



# Coming Undone

Frederick Dreamcatcher

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## **The Good Betrayal** *Kayla Lorimer, freshman*

I believe that betrayal can sometimes be good.

Okay, betrayal is awful, but it can give you a greater understanding and appreciation for the people who will not betray you. I found this out when I was in the car with two girls who were some of my best friends since before preschool. I remember being so happy that night.

The highway was packed, so our driver turned onto a backroad even though it was going to take longer. His reasoning was that he had children in his car that didn't belong to him, so he should be more careful that if they were his. The three of us in the back had no qualms over spending time with each other and were excited to talk. We decided we needed background music for our backseat escapade.

One Direction came on and, like the hater that I am, I wrinkled my nose and complained about how they used to be good but then they just turned into wannabes. The other girls both had different replies: one (we'll call her Candy) said that I should give them a second chance, and the other (we'll call her Missy) said I had it wrong--1D had been bad from the start.

Now, I knew that Missy actually liked them though. It started to bug me, knowing that she would lie straight to my face even though I was fairly certain she was aware I knew she was lying. Whenever it happened I would try to shrug it off, but that night Missy seemed a little more determined than usual to disagree with me. We grew quiet after that song, exhaustion hitting us in the calm of the night.

We continued like that for a while, murmuring bits of gossip or song lyrics until the hauntingly familiar song came on: "Hide Away." Daya started singing the first strains of the song while I contemplated the theme of the words. A lot of my friends had been getting in relationships, and I had been excluded by them more regularly, a new feeling that I didn't quite know how to handle. Missy was one of them.

As I was thinking, I quoted the lyric: "Where do the good boys go?" I asked Missy aloud.

She flipped her hair over her shoulder and mused, "I've got mine."

I smiled as I rolled my eyes. Come on, give me an actual answer. Why am I apparently so repulsive? I mean, it's not like I want to get in a relationship..."

"But?" asked Missy.

"But it stings a little to being undesired when everyone else had people begging to be with them."

That's when Missy looked at me and said, "I don't think there is one for you. It's just who you are. You're going to be that old cat lady that nobody loves, you know? I just don't think anyone is ever going to love you."

I stared in disbelief and blinked in horror when the sting of fog and tears become too much. I felt a blush of embarrassment envelope my face and I quickly looked over to our other companion. Candy was on her phone and thankfully oblivious.

I turned back to Missy and asked her what I could do about my unlovable self.

"Nothing," she replied, "I already told you it's who you are, you can't change." She rolled her eyes, obviously thinking she was in an argument with someone she thought was clearly no match for her brain power.

She turned away from me, ending the discussion. And a friendship.

Since that night, I have been through dark times and heartbreak, but I have never been more grateful for the people that will be there for me and that I can trust with anything... and grateful when those who I can't reveal themselves.

## **The Trade I Made** *Morgan Sider, junior*

I have always believed that I am the best,  
Always told myself that I was superior,  
But I wish I'd listened, for now my fears are manifest.

I always tried to leave people impressed.  
I had to be strong and confident on the exterior,  
Always believing that I was the best,

True friends of mine started to suggest  
That I return to the humble friend they knew in the interior...  
And I wish I'd listened, for now my fears are manifest.

The ignorance around me became my daily test  
As I started to believe that all others were inferior  
While I was still believing that I was the best.

If only I had broken down and confessed  
That, if they knew the real me, I feared they would disappear--  
I wish I'd listened, for now my fears are manifest.

Yet it was I who was ignorant, leaving their needs unaddressed  
And drove my friends to find a friend who's cheerier.  
I have always believed that I was the best,  
But I wish I'd listened, for now my fears are manifest.

## **Trapped** *Chandler Hoel, freshman*

Trapped inside a mind that is only filled with anger.  
Forever stuck in the relentless flame.  
A claustrophobic place in my mind  
Where I can never be happy,  
Where I am unable to feel for others,  
Where I don't care.

And I can never escape from myself.

My mind fills with wrath against others,  
But most of all against myself.  
I am constantly waiting for satisfaction,  
But I can never be satisfied in a world full of unfortunate people.  
Never in a million years  
Would I express my anger by hurting others  
Or by throwing a tantrum.  
All of it stays trapped in the prison I have for a head.

And I can never escape from myself.

Unfortunately, I cannot tame my thoughts.  
I will forever be stuck in a mind that burns me every day.  
Everyone I know wants nothing to do with me.  
The girl I love has abandoned me.  
Everything I am reflects on my sullenness,  
And I am ashamed.

And I can never escape myself.

## Dear Luke Davis *Nathan Hernandez, junior*

If eyes are the window to the soul, my father's eyes are more like shattered windows leading into an empty shell of a house. His usual blank, soulless stare sends shivers that run along my spine. I can tell that the years of substance abuse and alcoholism have taken their toll on him. I could never understand what went on in his mind, but after reading your novel *Candy*, I'm able to see through the eyes of an addict--through the eyes of my father.

Growing up, I was a witness to this man's fiendish ways. He spent most of my childhood in and out of jail. Being only five, I was naive as to what that really meant--all I knew was that my dad was gone. In all honesty, I missed him; what kid wouldn't miss their dad? On multiple occasions, I was exposed to drugs and violence, but it wasn't until I was twelve years old that I developed such an intense abhorrence toward my father. That was the age when I realized that his way of life was not normal and that he had a problem. I ceased talking about him and refused to visit him in jail. I could no longer stand staring at a screen listening to the empty promises made by the man on the other side. I couldn't comprehend why he continued along the path that he was on, but it's like the line in your book: "When you can stop you don't want to, and when you want to, you can't..."

The further I read into your book, the more I was able to understand that my dad had become both physically and mentally dependent on the many drugs he used on a daily basis, a list that grew too long to remember. It still makes me ponder. *Did he ever attempt to make a change? Did he ever think about the children he was leaving behind? Did he ever think how it would affect their lives? Did he ever think?* You showed me how powerful an addiction can be, how easily and how fast one can be consumed by drugs, and how the person you once were can be stripped away.

My father is too far gone to return to the man that he was. He let the drugs and alcohol decide his future. I hated him for choosing the drugs over us. His addiction rendered him hollow and unfeeling. I can no longer utter the words "I love you": those words would be untrue and would leave a bitter taste in my mouth. Your book did not give me the strength to forgive--not yet--but it did give me a better understanding of my dad. Now, it is no longer a hatred that I have for my dad; it's more of a neutral feeling. I've come to the realization that even though it was his choices that led him down this road, I can understand how difficult it would be to return from it. Your novel *Candy*; gave me the ability to overcome my anger, and for that, I thank you.



## **Under the Influence** *Aurora Rangel, freshman*

Alone under a highway overpass,  
My few possessions inside a backpack.  
All around me, sharp shards of broken glass.  
Nightfall comes, turning everything pitch black.  
I crawl into my tattered sleeping bag.  
Nowhere to run to and nowhere to hide.  
But it was worth it, despite the price tag,  
Even though I am here on the curbside  
My vision beginning to dance and sway.

It lets me forget my reality.  
It used to burn, but now it's like water.  
When I drink, I actually feel free.  
I have strayed far from my safe alma mater.  
But I finally found companionship.  
There is nothing else in this life to gain.  
It was so simple: just sip after sip--  
Now even this rot gut tastes like champagne.  
It's the only thing in life that matters.

## **I Was Born Hurt** *Kayla Lorimer, freshman*

I could not possibly hope,  
I could do nothing.  
I wasn't supposed  
to be doing things  
with sunshine  
in my lonely life.

I was born hurt.

I often wondered what I'd do,  
get up and throw something?

I thought of asking her,  
just once...

She didn't understand.

**Revenge is a Black Pudding** *Simon Garcia, senior*  
*Inspired by All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque*

Give a general a compass, and he'll use it upside down  
Teach artillery men to whistle, and watch them blow away  
Give a soldier some hope, and watch their luck turn red  
Teach a minister to pray, and he'll do so spiritlessly  
Give a civilian a story, and watch him twist away  
Teach boys to kill, and that's all they'll know  
Take a mother's son, and they'll give you benefits  
Give a country your life, and they'll try to give you black pudding.

**Heart. Break.** *Aron Navarrete-Jimenez, sophomore*  
*Inspired by "A Softer World" #359 by Joey Comeau and Emily Horne*

Nobody screws with me. No one has ever come into my life just to mess it up and watch me try to put it all back together. So you can't betray me like this. I let you into my personal life... I let you do whatever you wanted with me. I gave you everything. My heart, my time, my thoughts, only for you to just leave and take everything with you. Why? Why did you do this? I thought we were meant to be. I thought we were the only ones for each other, but you went and screwed it all up!

I endured you backstabbing me multiple times, only for me to get back up and love you again. But oh no. Not this time. This time will be different. This time, you will know the feeling. You will know how it feels to have the gun pointed at you, locked and loaded. You cannot do anything about it either. There will be no hope for you. There will be no one to save you this time, because the only one that was there for you was me. Me!

I will ruin you. I will make you the dunce in your classes. The fool that is laughed at by everyone and everything. Your life will turn into a living hell with every breath you take. The pain will get worse and worse and worse. By that point I won't even care. I know how it will end. I know everything that will happen to you, every action that you will take. Your happy little fantasy life will be over. But hey, for me, there are no sweeter words than this. Nothing lasts forever.

## **The Hate of Man** *Christopher Cinooco, freshman*

There is one thing that scratches in every person's blood:  
It's not personal negativity,  
It's not invasive insects.  
No, that one thing is mankind itself,  
The hate of our brother.  
We are our own enemy.

Mankind drives itself to madness.

Look at any government--  
There is no true peace, just war within.  
Simple tasks like driving,  
Make people do unconscionable actions.  
We kill our brother out of anger.  
We knock our brother's joys away out of rage and jealousy.  
Ask any man what has made him the angriest that day,  
And he will always blame his anger on someone else.

Mankind drives itself to madness.

Men like the feeling that they aren't at fault.  
We point fingers and never take responsibility.  
But take the blame and you will find peace within,  
And don't blame so you can free yourself.  
Wrath eats peoples' souls and damns them to hell.  
But love your brother and the inferno will never find you,

For mankind drives itself to madness.

## **Under the Surface** *Abigail Awad, freshman*

*Inspired by "A Softer World" #235 by Joey Comeau and Emily Horne*

I'm tired of being ignored. I'm tired of feeling like I don't belong. I'm sick of being the last one picked up from every soccer practice because no one remembered to come get me. I'm the forgotten middle child and I will remain this way forever, always in the shadow of my perfect older sister.

My late sister.

It was just some kind of freak accident. She was swimming at the lake like she always did, went too deep, and she drowned. I was sad, sure, but part of me thought that once she was gone that I would finally get the attention I've been craving for sixteen years now. But I'm not. She's dead and my parents still love her more than me. My sister is all my mother and father talk about. They keep saying that their life is incomplete now, and they just go on and on about how beautiful she was, everything she had going for her, and about how much she was loved by everyone. Why has it always been her though? Why have I never been good enough for them?

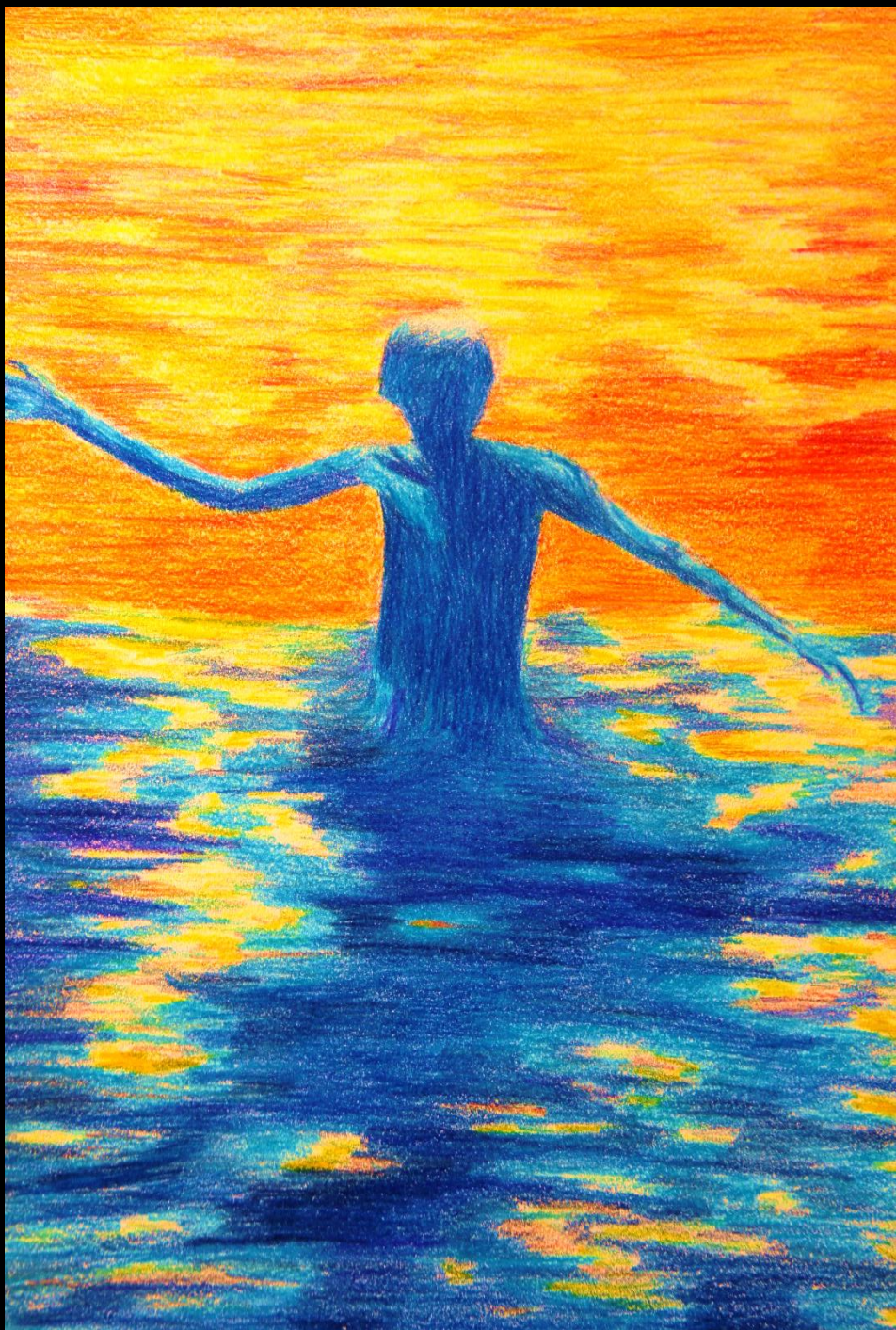
Why couldn't my plan work?

I lie here every night and confess my sins to myself in the dark. I've stained my cheeks with them as they fell from my eyes. My secrets. They consume me. My wicked plans against my own sister are still freshly written out in dark ink right in the front of my mind. Everyone always categorizes people like me as cold-blooded killers, merciless and cruel. If that's true, then why do I cry to sleep every night?

The truth is... I don't cry for her.

Yeah, okay, whatever. Maybe that's who I truly am. Wicked. Evil. But as far as they know, I had nothing to do with it. Like I said, it was a freak accident. That's the story. And you know what? It felt good. She finally felt my pain. You don't need water to feel like you're drowning, and she has caused me to feel this way my whole life. I don't know if they'll ever figure out that it wasn't an accident. I doubt they'll ever forget about her and start to love me. But I'll still never tell, no matter how long the guilt eats away at me. It's like my mother always said: "A life needs solid plans."

But really, a life needs secret plans.



**Emerging from Water** Vika Syata, exchange student



**Be Pretty, Don't Speak** *Grace Brunstrom, senior*

## **Her Eyes** *Mikyla Massey, junior*

her eyes show more stories  
    than the lashes on her back  
her heart holds more compassion  
    than the cigarette burns on her wrists  
but her mind remains untouched and unbroken  
it has more ferocity than a lion's thundering roar

## **Furious Mind of Mine** *Kenna Tarnowski, freshman*

My gender should not be the issue of society.  
I should be allowed to roam  
And feel freedom in my heart,  
But no matter what, I see hostility toward us.  
They know nothing better  
But to degrade us of our character.

Our insignificance never ends.

I look around,  
And I am overwhelmed and vexed  
To see the withdrawal of love  
And mistreatment of my gender.  
My fury toward my lack of rights  
Come from my rejection of control.  
I am worthy of higher responsibilities,  
And I cannot breathe when I am not substantial to society.

Our insignificance never ends.

I am obstructed from the care of my peers.  
If everyone was just more accepting,  
We would decrease the anguish in our lives.  
But bias fills us and we forget to love.  
We are important, can't you see?  
But to you?

Our insignificance never ends.

## **What We're Told** *Lydia Palmer, junior*

Women are told to be strong but gentle, sexually appealing but modest, confident but not outspoken. Society's standards for women constantly contradict themselves but aren't being changed because they've become the bar set for each female living today.

When boys say we're "not like other girls" we're supposed to be flattered because, well, who would want to be just any other girl? Boys expect the idealistic dream-girl standards that no woman can meet because we don't come straight out of the movies. It's hard for some men to face the fact that women can be rebellious, angry, driven, goal-oriented, and independent because we've always been generalized as shallow, ignorant, and dependent on others to succeed.

Many young girls in relationships are expected to be submissive, supportive girlfriends who go out of their way to make their boyfriends' lives better. These girls are meant to give boys what they want, no questions asked--that's what we've normalized as a society. Relationships like these are toxic and unbalanced, and something I've seen far too often as a teenage girl. I've had friends asking if they'd "done anything wrong" or "what could I have done to make him stay?" It's hard to witness the heartbreak and self-esteem issues that toxic relationships like these cause, and the damage often lasts. When boys are unfaithful, ungrateful, or disrespectful to their girlfriends, it sends the message that the girls being mistreated deserve it.

The degradation of young women in our society affects young boys as well. Many boys are raised with the knowledge that girls are meant to show them off, to make them look good. Girls are prizes to be won--trophies that stand tall and look pretty, nothing more. Some boys even refuse to acknowledge the fact that women can't always be beautiful and that we are only human. When we deem toxic behaviors okay in our everyday lives, we're letting behaviors like these overtake our societal standards forced upon women.

Our society degrades, discourages, and disapproves of women trying to live normal, everyday lives. The standards girls currently have for boyfriends are at an all-time low while the standards boys have for their girlfriends is at an all-time high. We must strive for a better balance between the expectations set for men and women and grow more accepting of women who don't conform to the unrealistic standards set for them.



## **You Can Hold the Door for Me** *Michele Blanken, librarian*

You can hold the door for me.  
I really don't mind.  
But don't hold it because you have to.  
Or because of some antiquated custom  
that tells you, you have to  
But, if you get there first  
it's only polite after all.

You holding the door for me  
Does not make us unequal.  
Don't hand me your laws  
And call them equality.  
We have been subordinated  
we know what that is.  
Besides I don't want your idea of equality.  
After 2,000 years of sitting home  
caring for the children  
keeping the hearth fires burning  
and rivoting your engines  
We don't want your wars.  
So, don't give them to us and call  
that equality

Equality is  
equal pay for equal work  
equal opportunity for careers  
and choice. The Choice to  
raise a family and keep  
my career.  
To have a baby and not  
call that sick leave

Hello! I'm not sick.  
In fact,  
I'm the opposite.

So, you can hold the door for me.  
But, next time maybe I'll hold it  
for you.

## **All My Life** *Eleanor Payne, freshman*

*Inspired by "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor*

As I picked up his key from the mud-stained rug by the door, I pressed its cold hard metal against my flushed red cheek.

And I cried, hoping to never see his face again.



It all started the day I met her, Eliza. How grateful I am for her now, for making me a stronger woman, and teaching me that I have all my life ahead of me without men in it. But back then, all I could feel was a deep, overflowing sense of loathing for her.

I remember that pretty spring day in October. I had the day off work, so I decided to surprise Ricky. I put on my cute checkered dress, fluffed my growing afro, packed a nice lunch, and marched out of the door into the sunlight. I hummed "Let's Stay Together" as I walked happily down the street towards his office. I buzzed in, and the secretaries greeted me with warm smiles on their faces. Recognising me from my internship and other previous visits, we had brief small-talk about the review that the ACAC would be doing on possible equal pay for women, and then I sang my way over to the elevator and pressed the golden button to take me to the fourth floor.

Joy was in the air. I was excited to spend time with my fiancé. The calm elevator music stopped after a minute of gut-dropping movement and the doors slid open slowly as I stepped out into a maze of offices. I was greeted with friendly waves and smiles from everyone that I passed, and when I reached Ricky's office, I nudged open the big wooden door just a tiny crack to make sure he was in there.

That's when I saw her. Sitting on his lap. Playing with the hair I so lovingly trimmed the day before. I scanned her up and down. She was a perfect specimen: tall with soft, curly brown hair and a voluptuous figure. She wore a crisp pressed pencil skirt and tight white blouse, with heels practically taller than me. Her thin tan legs were draped over him, her long graceful arms were wrapped around his neck, and her thick black eyelashes brushed up against his cheek. Her rosy-red lipstick made perfect imprints on his rough jawline and on the starched collar of his lovingly-ironed button up.

He leaned over and kissed her neck as she giggled quietly. I could feel my face start to burn with anger. I had seen enough.

I shoved the door open. His face turned sheet white when he saw me, and she nestled further into him, smirking. He stammered out some sort of fake excuse while I yelled some obscenities I can't even remember. She gasped, offended, and he held her close as I went on screaming. My face was redder than the prints of lipstick on his face. I stopped to breathe, fathoming what sort of explanation either of the two fools could give me.

Silence.

She got up slowly, looked me dead in the eyes, turned back to him, kissed him dead on the lips for what felt like ages, grabbed her purse, and walked out of the room, heels clicking on the floor as she sauntered out of view.

“What the hell was that?” Ricky yelled, turning to me, his face now regaining its natural color. “Why are you here?”

“Why was she here?”

“Gloria, I can explain! She was just helping me to fill out paperwork.” With tears streaming down my face, I threw his lunch bag at him, hoping it would hit him dead in the face. I slammed the door as hard as I could, and all the walls rattled. I ran through the office, scrambling to get to the elevator before anyone saw my tears.

I could hear his heavy footsteps behind me as I stepped into the elevator, the doors closing on the image of that little pair of red lips on his neck. Later that night, in the safety of my home, I turned all the lights off and locked myself in the bathroom, sobbing pathetically. I heard his key click in the lock and his footsteps on the hard, wooden floor. A high pitched clicking noise followed him around, so I pressed my ear to the door to hear better.

“Hello? Gloria?” He called out nervously. I gave him no answer.

“Well then, it’s just you and me, isn’t it?” The sultry, smooth voice seemed to seep into my head like venom. I gasped aloud: *he brought her into my home.*

“Didn’t you hear something?” The panic in his voice was tangible.

“Nothing at all...” she crooned sickeningly. I don’t even remember all I heard that long night on the cold bathroom floor, but I heard everything I needed to. He fell asleep on the couch, and the girl who he called Eliza snuck out.

The sun rose, and the sky turned a rosy pink. He stumbled to the kitchen to make his breakfast as usual, scrambled to find his clothes, and left without a word, sure his deceit was hidden. I finally emerged from the bathroom and silently packed all his things into a box and set it on the porch, waiting for him to come home.

Many hours and many tears later, I heard him arrive to find all his possessions on the stoop. He yelled through the door, the anger in his voice palpable. “You’ll regret this Gloria! You can’t live without me! You know it. It’s only you that you’re hurting. You just wait and see!”

Crumpling up against the door, my heart shattered and tears soaked my satin pajama shirt. Ricky was the first man I ever loved and the only one that I ever imagined growing old with. He was sensitive, gentle, caring... or so I thought.

*He’s right, I thought. I can’t do this. I’m so afraid. But this wasn’t my fault. It was his. I never did him wrong.*

I wiped away my tears, stood, and looked into the mirror, actually seeing myself for the first time. *He broke me, but he can’t hurt me again. I’ve spent oh so many nights feeling sorry for myself, but now I’m holding my head up high. I am ready to face the world. Hopefully.*



A month later, I was ready to go home and sleep off my double shift at work. After I'd finally decided that I didn't need Ricky anymore, I moved on. More hours of work and some lonely nights, but I was doing everything on my own. As tired as I was, I was looking forward to the future: *Tomorrow’s the Aborigines Black Power protest*, I thought as the bus took me home. *If this goes well, maybe the ACAC will finally agree to grant us equal pay to men. Wouldn’t that be nice.* I was dropped off and walked the two blocks home. I turned my key in the lock and pushed my stubborn door open.

Face to face with me was Ricky. Sitting on my couch, in my apartment, waiting for me to walk through that door.

“Gloria!” He leaped off the couch and wrapped me in his arms. I sighed and started to melt into him, but I stopped. *No, this isn't right.*

I shoved him back as hard as I could and slapped his face. Clutching his cheek, he got closer, so I shoved him onto the floor. I could feel my face burning red, and I knew that what was coming wasn't going to be pretty.

“Get out!” I yelled.

“Gloria,” he pled. “Come on now. Haven't you missed me? Hasn't it been awful to be here all alone?”

“No!” I replied. “At first, I was afraid... I was petrified. I just sat around and kept thinking that I could never live without you by my side. But I couldn't forget what you did to me. And I spent so many nights thinking how you did me wrong that I grew strong--and I learned how to get along without you.”

“Gloria, please...”

“No! It's been a month, Ricky. I finally get free of you, and then I just walk in to find you here with that sad look upon your face, and you expect me to go back to you? What, did you think I'd crumble? Think I'd lay down and die?”

“I had only hoped--”

“I should have changed that stupid lock or made you leave your key...”

“I had to see you again!”

“Why? Don't you have another woman? Weren't you the one who tried to hurt me with goodbye?”

“Baby...”

“Don't you baby me! Do you see me here? I'm somebody new, I'm not that lonely little person still in love with you. You're a fool, just dropping in expecting me to be free... but get this straight: I'm saving all my loving for someone who's loving me.”

“But I love you. I promise it will never happen again, as long as I live.”

“You’re right, Ricky. ‘Cause you’re not welcome anymore.” His face went slack in shock and his eyes filled with tears, but I was firm. “Go on now, go! Walk out the door!” I opened the door and he staggered out, as I slammed it in his wake.

As the echoing sound of the door slamming died out, so did my confidence. *What was I thinking?* I cried hard tears, tears of regret, sorrow, betrayal, and all the pent-up anger that he had caused me. Then I saw a flash of metal on the ground--his key. I picked it up and held it close to my cheek, catching my glistening tears. The rusty metal shone from a small golden strip of sunlight that came shining through a crack in my old broken blinds, and I was stunned by its beauty.

The blinds were broken, the metal rusty, but in that little moment, I saw how beautiful something broken could be. *Could I be like that?* I remembered everything I’d done in the past month, and the woman I had become. And I smiled. *Yes. I will be like that. I will survive.*

## **Anew** Sydney Christen, sophomore

A soft breeze blows around you  
Encasing you in a layer of goosebumps.

It is seven forty-two.  
Everything is peaceful and serene.  
As the time goes on, the light continues to dim.  
Before you know it, it is dark.  
Nothing can be seen.

After what feels like an eternity,  
Light slowly seeps through your eyes.  
Everything feels and looks different,

Almost as if you are a new person...

## Three Points *Samantha Scarberry, freshman*

“Just get it over with!”

Ashley took a huge bite out of her burrito as she tossed my phone to Melody. Mel looked at the screen and wrinkled her nose at what I had typed. “She’s right, Katie. This is fine. And the longer you wait, the more you’re going to worry about it.”

I sighed. *Why did I thinking showing them would relieve my anxiety?* As I sat squirming, my friends were revising my confession text to my crush. I’d never been too good at talking to boys, so when I confided that I had feelings for Ryan, they volunteered to help me. *Some help*, I thought. *They’re right though. If I don’t do it now, I’ll just worry more. Waiting will just keep reminding me of all the bad possible outcomes.*

“There,” Mel said, fixing my grammar (as she always does). “That sounds perfect.”

“Ugh, don’t do perfect. “Ashley rolled her eyes and snatched the phone away. “It’ll look like you tried too hard.” She tapped the delete button several times, abbreviating my well-thought out words to nearly intelligible textspeak. “K. Hit send.”

“Okay guys,” I said. “You need to like stop. I know you’re trying to help but you’re just freaking me out.” I took the phone out of her hand and looked at it. I steadied my trembling hand as I erased everything and just wrote what everything I felt. *Well, it still sounds a little stupid and desperate... but at least it sounds like me.*

The text was as good as it would get. My finger hesitated over the send button.

“Go on, girl,” Mel said, smiling.

“Yeah, go get you some!” added Ashley.

I took a deep breath and hit send.



I hoped Ryan would reply right away, but I still hadn't received a reply by the time I went to bed. *Maybe he just hasn't checked his phone, I thought. Or maybe he's too busy laughing to his friends.*

I tried to be patient and wait until morning, but my adrenalin overwhelmed me and suddenly I couldn't sleep. I felt as if I would puke any second. I had to know. I grabbed my phone of the nightstand.

*Hey, I typed. So, did you read my message?*

I sat in the dark for a couple of minutes before I saw my phone screen illuminate. I nervously looked at the screen and saw the notification with his name.

*Yeah, so listen Katie...*

He let me down as gently as he could while any hope for more late-night conversations and warm smiles crumbled before me. My best friend, this amazing human being was now leaving my life. *But I need him, I thought. He's the only one who can make the bad things in my life less horrible and normal things great just by being there. Now he'll never be there when I needed hope again.*

As tears filled my eyes, I looked around my room, only to see the posters of bands he helped me fall in love with, photos that we took together at the fair, and the dreamcatcher that provoked our last late-night talk. He had asked me what I dreamed of every night, and of course the answer was...

*I need to get out of here.*

I threw on my pair of jeans and my grey hoodie. I slipped on my worn-down black vans and (just as I had done many nights before) I softly tiptoed across the hall and squeezed out my front door, making sure it made no noise when I shut it.

While I walked down the street, I was comforted by the streetlights that illuminated my path. No one was around to see me cry, and the world was silent and still. The wind made the air feel drier. *I should've brought my inhaler. Oh well, too late now.*



I walked for almost an hour before I realized where I was going. I approached the football goal post. I was back at my middle school. Granted, I was only there for a year, but that's where I'd met some of the most important people in my life. It's where I met Melody and Ashly.

It's where I met him.

I was at the first game of the year. I didn't know anyone and was trying to keep to myself when the most wonderful boy came up to me said, "Hey, aren't you the new girl in my art class?" He stayed with me the entire game, and after. I sat by him for every game after that and walked the track with him on the weekends. I loved those afternoons, just talking and laughing until we were both so winded that we'd fall in the grass and look up at the clouds.

But now the sky was black with only the moon lighting the field. I grabbed onto the yoke of the goalpost and pulled my way up. Then, I maneuvered myself on top of the uprights where I could sit and think. I leaned my back against one of the uprights and stared up. He's the one who taught me how to climb these, I thought. I wonder if he'd be surprised to find me here now.

Out of habit, I reached into my pocket to put my earbuds in and listen to my favorite bands for a while. I felt around an empty pocket. *Damn, I left my phone at home.* I sighed and succumbed to the silent world around me. I knew the sky was covered in stars, but I couldn't see many because of the lights in town. I wished I could join them in the sky.



After a good half an hour of thinking and gazing up at the sky, I still felt awful. I decided I needed to go home. My hands were numb, and my feet had fallen asleep from hanging off the post. I made the decision to slide down the pole instead of jumping off. When I went to move onto the slanted pole to slide down, something happened. I couldn't move my leg.

*What in the world? Why can't I move?*

I went to pull out my phone and turn on the flashlight but remembered that I didn't have it. I squinted in the dark and saw that my pants had gotten pinched where poles connected. I couldn't get down without ripping them completely open—they were my only pair of jeans.

*Of course. Of course, this would happen to me.*

I didn't know what to do. I couldn't call anyone, obviously. I'd freeze if I stayed there until morning. Worse, if my parents found out I snuck out of the house, I would most likely be grounded and never be able to come out to the field again. As public as it was, the field was my secret place to escape. I couldn't lose it.

I made up my mind--I was figuring this out on my own. I wiggled the fabric and saw how much trouble I was really in. I started moving my body quickly back and forth trying to free my jeans. The unsteady post had shifted, and the fabric wasn't budging. My weight on top of the post was keeping my jeans pinched, and I couldn't get them free as long as I was sitting there. *If only I could get off this pole without my pants...*

I suddenly realized there was only one way to get out. *Oh, come on...*

I spent a few more minutes trying to come up with any other way to no avail. I closed my eyes and grit my teeth. "I can't believe I'm doing this," I muttered to myself as I unbuttoned the top of my jeans.

I unzipped my fly and hesitated for a second. *Come on, just get it over with.* I sighed as I quickly wiggled out of my pants and fell onto the turf.

The grass had started to gather dew and was freezing on my bare legs. *At least no one's awake to see this,* I thought, still utterly embarrassed. I stood up and gave my pants a gentle tug; the fabric easily popped out of the joint and fell to the ground without a single tear. I quickly put my pants back on and started to run home, my cheeks burning red in the cold night.

I silently opened the door of my house and walked inside. I slowly shut and locked the door. I climbed into bed with relief that no one had noticed I left. As my head hit my pillow, I looked over at my phone. For the first time since I got stuck, I thought about Ryan and why I was out on the field in the first place. *Maybe he texted me,* I thought. *Maybe he changed his mind even though I'm so awkward and I can't stop thinking about him and...*

Then I realized that I didn't really care if he had changed his mind. I didn't need his acceptance. I was the girl who was brave enough to dive half-naked off a goalpost, and if he couldn't see how awesome I was, it was his loss.

I turned away from my phone, smiled, and fell into a deep and perfect sleep.

**he feels** *Ella Berrend, sophomore*

at times,  
he would feel like summer air  
walking into it made me feel loved  
every part of me was touched by an indescribable brightness  
*the warm air filled my lungs*  
and exhaling brushed my sea-salt hair  
away from my sun-kissed face

on good days,  
he would feel like autumn fields  
tossing and turning in my own leaf pile  
hearing the breaking of every color imaginable underneath our bodies  
being swept off my feet to be pressed against a tree  
where I imagined a childhood filled with bonfires  
and treehouse rendezvous at midnight.

other times,  
he would feel like burning winter  
where my lungs felt every bitter inhale and frosted exhale  
I would feel the need for more air when it wasn't readily available  
I want to go back to those warm wonderful memories  
the feeling of numbness on the inside of my gloves  
which weren't nearly enough  
to protect me

sometimes i imagine that  
he would feel like bright spring  
with fresh cut grass between my toes  
or the feeling of eating a p b & j on the front porch  
or bright yellow tulips sprouting  
i'd imagine that things would bloom and grow  
or perhaps start over

a way to experience those things again,  
but differently

he'd feel new

## **Mountains** *Jill Ripa, theatre teacher*

Mountains.

She was looking for mountains.

She was thirteen and had lived in a small Texas town her whole life.

Sure, times were tough and money was tight,

But Samantha adored that life.

It was all she knew.

It was comfortable. It was home.

But it wasn't exciting.

Moving to Colorado from the flat plains of Texas was supposed to be fun.

Leaving her friends? Everything she knew?

That was nothing. It would all sort itself out.

"Samantha, look!"

Her mom pointed to the horizon in front of them.

Peeking over its pinkish line was a brownish mound.

*The mountains. Hmm...*

"Mom, it's barely a hill."

"That's just the beginning. Just wait until they're closer."

Samantha sighed.

*I really thought it would be more than this.*

She knew she had been terrible to her mom lately,

And she didn't even know why,

Sitting in her room and never talking,

Being sullen during dinner.

She could tell her mom was trying,

But she was (maybe even purposefully) making it difficult.

Deep down, Samantha knew that her mom was her hero

And that she should be better to her.

She was Samantha's rock,

But Samantha needed a mountain.

Okay, sure.  
It was about her dad.  
it was more... more than just the divorce.  
Something inside her tapped away at her brain and her heart.  
A feeling that her dad didn't love her.  
She always felt like maybe she could make him want her.  
Maybe if she wore the right thing...  
Or gave him the right gift...

The tapping inside her was getting painful.  
Somehow those mountains were bound to help.  
Any new scenery, really.  
A new start.

Samantha wanted to make things easier,  
But she just couldn't seem to release this...  
This heaviness.

Mom wouldn't understand.  
She was very into her new life. Her new husband.  
Samantha had to admit this new man was really good to her mom  
And even to her  
But something about even thinking like that felt like betrayal,  
A betrayal to her dad.  
To her dad that maybe didn't even love her,  
Maybe didn't even want her.

Nothing made sense.  
It was jumbled mess in Samantha's brain.  
There was more going on inside,  
But she couldn't make sense of it all,

And so she mostly just stared out of the window,  
Looking for mountains.

## **Silent Love** *Athena Chagolla, freshman*

*Inspired by "All I Need" by Radiohead*

We lay side by side, our arms and legs intertwined. The moonlight shines through a small sliver of my dark, heavy curtains. Her lungs slowly fill and deflate in sync with mine, like the ocean, rising and falling with peace.

Headlights travel across my white bedroom walls through my window. Faint rain taps against thin glass. We are warm and cozy, and everything is right.

We are in love.

The porch light outside my window flickers, and I see two moths drinking up the light. One seems to push the other away from the light. I roll over to open my eyes and look at hers only to wake up and realize it's all a dream.



The sky is dark and the stands are cold. I sit next to my friend Eli. The game is boring. We're losing. The sudden gusts of wind bring chills to my cheeks and arms. I'm miserable.

On the way here, we saw a dog trapped in someone's car. We called for help to get him out. It was the second one I'd seen in three days.

The cheerleaders below us dance and shout with excitement, with their striped skirts and long-sleeved shirts. Their pom-poms flutter and glint endlessly around their bodies.

I look around some more, disinterested in the game, and I see Nadine--the girl that I'm ninety-five percent sure I am in love with even though we've never had a decent conversation. For the past five months, I've considered writing her letters and poems that tell her just how much I feel about her. She's standing slightly above me to my left. Her friends are cheering on our team with so much emphasis that they make it seem like Nadine doesn't want to be here as much as me. Her long, dark hair flows in the breeze, like ribbons on a parade wagon. When her friends look at her with concern as to why she isn't as interested as they are, she gives a smile that makes my heart drop to the depths of the earth.

I steal several glances of her throughout the game. I get away with it, too. She doesn't look at me once... which I suppose is the sad part. She doesn't notice me at all. But the game goes by quicker, and before I know it, I am walking back to the parking lot with Eli. He's going on and on about how our team is horrible and the game was the worst he's ever seen, but I don't listen. I think instead of Nadine.

I compose a small speech in my head. Something I could tell her, one that would tell her how I feel in every way.

*You're all I need. You're all I need...*



As the weeks went on, I made an effort to talk to her and get to know her. The conversations we had only made me fall for her harder. She's an artist. She plays the guitar and paints on egg-white canvases with colors I had never known existed.

I feel like I've dropped several hints that I'm interested in her. Well, maybe to her I'm just "interested," but in my head and in my heart, I'm lovestruck and drowning in my own thoughts of her.

There are days where I feel like she wants me too, and those have been some of the best days of my life. Then there are other days where I know she doesn't feel it half as much I do--and those have been some of the saddest days of my life. Humdrum days, days where nothing feels right, and I have no feelings whatsoever.

I ask her to the opening night of *Forrest Gump* at the only drive-in in town this Saturday. She says she's going with her friends already.

I passed her in the halls yesterday, and when she saw me, her eyes lit up and she gave me the warmest hug I'd ever experienced.

It's all right, then it's all wrong.

She asks me to the next football game to make up for the drive-in.



We arrive at the stadium around seven. The car ride there was quiet but pleasant. An album by Beck played on a CD through her soft speakers. It was a kind of comfortable silence.

The game starts and the cold begins to creep onto our skin. Small winds come and go, sending us shivers and causing us to huddle closer to each other. Still, I get the feeling that she doesn't want to be here based on how often she stares into the dark blue sky.

"Do you want to get out of here?" I ask with genuine concern.

She looks over at me quickly, as if on cue. "Where would we go?"

"There's the auditorium inside the building..." I reply, trailing off.

"Yes, let's go." She responds quickly and grabs my arm, leading me down the stands and away from the game.

I smile to myself. *I'm making progress.*

We make our way through the building and into the dark auditorium. The dim emergency lights are on and the seats are empty. Faint conversations and laughter echo outside the doors.

I follow her toward the middle of the seats, right smack in the center. We sit, and she props her feet up on the seat in front of her. I take a deep breath and settle into my seat.

"Can I talk to you? Like, about some personal things?" she asks in small voice. I look over at her with concern.

"Of course, whatever you need," I reply.

She waits for a while, looking at the stage in front of us.

"I don't think my family really cares about me anymore," she says quietly.

"Why do you say that?" I ask. I shift in my seat to look at her.

"I feel like all I get from them today are brief conversations and shut doors. And when they do talk to me and ask me about my feelings, they don't seem very interested." She stares at her elevated feet.



"Maybe they just have a lot on their minds right now. They probably have other stuff going on too," I say in a reassuring voice.

"But I'm a teenager now. I need them more than I did before. They're allowed to have their problems and stuff, but they can't completely forget about me. It's ridiculous." She bends her neck to look at the ceiling.

I sigh and turn my head to look at the stage. "It'll get better. It always does." I tentatively stretch my arm around her shoulders. Just when I think I should pull back, she sinks into my arms, and my heart soars in achievement.

Once we sneak out of the school, we laugh the whole way to the parking lot, where we get into her car and turn on the heater as fast as we can.

"I'm glad I got to spend tonight with you, Thom," she says in a voice I haven't heard before.

I look at her with longing eyes.

"Me too, Nadine. Will I see you tomorrow?" I ask.

"Yes. If you don't find me, I'll find you," she says, smiling.

It was all wrong, but now it's all right.



This morning, I woke up with the same feeling I had last night. I could still feel her in my arms, her sweet words filling my ears. *Today is going to be a good day--I can feel it.* I was ready to tell Nadine how I truly felt about her.

When I got to school, I thought about how I would approach her a million times in my head. I had everything planned out until I saw the last thing I wanted to see.

Nadine was holding hands with some other guy, a strong and bold-looking guy, while walking in the hallway. I stopped immediately, watching her laugh and smile the same way she did with me last night but with him. My heart shattered into thousands of pieces, each one hurting like tiny shards of glass in my chest.

She saw me and waved, her smiling teeth and wide eyes plunging into my already heartbroken heart. I smiled and waved back, trying to look as if I hadn't been rejected by the person I spent five tiring and painful months on.

I turned and walked the other direction, straight out of the school and into my car. It's all wrong, so I need to go somewhere things can be right.

I'm now driving in silence. I can feel the tears slide down my cheeks. Tense breaths escape my lungs in short duration. And I plan to keep driving. I won't return to school today. Or tomorrow. Or the day after that.



I'm finally back at school, and I'm avoiding her at all costs. I don't want to go through the excruciating small talks and glances again. But of course, she finds me. Gliding through the hallway, her hair bounces and her smile stays glued on her face. It breaks my heart even more when I notice that her smile widens when she sees me.

There's no going back now. I have to talk to her.

"Where have you been the last few days? I was worried." she asks, casually, after giving me a painful hug.

"I was sick. The, um, flu," I reply without emotion.

"That's weird. It's not really flu season, is it?" she asks.

I snap at her. "Well, it doesn't matter, because I got it, so..." Her smile fades instantly and her eyes lose their usual glint.

"Okay, sorry. I'm glad you're feeling better, at least," she says in a sad voice.

"Yeah, me too," I say. "I'll see you around, I guess."

I keep moving past her, imagining her face and her feelings. It hurt me to hurt her. It hurt me a lot. But she's with someone else. Even though I'm in the middle of her picture, a trapped dog in her hot car, a moth who just wanted to share her light.

It's all wrong.

## **A Single Rose** *Chandler Smith, freshman*

I went and visited your grave today.  
I brought a single flower and I came alone.  
The world hasn't been the same since you went away.

I tried to keep my emotions at bay,  
But a tear of mine fell to your gravestone  
When I went and visited your grave today

I sat next to you and sang the song you loved to play,  
Then swallowed my sadness and reached for a lower tone.  
The world hasn't been the same since you went away.

You were the love of my life, my best friend, my fiancé.  
I scrolled through the numerous pictures of you on my phone  
As I went and visited your grave today

And I found a picture of us on Christmas Day--  
I was wearing the ugly sweater that you'd hand-sewn,  
But it hasn't been the same since you went away.

Now the fabrics of my heart have also begun to fray  
And in the vast open cemetery, I am left alone.  
I went and visited your grave today  
Because I haven't been the same since you went away

## **Sixteen** Aurora Rangel, freshman

The broken window cast a checkerboard of moonlight onto the dusty floors. There was just enough light that I could faintly discern my scared hands. I trailed my hand over the engravings on my wooden bedroom wall.

“Five, ten, fifteen,” I whispered, feeling the marks underneath my fingertips.

A quiet knock at my door drew me out of my daze. I knew it was time. I slid my riding boots on and soundlessly snuck out of my bedroom. Down the hall, my mother slid the master key out from underneath the disguised floorboard. Unlocking the door, she ushered me in.

A young man slept peacefully on the bed inside the small room. He had come to us at sunset, asking for a place to rest for the night. We had gladly welcomed him. Our house was rurally located with no other people for twenty miles. As such, we frequently had guests. Our quaint family home morphed into a family business.

I shuffled over to his bed, standing over him. Sleep pooled in his eyelids. Reaching into my boot, I withdrew a small blade. My reflection stared at me through the highly-polished steel, but it looked nothing like myself.

*I can't do this. Not again.*

I stole a glance at my mother. She gestured for me to continue.

A bead of cold, salty sweat ran down the side of my face. *God, please forgive me. I have no other choice.* To take his life was to live; if I didn't, I would be thrown out. *I'm just a child,* I thought. *I need my family.*

“Please forgive me.” I said before I slid the blade across his throat.

I stood frozen, watching the dark red blood pool on the sheets. Mother nodded approvingly, “Take his wallet. It’s in the pocket of his jacket. In the morning, we will sell his horse and other belongings.”

My mother walked out, leaving me alone with the corpse. Wiping the bloody knife off, I tucked it back into my boot. I dragged his hulking body off the bed, down the corridor, and stopped in the foyer. I pulled the ornate woven rug out of the way to reveal a concealed cellar door.

Mustering all my strength, I wrenched the door open and pushed the corpse in to join the ones before him. I locked the cellar door and returned the rug to its original position, before heading back to my bedroom.

I stripped down. I crawled into my comforting bed, and pulled the sheets up to my chin, hoping to hide from my demons. But, before sleep took me, I pulled the knife out from my boot. Slowly, I carved another tally mark into the wall.

“Sixteen.” I whispered.

## **Deep Pockets** *Eric Mabbitt, freshman*

Fight tooth and nail for what you may,  
For whatever you have you must keep.  
Not the world does your wallet pay.

Though thousands grasp at all you say,  
Scream for yours to calm who's cheap;  
Fight tooth and nail for what you may.

The future's dim and the horizon gray,  
And urchins below churn and weep  
That not the world does your wallet pay.

Mountainous machines with seedlings lay  
Into the salted fields where no man reaps,  
So fight tooth and nail for what you may.

The sun may rise, but it shines no rays  
Unto the masses who cry for heaps,  
But not the world your wallet pays.

Not for you is the common malady  
With your assets many and pockets deep.  
Fight tooth and nail for what you may,  
Not the world does your wallet pay.

## **Listen to the Right Voice** *Eleanor Payne, freshman*

I believe that all lives are meaningful. Including my own.

I have had a lot of problems realizing that. I can be very self-deprecating, saying to myself:

*You aren't important.*

*No one cares about you.*

*Why did you do that? You are so stupid sometimes.*

*Eww, is that what you're wearing today?*

*Why can't you just keep your mouth shut for three seconds?*

*Everyone hates you, haven't you realized that yet?*

*Grow up...*

When I say those thoughts aloud, I honestly believe myself. Every time a negative thought went through my head, I made no effort into stopping it.

That is, until a close friend of mine, an older man about the age of sixty, gave me some advice. Looking deep into my eyes, he told me:

“Eleanor, go easy on yourself. You haven't done what you needed to do yet in life. Just wait--you'll figure it out. But not if you keep hurting yourself like you do.”

It flipped a switch in my mind. I'd never thought of it that way.

I hadn't lived life to the fullest. I hadn't laughed at myself when I made a mistake. I hadn't embraced my faults. Most of all, I hadn't realized one very important thing: I was worth it.

The impact that people have on you can only be as big as you let it be.

In elementary school, a lot of boys in my grade would bully me, calling me stupid because I'm blonde, acting like I was inferior to them because I'm a girl, and a loser because I stayed by myself and read rather than chasing them around the playground like the other, prettier girls. I was a freak, worthless, only alive for them to tease me every day. I'd often go home crying to my parents. Through their love and support, they encouraged me to remember my true self.

Then, one day in math, I answered a problem correctly just before they did, and that infuriated them, the whole group of them. They began to try and beat me to the answers, trying to answer the question before I did. We had a race, and I won every time.

I felt triumphant, confident, and I guess that helped me to realize that maybe not everything that they said was true. The next day, I just let their teasing roll off my back. And the day after that, and the day after that.

Confident, with my head held high, I knew that I was worth it.

Looking back now, I'm grateful for their taunts: it was motivation to do better. Today, if I had the chance, I would thank them for helping me develop confidence. I would let them know that they too are important, and that they don't have to bring others down to bring themselves up. Light a candle instead of cursing at the darkness.

I believe that no matter what you've done, no matter if you've killed someone or saved someone, your life is worth living. We all mean something to somebody, whether it be your parents, family, significant other, friends, peers, your boss, etc.

But before all of that, you should mean something to yourself--that's the most important.

Your self-value doesn't decrease based on someone else's inability to see your worth. If you are ever feeling down, bad about yourself, or lacking confidence, remember this:

We are worth it.

## **To Argue a Losing Battle** *Ethan Ahlstrom, freshman*

*Inspired by "If" by Rudyard Kipling*

Do not engage in conversation if,  
When the other party thinks of you,  
It enrages them, and they do what they can  
To avoid mauling you like a bear.  
What happens when you talk to  
Them is that the words they hear  
You say get magnified down to the  
Most cartoonish version of the truth.  
They misrepresent the opinions you've  
Expressed as another argument spoken  
By no one. Your thoughts get twisted  
From grays to absolutes by  
Memetic evolution. Arguing *with* knaves  
Like these is a losing battle, and to  
Argue *like* them is to make  
An infuriating distorted totem. A  
Man who refuses to be drawn into their trap  
Is making the correct decision, for  
Engaging is only for fools.

## **The Things You Say** *Samantha Scarberry, freshman*

The things that you say had me in a trance,  
Changing my perspectives and my world with a glance.  
You used to tell me I was great (but I guess you got over that).  
When it comes to you, I've become a doormat.  
You said that I'm fake, like I'm hiding behind a mask.  
(The real me is a butterfly that you can never catch).  
I don't know why I do it. I don't know why I hide.  
I want to show the real me... but what if I'm denied?  
What if they don't like me? Will you be there by my side?  
(I will be the real me if that keeps you in my life).  
I'll let people in, but I can't tell them what I think.  
I'll keep my deep thoughts secret, and I'll hardly ever speak.  
And I'll cry throughout the night because I try too hard  
And then I break (and break and break) until I fall apart.  
So I've thought about your words (even if they weren't so kind).  
And despite what you say, I think I'll stay inside my mind.



## **The Plunge** *Mikyla Massey, junior*

“There it is,” I whispered, terrified of the opaque blue that was going to swallow me whole and engulf me into complete and utter obscurity, the cold acting as a spear, stabbing every inch of my skin, leaving nothing untouched.

“What’d you say?” A confident and thrilled voice beside me asked. I glanced over to my left, careful not to lose balance on this seemingly stubby ledge. It is as if the wooden post laying horizontally beneath my feet diminished each time I begrudgingly peeked down, leaving my toes to hover more and more in the salty air.

I swallowed hardly. It seems my breath was demanding to be announced but every natural instinct had been lost in the thick cloud of fog I call my mind. I curled my toes and clenched my hands, tightening my grip on my only sanctuary in a time of panic.

I forced a smile, “Nothing--just questioning my life and how it led up to this.” The face of confidence belonged to a girl around my age--the only difference between me and her was that she was laughing at the consequences that are challenging me in the face.

Miss Confidence chuckled heartily and shook her head. “First time?”

I nodded silently, focusing anywhere with the exception of downward.

She laughed. “It’s okay. I was like that my first time too. To be honest, once you do it, you can’t stop.” I admired her attempt to coax me.

Someone interjected: “Hurry up! Just jump everything will be fine!”

This time I knew the voice, and the other three voices that had been chanting the same line repeatedly for the past three minutes. My sisters had jumped before I had an opportunity to even step foot on the dock. I sighed and finally saw everyone wading in the water as if fear hadn’t the slightest thought of scratching them. Their arms swayed back and forth, reminding me of a place where I am not -- irritation suddenly struck me like a whip.

*If they can do it, I can do it... right?*

Confidence was still leaning forward her arms behind her barely clutching the same bar I was holding, her eyes peacefully closed as if she was waiting for something.

I asked, "So, what's your secret?"

Confidence thought for a moment and finally spoke, "I don't have one. I just love the drop. It makes me stomach drop and my adrenaline rush. I guess I'm sort of an adrenaline junkie. Okay, I'm going now."

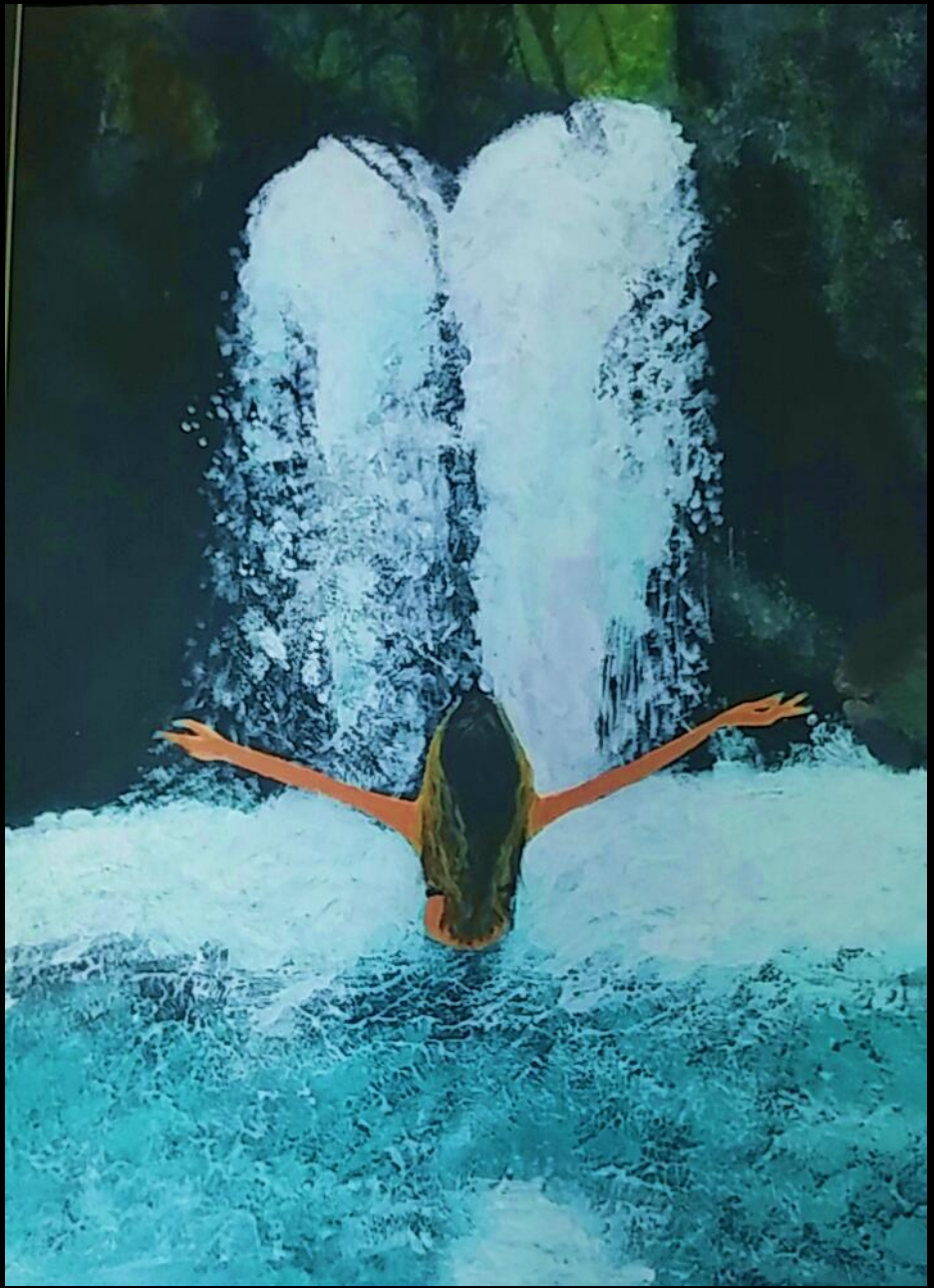
I witnessed her every movement from the release of the bar to the free falling of the forty-five-foot drop. I was not expecting such a swift plummet. I smiled small at the fact that she had unleashed a scampering holler an instance before it was unwillingly silenced by an extraordinary *splash*.

Although it was a small gesture, it reminded me that the only possible person that has the potential of preventing me from diving is myself. I took a deep breath, clearing my mind of any thoughts that would thwart my sudden courage of jumping. Oddly enough, I realized that the gap of me and the water wasn't wide enough.

I shakily but doubtlessly climbed the bar and stood on top of it, my body teetering a numerous amount of times. I grinned widely when I heard my sisters talking in disbelief as Confidence yelled up in encouragement.

I pinched my nostrils and fell forward.

I took the plunge.



**Taking Flight** Shelby Smotzer, junior



**Summer Days** *Lindsay Alderman, freshman*

## **Fairy Tale Romance** *Madeline Kovanda, freshman*

*Inspired by "A Softer World" #528 by Joey Comeau and Emily Horne*

Ethan Jones. From the first day I saw you move into the house across the street, I knew I wanted you. Who wouldn't want such an elegant smile with strong muscles? Even better, I never saw you with anyone. It was like you didn't have anyone. My handsome prince.

Every passing day I went without seeing you made me ache. I would watch you from my window and track your every move. Eventually I realized I had to get close, so I made the first step toward you. Our first conversation had me in the air. You were so tall and confident. I didn't even have to try to get you, you wanted me as well. You treated me like a princess that day.

It was like a fairy tale.

You asked me to dinner, and I agreed, flattered. Before I could even open my mouth to order, you interrupted and ordered for me. You chose the side salad for me, even though I previously said I was thinking about a pasta dish. I asked you why you did that, and you just said, "Any woman of mine isn't gonna be fat."

I just said to myself, *it was just a joke. Besides, now I know I'm HIS woman.*

You remember when I decided to go to the movies with my friends? It was a two-hour long movie, and the entire time you blew up my phone. *Where are you? What are you doing? You can't leave me.* And you accused me of cheating and said so many terrible things. After the movie, I came home, not knowing that you were so angry. You yelled at me for an hour, telling me it was my fault and I need to let you know where I am. When I tried to speak, you slapped me across my face. Then you grabbed me and said, "I'm sorry Chloe, I didn't mean to do that, I need you."

But it's okay. I know that you didn't mean any of those nasty comments you said. You were just trying to make me understand how much you care. Now I know that.

We make a beautiful couple, but like you keep saying, I need to listen more. I keep telling myself you're not right, but I love you too much to ever walk away. You're my prince, and after all, I asked for a fairy tale romance.

In my defense, I'd never read any actual fairy tales.

## **Cindy's Predicament** *Jaxon Kjorvestad, senior*

*Inspired by "Ashenputtel" by The Brothers Grimm*

Once upon a time, there was a girl who loved to party. She loved to party so much that she would go out every single night to different places to do so. Now she wasn't like everyone else and never got caught up in drugs and alcohol: she kept her distance not because she was afraid but because she loved her mom and dad and they trusted her. She figured that go have fun without any of that, and that's what she did.

But like all good things, Cindy's partying came to an end when her mother died. While her father coped with alcohol, Cindy shut herself in room alone to mourn. Eventually, her dad met a woman at the bar named Tremaine. Cindy did not approve of this, but she decided that she'd support whatever made her dad happy.

All was well for a while, and her dad decided to marry Tremaine. Cindy thought nothing of this until Tremaine moved in, bringing with her two teenage daughters. Both of them had the intellect of Cardi B, the llama-toothed smile of Miley Cyrus, and hair as wild as Lady Gaga.

"And who are these two, dad?" Cindy asked as she popped a bubble with her gum.

"Oh! These are Tremaine's daughters, Ana and Ella, I think you three will all get along, considering you all are around the same age," he said while the two gremlins made duck faces and took selfies.

A few months later, Cindy's father died in a freak accident. Cindy's stepmom and stepsisters then revealed their true selves, which proved to be that of green, hairy, Christmas-thieving monsters on a personal mission to make Cindy's life hell. Ana and Ella stole all her good clothes and left her with ugly dull ones. They would purposely take longer showers then they needed just so Cindy would have to shower at school. Speaking of school, Ana and Ella would bully Cindy by sticking notes to her back and calling her names, causing Cindy to become an outcast. At home, Cindy was treated as little more than a maid, cooking and cleaning every night.

One day, Tremaine found Cindy crying in her room (which had been inconveniently moved to the attic). "What troubles you Cindy?" she asked.

Almost too astonished to speak, Cindy thought that her stepmother wasn't as bad as she thought. Cindy began to say behind her tears, "Well, I-I..."

Cindy stammered and stopped her words as she realized Tremaine was holding a toothbrush. "Here, you can use this and make use of your tears by using them as water to scrub the kitchen floor." Tremaine then walked away, laughing heinously.

It wasn't long before the Homecoming dance, and everyone who was anyone was running around thoughtlessly trying to find a date... all except Henry, the most handsome boy in the school and class president. He was busy trying to find a specific, perfect date, so he decided to throw a massive party three days before the dance. He was sure he would run into the girl he was determined to go with.

Cindy hadn't been to a party since her mother died a year before and wanted to go to this party more than anyone, but her stepmother grounded her to her room for the week of homecoming so she wouldn't ruin any events for her daughters.

Knowing the house better than Tremaine, Cindy used the secret door behind one of the curtains in the attic that led outside, so she willingly went to the room without a fight. Luckily, the attic was where she stored all her party attire when her mother died, so none of it had been stolen by Ana or Ella. She put on a glow in the dark mask that she used to wear all the time and her best party outfit: denim shorts and a tight grey shirt that cut off at the waist.

When Cindy got to Henry's party, it was nearly midnight. Practically everyone in school was there, and she saw her two stepsisters melting over Henry (along with every other girl there). Yet Henry ignored them, and in fact ignored every girl until he saw one in a tight shirt and glow-in-the-dark mask. Henry leaned over to his buddy Chad, and asked him, "Hey, isn't that Cindy? The girl that went to every party but wouldn't ever drink?"

Chad replied, "Yeah! I think it is. Why?"

But Henry was gone: he had walked right up to the girl of his dreams.

"Hey! You're Cindy, right?"

"Yeah? What's it to you?" she replied.

"I've been dying to meet you," he said.

Cindy was amazed. "Really?"

"Yeah! I used to see you at every single party last year. I noticed you were the only other person who didn't drink. I thought you were cool, but I was always too shy to come up to you. Then you kind of just disappeared. But now you're back! And since you're here, I was wondering if you wanted to go to homecoming with me."

"Yeah! I'd love that!" Cindy said. "There's only one problem. See those two over there? They're my stepsisters and they make my life hell. If they saw me, they'd tell my stupid stepmother and I'd never be able to leave my house again. That's why I'm wearing the mask tonight."

Henry looked at her with a blank face for a second and then said, "I'll be right back." He walked over to Ana and Ella and left with them into the other room for a few minutes.

Henry then came back, put something in Cindy's hand, and said "I'll see you tomorrow." He gave her kiss on the cheek before leaving.

A few moments later, Cindy's stepsisters emerged clawing at their eyes, tripping over each other, and bumping into everyone. "Henry, where are you?" Ana said. "I don't think those were eyedrops."

Cindy smiled as she read the label of the bottle Henry placed in her hand: *Bippity-Boppity Superglue: Holds Tight 'til Past Midnight.*



## **Luke Burns** *Isaac Palmer, junior*

I'm only smiling on the outside.  
Every day the smile grows wider (only because I can't let them know).  
Not even my Father (whom I love dearly)  
Nor my secret love Jackie (whom I'd do anything for)  
None of them can know.  
(Woe to me for keeping such a secret).

I fear the worst if they were to find out  
    That I have struggled to keep myself away  
        From the hospital for mental patients.  
I envy those with right minds  
    Who don't fear or crave death  
        And that can lead normal lives  
            (And don't spend many nights sleepless  
            With the fear that they may be carted off  
            And forgotten by those they love.)

## **A Ond Arewell to the F** *Dennis Soukup, math teacher*

Too many F's in classes are seen  
Too many F's for young women and men  
An F that might show that we are not keen  
At doing the best that we can

A grade that's an F should be really quite rare  
Brought on by those who have not done enough  
Or perhaps the student does not really care  
Too much time spent on all the wrong stough

So goodbye to F's! See, nothing to phear.  
A "D" should now be the least,  
And should this phoul letter ever appear,  
Oph with its head like a beast!

Phrom here on, our school will be known as Phrederick.  
No need for "that letter," you see,  
And at Phrederick High, we need a new goal--  
How about getting rid of the "D"?

## **My Sister's Keeper** *Abigail Awad, freshman*

*Inspired by "The Girl with No Hands" by The Brothers Grimm*

Alena Miller was beautiful and pious. She came from a very poor farming family in a small town called Appletree just outside of Iowa City. Despite her family's poverty, the people she met were all drawn to her, offering her their endless love and support. However, it may have just been pity love, for she was born without hands.

Alena's lack of hands made life difficult. Her family had never been able to afford prosthetic hands for her, so she needed assistance in just about everything she did. This meant she got all the attention from her peers and family. This made her twin sister Leah, who had two perfectly good hands, extremely jealous. Leah had to help Alena more than anyone else, doing everything from brushing her sister's teeth to typing out text messages for her. While Leah never complained, she started to hate her sister. When she smiled, she grinned like the devil with strokes of fire in her malevolent eyes.

On her fourteenth birthday, Leah made a plan to get rid of her burden of a sister. She went to her father and asked him if she could get a job. Her father was reluctant, but as their tiny farm was struggling against the big factory farms, he agreed and signed what he thought was a permission note allowing his young daughter to work. However, Leah tricked him: the document stated that both Leah and Alena could work and give her profits to her family if, in three years' time, whichever sister helped the family less would be disowned.

Leah worked hard at a local restaurant for three years, ignoring her friends and never taking a day off. Every two weeks, she would dutifully give her parents her entire paycheck. Meanwhile, Alena had an active social life and saw her friends almost every day. On her seventeenth birthday, Leah gave herself a gift: she slammed the contract on the table and demanded her sister be kicked out of the house.

Her father couldn't believe what he had done, and his wife was utterly disappointed: "How could you? You know our baby can't make it on her own right now!" her mother exclaimed with a doleful expression.

Her father shook his head in disbelief. "I didn't realize what I was doing. I didn't even think twice. I thought Leah was willing to work to help us!"

Leah interrupted. "Well, what's done is done. No going back now. We made a deal, father," she said.

The next morning, Leah laid out her check stubs from the past three years and demanded Alena to show all the money she had earned, but Alena had none. Alena's lack of hands restricted her from doing any real work, especially around the farm, so she had never made a penny.

"But I never knew of this!" Alena said. "Leah, why not give me one more week to be fair?"

"One week?" she said. "No. You could go online and easily get crowdfunding that would out-earn me. The internet would love to donate to pretty no-hands girl!"

"Well, what about three days? Three days for three years?"

Leah figured her sister would be unable to go viral in just 72 hours, so she agreed. On the first day, Alena earned \$100 by giving an inspirational speech to the children of the local elementary school. The children loved her and went to their parents, saying, "I want Alena to be my new babysitter." When the parents of the children heard of Alena's financial problem, they all immediately agreed to pay her to babysit their kids--and they all were willing to pay her a year in advance. Alena now had just enough money to break her sister's contract and force Leah out of the house.

However, before Leah could pack her bags, Alena spoke up. "I'm sorry, but I cannot stay here. I realize that I have hurt my sister and that I have been a burden for too long. It's Leah's turn to be so loved." Alena slung a small bag over her shoulder and walked toward the door. Before her family could even reply, she was gone.

Alena decided to take a bus to Chicago, as a city that big must have some kind of work for a girl with no hands. As she was walking down a street in the nicer part of the city, Alena came across an enormous home built as if it were made for royalty. By the shimmering of the setting sun, she saw that trees with beautiful pears grew behind it. It was truly magical.

As she was gazing, a teenage boy named Jameson King came out to greet her. He was awestruck by Alena's beauty and offered for her to come inside. Alena had been very cold walking on the street, so he kindly brought her a warm blanket and a comfortably warm tea. Alena told him about her hands before he could even ask.

“It was a birth defect. I have a twin sister, and there just wasn’t enough room for my hands to develop,” she said as she shamefully peered down at the luscious white carpet.

“I don’t mind. I can tell you’ve been hurt by this world, but I will never hurt you. It makes your beauty more unique,” he replied. Their eyes met. His were a deep-sea blue and twinkled like the stars in the night sky. It was then that she knew he was different from the others. He looked at her with love and admiration rather than pity and sorrow.

The two sat on the couch drinking tea as they shared the stories of their lives. Jameson gently lifted the cup to her lips each time she wanted a drink without even being asked. Alena stayed the night that night, and the next night, and the night after that. Soon, the two were in love and lived in pure happiness. Months passed, and for her eighteenth birthday, he surprised her with the prosthetic hands she’d been wanting for so long. They were slow and not appealing to the eye, but they were enough. “Still, with or without hands,” he told her, “I could love you forever.”

Years passed. After graduating and getting married, Alena became pregnant with a baby boy. Meanwhile, things back home hadn’t gotten any better for Leah. Her parents hated her for driving Alena away. Leah blamed her sister for her troubles even more now that she was away. When Alena called her sister and parents to tell them of her euphoric life full of good love and wealth, Leah completely lost it.

Soon after, Jameson was forced to go on an eight-month business trip to the Arctic that could make or break his company and couldn’t be at the birth of their child. Worried that she would need help with the new baby, Alena asked her sister to stay with her as her assistant. While Leah initially fumed at the offer, she took it after crafting an extremely vindictive plan.

Since Jameson was up near the pole with no cell service, he and Alena wrote each other old-school love letters. She told him all the tales of her pregnancy and explained her love for him, and he wrote about the beautiful places he was seeing and reminders of how much she meant to him.

However, their letters never reached each other. As her assistant, Leah handled Alena’s mail and switched Jameson’s letters to ones filled with cruelty. Alena cried over the letters and thought her husband wanted her out of his life forever because of the awful words her sister wrote. Leah was delighted, and finally wrote a letter telling Alena he had found a new love.

In her deep sadness and fear, Alena packed her things and left. She moved back in with her parents, who took care of her and helped her raise her baby boy Tristan, whose name translates to “full of sorrow” in Latin. He was her daily reminder of her lost love. Yet the hole in her heart that her husband created just could not be filled, not even by her own son.

When Jameson returned home, he couldn’t believe that his wife was gone. He went to his parents’ house to ask his mother where Alena was. He missed his love and was severely heartbroken, for he thought she had found another. His mother explained everything and asked him why on earth he would write such horrid letters to the woman he loved. “I raised you much better than that. That is no way to treat a lady, Jameson King,” she said.

Confused, he asked, “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Mother. I only wrote letters full of fervid love. She’s the one that left.”

“She had to leave. Your letters basically told her to do so.” She then explained to him the cruelty that was found in his words. He realized what had happened. Their letters had been manipulated. Once James discovered this, he set off to search everywhere in the city for his love.

It had been months since Alena had seen her husband. Alena went to visit an old friend at a motel in Chicago, and as she walked out of the car with Tristan, who was already seven months old, she caught a glimpse of a man in resplendent business attire checking into a room. It was Jameson.

Their eyes met, and she saw that same twinkle in his sea blue eyes that she had seen the day they first met. He ran to her and as he ran a silky white handkerchief drifted and fell out of his side pocket. Tristan immediately crawled over to grab it and started swinging it around like blades of a helicopter. Alena picked Tristan up and handed James the handkerchief. He then explained what he discovered about their letters, and Alena realized Leah’s betrayal. Tears filled their eyes.

“I’m sorry I haven’t been here to watch our son grow up. Please come back home with me,” Jameson said as he held her in his arms. “A heavy stone has fallen from my heart. Like I told you the first day we met, with or without hands I will love you forever.”

“Nothing and no one so sinister will ever get between us again,” Alena said. “I promise.” And no one ever did, as they lived happily ever after.

## **Past Despair** *Elisabeth Kulesus, junior*

In my past, I lived to see a dark world  
Because life to me was just a misconception  
The tunnels were appealing;  
The darkness drew me in.  
And I was trapped  
By the jaws of the ominous feeling around me.  
The nights grew longer.  
The daylight burned with fire, consuming my eyes.  
And my room became my prison  
My brain became a contraption that could only release when the tears fell  
out of my eyes

I remember how coarse my voice was,  
Pleading for the help that I so bitterly fought for...  
And I made a decision that altered my existence.

I had given up on the joy in my life.

I look back now and realize how foolish I must've been--  
To think that there was no other way--  
But my decision set my path.

And though it was a trial, I am grateful  
Because now, I can see the truth.

I can see that there is so much more.

And all I needed to do was to look up.

There is so much around that makes it worth it.  
The mountains.  
The flowers.  
The late-night talks with my mom.

And I am grateful  
Because things are okay

**“I don’t want to be at the mercy of my emotions. No... I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them.”**

*–Oscar Wilde*

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