SUMNER
RENAISSANCE
C. 2014
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Introduction

Throughout the course of the 2013-2014 school year, our African American Literature class studied a plethora of expressive literature, artwork, and performances relevant to the African American experience. Most notably, our study of the Harlem Renaissance gave us a powerful example of just how gratifying self-expression can be. This explosive collection of music, poetry, and literature gave a voice to those who were thought to be voiceless; it was the birth of a new black identity. In an attempt to revive and shape their identities as modern day African Americans, students were required to create an expressive piece of work for their final senior project.

I am proud to present *Sumner Renaissance, c. 2014*. My students, each unique in their own form, went above and beyond the requirements of this assignment. This wonderful collection of work captures a recurring theme that turned out to be the greatest teachable moment of my career: writing not only gives you a voice, but it also heals wounds. As you read, you will discover very personal, astounding circumstances in life to which many of my kids have experienced. You will also discover the vivid imagination of my students and their extraordinary writing abilities.

As an educator, it is my responsibility to provide an expressive safe-haven for my students. This is necessary to get their creative juices flowing. My students should be proud of the work they have accomplished thus far. I know they are just as ready as we are for them to graduate and face the world fellow teachers, administration, and staff desperately tried to prepare them for.

Congratulations, Seniors! You have survived my "Literature Boot Camp"!

-Ms. Fields

"Literature is indispensable to the world. The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks at reality, then you can change it."

-James Baldwin
To kill you with kindness would be far too generous.
I’d rather see you suffer.
For you are a demon.
A demon by the name of low self-esteem.

You make people hate themselves.
You hurt people’s feelings.
You make people do terrible things to themselves.
You make them weak.
You are a treachery that needs to be stopped.

But I killed you before, yet, here you are again causing more chaos.
Shall I try again?
Nahhh, I think I’ll just use weapons this time
Maybe that will banish you once and for all.
Because you are a dirty trickster.
You have no right to do the things you do
What you need to know is…..
…they are special people even if they haven’t realized it yet.

They’re gifts from GOD.
They’re someone’s most important everything…
…even if they haven’t met that person yet.
They may just be traveling through a land of unbearable normality.
But they shine artistic ability and pure creativity.
So you, Demon. Give up now!

Stop your reign of terror
And leave them to be.
Because If they give up.
The haters Win.
The naysayers win
The monsters win.
The Demons win.
Or on second thought …
OFF WITH YOUR HEAD AT ONCE!!!
Dad, I sit and think about you every day. It has hardened my heart to know that you’re gone from my life. I think about how all of my friends have fathers to look up to and be guided by, but mine has passed. It’s been seven years since you passed and thoughts of you get to me more and more each day.

Why did he take you so soon? Were you ready to go? What were the last things on your mind in your last hours? I don’t know, but each day it seems like I’m getting closer and closer to the beginning of the end. I feel like my life is getting out of control. I used to be so calm and always knew what to do right off the bat. Maybe it was because I was young, but now that I’m older, I just can’t seem to find any answers. It’s like the more my life gets out of control, the more my friends’ lives fall into place. I just don’t know what to do, say, or think anymore.

As you know, daddy, I’m reaching my last days of being a senior and honestly, I don’t have a clue of what I should do after I graduate. I say that I want to go to college, but I don’t even know if I want to go. I don’t know if it’s being pushed on me so much that the only way I can get people to stop talking or pressuring me about it is to say that I’m going.

I’m standing here asking you and wondering how I’m supposed to make one of the most important decisions of my life. I would only wish that you were here to give me some knowledge, advice, or an opinion on my future. I need to know what you think would make me more successful in my future. I stand here at your casket pondering what my future holds. Am I going to make the right decisions? How will I turn out? If only you were here, daddy, I think this would be a much easier life decision.

In loving memory of you, daddy.
Johnanthan Ezikel Hamber
You will never be forgotten.
Time continues even after a bitter struggle between conflict and resolution. As time passes, things are either forgotten or changed through the course of history. It’s like fresh cut grass growing over a long period of time, but, believe me...

...even when time changes, life goes on.
This drawing is meant to express the way slaves felt when they were captured by slave owners. This captured man is chained up to a tree under the hot, sun. When he was captured, he was whipped. The “S” carved on his back shows that he is property to a master with the master’s logo. The tree he is connected to is a tree meant to hang slaves. His back is facing us because he is too embarrassed to face the world. Instead, he chooses to face the church because he knows that only God can help him. It is so hot and his owner is so brutal that the only means of water for this slave is the evaporating water from the bowl to his left. This is meant to train the slave.
Mermaids are usually considered to be very beautiful and extremely attractive in look, as opposed to the ones normal presumption that their scales would make them look repulsive. From my understanding, the first stories appeared in ancient Assyria, where the Goddess, Atargatis, turned herself into a mermaid in response to the shame she felt after killing her lover. A Mermaid is commonly seen with a comb and mirror, which makes her seem vain. Although Mermaids were known as vain, they were also known for their eloquence. With this in mind, Mermaids usually meant trouble for fishermen and sailors in the waters. The sighting of a Mermaid was a sign of bad things to come.
Some people question why things get hard in life and wonder why some things happen in bad ways. I say, “That’s just life and things happen for a reason.” Everyone has a life to live and in life, there are bad situations. Sometimes they just come and sometimes we are the cause of them. I, too, wonder why life can be so difficult. Growing up, I was taught that that’s the way life goes. You will have to go through good and bad situations to get through life. Some people might disagree, but usually those are the people who either don’t want to see it that way or are the people who are living their life wrong.

I ran across some people who do bad things and when something happens to them, they get mad and start feeling like things shouldn’t happen to them. I always heard that life will kick your butt. I never knew what that meant until I had a huge fight with my parents and ran away. After that, I moved in with my cousin and things got bad. I couldn’t find a job, I had no money, and I couldn’t take care of myself. After a couple of days, I moved back in with my parents. I realized that the fight we had happened for a reason because when you get out on your own trying to live your life the wrong way, life will kick your butt.

My granny always said, “God does things for a reason, depending on the person. God puts certain situations in their lives to teach them a lesson.” This applies to everyone because everyone goes through things and may not know how to deal with it. My granny also said, “God even takes people off of this earth to teach the next person a lesson.” I believe this also because we don’t know what the future holds.

My little brother will be 16 in July, but my mom always tells him that he will either be in jail or won’t live to see his birthday. Why? Because of the path he is following. He is a hothead, he fights, smokes, and gets put out of school amongst other things. He hangs out with the wrong people who are showing him wrong. He has family that tries to convince him he’s doing wrong and what can happen to him if he don’t stop. He doesn’t understand that God punishes people who do wrong. God has taken a lot of young boys off of this earth because they wanted to gang bang, steal, fight, and do drugs. That could be my brother one day, but I’m not ready for that.

People think life is easy. Some people think that they have everything. They have the feeling that they’re living their lives well with no problems. Those are the people who have the attitude that their lives are better than most people or have the attitude that they feel like they can solve everything. Problems come to everyone whether they are good or bad. There is at least one thing that every person has to deal with. A lot of people hold back and don’t talk about their problems, but that’s not good.

When I look at other people and see how they are living, I think about my life and how different things can be for me. No one is perfect and everyone has a struggle in some way. Every person has to go through good and bad things to get through life. Everything my granny has ever told me sticks with. Life is still kicking my butt. No matter what age you are, life will catch up with you. So, when people wonder about how things are done or why things happen, there a lot of reasons for everything. There are a lot of different people and each person is dealing with something in their lives. Some people may seem happy, but deep down something is bothering them. Everyone has to learn that life will be hard at times.
Throughout history, money has always been a hot commodity. When President Richard Nixon ended the international gold standard in 1971, this was the first time the world had no gold backing. Now in our period of time, we have currency that’s only worth however much the government says it is worth. This is a new fear of currency. The value of a dollar is calculated with two factors: exchange rates and treasury notes. Exchange rates are how much of one currency can be traded for another. Treasury notes are the number of US dollars in circulation. This would be okay if the Federal Reserve (Fed) had real limits on how much money they can print, but they don’t.

This brings me to a question. Who owns the Federal Reserve? You could easily say American taxpayers, but let’s dig deeper. The Federal Reserve is owned by local banks through bonds only issued to banks that are members of the Federal Reserve system. If you control the Fed, you control the money and (more importantly) the printing of it. The Federal Reserve isn’t so “federal” because a lot of major banks are owned by powerful foreign bankers. This could mean that these powerful foreign bankers actually own the Federal Reserve.

The Fed was created on December 23, 1913, along with the Internal Revenue Service when President Woodrow Wilson passed the Federal Reserve Act. This act gave exclusive power of printing American money however they pleased. When money is printed, it goes to the bank with interest. Banks then loan this money out the same way. This cycle was created to build up debt in order for the value of the dollar to fall. This fall would cause inflation. Thomas Jefferson saw this coming in 1802 when he warned then Secretary of Treasury, Albert Gallatin, about this in a letter. He said, “…If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around them will deprive the people of all property until their children wake up homeless on the continent their Fathers conquered.”

Inflation and deflation are not the only things valuing our currency. Oil is part of the petrodollar cycle that started in the 1970s when President Nixon built policies with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). This was the only organization to accept US dollars from the sale of oil in exchange for US military protection. In other words, countries had to export to America in order to get the US dollars needed to buy oil. When this happened, all the Fed had to do was print money and whatever they needed would come to them. America continues to do whatever it has to do in order to keep it that way.

Throughout the years, there always seems to be something that threatens our currency. This is why we have the gold standard to keep us afloat. This standard basically insures our money. Gold has less inflation and a lot of people feel safe with the American dollar knowing they can always cash their money for gold. The amount of money banks have should match up with gold; if it does not, consequences would arrive. Most major banks have collapsed because of this.

If you watch the news often, you will see the US government fighting every chance they get to keep the value of our American dollar high. Prime Minister, Muammar Gaddafi, dictator of Libya whose country is the 3rd largest oil exporter, planned to start the sale of oil in his own gold-based currency. It seems as if America already plans to destabilize their government. Libya’s Prime Minister is now dead and this sends a clear message. Green has led America into most of its wars and we are very serious about it.
La’Quisha Essex  
Life as a Senior

Yes, being a senior may be one of the happiest times of your life, but there are things you have to learn to manage while enjoying this time. Those things are being responsible, productive, and communicating with your teachers and guidance counselors.

Being responsible means you have to make it a priority to get passing grades in all of your classes. I know it may be frustrating because all teachers are not the same. Some require more than what they assign you to do. I remember when I was in class when progress reports had been given and I saw how poorly I was doing, so I knew I had to get those grades up. It was not as if I was not capable of doing the work, it was my attendance that was bringing me down. So, I went to every teacher I was not doing so well in and asked what I could do to improve my grades. They sat me down and explained where I was at and where I needed to be. They showed me the assignments I was missing. From that point on, I took what they said into consideration and got on my job. I turned in all of my assignments after that. My teachers were actually helping me because they were not expecting me to turn in all the work they assigned. I didn’t just turn in anything, I submitted Grade A, quality work! I learned that if you know you are going to be absent throughout the week, it is your job to inform your teachers to get your work before hand. They are holding you accountable for getting the work you miss. This comes with being responsible and connects with being productive as well.

Being productive consists of coming to school on the daily basis, taking care of your work in all of your classes, which helps you work at a steady pace so you don’t have to rush like I had to. There was a time when I missed a few days in Ms. Fields’ class. I was behind and not caught up with what was going on in class. I knew that I needed her class to graduate. Instead of talking to my peers joking around, I took it serious and sat up front to work. Ms. Fields noticed and told me I was working very productively. With me sitting up front, I got all of the information I needed to catch up with everyone else. Before you knew it, I was asking and answering questions like I was in class every day. It made me feel very proud of myself and I eventually realized that you can get a lot of information and have fun at the same time when you come to school regularly.

Communicating with teachers and guidance counselors plays a big role in your last year of high school. Teachers hold the key to your grades. They will tell you how to improve your grades if you are not doing so well or if you would just like to do better than what you’re doing. Counselors are like trackers that keep track of what you have done and tell you what you need to do. They help you go from point A to point Z in your high school career. They tell you your grades, discuss transcripts, and potential colleges you can attend based on your performance in high school.

I always hear students say “this teacher” or “that teacher” does too much when really they are here to help you. One thing I noticed about seniors is that they are afraid to talk to the teachers and counselors because of the possible outcome. They need to take those outcomes into consideration in order to better themselves and their position in life. Let’s remember that teachers and counselors are not against you, they are for you. They know your potential even if you have yet to realize it. They want more for you so that you can want more for yourself in life. With all of the fun things that come with being a senior, let’s not forget to be responsible, productive, and communicate with our teachers and counselors. This will make for a great last year of high school.
I know that I’m only a teenager, but I know a thing or two about relationships and the importance of trust. I’ve been in one for four years now. A couple of months ago, I found out about my girlfriend’s "friendship" with her ex through her cell phone. I never check her text messages, but this particular time, she asked me to read her incoming message out-loud. It was from a guy who I didn't know that said, "Wassup babe. How're you doing?" It took a minute before she finally admitted that this was her ex.

This particular ex was one she had a passionate affair with a few years ago. Apparently, he was having relationship problems and just wanted a shoulder to cry on. She originally lied to me when I asked who he was. It was only when I confronted her about my health problems (which I think was due to the stress of our relationship), that she finally admitted who he was. She lied to me with a straight face. Our trust was broken.

She went as far as saying that I would always have a special place in her heart. Ouch! With these words in mind, I really started to question if I wanted her to have my baby. I started questioning what was real and what was not. Since they were only communicating through texts and calls, she didn't consider that having an affair because there was no sex involved. He lived in another neighborhood and would only see her when she visited her cousin’s house.

I tried being cool about our relationship, but I just got so fed up one day. I was having trouble sleeping. I told her that I loved her enough to let this situation go if she would let go of him. If she wouldn’t let go of him, then our relationship would not work. I was pouring my heart out and receiving nothing but pain.

Trust is the most important thing that everyone in this world worries about. People should expect trust from each other. Who wants to have a friendship or relationship without trust? No one does. Without trust, there is no friendship and without friendship, there is no love. If there is neither trust nor loyalty in a relationship, then maybe you are not right for them. I often wonder that about my own relationship. Maybe we should just be friends. There are levels to loving a person. I am now in a relationship without trust and it is not healthy. We both sneak around and do things that you wouldn’t do in a healthy relationship, but neither one of us can stop even when the trust is broken. I guess I can see why people stay in “complicated” relationships.
You know how they say a picture is worth a thousand words? Well, that’s how I feel about music. Music helps me in many different ways. It expresses how I feel at times, it calms me down, and it’s a good way to study and memorize things.

Music is not to hear, it is to feel. I bet you are wondering how music has this much of an effect on me, but you probably feel the same way. When I’m feeling down, I listen to music. The song that I may be listening to might explain how I’m feeling. Music speaks for me when words can’t express how I’m feeling.

When I’m angry, music is the only thing that calms me down. When I put my headphones in, it’s like I’m blocking the world out. It keeps me from being stressed and depressed. You see…the way my attitude is set up…I need music to keep me from doing something that I would regret. It’s one of the ways I relax. Music has its own energy that takes over me.

The best way to memorize things is to have music playing while I’m learning it. I turn everything I learn into a song. That sounds weird, I know, but it works. Music is a good way for me to study because the rhythm of music helps me concentrate. Using music to memorize things helps me pass tests.

This is why music is like a picture that is worth a thousand words. It has affected me in many different ways. It expresses how I feel, helps me to relax and keep calm, and it’s a good way to study and memorize things. I bet music effects your life, too!
SLPS counselors are barely doing their jobs. They originally tell us we don’t need classes they remove us from, but at the very last minute, they tell us that we do. When this mistake happens, the counselors sign us up for advanced online courses that are barely passable. I may not know the specific job duties of a counselor, but it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to know when someone is not doing their job.

My counselor took me out of an important class and said that I didn’t need it to graduate, but I did. I had to take a class on the computer that had over 30 tests. There was a certain amount of time I had to finish this, but I didn’t give up because I never do and I’m determined to graduate. What about the other students who probably did give up and will not graduate? I passed that class, but if my counselor did her job efficiently, I wouldn’t have had the stress I did.

When counselors place students in the advanced courses online, we are overwhelmed. We go ask for help, but teachers and staff within our school are no help at all. Either they are too busy or they don’t know how to do the work. That’s how hard the work is. It’s really impossible for students to do these online classes on our own. Some students don’t even deserve this stress. Being at risk of not graduating is the worst news a senior could ever get. This is the situation a lot of seniors find themselves in towards the very end of a semester because a counselor failed to properly track credits.

We need for counselors to let us know information about our credits in advanced and not at the last minute. I do not doubt that I had work that needed to be done; I’m complaining about the counselor’s lack of control over my fighting chance. My education is too important for someone that does not properly handle what is expected out of him or her. I really wish counselors could see how hard taking a class online is compared to being in a classroom. I struggled all year to pass my online class, thanks to myself.

This situation really put a damper on the end of my senior year. I really thought I wasn’t going to be able to graduate or do any of our senior activities because of this situation. This could have been avoided if I had the proper support from counselors who are paid to do their job. There needs to be a way to hold counselors accountable for checking to make sure counselors are careful about reviewing our credits, especially seniors. Don’t get me wrong, I did have a counselor that helped me out, but most of the counselors I have dealt with have been lacking in their job requirements. Students and taxpayers deserve more professional and organized counselors that actually know what they are doing.
Mikal Walters
*College Benefits*

Do you know the benefits of going to college? The benefits of going to college include a better education and better pay when entering the workforce. Many jobs are now requiring degrees that can only be obtained by going to college. Another benefit of college is the experience itself and being independent for the first time. Better yet, can you imagine some of the disadvantages you will encounter in life if you don’t go to college? Not going to college can lead to being homeless or even unemployed. Going to college is almost mandatory when planning to pursue certain jobs and careers after high school. College provides students the opportunity to explore new fields and concepts. If you have no idea what career you want to pursue, you might get an idea in college. Or, if you generally know what you want to do, college can help you find an area to focus on. You also can receive many other benefits from going to college if you play sports. You will receive a chance to tour the country when competing against other colleges.

One benefit of going to college is receiving your degree. When you receive your degree, this means a better life and better opportunities. Statistics show that the median weekly earnings in 2012 for those with a Bachelor’s Degree was $1,066.00 compared to the weekly salary of someone with just a high school diploma, which is $652.00. (Miami-Dade County Report, 2011) You can see the big difference between the median salaries of both a person with a high school diploma and a person with a college degree. Some employees are hoping for a chance at a new position or a promotion. Though a person’s boss can be interested in the good work they’ve done, they also want to know if they have the education required to adapt to a new position. This means having a college degree can illustrate ambition and may give you an edge over other job employees or, at the very least, keep you competitive with them.

A college degree will expose you to a variety of new information and experience with a chance to learn about other cultures. As a college student, you will meet other people from places around the world with diverse backgrounds. This most likely will change your behavior to the right attitude which can help you mature into a thoughtful, curious individual. Gaining the awareness of people that are diverse is always a benefit and it’s another thing that justifies a higher education. Having a good relationship or understanding of people with diverse histories gives you a broader world view, cultural understanding, and sophistication because at college, you’ll surround yourself with people who can share a multitude of backgrounds, cultures and experiences.

As you know, there are many benefits of going to college so it can be said that there are some disadvantages of not going. For instance, many opportunities will be closed to you if you don’t go to college. Often times, people believe they will make a living by having jobs right after getting their diploma. You may find a good job, but what will happen if that job becomes eliminated? You will not have the foundation of a college education to set you apart from the competition when you look for another line of work. A college education puts you in a better situation when finding a professional job.

Many people are aware now that companies have more candidates to choose from with a college degree. These companies are no longer willing to consider applicants without a degree. You can infer that a college degree can provide you with a better chance at life when trying to be a successful and productive citizen.
Dear Mama and Daddy,

I am writing you this letter because sometimes, some things are better written than said. My main reason for this letter is for you to hear me out. Over the years, I have been seen but not heard. Maybe you did hear, but you weren’t listening. It bothers me that I had to grow up without you all. It’s upsetting because when it comes to me doing well, neither of you were around. It’s upsetting to me because in my eyes, neither one of you showed interest.

Look how time has passed. I’m already 18. Over the last four years, which one of you can say that you have been here? In these last four years, it has been hard for me to get up. As parents, I needed you to help me get back up when I fell. Instead of parents adding to my success, you were adding to my failure. Your words of encouragement were words that brought me down. In two more weeks, my entire high school experience will be over.

I graduate on May 16th, and I doubt you both even know that. A mother and father’s role is very important in a child’s life. Your child grows up in the world learning from you. In my experience, I learned how to be stronger without you. I hate to say this, but it is all very true. I love you both with all of my heart and I can never forget the two that created me, but I hate how the two that created me neglected me.

You are two people that made a beautiful memory. This memory includes me; something you will never forget. I didn’t ask to be brought into this world. You and my dad had a choice, but I never did. I didn’t have a choice in growing up without my parents either.

Being that I don’t have a relationship with you two, it’s hard to be around anyone else. It’s hard for me to have a relationship with anyone else. At this point in my life, I am scared someone is going to hurt me the way you both did. I want to be mommy’s angel and daddy’s little girl. We never came across these things because of the way you treated me.

As my parents, I wanted us to have fun like were best friends. I wanted to be able to talk to you as if you were my diary. I wanted you to be around and stay with me. I wanted my parents to love me unconditionally. When times got hard, I didn’t want you to push me away; I wanted you to help me through it.

I wanted you to help me through all my hurt and pain. I wanted you to help me through my weakness and guide me to my strength. I wanted you to be the parents that I always dreamed you would be. I’m not asking for a fairytale, I just want a real family. I want reality. I think it’s time to move forward, but I still want you here for me.

Love,

Jazlyn
Dear Rodney,

I have a couple of things I would like to say, but first things first, was it me or was it us? I used to sit up at night hoping you’d put your pride to the side and come see us or even call us, but you never did. I remember on my birthday when I sat up and cried because you weren’t there. For a while I hated you, but then I began to realize you have a life...but you also have a responsibility. I mean, mama got a life too, but she makes sure were clothed, sheltered, fed, and washed. You’ve done none of these things and I have so many questions to ask you.

I sometimes wish you’d come and visit. I wish you’d hug me and pick me up like you used to, but you don’t. You didn’t do it. It was just a vision in my head that’ll never happen and makes me angry. Every time mama gets a boyfriend, I try to push them away because they try to play the “daddy role”. I feel like if I can’t have you as my daddy, then nobody deserves to be!

Lil Rodney never brings you up and when I do, he says, “F*** that n****! He ain’t my daddy! Why you so worried about him? He ain’t worried about us!” Truth is, I think you think about us. I hope you think, dream, and talk about us. I do care about you because you helped bring me into this world so I should have at least some type of sympathy for you. I crave the love from a father. Have been craving it ever since you left. Do you know how long that’s been? I wish you’d come to my graduation so you could sit in the crowd to cheer and be happy for me, but you can’t. I don’t know if it’s because you don’t want to or because you can’t.

If I could have just one little thing in this world, all I’d want is you. I remember when you came to Saint Louis and it was Halloween. You couldn’t afford to buy me a costume so you got a clean white sheet. Mama was so mad because she had just got done washing when you got a permanent marker and drew on it. You put makeup on my face to look somewhat like Dracula. I loved that night, but when I woke up, you weren’t there and it all seemed like a dream. I also remember being scared as a kid. I was scared of what people might do to us for being kids with a woman in the house and no man to protect us. Fortunately, that’s when Kejuane, Lil Rodney, and Terrell stepped up. We were just fine. We grew up fast, but it was for the best and we’re all okay now with you being.

I look at Lil Rodney everyday and smile at him because he looks just like you. I guess that’s why I’m always around him. We go everywhere together and some people think we’re twins. I’ll tell them, “Yes,” and he’ll say, “Hell, naw. “He’s not as mean as he sounds. In fact, he’s actually smart for his age and handsome. He protects me and sticks up for me too. He’s always around, unlike you. I’m sorry, but part of me is upset and part of me isn’t. Part of me wants to run and jump into your arms and the other part wants to learn karate just to kick your ass. Great, now I’m getting emotional. I’m actually dropping tears as I write this letter to you. I don’t know why though. I mean, like, would you drop a tear for me? You probably would, but then again you probably wouldn’t. I’ll do so much just to spend a day with you or even an hour if a day seems too long. I just want to know more about you. When I talk to mama, I sometimes ask her how you two met and she’ll tell me every time. I ask her and won’t forget a single detail she tells me about you.

Since you don’t know me, I’d like to tell you just a little bit. First off, I, Ro’Quisha Cole, have finally made it to the 12th grade and graduate May 16th. I’m bipolar, yes I’ll admit that, but that makes me me! I also like to write. I love writing poems and stuff. I want to say them aloud, but I’m too shy so that’ll never happen. I’m quiet and friendly and I absolutely love doing hair. It’s a hobby of mine that I learned all on my own. Aren’t you proud of me? You probably don’t care.

Where are you? How’s your life? Do you go to see your other kids? What do you like to do? What’s your favorite color? Do you like to read, write, rap or sing? I shouldn’t have to ask you questions I should already know because you should be here to tell me. I can’t believe I’m sitting here crying over you; a worthless piece of sh**!

If you do decide to drop by one day, I want you to know that you won’t be addressed as daddy or father. You will be addressed as Rodney or a curse word I’m not gone say in this letter. I think I’ll just call you a sperm donor. Yup, that sounds about right. The only reason I wrote you this letter is because we had to write something in my class and for some odd reason, you were on my mind.

I remember on my birthday one time, you called and sang me happy birthday. When you called, you didn’t even know it was my birthday, but you played it off anyway and I was still a little happy because I realized two things:
1.) You could sing and could’ve had a record deal if you weren’t on that “stuff”
2.) I realized where I got my voice from and every time I sing, I think about you because I feel like you gave that to me.
Sometimes, I think how my life would be if you were in it. I probably wouldn’t have as much freedom as I do now. I was going down my timeline one day on Facebook (if you even know what that is) and saw a picture of you and my niece. You were holding her and smiling and she was smiling like she had known you since birth. I was kind of happy about it, but at the same time, I was upset because we don’t have that connection and I’m your daughter. I am your youngest daughter and I want a connection with you so bad. If I do see you one day, I think it would be weird and I’d just sit there looking around. I wouldn’t even be able to look into your eyes. I wouldn’t know what to say.

How’s the “jail life” for you? Must be great because you stay in there more than you do on the outside. No disrespect, but that’s GAY. Disrespect? I take that back because I don’t have any respect for you. You don’t have any for me. If you did, I wouldn’t be feeling like this and you’d be in my life right? I kept that Tweety Bird picture you drew for me (did you know that Lil Rodney can draw too?). I kept it for a long time and the only reason I don’t have it now is because our house caught on fire. Bet you didn’t know that, but then again you probably don’t care.

Do you talk to your other kids? If so, why don’t you talk to us? Do we disappoint you? Are you ashamed of us? Are we ugly? Do we stink so bad that you moved away so you wouldn’t be around our stench? I miss you sometimes. I wasn’t going to say this, but I feel like you should know.

When I said that I push away my mama’s boyfriends, I do but there are two that I didn’t push away. They are Terrell’s dad and D. Terrell’s daddy takes me places and takes care of me. When we go out and people ask who I am, he says, “My baby girl.” My heart gets warm and sometimes it’s filled with rage because those are words you should be saying! D let us move in with him when we were doing bad even if he didn’t want to.

My mama is my mother and father. She’s not transgender; she’s just a responsible person. I have a picture of you in my phone and it was saved as my screen saver for two months straight! Remember that one time we came over the house you stayed at with that big lady and we saw a whole bunch of spiders that came out of a box when Lil Rodney, Kejuane and I were playing downstairs? You swept me off my feet like I was stepping on hot coals and couldn’t move. That was the only day you saved me and afterwards, you picked me up and we lounged together. I had my thumb in my mouth and you were tickling me. I was so happy, but you sent us home afterwards. We didn’t even get a chance to spin the night. I also remember that one time when you were working at Union Station. You brought us some fried chicken and French fries. I actually eat a lot of French fries now.

The last question I need to ask is if you finished high school. I need to know that so I can put it on my FASFA. I want to see you face to face so you can see what you’ve been missing out on and understand how I feel. Maybe you feel some type of way too. There are two sides to every story.

I hope you don’t forget about us and I hope God loves you enough to let you come visit before he takes you from this earth. I don’t want to be the girl that didn’t like her father but wanted him to be there so she’s angry all the time. I want us to have peace before one of us passes on and I want you and Lil Rodney to have peace also. I’m not going to say I love you, but I will say good luck on your life and be safe.

God Bless,

Ro’Quisha Michelle Cole

P.S
If you can, please call.
Dear Mom,

Thank you for the millions of phone calls and teaching me how to be honest. Thank you for showing me how to respect people. Also, thank you for your love and support. You were there for me when I needed you. You waited up for me. You gave me endless lectures on your concerns of me. The laughs we shared together were priceless, like the time you almost broke the joy stick from playing Pac Man. I wouldn’t be here if you didn’t bring me into this world. You waited up for me. You gave me endless lectures on your concerns of me. The laughs we shared together were priceless, like the time you almost broke the joy stick from playing Pac Man. I wouldn’t be here if you didn’t bring me into this world. You were there for me when I needed you. You waited up for me. You gave me endless lectures on your concerns of me. The laughs we shared together were priceless, like the time you almost broke the joy stick from playing Pac Man. I wouldn’t be here if you didn’t bring me into this world.

Momma, life for me is kind of hard now because when you left, I didn’t know what to do. Now that you are gone, I can’t talk to or trust anyone. You were the only person I could talk to and open up to. You were a part of me I never knew. Who knew your time on earth would leave so soon. We did everything together: washed clothes, did dishes, cleaned up the house, eat, played games, and (my favorite) watched TV together. Now, I don’t do half of these things because it reminds me too much of how we did them together.

I miss your warm hugs, your laugh, and your smile. I miss sleeping in the bed with you, fighting with you, dancing with you, and so much more. I miss it all so much. When you left me, I didn’t know what to do or think. I didn’t want to believe it. I didn’t want to say good-bye. I was everything from mad, to sad, lost, hurt, and heartbroken. I knew it was time to say goodbye. That night that I did, I broke down in tears!

Before you left, you asked me if I was going to graduate. I told you that I didn’t know, but you talked about how much you wanted me to graduate. You made me promise that I was going to graduate. I had my fingers crossed when I made that promise to you so a promise is a promise. I know you want me to graduate and make you proud. I will.

Some people don’t know how it feels to lose someone close to you. You feel alone in the world, hurt, and angry all of the time. You go through depression and a lot of things are thrown at you that you just can’t seem to handle. Over time, I got over you leaving. I came to accept the fact that you are in a better place. I still think about you from time to time. I wish I could see you one last time to get a hug.

I remember I dreamed about you. I was in school having a good time at an assembly. All of a sudden, everyone stopped and turned to look at me with a smile. They told me to turn around. When I turned around, you were standing in the doorway glowing. I rushed to you with tears running down my face. When I got to you, I didn’t want to let you go. Your hug was so warm. I felt like I was really hugging you until I woke up and realized it was only a dream.

I’m going to make you proud by graduating. All of your kids will make you proud. We are doing things you would want us to do like graduating from high school and going to college. We are also staying out of trouble. I love you momma. Keep shining down on me because I know you are always with me. I miss and love you so much. Rest in peace, Pealie Smith (a.k.a. the Wonder Girl).

Your baby girl,

Nisha
Dear Granddad,

Hey! How are you doing? I miss you so much. I hope all is going well with you and Uncle Don. The other day, Tee tried to cook some chicken, but it didn’t have anything on yours. I told her it was nasty. She put all type of stuff on that chicken.

I haven’t been doing much without you here with me. I never really pictured my life as a teenager without you. I remember when you lived with us on Desoto. You were drunk when Tee, Kyanna, and I started messing with you. You chased us out the house and to a lot when I cut my foot and you got mad at us. I asked why you were mad at us and you said, “Because if y’all weren’t playing, you wouldn’t have cut your foot.” I mean, you were really mad at us for that. We just laugh at that story now.

As I got older, I realized that you weren’t just a granddad to me; you were also a father. Whenever I needed anything, you were the one to give it to me. If I asked my momma for something and she said no, you would say, “Baby, I’ll give it to you.” Momma would get mad, but she wouldn’t say anything because she already knew you were still going to give it to me. I have so many memories like this of you.

We did it so big for your 57th birthday at Grandma Sally’s house. I wish you were here to celebrate with us. Your kids were drinking your favorite drink, MD2020, that we called “Mad Dog”. Later on, we released balloons for you. Everyone cried. Yea, I (your big baby) was crying.

I can’t believe you left me so early in my life. I was only 17. I never really pictured you not being here for my graduation, but like momma said, you will be there in spirit.

Why didn’t you tell me you had heart problems? I thought we didn’t keep secrets from each other. I kind of understand why you didn’t tell. Maybe you didn’t want me to be worried. I was mad when I went in your medicine bag and found that heart medicine. I wish you told me. If you told me you had heart problems, your death wouldn’t be so hard to deal with. Don’t get me wrong, it would still be hard, but not as hard as it is now. I feel like I would have been prepared for your death.

How could you just up and die? You were just fine the day before you died. We were blaming your dialysis center at first. When you told that lady you just felt a shock through your body, she should have called 911. I still feel like it’s their fault you are not here anymore, but we can’t change what happened.

I remember on March 14, 2014 at 4:17pm when I called momma’s phone. Tee answered. She was crying hard. I asked what was wrong and she could barely talk. I decided to call Grandma Veva-Nell and she told me you were gone. I didn’t want to believe it so I asked my boyfriend to drop me off at her house. When I got there, my Uncle Bob was punching walls. That’s when I started to believe it.

Your funeral went well. Everyone was trying to hold it together, but when they opened your casket, that’s when all of your kids and grandkids lost it. I was the first grandchild to see you. I kissed you and almost fainted. I couldn’t take it. I didn’t want anyone touching me but Dutch. I didn’t stop crying until later on that night. I just couldn’t believe you were being laid to rest the day before your 57th birthday.

Life has been going good for me now. I went to see your gravesite yesterday and didn’t want to leave. I love and miss you so much, Granddad. You are my main man. Rest in Paradise, Granddad, and enjoy your life up there with Jesus. See you at the crossroad. Talk to you later old man.

Sincerely,

Your Granddaughter
Dear Lost Ones,

You may believe that this is the end, but it’s not. The beginning has set in. Struggles have gotten harder and the days and nights have gotten longer because of your dreams of how you imagined life should have been.

You thought that everything would fall in place and the future would be so bright. Out of nowhere came a tragedy so rare and so intimidating that it just made everything stop in its tracks. This made everything a dream. Nothing felt real and nothing felt like it was going to change soon.

Thoughts of “what ifs” crossed your mind. A time or two, you felt like maybe there was a chance that this was just meant to be. You lost a loved one and now you have made a choice to try and move on. They are not forgotten; they are still in memories.

Don’t let this move you to be a lost one like the rest. Don’t be that person who can’t get over their loss. They feel like they have nothing left. They are left at a point of weeping and constantly questioning why.

Trust me, friend, don’t let this bother you. Keep moving forward and try to keep a good state of mind. You have to try and move forward so you can live life and be happy. Don’t become a lost one.

Signed,

A Former Lost One
Danielle Jones  
*Letter to my Brother*

Dear Brother,

Man, we’re been through it all growing up as kids. We were tighter than two peas in a pod. I don’t know how to tell you this, but I hate how things turned out between us. We used to be so close. I don’t know what happened. I know you remember how you used to save me snacks until I got from school or when we used to sit in our car seats in front of the TV. Anyways, let’s talk about why we fell apart so bad. Maybe because you got older. We had so much in common. Everything from music to clothes, dancing, and food. I don’t want to put all the blame on you because it could be my fault.

I hated when you became Grandma’s favorite because I used to be her favorite. That made me dislike you even more. All I know is that I really do miss the ways we were when we were going up together. I even remember Christmas time when we were kids. I came down stairs and saw that you had cut the hair off of my Bratz doll. Man, do you know how mad I was at you? You still owe me a doll. I can think of so many other memories we shared together. I know you remember when you first met Armon over the phone. You two would talk more than we did. You said he sounded like girl and told him he couldn’t talk too. This all changed when you met him in person. You started to like him. On that day, I felt like if my you liked him, then he was good.

Well, brother, I want to let you know that I will always be there for you no matter what we go through. Laveal may not think I care about you, but I do. The only thing I don’t like about you is how you let your life go down the drain and how you let your friends encourage you to do things I would never think my brother would do. It’s like you didn’t even try to make it better; you just gave up.

The first time you got in trouble, you spent a total of nine months in DYS. You got in there for trying to be cool with some guys that proved not to have your back at the end. I just didn’t like seeing you in that place because I didn’t help you and that just made it worst. Then, when you came, it’s like you didn’t care about your family or me.

Now, you have to miss my graduation. I’m going to really need you here, but you went and messed up your freshman year. I just can’t imagine that my little brother won’t be here to see his big sister walk across the stage. You always told me if I didn’t do it, then you’d be disappointed in me. This is why I’m doing this for you and I’m going to keep doing it for you.

Love,

Your Big Sis
Dear Obama,

It is so hard to survive in St. Louis. We have a good city and it’s a lot of great people that came from our city, but there is an obvious problem we can’t continue to ignore. I’m writing to you because the youth doesn’t understand that we can make St. Louis a place where people would want to come to and have fun. This doesn’t have to be a place that people are scared to visit.

At the beginning of 2014, there were 291 murders in St. Louis; 91% of them were with a gun. It seems like every day, I wake up to hear about someone dying. When I go to my bus stop in the morning, I don’t feel safe anymore. I think about how they killed one of my friends, James, at a bus stop. James was just trying to come to school and get an education, but was gunned down. Around here, people kill like it’s a sport. Innocent people die and their family will never know the reasons why.

The biggest problem is that teens are starting to get more guns. This means that other teens are going to get killed. In the early 2000’s, most people murdered by guns were adults. Now, teens are the ones that are being killed and doing the killing. It’s just not safe here anymore for teens.

I think the internet plays a big part of the bad things that continue to happen. Teens get on the internet and bully online until someone gets hurt in real life. With the exception of the internet, there are not a lot of things to do in St. Louis to keep teens out of the streets. We need more positive places to go to after school. We need more jobs to help our families. When you have a legitimate way to make money, you wouldn’t want to, nor would you have time to do bad things. Imagine the number of teens that would be off the streets if they only had a job.

I’m sure you understand where I’m coming from. I always hear about how bad it is in Chicago and I think it’s the same in St. Louis. They call your hometown “Chiraq” and they say STL stands for “Shoot to Live” because down here, it’s “kill or be killed.”

It’s sad that young people are losing their lives before they get out of high school. The police aren’t helping because, honestly, they are doing some of the killing. It’s like they don’t care about what happens; like they want the blacks to kill each other. I remember when gangs were the problem here. Now, it’s every man for himself.

I’m writing to inform you, Mr. President, that it’s a war on your home front. I admire you because you have one of the highest positions as a black man, let alone a man. We need more role models like you to step in and help make a change. I know you had problems when you were coming up and you are dealing with several “wars” on your own. In spite of this, you continue to break the mold as a black man and I know you can help us black men in St. Louis break the mold as well.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Landrum
Dear Mother,

I have a lot to say that I can’t express orally. Maybe it’s because I never paid attention in oral communications my sophomore year. That same year, I was blinded by more than the sun; I was blinded by my own ignorance. That same year, you put your utmost trust in me.

Looking back on our years together, I have been a horrible son. As I was sitting here listening to Chris Brown’s “Don’t Be Gone Too Long,” I immediately thought about us. Everyone says a woman can’t raise a man. This is such a general statement that can be proven true, but there is one thing they all left out: a man can’t raise a gentleman.

I say this because I once heard in middle school that I needed to only have male teachers since there was clearly no respect for women established in my life. I remember thinking, “What the hell are all these people talking about? They don’t know me and they don’t know what I do.” Sad thing was as soon I got home, it showed. I never washed the dishes and never came in the house when I was told to, but I was always disrespectful.

Growing up with only my dad and my sister didn’t do me justice. I still didn’t learn how to be a gentleman. My sister was too busy playing the older brother. She did the best she could and I appreciate her for that. My dad was too busy making sure we didn’t end up in another home that wasn’t ours. He taught me a lot of things in life about women and how to be with women: opening the door, walking by the curb, and giving up my coat when necessary. Yeah, it’s cool that I know what to do, but you have to earn that respect and trust before you are in the position to even do so.

I didn’t have you around to tell me what to do and what not to do with women. I didn’t have you around to tell me how to talk to women, how to handle women when they’re being hasty, and how women are the backbone of this world. I remember growing up with my dad when you weren’t around and hearing James Brown sing, “This is a man’s world.” I was so young and emotionally misguided that I agreed and thought, “It is. I don’t need women.”

I remember crying for you when I got in trouble. I remember crying for you when I felt lost in this world. I remember crying for you when I needed you the most.

As a child, the memories I have with you were nothing but happy memories. No screaming, no yelling, no old fashion ass spanking, just love. Without that motherly love and that motherly presence, I disrespected women with no hesitation. I would hit girls, call them the most offensive words in the dictionary, and defy anything a woman told me.

Like I explained, my older sister, Kriya, was busy being that older brother I never had. For this reason, she had to be rough with me. She taught me how to fight back and how to defend myself. That was probably why I didn’t respect women. The woman I had in my life (Kriya) was too busy to be a woman. So, yes, there was a woman in my life, but not the woman I was looking for. Not the one I needed most. You weren’t there, but that doesn’t matter because you’re here now.

You’ve been there when I needed you, wanted you, and much more. I was too ignorant to see this. You could have gone my whole life without coming back, but you did. It’s been a long road, mother. We have cursed each other out, screamed at each other, and told my oldest sister, Deshana, all of our problems.

The relationship I have with you made me have respect for women. I can understand why women are hasty at times and I truly know what they mean by saying that pain is only temporary. You taught me everything I need to know about women. I thank you, mother. I’m 19 years old and I am no longer a man; I’m now a 19-year-old gentleman.

I only one last thing left to say mom: don’t be gone too long because you won’t be able to love me when you’re gone. Who’s going to love me when you’re gone? There is no love like love from your mother.

Love,

Sam
Dear Peyton,

The happiest moment of my life was when I found out I was pregnant with you. Knowing that I was having a baby by the boy of my dreams made me happier. I would always rub my belly thinking, “I’m really going to have a baby!” For about three months, I tried to hide the pregnancy from my mother, but she caught me. Can you believe that, baby? I had to give it up when she gave me some barbecue one day. That same day, almost five seconds later, I started throwing it up. Later on, she heard me say that I was pregnant and needed to get prenatal care.

I stopped doing everything that I used to do. Some things that I did weren’t right for you and me. I know if your father would have seen me doing them, he would have had a lot to say. I changed a lot of things not only because I was pregnant, but also because I wanted you to be a healthy baby. As the days went by, I thought more and more of how I was going to provide for you. I thought about all the good things I was going to do and try to be the best mother for you, Peyton.

I had the most perfect plans for you. I knew that you were going to have the best. I had plans of taking you to parks. Your first birthday party was going to have everything because both of your Grandmothers were going to make that happen. After I told your father, Princeshon, that I was pregnant with his first child, he was so ready to be a father to you. We were online everyday looking at outfits for you. Of course we were looking at outfits for boys, but I knew I would have a girl.

My mother and Princeshon’s mother was so happy that they were about to be Grandmothers to a little girl. Every day, they would ask me what you were doing. I will get so annoyed because I didn’t know. I was only three months pregnant. Two months later, I officially found out I was having a girl. That was another one of the happiest moments of my life. I began to smile so hard that tears of joy fell from my eyes.

That happy moment changed when the doctors told me that you weren’t growing. I was not worried because I was thinking that maybe it’s from me not taking my prenatal vitamins. That same day was when I told your father we were having a little girl. He was kind of upset because he was hoping for a boy, but we were still happy about our first little princess.

Everything seemed to change in the blink of an eye when I was rushed to the hospital. My blood pressure was so high. Three days later while still in the hospital, they told me that I was diagnosed with preeclampsia. This can cause women to have seizures and strokes. If I went through with the pregnancy, you and I weren’t going to make it. In spite of this, I still wanted to go through with the pregnancy. I cried for so many hours because I knew that you weren’t going to make it due to my high blood pressure.

Two days later, a doctor came into my room to check your heart beat. The doctor looked up at me with a worried look on her face. She couldn’t find your heartbeat. You passed away that morning. I was so hurt. It was like my soul left my body. My best friend was gone and everything that I ever wanted in life left me. Nothing matter me to anymore. All I could do was cry. I just wanted God to take me so that I could be with you. All I wanted at that moment was your grandson and your father. I called your grandson and told her what happened and she couldn’t stop crying. I was so lost for words and didn’t want to speak to anyone. I finally called your father and he left school. When he got to the hospital, he didn’t know what to do. He told me that it felt like, “…somebody ripped my heart out of my chest.”

A day later, I had you, my guardian angel. I just couldn’t stop kissing you and crying. I continued to cry and ask God why. Why did he pick you? Why my little girl? Why me? I had a lot of questions that I wanted to ask him, but your granny told me to never question God.

When I lost you, I didn’t have anything to live for. Everything that I was living for was taken from me. Leaving the hospital without you was a heart-breaking moment. I cried every day and night thinking about everything that I had planned for you and everything that you were going to be provided with.

Moving on from this situation is still very hard. Sometimes, I still wonder about what you would have been like and how our life with each other would have been. I learned to move on from that situation. Your father used to always tell me that everything is going to be ok and that we are going to try to have another one. I started to wonder if there was something wrong with me. Did I do anything wrong? Deep down, I know God took you for a reason. I know that everything happens for a reason and that he has a plan for me. I will never forget about you, my guardian angel, PEYTON JAMIAH STARKS. I miss you, baby girl, and I will never forget June 21, 2014. This was the day you were supposed to been born.

Love You Always,

Your Mother
Dear Mama,

I appreciate you in many ways. I’m thankful for you giving me life and I love the priceless moments we’ve shared. I remember when I was young and you would wake me up with bacon in the morning. When I got out of school, you would ask how my day was and asked if I had any homework. On the other side, I also remember when you would make promises you couldn’t keep. It was a constant disappointment. Eventually, I stopped getting my hopes up. I respect you as a person, but as a mother, you neglected me. I never felt so alone in my life.

I know you were dealing with your drug addiction and struggling in rehab when I was born, but you still could have done more than what you did. Sometimes you would take me with you and I would experience things that no one should ever have to experience. I’ve witness so much at an early age that I never should have. I shouldn’t have been alone at the age of 7 in a house while you “ran to the store.” While you were “at the store,” the house was kicked in by people looking for you and my “uncle.”

I appreciate you in many ways. For instance, you continued to let me live with my granny and get an education. You could have let me stay with dad, but you didn’t. We all know that staying with him wouldn’t have been the best decision. He was just as bad as you, except his addiction was jail.

You should be proud that I’m succeeding in life. Some people learn from their mistakes and some people don’t. I’m sorry you didn’t learn from your mistakes. You are very smart and wise, but you don’t use your intelligence for good. You received income claiming Diamond and me on your taxes twice, not thinking how it would affect the people around you. You knew that granny had to claim us. You forced her to put a hold on doing her taxes instead of reporting you to your parole officer who would send you to jail. Instances like this are the reason you burnt your bridges with a lot of people. Even though you truthfully burned your bridge with me, my love for you was too strong to let you go.

I guess I was always a mama’s girl. No matter what trouble you got in, I was always by your side. Even when you stole all my aunty credit cards and maxed them out in order to get cash for your drugs, I was by your side. When my granny and aunt caught you stealing, they would call the police. Even though you were guilty of stealing so many things and should have been arrested, I was right by your side. I would cry and hold your leg because I was your baby. I looked up to you through the good and bad. I loved you and would support anything you did. Eventually, I had to keep my distance from you when I had a child. I was okay with you taking from me, but I couldn’t allow you to take from my daughter.

I still try to give you support when you are doing well. After I had Diamond, you got out of jail and started going to the half way house on time. I was proud of you then. You started getting beside yourself when you found a man. That’s great that he gave you happiness, but I didn’t feel he was right for you. He had you in the environment you shouldn’t have been in as a recovering addict. This was not my business anymore, so I chose not to stress about what I obviously couldn’t control.

You are a big impact on my life. I look up to you as a lesson on what not to do with raising my daughter. She’s my top priority and comes first no matter what. I’m making sure she’s okay before anything else. She won’t have to worry about her mama putting a man over her. She’s never going feel like she’s unloved or unwanted in any circumstance. She’s the best thing that has ever happened to me. I plan on grinding and shining hard for her.

This letter wasn’t meant to harm or hurt you intentionally; it was simply me expressing how you made me feel. I’m grown now and living in a life I am still learning from. I have come to terms with how you are and I choose not to be around that. I’m going to continue to keep my distance because I think its best.

I love you dearly.

Lyric
The sport that everyone loves
The sport that takes dedication
The sport where the best doesn’t use gloves
The sport that’s full of amazement

Where unbelievable things happen
Where dreams come true
Where I keep the fans clappin’
Where the opposition never has a clue

My tattoos don’t make me intimidating
My height has nothing to do with how good I’m playing
My speed always has the defense scattering
My heart and will keeps the opposition praying

I refuse to have anyone crush my dreams
Always going hard in the weight room
Always doing drills with first, second, and third teams
When I reach top speed the defense just knows they’re doomed

Gives me reasons to strive harder
Gives my opponents reasons to be in shape
Gives my family a reason to be my #1 supporters
Gives me reasons to do whatever it takes

Regardless of what occurs
From turf burns, to cuts and bruises
I still release the speed of a demon as if I was a blur
Refusing to make up excuses, like Nike, “I Just Do It”

Everyone is hoping for the best
I never worry about anything
I always focus on being better than the rest
I have skill that nobody has ever seen

Using football as a way to get out the hood
The hood is not a place I want to be
My mother always told me football is the best path for me
I was always told do well if I could

Never missing a practice keeps me out of trouble
Maintaining a great attendance
Play football will help me escape the struggle
My dreams make me realize that my possibilities are endless

I have a big dreams and goals
I will continue to work hard to accomplish them all
And the only way to do that is by doing what I love and that’s playing FOOTBALL
Unique Bowens

My Time

6 am: alarm rings, sun is rising, birds sing
8 am: I’m off to class, if I’m late, go get a pass
3 pm: the bell rings, I’m out of class like lightning.
Monday through Friday: the cycle repeats because an education is important to me.

I wake up with weary eyes; my bed begs me not to leave
My daughter’s eyes are sleepy too as we get all we need
To run outside and get a ride that goes to our destiny
Our destiny is important to me

As you can see, I’m destined to be, the greatest woman I can be
I’m destined to climb mountains and reach the stars
Pursuing an education leads to fancy cars
Dedication to achievement leads to success

As anyone without a blind eye can see, I am destined to be my best.
I pray that my daughter follows my ambitious footsteps
She gets up in the mornings with me and she likes to go to school
I pray that when she grows up, she’ll know that school is cool

I get tired of waking up as the sun is rising
I would rather stay home in bed
Every morning my daughter cries when I start to do her head
Sometimes I wish it would all stop but I know it’s not my time yet

I know that success does not come before work
However success is important to me
If I fail how will my daughter eat?
How long will we survive on food stamps before I have to depend on me?

May 16th is my time
It’s my time to shine
My time to walk proudly across the stage
With a diploma that’s all mine

So at 6 am I can lay in bed, unless I go to work instead
And at 8 am I won’t need a pass
I can’t believe time goes so fast
I’m way too smart to finish last

That’s why I wrote this. For you
So you can know my struggle too
I want you to know that I’m human too
But when it comes to success I’m never through

Every young person needs a positive voice
To ensure that they make the right choice
I want to be a positive voice because
My time is near, my time is here,

This is my time, I have no fear
Asia Durham

Are you listening?! 

Do you find my voice interesting?
Are you listening to me?
Do I have a voice?
Do I fit in?

I feel more like a cow in a field of bulls.
A frog in a pond of toads.
A knife in a draw of spoons.
I feel like a lone flower within a battle field of corpses.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not scared the slightest bit.
I’m just uncomfortable and I don’t belong.
I know that and so does everyone else.
But I matter

Even if no one takes my words in a way of importance.
Even if the devil’s on my back the entire way to success.
Even if I stand alone.
Even if you try to deprive me of my success.

It really doesn’t matter.
I love me when no one else does!
I talk to myself when no one else will.
I can start a revolution by myself.

My words are powerful.
Maybe you don’t see that right now.
BUT YOU WILL!
And when you do, don’t be surprised to find that this girl is…

...BRILLIANT...
...EXZOTIC...
...CREATIVE...
...STRONG WILLED...

I am a Goddess!
I am an African queen that wears her head high like queen Nefertiti.
I am a confident woman still rising like Maya Angelou!
I am known so universal and yet so alone like Rosa Parks felt.

You’ll regret the way you treated me.
I’m whose voice everyone should have been given importance the first time around.
You had no idea that I felt like the sky is the limit.
Are you listening?

Now you’re the foolish ones.
The ones trying so desperate to find some relevance in my life.
When you didn’t give me a second glance before this.
Now follow the leader!

So to you now: Ahaha, you’re Pitiful!
You’re sad
You’re regretful
Guess what? I’m glad!

But I’m still me
100% through and through.
I only speak the truth.

PS...I GOT YOU LISTENING!
Victoya Frost

This Feeling That I’m Having

I don’t trust
I don’t love
What is this?

I don’t kiss
I don’t hug
So…what is this feeling that I’m having?

I wonder why this love is like no other
They raised him well
Real charming, like his father

I love this feeling
This feeling that I’m having
But is it real?

Is it true?
Is this for me?
What is this?

Who would have thought
I could find such a gentleman
Very sweet, kind-hearted, not like other men

That’s why I ask
What is this…boooay I tell ya…
…this feeling that I’m having?

I had to learn how to love
Communicate, commit, and be more
Generous with my hugs

This is all new to me
It’s hard to find something real
In this community

So you tell me
What is this...
...this feeling that I’m having?

I might text, I might call
But truth is
You can’t compare to this feeling I’m having

Forever and a day
Live long and die old
Be blessed to go to Heaven

‘Cause no one else
Got nothing on this feeling
This wonderful feeling that I’m having
I'm as torn as I sit alone in a lifeless jumble of secret thoughts, 
Wanting to end this bitter pain for some relief, 
Even momentarily, 
It won't subside.

This negative force that breaks my heart and kills my joy. 
Feeling sorry with useless tears, 
Our nights long gone, 
The visceral truth is laid bare.

Fear is the only motivation to carry on this cowardly charade, 
Isolation. 
The only option not to scare the world. 
Not able to grasp at the offer of life.

No longer able to play the optimist. 
I will surely sink and wither away, 
Perhaps that's the way to go, 
Sink into the depths of despair.

Drown in the uselessness of it all. Sit alone in the darkness 
Waiting... 
Waiting for her to come back to me. 
Can she hear my cries?
Demetrius Hemphill

*Life is Crazy*

I’m the type to change yo life
I’m a young brother who’s just trying to live my life
You meet me, you wanna be my wife
But, forreal, I ain’t the type

The things I seen just ain’t right
People dying from left to right
My own race every night
I’m just praying we get right

I come with no wrapping or pretty pink bows
I am who I am from my head to my toes
I tend to get loud when speaking my mind
Even a little crazy some of the time

I’m not a size 5 and don’t care to be
You can be you and I can be me
I try to stay strong when pain knocks me down
And the time that I cry is when no one’s around

To error is human or so that’s what they say
Well, tell me who’s perfect any damn way
This world is so cold and so evil
It might take you down a road and don’t please you

Thinking that you getting it when you really not
Taking sacrifices just to make the top
Rich or poor we are all the same
Through the fun or through the joy
Through the hurt or through the pain
One thing you should know, life could never be a game

One thing I hate is being broke
Because then people take you as a joke
And that’s something I never want to be
That’s why I strive to be a better me
Does God Make Mistakes, Too?

I cried
When you passed away
I still cry
Thinking, why?

Why?
Why did they have to take you away?
Granny, Granny
We going crazy
I’m all messed up

This happened unexpectedly
All I can ask is, why?
Why? Why? Why?
Granny, Granny

I can’t make you stay
A golden heart stopped beating
Hard working hands laid to rest
God broke my heart

Life isn’t the best
But it’s not the worst
I’m not rich
But I’m not broke

Why?
He only takes the best
Keep this poem going
Have faith, believe

Everything happens for a reason
They took you away
But, why?
Granny, Granny

For everybody in Heaven
That you’ve loved
That you’ve lost
And that you will keep in your heart

I miss your smile
Stlye
Happy spirit
And your west side pride
I can’t believe it
Not Granny, Granny
It's crazy how people die
It's crazy how mamas cry
It's crazy how n-words lie
It's just crazy as am I

It's funny how they play you dummy.
It's funny how they love they your money.
It's funny how they love me sunny.
It's funny who's in my circle honey.

It's stupid how they did Beezi.
It's stupid how they did weezy.
It's stupid how they did Deezi.
It's just stupid please be eazy.

It's cool how your people love you.
It's cool how your lady hug you.
It's cool how your homies do.
It's cool how your community show love to.

It’s great when you’re on top.
It's' great when you won’t stop.
It's' great if you don’t drop.
It's' great if you don’t get popped.

It’s wonderful when you get that grade back.
It’s wonderful when you get that sack.
It’s wonderful when you make it back.

It’s spectacular when you catch the one you been after
It’s spectacular when you survive a disaster
It’s spectacular when you finally master
It’s spectacular when you drive faster

It’’ magnificent when you can look past play
It’s magnificent when you live another day
It’s magnificent when you know kay
It’s magnificent when you keep to the right way

It’s tragic when Friends switch up
It’s tragic when family gives up
It’s tragic when you know they don’t give a Whaaaaaaaat
It’s tragic out here when you gone learn , “Lookin Butt’’

It’s turn up time when you graduate
It’s turn up time when you go to a different state
It’s turn up time when you have a clean slate
It’s turn up time when you live your life up Straight!!
Lift Me Up
so I can hold on to the dreams
that have yet to unfold.

Lift Me Up
to see the sun
so when I get up
the power can come.

Lift Me Up
so I can see the moon
the memory’s with the imagery
that comes to mind.

Lift Me Up
so I can see God to do my prayers
and to let him know
and also thank him for
everything he has done.

Lift Me Up
so I can go higher
and higher
with my goals.

Lift Me Up
with great faith that built a stairway
to heaven as now my memories try
to climb a hill becomes an old stone building

Lift Me Up
so I can enjoy the
life I have to live.

Lift Me Up
with all the realest and
not the fakeness

Lift Me Up
under my feet
so I can see
how big the world
can be

Lift Me Up
with all the things
that have been given so I can
give back before I go to heaven
From the bone breaking grasp of inequality
To staring down the barrel of racism
We have overcome our barriers
We have excelled and prospered
We have changed the way we are seen in society

Even after society tried to ram us off the road, we push through
Being abused both mentally and physically
We Rise
We rise to show the world that we are more than what they see
We rise to show our dominance

We rise to express individuality
We rise to show our determination
We rise to show who we are
We didn’t judge you for who you were
So we won’t stand for it vice-versa

We rise because we couldn’t stand to see society fail
We broke down the walls the kept us apart
And we came as one to help the world, not destroy it
We rise for the greater good of our next generations to come
We have earned our freedom and equality in society
But yet we still don’t get treated the same
But no more
We will rise to the top
And we will show the world who we are

In life, you have to work for what want
But even after selfless dedication, we still don’t get what we want
But no matter, we will rise
Even when you think you have us down
We will rise to show that we aren’t just your ordinary rift raft.

Society will no longer judge us
We will rise
To fairness and equality
We will get the respect we so rightfully earned.
We will rise

We have stood in the shadows for too long
We have let society walk over us to long
This is our world, too
We worked just as hard as the rest of society
And for some people, they worked harder to get what they achieved
We will rise
We will be seen by the world as an equal
No longer will we stand for the segregation
We will rise
We will be seen as one

No longer will we be excluded
No more long hours just waiting on society
We will claim our rightful spot
Nothing can no longer stand in our way
We Rise!!!
Breina Price

Never Was Supposed to End

We said it was forever
Said we’d never part
Deep down I knew it was a lie
But I still gave you my heart

Said you would stay
Not only did you say it you promised you would
But you chose to walk away
I knew, hey, I always figured you would

You aren’t there anymore
My dearest friend
I hate to say this, but we’ve reached the end

By day, you’re one person
And at night, you seem to turn into the Hulk
And I don’t understand why
We were always so close

Sometimes I sit and cry for you
Not for me
Ooh, how I still don’t understand what you’ve become
I only wish you could see for yourself

In life, you’re supposed to make friends
At first they all seem so true
Nothing else matters
Except what’s between you and them

I often wonder to myself
Has anyone else ever felt this way
For them you would give your life
Even if you wanted to live everyday

It hurts to lose what you thought was a good friend
It makes you sad and you often tend to frown
And the second they bail
It’s like your whole life suddenly failed

And hurts so bad to be accused of something you never did
We were friends
You should’ve known it wasn’t true

You planted the knife in my back
You were my life, but now, my memories of you are completely black.

I am afraid to love another,
but I know I shouldn’t be,
Because the people in my life, are perfect for me.

There is this game I play,
Where I close my eyes and fade away.
I can't believe it's true,
but in this place, I can't even remember that I loved you.

You can't fix something that's already broken.
Poems
Stephanie Singleton

Fake Friends

Betrayed by many but saved by few
Can only trust so many when you’re going through
Smile in your face, but talk behind your back
How could I be friends with that?

How should I even react?
Cause conflict and stay mad
Or pack my bags and call a cab
Living and being around snakes

Know what? I’ll tell them to get the hell out of my face
Becoming cold hearted like the Purge I’ll say
Is there anybody left I can trust these days?
But I ain’t tripping, just knew I wasn’t gone like the way it ended

No different than shadows
They stick around during your brightest moments, but scatter during your darkest hours
Betrayed by many, but saved by few
Don’t ever open your heart to someone new

They’ll only watch you climb and be amused to see you fall
See a true friend knows your weaknesses, but never flaunts out your flaws
Always wanna play the victim, but be the sneakiest and most unloyal of them all

I’m so sick of these fakes
Fake people
Fake friends
Fake smiles and grins
Man, man, man I can’t lose to win

I think I’d rather have 1,000 enemies than a couple phonies
They’ll let me know wassup
Judging me before they get to know me
But that’s what I get!
Thinking any and everybody’s my homie

When I got something, they all be swarming around
But when I’m down bad, nobodies anywhere to be found
Am I too nice? Is that it?
Somebody please throw me a hint

Where did I go wrong?
Can’t believe my so-called friends did me so wrong
Oh well things happen, people change
No stress, lesson learned though

Tired of looking like the fool
Next time I’ll know what to do
Betrayed by many, but saved by few
Once a man has a son who has a son there is history involved
You don’t want anything but for things to work
My father has a father who wasn’t in his life
But my father is in mines
What will happen when I have a son?
Only God can tell

Your family is the only thing you have sometimes
You will have to forgive to forget
Life is too short to hold grudges, but it’s ok to feel pain
No pain, no gain is what some people say

Stories are told and stories are twisted
When every one comes together the story becomes totally different
People feel different types of ways so they will try to make you feel different
Pain

History is to be made through your family
It is to be a dynasty
A family united is a person’s dream
Like mine

I would do anything for my family to become one
My family is hurt by a lot of small things
Lies
Truth will set you free and I wish everyone knew that

Its times where you think that things are doing to be ok
But they never are
But some things always holds us back
Why do we let it?

Money is always a downfall in life and families
But every one doesn’t show them like my father
I wish he would just take the time to listen to people
Things might become history

Life is everything you make it
Life can be hard
Life can be simple
Life can be a dream that people don’t have

Is living with money better than family?
Or is living with family better than money?
Money is a material thing
Family is something you can’t buy and will always have

History is to be made
Life is to be fulfilled
Families are to be one
Life is to be what you make it
My life was hard at first
It was like I didn’t care if I lived or died
I didn’t care if I was loved or not
I didn’t care about heaven or hell

My life was a roller-coaster
One week, it’s good
The next, it was bad
My Life just went up and down

My life was not healthy
I was in jail
I was on the streets
I was in fights
I just didn’t know if it would ever be healthy again

My life was a fight
I had to fight to stay out of jail
I had to fight to stay in my home
I just had to fight to stay alive

My life was not good in the M
In the M, I was breaking in people’s homes
In M, I was disrespectful to my moms
In the M, I was in and out of jail
Therefore, I had to get out of Memphis
So moms moved me here to the Lou.

Didn’t like My life here in the Lou at first
Didn’t know anyone
Didn’t know what to do to have fun
Didn’t know how to get a quick J.O.B.
 Didn’t know how to get quick bread

But My life is better
Not out here fighting
Not out here gang banging
Not out here braking in people’s homes
Not out here going to jail
Not out here fighting to live

My life got far in the Lou
I had my first job
I’m doing the best I ever did in school
I’m living
I’m about to graduate
And I’m respecting my moms now

So Thank you, Ms. Bell
Thank you for moving me
Thank you for helping me see who I am
Thank you for loving me
Thank you for not giving up on me
Thank you for saving my life.
And thank you for seeing how good my life was before I did
I walked in my first hour class. I looked around for my friend, Sandra, but saw no familiar faces. Chatter and laughter filled the air as everyone greeted each other from over break. Soda and bags chips flowed around the room. I sat down in my familiar place next to the window in the corner. “Have you seen the new boy?” Ashley said playing in her hair. “No one has seen him before.” Troy said leaning on Ashley’s shoulders. “I heard his family is from the drug lords cartels.” Brad said standing up. “No, I heard at his old school, he once killed a boy in cold blood for just staring at him.” Charlie said getting up in middle of floor. Everyone follow her with their eyes as she walked around the room dramatic. “Once he killed the boy, he chopped his body up into little pieces and fed it to his dog.” Charlie said waiting for our response.

“What?” I said getting sick of hearing this nonsense. “I’m sure the new boy is complete normal.” The entire class stared at me as Charlie moved closer to my seat as he responded. “Are you sure about that? His parents brought the creepiest house on the corner of the lake.” Everyone opened their mouths. “That house hunted and we know it!” Brad yelled. Charlie interrupted, “How about we make a bet. I heard Austyn throwing them a party and everyone in the neighborhood is invited.” She was clapping her hands. “You, Mariah, you go there and tell us how it is!” I hesitated, but said, “You guys are completely insane. Where do you come up with these stories?” I threw my hair back.

“Insane, you say? Well, we’ll see about that! Go to the party and see if you make it back alive.” Charlie said with a smile. I pondered the thought for a second and finally added, “Look, how about we all go. I’m sure we’ll see that the new boy is completely normal.” I said as the teacher opened the door. Ms. Fields didn’t take any nonsense in her class at all. She taught at a college out in Florida, so you knew she was a hard teacher. In spite of her being strict, she wanted the best for our class. We had homework piled up to our necks! You would get in trouble even if you’d breathe wrong. Most of the boys in our class had huge crushes on her because she was always pretty. She told everyone to take out their homework and pass it to the front. She then walked around and scoped out her class like an eagle. She looked for our cell phones as if we were savages. Our school had a “no cell phone” policy and she followed the rules like the strict teacher she was.

“Seems like a storm is coming.” Ashley said pointing out the window. As soon as she said this, thunder hit the ground the door opened. We all jumped! A well-dress boy in all black stepped foot in the door and leaned against the wall. He had his long, dark hair brushed neatly in a ponytail. Tattoos cover his arms, hands, neck, and few on his face. He smiled and put his hands in his pockets.

“I’m Austyn.” He smirked. Brad wasn’t the hottest boy in school anymore. He knew that as he rolled his eyes and looked at Austyn as if he was a creature from another planet. He scrolled his eyes around the room to see the girls admiring Austyn. “I heard you moved in that broke down fixer upper?” Brad said and laughed. The classed laughed and everyone stopped when Austyn opened his mouth.

“Did you now?” Austyn said. “Seems like you know quite a lot about me, but I know little about you.” Brad put his lip up and knew he was defeated. I knew this wasn’t over though. It was war now! No one steps foot in Brad school thinking they were going to run the place. I was getting excited just knowing this was the beginning of a great war! “Okay okay now, class, this is Austyn. He came to us from Trinidad.” Ms. Fields said. “Wow! Trinidad?” Charlie asked as she smiled and admired the fact that he was foreign.

At lunch, all of the girls sat at a table together as we watched the new boy. He hit the soda machine, making two sodas fall out. He grabbed the soda, stuck his knife in it, and started drinking. “See him stealing?” Charlie asked as she nudged me. “That’s a weird way drink soda. Why don’t you just open it right?” Sandra said turning up her nose. “Something’s just not right about him.” Brad said smashing his chips on the table. “I can feel it.”

Brad was the leader of the football team. He had a thing for me. He liked me ever since the beginning of the school year. I kept turning him down because I was afraid of what the other girls thought. He was too popular for me. Popular guys always received too much attention. Boys like that were made for girls like Charlie or Ashley.

After lunch, we were so busy talking about the new boy at Troy’s locker that we didn’t see him standing there. I finally looked up. “Woah!” I jumped shocked that he was behind me. “You scared me,” I put my hands on my chest to catch my breath. “Did I now?” He smiled as he looked me up and down. He was checking me out. Amused, I tried to hide my blushing.

“What business do you have over here?” Brad said standing in between us. “Brad.” Brad stuck out his hand for Austyn to shake. “Quarterback of the football team and my father owns this school.” He said feeling as if he had accomplished something. “Okay, Brad, the dumb jock,” Austyn said and laughed. Brad lowered and slowed his tone. “You should watch your next choice of words.” Brad was a quick hitter. Say one word, and he was ready to throw hands. That’s why he kept getting in trouble with his father. He had so many fights around here at school.

“Maybe you should have heard more about me.” Austyn said stepping closer. “I know guys like you.”

“Mm…” Brad said not blinking an eye.

“But I came over here tell you guys, you’re all invited to my party.” Austyn said as he winked his eyes at me and walked off.

I was in my room getting ready to go to Austyn’s party. I kept changing in every outfit in my closet. I wanted to look good. I kind of had a crush on the new boy. I finally decided to wear my little blue dress with the sides cut out. I had a body! I was proud of it and didn’t mind showing off what God blessed me with. I grabbed my keys and kissed my dog, Scooby, goodbye. I walked down the steps and past my mother and father. They were sitting down watching Dateline like they always did. They liked to watch stories about how people thought their husbands and wives loved them, but they would end up dead. After they get done watching it, they would look at each other in a very suspicious manner and laugh.

“Excuse me, Mariah. Where are you going?” My mother called out to me. I didn’t want to turn around because I knew my father will stare at me with disapproving eyes. I took a deep breath and walked back into the living room. Before I could open my mouth, my father’s words spilled out.

“And you wearing that skimpy dress?” He said. “Now, Now, Carlos. Let her be a teenager. She will learn from her mistakes.” My mother said kissing my father. “No daughter of mines should be dressing like street walker.” He said with anger. “Ugh, I hate my life!” I said punching the air. “Go, Go! Have fun!” My mother said getting up as she pushed me out of the house. I got in my nice mustang and drove down the long, dark road.

Rain started pouring down. I was frightened because the trees began to blow hard. It had gotten so bad that I could barely see. Oh, man! what did I get myself into going to this party? A tree branch fell and hit my wind shield. I when out of control and hit a tree. I just knew that no one from miles would come.
The New Boy (cont.)

As I unsuccessfully tried to start my car several times, head lights pulled behind me. I grabbed my knife and held it to the window as a shadow got closer and stopped. There was a knock on the window. I raised it down only a bit and got a good view of the person at my window. There stood Austyn staring down at me. I noticed that he had the kind of green eyes that shimmer when the light hits it right. “Need some help?” He said leaning in my car still staring at me. “Oh, umm...I was just on my way to your party when I hit this tree and my car wouldn’t start.” My voice was wimpy. “Good thing I’m here, huh?” He smirked.

My car wouldn’t start, so we had to leave it behind. His car reminded me of Batman’s ride. It was nice! You wouldn’t catch anyone in New Hampshire with a car like this. People around here were the preppy, quiet type. We didn’t like any new-comers. As we arrived at his house on lake, it was much different than I last seen. It seemed darker than usual.

When we got out the car, I walked on the porch. He grabbed a key from under a rock. Who does that? So much like the movies, I thought. He opened the door. I closed my eyes and was hoping not to see spiders and monsters. When I took one foot in the door, it was so bright! The picture hanging on the wall seemed like he was a royal family. Trophies were stacked so tall on the counters. He had a fire place that actually worked, unlike the one at my house. Fish swam freely beneath the floor. “Are those real?” I said pointing at the fish. “Yes.” He smiled. “I don’t wanna be rude, but what does your family do for a living?” I asked. “Real-estate business. We’ve been buying every building around here in town. We now own the school.” He laughed to himself. We both laughed at the fact that Brad didn’t know he wasn’t the richest kid in school.

“So, why did you move from your old school? They said you killed somebody.” I felt embarrassed based on how stupid it sounded out loud. He laughed and grabbed my hands. “Really? No. I moved because I kicked some kid’s butt for talking crap. I have quite a temper.” He looked at my dress. “Mmm...so what’s with you and Brad?” I felt more comfortable walking around his house. “He likes me, I guess.” I blushed and looked at the floor. “I like your dress. You look nice.” He was walking circles around me. If looks could kill, then I would be dead the way he stared at me. Boy! We talked and flirted all night. No one showed up because they were too afraid of the house on lake.

When we went back to school Monday morning, I sat and smiled at the breakfast table. When they made up stories about the new boy I knew the truth, but didn’t say anything. I just smiled. “What are you smiling about?” Sandra snapping her fingers in my face. “Awl, nothing. Just thinking of the new boy.” I smiled to myself. “What?” Charlie said moving closer to me. “You actually went to his house?” All of the ladies were looking at me. “I heard he had bugs everywhere,” Ashley said putting on her lip gloss. “No, he had rats inside his house and they like to call them pets.” Charlie said eating off my plate. I finally told them how nice his house was. I went on about the fish underneath the glass floor and the beautiful picture. They now knew how wonderful, amazing, and different Austyn was. I told them how his parents now owned the school and how they bought all kinds of buildings around the city. I also told them how he takes trips all over the country.

“Bullshit!” Brad said coming behind me. “How dare you lie! I call your bluff?!” He said. “You’re acting like little girl, Brad.” I teased. This was the most serious I had ever seen Brad. “You got a thing for the new boy, don’t you?” He stepped closer to my face. “And if she does?” Austyn said stepping behind Brad. “I’m sick of you sneaking up behind me you mouse,” Brad said turning around. “If I’m mouse, you must be an elephant.” He smirked. “What?” Brad said turning to face him. “You’re so sloooooow,” Austyn said laughing.

Brad pushed Austyn. Austyn quickly moved and hit him with a left then a right hook. Just two hits and Brad was on the ground shaking. He held his face and blood started running down his nose. Brad was shocked. His left eye started to get dark. The boys who Brad thought had his back just stared. Not one person helped him. They smirked and laughed quietly. Austyn squatted on his knees and pulled out tissue from his back pocket. “Next time. I’ll break your face if you ever put your hands on me again.” He threw the tissue onto Brad’s lap.

From that day on, everyone respected the new boy. To me, he was much more than just the new boy; he was my Romeo and I was his Juliet. It was love at first sight. To me, Austyn is the boy that lives on the lake. If you ask me if I know him, I’ll tell you of course because he’s been my boyfriend ever since that day of the storm. This goes to show you should never judge a book by its cover!
My day started off regular. We made plans for after school for Kise’s 18th birthday. School was pretty much the same. Nothing spectacular happened. After school, we planned to go to Applebee’s. We just wanted to get out for the day. After a long week of school, we wanted to relax. Everyone hopped on different school buses with the intentions of meeting back up.

Kise, Darell and I went to Kise’s house, Malik and Devin went to their homes, and Tyron went to work. We agreed to meet back up around 5 o’clock. School let out around 3 so this gave everyone two hours to wait before we would see each other again. When we were in Kise’s room, we saw cupcakes sitting on the bed. Of course, we ate some of those cupcakes then drank our favorite soda, Dr. Pepper, to wash it down. Kise received some money for his birthday. After this, we started to make our way to Malik’s house.

We left out a little late for the bus because they it’s never on time, but it was today. We saw it driving off and decided to make a run for it. It was cold outside and running while it’s cold is not a good combination. We finally caught the bus and headed towards Malik’s house. We got to Malik’s house just to discover he wasn’t there. We didn’t panic, thought, because Malik was probably with Devin at his house that was around the corner. We decided to go to Devin’s back porch and we found them there.

At Devin’s house, we watched TV and listened to music while we waited for Tyron to get off of work. While watching ESPN, we made jokes about the person’s favorite team that lost. We were defensive about our favorite team and also very defensive about our music choice. Everyone thought their favorite rapper was the best. We each had different favorite artists, so no agreements were ever made. Our arguments never meant anything because we were too cool to let something petty ruin The Crew. Kise Tyron finally called to say he was about five minutes away. We decided to walk and meet him.

Devin went out the front door while the rest of us went out the back door. We now walked down the alley. It was cold and the ground was slippery. Everyone was laughing and having a good time when the birthday boy slipped and fell on some ice. He jumped off the ground so fast hoping that no one saw it, but we did, and laughed as hard as we could. While walking down the alley and thinking we were nearly off the ice, we turned just to walk on the sidewalk that seemed even more slippery. Now, we were all sliding while walking. The alley had a slope, which made us slide. It was already bad because it was cold, but now we were sliding with every step we took. Trying not to fall had to be the hardest task of the night. Eventually, The Crew made it out of the alley and headed for the bus stop.

Now, the bus decided to be 30 minutes late! We played on the bus stop while we waited. There was more sliding and we laughed when each of us almost fell. The bus finally came, but it was packed because of all the delayed buses. While on the bus, everyone sat by each other. We all talked about funny memories. Everyone in The Crew was funny and loved to laugh, which was why everyone liked being around one another. We finally arrived at Applebee’s and walked to the hostess to request a table for six.

We sat, ordered our food and waited. The waitress had a nice sense of humor. The Crew joked around with the waitress until our food was served. We even asked the waitress for a follow on Twitter and Instagram. She told the group she didn’t have either and barely used Facebook. We ate and talked more. Some of us got plates to go. We left out of Applebee’s and headed for the bus. Everyone took the bus to Kise’s house since he lived closest to Applebee’s.

We stayed at his house for about an hour before everyone started to leave. We took some pictures while there and talked once more before everyone headed their separate ways. This day was pretty successful. Everything had gone according to plan which made it just another cool day for The Crew.
The saying good things are given to good people is a thing that never made too much sense. As far as I could remember, I was always a good boy growing up, but good things hardly happened to me. Now, I’m a 17 year old foster child that still never had anything good happen in life. I’m not good at sports and I’m not smart or talented in any way.

I’ve been working a part time job and saving up for almost two years. I’ve been saving because I plan on moving out when I turn 18 next week. My foster parents aren’t the easiest people in the world to get along with. They are very strict and particular with their rules and guidelines. I’m not happy living with them. There are three other children staying in the home also. They are all younger so they don’t need much to make them happy.

This morning, I woke up and did my usual routine to get ready for school. I went down for breakfast 15 minutes late and my parents were so angry. They made me walk to school which is a 30 min walk. I hate walking to school because I get bullied a lot by the kids on the street I have to walk past. I walked cautiously and carefully so that I wouldn’t be seen by anyone, but just my luck. A group of kids charged towards me and I took off running down the street. Of course they caught me. They beat me up pretty good. I got to school late, dirty, and bruised. There, everyone talked about me and made fun of me, but it’s always easy for me to ignore them and do what I’m supposed to do.

It’s so hard trying to get everything ready to move out when I have to do it in secret. My parents are not at all understanding of my plans, goals, or beliefs. That’s why I get no support from them. Everything that I had to do, I did on my own. That’s why when I cash my paychecks, I’m leaving. I can’t save the money in a bank account because I don’t know how. I just save all of the money in a secret hiding place, which is under the dumpster in an alley behind the house. I’ve been counting down the days until I turn 18 to move out and start a life on my own.

Before I knew it, it was my birthday. I went to school and did everything as usual, but on my way to pick up my paycheck from work, I noticed someone I knew from school being bullied by the same kids that bullied me. I should have just ignored them and walked away, but I didn’t. I tried to talk to them and they beat us both up.

Even though I got beat up, I went to work because today was the day that I would finally move out and nothing could ruin that. I cashed my paycheck and went home to get the money from my secret hiding place under the dumpster. When I got there, the money was gone. I was so heartbroken. I already had everything set up to move out today and now everything was ruined.

I decided to walk to take the long way to the store in order to let out some frustration. On my way to the store, I found a lottery ticket. I scratched the ticket not really caring about what I was doing. I almost didn’t realize I won the jackpot. I checked the numbers and almost fell out from excitement. I won $50,000,000 dollars!

A few days later, I had a check for $50,000,000 dollars. I still could not believe what happened to me. The ticket was right there in my hand. I didn’t realize that my life would never be the same. Just my luck!
On a nice Saturday, 13 year-old Ben and Kevin decided to hang out. Ben asked Kevin what he would like to do today. Kevin had no clue. So, Ben decides to invite their friends, Jackie and Cassie, over. Now, everyone was trying to decide on what we wanted to do. Cassie comes up with the idea to go bowling. Kevin thought about going swimming, and Ben thought about going out to eat. They all decide to go bowling so all four teens jumped into the car and headed to the bowling alley.

While there, Ben and Kevin pay for a set of four games while Jackie and Cassie search for bowling balls. Everyone had a chance to get their favorite bowling ball and they began playing. Suddenly, Jackie asks Cassie a question. “How do you feel about hanging out with the guys?” Cassie replied back, “I have no problem with them.” Ben and Kevin go to the concession stand to grab a quick bite. Kevin overheard the girl’s conversation and told Ben.

When they go back to join the ladies, everyone notices Cassie, who starts looking like she is sick. She runs to the restroom while the others continue bowling. Cassie never returned to the alley floor. After a while, Kevin tells Jackie to call Cassie and see what was going on with her. She never replied. Kevin called tried to call Cassie to see what her problem was. She did not answer any phone calls or text messages. It seemed like Cassie was slowly pulling herself away from her friends, but the guys didn’t let that happen.

As the night went by, Ben thought of the plan to call Cassie’s parents and check on her because since Kevin and Jackie seemed to have this on their mind all night. Ben asked to speak to Cassie when Mrs. Dutch answered. She told Ben that Cassie was not feeling well and heard when he heard laughter in the back ground. He stops and asks Mrs. Dutch if this was a joke or not. After Mrs. Dutch spent some time unsuccessfully attempting to understand and answer his question, Ben explained to her why he called. Mrs. Dutch told Ben that Cassie was sick and in bed.

Ben told Jackie and Kevin what Mrs. Dutch said. Kevin thought of an idea. He wanted everyone to meet Cassie at a restaurant before they go home. Everyone said that they had no problem with that, so on they met Cassie at Rusty’s Burgers. Everyone ordered what they wanted and sat down to eat. After they ate, Jackie decided to go home. Kevin, Ben, and Cassie decided to go home shortly after.

Before Ben dropped Kevin off, he asked if he thinks they could date Jackie and Cassie. Kevin told Ben that they should give it a shot. Kevin agreed and said that they should be confident about it and approach the two young ladies like men. Ben mentioned they should get back together next weekend to see if the girls were up for it. On the ride home, Ben was thinking about the long Saturday he had with his friends.
As young toddler in preschool, I was a dog that had its days. From time to time, I’d go to school in moods teachers didn’t appreciate. Don’t get me wrong, I had good days, but I got in trouble most of the time. Even though I would get in tons of trouble for the stunts I used to pull in preschool, I continued to act a fool.

Eventually, I pulled myself together as I entered kindergarten. I was an honor student with straight A’s and B’s. I listened to all directions and followed all rules as if I were being paid to do so. Toward the end of the year, my behavior began to fall off. I would spend most of my time in the restroom when we had our little breaks or talk when it was work time. Those were the options I chose instead of learning in class. I started messing with the little girls, too, which caused more trouble.

Bringing these troubles into first grade wasn’t a good idea now that I’ve come to realize. Though I tried hard to break this habit of terror for the teachers that I caused for them, I finally understood that this was who I was. I was the type of kid to refuse to change for anyone or any rule. I was young so I didn’t understand that being “yourself” under certain circumstances was also an option. I sometimes even caused problems with my favorite teachers.

I wasn’t all bad my second grade year. Though, I did start to talk a lot during lessons and I acted as if I didn’t care whether my second grade teacher made phone calls home or not. I also didn’t care whether she told my mom about my bad behavior during parent-teacher conferences. I started to let a lot of distractions interfere with my education plans. I had good days too, though, when I followed directions and understood my work.

Third grade, I had a Cuban teacher named Ms. Iskali. I was so fascinated by the fact the she had the same accent as Tony Montana. It was so interesting and funny. When you have a teacher with the same accent as Tony Montana, what do you do in class? You imitate Tony Montana. I would tell her, “Say hello to my little friend!” She didn’t like it very much and I got in trouble for it. Another trouble I had in third grade was my interest in girls. After looking at my big brother’s nude magazines, I fell in love with females. I acted out exactly what I saw in those magazines with other girls at school. Some girls liked it, but others told on me. Third grade was outrageous. I was too curious for my own good.

I was very hard-headed fourth grade. I felt as if I didn’t have to listen to anyone, including my mother. Even though I had respect for her deep down, I didn’t show it. This was when I found out I had anger issues that were uncontrollable. This was the year that I watched my brother die. You could assume that me witnessing that was the reason for getting into a lot of trouble in school and outside of school as well. My fourth grade year was my worst year. I got in a lot of trouble. So much trouble that my mother held me back and requested that I was retained.

I pulled myself together the next school year and was happy that I passed. But, my fifth grade year seemed as if I repeated my first fourth grade year over because of the troubles I had outside of school. I started disobeying my teachers and everyone around me again. I did what I wanted as if I were a psycho path. I remember one day I was put in in-school suspension (ISS) for misbehavior and my life was changed. There was a teacher named Mr. Cunningham who was more than just an ISS teacher; he was a parent as well who lost his kids to violence. He always treated us as if we were his own children. He always made attempts to prepare us for the real world and for middle school. After realizing that I was repeating my fourth grade cycle, I knew I needed to end it. I eventually got myself together so that I wouldn’t be held back again. I refused to be a failure.

Going into middle school with the mind set of refusing to be a failure and the advice my old ISS teacher gave me really helped. This made it impossible to change my mind that I would make it. As I made it through my middle school years, it pretty much remained the same. I started to get into a lot of trouble outside of school, but seemed to keep my stance as a good student.

High school was really the challenge I had to overcome; it was a dramatic experience for me. My freshman and sophomore years were years of maturity and growth. I had a lot of growing up to do during this time. I would always skip, horse play, and do other things that got me in trouble. My sophomore year was even worse than my freshman year. I believe this was because of all the troubles I had with my mother and girlfriend. I started the year doing well, but then the district let an ex girlfriend of mine come back to the school. This was a huge distraction for me and it changed my demeanor. Because of this, I got in a lot of trouble and was put out of the high school I was at.

My junior and senior years were not as bad as my freshman and sophomore years. I can actually say that this was my best year, despite some of the overwhelming troubles I had with teachers, principles, and other students. Ultimately, I took a huge step forward when I saw the opportunity of graduating high school. Although my senior year was very frustrating at times and it made me want to go on a rampage, I stuck to my books and the vows I made to myself of refusing to fail. It was not easy getting through this year, especially with all of the obstacles I had to get over, but I managed to do it with hard work, dedication and help. This goes to show that things happen for a reason, especially when it’s good.
Young and helpless, Dasia was crying and screaming. “Please stop! I won’t tell mommy, I promise!” The pain continued as she cried. She never understood why she went through this pain every time her mother, Ms. Lowell, left for work. She started to wonder if it was love; she didn’t understand because this was all she knew for two years. At six years old, Dasia felt tremendous pain from someone so close to her; someone she thought would protect her.

She was being sexually molested by her stepfather. She didn’t feel the joy he was getting out of this. This was traumatizing for her. About an hour or so later, the pain stopped, but she sat there and cried until she fell asleep.

When she woke up, her mother was home but she said nothing. They sat and ate dinner like everything was normal. This was the start of a horrible life for a beautiful girl.

This continued for weeks and Dasia was frightened to tell a soul. Her mother started to see changes in her sweet little daughter. She would ask Dasia over and over what was wrong, but Dasia wouldn’t answer or she would say, “Nothing, mommy. I’m okay.” She knew her daughter well so she knew this wasn’t the truth.

One morning, her mother left for work and Keith came over to watch Dasia. She sat on her bed watching her favorite cartoon. When he entered the room, tears ran down her face instantly. He kissed her on her cheek and said she was beautiful. She continued to cry and tried to scoot away from him. He pulled her by her pigtail and said, “Where the hell do you think you’re going?” She didn’t answer him so he smacked her. She burst into tears and tried to run, but didn’t succeed. He knocked her on the ground and he began to rape her. This was the worst pain she ever felt. She thought to herself that she wasn’t going to let this one go.

Dasia’s mother walked in the house around 10 at night. Ms. Lowell felt that something was wrong with her daughter, so she called out to Dasia’s second babysitter, Myra. Myra entered the room in tears and said, “I tried to reach you, but I didn’t know what else to do.” Ms. Lowell asked, “What’s going on, Myra? Where is Dasia?” Myra directed her up the stairs to Dasia’s room; it was a mess.

Ms. Lowell saw blood on the floor. “Myra, where did this come from?” Myra informed her that Dasia was at the emergency room. Keith left the house two hours before he was supposed to and Myra came in the house at 4:30 only to find Dasia unconscious. Myra tried to wake her, but Dasia wouldn’t wake up. Dasia’s dress was covered in blood. Her eyes were black and her body was covered in bruises. “That’s when I called the police,” Myra said in tears.

When they arrived at the hospital, Dasia woke and asked for her mother. Ms. Lowell entered the room and began to cry as she look at her daughter and realized she was in more pain than she imagined. Dasia cried out to her mother as if she needed help. Ms. Lowell couldn’t do anything but cry. She asked the doctors what was going on and they said that Dasia was badly beaten. She could have died if Myra didn’t get her to the emergency room as fast as she did. Ms. Lowell asked, “Do you know who is responsible for this?” Myra responded, “Dasia told me that Keith did it.” Ms. Lowell couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

She called Keith’s parents and asked where he was. They said he had been gone all day and didn’t return. She told his parents what happened to Dasia and stressed that Keith needed to go to jail for the crime he committed.

Weeks passed and Ms. Lowell got a call regarding Keith. He committed suicide by a single gunshot to the head. She was sad but relieved at the same time. She wanted him to go to jail, but she didn’t want him to hurt any other girls. Ms. Lowell decided to go to his funeral. She wanted to pay respect to his family.
“Did you guys hear about the house of mirrors,” said Stacy as she grabbed her math book and slammed her locker. Trish responded, “Apparently, if you repeat a saying in the bathroom, you will see an old lady looking at you in the mirror. It’s kinda like looking in the mirror and saying, ‘Bloody Mary’ 3 times; the only difference is, this actually works.” Stacy added, “I heard Keisha tried it and won’t go near a mirror anymore.”

“You straight believe that?” Kim said looking over at Trish and Stacy in disbelief. Kim added, “That’s just them popular girls making that up so you can try it and they gone make fun of you.”

“Yeah.” said Trish. “You remember last year they said Ms. Fields’ class was haunted? Kenny set up his camera overnight to record the activity, but the custodians discovered the camera and turned it in to the principal. The entire school drove him the rest of the year. He still eats lunch by his self.”

“Y’all always worried about somebody jonin on yall,” said Stacy mockingly. Stacy was the most confident of all the girls. She was a tall girl with blue eyes and a great smile. She moved to the small city of Tricktown her sixth grade year. Kim and Trish admired her. Kim was a short, chunky girl with red hair and green eyes who lived in Tricktown her entire life. Trish lived there also, but was a tall athletic girl with blonde hair and hazel eyes. They weren’t very popular, so Kim and Trish didn’t like anyone “jonin” on them.

Stacy was thickheaded. She always pushed her friends to be brave and not to worry what the other girls said. “I say this weekend, we go to the house and see what happens. Who cares what the other girls say? We will at least be able to say we were brave enough to stay the night in the house.”

“You trippin’ now, Stacy. You really think we staying the night let alone go in the house,” said Trish with harshness to her voice. “You’re out of your mind!”

“I’m with Trish on this one, you trippin’,” Kim said. “Whatever! Do yall then, but everybody gone love me when I stay in that house all by myself and if anything happens, they’ll blame you two,” Stacy said shortly as she began to walk away. "Hold on," Trish yelled as her and Kim caught up to Stacy. “We’ll go.”

“Awesome.” Kim said. “I’ll see you ladies tonight,” she said cheerfully as she disappeared to her math class. “How does she always talk us into this kind of stuff, Trish?”

“I don’t even know.” The bell rang and Kim and Trish rushed to their English class. As the last bell rang at the end of English class, the girls met at the statue by the doors leading out the school. “So girls, the plan is to say that we’re staying at each other’s house. We’ll go to Kim’s house since her house is right down the road from the house. Then, we’ll sneak out and go to The House of Mirrors.”

“Tight” Stacy said. “Sounds like a plan,” said Kim cheerfully. She and Trish had grown excited for the night ahead in their class. They were going to be the coolest kids in school after tonight and they couldn’t wait.

The girls made their rounds to all of their houses and finally arrived at Kim’s just before nightfall. They ate dinner with Kim’s parents and retreated to her room. The girls took a short nap, seeing how they wouldn’t get any sleep in that creepy old house later that night. The girls awoke at midnight and quietly climbed out of Kim’s window.

It had gotten quite cold outside on this October night with dew that fell on the grass. The wet half of the dead grass crunched underneath the girls’ feet as they slowly walked up to the old house. It was a small brick house with broken windows and an old oak tree in the front yard. The door had been covered in vines and the front porch was filled with cob webs. The girls pulled away at the vines and gazed at the odd, wooden door standing in front of them. Stacy took hold of the cold, wet brass doorknob and slowly turned it. The door creaked open and the girls easily stepped inside one by one. The floorboards squeaked as the old house settled underneath their feet and they slowly made their way to the bathroom. The bathroom door opened and inside there was a rusted bathtub, a hole where the toilet used to sit, and a dirty, cracked mirror.

The girls sat down on the woven rope rug in the middle of the small room as Stacy closed the door. Darkness filled the room and the only sound was a horrible blood curdling shriek. “Shut up, Kim!” Stacy said, “You’re going to get us caught!” Kim said trembling, “I’m sorry, it’s just so dark in here,” She squeezed Trish’s leg. “Don’t worry,” Stacy said pulling something from her bag.

The room slowly illuminated and the light from the flame on the candle she lit danced around the room, bouncing off the walls and on the old metal fixtures. “Now, we each have to close our eyes and put one of our hairs into the flame. The girls all closed their eyes, plucked a hair, and held it to the flame of the candle. “Well… Kim… Trish… I guess it’s time to look in the mirror.”

As Stacy stood up to look in the old, cracked mirror, her bag fell from her lap on the candle which caused an explosion. The entire neighborhood was woken and everyone rushed out to their yard to see what happened. The girls were never seen again. All that was found was the old bathtub and a small, melted metal cylinder. As the girls’ families stood and looked at the horrible sight, Kim’s mother noticed something in the distance. In the tree line was an old woman in a tattered white dress with a horrible smile on her old and cracked white face.
Earth, home of the human race, many other species of animals, and the only known planet to sustain life in its solar system. This is also my home, but I’m not human, nor am I an animal. Me, and others like me come from a different realm on the other side of this dimensional plane. Where we come from I am a Zennugen, translated, that means Demon-Human: we come from the demonic plane. Humans don’t take to kindly to coexisting with us; their religion just simply shuns our race, despite the fact that we don’t look too different from them. Zennugen and other types of demons then isolated themselves in territories, referred to by humans as clan zones. Clan zones have Zennugen or any kind of demon in bulk, not much biodiversity. I am Deora Adamai, of the Yarie clan, and I have a story to tell.

“Well the village looks more lively than usual!” a voice boomed as I awoke. I rose to find my father standing over my bed with a silly grin on his face. He gazed down on me with his emerald green eyes till I felt they were burning a red hot mark into my skin.

“I am awake father.” I said disdainfully. I got out of bed and followed him into the kitchen where mother was making breakfast. “Morning little one!” she said as she put everything down to hug me. I had always looked at my mother a bit differently than everyone else. Not because she was my mother, but because she was different from everyone else. Everyone in the Yarie clan had silver hair, in which they all cherished, emerald green eyes, in which some flaunted, and a complexion similar to that of chocolate milk. My mother on the other hand, had long maroon hair, beastly yellow eyes, and was more like butterscotch than chocolate milk. Everyone pretty much looked the same, but after a while you notice differences that individualize a Yarie. My father, the legendary fighter, always wore a red coat, adorned with buckles and buttons for the many weapons he unnecessarily brought on every trip. My mother was the penetrating fist silvera, the one mother you did not want to be punished by, at all.

As I sat down my older siblings began to rush into the room. My oldest sibling, Kaila, is 13. She is my favorite sibling, due to the fact that instead of patronizing me for being young like my brothers do she often takes over for mother when she isn’t around, and ignores them for me. She always wore white, no matter what, she liked to match her hair, and she would wear her hair in a ponytail when she was at home. My second oldest brother’s name was Draion, and he was 10 and was as vain as any self-loving body builder already. He came to the table exclaiming how grateful we had to be for him to bring his extravagant muscles to our view, in which both mother and father simply struck him in the back of his head and he sat down. He would get on me for being small, but he always would try to lecture me on getting strong like he was, despite the fact that he wasn’t all that strong yet: dad could still thump him through a wall. He always had to be the hero, on our last trip, in which we walked through the forest nearby, we were attacked by feral demons, I’m not very adept with a sword yet, so I had to be saved. “Have no fear little brother! I will grace you with my salvation!” he boasted as he himself struggled to throw the demon aside like it was a charging ram. My father finished it off, and Draion was on me about it for 3 weeks. The third oldest was my sibling rivalry. Demicron was his name, and we didn’t get along very well. He was a very quiet person, but he was also very dark. At the age of 8, he was already revered as the clan’s masochist, a title our mother was not glad to hear.

Now myself, the baby of the family. By tradition you do not get named until you earn a name. At this point I am named “Noname”. A human would read it as “no name” technically they would be right, but in reoka, which is the civilization in which all demons hail from, it means “full of potential”. I was only 4 years old, a last minute child per say, and had yet to do anything name worthy.

Draion sat up, he never liked shirts, which was his individual quality, and acknowledged mothers silver apron. Father, who obviously just noticed, face palmed.

Thank you Zeno.” She bowed as she thanked him, and he lit up. Zeno is the reoka word for son, as Zena is for daughter. Everyone laughed but Demicron of course.

“I require sustenance.” He said, as exclamatory as he allowed himself to.

“Don’t rush your mother when she cooks, good cooking takes time.” My father remarked. “If you want to rush something….!” He began. Kaila backed her chair away from the table. “Hit the backyard and let’s continue your training!” Both he and Kaila exclaimed.

Our training sessions with father were always all of us versus him, and despite our combined might, and our sister’s exceptional abilities for a 13 year old, we never won. I was always bait, I would attack, get parried, and my brothers would go in as soon as I went flying to the side. It was a nice plan, but it would be better if they were faster than father. He would parry, and as soon as I went flying he was already throwing another attack at both of them, the only one of us who could land a blow was Kaila, mainly because she didn’t primarily use swords like me and Demicron. Draion used his fist, but believe he
didn’t need to improve, and always lost. Kaila always asked mother for private lessons, and told me that when she was strong enough, she would teach me how to fight without my sword. She told me the thing she doesn’t like about swords, is that you can lose them, but you can’t really lose your fist in a fist fight.

We tried to fight our father for another 10 minutes before our mother called us in for breakfast. I had learned a little bit of healing magic from my older sister; she didn’t want her little brother to need “booboo management” all the time, so I healed my scratches and bruises as well as Draion’s, while Kaila handled her and Demicron’s. Mother had made a delectable ham and biscuits, served with homemade apple juice. Mother and Father went to eat in another room to eat, so we children conversed amongst ourselves during breakfast.

“You are to easily thrown aside little brother.” Demicron snarled at me.

“Nah. You’re just too slow to attack a legendary fighter like our dad.” I retorted smugly. Kaila laughed at my remark, because it was undoubtedly true.

“Surely you don’t mean I’m slow!?” Draion said in exaggerated shock. We all nodded that he was slow, and it was even said all his muscle made his small body too heavy for him to attack at high speeds. He began eating his ham with disdain afterwards.

“Cheer up little hero!” Kaila yelled across the table. “You can’t be born on the top rung; you can only climb from the bottom to get to the top.” Draion smiled and tried to hide his expression, but we all knew that went to his head.

“Big sister…” I began.

“Yes little brother?” she replied, expectantly. Because of my lack of a name, whenever I was addressed or addressed one of my siblings it was big brother and sister and little brother.

“You can hit dad, because fight a lot differently than me and the boys.” At this Demicron and Draion both stopped eating and sat forward in their seats to hear what else I had to say. “I know age doesn’t limit you much, but how did you get so strong?” I asked this as if she had some elaborate way to become her little siblings shield and sword against the dangers of the world. She smiled and got up from her chair, then embraced me her warm arms. I heard her giggle in my ear before she said “It’s easy. I have things I want to protect.” At first I was a little confused about this, but it didn’t stay that way too long.
It all seems so vague and unexplainable at the most, but I’ll try my best to paint a vibrant picture as I sit here and wonder why there hasn’t been any attack in a few hours. So, I guess I could start with saying I woke up at 6:30 in the morning like any other day to get ready for school. I brushed my teeth, washed my face, got dressed and other things a normal person does before school. Going to my bus stop I thought about what I was going to do when got out of school. To no avail, I couldn’t think of anything. As you could see, nothing seems out of the ordinary, but like I previously stated, this was no ordinary day.

So, where things go for a turn is when my school bus was only miles away from the school. There was a major accident on the road and once our bus driver saw there were people in danger, he got off to help and told us to remain seated. Now as I admire his courage and bravery, I really wasn’t too fond of him just leaving us on the bus alone. It didn’t seem that bad initially, so we just started talking and playing. The noise of an explosion stopped everyone in their tracks and the aftershock sent a wave of destruction all over the region. My attention was directed by the screaming of a female. Head hurting and ears ringing, I noticed that it was dark as if it were night time when I distinctlyly remember being on my way to school. I then realized the loud screaming was coming from Kim and for some strange reason I thought about the first time we met when she didn’t give me her number. I quickly snapped back to reality and stumbled onto my feet. I put my hand over her mouth and told her to calm down. I was going to help her to the bus, but noticed the windows on the bus were shattered and the entire bus was upside down. The reason she was crying was because her boyfriend Josh was dead. With little to no hesitation, I put her on her feet and said that we had to get out of here.

As I walked by the bus with Kim slowly walking behind me, we saw our bus driver out in the open running toward us. He had a very frantic look on his face when the unexplainable thing happened. It seemed like time had frozen when something grabbed him from his backside. Kim looked me in the eyes and screamed. She suddenly took off running toward a creature that I remembered going to as a kid while trying to keep up with her newly discovered running speed. What all seemed so vague was that thing that took the bus driver. Why haven’t we seen anyone else yet? And how was this happening? Were amongst the questions I was asking myself.

After running for what seemed like an eternity, I finally reached the diner. Once inside, I went to go check on Kim who was hid under a table. I suddenly stopped in my tracks and so did Kim’s sobbing as we heard rumbling in the back. The frightened look on her face told me that we needed to move, so as I made my way to the back. I instructed her not to move or make any noise once we reached the back of the diner. While I was trying to remain strong and keep a clear mind so that I would be a good leader in a time of need, my mind drifted once again to a time in the 5th grade when my teacher, Mrs. Williams, put me charge of the class. I shook my head back into reality. Maybe I thought about that incident because it sort of resembled the situation at hand, but I digress.

Leaning my head into the back window, I saw Joe Bean, the owner of the diner, wrestling with some kind of creature. Instinctively, I run and grab a knife to do some kind of damage to the creature and try to save JB. Seems like my effort to grab the knife was all for nothing because once I returned with my weapon, the creature quickly fled the scene. I dropped the knife and went to help JB who was now at his feet.

At that moment, I heard Kim scream loudly. I knew something was wrong because I told her to remain quite. I told JB to wait while I went to help Kim. Once I made it back to Kim, some dreadful creature was dragging her away. I ran toward her as she screamed, but I was at a standstill when the creature opened his mouth. There was a small creature inside of his mouth that roared. They flew away with Kim. Still motionless because of what I just witnessed, I was broken away from my state of terror when I heard the screaming of JB. Running to the back, I saw what seemed like the exact same creature do the exact same thing to JB as it had done to Kim. It flew away with JB.

As I was coming to realization of what was going on, I thought about the saying, “Once you take one step forward, you take two steps back.” It seemed like once we found one person, I ended up losing two. This was crazy. I noticed that I haven’t really seen anyone in a while. It was probably because the creature took them.

I looked around the diner when, unexpectedly, there was a noise. The door of the diner was ripped off and something ran in to grab me. I was struggling to break free when the creature’s huge wings appeared on its back. With a good hold on me, it bursted through the ceiling. As we flew away, I saw that I had a pencil in my hand. This is how I am able to document everything I’ve seen so far.

To Be Continued....
The day wasn’t coming any faster. I remember I only had a couple more days until I graduated middle school. I was so happy because me going to high school was getting closer and closer. The day was finally here and I was so glad to walk down the aisle. Everyone was there. My entire family showed their support. I was very proud and happy because I wanted to show them that I could do it and I did. I was proud of myself because I had a 4.0 GPA and it was going to be a new beginning for me in high school.

I started getting big headed after that day. I knew I was about to experience new things and meet new people, especially at high school. I was gone attend, which was Gateway High School. It was a lot of different races and people who lived all over attending. I was scared to go because of this exact reason, but once I start going there, it wasn’t so bad after all. You know how they say freshman year is the most important year? Well, I messed up. I started hanging out with the wrong people and started skipping classes. After I got in trouble when I got caught, I became a better student. I ended up with 7½ credits and that was more than I needed.

At the end of my freshman year, I had to move so I attended McClure-South Berkeley my sophomore and junior year. This school was way different; there were fewer students than at Gateway High School. I had a lot of family members who went there so I knew not to get in trouble there. My grades were good. I met people as soon as I got there. I was also involved in the band which kept me busy. One time, we played for a crowd of people at a parade. While I attended this school, I also ran for prom queen. I just wanted to stay active and try new things. I was so ready to be done with school because I got bored easily. I managed to keep participating up until my junior year. It was at this time that I knew it was time to be out of school.

In the middle of my junior year, I had to attend McClure North High School. Once again, I had to meet new friends all over again, but it was hard because those kids were stuck up and mean. Me being who I am, I did the same thing until people started wanting to know who I was and what school I came from. I got used to everything and all the people as the months went by. I was just ready to graduate because I was tired of switching schools and meeting new people. These were the worst days of my life because of the hard work and the requirements you had to reach in order to get good grades. My grades started getting worse and worse with every progress report and report card that came out. I never saw so many F’s and D’s in my life. I was upset because I knew what I was capable of. I had to explain to my dad that it was hard for me to catch up because they were teaching on a higher level, but he wouldn’t believe me. I told him if he switched me to a different school, I could show him better grades. I was so stressed because I thought my situation wasn’t going to get any better.

My senior year was finally here! I wanted to go back to my home school at Gateway, but I did not get in. St. Louis Public School District said the only option I had to attend was Sumner high school. I did not want to attend because of the things I heard, but when I got there, it wasn’t that bad. Everyone wanted to get to know me just because I was new and this was how I met people. I also met a good friend that I will never forget. His name was James Moore. I met him when he got switched to my class. Weeks later, we lost him and my entire attitude changed for the rest of the year. I was just wondering if things could get any worse. I wanted to give up once again, but I knew I couldn’t have that attitude while trying to finish school.

Weeks went by and those weeks turned into months. The day that I have been waiting for is almost here. I have been through so much and experienced a lot. I thought I would give up, but I never did. There was a saying that got me through all of these years: What doesn’t break you only makes you stronger. May 16th is almost around the corner and I am very proud of myself, my teachers and the family members who pushed me to get to where I am today. When I walk across the stage, I’m going to have a big smile on my face because that is when another journey will begin!
Kenneth Coburn
*I Love*

**Chorus**
I love (x4)
Girl, I love the way you move
I love (x4)
Girl, I love the things you do
I love (x4)
Baby girl, it’s me and you
I love (x4)
Oh, yeah

**Verse 1**
Girl, if this is a dream right now,
Please don’t wake me up
Baby, you a special drink
I will love to have a sip of you in my cup (yeaH0
Look at my Bugatti turn tricks
Because Imma take you on a journey
And you gone be like what is this (X2 echo)
And I can’t wait to get you home
Lamborghini gonna be so gone
It can be just me and you
Tell me what you want to do
Because we all up in my ‘Rari
It’s just me and you
Oooooohooooo
I know that’s what you lik
Enjoy this life

**Verse 2**
Have you Iced up in the latest fashion, girl
You know me from the STL
Baby girl, gone have to show me is she worthy or nah
And if she is, if so, ain’t no need for a job
Girl, I got you, Imma hold you down whenever
Make it rain with this money
Look, I just changed the weather
Float just like a feather
Hope that this coat is real leather
And if not, we can hit the mall and get you something better
And girl, ain’t tryna change your plans
I’m just the better man
Ain’t playin, listen to what I’m sayin
And you man, he better get his bread right
Because every night, he’s going to see my headlights
Everytime I get you something real nice
Ain’t even got to say it twice, baby girl
You with me tonight
And you love is like a secret spice, baby,

**Bridge**
I love the way you are
Come here, get in my car
You, girl, are a star
I’m saying your love is out of this world
I’m in Mars
aaaaahhhhh

**Chorus**
I love (x4)
Girl, I love the way you move
I love (x4)
Girl, I love the things you do
I love (x4)
Baby girl, it’s me and you
I love (x4)
Oh, yeah
SONG LYRICS

Dontoya Robinson
The Truth Behind the Mask (Beno Swavey ft. BabyFace)

Introduction
Have you ever wondered why I act the way I do? It's a mask, a façade. You see no one understands or realizes who or what I am. I hide this fake smile to fit in with my surroundings for acceptance from my peer. But it's time I unmasked and let my true colors show...LEGOO!!!!!!!

Hook
Can you just sit back and relax
Feel the rhythm in this track
Witness what's behind the mask (2x)
(Tell me what you learn
Once I unmask) (2x)

Verse 1 (Beno Swavey)
The truth behind the mask
Is hard to understand
Tryna fit in was a task
Till I sat back and asked
Why is this important
Cuz the way I'd been actin was unheard of
I lost me I lost all focus
So I'm tryna bring myself back
I was at my lowest
I was just a poet
That nobody really noticed
But I'm me again
So I'm givin double doses
Beno swavey is my name
And Pops I swear I'll neva change

Verse 2 (Deangelo AKA BabyFace)
I think imma make it
To the day that they envy
Lookin back at the past
These cats straight try ta hiss at me
I was the chubby one
sittin front of the class
and on the playground I usually always get picked last
nobody treat me fair
because I had weird hair
dealin wit these bullies
so you know I was scared
n-now that i've made it
these cats...straight try ta hate it
shout out to my haters you made me who I am
understand its babyface and babyface is who I am

Verse 3 (Beno Swavey)
I’ve been going back and forth with all these internal wars
Born on hatreds course
People wanna see me down
Mad that I want more
Story of my life but the quality is poor
I just wanna spread my wings and hope that I soar
Middle finger to my past
Like a storm it has to pass
I love what I do
Imma do it till the car crash
Neva listened to my folk I was such a hard head
That was before I got hit wit that hot lead
Now I know what's more important than my street cred
Yea I know you see what's behind my mask
So next time if you wanna know just ask

Bridge
No more hidden truths
This is for the youth
Follow your own heart
And do as you choose
Don't be like me and live a façade
Just be you and just work hard (2x)

Hook
“You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude toward what happens to you and that you will be mastering change rather than allowing it to master you”

-Brian Tracy

As people, we face many obstacles in life; whether it’s not having money to pay the bills or if it’s not having enough to eat. Obstacles are meant to slow us down, not to keep us from reaching our dreams. I have faced many obstacles in my life and they slowed me down dramatically. I was molested by three of my cousins on three different occasions. I lost my father at the age of 12 and just recently lost my grandmother in February.

When I was molested, I changed for the worst. I grew up having an attitude. I was angry and most of all, I was hurt. I felt that way because I couldn’t wrap my head around the fact that my world was falling apart. I was angry and started asking God, “Why?” It seemed like forever that I waited for an answer.

After a while, he finally answered and told me, “Kelsey, these things are helping mold you into the person that you not only want to be, but you will be.” So I asked myself, “Self, are you going to keep letting this hold you back or are you going to accept it and move forward?” I decided to accept it and move forward. I knew that if I kept living in the past I would never be able to reach any of my dreams in the future.

When my father was killed, I was upset with him. I was upset because I felt that he could’ve still been here. I thought that he could’ve changed his life for the better. He could’ve stopped selling drugs and got a real job. My father was like my best friend. How could he just leave me like that? How could he just leave me down here to struggle?

When my father passed, my grandmother became my best friend. I was mad at her when she died as well because she had been on drugs for more than 20 years. I knew she could’ve stopped using drugs. I felt like she was being very selfish because we offered her help and she refused the help. That was her decision, so she was heading towards self-destruction.

My point is that I can’t continue to be angry with them. I can’t continue to blame everything on everyone else. If you continue blaming everyone else for your situation, you will never be able to see that God has a plan for you. You have to understand that things will get better with time. I have to change for myself because there is a world out there that I want to see. I have dreams…BIG DREAMS. I dream of being a lawyer, a teacher, a doctor, a beautician, and a mortician. But, how can I ever get there if I’m angry at the world and continue to blame everyone for my hardships? How can I reach my dreams if I continue to have that mindset? I shared these things with you because I’m not going to give up on myself or my dreams and I don’t want you all to give up either.

Yes, we’re going to have a hard life; some more than others. Yes, we might not know why certain things happened or will happen. No, you don’t have to let these little obstacles stop you from putting one foot in front of the other. You can become anything you want to be. I don’t care what it is, YOU CAN DO IT. You can be anything you want to be. Just don’t throw in the towel so easily. Put up a fight and win that fight!
Spoken Word

Armon Hall

Reality

In slavery, there’s bravery
Mash potatoes & gravy
Extra, extra gravy
Chicken & waffles, is that even possible?

No Fork, no Spoon, no knife
“N-Words” living without a wife
Tell me what’s tight,
Ike, Tina
Getting hit in the backseat of A lima…..zeen

Someone tell me where the queens
But, wait, we don’t even have no kings to crown these queens.
Drug dealers & dophinnnnneessss is all we see.
Could it be we are dead & blind by the signs we see in our streets.

Drug dealers slanging, gang bangers banging
Pistol playing cause “n-words” haaaaatin
Crying babies with no daddies, we just wondering, “Is She Ratchet?”
Let’s just go back to the afro thunder during the summer
Break dancing on cardboard & enjoying each other

Bar-B-Ques without drive-bys like expecting a baby not to cry
It’s cool tho cause it’s in our daily life
Put a ring on that lady, she expected to be wife
Now that’s what tight,
Nike to Mike to Jordan to Flight, Who hype? Me hype! We hype!

Nasty background,
Cool Present
Bright future
Young, talented black
Far from useless

Love and Hate
Don’t Discriminate, procrastinate
Big boy, black as an ape!
But a young “n-word” like me got faith

Believed He That Who Died On the cross,
Got Raised on The 3rd day
Stand on my own two feet and watch a young “n-word” face reality
Sometime I close my eyes and imagine that there is such a place that were speaking from the heart and saying what is on your mind earns you respect. You see it’s okay to say that girl is acting like a bitch when she is in the wrong or that so called home boy of yours you can tell him that he is fake as hell and you don’t really care for him.

Wait though this is just a fantasy world so most of the time when I open my eyes I see instead all of the problems that lie ahead. I got one simple question for you why when I look at you I can barely get a word out I mean I can’t even talk in full sentences its funny though because I ask this question already knowing the answer to it so I’ll tell you why I am scared I am scared to be put back into that place that is empty because I need you to fill the gaps and the holes that show my soul and I am willing to put all my problems sorrows and fears out on the table so they can eat you form the neck down I am not trying to sound nasty but that what I am trying to do.

Because Let me stop playing though action speak louder than words but words say more and your actin say you love me. So what do I mean what I am trying to say is I would rather listen to your action than hear you say nothing at all so I am in a though process now because now all my problems sorrows and fears are bagging around in my head because they are nothing but just a bunch of unspoken words that I should have already said but things that were said are about to be spoken.

It must be funny to you because you over here joke-n so I slap you in the face and say you need to stay focus I don’t slap you feral but in my head I do but let me get this next question out before I lose my coo. What do you see when you look at me because if I am just that guy that has nice cloths and wears nice shoes I don’t even want you because you don’t even have a clue you don’t know what to do and now you just standing there looking like a fool because all these unspoken words don’t pertain to me they pertain to you.

So I am a paint a picture for you and I want you to look at it vividly I am only saying this once but I will say it clearly what is your biggest fear Oh wait you can’t even answer it because now you on the other side and you feel like you lost your pride so you punch me in the face I reframe my strength and don’t touch you but I do let you know that the next man is really going to hurt you now don’t get me wrong its killing me softly to let you go but you got to get to know you before you get to know me but all you got to do is let those unspoken words go free an speak. Don’t let my posture fool you cause I am standing here looking like I don’t care even though I really don’t but you looking all worn out and tried like you don’t even care so let’s just go about our own way because just like my hear those unspoken words will remain lock up and never be let free. Now don’t let my posture fool you because I am standing here looking like I don’t care when I really do so I guess this is good by but I do want to lest you know that my love to you is true.
For most black teens they grow up in the hood thinking everything that is bad is good. Young black men feel this is a jungle. After taking out one of your brothers you then sit back and wonder.

Am I next? After coming to a conclusion that you were the starter, than your gal call you up and say “I’m Pregnant you finna have a daughter. Broke the news to your mother all she did was scream and shout “She say you 17, you don’t have a job, and you’re a Damn drop Out. “She say your just like your father you’re never going to be shhhhh,

So you go back to your room, you sit and think is that my baby, did the condom really break. You’re unsure you’re very unsure, trying to think but can’t all you hear is your mom scream and shout. So you say forget it I’m going to walk out.

Now your gal she’s 17 and she’s a single mother and you you’re just another brother on the Corner trying to make something out of nothing.

But it’s not your fault I’m sure you want to go to school and finish, you want to go to college and be one of the best football players in the league. You have so many people judging you but they don’t understand you didn’t want to be another brother from the hood, and this isn’t the life you chose but the life you understood.

So you weighing your options and you say only the strong survive. You say you lived but now you’re ready to die, But you didn’t know so many people loved you and thought highly of you.

Your girl blames herself for making you a father at 17.Your teachers blame their self for always moving your desk thinking it was discipline but it was bigger than they thought you felt you were being separated from society. Your mom it hurts her to her gut, because you were her baby boy she was supposed to stand behind you no matter what. But now all she does is cry at night and on Sundays bring flowers to your grave site. To society you’re just another black boy in a grave yard.

But your daughter she deserved to meet you at least, but you feel that all your worries are gone and now you’re at peace.
SPOKEN WORD

Raven Woodard

A Disney Life

If we was on Disney somebody would always draw our faces they make us smile everyday but in reality we faking living life of Walt Disney but feeling like CSI trying to figure out the problem why the hell im hurt inside well umm maybe you can help me here’s the story and how it goes bout happy lil family three deep is how they roll.

Tori she 22 and everyday do the same old shit just cater her lil nig go to sleep and then wake again. Vicky just lost three but still on feet can’t nobody keep her down she make her own self proud.

And raven yeah that’s me got a daddy love to drink and every time the cup go up I just stop and start thinking. Oh man what to do? What to do? What to do? I’ll take any life from Disney my lord no that’s true. Shit anit even picky dallify duck cool and Minnie mickey goofy the dog any life just to take away this petty. I watch 52 every day and the characters play play, and play keep a smile every day But its fakes real fake just as fake as this smile I draw mickey face today. This life it want change this is it.