

Impact

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Sarah Renee Beach

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Though she painted death—her own metaphorically and that of others literally—Frida was not able to paint her accident. Years later, she said that she had wanted to, but couldn't because to her, the accident was too "complicated" and "important'" to reduce to a single comprehensible image. There is only an undated drawing... Its brusque, crude draftsmanship suggests the subject provoked so much distress that Frida could not control her line.

-Hayden Herrera, Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo

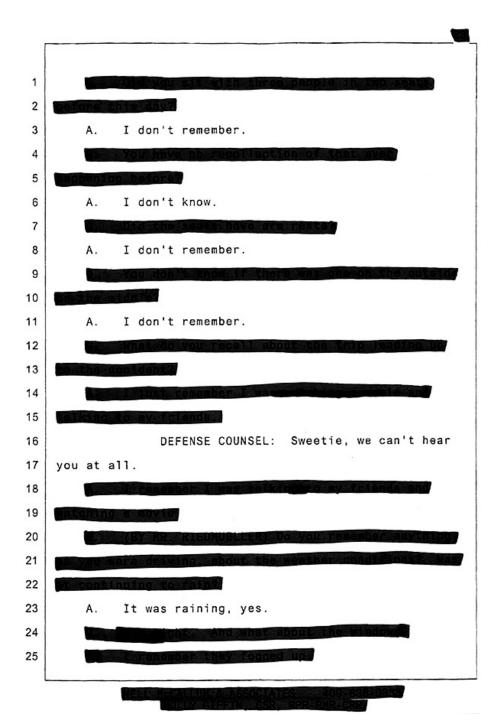
The Language of Symmetry

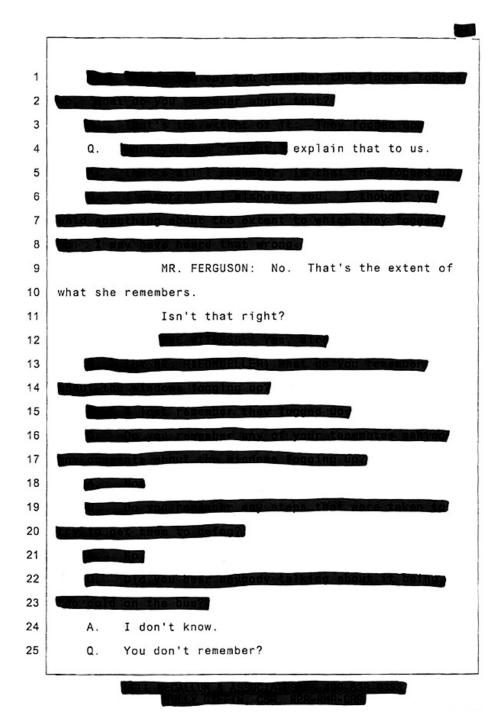
My structure displeases because of its lack of harmony, its unfitness.

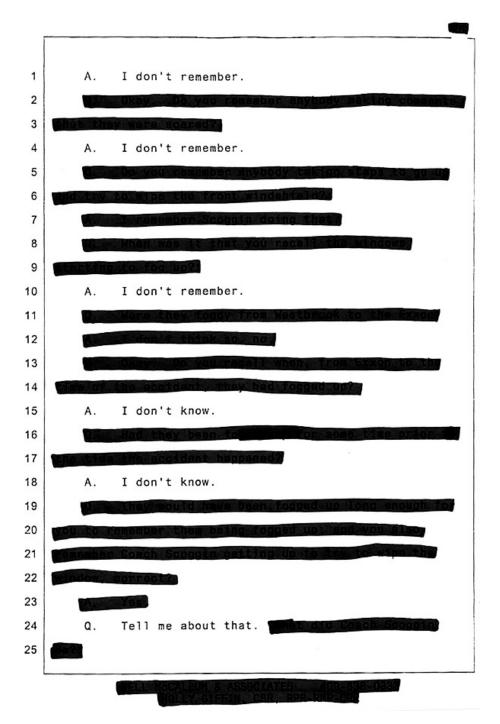
—Frida Kahlo

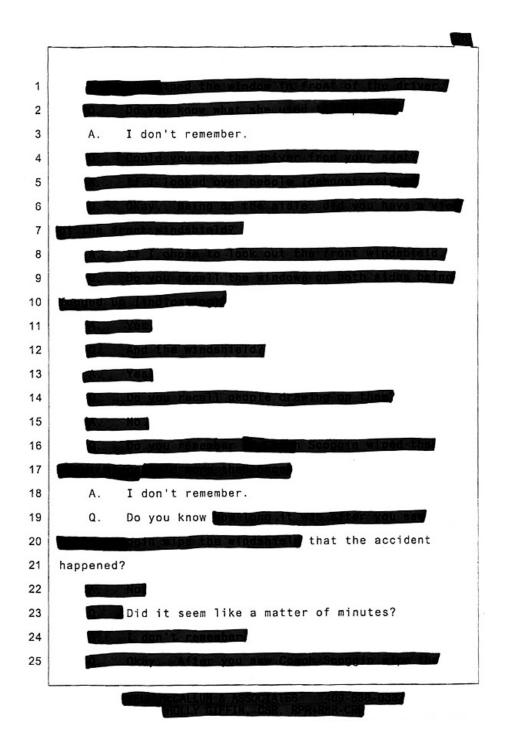
Halves halved exquisitely harmonious form mirror mirroring balance scaled precision when rotated another portion of perfect across the axis see me fold over flatly and fill myself with self so even sides touch and edges smooth themselves.

Place me on the table and pour liquid into me; see how still I fill. Exemplary geometry. Isotropic existence. Sleep and dream of monarch wings. Outline in chalk atop the two-lane road. Antenna curved away from antenna curve. Find me there, splayed.









Impact

as in two objects colliding

as in for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction as in a blackout

as in asphalt and flesh

as in a muddy ditch of ants

as in rain and a road

as in bodies rolled

as in strangers with umbrellas

as in waking up in the ICU

as in my name on the news

as in no visitors allowed

as in five am finger pricks

as in multiple wound vacs

as in bedside bags of urine, blood, debris

as in surgeries, stitches, sponge baths, seizures, IVs to the neck

as in "I thought I saw your brain"

as in "we heard you lost your ear"

as in "I remember your screams in the ER"

as in "thank god your face was spared"

as in "I couldn't tell you until I knew you'd pull through"

as in "she's gone"

as in watching a funeral on DVD

as in morphine drip

as in Demerol

as in PT

as in PTSD

as in therapy

as in EMDR

as in "don't forget to warn the stylist about the scar on your scalp"

as in a mid-conversation glance at a shoulder

as in "what happened to your arms"

as in an event tattooed on my body

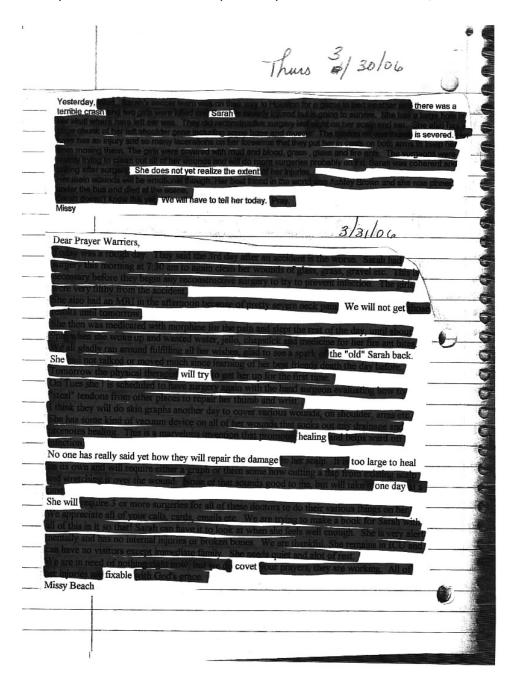
as in branded by pity

as in rumors about me, what I can still do

Frida Kahlo Couldn't Paint It

There's a violence in the vacancy, in what the canvases could not show: a scream heard over sirens, a bloody body glistening and somehow gold. She changed her birthday, dropped the "e," mythed herself into a semblance of self-control. A broken column, but her eyes do not wince, her face stoic atop the double scroll. A dereliction originating from a disturbance so unnerving a paintbrush can't ever know. Memory mystifies even the words strung together, explanations morphed and hollow. I remember our debriefing, the comprehension of events escaping me. I could not remember a true, crystalline thing, shaking with grief at the unknowing, at the images both haunting and eluding me. A day forever changing everything and yet what is there is wrong, made up, my mind's necromancy. I thought I saw Ashley sleeping soundly, her head resting unsmashed against the back of the seat.

My Mother Emails Her Prayer Group, Glues Them Into Her Journal



accident, n.

/ˈæksadnt/

1. an unforeseen event or one without an apparent cause

"At least a dozen were injured in the accident..."

2. a misfortune or mishap, especially one causing injury or death

"Alicia Bonura, 18, and Ashley Brown, 16, were killed in the March 29 accident..."

3. such a happening resulting in injury that is in no way the fault of the injured person

"Police said the driver of the pickup, who was hauling a flatbed of the foam, didn't realize he might have caused the accident..."

As in:

accident prevention accident proof accident report accident site accident statistic accident victim accident record accident damage accident investigation without accident freak accident accident waiting to happen

accidents will happen

Antonym:

intent

Dear "Lori Ann White, 41, of Silsbee,"

"I forgive you" is what I should've said when you walked over and told me, "I'm so sorry."

I remember your face as clearly as I remember my arms, how chunks of flesh were mysteriously gone, leaving crater shapes.

It's the collision I forget, but your eyes wide-reflecting the shreds of my ear all butchered like hamburger meat-I've remembered just fine.

Horizontal on the highway, cold rain diluting the warm blood pooling on the asphalt, I'll always think back to your hair, how your long braid dangled as you bent over me.

It's ghoulish how the memory of you has stood unscathed in the churning of the past ten years, which is why, when the Houston Chronicle article I found just yesterday—the one saying I was "more fortunate" because my ear had been reattached—called you by name, I read it again and again and again.

I never knew you as Lori with age and place, only as the woman who said sorry before I or my parents or the investigators or the lawyers thought to use the word blame.

What I'm trying to say is I know it wasn't your fault you swerved, lost control of the bus. You couldn't have known the debris was harmless, practically weightless

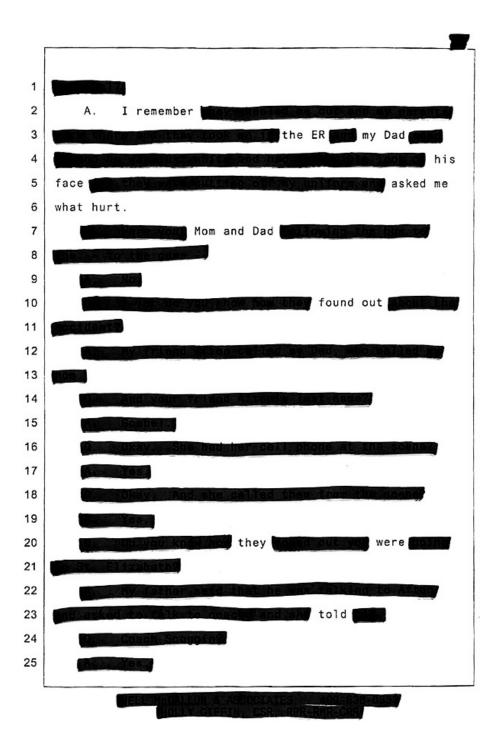
foam

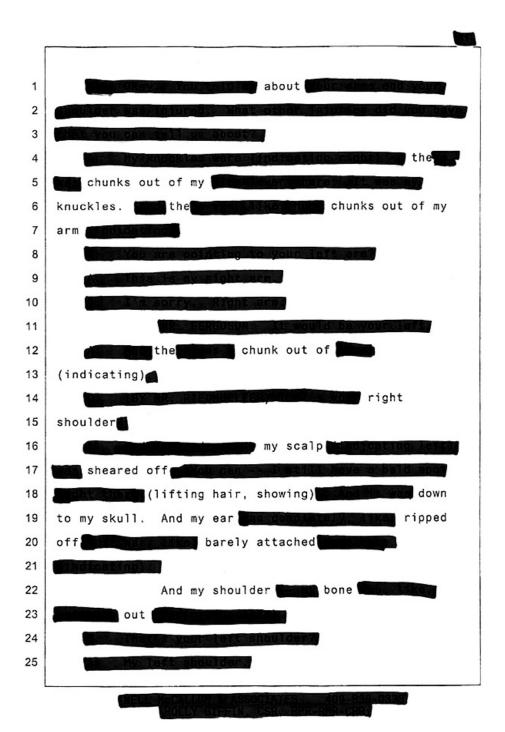
Navy Nike Shorts

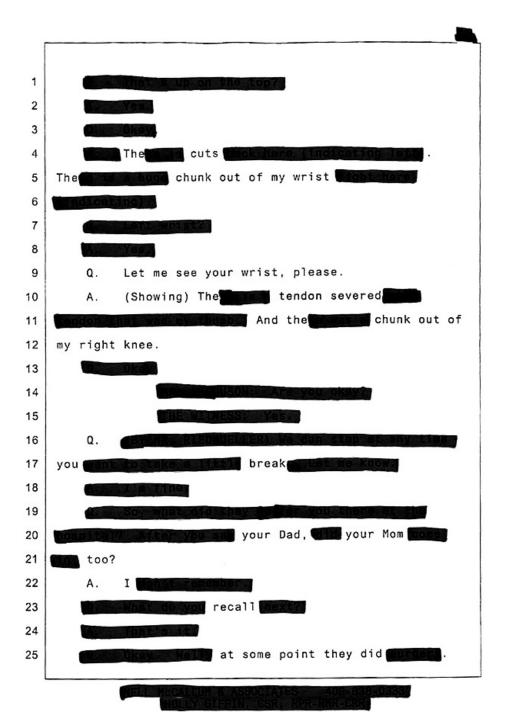
The paramedics didn't cut mine off, slid them carefully down my legs instead. We discussed who got to keep them, could still fold them in a drawer.

Our favorite soccer uniform shorts, the ones we put on expecting to end up at a match. I'd never kept a contract stating careful don't wear, careful don't part with.

An arbitration between what's lost and what remains—Their untatteredness weighs like a presence, their presence a loan.







Dear Lori Ann White,

I found another article about you. This one was nestled between "Devastated soccer team withdraws from playoffs" and "Hundreds gather at vigil to remember two teens."

Your brother told *The Beaumont Enterprise* reporter, "She wishes it was her instead of them," which is a nice sentiment I hadn't heard before.

Stories about you were whispered to me in the ICU: you'd been in drug rehab once or twice, were driving too fast, should've pulled over. But no one told me you'd been "[driving] commercially for at least six years" or that your brother "thought [your] driving record was excellent." He even mentioned that you left home early enough to "check the oil, tire pressure and other bus maintenance items before picking up the students."

To be honest, I'd never lingered over the magnitude of your remorse, only catalogued your rumored mistakes as I heard them, filed them among details I'd maybe revisit sometime after my catheter could be removed.

I didn't blame you. "Fault" wasn't one of the words I made room for in my hospital bed or used as encouragement between morphine drips. The significance didn't unravel until years later, when it ricocheted off the walls of a boardroom. One of the 14 seated attorneys had placed it on the tip of my tongue.

I told them you said you were sorry. The detail, new and fatigue-delivered, prompted follow-up questions like, how did I think you "operated the bus" and whether or not anyone at the scene of the accident said it was "the bus driver's fault." To these I replied "I don't remember" for the 96th and 97th time, respectively.

I see in the article that you "declined to comment on the advice of the company's lawyer." I can't help but wonder what you would have said, what you would have wanted known.

Hauntology

1.

Of rain is the pall, virulent mists huddled heavy of clouds drained

Obsessive, ghosts come collect in pools surface tension frame

2.

Wraiths sleet down splash up stream across the sidewalk seep into soil soak the bedrock with the drenched dream of echoes You dream you will be dead It feels good to be wet with name

3.

Mirrored puddle darkness impending pour scarcely contained

New Normal

There was something exhibitionistic

about the posters — taped outside

lockers of students she barely knew

They said RIP Ashley

under pictures found on MySpace

many of them featuring my face next to hers

I'm not sorry I tore them all

down

E & I Hardly Speak Anymore

I remember your screams,
E said as she passed me the joint. Before
you were out, they touched you
all over, seeing what hurt
the most. I don't remember that,
I exhaled along with the smoke. Why
were you in the same room? They ran
out of space in the ER and had to double up,
she explained, glancing back
through the window at the muted din.
It's the clearest memory I have of that day.
I hear it in my sleep. I'm sorry,
I said and sipped from my Solo cup.

Lucky

She would have fucked him had her dad not been awake, ripped open the truck door and said, "Get your ass inside."

She slept with him before in the Ferguson's pool house, the smell of Evan Williams making syrup of the air.

This time cheap vodka, Sonic Strawberry Limeade leaving pink chunks she would try to clean off her boots the next day.

He had been one of many attempts at absolving herself, in her warped body but no more zero-to-ten pain.

Pulled from the wreckage, receptacle for words like strong and brave, she recited her lines when prompted, his fingers hesitating over a scar—

"I'm one of the lucky ones. So thankful to still be alive." Her name means God's Princess, says the ceramic heart

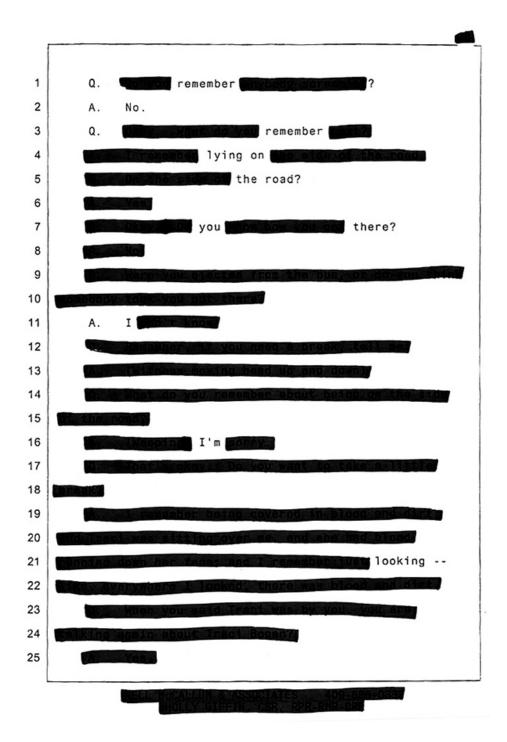
suspended from pink ribbon, cracked but still nailed to the bedroom wall. The heart quivered each time I escaped over the sill and under the pane.

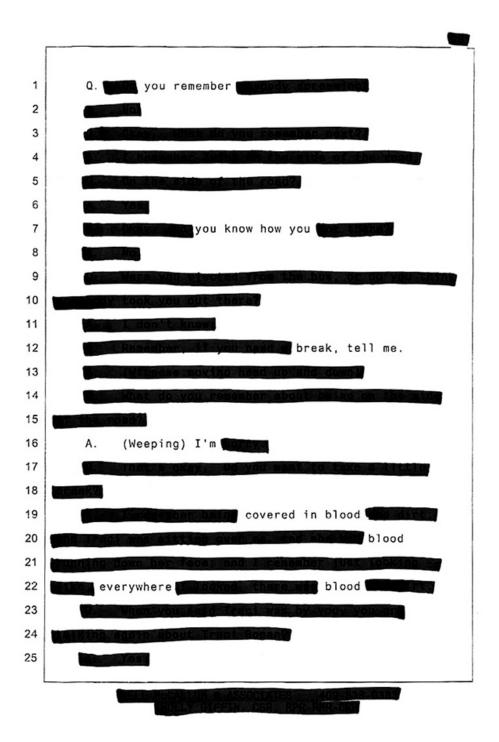
Dear Lori Ann (or do you go by just Lori?),

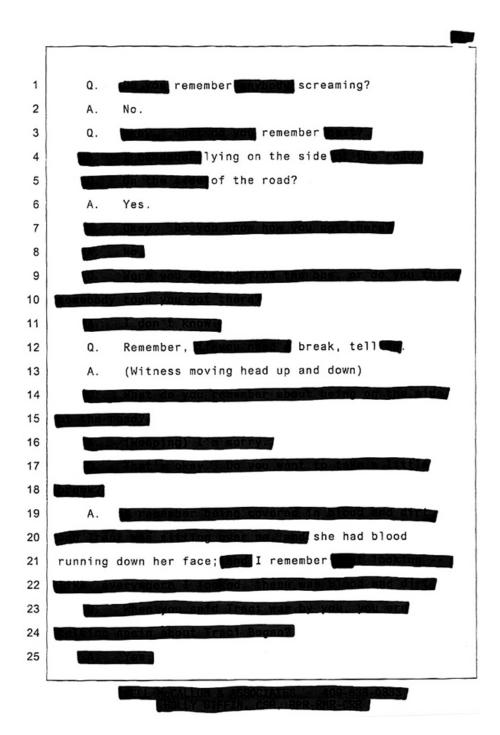
Last week, Traci asked me if I knew what happened to you. You may not remember, but she's the one who helped me off the bus, who sat by me until the ambulances came, blood dripping down the sides of her face. She remembers everything. Knows how the impact felt. Tried to lift Ashley's body but couldn't.

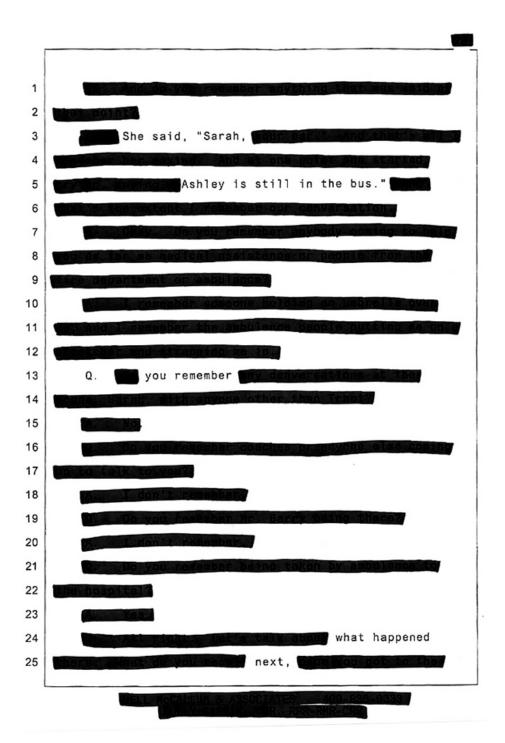
She'd been sitting between us, you know. Three to two seats as we watched *Dude, Where's My Car.* Sometimes, I think that Ashley's and my body protected Traci, limiting her injuries to a concussion, a now faded scar on her forehead that would flush when we drank vodka from Sonic cups after school. Other times, I think it could've been the weight of both Traci and me that killed Ashley, adding to the blow of her head on the ground.

Anyway, I told her no. I was surprised she had been wondering about you, too. She couldn't find you on Facebook. Thinks maybe you changed your name. Moved to Garland. That night, I spent an hour searching an online Southeast Texas database half expecting something tragic. You weren't there. You aren't anywhere. Which is for the best, I guess. I still don't know what I'd do if I ever found you. Maybe I'd ask whether or not you remember everything, too.









Acknowledgements

Thank you to the editors of White Wall Review in which earlier versions of the poems "Dear Lori Ann White, 41, of Silsbee," and "Lucky" first appeared.

About the Author



Originally from Southeast Texas, Sarah Renee Beach completed her MFA at The New School. Her poetry can be found in White Wall Review, Rust + Moth, and anthologized in Host Publications' I Scream Social Anthology Vol. 2. She currently lives in Austin, TX. More information about her work may be found at sarahreneebeach.com.

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