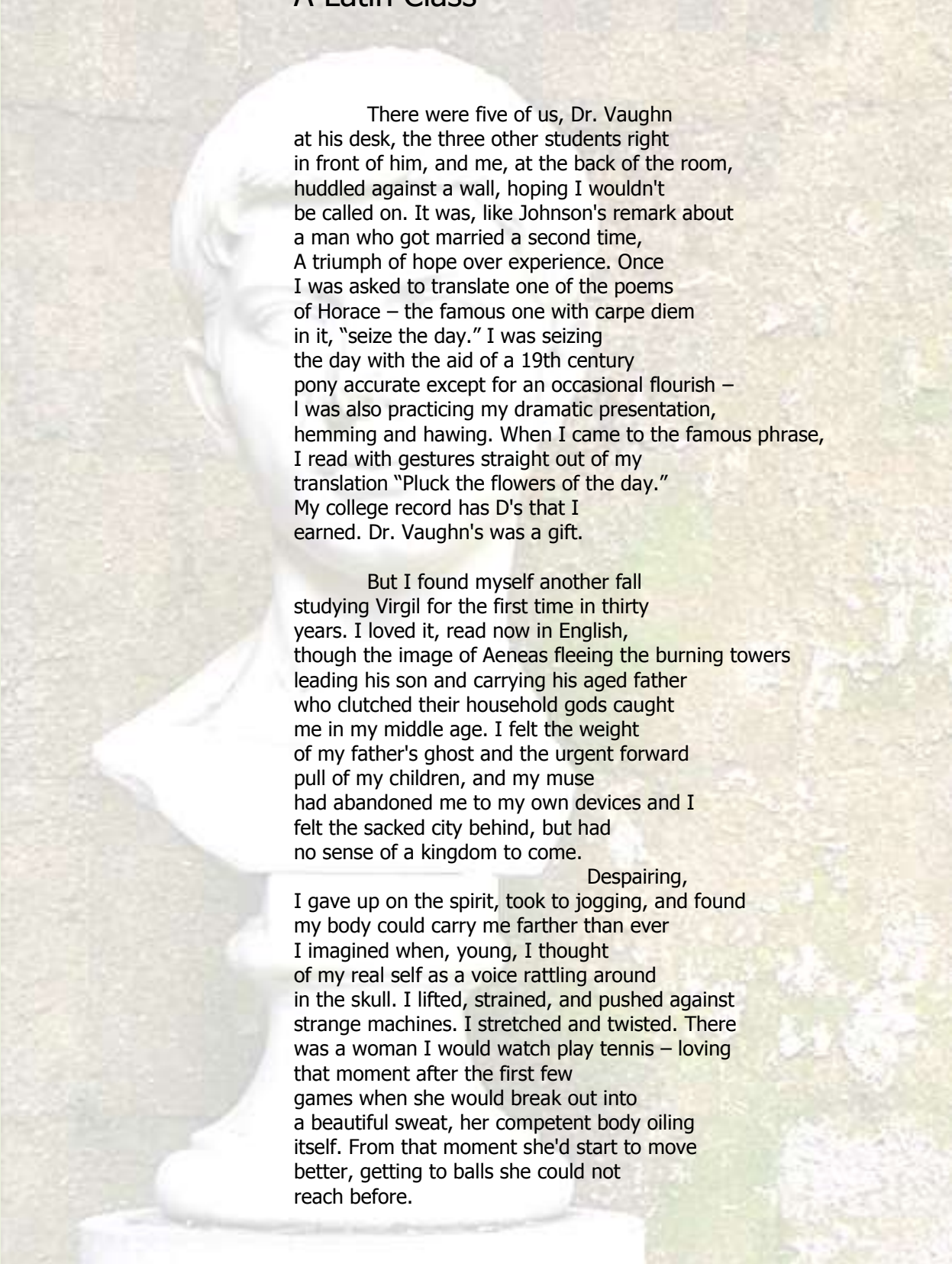


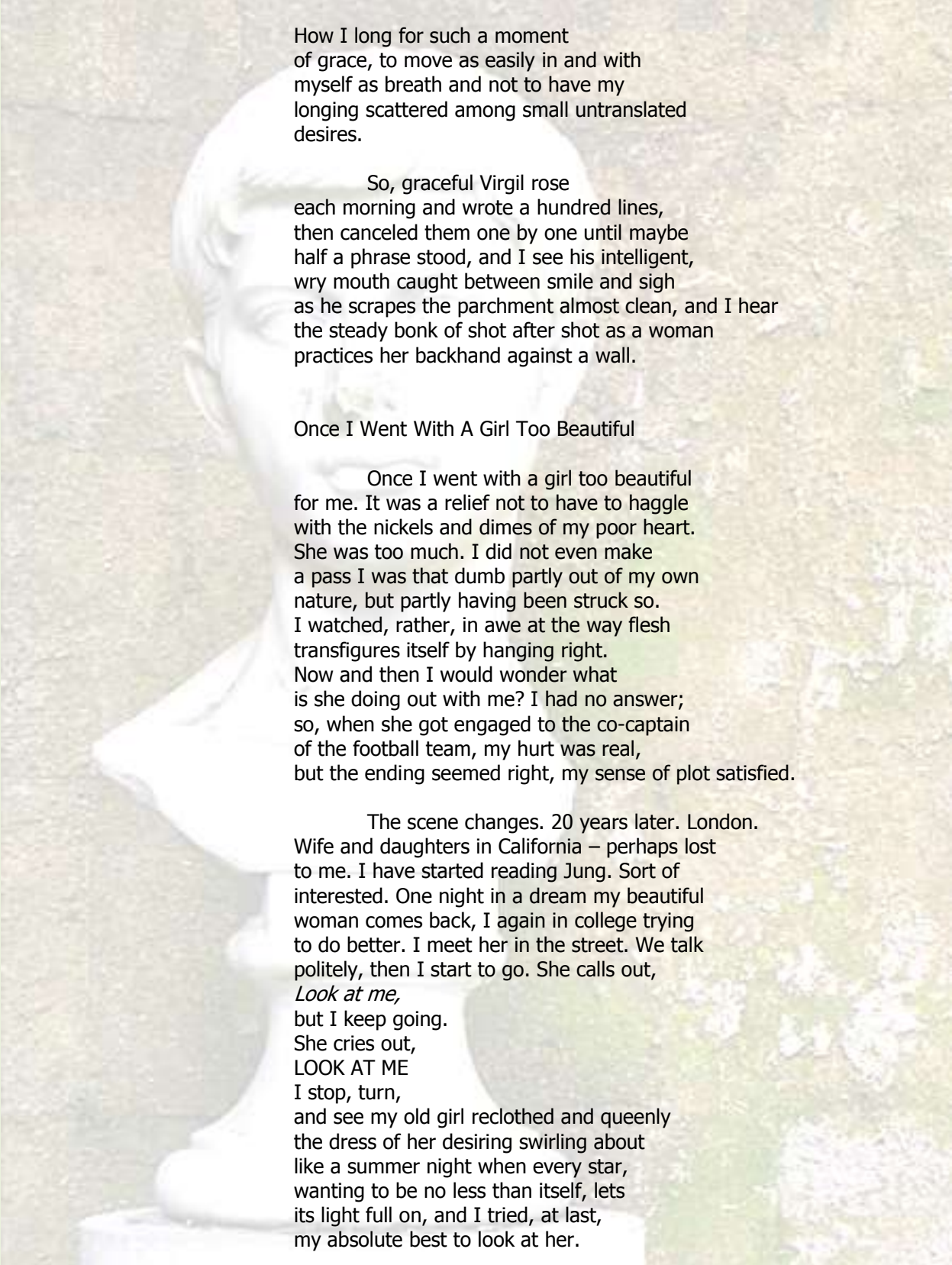
A Latin Class



There were five of us, Dr. Vaughn at his desk, the three other students right in front of him, and me, at the back of the room, huddled against a wall, hoping I wouldn't be called on. It was, like Johnson's remark about a man who got married a second time, A triumph of hope over experience. Once I was asked to translate one of the poems of Horace – the famous one with *carpe diem* in it, "seize the day." I was seizing the day with the aid of a 19th century pony accurate except for an occasional flourish – I was also practicing my dramatic presentation, hemming and hawing. When I came to the famous phrase, I read with gestures straight out of my translation "Pluck the flowers of the day." My college record has D's that I earned. Dr. Vaughn's was a gift.

But I found myself another fall studying Virgil for the first time in thirty years. I loved it, read now in English, though the image of Aeneas fleeing the burning towers leading his son and carrying his aged father who clutched their household gods caught me in my middle age. I felt the weight of my father's ghost and the urgent forward pull of my children, and my muse had abandoned me to my own devices and I felt the sacked city behind, but had no sense of a kingdom to come.

Despairing,
I gave up on the spirit, took to jogging, and found my body could carry me farther than ever I imagined when, young, I thought of my real self as a voice rattling around in the skull. I lifted, strained, and pushed against strange machines. I stretched and twisted. There was a woman I would watch play tennis – loving that moment after the first few games when she would break out into a beautiful sweat, her competent body oiling itself. From that moment she'd start to move better, getting to balls she could not reach before.



How I long for such a moment
of grace, to move as easily in and with
myself as breath and not to have my
longing scattered among small untranslated
desires.

So, graceful Virgil rose
each morning and wrote a hundred lines,
then canceled them one by one until maybe
half a phrase stood, and I see his intelligent,
wry mouth caught between smile and sigh
as he scrapes the parchment almost clean, and I hear
the steady bonk of shot after shot as a woman
practices her backhand against a wall.

Once I Went With A Girl Too Beautiful

Once I went with a girl too beautiful
for me. It was a relief not to have to haggle
with the nickels and dimes of my poor heart.
She was too much. I did not even make
a pass I was that dumb partly out of my own
nature, but partly having been struck so.
I watched, rather, in awe at the way flesh
transfigures itself by hanging right.
Now and then I would wonder what
is she doing out with me? I had no answer;
so, when she got engaged to the co-captain
of the football team, my hurt was real,
but the ending seemed right, my sense of plot satisfied.

The scene changes. 20 years later. London.
Wife and daughters in California – perhaps lost
to me. I have started reading Jung. Sort of
interested. One night in a dream my beautiful
woman comes back, I again in college trying
to do better. I meet her in the street. We talk
politely, then I start to go. She calls out,
Look at me,
but I keep going.
She cries out,
LOOK AT ME
I stop, turn,
and see my old girl reclothed and queenly
the dress of her desiring swirling about
like a summer night when every star,
wanting to be no less than itself, lets
its light full on, and I tried, at last,
my absolute best to look at her.