

PAUL HOSTOVSKY

LADDERS

Leaf-muck on the one hand,
 a great view on the other.
 All things being equal
 I like it up here where the air
 is clearer, and my thoughts
 are clearer, and this old
 ladder creaks and sways
 under me like a boat, my son
 text messaging his girlfriend
 with two thumbs and a foot
 on the bottom rung. My anchor.
 I can almost see his mother
 clear across New England (God
 bless her) in her own house now
 with her own leaf-muck clogging
 her downspouts and gutters.
 As Rainer Maria Rilke would say,
 you can't lean a ladder up
 against another ladder
 just because you're in love
 and want to make something out of it.
 What you need is a solitude
 as big as a house to sit in
 the middle. But we were young
 and in love and in a hurry and we
 took a running start—all the doors
 in the house flinging open as we flew
 through it and out toward each other,
 my ladder in my hands and her

ladder in her hands . . . And we
 kind of mucked it up on the one hand,
 but on the other we ended up with
 these two solitudes in autumn
 and this son with a cell phone
 calling up to me now, asking me what
 it's like up here, wanting to have a turn.