You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

—Ezra Pound
it was evening when i looked up to the sky and i swear i saw the face of yeats “hid amid a crowd of stars.”

sometimes time skips like the needle on an old victrola and we miss things

(maud’s gone now and so is he

i look at love as poetry

and time as the grooves on a record.)

—erin c. malone ‘99
I've come from her apartment, my divorced friend—twenty-four, a medical student, and beautiful. She's tired of loss, their arguments about the marble-topped table, the sectional couch. I know everything about the confederate flag her grandmother had given them, Ann and Marc embroidered in gold thread on that bottom edge, how even that was a fight.

She turned to Good Housekeeping for guidance, the year-long subscription producing a recipe for guacamole, served at every party.

The stinging nettles are back, a dozen just off the graying dock, floating in that red clay water like baggies.

We pulled up the crab pot and freed a female, her underbelly a sunset, fierce orange and yellow. None of this makes much difference. Even as the nettles washed to shore, we'd nudge them back into the water's dull cloud and watch them float away.

It was a small miracle, their soft masses sucking and pushing out the water, our eyes on their swift motions.

I was dragged through a corn field once to hear the sound, those stalks against our arms, the dry brushing.

It seemed like something more, but we didn't kiss and I left him there, the sky dimmed with night. All these details, and what should I learn? Ann talks about love, meaning company, but I know the feeling of wanting to hold onto a memory.

The nettles would get us every time, our young arms turned a quick, blotchy pink. We still saved them from the receding shore, motivated by the power of it all, this first feeling of life. What we remember can help us live; he tried to tell me this in the dark field, the past season's crops hovering over us. I remember releasing his shirt and that was all, the thin moon tipped behind the trees, its faint light, and that was all.

-Kellam Ayres '97
curtailed sun in the net

sun in the net and i am not poem:
dogs' shamming pander matures in errant.
poems retile and return sheets of thunder:
i'm undead letters' ongoing poem.

eye decomposes words' ersatz gerent:
rotting ode an intentional blunder.
signature cannot contain intercourse:
fecund process educes aberrant.

my dairy air splits logic asunder,
sews fabrics where tense prolix drives discourse—under.

-alex e. blazer '97
exile

the “weaker sex”

but you’ve never been doubled over with cramps aching and worn out, pale with femininity like a woman assaulted on a Subway platform, like a girl whose father visits in the night—you’ve never been so vulnerable.

I don’t think a “beautiful cycle of life” should leave you raw and bruised, weak. I need something to cradle my insides—there’s a bull pawing and sometimes he charges.

-Bekah Taylor ’00


12 December, 1996 (Thursday)
First day in a new city—I’m trying not to be too much Kerouac, but. Phoned Mother with news of my safe arrival, she was out with Rachel. Seems like they’ve been doing a lot of things together lately. This makes me nervous.

Unpacked some but it’s just so much. I kept stopping, seized by annoying little questions. What if I can’t do the job? How will it be, living alone? When Mr. James called to say he had an opening, I’d rushed to take it. I couldn’t imagine spending anymore time at home, working for Frank. But now that I’m here it just seems so... bold. I guess it’s time to grow up, Ryan.

I feel like talking to my father, but I don’t really know what I’d say. Ours has never been the type of relationship where you can just call because you feel like it. You basically have to have something planned. Anyway, he and Libby are in Cabo San Lucas.

12 December, 1996—later
Went to get groceries, and I ran into no one I knew, anywhere. So many different types of people—not sure if this whole thing is right, but you know, it’s really too late. Tired. Off to bed.

12 December, 1996—later
Too tired to sleep. Having horrendous moving dreams—I’m that second grader at a new school, the one nobody would play with. Don’t worry, you’ll make friends. You’ll make friends... Go to sleep, counting friends.

13 December, 1996 (Friday)
Mother called, wanted to know how things were. I didn’t have much to report. I start work on Monday, and I met with Mr. James earlier today. We discussed “business,” and I pictured myself turning into an old man. Not just any old man, but an old man that sells nautical supplies.

I’ve been reading too much and consequently thinking too much.

15 December, 1996 (Sunday)
Went for a walk yesterday and found a great bread shop. Bought a honey-wheat loaf and ate it with some Country Crock. Rachel hates Country Crock, won’t eat anything but real butter. Turned the TV on again to have voices in the room—I have cable left over from the guys who lived here before. Please, I need to sleep tonight, but the car horns keep me up with myself.

Spoke with Rachel earlier—does it matter whom called whom? I did. Just wanted to talk to her, hear a familiar voice that would be happy to hear mine. We said that we missed each other. She reminded me that Chicago’s only six hours by car, one by plane,
seven and a half by bus. Somehow I feel a lot farther.

18 December, 1996 (Wednesday)
I've been working so much; there's a lot to learn. Mr. James has lately taken to calling me "Rye," or "Rye-Guy," for some ungodly reason. We've had exactly two drinks exactly one time after work. In a bar with very thick glasses and waiters in black tuxes. He paid. You can't even call it a "bar," it's more of a chic restaurant with a small bar inside of it.

Get up, catch the "L," eat a doughnut with coffee, work, go to lunch, work, go home, watch TV, eat, shower, get to bed.

I've taken to reading the newspaper and laughing wryly to myself at the injustice and sheer crime of the world, especially in cities. I've taken to becoming my father.

19 December, 1996 (Thursday)

Wrote a very bad poem today about a memory of my Creative Writing professor in college. Professor Ruiz, he was about sixty-five, and one day in class he read a poem about old age. His hand was shaking so much that he finally had to set the poem down to finish it. I just remember the sound of the paper in his hand, shaking with such a painfully embarrassing rhythm. Shutting my eyes so tightly, hoping that would distract me from the incessant sound of old age.

Should probably think about getting home for Christmas. Flights are probably booked up. Mother called today to remind me of this. Oh yes, and I must find something very wonderful and personal for Rachel, too. Oh, yes.

Won't be heading to Boston for the holidays. Mother would die, and Libby's family'll be there, anyways.

22 December, 1996 (Sunday)

Still not sure how I'm getting home. Mother called again, absolutely furious with me. She decided I couldn't handle it myself, and called all the airlines, trying to find me a spot. There's one, tomorrow night. I'll have to take off at least three days from work. I hope Mr. James'll understand.

Still don't have anything for Rachel.

23 December, 1996 (Monday)

Spent all day at work worrying about Rachel's gift. Ran to a nice jewelry store to shell out too much money for something she'll like, and also something that doesn't come in a box that would remind one of a ring. The saleslady made a sizeable commission on a small gold watch. I wonder if Rachel needs a watch?

I'm on the plane home, and I think we're almost there. Flying is always so inspirational. Going home for the holidays and all that, there's snow on the ground in Chicago and Cleveland. And in the air, between.

25 December, 1996 (Wednesday)
Nothing's changed at all here. Mother and Frank are still extremely happy with each other; Rachel is still beautiful and perfect and on the verge of too much. We ate Christmas Eve dinner at her parents' house, and spent today with Mom and Frank, just like we do every year. The word "marriage" came up in conversation yesterday, in front of everyone, at dinner. I think it was Rachel's mom who started it, or her Uncle Eli. I don't remember.

Rachel said she loved the watch, wanted to know "how did [I] know?" and assured me twenty times that it's "perfect, absolutely." She ran around showing everyone, and they smiled tight smiles. They'd all asked Santa for a ring.

26 December, 1996 (Thursday)
I'll admit it is kind of strange to move to a new city and not have met one new person worth mentioning. Rachel drove me to the airport and we talked. She's concerned, wants me to meet people, but I know that "people" means only other men, especially those in the corporate track. I still don't know what I want, so I said not much. Just that she should get out more, too. And I mean that sincerely, in every way, as much as she would like to patronizingly think I don't, really.

I'm on the plane back, trying to be glad to be going somewhere, doing something. I make small talk with the child next to me, despite the potential for child molestation accusations.

28 December, 1996 (Saturday)
Everyone in the city is making their New Year's Eve plans. Rachel called; she's going to the Flats with some friends from college. I tried to make up some party or something, but I don't think I sounded too convincing.

Is this a movie of one man's depressed life? I'm trying to get back in the habit of literature, although there's really no one to talk about it with. I have chosen Kundera's The Unbearable Lightness of Being. His characters are full of unfulfillment, lust, and complications of emotions, so I'll stay at home for New Year's Eve with an infernally devastating cold.

30 December 1996 (Monday)
Didn't speak with Rachel today and so I thought about her. The absence of her voice was strange, in the way that I missed it.

Ate at a Thai restaurant tonight and saw the indifferent glances of restaurant employees who often see people eating alone.

I feel like a big, empty cliché. I've looked in my college and high school year-
books, thought about calling old girlfriends, and decided that they’ve married and changed their names by now. For some reason all this has made me extremely sad.

1 January 1997 (Wednesday)

Last night, or early this morning, I sat on my couch and imagined myself sitting on a couch. I was a contemporary short story, a twentieth century poem. I would be distinguished by my conceited self-consciousness. In universities and colleges they would discuss me as an example of an era.

This was after midnight, I think. Through my window I could see that everyone in the city was very sequins and black ties. I was wearing some old sweatpants and my rugby shirt. I longed for people who knew me like some did in college, those that could tell from the set of my jaw that I was feeling sad.

I watched TV until my eyes failed and I was just staring. When I woke up the next morning, I was sleeping beside a banana peel.

3 January 1997 (Friday)

Called in sick yesterday and today. I’m reading autobiographical fiction by Hispanic-American women. My father wanted my mother to treat him like that, and she got very tired.

3 January 1997—later

I miss Rachel, but. She has sunny hair that’s so freshly trimmed, it turns up at the ends. Like her nose, her lips, her little earrings. She was my first sex, and I was terrible. I felt so old yet young, so gangly and heavy pressing down on her. The movements and sounds were too loud to be discreetly ignored.

There had been girls in high school; after the movie I would drive them to abandoned parking lots and put my hands up their sweaters. And then it would be almost 11:30. Tuck in your shirt, sit up and think about ordinary things that would relax you: basketball, schoolwork, a fight with your mom over your curfew. Drive her home, Goodnight. See you Monday at school.

It was/is never about sex with Rachel—no pressing deadline but we’d been dating steadily for six months or so. We were safe, clinical even, to take the point off the sheer naked Puritanical exposure of my penis inside her vagina.

Boys have penises, girls have vaginas.

This conversation is insane.

4 January 1997 (Saturday)

Re-read yesterday’s entry. Is this a dialogue or a dialectic? I am insane. I want to adopt a child from an underdeveloped nation. I want to get an unlisted phone number, and give it to no one. I want to be one of the Beastie Boys, and join them on tour.

4 January 1997—later/5 January 1997 (Sunday)

I am now becoming attracted to women with short hair and tongue piercings. They speak in very childish voices. They hang out in coffee shops where you can access the World Wide Web. But in Chicago, even they talk on cell phones, and loudly.

6 January 1997 (Monday)

It’s been one week since I’ve spoken with Rachel. Does that mean we’re fighting? Maybe it’s just my turn to call. Maybe tomorrow.

7 January 1997 (Tuesday)

After two years of being next to her, I’m finally not and my head understands that of course I should feel a little strange. But actually, I think I don’t feel anything.

9 January 1997 (Thursday)

I sat down yesterday to write and my hands cramped to drop the pen. My mind stalled. I looked at all the blank space on the page and wanted to peel off the layers of my skin. It’s just dead, anyways, you know. Everything you can see on the outside is dead.

Mother keeps calling, leaving long messages on the answering machine tape, taking up too much space. Begging me to call, come home, write, anything. She tells Rachel to call and so she does, with a short voice. Buffered by my down comforter, I listen to her talk to the machine. “Ryan, it’s me. Your mom’s worried, dear. We’re all worried. Give us a call.”

11 January 1997 (Saturday)

Today when I went outside earlier, the wind cut the skin off my cheeks. I went to Tower Records and I took one copy each of all the free postcards they had. Mr. James’ secretary was there and she asked me when I was coming back to work. I was surprised because I couldn’t even think of an answer. A small boy got trapped in a well in Colorado and I’ve been following the updates on the twelve, five, six, ten, and eleven o’clock news. I’ve just been waiting, in between. There seems to be more important things than getting in to work every day. But still when Betty asked I was kind of happy. She was listening to the Gypsy Kings’ Greatest Hits on the headphones. She didn’t even turn them off or down to talk.

Betty also asked why I didn’t come to the company’s New Year’s Eve party. I didn’t even know about it. I just stood there like an idiot and said “Well, I don’t know.”

11 January 1997—later

I read an article that said some beggars make up to $1,500 per week. I have no idea what Rachel would say about this. I think it’s great. So if I get fired from selling nautical supplies, I know what to do.

14 January 1997 (Tuesday)

Rachel’s stopped leaving terse messages on the machine. She’s gone to not leaving any. The thing is that I want to hear about her brother, Carl. He’s seven and very smart.

Betty came over today and we watched reruns of “Three’s Company.” She told me that she lives with a man she met on the bus last year. They’re planning on having a
kid, but Betty won't allow that until she has the ring on her finger. I told her that in college I'd played rugby and studied economics. But all that seems so unimportant now. Betty didn't tell me to come back to work. We actually didn't even talk about it.

15 January 1997 (Wednesday)
I'd like to make my living watching reruns with people and talking about books. It's weird how we analyze what people don't say as much as what they do. I called up Mr. James himself today and quit. He didn't really sound surprised, just sad, like my father when I got a bad grade in high school. I don't think I'll become a beggar, but that's always a possibility.

I spent the afternoon in a used bookstore, and my nostrils are still filled with the dust of old thoughts. I bought Twenty Under Thirty; it's a collection of twenty short stories written by people under thirty years old. These are people I could know, or could be.

There's more to life than this.

—Lynn A. Tramonte '98
A poem concerning a silent manifesto

for R.H.

Round dark corners, at night taking me places,
meaningless sound.

the static crunch fizz

space between songs

pop the hiss the smooth silky absence

Which is more bizarre:
sounds without meaning
or meaning without sounds

don’t put it into words just yet.

Are there skat bops and melodies?

I swear, sometimes, that this is the new jazz.
Stranger, stranger it gets stranger every
scale, note, snare or slide.
Pulls me in and
takes my head off.

Sound is really nothing more than particles
(matter, a derivative of some laws of physics)
vibrating in unison
and abrupt ends.

Something disturbingly beautiful.

—Colin Bossen ‘98

Father

When the whole world seemed to be your hands,
I could measure the sum
of my unhappiness
as the distance
between your thumb and curled hard knuckle,
and count the rest as small misfortune,
bad luck surfacing in bruises
the purple half-moon
of your fist.

These hands guided
my mother’s low-backed beaded dress
in waltz,
petted dogs,
built tree houses felled by the wind,
and pushed higher our backyard swing
because I wanted to touch the clouds.

Bruises fade,
but yet unfortunate,
I continue stumbling into walls—at
least, that’s the excuse
I give still.
After all these years,
you
are no more distant
than those clouds.

—Alison Stine ‘00
Vacant

vacant
they sit
well tanned bottles
thin and tall
no longer tortured
by silly thoughts
of fitting together
all
slumped together
a poorly ordered
construction
a poor
conversation about
nothing
that comes up
rising out of
soul fed only
with intoxicants
now left
backwash
in the bottom
shoved into a cold
corner
alone

Ecstasy
(from the painting by Maxfield Parrish)

Standing at the edge of the cliff
toes pressing hard against red rock
your face looks out above the sea.
You are not watching
the shimmering reflections
of mountains in the water.
You have no fear
of the height you've reached,
no desire to return to the earth below.
Your brown curls tumble down your back
blending with sunlit colors on your clothes.
Breezes blow your tattered skirt;
it waves and ripples gently
as if you were a banner unfurling,
a flag planted firmly in this spot
to claim this single moment.
And still your gaze is raised upward
along the path of your outstretched arms.
The warm sunset bathes the sea,
the rock, the sky,
and you. Only the clouds that
follow your shape remain
pure clear white
like steam off of the sea below.

-Amy Spears '98

Sean Boyle '00
The Sun News arrived late this morning. My mother barely had time to page through it before leaving for work. I awoke at eight, showered, and joined her at the kitchen table to drink my coffee slowly and to eat my cherry strudel slowly.

“Paul,” she said in the swift, sharp way that moms do, “There’s a little blurb here about Amanda.”

“What’s it about?”

“She’s won a full scholarship to Fordham.”

“She always wanted to go to New York.”

“Did she mention this at graduation?”

“She mentioned it.” Amanda was ecstatic. Her white robe barely concealed her spastic body. She cried as the principal announced her name. I congratulated her and suggested that we hook-up again sometime. She agreed.

“Amanda’s such a talented girl. Remember “Hello Dolly.” Her Minnie Fay stole the show.”

“I was in that musical too, Mom.”

“Very smart too. What was her SAT score? Fourteen-hundred something. Do you remember the time when she came over and played Trivial Pursuit against your dad and . . .”

“I remember, Mom. Aren’t you going to be late for work?”

“Shit! You’re right. I’ll call you from work, sweetie.” A sloppy, coffee-rimmed kiss upon my matted hair. She gathered up her purse and portfolios and flew out the side door. Hurried words, “When did you stop dating her?”

“We never dated. We were just friends,” I cried; she didn’t hear. “Very platonic,” I added to affirm the remark. With the paper now in my possession, I steered the folded page of the community section into view. The article was short. Three paragraphs in total. It described the nature of the award, how Amanda won it, and her future plans. Beside the print was a copy of her Senior picture badly cropped. She still looked beautiful. Amanda. We hadn’t talked in months. We hadn’t been out in ages. I needed a cigarette.

“Paul, we’re good friends,” Amanda declared with a long draw on her cigarette, “so why don’t you trust me?”

“I do. I’m just not sure that this is necessary.”

“Sure it is,” she returned as smoke curled around her black bangs, “You wish to be believable in your role.”

“Yeah.”

“Then you must learn. Live the role, Paul.”

We were standing in a gazebo on a Thursday night in March. The gazebo’s basketball of a lamp flickered; pigeons cooed in the eaves. Rigatoni and red sauce marched through my intestines, while we stood there. After running lines at Agostino’s, we had taken the walk which led to the park with the gazebo. Amanda had seen it first, and we
danced under the orange glow and upon the painted white center. Then she said that she needed a smoke. She said that I needed a smoke.

"Are you sure you won't try it?" she continued.

"Yes."

"Your character smokes."

"I use prop cigarettes."

"They look fake. And you don't know how to hold it. You don't know how to breath. The audience will notice."

"And..."

"Just try it. Nothing will happen." She smiled behind a veil of gray. "Trust me."

I carefully took the cigarette from her and placed it between my index and middle fingers. It was a Camel. She lit it with a match from the matchbook that she had taken from Agostino's. The ink chef winked at me from his paper kitchen. The ritual began.

Amanda guided me through it all. I drew the smoke in swiftly and allowed it to collect at the back of my throat. I was burned. She asked me how it felt. I attempted to speak, but smoke escaped instead of words. She said, "Draw it in. Into your lungs. Don't trap it." I did. I inhaled. I choked and coughed.

"Did you feel it," she asked.

"Feel what?"

"A buzz."

"No. How do you do it so smoothly? I just choke on the smoke."

"Practice."

Sitting on the white rail of the gazebo, cigarette in hand, she was beautiful. She bent down and kissed me.

"What was that for?"

"Just to see what it was like. We both did something new tonight."

"I thought we were just friends."

"We are," she replied. Another kiss. I returned this one as I pulled her off the rail and onto me. We continued to kiss, and I mumbled something about having dreamt of this once. "Gentle," she whispered as I rammed my teeth into hers. My tongue was lost somewhere by hers. I could taste the tobacco in her. "You taste like cigarettes."

"What?" she asked playfully biting my ear.

I let her down. She said that she needed another smoke. I asked for another. I finished this one. I learned the ritual. I spoke in character matching seductive puffs with key lines. We spoke of the play for the rest of the night. After the final performance she stopped calling.

I finished the article and strudel. Moved on to movie reviews. I also went for the pack of Camels hidden in my coat pocket.

-paul durica '00

Seven Haikus

I
Laughing pumpkins lift their heads to flickering light, burning candle wax.

II
A screaming plum falls, a shadow crosses orchards filled with leather trees.

III
Twisted stars painted maize yellow swirl frantically above sleepy towns.

IV
The rains of springtime flash rainbows, stretch infinite across fields of dew.

V
The hazy purple snow tinted by blue skies soaks in translucent sun.

VI
Insistent pounding, a mid-afternoon concert— raindrops on gutters.

VII
Crystal diamonds freeze icy patterns on windows, a sparkling maze.

-Jen Suster '97
Pages from a Diary

Some memories clog our minds like the mineral build-up in old pipes. All we need is a little mind-clearing Draino, a release of all that's bad and old to cheer us along the way of life. I did that once, and the subsequent emptiness sucked me in for days. I stared at the white wall, thinking of trauma units, and the squeak of nurses' shoes. I knew then what Stevens meant: let be be finale of seem.

When I feel my life getting full, I have to purge. I stand there, and empty my soul. I revel in the hot rush, the guilt, then cool relief of the tile floor against skin.

--Trish Klei '97
Watching an Ageless Woman and an Ancient Trade

Colorless smoke, sweet yet choking, like the lover who does not interest, surrounds me. Temezcal burns. The axe against the oak follows the rhythm of my insides. The figure in an indigo smock sits on her roof; she could see me, but doesn’t. Perhaps she senses my stare. Lines and sun have deepened her face, and she is a fallen tree, defenseless against the insects boring into its skin to feed. Her even darker hair is pulled back, tightly away from the eyes. Infant in dreams at her side.

On her roof, flat and stone, above the dirt road scattered with children, she sends the shuttle through the warp. Long grey lines reach like colored fingers into her lap, and she massages them. They are attached to a tree many meters above her, and she holds the base steady on her thighs. The shuttle never violates stride—Back and Forth.

Again.
No interruption from the infant.
And except perhaps yarn against yarn, only breath breaks the stillness on this hill.

Below the fractured stones of the house younger versions of herself yell and chase the pigs. They are on the pursuit for neighbors’ baskets of dirty clothing, to be returned the next day. Two pesos. In giggles and hushed conferences, they raise their eyes to me, the white woman on the hill. Then they dart off and shout, their small squeaks slicing the silence.

The weaver slouches, enveloped by the living mountains on every side of her. Just months ago, these were the home of the oppressed faces hiding in dyed wool; those who dodged fire from confused boys in helicopters who dressed worn muscles in green. Children’s faces tough and taught to kill; unlearning what they once held true, fighting against their people. Proving again and again, like the shuttle, that they are pawns.

-Heather Trabert '97
Poem written after the fluid words of Linda Gregerson:

**Still Waters**

1

Single estuary of brackish concentration
Is filtered in from an ebbing
Sea of endless dimension.
Embodying a tranquil pool winding round
Pappy structures where cottontails arise
And fiddler crabs ally to dance.

2

Pair of voracious perch
All armed in suit of scaly glimmer
Pirouette through volume
Of mud mist and water,
In ravenous search of winged damsels
Cut short of flight by a surface of persuasion.

3

Trinity of chalky herons tip toe
About the murky moistened density
In all their stealth and grace,
Awaiting the hint of a silver flash
Upon which they strike and grasp
With their clutching bill of natural awe.

4

Quartet of throbbing bullfrogs
Lay their bulging bodies stationary about the engulfing sediment,
Like guard dogs molded into statue of motion.
Eyes fixated on the hope of stranded prey
Flown separate and astray
And then a realm of enticing dismay.

—Jay Brandeis '99

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**Birdhouse**

John awakes in August, Indiana, and feels at ease. His day will be a perfect continuation of a carefully constructed routine, his slow paradise. Today, as always, at 6 a.m., the Sentinel-Post slowly arcs from Jerry’s ’79 Buick idling down Cedar street, and comes to rest at the bottom of John’s brown porch stairs. The Buick’s ailing muffler is John’s call to rise, the parting rumble just enough to end his slumber without need of an alarm. John stirs up at the ceiling, following the big crack to the corner. He folds back his sheet, cotton blanket and well-worn brown comforter, turns, and sits up, toes touching the hardwood floor. It is cold beneath his feet, a cold that signals the coming of a new season. He stands, curls his toes, and walks slowly to the window.

John gazes over his backyard garden, taking account of its progress. He is pleased, but never to perfection. The ajuga, purple-leafed ground cover which serves as a border between the grass and garden, is spreading too quickly, and will require thinning later in the day. John looks forward to tending his garden, anticipating the feel of cool moist soil in his hands and under his fingernails. He puts these thoughts aside, and dons his thick maroon bathrobe, which hangs on a tarnished brass hook by his bedroom door. His steps down the hardwood stairs are slow and calculated, each plank of aged wood bending with a familiar creak beneath his bare feet. John ambles through the dining room and into the kitchen, where he turns on the percolator, the one he bought in 1967 when Hammond’s Hardware was still owned by Edgar Hammond. He pours his coffee into the worn mug that waits on the counter. Mug in hand, John retraces his steps through the dining room. He unlocks the front door and pulls it towards him. A wall of crisp morning air greets him, sending a single shiver rolling through his body. John unlatches the wooden screen door, pushes it open, and steps onto the porch, easing the door closed behind him. He steps carefully down the three stairs and onto the cracked sidewalk. He reaches down to pick up the newspaper from the yard, and the grass brushes a droplet of cool dew onto the back of his hand. The chill of the water causes him to shiver once again, and the cold seems to invade his body, tightening joints and tensing muscles that have been relaxed for the perfect summer that is now coming to a close.

He surveys the street before him. Old two-story houses lie at close but comfortable intervals, stretching three blocks in either direction. Their small front yards are canopied by a row of faithful trees, some of which alter the path of the cracked sidewalk. There are no fences, no gates, no hedges. The yards seem community property, with only their varied gardens as signatures of ownership. Each house has its own form of front porch, from the simple group of lawn chairs scattered outside the door to the brick extensions of the house, complete with a glider swing and a thousand pieces of colonial craft. Lights are beginning to come on in these houses as the rest of the town awakens. Across the street, Larry Walton is emerging from his house to find the morning paper, still decked out in his blue and green plaid pajamas. Larry, an English teacher at August Community High School, spends his summer as a lifeguard at the local pool, and has been John’s early morning comrade in newspaper retrieval for quite some time now. Larry steps lightly to his newspaper, grabs it, and strolls across the street to John’s sidewalk.

“Morning, John.”
“Morning Larry.”

“How’s retirement treating you?”

“Well, can’t say as I mind it too much, but this cold, I just don’t know.”

“Going to be your first winter without employment, eh?”

“Yes, I suppose it is.”

“Bet you’ve got a whole stack of books sitting by that fireplace in there. Now that would be a dream come true - a foot of snow on the ground, and me just curled up under three blankets by a nice fire, no papers to grade, no renegade kids to chase down, just a winter of sitting on my duff, pouring through all those books I never had time to read.”

“I don’t know. Reading never really caught my interest. Used to love it as a kid, but, after I got into hardware, I lost the feel for it. Liked to keep moving, building, you know.”

“I hear you. I’m sure you’ll find something to keep you busy. Well, I’ve got to get moving – kids appreciate it too much when I’m late to class. Have a good one, John.”

“Sure. You too.” Larry and his plaid pajamas stroll back to his porch and inside the house.

John squints his eyes, looks up and down the street, and smiles. He pushes from his mind the sprawling subdivisions and tacky strip malls that have been planted around the town, and thinks only of Cedar street and of good neighbors like Larry Walton. He is envious of the man, still young and able to spend his days moving around the classroom, solving problems and chatting with kids. The cold air breaks his train of thought, and he turns around, climbs back to his porch, and sits at the lone chair. It has been his routine to read the paper cover to cover every morning and sit in silence, watching the coming of the day, but when he takes a sip of his coffee, he finds it cold. The mug itself is even chillier to the touch, and the outside air is becoming more than he can tolerate. Frozen to the bone after only five minutes in the cool September air, John grabs his paper and coffee and retreats inside to the kitchen table, stopping on his way to edge the thermostat up a few degrees.

It has been four months since John Barton’s retirement from Hammond’s Hardware. He had begun his career there at age twenty, and for forty-five years had worked six days a week, eight hours a day, quietly strolling the floors of the store, giving customers directions to the Allen wrenches in Aisle Three or consulting on the best mix of concrete to use for setting a basketball goal. John was never the fastest worker, never the most personable or immediately friendly, but he knew hardware like no one else. If another floor clerk couldn’t answer a customer’s question, they’d ask John. He would cock his head and look to the ground, then give his answer: “Well now, I tell you what. You’re going to want to use wood screws instead of just nails in your tree house. Now you see, those nails will hold all right, wood screws will give you some lasting strength.”

Hammond’s had been bought out by SuperSaver hardware, a national chain, back in May. Bob Hammond was getting on in years, and was looking to move south and live on a golf course somewhere, so he took the cash and left the Midwest behind. The chain left Bob’s name on the store, banking on tradition to be a significant factor in steady business, but they changed just about everything else. A new manager was brought in from out of town, a skinny, nervous man named Herb Drinbock, who spent his first five years of managing at the SuperSaver by the mall on the east side of Indy. Herb threw out the old displays that Bob had put up twenty years ago and replaced them with standard SuperSaver fare. Where a poster of paint shades had once been, Herb installed some computer driven machine that would mix the right paints automatically. Touch-screen monitors were placed all over the store to aid in product location, and John was transferred to the checkout line. One week later, he stepped out of the newly chaotic world of hardware, retiring to his calm and simple home.

This morning, John finishes his coffee with a bit more haste than usual, upset at himself for retreating from such a mild cold snap. He reads quickly through the paper, stopping to carefully examine the weather section. It looks like the chilly weather is here to stay for at least a few days, and there is even a chance of rain this afternoon. He feels a tightening in his gut, a small but notable urgency pulling at his routine. He has spent every morning of his retirement on his front porch, and the promise of approaching fall with its dying light and frosty mornings is obviously going to interfere with that tradition. The thought of the coming season propels him a bit more quickly than usual through the house and into his gardening clothes. He shuffle up the stairs, removes his bathrobe, and dons his overalls, t-shirt and old flannel. He heads downstairs to the back porch, where his work boots and tools await him. The boots are cold from their night on the porch, and John flexes his toes to warm the hard insoles. He pushes open the screen door and steps out onto the soft back lawn.

Bordered by a row of crab-apple trees, John’s backyard consists of more garden than grass, a path of broken slate pieces trailing between the carefully divided sections of the garden. A few morning birds chirp about in the trees, and a squirrel skitters across the garden and behind a bush. In the background can be heard the hollow rattle of a jackhammer, intermixed with the annoying beeps of heavy machinery backing up. It is likely the street crew, whose latest assignment is to split the sewer main so that a line can be run to the three new subdivisions on the south side of town. Shutting out the noise, John moves directly to the near left side of the yard towards the plot of ajuga that has traversed his dividing rut and begun to invade the soft grass. The pesky ground cover, although beautiful when in full bloom, requires a great deal of attention, and John has been concentrating his efforts on the ferns on the opposite side of the garden in the past week, as the coming fall threatens their early demise. His pace slows as he lowers himself to the ground, one knee gingerly bending to sink into the receiving earth. John assures his balance with a steadying hand, adjusts his legs to compensate, and begins to pull the ajuga from the ground. He piles them carefully at arm’s length, keeping the growing pile out of the way. Once the offending plants have been removed and the borders restored, he surveys the damage. The grass has not suffered too greatly, and shows merely a few spots of dirt where the ajuga used to be. John smooths the thick blades with his hands, covering most evidence of holes. He gathers the discarded ajuga in his hand, and gently stands up. The physical exertion of the simple work combined with the cool September morning have slowed him again to a careful, reserved pace. The pull in his stomach is still there, but his tired body’s ability to respond to that pull has begun to fail. Torn ground cover in hand, John paces across the yard towards the compost bin on the far side of the house.

In the center of John’s backyard is a scale model of his house, painted and detailed with careful precision. The structure is mounted on a three foot pole, and a small
round hole in the front door allows access for any interested birds. The birdhouse was his first project after his retirement from Hammond’s, a meticulously crafted piece of small-scale carpentry that was two months in the creation. The robins who made their home there this summer have just recently gone south for the coming winter, and so John has not given much attention to the birdhouse lately. John pauses to admire his work. The smooth brown roof with its intricately carved shingles catches his eye this morning, and he smiles with pride at the exacting standards of his craft. John finishes his walk to the compost heap, tossing the ajuga onto the mound of dead leaves, rotting food and other garden waste that have accumulated over the summer. The pesky plants disposed of, John turns and ambles back to his gardening tools. When he passes the birdhouse again, it seems something is missing, something that he had not noticed on his first pass. John squints at the miniature house in disbelief, checking his vision. The four small round uprights which support the front porch roof have been carefully and deliberately removed. Yes, without doubt the half-inch dowel rods which he cut to length and painted brown have been wrenched from their wood-glued positions and are missing. He looks around the yard for the lost pieces, then realizes the futility of his search. He had expected some minor vandalism to strike eventually, perhaps a pellet gun shooting through the wood or even a pocket knife scratching down the roof, but nothing like this. He removes a glove and runs his wrinkled hand over the roof and down the etched siding of the house, staring at the now-sagging porch roof. The feel of the worn wood snaps him from his disbelief, turning it to the first feeling of disgust that he can remember since May. This gesture of specific and calculated destruction is more than he can tolerate. The damage must be repaired immediately.

John walks slowly through the door of Hammond’s Hardware, the conflict between his hurried brain and his tired body still eating at him. He has driven the nine blocks to Hammond’s, a distance he would walk on any other occasion. Upon entering the store, John realizes immediately that Herb has changed the layout once again, the third renovation since May. The aisles run the same direction, but the first aisle now consists of garden hoses, gutter pieces and PVC pipe. His disgust heightens another level, but like all renovations since May, John must suffer the insults of a poorly manned and incompetently staffed hardware store in order to obtain his building supplies. Unwilling to roam the twelve aisles in search of a single half-inch dowel rod, John grudgingly approaches one of the touch-screen locator computers that sit at the front of the store. He slowly types out “dowel rods” using the video keyboard, pressing the “enter” key when he is finished. The screen goes blank for a second, and then the words “no list of goods” appear. John sighs impatiently and re-enters his request, this time simplifying it to “rods.” Again the screen goes blank, but this time a list appears: “Rods, Curtain: Aisle Three; Rods, Lawnmower Steering: Aisle Eight; Rods, Stirring: Aisle two.” John grits his teeth in frustration and walks over to the first checkout line. The boy working the register, a chunky, scraggly-haired youth, turns and greets John with a bored monotone.

“Will that be all for you today sir?”

“I’m looking for dowel rods. Can you tell me where I might find dowel rods?” John asks. The boy squints in confusion.

“What rods?”

“Dowel rods.”
across each stack of wood, from coarse six-by-sixes to the smoother plywood sheets. Mesmerized, awash in the smell and feel of the piles of forgotten lumber, John finds himself sitting on a stack of two-by-fours. He looks down to find a pile of sawdust at his feet. John carefully reaches down and scoops up a handful of the fibers. He squeezes them, feeling the compression between his fingers and palm, then sprinkles the hand full back to the ground, eyes carefully focused on the drifting particles. The air clears, and with it John’s thoughts. Snapped from his daze, he realizes the waste that lies before him, the dismal existence of these stranded boards, their potential forever lost. He moves slowly towards the door.

It is raining when John leaves Hammond’s Hardware. The late September weather has turned even colder, and the pelting rain pops against John’s old leather work jacket. He climbs into his car, puts the dowel rod on the seat beside him, and looks up at the brightly lit “Hammond’s Hardware” sign glaring through the rain. He feels the tightness come back into his stomach, and the feeling of disgust returns. John grits his teeth, starts the car, and puts Hammond’s in his rear view mirror. There are projects to be accomplished, other things to worry about.

Dusk has fallen when John glues the final bit of dowel rod into place on his birdhouse. The newly painted pillars are a mismatch with the rest of the house’s well-worn color, but a few weeks of weathering will smooth things out. He steps back to examine the birdhouse. The beautifully crafted model appears tiny and insignificant, sitting on his wide workbench. The person who broke the pillars could easily repeat the act, or even move on to other areas of the house, the gabled roof, or even the chimney. Perhaps with some small wood nails, he can fortify the birdhouse, make it strong enough to withstand the vandals. He opens a drawer beneath his workbench and sorts through the various sacks of nails until he finds the tiniest in the drawer. He grabs the smallest hammer from the peg board behind the workbench, and lines up a nail that will secure the uprights to the porch roof. John stops, hammer raised carefully in midair. An uncentered nail will likely cause the upright to split, and an imperfect swing of the hammer, even at the most delicate speed, will probably crack the porch roof. John steps back again and realizes the impossible frailty of the birdhouse. No amount of reinforcement, no quantity of nails or extra wood can protect it from destruction. John’s heart sinks yet again, and the tightness goes out of his stomach. Cradling his creation in his arms, he trudges out to the backyard and mounts the house back on its post. While the newly replaced porch uprights bring the house back to its previous level of careful completion, the house appears tiny beneath the early evening sky, and the spattering rain seems to pound on the structure, as if to weaken it before his eyes. Standing in the cold rain, John feels the exhaustion of his day weighing heavy on his shoulders. He paces slowly back inside.

After hanging up his damp coat and work clothes, John trudges up the stairs and to his bedroom. He pauses a moment to stare at himself in the mirror. Never has he felt so tired, so hopeless, and his face reflects his mood. For the first time in his life, he notices the slightest hint of dark circles under his eyes. His hands, still cold from the outside work, are stiff and aching. With a deep sigh, John breaks his gaze from the mirror and eases himself into bed. The spattering rain becomes a blur in his ears, and he drops quickly to sleep.

John awakes at five in the morning, chilled to the bone. His bedroom is terribly cold. He realizes that the pilot light on his aging gas furnace must have gone out. John
pulls off the covers and moves quickly across the room. Bathrobe on, he hurries down the stairs. He turns the corner at the bottom of the stairs and strides to the basement door. His fingers touch the brass doorknob and its frigid metal brings waking memories of his night’s dreams. In the dream, his birdhouse sits on the checkout counter of Hammond’s, encased in a block of solid ice. The four porch-supports have been removed yet again, and John tries to chip away at the ice with his fingers. Herb explains that he’ll need more than that, and chuckles at John’s efforts. The frost from the ice gathers under John’s scratching fingernails, numbing his fingertips. The memory of the dream fades, leaving John standing at the basement door, panic and desperation pouring over his body.

As quickly as his newly awakened body will allow, John scurries around the house, climbing into his work clothes. They have dried from the previous day, and although they are cold to the initial touch, they soon warm with his body heat. He hurries out the back door into the yard and strides quickly to his birdhouse. The familiar gray light of an overcast morning fills the air and although the rain has stopped, the chill of yesterday is far from gone. He removes the birdhouse from its post and sets it gingerly in the grass. John dons his work gloves, grips the narrow post, and begins to work it back and forth, loosening it from the cold ground. After a few minutes of work the post is free. John’s back throbs from the effort, but he presses on. Gathering the birdhouse and post, he strides into his garage. John opens his car, carefully puts the birdhouse and post in the front seat, grabs a wooden mallet off of the workbench, and slides into the car. The vinyl seats crackle under his weight, and the steering wheel feels cold even through his thick work gloves. He fumbles in his pocket for his keys, finds them, and starts the engine.

On a country road north of town, the creeping gray of a September dawn begins to light John’s way. The rain has stopped, but its traces remain in the darkened road and the occasional puddle. A corn field stretches out to his left, its withered brown stalks begging to be cut, taken away from their leaning tiredness. On his right, a narrow field of weeds runs next to the road, bordered at the back by a wall of trees, just beginning to hint at the coming turn to fall. Evidence of civilization is sparse, with the occasional farmhouse dotting the countryside serving as the only testament to the existence of other people. A few snowflakes brush over his windshield. Within a minute, the air is filled with the soft white fragments, each parachuting its way gently to earth. John pulls the car off of the road and gets out. He blinks hard, three times. Indeed, it is snowing. The flakes have transformed the countryside into some sort of white heaven, and have given dimension to the flat ground around him. John opens up the passenger door and carefully removes his birdhouse and its post. He cradles them in his arms, closes the car door, and carefully makes his way down the road embankment to the field of weeds. The mass of tangled plants gives way easily to his stride, their summer strength having been transformed into the dying brown of fall. John traverses the field and reaches the patch of forest on the other side. He turns and looks out from under the canopy of trees. Already a half inch of snow has collected on the ground, on the weeds, on his now far-off car. John turns back into the forest, the layers of dead leaves from seasons past now cushioning his steps. After about fifty yards he arrives at a small clearing. He sits the birdhouse gently on the forest floor. Removing the mallet from his pocket, John carefully lines up the post and pounds it two feet into the rich forest soil. He then bends slowly to his birdhouse, picks it up, and mounts its creation again on its post. The birdhouse looks at home in those woods, its deep brown exterior blending perfectly with the vertical trunks in the background. John removes a glove and runs his hand down the roof of the house and over the newly replaced porch supports. He smiles, turns his back on the birdhouse, and walks through the woods and back to his car.

By the time John returns to his home, three inches have collected on the ground, covering Cedar street in an unexpected blanket of silence. John parks his car in the garage, returns the mallet to the workbench, and steps inside the back door. The house is still cold, and John heads immediately for the basement. The smell of the musty cement-floor, basement greets him, and he realizes that the pilot light is out simply because it has not been turned on for the winter. Grabbing a box of blue tip matches from a shelf, John pries the old grate off of the furnace, lights a match, and turns the pilot valve. With the sharp rumble of igniting gas, the pilot lights, warming John with its small flame. He replaces the vent and slowly climbs the basement stairs. At the top of the stairs, John decides to light a fire in the fireplace to help with the warming of the house. The blue-tips still in hand, he ambles into the living room and pulls aside the wire screens that shield the fireplace. He reaches up the chimney and finds the metal lever which opens the flue. The lever gives after some effort, and John hears the flue doors clang open. In the fireplace sits a prepared stack of wood, complete with stacked kindling and wadded newspaper. John remembers piling this wood last winter, a fire that he never got around to lighting. A single match is all it takes to ignite the paper, and John sits back to watch the fire grow. It is then that he realizes that the morning paper has probably arrived. After navigating through the hallway to the front door, he pries open the door. A few flakes of snow are sucked into the house. The newspaper lies in roughly the same spot as it was yesterday, but it is covered with an inch of snow. John steps onto the porch. At his feet is a thick paperback book with a small yellow post-it note stuck to the front cover. He frowns, bends down, and picks up the book. The note reads: “John – Thought you might like this one. It’s about an architect. – Larry” John tucks the book under one arm, pulls the front door open again, and strolls inside to his growing fire.
just shy of freedom

laughter of women follows from behind
together, still singular
like subjects of similes,
fills boredom with sadness, longing
sympathy
for men, who don’t seem to understand
it haunts like their footsteps
too close, ominous
if only for ambiguity’s sake

then realizing the lengths reached
from the safety of their masquerade,
chameleon costumes changing with company
and the calls of unity
they retreat into silence,
without words

in that moment
laughter reverberates
it sounds the same
but hollow

—Sean Boyle '00
[Touch the mothers you never knew]

Touch the mothers you never knew.
She who did the killing and she who stopped the wars.
She who burned and she who marched.
Starved and fed. Protested and acquiesced
The one-breasted and the sexless have all nursed you.
Now listen to the songs you have inherited.
Each time you close your mouth you have forgotten.

Muscled legs spread. Anchored.
          Bathed in rising light.
Flesh tears for the passage of life.
She comes to us screaming: Pink or brown,
like skin familiar with the heat.
She knows she is the seed within the fruit.
Rough red chases after her, cleansing and staining.

Sometimes the mother circles her with tired arms,
cooling and warming simultaneously.
Other times she feels the drugs still throb
and her chiseled thighs shake. Cold metal
surrounding the bed encloses,
while white coats with degrees explain
her hysteria. They try to quiet the child.
She does not sleep, but pulls at the breast.

—Heather Trabert ’97

Fishing for Meaning

“It’s been almost a millennium,”
you said with horror.
You wondered how you could have rippled
gavity waves that long
and still not have caught enough stars
to really matter,
but time casts life-lines into space
somehow without tangling them up.
You weren’t patient enough—
your fate was stolen,
nothing else to do but reel in and start over.
Floundering in the cosmic bubbles
churned up by others’ success,
you couldn’t help tumbling
rod over reel into the truth:
you saw on one fin the crispness of the water,
its sure tides; then on the other,
the workings of space, unbroken.
And with one terrible heave,
you flung your curved lead destiny
into the brevity of time
and ripped it open to reveal
a brand new fishing pole.

—Bekah Taylor ’00
The novel

Oh, I've been so many excuses,
I'm sorry, I . . .
I . . .

And I am silent.

—Sara Brown '99

exile

The little girl who has fallen and chipped her tooth,
I am her.
Crying, screaming, needing,
she is me.
And, as water flows off cheeks,
The sky beams blue.
Peach dress dirtied, slip showing, tights torn, and saddle shoes scuffed,
I walk home.
Hungry, tired, filthy, lost,
I surrender to the sun.
Hot, sore,
Dying on the dust.
Baking,
slowly melting away from all,
I close my eyes.
I was the blood splattered horse in the desert.
The rocks in the sharp river, smooth and aged, thirsty for the sun's warmth;
The trees on the peak, burned orange and gold, craving more time to live;
The ethereal wind: shy, world weary, yet pausing to play;
We are one.

He was part of me, that boy in Haiti,
waiting for a boat.
Watching waves break,
crash, fall.
. . . And, feeling the tube give way,
I screamed.
Lifeless,
lungs full,
At the bottom of the blue,
It was me.
The woman wearing dandelions in her hair,
is my shadow.
The baby food on her nose and the toddler in her lap,
powder, blue diapers, baby and all,
They are my essence.

I've been the tax man, the mountains, Mexico and death . . .
I've tapped to the rhythm of trumpets screaming; kick-ball-change on a cilantro night . . .
this morning i woke up and i
was Theodore Roethke
losing bits of myself to you

is this a just war that we're fighting now?
atoms colliding – these pieces of we

"Safety will be the sturdy child of terror,
and survival the twin brother of annihilation"
at least, that's what Churchill thought.

we never signed a "no first use" agreement

... no one ever jumped the gun
dropped the bomb
- until now.

i was sitting in that room the other night
when someone said to me, "did you
know that when

anti-particles
collide that they nullify one another?

well,

this morning i woke up and you
were the spokesperson for nuclear war.

—erin c. malone '99
Upon Enlistment

It took me days to decipher the 3-lettered addendum to your name at the bottom of the Happy Halloween note: Pvt. Private, Matt, seventeen. You'll have to cut soon those long curling red hairs, not strawberry, not carrot, but some unnamed in-between vegetable that distinctly shines of you. That hair will be the first visible slice, but the way you think, next, will be finely shredded until you know push-ups, parachutes, and the drill sergeant's boot heels better than us. You may have fantasized some G.I. Joe scene from our West Virginia days, but if you remember right, the neighbor's golden retriever, fur blazing like the fire of your hair, gnawed on those plastic men until you cried and we bought new ones. I don't want you to make a mistake of pride and act out some scene to be better than us. We need your shine. We need you as you are.

- Trish Kiel '97

Party in December

After two shots of Jim Beam and three glasses of champagne, everything is clear. I've made a mistake. Coming in a sports coat and tie as instructed. To a party of strangers. With an ulterior motive attached to me – see the Girl in the Black Velvet Dress. Morticia Adams of my philosophy class. She's beautiful. She's intelligent. I have a "crush." I read a poem of hers posted on the wall.

After two shots of Jim Beam and three glasses of champagne, the tongue inflates and floats. I'm on my knees by Emily. Chewing a Swisher Sweet. "No," she says, "Don't bite the end. Just lick the rim. Pucker your lips and just suck it in." I eat my cigar. Emily wipes my lips with a white towel placed beneath the vanishing liquor table (at least my hand and glass can't find it). She also insists on wiping one of my hands. Emily, by the way, is also in philosophy. A great girl really. She had me pegged for a stiff until the Jim Beam. Emily holds an emerald green chalice from Ireland in her hand. Filled with cheap wine. She pours me a glass. "If you like her, you should just tell her. What's the worst that could happen? She could say no. If she likes you, she'll say yes." Girl in Black Velvet. "I hate crushes," I reply, "fitting someone into some image. No emotional attachment to images. I just want to know her." Girl in Black Velvet behind Emily. Drinking. Engaged in conversation. "That's why you should ask her now. No emotional attachments. Nobody's hurt."

After two shots Jim Beam, three glasses of champagne, three glasses of cheap wine, the host dressed like Orson Welles is amazingly cinematic as he croons "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" under a string of red lights. Roland is a great guy; so is his roommate Barry. I'm grateful to them for inviting me. Roland holds Barry in his arms, swings him like a bride. They sing "I'll be Home for Christmas" or "White Christmas" or some schmoozy song. Roland is style; he flattens each crescendo with his artist's hand. Roland is unbelievably kind, gregarious, good. He knows Girl in Black Velvet. He'll help me. A group of suited men form a chorus line, spill ash and champagne over their striped ties and polished, leather shoes. I join in, tell Barry to time his leg kicks with mine. I see Emily talking to Girl in Black Velvet. "Eewww, eeww," looking my way. I fucked up.

After two shots Jim Beam, three glasses champagne, three glasses wine, and a gin and tonic, I see Girl in Black Velvet run off to ladies' room with some blonde, bird-like girl. "She's been in love forever," says Emily, "with this one guy. He's in Columbus." I nod. "She's going through a lot of problems." "I just want to know her," I reply. I see Girl in Black Velvet return. Sits herself in a corner. "Let me talk to her," says Emily wiping my hand with the white towel again. She goes over to her. I turn to a guy from my geology class and strike-up conversation. "What do you think of the final?" He's in a pin-stripe suit with shoes with spats. As I speak, the gin and tonic glides across my ivory shirt. I walk over to the two girls. Girl in Black Velvet places her hand over her face. I tell Emily that liquor is better than beer. Emily disagrees. I tell her not to get defensive. Girl in Black Velvet groans and runs out of the room. I tell Emily that I'll go after her; she's my responsibility.

After two shots Jim Beam, three glasses champagne, three glasses wine, gin and tonic,
and a splash of vodka, I walk, stumble, fall, crawl down to Girl in Black Velvet’s room. She opens the door just as I reach... “I can’t talk to you right now. I just can’t.” She slams the door. The lock clicks. “Damnit, don’t be so emotionally... caustic,” I mumble. “Just want to be pals.” I try the handle. I see Emily. “She’s my friend I’ll talk to her. You go back to the room and wait.” I’m not a child, dammit.

After two shots Jim Beam, three glasses champagne, three wine, gin and tonic, vodka, and a manhattan, and a martini, I stumble towards the bathroom. Roland’s there already.

- paul durica ’00

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**the expatriate**

1. enter, the poet, a liar
   branded and
   well read

she’s tired

2. the waitress brought white
   toast instead of wheat
   and has two lazy eyes

it hurts to look at her

3. the poet remembers that it is not
   her place to judge, but transcribe
   taps her fingernails on the table

she is not at home here

4. open any book and you will
   know that life is not only for
   the living, but the dead

the waitress knows

5. the poet glances down
   at blank pages
   stained with coffee and

wonders, where has poetry gone?

6. exeunt, the poet
   branded a liar, from life
   left behind her

she cared not what plato told

- erin c. malone ’99
Rockettes

It came in the mail slot yesterday. I stuck my hand in, and it filled me up. The notice read:

Auditions. Women, willing to travel, come Tuesday, 6:30. Dancing shoes and skills required.

I hurried home from work that day, smelling like pork chops I'd cooked for seventy GE foremen, along with onions, peas, and my famous cornbread. I'm so sick of being famous for something silly as food. I want my legs to be noticed. I would've been a flapper or follies girl, but those fads have passed. Now I want to be one of them, with sequins sparkling, eyes shining, because they do what they want. They don't go to school, then work, then home, where meals are skimpier than the ones I feed people who make a quarter an hour. They dance: for money, for men, for movies, even.

I know I could be like them. I practice my kicks so much momma says I'll put a hole in my head or the ceiling for sure. I raced to the audition, the shoes with taped soles bouncing against my shoulders. I ran in breathless, nearly faint: those women, their beauty deep as the make-up covering the shells of their faces. They were nasty, doe-eyed, blond. I prayed for swooping kicks, and graceful lines. I squeezed toes into shoes, laced-up, and died with each step. No prayer, no God came down to save my soul.

The music ruined me, I slid away.

My one shot to be a Rockette has flared up and gone.

The bitter peek of freedom it leaves stings. I taste it in the peas, pork chops, and yes, my cornbread.

—Trish Klet '97
Smoke Circles

They met in secret. He liked to think it was because she was ashamed of what they were doing, that she was afraid God would find out, or even worse, one of the nuns. He liked to think of her whispering her prayers at night, her hands clenched together so tightly the dimpled flesh around her knuckles stretched whiter than bone.

But when they came to the cave behind the woodshed and one long sweep of her flashlight revealed stubby vanilla scented candles tucked into rocky crevices and a soft wool blanket nestled invitingly across the floor, he began to wonder if she planned it all.

Even their first meeting seemed contrived. Everyone knew the Catholic girls hung out at the library after school. They stood out front in scattered groups like flocks of tropical birds pondering migration, each plaid, pleated skirt a fan of plumage, watching the boys from the public school parade past in their shiny cars.

His friends picked her out at the beginning of the school year, long skinny legs, hot chocolate colored hair curling shyly into the round, white curve of her elbow. Her books pressed against her chest like hungry children clamoring for attention.

The boys called out to her from car windows, their angular arms beckoning, their sugary voices singing that sweet song: 'hey baby let me take you for a ride let me show you what you're made for does that cross around your neck make you a saint cause angel I'm in need of saving.' She kept on walking, turning her head till her hair fell across her face and hid the smile that played with her lips like an eager adolescent.

This drove them mad.

They followed her home, strolling a few feet behind her, watching her book bag bounce against her back in time with their heartbeats. They called her house at three a.m. Their agreement— Lisa's agreement— was simple. He gave her a cigarette for standing— and closed her eyes. Lisa always closed her eyes, as if it helped her to remember, as if the flickering candlelight and the soft yellow beam of the flashlight were too distracting.

She squared her shoulders, sat back on her heels — the cave was not tall enough for standing— and closed her eyes. Lisa always closed her eyes, as if it helped her to remember, as if the flickering candlelight and the soft yellow beam of the flashlight were too distracting.
Her face came alive with movement, eyebrows arched, forehead crossed with tiny emotion lines: worry lines, passion lines, sorrow lines. He knew when she was finished because the lines melted back into the smooth plain of her skin like breakers settling after a squall.

Afterward, Lisa smoked cigarettes lying on her back, one hand propped under her head as if gazing up at the sky, as if she could see right through the roof of the cave, right through the trees to the stars beyond. She blew rings and watched them hang in the air between them, dissolving into nothingness, only air.

She blew smoke circles at the ceiling. He imagined tracing those circles underneath her shirt, across her stomach. But they disappeared too quickly, hitting the ceiling and scattering, drops of water into a pan. He imagined the smoke seeping down the cold, wet walls, rolling back to him over the ground all misty and hot and he inhaled the sweet, suffocating fumes until his lungs burned.

He never touched her.

"Do you want to kiss me?" she asked him once, grinding the stub of her cigarette into a pile of ash the color of stone.

"Yes," he said.

She closed her eyes, her lashes flickering, tiny gray butterflies beating their wings.

"I'm ready," she whispered.

She parted her mouth slightly, just wide enough for a breath, a slit of smoke.

He listened to her breathe. A heartbeat passed before he leaned forward and softly touched the tip of his index finger to her lips.

Though they met at the cave for two months, she did not invite him to kiss her again, and he would never ask.

Drinking beer behind the high school one night, one of his friends told him of the Catholic girl he had taken home, the curly-haired actress who, in the thrones of passion, quoted lines of Shakespeare. With her eyes closed.

"Did she read you poetry?" Steve asked.

"Did she what?"

"Read you poetry."

His friend threw a crushed can in the darkened direction of the football field.

"We made poetry," he said. "We didn't need to read it."

Early into November, it snowed for the first time. Steve waited at the wood shed for two hours before giving up on her and walking back himself. The woods were dark. Without Lisa or her flashlight, he tripped over small things; varicose roots, branches displaced by a long ago storm.

Inside the cave, orphaned leaves laid a brittle, colorless carpet that crackled and came alive under his boots. Two of the candles had burned to extinction, feeble wicks drowning in their own yellow wax. The snow drifted, sending up a white smoke screen, sprinkling the outer lip of the cave with sugar circles. He crouched by the ground and wrote their names in the snow. Steve and Lisa.
Abstraction

Not just shapes and sounds but emotion—
low and trembling
the quiver on lips and the shake of hands
drawn out and solemn—
filled with sparkling high energy
and bouncing tones.

A broken washing machine hides in the corner.
On top of it a pile of blue static-filled TV screens.
This is yet another scene from pseudo-reality.

This collection of words relies on images,
yet it is not visual.
There are no pictures of
white petaled flowers with black yellow centers and tough
vein filled leaves and hardy stalks
or mumbling eager soft fleshed lovers.

Instead there are only pattern drops.
On paper red and blue, the warm tones of feelings
things that emerge from the reflection of sounds
high electronic squelches
mixed with hard noise and new ideas made old.

—Colin Bossen '98
always kinesis
(arrived from g.k.'s night light)

1 fiction/s

you crease your pen upon
troughs, crests, clumps of bite,
clashes always tenable to the lunch,
grips hardly feeling the reason
ain’t no absorber ‘round here
a facile grimace of pulp — — .

shuffles much, already peeled,
fetish, acme, kinesis . . .

2 plot/s

you unstick your zen
in the hide of my disguise,
i clean my bread of slice
onto your plate — — not very,
you don’t own the publishing house
deconstructed when you peep — — .

the communal, prisms baits,
blighted and bloated . . .

3 reform/s

the leak,
the grafted glance in tow,
the rescaled placemat
gloats at a playground,
but how you take in and turn out
the sustenance of light — — .

ferried without fear of another witness,
repel, reject, respect . . .

4 frame/s

you bolt cultural backyards contesting
mottled bottles of things
however slight in significant pains
is yours and the move meant out of you
where quickening borders thicken games,
i die there then in my physical — — .

artifice congeals around it,
inner, outer, trans . . .

5 decay/s

but then the way crafted decomposes,
sums down, suns up.
you tinker with some clones
boating at the dry dock of trite.
a tinder blown space of refund,
a shiver gleaning toward — — .

all is rot, tense debunking,
tenaciously tentative garb of age . . .

—alex e. blazer '97
Lily
For L.R.

You washed your dress
in a river
made brown by so many skins
some days it ran red,
and hoping some color
might wash off
on you,
you drank with your hands
cupped together,
a small white offering
bowl.

Not even seventeen,
you already belong
to this man,
your chiseled wrists,
your spoon bone ankles sharp and smooth.
Even the blue flowers
on your back are his,
the paisley handprints
prettier
than your mother's patterned
china bowl
with the chip in its tooth.

He washes you
in the cold-skinned tub,
water stinging
from the stove.
You scrub and scrub.
The water burns
like blood
down your back,
but still your hands shine
white as new butter,
transparent
in the stare
he calls moonlight.

You drown
in the big metal bed.
Blankets twist, shadows on a sheeted moon.
Your legs become water
in the bruised dark, disfigured
through wax paper windows,
and yes, you know what the stars are.
They are fireflies
that flew too high and got caught
in the trees
like you
in this Salem town.

-Alison Stine '00
Falling In

I'm still picking leaves out of my hair—
those were your sky.
Me, I saw birds, your shirt that bore
two holes in your head on each
side of your nose
that let me see through to the
blue that was my sky.

You had tree branches growing
out of your ears, and some
leaves stuck in there too
(don’t know how that could’ve happened).
I was thinking we were in the right place;
the season was a coincidence.
I tried to tell you how you were an elf
and I was a wood nymph,
but all that came out
was something about happiness,
and how earth energy can ground a person.

Only to you my feet were dangling,
and so I pulled you up
to hold your head near my heart
so our skies would be one.
Now those were the days
when falling was safe
because there was no down,
and if I asked you
which way you were pulled
"Why, in," you’d say, drawing close.

You laughed when I told you
how you were an elf;
and I’m glad because
there’s something about happiness
that can ground a person.

—Bekah Taylor '00
**this bird has flown**

BOOMBA! BOOMBA!
sweet, jumpy girl,
up, down like Tigger
on a trampoline,
mattress contracts,
springs shriek.

    BOOMBA!
I rest my head
against the wall,
watch you
on my bed,
listen to the Beatles play.

Rubber Soul shakes the room
with ethereal sitar rhythms.

outside beneath a street lamp
moths perform a liturgical dance
for their electric god,
so alluring they race from the dark
to its sides,
encircling,
ever touching.

BOING!
up you go,
tossing back
spooky chick hair,
seen in parks
shading the poems
of Emily D.

tumbles over your face,
misfit Cousin Itt.

long legs
denim clad,
wide cuffs that cover Damascus sandals
stomp on the metal frame.

trip and slip,
you’re in my lap,
I feel your
sweaty skin.

I try to hold on,
but you’re up again,
in a second.

—paul durica '00
exile

exfoliating some sun

vocabulary:

my mind scream screens:
naïveté — narratee
paradoxical irony,
incredulous doubt
and "ontological shock"
of the experiencer

spills x,

the baroque mad:
mirror-headed humanity
mum's the self,
reflexive word
"allusion/illusion"
cultish conundrums

"outside in"

fordism/tvi/lcd:
casually devoted avidly
post-ford/tvii/"niche,
audenced quality demos
the ephemeral, fugitive”
accumulates narratives

pyrophany . . .

the dying skull leans:
capital expends capitol
toward mutant loss,
limen of just deeds
“Seeing is not enough”
demonstration fire . . .

—alex e. blazer '97

Liberation: May 8, 1945

for Gerda Weissman Klein

"Why, today is your birthday," the doctor exclaims,
spooning thick chowder to my lips while a nurse rubs
my feet for circulation. He notes on my chart
my date of birth. I am twenty-one today. Next
to that number, he pencils my weight: sixty-eight pounds.

1939: home with Mama, Papa, and Arthur, together.
Last night, I made my Papa a vow I'd never lose faith.
Those lonely nights I felt Papa's arms wrapped
tightly around my neck and the words, "Never give up.
Promise me you'll never give up."

Only yesterday, the Nazis murdered sixty-seven
girls on our march of death. Suse died
this morning pumping water, only one hour
before I could tell her we were free.
I just want to sleep. Why won’t they let me sleep?

Rescuers reached me first, frozen bones and sunken
eyeballs. I must've looked like an animal, yet still
wearing those ski boots Papa had insisted I bring three
years ago—how did he know? I've been liberated, they say.
Why would soldiers want to rescue a Jew?

A young American god reaches out to save me.
He brings warm strength, a forgotten piece of humanity,
my humanity. On the loneliest of nights, I felt Papa's
arms and my promise to him and to the American
soldier. "Never give up." He smiles upon me.

—Jen Suster '97
Seal Nowak in the upstairs bathroom, brushing her long, red hair in front of the mirror. Sixteen, with the best trumpet-lips in the county. Actually she played the cornet, and she played well.

It was cold out, February, and the snow was responding to gravity, lightly, when Seal looked out the window. The sky was white and she pulled out the hair dryer. On days like this Seal used to ride with her dad on his snowmobile. He would take it up to 70 miles an hour—but only if Seal promised not to tell her mother. She could barely hold onto her dad's waist around his thick winter coat. He'd finally slow down when they reached the edge of the woods, unless Seal couldn't stand the cold and the speed anymore, and screamed.

She left the bathroom after drying her hair, grabbed her cornet, and went downstairs. Seal's mother was reading the paper, turning the pages slowly. She poured coffee into her mug from the pot on the table, keeping one hand on the pot, pouring more as she read. "Um, I'm leaving now," Seal said.

"OK Seal," her mother said, "Good luck, honey." Her mom tried to make her voice sound cheerful.

"Going to see Dad now?" Seal couldn't make herself say the word "hospital."

"Pretty soon. I'm waiting for Carley to get up. I'll come back in a few hours to get you."

Seal walked the 0.7 miles to school with one frozen hand clutching the handle of her instrument case. She walked on the left side of the road, against the direction of cars. Long yellow grass covered the banks of the ditches, sticking out through patches of snow. There was an empty bottle of Colt 45 beside a Taco Bell bag. Broken glass from 20 years of beer bottle litter was scattered in the ditches.

In the parking lot Seal met her principal, who opened the door of his rusty black station wagon. It was strange seeing him on a Saturday, without the usual gray suit and tie. He was wearing black earmuffs and he clapped his hands together to shock warmth into them. "Hello, Seal. Let's get going, shall we?"

Seal, riding in the front passenger's seat, hardly breathing the whole time, afraid of having to form responses to anything he might say. She looked out the window at the small tract houses and dead fields, concentrating on the muted colors of Ohio. Everything was black, brown, and white—the trees, the patches of old grass under the snow, the cold, blank sky. Seal began pounding the fingerings to "Take Five" on her knee, but quickly remembered where she was.

Seal's principal only broke the silence once, and that was to ask about her father. "He's doing fine, thanks." And then, because she could tell he wanted more, "They've moved him out of intensive care. They're planning a double bypass for Monday. We're all doing fine." She didn't mean to sound defensive.

After about five minutes they reached the cemetery. Seal's principal stopped by a group of men in military uniform. They were ten of them lining up, about two football fields away from the burial site. "Well," her principal said, snapping the doors unlocked and staring out Seal's window at the men. She said "thank you"; he nodded and continued on through the cemetery road, utilizing the turnaround. Seal watched him park across the street. He stayed inside his car.

A man in a military uniform walked up to Seal and handed her an envelope. Inside was a check made out to "Seal S. Nowak," for twenty-five dollars. This was the most ever. She smiled the cemetery smile of a thin line, "thank you." He returned to his place in line, moving his rifle to the right side.

Seal Nowak walked to her place at the edge of the woods. She stood behind the military men with her cornet case, frozen hands, winter coat with the fake-fur collar. Seal wanted to be invisible. Checked her watch: thirty minutes until her cue. She'd better start warming up.

When you press the cornet hard against your lips, searching for high notes or trying to hang onto your breath, a red ring forms on your mouth from the pressure. Seal rubbed at her lips to warm them up a little, remembering what she'd promised her boyfriend in the third grade. "I'll keep my lips warm for you," placing one hand over her mouth and blowing out to create a warm space. It had been snowing out, February, and they were planning to kiss at recess.

Seal Nowak began to play. Scales, first, the B flat to warm up, checking her pitch on the middle C. Long, slow notes, while she tried to concentrate on her inability to keep a steady pitch, her tendency to pinch the sound. How the water built up in the cold mouthpiece, the spit she used to warm up the cornet, and gargled when she played. Right before it was her turn, after blowing warm air in the instrument for twenty minutes, she would wipe the mouthpiece out with her fingers and begin.

It was a quick service, and it was very far away. The point was that she be heard, not seen. From where Seal stood, she could barely make out the priest's gestures, but she didn't want to see. Instead Seal listened to the winter noises of wind and footsteps crunching on snow. The military men behind her were stomping up and down to keep warm. The wind was cutting at her cheeks.

Seal tried to force herself to think about music. The tall pines around her were almost black. She was going to have to play against the wind, something she hadn't counted on.

Finally the uniformed men fired shots, and there was silence. It was Seal's turn. Standing up very straight, Seal Nowak, playing "Taps" for the dead man she'd never met. She wiped the spit out of the mouthpiece, pulled the cornet up to a military right angle, and pushed the cold metal to her lips.

It cracked. She cracked. The sound cracked. Seal might as well have cracked herself, have been seen, have screamed in the attentive silence of this military funeral. There was still some spit left in the instrument, and she was muffled, garbled, pinched. She was sorry. The first note of "Taps" cracked with Seal's spit; she sucked in the musty air and finished the song.

She was sure the widow's hands flew up. She knew she heard the cries of the dead man's children. She anticipated the disappointment of her principal, who had attested to her ability and suggested her for the job.

Seal Nowak finished playing "Taps" to the silence. She couldn't tell if it was a respectful silence, or an embarrassed silence, or a very, very angry silence. She didn't want to talk to anybody. She couldn't see through the cold water in her eyes; the wind was now
slashing at her face. The black station wagon circled in the turnaround to scoop Seal up. She blinked her eyes to clear them, saw the car, and ran to it. The cornet case bumped against her leg as she ran.

Seal's principal unlocked the door, but didn't get out to open it. He smiled his own cemetery smile. "Very lovely, Seal. Very nice." They drove off in the February. Seal watching the same black, brown, and white scenery pass, but from the other side of the road. Driving back, Seal couldn't remember ever messing up that badly before. "I'll just take you home, Seal." Her principal turned right on Ridgewood, instead of continuing on to the school. At home, Seal pulled the garage door open and grabbed the house key from under the trash can. She waved good-bye and closed the garage door. Entering the house, Seal was afraid to look at the refrigerator. She didn't want to see what kind of message might be waiting for her there. Usually it was a list of chores, but yesterday it had been: "Your father doesn't feel well, we're taking him to the hospital. Call Grandma. She'll come get you." And Seal could hardly dial the numbers. It just didn't make sense. Her father wasn't a "sick" person, whatever that is.

But today there was nothing. Seal didn't know what to do while she was waiting for her mom to come back. By the time her mother pulled in the driveway, she'd left the house. Seal's mom parked the car outside the garage and got out. "Honey, what're you doing? It's freezing out here."

Seal Nowak, sixteen, practicing the cornet outside because it's cold and she needs to. "I know, Ma. I'll be right in."

"We're going back soon. Visiting hours end at eight."

"I'm coming."

In her front yard, in Ohio, waiting for the cars to pass so she can play. Seal Nowak played until she got it right, and the sound was so full it became nature, the cold wind. She brought the cornet down from her lips, and went inside with her mom.

—Lynn Tramonte '98
Contributors Notes

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Tyler Smith, a senior, is an English (writing) major from Indianapolis, Indiana. He is headed from Denison to an illustrious career in something. After that, he plans to retire to California and live off the interest. Tyler spends his free time, and also thinks highly of many things, most of which are true. He is the head fiction editor of Exile.

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Alison Amber Stine, a first year student, is from Mansfield, Ohio. Unless she realizes her dream and runs off to LA to play in smoky, dimly lit piano bars, she will graduate in 2000 with majors in English (writing) and theater. Her publishing credits include Hanging Loose, Mobius, and Dramatics, and seven of her stage plays have been produced. She enjoys composing, painting, and pushing buttons.

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Exile

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