

SCPA LYRICAL

VOLUME 3



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THE 4TH

By Samantha Pearce

We were happy.
It took a couple months,
But once you asked the question,
I was yours.

I was yours for a while.
You were mine.
Together,
We were just like a dream

In the beginning,
It was nice.
You treated me well.
I hope I did the same.

We planned so much together:
We planned our one year anniversary,
We planned to do so many things,
Yet it wasn't gonna happen.

Publicly humiliating me,
You've shown me who you are.
Openly talking about our problems on your socials,
I was embarrassed, sad, and felt like I wasn't enough.

We thought our relationship was like a walk on a beach:
Romantic and so tranquil.
Yet it actually was like a thunderous tsunami,
Or a volcano waiting to erupt.

Pushing you away was one thing.
I knew I couldn't handle being with you while dealing with my issues,
So I pushed you away,
But I didn't mean it.

It was to a point where we wouldn't talk,
So I decided to end it,
For the better,
To fix myself.

You understood,
Which made me happy,
But I still let the tears flow,
Even though it was for the best.

I apologized to you.
You said you were starting to love me.
I was heartbroken.
My emotional support was gone.

I realized what I had once it was too late,
I never understood how you much you meant to me,
Until I lost you,
And it crushed me.

Now you're numbing yourself with random girls,
3 days after our fall out,
So if you really did start to love me,
Why did you move on so quickly?

Even though I'm still insensate from everything,
I know it's for the best,
The best for the both of us,
And we both accepted it.

OLDER BROTHER

By Meredith Lange

You took me under your wing,
You were an inspiration,
And though I love you,
I will never forget how you left me.

There was not a thing
that could tear us apart
But you found your future far away.
And I don't feel connected to you any more.

We rarely are caught fighting,
I know we must cherish every instinct,
Every moment,
Every second together.

The only way I spend my time is writing,
I have new thoughts,
New emotions,
I have a new mind.

And it is rare to see a sighting
Of you carefree,
Of me carefree,
Of us happy.

That's the problem with older brothers, lighting
Your past aflame,
Changing you,
Transforming you.

HOW YOU LEFT

By Meredith Lange

I stand here, with the satisfaction of the eerie silence surrounding me. The silhouette of the dark ocean in front of me glimmers with the glowing light of the beautifully plump moon above. The silent waves call to me as they crash. Even the thoughts rushing through my head have dispersed into the now quiet city of Santa Cruz.

As I close my eyes and breath in the crisp, cool air, I sense a figure behind me. I slowly turn to face him. The shadows of the university covers his face. He stands shirtless, as his icy blue eyes scorching my soul. I try to call out to him, but my words clog my throat.

As he walks towards me I see two tattoos on his muscular chest. Soon he is no more than a few inches away from him.

He smiles at me. I can see his face, and I recognize him, but from what I do not know.

He takes another step, reaching out to hug me, and for reasons I don't know, I want to hug him as well.

He continues to walk, and I brace myself in the cold sand below me. But the handsome young adult walks through me, and I feel his warmth in me for a moment. I whirl around, feeling my heart race, my mind still free of thought. There is another figure that, out of a cloud of mist, had appeared.

The young man hugs the second figure, and kisses her. do they even see me? I ask myself.

And for the first time the entire night, I felt an emotion and I thought a thought. I know I love that man, and I knew that he loved me, but I also knew that he prioritized the girl, and that hurts, it burns.

Then, I see the man walking nonchalantly to the water. His steps in sync with the rhythm of the crashing waves. The man's feet leaving deep footprints in the fluffy sand.

His feet touch the salt water, and I run after him. As my feet touch the ice water, I flinch, but the man pursues onward into the darkness of the sea. He does not start to swim, just walks. He is up to his shoulders in water, then he turns. I look to where the girl was, and realize she is gone.

He is looking at me, he sees me. He whispers to me, "Goodbye."

Suddenly, a wave as tall as a mountain crashes over him.

Between sobs I whisper back, "Goodbye."

MISUNDERSTOOD MISUNDERSTANDINGS

By Ivy Lane

Depression is a furry creature:
one that loves to eat,
but keeps to itself.
It will not bother anybody
it will not cause you any trouble--
unless it gets hungry.
Sometimes the smell of sadness
can make its stomach growl
so it will decide that it is ready to eat.
It eats
and it eats
and it eats
and eats
until it has decided
that it does not want to eat anymore.
It will curl back up into its ball
warm and furry and comfortable
like a precious household pet
until its stomach growls once more.

Paranoia is an active cub
bounce bounce bouncing all over the place.
It bugs its brothers and sisters
because all it wants to do is
play play
play!
It wants to jump on your nerves
and tug at your hair.
It wants to play shadow puppets on the walls
and bang on the floors.
The whole house
your whole mind

the life that you know
is its playground.
And it will play
until mother or father or brother or sister or friend or lover
comes home
and puts it to bed
so that we can all rest easy
once again.

Love has a disorder.
It does not like to talk about this
but everyone knows it is true.
Love is bipolar
and it does not like to show people this
but everyone knows.
Sometimes Love is happy
sometimes it is sad.
Other times it's enraged
and on occasion it is numb.
Love feels all kinds of emotions
and most come without warning:
fury, lust, despair, grief, guilt, want,
obsessiveness, possessiveness,
nostalgia, emptiness, loneliness,
greed.
Love is a complicated creature.
It does not want anyone to know
it only wants to be simple
but everyone knows that it is not.

DEJA VU

By Ivy Lane

I do believe I need help.
Yes, I am very lost.
Hm? That way?
Why thank you, sir.
I owe you greatly.
I shall be on my way now.

Oh me, oh my,
I do believe I need help.
Oh, you see, I am very lost.
I went this way, but I suppose it was not the right way.
And now I have lost my sense.
Oh, thank you, goodness me.
I owe you greatly.
I shall be going now.

I say to the stars above,
I do believe I need help!
I am lost, I am so very lost.
I do not know where I am to go,
May I request your aid?
This way seems good,
This way seems right.
I will take this path,
I will redeem myself,
I will not make the same mistake again!
Thank you,
Thank you so very much.
I owe you greatly.
I shall be on my way.

Oh dear, oh me, oh my . . .
I do believe I need help.

YELLOW JESSAMINE

By Alexandria Ramos

One Sister have I in my city -
And one almost a day away.
None are real relations,
But both belong to me.

One I befriended playfully for technology -
And grew closer to years after.
The other I knew, but not well,
Growing on me right before she had to leave.

She did not see me as often -
Without a doubt, she was full of glee
Never I've heard her speak in such a way -
A mix of excitement and anxiety.

Today is far from her departure -
In the insignificant rain
I embraced her like I did before,
Making the wait worthwhile.

And still she speaks with delight
Throughout all the months
Deceiving her new companions.
Still in her eye
Her family lies
Back home, miles away.

I have woken up and missed her -
But carried on, happily.
I chose this harmless snake
From my meadow of daffodils.
My yellow jessamine, you are bright.

YELLING AT THE MIRROR

By Karlos Gonzalez

Is it your choice what my breakdown looks like?
Do you decide what is too much for me?
How much control do you need?

I give you my everything:
My heart, my soul, my every waking moment,
But that's not enough for you, is it?

No, you want more, you need more,
You have to choose when I have had enough!
You have to decide when I am finished!

But no! You are living in my body!
You do not have the right to my submission.
You cannot control what is not yours!

Love is a two-way relationship.
If I cannot feel your commitment to me,
Then you had better find a new soul to torture.

Give me back my life!
I deserve better than what you give me,
Here is where I draw the line.

I am not afraid to tell you this now.
I have no fear of what you can do to me.
You have already taken everything.

I will stand and I will fight you.
The only thing I have left is my will,
And you will not take that!

So come on and face me!
It really isn't that hard,
'cuz all you are is a reflection in the mirror.

HOW TO CATCH A LIAR

By Karlos Gonzalez

Do you know how to catch a liar?
Is it the eyes? The smile?
Perhaps you see their hearts on their sleeves,
And pity them for their loss.

I dare say it's keen,
What you do with your eyes,
I can never quite tell what they're saying.

I reach for the truth,
Behind all the hate,
But I fall short about every time.

Do you know how to catch a liar?
Is it the smell? The way they walk?
Maybe you speak and they shiver and scream,
And you cry for the life they have lost.

To far they have fallen,
From truth and from light,
It is eating them up inside.

Maybe, just maybe,
With a little more time,
They will see all the faults of their crimes.

Do you know how to catch a liar?
What is a lie anyway?
Is it a truth not told right? Or an empty goodbye?
Or perhaps you wouldn't know the difference.

Its funny to think,
That despite all our lies,
We still can find peace to some extent.

But deep down inside,
It's hard to stay quiet,
When the truth and the lie are as one.

WHAT IT'S BEEN LIKE SINCE YOU LEFT

By Cathlyn D. Serrano

I didn't just lose you on October 3rd when you stopped responding to my calls.

I still lose you to this very day, fifteen months later.

I lose you when the moon moves across the sky and is replaced by the sun.
I lose you whenever that song comes up on the radio and the last note rings with an eerie silence.

I lose you when I walk past your favorite chocolate in the store,
When I watch the cherry blossoms fall from across the street,
When I think of you for even a split second.

I lose you when I search up your name,
Knowing I no longer want you,
But you're still haunting me,
Still lingering onto me,
Still with me.

I lose you every time I hear your name and I feel a sense of panic.
I lose you every time that sick feeling comes into my stomach when "goodbye" reminds me of you.

I lose you every time another month passes with me trying to forget,
Forget,
Forget.

I didn't just lose you once;

I've lost you every day since you left.

TIME CAN HEAL

By JD Obedicen

I embrace it,
I hold it so near and dear
Because I know that it can heal.

The head trauma
That causes me so much ill-
Nest of all my fears.

Aches me awake.
Nirvana in my dreams,
No longer awaits.

Leaving my mouth dry.
Clattering and grinding of my teeth,
rings throughout the years -
Vibrating in my ears.

It wasn't my fault.
You're the one to blame.
Words of excuse,
Words of execution.

Of my own heart.
The beats that let me know,
That I am still alive,
That blood still flows down my veins.

So why do I feel -
That only half of me -
Seems to be real.

I embrace it,
Because only then can I feel whole.

In the corner of my mind
In the artery of my heart
I know that time can heal;
But how much time,
Do I really have left?

PALACE

By JD Obedicen

In a crystal palace
Where I was her prince
And she was my princess
We danced through the Snow -
Flakes of all our dreams
And gazed into the rising sun
Where I said to her,
“Lend me your heart
And we can be one.”
She stopped and looked
And said,
“I loan you my heart,”
And what soon followed was
‘til death do us part.’

In a palace of glass
Where I was his trophy
And he was my display
We trudged through the Snow-
Flakes of my own design
And gazed into the setting sun
Where he said to me
Give me your heart
And you can be won
And I stopped and looked
And said
Loan me your heart
And what soon followed was
Till death do us part
Shattered glass
And eyes made of
Pure gold.

SUITS, SPIRITS, AND SMOKE

By Chelsea Sanchez

Life is an illusion in which the only conclusion is to be under delusion,
pretend that everything is alright without seeing things under the light.
Break the expectations, be the new sensation,
use the exquisite, but it's not the real you, now is it?
Hold the most opulent party with some champagne in order to entertain
that conventional expectation of elegance as one of your aspirations.

Guests will come and go, dancing to and fro, the whole world seems aglow.
The bootleg liquor is changing the picture,
intoxicating your senses and making you defenseless.
The desire for that stale cigarette smoke making you go broke,
inhale another puff, since one is just never enough.
Party and party some more to that music you just can't ignore.

Wear the clothes you need, maybe some beads or a tie so you can mislead.
The more makeup you apply, the more flaws you deny.
The shorter the hair, the faster he'll be tempted for a love affair.
The crisper the suit, the more she's bound to touch the forbidden fruit.
These superficial aesthetics will surely make you magnetic!
Add jewelry of the highest carat, but can this new economy truly bear it?

Soon, the money runs dry, the adulterers spring lies, and the "accidental"
deaths are amplified.
Elegance was one big facade, they didn't realize everything they effectuated
was one big faux pas.
Perhaps it takes a Great Depression to elicit a confession.
There's only one truth that sadly wasn't realized by the youth:
It was the roaring twenties and they were once all soaring,
but this uproar was just another closing door.

LAST ONE STANDING

By Cali Naranjo

Gone they're all gone,
Like dust they've disappeared;
Tears fall as I sing this song,
It's something we all have feared
When darkness swallows,
When shadows form;
It's the pain that follows,
It's seeming to swarm
When the last one stands,
When there's no more light;
Then you finally understand,
You must give up the fight
You'll wake up free,
You'll know what is death;
But then you shall see,
When you take a new breath

YULETIDE IN THE VILLAGE

By Andrea Hernandez

The halls are orange in the calm candlelight,
And the tree has a fiery background;
Past the chimney high see the reindeer fly,
And the Yule Lads who'll roam around,
Will laugh and stare at the people they'll confound.

In the village, dead to the beings beyond,
Lie asleep in their beds unaware,
But dread the looming horror to their intentions
Where the comfort of peace brought by prayer
Becomes dust under the grasp of despair.

A cold wind blows through the rows of firs
In the forests that shimmer pale,
And come to twine where the mountains shine
And the gods of the land cheer and wail
For sacrifices made of the good and hale.

Not a breath of the strange gods of old
That tear the past and present its own
Can quicken the night, when a cosmic power
Spreads a blanket of dread from their throne
Down where its people fear of the unknown

So once a solstice, the gods arrive
To reap the souls of those unwise,
The ones who play and cheer with joy,
Who believe their parents' eerie lies
And stare confused at [the] anguished cries.

And all the blood and blossoms they give,
Shall bring them prosperity and hope,
And give them daily bread and wine,

Until they have to bring out the rope
And use the bloodshed to create another trope.

Then again they must wait,
Until the winter moonlight shines again.
To prepare their feasts and offerings,
And decorate the plate with a sweet red cane,
For none dare to break this sacred chain.

DROWN/DIVE

By Elena Sanchez

Sink or swim.
Whatever it takes to win
Whatever it takes to begin.

Lately, the lights are empty
And the temperature is too cold
No bars to hold.
The water used to flow evenly
But it's been choppy.

Sunlight
Salt flavored smiles
Lasting for awhile
The sun washing away the sand
A glistening hand

Preparing for a greater future.
Searching for wellness
For wholeness
For something to grasp onto

Instead, I am sinking
Instead, I am swimming
Instead, I am floating.

VOIDS

By Kaylin Isidro

The saddest part of human existence
is the continuous presence of voids.

Voids that congest our chests, depriving us of the happy thoughts that
reassure us that we belong, the bouncy tunes that serve as our lifeline.
None of us know what we're doing, but we'll turn lemons into lemonade,
thumb the buttons on gameboys, and eat gumdrops and popcorn balls
because

the best part of human existence is the extremes we feel living it.

We live for moments like this.

Standing on top of mountains, snow nipping at our bare skins, but we don't
care; we impaled our demons when we pierced our flag into the winter that
gathered at the top of everest.

Life is a game we play for amusement. the typing of keys paint the visuals
in the human brain for other specimens to see—what more do we need to
appreciate us?

We feel so helpless sometimes.

Hope drained and belly pains.

I feel so lost, but together we can fit in, if we create a society for the lost kids.

Wave the flags because we're rainbow kids. The skies and the heavens will be
blocked by our colors,

because the voids have eaten our brains and we are like decaying zombies;
the only intention we have, the only thing we pour our heart and energy and
focus into, is to survive this single day. Lifting a foot out of bed is like lifting a
dumbbell with a single toe, weighing us down with nothing but sheer feeling.

I can't figure us out.

Slam the piano keys and crunch gummy packs

let the emotions gush out of you like the blood of a stab wound,

uncontrollable and indescribable

just feel the life slipping away

but in reality

nothing is actually happening to us

it's all an illusion

all a void

and we're letting life play with us,

pull on our strings
but at the same time
we cling to it, with a tight, tight grip
but
some of us

let go

- sometimes we get sick.

DEAR GRAMS

By Jenna Ramiscal

You deserve every last drop of happiness
For your smile always made someone's day

Your thoughtfulness guided me through time
Showing the well lit up path
Granted by your compliments

Your stubbornness still got the best of you
But fights and outbursts soon became cheerful stories
Where we could only laugh

Your forgetfulness was a looming cloud
That filled up over time

Your repetitive kindness and
Overly asked questions
Were the foundations of our later conversations

You became like a broken record
A CD on replay
There were times
Where I no longer wanted to answer

Ever since the loss of your other half
Your body broke down
Shattering piece by piece
As if you were glass being broken
In slow motion

For the past six years
Have only been one long roller coaster
That seemed never-ending

The end was never clear

Until the ride stopped
Mid-path as if there was a blackout

Exactly twelve hours and thirty-two minutes
Before your special day
That granted you a new age
The 'never ending' ride stopped
There were no goodbyes
For the action was too sudden

Then reality hit me in the head
Leaving the buzzing pain
And ringing bells

Grams, I hope you know
You have always deserved
Every last drop of
My love
And forgiveness

CONSTELLATIONS

By Isabella Miller

A band of long-ers who abandon belongings, longing to journey, bound by the wind.

Pull out our judgment and egos in fistfuls and leave it with apple cores in rusty trash bins.

When our faces are masked by the darkness of night and all we have is the glittering starlight,

Pull your bandanna over your nose.

Huddle together in the cold.

When I saw you in the daylight I never would have known you lost a sister when you were five and a half years old, now I wonder how that shaped you after you told me now that was thirteen years ago.

Funny, the words that spill out like they're yanked from our insides on strings of constellations,

When faces are silhouettes and people settle in with the crunching of gravel and warm buzz of rubbing shoulders.

A NIGHT SCENE MOTIF

By Rahan Cadence

Integrals and individuals, this city is full of both.
Area under curves, where my hands rest and explore
Area codes for me change every season.

In print it's a drag; mundane, monotone, black and white.
But in action it's dynamic,
In color, in day, and in night

Salary fluctuates like the line graphs for stocks,
But nightlife is stable-
 Always changing, always up.
Sometimes, rock bottom means bottom of glass.
Other times, it's the butt end of a diamond in gold.

People are changing, like the city heights and lights.
On morning they glow yellow, the next week they shine white.

Who needs to see stars, if the nightscape is shining just as strong?
All the stars we need are in museums, pictures, and screens.
No monsters with red eyes, or closet freaks
But what might be scarier are the people on the streets.

VIRAL

By Rahan Cadence

My name is Jengo Uhmnyaga, thirty years old, Kinshasa, Zaire, Democratic Republic of the Congo. I have one handsome son and a good wife. I live in a cement house by the community school where I teach. I plant teak trees on my weekends with my class where it is legal. I am Jengo Uhmnyaga and I teach my students to fight against the white doctors.

My mother and father took my sister and abandoned me when I was young enough to not understand, but old enough to live by myself. They never came back from the “hospital” like they promised to. Even if they did, I wouldn’t let them anywhere near my only family. They didn’t know me, they don’t know my son, they never met my wife, and it is not important to find them again.

They left because my sister was more important than me. I could have cholera and they’d tell me to sleep and rest my tired monkey’s eyes until it’s gone. But my sister, her stomach hurts a little and they immediately get up to leave. They told me to stay home. I did. They all went to the hospital and never came back for me.

I have been sick for a week. It started out as a cold, then it became a fever. I thought it was malaria and considered getting help from the white tent, but I remember a family in my village who had asked for help because they all had stomach aches. Only the mother was ever seen again, trying to inhale the river!

I know I should find help. It is being offered to me in the white tent, but I would rather be eaten by worms than let their ghost hands touch me. They’re liars! They won’t help me! They’ll just take my blood and experiment on me like an animal! Why should they get the pleasure of collecting my precious blood for their fun and games?

I am miserable! I am sick! I am dying inside. My brain, my arms, my lungs, and in my heart! I cannot dig a hole in the dirt without fainting. I must ask my students to carry my textbooks because I cannot coordinate all my fingers to curl around them at the same time. I’m dying in the mind! In the movements, the thinking, in the memories, in the reality! I was teaching mathematics and suddenly there was a biology diagram on the board! I’m dying on the outside too! Everything’s dying! My skin crawls, underneath it burns, it bleeds and doesn’t stop until I faint. Faint! One step closer to death!

Death! In death there is no feeling. You cannot feel joy. Sympathy. Euphoria. Pride, gratitude, and desire. Interest, success, inspiration. Trust, appreciation, passion. Death. It's the ultimate anaesthesia. A drunken wash over feeling. Another hazy toast to the loss of life. And a goodbye toast to love. To curiosity, serenity, peace. To admiration, eagerness, and strength. Hope. You cannot feel pain. Grief and anxiety. Stress. You can't feel your bones aching. The blood leaking. Clotting, if you're lucky. You can't feel the feverish heat radiating off your bones. You can't feel the burn of pouring water on your skin. The aches of speaking and breathing. The physical drain of blood and the mental drain of power. The chilling hatred for the clean white tents.

So many of us are getting sick. The pretty little twin boys and their father who live across the street; there is only one of them now. I see the father at village gatherings. The youngest of the medicine men in our village dug his own grave. Even he knew there was no medicine for what he had. The old farmer whose cows he would let me and my sister milk on the few birthdays we shared. His cows are still alive, but none else. The biggest pain is not my thrashing head or arthritic legs, but my sister whose stomach never stopped aching.

It's the white tent. She went to ask for help and they took all three of them in and kept them for days. My parents left distraught only to return with the same symptoms of my sister a day later. My neighbor across the street carried his two little boys across hills and deserted land for many kilometers, only to be turned away because the white tents were full. Full! "Full," but black body bags inside continued to pile up inside the white tent. "Full," but full of the dead!

To me, "Mr. Teacher Jenga Umganya," they offer medicine for free, if only I allow them to check my blood so they can 'understand' what sickness I caught and 'which medicine is correct' for it. They say, they say! Well they said to the father whose legs were weak from weight and famine that his two children could not be treated because the dead were inside, taking up space. What medicine shall they give to the body bags after testing their blood?

My teak trees are outlasting even myself. What holds the white tents up? My trees. What burns infected flesh and blood? My trees. Who watches my students at the school from above? My trees? Who sees my son and wife eating without my at home through the misshapen window of my kitchen? My trees. Teak trees see all my life from my home, my school, my deathbed, and soon it will be my teak trees that are burned to kindle the hellfire that erases my disease.

These are the final words of Jengo Uhmnyaga:

My disease was not the virus- it was my ignorance. I misunderstood my life away. My family did not leave, but were taken by death, perhaps to protect my health. The white tents were the collectors; those who handpicked the diseases and took them away to protect the health of others. I have learned the truth, and earned my peace. Farewell.

ONE

By Olivia Staples

It's,

It's like,
It's like two

Two in one

When,
When one becomes two
Because you can't be one with two
Because,

Because you are one
With two things

But all together one
One of a kind
One person,

Only one

DIZZYING JUXTAPOSITION

By Olivia Staples

One way,
Another way.

Two ways,
But different directions.

I know what happened,
But what did happen?
I'm still the same,
Just more.

Changes are normal.
I'm normal.
I'm a child.

Do I feel guilty, pride?
I feel confused.

I live luxury,
She lived poverty.
What do I do, if all I've ever known was, all she ever didn't.

THE LAVISH LADY

By Arielle Santos

She sipped on her champagne,
Her skinny glass wrapped around her manicured fingers,
Her Chanel shoes pointed towards her husband and jazz singers.
The parties the two threw were lavish and screamed high status,
With the wealth they possessed, how could they not make their parties the best?

Only the richest of the rich could afford automobiles,
Only the richest of the rich could afford such luxurious meals,
Blinged high heels clicked and clacked down the streets of NYC
Wealthy folks took cruise ships to Sydney,
An opportunity they took to flaunt their extravagant clothing.

Trips to Harlem were orchid nights of swiffles from sliding feet
As they danced to infectious beats.
It was their favorite alternative to their parties booming with sex hormones,
Sweat dripping down their cheekbones,
tracing a trail of pale flesh through the wife's cherry rouge.

Ladies loved to thank the couple for the hospitality and phenomenal parties.
They tell the wife, "Oh, you're so lucky!
So lucky to rest diamonds on your collar bones,
So lucky to have the means for multiple telephones,
So lucky to own such an immaculate mansion,
And so lucky to hold the newest trends of fashion."

I never understood why folks around her looked at her with envy,
After all, haven't they heard of what happened to Gatsby?

BANSHEE

By Alaysia Spruill

My child, don't cry for me.

Ceramic shards and scorching coffee
Pooling 'round her feet
The phone just rings and rings
Men in uniforms confirm everything.

Pills tossed back carelessly
To quell the throbbing scream
To staunch the bleeding wound
No more light in the room
She will try not to sing,
lest she scream
No tears, like Mother said.

Drip drip drip

Pills tossed back carelessly
To have a moment of peace
To staunch the bleeding wound
Pure darkness in the room
Carpet scruffy, fuzzy like cotton
Mother's lovely face forgotten

And Death's serenade, Death in her window
Diamond tiles and blood; light bulbs glow
Death and one serenade
One blade
One scream

Mother's voice
Mother's dream
Pills tossed back carelessly

JOHN DOE

By Darius King

I would have never thought I would end up in a wedding dress, known as a bride. But at the same time, I was expecting it. Growing up as a female when you really are a male can mess up your whole mindset. People calling you a “she” when you know in your heart you are a “he.” People calling you “beautiful” and saying comments like, “she will make a great queen one day.” It takes a lot to hold on to yourself and not give in. I want to be a boy - I am a boy. Since I was born, my mother, Queen Nephele, raised me as a girl named Zoe, though I name myself Arius. The Juihé Empire is a matriarchal empire, and tradition in my family has only had daughters for over 70 years, therefore leaving only women to rule. I broke that tradition. If my birth as a boy was leaked, the empire would fall. Or so my mother says. The only people who know about Arius are my mother, father, my doctor and the few guards around the palace and they all were sworn to secrecy. I am not allowed to walk around the palace as Arius, and I have to wear the dresses my mother gives me and be Zoe. I especially can not leave the palace, even as Zoe, unless my mother is with me, to make sure I don't accidentally slip up. My voice is unnaturally high pitched, due to hours of practicing a “princessy” voice with my mother, so my vocal cords must have formed into a more feminine attitude. When I was younger, my mother said that it was even harder to keep my gender a secret, since I was more crazy and didn't listen, but to be honest, is there a difference now?

I pull out of my thoughts and go back to the present. Today is my wedding day with Prince Linus, who I had been betrothed to since our births. Or, mine at least. I've only met him once, and even if I were into guys, I wouldn't have liked him, let alone want to marry him. I hop off my bed, dressed in a pink blouse with about a million layers of makeup to cover up my masculine face, and walk out the door to my mother's room. I look like a twelve year old girl, which I guess was the goal, but I'm really fourteen, and Linus is eighteen. My hair is coincidentally long, so perfect for girl hairstyles. It's in a hazel braid along my shoulder. I open the door and I can hear loud chattering. As I walk in, my mother greets me excitedly with Linus's mom, Queen Selina, next to her.

“Zoe! We were just talking about your wedding dress.” she says. “Would you prefer a pure white or more of a beige?”

she says while holding up two different dresses. Neither. I think, but I could never say that.

“Beige, maybe?”

“I was thinking the same thing! Should your veil match the dress or should it be white and give the outfit a bit of pop? I personally feel like a pop of color wouldn’t hurt the outfit, but being more traditional and matching the outfit would be absolutely precious.” Mother rants.

“I couldn’t agree more!” Queen Selina says lightly. I turn away, leaving the room, trying to remember my purpose of even walking into that hell. As I leave, I hear them switch the subject to seating arrangements. I stride around the palace, since I can’t go anywhere else, and I quite literally bump into Linus as I make my way to the Coronation Hall, where in a couple of hours I will be vowing my love to him.

“So sorry, madam.” He says.

“It’s alright.” I say with fake reassurance.

“The crowds are starting to fill in in the Coronation Hall.”

“That’s wonderful. I’m glad so many people are going to watch this important moment for us.”

Disgusting.

“It truly is wonderful,” he says. The silence is awkward, and after a while I continue walking forward, with no set destination. It’s only a wedding. The kiss... it’ll last two seconds. Quick and easy. But I can’t take it. The idea of this is insane in my head. This can’t happen.

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I race through the halls with old rags on and a hood over my face. I had scrubbed the makeup off my face and changed into a more boyish style of clothing, which I wore under my disguise. The wedding is in ten minutes and my mother is expecting me to be down there in my wonderful beige dress, strolling down the red carpet and confessing my vows to Prince Linus at that time. I go down the grand steps into the Coronation Hall and blend with the crowd. I can see Prince Linus standing in the front of the hall and the Priest with him. My mother is in the very front, practically jumping out of her seat in excitement. After what seems like years rather than ten minutes, the wedding bells come on and the traditional drums and string instruments start playing. But I don’t walk down the aisle. Instead, I push through, making my way to the front of the hall, refusing to step on the velvet carpet. I walk to the stage where Prince Linus stands and rip off my rag disguise, revealing my outfit.

“What is the meaning of this!” Mother shouts. Prince Linus steps away uncomfortably.

“I am Prince Arius of the Juihé Empire, therefore the rightful heir next in line for the crown!” I announce boldly. I pull up my sleeve, revealing the royal symbol branded into my arm since birth.

“My mother hid me away, faking my life - and my gender - so this Empire wouldn’t fall.” My body feels so relieved to be exposed. My spirit jumps around in my skin and a smile spreads across my face.

NATURAL

By Christian Dominguez

To behold the fruit which grew from the seed planted so long ago,
And to be unsure of what to do with it, one can only hope the fruit remains
sweet,
and tasteful,
and colorful.
For when the natural process of decay begins,
It is already too late.

BUT AN IMPRESSION

By Bella Nazur

There is a man
Crafted of cold copper and bolts with
A laurel of victory around his head
Woven of remembrance and honor

Some walk past him and scoff.
They know better.

His hair stands stiff but
It's nowhere as stiff as his smile
Crafted of brittle emotion
Faked and molded into something new

Not too long ago, he would have
been seen as genuine.

He stands tall and proud
His face smooth as if the mistakes he made
Were erased from his face
Crow's feet brushed into oblivion

He's an antique as everyone knows.
Antiques always end up worthless.

He is the after-image of a dead man
Propped up through the force
Of history refusing to be forgotten
Of people warping it just like they warped him

Everyone knows that eventually everything dies.
Inevitably, even an after-image must die.

He is but a man made of metal
Hollowed out and remade
They think he can reframe history but
He is only the meaning he is assigned

DOLLY

By Julie Hughes-Quintana

Decorated like fine cake
She licked her liquered lips
And placed Dolly on a slip of velvet cloth.

“Girl,” she interrogated lowly
“I believe you’ve led me on”
The cruel woman darkened her encrusted eyes

Almost as a whisper
And laughed at her angel’s golden cry
She flew higher and higher

Touched the sun
And shattered in a million pieces to the ground
But the doll was fine.

HAPPINESS

By Kendra Curtis

What does it mean to be happy?
Is it feeling the rhythm of a beat?
Is it truly meant to be?

What makes people happy?
Is it laughing and playing in the heat?
What does it mean to be happy?

Is it going on a shopping spree?
Is it the feeling you get in your feet?
Is it truly meant to be?

Is it watching tv?
Is it eating delicious treats?
What does it mean to be happy?

Is it living life carefree?
What makes you feel complete?
Is it truly meant to be?

What does it mean to be happy?
Happiness is found in me.
Don't ever accept defeat.
Is it truly meant to be?

TILL NEXT TIME

By Jared Lee Pineda

Their meeting was not by chance,
but fate brought them together.
They both were lost
the feeling of emptiness haunted them, broken
souls in desperate need of repair. As time
passed, the further they fell.

Under the full moon they fell
in love, taking a chance
on one another. As time
passed, they finally felt together
They both were broken,
but with the other it was all lost.

They lost
themselves in each other. Fell
so deeply for the other, they were broken
when apart. Never a chance
to grow on one's own. Together
every moment, all the time.

As time
slipped away, so did my affection. I lost
her to another. Together
never felt so alone. Our love fell
apart. I begged for one chance,
but we were broken.

I was a broken
man. So much time
has passed, there's no chance
of us again. I have lost.
As Lucifer fell
to desire, we now fall together.

It is in vain to bring myself together
I once again am broken
I have fallen
to my desires. Only time
may heal these wounds. I lost her once,
but never again if given the chance.

It was not by chance that we fell
in love. I lost myself, I am broken, but together
we can be again. Till next time.

THE CLOCK ON THE DRESSER

By Sage Clements

Light seeps in through the small crack of the closet door. I have no sense of time here, just the muffled ticking of the clock on the dresser next to my bed. It's too hard to count the long minutes of the silent night. It's too easy to come up with fantasies that I know will never come true.

I hear my husbands footsteps on the other side of the door, pacing back and forth, "Honey? Where are you?"

I can hear the panic in his voice. The sliver of light cutting through the door grows wider and I can see his face surrounded by the milky morning sun, "How'd you get in here? Was it a nightmare again?" His voice is sweet and tender. He knows how much it scares me when he sounds worried.

I nod. He scoops up my limp body and sets me softly on the bed. "Are you okay?"

I shrug. It's the same thing every night. I have a nightmare. I think it's real. I die in every one of them, but always wake up in a different place almost every morning. It's almost normal now. Almost. He kisses my forehead and brushes my thinning arm lightly, "Still beautiful," he smiles softly, and I suddenly feel a catch in my throat. How much longer?

He kisses the top of my head and places his hand behind my neck and pulls me closer to his chest. He feels warm. I wrap my arms around his waist. He does the same. I listen to his steady breathing as he rocks me back and forth. I close my eyes to catch the tears and reel them back in.

When he leaves for work like he does every day, I feel even emptier than usual. I wave at him and smile small when he backs out of the driveway and drives away from the house. I turn to the mirror next to our dining room table. I wrap my arms around my waist that's almost gone now. My cheeks look sunken in, my hair is thinning. My eyes look like they're already dead. I look worse than I usually do. I wonder if I look like that over there too. I don't like thinking about that much, but how can I not?

I can feel my parents' presence sometimes and I know they're there. There in the hospital where the floors always too clean and the smell too strong. I can almost detect their touch trying to pull me back. It doesn't work. I feel my husband in the room too. He's always hated hospitals, and yet I can sense him the most.

There's no point in eating. They do all of that for me. The nurses are constantly refilling me like clockwork every twelve hours. I don't get hungry anymore. I don't feel too much. I'm just here, stuck, existing and not existing all at once. I sit at the table. I know what's coming, so therefore I wait. I wait. Hours feel like minutes, but what else can I do but wait? I imagine that the day is bright and clear, a few cotton candy clouds resting on the horizon line, the sunset a soft pink blended with a bright orange- my favorite. The lights from his small car trail down the street and pull into the driveway. I open the door for him and he places his stuff next to it.

He kisses my lips like they're soft and dying rose petals about to fall from their stem, "I'm sorry," his breath tickles my ear.

I bite my lip, my voice cracking, "You know it wasn't your fault. The accident."

He cups my cheek with his palm and studies my face. When the tears finally fall and create steady flowing streams that run quietly down my gray face, his hand makes its way down to mine and he leads me to the bedroom. I lay down. He lies down behind me and holds me tightly like he's afraid I'll disappear.

—

His arms are still wrapped around me. He's asleep now, pretending like it's a normal night when I think we both know it's not. I stare at the blank wall in front of me and trace my fingers up and down his arm. My breathing slows and I relax, almost as if I'm falling asleep like any other night. His touch becomes numb against my skin. I can faintly hear a solid beeping slowing to a solid one. I can almost hear the rushing of feet against a clean slate of floor. I'm so close to feeling the touches of real people rather than the ones that I pretended were still happening. The gray turns to color and back to gray a few times before disappearing completely. The clock on the dresser stops ticking.

FLOWER

By Dayona Davis

Warmth of the sun on my face,
Being a unique type of race;
Hands outstretched I take in air,
As people walk by and stare;
Standing up straight and tall,
Drooping slightly in the Fall;
Surrounded by colored leaves,
Listening in to eaves;
Soon I'm coated with snow and dew,
Up above where birds once flew;
Dark clouds hover bringing rain,
Now there's no need to strain;
Standing tall once more,
Old age makes me sore;
Warmth of the sun on my face,
I suppose flowers are an endangered race

NOT THE ONE

By Ruth Lubao

It all started out like such a dream,
You were so amazing I wanted to scream.
The beat of my heart sped faster as we'd talk,
Your charisma had me in shock.

As you entered my life, I didn't know what to expect.
Due to the past, it was myself who I wanted to protect,
but you soon made my doubts go away.
Each time we spoke, I'd feel happiness at the end of the day.

Our moments together were the best time of my life,
So when you left, it cut me like a knife.
It broke me in ways I did not know could ever be broken,
You said the words I never wanted to hear spoken.

Anger and sadness rushed through,
Tears streamed down my face, feeling blue.
I was confused and hurt,
While hugging your sweatshirt.

You said we had a bright future ahead of us,
But you gave no chance for us to discuss.
Walked away and gave up on me,
Do you now feel free?

You moved on so quickly,
And it made me feel sickly.
You act like there was never an "us" to begin with,
Now inside me, there is an emotional battlefield.

Left me to pick up the leftover pieces,
But the pain just increases.
Yet I still want to be your friend.
God, will this toxic loop ever end?

Somehow I repeatedly turn back to you,
Your words still hurt, but do you even have a clue?
Bad habits die hard,
And I am forever scarred.

This was an experience I'll never forget.
You were one of the greatest guys I have ever met
And I have to say this:
It is you who I will always miss.

What makes me mad,
Is that you didn't see what you had.
Now that you're gone,
I have to move on.

A CUP OF LONGING

By Zahra Linsky

As soon as I took a sip, I realized it was poison. Or, maybe not. I should spit it out but I don't want to look rude in front of her. The girl sitting in front of me wouldn't do anything to our tea.

We were friends—or hopefully, more than that—but the taste of poison on my tongue shattered that fleeting thought.

Fleeting thoughts. God, I have so many. Should I have smelled the tea before? Or should

I put my faith in the Lord's grace? As a terrible Christian, I doubted He'd listen. He'd sooner call me a sinner than let me into the pearly gates.

"Annemarie, why aren't you listening?" she said, twirling a loose strand of hair with her good hand. "You look awfully pale."

I picked up the glass and pretended to sip. The fluid slips back out between my lips. Fluid must be the best way to describe it. I didn't know what was inside—wait. How was she okay? She drank the same tea. "I'm fine, but what about yourself?"

She sighed and pressed her hand against her forehead in an unladylike manner—common when we got left alone, without even a maid to chaperone us. She enjoyed drama. I didn't think I ever did, even as a child. "Not the greatest, but it's been a long day. Mother has me looking at possible husbands."

"Well," I crossed then uncrossed my legs, "I guess we're both reaching that age. Has it really been so long?"

"Quite possibly."

"Though it hasn't been so bad yet?"

Her eyes widened. "Your mother hasn't told you yet, has she?"

"No, what do you mean?" My heart raced. "She doesn't tell me much."

"You should ask. I think it'd be quite entertaining." She winked and pushed her foot closer to me. It picked up somewhat under my dress. "At the very least enlightening."

I gulped and a hint of lemon slid down my throat. I hoped it's not truly poison, but I don't actually know what poison—

“I think she’s found someone for you too.”

“Really?” I chuckled to hide my disappointment. “That’s wonderful.”

“This shouldn’t change anything between the two of us. Should it?”

“Nothing. Never. We’re fine. Don’t worry about it.”

Her chair scooched closer. I leaned back further. “Are you okay? You don’t seem so good.”

“I swear, I’m fine.”

“You should have Hilda—”

“Her name is Luisa.”

“—tell your mother to call the physician. I want my dearest friend the healthiest she can be.” She smiled at me, teeth glinting in the pale sunlight. My heart panged from the tea or otherwise. “Especially if she’ll meet her new husband tomorrow.”

I gulped and looked down at my tea. If it really was tea, then I could use a sip to calm my dry throat. “It’s tomorrow?”

She sipped her own, grinning. A dribble of tea ran down her chin. With a look of surprise, she caught it with a napkin before it reached her dress. Smiling to herself, she left it neatly folded on the table. Drinking problems—that’s what my mother always called it. I liked to say that she and I were too happy. “Yes, and I’m going to be there right along with you. Aren’t you excited?”

“Of course! It will be wonderful, won’t it?” I said, even with a pounding heart and constricting chest. I knew what this was. I knew how it affected me. But she’ll never know. Never.

“It will.” After she was up and standing tall, she offered me her good hand. I don’t know what happened to the other one. She never told. But this one was warm and soft and the last time I’d ever feel her skin on mine. I took it gratefully, even when my head swirled with images of us in front of the gates, elated and together, or smelling sulfur down below, tortured and ruined.

LIZARD PEOPLE

By Zahra Linsky & Annie Womack

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

DENNIS

sits on the couch, waiting for JOE. Joe walks in, looking frazzled.

JOE What did you organize this “meeting” for? Is it about your “relations” with your new boyfriend?

DENNIS

(sighs) Nope. Listen, you’ve been getting kind of lazy lately.

Looking out, the room is split in two with duct tape, like two quarreling children might split a bedroom. The side of the room that Joe came from is covered with clothes and trash and overall dirt. It looks disgusting. Lazy is an understatement. On Dennis’ side, everything is well put together. It’s clean and nice.

JOE

I haven’t. I’ve always been this way. You’re the one getting lazy. (in mock surprise) Is that dust I see?

DENNIS

Stop being an jerk, Joe.

JOE

Nah.

DENNIS

Could you just take an hour or half hour or quarter or anything? Literally anything. Your side is driving me insane.

JOE

You should see the inside.

DENNIS

Oh god. No thank you.

JOE

Okay... So I have a question for you.

DENNIS

(leans back in chair) Sure. Shoot.

JOE

Is your boyfriend a reptilian?

DENNIS

What the hell, Joe. He’s not.

JOE

Are you sure?

DENNIS

Of course, I'm sure. We're dating. Do you think I would date a lizard man?

JOE

I dunno what your taste is, but he looks like a freaking reptilian, Dennis! I mean just look at him: red hair, green eyes, bad with phones—

DENNIS

He sits at a computer all day. He's good at it.

JOE

—and that scar on his chest? Pretty unexplained to me.

DENNIS

He had a heart transplant. Just, ach. Jesus Christ, Joe. You're always going on about this lizard people crap. You know that it's all just-

JOE

I've got evidence! Proof! The reptilian armada has been ruling this country since the start, Dennis! And you're doing nothing to stop it!

DENNIS

I swear to God if you say the word 'sheeple' I'm moving out. You're going crazy, Joe. I think you need to see, like, a doctor about this. It used to be okay, but recently...

JOE

No, no, listen to me! Open your eyes, Dennis! Your boyfriend is evil! Look, see, here.

Joe pulls out a book.

JOE

Look at all the ways to recognize the reptilians. He's got so many of them! Red hair, greenish eyes, those scars, his super good hearing, his love of science, he's always talking about how he doesn't feel like he belongs-

DENNIS

Joe, that's... Insane. That's insane. Those are all just normal human traits that lots of people have.

JOE

I'm just trying to protect you, Dennis!

DENNIS

Are you trying to protect me? Really? Or are you jealous?

Joe freezes for a moment.

JOE

Wh. I. I have no idea what you're talking about.

DENNIS

Joe... Come on. It's obvious what's really going on here!

JOE

Yes, he's a lizard person! Just like Obama and Ted Cruz and everyone else!

DENNIS

(ignoring Joe) You're trying to get me to break up with him because you like me.

JOE

That's ridiculous! Utterly ridiculous. It's so ridiculous I'm not even going to acknowledge it.

Dennis places a hand on B's shoulder.

DENNIS

It's okay, Joe. It's okay. I mean, I don't feel the same, but this doesn't change anything.

JOE

That's not what I'm trying to tell you! I'm just trying to tell you your boyfriend is a reptilian!

Dennis pats Joe's shoulder, not listening.

DENNIS

Go clean up your shit, Joe, and maybe I'll make you dinner.

Joe splutters, blushing heavily.

JOE

I'm——I'm not in love with you!

DENNIS

I'm sure.

JOE

You're being ridiculous. The evidence is right there!

DENNIS

Joe, my boyfriend is not a reptilian.

JOE

But do you KNOW that?

DENNIS

Yes. Yes, I do. Just like I know that this whole thing is a sham to get me to break up with him.

JOE

You're impossible! I'm going back to my room.

DENNIS

(calling after him) And clean it while you're in there!

Dennis watches Joe go, slamming the door behind himself, an amused look on his face.

As soon as Joe is gone, Dennis stands up and stretches. He pulls off his wig and takes out his contact lenses, revealing red hair and green, reptilian eyes.

He smirks.

DENNIS

No, Joe. My boyfriend isn't a lizard person. Not a lizard person at all.

CONTRIBUTOR PROFILES

SAMANTHA PEARCE

Samantha Pearce is a Junior who really likes the word 'nostalgia' because it reminds her of meaningful memories and people. Her experiences in life inspire her to write. Her favorite character, Willow, suffers from a mental illness that's a remnant of her parents' taking their own lives. A new friend helps her get through her issues and heal from the terrible memory.

MEREDITH LANGE

Meredith Lange is a 6th grader who likes the uplifting feeling of the word 'hope'. Life experiences inspire Meredith to write, especially the time her brother left for college. Cletis Lyton from "For The Forgotten" who lost everything at a tender age and is often overlooked is her favorite character as he has the biggest heart out of all the characters.

IVY LANE

Ivy Lane is a Senior writer who likes the word 'crestfallen' for its beauty, rarity, and unexpected meaning. She finds her inspiration from the people in her life, other writers, and the need to express herself. Sim Catham is her favorite original character due to his entertaining and interesting personality, as well as his ability to bring Ivy's stories to life.

ALEXANDRIA RAMOS

Alexandria Ramos is a junior writer who enjoys the beauty of the word 'enigmatic'. Alexandria gets her inspiration from a simple line from a book or show that branches out into a multitude of story ideas for her. Once she has her idea for a story, she uses the desire of wanting others to feel something about her story as a driving force to continue writing a well written piece. Kohara Hirai is her favorite original character as Alexandria has poured lots of love and thought into shaping her personality and desires.

KARLOS M. GONZALEZ

Freshman Karlos M. Gonzalez likes the Spanish word 'aburrido' which means to be bored. Gonzalez enjoys the word as he enjoys referring to something as boring but it sounding like burrito. Everyday experiences and conversation is inspiration in bloom for their writing. Gonzalez' favorite character is Gamma Machina, who believed with all his heart that he was human, because of the conflict they were able to experiment with.

CATHLYN SERRANO

Cathlyn Serrano, a Senior, identifies more as a poet than as a storywriter. She is fond of the word 'hope' because it's a meaningful word to her and something that she always tries to believe in. She's inspired by her awareness of her own piled-up of emotions and the desire to release them in a non-violent manner. Her best characters are herself or variations of her persona. She believes in hope because it can be found everywhere, or it could very well be someone's lifeline.

JD OBEDICEN

Senior writer JD Obedicen really likes the word bubbles. He tends to write his stories and poems around one line that comes to mind prior to writing. His favorite characters, JC and Devin, were born to poke fun at the real-life romance between him and an unnamed friend of his.

CHELSEA SANCHEZ

Junior Chelsea Sanchez enjoys the word 'oeuvre', meaning a collection of an artists works. Along with the word sounding beautiful to her, Sanchez works to have a large oeuvre in the future. She garners her inspiration from forcing herself to write and pushing through her limits as a writer. Other times, she finds inspiration in her current mood and ideas that come to mind. Her favorite characters are Atlas and Macy who are a part of a story that revolves around mental illness, love, and sacrifice.

CALI NARANJO

Cali Naranjo is a Sophomore with a fondness for the word 'love': a word so small, yet carries so much meaning. She loves the way words sound on paper and from the mouths of other people. Her family and her feelings inspire her to write characters like called Clauf, a misunderstood man who falls in love, but has his heart broken and later loses his wife in his arms.

ANDREA HERNANDEZ

Andrea Hernandez is a senior writer. She really likes the word ‘Poughkeepsie’, a fun-sounding city in New York. Television shows, films, and her own emotions inspire her to write what she can't say out loud. Her favorite character she's written is named James Barnes, whom she tortured with pen and paper.

ELENA SANCHEZ

Senior writer Elena Sanchez likes the word ‘iridescence’ because she feels that things will get better if you look at it from different angles. Sanchez is inspired to create stories and ideas that resonate with other people. She is also inspired by films and music. From her inspiration, she created her favorite character named Kaleb. Elena Sanchez likes the dialogue that came naturally when writing him and how he seemed a certain way at surface level but had more depth than intended.

KAYLIN ISIDRO

Kaylin Isidro is an eighth grader with a liking for the word ‘camaraderie’ because it looks pretty and it's an easy way to summarize a friendship when writing. Lofi beats inspire her to write because it allows pent- up feelings such as anxiety, sadness, and rage, to be unleashed on paper. From her inspiration, she birthed a dork named Ivan Kelley: a superhero with all the powers that Superman has, yet is the most unheroic hero.

JENNA RAMISCAL

Jenna Ramiscal a 8th grade writer reminisces of her past with her father whenever she sees the word ‘fantastic’, a word that she has taken a liking for. Family and friends inspire her to write because she likes basing characters off of them and the experiences that she has with them.

ISABELLA MILLER

Isabella Miller is a Senior who likes the words ‘juxtapose’ and ‘parallax’ for the way they sound out loud, as well as for their dynamic connotations. She is inspired to write by the impact she sees art leave on the world. She hopes that her art makes her audience feel good, understood, or inspired. She created a kid named Elinor: an ambitious girl who wants to become a detective to solve her mother's mysterious murder.

RAHAN CADENCE

Rahan Cadence is a graduating Senior who enjoys the word ‘amoxicillin’ because it’s the best-tasting, disease-sounding word that’s ironically an antibiotic. She’s inspired to write about her experiences out of spite, as well as to create works from her anger and energy. From Her Majesty’s inspiration came the birth of Johan: the intelligently humored and tactical government agent; a kind lover with an incredible mind and good morality whom she offed with his head.

OLIVIA STAPLES

Senior writer Olivia Staples likes to say ‘lol’ because she finds it is a good answer for ‘anything and everything’. She finds inspiration to write from her experiences in life. Due to the abundance of characters she’s created, she has not named a favorite.

ARIELLE SANTOS

Arielle Santos is a junior who likes the word ‘juxtaposition’ because of how fun it is to say. To find inspiration, she tends to read works by her peers or in good books she happens to pick up. Arielle does not have a favorite character she’s written. Due to the nature of most of her stories being non-fantastical, she doesn’t often make characters that are “epic heroines” or anything of the sort.

ALAYSIA SPRUILL

Alaysia Spruill is a Senior writer who likes the word ‘coffee’ since it is one of her favorite drinks. Her inspiration for writing comes from the world around her, her experiences, and her dreams. Though Spruill has written many short stories and has developed a handful of original characters, she considers Mary as her favorite due to being a strong female figure with great motivations.

DARIUS KING

Darius King is a seventh grader who likes the positivity that the word ‘light’ gives. The world around him inspired him to create his favorite character, Arius, who reminds him of himself. Arius is similar to his creator since both of them would not like to be trapped somewhere they can’t express themselves.

CHRISTIAN DOMINGUEZ

Christian Dominguez is a Sophomore who likes the pronunciation and contextual meaning of the word 'elope'. His childhood friend, whom he keeps close to his heart, inspires him to write. The two were separated when his friend moved away, but not before gifting Dominguez on of his memorable stories. Morgan, a goofy character who is outwardly clumsy but wants to get along with everyone, is his favorite character.

BELLA NAZUR

Bella Nazur is a sophomore writer who really likes the word 'bury' due to its versatility and the way it sounds different for each person. Though not entirely sure what inspires them, they do occasionally have bursts of unfiltered necessity to write. Their inspiration has helped them in creating one of their favorite characters, who they modeled after a friend. Due to the character's nature, Bella believes they are well-designed considering the length of that story. They're also a nuanced and bisexual character, which helps in making them more entertaining.

JULIE HUGHES-QUINTANA

Julie Hughes-Quintana is a Sophomore writer who likes the pretty word 'oblivion' despite its connotation. The intimate feeling that writing gives you when pen meets paper is exhilarating and inspires Julie to write. It allows her to escape reality for a moment and explore the vast universes anyone can create and see. FableHaven is one such universe that inspired the creation of Julie's favorite character, Davion. Her alter ego who is tall, muscular, and isn't afraid of anything.

KENDRA CURTIS

Kendra Curtis is a Freshman writer who took a liking for the word 'bright' because it reminds her of sunshine and puts her in a good mood. Her family, who supports her and her passions, inspires her to write, which eventually led to the creation of Casey- a character whom she shares some of her inner struggles and characteristics with .

JARRED PINEDA

Jarred Pineda is a Junior who likes 'alpenglow' because it perfectly describes the heavens, the sky, and their beauty. He is deceptively sentimental with natural inclinations to write, although the beauty of nature and the people around him inspire characters like Cassiopeia, a girl who stays strong for her brother despite their family struggles. She is Pineda's favorite for her strong will, character development, and his attachment in creating her.

SAGE CLEMENTS

Sophomore Sage Clements likes the word 'euphoria' for its versatility in her writing. Clements gets her inspiration from her father, a published writer who shares tips, tricks, and ideas with her. A brief moment of her life inspired the creation of her favorite character, Eleanor, who is relatable without being cliché.

DAYONA DAVIS

Dayona Davis is a Sophomore who was inspired to write as an homage to her beloved sister whom she was close with when they were younger. Her favorite character, Haily, carries aspects similar to herself. For example, both are in high school.

RUTH LUBAO

Ruth Lubao is a junior writer who enjoys the word 'howdy'. To her, howdy is energetic and fun to say, being a better alternative to the simple and regular hello. Her burning emotions that rage inside of her inspires her to write, generally in the direction of her current emotion. It motivates her to put words into her mouth and express herself without actually speaking. Ruth's favorite character she's created is a girl who moved away while taking on the identity of her dead best friend in memory of her.

ZAHRA LINSKY

Zahra Linsky is a Sophomore writer who likes 'maelstrom' for its visual and auditory appeal. She's inspired to write by the relationships she sees between individuals and the mischief of ruining characters' lives. Her favorite creation is Rosalie Foth, who butches dead bodies and sells them to her butcher landlord.

ANNIE WOMACK

Annie Womack is a Senior writer who likes the word 'syzygy,' which refers to the alignment of the moon, Earth, and Sun. Plus, it has a fun pronunciation. Her mother is a writer as well, and serves as her main source of inspiration. Her favorite character was one of her very first; Kat.

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