear end. His innuendo reminded her of a something between them that felt long lost, if it had ever really existed. "Let me know when you've pulled those chops," she said walking outside, "I've got to clean these boots a little better."

Outside, on the porch swing she traveled back five years to the day he brought her to this place. "It's a fixer-upper," he warned. A snow storm, followed by a glaze of ice, had fallen a few days earlier. The storm's evidence had melted away in most parts of the county, but this little nook at the base of a hill in a tree-lined valley had resisted the sun's rays. Upon exiting the car, they crunched across the hidden lawn to the back door. "The realtor left the door unlocked for us,"

he explained. She studied the dingy, old farmhouse exterior, surrounded by the skeletons of icy trees for as far as she could see. She looked over the inside of the house, noting the stained carpets and the untidy, cracked walls. She shook her head 'no.'

"Let's look around outside," he said. His interior salesman knew she wasn't buying. "You know, we can do this," he told her as they walked. "We're a great team."

"Oh, I don't know, Bill, it's so . . ."

"I really want this for us," he interrupted, pointing to the largest Kentucky coffee tree he'd ever seen, then toward what he imagined was the sunniest spot of the lawn where they would plant the garden. He stopped walking, jumped in front of her, and pulled a small, white box from his coat pocket. She gasped. He cupped her chin with his hand, embraced her with his eyes. "Marry me?"

"Yes!" she shouted and grabbed him by his coat.

He slipped the perfectly fitting ring on her finger. They stood under the icy coffee tree kissing until her knees buckled and she slipped from his grip. The sun, now above the coffee tree and nearing the roof of the house, forced the ice on the branches to drip. Donna's warm tears mingled with the icy drops that fell on her cheeks. When they left, she turned back to the house, not noticing the obvious disrepair of the clapboard this time. Instead, she noticed that the snow's reflection brightened the condition of the shabby house. Maybe it was all a question of attitude. They drove giddily to the realtor's office; she could hardly tear her gaze away from the bright diamond sparkling on her ring finger. It was the first real piece of jewelry she had ever owned.

"The chops are pulled." He stepped out onto the porch, a beer in hand, and lit a cigarette. "Cornbread's done. It's gravy time, baby."

She saluted him and playfully marched into the house. She opened a beer, lit a candle on the stove, and got to the gravy. Soon the house was filled with the sound of her metal whisk whacking, whacking, whacking the roux in the iron skillet.

"There's only one way for a man to get anal warts," she recalled Dr. Doyle saying, as she slapped the browning roux. He insisted on running a battery of tests, and at first she protested: "My husband is not gay. He may be having an affair, but I cannot imagine him being with a man."

Dr. Doyle was a straight-talking man, always balancing an unlit cigar in his clenched mouth. "Keeps me from taking up smoking again," he explained when she first started seeing him years ago. "Listen, I know this is hard to hear, and I'm sure even harder to believe, but you need to know the anal fissures and warts he's having surgery for cannot be transmitted vaginally. There just isn't another way. Certainly, you were concerned enough about the risk he has caused your health or you wouldn't have scheduled your well-woman exam three months early. Women are either on time or late for that sort of thing, but rarely early, unless. . ." he tapered off.

Her face fell. She could hardly look Dr. Doyle in the eye. He removed the cigar and spoke with a softer mouth now. "I'm very sorry, Donna. I am very sorry. You must feel confused, but I urge you to get tested for HIV at the very least, and do it today, okay?"

Donna nodded, and Dr. Doyle said some more things she could barely hear over the loud buzzing in her head. He left the room, but his words, spoken as if in a foreign language, lingered: "HIV . . . Chlamydia . . . Gonorrhea . . . Bisexual."

She added milk to the gravy and whirled the whisk round and round to keep it from lumping. She did make excellent gravy, a cooking gift from her mother, she thought as she

## Cheri Cherry

---

worked proudly. How would she ever explain this mess to her mom? Her mom was a retired nurse. She wouldn't be able to keep the surgery a secret, and surely she would know the truth as well as Dr. Doyle.

She realized her whisk had long stopped moving. There were lumps. She shut off the stove, her pride smarting. She reached for her beer.

After dinner, he invited her to settle in on the couch with him. "I better clean the kitchen," she said. "If I sit down now, I'll never get up."

Washing dishes and scrubbing pots always cleared her head. As she worked, Donna recalled once reading that saying good-bye takes courage. Now she understood what that meant. She wasn't sure she could find the courage, but then again, she knew she couldn't live with Bill's betrayal. So far she hadn't been brave enough to press him about the late nights, believing his simple "boys night out" explanation. Something snapped, though, when she found out his actions put her health and her life at risk. All night the day's events stewed inside of her.

She selected a container to pack the greens in, and when she pulled the lid off the pot, the smell nearly made her vomit. Just a little earlier, she had been sipping the juice from her bowl. She quickly snapped on the Tupperware lid, locking it away. She returned to the scrubbed stove where the candle was nearing the wick's end, spitting and nearly flickering out on its own. She blew it out and watched the smoke wiggle up toward the ceiling, until it vanished, and the smell of the wick waned. She could no longer smell the greens, or their liquor.

**:Mother Earth:**

You can't continue like this,  
loaning every item you own:  
tree: stream: wild orchid.

Your children don't understand  
they are part of you.  
They don't think  
when they cut down your arms,  
erect buildings over your breasts,  
pollute your womb with  
nuclear waste, toxic dumps.

How can you call to them  
and make them feel  
as we feel, Mother: naked and one  
with the dirt: the sun: the moon?



*Little Brother*



*Innocence*

## The Facilitator

Characters:

SARA: woman in early 20's

DEATH: Sara's Death, calm and collected at all times, an extension of her consciousness

Setting: Sara's bedroom late at night. The room feels cold despite the mementos of childhood and school days long since past. It is Indian Summer, the present.

(Scene opens on SARA's bedroom. It is after midnight. SARA is in the middle of the bed in an uneasy sleep. The bed and floor are littered with used Kleenexes. The window is open near the bed and the curtains move gently with the breeze)

(DEATH appears near the bed. DEATH hovers over SARA protectively and strokes her hair affectionately)

SARA

(Sits bolt upright in bed and screams out)

Jake!

(SARA chokes and struggles to breath. She does not see DEATH. Suddenly, there is a strong gust of wind that scatters Kleenexes and papers from the bedside table)

Wha' . . . Jake . . . baby . . . is that . . .

(Sara freezes fearfully and whispers)

Who's there?

DEATH

Shhhhh. It's okay now. I'm here.

SARA

(Turns and sees DEATH)

What the hell?!? Who are you?!?

(SARA jumps out of bed, putting the bed between her and DEATH)

DEATH (Completely calm and collected)

I won't hurt you.

SARA (Grabbing the lamp off the bedside table and holding it like a club)

Who are you?

DEATH (Approaching the bed)

It's okay.

SARA

I've had lots of self-defense, ya understand? I don't have anything worth taking. Just get the hell out of here.

DEATH

I am not going anywhere.

(SARA studies DEATH. Suddenly she comes to a realization)

SARA

You . . . I know you . . . Have we met?

DEATH

Not formally.

SARA

Are you some kind of stalker?

## Rachael Henney

---

DEATH

You could say that. I have known you your whole life.

SARA

Who do you think you are?

DEATH

I am your Death.

SARA

My death? What the hell?

DEATH

I am here to help you, if you will let me.

SARA

That's supposed to reassure me? Get the hell away from me!

DEATH

I wish you would stop using that word.

SARA

Damn you! Get away from me!

DEATH

Put the lamp down. I came because you called me.

SARA

I called Death. Now he wants to chat. I must be dreaming. This is just so . . . Shouldn't you be in a black cloak or something?

DEATH

Some Deaths are.

SARA

What do I have to do to make you disappear?

DEATH

You have a choice to make.

SARA

What do you want?

DEATH

(Sitting in the chair near the bed)

To help.

(SARA stares at DEATH for a moment. She is visibly shaken but slightly curious)

DEATH (con't)

We can take as long as you want.

SARA

(Sets the lamp down within easy reach)

Just don't make any sudden moves.

(Pause)

Well . . . ?

DEATH

Tell me about Jake.

SARA (Sarcastically)

And here I was starting to think you wouldn't hurt me.

DEATH

I am not the one hurting you.

SARA

I don't want to talk about him. He is gone, end of story.

(Pause. SARA struggles to breathe)

I just want to forget. To disappear. Is that so much to ask?

(SARA struggles and finally starts to cry. DEATH crosses center to SARA and holds her close. She allows him to comfort her for a moment. Suddenly, she remembers who he is and flinches back)

DEATH

What is it you really want?

SARA

What?

DEATH

You have a choice, Sara. I can grant your Death Wish. I can take you from this world, or I can take the wish from your heart so that it can begin to heal. (DEATH reaches for her heart)

SARA

You want to grope me? At a time like this?

DEATH

I want to touch your heart.

SARA (Pushing DEATH away)

What do you know about my heart?

DEATH

I have always known it.

SARA

You must be confused.

DEATH

One of us is.

SARA

Is that what you meant when you said I called you?

DEATH

Your heart called out to me.

SARA

Do people call you often?

DEATH

You are the only one I answer to.

SARA

I have my own private Death. I'm not sure how I feel about that.

DEATH

Everyone does. You are avoiding the point again.

SARA

I'm not sure I understand.

DEATH

For your own sake, you have to choose whether you are going to move on in this life or the next.

SARA

I have to choose.

DEATH

Yes. No one can live with a Death Wish.

## Rachael Henney

---

SARA

I'm doing a lot better. Can't I just . . . go on?

DEATH

Not with a Death Wish in your heart. It will twist you until all you can ever feel is pain. You have to make the choice to go on living or to let go.

SARA

Ever since he . . . I just can't . . . I feel like I am being eaten from the inside out.

DEATH

In a way you are. I am here so that you won't be completely consumed.

SARA

Jake . . . When he . . . I mean . . .

DEATH

You can ask me.

SARA

Did he have a Death Wish too?

DEATH

I wish I could tell you. That is between him and his Death. Right now, this is between you and me.

SARA

I have to let something go.

DEATH

Yes.

SARA

Do I have to let him go?

DEATH

Do you want to?

SARA

(Standing and pacing away)

You ask annoying questions.

DEATH

So do you.

SARA

Will it hurt?

DEATH

Healing always hurts. Leaving is just a different kind of pain.

SARA

Have you done this to me before?

DEATH

Yes.

SARA

What? When? Why don't I remember you?

DEATH

You don't need to.

SARA

And this time?

## Rachael Henney

---

DEATH

That will depend on your choice.

SARA

Why are you doing this? What do you get out of it?

DEATH

I love you.

SARA

Love? Death loves me?

DEATH

Yes.

(Pause)

SARA

Do I have to choose now?

DEATH

Do you really want to put it off?

SARA

Yes . . . No . . . I just . . .

DEATH

It's time, Sara. Let go. You're ready.

SARA

You sound so sure.

DEATH

So do you, when you listen to yourself.

SARA  
Will Jake . . . ?

DEATH  
It's time to move on.

SARA  
I don't know what . . .

DEATH  
Yes. You do.

SARA  
What makes you think you know me so well?

DEATH  
I am a part of you.

SARA (Laughing)  
I'm not sure if I should be comforted or frightened.

DEATH  
I love you.

SARA  
I . . . I think I believe you.

DEATH  
Come.  
(SARA goes into DEATH'S waiting arms. He embraces her slowly)  
I am here. I am always here.

SARA  
Do it.

(BLACKOUT)



*Broken Protection*

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## Interview with Leslie Adrienne Miller

On a frozen April morning, I sat with poet and Pushcart Prize winning writer Leslie Adrienne Miller on campus in Tower Hall. I had recently finished reading her new book of poems, *The Resurrection Trade*, based on 18th century medical drawings of the female body. I was fascinated by how science and writing could work together, as well as the difficulties of writing critically through poetry about the representations of women's bodies. Miller's other works include *Eat Quite Everything You See* from Graywolf Press, *Yesterday Had a Man in It*, *Ungodliness*, and *Staying Up For Love* from Carnegie Mellon University Press. I wondered what Leslie, a '78 graduate and former professor at Stephens, had learned through her time in the profession, as well as what advice she had for a young feminist writer like myself.

AUSMUS: What was your process in approaching the theme of your new book of poems, *The Resurrection Trade*?

MILLER: I can answer that very easily. I was pregnant. I never expected to be pregnant. I was a late, late person coming to marriage and motherhood, and there I was at 45, pregnant. I had feared pregnancy most of my life, I guess because I thought it would put a big dent in my career. But I loved it! Every minute of it! I did what I always do—I was so curious. I read everything about pregnancy. I always gravitate towards science writing, because it is clean writing and full of fresh metaphors. Some of my best poets are actually biology majors, because they are such great observers. That is what a good writer is required to do, be a good observer of the minute. I knew I did not want to write a book about my own pregnancy, because it is just too overdone. I came upon this book, *Woman: An Intimate Geography*. She (author Natalie Angier) has a fabulous sense of humor; she man-

## Interview with Leslie Adrienne Miller

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ages a very scientific subject in a writing style that is completely entertaining. That book led me to some images by Leonardo DaVinci. I was hooked after that, researching and going deeper. The more I read, the more I realized the reason the female body was so misunderstood is that they had all these male notions of what was happening. The female body was the last unmapped territory. Only women really understood the birthing process. Midwives understood these things, but men didn't. Like the notion that semen came from the brain—illogical kind of male ideas, like breast milk came from the uterus. These notions made me want to write about this subject from a female perspective. I think that whatever you are interested in, what makes you curious, makes good poetry. Things you don't understand are perfect ideas for poetry.

AUSMUS: Do you consider yourself a feminist poet?

MILLER: Oh, of course. There is no question. Feminism is foundational in every book I have written. My orientation is completely feminist, a position I got here, at Stephens, as an undergraduate. All the writers I was exposed to were feminist, something I would have only gotten at a women's college. Now, I never approach material any other way.

AUSMUS: What writers inspired you?

MILLER: Adrienne Rich, someone I had to, again, go to a women's college to discover. Denise Levertov was a huge presence. Marge Piercy, Carolyn Kaiser, Tess Gallagher, and Margaret Atwood. There were male writers, too, but the women were the most significant.

AUSMUS: How has your work changed thematically over the years, as a writer?

MILLER: The genre has changed; you know, you have to read all the time, so I am constantly reading and paying attention. I live in the Twin Cities, in a diverse literary community, so I continue to go to readings, and I believe that is part of my professional development. I learned at Stephens to go to these readings. Poetry is not something strictly to be on the page; you have to hear it through the voice of the writer and hear the discussion around the work.

AUSMUS: What is your biggest struggle as a writer?

MILLER: The biggest struggle always is preserving the kind of time and silence to do this work. It's not something that happens fast, and life happens too fast, so you have to slow everything down—finding time to do the work, that's hard. You have to slow down your head to do the work that needs to be done. A writer needs to have a slow motion view of the world. It's a struggle every day.

AUSMUS: What inspires your poetry?

MILLER: Everything. Most of us have ordinary lives, so you have to pay close attention to whatever comes into your view. Slow down to look at things in a microscopic way and think about them deeply and what important questions they raise. Subject doesn't matter—it's really a matter of how closely you pay attention to the subject.

AUSMUS: What would be your advice to young writers?

MILLER: Read. It's the only thing that a writer needs to sustain her way. Career-wise you have to read to orient your head, and how you present your subject matter in language will change accordingly. But if you're not reading widely in poetry, you won't be

## Interview with Leslie Adrienne Miller

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able to notice the changes, so you won't be able to see what you want to use or to change. When I was at Stephens, I read poetry that spoke to me, but I have come to understand that you have to read what you don't like, too, what you don't have a taste for. I learned that I have to read male writers, too, and I came to that very late. I didn't have interest in them. I didn't connect, but I started to in grad school, and as I got older, I began to understand their point of view. I do get accused of teaching more women writers than male ones, which is silly, since there are always more men writers than female ones. I think it's just that I am more passionate about the women writers.

AUSMUS: What are your other interests?

MILLER: Gardening. I always lived in apartments, but eight years ago I moved to a house and I started to garden. My ideal life is getting up at six a.m. and going to the desk (and writing) until about two in the afternoon; then going out and working in the dirt, getting dirty; reading in the afternoon and having dinner and good conversation in the evening. It is truly wonderful to go to writers' colonies, too. This book was written a lot at a writers' colony not far from my house. I got so into the material, I was living in these books because I didn't have anyone else to talk to!

AUSMUS: Is there anything you wish people would ask about your writing?

MILLER: People always ask how much of this book is autobiographical. It's just not an interesting question. Everything has details from your own life, but it also has stuff from what you have been reading. An interesting project would be to see what writers were reading when they wrote certain poems; that is the interesting question. You approach your writing through what you have been reading.

## Luminescent

I walk with women, a high desert  
path along the gorge, through  
sweetgrass, threadgrass,  
peppergrass and blue gramma,  
four miles through chamisa and sage.  
We sit on the rim in silence,  
dangling our legs from a rock ledge  
above the winding river.  
The sun slips behind us,  
like a lover out the back door,  
leaves the canyon flushed rose.  
Evening tucks its lavender and indigo  
secrets into the land, and we hurry along  
the desert track. Birds  
flutter in the scrub, settling  
in for the night. Later,  
the moon finds us laughing,  
feasting on bread and cheese,  
apples, cashews and olives,  
chocolate and wine by the flicker of candlelight.  
A white half moon, nestled  
in the crook of Scorpio's tail,  
scatters its jewelbox light on the river,  
where we linger,  
hold our cups out for more, captive  
in the clear night of a thousand stars.

### My Cristos

At the Santuario de Chimayo  
I could not find the pilgrim's  
reverence and awe  
in the church of plaster saints  
of virginal women with downcast  
eyes and covered heads, nor,  
forgive me,  
in the image of the bleeding  
Christ on a cross.  
Not even candles were lit there.

Outside,  
yellow-leafed cottonwoods  
whispered, "Wake up!"  
their alive branches arching  
a shady bower santuario  
underneath a blue sky.  
On the sunwarmed banks  
by the little rio, we took off our  
shoes and socks, rolled up our pants  
and waded into that holy water blessing

flowed down from piney mountains.  
In the women, virgins none,  
in the milagritos of their  
blue and pink and copper painted  
toenails, flashing like fish  
in the cold October waters—  
bare-headed, golden,  
afternoon light catching in their hair—  
my Cristos.

## Twenty years of dreams have been like this:

I find him.

Sometimes I look him up in phone books I can't read.  
Sometimes I search the Lake Superior beach in winter,  
frozen sand and blue-white balls of ice,  
the color of my breast milk,  
floating in the thickened Karo-syrup water.  
Or he finds me.

Often we go fishing in the little blue pickup camper  
he lived in when he was painting houses  
after the university fired him,  
not because of him and me—that was OK with everyone  
then.

In fact, when it was over,

(of course, it was never over)

the Chair of the department called me in—

I was a sophomore, just nineteen—

and asked me what I'd done to Jan.

How was he going to be all right now, without me?

They didn't fire him for making love to me in Poetry 224,  
for sitting on my desk and reading Yeats and Roethke  
to me, just to me:

*Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,  
I am looped in the loops of her hair.*

or

*I knew a woman, lovely in her bones.*

It didn't take me long to drop my math major

and take up poetry

or to stop wearing a bra

even though I flunked Ann Landers' pencil test.

This was the sixties, after all—short skirts, tight sweaters.

## Tina Parke-Sutherland

---

I stretched a lot in class.  
He noticed.

They fired him because he didn't finish his dissertation.  
He had trouble that way, finishing what he'd started.  
So did I. It was a bad combination.  
He was in the middle of a long divorce,  
losing kids he loved.  
I was engaged to a football player,  
and my mother had just tried to kill herself—  
not because of the football player, though.

He was a Dutchman, tall and thin and blond,  
his bones like the masts of sailing ships,  
a distance runner back before we all were.  
Every year he won the cross-country ski race  
around Presque Isle. His legs cramped at night,  
and he would let me rub them,  
the long, sweet sweep of bone to bone:  
toe to ankle, ankle to knee, knee to thigh.  
(A bit like yours, now that I think of it.)

Raised Christian Reform,  
he'd fucked only his wife before me,  
and he hated that I smoked  
although he like to watch.

Often he asked me not to move.

Since his wife had left, he slept on the floor.  
He taught me how to do that, just right,  
on your side so it doesn't hurt your back.  
What I taught him, I can't say.  
He had a cabin on the lake. We made fires.

I feel mostly pity now, for both of us,  
but the leftover desire  
oozes like November's thickened lake water,  
pushing its last before the freeze.

I don't know what I was to him: his best student,  
a girl who worshipped him  
at a time when he'd lost everything.  
I wanted him so much it made me ill—  
not a Victorian faint,  
more a lumberjack sickness.  
My muscles hardened with the stress.  
I was too much awake, too strong.  
I could have broad-jumped to the moon.

I mistook him for my mother.

Here's a poem I wrote about him when I was twenty-five:  
(I was in my first marriage and hadn't seen Jan for years.)

*You have come to stand,  
like the final big-flaked snow  
of some final spring,  
for all that cannot stay  
but never really leaves,  
for all that certainly would melt  
upon the slightest touch  
and yet draws in my hand,  
for all that haunts.*

*On these wet spring nights  
you filter through my dreams,  
strangely disassembled,  
your form refusing to take shape*

## Tina Parke-Sutherland

---

*but always with Madonna smile.  
Madonna, who will not take her child in her arms.  
Madonna, whose child wakes with arms that ache  
from reaching, always reaching, out to touch her face.  
Madonna, I pray this will be our final spring.*

Not great verse, I admit, but useful for my therapist.

In those dreams then, and in them now,  
sometimes in my great-uncle's driveway in Detroit  
or in my office at the college,  
we almost touch. We almost touch. Almost. Touch.  
Then the world turns into smelt,  
three-inch, shining, moon-curved fish.

Unlike we humans, smelt finish what they've started,  
and mostly they have started mating.  
Somehow they find the river of their birth,  
leave the big lake and swim upstream to spawn.  
We call it running—a smelt run.  
They do it in the spring, at night, all together,  
millions of slim silver fish  
pushing for the small ponds and trickles,  
broad-jumping to the moon.

Unlike salmon,  
they don't die from it.  
(Do we?)

What smelt are doing in my dreams,  
why I have these dreams at all,  
has not come clear to me.

I was hoping you could help.

## Simon

My cat sleeps in a curl on the coffee table. His fangs, chipped and yellowed with age, extend over his bottom lip, and the full plume of his gray-black tail falls over the table edge, dusting the floor. He's been with me through three boyfriends, a husband, and several homes, each nicer than the last (homes and men). Now we live in a two-story house on a cat-friendly street with very little traffic and bird-filled trees. With pets, like children, you learn how much you love what depends on you. I've always described Simon in honest terms, careful not to overstate his intelligence. He's responsive, quick, a problem solver; he knows what he wants and tells you so. (Here's my joke: "which is more than I can say about my men.") He arrived in my life when my brother, lightening his load on the way to Colorado, stopped by my house and handed me a cardboard box punched with nail-size holes. "For you," he said, smiling a little. My brother called the panting ball of fur Simon—"an English bad-boy name"—and then asked for money for gas, beer, food on the road. I handed him a ten and a twenty and said, "This is the only live animal you've ever given me." "Maybe." He laughed. There was some question as to whether Simon would revive from near suffocation. And now I have this cat, which over the years has become fraught with meaning. But sometimes he's just a cat that chokes up a tiny skein of tightly wound fur, a skein I find in the middle of my kitchen floor. I know that it is useless to imagine that Simon's devotion for me is as deep as mine for him. This is a one-sided affair.

## Toward Bureaucratic Progress: Part I-A

(LIGHTS up. ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT is on the phone.)

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Hi, I'd like to report . . . yes. Mm hmm.

(the SOUND of Muzak as she waits; and waits)

Yes, I have water stains on my ceiling . . . yes, I filled one out three weeks ago . . . no, no, I'm sure I signed it . . . mm hmm. They said—

(the SOUND of Muzak)

. . . hello?

(she waits; speaks fast)

Yes, hi! I have water stains on my ceiling that I reported three weeks ago and I filled out the forms and I signed them and everything and they said they were going to fix it and—

(the SOUND of Muzak)

. . . hello? Hello...?

(she waits; listens; presses a button on her phone; waits; presses another; presses yet a third button)

Water.

(she waits; over-articulates)

Wa-Terrrr . . .

(listens; punches a button on her phone)

Stain.

(listens; punches a button)

Ceiling.

(listens; over-articulates)

Seeeeeee-Leeeeeng

(she listens; punches a button and...  
SOUND of Muzak; she waits)

Hello...? Yes, hi! A person? Wow. Okay, so I reported water stains on my ceiling three weeks ago and I filled out the forms and

signed them and they should've been fixed by now and—

(pause; listens briefly)

Yes, I did and that's when I was transferred to you.

(pause)

I did that...then I was transferred to—

(pause)

No...yes, I tried, but—

(pause)

I've been transferred three or four ti—

(pause)

Well, no one did—it was a recordi...what? No, no, wait!

What's that number in case I get cut—

(SOUND of dial tone; she looks at receiver)

... off ...

(She hangs up the phone. LIGHTS fade.)

## Hefty Paychecks

The truck bumbled over the dusty, knotty road, jostling the shoulders and knees of the passengers. The tires rolled over stranded rocks or bumps, causing the passengers to soar a few inches in the air and land harshly on the wooden benches. Out of courtesy, they squeezed their shoulders and thighs inward to avoid touching one another during the first day of the journey. But as the traveling entered its third day, the passengers gave in to the jaggedness of the road and carelessly fell onto one another. Everyone riding in the windowless truck bed became unbearably restless until, finally, a young German passenger named Adrian rapped his fingers against the wall of the cabin and inquired about the remaining distance.

“Two hours,” a raspy voice replied from the other side. Adrian released a sigh of relief. He looked back to the other passengers and noticed anxious eyes upon him—he had momentarily forgotten that he was only one of two passengers that spoke German. The other ragged, middle-aged German speaker had only opened his wrinkled mouth once during the trip to complain about the stale bread, and now stared at the floor as if the statement from the front never existed, so Adrian motioned the remaining time with two upheld fingers to the others. A wave of relief rippled throughout the truck bed. He then rested his hands between his knees, relaxed his head on the rattling bed cover, and wondered about Poland, the truck’s destination. He naively imagined the mysterious country with infinite plains dotted by an occasional brick country home. His thoughts also drifted to his new work site—Auschwitz. He closed his eyes and hoped the camp’s mattresses would be soft.

About two hours later, the truck slammed to a stop, and every body in the truck tumbled toward the front of the bed. The back doors opened, unleashing sunlight onto the faces of the passengers, causing them to blink for a few moments.

"Get out!" a soldier ordered harshly from the outside. Adrian scrambled from his seat and jumped out of the truck door, landing on hard dirt in front of a retired army barracks instead of on the rolling Polish plains that he imagined. He noticed the other men still lingered in the truck, frightened and confused. He motioned for them to unload. Several other trucks arrived and more passengers unloaded. The soldiers commanded them in German to march to the cafeteria, one of the large brick buildings on the site. As the men paced through Auschwitz, Adrian's arms began to tingle and his face felt flush. Something about the site wheezed and rippled in his stomach, but Adrian executed the feelings with a deep breath and continued to march.

Once inside the building, the smell of hot soup hit them, and their stomachs grumbled in one language. Fortunately, bowls full of steaming potato soup already awaited them at wooden tables. For a few minutes their grumblings halted, and the cafeteria fell silent except for the sound of slurping. Suddenly, the door swung open and green-uniformed soldiers strolled inside. Adrian recognized many of them from the truck ride.

"Hello gentlemen," said the fairest-toned soldier. "After you eat your meal, you'll sleep in the next building over, and then tomorrow the work starts." The soldier's eyes scanned the room for questions, unaware that very few men spoke his language. "Remember also that your pay is in deutschmarks and is distributed every Friday. Also, you're here for three months or until the work is done." Every ear at the table perked at the word deutschmark. "Tomorrow you begin building something crucial to our war effort."

*Crucial.* Adrian remembered that word from the paper flyers that hung on every lamppost several months before in his hometown. Desperate for a job to support his father's failing carpentry business, Adrian ripped the flyer off its post and answered immediately. The flyers called for experienced build-

ers who wanted to advance the efforts of the Nazi party, and though Adrian didn't necessarily support Nazis, the good pay compelled him.

During the next weeks, the men struggled through the grueling construction work, while German architects directed the position of every brick. Every night Adrian fell onto his bunk from exhaustion, and every morning his muscles ached, but the hefty paychecks reenergized him. They laid bricks for new buildings and nailed together logs for hundreds of bunks. Next, the workers dug a strange, airtight underground room for which no one could comprehend the purpose. By this time, most of the men, including Adrian, understood that the construction was a labor camp. Based on common knowledge of the Nazi party, Adrian reasoned it must be a labor camp for the Jewish people. Images of children locked inside the underground room nagged at Adrian's conscience, but he pushed them to the back of his mind and behind his paycheck. At least the camp's future inmates would be served hot soup from the kitchen and a bed in the barracks, Adrian told himself. It wouldn't be so bad.

When the third month of work began, the mood of the entire camp darkened. A withdrawn disposition replaced the previously comfortable mood of the soldiers. Their faces and mouths tightened toward the workers, especially about the new construction projects. In the far corner of the camp, several yards behind the brick barracks, a curious, kitchen-like structure stood in mid-construction. The workers piled and cemented bricks together for rows of massive ovens. Adrian's hands involuntarily shook as he stacked the bricks and cold sweat seeped through his shirt.

"They will burn men in these ovens." Adrian turned to face the familiar old German, his mouth opening for the first time in weeks.

"No," Adrian answered, his hands fumbling for the next brick. He understood the Nazis' harshness, but no soul could possibly burn another. The old German continued in a cold

voice, as if reading an obituary in the newspaper; his weathered face remained unchanged.

"Why do you think the ovens are six feet deep? For bread? And the underground room? They will murder people in there."

"No," Adrian said again. Suddenly the room melted around him, the bricks of the ovens hazed, and his vision blurred with the logic of the German. He heard brakes squeal and the phrase *Sie bewegen* yelled from the outside. Through the doorway, Adrian and the men witnessed hundreds of people unload from trucks and then disperse into the directions of the barracks and the underground room. Adrian's mind exploded with the realization, then blackened as he fainted on the hard ground of Auschwitz.

He awoke to the familiar bumbling of the truck bed with a wet rag on his forehead; he and the other workers now headed home—their job completed. The old German leaned over Adrian and placed a paper on his lap.

"Here," he said, "your last check from Auschwitz."



*The City*



*Italian Eyes*

## Daddy's Girl

Daddy.

Grab leg. Don't let go.

Daddy don't go.

He bends down and unlatches the little girl tied around his leg, setting her on the dead grass. It crunches under her weight, and the dead spindles stick through her pants. She begins to cry. His wife stands on the front porch, watching her three-year-old daughter, somewhat annoyed. The cat plays in the corner, tapping the dead mouse it caught earlier that morning in an effort to make it play again.

He kisses his wife good-bye and climbs into their old car, leaving his family behind for business. He always takes the old car, just in case someone decides to break into it at the airport.

The little girl watches as the car starts, inhaling the exhaust—Daddy's smell. She sees the beat-up Volvo back out of the driveway. Her man is leaving.

Daddy saved me from the boys.

"Leave her alone!" Daddy shouted as he rushed around the corner of the park bathrooms. I stood against the stale gray wall, frozen and already forgetting. The sun spit its heat through the trees surrounding the path to the bathrooms, and, faintly, I could hear kids playing at the park. I looked down at my Barbie panties that were resting on my once white sneakers.

"Hi," I whispered to her cotton face, my brown hair falling in my eyes.

The tall boy in blue jeans began to run when he heard Daddy. He tripped over his shoelace some mother probably told him to tie, hitting the concrete ground. His brown hair flew into his eyes like mine once he landed. The fat one didn't

even have a chance to run before Daddy grabbed the back of his shirt.

Daddy drug him over to the tall one, who was trying to get up. Tall boy's jeans were ripped over the right knee. His left elbow was bleeding. Daddy grabbed Tall and pulled him and Fat behind some trees.

Daddy's voice echoed off the bathroom walls, "If I ever catch you near her again..." Chills ran down my spine and my skin trembled at his voice. His yells sang to me, making something inside me happy. I pushed my hair out of my eyes and slid to the ground where I rested on top of Barbie's face.

"Devin. Devin baby." My daddy stooped in front of me, his brown eyes level with mine. I stared at his face, so much more handsome than I remember. Dark hair like mine curled around his head. Eight years of knowing me, and he loved me ten times more than he loved my mother.

"Daddy..." I pulled his hands to hug me.

Slowly, Daddy helped me to my feet. I straightened my dress, as he straightened my hair. I noticed there was some blood on my thighs, a better red than the red on his shirt. Fat and Tall bled dirty; I bled clean.

Daddy gently cleaned my legs and helped me pull my panties up, closing his large hands around my smaller ones. He then held me close to him and carried me home.

As we left the park, I stared back at the gray wall and saw I left my shadow, but I didn't tell Daddy. I'm sure he would have grabbed it for me, but something told me I wouldn't want that shadow ever again.

She gave Daddy a hug before he climbed into his car, lingering in his scent. Her mother watched from the porch as she always did for the past fifteen years of Devin's life, while the old cat twisted its tail waiting for the Volvo to pull out of the drive.

"Devin. Hurry up. Your father has to go." Devin turned to look at Mother. Her presence always offended Devin at this time.

Every weekend, Mother stood there, a worn-down version of youth. Silver hairs gave her black hair a cinder-snow appearance that highlighted her wrinkles and aged body. Her hands weren't smooth anymore like her daughter's, but wrinkled with care and broken with life. Her right index finger was missing the top half due to an unfortunate garbage disposal incident, while her left ring finger was entirely too large for her wedding ring now, so she left it in her jewelry box.

Sometimes, when Daddy felt sorry for Mother and took her out to make her feel special, I would go into their room and find the ring.

Slowly, I slide my fingers on the carved lid of the jewelry box, feeling the richness of the cut. Then I open the lid and immediately direct my sight to the right hand corner of the box. The ring sits in its own section alone, waiting for me as it always has. Carefully, I pick the ring up and slide it on my finger, filling the emptiness in the middle of the golden band.

I look at myself in the mirror above the dresser where the box sits, resting my chin on my left hand while making sure I can see the ring in the reflection. I survey myself, noting the softness of my dark hair and the loss of baby fat in my face. I take off my shirt and look at my growing breasts. I know they're better than Mother's, perkier than Mother's, but I still don't know why Daddy doesn't look at mine like I sometimes see him look at hers.

I turn toward the bed. Ignoring Mother's side, I pull the covers back from Daddy's. I bend over the sheets and press my nose into the cotton. Inhaling the fibers, I drown myself in his scent—exhaust fumes and cologne. Daddy.

Then I climb into the bed face down in the sheets. I take my bra off, rubbing my hardened nipples on the fabric. I hear cars passing outside the window. The street lamp seeps through the room. I lie my head on Daddy's pillow. I unzip my jeans and slip my hand under my lacy boy shorts feeling myself in a way far better than Tall and Fat, thinking only of Daddy.

She sees him holding her, protective and fierce. She strokes her body where his hands could explore what he helped create and she could thank him in the way she always wanted to. She kisses and he loves her for it.

As she thinks of this, her breathing is heavy and uncontrolled, little moans escaping.

"Daddy," she says, moving her fingers fiercely in the bed, in his scent.

Faster the cars speed by the window, each one with more precision, more pressure to get to their destination until finally there are no more, and all is quiet, except for her. She rolls onto her back, breathing heavily. I pull my hand out of my pants.

"That was for you, Daddy," I whisper before getting out of the bed.

Daddy's little girl makes the bed the same way Mother would. She caresses the pillow where his head will lie and kisses the covers where he will nestle. She grabs her bra and shirt from in front of the dresser. Then, almost reluctantly, the ring is placed back in the jewelry box as if it had never felt its temporary owner.

Glancing around, I survey the scene, checking for anything that may appear out of place.

"I love you, Daddy," I say to the empty room before closing the door behind me.

Well, Daddy, you have your little girl in every way without even knowing it, like almost every daddy tends to. Little girl, so mixed-up and pieced together, we need to talk, you'll say one day. Then you'll break my heart and bleed me empty like all parents do to their girls sometime.

So, Daddy, if you're listening, don't go.

Come back soon.

Your little girl is crying and waiting for you to save her.



*Black and White Faces*

## Autumn in Her Hair

Inspired by Alex Vogel

She lies on a bed of decaying leaves,  
mouth kissing the sky beneath the quilted twilight.  
The dark roots of her hair blend with the colors of October.  
She wishes the starlight would seep into her skin,  
her blood and bones, granting radiance.

Insecurities find her, even in night's brilliance.  
Her shadow self curls next to her,  
as moonlight escapes the clouds  
and whispers in her ear,  
*Worthless.*

*None could love you.  
Your body is hideous.*

She agrees,  
turning to her side, makes herself small as possible,  
not wanting to offend the eyes of the earth.

The wind argues, "She is beautiful,"  
bending the trees' skeletal hands.  
*You are the flower beside the rose no hand will ever choose,*  
hisses Shadow.

Storm clouds saturate the night,  
erasing the light for the shadow to survive.  
"You are beautiful," whispers the breeze in darkness.

Hearing for the first time,  
she rises with Autumn in her hair,  
smiles and knows  
the gaze of the earth sees beyond skin.

## Immaculate Conception

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son...”  
Matthew 1:23

As I walk into the clinic, I catch my reflection in the window. I’m still getting used to the subtle distention, pressing, distorted. My shirts no longer reach my waistband; I hadn’t bothered buying anything new. I recognize the name on the door: Dr. Phillip Bernand, OB/GYN. There’s a billboard of him on Highway 34. He’s holding a boy child in his arms. It reads: “The only name Hartsville trusts for its most precious deliveries!” I never thought I’d meet Dr. Bernand.

The waiting room smells of sanitation and anxiety. It is decorated with landscape prints and big vases of plastic flowers covered in dust, red roses, blue roses, baby’s breath. The eyes of the other women in the room lift as I walk to the front desk. All are clearly with child. Some have other children waiting with them. At the age of thirty-seven, I suspect I am the oldest one here.

“May I help you, ma’am?” The twang in her voice, the way she drawls her vowels, reminds me of Him. I wonder if this will be passed on to our son. The photo-ID card on the receptionist’s shirt bears a crude resemblance to the woman speaking to me; Nancy Fuller has seen better days.

“Yes, my name’s Maureen Peters. I’m here for my 3:00 appointment with Dr. Bernand.” Nancy Fuller looks at the clock. It is 2:15.

“You’re a little early, Hun. He’s running a bit behind today, but he’ll get right with you as soon as he can. Now, fill these out and take a seat.” Nancy Fuller hands me two clipboards. Nancy Fuller wears an American flag pendant on her white scrubs.

I take a seat next to a rail-thin woman. It looks like someone has stashed a watermelon down the front of her pale

blue dress. She smiles wide and empty, flashing a set of square teeth—a politician’s smile. *It is His smile.* The woman clears her throat and takes a breath, as if to say something, but decides against it.

After completing Nancy Fuller’s forms, I reach into my canvas bag and pull out my stitching. It’s a tiny blue jumper he’ll wear home from the hospital. I’ve been hand-embroidering an American flag on it, stitching each individual star. I hold the light blue cotton close to my face and breathe in, imagining the scent of baby powder and milk stains. The woman stares at me. Again, she clears her throat and takes a breath, as if to say something, but decides against it.

There’s a familiar voice coming from the waiting room television. Without looking up, I—we—know who it is. I feel him quicken. “Baby, who is that?” I whisper, stroking my girth gently.

*The terrorists are fighting freedom with all their cunning and cruelty because freedom is their greatest fear—and they should be afraid, because freedom is on the march.*

The woman next to me clears her throat a third time. She glances at the blue jumper.

“So, you’re having a boy?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Isn’t Dr. Bernand just wonderful? He was with us every step of the way with my first son, and he’s been great so far with number two.” She laughs and motions towards the swell of her cotton dress.

“This is actually my first time here.”

“Oh.” She nods politely.

I continue stitching. The sound of ripping paper interrupts my embroidery. The woman’s toddler child stands in front of us with half of the cover from an outdated *Newsweek*. It was a picture of Him. She scolds the child through square teeth.

Minutes pass. One at a time, stars appear on cloth.

She clears her throat and speaks again.

"Do you have a name picked out?"

"Tres, Tres Immanuel."

"Oh, Trace. Like Tracey?"

"No, Tres, like three. The third."

"Oh," a breath, a nervous laugh, "Well, I'm sure his Daddy and Grandpa will love that. Now, are ya'll from around here?"

"I am, yes."

"I thought you seemed familiar. Your husband—" Her eyes connect with my naked ring finger. "Uh, the father, would I know him? Don't mean to be nosey; it's just my husband's the football coach down at Riley High. We stay pretty friendly with most everyone. Small town, ya know?"

"Oh, yes. I'm positive you'd know him." She waits for a name; I continue stitching. I notice the remote sitting on the table next to me and max out the volume on the television.

*America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.*

Thirty-nine stars become forty-four. The door opens and a large, jovial blonde asks, "Stella Holden?" The square-tooth woman corrals her toddler, still clutching the severed portrait of Him.

Forty-eight stars.

A red-headed girl wearing a Royal's tee-shirt tight across her unborn grabs the remote from the chair beside me.

"I guess you don't mind if I change the channel? You look pretty busy."

Forty-nine stars.

"Ma'am?"

I feel him kick.

"I'd rather you didn't," I say, without looking up.

The door opens. "Maureen Peters?"

I follow a woman down a long hallway with many closed doors. We reach a room with a scale.

"Go ahead and hop up there, Mrs. Peters."

"Miss," I correct her.

"176 pounds. How far along are you, Maureen?" I look at the calendar. It is February 11th.

"Five months, exactly."

"Well, we really like you to get in here as soon as you're positive you're pregnant, so we can run tests and make sure you and your baby boy or girl have a healthy pregnancy." Her tone is slow, patronizing.

"It's a boy."

She takes a breath, as if to say something. She does not. She takes my blood pressure and scribbles something down.

"Second door to the left. Dr. Bernard will be in shortly." She walks away, huffing.

I find my way to the second door on the left. There's a white robe folded neatly near the stirrup chair. I undress quickly, but not without briefly taking in the sight of breasts and belly stretched like canvas. It looks slightly distorted, unsymmetrical. Not exactly the pale, perfect swell I'd seen in photographs and paintings. The room is freezing. I don the white robe and await Dr. Bernard's arrival.

I contemplate stitching the last star but decide against it. A knock.

"Come in." The door opens and my suspicions are quickly confirmed. Dr. Bernard's billboard on Highway 34 has been airbrushed. The man before me is frazzled, old, rushed. His pen has bled blue ink into the pocket of his lab coat. His hands are red and fat.

"Hello, Maureen. It's a pleasure to meet you." He surprises me with a firm grip. "Now, I see you're five months along. Is there any reason you didn't come in earlier?"

"I was watching television."

A second passes. His face crinkles, exaggerating the lines on his forehead.

“Well, uh, at least you’re here now. We’ll be doing all we can to make sure your child is delivered safely. So, let’s go ahead and get started on the ultrasound.” He retrieves a container from the cabinet and smacks on two rubber gloves. “Now, this will probably feel cold, Maureen.” He takes the liberty of moving the robe away from my stomach. I feel myself blush at the thought of another man seeing me so exposed. It is cold. It is very cold.

He navigates a contraption through the wetness and stares into the screen. He is silent. His expression grows more intense, lines cutting deep in his forehead, as if something had gone unexplainably missing. He moves the device more maniacally now, fast, then slow, then stopping.

“Maureen...” he stammers, jaw slightly ajar. He draws back, takes a breath, and regains his composure. “Maureen, you have taken a pregnancy test, haven’t you?”

“What? No. Why would I? Look at my stomach.” Dr. Bernard seems at a loss for words. He lets the silent pressure build.

“Maureen, when was your last sexual experience?” he finally asks.

It is September. I am sitting in the old, moth-eaten recliner Mother had left me in her will. Since she’s been gone, the chair has become a throne for me. I sleep in it. I eat in it. Mostly, though, I watch TV in it. I am sitting in the dark watching news clips. The glow of the television illuminates my nude body. I find something about His presence deeply attractive. As He speaks, there’s a tingle of unfamiliar sensations.

*America has never been united by blood, birth, or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests, and teach us what it means to be citizens.*

Yes. Blood. Birth. Soil. Yes. Something in my deepest parts quakes. It starts to build, burn, until I feel I might explode with ecstatic sparks.

*The desire for freedom resides in every human heart. And that desire cannot be contained forever by prison walls . . .*

The burning releases its tension and consumes me with wave after profound wave of racing heat. I am on fire, passionate, powerful fire. I sit in Mother's chair, quivering in the aftermath, uncertain, spent. Soon after the morning sickness begins, I know.

I stare at Dr. Bernard blankly. "I'm not sure I feel comfortable sharing that information with you." He takes a deep breath.

"Maureen, have you ever heard of Pseudocyesis?"

I say no with a raise of my brow.

"Pseudocyesis, false pregnancy. Women can exhibit all the physical symptoms of pregnancy without the egg ever actually becoming fertilized. The mind is a powerful thing, Maureen . . . When your desire to become pregnant is this intense, the body will react accordingly."

"You don't know who's inside of me. You don't know what this means." I snatch the robe, covering myself.

"Maureen, I know this is hard to hear, but these symptoms are all psychosomatic. The bulge of your stomach is made up primarily of excess feces, fat, and urine. Take a look."

He motions towards the screen.

"No. I don't want to look. I won't look."

"I really suggest you see a therapist, Maureen. I know a great guy down on Keene Street. He's very helpful. But for now, please just take a look at the monitor. It will really help your mind and body understand what's going on to see that there's no fetus here."

I bite my tongue until it bleeds, hold my breath until veins swell blue. Finally, I stare into the monitor. I see a television screen of white static. White. The color of nothing.

## Nineteen Hours

After hours of spasms and throwing up,  
I want to push, bearing down heavy.  
A masked man says "Wait."  
I would laugh if I could. Instead,  
I beg my husband to consent to sterilization.  
He doesn't answer, reminds me to breathe, holds my hand.  
His eyes focus, and I remember  
they are responsible for my condition.  
Unable to resist, I swim in them  
like so many times before,  
and he opens them deep and wide for me.

A nurse yells, "The head is crowning!"  
Then shouts, "It's a girl!"  
They whisk her away.  
I barely catch sight of her slippery side,  
her wriggling feet and open mouth. She takes her first breath,  
exhales her first cries.  
I ask if everything is okay.

Still wailing, she is delivered to her father's arms.  
He speaks "hi" in a voice so sweet it breaks  
her crying spell. She focuses on him.  
He knows it's my turn now  
to study her glance, a mirror of my own.  
She nurses. I tell my husband  
she has his strong jaw, his dimpled tongue.  
Nineteen hours fade  
as we consume each other.



*Wonder*

## A Hundred Pieces

Sometimes when I'm  
on hands and knees  
tidying the toys, I think  
how great I am at cleaning,  
my challenge to get faster  
picking up the hundred pieces,  
a grocery set from my dad, whom my daughter knows  
by name, but not his round, wide face or  
voice of lilting baritone.

I think of him,  
the hundred pieces, how she'll be  
bored when we bury him,  
a man she didn't know but should have,  
should have seen the good, and heard the odd,  
like when he'd sing off-key,  
missing the chorus cue  
in his best Johnny Cash,  
wailing how he'd never get over those blue eyes and  
how he'll still miss someone.

I know he'll shout at me from the grave,  
guilting me for the whole mess of us.  
We blame each other for the failure, a father,  
a daughter who won't meet halfway  
to get along, but I tried.

I think.

I will miss those hazel eyes,  
the arms that comforted, sometimes,  
but the memory that will play louder than  
shouts from the grave is the voice  
that made me and the dog howl.



*Stephens Woman*

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## Red Lace

This morning, as we pulled out of the driveway, leaving for the hair salon, I noticed it: a window, quaking with the breeze, shimmering with each shudder. It seemed almost alive, the shine of the glass as it bowed like sunlight off of the back of a great wriggling fish.

“Mom, that window,” I said.

“Hm. I left it open.”

I knew that it was open. I could see the angle of the frame, but the glass, the glass was wrong. I shook my head, squashing my paranoid inclinations, and pulled my bangs up from my eyes. We drove down the shady street and into the glaring intersection.

My friends drop me off at the intersection, so bright this morning, now lit with a sickly yellow, reflecting back on the earth from an overcast sky. The awful, yellow swirl glows against the purple of the rest of the sky. A tornado sky, I would have said, but the cool air lacks those static sparks. This feels different; tonight, a tension hangs in the air—a warm, wet, thickness, snaking with the breeze. The air carries an earthy smell, rain and ozone. Little thrills of pain shoot up my legs with each click of my too tight, black leather high heels on the pocked concrete. My breathing, a hushed growl of discomfort, nearly masks a different kind of footstep. My steps click, the clean snap of a dry twig, and echo back a tinny scratch from the abandoned street. The other steps clop, like thick, rubber-soled snow boots on the kitchen linoleum, no, more like hooves on cobblestone. The sound is faint; the feet creating it are far enough back that I cannot see their owner’s reflection in any of the houses’ darkened windows.

“You can’t have me,” I whisper and press my shoulders back, head held high. I don’t know who or what I’m addressing. Somewhere hot and red and primordial inside of me has taken control of my voice. I stop, half hoping, half dreading to

hear. Silence. I can hear only the steady whump of my heart and the hiss of blood escaping through its weak valve. I can't quite name what I think is following me. I know that I'm not afraid of vampires or ghosts, and I know that the devil isn't real. "My soul. I've earned it," I say and continue to walk. The clopping step echoes mine. I must be imagining it, but I can't yet compel myself to turn around. Just a few more steps and I'll be safe at home, safe from what I can't yet process. My brain feels shrouded. I imagine my thoughts becoming tangled in a red lace, drawn behind my eyes just across the bridge of my nose.

I reach the porch step at a jog, my toes squashed in my shoes, and I stumble, scraping off the shiny black surface of the shoe along with a small strip of my own flesh. I catch the door handle and steady myself as I twist it. The door is locked. The porch lights are out. I am alone.

I turn around, ready to face the clopping footsteps, but find no one. A neighbor pulls a silver SUV into his garage. The motion sensor light over my garage flashes. I sit down on the porch next to a potted gerbera daisy, my back to the door. I watch the street and remind myself that I could always throw the terra cotta pot beside me if I need a chance to run. I dig through my tiny black purse: no house keys, just my ID, a cell phone, and a twenty dollar bill.

I call my mother. "Mom, I'm home, but I don't have a key."

"Oh, we were just about to have dessert. We'll eat real quick and come let you in," she says.

"Oh, no, nevermind. I don't want to ruin your night."

"It's not ruined. We'll be back in a bit."

"Just forget I called," I say. "I'll call the girls and make them take me somewhere for a while."

"Are you sure?" she asks.

"Yeah, it'll be fine." I don't want her to come back now.

I'm fine. I'm safe. I'm being silly. Nothing is going to get me on my own front porch.

"The front window's still open if you want to try," she suggests.

"I don't want to break the screen," I reply. "I'll be fine. See you later."

I hang up and tuck the phone into my purse. I'm not going to call anyone. I take off my high heels and watch cars drive by. A black car with its lights off drives by real slow. I'm sure the driver can see me, a pale face in the cavern of the porch, if the maiden hair grasses don't conceal me entirely. I try to look inconspicuous; I'm just sitting here because it's nice outside. Now, I wish I smoked; at least I'd have a cover for sitting here.

The newspaper van flings a thick yellow Sunday paper into the gutter by the mailbox. The black car crawls by again. I realize that the person in that car is more of a threat than the footsteps ever were. I have to get in the house.

I put all my belongings into a pile under the window. I try to pry the glass back enough to touch the screen. I can just slide my hand into the space. I bang on the clip holding the screen to the window frame. The screen ripples, warbles. I press all along the edges of the screen, looking over my shoulder for the black car, listening for the footsteps. The bottom of the screen bends into the house. I can just fit a pinky inside. Another car drives by, and I jump back from the window. All I need is the cops to show up as I break into my own house.

I force my fingers under the screen and lift, attempting to slide the clip out of place. I press an earring through the screen and try to release the clip. The fragile earring snaps, but it slides the clip a little bit out from the wall. I hear a rustling, a dry, brittle sound, as if someone swept against a bush. I pull harder at the screen, willing it to lift free. The left side slides in. The black car creeps into my vision. I grasp the left side of the screen, yanking it up and down, viciously. The red

lace returns behind my eyes. I hear voices but understand no words. Something out there is watching me; it wants my soul. It wants to possess me, like this lace holding my reasoning and voice prisoner. It enjoys my fear, I think, and it is waiting for me to make some fatal miscalculation.

Finally, the screen pops free. I fling it onto the floor, reach through to crank the window open, and scramble through. As I step through the window, I hear a noise. Please be the floorboard creaking. I hear one clomp, the footstep. I jerk at the window crank; it catches and squeals as I try to force the frame back toward the house. I latch the glass shut and fumble to press the screen back into the window. I fit it into the frame, and I sit there, in the dark, watching out the window.

You have my fear but not me.

An hour passes, and my parents find me sitting before the window in the dark.

"I knew you'd find a way in," my mother says, "my little cat burglar."

I'm not alone; you can't get me. I leave my purse by the window and head into the kitchen to hug my mother.

"You really shouldn't leave that window open. If I could get in, anyone could," I say, smoothing my voice out, relaxing my tense heart.

"As if there's anything anyone would want to take," she says. "But, I knew, as soon as we hung up, that you'd get in somehow."

"I just have the devil's own luck, I guess," I say to her.

"Yeah, you always, just barely, get out of things," she agrees. "How was the party?"

I head back into the front room to retrieve my purse. The window is still locked, but my purse and the broken earring that I used on the screen are gone. I imagine that I see the glass rippling where it pulled my purse through. It took my ID, a picture of me—as if to say, I could have you, and I will.

## Adaptation

Living in constant elasticity  
keeps me stretched so thin  
my intentions are transparent  
and my vulnerability  
gives me bloodshot eyes.  
Trying to act hard in a place where  
having heart is just not becoming,  
doesn't get the job done.  
All that trusting and loving everybody  
and soft gets taken blindly.  
All that touching spongy bodies  
just to find nothing  
quite sticks to me.  
Taking blows to all the weak parts  
and managing to love again,  
not get all dried up and rigid  
like the rest of them.  
Constant run-ins  
with the wrong kind of sharp element  
got me developing tougher skin  
but retaining that rich inside  
that makes all the love I give  
so good.

# CContributors' Notes

**Janeke Ausmus** is a Senior Creative Writing major, Women's Studies minor, and this year's Editor-in-Chief. She currently lives on 500 acres in rural Missouri and is excited to start her all-natural farming business. Her favorite part of life is waking up to hot coffee and deer in her front lawn. She dreams of having dinner and wine with Adrienne Rich one day soon.

**Kim Bennett** is a senior Creative Writing major. She would like to thank her friends, boyfriend, and family from Sedalia, Missouri for all they've done for her, especially Alex Vogel whose painting inspired the poem. She would also like to thank her professors at Stephens, who helped her during the past few years.

**Cheri Cherry** Gustave Flaubert said, "There is not a particle of life which does not bear poetry within it." This alone, the truth of things both big and small, inspire Cheri to put pen to paper. Cheri is largely influenced by women writers, due to her interest in female experiences. She lives in Jamestown, Missouri, in a circa-1870 wooden, country church surrounded by acres of inspiring woods with her encouraging husband, a daughter who adds impetus to both their lives, and a few spoiled animals.

**Rosario Chico** is a sophomore digital film major and broadcast minor at Stephens College.

**Karolyn Gunter** is a Fashion Design major from Poplar Bluff, MO. She has grown up around the arts and loves painting, reading, taking pictures, and visiting museums in her spare time.

**Rachael Henney** is a senior, majoring in Theater and English. An avid bookworm, Rachael is looking forward to telling some stories of her own, both onstage and off. She is thrilled to be

## Contributors' Notes

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included in *Harbinger* this year and would like to thank her family and friends for their love and support.

**Krysten Hill** is a senior Creative Writing major and poetry editor for *Harbinger*. She lives in Kansas City in her down time away from Columbia, Missouri. Krysten draws on the experiences of women in her writing. She considers the creation of art and the cultivation of voice as a truly revolutionary act. She lives for the 3 a.m. quiet that inspires her and claims the spoken word as her one true love always and forever.

**Juliana Jones** is a freshman at Stephens College. Her photographs came from a trip to Guatemala.

**Kim Knaust** is a junior Creative Writing major from St. Peters, Missouri. She is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta English Honors Society.

**Kate Berneking Kogut** is an award-winning playwright who teaches playwriting and screenwriting at Stephens College. She completed her Ph.D in Theatre at the University of Missouri. When she has free time, she plants daffodil bulbs in the fall so she can enjoy the flowers in the spring.

**Angela LeVota** is a freshman at Stephens College, involved in Student Government, IFA, and Modeling Group. She loves traveling, music, and fashion, and has always had a passion for the arts.

**Jordan Lilienthal** is a freshman from Minnetonka, Minnesota studying entrepreneurship and business management. Jordan's inspiration for her photography comes from her love for dance and her family. As a dancer at Hopkins Dance Center for fifteen years prior to coming to Stephens College, Jordan found the young dancers at her studio to be inspiring and amusing.

**Wynde Noel** is a digital film major from Columbia, MO who enjoys photography, film, concerts, and all art forms. Her future plans are to become a professional photographer for a music magazine and have a great time growing old. "All I know is that whatever I do in life, it will be in the arts."

**Mackenzie Riggs** is an undeclared major from Evansville, Indiana and is planning to transfer into a nursing school. Her interests include reading, writing, politics, and running. She is a writer for *Stephens Life* and a member of the Stephens College Democrats.

**Tina Parke-Sutherland** joined the English/Creative Writing faculty at Stephens College in 1991. Since then, she has taught creative writing, literature, mythology, global studies and women's studies. Each summer she serves as writer-in-residence at the University of Minnesota's Northwoods Writers Conference in Bemidji, Minnesota. She has just finished a collaborative screenplay with her husband, Bill Sutherland.

**Kristine Somerville** works at *The Missouri Review* as marketing coordinator and teaches at Stephens College. Her short stories and prose poems have appeared in various magazines, including *The North American Review*, *Hayden's Ferry*, *River City*, *Pasages North*, *Southern Indiana Review* and *Quarterly West*.

**Terry Song** teaches creative writing and literature at Stephens College. Her collection, *This is My Body*, was published by West End Press (1994). Her poetry has appeared in many journals and anthologies. She spent last fall as a writing fellow at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation. She will miss her students and colleagues at Stephens, when she trades her teaching hat for a garden hat and new life as freelance editor and writer on her two acres in New Mexico.

## Contributors' Notes

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**Kat Thomas** is a junior, majoring in Creative Writing and Broadcasting from Celina, TX. Tortillas are her favorite food and one day she will own some sheep because they are enjoyable to watch.

**Tiffany Turner** is a senior Creative Writing major from Moberly, Missouri. She is the 2008 Prose Editor of *Harbinger* and the president of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society. She enjoys writing and editing fiction, memoir, and poetry. She is working on a short novel. Her influences include youth and subculture, feminism, media and politics, and the natural beauty of the world around her. She would like to thank her parents for their support and love. Her story "Immaculate Conception" recently won Honorable Mention at the Sigma Tau Delta National Convention in Louisville, KY.



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