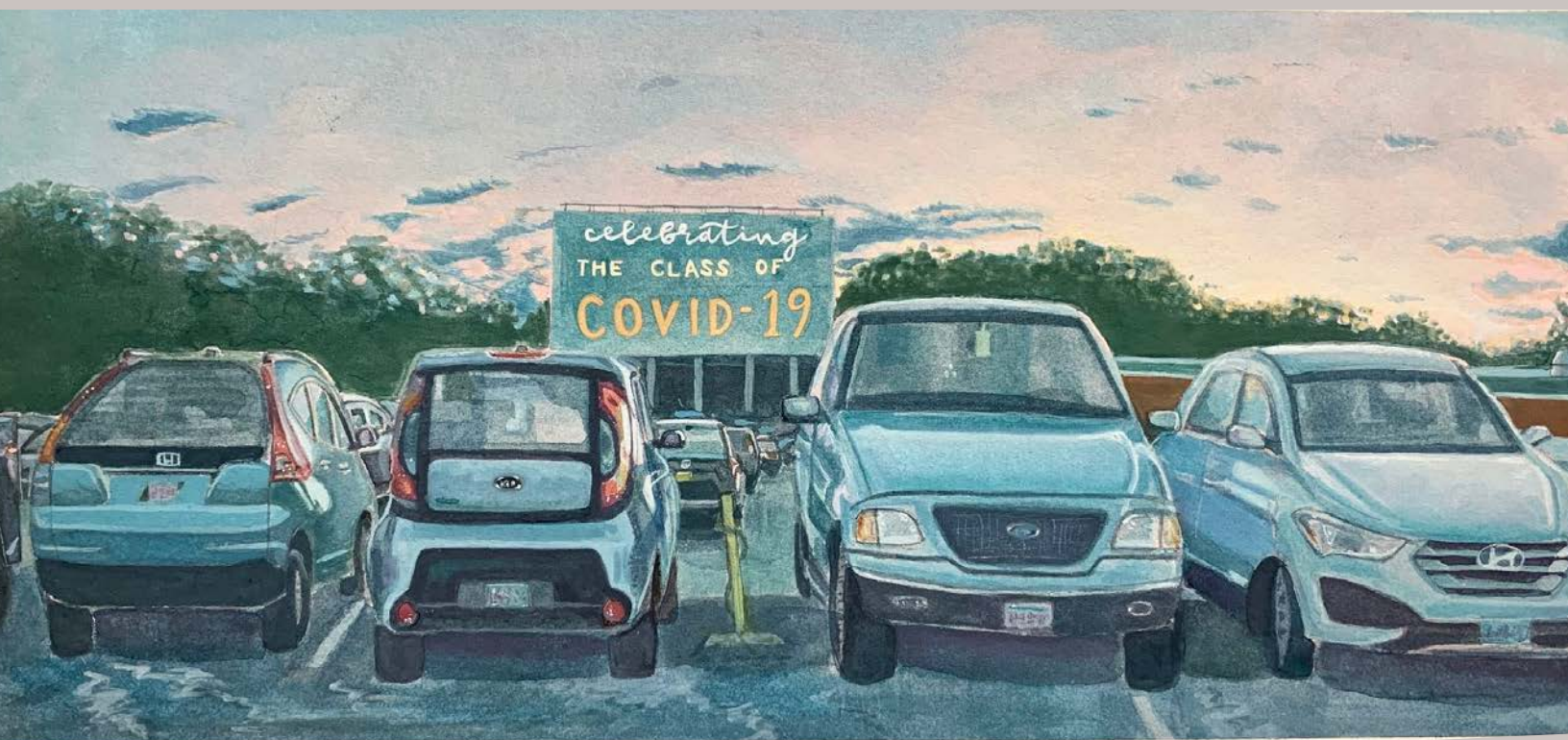


The Quill



AMSA's Literary and Creative
Magazine

2019/2020 Edition

The Quill

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Cover Image: *A Socially-Distant Celebration*, by Jesse Hogan '20

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Literary and Creative Magazine, Issue VIII,
2020

A Letter From the Editors

Dear readers,

This year started out like any other, yet ended differently for the very first time in our AMSA history. However, despite all of the hardships we students have faced, you still sent in your pieces for this year's Quill! We applaud all of the work we received over the past 10 months. AMSA surely has brilliant and creative artists in its corridors! We cannot thank you, the students, enough for the hard work you put in during these ever changing times. Without your photographs, drawings, paintings, digital artwork, poems, prose, stories, and more; the AMSA Quill would cease to exist. Thank you for making this possible.

We would also like to thank the English and Art teachers who spread the word about our club to their students throughout the year. There is only so much we can do on our own; it is with your help that we collect as many submissions as we do each year.

Last, but not least, we would love to thank our incredible advisor Mrs. Rousseau. Her passion for literature and the arts is the guiding spirit of The Quill. Without her rallying, enthusiasm, and business cards, we would have less of a following.

We hope you all enjoy what we put together this year, and we cannot wait to see what other amazing pieces will be in next year's Quill!

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Original Works





Capelli, by Madeline Jones '20

For You Anonymous '21

Humans have the capability to think of the future and remember the past...

For select individuals, this power is both nostalgic and troublesome.

We have no idea how much our brains work to forget traumatizing events in our lives -- to protect us.

Sure, we all have good memories; hold onto them and recall them, as needed.

Many can get lost in the "what ifs" and regrets of the past, but simply see it as your path.

Your path is unique.

Maybe you chose the orange colored pencil over the red one, or talked with someone who seems far from the group, or ate grapes instead of chips.

Whatever it may be, it's yours, and you should own it.

Maybe you didn't pass the test, or didn't sleep one night, or procrastinated to the point where you're extremely stressed out.

We all need reassurance that we're doing the right things, but "right" is a relative word. No one path in life is the "right" one, so eat that piece of cake, go hang out with your friends, and write your very own story.

I ask whoever is reading this to please take my words into consideration or pondering. Be easy on yourself and don't beat yourself up over miniscule events or actions. Make time for yourself.

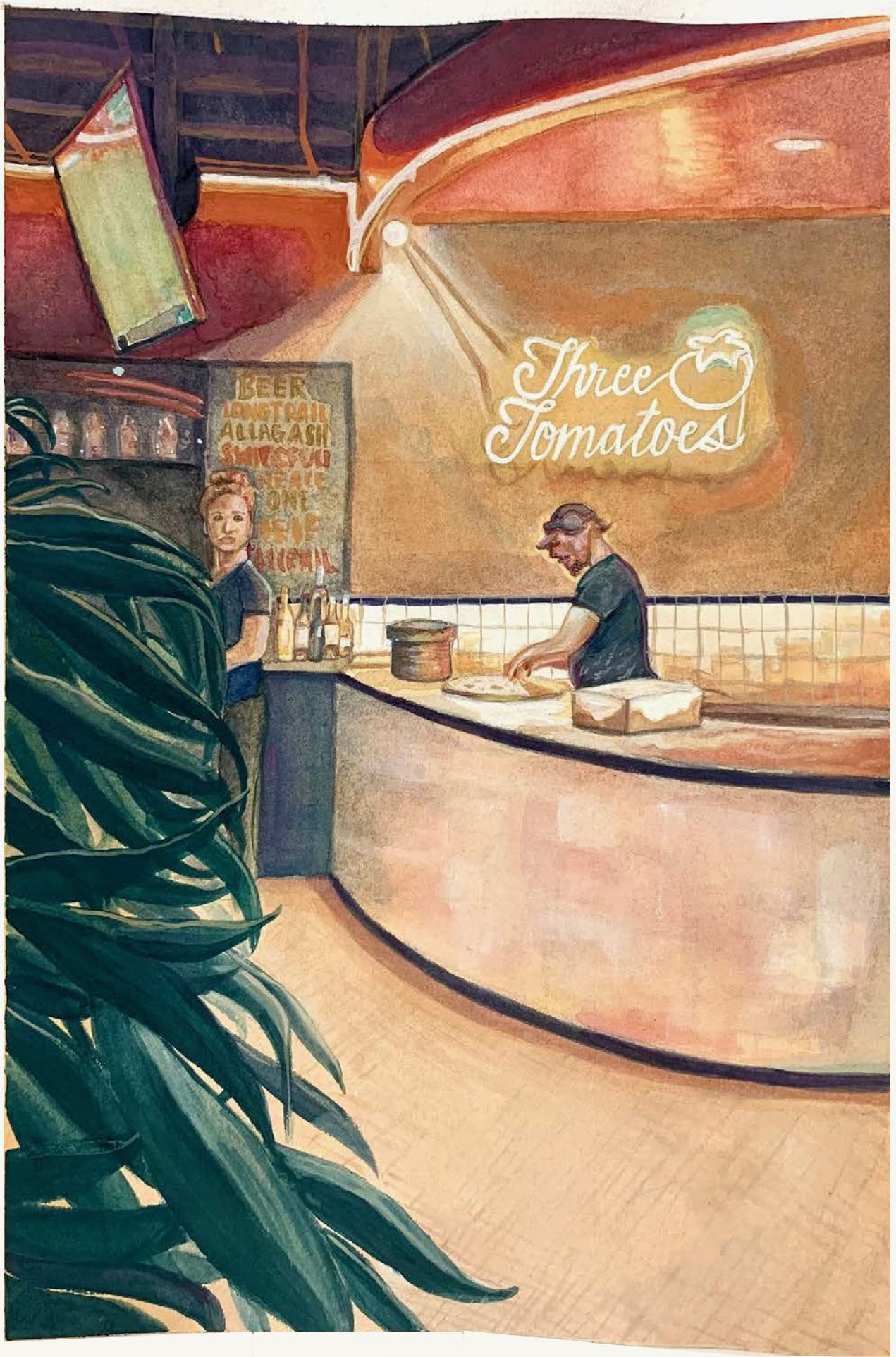
This message is for you, but mostly me...





Ellis Island, by Madeline Jones '20





Three Tomatoes Pizzeria, by Jesse Hogan '20



The Streets of Portsmouth, by Jesse Hogan '20

The Visitor (Where you left your heart)

Rianna Jakson '20

The lead ring swings forth an' strikes the
plate,

Wrought with distress it implores

A bride long buried a lifetime ago,
comes to find their promise ne'ermore.

"A morning malady plagued me thus,

In haste we took up vows.

Dagger taken jus' as abrupt,

A stirring fear arous'd.

Red veils the truth beneath.

Its edge coerced my heart,

as I, its sheath,

prompt'd by twin,

succumbed to Maniae's part.

But lo! Sixteen years

Has so seasoned you.

A life you had accepted,

True happiness

you ne'er knew.

Unnatural am I, a wrong

this feat commits.

To remember from where I came,

the longer time unknits.

Reminds me like a reverie,

from whence I was yank'd.

Where e'rything is warm an' happy.

Life went on, an' heart did sank.

But I cannot live or love through lies;

Help make your 'almost' right.

And let patience know,

that's where I'll be,

where once I watched o'er you,

in happiness an' peace."

And when it's all over, wake me thus,

When I am worn with Graeae's beard.

Wiser since, but memory fails us,

And death no longer fear'd.

The lead ring swings forth an' strikes the
plate,

Wrought with confusion we invite

A girl, buried not two full moons ago,

taken too soon, demands murderous
insight.

O heavy head from dizzying spell,

new surroundings make vision cloudy;

Autumn's fully frosted — Speak! Pray tell,

Why I come back to thee?

Mascara stains these cheeks,

Bare feet walk these halls.

A dark night; storm made sleek,

The road where regrets fall.

But soft, faded echoes return to mind;

Pieces form to mend loose thoughts.

My shroud's lifted: Truth unkind,

What reason doth excuse your nought?

If I be here, to see man make amends,

Remove thy falsehood Grief compensates.

If I be here, to hear man make new friends,

Accept thy mistake Trauma underrates.

'The storm!' Says he, what makes roads
slick.

'The rain!' What makes confidence fade.

But storms do not make turns too quick.

An' rain does not make girlfriend feel
afraid.

But think me not vengeful, haunting spirit;

Understand what I brought to light:

The truth, as you needed to hear it,

Hurt me you could never, but scare you
may some nights.

And how Apollo carries his chariot anew!

He leaves us with his warm embrace.

As I forgive you, now I must leave you,

Leave me a moment as I admire his grace."

The love we've lost hurts as hell

Haunts us, but we will love again.

How much will it hurt, time will tell;

Death only knows, unto then.

The lead ring swings forth an' strikes the
plate,

Wrought with despair we depart

A girl, whose mind's at war with self,

flees all, with heavy heart.

Aspiring muse; exciting poem

Of fantastic chase snaring restless Neptune.

A brush o' ceruse that blankets denim,

Suspended o'er head as she lays beneath
moon.

But visage marked by fine temperate,
 And brandish brazen smarts.
 Couldn't let go; begged Her to stay,
 Where she left her heart.

"Before me stands lone visitor,
 Where once I was the guest.
 Hark now these words henceforth,
 Learn what's loss'd now, or ne'er lest.

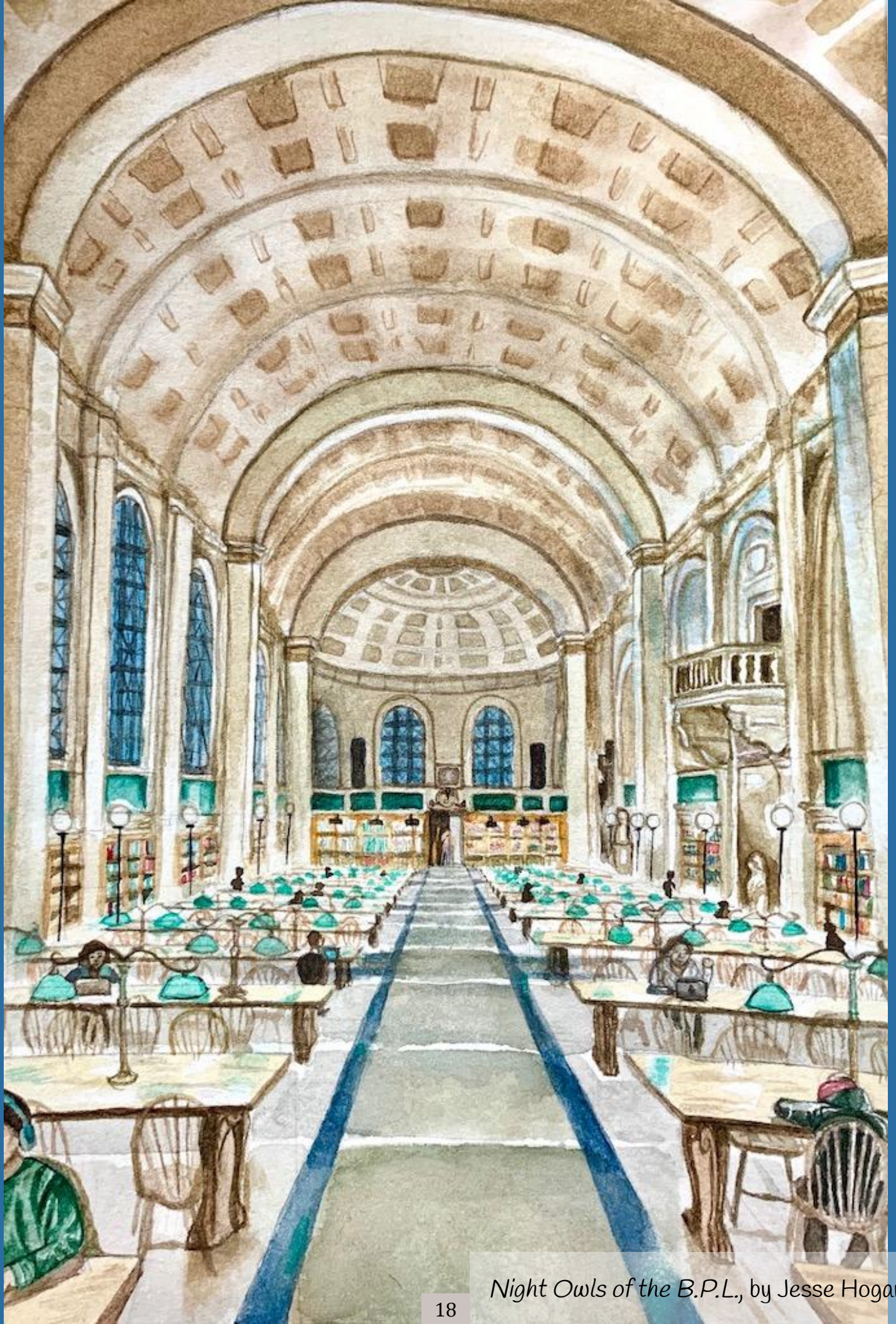
Upon the thirteenth stroke you hear,
 He who bears Fate's threads.
 From a cradle to a grave I overseer,
 Acceptance, guilt an' dread.

Repentance brought you to my door,
 Seeking salve of broken heart.
 Sweet child, orphaned, hurt, ignored,
 Blames self for untimely depart.

Whispered before we took leave,
 On mother's dying breath:
 'Make art; Speak, Achieve;
 Brave battles an' ne'er fear death.'

Yet bereft of tender warmth, 'twining
 Around some reason to stay,
 Armed with shears, hurting, dividing
 Crest from spindle, she frays."

Of Lethe's lake
 the world unwilling
 sups your legacy away.



Night Owls of the B.P.L., by Jesse Hogan '20



Excerpt

Grace Mason '24

He stood on a tall mountain overlooking a dark, frozen lake. Above him, the velvet black sky glittered with billions of silver stars. To his right, the dying sun cast brilliant hues of orange and pink across his face, as if it was giving him one last beautiful memory before it left him in the dark. Before him the lake was surrounded by a thick layer of evergreens that seemed to stretch into the darkening sky. The tips of their branches were dotted with a heavy layer of snow. To his left, a river raged, sending up massive waves of icy water, the powerful sound of them crashing into the rocks along the bank reaching his ears despite the distance. And behind him stretched the desert, a barren wasteland somehow free of frost, but rock solid all the same. A thin pattern of naked footprints seemed alive in the gloom. He had just come from there, had walked the doomes for weeks without food, water, or shelter. Despite the frigid winter air, he was dressed in a thin, white tunic and short, black pants. His feet were bare and covered with grime like the rest of him, and, even though snow covered the ground on which he was standing, they still regained their rightful color. The boy's skin never showed signs of cold, his cheeks and nose never turned the usual pale pink like those of the other kids. His white-blond hair, red in the fading sunlight, rippled in the cold breeze. His icy blue eyes seemed transparent in the dark, and shone like a cat's.

The boy looked down at the edge of the lake, where a little wood cottage peeked out through the trees. It appeared warm and welcoming, and a faint memory twitched at the back of his mind. He stood there for a long time, seeming as though he was carved in ice- a small black dot, miniscule compared to the massive silver mountain on which he was standing. Then, as if waking up from a trance, he began the long descent down to the wooden house in front of the woods, seeking out the three people who were destined to help him save the world.



The T, by Jesse Hogan '20

Do/n't Leave Me Alone

My life was loneliness

The only thing I knew

And when somebody showed up

I thought they were the clue

But no, they were a shadow

Nothing but a hue

With all the monsters inside me

There's nothing I can do

Why did no one come to me?

Please, nobody come to me...

(now read it in reverse)

Sofia Alginina '24



Running Man, by Nishi Kapoor '21

Humanity's Flaws

I wonder

How have we plundered

The Earth's greatest treasures

It's beauties, its memories

Taken by man

Destroyed by humanity

We are ruthless, cruel

Abusive, heartless

People say 'Make a change!'

When you really can't make a difference.

Sofia Alginina '24



Picture by Jyothisha Chilokuri '21

Granted Things

We take things for granted

We use them to their extent

But when they disappear

We realize its true worth

The true worth of happiness

Of friendship

Of love

Of many things

That I won't name

Because otherwise, this poem would be too long.

Sofia Alginina '24

Too Young

My parents always used to say

“You’re too young for that!” Or

“You’re too young for this!”

What if I’m this certain age?

Why is time so valued?

We think the longer you’ve spent in this world,

The wiser you are

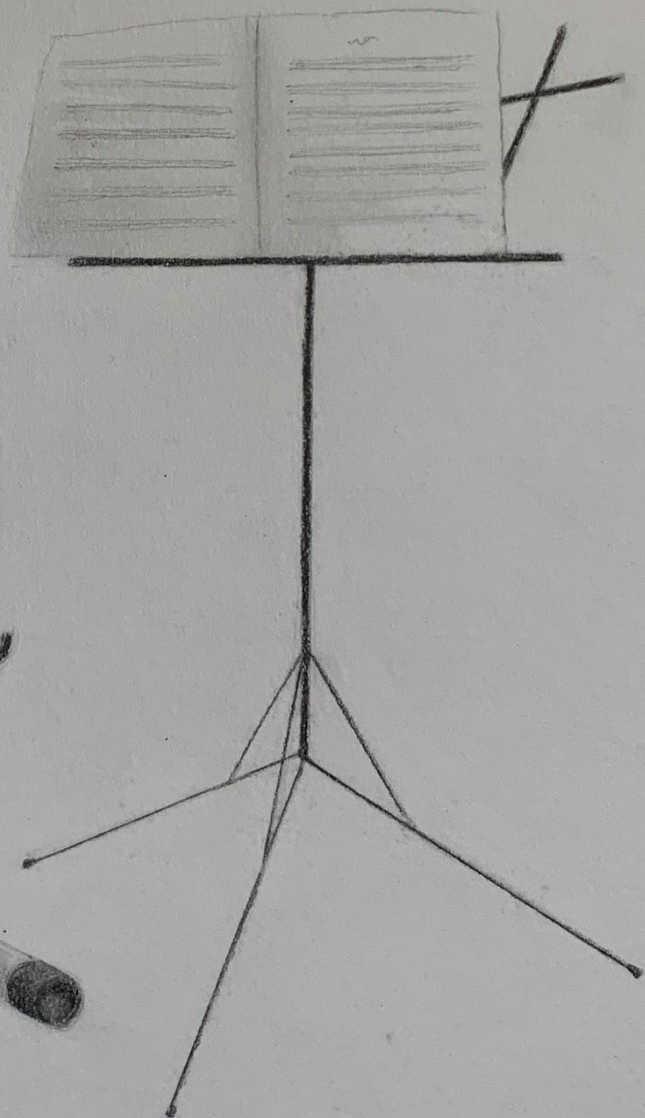
No, that’s not true

The more you’re here

The more you realize

We aren’t as good as we think we are.

Sofia Alginina ‘24





Restriction

Just because I'm young

Means I have to sleep early

Means I can't talk with my friends when I want

Means I have to work harder to relax

Why can't I grow up?

I want to be an adult

But I don't want to be an adult

I cherish my youth, my childhood

My childishness

But I hate the restrictions you put on me

The invisible shackles that you say are good for me

What if this isn't what I want?

I want something different

Only melodies and lyrics help me, not your restrictions

One day you'll realize you were wrong.

Sofia Alginina '24



The Circle of Life

The sky is a seam
Like gray clouds in the night
Waiting for a boom
To express their inner delight-

-Looking for a piece of danger
Chance of your death demise
Such as a butterfly in the middle
Sprawling the string-

-Do you love what is not
Do you love so paper thin
Do you love like a rose
ready to prick-

-The weeping of the willow
Yearning for a someone
To only get sadness
As an evening friend-

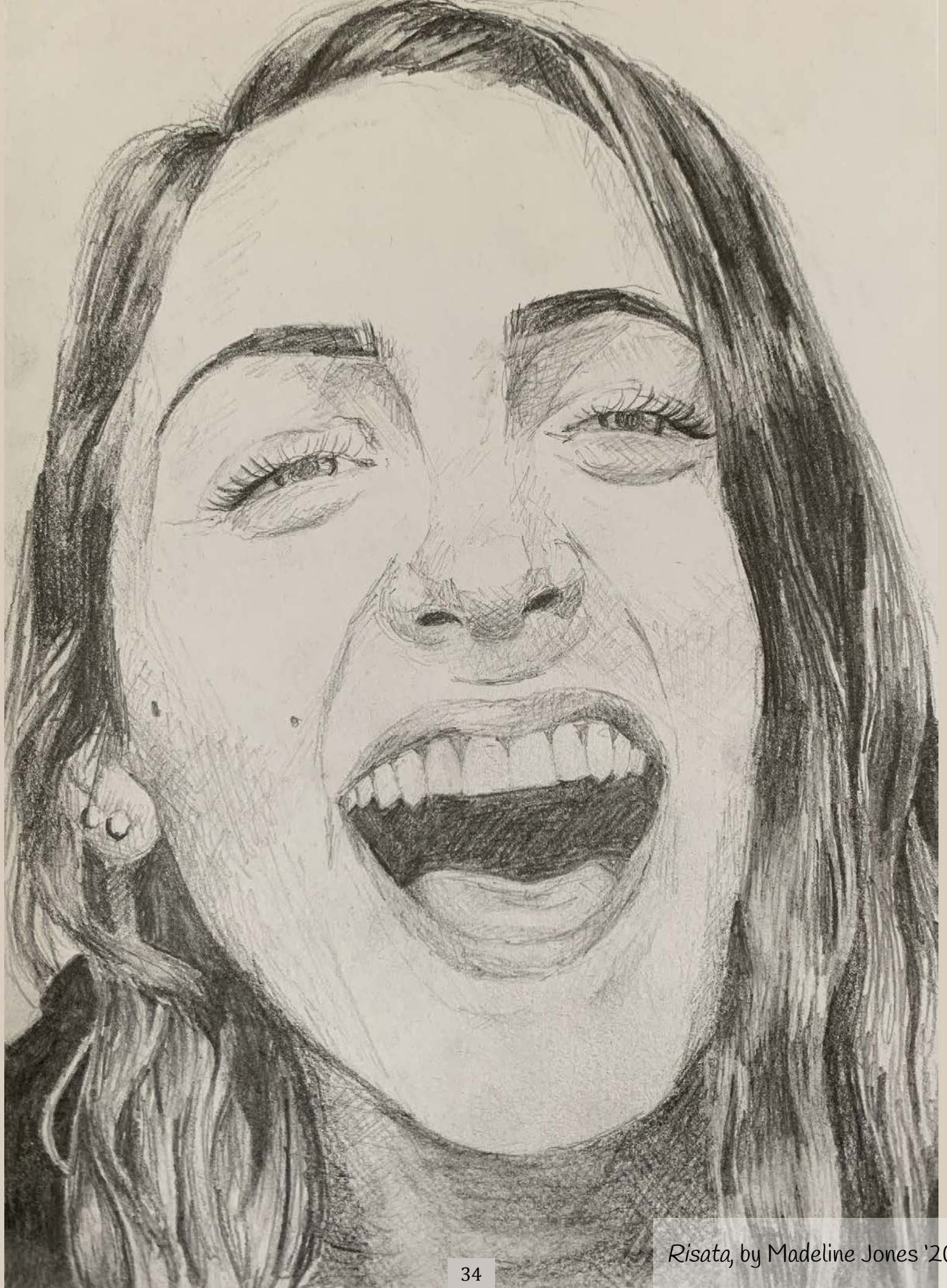
-But here I was
Here I am
Sitting at this desk
Re-encountering the events-

-Blessed by a child who mourns and prays
To be of question as what we say
For death due us part and love shone within
These tales will be your sin-

Holly Giuliotti '25



Self Portrait by Nicholas Solimine '22



Risata, by Madeline Jones '20



The Match, by Nishi Kapoor '21

Sweepings of the Street

Amanda Denney '22

CHAPTER ONE: THE FACTORY

Monday, 16 September 1816

Sarah ran her fingers through her matted blonde hair, wiping the sweat from her brow, and pulled on the rusty metal lever with both blistered hands. The lever was one of many that controlled the enormous power loom in the center of the factory. It was a quicker way, they said, to manufacture large amounts of cloth at once. All the same, Sarah wished the power loom had never been invented.

Had the machine not taken over the domestic weaving industry, Sarah's mother would still be sitting at her manual loom, her fingers flying over the beautiful handmade cloth, preparing to sell the fabric at the market the next day. Her father and Thomas would still return from the fields every evening with enough energy to eat dinner with their family without falling asleep. Sarah would still be at home helping her mother weave, reading to Abigail, or performing household chores.

But six months ago, Mother's weaving business had folded. A power loom had been built nearby, producing fabric at a far cheaper price. At the same time, a late temperature drop froze the ground and destroyed the crops, leaving Thomas and Father unemployed. Their jobs gone, Sarah's family was forced to leave their farmhouse in the countryside and relocate to a city to search for work. That was how Sarah found herself working twelve hours a day, moving levers and tools until her arms ached, in this cramped London factory.

"Star," said a familiar voice. A smile spread across Sarah's face at the sound of her childhood nickname, and she turned to face her brother. At fifteen, three years Sarah's elder, Thomas Lee was tall and lean, his muscular build from lifting heavy loads giving way to the thin look of malnourishment. His round face was pale and studded with pimples. His blond bangs were plastered against his forehead by sweat, and he staggered under the weight of the three boxes of heavy tools in his arms. Thomas hoisted the boxes higher and flashed Sarah a grin. "How do you do?"

"Well, I suppose," said Sarah, neglecting the levers for a moment to flex her stiff fingers. "My hands are a bit sore, but I'll be fine." In fact, new blisters were forming from her tight grip upon the levers, but she had grown accustomed to the calluses that came with factory work.

Thomas was about to reply when a large man passed: the overseer of the factory. He carried a cane, which Sarah knew was not for his own use, but to keep workers in line. "Oi, you!" he snapped, gesturing between Sarah and Thomas. "Get back to work!" Sarah had braced herself for the smack of the wooden cane against her calves, but it stung nonetheless. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Thomas stumble and knew that he had been hit with the cane as well. She glanced at him to ensure that he was unhurt, then returned to her task.

As she often did during long days at the factory, Sarah began to sink into a mindless pattern. Minutes stretched into hours. The room's sweltering heat and the noise from the machine faded until her only sensation was the cold metal of the levers against her hands.

Sarah's lethargy was penetrated by a shout of "Ladder!" Disoriented, Sarah turned towards the sound just in time to see one of the ladders against the wall sway and begin to tilt. The worker standing near the top turned and leapt from the falling ladder as the workers nearby scattered. The man landed with a cry and collapsed, clutching his leg. A chill ran down Sarah's spine as she recognized the man.

"Father!" she cried.

Thomas whipped round at Sarah's scream. His eyes fell upon Father and widened in horror. He deposited the boxes at the side of the room and raced to Father's side. Sarah left her post and knelt beside Thomas. Father's right leg was twisted at a painful angle and his face contorted into a grimace.

"

Mother was there a moment later, murmuring soothing words to Father and examining his injured leg with experienced fingers. “His leg is broken,” she said. “I need bandages and a rod to set the bone.” Her voice was steady, but her eyes betrayed a hint of fear as she looked up at Sarah and Thomas. Thomas left Sarah and ran across the room to find the materials.

Father inhaled sharply through gritted teeth as Mother gently rolled up the leg of his trousers. Thomas returned with a rod and strips of fabric in his arms, setting them on the floor. Mother laid the rod along the length of Father’s shin.

Thomas’ callused hand slipped into Sarah’s. Sarah turned to him and whispered, “Will he be all right?”

He nodded, his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat as he swallowed. “Mother knows what to do,” he murmured. He did not look at her, however, and Sarah could see the anxiety in his expression as he gazed at Father lying on the floor. Sarah buried her face in her brother’s rough shirt, tears burning in her eyes. Thomas wrapped a protective arm round her and held her close.

After Father’s leg had been set and wrapped, Mother straightened and turned to Thomas, who had let go of Sarah. “Take your father home,” she said. “Sarah, stay home and care for him there. Elevate his leg and use a cloth to cool it. Thomas, come back here in an hour.”

Sarah and Thomas scrambled to follow instructions. Thomas helped Father to his good foot and slung Father’s arm over his shoulder. Using Thomas as a crutch, Father limped towards the door, wincing with every movement of his injured leg. Sarah stood at Father’s other side, allowing him to lean on her shoulder if he needed more support. The three of them slowly exited the factory.

It was a chilly, overcast September afternoon, and the smoke curling upwards from the factories faded into the gray sky. London’s economy had been severely damaged by the crop failure and the temperature drop that year, leaving food scarce and many citizens deep in poverty. The main streets of the London slums were just wide enough to allow a horse-drawn cart to pass between the tight rows of tall buildings, and the alleys lining either side were even narrower. At the edges, the dirt of the unpaved roads coalesced into a contemptible mix of mud, rubbish and manure.

“I don’t know... what happened,” Father breathed, the muscles in his face twitching. “One minute... I was working on the ladder, and the next...”

“No matter,” said Thomas. “Concentrate on walking.”

As they turned onto Sarah’s street three blocks later, Sarah caught sight of someone sitting on a bench in the shadow of a tall building. It was a child, a small boy about eight years old. His face was dirty, his clothes ragged, and his feet bare. He gazed at her with wide dark eyes framed by brown curls.

Sarah instinctively turned towards Thomas, who was busy helping Father. Her mother always worried about money, and never would have approved of Sarah giving their money to strangers. But her mother was back at the factory, and this boy looked as though he had not eaten a full meal in weeks. Sarah slipped her hand into the pocket of her apron and handed the boy twopence¹ of the money she had earned the day before. His dark eyes grew round as the coins themselves. “Thank you,” he whispered, cupping the coins in his dirty hands.

“God bless you,” Sarah said to him, turning back to Father and Thomas. The boy disappeared into the shadows with his prize.

They reached Sarah’s house a minute later. The three-story building was shared by three families, Sarah’s family on the second floor. Thomas helped Father upstairs and Sarah ran ahead to ready Father’s bed. The family shared two beds, one for Father and Mother and one for Thomas, Sarah and Abigail.

¹ In the British LSD (pre-decimal) system, twelve pence (singular *penny*) were one shilling, and twenty shillings were one pound. Words such as “tuppence” or “twopence”, “threepence”, and “sixpence” will also be used.

Abigail appeared at the door as Sarah entered. "You're home early!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms round her older sister.

Sarah gently extricated herself from Abigail's embrace. "I know, Abigail. Listen. Father's hurt from work, and I need you to stay out of the way when he comes."

Abigail's face became solemn and she stepped back as Thomas and Father entered. Sarah quickly pulled back Father's bedclothes and moved aside. Thomas eased Father onto the bed and Father leaned back, breathing a sigh of relief. Sarah took a pillow from her own bed and propped his leg against it, apologizing as he grimaced at the motion. She found a scrap of cloth in the cupboard, dipped it into the water-basin, and ran it gently across his skin to reduce swelling and soothe the pain.

As Sarah left the bedside, Thomas pulled her into a hug. "Thank you," he murmured. Sarah nodded and reached for a log to revive the fire. Thomas retrieved his jacket from the peg beside the door and left for the factory again.

Her family's portion of the house was small: a single room in the shape of an L. The two beds lay at the wall across from the door, and an ash-filled fireplace protruded from another wall, with a pot and a grate for cooking. A cupboard stood in a corner, holding food, money, dishes and other supplies. A wooden board stretched between two barrels filled with dried food and supplies, creating a makeshift table, and two simple wooden benches acted as chairs. The only other furniture were two trunks, one at the end of each bed, and the water-basin in the corner.

Sarah moved several logs into the fireplace and lit a fire, then took the water-basin outside and down the street to fill it from the pump. Holding the bucket round the middle with both arms, she carried it up the stairs. She poured water from the spout of the water-basin into the pot and added tea leaves, then set it over the fire to boil.

Abigail tugged on Sarah's sleeve. "Sarah, is Father well?"

"Aye, Abigail, he is. He hurt his leg at the factory, but he'll recover in time. Will you show me your writing?" Sarah prompted. Abigail scrambled to retrieve her stack of paper, where she had been practicing her letters. She had written her name, *Abigail Lee*, over and over, followed by the alphabet and numbers. Sarah had attended school in the countryside, as had Thomas before he had worked for the farm, but at six years old Abigail had never gone to school; instead she learned from Sarah, Thomas and their parents by turns. Though there was considerably less time to teach Abigail now that the rest of the family worked, Sarah tried her best to keep up the little girl's studies. Abigail proudly displayed her messy handwriting page to Sarah, who praised her. Then Abigail wrote a new sentence. "I love my sister Sarah and my brother Thomas," she read.

Sarah smiled. "Good. Thomas has an H here, see? T-H-O-M-A-S." Blushing, Abigail fixed her brother's name. Sarah poured the tea into a cup for Father, refilled the water pot, and added five small pieces of dried meat to the pot of water, then left the fireside and sat on one of the benches in front of the table with a sigh.

Mother and Thomas returned home at about twilight, hands dirty and cheeks flushed. Mother washed her face in the water-basin, took off her bonnet, and knelt at Father's bed. "How are you, dear?" she murmured.

"Better, my love," Father replied, though he was still pale. "Thank you."

Mother kissed his forehead. "I'll bring you dinner."

"Did they give you our money?" asked Sarah, turning on the bench to face her brother.

Thomas shook his head, turning to hang up his jacket. “They canceled both of your wages for the week,” he said.

Sarah’s jaw dropped in indignation. “They didn’t pay you for me and Father?”

“Nay. They said they can’t keep records of your work hours when you leave in the middle of the day.” Thomas cursed under his breath.

“Thomas!” Mother chided.

“Sorry.” Thomas walked to the window and leaned his arms against the sill.

“Have you started dinner?” Mother asked.

Sarah nodded. “I have meat in the pot now. It’s been cooking for about an hour—it is probably done.”

Mother knelt in front of the fire to take out the meat. “Abigail,” said Sarah, “will you help Mother take out the dishes for dinner?” Abigail obliged. Sarah walked over to the single window, where Thomas was lost in bleak rumination, and stood next to him. Cool air wafted through the unglazed² window-frame, kissing her skin.

“Are you all right?” she asked her brother.

Thomas started. “Oh, Star, I didn’t see you. Yes, I suppose I’m all right.”

“You’re angry about the money?”

Thomas was silent for a moment. “I wish we could go back to the way things were.”

“So do I,” Sarah sighed, watching her brother gaze at the darkening city. The flickering light of candles and street-lamps were the only illumination of the dark streets. Smokestacks and chimneys were shadowy silhouettes against the indigo sky, which was still lit pale blue from below the horizon.

Thomas blew a puff of air that fanned his bangs upwards. “All this blasted smoke,” he murmured, still facing the window. “I miss seeing the stars.”

“I know,” said Sarah. Back at the family’s farmhouse, Thomas would venture outside at night and admire the stars forming patterns in the dark sky. Sarah would sit with him and beg him to tell her stories about the constellations. In London the stars were blocked by factory smoke, and Sarah knew that her brother longed to see them again.

Thomas turned to Sarah, his signature lopsided grin replacing his wistful expression. “No matter. The most important Star is right here.” He ruffled Sarah’s hair affectionately, and she smiled. She admired Thomas more than either of her parents: he always managed to find the right thing to make her laugh in any situation. He could meet her eyes and soothe her with a glance. He also hated when things were unfair.

Thomas nudged her from her daze. “Come on.” Sarah followed him to the barrels in the center of the room. She lifted the tabletop, and Thomas heaved the barrels one by one to Father’s bedside. Sarah replaced the board, then moved the benches to either side of the table while Abigail set five places with tin plates and mugs. Father sat up, wincing as the movement jostled his injured leg. Mother placed a slab of beef on each plate and poured a cup of tea for each of them. She spoke a quick prayer and they began to eat with their fingers.

After a minute of silence, Mother said, “I don’t think it is safe for Sarah to return to the factory.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sarah. While she did not enjoy factory work in the least, she had been employed there for nearly six months.

“You’re the most likely to get hurt,” said Mother. “You’re a child.”

“I’m twelve!” Sarah protested.

² not fitted with glass.

“Exactly.”

“Mary, we need all the money we can get,” said Father.

“What difference will two fewer shillings make?” asked Mother. “Money is beside the point. You know what that place can do to someone—it could kill her.” Sarah bristled at being spoken about as though she were not in the room, but she remained silent.

Father nodded. “Very well. We can’t risk her hurting herself as well.”

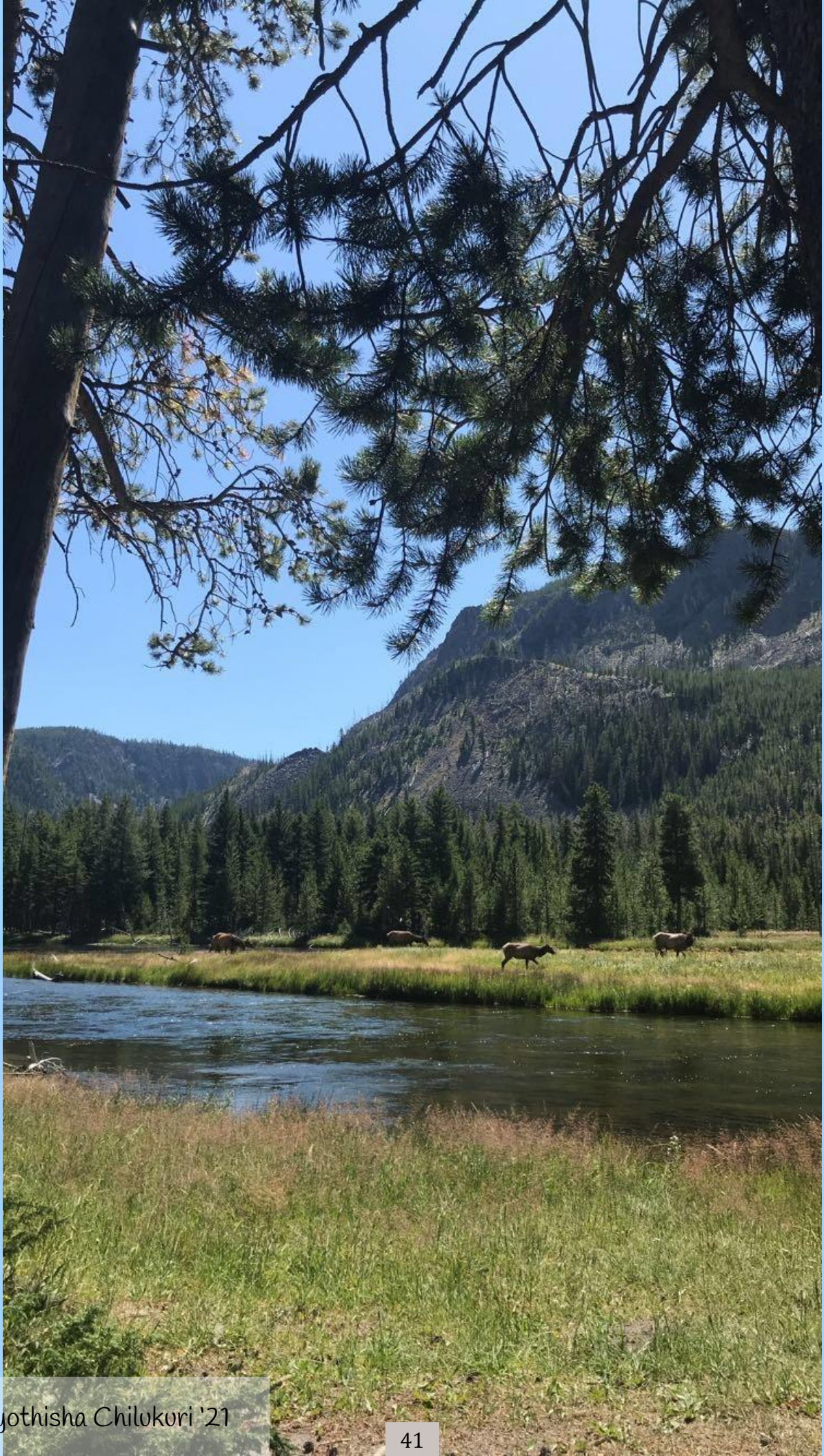
“I agree,” said Thomas.

Father turned to him. “You also, Thomas.”

“Nay, Father.” Thomas shook his head. “I’m an adult now. I earn more than Mother. I ought to keep working.” His eyes cut to Mother, trying to gauge her reaction to his remark about her wages. She sent a sharp glance in his direction but did not reply.

“So be it,” she said instead. “Sarah will stay home and care for you and Abigail.”

Sarah consented. Although she felt guilty about not earning money for her family, the day’s events had confirmed that the factory was indeed dangerous, and a part of Sarah rejoiced in finally being rid of the horrible place.



Picture by Jyothisha Chilokuri '21



Portrait by Amanda Denney '22

Inspired Works



Frodo, by Amanda Denney '22,
inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*



Angelica, by Valerie Lortie '25,
inspired by *Hamilton*

I wake up in the darkness and noise of something that I can sense is moving up. To where, I don't know. I do not remember who I am, how I got here, or why I am here. This place is terrifying. I feel so alone. Afraid of where I'm going, I hug my knees to my chest in utter fear. This thing seems to take an eternity to reach where it is going: this scares the hell out of me. Finally, the thing stops to a screeching halt that causes my hands to cover my ears because of the awful, grinding sound it made. I am silent. Suddenly, light starts invading my eyes, so bright that I shade my eyes, yet I am temporarily blinded. A horrid metal-against-metal sound radiates from the air and reaches my ears, which have heard stillness for a long time. I raise my head from my knees and the light continues to burn into my retinas. I am able to see this thing that brought me here and I recognize it as a caged box: I was the only delivery. Out of this box, there are clear blue skies that scream into my vision. The cage is too tall for me to get out, the fear of being trapped in the box alone and in complete darkness was enough to motivate my escape. I decided the way out was to jump and pull myself over the edge and out of this box. I jump, but I'm still too short of the top. I jump again, still didn't make it over. Third time, I desperately jump and pull myself onto the grass.

I am free. I lay for a bit on my back, staring up at the blue sky and yellow sun beaming down upon me. *What is this place? Who am I?* I push myself to my feet. I see trees, grass, and the skies, but the thing that sets my nerves on edge the most is the tall, massive, concrete wall surrounding me. *What is this place?* I turn around in a small circle. *Is anyone else here?*

In a desperate attempt, I yell, "Hello?" No response. I really feel alone now.

I begin to get thirsty. *Where can I find water?* I choose to walk into the forest and try to find a stream. *What if there are animals here? Will they hurt me? What if there are people here? Are they avoiding me?* I hear the stream before I see it. Desperate and parched, I take my hands and quietly place them in the water, out of paranoia that other people could be concealed behind the many hiding places such as the tall trees and bushes and attack me when I drop my guard. I bring my cupped hands towards my mouth and hesitantly sip the water, unsure of its potability. Starting to grow paranoia for the water, I force myself to stop drinking.

The sun begins setting and I try to find a safe space to lie down and sleep. *Why am I here? Why am I here in this scary place? Where is everyone?* I find a tree that has a limb wide enough for me to sleep on, so I begin climbing the tree with all the strength that I have. I swing myself up on top of the limb and try to get comfortable. As the sun softly dips below the top of the wall, a terrible and even more horrible thing starts screaming, but the sound is not human, and it sounds like it is coming from outside the wall...it stops. Pure fear of that moment drives me to breathe heavier and grow more frightened of this place I am foreign to.

Why am I alone?! Angry, sad tears brim up in my eyes, and then they cannot hold themselves in anymore: tears streaming down my face, my vision blurred, and my feelings pouring out. As I begin to lay down and fall asleep, I remember something:

My name is Albert.

Written by Evangelina Bordick '21,
inspired by *The Maze Runner*

