

Zeitgeist.

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Features

Seven Things You
Taught Me About
Nature

Julia Fang

Forest Rendezvous

Grace Wu

my friend in the sky

Mamie Yang

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Zeitgeist /'tsīt-gīst; zīt-/

The general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era.

A student-based enterprise that seeks to entertain, motivate, and inspire through short stories, arts, columns, and a variety of other media.

Provides a platform for aspiring writers and artists to express their identity

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Camille Fan
Mbali Toli

Theme: The hues that reflect the calm seas, stain the skies on a clear day, define the tiny Twitter bird — blue.

Love.

by Louis Tszi

Layout by Joe Liang

I didn't know what it was. A foreign concept. Whatever it was, my dreary life had no place for it.

And then I met you.

The colors grew brighter, and I felt like I had something to look forward to in my drab life. It was everything about you, and you loved everything about me. We gazed upon the night sky together and wished upon shooting stars. We said that we were forever. That we *loved* each other.

We gave each other flowers, passed notes, and complemented each other.

I remember asking you once, under a cherry blossom tree. *What is love?* You told me an array of beautiful words: attachment, fate, intimacy, responsibility. And I believed. I *chose* to believe.

We grew comfortable with each other. But time went on. And you got too comfortable. You became angry, saying that I wasn't doing enough for you. I had to do more, give up more. I couldn't understand what you were talking about. But you said it was for "love", and so I listened.

Your requests became outrageous: frequent declarations of love, uncomfortably intimate sessions, and moments of temper

simply told me that such was the way of Loving. I followed because I *had* to Love. I couldn't afford that. I was scared of going back.

I still gave you flowers, we still looked upon the same night sky, and I'm still me, and you're still you. But somehow, things are different now. The wind blows harsher, and sometimes, I can feel you even when you aren't here. Is this Love? And are you really still you?

But I didn't question it. I made my inquiries stop because I was Loved. And it feels so good to be Loved.

Then one day, while we talked over dinner, you leaned across the table and went up against my ear. "Do you love me?"

A wave of goosebumps rolled over me, and time seemed to stop, freezing my shocked expression in place. But eventually, I answered, "Of course I love you." I felt guilt blossom inside of me for not immediately answering.

But you didn't seem to notice it. You gazed at me with a tinge of self-satisfaction in your eyes and gave me a kiss. "Good."

I hadn't realized it then, but I'd been trapped. I'd become ensnared by your Love, because of how much I hated going back to a Loveless life. I let myself get caught in these chains. I was so desperate to find out what it felt like to love.

And now I can't leave. Because of Love.

Wallflowers

By Emily Pan
Layout by Elaine Gu

Coiling,
Twisting,
Blooming,
Flourishing,
on the walls
we Grow.

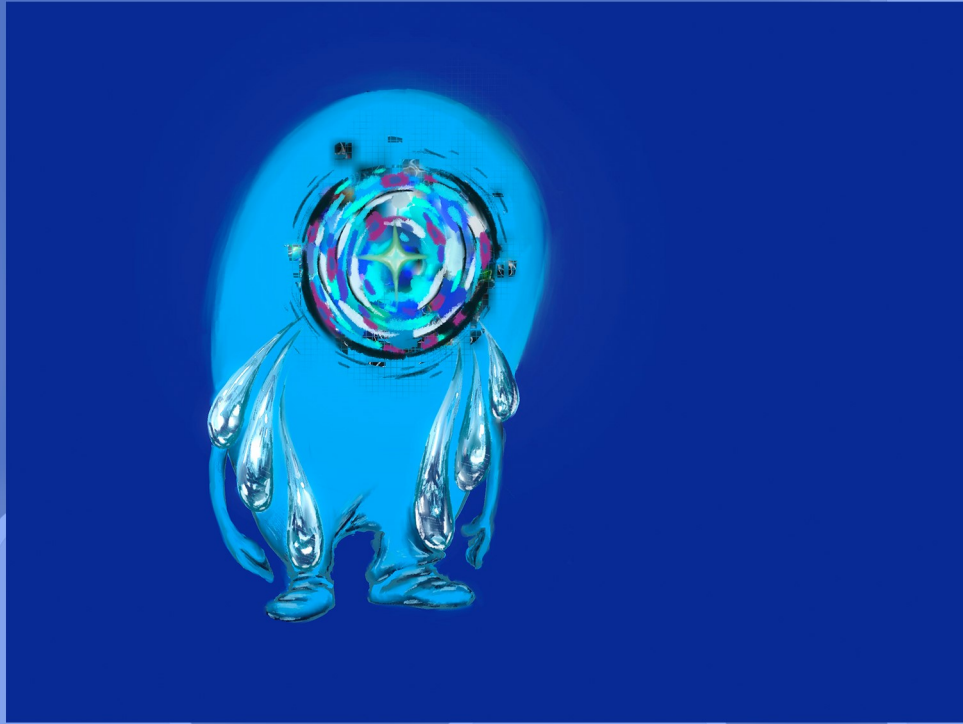
Wallflowers aren't vibrant—
lacking resplendent aromas
and jaunty shades
of roses,
gardenias,
sunflowers,
or even tulips.

Wallflowers are inconspicuous—
tending to cling
to brick and mortar arches
stubbornly.

Yet, we have tried—
with effort strenuous
as Sisyphus pushing his rock—
to emulate our popular neighbors.
Only to be shunned further
because we grow on walls,
not soil.

Thus, wallflowers are
the black sheep of society.
Made to bask in shadowy whispers,
crevices we now
call home.

Which is why wallflowers tremble a storm
upon being ripped off of their walls.



True Blue

by Lizzie Shi

Layout by Joe Liang

Materials: Digital Art

Artist Statement: The prompt “blue” led me to think of the color as well as the emotion, so I decided to combine the two concepts to form an image of a sad, abstract looking character colored with multiples shades of blue.

The blue character tries to project his negativity and gloominess onto the pink girl, but she blocks it out by having headphones on and listening to upbeat music. This is portrayed by the swirls of yellow and green surrounding her.

Seven Things You Taught Me About Nature

By Julia Fang

Layout by Vivien Yeung

1. It's salty

We take turns going into the waves, my brother and I. When I descend into the water, there is a moment when I'm overwhelmed by the sheer force of the sea, and a stream of water seeps in through my lips. Before I resurface and cough out a mouthful of seawater, it feels warm and sticky against my teeth, like fish sloshing around the insides of my cheeks. And after it is ejected from my mouth, it leaves a salty residue tingling on my skin, and I am reminded of it each time I lick my lips.

§§§

2. It's tall

I convince my brother to cross the bridge with me. It hangs over a deep valley of lush vegetation where the forest below teems with life. The massive greenery overwhelms the landscape, making the mountains look like mounds of fluffy matcha ice cream. Not a speck of the ground peeks through, and we are suspended many hundreds of meters above it. If I was alone, I might have felt insignificant, swallowed by the verdant land, but, watching my brother waddle across the swaying bridge like a pregnant goose, as small of a speck as I might be in these huge mountains, I feel like this moment might just be enough.

§§§

3. It's a challenge

“Ready? One, two, three—”

I'm in the water, watching the mottled brown lines on the tiled floor of our compound's outdoor swimming pool. My magenta goggles tint my world a futuristic bright lavender color, and I watch pink bubbles from my nose float upward, jostled around by the current. At the bottom of the pool, there are little specks of dirt residue that had drifted down from the orange leaves, which float like miniature rafts at the top of the pool.

A foot kicks through the bubbles, slicing them into little halves that quiver rapidly as they ascend. A limb lands on my shoulder, and I struggle to keep my concentration as a laugh bubbles in my throat, and more air pockets release through my nostrils.

Another leg hooks around my other shoulder, and I can feel my brother's black and green swimming trunks and his weight on my neck. The water pushes against us, fighting our every movement with titanic force, but we hang on to each other tight. When he's steady, I know we've done it—the underwater acrobatics that we've been attempting for the past hour.

My suppressed lungs are now creaking for air, but I let the moment of triumph settle before lunging for the surface.

§§§

4. It's a weapon

Right when I can hear the crisp sounds of Shanghai's screaming cicadas and I'm prepared to refill my lungs with the humid summer air, I feel a violent splash across my face. It's hard to focus when water is going into your mouth, your ears, your nose, but my brother doesn't relent. With a fierce cry, I let loose my own torrent, watching it hit the water shield he has erected around him. Just like that, we're immersed in battle, hands a blur of motion in the turbid water. I'm laughing so hard I can't breathe.

§§§

5. It's painful

Like when I skidded across the wet pavement a few months ago, hand scraping the rough granules in the ground, after the impact of a moped against the front wheel of my bike. Painful like when I got a rope burn while climbing outdoors, the hot friction against my thigh blazing like a miniature bonfire for a fraction of a second.

But it's a different kind of pain this time. It's a different kind of pain imagining someone else jabbing your arm playfully every time you walk past. It's different knowing that you're probably saving the last piece of chocolate cake for them because you know it's their favorite. It's different imagining you telling them the things you used to stay up for hours telling me. It leaves behind a memory on my skin, but not a long and ragged wound that bleeds and bleeds and heals in a few months or years. It's a tiny crack in my chest that breaks apart once in a while, a subtle reminder that something was once there. And it can never be sealed.

§§§

6. It's itchy

Back in Michigan, we often complained about the abundance of pesky mosquitoes. We would later realize that the mosquitos there were nothing compared to the horrid swarms in Shanghai. However, we were content in thinking that we were combatting our deadliest mosquito enemies in Michigan.

One day, my brother's neck was swollen to the point where it looked like a baseball under his flesh rather than a mosquito bite. The huge welt was a pinkish red, and the bulged skin had crescent moon-shaped marks where he had tried to ease the itch. As always, I boasted that his bite was not as impressive as the soccer ball-sized bite on my leg, shamelessly declaring that mine itched so much that I thought the red blotch might burst and splatter onto the bedpost.

My brother and I bore the ache of our bites like battle scars while our grandma fussed over the size of our welts like a mother bird over her nest of eggs. It was like a competition of who-can-get-the-most-pity-from-grandma. We were just kids.

§§§

I was lying before. It doesn't hurt. Not the way I always thought it would. It's more like a numb emptiness that I don't recognize, which grates away the crumbling edges of my heart like acid rain. I don't realize I've tried to fill that emptiness in other ways, only to find out that the replacement is not the same. I don't realize I've become irritable because what I have substituted for you is not like you one bit—nothing ever is.

You're in Boston, enjoying a cheap beer with a group of strangers squeezed in a tiny dorm. I wish I could make you miss me.

§§§

7. It's fleeting

I wanted to watch the sunset at Laguna beach. I didn't know it would be the last one I saw with you.

It's late in the afternoon. We rush out of our Uber toward the crowded, sandy shore, taking our clothes and towels with us in a few hefty bags, which we lug around clumsily, but the weight doesn't matter because we are here at the beach and we're going to watch the sunset.

We take turns going into the water because someone needs to watch the bags. I can't splash seawater into my brother's eyes or do underwater acrobatics or practice the water-bending we learned a few summers ago after binge-watching *Avatar*. Still, it doesn't bother me because we're going to watch the sunset.

After we're both sopping wet and our mouths are dry from swallowing too much seawater, we walk onto the shore and find the clouds a pretty pale pink. The night sky is dim and bathed in a dull, faraway glow—a perfect, even wash of gold among the clouds. The night air is getting chilly, and I shiver slightly in my baby blue bathing suit. But I don't mind because we are watching the sunset.

I ignore the tickling of water droplets sliding down my legs and the damp sand wedged between my toes. The cluster of city lights in the distance twinkle like stars against the dark sheet of night, but the sun is not ready to give in yet as its pale glow floods along the horizon. Finally, the light drains into the sea and seeps out of the clouds. It's not as breathtaking as I had imagined it to be. The sky is mostly misty and gray, like a veil of dust has filtered the vibrant sunbeams I expected. But I'm not disappointed. Because I'm watching the sunset with my brother.

The sand becomes doused in shadow as the golden crown descends, and the final streaks of light blink out of existence until there's nothing left. The next summer we are packing our lives into cardboard boxes sealed with yellow tape. His things are in a separate suitcase of his own. It is then that I wish everything had lasted longer.

her stubbornness

By Joyce Wang
Layout by Grace Wu

You smudged your fingers with paint. You clawed your canvas. You wiped the rest, whatever still clung to your hands, onto your face. You weren't acting out of impulse or aggression – your chaotic nature was much more like an intricately planned decision. *I chose this* was a phrase that you repeated until I gave up on questioning.

You started caressing your cheekbones before moving towards your nose, smoothening the bumps of paint slowly and carefully. I watched your features erupt in greens and purples and blues. Somehow, this was an artwork much more valuable than the plain surface that stood in front of you; that was what you should've been working on all this time, yet you chose to forget.

"What do you think, mom?" You asked me.

I looked at the child I raised, unrecognizable from starvation. "You don't need to cover them up like that," I said absentmindedly. That was a slip, but any regrets were too late – you weren't talking about your painting. I tried to meet your gaze immediately after my mistake, but you were already looking away and staring blankly at your ruined art. A splattered reflection. You wanted me to call you beautiful, and I betrayed your trust.

A half-formed apology died at the bottom of my throat. You smiled. You always smiled like that when you didn't want to... It was an expression so mechanical that your muscles merely lifted without changing your pained composition. You let me know that I upset you while refusing to compromise your pride.

You muttered something about giving those scars another color. Another sad smile. A voice that faded into broken sentences. I sighed, remembering that you were wild, too free for me to ever understand. Once again, you had me drowning in guilt. But are you happy now?

There's a knot in my stomach; you begged when I threw food at your feet and forced you to swallow.

You wrestled with the chains that locked you in place. I shut my eyes. In these nights, your screams would add a new pitch to the melodies I already heard – the clatters of metal against an icy floor. I stayed silent. I thought you were resisting me; I thought you told me to leave. How was I to know that you were crying for my help? You always blamed me for not saving you, and I had nothing to say. It was terrifying to be a perpetrator in your nightmares when you sought hope from me, again and again.

Today felt the same as every other time you questioned me – you made me a criminal who trembled under a blinding spotlight. Even if I expressed genuine concern for you (Were you not proud to embody the marks that spread across your face or the reds that dotted your legs? Why fight so hard to show all parts of yourself only to hide away now?) I would still wrong you in some way. And you would look away in disappointment. Another scar tattooed onto both of us.

"Three years, and you still don't get it."

You stood up and walked out of my sight.

The door slammed. I was entirely alone in the darkness of your maze.



The Little Match Girl

By Elaine Gu

Materials: Digital Art

Artist Statement: “But in the corner, leaning against the wall, sat the little girl with red cheeks and smiling mouth, frozen to death on the last evening of the old year.”

-Hans Christian Andersen



Deerman 1972

By Vivien Yeung
Layout by Sophia Xin

Materials: Digital Art

Artist Statement: This deer is about to offer you a deal you can't refuse.

my neighbor

By Cathy Tu

Layout by Elaine Gu

my neighbor,
he was laid off today,
his bank account
ghosted by his promised pay.

my neighborhood abided tranquilly,
formerly absent of the din.
but i guess my walls
have now become paper-thin.

listen—
why, are those his wails?
and now, *The Scream*;
his visage pales.

i could hear the melting of his tears,
the trickling of them all—
or perhaps, that was just the pouring of alcohol.



Joy

By Daniel Wu
Layout by Camille Fan
Materials: Photography

Artist Statement: The children of Xiaohusai, a rural village in Yunnan, China, know nothing but joy. The joy of sculpting endless amounts of mud, the joy of farm-to-table meals, and the joy of crystal-clean creek water. After third or fourth grade they also learn the joy of working in the tea fields because their parents can't pay for their schooling anymore. They learn the joy of waking up before dawn and returning after dusk. They learn the joy of poverty. Learn more at xiaohusaitea.org



Social Media's Lament

By Vivien Yeung

Layout by Mbali Toli

Twitter

Are you angry at your boss? Are you angry at your friend? Are you angry at that chip-on-the-shoulder snake that cheated on you with seven other immature playgirls? Or maybe you're just angry that your favorite movie was rendered fourteen times less than the original, and your favorite character's arc diminished into chasing a snotty teenage nobody for validation? Did your Doritos get stuck in a vending machine? Scream it to the world! Revel in every pink heart you get every couple of hours so that you can nod to yourself thinking that you're finally right for once, when in reality, they scrolled past your rant on a couch-potato-kind-of afternoon and found it funny. But at least you can feel better about yourself, right?

Snapchat

Are you tired of just texting in class? Do you wish you could see your friends' faces instead of their overused profile picture? Do you miss goofing off with them like you would in real life? Try cute filters and simple minigames! The age of dull selfies is over, and now even *you* can have your mouth enlarged beyond the capacity of your face. So funny! Send a photo every day to the same few people to show off how pretty the top right corner of your face is, only to have a breakdown when the tiny fire next to their name blows out, and you feel like all your life's hard work amounted to nothing. Add random strangers so people can see your mutual friends' icons and assume that you actually hang out with people instead of staying up in your bed watching YouTube every night. Keep adding people until all your snap stories are plagued by feminist rants, random hangouts, memes, and unreadable glittery emoji-ed nonsense. If you go deep enough, they might even send you unsolicited videos. Go even deeper and you'll realize you can get multiple of the same unsolicited video from fifty people.

Instagram

Do you ever wonder if you're as pretty as other people say you are? Do you ever get insecure about not hanging out with friends as much as someone your age probably should? Do you stress about whether you're as talented as the people around you? Well, prepare to have all your insecurities proven right! Scroll through hours and hours of Instagram feed until all that remains of what you recognize as yourself is gone. Ask yourself why other people can be so beautiful and lead much better lives than you, and forget that people only pick the pictures where they are perfect. Let go of realistic expectations and wrap yourself in a blanket cacophony of impossible idealism and double standards. Post every day on your story so you can rebel, like a six-year-old against a bully, and prove to everyone that you have something to show. And this time maybe, just maybe, you'll feel worthwhile.



Facebook

Enter the world of grandparents rekindling with their high school friends just before their funeral. You'll be shocked at how family friendly a social media platform can actually be; it's like Twitter but exclusively community lunches, four-year-olds' birthdays, baby showers, and weekend church activities. You'll also see wholesome pictures of family gatherings, middle eastern volunteer work, and humble traveling. It's sad that it'll all come to an end soon, but it's still nice to see how simple life can be sometimes. Don't be afraid when you type the URL one day and everyone's online, but no new posts were made. It's probably because the last user died on their not-so-gamer swivel chair and forgot to log off.

TikTok

Do you miss Vine? Do you miss Musical.ly? Well they had a baby and this is it! If you thought Instagram had a tasty feed, this will keep you for longer. Scroll through hours of pop song parodies, K-pop cuts, overdramatic school trouble reenactments; relatable skits about being Asian, gay, Muslim, or even just going to college; people doing basic dance moves, thinking they own the floor and putting tags of pseudo-relatable/inspirational quotes to distract from the fact that they can't actually dance. And then professional dancers are actually killing it, so you have to keep brushing up and then back down to rewatch it. Or maybe it's even just a five-second clip of a teenage boy taking off a ski mask. Now that's hot! Eventually, you might even try to make your own TikTok, only to realize it doesn't fit any algorithm and will always get you barely over five views when celebrities can post the same TikTok twice and get more views the second time.

Reddit

Reddit is where the breathing, walking memes live. It's the beautiful sanctuary for all Tumblr users who miss the thrill and sheer chaos of forum hijacking and memeing. Discover incredible niches hiding in the dark corners of this site, including MBTI bigots, the religious community of entitled men, way-too-emo fangirls, and not-so-official support groups for childhood trauma. Read in-depth personal stories of home invasions, the worst breakups, and how dumb high school is, coupled periodically with references to movies, differential equations, and Cartoon Network shows. Before you know it, you've read the literary equivalent of seven Bibles combined, and your mom still has the audacity to say you don't read.





Forest Rendezvous

By Grace Wu

Materials: Woodcut

Artist Statement: This artwork is an examination of the conflicting concepts of ephemerality and permanence. What is seemingly a snapshot of a brief moment in a love story doubles as a long-lasting reminiscence that permanently shaped the identity of an individual. The flowing river in the center symbolizes interpersonal emotional exchange, the fleeting nature of the human experience, and the spiritual pursuit of harmony between man and nature.

“unmisted by love”

By Sophia Xin



Materials: Woodcut

Artist Statement: In Eastern culture, women are often associated with water, which conveys qualities such as inclusiveness, tenderness, and purity. I appreciate such qualities, but I believe that there is so much more to womanhood. Still, I find it important to seek inner peace through introspection—it is also essential to love yourself no matter what happens. This piece conveys reaching that final inner peace: reconciling all of yourself and embracing the ability to carefully sense your surroundings and live in the moment. The women’s hair extends like a river, connecting all the way to the tides behind and the clouds below; the Chinese-style clouds symbolize uplifting spirits. And in the upper left corner, fireflies: a reminder that there is always light and hope, even in the darkest of nights.



From Rain to Rain

By Catie Yu

Layout by Elizabeth Shi
& Joyce Wang



September 3rd

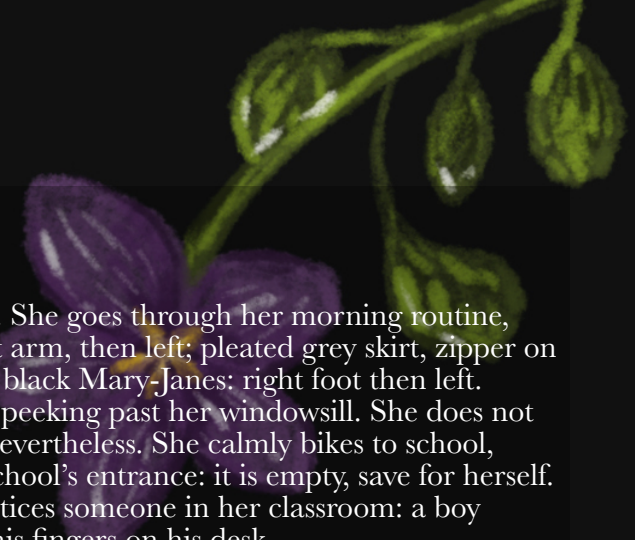
6:33 AM: Rika's alarm goes off, signaling her to wake up. She goes through her morning routine, putting on her school uniform. Starched white shirt: right arm, then left; pleated grey skirt, zipper on the right side; knee-length white socks: right leg then left; black Mary-Janes: right foot then left. She breezily bikes to school, easily clearing the distance. She pauses at the entrance: it is empty, save for herself. In a hurry, she enters the building and climbs to the fourth floor to her first class of the day. At the chipped white door frame, she once again pauses. There is someone in the room, thankfully: a boy seated towards the back, hunched over his desk, headphones in his ears, early morning sunlight glinting off his phone. His general physical appearance matches the description given to her, so she confidently approaches him.

"Hello. My name is Rika. You must be *Ciro*." The boy looks up, startled at her voice, and rips out his earbuds. Rika continues, "I was assigned to be your ambassador to help you adjust to our school. It seems I was unable to catch you on your way in, so let me be the first to welcome you." She extends a hand and waits for him to shake it, which he does awkwardly. Once he lets go, she says, "If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me. I will try to help you to the best of my ability," before turning around and taking a seat in front of the boy. She pulls a book titled *Star Signals* out of her bag and begins at the first page.

The boy appears fazed for a second, scratching his neck as he tries to process the sharp series of words that were just flung at him. Once comes to his senses, he taps the girl's book, pulling her from her reading. He sheepishly apologizes, "Sorry for not responding just now. Yeah, I'm *Ciro*, and I just got here from Florida." Rika remains expressionless and does not respond. *Ciro* hesitates before asking, "Hey, this is a super random question, but how strict is uniform policy over here? Do the teachers go ballistic over an upturned collar or something?" Rika notes that his dress shirt has been completely unbuttoned, revealing a graphic T-shirt underneath, before answering, "That's an interesting question. Thanks for asking. We've never had an issue with uniforms before, so I don't know. We are all quite happy with our uniforms as they are, so the teachers do not have reason to go ballistic, as you'd say." Rika frowns for the first time that day. "You might want to button up your shirt. It would be distracting during class, and it is not very spirit-y of you. I know it's your first day, but you are now a part of your school, and it would be best if you begin to act the part."

Ciro considers fighting back; he doesn't want to blindly follow orders. He might be new, but he wasn't a sheep, for goodness sake. But then he realizes that Rika has turned back to her book and does not care for his response. He does not button up his shirt and plugs his headphones back in.

March 3rd



6:33 AM: Rika's alarm goes off, signaling her to wake up. She goes through her morning routine, putting on her school uniform. Starched white shirt: right arm, then left; pleated grey skirt, zipper on the right side; knee-length white socks: right leg then left; black Mary-Janes: right foot then left. Looking out of her window, she notices a periwinkle bud peeking past her windowsill. She does not remember it being there before, but she feels reassured, nevertheless. She calmly bikes to school, enduring the light drizzle on the way. She pauses at the school's entrance: it is empty, save for herself. She enters the building, climbs to the fourth floor, and notices someone in her classroom: a boy seated towards the back of the room, agitatedly tapping his fingers on his desk.


Ah, *that's right*, she thinks, *the new kid*. She walks up to him and introduces herself: "Hello. I'm Rika and I'm your student ambassador. You are *Ciro*, correct? I was supposed to show you to your classes, but it seems you already know your way around, so I see that will be unnecessary. Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out." If she sees his confusion, she does not react to it and sits down a few desks in front of *Ciro*. She pulls a book out of her bag, but before she is able to open it, a hand blocks her. She looks up and finds *Ciro*, still with that confused expression on his face, now bordering on annoyance.

"Is this.. is this some kind of joke? We have a presentation together in like 15 minutes. You did not finish your half of the slideshow, and you did not respond to any of my texts or emails last night. Can you please try to throw something together right now? I cannot afford to have my grade ruined because you suddenly randomly turned into a flake."

Rika replies tonelessly, "I'm sorry, I don't understand what you're talking about. We met for the first time just now. It's the first day of school. We don't have any presentations or grades on the first day of school. Are you feeling alright?" Her words sounded sincere, but *Ciro* could not believe them. He stared at her in shock.

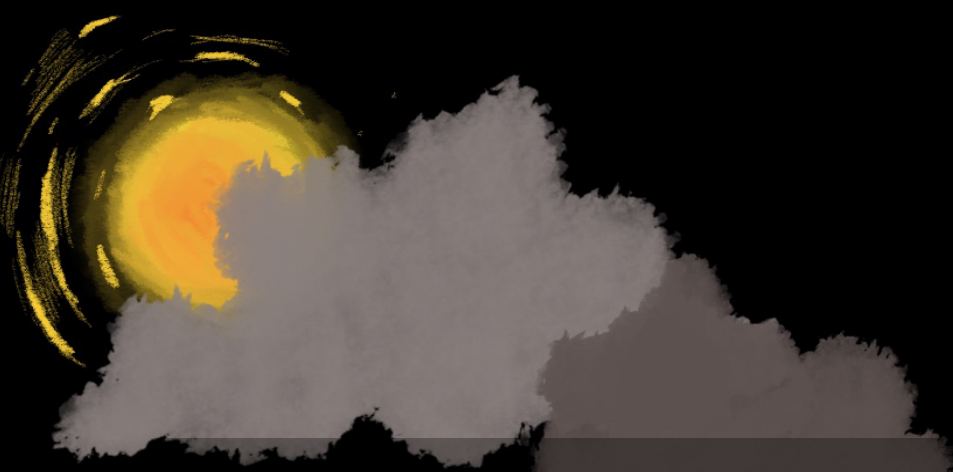
"Rika, are you feeling alright? You've never shown any interest in practical jokes, yet you seem to be pulling a ginormous one on me right now. Please, I'm begging you, just do your part of the project like you normally do, and I won't bother you for the rest of the week, okay?" His voice drips frustration, and his spirits sink lower when Rika's expression does not change. Not that he expected it to; when did it ever change? But before he could say anything further, the door opened, with the teacher and more students shuffling in. That was odd. He could have sworn that class didn't start for another 10 minutes, but he knew better than to question the teacher now. He dutifully took his seat as the teacher wrote out on the whiteboard, "Welcome to the first day of school!"

May 3rd



6:33 AM: Rika's alarm goes off, signaling her to wake up. She goes through her morning routine, putting on her school uniform. Starched white shirt: right arm, then left; pleated grey skirt, zipper on the right side; knee-length white socks: right leg then left; black Mary-Janes: right foot then left. On her windowsill, a small bluebell stalk blooms; she does not remember acquiring it, but it reassures her nonetheless. She bikes to school, a poncho draped over her shoulders to shield her from the rain. She pauses when she reaches the school's entrance: it is empty, save for herself. She enters the building, climbs to the fourth floor, and notices someone in her classroom: a boy seated towards the back of the room, reading one of the algebra posters off the wall. She approaches him, but before she can get a word out, he speaks, slow and drawn out.





“You know in my time here, I’ve never actually read any of these posters. They’re pretty interesting, actually. Hats off to the math teacher. At least these stay the same.” Rika, perplexed, opens her mouth to say something, but before she can, the boy starts talking again.

“I felt like I was going crazy. The past three months the grass has been dry outside and the sky has been blue, the sun shined exactly like it did in Florida, and classes went on like normal. But they weren’t. Someone restarted my life but forgot to restart me. No one remembered. And then the rains started yesterday, and I just knew that it was happening again. Rika, do you remember me?”

Rika does not respond for a few moments. She does not comprehend what is being asked of her. She says, “Hello *Ciro*, I’m your student ambassador for this new school year. Would you like to go see the nurse? You sound distressed.” *Ciro* smiles sadly and shakes his head, looking away from her and back to the poster at the wall. Awkwardly, Rika hovers by his desk, waiting for a more concrete response. Eventually, the door behind her opens and more people begin filing in. She takes this as a cue to find a seat and prepare for her first day of school. She does not look back at *Ciro*, who is still reading the same poster, eyes slowly turning glossy.

May 24th

6:33 AM: Rika’s alarm goes off, signaling her to wake up. She goes through her morning routine, putting on her school uniform. Starched white shirt: right arm, then left; pleated grey skirt, zipper on the right side; knee-length white socks: right leg then left; black Mary-Janes: right foot then left. Her bedroom window is open a crack, and through it pokes a large lavender blossom. She has never noticed it before, but seeing it now gives her a feeling of hope. She bikes to school, calmly enduring the light drizzle on the way. She pauses at the school’s entrance: there is a boy standing next to the gate, shivering as the rain soaks through his hoodie down to the cuffs of his jeans. He has an indiscernible look on his face, but it immediately lightens once he sees Rika. He trudges up to her through the ankle-deep water.



“There you are Rika! I knew you would be here. You’re always here. I’m always here. Why am I always here?” He vomits his words quickly, and he has to shout to be heard over the rain. Rika does not answer, nor does he really expect her to. Instead, he continues to shout, “You know, I tried driving out of town yesterday, once the rains started. I kept driving through fields, just endless fields. I couldn’t get anywhere. I think I passed out, because when I woke up, I was here. Why can’t I leave Rika? Why not?” Rika just stands, staring at him as the heavy drops continue to hit them.

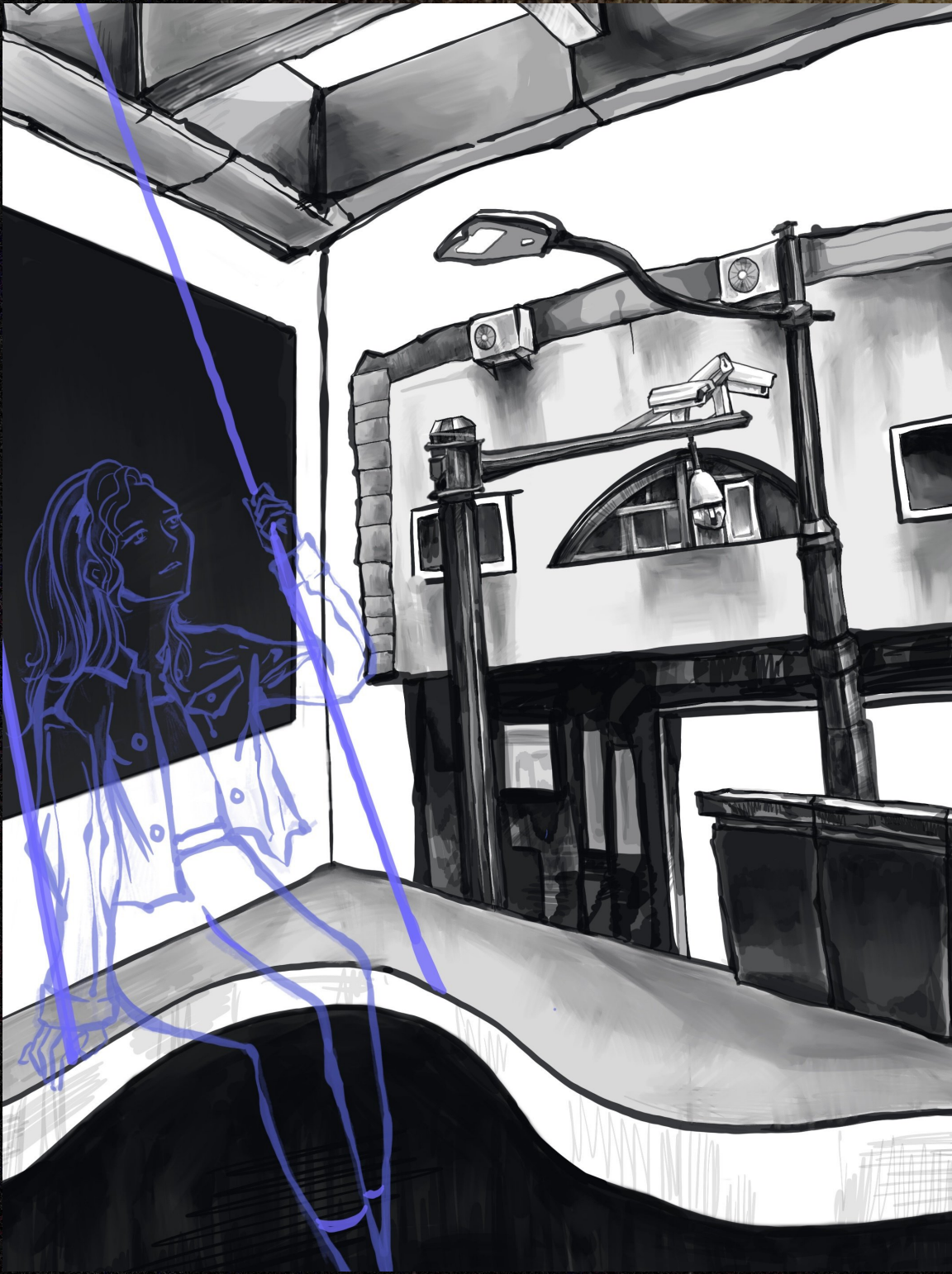
Ciro holds up a crisp piece of paper, holding it under Rika’s umbrella to keep it dry. He begins shouting again, haltingly this time. “This is my letter of resignation. I’m dropping out of this darned school. You won’t remember me soon enough anyway. So I guess this is just my way of saying goodbye.” Rika stares at him for a few seconds longer, wondering how a kid who just arrived could already be dropping out, before deciding to turn and head to class; it was almost time and she couldn’t be late. As she goes, *Ciro*, watches her and turns the paper over in his hand. It slices his skin and for a second he feels flashing pain. Paper cut. But upon inspection, was it a cut? All that leaked from it was clear, just water. Curious. Very curious.

May 27th

6:33 AM: Rika’s alarm goes off, signaling her to wake up. Against the backdrop of the drums of the beating rain, she goes through her morning routine, putting on her school uniform. Starched white shirt: right arm, then left; pleated grey skirt, zipper on the right side; knee-length white socks: right leg then left; black Mary-Janes: right foot then left. On her bedside table lays a wilted flower, dripping wet but wilted, nonetheless. She does not notice it. She bikes to school, umbrella in one hand and the tallest Wellington boots she possesses adorning her feet. She pauses at the school’s entrance and peers out from under her umbrella: it is empty, save for herself. She wades through the waters that rose to mid-calf, taking care to not splash her book bag on her way to the building. As she ascends to the fourth floor, she notices that the stairs each have moderate amounts of water on them. She presumes the windows on the landings have been left open over the break and does not pay any more attention to it.

Upon entering her first block classroom, she feels that something is off. She approaches the back of the classroom, and at one of the desks, she finds a pile of rags, sopping wet, and a large puddle of water coating the table, chair, and floor. The desks surrounding it are completely dry. Rika cannot shake the feeling that something is missing here, like there was something she was forgetting to remember. It hurts her head, and after some mental debate, she decides that someone must have accidentally left a classroom window open as well, while noting that none of the windows in the classroom are open. She selects a desk towards the front of the classroom and pulls out a book, titled *Star Signals*, and begins at the first page.





GOLDEN CAGE

By Joyce Wang

Layout by Camille Fan

Materials: Digital

Artist statement:

She's on the swing again, fully in control.

While she enjoys the views, the sky

around her slowly loses its bright blues.

My Friend in the Sky

By Mamie Yang

Layout by Camille Fan

she sits by me through lonely hours,
sleepless nights.

lurking in the clouds, she hides
in the shadow of the extrovert.

a shadow? or a reflection
of the coward it hides within.
oh how i wish she'd come by more often,
stay with me a little longer;
during the daytime, perhaps.

streaks of eccentric light illuminate
her milky white skin,
sprinkles of ash, here and there
'acne prone'
i bask in her beauty—
safe
in her passive dominance of the night.

the stars that once accompanied; smothered.
intoxicated by the finite fragments of poison
overriding the azure.

amidst the smog she shines in solitude,
imperfect as the moon.



Concordia

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL SHANGHAI