

THE CUT

The sirens began at dawn. Every year, they sounded the same. One long, metallic wail that echoed through the city and made every teenager's stomach churn. Tessa made her way to the gate of the test center and adjusted the thin silver band around her wrist. The tracker that had recorded every step, every breath, every second of her long life education. The final exam was today. The test that decided who deserved to remain alive. Every 365 days, the lowest 50% were "cut out". No one said kill anymore, as it sounded too wasteful, too human. At the testing center, as she walked over to a table with a tablet she had been given, her heart thudded as she placed her hand on the scanner. Her name appeared: TESSA MORROW - DISTRICT 9.

The timer began counting down from 60 minutes. The questions were different this year. Not just maths or history, they were political choices. She hesitated, sweat beading at her temples. When the timer hit zero, her screen shut down. A voice from the speakers called out the names of students, hers included. She knew what it meant. Frightened, the rough hands of guards dragged her away into a separate room with others ranging from first to 12th grade. Some were trembling, some were crying, but she knew not to interfere. Everything suddenly went black and she woke up by the continuous hum of a large machinery. Confused, disoriented, before she could process anything, she was dragged up on her feet to an assembly factor. There, she spent the rest of her years assembling products, and operating machinery with a few breaks in a day. Others, from the outside world, unaware of this situation, continued to believe that population control just wanted a better future and kept our society balanced.

