

WHAT'S  
HAPPENING  
WITH  
*MOMMA?*



It was Fall in Virginia.  
 First great yellow leaves fell from tall oak trees.  
 As each came the color of tobacco's skin, she looked right in.  
 With the look of her hair other children  
 also reached a look of serious prayer.

She sat under the tree play acting "Smoking Like Daddy".  
 When he lit up, it meant he was in a very good mood!  
 Now the sweet aroma of his tobacco smelled in her head.

As she sat daydreaming,  
 a loud piercing scream came from her mother's bedroom.  
 A dull thump sounded like someone had hit the floor.  
 Sheokle jumped up and ran into the house.



When she saw something broken on the floor,  
 she went to see what it was.  
 She saw a piece of glass and a  
 small metal object on the floor.  
 She picked up the glass and  
 saw that it was broken.

Just then her big brother Carl came around the corner.  
 He was carrying a piece of wood.  
 She remembered that he had hit the floor.  
 She had seen him throw her glass.

The screaming brother never did say what had  
 happened was not right.  
 "What's wrong with you?" he demanded.  
 She could not stop crying.



*It was fall in Virginia.  
Red and yellow leaves fell from tall oak trees.  
As oak was the color of Skookie's skin, she blended right in.  
With the help of her two older brothers  
she made a set of acorn pipes.*

*She sat under the trees play acting "Smoking Like Daddy".  
When he lit up, it meant he was in a very good mood!  
Now the sweet aroma of his tobacco smelled in her head.*

*As she sat daydreaming,  
a loud piercing scream came from her momma's bedroom.  
A dull thump sounded like someone had hit the floor.  
Skookie jumped up and ran into the house.*



*She saw her momma laying on the floor.  
It scared and confused her.  
Slowly her momma's eyes opened.  
"Go get your grandma!" she cried.  
Stunned, Skookie ran out of the house  
as fast as her legs could take her.*

*Just then her big brother Carl came around the corner.  
He was coming home from school.  
She screamed and hollered as she ran to him.  
Snot and tears ran down her face.*

*The towering fourteen year-old boy could tell  
something was not right.  
"What's wrong with you?" he demanded.  
She could not stop crying.*



As he was out of the yard, he turned his feet back  
 He did not want to go back to the house.  
 "The horse was very in the house!"  
 The horse was very in the house!  
 The horse was very in the house!

He was very in the house, he was very in the house.  
 He was very in the house, he was very in the house.  
 He was very in the house, he was very in the house.  
 He was very in the house, he was very in the house.



The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows

The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows

The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows  
 The photograph shows



Grasping at his sweater with one hand,  
she pointed at the house with the other.  
He pulled away and vaulted up the steps.  
She ran behind him.  
He came out of the bedroom, just as she got there.

As he ran out of the yard, he heard her footsteps behind him.  
He did an about face and ordered,  
"Go back and stay in the house!"  
She froze on the spot and watched him disappear from sight.  
Her legs felt like wooden pegs.

Inside the house, her momma's screams  
and moans of agony flowed through the walls.  
Minute after minute dragged on.  
Skookie's face and hands pressed against the cool window pane.  
Her seven year-old body began to tremble and shake.



Her grandma came.  
She was holding four year-old Baby Brother's hand tightly.  
"Stay with your sister," she said firmly as  
she pushed him toward her.  
Moving swiftly, she went in the bedroom and closed the door.

"Something awful must be wrong," thought Skookie.  
Memories of being a flower girl at Baptist funerals  
raced through her mind.  
She wrapped her arms around herself.  
Crouched in the corner, she began rocking back and forth.

It was getting dark when the doctor and some neighbors came.  
They gave Skookie quizzical looks as  
they tried to act as if nothing was happening.



*"This small square window overlooked  
Skunkie's neighborhood in town. Just above some trees across  
from the neighborhood were the  
sheds of some big barnyards across street."*

*Her daddy arrived with a big bag of groceries.  
The neighbors murmured in hush-hush tones.  
Then Grandma spoke with him. She sounded very stern.*

*He went in the kitchen and fixed their dinner.  
Baby Brother would not eat.  
Skunkie threwed hers all up.  
Angrily he yelled, "If you don't eat I'm going to tear you up!"  
They both began to cry.*



*"Just then, Aunt Nana came out of her mamma's room.  
She looked at Skunkie and asked,  
"Do you know who lives in some biggie states?"  
Skunkie's head came along to her face as she asked,  
"How did a baby get there?""*

*Grimacing widely she replied, "The stork brought her!"  
This child's words ring home to Skunkie.  
"What's wrong with my mamma?" she asked in  
a quivering voice.  
"Your mamma's going to be all right," said Aunt Nana.*

*Still it was a bit too much!  
Skunkie's body collapsed into the chair as  
her mind closed itself down for the night.  
She did not know it yet but  
as big sister, she had become a mother!*



The small house became crowded.  
Skookie wanted to leave, but she was too scared.  
And where would she go?  
Both of her big brothers were gone!

Her daddy arrived with a big bag of groceries.  
The neighbors murmured in hush-hush tones.  
Then Grandma spoke with him. She sounded very stern.

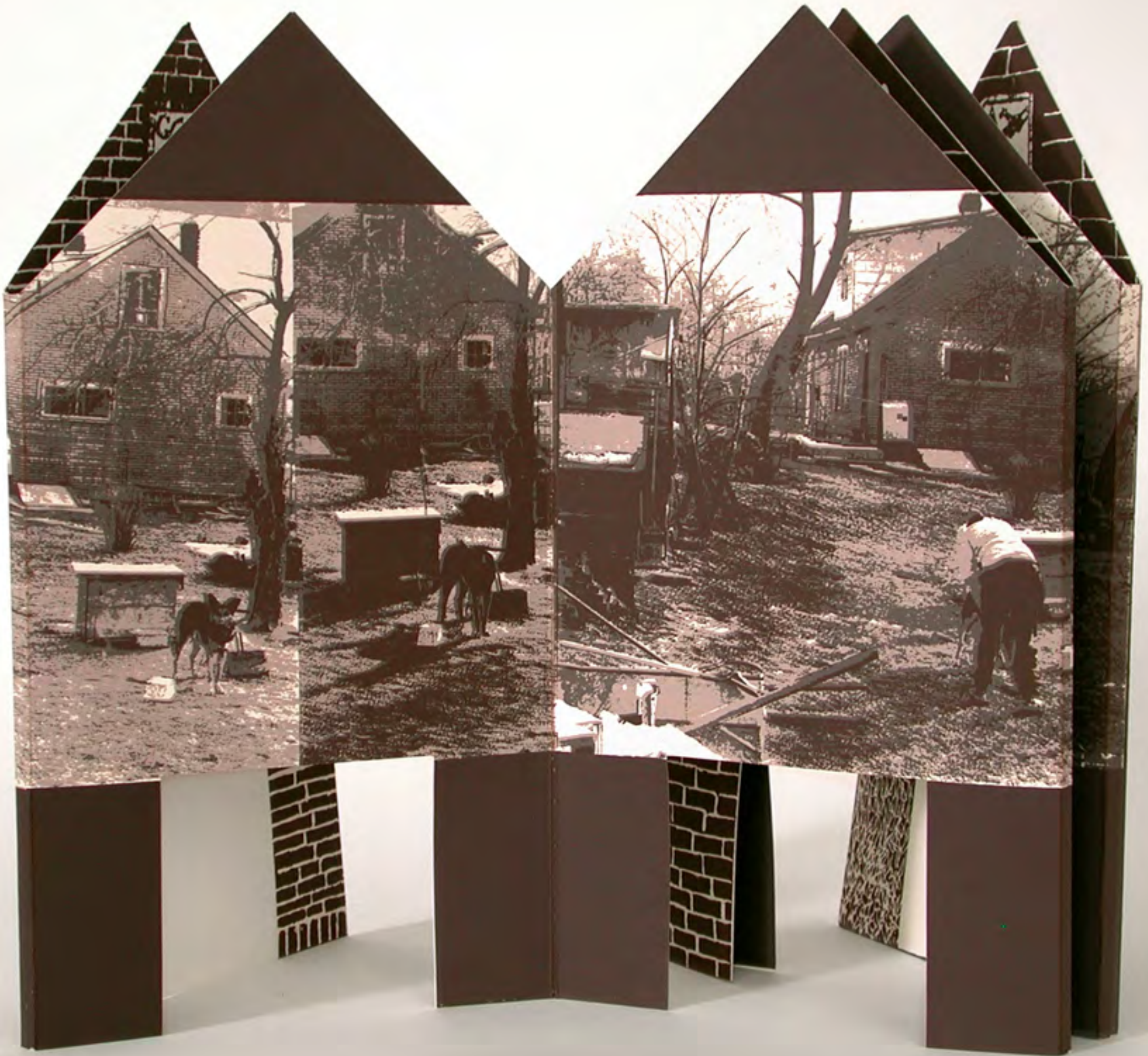
He went in the kitchen and fixed their dinner.  
Baby Brother would not eat.  
Skookie threw hers all up.  
Angrily he yelled, "If you don't eat I'm going to tear you up!"  
They both began to cry.



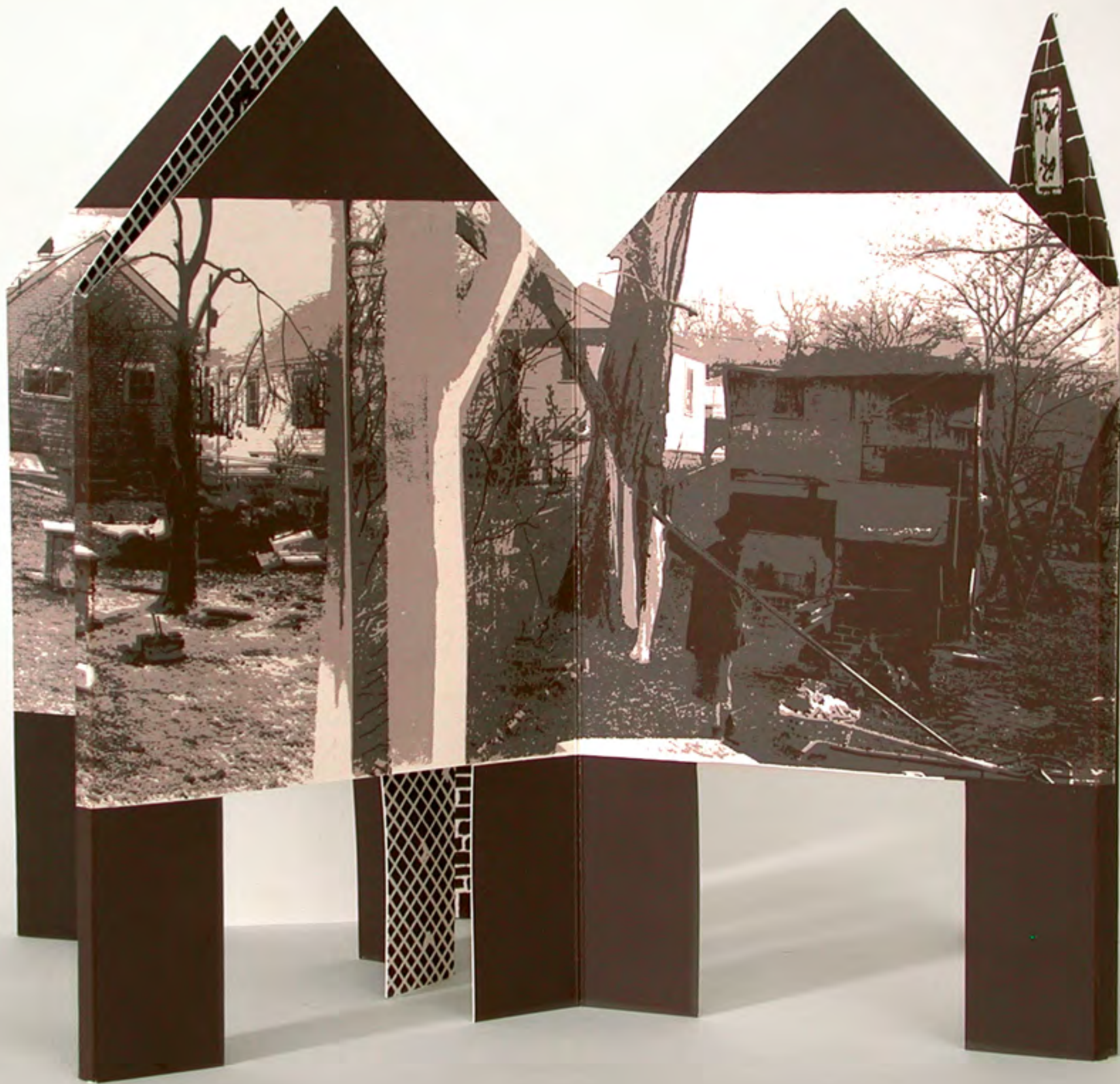
Just then, Aunt Nana came out of her momma's room.  
She looked at Skookie and asked,  
"Do you know you have a new baby sister?"  
Skookie's wet eyes clung to her face as she asked,  
"How did a baby get there?"

Grinning widely she replied, "The stork brought her!"  
This didn't make any sense to Skookie.  
"What's wrong with my momma?" she asked in  
a quivering voice.  
"Your momma's going to be all right," said Aunt Nana.

Still it was a bit too much!  
Skookie's body collapsed into the chair as  
her mind closed itself down for the night.  
She did not know it yet but  
as big sister, she had become a mother!









When she was in kindergarten, she had a very special friend. His name was Mr. Bird. He was a very special friend. He was the most beautiful of all the birds that she had seen.

She was sitting there when she was writing "Thinking Like Daddy" and she was so happy. She was so happy that she was writing about her friend Mr. Bird.

And when she was in kindergarten, she had a very special friend. His name was Mr. Bird. He was a very special friend. He was the most beautiful of all the birds that she had seen.



Just then her big brother Carl came around the corner. He was running home from school. He was so happy that he was home. He was so happy that he was home.

Just then her big brother Carl came around the corner. He was running home from school. He was so happy that he was home. He was so happy that he was home.

The incoming bus was just old but she could not stop crying. "What's wrong with you?" he demanded. She could not stop crying.



As he ran out of the yard, he heard her footsteps behind him. He did not know how to get away. He did not know how to get away.

As he ran out of the yard, he heard her footsteps behind him. He did not know how to get away. He did not know how to get away.

Inside the house, her mother's voice was so loud. She was so loud that she was shouting. She was so loud that she was shouting.



The teacher was so kind. She was so kind that she was smiling. She was so kind that she was smiling.

"Wonderful world we live in!" thought Maudie. She was so happy that she was smiling. She was so happy that she was smiling.

It was getting dark when the doctor and some neighbors came. They were so kind that they were smiling. They were so kind that they were smiling.



The teacher was so kind. She was so kind that she was smiling. She was so kind that she was smiling.

She had a very special friend. His name was Mr. Bird. He was a very special friend. He was the most beautiful of all the birds that she had seen.

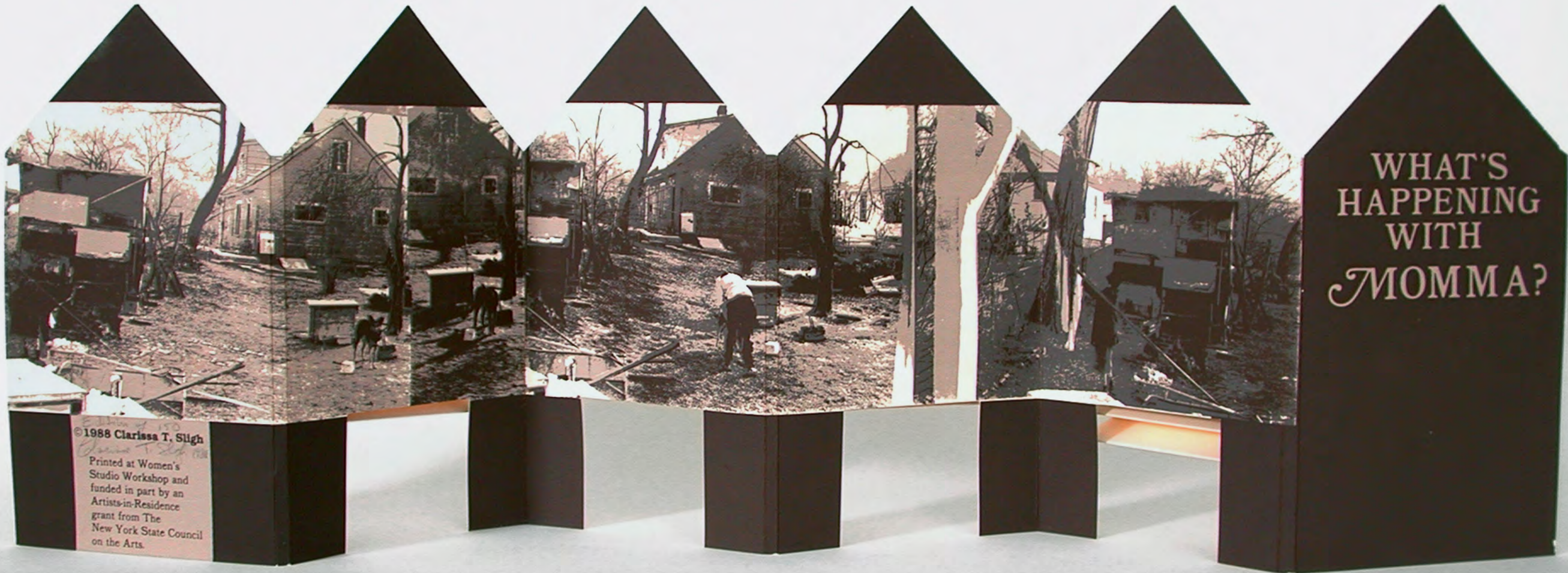
She was so happy that she was smiling. She was so happy that she was smiling.



Just then, Aunt Maudie came out of her room. She was so kind that she was smiling. She was so kind that she was smiling.

Clattering wildly she replied, "The clock brought her!" This child's mother was so kind. She was so kind that she was smiling. She was so kind that she was smiling.

It was so dark that she was crying. She was so dark that she was crying. She was so dark that she was crying.



WHAT'S  
HAPPENING  
WITH  
MOMMA?

©1988 Clarissa T. Sligh  
Printed at Women's  
Studio Workshop and  
funded in part by an  
Artists-in-Residence  
grant from The  
New York State Council  
on the Arts.