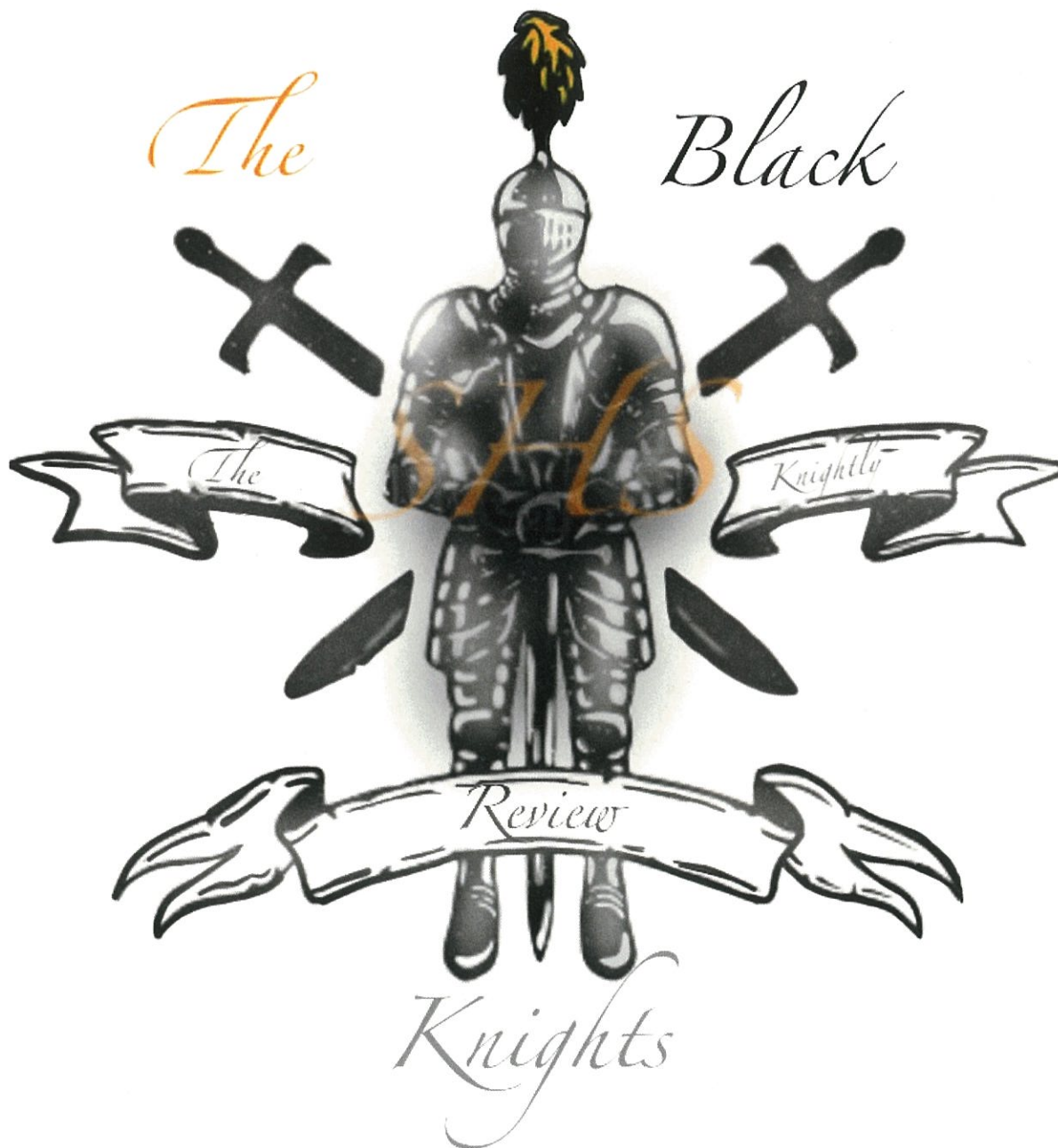


2017



A Letter from the Editor

June 15, 2017

Dear Readers,

Stamford High is a school blessed with many creative and talented writers. I am so lucky to have worked with all of the students published in this magazine. Many hours of imagination and creation went into writing the poems, stories, essays, and memoirs within these pages. All students included in this publication worked diligently in both Creative Writing and Writer's Workshop courses to develop their skills and showcase their talents. Over the pages of this magazine, you will see just how unique and original our SHS writers are.

Enter into this motley world of imagination, and escape into a vivid, colorful world of holidays, seasons, memories, friends, family, love, heartbreak, loss, tragedy, self-image, triumph, courage, ghosts, the zombie apocalypse, and so much more!

A special thank you to all of the students that participated in the designing, writing, editing, and revising of all of the works published here.

Happy Reading!

Proudly Yours,

Ms. Hadsell
Editor-in-Chief of *The Knightly Review*
Creative Writing/Writer's Workshop Teacher

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NOSTALGIA

Ravyn Akins

Nostalgia frees her undeveloped mind
Caresses her to sleep with typewriter clicks
The songs from her records are her only comfort
While the clothes she wears makes her a rebel
She knows her ways aren't always welcome
But even the slightest remembrance uncovers the simple life

Nostalgia embraces her covert personality
An old soul gazing through the year of 1962
Evolution of modern technology ignites a nonchalant attitude
The heart that was born now strives to go back
Her neatly stacked cassettes tell a different story
But even the slightest remembrance uncovers the simple life

Nostalgia recovers her cheated heart
Sight of the vintage sun glaring the dust off the American flag
Admiring the antennas on the television
While the smell of denim blue gives her confidence
The life she knows she can never have
But even the slightest remembrance uncovers the simple life
Simple life simple life

NOT EXACTLY LOVE

Ravyn Akins

Curly top, smooth skin, inquisitive smile
Invisible to your own sanity
You are my once forgotten treasure
Decaying in my mind

Invisible to your own sanity
You forgot the infinite times you made me laugh
Decaying in my mind
The summer of incredulous dramas

You forgot the infinite times you made me laugh
I wanted to stay friends
The summer of incredulous dramas
The only person who gave me intimate complications

You are my once forgotten treasure
Decaying in my mind
Curly top, smooth skin, inquisitive smile
Invisible to your own sanity

IF I WERE IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD

Eva Allison

If I were in charge of the world,
My favorite toy would never go gray.
There would be no books
That leave cliffhangers behind.
No ice cream would fall from
Cones crackling in tiny hands.
If I were in charge of the world,
There wouldn't be soldiers
Ripped from their families
To fall in the hands of the foe.
And there would be a bridge
Between the hopeful
And those who need a taste.
Every child would have endless books to feed their
Thriving minds as their stomachs stay satisfied.
And all those children would have equal opportunities to
Grow into society as themselves.
I would try to make it easier to
Know that a smile is like a star;
It's strong to glow in the darkness
Even though the black is so overwhelming sometimes,
And that those stars are mirrors of the
Fire that fuels one to touch the sky.

We are

Red

Like a newly blossomed rose, red
As the polish on misunderstood nails,
The velvet spread across the lovers' lips, red
As the blood flowing through the beating heart

We are

Blue

Like the sky clear of misty thoughts, blue
As the waves crashing onto silent cheeks,
As the eyes full of secrets locked away, like
Blue jays slowly coaxed to sleep

We are

Yellow

Like sunshine streaming through school windows, yellow
As the forgotten hills of daffodils,
The cat's wise and naughty eyes, like
Lemons squeezed of juicy life

We are

Green

Like the blooming grasses, green
As rising lily-pads under croaking toads,
As the luck so few can wander upon, green
Like lollipops dancing in smiles

We are

Purple

Like mauve sugar-sweet frosting, purple
As tulips under spring's storm, like
The spine of a story unknown, purple
As the tongue touched by blackberries

We are colors

Flowing through our souls

* This poem was also published online at *Teen Ink* and won an Editor's Choice Award

MY TOWN

Raquel Arrindell

Colorful houses next to each other
Corner stores with loud music and men playing Dominoes
Animals just walking around like it's normal because it was
Kids playing all over the place
Smell of food everywhere you go
Old cars, bikes, motorcycles everywhere
Grandmas walking around looking young but they aren't

WHERE I'M FROM

Raquel Arrindell

I am from Barbie dolls, and fake babies with strollers

From Teddy bears and a soft Tinkerbell blanket

I am from "Go wash them dishes"

And the smell of cleaning products every Sunday morning

I am from a mango tree across the streets where everyone from the neighborhood can grab and take home

Whose mothers are your doctors, no need to go to the hospital

I am from yoyos and mp3 players

From Aunty and *primo*

I am from cookouts in the backyard and get-togethers at random times

And from loud laughs and loud conversations

From overprotective uncles

I am from "When you are really hungry no bread is hard to eat"

I am from goats walking down the hill and dogs

From rice, beans, and chicken

From *Tres Reyes Magos* (a holiday after Christmas)

And from grandparents rocking in the rocking chair on the porch

I am from playing volleyball with the neighbors in the middle of the street and moving every time a car comes

I am from those moments where kids had no electronics so they went out and played and played with neighbors

LOVE

Tyreke Brown

This emotion sets off things in your body
It catches you off guard on some occasions
The emotion makes you do strange things
You feel dangerous and bad when this emotion comes
You catch yourself in dares often
This emotion makes you feel desirable

When a tornado hits you know what caused it
You feel this emotion in your soul
Your eyes become apparent to this emotion
This emotion sets off passion in your body
An emotion like this gets you deep trouble
Pulling away from this emotion is a dangerous decision

Going through rain you can see and feel this emotion
You feel this emotion when you meet the right one
You are surrounded by this emotion by friends & family
This emotion is in one of Beyoncé's song titles
This emotion makes you have butterflies in your stomach
Can you feel the LOVE yet?

NAME NOT FOUND

Tyreke Brown

Sexy, Confident, Cool
My heartbeat speeds up when I see you
Love is Fire
You smell like brownies in the oven
My heartbeat speeds up when I see you
Your body is a masterpiece
Brownies in the oven
Cooking class

Your body is a masterpiece
A hug
Cooking class
Passion

Love is FIRE
Brownies in the oven
Sexy, Confident, Cool
My heartbeat speeds up when I see you

SEASONS

Nathalie Castro

Leaves fall to the ground.
Animals go in hiding.
The green grass goes dead.

Air turns into crisp.
Burning tongues from hot cocoa.
Snow falls to the ground.

Trees begin to grow.
April showers bring flowers.
Flowers to blossom.

Sun and clear blue skies.
Birds chirp at sight of dawn, waves
Ruffle for miles

A year has flown by.
Habits and emotions change.
What can the year bring?

25-LIFE

Trey Donoghue

ridiculous lies
and a criminal's face
with a sly smile
in a small place
the walls creep in
and the lights dim
survivor with the guilt
of a mortal sin
placement in a cage
reserved for the moment
irrelevant age
no longer can show it

NIGHT SKY OBSERVER

Trey Donoghue

as i
continue
looking up
at a lively night sky
with lights buzzing
and the atmosphere shrugging
at shooting stars

as i
continue
struggling with earthly concepts
the moonlight
reveals the beauty
in the nature
all around me

as i gaze
into the void
with cloudy eyes
i fall silent
and allow the
calmness
to wash over me

RAIN

Dan Fecci

There's something so delicate about precipitation,
The way it acts, the way it controls everything,
The way it takes, and gives back;
Taking everything dirty,
And making it pure again.

It travels on its own will,
Collected from everywhere;
Every ocean,
Every river,
Every pond,
Every drop,
All to be collected and redistributed
In its own manner.

It carries the world on its shoulders;
The necessity of life,
To be given to all who need it,
Every plant,
Every animal,
Every person,
It is the reason we live today.

THE NEW YEAR

Dan Fecci

The recent lack of peace has finally been released,
The deceased are pleased that the joy has recently been increased.

It's a new year, and with a cheer that you can hear,
The thought appears without fear, the time for changing is here.

Yet what's weird is how peers try and steer your ears,
The mere fear of change is something that you can just clear.

But dear, it's not something that just appears,
We're near, as a fact, but waiting shouldn't make you tear.

We're all doomed to fall, after all,
Hitting a wall doesn't mean that what's tall has shrunk to small.

Yet people brawl over that call,
And try to haul over attention, yet bawl when they have to crawl.

Yet what they don't know is hope; the best way to cope,
With the urge to mope and smoke dope, the best thing is some soap,
To cleanse the lens of the mind, for your friends tend to be blind,
What ends the trends of time, is to mend what men declined.

Get yourself together, and enjoy the last of holiday cheer.
Happy New Year.

ANGER

Dylan Fyffe

Anger reveals his genuine emotions.
Whirlpool of emotions, yet anger drowns him in the deepest of oceans.
He paces along the walls of the room
He thinks if there's no change in state of mind
It could only be a matter of time

Anger consumes his thoughts
It makes him feel as if he's lost
He drinks, he smokes, he procrastinates,
Ultimately he just wants to escape.
He punches, he kicks, he wants to tear away
The emotional tape

Anger can make or break you
It can twist, turn, and manipulate you.
He is a lost boy wishing to be found
He yells, screams, and cries,
Yet without making a sound
There is a lost boy wishing to be heard
Open your ears to him,
Before he becomes a ghostly blur.

DISTANT

Dylan Fyffe

“Hi, how are you doing?” I say,
As I curl into my shell.
It’s okay to converse, to meet and greet people,
But my mind prefers not to.
“How are you feeling? Are you okay?”
Questions that cause my shell to grow greater.
“I’m fine. Everything will be okay,”
I say to avoid conversation.
It’s not that I hate people,
But my inner, distant self likes to make it seem that way.

Most days I’m up, some days I’m down.
“You don’t seem like yourself.”
“I know you better than anyone else.”
“You don’t seem okay.”
I wouldn’t even know when I’m okay,
Am I ever actually “okay”?
Do you really know me?
Cause I barely know myself.
All the things I think, but all I could fathom to say is,
“I’m fine. I’ll be okay.”

My inner, distant self tells me to limit my connections,
Isolate yourself
Don’t tell people what bothers you,
They don’t actually care.
Sometimes I listen,
Do they care?
Do they listen to reply, or to understand?

SHADES

Colleen Green

Blue as the waters in the sea
The blue deep inside a newborn's eye,
Signifying nothing but peace,
Blue as blueberries with that sweet sugary taste

Red as fresh apples in October
The red in autumn leaves,
That seems to fade away quickly
Like the vivid memories of people I once loved,
Red as the sun,
If you care to stare long enough

Jet black as my eyes,
That bury untold secrets,
Black as the ashes from burnt memories,
Black as my race,
Which seems to define me,
Black as the place in my mind,
I'll leave behind me.

WOLF

Nataly Hoyos Dominguez

I am a Wolf
Grey as a thundercloud up in the sky.
I crawl to protect my pack.
I hunt alone at night to bring to my pack.
I can walk around at midnight.
I can howl at night, when the moon is out.
I AM A WOLF!

MR. TACO

Bryan Hurtado

With his structure in order
He makes me feel giddy inside
With gorilla strength
Contains a greasy aroma

He makes me feel giddy inside
I like his originality
Contains a greasy aroma
Just like the Taco Bell across the street

I like his originality
With the organic ingredients
Just like the Taco Bell across the street
He added a snack to my belly

With gorilla strength
Contains a greasy aroma
With his structure in order
He makes me feel giddy inside

COLOR POEM

Kevin Inga Sosa

Blue is the color of water
Blue is my favorite color
Blue's Clues was my childhood show
The color blue is the color of the sky.

Yellow is a bright color
The sun is yellow
Just picture yellow as light
Yellow is my second favorite color.

Black is a dark color
Imagine going outside with no clouds
And no lights anywhere that is what black is
Black is the color when you close your eyes

Orange is a fruit
I don't like the color orange but I like
The fruit. Orange and Yellow are
Two different colors. Different is unique.

WINTER

Prisca Jacotin

The wind hits me on my face
The snow kisses the ground
The clouds swim through the air

The ice cold stands outside my door
The trees are dancing
The snow smothers the town

So cold my car shivers
The sun is hiding
Cause winter stands to face it

I KNOW WHAT YOUR NAME IS BUT I WON'T 'CALL IT OUT'

Sarah Jaworoski

You have thick-framed lenses and a nasty loud mouth; your attitude is twisted.
You cause (most) of my anxiety! You make my skin crawl in discomfort.
You're as venomous as a snake. You think you're a queen...*laughs* you're not even close.
You smell like filth—even when you're clean.

You cause (most) of my anxiety! You make my skin crawl in discomfort.
I hate—no, I despise—everything about you.
You smell like filth—even when you're clean.
We met in class where you would taunt me.

I hate—no, I despise—everything about you.
I expected a little bit of respect.
We met in class where you would taunt me.
You have added more anxiety and stress on me.

You're as venomous as a snake. You think you're a queen...*laughs* You're not even close.
You smell like filth—even when you're clean.
You have thick-framed lenses and a nasty loud mouth; your attitude is twisted.
You cause (most) of my anxiety! You make my skin crawl in discomfort.

SAD COLORS

Sarah Jaworoski

Black...

Black makes you seem very mysterious...

but deep inside you have power,

so you like to believe you are powerful...

deep down, you are.

Red is dangerous!

So you can target a spiteful villain.

Grey and Black...Are the only colors you see.

Crimson stained hands...What have you done?

Sad colors have sad, sad stories.

Grey...

as if it were movies you'd watch back in the olden days

where everything was silent and black and white

and you had no idea what was going on...

but those are just the same plain old rain clouds

with threatening yellow lightning bolts.

TRAP DOOR

Fashyon Jones

Caramel skin, brown eyes
He makes me feel special
I had fallen in a trap door of love
The strong scent of cologne.

He makes me feel special
His protective side is loveable
The strong scent of cologne
Meeting in the football field, eye contact intense.

His protective side is loveable
Cold shoulders
Meeting in the football field, eye contact intense
“Home bound” to more adventures and excitement

I had fallen in a trap door of love
The strong scent of cologne
Caramel skin, brown eyes
He makes me feel special.

Sunshine showcases her pearly white teeth
Her vibrant personality is always pleasant
She's always smiling even on rainy days
Sunny days, it's always there.
Never letting negative things affect her

Sunshine walks through the flower field
She touches every few flowers
She thinks about how wonderful the weather is
She wanders into a tunnel

This tunnel doesn't match her mood but it soon will
It's dark, gloomy and scary
Looking out into where the sunshine was
It was two different scenes
Sadness took over her mind

Sunshine runs to the sunlight
She doesn't want to feel sadness again
Happiness is all she knows, all she wants to feel
She loves being happy

SEASONS

Olivia Labella

The skies filled with grey
It's almost the holiday
There's snow on the ground

Winter is over
Flowers are starting to bloom
The leaves are changing

Kids are out of school
We like to go to the beach
And like to have fun

The leaves are changing
It is starting to get cold
Happy Thanksgiving

HIDE AND SEEK

Cynthia Maignan

Hide and Seek was my favorite game when I was a kid.
I played it with my older brother, my little sister, my cousins, and my neighbors.

We always played it at night.
Our parents only allowed us to play outside until 8 pm.
It was always so dark at around 7 pm.
So, we would spend about an hour playing it outside.

I was so jealous of everything when I was a kid.
When I went to hide, and if the person found everybody else,
But me, I would start crying.
My cousins would always have to comfort me.
To me Hide and Seek was a joy of being found.

It was always so easy for me to find my older brother when he hid.
He used to wear his favorite cologne every afternoon.
He smelled like chocolate.
I loved chocolate, so I loved the smell of his perfume.
So when I smelled it, I knew it was him.
But he never understood how I always found him first.
He still doesn't know until this day.

For the other kids, when they hid,
They always hid in the same spot,
And they would talk to each other very quietly.
And I still could hear them.
Hide and Seek was definitely my favorite childhood memory.

MY LOVE

Cynthia Maignan

He is caring, loving and sweet
He makes me feel like I'm on top of the world
He is the sunshine of my heart
He smells like cinnamon and vanilla

He makes me feel like I'm on top of the world
I love how he makes me laugh without even trying to
He smells like cinnamon and vanilla
I met him at my work

I love how he makes me laugh without even trying to
When I first met him, he looked mean
I met him at my job
He added happiness into my life

He is the sunshine of my heart
He smells like cinnamon and vanilla
He is caring, loving and sweet
He makes me feel like I'm on top of the world

MY CARAMEL

Thierry Maignan

His caramel skin and brown eyes are everything
He makes me feel like a little princess
He is the sunshine to my heart
He smells like brown sugar and vanilla

He makes me feel like a little princess
He is the sunshine to my heart
He smells like brown sugar and vanilla
We met the first day of freshman year

I love the way he smiles
I expected him to be distinct when we first met
We met the first day of freshman year
He added love into my life

He is the sunshine into my heart
He smells like brown sugar and vanilla
His caramel skin and brown eyes are everything
He makes me feel like a little princess

SADNESS

Thierry Maignan

Sadness runs through his body, like water running through the river
Sadness surrounds him
He fakes his smile
He fakes his life
Feeling lost
He wonders if life would be better without him

Sadness screws his blood pressure
Sadness causes his anger
He gets angry every time someone asks if he is okay
Would he ever be okay?
Would he ever be able to smile like he usually does?
Would he ever walk around the halls once again?

Sadness screws his mind
Sadness is death
Sadness causes tears
Sadness is lost
He fakes his smile
He feels lost

COLORS

Sinead Martin

Green, green as the fields of Ireland
As the seasons change,
The grass becomes more vibrant
Green, green as the evergreen trees
That will stay forever green

Blue, blue as the color of my eyes
Just like the sky on a cloudless day
As the crystal-like water of the ocean
Blue as the denim on my jeans

Red, red as the color of love,
As the blood that pumps through my veins
As the color of the tulips that bloom in spring
Red as the color that ends another day

FEAR

Sinead Martin

Fear watches me stare at a blank page
Blanking on what to write
She watches me erase and erase
Never letting me out of sight
Suddenly my memory saves me
My fear watches words flow from my pen like a stream

Fear wanders behind me
From class to class
My fear is like a pest
She watches me hope I can pass this test

My fear tells me "You're going to fail"
For the most part I always pass with no avail
My fear overwhelms me,
I drown in my work
My fear swims after me
Wanting to strike again

CRUSH

Calika McBean

He's tall with chocolate complexion with two dimples
He uplifts my spirit
He's like a good apple out of a bunch of bad ones
He smells like sunshine

He uplifts my soul
He stands out of the crowd, he understands me
He smells like sunshine
We met on the playground during recess at preschool

He stands out of the crowd
Expected him to be nothing but a stranger
We met on the playground during recess at preschool
He's my other half, he completes me

He's like a good apple out of a bunch of bad ones
He smells like sunshine
He's tall with chocolate complexion with two dimples
He uplifts my spirit

EVAN

Olivia McGovern

Evan
He is funny
He is sweet
He is covered by a mop of curls
He is addicted to drugs
He is losing his smile
He is cutting his hair
He is my friend
He is slipping
He is losing control
He is gone

NEW YEAR

Olivia McGovern

New year new mindset
But what if I can't change
What if change is bad

Another year gone
Another funeral to see
Cycle repeating

SEASONS

Kyran McNeil

A calm sensation
Runs throughout my whole body,
I call it fall.

Uncomfortable
Feeling takes over my mind,
Like a plague, winter.

Another feeling
And takes depression away.
With joy I call spring.

Left with excitement
And happy feelings. I know
Summer has returned.

TWO-FACED

Taina Mercado

With droopy eyes
She tries to hold back her tears
Afraid that someone will see
But no one notices that she disappears
Her head hangs low
Her thoughts rush around
Banging every spot her skull contains
The brain bounces
The thought shouts
But no one knows she's to blame

She's to blame for how she feels
She's to blame for being real
It's your fault for doing nothing
With anxiety her nerves run wild

"Shush child"
Never fear because your best friend,
Depression, is here
To shut down all your worries
You won't feel; now you're numb

The heart mourns
It's slowly torn
Her eyes leak
Her bones grow weak
Curled into a ball
Against the cold wall

But why are you to blame?
You and I don't know
For anxiety and depression
Only occurs for the hell of it
She fights with herself in this glass wall
That reflects herself
But she doesn't see herself
She sees the two-faced beast
One shakes uncontrollably
Constantly begging for mercy
But why does she plead?
"Someone help me, please?"
What's happening!?

Then she sees the other side
She tries to hide
Her face from being seen
The face hangs low

She's pale and almost transparent
She's hollow; she's full of sorrow

What is this madness held within me?
I knew we were all mad
But this is insane
In God's name
I shout his name in vain
Do you hear me now?
What do I do to stop this mutiny?
I don't know how

This anxiety—she's a bitch
Covers my mind with useless thoughts
She makes me scared
She makes me panic
But why?
And just as I think she's about to leave
She yells
"HERE SHE COMES!"
Guess who?
It's her best friend
Depression
Oh, depression
Oh, sweet depression
Although you do not make me feel insane
You both love to play with my emotions
You make things bland and bitter
We watch everything in slow motion
Because for you both it seems so much
better.

Anxiety and depression you're unfortunately
a part of me
So I guess it's us three against the world
Or maybe it's me against me?

UNTITLED

Danny Montano

She is caring and loves me
She makes me feel like the happiest guy ever
I'm over the moon for her
She smells flowery and fresh

She makes me feel like the happiest guy ever
She understands me and she's beautiful
She is caring and loves me
We met at her *quince* party

She makes me feel like the happiest guy ever
I didn't expect that I would catch a lot of love for her
We met at her *quince* party
She has added love and kindness to my life

I'm over the moon for her
She smells flowery and fresh
She is caring and loves me
She makes me feel like the happiest guy ever

GUILT

Hayley Navarrete

He sits in a chair
Head down
So much guilt inside he's faded away
He is a shadow now

Thinking constantly
Blaming himself, isn't fully sure
What has happened to make him feel
So heavy

So closed off he doesn't cry
Just constant thoughts... lingering
Stormy days can make him
Fully disappear
Into the shadow-filled fields

Only in the light does he
Feel vulnerable to his true feelings
Sharp, Dangerous guilt

What has he done?
He doesn't recall...

He is his own worst weapon
Hurt more and more to try

Try to remember what he did
What could you do to feel that whoever you're close to
Will get hurt

He cuts them with your knives of forgetfulness

YOU

Hayley Navarrete

Long brown hair, brown eyes, rosy cheeks, contagious smile
Happy, nervous, beautiful, loved
You are my happiness when there is nothing else
Cigarettes, and fresh linens

Happy, nervous, beautiful, loved
Your genuine, perfect laugh
Cigarettes, and fresh linens
English class, middle school

Your genuine, perfect laugh
Outgoing, fun, adventurous
English class, middle school
Acceptance, affection, balance

You are my happiness when there is nothing else
Cigarettes and fresh linens
Long brown hair, brown eyes, rosy cheeks, contagious smile
Happy, nervous, beautiful, loved.

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

Lissan Otero

Hold my hand, Daddy,
I want you to show me the way so
That I can go out in the big world!
Daddy, one day can you teach me
The things I want to do?
Then let me learn to be the pretty daughter you want me to be!
Should I ever get stuck, I know you will be there to save me,
Like the true Daddy knight should do when his princess daughter is down.
I can rely on a kind word from you to dry my tears, Daddy, when I'm
Feeling sad let me know that's it's gonna be okay! So that way
I won't feel so bad and sad.
You're the only one who has shown me the sunshine, and then get me free
To be the brilliant person that you raised me to be. Thank you, Daddy.
You will always and forever be my true knight in armor

I love you, Daddy...From my castle back to my heart >3

THE SEASONS

Lissan Otero

A drop turns into green
A seed that waits to sprout
Canvas of spring

Red canoes that would rush through
White waves and clouds
As summer shapes float

Frost is around the corner and the grapes grow
Autumn slumbers on the lake
As the full moon appears

White falls
An open hand holds winter
Melted steps

ANXIETY

Geeta Pandya

Anxiety wakes up from her sleep,
Now awake she crawls over to me
She jars my eyes open,
As she plays scenarios in my head that will never happen.

At times she leaves me alone,
Letting my confidence flourish and grow.
But sometimes she follows
Threatening to come back tomorrow.

Her hands shake with nervousness,
As she causes people restlessness.
She came again spreading her wrath,
However I had overcome her, confident I sat.

VIBRANCE

Geeta Pandya

Green as the leaves that grow on the trees,
As the fresh mowed lawn
As the algae on the ocean floor,
As the sour lime.

Orange as the vibrant sun rays
As the topaz stone,
As the blooming fragrant marigolds,
As the autumn leaves,
As the plump pumpkins in the patch.

Red as the Macintosh apple,
As the beady sweet pomegranate seeds,
As the bright lipstick,
As the stripes on the American flag.

HOPE

Emily Paulino

Her sparkling orbs scream innocence,
Persistence,
She smiles at you passionately
She feels the pang of rejection from others
And their loss of interest in who she is
But her optimism continues to cascade down on her like her luscious locks of wave
She waves like the ocean.
Coming and going.
But she remains
Consistent and
Powerful.

RAIN*

Emily Paulino

I look toward the window to hear vicious thunderclaps that scare away the raindrops,
I lay cozy in the dim room tangled in the blankets,
I'm warmed,
But by the arms that belong to another beating heart,
The rain pelts my window,
Running from the angry thunder,
And the lightning that flickers in the sky fails to disrupt my serenity,
And I drift into slumber,
To the rise and fall of his chest.

* This poem was also published in the March 2017 issue of *Teen Ink*

SEASONS OF HAIKU

Emily Paulino

Winter enters in,
The land is designed with snow
Intricate snowflakes.

Summer's heat arrays,
Burning skin by sunrays,
Oceans balance heat.

Fields of rosy hues,
Dewy grass and spring rains last
Reviving the trees.

Skies sprinkling leaves,
Trees displaying warm colors,
Winds blowing at ease.

YA DAMN COWARD

Alex Pellicciari

When I walk in the classroom
I say to the coward inside me don't start shivering
It's not even cold in the room
I hold myself because I am freezing
"Don't smile you, people will judge you"
Biting my inner lips to hide a smirk
"Don't smile they'll think you're stupid"
Won't I just feel better later?
My heart is gripped by a cold fist
Shivers spread throughout my chest
Crawl to my spine and trickle down
The coward takes over my whole body
I shake and shiver but a joke is made in class
It's literally the medicine bringing me back like an exorcism
Making the Coward come out of me or be put to rest
Smiling making no sound and quickly going back to that emotionless face
Laughter is the best medicine people say it can break anyone
It can even exorcise me from that coward inside me
I can be myself and I ask the coward, "I won't miss you, you damn coward"
No answer and now I'm comfortable to be myself around others
Shivers are gone but the only place I still feel the coldness is in my head
Right now my mind and body are owned by me but he'll be back for more

INTO THE GARDEN

Hana Redzepagic

I peer into the garden, seeing a plethora of shades
Reds as dark as roses and bright dahlias
Singing birds chirping to each other,
Enjoying the beautiful day

Green is peeking under my toes and in the big bushes
Trees and leaves litter all around, covering the garden with shades of moss and emerald
The green grass is almost shining, freshly mowed and smelling fresh

The baby blue sky stretching for miles above and looking down upon the lovely garden
All you see is blue, no clouds in sight
When the sun soon sets, it is replaced by dark midnight blue and navy.

GRIEF

Anastasia Roddy

Grief she is such a young beautiful thing
Her grey eyes gazing in space
She sits at a desk writing “insane”
Salted tear stains seem to never go away
How did Grief get this way?

Grief hollows by the day
Her once cocoa butter skin aging,
Walking towards the mirror a lonely widow
Holding a pillow, screaming his name.

Grief cutting her pain
Lying in the rain
Weeping in her prayers
Her shoulder length black hair intact around her face
She tugs and pulls
Grief is going “insane”

NO NAME

Anastasia Roddy

Almond eyes, seasick waves, buttery skin, I'm in a daze.
Cocoa butter kisses you leave on my face send me to another place.
The moon to my stars, the blue to my sky. Oh, how I hate to say, "Bye".
My peanut butter chocolate cake with Kool-Aid, I can't get you off my mind.

Cocoa butter kisses you leave on my face send me to another place
Your weird isn't like mine, but your heart finds a way to connect with mine.
My peanut butter chocolate cake with Kool-Aid, I can't get you off my mind.
I got on your bus, I saw the look in your eyes, no words spoken but that was my "Hi".

Your weird isn't like mine, but your heart finds a way to connect with mine.
I expected you to be feigning and for you to be mean, but instead you was relaxed and kind.
I got on your bus, I saw the look in your eyes, no words spoken but that was my "Hi".
Peace and aspect, was nothing I suspected to be taught by a guy I just met.

The moon to my stars, the blue to my sky. Oh, how I hate to say "Bye".
My peanut butter chocolate cake with Kool-Aid, I can't get you off my mind.
Almond eyes, seasick waves, buttery skin, I'm in a daze.
Cocoa butter kisses you leave on my face send me to another place.

BEAUTIFUL BUT FADING

Chase Roden

Blue as violets in spring
Soft to the touch
Blue as the color of the open sky
Where I want to reach to find my dreams
Blue as the deep color of your eyes
Your beautiful, gorgeous, eyes that I lose myself in

Red as the color of blood
As soon as it leaves the body
Red as the color that drips from a knife
After it has traced a line into your skin
Red as the color of my eyes
After all the crying

Transparent as the tears
The tears that run down my face
Transparent as the glass I look through
Seeing your happiness
Transparent as
Transparent as me

UNTITLED

Chase Roden

April showers will
Bring mayflowers into bloom
Bringing the life back

Soft skin burns easy
The sun brings blistering heat
The ocean calm breeze

The green now changes
Now to beautiful color
Finally to death

It is all now dead
Cold, hard, forever frozen
Within pure white

It all will cycle
It all will soon start a new
In the four seasons

A PIECE OF ME

Tabby Sales

A piece of my childhood the good old days when it was smiles all day
A piece of my childhood the good old days when I knew no harm
A piece of my childhood the good old days when being fragile was okay
A piece of my childhood the good old days when I smiled with no hesitation.

A piece of my childhood the not so great days I wish I could forget
A piece of my childhood the not so great days when I cried myself to sleep
A piece of my childhood the not so great days when faking it was normal
A piece of my childhood the not so great days when at the age of 6 I started crying myself to sleep.

A piece of my teen years when depression hit
A piece of my teen years when I first tried to kill myself
A piece of my teen years when my childhood seems better to forget rather than remember
A piece of my teen years when drugs and alcohol became a normal thing for me

A piece of my life now when things are finally looking good
A piece of my life now when life seems to have meaning
A piece of my life now when I have hope for the future
A piece of my life now when I am okay and happy with who I am
A piece of my life now when I finally found forgiveness for everyone who made me want to forget my childhood.

UNTITLED

Kyhra Serrano

"Things change. And friends leave. Life doesn't stop for anybody."

-The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Things change
And friends leave
Life doesn't stop for anybody
Life is a story full of events
The characters will come and go
The plot will change a lot and then there will be several conflicts
But that should not make your story terrible
And it does not put your story to an end just yet
You keep writing until your story is finished, filled with a series of events
Events that will involve different characters and themes
Your story shouldn't stop when one conflict appears
All writers look past the conflict until a resolution comes along
That resolution will bring up new characters and several more chapters
The story doesn't stop with one problem and a resolution
It continues until you feel the ending is right or meant to be
But then again you never know what the ending may be
Or if there even is an ending
We can never know for sure how our story will end
But we can always make our story ours
How we want it to be even with all the conflicts and loss of characters
We make it our own and we choose how we want things to go
Sometimes

HAPPINESS

Joe Tiani

Happiness makes our days warm
Nothing can take you down
Even when others try to make you mourn

Happiness makes our days brighter
Even when others don't want it to be
They can't do anything about it because you're a fighter

Happiness makes you look forward to tomorrow
Especially when it's not around
And yesterday was filled with sorrow

SEASONS OF HAIKU

Joe Tiani

The rain falls today
To bring us life tomorrow
To show us spring's here

Sun beats down with strength
To burn everything with grace
To help our lives thrive

The leaves will fall now
The earth floor will start to crunch
We rake it away

The air has frozen
The rain shall turn to fresh snow
Nature's new blanket

She will go to sleep
But don't worry everyone
Her cycle restarts

YOU COME FIRST

Joe Tiani

We accept the love we think we deserve
Although for some of us it's one we should not preserve
For some of us it's something we cherish
But for others they would rather it perish
For not all love comes in good form
Especially when the person you loved starts to transform
When they start to take you for granted
But you can't leave since love was already planted
When they start abusing you
But they turn the blame and start accusing you
Then you will be done with their lies
But they'll try to suck you back in with cries
You just have to push on and not look back
Because you know the love you had is starting to lack
Because now that they've broken your last nerve
Hopefully you'll realize it's not the love that you truly deserve

UNMARKED CAGE

Griffon Valerio

I am kind of human on the outside
And on the inside I am dead
People see life, energy, maybe annoyance?
Most likely the latter
All I see is what screams at me from the mirror
That darkness we all have, that darkness I've left hidden and locked away all this time
"What's wrong?"
"Are you okay?"
Until I'm dead nothing will ever be okay
The voices get louder, pain becomes unbearable, my screams of torment get louder
Put on a smile and no one sees through it
That smile, those jokes, and my "energy"
Mask
No one will ever see my true self
My true self... It is something no one will see
You can't let the monster out of the cage once it's locked, the damage it causes once it stretches its legs will be more detrimental and more devastating than ever before
... It hungers
It must feed
No!
I must let it starve, and though if its hunger becomes insatiable and I must destroy it...
And though that would mean the end of the beast... as well as the cage would meet its timely end...
It would be for the benefit society itself
The world holds no room for monsters, nor the cages that hold them

JEALOUSY

Kathryn Zingone

Jealousy wears the most expensive clothes,
Jealousy spends hours in the mirror,
Making sure she looks the part.
Jealousy has everyone's attention
Yet she's still....
Not enough.

Because jealousy sees happiness smiling brighter
Than the sun.
Jealousy's lip quivers and her eyebrows scrunch up.
The clothes aren't enough, the makeup isn't enough
Nothing is...
Enough.

Happiness has hair that embodies rays of light,
Streaming down her back and swishes with laughter.
Jealousy's hair curls up in anger,
Winding and twisting into harsh snarls around her shoulders.
Jealousy fumes with anger while happiness's eyes twinkle.

Nothing is enough...
Because Jealousy can't be happy.

We didn't talk about anything heavy or light. We were just there together. And that was enough to calm my beating heart, even for just awhile.

The sky was littered with dark clouds, covering any trace of the stars or the moon looming over us. It was much too dark to see anything more than the outline of his face, and the dewy grass prickling my skin was bothersome, but it was worth it if it meant being with him. A cold breeze swept through, sending a shiver down my spine, reminding me of the cold winter that would soon come.

He noticed, quickly covering my frame with his jacket, warmth enveloping me. He kept his hands on my forearms, attempting to warm me as best as he could. "We should really go inside soon, before you catch a cold."

I shook my head vehemently; wisps of dark hair left the clutches of my hair tie and fell into my face. "We're not going. Not until you have to leave." He sighed, clutching me tighter.

"You realize that I ship out at seven in the morning, right?"

"Yes."

"And you're planning to stay up with me for the next, what? Six hours?"

"Of course I am. What else would I do?"

He chuckled lightly, resting his chin on my shoulder. "You're ridiculous, you know that?" He said, amusement laced in his voice.

"But a good kind of ridiculous, right?" He laughed again, but this time a deep, genuine laugh that brought a smile to his lips. I couldn't remember the last time he laughed like that. It must have been before he knew he was getting shipped, before he knew he was leaving us once again.

We sat in silence, our breaths syncing. I tried to concentrate on nothing else but his heart rhythmically beating in his chest. I took his hand, fingers intertwining, just to feel more physical contact. I sighed heavily, creating a billowing cloud in the air. I offhandedly wondered if I would catch a cold from this weather, but ignored it. A couple of sneezes was worth spending these last few hours together.

"Whatever you do, just come back, okay?" He gripped my hand tighter, not wanting to let go.

"Don't worry. I'll always come back to you."

BEFORE I GO

Olivia McGovern

“There is something you should know in case I don’t come back,” I whisper through the phone, hands shaking. “I...” hearing footsteps dancing toward me, I am cut off.

“He is coming, I need to hide,” I tell her through the phone. “I love you,” I say one last time before the footsteps stop and the line is disconnected. I turn around, eyes tearing as I look up at him. Standing with eyes of rage and anger, he rips the phone off of the wall and with the other hand he grabs my throat. During the shouts and screaming my vision goes blurry.

The room starts to spin as he shouts, “Why did you call? “How did you get out?” over and over again.

It is as if he expects an answer despite me not being able to breathe. As his grip tightens completely closing my airways, I close my eyes. This is it, this is how I die. As the light fades and my vision disappears into darkness he throws me on the stained carpet. While gasping for air he takes me by my arms and half carries, half drags me down the stairs.

As tears stream down my face with a raspy voice I cry, “Kill me, please kill me.”

I cannot go on this way any longer. Telling me to shut up, he unlocks the door and throws me in. I pray that he will leave. He puts the key in his pocket and shuts the door with him still inside. Realizing he will either beat or force himself on me, I back into the corner into a fetal position. He starts off with stomping on my side; he likes to leave my face pretty. I feel his steel toe boots bash into my ribcage over and over until I hear a crack. I scream for relief from the agonizing sensation running through my stomach up to my throat. After I start coughing up blood he leaves and locks the door behind him. Or at least I think he does, I couldn’t hear the click over the pounding in my head. Everything starts to go black as I feel myself either passing out or dying.

I wake to the sound of the door creaking open, releasing light into the small room. He throws a sandwich at me and before he leaves I look around the room and see red stains covering the floor along with my ripped shirt and pants. Every time I breathe I feel the weight of my ribs collapsing against me.

Definitely broken. I can’t move without pain shooting up my body. Looking around the dimly lit room, I see all of the scratch marks on the wall, counting my days here. The only thing keeping me going was the phone call and the hope that I will see them again.

Suddenly the door swings open to reveal him, my captive, the man who stole my life. Standing at 6 feet with a strong build, the chance of fighting him off is useless.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. I called a taxi to get to my friend’s house around 7 at night. I never made it there. I remember driving with him in the front, then he stopped for gas, claiming he needed his wallet from the back. He came in and instead he put a white washcloth over my face holding it there while I fought and tried to yell. I later learned it was soaked in chloroform by its sweet smell, thus causing me to pass out. I remember hearing

stories of this and reading books. I never thought it would be me. I used to be so much more; I wasn't just this shell of a human I am now.

I don't know my age. I was taken at 17, but that was long ago. I think. I had dirty blonde hair; it's now brown with dirt. My mossy green eyes once full of life are dull. Bruises and scars rake across my thin body. Lost in my own thoughts I don't hear the footsteps creeping toward the door. Forcing myself into the corner, trying to prepare for the worst, I hear the door handle moving. He always unlocks the door first, but I didn't hear the lock click open. Thoughts race through my mind.

Who is there? Will they hurt me?

I hear a voice on the other side, "Hello? Is anyone there?"

Tears stream down my face as I attempt to yell back. I can't say much, my ribs and throat hurt too much. I manage to squeeze out a few words, mostly just "Help" and "Hello". Still they hear me and start attempting to break the door down. With each bang on the door towards freedom I jump with fear, for my body and mind still expect the worst.

Finally the door is forced open. A bright light fills the cramped room and it burns my eyes, but I can't look away for fear it will all disappear. I hear voices everywhere as men in uniforms creep into my room. They are all asking if I am all right and safe and if I know where Roy is. Fear kicks in as I realize they haven't caught him yet. I can't breathe. I'm clawing for air while they try and come closer. I haven't seen another human besides Roy in what feels like years. One tries to pick me up by my stomach not realizing my pain. As I scream in agony, he doesn't let go, not even when I cough up crimson on his dark uniform. Rushing through the hellhole I survived in for years, they open the front door and run to their cars.

I focus on the sunlight on my pale skin, the feeling of the wind dancing through my knotted hair, the long weeds that reach out to tickle my feet. Is this freedom? Or just a dream? If this is a dream I do not want to ever wake.

I hardly sleep, I keep dreaming of his face and that smug little grin. I'm safe but my mind is still trapped back there. Waking in the hospital, I feel the itchy sheets and the uncomfortable clothing they placed me in. Scanning my body, I see the gauze wraps covering my ribcage and most of my arms and my left leg. My left ankle, that's where he crushed it with his boot after I couldn't stop crying. The room is gray: gray floors, gray bed, gray everything. I do not notice the woman in the corner, watching me like a hawk. Her lips purse together with makeup caked to try and hide the bags under her eyes.

"Who are you?"

"Sarah Highman."

"Do you know what year it is?"

"No"

She leaves as soon as breakfast came in, leaving me to my mind. *It is 2006. I was born in 1986. My mom's name is Margaret and I never met my dad. I was taken in 2003.* Repeating the facts help keep me sane, trying to process everything.

13 years later:

I live in a rural area in Maine, nice and quiet, all by myself. I see my therapist every few weeks. They caught Roy. They found him in the bathroom with an empty shotgun in his cold hands. My neighbors would describe me as a scared animal, always on edge, skittish, and alone. They don't know. If I told them my past then they would look at me like a fragile doll. A doll with scars littering her body and a mind of poison. I may not be okay, but I am alive; I am surviving and thriving. Although I flinch at loud noises and can't be touched by another human, I am free and happy. I spend my days outside, feeling the breeze, the sunlight warming up my skin along with the sense of security in my safe haven.

September 12, 2056 5:46PM

The rain started again. I can tell by the rain crashing on top of the bunker door it's not too far away from a broken window. So that means it'll start to get cold. I switched on the electric fan heater; it glowed orange and started to hum. I found it a week ago in an abandoned warehouse filled with electronics from decades ago; it's like a pre-war ruined super-sized market. I live in a pre-war bunker that's kept a roof over my head for about one decade and hope for longer, too. My little home is cozy warm and just home to me. It's kept hidden so no one finds me.

I am an outcast from the people at my school—no one really speaks to me or looks at me. I feel like a ghost every day I go to school, until I go to one class where I feel like I'm in a second home, which is art class. I mostly chose to be an outcast from the better society in the real city. I live in the abandoned part of the city; it's covered in scrap, raw sewage, radiation, and some head crabs, but thankfully if I'm ever bitten I can be cured by the new vaccine that was introduced about a week ago by The Union.

The Union is basically the city's government they manage everything--and I mean everything. I don't exactly know if there are any other cities around the world; I've been here since I was born. I lived with my Dad in this fallout shelter until one day when I was about 10 years old he never came back after going out looking for food and I'm sure he's dead. My father was a good man he always took care of me and provided for me in the harsh times. We were homeless. When I was newborn, we lived on the streets in the city but then my father got suspended from the city and was forced by Civil Protection to go live in the abandoned part where I am now, known as District 2. My mother passed away a day after giving birth to me she got very ill. I don't really question myself every day what my mother looked like. I have asked my father but he used to say that she was just purely beautiful. I believe him. I don't know where I was born, but I do know when I was born: September 18th, 2040.

When I mean no one talks to me I really mean no one talks to me. I go to Thompson High. It was named after a man who administrated City 27 when my Dad was a little kid and Doctor Thompson built a school after the Education protests in the plaza. There were protests due to people being able to repopulate once again after decades, but most kids were self-taught by parents and so many kids kept popping up that schools were needed. Thompson High is a very modern public school and I bet you're wondering how I can go to a public school being an outcast and having no family. My guardian, Theodore, lives in the low class part of the city. He works at a convenience store named Theo's Market; of course, he's like a brother to me, a brother I never had. I don't live with Theo because he can't offer me shelter, but it's fine. I didn't even ask for shelter from him because I wanted to live in my own cozy home where I've been living alone for five years now, where I have provided for myself.

Every day when I wake up I mostly tell what type of day it is by seeing the sun split through the door of the bunker. My home is just steel and concrete with a small bed with a sleeping bag on top. The mattress is mostly either made into a couch and cushion for my back when I sleep in my sleeping bag. Christmas lights are lined up on the walls making the room glow of orange, yellow, green, red, and blue and they're basically the one light source I use. Cans of food sit in my footlocker or a filing cabinet and only purified water stays in the Icebox. The floor is cold and hard and not dirty at all. I've kept it clean and nice for myself. I don't like my feet being dirty in my bed. The only way out is by an extendable ladder not too far up to climb either—probably about five or four feet up.

September 13th 2056 Wednesday 4:00 AM

I'm sitting outside of Lenny's Soup Kitchen in an uncomfortable metal porch chair, but it's just a chair. I shouldn't complain; we're all poor here. District 2 has freaks and weirdos, but we're all the same: poor, hungry, homeless, and tired. We're the lowest of the low and get along the most. Lenny knows me since I did some janitor work this summer and made just about 40 tokens. It was a great job since summers are always the greatest at his place. It's located in a narrow alleyway and everyone who lives here knows about Lenny's secret soup. The recipe is unknown. All I know is that it has carrots and broth, that's it; probably that's what it all is. Lenny's place mostly brings people hope because they can purchase a cheap, wonderful warm meal during hard times and everyone is friendly, most of the time. There are assholes who come around and are dicks, mostly morphs.

Morphs are morphine addicts they find it from abandoned clinics or deal or buy it. Say you're high on morphine and you feel absolutely no pain you kind of feel like the incredible hulk, no? The Incredible Hulk is one of my favorite comics. I started reading at the age of seven while looking through a kid's room in an abandoned home with my Dad. This one time a Morph walked into Lenny's kitchen and tripped and fell breaking her nose making it bleed and it became flat. Everyone laughed at her, then she got up and was embarrassed but didn't feel anything she just felt her nose for blood and got some on the side of her left hand. She became furious and charged on a woman laughing right at her and punched her in her gut and then she ran away, I saw it coming home from school last year.

Lenny is a charismatic guy. He's nice and cool and always provides for the people who really need help—he's kind of like Theo, but just a good guy I know. I just feel welcomed to these types of things where people get along and we all have the same problems but we're all different in our own ways. Lenny's kitchen is a tiny pre-war coffee shop transformed into a soup kitchen and it has a small outside sitting area because it's in an alleyway, after all, so you walk down a narrow single way to a dead end of the alley, and there's tables made from cardboard boxes or some old wooden tables that are put outside along the wall near the door. Inside it's warm and smells wonderful and it's very dim and orange because of the lighting. Once you walk in a giant swish of warm air brushes your face and flows out the door and Lenny has a sign on

the inside of the door to quickly close it. The heater in the kitchen is basically the stove and since it's so small it's a good heat source for everyone. Lenny's kitchen is his home and come to think of it he never really leaves that kitchen, ever. A strong plastic bowl with a dent on the edge where my metal spoon is resting, half of it bathing in the soup, is covered and kept warm like a bath. I miss warm showers and baths.

September 14th 2056 3:23AM

It's one of those nights where I can't sleep. Those are rare to occur to me. Like when your eyes are shut closed and all you see is black but you know where you are, who you are, and what you're exactly doing and it's annoying not being able to sleep but at least tomorrow's Friday. I can get some sleep in lunch maybe, but I worry someone will steal something from me. I should just close my journal and just go to bed, but I can't. I guess you need sleep every day. I can't function when something is forcing to keep me awake. Just as I was writing, I heard a metal door close upstairs, creak. My heart nervously pounded rapidly and I feared for my life, but the door to my bunker was well hidden. I hope no one followed me here. I swore that was a door closing--nothing just makes a squeal and slam unless it's a zombie. It could be one; hopefully it's not the fast ones. I'm gonna barricade my door and go to bed by staring in the dark.

September 14th 2056 7:34 AM

I lay on a bench right outside the doors of my school, using my backpack as a somewhat comfortable cushion with my legs hanging off the metal armrest making my blood rush to my feet. Just me writing seeing people walk off the buses looking at me as they walk by like I'm waiting for someone or writing about them. I mean no harm, unless you think I do. It's not my fault you give me a dirty look while I'm doing nothing but writing to myself. This bench I'm sitting on has a story about our infamous City Administrator that sat on this bench and took a photo with the principal of our school last year during the fall.

Last night was terrifying. Turns out it was windy last night, super windy. Surprisingly enough, the door in one of the rooms above my bunker blew open because the window in there is shattered; it's been shattered ever since.

GHOST GIRL

Alyssa Quinones

I awoke to a fog so thick that my surroundings were a blur. The sky was full of the mist and rain began to lightly fall through the clouds. I tried to make out through the heavy clouds where I was. My bare feet dragged against the ground, the dewy grass slipping between my toes. My head spun in confusion, my memory faint. I blinked a couple of times trying to adjust my eyes, but it failed. I reached up, gently rubbing the back of my hand across the two blurs and looked around again. It was clearer this time and I could just make out the cool gray tombstone to my right. Letters engraved deep into the rock and the years printed so clearly that you could tell they recently were placed here. I took a step forward reading a few of the others. "Margaret Jones," I read out loud to myself and kneeled slightly, feeling over the wet stone. I stared at it for a while wondering how she could have died. *Maybe a heart attack*, I thought to myself imagining what the corpse could have looked like during its time.

A quick snapping sound broke me away from my thoughts. I stood quickly, turning my head in the direction of the noise. I saw a small figure move deeper into the fog and I took a step closer. The figure turned into a dark shadow as the fog got heavier. Suddenly everything went clear and the small figure was standing at my feet. I looked down at the pale little girl. Her hair was blonde and braided cleanly. Her eyes were wide and dark, the closest to black as possible. Her small body was covered in a bleach-white nightgown, her feet bare like mine. "Are you lost?" I asked her, kneeling down to her level. I locked my eyes on her dark ones and searched in them. There was something not right about them, something empty and cold.

Her lips stretched into a smile and a light giggle escaped them. "No." She said continuing to laugh.

"Where are your parents?" I asked her as she began to slowly walk backwards, still laughing.

"Come play with me," she said in a giggle. She turned and began running in the other direction and I found myself chasing after her.

"Wait!" I called out in confusion, but she wouldn't stop. She grew more and more distant the faster I ran until suddenly I lost sight of her. I stopped running and took a breath, wondering where the little girl could have gone off to. I leaned against a tree and let myself slide down until I reached the ground. I could feel the wet grass staining the butt of my pants and for the first time I questioned why I was barefoot. I began pulling at the grass, the water seeping under my nails when I saw something move from the corner of my eye. My head snapped up and saw the fragile girl standing above me. Her eyes burned into mine with a sense of something sinister.

"Who are you?" I asked her again, slowly picking myself up from the ground.

"My name is Ashley Clifford," she finally answered and smiled wide.

"Where's your mom, Ashley?" I asked her in a soft, sweet tone. She responded with sad eyes, tears puddling in them.

“She’s not here. I can’t find her,” she said blinking to release the warm droplets. “Can you help me find her?” She cried and I wrapped my arms around her comfortingly.

“Sure, let’s go,” I said and stood up tall taking her hand in mine.

We walked through the smog, desperately searching for the lost girl’s mother. The sky spiraled in gray clouds and the leaves circled above the ground. We walked through the graveyard, searching as the little girl continued to cry out. She yanked her hand out of mine and began running again. “Ashley! Wait!” I called out chasing after her. Once again she was lost and I was left to stand around wondering what was happening. Suddenly there was a faint light on the ground in the distance. I followed the twinkle until I reached a woman sitting on the ground. Her body was placed directly in front of a tombstone and I could hear the soft sobs escaping her lips. To the right side of the stone was a lit candle and a picture frame. I felt my stomach drop as I analyzed the person in the frame.

“I died at six. It was murder they said.” I heard from behind me and turned slowly, seeing the same pale girl walking towards me. “She comes here once a week to talk, but I don’t hear anything,” the girl said, looking down and I moved closer to the collapsed woman on the floor. I could finally make the name out on the stone, *Ashley Clifford*.

“So...You’re dead?” My lips shook as I choked the words out.

“Aren’t you?” She asked me and I snapped my head looking back at her.

“What?” I asked her and suddenly realized I couldn’t feel a thing. I could not hear nor feel my heart beating and I realized for the first time I was not breathing. “No...No!” I yelled at her and ran past her looking around. Suddenly the fog cleared up completely revealing a tombstone in front of me. If I could feel anything I would have felt nauseous. “Anabella Marie,” I whispered to myself reading the name engraved into the hard rock. I fell to my knees in front of it, my hand lightly running over the cool stone.

“How ... How did this happen?” I asked out loud. It was impossible. There was no way I could be dead. “You’re a liar!” I screamed at the little girl. “Where am I?!” I questioned grabbing her by the shoulders. “Tell me!” I yelled as I shook her and she began screaming. The sound was so piercing I reached up quickly and covered my ears. My scream mixed with hers as I fell to the ground trying to fade the sound out. In an instant everything went black, and the only thing left to hear was the sound of my breath echoing throughout my head.

Screams echoed everywhere. Images of children being ripped from their parents' arms took over my vision as warm tears melted my cold skin. "Mom?" I yelled as bodies crashed into me causing me to stumble around. "Mommy!" I cried. My small hands grabbed onto sleeves of people, pushing and stumbling through the crowd. I tripped over someone's foot, hitting the muddy ground. My hands sunk into the ground as the cold mud splashed up onto my face. I looked up seeing men and women running and screaming for their lives. In the distance I caught a quick glimpse of my mother's long black hair that was pinned back and held together by a small bow. "Mom," I screamed and jumped to my feet. I pushed past everyone, my feet sinking into the ground as I tried to run towards her.

"Kylie!" I heard as I grew closer and closer. My heart raced and the sound of it beating filled my ears more with each step.

"Mom!" I yelled again when I was pulled back. My mom turned around meeting her eyes with mine. I could see the fear change to relief and then back to fear. I was dragged backwards by someone I could not see. I fought against their grip, trying to break free but I was too small and too weak. I watched as my mother ran after me, tears plastered her face as screams broke through her trembling mouth. Suddenly, a lifeless hand came from behind her grabbing her throat and ripping it out. I watched as blood spurted out of her and her insides fell to the ground. We held eye contact as her knees slowly crashed to the floor and the monster that lingered behind her bent down, biting and tearing at the rest of her neck. I watched in shock. My body became numb as the image clouded my vision. I wanted to break free, I wanted to save her but I knew that I couldn't. "NO!" I screamed. My voice broke through my mouth like a volcanic explosion. Every feeling, every emotion broke through me, spilled out of me in that scream. I tried to fight the guard who had dragged me back. "NO! MOM!" I screeched and kicked on the ground making the mud splash up.

Eventually the guard grew tired of me fighting him and threw me over his shoulder. I began punching and slapping the guard, while screams and cries escaped from me. Suddenly, my body became airborne as the guard threw me off his shoulder and into the back of a van. I hit the ground with a bang and I lay there, curled into a ball as the tears began again. I covered my hot face with my cold hands as the tears melted my skin again. I was drenched in dirt and tears and I couldn't find the energy to stop crying. I felt a hand touch my back, making me sit up quickly and back up towards the side of the van. I looked around for the first time noticing I wasn't the only crying child here. I made eye contact with little boys and girls who were weeping about how scared they were. Their tears made mine stop and I noticed one little boy was closer to me than the rest.

"It's okay, don't be scared," he said to me and I analyzed him. He was a tall little kid with dark brown hair and green eyes. "You're okay," he said reaching his hand out to me and I stared at it. He was a scrawny little thing. His shirt was ripped up and he had dried blood on his

face. I grabbed his hand and he pulled me onto my feet. "What's your name?" He said and I kept my eyes low. In a small broken voice I responded with the only thing I knew I had left now, my name.

"Kylie," I said playing with my fingers.

"I'm Jackson," he said when the van began to shake.

"Okay, kids. Forget who you were, forget where you came from or your family. You are all each other have now," a guard yelled from the other side of the van and I looked around at all the kids. Some looked scared, some began to cry, but Jackson and I stood there, emotionless and listened. I thought of my mom screaming my name. The broken cries vibrated my name through the crowd of monsters until it just slightly reached my ear with an agonizing pang of hurt.

"Kylie!" It replayed in my head. I could no longer hear the guard. Jackson was whispering something to me but all I could hear was my name repeating over and over again.

"Kylie!" She cried.

"Kylie!"

I awoke with sweat plastered across my face and my hair matted on my forehead. My body jumped up as I looked around frantically.

"Kylie? Are you okay?" I heard and looked straight ahead seeing Carla staring at me.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I said, sighing and pushing my hair out of my face.

"Did you have another nightmare?" She asked and I kept my eyes low, nodding.

"I'm fine, though," I said pushing the blankets off my sweaty figure and jumped out of bed. I reached for my towel and headed down to the showers. All that I could think of was my mother's screams echoing through the crowd of broken families and monsters. Her cries scratched out of her throat and tears drenched her face as her flesh was ripped from her. The images remained so vivid over the years and it seemed like each time I thought of it, I could see it clearer.

Tears dropped from my chin onto the ground as I dragged myself to the shower, turning it on and allowing the steam to melt the walls. I peeled my clothes off and stepped into the steam, allowing the water to wash away the remainder of the horrid images. I watched as the water created a thin layer over my mutilated skin. When you are forced to watch the one person you love most in life die before your very eyes, it fucks you up mentally. I sighed and let the warm pellets hit my body as I closed my eyes, trying to relax.

"Hurry up! We have training in 10!" Someone yelled into the bathroom, startling me. I washed up quickly and dried off twice as quick.

We trained in a small grey gym. Knives and guns lined the walls and in the middle was a boxing ring where we learned to fight. I walked over to the wall covered in small knives and grabbed two of them. I twirled them between my fingers and gripped the handles tightly as I began to think of the first time I had used these.

"You're going to have to learn to fight if you want to survive," James said. He was the guard who had helped gather us all as kids and kept us hidden in the bunker. He was also the asshole who forced us to fight.

"I'm tired," one kid said and plopped on the ground.

"Your exhaustion is what will be your downfall, get up and fight!" He yelled, grabbing the boy's arm and pulling him up. "Fight her," he said pointing at me. I looked at them both in shock and fear. I had never fought a day in my life. I was only six and never had a worry in the world other than what color I should draw the clouds. Seeing what happened to my mom, and what they did to her, I knew that I had no choice if I wanted to live.

"She's a girl," the boy said. I thought about the pain I felt without my mother knowing that she would never be with me again. The rage grew in me until steam escaped from my ears. Suddenly I felt my body move and slam against the young boy. He flew to the ground and jumped back up, running at me. I took a blow to the face causing me to fall back onto the ground. I could see the boy grow with anger. Bigger and bigger until he was beating the crap out of me. I tried to crawl away as he kicked me in the ribs and I collapsed, my lungs begging for air.

"Help," I tried to say through gasps. I looked up at Jackson who had been standing against the wall watching us fight. His eyes were filled with anger when he saw my face and I noticed he had a knife in his hand. He placed it on the ground and kicked it over to me. I tried to reach for it and ended up getting kicked in the ribs again.

"You will die if you don't fight back!" James said and I spit blood onto the ground.

"Kylie!" I heard my mother's voice calling me. I saw her throat being ripped out all over again and wish that there was something I could have done, some way to save her. I looked at the knife by my side and thought of how to save her. I could save her. I gathered all my strength and reached for the knife again. I swung my arm back and cut the boy in the arm. He fell back, crying out as blood poured out of him and I got up backing away. Blood began to surround him. It became a puddle and I grew guilty. This wasn't me; this wasn't who I was. But this was who I had to become.

This place was a hell. We practiced on each other, hurt each other. I grew more tired each and every day of waiting to get out, to see the world. All I could really remember about my past was my mother's death. There was not a remembrance of good times, of laughter. The only thing that has ever been able to cloud my memory was the vivid image of my mother's fearful eyes. I wanted out. Out of this hellhole that kept us trapped from the outside world. I wanted to see the sun, feel fresh air.

"What are you thinking about?" I heard a voice next to me. I looked and saw Carla.

"I'm thinking about getting the fuck out of here," I said looking at the knife in my hand and twirling it around. "I can't be here anymore." Frustration echoed through my voice.

"It's dangerous out there... We can't leave," she said and I shook my head.

"We have to. Do you want to stay in here the rest of your life?! Trapped? We'll run out of food and water, what then? We'll slowly disintegrate until there's nothing left but our dried out

corpses!” I said in frustration. I noticed that it wasn’t just Carla I was talking to anymore, but everyone else was staring at me and listening. I watched as their eyes begged for me to continue speaking. I knew I wasn’t the only one here feeling this way and I knew without making a move, we would eventually die.

“We need to get out,” I said as they all gathered around me and I looked at each and every one of them. “We can’t stay here any longer. We have trained. We know how to fight, how to defend ourselves. We can’t continue to stay here knowing that eventually we will run out of what we need!” I said firmly and got nods of agreement.

“You think you guys can survive out there? You will all die,” I heard James’ voice from the back of the crowd.

“We will die either way,” I said as he walked towards me until we were face to face. “I’m leaving... anyone who wishes to join, can,” I said looking around at everyone. “Gather all your belongings and prepare to leave tomorrow morning.”

I walked away from the crowd after that and let out a breath that I was holding in. I didn’t know if we would make it out there for more than a couple of minutes, but I knew that I was determined to try.

“Kylie, are you crazy?!” Carla was hurrying after me as I walked back to my bunk.

“No, I’m realistic,” I said to her, avoiding her glance. Carla and I met the very first day we got thrown into the van except at that time she was known as Jackson. Over the years he transformed into a she, thanks to the medical supply we had and she also became our doctor. “Think about it Carla, we’re going to run out of the necessities and then what? We die either way. Why not try and fight for freedom. We’re strong; we can do this.”

We walked in silence to my bunk and I turned looking at her. “I’m going to pack my things and wait at the opening at the crack of dawn. Those who wish to join will meet me there and if not... I’ll go alone.” I turned and walked into the dark calmness of my room.

I awoke with urgency. Anxiety overwhelmed me as I packed all my belongings. I kept thinking to myself that this was for the best but the fear was hard to hide. *What if I lead them to their deaths?* I thought about how my mother had died and images of everyone here dying the same way was on constant replay. “I have to do this; I have to break out of here. I have to be strong,” I kept telling myself as I zipped up my black leather jacket and tied up my combat boots. I walked out of my bunk and hurried over to the training room where I grabbed a bunch of knives and guns along with packs of bullets, throwing them into my bag. I took a step back and thought about everything I was leaving behind. I thought about my life, and how in a couple of hours it could be over.

“Mommy!” I cried as I ran from Bella. She was our new four month old puppy. Her fur was a soft brown and she had just begun teething.

My mom held out her arms and picked me up, throwing me into the air. “You’re fine, relax” she said laughing softly at me.

"She bit me," I said giving the small puppy an angry look.

"You're bigger than her and stronger than her, don't be scared. It was a love bite," she said smiling and pushed my hair from my face.

"I'm strong!" I yelled giggling.

"You'll always be my strong girl; you will be a leader one day."

Her words reiterated in my head. I looked down at my trembling hands and closed my eyes, taking a breath. With sudden determination my eyes flew open and I strapped a gun to my hip and a knife to the other side. I picked my bag up and threw it over my shoulders before heading for the opening.

I waited for what seemed like forever. The realization that I would have to fight alone hit me and I began to feel weak again. I admired the grey walls and the warmth that surrounded us all. I would no longer have a bed, nor a warm place to sleep, but I would have myself and my strength and freedom. Before I could rethink my plan, I reached for the big handle on the steel door.

"Kylie, wait!" I heard as I slowly began to push it open.

I turned in an instant and my eyes teared as I saw them. Carla and the others were gathered together with their bags and weapons.

"You aren't alone." Carla said walking over to me. "We have to be free, we need to be free." She said placing her hand on my shoulder and the feeling of comfort shot through me.

"Then let's go." I said nodding at them and pushed the door open. Little did I know that that moment would change our lives for the worse.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOUT MAN

Evan Stambouloupoulos

The story all began on a sunny day. In a nice house with leaves scattered around the yard as if it had a nice coat on it. But in the house were two teens by the names of Jerry and Dan. They loved paranormal activity things like horror movies and talking with spirits, but soon after they would not like it anymore because they would learn that they made a mistake because of a board. As Jerry and Dan were watching a movie, Jerry had an idea to go to an abandoned funeral home where all the dead bodies were and see if they could communicate with them by using the Ouija board.

Dan said, "Are you crazy? Didn't you hear about the guy that used it in his own house? The guy used it only once and got scratches the next day and would hear in his ears something saying 'You're going to die in our hands.' This had been going on for five years then he got married to a woman named Nancy. She got married with this guy that used the board and he got the curse on her, too. But then they had a baby boy and he only lived for three days in the house and the ghost killed him in his sleep. But the parents thought it was from a sickness, but it wasn't. Then they tried to have another kid, but all she kept getting were miscarriages all the time. Then one day the wife went crazy because she kept hearing in her head, 'it's all your fault,' and she killed herself and the husband did too, then the ghost disappeared from the house since they all died."

Jerry was scared of the story but still wanted to go the abandoned funeral home to talk to some spirits. Then Jerry said, "I have a plan but we go the funeral home at the crack of midnight before Halloween ends and say two questions to the spirits and then we will be on our merry way, got it?"

Dan said, "Okay. I'll meet you then."

It was 11:20, almost midnight. Dan met Jerry there and he brought that board with him. Jerry said, "Are you ready?"

Dan said "Yes." But he wanted to get this all over this so he could make Jerry happy.

They set up the board up and the candles. As they did that, Dan felt a cold breeze up his back as if someone put a bag of ice on him and Jerry felt the same way, too.

Jerry said, "Are there any spirits with us?"

The board was moving saying "YES," but Dan thought it was Jerry doing it. He was wrong; Jerry was as white as a vanilla ice cream, but they still continued.

Dan asked, "Who died in this building?"

It said, "YOU."

They got so scared and wanted to leave, but Jerry had to ask one more question.

He asked, "What is your name?"

The board said "THE GOUT MAN."

They had heard that name before from their parents as a myth, but it was true. Then they let go of the board and the board piece was moving rapidly saying, "YOU ARE GOING TO DIE WHERE YOU STAND."

The candles went out. The room was so dark they couldn't see a thing, but they did see something: a large black figure in the corner with big horns approaching with large sharp claws, saying, "I'm gonna get you" four times.

They started running for their lives like there was no tomorrow. They had to break the door open because it was sealed tight. So, Jerry broke it with the hammer he brought, just in case this happened. They made it out safe and sound but the beast turned back into the house and they went home quickly and wanted to forget this ever happened and now they watch comedies instead of horror movies.

A NIGHT TO FORGET* (excerpt)

Griffon Valerio

3:44 am. The phone rings. Marissa answers.

Panting, in a heavy panicked breath, “There’s something you should know in case I don’t come back.”

She’s confused. This is the first thing she hears as her best friend calls in the middle of the night? She was half expecting before answering he would ask for a ride like, usual. But this is different—she can tell—his breathing is quick and scared. She hears him shuffling the phone, moving around, and after each movement there is a pause.

“Mason, what’s going on? It’s late, is everything ok?” She asks, fully aware this is not the case.

“I don’t know what’s going on. I got chased by a bunch of guys after I left this party. I’ve been running for like six blocks. I finally ducked into an old burnt out house.” He forces a laugh. There is tension in his voice, a sort of highly strained awareness—no fear, just alertness.

“Where are you? Let me come get you! I’ll call the police!”

“Please don’t hang up. I called you for a reason.”

She hears a sound besides his raspy panicked breath—growling, howling, like a rabid dog mixed with a satanic raccoon. Whatever it is clearly isn’t human. She panics, calling out to him again, pleading, “Please tell me where you are! What’s happening? What are those horrible sounds? Let me come get y—”

He cuts her off, “Please Marissa just shut up. Listen. I called you because I don’t think I’m getting out alive. I don’t know what these psychos want but they haven’t said a word; they just keep screaming and shouting. I managed to hide but they know I’m here. They’re hunting me like a damn animal. Look, I waited too long to tell you this, but I figure now is a better time than any. I love you. I’ve loved you since the day I met you. I know you’re scared and I know that once this is over you will hurt for a long time. But don’t mourn me. Live your life. You’re the strongest person I’ve ever met, it’s one of the reasons I fell for you in the first place. I’m gonna miss you.”

She holds back bursting tears. She wants to hang up, but can’t knowing this may be the last time she ever hears his voice. She manages to hoarsely spout out a few scattered words. Her voice shakes as she speaks. She can hear him breathing heavier and it feels like an elephant is sitting on her chest, “Please tell me where you are, don’t do this.”

He forces out another laugh, “It isn’t up to me. I’m sorry for this. I never meant to—”

Glass breaks. “Crap, I knocked over a lamp.” Then once again, the low gut-wrenching screams. “Oh no, they heard it! They see me! I gotta run!” And run he does. She hears footsteps,

* This story won 1st place in the 2017 Stamford Literary Competition

his, then another set, then another until it sounds like a stampede. “A door, thank God!” Heavy breathing. A slamming door. Dead weight pounding against solid wood.

He sounds way calmer than he should be. He sighs heavily, “Okay, that door won’t hold, but I’m safe for now. Weapon. I gotta find a weapon.” Marissa hears a rattling of drawers, panicked breathing, a couple of angry obscenities under his breath. A driver, of course.”

With what sounds like bodies ramming against the door, Marissa finally speaks, “A what? Why are you complaining? At least it’s something! And why were you even looking for that? You should be hiding or running! Not getting ready to fight a mob of crazies!”

“I’m complaining because I suck at golf! What am I gonna—”

Over the span of the next minute Marissa can only hear a few things: the cracking of wood, her friend saying swearing and dropping the phone, those screams again, and the charging of footsteps.

Mason screams, Come on then! Give it your best shot!”

Bodies thud against a hardwood floor and with a crunch, he call ends with a dial tone. Marissa is left there, speechless, crying. The last thing she sees is his face on the contact photo on her phone. She finally speaks but can only muster a sentence, “What the hell was that?”

For the next few moments, she sits staring at her friend’s picture, unable to know if he got away, if he’s hurt, or worse. “What can I do now? I hope he’s okay. Okay, okay, calm down, he’s tough. He can take care of himself, he’ll be fine. The cops! I’ll call the cops!”

She fumbles with the phone trying to dial 9-1-1. When she finally does hit the call button, her worst fears are realized, “We are experiencing an overload of calls at this time, if you have an emergency please hang up and try again.”

“What does that mean?” She sticks her phone in her pocket and heads downstairs. It’s Friday and her mom works third shift at the hospital downtown. The last time Marissa spoke to her mom was when she got home from school. A yellow post-it note hangs on the fridge that she hadn’t noticed before: *Sweetie, I didn’t have time to go shopping but there’s some canned stuff and leftovers, and some Lunchables your brother never ate. I love you. No parties or boys over while I’m gone! Be safe!*

Marissa stares at the note awhile longer, realizing now that she’s all alone and confused and then it dawns on her, “The news! Why didn’t I think of that?”

Turning on the TV and switching to the news, she sees a news station that looks like a twister went through it, and one man in front of the camera, hair disheveled with a scared look on his face:

“THIS IS AN URGENT WARNING. THIS IS NOT A TEST. CITIZENS ARE URGED TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOMES AND WAIT FOR SUPPORT FROM THE NATIONAL GUARD. THIS IS NOT A DRILL. WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS OF SEVERAL ATTACKS ACROSS THE CITY. INDIVIDUALS ARE ATTACKING CIVILIANS, SHOWING HEIGHTENED SIGNS OF AGRESSION, AND EVEN CANNABALISM. WE DO NOT YET KNOW IF THIS IS A TERRORIST ATTACK OR SOMETHING MUCH MORE

COMPLEX. I STATE AGAIN, CITIZENS ARE URGED TO STAY PUT UNTIL HELP ARRIVES. ALRIGHT, THAT'S IT, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. I GOTTA GET MY FAMILY AND GET OUT OF THIS CITY...THIS IS AN URGENT WARNING—."

Marissa turns off the TV as the broadcast repeats. "What do I do now? I gotta get Jonah and get to Mom! As she screams this, a loud thump emits from upstairs, from her brother's room. She calls out to him as she makes her way up the steps. "Jonah? Jonah!" As she yells, the banging gets louder and she hears noises similar to what she heard when Mason called. "Jonah?" Then she hears it, that gut-wrenching scream she heard over the phone. The slamming against the door grows harsher, the clawing of nails on wood, stronger.

She turns the knob and pushes the door open and is met by the eyes of her brother, or what is left of her brother. Every orifice on Jonah's head has old and fresh blood pouring out of them, his shirt torn and bloodied, and his pupils so big his eyes mirrored a shark's—the whites bloodshot red. Though she only has a second to notice before the monster that was once her brother lunges at her and tackles her to the floor. She holds him back by the shoulders, knees him in the ribcage and darts downstairs to the kitchen.

"What do I do? Mason said something about a weapon!"

She roots through the kitchen junk drawer and pulls out a screwdriver just as Jonah comes barreling down the stairs, screeching the whole way. He stops on all fours when he spots Marissa.

"Jonah, listen to me! I know you're in there somewhere this isn't you!" Her words are thrown at him to no avail. He lets out a high-pitched un-human scream and throws all his weight in lunging towards her again. She ducks under and out of the way. He hits his head against the counter and staggers. As he turns back around, Marissa runs full speed at him screwdriver raised, "I'm sorry, Jonah!" With a loud splorch she stands back to see the handle sticking out of his eye socket. She falls to the floor, across from him and lets out a deep breath.

"What now?" It's around 6 am and in the quiet of the morning, as the sun begins to come up, there is a knock at the door.

THE WOUND

Griffon Valerio

The sound of sirens, firemen boots walking on broken glass, men and women screaming and shouting, though it sounded like nothing but white noise. The world felt upside down, maybe that's because it was. The papers said the car was found on fire and upside down. I don't really remember much of that night. We were driving back from the movies to see *Super 8* for my 18th birthday. I was asleep in the back seat, my dad was driving, and my mom was in the passenger seat. All I really remember was the blinding high beams of the pick-up truck that plowed into us, and then CRASH. There was spinning I think; I felt myself get cut on the forehead, then everything went black.

The sound of sirens woke me up. I saw men scrambling outside the car walking on the sky. It smelled of gas and smoke. There was a fire right next to me and I screamed as I realized my jacket sleeve had caught. That's the only way they knew I wasn't dead, so they worked harder to pull me out, funny. They pulled me out and wrapped me in a heavy blanket and sat me on the back of the ambulance to "assess the damage" as they put it. I was still in shock. If I remember correctly it was around then--with blood falling down my face and my arm and back stinging--I went numb and didn't feel a thing as I watched the firefighters running and yelling as they were trying to put the fire out. With a loud BOOM the whole car burst into flames SHAKING the ground. I didn't move. I didn't scream. I just watched in horror as my parents cooked inside that steel deathtrap. There were no screams, so I knew they weren't alive that long to feel it.

Everything went black again after that thought.

I woke up in the hospital three days later. A nurse brought me a newspaper and told me what had happened. I had third degree burns on my right arm, shoulder, and back. Then she helped me to the bathroom. I saw my face after she took the bandages off: a big ugly gash across my eye. They shaved my head to stitch it up. The cut went pretty far back. She said I was lucky it didn't get caught in my eye. Maybe so. Doesn't matter so much these days, nothing does.

LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS (excerpt)

Kathryn Zingone

The morning air had a harsh chill, making it even harder to wake up early. I zipped up my jacket tightly, and stepped outside to face the day. Even though it was currently below freezing, in just a few short hours the temperature would probably skyrocket to the 90's. In Gemovia, things like the weather and resources were always changing. One minute my family's crops would thrive, only to find the soil dried out the next. I know the weather has a lot to do with this, but I've always wondered if there was something else controlling it.

Gemovia has simple rules, but if you don't obey them the consequences are harsh. Gemovia wanted its citizens to embody all of the characteristics of someone that led a simple life. We were expected to hunt and grow our own food, to not live beyond our means, and to prepare for change always. Violence was something that was used to solve disputes.

I knew that on the other side of town there was what society called "The Reckless." Owning only the clothes they wore, these people took the law into their own hands. Every night, they would hold controlled fights and rallies for the whole city to come and watch. I never understood why the people and the government found fighting so interesting, and it was something I had never wanted to take part in. It's little things like these that always made me question what Gemovia's true intentions are with its people, and my mind can never seem to shake the feeling that someone's always watching.

As I walked along the dirt road, watching the dust rise up from the ground in soft clouds, the air was already starting to warm up. These were the moments I enjoyed. Walking in the peace and quiet, the world looked softer when it was covered in nature. The city was too harsh and the air was too claustrophobic, but out here I could just breathe. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I caught a small gleam of silvery light embedded deep in a bush. Full of curiosity, I made my way to the bush and there behind a few leaves, was a tiny, bright camera. The camera, not even bigger than the palm of my hand, looked like nothing I'd ever seen before. It was a dark gray color with a long lens extending almost to the end of my fingertips. On the side it read "Property of Gemovia Government: Division Two." On the back, engraved in bold was written, "Be the best version of yourself." Staring down at the camera, I wasn't completely sure what to do next. Shoving it deep in my jacket pocket, my mind swirled with a million different thoughts.

Was Gemovia watching us? More importantly, why? No longer taking time to watch the dust clouds slowly seeping up beneath my feet, I picked up the pace and hurried to the market. Once the market was in view, I could see Dom's soft silhouette, with his back turned helping a customer. For as long as I could remember, Dom had been my best friend. From climbing trees when we were little, to walking down to the abandoned movie theater on the outskirts of town, he was always by my side. Eager to show him the camera I shouted walking towards him, "Hey Dom! How's it going at the market today?"

Turning around and flashing me a smile, he replied saying, "Little slow but still good what's up?"

Seeing his smile and the way his eyes twinkled when he was happy immediately made me feel an instant wave of guilt. He was obviously in a good mood right now, and I knew that telling him about the camera would just make him worried. Plastering a fake smile, I quickly took my hand out of my pocket and let it drop by my side. "Oh, it's nothing. Just wanted to come say hey," I replied.

Unfortunately, he knew I was lying as soon as the words left my mouth, and scooting closer his smile faded. Leaning in so our eyes met, he whispered, "Seriously what's wrong? Did you find something?" Dom was just as suspicious as I was about Gemovia and the government's true intentions, so he was always on high alert.

Motioning my eyes to the alley at the end of the street, we quickly scurried through the eager shoppers to talk in private. Once we were in the alley and I was sure no one could hear us, I stuck my hand in my pocket to reveal the camera.

"Where did you find this?" He asked, his eyes squinting in the dimmed light of the alley to read the words on the back.

"I was walking down the road just outside of town and I saw a ray of light inside some bush. It must have been reflecting off of the sun, so I walked over to it and there it was plain as day."

In his big hands full of calluses from working at the shop, the camera looked even smaller. "What pictures do you think are on it?" He asked.

Taking a deep breath and looking both ways just to double check that we were alone, I pressed the cool silver button on the top of the camera. I clicked on the most recent picture, and I couldn't believe what stared back at me. Right there on the tiny screen was me. I stood speechless taking in countless pictures of a girl who mirrored me completely. The only difference was a long silver streak in her ponytail.

Annoyed that I hadn't said anything, Dom took the camera and looked at the pictures. It only took him a quick glance at the screen to say, "Oh my God, she looks just like you" he whispered in astonishment. Scrolling through the pictures, he continued talking, "Who do you think she is? How come we've never seen her before? I thought Gemovia was the only thing left. What are you going to do now?"

Turning my heel on him to move deeper into the ally, I turned around to meet his eyes and whispered back fiercely, "I'm going to find her." Looking straight ahead, I walked into the darkness before me.

BATHING SUIT BLUES

Gabrielle Baldassare

It was a beautiful day to go outside. The sky was as blue as the ocean, void of any clouds. The sun was blindingly bright, automatically putting me in a great mood and the trees were dancing to the music of the wind. My family and I had plans to go to the beach and I couldn't be any more thrilled to spend time with them. Relaxing in the sun, finding cool seashells with my niece is what I looked forward to. My mom, just days before, took me shopping to find a bathing suit and I could not wait to show it to everyone.

As I walked towards the beach, I made sure that I had the necessities needed to enjoy the day to the fullest. With me I carried, sunscreen, water, my phone, my headphones and my keys. With my new bathing suit I carried the confidence I never knew I had. I also carried two of my favorite things. The book I was currently reading and my camera. I always carry a book with me no matter where I go. For me it is a way to escape reality and take part in big adventures. Nothing is better than relaxing in the sun, reading a good book while hearing the sound of the waves hitting the shore. The camera was so that I could capture the lasting happy memories that today would create. I could look back at them and remember the feeling of joy and love that my family provided. But most importantly, I carried a smile so wide that my face hurt, knowing that I was going to have an amazing day.

As I arrived to the beach I quickly spotted my family. I walked towards them with such enthusiasm that it was hard not to notice.

"Aunt Gabby," my 3-year-old niece screamed while running to hug me. She ran right into my legs causing me to lose my balance and fall into the scratchy sand. My niece and I started to laugh hysterically.

"Hi Ava," I said while laughing, "Are you excited to play?"

"Yeah," her sweet voice mumbled. "Aunt Gabby come look at the pretty shells I found," she tried to say getting up with a start and dragged me to her pink pail and shovel.

"Wow, those are so pretty" I encouraged her, making her smile.

"I know," she said making my family and I laugh.

I lay my beach towel down and sit looking around the noisy beach. All around families and friends were hanging out enjoying themselves. Children ran from their parents with their chubby legs, their older siblings following closely behind. People were dancing to their blaring music and a group of friends were getting ready to start an intense volleyball game. Overall everyone seemed to be having the time of their lives with no concerns in the world.

As the day progressed, I became more confident with myself and my new bathing suit as I realized no one cared or watched me spend time with my family. I no longer carried the insecurity and social anxiety that I masked behind my happiness. I was having a great time and couldn't wait to get in the water to cool my sweaty skin.

"Hey Ava, you want to go look for more seashells down by the water?" I asked my niece who was currently enjoying covering her dad up in sand.

“YEAH,” she yelled and started running towards her bucket.

“Make sure you watch her,” my brother announced. I nodded my head and grabbed my niece’s hand making my way down to the shore.

Walking down I noticed there was three other teenagers close to where my niece and I were. They all were skinny and had on bikinis. It made me lose some of my confidence. I wanted to introduce myself and try to make friends with them, but I couldn’t. I carried too much fear to do so.

I was playing with Ava, having a splash war, when I noticed that the same girls from before kept on looking in our direction. They were smirking at us. I thought maybe it was because they thought me and my niece were funny because we were throwing water at each other. I waved and smiled back which resulted in them laughing and turning their backs towards us. I quickly put my hand down and tried not to think too much of it. After a while I saw them doing it again but this time they were talking and pointing.

They were not that far away, so I could hear parts of their conversation--though I wish I hadn’t.

“She really shouldn’t wear that. She’s too big for it,” one of them said making the others giggle. I froze. Who were they talking about? It couldn’t have been me, right? I looked around and realized that only my niece and I were near them. Oh no. It was me they were talking about. It had to be.

“I know she looks awful in it. That bathing suit is only for skinny people.” I looked down afraid that if I looked at them then I would start crying. I tried to ignore their taunting looks and sinister laughs, but it hurt too much.

“Come on Ava, let’s go get some water,” I said pulling her towards the sand. Walking towards my family seemed to take forever. The sand, once colorful became pale and burned my feet, the rocks breaking the skin. The sun seemed to find its way behind the only cloud in the sky, keeping itself hidden. My shoulders felt heavy as if I was still submerged in the unclean saltwater, as if I carried all of my stresses on my back. Walking that shameful distance I carried the taunting smirks of those girls. I carried the judging eye of everyone who was watching me in that restricting bathing suit. I carried society’s rules that big girls couldn’t wear what skinny girls could, that big girls are not allowed to feel confident, pretty or important. But what I carried the most was the suffocating pain from embarrassment.

“Hey what’s wrong?” my mom asked me.

“Nothing, just a little tired. Might be from the heat,” I lied giving a fake smile. The day went on and I couldn’t shake the feeling that everyone was watching me, judging me. I carried the feeling of not belonging. I carried the made up thoughts of those around me. I walked back to my house with my shoulder slumped from carrying all the pain, my head down so no one had to see my tear-stained face. But out of everything I carried back, I did not carry the smile that I started my day with.

BODY IMAGE RANT*

Grace Ferrante

Ever since I was a kid, I've always had this image of myself that has been ingrained in my brain for as long as I can remember. People tell me otherwise but I will never get over the fact that I will always look like this no matter how hard I try. This has been an issue of mine ever since boys were pointing and laughing at me when I wore a bikini for the first time. My stomach hasn't seen the light of day since then. I miss being able to wear a two piece swimsuit and feeling confident in what I'm wearing in general.

Many women have the same issue as I do and I want there to be a change. There have been way too many cases where girls have stopped eating to fit the satisfactory level of society, including me. I wasn't eating as much as I needed to especially when I was dancing for the musical. This caused me to have some health issues. One day I almost passed out because my body couldn't take what I was doing to it. This was my body's way of telling me that I needed to eat.

I took rehearsals for the musical as an excuse to not eat so I could lose weight quicker. This was not the case for me. I don't know if I lost or gained any but I did notice a difference with my mental health. I wanted so badly to meet the standards and the expectations of society but I'm just not built that way and it does make me sad, because women with that body type are usually the ones who are chosen to be models or wear a certain style of clothes and they are the more attractive ones. To this day, I still don't understand why it is such a big deal to be a size 2, but I cannot live up to that standard. So I have to be like everybody else unless there's something about me that really stands out.

A friend sent me a video telling the story of a plus size woman who did not eat and lost a lot of weight for a photoshoot, which she ended up being turned away from. They said that she was "much too big"....at a size 2!! I can't stand the fact that the fashion industry is pressuring women to be a size 0 and have them pretty much starve themselves to make them look better when they just use Photoshop anyways!! This makes me so angry and I do not want it to exist anymore. There is much more women can do rather than to sit still and look pretty.

I've spent years asking my close friends what the hell is wrong with me because people didn't want to be around me, this was because I thought the reason behind it was that I wasn't pretty or that I was too fat and they didn't like kids who were fat. But then years later I found out that wasn't the case--but let's not get into that. But still, I will always have this image ingrained in my head that won't escape my mind. But now I need to start accepting my body for what it is, along with every woman in the world and the industry.

* This essay was also published online at *Teen Ink*

I remember the best summer of my life. It was the summer of 2013. That summer was full of events and memories that I'm sure I'll remember it pretty much all my life. I lived in Jamaica in 2013, and almost every summer my older brother Jason and I would travel to Connecticut to spend time with our family. We really enjoyed and took advantage of these visits because back in Jamaica we didn't have as much fun. Unfortunately, that year Jason could not make it to Connecticut with me because he had a summer job, which he couldn't abandon, so I had to travel by myself for the first time ever.

The plane ride was great though; I always enjoyed them anyways. There were three seats in a row and I was assigned the end seat, which was the not-so-great part because the lady who got the window seat kept it closed for most of the flight. I did, however, get to look through the window across from me in the other row. I watched as the world became smaller beneath me, until we were high up in the clouds. It was really breath-taking to see all the clouds surrounding me. It made me feel calm, tranquil, precious. For most of the airplane ride, I fell asleep to the provided music. The earphones the air hostess gave to us were uncomfortably hard, like a stone piercing into my ear, but I eventually got used to them. I have to admit, travelling alone can be quite frustrating, especially when it's your first time.

We spent the first week at my aunt's house, going to the beach, playing badminton, skating, riding, feeding the birds. Bowling, watching action movies and typically all that fun summer stuff we all enjoy doing. I also found out that even though Jamaica had a hot climate, on particular days, Connecticut was worst. By early July, we packed and my grandfather drove us to the airport in New York. One thing about traveling is that you have to be patient, because they always tell you to come early and then you end up waiting for what could even be an hour. We slowly boarded the airplane and they checked our passports and boarding tickets as we went through. I love that drop feeling you get in your stomach when the airplane takes off and lands.

We arrived at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport at around 12:00 noon. However, we couldn't check into the hotel as yet because we booked it for 2:00 p.m. And when my aunt called to ask if we could come in a little earlier, they told us 1:00 would be a suitable time for them. So, we went over to one of the airport's fast food restaurants and we ate and talked. At first it was just me, my aunt, and my cousin, Anna. My sister Alison was driving all the way from Georgia and my aunt's best friend Angela was on a plane to Florida. By the end of that day everyone had arrived safely and ready for our cruise which was three days away. While we were at the hotel, we often went down to the pool. We also tried to go to a nearby beach but everywhere was packed and we couldn't even find parking. There was a huge blob of people blocking the roads because they were all on their way to the beach, so that's how we found ourselves in the downstairs pool. We enjoyed it, though.

The process of getting on the cruise ship was a bit drawn-out, but it doesn't really matter; it was worth the wait. My aunt, Anna, and I all slept in one room while Alison and Angela slept

in their own. It was still quite early after we boarded the ship and went through all the safety procedures. After that we went ahead and took a tour around the ship. There were tons of people of all races and kinds there. The music was deafening and we could feel it beneath our feet as it echoed all around. The pools and Jacuzzis were jam-packed with people--there was hardly enough space left for even a child. I hoped that it wouldn't be like this the whole trip.

The cruise was scheduled to take us from Florida to the Bahamas, then to an island owned by the cruise line called The Island of Great Stirrup Cay, and back to Florida. The whole cruise lasted for about five days, if memory serves me well. The best part about it all was that all day every day the food was buffet style, so we could eat as much food whenever we wanted and trust me, there was a lot of food. There were many different types of prepared chicken, beef, rice, rolls, salads, pancakes, a variety of fruits, juices, mac n cheese, fries, burgers and buns, ice cream, cakes, you name it.

Our first stop was the Bahamas; it was quite an experience since it was my first time in that country. I found it to be similar to my own country, Jamaica. The temperature was warm all year round and majority of the houses were built with cement and not wood. Everyone seemed to know each other and they had their own type of creole language. Green lush trees everywhere and some containing fruits of some kind. It gave that tropical feeling of cool breeze, warm sun and clear beaches. It was small and the people were nice and friendly; they even had a nearby beach that we snuck into. There were hardly any people even there, so I assumed it was a public beach.

We were swimming and enjoying ourselves when Anna pointed to something in the water and asked her mother if she knew what it was. We became frantic and started to leave the water and the few people who were there also became aware of the greyish looking object and got out of the water. I thought it was a jellyfish or something of that sort. After being there for a good while watching the object not moving, my sister decided to take a closer look. She then informed us that it was a piece of slimy cloth on the sand in the water and told us it was nothing to be afraid of.

After all the chaos with the beach we decided to go to a nearby store because the cruise would be leaving soon. We bought ice-cream in the little shop, some chips and water bottles.

Later that night, we went to a comedy show on the ship, and I can't remember a time in my life that I laughed so deeply. The next day we hung out on the ship. We then arrived to the Island of Great Stirrup Cay. I remember having to wait for the mini-boats carrying people to and from the island. There were two boats and on our way over to the island, the scenery was beautiful. It wasn't busy and crowded with people like most places today, I felt as if I was going on some mystical adventure far out in the middle of nowhere. If I had been a photographer, I would feel twice as happy and accomplished that day. The view was exceptionally beautiful, something you hardly see every day. The pungent smell of salt water sneaked its way into our nostrils. There were brightly colored trees and huge rocks partially covered with green, slimy vines, you could even see some of the fish in the clear, blue water. It was like those pictures you would see in magazines or on television and thought it was fake. It was truly a sight to see. After

scanning our cards at the entrance, we found a chair on the beach and rented some of the floats. It felt as if the sun was ten feet away from us! The island was exceptionally great but it was extremely hot. I felt like I had just been locked in an oven for several hours; I believe I even looked like that, too.

One night, my aunt's friend had her birthday party in one of the restaurants. I remember we dressed up in full white for the theme. Unfortunately, Anna was tired and wanted to go back to our room so I had to go with her. The party had barely just begun and I was a bit upset that I had to babysit her. The next day my aunt told me all about it, about how they sang and danced and enjoyed themselves.

We packed and got ready the next day to leave, and I really missed the ship already. We checked back into the hotel in Florida and continued our fun. There was some sort of fair right across from our hotel, but I can't quite remember the name. We decided to dress up and go pass by. It was really nice walking on the pier feeling the nice afternoon breeze beating against our skin. There were a lot of mini restaurants and mini shops, most of which contained food. There was this particular food shop we passed, and they had out some displays of the food they served. A fly was trapped in one of the containers and I remember how we made silly jokes about what the poor fly might be thinking. We went over to Haagen-Dazs and got ice cream. A funny looking man was near to the front of the fair and he had a snake. When my sister saw the snake she ran all the way back to the ice-cream store and closed the door. We had to go in and reassure her that it was a trained snake and that she would be fine.

We continued our walk and bought some souvenirs. I got a pink flamingo that had Florida written across it in black. Then, we took many pictures beside the huge ice-cream cone, beside a street statue, beside water fountains, and the aquarium at the center of the lobby. It was a bit heartbreaking to leave the hotel and say our goodbyes. It was just me, my aunt, and my cousin again, heading back to home in Connecticut. We skyped my mom and my brother back in Jamaica and they were happy to see us. The rest of summer was just a relaxed phase, watching movies most of the time and occasionally going out to the backyard to ride our bikes and skate. I headed back to Jamaica with filled bags of new clothes and fun stuff I bought while in Connecticut. The summer of 2013 was the best summer of my life, so far.

THE 19TH

DeVonte Henley

DeVonte Henley is a courageous young man who loves to chase his dreams. Born in the city of champions, the great reputation follows suit. The 18-year-old man is determined to make amends for all the deaths he has experienced. Losing his beloved mother and grandfather in the span of five years has taken its toll on the young soul.

It was August 19, 2009, when my mother was taken from me. I felt as if the entire world was falling apart but it just did not feel real. I sat there for hours waiting and waiting for her to wake up and it just didn't feel real.

After facing the reality of losing my mother at the age of 10, things started to change very quickly. In five days I had to say goodbye to my mother and home in Boston to create a new one in Fairfield, CT. The sad thing was after her passing I didn't feel for her death like I should have. In a sense I felt like I was trying to forget about her because it was too painful. I couldn't complain about life afterwards because my aunt took great care of me. Going from a struggling home to a gorgeous suburban home was one of the many things to take my mind off of my mother. Life was getting better as time went on.

Everything changed for me after the funeral of my mother. Another huge but positive change during the time of my mother's passing was being enrolled in a Catholic school. St. Ann's in Fairfield, CT was an enormous upgrade from the public schools of Boston. St. Ann's gave me a chance to showcase both my academic and athletic talents. It seemed as if my mother's passing was a blessing in disguise as I started to enjoy my life a little more in Connecticut. This new life was the best possible coping mechanism and I wonder what dreadful life I would've continued if I stayed in Massachusetts.

All this was short-lived when one day after basketball tryouts I had a near death experience that sent my family into frenzy. My head was gashed open and it was a scary thought to think I could possibly join my mother in the afterlife just two weeks after losing her. I felt as if God was sending me a message to not give up on life and push through even when you're at the your lowest point. At 10 years old this was low point, not a lot of ten year olds deal with such tragic situations. Time passed and I grew apart from my mother completely until her father passed in the spring of 2016. After my Grandfather's passing my fragility had reached its peak emotionally and so did I. He was a cornerstone of my family and losing him was a painful but beneficial lesson.

I've had a million memories in my short-lived 18 years but I chose this one because these experiences have taught me so much and have prepared me for my future. I've learned that all the pain was temporary and I can use all these negativities to fuel my success.

“Tell me what happened.” Her simple sentence opened up wounds that I had kept buried for so long. I sat staring at her for a while, thinking of where to begin. I thought about how life was during that time, how everything had changed. I had dug a deep grave for these memories and enclosed them in a soft brown coffin. White roses topped the coffin, but they had wilted and turned into small piles of brown petals, disappearing into the soil along with any remembrance of my grandmother. I kept it all deep inside me, fearing that if the coffin were to rise again and open, I would not be able to survive the overwhelming feeling of loss.

My therapist analyzed my dark eyes. I knew that she could see behind the wall that I had built. It’s her job to figure it all out. Figure out why I’m so messed up; figure out why this dark cloud that I’d allowed to be my friend wouldn’t leave. I stared at her as the vivid memories rushed back into my mind. “I feel broken.” I managed to form a full sentence this time, shrugging at my words. It was easy to talk about once you got used to the feeling. Being broken for so long becomes a constant, you grow accustomed to the feeling of loss and pain until you are unbothered by it.

Loss is painful. The feeling of losing someone you love can overwhelm you. It can break you until breathing becomes the hardest thing in the world. Something that was once so easy now becomes unbearable. The gentle in and out of soft breaths becomes yells and cries; scratching at your throat, trying to rip the skin just to let air in. Loss breaks you mentally and physically. You don’t want to move, you don’t want to live. All that flows through your mind is the vivid image of the person you lost. Their face becomes so clear after they’ve gone. You close your eyes and make out little features you never noticed when they were with you.—

“Alyssa...What are you thinking?” My therapist’s voice broke through the thoughts.

“I’m thinking about how I watched her disintegrate,” I said after a moment. I could not meet her ocean blue eyes without feeling as if someone was ripping me open. My comfort zone was thrown out the window and I felt myself shoveling the dirt on me; the coffin was beginning to rise.

“I can see her face right before she died. It was almost deformed, unrecognizable in a way. I can always see her face. Her eyes wouldn’t focus on us and she was swollen. Her face filled itself out, after years of seeing skin and bones... her face finally filled out,” I said zoning out. I grew lost in the thoughts that began to pile up in my mind. The coffin was open.

“She couldn’t talk at all, and I never found the right things to say. I would just sit there and stare at her, stare at the cancer that was eating her from the inside out. I could see it with my own eyes, everything that it did to her. I could see her dying. I held hands with death. She was so cold.” I rambled on with my thoughts. Once I started speaking I couldn’t stop.

* This piece won 2nd place in the Gilda of Westchester *Cancer: Tales Untold* Essay Contest

“It began when I was seven. I didn’t understand it much back then. I remember being in the hospital a lot. I believed that she was just usually sick. I thought that being in the hospital so often would save her...but it didn’t.” I trailed off. The words poured out of me like water. I tried to stitch my mouth shut, but water seeped from the cracks. I had no control. I didn’t want to talk about any of this. I didn’t want to open old wounds, but I couldn’t stop. Anxiety flooded me, unable to not be in control of myself, of my words. I kept going.

“When I got older I began to understand what cancer was and what it does to people. I began to understand that I was watching death work its way into my grandmother’s life. It was draining her. My mom explained to me what was happening. She realized that there was no shielding me from the inevitable. She explained that my grandmother had gone in for a colonoscopy. They had found polyps and did a biopsy, finding cancerous cells. At one point I remember them having to remove her large intestine completely and she was left with a colostomy bag. We thought that the cancer was fully gone, but there was no stopping it.”

Once you’re infected, you remain infected. If you catch it in time to get it all out then you’re lucky. If one small piece is forgotten, then you aren’t so lucky. My grandmother wasn’t so lucky.

“She died in 2013...I watched the slow disintegration for seven years. My childhood didn’t exist. The only thing I knew and loved was slowly leaving me, being pulled from my arms, from my world. Everyone says it was better because she wasn’t suffering anymore up in heaven, but that doesn’t change the pain and agony that I felt,” I said, fighting the tears emerging in my eyes.

“That must have been hard for you; you were so young,” my therapist said with a pout plastered across her face.

It *was* hard. I grew into an adult at a young age because I was forced to take care of my grandmother. To me that was normal. At the time I didn’t think much about whether it was hard or not, I just did what I had to do for someone that I love.

“Yeah...I guess it was. Anyway, I watched the cancer spread through her. Eating all the fat from her body until she was a skeleton with a thin skin exterior. It went from the colon to her liver to her bones and then finally to her stomach. The cancer spread so quickly throughout her body that she lit up like a Christmas tree.” I thought of her like an infant. Fragile and in need of care and nurture 24/7. She cried all the time from the pain and the hunger. The cancer ate everything in her and also made her reject everything she consumed. Vomit plastered the inside of the toilet bowls and the sink every morning and every night. She begged to eat, pleaded to fill the dark hole of hunger, of starvation.

“She couldn’t eat, everything that went in came back out...my mom thought that she could heal her by making her eat healthy... but there was no healing her. It was too late.” Releasing a sigh, I ran my hand through my matted hair and crossed my legs.

“My mom cries sometimes when she thinks about it. She regrets yelling at her to eat healthy. She knows now that there was nothing she could have done to save her. But when

you're in the moment, when it's happening right in front of your very eyes to someone you love, you will do anything to try and save them."

I never tried to save her, I thought to myself. Regret and pain suffocated me until it felt like there was a rope tied around my neck, hanging me. I knew that I couldn't save her but I still should have tried. *Why didn't I fucking try harder?* The question replayed in my head like a broken record, haunting me. I didn't know how to try. I didn't know what to do to help her. When she was hours away from dying there was nothing that I could say. I couldn't form words into sentences; all that I was capable of doing was staring. I stared at her broken, lifeless face until it was time to go home. I rose, leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on her cold cheek.

"I love you Nani."

The remembrance of those words sent a shock through my body and I sat there watching each memory as if it were a movie. I could feel the warm tears rolling down my cheeks as I tried to blink them away.

"Losing someone you love is very hard. You can't blame yourself for anything and neither can your mother. You both did the best that you could to make her comfortable and happy before she passed. She's healed now." My therapist's words broke me from the trance.

She's healed now. She was healed. I never thought about it in that way. I knew that it was better that she was gone, but I never really comprehended how it could be better. She was healed; being gone from the earth, being sucked away into an afterlife of heaven has healed her. All we ever wanted was for her to be healed. Forget the bad memories. Forget the harsh words that came from our overwhelming love and concern. Forget that we watched her become bones in front of our eyes. We fought so hard to heal her and make her better and now...after all this time ... I realized that she was.

"She's better." I said out loud looking up at the ocean blue eyes staring back at me. "She's free." The words spilled out like cold water that flooded over the burning flames of my most painful memories. It became a river that washed through my mind, erasing every ounce of pain and regret that was buried deep. It lifted up the coffin, rested it on those cool blue waves, and ejected itself through my cracked lips. I let out a sigh of relief as I leaned back into the white couch.

SATURDAY LOVE

Anastasia Roddy

I believe his name was Jordan, but then again I don't quite remember. Or did I really get his name? Summer 2015 I believe. I was down south, over at my *oma's* house. She had taken me and my sister to the roller rink. It was my first time there. I had never really been skating before, so it was going to be a learning experience. We got there a little early and no one was there yet, so we got a little practice.

Falling and sliding. Gliding and bumping. Bruises of laughter, we did terribly. Laughing on the sideline, I couldn't help but feel his stare on me; my eyes wander his way most of the time. Him and his friends are just looking and smiling at us. We rolled by a couple times, holding on to the rail. "Let it go" he whispered gently past my ear. His accent so deep and lovely, Skin a beautiful cocoa; his smile wasn't all that pretty but his personality was like gold.

We were holding hands. Laughing, joking, dancing and that one good fall makes my heart blush. All at once I felt like I was in love. I had a good time, the whole time I was right by his side. "They hatin cuz' you cute and they not" he said. Made my heart warm and insides turn. We sat down by the games talking and cooling, getting lost in his brown eyes made me forget about it all. About all the bad I had done, all the bad that had been done to me. All the hate and insecurities. For the first time I was actually happy. I was actually living in the moment, living a fairy tale. A moment I don't ever want to forget. He made me feel wanted and pretty. He didn't make me feel like I was in my sister's shadow. He was really my guiding light and now that I think back on it, all I can say is, "Hey man, what a night."

So sad when I had to say goodbye, during our final dance he kissed me totally off guard. It kind of made my stomach turn, kind of melted my heart, kind of gave my body a buzz. Kind of felt like love. The type of love you get when you finally eat that piece of cake you been saving or the type you get when you know your crush likes you. That type of love. If I knew the last I would ever hear from his was "No goodbye hug?" I would have made it memorable. I just want that back. I want that night and that feeling back. All I ever ask God is, please tell me what I did to deserve a Saturday that great!

2010. I remember that year as if it were yesterday. Finally, after seven years of not living with my mom I finally got to see her, touch her, feel her, and smell her Chanel perfume that has a bit of a bittersweet smell to it. But before I even thought about how she would smell, I had to go through a lot to be with her. Even after being separated for so long, my mom never abandoned me—she was always there for me. Although she couldn't be there physically, she always called to check on me, and she always knew when something was wrong, even if I didn't say that something was bothering me. I remember packing my stuff and counting down the hours to finally see my mom, 13 hours to be exact. Before I got my happy ending, I lived through my nightmare; I remember it clear as day.

We were waiting for our flight and I decided to wander around the airport and got lost. The airport security came and started asking me questions like “Where are your parents?” I was so frightened, I couldn't speak. Soon enough, they put me in this room and I eventually told them that I was going to be traveling to the U.S. to be with my mom. I was 9 years old when this happened and was so frightened. They asked me who brought me to the airport and was going to bring me to my mom. So, I gave them my sister's grandmother's name and they located her. However, it turns out she didn't really have custody over me or my siblings; she was just taking care of us. My brother and sister were okay to leave the country because their dad signed off on the paper, but they had this look on their face almost like disappointment because they knew none of us were coming home to be with mom. Everyone got to back home with my sister's grandma except for me...

Instead, I spent about a week in a home for kids who didn't have parents to look after them. I remember the nasty taste of the chocolate milk almost as if it was expired; sitting around this big table with all these boys and girls I didn't know. At that point I was no longer counting down the hours to see my mom, I was now counting down the days hours and minutes to get out of that group home! Finally, after about two weeks I got out. I remember them opening up that white gate up and seeing my family waiting for me. The whole time I was in there I was scared that I was never going to be able to leave. Finally everything got sorted out with my papers and we headed to the airport again.

Everything went great! My brother, sister and I got into the airplane and I was so scared because at this point we no longer had an adult with us. 12 hours later and we finally got to the JFK airport. I was so lost because I didn't know how to speak English; everything was so confusing to me. My mom was an illegal immigrant at the time, so she didn't go into the airport and a family friend had to pick us up. At first it was kind of weird, because I had no idea who this strange guy was. Eventually we got passed through everything at the airport and finally got outside.

I remember it was towards the end of summer when we arrived, so it was still hot out. I took a big breaths when I stepped out of the airport and even the smell of this place was

different, it smelled more like a city, different because where I grew up smelled more country-- dirt, animals, trees, fresh fruits, and such things. When I got into the car where my mom was waiting, I couldn't contain myself; I was full of many different emotions. My first thoughts were, *Is this my mom? How should I act around or towards her?* I couldn't help but cry because my mother was crying. She was so happy and filled with joy. We were all so speechless. My sister was still very young when my mom left so she had no idea what she actually looked like, but my brother and I still remembered our mom and what she looked like, so it wasn't much of a surprise when we saw her. It felt so great to finally be with her and never have to feel alone again, hug her see her and smell her and just know that from now on nothing can separate us from each other.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Emma Seymour

Many times in a clothing store, you'll be looking through sizes of a shirt or pants, only to realize that all the sizes are exactly the same. The tag says, "ONE SIZE FITS ALL," but is this really true? Does one size *really* fit all? Brands like Abercrombie & Fitch and Lululemon claim to only make clothes for people that are thin, but Brandy Melville, another clothing company, sells only clothes that are supposedly "One size fits all". Shirts, pants, jackets, socks, everything there claims to be able to fit everyone that comes into the store looking to buy something.

This clearly can't be true. People are all different sizes, shapes, and that is perfectly okay. Any company that doesn't provide proper sizes for their customers is at fault for not understanding this. This is why most clothing brands carry sizes extra small, small, medium, large, and extra-large. It's also why pants are made at different lengths and varying waist sizes are available for people. This size system leaves a variety of sizes a shopper can utilize to find their perfect fit.

A brand leaving out the majority of women that don't fit their size standards is unwarranted and biased. I believe that clothes should be available to everyone. If one size fits one body type, it should fit all others as well. Making clothing for one body type defeats the purpose of a store, and it is a ridiculous decision on the company's part. Brands like Brandy Melville and even Abercrombie and Fitch and Lululemon really need to give their sizing and the way their clothes are made a second thought. A second thought for women that may not believe they are a size that is sought-after or feel like they are less than good enough because of these unfair clothing companies ostracizing them from other women. Everyone deserves to have equal opportunities when purchasing clothes and feeling comfortable while doing so.

HUMANITY IS A DISEASE

Griffon Valerio

Our environment, our species and countless others, and our planet are dying. Our species, humanity, is the plague, the disease, the sickness that infects our mother Earth. And you know who cares? Barely anyone is analytical enough or even possesses the mental capacity to sit for a minute and go, “Oh wait, everything we’re doing everything the people we put in charge are doing, everything we do to obtain and obsess over our ‘creature’ comforts, is rapidly killing out planet and we will soon live (or in actuality die) on a lifeless ball of dirt and rubble and polluted water drifting through space. We’re doomed!” But sadly, instead of going okay let’s make a change the mentality is that of tossing any plan of restoring our ecosystem and planet into what I like to call the “fuck-it bucket”.

But it doesn’t have to be. The biggest issues at this juncture is over farming of methane producing animals for food, over hunting of endangered and soon to be endangered species, and the burning of fossil fuels. Beginning to correct these issues alone would move the planet in the right direction not only to solidify a planet survivable for future generations of humans, but to progress the planet into a new age of technology and renewable energy to give the planet a chance.

Let’s start with the mass farming of bovines alone for food. This mass farming of cows accounts for a 40% increase in methane production and ozone degradation every year. If every American ate 2wsvegetarian one day a week for a year, demand for massively farmed and processed meat would decrease rapidly and the number of cows farmed in the US would decrease by at minimum 100,000.

People have almost a religious dependence on an old world ideal that man must eat meat, but it’s almost entirely rooted in falsehoods. Back as far as the stone ages, the time of the caveman, men were typically foragers and gatherers of fruits, vegetables, and berries, and women would generally hunt animals, but only on rare occasions.