

The Messenger


Volume 2009
Issue 1 *The Messenger*, 2009

Article 54

2009

The Messenger, Spring 2009

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Photography Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2009) "The Messenger, Spring 2009," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2009 : Iss. 1 , Article 54.
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2009/iss1/54>

This Complete Issue is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Messenger by an authorized editor of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.



A woman with long dark hair is the central figure, wearing a blue dress with intricate silver or white patterns. She is positioned in a room with a doorway in the background, through which bright light is streaming, creating a strong silhouette effect. The floor appears to be made of earth or a similar natural material. The overall mood is dramatic and artistic.

the messenger

SPRING 2009

table of CONTENTS

Apodemus	Emily Smith	01
Half Empty	Katie Fishman	01
En Route Dining	Rob Moore	02
A Smile for You	Sherin Siew	03
An Easy Moment	Sherin Siew	04
Late December	Elizabeth Robinson	05
I Found Lost	Emily Lathe	07
French Kiss	Rob Moore	07
downward climb	Andrew Shult	08
Clowns of las Ramblas	Ale Nicolet	09
Le Roi, laissez-le dormir	Victor Wasserman	10
zest	Jennifer D'Arezzo	14
The Moment	Darius Nazeri	15
Ladakh, India	Alex Regan	15
The Night After Christmas	John Alulis	16
Brecian Grafitti	Ale Nicolet	17
teal	Jennifer D'Arezzo	18
Extinct	Katie Fishman	19
barbie land	Jacquelyn DeWolfe	20
Lonesome Conflagration	Rob Moore	21
Modern Epoch	Andrew Pasiuk	21
The Month to Come	Rob Moore	22
Elaine Davidson Finds Home	Lucy Hester	23
19.52	Andrew Shult	25
Cortona Cat	Jacquelyn DeWolfe	26
Master Craftsman	Schuyler Swartout	27



table of CONTENTS

flamenco	Jennifer D'Arezzo	30
Reflections	Liz McAvoy	31
bisou	Andrew Shult	31
baseball hat and glove	Cain Montgomery	32
stealing	Laurie Guilmartin	33
Undisturbed	Sherin Siew	34
Sunday Laundry	Ale Nicolet	34
névé	Andrew Shult	35
Napping Cat	Ale Nicolet	36
Counting my Blessings	Laurie Guilmartin	37
Stepping Stones	Katie Fishman	40
Red Badge of Courage	Erin Morgan	41
Booby Trap	Dawn Hackett	41
No Name	Ale Nicolet	43
Bridgeport	Madeline Gordon	44
OIE Submissions		49

Title page by Sheron Siew, "**Blue Movement**"



The **Margaret Haley Carpenter Award** for *Poetry* goes to the author of "Translation."

-- EMILY SMITH

The **Margaret Owen Finck Award** for *Creative Writing* goes to the author of "Counting My Blessings."

-- LAURIE GUILMARTIN



Through a hole in the wall lives a mouse:
I have seen it

ferrying miniscule picnic
delights to a spot nice and close to the radiator.

I make this mouse
my enemy. I leave angry notes outside of its hole.

But the paper flutters
trapped beneath the radiator shelf

and I catch the tiny
fellow dancing to its dry percussion.

Apodemus
EMILY SMITH



Half Empty
KATIE FISHMAN





En Route Dining
ROB MOORE

A Smile for You
SHERIN SIEW





An Easy Moment
SHERIN SIEW

Late December

ELIZABETH ROBINSON

I.

Mackenzie often sits alone in her room watching recorded tapes of a family she has never met. She bought a box of fabric at a garage sale two summers ago and found them at the bottom. She cries for them; their youngest child has autism and cannot walk straight but rides on his father's shoulders to first base at his tee-ball game, but she does not cry for us. She tells me that feeling something is better than feeling nothing at all.

My mother spends hours alone in the family room hanging strands of cranberry beads on the limbs of her Christmas tree. She often hums the pious Christmas hymns that the famous carolers don't sing on their albums. Mackenzie likes the big colored bulbs, the kind that are always the last left on the shelves in the holiday aisle at Prown's, so my mother weaves the lights in and out of the branches to glow blue, green, and orange between the cranberry strands.

On Christmas Eve the four of us stand in front of the fireplace that turns on and off with the twist of a knob, and we each hang our stocking on the mantle with a thumbtack. My father sighs and hangs his last, at the right end of the mantle and furthest from my mother's. Then my mother says something festive, asking God to bless the joy of the season upon us. Every year and it is always the same.

We get an invitation to spend Christmas Day with our cousins who live in Florida and who are counting on the fact that we never accept. My mother says that Aunt Kate is just being cordial and that if she really wanted us to visit, she wouldn't have moved to Florida.

My father simply sifts through the mail like a card shuffler, throwing the Christmas cards from our doctors and local politicians and distant relatives into a pile for my mother and keeping the bills to open later at the kitchen table. Sometimes I sit with him to do my homework, and I watch him while he punches numbers into his pocket calculator and stops every so often to adjust his glasses.

In January, after the Christmas shopping bills have arrived, he will insert a few grumbles into his routine while he calculates the balances he owes for my mother's purchases. Mackenzie will sit on the couch sipping eggnog that she has spiked with rum and watch my mother take down the lights and the cranberry beads. My mother will cluck at the holes left by the thumbtacks in the mantle, but there are only four as she makes sure we use the same holes every year.

This year, in late December, I have decided that I will run away.

My mother leaves her magazines in the recycling bin with the page corners folded down, all of them depicting sprawling gardens and spacious kitchens with lavish molding and tile backsplash. I have ripped out some of these pages and saved them in a shoe box under my bed to try and be a part of her fantasy world. This is where they can look for me when they realize I've run away.

I'm not going to tell Mackenzie because she will not cry. She will probably offer me her rain poncho and some quarters, but she won't say that she will miss me when I'm gone.

My Christmas presents will sit unopened under the tree while Mackenzie opens her new sewing machine and a few sweaters. My mother will smile diplomatically at my father when she opens the necklace that she has been eyeing in the window of Zeigman's and purchased and wrapped for herself.

II.

I had underestimated the weight of my action figures that I crammed into my backpack along with a granola bar before leaving the house. I pass people in jogging suits and women with baby carriages protecting heavily swaddled lumps with eyes. They stare at me momentarily probably because I have snot running from my nose and I am carrying twenty pounds of action figures on my back. The wind has begun to pick up and I have finished my granola bar. Perhaps this year will be different. Perhaps I should go back to watch my mother open a Christmas present that my father has thoughtfully picked out for her. They will kiss each other and Mackenzie will take a part of her blanket and throw it over my legs to keep me warm.

I begin to retrace my steps down the sidewalk, shifting my backpack from one shoulder to the other. As my house appears in the distance I break into a run and the Christmas lights twinkle in a blur of festivity on the front lawns of the neighborhood.

III.

I had hoped that it would snow. My mother has made ham for dinner this year, with crescent rolls and candied yams and the green-bean casserole my father likes. Mackenzie sits across from me and extracts the onion crisps from her casserole before plunging in with her fork.

My father pats his lips with his linen napkin. His black hair looks like it has been combed back with the mashed potato gravy. My mother takes his silence to mean that he is satisfied with the meal she has prepared.

We line ourselves in front of the fireplace. My mother goes first, tacking her stocking methodically onto the mantle. It will be empty on Christmas morning; it is always empty, but she hangs it just the same. She looks back at me as I step forward clinging to my stocking, as if to indicate the void that would have existed in the assembly line had I not come back after wandering the streets with my backpack for a while.

Mackenzie follows after taking a sip of her eggnog. She did not offer me her rain poncho; she did not even open her door, yelling over the Rolling Stones that she was re-piercing her ears.

My father shifts in his place before clearing his throat and shuffling towards the fireplace. The embers slowly inhale and exhale the gasoline from the valve, glowing blue at the base of the flames that rise up the stone backdrop. He stands there with his back to us, fingering the loop on the top of his stocking. He lifts his stocking towards the fireplace and up, up towards the mantle but then his left fist opens dropping the thumbtack to the ground and in one soft motion he tosses the stocking onto the quiet flames of the fire. My mother's eyes glow red as she watches the stocking melt into the fake coals attached to the bottom of the grate. She slowly brings her hands up to her mouth and takes in her breath as if it will stop her from feeling. Mackenzie looks straight ahead at the fireplace and then up to the mantle bearing the three stockings that we have hung. The four of us do not move from our respective positions, my father in front of us facing the fire with his hands in his pockets and his chin to his chest. And then with a sigh he steps backwards into his place by Mackenzie and my mother whispers for God to bring the joy of the season upon us.

I erase the road ahead of me

So I can find my way to lost

It is a struggle

In this day and age there are far

Too many ways to be found

I am met by cage fighters

In I-don't-know where

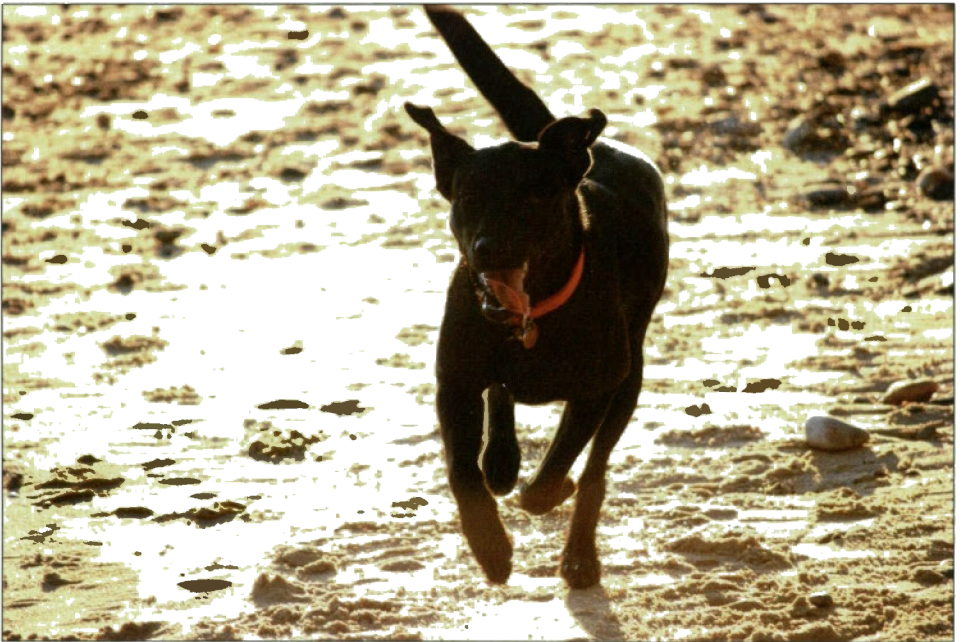
They are slender now

Enough to slide through the bars

All that they left behind was

A ribbon of white and blood

I Found Lost EMILY LATHE



French Kiss ROB MOORE



downward climb
ANDREW SHULT



Clowns of las Ramblas
ALE NICOLET

Le Roi, laissez-le dormir

VICTOR WASSERMAN

One day in winter the King Of All Things awoke to find that he had died. But this was a simpler time and aside from that one peculiarity everything in his room seemed to be in order. His bed was quite larger than anything you've seen before and he was in no condition to get out of it all by himself this morning; not after the night he had had. So many dreams had left him restless and he had been dehydrated after he had drained his glass of warm milk so early in the night. And so he lay like a dead man in his bed for some time.

When he felt that his strength had come back to him he rang his bell and his butler came in. "Django," he said, "it seems I've died and can't get up." Django responded with a very proper sigh and told the King Of All Things that he was very sorry for her that and that he had his deepest sympathies. The King responded that he already knew he had them, but the gesture was appreciated.

Together they managed to move the King Of All Things several feet by pulling at his legs, and then at his arms, and then back at his feet until he had slid some distance. His sheets became ruffled because of this but the King did not mind, because he had many more and could replace them. After a little under an hour of this work Django informed the King Of All Things that he had reached the end of his bed and could step down onto his rug now.

The King thanked his butler as he stood up and told him to make a note that in the future the King Of All Things would like a smaller bed until his condition improves. Django removed a note pad from inside his tuxedo pocket and scribbled "KOAT bed: smaller," and then bowed and turned to leave. When he reached the King's door he stopped and turned again. "Would you like me to get your clothes, Sir?"

"No, Django, I don't need all of them today. Just my robe, please." Django fetched it from the King's desk chair and brought it to the King's bedside table, and then left, closing the King's door behind him. Now the King Of All Things was not a heavy man in his lifetime but he was not feeling limber this morning. While still sitting on his bed he performed some stretches and bends until his legs and back felt like they could survive the strain of standing while he put on his robe.

His robe was a wonderful piece of fabric skillfully woven and had thus earned the right to be called specifically "his robe." He had many more, for he was the King Of All Things, but only this one was kept at the ready and inscribed KOAT over his breast pocket. This was true of his favorite desk set and all of his pens, ink bottles, letterheads and his desk itself had a plaque. As was true of his shoes, rugs, bedside table, lamp, bureau, curtains, and door and, until this morning, his bed. Now his bed would be sent to his son's room until it learned to behave itself.

The King Of All Things was, among many things, the King of Modesty, and he would be the first to tell you he wasn't the brightest man on earth. Well, not the first, but if you asked him about what someone else had said, he would have confirmed it, and added, "but I'm his King." He was also the King of Pride, you understand. But as such, the King Of All Things sometimes failed to understand the more delicate things in life, such as the act of departing. Never had the King departed in his life. Wherever he was to go, everything came with him, and as such, he rarely saw the benefit in going out of town (though he greatly enjoyed arriving).

Nevertheless, the King would not be hindered by his own demise and set about the course of his day with this goal in his mind. He placed on his slippers and walked to his great golden doors at the end of his room, knocked lightly, and waited for his butler to open them. They swung open presently and he proceeded down his enormous hallway designed to accommodate elephants (because he had those kinds of things in his house every so often) with Django walking diligently behind him.

"Will you be operating today, given your condition, Sir?"

"Yes, Django, but I'd like it if you'd have Martin come and have a look at me."

"Yes Sir, should I give you the run-down?" The King Of All Things informed Django that he already owned "the run-down," but that he would like to hear it. "You're quite right, Sir," he said and they continued down the hallway at some pace.

His first order of business was to inform his wife of his passing. It would give her something to do and she could plan for his funeral, and his wake would help her to narrow down what she should wear that morning, and all those things would make her happy, he felt. In time the King Of All Things arrived at the King's room in which the Queen Of All Things slept.

Before entering the Queen's room, it should be noted that she was very special, and so her living space reflected this, at times to drastic extents. Unlike the King Of All Things, the Queen Of All Things had not been born into a family that owned everything. She had, of course, come from a degree of royalty, (I say "degree" because, compared to the King Of All Things and his relatives, even the collective royal majesty of Spain, Britain, Belgium, Portugal and several Baltic nations amounted altogether to no more than a humped-back whale orbiting the comparative magnitude of a celestial body) but when she moved in with the King just after their honeymoon (somewhere around the East Wing of the palace) all her belongings had barely filled the trunk at the foot of her bed and so her mother-in-law had made a wedding gift of a wardrobe that was so immense, the Queen entertained fantasies that the people outside the palace must be naked. This had imparted to her a frantic nervousness about making choices such as what to wear because of the seemingly limitless available options and she would often become completely paralyzed when asked to make mundane decisions as a result.

Now the Queen Of All Things had a very large bed, far larger than even the King Of All Things, and the finely carved wooden headboard, which read QOAT on it, had been a far larger undertaking than the carver had been aware of at the time. The spacing

of the letters so as to make them even, as well as the inconsistency of dimensions across the headboard, had caused numerous delays.

The consistency problem stemmed from the lack of a single piece of wood long enough to form the headboard and so several planks had been chosen on the merit of being the best of each supplier's stock, which contributed to the lack of uniformity. The King maintained that though a tree of such dimensions was not available, he was still the King of it and ignored the rest of what was just mentioned on the grounds that it undermined his authority, of which he was the King, and therefore an act of treason. The carpenter had not been hired back. (On an unrelated note, firewood has been scarce of late).

The rest of the Queen's abode had been structured around the bed, in much the same way as a bank is around a vault. The room in which the Queen Of All Things slept had been designed just like Versailles and, in fact, Versailles is a scale model of her room (the French royal family had been disappointed to find that there was no body of water large enough to feed the QOAT fountains and had opted for the diminished size rather than waste the metal piping. The underground French resistance was made possible because of this decision). The enormity of the room provided a special problem for the Queen Of All Things.

You see, the Queen Of All Things was the first woman to marry a King of All Things and weigh less than her husband. Prior to this precedent, the traditional wing for the Queen had seemed quite quaint. But the Queen had grown tiny since her marriage. Now it was a very empty and sparse place and the decorator had been forced to spread out the furniture in an attempt to fill every corner of her room. As a result, the Queen had to powder her nose at one end of the room, and then go up three flights of stairs and across the room to check if she had been consistent all over. All of this contributed to a general lack of excitement in the Queen's life because she could not typically muster enough interest in any task to perform it. The King Of All Things attributed this to why his wife was smaller than the traditional queen; her maid placed the blame on the presence of her private kitchen in the Mirror Room. (Bulimia Nervosa was discovered around this time as well, though I believe it was unrelated.)

As the King Of All Things came through his QOAT doors, his Queen's maid was still trying to explain that his Queen did not usually rise for another half hour. The commotion awoke the Queen and put an end to the argument the King Of All Things and her maid were having.

"I tell you, stop giving me reasons, I already have them."

"What's all this noise, Britty?" The Queen Of All Things asked sleepily.

"Good morning, my Queen. I'm afraid I have some bad news." The King Of All Things sat down on the side of his Queen's bed, looked across the expanse at her, then back at where he was sitting. "Could you scoot down here a bit, honey?" he asked.

The Queen Of All Things looked across the expanse at him. "No," she said sleepily, loud enough for him to hear. These were simpler times.

"My dear, last night I died," said the King Of All Things, playing bashfully with his KOAT embroidery.

"Oh Britty! I'm so sorry," she said, wiping the sleep from her eyes. The King agreed it was sad, but assured her he already had her pity. "Yes, that's very true. Will you go see Martin this morning?"

"He's my next appointment." The Queen Of All Things said that was good and sent the King Of All Things on his way, closing the QOAT doors behind him.

"Doris? Would you bring me just the black clothes today." As the King had thought, it would be easier for the Queen Of All Things to get up the extraordinary energy necessary to do the tasks of her day with the preparations for her husband's funeral underway. The Queen Of All Things had never really adapted well to the sheer enormity of her closet and wardrobe therein, nor any of her tasks. When she had moved in after their marriage, she had packed all of her favorite clothes, but they had all since been forgotten amongst the mountains of fabric. She thought one time she saw one of her original socks, but wasn't sure.

"Oh!" She exclaimed, looking over at the headboard while Doris did her hair, "the tombstone is going to be simply massive!"

I should explain. The King Of All Things was a compulsive man; hence, why he up and died one night. Particularly, he was a compulsive winner, and felt that as the King Of All Things, he should be the best at all things. Unfortunately, he was not physically or mentally equipped to do this. As a result, he was often a trendsetter: inventing new ways of being the best, or new things to be the best at. Combined with his general compulsiveness, this led to his strange desire to have the longest name in the world.

He had been born Abraham, or maybe Kato (this was before birth certificates), but over time he added more names, sometimes at random, sometimes to commemorate special occasions (for his first anniversary he took his wife's maiden name). This persisted for some time until he developed a system: whenever a new child was born and named, he took the name too. He considered this his gift to every newborn and had a form letter sent out informing the parents (he was the King of Generosity too). But as a result, the King Of All Things lost the value of his original name. In response to this, his friends chose to call him Britannica. His wife called him Britty. Everyone else called him stupid. The committee is still out as to what the tombstone will read, though the stonemasons had a contingency plan to go on strike.

The King Of All Things was sitting on his throne with Martin, his chancellor, at his right. To Martin's right was Django, who couldn't stop staring at Martin's right hand. Martin's right hand was missing the tips of its fingers and Django had never been able to overcome this, not because he was squeamish (let us remember Django followed the King everywhere and the King was very competitive), but because of how Martin had lost his fingertips.

Martin had been hunting with the King Of All Things and his procession one day, when he had felled a fowl and was

holding the small bird in his hand. A new dog was being used that day and, failing to grasp the concept that the bird could be retrieved without his assistance, the canine had jumped and bitten down with the bird in his mouth, hand and all. In response, the King Of All Things, angry at the disobedience being shown by the dog, took his sword and cut the hound's head off.

He had failed to account however for how far down the dog's throat the bird had been, and removed the tips of Martin's fingers as well. This was a simpler time though, and the King and Martin laughed it off, saying, "You don't have to worry about the world being at your finger tips now, eh? They're six feet deep in world! Aha ha." (The King had the best sense of humor, he made everyone say so.) But Django's unsettled constitution aside, the room was very serious.

"Can you make me better, Martin?" the King Of All Things asked.

"Not really, Sire. After all, you're already the best." (Martin was the only one who was better than the King at wordplay.)

"That is very true, Martin." (The king did not know this.) "But there must be some thing I've overlooked..."

"Do you remember how you died, Sire? Or when in the night?"

"No, I only discovered in the morning when I found I wasn't thirsty anymore."

"What do you mean, my King?" Martin asked with confusion.

"Well, you see, I went to my bed with my warm glass of milk as I do ever night. Don't I, Django?"

"You do, Sir." (He thought he saw Martin trying to tap his fingers and gagged.)

"And I was quite thirsty because, as you recall, it was a hot night." (I refer you to the introduction.)

"Yes," said Martin, "I could scarcely get rid of all my firewood fast enough..."

"Well, once I had drained my glass and nourished my pallet, I was able to sleep some. But I awoke in the night thirsty again."

"Why did you not ring for Django?"

"He did, Chancellor," piped in Django, "but the furnace was so hot the milk boiled off and I could not prepare a glass of suitable warmth."

"Yes, that is a shame," said Martin, "However did you manage that night, Sire?"

"As you can plainly tell, I did not."

"You are absolutely right, it is plain to see that I had forgotten myself entirely after your most unfortunate story, and that the most unfortunate part of it escaped me entirely. Please, accept my apologies."

"I assure you, Martin, I already have them."

"Indeed, Sire." (I refer you to Martin's proficiency.) "And so you awoke to find that you were dead, due to your dehydration in the night?"

"Most certainly! Can you cure this affliction, my most trusted friend?"

"I can promise you, Sire, if I cannot, the grave stone will be on me."

"You've never been more wrong," replied the King.

Martin thought for a long moment, and rubbed his chin diligently as he did so. Django excused himself to vomit. The King Of All Things considered if he should get dressed or have Django procure enough robes to last him for the duration of his rule. (I peeked at the Queen changing.) Then Martin spoke.

"Your highness, you say you do not recall the instant of your death?"

"This is true."

"Nor the means?"

"But we suspect it was the lack of a drink that night," the King Of All Things interjected.

"This is the belief. However, before we have Django arrested for murder (for Django had just returned from the restroom and Martin had noticed the look in the King's eye) we should take another look at this."

"What do you propose, Chancellor?" asked the King.

"Well, how do you feel at this moment? Well?"

"Aside from expired, yes, quite well."

"And how would you say you felt yesterday, prior to your initial thirst? As good?"

"As good as always," said the king.

"So as good as you did when you were alive?" The King Of All Things prided himself on his pleasant disposition and health and said so. "But you do not recall the moment of your death?"

"No, I was asleep."

"Do you recall the moment of your birth then, Sire? Because you most assuredly were wide awake then. I saw it for myself."

"I do not recall that."

"Your birth or my attendance?"

"Neither. Was I a good looking babe?"

"The best." The King clapped. Django felt an invisible noose around his neck. "So you recall neither your birth nor your

death, yet you are quite certain that both occurred?"

"Well, I had always held myself to be the greatest man alive, so yes, I presumed I was alive. And you testified that I was alive."

"I testified that I saw you were born. And you testified that you died. Neither of us has said anything about your confirmed existence between those events."

"You are very right about that. Django," called the King Of All Things, "Approach!"

Django drew near. "Yes, Sir?" he said nervously.

"Have you ever seen me alive?" the King asked.

"I have only ever seen you as you appear to be now."

"Dead?" asked the King, surprised.

"If that is what you are, you have always seemed so to me."

"Thank you, you may sit now." Django couldn't decide if that was better or worse. Then the King Of All Things turned to Martin. "So we do not know that I was ever alive for sure then?"

"This is so, and the Queen Of All Things is likely to give a similar testimony."

"Then it seems I've never, in fact, lived. Is this correct?"

"I'm afraid so. Whatever will the Queen think? How can you have a wake for someone who's never lived?"

The King Of All Things was flabbergasted for a moment. "You are absolutely right, Martin. If I've never lived, they will have nothing to talk about. The King Of All Things has never lived! I must fix this before it is to late!"

The King Of All Things stood to run for the door and Django was happy to go, but Martin grabbed the King by his sleeve and this made Django have to sit down again. "I have one last thing to say before you go and live a life worth mention, my King."

"Yes, Martin, what is that?"

"Perhaps we should not tell anyone aside from those who know already that you have passed, Sire. While its not a huge hindrance for you, who are so talented and could most assuredly impress people as the most alive dead person they've ever met, it would hurt your reputation as the most alive living person if people found out you've never lived before now."

The King Of All Things, standing in his bathrobe in the grandest house in the world, reflected on this notion. "You are correct as always, Martin. Please keep this to yourself, as I know you will."

"How can I keep it to myself, Sire, when it is and always will be yours?"

The King Of All Things laughed, "Very true, my friend. But that is a problem for another day! I have a life to live! Django, call out the dogs!"

The King Of All Things, and his wife, happy to be doing something in preparation for his wake, and Django, after he had changed his pants because they were producing a faint odor of urine, all set out with the King's men and the King's horses. Martin, who abstained, left through the King's side entrance, and walked along the snowy trail to the local village wherein he lived, thinking to himself all the way that this was a simpler time he lived in, and wondering what exactly that meant.





zest

JENNIFER D'AREZZO

The Moment

DARIUS "RASHEED" NAZERI



Ladakh, India

ALEX REGAN

'Twas the night after Christmas, and all throughout Trenton,
Not a Hessian was stirrin', not botherin' with entrenchin'.
Their stockings were hung up to dry in the air,
Not knowing George Washington soon would be there.

The mercenaries were nestled all snug in their beds,
While pliant young virgins danced in their heads,
And the whore in her nightshift and Colonel Rall in his cap
Had just settled down to spread 'round the clap.

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter
Rall sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window he flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the luster of midday to objects below,
When what to his wondering eyes should appear
But an army of colonists, irate and sans beer!

With a great hulking general, so tall and so dashing
Rall knew in a moment it must be George Washing (ton).
More rapid than eagles his soldiers they came,
While George bellowed and shouted and called them by name.

"Now Americans, now patriots, now Virginians and southerners!
On New Yorkers, on Jerseyians, on Yankees and northerners!
To the top of the porch, to the top of the wall,
Now dash away, dash away, capture them all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the barracks the colonists they flew,
With guns in their hands and in Washington's too.

And then in a twinkling Rall smelled from the roof
The torches and firebrands of colonists aloof.
As he reached for his sword and was turning around,
Through the door General Washington came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with blood, gore, and soot.
A half dozen heads he had slung on his back,
And he looked like a giant, preparing a snack.

His eyes – how they flashed! Enough to cause worry!
His cheeks were bright red from being out in the flurry;
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow
That shoots arrows at prisoners who march far too slow.

A bloody finger he held clenched in his teeth,
While smoke from the torches wrapped his head like a wreath.
He held a severed head whose name had been Kelly
And whose face turned the knees of his enemy to jelly.

He was tall and well-muscled, not short like an elf,
And he laughed when he saw Rall in spite of himself.
A wink of his eye and a jerk of his head
Soon gave Rall to know that he fast would be dead.

He spoke not a word but went straight to his work,
Lunged with his sword, then twisted with a jerk.
Then laying his hand overtop of Rall's nose,
Yanked the blade free and wiped the blood from his clothes.

Then he sprang from the room, to his men gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
Survivors heard him exclaim as he rowed out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

The Night After Christmas

JOHN ALULIS



Grecian Grafitti
ALE NICOLET



teal
JENNIFER D'AREZZO

Extinct

KATIE FISHMAN

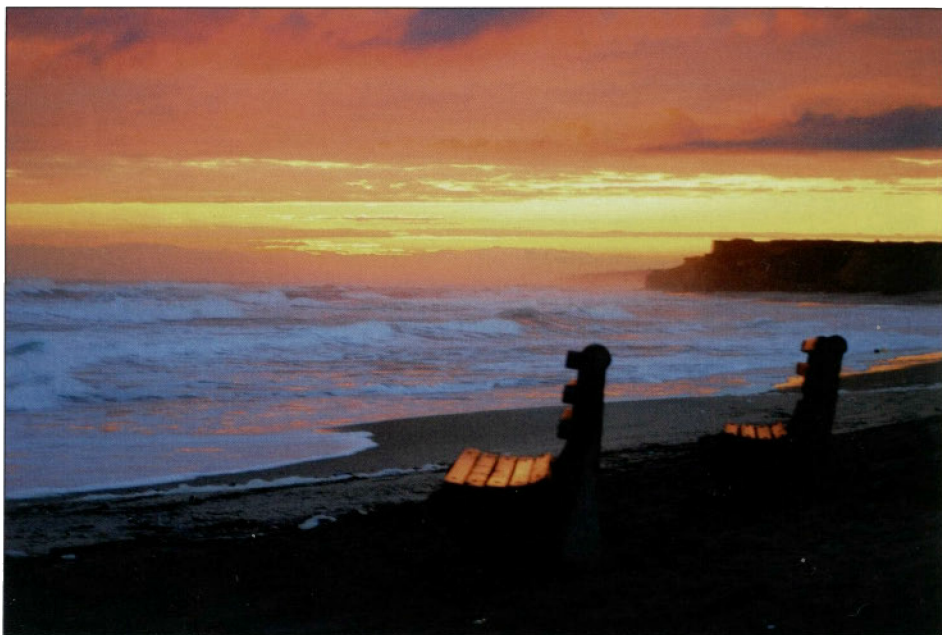
Lilly's obsession with dinosaurs was getting out of hand. She owed her school library over 500 dollars in late fees, all of which were for dinosaur books she had checked out, fallen in love with, and thus never returned. She dyed all her clothes realistic dinosaur colors that carefully matched the dinosaur illustrations she kept in her locker. Whenever she went to the bathroom, she drew caveman-like drawings on the stall doors depicting the giant prehistoric creatures. Alongside these drawings she wrote things like "Long live the dinosaurs" and "T-Rex and me, BFF." After school, she went to the park and dug around for fossils.

For her 18th birthday, Lilly's friends decided to surprise her with a fancy dinner and a hotel room downtown at the Fairview. They hoped this mature (and very generous) gift would encourage her to grow up and finally leave the prehistoric fantasy world behind. At the hotel these hopes were quickly dashed. While her friends checked in at the reception desk, Lilly nibbled, brontosaurus-style, on the fake ficus in the hotel lobby. As they rode the elevator to their room on the 8th floor, Lilly roared like a mighty T-Rex. By the time they reached the bar, Lilly's friends had abandoned all hope of curing her obsession. They hoped Lilly's fake id wouldn't work and they could leave her curly blonde pigtails and "pterodactyl green" dress behind.

Lilly made it into the bar and slurped down drink after drink in celebration of her birthday. It would have been great, except she had a tendency to do an extremely perturbing velociraptor impersonation when she was drunk. Tonight, Lilly jumped onto the bar to perform her Velociraptor Rap. She flapped her arms, making unbearable screeching noises. She stomped on peoples' full drinks, breaking glass and spraying them with liquid. Eventually, someone called the cops. Lilly tried to escape, but it was no use. She was soon locked up in the county jail. As she slumped sadly in her cell, Lilly felt the pain of the dinosaurs, felt the ice age moving in, the meteor about to hit.



barbie land
JACQUELYN DEWOLFE



Lonesome Conflagration

ROB MOORE

Modern Epoch

ANDREW PASIUK

It was a sailor's sun, but we claimed it as ours anyway. It was orange and red and made us think we were somewhere far away. We kept it in a cage in the backyard. We walked around barefoot in the middle of winter and lounged beneath palms. Once or twice I recall snow falling in everyone's yard but ours.

Our faces were dark and sweaty and getting darker and sweatier. At night we could hear the owls sleeping, the grass growing taller than the trees.



The Month to Come

ROB MOORE

Elaine Davidson Finds a Home

LUCY HESTER

If you're doing a systematic exploration of the Royal Mile, beginning at the top and working your way down, you won't find Elaine Davidson until you're nearly halfway to Holyrood Palace. You'll be almost to Nicholson Street and the Northgate Bridge. You'll have just about come to the portal entrance to Mary King's Close, and you'll be deciding whether to take the plunge into the dark underworld of that ancient street, bricked up and built over in Sixteen-Twenty-Something to incarcerate the portion of Edinburgh's population that resided there, three-quarters of whom suffered from the plague, and four-quarters of whom never saw the light of day again. You don't really believe in ghosts, but everyone who's ever been down to Mary King's Close does, so you've gotta see what the hype is about, test your fortitude against the supernatural.

Before you get the chance to, though, you see Elaine Davidson. You don't know her name of course-- that will come later when you have a chance to look her up on Wikipedia and the Guinness Book of World Records. It will strike you then as inappropriately anti-climactic. The name is fairly innocuous, conventional enough. There are probably lots of women named Elaine Davidson in the United Kingdom. But there isn't anyone anywhere who looks like this. You gather your cohorts--have they seen her yet? They have, and like you, they are wondering how to proceed with an appropriate response.

The thing about the Royal Mile is that it's sort of like a Scottish Disneyland. Day in and day out it buzzes with tourists, striving to fulfill their every Scottish fantasy. Edinburgh Castle sits at the high point of the Mile, flanked by statues of Robert the Bruce and William Wallace. As a military fortress, it doesn't offer much in the way of pretty photo-ops, there's mostly just a lot of canons and stone. But the Scottish crown jewels are there, along with the closet where Mary Queen of Scots gave birth to King James before spending the rest of her life in captivity, and there's a dog cemetery that will melt the heart of even the toughest lad.

Outside the castle, any vigilant tourist will be sure to stop for the Mel Gibson look-a-like who stands ready and waiting in full battle garb and blue face paint, proffering a variety of machetes and battle-swords and what cannot fail to be anything but a timelessly-valued photograph if you let rip your best war-cry and drop a quid in his can. He played Braveheart's stunt-double, and as far as anyone knows, he's claimed his stake there on the Royal Mile every day since. He stands next to the entrance to the Tartan Factory, where you can watch tartan being made and learn about the history of kilts and tartans and purchase scarves and blankets in the authentic patterns of just about any Scottish clan in history, along with more than a few that never existed at all. But don't buy too soon! Stores like "Thistle Do Nicely" and "Nessie" have a wide range as well, so you'll want to shop around.

By the time you've worked up an appetite you'll have arrived at Deacon Brodie's Tavern, the perfect place to stop for your fish-and-chips and Im Bru (the waitress will swear that it's the best cure for a hangover, but after just one you'll know to never order another). Deacon Brodie's is the one-time residence of the real life Dr. Jekyll, or Mr. Hyde, if you prefer. He was hung just across the street, around where the statue of David Hume sits now, in front of St. Giles Cathedral. They say Presbyterianism started at St. Giles, which has sat there on the Mile for almost 1000 years. The Thistle Chapel, inside, is used by the Queen twice a year for the meetings of the secret Order of the Thistle. The Order's newest member is Prince William. Too bad you didn't plan your trip around his next visit.

So you're buying your scarves, your beer-coozies that look like kilts, your stuffed animals of the Loch Ness monster, checking out a biography of Sir Walter Scott while trying to remember what it actually was that he wrote, all the while taking pictures of everything you see and enjoying (or telling yourself that you enjoy) the tunes emanating from the bagpiper that inevitably has taken up temporary residence next to David Hume's right hand. And the best part about it all is how authentic everything feels. So much history! So much culture! There are so many old things here!

And at that moment, precisely at that moment in which you feel most in tune with the Scot within you, when under your breath you're singing the words "You take the high road and I'll take the low road," when you are making a mental note to remember to cheer against England in any sporting event you may encounter in the future; at that moment you'll see her.

A small woman, most of her face is obscured, so she looks like she could be from just about anywhere. Anywhere, that is, but Scotland. The only thing she seems to have in common with her surroundings is that she appears to be very old. But this, too, is a fallacy. Internet reports place her at 24 years old. Even after reading this you won't believe it. No one could acquire so many piercings in so few a number of years.

Every inch of her face and ears is weighed down by metallic hoops and balls. Yet somehow, she manages to color the skin beneath them in brilliant colors: fuchsia eyes, yellow cheeks, a polka-dotted forehead. Her hair is massive. Today her dreadlocks are bright green. Well, that's the dominant color, at least. They are accented by a blue flower easily half the size of her head. The Guinness Book of World Records says she has 5,920 piercings. You don't know this then. You only know that there is one thought running through your head. What is this woman doing here?

Do you take her picture? Is that rude? With Braveheart up the hill this issue had been so much simpler. Can you ask her the other thing you are dying to know: how do airport personnel react to you? Maybe she can't fly anywhere. Maybe the reason she is here is that she was here on 9/11 and then after that she could never get back through airport security.

You inch closer to her table, straining to see what she is selling. Postcards. Pictures she has drawn of St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Palace. Incredulously, you consider the possibility that she is here for the same reason you are. Is it possible? Could she be searching for her inner Scot?

You hesitate for a moment, but in the end you don't take her picture. You don't say hello or buy a postcard for the cheap thrill of grazing her hand. You simply move beyond her into Mary King's Close, to find out if you can be frightened into believing in ghosts. Later, though, you will tell your friends, "When you go to the Royal Mile, look for the pierced lady."





19.52
ANDREW SHULT

Cortona Cat

JACQUELYN DEWOLFE



Every night, the clockmaker keeps three lamps burning on specially made hooks placed in his workshop. They provide all the illumination he needs, and are placed at different angles so as not to create messy shadows. The clockmaker hates a mess. Atypical of his profession, his workshop is clean and uncluttered, with pristine white furnishings. No spring is out of place, no metal turning escapes his raptor eyes or his full-bristled broom. He personally cleans each morning with lye soap and elbow grease and an immense zeal. A visitor might mistake the room for a hospital.

The clockmaker grunts and places his minuscule screwdriver on the workbench. Rising from his stool, he takes the miniature clock he has been working in his hands as he paces toward the window. The only window in his workshop, and it faces away from the city. If it had faced the other way, the clockmaker would have seen the enormous clock that he had designed and built for city hall. It was lit from behind atop the tallest structure in the city. People called it his masterpiece. The clockmaker disagreed. The town clock was big and pretty, that was all. Standing at the window, he raises the pocket watch-sized hunk of gears and springs in front of his face as if he were looking through it, until it eclipses the moon. He smiles, but he is not happy. The clockmaker smiles only when he is mad with frustration. His real masterpiece is incomplete and time is running out.

The clockmaker laughs. "Time is running out." People often use clock-related clichés around him. He only thinks of them when he is smiling in frustration. Lowering the metal in his hands, he takes a final glance at the dark mountains then wheels around to face his workbench. Five springs, arranged by size, sit next to his tools, taunting him. He needs to pack them into an area the half the size of a sugar cube, but it is late. They will wait until morning. Extinguishing the three lamps, the clockmaker closes up his shop for the night.

When the clockmaker returns home, his wife is waiting for him, reading by candlelight in bed. A plump, redheaded woman who was educated at a women's seminary, she has never worked outside the house. She is the clockmaker's one luxury; he spends his money buying her fashionable clothes, the latest books from London and Paris, fine jewelry that his guild brothers have made, and other lavish goods. As he prepares for bed, she straightens herself against her pillow, sets the book on her nightstand, and with buckled brow: "What has got you so bothered in your watchshop?"

The clockmaker stops unbuckling his belt, turns to her and flashes a smile. He says nothing, but finishes removing his clothing and blows out the candles. That night, lying face-up in the dark, they will talk of his workshop, of the incredible timepiece he is perfecting, and of the five springs. By the time they fall asleep, he will have either found a solution, or they will have quarreled and gone to bed angry. If they quarrel, the clockmaker will stop at the market tomorrow, purchase an imported, expensive set of paints, and come home, beaming as he opens the door, trying to be a peacemaker.

The clockmaker is very happy; he has completed his masterpiece and did not have to buy paints. Sitting in triumph at his workbench, he adjusts the dial to its lowest setting and winds the watch. A ticking sound fills his head – bliss! He counts the soft ticks, fifty-nine of them before the loud tick marking a full minute. In fourteen more minutes there will be a single bell tone. In fifty-nine there will be a Westminster Chimes pattern. His eyes close in pleasure as he slumps down in his chair, counting seconds and reveling in the watch's accuracy. It turned out to be far more accurate than he had imagined. How the world will thank him, when he unveils his invention in the city square next week.

Although it is midday on a Thursday, a large crowd has gathered in the square to see the clockmaker's next great invention. The clockmaker is a local celebrity; even the mayor and his family have arrived in their carriage to witness the spectacle. But the clockmaker is running late, and the crowd has begun to grow restless. They had expected to see a large and majestic creation and are puzzled by the absence of a structure covered by cloth, ready for unveiling. The clockmaker's

wife shuffles her weight from foot to foot from her place behind the podium where her husband is due to speak. She does not know what he is presenting, what he has been working on for months. He has come to her with problems and frustrations, and she has done her best to talk him through them. But he is the master craftsman, and she is just his well-educated and spoiled wife who gets him out of jams, on occasion. She knows the object is small, small enough to be a pocket watch. She knows that it is far more intricate than anything her husband, or probably anyone, has ever attempted before. Her thoughts drift from the mysterious invention to the wooden panels of the podium, to the bustling and irritated crowd, to the gray, woolen clouds overhead, which look low enough to scrape her husband's clock on top of city hall.

From nowhere, the clockmaker arrives in his finest suit. He hustles past his wife, stopping only long enough to give her a quick peck on the cheek before he mounts the large podium. His wife's ears are pricked. The mayor's ears are pricked. The crowd's ears are pricked. The entire city, even the noisy factories, seems to have grown silent in anticipation of the clockmaker's speech. It turns out to be short. The clockmaker clears his throat and begins: "Fellow citizens! I am proud to present to our fine city a new technology, one that will revolutionize the way we live, that will make our city the undisputed leader in commerce and culture. I am about to present to you time itself, in its pure form. This gift I give to you with no expectation of payment, for I believe its worth to be too great to be expressed in monetary terms. Without further ado, I present to you the gift of perfect time!"

The crowd is silent; nothing is happening. The clockmaker steps away from the podium and puts his hands in his pockets expectantly. In about thirty seconds, the ticking begins. Incredibly clear and exact, just like in the clockmaker's workshop. The crowd hears it too, and they are applauding loudly for this magic clock that ticks out of nowhere. The clockmaker raises his hands in success. Then he steps behind the podium. No one sees him leave. Eventually, the crowd realizes that the demonstration is over and begins to filter out of the square.

It takes a few hours for most of the town to realize that the ticking is not stopping, although some of the farmers and deliverymen who work outside of the city discover the phenomenon very quickly. No matter where they go around the town, they can hear the soft ticks of seconds, the loud ticks of minutes, the Westminster chimes. They try walking around corners, descending into their cement basements, putting pillows over their heads. Then there is panic. At twilight, for the second time on the cloudy day, a crowd gathers in the town square, this time full of anger and facing the mayor's residence. The mayor, delivering a speech amid the incessant ticks and tocks, outlines a plan to the frustrated mob.

The first thing they do is try to find the clockmaker's device. The podium is dismantled and every board thoroughly inspected, then destroyed with sledgehammers by the frustrated townspeople. The clock continues. They search the entire square for suspicious objects, every tree and statue, with no success. By now it is approaching nightfall, and many are worried about their chances of sleeping amid the perpetual ticking. Just before the Westminster chimes toll eight o'clock, someone suggests going to find the clockmaker.

The clockmaker's wife has not seen her husband since he dismounted the podium that afternoon. Alarmed at his apparent disappearance, she had gone back to their house, hoping to find him celebrating his invention with fine beer and tickets to the local theatre. But he was not home and did not return all evening. The continued clicking of his watch contraption has kept her on edge; she expects him to walk through the front door at any minute. But she has become very alarmed. Their house is not far from the town square, and she could hear the mob's angry shouts as they tore up the podium. By the time a group of citizens reach the house, she has retired to the bedroom. The mob, now holding torches, pounds on her door, demanding to speak with her husband. When it becomes clear that they will not leave, she opens her bedroom window and calls down to them, explaining that her husband is not at home. They do not believe her. They yell and pump their torches in the air. Her repeated, pleading insistence that she has no idea of the clockmaker's whereabouts does not satisfy

them. The ticking has not stopped. They are growing violent. The clockmaker's wife has just enough time to slip out the back door of her house before they throw their torches onto its roof and through its windows, setting it alight.

A group of citizens have climbed the city hall clock tower, armed with torches and sledgehammers. They believe that the clockmaker has hidden the device in his older creation. This time they do not bother to inspect the clock thoroughly; the strongest among them, a behemoth machinist from the boiler and stove factory, smashes the clock's illuminated face. The glass falls from the tower with a loud crash, momentarily drowning the ticking seconds. The mayor looks across the square from his balcony, seeing the machinist and his crew in sharp-edged silhouette against the clock's powerful lantern. Then they smash this too and the mayor, for the first time in his long career, begins to truly fear for his city.

The clockmaker's wife has sought refuge at the house of her sister, on the outskirts of town. Her sister was unable to attend the ceremony in the town square because her infant child has been suffering a cold. Standing over her son's cradle, she coos and pulls faces, trying to placate her sick child who has been crying ever since the ticking began. Looking up for a few seconds, she asks her sister what her husband has done.

"I have no idea what it is or how he did it!" she insists. "He never tells me what he's working on, and I don't know where he's run off to!" The clockmaker's wife is frightened. Unless someone finds her husband, she is the only living link to the city's most wanted fugitive. She is worried about the safety of her sister and her family, now that they are harboring her. The baby continues to cry, his breaths synchronized with the ticking seconds. Her brother-in-law storms into the room, his large, carpenter's hands held up in panic, ten o'clock and two o'clock. He points at the window. The two women gaze in horror onto the city, an orange-and-smoke blaze at its center.

"I am going to pray that the fire does not reach as far as our home. But either way, people will come looking. Whoever survives will come looking." He glares at the clockmaker's wife. She knows her time here is up. She pleads "I don't know where he is! But if I knew, I would be the first to shake him up and down and scream at him to try to stop this! I wish I knew where my crackpot husband was so I could strangle him, so that I could bring him into the town square and have people throw stones at him to make him pay for this! Don't throw me out. Please don't make me go out there." But it is too late to convince the carpenter. He opens the front door, revealing a distant-but-approaching flicker of moving torches, and gestures that she needs to leave.

The mob has begun to light the square on fire. They chop down trees and smash storefronts and rubbish bins. Then they turn their attention to the mayor's mansion. They demand an answer that the mayor cannot give. The mayor's carriage speeds away from the city as his house burns. All through the night, the town burns, and still the sounds do not stop.

The clockmaker walks through a cemetery on a hill outside of town. No one has seen him yet, and he has not yet entertained the possibility that they will. He spent the afternoon strolling the aisles of tombstones like a beaming child, rubbing the silver watch between his palms like a smooth stone. He had set loose his masterpiece! Perfect time, anywhere, with no clocks to look at or wind up, for everyone, for free, all throughout the city. He expected the mayor to find him and offer him a substantial prize for his revolutionary contribution to humanity. Over the course of the evening, he has realized that this will not happen. Why haven't they embraced his perfect time? When he sees the city ablaze he panics. What have they done, and why? The clockmaker smiles as he looks toward the burning town. He knows he cannot return, but he cannot bear to remove or stop his watch, bringing silence and all sorts of timekeeping errors back upon the city. But he will not get the recognition he

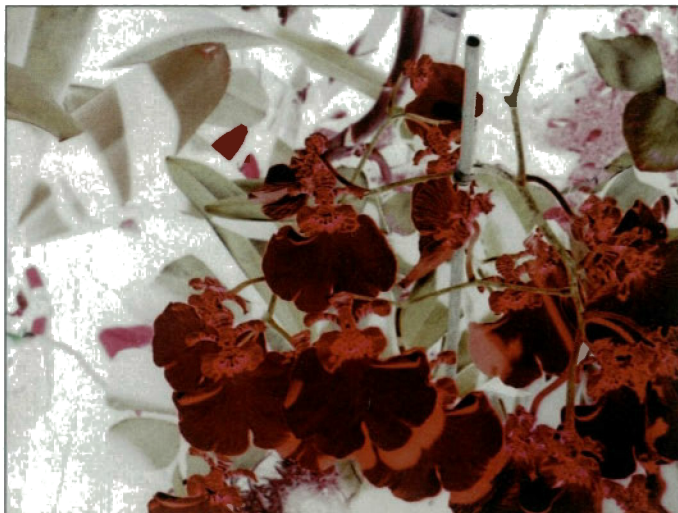
deserves! Why haven't his fellow citizens hailed him as the next Da Vinci? Or better than Da Vinci! The clockmaker is crushed, but even he understands that his clock is too dangerous to carry with him.

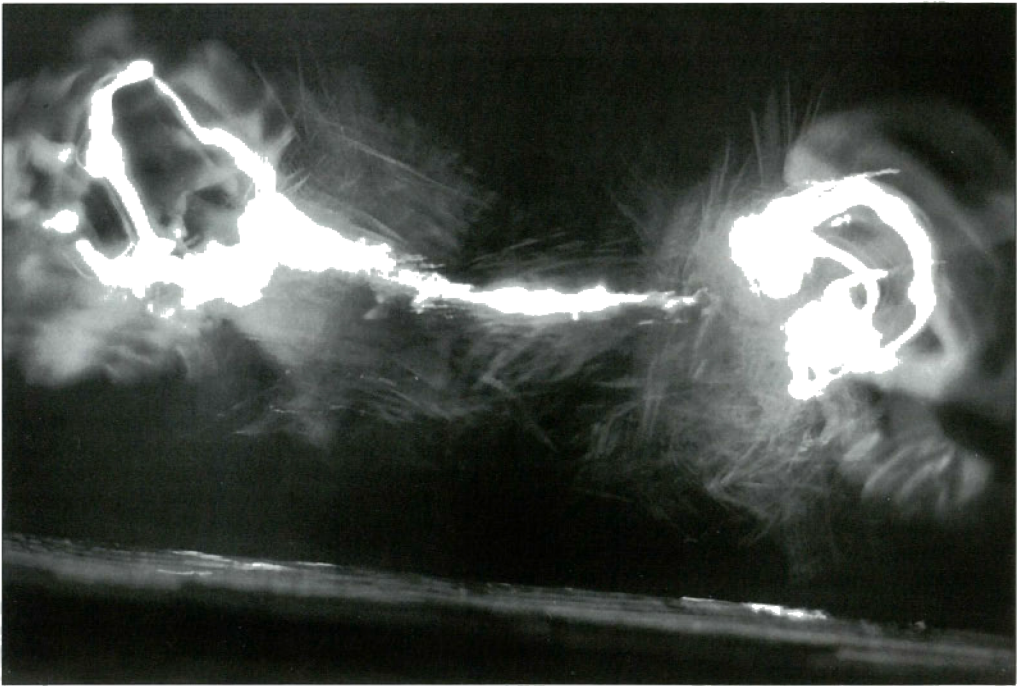
Stopping at the last tombstone in the row he is walking, the clockmaker stops in his tracks and kneels down, beginning to dig with his bare hands. But after a few handfuls, he stops. He can't bury his perfect clock in the cemetery – only dead things ought to be put there. He stands up, feeling slightly foolish now with his fine suit and dirty hands. After a second's more thought, he concludes that hiding the device in the cemetery would leave too much of a risk of someone digging it up while exhuming a grave or burying a fresh corpse. Leaving the graveyard, the clockmaker walks toward a large oak tree growing by the roadside. Halfway up, just below its leafy branches, is a large knot-hole; an ideal hiding place. He lands the clock inside the knot-hole on his third throw, then looks back at his burning city. The mayor's carriage approaches on the road out of the city. Its horses maintain a blistering pace, sending the cart ricocheting from stone to stone on the cobbled road. In a display of athleticism anomalous for his age, the clockmaker jumps onto the back of the cart as it peels past the cemetery. He holds tightly, knowing he will be jostled about for some time.

The carpenter's son has just learned to walk. His father, now very busy rebuilding the city, was not able to see his first steps, but his wife described them in detail over their meager dinner. He relates to her the day's troubles – the city is trying to build a new clock tower that is synchronized to perfect time, but none of the city's craftsmen can build a clock that is so exact. As foreman for the construction of the tower itself, the carpenter is extremely frustrated. His son gurgles nonsense words as if consoling his father. In a few days, he will speak his first word, "hour." He no longer cries all the time. The carpenter and his wife don't even notice the clock anymore. And thanks to increased punctuality, the rebuilding of the city is progressing far ahead of schedule. Only the carpenter's wife is unhappy. She and her husband never mention her sister, but whenever he talks about the clock or the clock tower, she looks down, lost in a vague mourning, remembering alone the way things were before perfect time descended upon the town.



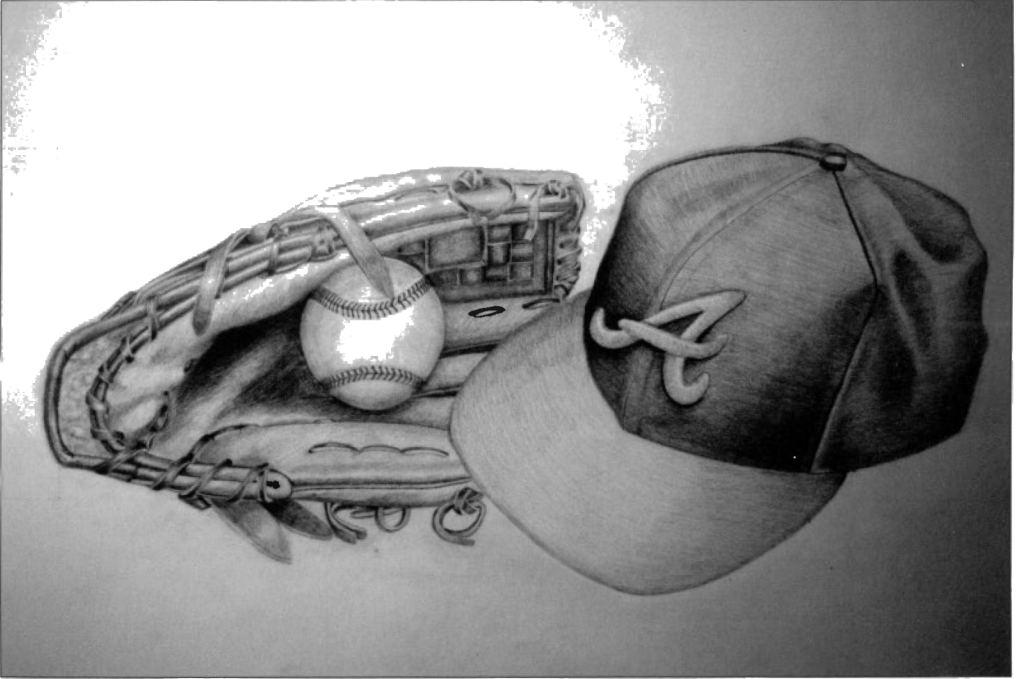
flamenco
JENNIFER D'AREZZO





Reflections

LIZ MCAVOY



baseball hat and glove

CAIN MONTGOMERY

bisou

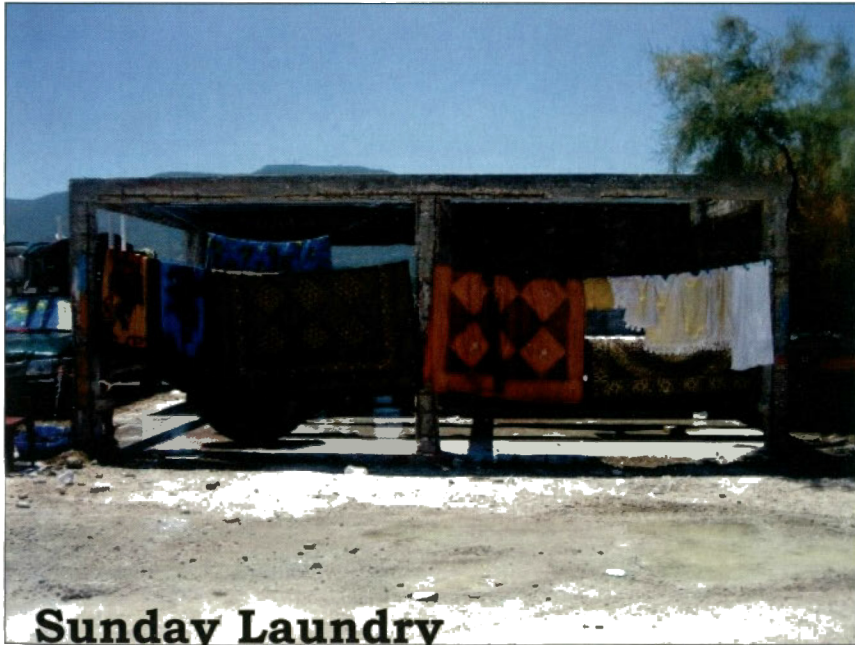
ANDREW SHULT

stealing

LAURIE GUILMARTIN

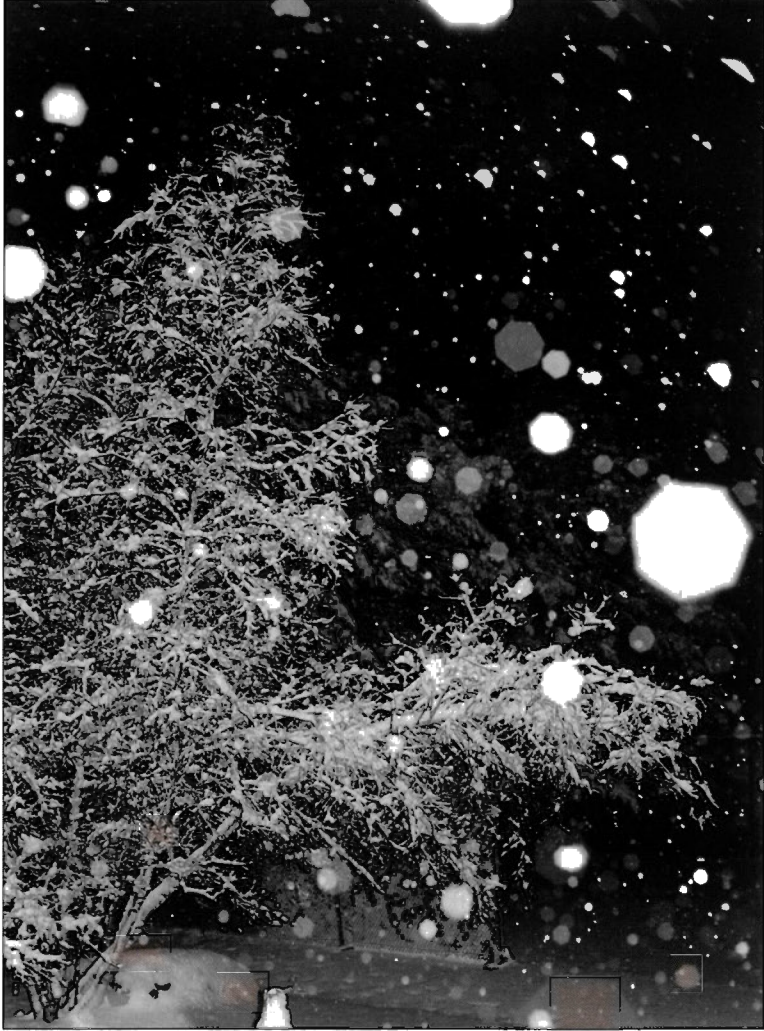
First it was going to be wine, but then we decided we weren't wine people, so we said beer—we could get any kind and I told him that my parents drank Corona by the pool, so we could get that, but he said to me, "our first drink will not be a cold one," and so he changed his mind back to wine and justified it by telling me that we were wine people as long as we drank it out of the bottle and I imagined it and saw us running from the store—the bottle tucked in his pants—and it just seemed better than bolting with a six-pack under my arm—so I told him he was right and we walked up the two cement stairs and stood in front of the little 7-11 on Cramer and I was scared so I told him I was and he squeezed my hand and told me that we would be fine and even if we were caught, well, it would be a good story for our kids and I smiled trying to imagine a fireplace, or sewing, or reading a bedtime story and I imagined wishing or remembering the days when he and I were young and wild and I said yes, we need to do this and thinking of it my skin began to itch and jitter and my hand melted so that the streams of my sweat ran together with his and he told me to be cool or else they'd notice something was up and I told him I'd try my best, but I wasn't sure if I could be cool, so I asked him if it would be better if he went alone and he told me that I was Bonnie and he was Clyde and one never really could have ever been famous without the other and I smiled and said, "Okay, now then," and we walked in and I nodded to the cashier and mouthed to him, "Afternoon," and he looked back down at his newspaper—he was old, maybe seventy—sometimes when I see a man that old, like him, who looks like they're missing something, my eyes well up because I pity them—but I turned quickly away because I didn't want to back down, but I was starting to wonder why we were doing this, why we had to do this, and I know he said, "well we're too young to buy alcohol, so let's just take it," but when he looked up and winked at me and took off his belt and slipped the bottle under his sweatshirt and into the back of his pants I turned to look at the cashier who looked up at me and then over at his pants and the cashier bit his cracked lip and looked back down and smiled and I knew I was already drunk and I grabbed his hand and we jumped up and ran and ran and ran and ran and I knew why.

Undisturbed
SHERIN SIEW



Sunday Laundry
ALE NICOLET

névé
ANDREW SHULT



Napping Cat
ALE NICOLET



This year we forgot to eat the chocolates in our advent calendars. My mother found a buy one-get-one free deal for them at Costco, but they lay left behind on desks and under beds as Santa's face beamed for a lost audience. The calendars were still firmly packaged in their cellophane wrappings—the corners tightly folded and waiting for eager fingers to tear at them and look inside.

My half-brother Joey asked me if I thought Christmas would help anything this year and I didn't think so, but I just smiled at him, shrugged my shoulders and looked outside. The icicles dripped into the already melting snow and the white lights on the plastic reindeer burned into the mild December evening.

Isn't it funny how Christmas makes you remember things? he said. I put my hand over his, made quiet shushing noises, and told him I was sorry. He looked over at the Christmas tree and the presents newly opened. Next Christmas will be easier.

Bing Crosby sang to Rosemary Clooney on our television set. My parents sat on opposite ends of the flower-printed couch that match the curtains over the bay window. Too much sunlight coming through the windows over the years has dulled the curtain's flowers. Bright greens have turned to moss and the Mediterranean blues have become muddy. My mother held on to her glass of Chardonnay with both hands. She never turned her head but you could tell she wasn't listening to Bing Crosby—her eyes were twitching from the window to my father to her wine to my father to the rug to my father to the candles to my father.

When I'm worried and I can't sleep, I count my blessings instead of sheep. And I fall asleep counting my blessings.

Only Joey went to her funeral. I never met Judith because I wasn't allowed to, but she died this year on November 30.

Joey and I were watching Psycho downstairs when we heard our father call to us sternly—angrily. The blonde's shower was about to end, but I pressed pause. Joey clenched his jaw and looked up at the ceiling. He sighed. This better be good, he said.

We stopped when we got to the top of the stairs—you can see into the kitchen from there and we could see and didn't want to know more. My mother was crying. My father's hands were folded as he stared at them with resolution. When we entered the kitchen, my father looked up at Joey. Your mother died last night, he said.

Joey really did turn white and then he stumbled and then he said what?, and finally my mother rushed over to him and hugged him and they cried for awhile. When my father stood up he walked over to Joey and put his hand on his shoulder and I don't remember what he said to him, but after that, my father left the kitchen.

Two weeks before my father married Judith he told me Nana said to him if you have doubts don't. He said he shouldn't have.

Nana said Judith was volatile. While one minute she would play the peaceful hippie in her airy skirts, and talk about inclusion and how much she loved my father—the next minute she would be up in arms. She would yell at my father and tell him he was bigoted and greedy. According to my grandmother she used to hit him.

My final paper for my 10th grade English class this year was to write a biography on someone in my family. I chose my father. I just wanted to hear him talk about Judith. When I try to speak to my father—pick at the lock of his old life—it will never budge. It has become rusty and stuck. I knew many of the answers already from family rumor and from Joey, but I asked anyway. When I asked how long he and Judith had been married, he said he didn't remember. When I asked him how they had met, he said college. But how? I don't remember. Is she younger than you? I don't know. What does she look like? I don't have any pictures of her. Why did you get

Counting my Blessings

LAURIE GUILMARTIN

That's enough.

The one story he did tell me was that on his and Judith's wedding night they stayed at our family's old farmhouse. It had been storming and when they were about to go to sleep he said they heard a loud crack, then thunder that shook their wedding bed and finally a fall. Judith jumped and my father ran outside to see that the large oak in the front yard had split in two. The story sounded too familiar and I told my father that sounded a lot like a scene from *Jane Eyre*. He looked at me and then started chewing on his fingernail. I guess life imitates art, he said.

On the 22nd we decorated our tree. Each of us had one ornament we had put up every year since we were little. Mine was a golden ballerina that would twirl round and round if you spun her feet. Joey and my father each put up their ornament and left—my father to his office, my brother to his room. My mother put on the Peter, Paul & Mary Christmas CD as we finished decorating the tree. When we finished, my mother said, there, now that's a beautiful tree, and went to sit on the bay window. She looked at the curtains and moved her fingernails over their fabric as she looked outside. She took off her glasses and rubbed them on the bottom of her shirt and I sat on the couch and watched her as I sipped my Diet Coke. She sighed and looked over at me. She asked me if I would like a glass of orange juice. That stuff's not good for you honey. I said I was fine and walked downstairs to my bedroom.

Joey said Judith was beautiful. Early in the morning on the 23rd I heard knocking at my door. I opened it and Joey was standing there smiling and waving a plastic baggy in front of my face. Present from college, he said, let's go smoke. I put on my boots and coat and we walked across the street and then over into the woods.

I had never smoked a spliff before and watched his precise movements as he took a cigarette and broke it in half. The tobacco fell onto the paper as he stretched it out and then broke up the weed and sprinkled it on top. We passed it back and forth in silence. When it was done, we lay down and looked up at the clouds. The woods were silent and we just stared and stared.

Did you know he was the one who left her?

I didn't know, but I didn't want to be high anymore. I wanted to go back to sleep because it was cold now and my parents would worry and I was in the woods at 8 in the morning and it was cold and the woods were empty and silent and crowded.

She really was beautiful, he said. I don't know how any man could have left her. Even as she got older, her hair didn't lose its curl or its blackness. She was always so colorful—every outfit just—bright. I don't know, he said. She was my mother, but I would see the way men looked at her, you know?

I didn't know but I moved my head up and down and then refocused on the clouds.

I don't know why she never got remarried, he said. I asked her once why she didn't date like Dan's mom and she said something like once was enough for her. She said she didn't want to fight anymore—even though I'm sure she started the fights. She loved fighting—but what she did she called discussing.

I told Joey that I was tired—that I wanted to go home. He told me my eyes were too red. They'll know if you go back now.

He said he wished they had never gotten married. I think she hated him even more than he hated her, he said. At least eventually. I mean she was crazy, sure, but God was he an asshole, sleeping with another woman. I was there after he left, and I was little, but how can a person forget the banging on the walls and the screaming and crying and sleeping on the floor. Come on, you were born before the divorce was even finalized between them. A new baby born to her husband that wasn't even hers. Maybe she would have been happy if she never found out—I mean she loved him I know she did, she always told me how much she loved our father, but she hated him too—

They should have never gotten married to begin with. Nothing good came out of that marriage.

But if they never got married, I said, you wouldn't be here. That's something good.

Well, I wouldn't have the splitting headache I have now.

We sat for a while and looked at the trees. It was warm for December. The early morning light flickered in-between, and in and out of pine needles— the light seemed to dance— no — waltz for my brother and I. That morning we were audience to the woods' Christmas pageant. We sat on the slush-covered ground and followed the sun as it moved up higher into the sky, except there was no where to go—no destination. Around 10 I was worried about how nervous my mother would be—wondering where we were—and I started to cry. Joey rubbed my back. He said, shh, shh, don't worry, we're going home.

When we got home we spent the day lying on the couch watching Christmas movies. My mother never noticed we were gone.

On Christmas Eve my father was drunk. The whole night his glass of merlot was consistently half full—the sound of popping corks adding extra notes to the traditional Christmas carols. My father is the kind of man who gets angry if someone says Happy Holidays to him rather than Merry Christmas. He has never been one to say much, but he will interrogate people if they say Happy Holidays to him.

What did you say? What other holidays are you referring to? I believe it's the day before Christmas so I think you can say Merry Christmas—it's not Chanukah and it's not Kwanzaa.

When he was a child, he used to be a part of his church's live nativity. He and other kids from his youth group would dress up as shepherds, wise men or angels and parade around the center of his town. People from the town protested the nativity scene years later and the youth group can't do it anymore. Goddamned left wing liberals, he said. He blames it on Kwanzaa. He hates Kwanzaa with a passion.

Joey, my mother, my father and I all sat in the living room Christmas Eve as my father made his yearly speech against the Happy Holidayers.

When my father said, Judith loved to say Happy Holidays; Joey looked at him and started chewing his nails. That's the problem with the bipartisan household, my father said. We'd fight about mostly everything. She always had to make sure not to exclude anybody. I was never understanding of others' situations enough. We don't want to offend anybody, she'd say. But she offended people all the time. As my father laughed Joey turned more and more red—he clenched his jaw and sat on his hands. My father said, she probably even sat and fought with St. Peter—now we don't want to leave anybody out of heaven—it's just not fair. I can see her screaming at St. Peter. I can see it so clearly.

Joey looked at my father with tears dripping down his face as he stood up to leave. You are such a cowardly man, he said. I can't be here—I can't be near you. I'm leaving tomorrow and I don't know where the hell I'll even go, but I'll figure it out. I don't ever want to be anything like you.

When Joey walked into his room my father stared at the door that had just closed—not seeming to blink, his eyes became more and more wet. My father does not cry so my mother and I looked at each other and then at the floor. I think we felt guilty. My mother reached out and put her hand on my father's knee, but he just swatted it away. Don't, he said, and went into the kitchen. After a couple of minutes I heard him go into his own bedroom. Soon my mother followed and I stayed in the living room for a moment and looked outside. I could see and hear the melting icicles drip into the snow. Drip, drop, drip. And the Christmas carolers' voices that came through my mother's clock radio sounded more like ghosts from a far distant place that was no longer real. After a few minutes I realized it was late enough and walked downstairs to get some sleep for Christmas morning.





Stepping Stones

KATIE FISHMAN

Red Badge of Courage ERIN MORGAN



Booby Trap DAWN HACKETT

It was only a lump.

The receptionist did not look up when I arrived, 15 minutes early as requested. They ask for that so the waiting time is rounded up to two full hours. I smiled at her as I imagined the bacteria swarming on the smudged glass between us. She did not look up. I cleared my throat. She answered the phone.

There was a seat near the door. No one sits there because you have to adjust your feet every time another person is called. I briefly considered going home, but my legs wouldn't cooperate. I smiled politely at the 400 pound woman next to me who spilled into the chairs on either side. I wondered, Do they have mammograms in heaven? She'll be there for sure. Two of mine were a quarter of one on her; one of mine outweighed five of the woman's to her right, just about the same as the blonde across the room. She had put on makeup for the show, hair perfectly coiffed, probably afraid that mammogram camera would accidentally snap her face and not the Cancer. I hear it happens.

I sat waiting for the persistent robot nurse to call my name, have me undress and hand me off to the next robot. The second one speaks, tells you not to breathe and brings down the wrath of digital imagery on your chest. I imagine it in my mind, comparing breasts, waiting to hear my name. Tug of war ensues, C word downfield, dying scarecrow relative memories sidelined. Two hours later I was still weighing the breasts in the room when I heard my name. Robot one ushered me in and checked for deodorant in my pits. I probably should have shaved.

"I'll be right outside. Put your purse in the locker. Just pull the curtain back when you're ready."

She was gone when I stepped out. I clutched my parchment robe across my soon to be putty breasts and I wondered, Do I put this locker key under a breast or an ass cheek? I searched for signs of life and, finding none, slipped my left hand inside the robe and felt my right node, just between that normally vacant space where the tissue ends and the gland hardens. It was still there, too late to run now. Not in

get-up. I grinned, imagining myself bare-chested with only one tit, running in public to show the world a big wicked scar, right arm high into the air and middle finger up. I saw an old poster in my head, huge set of eagle claws inches away from snagging a field mouse who is smiling and flipping the eagle off in his last great act of defiance. I wondered, Do they have separate asylums for one titted women?

Robot one reappeared, a bit of mayo smeared on her chin.

I asked, knotting my brow, "You did call Miss Thirty-Eight Double D's, right?"

She wiped her face, gave me a sneer, giving the baton to robot two with a lean-in, passing on some sacred piece of information my tits apparently couldn't handle.

Thirty minutes later I was still looking down at the Plexiglas pressing my right breast into a perfectly flat diagonal. My nipple was ready to shoot across the room and ricochet, placing a nipples pockmark square on my forehead and I wondered, Did they do this to Lance Armstrong's balls?

Robot two corrected me again. "This time remember to hold your breath, grab the bar with your right hand and lean back away from your breast with your left shoulder. We've got a lobby full today. And for goodness sake, look straight ahead and try to smile. Ready?"

The blonde was right, I should have worn makeup. I wondered, Do they have a pill to fix stupid. I sighed, exposed, miserable.

Robot two came over and put her hand on my shoulder, willing me into proper alignment, speaking calmly.

"Don't worry yet, OK? A lump is always cancer until they tell you it isn't, that's how our minds work."

Deflated, shoulder slumping against her hand, I took a deep breath and steadied my grip.

"Ready when you are."





No Name
ALE NICOLET

Bridgeport

MADELINE GORDON

At 8:50 A.M. I hear the tinkle of the bell as the door swings open on its rusty hinges. I inhale deeply to stop myself from immediately spinning around to see who it is and exhale slowly as I attempt to casually look over my shoulder, pretending to be completely engrossed in my inventory sheet. Every morning for the past year, he has pulled into the parking lot between 8:45 and 9:00 in his rusty, red Chevy pickup with his chocolate lab, Petey, in the passenger seat. Depending on the season, his outfit varies from faded blue jeans, with a dip-tin circle on the back right pocket and a plaid flannel button up to the same pair of jeans with a thick, grey wool sweater – patched at the elbows. Always on his feet is the same pair of work boots, caked with farmyard dirt and manure. We don't speak much, despite the mumbled hellos and safe topics, such as the weather and the potato harvest. Each day he buys a large black coffee with extra sugar and a box of wintergreen Tic-tac's. On Sundays, he adds local paper to his order, out of which he takes the page with the police report and the comics, before slapping it back on the counter and walking out of the door, letting it swing shut behind him.

"Hey, thanks for picking me up." The dry heat of the car slapped my face, making my cheeks tingle and my ears burn, as I slid onto the cracked, leather seat, clunking my boots together outside of the door to knock off most of the snow before slamming the door behind me.

"Anytime. Here, I picked this up on the way over." I took the paper cup he passed me, careful not to let our fingers brush, and let the heat seep its way into my palms, the burn momentarily taking my mind away from the dull throbbing that had taken up permanent residence in my belly.

"Oh, uh, thanks."

"Sure. My mom always drinks tea when she is stressed. I thought it might help."

"Yeah," I stuttered, faltering for a response, dumbfounded by his shallowness. The heat in the car was suffocating. Or maybe it was just being back in that truck with him that was suffocating. I shivered despite the sweat that was beading on my forehead and took a sip of tea so that I didn't have to say anything more. I cringed at the aching sensation that filled my mouth and I struggled not to spit the scalding brown liquid all over the windshield. I swallowed instead, the burn spreading through my chest, before settling in my stomach, warming me from the inside out.

"So, uh, I found a clinic in the phone book," he ventured. "It's in Wellesley. I figure that's a safe bet since it's pretty far from here." His voice was steady, but his words clipped, as brittle as the icicles that hung from the mailbox, threatening to shatter at any minute from the tiniest disturbance.

"That's fine. Just go."

Without glancing at me, he reached forward and flicked on the radio, the Red Hot Chili Peppers relieving us of the painful silence that had descended over the cab, like the fog that precipitated on the windows, hiding us from the world outside. He rubbed the windshield with his sleeve, the plaid cotton soaking up our hot breath, and squinted as he started driving through the snow.

Every Sunday, the ladies in the coffee line at the Bridgeport Baptist Church whisper gossip back and forth while fanning themselves with their hymnals and pretending like they are discussing power of the service. There is not much in our small town that escapes the wrath of those bored, menopausal mothers with too much time on their hands. When I was in ninth grade, my mother came home from church and warned me about the handsome Miller boy who lived in the once-white farmhouse on the other side of town. He was apparently too excitable for the good ladies at church to look past – a bad egg, she said. By the time I was in my junior year, the Miller boy was a legend in Bridgeport – sweeping girls off of their feet and winning every late-night, back-road car race in the county in that dinged up old pickup that he was so proud of.

One time, his father caught him with a town girl in compromising position in his truck, Dirt Derby ribbons hanging from the rear view mirror and a shotgun rack in the back, so he was shipped off to military school in Texas. At least that's what my mother told me happens to children who don't mind their parents and turn their back on God's wishes. Mr. Miller never would tell anyone who that poor, humiliated girl was, so the coffee line ladies lost interest and the Miller boy's scandal took the back burner to more interesting gossip, like the postman and the kindergarten teacher running away together.

He came back before my senior year in high school, subdued, the spark gone from his eyes, the mischievous grin, that could send any adolescent girl's heart catapulting out of her chest, broken by the lines forming around his dimples. He wore a three day old beard and deep purple shadows under his eyes. These days, they say the Miller boy is more like a shadow than a person, floating in and out of town without speaking to anyone. But I have spoken to him every day for the past year. My eyes follow the movement of his head behind the pastry case, his familiar floppy brown mop swaying back and forth between the muffins and the donuts while he fills his daily cup.

* * *

We drove in silence, the weight of my conscience pressing like a brick on my chest, making my breaths come in short gasps until my head was spinning. I clutched the tea, now cold, in my left hand so that he couldn't try to hold it – not that he wanted to. He grasped the steering wheel, his knuckles turning white from the strain, or maybe it was just the cold. After about an hour, I asked him to stop because I had to use the restroom – I was peeing every five minutes these days. I bought a pack of Virginia Slims on my way out of the gas station to calm my nerves and chain smoked until my head felt as foggy as the windshield and my lungs ached more than the rock in the pit of my stomach. He just stared straight ahead and drove.

* * *

As he fills his coffee, I quickly turn back to counting the cartons of Oakhurst milk on the floor behind the counter, praying he won't catch my eye. I hear his boots clunking across the tiles, and turn to face him as casually as possible, feigning oblivion to our daily routine of ignorance.

"Morning, Dan."

"Hey, Soph. Sorry about the mud," he ventures glancing at the floor. "The snow melt's creating quite a mess out there."

"Oh, don't worry about it; the floor's filthy anyways. I'm just glad it's finally turning into spring."

"No, no, the store looks great. I have been meaning to tell you, you've done a great job with the

place. We have always needed a spot like this in town. It's so nice to have a place to pick things up around here rather than having to go all the way into Wellesley."

"Yeah." My face burns as my heart starts to throb. I snatch the five he is holding out and punch the keys on the cash register with a shaking finger.

* * *

"You don't have to do this unless it's what you really want." His voice snapped me back from my nicotine-induced coma, making the hair on my forearms prickle. God. I hated how he could do that to me. Just hearing his voice made my whole body vibrate with electricity until I thought I was going to puke.

"I have to, I don't have a choice."

"I can take care of you."

"You have your whole life ahead of you. What about college?"

"Well, what about you parents? They could help too. And mine. We could do this together."

"You can't be serious. Can you imagine the scandal? 'The minister's daughter gets knocked up by the town bad boy.' Jesus. The entire town would have a field day."

"Who cares what they all say? It doesn't have to be like this."

"No. It does. Please don't ask me again."

"But Sophie, I want..."

"Dan, I've made up my mind."

"But..."

"NO."

A wave of heat took over my body, sweat breaking out on my hairline and soaking through my cotton cardigan – then cold. Goose bumps tingled on the nape of my neck, sending shivers down my spine. Stars blinked across my vision and blackness started to creep in on the sides. "Dan. Stop. Stop!" The truck had barely reached the shoulder of the highway before I swung the door open, stumbling out into the cold, clammy palms on my knees, vomiting into the dirty snow bank.

* * *

I slide his change across the counter to ensure our hands will not touch. I force myself not to look at him as I turn back to the inventory sheet, even though I can feel the heat of his stare on back of my head. We stand in awkward limbo, the air between us charged with unspoken words and broken memories. Petey's barks in the parking lot pierce the silence.

"Alright, well I should be going," he mumbles. "See you around, Soph."

"Bye." I do not move until the bell tinkles and the door slams behind him, and then I can finally

breathe again. I feel a well-known prickle on my forearms and look down to see goose bumps raised on my skin. The engine revs and gravel crunches under the tires as his truck pulls out of the parking lot and onto Route 9, heading out towards the farm.

* * *

I stood in the snow, nausea waves washing over my entire body, shaking from either the cold or the vomiting, or both. I could see his shadow through my legs as he approached and tentatively started rubbing my back. The heaviness of his hand on me brought another bout of nausea and I lurched forward, dry heaving, feeling like my insides were being pulled up through my throat.

“Please, don’t touch me,” I moaned. He pulled his hand back as if he had been burned and stuffed it in the pocket of his jeans. I closed my eyes and focused solely on breathing the cold, cleansing winter air – in through your nose, out through your mouth. In. Out.

He walked back to the truck and returned with a Poland Spring bottle and a pack of Trident, placing them on the dirty snow bank next to me. “Are you feeling any better?”

“I guess so.” I straightened up slowly, afraid to move too quickly for fear of more sickness. I took a sip of the water. It tasted stale, probably left over from one of our summer drives to the lake. I would tell my mother that I was going to volunteer at the soup kitchen in Wellesley for the day, but instead I would walk to the high school parking lot and hop into his truck and stick my bare feet out of the window while we drove for hours – smoking cigarettes and singing along to Rascal Flatts, letting the wind whip through our hair until it was too tangled to run your hands through. I took another sip and let the tangy liquid linger in my mouth before spitting it out in the snow, the old water reminding me of the two of us, stale and bitter.

* * *

Every day after the coffee exchange and the terribly stiff conversations, I listen to his engine disappear down the road until I cannot hear it any longer – only then can I finally catch my breath. Watching his tail lights blink at the stop sign always makes me cringe, bringing me back to that winter. When he left town after Christmas, people said he was never coming back – that he had grown too big for our small town and he had gotten out for good. He would travel the world with the Army and would never look back. I never said a thing.

He sent a letter in the spring, postmarked from Boston, the wobbly script on the front of the envelope smudged from the journey. I stared at the unopened envelope for three days: at the sunflower stamp peeling up at the corners, at the smeared return address, at his sloppy handwriting that I could distinguish anywhere, at my name and his on the same piece of paper. I carried it with me constantly until I had memorized every aspect of the envelope, until I knew the feel of the paper in my hands and the density of the letter inside. Then I threw it, still unopened, in the trashcan on the corner by school, unable to bring myself to hear his plea for forgiveness – unable to stomach his reasons for running away. Every once in a while I think about that envelope and his secrets that were sealed inside – the only barrier keeping me from them a bit of glue – and how different my life could have been if I had only been brave enough to open that flap.

* * *

We sat in the parking lot of the clinic for forty minutes, the snow piling up on the windshield wipers in fragile little mountains until a wind gust came and whipped them away, scattering the snowflakes in every which way, turning the piles into a swirling cloud of white. We sat in silence, watching the

swirl around us, not moving, not speaking, barely breathing. My mind was as blank as the whiteness dancing and twirling around me. He looked at me every couple of minutes, nodding his head in my direction, eyes begging me to speak, but I couldn't say what he wanted to hear – so I said nothing.

“Soph, please say something.” His voice was deep and pensive, unlike his usual relaxed manner. How could we have changed so much? We would never go back to the two people we were this summer, two carefree teenagers – in love with life and in love with each other.

“I'm scared.”

“Don't be. I'm here with you and I'm not going anywhere. You don't have to be scared. If this is really what you want to do, I'll hold your hand the entire time, I promise.”

“No, I want to do this alone.”

“But Soph...” his voice faltered, cracking. “Are you sure? I mean, if that's what you really want...”

Tears boiled up in my eyes, but before I could be swayed, I grasped the door handle and pushed, flooding the cab with the frigid air. I jumped down and slammed the door behind me, stalking across the parking lot with a stiff back and shaking knees, leaving boot prints behind me in the snow drifts.

* * *



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
OIE SUBMISSIONS

**2009 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WRITING CONTEST
1ST PLACE**

“WHEN A DOOR CLOSSES, A CURTAIN OPENS”
JILL EISENBERG, NANJING, CHINA

I used to need doors. In fact, I respected doors and all they stood for as symbols of privacy and the power of deciding who comes through that door and when—but in my home stay in Nanjing, China last fall, all I had was a curtain. This faded, flower-print bed sheet was what transformed my room into the family room and home office, and separated my room from my Chinese grandmother’s room.

When I arrived in Nanjing last August to meet the people who would be my family for the next several months, I had already mentally prepared myself to bid farewell to western-style toilets and laundry machines. I was not, however, prepared for giving up other western luxuries, like personal space, that I had assumed were standard, practiced and respected by *all* cultures. I did not even think about doors, or all my arrogant cultural assumptions about privacy.

In a country of 1.3 billion people, there is little physical space—a lasting lesson I quickly experienced my first time on the subway system during rush hour. Urban families in China typically live in small, high-rise apartments with children and grandparents. In contrast, the culture of suburbia that is so uniquely American has encouraged most Americans to take for granted the idea that each individual is entitled to personal space, both physical and psychological—a real or mental place to escape, meditate, and reflect.

In China, and in my family’s all-purpose room, I learned to reevaluate my beliefs that I had assumed to be absolute. My family, and that curtain, taught me that privacy is not a right, but a privilege. Unlike in my American dorm room, it was disrespectful and inappropriate to draw the curtain across “my” room, switch off the lights, submerge into a book, and retreat with my iPod’s headphones. Watching a TV drama after dinner, brushing teeth, and studying were all group activities and invaluable opportunities for family bonding.

My experience in the home stay also taught me that the family unit, not the individual, is fundamental to Chinese culture. By the end of the term, I did not feel like a guest in the house, but a family member. Over the few months in Nanjing, my Chinese mother and grandmother gave, and expected me to take, more responsibility around the apartment. I may have “lost” my privacy, but I gained their trust.

The family-centric atmosphere also gave me the opportunity to play with my eight-year old Chinese sister before her mother came home from work and while her grandmother prepared dinner. During those couple of hours each evening with just the two of us, my little sister taught me the Chinese versions of “Rock, Paper, Scissors” and the story of the Ugly Duckling. She also let me into her imaginary world where she could turn my bag of hairclips into a royal family that fights hairbrush monsters.

Although I am back to using a door in America, I will never forget seeing my sister’s toes peaking out from under the sun-bleached yellow curtain in our invented hide-and-seek games.

**2009 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WRITING CONTEST
2ND PLACE**

"APOLOGY TO A SECRET LOVER"

STEPHANIE SWISHER, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

The first time I saw you, I was hesitant to let you into my life. I was appalled by your grotesque appearance, unorthodox name, and pungent odor, but I put aside my American stereotypes and took a chance on you. The moment you touched my lips, however, I realized my mistake. You were disgusting, offensive even. You became part of a daily ridicule among my friends as I wrote you off as yet another strange Australian relationship that this "seppo" would never be a part of.

Then one day out of nowhere, I had an unprovoked desire to have another go with you. Once we were alone, I hungrily stripped off your little yellow number and...I could not believe it. How amazing! How tantalizing! How could something so wrong be so right? As our secret affair grew, it became more and more difficult to keep you under wraps, but I still wasn't ready to admit my feelings to my friends.

To this day I have kept our relationship a complete secret, but no more. No longer will I cover you up with a piece of cheese or quickly throw away your package and hide the evidence of our remarkable rendezvous. Now, in front of everyone, I am ready to admit the truth to the world: I, Stephanie Marie Swisher, love you Kraft Vegemite Concentrated Yeast Extract. I love your salty taste, your sticky yet smooth texture and your pungent smell that flirts with repulsive, yet is undeniable. You are like an angel sent from heaven (if only angels were a yeasty residue and heaven was a beer factory). You have made me feel more daring and more like an Australian than any Tim Tam ever could because I had to work up the strength to love you.

Vegemite, you catalyzed a profound change in my life. Not only did I lose my gag reflex from when I first smelled you, but I also slowly shed my stereotypes against the unconventional things of Australia. You forced me to step out of my comfort zone. Spaghetti on toast, kangaroo kebabs, and possum pie were just the threshold into a world of positive discomfort.

Maybe it is because I am an only child and grew up far in the country, but I have always been scared to be alone. I was overly dependent on other people and constantly surrounded myself with others. I was too scared to ride the bus into town by myself. The thought of graduating from the University of Richmond frightened and confused me. I thought I would drown in this huge world on my own, but my time in Australia showed me that I'm capable of more than I originally thought.

Living half way around the world in a place where you do not know a single soul can be uncomfortable, but experiences like trying Vegemite showed me that if I embraced discomfort and did the things that I wanted to do despite my fears, I would have an amazing time, and I did. After my program finished I traveled up and down the east coast of the country, winging my itinerary along the way. I lived in hostels. I met the most incredible people from all around the world, including Vladimir who blasted "Skatman" from his iPod at 3:00 am. I had a two hour conversation with a bewildered Irishman and, to this day, have no idea what he said. I met a Kiwi whose job entailed jumping out of helicopters on top of wild deer, knocking them out, and then raising them on a farm. I surfed, camped on an island, climbed a glacier, and finally, rode the bus into town by myself.

So thank you Vegemite for being truly unique and genuine. You helped break down my stereotypes and kept me open-minded. Before I was bland, now I taste. Before I was weak, now I am Vegemightly.

2009 INTERNATIONAL PHOTO CONTEST

*PARTIAL SELECTION OF WINNERS, FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF WINNERS VISIT:
INTERNATIONAL.RICHMOND.EDU/PHOTO_CONTEST/2009_WINNERS.HTM



**QUITO
OVERVIEW**
BEN WEINSTEIN,
QUITO, ECUADOR

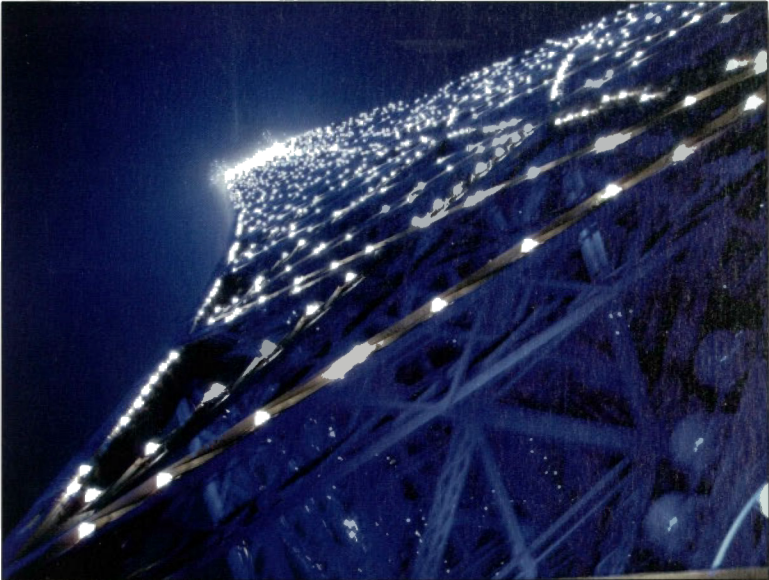
**AN
ORGANIC
DAY
WITH
PAW**

JACKIE FAN,
SURIN PROVINCE,
NORTHEAST THAILAND





MOTORCYCLE DUCKS
BROOKE GARNETT, '03,
JAVA, INDONESIA



EIFFEL TOWER BY NIGHT
ÉLODIE PARIS, UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LILLE,
PARIS, FRANCE



THE ROAD
DICK PAGE, '92
INDIA



APPROACHING STORM
JONATHAN WIGHT, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS
CUMBRIA, ENGLAND



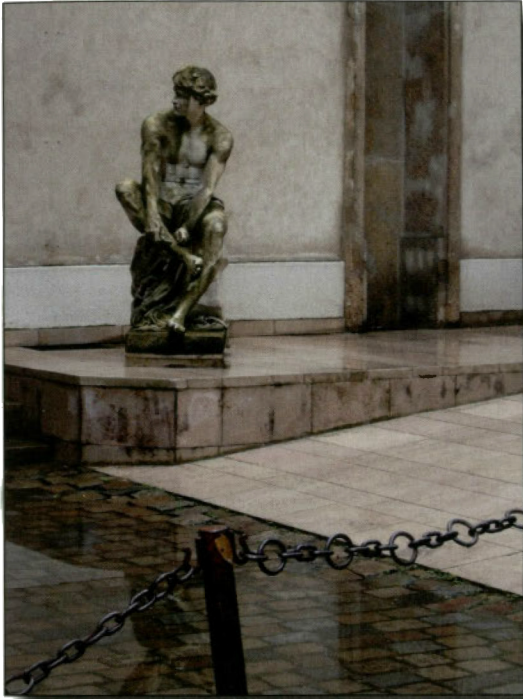
DOWNHILL RUN

JOHN KENDALL
SAN PEDRO DE ATACAMA, CHILE



WRITING ON THE FREEDOM WALL

SHERIN SIEW, HONG KONG UNIVERSITY
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA



AFTER THE HAILSTORM

EMILY MARIE RUZICH
LYONS, FRANCE



WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?

ELODIE PARIS,
UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LILLE
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

staff LIST

Jenny Patchen, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Alice Chaosurawong, DESIGN CHAIR

Susie Compton, DESIGN ASSISTANT

Jane Crifasi, PUBLICITY CHAIR

Erin Clark, ASSISTANT EDITOR

Brianna May, ASSISTANT EDITOR

Katie Fishman, EDITOR, ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

Liz McAvoy, EDITOR, DIGITAL ARTS

Schuyler Swartout, EDITOR, POETRY

Jessie Pascarelli, POETRY ASSISTANT

Phillip Opsasnick, EDITOR, PROSE FICTION

Caitlyn Paley, EDITOR, PROSE NON-FICTION

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

Liz Mcavoy, Schuyler Swartout, Jessie Pascarelli, Jacquelyn DeWolfe, Ali Eaves, Ashley Davis, John Alulis, Matthew Rifka, Andrew Pasiuk, Kara Finzel and Steve Minnich

DIGITAL ARTS

Liz Mcavoy, Schuyler Swartout, Jessie Pascarelli, Jacquelyn DeWolfe, Ali Eaves, Ashley Davis, John Alulis, Matthew Rifka, Andrew Pasiuk, Kara Finzel and Steve Minnich

POETRY

John Alulis, Erin Clark, Grace Leonard and Matthew Rifka

PROSE FICTION

John Alulis, Schuyler Swartout, Matthew Rifka, Brianna May, Steve Minnich and Maria Elisa Ribas

PROSE NON-FICTION

Maria Elisa Ribas, Erin Clark and Maddy Gordon



LASTLY, WE ARE GREATFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND'S DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, NAMELY OUR ADVISORS DR. BRIAN HENRY AND DR. DAVID STEVENS. WE ARE ALSO PROUD TO BE AFFILIATED WITH SIGMA TAU DELTA, THE ENGLISH HONOR SOCIETY