

4-4-2023

Thistledown and Feathers

S.A. Galloway
Bridgewater College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/bc_philomathean



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Galloway, S.A. (2023) "Thistledown and Feathers," *Philomathean*: Vol. 2, Article 11.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/bc_philomathean/vol2/iss1/11

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals and Campus Publications at BC Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philomathean by an authorized editor of BC Digital Commons. For more information, please contact rlope@bridgewater.edu.

Thistledown and Feathers

“Twenty-four days until Christmas,” Áine said. We warmed beside a beach fire. The lake was still, no wind, and no one would notice the fire in daylight. I treasured Saturdays with Áine. They had become “our time.”

“What’re you gonna get me?” I asked, precocious, as if a child again. But to look at her was too bold. Instead, I managed the fire.

“It’s more blessed to give than to receive,” she replied.

I tried to pretend there was no tug of magnetic hormones between us.

Áine then asked, “What would you like me to give you?”

I sobered. There it was. The question was real. I’d dreamed of her asking a hundred times, a hundred different ways. And my dreams all went awry. In one, Áine became a red mare and rode off into the sky. In another, she became a cartoon mother scolding me for lascivious thoughts. Another variation led to us shamed naked in the stocks of a faraway Puritan settlement. And ninety-seven other failures. I dared not answer. If my desire for Áine were ever uttered, the possibility of it would explode like thistledown on air currents, never to be reassembled.

Áine looked at me, her lips edged in pink, her hair red and yellow in the sun and fire-light. I felt a prickle in my jeans, and the heat rushing through me had nothing to do with the fire. Finally, Áine looked away across the lake, and the colors drained.

*

“Seventeen days until Christmas,” Áine said, at the lake again, and I felt my whole psyche tighten. The weather was still holding above freezing and we had skipped rocks and generally behaved like adolescents all afternoon. The sun would go behind the mountains in

less than an hour, and today a wind off the slopes troubled the fire.

This time she added, "I'd like to get you a ring."

"A friendship ring," I clarified.

After a moment, she said, "Yes, a friendship ring, because we are the very definition of friends."

We fed sticks into the fire until dark, consuming all the deadfall within reach.

*

"Ten days until Christmas," Áine said as we walked the busy mall. It had snowed earlier and the road to the lake was uncertain, even if the snow had all melted in town.

We looked at clothes and shoes and bric-a-brac, and when we came to the jewelry store, I said, "Let me buy you lunch," and we turned back toward the food court. I had dreamed again of disaster, of the angel of pestilence visiting the fields and leaving every horse, cow, sheep, goat, desiccated in the sweep of a single night. Instinctively, I knew to admit what I felt beneath my shirt and pants was to release that angel.

*

"Three days until Christmas," Áine said.

We'd spent the day skiing and were finishing off the day with coffee at Bateman's. I'd dreamed the day before that Áine had come to me in the night, had entered my bed, her nipples on mine, pointedly, and our bodies celebrating each other, joined at our sexes, reveling in the orgasm that is life. But when the moment of climax came, the room exploded – roof and walls atomized in an instant, bed beneath us shot into a million feathers, and I, raw and bloody in a limbo that was all that remained of the universe. It was nearly closing time.

Áine leaned toward me and said in a contained voice, "Imagine how many hundreds of couples are making love across the city right now, freely, happily, unconcerned about what someone else might think."

I looked at her, and I could see she saw my fear. In return, I could see her patience, worn

thin. We were both tired from trying to master the mountain.

“Mallory Thomas, I swear you are so timid you will never have what you want in life for fear it will bite you.”

I saw her rightness, the terrible truth. “For both our sakes, I hope that isn’t true.”

“Will you go to the mall with me tomorrow and pick out rings?”

I nodded.

*

But Áine didn’t come the next day, her car flattened under a poultry truck at an unmarked country intersection – my Christmas legacy, no longer dream, but thistledown and feathers.

Written By:
S.A. Galloway