DREAMCATCHER
LITERARY MAGAZINE
at James I. O'Neill HS
THE DREAMCATCHER
LITERARY MAGAZINE

2019-2020

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JAMES I. O'NEILL HIGH SCHOOL 2020
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**Lifeguard motto**
Trapped in a shack  
Clear waves crashing beneath us  
Time to save the day  

- *Nick Vasta*

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**Pressure**
Pressure bombards your chest,  
Air thickens as you hold your breath,  
Blood rushes to every vein,  
Every thought insanely sane,  
Eyes twitch with laughter,  
Time runs slow then faster,  
Every word,  
Slightly slurried,  
my dancing heart,  
I keep preserved,  
For nights I dream,  
The serious tease,  
You made for me  

- *Nick Vasta*
In Deep Water

With cold water dripping down my body and adrenaline rushing through my veins, I noticed my unusual quick breathing. Contrary to his normal stoic stance at competition, this seemingly minor detail revealed an unfamiliar nervousness that now began to rise in me. As I climbed the stairs to the diving platform the frigid water beneath my feet sent chills through my spine. Instincts from years of competition told me to suppress the fear starting to knot in my stomach but something seemed different. I am prepared. Something in the air seemed off at this capstone diving: a meet that could quite possibly set the the path for the rest of my life. Was my experience telling me that this the day I had trained and hoped for? Step by step, positive thoughts conditioned by sports performance coaches kicked in, taking me to a familiar place. I lost myself in the comfort of the starting pistols for the swim lanes in the other part of the pool, the chatter of family members and friends of the competitors chirping in the bleachers, the announcements of upcoming swim events through the bull horn, and the sweet smell of excited tension in the air wrapping around me like a fog of humidity.

Loud and strong, almost as if I was speaking aloud, I have worked my butt off every day for years. In fact, I remember a time without diving in my life. Flashes of photos on the refrigerator in our cozy kitchen of me, at various ages in a bathing suit, diving or standing by a pool with medals and ribbons echoed. This is the competition I have been waiting for, I am ready. Life revolved around a cycle of training for competition, climaxing with the thrill of victory or hard lessons of defeat week after week, and year after year during the competition season.

Peaking at the last of the National diving meets of my high school career at the end of the season would be important and fun, but this invitational was the last one before the coaches drafted up their dream list of athletes and gifted coveted college scholarships to the best. These same college recruiters had been at one of my diving meets before, one where I performed horribly. When I got to the top of the stairs I could see on the horizon a few of them packing up their clipboards and notes: perhaps I was no longer a contender. When I was younger, I naively thought that judges were the ones who the high school students were performing for, just as the younger kids did. Years later, I realized that there were two score cards, and that the judges mattered only to get you scores high enough to get to the next invitational: the collegiate coaches had score cards of their own, calibrated to spot the athletes who could and would continue to grow, with the ability to bring in points to their teams.

The judge called my name and I walked, almost in slow motion, to the very edge of the platform. I
turned around so that my back faced the crowd. Coldly staring at the wall in front of me, I raised myself up onto my tip-toes, and elevated my arms straight above my head. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine my perfect dive, a triple twist while I did two and a half flips in the pike position, but every time I visualized it something went wrong. I had three dives, and the first one was the most important because it would show the judges and recruiters the type of headstrong athlete that I knew I was. Three dives, three opportunities, three chances to get a ticket to my dream college on a diving scholarship. One, two, three, go. Jumping backwards off the platform, I started to twist and contort my body while exponentially falling through the air towards the water. I framed my hands above my head, hands clasped tightly together, to create an opening in the water for my body to slide through. I knew I was in the perfect position. Enveloped by water, I had nearly perfectly executed the dive. My mind momentarily took me back to preparation for this day as my muscle memory swam my body to the deck.

3,000 miles. That's how many miles my feet had pounded the pavement training my body to be lean and strong. My mom kept a picture of every pair of running shoes I had gone through while training, 37 pairs to be exact. My favorite pair was pink and black, with 3 layers of cushion to help with the painful blisters I used to get on the bottoms of my feet from running. It was my favorite pair of shoes not only because of the support that it provided me with, but the memories that came along with it. I remembered the blazing summer day just a few years back, when I was running my first 10 miles. I could see the heat waves in the air, I could hear the loud cicadas buzzing, I could taste the brackish sweat that was dripping into my mouth, and I could smell the delicious smoked ribs coming from the nearby barbecue shop. My hands were ripped and bleeding from the weightlifting I did, my bones aching and cramping. Wanting to stop and relieve my body of the gnawing discomfort, I started to slow down, yet I never stopped. That drive and hunger was something I always knew would stay with me throughout my diving career. I learned how to push myself from my mother. She raised my sister and me on her own, while going through college and working three different jobs, but always making sure there was time to spend with us. Gray in her hair and more wrinkles than the other mothers I knew told me that raising two girls and working three jobs was not an easy task, but she managed to do it with a smile on her face. If my mom could do something as tough as that, I would be able to accomplish my dream. She is my biggest cheerleader and always comes to every one of my competitions.

I rose out of the water and searched the stands for my mom and sister. Smiling and waving at me, cheering and clapping, their love and pride poured out. Mom's eyes looked different, but I put it out of
my mind and focused on the competition. Coach grinned as he hugged me and patted my back, “That was it.” Talking about what my next dive would be while the buzzers beeped in the background, we easily agreed and he turned around to enter the score. As I waited for my next turn I could hear the recruiters speaking with each other.

“She really stepped up her game this year. Maybe we should reconsider if she can nail these next two dives.” “You really think she can do it? I think the nerves are gonna get to her.” Their cavalier remarks did not shake my confidence but were a challenge that fueled my already aggressive approach to winning. Walking to the hot tub to wait for my next turn, I could feel my muscles tense as my mind wandered. What if I mess up and hurt myself? What if I lose my chance of becoming a collegiate diver? What if I let my dreams slip out of my grasp? Too many What ifs, not enough why nots. I had to shove negative thoughts out of my brain because I could feel that it was my time to shine, at least I thought.

A girl, one I had seen at previous meets, sat across the hot tub. Blankly staring at the wall behind me, with a blank faced expression, she showed no emotion. Something seemed different. Who wouldn’t look nervous and excited at a meet that would determine the rest of their life? I told myself that maybe she was just scared. When the announcer called her name over the loudspeaker, she robotically stood up and climbed out of the hot tub. Waiting in the warming water, playing with the bubbles that were floating all around me, I thought about my dreams and goals.

Stanford had one of the best diving programs in the country but most importantly, the academic reputation that would help me to become a sports medicine doctor. I dreamed of the cool California weather, of being part of an incredible team, and of being able to get into medical school—really any medical school. Dr. Danny, my physical therapist, Dr. Holland, my pediatric sports medicine doctor, and Dr. Shir, my current sports performance coach (a psychologist) were part of the team that had kept me healthy for the past 6 years of competing. Both mentally and physically training to help me achieve my goals. I wanted the opportunity to help other athletes achieve their goals as they worked towards their dreams which would be the achievement of mine. But if not Stanford, it could be another school: I would work wherever I was in college to make sure I got to medical school. And I knew I would. There had not been a goal that I had not achieved yet. Another diver sat in the tub, cordially smiled at me out of social obligation, and focused on her mental preparation as we both turned around to watch another diver pass through the air towards the water. Her entry was sloppier, with a large splash resulting from her angled entry. She had not entered the water perpendicular to the surface and a low execution score
would be her prize. I closed my eyes to smell the chlorine, feel the water, absorbing the sounds of the meet as I began to visualize my next dive.

Ringing in my ears, the meet coordinator was announcing the scores but I could not see her: the announcement was distinctly different and distant. I got up out of the hot tub and everything flashed black and white. I mechanically walked past the other divers and coaches, confused and discombobulated. Nerves. I knew nerves could make people freak out in weird ways, but something like this had never happened to me before. I closed my eyes to imagine my next dive, telling myself that I had to nail these next two dives if I wanted my dream. As I walked up the stairs, I started to feel a horrible pain in my head. I focus, my head spinning and the pain was turning into agony. But it did not matter because I had to focus on the one opportunity I had dangling in front of me. I grabbed my head and started twisting and turning on top of the platform, the pain was indescribable. Stepping to the edge of the platform, the agony in my head turned into suffering. Everyone was watching me and I could feel that I had to do something. I jumped. I started twisting and turning through the air, trying to focus on placing my body perfectly in the water. Several starting pistols went off at once as I was falling through the air. I hit the water and a series of flashes of light, noise, screams, beeps, and...darkness.

The haze of my reality hit me hard and fast as I opened my eyes. My mom looked at me lovingly, smiling as always, it's going to be ok. "You hit your head on the platform during practice.” Coach was behind her, soaking wet. I could tell that he had likely fished my limp body out of the water. "Mom,” the words choking in my throat, “can I compete next weekend?” Coach laughed, Mom sighed, and I felt a bald patch on my head with stitches. This had happened before, I knew what to do and how to recover. I had 3 weeks until the competition. I am going to nail this competition. Stanford, here I come. As the doctor walked into the room, I could tell something was wrong. He had the look of fear and grief slapped on his face. I knew what he was going to say even before he said it. My dreams had been stripped away from me. My only goals washed away all because of one mistake. My entire life gone in a second. Everything I had ever worked for just disappeared. Is this a nightmare or real life?

- Elinor Lemler
The Woman in the Park

Every Sunday evening he visits the park. The band played today, and smiling people wandering around moving like long grass in the wind brought a certain joy to him. Despite the wonders that surrounded him, the notes ran in and pulled back much like water might on a beach shore, the children giggling and running about, the yellow leaves that glowed gold in the light of the setting sun, he was there for one reason.

A woman.

She came to all of the concerts to observe every simple joy that surrounded her. Always alone. Unaware of her own beauty. The way her eyes caught the sun’s rays and lashed back with an icy blue. She sat, her gentle hands settling on the fur around her shoulders as if it would come to life and sit in her lap. Her chestnut hair fell in curly tendrils around her face, and her fair skin shone in the light like the moon reflects the sun to give people light through the dark night.

He wondered how such beauty could go unnoticed...

- Adriana Espinoza

Missing you

It is hard to not find you in other people
It is hard to forget that smile,
Those eyes
That voice
It is hard to keep you out of my mind
But I can’t change that
I wanted you to be mine
I wanted us
But you love her
And there is nothing I can do but stand here from a distance and be happy for you
And while you love her
I will ask myself late at night why not love me
Why...not...me

- Brizna Fregoso
**Road trips**

Out on the road
Wind in my hair
Sun glistening on our skin
The smell of fresh flowers
all around us
Mellow music playing in the background
Adventures await
We love these escapes

*Brizna Fregoso*
End of the School Year

Let’s make a wheel
Gotta make it spin
Don’t like the New Deal
Last night I got the win

I wrote a good essay
Pounded out the grind
While my room was mesay
I hope for a ninety-nine

Prom is coming soon
I’m gon pull the electric slide
We will wipe the floor
And clean up better than fluoride

School has been rough
I’ve stayed up mad late
Life has been tough
But this is the best day to date

Can’t stop putting in the work
I have to do my best
Put forth all my ef-furt
Let God do the rest

Soon to play sports
Cars will be drop-toppin
Everyday I can wear shorts
Summer will be poppin

- Asher Spain
Artwork
by Makayla Cooper
Man of Grey

The roofs of the Home Depot and the McDonald's
sketch harsh lines on a sky the color of wet paper.
The full, green grass looks plastic and placed,
like a golf course on the cover of a magazine
you find in the dentist's office.
The trees are sparse and skinny,
splattered with a tired, weathered red,
and in a shade to match are puncturing signs that say
"Do Not Enter" and "Wrong Way."

Neighborhoods of mobile homes seem tossed carelessly onto the land,
washed out in pastel colors.

On the lawn of a weathered, ghostly house
bends a man who looks like he was drawn from its walls.
His shirt, crisp but baggy, is a whitish-grey which looks beaten by many years of laundry loads, and it
blends from his neck into his hair.

Cloudy pants with a whisper of blue hang lifelessly from tired, aching legs and hips.
His clean, white socks are pulled all the way up, like those of a child.

- Solana McKee

Lost

I can't find my way home. I'm lost in the vast abyss of my thoughts and I can't find my way home. I don't
know how long it's been. 30 second? 30 minutes? 30 hours? 30 days? I'm lost. I can't find my way home.

- Adriana Espinoza

Artwork by Alexa Walsh
**Late night**

Sitting, waiting
Breathing, feeling
So many thoughts racing
So many questions
What to do
What to listen to
Boredom is all I have
As I lay awake on my bed
Listening to the rain tap on my window
Feeling the fan on my face
Sitting, waiting
Breathing, feeling

* Brizna Fregoso
Photographs by Guy Cervone
About My Sister

heavy brows, wild hair,
doesn’t care.
braces over a tooth which has been
chipped three times,
and a scar under her lip
from a runaway bike and a dirt road.
eyes which are more gold than
brown,
shadowed by delicate, just-repaired
glasses.
she brims and boils with emotions
and with worlds everybody else
hasn’t seen yet,
and I hope she never grows up.

- Solana McKee
**Big Boy Boe**
The chair creaks
All the kids shriek
It's not a monster
Nor a ghost
It's something much worse
Coca-Cola quenches his thirst
A kid is drowning—OH NO
Save me Boe!
He sits
Eating his Creme-O's
He's a mentor
He's a friend
But above all
He's there till the end

- **Nick Vasta**

![Photograph by Eritin Leary](image-url)
Toes in the Sand

Big, I think.
Unbounded, unlike anywhere I’d ever been
Having grown up on roads and pastures and schoolgrounds
Stitched together with tress.
A million times more than many mes
Stacked one on top of the other
Before you’d reach the bottom.
Thrusting and sweeping,
reaching and retreating,
pushing and pulling,
So fiercely it might shake the stars from the sky.
Sound wrenched from the core of the earth,
A rumble poured forth from the rift.
Seeping into the skin and sinking the toes into the sand, eyes closed.
Cold spray wraps the body like a blanket,
grasping the hands and hair,
lifting me up to the moon,
guiding me homeward.

- Solana McKee
The Warehouse of Wichita Falls

There he lay, face down on the floor of the warehouse, with a gunshot through the center of his forehead. The sirens of the fast approaching police cars began to grow more deafening as the gap between them and the crime scene narrowed. Inside a large brick of a building with grimy yellow windows and creaky metal doors, the body of a man lay sprawled out in a pool of his own blood. The killer, whoever it may be, had long since escaped before a homeless man, looking for a place to spend the rainy night, found the body.

Within hours, the cops had been called and the crime scene was being processed. Detective Hackley, the head detective of the Wichita Falls Police Department, was tasked by the chief of police to inform the family. He was a taller man with a stout stature. Under his crooked nose, he proudly wore an atrocious mustache that curled at the ends. Grimly, he headed to his squad car and left to complete this miserable task. He had done this so many times before but for some reason this time was different for him. It almost seemed like a personal attachment that Hackley had, but he had never before met this family.

Meanwhile, the Barrows were enjoying a late night of Netflix and ice cream on the sofa. Although her husband had not yet returned home, Mrs. Barrows was not worried. He often had to work late shifts and it was a rarity that he would be home by this time. Obadiah sat adjacent to his mother, shoveling his cookies and cream ice cream into his face before his mother could steal another bite. They were clueless to what had happened just moments before, and everything seemed almost perfect. Their cat, Artemis, was laying in Obadiah's lap, purring so loud that it almost drowned out the television. It was already dark outside and the room was lit only by the TV and the headlights of the occasional passing car.

Suddenly, their peace was interrupted by the glaring lights and siren of a squad car that had just pulled into their driveway. Mrs. Barrows, concerned and confused, walked hesitantly toward the front door. Before Detective Hackley could even knock, the door creaked open and he was forced to look Mrs. Barrows in the eyes and tell her what had happened. Obadiah had gotten up off the sofa and walked towards his mother and this cop whom he recognized from a job fair just the other week at his high school. Detective Hackley looked almost remorseful when he began to speak.

“Heather Barrows?”

“That’s me.” She replied, “Why are you here?”

“This is going to be hard to hear. Mrs. Barrows, I’m afraid... I’m afraid that your husband has been murdered.”

She did not know what to say. Tears started to roll down her face as she backed up and dropped to the ground, face in hands. Obadiah stood there, frozen like a statue. He was shocked. He tried to cry. He tried to move or even talk, but his body wasn’t cooperating. Instead, he stood there with his mouth gaping
open. His eyes were filled with fear and sorrow.

“Well,” the Detective began, “We at the Wichita Falls Police Department are putting all our effort into solving the mystery of his murder. Rest assured, we will bring his killer to justice.”

“I... I...” Using the wall for support, Mrs. Barrows tried to say something, anything. “Thank you. If we can help you...”

“Please, you have been through enough today. Make sure to stay in town in case I need to ask you any questions. I am sorry again. Good night ma’am” The Detective said, walking toward his car.

As the Detective pulled out of the driveway, Obadiah finally found it in him to move. He silently walked towards the door and shut it. He joined his mother by the wall and rest his head on her shoulder. They stood there for the next ten minutes, crying into each other’s shoulders.

It had been a few days since news of the death of Obadiah’s dad spread to close friends of the Barrows family. Damien and Abigail, Obadiah’s best friends and neighbors, began to worry because they hadn’t seen him in class for the last three days. He had been through a hard time but he had to return to class eventually. Although they didn’t know all of the details of the murder, they knew that it was not pretty. Damien had the idea that they should go to his house and make sure he was doing alright. He hated that Obadiah was hurting and wanted to do whatever he could to help.

They approached the Barrows’ front door and Abigail rang the doorbell. They were hoping to see Obadiah but Mrs. Barrows was the one to answer the door.

“Would it be alright for us to see Obadiah?” Damien asked in his typical polite Southern way.

“Of course! Come on in you two. As you have obviously heard, it has been a very hard week for us. I hope you haven’t been too worried. We are all just trying our best to cope with what happened.” Mrs. Barrows said, trying to keep collected in front of these children.

“Thank you, Mrs. Barrows. Yeah, we want to make sure Obi’s alright. Where is he?” Abigail added.

“Um, I believe he is out back. He needed to get himself some fresh air.” answered Mrs. Barrows.

“Thank you ma’am. I appreciate you letting us into your home in this trying time.” Damien responded. He always seemed to act as sophisticated as possible when talking to adults.

The duo marched through the house to the French doors that opened up to the back yard. They stepped onto the deck, finely furnished with a grill in one corner and a circle of push seats around a fire pit on the other side. The Barrows’ backyard was huge. A wide creek ran through the yard at the end, serving as a natural border for the space. Obadiah was laying on the shore of the creek with his feet in the water. He was staring up at the sky. Damien and Abigail paced through the grass and sat down on either side of him.

“Hey.” Obadiah muttered, closing his eyes. Damien and Abigail both flung off their shoes, plunged their feet into the water and laid down next to him. Damien placed his arm around Obadiah’s
shoulder in a comforting embrace.

“How are you doing? You okay bud?” Abigail asked, running her fingers through Obadiah’s hair.

It seemed as if half an hour had gone by before anyone even tried to move. Damien and Abigail had no clue what to say and Obadiah was trying to work up the courage to talk about how he felt.

“I... I don’t know.” Obadiah sighed, “I’m just angry because why the f- did this guy have to kill my dad? It’s a whole bunch of bulls-! I just want to find who did this and make them pay.”

“I can’t even begin to understand what your going through Obadiah,” very typical of Damien, calling him Obadiah when every other living soul referred to him as Obi, “but just know that Abigail and I are always going to be here for you.”

“Yeah Obi, we aren’t going anywhere, so please talk to us.” Abigail said sweetly.

“Thanks guys, I just,” Obadiah paused for a second, “I don’t want this murderer to be caught by the police. I know this is weird, but I want to find ‘em myself and bring them down.”

“Obi, I know you’re hurting but that would be dangerous. There’s a reason this stuff’s left to the police.” Abigail replied, afraid of what Obadiah might do.

“Please, at least help me track them down. We can call the cops once we find them, but I need you guys right now.” Obadiah propped himself up on his palms and looked Damien straight in the eyes. “Will you please help me?” He sounded desperate as he shifted his glance towards Abigail. “Please guys.”

Damien, wide eyed, looked at Abigail with concern on his face. She sighed and nodded at him. Damien began, “We will do it, but Obadiah, you need to promise me that you won’t do anything too rash.”

“I promise,” Obadiah said, sitting all the way up and pulling his friends into a hug, “I won’t let anything happen to you guys.”

The kids all stood, attempted to dry their feet in the grass, replaced their shoes, and began to head into the house. Once inside, they found that Mrs. Barrows had made them cookies while they were outside and left them on the dining room table with a note. She had just run to the store and should be back before dinner.

“Do you guys want to just stay here and plan out what we’re gonna do?” Obadiah inquired.

“Sure.” Damien replied. His parents both worked really late so they wouldn’t mind if he stayed at Obadiah’s for a while. He loved spending as much time as possible with Obadiah.

“That shouldn’t be a problem for me either.” Abigail chimed in. She texted her mother and confirmed that she could stay as long as Obadiah needed her to.

The three of them, along with Artemis the cat, made their way into the garage, equipped with a work bench and stools for them to plan. The gang all sat down, Artemis joining them in the center of the table, and started to talk strategy.
“Isn’t there a thing where the criminal always returns to the crime scene or whatever?” Abigail suggested, “We could go to the warehouse and stake it out. Just an idea.”

“I’ve heard that, but I’m not sure how true it is.” Obadiah replied. “I guess it wouldn’t hurt to try.”

“Ok, so we have the location of our stakeout, now what’s our plan of action for when we get there?” Damien asked, very matter-of-factly.

“Easy.” Abigail stated, scrolling through photos of the warehouse on her phone, “There’s another warehouse right next to that one, so we go to the second or third floor with our binoculars and just watch. We should have a pretty good view of whatever’s going on in the other one.”

“Okay, but shouldn’t we get dressed in black and stuff?” Obadiah questioned, “That’s how they always do it in the movies.”

“That would probably be a good idea. Do we want to bring some snacks with us? You know, some food for the road?” Damien inquired.

“I don’t see why not. We could stop at Rite Aid on the way.” Abigail answered.

“Cool! Sounds like we’ve got a plan then.” Obadiah concluded.

With that, the gang cleaned up the papers strewn around the table, gave Artemis a little love, and then left with their mission at the front of their minds. After a quick pit-stop at Rite Aid for some snacks and a twelve-pack of Coca-Cola, they found themselves at the back door of the warehouse neighboring the old crime scene. Railroad tracks ran adjacent to the warehouses with the occasional train passing by. The kids went through a back door and walked up a flight of stairs. After navigating through the maze of hallways that was this warehouse, they found a floor-to-ceiling window with a direct view of the warehouse where Obadiah’s dad had been murdered. It was the perfect place for the three of them to set up for the night.

The sun had already set, so these friends sat in complete darkness as they waited for something, anything, to happen. After almost an hour of silence, Damien thought he saw some strange movement out of the corner of his eye. Relaying this to the group, he began to keep a closer watch on the main floor of the warehouse. After a few moments had passed, Damien tried to assure the others that it must have been a false alarm, but at that moment, a figure behind them turned on a flashlight. Obadiah and his friends turned around to see Detective Hackley standing over them with an outraged expression on his face.

“You kids are going to get yourselves killed!” Hackley screamed, “I cannot believe how immature you are being, showing up here. What did you think would happen?”

“We just, we just want to catch the killer sir.” Obadiah responded, looking like a deer in headlights.

“Kid,” the detective seemed to be calming down, “that’s what the police are for. I wish you kids would trust us to do our jobs.”

“It’s not that we don’t trust you.” Damien stated, “We just want to help out. If we can assist the cops in finding the killer, we would know that we were able to help Obadiah.”
“Look, I trust you guys,” Hackley began, “but since I found you guys here, I have to take you in. Y’all are going to have to spend the night in the holding cell down at the station. We can’t let anybody get hurt because of this case and I don’t know if y’all can keep your noses out of it.”

Abigail began to speak, “But…”

“No buts,” the detective interrupted, “The fact is that a man got killed right over there just the other night. I cannot let you three put yourselves in danger just so you can ‘feel helpful.’ Come on.”

Back at the station, Detective Hackley put the kids into one of the holding cells in the back and locked them up for the night. The cell was as expected. Three of the walls consisted of brick that was painted white and the last wall was just the stereotypical prison bars that opened it up to the rest of the precinct. The white walls had long since faded to grey and the metal toilet in the corner with the metal benches on the wall were the finishing touches to this prison cell.

“Y’all better not have to use that.” Abigail said, pointing to the rusty toilet.

“Don’t worry, I wasn’t planning on it.” Obadiah grunted, obviously upset.

“Obadiah, I can tell that you’re not happy about this, but maybe the detective is right. I mean, we are in jail right now. We should stay out of this.” Damien sighed.

“Yeah man, I want to be able to help you, but I really don’t think I can watch you get yourself hurt over this.” Abigail reasoned, “The cops know what they’re doing, so leave it alone and let them do their job.”

“Why do you guys want me to give this up? This is my dad’s murderer we’re talking about, not some random low-life from the news!” Obadiah vented.

“It’s not that Obadiah, we just…” Damien began to speak before being interrupted by Obadiah.

“No. You guys are not allowed to tell me what the right thing to do is! You don’t know what it feels like okay? Why do you guys even care what happens to me? What have I ever done to make myself worth caring about?” Obadiah was now yelling at the top of his lungs. “I don’t get it!”

“It’s because I love you Obadiah! Okay? Is that a good enough reason for you? I’m sorry if you don’t like what we have to say, but I have been in love with you for so long and I do not want to see anything bad happen to you!” Damien snapped. Obadiah looked shocked. He had never seen Damien so upset in his life.

“I, well, I don’t know what to say.” Obadiah looked puzzled. He did not know how to process what Damien had just told him.

“Yeah, okay. Can we just get some sleep?” Damien asked, looking defeated.

“Yeah, let’s just get some rest. We can talk about this in the morning.” Abigail chimed in.

Each of the kids chose a spot on the bench and curled up to go to bed. The metal benches were far from reasonable mattresses, but they served the job well. It had been a long night, and as soon as Obadiah laid down, he was out cold. Abigail had also passed out soon after laying down to rest, but Damien couldn’t sleep. He stayed up all night pacing around the cell, thinking about what he had just
admitted. He didn’t even realize that he had feelings for Obadiah until he was screaming it at him in a prison cell.

The next morning at the crack of dawn, Detective Hackley came to let the kids out. Obadiah and Abigail were passed out on separate ends of the bench with Damien leaning against the wall, looking down at his feet. He hadn’t slept all night, being kept awake by the events of the day prior. Hackley walked toward the kids after unlocking the door and tapped Obadiah and Abigail on the shoulders to wake them up.

“Okay y’all, I’m letting you out now, but you’re going to have to be escorted by the department back home.” Detective Hackley stated. “Now come on, we’re going.”

The kids got up without a word and followed the detective into the parking lot. They got into Obadiah’s car and got ready to head home, followed by Detective Hackley in a squad car. Once inside Obadiah’s home, they watched the detective pull out of the driveway and headed back to the backyard where their whole journey had begun the day prior. Spirits broken, the kids headed to the creek and laid down on the shore. After a few minutes, Obadiah broke the silence.

“What am I supposed to do?” Obadiah exclaimed, aggravated by the events of the day.

“You are not going to like our answer to that question Obadiah.” Damien responded. “I still do not want to see you get hurt.”

“Yeah bud, I don’t think it’s safe for us to be running after this killer. I also don’t think I can go to jail again, what is that going to look like on transcripts? Don’t forget, we’ve got to apply for colleges next year and that stuff is what a college will turn you away for.”

“Well I’m not giving up on this okay? I need to find his killer!”

At that moment, Obadiah’s phone began to ring. The caller ID was blocked, and after all that had gone down over the last twenty-four hours, all three of them feared to pick it up. Hesitantly, Obadiah reached for the phone and answered the call, putting it on speakerphone. For fifteen seconds, there was nothing but static noise, but then a deep voice began to speak, cutting out every few seconds.

“Obadiah... You’ve been sticking your nose... where it doesn’t... belong. I killed... your... father, and... I’m leaving... town. If... the cops aren’t... able to find... me, you’ll... never... have the satisfaction... of watching me... brought down.” The deep voice said between crackles of static. A train whistle sounded in the background of the call right before the killer hung up.

“Woah.” Abigail said, “That sort of changes things.”

“Look, now I can’t stop guys. Could you please help me because I’ll do it either way. Y’all can decide on weather I go in alone or not.” Obadiah explained.

“Ugh...” Damien sighed, “If you won’t give up, I’m not going to let you go in alone. Where do we know that has trains passing by?”

“Oh my god!” Obadiah screamed, “He’s at the warehouse!”

“Why would he go back there after all of this?” Abigail asked.

“I don’t know, but we have to go. I can’t pass this by, it’s my last chance to get this guy.” Obadiah stated.
The kids all piled right back into Obadiah's car and they raced to the warehouse. Upon arrival, they saw another car parked around back. The lights were on inside the warehouse and the situation suddenly became real. There was a murderer right inside the metal doors that separated him from these kids.

"Before we go in, we should call the cops. The least we could do is protect ourselves and explain what is going on." Damien stated.

"I'll call." Obadiah said in response.

After alerting the cops to the situation, the teens walked toward the metal doors. In a few seconds, they were going to reveal the killer to themselves. After a few moments of hesitation, Obadiah flung open the door and the all piled inside. To their surprise, they saw a man recognizable to all of them sitting in the middle of the room. The killer: Detective Hackley.

“What? Why would you do this? Why would you kill him?” Obadiah was screaming, tears streaming down his face. Damien and Abigail were too shocked to say or do anything.

“I have never been a fan of the typical 'bad guy backstory' from the movies. I don't need to explain myself.” Detective Hackley sighed. The kids began to approach as he reached for his pistol. Within seconds, he had shot them each, watching them crumble to the ground. Obadiah, laying right next to Damien, reached his hand out and interlocked his fingers with the other boy.

Obadiah turned his head toward Damien as both boys were bleeding out. “Damien, I... I love you too.” They closed their eyes as their lives, joined together by the boys' confessions, left their bodies. The sirens of the fast approaching police cars began to grow more deafening as the gap between them and the crime scene narrowed. Abigail, barely surviving the gunshot to her gut, had to watch as her closest friends died and as their killer got away.

- Justus Crow
Smoke
If you weren’t listening, you wouldn’t know something was wrong.
She speaks at around her usual, certain volume,
but it leans and groans with a bass and a sting I have never heard before.
Each phrase slices, paper-thin,
but her face beats at the heart,
not because it is full but because it is empty.
She says she felt mocked, and in return she mocks,
shoving away her hurt so it can hurt someone else.

- Solana McKee

School
Beaten within inches of its life,
Creativity just can't survive,

I’ve seen this too many times,
So much potential left to starve,
Dreams become heavily scarred,

Creative minds,
Put in factory lines,
Regurgitating information,

To keep their grades alive,
Forced to do the same thing everyday,
Boredom and hatred swells in their brain,

One day I hope school will change,
So that students will think outside the box,
And not in a cage.

- Nick Vasta
Photographs by Isaac Walker
A Letter to the Boy I Love

Dear boy,
When I see you each and every day I can’t help but to smile.
I have grown up too fast and sometimes I am ashamed,
But your contagious laugh makes me feel safe.
I know you could never love me back,
And I have come to accept this about us
But this friendship brings out my inner child
So please don’t let it end.
Even if I can’t have you, I’m glad we’ve had this time.
I’m thankful for the friend I have made.
I just want to continue to see you each and every day.
Love,
boy

- Justus Crow
Artwork by Marie Gregory
Once Upon a Time

I miss the days when time was exciting
When friends came to play, when crayons were inviting.
Lemon yellow, cornflower blue, each shade an adventure,
Wild fantasies freely inciting.

I miss the days when school was a whirl
When we flew to the swings, wings joyfully unfurled
Hot days, ice cream parties, day trips to the zoo
Children only, little boys and little girls.

Now each moment ticks on,
Simply falling through space
The breeze passing over our setting.

But the light and the love,
Memories piled in place,
Stay long as the sunlight is letting.

- Solana McKee
Artwork by Marie Gregory
Some Days
Somedays I sit back
And enjoy the sunlight.
The bright sunny skies are
ALWAYS my favorite sight.
We look at the blue but never realize
Just how blessed we are to see with our eyes
To look out into space, is a treat
I say this because I bet you never pondered
Just what type aliens are out there for you to meet.

Somedays I sit back
And enjoy the green trees
The animals are beautiful
Especially the bees
We look at the green but never realize
All the intricacy that escapes our eyes
To gaze into the wilderness is a treat
I say this because I bet you never pondered
Just what type of creatures are out there for you to meet.

Somedays I sit back
And enjoy the crystal water
The river bank is beautiful
Especially when it's hotter
We look at the clear but never realize
Just what makes it clear to our eyes
To gaze into water is a treat
I say this because I bet you never pondered
What type of mermaids are out there for you to meet

Sit back, take a break from it all
If you don't chill, you will surely fall
Just stare out into the beauty, and hold your gaze
Somedays...
Somedays...

- Asher Spain