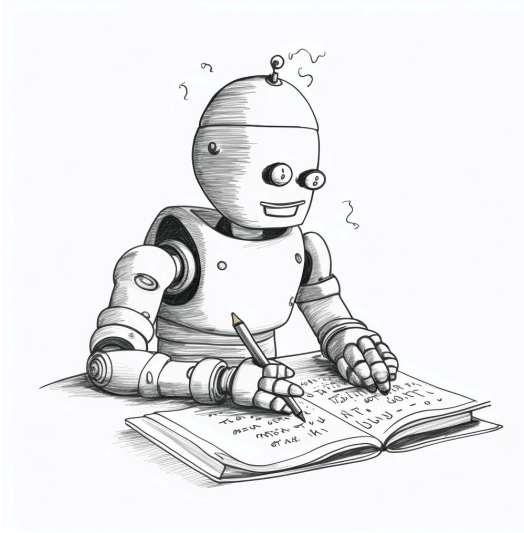


# *Class in Session*



*Poems by Jesse McDaniel*

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## *Life and Death*

*Live by the Sword  
and die by the Sword.  
Die as a servant  
in the name of a lord.  
Live as a villain  
and die as a hero.  
Live by words spoken  
and die once awoken.  
Live under a hot sun  
before becoming frozen.  
Live revering love  
or end up broken.  
Live a life desired  
or die far from tired.  
Live chasing a dream  
because life is brief.  
Die turning a new leaf.  
Don't forget to breathe.  
Live a life with purpose.  
Don't get off the ride.  
Die with nothing left  
except those by your side.  
Live with zero regrets.*

*Die with nothing to hide.  
Live letting everything go  
before the last episode.  
Live by facing fears  
or walk the same old road.  
Die knowing you lived life.  
Live with the brightest light  
that illuminates dark nights.  
Die happy. Go out laughing.  
Live knowing life is a gift.  
Die knowing all will be missed.*

## *Erasers*

*Many things get erased:  
memories, words, history,  
or sacred texts, to name a few.  
Some stories are written  
in pencil: others in permanent  
marker. Pages in books get ripped.  
Statues get torn down or chipped.  
What will stand the test of time?  
What secrets are locked away?  
Things that hide in the night  
never see the light of day.  
Can the past get rewritten or erased  
entirely? It can't be. Did the past  
ever exist if we can't remember it?  
Certain words lose their meaning  
as time goes on. Some still sing,  
but we hear altered versions  
of old songs. Do we always  
have to believe everything  
we are told? We have to trust  
our eyes, but it can be hard  
to see what went missing.  
When we can't remember  
events, people, or experiences,*

Father Time builds fences  
that separate perception  
and retention. We need to  
listen before what we hear  
gets lost in translation. Our  
train of thought may be lost,  
but we can always trace  
our steps after we leave  
the station. I am not sure  
who is holding the pencil  
that erases more than it writes.  
Don't let them control  
your thoughts or change  
what is set in stone. Every now  
and again, we need to go  
outside and look around, to see  
if the sky is still blue, if the sun  
is yellow and the grass is green.

## *Dancing in the Graveyard*

*Now and again,  
I visit the graveyard.  
The weather is cold  
and the ground is hard.  
I walk past tombstones  
and read many epitaphs.  
Those buried in caskets  
are more than just bones.  
This is where they call  
home. The commemorating  
words carefully carved  
onto each slab tell a story  
that came to an end. Some  
stories are shorter than  
others. I follow the same  
path that leads me to you.  
I reach out; I kneel  
and place black roses  
on the ground right next  
to your plaque. I usually cry,  
but this time I laughed.  
I know death isn't funny,  
but when I felt a slight  
breeze kiss my rosy cheeks,*

the soft wind whispered  
a joke in my ear. I knew  
it was you telling me to  
cheer up and remember  
the good times we had.

You were telling me  
not to be sad. I stop kneeling  
and begin healing. I look up  
and see your spirit  
reach for my hand.

As I go to grab it,  
I stare into your ghostly  
eyes. I try to talk, but I can't  
move my lips. You tell me  
to listen. I stood mesmerized,  
as your phantasmic skin  
glistens. Stuck in a trance,  
I hear your angelic voice ask,  
"May I have this dance?"



## *Rungs on a Ladder*

*How tall is the ladder I'm on?  
How much higher can I go  
before my energy is gone?  
I look up, but I can't see the top.  
I look down, and I know I won't  
stop. Below me is a ground I can't  
see. I am far above the trees.  
I have almost reached the clouds.  
I see many people climbing  
their own ladders. Everyone is  
moving at their own pace.  
Some are below me; others are  
reaching new heights. As I pass  
another rung, I feel myself  
getting older. My knees grow  
weaker, but I keep climbing.  
With every step, I realize  
I still have some time left.  
Before I reach out and grab  
another rung, I stop and look  
around. I breathe in the crisp  
air, and I feel the heat radiating  
from the sun. For once in my life,  
I am beginning to feel free.*

*The day I was born, I started  
at the very bottom of the ladder.  
I have climbed every day since.  
How much higher will I go?  
The best part of asking that  
question is that I will never know.*

## *Inside those Walls*

*What goes on inside those walls?*

*What happens beyond that gate?*

*What are they hiding, and who  
are they trying to keep out?*

*I have a few ideas, but I also  
have my doubts. I can't even*

*count the number of times*

*I looked through the bars*

*of that gate. I've never  
seen anyone leave or enter.*

*A long driveway leads*

*to the mansion, overgrown*

*with weeds. Rusted luxury cars*

*are parked around a bronze statue*

*of a mustached man with a sword*

*in his hand. The locals around here*

*steer clear. I have heard several*

*rumors about this place.*

*Someone once told me that*

*a group of boys thought the mansion*

*was abandoned. They hopped the walls,*

*twisted the doorknob, and walked*

*in, but that's not where the story*

*ends. They entered as boys*

and left as men. When they returned to their homes, their parents asked them what happened, but they couldn't speak. It looked like they saw a ghost. Maybe they did? They were never the same.

Every Halloween, the same story gets told. Is it a cautionary tale that will never get old? I wish I could say that I'm not sold.

I truly don't know what to believe, but once I see beyond those walls and the mansion in all its glory, I know I want to be a part of its story.

There's something about this place that pulls me in.

One night, I drove up the hill and just stared. For the first time, I saw the front door open. A beam of light lit up the dark night.

I waited a few minutes, and no one walked out. This time, I built up enough courage and hopped the gate. I tiptoed to the porch. I walked toward the light

and through the door. In a flash,  
I hear the door shut behind me.  
The light grew brighter. Before  
I knew it, I woke up in my bed,  
but every day after that night,  
I kept hearing this voice  
in my head telling me to walk  
back through that door and into  
the light. So, that's what I did  
every night for the rest of my life.

## *Inside my Mind*

*If only you could see  
inside my mind. The chaos  
and destruction needs  
no introduction. There is  
a battlefield in-between  
my ears. I see things  
that others don't. The voice  
in my head doesn't always  
say nice things – things that  
cut my wings. It's hard  
to tell what's real. All I know  
is that I still feel. I feel pain,  
joy, regret, pride, anxiety,  
and uncertainty. It's difficult  
to ascertain why the flame  
in my soul burns so bright.  
There's a beast inside me  
that is hard to tame. Do  
you know my story  
or my name? Is life  
some sort of sick game?  
If so, I refuse to keep score.  
Memories come and go  
just like the river flows.*

*My reality may be distorted,  
but I am not the only one.  
I turn the page, as my story  
has just begun. No need to  
run from myself. I must face  
the truth: my truth. I wish  
life could go back to  
the way things were. Now,  
I'm not so sure. Which would  
be worse: to live as a monster,  
or die as a good man?  
The answer lies inside  
my mind. I will find out;  
it's a matter of time.*

## *Tomorrow's Tide*

*The feeling of the fresh  
ocean breeze, glimpses  
of distant keys, swaying trees,  
and sandy feet brings me  
a sense of peace. My worries  
fade away, every dark day  
becomes one with bright  
rays of light. Sand castles.  
No hurry. No hassle.  
Time flows with the tides.  
Waves crash against  
colossal cliffs. I can check  
visiting heaven off my bucket  
list. Flying kites. Bonfires  
at night. The crisp mist  
drizzles as the water  
and the shore kiss. The tide  
may be low tonight, but it  
will rise tomorrow. Mother  
Nature takes control. We  
are at her mercy. Life gets  
rough when the sea misbehaves,  
yet we learned to ride the waves.*



## *Out of the Blue*

*Bad times come  
out of the blue  
Don't get me wrong;  
good times do too.  
Mood swings come  
and go. The colors  
inside rarely show.  
It's hard to reveal true  
colors when they hide  
under the covers. Who  
cares if they don't like  
your colors? Those  
who judge think life  
is black and white:  
wrong or right.  
There's a lot in-between.  
Every color is different.  
That's what makes life  
beautiful. Inside and out,  
the person you are shines  
bright and brings  
needed color into a dark  
night. I know people will  
come from out of the blue*

and will eventually show  
their true colors. That is  
what the world needs –  
more shades, tones, and hues.  
When you appreciate colors,  
it's a great life you choose.

## *Birthday in the Sky*

*Happiest birthday to you.  
Although you can't celebrate  
with us on earth, I know  
the party doesn't stop in the sky.  
Sometimes, I ask myself why:  
why aren't you here to blow  
out the candles or open  
our gifts? I will never get that  
question answered. It doesn't  
matter because I still see  
your face in the sky,  
on sunflowers, in the mirror,  
around the corner, in these  
words I write. I know  
you're smiling down as grey  
clouds part. If it rains today,  
I know it's you watering  
my soul. These candles may  
never get blown out,  
but the burning flame dancing  
in my heart tells me that when  
your story ended, mine got to  
start. Happiest birthday to you.  
You are dearly missed and will*

*always be, but I know you  
are always with me  
until my soul is set free.*

## *Insanity*

*The universe has a plan,  
and I have no say in the way  
things play out. One person's  
reality is another person's  
fantasy. You can't see what  
you don't believe. How different  
would we be if our dreams  
came true? Would alternative  
timelines change my mind,  
hiding behind manic eyes?  
I am not crazy. I am no different  
from you. I can't explain why  
I do what I do. I don't think  
I would even if I knew.  
If I survived, would others  
be alive? The darkness inside  
me sheds light on the guilt  
that our minds built. I laugh  
because I know the world  
is ending. Well, at least mine is,  
but I'm okay with that. Life will  
go on as it should. I wouldn't  
change it if I could. This is how  
it must go. I don't have a choice.*

*I have seen what's on the other  
side of a fractured mind, blurring  
the line between fact and fiction.  
I know that everything will be okay  
even if I don't see another day.*

## *Cloudy Eyes*

*Striving for perfection. Seeking direction.  
I want to feel better. I want to escape.  
I can't wait for sunny weather – open skies.  
It's hard to see clearly with cloudy eyes.  
I'll do whatever it takes to feel right.  
Questioning reality. Avoiding the light.  
Testing my might. Losing the fight.  
Searching for solace. Sitting in  
silence. Too far gone: withdrawn.  
Existing. Diminishing. Yearning  
to be accepted, loved, and valued.  
I can't get out of my own mind.  
Some day, I will fit into that red  
dress. Some day, I will find love.  
Some day, I will break the addiction.  
That dream remains distant as I try  
to chase the happiness I'm missing.*

*\*INSPIRED BY THE FILM: REQUIEM FOR A DREAM*

## *Home Movies*

*It's hard to believe that  
unimaginable and terrible  
things happen to innocent  
families. You would never  
think that it could happen  
to yours; darkness resides  
inside disturbed minds.*

*Ungodly souls put others  
through hell. I'm nervous  
to tell the secrets I discovered  
watching those home  
movies. Why me? Why did I  
have to stumble across  
a box containing film  
of people getting killed?  
I became obsessed with  
making sense of a mystery  
radiating death. The lives  
of undeserving families  
were robbed of the chance  
to live a full life.*

*The manifestation of evil  
hides during the day  
and comes out at night.*



*Those people that I write about  
don't just exist within the books  
I'm trying to sell: books  
collecting dust on the shelf.  
They roam the earth after  
they cross the line dividing  
life and death. Why must  
my family pay the price  
for my self-serving success?  
Do I finish what I started,  
or do I save the family I love?  
When push comes to shove,  
I will make the right choice.  
There's no need to be the star  
of another home movie.  
Forget this house, it's time to  
pack your bags; we're moving.*

*\*INSPIRED BY THE FILM: SINISTER*

## *Life in a Small Town*

*Life in a small town  
is simple. No fancy cars,  
skyscrapers, or malls.*

*Time moves slower.*

*Familiar faces. Nothing  
beats climbing water  
towers, playing with  
crickets, watching  
camper vans.*

*Taking care of family  
is what's important.*

*It's clear to see  
my love for them  
is deep. They need me  
just as much as I need  
them. Some days  
are harder than others,  
but I wouldn't change  
a thing. Why would I?*

***\*INSPIRED BY THE FILM: WHAT'S EATING  
GILBERT GRAPE***

## *Fatherhood*

*That can't be my "son"  
I mean... Look at it!  
What have I done?  
You walked away  
and left me with  
a monster. My eyes  
are playing tricks  
on me. Is this a dream?  
Is this real? I don't know  
how to feel. This wasn't  
a part of my plan.  
Nothing could have  
prepared me for this.  
Now, filled with dread  
and fear, I see an unfit  
father in the mirror.*

*\*INSPIRED BY THE FILM: ERASERHEAD*

## *Frozen in Time*

*The earth stood still: frozen in time.*

*Everything stopped on a dime.*

*For just a second, busy streets,  
stomping feet, rivers, clouds,  
and people didn't move.*

*Impervious to laws of the land,  
sand inside the hourglass stopped  
falling. Like statues, people stood  
in place. Father Time hit the pause  
button and set the remote down.*

*With curious eyes, he stared  
at the screen, and to no surprise,  
he noticed how tired everyone  
looked. He saw the stress, pain,  
and hurt painted on worn-out  
faces. However, he would be  
remiss if he didn't notice  
expressions of joy, happiness,  
and bliss. For just a second,  
the world stopped turning.*

*Silence filled the air, and nothing  
else mattered. Mother Earth  
was flattered. He picked up  
the remote and pressed play.*

Like ambitious ants and busy  
bees, everyone rushed to beat  
the clock. With motion came  
commotion. The moment of silence  
lasted all but a second, yet it showed  
that pausing or going slow  
isn't the end of the world.  
He sat back and turned  
the television off. He understood  
why time can't be stopped.

## *Tracks in the Mud*

*When I look back, I see  
a long winding road  
littered with cracks,  
empty backpacks,  
loose gravel, skid marks,  
broken hearts, stop signs,  
speed bumps, timeless  
art, hitchhikers, bikers,  
dirty diapers, beer bottles,  
diplomas, blood-stained  
pavement, blooming buds,  
tire tracks in the mud,  
worn-out shoes, ripped  
clothes, potholes, wandering  
souls, mile markers, road kill,  
love letters, knitted sweaters,  
flat tires, dumpster fires,  
police sirens, and a setting sun.  
The road that led me here  
filled me with fear, but I  
didn't stop moving. Pain  
and all, I always got back  
up after the fall. Scratched,  
bloodied and bruised, I knew*

*I had everything to lose. I look back and sigh. I may have slowed down, but I always took another step. I still have some gas in the tank left. I've reached a stopping point, but this is not my final destination. There is more to see and air to breathe.*

*"Poetry is not an expression of the party line.  
It's that time of night, lying in bed, thinking  
what you really think, making the private world  
public, that's what the poet does."  
- Allen Ginsberg*

