

Alex Butler

## Street corner time

Right before God died, she sat up and said something like this: “What creatures do I have before me? What are these wonderful things?” Her eyes were still alive as she curled to the floor like a wet towel. We were in the alley down by the corner. There were three of us. I guess it wasn’t my place to judge her, and I shouldn’t have said those awful things. But now, well, there she was, right in front of me – not blinking, eyes always open. I tried to take my eyes off of her, but there was no chance it... She lowered her brow and I was there. Veins dripped with sweat of dew in the cascading web of red around me. Still that eye. No one was around anymore. She was toying with me. All in a moment, she was a tigress, an ant, a bee. Closer and closer. A lion. A red panda. Closer still. An oak. The eye was pulsating, throbbing and red. It was touching my forehead. She kept moving closer. Let me in, Let me in - she spoke with a soft wind. Let me in and forever I will let you call me you.

**THE EARTH WOULD STILL REMAIN SOLID**  
A SESTINA

As I pull on the loose string, caught, the solid  
ground stares right at me, laughing. The  
cord is stuck on his left zipper, the German who remains  
on my back, the tandem instructor, and we fly fast to earth  
whizzing, whistling into a breath, my eyes still  
watering with tears. Margaret, my love, what would

you say to me right now? Tightening in my chest. Would  
God put out her hand and help with the weight? This man is solid,  
a good 200 pounds of human, a heart attack victim still  
carrying my only hope on his back, and I'm frantic to tear the  
fucking bag wide open. 15,000 feet to Earth.

Christ, my Body. What will remain?

But another question: just what will they do with my remains?  
Will my legs be a stain? My arm? A piece of my foot? I would  
have never done this if it wasn't for her. Oh God. Earth.  
God, she was beautiful. Her legs in the tub, all wet. Jesus. A solid  
50 seconds of freefall, they said. Hell, I might be the  
only person falling through air right now. All the way around, maybe. Still,  
my arms writhe around with the zipper. We're way off course. Seconds still  
to go. Maybe 12. My legs are twitching but my arms remain  
locked behind me, the air is powerful. It pulls vomit to the  
back – I've spit up without even thinking. Would  
his weight just crush me? Am I going to feel his solid,  
heavy, Germanic frame enter into mine when we meet earth?

God Maggie, I love you. I do. Your calves. You should see this; the Earth.

I'm sorry we fought. God, I love you. If you were here, still,  
that's what I'd say. Love. Know it. Know it. Some solid  
images now; a car, a couple walking on the road. I remain  
in air, hung above them. I will die and they will live. It would  
hurt. It will hurt bad. Let there be a heaven, please, for the

good. God forgive me. Her throat, that smell of roses. The  
way we would hide between the sheets. The earth  
is solid. Shit, way off course. Physics and gravity would  
end this. I love you. This fucking German. She asked me to jump. Still  
I keep thinking, asking myself what will remain.  
No more tears, no more tears, please, be solid.

Asphalt, it looks like. A street. Am I yelling? 120 miles an hour. It doesn't matter.  
Be positive. Life was good, think about love. Maybe a yard. Here it comes. Maggie.

Breathe in. Breathe in.

## POWER CORRUPTS

### A SESTINA

Dripping soft strings loop around the bottom voice  
Rain patters as everything turns dark, falling bare  
pure drips drops like fat business men all holding in explosions  
in their eyes and stomachs, leaving their streets for the underground  
this troubled world of process, land, and fire  
each abstract poetic reaching for some fame and control

over what happens next, belting out those hot words of control  
driving speed beeps screeches the lining of the throat and voice  
strain your words to act wiry, on fire  
yah yah yah here it is that burning blue bear, bare  
howl for my friends of a lost generation told the underground  
rickety split wipes the mouth spittle speck of explosions

and it's heard. It howls again, more marks of explosion,  
the room is getting very adult and very hot – wine is the last control  
letting us slip into gaudy silliness with jazz blaring from underground,  
the cellos and bass and bwah and cutcutcut! black tar voice  
speaking in jolts, sporadic dances like the rain bare  
who pelts the bear of each and every moon ghost fire

On the television set a monkey, our Judas, sits with fire  
making a deal with it, marketing with deaths and explosions  
too big to forget. He is tight-knit with a tie and bare  
fists pounding on a podium which everyone tries to ignore, labeled “Control  
Your Tears.” Democracy calls your attention while voices  
are gagged and all intellect makes a run for the underground

Bedazzled, wiry, feather plumes jut overacrossunderground  
Sitting crosslegged, our fit dipped in acid, fire  
on one end and a fool on the other, brazen crass voices  
Crickle and crack and leak to the explosions  
Of our past, out of wombs, out of skin, into white control  
Let the mothership fly, it's only halftime still empty and bare

unclean plagues and sick hearts lie with crowns, still Bare.  
Feeling real dirty emerges the underground  
Basted and peppered with drops of control  
Rained, guttered out of minds light ablaze, on fire  
in the parking lots of congress as it Explodes  
and all points lead to me to my lost voice.

Naked, bare eyes burn and drop, the glob of fire  
bury the Underground into everything, the explosions beg the  
voice to lose control and, still, ask to let the mothership fly.

**BLACK WHEN THE SKY OPENED UP**  
A SESTINA

Right to the bone it cuts straight up  
the spine, the piercing chill air as it makes black  
of my sight. Pores and tips rip wide open.  
I stand a statue of instinctive isolation when  
the heavens decided to hack a hole in the sky  
and let the ice flow into the mouths, the

eyes, the lungs of its children. The  
frigid air was filling my lungs in big gulps, up  
strokes – stars make a jewelry display case of the sky,  
glimmering small specks litter the black  
openness, the discarded remnant of when  
cosmic times were better and prosperous, opening

up. I had dropped my cigarette and it opened,  
pieces of brown cancer peppered, and I increased the  
size of my step. Ambers had fizzled and fled when  
paranoia hit, the black beast smiling from somewhere up  
above, staring. The only moment my black  
eyes question anything, and it seems to stem from the sky,

that huge dinnerplate of thought. It all begins with the sky  
and ends with it. Its our abyss with it's eyes opened  
so wide, staring right back. It's a dogged fight with blackness,  
to compete and build our thoughts to the  
top of the it, racing with it the whole way up  
into everything else. "It" being unknown, but when

we touch upon it, when we finally grasp it, when  
we all truly know, then it's simple: the sky  
will drop out. It will shrivel and dry up  
and fold in on itself. A giant gap would open  
and the white diamonds that once speckled the  
beast would tumble off its black

hide. Dribble over its hair, sloshing black  
drips. Shrugs and quits. Retires and sleeps. When  
all is said and nothing else is, the  
reality of this, will matter as much as a blue sky  
when all I see is black. I will tear your eyes open  
and hang you by your feet to show you which way is Up.

And this is how I felt, cold, alone, black when the sky opened up.

Alex Butler is currently a student of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. There, he worked as the assistant Arts&Living editor and was a frequent contributor to the student newspaper, The Daily Collegian. As an undergraduate, he looks forward to majoring in English with Departmental Honors and studying in Pau, France next fall. Over the January break, Alex plans on working as a temporary substitute teacher in his hometown of Wakefield, Massachusetts. His work will be featured at the annual Five-College Poetryfest in Amherst this year, on March 7, 2007.