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Exile Vol. XLVII No. 2

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Exile Vol. XLVII No. 2

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Exile

Spring 2001



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*

Exile

**Denison University's
Literary and Art Magazine**

**45th Year
Spring Issue**

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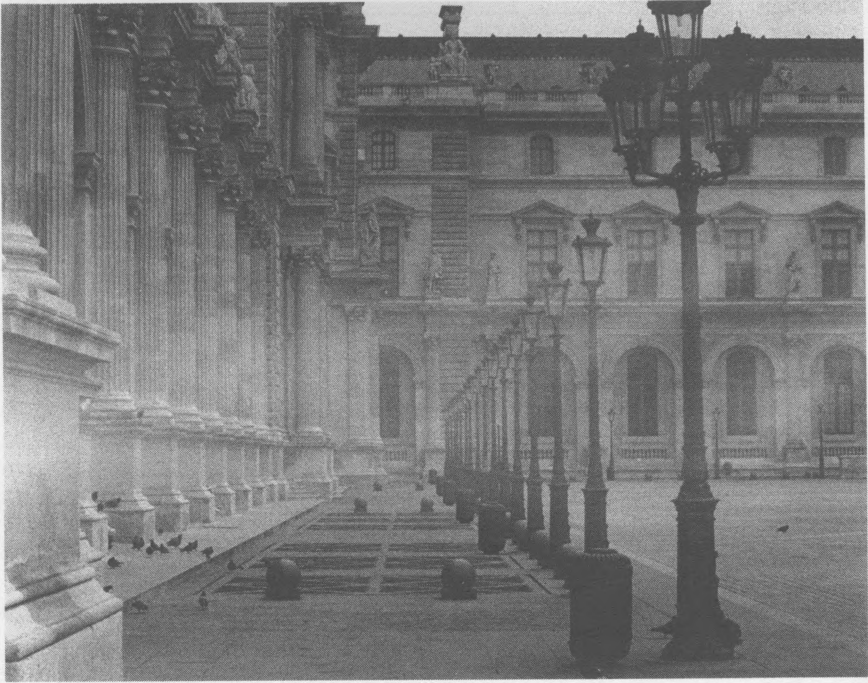
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"Untitled" by Alan Palmer '02

Leaving Home

Only beneath the rumble-clank
of tires on corrugated
metal, the engine house roar,
and the smell of overworked machinery
is the Ohio beautiful.

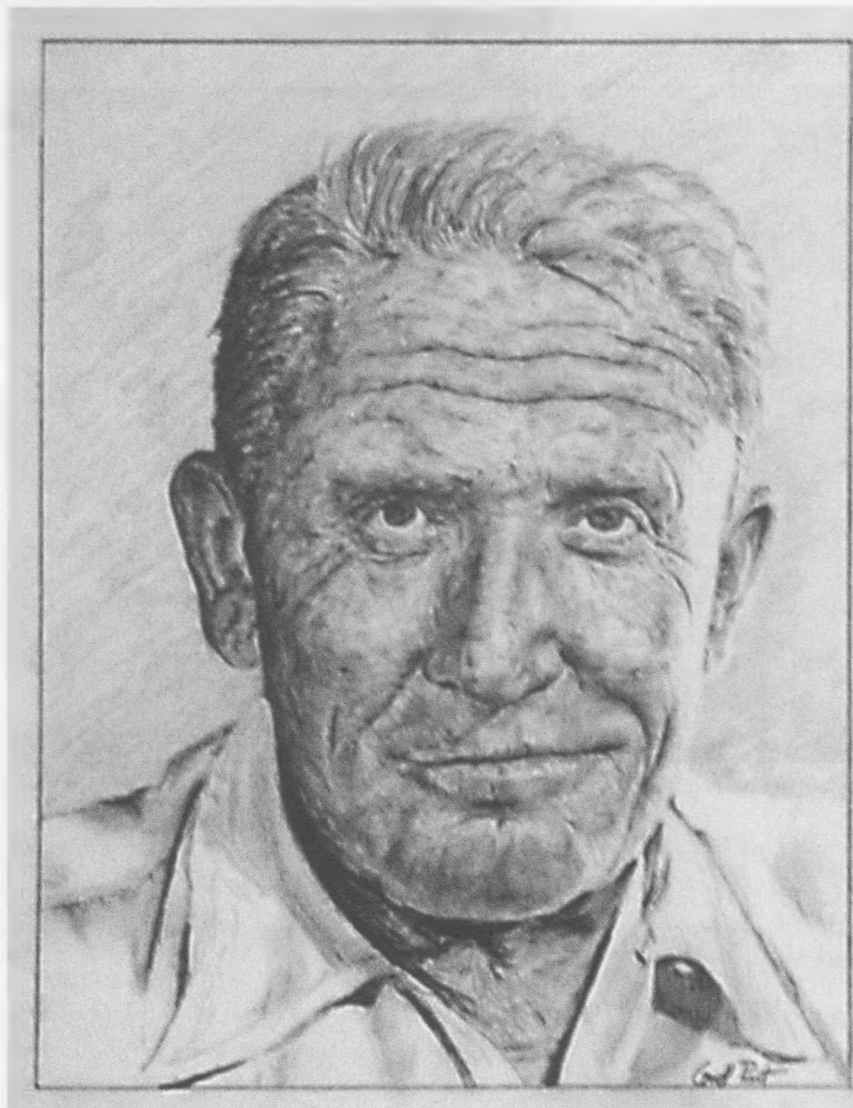
Even then, it is not so much beautiful
as wild—a touch of the old magic
ready to swallow good
and evil in its churning.

The gulls that feed here are the wings
of a farther country, calls laced
with salt brine they have never known,
unless from the blue-tarped
industrial mounds along the river's bank.
Even oil slicks lose their potency, briefly,
to wind-churned white caps, and gazing
from the rail I lose the sound
of the cars idling behind me
to the urgency of movement.

Ferry riding, the rail is my home
despite rain spats or the start of ice.

Forced to settle again
on four wheels and crunching
gravel I will be queasy,
body rocking with a hint of the ocean.

—Katie Kroner '01



"Untitled" by Geoff Peart '02

A Language No One Understands

In a language no one there could understand, the man said, "I'm home!" Only the ugly baby and his wife's great-aunt Mamie were at home, as the shadows of pines fell further across her trailer. The man found consolation in the fact that he could say whatever he wanted. Still, at the end of the day, there wasn't much worth saying.

A note his wife left indicated that she was out getting chicken and spices for one of the dishes he had loved in their homeland. He kicked off his shoes and slid his tired feet into his slippers. The man set his lunchbox and newspaper down next to the sink and walked down the narrow hall to throw his work coat over the bed. The air was still and slightly damp in the old trailer. Mamie had lived there since her husband died seven years before, and if there ever was any lingering presence of the departed soul, it was gone now. The trailer groaned like her at night, hugged squat and suspicious to the ground in the day, and smelled, as did she, perpetually of vinegar. In the other dimly lit room, the ugly baby slept next to the old woman, who coughed and rolled slowly under the comforter like a breaking wave. The baby had been a curse, like Mamie, who had come to America following her dream of wealth, or freedom, or some foolishness, cars perhaps, and found only this whirlpool of unhappiness in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. When her husband was alive, it had been different, but not much. And now she had sucked the man and his bride into it as well.

Satisfied with their sleep, the man headed for the kitchen, where he always read the newspaper in a folding chair. Or pretended to. It was a habit from his distant home, which he had painstakingly preserved for the five months he and his wife had been in this country. As he sat glancing over the recognizable white faces that filled the pages, he envisioned the breeze coming in off the water at his childhood home. He had eaten fruit and sweets for breakfast as his father had read the paper, the breeze smelling fertile and promising. Here there was no gentle wind, only horrible gusts followed by stillness. Stillness followed by horrible gusts. Here there were enormous hills for walking up and down, or around. Here he and his family were at risk, but they were fulfilling their duty.

His wife entered carrying a small plastic bag with her purchases from the grocery store. "Hello," she said to her husband with a furtive grin. "How was work, my darling?"

He watched her set down the groceries with deft movements. She always moved her trim body precisely, in a way that made him feel gawky or callous by comparison. "Hard work today," he said, rubbing his short dark hair just above the temple. "We are finishing up the old house in town, and we carried rubble all day." He considered dwelling on the image for his wife's benefit, some talk of rebuilding from nothing, but he found it depressing. As hard as he had it, at least he ventured out into the world. He wondered how she could bear days alone in this trailer, tending to their child and feeding and cleaning her great-aunt as she floated farther from this world and nearer the next.

The woman leaned forward to listen for a catch in her husband's voice, some clue as to his emotional life, that thing which had gone silent since leaving their homeland. If only there were some way his mother could write to them, she thought. If he could hear her words, he would surely talk to the woman about the real things. Once, while having a drink after their first long month of watching the old woman's health

deteriorate, her husband had said those rock-breaking pigs at work didn't know their own asses from a donkey's face.

She prepared the meal after peeking in on her sleeping child. Her husband and his mother had called the baby ugly in her presence once, to her great chagrin. She knew that it was a joke between the two of them, and her dignity as a mother was hurt. How dare he insult their baby girl? She knew he wanted boys, boys who could learn to fish and to build things as he had his whole life. She would still give him boys yet, once this arduous duty was fulfilled. She imagined little hands, broad and chubby, handing her vegetables as they prepared her husband's favorite chicken dish. She turned on the lamp as the sun settled in the dark timbers of distant hills. There was a window over the sink, thank God, for the stark trailer distressed her and the land was beautiful, if foreign. The woman saw her own reflection in the window as she washed her hands. She had few of the lines that marked her great-aunt's face. She could also see her husband sitting in the folding chair, gazing intently across the pages of words he couldn't possibly recognize, turning the pages as though chasing a mystery to its heart-stopping conclusion.

The man flipped page after page, trying to absorb some meaning, some sense of the world into which he'd been placed, but his mind wandered. He thought of his friend who had arranged the boat trip to sneak them into the country. "Why hadn't you just applied for the visa?" his friend had asked. "When there is no time, there is no visa," he had said. He knew his wife felt an obligation to be with Mamie when she died, to care for her, as she had no one left. Time was of essence, as the letter had read simply, "I am dying. I love you. -Mamie." Furthermore, this, he hoped, would make up for his disappointment in their ugly daughter. He had suspected it would be easy to get into the US, and it had been. He found a man who paid in cash by the day, and though he understood little of what his workmates said or did, he felt productive. Still, every week he sent his mother letters he showed no one, faithfully telling her everything of this new, painful land of red mud and falling rocks. He sent these all without return address, as there was none to write.

The oven emanated the juicy smell of chicken and his stomach rumbled in anticipation. He loved his wife very much, and he watched her look out the dingy window over the sink with a certain reverence. She deserved better than this, and she would have it when they returned. He smiled as he pictured a day when they would recount their tales of America to the grandchildren in the home his sons would have built for their mother. Thick rugs would lie across the wood floors of large rooms with portraits of the family on the walls. He had turned to the back of the newspaper when he heard the infant cry out.

The woman turned, startled by the sudden noise. Her husband stood, and said he would calm their daughter. She considered him a responsible, honorable man, and his callused hands could stroke their daughter's soft scalp surprisingly tenderly. He walked down the narrow hall and the woman took a hot cloth to wipe off the countertop where they ate. Her little girl continued to cry, and she said under her breath, "Why in God's name are we still here? Will Mamie ever let go of our throats?" She wiped the countertop clean once more, and folded the cloth neatly beside the sink. The chicken would be ready in five more minutes.

Her husband came back into the kitchen holding the screaming baby. His shirt

was untucked, and his eyes were awake and bright again. The baby squirmed halfway out of his tanned hands as the woman took the baby into her arms. "She rolled up against her, but not on top," he said. The woman nodded, and felt a twinge of guilt for having left the baby in bed with Mamie in the first place. Mamie passed easily from alertness and normal functioning to a ridiculous invalid with no more ability than the girl who slept beside her. She would stammer phrases in her mother tongue, interspersed with television English and bits of knock-knock jokes. Other times she couldn't remember where she was or who was caring for her, just moaned in pain and fright.

The baby pounded the woman as she cooed in its ear and swayed back and forth quickly. "She feels hot to me, darling," she said.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked.

"I don't know," she conceded. "I just don't know why she would start crying so suddenly."

"Maybe she soiled herself," said her husband.

"No, it's not that."

"Mamie did roll up next to her. Maybe it's the old woman's heat."

The woman did not answer, but continued swaying, even as the infant squealed more vigorously. She wished her mother was there for advice. She tried rubbing her little girl's belly, to no avail. She tried lifting her up and down, a game they played most days. She turned from her husband and undid the top four buttons of her blouse to see if the baby was hungry. She wasn't. Frustrated beyond tolerance, the woman handed the baby back to her husband and stormed down the hallway.

"Darling," he called, "what are you doing?" The baby jerked in his arms like some hideous reptile snapping at his shoulder. He spoke nonsense words in English, the words he knew, to calm the baby and himself. *Sledgehammer*, he whispered, *shucks, mister, cheese pizza, free*. He spoke the words reverently, as though invoking a spell to quiet the child. "Darling," he called again, "what's going on?" She didn't answer.

The man padded down the hallway in his slippers. In the side room, his wife was slowly shaking Mamie, who lay there like road kill, vast and unpreventable. Tears were dropping from his wife's eyes to her great-aunt's face. "Why?" his wife growled at the dying woman. "Why? Why? What are we doing here? Why did you bring us here?" She cried softly and Mamie rolled away from her, shielding her face with her hands. His wife struck her back lightly with her thin fists and Mamie made a low sound in her throat. His wife pushed her hair out of her face, straightening up, wiping her eyes. She had not seen him in the doorway.

When she had calmed herself, she walked back out to the kitchen. Halfway there, she realized the chicken was burning. Smoke was slowly wafting from the oven in a thin curl like her daughter's hair. Her husband was nowhere to be seen. She cursed, and pulled the burnt dish out. It was beyond any hope. "No!" she groaned. She could still hear the baby's cries down the hall. She headed for their bedroom, where the child lay thrashing and crying in the middle of the bed. Why hadn't she stayed home with the infant while her husband came to tend to the old hag, she wondered. She knew the answer. More than the danger of his arrest or the pressure of his mother, she had come because she never felt so alone as when her husband was away. It would have been as though he were dead. To the left of their bed, her husband sat on the floor, writing in the

margins of a newspaper. He was oblivious to her approach, and she made out the words, "Mother, I have failed her" in his tight, angular script. He stood up, startled, and dropped the newspaper behind him, on the flea-infested couch Mamie had owned too long to throw it out with the other trash they found cluttering the trailer when they arrived.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I live here," she laughed.

He shook his head. "No, I mean, what are you doing? Can you calm the baby? I can't. And she's hot now, but I think it's from bawling."

"Dinner's burnt," she said. "I'm sorry."

He touched her cheek. "It's all right. I'll fix us something." The baby wailed, kicking tiny feet. Her face was red. "It's going to be all right."

"No," she said. "I think the baby is sick. We should go to the doctor."

"You know that's impossible."

"Don't let your pride hurt a child," she scolded.

"Do you want to see me arrested?" he asked, puffing out his chest.

"Do you want to see the young and old alike die here, in this country?" The woman was crowding him into the couch.

"You don't know a thing," he said, as his face flushed.

There was a knock at the door. The man and woman looked at each other in disbelief. In five months there had not been a visitor to the isolated trailer far off the road, without so much as a gravel driveway. Another knock, this time with more insistence. "I'll get it," said the man, stepping around his wife with newspaper in hand.

Hi y'all, said the ruddy-faced kid in English as the man opened the screen door. *My name's Jim. I was just hunting downriver and my truck broke down. I wondered if I can please use your telephone.* Jim fidgeted with his ball cap. This guy looked like he wasn't from this neck of the woods, and Jim had walked a distance already. The sun was down and a chill was coming down the mountains. He couldn't afford to be turned away.

I speak little English, said the man, who was the color of a buckeye's light center. A child was screaming somewhere in the shoddy trailer, and Jim wondered if the guy was embarrassed, blowing him off.

Y'all don't understand, he said. *Telephone. Phone call. I need some help here.*

I speak only little English, said the man. *Sorry.*

Jim stepped forward on the porch towards the door and saw an attractive young woman holding the screaming baby to her chest. *Your wife?* he gestured. It smelled of grease fire and peppers as the air began to stir. Jim shivered, and pulled his orange jacket close around his narrow shoulders.

Sorry, said the man, closing the door. Jim stepped forward, and touched the man's arm. He pulled back from the doorway, and Jim walked in.

I don't mean any harm, he said. *I just need to call somebody, okay?* The man said something intelligible only to his wife. The hushed words sounded like crickets chirping, or frogs calling to each other over a great distance. *I just need to call somebody*, he repeated, looking for the phone. The sole adornments on the walls were a mirror whose frame was chipped and faded to a shade of yellow the color of the original wood, and a small black and white photograph of an old woman in foreign dress, thin fabrics thrown over her shoulder. He spoke more loudly and slowly over the baby's wails, *Where*

is your phone? When no one spoke, he yelled, throwing his hands up, *Where in God's name is the phone?* Silence fell momentarily on the trailer. All eyes turned to the baby, who had hushed in fright at the stranger. A low moan came from the back room, a long low moan that chilled them all more than any wind. It was the sound of crackling leaves, then the groan of a house shifting, and then like a dirge in a dead language. It thinned to a hoarse whisper. Jim took in the rest of the room in the ensuing silence. The thin tan rugs, the folding chair tucked neatly in the corner, the blackened meat in a pot steaming by the sink, the spotless counters and walls: only the poorest people took such good care of what they had. There would be no phone. Jim would have to walk back to the road and try to eventually flag someone down. He tugged his ball cap down over his ears, looked at his sneakers, and turned, leaving the trailer in silence.

The baby was still, quieter than breath. Her mother stood perfectly still, trying to preserve whatever had finally worked. Her father didn't move either. The baby's face was losing that violent scarlet hue, and the screen door slapped shut behind the boy, but the man didn't even glance in that direction. He thought of his letter to his mother, and composed more of it in his head as he stood there looking at his wife and child far from home.

The fire is out, Mother. The fire is out and the smoke is cleared away. The baby's cries have been answered, or it has given up. I ache for your voice, and who I am to you. We are starving for words here, and for time to return. We get older here, but Mamie doesn't change. She grew so close to death in our first few weeks here, and now she stays there, close enough the heat chars her, not so close the flames consume. An American came into our home today, Mother, and he yelled and yammered and finally left without a word. Today we are like Mamie in this other world.

—Chris Million '02



"The Reverend: Self Portrait" by Erin Kaczur '02

Night, Late Summer

Your eyes, blank as the faces of those who die
in sleep, blur between the pavement's dull hum

and the car's speed. This river-winding road
takes me home—the last time. I gaze beyond

August cornfields flying under stars.
That evening I lay mute in your bed,

amazed: no marks in the infinity
of places you had touched, the desperate

coupling we tried to name love. Later,
you whispered until pain erased language.

Now fireflies shimmer in a cicada chorus. I can't
see the beauty of their hungry courtships—

I can feel emptiness in my hands.

—Kara Burt '02



"Sur Mount Saint Michele" by Dena Behi '01

Sunrise at Oxford

It wasn't until I came to college that I discovered I have no sense of self. I always thought it was enough to just *know thyself*, as they say, but apparently I was wrong. You have to have a sense of yourself, like a picture in your mind as a concrete object—as tangible as a piano or a brick wall—and without this mental picture, you're suspended in the air, grasping at nothing. You have no *social responsibility, character strength*, or my favorite, *interconnectedness*. College is filled with funny buzz words.

In our second week here my high school friend, Jean, and I went over to the honors building to see this speaker. The speaker is the one who showed me my inner void, so to speak. Jean's in the honors college and has made a bunch of really dorky friends who all have these common experiences. They were national merit scholars. High school valedictorians. They like Celine Dion. They've never been drunk or smoked a joint. Hell, I don't know what they talk about.

Jean's not like that, but she hangs out with those kids anyway. She's smart and everything, but I'm smarter, and the reason I know this is because I scored higher than her on the SAT. Much, much higher. In fact, I only missed two questions—one math and one verbal—and the only reason I'm not in honors is because my high school GPA was around a 2.6. I'm surprised I got into Miami at all, but apparently someone up there thinks more of me than I think of myself.

Anyway, I went with Jean and her nerdy brigade to see this speaker about our sense of selves. She was supposedly a psychoanalyst and she pedaled this little book called *How To Find Your True Aspirations in Life* or something. Strutting around up there in a pink suit, she talked for a good hour and almost put me in a coma.

But one thing set me off. To get us started, she told us to picture a cube in our minds—and it could look like anything we wanted—but it had to be the first thing that came to mind and we had to keep it there. Then we had to imagine a bunch of other things along with the cube, like a ladder, a horse, a fence, and a few other random objects. “The cube is supposed to represent how you see yourself,” this woman said.

As hard as I tried, I couldn't see the goddamn cube. It just wasn't there, and when I blinked my eyes, all I could see were spots. “The ladder represents your relationship with your friends,” the woman said, “and the horse represents your lover.”

On the way back to the dorms, everyone was still crowing about the incredible experience. “My cube was shiny and blue,” Jean said, “and in the middle of a desert.”

“Mine was shimmering and like jello,” Beth Saunders said. She's Jean's roommate, and about as attractive as a mortician's wife.

“I didn't have a cube,” I said, feeling bereft. “And when she told us to picture a horse, all I could see was the underside of a huge hoof coming down to crush me.” I looked up at them as they stared at me.

There was silence. Then Jean said, “Peavey, you're probably just tired. It's been a long week.”

I glanced over at Eddie Porter. Jesus, he's another one. He hadn't said anything, but his huge eyes were just peering out of the darkness at me, boring holes into my fragmented self-image. He was giving me the creeps.

And I knew what they were thinking. *That Peavey. He's not one of us. He's not*

in honors. Not in honors. You're damn straight about that.

"My horse galloped around my cube, then stopped and waved its tale. What do you think that means?" Jean said, untangling a tiny leaf from her hair.

"That your lover is trying to elude you, maybe," Beth said.

Jean glanced over at Eddie. She's got a thing for him. It's sickening. Her first college crush is this prep school idiot from Massachusetts who dresses like an undertaker and wants to major in political science—or the science of screwing taxpayers out of money, as I say. He also has this proper little accent that's pushing pure British. And to top it all off, he's got a poster of a seagull in his dorm room. Not that I spend a lot of time there—I've just seen it from the hallway.

"My horse nuzzled my cube," Beth said.

"Wow, that sounds really racy," I said and Jeanie gave me a look. Beth's the last girl in the world you'd accuse of being racy.

That pretty much ended our conversation about the cubes, but my mind kept spinning. Sometimes when I get something in my mind I can't get it out, and it's like the only cure is exorcism. Jean tells me they have drugs that can help me. They have drugs that'll help anything.

Then Jean and Beth and a few other girls took a different path to their dorm. That left me alone with creepy Eddie. But instead of jumping on top of me, Eddie just peered thoughtfully into the night. "That Jean is really . . ." He looked over at me suspiciously. He was probably wondering if she and I were lovers in high school. "Something," he finished safely.

I didn't say anything.

I know things about Jean, things that no one else at this dumb university will ever know. No, we were never lovers, but we were very good friends. And now Jean is just blossoming in the academic atmosphere while I'm shriveling up and turning blue and fading away.

Things were bad the day I arrived here. I can still see my parents as they stood together in my room—trying to get along for that one day just for my sake only—and I can still picture my geeky roommate from China. Isn't that rich? I was hoping for a deadhead with international drug connections and a fake ID, and instead I got Wen Hui who does Calculus problems in his head like it's his long lost vocation. He scurried around the room that morning and offered my parents pieces of this Chinese dessert. "This is delicious," my mother said, trying not to gag.

My father was standing on the opposite side of the room. He and my mother have been divorced since I was fourteen, and they only come together on rare occasions like graduations, funerals, and their only son's trip to college. My father nodded and smiled.

"Yes. I am glad you like it," Wen Hui said. "I am very happy to meet you. Both of you!" I almost expected him to bow a little.

When I first found out I was going to have a foreign roommate, my mother said, "Mrs. McGrath's son had a roommate from Iran. He liked to sleep in the nude, and if that wasn't bad enough, he sometimes wore a long black cape around the room."

But now my mother seemed quite taken with Wen Hui as if the kid oozed some

kind of aphrodisiac. "Oh my, Wen Hui," she said with a strange smile. "I think you're going to be a wonderful influence on our Percival. If you ever need anything from us, don't hesitate to call. It must be hard being so far from home." She came over and put her arm around my shoulder. I cringed and pushed her arm off of me.

Then they left me that day with my roommate. I watched them drive off in their separate cars, and I lit a cigarette. "It's Peavey," I told Wen. "If you ever call me Percival, so help me God I'll put you in a wheelchair, got that?"

I took Wen Hui and showed him my padlocked case. I got the key and opened it and took out my plastic baggy, filled to the brim with the best marijuana in the state of Ohio. "If you touch this, you're dead," I told him. "But if you want to smoke some with me, it's okay. Just ask."

That night Wen Hui and I climbed into our bunk bed. I finagled the top bunk, of course. "Nice to meet you today," he said before I turned out the light.

"Whatever," I replied. The room was plunged into darkness and I stared at the ceiling until I could feel the sun rising.

It's the third week of school now, and I'm sitting in creative writing. I've always wanted to be a poet or a rock star—preferably both—but things aren't looking too good for this kid. No one likes my stuff. "Too dark," they always say. "It's so depressing. Stuff to cut your wrists over."

Thinking about wrist slitting makes me think of Jean. I give her a sideways glance. She's just finished reading her poem, "The Family Picnic," and everyone just jumps right in, saying how much they like it. They all like Jeanie's stuff. She's a big hit here and she handles it quite modestly, always careful not to rub it in, always thinking about my ego. She's a saint, really.

The professor makes a few comments. She's a young, beautiful woman with long blond hair and shapely legs. And her feet—oh, they're so tiny and exquisite, really nice. So of course, it's in this class that I always seem about as intelligent as a grapefruit. "Yes, the imagery is really quite nice, Jean. But you might strive for more, um, narrative and less commentary."

Jean nods and smiles and writes a few things in her notebook.

Then it's my turn. I read my poem, "For Cara." It's about my first girlfriend—an older girl. Not quite a Mrs. Robinson, but a good two years older than I was. She was a little weird, the black lipstick and combat boots type, but she was cool.

I finish reading the poem, and everyone in the room sits there. Their eyes are glazed over, like they've just had to sit through hours of C-Span. No one says a thing.

After the class is over, I walk with Jean out of the building. "Damn!" I cry, letting my true emotions flail after weeks of sucking it up. I take out my poem and proceed to rip it to shreds.

"No! No!" Jean shouts, and grabs my hands in hers. "Calm down Peavey. It's not the end of the world."

"Easy for you to say."

"Hey! I liked your poem. I even said so myself!"

I shrug. "That doesn't count. You're my friend."

She stares indignantly. "Yeah, and I actually *knew* that psycho hose beast Cara,

so there. I had to work extra hard to see her as a beautiful flower.”

“Now you’re making fun of me.”

She throws up her hands. “You musicians. You’re all insane!” She stalks off to her next class.

I call to her. “Jeanie!” Her head spins around. “Call me, okay?” She nods and tries to smile.

I go off to my music theory class. Yeah, that’s my world. I’m a music performance major—piano and voice—and when I’m in that fine arts building I feel like the whole world’s just been put on hold. I can forget about my roommate and my nonexistent sense of self. When I’m with Mozart, nothing else matters.

But today I can’t stop thinking about Jeanie. Her poems are so light and airy—sort of like her. They’re upbeat and positive—but not in a Hallmark card way. I don’t know. I think it’s sort of unusual, considering what she’s been through. Her father died two years back and after that her mother ran out on her. Jean had to live with her aunt and uncle and cousins for the rest of her high school years.

The big surprise came on graduation day. Jean’s seat was empty during the ceremony. I kept staring at that little metal chair with the white cover over it, and I kept expecting her to come through the door in her gold gown, straightening her cap under the *Class of 1996* sign, and shuffle her way through the rows to find her seat. But that seat stayed empty. Her aunt and uncle and cousins were all up in the bleachers, and they looked confused too. When I looked over again, they were gone.

Later we found out what happened. Just a few people knew, but I suspect the story rippled through the high school anyway, despite our best efforts to keep it contained. Christ, people talk. Especially Catholics. Jean’s story was the stuff of B movies and crumpled up poetry.

Jean told her aunt and uncle that she was running late that morning. She told them to go on without her and she’d take the other car and get there later. She waited for them to leave, then went to the medicine cabinet and took every pill known to mankind—even the sleeping pills the doctor had prescribed for her. She was about to chase everything down with a bottle of Jack Daniels when, according to her, God spoke to her. She said that God told her to go to the hospital, and that’s what she did. She got herself together and, get this, *drove herself* to the hospital. In her cap and gown. The doctors had never seen anything like it. She didn’t even cry when they pumped her stomach, but she cried afterward. I went to see her in the hospital and she cried in front of me. “Peavey,” she said, “it’s just so lonely. Here it was, a really important day, and all I could think about was the fact that I was alone. My father wasn’t there to see it and my mom doesn’t care.”

“But your aunt and uncle—they care,” I told her.

“They care because they’re obligated to care,” she said bitterly, wiping her tears away. “Oh well. It doesn’t matter now.”

She went into some intensive therapy and started taking Prozac. “The pills are what did the trick,” she told me. “You can talk about your problems all you want but unless you change your brain chemistry it’s just dollars down the drain.”

She might actually be right, because after that she seemed okay. Better. Like old times, but even more outgoing. And now there’s hardly any darkness in her poetry,

and it seems like all the darkness in the world's just been poured into mine.

After my classes are over, I find myself down at the local drugstore in the town. I don't even know how I got there. And what was I looking for? Oh yeah, beer. I grab a couple of cases and proceeded to the checkout.

I stare at the magazines as I wait in line. There's a *Spin* with Rage Against the Machine on the cover. That'll be me someday. Jean and I have already played in a few rock bands. Last summer we played a few clubs and parties—nothing big, but at least something to help us get on the map. Jean plays bass and she's pretty good. Nothing like me, of course. She may kick my ass in poetry, but in music she's definitely Salieri.

Okay, so I'm standing in line. Surrounded by townies, ugh. This scruffy old guy is right in front of me and an old woman stands behind me. The old guy points to the latest issue of *Cosmopolitan* and says, "Look! This woman's hardly got any clothes on. My, the things they put on our newsstands these days."

The cashier remarks about the loose morals of society and the old woman behind me chuckles. I look away and pretend to be really engrossed in the big red pharmacy sign.

"Well, you know what my father used to say," continues the old man. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

I simply stare at the old man. The woman behind me titters and the cashier smiles. The old man looks at me, notes my mirthless face, then looks back again. I have yet to crack a smile, mostly because I have no idea what he's talking about. All I know is that it sounds very dirty. After a few long seconds the old man gives up and stops staring at me.

After he's gone I plunk my beer onto the counter.

"I need to see your ID," the cashier says, giving me a stern look. And that's that. I don't bother to make excuses or tell her I left my wallet in my dorm room, because she's not going to buy it anyway. I just leave it on the counter and shuffle out of the store without a word. Townies.

Jean calls me just as my favorite soap opera is ending and the credits are rolling up on the screen. I struggle down from the top bunk and pick up the phone. "Yeah."

"Hey," she says. "You told me to call you."

"Oh yeah. What are you doing tonight?"

"I don't know. I might go over to the honors building—hey, are you watching *Days of Our Lives* or something?"

I reach for the remote and press the mute button. "No."

"Is your roommate around?"

"No," I said, checking to make sure the little guy wasn't hiding under the bed. "But when I came in earlier today the jerk-off was just sitting here . . . staring. God, what a freak."

"Oh yeah, the nerve of him. Wow, to just sit there and stare like that. Seeing as it's his own room and all, I can't believe you have to put up with that shit."

"Shut up. You have no idea what I'm going through."

Jean just sighs.

"So, what are you doing tonight?"

"I might go over to the honors building. They're showing *Braveheart* tonight and Beth and Eddie really want to go."

I'm glad she isn't here to see the look of disgust on my face. And *Braveheart*. Man, who wants to sit through that again? A bunch of Scottish guys in skirts running around in 55 A.D. or something. "Well. I'm trying to secure some *bebidas alcoholicas*," I tell her. "I want to throw a party here."

"Gee, I'd like to come, but I think I'm going to have to study."

"For Christ's sake, it's Friday night!"

"Don't scream at me. We're at college if you haven't noticed already."

"Yeah, and it's not exactly Harvard or MIT, if you haven't noticed already. You don't have to study on Friday night—to do so is actually criminal."

Jean sighs again. The conversation is really sucking by now. "I'm going to dinner in about an hour. With Eddie and Beth. If you want to come, I'll see you there." She hangs up on me.

It's hours later, and I'm sitting on a bench in the quad. I'm waiting for my shipment to come in. I gave this upperclassman named Matt twenty bucks and told him to go buy me some beer. He hasn't come back yet.

After I got off the phone with Jean, Wen Hui walked into the room. His face was crumpled up with confusion. "Peavey," he said to me, "I hear words on the quad. I don't know what they mean. What is 'fuck you'?"

"Oh, that's nothing really," I said. "Fuck has many meanings. It can mean pretty or special. If I'm shopping for a car, I might say to the dealer, 'Man, I want to test drive that fucking Grand Am.' Or, about girls I could say, 'I wish that one was my fucking girlfriend.'" I looked right into his eyes. "It has many different uses."

"Oh. And fuck you?"

"Means, 'Thanks. I really appreciate that.'"

"Are you sure?" Wen Hui asked. He still looked a little confused. "Because I see students on the quad, and they do not look happy when someone tells them, 'Fuck you.'"

I patted him on the shoulder. "Of course I'm sure! I've lived here my whole life, haven't I?" I moved to the door and grabbed my hat. "I'm going to dinner now. See you in a while."

"Can I play my compact discs on your stereo?" Wen Hui asked carefully.

"Go ahead. But don't leave it on."

"Fuck you, Peavey!" he said as I walked out the door.

"And fuck you too," I said as I closed it.

Dinner was a torpid affair. The food was barely tolerable, and I visibly reached for my Tums several times throughout the hour. Beth and Eddie and Jean readily conversed about their wonderful classes.

"Oh, isn't Professor Brown a fascinating guy? He's known so many famous people," Jean was saying.

“Yeah, and he’s been to every country on the African continent except two,” Beth said. “So well traveled.”

I decided to speak up. “You know what I think? I think that giving us exchange students is the establishment’s way of punishing Americans for being dumb at geographical stuff. Before I met Wen Hui’s new friend, I thought Tunisia was a venereal disease.”

Everyone became very quiet. They stared at their plates. Finally Beth said, “Well, it seems like you and Wen Hui really get along.”

“We don’t draw blood,” I told her. “Though that day is probably coming,” I added quietly.

“So, you and Jean went to the same high school,” Beth said. “Jean was telling me all about it. I’m Jewish myself, so I have no idea what Catholic school must be like.”

I was about to tell her that it’s the same as public school except for the fact that there’s a crucifix in every room and you have to pray before shooting spit wads at your enemies, but Eddie cut in before I had a chance.

“I’m Jewish too,” he said. “Well, only on my mother’s side. We always celebrated both the Christian and Jewish holidays at my house.”

Beth looked absolutely thrilled. The two locked eyes. “Eddie, I had no idea. You should really think about coming to a Jewish Club meeting one of these days.”

“Yeah, that would be great!”

Silence settled over the table. Eddie and Beth continued to stare and smile at each other, and I began humming Debbie Gibson’s “Lost in Your Eyes.” Jean gave me a hard kick under the table.

After we finished eating and were walking out the door, Jean said to me, “Well, have you come to your senses?”

“About what?”

She looked like a disapproving school teacher whose upset because I’ve forgotten the capital of South Carolina. “About coming with us to Eddie’s room and then heading over to watch *Braveheart*.”

“Oh. No, I’ve got other plans.”

We said good-bye and went our separate ways. I’ve been waiting for my beer ever since.

Now I can see Jean coming up over the hill. She’s alone and it’s nearly dark.

“What are *you* doing?” she asks me when she comes close to the bench.

“I’m waiting for beer.”

She stops in front of the bench. “Oh. Is the forecast calling for a sudden alcoholic shower or something?”

I sigh and shake my head. “You’re so ignorant. I gave this guy twenty bucks. He’s twenty-one. He was going to the store and planning on buying me some.”

“Oh? And you trust him because . . .”

“Because it’s the unwritten code! Because it’s the rule! He was under twenty-one once! Someone must have done it for him!”

“Don’t shout,” Jeanie says. She sits down next to me. “I’m just not sure that trusting someone with twenty dollars is a good idea in this day and age. Do you even know who this guy is? And how do you know he’s really twenty-one? Did you see his

birth certificate or something?”

I lean forward and contemplate screaming. I bend over and run my fingers through my hair. Why is she like this? In high school, I was always the one calling the shots. I bossed her around and told her where we were going. I picked the movies, I picked the friends, I picked the concerts. And suddenly everything's turned upside down. Jean's the prime minister of our friendship.

“So why are you here?” I ask.

She sighs. “I was on my way to my room to fetch my photo album. I want to show Beth and Eddie the pictures of that time we went to Washington D.C.”

“Jean! I'm in those pictures.”

“So?”

“Jean, those two kids are horrid. Eddie is just plain weird, and Beth has a classic case of anal-retentiveness. Just look at her! I swear to God, if you put an acorn up her ass, it would come out looking like an oak dining room set.”

Jean jumps up from the bench. “That's it Peavey. As of right now, we're not friends anymore. If you're going to hold those awful attitudes—and if can't tolerate my new friends—then that's okay, I can do better without you.”

“No you can't! Goddammit Jean, I've always been there for you! Last year, this year—you couldn't have survived without me.”

A darkness seems to hover over her face. Perhaps she's understanding what's actually going on. “Fine. *Fine*. Later we'll discuss. For now, you can just sit there and stew in your own sarcasm.” She straightens her shirt and gives me the finger before walking away.

An hour later I realize that she's right. Matt's not coming back. I've been ripped off. I've been taken for the fool. “I'm an idiot,” I say to myself as I watch hordes of people walking past. I reach into my pocket and can feel the taut plastic baggy between my fingers. I didn't trust Wen Hui in the room with it—he said he had his friends coming over.

A group of lovely, J-Crew clad coeds walks past. “Hey!” I call out to them. “Where are you all going?”

A blond girl stops in her tracks. “SAE house! There's a party there tonight. Wanna come?” She must be a freshman. An upperclassman would never ask me this.

I jump from the bench and rush over, but try not to look too excited about this. “I hope this beats the DU party,” I say, though I wasn't there.

“What are you talking about?” a frumpy brunette says to me. “That party kicked ass!”

I shrug. “I guess I left too early.”

“I'm Cathy,” the brunette says. “What's your name?” She's okay. She'll be on a diet for the rest of her life, and will probably have to get by on personality alone, so she's fine to hang with. But I really want to get with the blond, whose skirt reveals these incredible, picturesque legs, and awesome little feet. I've never been one to be ashamed of a foot fetish.

I tell them my name, and the brunette squints at me and says, “Is that a real name?”

"It's my last name. My first name's too horrifying to reveal."

"Oh. What is it?" Cathy has no sense.

"Percival."

"Aw, that's a cute name," the blond says. "I'm Marianne." Marianne. She's obviously southern and reveals a slow, pretty smile. The other girls they were with have walked steadily ahead of us and are out of earshot.

We talk about the boring stuff—the majors, the places of origin, current living conditions, roommates—and then we reach the SAE house. It's a stately, three-story brick building. "It's hopping," Cathy says, though that's an understatement. Having a seizure is more like it. I'm waiting for it to keel over and die.

There's a guy at the door and he smiles and Marianne, then glances briefly at Cathy. "Hey ladies," he says, chivalric and smooth. Then he frowns at me. "Who are you with?"

"Them," I say, feeling the hint of dread creeping into my voice. I gesture to Marianne and Cathy.

"Not good enough," he says.

Marianne and Cathy look at me and shrug. "Sorry, Percival," one of them says. They walk away.

"But wait," I say to the bouncer as he proceeds to shove me from the threshold. "That guy over there invited me." I point to a nearby stranger in khakis and a white hat. He's got to be in the fraternity.

The bouncer shouts to the white hat: "Hey Andrew! Do you know this piece of shit?"

"No," the white hat returns, and the bouncer swats me away, like I'm some kind of gnat or horse fly.

"Wait!" I say again and reach into my pocket and pull out the baggy. "He does know me! He told me to bring this for the party!"

"All right!" The bouncer takes the baggy and shoots it across the room to the white hat. "The maggot's come bearing gifts."

I squeeze through the doorway and try to follow the baggy as it travels through the vast sea of kids in preppy clothing, making its way across the room. Then it disappears from my sight. A few minutes later, the distinct smell hits my nostrils. "Damn," I whisper. It's gone. No compensation.

Bitterly, I traipse over to the keg. I might as well get my money's worth somehow, and I make up my mind to get as drunk as possible. To drink those stupid frat boys out of house and home. They'll never throw another kegger again.

While the party goes on, I stand by the wall with a plastic cup of beer and try to free my mind from my body. I think about Camus. Sartre. All the reasons why I shouldn't care that everyone else is getting some except me. Hell, I bet Jean is gearing up to seduce Eddie this very minute. She's taking out the candles, whipping out the skimpy underwear—ugh. The smoke of the partygoers' cigarettes turns my vision foggy and clouds my contacts. And still, I keep going for cup after cup of the amber liquid and I watch the others dance on furniture, hold each other, wrestle, and laugh. I've never felt so disconnected in my entire life—then I realize that the anonymity I feel is simply my birthright.

My gaze drifts over to a dark corner of the room. And then—*what?* Wen Hui is

sitting on the couch with two lovely college women on each arm. Another comes over and massages his shoulders from behind. I do a double take and nearly spill my beer on my pants. Wen Hui's a babe magnet, and he never even bothered to mention it. He just let me go on thinking he was another average, virginal dork. I suppose, in all fairness, it's my fault—I forgot about how he charmed my mother on our first day. And he is sort of tall . . . unlike me . . .

When Wen Hui's eyes start to turn in my direction, I dive behind a large, ugly plant. It smells horrible, and I wonder how many people have used it for a make-shift toilet throughout all the years of parties and bathroom hostage situations.

Then I can hear Wen Hui's voice. I peer through the leaves of the plant. He's at the keg and conversing in his broken English with a tall, broad frat boy. The frat boy's evidently manning the keg now, afraid that some of the uninvited are taking more than their fair share. Wen Hui gestures to the ladies at the couch and hands him three cups. The frat boy gladly fills each cup. "Ass-kisser," I whisper to myself.

Wen Hui gets his cups together, and smiles at the frat boy. And now I feel the emotion rising up in my stomach because I know what's going to happen next.

"Fuck you!" Wen Hui says.

"Wha'd you just say?" the frat says, a dark look crossing his face. He turns away from me and I can only sense the anger between them.

"Fuck you?" A large roar from the especially raucous music muffles Wen Hui's reaction. I want to laugh, but strangely, guilt swallows any satisfaction I might have had.

"What the fuck is your problem?!" the frat boy screams. Suddenly the party falls to a hum and heads spin around. The frat boy snatches the cups of beer and flings them in Wen's face. The kid stumbles backwards, his mouth slightly agape and his eyes wide with . . . fear? Astonishment? Betrayal? He wipes the beer from his eyes and backs away.

"I'm gonna kill you," the frat boy continues, as if there's really that much at stake.

At this point, I decide to act. I dash out from behind the plant, and suddenly I'm not myself anymore. I'm this idiot standing outside of his own body, watching some impish being throw himself into a volatile situation. As that frat boy rose his fist to pound Wen Hui, I came up from behind and socked him in the back. He spun around, finding a new target for his rage. "Run," I told Wen Hui.

About eight punches to the face later, I'm thrown outside, landing appropriately on my side. Wen Hui is there. "Peavey, you okay? I will call security."

"No, don't call security," I say. I smell beer on my breath. Lots of beer. And on Wen Hui too. "Damn. Motherfucker broke my nose," I say touching a throbbing bump on what used to be a long, straight bridge.

"I will call the ambulance."

"No!" I shout. I roll over onto my back. "Just leave me the fuck alone."

"Come back to the room," he says. "We will decide what to do there."

"Get lost," I say. "Scram."

He looks down at me, puzzled. "Hello!" I shout. "Make yourself scarce."

"Scarce?" Wen Hui's face is puzzled, but now there's an angry tinge to that

crumpled up confusion.

“Get outta here,” I say forcefully. “I’m going over to my friend’s room.”

Wen Hui looks angrier, but he stalks off into the night. Slowly, I peel myself from the ground and stagger along the soft, wet patches of grass. How strange the campus looks to a drunk person! The hills roll like waves and the brick buildings look, in the dark, like some freakish, Ivy League nightmare. I pause to throw up on a sidewalk, then keep walking. I stumble through the quad and notice that the girls who are walking in the opposite direction huddle together when they see me and grow very quiet, like there’s some terrible secret hanging in the air.

At last, I find the clone brick building that happens to be Jean’s dorm. Just as I’m trying to get in, a hippie couple walks out into the night. The boy has long, red hair and he holds the door for me while his girlfriend clutches her long skirt. “Whoa,” the guys says, “you okay?”

I can smell the evidence of their deodorant boycott and try to squirm away. They’re the *Save the rain forest, don’t take a shower* type. “Fine.”

“You look a little, uh, roughed up.”

“Just lookin’ for my girlfriend.”

“Had a knock down, drag out fight with her, eh?” the guy says from the doorway.

I’m already halfway up the stairs. “And she kicked my ass.”

Jean’s not in her room. I knock and knock until someone comes out of another room and tells me to shove it or drop dead—the second option being more likely.

She’s seduced Eddie—I know it. I stagger back down the stairs and out into the cool, September air. I walk for a while and then lay down behind a nice, flowering bush. “A flower bed,” I say to myself. “So soft, to make the flowers sleep.” Is that from *Alice in Wonderland*? I curl up on my side and let the rhythmic throbbing of my heart drag me into unconsciousness.

You wouldn’t believe how incredibly slow a sunrise is. I’m watching one right now. I think it’s the first I’ve ever seen, yet it feels, strangely, like my last. I’m dying. There’s dry blood on my lips—I can taste it. I can’t lift my head to see exactly where I am, but I can feel the light oozing across the campus. It spreads like smoke or fog, and soon nothing’s untouched. The sky, from what I can see of it, goes from this dark, bruised shade to something a little more red and bloodshot. Everything’s still a little fuzzy and undefined, like it’s waiting for a name. It’s waiting for the first person on campus to wake up and call it Saturday.

I start thinking about how I wish I were home—and I realize that I am home. I don’t want to go back to living with my mom or dad and choking on the discord between them.

I decide to roll over and go back to sleep when I hear a voice nearby. “Yah, I think that’s him! Over here, yah.” Sounds like Wen Hui’s friend.

Then another voice: generously, a Southern Ohio twang. “Hey son, can you hear me?” A shadow stands over me, blocking the fresh sunlight. I grunt.

“Peavey, are you well? Are you okay?” Wen Hui asks.

The man pulls me to my feet. He’s overweight—definitely a security guard.

"Can you walk?"

"Peavey, we have been looking for you for hours," Wen Hui says.

The security guard puts my arm over his shoulder and holds me around the waist. "You wanna go to the emergency room?"

"No, no," I say. "Just take me to my room."

"Y'sure?"

"Very sure," I say.

"Technically, I should make you come to the security office and sign a statement and answer some questions," the guard replies. "But since you look pretty wore out, I'll give you a ride back to your dorm."

"Peavey, Munish and I have looked for you all morning," Wen Hui says, pointing to his friend who grins widely. "We thought you died."

The four of us make our way to the security vehicle. I can't walk too well on my own, so the security guard helps me. Then he guides me back into my room.

Everyone's gone, except for Wen Hui. He gets his meal card and starts to leave the room, but stops. For a minute he looks very grim. "Peavey, I am going to breakfast. You lied to me. I have much to discuss with you, but not now." He leaves.

I lay on top of the covers in my top bunk, and drift in and out of consciousness. Minutes later, I hear the door open very quietly. Must be Wen Hui. I pretend to be in a deep sleep.

"Peavey," a girl whispers.

"Jean?" I open both eyes and lift my head from my pillow.

Jean looks horrified. "Do you have any idea what you look like?"

"No, but people were pretty scared of me last night."

"I just ran into Wen Hui on the quad," she says. "I couldn't understand much of what he was saying, but he said something about you almost getting killed and then disappearing for hours. I was over at the honors building last night and I fell asleep there. I guess I missed everything. What the hell happened?"

I shake my head and put it back down on the pillow. "Strong frat boy."

"Oh."

I hear nothing for a minute. Then I hear the smallest rustling and feel her climbing up on my bed. She stretches out beside me.

"I must smell terrible," I say.

"Only if you're not used to living in a cheese packaging plant."

I stare at the ceiling for a few brief moments and she shuts her eyes. "Sorry," I say. "I know I was out of line last night. I'm a real pisser these days."

"To put it mildly."

"I just don't know what's gotten in to me. I used to be pretty care free. Remember?"

"Not really, but okay, I'll give you that much."

I sigh. "Maybe I should go on some of those pills that you take. Maybe it would improve my outlook or something."

Jean opens her eyes and lifts her head. "Ah, I don't know about that."

"They helped you."

Her eyes lower to the bedspread. "I guess they did. I feel better now. Less

helpless and less shy. Happier about the simple shit, like getting up in the morning and taking a shower, or whatever. But,” she continues, her voice growing fainter, “I feel like something’s missing in a way. Like I can’t feel anymore. Like something’s been cut out of me and thrown away and I can’t remember what it was. That sort of feeling.”

I sit up. “Really?”

“Yeah, it’s weird. I don’t cry anymore—I can’t. I couldn’t if I wanted to. And I can’t feel deeply anymore—like I can’t empathize or something. And when I’m happy or nice to someone, I wonder, ‘Is that really me? Or is it just the pills working in my brain?’”

She sits up and pulls her knees to her chest. “The ability to feel is really elusive, I think.”

“Sometimes it’s too much,” I say.

Jean sighs and lays back down. “I’m happily unhappy,” she says. “There’s a paradox for ya.”

And there’s irony for me, too, when feeling bad feels good. I lay back down with her and listen to her breath become steady and faint against my skin. “So what about Eddie?”

Her eyes pop open. “Ugh! Don’t even get me started on that guy. All night I tried to get with him. We were over in the honors building and I practically laid myself out for that guy and it’s like he saw nothing. He’s quite dense.”

“He has a picture of a seagull in his room.”

“I know. With some inspirational inscription underneath. Something like ‘Footprints’ or whatever. That just says it all.”

She goes back to sleep. I stare at the blank, cracked ceiling above me and try to think about how I’ll look back on my wild night at laugh some day—but I can’t quite convince myself that that’s true. I can feel Jean’s breath on my neck, and there’s something pleasant about that. Some sort of kinship I hadn’t really thought about too much. I consider myself sort of lucky now—as if I know some secret that the rest of the campus could care less about.

If I listen hard enough—I can hear voices outside—the voices of a campus of fourteen thousand people. Fourteen thousand people, who could care less whether or not you made it safely into the world. Everyone’s working for themselves, working against each other, colliding in the process. It’s odd and fascinating and still experimental, I think. And there’s something comfortable about it—like being the anonymous guy at a party, or the pigeon crouching in the underpass. It means you don’t have to try too hard or think too much, or try to stay in touch with the people you used to know. It’s like watching a sunrise and not feeling a thing.

—Kristina Garvin ‘01



"Untitled" by Theresa Lashway '04

On Alicia's Birthday

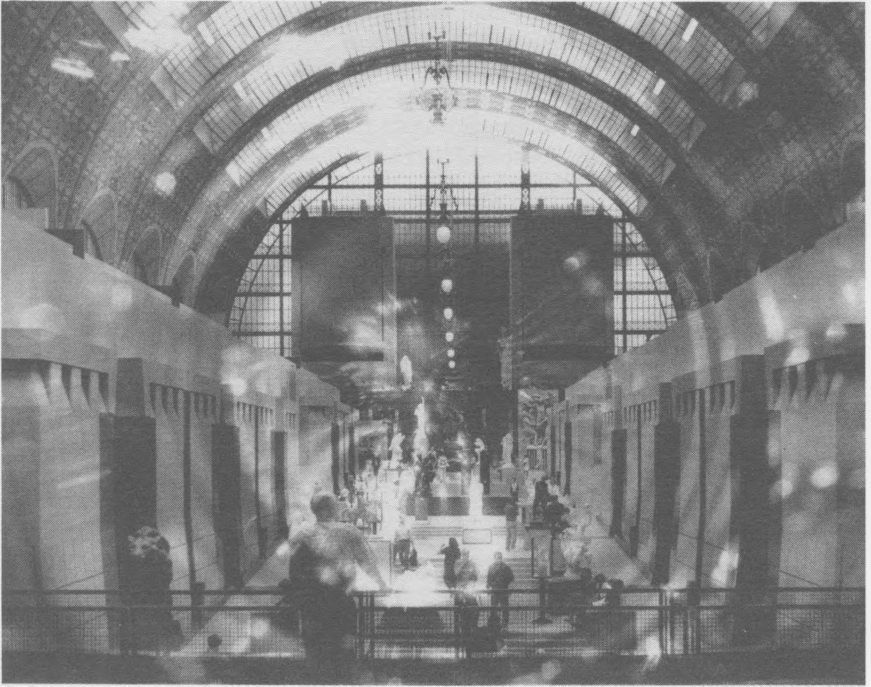
Strolling after lunch I saw
a vulture sailing overhead
while a leaf began to fall.

The same gusts which the vulture
dizzied to such airy heights snatched
the leaf from beaten stem. Sure

you feel tripped up, torn by time.
We all stand in the wind all day.
Not one to give advice, I'm

thinking you could spread your wings
and soar across the drafts or descend
golden, peacefully tumbling.

—Chris Million '02



"Untitled" by Alan Palmer '02

Face in the Grave

The red soil around it was alive with the smell of burning sugarcane spice and the tombstone glowed with the sun on her name: Evangeline Kanabele, Beloved Mother and Sister born 1949 died 1990. *May the wings of angels touch the palms of her hands and return her to her father.* Perhaps, that might have happened if Aunty believed in God. Anyway, Katrina knew that Aunty Eevee wasn't dead. Aunty was right here in that hot black tombstone. Sometimes when the rays of the sun hit the black marble surface just right, through the shade of the plumeria tree, she could see Aunty's brown smiling face beneath those etched words and that face looked at Trina with those same eyes that giggled when she walked on the reef, with those same lips that cursed God under that black veil, with those same moles that stared at Cameron while he stared at Trina over the dinner table every night. If it weren't for her face, the darkness of the thing would make it ugly, that tombstone; Aunty didn't like it at all. If only it were round and citrus yellow like a tangerine instead of a cracking marble pentagon, perhaps Aunty would be happier with her surrounding. Then she might have found time in her dead heart to be content with Katrina whose eyes would cry like the day she was born, whose lips would kiss the devil, and whose would face absorb the beauty of all things that hurt.

Trina hated the place, but she ventured there every day through the yellowing green cane field, past the pier, through the keawe trees, until she finally reached the Filipino side of the cemetery. It would have been easier to drive there, but sweat is good for cleaning the impure heart and the Filipino side of the cemetery was downtrodden with blankets on top of blankets of weeds and she wouldn't want to chance getting Cameron's brand new car stuck in them. Besides, walking helped her think about what she's going to tell Aunty today. When Trina's not upsetting her, Aunty was usually quite fond of her company. Trina's bringing Aunty lunch today. Rice, lomi salmon, and chicken heka, Aunty Eevee's favorite. Hopefully Aunty wouldn't get angry with her this time. Go suck on a dog's cock. That's what Aunty told her the last time; it nearly hurt her feelings and got her a slap on her face.

Through the weeds and past the Portuguese graves to the Filipino graveyard, Trina's feet were getting dirty. Weeds stuck under her toes and weed seeds stuck to her bare legs. A nail poked through her rubber slippers, but it missed her heel so she left it there and just kept on walking. The wind whipped her long hair, her face, and her sore brown arm. Why was it sore again? She couldn't remember. Maybe she hit it while squeezing through the keawe trees. She couldn't remember. She walked through the city of graves of dead Portuguese and Filipinos. Black, gray, and old cement made the place still and calm, peaceful and beautiful. The plumeria tree behind Aunty's grave was in full bloom and the scent of the white milk flowers streaked with yellow permeated her hair and skin. Trina moved toward the tombstone and lay on the warm red soil. The small grains felt soft against her smooth skin. Scattered grass made knitted patterns with the dirt, giving it the appearance of soft Hawaiian pillows. She felt warm all over. Aunty Eevee was there.

"I brought lunch."

I not hungry Trina. What's wrong?

"Nothing, Aunty. I just came to visit, 'es all."

You just came here yesterday. What's wrong pretty girl? You look sad.

Aunty liked to talk shit all of the time. Katrina didn't feel sad. She was just tired. Two little sisters to take care of and a shitty job can do that to any young woman. She often wondered about her "good fortune" in having a sickly mother with cancer and two little sisters who did not appreciate her efforts to care for them. At least Aunty should be able to understand. Yet, Trina felt that not everything was right. She couldn't remember. She stared at the corner of the shiny tombstone wall where it met with the dirt floor.

How's your momma?

"Still sick." Why does she ask things that she already knows the answers to?

How's your sisters?

"Still fucking brats. Rosemarie started first grade today and Rondell is going out with some white guy from Honolulu."

How are you?

"Fine. Jesus, Aunty, why you asking me all of these questions? I told you this stuff yesterday."

Yeah and you looked like shit yesterday and you look more like shit today.

What's wrong? What happened to your face?

What? Nothing was wrong with her face. Aunty could be such an old jealous lady sometimes. Just because she was old and dead, didn't mean that she could take it out on Trina.

"Aunty, you know what? Stop playing twenty questions with me! I no need come here to visit you, you know. I can find one other aunty, some old lady at church or that lady that works at the Koloa grocery store. You don't need to be my aunty, I can find someone else to talk to, to take care of. You can just be Cameron's mom and leave me alone. "

Trina! No get stupid now. Your cheek is swollen and you have a scratch on your forehead. What happened? You tell Aunty okay.

Trina sat up, raised her right palm to her head. Ouch! Her arm hurt. She put it down and felt her face with her left hand. Aunty was right, there is a scratch on her forehead with some dried up blood. Her left cheek was big and it hurt to touch it. "I dunno what happened Aunty."

You can tell Aunty anything girl. Aunty's voice went down to that sweet whispering voice. That was the voice that used to comfort Trina when she got frustrated taking care of her bedridden mother or when Cameron was being a bastard.

Remember that time when you and Cameron got into trouble in Kindergarten? I took care of you then and I can care for you now.

Trina caught sight of a dried up maile lei on draped over the right corner of the tombstone. It's funny how she had never noticed it before. The brown vine, once green, was still fragrant in its sweet forest smell, but the leaves are pale brown like clay. She brushed the dried leaves with her fingertips. She didn't make this lei. It was Cameron's. Her almost-husband Cameron, they were engaged and perhaps soon to be married. He was dark and handsome with hair and eyes as black as stone. He was strong and cared for her well and supported her family with his well-paid construction job. Trina believed that he was a good man, most of the time.

Trina, do you remember?

Yes. Trina remembered. It was at St. Mary's School. Morning recess. Cameron, her best friend, had decided to put his finger up Brandi's asshole. Brandi was this ugly little white girl from Washington. She thought she was better than everyone else because she could talk better than they could.

"If she's more good than us, she won't have an asshole," Cameron said one day on the monkey bars. He snuck up behind her while she was pulling herself up on the bars; he lifted up her plaid skirt exposing her strawberry shortcake underwear. EEEEEUUUW. He got his index finger ready and 1, 2, 3, he stuck it up that little white asshole of hers. Brandi was in shock and couldn't make a sound. Cameron made a sour face. He probably felt some sort of ooze seeping through the thin pink material of Strawberry Shortcake's face. He pulled his finger out with one abrupt gesture, leaving the lacy panty still stuck in the crack of her ass. She started to cry, but couldn't tell Mrs. Fernandez the name of the kid who had done this disgustingly violent thing to her. Cameron, the ever-charming bastard blamed it on Trina. She got whacked with a yardstick.

"Aunty, Cameron's a bastard."

I know Trina. I know.

He had whacked her with a stick this morning. She didn't want it, but he gave it to her anyway. The broom. Right across her pretty brown face. Blood stuck in her long brown hair. She had to go to work. But Cameron was angry. His car. He had to have his car towed out of the fucking weeds. Katrina what the fuck were you thinking. He works all fucking day and the best you can do is get his new car stuck in the fucking weeds at the fucking graveyard! Mom has been dead for years and Katrina still talks to her! As if she's still here, as if she's alive, as if she's still walking down the streets collecting soda cans, as if she's still bitching about how Cameron's daddy beat her! Katrina is a fucking idiot!

"I don't like Cameron, Aunty. . . . but . . ."

But what?

Cameron wasn't always a sinister figure. Trina loved him, sometimes. In high school he left carnations in her locker every morning and at home after a really bad fight he would leave her flowers or clean the bathroom or even give mom her medication. And most important of all, he wanted a future with Trina.

"Katrina, lets put the baby's room here."

"Next to my mom's room. I think her yelling would scare the little thing. And anyways, I'm not even pregnant Cameron."

"I know, but I can dream can't I?" He put his muscular brown arm around Trina's waist and kissed her earlobe. "I love you, Katrina."

Trina would smile.

But then there would be times like last night that could destroy all the tender moments that they had ever had. It made Trina damn his temper and her childlike inability to stand up for herself.

Last night. Trina had cooked dinner and fed her two younger sisters. Raw fish with rice, it was good. Cameron got home late and called Trina a fucking idiot. He was all sweaty and dirt was caked into his clothes. He was tired and the girls had eaten all of his food.

"Get these kids out of my house!"

"This is my mamma's house and if you don't like it you get out!" Trina had never yelled before. Her voice scared her.

"Bitch." Cameron picked Trina up like how he used to when they would go surfing in high school, but this wasn't playful and this wasn't high school.

"AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

"Shuddup."

He threw her on to the floor of their bedroom. Her leg hurt. Stop Cameron. But he wouldn't. He gently unbuttoned her shirt and stroked her long hair. She was naked. His dirt-oil work clothes still covered his body, except for his groin area, which was growing as he caressed Trina's breasts with his fingertips. Then he forced open her legs and rode her. His body smashed hers into the floor. She would not scream, she would not get hit, or upset her mother. Up and down. Push and yank. Kiss and stroke. Until the ride was over. He brushed a tear from her eye and kissed her eyelids. Then he gently kissed her cheeks and lips while his sweat and dirt were stuck in her pubic hair.

"Now get up honey and make me something to eat," he said with an endearing smile.

Trina stood up; her naked body made its way to the kitchen.

Why don't you eat the lunch?

"I'm not hungry."

Leave him dear. Go away.

"You want me to leave your boy?" Trina was crushing the leaves of the maile lei. Crush. Rub. Release. The rotted leaves would make fresh new soil.

He hurts you. Like his father hurt me. Just tell him to fuck himself.

She had. He took it as a joke and sucked the voice out of her neck. Aunty could see the teeth marks.

"I can't leave him."

You can't tell me that you love some damn Hawaiian Flip fool like that. He'll kill you.

For a brief moment, the graveyard looked like the perfect world to Trina's eyes. She wanted to be part of its vast universe, its holy silence, its still peace. Wind brushed her hair to wipe the tears from her eyes. Her body hurt all over. She had been beaten over and over again. By broom, hand, mouth, and dick. She wanted some peace.

"I'm already dead." Trina dropped her body on Aunty Eevee's grave, but her mind floated above the sky.

No you're not. Go find a white man to take care of you, a white man with lots and lots of money. Leave this place.

A white man? Trina hadn't thought of that. Aunty and her old woman ways. Old women always think that rich white men are just waiting out there to save their impoverished young daughters. Didn't she know that today people like Trina didn't like the white man oppressors, even if they did have money to support her and her family.

"I'm pregnant, you know."

Leave.

"I'm too young to have a baby."

Leave.

Could a child be born into dirt? No. Cameron would not know about it. She wondered if she could give birth in a baby grave. A cute little plot lined with soft brown pillows and a mellow lullaby sung by dead bones. Trina could care for it here in the peace of the graveyard. She would feed it where her blood could make the child cleaner than any dirty milk that its father could buy.

"I hate him."

I know.

"And I hate you for making him."

You can't blame me for the things that he does to you.

"I don't. I blame you for making him the man that he is."

Little girl, you listen to me. I was you. To hell with my son. Go find a white man, make your life better.

"I don't need a white man, Auntie. I can take care of myself."

Then what are you doing here?

The tombstone looked at Trina. She stared until she couldn't see Auntie Eevee in it. She saw blackness, cold darkness, but at the same time, soothing peace, peace for the dead. Trina wasn't dead. The sun set and its orange rays hit Trina's legs with beautiful violent fire as it flickered through the plumeria tree's shadow. Trina felt the fire, she was alive. If the graveyard earth would part and dig a plot for her baby bearing body, and if the trade winds might chance to push her in it, her body's fire would melt the cold grave until the heated live earth surfaced and the dead particles rested on the bottom.

"I don't need to listen to you Auntie Eevee, you're not even here."

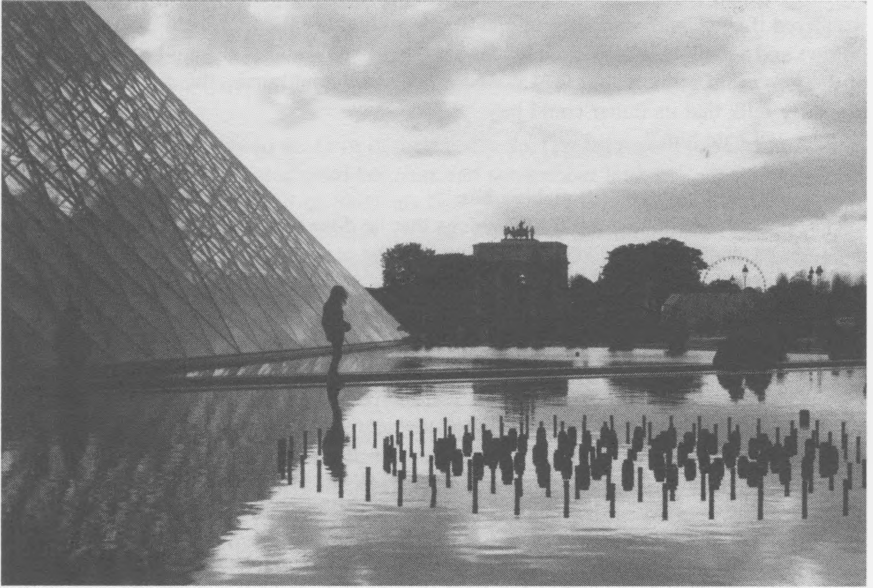
That's true.

"You're dead."

I know.

Katrina brushed her long hair out of her face, picked a plumeria flower and put it over her left ear. She looked into the tombstone and put the image of Auntie Eevee's face upon it. It was smiling. She searched her mind for her baby's face. It was silent. Her face. It was crying. Then Cameron's face seemed to touch hers in a warm breeze; her beautiful brown eyes were afraid of the dark and those powerful lips shivered on his pale brown face. She laughed. She might leave him, she might not; she wasn't sure. Trina and her baby walked out of the still graveyard and headed for the beach, where warm evening waters could wake her spirit. She may have dreamt about death, but not yet. It was not time for her or her baby to join Auntie Eevee under the plumeria tree. Instead, she would spend the dawn of the night at the pier, talking to her unborn child about the future while singing to it "may the wings of angels toughen your palms and bring you to the arms of your mother."

—Jenny Silva '02



“Agathe Devant le Louvre, Dimanche” by Dena Behi '01

Joanna

You tell your life as if it were an epic
and I suspect that like Herodotus
you are willing to spare the truth for a good story.
Passing through one-hundred weeks in as many words
you linger on the shell of a clementine
the near-ellipse of its segmented fruit,
beaded juice and sticky fingers.

By the end of the Greyhound route
that winds itself out into the day's second twilight,
rocking us to our separate destinations,
I know as much about the women you love
as I do about you, and more about your favorite foods
than even about them.

Your tale always pauses for your appetite.
Pain, you say, is the essence of taste;
sharp, or tart, or spicy enough
to leave your dinner guests wiping their eyes
are your specialties. From what I taste of your stories,
they are also your life.

I expect your skin to smell of rosemary, or paprika,
or oranges, and suspect that the furrows in your face
are lined with your living:
the dust of gay-pride marches,
the bite of garlic on an unsuspecting tongue,
the music of soft-shoe and swung-eighths,
like dark chocolate, sweet and bitter in their timbre.

—Katie Kroner '01



"Mistletoe" by Will MacCardell-Fossel '02

Octavius

When you have money, your house gets a name instead of a number. For example, I do not live at 782 Maplecrest Road. I live at the Mitchell estate with my parents: THE Mr. and Mrs. Bailey Mitchell. The respect and power of that name has been replaced by stories and whispers in the past three years or so of our notoriety. With that you get a street crowded with people wearing Bermuda shorts and wielding disposable Kodak cameras ready and eager to snap up a piece of myth. A lot of my father's money has gone into rubbing out that myth from the television and the news, but I can still see small reminders of Octavius. His dusty dirt paths still slice up the gardens, and when the sun shines right, you can still see the splotches of red paint that Mason has never been able to scrub off the black iron gate that's constructed by necessity across our driveway. It has been extended since with security cameras and guards to block out the crazies, but they do not really come around like they did before when the story first was made public. It's not talked about either. Maybe people are not interested anymore, but at the time, they were.

It's not every day that an eccentric billionaire buys his dying daughter an elephant.

Now I don't want that to sound melodramatic because it isn't. I'm still dying and have been for the last 5 years. It something I have gotten used to. The whole story only started as some minor human interest by a poor fool that was past his deadline. The picture he snapped was actually quite beautiful when you consider that he hung from the bouncing branches of a weeping willow in order to get it. It was of me sprawled across the back of Octavius as he dipped his trunk into our fountain for a drink. I kept it next to my bed until my mother took it away. I was twelve at the time of the picture and was wearing the uniform from my private school, Our Lady of the Oaks. My skin, even then when I was only starting to show visible signs of my illness, had a milky Elmer's glue quality, but back then my blonde hair was shinier, my teeth whiter. My eyes were closed in complete childish contentment. I used to lie like that on his back for hours as he systematically trampled every prize winning rose my mother had ever planted.

My father had seen me like that at my eleventh birthday party orchestrated with a festive circus theme by my mother. The whole day had been a success by her estimation. The hard worked clowns sat scattered about in the aftermath smoking cigarettes. They had taken off their long flat shoes and were waving them back and fourth in defense of the sticky summer air and the rabid flies that longed for a taste of their running makeup. All the workers regarded their cleanup duties with one eye and me with the other as I sidled up to the large yellow truck that had the word "Octavius" scrawled across the side in blue letters. A huge, bald, black man, the same who had led Octavius through a repertoire of simple tricks to the delight of fifty or so 5th graders, stood plucking rhinestones from the elephants large African ears. He was small for an elephant as he was still bit of a baby. Standing at my full height, I could look right at his huge brown eyes that were barely visible through a curtain of thick lashes. My gaze once or twice flickered towards the man whose large left hand was filling to the brim with plastic gems supplied by his busily working right hand. The darkness of his face cracked open to reveal two rows of perfectly white teeth. He said nothing to me, but after he had emptied his hands

into a large Ziploc bag, he hung his hands clasped down between his knees and beckoned me to him. I put one of my delicately shod feet into his hands and was positioned between Octavius' ears before I realized that I was moving. His ears slapped playfully at my knees, and I giggled loudly as the man applauded. He was laughing too. I looked up and saw my father standing on our back porch with his usual glass of Scotch. The black man left that day with a small folded piece of paper and an empty truck.

My father sold one of our seventeen BMW's and made a stall for my baby elephant in the empty space. I spent many long afternoons with Octavius up until around the time that the picture by the fountain was taken. After that I could no longer go outside, but that had more to do with my health than the couple of local news trucks that showed up shortly thereafter. Instead of moving into the hospital, the hospital moved into one of the spare bedrooms on the first floor. My lungs worsened and the doctor recommended plastic sheeting that had to be hung in a tent-like canopy from the ceiling to just past my knees. An armed guard was eventually posted outside of the window after a British photographer managed to climb the fence and snap a picture of me there wrapped in plastic like a white chocolate Easter bunny. The story that had started so benignly catapulted into a full-scale media blitz. It lasted forever. After the medical stories dissecting my unheard of sickness dried up, the focus shifted to Octavius himself and a group of crazies who bore the distinction of having 11 season passes at zoos revoked for what they called "liberation of god's creatures." They'd been on the news two years before for releasing a cage of howler monkeys into San Diego. The granola munchers of Southern California had cheered this heroic act until the little beasts had shown up on their windowsills and birdbaths, screeching their gospel at the tops of their puny monkey lungs. These same liberators stationed themselves outside my family's front gate. The police were pretty sure it was them that scribbled "INDEPENDENCE FOR OCTAVIUS" in red paint across the black bars, but no one had technically witnessed them doing it.

"Independence," my mother had sneered. She had stood next to my bed the morning after they wrote it and blocked my view of the growing group of angry sign holders. She sipped nervously at her morning coffee as she measured out my medicines. "What do they want? For us to set him up in a Malibu condo with his own line of credit?" I turned and stared out the window at Octavius who was blithely walking our same old path without me. All day for months he paced back and forth until lines were worn into the grounds, and Jose, the gardener, quit as a token of his indignation. Everyday, I asked my mother if I could go out, just for a little while and she would insist again that I wait until I was a little bit better. I had to content myself with only watching him. The plastic sheet distorted my view of the yard that now seemed so much smaller and Octavius so much bigger. It also muffled sounds. The night the gun went off, I rolled over and closed my eyes again convinced that it was thunder.

Not only did the person shoot Octavius between the eyes while he slept, he left a letter that included Patrick Henry's famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech altered for the occasion and written out entirely in magazine clippings. In the end, the assassin claimed that Octavius' murder was an assisted suicide and that he had no ill regrets. That is the information that I managed to piece together. My parents won't ever talk about Octavius.

I wish that they would because my world of dreams and my world of reality

have melted into one another so much that I can barely tell the difference anymore. That's what happens when you spend this much time in bed being told to rest. I still stare out of that window at the dirt lines and convince myself that an elephant named Octavius left them there. I try to remember looking into his eyes and knowing exactly what he was saying. It keeps me from having to stare into my reflection in the plastic, because I can hear what those eyes are saying. I hear it all day, over and over again until I want to scream. Sometimes I do.

—Suzanne Hodsdon '03



"Untitled" by Alan Palmer '02

We Bury Anthony

We bury Anthony as you'd bury a tree,
Leaves unfallen, broad trunk, exemplary, a tree.

Six puffy-eyed boys, petrified, become, like men,
Stunned under polished oak as they carry a tree.

The great sky is birdless and the white sun, slipping,
Beats down where wildfires left hardly a tree.

His hair crow black, his rebellious jaw, Cherokee
To spite his brave posture, military, a tree.

I'm gnarled by unprecedented loss. It lops limbs
Off my carefully branched itinerary tree.

Mourners will plant a memorial garden with
Sturdy mums. Witness life and death vary, a tree.

Chris, weary of chasing Anthony, longs to leave
Half of himself rooted, stationary, a tree.

—Chirs Million '02



"Untitled" by Theresa Lashway '04

Contributor's Notes

Dena Behi is a senior political science major from Mansfield, Ohio. She likes to ski, play tennis, and travel. She hopes to someday be able to say that she's lived everywhere. Her work is dedicated to Agathe...ma soeur.

Kara Burt is a junior sociology/anthropology and Spanish major. She enjoys and is grateful for thoughtful company and postcards. Kara is currently suffering from Girl Scout cookie withdrawal.

Kristina Garvin is a senior English (literature) major from Columbus, Ohio. After graduation, she plans to attend graduate school for literature and creative writing. Of "Sunrise at Oxford" she says, "I wanted to write a satire of college life. Ironically, the story turned out more tragically realistic than satiric. If the protagonist is redeemed in the end, it is not because he has changed, but because he has managed to forge a connection with another person." The story is dedicated to N., her favorite dirtbag, and everyone else at Denison who made life so gosh darn special.

Suzanne Hodsdon is (tentatively speaking) a creative writing major with a minor in film. She wrote the submitted story as an exercise in Matthew Chacko's ENG-237 class last semester for the prompt: "MY PET"—write about an animal that you yourself have never owned and a person who might. So, no...she has never owned an elephant, only two rather puny shih tzus with delusions of grandeur. They live in Akron, Ohio (not Southern California)—where Suzanne is when not holed up and working in one of Denison's finest West Quad cubicles.

Erin Kaczur's nickname is "Tech," short for technicolor because of an interesting disability. Other than Tech, she is also known as the electronic music artist Grand Underlord. She is a Media Technology and Arts (MTA) major, Class of 2002, from Warren, Ohio. Erin painted the mural in The Bandersnatch. She has also been a professional freelance Graphic Artist for 5 years. Other than artwork, Erin plays bass guitar, for 8 years, and guitar, for 7 years. Her favorite artificial flavor is orange. She has spent up to \$1,000 on tattoos and body piercings in the last 2 years. Her favorite quote is from her friend Jell-O—"Life is not a concept; it's a cereal."

Katie Kroner is a senior English Writing and Communication double major from Cincinnati, Ohio. When she is not riding mass transportation or brooding over her Senior writing project, she passes time performing with Denison's Latin Jazz Percussion and reading Edward Gorey.

Theresa Lashway is a class of 2004 Psychology and Studio Art major from Dayton, Ohio. Her hobbies include art, dance, reading, and writing.

Will MacCardell-Fossel is an Economics major from Duxbury, MA with minors in both English and Computer Science. He will graduate in 2002.

Chris Million ('02) is an English (Writing) major from Columbus, Ohio. He will serve his second year as a Teaching Assistant for the JR Reynolds Young Writers Workshop this

June. "Powerful writing imbues in its reader the assertion, 'I am imaginative, fallible being as we are all. Try to understand me in the knowledge that you cannot.'"

Alan Palmer is a junior English major and Art Minor from Indianapolis, Indiana.

Geoff Peart is a junior from Detroit, Michigan. He is a Psychology major and an Economics and Art minor. Geoff likes to experience life...

Jenny Silva is a Junior English Writing and Education Double Major from Kalaheo, Hawaii. She enjoys listening to reggae and Hawaiian music and eating Spam Musubi. Writing is a medium through which she keeps her sanity.

Julie Wade is a junior Psychology major and Studio Art minor from Kingston, Jamaica. Her interests include painting, interior design, and art therapy. She also enjoys both poetry and crafts.

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