

On Holcomb Gardens

by John Purcell

That green moat strikes the eye immediately upon entering the place. It is a strange green, deeper and shinier than its pea-soup consistency would at first give reason to expect. There are bottles and pieces of paper floating along the edges, as well as larger objects captured under the layers of green slime, appearing as bodies submerged in the river Styx. It leads past a small underground utility building with the words "Morrison Motel" scrawled onto the door, and runs past an almost circular parking area where people sit in cars waiting for something.

A burly black man sits in one car, a 1937 roadster, while in the other, a young couple smokes marijuana while arguing about the location of an eight-track tape. The girl finally leaves the car, shaken after an exchange of obscenities, and strides away in her tight blue jeans and army fatigue jacket. The black man smiles and closes his eyes, nodding slowly.

Along the dirt pathway, rows of bushes tinged with brown move slightly in the stirring of a breeze. In the center of the garden grow rows of wilted flowers, their edges faded like the pages of an old magazine. Grunting football players run along the pathway surrounding the garden, and smack each other on the shoulders and bottoms in clumsy camaraderie. A bronze statue stands in an empty fountain, a statue of Prosperine by a Frenchman named Toulouse, tarnished with a blue stain across her naked breasts. The smell of something burning, a thick sooty smell, floats in the air over the statue and forms a strange halo around the head of Prosperine. Sounds of voices singing far off and distant, of car doors opening and slamming, of the occasional crow's caw, all echo around the garden, seeming finally to deposit themselves in front of the fountain.

