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The Agathist
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Advisor's Haiku:

It takes more than a
global pandemic to stop
the power of art

(Thank you so much, staff. "Proud" doesn't come close to describing how I feel.)
--Mr. Dickson

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stay quiet.

Isabella Thompson

... but Harvey Milk
was never
quiet.

he painted mummified streets
with life,
strung camera film
from storefront to storefront,
like decorative garland,
or the chains on handcuffs,
always making use of that
talkative brain
that mirrored his heart.

no new neighbors
brought Tupperware containers full of
freshly-baked empathy,
but, yet, his skin was not so easily broken,
no,
he simply invented the
kindness, comprehension, love,
all on his own.

and you tell me,
all these decades later,
to be
quiet?

my dear King of Castro,
might I be your Queen of
Misrule?
you can teach me
how to befriend zippered molars,
or even, perhaps,
how you never
stopped punching.

*Rest in Peace,
and be assured that
I will not stop until the bullet has kept its
promise.*



Ring of Dandelion Ashley Lin

Not Finished

Kaleb Love

Don't give up on what is not accomplished.
It may not go as planned but keep fighting.
Do not give in now, you are not finished.

Pronounce those "old" dreams as reestablished.
Bring them back to life and keep progressing.
Don't give up on what is not accomplished.

Unfinished goals can still be established.
Reaching is a step closer to winning.
Do not give in now, you are not finished.

Rebuild the dreams that have been demolished.
Make them the strongest, keep on strengthening.
Don't give up on what is not accomplished.

Believe in the dreams and goals once cherished.
Achieving is obtained by believing.
Do not give in now, you are not finished.

Recognize the dreams and goals you once desired.
Start rebuilding and reestablishing.
Don't give up on what is not accomplished.
Do not give in now, you are not finished.



Free Spirited Taylor Herron



Fragile Caroline Walton

Streetlights

Georgia Pitcock

2:30 a.m. is a strange time to get a call, in general. At 2:30 you should be asleep, or maybe binge watching something. But definitely not calling people.

My phone starts buzzing in the middle of the night. I raise my head from my pillow to look at the screen. My eyes squint to see the light on my alarm clock. The red numbers glowed 2:36 a.m. The light from my phone burns my eyes as I try to register who would call me so late on a Thursday night. Once I see that it's my best friend, I answer the phone. "What on God's Earth do you want?" I almost know what she's going to say next before she even says it. "Oh, I'm sorry. Did I wake you up?"

"Yes, what do you want? You woke me up so it better be good."

"You're gonna be mad at me." Her voice starts trailing off.

"Oh, great, because *this is exactly what I need right now*," I start thinking. "Why would I be mad at you?"

"Because it happened before." My mind starts to race, thinking of what could have happened to her.

"What happened?" There was a silence over the line, almost like she was trying to find the best way to tell me bad news.

"If you don't tell me in the next ten seconds, I'm going back to bed," I tell her.

"Well, you see, it's kind of a funny story. I was going to go get something to eat, and I kind of need your help." The sound of panic starts to creep into her voice.

"Why? What happened?" I sit up in bed, starting to become more aware of everything.

"I might have run out of gas and so now I'm stuck here, and I need you to bring me gas." She takes a deep breath, like she had just ripped off a band-aid and the hard part was over.

"You've got to be kidding me. I'm on my way." I roll my eyes and get out of bed. I start putting on clothes and getting my keys.

I start driving down the dark country roads. It's creepy at night, there are no other cars and I can only see the road directly in front of me, there were no streetlights. Everything else was completely black. "Why am I doing this," I say to no one in particular. "I should just make her get her own gas. Teach her a lesson or something. But no, I'm out of bed at 2:30 in the morning." I keep talking to myself. "What would happen if I didn't bring her gas? Would she call someone else or would she just stay there until the morning?" The road seems to get creepier as I keep driving. All I can see are the tree branches stretching over the road like fingers.

I make it to town and go to the gas station to get a gas can. If I thought that

the road was creepy, I had another thing coming. Gas stations at 2 in the morning are a place that I do not want to be. It's empty and your steps echo through the entire store. The cameras hum and the feeling of being watched is amplified. I walk between the aisles and grab a container. When I go to pay for it, the cashier looks up from his book at me. "Why do you need a gas can right now?"

"My friend ran out of gas. So, I'm bringing her some." For some reason he doesn't seem convinced with my answer.

"Really? Why is your friend out at this time? Don't you have school in the morning?"

"I don't know why she's out right now, but I'm not just going to leave her stranded. I can't do that." He still doesn't seem convinced about my motives. "And yes, we have school in the morning so I would like for this to not take forever."

"So, you're not gonna do anything illegal with the gas?" He starts to eye the cameras, as if he wanted to make sure I knew I was being filmed. Maybe he wanted me to know that if I did do something bad, I would be caught.

"What?" I laugh a little at the idea. "If I was gonna do something illegal I would definitely not be dressed like this and we wouldn't be having this conversation. Can I please just have the gas?" He starts to look at my Snoopy pajama pants and faded t-shirt. I guess that was enough to convince him.

I leave the gas station and headed towards her. As I get closer, I can see her car in one of the spots. I pull up next to her and she gets out of the car. "You are the greatest human being of all time. You know that right?"

"Yes, I do. You're gonna pay me back for the gas. You know that right?"

"I'll pay you back in the morning. Since you're already here, do you wanna get a slushie?" She looks at me already knowing I'm going to say yes.

"You know we have school in the morning, right? As in we both need to be up at 6 and it's currently 2:45."

"Yea, yea."

"I get into the passenger seat, moving wrappers, empty water bottles, a hairbrush and jackets out of the way and into the backseat. She starts shifting through her collection of water bottles, books she's already read, and clothes. She grabs 2 reusable cups out of the cup holders and hands them to me. "Alright hunt for loose change." We start moving things around to find 50 cents. I look in the middle console for any loose change she might have.

"Alright I got 28 cents. What'd you find?" She sits back into her seat holding a quarter and 3 pennies.

"3 dimes. We have enough." We hand our cups to the waitress that came to the car and ordered our slushies. Coke for me, strawberry for her. Same flavor since 4th grade when we first met. "Next time you run out of gas at 2:30, call somebody else because I am not making this a regular occurrence," I joke.

"I know, it won't happen again." She looks at me, realizing how many times this has happened.

"How is your car out of gas anyway? I thought you filled it up yesterday." I didn't think, I knew.

"Couldn't sleep. Too much yelling. *You come home at midnight, drunk. Wasting all of our money. What am I supposed to do about this now, huh?*" He started yelling back after that. Saying it wasn't his fault, you couldn't understand half of what he was saying though. He was too drunk to walk, let alone talk; lord knows how he got home this time. So, I just left. I don't know, I guess I thought it would help. I just couldn't listen to it anymore." She stares out the window to avoid looking at me. Her eyes fixed on the 'open' sign. "Hey, hey look at me." She drags her eyes away from the flashing neon sign to look at me. "Everything is gonna be ok. I'm here, everything will be ok. We can drive around as long as you want." She smiles a little and looks at me. "Ok."

The waitress brings us our slushies and we sit there in silence. I look at the road around us. The flickering lights of the neon sign flashing red, the stop lights switching colors, signaling nobody. The streetlights scattered across the roads glowing a dull orange. And suddenly, at 3 a.m., the street doesn't seem so scary anymore.

Stars of New York City

Brady Permenter

I was almost done wheeling myself through the crowd¹ when the city plunged into darkness.

Most locals avoid Times Square because there are “too many tourists,” and New Yorkers down right despise tourists, but to me they’re the best part. Because I’ve been hooked up to an oxygen tank for most of my life, sports aren’t really my thing.² So, the only physical activity I really get is hastily scribbling down brief stories. And those stories need characters.

Lucky for me, Times Square is the El Dorado of interesting characters.³

There are Chinese business men in sharp suits and Southern belles with drawn out vowels and Italian grandmothers from Mulberry Street and guys selling Coach bags out of suitcases. You’ve got street performers and frequent flyers and new arrivals and old vets that look dirtier than the Hudson.

Every single one of them has a story, and if you watch close enough you just might catch a glimpse of that story; a piece of dialogue, a bit of characterization, or a section of plot.

The sun had just set when the power went out. In an instant, the bright lights of the billboards turned into sleeping black mirrors. I was expecting bloodcurdling screams like the screech that one girl inevitably lets out whenever a teacher flips the lights off to passive-aggressively shout “For your own sake you better shut up because I’ve been dealing with you people for way too long and I’m this close to snapping.” But instead, the entire street was covered in a thick layer of silence; it was one of those deep meaningful silences, the ones where you have something to say, but you feel like the words are being crushed up and pushed against your diaphragm.

Since there was nowhere else to look without feeling extreme discomfort, I shifted my gaze upwards. I was hoping to commit the scene to memory; blinding beacons of light replaced with massive gloom-filled towers that stretched into the ink-black sky. Instead, I saw something I had never seen before.

Stars.

¹ Yes, it’s easier for everyone when I catch a ride with a friend, but I don’t like to bother people, and none of my friends were dying to go to the Square nearly as much as I was.

² Well, playing sports isn’t, but I can put together a fantasy team better than Joe’s can put together a pizza.

³ Central Park is pretty good too.

In New York, nobody ever mentions the stars,⁴ the only time you even hear about them is from tourists who have come from distant, less light-polluted places, like Thailand, Nigeria, and Mississippi⁵. But here they were, bravely shining; illuminating the concrete jungle with a confident, almost arrogant, glow. Even as I rolled my way back home, I stared into the sky’s soulful orange eyes.

I had just found my next protagonist.

⁴ Well, they talk about celebrities, but I mean celestial bodies.

⁵ You also hear about them in school, but that doesn’t count because nobody actually pays attention in class.



All City Millie Murphy

Portrait of the seaside in shades of pining

Camden Clem

If I sit silently by crystal seashores
Will my insides coat with emerald moss,
My mouth open up, and all become clean air
And conch shell voices?

And will you be there?

Lichen are not good company, but
I will hold your hand until it crumbles
To dust and mingles with the seashells
Below our feet.

Listen closely, listen quietly

My love, the tides are crying out
Songs of the moon they have
Captured in their grasp, all alone,
Silver and pure.

Wait for me

When I have been bogged down by
Sea spray and salt coats my bones

I will still reach out

Though it may take more time
Than the sunrise is willing to give,

I will come

Adorned in snails and
Tones of decay. Light the sky
In blue fire and it will burn away
To lattice.



Untitled Jeffery Adams

Dear Mississippi

Mitch Magee

I would like to start this off by saying thank you. I know you don't hear that very often, and I know you are desperate for words of positivity. This lack of appreciation may be a consequence of your wretched history, but those times are gone. It's time for us to view you for what you are now, not what plagued your past. Sure, you may have your problems, but that's what makes you so interesting. Nothing can reach its full potential without struggles along the way.

I know my opinion of you may be unpopular, but I really am on your side. I thank you for bringing me lush tress and fish filled lakes. I thank you for the beautiful sunsets clear and the blue skies. Nowhere else would I have been able to have the peaceful childhood that I was blessed with. If not for you, I would not have been introduced to blues music, which I have grown to love. Your culture has shaped me into who I am today and for that, I am eternally grateful. I wish that I could make everyone feel this way, but I know that is a daunting task. I will make it my life mission to make your beauty and peacefulness remembered and appreciated.

Sincerely,
Grateful Mississippian



Texture Caroline Walton

Reaching Down

Belle Clem

Outside the community center, behind the liquor store
and the barber shop,
a little willow tree is losing its mind;

It's astonished by the utter
Sufficiency of everything.
Trying
Reaching down a little deeper,

dropping crisp white petals to the earth in clouds,
so Nature's wastefulness seems quietly obscene.
Persisting in its soft-headed
Hallucination of happiness.

It's been doing that all week:
making beauty,
throwing it away,
and making more.



New Beginning Caroline Walton

Lunch with Aunt Margaret

Molly Reed

The sun rested on treetops. A cool breeze tussled tree branches and pushed around the flowers. Their green stems and thin petals waltzed in the wind, while I stood planted to the ground. The wind could not push me or lift me away with the green leaves. It pulled the hair off my shoulders and forced it into my face. Tucking it behind my ears would be a useless battle.

“Pick the prettiest ones. You know how she is,” Mama yelled from the window. I turned to the house, watching her blue apron disappear behind the white curtains. The window remained open, exhaling the smell of burned bread.

The grass felt soft beneath my feet. Mama will have a fit when I return without my shoes. She’ll stare at my toes, until she is convinced of their cleanliness. Then she’ll spend too long arranging the flowers in their vase. Aunt Margaret is sure to face the prettiest petals. I’ll befriend the rejected ones, while Mama drags on about a life she’ll never have. Aunt Margaret will be busy judging the flavor of her tea.

I scanned the colorful flowers, reaching for the tallest ones. I plucked a few from the ground. My fingers gripped their flimsy stems, ensuring the wind wouldn’t take them away.

When I turned to go back to the house, I noticed Mama’s garden. Her vegetables lined up and sorted into order. More vegetables were missing than usual. Mama didn’t trust me to pick from the garden, so I was assigned the flowers. There was no one else to do my job, so this was common. Mama had her garden and I had the flowers. They weren’t mine, however. I allowed the earth to claim their beauty, never interfering until Aunt Margaret came to visit. But Mama never left her garden. If the vegetables weren’t outside, they were inside, being her experiment in the kitchen.

“Hurry up now,” Mama called. “The table ain’t complete without them flowers.” I began walking towards the backdoor, spying Mama’s figure through the curtains. She turned and walked off in the direction of her room. From there she would soon emerge, wearing her same Sunday dress. The one she always wore, whether it be at church, or lunches with Aunt Margaret. I will dress up also. I’ll brush out my tangled hair and hide my dirty toes inside a pair of shoes. I will sit across from Aunt Margaret and make friends with the rejected flowers. The whole garden will bow down to me. Even Mama’s.



Elegance in Nature Caroline Walton

I am From

Dawn Munro

I am from the water.
from California rivers and Mississippi reservoirs.

I am from the flowers
in my Mother's garden
marigolds, bloomed bright yellow.

I am from the tree house,
in the great oak,
whose lonely steps are all that's left.

I am from chocolate chip cookies and sourdough bread.
from sweet vanilla and strong coffee.

I am from the valley and the south,
an uncommon mix.
California fast talking and Mississippi smooth.

I am from the earth
from scabbed knees
bleeding on the rocks
dirt in my mouth
eyes blurred
crying to my mother
like the first day I was born.

I am a leaf off the tree of my parents first kiss.
from my Mother's hair.
from my Father's eyes.

I am from the fire.
forged
like a knife
into who
I am.



Morning Break Britney Goss

Fifty One & Madison

Jadyn Anthony

Every teenager feels that getting their license is a rite of passage and must be done in a timely fashion, otherwise their life isn't perfect and they'll just die the day after next because another kid got everything they wanted all neatly wrapped in a bow.

This in fact, was not the case for my friend Trinity and me. We were both patiently waiting on the day that God would somehow magically bestow us with everything we needed to be lawful drivers, but sadly that wasn't the case. Somehow, we both were placed in the same Driver's Education class, and the day that I found this out, I'd believed I was one of God's chosen ones, and I just knew this would be the time of my life.

The classroom that we were in was in the school's field house. Walking in, I could feel and smell all the pain and agony of our too-many-times-defeated football team. Our teacher, Coach Metz, was a man of few words, so he had his own, personal oracle exclaim the tasks, do's, don't's, and the in betweens for the class.

"Alright everybody. This is Driver's Ed." Coach Hardy exclaimed with one of those deep southern accents. "First order of business, ro-ole!"

The ro-ole was taken and soon after, he broke the terrible news. We will not be driving until we have completed ALL of the safety videos and you've completed ALL FIFTY-FOUR safety questions.

"We'll start driving after spring break."

"Spring Break?! That's two whole months of this."

Good God, I only signed up to drive.

Not only did the class watch a thousand videos about driving safety, but we all completed our questions all before spring break.

"I don't have my permit." Trinity whispered to me almost ashamed.

"Trinity, you only have a few weeks before you're kicked out of this class. You'd better get it before I end up dying with a random and not you."

"Well I guess I'll get it eventually, but for now you can die with a random."

"Excellent."

Almost a month passed before Trinity got her permit and therefore my driving partners ended up being another friend of ours or any other random. Luckily, our teacher, Coach Metz devised a beautiful system for picking drivers: looking at the ro-ole and going in alphabetical order. Perfect. I'd managed to dodge driving at least three times because of the simple fact that I was nervous to drive around my classmates.

It was the first week of driving, and because Trinity hadn't gotten her permit yet, I was stuck driving with any classmate of Coach Metz's choosing.

"Jadyn, you want to drive?"

"I guess so" I said almost inaudibly, but somehow, he still heard me.

"Lauren! You want to drive?"

"I guess so"

My heart began racing. I knew Lauren existed from band, but I barely knew her. I knew that she already had her license and would drive better than me, and to put the icing on the cake, I just knew she hated me, but I didn't know why. The class left the room and it was only Lauren and I left in the big, empty, white classroom.

"Do you want to go first?" I asked trying to hide my fear.

"That's fine."

We got in the navy blue Chevy Malibu. It had a big rectangular sticker on the side door "Madison County Schools." The interior of the car was somewhat clean at first glance. You could tell they tried to give the students a great experience in a newer model car, but of course I wasn't surprised when I got in and smelled the musk of the car and saw open chip bags, dirt, and grass sprawled across the floor of the backseat. Coach Metz observed my disgust.

"Yeah, it's always the boys. I told them not to eat back there, but they don't listen" he said with an almost defeated voice mixed with some disdain.

"What can you do about it?" I said not hoping for a reply.

You could tell that Lauren could drive and had been for a while. We drove around rural Madison and eventually on the busier streets near the school. After driving for what felt like thirty minutes, we finally began heading towards the gas station across the street from our school creatively named, Germantown Market. We pulled into the parking lot and Coach Metz had Lauren park in a parking space in direct view of our school's football stadium.

"Alright, you did good."

"Thank you"

"If y'all want snacks you can go."

Coach Metz went inside while we changed seats.

"Hey, are you getting something?" I said over the roof of the car. Her answer would determine my next action.

"No"

Dang. I really wanted a chocolate muffin. "Next time" I thought.

I backed out of the parking lot and we took the same dead route as before, and closer to the end of our voyage, we reached Gluckstadt Road. This road was not too long but not too short, on one side you could see a house or a neighborhood, but on the other, you could see a gas station or a doctor's office. It was all about perspective.

The only way to get back to our school from this road was to turn left, in front of Burger King, that lead to another long street that would lead you straight to the school. "Alright" I thought "You got this. The light is green. Just, GO!" As I began speeding up, the light changed to yellow, and per the advice of the safety driving videos, the state driving manual, and Coach Metz I should have slowed to a stop, but in my mind, it was too late. I sped up and took a sharp left turn going 37 miles per hour. I quickly realized that my decision was the wrong decision. I tapped the breaks hard enough to get down to 29 mph. I was extremely embarrassed and I never talked about it again.

At least once a week Trinity and I would facetime to "work" together but it'd always turn into a comedy show within seconds because not only are our families really loud and crazy, but we are the funniest, greatest people we'll ever meet. This particular day was a Sunday and our lives changed forever.

"Jadyn, guess what."

"What?"

"I got my permit in one try, unlike you." I was silent for a second because I hadn't planned on being attacked so viciously that early in the conversation.

"That's good. It'll be my turn to drive on Monday, maybe he'll let us drive together." Would it matter if it was our hearse? I knew Trinity hadn't been driving as long as I had, but what are friends for if we can't risk our lives on the deathways together.

As I'm walking into the raccoon's nest, late of course, I see Trinity and she was excited and so was I. After going through the pre-class ritual, it was time for Coach Metz to pick drivers. He picks me and I automatically ask him to drive with Trinity, and luckily, he approves since it wasn't customary to have your own selection when picking drivers as far as I knew. As the class was filing out and making their way into the main prison building, Trinity and I are smiling ear to ear. Not only was it written in the stars, but our obituaries too, that the late greats, Trinity and Jadyn embarked on a trip around Madison county, with the one and only Death. We headed outside to find the same navy blue Chevy Malibu, parked outside with morning dew and rain that refracted only white clouds due to the day's impending rain.

"Alright who wants to drive first?" Coach Metz asked. I looked at Trinity who then looked back at me.

"I can't back out of parking spots. I'm going first. You can bring us back." Trinity blurted.

"Well that's that" I said flatly.

All three of us got in the car. Trinity in the driver's seat, of course, Coach Metz is the passenger seat, and I, sitting right behind Trinity. I knew that if I sat in the middle, we'd crash for sure. She'd get so distracted by laughing at me, that

we'd run into a light pole.

As we drove off I noticed too many things at once: The first being that Coach Metz only listened to the sports radio station so my only noise would be what college boy was good, his round in the draft, and what man was getting drafted out (I hate to say it but I started liking it later on) and the second was that Trinity has no speed control and was hitting the brakes every few rolls of the tire. This is going to be a long drive.

Luckily for all of us the drive was blissfully uneventful. Trinity eventually figured out how to keep the car trucking along at a smooth pace and the backroads through the edge of Canton, Mississippi were deserted. We turned onto Highway 51, and as the empty county roads quickly turned into slightly fuller city streets, my senses quickened for the driver and my eyes darted cautiously around, looking for any danger that might've been approaching us from behind. Trinity, on the other hand was only focusing on the multitude of cars in front of her and watching for speed limits, making sure to always go five over, of course.

As we started approaching business and turning lanes, my heart began racing. I was scared for Coach Metz and the car of course. We stopped at a light at the intersection of Highway 51 and Madison Avenue, and on my left, was a seemingly small brick building, the Post Office. There were few cars in the parking lot since it was only 9 am. Who gets up any earlier to go to the post office? There were other cars in front of ours that needed to turn and once it was Trinity's turn to turn, I died instantly. Why was she going 35 mph in a sharp left turn?! Immediately, my body melted out of my seat and I was on the floor of the car with my arms tangled in my completely functional seatbelt. I looked up and thought I saw heaven. Was it my time? No. I was only looking at the sky. Quickly, I'd come to the realization that I was in fact, alive but not well since I could still hear the southern twang of the sportsguy on the radio applauding LSU for a great baseball season. I raise myself up only to realize that Trinity is about to hit a light pole. Swerving to keep from hitting the light pole, she gets in the oncoming traffic lane for four seconds too long.

“Woah there. Watch it.” Coach Metz says calmly after grabbing the wheel to save our lives. My hero.

“Trinity! What were you doing? We literally almost ran into the post office.” I half yell

“I don’t know. I went a little too fast.”

“No, duh. When is it gonna be my turn so we can go back to 6th block in one piece?”

Coach Metz chuckles and we all arrive safely at a gas station in Ridgeland. Trinity parked the car beautifully and I was shocked as to how we went all the way in Ridgeland in what felt like 20 minutes. Maybe it was the adrenaline. Maybe it was Trinity’s abidance to the speed limits.



Baby Yoda Ashley Lin

Her Sonnet

Alana Forman

I simply adore your laughter sometimes,
Your smile illuminating the whole room,
Capturing your eyes sparks a fire inside,
And you felt powerful watching the flames.
You sway as swiftly, as if you don't care,
That you have everyone's full attention,
And you revel in each consistent stare,
As only you knew of your intention.
We were easily compelled by your looks,
Never noticing your disguised motives,
Collecting and reading people like books,
Only believing what you had shown us.
We will never know who you really are,
Only remembering the unhealed scar.



Opportunity Knocks Mikinzie Sanders



Heavy Hearted Taylor Herron

Dear Me in Five Years

Haley Dennis

Please tell me you're sitting just outside of Café Beignet drinking hot chocolate watching the people pass by. I love the calmness of that little café. Please be laughing at something Quinn is saying and not trying to ignore another unpleasant message from your mother. She'll never love you like she should. I hope you're living my dream, our dream. I hope you're hopeful and inspiring. I hope you make it out of everything I am going through right now. God, I just hope you're happy. I hope you're living in a tiny, but perfect, apartment with the man of your dreams and all of our animals. You will make it work because he is so worth it. I hope you're working too much, and I hope you fall in love with helping others like those who saved you once. Please don't forget those faces- they made you who you are. Please tell me you're pleased with your life. I hope what I am fighting for now will pay off in the end. I hope you have friends that would do anything for you. I hope you build your own family there. Please don't forget about the openness of home though. Maybe mawmaw will make you chicken'n'dumplin's when you come home to visit. You know she misses you so much. I hope you finish your hot chocolate and rush to work for your shift at the hospital. Please tell me we can actually make it. It doesn't seem like we will right now. I need you to be everything I said I would be- happy, giving, and a fighter. I hope you have plans for children. We always said we would try to adopt- don't forget why. Mostly, I hope with everything I have that you love your life.

Obligation

Ashlyn Chisolm

I convince myself I'm building endurance
So, I continue stacking bricks

Solidified by rejection and neglect
Tarnished iron painted over in red

I sit and serve my purpose
Like chinaware

I am nothing more than a pretty ring
On a dead man's finger

My purpose served as soon as he's gone
My legacy buried and rotting

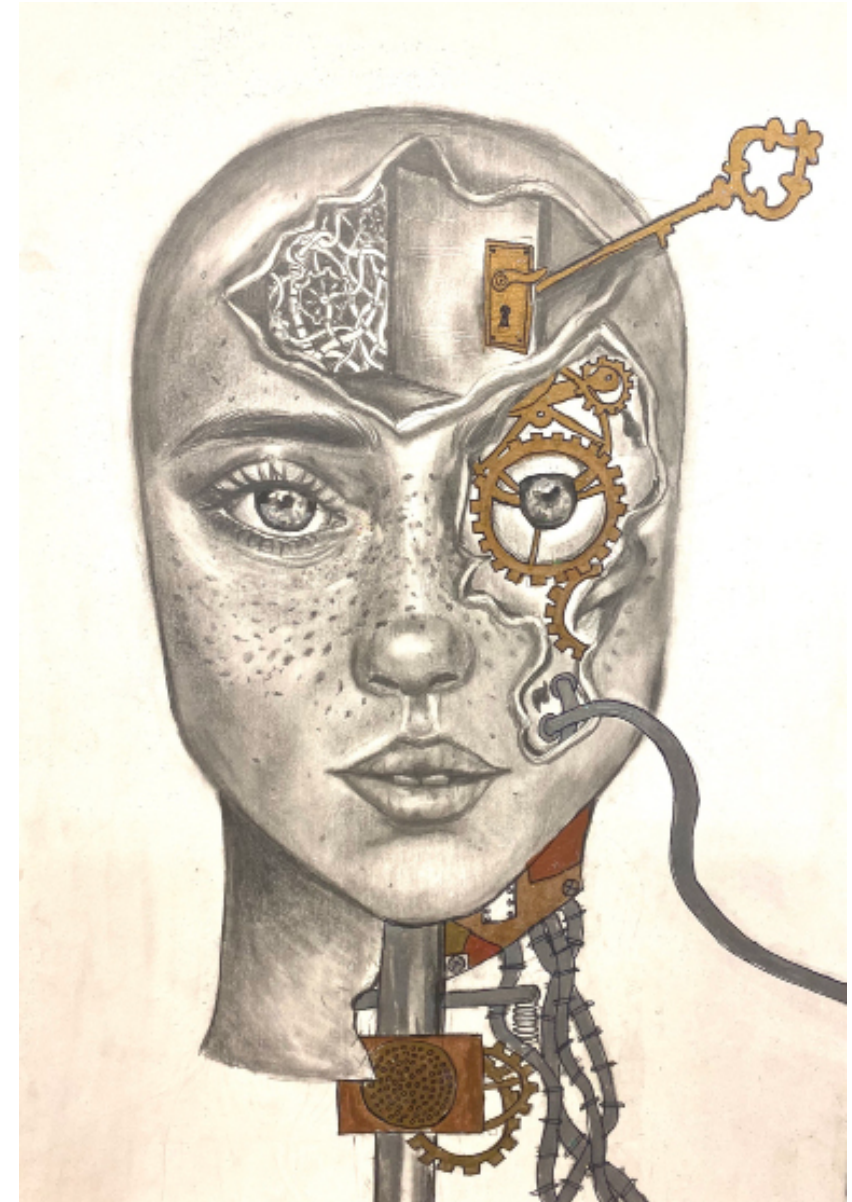
God forbid I am self-sustainable
Lost in a senseless, obligatory spiral

Responding to others
only out of the nature of my kindness

I hope for the best in the beginning
But faithfully they let me down

Striving, searching, lurking
They wait for me to show my Achilles heel

I oblige eventually, of course



Untitled Drew Damon

Heart

NaTya Gunn

My heart is not for sale
Unless you are able to dissect
the organ, spill open my veins,
reach inside my soul, and grip
my admiration from the bottom up.
Allow my blood to drip down the shaft
of your arm and form a puddle
in the crease of your elbow to
ensure the love still flows
through. A crimson pool
of my entirety lies in your hands. Be
mindful and particular to where it leaks,
it can slip through the cracks of concrete
and excite demons.
Once you are finished, place aluminum
foil and saran wrap around the wound
to seal it back and save for later. Though
dry when cold, when microwaved it
is fulfilling and moist to the taste.
It forever withholds melancholy
to perfect the damage



Morphing Taylor Herron



Flower Girl Taylor Herron

Crowns

Taquera Anderson

We keep our face beat
Just to hide the defeat
We keep your cups full
Just to keep your mouthful

And still no respect

Gave you a gift that couldn't fit in a box
But you trapped it with latches and locks
You kick us to the corner
Even when you get all the honor

And still no respect

Women would rise like trees
We could put the world at ease
We could put our foot down
Even make a man stand down

And still no respect

One day your chin will rise
To us you will honor
We will have the power somehow
One day the whole garden will bow



Gleaming Taylor Herron

I Learned

Rachel Parr

At age 1 I learned to walk. My life was easy, but that wouldn't last. I just didn't know that yet. I didn't know what all I would learn.

At age 2 I learned to write my name. My life was simple, but that began to change. I learned, to plug my ears as the terrible screams shot across the room like silver bullets ripping through my innocence.

At age 3 I learned my alphabet. My life was starting to get a bit chaotic, but nothing had really changed. I learned that when daddy starts to yell, shouting terrible things, I need to run, I need to hide, but this was just starting to become par for the course.

At age 4 I learned to read. My life was terrifying, but that had never really affected me before. I learned the art of painting a smile, a false face of happiness. I was starting to understand. This is not what little girls should have to feel.

At age 5 I learned to add and subtract. My life was not normal, but I was only starting to notice that. I learned to get absorbed in my schoolwork. Any distraction was a good one. Those 8 hours were like an ibuprofen to alleviate the headache. The worksheets laid in front of me minimizing the dull ache in my tiny heart.

At age 6 I learned to multiply and divide. My life had stopped feeling easy, every remnant of that feeling, gone. I learned that as inevitable as $1+1=2$, true love is rarely ever true. Fairy tales seemed to taunt me, why can't mommy and daddy just be like that. It wasn't long before I knew, Cinderella could never be you.

At age 7 I learned about mitochondria, the powerhouse of the cell. My world was slowly starting to make more sense. I learned that you can trust a mere trifling of people, the few people you can trust nuggets of gold in an otherwise dull world.

At age 8 I learned that x represents a numeric unknown. My life seemed to only be going downhill. I learned more about the city justice system than any little girl ever should. My room slowly filled with the little trinkets the officers give kids to keep them calm. I end up with more personal experience in the court system than most people twice my age.

At age 9 I learned about exponents. My life seemed to get more twisted every passing day. I learned that no place is safe. No one can escape the pain. My childhood cut short by the startling realization that I'll never be free from this baggage they keep strapping onto my back.

At age 10 I learned about irrational numbers. My life seemed to get a bit better, but it was still nowhere near normal. I learned that the people in charge of my life would never care about my opinions. I had no choice. I was just a small insignificant whisper in the midst of screams and shouts. Constantly being told to hush, the grownups were talking, when all I wanted was to go home.

At age 11 I learned about the layers of the Earth. My life started over in a sense, I moved to a new place with new people. I learned to adjust. The madness with dad remained, fluctuating with each passing day. Better and worse, better and worse, worse and worse and worse, better and better and better, worse and worse and worse and worse... this was the game we played.

At age 12 I learned the quadratic formula. My life was getting better, my own will a force for good in a dark world. I learned that some people don't get to life easy. Some people are destined to live in a complex web of heart ache. Some people have to fight for every ounce of happiness. I realized that I am some people. I realized that I had to fight for my own happiness and so I did.

At age 13 I learned to work a Punnett square. My life was definitely changing. The people I surrounded myself with were helping me to push aside the bad memories. They were helping me make a good Monday morning out of a bad Sunday night and put it all aside. I learned that you can't get better alone. My people became a glue through which I was put back together again and again. Like a lone-some bird reunited with the flock, I felt renewed by my support system.

I'm 14 and I've learned 5 ways to solve a quadratic equation. My life feels like it's better than it was way back then. I spend less time with him, school keeps me busy. I won't know for sure if it's better until later in life. I've learned that life will never be as simple as it once was and the rocks being thrown at you just get heavier and heavier, but I've also learned that you just have to get stronger and stronger to fight it. I've learned that having a harder life just means you have to work harder. Being at a disadvantage doesn't mean you're going to lose.

I have so much to learn. I don't pretend to know all the answers, but I've learned that the answers are rarely ever what you initially thought them to be.



Avis and Jager Amy Nguyen



The Beauty is in the Veins Caroline Walton

Mascara

Breanna McBrain

I drive home feeling the wind come in
Slowly with watered filled eyes I drive down the road
I'm feeling a knot in my chest
A feeling of sorrow and confusion
"Why" is the big question?

I walk in my house putting on a fake face
Smiling and laughing
I stand on my lonely stairs where he once stood
Waiting on his girl, his number one
At the bottom of the stairs where he stood
Waiting for me to come back down
When he stood there
With arms ready for holding

Now he's a memory
A special sight
So I will go back to driving down the road
Tears in my eyes
Black mascara smeared down my face
Going back to the big question in my mind...
Why?

Not Saying Good Bye

Ada Walters

When they covered the precious coffin with brown rocks, decomposed organisms, and weeds. I felt too ashamed to send her off when I had not properly said goodbye. I refused to throw dirt on her. I refused to let go of my grandmother, to accept a death I had not seen coming, to believe that an illness could not only interrupt, but steal a beloved life. When my parents finally revealed to me that my grandmother had been battling dementia, I was fourteen and I was mostly unhappy with myself. They had wanted to protect me from the complex concept of death. However, when the end arrived, I wasn't trying to comprehend what dying was; I was trying to understand how I had been able to abandon my sick grandmother in favor of playing with friends and watching TV. Hurt that my parents had deceived me and resentful of my own oblivion, I committed myself to preventing such blindness from re-surfacing. I became desperately devoted to my education because I saw knowledge as the key to freeing myself from the chains of ignorance. While learning about dementia in school I promised myself that I would memorize every fact and absorb every detail in textbooks and online medical journals. And as I began to consider my future, I realized that what I learned in school would allow me to silence that which had silenced my grandmother. However, I was focused not with learning itself, but with good grades and high test scores. I started to believe that academic perfection would be the only way to redeem myself in her eyes to make up for what I had not done as a granddaughter. However, a simple walk on a trail behind my house made me open my own eyes to the truth. Over the years, everything even honoring my grandmother had become second to school and grades. As I walked against the Earth the wispy white clouds hanging in the sky reminded me of my small though nonetheless significant part in a larger whole that is humankind and this Earth. Before I could resolve my guilt, I had to change my perspective of the world as well as my responsibilities to my fellow humans. When I see patients trapped in not only the hospital but also a moment in time by their diseases, I would try to talk to them three times a week. Wilma was a patient there and was surrounded by IV stands, empty walls, and busy nurses that quietly yet constantly remind her that I'm the girl that came to see her all the time. Her face is pale and tired, yet kind not unlike my grandmother's. I need only to smile and say hello to see her brighten up as life returns to her face. Upon our first meeting, she opened up about her two sons, her hometown, and her knitting group, but no mention of her disease.



Just Blooming Caroline Walton



Trio Ashley Lin



White Out Ashley Lin

Clocks

Sadie Gibson

Clocks, I think,
Are the cruelest abusers
Of human emotion;
Taunting us, with
Ticking, to represent quite an
Anxious concept.
Don't trust clocks.
That way, you can
Stay young, forever.



Norm and Mini Ashley Lin

Funny Stories I Would Never Repeat in Front of my Father

Logan Riddle



Diner in San Antonio Jenna Hood

After a rough divorce with my mother, my father spent many months out of the girl loop and was mostly trying to not be super sad and fix his finances and making sure he could afford child support later (or even his water bill). Two hundred and twelve dollars a month (almost double his water bill at the time). His job could pay for it all, he just couldn't eat anything but sandwiches for a while. Which he could do. This in turn helped him lose some pounds giving him a chance to bounce back (not saying he was fat, but this was a good thing). He isn't the most tech savvy person in the world, yet he isn't oblivious. I suggested that he try some dating apps. While I don't remember the apps he used, I do remember some stories of the fun and interesting girls that he and I encountered and his adventurous journey to his third wife.

I didn't go on every journey to meet these girls but for the few times that I did, I thoroughly enjoyed being their third (and sometimes fourth or fifth) wheel. Usually my Dad would bring me on these trips when he's met the girl first (probably to make sure they weren't crazy, which now seems useless due to my father asking me if she crazy the next date as if he couldn't measure himself the first time). So, on these second dates, we would talk and do things. And a similar thing that most of these women, that my dad thought was cool, would do is, ask questions about me and talk to me. I couldn't tell how that affected my Dad, I'm sure it wasn't negatively though. Yet, he did seem to get slightly annoyed when I rambled about my school life which was way less interesting than what we could have been talking about. I remember talking about the drama that I wasn't a part of, and saying names that probably shouldn't have been said. Not to mention my dad's overwhelming sarcasm as I spoke about my uneventful day. Online dating can be a risky place for anyone. My father could have met anyone at this time. And on these adventure with my dad we met some interesting folks. Most of them weren't too scary. Yet I would never repeat them, around my father.

We went to the woman's house, she was sweet, spoiled, but sweet. You could tell she's always had anything in the world she wanted and then she'd throw it away. She lived in a trailer about 200 yards from her parent's house. Me and my Dad ate there a couple of times. Huge place. When I went to meet her, this was the second time my Dad had seen her. She was odd, odd stance. Slouched, but wide-eyed. We got out of the car that was now reeking of old McDonalds fries and

soda. We walked up and knocked on the door, because there was no doorbell. She came out to greet us and her child stayed inside for the most part. We sat on her front steps and talked for hours (probably for too long). After a while, we decided to start heading back home. My dad and I stood and in the middle of my dad extending his legs, the woman's small boy, urinated on my dad's back from over the railing. While quite impressive, it was also quite disgusting, soaking his shirt. The mother turned around in a panic and started apologizing but didn't know what to do. With just the least amount of hope left, she decided to let him finish. My dad said that it was ok but you could tell he didn't like getting peed on. The two-hour ride back home was long and... smelly. Even after he changed shirts and burned the other. The other shirt smelled like work and sweat. While most stories I remember, he probably doesn't, but this one. He remembers it like the back of his hand.

If you're not from the South, then you may or may not understand what a switch is. A switch is a parenting device that the child goes and grabs a thin stick and then the parent uses the thin stick to whip the child. While mostly barbaric... never mind, it's very barbaric. This next story is my father and I's experience with a screaming child and awkward staring. While I'm not one hundred percent sure if it's the same woman or not, the story starts in a park in Tupelo. We met with this woman and her kid (my dad and I were early). We bought things to do but of course we used none of it. As a group of four, we walk around the park. It was a beautiful place, big too, yet I didn't get to enjoy it all that much. The woman's kid was either having a fit or asking my dad dumb questions. Surprisingly, my dad stayed cool (I think he got used to it due to being around me so long), for the most part. After about an hour of this kids annoying behavior, the mother snapped, my dad insisted we stayed but she was going to drive him home. To conserve gas and so my dad could spend time with the girl, we carpooled with the girl back to her house to drop the kid off. She was only about 7 minutes away but it was 30 minutes of agony due to the ear-piercing screams that seemed to come out of thin air. No rhyme or reason. After an eternity of kicking and screaming, we stopped by a bushy area (it was winter at the time). The woman stepped out of the car and yanked the kid out the car. Screams of terror were thrown into my face due to me being in the backseat with him. Once he was fully out, the door was closed. I looked at my dad and he looked me. Silence and then CRACK! WHIPSH! AGHHH! Silence again. The woman and the boy stepped back into the car. Silence all the way home and back to the park except for the occasional cough from an asthmatic like me (which somehow made the car even more dead). Instead of making the date continue, my dad makes a lame excuse to leave and we depart. We didn't see them again. Or at least I didn't.

I give no offence to my father in writing this. I love him dearly. While he has made some, odd, bad, and slightly destructive decisions. My opinion of him will never change. He taught me to throw a baseball, ride a bike, stand on a skateboard,

never change. He taught me to throw a baseball, ride a bike, stand on a skateboard, drive a car, decent money management, how to be a hard-working person, and how to get out of any bad situation. While he wasn't very good at the last one, his actions at least taught me how. This writing is in his honor. He's not dead, let me make that clear. He's very much alive. I talk to him all the time. Though these stories along with a bunch others, need to be told for the hilarity and for me to reflect.

Onion Grass Smells Nice

John Murry McCullouch

That onion grass
Smells real nice,
Like grandma's kitchen
A few days before thanksgiving.
Full of anticipation,
An exclamation of one's self,
Before being thrown in the pot.
It sure doesn't taste like thanksgiving though,
I tell you what.
But that smell lights
Fireworks up your sinuses,
shouting the coming of spring.
Even though if you're smelling onion grass
Spring, and really anything interesting,
Is far far away.
It just sprouts up
Overnight, like a mama waking her kid
To see him lift his finely edged head
Covered in cowlicks.
It doesn't do much other than that,
Bloom and smell and stick out.
But like that mama, any respecting gardener
Will march out to uproot that
Onion grass, to keep it from
Ruining his kept, cornered yard.
That man will march back in, yard saved
From the terror,
Only to find the lingering smell
Of onion grass
Serving its purpose.



Sleeping Wink Millie Murphy

The Art of Photography

Caroline Walton

The art of photography
What a special talent
It takes a certain eye
A certain thought process
And a certain way of seeing things

It takes patience
lots and lots of patience
It takes patience to wait for the perfect lighting
It takes patience to find that perfect angle
It takes patience to find the perfect shutter speed
Look away and the image could just disappear

You must pay attention to the slightest of details
Being observant is everything when it comes to the art of photography
Look away and you might lose sight of what you saw before

A flower, a butterfly, a bee
Birds, cats, geese, and ducks
Raindrops on leaves
The horizon and the clouds moving in
A cicada, a moth, a beetle, a spider
A dandelion
A friend, a family member, a stranger
A blank stare, a smile, a falling tear
All created by God

And sometimes
Sometimes the background just isn't quite right
And so, we hold onto what's passing out of sight
The collision between is it too soon? Too late?
Don't let that perfect moment dwindle

The sheer thread connecting to the perfect light
In which the background is precisely right
Such a small amount of time to capture that exact moment
That perfect photograph
That memory that will last a lifetime



Fahrenheit 451, The Sound of Silence Amy Nguyen

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