

Brianna Cunliffe, “A Luminous Endeavor”

President Rose, Members of the College, and Guests:

As we speak, the ocean a few miles to our east is readying itself to be filled with stars.

When I came to Bowdoin, one of the first things I did was to pile into a big white van with strangers and go winding off into the thick Maine dark for the vague promise of something “really cool”. A hurricane was bearing down on my coastal North Carolina hometown, and a different cyclone was brewing in me— a terrifying lack of certainty about who I was, and whether it would be enough. So naturally, I buckled up, jammed in beside strangers and stumbled through the pines on our way to plunge into the pitch-dark sea.

There was no explanation for what would come next. Just an invitation to jump. Once we did: the blue-green bloom of a thousand living, warm stars, following the motion of our heaving bodies, dancing in tandem with the burning sky. Adrift in utter strangeness and a beauty so deep

fits all solution. There is only a rich variety of people and places grappling with our current intersecting crises as best we can. A drifting, diffuse, and luminous ocean. There is only our obligation and our sincere desire to help. There is only the invitation to jump in, and then make room; lead the way, and get out of the way, amplify new voices and sit with silences. Look for the heart of the matter, the space where most good can be done, rather than listening to our egos. No one can tell us what comes next.

Wherever you are going, if it's an elementary school classroom or a theater backstage, whether it's back to the library or into the backcountry, I hope you know how you make the world come alive. How your motion illuminates the unseen, how it brings new patterns into being. How integral you will become to your future community, and how irreplaceable you have been and will continue to be, in ours. I hope you know that you are loved.

I wish you love and fulfillment, I wish you wicked problems to solve and a brilliant group of friends with which to solve them. I hope you trust the dark water to fill with abundant light once you take the plunge. I hope you find your own constellation to call home.