

DELORES JEPPI

It seems insane now, but
she'd be standing soaked
in schoolday morning light,
her loose-leaf notebook,
flickering at the bus stop,
and we almost trembled

at the thought of her mouth
filled for a moment with both
of our short names. I don't know
what we saw when we saw
her face, but at fifteen there's
so much left to believe in,

that a girl with sunset
in her eyes, with a kind smile,
and a bright blue miniskirt softly
shading her bare thighs really
could be *The Goddess*. Even
the gloss on her lips sighed
Kiss me and you'll never

do homework again. Some Saturdays
my ace, Terry, would say, "Guess
who was buying Teaberry gum
in the drugstore on Stenton?"
And I could see the sweet
epiphany still stunning his eyes

and I knew that he knew
that I knew he knew I knew—
especially once summer had come,
and the sun stayed up till we had
nothing else to do but wish
and wonder about *fine sistas*

in flimsy culottes and those *hotpants!*
James Brown screamed about: Crystal
Berry, Diane Ramsey, Kim Graves,
and *her*. This was around 1970: Vietnam
to the left of us, Black Muslims
to the right, big afros all over my

Philadelphia. We had no idea
where we were, how much history
had come before us—how much
cruelty, how much more dying
was on the way. For me and Terry,
it was a time when everything said

maybe, and maybe being blinded
by the beauty of a tenth grader
was proof that, for a little while,
we were safe from the teeth
that keep chewing up the world.
I'd like to commend

my parents for keeping calm,
for not quitting their jobs or grabbing
guns and for never letting up
about the amazing “so many doors
open to good students.” I wish

I had kissed
Delores Jepps. I wish I could
have some small memory of her
warm and spicy mouth to wrap
these hungry words around. I

would like to have danced with her,
to have slow-cooked to a slow song
in her sleek, toffee arms: her body
balanced between the *Temptations'*
five voices and me—a boy anointed

with puberty, a kid with a B
average and a cool best friend.
I don't think I've ever understood
how lonely I am, but I was

closer to it at fifteen because
I didn't know anything: my heart
so near the surface of my skin

I could have moved it with my hand.