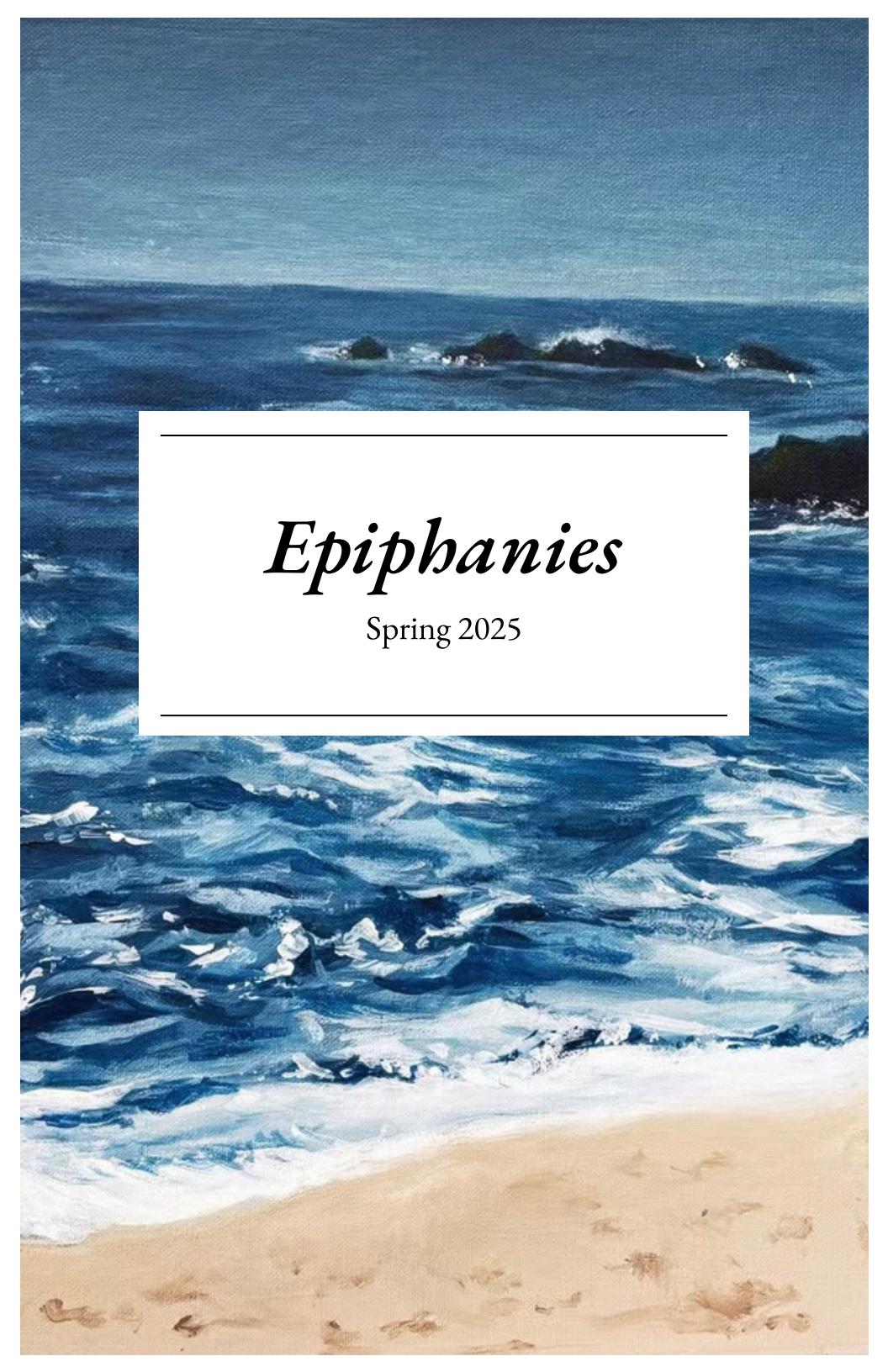


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# *Epiphanies*

Spring 2025

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# **Epiphanies Literary Magazine**

*2025 Staff & Acknowledgements*

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July Wen '25

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July Wen '25

*Special thanks to the English Department for helping with  
gathering submissions!*



## The Start

*Wynne Herrera '28*

I thought it would be bigger than this,  
bigger than falling leaves  
and tomatoes left on the vine to decay.

Maybe there would be a gust of wind to blow the fire into our laps,  
a man with a hook to pull down the stars.

Instead it's just me in my bed,  
waiting until the last second to sit up.

I thought it would be bigger than this,  
bigger than waking up to a fog that feels like it is rolling into my lungs  
and two pills in a sea of acid.

Each year it gets smaller  
and bigger at the same time.

It swells until it explodes,  
grows until it presses the breath out of my throat.

I hold that decaying tomato and think how much like it I am.  
“Poor you,”  
is all I can whisper.  
It probably thought the end would be bigger than this.

## **Home**

*Jamila Burgos '27*

When the night whispers *your* name  
i extended into darkness,  
becoming one with light, or the absence.  
eyes, straying,  
hazy streams of your scent  
floating ever so swiftly by.

When the night whispers *your* name,  
i shakily groan,  
my body aching to collect what i owe,  
so that the world would prize me with *your* melodic voice  
cascading through my mind,

When the night whispers *your* name,  
i place my foot one after the other  
as silently as a cat,  
along stairs molded from shattered stars,  
my body floating into the stars

so I may lie beside *you*  
simply, to feel *your* heartbeat next to mine

*Home.*

## **Someday**

*Melissa Wang '26*

Some day, some day,  
Thou wander to see the dusk,  
Alone-----  
With ruining faith,  
Take pale face,  
In a sorrowful place.  
Thou assume the night for a darkness, solitude abyss,  
Coming soon as a monster devours thou misery endless,  
Thou sit silence and wait for the death,  
Soundless sky numb and wise,  
Thou didn't wait until the night,  
But find the sunrise.

## Sappho

Tiantong Hu '26

The ants quietly carry my body,  
to their home  
to her queen.  
And I, lying under this beautiful dark roof named the sky -  
feel.

Unfortunately, this is not my first time to feel.  
The worker ants are so diligent,  
as if her queen is the fairest one in the queendom of all ants  
as if in Sappho's garden  
A pair of lips plucks another pair of lips.  
Yet ants have no lips  
and I have no heart.

The biting wind is an eternal sorrow  
clamping shut my eyes,  
A soft breeze, gentle drizzle—  
like looming breasts under the sweater of a Southern woman

Women will no longer love this dead body of mine  
But the ants will.  
Food was my wife who lived with all my heart  
Now, perhaps food shall be the female muse for the ants.

Sons of the forest  
sons of the earth  
are the grooms who bloom for you  
Sons of the dust  
sons of the rivers  
are the brides who roll upon you  
Sappho Sappho  
kiss  
Me!



Tiantong Hu '26

## The Oven

*July Wen '25*

He presented me with  
A level of vulnerability I do not possess, and  
The inability to reciprocate  
Triggered a sequence of self-loathing  
Bolting  
Away, I have always believed I was unkind.

Arrogance compensates absent senses, it is a defense  
That makes me the unbelievable believer  
Until proven otherwise by  
the System, my body tattooed with  
Tire tracks of power  
Teacher, I have never felt closer to the earth,

Is it beneath  
Or above me?

I want to conduct a post-mortem  
Of the notion that used be in me  
Of how I qualify.

Would you mourn with me my words that are  
Compressed  
By the atmosphere into sighs,  
I grieve that I am no longer a deliverer of poetry.  
As the boulder crushes my spine,  
I fail to imagine Sisyphus alive.

Perhaps I have been too kind,  
rather than not.

As the leftovers were being microwaved I  
Could not help but stare below the stove  
Their rule and my fates left in my chest  
a feeling ambiguous, reminding me  
of the death of Poe — confusing and

Pitiful and  
Perfectly in character.

The light radiates deceit, I dream of a warmth that's not there  
Would going in be the way out?  
Thoughts parade through my mind, I wonder  
If I followed the echoes right now  
Would Sylvia be proud?



Daisy Zhuang '27

## **What if?**

*Pauline Bouolleau '26*

What if it snowed tomorrow?

People would be full of sorrow,

'Is this because of climate change?

The weather is truly strange

During this month and its April gales.

The blossoming time of maple trees.

Hasn't it been officially spring for a couple of weeks now?

You'd think winter had said goodbye with a gentleman's bow.

But no, let's focus on today

Isn't it nice to feel the warmth of this season, the windy breeze on display?

The wonder about the snow remains

But the weather forecast explains

That it is, in fact, spring.

## **Speciesism**

*Oliver Daughenbaugh '27*

A buck and a doe frolic through morning dew  
Their prized firstborn trailing close behind  
The beaver moves swiftly through fallen branches  
He must make it home to repair the dam  
A feline perched in the afternoon sun  
Leisurely grooms herself, belly full

A heifer screams for her calf, but  
Her throat is burnt and raw from ammonia  
Her side is teeming with blisters and sores, forever untreated  
She grows weary of mourning her stolen children  
She knows her insemination will be repeated once again,  
Her calf will become veal,  
And her udders abused by uncaring machinery.

All their love, their pain, the same  
Separation, speciesism lifts up the unworthy  
Creating a false sense of superiority  
Think critically, you vote with your dollars  
And don't believe humane-washed lies used to sell a system created by our  
capitalist forefathers.

## Crisp Tap

*Jerry Rao '27*

A slender piece of wood with numerous shiny pedals  
The outside is wood and nickel, and so tricky to play  
The sound of the crisp rain tap, each touch made by the metal  
But squeeze too much, and see that the rain taps begin to fray.

From each sonata on the stage, shall no one ever cry –  
Because of sorrow; only from the fortissimo sounds  
Which ringeth in my ears, like a jubilant, joyous fly  
And few people know, that playing, removes a lot of pounds–

From the weight of your shoulders, at least for the time being.  
For in a parallel world, you exist as the ruler  
You decide it all; 'tis all in your hands. It's your choosing  
So play what you wanna play; you're done sooner or later

Potentially people will give you awards for your work,  
But if not, who cares anyway? For you, it's sure a perk.

## **The Crown**

*Elvis He '27*

More lands, more coins, more blood to spill;  
The feast for a stomach that never fills.  
They bow to shadows and kneel to dust,  
An empire rots from greed and rust.

You trade your soul to climb so high,  
But the wind up there just whispers ‘why’?  
What use is power for the hands with chains?  
A king is just a ghost of fames.

The crown outlives the skull it grips,  
Just another fool to lose their lips.  
The more you have the more you fear,  
A throne up high that no one cares.



Melissa Wang '26

## **Ghost in The Dark**

*Ana Lucia Molina de la Calle '27, Addison James '27, Lillian Salisbury '27*

The dark night closes in upon me  
And I smile and giggle  
The wind in my hair

Makes me forget everything  
Why do windows open  
Why do doors close

And why can't I forget I will never love again  
Laundry detergent makes my clothes clean  
But can't erase the dirt I felt with you

Mind longs for forgetfulness but the sorrow is never left behind  
How long does it take for a giraffe to fly  
Is the same as asking how long it takes for me to forget you

My heart flutters from the fear of the ghost  
I ripped my pants  
You ripped my heart and soul

I long to hurt you  
And put an axe in your skull  
But I want to love you

Ghost in the dark whispers  
Where is the bathroom  
I need to purge my memories

I feel the utmost exhilaration  
Relief  
It's all gone, even you

Because the wind in my hair  
Made me bald  
They say hair holds memories

And I can't even remember you



Melissa Wang '26

## Burst

*Cindy Han '27*

The last trace of light fades  
I was standing by a mirror  
The mirror ripples, reflects, and tears down the sky  
It seems to burst

I want to hide away  
Away from darkness  
I saw the flight  
Lost, the light

I want to escape  
Away from dead silence  
I saw the people's shadows  
Lost, the sound

## Midcoast, Maine

*Mira Hartmann '25*

The peninsulas are the legs of a crushed crab sticking out in ragged directions. Olivia asks her dad, Mike, when they will arrive at the beach. They drive up one coast only to reach the top and drive back down the adjacent peninsula. At the beach, kids play on the rocks, leaping over the poison ivy that grows in the cracks above where even the highest tides can't reach. Dogs charge fearlessly into the waves, chasing fuzzy yellow tennis balls, silky smooth driftwood, or a rock, thrown, skipping across the white caps. Rockweed bakes in the summer heat releasing an intoxicating salty smell that is as addictive as it is grotesque. Salt—everything is coated in salt and sand. Beach towels and shell-cut feet deposit sand into every crevice of the Subaru Foresters that are as hot as ovens.

At Pemaquid Point, on the rocks adjacent to the lighthouse, which is under construction with orange caution tape and scaffolding surrounding it like a great blue heron standing in a poorly made nest, four teenage girls stare out at the setting sun and rising moon. To their backs, the clouds are on fire, before them, the water is gentle and the moon sways across the waves perfectly mirrored between the sky and the Atlantic. The waves lap at rocks jutting out of the water and create a melodic undercurrent of sound in an otherwise silent evening. Buoys sway lazily and the head of a harbor seal bobs to the surface between them. The girls watch him and scan the water eagerly waiting for his face to reappear when he dives under. They fondly call him "Poochie Poochie" because of how he looks like a dog with big puppy eyes begging for a dinner time morsel. The girls write poetry, one word at a time, and laugh at themselves and the fast approaching school year. The quiet summer evenings like this are dwindling away.

Snow, and ice, and wind, and waves close the point and drive away the tourists, license plates blending back into their origins. Bustling hubs of people are abandoned and store fronts are filled with signs reading "See You Next Summer!" Mainers drive inland, to the mountains, to ski at the Camden Snow Bowl or Sugarloaf. On the coast, the snow doesn't fall as heavy or stay as long. New Year's Day brings everyone back to the beach. People, young and old, drop their heavy coats and shed their winter boots and send themselves hobbling or hurdling or screaming or laughing into the frigid water. Salt fills their mouths and burns in the icy wind as they reemerge from the water to scramble back up to their towels and bathrobes and not-so-daring family members who laugh at their shivers and "brrrrrrs!"

The polar plunge participants are left gleeful and invigorated. The ocean is swirling and gray and lets no one overstay their welcome.

Fresh snow means fresh tracks. Locals leave hooves and paws and claws imprinted in the ground for their neighbors to follow in their clunking boots. Stories are told in the snow. A deer dug for frozen moss and then lay down and slept under a spruce. A snowshoe hare disappeared into thick brush at a leisurely pace, a fox followed at a trot. Blue jays swoop from branch to branch knocking clumps of snow onto passersby. They occasionally stop to fluff themselves as defense from the cold. Their feathers rustle against each other delicately, juxtaposed by their harsh, angry squawks at one another, and intruders to their woods. Ice crackles in the streams and coves. The smell of the mudflats is suppressed by the miniature icebergs that have been abandoned by the outgoing tide. Joe, a worm digger, still ventures out at the unseen hours of the morning when the tides are at their lowest and the thermometer screwed to the outside of the door frame reads something below zero. He steps off the rocks and sinks deep into the dark mud with the crunch of ice shattering on the surface. Every step releases pops and oozes of suction. He has a bucket in one hand and a rusted, green clam rake in the other. His headlamp provides the only light he needs to trek out into the flats and dig for marine bloodworms. The far off buzz of cars driving over the bridge across the Sheepscot keeps Joe in a meditative state, almost still asleep as he rummages through the thick mud. He is already home when Laura and his two sons wake for the real day to begin.

Jade plants fill the windows of one of the two houses on Bunchberry lane. They bathe in the tenuous warmth of March sun. The southward facing panes of glass are alive with drops of snowmelt racing each other from the eves to the soaking dirt below. The songs of robins and titmice act as alarm bells for drowsy frogs. They emerge bright-eyed and croaking war cries. Males face off in brutal battles over females and the rights to fertilize frogspawn. In a two square meter sized pond there may be twenty-plus frogs engaging in this annual production of theatrics. The cacophony goes silent as suddenly as it began, and what was twenty exuberant frogs becomes four lazy frogs overnight. They will remain the sole residents of the pond until September or October when the first heavy frost and shining, thin sheet of icy glass recover the pond and a dozen or more frogs return to their winter beds.

The leaves turn from green, to red, to brown, to fallen and crunching underfoot before anyone realizes that it has become too nippy for just a

sweater. The air smells fresh and crisp. It has just been shipped in on northern winds that bring Canada geese and new school supplies too. Jen wakes up early to pack Olivia's lunchbox. She slices a McIntosh apple fresh from the farmer's market and packs half of it neatly into a tin. The other half she eats as she loads the dishwasher and shoves papers into a computer bag. The apple is golden and red. It is juicy and sweet, and it snaps between Jen's teeth. Olivia is overwhelmed with the scent of the apple when she walks into the room. She breathes it in and savors the smell until the moment she walks out the door, climbs into the car, and sets off for her first day of fifth grade.



Daisy Zhuang '27

## **Seasons**

*Kaitlin Boston '27*

The season of calm,  
Snowflakes dance in the blue sky,  
Bleak - dreary - dismal.

Rain pours - thunder sounds,  
Flowers bloom from frozen ground,  
Life begins to stir.

Cold, chilled deserts,  
Scorching sand beneath my feet,  
Only sun in the sky.

Leaves crunch, fall, and turn,  
Pumpkins, turkey, sweets - family,  
So many hues all around.

Repeat.

# I am THE sea

*Silina Natour '27*

Blue as a sapphire

Home to whales, dolphins, and all water creatures

Surrounded by an opposite life of land people.

I am a paradise for some, yet a mighty beast for others

Boundless and breathtaking,

Treacherous and tempestuous.

I am a mirror reflecting the mystery of creation

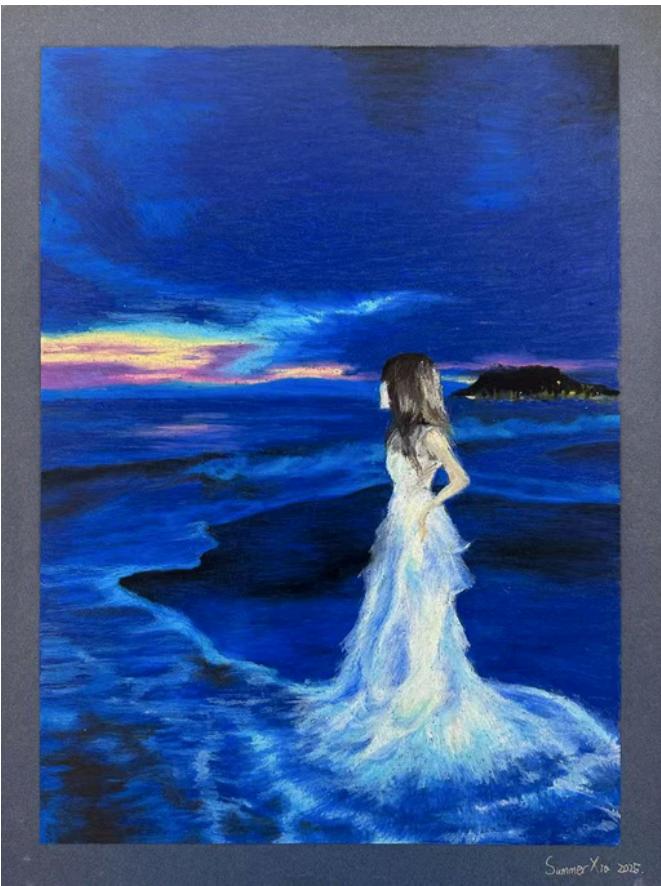
Murmuring about the moonless secrets of mine,

Of how some survive me and some don't.

About how I hide my visible waves deep inside,

So my true colors won't subside.

I am THE sea.



Summer Xia '26

*Summer Xia '26*

## **They call white holes a rhapsody**

*July Wen '25*

*The first line prompted by Angela Wang '26*

“They call white holes a rhapsody”

His text left on

Read in her phone as

She searches Target for strawberries. Not

Jam, not

Juice, not

Flavored candy, not

Freeze-dried — so close! But

She has always despised

Smoothies pretending their ingredients

Aren’t no longer

Fresh

“They call white holes a rhapsody”

He drafted and

Sent hoping it would catch

Her attention. Like it did to

Him, antithetical as he’s

Drawn into something that

Pushes everything

Away. Hypothetically

Cosmic

Just like his dream

Girl

Her crazy fantasy is that

Somewhere outside his crazy

Fantasies perhaps white holes do

Exist. Episodic,

integrated and

Integrating. As they

Reverse time and the

Space he and she both

Occupy, perhaps

Instead of a fall

Out  
She will fall in  
Love with him once  
Again.

## **Skin**

*Tiantong Hu '26*

This is a body I have never closely observed,  
The texture of the skin is like the veins of the marble  
patterns I've seen on grey elephants  
Cracks like the earth  
circling, circling in ordered array  
O mother who bore my soul  
O Earth that birthed my form  
O the female elephant who leads the herd  
This young, fair, delicate, rough skin  
these black, red, brown scars  
these red, green veins and tendons  
How could they belong to me?

## **My heart is a bootleg meadow**

*Angela Wang '26*

Why couldn't I ever have something nice?  
I'm talking a bosom friend, a playful moon, a perfect video game run  
—Or even a patch of tall grass to drown in?

Mine is digital, like the old Windows background,  
Hemorrhaging #78AE43 green, not  
Chlorophyll. Sleek blades crying aphids and ants,  
Etiolated stems thickening on borrowed time.

(Ethylene dissolves in the air. Something inside me ripens.)

Lamb gnaw at the weeds, at their very own nerve endings.  
Ripping roots from follicles, twisting flesh like hemp.  
Dreaming not of snowier pastures but of becoming  
Woodcutters, to live boldly with an axe in hand,  
To bear sin like they'd bear posterity.

(Sometimes they fracture into pixels.)

Someone messages me. My phone screen  
floods the room: "Touch some grass."  
I roll over on my bed. Wrench  
my overcharged computer from its socket. Hunt  
on Steam for a nature-themed game on sale. Filter  
for only negative reviews.

*Why couldn't I ever have something nice?*

**silence, is violence**

*Jamila Burgos '27*

they say, we are Brothers and Sisters  
but what does that mean?  
*surely not another carrying their child's  
shattered body through ruins of rubble.  
not cries for father's as cement  
muffles every reaching scream from deep below.*

yet, our silence.

*not the thundering sounds of bombs  
becoming a ticking time bomb,  
awaiting a newfound longing for the quiet peace of letting go*

yet, our silence.

*not men lying splattered with flour and blood  
fresh from death,  
a massacre after days of waiting  
simply for bread.  
not darkening skies,  
air so unbreathable,  
lungs become dry with grim  
with no more space for sound  
only the slow passing of time.*

yet, our silence.

*not bearing stories of the burning fear dwindling inside  
when a uniform says to strip —  
your clothes, your layers, your skin flesh and bones,  
lying on the floor  
until you are nothing more, than exposed  
leaving you an empty void.*

yet, our silence.

Brothers and Sisters,  
do you not realize?  
it's been televised...  
a man's body flickering in flames, in retaliation.  
young men getting killed  
miles away from war,  
simply because their blood  
contains a drop of sacred earth?

we were not taught to be defeated by death,  
whether you hold the pistol  
or stand hundreds of miles away,  
the blood still dries upon our skin  
staining the ground we walk on.  
staining *us*.

there's no room for silence  
for silence, is violence,  
we need to scream  
until silence can settle upon the entirety of this world.

## **Our world**

*Sorrel Pierson '27*

They argue on TV like it's a game,  
Pointing fingers and placing blame,  
They say so much but yet nothing is said,  
All while real people can't afford bread.  
They promise us change every four years,  
Yet here we are stuck with the same old fears.  
We scroll through the news hoping for something new  
Wishing for something real to ensue.  
We're told we are too young to understand,  
But we see the cracks spreading across the land  
Still when days grow dark and grim  
We'll hold hope like a fire within.



*Cindy Han '27*



Nia Amirah Foote '25

## To Give Gifts in May

Nia Amirah Foote '25

I can't do it. I can't stand here, saturated with grief and despair, from paralysis and stupefaction, pretending like this is a fond memory. Like the ordinary wasn't mundane. Like my childhood boredom didn't feel like another illness I succumbed to. Like isolation was a choice and not my fate.

I've observed the redacted snarkiness, seeing her hunched up in puzzling positions like a twister, for a cruel game of US health care. Every year, the bystander of someone on a stretcher who's delayed, denied, and defended.

I know it's selfish to say you're the one suffering when your loved one is ill, but what if I genuinely believe it.

What if I believe that your body has betrayed yourself and *me*? I know that I never want to go back in time again, now -- but if I could, could you spare a slab of your love aside this time, instead of leaving all your passion for your pain? Is that too selfish to ask for?

But what about me? Me and my regret for diminishing your pain because I could not allow myself to believe it. The times when I walked to your closed door, palms tracing the indent, spine parallel to the door handle, only to turn myself away. Again and again and again.

If I were a better tea maker would you have been less sleepy? If my soup was more vibrant would my love have ignited, a sense of enlightenment. If the water was always room temperature, instead of cold, would that have stopped the aching in your bones.

Or is it silly of me to think that love will ever be enough. That love is always the answer. The only answer. That it will suffice. That it will survive, and thrive, despite the predicament of my premature life, exchanged in another hopeless sacrifice.

But wait, before I go. Just know, world, that I don't believe that everything happens for a reason. For what reason will I never see the sun rise again. To hug without hesitation. To cradle warm skin, and soft hands, and fluttering hearts.

To give gifts in May.

But no. Goodbye! Enough is Enough, right?! Enough Mays. Hand-me-down jewelry and clothes and lipstick and word games and movie nights. Enough of the Spa dates, even though I liked your company more than my own.

For what reason have you decided that I live for the obnoxious amount of light blue. The throw up of emotionless abstract art framed on the walls. The banana-colored floor's echoing. While your clock stops ticking. But you force mine to go. Why, oh why, oh why.

Oh Earth, the nerve you have to be so round and stern but so lenient. So wavering.

So what if I wished that I had a mother who was not ill?

All humans do is dangle on yarn, waiting for a needle to entangle them into their death.

# Nostalgia

*Meili Unger '27*

They say we'll never be those kids again.  
And maybe that's the hardest part.  
If you asked seven-year-old me what I dreamed most of being,  
I'd smile wide and say, "A teenager."  
I was chasing a version of myself I couldn't wait to be,  
Not knowing that sixteen would only wish to be seven again.  
I want to go back,  
To the days when the world felt small,  
And happiness came in the shape of juice boxes and blanket forts.  
Now, I sit in class lost in memories  
Some moments never leave your bones  
Like the salt in the sea,  
They settle deep and stay with you.  
They become part of you.

Nostalgia is a quiet proof  
That you are living a life to be proud of.  
What a privilege it is  
To be able to yearn for your own memories.



July Wen '25

## A Wish For the Future

*Wynne Herrera '28*

Someday my voice will take up more space than my body.  
Someday I won't need to put on makeup,  
won't run a straightener though my hair,  
will wear whatever I want, no matter how unfashionable.

My appearance won't matter.  
It won't matter more than my speech.  
More than the stories I have to tell.

I will speak with cadence in front of a crowd,  
hitting every word with the right inflection.  
Everyone in the audience will wait with bated breath for what I have to say  
next.  
They will be listening, not looking.

Not at my face- not at the raised bumps on my nose or the dark circles  
under my eyes.  
Not at my hair, the frizz that sticks up, the flyaways that never land.  
Not at my body, not the way I have rolls in my stomach or scars on my  
calves.  
Maybe they'll close their eyes.

I don't think I'll ever know.  
I don't think I'll ever be in that room, in that situation, letting my voice  
take up more space than my body.  
But maybe I will prove myself wrong.

## **Oh, Maria**

*Ana Lucia Molina de la Calle '27*

Oh, Maria  
It's not your fault.

Your tiny, beating heart is safe with mine.  
Last week,  
My fingers intertwined with your magical hair  
Braiding your golden brown strands  
That glow and shine and blossom  
As your dulcet voice seeped through my chest.

Maria,  
My soul weeps for you.  
Your forest eyes, teeming with tears  
Strike me with such wonder  
As I recall them before  
The black shadow of deathly regret  
Sought to consume you.

Maria, my sweet, wonderful, beautiful girl.  
I will listen to your shrieks and wails of agony  
Of your pain  
Of your nauseating helplessness.  
When you're with me  
The hungry blaze shall never, ever hurt  
your melodic soul  
Blessed with an inherent goodness that can never fray.

You're just a young girl.  
I know you didn't mean it.  
Oh, Maria,  
Maria, mi niña,  
I'm here for you.  
This is not your fault.  
You can be free.

## **Westtown School**

*Melissa Freeman '26*

20 miles west of Philadelphia, somewhere in the midpoint between the gray urban streets of the bustling city and the endless miles of farmland green with corn, lies the sprawling campus of Westtown School. Centuries older than the homes that surround all sides of it, it stands marked by time through its signature weathered red brick that is replaced in small sections once a year and the faulty air conditioning makes a classroom 83 degrees during a history final in June.

Inside the Main Building, the heart of all things Westtown, two friends sit peacefully in the dining room where the only sound heard is the loud humming of the heater in the corner. They eat a staple breakfast for a Westtown student: a bagel that is either completely untouched by the heat of the toaster, or burnt to a crisp. Charred bagel is an aggressive taste to start the day with. The setting of the toaster never matters, one just hopes that fate agrees with them that day. They spread a random type of cream cheese over the bagel, having plucked it arbitrarily from the several rows of different flavors sitting in the occasionally lukewarm fridges. If it is Wednesday, the duo mentally prepares to sit in silence for 40 minutes, counting 296 window panes in the Meeting House, while others mull over thoughts of God and hold loved ones in the Light, sporadically rising to speak, startling those who lie slumped on their bench, overcome by the desire of sleep. Most of the 694 students of the school have grumbled about going to the Meeting House, but as time passes, they begin to appreciate the time of peace. The stories spoken can be interesting, giving hints to the mysterious lives of other students or teachers as they speak of fond memories, anticipations or a heavy grief that weighs them down.

Outside the stone walls, the campus slowly begins to thaw from its seemingly endless months of bitter winter. Emails about spring break transportation arrive in inboxes and the crocuses on the longest hill start to bravely emerge through the scattering of gray snow and snow drops clump in between tree roots. Photos of these famous flowers are snapped and shared by every student, often uploaded to Instagram with different songs from different lives playing in the background. The music is a story within itself; it speaks of childhoods and friendships and losses. Music seems to be woven into this tapestry of a campus as the talented pianists play melodies that echo down the open hall, a soundtrack to the movie about life at Westtown. Snippets of music from TikTok dances loop on repeat from the

teenagers wearing different colors of sweatpants and sweatshirts attempt to memorize the popular moves. At the dances, the sharp contrasts between the different types of music causes whiplash from time to time when the DJ switches from the classic Westtown dance song of Mo Bamba to the sparkly beats of Nicki Minaj's Starships. Friends whisper and laugh on the side, but can barely hear each other over the roar of the music that makes ears silent, like they've been stuffed with the thickest cotton. Stories from the dance will swirl through the school, changing colors like a chameleon as it leaves a new mouth, as the rumors run through the school.

As the days slowly tick to zero, the flowers of the dogwoods begin to reveal themselves all over the campus. They bloom brightly, splattering the now lush and green campus with clumps of white that symbolize the long awaited end of the year. Outside, the air is fresh and warm, but stress still hangs heavy for high school students. One student anxiously stares at the clock, waiting for the tortuous test to finally end so she can be free from the chains of Avagadro's number and the different types of ions. As she scrambles down the steep steps of the shiny science center, a melancholic feeling takes over, dulling the joy of being free from chemistry, like water added to a sweet drink. With sadness, she anticipates the heartbreak that follows after friends fly home in the days coming. They will venture across many oceans and continents to the other side of the globe, where the time difference makes it impossible to communicate, making missed calls a daily occurrence. Eager seniors tap toes in anticipation as the first Saturday of June draws close. At 11am, they will cross a stage that is covered with the green grass of spring and decorated with the brilliant flowers. Younger friends watch from the audience, with damp eyes. The strong smell of cigars clouds the air in a thickening haze as graduates and loved ones migrate to the field for pictures of white dresses with bare feet and suits with red flowers. Tissues are yanked from pockets and eyelashes become wet as choruses of heartfelt goodbyes begin. Wandering into the yellow dining room, the room now evokes a sense of deep nostalgia for younger days. Turkey and cheese sandwiches with cookies and apples are grabbed in haste, Westtown's last meal for the graduates. Slowly, everyone disperses, some graduates itching to be broken free from the small school that is like one large dysfunctional family. Others drag their feet, walking as slowly as the turtles in the lake. Last glances are taken of the red bricks and flowering trees and blue sky. Their lives start to truly begin and the picture-perfect campus starts to fade into a fond memory.



AJ

The Coach Barn

1/5

Addison James '28

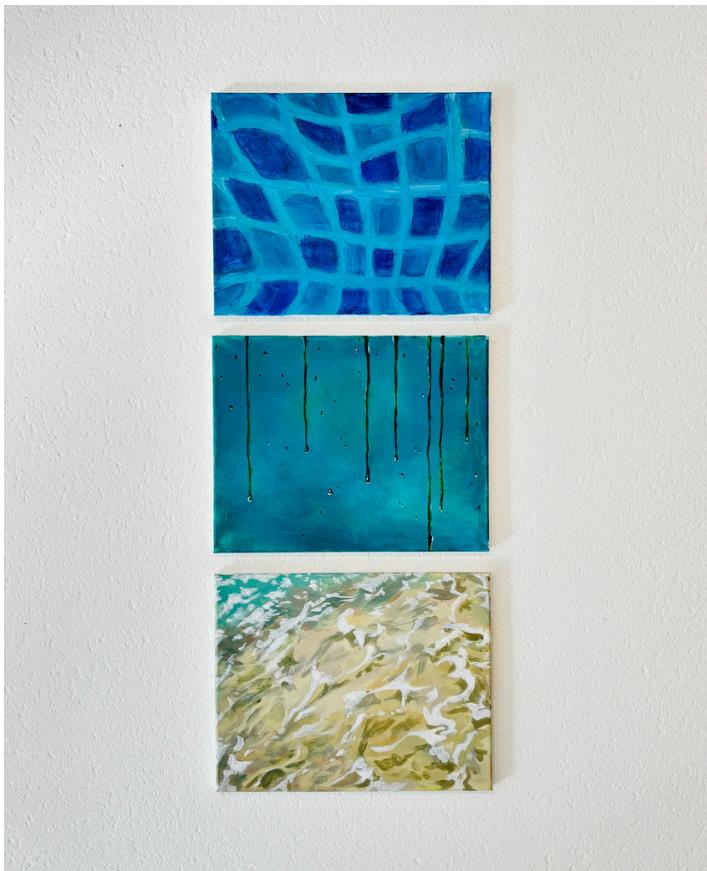
## **Haiku for \$15.00**

*Chase White '27*

Money is flowing  
Through my veins the change jingles  
I'm gonna make it.

**Mystical Morning**  
*Marielizabeth Villa '27*

Mystical Morning  
Saltiness perfume of sea  
Dancing shore



*July Wen '25*

## **Countdown to the Reaper**

*Shawn Sprott '25*

We buried the clock  
but time kept going  
It digs itself up now  
Ticking between our ribs

8 booming rings  
The reaper's radius tightens  
a mile, a yard,  
Finally the length of a gasp

*Only 4 hours remain*

We run through backyards  
jumping fences slick with rain  
Behind us the neighborhood dogs howl  
*They know his shadow*  
is not a shadow

Suddenly aware of my own heartbeat  
Too loud. He'll hear it  
organs slushing  
A wet whimpering betrayal

If I dip my toes in the water,  
do I have to swim?  
The river bank calls us  
but couldn't hide us

*He'd wade in after*  
*Scythe rippling the current*  
*Like a small tidal wave*

*3 hours now*

We try to pray  
but our teeth chatter

Praying  
the wrong names

When the last hour cracks  
we finally turn to face him  
The hood falls back

No skull, no void  
Just a face  
Mouthing our screams

## Tidal Forces

*July Wen'25*

Step, I  
tremble  
Towards your hollow cheeks

On young, not tired,  
legs I walk.

I picked for you  
Thoughts (that have not ripened)  
(Which you should disregard)  
(Though I expect  
You to leaf through them  
Anyway.)

You welcomed me like a ghost town.

Embraced by  
Emptiness, perhaps with echoes  
Your walls liberate

Into you  
I am an ocean wave  
Crashing.

I will love you with tidal forces.

You are rocks,  
Caves, the sand, and warm red bricks.  
The waters my mind raises  
Shall find their way to you.

## **Antediluvian**

*Angela Wang '26*

**Antediluvian:** adj.; of or relating to the period before the flood

1

I hate how red dust clings to everything on Asche—the walls, the floors, the bulletin board, her lab coat. Only her braids seem immune, two twisted ropes of blue-green hanging down her back like memories of water. Like home.

I watch her watching my notice.

She tilts her head at the perfectly aligned notice I'd just pinned—10 Ways to Save Electricity In Your Dwelling—and reaches out to adjust it slightly askew. She mutters to herself, mouthing funny noises that seem to be an Aschen dialect. My auricular translator buzzes softly against my ear, calibrating to her particular tongue. These devices were supposed to be undetectable, but I still fear irrationally that their gentle hum might give me away.

"Why would you do that?" I ask, unable to stop myself.

She startled, not having noticed me lingering. "Oh! It's just that I'm used to them being a bit...". Her fingers make a tilting motion. "Makes it feel alive, y'know? Like someone real posted it, not just another bureaucratic drone."

I re-straighten the notice, smoothing out the cold surface of the paper, "Just because you're used to it doesn't mean it's right." Despite what folks used to whisper back home, before the Purge, Asche isn't as free as I thought it would be. Back on Flutis, I could've just reported her for third-degree sedition and got her banned from all public transportation, but now I had to endure this petty school girl who preferred notices to be slanted. She sighs, "You're right. I shouldn't be bothering. Especially now that it's so close to....".

My pulse quickens. Does she know? I keep my voice steady, "Close to what?"

"The orbital convergence," she says, looking at me strangely. "When we'll have the chance to send signals to Flutis? The water planet?" She studied my face. "It's why all the ecologists are working overtime. Our best chance, if any, at establishing a sustainable water pipeline."

"R-Right." The overhead lights catch the blue-green strands of her hair, and absentmindedly I see waves lapping gently on the shallow shores.

Home.

"Next time, maybe actually read those notices you're hanging up. I'm Hilde, by the way," she says, extending her hand in that Aschen manner I still find jarring. "Department of Xenoecology."

I shake her hand, careful to match the pressure, as if I've lived here my entire life. "Arkose. Security Division."

She smiles. "Well, Arkose from Security, I hope you don't write me up for bulletin board tampering."

I force a smile in return. "Not today."

As she saunters away, I press my back against the cold cave wall. Three long taps on my translator. I replay the audiolog sent from ground base on Flutis just this morning: Any day now.

## 2

She waves hello to me every time she passes by in the hallway, often lugging some hefty microscope or carrying a machine that resembles a centrifuge. I learn that her full name is Hildenbrandia, after a genus of freshwater red algae that I have a mild recollection of taking field samples of back during Training—bloodred colonies that clung to lakebed rocks. There's something cruelly poetic about Aschens naming themselves after living things their barren world cannot sustain. This lifeless rock, honeycombed with desperate tunnels, where people name children with dreams of vegetation they've never seen. Hope disguised as taxonomy.

I wonder what Hilde would think if she knew her namesake flourishes in the shallow edges of Flutian lakes I swam in as a child. Her smile grows more familiar each day. Each time, I remind myself: she is not meant to survive what's coming.

## 3

I patrol the main corridors one evening, checking motion sensors and pretending I'm not hoping to see her, when the overhead lights flicker and dim. Not a complete outage, just another brownout—the third this month as Asche's aging power grid struggles to support the increased research demands ahead of orbital convergence. The emergency lights cast everything in a soft amber glow.

"Arkose!" Her voice echoes slightly in the dimness. "Is it the eastern grid again?"

I turn to find her leaning out of the experimental controls room, datapad in hand glowing blue against her face.

"Probably," I answer. "Should stabilize in about twenty minutes, like last time."

"Perfect," Unexpectedly, her face lights up. "I've been meaning to take a break anyway. Care to join me for a walk to the eastern viewport? The emergency lighting makes the view rather spectacular."

I pause. Nothing from Training has specifically prohibited this, and Operation High Tide hasn't technically started anyway. So, I allow myself to nod. Just this once.

We walk in the dim amber light through corridors that stretch like arteries through Asche's rocky body. She talks about her research—water reclamation systems, filtration improvements, ecological modeling. I flinch as she excitedly mentions their plans to contact the "sentient creatures or even possibly civilizations" on Flutis, and double-tap my auricular implant to initiate recording.

"You're quiet," she observes as we reach the viewport, a massive reinforced window facing the stars and, in the distance, the gleaming blue sphere of my home.

"Just thinking," I say.

"About security things?"

"About..." I pause, finding myself wanting to offer something true. "About how strange it is that we're here at all. Underground. In the dark." She smiles, turning to face the viewport. "We adapt. We dig in. We survive."

The irony sits like a stone in my throat.

"I have something to show you," she says suddenly, reaching into her pocket. "I carry it everywhere, a sort of talisman."

In her palm rests a small hourglass, its glass chambers shimmering in the emergency lights. Dark liquid flows between its chambers.

"It's water from the deep aquifers," she explains. "The last natural reserves we found before they dried up completely. Mixed with ferromagnetic particles to make it flow like this."

I stare at the hourglass, at water from Asche trapped in an endless cycle. Water that should have remained free. Water that Flutis has in abundance, enough to drown worlds.

She lets me hold it. The weight of it in my palm feels accusatory.

"How do we tell time amidst all this repetition?" She asks suddenly, her eyes on the flowing liquid. "Day after day, week after week, year after year. Wake up, dust the room, study samples, dust the room, then sleep. It's like I'm trapped in a time loop, but it's my existence itself that's

perpetuating the loop.”

She takes the hourglass back, holding it up to the viewport where starlight catches in the glass.

“Like water in an hourglass. Like a pendulum. Back and forth, back and forth. Until the air resistance and kinetic friction eats away all your energy and your pulse stops and you’re frozen in time, all tense from the rigor mortis because even your sarcomeres have given up on cyclic motion.”

She sighs, “It’s just... sometimes I feel so confined within myself and my selfish will to live, my self-serving survival instincts. I cannot..” she gestures wildly in frustration, “I cannot crawl out of my own skin. Ecdysis, that’s what the zoologists call it. I’ll never be able to see the bigger picture.”

Even the Aschen civilization as a whole is trapped within itself—we’ve been so focused on survival we know near nothing about Flutis. The finance sector is threatening to cut research funds, every project has to ‘enhance overall survival’ or whatnot, a-and nobody gives a white dwarf about Xenoecology! All of that wondrous, flourishing life right there—and we know nothing! Stars, I’ve never asked to be involved in any of this.”

We’ve wandered to one of the small recreation areas, where someone has set up a portable heating device that simulates a campfire. She tosses a synthetic marshmallow—a luxury item—into the flames. The sticky artificial gelatin is swallowed whole. The flames burp in satisfaction.

Something inside me aches to reach toward her, to just take her into my arms, and whisper her sweet nothings, pretend I’m protecting her as I let the nihilistic darkness pounce upon us. But I knew that she was wrong. Oh stars, I’ve always known this.

“No,” I whisper back, “You’re wrong. There is a way to make your mark, to take a peek outside this vicious cycle of destruction.”

“How?”

I lift her chin up. “What do you see?”

“Flutis. Abundant water, plant diversity, civilization remnants, everything researchers on Asche could wish for. Perhaps a little too much.”

I grimace at the mention of Flutis, “What else do you see?”

Her head swivels around in confusion. “Just stars.”

“Not just stars. Stars.” I meet her gaze. “All they tell us about is Flutis. But what about the rest of the universe? What about all the other planets and galaxies out there? Hilde, the answer lies out there somewhere. It has to.” The tingling feeling in my ears is back, and for the first time in years, I feel like I am on my ship again, wide-eyed and unafraid.

She shrugs, unconvinced. One of her twin braids bounces off her

shoulder.

I turn off the fire. “Come. I have something to show you as well.”

4

The lock on the door clicks as I force my key into the keyhole of my Class 8 dwelling. It sits between rows of identical dwellings partitioned by cold stone walls.

“It’s not much, and I haven’t dusted in a while,” I say, suddenly self-conscious about how bare and unhomely my dwelling seemed. It’s spacious, though not as large as my dwelling back home. There’s one singular stone desk embedded in the corner of the room with a creaky leather chair that occasionally wobbles from the unstable mantle.

She coughs from the dust and points at the map on the wall. “What’s that?”

The walls are empty save for an outdated map of our solar system—one of the last ones that remain on the planet. The shelves are neatly stocked with canned foods, the exception being a digital clock connected to half a thruster, saved from my spaceship that was wrecked upon impact. It’s nonfunctional, with a few stray wires sticking out, and its time is running much slower than usual. There’s a mono-cot in another corner, its pillow and sheets made from softened modified cornstarch. Around the monocot, books are strewn around haphazardly.

I pick up a book splayed open on the floor and place it on a shelf. I think of the time I smuggled a book from the autoclaves back on Flutis, smeared spit on dry, coagulated pages, suddenly glad that information access isn’t outlawed here on Asche—just carefully curated. You would expect the government on the lush, resourceful planet to be more forgiving towards its citizens.

I show her pictures salvaged from my wrecked spaceship. “I found these pictures in the cockpit of a wrecked spaceship. I have the ship logs as well; I just can’t transcribe them because they’re in an alien language.”

“Holy. Seven. Supernovas.” Hilde gasps, jerking backward. Her fingers hover over the images, afraid to touch them as if they might dissolve into dust. “So there are other civilizations out there...”

“My whole life, they told us we were alone.” Her voice is barely audible. “That it was only Asche and Flutis and the Sun. That the stars were just... decorations.”

“They lied,” I say simply.

With terrible timing, the tingling in my ears becomes unbearable. It’s a

stinging pain, almost like an electric shock. I tap on my translator frantically, trying to stop whatever it was. The special ringing alert plays: A starred message from the Commander. I freeze.

Hilde doesn't notice: She's going on about one of her colleague's work on studying ancient plant fossils. Something about how two thousand years ago there used to be complete marine ecosystems here on Asche. She begins listing all the plant and animal names; Some of which I recognize and others completely unheard of.

I gulp and press play. The dreadfully solemn voice of the Commander rings in my ears: "Floodgate opening initiated. Operation High Tide is a go."

## 5

"Hilde, there's something I have to tell you." After three full minutes of anxious pacing, I manage to say.

"Actually, Arkose, I need to tell you something as well." She twists her braid, not meeting my gaze.

"Okay, but this is urgent. Hilde, look at me, Hilde." I swallow the lump in my throat. "Hilde, your people may or may not be doomed."

"Your people?" Her eyebrows scrunch up.

"I-I-I'm from Flutis. No time to explain; I can get us out of here." The words scratch my throat like pieces of broken glass: "Haven't you always wanted to go to Flutis? Diagram the plants there, study marine ecosystems, and look at the extinct coral algae that you're named after." I reach for her hand, but she recoils. "Hilde, you're one of the brightest minds here on Asche; this is your chance. Come with me, please."

"Oh stars." She shakes her head violently, backing towards the door. "Oh stars, I don't—No, I must." She darts out of the door, running in the direction of the lab—to warn them? To activate some emergency protocol I don't know about? To die surrounded by her work?

"Hilde! Hildenbrandia! Hilde, wait!" I chase after her, only to find myself facing the empty labyrinth of stone corridors and my own shadow cast upon it, dyed blue-green by an unnamed dread.

I check my watch. Counting down from 5 minutes 4 seconds. The evacuation alert will have gone out to all Flutian agents by now.

I enter the escape pod hidden within the tunnel adjacent to my dwelling—the real reason I was assigned to this particular dwelling—and suit up. Check the control configuration. Hand on the thruster, deep breath, you've done this thousands of times, and this is no different from the last forty times you did this, except it is; it is different because the corridors

outside are filled with people who will soon be drowning, and one of them has blue-green braids and carries a tiny hourglass of the last water from Asche's dried-up aquifers.

Turn on the landing camera, take off.

The pod detaches with a violent shudder. Through the viewscreen, I watch Asche's surface grow distant, its dry craters becoming abstract patterns. Somewhere beneath that surface, Hilde is running. Somewhere beneath that surface, desiccated aquifers beckon the coming of the tide.

## 6

My hands stop shaking after the first few seconds after takeoff, and my instincts take over. The adrenaline rush from flying kicks in as I dodge the massive ice asteroids bombarding Asche, bursting into torrential rain as they enter the atmosphere.

Rather surprisingly, I was able to reach escape velocity within a tenth of the estimated timeframe—even with Asche's weak gravitational field. I check the landing camera: the flooding planet is spinning far quicker than usual. This wasn't in the simulations. Something's wrong.

*Tap. Tap, tap, tap.* Three extra taps for ground support, “Hei Ground. A108 speaking. Check suction scaling. I repeat, check suction scaling.”

“Hei A108. Ground speaking. Suction scaling is in a valid range.”

“Hei Ground. Check propulsion power. Scratch that, check all configurations. There appears to be an additional gravitational pull generated by the tachycoriolis of the planet.”

“Hei A108. All configurations are valid. We are reaching critical flow. Floodgates are fully open.”

I see the vortices of water from Flutis rising out of its atmosphere. Each droplet flash-freezes in the vacuum—only to vaporize again as it rips into Asche's atmosphere steam-blasting whatever remaining deserts into mud. At least thirty of these twisting tendrils extend towards Asche—what I recognized to be the last and ultimate stage of Operation High Tide. The toxic algal blooms will take care of what couldn't be drowned.

(Holy. Seven. Supernovas.)

“Close Floodgates. I REPEAT, CLOSE FLOODGATES.” I scream into the receiver.

“...”

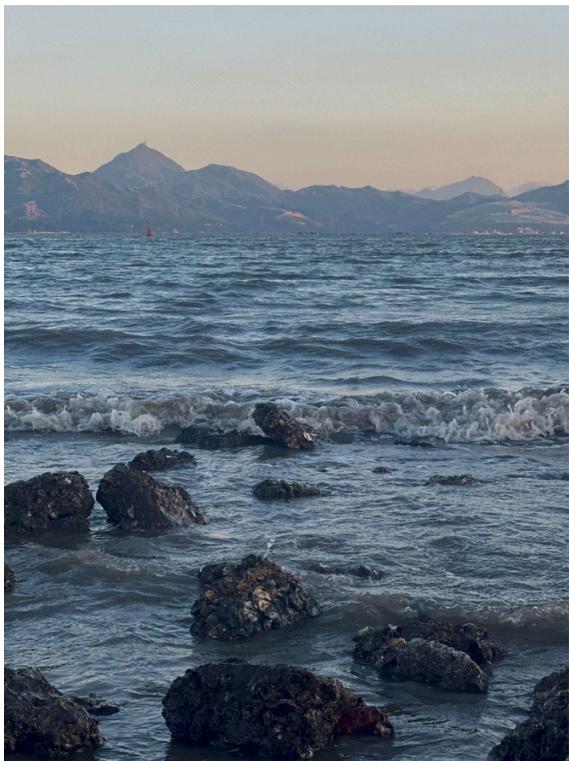
“Hei, Ground? A108 speaking.”

Through the ground radio, I hear multiple alarms going off, curses, high-pitched static, excruciating screams, and then nothing at all. Ground

operators on Flutis must be experiencing evaporation and combustion from gas and radiation overexposure. Somehow the silence holds more terror than the screams.

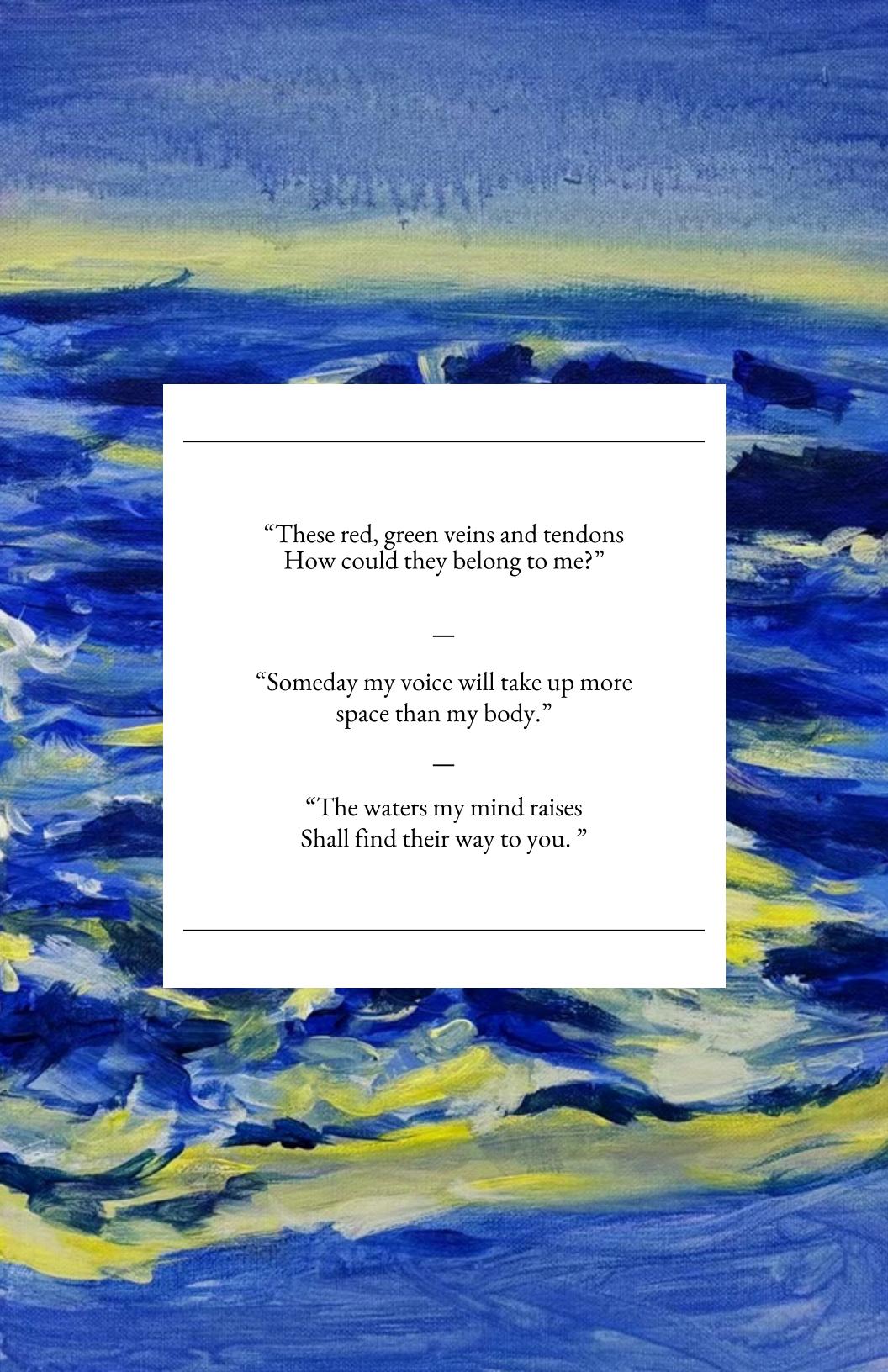
I release the controls and drift. I take one last look at the open sky, expecting to find the blue planet I once called home. Flutis, drained of its oceans, is now a parched, barren rock, an awfully exact replica of what Asche once was. Vaguely I remember how Hilde snatched the bottom half of her hourglass and flipped it upside down, how the viscous dark liquid traveled through the narrow neck by the pull of gravity and accumulated in the bottom. *Like water in an hourglass. Back and forth, back and forth.*

She had been right, after all: This is how it starts, and from now on it will continue forever.



Cindy Han '27





“These red, green veins and tendons  
How could they belong to me?”

---

—

“Someday my voice will take up more  
space than my body.”

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—

“The waters my mind raises  
Shall find their way to you.”

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