

# The Messenger

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## The Messenger, 2003

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the messenger  
the messenger





fig. 1. pecan



|Chris Creel

# The Messenger

## 2003

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# Moon

In all your brightness, burn  
like a vicarious utopia,  
virgin fricatrice of the stars;  
for in your eyes are the craters  
of my monochrome solipsism;  
you were there (yes?)  
when the first men peeked upward  
into the vaulted heavens,  
and here, as my eyes close  
over the atramentous pages.  
And elsewhere, in between,  
ever vigilant and ever stuck,  
like a raspberry seed  
in solar teeth

*By Samuel Keyes*

# On the Priesthood

I dream a house in life I will not see:  
Its marble, books, and silk and templed walls,  
Holy, chandeliers, colored glass, and halls,  
All corridors and well-hung tapestries.  
I would, in spring, take garden strolls and think.  
In fall, recline, in winter, by the fire,  
And grant myself my meaningless desire.  
Raise herbs, and cook; Raise grapes, make wine, and drink.  
And there, within my sacred house, would I,  
Grow old! Grow old! And rest so splendidly,  
That I, delightfully, so carelessly,  
Could live amongst my memories and die.  
But, dream, I do; it is my sacrifice.  
I trade one paradise one paradise.

*By T.F.G. Warner*

# Jilted

i.

He met a girl.  
She was perfect  
And he was in  
Love. All was well  
Until he realized  
That perfect was just  
An adjective, begun  
With the pursing of  
One's lips, and love  
Was an extended  
Tango. The last time  
He tangoed he pulled  
A muscle; this was  
Much the same.



*Nora Pfeiffer* |



**ii.**

Finally ready to sleep with her;  
He had just crawled into their bed when  
She mentioned something about  
The lawn needing mowing. So,  
He readjusted his fig leaf and,  
With the hairs on his arms bristling,  
Tramped out of their garden.  
Muttering under his breath.

**iii.**

I have put on my knee-length trench-coat  
and am walking behind you two steps to one.  
Then, as I listen to you drip charming thoughts,  
a pebble becomes lodged in the tread of my shoe.  
Bending over to pick it out, it tells me there are  
many more where he came from. I look up and  
you are far down the path whistling something with  
a hint of red in it. As I run to catch up, the street  
vendor, selling baseball caps, and the pebble look  
after me with pity and nod to each other knowingly.

**iv.**

Maria always crossed her fingers when talking about  
Herself. Silently hoping, by some strange twist of fate with  
Perhaps a splash of luck, that someone else might find her as  
Interesting as she (and her father) did. And, as this new face  
Gazed across the table at her, it couldn't help but wonder  
About her schizophrenia. With luck and fate in the right  
Proportions, resembling a cocktail, it was intrigued  
By her habit and became quickly entranced by her twisting  
Digits. Unfortunately, she had no space for him  
Between her embracing fingers.

*By John Dunn*

# V-Day Massacres

By Karen Cahill

For as long as I can remember I have been a pioneer against St. Valentine's Day, a lone soldier in the coup d'état of all things pink and red and chocolate. It all started in the second grade when I tried to stage a revolt against the manufacturing of paper bag mailboxes. I figured the mailbox was the root of the evil and without it valentines would not be delivered. But I was wrong. Neither snow nor sleet nor lack of homemade receptacle stopped the children from passing them out. In the fourth grade I infiltrated playground society in an attempt to find out what make this holiday tick. I stayed up all night filling out Scooby Doo cards. *You're groovy. Will you be my mystery valentine?* How the hell was I to know that Scooby Doo was out and Hello Kitty was in? I was the laughingstock of the lunchroom that year. In fifth grade I successfully picked out that year's chic valentine, My Little Pony, but tripped on an M&M while delivering one to the cutest boy in Ms. Fallon's class, sending chocolate milk all over him and landing me on the tile floor under his desk with my days-of-the-week panties exposed to all. Infiltration was foiled again.

Junior high. It was customary to attend the school dance in the gym, appropriately decorated with the cheesiest of Valentine's paraphernalia. The girls and boys would separate like oil and water until the first slow song. That is when paranoia set in. If you weren't quick you could end up creating a social faux pas that could brand you "uncool" for the rest of the year. That would be dancing—if

you can even call it that, arms stretched out, barely touching your partner's shoulder, each shuffling one step to the right and one step to the left, all the while looking and talking to your best girl friend who was doing the same right next to you—dancing with the boy who still brought his lunch in a lunchbox or, even worse, the boy who wore sweatpants every day. I did plenty of reconnaissance work while appearing to be rockin' out to Tiffany and Michael Jackson and always strategically positioned myself as close as possible to my ideal shuffling partner. My cool status remained intact throughout the three tumultuous years of junior high, but I was still unsure of what all the V-day hype was about.

In high school, I let the pioneer in me take a backseat to the hormonal teenage girl. I figured V-day was as good a day as any to be ravished by that week's obsession. The worst occasion was sophomore year when my boyfriend of three weeks took me out. He thought it would be impressive to show me how he recently took up the habit of dipping. He put about a half a tin of cherry-flavored Skoal in his mouth. When we started making out the remnants of his new favorite pastime were deposited in my mouth and I unknowingly swallowed them. I spent an hour throwing up out the window of his father's Chevy. Chalk up another one on the list of memorably horrible V-days.

During my college years, from New Years to the beginning of February my girlfriends would be pioneers with me. I

remember spending many nights with a band of femme-nazi sisters, drinking beer, smoking cigars and extolling the evils of all holidays centered around being in love, kissing in public, giving stuffed animals as presents, etc. But as the fourteenth of the second month of the year approached, without fail, the cries would become softer and the band would slowly disband. Come the fourteenth, the only place I could find support was in the binding, itchy fabric of my pantyhose. The girls would conveniently get a call a day or two before V-day and giggle like schoolgirls as they told me how they were invited to TKE's Captain Crush Dance. Junior year I giggled too as I got ready to accompany Peter Madison to the V-day social. We pre-partied in his dorm room. I took shots of Jagermeister while he consumed Keystone from a beer bong. One half hour before the social started, though, he was passed out in his bunk bed with a penis drawn on his forehead, courtesy of yours truly.

For twenty-something years (come on now, a real woman never reveals her true age) I have been on the pulpit trying to enlighten my fellow sisters as to the evils of V-day. It's also true that for all these years I have also been trying to procure a decent date for this most meaningless of holidays. But there's rhyme to my reason. Conscientiously objecting to a meaningless holiday while dating someone is extremely bold and powerful. Trying to convince yourself that you are conscientiously objecting to a meaningless holiday when you are alone is pathetic and depressing. You're much more likely to take advice on making felt centerpieces from Martha Stewart than you are from Mr. T. Just as you are more likely to take meaningless holiday advice from a charming, successful, date-friendly gal than a socially inept woman who spends her time

home alone, eating Ben & Jerry's Chunky Monkey by the pint and watching "Family Ties" reruns.

One of the reasons my sermons have failed miserably over years, in addition to my erring on the side of Mr. T, is chocolate. Chocolate can be found wherever a meaningless holiday chooses to rear its ugly head. Why? Women get high off of chocolate. Every woman is either an open or a closet chocolate junky. A woman would trade in her ovaries for an intravenous line of chocolate. One hit and they're sucked into a downward spiral that will inevitably end in them spending hours on a treadmill hurling profanities at the Chocolate God. In addition to being a scientifically proven aphrodisiac, a menstruating women's best friend, and the cornerstone of V-day, chocolate is the kryptonite to a woman's common sense. Women are suckers. The minute you get chocolate in them, they turn into the sappy creatures you see on February 14, easily entranced by a giant heart-shaped box or an oversized pink stuffed elephant. These days I want to get a hold of said holiday Creator and rip his sappy heart out, sauté it in a white wine sauce and serve it up. But it would undeniably taste better if I had a date to share it with.

When I started dating Rick right around Thanksgiving last year, thoughts of a Revolution formed. Granted, we were not building on a solid foundation. I got rip-roaringly drunk at my friend Bethany's birthday gala and ended up at home with Rick. But after a few weeks we realized that even without our friend Jose Cuervo in the picture, we enjoyed each other's company. And as every woman knows, you never end a relationship during the holidays, no matter how meaningless they may be. So I was secured through the New Year and I figured I could hold on tight for an extra month—finally getting

that elusive perfect V-day date and finally getting to the bottom of things.

Being the meaningless holiday hater that I am, I expect my boyfriends to keep up a continuous spree of gift-giving and affection throughout all twelve months, regardless of anything predetermined by nameless, faceless, holiday-creating lunatics. Toward the end of January, I was pleased when Rick went on a weeklong binge of showing his devotion. He repeatedly said he loved every inch of me and wanted to express it. This naturally encouraged me to gorge on every sweet he brought home for me. When the chocolate-induced high kicked in, I was more in love than ever. I proceeded to do his laundry and cook his dinners while he worked late on a big accounting project. Little did I know the chocolate-toting bastard was drugging me up while he had affair with his secretary, Suzanne. After the chocolate stopped coming and I sobered up to the true meaning of "working late," I threw his clothes out the second story window and his ass out the front door. It took super-human strength to ignore his attempts to bribe me back with everything from chocolate covered strawberries to pure chocolate fudge.

Two days before V-day I was still trying to get Rick's lingering smell out of my apartment and was reluctantly resigning to the fact that I would be alone for the upcoming meaningless holiday. It was so depressing, in fact, that after snacking on a bag of chocolate chunk cookies, I was tempted to pick up the phone and see what Rick was up to. But, turning to my kryptonite for kryptonite I was able to stifle the urge to talk to the man who recently ripped my heart out and danced a jig on it.

Nothing will sober a chocolate high like alcohol. Sounds like an award-winning advertising campaign to me: *In times of weakness, Smirnoff is there.* I curled up on the couch with my bottle and channel surfed, careful to avoid Valentine-infested

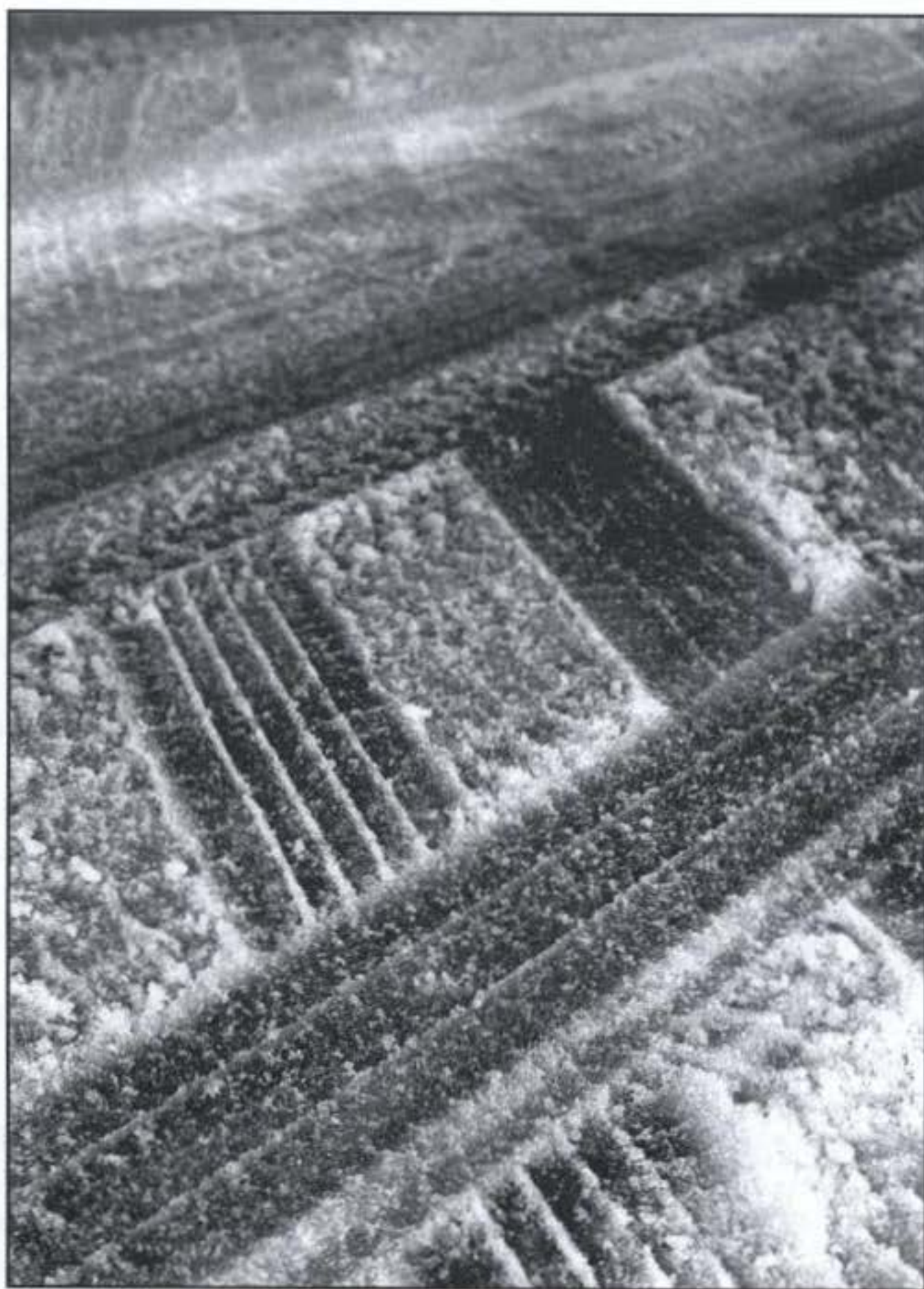
**"When the chocolate-induced high kicked in, I was in more in love than ever."**

stations such as Lifetime or the Romance Channel. If I saw "Untamed Heart" one more time I was going to drive to the zoo and personally punch a baboon in the face for the thought of such a beast lending its heart to

Christian Slater's character.

One day before V-Day it dawned on me that the people at work, in typical office fashion, would inevitably pin me between the water cooler and the Xerox the morning after the meaningless holiday and badger me about what I had done the night before. They loved to flaunt their perfect dates in my face and feign pity when I told them about my long-standing hatred for the holiday. The memories of last year's attempt at lying were vomit-worthy. I was exposed by Sheldon, the office runt, who happened to see me in my paint-stained sweatpants, in the naughty section of Video-To-Go as he walked by the store with his runt of a date. I needed to find plans worthy of a morning-after story, fast.

While thinking that in a fair and just world I would have a boyfriend who would fly me to Fiji for the weekend, not so that I would give in to the meaningless holiday, but solely so I would have a fabulous story to tell, I was reminded of my stunning neighbor Greg who was a pilot for American Airlines. Greg was amazing. He was smart. He was funny. He was stunning—I can't stress that enough. But like all stunning men my age, he was



Car Tracks | *Ramil Zeliatdinov*

never home and was always having sex with someone other than me. We had your typical neighborly relationship. It was a classic across-the-stairwell affair, starting with me getting his mail by mistake and progressing into him asking to borrow milk from me—the foundation of a life-long commitment if ever I saw one. I knew the fling he was having with one of the stewardesses ended after the company strike, right before Christmas. And I knew if there were a god in Heaven, he would be in town this weekend and willing to log some frequent flyer miles with me.

I got off the train and started to run to my apartment. It's difficult to describe the amount of skill involved with running in a skirt and heels. Not only do you have to judge the rugged terrain of pothole-filled streets and cracked sidewalks, as well as dodge mobs of fellow travelers, but you have to do it with the ease of an ice dancer. I'm a business woman, I can't be seen sweating like a fat man in a sauna. I have to remain cool and collected at all times, even if I am bursting at the seams to get home and stalk my neighbor.

I approached the building with an intense feeling of anxiety. It pained me to think that if this Greg thing fell through I would be forced to call my failsafe, but ambiguously gay, friend Chad. There are plenty of things an ambiguously gay friend can cover as a date for—funerals, lame office parties, Bar Mitzvahs—but V-Day, I feared, would be stretching the limits of our relationship. Looking up to the second floor I noticed that my apartment was in dire need of new curtains, but more importantly I saw that Greg's lights were on. Hooray! Surely my neighbor wouldn't think it was out of the ordinary if I asked him out for Valentine's Day. What are neighbors for? Being the overt meaningless holiday hater that I am, I have

become adept at pretending as if such holidays don't exist in my world. *Oh tomorrow's Valentine's Day? You don't say... I had completely forgotten. I didn't even realize people were still into that. I was just thinking you'd like a nice home-cooked meal as a change to that awful airline food you're used to.*

Bounding up the stairs, perhaps a little too anxiously, I heard Greg's door open -- no better time than the present to secure my V-Day date.

"Greg!" I shouted, more loudly than I had hoped in trying to make up for being out of breath from all the bounding.

"Sorry to disappoint," a male voice responded.

"Oh, you're not Greg," I stumbled and immediately wanted to take back.

"You're right. I'm Greg's brother Nathaniel. And you are?"

"Jack. Uh... Jaclyn. I live in 207."

*"Oh right, Jaclyn. The beautiful and charming neighbor from across the hall. Greg has told me wonderful things about you."*

Ahhhh. Am I delirious? Did he just say what I thought he...

"Nice to meet you Jaclyn. I'm staying here for a few days while Greg's out of town."

Clearly I was delirious. As I wondered whether or not I had accidentally snorted some chocolate on the way up, I shook hands with the even-more-stunning-than-Greg Nathaniel. The grip he had on my hand screamed "I want to be the father of your children" but, sadly, he had other things to do with his time.

"Well, I'll see ya around," he said as my hand fell limp against my skirt.

The disappointment of not having a gorgeous stranger make out with me on first meeting and losing my date to the Friendly Skies left me slumped against the banister for a few minutes. I trudged into

my apartment.

T-minus 24 hours. I picked the phone and called Chad on his cell phone. Chad like everyone in America who wasn't me, had his cell on him twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

I was guaranteed to have life-changing conversations as he peed in public bathrooms, picked up his dry cleaning or was stuck in a traffic jam on I-95.

Chad was particularly fond of the vibrate feature of his phone.

"Hello Gorgeous."

"Hey Chadwick.

How's life?"

"Life is stupendous.

Life is grand. Life is the best it's been in quite some time."

"Why's that?"

"I got a raise today and my stock has gone up seven points since last week."

"Well, well big spender. Where are you taking me tomorrow night to celebrate?"

"Tomorrow. Hmm... Tomorrow's no good, I've got plans with my mother."

Curses. If there's one area of a potentially gay man's life that you couldn't mess with, it was his relationship with his mother. Surely I couldn't say *Chad will you please stand your mother up so that I can have a date for V-day so that I can not feel like an idiot at work on Friday.*

"Big Valentine's Day plans with your mom eh?"

"Well I wouldn't say big. But we do go out every year. Don't you have a date?"

"Well. No. I don't."

"Oh, you're more than welcome to come along. I can pick you up at ..."

"No, no, it's ok. I'll figure something

out." Spending V-Day with my 30-year-old best friend and his mother was about as tempting as licking cement.

At work I was a zombie. My only remaining hope was to meet and kidnap

**"Thoughts of using a candy bar as a concealed weapon in my pocket and forcing someone to take me out to dinner ran through my head."**

someone on the train ride home. Thoughts of using a candy bar as a concealed weapon in my pocket and forcing someone to take me out to dinner ran through my head. Sadly, I sat next to a bum on the trip home. Rock bottom came when I thought about what he may look like with a shower, close

shave and a haircut. I decided I wouldn't even need to kidnap him, I could get away with telling him it was some sort of Bum Outreach program.

Slowly working my way up the apartment steps, I ran into Nathaniel who was smoking in the stairwell.

"Hi there. I hope you don't mind I'm smoking in here, but it's cold as all hell outside."

"Uh, no, it's not a problem. Just don't let the super catch you," I said, without lifting my gaze from the dirty steps.

"Hey, do you know any good restaurants around here? My friend is supposed to be coming down tonight."

Friend. Did he think I didn't know? It was V-day, of course his girlfriend was coming down. Of course he was going to wine and dine her. I should have directed him to the nearest candy shop so he could stock up on chocolate, but instead I did stammered,

"Blue Moon. It's down on the corner of Fifth and Main. It's really good. It'll

be perfect.”

I walked through my door and headed straight for the freezer. Before I changed into my ratty sweatpants, I dove face first into a half-eaten carton of ice cream. I started watching sappy love movies on ABC. An hour and a half into my chocolate-induced coma, there was a knock on my door.

Someone must be lost, I thought.

“Hi there, I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

Nathaniel.

“It’s just I heard your TV was on and I figured you were home.”

“Um, yeah I was just watching a movie.” A most witty response as I wiped the ice cream from my face.

“Well, my friend bailed on me. Said something about his girlfriend wanting to go out for Valentine’s Day. So I’ve got these reservations and I don’t want to waste them. Are you up for it?”

Clearly I was delirious again.

Gorgeous man I hardly know asking me out on V-day just when I thought all hope was lost? I tried to remain calm.

“Well I need to get changed, but if you can wait a few minutes I’d love to.” Hah! I pulled off a decent-sounding reply. It was a miracle. The miracle of V-day.

“Sure, just come over whenever you’re ready.”

I accidentally slammed the door in Nathaniel’s face as I raced to get ready. I ransacked my closet for the perfect ensemble. Sure, it was freezing cold outside, but I wasn’t about to bundle up like an Inuit for a first date, so I went for the timeless little black dress. I furiously applied makeup to get that I’m not wearing any makeup, I’m naturally beautiful look. I was surprisingly ready to go in ten minutes, but didn’t want to appear over-anxious or insane, so I sat around and waited an extra ten.

I knocked delicately on the door and was pleased with the gentleman who greeted me. Nathaniel had obviously taken the twenty minutes to spruce himself up, gelling his hair, changing his shirt and putting on enough cologne to leave a sweet scented trail behind him as he walked.

“You look great,” he said as he closed the door behind him.

“Thank you, you don’t look so bad yourself.”

As we walked toward the restaurant Greg asked, “What’s a beautiful girl like you doing home on Valentine’s Day?”

Before I could dream up a fancy lie involving the recent death of a fiancé, my conscience did something it rarely does and spoke up for itself.

“Well I’ve never had much luck with Valentine’s Day dates. So I decided not to tempt fate after my boyfriend and I broke up last month. What’s a charming boy like you doing all alone?” I flashed a vixen-like smile when saying the word boy, since it was clear we were both old enough to have boys of our own.

“To be quite honest, I hate Valentine’s Day. I hate all the build up, the stupid cards, the stuffed animals. All the hype is totally unnecessary.”

“Unnecessary?” I said, playing dumb in an effort to see what made Nathaniel tick.

“Totally unnecessary. Why do I need Hallmark to tell me when to say ‘I love you’ to my girlfriend or wife. Why do I have to feed her chocolate until she vomits on some random day in February, instead of loving her every day?”

*Is it possible to fall in love with someone so quickly?* I thought.

“Sorry to get so worked up over a simple question. But, ahh, I just hate stupid, meaningless holidays like this. I would love to find a woman who felt the





| *Emily Wilson*

same way I did, but it seems like they've got chocolate running through their veins and Hallmark has brainwashed them."

I was in the process of a mental multiple orgasm when we reached the restaurant.

"You know what?" I said before entering. "This place is going to be full of the very meaningless holidays worshippers we loathe. Why don't we go back and I'll make you a fabulous dinner."

With that, Nathaniel took my hand as we headed back toward the apartment. We fell deep into conversation about the ridiculousness of V-day.

"You know I feel sorry for couples on days like today."

"Why's that?" I asked, again knowing the answer but still wanting more of

behind-the-scenes Nathaniel.

"You realize tonight will be the ultimate reason for half of the breakups that occur in the next few months. Either he was too eager and scared the shit out of her. Or she was too expectant and disappointed when he didn't live up."

"St. Valentine must have been a sadist..." Finally someone to listen to and respect my V-day diatribe!

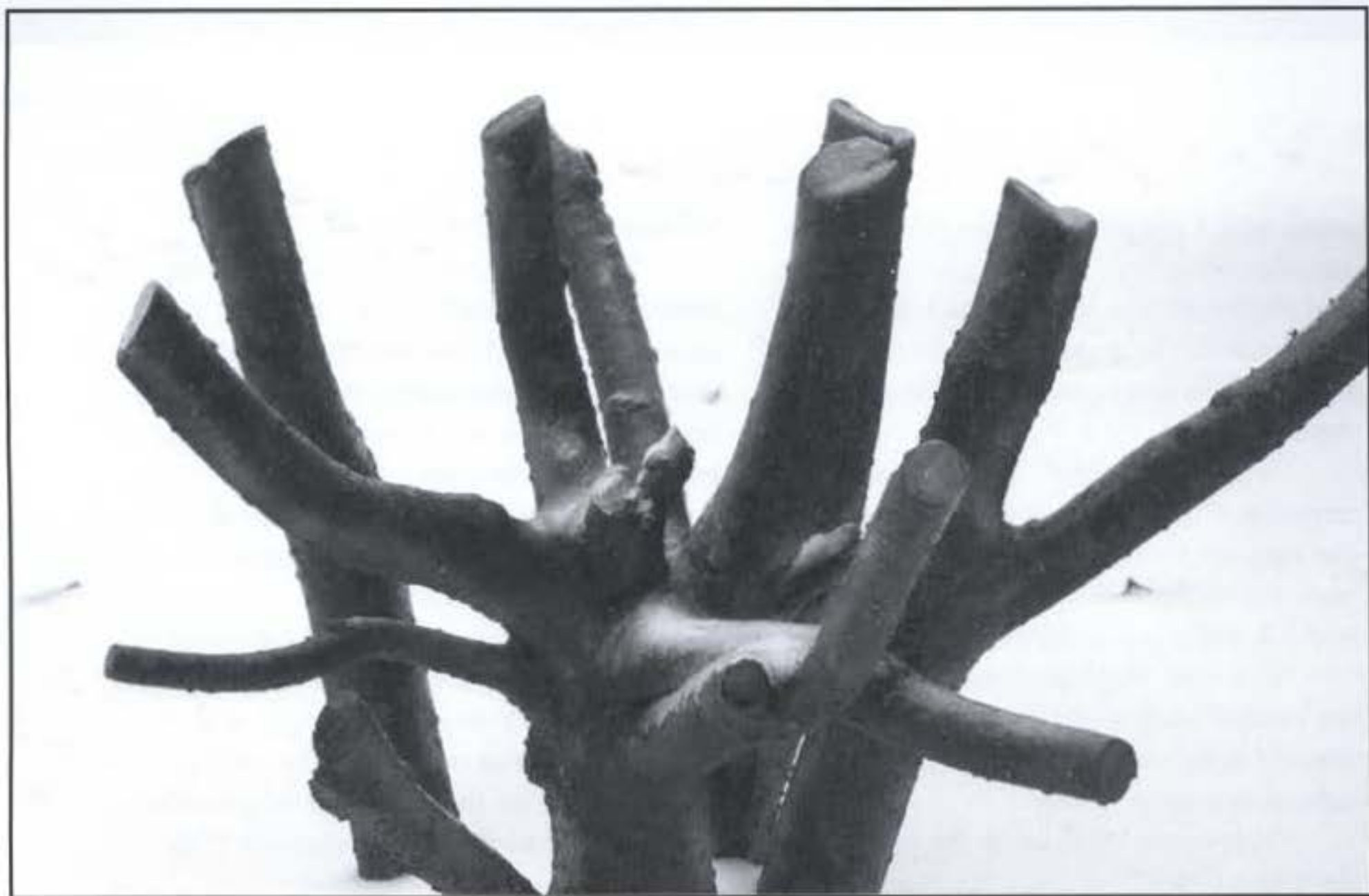
We went back and forth hypothesizing the origins of the holiday, laughing at stories of past V-days turned ugly and imagining who at our respective offices would corner us first. We talked ourselves right into the morning of February 15th.

The Revolution had begun.

# Sestina trying to be a tree

In one concept of beginning life is a metaphor for green:  
with the logos contract meaning is music.  
Therefore let us start at the beginning:  
a little boy, desiring to be perfect,  
spends his early years building a dictionary  
of the experience that comes with age.

He knows stones age  
more firmly than what's green  
(he read it in a dictionary  
while researching the origin of music)  
and he who is perfect  
has no beginning



Pen | *Ramil Zeliatdinov*

nor ending; yet in beginning  
all come of age  
with what is not perfect.  
Not all is green;  
there is death, even in music;  
no absolute within the dictionary

he is living; the abstract dictionary  
fails before the beginning  
for within its vacuousness no music  
soars to explicate itself or age's  
raison d'etre; there is only the green  
boasting from the void of perfection.

No thing is perfect.  
The boy knows this without a dictionary.  
All withers from green  
to empty, so he begins  
(now further in age)  
to trust in music.

Who can doubt music?  
I doubt intimations of perfection  
and we are all young—true age  
doesn't exist in our dictionaries.  
We grope for beginnings,  
feel nothing green.

*Envoy*  
Age is an imperfect dictionary  
One walks in green pastures  
to not hear the music of the beginning.

*By Samuel Keyes*

# Little Town

he lived knee-deep in corn-fed americana  
like you, you say  
he was mostly a god-(to the point of  
hallucination [aberrations they called them])  
fearing man, fit good in overalls and on tractors  
norman rock, well, you know the rest

when he was dead, they wrote  
an epitaph over his little piece of the world  
on granite, 'granite, t'ain't much, but,  
we dasn't raise poet-types':

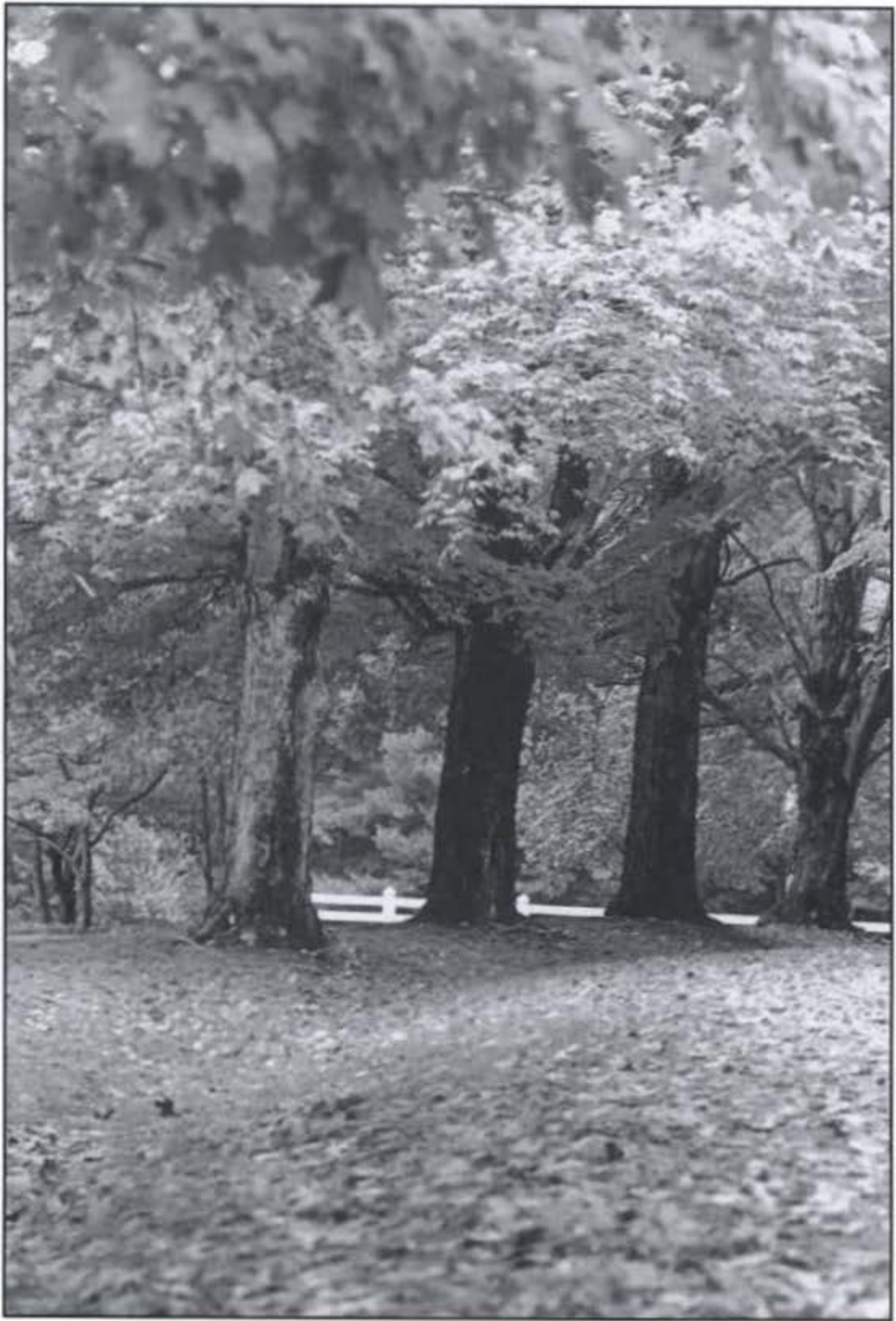
'b. 19xx, d.19xx  
a good man, loved his wife  
left this life, for his country  
(read:you,  
may god him rest.'

some young upstart bought  
13 acre, 13 goddam acre  
relocated the little village of  
corn-pone poems  
cross town, cross the river and  
old bridge where the kids played hooky  
like real kids, with butcher's string and mealworms.

they say lots of things in  
towns like these, and, most are  
taken with a grain of salt and snap on the  
suspenders  
but

believe you me, there  
are certain places you just  
don't step.

*By Doug Boyle*



| *Kristin Martin*

# My Final Love Poem to You

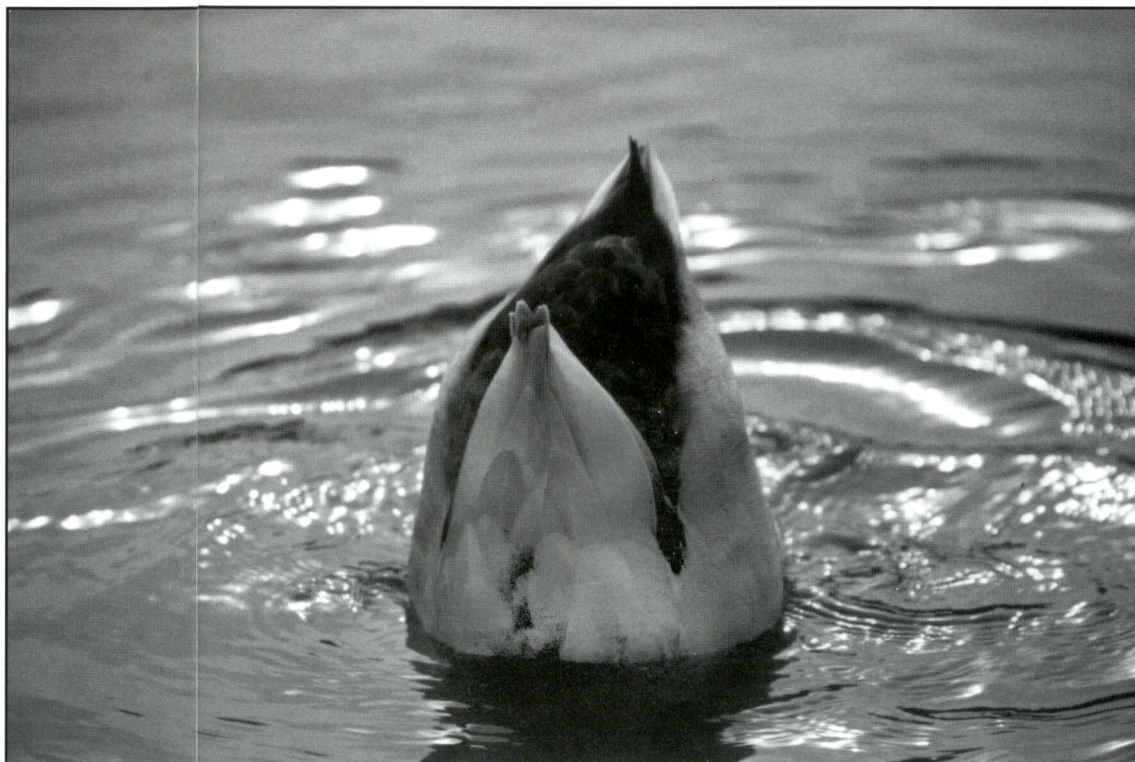
You are like ornamental cabbage,  
Lost somewhere between unedible  
And not quite aesthetically pleasing.

Squat, round, and choked to the ground  
You look misplaced  
Among the azaleas, plain  
Among the tulips, lack substance  
Next to the crisp cut hedge.

Maybe, if I took you and planted you  
Twenty times in an organized pattern  
Around a soft lily pad pond  
You would seem in place,  
Made grand through some sustained effort.

But then, still, I would probably step on you,  
Unknowingly of course, while trying to get  
A better view of the goldfish.

*By Terry Smith*



| *Elliot Mitchell*

# Cloud-low Bluegrass Portrait

Out from under arches in Saint Louis  
she echoes clear to the east,  
standing in a wine-lit prairie expanse,  
singular and urgent as a silhouette.

My old friend will not miss tomato season.

She uprooted and drifts now, pulled through  
the sixth-month sex of the flatlands;  
shy under brush blankets, the wildflowers low  
and her dress, worn soft dog-eared like a violet  
bellows everything should be homespun..

In summer sweat straw hair turns a pale autumn;  
brown sticks like corn-wisps over eye corners  
as she turns earth with heel and toe-nail teeth  
where getting clean is easier than gripping water.

I broom dust out of my garage,  
watch bag worms feed, motionless  
suck a plumb to the pit to pass the dusk, beg  
to extend her days in the bushes.

*By Emily Kay Carson*

# Your Withdrawl My Symptom

You see me but you look through me  
Standing there, watching you stare  
At her soft, silky, golden smile.  
I know I am here because I can feel the  
Hot foggy breath upon my neck, trying  
To melt me. Whispering that I don't belong.

With one foot on the ground, I reach  
For the birthmark upon your shoulder  
That morphs images of our past history, together.  
But you shrug me, and turn your unlaced  
Tims toward the pale Ralph Lauren lighting  
To receive your daily injection from her.  
It seeps through your veins, Firing your nerves  
And exploding your head, with adulation.

Again you have left me here alone  
And impatient, trying not to feel mediocre.  
Picking out my hair; slouching my nose;  
Pouting my lips; accenting my curves;  
Flaunting my shimmering, naturally, nut-brown  
Skin; Peripherally eying her attempt at mimicry.

I am the intellectual debating with conviction for you in courts.  
I am the musician vibrating the B-flat in your sonata.  
I am the athlete long-jumping white deserts.  
I am the comedian inspiring your raucous laughter as an outlet from your toil.  
I am all that I can be, except her.

But still you don't hold me. I am confused.  
And keep reminiscing of how our heat used to defuse  
through each other's scarred tissues,  
In the ultimate ecstatic equilibrium.

*By Trenise Robinson*





| *Kristin Martin*

# Quietly, Surely

Richmond, you are not  
merely these monuments gardens still  
twilight, nor even this single person jotting  
nothing busily upon the wrinkled measure of time  
nor the tune that plays independent from thought  
in cafés, that bellow sensation nonsensically  
nor the faces which sit and drink on the boulevard,  
laughing, who converse smoke smile, you are  
not only a million little ideas rocketing to the edges  
of evening; these things you are and you are all

who is vibrant ephemeral living: you are  
the consciousness of our voices friendships confirmation,  
you are the gesture by which we express to one another all  
which we hold more dear and fragile than yes,  
you are the single place we contest our clumsy fate

on roofs barstools rocks we are  
peeking, mulling, testing the idea—  
when never and forever meet and we are not the same,  
but we continue youthful futilely ignorant

quietly above everything the strolling upward ghost  
of Robert E. Lee strongly surely walks

*By Vanessa Loftus*

# Poetic Absurdity:

## The Rise and Fall of Chairman Mao

By: Chris Creel

It is usually a gradual process. At least I think it should be, losing your world and accepting a different reality. Most people fade away, inoculated against thought by daily sitcoms. Most of America has been led into a collective unconsciousness by nationwide syndication. Looking into the TV we are all looking back. Each person on screen is a life we are more interested in than our own. We are in danger because our sitcoms stretch past comedy and into drama. Not only are their lives funnier than ours, but also their kisses are perfect, embraces profound, and hair in place (of their morals).

But it's all looking back and projecting their storyline onto our own dismal composition of fragmented memories. Perhaps we don't even know the pathetic manacles TV holds us to, but the Rational will hope for a time we break loose and are free. However, I am not a Rational, I am poetic. Revolution wasn't what I expected. That night I didn't want a change of mind—to begin again. That wasn't what I was thinking when I felt the bones break. I can't even say for sure I really felt them break. However, my body broke free and screamed out from the cinderblocks.

When I left Dallas to go visit college after 8 months away I was going back an uninspired shell of what walked off the stage on graduation day. Poems and poets, connections and people, kept me moving and alive in college. That had, of course, stopped there. Afterward memory and memories, speculation and stagnation kept me tied to my reclining chair. The life of high school teaching was left behind in a church 400 miles away when I drove down

to Houston.

For 8 months fluorescent lights shone on a room full of only boys, and I'm not Catholic. Those lights flash on and off 75,000 times a second. This accounts for the buzzing, migraines, and possibly for the momentary visions I try to fit in between the flickers. Students in navy pants and predictably untucked shirts walked around in circles never moving forward, only reveling in shoves, sarcasm, and anything except American Literature or progress. Once during an exam I swore I saw a girl in the back row. I don't know why this didn't strike me as odd. She looked eighteen, possibly a senior, with black hair flopping about in confused youthful ecstasy. Her short dress didn't seem out of place to me because I didn't notice anything else in the room. Under an incandescent glow she remained looking up at me. Her eyes didn't blink because the blue whirlpool seemed to radiate more permanently than anything else that should be in the sublunary world. She stood up and walked toward my desk. As each step swished her skirt back and forth, I fell more into the mesmerizing sway of her pendulum of thigh, skirt whipping past. The soft curves below her right calf gave me the peace of a white sand desert. She moved in the landscape and made it her own. Her lips quivered in front of me, but her eyes kept me steadfastly viewing her face surrounded by the horizon.

"Mr. Gallagher, do we turn our exams in here? Mr. Gallagher?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes. Here is fine," I said as I looked away from the institutional wall and toward the boy by my side: curly hair,

lint-covered pants, and probably raging hormones as well.

My life had been eight months of living at home and walking on polyester rugs. Excitement was when my tiger blanket was washed and the dust removed from the TV. My skin cells were constantly sloughing off and forming a nice gray snowfall all around. That was me on the bookcase and caught atop the fan blades. I sat with my back turned to the windows, away from everything except the clean TV. I refrained from sitcoms and other traps of the mind, but nonetheless the History Channel kept me locked in the sedentary life of benign war.

"And then Custer slaughtered 1000 Indians," said the portly gray haired man in a suit. I won't believe him though until I see a shot of screaming Indians or a computer simulation. Perhaps a pan over some old photograph with tomahawks useless on the stained ground will convince me of carnage. These shows take war, death, violence, and present them in a predictable series of snapshots, commentary, and reenactments. It's hard to keep from laughing at the actors of today running around screaming like long dead soldiers.

"And the Indians were not happy about this," said the man.

I tried to continue writing during this time, but I felt few poetic symphonies were ever created in a sunroom with a Jewish mother droning on about marriage and responsibility. Marriage is too far removed from my room, and dust-covered drowning in my own skin seems responsibility enough. My writing fell into a vicious cycle. The mind regurgitates and chokes when the stimulus of emotion is removed. My closest companion was an epileptic dog that shook like a children's toy every time lightning crashed. Angry but numb, my mind became like Venetian blinds broken closed—a mass-produced, failed expecta-

tion of perfection. This broken record went on from graduation in May until the New Year. Everything was still the same; I didn't even bother with resolutions.

My first trip back to Houston was to be for my best friend Matt's birthday. We met in the last two years of college and spent most of the year writing drunken poetry and effervescent ejaculations of life with loud screaming laughter and a complete disregard of tomorrow's class or tomorrow's problems. It was February and his 21st birthday. Never before had I left Dallas with 200 dollars of alcohol and the savage masochism usually exemplified by rock stars and select members of the press.

I stepped alone into my gray Nissan Stanza with dents along the passenger side door. It was always comforting to drive that car. The seats were old and stained with a montage of high school romances and flashes of clarity. They bucketed down and held you without judgment or deceit. It had become impossible for me to sit in the car without occasionally stroking the passenger seat on long drives. How easy it was to disappear into first kisses, last good-byes, and times when life actually mattered. The only thing new was the CD player, where Dylan whined through 1987 speakers which must have felt his original ballads lacking and took the liberty of adding extra inflections, rises, and caverns to sit and take shelter. The drive blurred into one continuous fence. I felt no comfort by the unification of my boundaries on both sides; God is not in some amalgamation of the outside world, but rather within.

The Texas highway was always changing, but I felt myself entranced by the subtle movements in the white fence posts and barbed wire as a dog entranced by his own shadow. Interstate 45 was a poor substitute for the back roads and mesquite trees of the hill country I had driven with my girlfriend in college. She was a freshman in my final

year and we were together my second semester and part way through the summer. She seemed fixed at the end of the highway, the horizon.

We broke up in summer, near the Fourth of July. All I remember was the light that fell on her face on that porch swing of Matt's house. He was staying in New Braunfels in a house overlooking the river flowing by in a crystal clear movement of spring-fed idealism. When she stood up, I sat speechless and watched the sunlight fill the empty chair. It had been blunt and unexpected for her to carry on and then drift off. Maybe if I recited Shakespeare or constructed a sonnet on the spot, told her that the sun was an illegitimate suitor unworthy of touching her skin so softly, or said anything besides "damn" as she walked down the steps and into her car, then she would have stayed. Perhaps the fact that I never got a reason caused me to attach all manner of things to our memories together. In some concoction of imagination she had become exalted in my mind. Each flip of hair and lasting glance persisted in my mind and weighed me down, pulling me slowly to a point where I couldn't breathe.

Contemplation is the essence of a man's dealing with women. We can only understand and appreciate when we look in the past. There is too much shit to deal with in the present, only in reflection can we attach our own sensibilities and make a sculpture of marble. One cannot contemplate the present; once you begin it is lost. However contemplation can only value and judge the past. The soft figurines created by a woman's shadow along a burnt orange wall can only gain permanence in reflection, the present forgets as soon as it begins. Women, beauty, would only exist as a phosphorescent sparkle and fade where it not for contemplation of that memory of that first glance. Her eyes would not illu-

minate the disparate abstractions of the distance were it not for me.

For the next three hundred miles I listened to the radio drone incoherently as I forced her out of my mind and focused solely on the white line and road ahead. But once during the drive I saw a pile of sand atop some pasture probably covered in a cow dung mosaic. Immediately I was on Galveston beach, March 30th 4am.

"Feel the sand, feel the breeze, feel the sun two hours away," I said breathing into the crashing whitecaps two miles from the flickering lights of offshore oilrigs.

"Feel the sand, correctly. Just leave your clothes here," Sarah said as she dropped her pants by vacillating line of shore. She spoke with action. Her muscles contracted in tune with the rhythm of the waves, the rhythm of her steps. I ran out just beyond knee depth to get a better view of her back arching around the wave at the apex of her jumps. She arose from the brown ocean, wet and cold, but hiding both and showing a light from her stare into me. We kissed, but didn't make love, we never did—I had to imagine it, then and now.

Around 6:30 I pulled into Houston and saw the sunset pink and orange with convoluted clouds filling my eyes. I read that the sunset looks like this because of the pollution. I didn't care. If we're going to be drowned in our own toxic gasses and other agents of asphyxiation...let it be beautiful, let it be orange and red with a touch of ocher.

Upon arrival, the first one to meet me was Byron. He was half balding and fully insane when I met him a year earlier. He walked in a shuffle step to the car looking like a lanky bean figure ordained with a recently acquired beer belly. He could always be counted upon for an emotional rant about some matter of philosophy or something else equally unimportant. However, the electricity, drive, and down-

pour of words was more than enough to make up for lack of any definite subject matter.

"I'm guessing you'll need help with that you elderly bastard." He smirked at the box in the back of my car.

"Yeah, this is the birthday present. I can't say it's cake exactly."

"Well I'd be glad to help you, but I am still age deficient. How have things been for you," he asked as I moved the box from the seat and into my arms.

"Ah, same shit different day. It's good to be back here though."

"I'm glad you're here. Ashton, this is a new time, new night, new experiences with people who have always been able to grab you," he said apparently half drunk. I was glad to be there, but felt little comfort in the distance of small talk as we walked side by side across the green and towards the dorm, my old dorm, with the architectural grace of a governmental monolith.

"What are you doing now, still finding comfort in your numbers?"

"Well, I gave up math and have gone to English. I guess I'm trying to be the sad bastard intellectual you always thought me capable of," he said with a cracked smile as he reached for the door.

Our plastic conversation was masking the pain he knew I felt being back here. It was no secret that only my final semester was enjoyable, my semester with him, Matt, and of course Sarah. But that was more valuable than four years of benevolent mediocrity. I didn't know if I wanted to see her or not. She would be a sophomore now, but even with time removed I could still feel her around me like Wisteria

climbing and grappling around my windpipe. It was still too early in the year for flowers.

I was three years older than her, but at twenty-two, there was a wall between the past and happiness. I wished that I could find some reversal or stoppage of time where I could go back, be free, and

be with her, live. Had I decided to stay around, maybe she would have stayed around. Instead, hopes of graduate school went out one thin envelope at a time. All I could do at such short notice was teach Catholic boys about the power of literature while I saw the

**"If we're going to be drowned in our own toxic gasses and other agents of asphyxiation...let it be beautiful, let it be orange and red with a touch of ocher."**

words rebound off of their world inundated with the collective anesthetization of television. Images are easy for the imagination. Words cower behind a soft black veil and preserve their stark white virginity, or rather subjectivity.

As I brought the boxes into the dorms, I walked slowly up the stairs and opened the door to a deluge of new faces that seemed caustic to my memories. But all that mattered was Matt and my final shot of youth. He was standing in the back of the room grinning in his tight white T-shirt, cowboy hat, and 21 years.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome to my room, my home, and my...my...ah, my shot for you," Matt slurred to me as he picked the bottle of vodka from the box I had put on the desk. His drunkenness procrastinated real discussion until tomorrow, and screamed of exfoliating any ingrained suffering: I indulged. I smiled and took the shot down feeling the burn of my throat causing a light cough and ritual squinting of the eyes. Afterwards were cheers for my

return, salutations and raised glasses. I poured another shot and laughed at the thought of my students at home writing sober drafts after dinner. They then disappeared as if the fluorescent lights caught spontaneous fire and burned them out of my mind. The church rafters collapsed upon the children, nuns, priests and congregation.

From this point on I simply became an inebriated swell of emotion without direction. Cheap rum made my thoughts impotent of any satisfying direction. With each raised glass people began to blend into the white textured walls. The out-of-season Christmas lights became a white out. There was little talking that I noticed; any voices became malleable abstractions droning like a tenor sax. Jeff Buckley resonated from cardboard minarets.

*Lilac wine, I feel unsteady...Like my love.  
Listen to me, isn't that she, coming to me.  
Or am I just going crazy.*

Listening to the soft crescendo of the song, I felt him jump into the water outside of Memphis in '97. Not gasping for breath, but rather closing his eyes and forgetting. That must be what it's like to drown. You feel it possible to hold your breath, but then you swallow and accept.

With my next shot I walked into the hall and under the incandescent elliptical glow of the overhead hall light was permanent youth. Sarah's soft black hair contrasted with pearly skin and azure shirt. I don't know how she should have looked. The only impressions of her I had were the removed abstractions and additions of memory. I don't photograph women.

By this time there were three of her, but I walked to the most likely candidate of reality. I thought her breathing was palpable as I walked closer. She was standing outside the bathroom door with her hand softly placed on her hip in the expected disbelief of seeing my emotionally contorted face. This was the first time I had seen her since she dissolved our relationship.

My mind's wanderings died down as I looked at the soft curvature of her neck pressed against the ribbed blue collar of her cotton shirt. She was a form presented in front of me. I'm sure there was a meaning. Mumbles came out when I tried to speak of my thoughts. I write

**"I write poetry,  
but at this  
moment I was  
nothing but a  
diseased charlatan  
unable to speak  
with the elo-  
quence I proclaim  
to have."**

poetry, but at this moment I was nothing but a diseased charlatan unable to speak with the eloquence I proclaim to have. The words, "I miss you," rebounded through my head but came out in jumbled syllables with the careless stupidity of a drunken postcard from a friend: "Glad you here, wish you beautiful."

"I didn't know you'd be here. I wish I had known, maybe then we could have talked," she said with the calculated redirection of a matador. I reached out to make her hair my elixir and to disappear into the security of the past, but at that moment the bathroom door opened.

"This is Tyler," she said. I didn't shake hands. "I'm sorry Ashton, but I can't talk now, maybe tomorrow. How long will you be here?" I stared. "Well, hopefully you can speak tomorrow." I glanced at her creature friend and saw a double image of some disfigured minotaur with coarse brown hair and a carefully pressed shirt over bulging

room. I grabbed five bottles and walked out the door. The beer splashed in the parking lot as the rainbow tosses came to an end just before the edge of a building. I sat and broke each one on the ground without any reason. Should catharsis have a reason? I had become a drone of drama. No grounding for my actions, none for emotions. I simply thought and acted accordingly, as the broken protagonist should.

Filling with frenzy I walked inside to purge tears and exorcize demons. When I opened the door to the first floor bathroom, inside were Sarah and this thing in some embrace. In my state it looked like cannibalism or some other debauchery that turned my mind into a rapture of emotion that felt like searing needles escaping through each and every pore of my skin. In my lucid anger I walked upstairs and saw Byron walking down the hallway. He looked frightened. Understandably so, I was enveloped in an escape from reason. I walked down the hallway not feeling the floor or seeing the walls. Each thought in my head resonated with futility and fury.

“Show something, leave something!” echoed something in me. I turned toward the wall and punched my hand into the cinderblock. The austere white turned red and my hand broke apart. I thought I punched once, I was later told it was five times. Everything went black and absent as I fell to the floor.

When I woke up in the hospital, the TV was on and CNN was talking about something of little importance. I turned it off and reclined in bed assessing my situation. I looked in shock at the bandage and supports mounted around my hand. Stupidity is not an easy feeling to couple with pain.

“Would you like red Jello or green,” the nurse asked as she checked my pulse and other signs.

“What? Neither,” I said.

“You have to eat, the doctor says you must eat.” She said in a monotone talk that seemed to have the same inflections as the beeping of machines in my room.

“Your friends came, but it isn’t visiting hours.”

I drifted off from her talking and eventually she left. Looking down at my hand, I was at a loss for an explanation. Lying between sterile white walls and rigid sheets, I had little to do but use my good hand to push the button on the tower next to me releasing the morphine drip. I turned on the TV. When it came on I saw the History Channel discussing Mao Tse-Tung’s communist reign.

“Born in a village of Shaoshan in the Hunan province, Mao was raised a peasant but became a leader,” said the narrator, this time with a deeper, seemingly more poetic voice.

“Constant revolution, this was his answer. From the peasants comes the change. From the peasants comes revolution. To gain control of the country, Chairman Mao had to gain control of the countryside. Mao’s wife being beheaded by the Nationalist Party of course sparked revolution, but Mao wanted constant revolution. He had all of his wives beheaded. In fact hundreds of wives were beheaded, all for the sake of the nation. They died proud and willingly for Mao,” I heard as the voice drifted me off to sleep.



# For the People Who Say I'm Not

Yes, I would like a cup of tea,  
The kind that makes my pinkie point  
To the North Star to which I  
Stealthily run seeking shade under my wild naps  
That complement my chanting spirit.

I place one hand on my lap, not  
To impress you, but to rest my palm,  
Blistered from clenching that cackling rope  
Around my neck, the veins straining to  
Burst and squirt into your face,  
Opening your blue eyes with its gold.

Would you please pass the croissants?  
I always pick the brownest one  
Before you accuse it of being stale  
And pass it under the table to Fifi  
Whose fangs beat into its soft sweet core.

Excuse me from the table, it has been a pleasure  
But I can only stand your café talk  
So long, and my soul pleads to be filled  
With collard-green jokes and old-school counsel..

*By Trenise Robinson*

# Yhatabuta/As it is

*For Jess*

**1**

And if I think of a grave plot,  
veiled under ginger leaves, speak to me  
of the measureless moment after  
marching on this gravel  
and laugh at my misunderstandings.

I peel back branches, mark territories  
where crows will crawl on granite; songless  
a half-constructed steeple sits stilted,  
a duck blind screening bell-prayers,  
vows and other violences to silence;  
I break ground, place oleander on all fours.

Between the blades circling in the horse's mouths  
and the faint lace camisole of darker blues  
where rain begins in distance  
cricket wings rub into evenings with sweat  
that does not know the season will turn.

I leave my name uncarved until the day comes.

**2**

The underground was damp then,  
crossing London feeling palms stutter.  
There were bird's feet raised under pink wrists  
to remind me awake, of when I will marry;  
my new fear of fire, my old fear of water.

*This is a season wreathed by a ring of stars.*

Among the antique lullabies of letters past  
and holly waxed in watch shop windows  
there were quick stares and revolutions.

*This is a season of ultimate love come to earth.*

From the bells above some market street  
came the ricochet and the drowning  
of pure gold timbre, muted song, conversation.

I almost bargained a silver band for you,  
handmade with care by an old widower.

3

In those months of birth-blood and bloom,  
I spoke of your hands as boat wake  
brushing pylons ringed in plant life—  
a sotto voce sent along the horizontal plane.

As I watched the fullest blossom of brute orange  
stretch lengthwise at tide-level (the sort  
of blossom that occurs once only,  
under particular temperatures, to be recalled  
upon other sundowns that are similar,  
but never compare)

I grasped by negation all that was not you,  
sensed absence in the loiter of light and noise.

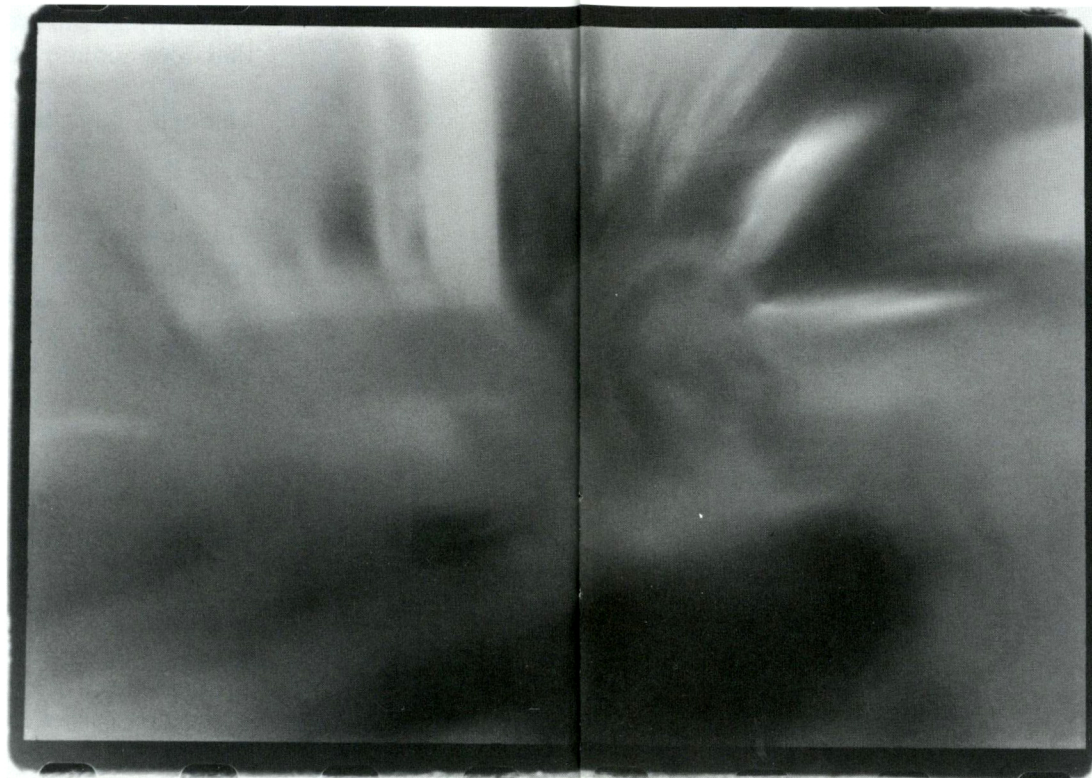
4

Under elongated suns, elongated shadows,  
where the draught digs pits in dense dirt  
I sharpen my trowel on sandstone,  
run the edge back and forth until minor sparks  
stem and spread in all directions.

In all their blamelessness, the lilies  
need both to be nurtured and take root  
as the rain sits a still distant curtain,  
draped downward.

But if I think of this grave plot,  
veiled under ginger leaves, speak to me  
of the hope of thunder and heat lightning,  
of the parting charge of listening and breath.

*By Emily Kay Carson*



*|Tyler Bryant*

# After Reflecting Upon Dalí's *The Ghost of Vermeer*

My good chap, sit down and listen  
we've gotten it all wrong. It's staring  
that we simply must get back to.  
Take a knee with me and gaze across  
dusty sandstone streets and over ancient  
clay walls that show the need for re-mortar.  
Have a drink of absinthe, I have the bottle  
balanced on my table leg. My foot walks  
away — let it, I am content.

We have grown boring for want of wives  
and toothbrushes. Its not that we don't  
need new lovers, but that we should stop  
counting. We forget those we  
smell sweet, taste wet, love well.  
Our cut must be long, flat, deep.

Why shouldn't every woman be like  
expected flowers. A real delusion?  
Let mandolins play under moonlight  
without embarrassment or scoff,  
my cane will keep me on the ground  
despite my lack of feet.

*By Terry Smith*



| *Tyler Bryant*

# Namaste \*

I carry with me the words of the Western world:  
Lowe alpine  
top of the line  
North Face  
premium plastic  
Platypus  
leak proof  
Gortex gloves  
LL Bean

My high tech  
Rock Creek  
Nalgene bottle is guaranteed,  
but still I am no match for the weight of the  
East.

The smells of buffalo sweat  
and sour yak milk tea  
mask the odor of smoke from a  
dying fire.  
Mimics of a dying world  
perfumed by a rhododendron blossom  
floating in a pond of  
reused water.

Moments run clockwise round a makeshift  
Buddhist temple,  
and I succumb to the hours  
under bronze-leafed remnants of  
worship.

Soaking it,  
Absorbing it,  
Taking it all in.  
My eyes are fixed on a game  
where sherpa's wrestle and cow bells ring.

\*The title of this poem is a Napalese greeting that translates into a poem of its own: "I honor the place in you in which is of love, of truth, of peace, and of light. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are one."

Then a tiny hand.  
Wrinkles filled with dirt,  
dusted face,  
and matted hair.  
Old soul in a little brown body,  
squatting. Starring  
with old eyes wide open,  
and a smile that makes the Hilambu seem shy.  
I see in his eyes a trail of breadcrumbs left by  
travelers before me.

Gifts of chewing gum, postcards, and long-underwear;  
bandanas, watches, paper and pens, copies of High Life,  
decks of cards, tubes of lipstick,  
and Levis for men.

Smile tempts another trace of longing,  
his focus dancing upon my  
Oakley's reflection.  
It seems a fair exchange:  
A picture for a pair of sunglasses.  
*Namaste*

Muted by snow-cloaked edges,  
the mingling of many voices and  
jumping conversations in the distance  
lead me beyond the one-room  
Hotel Tarkeykajang;  
where a waterfall falls  
cutting through the thin, fragile, ever-present  
Himalayan vista.

Tiered rice fields  
climbing up cliff sides  
breast born,  
earth erupted,  
redirect my attention  
to prayer flags flapping  
in the untouched wind,  
and flowers growing in  
unexpected places.

*By Kendra Colleen Wilsher*

# To Veganism

You fucked me in the ass  
With your guilt pangs  
And your damned ambivalences  
Does it matter? or Do they care?  
Repeatedly  
From the beginning  
You were a force  
That gradually overwhelmed me  
Like a disease  
A cancer  
Slowly pervading my being  
You drenched me in the turmoil and  
Sewer-water of asceticism  
You put me on Nietzsche's bad side  
for Christ's sake.

But somehow  
(and somehow I saw this how)  
after time  
I began to like your smell  
Cold, acidic  
Cleansing my sinuses like cilantro  
And the cold sharp slap  
Across the face  
In the presence of brie,  
I developed, through you  
A new identity

Compassionate  
Caring,  
Closer to my dog

(a big difference for a small thing)

A new structure even  
And a joyously masochistic taste  
For resisting temptation.

*By Matt Homan*





Nothing But the Kitchen Sink | *Patrick Huber*

# half-life

Concrete hallways teeming with balding, placated men, in brown trenchcoats, adjusting  
their horn-rimmed glasses and humming sonatas.  
White-trash women nursing the broken heel of a burgundy pump; gravelly voices, like the  
sweeping of a chimney, echoing from the bowels of the trailer park.  
Cross-eyed virgin street corners — changing traffic lights create temple throbbing  
hangovers — holding hostage the peanut vendors.  
The cracking sienna skin of an Oldsmobile dashboard in the sun.  
An unshaven, homeless Casanova dreaming of deodorants, milkshakes, and women so  
beautiful you fall in love.  
Frozen beatnik poems, no stanzas, thawing on bongo heated stages.

(drum break)

Tuesday — 1:30 am — chips and dip — local 7-11 ... alone.  
Gray faced men riding the 6:30 Metro and muttering a solemn Rosary behind the lettered  
shield of the Post.  
Shoulder lane joggers in Crayola flavored silk shorts battening down the hatches of a  
cubicle.  
A lone flag standing motionless on the moon.  
Bare-chested black boys stamping scattered fragments of ancient dances in the coursing  
river of a fire hydrant.  
The bone gnawing sounds of America devouring its young.

*By John Dunn*



|Alexander Stewart

# Fair Warning

*Nobody before me, nobody after me,  
writing it.*

*~Ikkyu.*

I have twisted Anna into something soundless,  
remade you in my own iconography. Currently

you are a wildfire with hair in rare areas, absurd  
tremblings, the once-hunted; I undid the other,

having confirmed her a peacock with dull plumes,  
pacing a sexless cage. You will learn.

With familiar women there is a certain speech—  
*Nobody before me, nobody after me*

Rewriting it: I tease you in your misshapen moods,  
more womanish than my straight back and slack tongue.

Speaking without sympathy, you let yourself be  
left alone, stroking your stalk with impatience.

Get up. Blame no one. But know, if only  
for a moment, you were the light on the mirror,

the stiff arch to smaller, brighter shores. You  
dissolve, I sweep my hands of your siftings.

The rest, as they say, is the jotting of the conqueror.

*By Emily Kay Carson*

# Room 13.z

Recoil following the matronly woman  
Along clean white corridors listening  
To clip-clop of alternating feet  
Annoying and raising apprehension.

She motions with right arm  
A sweeping gesture overly dramatic  
Leaving sweat and heartbeats that pump  
Itchy blood reminders of something between ears.

Door flung open reveals red-eyed children  
Playing puzzles, failing to connect sky  
With sky, pieces of boats missing  
A fat girl in the corner drinking glue.

Stop crying little Sally, stop crying  
But she does not hear that. A boy with  
Backward cap tosses Lincoln logs to affect,  
Pull glue away to find push pops melted.

Blink. Corridor clip-clop nausium  
Groping door handles yield way –

Grass covers walls with blinking eyes  
A pair, brown with shades of gray eyeliner  
Blink questions, expecting answers, looking  
Noncooperative in cooperative way.

Breakfast is scrambled eggs English muffin  
Butter orange juice coffee. Blink. Lunch spreads  
Picnic basket on blanket on grass near eyes  
White wine and cheese, simply brie and a baguette.

Eating comfort followed by soft laying  
Out stretch but no sun. Siesta with grass tickling  
Along bare back contentment of being turned  
From blinking eyes finding sleep.

*By Terry Smith*

## **Editorial Staff**

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## **Prize Winners**

Margaret Haley Carpenter Prize for Poetry: *Little Town* | Doug Boyle

Margaret Owen Finck Prize for Fiction: *V-Day Massacres* | Karen Cahill

Special thanks to professors Steve Barza, Abigail Cheever, Terry Givons, Dona Hickey, Kathleen Hewett-Smith, and Louis Schwartz for selecting the prize winners.

## **Publication Information**

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[www.student.richmond.edu/~messenger/](http://www.student.richmond.edu/~messenger/)  
[messenger@richmond.edu](mailto:messenger@richmond.edu)

## **Editor's Note**

The Messenger received almost two hundred submissions this year, and needless to say, the selection process was involved and difficult. This year's staff continued the magazine's highly selective tradition by choosing only 16% of submissions for print.

If you received one of the first 2,000 copies of the magazine, you will notice a CD tucked in the back cover. The CD was made possible through an undergraduate research grant, support from Jennifer Sauer and Valerie Cemprola, and the aid of the Technology Learning Center and Music Lab. Special thanks to Fran White, Daryl Weade, Matt McCabe, and Tom Gregorio. The CD hopes to remind listeners that poetry is a dynamic art form that functions as performance as well as literature. The CD is entirely improvisational, and no track received more than three takes. If you did not receive a CD with your magazine, our website supports an audio link.

# Messenger CD

*Cloud-low Bluegrass Portrait (one)*

Read By | Emily Kay Carson  
Guitar | Gary Larson  
Mandolin | Matt McCabe  
Violin | Tom Gregorio

*Namaste (deux)*

Read By | Kendra Colleen Wilsher  
Synthesizer & Theremin | Matt McCabe

*For The People Who Say I'm Not (drei)*

Read By | Trenise Robinson  
Guitar | Seth Hayden  
Drum and Snare | Stefan Czeschowski  
Trumpet | Matt Burke

*Quietly, Surely (nne)*

Read By | Vanessa Loftus  
Guitar | Seth Hayden  
Saxophone | Matt Kiel

*My Final Love Poem To You (bes)*

Read By | Terry Smith

*half-life (fhest')*

Read By | J. Dunn Two  
Guitar | Joel Oliphint  
Persussion | Bret Ambler  
On The Priesthood

*On The Priesthood (sab'a)*

Read By | T.F.G. Warner

*Yhatabuta: As It Is (oito)*

Read By | Emily Kay Carson  
Chimes | Matt McCabe

*After Reflecting Upon Dali's The Ghost Of Vermeer (chiu)*

Read By | Terry Smith  
Guitar | Joel Oliphint  
Mandolin | Matt McCabe  
Trumpet | Adam Claar

*Your Withdrawl My Symptom (de: shimt)*

Read By | Trenise Robinson  
Djembe | Stefan Czeschowski & Vail Dixon

*Sestina Trying To Be A Tree (once)*

Read By | Samuel Keyes  
Cello | Jamie Evans

*Fair Warning (jyu ni)*

Read By | Emily Kay Carson

*Jilted (trite)*

Read By | John Dunn  
Guitar | Gary Larson

*Room13.z (quattordici)*

Read By | Terry Smith



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