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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
Editor's Note

The process by which Exile comes into being each semester is by no means a quick or simple one, and was further confounded in this instance by having me at its core. I do not necessarily mean to discredit myself *ad nauseam* as some editors would, but they will all tell you that transitional periods are the toughest on a publication. The collaborative effort of Jeremy Heartberg and Jennifer Humbert over the past several semesters, not to mention the competent and eager editorial staff they have recruited, has seen to it that the transition made in these past few months has not been bulky or awkward, but rather quite seamless. It is appropriate then, that the two of them are both prominently featured in the edition of Exile on which you presently fix your gaze. In recent years, you have benefited from Jeremy's and Jen's dedication to Exile as a whole; this year, enjoy their dedication to the flexibility and nuance of language, to the manipulation of form, to poetry. Jeremy, Jen, Sarah, and Emily, thank you, you will be missed.

April 2006
The Liberation from Jack Kerouac (II)

Down black miniscule alleys
wish I could talk to Cracker Jack Kerouac.
On those days—no, nights—when I am attacked
by asthmatic despair I walk on red black cobblestone and whine.
He would understand, that Frank Sinatra voice bubbling from His depths
like a bedraggled alcoholic geyser. He would tell me, sitting too close,
breath fermenting used-to-be grapes, that we all die anyway.
Why are you so worried? He'd slur, and reference Mexico City Blues,
mumbling about meat wheels and promises He made to God.
But then I'd make promises to Him, calling through cigarette smoke
that I'll say my prayers or at least write them down
and enshrine them in my bookshelf like a half-hearted offering.
He'd tell me prayers aren't good enough
and would lean in for a corpish kiss, face mangled
by mud and merlot, horrifying when it gets close to mine.
And I'd turn my head and he'd vanish,
banished like God into the labyrinth
of slumbering streets, abandoning me
like faith does at night.

The Liberation from Jack Kerouac (I)

don't tell me bout poetry
cause my daddy knows all them beats.
cracker jack said don't tell me bout meaning
it's all bout them sounds.
daddy don't know about
the pot spot,
hot spot in the trees,
psychedelic mystical clearing.
add the deer, dear
and it all comes clear
like water and the clearing,
that yellow spot with leaves,
please, on the hill.
old roommate and her massive
bowl, green smell and blur
and seven deer, eight deer
and a fawn with white spots.
purity and the lack of it,
say kerouac and i
in unison.
revision and the lack of it.

exile

sex and the lack of it.
wanna spit a river down
this hill.
daddy don't know
bout the time i laid in bed,
thought i was having
seizures but was really
shivering, felt like the
soft edge, the hard edge.
the soften edge of orgasms,
that trailing scary edge nobody
ever feels. thinking i'd
rather be drunk.
doesn't know bout my sister
smoking from a beer can
cause texas stole my bowl.
texas the state?
yes, dallas, texas.
doesn't know bout
selling those old cds
for drinking money.
tells about a time he sold
his ginsberg so that he
could eat,
that patron of patronization
and dive bars, that
kerouacian reviser.

Katie Berta, '08
Fragmented Grief

at least four phone calls—quick, hushed—came to life
in her eyes, her half of the conversations were soft—she quoted
her bible, her father, the Atlantic monthly—she clicked her nails
against the telephone's black body.

at least two jackdaws—pert, slick—sat upon the ledge
where she grew sparse herbs, the jackdaws lectured one another—
they spoke in chirps, in silence, with extended wings—and in their noise,
neither bird felt the touch of its body against the window.

Jen Humbert, '06
Rauschenberg Painting Iris Clert

This is a Portrait of Iris Clert if I say so.
-Robert Rauschenberg

Do not start; rather look up
past assorted paints, pestle,
rolls of canvas, a still wet nude
on the wall. Look up
out the window in the corner-
brick of beam and leaves.
Remember, a bluebird
flew into this morning, thud
and feather burst. Comical
and still, the form lights
against the ground, its spinal cord
align inverse. The universe
must look like this sometimes:
independent figures colliding
with dust. Hope and chance
turn a star. I say do not start.
Gaze chaos, assorted colors,
the impression of a sunset.
Here is a sunset, here.
You cannot find it anywhere
else. Shade your eyes. Firm
parts of speech: a verb, antecedent
to daylight. Everything here predates
us. All else is
shadow or bones
rolled against a wall. And the world
shallows its descent into a gap,
an unknown star system, a secret
whispered into the dark. A woman
you have yet to conceive
floats against this grain.
You will find her somewhere.
She is a beautiful poem.

The Great Lego Wall

Thirteen minutes had passed since the store manager had unlocked the front door. I had arranged the coins in my change bin, matched my car watch to my cell phone watch, and ordered the bills in my wallet. Had I been a smoker I probably might have had a cigarette, rather than sit in a cold car watching parents struggling to contain their kids as they rambunctiously jumped to the store entrance.

How old would he be now?
I try and do some quick mental-math. We were twenty-two the last time we saw each other, and that had been five years ago. Was he five? I began to pull out my cell phone to check the math but hesitated. I have a weird mental thing about phones now. I can blame that one on her as well.

I hadn’t recognized the number on caller ID and I should have gone back to cooking dinner, but I got one of those six sense feelings; not the seeing dead bodies one but when you know something important is going to happen. I guess it’s more like a Spidey sense, then.

Anyway, I answered the phone and she asked me my name. I told her and then asked who she was. When she found out I didn’t remember her, it sounded like she was about to cry. During her sobbing she said two simple words: cowboy boots. I couldn’t tell if she was happy I remembered her then, or more sad that I only remembered her from the boots. Boots said she overheard from a friend I was living in Richmond and that she was going to be there in two weeks to spend the holidays with some family. She then said there was someone she wanted me to meet.

When I was younger I remember asking my dad what he was thinking when I was born. He said it was like being alone at a New Year’s Eve party...but you were happy. That might have been true to him, but the first thing that came to my mind were a couple obscenities and a blasphemy. Boots must have had a Spidey sense, too, because she told me not to worry, she didn’t want child support. She just asked if I wanted to see him.

Does that make him a bastard? If he is, it’s entirely her fault. She knew I would regret it in the morning. Boots was like a predator: a hunting lion; and I was her prey: a drunk horny gazelle. Those cowboy boots! Good God! I should be blaming them. How much does it cost to get your tubes tightened?

He would be six.

I get out of the car, locking it behind me, and walk through a cluster of minivans. It occurs to me that everything in the toy store might be picked over. Everything he would want is now wrapped and ribboned, waiting underneath a tree. I push the thought aside and hurry through the dirty snow.

As the automatic doors open, I feel a twinge of nervous excitement: ten feet in front of me is the new X-Box. Thoughts of Boots and our son are soon replaced with thoughts of playing video games all weekend long, like back in high school and college. Wireless controllers? Oh hell yeah.

I want to run but opt for a brisk walk, almost knocking over a light-saber display. Some little kid is already there playing some World War II game. I pretend to read the warranty information but watch him play from the corner of my eye. All the excitement I had mere seconds ago turns to anger.

"Look! It’s Santa!"
The kid doesn’t even move...he’s stupid and deaf. Maybe if I tell him there is no Santa he’ll run off and cry. But what if he’s Jewish? Screw it.
I pick up one of the boxes and cradle it under my arm. I don't need to play one to know I want it. Plus, I don't think I can stomach watching this kid anymore. My son's not going to be anything like him. I remember that he's the only reason I am here, and I still have to get him something. My first gift to my son. I better make it special because it might be his last. Maybe I should get him an X-Box 360. He'd be the envy of all his friends. What would Boots think about that? It's weird to think of her as a mother. I'm sure she wouldn't mind; she'd probably just roll her eyes.

No, she'd sit down and watch him play it and take it away from him after five minutes. She'd justify it by quoting some liberal senator, saying video games are immoral and will turn him into some Hitler youth.

I'm thinking these things but the truth is I think it would be pretty pathetic if I was playing the same video games as my son. I'd be like those guys at the bar, hitting on girls half their age in an effort to hold onto their youth. Or the mom that wears the same clothes as her daughter, even though her husband still doesn't notice her.

To some people that might be comforting: knowing your son was doing the same thing you were. And I guess if it was something like looking at the same star from a different place that would be nice. But killing the same aliens? Just thinking about it makes me feel old.

Legos, that's what I'll get him. Who the hell doesn't like Legos? I start walking towards the back of the store. I'm not really sure if that's where they are, but I feel lucky. A fluster of pink overwhelms me as I walk through the Barbie section. Thousands of fake plastic eyes follow me as I try to get through the aisle as fast as I can. It makes me thankful that Boots had a son and not a daughter; I don't think I'd be able to stay in this aisle more than fifteen seconds.

Oddly the bike aisle is after the Barbie one. It's comforting being in a more masculine aisle. That's probably why they put it after the Barbie aisle, to make boys feel lucky they aren't girls.

I pass a massive blue bike with big mountain tires. It reminds me of my old Schwinn bicycle. In elementary school I would ride to school on it. During recess I'd wheel around the playground attempting to impress girls with my simple tricks. Then there was that time I tried to hit the kid with the panhandle.

I wonder if he's still on training wheels. He's six so I doubt it. I should have been there when he first rode without them. I should have been there to encourage him, to film him and show it to his friends when he was a teenager. I don't know what he looks like, but in my mind I can see the pride in his face and a big smile with only a few teeth. Maybe I would run alongside him, yelling fatherly advice into his ear.

I pull the bike out. The handlebars feel small in my hand. I try to sit on it but my knees won't fit. I don't think I've been on a bike since the accident in sixth grade. It had been early in the school year, one of those summer days that was borderline autumn. On my way back from school I had spotted a construction site. There were no workmen in sight and the piles of wood begged to be used. I fashioned a ramp out of spare lumber. It wasn't too tall, but high enough to boost my ego. I circled the site one time, hoping to get enough speed to make the jump worthwhile. My mom had always insisted that I wear a helmet but as soon as she was out of eye sight I always took it off and hung it on the bike handles. As I rushed towards the ramp, the helmet bobbed against my arm. Ten feet away from the ramp, the helmet strap broke lose, and I watched the helmet drop between the bike wheels.

The bump was instantaneous; my back wheel hit the helmet, catapulting me and my bike forward. At the same time the bike had just hit the ramp. The bike and I flipped forward, slamming the handlebar into my side. Then I must have fallen off the ramp because when I woke up I was in the dirt before it. My arm was limp and I felt like there was a hole in my side. I don't know how long I laid there but eventually some lady walking her dog had found me. Turns out I had broken my arm and almost ruptured my kidney. I haven't been on a bike since that day; I've even avoided exercise bikes.

The bike seems so small and fragile. I roll it back into its place and continue to walk towards where I hope the Lego section is.

The store is fairly empty. People are busy with their kids, and the store is open for business. People are trying to get Legos before the sale ends. I've already bought them before but this year was more expensive. I'm wondering if I should have bought them last year. I think I should have bought them last year, but then I think about last year and the year before that and I think maybe I should have bought them this year. Probably I should have bought them last year. It's all so confusing.

I turn and see a middle-aged woman with a bemused yet kind face. Had I not found out four days ago that I had a son, I may have been tempted to flirt with her.

"Are you a little too old to be buying Legos?" she asks me.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I say, "I have a six year old for Christmas."

"Actually, they're for my son," she states, "I didn't mean anything bad by it. How old is your son?"

"He's fifteen," I reply.

She seems pleasant, but there was something in the way she asked me how old he was that seemed somewhat...judgmental.

"Six. I think."

She gives me a hearty laugh and tells me I sound like her husband. I bet she is a soccer mom.

"Do you have any kids?" I ask.

"Four boys," the soccer mom replies, and even though I didn't ask, she tells me their ages, "Fifteen, eleven, ten and seven."

"So do your sons have a preference when it comes to Legos?"

"Well, Tom and Walker love the Harry Potter movies so much, so I know they would like them. And little Hank is crazy about dinosaurs." she tells me.

"But I know they would all like that X-thingy more than anything," she adds, motioning to the box under my arm.

"Are you getting that for your six year-old?" she inquires.

"The X-Box? Of course not," I say, doing a quick chuckle before lying "It's for my nephew."

She looks relieved, as if buying a six year old an X-Box is the worst thing in the world. I feel stupid about claiming to have a nephew so I switch the topic back to Legos.
"So you think a six year old will like dinosaur Lego?"

"Oh, definitely. But if you get him one with more buildings it will help his motor skills."

I want to make a joke and say he won't be driving for another ten years, but I don't think she'll get it. And I want to hear more about motor skills.

"Really?"

"They did a study in the eighties and children who played with Legos. On average, they did seventeen percent better on the math section in the SATs."

Even though it sounds like she's gossiping, I become intrigued.

"What else can you do to improve these motor skills?"

The soccer mom goes into a lecture, and I start to think this isn't the first time she has been asked about this. She starts talking about the importance of building blocks and then randomly asks me if "We played Beethoven when he was asleep?"

I have no clue what music Boots played when he was sleeping and since the soccer mom already knows I have no clue how old he is, I tell her we played him Mozart instead. She ponders this for a few seconds before confessing she doesn't know if playing Mozart is the same. I must have looked concerned because she started to laugh.

"Don't worry. I'm sure your wife knows what she's doing."

My wife? Ha!

"She should feel very fortunate, having a husband who helps with the Christmas shopping," she tells me.

"Do what I can," I reply.

"Well, I should probably find Hank before he breaks something. It was nice talking to you. Have fun with your son."

"Have a nice holiday."

Soccer mom walks away and I am left standing next to a giant wall of Legos, wondering what the hell I am getting myself into. The X-Box feels heavy, so I set it on the ground next to me. I stare at the wall and debate between dinosaurs and Ancient Greece. I hadn't been there his entire life, why should I start caring about how he'll do on the SAT.

I grab the Ancient Greece Lego set and start for the exit. At the end of the wall I remember my X-Box. I return to get it and find it difficult to carry both the packages. Finally, I manage to wrestle both of them under my arm. Halfway down the aisle I feel them starting to slip. With time running out, I use my other hand to secure the X-Box as the Legos crash to the floor.

I freeze; hoping the great wall of Legos doesn't come crashing down upon me. If there is a security camera on me, I am sure I look like an idiot: a bumbling 27-year-old, frozen and alone in the middle of a toy store. Alone. My father's words echoed in my ear.

"It's like being alone at a New Year's Eve party...but you're happy." I remain hunched over the Lego set and watch a father and son walk past the aisle. They did not notice me, but I watch them. They are only in my vision for a mere second; but it's enough.

The father had his arm draped around his son. Both were laughing at some inside joke. They both were wearing thick boots and the father had a scarf wrapped around his neck. The boy had a large baseball cap over his head. It must have been his fathers because it was far too large for a boy that age; you could barely see his red hair. Tucked underneath the father's other arm was one of those cheap plastic sleds.

They had probably woken up early. The father had cooked a big breakfast as his son watched the morning cartoons. Maybe they had a snowball fight before deciding that sledding was in the works for the day. The wife stayed inside and sipped coffee, watching her husband and son from the window.
Outgrowing

Long grass girdles bottles wrapped twice around pulls them in like poison

Strange mud (part blood) around one carcass.

Nearby a buck's spine arching out from the ground curves back down.
Rhizoid continuum, thick thread of bone.

Sarah Rogers, '06

"Blind Man" Abbe Wright, '07
Garden of Eden

I went looking for magnolia flowers
But I didn't find 'em.
-Langston Hughes

in parks, on a walk, I have spotted flowers I did not know and called them magnolias. I have never seen a magnolia tree spread her transient bosom across five feet of thick green ground when she wakes in the spring. I have lived in cities, but without big names. still, I know enough names to play at keeping up, to play at looking nice and knowing all about magnolias being quaint; being known.

Jen Humbert, '06
Gods

Laughing like a bunch of jackals feasting on a newly mauled wildebeest, we can’t help but insert shrieks of tinkle-ininsulated ripples, but thank God the dark burgundy red is underneath us or else I’d probably fall. We probably look like a couple of blazing Greek gods, Apollo and Daphne united on a sofa. Something out of a Michael Jackson music video.

I pull my hands out from underneath her black skirt, and she quickly composes her auburn hair as her legs deftly retreat from my lap. Having just completed a naughty transaction, we notice the Rolling Stones resonating from the kitchen.

“I was round when Jesus Christ had his moment and doubt of pain!” she belted, Mick Jagger her accompanist blaring from the kitchen. The banjoer in her pleated blouse sliding next to me kept it going, I’m sure the way Mick would have wanted it in ’68.

I turn my head up from the coffee table and she’s squinting at me like I’m shining a floodlight in her face. Her pearly grill stretches from one ear to the other, Marboro Light in her left hand, her right arm wrapped across her torso and the pressure of her arm pulls up the sky-blue blouse revealing a dimpled navel, saucy and chic, so I shake my head hunchered over and try to roll up the Twenty that just unraveled in my hand and do this and reclaim my high.

“Natalie, dear, it’s ‘Had his moment of doubt and pain.’ So get it right or Mick will turn over in his grave,” I declare, sniffling in the good, holding the Twenty up to the light behind me to see if I can find the stripe.

“Mick isn’t dead, you idiot. I thought you knew so much about music, mister!” she fires back, flippantly smacking my arm.

“Yeah but he’ll be fucking dead soon, he’s an old motha these days,” I say and wave my right hand in her face. Her pearly grill stretches from one ear to the other, and it’s just a beautiful thing. Okay okay, drag.

Laughing like a bunch of jackals feasting on a newly mauled wildebeest, we can’t help but insert shrieks of tinkle-ininsulated ripples, but thank God the dark burgundy red is underneath us or else I’d probably fall. We probably look like a couple of blazing Greek gods, Apollo and Daphne united on a sofa. Something out of a Michael Jackson music video.

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music seems to absorb any suspicion that Jill may have carried in the door with her.

The ensuing montage of small talk and cigarette smoke tapers off, punctuated by the latch of the door catching behind Natalie, and I can feel Jill is wondering why I’m hanging out with my old boss and it’s irking me but I’ll make her forget about it. Al Green, help me out here. Flutes, violins and a thick bass line will make this okay, and now Jill seems unaffected by Natalie’s wake. All on a chain-gang it’s a new day away back, oh, sha-dack clack, cigarette.

Half hour or so later.

I’m sitting on the bed, sitting on my hands and thinking about how lucky I really am and I start thinking about my mom and God and my dad working in New Orleans, and I flash on Natalie leaving and how much of a reprieve it was from a potential disaster. Jill’s chill, thank God. She knows Natalie and I are platonic—or not even—just old work buds. I take off my khakis and black Oxford, set them on the edge of the bed.

My heart no longer wants to burst and I’m calming down. Jill is in the bathroom and I can hear the tub filling up, the summery smell of warm water fills the apartment. I shuffle to the kitchen and put on some Al Green? No, it’s Isley Brothers. Some serious baby-making music.

I trot back toward the bathroom, slowly, slip in the door and ease myself behind her as she juggles some makeup-removing type pad. My arms wrap around her bathrobe-covered mid and I draw myself against her back, press my lips on her neck and inhale her sweet aura, an amalgam of shampoo, deodorant, perfume and pheromone. I balance my chin on her shoulder and seep into her sight and her eyes flicker on mine in the mirror.

She smiles, I relax even more.

She murmurs something about work, and how it was nice to see an unexpected Natalie and how we should all throw a dinner party and then I stop listening and focus on Jill’s snug physique, not a hard-body but I wouldn’t want it any other way. I look up and she beams me a smitten smile, I nod and kiss her neck endearingly. Her contours complement my vague abs but I exhale and press against her even more. A swelling pulse underneath my white-black-red striped boxers rises. Though, I move away and sense the bathtub almost done filling up when the pitch of the water level escalates.

I dip a finger in. Scalding, bubbly. Wisps of dimly revealed steam dance on the surface. A decisive slam of the mirror cabinet tells me she’s done messing with her makeup. I spin around, and she’s approaching me with a startling strut, but I guess I’m still just high. I grab either end of her robe’s fleece belt and swing them in a loop, smirking and pulling her into me. And she undulates to Al Green this time; it’s erupting from the kitchen. I slide my hands in between the folds of the fleece and my arms gracefully draw it open, exposing her lush, full breasts and humbly defined build, smoothed by the sculptor all the way down to the fold.

Sexy girl in the bathroom, let me show you how I work what I work why I work how I work and my hands move up and down her curves like God putting the finishing touches on Eve and on up behind her arms, swooping her cool back and she pulls me closer, the warmth from her body sealed up by the fleece escapes into my heart and down around the throbbing below and now she puts a leg in between mine and it’s the tender blazing that heats the mercury, Jill’s amatory breath makes me feel like this Lothario but it’s just fueling my looming proclivity to move into the bathtub.

Tangled in between each other we slither into the tub and our bodies disappear into the white, the alarming hot lets us know that we’ve submerged ourselves and some bubbly water overflows the side onto the tile, we don’t care, and I can’t stop thinking about how lucky I am and hands dive down gripping her plush thighs so she cocks her head back in a visceral way and the muscled inflate her breasts upward like a forgiving electric shock, so I start kissing her from the neck down the yelps of laughter come, and the
She whispered to the moon

Her long hair still
dark, and her face gray;
she walks.

Bare feet

sliding past
broken twigs
and fallen pine needles
until the trees drop

away,

leaving her with the river
and the bouncing moon
in the current.

There are wolves in the forest
Behind her,
but their howls have stopped.
There are eel in the river,

but none graze her toes,
which calmly let the current
pull at them with the cold.

She listens to a tree frog
call out

against the constant screech
of cicadas,
and remembers how cruel
the sound was
when she was eight.
when the only thing that
broke
the pulsating whine
of the summer was the

crack

of a bottle against the wall.

And as the brown glass shattered,
she walked.

Bare feet

sliding past fallen shards
until the door closed behind her
and her father’s voice
gave
way
to the cicadas.

Dave Murrin-von Ebers, ’07

A Joke

1See note.

Jeremy Heartberg, ’06

1 Here
insert the joke
about the huge tomatoes
and the dead dog
and the butcher. Carve it
on my headstone.
I can’t wait to see it,
and how the people will laugh!
Retrospective

I always wanted to cut a dash.
It has been a sovereign pleasure
a baby I picked up and never put down.

Fashion became for her
like firework paper,
English tweeds and tartans
cotton gingham and silk taffeta
worsted or woolen

with flirtatious weightlessness
rounded Dickensian bowler hats and kipper-printed portrait ties
lie in a period piece.

Vermicular squiggle prints,
red barathea and
prints inspired by Matisse
formed blocks of hand-printed color and
braved the commuter train from Seaford
and Glossop, Derbyshire.

Jordan,
wearing rubber clothes, a beehive,
and cream waterproofed cotton
mackintoshes
has worked longest on my team

To work with the V&A;
racks of sumptuous garments
standing like idle courtiers
lining the corridors
imbues the fabric
with their knitted jacquard bodies

Casey Flax, '06

[Phrases taken from the book Vivienne Westwood.]
Ketchup Fetish

Category: None
Rating: -0.33 on 9 reviews
I have a ketchup fetish
Holy shit, it's true.
I was compelled by my daughter to buy some green ketchup
She pours it on her ice cream, her pancakes...
It doesn't matter, though, MCR is an incredible band
Needless to say, there's little that fazes me,
You get turned on by bathing in ketchup
Or a sweet red-head who spills ketchup on her dress and shows her...
With one thin line of ketchup
Am I the only one who likes ketchup this much?
Pikachu has a ketchup fetish
- he is easily pleased!
Jigglypuff has serious issues
He tries to be sneaky when he takes ketchup out of the kitchen
So Kerry is a flip flopping, skeleton look-alike who has some sort of
ketchup fetish
Usually wears wrangler jeans and a white tshirt
Around in Karo syrup with food coloring, fake blood
So when I emerged from the lake, my friends cheered me on with, “Go Heinz 57!”
Shampooed in ketchup
I was actually expecting action when I read this title

Dawson West, '07

Winter Raspberries

You love most things ordinary,
in season, but you cull these
out in the corners of Kroger
from the other dull January harvest;
when the summer-ripe bushes are bare,
you bring them in balled, half-handfuls,
serve them in your mother's cut crystal
dishes and with clotted cream and sugar
you make them taste sweeter to
our tongues than in the season
they are brought in big ripe
bushels from the backyard,
plenty for pies and still
leftovers enough to get
the bees giddy with drink. But what
we remember best is how winter's
snow banks welcome red. Once,
sledding down the hill, your son
my brother broke open his nose.
When blood spilled to snow in
crimson clots you buried the wound in
the elemental abundance – a cool whiteness,
a poultice as present as the skin of your palm –
your palm as quick, as poised as
if for spooning heaps of sugar to
the season's sour berries – that growth
you seek – digging through the chill of weak
winter produce, the pale vegetables, vigilant for
the dark bruise they make, like you watch
the mole, risen on creamy drift of clavicle, grow
rutilant, a cancer you cannot afford to cut out
until you make sure our bones are set, sure
we are sustained and then some,
that the cut crystal is clean enough
to be held to the light and send out its
inherited prisms. You prefer we have
the small, immediate pleasures of sight: the contrast of red and of white, of taste over anything longer, more lasting, for yourself.

And like now we cannot remember the womb-fruit you passed us, once, through the placenta, or the after-months of sweet milk secretions, our

oblivion does not allow us to know this food as blessing. Nor that we owe any thanks. Nor that we should expect something less.

Jennifer Luebbers, '09
Some Days Hit Like Mack Trucks

On that day, Mack reached for the paper at the opposite end of the table. His fingertips rubbed against the ink and pulp and caught against the rubber band as he slid his hand downward. At the tail of the newspaper, his left index finger followed the saw-toothed edges in a counterclockwise motion until reaching the center knot of paper fiber. Leaving his hand still, he reached for his stained coffee mug. A hairline crack traveled down one side to a little above the base, but nothing ever moved beyond its form besides the coffee tossed from its lip. Bringing it to his own lips, Mack slowly permitted the dark fluid to pass between his teeth and across his tongue. The coffee clung like waterlogged potting soil. Today, he had poured in eight scoops for nine cups. He believed he enjoyed it best when pitchy.

Of course, like many things, he was wrong.

The newspaper flew across the room, ricocheting against the wall and rolling across the contents of the fieldless trash can until it landed atop a stack of neatly folded papers, tied carefully with string and ready for recycling. Mack raised himself up abruptly, his chair catching against the butcher's block behind him. The microwave on top shifted across the breadcrumbed pine, grazing the toaster. It did not fall with the chain reaction of its impact. Instead, the toaster clung onto the edge, awaiting some additional force. Mack stomped across the room to the trash, grabbed the freshly thrown paper, and pressed it into the top of the garbage, squishing the contents below it.

Turning away, Mack caught his old dog Dudley eyeing him mournfully from the rim of his shiny-bottomed dog dish. The dog kept his head down, while his back legs hung limply off the grungy couch cushion which served as a bed. The teeth of the zipper faced the wall so Dudley wouldn't catch some of his few remaining dog hairs, especially sparse on his lower back, against the jagged row of metal.

Mack's fists clenched. But it was only a moment before he snatched up the toaster and placed it firmly back beside the microwave. Dusting the dirt and griny flecks off of the bread, he shoved them

into the top of the garbage, squishing the contents below it.

After Mack threw the paper into the trash, the newspaper, his left index finger followed the saw-toothed edges in a counterclockwise motion until reaching the center knot of paper fiber. Leaving his hand still, he reached for his stained coffee mug. A hairline crack traveled down one side to a little above the base, but nothing ever moved beyond its form besides the coffee tossed from its lip. Bringing it to his own lips, Mack slowly permitted the dark fluid to pass between his teeth and across his tongue. The coffee clung like waterlogged potting soil. Today, he had poured in eight scoops for nine cups. He believed he enjoyed it best when pitchy.

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into the top of the garbage, squishing the contents below it.
Juney’s smile flickered at the corners of his mouth and then vanished quickly. “It’s a big deal. There’s a lot at stake here.”

“You’re telling me that,” Mack said, momentarily bearing the tips of his teeth. “So, when’s it all going down?”

Two new guys stationed at the large press appeared from beside the candy and snacks, their entrance hidden by the hulking machines. At the sound of their quartets hitting the change return, Juney glanced over his shoulder. He adjusted his thin tie, tightening it up towards his neck, which made the rolls of his already rotund head jut over the collar. Even without the tightening, his head remained incongruous with his body, which, although overweight, could never be considered obese. Examining the guys in the guard house, Juney answered, “Mr. Buchanan is due to arrive at approximately eleven today. The issue with you and the rest of the guards will be settled after lunch. One o’clock, I believe.”

“That’s what I thought. Just checking if anything had changed,” Mack said with a breath outward. “Damn Juney, I didn’t think it would come to this.”

“Look, no use talking about it now, riling up the guys beforehand. Just wait and see what happens.”

Mack pierced his eyes upward but his district rep, which was solely what he felt like to him today, gazed downward. “See what happens, huh? Well, I’ll tell you one thing, if he calls us “gate watchers” one more time...I’m telling you I’m not sure what I’ll do.”

Suddenly, Juney’s expression turned. “Hey Mack, you better watch yourself. More people than just Buchanan are going to be at this thing today. You understand? Your jobs are all on the line.”

Taken aback from Juney’s sudden moment of aggression, Mack hesitated for a moment. Sparks ignited at his temples. “No shit. You think we don’t know that? I have to go in there and speak for all these guys,” he gestured towards the door. Inside, the guards on duty were all taking notice, listening to their union representative much younger than most of them once again spurting hot. The oldest among them, Fox, hobbled across the door frame, the tufts of his white hair, like duck down, peeking above the window. He opened the door of the shack, staring into his hand instead of at the two men. A quarter, two dimes, and a nickel spotted his papery palms. After mouthing his counting and staring back from his rendezvous. I need to see about that faulty press.”

Both men shook their heads as he retreated. Mack pinched the spine of the magazine and flipped it down onto Dale’s seat. Now, he saw a truck was waiting at the gate. He granted the coal clearance and got up once more.

But Fox spoke before he could. “Damn kid needs to find another hobby.”

“Yeah, like his job,” Mack said, washing down a steaming cup of coffee. “I’ll tell you what, you man the monitors and tell him to get his ass moving and check about those late shipments when he gets back from his rendezvous. I need to see about that faulty press.”

Fox flexed his curved toes in his boot and looked to Mack. “How’s Davidson doing?”

Mack set his used cup aside and peered out the front glass. “I’ve heard he’s doing alright. We got him out in time, enough to save his foot.”

“I’m telling you Leon—gate watchers are expendable.”

Mack could envision the puffing figure of pure arrogance just beyond the door. Although he wouldn’t be chewing on his cigar, since the heart attack, his breath would still permeate that acrid stench of hot detritus and ash tray. Mack swallowed his own spit with difficulty, his esophagus stiff with the memory of Mr. John Jay [J.J. to those company men he wished to take over quickly] Buchanan, a.k.a. Fat Cat.

Lifting his eyes from a bundle of documents he mostly understood, Mack scanned the claustrophobic room. A row of windows were on one wall, but no other furniture existed beyond the table and chairs. Not even a pathetic fern or a bought in bulk piece of art to grace the surroundings. Cement block walls did seem fairly appropriate for this confrontation. Their pock-marked surface, a sea green, smelled freshly painted. All the other reps, some guys Mack barely knew, were seated on his table and chairs. Not even a pathetic fern or a bought in bulk piece of art to grace the surroundings. Cement block walls did seem fairly appropriate for this confrontation. Their pock-marked surface, a sea green, smelled freshly painted. All the other reps, some guys Mack barely knew, were seated on his...
side of the conference L. The table’s opposite right angle housed the other side. Juney sat motionless there. A company is like its own country.

Even though Buchanan was easily overheard through the door, nobody moved. Mack didn’t recognize who he was talking to by the name, and when the doors swung wide and Buchanan pushed his way through and to the head of the table, he still could not place the tall, clean-cut man who followed behind.

Silence. Like the prow of a ship, Buchanan jutted his shoulders wide to lean over the table and toward the mill men. With this commanding air of confidence and arrogance, the boss certainly owned the discussion from the beginning. Always good to have a meeting directly before the meeting. A confidence booster. Someone is backing you up. Mack would remember that next time.

The discussion began one-sided from the start. The unidentified man, Leon, had been called in from a neighboring plant, specializing in steel not titanium, which had recently modified its system. Modification meaning extermination of many of its employees for a smaller, less unified, hypothetically cost-efficient production system. Everything Mack’s side brought up was pushed down with a quick reference to said document, numbers, and references to higher yield. For the most part, all remained still and numb, a vacuum of quotients and bottom lines. And then, it hit.

“In particular,” Buchanan gestured with his hand toward Mack but not addressing the blue side of the conference table, “some of our units, like gate watchers...” Mack heard nothing else. It seemed as though Buchanan’s words had been delivered with added emphasis, droplets of spit falling onto the cheap but waxed pine with the force of his teeth.

A bang rang out as Mack’s chair struck the wall behind him. Standing up now, he glowered down at Mr. Buchanan. He had no other choice at this point in the game. “What exactly are we doing here?”

Buchanan answered as quickly as a piston cycle. “If you don’t know, then I suggest you leave” Buchanan offered amusedly, scanning the partners to his right.

Juney mouthed for Mack to sit down and cautiously looked to the head of the table. Mack saw the gesture and suddenly regretted his temper. It was too late now. You can never back down from a fight. He swallowed and locked his eyes directly on Buchanan in the hopes of keeping the strength of his point intact. “If you can’t understand what exactly it is we do, then how can you write us off. Some of those guys have badge numbers of eight and twelve, been around since the place started booming, and even then they didn’t just watch the gate. We’re in charge of fire control, emergency response—if you can’t understand what we do, then how can you write us off.”

“Look, he’s my son and—”

“I know that, but we’ve worked together for pretty damn long. What the hell are guys like Fox and Marten going to do?”

Juney hung his head, placing the glass at the edge of the table. “There was nothing else I could do for you, any of you, Mack.”

Although anger erupted once more, Mack felt no relief. They were all dismissed early that day with pay for a full shift. He moved in a daze, and only two distinct images imprinted on his mind. First, it was Bill handing out cans of his remaining Pepsi cube to all the guys around him. And Fox, he knew before he got there and had already called about getting a dog. He smiled as he hobbled to his car.

On Mack’s way home, he went through the drive-thru of a MacDonald’s he usually ignored. He hadn’t had a Big Mac in years. Pulling up to the speaker, he wondered if they would be out of Big Macs. Instead of asking for one, he ordered a Quarter Pounder meal, “make it a large” instead. Then, he asked for a cheeseburger.

“Will there be anything else?”

He thought for a moment. Would there be anything else?

“Sir?” the tinny voice regained its presence.

Mack noticed a green flag with shamrocks at the right of the menu advertising the Shamrock Shake for the month of March. He needed a little bit of liquid luck. “Yeah, I think I’ll take one of those green shakes.”

Pulling the wheel around made more difficult with standard steering, he fumbled in his pockets for exact change. At the window, an elderly woman, with a nametag which read Marjorie, accepted his money. She retreated back to pick up his order. He looked around for signs of teenagers working hard to enjoy themselves, but there weren’t any. She returned quickly and handed him the bag. Then, she reached for the cups, and as she passed them through the window, she smiled and said, “You know, I just love these things,” directing towards the shake. “I wait all year for them.” Before Mack could reply, she put her hand up to the headset to listen to another order.

“Thanks Marjorie,” he said with a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. She didn’t actually hear him.

At home, Mack carefully unfolded the cheeseburger from its wrapper and broke it up into bits. He put one small bite within the cup of his palm and presented it to Dudley’s nose. He sniffed and chewed carefully from the side of his mouth. Dudley wagged his tail and started eating more. Mack breathed now and got up to wash his hands.

After, Mack prepared his own dinner. He cleaned a glass from a pile in the kitchen sink. Never caring for straws, he poured the shake into the freshly cleaned cup. Then, after placing his burger and fries on a plate and grabbing a napkin from the holder, he sat down with his back to the blinking light of the answering machine.

After wiping his mouth with a napkin, Mack peered around his shoulder to the phone again. It pulsed still. Rising up, Mack wiped the crumbs from his work pants and plodded over to the portable black and white television resting on the counter top. After the knob twirled to on, the pinpoint at
the center of the television expanded until light and sound filtered throughout the now darkening room. Deep shadows embedded themselves at every angle in this new glow. And, Mack's own outline deepened as he stepped away from the pointing weatherman to sit back again.

But the silence was overwhelming now. Mack shuffled the undercooked fries along his plate, some snagging into the pool of ketchup. As he continued to circle his hand around the plate, Mack listened to Dudley breathing, the puff of his cheeks snacking against worn teeth and gum with one large breath. The entire sandwich was gone from atop the full dog food bowl. One stray fry fell from the plate and onto the wooden floorboards. Instead of bending to pick it up, Mack pivoted his boot until it hovered over the soggy food. The fry was mashed into the wood like a cigarette butt. Lifting his foot to examine the kill, like a child who purposefully steps on a slug for the first time, he remained neutral.

Wiping the squashed food up from the floor and the bottom of his shoe, Mack leaned his chair back on two legs, stretching until he could press against the message button of the machine. He waited, the buzz of silence tapping against his eardrums.

A breath from the recording. He held his breath. "Hello, Mr. Walters..." Mack continued to stare at the first message wondering what the news would be. And the answer began, "Is there water in your basement? Is a damp basement an uncomfortable basement? Certainly. And what better to slowly erode your foundation than the earth's natural eroder, water. If you have these problems or concerns, please call me, Chuck Lee, toll-free at 800-929-SEAL for a free estimate on your home."

Mack scuffed a hunk from his own burger, letting the oozing cheese and meat to slide down his throat. It was good. "Hi Mack." He almost choked, and the shake only crawled down the glass, unable to quench his thirst.

This moment of panic past though, and Myrea's voice filled the room. Her presence blocked out the low muffle of the television news, and Mack could not bring himself to turn and gaze at the machine once again.

"I found some of your things, bank statements and things like that, mixed in with my own. I can mail those out to you tomorrow." Her words did not stitch themselves into the air as he remembered her face. She had been the same for so long. No matter how often he took him out, carried him out to pee, the dog didn't make a sound, only shifted on the bed. He threw the stained towel down, and it landed on his lower back but quickly getting to his feet. His boot, now a foggy black, flipped the light switch at the back of the wall behind the butcher block. The toaster with its duct taped handle rested safely on all four legs. Pressing down, the tape held, but he only pressed harder, until the toaster did a somersault into the air toward Mack. Ripping it from the wall in mid-air, Mack smashed the appliance into the brimming trash and heaved the bag out, tying it as he did so.

The screen door slammed against the house siding as Mack hyperextended its spring, but it compensated and wasn't fully closed before Mack grabbed it again and returned to the kitchen. He would miss her.

After quickly cracking his neck from one side to the other, Mack strode over to the olive green Fridgidaire. The warm light from the ceiling fan, which now churned slowly, filled in the shadows as he crossed the room. Swinging the fridge door open, he grabbed for the bottom shelf. A pop and crack sounded behind the still open door, and the can of Budweiser was soon empty. He tossed it toward the sink and watched it half-spin across the counter until the can, lip still wet, clanked down against the dirty dishes. He reached for another, stood and cracked it, and drank this one much slower, closing the door of the fridge with his left hand. Half gone, he drew the can away from his tight lips to breathe. His lungs filled and then attempted to expand some more. He pulled the next breath through his nostrils but stopped suddenly and looked toward Dudley.

The air had changed. Dudley sensed it. His haggard head lifted up from the pillow and pointed toward his owner. His tail thumped once. But after meeting Mack's stern eyes, he lowered his head back down and silenced himself. Mack's can softly hit the table top. Walking a few steps to his left, he was directly beside his dog. The pudginess, more of a stain now that it had seeped into the cracks and material of the wood, stretched from a space beside the dog bed across the floor and underneath the black plastic bag at the bottom of the fridge. The floors had always slanted westward a slight degree, but only at these moments did this seem significant. From the looks of it, the dog had attempted to get up, partially made it, and missed the pillow which would have absorbed the urine.

Mack's fists jutted out from the sharp arrows of his arms. They clenched and re-clenched in time with his pulse making the blue ridges of his veins protrude from the flesh beneath. The disinfectant spray still rested on the countertop where he left it the night before. Grabbing that and the roll of paper towels from the holder, he bent down and swiped at the moist wood furiously. "You stupid dog." Each syllable was accented and prolonged by his movements across the wood. "I'm sick of this shit. You hear me? Sick of it." He looked at the ashamed dog, which seemed to be turning away from him as much as it could. Mack brandished the wad of soaked paper towels and shoved it in the dog's face. He continued, "Look at this. Look!" And Mack shoved harder, remembering every night which had been the same for so long. No matter how often he took him out, carried him out to pee, the dog still peed on the floor. He had never done it, even as a puppy, and had been so much better than other dogs, right from the beginning. Mack had been so proud.

Dudley flashed his rotten mouth toward the wave, snapping at Mack's hand. Mack stumbled backward, landing on his lower back but quickly getting to his feet. His boot, now a foggy black, retreated back and almost connected with the dog's boney belly. But Mack held himself back. Dudley did not make a sound, only shifted on the bed. He threw the stained towel down, and it landed on Dudley's head accidentally, shrouding his eyes. But the dog remained where he was in his downcast position.

When Mack looked down at Dudley he almost laughed at the sight. This light humor quickly descended into his stomach, gaining weight as it went. The yarn of the day knotted there, tying everything else with it.

Suppressing the contortions of his face, Mack scraped up the limp dog. Some urine soaked into his own shirt as he carried Dudley outside to the front yard. He followed the footprints in the snow,
now icy molds.

Dudley mostly used the overgrown and intermixed clump of Lamb’s Ear and Mint at the edges of the herb garden in his prime. Crossing over the patchwork snow, Mack brought Dudley down to his favorite spot. He held him up, positioned his legs wide for a sturdy stance. After the dog felt solid, he slowly removed his arms. Dudley stood there for a moment. “Go on boy,” Mack said, remembering Myrea shooing him off repeatedly while he never did anything about it. Even let her work alone all those days while he addressed things he could no longer remember. Her fingers stained green with mint in the spring and summer from pinching and rubbing. She loved that smell, fresher than the freshest fresh from a bottle she would say. Dudley tottered forth a bit on his own but quickly crumpled down to the wet ground.

It was time, beyond time, for his old friend. Mack scooped him up again, pressed himself close. He mentally gathered what he would need as he walked back to the empty house—a clean sheet from the couch, a shovel, thrown somewhere in the recesses of the garage, a gun, the M9 9mm semiautomatic behind the camping first aid kit in the coat closet, and another beer.

The ground broke free easier than Mack had expected. The unanticipated thaw in early March had softened the soil, ridding it of the deep frost, even though this layer of snow covered it now. Sweat clung to his temples, reflecting the glow of the waning moon. He shivered against the chill of the night and wiped the perspiration off with the sleeve of his browned Carhartt jacket. It was almost done, a good resting place for any dog, especially a worthy one. Beyond the lawn surrounding the house through the remnants of the summer garden and past the old corn field, this spot always seemed quaint to Mack. Nice mixture of deciduous trees, mostly maple and sassafras, with a little blossoming cherry tree standing central to the wood. That was definitely the spot, a perfect marker. Also, it had a nice view of the creek. He liked that about it and gazed his own eyes down for a bit while he continued to catch his breath.

Dudley curled up on top of the blanket and sheet behind him. Mack felt he watched his back while he worked, but Dudley only continued to rest his head. Mack couldn’t turn to look at him until he finished his task. He realized he was probably digging deeper than necessary. The last stab while he worked, but Dudley only continued to rest his head. Mack couldn’t turn to look at him just yet. There was some blood.

He tried to fit into their molds, but even his stride had changed now that he was alone. The house loomed ahead as he cleared the woods and entered the hillocks of the corn field. The fallen stalks he left to fertilize the dirt crunched and snapped as he past over their hollow shells. The brittle breaking of their frames seemed to echo across the valley and ricochet against the house’s frame. He stood for a moment, imagining the trail of chimney smoke in the moonlight. He wouldn’t go a step further.

Mack turned to his right, down the slanted field outside of his tracks. Here, the snow was untouched, but small rows of tilled earth, moulded up for spring planting, jutted out toward his brisk footfalls. He bounded over them to the edges of the field. But once he reached this seemingly untouched earth, he kept going. He lunged down the steep hill avoided on the tractor, where the incline always tempted the heavy machinery to tip. Long blackberry briars and multiflora rose with tendrils the purple of dried blood gripped at his jacket, as he entered that uncut area. He descended, bounding through the mass of foliage, using the shovel like a machete. Tendrils bent and curled back, allowing him to pass. The moon disappeared behind the hill.

Mack’s foot caught. It was something like a trip wire. One briar arched over the ground but decided to delve into the earth again. The shovel went first, skidded down atop the icy crust and rested in the fork of two small trees. But he continued down the snowy hill, tumbling over himself. The hooks of the briars kissed his face as he went. He wished he had put his gloves back on and tried to reach for his back pocket. A shot echoed out. He felt the force and knew this is how he would die.

Mack found himself face down at the base of the icy slope. The barrel of the handgun still pointed toward him but not in reach. He spit blood and snow crystals from his mouth and realized that it tasted wonderful, like childhood. He put his face down to the ground again and ate some more. Then, a pain in his back reminded him of his wounds. He felt with his hand, not wanting to set his eyes on it just yet. There was some blood.

The tree limbs quivered in a small stir of wind. A twig fell. He started to pant, and the briar marks spotting his hands and face bled like leech bites. Mack tried to control his breathing, closed his eyes, and lay back against the snow, allowing himself to rest into the contours of the land, to trace the arching world above and below him.

But he did not die.

Sarah Buderick, ’06
Knot
Conceição Albuquerque

Things follow me that I didn't make,
Tucked away papers, marked in time and homesickness.

At the brink of the quay I hope.
There are no feet to grasp in this solitude.

At the turn of the corner I cut ties, I repented.
The trails remain in the stains of the handkerchief
in folds of pain.

This knot clasps so, robs me of air.
Who has the delicacy to undo it?

Sarah Rogers, '06
Contributors’ Notes

Bios

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