Empty and beautiful
Yet FULL of the SEA
Volumes I, II, & III
Empty and Beautiful Yet Full of the Sea

Volumes I, II, & III

Poems and Prose from the Adolescents of the Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital
The poems and prose pieces included here were written by the young people in the Adolescent Program at Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital in Nashville, TN, between September 2013 and June 2016. While in residence, youth between the ages of 13 and 18 attended weekly writing workshops provided by Southern Word, a local non-profit organization that offers creative solutions to teach literacy and provide social and emotional support for youth to help them succeed in life.

Stays in the program are typically brief and, thus, writer mentors Melissa Gordon, MSW, Kelly Falzone, MS Ed, Shawn Whitsell, Dylan Phillips, Lee Conell, and Benjamin Smith met with most of the teens only once, though some teens were able to attend two or more sessions during their stay. The ninety minute workshops included writing prompts and performance exercises, as well as sharing of new writing. Participants were offered the opportunity to submit work for this anthology, with a guardian’s permission, that would be published under a pseudonym. Editing for space, readability, confidentiality, and illegible handwriting was sometimes necessary for inclusion.

Southern Word believes that through words all youth can claim the power to determine their future. We are absolutely committed to providing young people, especially from underserved (and under-heard) communities, with the chance to develop and publicly present their voices. We ask you to join us in celebrating the brave and often misunderstood youth of this anthology who share their stories, struggles, hopes and healing, all of them breaking the silence that often surrounds mental health diagnosis and the stigma associated with seeking services and support.

For more information, referral, or crisis intervention assistance from Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital for children, adolescents, and adults, please call (615) 320-7770 or visit www.vanderbilthealth.com.

To learn more about Southern Word programs or events, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to support the work, please contact us at info@southernword.org or visit www.southernword.org.

This project is a collaboration between Southern Word and Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital. All rights to work included here belong to the authors who have given permission for this publication. This chapbook is made possible through the support of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, Metro Nashville Arts Commission, Tennessee Arts Commission, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Book design and photos by Amy Ashida.

Compilation and editing by Melissa Gordon, Kelly Falzone, Shawn Whitsell, Dylan Phillips, Lee Conell, and Benjamin Smith.

Printing by Vanderbilt Campus Copy, Nashville, TN.

The poems and prose pieces included here were written by the young people in the Adolescent Program at Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital in Nashville, TN, between September 2013 and June 2016. While in residence, youth between the ages of 13 and 18 attended weekly writing workshops provided by Southern Word, a local non-profit organization that offers creative solutions to teach literacy and provide social and emotional support for youth to help them succeed in life.

Stays in the program are typically brief and, thus, writer mentors Melissa Gordon, MSW, Kelly Falzone, MS Ed, Shawn Whitsell, Dylan Phillips, Lee Conell, and Benjamin Smith met with most of the teens only once, though some teens were able to attend two or more sessions during their stay. The ninety minute workshops included writing prompts and performance exercises, as well as sharing of new writing. Participants were offered the opportunity to submit work for this anthology, with a guardian’s permission, that would be published under a pseudonym. Editing for space, readability, confidentiality, and illegible handwriting was sometimes necessary for inclusion.

Southern Word believes that through words all youth can claim the power to determine their future. We are absolutely committed to providing young people, especially from underserved (and under-heard) communities, with the chance to develop and publicly present their voices. We ask you to join us in celebrating the brave and often misunderstood youth of this anthology who share their stories, struggles, hopes and healing, all of them breaking the silence that often surrounds mental health diagnosis and the stigma associated with seeking services and support.

For more information, referral, or crisis intervention assistance from Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital for children, adolescents, and adults, please call (615) 320-7770 or visit www.vanderbilthealth.com.

To learn more about Southern Word programs or events, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to support the work, please contact us at info@southernword.org or visit www.southernword.org.
Empty and beautiful yet full of
The sea
The sea is enchanting, intensely captivating
There is the smell of salt and
Surprises
Swimming with sharks, but not
Knowing the danger beforehand
Waiting for waves, patient as the
Sea itself
Tossing and turning
Things change and
Nothing good can stay

-Katherine
I am from trilling, operatic grandmothers, humming in the living room while sweet delights bubble and bake.
I am from looking back and seeing my family shrink before my eyes.
I am from working to start over, again and again, making do as well as we can.
I am from far-off countries, joined together from cultures and ideas of every kind.
I am from hard work and toil: blood, seat, and tears.
I am from welcoming faces when you walk in the door, always ready to listen and argue you to the ground.

I am home
I am from a lonely room. Nowhere to go, nowhere to contact, Listening to my classmates, making friends, I am from being yelled at by my parents and friends. I am from getting, and forgetting in trouble, overall I am able to live. I am home.

-Chase

-Kristen
I am from trilling, operatic grandmothers, humming in the living room while sweet delights bubble and bake.
I am from looking back and seeing my family shrink before my eyes.
I am from working to start over, again and again, making do as well as we can.
I am from far-off countries, joined together from cultures and ideas of every kind.
I am from hard work and toil: blood, seat, and tears.
I am from welcoming faces when you walk in the door, always ready to listen and argue you to the ground.

I am home
I am from a lonely room.
Nowhere to go, nowhere to contact,
Listening to my classmates, making friends,
I am from being yelled at by my parents and friends.
I am from getting, and forgetting in trouble, overall I am able to live.
I am home.

-Chase

-Kristen
I am from a gated community.
Where going outside without designer clothes is a crime.
I have a nice home where I hate spending time.
Because when I drive up the long hill to my abode,
the pressure is on;
To be a conformist, even though I don’t have a Man.
I know everything’s fine when I see my dog playing
on the tennis court.
But then I come home to find my dad asleep
in his fort.
While Yolando is baking dinner, I sit and make
her help me with homework because I’m a sinner.
I know cheating and lying is bad, but who cares –
My dad won’t know and that’s something I’ve always had.

-Winding lines and slippery floors,
Laughter, humidity and whiffs of popcorn.
Banjo music and flickering lights,
Hot in the morning but a light breeze at night.
Drips of waters and drips of ice cream,
Flashes of cameras to capture excited screams.
Sweaty heads and ticking clocks,
When they’re happy I wish time would stop.
The Mickey Mouse hats and the kid with a scraped knee,
Witness all of this in line at Disney.

-Emily

-Sarah
I am from a gated community.
Where going outside without designer clothes is a crime.
I have a nice home where I hate spending time.
Because when I drive up the long hill to my abode, 
the pressure is on;
To be a conformist, even though I don’t have a Man.
I know everything’s fine when I see my dog playing 
on the tennis court.
But then I come home to find my dad asleep 
in his fort.
While Yolando is baking dinner, I sit and make 
her help me with homework because I’m a sinner.
I know cheating and lying is bad, but who cares – 
My dad won’t know and that’s something I’ve always had.

-Winding lines and slippery floors,
Laughter, humidity and whiffs of popcorn.
Banjo music and flickering lights,
Hot in the morning but a light breeze at night.
Drips of waters and drips of ice cream,
Flashes of cameras to capture excited screams.
Sweaty heads and ticking clocks,
When they’re happy I wish time would stop.
The Mickey Mouse hats and the kid with a scraped knee,
Witness all of this in line at Disney.

-Emily

-Sarah
I gave you a key to open the
door to the darkest parts of my mind.
I gave you a map to walk my path
and keep the secrets you find.
I gave you the power to rub my thoughts,
and keep my emotions aligned.
I gave you the cage to lock up the
Dark and keep my life refined.

- Donovan

I gave you my heart, every ounce of my
being terrified of making you my everything. I
was worried I was too weird: you were worried I
wouldn’t like your beard. Little did we know we
would be each other’s salvation. . . Pulling each
other up from the darkness of damnation. If
you don’t gotchyu, I gotchyu. Para siempre we
will help each other through.

- Bambi
I gave you a key to open the door to the darkest parts of my mind.
I gave you a map to walk my path and keep the secrets you find.
I gave you the power to rub my thoughts, and keep my emotions aligned.
I gave you the cage to lock up the Dark and keep my life refined.

-I gave you my heart, every ounce of my being terrified of making you my everything. I was worried I was too weird; you were worried I wouldn’t like your beard. Little did we know we would be each other’s salvation... Pulling each other up from the darkness of damnation. If you don’t gotchyu, I gotchyu. Para siempre we will help each other through.

- Donovan

- Bambi
I’m not who you think I am
I am not strong like Zeus
I don’t have a black heart
I’m not cold like Alaska
I can’t operate like a computer
I was once just a little American girl
With a pink personality and teal shoes
I played with Legos
I knew nothing of love
I listened to tales of Big Foot and tried to catch
Santa leaving us presents
That girl’s not gone forever
I still have an imagination and hopes to travel
from Canada to Alaska
I’m full of potential and ready to move forward.

-Emily

To Me, From Me

you’re a hopeless warrior,
committed to your leader,
but a hopeful traveller,
  wandering with all the answers
a floating dandelion in the wind,
  I am hiding in the ghost of your sin
you’re a frightened sleeper
  dreaming of a better world
but a courageous teacher,
  learning to live
little rain cloud in the sky
  I am hiding in the whisper of your goodbye

-Julie
I’m not who you think I am
I am not strong like Zeus
I don’t have a black heart
I’m not cold like Alaska
I can’t operate like a computer
I was once just a little American girl
With a pink personality and teal shoes
I played with Legos
I knew nothing of love
I listened to tales of Big Foot and tried to catch Santa leaving us presents
That girl’s not gone forever
I still have an imagination and hopes to travel from Canada to Alaska
I’m full of potential and ready to move forward.

-To Me, From Me-

you’re a hopeless warrior,
committed to your leader,
but a hopeful traveller,
wandering with all the answers
a floating dandelion in the wind,
I am hiding in the ghost of your sin

you’re a frightened sleeper
dreaming of a better world
but a courageous teacher,
learning to live

little rain cloud in the sky
I am hiding in the whisper of your goodbye

-Emily

-Julie
The Voice of the Mental

An opera singer, emotions belting through shallow halls, echoing and reverberating with pure, unfiltered feeling.

A low tiger’s snarl of rage, escalating into a deep-throated growl of warning and anticipation.

A child crying, voice rattling with pain of a world only just being discovered.

A rabid dog, biting and howling against its oppressors until whimpers of pain and regret spew from its jaws after having its tail stepped on.

A buzzing coffee shop atmosphere, calm chatter pulsing like a wave up and down, loud and soft.

A single cricket singing in the night after all has gone silent, a cry to the insomniacs making love to the stars.

A young gay man, preaching to his friends about love and acceptance while the sorrow of an ignorant family follows his words.

The silence of a funeral, full of broken tears and stifled cries, pain hanging in the air, unmoving but processing.

The emotions of them, screeching pain, roaring anger, sobbing abandonment, silent depression, profane and raw emotion.

-Skye
The Voice of the Mental

An opera singer, emotions belting through shallow halls, echoing and reverberating with pure, unfiltered feeling.

A low tiger’s snarl of rage, escalating into a deep-throated growl of warning and anticipation.

A child crying, voice rattling with pain of a world only just being discovered.

A rabid dog, biting and howling against its oppressors until whimpers of pain and regret spew from its jaws after having its tail stepped on.

A buzzing coffee shop atmosphere, calm chatter pulsing like a wave up and down, loud and soft.

A single cricket singing in the night after all has gone silent, a cry to the insomniacs making love to the stars.

A young gay man, preaching to his friends about love and acceptance while the sorrow of an ignorant family follows his words.

The silence of a funeral, full of broken tears and stifled cries, pain hanging in the air, unmoving but processing.

The emotions of them, screeching pain, roaring anger, sobbing abandonment, silent depression, profane and raw emotion.

-Skye
My Quest

I wear my crisp white sweater on my passionate voyage to get my first Pokémon. On my quest, I stumble up to the Parthenon. Tinker Bell asks if I’d like to go inside. If I don’t find anything, I will never earn my mother’s approval. As I trudge through the beige hallways, I enter a tunnel formed by Slinkys. I run into a few aliens, who tell me where to go. I enter into the room they lead me to, and eventually find another door with Hercules painted on it. I open it to find the love of my life, a pink snorlax. I run to my home as fast as possible, passing Dollywood on my way. When I get to Opry Mills, I burst through the door to find my family watching “Power Rangers,” with no care as to if I was successful.

-Green

Anxiety

Anxiety strikes at the strangest moments. It devours all of your love and happiness. You feel worthless and scared. It is like a black hole swallowing you deep into the Earth. In reality, you are at the mall with your friends, but in your mind, you are in some other universe. This universe is filled with multi-headed reptiles and other horrifying mythical creatures. Everything is different shades of blue. It is calming to be surrounded by sky blues and aquas and turquoises. You are in a panic but everything seems to be in slow motion. Back in reality, people are attempting to calm you down, but you are calm. This is where you belong. Each time you go deeper and deeper into this universe until one day you are gone. One day you just become numb to reality. This is when people begin to worry, but it is too late. The universe has swallowed you whole.

-Fern
My Quest

I wear my crisp white sweater on my passionate voyage to get my first Pokémon. On my quest, I stumble up to the Parthenon. Tinker Bell asks if I’d like to go inside. If I don’t find anything, I will never earn my mother’s approval. As I trudge through the beige hallways, I enter a tunnel formed by Slinkys. I run into a few aliens, who tell me where to go. I enter into the room they lead me to, and eventually find another door with Hercules painted on it. I open it to find the love of my life, a pink snorlax. I run to my home as fast as possible, passing Dollywood on my way. When I get to Opry Mills, I burst through the door to find my family watching “Power Rangers,” with no care as to if I was successful.

-Green

Anxiety

Anxiety strikes at the strangest moments. It devours all of your love and happiness. You feel worthless and scared. It is like a black hole swallowing you deep into the Earth. In reality, you are at the mall with your friends, but in your mind, you are in some other universe. This universe is filled with multi-headed reptiles and other horrifying mythical creatures. Everything is different shades of blue. It is calming to be surrounded by sky blues and aquas and turquoises. You are in a panic but everything seems to be in slow motion. Back in reality, people are attempting to calm you down, but you are calm. This is where you belong. Each time you go deeper and deeper into this universe until one day you are gone. One day you just become numb to reality. This is when people begin to worry, but it is too late. The universe has swallowed you whole.

-Fern
I’m not who I say I am.
I’m not Wonder Woman with a gold cape. I’m a shy kid who wears a mask.
I go to church, but not every Sunday.
I obey the rules in school, but not at home. I smile, but I’m sad.
I’m “happy” around people but sad at home.
I’m not who I say I am.

- Shadow S.

I’m not who I say I am.
I’m from the projects where the real stuff happens, The struggle of truth.
I’m from where you see people
Robbing others to just support
Their family.
I’m from the place where you
Smell the stench of the floor
Rotting away.
I’m from the projects.

- Amber
Masks

I’m not who I say I am.
I’m not Wonder Woman with a gold cape. I’m a shy kid who wears a mask.
I go to church, but not every Sunday.
I obey the rules in school, but not at home. I smile, but I’m sad.
I’m “happy” around people but sad at home.
I’m not who I say I am.

-Shadow S.

I’m From

I’m from the projects where the real stuff happens, The struggle of truth.
I’m from where you see people Robbing others to just support Their family.
I’m from the place where you Smell the stench of the floor Rotting away.
I’m from the projects.

-Amber
Finally

I saw people smiling and him so serious.
I heard people laughing til night.
I felt his soft hand grip mine.
I smelled the grass freshly cut and the cologne he wore.
My mind buzzes with judgment and worry.
I really don’t care anymore.
As I tasted a soft cold breeze,
we finally handled each other’s hands.

-Amber

I’m From

I’m from highways and guardrails
so I didn’t get hit.
I’m from two different houses with two different backgrounds.
I’m from a small town where news flies fast,
where everyone knows my future, present, past.
I’m from “you have pretty hair” to “you look like a spawn from hell.”
I’m from a musical home.

-Chelsea
Finally
I saw people smiling and him so serious.
I heard people laughing til night.
I felt his soft hand grip mine.
I smelled the grass freshly cut and the cologne he wore.
My mind buzzes with judgment and worry.
I really don’t care anymore.
As I tasted a soft cold breeze,
we finally handled each other’s hands.

-Amber

I’m From
I’m from highways and guardrails so I didn’t get hit.
I’m from two different houses with two different backgrounds.
I’m from a small town where news flies fast, where everyone knows my future, present, past.
I’m from “you have pretty hair” to “you look like a spawn from hell.”
I’m from a musical home.

-Chelsea
Here’s To:
The kids who have an open mind.
The kids who believe you don’t have to follow the crowd to be “normal.”
Here’s to the kids who think that being different is okay.
Here’s to the kids who want to help people when they can help themselves, because they know what sadness feels like.
They don’t judge a book by its cover and actually get to know them.
Here’s to the kids who try to make this world a better place and aren’t gonna stop until they get what they want.

-Chelsea

You.....
I miss the old you....
The one who was my best friend for years.
The one who was just like me in every little way.
The one who helped me get through EVERYTHING.
I didn’t care how broken you were,
I was just as broken.
Every day, I loved talking to you.
I know you understood.
I could never share what I told you with anyone else. I loved you so, so much.
I loved you so much.
We became something more.
Even though I couldn’t see you at school every day anymore,
It didn’t mean I would leave your side.
Your gentle voice and smiling face gave me comfort.
Here’s To:
The kids who have an open mind.
The kids who believe you don’t have to follow
the crowd to be “normal.”
Here’s to the kids who think that being different
is okay.
Here’s to the kids who want to help people when
they can help
themselves, because they know what sadness
feels like.
They don’t judge a book by its cover and
actually get to know them.
Here’s to the kids who try to make this world a
better place
and aren’t gonna stop until they get what they
want.

- Chelsea

You…..
I miss the old you....
The one who was my best friend for years.
The one who was just like me in every little way.
The one who helped me get through
EVERYTHING.
I didn’t care how broken you were,
I was just as broken.
Every day, I loved talking to you.
I know you understood.
I could never share what I told you with anyone
else. I loved you so, so much.
I loved you so much.
We became something more.
Even though I couldn’t see you at school every
day anymore,
It didn’t mean I would leave your side.
Your gentle voice and smiling face gave me
comfort.
The light of my life was you. 
You eventually became the light I needed to see through the dark. 
That’s when you broke my heart and shattered it to pieces. 
You weren’t the person I thought you were. 
All of a sudden just leaving me. 
Stopped talking to me, 
Never even telling me why. 
I fl ooded my room with tears. 
How could you possibly do this? 
I didn’t do anything, did I? 
A few months later, 
You begged for me back. 

My heart listened. 
You broke every single promise you made. My heart didn’t even become shattered. 
It became crushed, 
It became sand. 
Where did my real best friend go? 
I ended up being a fi x to your self-esteem. 
I miss the old you. 
Everything you’ve done to me has left me with pain. 
Trust no one. 
Trust nothing. 
Not even your heart.

-Sarah
The light of my life was you.
You eventually became the light I needed to see through the dark.
That’s when you broke my heart and shattered it to pieces.
You weren’t the person I thought you were.
All of a sudden just leaving me.
Stopped talking to me,
Never even telling me why.
I fl ooded my room with tears.
How could you possibly do this?
I didn’t do anything, did I?
A few months later,
You begged for me back.

My heart listened.
You broke every single promise you made. My heart didn’t even become shattered.
It became crushed,
It became sand.
Where did my real best friend go?
I ended up being a fi x to your self-esteem.
I miss the old you.
Everything you’ve done to me has left me with pain.
Trust no one.
Trust nothing.
Not even your heart.

-Sarah
Being judged but not having control
Walking around with everyone else speaking
Wearing a mask you can’t take off
Breathing but not getting air
Knowing who you are but not saying it
Waiting for someone to love me but pushing everyone away
Having no say
Feeling hopeless
Yelling and fighting
Second-guessing myself
Not loving myself
Hating how I felt

Crying for help
Wanting acceptance but never receiving it
Waiting for someone to love me but pushing everyone away
Loneliness is a door
Keeping me in
Separating me from life
Darkness closing
Not letting me out
Everyone looking at me through the window
Laughing
Waiting for someone to love me but pushing everyone away

-Porsha
Being judged but not having control
Walking around with everyone else speaking
Wearing a mask you can’t take off
Breathing but not getting air
Knowing who you are but not saying it
Waiting for someone to love me but pushing everyone away
Having no say
Feeling hopeless
Yelling and fighting
Second-guessing myself
Not loving myself
Hating how I felt

Crying for help
Wanting acceptance but never receiving it
Waiting for someone to love me but pushing everyone away
Loneliness is a door
Keeping me in
Separating me from life
Darkness closing
Not letting me out
Everyone looking at me through the window
Laughing
Waiting for someone to love me but pushing everyone away

-Porsha
**Baby Giraffe**

I am a baby giraffe  
Standing for the first time  
Living life by the spin of a dime  
It’s such a crime to stand up easily  
The weird person runs its hand through my curly hair  
It’s not fair that they think I’m an animal  
They scare me out of my mind like a cannibal  
All I want is a passion  
To spend my little giraffe life on  
Like fashion or something creative  
My life would be so happy  
If only I had a passion  
For my little giraffe lessons  

-Harmony

**The Tree House**

There is a dense forest with old trees. When you look around it looks like a never-ending dark and gloomy place. It smells like rain. You can hear thunder in the distance, along with the hoot of the wise owl. In the center of the sad and angry forest, there is a tree house. An old beat-up tree house. It is falling apart. It is empty inside. On the outside there is withered wood and cracks showing years of hurt. It looks as if many people have broken the structure. The forest is my mind. The tree house is my heart. Darkness, hurt, brokenness, and emptiness is what my heart looks like.

-Ida
Baby Giraffe

I am a baby giraffe
Standing for the first time
Living life by the spin of a dime
It’s such a crime to stand up easily
The weird person runs its hand through my curly hair
It’s not fair that they think I’m an animal
They scare me out of my mind like a cannibal
All I want is a passion
To spend my little giraffe life on
Like fashion or something creative
My life would be so happy
If only I had a passion
For my little giraffe lessons

-Harmony

The Tree House

There is a dense forest with old trees. When you look around it looks like a never-ending dark and gloomy place. It smells like rain. You can hear thunder in the distance, along with the hoot of the wise owl. In the center of the sad and angry forest, there is a tree house. An old beat-up tree house. It is falling apart. It is empty inside. On the outside there is withered wood and cracks showing years of hurt. It looks as if many people have broken the structure. The forest is my mind. The tree house is my heart. Darkness, hurt, brokenness, and emptiness is what my heart looks like.

-Ida
The View Outside the Window

My favorite place to go is my bathroom. I know it might sound weird, but let me explain before you start making judgments. I like my bathroom for many reasons. One reason is because it’s calming. Whenever I need to escape from people I go to my bathroom to get some peace and quiet. Another reason is because it has an air freshener in it that smells like caramel. Caramel is my favorite candy and smell. It reminds me of a lot of happy moments in my past. My bathroom is painted a really calming color: sky blue. Whenever I walk in, I feel like I’m in the sky. I always keep the window in my bathroom open, so if it’s sunny, the sun will shine in.

My all-time favorite part of my bathroom is the view outside the window: There’s an old tree you can see from the window that’s probably fifty years old. My grandmother planted this tree when she was in her twenties. Every time I look out the window I think of her and smile.

-Shadow S.

Things I Have Not Learned

I am not who I say I am. I am not the passionate white boy I seem to be. I am alienated from the world, only living by things I have not learned. I try so hard every day to keep my insides beige, to get others not to see me as Hercules. The expectation to be as powerful as a Power Ranger is my biggest fear because if I am not that powerful, their perception of me fades like a Slinky going downstairs. I am looking for love with pink lenses and a black reality. Everyone thinks opportunities are around me like Tinker Bell is around Peter Pan. All I see ahead is Opry Mills on a Monday night at seven o’clock.

-CL.
**Things I Have Not Learned**

I am not who I say I am. I am not the passionate white boy I seem to be. I am alienated from the world, only living by things I have not learned. I try so hard every day to keep my insides beige, to get others not to see me as Hercules. The expectation to be as powerful as a Power Ranger is my biggest fear because if I am not that powerful, their perception of me fades like a Slinky going downstairs. I am looking for love with pink lenses and a black reality. Everyone thinks opportunities are around me like Tinker Bell is around Peter Pan. All I see ahead is Opry Mills on a Monday night at seven o’clock.

-C.L.

**The View Outside the Window**

My favorite place to go is my bathroom. I know it might sound weird, but let me explain before you start making judgments. I like my bathroom for many reasons. One reason is because it's calming. Whenever I need to escape from people I go to my bathroom to get some peace and quiet. Another reason is because it has an air freshener in it that smells like caramel. Caramel is my favorite candy and smell. It reminds me of a lot of happy moments in my past. My bathroom is painted a really calming color: sky blue. Whenever I walk in, I feel like I’m in the sky. I always keep the window in my bathroom open, so if it’s sunny, the sun will shine in.

My all-time favorite part of my bathroom is the view outside the window: There’s an old tree you can see from the window that’s probably fifty years old. My grandmother planted this tree when she was in her twenties. Every time I look out the window I think of her and smile.

-Shadow S.
Does He Really Care?

His brown eyes kill me. They’re soft and sweet, unlike his harsh composure. He seems like Blaze’s version of a loner. To most people, he’s rude and rough, but to me he’s kind and gentle. He actually listens to me unlike everyone else. Most people just ignore me, but he doesn’t. He is slowly becoming a close friend in this dark world. When I talk to him, everything else fades to grey. When he smiles, I can’t stop staring. His laughter is my drug. Am I falling in love? No... This can’t be...

He wouldn’t want me...
I’m nothing, my eyes he calls “beautiful” are dark caverns.
No emotion shows through them.
I’m ugly, everyone back home agrees.
I’m helpless.
Hopeless.
I’m better off alone...
Better off dead.
No, I’m not allowed to have these feelings.
I’m not allowed to feel lost every time he looks away...
When he looks at me, I freeze Motionless. I stare into those soft brown eyes. Does he really care?

-Hannah
Does He Really Care?

His brown eyes kill me.
They’re soft and sweet, unlike his harsh composure.
He seems like Blaze’s version of a loner.
To most people, he’s rude and rough, but to me He’s kind and gentle.
He actually listens to me unlike everyone else. Most people just ignore me, but he doesn’t.
He is slowly becoming a close friend in this dark world.
When I talk to him, everything else fades to grey. When he smiles, I can’t stop staring.
His laughter is my drug.
Am I falling in love?
No...
This can’t be...

He wouldn’t want me...
I’m nothing, my eyes he calls “beautiful” are dark caverns.
No emotion shows through them.
I’m ugly, everyone back home agrees.
I’m helpless.
Hopeless.
I’m better off alone...
Better off dead.
No, I’m not allowed to have these feelings.
I’m not allowed to feel lost every time he looks away...
When he looks at me, I freeze Motionless.
I stare into those soft brown eyes. Does he really care?

-Hannah
The Love of My Life

He was the love of my life but he was a lowlife
McDonald’s worker
for twenty years.
As we kissed, he smelled of stale buns.
His hands felt like old McNuggets.
His hair reeked of fryer grease.
I only truly loved him for these reasons.
And the discount.

-Green

Do As You Wish

Loyalty is faux, as if it were the Easter Bunny.
In Church I ask God, “Why must my wonder woman?”
Big Foot got shot with the Love gun,
not the Nerf Gun—come on.
“I’ll let you see.”
Thy heart turns cold, though it must be Gold....
The silver Slinky just falls down the stairs.
Centennial Park was the place to be
while the world is so obscene.
Throw a football like you love it, baby, because
trust is not for me.

-C.N.
The Love of My Life

He was the love of my life but he was a lowlife
McDonald’s worker
for twenty years.
As we kissed, he smelled of stale buns.
His hands felt like old McNuggets.
His hair reeked of fryer grease.
I only truly loved him for these reasons.
And the discount.

-Green

Do As You Wish

Loyalty is faux, as if it were the Easter Bunny.
In Church I ask God, “Why must my wonder
woman?”
Big Foot got shot with the Love gun,
not the Nerf Gun—come on.
“I’ll let you see.”
Thy heart turns cold, though it must be Gold....
The silver Slinky just falls down the stairs.
Centennial Park was the place to be
while the world is so obscene.
Throw a football like you love it, baby, because
trust is not for me.

-C.N.
Life's Game

When you think about struggles in your life, it feels like a battle. It’s you versus life in a never-ending game of chess. Constantly trying to see what is next. Getting too focused on making a move, then strikes a mistake throwing you in a panic. You’re trying to fix it and protect yourself. Against life’s onslaught you see it. Your opportunity to strike back at life and get a foothold, then back to normal, the struggle between two forces continues in strife, trying to topple or conquer the other.

-Thomas

This is Who I Am

This is who I am. I am a girl who believes in Tinker Bell and mermaids. Yet I can’t believe in myself. My self-esteem plummets faster than the roller coaster at Six Flags that I rode when I was six. I want to run around in dog parks, trusting that the dogs’ kisses will wipe away all my tears. But all I can feel are my thoughts, flying Japanese monkeys attacking my brain. I am a girl who wants to feel passion hotter than the summer sun. However, in the summer I’m locked away in the darkness of my soul. I am a girl who wants to journey the navy blue sea, yet my only odyssey is the trip to the hospital where my mother is crying at my side.

-Cat1618
Life’s Game

When you think about struggles in your life, it feels like a battle. It’s you versus life in a never-ending game of chess. Constantly trying to see what is next. Getting too focused on making a move, then strikes a mistake throwing you in a panic. You’re trying to fix it and protect yourself. Against life’s onslaught you see it. Your opportunity to strike back at life and get a foothold, then back to normal, the struggle between two forces continues in strife, trying to topple or conquer the other.

-Thomas

This is Who I Am

This is who I am. I am a girl who believes in Tinker Bell and mermaids. Yet I can’t believe in myself. My self-esteem plummets faster than the roller coaster at Six Flags that I rode when I was six. I want to run around in dog parks, trusting that the dogs’ kisses will wipe away all my tears. But all I can feel are my thoughts, flying Japanese monkeys attacking my brain. I am a girl who wants to feel passion hotter than the summer sun. However, in the summer I’m locked away in the darkness of my soul. I am a girl who wants to journey the navy blue sea, yet my only odyssey is the trip to the hospital where my mother is crying at my side.

-Cat1618
Secret

There is a secret.
An obvious secret.
A secret not to be forced
But a secret to be asked for.
A secret to be thirsted for.
A secret that brings peace.
A secret that provides needs. A secret that brings happiness. A secret that loves you. Where’s this secret? Everywhere.
What’s this secret?
You must search for it and it will find you.

-Luke

Summer Time

Florida.
I see beautiful, healthy, thick palm trees.
As I drive I see the sky, the clouds, so plump but so delicate.
The weather is perfect and the wind lightly brushes against my skin, feeling like the world is in my hands.
The stress and thoughts disappear and in that moment everything is perfect

-Eolach
**Secret**

There is a secret.
An obvious secret.
A secret not to be forced
But a secret to be asked for.
A secret to be thirsted for.
A secret that brings peace.
A secret that provides needs. A secret that brings happiness. A secret that loves you. Where’s this secret? Everywhere.
What’s this secret?
You must search for it and it will find you.

-Luke

**Summer Time**

Florida.
I see beautiful, healthy, thick palm trees.
As I drive I see the sky, the clouds, so plump but so delicate.
The weather is perfect and the wind lightly brushes against my skin, feeling like the world is in my hands.
The stress and thoughts disappear and in that moment everything is perfect

-Eolach
Waves of Remorse

She breathed in the salty ocean breeze. Letting it fill her lungs and calm her body. This road trip was the best decision she had made in a while. She finally got away from the reputation she had made in Atlanta. She got tired of her life there, so she packed up and left her old life behind, even her old name. She tried to come up with a new name that matched who she wanted to be as she walked down the shoreline. The sand was fine and slightly warm between her toes. She stared into the sunset and allowed the intense blending of colors calm her emotions. The waves crashing upon the shore felt as if they were wearing away all of the damage that she had caused to herself and others. She allowed the slight and faint noises of the birds flying over the ocean to calm her, as if they were forgiving her for everyone she had hurt before. Her head kept on spinning and her heart sped up until finally she couldn’t ignore it anymore.

-T.C.

Strangers Saw Her As a Cyclops

Strangers saw her as a Cyclops, one with a cold black heart. She had a fire in her eyes, but not one filled with love and honesty.

Friends saw her like Perseus at first. They saw her blood run from aqua to magenta. She faded from Hercules to the lowest of them all.

Family saw her as if she was broken. Like she turned evil and cold. But the truth is she wasn’t like that on purpose. She had to pretend she didn’t have a heart, so it didn’t get broken.

-Drew
Strangers Saw Her As a Cyclops

Strangers saw her as a Cyclops, one with a cold black heart. She had a fire in her eyes, but not one filled with love and honesty.

Friends saw her like Perseus at first. They saw her blood run from aqua to magenta. She faded from Hercules to the lowest of them all.

Family saw her as if she was broken. Like she turned evil and cold. But the truth is she wasn’t like that on purpose. She had to pretend she didn’t have a heart, so it didn’t get broken.

-Drew

Waves of Remorse

She breathed in the salty ocean breeze. Letting it fill her lungs and calm her body. This road trip was the best decision she had made in a while. She finally got away from the reputation she had made in Atlanta. She got tired of her life there, so she packed up and left her old life behind, even her old name. She tried to come up with a new name that matched who she wanted to be as she walked down the shoreline. The sand was fine and slightly warm between her toes. She stared into the sunset and allowed the intense blending of colors calm her emotions. The waves crashing upon the shore felt as if they were wearing away all of the damage that she had caused to herself and others. She allowed the slight and faint noises of the birds flying over the ocean to calm her, as if they were forgiving her for everyone she had hurt before. Her head kept on spinning and her heart sped up until finally she couldn’t ignore it anymore.

-T.C.
**One Morning**

One morning when I woke up I saw people hopping about like frantic rabbits. I guess that’s what happens when you live in such a cold society. It beats you down with stresses and expectations, until one day you finally break and become as timid as the darkened woods. You can no longer have a gleaming personality like a teal mermaid’s tail in the evening sun. These broken souls then become ghosts. Still, society pokes and pokes at the imperfections we inevitably own. Then we end the day in a broken home. When we were all created surely this wasn’t the goal. We all were created to have hopes and dreams.

- Green

**Cliché**

The people look like salt + pepper, as cold as the wind
timid like the rising sun
They walk like addicts
but speak like preachers.
Singing their happy song
and dancing like beautiful prisoners.
The people look like salt and pepper.

- Julie
One Morning

One morning when I woke up I saw people hopping about like frantic rabbits. I guess that's what happens when you live in such a cold society. It beats you down with stresses and expectations, until one day you finally break and become as timid as the darkened woods. You can no longer have a gleaming personality like a teal mermaid’s tail in the evening sun. These broken souls then become ghosts. Still, society pokes and pokes at the imperfections we inevitably own. Then we end the day in a broken home. When we were all created surely this wasn’t the goal. We all were created to have hopes and dreams.

-Green

Cliché

The people look like salt + pepper, as cold as the wind timid like the rising sun They walk like addicts but speak like preachers. Singing their happy song and dancing like beautiful prisoners. The people look like salt and pepper.

-Julie
Lunch

Red scrubs
Veggie subs
Health is a choice
Too much noise
In this ward
Trying to praise the lord
I often get bored
Making myself better
Skin as tough as leather Wishing I was light as a feather Discharge, admitting
Try to make a fitting
In this living
Got to stay strong
Have to go along
with the program
In order to be myself
I can’t take crap from anybody else

-The Child

A small child wanders out of her home. She seems upset as she walks towards me. She welcomes me with a sad smile. The child uses her gymnastics skills to gracefully tiptoe across a log to cross the creek to reach me. She sits down on a rock and watches the water flowing past. She takes a moment to breathe and notice the scenery. The sun is shining through the trees, creating tiny spotlights for the woodland creatures. Red cardinals are squawking. Squirrels are scattering and breaking twigs.

The young child finally opens up to me. She cries on my shoulder for a while. All she wants in life is quietness and solitude. All I want in life is to make her happy.

I want her to stay with me forever.

-Fern
Lunch

Red scrubs
Veggie subs
Health is a choice
Too much noise
In this ward
Trying to praise the lord
I often get bored
Making myself better
Skin as tough as leather Wishing I was light as a feather
Discharge, admitting
Try to make a fitting
In this living
Got to stay strong
Have to go along
with the program
In order to be myself
I can’t take crap from anybody else

- Harmony

The Child

A small child wanders out of her home. She seems upset as she walks towards me. She welcomes me with a sad smile. The child uses her gymnastics skills to gracefully tiptoe across a log to cross the creek to reach me. She sits down on a rock and watches the water flowing past. She takes a moment to breathe and notice the scenery. The sun is shining through the trees, creating tiny spotlights for the woodland creatures. Red cardinals are squawking. Squirrels are scattering and breaking twigs.

The young child finally opens up to me. She cries on my shoulder for a while. All she wants in life is quietness and solitude. All I want in life is to make her happy.

I want her to stay with me forever.

- Fern
Orange Peels

The blue and yellow ENOs, tied to the tree. Tickling ants busy on the wooden deck. An old man. Wrinkles ran down his arms, mingling with war scars. This place was blue and green, the calm tones—flashing red for the hidden rages. The ginger cat sat patiently by the orange peels and empty ramen bowl, and half-planted ferns lay across the sad, drooping steps. It was finally warm and bright, though the shade cast by the oak led the cat to settle down as if it were night. It was sunny. It had never been sunny. The cat was softly purring, wind rustled the oak leaves—the light tickled my eyelids. Occasionally a car was heard passing by, unaware of life on the porch behind the house. The rotting orange peels began to release a mild perfume. I felt safe here. I rocked back and forth in the ENO while Stephanie stormed in and out, angry at Joey and life, while Savannah embraced Alex, both crying for the other. All we wanted was a kind of quiet peace.

-Skye
Orange Peels

The blue and yellow ENOs, tied to the tree. Tickling ants busy on the wooden deck. An old man. Wrinkles ran down his arms, mingling with war scars. This place was blue and green, the calm tones—flashing red for the hidden rages. The ginger cat sat patiently by the orange peels and empty ramen bowl, and half-planted ferns lay across the sad, drooping steps. It was finally warm and bright, though the shade cast by the oak led the cat to settle down as if it were night. It was sunny. It had never been sunny. The cat was softly purring, wind rustled the oak leaves—the light tickled my eyelids. Occasionally a car was heard passing by, unaware of life on the porch behind the house. The rotting orange peels began to release a mild perfume. I felt safe here. I rocked back and forth in the ENO while Stephanie stormed in and out, angry at Joey and life, while Savannah embraced Alex, both crying for the other. All we wanted was a kind of quiet peace.

-Skye
Complex Music

It’s March 18th, 2015. I’m in my room waking up from an afternoon nap. The sunlight is shining through my window. I can hear my dogs barking outside. I get out of my bed and breathe in the smell of peppermint coming from the candles on my nightstand. My room is painted blue like the sky. It’s my favorite color. I pick up my dark blue guitar that I’ve had for two years and start to play the song “Tim McGraw.” As I play I think about wanting a new guitar. Not just any guitar—a twelve-string guitar. If I had it, I would play some more complex music. It would be great. I’m going to ask my dad for one soon. I hope he says I can get one. My mom already knows that I want one but my dad doesn’t.

I walk downstairs to the living room. My dad is sitting on the couch with my dog, Foxy. He says, “So, I talked with your mother and we decided that you should get a new guitar. In fact…” He begins walking to the closet. He opens it up and sure enough, there is a brand new twelve-string guitar.

For the rest of the night, I play it until it is time to go to bed.

- Shadow S.
Complex Music

It’s March 18th, 2015. I’m in my room waking up from an afternoon nap. The sunlight is shining through my window. I can hear my dogs barking outside. I get out of my bed and breathe in the smell of peppermint coming from the candles on my nightstand. My room is painted blue like the sky. It’s my favorite color. I pick up my dark blue guitar that I’ve had for two years and start to play the song “Tim McGraw.” As I play I think about wanting a new guitar. Not just any guitar—a twelve-string guitar. If I had it, I would play some more complex music. It would be great. I’m going to ask my dad for one soon. I hope he says I can get one. My mom already knows that I want one but my dad doesn’t.

I walk downstairs to the living room. My dad is sitting on the couch with my dog, Foxy. He says, “So, I talked with your mother and we decided that you should get a new guitar. In fact...” He begins walking to the closet. He opens it up and sure enough, there is a brand new twelve-string guitar.

For the rest of the night, I play it until it is time to go to bed.

-Shadow S.
The House of Ice and The Cry

I. The House of Ice

This is a house of ice. In this house is a little perfect family, like one of those families in those rich family pictures—by day, anyway. By day the family goes on doing their normal things, but at night things get a little difficult. This is when the house of ice is the house of ice. The dad is all hollow inside, cares about nobody, only cares about sex and alcohol. The mom is in a deep and dark (bleak) hole. She cries herself to sleep each night. When she doesn’t do that, she drugs herself to help the pain of her not having the picture perfect family. While all of that happens, the little sister is crying. She wants to know why her family is so isolated and alone. We can’t forget the brother, who has already passed.

The house of ice is real. The house of ice is me.

II. The Cry

Her soul shouts for help. It cries out. Somebody help me, please. She goes deeper and deeper into a world of darkness. She hears a faint sound calling out for help. She tries to answer but before she does, she realizes it is her soul. Her soul has been brought down by so many hurtful things.

She wonders how she never even noticed that her soul was gone. Then it hits her. She’s been paying so much attention to the negative that it brought not only her but her soul down too. She and her soul work together to work everything out. In the end it is better. The way they got through it is by repeating this: “Never give up, there is no ending, just a new beginning.”

When you think all is lost, think of a new way out.

Or a new beginning.

-Anna
The House of Ice and The Cry

I. The House of Ice

This is a house of ice. In this house is a little perfect family, like one of those families in those rich family pictures—by day, anyway. By day the family goes on doing their normal things, but at night things get a little difficult. This is when the house of ice is the house of ice. The dad is all hollow inside, cares about nobody, only cares about sex and alcohol. The mom is in a deep and dark (bleak) hole. She cries herself to sleep each night. When she doesn’t do that, she drugs herself to help the pain of her not having the picture perfect family. While all of that happens, the little sister is crying. She wants to know why her family is so isolated and alone. We can’t forget the brother, who has already passed.

The house of ice is real. The house of ice is me.

II. The Cry

Her soul shouts for help. It cries out. Somebody help me, please. She goes deeper and deeper into a world of darkness. She hears a faint sound calling out for help. She tries to answer but before she does, she realizes it is her soul. Her soul has been brought down by so many hurtful things.

She wonders how she never even noticed that her soul was gone. Then it hits her. She’s been paying so much attention to the negative that it brought not only her but her soul down too. She and her soul work together to work everything out. In the end it is better. The way they got through it is by repeating this: “Never give up, there is no ending, just a new beginning.”

When you think all is lost, think of a new way out.

Or a new beginning.

-Anna
A World of Color

I am not someone who jumps around hospitals looking for a little self-esteem and trust, staring at the boring grey or black walls while dreaming of mermaids and Tinker Bell. Sometimes I wish I could go to Six Flags or a dog park instead of being in this dreary environment. I am not someone who looks for passion in the wrong places or turns into a jellyfish every time I talk to someone. I am someone who decides when to trust myself and independently builds my self-esteem. I fill my life with interesting positives and live in a world of color—navy blue and magenta. I choose to make as many positive changes as I can because in a world of negativity, you’re the only person who can become something different.

This is who I am and no one can change that.

-A.E.

Amazing Grace

Her name was Gracey and she was always smiling. She made everyone else smile, too, just by walking in a room. She was a cheerleader, very smart, so sweet. But one day something really bad triggered her. She ended her life.

She had over two-hundred people at her funeral. She touched a lot of people’s hearts. She touched mine. We were close friends. She was always there for me. She helped me through my rough times. She was amazing and kind and super beautiful. She is in a better place. The saddest part of it all is nobody knew. There were no signs. She never cut. She never seemed unhappy.

Slowly it changed. She balled it all in. Finally it got too much and she ended it.

When I found out she passed away, it broke my heart into pieces. Now I’m here, facing it all without this beautiful girl. I’m slowly getting better. She’s my inspiration.

This is for you, amazing Grace.

-June
A World of Color

I am not someone who jumps around hospitals looking for a little self-esteem and trust, staring at the boring grey or black walls while dreaming of mermaids and Tinker Bell. Sometimes I wish I could go to Six Flags or a dog park instead of being in this dreary environment. I am not someone who looks for passion in the wrong places or turns into a jellyfish every time I talk to someone. I am someone who decides when to trust myself and independently builds my self-esteem. I fill my life with interesting positives and live in a world of color—navy blue and magenta. I choose to make as many positive changes as I can because in a world of negativity, you’re the only person who can become something different.

This is who I am and no one can change that.

-AE.

Amazing Grace

Her name was Gracey and she was always smiling. She made everyone else smile, too, just by walking in a room. She was a cheerleader, very smart, so sweet. But one day something really bad triggered her. She ended her life.

She had over two-hundred people at her funeral. She touched a lot of people’s hearts. She touched mine. We were close friends. She was always there for me. She helped me through my rough times. She was amazing and kind and super beautiful. She is in a better place. The saddest part of it all is nobody knew. There were no signs. She never cut. She never seemed unhappy.

Slowly it changed. She balled it all in. Finally it got too much and she ended it.

When I found out she passed away, it broke my heart into pieces. Now I’m here, facing it all without this beautiful girl. I’m slowly getting better. She’s my inspiration.

This is for you, amazing Grace.

-June
Goodbye and Be Happy

It is a cold December night. The house is full of screaming. Sixteen-year-old Mikey is in his room crying because his family is falling apart. His parents are in the living room fighting, but they don’t know what’s going on with Mikey. He keeps thinking it’s going to get better but in the back of his mind, he fears it won’t. His parents tell him to die so he starts to think his parents would have a better life without him. He goes to the kitchen that smells like mold and old socks and grabs a knife. He walks past the living room. His mom sees him and the knife but acts like she doesn’t care. He gets to his room and the only thing his parents hear in the living room is a thud. They run to his room and see a note that says, “Goodbye and be happy,” but there is no body. His parents go three months looking for him. They finally give up searching and start to bond over the pain they feel.

On a warm March day Mikey walks up his front steps and rings the doorbell.

His mom answers the door and starts to cry.

His dad sees he’s there and hugs him, says, “It’s good to have you home.”

-Sophia
Goodbye and Be Happy

It is a cold December night. The house is full of screaming. Sixteen-year-old Mikey is in his room crying because his family is falling apart. His parents are in the living room fighting, but they don’t know what’s going on with Mikey. He keeps thinking it’s going to get better but in the back of his mind, he fears it won’t. His parents tell him to die so he starts to think his parents would have a better life without him. He goes to the kitchen that smells like mold and old socks and grabs a knife. He walks past the living room. His mom sees him and the knife but acts like she doesn’t care. He gets to his room and the only thing his parents hear in the living room is a thud. They run to his room and see a note that says, “Goodbye and be happy,” but there is no body. His parents go three months looking for him. They finally give up searching and start to bond over the pain they feel.

On a warm March day Mikey walks up his front steps and rings the doorbell. His mom answers the door and starts to cry. His dad sees he’s there and hugs him, says, “It’s good to have you home.”

-Sophia
The Smoke of the Night

The breeze of the summer night flies through the room. You walk into a house just as the screen door slams. The blast of exotic and not-so-exotic marijuana flows through. You walk around the room to do your heys and wassups. The lights dim. The room is full. You go to the deck to say hey to the host. The barbeque smell hits. You see your boyfriend. He sees you. Your eyes meet. You go to a room.

The room smells like sex, pineapples, weed.

The room sees two summer lovers lying in silence, eating hot Cheetos and apple candy.

He kisses you and says, “I think this might be over.”

You say, “Please don’t blow my high.”

You argue. You get dressed. The room feels lonely. As you leave the room, even though there are a hundred people in here, your heart is broken. The room says, “This summer love is done.” The room smells like sadness. Love is lost and so are you.

-PoeticFifi
The Smoke of the Night

The breeze of the summer night flies through the room. You walk into a house just as the screen door slams. The blast of exotic and not-so-exotic marijuana flows through. You walk around the room to do your heys and wassups. The lights dim. The room is full. You go to the deck to say hey to the host. The barbeque smell hits. You see your boyfriend. He sees you. Your eyes meet. You go to a room.

The room smells like sex, pineapples, weed.

The room sees two summer lovers lying in silence, eating hot Cheetos and apple candy.

He kisses you and says, “I think this might be over.”

You say, “Please don’t blow my high.”

You argue. You get dressed. The room feels lonely. As you leave the room, even though there are a hundred people in here, your heart is broken. The room says, “This summer love is done.” The room smells like sadness. Love is lost and so are you.

-PoeticFifi
Is That Love?

It was funny, the first time we met.
I still remember it.
Over Snapchat, not even in person. Not even in person.
A couple weeks passed and we met for the first time again.
I still remember it.
We parked your truck in a starlit field next to train tracks and you grabbed me with your football-superhero arms, and I kissed the moon, smiling like I was on top of the world—and I was.
Is that love?
I remember the Jimmy John’s runs in the warm sunlight
And the Sonic runs in the mad night.
Your arms held in my rage and my tears ran down your veins, into your heart.
Sometimes I wonder if it was my fault you drowned.
You tried so hard to save me.
You gave up part of your own life for me: your sanity.

Is that love?
I never apologized like I should have.
I let my sadness swallow me whole and you followed into the belly of the whale.
Only once did you lay your head on my lap, let your bare emotions fall into my fragile palms like a broken baby bird, and only once did I listen to you when you widened the crack in your soul to let me in.
I remember that.
I never apologized like I should have.
And then you left.
It was abrupt.
I didn’t know what to do.
I still remember it.
Your hand, as big as my two combined, pushed me down down down down
And I choked on you and my feelings and your feelings and life and I couldn’t take it and neither could you.
So you left.
I still remember it.
Is that love?

-Skye
Is That Love?

It was funny, the first time we met. I still remember it.
Over Snapchat, not even in person. Not even in person.
A couple weeks passed and we met for the first time again. I still remember it.
We parked your truck in a starlit field next to train tracks and you grabbed me with your football-superhero arms, and I kissed the moon, smiling like I was on top of the world—and I was.
Is that love?
I remember the Jimmy John’s runs in the warm sunlight
And the Sonic runs in the mad night.
Your arms held in my rage and my tears ran down your veins, into your heart.
Sometimes I wonder if it was my fault you drowned.
You tried so hard to save me.
You gave up part of your own life for me: your sanity.

Is that love?
I never apologized like I should have.
I let my sadness swallow me whole and you followed into the belly of the whale.
Only once did you lay your head on my lap, let your bare emotions fall into my fragile palms like a broken baby bird, and only once did I listen to you when you widened the crack in your soul to let me in.
I remember that.
I never apologized like I should have.
And then you left.
It was abrupt.
I didn’t know what to do.
I still remember it.
Your hand, as big as my two combined, pushed me down down down down
And I choked on you and my feelings and your feelings and life and I couldn’t take it and neither could you.
So you left.
I still remember it.
Is that love?

-Skye
Aiyana

To be honest, I never completely understood Aiyana. I understood that she was severely depressed, that she self-harmed, that she hated herself, and that all of these things applied to me as well. In these regards, she and I were two sides of the same coin. Of course, like any true friendship, we had our differences, disagreements, disappointments. The times when we spoke to each other were sparse and frequently dealt with the subject of our lives and informing the other of the rather depreciated happenings that would lead towards her ultimate demise.

She, like the apotheosis of an egregious book, was the apex of a dark time in my life. I struggled to even comprehend my own existence. Why I, of all people, had chosen to live. Occasionally, I would find the light of my life in the people surrounding me—clearly, people who actually deserved to live. Friends, like Aiyana.

We met through Instagram. She came to me.

Her account name was “bleaksxicide” and her feed was as joyous as her name. Her depression shone through her posts like the sun through clouds—ostensibly hidden.

I followed a large number of depression-themed accounts and I never, ever sent out the standard “you’re beautiful” and “life is worth it” messages because they annoyed me to no end. And yet once, just once, I opted to talk to her (mainly because she seemed actually close to suicide, which threatened my conscience), and I came to understand the power of words—helping, mending, and later killing.

I left something simple on a post of hers. She thanked me. It was as straightforward as that; yet that exchange sparked, though did not quite create, a friendship more complex than the word “rainily.”
To be honest, I never completely understood Aiyana. I understood that she was severely depressed, that she self-harmed, that she hated herself, and that all of these things applied to me as well. In these regards, she and I were two sides of the same coin. Of course, like any true friendship, we had our differences, disagreements, disappointments. The times when we spoke to each other were sparse and frequently dealt with the subject of our lives and informing the other of the rather depreciated happenings that would lead towards her ultimate demise.

She, like the apotheosis of an egregious book, was the apex of a dark time in my life. I struggled to even comprehend my own existence. Why I, of all people, had chosen to live. Occasionally, I would find the light of my life in the people surrounding me—clearly, people who actually deserved to live. Friends, like Aiyana.

We met through Instagram. She came to me.

Her account name was “bleaksxicide” and her feed was as joyous as her name. Her depression shone through her posts like the sun through clouds—ostensibly hidden.

I followed a large number of depression-themed accounts and I never, ever sent out the standard “you’re beautiful” and “life is worth it” messages because they annoyed me to no end. And yet once, just once, I opted to talk to her (mainly because she seemed actually close to suicide, which threatened my conscience), and I came to understand the power of words—helping, mending, and later killing.

I left something simple on a post of hers. She thanked me. It was as straightforward as that; yet that exchange sparked, though did not quite create, a friendship more complex than the word “rainily.”
From there continued the throes of my attempts to make her know that she meant something, which she would always thank me for. We weren’t exactly friends at this point, but we cared about each other enough to where we thought about each other during school, when bored, and when on Instagram.

Then, on the first day of my freshman year, I had to go to the hospital because I became extremely suicidal, almost slitting my wrists. Quickly before leaving, and for no apparent reason aside from feeling that this completely random and unknown person should know this rather personal information, I sent Aiyana a message saying that I had to go to the Emergency Room for suicidal ideation.

She, shocked, asked me an eloquent “what” and sent me a DM saying that I mattered to her and that I shouldn’t ever hurt myself. Maybe it was because I had come to know her, but her words actually meant something to me. She made me feel happy, which was then a distant, distant feeling.

However, in this way was she also a hypocrite.

I suppose, of course, that I, too, was a hypocrite because, in spite of the joy Aiyana and my other friends gave me, I almost ended my life on numerous occasions and was still spouting encouragements to her on a daily basis.

Following my almost-death, Aiyana and I continued to speak to each other on a fairly regular basis. We became closer than some of my real friends and, ultimately, I fell head over heels in love with her.

After my fourth or fifth failed attempt at my life, my parents were utterly irate with me and decided that my electronic devices were undoubtedly the cause of my lypophrenia, so they took away my access to my then dear Aiyana. Immediately, I began to worry about her well-being.
From there continued the throes of my attempts to make her know that she meant something, which she would always thank me for. We weren’t exactly friends at this point, but we cared about each other enough to where we thought about each other during school, when bored, and when on Instagram.

Then, on the first day of my freshman year, I had to go to the hospital because I became extremely suicidal, almost slitting my wrists. Quickly before leaving, and for no apparent reason aside from feeling that this completely random and unknown person should know this rather personal information, I sent Aiyana a message saying that I had to go to the Emergency Room for suicidal ideation.

She, shocked, asked me an eloquent “what” and sent me a DM saying that I mattered to her and that I shouldn’t ever hurt myself. Maybe it was because I had come to know her, but her words actually meant something to me.

She made me feel happy, which was then a distant, distant feeling.

However, in this way was she also a hypocrite.

I suppose, of course, that I, too, was a hypocrite because, in spite of the joy Aiyana and my other friends gave me, I almost ended my life on numerous occasions and was still spouting encouragements to her on a daily basis.

Following my almost-death, Aiyana and I continued to speak to each other on a fairly regular basis. We became closer than some of my real friends and, ultimately, I fell head over heels in love with her.

After my fourth or fifth failed attempt at my life, my parents were utterly irate with me and decided that my electronic devices were undoubtedly the cause of my lypophrenia, so they took away my access to my then dear Aiyana. Immediately, I began to worry about her well-being.
Slowly, slowly, slowly, I worked towards retrieving my access to my love and, after much trial, excitedly retrieved my iPod after a party one night; however, my excitement would, mere seconds later, turn to sorrow, anguish, and the worst pain I would ever experience. It was worse than stubbing your toe, worse than banging your head into a wall, worse than having your blood slowly drained from your body. Far worse.

When I looked on Instagram, her account name had changed to “iwbksm” and she had sent me this message:

*Hey I haven’t talked to you in forever… I just wanted to thank you for everything…being there for me genuinely and caring. You’re an amazing person and you deserve the world. Unfortunately I can’t do this anymore. I’m hitting below rock bottom. I don’t want to just leave like that but I feel like everyone would be much happier if I no longer exist… I’m sorry.*

When I first saw her message, my heart sank deeper than the greatest abysses of hell. It was dated September 5th and I had received it September 12th. Nothing else had come from her. I knew then that the only person who had ever understood me was gone.

To this day, I have received not so much as a word from Aiyana. Everyone tells me that she isn’t necessarily dead, but I know better than that, in the same way that I knew she was a real, living person, with real problems and a real life and real friends who were probably crying over the death of their poor, innocent, sad friend. Parents shouldn’t have to see their children buried. Friends shouldn’t be made to vacantly stare off into some distance, contemplating whether they would see their love in some utopia or dystopia again. Nobody should have to grieve over a life taken by itself.
Slowly, slowly, slowly, I worked towards retrieving my access to my love and, after much trial, excitedly retrieved my iPod after a party one night; however, my excitement would, mere seconds later, turn to sorrow, anguish, and the worst pain I would ever experience. It was worse than stubbing your toe, worse than banging your head into a wall, worse than having your blood slowly drained from your body. Far worse.

When I looked on Instagram, her account name had changed to “iwbksm” and she had sent me this message:

*Hey I haven’t talked to you in forever... I just wanted to thank you for everything...being there for me genuinely and caring. Youre an amazing person and you deserve the world. Unfortunately i cant do this anymore. Im hitting below rock bottom. I dont want to just leave like that but I feel like everyone would be much happier if I no longer exist... Im sorry.*

When I first saw her message, my heart sank deeper than the greatest abysses of hell. It was dated September 5th and I had received it September 12th. Nothing else had come from her. I knew then that the only person who had ever understood me was gone.

To this day, I have received not so much as a word from Aiyana. Everyone tells me that she isn’t necessarily dead, but I know better than that, in the same way that I knew she was a real, living person, with real problems and a real life and real friends who were probably crying over the death of their poor, innocent, sad friend. Parents shouldn’t have to see their children buried. Friends shouldn’t be made to vacantly stare off into some distance, contemplating whether they would see their love in some utopia or dystopia again. Nobody should have to grieve over a life taken by itself.
Maybe, however, the pain was partly my fault. My attachment to Aiyana came...suddenly. I loved her after almost no words. Was the love, though, worth the pain? I have always thought of life as being “worth it” for those whom you could say you loved. Aiyana’s death taught me that everyone I loved would one day fall victim— to fate. So then which is better: To die and cause grief or to dread grief? To which way shall the scales top?

Aiyana is dead, and I no better.

-Ophelia

Beautiful

Beautiful.
What does it really mean?
Girls half-naked on TV or magazines.
Long hair, perfect body, white eyes, big eyes.
This is society’s idea of beauty,
The ones you look at
And your self-esteem sinks.
We see humans as objects to look at and compare ourselves to.
We should be viewed by what makes us happy.
A reason to enjoy ourselves.
A perfect boost of self-esteem and confidence.
Not looking at perfect bodies on television.
Then throwing up in the toilet to be like them.
Beauty is loving yourself.
“Beauty comes from within” is what my mom would always tell us.
Maybe, however, the pain was partly my fault. My attachment to Aiyana came...suddenly. I loved her after almost no words. Was the love, though, worth the pain? I have always thought of life as being “worth it” for those whom you could say you loved. Aiyana’s death taught me that everyone I loved would one day fall victim—to fate. So then which is better: To die and cause grief or to dread grief? To which way shall the scales top?

Aiyana is dead, and I no better.

- Ophelia

**Beautiful**

Beautiful.
What does it really mean?
Girls half-naked on TV or magazines.
Long hair, perfect body, white eyes, big eyes.
This is society’s idea of beauty,
The ones you look at
And your self-esteem sinks.
We see humans as objects to look at and compare ourselves to.
We should be viewed by what makes us happy.
A reason to enjoy ourselves.
A perfect boost of self-esteem and confidence.
Not looking at perfect bodies on television.
Then throwing up in the toilet to be like them.
Beauty is loving yourself.
“Beauty comes from within” is what my mom would always tell us.
We seemed to never believe
Beauty is knowing how strong you are,
How much you accomplished.
We listen to what society says
Because we think it’s the only thing that matters. We think it’s the only way to be accepted in this world
Because if we make ourselves sick,
And throw up our dinner every night
Then cry ourselves to sleep
While we slit our wrists
That’s beautiful, right?
You’re beautiful because you woke up this morning,
You’re beautiful because you got through everything you didn’t think was possible, Beauty is every time you smile, Beautiful is every reason you enjoy life.

-Sarah
Empty and beautiful

Yet FULL of the SEA

Volumes I, II, & III