ALTERNATIVE UNITED VOCES

FICTION
POETRY
& ART

VOL 4

Alternative United Voices – Volume 4

A compilation of short stories and poems from the students of Montreal's outreach high schools

> Cover art by Elizabeth El-Zawhari Back cover art by Megan Sharp

> An Alternative United publication

Organized by Colin Throness



Find out more about Alternative United and read the publication online at alternative united.ca

Acknowledgements

Big respect to the Outreach Network's staff for their kind encouragement and support with this year's publication, in particular Caitlin O'Brien, Pamela Bussey and Lise Kuhn for getting involved and spreading the word, and Heather Hardie for laying out the visual art submissions and designing the cover.

Thanks also to Chantal Juhasz and the English Montreal School Board for their support and encouragement.

A special thanks to John Commins and Christine Lachance for their generosity every year towards Alternative United. Wow!

This year we had two awesome judges, Heather O'Neill and Kate Lavut, who read all the submissions and took on the impossible job of picking the winners. They also came to the launch party to mingle with the participants. Much respect to them for their time and effort!

And last but not least, a massive thank you to all the students who participated this year. Keep it up! You won't regret it!

Printed in June 2019 by



Foreword

I am so impressed and in awe of all of you in the Alternative United Voices. You are now all published authors! You can hold on to this book and read it and be proud that you did something that means something.

No matter what happens in life, writing is your secret weapon. It is your way out, and it's your way in.

Writing is what saved me. Whenever I felt sad, or happy, or pissed off, I would grab myself a pen and a paper and write my feelings, my fears, my joys and my anger down. That is what got me through life.

Through lunch break if I didn't feel like eating with anyone, through the feelings of disappointment when I was handed back another failed exam, test or paper, I wrote. I wrote it all down.

It doesn't matter if you can't spell to save your life, or if your grammar is all over the place, it's the words that count. It's your words that count!

I look forward to reading your words for many years to come,

All the best,

Kate Lavut

SHORT STORIES & POEMS

Mile End – 6

Alexandra Koliakoudakis, I am your weekend
Safe and sound
Where beauty hides
Lau Pich, Untitled
Leah Lazerman, Untitled
The Things I Love
She Is My Everything
Staring at my Reflection
Olivia Berg-Vottero, Untitled
Panayiotis Manias, Untitled
Taiisha Smith-Coombs, Everlasting Misery

The Hub - 31

Alexa Faria, Grade 5
Jordan Cohen, Drowning
Neve Bergeron, Metro Floor
Ray-Vohn Golding, My Graduation Picture
Anonymous, The Vein in my Wrist

Options – 36

CH, ADHD
In the End
Katherine Fairchild, Friends
Untitled (x3)
Noah, Mistreat
Ranika McDonald, The Pain We Feel
Victoria Gomez, Dear You
Anonymous, Untitled

Outreach - 47

Adam Siegel, Not the worst brother in the world
Mateus-Allaistair, The Sorrow of a Child
Callum McNeill, Breathing Toxic
Latisha Simpson, Insults
Kaesye Duncan, A Kind of Magic
Many, Reality Check

Talya Spence, Turbo AAP, AAP family Anonymous, Afraid of Heights Anonymous, Lost Control

The Hive – 67

Alessandro Martinez, Revenge Done Right Alex Galvano, Rico's Story Kathryn Bastien, The Big Leagues Kristopher Palmigiani, Trucks Up Victor Marco Gombay, Time of Predators Vincenzo Sferlazza, Royal Boys

Perspectives II – 88

Joshua Lo Dico, The Bravest Panophobiast
Keijo Marrone, The Lost Raptor
Malcolm Williams, Symere Woods
Massimo Carabetta, Penumbra
Melanie Laing, Grandson
Mitchell Guerriero-Joseph, Secret Compartment
Tung Linder, Rapture

VISUAL ART

Options – 125Bishop Johnston

Outreach - 126

Adam Siegel
Emmanuel Benzaquen
Kaesye Duncan
Matthew Wiseblatt
Uwan Joseph
Sarah Guzman Dee

Focus – 135 Kaidon Dewitt

Venture – 136

Anonymous (x3)
Anonymous, *Breaking out of the closet*

I am your weekend Alexandra Koliakoudakis

I am your weekend Your break from Monday to Friday You come to me to get your fix of pleasure While I happily oblige

I saw her underwear on the floor once
I know what you're doing is wrong
I'm not complaining though
I'm your vacation, your escape

You like me more with my glasses on
It fills me up with self-worth
You spend an hour or two with me
Then vacation is over, and you leave to be with her

I am your weekend
But you're much more than that to me
I stare at you while everyone's around
They probably notice, do you?

I stare at your hands
I get butterflies in my stomach
You act so different towards me
When we're not in your room

I find myself yearning
No matter how much time goes by
I compete with your weekdays
I want you to want me more

I want you to know me I want your attention I want you to tell me "I want more than just your body"

But as long as you're with her

And I'm the friend with more to offer

I'll take the little time you give

It's fine if that's all you want to throw me

I am your weekend Your break from Monday to Friday Ask for more of me I'll give you as much as you want

Safe and sound Alexandra Koliakoudakis

My house was a prison
I wouldn't call it a home
Not one flower would have risen
No blade of grass grown

Tension thick as brick
Stability frail as tissue
The energy made me sick
Not one day without an issue

My dad was always mad My brother always bitter The burdens my past self had My brother would often hit her

She did everyone's laundry She made everyone's food She thought of leaving fondly Yet always in a bad mood

Too scared to escape
Since it was all she had ever known
Yet staying made her afraid
She'd had enough of their tone

So one daring day
After years of contemplation
I went and ran away
For a life-long vacation

In fact, I left the city
To move in with my mom
I never felt guilty

I'd finally become strong
I took control of my life
And turned it around
My will sharp as a knife
My mental safe and sound

Where beauty hides Alexandra Koliakoudakis

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder And I see beauty in everything

Not only in the stars, and the colours of the rainbow But also in the word, 'Paris'

And in the way a bottle cap is a perfect circle

And in the way you can tell someone is having a good day by the
tone of their voice

I see beauty in the bark of a dog And the wag of its tail

I see the beauty in success And the beauty of learning from failure

I see beauty in the way birds fly
I see beauty in the way water flows

Beauty in the sand Beauty in the beach

Beauty in opening the curtains in the morning And beauty in the dark

Beauty in a book Beauty in a movie

Beauty in a day Beauty in a week

But the most beautiful thing
Is a life

All these beautiful moments Packed into someone

Making them the beautiful person they are

*Untitled*Lau Pich

This feeling

Of pain, day by day leaving you soulless without remark for the rest of the world

Causing all hope to evaporate and leave you wondering, what's the point?

But then everything comes crashing down, when you thought it couldn't get any worse, it does.

Your mind filled with dwelling and despair

Body feeling weak, tears causing your eyes to flood

Not able to see past the agony

Your loved ones no longer in reach, trapped physically and mentally

Unable to break the spiral which keeps your mind imprisoned, locked away from all the hope and happiness you never had Hours and days wondering when it will all stop, when you will be free

Keeping your own self from your goals, which seem so close, but never in reach

Keeping your eyes closed and ears sheltered, thinking nothing anyone could say would help, wanting to stay in this never ending hell, knowing you couldn't escape either way,

Pretending your way to glory, but your head still down and tears still shedding

Your love shows you this isn't the end, but do you listen? No.

Sitting alone, smoking.

The fumes clashing with the tears

Face burning, tears drying, eyes swelling

Mind lost in thoughts of the unknown world you want so dearly

Then suddenly, like an ecstatic shock, stopping the thoughts, the dwelling, the sorrow, the hopelessness
A small glimmer of light fills your dying eyes
With something other than despair and salted tears.

*Untitled*Leah Lazerman

Yeah Mom, or should I even call you that?
A woman that everyday reminds me of how much I'm a brat.
You're the one who told me... you're not my mother.
Well, that hurts me
But it doesn't bother my brother.
I've asked him several times. He hates you.
That doesn't matter though, you love yourself,
Ain't that true?

That's okay though, really. This topic is completely silly.

I wanna be able to speak and have a voice. You think I wanna scream, but I have no choice. Every night my sister annoys me. She has mixed feelings about you, you know? Like, you're the devil but you're an angel at the same time. Well, I gotta tell you – her opinions are far away from mine.

I want you back, no matter the cost. Would losing me even be a loss? How could you just toss Your parenthood into the trash? You think cash can fix this all?

Please Mommy, we miss you. Well, I know I do.

I've been lonely lately, without you...

My sister thinks everything that comes
Out of my mouth isn't true.
My brother ignores me... if you ask me why?
I have no clue.
And the other brother? The one "in charge"?
I'm almost positive he doesn't have a heart.
He doesn't care that I cry,
When I want us to talk, he won't even try.
When I ask him about his day, I know he would lie.
I think, he, too... just wishes you would die.

My sister... man she cries every night.

I wish we'd never fight.

Screaming at each other to turn off the light.

But then... We talk about life.

That no matter what's happening now, our future will be bright.

We'll always be by each other's side.

"I'll save you", you whispered in my ear... But those words I no longer hear.

I wonder what you think... deep inside. 'Cause you gotta be honest, ya can't hide Forever, we will however end up together. And that's not a bad thing! Mom, are you listening?!

I can't take it no more,
I'm broken, I'm sore.
Once, I used to think you
Adored me.
Now you just want me to let you be.

I feel bad...

For making you sad, I guess I'm just mad

At myself.

'Cause I can't reach my goal, and that's

Loving you until I grow old.

I want you back... I can't keep

Track of the days that you're gone.

I apologize.

You must think this is all lies.

You know what they say... "everything you touch only dies."

So... our relationship is done.

And my mother is gone. Physically, mentally, and emotionally.

It's sad, but it's reality.

She isn't here.

Not when I have a secret to share...

Not when you need take care...

Not to brush your fingers against my hair...

I know you're not there.

I remember the moment so vividly.

When I saw you in the car...

I saw your face, you weren't that far.

And what you did completely broke my heart.

Tore it apart.

The second you turned around, I dropped to the ground.

I begged you to stay. But you didn't make a sound.

Then you drove away too fast...

It felt like I was under those wheels, getting crushed...

You hurt me so much to the point that I cannot explain.

All I feel right now is pain.
Well, I'm not here to make you feel bad.
'Cause you are a great mom, the best I would even say.
Just that what you're doing now is wrong.
You've gone insane.

But I want to help you, I do.
Just tell me how, I beg you.
I get the trick
I make you sick
But you can't just kick
Me away.
Because what will happen is we'll begin to stray
Farther from each other.
And I will slowly lose
My love for you, Mother.

The Things I Love Leah Lazerman

I love when the snowflakes sail gently down. I love when there are bright green trees around. I love gazing up at the stars, counting each one, And hugging a loved one – once I am done.

I love the little moments of laughter, The spark of a smile in one's day. I love when cheerful children run and play.

I love staring out the window On a cold, rainy day. I love when the sky turns dark gray.

But what I love the most is one's instinct to help. Kindness is the most beautiful trait. I've always tried to avoid the feeling of hate.

I love when one is so innocently pure – that, I can assure, Is the only cure.

There is so much beauty in this world... So much life.

I often feel overwhelmed.

She Is My Everything Leah Lazerman

I loved her to the core, There was nothing more pure than her. I thought she'd never leave, that's what I believed. She was so precious to me, so unique. She was always strong, never weak.

I took her for granted, because I thought she'd stay, Even after all of the horrible things I'd say... How could I have been so ignorant? How could I have been so unthoughtful? I have come to believe that I am just this awful.

There is no room for change,
Because the person in my mirror – sure as hell is me.
The question remains: Do I agree
With who I am as a daughter?
Why even bother at this point?
I don't mean to disappoint... But I know
That our broken relationship will remain this way,
Because until I fix it – she will have nothing to say.

I am willing to do anything
To have her look at me the way she used to...
Looks full of pride, smiles full of laughter...
I am the one, she always looked after.

I want to give her everything, but I don't have much to offer. I do not even have the title of a daughter. She deserves my all, but that portion is just so small... That it will probably never be enough.

Everything I touch, I only destroy.

But I have to continue fighting. She is my Everything. My Love, My Pride, My Joy.

Staring at my Reflection Leah Lazerman

I am just about to enter the shower when I examine myself in the mirror.

Oh, I hate the way I look.

I could never feel confident wearing something that might reveal too much skin.

My body, that's one.

I gaze into my eyes. Those eyes that tell lies...

My mouth, what comes out of it isn't too nice.

I become silent when my mind is too loud.

The thoughts are mostly negative.

I have a flashback of something funny that my friend had told me, earlier in the day.

That put a smile on my face, which forced a laugh.

When I enter the shower, cool water is streaming down onto what I consider, my beautiful face.

When I hear the bathroom door open, my heart skips a beat.

The woman I adore is doing laundry.

She had asked me who I had been talking to, since she overheard me mumbling something.

I responded with "myself."

She said, "That's so cute, I love you, have a great shower."

I smiled as tears started pouring down my face.

The water from my lonely shower kept washing off the tears, when I hoped they'd stay.

The words gave me satisfaction for a split moment, but I pushed that feeling away...

Although the words were so beautiful, and so endearing to hear... I am not worthy of them, they are my biggest fear.

I love her so much, but not enough, not even close.

Because I could never show it, never can I,

Overdose on my love for her.

Besides, she was wrong.

I didn't have a great shower, in fact—I never do.

Because everything that makes me ugly, reminds me of you.

Yeah, I'm talking to

you!

You in the mirror.

*Untitled*Olivia Berg-Vottero

You hurt me.

But not as much as the cigarettes or the blades did.

I lost count on how many packs as well as how many cuts.

The scars might fade over time but the ones that are left will remind me of you,

Like the taste of tobacco.

I was addicted to you like I'm addicted to this nicotine.

I thanked the cigarettes for erasing your taste off my lips, the taste of regret was what was left when I kissed you for the last time.

My heart permanently crushed like cigarette butts on the sidewalk.

My body has been burnt and I am nothing but ash, that you flick off the end of your cigarette before you take another puff.

Another puff, another girl.

I'm just a cigarette to you, something temporary but leaves permanent damage like a painful memory and that's all I'll ever be.

You don't deserve me but yet you have me. You needed me when you were craving my body.

I was your addiction while mine was smoking.

I trusted the lighter that didn't have much fluid more than I ever trusted you.

I chain smoked until I couldn't breathe and it felt like your hands around my throat.

It felt like you were there.

The cloud of smoke was warm like the blood flowing down my arm the day you damaged me.

But now that you're gone, there are many things I could do.

I could finally breathe clean air when you left.

I felt normal, not like a cigarette or more.

On Saturday nights I felt the shame, it came to me in waves.

Like your toxic smoke, the air that caused so many problems to people around it.

But now I'm clean, I'm no longer addicted to you like you still are...

I'm free and you still have your ball and chain.

Your smell no longer lingers, your taste has left my lips.

My eyes clearer than ever and my happiness finally back.

I have no new addictions, my scars are gone and I can't count them no more.

I hope I never get a new addiction.

I hope...

Untitled Panayiotis Manias

Magic has effects on whoever has it.

Heckle, the young badger, was affected greatly when he searched.

He grew the tail of a big lizard for brash hits.

As he continued the amount he gained still hurt.

The back had wings of a crow for great flight.

The teeth of a shark filled his jaws.

Increasing the strength of his bite.

But he still had the same paws.

Being a honey badger, he has no fear.

He seemed to grow lizard horns on his head.

And for better hearing – bat ears.

Already his appearance is enough to have dread.

To be creepier, his spine became snake-like.

On his neck gained the gills of a newt.

With his intelligence there is no telling how he will strike.

At this point what was a medium-sized rodent is no longer cute.

With porcupine quills on his tail, his journey was complete from that day on.

This creature had enough magic to be the master of chaos.

Everlasting Misery Taiisha Smith-Coombs

I wake up to the sound of my alarm *Ring! Ring!* Jump out of my bed and head to the shower humming to my bathroom radio. The perfect song is playing on the radio.

"I got this feelin' inside my bones, It goes electric, wavy when I turn it on."

Which is a typical feeling to have on your birthday especially when today is a very special day besides being my birthday. "Turn down the fucking music, you moron!" my "mother" yelled from her room. I turn down the music without a reply. I won't let her ruin this day for me. I finally get to see my dad after seven years of being in prison. He is coming out of prison today on my 16th birthday. So my Mother doesn't have to "worry" about forgetting my cake again this year, or coming home drunk and beating me senseless again.

Every morning I skip on breakfast and head on out to catch my bus as soon as possible. I yell, "Bye Mother!" followed by silenced waiting and hoping for a "happy birthday."

I walk out to an empty street and garbage blowing in the wind as I walk I spot my childhood best friend Lisa Conner at the bus stop. I give her a hug and greet her.

"Hey girl, happy birthday!"

"Thanks Lisa, at least somebody noticed."

She looks at me with confusion, "What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"So what are you doing for your big day?"

"I'm going to meet someone today."

"Who's that special someone going to be?"

"My father," I struggled to say.

She looks at me with her eyes popping open.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

Lisa smiles and hugs me with joy. "Well you need to tell me about it right after!"

"I will, indeed."

Instead of jumping into the 189 bus to school I get onto the 98 bus.

"Bye Lisa!"

"Happy birthday, Tonnie!"

As the buses begin to drive away I gaze out the window and see families playing in the park, laughing, running with joy. I get comfortable on the train because I know it's going to be a long ride to the correctional center my dad is finally coming out of today. Four hours later, I finally get to the correctional center and I buzz in.

Static microphone sound... "Who are you here for?"

"My Father, Tommy Jones."

"Let me check and see."

I wait outside for over five minutes.

"Honey, your father left this prison 10 days ago."

"No, that can't be, he always told me he'd be released on my birthday."

"Well, we released him 10 days ago."

"Oh okay."

"Sorry honey."

"Do you know where I can find him?"

"Yes, we'll buzz you in."

I walk in with my head hanging low.

I see the officer and he points me to his office.

In silence he searches his files cabinet.

"Tommy Jones, right?"

"Yes."

"Alright, He's living in 3103 County Huntstown."

"Thank you, sir."

"I know it's none of my business but from your files I see that your dad had a drug issue"

"Yah, he did. It is the only reason he was in here."

"But it was never resolved until he became fully sober being locked up in this prison."

In my head I started to question why he was telling me this, so I asked him.

"Your point is?"

"You are very sweet and you seem like an intelligent young girl. You tell me what you think my point is."

"I have no doubt in my mind that he didn't overcome those drug issues."

"I understand that, but he hadn't really gotten the right help that he needed for those drug issues. So when you do see your father, please talk to him about getting some sort of help.

I do care about my dad a lot. He's the only who seemed to be there for me and love me.

"I will do, sir."

"Name is Ron Swindlel, here's my card if you ever need anything."

"Thanks."

I left with some type of relief and stressed about what the officer had just said.

But I'm not going to let that ruin my birthday.

Five hours later.

On the bus.

Tapping my feet.

Two minutes away from his house.

The bus stops.

I finally arrive to 3103 County Huntstown.

My heart's beating out of my chest, hoping he'll be happy to see me.

I ring his doorbell.

No answer.

I ring a second time.

No answer.

I attempt to turn the knob and the door opens.

I walk in.

"Hello? Dad?"

I see a bunch of balloons, a gift, a cake with 16 candles.

"You home?"

I get to the entrance of the living room.

I see his feet off the edge of the couch.

I walk in and I see him.

I drop to the floor.

I try to help but it's already too late.

I call.

I cry for a whole hour on the steps waiting for the ambulance.

Suddenly five police cars appear after the ambulance.

I see Officer Ron.

He walks towards me as I begin to cry uncontrollably.

He gives me a hug

"Let's get you home."

"Please don't!" I scream with tears. "I can't live with my mother anymore."

"You don't have any other family?"

"I don't know, I never got to meet them."

"Well sweetheart, you have to go somewhere."

"It's my birthday and I would like to feel safe."

"Fine, you can stay with me and my wife at my house, but tomorrow morning we are looking through your files for any other family members for you to stay with."

"Thank you so much."

After 40 minutes of driving we finally get to his house.

His house is jaw dropping. It's huge. I feel so embarrassed I've never seen anything like it before.

We get into his house and see his son run into his arms and let loose after a five second hug.

He gazes at me in a confused way.

"Who is she?"

"She is a young lady who is going to be staying with us for a while and it's her birthday today."

"Happy birthday!"

"Where's your wife?" I ask.

"She went out. She'll be back soon."

"Okay, so where will I be staying?"

"Allow me to lead you there."

We finally get there after 500 steps.

He leads me to a big purple colored room. Pajamas on my bed, ready for me to fit in.

I stare at the room while the doorbell rings.

"Wait here."

I decide to put on the pajamas and sit on the bed.

I get flashbacks of my dad dead on the floor and I realize that I'm never going to see him again.

"Tonnie, can you come down here for a second?!"

Wipe my tears from my eyes and head downstairs.

As I walk down the stairs I hear:

"Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you..."

With a delicious chocolate cake lit up with 16 candles.

"Thank you! I very much appreciate this. Who bought the cake?"

"I did," the wife says.

"This really means a lot."

We went to sit down and shared pieces of cake.

I never experienced this before, being with people who actually care about me.

I haven't had a cake for my birthday since I was a toddler.

This day has been a lot for me, I never really had a real family before.

Hopefully tomorrow I learn about the rest of my family, even maybe join this one perhaps.

*Grade 5*Alexa Faria

Grade 5, what a great time. "Last one to the playground is a sore loser." Running to the bright yellow slide eager to be the first of all my classmates to the top. Passing notes about who has a crush on who. The worst part of my day was when my teacher took the note and read it—embarrassing. The cafeteria of loud hyper children would fill my ears at lunch time and it felt like everything in my life was perfect until grade 6 hit me. Depression broke me, anxiety broke me, PTSD broke me. They are the cancer of the soul. It's like a dark place that you can't escape, it feels like falling down a dark bottomless shaft wondering if and when your fall will ever end or if you'll ever be caught. As you look back to where you fell from you can see it receding further into the distance and the light becomes dimmer and dimmer while the shaft into which you are falling becomes deeper and darker. It's like standing underneath a floor of glass, banging on it as hard as you can, trying to get the attention of others but no one can hear you. It's like a state in which nothing tastes, smells, or feels right, and you are unable to make decisions, yet you carry on and so much of the time you just don't have the energy or the desire but you still carry on anyway. It's having multiple emotions like fear, despair, emptiness, shame, embarrassment, and the inability to recognize the beaming, eager, carefree person you used to be. Nothing is enjoyable. You can't smile anymore. It's like you are an actor, forcing the fake smile, wanting to scream your lungs out and your head off but you don't know why, when you look in the mirror you only see dead eyes with no spark, no joy or hope. You wonder how you'll manage to exist another day. It's like drowning and you don't even need water to feel that. Feeling alone in a room full of people. I lost my innocence at a young age.

Drowning Jordan Cohen

As I sink to the bottom of the bottomless ocean

I look up and see the sun ever so

Slightly fading away

Not knowing what to say or do or how to get help

I float there

Slowly sinking

Running out of air in my lungs

My inner demons pull me lower

All that depression and anxiety I kept inside for so long is starting

To weigh me down

As I sink deeper and deeper

I glance my eyes up and slowly see the sun completely fading away

Because I've become too deep

I'm faced with the option

To try my best to swim up no matter how hard it will be

Or give up and inhale to get it over with

On one hand swimming looks impossible and unachievable

And on the other I can finally end all this suffering

The more and more I think about this dilemma I keep sinking

Faster and faster

Which makes the odds of swimming pretty much

Near to impossible

I think and think, until I can't take all of this

And take my last

Inhale...

Metro Floor Neve Bergeron

As I sit on the metro floor

I wait and watch the different people come through those doors.

Cold fingers and sweaty feet,

I think of all the people I'll meet.

Maybe they'll make it out ok,

Maybe they'll take me away.

As I sit on the metro floor,

I think about running out those doors.

Hugs sounded good, but drugs felt better,

You can tell by the holes in my sweater.

I wish to go home, I wish for her to come

But she'd rather sit at home with no one.

I've pleaded and cried

But I've learned my tears dry.

As I sit on the metro floor,

I draw myself closer to those doors.

So many people around but I still feel alone,

It might be a better choice to stay on my own.

Maybe without the stress of others

I might be able to live with my mother.

Maybe if I get clean,

Never again will I have to eat canned beans.

Drugs take your money and so do cigarettes

I hope to someday be better than the rest.

Not better than the general population but better than the scum

Because just like everyone else, I don't want to be a bum.

Change is optional but I'll do it for the best

So maybe I'll have all this stress off my chest.

No more sitting on the metro floor

Because I'm going to go outside those doors.

My Graduation Picture Ray-Vohn Golding

I'd marry that guy.

I never thought I would see this picture.

I'd put this face on a sweater.

Class of 2019 no later.

I love this picture more than anybody else.

When I see this picture I realize that I'm black and proud.

They say black people don't graduate but I did.

Black people are drug dealers,

I'm not.

Black is beautiful. So is my picture.

The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice. But I'm light skin so it doesn't really apply to me.

There is a lot of black excellence in this picture.

I'm the one who stole the cookie from the cookie jar. I stole that cookie, my diploma.

I'm beautiful.

The Vein in my Wrist Anonymous

I look at myself in the school mirror

In my foreign uniform not being able to think,

Not one thought in my head is mine, but only the echo

Of these destructive voices

Telling me to do it.

I look at the thin blue vein in my wrist

And in my other hand I feel

The sharpness of the small razor against my finger.

The voices get louder like an excited crowd at a sports game

As I raise the blade not being able to focus

On anything

Not even the consequences.

Still staring at this vein of mine

I see the blade

Press against it

And without a second wasted

I drag it

Faster than a blink of an eye.

I start feeling relief, pleasure,

Just by seeing the thick red liquid

Running

Dripping

Onto the school bathroom floor,

But it wasn't enough.

I dig the blade into the cut and slice again,

Two, three times till I see a clear view of my thick blue vein.

As I stare at it,

Reality snaps back to me and

I realize what I have just done.

ADHD CH

You see her brain doesn't work Like you or me She has some difficulty Oh no they think it's ADHD Now they're acting like something's Really wrong with me Let's put her on pills and make her sleep Now I don't have the strength to speak What's so wrong with ADHD It's just my mind taking in everything it sees I'd rather think faster Than some doped up girl Who lets everything past her I know all the answers But should I speak? Or will they say it's the ADHD I sit quietly Wondering how I can change Wishing I had a different brain They tell you when you're young to love yourself How could I do this when they're trying to make me someone else

They said it's to make it easier for you
But in my point of view
It was to make it easier for YOU
I love my ADHD

I love that there's never weird pauses with me
I love that I'm loud and
I could stick out in a crowd
I love that I'm proud
Of my ADHD

In The End CH

You killed her

Maybe you didn't put the blade to her veins
But you knew she was in pain

No, maybe you didn't push her off the cliff
But you were on the sidelines yelling

Take a dip

You guys made it very clear
That no one would notice if she wasn't here
Maybe you didn't shove the pills down her throat
But you and your friends would tell her to go die and choke
Life was like a constant race

You guys kept tripping her she couldn't keep up with the pace
This is a girl who will never have a husband or wife
Because you guys pushed her to end her life
This is a girl who will never have a chance to see the world
The last thing she saw was her four walls and her bedroom door
Don't cry, don't ask why because you pushed her to die

Friends Katherine Fairchild

I showed you the best parts Of life, When all you did was take From mine. I would have stayed up All night for you wiping Mascara from your eyes, I miss the person I thought you were. Someone I called my friend. But friends don't stab you In the exact same place You were burnt. They don't abuse your kindness And mistake it for weakness. They don't hold you while You're crying, And then become the reason you're crying. The truth is, Friends can break your heart too.

Untitled

You make me the saddest and happiest person I've ever been
I could never ask for something more beautiful And treacherous as you,
You gave me life and put a hole in my chest
You gave me life by setting my bones on fire
And now all I have left are the ashes
I would write a million poems for you
If it would bring you back
But you're gone
And so is my love for everything else

Untitled

The words I could write for you would never end I love you so painfully
Over and over again
You were never meant for me
But I loved every second I spent with you
I will always love you,
And if I don't
It means a part of me
Is dead
This 3rd degree burn
That goes deeper than skin
Called heartbreak
It hurts I'll never see you again,
But maybe I'm better here with you now.

Untitled

Fluorescent lights
Pale shaky voices
Jagged shards of glass
We will take all our chances
Pierce my skin
But leave me whole
Are we digging deeper
Or just searching for more?

Mistreat Noah

If you say something 'wrong' you'll get a smack
You're too afraid to fight back
I know the abusive life is rough
No one can really shrug it off
You're too afraid to raise your voice
You think you don't have a choice
I never see you smile just frown
You can save yourself before you drown
He says he'll stop I know it's a lie
So get rid of him and find a better guy

The Pain We Feel Ranika McDonald

"You really are the perfect girl," he begins.

I feel my heart aching. As much as he tries to sugar coat things, it's never going to be easy.

"It's just, I'm not ready for commitment right now. I'm still hurt over Marissa. You know that."

The way these words effortlessly fall out of his mouth makes me feel he is lying. However, I trust him to the point that I feel he's not lying to me. Hopefully he's not lying to me. Marissa. That's her name.

"Mel, are you listening to me?" his words cut like a knife.

"Y-yes." I stutter, "Yes of course I'm listening to you," I answer.

He smiles.

Is this going to be my last time seeing him smile?

He starts to talk again. However, I'm not listening. I want to be in his arms forever. I wish he wasn't telling me this.

"It's crazy how I used to hate every guy that hurt you, now I'm that guy," he says, as he holds my hand.

Still, I accept his hand and let his fingers intertwine with mine. Warm tears run down my face. I watch them fall off my cheek and land on my pants. Andrew and I have been talking about his commitment issues for the past hour, and the more he talks the more disheartened I feel.

"Honestly, I do not understand why you're reacting like this," Andrew says to me.

Deep breaths, deep breaths.

"Well, how am I supposed to feel when I'm scrolling down my feed and I see you with another girl?" I start.

"You won't," he snaps.

"Oh really? Because all you do, all day, is be on your phone. God knows who you text all these days," I snap.

He remains silent. I can tell he has a lot to say but just won't say it.

"You expect me to sit here and watch your life play out while mine isn't? 'Cause you want to give your love to someone else?"

He takes a deep breath, and calmly says, "Okay Mel, don't bring your insecurities on me. Because none of that is going to happen. You need to relax."

"You're really hurting my feelings Andrew, please stop," I beg. I'm balling.

"Okay," he snaps once again, and walks away.

Watching him walk away is like watching my whole heart shatter like china plates hitting the ground—instantly broken.

Is this what modern love feels like?

Dear You Victoria Gomez

Dear you,

Here I go, falling all over again.

How many more times till the end?

You finally came back to me.

What now have you been feeling lonely?

I keep thinking you're going to run away.

Because you loved me enough to choose me, but never enough to stay.

Skin to skin, heart to heart, We always end up apart.

Dear you,

Was it all just too much, or just not enough?

We can try our best, just know it'll be tough.

Our memories, we talked about them like old clothes.

No matter how much we washed them they're still just as nice as when we first got them.

Here I go, finally felt loved as if it was a gift from up above.

I'll take the risk, maybe this will be different.

Won't be so inconsistent.

Skin to skin, heart to heart, Maybe I won't get left in the dark.

Dear you,

As I gave you my heart once more, you promised to keep it safe.

And as I unlocked all the doors you promised you'd stay.

We'll have our blues and greys just promise me you won't walk away.

We'll make it this time, it'll be different.

Won't go by so fast this time, it's a commitment.

As I laid my head on your chest to rest the night.

It was finally real, I was done my fight.

We promised each other we'd make it last.

That it won't end up anything like our past.

Don't pay attention to them, they'll all have something to say.

We'll figure it out our own way.

Skin to skin, heart to heart, It finally feels like nothing can break us apart.

Untitled Anonymous

Sometimes it hurts a lot because I know I'll never really be enough for her to be truly happy I wonder why I'm not enough a lot I wonder why does she still love him when I saw this new side of you I realized how much he doesn't deserve you and how you deserve so much better I saw a side of you that just wants to take care of the one you love spend time together with him and love him forever I hope that one day I will truly be enough for you because I truly love you with every part of my body and always will I'm sorry that I'll never be enough

Not the worst brother in the world Adam Siegel

Even though I know that you care, I can't help but see you're totally unfair. You would always tell me to do your shit, And what not to do, ugh, what a hypocrite.

You fill up the house with so much sound, I can't hear my thoughts for they are drowned. It's when you scream and get out of hand, And when you sing, well, you think you can.

Sometimes it's like you could star in a slapstick, When you bust into my room and dance like a spastic. Though I must admit it makes me laugh – Like you always do, like you always have.

Before you get an ego there's something I need to stress: This doesn't make you funny, I'm just easy to impress.

You're so annoying it makes me want to hurt you, Even though it goes against all my virtues. You refuse to leave my room as if to start a war, And even when you do leave, you never close my door.

You always poke me in hopes of some reaction, And for some reason I give it, to your satisfaction.

All jokes aside, there's something that I've got to say: I mean this literally, there's a rubric I must obey. And even if it kills me I have to admit it, You are not the worst brother that I could have been gifted.

You're always there if I just want to chat – Which I never do, but let's keep it at that.

We're a daring duo, partners in crime; You're there for me, well, most of the time.

So even though you can be really mean, I'll stay by you, till I turn eighteen.
And with time all these stories I've told, Will easily be turned into comedy gold.

The Sorrow of a Child Mateus-Allaistair

I am alone in the world.

Only seven,

Family, yes, but they aren't here for me.

I have stories to tell, but nobody hears them.

My pants are ripped at the bottom, tight at the waist, and haven't been cleaned in two months.

I haven't been allowed food in four days.

I still don't have a toothbrush or deodorant,

My siblings block me from the bathroom.

I can't take showers or pee or poop.

They are always after me.

Hitting me with toys,

Burning me with boiling water or lighters.

Yet still I smile when I play with the other kids my age.

With them, I can be cheerful and happy.

Playing with friends at the park and going to the pool,

Doing my work with friends and fooling around during class,

Going up and down the place,

Like any kid would.

When it's time to go home,

I suddenly stop after everyone is gone.

I am left all alone.

Waiting to be picked up by my parents.

The sadness pours into me like a river, so

I hold my knees and bury my face between them –

I feel as if a flood is going to pour out of me.

[&]quot;His parents are to blame!"

[&]quot;He's a stupid kid, his parents must be so disappointed."

[&]quot;God has something planned for this child, you'll see."

[&]quot;This child is cursed by the devil!"

Breathing Toxic Callum McNeill

Everything at once.

It all has to happen at once,

Every single time,

It's everything,

All at once.

I'm sitting here, wasting the day away, and staring at a blank white page again. I see it all; I see everyone else succeed, talking so merrily, and yet. I feel cold again, like every other day before, frozen in time, as time slips away. Everything I try, ends up empty on the inside, nothing left but the scribbles and mistakes.

I try to finish, or even get started, but my head pulls me away, again. It says Tell me. Why even try? You know what to do, but never find the reason why. Just don't look, only look at me, at everything you want to be, at everything you'll never achieve.

I'm breathing.

Home alone, surrounded by everyone. Boxes filled with everything I've ever loved. Barren, the room where nothing resides, but me. Must I really leave you behind? Will they ever choose to change their mind? Or is it all for nothing, all once again?

You'll never pass, you never worked in class, at all. Why shed those tears? The end draws near, for you. After everything, can't I just escape? My life is never where I want to be. And yet I'm tethered here, all because I want to be. I'm breathing.

I'm breathing, toxic.

Why do I do this? All at once, every time. I still walk, still dream, my life has way more worth than it seems, and still, you force me to breathe, toxic. You'll never go, no matter how hard you try, in the end their hope is just your lies. Just stay behind, let me take you away.

You force me to...

I'll force myself to breathe, I'll push myself to succeed. No, I don't care about the pain, and it hurts more anyways, to breathe, toxic. Even if you make it, I'll never go away. Even if I make it, I'll need you to stay. Everything's happening, all at once, at the same time. But If I keep on walking, I should be fine. I know I'll never leave you. But that will just have to be, since I know that you can never force me to breathe.

Toxic.

A Kind of Magic Kaesye Duncan

"If you let that beautiful Lily into your heart, maybe it can make it bloom" I pick at the lilies surrounding me in the field. Making a flower crown seems to be all my mind will let me do. Though to the anguish of my best friend, we have things to do. But I won't let that happen 'til I'm done. At the moment what I need is more important.

I've always adored lilies. Their smell, their look... and I've never known why. But the moment I see one I just lose my mind. So at the moment my brain is slightly going crazy. And the flower crown isn't just because the lilies are beautiful but because it helps lower my anxiety and I can't be anxious today. I just can't. Though the beauty also helps.

"Meadow, we have to leave, we have classes in 10 minutes." That's my best friend Melody. If I'm being honest I'm not exactly listening to her. But to be fair I'm never really listening when I'm surrounded by lilies. Plus I'd rather stay here than go to my psychology class right now. It may be the major I wanted but the professor isn't the greatest. I mean he's smashed at least 20 of my flower crowns. That makes him a super villain in my book.

I fall back and pick some lilies from the ground, bringing them to my nose. Aren't they just the most satisfying smell? I don't understand how someone couldn't just fall in love with these beautiful creations of nature the first time they smelled them. It's like happiness surrounds you and holds you in its warm embrace. And you end up never wanting to leave.

"Melody Austin! Don't you have a class in nine minutes? Shouldn't you be on your way?" That was Mary. It never really surprises me that she finds us easily since we do the same thing

every morning. It's become our daily ritual. I love Mary very much but we don't really ever speak. She's always focused on her sister, her boyfriend and work. I can't deal with the amount of stress she lets out. Plus she doesn't like lilies, she'd rather roses. So I kinda hold that against her.

"I'm trying to get there but Meadow refuses to get up. I honestly don't understand her obsession with lilies. They're just flowers." She says walking closer to me with Mary two steps behind her. HOW DARE SHE?! She's my best friend, she's supposed to understand. Lilies are not just flowers, they're THE best flower. How could anyone say such a thing? It's very much rude to ignore the flower's feelings.

I sigh, getting up and placing the finished crown on my head while tangling some of my auburn curls into it. I can't go to class without it. If I did I feel like I might have a panic attack. If that makes me weird then screw it. And I know it does. I'm not stupid.

I begin walking in the direction of the building my psychology class is in. I put the biggest smile I can place on my face, remembering the words my mother used to tell me.

"Put a smile on your face and all fear shall be erased. Put a crown of flowers on your head and it shall give you power."

It's not the best rhyme or quote in the world but it gives me comfort so I say it every day before class. If I say it, I stay calm. It's the one thing that stuck with me that was said by my mother. And it's the only thing I need.

As I'm walking by I grab both Mary and Melody's hands. I squeeze their hands hoping my anxiety will slowly disappear. I need more comfort than they will ever know. If they weren't both here right now, I think I might just have broken down and stayed in that field.

"So are you guys coming to the show tonight?" Mary asks while smiling wide. Her boyfriend is in the band so I can understand why she's so excited and proud of him. Though we've never met, I do believe that he's a character. Not a bad one, but one of incredible interest.

"Yes, we are in fact going. That's why Meadow's spent the last hour picking lilies. She's nervous about being surrounded by new people." Melody answers back while squeezing my hand and laying her head on my shoulder. Her comfort slowly lowers a bit of my anxiety but it doesn't get rid of it completely.

"Don't be nervous, Meadow. They're really nice boys and we promise we won't leave you alone for one minute!" Mary tries to reassure me.

I sigh. Last time they promised that I ended up passing out and spraining my arm. But I smile anyway. It's a new year and I promised that I would open up more. And I promised Mary that I'd finally meet her boyfriend. We may not be close but she trusts my judgment.

As we make our last couple of steps to the door of the building I stop and turn around looking at them both. I force the biggest smile I can create onto my face.

"Well what are we waiting for? If we want to go to that party, first we must get through classes! Trust me, the fun can start later." I turn around after giving them both my first tiny paragraph I've said to them this morning.

I feel like I'm going to completely regret ever agreeing to go to this party. But hey! Better to regret it than never know! And Melody and I made our way inside, leaving Mary to go to work. Today is going to be interesting. I mean, it's October 6th, 1973. What could possibly go wrong?

*Insults*Latisha Simpson

"You're dumb at math"

"You're doing badly at school"

"Tidiness and cleanliness is next to godliness"

The bully feels like a knight saving the world. The bully is powerful when he is in control. The bully feels safe when he hurts them with his words.

The victim reeks of stress
The victim feels shivery cold
The victim feels sick to the stomach, blood rushing to the face.

Insults taste like rotten cheese Like the aftertaste of milk Like bland tea.

The bully looks fit and fresh. The bully could be anyone.

The bully smells like hate when he spits insults.

Reality Check. Many

I'm that kid who's known to steal everything because no one suspects me; or at least that's what I think. I feel this sense of untouchableness; I usually walk out with electronics, clothes and at times even living animals. My friends always call me a bum for stealing and I try and explain to them that it's because I don't have a job and no income. Yes, I know it's the wrong thing to do. Yes, I know it's not my property and yes, I know it's against the law – but I'm living my best life.

Summer of 2016. I'm with two friends. It's a Thursday afternoon at Place Vertu Mall. Today I plan to do something a bit crazy. I want to go into Sears along with two friends and fill up all our bags with liquidation items. The store is in the process of closing so who really cares, right?

We open our bags and scoop everything off the shelves into them. From chargers to candles, we take everything. The thought of getting caught isn't even a thing at this point. So here we are, three teenage boys in an empty store, completely clearing shelves, not a care in the world. I don't really feel the need to check for cameras because I just don't give a shit. We pass all the aisles, taking things and then my friend Peter yells at me from two rows down "Ayt yo, let's get the fuck out of here!" I refuse, because I feel there are still potentially good things that I could resell for good money. So I grab about 30 chargers and just walk out with them on my shoulder.

We start walking to the store's exit when we hear a guy from behind us scream, "Stop right there! You guys are under arrest for shoplifting!" My friends, the people whom I think will drop everything and run with me, just stand there flabbergasted. I drop everything and run for my life thinking, "This is where it ends." I look back and realize I have a pretty good lead on one of the guards. By now, I'm in the parking lot running towards the exit. I look behind me to see that the guard is no longer there. To my surprise I turn back around to see three cop cars.

"They got me, it's over," I repeat to myself over and over. They proceed to get out of their cars. "Down on your stomach, hands out wide like an airplane!" yells one of the officers. At this point I'm really, really thinking my life is over because I always steal from this place and the guys that I'm with have a bunch of shit from other stores that I had put in their bags earlier that day.

They bring us to a room at the back of the store, shoplifting posters everywhere. The officer on the right asks us, "So, who's the mastermind behind all this?" I keep my mouth shut as the other two point at me. Just as I had suspected, they rat me out and blame everything on me. Which, to be honest, they aren't wrong. If it weren't for me they wouldn't have even had the thought of stealing. I'm then isolated from the other two guys and the officers start their questioning. They're asking me if I've ever stolen from here before, all that dumb talk. I respond with a simple "No." The officer asks me, "Would you like to call your parents or come to the station with us?"

At this moment, what just happened actually registers in my head. What are my parents going to say about this!? Kick me out? Ground me? Disown me? Thoughts are racing through my head. I don't even care about what just happened with the cops; my worry is, "what are my parents gonna say to all this?" So I pick up the phone and dial my mom's number. I know I can't go into detail on the phone because she's going to worry, so I have to make it quick and concise. "Hello," my mom answers. "Yeah, Mom, I'm at the

mall and I just got arrested. Nothing's wrong, I just need you to come pick me up and bring me home, please."

My mom's giving me the classic guilt trip in the car the whole ride home. But to my surprise, she isn't yelling at me.

I get home and see my dad. My parents aren't even mad, but the disappointment is insane. I feel horrible for what I just did.

Two weeks go by and my parents still haven't acknowledged me. Quite frankly, if my kid did that, I would have done the same thing. Violence doesn't do shit for me; I would just do it again. But when I saw the disappointment in their eyes after coming home two weeks ago, it made me realize that this isn't the life I want to live. I want to work for my things.

I've rethought all my choices since then and I... I will never steal again, and I can say that with confidence.

Are You Ready Talya Spence

I am not ready yet!

After the 2 months I've been preparing myself I can't do it!

All of a sudden,

Now

The air feels cold as I wrap my arms around myself feeling every trembling Sensation on my body.

With the clock ticking down the very last second to shine,

In only 3 minutes

That's when the anxiety kicks in.

My heart beating as loud as the music playing on stage,

The voices in my head telling me

"You better come out on top or else someone more deserving than you will Take it".

"2 more minutes till showtime"

Prepping backstage

That's normally when the breathing gets out of control.

Take a second, get it together

Which never really works out,

Take another to get the spiraling to stop.

I only have one more minute to get everything together,

It's very hard to focus with the competition killing it right on stage.

"You have to be better than you were yesterday!"

Now

Whether or not I get my shit together there's really no turning back now...

I mean I could,

But that wouldn't be a smart idea in the long run

And I've worked too hard to get where I am today.

Right here, right now I have exactly 3 minutes to prove I deserve that trophy more than anyone in this room

"stage time"

I pray I don't fuck this up.

AAP family Turbo AAP

Hustling through these streets for cash
Hearing sirens gotta dash
It can be tough sometimes
Especially as a teen committing petty crimes

Grown up now the safe gotta couple hundred thousands No emotions just a little guilt for a couple of seconds Always wanting the safe and pockets to fill To get Ma that Rollie and Pops that Richard Mille

Want a cash out today? I got you let's hit a 45k All this dirt so to God I pray

17 and got the legal sneaker shop
Nevertheless, these large amounts give me this rush where I can't stop
Hand over your credit card for money no risk? Check, your account soon you got debt
I will wake up the next morning knowing you're in the red still won't feel regret

As long as little bro got that W I don't care so fuck all of you.

Afraid of Heights Anonymous

Society only believes what
It wants to see.
They choose to be contaminated with
Ancient beliefs,
They think that new should
Be buried far beneath the old.

They can't possibly practice what They preach.

For their biblical god –

You know, the one that killed everyone, The one who will resurrect their son To come get the holy ones.

Can be contradicted by hypocrisy.

We're all aware that there is no Religious democracy.

Letting the earth burn
Like the witches on the stake,
When in reality, greed
Had everything to do with our mistakes.

Everyone wants to go to heaven, But nobody wants to die. Everyone wants to fly, But they're all afraid of heights.

These heights we must take Are the heights of unifying, Not the inhumane ways of crucifying Those who aren't the same. The heights they take are In fact the heights of Artificial light, They will never advance And never take flight.

We battle our beliefs And our beliefs battle us, If we practice what we preach, It still won't be enough.

Lost Control Anonymous

My face furls up.

My palms sweat.

My blood starts to boil and my fists clench.

Everyone in the room turns to me.

They all know exactly what's going through my head,

They can read it on my face.

Rage.

Seven years old.

Grade one, already I'm beating kids up.

I throw chairs at principals,

I stick my fists through walls.

I lose control,

Strangle my own friends for looking at me wrong.

I've already been suspended a few times,

There are many more to come.

My dad thinks I'm broken.

He doesn't understand me,

He doesn't want to.

My mother tries everything.

Nothing works and she breaks down.

She fears I'm broken.

She loses hope.

I'm in the car being driven to the hospital.

No words are spoken, my dad at the wheel.

It doesn't take us long,

The smart men knew what they were doing.

They wore white lab coats.

I'm just a kid, I don't know right from wrong. How could I?

Intermittent Explosive Disorder.

That's what they decided I have.

Disorder.

Like Intellectual Development Disorder. Mental Retardation.

I really am broken.

I'm back at school.

They're all staring at me.

It's as if they know. As if they can see it on me.

As if I wear it.

Intermittent Explosive Disorder,

Plastered on my forehead.

I am a little embarrassed. But, ironically, I mostly feel anger.

Over my lack of control.

Anger because of my anger.

The story of my life.

And that doesn't affect me as much as it affects the people around me.

The people I love,

The people I care about.

They have it the worst.

Those who need to stick around, do so reluctantly,

The ones that don't, leave. And who can blame them?

Who wants to walk on eggshells everytime they're around someone?

You take one wrong step, and crack.

You cut your foot open.

I couldn't know that then.

When I was seven, I thought I was loved, regardless of my anger.

I thought everybody would come and go as I wanted them to.

How stupid I was.

I didn't realize that anyone, no matter who it is, can leave you behind.

They will leave you behind.

Nobody owes anyone anything.

They have their own lives, with their own issues and their own disorders.

They can leave if they want to leave.

And that's exactly what happened.

Left alone in life, I fight for control. I'm still fighting.

I've hurt many people.

In the end I hurt myself the most.

I am older now, I can't blame my ignorance.

I can't excuse my actions with apologetic words.

I have the power to cause real damage.

I have the capacity for terrible things.

I carry the shame of many mistakes.

Finally, I am learning.

Isolation can do that.

When you cause your own isolation,

It's a different,

Deeper kind of learning.

This is a true story.

This is the story of my life.

Revenge Done Right Alessandro Martinez

The bell rang and Alex walked out of school like it was the first day of summer. He walked straight to the dep. Really it was not the last day of school or anything, but it was so nice out that he wished he didn't have to go back. He wanted to just work full-time instead of part-time, even though he was making a lot of money. After all he had big plans for the summer, like going to Toronto for a week to chill with his friends and go shopping with the money he saved up.

He went to buy himself a drink and a couple snacks and then he pulled out a stack of cash, most of his savings. When he went outside there were four guys from his school telling him to give them money, but instead Alex flipped them all off and ran to his house.

Later on that weekend, Alex went to go play basketball for a couple of hours. But about two hours later, the same four guys pulled up on him at the park.

One of them said: "If you don't start giving us 20 dollars a week you'll regret it. So Alex pulled out 80 dollars and gave it to them. "Every Friday you have to give us 20 dollars each." Then they let him go. Walking away, Alex knew if he started giving them his money he wouldn't be able to go to Toronto.

Monday morning Alex went out for a jog knowing he wouldn't be bothered till Friday. So he took advantage and went to go sign up for boxing classes down the street, with some of the money he had saved up. He didn't care because he had more money coming in that same week.

While he was walking back home he was thinking of a plan of what he was going to do on Friday, when the guys came to collect.

He had options, he could go beat them up by himself, maybe if he had a weapon or something. But that was risky, because he could get in trouble with the cops or they could use the weapon against him. Another possibility was bringing backup, but he wouldn't want anything happening to one of his boys if the fight got out of hand.

Alex couldn't wait till he got paid that week, because he had an idea in mind. Maybe he could hire a bodyguard or two so he could scare the guys away on Friday and tell them that they would all have to give him 20 dollars a week, or else things would go bad for them, instead. Alex didn't want to deal with this anymore he just wanted to finish school and go to Toronto with his friends. From Tuesday to Friday Alex was going to hit the gym so he could at least learn some techniques and learn how to punch properly. Then if the guys came back for him after his plan on Friday, he would be able to defend himself.

Thursday morning Alex took a walk to the bank to pull out his money. Alex needed to find one or two bodyguards to hire because there was only one day left till the guys were going to come and collect from him, but he wasn't fully prepared yet.

When he got home, he went on the Internet to see where he could find bodyguards to contact and hire for a day. After two hours of looking he finally found two guys that were available so he contacted them to see how much it would cost for a day, he told them to be ready for tomorrow. Alex had to pay 200 dollars per bodyguard, but it didn't really bother him because he had \$3500 in his bank account for Toronto. The guards were huge and built, he wasn't worried about them being able to scare the four boys. That same night Alex went to bed early so that he could be ready for tomorrow because he didn't really know what was going to happen.

The next day Alex woke up early to prepare himself and called up the bodyguards to meet him near his house. When they got there, Alex told them where he was supposed to meet the other four guys, so they went. Alex felt nice walking down the street with two big built bodyguards by his side knowing that no one was going to mess with him. When they got to the corner where they were supposed to meet, the guys weren't in sight, until Alex saw them coming down the street.

The guys walked up to Alex, all shook when they saw two built bodyguards standing next to him, waiting for one of them to say a word.

"There's going to be a change of plan," Alex told them. "I'm not giving you anymore, but you have to give me my 80 dollars back or you're going to regret it."

Their faces looked like they didn't want that to happen so one of the guys said: "That's not happening on my watch."

But then one of the guards grabbed the kid, picked him up and Alex looked at him straight in the face. "If what I said doesn't happen, then my uncles here are going to make you pay or there's going to be consequences." Then he slapped him in the face. "Get out of my face before things go even further, and don't ever think of trying this again on me."

A few weeks later Alex was preparing his things for Toronto the next day. He called up his boys and said that he's pulling through the next day and that everything got fixed.

Rico's Story Alex Galvano

There was a kid named Rico who lived in the Southside, lived a normal life, went to school, wasn't doing that good but still passed. One day his dad came home saying he had a job offer on the eastside which meant they had to move there in a new house. Rico had a little brother who was in school too and when they had found out they had to move, they were not too happy because it meant they had to make new friends and go to a new school.

The next day their dad came home and announced that he took the job, so they moved to the eastside in a new area which was really ghetto. House windows were broken, garbage was everywhere and the neighborhood looked dirty. But one thing that looked nice was that the whole hood would hang out at the basketball court like a big family.

That same night Rico decided to go play basketball and meet new people. There was a team missing a player so Rico said he would play and that's how he met Josh, by playing ball.

They went to the same school, spoke every day and became like brothers. At school, Josh introduced Rico to this guy named Tyler who was nice but something about him was weird. But Rico didn't say anything and went home after school.

Everything was going fine for the first month until Rico's dad lost his job. After that it was all downhill. They were barely able to pay the bills and Rico's dad got sick and was in the hospital. So Rico had to find a way to make money so he could feed his little brother and pay the bills. He started talking to Josh at lunch about what had happened and how he wanted to make money and take care of his family.

After hearing Rico's story, he said, "I know ways you can make money and still go to school."

"I'm down for whatever, I'd do anything to help our family," Rico said.

So Josh wanted to help and brought Tyler. Rico filled him in too. They both understood and once they got to the hood after school, Josh introduced Rico to his cousin who was part of a gang that sold drugs, robbed anything that was worth something and always hustled.

While they were talking business, suddenly someone ran up into the house and shot Josh's cousin in the head and robbed everything that was inside, then ran off. Josh and Rico couldn't do anything, they didn't have a gun or weapon, they just watched it all happen, helpless. Josh just looked down at his cousin bleeding out and yelling for help. Josh couldn't do anything while tears were going down his face watching the cousin that had showed him everything he knew die.

Ten minutes later the ambulance came and then the police, to see what happened but Josh and Rico didn't say anything. Rico was trying to make Josh feel better but the only thing Josh had on his mind was his cousin getting a bullet to the head and bleeding out in front of him.

"Why him?" Josh kept saying.

So they both went home but were not able to sleep. All they thought of was all the blood they had just seen.

The next day they woke up for school and spoke to Tyler about the situation.

"Lets get them back, kill them all," Tyler said. He looked really serious, you saw it in his eyes. They recognized the guy who was shooting because he was someone's brother in their grade. Apparently the guy had a trap house where they would all chill and sell the drugs. They all agreed the plan was they would go find them, run up in the house, kill everyone, take all the drugs, money and guns that were inside.

They needed a gun and knew Josh's cousins friend would have many, so they all went to his house and borrowed pistols.

After that, Tyler, Josh and Rico got ready, put masks on, black gloves. Rico's heart before getting there was beating really fast, and his palms were sweaty. He was starting to have second thoughts, but it was too late not to do it.

Finally they got to the shooter's trap house. They opened up a side window and went in and saw everyone in the living room chilling, so Rico, Josh and Tyler ran at them, started shooting and killed five guys. Then they took everything like they said they would. While they were running out of the house they just saw a little girl crying. She was about six years old and they realized they had probably killed her dad. After seeing that little girl's face, Rico couldn't stop thinking about what he just did.

"Now the girl is going to grow up with no father," Rico said, shaking his head. He felt sick about what they had done and puked everywhere, while everyone else had a laugh.

When they got back to the cousin's friend's house, they still had everything, so Rico took over the drugs, and Josh and Tyler took care of selling the stolen guns from that day.

Rico made a lot of money off of this, took care of the bills and his brother, but his dad was still in the hospital and Rico would not visit him that often. He was too busy making money by selling drugs. Rico also rarely went to school but his brother went every day and got good grades. One day Rico finally decided to go

back to school and he got called to the office at the same time as his younger brother. They got dismissed and picked up by their aunt and went to the hospital.

As soon as they got there, the doctors announced that the father had died. Rico and his brother were in shock and just started crying. Their aunt brought them back home and Rico got back on his grind and from that day he dropped out of school for good, but not his brother. His brother wanted to be a doctor and help people.

Five months later Rico was making a lot of money but still had problems with the gang who they had robbed and whacked five members.

One day Rico's brother was walking home and a car was there, just sitting there. It was tinted black, you couldn't even see who was inside. The closer Rico's brother got, the more the window lowered.

Suddenly, the windows rolled down and two guys just started shooting Rico's brother, thinking it was Rico. His brother fell on the neighbour's front lawn and couldn't breathe and was bleeding out.

Rico walked out of the house having heard the gunshots and saw his brother bleeding out. The car with tinted windows screeched down the street and peeled around the corner. Rico ran to his brother and tried to help but he was barely awake.

"This is all my fault," Rico said, crying.

Rico called the ambulance, but it was way too late. His brother died in his arms, blood everywhere, on his hands, his shirt. He could only blame himself.

Rico went to his father's and little brother's funeral. They had both died in the same week. His brother's funeral was a closed casket because they had shot him in the head. Even though his father was dead he had still saw his father's look of disappointment. After they were buried, Rico just stood there for hours, crying in the rain.

Ever since that day everything went bad in Rico's drug dealing business. He wasn't making as much money, and was depressed. One night, he took a bunch of cocaine and pills to not feel the pain but all he could see was his brother's face and his father's face that he never went to go visit. At this point he was fed up of the life he lived, saw a gun on the table next to his drugs.

He grabbed the gun with his shaking hands and put the tip of the pistol in his mouth.

As the sound of the gun shot rang through the neighbourhood, Tyler and Josh stopped dead in their tracks on their way to Rico's house. They looked at each other and ran as fast as they could to Rico's. They walked in, saw Rico on the couch with a bunch of pills and cocaine in front of him on the table. He was bleeding out on the couch.

Josh and Tyler looked at each other and took his drugs and money as fast as they could in order to restart the business.

The Big Leagues Kathryn Bastien

The speakers are booming, hockey players drinking, girls dancing, people are interacting. It's just the party. Jonathan and Brayden are childhood best friends, they grew up playing hockey together. Currently, they both play for l'Armada de Blainville Boisbriand. Jonathan is the captain and Brayden is assistant captain, both boys are on their last year in the junior professional hockey division, and next year it's the big leagues for these boys, if they don't mess up.

Tonight they are partying because they won their first season opener after New Year's break and the team is back together. As more girls and people start to fill the bar, Maela walks in. Jonathan spots her at the door, he strides over to her and kisses her passionately on the lips. She then gives a hug to Brayden.

"Hey boyysss, big party I see?" Maela says with a little chuckle.

Jonathan smiles. "Of course, go big or go home. We won the game so what do you expect?"

No hockey player can mess with Maela. Basically almost the whole town knows her. She's the captain's girlfriend, the team's reporter and the assistant captain's best friend.

Since Jonathan is with his girl, he feels more at ease and takes another beer. Before you know it, the night is slowly winding to an end. As the speakers start losing their rhythm, the pub starts emptying its noisy shadows. Only Jonathan, Brayden and Maela, along with a couple other team members, are left.

Jonathan who is a little drunk is all over his girl. Since the surrounding is quiet they decide to end the night with a romantic

slow dance. Maela's arms are clasped around Jonathan's neck, his hands are softly gripping her waist. While dancing, spinning, laughing, Maela leans in for a final goodnight kiss. Both, intensely lost in the moment, a flash of light shines in Jonny's eyes.

The night comes to an end. It is time to leave the bar. Only Jonathan, Brayden and Maela are left. Outside of the bar, Maela asks Jonathan, "Baby are you okay to drive?"

"No, but Brayden is, so he'll be taking the wheel. Don't worry, baby girl. Everything will be okay," Jonathan says, in a silly drunk voice.

From the passenger's seat Jonathan is looking out the window, trees whipping by. The night is still young yet everything seems to be a blur for him. Since Jonathan was too intoxicated to drive, Brayden is at the wheel, although what he didn't understand was that Brayden was just as drunk as he was.

Brayden's phone keeps going off in his pocket, he thinks it's someone he met at the party. He shoves the phone in the driver's door because he loses patience. He's too drunk to text while he's driving.

Next to him, Jonathan couldn't quite place what was going on, all he could hear was the sounds of tires screeching, glass breaking and a car alarm that's pounding Jonathan's head in.

The scene is horrifying. Brayden can't seem to recall who he hit. Both boys were all disoriented. They are in a ditch with the front of the truck all smashed up and dented by a tree that seems to be in their way. Jonathan is almost non-responsive. Brayden's heart is pounding with adrenaline, he can't seem to think straight. He knows time is running on the clock, he hears the sounds of the sirens off in the distant. He also knows that if this incident comes

out, it can ruin his career and ruin his chances of making it into the big leagues as a professional.

Without hesitation, Brayden makes a life changing decision, he slowly starts making his way towards the passenger seat. He is walking all wobbly, tripping over the remains of what glass is left over from the windshield of the truck. As he gets to the passenger's side, he realizes Jonathan is passed out. Unconscious.

With sirens approaching, Brayden wonders if his heart will rip out of his chest. He is having second thoughts about this, but it is too late now. Time is ticking and he knows he has no time to turn this around.

The police cars pull up to the scene, their headlights illuminating the crash. Brayden tries to snap out of this bad dream he thinks he's stuck in, but he comes to realize that this ain't no dream. It's reality.

As the police investigate the crime scene, they realize the driver is unconscious. Brayden is debating if he should admit what he has done before digging a bigger hole for himself.

The police officers approach Brayden, who is now in the passenger seat. They start interrogating him.

"Sir? Do you remember anything? Has the driver been drinking?"

Brayden's head spins while he is trying to respond.

"I-I-I can't q-quite recall what happened," he replies, in a stuttery voice.

"Do you happen to remember the collision?" the officer questions.

"What c-c-collision?" asks Brayden, all worried.

"Well sir, the driver, your friend Jonathan, hit another car..."

"No, no! We hit a tree, look!"

"No sir, you collided with another car, then rolled into this ditch, hitting a tree."

"Have they been able to identify who it was?" asks Brayden.

"Not yet, the only information we were able to retrieve is that the injured victim is a female and she is a reporter for a hockey team."

"A-a-a-re you sure?" asks Brayden.

"I'm sorry sir, do you know the victim?" the officer replies.

"I-I-I don't know," responds Brayden.

The paramedics help Brayden to the ambulance. As he steps in, he remembers his phone. It's in the driver's door...

Trucks Up Kristopher Palmigiani

It was a regular day in the life of Johnny.

I was at the shop working on cars, changing spark plugs and brake calibers, tinting windows and working on my truck. I learned all this from my grandfather when he was alive. He was a general contractor who used to love working on cars, going camping, and spending time with me. We used to work on our snowmobiles and ATVs. The best time I had visiting my grandparents was when I was working with him on our vehicles.

I like working on cars because I like being hands-on. I've been working on trucks since I was six years old. Now I am eighteen and took over my grandfather's shop, it's called Trucks Up, in Old Town Road, a small town in Saskatchewan. Across the street there is a Tim Horton's that I go to every morning for my girlfriend, Jessica. Every morning I get her a coffee and a blueberry muffin, it's the same every day. I want to travel the world with my girlfriend one day, it is our dream.

One day I got into my GMC truck and drove to the shop. I got there and I parked where I normally park, but my Jeep was not where I left it. I walked in the shop, there was broken glass everywhere. Everything was spray-painted in black and blue, the colours of the Nemo Gang – the walls, the cars – and there was \$10,000 missing from my office.

Good thing my best friend from childhood became a detective and his name is Billy Farmer and everybody calls him Detective Farmer. Billy is six foot tall and he is a detective and has a beard that is very thick. Billy is very ballsy. This one time, we were hiking, he jumped off a 40 foot cliff into the water to catch a criminal that stole an older lady's purse, which ended in a foot pursuit and the criminal got pronged with a Taser. "Suck on this," I remember him saying.

Billy always has my back. The morning I got robbed I called him up.

"They took my truck, those bastards," I told him.

"It's okay, I'll take care of it," he said. "I'll meet you at your house."

He came to my shop and started investigating. "It's the Nemo Gang for sure that did it."

So we started to plan a sting operation.

We went down to the police station and we borrowed a Lamborghini. We planted it near my shop. We hid near the Lamborghini and we waited for the Nemo Gang to steal it. Back up was waiting in position for the Nemo Gang to show up. When they finally showed up we jumped out and we busted them, but like every criminal the leader of the gang ran.

Detective Farmer and I started a foot pursuit for two kilometers and he fell and we caught him.

"We got you," I said. "You stole from the wrong guy. Where's my Jeep?"

"At your mother's," he said.

We struggled for a bit to put him in handcuffs but we finally got him. Then I went home.

When I got home the phone rang so I picked it up. It was the cartel that was on the phone.

A deep voice was on the phone. "We're going to find you if you don't release the Nemo Gang, the money and the weapons that you confiscated."

That's when I realized that it was time to go on that world road trip with my girlfriend. So we packed all our stuff and left into the sunset.

Time of Predators Victor Marco Gombay

Spring was returning after a long, cold winter. The hunting season was back at its best. Newborns were coming, and the circle of life starting once again. Many years, and still I was amazed with how fragile life could be. Being a predator meant that the top of the food chain was my place in this world. Here in South America the Abelisaurus was king. I was a powerful hunter feared by all. There were rumors of a creature even bigger and fiercer than me up north. But that was nonsense, I was the best. But I knew my only chance of eating that day was to find a herd of Adamantisaurus and isolate a young.

As I made my way through the forest in search of my meal, an ugly mammal called out from the branches. "Hey there, big guy. Things are changing. A new era is coming where mammals will rule the earth, but you will not live to see it through. Remember my name, I am the Cronopio and your time is up."

Little did I know that he was right. I wouldn't live to see another spring. As I kept going on my journey in search of food I met many more annoying mammals claiming that the time of reptilian kings had come and gone. Luck was on my side that day, I caught a prey and ate plenty. As I settled down for the night I looked up at the stars, as I do every evening. In the sky there was a giant ball of flames heading this way. I didn't know it then but the mammals were right, my time had come. The irony in all of this was that even after I was gone they never got a chance at the top. They were destined to remain prey for ever.

The summer was hot and I desperately needed food. I was about to lay an egg. It would create a new generation of predators. Killer birds were at the top of the food chain now. I couldn't fly but that hadn't stopped me from being a tyrant. My favorite meal were Eohippus, but I had not been lucky lately and hunger was driving me nuts.

I suddenly heard the sound of hooves. It meant that my meal ticket was finally here. As I ran towards the source of the noise, I reached a clearing and there in middle was a herd of horse-like creatures. I walked silently around them and then pounced from behind. They ran in panic, but I was too fast. That's why I was hunting them and not the other way around. As I closed in, my prey turned its head and spoke. "Our time is near, mammals will soon take over and you will be nothing more than memories. The shock momentarily paralyzed me. I had never been spoken to in that way by a prey. I was about to plunge my beak deep into his neck to remind him that I was the one in charge. But it was too late, my meal had already fled. I was left there still starving. I lost my child a few days later. I had failed to propagate. The Eohippus was right, soon I and all other Gastornis were going to become nothing more than memories for those who would take our place at the top.

I woke up at the crack of dawn. The rest of the pack was still sleeping. As I looked lovingly at all my females I suddenly felt quite old. I had been the alpha male for many years, but my bones were creaking and my muscles sore. The burden of time was slowly catching up on me. After getting up and tiptoeing away, I headed to a place where I knew I could think in peace.

As I reached the stream a giant sloth was already there, he turned towards me and said. "Hey their saber-tooth, things are changing. You were the king, but that time is gone. A new era has

begun, where only one stand at the top. I am sorry my friend, but none of us will live long enough to see it through." I turned to him and asked who was trying to take my place. Then the sloth waved his head slowly, his eyes full of grief. He told me that there was no outrunning destiny, but I was free to try. "Saber-tooth they live on the other shore and are called huuumans." These were the last words that I would ever hear. And so I decided to tempt my chance and teach these newcomers a lesson.

The dampness of the autumn afternoon made this hunt all the more enjoyable. I could hear the heart beats of my frightened prey, its smell filled the air. I could follow his steps in the tall dry grass. It was an ugly creature that walked on all fours and couldn't even run. I felt deeply offended that the giant sloth had thought that this thing was going take my place in this world. As I silently made my way towards my supper, I started to think. If I was the greatest hunter of them all, what was there left in this world for me aspire to. Then I thought, if I had achieved it all why was I still fighting what else did I have to prove?

As I pounced on my prey I heard a noise in the grass, a movement to my left. Then I felt the cold grasp of death pulling me by her side. I looked around and saw him. A tall biped with no claws or fangs. He looked frail and weak and had no fur. He leaned down and picked up the small creature. How had I not noticed him? I was, after all, the greatest hunter of them all. He approached and removed a long branch with a sharp tip from my chest. The creature looked at me with its small eyes. There was something in them so unsettling that reminded me of the depth of hell. Then I saw it, there was no hunger in his eyes. He hadn't killed me to eat nor to stay alive, but simply because he could.

As I drew my last breath, I thought of what I had been told earlier that day. "Things are changing, you were the king, but that

time is gone. A new era has begun where only one stands at the top." Maybe it was not meant to be me. If hadn't been so cocky, perhaps I would have lived another day. But it was too late now the sloth was right, the humans were taking over my world.

Jonathan was running as fast as he could, his heavy boots leaving tracks in the snow. He was trying to escape, fighting to survive for the first time in his life. But he knew deep down it was a lost cause. He was only human after all, and for the first time in his life he was regretting it. At that moment he wished he had the strength of a dinosaur, the speed of a giant killing-bird, or even the agility of a tiger. He would have given anything to be a proper predator like those he had read about in books. But he, like the rest of mankind, was learning the hard way that they wouldn't stay at the top forever. Jonathan had never worried where his food came from or how the animals he ate had been treated, until the frightful day of May 11, 2021, when they arrived.

Jonathan saw the monster walk toward him in a deliberately slow manner. It knew that he was running out of breath, so it did not even bother to run. The invasion had begun a few months ago. The aliens were clearing the earth in the goal of farming what would be left of the human race. As Jonathan witnessed what he knew were his last moments he remembered what his father had once said when he'd been bullied as a kid. "In this world you eat, or you are eaten, the strong prey on the week." The thought of his father's words made Jonathan smile as the alien picked him up and put an end to the time of men.

Royal Boys Vincenzo Sferlazza

It was a Friday and I was at a house party with my boys, Anthony and Joey. We had an ongoing conflict with the Royal Boys because Anthony had told them that they were weak and they had no chance of beating him up. We were at a house party and we heard that the Royal Boys were coming to the house party too.

Joey said to me, "OH FUCK, WHAT DO WE DO?"

I told him, "Nothing bro, it's gonna be okay, trust me."

We stayed at the party and we were having a good time till the Royals Boys showed up to the party.

They walked in the house and started pushing Anthony on the wall and saying, "Who you think you are talking shit about us?"

Anthony replied, "Bro, you guys won't do anything, you ain't shit."

Andrew jumped in and said, "C'mon boys, let's have a good time. I don't wanna see anyone fight." It was Andrew's house so we respected what he said and the Royal Boys let Anthony go.

We were all having a good time, drinking, smoking and hooking up with girls. It was 1:00 am in the morning when everyone started to leave, everyone except Anthony, Joey, Vincenzo and The Royal Boys. So the three boys decided to leave.

They were walking to Vincenzo's house when they realized that the Royal Boys were following them in their car. The Royal Boys jumped out of the car and started jumping Anthony, they threw him on the floor punching him, and they stomped on his head.

That's when I jumped in and punched all three boys in the face. I am an experienced boxer, so I knew how to easily knock out someone. The Royal Boys were bruised and beaten. They gave up.

Anthony had passed out from losing lots of blood because of the punches and kicks to the head, so we called 911 and they brought him to the hospital.

When we were at the hospital we were scared if he was going to be okay and if he was badly hurt. We were all praying that he would be okay. Then we saw the doctor come out of the Anthony's room and he looked sad.

He came and told me and Joey that Anthony had passed away due to the injuries to his head. His skull had been cracked and his brain was badly bruised. He had lost too much blood and they couldn't do anything.

Joey and I started crying and punching the wall. We left the hospital and went straight to the Royal Boys' house.

I walked up to the porch, a gun in my hand. Joey stayed in the car. I kicked the door down, walked in the house and point blank, popped all of them straight in their heads.

Without thinking, I knew I had to leave the country. I sped to my house, went in my room and got all of my clothes, not even looking back.

I found myself standing in the middle of an airport. I stared at the board of flight times and countries. I saw the plane to Italy leaving in three hours.

I landed in Italy, went to my nonna's house.

Two weeks passed and I found myself a good job as a pizza chef. My life was going fantastic, so it didn't cross my mind to

think of what happened. But then three weeks passed and well I was on my way to go by a gun at a gun store. It crossed my mind of me shooting all the Royal Boys.

One day I was in my house training and the feds busted in my house and I got arrested for killing all the boys. They shipped me back to Canada and I got sentenced for three life sentences in jail on June 4, 2018.

So now it's Januray 4, 2019 and I'm waiting here day-by-day in this cold lonely cell till I die.

The Bravest Panophobiast Joshua Lo Dico

Jason was hanging out by his locker gathering his binders and other necessities for the day when Carrie walked up to him. Jason wasn't sure why she did, they had Gym and Chemistry together but never really talked.

"So, what time will you pick me up?" said Carrie.

Jason had a confused look on his face when she said this. "Hi Carrie, uhm—what are you talking about?" he asked.

"What? Didn't Michael tell you?" asked Carrie. "He said you would take us tonight."

"Take WHO out tonight? And where?" he said as he was taking the rest of his books out of his locker.

"Michael said you'd take the three of us too see Annabelle of course," replied Carrie.

Jason nearly dropped his books at the mere mention of that name. Ever since he'd heard of it, it'd been haunting him every night. It reminded him all too much of Nightmare Doll. Jason stormed off, leaving Carrie confused, to find Michael collecting all his binders over at his locker as well.

"Michael, what have you dragged me into?!" said Jason in a very angry voice. It was strange for him using this hard a tone. He was rarely ever really mad, but this particular situation really seemed to get to his nerves.

Michael, who turned around very fast, had a very nervous and guilty look on his face that all but took to know that he knew he was busted. "Hey Jason, ol' buddy, ol' pal, ol' friend of mine! What's up?" he said through a forced smile. But Jason wasn't having it.

"Don't try that Scooby-Doo crap on me! What's this about me taking you and Carrie to see Annabelle tonight?"

The smile on Michael's face faded and was replaced by one of awkwardness. "Look Jason, I'm sorry that I haven't told you anything yet. I really am. But I just need you to hear me out first," said Michael in a calm, reassuring voice.

Jason growled. "You have five minutes."

Michael clapped his hands together and began, "Alright, so, by now I'm sure you are aware of my insanely massive crush I got for Carrie, right? Well last week during lunch I casually overheard—"

"HA! Oh please!" interrupted Jason. "I think being a creeper is the more accurate term," he said crossing his arms.

"Anyway," said Michael, continuing, "I casually overheard Carrie mention how she really wants to see this movie. Since, if you haven't heard by now she is a big fan of horror movies. But she can't see her parents are celebrating their 34th anniversary and are going out tonight and the closest theatre is a 30 minute walk from her house. Later I told her that I had heard about her problem and that if she wanted I could help her tonight."

Michael was right about one thing for certain: Carrie had a thing for horror movies. Not only that, she'd done all sorts of crazy things according to gossip around school. She'd gone skydiving, escape room challenges, spider feeling, spending time at reptile zoos and being outside during thunder or lighting storms. There was even a title for her around the school: The Girl without Fear.

"Ok, and how exactly do I fit into all this?" asked Jason who was beginning to get annoyed by Michael and his hair-brained schemes.

"Well my friend, as I recall you recently got your license after obtaining high flying flags, so I was hoping that you'd be able to drive us from her house to the theatre and back."

Jason thought for a moment or two before this and eventually replied, "Alright, I suppose that I could do that for you.

Michael made a fist bump in the air when he heard this. "Yes! Thank you! And afterwards when the movie finishes the three of us can—" but Michael's sentence was cut short by Jason putting an arm on his shoulder.

"What do you mean by When the movie finishes?" Jason asked suspiciously.

Michael blinked and regained his focus." Well you are going to be with us right? How else are we supposed to get home?"

Now Jason was really getting annoyed with this. "You mean to tell me," he said in a low, hard voice, "that you expect me to actually SIT and WATCH through the entire screening of that movie? Even though you are extremely aware of my fear of dolls."

Michael started looking at Jason with pleading eyes now. "Look, please man, I'm begging you here. I really like this girl and I really want to make a good first impression on her. I know you hate dolls but I'm asking as a friend here, help a brother out. Jason was beginning to question what it meant to be a friend at this point. Is to be a friend mean that you can take advantage of other people's aspects in life to their own self interest? Or use a friend to get what they want even though it would make that friend

extremely uncomfortable? But Michael WAS his friend still. And a good friend would help their friends in a time of need.

Jason gave in. "Fine" he said. "I'll watch the movie with you two. But you owe me big time for this. Michael didn't show it but he was half tempted to jump in the air but held back nonetheless.

"Alright! Yes! Thank you, Jason, you're a true friend. At that moment the bell rang and everyone started moving to their classes. Michael looked back at Jason. "Well, see you tonight, friend!" said a very happy Michael running off to his least favourite subject, math class.

"Yeah" said Jason drily. "See you tonight."

Some time had passed where Jason, Carrie and Michael were all standing in line at the theatre to get their tickets. Carrie and Michael were very excited to watch the movie but Jason was just standing in line looking at the poster of Annabelle not saying a word. It was only when Michael nudged him on the shoulder because Carrie was starting to take notice to his staring. The three were next in line and the usher asked what movie they'd like to see.

"Three for Nightmare Doll," said Jason. The usher was a little confused by this.

"Excuse me sir, but did you say 'Nightmare Doll'? Because the register doesn't show me—" the usher began to say but was caught off by Michael.

"Oh, silly Jason." He looked at the usher. "I apologize; my friend can be absentminded sometimes. He meant three for Annabelle, please." Then Michael handed the usher the money who then received three tickets. Jason looked back and noticed that Carrie was noticing him for a second time now tonight.

Finally came the moment that Jason had dreaded all night: the screening. Throughout the experience Jason watched through cupped hands, only taking a few glances at a time. It was probably one of the worst experiences of his life. Only second to that dreadful night at his grandmother's house so many years ago.

After what seemed like an eternity, the movie had finally ended. Jason was certain that he wouldn't be able to sleep for a while now. Michael said that he needed to use the washroom which left Jason and Carrie standing there together. It wasn't until Carrie spoke that the silence broke.

"Jason, I need you to tell me," she said softly, "if you're afraid of dolls?" The question came like a slap to the face at Jason. He was very surprised for Carrie to ask this of him. But he couldn't exactly lie about something that was very true.

"Yes," said Jason in an embarrassed, tight voice. "I have a fear of dolls."

Carrie smiled at this. "I thought as much. You made it very obvious the whole day. Even with your attempts to cover it up. I mean, with your outburst this morning when I said Annabelle, your reaction to the poster while waiting in line and your scared-to-death reaction throughout the whole screening."

Jason went red in the face at all this. "Wow, you're very perceptive aren't you? But I think you forgot to mention the one with me and the usher."

"Actually, I was hoping you'd say that," said Carrie. "I wanted to ask you, who's Nightmare Doll?"

Jason went stiff at the name, but decided to tell Carrie anyway since she seemed very calm and, weirdly, almost sympathetic to him.

Jason took a deep breath before beginning. "OK, you want to know?" said Jason. "Well, here it is. Eleven years ago I spent the weekend at my grandmother's house. Now, at the time I had dolls—well not dolls I had action figures like G.I. Joe, Thundercats and Transformers—so really I didn't think much about them at the time. When I went to my grandma's house she had dolls all over her house. And not just any dolls, they were big, fully clothed, white-faced—"

"Porcelain dolls," finished Carrie with a sad look on her face. "Oh sorry, didn't mean to interrupt, please continue." Jason looked at her for a moment and continued.

"Porcelain dolls. But the guest room that I had to sleep in had a doll that looked exactly like Annabelle. It would sit at the foot of my bed on top of a dresser and just stare at me all night. I called it Nightmare Doll because that's what exactly what it was: A nightmare."

Carrie looked longly at Jason before finally speaking. "Jason I have a fear of dolls too." Jason gave a look of surprise about this at her. The Girl without Fear afraid of dolls?

"You're afraid of dolls too?" asked Jason. "But, you skydive and swim with sharks and pet tarantulas," said Jason, feeling as though he had been lied to by the whole school, but Carrie looked down and shook her head smiling softly.

"I'm afraid of flying Jason. As well as the ocean and especially spiders. I'm a panophobiast, Jason," she said ever so simply.

What with Jason's fear, he knew a thing or two about phobias and remembered what a panophobiast was. "You're afraid of everything," he said shockingly.

Carrie nodded looking over at the poster of Annabelle and examining it. "You shared your story, so I think it's only fair I share you mine. When I was around the age when your fear of dolls started, I was just naturally scared of everything. I don't know why I was so afraid of everything. I guess as I got older I realized how the world was full of so much chance and anarchy that anything could happen at any time and you'd never see it coming." Jason listened carefully, wanting to be respectful and take in every word. As well understand where this was going.

"So with that being said," Carrie continued, "I became too paranoid and frightened at everything in life, not being able to expand, explore, or whatever emotional crap. One day I was walking up to my house from school and noticed a stray dog at the doorstep. I panicked since dog bites scared me since it could've had rabies and sent me to the hospital. I backed against a wall as the dog came over to me. But what I didn't expect was the dog to simply lick my hand. After that I wasn't afraid anymore. The dog was gentle and sweet, so that I couldn't help to be afraid anymore. It was at that moment that I made my ultimate realization: What if I don't have to be afraid anymore?"

Carrie then went on to explain her mission: To conquer all her fears. She told her parents about it and they were both more than willing to help her. So she took skydiving lessons for her acrophobia, spider petting for her arachnophobia, scuba diving for aquaphobia, camping outside during thunderstorms for astraphobia, holding snakes at reptile zoos for ophidiophobia and so on. During this Jason was astonished, to say the least by this. He had never met anyone quite like Carrie before. The Bravest Panophobiast? Now that was a title to live with.

"Carrie. With all due respect, why tell me all this?" asked Jason, who really only cared about that question and that question alone at this point.

Carrie smiled. "Because Jason, I think I can help you. I look at you and see me, afraid of something you can't get over and unable to cope with. If you'll let me, I can help you conquer your fear of dolls. Especially Nightmare Doll."

Jason didn't even flinch at hearing Nightmare Doll. It was as if that by being next to Carrie, he was already a braver person. "You—you really think that you can help me?" he asked hopefully.

Carrie gave him another brave smile. "I KNOW I can help you. So, what do you say, friend, deal?" she raised her right arm as means for Jason to shake, but Jason was distracted at what she had said: friend. One that would help him...

Jason seized Carrie's arm and smiled half-bravely at her. "So, friend, when can we...?" His question was caught short by Michael coming back from his bathroom break.

"Hey Carrie. Great movie wasn't it? So, you doing anything next week?

"Sorry Michael" she said apologetically "But I got plans next week to help a friend, isn't that right, Jason?"

Jason looked at Carrie in an entirely different way than with Michael now. "Yeah," said Jason. "Carrie has to see a friend about a doll."

The Lost Raptor Keijo Marrone

One cold night in December, nearing Christmas Eve, I couldn't think in my wildest dreams that I'd discover what I did that night in the woods. I was taking a walk through the forest, near my house. Very creepy looking place, the trees were all slanted, looking like they were about to fall to the ground, and you can hear a lot of weird sounds coming from the woods. Mostly the sound of bears growling, and maybe the occasional noise of the moose. I was very familiar with the route, it was the path to go back home. As I took the path, I couldn't help but notice this beaming light between these two trees. Of course, I went out and got a closer look. It was like something out of a movie, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was this round, weird shaped thing. Much like an egg. What I saw that night was something that I will never forget.

Right before me, the egg began cracking. It began to hatch. Me being the imaginative dummy, I thought it was an alien and it would eat me or something. As it cracked more and more, I started to see an odd shaped head. Definitely not human. At that point, I thought to myself, "ok, this is it, I'm dead. This is something out of those 'Predator vs Alien' movies."

Instead of running away, like any smart person would, I stayed and saw what it was when it eventually fully hatched. It wasn't an alien, after all. From the weird shaped head, and the noises it was making, I could tell it was a dinosaur. The short arms, the big head and resembled to a reptile. I was still freaked out, as anyone would be, but it was just a baby though so, I picked it up. I was shaking with fear. Here, I was thinking, "what am I gonna do with this thing?" I didn't know what to do at that point. I didn't

know whether to bring it to the cops and let them figure it out, or just bring it home and feed it. In the end, I just brought the thing home.

When we got home, I put the dinosaur down on my couch. Luckily, it stayed there. I looked up on the internet what kind of dinosaur it was: "what are the types of dinosaurs?" After a good minute of research, it turned out that it was a raptor. Of course, me being the sports fanatic, I named the dinosaur, "Kawhi" after the overrated basketball player that played for The Toronto Raptors, Kawhi Leonard. Shame really, they traded Demarr DeRozan for him. Being that it was a raptor, I thought that the best thing to feed it were the tears of The Raptors' fans. You know, 'cause they suck so much.

As the days went on, I started to notice that Kawhi was very boisterous, jumped around a lot, and was very energetic. A bit too energetic. On New Year's Eve, I started to hear weird things, coming from the dino. Bit of a growling, crackling type sound. I realized that he was growing. It had only been a month and a half and already, the raptor was the size of my head. That's pretty unreal, considering the fact that I have a really big head. I couldn't believe my eyes. "Jesus, you're something else, aren't you?" I asked.

The next morning, I decided to go on my couch, and watch The Raptors game. It was a big game, they were facing The Bucks who were the best team in the entire league. As I continued to watch, the dinosaur jumped on the couch, and joined me. Next thing I knew, I was watching The Raptors game with an actual raptor, beside me. Kawhi was watching the real Kawhi Leonard on TV. Leonard went up and scored a three pointer. The dinosaur was ecstatic. By the end of the game, Kawhi Leonard had a total of 200 points, breaking the all time record of 100.

When I woke up the next morning, I saw nothing short of an absolute disaster in my kitchen. "My God, I wonder who did this." I sarcastically said to myself. Kawhi was behind the cupboards, with a mini basketball in his tiny hands. "Naming you 'Kawhi' was really a smart move, eh?" He looked up at me, and winked. I didn't know how to feel. Shocked? Outraged? Creeped out? I just didn't know what to do. I put up my mini basketball hoop, that I'd use once and awhile when I was bored, and right after I set it up, my little raptor was dunking, left and right. I was just lost for words. It was as if i was watching an over exaggerated cartoon. He just kept on going, dunking the basketball, doing front flips and backflips, posing, making weird faces as if he was on TV. Once I saw all of this, I couldn't help but film it. I just had to. I knew it would go viral, and it did. 18 Million Views and counting.

It had caught the eye of everyone. LeBron James saw it, Michael Jordan saw it, Kyrie Irving, Kyle Lowry, Ricky Rubio, etc. I was getting phone calls every second, from people that I didn't even know. It was so much to take in, until Kawhi Leonard picked up the phone.

"Hey, I'm Kawhi Leonard. I couldn't help but notice your video, you posted a couple of days ago. Not bad. I thought dinosaurs were extinct, but I guess I was wrong. Me and many others. I gotta say, that thing's got moves. How would you like to come to one of our games, and get a pass backstage?"

Of course, I said "yes." I couldn't wait, I always wanted to meet Kawhi Leonard just to tell him this one thing. Extremely important.

I packed up, took the dinosaur, and we were off to Toronto. He was pretty big, but thankfully, he still was able to fit in my bag. As we arrived in TO, everybody spotted Kawhi from my

backpack. They were all over him with the cameras. This was big stuff. Fortunately, we got to the game in one piece. The game itself was alright, The Raptors lost to LeBron and his Lakers. We went to the back, and immediately, I saw Leonard.

"Hey kid, what's going on? Tough game, we had." As he continued to talk, I was just thinking about what I had to tell him. Finally, his mouth stopped moving.

I took a deep breath, walked up to him and calmly asked, "Hey, Mr. Leonard, can I tell you something? It's really important that you know."

"Sure kid, what is it?"

I leaned in, and said after a moment of silence, "DeRozan is better."

Symere Woods Malcolm Williams

Symere Woods was just another trap rapper trying to make something out of his music. Symere was born on July 31, 1994 on the ghetto side of North Philly. As he grew up, Symere had a taste of music that nobody around him had in his area. He had a taste for rap, but he also had a love for the dark side of rock. But one day his life changed in a matter of minutes.

Symere was feeling kinda off, like his gut was telling him not to go outside, but he got haunted and still wanted to go get a few drinks and snacks for his munchies he was building up. He grabbed his leather coat, put on his rock-star boots and proceeded to make his way to the 99 cent store. For some reason he was really nervous, he had butterflies in his stomach and his palms were getting sweaty. Or it was the rain dripping down his leather coat. He couldn't tell.

While he was walking down the street blasting Marilyn Manson in his ear buds, he saw something out of the ordinary. It was three crows in a row on a tree ledge not far from the ground not moving a muscle. He learned that if you see three or more crows around each other, it was a sign of bad luck. Not only were there three crows sitting in a row, not more than two inches away from each other, but it also was pouring rain.

So at that point he knew he wasn't nervous for no reason. A big explosion happens behind him, a lightning bolt had hit a telephone pole that fell on to a SUV. But an unusual big ball of mist appeared from the destruction of the pole falling over on the car.

Symere's heart was racing out of his body, as he removed his ear buds slowly, trying to stare at the mist because he felt like he saw a figure behind the mist.

His jaw slowly started to drop as a figure revealed itself. A seven foot tall giant, hood over its head and all Symere could see was its bright white skeleton's grin. It was wearing an all black robe down past its feet, almost looking like a wedding dress of death. Symere was standing there frozen, not moving a muscle, as a tear drop rolled down his cheek.

The seven foot giant approached him slowly, it was almost like everything was going in slow motion.

The giant told Symere, "I'm Death, son." He raised his arm and touched Symere on his forehead with his skeleton finger and said, "Let's take a trip."

Symere woke up in a flash, in space next to Death. Death said, "You don't talk that much, eh?"

"Not when you come face to face with Death, literally," Symere said.

"So why are you doing this to me?" Symere added as they passed by Planet Mars.

"Look at that beautiful creation. I was born on Mars, believe it or not," Death responded.

Symere stared at Mars, amazed at what he was looking at. "Wow, it's weird. Sometimes I feel like I'm from there too." Symere said, and both of them giggled. "Wait, born? Aren't you Death?" he added.

"Long story, my child," Death responded.

"So, am I dead or am I lying?" Symere said.

"No I just wanted to talk with you, specifically."

"So you took me to space to talk. You could've called or texted me."

"Yeah, I know but then you would just think I was a crazy person," Death said. "Listen Symere, I don't have that much more time with you, but I need to tell you something. You're my son, Alcard, and you were born on Mars, not me. And you were taken from me by Almighty Father and Mother Nature their selves. I wanted to let you know that before I put you back on Earth."

"Wow this is a lot to take in at the same time, Death... Dad? I don't know what I'm supposed to do," Symere said, panicking.

"Listen to me. Act like nothing happened but I want you to do one thing for me," Death said.

"What that?" Symere responded.

"Don't stop making your music YOUR way. Trust me, you're gonna spread the message I want you to spread out that I can't spread myself and I want you to use the nickname LIL UZI VERT"

"Lil Uzi Vert? What is that?" Symere said.

"Trust me, it's a powerful name from that Mars God his self. Now, wake up!" Death waved away saying. "Wake you, ahhhh!"

As a big flash happened again, Symere woke up in his bed sweating, like he just came out of the pool with his clothes on. Next to his bed was a bag from the 99 cent store, with a bag of hot Cheetos and a Sprite bottle.

And as he sat in his bed, not moving, he tried to figure out if it was a dream or reality. And that's the story of Symere Woods known as Lil Uzi Vert.

Penumbra Massimo Carabetta

Money... it's what everybody wants... How do you get it? Well it's up to you on how you do so. You can do it the clean and smart way and make very little or you can do it the dirty but smart way and make a fortune. Oh... where are my manners?

I'm Connor Coleman, head of the drug cartel in New York City. The feds knew me as Penumbra, the man that lies in the shadows. They were on my ass for six years but knew very little about me. Still to this day, they don't know where I live or what my name is. Little do they know I'm living large in a mansion along a cliff side. You must be wondering how I got to where I am. Well, how's about I tell you.

It all started when I first arrived to New York City. I tried to start a new life after my family was killed in a car accident. I'm lucky to have survived the crash with only a scar on the side of my cheek. I was all alone with nothing but 25 thousand dollars that I received from my family's death. So I had to find somewhere cheap to live.

I found myself a small rundown apartment for a cheap price. The paint on the walls was peeling off, the windows were all shattered and the only light source I had was flickering bulbs. The place was such a dump. I often felt shivers down my spine almost as if bugs were crawling on me. Hell, the bugs probably had shivers running down their spines too. I knew I had to find myself a job that makes good money. I didn't want to live in a rundown apartment for the rest of my life. So I took a walk down my street to try and find myself a job. There were so many different stores, it was unreal. I'd never seen anything like it before. I walked into the first place next to me. It was a butcher shop. One of the only

places looking for employees. There was a scary looking man at the counter. No matter how scary, I had to approach him.

Man: Hello, how are you today?

Connor: I'm doing pretty well actually.

Man: So what kind of meat are you looking for today?

Connor: Actually I'm looking for a job and saw the help needed sign. So I thought I'd pop in.

Man: Alright, step in my office.

The man had a scar on his right eye going all the way down to his cheek and his arms were practically the size of my head. This man looked like he had been through hell. He asked me for my name.

Connor: I'm Connor and you are?

Man: Well, Connor, if I told you I'd have to kill you. HA HA!

I laughed nervously with the man.

Man: James is the name. It's a pleasure to meet you. Now, please, step into my office.

I got into his office and took a seat. As I was waiting for James to start the interview I looked around the room. You can already guess that something shady might be going on when someone has a bear carpet on their office floor. James had the heads of 10 different animals all along the walls but the one that stood out the most was the lion head on top of a stone fireplace. He finally took a seat and started the interview.

James: So, how old are you?

Connor: 22 years old.

James: What skills do you have?

Connor: My father was an investor so I'm pretty handy with money. Also, my grandfather had a farm so I'm used to stripping down meat to the bone.

James: Alright, sounds good enough to me. Meet me here first thing in the morning. We open at 7:00am.

Connor: See you then.

I walked out of the butcher shop and took a walk down the street. My stomach was rioting for food. I decided to stop at a local bakery for a nice sandwich. The bell rang as I walked through the door, letting the baker know I was here.

Connor: Hello.

Man: Hello! What can I get you on this fine day?

Connor: I'll take the double tomato special.

Man: Good pick. That's one of my favorites. Say, you from around here?

Connor: Actually, I just moved here.

He rang up my order and handed me my sandwich.

Man: Welcome to the neighborhood!

Connor: Thanks.

I smiled and took a bite. The flavors exploded in my mouth.

Connor: Wow! This has to be the best sandwich I've ever eaten.

Man: Why, of course it is. It's my passion.

Connor: Say, you look like you're in shape. Is there a gym around here?

Man: Oh, I own one. If you'd like, you can come try it out sometime. We're open all week.

Connor: Sounds good. Sorry, didn't catch your name.

Man: Mason.

Connor: Alright, Mason, I'll pop it when I can.

Mason: Sounds good.

I continued walking down the street eating this God-like sandwich. I was trying to get to know the area. As I walked around the block, I noticed a few clothing stores, some bars and a coffee shop. Finally, I decided to go back to my apartment and get some rest. I had to get up early tomorrow so I needed to rest. I got myself a glass of water and went to bed.

I woke up the next morning at around 6:00 am, got ready and went to the butcher to start my first day of work. When I walked in, James greeted me.

James: Hey, you ready for your first day?

Connor: Well, why else would I be here if I wasn't ready?

James: Good point. Let's get started.

James handed me a pair of gloves and a hair net and taught me how to use the cash register and how to perfectly slice meat. He went into the back room as I was dealing with the very few customers we had. I was surprised that he was still open by the small amount of people that came.

When I finally finished my shift I went in the back to speak to James. I was walking towards his office when I heard screaming coming from the basement. I wasn't sure what I was hearing but it sounded like someone was in distress. I had to check it out. As I slowly went down the squeaky steps I heard grunts and coughing. I

saw something in the dark spot of the basement. I tried to get a better look not realizing that a step was missing. I stumbled down the stairs in pain, landing with a BANG!

I ended up with scratches all over my arms and legs. I carefully got up in the very dark and now quiet room. I couldn't see anything at all. I was standing in the dark in pain up until I heard footsteps getting closer and closer.

Voice: HELP ME!

I jumped as a man screamed right in front of my face. I felt around for something, maybe a weapon, to protect myself. Instead, I felt a light switch and flipped on the lights.

Connor: OH MY GOD!

Everything blacked out. I woke up in a room, chained to a wall. Lights turned on and James was standing in front of me.

James: You actually think you can steal someone's identity and get away with it?

Connor: You idiot! Do you know who I am? I'm the man that keeps everything running. The whole reason why you're still open is because of me. I'm Penumbra.

James: Ha ha ha. You are going to regret being someone you're not.

A man in black walked into the room. His face was all black. It was like he had a mask on.

Connor: Let me go at once!

The man in black pulled out a knife and dragged it against Connor's face. As blood went down his cheek, his eyes were filled with fear.

Man in black: You think you can take my identity. Normally I'd just torture people like you. But because you know my actual name, it's over. I'm Penumbra, the man who is taking your life.

Penumbra stabbed the man several times in the stomach leaving him there like a piece of meat on a drying rack.

Penumbra: I have things that need to get done today. James, torture him till he dies. I have a meeting with Aki. We have 135 pounds of heroin to ship out.

James: You got it, boss.

Aki was a trusted business partner for the cartel. He helped sell the product, then clean and distribute the money. He's what kept everything balanced money wise. But the only thing was that he had a cartel of his own, the Japanese cartel. That could have consequences that wouldn't end well.

When I got to the meeting point there were nothing but bodies. The heroine worth millions was all destroyed. In the pile of bodies I saw one of my trusted men, Mason covered in blood trying to say something to me. Mason owned a sandwich shop with his brother Levi.

Mason: Penumbra... it was...

He was trying to tell me something but he couldn't come to do so. Mason was badly injured but I couldn't do anything about it. The best I could have done was get the information I needed and kill whoever did this.

Mason: It... it was the... the Russian cartel.

Penumbra: How did this happen?

Mason: They came out of nowhere... and... and killed everyone. All the product... destroyed.

Penumbra: You served me well.

I put my hand on his eyes and closed them whispering "It's over. May your soul rest." I had to get rid of that Russian cartel before they screwed me anymore than they just did.

As I got back to my manufacturing facility, Levi, Mason's brother approached me with anger.

Levi: You son of a BITCH! You got my brother killed!

Levi pulled out a gun and pointed it right at me. One of my men quickly jumped in front of me receiving a bullet as another shot the gun out of Levi's hand.

Penumbra: You tried to kill me after all I've done for you! Your brother died serving me for a mistake that you made. He saved you and gave you the gift of wealth. And this is how you treat the man that made it all happen?!

Levi: You have some nerve talking about my brother like that. I'm going to kill you!

Penumbra: I doubt it. James, do what we do to people that attempt the impossible.

James ripped out Levi's fingernails as he screamed in pain. I watched him suffer more than any human should.

Penumbra: Shut him up!

James: You got it.

James took a pair of pliers and ripped Levi's tongue out. As he was choking on his own blood I heard something. BANG! BANG! It was the feds. NYPD ON THE GROUND!

I rushed to the closest exit with two of my men. We got into a car and left everything behind. How did the cops get a warrant to

search my facility? I thought to myself. There was only one man that can be doing this.

I told my men to drive to Aki's place. On the ride there I received an email from Aki. It was a video message. It showed the fire fight at the meeting point we arranged. He was there and started the whole thing. I was pissed and told my men to hurry. We had some Japanese to kill. Along with the video, Aki sent me a message saying, "You're a loose end I had to deal with." This pissed me off even more. When I get my hands on him he'll regret every word he said.

We finally got to his facility and rang the doorbell with our bullets. My men were killing every breathing thing including the innocents that were there. No witnesses is how things need to be. The killing finally stopped as we approached Aki's office. Both my men got stabbed in the back as I ducked under the blade of a sword. The man on the other side of that blade was Aki himself.

Aki: I'm surprised the feds let you get away. It's a mistake on your behalf because the outcome of escape is death.

Penumbra: Give me your best shot.

Aki came at me with a sword, I ducked under another one of his swings and punched him in the stomach then followed up with a punch to the face. I then disarmed him as he threw a ninja star at me. It cut the whole side of my arm. He jumped right at me and kicked me to the corner of a railing. He swung at me with his right arm. Blocked! I then head-butted him. He stumbled to the other side of the railing as I put my hands around his neck, choking him. With all his force he grabbed me and threw me off the edge of the railing with him alongside me.

BANG! We both hit the ground. To my left was a gun. I knew if I could get a hold of it, he'd be helpless. I got on all fours

and started to crawl towards it. Next thing I knew he wrapped a chain around my neck and started pulling. At the corner of my eye I saw the ninja star that he threw at me earlier. I reached out for it and grabbed it with the tip of my fingers, directing it straight into his left eye.

Aki: Aaaahhhh!

As he fell to the floor in pain I laughed.

Penumbra: You see Aki, the mistake you made opened a door to your death. With you dead, people won't know whether I'm real or fake. So in the end you're the loose end.

I slit his throat and watched him die right before my eyes. He got what he asked for.

Money... it's what everybody wants... How do you get it? Well, it's up to you on how you do so. You can do it the clean and smart way and make very little or you can do it the dirty but smart way and make a fortune. I'm the real Connor Coleman, head of the drug cartel in New York City. I don't do so well with impersonators. My money is important to me. I did what I had to do to get to where I am.

Grandson Melanie Laing

Living without parents could possibly be the hardest thing in the world, not having them around has affected my grandson Tyler in many ways. Tyler has grown up without parents since the age of 14 and ever since that day my grandson has been different in many ways than one. And I guess that's understandable considering the past few years he's had.

Tyler is 16 now and I think that everyday gets harder for him to try and find who he is without his beloved parents. Tyler lives with myself and my wife Sara and we absolutely love him to death and want to be there for him but every day we see him lose himself more and more. My wife and I really worry, to the point where if he goes out we don't sleep until he comes home. But that all changed one year ago, one of the worst nights of my life.

Ring ring ring.

"Hello."

"Hello, is this Chris, the legal guardian of Tyler?"

"Yes, it is. Who is this?"

"This is Officer Jackson, your grandson has been sent to the hospital and we need you to come to the hospital, please."

"Tyler... Is he okay? What happened?"

"Sir, your grandson has been in a car accident. Please come to the hospital."

"Okay. I'm on my way."

Getting out of bed and rushing to put my clothes on while trying to wake up my wife was one of the hardest things to do. I didn't know what to think, I didn't know if he was hurt or what was going to happen when I got there.

The car ride over there was the longest car ride I've ever had and the quietest. Being stuck in my thoughts, in a very small place was starting to get to me. It was like being drowned and just scrapping at the person to just let you go so you can breathe again.

Finally getting to the hospital, running in and seeing my grandson sitting on an old wooden chair with blood on his hands and face was not what I wanted to see. Rushing to him and being scared to touch him so I didn't hurt him was nerve racking. I tried to ask what happened and nothing was coming out. It was like someone knocked the air out of my lungs. Being in shock was probably the worst thing that could happen at that moment.

"Sir, we need you to step back."

"Sir, please go with this doctor. She'll explain everything."

Leaving with the doctor while a bunch of doctors worked with my grandson was terrifying.

"Sir, your son was in a car accident. He was not driving, but his friend Jake was driving intoxicated."

"What is going to happen to my grandson?"

"We are not sure yet. Doctors say it's not too serious, so that's a good thing."

"Yeah, I guess that's a little easier to handle."

"We'll let you know as soon as we know what's happening."

With that, the doctor left me and my wife in our thoughts again. Waiting to hear what kind of injuries my grandson has was really testing my patience. Waiting for something was the longest thing and the most anxious thing in the world. It was like being at a hockey game and sitting in the dressing room waiting for your coach to come in and tell you it's time to play. It was like being

locked in a cell in your head and your cellmates are your thoughts and they're constantly picking on you.

"Sir?"

"How's my grandson? Is he okay?"

"He's going to be fine. He has a few broken ribs, broken leg and a concussion, but aside from that everything's going to be fine."

"Thank god. When can we see him?"

"You can see him now. Follow me."

Walking to his room was nerve racking. It was like walking out of the dressing room to go to the hockey rink. All those nerves, I felt like I was going to throw up but all the nerves seemed to vanish when you get to the side of the rink and you're about to step on the ice. That's the exact feeling I felt walking to the room and walking in the room.

"Hi buddy."

"Hey Grandpa."

"How you feeling?"

"I feel stupid for getting in that car. I should've never got in that car."

"Tyler, you scared us so much we thought we we're going to lose you like we lost your mom and dad."

"Don't worry, Grandpa, I'm not going anywhere. I finally know who I am now."

That day was one of the worst days, but at the same time it was one of the best days for my grandson. That day was the day he finally found himself again.

Secret Compartment Mitchell Guerriero-Joseph

"I can't see anything, the car's so hot-boxed," Larry says, staring into his iPhone's selfie camera. His eyes are completely bloodshot.

"Me too, jeez. Who'd you buy the weed off of again?" Selena adds, her voice light and shaky due to her intense coughing. Selena looks over at Adam, he's almost finished his third beer, chucking it carelessly out the car door.

The trio's parked in an empty parking lot, enjoying their Saturday night drunk, high, and clueless as to what's coming.

"I feel so finished," Adam says laughing. "We need some tunes, hand me the aux cord."

Larry grabs the aux cord and holds it out to Adam. Adam grabs his phone and connects it, going through his playlist and pressing on the wrong song. He bops his head and doesn't say anything. Adam goes on his SnapChat and checks himself out in the camera, wiping off alcohol on his face with his sleeve.

He checks the time on his phone. "Hey, you guys know it's 2:00 AM, right?"

Larry looks behind himself at Adam. "I had no idea. It's late. I feel so croaked, I can't move anything." Larry leans back in his car seat, preparing himself to sleep.

Selena lights up a Marlboro cigarette and steps out of Larry's car. It's her first time walking in hours, she nearly trips from how intoxicated and under the influence she is. She stares into the car's window, Larry is sleeping with his head completely leaned back and Adam is half-asleep. She shakes her head, thinking of how she's going to get home tonight. She pulls her phone out of her purse to check the time, and sees her phone's dead.

She mumbles under her breath, sighing. "Guess I'm gonna have to stay here for tonight." Selena steps back inside the car and checks her school bag. She buries it under the seat of Larry's car.

The trio is woken up to sounds of birds chirping in the early morning. It's 5:24 AM. Selena, Adam, and Larry all look around their surroundings, confused at first as to where they are.

Adam opens the car door and steps out, gagging. "You think you're going to throw up?" Before Selena can finish her sentence, Adam throws up over the ledge. "I got work in a couple hours, we need to get the hell out of here," Selena says to Larry.

"Well, you're gonna need to hold on, there's no way I can drive right now." Larry shakes his head, feeling as if he's going to throw up as well.

Selena searches through her purse and finds her portable charger, plugging her phone. "I'm bored, let's roll up a joint." Selena pops open the glove compartment and grabs a small bag of weed. She takes out her grinder and starts rolling up a little joint. "I guess we're gonna wake n' bake."

Larry rolls up all the windows as Selena sparks the joint. After the trio smoke the joint, they relax in the car, listening to music and conversing. A couple hours go by, and all three of them hear the sound of a vehicle approaching. "Who the hell is out here at this time?" Larry looks at the rear-view mirror and spots a marked Sheriff's Department unit in a GMC Yukon XL.

The font on the front of the car reads "K-9". The deputy steps out of the car and slowly walks up to Larry's vehicle, immediately getting hit with the whiff of marijuana. "Alright, driver. Are you aware that marijuana is illegal in the state of Utah?"

Larry puts his head down, and says nothing. The deputy reaches over and opens the door. "Do me a favor and step out for me, buddy."

Larry steps out and he's handcuffed. The deputy walks him over to his car and searches him, finding a Ziploc bag with only marijuana residue. "I have a canine dog with me. He's trained to sniff out illegal narcotics. If I search this vehicle, am I going to find any?"

Larry shakes his head, and the deputy opens the dog cage. The K-9, a large German Shepherd, jumps out of the car and the deputy holds it by the leash.

Adam and Selena are brought out of the vehicle, and the deputy does the turn around with the dog. The dog jumps inside the car and tugs on the hidden backpack, barking and wagging his tail.

"Hit!" The deputies grab ahold of the backpack and open it, emptying the contents out on the hood of Larry's car. There's ecstasy, Xanax, a scale, and baggies. "This is distribution. That's a felony in the state of Utah." The deputy walks over to Larry, shaking his head. "So you're drug dealing?"

Larry shakes his head. "I promise you, that isn't mine."

The deputy looks Larry straight into his eyes. "You know how many times I heard that old excuse? If it's not yours, then whose drugs are they?"

Selena cries out in guilt, "They're mine, OK? Please, don't arrest him, I promise you there not his." The deputy looks over at his partner, and they start reading Selena her rights.

Larry is fined for the small amount of marijuana that was found on him, he's let free of his handcuffs, and sent on his way with Adam.

The deputy conversates with Selena on the journey to the prison. "You know, what you did is very admirable. If you hadn't said anything, your friend there would have taken the charge for you. Why'd you admit to it?"

"He's my friend."

Selena is charged with felony possession with intent to distribute, and she's processed at the correctional facility.

Rapture Tung Linder

Peace had finally began to exist. God had worked very hard to suppress Satan's hatred for him. Heaven began to feel again and life had to recreate. It had been over a thousand years since the Armageddon occurred. God knew the devil was waiting so in that very thought he began to hunt for purebred Satans in heaven. The kind where only pure evil existed.

Bounties and contracts had been completed when God came across a man that had blood in his breath. His name was Rapture. No man has ever survived his bounty, even God felt his presence. Rapture was trained by one of God's children and banished from heaven. That very moment Satan had found a new child, he was his master and he showed him everything. Rapture did not like to be controlled. Rapture decided to stop working for him. The devil killed him and there was a bang that sent him back to heaven.

God needed him but he knew Rapture would not listen, so he bribed him with freedom. Only if he joined his army. Rapture wanted to be free so he joined. God removed half of his demon and taught him a spiritual power. After Jesus Christ had been killed for our sins the devil wanted to get God when he was sad and unprepared for war (when God was mourning the death of his son Jesus Christ). The devil had sent a million demons and broke into heaven to find God, but he could not be found. There was an energy that came out of the shadows. A dark energy that made babies cry. The kind where you could not move, frozen and scared. Rapture heard Satan say he wanted nothing but to tear his head off.

These demons had a very distinct look. They were all black but moved like a smoke ash, all black but had blood red eyes. A terrible screech was their war cry. Over many decades these demons trained to kill angels and possess human for the gain. Demons would enter your body and turn your insides to ash in a blink of its eye.

Rapture had spoken to God and finally God was ready to reap for his lost child and sent his student to hell to warn the devil that there is no need to fight because it ends the same way every time.

God knew this day would come and there would be a disciple he had to give this gift to. He called it holy gold. A sawed off shotgun, gold encrusted with biblical quotes. It had a large gold cross for a scope and was really cold to touch. Heavy was not the word, only the chosen one could carry it, filled with bullets that can send even a light back to darkness.

Giving this weapon to Rapture was a feeling that was unexplainable, only God can tell you. Time stopped and an explosion occurred for a second, but he was able to speak to God for the last moment and disappeared in that light.

That one second he had travelled for 50 years to the deepest darkest places to make his way to hell. Rapture had arrived to a place of fire, screaming, crying, and a temperature that felt like your skin would burn off. These demons came at him from all corners, left, right, even under him. No hesitation. He lifts his gift and a flash and an echo, a bang that was deafening went off. Bullets that your eye could not catch hitting these creatures. Their eyes would flash a light, like God entered them and disappeared.

Rapture was a man that had been training for centuries. He was about five foot six, white, and had very pale skin. His hair was black and he stood with perfect posture. His movement wasn't human. He would travel at speeds that not even a jet could hit.

These demons were dying at hundreds a minute. The holy sound from his gun and his speed was a force to be reckoned with. Satan had disciples that wanted to kill the Rapture. They looked forward to eating his soul. At a black castle at the top of the highest mountain, Rapture had to climb for a week surviving, killing and laughing. He had finally made it to the top.

No words can explain this demon at the top. He stood like a warrior in ancient evil times. He looked alien, like flesh but grey, skinny like an alien, but the look of the devil. Not for a single second there was not a resemblance to the devil, he had to be his student. Being the devil's disciple, they had many things in common, they spoke a language to each other that was not human. The duel began.

These two went at each other neck to neck. Bullets flying, an angel and a demon serving their masters to the fullest their potential could. Rapture had tricked him to running at him when he threw his gun at him. The warrior caught it and sunk of its enormous weight, when Rapture pulled out a blade and stabbed him in the heart.

A smile, the warmest smile, speaking to the dying spirit: "Brother it's time I set you free. Do you remember when we would play fight over who got to watch TV first in the real world before everything went wrong? We have been here for too long and it is time for you and Mom to live on out of this cursed world." He had killed his older brother, the hardest thing he had ever done.

This kill was not in vain, he wanted to be free after this. He had no intention of speaking to the devil, he wanted nothing but cold murder. There was a spark in his heart, it skipped a few beats and blood filled his eyes he had gained a power from the loss of

his brother. His brother gave him the ability to be immune to weak spirits, only spirits of elite class could hurt him. The black suit had changed colors, it became all white.

After a few months passed he travelled to the end of hell, so close he could smell Satan. A ball fell from the sky and landed on the burning ground. A breed like he was, but serving Satan, had found him. No words, only clashing. Rapture fighting him and hundreds of weak spirits. Until, there was no more spirits, Rapture and him one on one. This demon was way too powerful for Rapture, he was beating him to every punch and landing every bullet. He even was able to teleport at certain points in time. There was no winning, not even quitting you had to be in it till your last breath. He had screamed his name Death. His energy felt like death. Rapture ran into Death to punch him when Death entered his body. Rapture was screaming in agony of extreme pain. He landed on the ground crawling for his life. Rapture started praying to God asking him to allow him to join his brother and his mother. Tears going down his eyes, an angel had pulled him into a different realm.

It was bright flowers people smiling laughing, even Rapture had fallen to his knees at his family's feet, slurring his failures. "Big brother, I mean Rapture, I love ya and miss you but it is not your time to join us yet. You go back out there, fight like you would have for Mom."

Rapture's eyes began to turn all black, but his pupils became crosses. Rapture began to pick himself up. Death was laughing at his weakness. Death noticed his eyes changed. "But those eyes are forbidden. No one has ever seen those eyes in millenials. How did you get them?"

Rapture began speaking. "I can feel the power but I'm blind. Oh, and one more thing. Welcome to hell."

The crosses in his eyes glowed bright white and Death started to burn to death until he was banished of all worlds. Rapture had one last kill. He was standing outside of Satan's door. Making one last prayer before committing his final sin, he knew this had to be done. Disappearing in the fire, he was behind Satan, in the shadows watching him, plotting, ready to blow his head off.

Satan spoke. "Stop hiding boy. Do what you have come to do. Do not let your family's death be in vain."

The devil had told him a secret. Right before he labeled him the strongest angel alive with the power of a demon and the heart of an angel. He was crowned the Boogeyman. With no hesitation he ran towards Satan with the sharpest blade. It was so sharp it made a noise that was deafening.

God appeared, breaking his blade in his hand. Ripping his holy shotgun from him, stripping him from his blades. God said to him, "Rapture, how dare you betray my trust and disobey my orders. You will be sent to life in prison and will not be shown any mercy."

The devil laughed. "God, brother, you are always being so naïve. This will be the biggest mistake you ever made." Right before Rapture was moved, the devil stuck an orb in him. God could not stop him in time.

Rapture disappeared. God looked at Satan. "When he said I'll be seeing you soon, brother," with a nasty laugh, "Yes, you will."

Over a trillion decades later there was a rumor that a man escaped. His power was surpassed what they called the Boogeyman. The rumor was he wanted revenge on God. Satan had

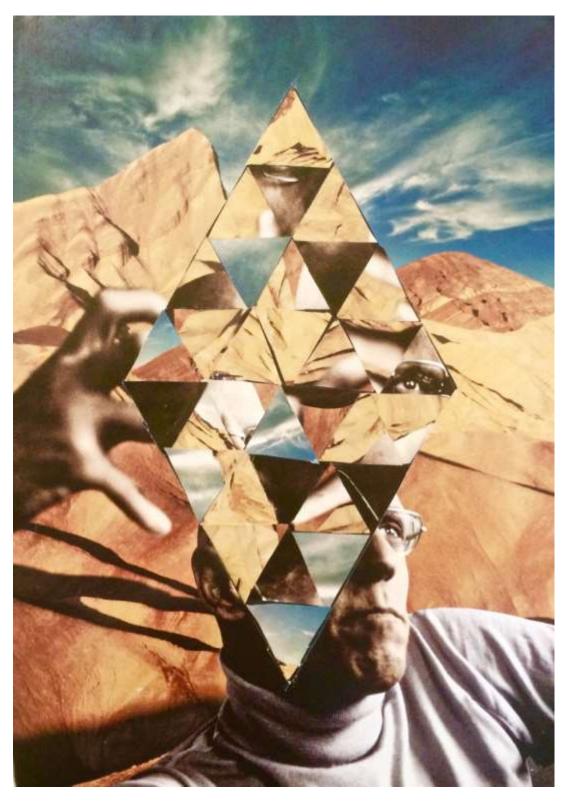
found him and crowned him the king. Gave him his own army and everything he ever wanted. Heaven's gate was broken. A power creeped in and a ghostly figure with crosses stood at God's throne with death in his eyes.

"Welcome to the rapture. Please rest in peace. Take your last breath and watch the light of a holy ghost take you away."

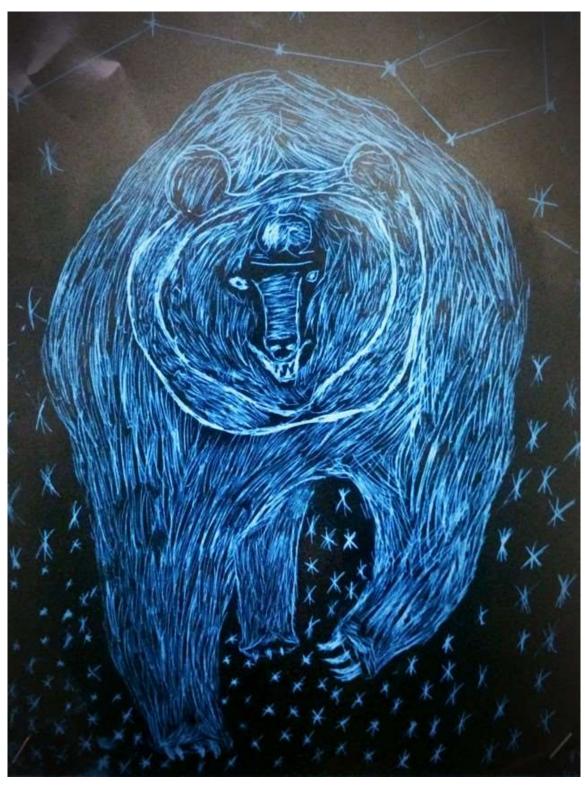
The end



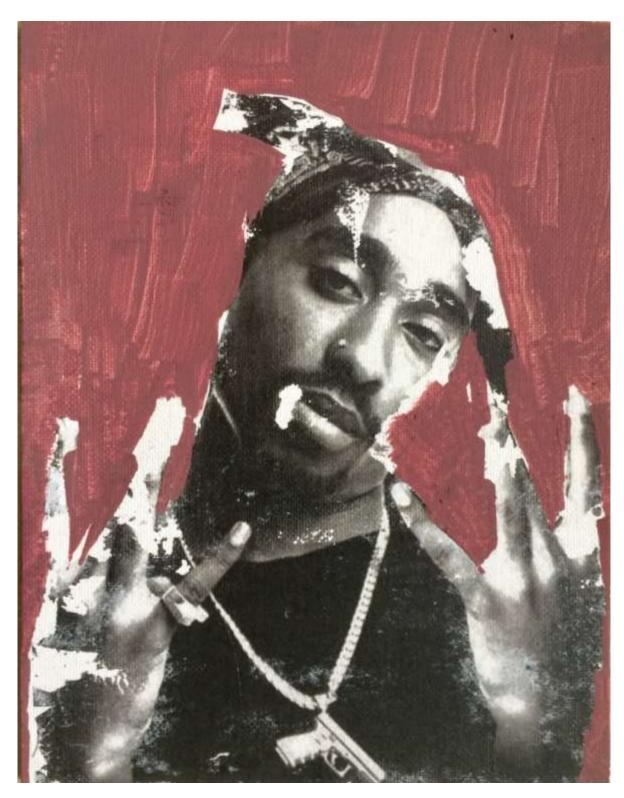
Bishop Johnston



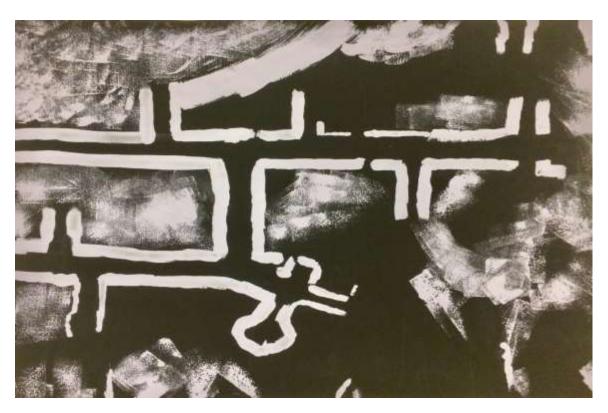
Adam Siegel



Adam Siegel



Emmanuel Benzaquen



Emmanuel Benzaquen



Kaesye Duncan



Kaesye Duncan



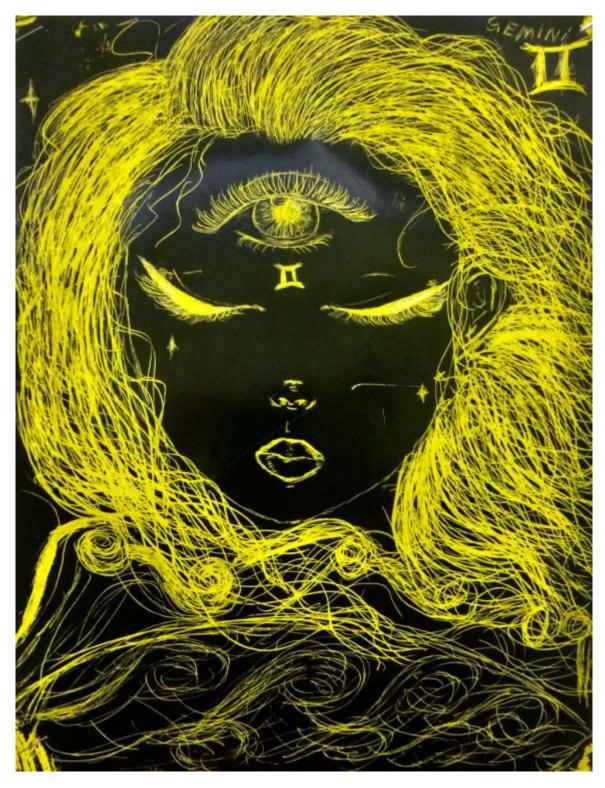
Matthew Wiseblatt



Uwan Joseph



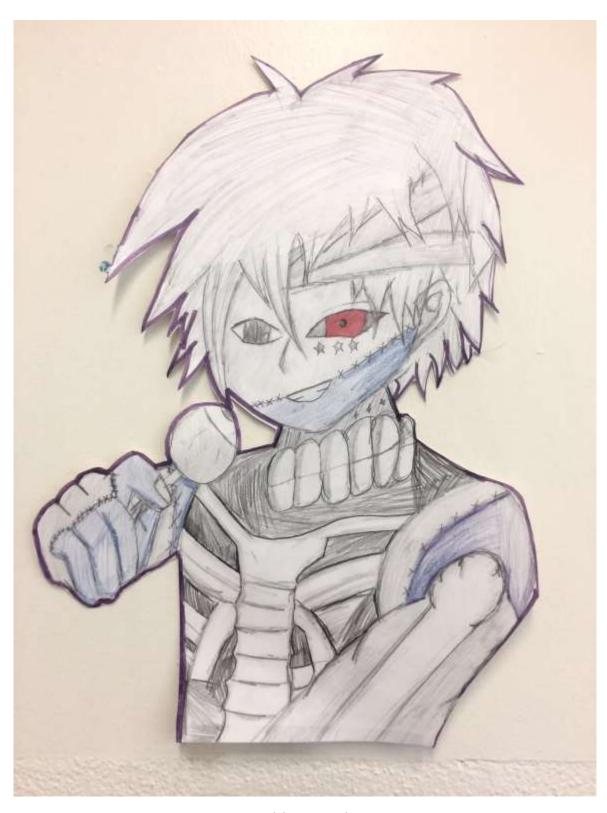
Sarah Guzman Dee



Sarah Guzman Dee



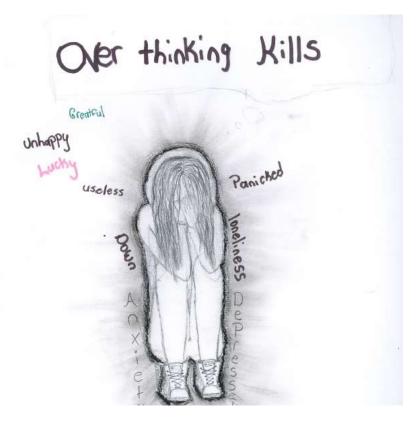
Sarah Guzman Dee



Kaidon Dewitt



Anonymous



Anonymous



Anonymous



Breaking out of the closet Anonymous

This piece is about breaking out of the closet for people who are LGBTQ and who hide themselves from the world because they feel society won't accept them and will treat them differently, but some people choose not to care and that's what this piece is about, not caring what society thinks of your sexual orientation and just to be confident.

I found this picture online and thought it was a well-spoken image about coming out of the closet. I drew the lines, added detail and colored it.



Let's get it.

