

SPRINGFIELD

SONDER

LITERARY
MAGAZINE

VOLUME 7, EDITION 1

Meet the Editors

Co-Editor in Chief Asna Akram

Hi! I'm Asna Akram, and I'm currently a Senior at Springfield High School. Lit Mag is a great opportunity for me to experiment with different writing styles and explore new topics.

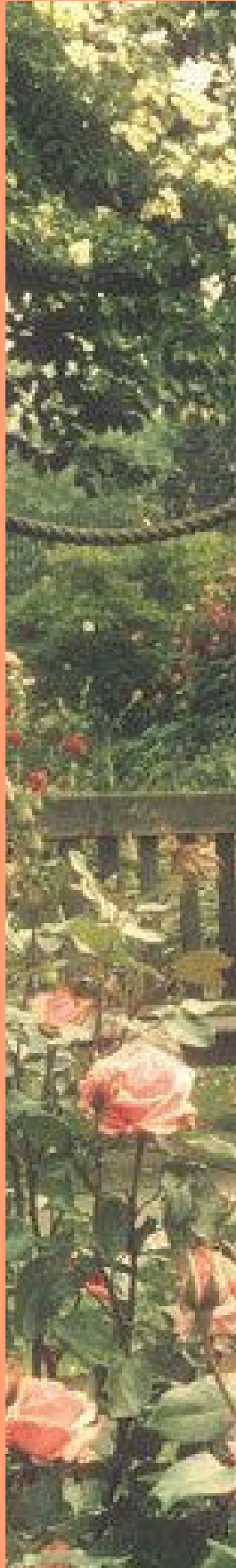
Lit Mag allows me to have a safe haven for my writing peices. I love the process of putting my thoughts and ideas down on paper and seeing them come to life. I'm excited to see where my writing journey takes me.

Advisor Mrs. Zubler

Hello, Everyone! My name is Mrs.

Zubler and this is my sixth year working with students to create our school's Sonder Literary Magazine.

Students at SHS take great pride in their creative work and enjoy sharing it with you. We know you will appreciate the variety of genres and topics within each edition, and hope that you also consider publishing with us!



Co-Editor in Chief Haniya Raheel

Hey! My name is Haniya Raheel and I am a Senior here at Springfield High School. I love to create writing pieces and edit videos in my free time. I can't wait to get to know everyone here in Lit Mag and create writing pieces in an environment where everyone shares the same passion. Thank you for taking your time to read our writing pieces.

Staff Writer Rosmy Joseph

Greetings! I'm Rosmy Joseph, a 12th grade student and senior at Springfield High School. I've worked with Sonder for three years as a Staff Writer who specializes in poetry and short stories, but I also enjoy creating art (through drawings and paintings!) as well as reading novels in my spare time. My passion is within the sciences, particularly biology and chemistry, but I enjoy learning anything and everything! Please enjoy our combined efforts over this literary masterpiece!

Meet the Writers

Nom

I've just joined Sonder as a junior this year and I'm very excited to be able to bring these wonderful pieces of writing to you. Writing is an outstanding art form and having the chance to share it with others is the best use of it. I will not continue to overstate the significance of this collection but on one final point, just know that all of these writings have a piece of a person within them and that there is beauty. Please enjoy.

Khushi Patel

Hi, my name is Khushi Patel! I joined this club in my 11th year and am excited to be a leader in my final year of high school. I love to write poetry and scary tales. Poetry has been a way to express emotions and test out new figurative languages! I try to improve my writing by experimenting with new genres such as psychology and mind-twisting stories. My favorite sport is tennis and my favorite subject is math. I hope you enjoy our creations!



Jasmine Rai

Designer

Hi! My name is Jasmine, and I am currently a Senior here at SHS. This is my second year in Literacy Magazine. Writing is a way many find a way to relax. I hope reading these pieces written by our classmates will allow you to see the different writing skills we all own. In my free time, I love to hang out with my family and friends. Over the past few years, I have dedicated many hours to volunteering at SHS and Bryn Mawr Hospital. I hope our writing pieces entertain you!

Gina Norman

Hello, my name is Gina Norman. I'm a Senior and I joined last year. I have a big passion for writing and watching movies. My top 5 favorite movies are Scarface, Goodfellas, A Bronx tale, Donnie Darko, The Outsiders. I have small talents like drawing and playing the piano that I do in my free time. I've already been to 3 places outside the country before I turned 13. I'm very open and bold person who loves meeting new people and making friends, and I hope to make new friends with in this club to.

Meet the Writers

Julia Mobley

Hello! My name is Julia Mobley! I'm a sophomore who's way too excited for high school. I love writing poems about my biggest story that is currently in the creation stage. Poems are one of my favorite things to write about due to the fact that they can be mysterious and vague. I will probably mostly write about this guy named Dave and everything that entails with him. Which is a lot.

Tiana Bassett

Hi! I'm Tiana, and I'm in my junior year. I am in the marching band, and I love reading, writing, going to concerts, and participating in community service opportunities. Writing brings freedom and control to things out of my hands. It's a comfortable way to share parts of myself, in short. Vulnerability is apparent, but it allows for creativity and liberation. I hope my work brings you as much joy as it brings me.



Crystal Bennett

Hiya! My name is Crystal Bennett and I'm a junior currently pursuing secondary education as a reading specialist. My love of reading and writing stemmed from our family traditions and time well spent in the libraries with my aunt. I am honored to be this year's co - designer and look forward to implementing the brilliant ideas of my team into this year's edition of the Literary Magazine. I hope reading our short stories and poems will bring you as much joy as I find in reading them!

Nicholas Samuel

My Name Is Nick Samuel and my role in the Literary Magazine is a writer. As of now, I'm currently in 11th grade, this being my first year working in Lit Mag. I have quite a few writing interests with them being poems, some editorials, and definitely short stories. Some of my other interests are throwing in track and field, performing in the marching band, and writing in the newspaper for the school. Another interest of mine is researching things, especially doing music and Ecology/Environmental Studies.

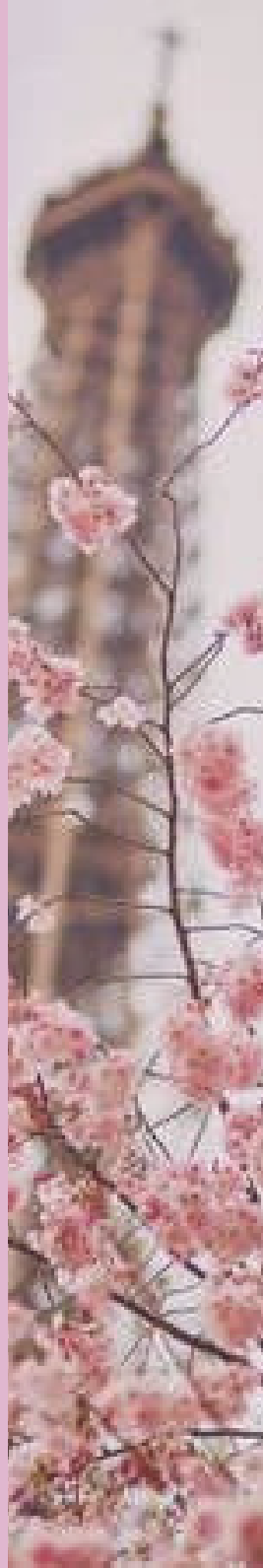
Meet the Writers

Siren Solace

Hello! My name is Siren Solace. I am a junior this year. Writing has always been second nature to me. I try to connect most of my pieces with parts of my life or people who inspire me. I also enjoy reading on the side. I am never not reading all types of stories. Reading helps strike my creative light bulb. Other than reading I also perform in musical theater. I hope you all enjoy the pieces I create!

Minnah

Hello. I'm Minnah, and I'm a 9th grade writer for the Springfield Sonder. I like to write fictional stories, informative pieces, and poetry. This is my first time joining a Literary Magazine club, and I'm excited to be part of it. I have been intrigued by literature since a young age. Writing is a beautiful way to share a part of me with the rest of the world. Thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy the magazine.



Kaitlyn Flickinger

Hello! My name is Kaitlyn, and I am a sophomore. I am a writer in Lit Mag and this is my first year joining the club. I really enjoy creative writing but can never really put pen to paper. I would consider myself having a creative mind as I can come up with a lot of story ideas. My goal is to write more frequently and to be able to create pieces I can read in the future. Some of my other hobbies are painting and reading. I am excited for this year!

Kara Kenney

Type here...

Roses

Kaitlyn Flickinger

I decided to visit the forbidden mansion. On my walk along the path, an angelic rose appears at the door stoop. The rose reminds me of a story my mother used to read to me, *The Beauty and The Beast*. The rose almost seems as if it is glowing. Rather than lingering, I enter.

I see a hallway with doors on each side. The hallway appears to stretch on forever. I left quickly, out of fright. Walking back, the rose seems to not be on the porch anymore. I brush it off and run. I run, run, and run until I finally reach my home.

After a rough day, I decided to go to sleep. While I am dreaming, I dream of what could be behind all of those doors. I dream about the rose. I dream, I dream, I dream.

BANG!

I woke up frightened by a very loud noise outside. Sleep will not come to me anymore, so I walk. My walk leads me back to that place. That mansion. The slow, glowing, sunrise puts the house in a different light. I enter the serene and peaceful mansion...the hallway is just how I left it. Dust collects in nearly every corner, as well as a multitude of cobwebs. I venture off into the house, going deeper and deeper. I'm finding hallways with doors lined up, opening the first door and finding more hallways, diving deeper into the abyss of this magical house. Losing track of time, I realized I was late for supper. I dart home.

When I am close to home, I see a bush of roses. The roses appear to glow while I pass by. I look across the street and another bush of roses appears. The roses remind me of the ones in a story my mother used to read to me. There is familiarity when I am near them.

But why? Why do they look like I have seen them every day for every second? My mind goes back to the house.

Now, when I am walking around town, I only see rose bushes. They have luminescent florets that look out of a storybook. I decided to ask my parents why they had appeared

"Why are there rose bushes everywhere?" I asked them during supper.

"What do you mean?" my mother replied

"There are rose bushes on almost every lawn and every garden, even ours," I responded. How could she not know about the roses?

"There aren't any bushes," she stated assuredly, "Are you feeling okay?"

Either every person in this town is crazy, or I am going insane. I am so bewildered. My mind goes back to the house. Was it all a dream? Is it the house? Something about the house. No, no, no!

My mother is the one that is crazy. I am entirely sane.

I hurriedly left the table to find the house. I dash across roads as quickly as I have ever dashed. When I arrive, I notice the house doesn't seem as whimsical as it did the last time I visited. Now it is gloomy and dark, almost as if it were to jump out at me, but it had a shine in the shadows and it sparkled in the sun. Now the interior seems dark and almost...suffocating. I entered the first room...it is not the same as when I left it. It used to have a tall dusty bookshelf with books that appeared to not have been read in millions of years. It had piles of books in nearly every corner. Now there aren't any more books and no dusty shelves are displayed.

I get a weird feeling that something bad is going to happen, so I leave.

I turn the knob to open the door...it won't budge. I push and pull; trying to find objects to use as a lever..

Nothing.

"You will never leave," an eerie gust of air says hauntingly.

"What are you talking about?" I am crazy, I am crazy, I am crazy. "Who's there?" I am very freaked out! Can the wind talk? It seems hours pass by before...the knob turns! I am saved, but the knob keeps turning and turning. The door won't budge. I push and I kick, but the door won't budge. I feel horrible. I feel like a washed up plastic bag that has been reused too many times. I am drained. In my delirium, a voice pops into my head.

"Wake up!"

I listen to the voice. It scares me, that deep voice.

"Please leave me be. I won't come back, I swear." A man appears, old and tattered. I proceed to open the door. It will not budge. He has a ring of keys. Maybe they can open the door.

I reach for them, but the man puts them at his head and swallows them whole, contorting his mouth in ways I have never seen before. It was horrifying! I can hear myself breathing fast; I am scared I will never get out of this place. I feel a hard shake.

I woke up suddenly to my mother's face.

I am late, I am late, I am late.

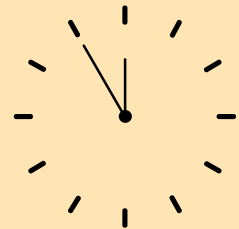
Was it a dream? It must have been, but the dark silhouette of the mansion still haunts me. I rush out the door and see a strange looking rose bush in the yard.

My mind goes back to the house...

In the Heat of the Moment

Tiana Bassett

The hairs on the children's heads stuck up from the thick static of the hot, sticky plastic slide. The wood chips rustled and shifted with every step, revealing a new underside of the dead grass beneath. Even from afar, I could feel the sand from the pit, abundant with child's play, cling to my skin. I sat on the swings, kicking up dust with every push backwards. As I stared straight ahead, I pictured the forthcoming autumn season; illustrated in front of me, the sky was more blue, the grass was adorned with vibrant fallen leaves, and the trees, oh the trees, were decorated with the welcoming colors of my favorite season. Screams of joy and laughter brought me back to the steaming reality. The summer was coming to a close; however, the blazing sun left me wondering when the temperatures would drop and the ground would crunch with every step. The swing's chains squealed with each swing. This park, a staple in my childhood, my entire life, even, has never led me wrong. The comforting sway of the wind in the trees over the rush of the nearby creek was an escape much closer than my beloved beach. The joy and excitement of kids adventuring the terrain fills me with both regret and warmth. I miss my life before I grew up, before the red robins' cries turned into cawing crows and the falling leaves turned into mush.



Minnah's Poem - Needs Title

**Silence is screaming
But fingers are shushing
To make the Earth a 'happy' place**

**Technology augments
But the world is losing reality
To let the dreamers think they're winning**

**Heads are spinning
Cars are rushing
Minutes go by seconds
Speed means efficiency**

**People cry
No one cares
Everyone runs by their own agenda**

Unexpected Connection

Tip, Tap. Tip, Tap. I stare at myself in the mirror as I try to emulate the movements coming from the choreographer in front of me. I slowly started to get frustrated by the complicated movements. It felt like I had two left feet sewn onto my tired legs. Our choreographer splits the group into two for more space. I was put into the second group, giving me a chance to catch my breath. Tip, Tap. Tip, Tap. The sound of shoes was endlessly pounding into my head. I watched carefully as the first group continued the routine. I caught myself gazing at this fluffy, dirty blonde-headed boy. His movement was powerful and flawless. His body moved like water gliding down a river. I was in awe and unaware of how long I was staring at him. I just couldn't move my eyes off of him. It was like the dance was created for him. He reminded me of a young Erick Hawkins dancing freely.

Eventually, this rosy-cheeked girl tapped me on the shoulder since the groups were switching. I didn't know if I could take another minute with this choreo. Tip, Tap Tip, Tap. I couldn't understand why the moves weren't sticking with me. Tip, Tap. Tip, Tap. The sound wouldn't leave my head. I could feel my heart beating out of my chest.

"You have to lift your leg more," the fluffy, dirty blonde blonde-headed boy said to me, making me question how long he was watching me struggle. The room went silent. The pounding in my head had stopped. All I could do was stare at him like he was crazy. *Why would he be talking to me right now?* His technique is full of grace, and then there's me who can't even get this simple combination down. I was able to get a better look at him. He was much taller than me. His eyes seemed to be a dark hazel like mine were.



“You don’t have to take my advice, but respectfully, you seemed like you needed a hand,” The boy continued. I shook myself out of my trance and took his advice. The moves started to feel more comfortable. He walked me to the side of the room where there was more room to practice.

We walked through the dance together while he corrected my mistakes. I thanked him with a smile. We went through the combo one last time, but this time felt different. The room felt still and tranquil like it was just us. The moves started to feel like second nature to me. The combination was finally sticking to my memory.

When we finished the dance, he smiled back at me with a pearl-white grin. “See, not so bad after all is it?” He laughed easily and earned a wide smile from me in return. The choreographer called the group to gather around her.



“We will be sending out important dates that should be marked down in your calendars. Great work today everyone, you are dismissed” The Choreographer announced. “Speaking of dates, when’s our first one?”

The boy whispered in my ear, sending chills down my back. The blood instantly rushed to my cheeks and I couldn’t help but blush. Without a response, I started gathering my belongings and making my way out of the class, a hand grabbed my wrist.

“I never caught your name,” the boy asked with another smile.

“November. And yours?” I asked, smiling back.

“I’m Atticus. We should hang out sometime,” he responded with a chuckle. I nodded in agreement as we walked out of class together. Who knew that not knowing my choreo could cause me to meet my best friend



The Tale of a Tigerlily

Sophia Zhyzneuski

At the age of 4,
The tiger lilies bloomed
The first time I felt my heart's core
As the lilies saw me groomed.

I'm thirteen
I walk through a familiar scented debris.
My large heart causes my body's nervous lean;
Which quickly is aided by the comfortable essence of Tigerlily.

The scar of the debris grew in and out
And you saw me constantly complying
Because I knew without a singular doubt,
That she influenced your lying.

I gazed as she flew by
Whilst swaddling my very first
Who would help her at a sigh
As that familiar flower in my heart burst.

I ran from the store
As she caused my muddled and inevitable gloom
But at least I could reminisce through the lore
Of the tigerlily's daughter's doom.



Visibility

By: Crystal Bennett

My pulse stutters as I take in ragged shards of vaguely breathable air. The world to my surroundings has turned into a cloud of mist. A nebulous of thickening fog that washes over the forest. Visibility is dense, the horizon has retreated into a thin web of scattered tree tops and flocking birds. The mist settles around me with a hollow wind, whirling agile leaves into its misted gaze. The wind tumbles into a dynamic mixture of mist and aspirations for the conclusion to this unforeseen pattern of weather. The wind whips around with a threatening howl to only succumb to the silence of the forest. I wheeze as my heart and lungs constrict with panic, but the hurricane of rapid kinetic air ceases to exist. All trace of its destructive ways dissipates with retreating mists. The forest settles into its new surroundings, leaves falling attentively from the once whirling air, branches relaxing with the exhale of movement grounded from the stoic grasses below. Calm serene serenity pacifies the forest floor, tree tops and surrounding vegetation. If one were to ponder my knowledge, I could indeed say with absolute certainty that there is such a calm that follows a storm.

A Strange Reunion

Rosmy Joseph

The afternoon sun was out, the leaves vibrantly dancing along the sidewalk as my feet prodded the pavement. My bored eyes grazed over the autumn landscape: the colorful yet decadent trees, the cool breeze whistling through the town, and the faint smell of fresh rainwater.

Amidst the familiar season, my soul seldom felt at ease: there was a certain nonchalance in the way my arms swung, the manner in which I held myself as my eyes lazily scanned the terrain I called home. Something felt out of place, though I couldn't put my finger on it.

I kept walking. What was only twenty minutes of movement felt like twenty centuries as I witnessed an elderly woman watering her wilting chrysanthemums, a gray squirrel hurriedly bouncing along the ebony wires hung above the uniform houses, and a group of young boys shouting as they frolicked into the nearby creek, searching for something to bother.

I suddenly felt a pair of beady eyes boring into the back of my neck, so I whipped around to see a boy. He looked close to my age, though frankly I had never seen him before. Those beady eyes, forest green and striking, stood out against the autumn hues. His hair was strange indeed, an unnatural white, so snowlike that he reminded me of a grandmother. His skin was no darker.

I raised an eyebrow in confusion. Why couldn't I recognize him? I thought I knew everyone in this town. It was always the same thing every day... So why was today so different?

Against my better wishes, I decided to communicate with him.

"Who are you?" I said, speaking loud enough for the odd boy to hear. I did not mean for my voice to sound snarky, but it came off sounding that way. Perhaps intimidating him was to my advantage.

“Your new friend”

The arrogance that radiated off of this boy, as well as the reverberation of those three words around us was both impressive and chilling. The breeze silently enveloped us, as if to carry away his words and spread them to the entire town. I rolled my eyes.

“And why exactly would I be friends with you?” I questioned, my voice still cold as ice.

He was unfazed. “Because you have no other choice.”

And with that, he grabbed my hand and yanked me away. I almost shrieked with fear, anxiety, and confusion. Where was he taking me? Was I getting kidnapped? Would I ever see the light of day again?

The boy looked over at my frightened expression and snickered.

“Relax. I won’t hurt you. Promise,” he said with that sneaky smile of his. I fought against his hold, but the grip with which he held my hand was so firm that I couldn’t shake myself off even if I wanted to. I glared at him.

“Why are you so cryptic and weird?”

The boy laughed louder, amused by my question.

I felt like a child getting dragged away by their parent to get grounded for a month.

“Do you think this is funny?”

“As a matter of fact, I do.” He replied with that wry smile again as he guided me beyond the path and into the lush forest of trees. I grimaced as we stepped over red, orange, and yellow leaves that lay spattered about.

“Where are we going? You haven’t even told me your name!” I exclaimed

“I’ll show you. And that’s not important.”

“Yes, it is! Tell me right now or I’ll... I’ll scream for help and you’ll get in trouble!”

“The police won’t find us out here.” He tugged at my arm and kept going.

“Don’t make me!” I looked like I was going to lose my mind

“Fuss all you want, you’re still coming with me.”

“NO!” I shouted

“Yes.” He asserted calmly.

“Look, I know who you are. And I have to say, Martin was right. You are *tough* to deal with,” he added with that stupid smile as he stared back at me. I looked away, fuming.

“You’re not telling me anything here! Who is Martin? Who are *you?*”

“Okay, fine!” He laughed defensively. “I’m Jack.”

“That still doesn’t tell me anything, *Jack*.” I replied back, a look of irritation browsing my features. I felt the breeze ruffle my dark hair as I stared at the pale boy again, silently demanding for more revelations.

He sighed. “Martin’s my boss, but I won’t elaborate any further. As for you, I have a question: have you been feeling rather *bored* recently? Be honest.”

My eyes widened with surprise. *How could this strange boy have known about my disconnection with the world? The boredom I feel on the daily?* I grew intrigued, albeit concerned.

“Um.. maybe I have. Why does it matter?” My voice was quieter this time. He had my attention.

“Because of *this*.” He held out a blank piece of paper that he removed from his pocket. I stared at it, confused again. Before I spoke, though, he gently ran his fingers across the paper, causing a cascade of images to appear: images of the town from hundreds of years ago all the way up until today... like a scrapbook of time itself. My eyes went as wide as saucers and I replied on instinct.

“Are you a *magician?*” I spoke almost like a child again, as if he had amazed me beyond belief. Which he had.

“Not quite. Would you believe me if I told you who I really am?”

There it was again; his crypticity was so aggravating and yet so captivating

.

“Fine... then I’ll ask again: who are you?”

He smiled. “I’m your son. From the future.”

From that day onward, my life went from spectating the normal to unlocking the extraordinary.

It can be said that I’d never be bored again.

Little Solider

By Asna Akram

The young boy sat on the ground clutching his toy soldier. His father had given him the toy when he was merely a baby. It was the boy's favorite toy. He would always pretend to be a soldier that was fighting in the war. No matter the hardships the boy pondered up, the toy soldier would always triumph. The boy wanted to be a soldier just like his toy. The toy soldier was his little good luck charm. He would take it everywhere he went. He was convinced that it would always help him. But no matter how much luck you have, it always seems to run out. A letter came in the mail addressed to his father. His father was drafted for the war. His father explained to him that they would not see each other for a long time.

Although the boy knew that what his father was saying was important, he couldn't help but tune him out. His father would become a soldier like his favorite toy! The boy was excited to find out that his father would become a hero. The boy imagined his father in place of the toy soldier. Instead of his toy winning the battles and getting victories, it would be his dad! The boy wanted to be a soldier when he grew up, just like his dad. Although the boy was excited, the look on his father's face was filled with dread. The boy looked over at his father with confused eyes. Didn't he want to be a hero?

Later that evening, the boy awoke from the loud noises that were coming from downstairs. As he slowly trekked down the steps to avoid making any noises, his ears filled with sounds of bickering and distress. Was it about the letter? Despite the boy's efforts to not be found, his parents looked over and ushered him back to bed.



As his father prepared to leave for the war, the boy told him to wait and ran to his room. In the boy's tiny hands was the toy soldier that his father had given him a lifetime ago. He handed it to his father explaining how the toy had given him a lot of luck throughout the years. The boy hoped that the toy would give his father luck as well.

"Goodbye, my Little Soldier," his father said and he ruffled his hair.

As he saw his father walk away, the boy thought about how he couldn't wait to talk to his father about all his adventures. The boy made a routine to look out the window every day to check for his father. He wanted to make sure that he would not miss out on seeing his father's return. Despite the letters back and forth, nothing could truly quench the desire for his father's touch. But, no matter how much he waited, the boy's father didn't return.

One day, while the boy was looking out the window, he saw a brown box. Inside the box was another letter just like the one before. After one glance, his mother clasped the letter and wept. His father had died in the war. Why did his good luck charm fail him? The boy wept alongside his mother.

Alongside the letter, however, were his father's belongings. The box contained all the letters they had sent him. There were pictures there too. In the back corners of the box, laid the toy soldier he had given his father. The boy sobbed harder. His father was supposed to give him the toy. He wanted to hug his father, not the toy. As he gently held the toy, he realized that all his thoughts about the toy's lucky magic were a lie. If it was truly magic, his father wouldn't have died, right? Instead of all the happy memories, the toy used to give, his mind filled with despair as he wrapped his hands around the toy. The boy's previously treasured toy soldier became a nagging reminder of the death of his father. It flooded his brain with memories that he now wishes to forget. The boy remembers himself and his father playing board games around the coffee table. He remembers his father teaching him how to ride a bike. He remembers all of the times he and his father played soldier together. He realized that he didn't want to be a soldier anymore. He didn't even want his toy back. He wanted his father back.

The young boy sat on the ground clutching his toy soldier as he cried.



Poisonous Politicians

By: Julia Mobley

Another banquet, another boring conversation with a boring politician. She was regretting coming here. The product that she forcibly put on her curls was slowly wearing off as the hair began to grow and expand as it got frizzier. The sweltering heat that she was indeed, NOT used to, was making it worse. At least her dark blue dress was beautiful. It was lined with a silver lace that reminded her so much of home. Fine dark blue fabric wrapped around her body, she was the empress of the Northern Empire after all. Another factor that made her day all the better was the dirty looks she got from the Realican guards that surrounded the palace. All she could do was put on a perfect empress smile, even though her skin was boiling from the inside. She and other leaders were invited into the Royal castle of Bazin- Located in Realica- for "A chance at peace." She knew that Fictical was currently on edge after the death of one of the leaders of Fictical, and that Fictical blamed Realica for his disappearance. So apparently, this banquet was supposed to be a sign of peace between Realica and Fictical and their allied nations. However, She watched as Jess glared ever so silently at Miles Bazin, The king of Realica. She was sitting right next to Jess.

"Hey," she whispered very quietly to her friend, "You're glaring."

"Shoot, am I?" Jess asked, as her face formed a more neutral expression. "Thanks Elizabeth," Elizabeth smiled

"No problem. Just so you know, the Northern Empire has your full support." Jess nodded, dirty blond curls slightly falling in front of her face.

"Yes yes, I thank you for that," Jess muttered as she looked towards Miles once more. The man was dressed ever so extravagantly, White and black robes draped over his shoulders. A red-collared shirt with a dark purple cloak swaying behind him. The man had a smug look on his face, he was sitting at the large rectangular table opposite Jess. Elizabeth slightly narrowed her eyes at him, she never did like his presence.

The Realican King stood up, "Hello my fellow Leaders." His voice rang in Elizabeth's ears. "I invite you to my banquet in hopes of peace and prosperity," he said, smiling at all of the people at the table. It was mainly a combination of different advisors and nobles, each sitting in their assigned section. Elizabeth flickered her eyes towards her advisors, who looked to be having a worse time than her.

She spotted both the Leader of The Ugrates seated next to King Miles, meanwhile, the Leader of Shuhuili sat with her and Jess on the other side of the table. A polite yet tense conversation broke out between some of the advisors as the food began to be distributed. Elizabeth watched as the foreign food was placed in front of her.

It looked to be some sort of breaded Chicken with a of Mushroom sauce dribbled on top of it. She sat up a little higher and looked around at the table for a brief moment. Realica's king met with her dark blue eyes only for a moment before they got torn away, good riddance she thought. She grabbed her fork and began to eat her meal, only hoping now that peace could be achieved.

Dinner had reached that point in time in which there was only conversation. Everyone had finished their meals and paid their compliments to the chief. Now the table was abandoned- save for the servants cleaning up the meal- and everyone had moved to the massive room around them. Elizabeth had to give it to the Realicans, they knew how to decorate. The walls weren't even walls with the amount of red, white, and black decor there was. The chandeliers made the room dazzle even more. Of course, only if it could draw Elizabeth's attention away from the tensions in the room. It was as if a thick cloud of poison was drifting around the room, infecting everyone with a sour mode. Yet it was invisible, for everyone was trained in the art of lying. Smiles were plastered onto everyone's faces, assembling sweet words and kind compliments behind the masks of hatred. Elizabeth would hope to think that she had a graceful smile, hoping to hide away from the warrior that she could become.

She stood off to the side as she watched nobels and other leaders discuss politics. As much as she loved to lead her people, she hated the type of dance that she had to perform in a political setting. Any wrong move could set someone else off, which could set the whole room off. She had always been a bit off when dealing with other people's emotions; it was even worse now that they were fake.

She held a Shuhuilian wine in her gloved hand. Maybe she could hope that an extra bit of spice would give her the confidence to talk to someone, anyone. She had sent out her advisors to sweet-talk other royals, maybe gain a hint of information or two. She took a sip from the wine, before seeing a tall wide figure stumble his way through the crowd. She recognized him as Rodrick Stone, King of the Mountainous kingdom. He had rather fine red garments on, with hints of light blues through the clothing. He wore a crown made of pure gold seated on top of a neat glob of brown mousey hair. Elizabeth studied him for a bit before meeting his emerald eyes. She nodded at him, a simple gesture. Their countries were allies after all. He moved his way through the crowd a bit more before standing in front of her.

“Good evening, Empress Elizabeth,” he said, bowing his head a bit, it's not like he could bow anyway, not with nobles surrounding their every move.

“Kind words are appreciated, King Rodrick,” she said as she gave a little curtsy, she already hated the formalities. It made her head spin.

He chuckled, “I see you have already broken into the wine”

“Those Shuhuilians know how to make some pretty good wine alright?” she said with a smirk.

“Haha! I would have to agree with you on that,” Rodrick said, most likely trying to ease tensions. However, her stomach still had a nauseating effect on her whole body. Her body shook a tiny bit, and she swore she could feel beads of sweat start to form at the tip of her hairline where her silver crown was. She tightened her hold on the glass as she took another sip.

“Stars above,” she mumbled, as she had to stop her body from swaying. “Is it hot in here? Or is it because of where I come from?” she asked Rodrick,

“Hm, I don't think so,” he said, bushy eyebrows now knitted together. “Are you alright Elizabeth?” She blinked a couple of times before processing Rodrick's words,

“Y-Yes, of course, I am,” she said rather loudly, “It's just- very hot in here,” she finished, as she took another sip of wine to hopefully moisturize her now dry throat.

“You are swaying back and forth a lot,” Rodrick said, worry filling his voice now.

“Mh fine I just need-” Elizabeth collapsed against Rodrick, the magic within her body slowly dissipating as her vision slightly darkened. Rodrick held Elizabeth up by only his arms, although he could see Elizabeth's eyes become unfocused. Some of the people around them gasped in fear. Elizabeth's mind was clouded, she couldn't think. She couldn't even reach her magic within her. Something was wrong, very wrong

She felt her stomach lurch, next thing she knew, she was throwing up blood. She felt herself collapse in Rodrick's arms, the blood-stained everything, her clothes, his clothes, her hands, and the poor soul that was holding her. Her head felt fuzzy and she could only register the ripping of her insides. Whatever it was, it was corroding her magic, it was eating her internal organs. She had lost her breath a long time ago. More blood lurched up through her stomach as she was laid down on the ground. She laid on her back, and blood gurgled in her mouth. It quickly slid out like a snake once her face met with the coldness of the floor. Her hair must've been a mess by now. She felt her body and all of her strength start to fade away, as her last memories were of blood splattered across the floorboards...

Perfection

By: Nicholas Samuel

I sat there and questioned myself on how I could do better, be better, and finally stay better. What am I missing? How can they be better than me? I kept repeating the same, similar questions to myself for hours. If I wasn't so focused on these questions, I probably would have noticed that my bottom started to hurt from sitting under the tree for so long on the hard ground. Now that I think about it, there truly wasn't anything special about this tree.

The Tree was just a place I liked to sit and think when I needed to be alone. The Tree was a big old oak tree. It was there before my time, but I'm not exactly sure for how long. I stood up and wiped the dirt off me, and not to forget the ants that were crawling onto me too. I looked up at this tree I've held so dear to me for so long. The Tree looked kind of funky to me now that I got a good look at it, but I just brushed that off to the side. Who would care for a weird, funny looking tree? One thing was for certain though, the hill it sat on was beautiful. Comparing it to any other hill would be an insult and very unforgivable. The flowers that bloomed on it were gorgeous showing off their beauty like no one was watching. The grass was in a category of beauty of its own. It waved in the wind like it was at Mardi-gra dancing in the streets like nothing mattered. Laying on the grass was like laying on a cloud that could put a newborn baby right to sleep. While the scenery was out of this world it only distracted me from my self reflection for a short while.

I looked into the pond the tree hung over. It was so limpid it could be used as a window. The environment inside the pond intrigued me. The frogs, insects, plants, and even the hard rock and dirt worked in perfect harmony. There was one thing I noticed out of everything in the pond, and it was my reflection. It repulsed me because it reminded me so much of myself and how much worse I was compared to anyone I knew personally and knew of. Big TV celebrities you would see on social media from time to time sometimes made me feel really low. I threw a rock into the pond, making ripples in the water, and disfiguring the image of myself in the process. I finally turned to the dimming sky; it was starting to get dark.



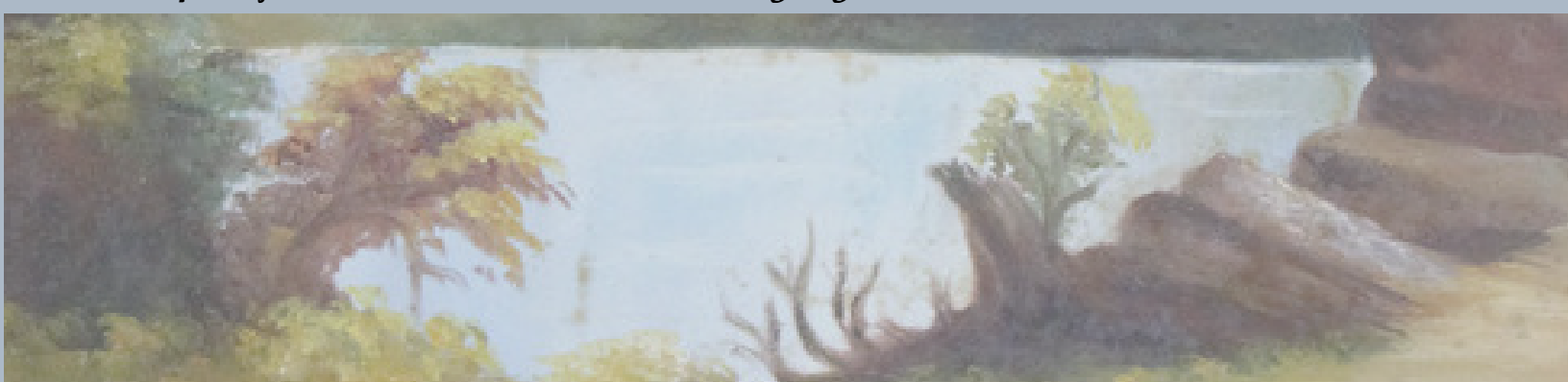
It was a pain traveling back and forth between the house and hill, but in the end it was worth it. To get back home I had to go through this dense, and decently sized stretch of forest. I've established some sort of path to the hill, but it's quite hidden and a bit rough to travel through. As I started to head down the path to the house I tripped over a protruding root of a tree. I got so infuriated over this. I instantly became a toddler who was having a tantrum after not getting what it wanted. I screamed curses and just sat there in silence. I thought I can't even walk right either.

After I was finally calm I started to sob. I let my feelings finally get to me and take control. Luckily no one saw this incident besides maybe a squirrel or two plus an owl. Knowing I needed to get home I sucked it up and decided to "walk it off" as the saying goes.

After a bit I finally exited the forest and laid eyes on the house. Dad's carpenter truck was outside parked in the drive next to mom's car. Dad is almost 56 years old. I thought he would've retired by now, but I guess he loves his job, especially since he owns it too. I believe my mother also wants him to retire as I do, because I always see a worrying face on her whenever My dad gets home with some sort of injury from work. My dad currently runs a moving company. On the other hand, my mom is the head of marketing for a big company in New York. This makes her go on a lot of business trips for work. I don't expect her to retire anytime soon considering she is only 51 and has a much less dangerous job. I type in the passcode to my door and enter the house, where my parents are waiting for me.

I don't really know why I thought there would be a nice cozy welcome from my parents, because there usually never is. The only times where that happens is when I get good grades or I'm needed to do something. My parents are always nagging me about everything and the mistakes I make as well. I often get frustrated and pretty depressed when this happens all the time. Eventually, I decided to go to bed and see if I could relax and get some sleep.

Like usual my parents were off to work so it was up to me to make sure I got to school on time and to be well prepared for it. I went to school and saw the usual activities of people cramming in the answers to whatever assignment they have due. I also saw people gathering in the hallway to look at something. It appeared to me there was a fight going on. I quickly rushed over to not miss what was going on, and then I saw him. . . .





FOR EACH OTHER

Jasmine Rai

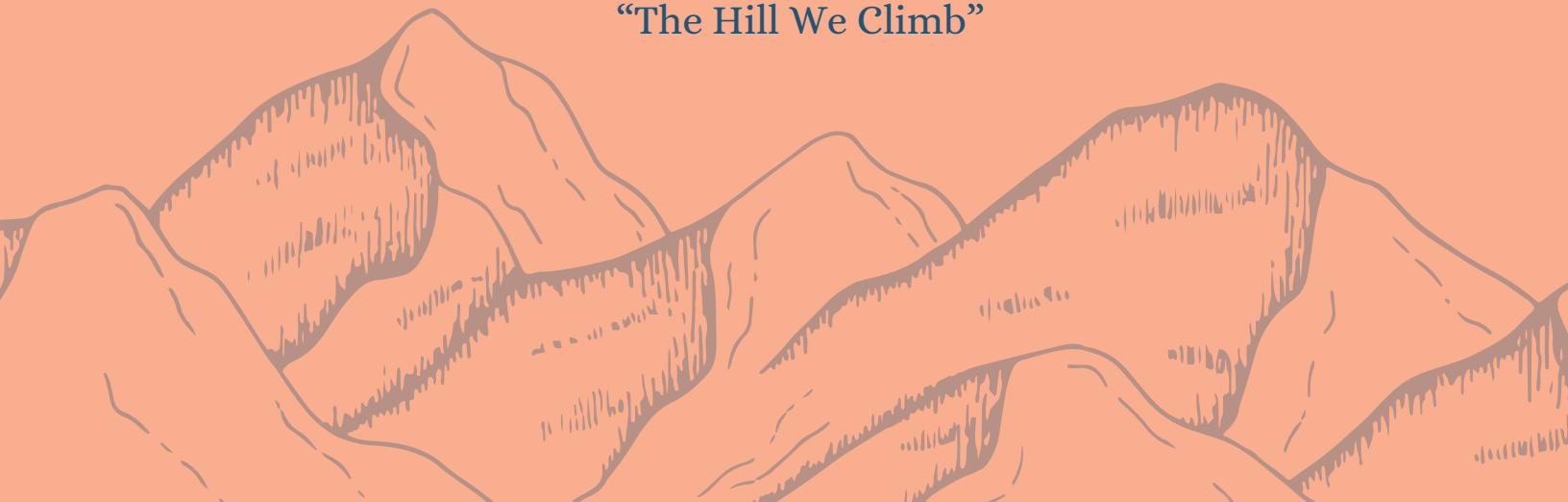
For Each Other.

Everyday, we climb mountains,
We push through for each other.

We grow, we learn, we teach,
Lessons to each other.

We try to conquer what's ahead of us,
Without knowing the path in front of us.

Inspired by Amanda Gorman
“The Hill We Climb”





If **Not** Told Clearly

Minnah

Does the wind not blow so repulsively?
Leaving no night alone
And no tree unheard
Rejecting the songs of silence
who doubt thoughts of young minds would invest in them

Is art not valued so dearly?
Then your eyes must be pools of paint
But an overflowing bucket must be discarded
Leaving only drops of saturation

Does the wolf not howl in the blankness of the night?
Anticipating an answer and anxious of an echo
Forgetting every shimmering star
Only wanting the moon and bathing in all its light

Is history not a story untold?
Lives explained yet never perceived
Analyzing them all yet forgetting any individual
Since a child and a mother were once like you

Did you forget?

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