



A WALK ON THE DARK SIDE

UNDEFINED

2023 Literary Magazine

Fluvanna County High School

Vol. 20

2023 Literary Magazine

Volume 20

UNDEFINED



FLUVANNA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

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Arianna Grier '23 - Pen and Ink

The 2023 "Undefined" Literary Magazine, Vol. 20, showcases the creative writing and artwork of Fluvanna County High School students. The publication was created by the FCHS Literary Magazine Club. The editorial staff evaluated both writing and art submissions from students in the school's Creative Writing classes and Fine Arts classes, as well as submissions from students in the general student population. Final selections were made by the club members. The magazine was designed by the editors using Canva and published through Flipsnack. Typefaces were Abyss and Grenze. Special thanks to Art teacher Amanda Clements, as well as Michelle Coleman and Michael Morris, for sharing their students' artwork. For more poetry, prose, artwork, and plays visit www.theflucobeat.com.

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Malachi Jackson '24 - Digital Art

ON THE EDGE

Anderson Miller '25



Malachi Jackson '24 - Digital Art

Sitting on the edge of a bar
wondering how long it will hold
I look down at the city from above
the emptiness makes me cold
I think of the memories
the good and the bad
I think of my life with you
which I never had
my mind is twisted
like a steel bar in the heat
the feeling I feel
is the feeling of defeat
I wish things could be different
and I could live a happy life
but my life without you
is like a stab with a knife
the tear that it makes I can never stop feeling
for the wound that it makes will never start healing



Abigail Kimble '23 - Photography

THE ESSENTIALITY OF AIR

Maya Blackburn '26



Abigail Kimble '23 - Photography

Do we breathe air?
Air is quite essential
But do we care?
Yes, because without the potential
We would be... where?
We'd be nonexistent.
How can we compare?
With and without air, it's differential.
Though it may be unfair,
It's not confidential.
Be aware,
Air is reverential.
We breathe air,
I swear.



Liam Wells '23 - Colored Pencil

THE ORIGAMI INCIDENT

Kendall Forrest '24

The sun had just set behind the distant hills, casting an orange-pink hue across the sky as two police officers, Smith and Brown, drove into a quiet neighborhood. The streets were lined with tall trees, their leaves rustling softly in the evening breeze. The officers' car was a sleek black and white vehicle, its headlights piercing the gathering darkness. As they turned onto a residential street, the officers slowed their car and their eyes scanned the area for any signs of trouble. The houses on either side of the street were dark and silent, their windows shuttered against the encroaching night. A lone street lamp flickered overhead, casting a pool of dim light on the pavement below.

Suddenly, a shadowy figure darted out from behind a parked car, causing the officers to slam on the brakes. They both reached for their holsters as their hearts pounded heavily in their chests. But as the figure drew closer, they realized it was just a neighborhood cat, skittering across the street and disappearing into the darkness. Breathing a sigh of relief, the officers continued down the street, their headlights illuminating the way. They passed by neatly-manicured lawns and white picket fences, each house a mirror image of the next. The only sound was the soft hum of their engine and the occasional chirping of crickets. As they neared the end of the street, a small group of kids appeared, playing basketball in the middle of the road. The officers slowed to a

crawl, watching as the kids scrambled out of the way. One of the kids waved excitedly at the officers, who nodded in response before continuing on their way.

Finally, the officers reached their destination, a small house tucked away at the end of the street. They parked their car and stepped out, the darkness closing in around them. They exchanged a quick nod before heading towards the house, their flashlights casting a narrow beam of light on the path ahead. As the officers approached the porch, they noticed something odd: It was littered with scraps of paper covered in unintelligible writing, and strange origami dolls were scattered everywhere. The dolls were made from brightly-colored paper and had intricate folds that suggested a skilled hand had made them.



Liam Wells '23 - Colored Pencil

Officer Smith raised an eyebrow. "Well, what is all this?" he muttered.

In response, Officer Brown shook his head. "I have no idea. Looks like some kind of art project, maybe?"

They cautiously made their way up the steps, avoiding the scattered dolls and trying not to disturb the strange paper writing. The porch creaked beneath their weight as they approached the door. One of the dolls had been placed on the doorknob, its arms spread wide as if to greet them. The officers exchanged a look before Brown reached out and plucked the doll off the doorknob. As he did so, a small slip of paper fell out from within the folds of the doll's body. He picked it up and squinted at the tiny writing, trying to make out the words in the dim light.

"What does it say?" Smith asked, leaning in to get a better look.

"I can't tell," Brown said, shaking his head. "It's too small and the handwriting is terrible. Something about a party, maybe?" He pocketed the slip of paper and reached for the door handle. The metal was cold to the touch, and he hesitated for a moment before turning it and pushing the door open. The officers stepped inside, their flashlights sweeping over the dimly-lit interior.

As the officers made their way into the living room, they were met with a chilling sight. The room was empty and desolate, as if there was no one home. However, in the center of the room was a large, intricate, ritualistic circle made out of the same vibrant paper as the origami dolls. The circle was surrounded by dozens of dolls, each with their own unique design, and strange writing was painted on the walls. The officers' flashlights flickered across the eerie scene before settling on a pile of human bones in the center of the circle. Their stomachs churned at the sight, and they exchanged a horrified look.

"What on earth?" Smith muttered.

Brown stepped forward, shining his flashlight on the bones. "Looks like these have been here for a while. We need to call for backup." As he spoke, his flashlight illuminated a small slip of paper tucked beneath one of the bones. He reached down and picked it up, holding it up to the light. "It's the same writing as on the walls," he said, his voice shaking slightly. "What do you think it means?"

Smith shook his head. "I have no idea. But we need to get out of here and call for backup. This is way above our paygrade."

They slowly backed out of the room, keeping their flashlights trained on the ritualistic site. As they reached

the door, they heard a faint rustling sound from somewhere within the house. They froze, their hearts pounding in their chests.

"Did you hear that?" Brown whispered inquisitively, flicking his flashlight towards the hallway leading out of the living room.

Smith nodded grimly. "Yeah. Let's get out of here."

The rustling sound grew louder and more intense, and the officers could feel their skin prickling with fear. Suddenly, something started to move in the darkness, something that seemed inhuman and uncanny.

"You seeing this?" Brown hissed, his voice barely above a whisper.

The creature's long, spindly limbs were twisted and gnarled, with razor-sharp claws that glinted ominously in the dim light. Its skin was a sickly pale color, stretched taut over its skeletal frame. But what truly set it apart from any human or animal was its complete lack of a mouth. Its face was a blank, featureless mask, devoid of any expression or emotion. And yet, the officers could feel a malevolent energy emanating from it, as if it were somehow aware of their presence.

The creature moved with a jerky, erratic gait, as if it was not entirely in control of its own body. It crawled on all fours, its limbs twisted and contorted in unnatural angles, and yet it seemed like it would be over eight feet tall if it stood upright. The officers turned and ran towards the exit, their hearts pounding in their chests, and as they did, it was as if they could feel the creature's gaze burning into their backs, and they knew that they had stumbled upon something truly evil, something otherworldly.

Unfortunately, while they were running, Smith slipped on a stray origami doll, and before he could get back up, the creature had inexplicably grabbed him by the ankle and was somehow dragging him back into the house.

"Help me!" he screamed, his voice echoing through the empty halls. Brown turned and fired his pistol at the creature.

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

But it seemed to have no effect as the bullets merely passed through the creature. With a surge of terror, Brown turned and sprinted towards the door, his feet pounding against the creaky floorboards. He burst out into the fresh air, his breath coming in ragged gasps. Without a second thought, he scrambled into the driver's seat of the patrol car, fumbling for the keys. As he turned the ignition over, he could hear the creature howling in rage somewhere in the darkness around him. He slammed the car into reverse and tore out of the driveway, the tires screeching on the pavement as gravel flew through the air.

As Officer Brown drove the cruiser away, tearing down the road as if hell were in his wake, he could feel a terrifying sense of guilt and horror gnawing at his stomach. In his fear, his haste, and yes, his cowardice, he had left his partner and friend behind, and he doubted if he would ever see him again. All he knew was that he had to get as far away from that house as possible, before it was too late.

THANKS FOR THE LIES

Victoria Scotto Di Vetta '26



William Dudzik '23 - Digital Art

There you are laughing and smiling
If only you knew right now I feel like I'm dying
I'm putting on a show
So nobody will know

The dark feelings that I try to hide
And how I really feel inside
See, there's another side that you don't know
The side that cries as a river of tears flow

You don't know the side that misses you
That's the side you'll never get to view
People don't know I put on a mask
They assume I'm fine because they don't care to ask

I keep on hearing your voice in my head
Saying one day we'd wake up
in the same bed
Thanks for the lies
Now listen to my cries

LONELINESS

Tomas Cruz Vega '25



Celia Becerra '25 - Charcoal

Left out again.

DOn't worry, it's a common occurrence.

SeNd not for help, but for someone, anyone.

NevEr does anyone notice.

SteeLing my heart in the face of being forgotten.

Maybe I forget those that want to be with me.

Perhaps **N**o one cares.

So in the **E**nd, I'm still here waiting.

Cursed to **S**ee others, but not for others to see me.

Unheard, **l**o**S**t, and alone...forever.

THE DANDELION

Grace Harris '26



Emma Abel '24 - Photography

When winter's cold is gone
And the world comes back to life
A yellow dandelion
The first spot of color
Comes to life
A child runs to it excitedly
The first flower for his mother

Eventually the yellow turns to white
A fluff of mystery
Magical
A wish to make

As years go by
The flower is gone
A weed appears
An ugly shade of yellow
Its seeds fly all around

The child
Now a man
Plucks the weed angrily
Just another problem to be exterminated
Nothing more



Evelyn DeMers '23 - Mixed Media

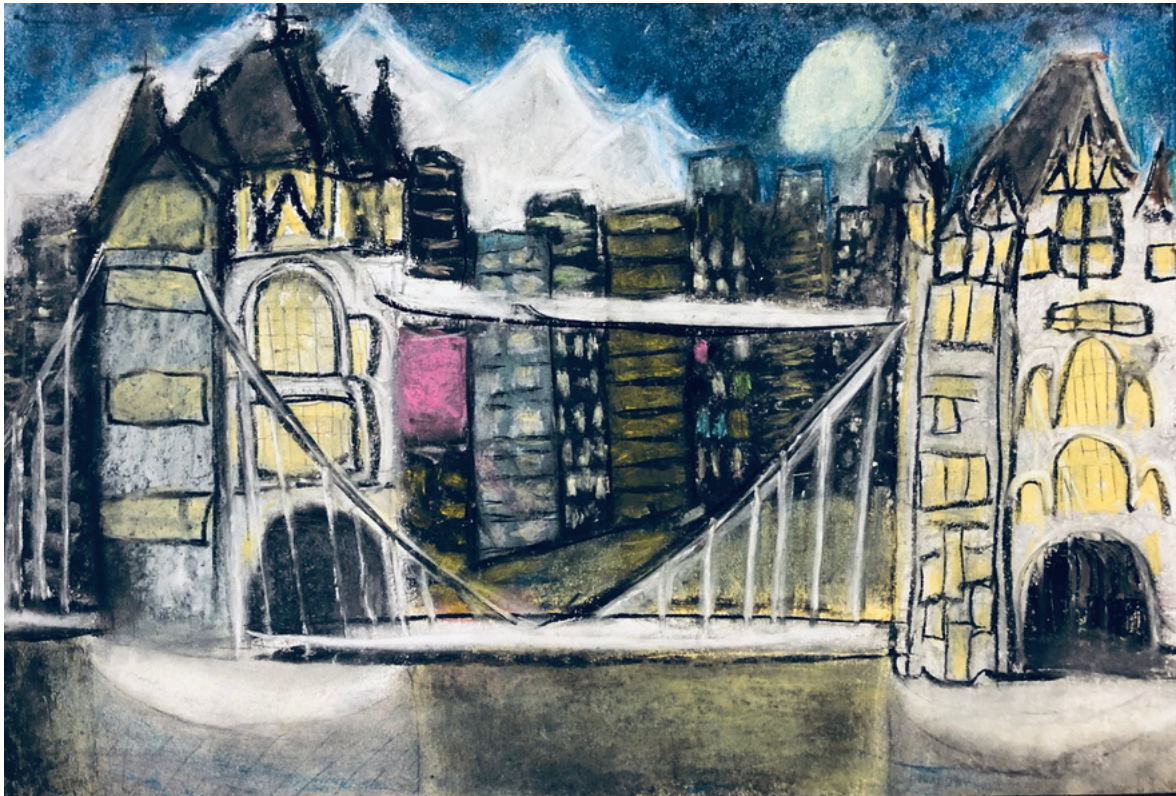
CONSPIRACY BOARD

Lila Matthews '26



Evelyn DeMers '23 - Mixed Media

Standing against a wall,
Loud and determined
Red yarn strung up connecting sharp tacks of truth,
Dull with doubt, the tacks barely prick the surface.
Still threatening society,
Threatening to spill the truth of what is known.
In a dark room it sits
Seen by only one,
The creator of its youth,
Of its ideas and ventures.
Where ignorance is bliss,
When the freedom of a clear mind
Is tied up with red yarn,
Pinned into place with tacks,
And locked far away in a shed of lies.
Promising the truth,
But with maddened thoughts.
Its promise is but
A single drop of water in a desert.
Useless.



Mikaela King '26 - Pastels

THE TIME OF MY LIFE

Madeline Hamel '26

Last Week...

“Come on! It’ll be fun,” my best friend Jessica pleaded.

“It’s a bad idea,” I replied in an annoyed tone. She’d been begging me to come to her party for weeks, and normally I would, despite how incredibly boring I found most parties to be. But this one was different from the others. It was being held in the abandoned mental hospital on the outskirts of town.

“Please! I’ll do anything. I promise you won’t regret it!” Jessica begged.

“Nobody’s been around there in ages! It’s got to be full of spiders and rats by now. Definitely not party material,” I told her. I knew how she prided herself on always having perfect parties and hoped this might change her mind.

“What? Are you scared or something?” she teased.

“No! It’ll just be gross. Besides, you know it’s trespassing to go in there,” I replied.

“Aw, you *are* scared!” Jessica squealed. A little crime had never stopped her before. “Don’t worry, nothing’s going to happen, except you having the time of your life.”

I couldn’t imagine that I’d have any fun at one of her parties, but I didn’t want to listen to her begging

anymore. "Fine, I'll come," I groaned so she'd leave me alone.

"Thank you!" she exclaimed as she flashed me a shining smile.

Now...

Without warning, the derelict, ghostly room erupted into screams. I clasped my hands over my ears, hoping it would block out some of the racket. It didn't. I couldn't see what had happened, but suddenly, everyone was running in panic out of the room. People were rushing past me in a blur, and I was being pushed violently back and forth.

Why on earth did I agree to go to a party at an abandoned mental hospital?

Someone ran into me forcefully and I fell, my head smacking into the ground. I touched my scalp with the tips of my fingers and saw that it was bleeding. Dazed, I scrambled to get back on my feet and started running towards the door.

"It's stuck!" I heard someone yell from its vicinity. The volume of the screams was making my head pound.

"Move! Let me try!" another person shouted, and I could hear them banging on the door. Eventually, they realized that it wasn't going to budge, so people started running back into the center of the room.

Still in a state of shock, I quickly scanned the room, trying to figure out what was going on. On one side were tables of half-eaten food and drinks, and on the opposite side were a few more tables surrounded by overturned chairs. The tables were littered with plates of food and girls' purses. At the front of the room were speakers so tall that I couldn't even imagine how Jessica had gotten them there. Fanning out from either side of the far end were large, wooden staircases that looked like they could collapse at any second. Every wall was lined with doors. Reinforced doors. Finally, I looked to the middle of the room and examined the space that had been cleared to be a dance floor.

At that moment, I realized why everyone was so panicked. In the middle of the floor was a body. An unmoving, non-breathing, bleeding body. My stomach churned, and I leaned over to throw up. Once there was nothing left in my stomach, I started sprinting towards the stairs, hoping to find a place to hide. *Someone's been killed!* I thought to myself, trying to process what I'd seen. *This can't be happening,* I thought. But it was.

I scanned the second floor. There wasn't a single person in sight, and the whole building was eerily silent now. The only thing I could hear was my own breaths, and I tried to slow and quiet them, praying they wouldn't give me away.

Abruptly, Jessica's speaker squealed, and I practically jumped out of my skin. Shaking and holding my breath, I ducked behind the rail of the staircase.

"Hello," a voice I didn't recognize said into the silence. It was a man's voice, and he seemed unusually happy. Definitely much too happy to be standing in the room with a body.

The killer! I realized, and my heart skipped a beat.

"I'm sorry I killed your friend," he said, and I remembered that I didn't see who had died.

Please don't let it be Jessica, I thought desperately.

"I didn't mean to," the killer continued sadly.

How could he kill someone on accident? Slowly, I stood up to peek over the rail; the curiosity of who this killer could be was consuming me. When the room was in sight, I saw a tall man with a dark beard and crazed blue eyes standing near the speaker. I looked more closely at him, trying to ignore how dizzy I was suddenly feeling. The man was deathly thin with long hair and a matted beard. His skin was sunken and his face was scratched as though he'd been clawing at it, and in his hand he held a knife thickly coated in blood. I watched in horror as a drop slowly fell from the knife and splashed onto the floor. I forced myself to pull my eyes away from it. Terrified, I looked towards the body.



Mikaela King '26 - Pastels

It was a beautiful girl with dirty blonde hair and still open hazel eyes. *Jessica*. I felt like I was going to pass out. Unthinkingly, I began to crawl towards one of the doors, needing my best friend's body to be out of sight before I did something irrational and wound up with the same fate.

"He made me do it," I heard the killer sob, "and I can't get him out of my head!" The man was screaming now.

Multiple personalities, I realized. Finally, I reached a door. Relieved, I opened it and walked in, thankful to be away from the main room. I took a deep breath and tried not to think about Jessica.

Suddenly, a rough hand clasped over my mouth and another around my waist. Complete and utter horror washed through me.

"Shh, don't scream," a voice cautioned me in a whisper. The person moved their hands off of my mouth and onto my shoulders to spin me around to face them. It was a boy I'd gone to school with since kindergarten, but my mind was moving so fast that I couldn't quite remember his name. He was taller than me, but not by much, with brown hair, and eyes filled with anxiety.

"Jessica's dead!" was all I could say.

"I know, I saw it happen," he replied. Then he said, "Be quiet, I'm trying to hear what the murderer is saying." So I didn't say anything else. We both focused intently, craning our ears to hear what was happening outside.

"They left us all behind. They left me alone with him," the killer said in despair.

"Who's they?" I whispered to myself.

"Shh, maybe he'll explain," the boy muttered in reply.

"The doctors told us that we were unimportant to society and left us to die. Every one of us, after they'd kept us here like a prison! All alone. But I can never be alone." His voice had a sing-songy lilt to it now. "He never stops talking! Do you all want to hear what he's telling me now?"

It was strange how he spoke to us, how he spoke of this murderous man in his head. It made chills run up my spine and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

"He's telling me to find more of you to kill. No! No!" he cried, clearly no longer speaking to us. "Please don't be angry. They'll find out eventually. Yes. They'll know when we get to them. They'll scream and make it obvious."

It was odd not to be able to hear the other half of the conversation. Suddenly, he stopped talking. Now all I

could hear was our breathing. Then, after a moment something else. Faint footsteps. "He's coming," I whispered to the boy.

"When I got up here earlier, I saw a window at the end of the hall. It's boarded up, but I'm sure there's a loose board you can pull on while I distract him." He spoke so quickly that I almost wasn't able to understand him. That's what reminded me of his name; I'd only ever met two people who talked like that. Jessica and Isaac.

"How do you plan to distract him?" I questioned.

"I'll go out there and make some noise or something so he comes after me," Isaac explained. "Then, once you've got the window open, I'll get away somehow,"

"You can't do that. He'll kill you!" His plan was the opposite of foolproof.

"I'll be fine," he reassured me, but he didn't sound very confident. The footsteps grew louder, and by the time I opened my mouth to argue, Isaac had already slipped out of the door. The killer laughed giddily when he saw him, and his footsteps quickened.

"Go, Olivia!" Isaac shouted, so I opened the door and sprinted down the hallway. My heart pounded in my ears as my hands searched the wooden boards for a loose spot. I glanced back at Isaac as I began to pull on the board and saw that he was fighting the killer. Isaac's face was bleeding, and so were his knuckles. The killer was grinning, despite the fact that his knife was now lying across the room where it had evidently been kicked. As I ripped the loose board from the window, I remembered Jessica. I remembered how we'd spent every birthday and holiday together and our first days of school. I remembered all the pointless parties she'd thrown, and her bright, contagious smile. How you could tell when she was really thinking about something because her eyes lit up. And I remembered her lifeless body on the cold, dusty floor of this awful asylum.

My blood boiled and my heart broke. Still holding the board, I ran to where Isaac was now cornered. The killer was facing away from me, but he had somehow retrieved his knife. I had a perfect shot, but I didn't want to watch his back as I killed him. I wanted to see his eyes.

"Olivia, what are you doing?" Isaac asked in fright. The killer spun around to me. A bitter smile broke out across my face as my eyes met his.

"Avenging my friend," I replied as I swung the board back and smacked the killer hard across his face. Shocked and in pain, he let the knife slip from his hands. My reflexes kicked in and I bent down to grab it with one hand. While I was crouched down, the killer grabbed my board and pried it from my other hand. But I was faster than he was. Before he could hit me, I shoved the knife deep into his stomach. I watched his eyes as the life left them and he collapsed to the floor, and I knew that I should feel sorry. But I didn't.

Isaac ran over to me and grabbed my arm, pulling me away from the body and towards the window. As I climbed out onto the fire escape, I started to cry. I cried so hard my chest felt like it was going to split in two and my head throbbed painfully. Jessica's words from last week rang in my ears.

"Don't worry, nothing's going to happen, except you having the time of your life."

If only she had been right.

THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE

Madeline Hamel '26



Hadley Dyke '24 - Photography

What's the opposite of love?

Maybe it's seeing someone care and giving them a shove

When someone wants to stay

But all you do is push them away.

What's the opposite of kindness?

Maybe it's a constant blindness

Ignoring all the pain

Unless you can use it for your own gain.

What's the opposite of joy?

Maybe it's when someone treats you like a toy

When all you can do is cry

And nobody can tell you why.



Meredith Hudgins '25 - Rice

BENEATH THE LEAVES

Astrid Carrion '23

I remember the day I found you. We hadn't talked in years. I went to the forest to breathe; it helped me feel grounded. More at peace with things. I'm not sure why, but that day I walked for hours, straying further and further into the darkness that consumed me. The tall trees cluttered all around, the moss-covered floors filled with leaves and vines. And you lay there right in the middle of it all. I thought I had found a clearing, but when I went in further, I found you sprawled out and still, consumed by it all. Like overgrown roots, taking over all around them. Except you were the one being consumed by the forest floor.

Grass grew into your skin, the vines covering you completely. Moss had become a part of you. To see you there amongst all that was living, it felt as if you were alive too. Almost as if you were the one growing and guiding. I thought of you as a tree, securing its roots before it could fully grow. I thought of you as alive. Your skin was glowing golden, your hands were covered completely in green, and your legs were secured to the floor until they had become a part of it.

You were living like a plant in my mind, unable to speak, only moved by the wind or the movement of others. But that all ended when I saw your eyes. They were dim and dull. For the first time, I saw you as you really were: lifeless. Overtaken and overgrown. I looked into you and saw nothing but death consuming and crawling into you, taking you in until nothing was left over. I looked into you and now, feeling lifeless, I collapsed.

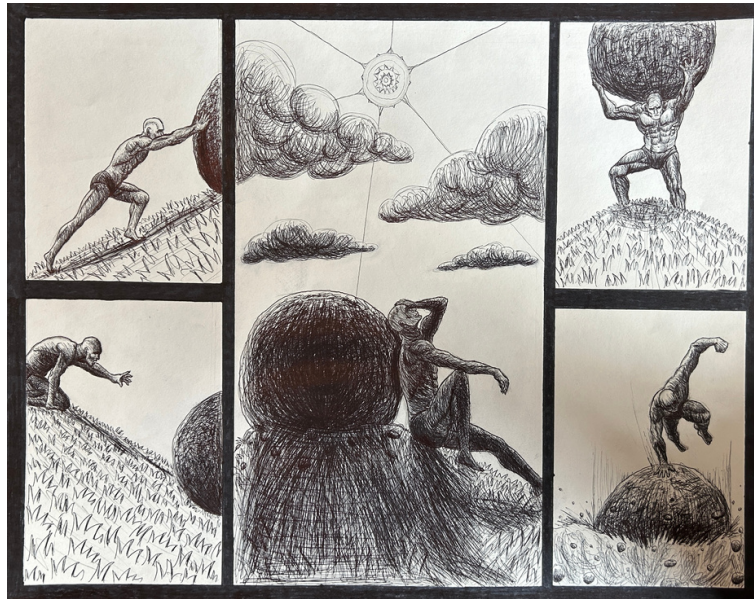
It felt as though all I was had been taken. For now I knew you were gone and right in front of my eyes. I felt you fall. Of course, you hadn't taken over the forest floor. You never could have. Plants are born to grow, to

overtake and conquer. And you had been consumed, nature eating you alive. The life of the forest floor had overtaken your soul until you were no more.

Looking at you now, I knew there were probably bugs living inside of you and roots growing within you; never had grief overtaken me in such a way. I had seen you as living, yet before my eyes it felt as though I had watched you die once more. Consumed in it all. I laid down on the ground, curled up and crying. I wished death would overtake me too, waiting for the vines to grow into me and the grass to cover me until I was no more as well.

It took everything out of me to leave your side, to walk away from you, but I knew I didn't belong. I find comfort in the fact that you have now fertilized. Your death created life and with that, I can live in peace. I couldn't go back to the forest for weeks. I thought about moving away from you, afraid your memory would overtake every tree I saw and every blade of grass I stepped on. I went back after a few months to see if you had disappeared. You had.

Now I knew you truly were gone. I looked to the tallest tree surrounding where you'd been and decided that that was indeed your final resting place. I created a cross out of sticks and left some flowers there, because even though you are in all that is now living, you are still gone.



Eugene Frye '23 - Pen and Ink

MIDNIGHT THOUGHTS

Cadence Goodnight '26

Wandering through your mind like a crow in a wheat field
Not a single worry of what thoughts come up in that empty void
Trudging through the dark abyss that is your perception of reality
The incandescent light emitting from the moon
remains the only luminescence in the thing we call life
Those dark times coming and going like the waves of the ocean
crashing against the shore and pulling back
Everything within your line of vision seems to be the reflection
of that deep, aching feeling in your soul
Trees rustling their leaves wake you up to what is really there
Your head burns like the black asphalt on the roads on a hot summer day
Deathly stares come from everyone around you, yet no one is there
The thought that maybe there really is a light somewhere out there
Maybe that light is you, returning to me from the depths of guilt and remorse
This may be the end, but the thoughts continue racing
...never-ending

THE PRINCESS HALLUCINATION

Greenlee Sensabaugh '25



John Smeds '23 - Digital Art

The forest is vast and empty. Large evergreen trees stand tall throughout the expanse alongside small patches of wildflowers and mushrooms. There's a grove of fruit trees in a patch off to the right. Massive lemons sprout from the ends of branches, as well as apples, pears and oranges. I look up at the sky above me. I have already picked the fruit that I want for this week. The fruit I pick today will likely have to last me through the winter, so I need quite a bit of it. I let my eyes fall towards the ground again. A large oak tree sits just outside of the grove that I'm in right now. At the foot of the tree there's a large suitcase that I haven't seen before.

Actually, I've never seen anyone in the woods before. Most people in my village are afraid of the woods because they think they're dangerous, but I don't think so. I've found my home here, gathering all my fruit, as well as mushrooms and wildflowers, and then selling them at the morning market. Most people don't question where I get my goods from.

Standing up, I walk over to the suitcase below the tree and click open the latches, and I let the top fall down. The suitcase opens. The inside is coated in purple velvet and holds a singular crown. I run my fingers gently over the rough edges of the stones and around the curves of the metal that holds it all together. The gems glint softly in the light like tiny stars shining in the night sky. I lift the crown lightly into the air and set it onto my head.

In a split second, my tiny grove of trees is gone and I'm transported into a deep dark forest. I let out a shrill scream as the scenery changes right before my eyes. A mist hangs heavy in the air around me. The trees are so much more dense now than they were. My head is spinning as I struggle to take in my new surroundings. The old, torn sack that I call a dress is gone and has been replaced with an elegant gown that flows to my feet and pools behind me to a skirt train. The sleeves cascade down my arms like a waterfall in a brilliant green color and slowly widen where the fabric meets my wrists. My hair is no longer tied into a messy lump at the back of my head; it's now woven into a large braid that plunges down my back and has miniscule flowers threaded through it. The crown still sits on top of my head.

I whip my head from side to side, searching for anything familiar in the woods. The booming noise of hooves hitting the ground behind me makes me turn on my heel. A white stallion rides smoothly through the forest towards me, a man in a shining suit of armor sitting on top of it. The horse comes to a quick stop in front of me as the knight takes off his helmet.

"Princess Odette," his voice calls out. "You shouldn't be out in the woods this late. It's too dangerous for you to be here. You never know who'll be in these woods."

I stand still, staring at him as he makes an easy dismount off of his horse, despite the heavy armor. He walks over to me in big strides, his hand outstretched to me.

"I think you have the wrong person, sir," I say, my voice shaking slightly. "My name is Odette, but I'm not a princess and I've never been here before. I honestly just need to find my way home and rest."

The knight lets out a chuckle at my words. "Don't be silly, Princess. Come on now, let me take you back to the castle. The king and queen have been worried sick."

My left hand tenses at my side as my right hand reaches out hesitantly to grab his. His hand is rough and warm as it wraps around mine. He leads me over to the stallion and hops on, pulling me up after him.

"Are you ready to go, Princess?" he asks as his hands lock around the reins.

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be," I say as I wrap my arms around his waist and pray as we race into the distance.

LOVE IS DESPAIR

Wesley Ownby '25



Evelyn DeMers '23 - Color Pencil

Those eyes--shining crystals
I can't help but stare
Lost within the gaze
Of a beautiful nightmare
Those eyes--a drug
To which I'm cripplingly addicted
That voice--a virus
By which my ears are infected
The words--a song
Looping in my brain
Why can't I be free
Of the terror in which I find pleasure?
Their presence a cage
Which I can't escape
Love is despair



Alyssa Johnson '23 - Watercolor

LAST OF MY KIND

Lila Mathews '26

There was once a time where I would dance in the wind with my friends. Those were the days before they came: the monsters with two metallic claws. Malicious giants who cared not for our lives, they were a force not even mother nature could hold back. With their loud, rumbling growls they came, stealing the lives of my friends.

Now I stand alone in a field, the last of my kind, providing a sanctuary for my squirrel friends and giving shade to the grinning bobcat below. As usual, the howling wind whips against my rough bark, causing my branches to clack together.

As the season changes, my leaves change their many colors. Like always, they come to see me, the monsters. They raise their young to watch me...to admire me. Watching as my leaves change, they lay a blanket underneath my branches.

How can they be so happy while I suffer?

Seeping into the ground, their acidic drinks burn my roots. The young ones' hands grip my branches, lifting themselves up till my boughs break and they fall. Crying, they run to their parents for comfort, yet no one asks about my well-being. Soon they pack up and leave.

Alone again, I sit withering in the icy wind. When the first frost comes, my leaves have long since left. In a deep rest, I watch as glistening snow falls around me, covering my hill. A quiet time in winter is when the

monsters do not come, and their children do not play. Soon the twittering of spring's first babe comes from my branches, promising the warmth of spring and the monster's arrival. It is only a matter of time.

They'll come just like they always do...

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