

Sunlight

Chases



Shadow

Written by,

Brindin Hill

Dr. Brooks,  
Thank you so much  
for everything you have done.  
Not only was your help on this  
project invaluable, but you have  
given me new insight into life... a  
better idea of who I am and who I  
want to become. You have  
touched my life in a  
way only a few have.  
I'll never forget you.  
Thanks,  
Brundin

### Dedications

I dedicate this book to Dr. Randy Brooks.

He not only introduced me to haibun and haiku, but he helped me through every stage of this project. He taught me that my writing is not about pretending, but about intensely feeling...living...perceiving. It is about the awareness *not* of the analytical, but of the aesthetic. This lesson is one that I will always carry with me.

Thank you, Dr. Brooks.

I also dedicate this book to my fiancée, Aaron Sawyer. Without his encouragement, I never would have taken the risk of writing about my life and sharing it with other people. He has been the most supportive and most helpful through every stage of my project.

I love you, Aaron.

## Special Thanks

Dr. Randy Brooks  
Aaron Sawyer  
Cindy Landacre  
Danielle LaSusa  
Jeremy Ellis  
Mom, Dad, Kyrstin, Robin  
Mitch Mattson  
Emily Evans  
Alisha Komala  
Sean Keller  
Sarah Matherly  
Dr. Brian Posler

## Preface: An Introduction to My Aesthetic

When I first enrolled in my Global Haiku course for second semester of my junior year, I expected an easy-A, blow-off class. As far as I knew, haiku was an old, formulaic type of poetry involving three short lines or phrases, which were composed with the use of a 5-7-5 syllable pattern. I thought that because of this predetermined form and highly structured use of syllables, the poems would be boring and lack insight. I prepared myself to study a dead art form and write silly little ditties to turn in for each class. During that semester, however, I learned that all of my beliefs about haiku were inaccurate. Not only does it not require a certain number of syllables, it is a vibrant and flexible artform. Haiku is by no means a solid, unchanging, and predetermined poetic style...it is all about living.

Although this art form does descend from an age-old tradition beginning in Japan approximately six or seven hundred years ago, it did not find its birth in America until sometime around the 1950's. These poems may be extremely brief, but they allow for a great deal of variety in their composition, especially those written in English. Because haiku is such a young art in its English form, there is a great deal of freedom in the approach taken to writing it. The same goes for other haikai arts, including haibun, the main poetic form that I used for writing this book. Haibun is often defined as "haiku in prose," because it is a short prose piece written in the spirit of haiku. Therefore, the aesthetic approach that I take to writing haiku is almost identical to the approach that I used in composing this collection of haibun. Additionally, since the aesthetic guiding the composition of haiku and haibun is different from the aesthetic used in most western literature, it is important that you understand the purpose of this type of writing in order for you to more deeply appreciate it's power and resonance.

When reading this book, close your eyes...take four deep breaths and let yourself relax. Then, slowly open your eyes and let them fall gently onto the page.

Inhale one last time, and read the haibun with its corresponding haiku. Pause for a moment and allow the words to sink into your mind. Visualize the piece with clarity and it will come alive inside of you. This is the essence of the aesthetic: live the poem. You are not simply reading about the experiences of another...you are living and experiencing a specific moment for yourself. The point of haiku and haibun, and therefore my book, is not to analyze and interpret events and emotions for the reader. It is to give you a brief impression of who I am with this autobiographical work by allowing you to live through some key moments of heightened experience in my life. I want you to experience my moments of intense awareness on your own, to feel your own emotions and draw your own conclusions.

The main structure of this book is autobiographical. I borrowed this idea from Masaoka Shiki, who lived from 1867-1902 and is considered “the father of modern haiku”(Beichman 1). Shiki was the first haiku master to introduce the idea of realism to the genre of haiku. Since haiku had previously been written on assigned topics, people had composed haiku without making any effort to base their poems off of their own experiences. Shiki, however, believed that in order for people to use the aesthetic well, they needed to write only about moments they had experienced (Beichman 21). From this idea, Shiki then developed his ‘shasei’ prose, or his “sketch from life” prose. The key element to this sort of writing is the painting of a picture during the sharing of a personally experienced event. Shiki believed that this sort of writing is much more effective than any piece written from an author’s imagination. This form of prose is the source of my book’s framework; I have isolated specific moments of importance from my life and written about them in a descriptive and specific manner.

The other important element involved in “sketch from life,” prose, however is that it must include a second layer—one of intense perception and meaning. In other words, the prose portion needs to be more than just an account of events (Beichman 110). I wanted to ensure that I could produce such a meaningful insight and

experience for my readers. In order to do so, all I had to do was to stick closely to a couple of the guiding principles in my haiku and haibun aesthetic.

The most obvious of these principles is my use of the third person. Although to some western readers may think that this has a negative depersonalizing effect, it is only because they are not used to this different aesthetic approach. In fact, in haibun some sort of emotional detachment from the situation is almost required. By emotionally removing themselves from the situation, the writer can better focus on "the action of living, rather than on the 'liver'" (Higginson 221). In other words, haiku and haibun are meant to be a written record of a moment of heightened experience that illuminates a universal moment of the shared human experience. In order to do that, the writer records the events with the use of strong images and pictures so that the reader can visualize it and experience it. What the author does *not* include is any sort of explanation, analysis, or personal emotion. If he or she were to include those, then the reader would no longer be able to live the moment for themselves and in their own way. They would just be listening to a story. By using "I," the author runs the risk of indulging in this sort of self-analysis and explanation, especially when dealing with personally experienced situations (Higginson 221). What is truly important in haibun is not what the author intended to communicate, but what the reader takes from the poem. By writing the book as an outsider, I can be sure that I am including only those details that are necessary and appropriate for the haibun aesthetic to function properly. Therefore, my book is set up as though we are watching specific events and moments of a woman's life, rather than setting you up to read my diary.

The next most noticeable principle of the haiku and haibun aesthetic that I followed in my book was my use of the present tense. I used the present tense for the same reason that I used the third person: to allow the reader to live through the experience. If my book had been written in the past tense, it would be more like the reader is reading a history book or stories frozen in a specific time and place. The

beauty of the present tense is that it allows the readers to experience the moment at the same time that it is happening. The past tense, on the other hand, brings the readers to an earlier time, which makes the moment lose its sense of immediacy and importance (Swede 30). Therefore, even though I am sharing moments of my life that happened many years ago, I have transferred those memories from past to present. You can be a baby, play with sisters, get engaged ...experience these important moments of my life for yourself as you read them. In fact, my work is not complete until you have done so. The beauty of haibun is not found in the act of composition, but in sharing it with others...and for each person, the final piece of literature is different because of the various life experiences that they bring with them to the reading. This is my favorite part of haiku and haibun, because it creates a special connection between author and reader. Without you, my poetry would remain unfinished.

Additionally, my haibun collection is rich in imagery, which helps the readers to place themselves in the moment. For example, instead of speaking generally about a winter night by stating, "It was cold that night," it would be much more effective to write, "The moon was clear and the wind blew as though piercing my body." The second phrase *describes* what the first phrase only *explains*. Additionally, the imagery should make use of the various sensory perceptions. Using the example above, one can see that by combining the vision of the winter moon and the feel of the bitter-cold wind on the skin, the reader can much more easily experience this heightened moment of human existence. Additionally, this use of imagery ensures that the readers will be able to connect with the moment being recorded. Even if they have never been in a similar situation, the imagery would appeal to things that they are familiar with: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. If the imagery is presented well, then the reader should be able to imagine the unfamiliar situation fairly clearly. This is what makes the described moment of human experience a "universal" one.

Another element of my haiku and haibun aesthetic that I use in order to ensure this sort of universal quality is my inclusion of the natural world. Every prose portion of the haibun in this collection is grounded in the modern human world. More specifically, it is grounded in the modern, human, female, American experience of the world. Now, some of the events that I describe are certainly universal ones. Others, however, may not be. For this reason, all of the haiku paired with the prose are based in the natural world. By including a nature haiku that echoes the *essence* of the previous prose portion, people can get a better sense of the experience described above. Everyone understands the natural world, because we all live in it. By drawing on this common resource, I can draw in my readers and allow them to experience things that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. Most importantly, however, the nature haiku also allow the reader to reconnect with the natural world.

Whether or not nature is an essential element in haiku is an issue that has been long debated. Because of the close connection between the haikai arts and Zen Buddhism, traditionally nature has played a prominent role in the aesthetic. With the influence of Zen, a haiku has been defined as the moment when the poet reaches “an enlightened Nirvana-like harmony” and the poet’s nature and environment become unified (Shirane 45). Although this use of nature in haiku would function fairly well in an eastern society that understands the close connection between nature and humans due to their exposure to Zen philosophy, it is highly debated here in the west. I believe that the connection to nature, however, is essential in creating the sort of “universal insight” that haibun and haiku aim for...even for those in the western world.

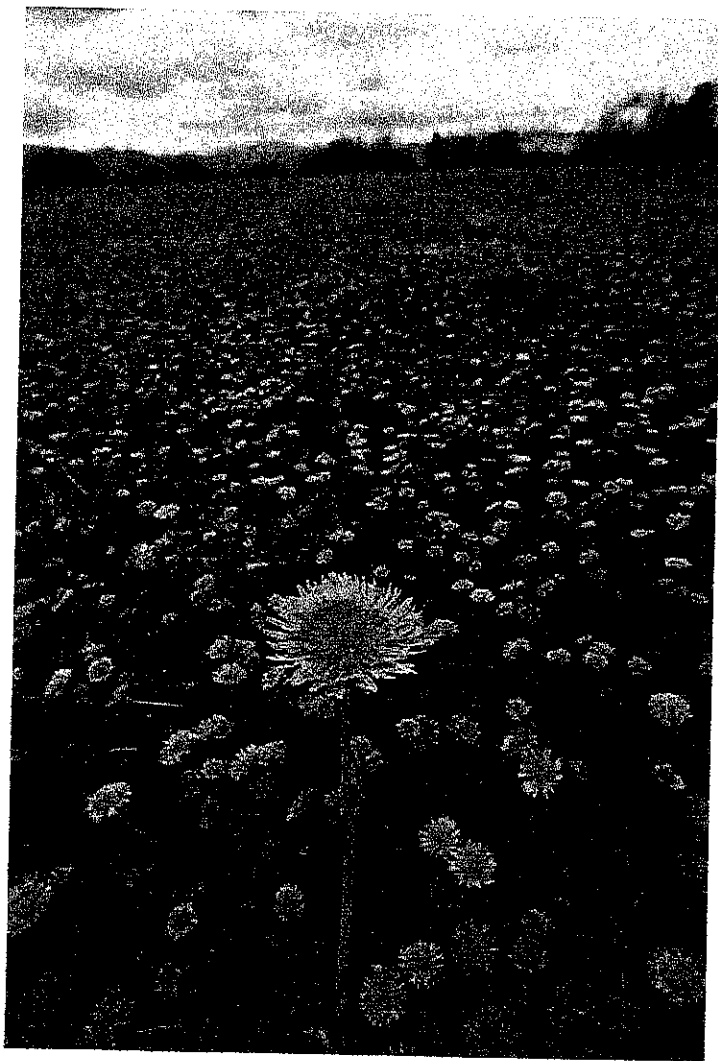
Living in the modern global community, many people have become distanced from the ebbs and flows of nature and its processes. Because of this distance, they fail to realize the close connection shared by all life...not just by humanity. Nature moves and lives in a way that closely resembles and reflects the human world. After



all, people share a common 'human *nature*,' they just usually fail to take the time to deeply reflect on, or even recognize, their roots. This belief in the need to link nature to human nature is certainly not new. In fact, Cor Van Den Heuvel, in his *The Haiku Anthology*, explained that the essence of the haiku aesthetic is, in fact, found in recording those moments that link nature to human nature. He goes on to say that those moments are the most insightful and the most important for people to experience and reflect on (Van Den Heuvel xv). One of my favorite haiku poets, George Swede, uses his poetry to transfigure this schism between the natural and human worlds. I am using my poetry in an attempt collapse the gap...to show the intricate connection between the two.

The last thing that I need to be sure to impress upon you before you read my collection of poetry is that although nature is important, it is certainly not the only place in which one can find moments of deeper meaning. Since our lives are grounded in the natural world—we *are* part of nature—they can also create such heightened experiences. In fact, one of the greatest haiku masters, Matsuo Bashō, found these sorts of moments in his everyday life and wrote about them. Bashō took a great number of journeys throughout his life, and he kept a sort of diary on each one. Those 'diaries' are now known as his travel journals. The entries in the journals are written in haibun format. He wrote about places that he saw and people that he met in his travels, as well as experiences that he had. The overlying format to my book is adapted from this idea of the travel journal. I write short haibun passages that capture significant moments in the journey of my life. I hope that it takes you through some fun and powerful experiences of human existence. Bon Voyage!

*A Yellow*



*Dandelion*

Tiny hands clumsily reach for the spinning yellow ducks, hung carefully over her head only a few hours ago. Wide eyes dart back and forth, spying a single teddy bear at the end of the crib and a light blue blanket just out of reach. The baby girl giggles and stretches her feet up into the air to meet her hands. Noticing her pink footies for the first time, she tries to clasp the fuzzy slippers...but her pudgy arms cannot quite reach. Her outstretched fingers grab only air, and she wails. Two familiar faces appear over the edge of her wooden home. Quickly forgetting about her attempt to capture her own foot, she smiles and gurgles as two soft, white hands reach down to sweep her up into a bed of fleshy warmth. As she loses herself in the familiar scent, a sweeping melody escapes from her mother's lips...and her father's voice softly echoes the song from behind her mother's shoulder. "Sweet dreams 'til sunbeams find you..." Although she cannot understand what they are saying, she can feel the rhythm of the music, and the beautiful song slowly lulls her into a peaceful slumber.

cradle of twigs  
the robin guards  
her tiny blue egg

Locking her eyes on the gentle waves washing ashore, the girl strokes the turquoise nylon of her bathing suit. She sinks her feet more deeply into the sand with every rush of white-capped water and stands completely still...relishing the iciness of the lake despite the numbness of her toes. Off on the horizon, a tiny dot drifts on black water. As she watches the strange speck, it darts left, and two huge sails are silhouetted against a low orange sun. Bright purples and greens and reds replace the blue of the summer sky, and the child loses herself in the array of colors. Interrupting the girl's thoughts, a man's powerful voice calls out that it is time to leave. Merely glancing at him, she returns her attention to the lake and pauses for one last moment. She then turns her back on the icy lake and steps into the unexpected warmth of the dry sand. Walking to her mother, she grasps her hand and smiles as they begin their trek to the car. "So, did you have fun today?" The child doesn't answer. Instead, she just nods and peeks over her shoulder one last time to see the fiery sky and icy water fading into the distance.

Spring sunrise  
the fox  
peeks out of his den

Distant orange flames playfully peek between the gaps in the pine trees and beckon the tiny camper through the deep blackness of night. Guided only by that glimmer of distant light and the soft murmur of familiar voices, she clings to her broken flashlight while her feet glide over the damp grass. Catching her toe on a stone, her feet slip out from beneath her...her hands fly forward attempting to catch her body, but her wrists cannot hold her up, and she lands softly on the grass. She can see the bright stars from her spot on the ground, and she eagerly returns to her feet...continuing toward the voices. She suddenly recognizes her father's song dancing over the tops of the trees...the sound invades her ears and fills her with life. Breaking into a run, the girl seems to fly over the grass with graceful ease until she reaches the end of the path and finds herself beside the campfire. Smiling quietly and glancing around her, she finds her father still singing along with the comforting strum of the guitar. She walks toward the dancing flames, sits down on his lap, and allows her mouth to form the words that time has etched into her mind. Cuddling closer to her father, she lays her head against his chest and feels his voice resonate...mixing and mingling with the beat of his heart...creating its own harmony.

midnight rain  
the squirrel  
finds his tree

The little queen stands proudly in her castle at the top of the hill. With the wind whipping through her curly, golden locks of hair, she surveys her kingdom below. She glances at the lush green field and locates her younger sister running back and forth across the grass in pursuit of a small, checkered ball. Her Majesty then turns her attention to the edge of the field until her eyes stumble across the yellow and white lawn chair belonging to her father. Observing his absence, however, she begins to scan the area beyond the maple trees in hopes of locating him. A waving hand catches her eye...the little queen has found him. With the breeze gently tickling her nose, her royal majesty closes her eyes, spreads her arms wide, and begins to run toward him. She reaches the bottom of the hill and grabs at the warmth of his body, yelling, "Daddy!" After a moment of silence, she hears an unfamiliar laugh and then a stranger's voice: "I'm not your daddy." The man laughs once again, and her face turns rosy as her heart quickens its pace. Skimming the crowd, she spies her father's blue jacket and immediately abandons the chuckling stranger. She keeps her eyes open this time as she runs safely into her father's arms. She no longer wants to be a queen...she only wants to be a child, with her rosy cheeks invisible to the strange, giggling man.

lone bear cub  
powerful paws stumble  
over jagged rock

Slowly sipping cranberry juice from her father's wine glass, she carefully balances herself on the high barstool. With her skinny legs dangling in mid-air, she playfully flirts with the invisible, yet handsome stranger seated beside her. She asks him for a light and carefully raises a candy cigarette to her lips to take a long, slow drag. After releasing the smoke from between her pursed lips, she casually casts him a sexy smile in hopes of seduction. Pulling her gaze away from his blue eyes for a moment, the girl then turns to the bartender and asks for another glass of wine. She refills her drink and pays the bartender with pink monopoly money. The small child then turns back to the handsome man...who remains silent.

edge of the nest  
the tiny bird stretches  
unfeathered wings

Laying out her light blue sleeping bag at the top of the carpeted staircase, the small child's glowing eyes meet her younger sister's and the two of them laugh as they continue to perfect the placement of the blue satin. She tugs at the corners of the bag one last time and carefully lowers herself on top of it. Her sister plops down behind her and waits patiently for the signal. "On your marks...get set...GO!!!" she screams. Throwing their arms out beside them, the two small children frantically push at the brown carpet...inching the sleeping bag over the edge of the top stair. The little girls' mouths grow wide as the sleeping bag flies down the staircase. Squealing and giggling with every bump, the two girls suddenly hit the bottom and topple over...landing on top of one another, exploding into a fit of laughter, and rolling around on the floor. As the laughter begins to subside, the two girls glance at one another, and without a word their small hands drag the blue sleeping bag back to the top of the staircase.

summer breeze...  
two kittens wrestle  
in tall grass



Stepping cautiously onto the playground, she readjusts her bright red polyester skirt with shaking fingers. The fabric seems itchy and stiff compared to the smooth, cool feel of her worn blue jeans. Eyes darting around her, she scans the crowd of children... searching for his deep brown eyes and black hair. She spies him on the kickball court and moves toward the edge of the blacktop. Licking her heavily painted lips, she tastes the bitterness of the make-up and suddenly lifts her hand to wipe the taste away. She catches a glimpse of her reflection as she passes the window on the side of the school... she barely recognizes herself. Gazing enviously at the girls using twigs to dig up worms in the mud, the young girl sits carefully down on the blacktop and arranges her skirt neatly around her legs in case he should notice her watching.

clinging to a tree  
the chameleon's skin  
now brown

Trembling hands tightly clasp the newly polished silver of her flute as she cautiously inches out from behind the curtain. Afraid to lift her head, the small child fixes her gaze on the cuffs of her pants and the shiny black leather of her favorite shoes. She takes two deep breaths and raises her eyes...squinting in the sudden brightness of the lights. She rapidly scans the audience for her mother's face. Heart throbbing faster and blood pounding in her ears, she finally spots her mother's blonde hair and small frame in the very corner of the auditorium. She inhales deeply one last time and lifts the flute to her mouth. The cold metal resting on her chin vibrates as her breath begins to move through it. Out of the corner of her eye, she notices a grin growing across her mother's face, and she continues to play...allowing her fingers to fly over the keys. She finishes by flashing a quick smile to her audience and bending her legs awkwardly into a curtsy. She runs offstage...giggling.

gentle rainstorm  
an acorn falls  
from the sturdy oak

She slips easily between gaps in the crowd as she searches hopelessly for her locker. Pausing for a moment against the smooth, cool stone wall, she inhales deeply and then moves on. Her small feet carry her rapidly down the hallway and around the corner. Noticing a staircase to her left, she fights her way through the mass of people and slowly climbs the concrete steps. As she reaches the top, a tall boy in his football jersey knocks her books from her hands as he passes... sending her loose papers floating down the stairwell and her folders everywhere. She drops to her knees, scrambling to collect her papers from the floor. She raises her head only to find countless eyes fixed intently upon her. A single chuckle surfaces from the crowd, and it spreads from one person to the next until the hallway echoes with laughter. She suddenly abandons her books and runs back down the stairs, fighting her way through the laughter of the crowd. Resting her head gently against the cold metal of the bathroom stall, tears flow down her cheeks. *Sixth grade was better.*

first light...

a raccoon

hides from the sun

She carefully lowers herself onto her mother's lap and nestles her face in the comforting warmth of soap-scented skin. Her fingers caress the strands of long blond hair cascading over her mother's shoulder. She inhales deeply. As she exhales, her muscles release the day's stress and her mind relaxes. Beautiful strains of music begin to escape from her mother's lips, "Sweet dreams 'til sunbeams find you." The child opens her own mouth to join her mother and sing, "Sweet, sweet dreams that leave all worries far behind you." As their voices mingle in the darkened room, tears begin to trickle down her cheek, and she slowly drifts into a peaceful state of unconsciousness.

old, dusty cave  
solid rock  
keeps hail out

At the far end of a deserted lunch table, the girl carefully studies the colorful graffiti covering the dark brown wood. She deciphers various pictures, names, and dates, until her eyes stop on one particular name...her own. Reading the carefully carved sentence, "Brindin is a loser," she sighs deeply and her eyes begin to burn as she fights back tears. She shifts her gaze from the hateful marking on the table to her lunch sack and unrolls the crinkled brown paper. Removing her cheese sandwich from its plastic bag, she hears whispers and laughter coming directly from the table behind her. Heat begins to invade her cheeks, and a single tear escapes down her face...but she quickly raises her hand to wipe it away. The laughter continues to grow. She takes one bite of her food and carefully returns it to the brown lunch sack. Gathering her books and rising to her feet, she suddenly feels a strong blow to the back of her head. She reaches her fingers up and peels a piece of sausage pizza off of her golden blonde hair. Fiery eyes stare at the slice of pizza as she breaks into a full run toward her safe haven, the bathroom stall...the echo of laughter behind her.

forest of trees  
in the shade...  
a yellow dandelion

Slipping her skinny white arms through the sleeves of her new shirt, she easily slides the cool fabric over her head and observes herself in the mirror. She reaches for a pair of earrings from her jewelry box as she lowers herself onto the plastic stool facing her vanity. With unsteady fingers, she clasps the earrings into place and observes herself one last time. Her flowing blonde hair, tied tightly behind her head in a long, wavy ponytail, follows the curve of her pasty white neck and cascades over her shoulder...shimmering brightly in the light as it curls around the curve of a tiny breast. Raising a small tube of lipstick, the girl carefully applies a thin layer of bright red paint to her mouth...and smiles at her reflection. She runs out the door before her mother can see her, and she seems to float down the street as she reaches the crosswalk. Approaching the dreaded brick building, she does not flinch. She raises her head high and walks steadily to the door. They won't laugh at her today...they can't. She looks like the girls in the magazines...beautiful, for the first time in her life.

gentle breeze...  
a seagull soars  
over dark waters

Drops of chlorinated water race down her rosy cheeks, momentarily clinging to her chin before crashing to the concrete floor below. A smile slowly creeps across her soft, wet lips as she stares at the vision of a bird painted in a mound of frosting. The flickering candles captivate her as the flames gently dance over the yellow icing. She squeezes her eyes shut as her mind searches for the perfect wish. Unable to select only one, she inhales deeply and blows with all of her might as she whispers almost inaudibly, "I wish for more wishes." She glances at her friends and family through the rising smoke of the extinguished flames. Suddenly, she scurries her bare feet over the cold concrete back to the swimming pool. Before the cake has even been sliced, the child immerses herself in the warm water, leaving behind only a trail of white bubbles on the surface.

rising sun...  
a single red leaf  
dances in the wind

Last

Night's



Frost



She brushes tiny strands of her golden hair back into place as she peeks out of the car window and scans the vast concrete of the junior-senior parking lot. Opening the door and slinging her backpack over her fleshy shoulder, the teenager looks at her older sister. Deep brown eyes smile back at her, and she takes her first step toward the enormous building. Her eyes grow even wider as she moves closer and closer to the double doors. She breathes in deeply one last time before passing into the expansive hallway. She keeps her eyes down as she mutters a soft goodbye to her sister and follows the row of lockers...searching for the number B500 and repeatedly chanting 8-10-34 under her breath. Spying her locker on her left, a smile slowly spreads its way across her face...*No asshole to knock my books out of my hands this time.*

trembling legs  
...the calf  
remains standing

A trail of tiny bubbles rises to the surface of the pool as she glides easily through the cool, blue water. Feeling for the cement wall with outstretched hands, the girl's lungs begin to ache and she immediately breaks the surface of the waves and inhales deeply. Her long blonde hair plasters itself to her cheeks as she rises to her feet in the shallow water. The girls on the bench stare at her as she chokes and gags on the fumes of the chlorine that are filling her tired lungs and reddening her eyes. Turning her attention to her own navy blue swimsuit, she suddenly notices a splash of red in the water directly beneath her. Slowly creeping out of her suit, the drop spreads and disappears in the pool like a drop of food coloring in water. Her eyes widen in amazement, and she stares at the curious rivulet of red as it swirls aimlessly beneath her young body.

blur of orange  
the monarch  
leaves his cocoon

Sticky palms cling to the back of her satin dress as their bodies sway together to the beat of the music. Careful not to step on his toes as they glide over the slick gymnasium floor, she nuzzles her face into his neck and inhales the strong scent of soap and cologne. She feels his fingers begin move gently across the small of her back, and strange shivers shoot uncontrollably through her entire body. Raising her head off of his shoulder, she tries to will the shivers away...until her eyes meet his. She leans forward as he presses his soft lips onto hers, and she completely freezes. Every muscle in her body tenses...but only until his fingertips sweep over her lower back. Tasting the wetness and warmth of his lips, she allows her muscles to relax...and she loses herself entirely in her first kiss.

warm sun  
last night's frost...  
water

Collapsing quietly onto rough brown carpet, her eyes scan the sea of silent bodies scattered over the sanctuary floor. The early light of morning peeks in through the window above her and spotlights her hazel eyes. Too tired to shield them from the sun, she squeezes them tightly shut and licks her dry, cracked lips. As the sun finds its way behind a gray cloud on the horizon she allows her muscles to relax in this softer light of morning. Just as her mind slips into the haze of sleep, her sister gently pokes her in the side with the tip of her foot. "Good Morning Ugly! It's time for breakfast!" Cursing her sister's perkiness, she groans loudly as she painfully rises to her feet. She joins the army of red-eyed, groggy teenagers headed down the steps to the kitchen, vowing that at the next youth conference, she would actually sleep. A small smile crosses her rosy lips as she remembers the fun she had the previous night...then again, not sleeping is more exciting.

drooping branches...  
the weeping willow  
greet the dawn

Darting between harsh, heavy raindrops, the volunteers run from their trailers to the partially constructed church for protection from the torrential downpour. The frightened teenager among them scampers to a remote corner of the building, trying to shield herself from the strong gusts of wind billowing through it. She glances out the window, and her eyes grow wide at the vision of small oak held horizontal by the wind. The tiny tree's roots cling to the earth as it fights for survival. All of a sudden, she hears shouting from the next room. She darts beneath the insulation as it falls from the ceiling...she had hung that insulation only hours before with the help of her sister. Reaching the crowd of people, she spots one volunteer standing outside in the storm...shampooing his hair. She laughs quietly to herself and runs outside into the pelting raindrops, steadying herself against the raging wind. She turns up her face as she spins under the threatening black clouds. Her sister then runs to join her and the two girls laugh as they grab hands and twirl in the storm...finding peace where they had only found fear moments ago.

barren landscape  
a tornado waltzes  
amid the destruction

Staring intensely at the sleek black telephone, she moves her trembling hand toward the receiver. She pauses, glancing again at the note clasped tightly in her opposite fist. She opens that note for the two-hundredth time and carefully rereads the words: "I think you're pretty cool. Give me a call sometime." Hardly poetic...but her heart catches in her throat each time that she reads them. Looking further down the page, she sees the phone number with his name scrawled just below. She refolds the note and reaches quickly for the telephone before she can change her mind...again. She dials the number and breathes deeply as the phone rings on the other end...once, twice, three times...then she suddenly hears a voice...*his* voice...warm, deep, and alluring. "Hello?" Her body freezes, she cannot breathe...she cannot even move the tips of her fingers. She hangs up quickly before answering him and cries...allowing her tears to stream freely down the curves of her face. After drying her tears, she pulls out the note again, rereads the words, and picks up the phone...she *would* say hello.

tiny shadow  
the groundhog  
runs for cover

Her deep, hazel eyes observe the curves and crevices of a maturing body... flabby arms, pudgy stomach, cottage cheese thighs, enormous ass. "Be careful or you'll soon be growing out instead of up," her mother's words echo in her mind. The reflection in the mirror is proof of just that. Tears wind down the bloated cheeks and double chin that cruelly reflect themselves back at her in the dusty, bedroom mirror. She grabs the roll on her stomach as tears explode down her face...her heartbeat pounding like thunder in her chest and her anger flasheing in the heat of her eyes. She collapses on the bed and every muscle of her body melts in exhaustion. When the worst of the storm has passed, the girl looks into the mirror again at a face she hardly recognizes...the face of a stranger. She swears off food except for one salad each afternoon and promises herself that she will exercise two or three times a day. She wants so badly to be thin, to be beautiful. She wants a body that she can flaunt and be proud of, a body that will attract boys and look ravishing on the cover of a magazine...anything but this.

firefly jar  
tiny wings beat  
against cold glass

Toes dangling over the edge of the canyon, the gentle breeze tickles her face as a drop of sweat slowly creeps down her back, carving its path between her shoulder blades. Exhausted from the hike, she sighs deeply, inhaling the scent of red clay and dust. A miniature tree, over one thousand feet below her, clings to the canyon wall with its tiny roots, as if terrified of losing its grip and crashing into the river below. Faintly in the distance, the rush of water sings a lullaby to the sun as it descends behind a wall of red earth. A chill night wind replaces the warmth of the desert sun, and a shiver tiptoes up her spine. As the dark of night slowly devours the beauty of the Grand Canyon, the rushing sound of the river grows louder, and she pulls her toes away from the edge...tucking them beneath her for warmth. She closes her eyes and wishes the rest of the world away. She has found peace in the canyon...and in herself.

starless night  
a quiet lullaby  
mingles with the shadows



Red caps and yellow tassels decorate the otherwise empty gymnasium floor as the girl enters the room with her closest friends. Her eyes grow wide at the enormous number of people that she has never met in her four years. White stick legs poking out from beneath her gown, she glances angrily at her nylons wishing that they would somehow make her legs look thinner and longer for her walk down the aisle. Looking eagerly around her, she tries to absorb all of the activity and excitement in the room as she takes her seat. Desperately attempting to straighten a crease in her robe as the valedictorian rambles on about the future and unseen opportunities that lie ahead for each of them, she notices the ropes around her neck are tangled. Once she has pulled them apart and adjusted them perfectly, she leisurely leans back in her folding chair and waits to hear her name...waits for her chance to walk down the aisle...patiently waits to get the hell out of high school.

barren branch...  
the last leaf  
floats to the ground

In a dingy, cluttered office, the girl gingerly twirls the strands of her long blonde hair around the tips of her fingers. She shifts her weight on the worn padding of the office chair as she glances once more at the clock on the wall. After reviewing her application one last time, she sinks more deeply into the chair and exhales loudly. Finally, a round, middle-aged woman wearing a red vest lumbers into the room. As the woman takes her seat, the girl surveys her interviewer's tired eyes, overgrown nose, frizzy hair, and droopy lips. *What a depressing way to start summer vacation*, she thinks as the woman rudely reaches across the desk and snatches the application out of the girl's delicate hands.

Summer sun  
grapes shrivel  
on the vine

She runs across the crowded room to meet her friends and smiles as she takes a seat across from her younger sister. Avoiding the food in the center of the table, she reaches out her skinny arm to grab for a glass of orange juice. The people at the table cringe and put down their plates at the vision of skin clinging to nothing more than bone. They stare more intently at the gaunt cheekbones and sunken chest of a once plump and happy friend. An awkward silence fills the room. Sensing their eyes upon her, the small girl rapidly withdraws her arm without having reached the orange juice. Her cheeks turn a fiery red and her eyes carefully study a grass stain on the knee of her baggy jeans. Her younger sister suddenly breaks the silence, "Your arm looks gross. You're too skinny." The girl mumbles some awkward sentences about not being too thin and runs from the table. Too skinny? No...that's impossible. She glances down at her chubby, bloated body for the fifth time in the last fifteen minutes...impossible.

salty, sea air...  
a flickering flame  
against the raging wind

Sinking her feet deeply into warm sand, she silently surveys the crowded beach. She spies a group of seagulls at the water's edge, and moves toward the icy waves rushing into shore. A bucket of dinner scraps in hand, she takes her seat only a few feet from the flock and begins to create a trail of food that will lead the birds closer to her body. The seagulls smell the fish and bread and begin to cautiously inch toward her, stopping every few inches to fluff their white feathers. Finally, one of the bravest birds gathers up enough courage to dart to her hand, steal the food, and then run away. He rejoins the members of his group and fights them for his meal. She smiles at the skill and grace of that majestic bird as she refills her hand with food. One by one, the birds carefully approach her. Once the flock has eaten its fill, the birds take flight over the rough waters of the ocean... becoming tiny specks on a shimmering blue horizon.

gentle rain  
tiny droplets  
feed the hungry earth

Escaping from thoughts of college and leaving the people she loves the most, she runs against the pounding raindrops and vicious wind. Clothes plastered to her small frame, she gradually moves deeper into the vast blackness of the night sky. Although the grass is slippery and wet beneath her feet, she glides gracefully over the open field, finding peace in her solitude. Catching her toe on an invisible stone, she flies forward and finds herself lying in a mudpuddle. She screams at the sky, and sobs begin to shake her small body. Glancing down at her white fingers caked in brown earth, her tears quickly subside and she quietly begins to smile. Her smile turns into a giggle...into gentle laughter...into shrieks of delight. She finds her freedom beneath the night sky...crying salty tears that mingle with the raindrops and flow back to the earth...the brown earth that now covers her body.

winding river  
even the rapids  
lead to calm waters

Untamed

River



Staring blankly at the moving images on the t.v. screen, she picks at the dry lettuce leaves on her plate. *Another day wasted*, she thinks, as she lifts the remote control off the bed. After clicking through a few more channels, she presses the red power button and hurls the remote across the room. She locks her eyes onto the mirror and stands to study her reflection. As she lifts her shirt, she can see her enormous gut poking out from above the edge of her jeans. Interrupted by a knock on the door, the girl flinches and drops her shirt. She runs to her desk, frantically searching for the computer's power button so she can pretend to be busy. Just as she locates it, she hears another knock...a little louder this time. "Yeah?" she casually answers. "Hi Bri...it's me," peeps a small voice from behind the door. *Damn it...it's that girl from down the hall again.* The doorknob begins to turn and a tiny girl with curly brown hair and deep olive skin pokes her head through a slivered opening. "Can I come in?" she asks quietly. "If you want." She exhales deeply and carefully slides the remnants of her salad under the bed with her foot. "I suppose you want to talk again."

still blue water  
a soft breeze  
...ripples

Entering a dingy back door, she gags on the scent of sweat, beer, and vomit. Her heart pounds in her chest as a swarm of drunken men eye her lustfully... whistle and holler behind her... grab her ass. Her eyes swim over a sea of unfamiliar faces, and she wishes she had stayed home tonight. But, here she is... surrounded by sweaty, hormone crazed, frat boys with only a tiny girl with curly brown hair for protection. She allows herself to be pulled down the basement steps, not wanting to be left alone. At the bottom of the stairs, she discovers a crowded "dance floor" filled with drunken bodies bumping to the beat of the music. Her eyes grow wide as she walks into the middle of the crowd and slowly begins to move her own body to the beat. Awkwardly, she bounces from drunk to drunk ...wishing she were a drinker too. Sweaty and tired of being humped by disgusting men, she tells her friend she is leaving. Stepping out into the chill of an October night, she gazes at her feet the entire way home... watching them crunch leaf after leaf after leaf.

flock of geese  
one bird  
trails behind



“I need to move on. I still love you, but I’m not *in* love with you.” Even as the words escaped from her lips, she could sense how cliché they were. It was as if she had stolen them directly from the mouth of some star in a sappy, romantic flick about a washed-up love affair. Now, sitting in this strange new man’s bedroom, she smiles at the echo of those words in her mind...the craziness of it all. Responding to the creek the door, the girl drops the smile from her mouth and bites her lower lip. A young man with brown hair and baby blue eyes slides up next to her on the bed. He wraps his arms around her and lays her body down. The young woman loses herself momentarily in a tangle of limbs and the cool, slippery feel of his lips. The man slowly starts to trail his hand down to her penguin covered pajama pants, but she grabs his wrist. “I’m sorry. We’re done here...I’m done.” Picking up her discarded sweatshirt from the floor, she slips out the door before the boy can even respond.

sticky thread  
the spider...  
and her prey

Clutching his tennis racket in one hand, her new love interest moves his glistening, muscular body through the front door of the tiny apartment. The woman sits with her legs tucked up beneath her on a barstool in the kitchen, and she observes him with cold, guarded eyes as he walks into her living room. He immediately gravitates toward the warmth of the kitchen stove and the sweet scent of freshly baked cookies rising from the cooling racks on the cluttered counter. “She’s not here.” The words burst forth from her lips before she even realizes that she has opened her mouth to speak. “I’m not here to see *her*,” he replies. “I saw you walk by the tennis courts, and I wanted to say hello.” Still standing in front of the counter, the young man moves his eyes around the room until finally fixing them onto her face. She feels a sudden rush of warmth in her cheeks, and she pulls her gaze down to her school books scattered on the kitchen counter. After a moment, she raises her eyes once again to meet his, and the corners of her lips pull themselves into a nearly imperceptible grin.

frozen pond  
a warm sun  
softens the surface

Almost midnight. Her hands tightly grip the coffee cup as she rambles on about her family, Swedish food, and anything else that might fill the silence in the restaurant. His eyes survey her as she talks, and she squirms slightly under his gaze. As the conversation comes to a break, she bends toward her plate, examining her half-eaten slice of pumpkin pie. Setting down her mug, the girl picks up her fork to force down one more bite of pure fat. The young man begins to cough again, cursing under his breath before asking her another question about her life. *He certainly is easy to talk to*, she thinks as she opens her mouth again to speak. Just as sound escapes her lips, however, the man holds up a finger as if to stop her, and she patiently waits as he coughs uncontrollably for another thirty seconds. Once he has finished, he motions for her to continue, and she does. Staring at her paper placemat, the salt and pepper shakers, the ketchup bottle, and the tiny packets of sugar, she speaks for a few more minutes. After she has finished, she looks up into his light blue eyes and freezes. Blood pulsing furiously through her body, she cannot move or take her eyes away.

all night...  
crickets chirp.  
silence at dawn

Hunching over a semester's worth of notes, folders, handouts, and homework assignments lying sprawled on her bedroom carpet, she rubs her red eyes and grabs for the coffee cup. She swallows the last of her caffeine fix and rises to her feet. She stretches her arms into the air and then flops herself into the cold, hard chair in front of her computer. *Perhaps I should have read some of the material this semester,* she thinks as she runs her fingers carelessly over the keyboard. Glancing once again at the teacher's study guide, the young woman's vision blurs...creating one solid gray mass of unfamiliar names, places, and musical compositions. She rubs her eyes again to clear her vision. Suddenly, her roommate rushes into the room and screams, "No more studying! It's family Christmas time!" Knowing she cannot argue, she allows her roommate to drag her into the living room...abandoning her books for the chance to decorate the tiny, plastic Christmas tree, listen to carols, and laugh uncontrollably over all of the latest gossip. Soon the carols morph into the old Michael Jackson medley, and the girls begin to dance...screaming and laughing as they pull themselves onto the bar stools. Swaying her hips to the music as she hollers and balances herself on the narrow seat of the stool, she giggles away the thought of the unfinished study guide and her bitch of a final in only six hours.

2 a.m.  
wolves come out  
...to play

Her tongue slipping gently over the familiar curves and crevices of his smooth white skin, the young woman moves her body to the rhythm of his heartbeat. Covered in sweat, she glides easily across his stomach...pressing her feet against the bed frame for support. Whispered "I love you's" disappear into the darkness of the room as she savors the taste of his glistening neck and the salty flavor of his soft, warm lips. He breathes more heavily against her ear, and she moves more quickly to match the increase of his pulse. Hips thrust faster...tongues tangle...more "I love you's" disappear into blackness. She bites her lower lip to keep it from quivering. His body begins to shake, and his moans grow louder as she digs her hands deeper into his flesh. They both cry out as they reach orgasm, and every nerve in her body seems to explode. He collapses on top of her, and lies still for a few minutes. After one final "I love you," the woman's eyelids grow heavy. Lulled by the slowing rhythm of his breath, she falls easily into the soothing silence of sleep.

summer sun  
winding vines cradle  
the blue jay's nest

Clasping the needle between her teeth, she giggles uncontrollably at the overweight actor rapping along with his CD... bouncing his belly to the beat of the song...waving the cowardly lion's unfinished tail through the air. "Daddy gone craaaazy," he continues to rap as he sits back down at his sewing machine to wind a new bobbin of light brown thread. She returns her attention to her munchkin bootie and runs through a few of her spoken lines for the show. Realizing how sick she is of the wicked witch, munchkins, the scarecrow, and the tin man, she looks to the clock for help. 2 am...damn summer stock theater and its eighteen hour work days. All she can think about now is returning to her soft bed and snuggling up to the warmth of her boyfriend's sleeping body, but *he's* covered in paint and using a power drill in the set shop. She has to keep going. Finishing her munchkin bootie, she tosses it aside, and picks up the tin man's costume for relief from the monotony of mass bootie production. Suddenly, she gets an idea and runs to the stereo, turning up the volume. She puts on the tin man's metallic panties over her shorts and jumps onto the sewing table, screaming the words to the song as she violently shakes her hips.

2:18am...dance break.

hot desert sands  
suddenly cool  
with rain

Collapsing on the cool wood of the kitchen floor, she curls her body into a tight ball as her cheeks flash a fiery red. "I'll eat when I'm hungry, just leave me the hell alone!" Her lover lowers himself to the ground, lifts her face to his, and tries to hold her...but she just pushes his arms away from her trembling body. After a moment's pause, she turns to look at him and her eyes lock onto his. "I know I am better. I'm eating more...but I just want to be normal." No longer able to sit upright, the young woman can feel her body collapse into convulsions. She falls into the warmth of her lover's arms. Lying on the kitchen floor and sobbing, she feels like a child...afraid to be alone...afraid of her own shadow...terrified by her own thoughts. She only cries for a few minutes, though...she has shed too many tears for this disease...no more. Once her muscles can support her, she returns to her feet and begins to boil water for spaghetti. She would eat a full meal tonight. *No more tears, no more battles...I love who I am. It's time to live like I do.*

under the maple  
sunlight  
chases shadow

The strains of a familiar melody seep through the crack below the bathroom door and echo off the cold tile walls. She runs her hands under cool water as she hums along...letting her body absorb its rhythm, its sound, its sense of peace. *The first time that the words "I love you" ever passed from between his lips, this song was playing.* Grabbing the hand towel and quickly wiping the dampness from her skin, she pushes open the heavy wooden door. She realizes that the lights have been dimmed, and she can see a single, glowing candle on the corner of his fold out card table. Her lover moves toward her. He reaches for her body and leads her to the sofa in silence. Settling into the scratchy, worn-out cushions, she smiles. He pulls out a small wrapped box, and her eyes grow wide as she tears away the paper and bow. Delicately lifting the cardboard lid, she spies a tiny ring box. Her eyes glisten as shaking fingers pull at the soft gray, velvet. She opens it. *A diamond...boly shit...it's a diamond!* Shifting her gaze to her lover's face, she watches him lick his lips and say, "Will you marry me?" Throwing her arms around his neck, she pulls him as close to her as she can...still not close enough. "Yes," she whispers into his ear, "yes."

untamed river  
carving its path  
in solid ground