

## **Waking Moments**

by Nova Root, 15, Scarborough

The oceans are falling on us.

I can still feel the waves' collapse, attacking my lungs and invading my eyes with its grime diluted cascades of water, despite my desperate attempts to save my body from its wrath.

The flood was my family's final straw. I left behind the ruins of my childhood town and emerged a vague outline of the person I was before I was caught within the grips of the tide. Sometimes I connect my hands with the ground to remind myself that I am no longer there, but I am met with dry, cracked earth that is little comfort to me. Even now that our population has wrangled our way to higher ground, I feel like a portion of me is still tethered to the old oak wood of my home, now driftwood buried beneath the water's mass, alongside the relics of a future far gone.

Standing on the shore that once housed a supermarket, domineering in the shadow of its own destruction, I can almost hear the cries of names and bodies lost to the sea's torment; they are mourning. The adventurers of the forgotten past sob at their own expectations, and the martyrs of the startling present scream at the sword of ignorant authority fresh in their backs. The blade still glistens with the polish of money and false promises displayed on pixelated news screens. I am a teenage girl, communing with a limited cohort of survivors left to suffer through a short path of infinite strife, listening to their pleas as I stand silent, knowing my chance to assist passed by me years ago. My own fears hypnotized me into believing that humanity held the reins to nature. Now the correlation between how tightly we pulled at its neck and the damage we are presently inflicted with is obvious to me, but these revelations occurred to many of us too late.

The ground is on fire.

The heat scurries across the dirt like a pest. The trees are brides, caked in white, terrified of what is to become of them. The heat is now a part of me, another layer on my quickly toughening skin, no longer the pale, soft, quality of my childhood. My feet are burnt now too. The tar that coats and covers our landscape is a stove for our unacclimated bodies. Mom said that on the rare days of her childhood that her town would take on this quality, she and her friends would run in water hoses and sprinklers in the street. We now run from the elements instead of taking them on as friends.

We often see the flickering of danger on the vanishing point of the barren landscape, illuminating what little vegetation is left. I hate how beautiful it is. The crimson flames flash in temptation of an innocent touch, I have to resist the urge to let my hands glide towards the allure of incandescent reds and oranges to feel the bite of the blaze. The fire and the water fight over the annihilation of our homes, both spurred on by the invasive toxicity of the air.

The air- if there's any truly left.

It poisons my throat, corroding every waking moment. It's inside of me, around me, following me; no matter how much we try to run from it, it chases. I hear the coughing so frequently that I don't know if it's occurring two feet away from me, or a trauma ringing inside of my head. The variety of masks worn are a futile attempt at rescinding the very element we need to survive.

Dad reminds me of when the air was a good friend to humans, one that would run alongside us in our games of tag in the backyard. It was relied on by our lungs and throat, evidently faulty without it. Yet my younger brother cannot recall a period of such novelty; he is too young to have experienced that earth of untainted candor in earnest. The gentle spring breeze is saved only barely by memories passed around longing fingertips through stories shared over scarce meals and long journeys. These retellings are bookmarks in the chapter book of our downfall, and the cause of the hope that rises and falls with the unreliable tide.

The world is no longer pure. Our lives have been corrupted by our own desires and hubris. Our regrets are leeches on our backs. They taunt us from the bare scraps of food we eat to the disturbing variety of colors in the sky hung above us by threads of emissions like a blanket.

For now we can only sleep, and dream of a world where we don't taste the salt inside of our mouths, we can see beyond the smoke, and can breathe the air in tandem with the life that surrounds us.

The world we are dreaming of is the one you hold in your palms, shaking under the weight of a universe of possibility.