

Works by Three Dwight Recipients of 2021 NYC Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

His Hopeless Eyes

Anoushna Bardhan '22

His gaze scorches me. His light, disembodied eyes stare directly at me and follow my gaze as I walk onto the ferry that crosses the Ganges. Discomfort and guilt linger inside me. He sits against the back of the boat banging a wooden stick against a plastic container. The little girl he is with dances to the beat, holding out a hat to collect tips.

A chill rippled down my spine as I stare into his clouded eyes. There is no emotion. No hope. An unsettling feeling started swelling inside. His haunted eyes follow me. He continues to bang the misshapen container with slumped shoulders. A dark aura surrounds this boy. His desolate eyes told his own story.

The little girl moves up and down the rusty ferry dancing to the beat. Layers of makeup mask her youthful features. She could not have been a day over seven. Her bright pink shirt catches the attention of everyone on the boat. She jerks her hips forcefully at random moments as if to convince us she is a willing participant. She jumps up and down on the seats and waves her hula hoop around. Her hands flow in all directions. She starts to chant. Her audience is intrigued, but not me. I recoil at the sight of her and move closer to my brothers, shielding my eyes from her. I am keenly aware of the sweat dripping down my face and the raised hairs on my arms. The tannic taste in my mouth. The trash floating around the river bumping against the tattered sign of *Kolkata Ferry* suddenly comes into focus.

As she dances around the ferry, a liquid trail raced down her cheek. She quickly wipes it away, smudging her dark eyeshadow in the process. She then returns to jerking around as my judgments vanish. She is only a little girl, a couple of years younger than me. This is not what she would want to be doing. Her eyes held such sorrow; I had to look away. I focus my attention on the view around me. I look at the crowds bathing in the water. The people washing their utensils and clothes on the banks of the river. I realize what a poor country it is around me.

The vibrant colors of flowers enter my sight. The flower market approaches us — the last part of our tour. As the ferry glides down the muddy river of Kolkata, I look back at the girl and the boy. The girl walks around after her performance with a ragged hat asking for change. As she approaches people, they turn their gazes and curl their lips in disgust. She looks at her companion wistfully searching for comfort. He smiles and nods for her to continue.

My family and I get off the ferry and walk towards the flower market. The crowded space overwhelms my senses. I am pushed back and forth by the people jostling past. People selling goods grab me. Vendors forcefully grasp at my feet. Mud splashes all over my clothes. I feel my cheeks blush as my eyes start to tear up. I shrink back into the protective company of my brothers, embarrassed by my tears. I feel a sudden rush of empathy for what the children on the ferry must feel every day.

All this fades away as I think of the boy and the girl again. Their image lingers in my mind. I wander through the market paying no attention to the tour — my thoughts of the children on repeat.

I look at my father, searching for comfort. I grab onto his hand, and he squeezes it. He looks down at me and smiles for me to continue. At that moment, I am reminded of my comfortable and protected life in New York, nestled within a loving family. I realize how precious that must be. My father worked hard to get where he is today. He worked hard to get the job and the secure life he has now. I feel an overwhelming feeling of thankfulness. He worked hard to be able to support his children. The boy and the girl on that ferry work hard to survive, to earn a few coins every day to make their living. The determination and grit it takes them to survive are qualities that I don't yet possess.

My father is from India and had he been born into slightly different circumstances, those same bare feet dancing around the ferry could have belonged to me. I am grateful for the life that I have, especially on behalf of all those who don't.

From the flower market, I glance at the ferry again. The girl is dancing, and the boy turns to look at me, staring at me, with those clouded, haunted, hopeful eyes.

Amelia

Ava Goldfarb '21

This room was so dreadfully hot. So suffocating I felt like I could choke at any minute. The fire that roared in the fireplace across from my bed was at least four feet tall and orange like the last dregs of a summer sunset. But this air was not like the sweet summer air I can tolerate. No, I smelled unwashed and the room was so dreadfully hot.

I was propped up on a mountain of pillows and weighed down with blankets varying from cotton to the heaviest wool. Of course, it was all covered by a plush velvet blanket that matched the drapes that blocked out the watery grey light from the sky. I felt a drop of sweat inch down my face. I needed water but it would be hours before Betsy would come with tea and scalding hot soup. I could cry at the thought of eating more of that wretched soup. I truly had been feeling better despite still having a fever.

I did not understand why mother had shipped me out to the seaside to heal if she intended to shut me up in this god awful room. The doctors had said that the fresh seaside air would help me more than the air in London. So mother packed up me, our maid, and herself to our seaside estate for me to convalesce.

I only got to leave the house on Friday afternoons. I sat in a chair wrapped in blankets and overcoats to protect against the wet March air. I loved the cold sea breeze and the sensation of mist on my feverish forehead. But it was only for that hour that I got to breathe in the chilled refreshing air that I was brought here for in the first place.

I pried my arm out from under the layers that I was buried under. I shifted my legs under the blankets and began to inch to the edge of the bed. I decided that I would rather die than sit in my bed for another ten minutes. If I could get to the window and just open it maybe I could survive my imprisonment in this heavy room. Its decor was so ugly - wine-colored velvet covered each piece of furniture, the drapes, and the elaborate canopy above my bed. The walls were plastered with a silky red pattern with delicate gold flowers adorning it. It was a dark room only illuminated by the roaring orange fire.

It was nothing like my room in France. A room full of pale blue and white decorations and four large windows I could open to look at the sprawling garden below in full bloom.

I finally made it to the heavy drapes. I pulled them open and rested my arms on the window sill. A coughing fit wracked my body and I fell to the floor. I took one deep steadying breath. I needed to open that window. I hoisted myself up to the edge, my nightdress soaked with sweat. I managed to lift the window and the salty wet wind blew into my room. I drank it in. I didn't feel sick, I felt like I was flying before the door swung open and I collapsed to the floor again.

“Amelia! What are you doing out of bed?” My mother reached me and tried to lift me from the floor. I heard Betsy enter with my bowl of soup.

“Oh my heavens,” she rushed over and hoisted me to my feet.

“Amelia darling, why are you by the window?” My mother beseeched me, while dragging me back to my plush cage.

“I needed air.”

"No, Amelia, you need to rest."

“That's all I've been doing for months. Mother, what I need is air and a cup of water.”

My mother spooned water into a cup for me all the while staring at me with the utmost contempt. Betsy dabbed my head with a cool cloth before she began to force me to drink the soup. She smiled at me and whispered, “Behave today and tomorrow I’ll give you a bath.” Now that was enticing and I resigned myself to drinking every last drop of that soup.

“Amelia” my mother's stern voice indicated that she was displeased with my current behavior. Not that anything I did *ever* pleased her. “You have a responsibility, to *keep* your engagement.”

I knew what she meant. To marry my betrothed I had to be alive. It was a business transaction to save our estate. I had to marry the rich Frenchman in order to stay in the upper echelon of our social class in England.

As she swept out of my room I heard her mutter, “What a waste to send her to France all these years.” My own mother did not care if I lived or died for her own sake but because she had to keep her ranking amongst her friends.

“Betsy, she is a heartless wench!”

Betsy smothered a laugh but gave me a reassuring smile, “She is concerned for you, it's just too much to bear when your child is ill.”

“Betsy, I think I will take a nap now.” She tucked the layers back on me and went to close the window.

“Please, keep it open.” She looked back at me, hands still on the window.

“I will leave it open enough to get some fresh air in the room.”

Relief washed over me knowing I wouldn't be trapped in this gilded oven for hours longer.

My life wasn't always stuck in the sorry grey coast of England. No, I lived in London during the fall and winter and attended galas and had been educated by numerous tutors. Every spring since I was fourteen I was shipped off to the southern countryside of France to stay at a sprawling Château with dozens of other little ladies and young lords to enjoy the fresh air and find a husband. The Lady Duverne owned the sprawling estate, she was widowed in her youth and never remarried but instead created a summer school for edification.

Every year I stayed in the same glorious room. It was my favorite place on earth. The room was light and dainty and the fresh scent of flowers, not piss, pervaded the whole estate. In the mornings I would walk with Margot and, in those first few years, practice my French, asking everyone *Quel est votre nom?* and *Comment ça va aujourd'hui.*

The older girls would talk to us about suitors and corsets, and what boys were like. We would sit on their plush beds and giggle at the stories. Only the older girls, sixteen up to nineteen, were allowed to attend the balls held at the end of each month. We would sneak down to the grand ballroom, it's gold decorations and glistening mirrors shining in the candlelight. The older girls' skirts twirling and spinning across the dance floor. It was lavender, blue, green, rich colors in satin and silk. We little girls would dance with each other in white nightgowns and dressing coats, swaying to the distant music. Then a matron would see us and scold us, telling us it was time for bed.

In those early years, we could be little wild girls exploring the country. My little troupe of friends and I would steal away to a stream hidden in the woods. There we would lay in the hot summer sun wearing our underclothes. We would play and make flower crowns, and when the boys would come we would hastily grab our dresses and run screeching into the forest, giggling all the way.

Glass Houses

Sarp Sevil '23

I could feel the beads of sweat running down my neck. My stomach was burning from anxiety as I walked down the bleached hospital halls. I had so many thoughts and questions racing around my head. My father had a look of worry I had never seen from him before which only compounded my stress. The doctor referred us to the correct room, or at least I think he did. His lips were moving, but all I can remember is the piercing ringing in my head. The glass was cracking. I took a deep breath and turned left into the room. I saw my mother unconscious with

seemingly hundreds of wires and cables erupting out of her. The anxiety I had vanished in an instant, and all I could feel was a deep pit in my stomach. My glass house shattered into pieces.

I was born looking out tinted windows, a gift of innocence and the belief that the world is fair and just everyone receives from their parents when they are born. My memory of seeing my mother in the hospital is far from the worst or even most important event of my life, but it did mark a turning point. I came to realize that the world as I knew it was a fallacy. The first thing I asked the doctor wasn't what is wrong with her or is she ok. I asked him why. Why did she get sick? Why did it have to be her? I was trying to put the fragments of glass back together, trying to rebuild the illusion, but all I ended up with was bleeding hands. Looking back, this was a selfish question. The kind of question you would expect a self-centered child to make. I was more concerned with myself than with her. I couldn't accept that someone could get sick for no reason. People can't just get disabilities randomly, right? Good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Everything happens for a reason, that is what I was told my whole life so it has to be true. Immediately, my mind tried to justify it. I looked for something to blame, and the first person who came to mind, as shameful as it is to admit it, was my mother herself. I thought, even if just for a moment, that she deserved it. It didn't make much sense but in my mind's mad scramble to pin the blame, it chose the easiest answer. But the theory didn't hold. I knew she was a good person so it couldn't be that she deserved it. I was back to square one.

Sitting next to my mother in the hospital, I spent hours thinking. The hum of the air conditioner filled my empty head like TV static. The beeping of the medical equipment synchronized with the beating of my heart. I couldn't tell if the dizziness was from the chlorine-washed floors or my own anxiety. There had to be a reason, someone to blame. And the

only configuration that could solve this dilemma was that it was my fault. Previous to this, my mother had had serious back problems from her many back surgeries she needed after having a c-section. In my mind, my birth took away her health. But there was one more answer. Instead of a solution to the problem, it's a rejection of the equation. Either I am responsible for taking away my mother's health or this fundamental principle I have believed my entire life is wrong. And on that day in the hospital, I made my choice. I could have just as easily blamed myself and spiraled downward into guilt and self-loathing. I can't explain why, and honestly I don't know why, but for whatever reason, for whatever combination of sounds, smells, thoughts, and feelings; in that moment, I decided no one was to blame.

To know and to accept the truth are two very different things. Some people live their lives looking out tinted windows, never challenged by the world through sheer luck. They try to justify to themselves that they deserve what they have and die before the world can prove them wrong. They live ignorant, blissful lives. Many believe the answer I came to is depressing. The world is a random, meaningless place where things happen by chance and we have so little control. However, I think the truth is more bitter-sweet. Random things happen, good and bad, for no reason at all. Life will likely suck for the most part, but on this small insignificant planet in an endless cosmos exists the miracle of the universe experiencing itself. To live is not to be happy, but to persist through the storm to reach the fleeting moments of joy and sunshine life has to offer. One day, hopefully later than sooner, my mother will die. But her death doesn't mean all the wonderful times we spent together were for nothing. Not everything in life needs to have a purpose. A sunset doesn't need meaning to be enjoyed, the enjoyment is the meaning. Our experiences are all we have. The meaninglessness of the universe doesn't mean everything we do is pointless, it means we get to decide what the point is. Most people at some point see their glass



houses fall. But from the crumbled shards, a new house can be built out of stronger materials that no storm can topple.