

# Exile

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Volume 31 | Number 2

Article 20

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1984

## Elegy

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### Recommended Citation

Townsend, Ann (1984) "Elegy," *Exile*: Vol. 31 : No. 2 , Article 20.

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Ann Townsend

## Elegy

Richard, you are sinking faster than I ever imagined.  
You have slipped into the river without words or regret,  
water fills your open mouth as you glide into the current.  
Your slow-moving hands, still smudged with nicotine,  
divide the blackening water, the water dark with silt,  
the water that seals itself over your old head as I watch.  
The new moon has gone away to sleep, leaving the empty birches.  
The bitter mist has risen over the water,  
and you will not come back to me, I know.

This silent end is such a surprise.  
You used to flirt with disaster, skiing through the heavy snow  
that lay above the timberline, in weathers worse than this.  
Now you can no longer see your legs.  
There are no trails and who knows where this water begins.  
As you drift farther from the riverbank, farther from pain,  
I think your hands, old fading fists  
closed against tenderness, must drift like blossoms  
floating in the gathering dark.

I stand here drenched with mist, repeating what you have told me:  
*forgiveness*, your best word.  
And the river at my feet is hushed and broken.  
I'd like to lift you out of there,  
find your pale lips, your clenched teeth,  
and ease you back into your life,  
but I cannot. I cannot reach you in this determined dark,  
this raw wall of water that divides  
your lovely face from mine.