

HIGHBRIDGE VOICES LITERARY MAGAZINE

Under My Skin

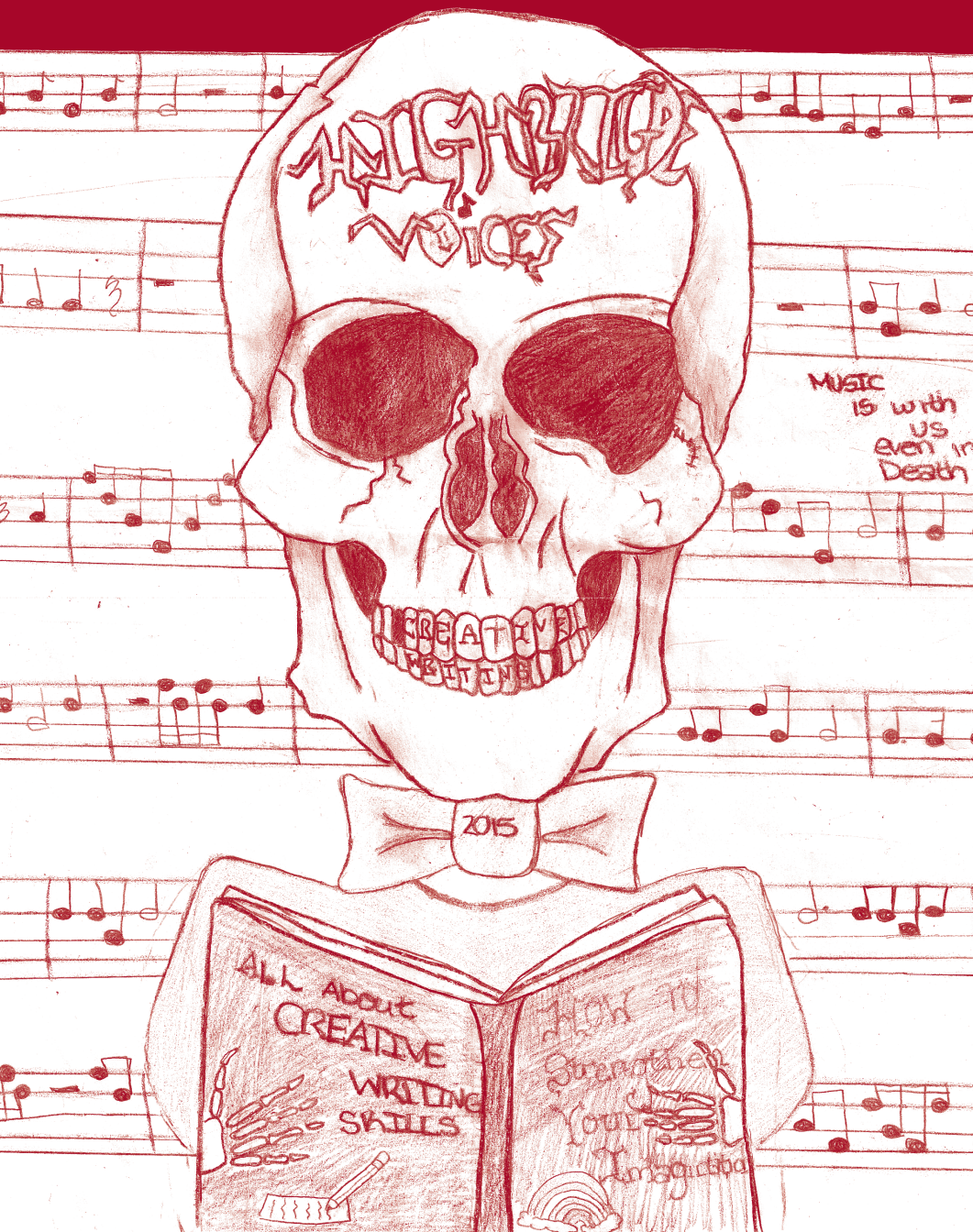


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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the second edition of the Highbridge Voices Literary Magazine. The first edition, released in June 2015, was a smashing success. I couldn't have been more proud to see all the hard work of our students come together in a beautiful volume that was published both online and in hard copy. It was truly a landmark moment for our program.

Now, as we open a new calendar year, our students have matured as thinkers, writers, and, most importantly, as human beings. I believe this second edition reflects their growth. For Volume Two, we took a little bit of a different approach. At the beginning of the semester, I asked students to bat around some ideas for a theme for the issue. Three words kept coming up over and over again: Under. My. Skin.

Under My Skin is a perfect theme for developing writers. It can be interpreted in a number of different ways, but ultimately those three words encouraged our students to dig deep inside themselves and write about some of their more uncomfortable feelings. Consequently, I think this volume is more abstract and, at the same time, more personal. It reflects the idea of "becoming", a word that perfectly describes the often fraught journey of all young people, particularly our students, who face the challenges associated with growing up in the poorest Congressional district in the United States. As you will see from their work, not only are they surviving, they're thriving.

This will be the only edition of the Magazine in 2016 as we turn our Creative Writing class into the engine for the first ever Highbridge Voices original musical. Rest assured, this second edition proves that the literary magazine is now a permanent part of the Highbridge Voices landscape. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Thank you!

Danny Lanzetta
Editor-in-Chief

LIFE IS LIKE...

LIFE IS LIKE...

BY SAMUEL OWUSU

Life is like the sea with its many ways. It can be nice and easy when it sparkles with light, like diamonds in the sunlight, showing off a beauty that everybody wants to see. Or it can be bad and hard, like the sea when a storm has breached the calmness, your body stuck inside the waves as you hope for a way out. Dark and gloomy like a piece of coal, left out in the night, waiting to be lit again.

LIFE IS LIKE

BY NASIR SMITH

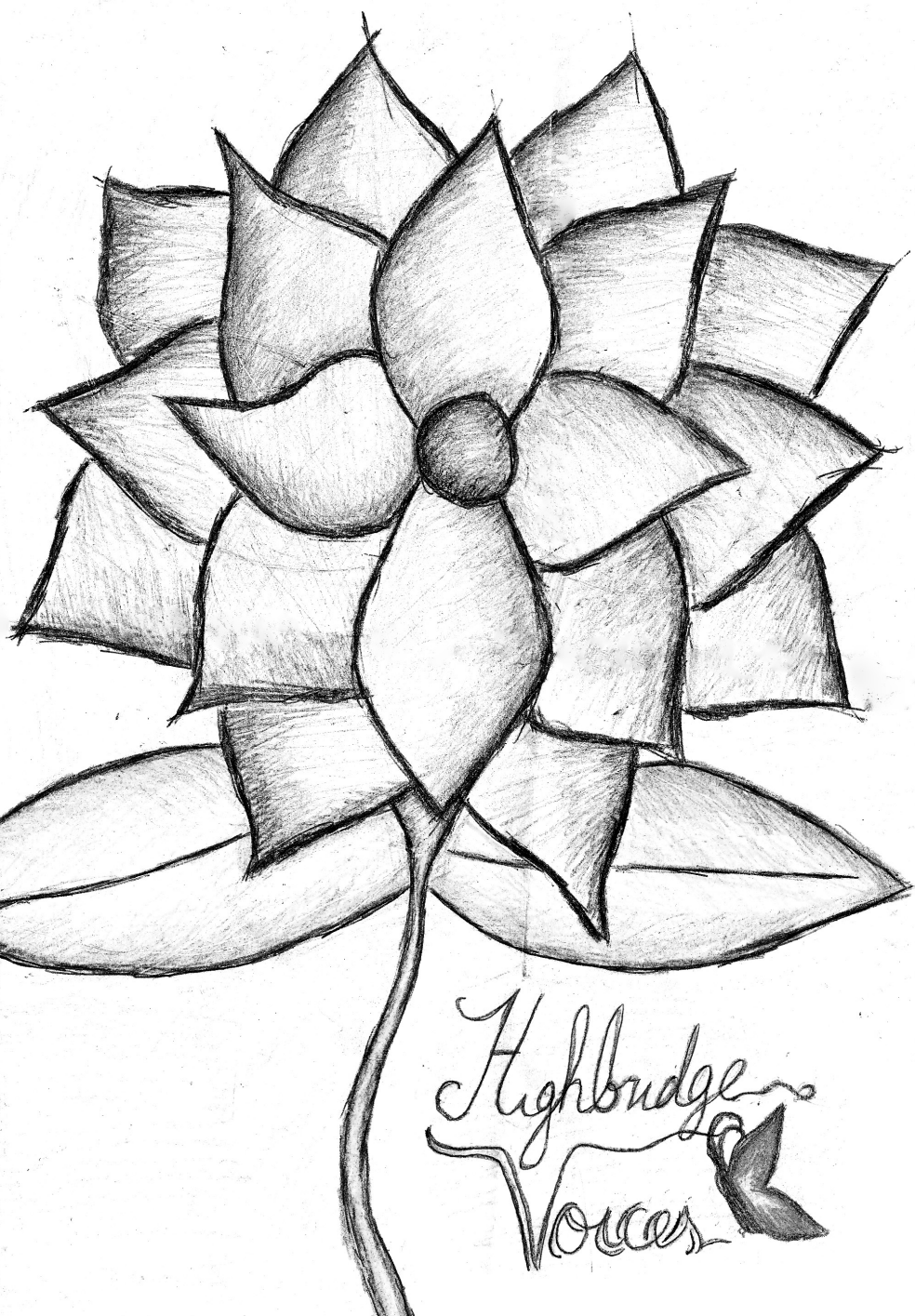
Life is like a butterfly that can't fly.
Life is like the clock that says be here at 5:00 on the dot.
Life is like the world coming to an end.
That's what life is like.

Life is like a dream you have over and over again.
Life is like the dream parties you always wanted.
Life is like an addictive video game.
That's what life is like.

LIFE IS LIKE...

BY DOMINICK VELASQUEZ

Life is a series of endless trails that keep on going without end. Some trails are paved with good memories, while others are bad. But for some reason, the bad ones stick with you more and watch you like a hawk and are always threatening to eat you up. Until you meet someone new and get to know her and laugh and share the good times. Maybe you even start a family with that person and find out life isn't so bad after all.



INSIDE OF ME

WHY WOULD THE SUN TURN BLOODY?

BY ESTHER BONNAH

I see that most people are emo and shy
to know that the sun turns bloody.

Most people will cry when the sun
turns red in its mysterious ways. How
can everyone know that there will be a
bloody sun and no bright yellow days
for the rest of our lives? Why would
anyone listen to the days we have of
this desperate situation, of how and
why the sun turns bloody? Know now
that we are different and the days of
darkness and horror are to come.

UNTITLED

BY ANONYMOUS

Step by step
Walking
Wondering what I would do
When I got to my home.
I walk through the front door thinking,
“Mom, I’m home.”
I laughed at the fact that I lived by myself.
Then:
BOOM!
I saw a huge pair of wings
White and pure as snow.

HAPPINESS

BY ANONYMOUS

I'm like a bear that just found honey,
I'm like a poor man who just found money.
I'm like a bird that just learned to fly,
I feel like a shy kid must around someone who can
express and show how he feels.
I feel like a baby who learned how to talk
And walk.

DARKNESS

BY ZANE SANON

Walking back and front alone in a cave. Only me and a torch. I keep moving. I find different entries to other parts of the caves. Soon I hear whispering. Then squeaking. Then silence... Soon I see a dark figure running to me! I start running as I'm chased by the dark figure. I trip, fall down, and the dark figure jumps on me! I scream waking up from a dream in the darkness of my room.

RAGE

BY DANIELA OWUSU-ANDREWS

I am a thunderstorm
causing destruction
all over.

I am a fire that
is destroying anything
in my path.

I am a tree that
is falling,
destroying a house.

I am a snake
attacking anyone who
comes my way.

SADNESS

BY JUSTIN DUVAL

It's raining outside,
Nothing to hide,
Lying down thinking about rough times,
Nothing to feel,
Emptiness inside,
It's like a curse that makes you go crazy,
But at the same time I'm feeling kinda lazy.
So don't waste any time;
Just let it out and don't let it soak in.
Just let it out;
Don't try to complicate it.
Just like a cloud: soak it in
and let it out.

NOTHING

BY DANIELA VELASQUEZ

The aching of my heart. The stinky sweat on my hands. Makes me feel what I feel. Makes me act how I act. Makes me think what I think. My mouth starts to water as I try not to fumble the words. The feeling is just the same as the taste of chocolate. How it melts in my mouth. The sweetness. The richness. The feeling of comfort. I don't know where this comes from. Probably my brain, my heart. Anywhere. Even the tips of my toes. But ultimately, nothing can explain how I feel.

Absolutely nothing.

HELP

BY ASHELY ALVAREZ

I'm tired. Tired of it all. Seriously, I'm exhausted. I can't run anymore. I'm breathing hard, my legs are giving up. Scratch that...they already collapsed under me. My shaking arms are trying to hold up my hanging head. I ran out of tears even though I never knew how to cry in the first place.

When you look at me and try to speak, I try to forget your voice. You're only an echo as I decide whether I should block you out or try to focus back in. I'm tired. I can't run anymore. I'm not ready to face the music even though I looked for it to comfort me.

My mask is breaking...you can see the dark circles under my eyes. And the color faded away from my cheeks. My light is diminished and my smile is crooked. My vision is blurred, then gone.

I lock myself in a dark room and scream for help.

I do all this but I keep on smiling. The little girl you know of is a used-to-be. All of this behind my head, behind my eyes...

Then I leave saying simply, "I'm sorry. I didn't get that," and walk away.

FIRE

BY DARRIEN SANON

It all started when I was 14.
Fire was everywhere,
Heat radiating off the walls.
But it wasn't hot.
It was warm and comforting.
I had no idea what was happening.
Was I even living anymore?
I felt the warmth crawling beneath my skin.
That was the moment he pulled me out.

MY EMOTIONS

BY DANIELA OWUSU-ANDREWS

I am like a dragon
attacking a village.

I am a lion
attacking its food.

I am a fire
out of control.

But as I write
I slowly feel
like a cloud drifting
through the air.

THE SADNESS IN MY SOUL

BY ZANE SANON

I lie down on my bed and hide my face between my knees as I silently cry to myself. I create a river of tears. I ask myself, "Why? Why? What did I do to deserve this happening to me?" I am the happiest person during the day, yet I always must cry myself to sleep. I cry more tears than when they sky cries on everyone. I go on my phone, tablet, computer looking up funny videos to try and distract myself but my tears still cloud my vision. If I were to play the piano, I would play only sour notes. I go to bed and fall asleep, seeing visions of people saying evil things to me as I cry in my sleep.

HOLIDAY HOUSE

BY MELANIE QUIROZ, AGE 9

You hear the bells and see the snow falling.
Santa comes home;
He is full of jolly.
The candy canes and the sweets are so delicious-
What a treat!
Let's all scream and cheer!
For Christmas is for family here.
Bring the hot cocoa
And smell the gingerbread.
Tears of joy
And no sadness.
Santa brings the elves with him
And says, "Ho ho ho! Merry Christmas!"

THE FEELING OF...

BY SAMUEL OWUSU

I'm like a drug or a double-edged blade: you enjoy it but it's kind of bad for you. You feel like you can't live without it, but when it's gone it's like experiencing withdrawal or getting cut by your own blade. You feel depressed and sad like something inside you has shattered. You feel lost without it, like you're stuck in the darkness, trying to find the light. Waiting and hoping for it to come back. The feeling of...

THE SKIN SHE'S IN

BY BLESSING ADEBISI

They say she's the definition of beauty.

You look at yourself in the bathroom mirror and ask: am I?

They push you against the wall, saying you're as ugly as the woman that
gave birth to you.

You sit there and think, heart shattered and all, as the pretty girls laugh
and call you names.

You get up and run out of the bathroom while drops of sadness run down
your face.

The day finally ends.

As the last bell rings, you run home as fast as you can, into your room
where you shut the door.

You slide down the door frame and start crying hysterically as you look
at the picture sitting on your bed: you and your mother before she passed
away.

You go under your bed, bring out a little box.

You open it and take out a blade. Then you start cutting away.

The pain, it hurts, but it feels good, like a stress reliever, and you continue
to do it until you fall asleep...

A few days pass and your scars are healed, but they look like sugar
skull lips on Halloween night.

You go to school and everyone is looking at you, saying things about you
and causing you to feel worthless.

You say to yourself that no one could love you, they're right, you're
worthless.

But you don't know why they hate you.

Later that day, you start to write in your journal.

She takes your book and starts reading everything out loud, getting the
attention of the whole class.

But now she does the unthinkable.

She says: "You can just go home and kill yourself. No one would care."

That day you come home, straight into your kitchen to grab a knife.

You walk at a slow pace into your room, you set the knife down, grab a
piece of paper and write a note.

You fold it nicely and put it at the corner of your bed.

Then you take a seat, grabbing the knife.
Knowing what you're about to do, you shed one last tear.
You start to stab yourself no matter how bad the pain.
One, two, three...
Now you're gone, looking at everyone, seeing everything.
Your father comes home from a business trip, sees everything, calls the
police.
As the paramedics pronounce you dead, your father is on his knees crying.
Then he sees the note and reads it...

A week later everyone that said they hated you is at your funeral...
Wow.
They all said they didn't care so why are they here?
Your father goes up to the podium and says a few words.
Then he tells everyone that you left a note.
The note says...

By the end of your funeral, your note has everyone in tears.
But you're curious what the note meant to them.
And you think what caught their attention was the last sentence:
"It's because of the skin she's in."

STORIES, ETC.

THE TRUE ADVENTURES OF A PART-TIME HEISTER

AN EXCERPT BY ANGEL FERNANDEZ

Sins. That is all I ever had. (Well, besides the sports cars and high-end apartment).

I can't say I'm not happy, but my life has been crazy. My best friend thinks I am dead. I remember going to prison at 14. I went there to escape my past. To just get away from all the craziness. I do have one good thing now: a family. My wife, a daughter, and a son. Life isn't really that bad.

Most sins I regret. I had many troubles growing up. I lost my parents in a fire started by a gang called the Jurassic Exos. I had vowed to take them out. I have paused my search for them for now because I can't keep committing sins. Most of my life, I've needed guidance that wasn't there. Truth is, my sins are my guidance. My sins are my guidance and my regret all rolled into one. I have done many things that I regret but I will not name them now because they are too brutal. Not kill a child brutal--but brutal.

Back in the day, I went to prison for going on a robbing spree of three stores. It was a challenge from my friends Nikoli and Tyronne. I got caught escaping the third store. They busted me out of prison a week later. We always bailed each other out. We then decided two years later to pull our first big score in a small town named Berne near Albany, New York. I decided to take a quiet approach. We put some knockout gas in the ventilation system of the bank. We took about six thousand dollars in cash. We camped inside our homes for a few weeks and donated the heist clothes to goodwill. Then we split the take evenly. Right after that, was when I met Johnny.

To Be Continued...

UNTITLED

AN EXCERPT BY DANIELA VELASQUEZ

What is it like not to be loved? To not be like others? What is it like to be told:

“You’re Evil.”

“You’re Death.”

“Kill Yourself.”

My hands rush up to my head. I shake it hoping that the voices that are taunting me will disappear. Some of them do but the rest are still lingering in my head.

I lay in a muddy hole wondering, “What has happened to me?” But I still have no answer. My head tilts up and I eyeball the black sky. The black sky with beautiful stars. I get up, finally coming to my senses. I feel as if this is a déjà vu moment because this happened more than once. Many times, in fact.

It’s been almost 6 hours trying to fetch food for my crooked home where everything is broken and dead. We never have enough food, so I’m the one left with the job of finding some.

I continue to walk through the ridged forest until a mysterious voice echoes through the trees.

“Who’s there?”

Silence fills the area. Suddenly my body starts to steam and it feels as if I’m hearing ten times better than I normally do.

“This isn’t funny! If you want something from me, come out and say it!”

The rustling stops and there is silence. Dead silence.

I start to panic. And before I even think of running, a small red drop, super small, super quiet, falls onto the middle of my forehead. That one drop makes my head tilt up and stare in confusion. Then, a sudden realization: I have to run. But I don’t. I stare into the sky, above my head to see the horror of a dead little girl with a shocked look on her face, hanging from a tall tree.

“Oh... my...God...”

MY TRUE STORY

SAMUEL OWUSU

I was walking down the street, minding my own business, when a bullet flew right by my head. I ducked down, looking around to see where the bullet came from. I saw and noticed that I was in the middle of a gang fight that had just sprung up. I hid underneath a car hoping nobody would notice me. I heard the impact of a bullet connecting with flesh and bones, a man's scream. I closed my eyes, hoping that this was all a dream, that I would wake up from this horrible nightmare.

A shadow covered the floor near the car I was hiding underneath. My heart rapidly started beating as the shadow got closer and closer. Soon it was right in front of me. I was about to scream.

BANG! BANG! THUD!

Those were the next sounds I heard. The shadow on the floor started to get darker and darker until a body replaced with the shadow. I screamed into my hand hoping nobody would hear. The blood started to soak out of what I knew was a dead man's body. The sound of the gunshots finally ceased, and I thought it was over, until I heard a voice say, "Yo, there's a kid hiding underneath the car."

My heart caught in my throat as they dragged me out. I started to cry as they peppered me with questions and took all of my valuables. Then the leader of the group pointed his gun at my head and started to pull the trigger.

BANG!

I woke up rubbing my head because I had just slammed it against the headboard of my bed. I sat up and thought about how real that dream—no, nightmare—felt, and was glad that it was all in my head.

1992 NBA EASTERN CONFERENCE FINALS: KNICKS VS. BULLS (A RE-IMAGINING)

AN EXCERPT BY KHALID CHAPMAN

Concourse Village: 5/14/92—9:30 a.m.

After a 32-point game in Game 5 and an MVP trophy, I'm pretty confident about playing against Jordan, Pippen, and the Bulls. I'm excited to see what John Starks and Patrick Ewing are going to do for the Knicks today. Our team needs to have 110% teamwork. If we win, then we go down in history. If we don't, then...sigh...then we're just another team.

Rucker Park, Harlem: 5/14/92—9:43 a.m.

To start off, I just practiced jump shots in Rucker Park, then played some pick-up games with the kids in the park. It's the end of the week and I want to end it with a win. All the blood, sweat, and tears I shed on that court. I want this bad.

Madison Square Garden: 5/14/92—6:00 p.m.

When I got to the Garden, I was ready to play. I went through the front entrance to see how many people were there. When I saw the huge crowd, I became even more motivated. After getting dressed, I came out of the tunnel and a 15-year-old boy by the name of Danny Lanzetta requested "big buckets." After that, the goal is 45 points.

Aftermath: 5/14/92—11:30 p.m.

"Amazing performance by Anderson Curry!" That's going to be the headline tomorrow. I'm satisfied with myself today. With the help of John Starks, Xavier McDaniel, Big Patrick Ewing, and Anthony Mason, we were unstoppable.

THE GUILT

AN EXCERPT BY JUSTIN DUVAL

I remember feeling like I had to pull the trigger. I didn't feel like I had any other choice.

My name is Jace. I have a dark past. I lost my mom when I was five. My father left my family to fulfill his dream. I was left with my big brother John. Our mom left us \$10,000 to live on. We bought a small apartment. To maintain our money, my brother got a job at McDonalds. It will at least give us enough to buy food.

My brother woke me up one night. He said, "Jace, wake up. I have to tell you something."

"What John?" I said

He hesitated. "I...I have to do some errands. Be right back, OK?"

"Alright. Don't take long," I said.

Later that night, when he still hadn't come back, I started thinking: "Where is he? Errands shouldn't take this long."

The next morning, I packed up to go search for him. He'd told me where he kept his pistol. He said to use it for emergencies. I thought this situation counted. I took the gun along with some Kool-Aid and Pringles.

I started walking down the street. I searched for him all day and eventually got lost. I didn't know where I was, but I suddenly had a feeling I was being followed. I ran into a dark alley and saw a man chasing me. I came to a dead end and had only one option. I turned around, pulled out my gun and pointed it at the man chasing me. The mysterious man shouted, "Don't do it!" I pulled the trigger. BANG went the pistol.

I approached the fallen figure and saw with horror what I already somehow knew...

It was my brother.

PROLOGUE

AN EXCERPT BY KAYLA DE MUNDO

Life can be chaotic sometimes, especially when you're dealing with something big in your life. Something that is thrown at you unexpectedly and you have no time to dodge it. So it hits you. Hard.

My name is Katerina, Kat for short. I've lived my life with boys, my dad and my brother. I'm 14 years old and without my mom. Well, until three months ago. It was a last minute thing that blew up in my face. It all started with a little talk from my father.

Flashback

"Dad, can you just tell me?" I say. My father was sitting in front of me with a frown on his face. He wanted to tell me something but he refuses to spit it out. I was getting worried.

"Well, you know your mom had a problem I never told you about." My breath hitched as he scanned my face for a reaction.

I stared at him for a moment before I could speak. "Yeah," I said. "You wanted to wait until I was old enough." I shut my eyes, hoping the news wouldn't be as terrible as I imagined it. It turns out it was worse. Much worse.

"Your mom hung out with the wrong crowd. She got involved with some stuff. Drugs and illegal stuff." He searched my eyes, which were getting watery and threatening to overflow. A sob involuntarily escaped from my throat.

"OK. And why are you telling me this now?" I asked, confused, tears now streaming down my face.

"Well... your mother is...she's in the hospital," he said hesitantly.

And everything went blank.



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