

LEAVE  
HER,

JOHNNY.

by CAPSLOCK

Drawn March 8-14, 2020,  
on EC3E (Tetuzoo)  
at MIT.



A comic about  
leaving college on  
March 14th, 2020  
set to the lyrics  
of the classic  
sea shanty.

MCMLXVI

This comic is a series of drawings I drew in about a week while having to evacuate MIT's on-campus housing in March 2020, due to the nascent COVID-19 pandemic.

The first night after it was announced we had to evacuate, someone played the sea shanty "Leave Her, Johnny" on our dorm speaker system. When I heard it, I ran to steal a ream of paper from the library, to make a last-ditch attempt to document not just that experience of leaving suddenly, but also the things I loved about the community I lived in.

Each panel was drawn on a half-sheet of printer paper with pencil, pen, and an extremely dried-out gray crayola marker I had acquired somehow. They were drawn more or less chronologically. I added the commentary on the left in 2022, as a version for people who weren't there at the time, because I think it's a better comic with context.

On the back inside cover, I've included the text of the email I first published this comic in, to my friends who were on my art email list.

On March 10, 2020, I woke up to an email declaring all undergraduate students had to move out of university housing immediately, and not expect to come back.

We had seven days. It was the second semester of my junior year.



Everyone saw it.

My dorm group was close-knit and independent. About 40 people. Some could move back with their parents. Others couldn't



"Leave her Johnny, leave her."

I was in a big project  
class that semester,  
working with a team on  
a little robotic car.



That's the first thing  
I remember doing that  
day - walking to the CS  
building to give it  
back.



and it's time for us  
to leave her.

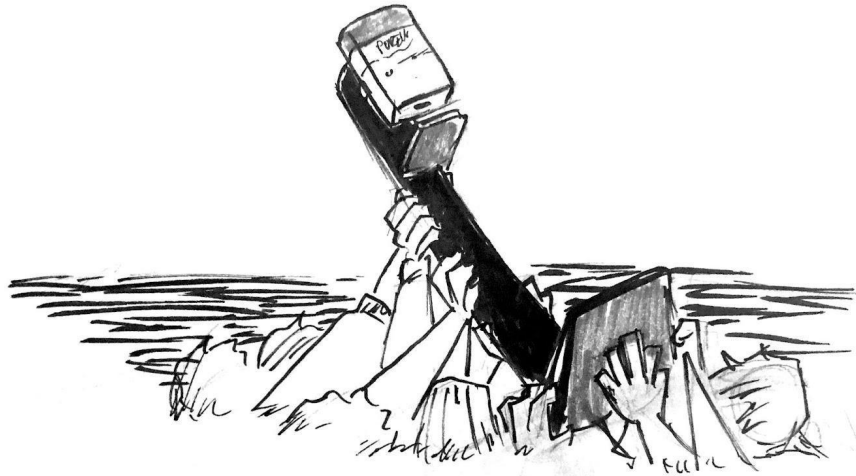
Leave her Johnny,  
leave her,

The public announcement  
came that evening.



Hundreds of these Purell dispensers had popped up overnight.

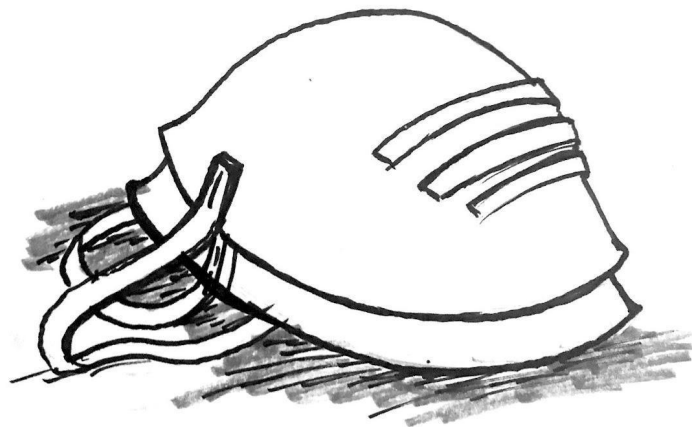
There was a photo circulating of a bunch of students hoisting one into the air in Killian Court.



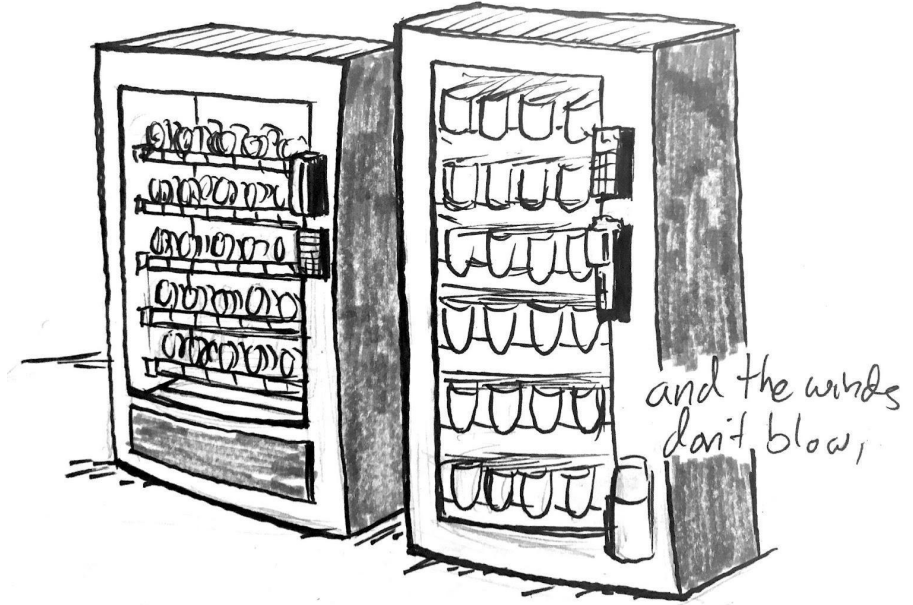
oh, leave her Johnny,  
leave her.

There were email  
threads, dozens of  
replies long, of people  
arguing about masks.

for the voyage  
is long.



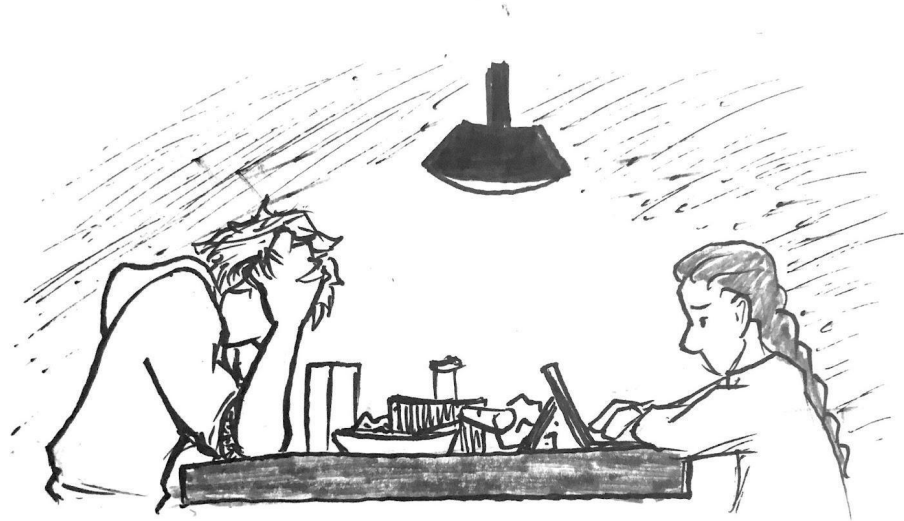
All the vending machines  
were emptied by the end  
of the day.



and it's time for us  
to leave her.

I couldn't go live with my parents. My friend offered to let me stay with her family.

She made a spreadsheet. We went to everyone we knew, confirming they had a place to stay, writing down where.



Oh, the wind was foul;  
and the sea ran high.

MIT only gave students a few moving boxes each. Alumni we knew brought in more for us to distribute.



I'd lived in my room  
for two years. I had  
furniture I'd built, a  
mural I had painted on  
the door.



*She shipped it green,  
and none went by,*

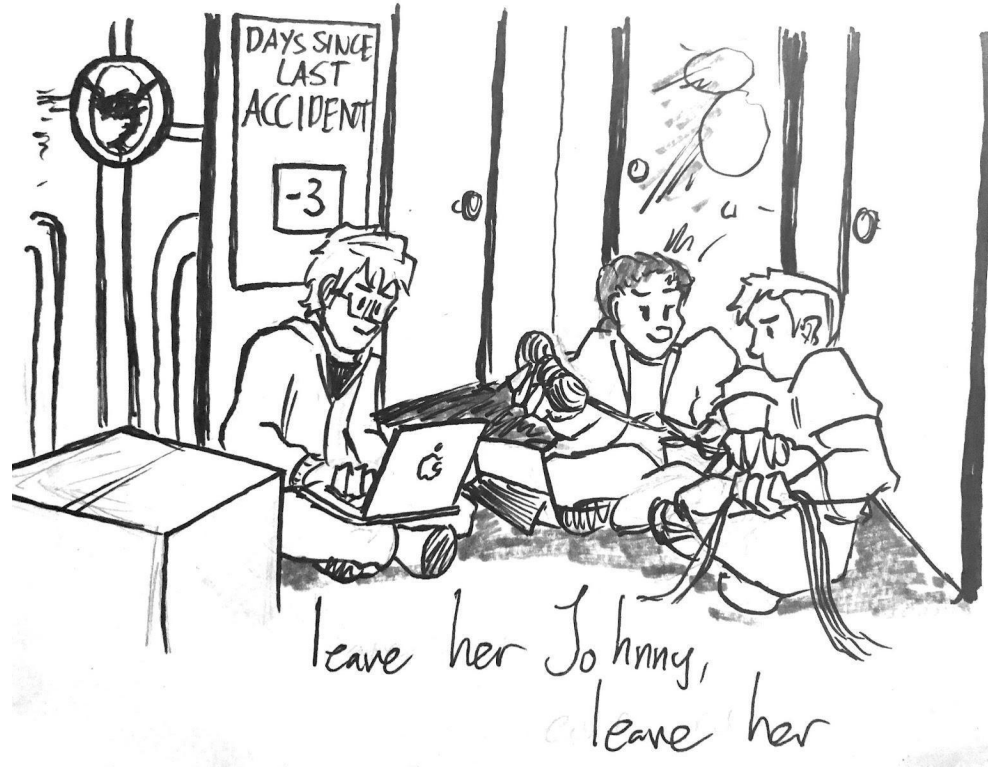
I was renting a car to  
share with two people.  
All our things would  
have to fit.



and it's time for  
us to leave her.

MIT was denying emergency housing to students who didn't have other places to go. Students were told to 'think creatively' about places they could live.

I emailed the entire undergraduate body to organize a sit-in outside the housing office.

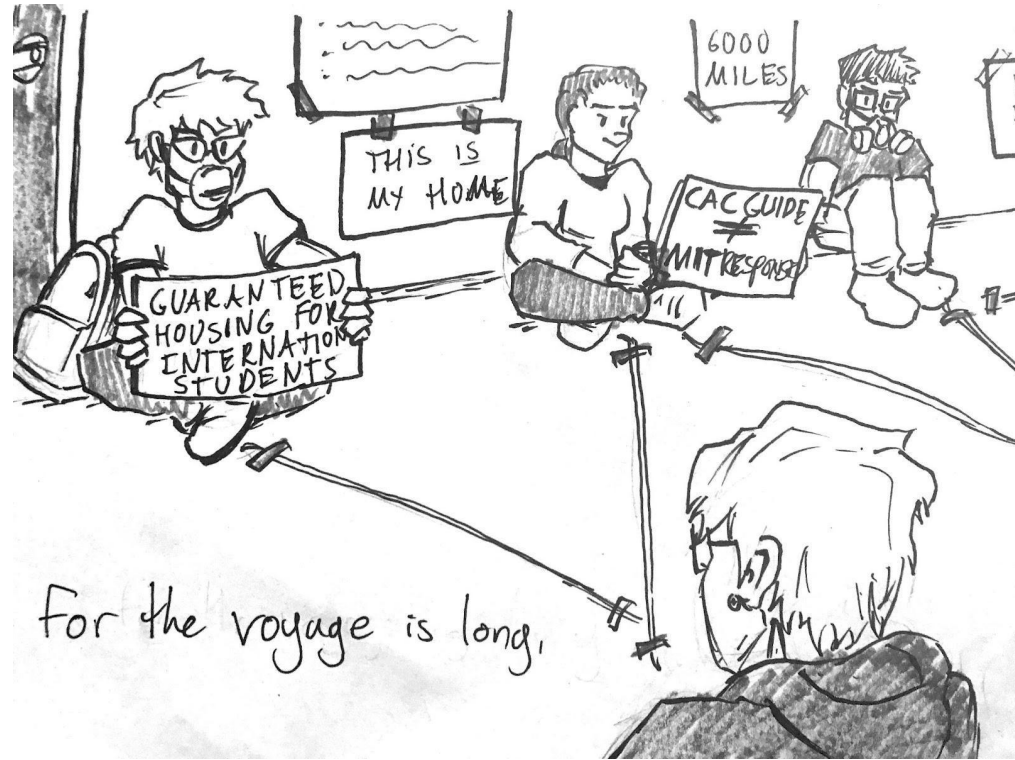


I didn't sleep much  
that night. That whole  
week, really.



Oh, leave her Johnny,  
leave her.

We sat in a hallway, with posters and 6' pieces of yarn taped to the floor between us, so we couldn't be disbanded for not social distancing.

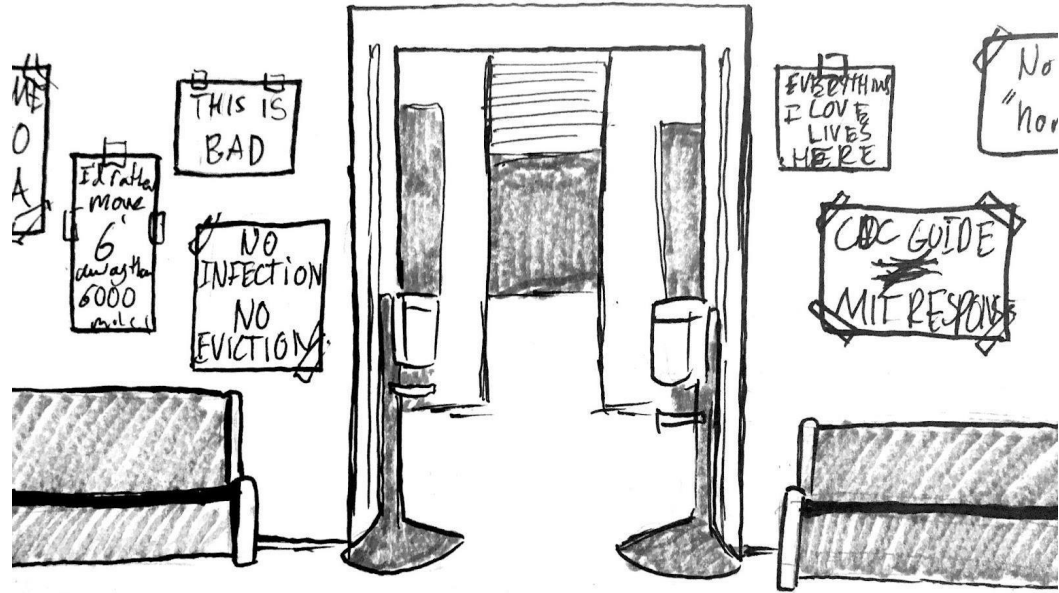


No one was even in the office. They had homes to work from.

We wrote and sent emails while we sat instead, asking MIT to guarantee housing for students who needed it.



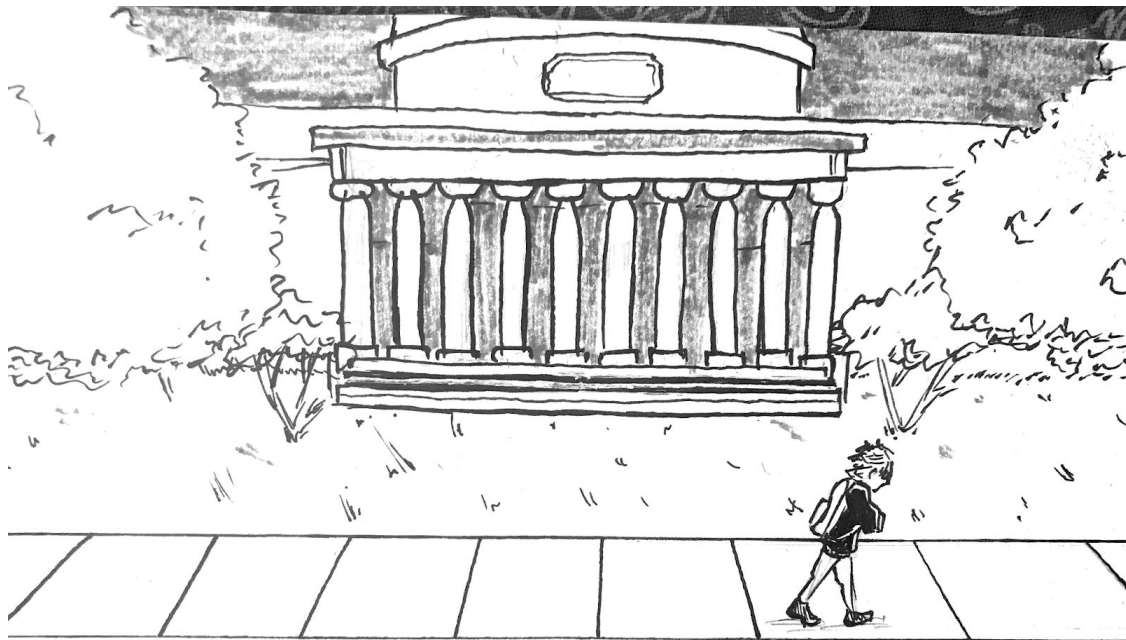
I don't think anything came of it. Students scrambled to help each other find housing in the chaos.



and it's time for us to leave her.

That's what I remember  
most strongly about  
leaving that week.

People I loved, who  
cared for each other,  
and the institutions  
that failed them.



*I hate to sail on this rotten tub.*

We hid our illegal haircutting supplies (long story) in the drop ceiling, where some future student could retrieve them.



People left out food and alcohol in public dorm spaces, anything they couldn't take with them.



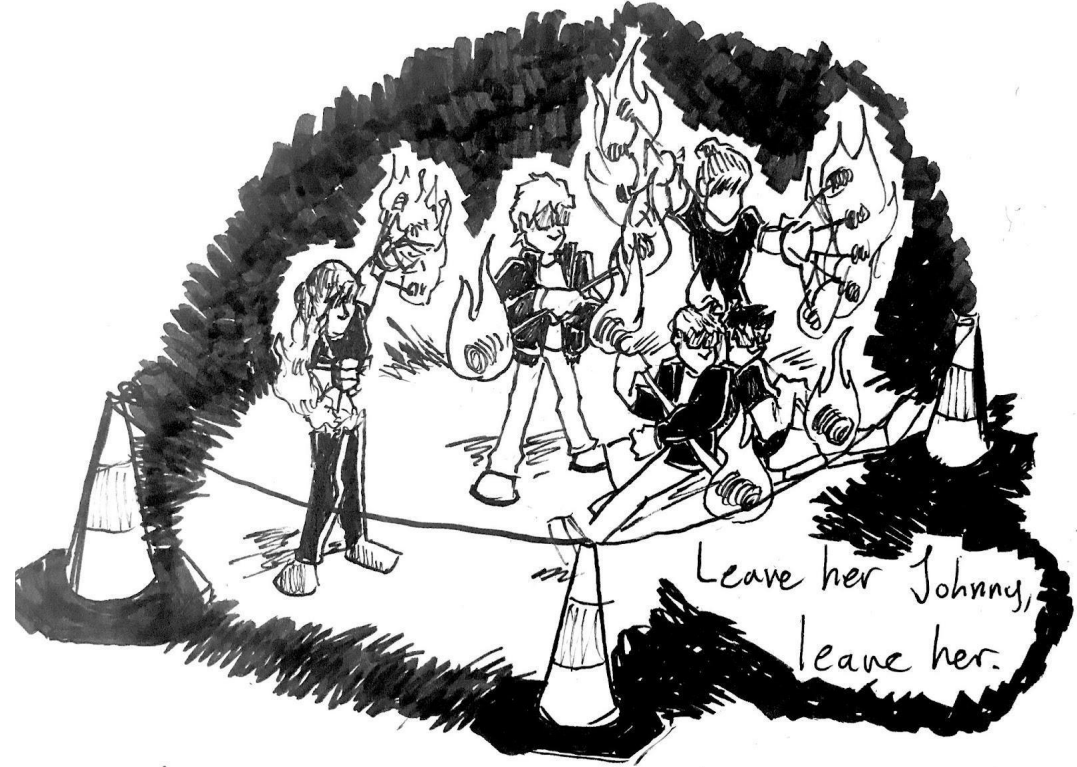
No grog allowed,  
and rotten grub,

I saw the first few people leave while setting up one last firespinning club meeting outside.



My friends and I had been practicing for a performance since December.

We wanted to perform on fire, just once, while we were still together.



We bought a custom cake  
for the Seniors on our  
hall.



Oh, Leave her Johnny,  
leave her.

When I had free time, I'd go to the kitchen and wash dishes. Sometimes at 2 or 3 am. Anyone's dishes that were piling up.



I tried to meet with  
each of my friends  
once before they left.



*and the wind  
won't blow*

We took pictures of everyone's things piled up in the hallway the last couple days.

Hallways narrow enough to be a fire code violation even when they were empty.

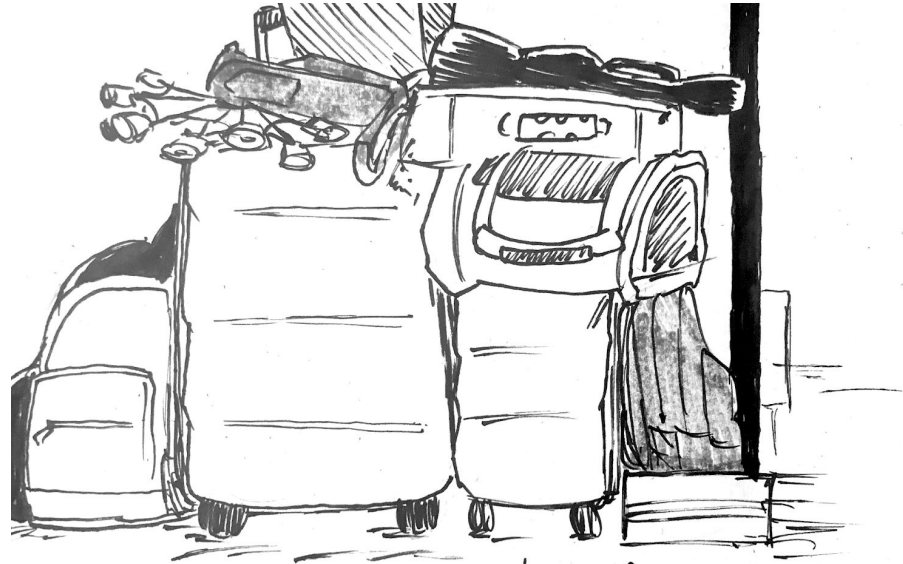


My friend and I  
walked an hour into  
Boston on a cold  
Sunday morning to get  
our rental car.



We swear by  
rote for want of  
more.

I got everything I had  
left down to a small  
pile of luggage.

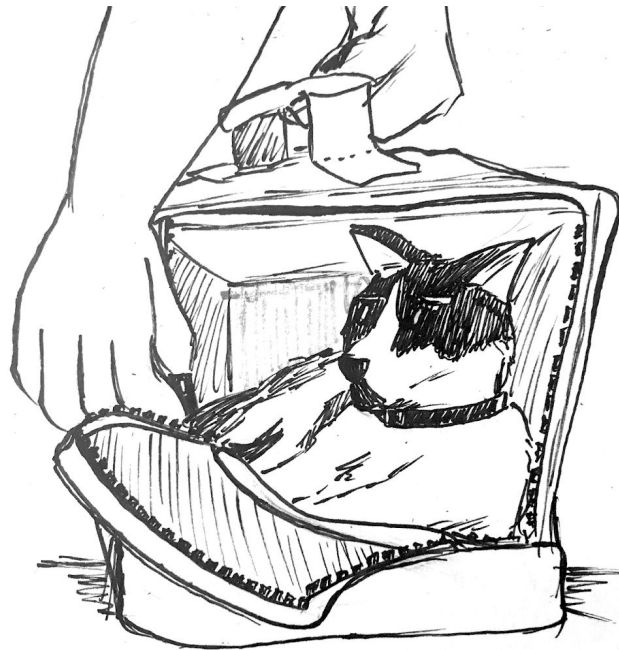


leave her Johnny,  
leave her.

We spent the rest of the afternoon helping friends move their things to storage units.



Our dorm allowed cats.  
I said goodbye to them  
too.

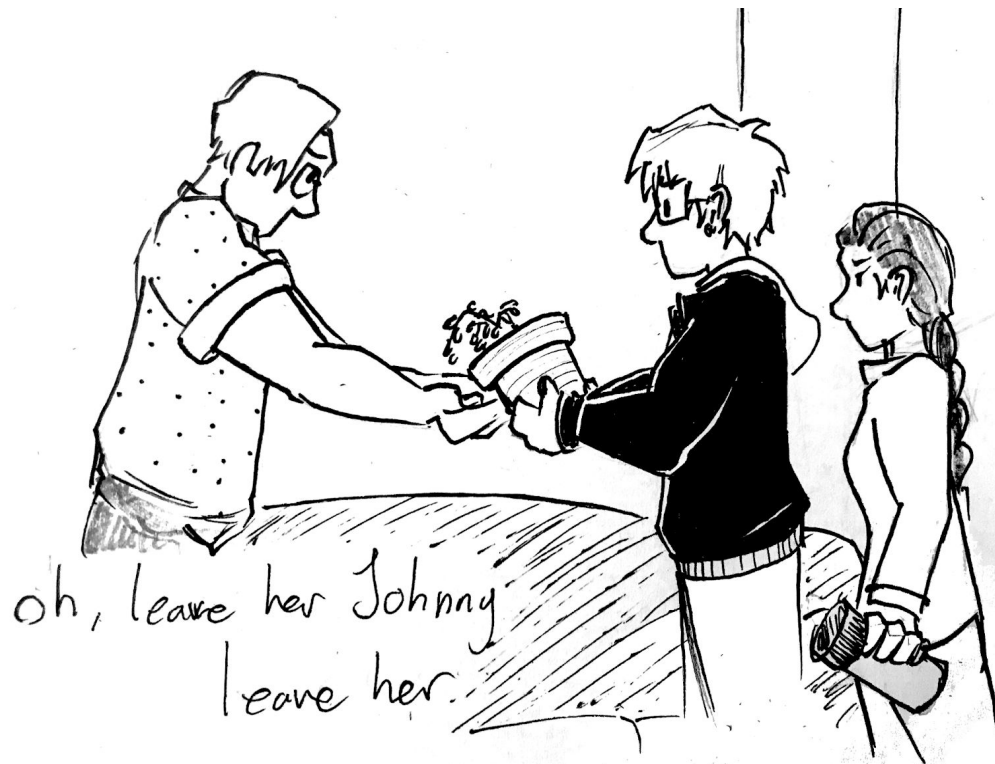


*and it's time for us to leave her.*

It was going to be an 8 hour drive, plus the time to drop off another friend on the way. We were crammed in with everything we could fit.



I gave my one potted plant to the head of our dorm. I was worried it would die in the car.



It was March 14th,  
2020, when we left.

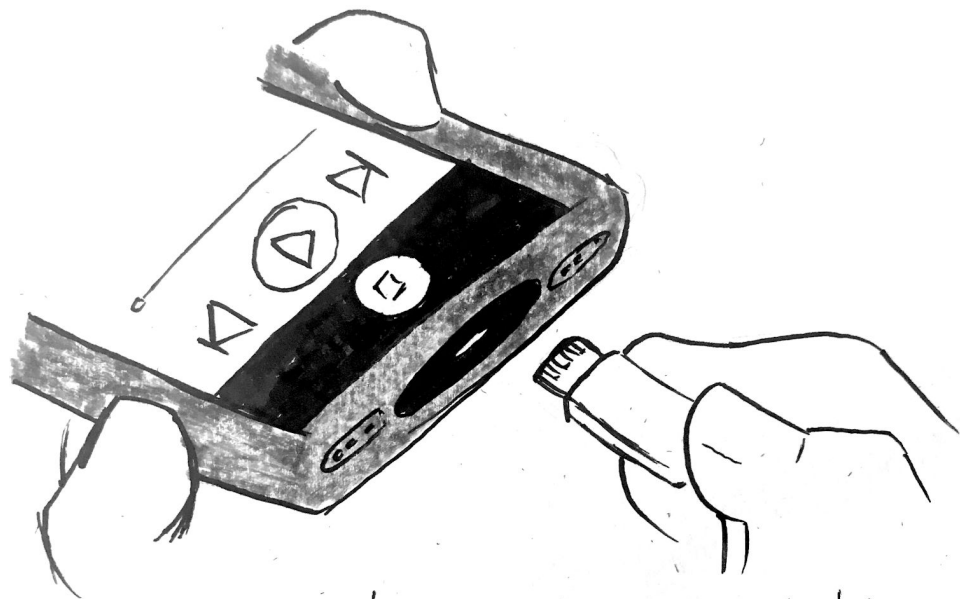
3/14 is 'Pi' day,  
the day MIT gives  
admissions decisions  
to incoming students.



for the voyage is long,

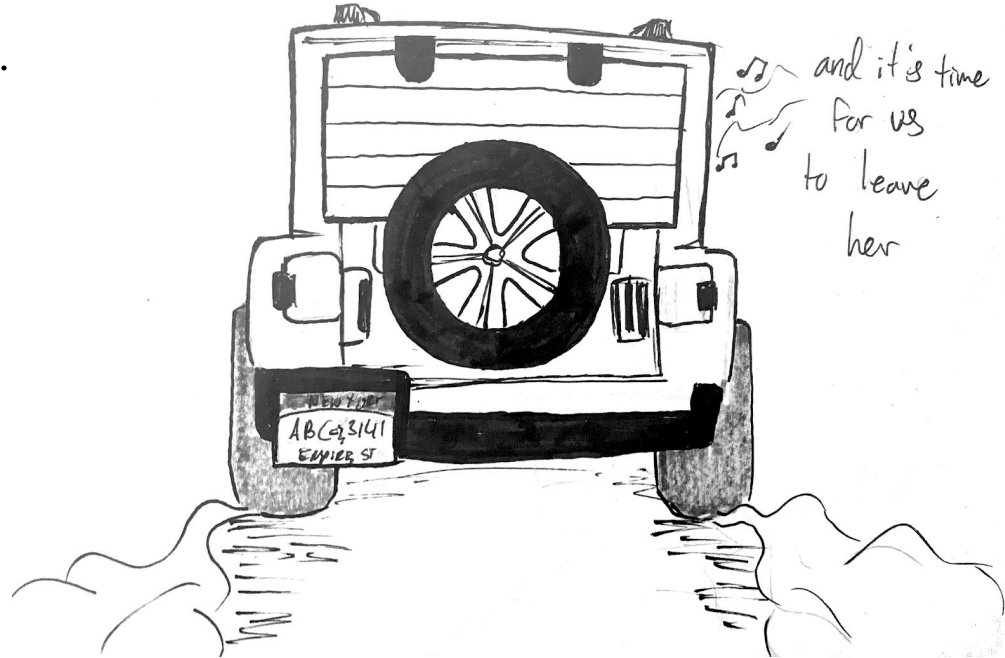
I'd wanted to be there  
since I was 12, in  
that all-consuming way  
you want things when  
you're young and think  
you need them.

I don't think I'll  
ever be able to  
explain what it felt  
like to leave.



and the winds won't blow

But I've never gone back.



“Apologies for poor quality images - I used my art photography setup to make protest signs. I don’t think I have much more I can put into words. Maybe one thing I worry wasn’t conveyed by this comic, looking back, is how angry I was, and am. This semester has been a war zone. I’ve had to be composed while I’m angry, and rational while I’m angry, and caring while I’m angry, and vulnerable while I’m angry, and on and on and on. I needed to hastily weld together at least the tail end of that emotional rollercoaster. But I also hope this helps someone feel acknowledged.

In person, I feel empowered to be there for the people I care about. But it’s harder at a distance. Half of the reasons I create art are for me, but this is the other half. This is my one hammer for anything that looks like a nail. I try to take something from what my friends have given and taught me, from what I know they loved, and how they lived, and make into something they can see and hold.

My favorite book series as a kid was Diane Duane’s *Young Wizards*, about a world where magic is embedded in the ability to describe something. Where you could strengthen things, preserve them, protect them, by communicating their essence.

All of you are worth protecting. What you have is worth protecting.”

cAPSLOCK, MIT ‘21