

When You're Old Enough to Drive

Poetry — Alice Tyszka

Metal, ice cold on my skin, feels like freedom
My hand and heart sense a new energy – an escape
And with open palms
They scream
let it in

The head echoes warnings
though they all sound faint at first

The mind brings the stern voice of my father
And words repeated so many times
they were a most played song
On a broken record

You can go out when you're old enough to drive

My mother's voice was next on shuffle

*When you're old enough to drive,
you'll be old enough for a later curfew*

Play the next song

*When you're old enough to drive,
You'll get more responsibility*

Holding the jagged silver just a little bit tighter,
My feet move across the hot pavement of my driveway
and feel the strong summer sun

My lebaron was waiting for me,
Its red paint glistening and sweating
In the warmth of June

When the door handle found its way into my hand,
I felt freedom return like a fire once again
Burning inside just as the handle seemed
like it would sear my flesh

My mother and father used their camera and took
What felt like a million photos
of the lebaron and I
And the flash they couldn't turn off
was useless like headlights under daylight

My eyes caught a glimpse of my uncle on the front porch
Standing with his arms crossed, he watched from a distance
For a while until my parents finally went inside
with their smiles and their camera

I got in the lebaron trying to escape
Why couldn't he smile for me?

Our eyes never met as his figure slowly
Moved toward the car
Nothing but a shadow from the light above

Reluctantly, though, the window rolled down
and my ears listened to words that would forever
haunt

*When you get behind the wheel, always remember
You have power, you have freedom*

There are truly tragic things that come with age

*Every time you get behind the wheel,
You have a responsibility to stay safe*

*If you aren't, you can kill someone
You can be killed*

A memory, a story on the news
Something people take too long to drive by, curious
As they see uniforms holding brooms

And they can imagine the sigh of bristles sweeping glass
And tire rubber against a dark road

These are the things you have to think about now
When you're old enough to drive

My mind thought of everything and nothing as I
Worked to steady my small shaking hands
Against the red leather wheel

The body does silly things when it suddenly gets hit
By the weight of the world

I was young enough
But old enough to die