



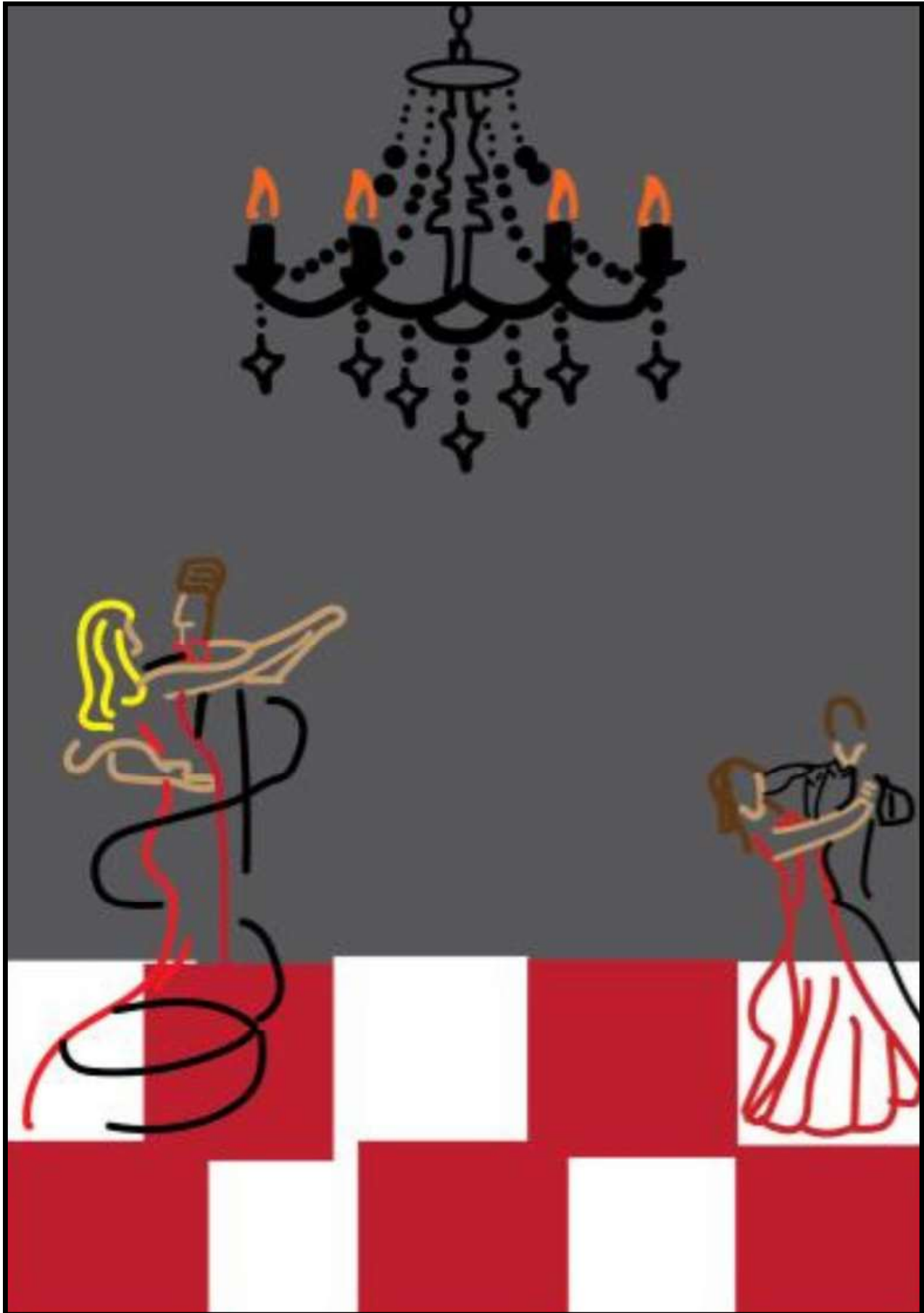
UNDEFINED

STEPPING INTO THE GLOOM

2024 Literary Magazine

Fluvanna County High School

Vol. 21



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Volume 21

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STEPPING INTO THE GLOOM

Fluvanna County High School

1918 Thomas Jefferson Parkway, Palmyra VA, 22963
fluco.org/theflucobeat.com - 434-589-3666

The 2024 "Undefined" Literary Magazine, Vol. 21, showcases the 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 those 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 EFCO Brookshire and Rosario. Special thanks to Art teachers Rosa Lee Fry, Michelle Coleman, and Michael Morris for sharing their students' artwork, and Choir Director Sara Harkrader for the music contributions. For more poetry, prose, artwork, and plays created by students, visit www.theflucobeat.com.

Editor: Kessler Potter '24

Assistant Editors: Rachael Broxon '27, Annika Potter '28

Literary Magazine Club Member: Hunter Perkins '24

Journalism Adviser/Publisher: Elizabeth Pellicane

Front and Back Cover Art: Jasper Marsh '25 - Photography

Inside Cover Art: Jalyn Ondek '24 - Digital art

Title Page Art: Celia "Eden" Becerra '25 - Graphite on paper



Juno Polygon Animal, Vincent Gonzalez '24 - Digital Art

This year, FCHS' Piano Lab class teamed up with the Graphic Arts class to create images inspired by music that the piano lab students wrote and performed. The inside cover art comes from this collaboration. The QR code below, as well as those on pages 8, 26, and 33, open audio recordings of these pieces.

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LADY-BUG

Jack Vest '27

as bright as a red glowing light,
little dots on your back,
Dancing along a path,
You never seem to look back,
representing luck and rebirth,
you never seem to get ever hurt,
until one day you are on the ground, and a little kid stomps you down.



Patience Hartman '25 - Colored pencil



Sydney Gibson '24 - Photography

LIFE

Kendall Austin '27

Life is like a garden
So full and colorful
But yet so bland and boring
A tapestry of moments

In the past, present, and future
Our hearts are fragile seeds
Petals of the hope we hold
The dreams are blooming flowers

Bright and very bold
Weeds are the challenges we face along the way
Time is the key
To seeing what grows

THE RED CARDINAL

Christian Johnson '27

A little
Tiny and small
Bird. Red and short.
Chirp, chirp, chirp, tweet.
It calls in the morning. The
Mighty red glow breaks
Through the dull winter skyline.

A red spot on an empty canvas. The
blue birds don't compare, for their feathers
Aren't as bright. Nothing but joy rises when I catch
A sight of this little red bird. Often when there's one, I
Don't see another. That makes me sad. I found a nest, saw
A cardinal dad. They're the best. Such a small bird, where's
The rest? "Girl, why are you so brown?" asked a male cardinal.
What a flashy bird the cardinal is. A need for seed
Maybe that's the reason. Is it almost mating season?

The most pleasant bird to see on a wire. A cute bird, red like fire, on which few base their attire.

Like a red brushstroke,
It flies in the sky
A skittish bird.
Really quite shy
Such a pretty
Bird, it makes
You wonder
Why?

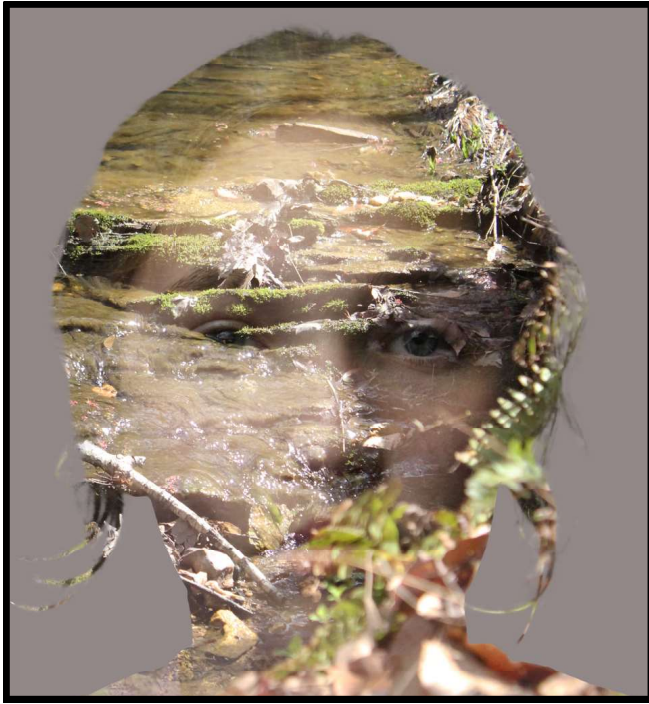
SERENADE SHOWERS

Rachael Broxon '27

Piano is like rain.
Each note a staccato droplet of sound.
Spring showers, light, warm and clear.
Plink, plink, plink.
Rain on a tin roof.
Plink, plink, plink.
Skilled fingers dancing on ivory.
A sound that waters the soul.
A flood that drowns away doubts.
Then a low rumble of thunder in the distance.
A tremor.
Crash!
A child's meaty fists on the keys.
A flash of lightning across the clouds.
A deep breath of static.
Then...
Calm.
 Plink,
 plink,
 plink.



Tanasia Jasper '24 - Photography



Jalyn Ondek '24 - Digital Art

NATURE'S MISFITS

Allison Rhoades '26

Bees are like broccoli,
always misunderstood,
To the world's cautious eye,
their values, not so good.
Buzzing wings and florets high,
their health benefits, we can't deny.
Both bees and greens,
essential and complete,
let's welcome their goodness,
and not retreat.
For broccoli and bees,
though some may shun,
are important for health,
for everyone.



Tanasia Jasper '24 - Digital art

DIRTY WINGS

DON'T FLY

Amina Seiden '26



Music by Madison Gullet '26

Once pigeons weren't able to be commercially bred or capitalized on, humans had no need for them. They were tossed out, deemed unwanted, and now live among the streets scavenging for scraps, a low blow for an animal once essential to communication, espionage, and rescues. In the late 1600s, pigeons, known at the time as "Rock Doves," were first brought to America. Pigeons were synonymous with doves linguistically, but not aesthetically. Humans decided that this difference tainted their worth.

I suppose I see myself in them, but only because you did. How ones who once soared the skies are now tied to the ground. Where life was once a flight away, now a shoe can easily crush it. If I was a pigeon in any way that you described, I would be flattered. But you decided I was not worthy. My first impression of life was that of a dove, but my forename was left indelible in my mind. Not as light as a dove, not as airy, not as divine. Though we are both birds, the world treats me as if I'm dirtier by default. Why is that?

Maybe if my eyes were as light as a dove's, if my skin was as white as others', you'd like me. Maybe if my pigment went to sparse freckled speckles instead of distributed planes, I'd soar as high as the other birds.

I see the dirt they throw on the pigeons and I wonder if it was always there. Could a bird be born with grime? If so, why won't it ever wash off?

As stupid as pigeons are portrayed to be, doves don't compare to pigeons intelligence-wise. In fact, no other birds seem to. I've heard pigeons remember faces, stories, and navigation routes from past lives. But for other birds, the reflection of their beauty is enough to silence the air surrounding. For all a dove has to do to outshine a pigeon is exist. A stark comparison to the doves who can barely subsist.

When you look at me, do you see that same brown-eyed animal? A creature that crawls even

though it was born with wings?

I almost hate that you see me as a pigeon. That I was born into everything you make them seem to be. That for a hummingbird to sing is a gift, but for a pigeon to peep is a curse. That for a dove to soar is a right, but for a pigeon to fly is an escape.

I've learned that once places are contaminated with city birds, their value is no more. That a pigeon's presence is all it takes to shake the ground and send broomstick bristles flying, trying to clean the mess they make.

But I have to tell you something. White doves don't truly exist. Doves, in fact, are brown. Real albinism would have a dove killed in its natural habitat.

I wondered why doves are seen as a symbol for purity and peace when they are nothing but man-made art. And then I realized: If it was natural, humans wouldn't want it. Doves, the architect of hope, were constructed by a society to replace their lack of that emotion. Though a young mind can't tell the difference between a pigeon and a dove—not until fed the distinction.

It is all so confusing. I should hope I could spot the difference between a dove and pigeon, but now they seem so similar. Both crushed by a standard neither of them seem to fit into, yet by one of them created.

Still, there's something so painful about being such a bird. This was never supposed to be—I was supposed to fly above it all, but I feel all eyes looking down at me. Small me. The monstrous, dangerous, barbarously, small me. I wonder if there's more bread crumbs where the rest of my kind came from.

But no matter where I came from exactly, I'll always be a pigeon. A pigeon in comparison to a song-bird, to a starling, to a song-sparrow, or to an eagle. The eagle. The eagle is a representation of what all birds could be: crested feathers, strong talons, and a cry that isn't their own. But I try my best not to be too unnerved. Just because my feathers are for shielding rocks, and not soaring, my talons are for penetrating power lines and not produce, and my screams are personal and sparse, not plagiarized and significant.

There are so many times when I feel angry about my voice. That it's interpreted as a weapon and not as a defense. That the anger it causes is only reflective of the shield that it is. That my ammunition is their hate, mirrored. That suddenly, doves are endangered. That the country I stand in was planted with seeds of vegetables I can't eat, filled with water from which I cannot drink, and covered in blades of grass too sharp for me to lie in. That my accoutrements will never be fur or pearls, but wraps and crutches. So all my food will be taken and misconstrued, my dreams simply a stepping stone for others to achieve theirs. There will be fights to keep me

out, and fights to cage me in. My war to fight is civil; my ending is lively and through all five courses, I will stay hungry.

For a bird once wanted is no different than a people once treated as such an animal. And just maybe, if I was never taken from the country I was born in, there wouldn't be such a rush to send me back.

WHISKED AWAY BY THE WIND

Lila Matthews '26



“Man by Ocean 101” Cassie Davis '27 - Digital art

The grass blew chaotically as the salty smell of the sea mingled with the smell of distant rain. The clouds promised a storm like no other, but it wasn't something I wasn't accustomed to, for I had seen many storms, but none quite like the one I was going to experience that day. Nothing could compare to being taken by the wind.

The sand squashed beneath my feet as I walked along the shore nearing my home, the lighthouse, with each step. I watched the waves crash against the rocks beneath the lighthouse where the fiddler crabs lived. My eyes followed one as it scuttled across the sand not too far from my bare feet. Its tiny legs moved so fast you'd think if you blinked only for a second it would be gone. *How odd, I thought. The fiddler crabs rarely stray from the rocks. Perhaps it has gotten lost due to the wind.* My attention was drawn away by the sound of my name being called in the distance. I spun around looking for who could have possibly been on the beach after a weather warning was issued. It was dangerous for those who didn't understand the ways of the sea.

“Hello?” I questioned after finding no one on the beach. After a moment with no response, I turned back. It was then that I saw him. A few yards away from me stood a man dressed in the strangest of clothes. They were an array of blues and greens—far more shades than I'd ever seen in one place. “It is not safe to be out here, you know,” I called, beginning to walk closer. With each step, I noticed the complexity of his features. One: He stood tall with broad shoulders. Two: His cinnamon skin was painted with the most peculiar patterns of white and blue specks. Three: His hair was akin to the color of the sun through amber. Four: His sharp nose was dusted with even more blue specks. Five: His eyes...they were unlike anything I'd seen. They were an astounding blue, though what set them apart was their similarity to the eyes of the stray cat that lived under the lighthouse porch.

“Your eyes,” I whispered, barely audible over the wind, “they're like a cat.” He smiled as his hand brushed the sword I had yet to notice that was attached to his hip. My eyes never

strayed from his after that, too captivated to look away in fear that if I did, he'd disappear.

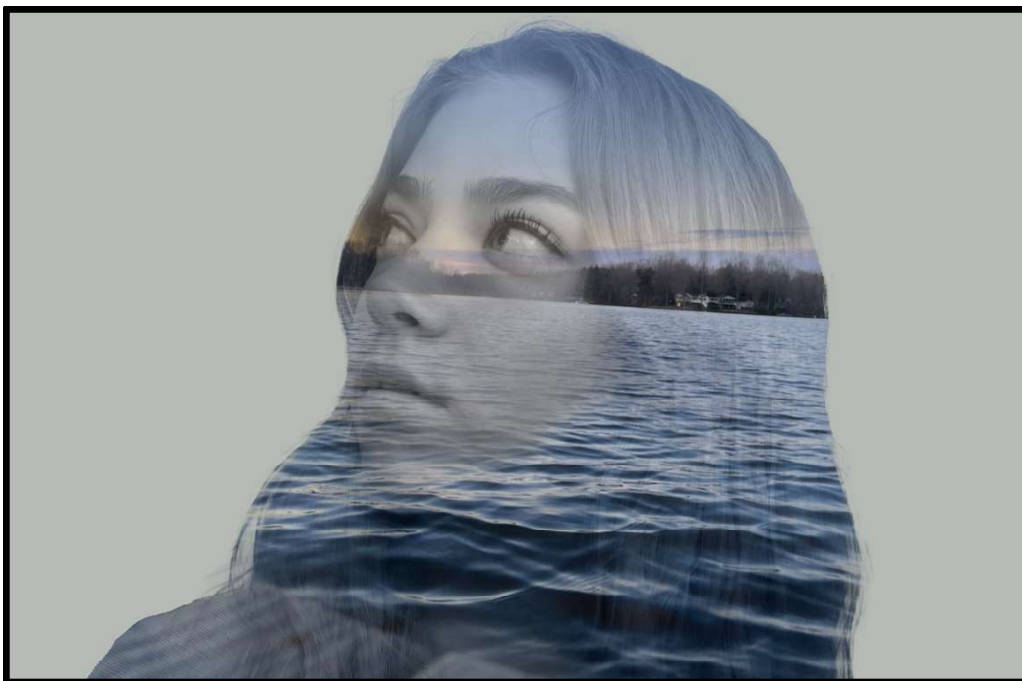
"They're gorgeous, no?" he asked. His voice hit me hard, stealing the air from my lungs like being dunked in the ocean in the middle of winter. It was smooth and melodic. It was then that I knew he was a water fae. I said nothing, still staring into his cat-like eyes.

"I'll have you know they are quite a rarity among my people," he explained. "Never really know what your fae mark will be 'til your hundredth birthday." His words bounced around In my head: "my people," "fae mark," "hundredth birthday." I knew what he was; I'd read tales of them stealing kids from the shore and sinking boats, but that is exactly what I'd thought they were: tales. Make believe. That was all it was meant to be. Yet in the back of my mind, I had always known that they were out there and I had always heeded the warnings written in children's books. Finally, I took a step back, wondering why I hadn't sooner.

The sky above grumbled loudly before releasing its cold tears upon us. The wind began to pick up as he stepped closer, his feet leaving deep shoe prints in his wake. Strangely, the pouring rain soaked only me, leaving him untouched. "Who are you? What do you want?" I asked quietly, my voice wavering slightly.

"My name is Wind and I'm the first commander of the wave. I'm here for you, our new light keeper," he answered, his face now serious. He stepped forward in one swift action, wrapping me in his arms, his salty smell invading my senses before there was nothing.

And just like that, I'd been whisked away by the wind.



Carolyn Spence '25 - Double exposure photograph

ENVIRONMENTS

Riley Foltz '27

every creaturE you could dream
all bed down in nature's green.
creatures small and creatures Vast,
here they llve in the sun's attack.
living seemingly in haRmony,
there will always be the agOny.
they know not of the prowling daNgers below.
with the screaMs and squawks of death's new crow,
he'll call out to those below, "flee, vErmin! flee!
Death's evil Nature has been set free!"
they'll scatter in the nighT
to hide from his Sight.



Carolyn Spence '25 - Photography



Virginia Stewart '26 - Digital art

THICKET

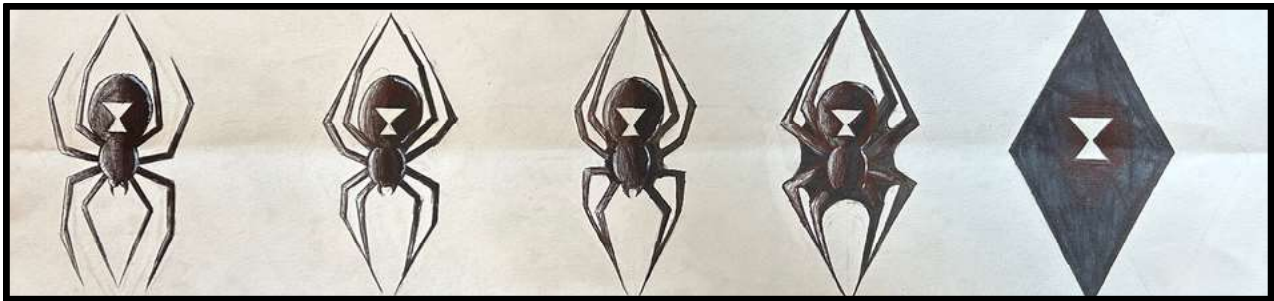
Rachael Broxon '27

into The thorns
clutHing your basket tight
intrepId adventurer
quickly you skip over roots and stones
from bEhind you, a low growl —
a beasT approaches

LAST NIGHT

Jimena Linares-Torres '27

Dreams
Vivid, Inspiring
Imagining, hoping, achieving
Stars, success, fear, monsters
Creeping, twitching, chasing
Terrifying, haunting
Nightmares



Eden "Celia" Becerra '25 - Pen and ink

LIGHT AND DARK

Luke Wright '26

Sun
Bright, Warm
Heating, Burning, Illuminating
Light, Ray, Shadow, Beam
Darkening, Depleting, Celestial
Cool, Giant
Moon



Maddi Owen '24 - Photography

TWO SENTENCE HORROR STORIES

I kissed my daughter on the cheek and tucked her in. I walked to the kitchen and heard behind me, "Daddy, who's in my room?"

Miley Shifflett '27

The woman desperately reached out towards the man standing next to her hospital bed. He continued giggling as he held the cord to her ventilator just out of reach.

Riley Foltz '27

I always leave the lights on, even when I'm sleeping. She only comes out when it's dark.

Ella Squicciarini '27



Vincent Gonzalez '24 - Digital Art

COME PLAY WITH ME

Francesca “Laurance” Orfini ‘25

My eyes shoot open as I feel something on top of me. My eyes meet those of my stuffed animal.

“Good morning!” it says to me.

“Ah!” I scream in response.

I push it off of me and run to the other side of my room. It jumps off my bed and moves closer.

“Stay away from me!” I say to it.

“Don’t be scared! I’m just your friend like I always have been. But now I can speak,” it says.

It starts to come closer, but I run to my door, slam it behind me, and sprint down the stairs. As I make it down the stairs, I hear the cracking of wood. I look up the stairs and see the stuffed animal has made it out of my room. It makes eye contact with me.

“Where are you going, friend? Don’t you want to play with me? Your mother enjoyed meeting her friend,” it says.

“What does that mean?” I say.

“Oh, you’ll find out when you go into the kitchen,” the monster stuffed animal says.

I run into the kitchen and find a gruesome scene. My mouth is open, making noise, but I can't hear anything. My body is violently shaking until I retch stomach acid up onto the kitchen floor. The stuffed gnomes my mom keeps as decorations are still working at what is left of her body. I run over and kick the gnomes off my mother.

"Mom?" I say.

Silence.

"Mom!" I scream.

"Don't you like the beautiful work our little friends did?" the stuffed monster says.

"No! I absolutely do not like this," I say.

"Well, that means you'll have to be next!" it says.

It begins to run towards me, the gnomes following behind. I jump up and go through the glass backdoor. I slam it closed, catching a gnome in between the wall and door, slicing it in half. I run until my legs go numb. I stop and look around and notice the stuffed animals are nowhere around. I whip my head around from left to right, until something bites at my leg. I drop to the floor in anguish, screaming. I try to kick the little creature off my leg, but its grip is too tight. As I am lying on the ground, more begin to come out from their hiding spots. There has to be at least a hundred of these creatures. I scream as they all slowly come closer. My leg has stopped kicking at the creature as I freeze in fear. They all jump at me at once. I attempt to fight them off, thrashing my arms, legs, and even head around to prevent them from biting me. It ends in failure as I feel little, sharp, jagged teeth sink into my body. I scream and scream until my throat is raw and my vision goes blurry. Until I can't feel or see anything.



Maddi Owen '24 - Photography

CONTAGIOUS

Hunter Perkins '24

INT. ARMORED VAN - DAY

A team of soldiers sits inside a van. They're armored from head to toe and hold rifles in their arms. One of the soldiers, a woman named PRIVATE HELLMAN, talks to another soldier, PRIVATE THORNTON. They sit across from each other in the back of the van. Next to them, closer to the front of the van, sits PRIVATE CASTILLO, a thinner man with glasses and a cigarette.

PRIVATE THORNTON

Are you sure you're up for this?

Private Hellman looks at him.

PRIVATE HELLMAN

I've told you about my parents, right?

PRIVATE THORNTON

Yeah. The fire.

PRIVATE HELLMAN

Right. I swore to myself I'd never let something like that happen again. Whatever this is, it's no exception.

PRIVATE THORNTON

I just know you're a doctor, not a soldier. You're not the most experienced person in here. No offense.

PRIVATE HELLMAN

None taken. I know my limits. But to me, it's not about succeeding. It's not even about surviving. It's about proving my worth to myself.

PRIVATE CASTILLO

You don't have to get so personal. You know that, right?

PRIVATE HELLMAN

I'm fully aware of my flaws. I have no reason to hide them.

PRIVATE CASTILLO

Not if your flaws get us all killed. Just sayin'.

The van turns left. In the driver's seat is PRIVATE YANES, a muscular man with sunken eyes and a boney face. The blonde soldier in the front passenger seat, SERGEANT GRIFFIN, speaks up.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN

I hope you all know what we're getting ourselves into.

Everyone except for Private Yanes looks at Sergeant Griffin.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN (CONT'D)

This isn't a normal operation. We don't know what we're up against. All we know is that this town has gone silent. I understand your confidence, but there's a possibility we'll end up just like them.

The van falls silent for a moment.

PRIVATE CASTILLO

With all due respect, sir, that's exactly why I'm not going to shut up. I don't know what we're headed into, but I'm not going out with silence.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN

I respect that, but I don't want to go out listening to you, jerk.

Private Thornton smiles.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN (CONT'D)

Besides, I have family out here. I'd like to have the luxury of worrying about them.

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - LATER

The van pulls up to the town and the team steps out. The area is beautiful. Just beyond the town and the green land around it is a range of mountains. Everything is silent.

PRIVATE CASTILLO

Pretty.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN

Let's go.

EXT. TOWN - MOMENTS LATER

The team sneaks through the town. Private Hellman looks around. There isn't a single person in sight. She continues into a nearby house that has been left open, her rifle raised.

INT. TOWN HOUSE

Private Hellman enters the kitchen, where she finds the body of a dog. She crouches down next to it and examines it. It doesn't have a single scratch on it. Private Hellman looks up, shocked, wondering what could've happened to it.

PRIVATE THORNTON (O.S.)

I found someone!

Private Hellman stands up and leaves as we pan back down to the dog.

INT. RESTAURANT

The body of an older man sits slumped over in a booth with his hand in his lap. Like the dog, the body is unscathed. Private Hellman and Sergeant Griffin approach Private Thornton.

PRIVATE THORNTON

He's completely unscathed.

PRIVATE HELLMAN

Whatever happened here, it wasn't physical. There was no struggle.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN

Everyone else is gone. Why do you think he's the only one in sight?

PRIVATE HELLMAN

It's a sickness.

Sergeant Griffin and Private Thornton look at her.

PRIVATE HELLMAN (CONT'D)

There's a dog a couple doors over. Completely unscathed, just like this man. My guess about why he's the only one we've found so far: He's elderly. He probably had a preexisting condition, so he was one of the first to go while everyone else was able to get up and leave.

The other two look at her, shocked.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN

Let's keep looking. The rest of them have to be somewhere around here.

EXT. TOWN PLAZA - MOMENTS LATER

A suspenseful track begins to play. We move to the right across the ground as numerous bodies, now younger, lie scattered throughout the plaza, most of them lying with their hands wrapped around their necks. All of them seem to be physically unharmed. The team's stepping feet emerge on the left side of the screen. We move up and in on the face of Private Hellman as she scans the scenery, shocked. The camera stops as she stops walking. The others keep walking past her. Finally, Private Castillo turns around to face her, breaking her thousand yard stare. He plucks his cigarette butt out of his mouth and onto the ground.

PRIVATE CASTILLO

Having second thoughts?

PRIVATE HELLMAN

Do you ever shut up?

PRIVATE CASTILLO

No, I'm serious.

PRIVATE HELLMAN

No. I might be new here, but I'm not any less determined than you are

PRIVATE CASTILLO Alright. Just making sure.

Private Castillo turns back around and keeps walking. Private Hellman follows, exiting the screen. A heartbreaking track begins to play in the background. The body of a woman with

blonde hair lies on the ground with her hand near her neck, just like the others. Around her neck is a gold pendant. Sergeant Griffin approaches her, kneels down, and looks at her. Their hair colors are the same. Private Yanes looks down at him with no emotion. Private Castillo watches also.

PRIVATE CASTILLO (O.S.)

Man. I'm sorry.

Sergeant Griffin removes the pendant from the body and ties it around his own neck. Then he stands up. He speaks, the emotion noticeable in his speech.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN

They suffocated. Everyone around here has their hands around their necks like they somehow thought it would help them. We should keep moving.

Sergeant Griffin keeps walking. The team doesn't say a word. They follow him without question.

EXT. ROOFTOP - MOMENTS LATER

The team steps out onto the roof from the stairwell. Sergeant Griffin, Private Hellman, and Private Thornton keep walking to the rooftop. Private Castillo leans against the wall, pulls out another cigarette, and lights it. Private Yanes stands next to him. Private Castillo glances at Private Yanes through the corner of his eye.

PRIVATE CASTILLO

You don't talk much, do you?

Private Yanes keeps his eyes ahead of him.

PRIVATE YANES

No.

Private Castillo simply nods.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN (O.S)

Castillo. Yanes. Get over here.

Private Castillo and Private Yanes follow the others. Soon, they see something shocking down below that we don't.

PRIVATE CASTILLO

Oh my god.

There's a hole on the roof of the building below them. Through the hole, they see a crashed spacecraft. Faint choking sounds are heard. Private Hellman slowly looks over at their source: Private Castillo. The other team members look over at him in fear. Private Hellman rushes over to him just as he collapses onto the ground.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
Come on, Castillo. Talk to me. Breathe.

He continues to struggle as he turns blue. Sergeant Griffin leans in.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN
Come on, you said you weren't going out in silence. Just breathe! You're not done yet!

Private Castillo's muscles relax and his arm slumps to his side. The life fades from his eyes. The team looks down at him in shock. Sergeant Griffin steps back.

SERGEANT GRIFFIN
We need to keep moving. We can't let that thing take any more lives.

Private Thornton looks over at him while Private Hellman continues to look down at Castillo's body.

INT. BUILDING

The team slowly closes in on the spacecraft, weapons raised. There is no music. Only silence. The spacecraft's metal plating is rippled and buckled, nearly coming loose. Smoke rises from the seams. Sergeant Griffin signals for them to surround the spacecraft. Sweat drips from Private Hellman's face as she closes in. Finally, the content of the spacecraft becomes visible to her: a small blue creature with large, innocent eyes. She looks at it, shocked. She hears choking sounds and looks to her right to see Private Thornton drop his rifle and wrap his hands around his neck. Thornton stumbles over to Private Hellman as if she can somehow help him. Finally, he collapses. Private Hellman's eyes widen with fear as she rushes over to him and checks on his body. Tears fill her eyes as she realizes he's gone. Sergeant Yanes simply stares at the extraterrestrial. Sergeant Griffin starts gasping for air next. Private Hellman watches him with fear, but does nothing to save him, choosing to carry out his final orders and stand her ground. He collapses to the floor and stops struggling. Private Hellman glances over at Private Yanes, who is now the only one left standing besides her. His rifle is lowered. He drops it on the ground loudly, then steps toward the extraterrestrial.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
Yanes! What are you doing?

PRIVATE YANES

I've seen a child like this one before. It killed my family just like it did this village. You said you swore to never allow people to die again. But you don't know what this thing is. So I'm going to kill it.

Private Hellman stares at the extraterrestrial. It reaches out for her. Private Yanes steps toward it. Private Hellman glances over at Private Yanes.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
It didn't kill your family.

Private Yanes looks at her.

PRIVATE HELLMAN (CONT'D)
It's sick.

PRIVATE YANES
You swore to help people. If this thing survives, all of humanity could die.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
I did swear, but this thing is innocent. I don't think it's right.

Private Yanes looks back at the extraterrestrial. Then he lunges for it. Private Hellman aims her rifle at him and he stops.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
Don't. Do. It.

PRIVATE YANES
Hellman. Think about this.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
I don't need to think about it. Who says this thing can't be considered human? What if this is my chance?

PRIVATE YANES
But think of how many more people you could save. Put down the gun.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
I can't.

PRIVATE YANES
You can.

PRIVATE HELLMAN
I can't.

Private Yanes sighs, then whips out a pistol and shoots Private Hellman. She drops to the ground on her back. The child cries. Private Yanes begins strangling the child, but then he slows down. He begins choking and wraps his hands around his own neck instead of the child's. Private Hellman looks up at him. Finally, he drops to his knees, then to the ground. He goes limp. Private Hellman slowly puts her head back down and looks up through the hole in

the ceiling. The sky is still just as blue as when they arrived. A helicopter is heard in the background before flying overhead. Private Hellman slowly rolls over. She crawls toward the spacecraft with everything she has. Finally, she grabs the edge of the vehicle and pulls herself up. Private Hellman looks down at the child with awe. It looks back up at her and stops crying. It reaches out and touches her face. She smiles slightly.

PRIVATE HELLMAN

Look at you.

The child touches her nose. She takes it into her arms and holds it.

PRIVATE HELLMAN (CONT'D)

That's quite a cold you have. Lucky for you, I happen to be a doctor.

Hellman stands there, bleeding, as the light shines down on her through the hole in the roof.

FADE TO BLACK

CREDITS



Joy Mallette '25 - Nylon sculpture

PIANO/GRAPHIC ARTS

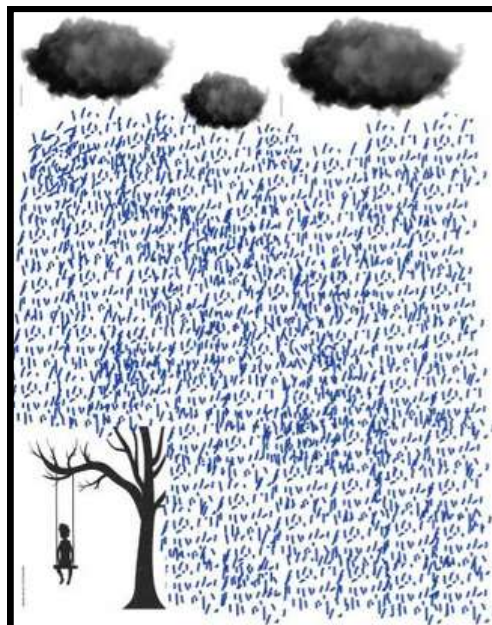
Art: Malachi Jackson '24
Music: Avery Blackburn '24



Art: Beck Martin '25
Music: Delaney Feury '26

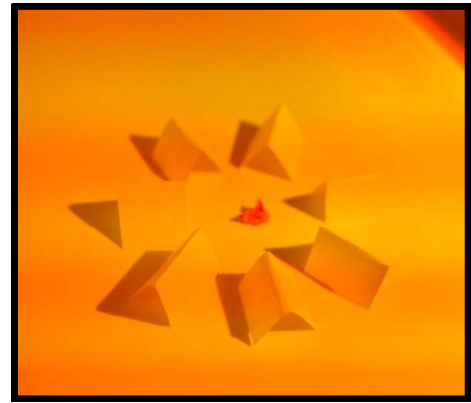


Art: Korbin McComb '25
Music: Cassidy Martyn '25



LOST ON A DESERTED ISLAND

Ruby Frazier '26 and Laurence
Orfini '25



Ryan Scopelliti '24 - Photography

A real man never cries. That's what I always thought, and I'd stuck to that. But today that all changed.

As the red and blue lights illuminated my tears, I was approached by another police officer.

“Can you tell me what happened here?” he asked.

“Gladly,” I said.

It all began five days ago. My girlfriend Lacy and I were staying at a tropical resort, and we wanted to go scuba diving. We thought it would be fun because it was supposed to be private. The idea was that you could rent your own boat and explore the ocean. On your own. In private. However, when we got there, there was only one boat to rent and two other people. One was a big, tall man with light brown hair and light eyes. The other was a scrawny teenager with curious eyes and a goofy smile.

“We should wait for another boat,” I said to Lacy.

“What? Ryan, don't be silly! We can just join them. It's not like we all have to hang out together once we get there,” she exclaimed.

I agreed as I did not want to upset her. Once we got on the boat, we met the strangers. The big one was Tom. He told us that he was a hunter, a nature man. He said that he was taking this vacation as a celebration of his divorce. A funny guy, I know. Then the other kid, James, went on and on about how he was an aspiring marine biologist and how none of his family wanted to go scuba diving with him, so they let him go alone. I mean, if I were this kid's family, I would not want to be on a boat with him for an hour either.

As I was forced to entertain these people for the entire boat ride, Lacy was just peacefully writing in her diary - well, our diary, I suppose. We would both write entries in it and then let each other read it – her idea, not mine. She says it's a “look into each other's souls.” It's

supposed to be a sentimental gesture of love, but I don't really get it. I only entertain the diary to satisfy her wishes. Eventually, after hearing these two yap about God knows what for 30 minutes, the boat began to rumble. Almost like a car that wouldn't start.

"Aw, man, you've got to be kidding me," groaned Tom.

"Why did we stop?" asked James.

I leaned over the side of the boat to check the fuel level, and sure enough, we had run out.

"It's the fuel. We ran out," I stated.

"Honey, I thought I told you to make sure there was enough fuel before we left?" Lacy asked.

"I did. I don't know how this happened," I responded.

James then shouted "We can probably use the emergency oars and paddle to that little island right there!"

"Why don't we just row all the way back to the resort?" Tom asked.

"It's too far," I said. "We got out here by speedboat. Trying to row back could take forever."

"Besides, doesn't the resort have some sort of policy for this type of stuff? Once they realize that their boat didn't check back in later today, then they will come looking for us," Lacy said.

Everybody agreed to stay on the island while we waited for rescue, so we rowed the boat for about one mile to the island. By the time the sun began to fade, we realized that it would take longer for rescue than we thought. We decided to make a tent-like structure out of fallen branches and giant leaves near the edges of the beach away from the shore, but still visible if we were to be rescued. While James, Lacy, and I were putting the tent together, Tom came back from wherever he had gone with a giant rodent-looking creature. It was, in fact, dead; its neck snapped.

"Dinner," he said as we all gawked at him.

"How on earth are you going to cook that, man?" James asked.

"Burning it," Tom replied as he pulled out a lighter.

"That is a terrible way to go out," Lacy said disgustedly.

“It's already dead,” Tom said.

“I know, but the flames... I mean, just imagine being burnt,” she said.

“Imagine,” I said...

Dear Diary,

The boat ran out of gas. I know I filled it up to full. We were going to go scuba diving as Lacy and I were celebrating our anniversary. I'm not worried; to be honest, we should be off this island in no time. Once the resort notices one of their boats went missing, they'll be out looking for us in no time. I've been looking around this island, and it's surprisingly full of life. The grass, leaves, and plants look so healthy; you don't really see that anymore. There's not much to do other than set up shelter, keep resources in check, and keep hope for when someone comes to get us.

So, Ryan signing off,

If you read this, Lacy, I love you.

Dear Diary,

It's Lacy checking in. Ryan is planning on taking me to stargaze to get my mind off things. He's already told me the plan and the meeting spot, so there's no more surprises on this island. We plan to take the clearest route, around the perimeter, so we don't have to go through the dense forest. I'm so excited! I have missed the normality of dates. We haven't had anything normal since the day we landed here. Everyone is really tense; I understand the fear, but there's still hope. It's not like we're completely out of hope. We have each other, and this island is full of animals we can eat. We'd be completely lost without Tom. To be honest, him having skills for hunting and knowing about living off the land helps keep some of my worries down. If I was here without Ryan, I'd be completely and utterly lost.

-Lacy <3

I love you too, Ryan

Days went by, and the boat disappeared, probably taken by the current. They had forgotten to anchor it. Tensions were high. James had now become the embodiment of panic. Tom complained that we had no drinking water left, and tried to get me to somehow figure out how to boil the ocean water. But Lacy, being Lacy, remained optimistic. I, on the other hand, had grown impatient. After days of pondering the perfect strategy, I finally decided to carry out my plan of giving Lacy a night to remember. This was what I had been waiting for ever since I met her. It was time. I told her that I was taking her stargazing, a sort of private excursion. The skies were clear, the stars were sparkling, and everything was quiet. Everyone had fallen asleep back at the tents.

“Shh, don't wake them up,” I whispered.

“I won't, I won't,” she whispered back.

We must have walked about a half a mile to the beach on the other side of the island. Everything was perfect.

“Why are we here?” she asked quietly.

“For the thrill,” I said.

“What do you mean?” she asked with a sparkle of glee in her eye.

I knelt down.

I reached into my pocket.

I pulled a knife out. Sharp.

I looked into her eyes. Fear.

She didn't have time to scream. The blade was faster...

To cover my tracks, I pulled out the lighter from my other pocket. I watched as the flames consumed the night. I made it back to the tents before anyone woke up, and I put my knife back in my pocket. Then, I resumed my role. It didn't take long, maybe ten minutes, before the stench reached the tent.

“What's that smell?” James groaned, awaking from his sleep.

“What?” I asked.

“That smell, something is burning,” he said.

“Where's Lacy?” I asked. “Oh god. Lacy,” I said.

“Something's not right,” James said as he stood up, looking into the night. “Over there!” he exclaimed. He pointed to the small glimpse of fire's light. We ran to the same familiar spot. For me, at least.

“Is that... Oh my goodness, I am going to be sick! Who would do th—,” he said. Well almost said, anyways.

The knife, crimson, was of no use to me now. I threw it far into the dark ocean. The lighter created those beautiful golden flames again. All of a sudden, I heard footsteps. My last guest had arrived. My final act.

“What is this?!” Tom screamed.

“Art,” I said.

“You are crazy, insane!” he cried in sudden realization.

He tried to run. I ran too, only faster. We were soon on the ground, and I let him punch me. He didn't know it yet, but he was granting me my innocence. Eventually, I grew tired of pretending to struggle. I grabbed a rock near my hand and swung it at his head. He dropped. I stood up. I wiped my finger prints off the lighter with his shirt. I put it around his hand. I replaced my fingerprints with his. Not that it really mattered. DNA doesn't do too well in water, anyways. Still, you can never be too careful.

Dear Diary,

I can't believe I actually did it. Years of planning my magnum opus: killing someone. The best part was it's someone you could say I loved. I've been waiting, watching, and meticulously planning for this beautiful masterpiece of a night. I was full of adrenaline as I asked Lacy to go stargazing. The scene itself was gorgeous, even more beautiful after my plan was done. Walking there, holding hands with my victim, the lighter and knife hidden out of sight, the fact she had no idea how long I'd been planning this. These thoughts started years ago, but my plan didn't start till we entered that resort. I purposely underfilled the gas tank, just enough for us to get to an isolated island. What wasn't in my plans were those two nuisances, but it all worked in my favor. Being able to frame Tom takes all the blame off me, and makes me seem like another victim.

Lacy had no idea of the real me. I slit her throat the moment I got the chance. I'd always imagined what it would feel like to cut someone else, but it is more satisfying then I'd imagined. All I had left to do is start the flames while I could still see the fear in her eyes. The human body really is extremely flammable. The stench is like nothing like you could imagine. Just a waft of it sends alarm bells ringing in your head, and your adrenaline gives you an amazing high.

The only thing I had to worry about now was Tom and James. James was so easy to dispose of. A simple jab of a knife and he went down as fast as an acorn from a tree. I was worried about Tom the most - he's bigger in stature than me, more experienced in combat than me - but he wasn't prepared like me. How ironic; a man like him, downed by just a rock. The worst part was waiting for the police to come, so I could finally settle this.

Framing Tom wasn't hard at all. A big man who's a hunter goes crazy after being trapped on an island? That should be the news headline. And the rest of the story? Tom attempted to stab me, but I disarmed him, and in the process the knife landed in the ocean. While he was searching for the lighter to burn me, I found a rock and hit him before he could light me ablaze too. It must have been ejected from his hand once he hit the ground. It's all so beautiful how things clicked into place.

So goodbye, Lacy. You were as beautiful in death as you were in life.

The sun was barely rising when a police officer approached the shore.

“Over here!” I yelled frantically.

The policeman made it over to me. “Sir, are you okay?” he asked.

“She’s gone, everyone’s gone...” I said as I broke into tears.

“What do you mean, sir?” the officer asked.

“He was going to kill me too! I should have protected her!” I cried.

“Hey Cortez! You need to see this!” another officer yells from a separate boat. “I was taking a perimeter from the other side of the island, and I found bodies,” he said.

As the red and blue lights illuminated my tears, I was approached by another police officer.

“Can you tell me what happened here?” he asked.

“Gladly,” I said.

He asked questions. They found everything the way I wanted them to. They confirmed the murderer. The cause of death: immolation. The murder weapon: a lighter, found in the shallow water near the shore.

Hours later...

“...and that’s when I saw them. He tried to kill me too, so I managed to fight him off. I had to. He was going to kill me. It was self-defense,” I said.

“Thank you for your statement. You are free to go. I’m so sorry for your loss,” the officer said as she opened the door to the interrogation room of the police station.

“Thank you, officer,” I said, surreptitiously running my hand down my back pocket to feel the slim diary hidden in it.

When I got into my car. I decided to write one final entry in the diary.

Dear Diary,

A real man never cries. That’s what I always thought, and I stuck to that. But today that changed. I cried tears of joy. I had gotten away with it.

A final goodbye,
Ryan

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Art: Camryn Birckhead '24
Music: Logan Blevins '25

