

6-1-2024

## **The Forest Within**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Scherer, Lindsay N. (2024) "The Forest Within," *Digressions: Literary & Art Journal*: Vol. 21, Article 8.  
Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/digressions/vol21/iss1/8>

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## The Forest Within

### Author Bio

My name is Lindsay Scherer and I am a freshman majoring in Marine Biology. I am in the Dual Admissions Program for Marine Science, as well as the Farquhar Honors College. I was originally born in New Jersey, but I've moved around frequently and I currently live in Bermuda. I am planning to get my PhD in Marine Biology and work with coral reef conservation and restoration efforts around the world. In my free time, I love to scuba dive, drink coffee and read books!

# The Forest Within

LINDSAY SCHERER

Ajea and her parents would always tell each other everything; there were no secrets in the house until Ajea started to hear voices from the forest. Sometimes the voices from the forest got so loud that Ajea had to cover her ears to endure the pain.

"We can help you. If you tell anybody, they will die."

Ajea desperately wanted the voices to stop, so she slipped into the forest, unnoticed by her parents. As soon as she stepped foot into the forest, Ajea was instantly greeted by the most terrifying sight: shadow figures, looming over her, trapping her in their circle. Ajea crouched to the ground, trembling and sobbing, her fingers digging into the soil beneath her. Before she knew it, the demons were attacking her with their pointed, yellow claws and their sharp, bloodthirsty teeth.

Disoriented, Ajea walked out of the forest bruised, beaten, and covered in gashes. She left a bloody trail from the forest to her house. When she finally returned home her parents greeted her, but not like usual. They seemed distracted, closed off as if they were hiding secrets of their own. They paid no attention to their daughter's mauled state, and the family sat in silence around the dinner table, each picking at their plates. That night, as she started to drift off to sleep, Ajea heard the forest again, "We can fix you."

A week passed and no voices were heard until they suddenly came back louder than ever.

"We can help you. If you tell anybody, they will die."

Ajea was afraid to tell her parents; she didn't want anything bad to happen to them or for them to be disappointed in her for not being able to get through this by herself. She crept into the forest once more and the same ritual took place: Ajea crowded by a circle of demons who enjoyed her pain. Again, she stumbled out of the forest but instead of eating dinner with her parents, she went straight to sleep.

Another week passed before Ajea heard the voices, so loud that the pressure in her skull was too much to handle.

"WE CAN HELP YOU. IF YOU TELL ANYBODY, THEY WILL DIE."

Desperate to alleviate her pain, Ajea shamefully ventured into the forest, knowing her fate. For the third and final time, she did not fight back, she let the demons slash, bite, and tear her apart as she squirmed on the ground covered in her blood. Ajea barely made it out of the forest, dragging her body along on her forearms and knees. That night when she got home, her parents finally saw what they had been overlooking, Ajea's scars, her fresh gashes, rivers of blood creating tributaries all over her body. Sobbing, Ajea told her parents everything — the voices from the forest, the demons, and the brutal attacks. Her parents demanded that they go into the forest with her immediately. At first, Ajea was hesitant, she did not want anything bad to happen to her parents, but they convinced her that together they would be stronger than the demons.

Upon entering the forest, the demons immediately surrounded the family. Ajea was frozen in fear, squinting her eyes shut, but her parents stood tall, grabbed her hands, and walked straight through the malignant spirits. Their confidence and fearlessness scared the demons away and Ajea opened her eyes to find her parents still by her side and the demons were nowhere in sight. As Ajea walked out of the forest for the final time, hand in hand with her parents, she understood. She understood that being lured into the forest by the voices is normal, but she must never go alone.

### **Author Statement**

*"The Forest Within" is a fictional piece reflecting real-life coming-of-age experiences. Throughout the tale, Ajea is lured into the 'forest,' a metaphor for her declining mental health and its convincing nature to depend on unhealthy coping mechanisms. By the end, she recognizes the importance of allowing her parents to be there for her and that it is normal to experience these emotions, but she must depend on others' help to avoid being lured into the forest. My inspiration behind this piece was to highlight the significance of understanding one's mental health and being able to depend on others for help."*

