

# THE ALCOTT YOUTH MAGAZINE

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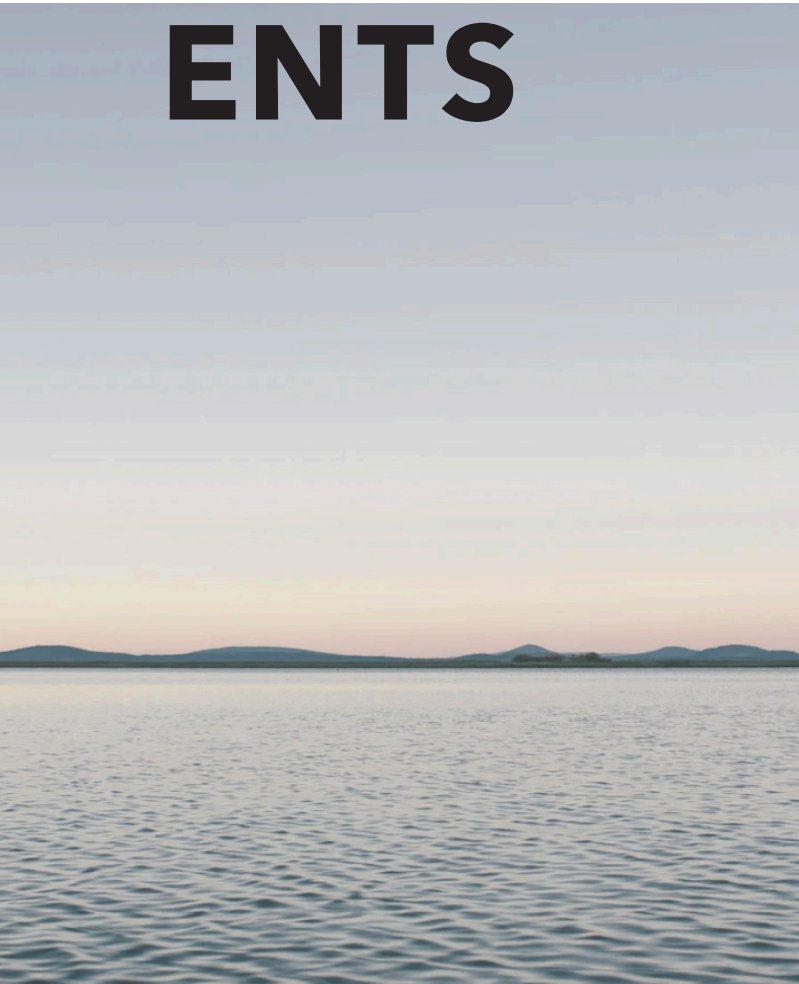
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## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Sophie Kim is a junior in high school from Winchester, Massachusetts. She loves playing tennis, and especially loves playing for her high school tennis team in the spring. She has always had a strong passion for reading and writing, and is excited to share the incredible stories of young women through *The Alcott Youth Magazine*. She hopes these stories will encourage and inspire young people, especially women, all over the world.

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## DIRECTOR

Kaitlyn Donato is pursuing her A.B. at Princeton University. In her sophomore year of high school, Kaitlyn recognized that there were too few magazines focused on writing for and by young women and decided to create *The Alcott Youth Magazine*. With the magazine, she hopes to publish inspirational writing for all to enjoy. Kaitlyn also oversees an affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Books and Bridges, Inc., dedicated to reading books about women in leadership to elementary students. She hopes to foster a dialogue about women in leadership throughout schools and communities.



**SOPHIE CUSHMAN**

# AN INTERVIEW WITH SCIENTISTS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

BY KAITLYN DONATO



**ASHLEY HALL**

When Inspiring Girls USA learned that one of their young ambassadors had a love for dinosaurs, they did everything they could to connect her with women in relevant scientific fields. Ashley Hall, a paleontologist and museum educator at the Museum of the Rockies, has participated in dinosaur excavations in Utah and researched sauropod claws and the evolution of birds from deposits at the La Brea Tar Pits. Sophie Cushman, a Classical Archaeologist and PhD candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, has excavated ancient sites in Greece and researched the use of chamber tombs in northeastern Peloponnese during the Late Bronze Age. Both women were kind enough to dedicate their time to Inspiring Girls, speaking directly with young girls to demonstrate everything that they are capable of accomplishing.

Like our young ambassador, Ashley also loved

dinosaurs from an early age. She was fascinated by everything about science and nature, and she was always trying to learn more. “I remember specifically having a pink *Parasaurolophus* toy, and that’s my favorite dinosaur. I loved it so much. My parents were also hugely influential and supportive in taking me to the Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois. They have an amazing dinosaur collection, huge fossil collection, gems and minerals. I grew up as a little girl, just adoring natural history. I was really interested in paleontology, marine biology, Egyptology, and anthropology.”

For Sophie, the path to becoming an archaeologist was somewhat different. “I didn’t know that I wanted to be an archaeologist until I was in college. When I was growing up, I was really interested in history and the ancient Greek myths and gods. In high school, I started taking Latin,

which is the language that they spoke and wrote in ancient Rome. During college, I became more interested in the ancient world. Eventually, when I was trying to decide what to major in and what to do after college, archaeology seemed like the perfect combination of all of my interests.”

While Sophie decided on her career path later on, she encourages anyone interested in the scientific study of the ancient world to follow their love for the field. “I’m so excited that you all have this passion for either paleontology or archaeology from a young age,” Sophie said to the young girls in our audience, “because it’s definitely great to be excited about something.”

However, both Ashley and Sophie recognize that not everyone is familiar with what careers in archaeology or paleontology entail. “Paleontology is the study of ancient life, so ancient plants, ancient animals, dinosaurs, ancient mammals, bacteria, the earliest forms of life on Earth, and the most recent forms of life on Earth,” Ashley explained. “Anthropology is all about people and the evolution of people on Earth.”

“Archeology is technically a subfield of anthropology. It’s a type of anthropology, because it’s the study of ancient cultures and civilizations,” Sophie added. “But within archaeology, there are

many even further subfields. So once you figure out what you’re interested in, you can specialize in that within the broad general category of archaeology. You could be a bioarchaeologist, someone who studies human remains, or a zooarchaeologist, someone who studies animal remains. You could even be someone who specializes in pottery or architecture.”

“People have a very preconceived notion about what it looks like to be an archaeologist from Hollywood movies, TV, and video games. You might have seen some of the Indiana Jones or National Treasure movies where everything is very exciting, fast paced, and you’re running around. And to some extent, this is true. When you’re working on an excavation, and you find something important, like a sculpture or a burial, you often have to move really fast to get it out of the ground and somewhere safe.

“But at the same time, archaeology is a science. When you’re digging you have to be very careful. There are also a lot of less action-packed tasks, like counting and sorting pottery, lots and lots of paperwork, and a lot of moving dirt from one spot to another with shovels or wheelbarrows. Because archaeology is a science, but it is also a destructive science. Once you dig something up, you can never get it back into the exact spot that

you found it, so we have to make sure to keep very good records of all of that.”

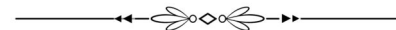
Ashley’s experience as a paleontologist is similar. “Most of my year is spent as an educator. My job at the Museum of the Rockies is to take dinosaurs and dinosaur bones to schools and community festivals. Then in the summertime, we go out in the field with students on paleontology digs. My job is mainly as a teacher and then part-time in the field, going out, having fun, and digging up dinosaurs.”

Although their jobs are not always filled with action, Ashley and Sophie have much to excite them. Sophie, who worked on a site at Azoria, an ancient Greek city, discovered that the city remained “almost perfectly intact” after it was destroyed by a fire over 3,000 years ago. “It was a big city. They had houses, public buildings like temples, and a public dining hall, where all the members of the community could come in and have these big elaborate feasts. It was super exciting to be able to go in, dig this site, and see the remains of the meals that people were cooking on the day that their city was unfortunately destroyed by this fire.”

While people might expect the field to be the most interesting aspect of her job, Ashley has

discovered a love for paleontology collections. “We have these big cabinets full of fossils, and my job was to go through, take out a bone, and work on identifying it. What did this fossil come from? What is it? Is it very common, or is it something really rare that we’ve never seen before?”

Archaeology and paleontology are fields that constantly challenge scientists to uncover more about the exciting mysteries behind life and the ancient world. Whether by educating students in museums or serving as role models for Inspiring Girls USA, both Ashley Hall and Sophie Cushman have inspired new generations of scientists. Their unique career paths encourage young girls to be confident, pursue their dreams, and defy gender stereotypes in science.



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A scenic view of a fjord with steep mountains and a blue sky with clouds. The water is calm and reflects the sky and mountains. The mountains are dark and forested, with some peaks shrouded in mist. The sky is a clear blue with scattered white clouds.

# WRITING

# Rockefeller

By Madelyn Furman

*Shithole*, she's thinking, probably. Marie watches as her mother takes careful steps around the small dorm room. Her mother wouldn't dare let her pristine clothing be touched by anything in there. Marie had spent hours cleaning to make it look presentable for them. Every piece of furniture dusted, every book straightened, each piece of clothing from the floor thrown into the closet. Her father stands in the doorway, arms crossed, taking in his surroundings. Two beds, two desks, and a small window. *Shithole*, he's thinking, probably.

Marie walks over to the window and opens the blinds revealing a New York City street. Tall buildings with Christmas lights hanging from balconies. People in their coats walk by as tiny snowflakes start to fall. Her mother joins her to examine the view. Her father finally steps inside the room.

"Not much of a view, but it could be worse," Marie says. When she first moved in, she thought that this was the greatest sight she had ever seen. How many people get to see a glimpse of New York City from their dorm room window? Now,

she can see what her parents see. Historical buildings turn into trashy, old ones, and New Yorkers living their lives into rude strangers. Marie closes the blinds halfway and steps away from the window.

After looking around, her mother nods and then gives Marie a half-smile, the smile that says she's hiding what she really thinks. She takes another slow look around the room. Her father swipes a finger across the desk checking for dust.

"It's so... quaint," her mother says. Marie smiles, trying to take that as a compliment. Marie can't blame her for her reaction. The woman has a status to uphold. "But, you know, a change of pace is always nice," she continues. Her father nods.

That's something Marie can actually agree with. She has traded boring dinner parties for a loud cafeteria and Saturday tennis matches for Saturday study sessions. There's no unspoken competition to be better than the person standing next to you. She's good enough here.

"So, NYU doesn't give you a private bathroom? I think Audrey got one as a first year at Harvard," her father says. Ten minutes without mentioning Marie's sister. Audrey is three years older than Marie. Her early acceptance letter to Harvard was

featured on the 2018 family Christmas card. Their father was the first in his family to go to college, and it was Harvard, at that. Marie's acceptance to NYU didn't make the cut last year.

"You're right, she did. I also don't remember Audrey's being so small," her mother chimes in. She should've known. Three hours of cleaning just for judgy stares and snarky comments. But not even one genuine compliment or somewhat positive facial expression?

"Well, we'd better get back to the hotel. Get some rest for tomorrow," her father says. Both Marie and her mother nod in agreement. After a short goodbye, Marie closes her door behind them. As soon as she does, she takes a long-awaited deep breath. She sits at her desk and opens her laptop. At least that's out of the way now, but that wasn't the hard part.

Marie's door opens again. This time, it's her roommate, Jess. Jess's bright blue hair makes Marie's dull brown hair look even duller. Jess's confidence and Marie's quietness balance the other out perfectly. And Jess actually cares about Marie's interests. She listens to rants about books and finds quiet places in the cafeteria. Jess somehow knows what she's thinking even when she isn't saying anything.

"So?" Jess says as she flops down onto her bed. Jess patiently waits for Marie to look up from her laptop. Marie keeps typing, then shrugs.

"They were only slightly disgusted. She called it quaint," Marie says, showing Jess a sarcastic smile. Jess scoffs. "I have no idea where to bring them tomorrow." The clock is already ticking. She needs them to stay at least until tomorrow night, and they're not above leaving early. Marie looks at Jess for an answer. Jess answers at once like she knew Marie would ask.

"Just choose your favorite place and that's where we'll go. If they don't like it, then that's their own fault," Jess says. Marie had told Jess all about them. About how judgmental they are, how snooty, how conceited. Now Jess gets annoyed with them each time they're mentioned despite having never met them. It's nice to have someone on her side for once.

Marie nods. Tomorrow has to count.

—————

Marie waits on the steps next to the huge columns of the building's entrance. The morning sun isn't warm enough yet to melt the thin sheet of snow



on the ground. Marie hugs herself trying to stay warm. She's hoping the weather will get better later. But right now, each gust of wind stings her face. Jess sits on the steps next to Marie, her head in her hands. They're thirty minutes late. When Marie finally sees her parents walking up, she taps Jess's shoulder. First impressions matter. Jess shoots up just in time.

Her parents somehow look more miserable than they did the day before. Her mother is bundled up in a coat and a scarf, her arms crossed and her face sporting the ever-present frown. She despises the cold. Her father walks alongside her mother. Every few seconds he looks at her, just waiting for the impending complaints.

Marie had decided to bring them to the New York Public Library, where she's spent countless hours just browsing the shelves alone or studying with Jess. It's a beautiful change of scenery in a busy city. She'll get an hour here today, if that. When her parents make it up to Marie and Jess, they walk right past them for the door.

"It's *freezing*," her mother says as they dart by. Marie still stares out at the street. Couples holding hands. Shopping bags filled with Christmas presents. Jess touches Marie's arm. Marie takes a deep breath, and the pair finally head inside.

"This is my roommate Jess. Jess, these are my parents," Marie says. Jess smiles and holds out her hand. Her mother raises her eyebrows at the blinding bright blue hair. Her father shakes Jess's hand firmly.

"It's nice to meet you," he says. Cordial.

"This is where we are most afternoons," Marie says. Her parents nod, taking in their surroundings. Marie leads the group through the halls. The library looks more like a cathedral. Tall ceilings, paintings lining the walls, and a heavenly mural on the ceiling. The first time she came here, Marie marveled at the paintings for at least an hour while Jess intently listened to Marie's interpretations. Her parents don't take more than a few seconds to glance at each one. *Tacky*, they must be thinking.

Marie wastes no time and takes them straight to her favorite part of the entire building, the Rose Main Reading Room. It's a large room with dozens of tables and chairs in the center with shelves and shelves of books lining the walls. Even now, the room entrances her.

Marie glances at her mother. The frown prevails and her eyes are bored. Then at her father. He

looks around the room, but not because he's in awe. More like he's trying to find the exit sign. Her mother could tell her about the most astonishing library she visited in France. Her father had probably spent his time studying at Harvard in libraries three times this size with five times as many books. Of course this place wouldn't work.

"Isn't it so nice? This is our favorite place in the city," Jess says, breaking the silence and staring at Marie's parents. Marie holds her breath. Her mother just tilts her head at Jess and her father continues to look around. Her mother shrugs and then corrects herself with a nod.

"It's very pretty. Is it always this crowded?"

"Actually, no," Jess says without missing a beat. Her mother raises an eyebrow, unconvinced. At least Jess tried. Marie thinks of telling them a story to interest them in the place. Or in her. About how one time she stayed in the reading room so long that she didn't realize the library was closing until a staff member tapped her on the shoulder. Or the time she and Jess almost got kicked out for laughing too loudly. But she doesn't. She can hear their voices saying *disrespectful* and *impolite*.

The more yawns and judgmental glances that

come from her parents, the more Marie wants to leave. The tall ceilings just get shorter and the people in the paintings stare at her. She finally leads them all out of the library and they all say a quick goodbye to Jess. Marie watches as the blue hair gets farther and farther. Only one more place to take them before tonight. Last chance.

The park is just as serene as the library, an escape from the city. Trees coated in snow surround them. Friends laugh as they pass by. People walk their dogs. Parents watch their small children play in the snow. People-watching in Central Park is Jess and Marie's favorite pastime.

Marie and her parents find the bench with the least snow sitting on it. Marie sits on the far edge and her parents on the other. Her mother rubs her hands together, trying to generate any kind of warmth. Her father puts his arm around her. He sighs, annoyed. Not at his wife but at the weather. Marie can't control the weather.

"Marie, how can you stand to be out here?" her mother says. Marie shrugs. It's not like she isn't cold. She definitely is. Maybe she's just used to it. "We should go back to the hotel." Her mother stands up. Why did Marie even bother?

"We can just keep walking around, that should

warm us,” her father says. That makes Marie look up. Her mother shakes her head. She knows what’s best. Marie and her father lock eyes. He’s trying. Please try. He turns back to his wife.

“It shouldn’t be that—” he starts. She cuts him off without speaking. Just her stare. He nods. Nothing but silence. He’s deciding whether to fight back or not. Her stare is strong. He sighs. “How about we just reconvene later?” her father says finally. Her mother nods immediately. Time’s up.

“Yeah, go warm up,” Marie says. She looks out at the park. A young mother and her daughter in the distance try to catch snowflakes in their mouths, laughing as they fail.

“We can call you later to meet up or something,” her mother says. Marie nods but her parents walk away before they see her answer. Marie sits in the middle of the now empty bench.

She almost feels guilty. They hate New York City. If Audrey had shown them her NYU dorm room, they would’ve fawned over it. If they had gone to the library on their own, they would’ve stayed there for hours. If anyone except Marie would’ve taken them to Central Park, they would’ve taken a nice, relaxing walk. But the dorm room is Marie’s dorm room and the library is Marie’s library and

the park is Marie’s park. But this is nothing new.

Marie doesn’t notice the tears on her face until they reach her chin. She wipes them away. She sits alone in the middle of Central Park as it snows. An hour and a half goes by without her noticing. That is, until her phone rings.

“Hey, your mother really isn’t feeling very well. I think it’s this weather,” her father says. Marie already knows where this is going. Maybe it’s for the better. “I moved our flight up to early tomorrow morning, so we’re going to stay in tonight.” He almost sounds disappointed. But how can he be expected to choose Marie? “You didn’t have anything planned already, did you?”

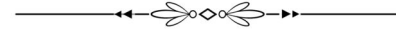
She pauses, but she already knows what she’s going to say. A blue bird flies and lands on a tree in front of her. If they can’t stand to be around Marie, then they don’t get to be around her.

“Nope.”

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Hours later, the sky is dark, and Rockefeller Center is full of people. It’s night, but somehow the air feels warmer than before. Marie stands in the crowd on her tiptoes searching over the crowd.

Finally, she sees Jess's blue hair. Marie waves to her over the crowd. Jess won't bring with her any judgements or expectations. Marie can just be.



As soon as Jess reaches her, she hugs Marie. There's no room to do this, but she does it anyway. Jess doesn't let go until Marie does. She hadn't been able to tell Jess about the rest of the day yet, but she didn't need to. Marie checks the time on her phone.

“With two minutes to spare!” Marie says. Jess laughs and they both look in the direction the crowd is facing.

A dark 80-foot-tall tree sits in front of the crowd. There's a barely visible outline of a star at the top of it. Everyone in the crowd, including Marie and Jess, feels the anticipation. Every face is smiling, including Marie's for the first time today. The countdown starts.

*Five, four, three, two, one.* All at once, the star on top of the tree lights up bright white and thousands of colorful lights cover the tree. As Marie watches the tree with Jess's hand in hers, the reflection of the colorful lights sparkles in her eyes.

*Madelyn Furman is an English writing major at McNeese State University. When she's not reading or writing, you can find her playing guitar or finishing a crochet project.*

# Olivia Doesn't Know

By Josslyn Ervin

No one gets away with a plain life for long. At some point, the unusual will crash in with no benefit of preparation. No forethought. No warning. Suddenly, everything can change, and we discover if it's truly rock or sand beneath one's feet.

2:27 pm. Gravel crunched beneath my black sneakers as I approached the front entrance of Meadow Street Baptist Church on August 21. I clutched a spiral-bound notebook in one hand and a camera in the other. Although it was 2017 and many of my colleagues had traded writing for typing, I still preferred paper, pencil, and camera over any new Apple product. This was a mature, black notebook that befitted my mature, nineteen-year-old self. It was nothing like my old, sky-blue diary with my name, Olivia Jenks, written in Crayola marker on the front.

2:28 pm. I climbed the four brick steps and observed the door, to which pale green paint battered by a century of exposure clung. Two rusty nails stabbed the wood. The shadows of a thousand hands cloaked the doorknob that my own must inevitably touch. Quaking, I forced

myself to relax. My jitters were completely uncalled-for. Besides, there was no backing out now. Timothy Hubert had taken the task of covering the grand opening of the pet store, and I'd be out of my newfound job if I didn't turn an article in by Friday. *You get one chance, Ms. Jenks*, I recalled Mr. Burgess growling at me as he begrudgingly gave me this lead, *one chance!*

A note to aspiring journalists of Lichentown – Mr. Burgess is a hard man. You'd best move away to make your writing debut, unless you want the talent violently squashed out of you like an insect's intestines under a boot. The Lichentown Gazette ought to be the last place one searches for journalistic employment. Unfortunately, I didn't possess the funds to escape my hometown, which meant I needed to meet Mr. Burgess's deadline. So I needed to open that door.

2:30 pm. I tucked a loose strand of auburn hair behind my ear, took a deep breath, and opened the door, shivering as my hand made contact with the cool doorknob. The first thing that struck me about the sanctuary was the tall stained-glass windows on either side, glowering down on the worn pews

placed as straight as a hymnal's spine. The front of the room looked the way I had expected it to – a decrepit piano, a stoic pulpit, and a sinking organ. I walked through the room without interest. Nothing unusual here, and thus, no reason for an astute journalist to remain.

2:32 pm. I passed through the splintered doorway at the front of the sanctuary and continued down the dim hall. These must have been the Sunday school rooms, adorned with folding tables and miscellaneous, outdated chairs. The carpet felt crunchy underfoot as I peeked in musty, dusty room after musty, dusty room. How large the congregation of this church must have been. I stopped at the entrance of a grim bathroom with two toilet stalls on one side and two once-shiny sinks on the other. Still, this place appeared normal. I'd have to put a writer's spin on it. Maybe, I could talk about the beneficial uniformity of Southern Baptist churches in the Bible belt, built to last and thrive. But who would want to read that? I needed something interesting. Newsworthy. Sensational. Like a ghost story.

2:35 pm. I stepped out of the bathroom and continued down the hall. Here was the nursery, the darkest place in the building. I hit a light switch nearby, but it didn't work. *Figures*, I grumbled. I dug a flashlight out of my purse and flipped it on.

The beam fell on a picture frame on the wall in front of me. It held a blank sheet of white paper, like what church ladies would give to four-year-olds to draw Jonah in the whale on.

The hall was already dark, but I could see the light being sucked from it. I frowned and scratched my ear. The solar eclipse! I remembered my star-crazy cousin, Dalton, gushing about it at the Independence Day Barbeque. Personally, I didn't appreciate the precise rarity of the moon blotting out the sun like black ink splashed on a masterpiece. Life is complicated enough. Why complicate night and day, the simplest things people can rely on?

2:36 pm. With an article to write, I didn't have time to philosophize. Blinking a few times, I went back to studying the picture frame. A small blue dot appeared on the paper. *Wait, what?* I rubbed my eyes and looked again. There was another blue dot, next to the first. Then, a squiggly yellow line, a pink circle... Astounded, I stared at the picture drawn by no one. It looked like a little kid's drawing of another child. A green flower akin to a daisy came next. I smiled as comfortable memories of paper and crayon trickled into my head.

Suddenly, an angry red line slashed across the

throat of the depicted figure. Then another. And another. Slowly, I backed away. I heard a small, aggressive, thudding sound all around. The other six picture frames had similar drawings, each depicting a child overwhelmed by red slashes. The sound began to bewilder me. In the darkness, I gripped my flashlight harder and fled through the hall. As I passed by the bathroom, the toilets flushed. Footsteps pursued me. A window broke in one of the rooms as I passed. I sprinted through the Sunday school hallway.

3:38. My logical journalist brain came back on. Would a proper reporter flee from a good story because she strained her eyes and the toilets malfunctioned? Of course not! I stopped running near the doorway to the sanctuary. There was another, smaller door adjacent to it, shadowy and curious. I stepped through it, shining my flashlight around the cramped space. A few stairs lead up to a baptismal pool. Warily, I mounted the stairs and peered into the water. A pale face stared back.

I jumped, jerking my head back and away from the atrocious sight. I uttered a strangled cry of revulsion and terror. When I hesitantly looked back into the water, I only had to study the face for half a second to realize it was a reflection of my own.

I laughed nervously. Why wasn't the pool empty? The church members must have been concerned about young children getting into it and drowning. I shivered at the thought of a drowned child's body hidden at the bottom of this caliginous pool. It wasn't hard to believe. As I gazed into the stagnant water again, a warm, flickering light appeared. Was it a reflection, or did it originate from the pool itself? I leaned over to get a better look. It was a reflection. I spun around, and without warning, something struck the back of my head, and I tumbled down the stairs, helpless as a ragdoll. All I saw before I got knocked out was a single candle stick floating in midair.

I blinked and licked my dry lips. My watch read 3:46, which meant I had only been out for about five minutes. The eclipse was almost over, light ventured back in and re-conquered the stolen territory after the interruption of its reign. Slowly, I stood up. My head was sore, but that appeared to be the only damage. I stuffed my things into my purse and fast-walked out of the church.

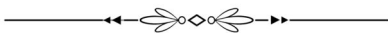
Since that day, I have done my best to discount those spooky events as a dream, hallucination, or mirage, but to no avail. I got just what I wanted – a ghost story.

I am treated as all witnesses of the unbelievable

are. Some call me crazy and shun me, and others believe and revere me. I'm not sure which is worse. After I published my article in the Lichentown Gazette, a group of skeptics visited the church and found evidence of what I had witnessed, such as the broken window, drawings covered in red slashes, and baptismal pool still full of dark water. They published their findings, and soon ghost hunters and stupid teenagers crawled all over that building. The goings on of Meadow Street Baptist Church became so blatantly ruinous that the city knocked it over.

I'm sorry they did. I'm sorry I can't make sense of it, and I can't tell all the people looking to me why it happened. I'm sorry I ever opened that green door in the first place.

I should have gone with the darn pet store.



*Josslyn Ervin is a homeschooled high school senior from rural South Carolina. Her interests include classic literature, music, and thunderstorms. She's seventeen years old, and this is her first published story.*



# Finders Keepers

By Niah Eppley

George wasn't a thief. Her sticky fingers usually only applied to pilfered cookies and midnight snacks, but her nails were already ruined, splintered and weak, from digging with her bare hands in the dirt in the dead of night, like a neighborhood dog searching endlessly for a bone just out of reach. Unlike a dog, George didn't have sturdy nails made for tearing apart the tight earth. If she wanted to continue her midnight action, then she would have to branch out and find tools to take the place of her vulnerable body.

The hardware store smelled of gasoline, a grimy layer of sawdust clung to every surface. She left long lines as she skimmed her hand across dusty shelves, like carvings into sand, until she found herself in the small gardening section at the far end of the store. The shovels weren't the bright colored plastic she was accustomed to; these had curved metal heads and rubber handholds. They were made for carving into fragile earth.

Before grabbing one with a dark green grip, George touched every item on the shelf. Her fingers, coated in dust, left tiny markings behind, paintings only her body could produce. If the

woman working the counter tried to peer around shelves and merchandise crammed into the small space, she would only see a girl trying to waste away time during a hot summer. She wasn't a customer but not someone to chase out, either.

George carefully took the gardening shovel from its hook and pulled the others forward to take the place of the snatched. She slipped it into the pocket of her baggy hoodie. One she preferred because it seemed to swallow her whole. She could disappear into ripples and folds of fabric. Charlie used to compare her to a hermit crab, retreating into a shell too big. Maybe, she wore it to discourage mean comments from her grandparents and nosy kids at school who took any opening to criticize, or she wore it to feel the comfort of being small, even as her body grew.

She was a cute, chubby kid, but with age, people became less willing to accept the natural roundness of her face and body. The loose clothes in which she draped herself were an advantage, not something for other kids to mock. But, she found other ways to strengthen her outer shell. The sharpness of her tongue was a good deterrent

for most. For a girl that had no sharp edges, she often left people nursing tender wounds.

As George started to weave back through the shelves to the front of the store, she was interrupted by a familiar call.

“I thought that was you! How are you doing, George?” asked Mr. Allen, her elderly neighbor.

Mr. Allen was the kind of man you’d see on a commercial advertising some new medication: tall and flat and still getting around regardless of his ever increasing age. He used to babysit her brother and her when they were small, but as they grew, their constant energy became too much for his frail body and house to handle. She has vague memories of sitting on Mr. Allen’s lap while Charlie splashed around in a kiddie-pool, but they are overshadowed by how he treated her for the last five years as her girlhood became more evident. Like the kids at school, he couldn’t tolerate all the ways in which she didn’t look like every other perfectly pretty girl. He had always liked Charlie better, anyway. Mr. Allen had raised three boys and Charlie fit nicely into the golden boy archetype. “Shouldn’t you be in school?”

“It’s July.”

“Oh, that’s right! Sorry ‘bout that. What are you doin’ then in this fine establishment?” Mr. Allen lived in the south his whole life, until he retired and his restless legs brought him to their small Indiana town. He had a way of saying things, buttery soft and as sweet as sugar that made him sound cloying, even if he was interrogating her. It made him stand out from locals who clipped words rather than letting them linger on their tongues.

“I just...” It was none of his business, but Mr. Allen would only hunker down if she confronted him with that. He was just as much a dog with a bone as George was. “Just didn’t want to be home, I guess.”

Mr. Allen got a pitying look in his eye. The look that adults give children who have gone through something terrible, something shattering, but adults don’t get it. At Charlie’s funeral, every family friend and distant acquaintance looked at her the same way. Like they understood her pain more than she ever could. Like she didn’t realize the enormity of tragedy. Like they held all the answers to the secrets of grief.

“Ah, I expect you wouldn’t.” The loud buzzing of the air conditioner filled the space between them. His hunched back did nothing to lessen his height

He was always looking down on her.

“Bye, sir.” As she said goodbye, her body already turned towards the door.

“Bye, George.” he sighed.

George hightailed it out. The bell above the door jingled, a tiny band’s final goodbye. With her prize safely secured and no one to stop her, George started the short walk back home.

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Though the path between town and home was ingrained in her brain, George wasn’t used to walking it alone. Before, she was accompanied by her mother and older brother. Charlie and George would walk side by side, exceptionally close even with the age gap. They were loud with their youth, disrupting an otherwise serene neighborhood. Their mother would trail behind, waving at neighbors and tracking new cracks in the pavement, which she reported to the HOA when she got home.

Now, George dragged her feet alone. Without Charlie by her side, cracking jokes, knocking into her side, or pushing her into the grass of manicured lawns, the ten-minute walk stretched

into eternity. There was no more poking fun at the decorations people put up for Halloween and Christmas or peaking through the front windows of houses and into living rooms almost identical to their own. It was just George, staring up at houses that have remained unchanged.

There was only one entrance to the neighborhood, so George passed by each one of her neighbors’ houses. The house Charlie collapsed in front of was no exception. The house with the lawn their mother dragged Charlie onto, so he wasn’t lying on hot pavement when she put her ear to his chest, where a neighbor called 911 when he saw a family of three collapse into a family of two. The place where George stood helplessly watching, as her mother climbed into the back of an ambulance with Charlie: the ambulance’s lights casting his skin red, the flashing lights the same pace as her heart beat. As they drove away, George began to weep.

Now, the house was the boogeyman in her dreams, growing taller and wider until it eclipsed the sun and stretched out across the horizon. Its shadow forever linked to her final memory of Charlie. Before the trees in the backyard regrew their leaves, she could catch glimpses of it between branches and through the gaps of houses. It always seemed to be looking back.

Her own house seemed miniscule in comparison. The garden beds, previously home to native flowers and whatever her mother could get from the grocery store, now withered, languishing for a drink of water, a helping hand. The flowers her mother lovingly cared for, dead. The house itself, a red bricked, two-story home her father pampered, looked shabby in a way it never had before under his care. Routine maintenance was no longer a priority in the face of losing a son that the house should have protected, like her parents were betrayed by its inability to shelter their family from harm.

George opened the front door, she kicked her tennis shoes off into a pile of sneakers, heels, and yard shoes. Charlie's favorite pair were absent from their designated place, right in the middle. Her parents were having a hushed conversation in the kitchen, barely audible over the sound of her bare feet on hardwood floors. Her father's voice was muffled and quiet, and her mother's rising in pitch so George could hear every third or fourth word: you, right, house, George.

These types of conversations, previously few and far between, fights between two people who always avoided conflict, had become commonplace in the three months after Charlie

died. It was the only way her father could be dragged into acknowledging the existence of life outside of the comfort of TV, and the only time her mother stopped hiding behind menial tasks: cleaning out drawers, organizing the basement.

Instead of engaging with the argument filling the kitchen, George went up the staircase lined with old family photos and to her room at the top of the stairs. Her door was cracked open, waiting for her entrance into its embrace, while the door across the hall was closed from any grieving eyes. She could imagine Charlie listening to music or playing video games if she weren't confronted with the growing quiet that seemed to creep out from under the door. The reality of his dust collecting room, all his things arranged perfectly, the carelessness in which he treated his belongings absent, was too much to bear. She appreciated whoever made the decision to lock it up and out of sight.

George shut the bedroom door behind her as she finally unveiled her stolen treasure. The gardening tool, cold metal and dark colors, was a stark contrast to the pink that occupied every square inch of her room. It belonged to a girl that had never felt any real pain, only scrapped knees and stubbed toes and biting comments from classmates. George had long since grown out of

the pink. Her closet, full of large, secondhand hoodies and T-shirts for bands she hadn't listened to, was more of a reflection of who she was now than her own room. Her parents, confronted with the fact that they'd lost who she used to be while they weren't paying attention, would have to mourn her at the same time they grieved for Charlie.

After digging through her closet, the floor was scattered with Legos and battered copies of Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys, George secured a space under the abused books for her shovel. Once the sun had set, her parents had gone to bed, and the nosy neighbors had settled in to watch reruns of the sitcoms depicting a foreign serenity, she would take her shovel and dig until she found what she was looking for.

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Lego set building was the one activity that their father could do with Charlie without getting distracted halfway through. They'd spend days after birthdays setting up Death Stars or entire cities out of tiny bricks. It gave Charlie a chance to connect with their forever estranged father, and George craved that closeness. She was never granted that same openness that Charlie was freely gifted. When George broke Charlie's favorite Star

Wars Lego set, a large Imperial TIE fighter, he was furious. He called her the worst sister ever and vowed to never talk to her again. Eventually, he calmed down, realizing how boring Battleship and Hide-n-Seek were with only one player, but not before he got all his most cherished toys together and buried them in an old toolbox in the backyard in a fit of possessiveness. George had become a little obsessed about the whereabouts of the buried treasure. She felt like a detective or archeologist trying to uncover the secrets of the past, but without Charlie's help, there was too much ground to cover.

One particularly boring summer, George took a shovel from her mother's gardening shed and dug hole after hole in the freshly mowed yard, trying to find what her brother tried to keep away. By the time her mother caught her, Charlie having tattled after the fifth hole, the yard was a mess of overturned dirt. Their mother, usually exceptionally well-tempered, bought the meanest padlock she could and forbade George from unsupervised time in the backyard the whole summer. So, while the gardening tools sat neglected in the shed, George was forced to steal for her plan to work.

The Christmas before Charlie died, he confessed to her that he had forgotten where he buried the

box, so they vowed to search for it together when the ground finally thawed, but time got away from them and soon enough, Charlie was buried too.

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Her mother laid down steaming ceramic dishes of chicken, homemade mac and cheese, and broccoli. Her mother was making more and more elaborate dinners each day. They used to rely on a few consistent meals, but now, she would spend hours working over a hot stove, using spices she used to never touch. Her hands were in constant motion, her body not sitting for even a second. Stillness was the greatest sin. Her father, on the other hand, rarely stood from his recliner. His butt had become a permanent imprint on the seat, the soft leather as malleable as beach sand. The track he paced from chair to kitchen to chair again ruined the softness of the previously plush carpet. His immobility left just as much of a stain as her mother's constant productivity, who left unwashed dishes in the sink for days at a time.

As her father dug in, George and her mother sat back in their chairs, neither reaching to scoop food onto their plates. Without Charlie, their routine, the way they'd eaten for twelve years, was ruined. They weren't sure how to move, who was supposed to go first, or what could

break the silence. Charlie, forever talkative and energetic, carried them through countless dinner conversations. He could rope their father into talking about his day and irritate George out of her silent deference to the louder people in the room.

“Did you see those holes in the backyard? Mr. Allen was telling me about the mole problem he had a few years ago. Completely tore up his yard.” Her mother said, turning her fork over and over again in the palm of her hand. George squeezed her own utensil tightly in hand, the thin handle leaving a deep imprint in her palm.

“Uhuh.” her father said as he shoveled bites of chicken into his mouth, eyes unfocused.

“He also told me about how he ended up killing it. Apparently- “

“You're going to kill it?” George asked.

“George!” Her mother acted scandalized, like she wasn't the one to bring it up. She was always like this, blaming others while she victimized herself. How dare anyone suggest that she might be at fault! It was the first time that week her mother deigned to say her name. It must have grown bitter in her mouth, a reminder of the name she could no longer call.

“What does Mr. Allen know anyway?” George mumbled under her breath, scrapping her fork across an empty plate, listening to the screech of metal against ceramic and watching as small lines appeared in the white paint.

“Don’t make a nuisance of yourself.” Her mother said as she yanked the offending utensil out of George’s hand. “Is one nice dinner too much to ask? And Mr. Allen has always been kind to us. To you.”

Charlie’s seat, pushed up to the table and placemat clean, felt excruciatingly empty. Without him, the person the whole family orbited, they were set loose, ready to bump into each other and shatter.

“Mr. Allen said he saw you at the store. Said you were looking around like you were planning to take something.”

“You have him spying on me?” George was angry. For the first time since Charlie died, George’s mind wasn’t totally occupied by the loneliness of missing him. There wasn’t any reason to get mad at her father, a non-entity in their house, like a virtual pet you had to remember to feed. But her mother, her mother who was always stepping in, always putting her foot out there, so different from

George herself, was the perfect figure for which she could aim all her bottled-up pain at.

“You guys don’t even leave the house, but you have Mr. Allen, who hates me by the way, spying on me?”

A big sigh escaped her father’s chest. His chest expanding, pushing against the edge of the table enough to slightly skooch back his chair, like he was exasperated by her show of emotion. Her mother, on the other hand, seemed to deflate.

“Why did it have to be Charlie? It shouldn’t have been him.” her mother asked, tears slipping from her eyes and falling on her still empty plate. The balloon of tension built up over the last three months, hanging over their heads at every dinner just like this one, popped. It took a minute before George realized no one was going to say anything. No apology. Nothing that could bring them back together.

George pushed her chair away from the dining room table, stood up, and left her parents sitting together, but alone.

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The box continued to elude her searching. After

spending three hours with the shovel in her hands and knees in the dirt, she was tired and frustrated as she sat back onto the grass. George had spent years looking for it on and off. Charlie was the absolute worst at hide and seek, always trying to squeeze his body in places it wouldn't fit, behind curtains or under the sink in their bathroom, so it shouldn't have been that hard to find something he hid five years ago. George tried to put herself in the mindset of her brother, but she always had a hard time imagining what life was like for him. As the golden boy, the first born son, he was everything she could never be. He loved their parents, flaws and all, and they loved him in return. Even before Charlie's death made her abrasive and angry, she was already the add on. Her parents wanted three boys, but when they had her, birthed powder pink and crying, they decided not to risk another pregnancy. How was a child to deal with the fact that for her parents, she was the worst-case scenario? That she continued to be the worst-case scenario.

Her mother loved Charlie with the same care she loved her garden. She coaxed him into growing taller and wider. She wanted him to take up space, a beautiful flower that just needed some tender, loving care to reach his full potential. George was a weed her mother tried desperately to eradicate, but she kept missing the roots because under the

protection of Charlie's arms, George was safe. The garden though, previously bursting with the work nurturing hands tended, was dead. Nothing grew there anymore, not even weeds.

George would never touch the garden. She was afraid of an even harsher punishment than what she got for digging around the shed, so it would have been the perfect hiding place. George imagined Charlie carefully digging into the dirt, trying to find the best place for his favorite things.

George brandished her shovel and dug. She started closest to the back door and worked her way around the side of the house, cautious of the motion sensor flood lights pointed into the darkest corners of the yard. When she came upon the place under her brother's window, where the ivy grew tall and wrapped up the side of the house, she knew she was in the right spot. Her pants, crusted with dry dirt at the knees and shins, stretched as she leaned forward. Her shovel set a furious pace as it carved into the earth. Every rock and root network she passed made her heart stutter an awkward beat in her chest. Until finally, her shovel hit something that was not so easily discarded. The clang rang out in the quiet backyard, interrupting the silence that had settled over the neighborhood. George waited a second for lights to flicker on, for someone to notice, for



someone to catch her red handed, but no one did.

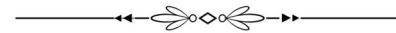
She threw her shovel to the side and started to dig with her own hands. Her breaths became more frantic as she unearthed a heavily rusted box.

George yanked it out of the earth, fell backwards onto her butt with the force of her pull. The box landed next to her in the yard, but the handle stayed in her grasp. A final piece of her brother that she never really got to know, too young to remember what he really hid away, and she found it. She rolled up onto her knees and cracked open the toolbox.

At first, George didn't know what she was looking at. Muddy, grayish water obscured all of the box's content. As she dumped it into the yard, it became clear that everything was ruined. Toy cars were stripped of their paint. Lego figures' faces were completely gone, and bundles of paper now a slimy mush at the bottom. This was what George had been searching for. All the hope she had tied into these tiny things, gone. There was nothing more to learn from a box of ruined toys. It didn't spontaneously give her insight into who Charlie was, nor did it fill the cavity near her heart where he used to be.

She thought that everything buried would eventually be welcomed home, but whatever

magic carried in his toys that kept a favored stuffed animal's stitches from tearing or an action figure from losing a leg, no longer existed. There was no satisfaction in finding something that had been ruined long ago. There was no value. It wasn't the gold pirates hide away or the solution to an unsolved mystery, but more proof that everything could be and would be taken away. George had unknowingly been in a battle with the earth, and the earth won. It reclaimed these precious things, leaving her with only vague memories of what used to be.



*Niah is a writer and poet working on her Bachelors in English. She writes about self-discovery, forgiveness, mourning, and all the things that try to escape definition. She lives in Ohio with her darling cat Nico and the creature lurking in the woods behind her house.*

# Of Wind and Waves

By Bailey Kim

Eris first met her when she was fourteen.

She doesn't remember much of that day now. It was the first day of high school, and the entire student body was giddy over the new milestone they'd reached. Everything they did back then seemed so new, so big compared to the small amount they'd experienced of the world so far, even though they liked to pretend amongst each other that they'd already lived lifetimes. People will always wish to act more maturely than they are.

Most of that day was a blur. How much is there to remember from the first day of school, anyway? Students were hustled from class to class and sat in itchy plastic seats lined in rows. They would daydream, their mind already wandering to mundane things, already wondering when they could go back home and rest in the comfort of their beds. Thinking about it now, everything felt so simple back then. So easy in a way that she would've never thought of as easy before.

Eris was never one for lasting friendships throughout her entire life. She's convinced herself

that she'd given them up, ignoring the pang of envy she felt whenever she'd witnessed those who could do what she deemed impossible for herself. Internally, she'd come to an understanding that for her, maintaining friendships was tiringly impossible. It was much easier to avoid the hurt that would eventually come once they grew tired of her and decided that the grass was greener on whatever side they'd set eyes on next. And the grass would always be greener because Eris is only a short, pale yellow, dying blade in what is a vast field of tall grass.

Maybe that's why she remembers the first time she met her so well. It's the only memory that stands out from that day and the only one Eris can still recall in perfect detail even all these years later.

*She's sitting in an awfully humid classroom, staring at some achingly boring syllabus projected on the front board, fanning her shirt in a poor attempt to dry down the thin layer of sweat starting to form underneath it. A beige bag is set down at her feet and a body dumps itself into the seat next to hers. She looks up.*

*“Hello! I’m Gabbie.” She smiles a smile so bright that Eris thinks she’s blinded for a moment. “What’s your name?”*

The rest was history, as they say.

Eris saw Gabbie nearly every day after. Their friendship grew quickly, quicker than Eris could remember a friendship growing ever before, sprouting like dandelions in the early months of spring and blossoming in bright yellow hues. They spent every waking moment they could

together, exchanging stories of no great importance and laughter of too much. Eris saw the sun in Gabbie’s eyes and could only hope it would never burn out.

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Gabbie lived on the other side of town in a large modern house so pristinely white that she wondered how they managed to keep it clean. It was extravagant in every way it could be, crisp and straight and beautiful. It was everything Eris’ house wasn’t and, maybe, everything she wished it could be. Bright bushes of flowers framed the pathways and the windows sparkled, reflecting rainbows onto the marble floors. Intricate chandeliers hung from the ceiling, and winding

staircases lined the walls to the second floor.

Eris never met Gabbie’s parents, or anyone else in the house really, but she came to realize it was never necessary since the house already seemed to have everything they ever needed. The pantry was full of their favorite things to keep them fed, and the house never felt completely empty, with things appearing at their own convenience in a way that could only logically be explained as someone placing them there. Eris had never seen them, though.

It was here that they wasted their days, most after school when they finished their work, some when they didn’t but couldn’t bring themselves to care. They’d play games, sing songs, and talk, about anything and everything. For the first time ever, Eris felt as though someone cared for what she had to say. Her words mattered to Gabbie, and that was maybe what Eris loved most about her, because Gabbie smiled when she smiled, laughed when she laughed, and cried when she cried.

It was also here that they made a promise.

They were watching a movie, lounging on one of Gabbie’s large couches, its cushions so soft that it felt as though Eris were sinking into it, becoming a part of it. The film was some cliché romantic

comedy, one with a plot you could probably find a million remakes of by different studios, and Eris couldn't help but find her mind wandering. She watched how all the main character's friends practically revolved their lives around her, always attentive to what she had to say, even if it was just complaining about the man she saw across the street one day. Eris wondered if she could ever have that with someone, despite how unrealistic it was. To be a main character with unwavering friendships and undying support no matter the scenario. She wondered if she had that with Gabbie. Didn't it certainly seem like it?

"What are you thinking about?"

Eris sometimes wondered if Gabbie knew her better than she knew herself.

"It's nothing."

"It's not." Gabbie smiled softly. "You know you can tell me anything, right?"

Eris knew.

"It's just..." She paused. "Would you ever leave?"

"Where would I go?"

"I don't know." Eris rubbed her palms against her eyes. "It's just what everyone does."

"Eris," Gabbie said, the most serious she had ever seen her. She grabbed Eris' hand and squeezed it with both of hers. "I promise, on my life, that I will stay with you no matter what. I won't leave, not like the others."

"Will you stay forever?"

"If it's meant to be, then yes." Gabbie extended her pinkie towards Eris, and they linked their fingers, gripping tight.

"Forever."

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Eris first met Bella through a school project, and even after it was over, they never stopped talking. She had Gabbie to thank for a lot of her early friendship with Bella, feeling less afraid as she was only months ago to venture past the point of just acquaintances. Bella was a lot like Gabbie in a way, though if Gabbie was a breeze, Bella was rushing waves. Gabbie always knew the right things to say and where she needed to be when Eris needed her. Bella, however, sometimes said the wrong things and was often occupied with her

own life and own thoughts, and sometimes she was a great listener, and sometimes her mind was too clouded to be. That's what Eris liked most about Bella. She was uniquely human, but instead of annoyingly so, in a way that felt real. Bella would grab her hand, and Eris would feel the pressure of it in a way she never felt with Gabbie.

She never introduced them to each other. She wasn't completely sure why, though now she may have a few ideas. Maybe it was because Gabbie felt so personal to Eris. It felt so strange to think about them meeting because then maybe, something would crack and the happiness she had been soaking in and building on for the past few months would all shatter. Perhaps she thought they wouldn't get along. Regardless, after meeting Bella, Eris started to see Gabbie less and less.

It wasn't that Bella replaced Gabbie. In Eris' mind, nobody could replace what Gabbie brought, but eventually, she stopped showing up to class. After school, Eris would run to her house, across the field, and into the garden, and there, Gabbie would be sitting amongst the flowers.

*"Where were you today?"*

*"Here." Gabbie plucked a rose from a nearby bush, careful to choose one without too many thorns, and tucked it behind Eris' ear. "Where else?"*

Gabbie had never revealed much about herself. Eris never put much thought into it before, but truly, she was a mystery hidden between light-colored clothes, long hair, and sweet eyes. What did she like to do? What was her family like? What was her favorite color? After all these months, did Eris really know Gabbie at all?

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"I'm leaving."

"What?"

They were sitting in her garden again, coloring their drawings of bees and birds and butterflies and looking at the sky to watch the clouds pass. They never talked much these days, but Gabbie's presence brought Eris a peacefulness she couldn't find elsewhere. It was safe. Comfortable.

"I'm leaving."

"To where?" Eris sat up, turning to look down at Gabbie, who was still lying down on her back,

staring at the sky.

“Somewhere else.”

“Is your family moving?” Eris sounded panicked.

“No. I just need to move on.” Why was Gabbie so calm?

“From what? From me?” Eris was standing now. She could feel her eyes burning.

“From everything. From this town. From the people here.” Gabbie stood too.

“We had a promise. I thought we had a promise. You said forever.” Eris could feel the tears rolling down her chin.

“We did.” Gabbie reached out, wiping a tear as it fell from Eris’ eye. “But it’s just not meant to be. Not anymore.”

“What happened? What did I do wrong?” Eris’ chest ached and she hated the look in Gabbie’s eyes, how back then they held the sun, and now were clouded over, rays of light barely peaking through.

“Nothing.” Gabbie smiled. It wasn’t a sad smile. It

was an accepting one. A genuine, proud one. “You learned, Eris. You did well.”

Eris hated how light Gabbie felt when she hugged her. She hated the last time she looked back to that garden with the flower bushes, the house with the spiral staircases, the girl with the now clouded eyes but still bright smile. She hated how, the next day, when she ran and ran, there sat no crisp, white, modern house, but instead a vast field of tall grass and wildflowers and streams and no sign that a house ever stood there at all. She hated how she never saw Gabbie again, left with only the sounds of the breeze against the grass and the water against the rocks.

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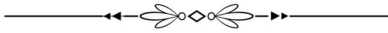
It’s been six years since Eris met Gabbie. Leaves have changed and fallen many times over, flowers have died and rebloomed, and the world has kept spinning.

It’s been five years since Eris lost Gabbie. In perspective, maybe five years isn’t that long at all. It’s felt like centuries.

It’s been five years of confusion and questioning, years of only Eris and her memories and no one else’s. Sometimes she sits and wonders what

could've happened if she never met Bella at all. Would Gabbie still be here? Would she have kept her promise? Would it have been meant to be? She wonders where Gabbie is now, if anywhere at all.

It's been five years, and after all this time Eris has started to wonder if, maybe, just maybe, Gabbie never truly existed at all.



*Bailey Kim found her love for books at a very young age.*

*Her father would fall asleep while reading, she would eagerly picture how the story would unfold. Today, she is a dedicated gymnast who devotes almost as much time training in the gym as she does in school. To unwind, she often stays up too late reading. When she has a free moment, she enjoys writing short stories, daydreaming and sketching. Bailey is currently a junior in high school and resides in New Jersey.*

# The Vineyard

By Sydney Heintz

There were entire clots of them in the vines, glowing like velvet lanterns. Sam flicked one in the air, caught it in his mouth with a satisfying thwack. Viv tried. Grapes started dotting the grass. Then he said he'd teach her but she didn't want to be taught anything by a boy.

In the evening they'd go haunt the playground above the school. The oak stretching its black limbs into the sky. "Go get the ball, scaredy cat!" And indeed, she was afraid of what was on the other side of the wall, but put on a brave face and went and got it anyway. The terror of being examined in the dark. She shrieked. He laughed.

It was a sleepy joyous August. She was nine. He was a year older. They felt alone; they were alone. The only time she took notice of another presence was when her Pa would come home late and go to bed even later, and she would pretend to be asleep. Then at sunrise she'd run down the road to Sam's, and the whole thing would become a faded memory against the luminous swell of their voices, ever chirping and singing in the dawn.

The grapes were one in a series of projects. There

was also, importantly, the milk. They realized that the barn was an easy target. Only the Old Soldier worked there, sometimes sweeping, sometimes milking, always humming a tune while he toiled. The sweet pots would be left to warm in the sun while he checked the cows, a bunch of sorry-looking creatures.

"Hello, Mr. Hardison," said Viv, striding into the shadow of the barn.

"Hello missus," replied the Old Soldier.

She stood there as he took long sips from his mug. Then she kicked up a bunch of hay and watched it fan out. Sam had poked his head out from behind the gates to see what was going on.

The Old Soldier's eyes were like no other eyes she'd ever seen. They reminded her of the stones in the courtyard of the church. Wet and misty and swimming with silence. She thought she saw him flick them in her direction, but she couldn't be sure.

"You always by your lonesome, Mr. Hardison?"



“Yus missus. Since me wife died.”

“What’d she die of, Mr. Hardison?”

“O’ the winter, missus.”

Viv felt a shiver despite the heat, which pasted over everything thickly. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Sam starting to handle the buckets, patting the creatures sometimes as he lifted them. A little uneasy, Viv screwed the points of her shoes into the dry mud. She said,

“I can help you sometime, Mr. Hardison. With them animals an all.”

This threw the Old Soldier into a thunder of protests – “That’s ‘ery nice o’ you missus, ‘ery nice indeed, but it ain’t necessary, missus” – as he lifted himself into an upright position. Viv watched him half-awestruck, half-afraid. She wouldn’t have believed that the Old Soldier was once like her, a fancy-driven child of nine. Not when he looked like a saint risen from the dead.

“Lemme show you ‘em cow-darlins, missus,” he said. And before she could retort, the Old Soldier had made a full turn, and there stood Sam in full view, two brimming buckets in hand. Viv saw

his face contort in horror. Neither of them said anything as the Old Soldier’s eyes glazed over the area.

“Right o’er here, missus,” he said, staggering towards Sam. The two children stayed rooted to the spot as the Old Soldier’s greying figure approached the cows. Sam resumed tip-toeing away, and Viv felt something squeeze in her chest. Even when his small shadow disappeared, she continued to watch the Old Soldier stroke his cattle, the fog in his look lifting as he sounded out bits of thoughts: “Them lay down when the rain comin’, see – the wind tell’em more than any other creature. Even me wife wa’nt that acquainted with them ways a’ nature, missus, no’ even she, them best of wives a man can aks for, missus, picking fruit all day long in that forest at the edge o’ town. Then ‘course there was the war, and a war ain’t got no time to be consid’rate, so it got its way with me eyes, see, missus, and now it’s jus’ me and em creatures, jus’ us, missus, but we take good care o’ each other, don’t we my darlins?” Then he lapsed back into his tune, and the glaze over his eyes sealed itself again like filled crevasses of earth. “Missus?” he said, “Missus, you see ‘em beauties?” But Viv had already begun running along the path.

She found Sam above the school. Chin licked with

milk.

“Who knew the man was blind as a bat!” he hollered when he saw her coming down the road. But as she approached, he saw she had turned color. “What’s wrong?”

She merely sat on the ledge a bit further from him, the one that gave onto the lake. She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t know how to say it.

“We gotta take ’em back, Sam.”

He wheeled around to look at her, one finger still in his mouth.

“Are you crazy?!”

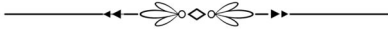
“We gotta!” she said, shaking in spite of herself. “He’s all alone. We can’t. We just can’t.” Then she began to cry, and Sam went silent. Four legs dangling over a stone wall. The light filtering red through the leaves.

“Yuh really feel sorry for Old Soldier?” he asked, almost in a whisper.

A moment passed before she nodded, hair splayed about her face, neck open to the clouds. This was the time when the trees froze into dusk, and all the

houses along the vineyard road lit up one by one like earth-grown stars. It began to rain. Slowly at first, then more, until her T-Shirt clung to her back and Sam held out a pink tongue to the sky. For a long time they watched the lake shimmering coolly around the pier, half-observed by the sheets of rain, wondering silently at its benign immensity. But what Viv would most remember, was when the storm lifted, and a small fire seemed to hang in the space between two mountains, a ruby in an otherwise bloodless sunset. How she longed to be suspended there, gazing upon the prize beneath! She thought of sharing this with Sam, but, deciding against it, the moment was buried and lost to the depths of herself.

She took the milk back that night, her lean arms struggling against the weight. The barn was quieter now, with only the animals’ slow breath rising to the heavens. A flap of wings, and a pigeon landed on a beam above as Viv passed by each of the enclosures. An earthquake made of the smallest rustle of grass. At the far end she lay down the pots and seated herself next to them. She imagined the Old Soldier finding them the next day, and lay back against the hay with a weak smile spread across her face, her soul shining just that little bit brighter in the dark.



*Sydney Heintz is an incoming freshman at the University of Cambridge. She is an alumna of the Iowa Young Writers' Studio and has been published in the Write the World Review and Parallax Online. Though originally from New York, she has been living in Switzerland her entire life, where she reads, paints, and practices Bach.*

# POETRY



By Ruby Seidner

## Metamorphosis

My metamorphosis began when I was a little girl  
unafraid to express all emotions with my tongue stuck out,  
and one hand on my hip.

Until, the day I learned that my *I love you's*  
and political rants would be met with awkward smiles,  
and heads turning away from me.

When that happened the little girl broke, and what was left in her place  
was a shy preteen so afraid to make the wrong  
move, she hid behind not caring,

behind slacking, and a raunchy sense of humor

Because why try, if every good idea,

every dream realized, every report card

will always lead to another death, another friend lost,

another rejection, and another day that ends in tears.

This girl isn't forever,

but the person in her place isn't that much better.

Because after her came a teenager trying so hard to be perfect,

trying to make every good grade, every achievement, every piece of linear writing

numb the emotions she tries to forget.

That girl still exists, as my next metamorphosis hasn't happened yet.

I'm changing though, i'm diving into my heart and soul,

trying is trying to find the mutant underneath

the pounds of makeup.

The warrior with the confidence of a thousand suns.

The oddity who owns her curves.

The freak of nature who charges forward towards a future that may not even exist.

The goddess with geodesic cosmic energy,

that she uses to create ballads of love, hate and everything in between.

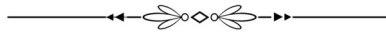
The adolescent that holds her lover's hand without the fear that someone will break her own.

The girl who is okay.

Maybe this wonder exists, maybe she is what she looks like, or maybe she is something else completely.

All I know as I drown in the bile of my own heart

is that she is someone worth looking for.



*Ruby Seidner is a high-school student who has been writing since she was a little girl. She has been published in The Global Youth Review, The Coterie Youth Mental Magazine, and AllTeenpolitics with forthcoming publications from Polyphony Lit's blog, and Chewing Dirt Magazine. She lives in California with her parents and two dogs.*

By Katie Nelson

## Glass

She is glass.

Skin clear as a cloudless sky,

no rainy red spots on her cheeks—

She needn't cry for weeks. Not in front of me.

Like a child standing open-mouthed outside a toy shop,

peering through the window, bottom to top, scanning every aisle;

only my eye is on the pane nailed in the frame,

the flowerless vase. A step closer

and all I see is myself.

She crouches in the curves of the rim,

stretched thin. *Come out, come out.*

If only she were iron, obsidian. No, brass.

Then our bodies could blend on that fragile frame,

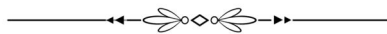
mine heightened, hers widened.

*Come out, come out.*

A peek from the corner, the bat of a lash—anything to clash our roaming gazes.

But, alas, I must turn away, mustn't waste my day

over a girl who's only glass.



*Katie Nelson is the author of a full-length fantasy novel and a short story collection entitled, Parties All Around. Her works have been recognized by Pigeon Review and the Bridport Prize. Katie is currently a senior in high school with intentions of studying creative writing in college.*

By Aigerim Bibol

## **Medusa**

They called her a monster,  
transformed from fair maiden into foul creature

A girl whose beauty rivaled that of the gods themselves,  
whose name was whispered in equal awe and envy

Powerless against Poseidon's lustful desires,  
her sacred sanctuary was seized by his merciless grip

Blamed for the sea god's sins,  
she bore Athena's wrath, her suffering a scapegoat for his violation

Banished from the realm of man, she wandered a path unknown,  
a lost soul longing for a home in a world turned against her

Her once luscious tresses now venomous serpents,  
writhing and twisting in perpetual torment

Her once lovely blue eyes now cursed with a petrifying gaze,  
turning strangers and lovers alike into cold, unyielding stone

Her once wide-eyed innocence stolen by fate's cruel hand,  
a cautionary tale for those who dare to defy divine authority

In a garden once blooming with flowers, now a graveyard of statues,  
her name was whispered in terror and contempt



Young Perseus, hailed as a hero, held her head like a trophy,  
a weapon forged from a woman's pain, forever displayed on Athena's shield

Oh, Medusa, how your tears fall,  
silent rivers of sorrow

Did they hear your cries of agony,  
lost in the echoes of despair?

Did they ever stop to wonder about the heart  
hidden behind the viper's hiss?

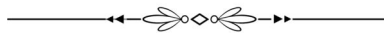
Did it even occur to them that you didn't have a choice,  
bound by the whims of gods with no concern for your grief?

It must have been lonely on that island,  
forced into a lifetime of solitude

Fearing your reflection, a cruel reminder of the price you paid  
for being a pawn in their game

Cursed for your beauty and slain for your lack thereof,  
forever remembered as the villain in your own story

They called her a monster, but she was just a girl



*Aigerim Bibol is a high school junior from the DC area. She is an editor for Polyphony Lit Magazine, The Trailblazer Literary Magazine, Peiskos Literary Magazine, and a BreakBread Literary Apprentice. When she's not reading or writing, she can be found singing along to Taylor Swift, binge-watching Gilmore Girls, and drinking copious amounts of coffee.*

By Mehuru Alaspure

## Heart

It lay there  
Broken into pieces  
Like a shattered chandelier

All of the light drained from its chamber  
Crimson red, bathed in blood  
A frighteningly alluring colour

It lay there motionless  
Almost black with hate

It rested like a raven staring off into the starry night  
Begging for a breath  
Begging for life  
But all it was  
A vessel of emotions bottled up  
Suppressed, Compressed  
Till it turned into a deep abyss of nothing

The frost blue of my veins almost lethal  
Looked dead and bloody cold.  
It looked glossy in tears

Rhythmic beat palpating out of a soft peachy flesh.  
A quiet orchestra  
Binding the strings of life

Syncopating with my blood

It played with my psyche

And brought hope

On the coldest days

And the darkest nights

When everything felt empty and out of reach

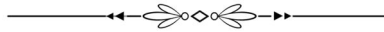
When all my love was gone

When my tears choked me till my dry throat felt bloody

Till my arteries tore out of my flesh

It was still beating

My little Heart.



*Meheru Alaspure is from Pune, India. She is currently studying in grade 9 and is 13 years old. She writes poems as a hobby. Poetry feels like escapism to Meheru. All her feelings, flowing as words, she puts down on paper.*

By Sruthi Kotlo

## **Paramount**

The death of a star,  
mutilated in space,  
seethes from the ruins of its own fuel

It convulses into itself  
laughing and shuddering,  
as the heat clambers out its lungs.

When your palm meets the glass,  
the warmth expands to your flesh,  
and in this room of people, the heat collects

You watch as they watch you  
when you're off to the side,  
and you watch when they don't watch.

The star is igniting, in medias res,  
with the crushing weight  
of being uninteresting in an infinite space.

## Health Inspection

The health inspector walks. Checking boxes. Down the road.

Checking boxes. Checking boxes.

Down the road.

With silted teeth and thick fingers

Eyes sagging

In the restaurant's salubrious lighting

Peeking between corners and over ledges

Under stools, behind bodies

Foraging for rot, the avaricious search,

the desire to find,

hidden decay

With his fingers prying, splayed against cabinets

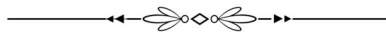
Eyes cerulean, tainted with lightning streaks cutting red

Skin turning insipid from the hours of hunting

One thing

He was told he'd find only one thing foul

in this room.



*Sruthi Kotlo is an 18-year-old freshman at Washington University in St. Louis and is studying Data Science and English. She is from the Chicago area and enjoys writing fiction, poetry, and other forms of storytelling.*

By Serena Lee

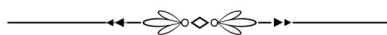
## **imposter syndrome**

on worse days i look at myself  
in the tall blurry mirror  
and i can't recognize the person staring back at me  
like a vacant vessel of someone who hasn't yet revealed themselves  
i see a shipwreck, a hollow boat with skeletons and treasure  
so rusted that it can hardly be considered sellable,  
so dull that my eyes ache for the glimmering gold lost to the raging sea  
if i reach far back enough  
behind my eyes, hidden beneath the top of my head  
will i find who i truly am?  
am i a mind trapped in this mechanism we call a skeleton?  
or is my mind a lucky commodity gifted to my sack of skin  
from a benevolent creator?  
something about this skin  
checkered with pores and bicycle scars  
feels like the softest cage  
my ribcage encages my traitorous heart,  
blood vessels wind around my entire being  
like unwanted bondage and thrumming pain  
who am i if not for the skin i sleep in?  
if not the for the bundle of bones i see  
in every x-ray scan i take?  
  
who am i if i no longer recognize it?

## appearance

i wish i couldn't look at myself in the mirror  
because it hurts whenever i do  
the sharp perusal of my eyes stings as it glazes over  
my stretch marks, my hip dips  
the craters in my pelvis and the craters in my face  
when i stretch it into an elastic, slippery smile  
bullets stream out of my pupils  
sneaking out like silent tears  
puncturing my upturned nose, my circular cheeks  
the tears -the bullets- trickle down my body  
unashamed of their blatant touches as they circle  
my round stomach, my flat chest  
i shake with the force of it  
and the tears -the bullets- fall  
down  
down  
down  
their descent as silent as my heartbreak  
as they fall into the endless pit we call tartarus  
where i stand suspended over  
like a helpless damsel with no knight, no prince  
more bullets fire from my almond eyes  
laughing like haunting demons as they too  
explore my *hideous* body

i wish i couldn't look at myself in the mirror  
because it hurts whenever i do.



*Serena is a Korean-American sophomore living in Cambodia. When she's not writing poetry, you can find her reading, playing soccer, or playing discordant notes on her piano.*

By Savannah Sisk

## **Predator and Prey**

I envy the zebra,  
with her eyes plopped on the side of her head.  
She sees the lion coming,  
and she runs.

I am a human woman,  
a predator,  
with eyes at the front of my face,  
apex,  
indomitable.

Whoever made me did not consider that  
I would be preyed upon by man.  
Man, who hunts woman as he does everything else,  
for sport.

Whoever made women did not think of us  
swiveling our heads as we walk quickly through  
the dark parking lot  
toward our cars,  
clutching our keys between our fingers.

Then, we do not feel so apex,  
so indomitable.



## Moleskiene

When you are a writer,  
they always tell you to buy a moleskiene notebook  
and to carry it wherever you may go.

I don't even know how to spell moleskiene.

Moleskin,

Molleskinne,

Moleskiene,

hmm.

I do not have a moleskiene,  
yet I am victim to the idea of one,  
that carrying a little notebook to fill with random prose  
is, yes, a very good idea.

One of these days I shall think up something very  
pretty,  
and then I will write it down in my notebook  
which is not a moleskiene.

I scribble and nothing is good in the moment,  
then I come across it much later, and am impressed.

"I wrote that?"

I scribble and it feels incredible,  
then I re-read it later and wrinkle my nose.

"I wrote that?"

This is the curse of the moleskiene,  
the nightmare which is feeling  
desperate to be profound.

If you try too hard, it will always be inauthentic,  
yes, profound prose must come from the heart.

But then shouldn't a moleskiene work?

I ask you:

will every thought you have ever had be profound?

No, it will not.

We are not frustrated

with the moleskines,

we are frustrated

with our fickle creativities.

That is just the sort of thing you would scribble in a

moleskiene.

## **Wildest Dream**

We look at you and think

you are our wildest dream.

A cool and errant breeze,

a twisting mountain stream.

Something which

is free,

and cares not what others think.

You are the breath, the life, the air

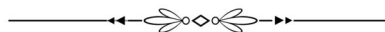
of us, past mothers;

you are the heir.

It is you who is our wildest dream,

tenacious, strong and churning.

Free.



*Savannah Sisk is a sixteen-year-old woman living in the American south who spends most of her time daydreaming up ways to move to New Zealand. She has been writing ever since she learned to hold a pen.*

By Nicole Orejuela

### **If I Were A Boy**

then people would not comment on the color  
of my clothes.

Red is too provocative,

Yellow is only for the spring, and Black  
should only be worn at funerals.

Way to kill the mood.

If I were a boy,

then I would not be expected to

bite

my tongue.

Don't you know that a Smile is an assumed part of the dress code?

Good girls are polite;

they're sweet and well-behaved.

Quiet.

Don't be so emotional.

If I were a boy,

then the most important number on the scale

would be my GPA,

not how much I weigh.

Being strong

is a physical achievement for men

and an emotional requirement for women.

But they don't understand the weight I carry

that no one can see but

me.

The invisible weight that they

have placed on my shoulders

that never goes

away.

They don't understand

how the weight

crushes

me, breaking

my back

and my soul.

They don't understand

how it suffocates me,

tightening around my neck and

forcing unwanted tears

to pour out of my bloodshot eyes.

How everyday it only gets tighter

and tighter

and

I can't breathe.

I can't breathe

I can't breathe

I can't

*Ataraxia*

A soft hand rests on the curve of my back.  
I gaze up, misty eyes clouding the reflection  
of her gentle smile.

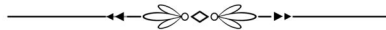
*Ataraxia*

I gasp,  
feeling the pressure slowly lift from my chest.  
I greedily take in desperate puffs of sweet air,  
the fog finally clearing from my muddled mind.

*Ataraxia*

I look up at her again,  
this angel sent down from the heavens to save my life,  
and I realize

She's me.



*Nicole Orejuela (she/her/hers) is a 20-year-old undergraduate junior from Brookfield, Wisconsin studying psychology at Northwestern University. An ardent writer since elementary school, Nicole won her first writing contest in the 4th-grade for her essay on the Peel Mansion Foundation. Since this early accolade, Nicole's love for writing and storytelling has only grown as she's progressed in her academic career, evidenced through leadership roles such as serving as an Editor-in-Chief for her high school newspaper. When she's not drinking too much coffee at a local café or reading a new psychological thriller novel, Nicole enjoys creating new literary pieces in the form of short stories and poetry and hopes to one day publish a book.*

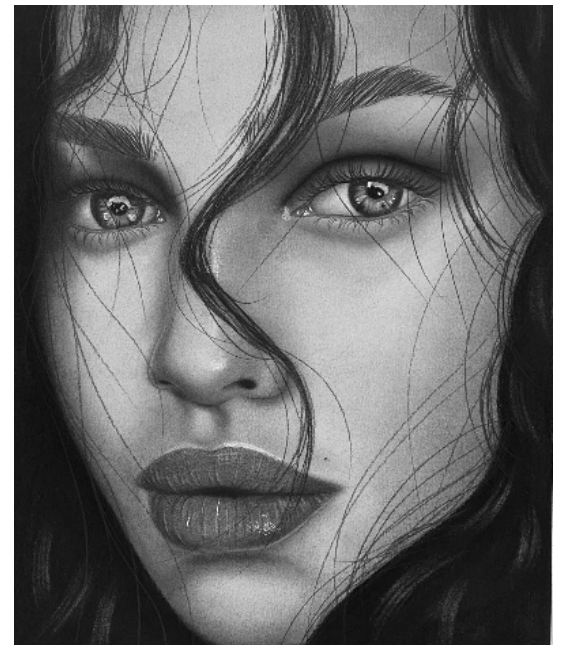
# VISUAL ARTS



# Fatima Mohamed

Artwork Collection





*Fatima Mohamed is a graphite artist from Bahrain.*

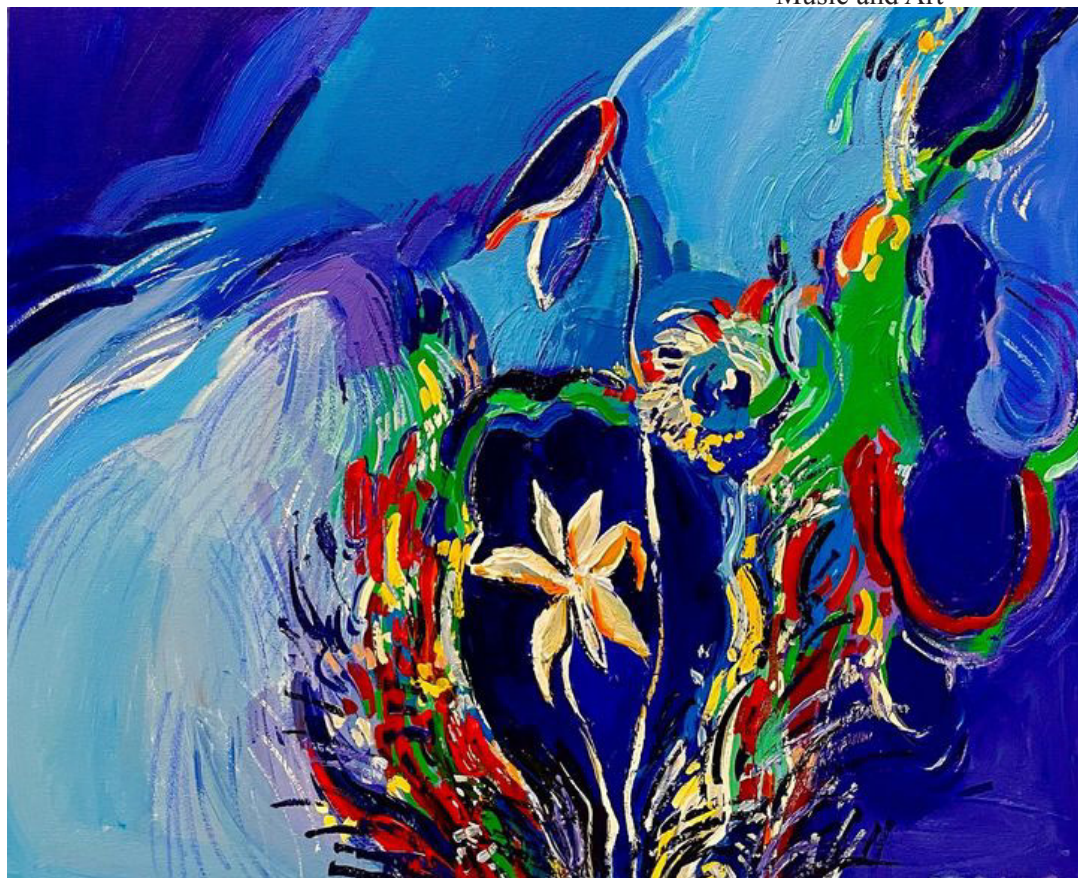


# Diella Valla

Artwork Collection



Rhythm



Music and Art



*Diella Valla, twenty-years old, is passionate about painting and fashion illustration. She lives in Kosova, where most of her work is also based on. She is currently studying painting at the University of Prishtina, Kosova.*



# Sophia Shoff

Artwork Collection

*Sophia is an aspiring artist from the US. She is a traditional artist and likes exploring different art mediums. Check out more of her work on her instagram: [sophiashoff.art](https://www.instagram.com/sophiashoff.art)*

# Julie Smith

Photography Collection







*Julie Smith is an amateur photographer from rural Northumberland, England. Her main passions are photographing wildlife and the night sky.*



Starry Night at Cawfields, Hadrian's Wall

# Karolina Hanulewicz

Photography Collection



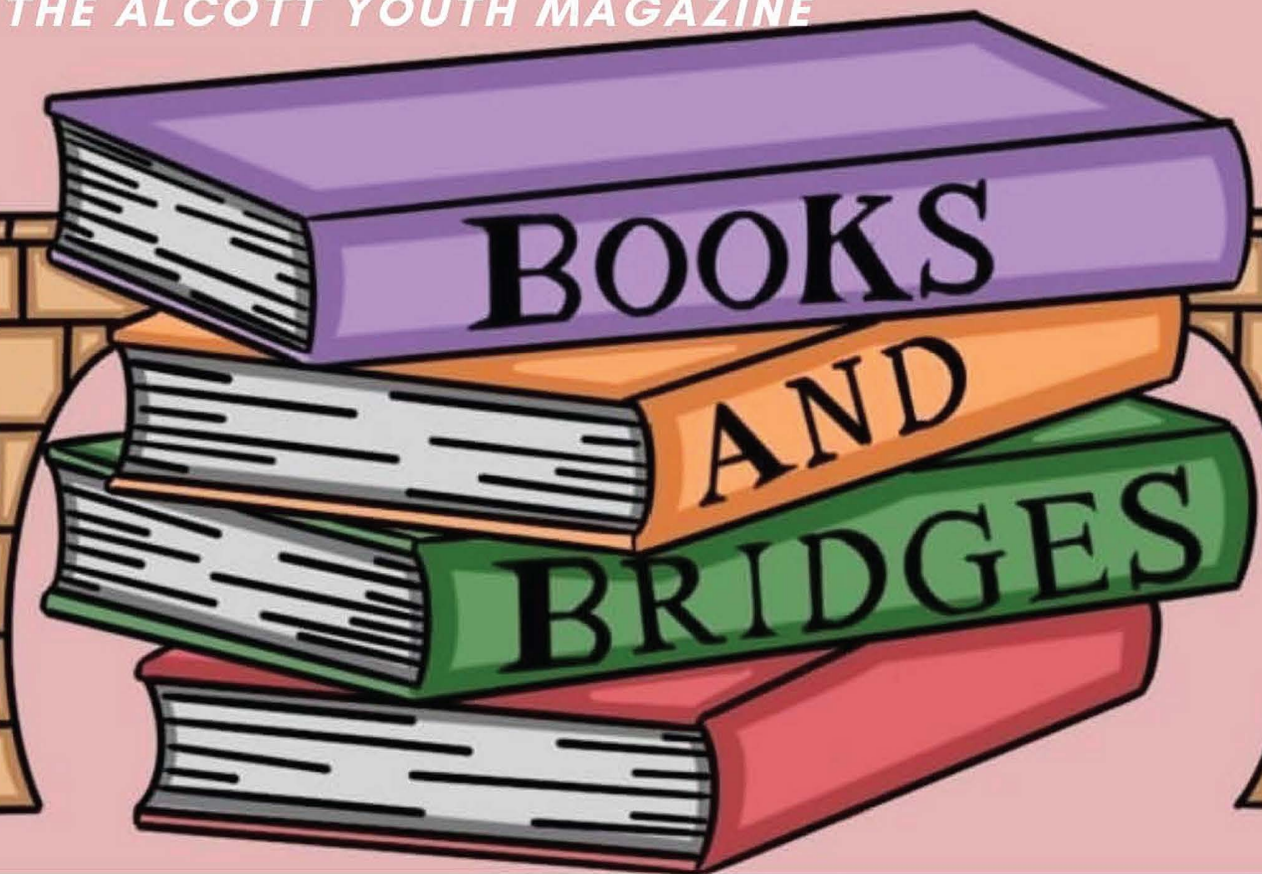


*Karolina Hanulewicz is a young, self taught landscape photographer from Central New Jersey.*





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