the echo

2014
the echo
The *Echo* has a rich history as an esteemed publication of student literary and art works. As a part of Furman’s effort to promote intellectual creativity amongst the student body, the magazine is a display of such academic and artistic excellence. *Echo* is both by the students and for the students of Furman, with a vision to uphold this tradition of publishing promising authors and artists. We hope you enjoy this collection.

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LESSONS FROM THE GARDEN
{Winner of the 2014 Echo Creative Nonfiction Prize}
Jennifer Bilton

The weed asks the flower, “What makes you different from me?”

The flower tells the weed, “They tell me I am beautiful, I have a reason to be.”

The garden tells its children they are valuable because they came from this earth. “You have much to give, even if they can’t see your worth.”

The gardener shuns the weed, exhumes its body, and picks the flower.

I remember the summer I fell in love with flowers. Not the packaged roses crumpled in vases at the grocery store. Not even the potted plants at the nursery. Flowers that grew out of the ground and over my head. Standing in the garden nestled in the wall of Cashiers Valley and staring up at the trees scraping the sky, I felt so small.

My grandparents brought me down to the garden for the first time near the end of my seventeenth summer. We put on long pants to protect us from the bugs and sturdy shoes to scale down the mountain. Around the side of the garage, past the row of hydrangea bushes, down the steep hill coated with leaves and lined with trees, and beyond the tan rocky clearing beneath the porch towering overhead on sturdy wooden beams like stilts, lay the rectangular plot that would come to define my mountain summers.

My grandmother taught me how after the blooming season, you must dig the dahlia bulbs from the ground and store them in the cool, dark basement for the winter. She recited the name of each flower proudly making its way into the world, like a walking gardener’s encyclopedia. My grandfather stood outside the picket fence bordering the garden, examining the tomatoes. Together, as if nurturing were in their DNA, they make things grow. They grew a family around them, planted a garden, and built lives around both.

The promise of flowers draws me back each summer, a hope that still reso-
nates within me, calling me home.

Flowers speak a language that weeds don’t understand. But maybe they just haven’t been taught.

Petals become letters that grow into deeper meaning.

If you open a dictionary and run your finger down the L’s, you will see Primrose, Ambrosia, and Anemone; Carnations, Lilacs, and Roses. They speak different dialects of love but tune to the same pitch.

If a lover gives you a rainflower he is drowning you with sincerity. He will never forget you. He will atone for his sins. He will love you back. You can give thanks with a rose the color of raspberries. He will reciprocate with a Hydrangea for the gratitude of being understood.

Orchids reach for the clouds but want not their tears. They are refined, a cultivated beauty. Geraniums stand vibrant on porches over valleys, the scarlet clusters accented with stars and stripes speak to gentility and determination. Dahlias flourish in valley gardens, their heavy rainbow heads reaching towards the trees with dignity.

Rosemary for remembrance, olives for peace. While ivy tells of good news, mint harbors suspicion.

But the sunny heads of marigolds bring pain and grief, where Love Lies Bleeding overflows with hopelessness. Morning Glory unfurls for the sun, but retreats as the trumpets curl, its beauty lost in vain.

Weeds speak lessons of resilience, of hardiness. But the gardener does not speak their language.

Together we foraged the garden for the prettiest blooms, admiring their vibrant colors and reveling in their perfect symmetry, careful not to cut the buds. My grandmother and I carried our collection of dahlias, daisies, hydrangeas, and ferns back up the hill in a tin watering can. As we stood at
the kitchen sink arranging our floral plunder, she taught me about balance and shape. *Peel the leaves from the stem to keep the water fresher. Balance the bright blooms with tall swoops of green fern. Keep in mind the scale of the vase. Three is a golden number.* With beginners luck, I wielded my power as my grandmother worked on a large arrangement and I, on many smaller ones. She praised me for my eye, but it seemed to come naturally, the arranging itself as well as the love that blossomed the moment I completed my first vase. I felt almost like an artist of the earth, stealing some of Mother Nature’s power of arranging the world, and assembling it the way I wanted, a way that allowed me to keep it for myself.

Any and every gardening magazine will educate inquiring gardeners on the most sought after advice. How to kill weeds, in increasing order of severity:

Plan your approach. The garden is a battlefield and weeds are the invaders. Be vigilant.

Cut off their supplies. Do not aid the enemy with extra water and fertilizer rations, even at the flower’s risk.

Pulling weeds is most effective when they are young. Pulling them from surface level will not win the war. Attempt to eradicate their taproots before their grasp grows too far from your reach. Use a shovel like a gun if you must.

Use chemical warfare as a last resort. Be green, if possible. Herbicides can kill germinating lawn seeds, pose risk to animals and humans, and damage the environment.

Prepare for sacrifices. And good luck to you.

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If you want to kill flowers, use scissors and put them in a vase.

But now, on some level, I dread the arranging. Dread the sound of my
grandmother's refined southern drawl: "I'll let you do it. You're always so
good at arranging them. I can't wait to see what you come up with."

It's not the miniature bugs that get brought into the house, hiding behind
the folds of the dahlia's petals. It's not the wet clumps of leaves and stalks
and stems that collect in the sink. It's the worry of arranging them just
so. The demands of balance, cutting tall blooms down to size, desperately
willing shorter ones to reach the water. But also, the disappointment of
always trying to recapture that first moment, summers ago, and like the
stems, coming up short. My grandmother and I, like artists at the sink, col-
laborating over our designs. She would lean in, occasionally holding up a
bloom so I could insert another one into my collection, admiring my work.
“You’re good at this, Jennifer.”

And like an apprentice, thrilled by praise from the master, I understand
what I imagine to be the slight remorse of taking the master's place. Of
graduating. Of doing it alone.

Humans make weeds. They decide what a weed is and what is not, defining
nature to their fancy. A weed in one garden is a flower in another. A weed
to a gardener is a prize to a child.

Humans have made weeds uglier. We have tainted nature's green growth,
however undesirable, with unpleasant undertones. Pearlwort and Liver-
wort yield to Ragwort and Ribwort Plantain's unsightly names. Fat Hen,
Hairy Tare, and Hairy Bitter Cress are made more unwelcome in this world
despite their blooms.

Humans turn to language to determine a weed's worth and to justify its
unworthiness.

I struggle with definitions. I worry over what I am to be and how I am to
get there.

Am I a garden? Do I wall out the world with wooden fences, protecting
what's inside? The garden can't survive the winter. How can I love a 10 x
12
5 foot world for its natural beauty when human hands put it there? *Can I exist on my own?*

Do I have enough power to be a gardener, to shape the world I want to my liking? They must get their hands dirty. They must plant seeds that might not grow.

Am I a writer? I often find inspiration in sadness. I can write a weed beautiful, but do I believe my new definition?

\[\text{≈}\]

The dictionary says that to find a weed, you must simply look for a plant growing where it is not wanted. In the garden. In the roof gutter.

A weed would say you must simply look where nothing else can grow. In the desert. In the cracks of the sidewalk.

\[\text{≈}\]

Weeds can be beautiful, if you look the right way.

They need not be so unwelcome. They are the stuff of ancient remedies in faraway places. They are the stuff of child’s play. Searching for luck among the clover. The dandelion crowns on children’s heads, their wispy wishes sent on the wind.

Give up the chemicals; let the weeds protect your garden. They can attract beneficial insects to your garden, and also deter or distract the pests. They can blanket the soil, harboring the rainfall and sharing it with the flowers. Their deep roots can uncover elements deep within the soil, bring them to the surface. They can break through hardened soil, helping other plants reach their potential, letting them grow their roots deeper, like good neighbors.

Let them teach you a lesson, in growing, in nurturing, in tenacity.

Look closer, look deeper. Do not be at war with the earth – let the weeds save you the trouble.
The world opened up for me, down in that garden. The earth let me in and told me the secrets of the breeze that made the stalks dance. I took those cherished moments – the gleaming sun, the cool air, the immense height of the sky above – and folded them in my heart like petals pressed between pages.

I am no gardener. I can only hope the green thumbs of my grandparents have nestled in my DNA as well. Hope that maybe one day I can replace all that I’ve taken. Hope that I can build a garden and a family to revolve around it on my own, someday. I know their green thumbs have molded my heart like clay. I can be any number of things: a weed, an encyclopedia, a watering can.

When the plants speak to you, open up your heart to listen.

Flowers remind you to acknowledge and treasure the beauty around you. Beauty you do not have to ask for. They teach you to admire the strength of small blooms, with their heavy heads and skinny necks, reaching toward the sun. They help you say the words buried in your heart, fluent in the language of human emotion.

Weeds teach you to be indiscriminate, teach you the value of meager things. They grow without praise, grow in spite of threats. And in their hardiness, they speak languages of tenacity. Their tone is insistent – they are always reaching for something.

Flowers and weeds may speak of different experiences, but their message is the same:

Bloom where you are planted, and whatever you do, grow into something brilliant.

I’ve done some digging of my own.
I brought a camera that day, on August 14, 2010, when my grandparents brought me down to the garden for the first time.

The first photo: My grandfather standing behind the thicket of cosmos outside the borders of the garden. His face is obscured by the bush taller than his head, but he holds up a perfect red tomato above the clearing. *Papa, smile!* And he does, even though I can’t see his face, I know he is smiling for me.

The fourth picture: My grandmother in front of the stake of deep red dahlias with sunny centers, long, thick stems leaning towards her. Scissors raised. Shot before the moment of impact.

My grandfather emerges from her right shoulder, bent over. Again, a branch covers his face. I almost didn’t see him.

I take a picture of the cosmos even after my grandmother says she hates them. “They grow too high, too fast. I’m going to clear them down next year.” They are weeds, despite their thin orange petals that burst open to greet the universe.

My grandfather beaming, holding his basket of tomatoes. The flash glints off of his glasses, the yellow cosmos dot the background. Looking back at this picture, my heart beams as well.

Later, my grandfather holds the camera. A shot of my grandmother looking down, holding up two bright red blooms with orange streaks, one in each hand. I can hear her saying *Look at these. Aren’t these gorgeous?* as I look on with a small smile. We put them in the watering can.

The last photo from the garden: my grandmother and I standing side by side, holding our containers full of flowers, scissors still in hand. Daisies grace the bottom left corner and a heavy pink and white striped dahlia leans its way into the frame. I lean in towards my grandmother; dark red flowers fill the space between us.

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I went down to the garden in November, but I couldn’t go all the way. Standing on the hill, I looked down at the clearing, the leveled ground,
the fence keeping nothing in. I came to the wrong place to find comfort, I think to myself.

From this angle I see that the garden hangs over the hill. I can see the wooden beams that hold it up from underneath. I see the branch poking up from the clearing, missing the home that belongs on top. The emptiness startles me. The colors that I expect to wait for me at the bottom of the hill are replaced with the brown dirt, the brown leaves on the ground, the brown bark of the naked trees.

I am reminded that nothing is unsupported. The plot of earth that harbors so much life is held up by dead logs, the dahlia stalks are held up by stakes, the garden is held up by the hands that tend to it and the hands that weed it.

I try to let the emptiness bed my worries. I look to the ground for answers. The next time I return, in May or June, I will stand in this spot a different person. The ground will meet me, beneath my feet as it always does. The garden will meet me in my search for answers with its flowers, with its weeds, saying *This is all I can offer you.* I will stand in this spot, looking at new versions of old flowers, harboring new fears to old questions, but I will be different. If I buried my worries on this hill, I wonder what would grow. The ground will meet me in its constancy, and I will be left to decide whether my footprints are flowers or weeds.
sweat warm, sweet
    several-sheeted lines
fan out: veins running parallel
    seething
    stretching to my body yours

from taut ankle up
    the ocean’s lovely berth
lies frozen salt water
    (more clay than glass,
        more earth than obsidian)
    immobile monstrosity of bright,

but so, so small! smaller
    than i was led to
expect, the unexpected -
    just in every new look, - a comfort
in surprise, in loveliness.
    (a sudden spreading width
portends a promised length)

i cannot contain my amusement
    and wonder in the sudden bigness
of what you become: a planet
    of clouds, cached in the wet-
wearied world beyond me
    , unwinding, unwaving,

    and so suddenly, the sleet and rain
of what become you
    are lifted, and feign bipedal form:
to find rest by my side
Today is the day I push the machines into the sea. So many obscure pipes and gears sticking out this way and that. And to think that I thought them beautiful; they are not beautiful. They only function to make “me” into “them.” See, one day as I tinkered, as I planned and schematized how to fit the creator of the universe into a box, I noticed a black bump on a knuckle of my writing hand. I tinkered onward, but an hour later, the bump was no bump, but a little steel gear where my knuckle might have been. With each flex of the hand, a spout of steam hissed from a small exhaust. I tinkered onward, but, the next day, each knuckle had been replaced. And the day after that, my fingers were shiny, metal coils of the sort one might find on a Swiss Army knife. And the day after that, my arms--car exhaust pipes, my legs--long copper rods conjoined with large wrenches at the knee, my mouth--sputtering oil instead of saliva, my torso--a generator displaying a sinusoidal energy graph in lieu of heartbeats. My eyes alone remained to watch it happen.

My hearing I lost gradually. First, there was a slight hum, in the quiet of my bedroom, barely there. But I couldn’t make out the melody my radio had played moments before. The next day a friend visited, and I only understood certain of his words. I begged him whether he heard it; he laughed. I taught arithmetic at a school near my home. I could not hear my students’ questions for the roar of gears grinding, pistons firing, and sockets wrenching.

But I couldn’t stop. I could not stop tinkering any more than a society could stop progressing, or a small boy could stop asking questions, or an ant eater could stop eating ants. Twenty-three years and no returns. Can you imagine? Coming up empty? That early in life? Where does one go? What does one do? I had to find the bottom of it all. At least I had to know that there was a bottom. I tinkered onward; the machines multiplied.

There is a sorry exchange that occurs when one learns something new. I wish that my teachers had explained it to me. I wish that their teachers had explained to them the transaction that often takes place: something real is lost to the measuring sticks of academia. I taught a student that Mt. Everest is 8,848 meters above sea level. I never taught him that a meter is just an ar-
bitrary measurement decided upon by a bunch of rowdy French politicians in the late 16th century. I never taught him that the best description of the mountain could be just “Everest.”

But I did not tinker with reality. I tinkered with my life. A student who makes meters of a mountain’s majesty has little to lose except perhaps his imagination. But I turned the process round-- I made meters of myself. And the machines multiplied.

I spent my nights slaving beneath them. Thinking and thinking and thinking. Pacing and pacing and pacing. I parsed my existence for any sign of a point. But each epiphany brought new mechanisms and new frameworks to follow. I hesitated once when the whirring of the motors seemed to envelop my mind. I lay unconscious on my floor for hours. But there had to be something. No one wants to be damned, but no one wants to be meaningless.

The day after I fainted I drove to my doctor’s office. He was always a nice man. He made jokes, he asked questions, he showed concern without scolding me. He reminded me of my grandfather.

“I’m broken,” I told him as he helped me into his office. “You’re a downright mess is what you are, John!” he barked back, beaming. I sat on the examination bed. “No need to worry, we’ll get you fixed up! Happens to all of us!” The room was entirely white, tile to ceiling. Labeled drawers lined an entire wall. It was a large office. “You can see what’s happened to me?” I sputtered, as he laid my head back. “Of course I can. I name everyone’s maladies, and I name the cures, John. I am a doctor after all.” He smiled patiently. His white teeth gleamed under the fluorescent lights that lit the room.

“What’s wrong with me?” I asked him. “John, it’s nothing much to worry over. It happens to all of us at a certain age. Be glad you’re getting it over with! Just think of it as the final step into manhood. There is an operation. I promise you will be well after the surgery. But I must act quickly.” He rifled through a box of medical instruments in the corner of the room. I rolled over to see the white wall of drawers.

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At first, I was blinded by the reflected light. Then the drawers came into focus. One label read *Charlotte Mckenzie, Psychologist.* Another read: *James Pickett, Mathematician.* Another drawer was slightly open: *Mark Harris, Actor.* I could see several metal shafts and a wrench. Then, another read: *Allen Fentress, Lawyer.* Another: *Eliza Robinson, Physicist.* There were many more, each marked in the same fashion, each with name and occupation, each a 1’ x 5” rectangle, each perfectly sterile. But my eyes settled on one:

{ *John Fernsby, Philosopher* }

He had already unscrewed my left shin. He opened my drawer and threw in the wrench, before returning to my thigh. “Doctor!” I shouted, “Doctor!” He said nothing; he only worked. My left thigh was in the drawer. My left arm was in the drawer. I threw myself onto him and with a metallic clang my right shoulder slammed into his skull. I dragged myself across the floor, out the door, and down the hall. My frame screeched against the pavement outside. I drove home.

It was almost silent in my room. I sobbed. Doctrines burn as quickly as paper. I lit a match and burned them, every one. Every treatise, every truth, every lack thereof, and every diagram. The machine parts were strewn everywhere. A man on the radio sang a melody.
He sits in a corner booth
all by himself. Everyone
else is looking for fast,
but he eats slowly. His shaking
fingers struggle, each bite a
crawl to cross the finish line
of his mouth. Wrinkles
threaten to slide off his face
as he stoops forward from the
weight of all the years. His
drooping eyes stare straight
past the kids wearing ketchup
and the mothers chasing them
around the yellow-arched maze
to something far away –

A long blonde ponytail
reflecting rays of sunlight,
a sweaty hand nervously thumbing
a ring in a pocket, a flower
garden behind a white house,
a strip of skin beneath a perfect
collarbone, a little baby red-faced
and crying, two rocking chairs
moving in quiet rhythm, and
holding a frail hand in a sterile
hospital bed.

His skinny ankles, peeking out
from gray trousers, tremble
as he stands to leave.
Mr. Darby turned to the woman by his side, “You know Ms. Colette, I believe he is dead.”

Ms. Colette nodded in agreement, examining the man on the floor as she did so. He lay at the bottom of a large staircase. The staircase itself was inside a large mansion, the largest in all of London, which belonged to the man on the floor, Mr. Kingsley.

“Ms. Colette, I am going to fetch the Commissioner, we will have to move the body down to the yard where it can be properly examined, and the house will have to be cordoned off, and the maids and butlers collected for interview, and the dogs fed.” Mr. Darby left the room via the very ostentatious front door.

Outside he approached the Commissioner and said the following:

“Commissioner, Mr. Kingsley was murdered!”

“Dear Mr. Darby,” replied the weary Commissioner, “please tell me that this is not another one of your grand adventures. Mr. Kingsley was a close friend of mine and I will not have you running about his estate without reason.” As the Commissioner well knew, Mr. Darby had a habit of overreacting to situations. He cast a sideways glance at his head detective, Mrs. Shiresham. She shook her head and looked at Mr. Darby.

“No, no, good fellow, he was most certainly murdered. He received a knock on the head, which was fatal, and then someone carefully placed him at the foot of the stairs to throw off your brilliant detectives. But they could not fool me!” With the last statement Mr. Darby pointed his finger into the sky and returned to the house.

Behind him the Commissioner and Mrs. Shiresham stared at him. As always, he never ceased to leave his audience incredulous. The Commissioner rounded up his officers and instructed them to secure the grounds. He ordered that armed watchmen patrol the large fence on the border of the property, each patrol was to have two men and a dog. He then asked Mrs. Shiresham to receive the reports of the patrols as the dogs would no doubt
agnivate his allergies.

"Ms. Colette, the Commissioner has been informed of my conclusions. We have permission to begin our investigation. We shall have to find a suspect first. Have the maids and butlers been collected?"

Ms. Colette again nodded at her partner and then moved out of the room towards the servant's quarters. Mr. Darby, exasperated, as usual, by his partner's silence took to ordering the newly arrived police officers. Under his guidance they carefully placed the body of Mr. Kingsley on a stretcher and carried him away.

"Mr. Kingsley was the richest man in all of London," Mr. Darby spoke to himself, "which gives plenty of motive to a killer. But the house has not been broken into. I believe that the killer must have been someone Mr. Kingsley knew, someone he trusted!"

Mr. Darby, firm in his belief that he was alone, turned around to find Mrs. Shiresham occupying the front doorway. He gave a start and then quickly collected himself.

"Mr. Darby, the Commissioner requests that you return to the yard and confirm your beliefs with the coroner. If you cannot prove that Mr. Kingsley did not simply fall down the stairs then you will be asked to stop making ridiculous accusations." Mrs. Shiresham spoke with an undertone of ingratiated annoyance.

"Of course, of course, Mrs. Shiresham, I can't have the Commissioner thinking I am incorrect, now can I? I trust you to stay here and maintain the scene of the crime in my absence. But don't uncover too many of the great secrets before I return!" He bid her adieu and left the house once more.

Meanwhile Ms. Colette had spoken with all of the servants and also returned to the yard. Upon seeing Mr. Darby there her face registered no surprise.

"Ah, Ms. Colette, good to see you here, I have only just come back to see the body. What did you find out from the maids and butlers?" Mr. Darby,
Ms. Colette told him of the ins and outs of the Kingsley mansion; over the last few days there had been many visitors, members of state, bank officials, even Mrs. Shiresham had called on Mr. Kingsley in response to his stolen dog. It had been his favorite German Shepherd. Upon her return the previous day she had been turned away, shortly before the realization of Mr. Kingsley's death. None of the visitors had stayed longer than their business required them to, as Mr. Kingsley was not known for his ability to entertain.

Besides the visitors to the mansion all had gone as it regularly did. Mr. Kingsley woke in the morning and took his breakfast in bed with the morning paper. Afterwards he would go to the kennel and tend his dogs until lunch. Lunch was promptly at noon, and after lunch visitors were allowed to make appointments. When not seeing visitors Mr. Kingsley tended to his large company, something he managed to do without ever leaving the mansion. When the time came for dinner Mr. Kingsley dined alone in the large dining room of the mansion. He would then sit by the large fireplace in the sitting room and smoke his pipe for exactly one half hour before retiring to bed. The daily schedule did not vary any day of the week, not even Sunday, as Mr. Kingsley was not a very religious man and believed it better to continue working on Sundays.

"Excellent work, Ms. Colette," Mr. Darby said, "why don't you come see the body with me? It never hurts to have an extra pair of eyes along."

Ms. Colette followed Mr. Darby into the basement where the coroner worked. Whereupon they were informed, just as Mr. Darby had suspected; that Mr. Kingsley could not have died from a fall down the staircase. In fact, the coroner went so far as to say that Mr. Kingsley must have received a blow to the head that was entirely unrelated to stairs.

"Exactly as I suspected!" Mr. Darby again pointed his finger at the sky, or rather, the ceiling, as they were now in the basement of the yard, "Ms. Colette, we must return to the mansion at once and look for a murder weapon."

With that Mr. Darby rushed out of the room and back upstairs. Ms. Colette followed him a moment later. After they had gone Mrs. Shiresham and the
Commissioner both arrived in the coroner’s office to hear his report.

“Mrs. Shiresham, I have no doubt that Mr. Darby will be invigorated by this news, you shall have to return to the mansion and monitor him. See that he does not cause any irreparable harm to himself or the estate.” The Commissioner blew his nose in a handkerchief and then returned it to his pocket.

“Indeed Commissioner. We can’t have him ruining a national landmark.” With a steely look Mrs. Shiresham shook the Commissioner’s hand and left to follow Mr. Darby.

Back at the mansion Mr. Darby drew ever closer to revealing the truth behind Mr. Kingsley’s death. He called out through the mansion for Ms. Colette to join him in Mr. Kingsley’s office.

“Ms. Colette! Look at this,” she looked, “it has to be the murder weapon.” In his hand he held a good sized bust of Mr. Kingsley. It was made of solid gold and perfectly sculpted, all but for the large dent on top, which, oddly, coincided with the place in which Mr. Kingsley had been struck.

Mrs. Shiresham entered the room then. Mr. Darby held up the bust for her to see and explained his suspicions.

“Mr. Kingsley was cleared killed by a business partner! They must have had a disagreement over money and Mr. Kingsley was murdered with his own statue.”

Mrs. Shiresham bore his explanation and then offered a counterpoint.

“Mr. Darby, this is an excellent conclusion, but what if it was not a business partner? Perhaps Mr. Kingsley was struck by one of his own servants; after all they have access to the entire mansion. Would it not be easy for one of them to come in without Mr. Kingsley’s notice?”

Mr. Darby paused for a moment; he was not used to having people second guess his conclusions.

“Of course, Mrs. Shiresham, this is a possibility, but look about. There is no tray, if a servant had killed Mr. Kingsley would there not be evidence of
a servant in the room? The desk is covered in papers, which would imply business dealings, and there has been no space cleared for the arrival of a servant. A man such as Mr. Kingsley would have to have made space for tea, had a servant entered the room. There is no way that the killer could have been a servant!"

Satisfied with his rebuttal Mr. Darby exited the room to review the list of visitors. Ms. Colette scanned over the papers on the desk, which were all pedigrees for Mr. Kingsley’s large collection of dogs. On the very top was the impressive pedigree of his missing German shepherd. With a neutral look at Mrs. Shiresham Ms. Colette left the room. Behind her Mrs. Shiresham quietly took the top paper from the desk and put it in the pocket of her dress.

Mr. Darby stood at the bottom of the staircase with his notebook out and pencil in hand. He was reviewing the list given to him by Ms. Colette. There was one name on it which particularly puzzled him: Mrs. Shiresham. Of course, he knew she had been investigating the missing dog, but why had the Commissioner himself not taken the case?

“Ms. Colette,” Mr. Darby said in a low voice, “I don’t believe we can trust Mrs. Shiresham any longer. Her presence at the mansion the day of the murder is too great a coincidence.”

Ms. Colette nodded at Mr. Darby, as he had come to expect, and then directed him back towards the yard.

When Mr. Darby and Ms. Colette arrived at the yard they rushed to the Commissioner’s office.

“Commissioner!” Mr. Darby shouted through the halls, “Commissioner I believe I know what has happened to Mr. Kingsley!”

Mr. Darby burst into the Commissioner’s office, throwing the door against the wall.

“Mr. Darby, this is entirely unprecedented, what are you doing here?” The Commissioner stood, putting down his handkerchief, and gave Mr. Darby an angry glare.
“Commissioner I’m sorry to make such an entrance but I believe I have discovered Mr. Kingsley’s killer.”

The Commissioner looked at Mr. Darby with incredulity, and then looked at Ms. Colette, who nodded.

“Mr. Kingsley was killed by someone he knew, someone that he trusted. I investigated his office and found the murder weapon, a bust of the man himself! But the killer was not a servant, there was no space made on Mr. Kingsley’s desk for receiving tea. Other than tea there would not have been a servant in the room and Mr. Kingsley would sure have known something was amiss. Instead I conjecture that the killer is Mrs. Shiresham!”

“Mrs. Shiresham! Mr. Darby this is ridiculous.” The Commissioner sat down again.

“No! It had to have been Mrs. Shiresham, she was investigating the disappearance of Mr. Kingsley’s prize dog, and the last thing on his desk was the pedigree of that dog. He must have been discussing the case with Mrs. Shiresham when she killed him. She is not only the murderer but also a thief!”

As Mr. Darby made this exclamation Mrs. Shiresham entered the room.

“Mr. Darby, I applaud you efforts, but you are gravely mistaken.”

Mr. Darby whirled around to stare at Mrs. Shiresham, the killer was now in the room with him!

“Commissioner, Ms. Colette, although Mr. Darby has made an excellent case I know who the real killer is. Mr. Kingsley’s dog was stolen a week ago, as we all well know. That German shepherd was his prize dog, the most purebred German shepherd in the world. The dog is said to be so purebred that it would not even induce an allergic reaction! Which is why, Commissioner, you are the murderer.”

“Me! Mrs. Shiresham this is a terrible defense, clearly Mr. Darby has outwitted you.”

“No Commissioner, you are the murderer. When I was assigned the case of
Mr. Kingsley's missing dog I requested to see the pedigree of the animal in question. I realized almost immediately that the pedigree was a fake! The dog was not, in fact, the most purebred German Shepherd in the world. Which is why, Commissioner, when you stole the dog your allergies gave you away; I realized in the coroner's office when you began to blow your nose. The closest you had been to dogs that day was at the mansion, but you had me handle the patrols so that you would not come in contact with the animals. When I shook your hand I found black hairs on your sleeve. The sort of hairs which a world class German Shepherd would have:"

Mr. Darby stood dumbly in the center of the room, listening to Mrs. Shiresham's explanation. Ms. Colette listened carefully, but showed no signs of exasperation. The Commissioner showed a large amount of exasperation.

"When I returned to the mansion Mr. Darby had found the bust which was used to murder Mr. Kingsley. This bust, made of solid gold, would have been much too heavy for me to lift with any ease, let alone use as a bludgeon. But as Commissioner you have regular access to the police gym and are often seen there. The last piece of evidence is right here in my pocket; the true pedigree of Mr. Kingsley's missing dog. I believe that you went to speak to Mr. Kingsley about his dog and that he showed you this pedigree. In embarrassment at your mistake and anger at Mr. Kingsley's pride you took up the bust and killed him:"

"That's brilliant Mrs. Shiresham!" Mr. Darby let out an impressed exclamation. Ms. Colette nodded her agreement.

"Yes Mrs. Shiresham, well done." The Commissioner had stood up again. "But I cannot allow you to compromise my position as the Commissioner of London. You are all under arrest for treason!"

With this two large police officers entered the room. But instead of arresting Mrs. Shiresham and Mr. Darby and Ms. Colette they stepped around the desk and each of them clapped a large hand on the Commissioner's shoulder.

"Commissioner, it is you who is under arrest, for the murder of Mr. Kingsley, the richest man in London." Mr. Darby pointed his finger at the Commissioner with a triumphant look on his face.
1. 2004

Raining broken glass.
He leapt. His buttoned shirt
bent around his body, cascading.
A stranger, her hair suspended
in motion rushed to the
newly open window.

2. 1993

What’s wrong?
Why would you say that?
How do you know?
That doesn’t make sense.
True, but you can’t say it.
It’s gonna be okay.
It seemed appropriate.
I don’t. But it’s true.
Not knowing doesn’t make it any less true.
Why not? I can say whatever I want.
Why not? If I say it, I mean it.
Unless you’re lying.
Lies have a different kind of meaning.
How do I know you’re not lying?
Faith, really. That’s it.
Okay. It’s gonna be okay.

3. 1962

The musk of burning mahogany and pine,
the fragrance of amber rising with the ash.
The horses break from the barn doors
into the shadows of the trees.
The structure bends in the light as we watch from the hillside.
Beneath the black night the budging red seems small a candle drowning itself in wax. Grandma is crying.
DEGAS: FIELD NOTES
Jennifer Bilton

I found the sky
too stubborn to be unmoving.
The dancers, trained
to remain as still
as they are taught to move,
bow their heads down to art.
The sky demands
that we bow up to it.
And then it moves along
as if our noticing
never mattered at all.

On Degas – Sky Study
http://www.edgar-degas.org/Sky-Study.html
Oh how the rain mocks we of humanity,
Pelting us with the life giver,
Drowning some, soaking all without pity

The rain with its acid mixture,
Made by man and our anti-elixier,
Water the source of all life,
Thrown down by clouds as knives.

Water when dying or entering strife,
Water on birth and beckoning life,

It brings with it thunder and jagged blades of light,
Blotting out the sun threatening to bite,
Scaring the small or easy to fright,
Shaking the earth and our hearts with its might,

This maddening conundrum assaulting my head,
How could the life giver represent the dead.
HILF...

{Winner of the 2014 Echo Photography Prize}

INCISION

Kristen Murdaugh, digital photography
AUTUMN SCENE
{Winner of the 2014 Echo Painting Prize}
Kendall Driscoll, painting
SEASON'S END

THE VALLE
Graham Browning, digital photography
CROWLEY, Heroes Series
Victoria Ferrer, acrylic on canvas
URKEL, Heroes Series
Victoria Ferrer, acrylic on canvas
GOLD

Benjamin Riddle, digital photography
This is an abstract shot taken ~20 above, looking straight down between two adjacent slats in a wooden pier off of the coast of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The beige-black partition in the center is the support for the pier which runs all the way back up to shore, hence allowing for the separation of colors. To me, this picture is a sort of microcosmic representation of the larger reality of apartheid - the arbitrary imposition of a human barrier to separate colors that would otherwise coexist.

*Rhodes Hambrick, digital photography*
RUGGED EXPOSURE

This photo was taken immediately after a storm broke at my rural homestay site in Khorixas, Namibia.

Rhodes Hambrick, digital photography
This is the grandmother from my homestay in Khorixas. The horn and dress are indicative of her heritage as a Herero woman; she wears them in all weather and as she does her daily farm chores (herding and milking goats and cows, cooking and cleaning her homestead, etc.).

*Rhodes Hambrick, digital photography*
VIEW FROM TRAIN WINDOW IN AUSTRALIA

Alison Williams, watercolor painting
Sarah Rasmussen, digital photography
A ROSE WITH A BEE

Helen Reed, digital photography
AUDREY

Sarah Rasmussen, mixed media drawing
GREAT WHITE NORTH SERIES

Dante Durrman, digital photography
continued on next page...
GREAT WHITE NORTH SERIES

Dante Durrman, digital photography
UNTITLED

Summer Woods, digital photography
Aye Sae liked peeing off of high places. The higher the better. If he peed off the slide he could watch it change the color of the playground sand. If he peed off the wooden bouncy bridge he could see how many spider webs he could destroy in five seconds. Once, when I finally got him to pee in the restroom, I turned around to see him standing on the toilet bowl, giggling himself almost off the ledge, amused and proud of the thunderous splash he was creating.

Aye Sae was the first small child I ever babysat. He was born in a refugee camp in Thailand, and he would start pre-school in Atlanta in September. Childcare was one of my main responsibilities at Jubilee Partners, a Christian Service Community which seeks to help the most vulnerable refugees: those who don’t know English and those who are sick. The rest of my time was spent tending to the organic garden, teaching English to adult refugees, and rounding up incorrigible goats.

Watching Aye Sae was the most challenging task of all. He continuously talked to me in Karen: sometimes commands, sometimes jokes. He must have known I couldn’t understand. Eventually I just started responding in English, which pleased him. We were amused and we filled the silence. The only English word I ever heard him say was “apple,” which was always a command. Do you want me to read you a book? Apple. Don’t make me call your mom. Apple. You already ate all the apples. Apple.

Aye Sae’s parents, Ler Paw and Thong Toe, composed half of my class. Ler Paw’s English was not much better than her son’s. The English she knew usually came in commands too: “Teacher, no.” “Yes, Teacher.” “Teacher, write.” “Teacher, come.”

On her last week of class, “Teacher, eat.” So I went to her cabin for lunch. She gave me a Fanta which I put in my purse. That would be the ninth soda I had collected that summer at refugee houses and cabins. From the freezer she retrieved a gallon bucket of vanilla ice cream and two spoons. The ice cream had melted, re-frozen, and accumulated specks of red and green, which I pretended were sprinkles and ate.

I looked up from the ice cream and asked, “How are you?” The refugees
hadn't yet learned that when Americans ask this, we don't want the answer, we want the script. But I think I meant it this time.

She stuck her spoon in the ice cream, looked up and said, “Teacher, scared.”

She told me, in much fewer words, that she loves Jubilee, that she loves blueberries, she loves the garden, and the church service and that she “no love” her trip to Atlanta. The ice cream melted again.

I didn’t know what to say. I was scared too. Her husband had PTSD and would have a hard time working. With her lack of English she would have a hard time finding a job. I focused on that. The next day I taught the students how to fill out forms and job applications. Thong Toe skipped class again.

I only had two students in class that day: Ler Paw and Rae Paw, a much older Karen woman. They struggled with remembering their social security number and how to spell the names of their children. For “work experience” I taught Ler Paw how to write, “seamstress” and “gardener.” She was so pleased that this mattered enough to write down. She beamed and said the words out loud, “Seamstruss” she said, holding the “ss” and her chin in the air.

Ten minutes later, after break, both of them had forgotten how to spell and pronounce these words. I was frustrated and they could tell. I taught them a new word, “memorize.” I said, “When you memorize something you just know it by heart.” I pointed to my heart. “You don’t even have to look it up,” I said, shaking my head and closing the notebooks in front of them. “It is here,” I touched my head— “forever.” I told them to memorize how to fill out the form by class tomorrow, Ler Paw’s second to last day at Jubilee.

And they did. The next day, both Rae Paw and Ler Paw had memorized every word. Thong Toe skipped class again.

Ler Paw was right to be scared about leaving Jubilee. A week before her family left I confronted Thong Toe about his chronic truancy. He told me he was sad and scared. He already had friends and cousins in Atlanta. “Good!” I said. “No” he said. “They alcohol a lot. They make me alcohol, and I don’t want.”
You should have seen the way he stared through things. I knew in those moments he was either on the frontline in Thailand, battling the Burmese, or already in Atlanta on his cousin’s back porch—either in the past or trying recklessly to forget it.

It’s hard to leave community. It was hard for them to leave their community at MaeLa camp in Thailand, even if they were starving in every other way. It was hard for them to leave Jubilee. America, I’m afraid to say, wasn’t what we showed them. It wasn’t all sunshine and community, hymns and soccer. This was bad news for them and bad news for me.

The staff at Jubilee Partners has to get used to saying goodbye—an act that gets harder when you live, garden, eat, and worship with the people you send off. That’s probably why we hold hands before loading up the van. We say kind words, which the refugee families understand in tone but not diction, and sing the parting prayer.

Ler Paw’s family cried and gave each of us the now traditional goodbye breakfast of one banana and one hard-boiled egg. I shook Thong Toe’s hand. He blinked away tears. I hugged Ler Paw and told her I would miss her. She said, “Teacher, thank you, beautiful teacher.” Then ran into the van. Ten seconds later she ran back out and grabbed both of my hands.

“Teacher, come.”

“Please, teacher.” Commands with tears.

“I can’t,” I said.

“I have to take Nestorine’s family to the zoo.”

I have to finish college.

I only have one week left here.

I’m scared, too.

I don’t want to leave either.

Rae Paw hurried over to us. Standing five feet tall, you would not expect
her to be someone who would command attention. But it was her smile that did it—disproportionately larger than any part of her body, her smile commanded happiness first and attention more as a bi-product. Still, it seemed odd to me that she would smile at this time. She reached up, putting one hand on Ler Paw’s shoulder, and the other on mine. “Jenna, memorize Ler Paw. Promise. Memorize her.”

I promised, and I have.
TO MY OTHER
Victoria Ferrer

I birthed you somehow.
In this world, we came to be
one soul
facing each other- a divided screen.
you seem unaware
of the blueprint you speak.
the thoughts in your mind
that haunt you in sleep.
the stars that guide you
back to yourself.
the love you long for,
once held.
She showers in rose petals,
waiting for the day
you remember a promise
that shatters physical
time and space
and all imaginary distance
we've created in our
sick,
sick
minds.
REQUIEM
Jacob Zimmerman

In the aisle, a touch on her shoulder causes her to turn.
   “I didn’t recognize you. You look older.”
   “Yeah. What was your name? I really should learn to remember.” She shook my hand, her eyes dead.
   “It’s fine. We were in the same third grade class.”
   “Oh! You were that kid with the stories!” She said.
   “Yeah, that didn’t really last.”

I don’t know what to say.
   “It was nice to see you.” “Catch you later!” “Sure, we’ll see.”
I waved. She walked away.
Silence, in loaves of bread. Memory.
A little girl who smiled.

Time kills every child.
banjo, n.
Pronunciation: /ˈbændʒoʊ/  
Forms: Also (earlier) banjore, banjer.
Etymology: A corruption of BANDORE n.1, through African slave pronunciation, ban'jøre, ban'jō.
1. a. A stringed musical instrument, played with the fingers, having a head and neck like a guitar, and a body like a tambourine; a modification of the bandore.

EXERPTED FROM THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

I bought my first banjo in high school for a couple hundred dollars, splitting the cost with my younger brother, who, like me, had recently developed an interest in learning to play. My dad handled the transaction after finding it for sale on Craigslist, and one day it just appeared in our living room, protected in a black case with an uneven matte finish, the instrument like a meteor that had fallen from the sky, an object without history or context.

The instrument sat next to the fireplace beside my brother’s keyboard and my acoustic guitar, a Yamaha my dad had purchased for his sister while a Navy mechanic stationed in Japan (she returned the gift, unable or unwilling to learn to play it). There was also a white Fender Stratocaster, on indefinite loan from a guitar teacher with whom I no longer took lessons, as well as other miscellaneous instruments lying on and around the hearth: a glockenspiel and mallets; drumsticks and practice pad; an electric kazoo I had bought my brother a couple years before, a novelty item played once or twice and disregarded; a harmonica and harmonica holder (a metal apparatus that loops around the neck like orthodontic headgear) purchased to help me emulate a troubadour from Hibbing, Minnesota.

I started by unlocking the case’s five fasteners — spring-loaded, they each produced a satisfying metallic click as they flipped up. Inside, the banjo sat nestled within the case’s fuzzy interior lining. I grabbed it by the base of the
neck and pulled it out. The instrument was heavy, heavier than the Yamaha and Fender guitars, much heavier than it looked. The instrument’s circular head, ringed with a metal hoop that stretched taut the percussive membrane, weighed the instrument down, the distribution of mass like that of a sledgehammer. “Gold Tone,” written in black across the yellow wood headstock, identified the manufacturer. The four tuning pegs were a translucent white plastic resembling pearl. The fretboard was made of a dark brown wood, inlaid with silver-colored diamonds marking fret positions. Up five frets was another tuning peg for the fifth string, pitched higher than the other four. (I now know that this is considered a reentrant tuning that breaks the ascendant ordering of string pitches characteristic of the guitar and many other stringed instruments.) I followed the strings down the banjo, across the white head and over the three-columned wooden bridge to the tailpiece around which looped the string ends. A black strap with plastic hooks attached to brackets circling the banjo’s metal hoop. I adjusted the strap, slipped it over my head, and took a seat, setting the banjo in my lap. I’d played banjos in music shops before, but it still felt awkward and unfamiliar to hold. With my thumb pad I strummed across the strings.

The first notes were pure; bright and clear, they broke the silence and filled the room. It seemed as though the sound itself refracted light, diffusing it and painting the white walls in warmer shades.

No, that’s not right. The first strum was tentative, and the strings, thinner than a guitar’s, must have caught on my fleshy thumb. The sound must have been a series of loud, arpeggiated plucks, like snare drum shots, together sounding a G chord.

Or did I strum with the nail of my forefinger in imitation of the indie musician whose unorthodox playing was part of the reason I decided to pick up the instrument? Or did I see the plastic thumb picks and metal finger picks in the case and, recognizing them as the hallmark equipment of three-fingered bluegrass, try playing with them? Maybe it doesn’t matter.

However I played, the sound was distinctive, not at all like my acoustic guitar. My guitar sounded warm and welcoming but also neutral, standardized, difficult to hear when in a mix with other instruments. But the banjo was not only loud — it had an accent, though I had trouble identifying it. It sounded like one of the old men from the Baptist church I attended; in a thick southern drawl, it cracked corny jokes and inquired about family
members, peppering remarks with biblical language. ("Yessir, I’m old as Methuselah but I ain’t never …") It also sounded like a stereotype, a cross-eyed mountain man, sitting on the front porch in a rocking chair, looking out over a lonesome Appalachian valley, wearing overalls with one strap, a piece of straw sticking out from between crooked teeth. It sounded also like a folk revivalist, shirt sleeves rolled up, reciting country aphorisms to a big city crowd, performing authenticity.

I heard all those accents and more as I fumbled to form chords and make music with the new toy. I enjoyed listening to that accent, listening for what it was saying and what it meant.

* * * * *

In the second grade, my school decided that I needed to attend speech classes to improve my articulation. My parents agreed. I cried the first time an administrator tried to take me out of my regular class to go to the speech therapist. I didn’t want to leave my peers. It was unsettling to think I didn’t know how to talk.

* * * * *

I imagine that Joel Walker Sweeney would linger backstage, or in a small tent next to the big top, before he would perform in the years leading up to the Civil War. While he sat, an assistant would take a piece of cork and hold the end to a candle flame until it smoldered. After letting it cool, he’d apply the burnt charcoal tip to Sweeney’s face and hands. His skin would become darker than any man’s skin, darker than the darkest night, than an all but impossible abstraction. Additional red makeup, applied thick, would exaggerate his lips. A wig would give him wooly hair, and tattered clothing would complete the ensemble, transforming the white musician from Appomattox, Virginia.

But Sweeney was not yet in character. He would chat with the other performers backstage and complain about the heat or the cold or the rain or the snow. Perhaps he would spread out a newspaper and read of happenings in Washington, cursing the divided Congress and laughing at a caricature of a dogmatic abolitionist. Or he would sit and collect his thoughts, rehearsing in his mind the show’s songs and dances. Maybe he’d think back to his childhood, the days spent on the family farm, and the black servants
who worked for his father, the slaves he would later claim taught him the
music he now performed. Sweeney would wait backstage while an emcee
primed the crowd with homespun jokes and apocryphal anecdotes, and
when he heard his cue, he would grab his banjo and step onstage before the
farmers and factory workers, businessmen and doctors, coal miners and
shipbuilders and all the rest who had come to see him transmit the culture
of their country’s enslaved underclass.

Sweeney would play a five-string banjo, a variation on the black slave’s
gourd banjo that legend would later identify as his creation, though
scholars now question that narrative. Sweeney’s banjo was made with a
hardwood like maple or rosewood, tonewoods selected for their acoustic
properties. Instead of a gourd, the sheepskin head stretched over a wood­
en, open-backed hoop. The fingerboard, like a violin’s, lacked frets. Catgut
strings, made from the fibers of animal intestines, extended the length of
the fingerboard to the headstock, curly-shaped like the flag of an eighth
note. When played, Sweeney’s banjo did not sound the bright tones of a
modern banjo with steel strings. The pitch was lower, the timbre more mel­
low, but even then, it evoked another world.

As Sweeney performed — for his white audience, rich and poor, Ameri­
can and English, once even for Queen Victoria — the lyrics narrated his
co-performers’ theatrics.

Some folks say dat a nig-gar wont steal!
But I cotch one in my cornfield
So I ask him bout dat corn and he call me a liar
So I up wid my foot and I kick him in de fire

O whar did you cum from
Knock a niggar down
O whar did you cum from
Knock a nigger down.

Other songs, performed in character, sought to document the primitive
rhythms of the slave’s life.

What are the joys of White Man here?
What are his pleasures say?
Me want no joy, no ills me fear
But on my Bonja play:

Me sing all day, me sleep all night
Me hab no care, my Heart is light
Me tink no what tomorrow bring
Me happy so me sing.

Black slaves must have seen Sweeney perform. I wonder what they thought of his art. Did they smolder in barely repressed rage at their music's adulteration? Or did they even care, for what could cultural appropriation compare to the indignity of their chains? (Unless they recognized it as another shackle.) Did they celebrate that their oppressors had adopted their music? Did they see flattery alongside defamation in white society's imitation? Did they see themselves in it? Did they laugh because they were in on the joke, appreciating the slapstick antics of the "Ethiopian delineators?" Or did they sense they were at its end?

Did they like the music?

Now white folks, I'd hab you to know,
Dare is no music like de old banjo,
And if you want to hear it ring,
Jist watch this finger on de string.

When the show was over, I imagine that Sweeney would return to the side tent or back room and find a bucket of water. Cupping his hands, he would splash his face. The charcoal would mix with the water, and cloudy black drops would streak down his face and fall to the floor. With his handkerchief he would rub off the red makeup. He would take off the wig and tattered clothes and put on a clean shirt and suit jacket, pulling out a comb to fix his hair. He might greet a few loitering spectators and then check on the evening's proceeds. Later he would return home, and after dinner, he would lounge in the parlor and read. And then I like to think he would pick up a banjo leaning in a corner and play for himself. Did it sound different to him then, no longer in drag?

* * * *

I spent a semester in China my junior year of college, studying the language at a university in Suzhou, an ancient city famous for the elaborate
system of canals criss-crossing its urban landscape. (Marco Polo claimed he visited the city in its heyday and hailed it as the “Venice of the East”; my Chinese roommate countered that Venice was the “Suzhou of the West.”) The trip was the first time I spent more than a couple weeks outside the country, my greatest success in efforts to explore the world beyond the suburb in South Carolina where I grew up. I wanted “cultural immersion” to use the sales pitch for such trips, to experience China as more than a tourist and to be recognized as more than an outsider. I had an advantage in this: as a Korean-American, I could pass as Chinese to all but the most discerning eye. But speaking passable Chinese was another matter.

My roommate, Tuo Kai, was a student at the university majoring in English as a second language. He was tall and lanky, his hair short, his glasses frameless, his demeanor alternating between overly serious and awkwardly jovial. He grew up in western China and was one of a small group of students at the university from a different province. He spoke English imperfectly but with confidence, often using odd expressions that I suspect he picked up from a textbook or Hollywood film. Other elements of his speech were entirely his own — my American peers and I called them Tuo Kai-isms — like his habit of expressing delight with a drawn-out, “Won-der-ful!”

We each had a lofted bed with a desk underneath, the loft a creaky metal frame that always seemed about to collapse. Weeknights we would spend several hours sitting at our desks with our backs facing while we studied each other’s native language. Sometimes he’d ask me to proofread an essay for class, but more often he’d ask about American culture — about movies, music, television shows, books. Other times he’d ask about whether specific words or phrases were commonly used. I’d try to give a direct answer but would often provide too much context, citing circumstantial exceptions and regional differences and other unnecessary information for someone learning English as a second language. Regional differences interested him though, and I’d try to explain them. I’d caricature a Southern speaker (“Well, I ain’t never been there, but if y’all are a-fixin’ to go …”) and a valley girl (“And then I was like, ‘No way,’ and then she was like …”). Once I explained African-American English by reading from Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (“Doan’ you hear me? Shet the do’!”).

I would ask Tuo Kai similar questions, but unlike him, I lacked conversational proficiency in the language I was learning, struggling to pronounce even basic Chinese phrases. (“Ni hao. Wo shi meiguoren. Ni mingbai le”
Pitch could change meaning, but I inflected words at random, unable to tell the difference. I would need to repeat myself two or three times before Tuo Kai could make sense of my anglicized sounds. I spoke with an accent I couldn't hear, and yet it named me — as an American, as different. It made me visible when I wanted to blend in, separate when I wanted to belong.

Each year since starting college, my brother and I have traded who takes the banjo and who takes the guitar. This year, I got the banjo. I keep the instrument under my bed, atop its black hardshell case. Many days, when I finish with classes and return to my apartment, I set down my backpack, filled too full with books and binders, and, kneeling, take the banjo from its resting place, grabbing it by the base of the neck and slipping its black strap over my shoulder. I sit at the desk where I now write and place the instrument on my lap, the neck angled toward the ceiling. With my left hand, I feel for frets and chords while my right hand assumes its position and shape — thumb resting on the fifth string, other fingers bent towards the palm, forefinger jutting out slightly so that I can strike the strings with the back of the nail, which I grow out for that purpose.

I play most often in the clawhammer style, so named for the shape of your hand. It’s also called frailin’, flailin’, rappin’, frappin’, clubbin’, and the ol’ Kentucky knock, among other names. The nail of your forefinger first picks a melody note on the downbeat. Then you strum a chord and, as you finish, pluck the high fifth string with your thumb. The banjo drones in reply: “Bum-ditty. Bum-ditty.” It’s a simple, rhythmic, but versatile style first developed by black slaves, the first to play the banjo in its African proto-forms. Bluegrass is now the more widely-known playing style, with its rapid fire notes in a grandstanding flurry of eighth note rolls.

Most of the tunes I know are old time standards. “Rye Whiskey.” “Cripple Creek.” “Shady Grove.” These songs and others have become part of an unofficial anthology and mythological tradition, in no small part due to the folk music revival’s efforts to preserve and valorize America’s musical roots — the people’s songs, the commoner’s melodies, the proletariat’s anthems. One scholar has called the banjo “an anti-modern machine.”

The banjo no longer feels awkward to hold. The weight is familiar. I form
chords and run through scales from muscle memory. The sound too, though still distinctive, is less strange, more like the voice of a family member, a loud-mouthed uncle or nasally aunt heard about the din of a family reunion. And yet, as I play, there are still rifts: temporally between the banjo as instrument and artifact, familiar and foreign. Philosophically there's a distance between myself as subject and the banjo as object — irony, an inauthenticity, characterizes the relationship. The banjo feels like it belongs to someone else. But to whom? To its inventors? Its popularizers? Its conservers and recoverers?

When I finish playing, I slip off the strap and return the banjo to its resting place, under the bed or leaning in the corner. I return to classwork and all the rest that occupies me as a college student.

But the banjo is not still. The membrane replies to footsteps and resonates with the drone of the apartment's heating system. The fifth string vibrates.
A thread runs up her spine
knitting verses of Heaven into her bones.
Braids fall into halos, black onto white.
Angels fall on strings of glory
glowing before the unholy.
This child
has hidden a soul behind
proud and shy eyes.
Her lips turn up in a
knowing smile, her dark skin
shines before walls
of fire and a shadow that
is not her own. Still worldly,
she has turned her back
to the painted streets of Hell,
covered the world in white.
And grace dangles
on the end of her string.

On Mary Whyte's Paper Angel
http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-5DI5piiYm5s/T-yjkk7ngQI/AAAAAAAARKY/j2MzEeogkL0/s1600/Mary+Whyte++(26).jpg
THE POOL PARTY
Sarah Luke

The pool water was like syrup, just looking into it at night, or a black mirror. We put our toes in first and watched rings of water glide across the surface. It looked like wind racing wind. Lily ran up to the porch and turned on the pool lights, shouting, “My momma’s ring fell in the water!” Now the lights were on, and we all saw it at the bottom. Drew jumped in and brought it up, and everyone said, “Now, turn those lights off!”

Boys and girls in a black pool, wet skin and slick hands. Slick lips. “Has anyone here had their first kiss?” someone asked. We all looked around. Twisting around in the water was a slow dance of hair chasing skin. We could hardly see each other. Everyone felt beautiful.

Mark stood with his elbows on the pool’s edge, the water like dew in his buzzed hair. Everyone knew he lived in his car, where he slept with a girl from the rival school. Nobody looked at him. Someone asked who gave him directions to Shay’s pool.

Helen swam a doggy-paddle to the edge, tucking her hands into the water and tapping her feet on the surface. Mark watched her while she talked to him. He nodded his head and led her to the deep end of the pool. Someone bet he would kiss her. Someone said he wouldn’t.

Shay’s sister, who was twelve, came outside and sat with her calves in the water, churning it. Shay told her to go back inside and get the ice cream. She disappeared again, and Shay said for us to look at her belly ring, a flat metal elephant sitting in her naval. One of the boys behind her made like he was ripping it out. The girl beside him giggled.

Shay’s sister returned with both arms wrapped around a tub of ice cream. Everyone got out and sat around the glass patio furniture. We saw Mark and Helen again. One of the girls ran to Helen and pulled her under an umbrella stand, her lips moving rapidly. Helen tossed her hair around so we couldn’t see her face.

Mark said he had to get going. Somebody asked where he had to go; he lived in his car! We watched the headlights like burning bulbs disappear around a bend in the road.
Shay’s sister came back with spoons. She dipped hers in the tub once before Shay told her to please, please not bother us. This was a teenager thing.

We watched her walk to the diving board and wave her spoon in the air. She pointed her toes and jumped in. Lily mentioned how sweet she was. The boys kept talking about last night at somebody’s lake house, who brought the beer and who wouldn’t drink. Lily said she wouldn’t drink. Some boy put his arm around her bare shoulders and winked at Drew, who shrugged. Shay’s sister jumped again off the board.

Shay said Booker calls her up some nights when he’s drunk and wants to do it with her, and that was why she didn’t invite him, why he wasn’t here. Under his breath somebody said tonight Booker was at another party at a college girl’s house, but Shay didn’t hear this and said again why Booker wasn’t at her pool.

Shay’s sister was gone now, and the water was smooth. We got back in the pool, splashing like weights, slipping in like fingers.

Helen asked where the bathroom was. Shay said her sister would show her, and she shouted at the house for her. The TV blinked through the window. Shay said whatever, she would show her herself.

Lily beckoned Drew to the deep end and tossed in diving rings. We’ll see who can find more, she said. They disappeared under the surface.

Drew came up first, wearing four rings around his arm. He hoisted himself onto the concrete ledge. Lily emerged seconds later, coughing and spitting up water. Drew pulled her out onto the side, dropping the rings and holding her up with his arms. He shouted for the rest of us.

Lily smacked the concrete with her hands. When she stopped coughing, she whispered so only Drew heard. Under the surface of the black mirror, one of the rings rested on Shay’s sister, still as carpet at the bottom of the pool.
This is the semester I take slowly. Second sermon Sundays, and side of the road sunsets, apologizing for the many times I blasphemed yellow and pink. I do not start letters with, "I'm sorry it took me so long," I thank God with my mouth full, and I do not forget the cilantro.

I thank God for my mouthful. I take the back road to Walmart on a Carolina snow day, risking it all for bacon, Merlot, and two avocados. In the morning we wake up hungry and proud, our shoeless footprints surrounding the house--as naked as the cat's but circular and shaky.

This is the semester I feel the snow between my toes, but not the coldness. It is only now that I have noticed the noontime nests at the top of winter's naked trees. This is the semester I take the access road all the way to Georgia.
My body is a prison,
A prison where shackles arise from the concrete.
It grounds me like cinderblocks aboard the basket of a hot air balloon.
Sometimes life feels like it weighs far too much and nothing can help us see
that things will get better.
Sometimes life isn’t beautiful, especially with four hours of sleep.
Sometimes we just want an end to set us free.
Let us loose and unpin us from this terribly muddled world we’ve been tied
down to.
We try to save ourselves, but sometimes, that’ll never be enough.

Life weighs down my body.
I wake up in the morning,
I feel such weariness in my bones, and I wonder if it’s even worth the trou­ble of getting out of bed.
They say to keep moving forward,
But every step hurts and spears pain the further I walk.
When the day starts, I pray that the day will end quickly
And then next day, I find myself repeating the same prayers.

Why did you do it?
Was it for attention?
What’s wrong with you?
Don’t you know that the people around you love you?
Why?

Maybe this was for attention.
Maybe this was a plea screaming to the world
“Please, save me.
Save me from myself.
Just be there for me.
Tell me things will get better.
Hold me together when life is tearing me apart limb from limb.
Help me balance when my circus act is tottering unsettlingly from one side
of the tightrope to the other.”

One day, I screamed to the world
And one day, it screamed back.
“You aren’t alone,” it said.
“Life is hard and living it well is even more difficult,
But listen to me when I say there is something worth fighting for.”
And just like that I felt a jolt in my heart,
I witnessed life being breathed back into my petrified body.
I began to see beauty in my heart and in my brain, lungs, and pancreas.
The art of living seemed magical as the system of weights in my life seemed
to level out,
Leveling out to reveal landscapes of freedom, not cages of imprisonment.

Life appeared as a promise,
A promise worth fulfilling,
So I adjusted a few knobs and evaporated the energy drinks sloshing
around my end of the scale,
I freed up my inhibitions and let them soar,
I filled myself with light and hope and sparkle and gleam until I felt like I
was one with the stars—
Weightless and showing brilliantly across the night sky.
Every day held promise and purpose,
Whether it was making the Dean’s List or making a delicious meatless veg-
an sandwich.
Whenever life begins to weigh me down again,
I only need to remember pull off the makeshift shackles in which I’ve im-
prisoned myself.
Some days, we need constant reminders not to cut the ropes which hold us
up.
Every day, we should construct survival mechanisms and restructure our-
selves to live better,
So that we find ourselves weightless compared to the scale of life burdened.
Mr. Webster liked his room. It was white, stark, with two plastic chairs, a plastic table, a metal bed, a toilet, and a shower in the corner. There was one window, but he never looked out. He could not remember why. It was small, with bars over it. There were three florescent lights in the ceiling, each parallel to the others. There was a clock on the wall with a white face, black numbers, and black hands. At nine every night, the lights went off, and at eight the next day, the lights came on. Sometimes before the lights came on, sunlight would fall through the window. In the wall was one white door with a brass handle that failed to work for Mr. Webster. Sometimes it would open, and someone would come. He wished it would happen more often—he could not remember the last time he had a visitor.

Mr. Webster was sitting at his table, on one of his chairs, looking up at the window. It was two fifty eight in the afternoon.

The door opened.

A man, an old-looking thirty-five in a business suit and a bowler hat, entered. The man had brilliant blue eyes, a big nose, and square glasses that seemed too small for his face. Mr. Webster looked at him. There was nothing in the man's hands, but he held them like he was carrying a tiny package.

"Hello." Mr. Webster said, smiling. "What day is it?"

"Thursday." The man said.

"What month?"

"October."

"What year?" The man did not answer. Instead, he moved leisurely to the seat opposite Mr. Webster, the feet of the chair scraping against the floor as the man slid it back and sat down.

"I don't see how that's important." The man said quietly, offering a quaint smile.
“Very well.” Mr. Webster leaned in. “You remind me of someone. Your face looks very familiar. Those eyes. I feel like I should know whose eyes those are.”

“They were your wife’s.” The man said, blinking.

“My wife. Hmm. Knew there was someone I was forgetting. How did you get those eyes?”

“You gave them to me.”

“I have no memory of doing that. How do they work?”

“Not that well. You see that I have to wear glasses.”

“Do you know what happened to my wife?”


“So, why are you here?” Mr. Webster leaned back, away from the man.

“I thought it would be nice to drop in. See you again.” The man smiled once more.

“And when was the last time you saw me? I have no memory of you.”

“Last week. Thursday.”

“Wonderful.” Mr. Webster leaned in. “That nose looks familiar. It seems very large. Is it useful?”

“Have you ever looked in the mirror?” The man asked. “That’s why it looks familiar.” Mr. Webster carefully reached up to his face, brushing his fingers across his own nose before bringing them back down to his lap.

“Do I have an extra nose I don’t know about?” Mr. Webster asked.

“In a sense, yes.” the man took a deep breath, glancing around. “How do you like your room?”
“Its very white. A little too much light for me. But the sun comes in my
window on most mornings. That’s nice. Where am I again?”

“In your room.” The man in the hat stopped smiling.

“I don’t remember coming here. That is very strange. I would think that
would be something I would remember. Where is my wife? I would think
she would want to be here too. I don’t see why she can’t be.”

“Don’t worry.” The man smiled again. “You sent her away a long time ago.”

“Really? Why would I do that?”

“Well,” the man sighed, “you did. There’s no way to change that now.” Mr.
Webster paused.

“Why did I do that?” He said.

“I don’t know.” The man said.

“Oh.” Mr. Webster said. “I don’t remember doing that.”

“You never do.”

“How did it happen?” Mr. Webster asked, leaning forward.

“You always ask the same questions. You crushed a bottle of lorratab and
put it in a turkey sandwich you made for her.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. You’d have ask yourself that question, because I can’t think
of a reason. You thought it was sugar. You confused it with vitamins. You
wanted...I’m sorry.” The man said slowly, rising. Mr. Webster watched him.
“This always happens. I have to go.”

“Why?” Mr. Webster said, confused. “I upset you? What were we talking
about?”
“Goodbye.” The man reached across the table, reaching his arm around Mr. Webster’s body. Mr. Webster did not know what to do. The man walked towards the door.

“Wait.” Mr. Webster stood. “Am I a bad person? I can’t remember. Please come back.” The man turned away as he rapped on the door three times. The door swung open. The man looked back, and then he was gone.

Mr. Webster walked over to his bed, lying down. He looked up at the ceiling. Everything was white. Mr. Webster liked his room. It was white, stark, with two wooden chairs, a wooden table, a metal bed, a toilet, and a shower in the corner. There was one window, but he never looked out. He could not remember why.
THE MIRROR
Caitlin Gilliland

I sat face to face with my reflection
Different faces and sounds and silence
A damaged laugh
A crooked choke
And sobbing to attune
Gurgled up inside me
Blood bubbling from a wound
Nothingness like fungus spread
The meaning of it all
It takes one thought
One itchy thought
To feel anything at all
And so I sit with head in hands
Different hands and head and self
A worried sigh
A deep inhale
And looking into the mirror
My eyes transfixed upon the glass
The nothingness grew clearer
A virus of pure thought and dread
The emptiness of occasion
Left a taste
A bitter taste
Of fear, dread, evasion
AGING IN SECONDS OF MINUTES OF HOURS
Chrissy Reinemund

Of days of weeks of months of years, but, in this case, four months (and however many seconds and minutes and hours to be calculated) have passed since I have arrived back from my time abroad. And people have constantly barraged me with one seemingly simple question: “How was it?” And then, “tell me all about it.”

It’s like the infamous question on your birthday: “Do you feel a year older?” Which is quite an annoying question to begin with, and it usually comes from someone to whom you’ve rarely ever spoken -- like your friendly neighborhood Starbucks barista -- so it often comes out as a conversation’s desperate, dying cry for help. And it’s a silly one, too, because on any given day, after any passing of time, after any given experience, that same question is perfectly acceptable to be asked and to be answered. And if one were capable of noticing the daily changes in his or her face, his or her behavior, his or her attitude and his or her gaining of knowledge of life -- all of which do, in fact, happen day to day, perhaps that question wouldn’t be so darn pestering. It would definitely be an easy one, and also an enjoyable one, to answer.

But that takes the fun out of everything. I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t like to notice the new, tiny wrinkle that formed in the corner of my eye since yesterday; I’ve changed since yesterday. So have you. I’ve changed in the past four months. And so have you. I was in France with a French family, things that have brought about this change in myself; and wherever you were and whomever you were with have affected the change in yourself. However, you can’t really pinpoint what is different, because your change has happened and is happening very gradually but very surely; and these changes are so personal and so exclusive, only understood by God -- hardly even understood by you. But you know that these places, these things and these people, in some incredible but completely natural way, have changed you.

“How was it?” And then, “tell me all about it” are not so simple anymore. And I have grown to hate these questions in the same way that I hate that silly birthday question.

I could begin to tell you “all about it,” about the unbelievable amount of
love that I received from my French host mother, father and four brothers; about the tear-jerkingly lovely landscape from atop a mountain in Vezelay; about the beautiful, impeccable sculptures of Rodin, or the architecture inside Chartres cathedral; or the hilarious amount of cheese, whose name has slipped my mind, and wine that I consumed over the course of one evening in Bordeaux; or the friendship that all of us students formed with each other and also with our French professors while listening to each of them desperately try to pronounce “the” without the consonant “ZH;” or the incomparable sense of accomplishment that I felt after, at long last, successfully navigating Paris by bus, by Metro and by RER; or even coming to the conclusion that Owen Wilson was indeed correct in his statement, “Paris is most beautiful in the rain.” I could try, but then again, I really couldn’t try. These things have changed me, not you; therefore, trying to tell you “all about it” and trying to give you a sense of what exactly it was like is just impossible.

And I’m not being pretentious; I’m being honest. You don’t have to go to France to understand that your own experiences are yours -- and yours alone.

So please, don’t ask me to tell you all about it. I know you’re being polite, but I am only being equally polite when I refuse to tell you all about it. I will tell you only what I can. And on June 2nd, don’t ask me if I feel a year older. (That means you, friendly neighborhood Starbucks barista.) And from here on out, I promise to only refer to my time abroad when it is absolutely necessary, so as to avoid being pinned as one of those students who really just won’t shut up about the time when -- “hey, guys, when I was in France…”

The audacity.
I carry a city with me
like a secret. I know
it is not beautiful,
stuck to my soles.
Every step leads toward
or away from home.
Standing here, I can't tell you
what city this is –
with clouds borrowed
from a cartoon,
rooftops like clock towers
and steeples, trees like
soap bubbles enclosing
a capitalized Capitol.
Is this the city of my youth?
The harsh borders painted smooth,
too cheery, too ideal. But real?
I couldn't say.
Home is not where you left it,
but where you take it
and what you make of it.
GET ME SOME FLOWERS
Kendall Driscoll

Get me some flowers the day you realize I’m not like all the other girls in our class of 262 graduates. You’ll find yourself planning out the strategy of how to ask me out. I’ll be at my locker, and you’ll be there, too, with violets in hand because you know how they are my favorite since I am named after them.

Get me a bouquet of pink roses for prom. You know how I love their smell, their delicate petals, and their aesthetically pleasing appearance. Show me that you care enough to make this evening memorable. Do it just for me.

Get me a simple vase full of flowers for our wedding. Who needs extravagance when simplicity can provide all? I love you and you love me, and that’s all that will ever matter in the long run of forever.

Get me some carnations and leave them next to the hospital bed while I’m getting my chemo treatment. Attach a note to the stem of the single violet thrown into the sea of red that says “You’re beautiful.” Even though my hair has fallen out and my skin has blanched to a sickly whitened tinge. Bone marrow transplants, several hospitalizations, and a diagnosis of terminal cancer can’t stop our love.

Get me some flowers the day my body gives out and I am finally at peace. Place those violets, carnations, and lilies on my gravestone. Don’t say goodbye to me for we always knew that cancer would be my end. Just get me some flowers for the day we meet once again.
It is mid-summer where my husband and I live. Inside the house, my husband is sweating. Oh, the way that he acts has annoyed me for years. That is not to say that we did not love each other at one time. Of course we did, or we would not be married right now. Yet tensions had begun to rise a few months ago as we began to notice more and more of each other’s annoying habits.

Early that day I talked my husband into playing scrabble with me. We had been spending more time together recently, but nothing had helped the relationship. Today I had a plan and this was the main part. My husband must be playing scrabble for all of this to work.

You see, my husband has this nasty habit of chewing on the scrabble tiles. This has left all of them with bite marks on the edges and it makes it rather gross to play the game now. Never mind that, though, for this would be the last game of scrabble I would ever have to play with this pig. After twelve years, I would finally be rid of this lazy man who left all the work to me.

The game begins with us looking at our tiles. From the look on his face, I know his tiles are bad. It won’t matter, though, because he follows a very predictable pattern. He seems to love words that denote some form of action. This exact quality is what gave me the idea for this plan in the first place. As I predicted, he plays an action word as the first word. He places the word “begin” on the board.

After he plays his brilliant word, I look down at my tiles. Slowly I begin to rearrange them, looking for the perfect combination. I don’t want to leave him out in the cold when it comes to my brilliant plan. No, I think I shall give him some small hint. With that, I place down my tiles on the board to form the word “jinxed”. That is just what this game is going to be.

It seems to me like he is taking this game seriously for once. No matter, that will not change the plan. He looks at his letters for quite a while before making up his mind. What could be going through that mind right now? I don’t know, and to tell the truth, I no longer care. All I currently know is that he played the word warmer and is still chewing on one of the tiles. That irks me so much.
Outside the sun beats down even more. As I look down at my tiles, I see a word that will work perfectly. Sure, I can't be sure it happens, but there is a high possibility of it occurring. This is just perfect. Without another thought, I play the word “sweatier”. He may begin to sweat more, but he also plays a perfect word for me to make real. He plays the word “humid”. I try to keep his interest by saying I have lousy letters. It seems like it may have worked. To make it seem that way, I play the word “fan” and then get up to fill the kettle and turn on the air conditioning. The kettle would increase the humidity as the water became water vapor. Of course the air conditioning would serve as our fan. As I turn on the fan, I am zapped by static shock. Talk about luck, for I sit back down at the table to see he had played the word “zap”. So far everything had come true. I think he had received more than enough hints to know what is going on.

Loudly, I rearrange the letters that I possess just to continue to make him think I have bad letters. Everything was going perfectly. He just sits there, staring at me with those hate filled eyes as I feign innocence. Looking at the letters, I finally find the perfect word. It seems to pose a question to him in my mind as I place the tiles to the word “ready” on the board. With that I stand up to get myself a cup of tea from the whistling kettle.

As I am getting my cup of tea, I hear a small clack on the table. That little cheater has changed out a tile. I return to the table giving a look of suspicion, because I now think he might be up to something, too. On the board is the word “cheating” when I return. Maybe I too am being affected by this horrid plan of mine.

Under my breath I mutter an obscenity before asking him, “Did you cheat?” He denies it, but I know he has. I shall ignore that fact and instead play the word “ignore” just to make it all the more true. I won’t have to deal with him much longer.

He thinks he has some power over me. The next word he plays is “sleep.” It is almost like he expects me to fall asleep right here and now. I don’t think so. After all, I have more power over myself and my actions than he seems to have over his actions. Look at him, sitting there with anger pouring from his eyes. No, he does not hide his emotions well at all.

Now we have been playing for a while. None of us has come up with stellar words, but there is something brewing in his mind. When I see
the word “explodes” on the board, I wonder what is going to happen. After all, he played “zap” when I was zapped by the air conditioning unit. Then he played “cheating” when he himself had cheated. Was he making these things happen? No, for when the air conditioning unit exploded, he seemed just as shocked as I was. Something is going on here. What I need is a sign, so that is exactly the word I play.

My husband seems to have realized what is going on to. His next word is “fly”. Both of our words will tell us if something is going on. As he leans back in his chair and closes his eyes, though, I can barely keep myself from jumping over the table and killing him there. No, instead I must sit here and wait for an even better opportunity than for him waiting for something to happen that will never happen. This is when I spot the fly above my cup of tea.

Somehow I must warn him of what is going on. Yet I can see now that he will not believe anything that I tell him. He is too wrapped up in his own thoughts and plans. He is too busy thinking of how much he hates me. No, I will only play the word “caution” to try and warn him. Hopefully he will take the hint.

He is chewing on yet another tile while he plays the word “quake”. The ground slowly begins to shake beneath my feet. This is just amazing. How is everything that we play actually happening? What is making it happen? It is like something has been waiting a long time to help one of us.

As it is my turn, I look down at my tiles. The word is already spelled out for me in the pile. That word is “death”. Once the word is placed on the board, my husband gasps. That tile he has been chewing on goes into his throat and seems to get lodged there. I see him trying to cough, trying to get it out. His face begins to change colors and blood runs down his neck as he claws at it. All I do is sit there in shock, watching him die.

After many minutes, he falls to the floor, dead. Slowly my mind catches up. I get up from my chair. I kneel down next to him and check for his pulse. There is none. No, he is definitely dead now. Someone has destroyed my problem, but was it really this much of a problem? My mind races as I think of how we could have worked out all of our differences. Because of our hate and distrust for one another, I had not been able to warn him and now he is dead. It did not need to be this way. He did not need to die.
THE CLOWN

Carolyn Craig

A clown he was not meant to be
His face would incite babes to flee
Yet there he did stand
Three balls in his hand
Unfortunately aiming at me
Dust of ivory boulders,
nature's shattered monuments,
smothers barren ground,
a blanket for the bone-white wasteland.
Wilted cacti stretch broken limbs
to an abyssal sky above
begging the heavens for nectar
after a thousand dry summers.

A well pierces deep into the heart
of the desert's desolate, ghostly flesh.
At the bottom of the Sable scab
lies the girl with no eyes,
face plastered with an incessant smile.
Alone, blind, and mute,
life born in eternal soot,
Persephone swallowed by the Earth.
Goodbye,
Imaginary friend.

Never spend another,
Never have another,
What have I done?

Seasons pass and passed.
In me,
Out of me.

Death is only contained,
Congratulations,
They say.
But -
Massacre,
And,
My hand, my mind,
Responsible.

His voice breaking,
No more.
Beyond locked barricades.

Want to flee,
Cannot.
Guilt swamps
Wells
Of quivering fervor
Quenched at what expense?

Red sap and then
Waxen grasp,
Consumed.

You were there.
Inquire.
In pungent flashes,
Pulled.
As death spoons, slices

Riot, or desire
INASPETTATO

Teddie Chastain, film print