

# THE ALCOTT YOUTH MAGAZINE

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Gazis's Journey to  
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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 stories of young people, especially young women, through *The Alcott Youth Magazine*. She hopes these stories will encourage and inspire young people all over the world.



# OLIVIA GAZIS

INTERVIEW BY KAITLYN DONATO



“How would you spend your Saturday?”

While I had never given this question much thought before, CBS News’ Intelligence and National Security Reporter, Olivia Gazis has built a career off asking the right questions of everyone around her, including herself.

“Is it, for example, learning words in French in your free time?” Gazis asked her virtual audience of young girls. “Or is it solving multivariable equations?”

I consider this for a while, knowing quickly that, for myself, it is not the latter.

As a journalist, Gazis has never stopped asking herself these types of questions, and her refusal to settle for anything less than what excites her has led to a remarkable career: from interviewing refugees in Poland as part of her Fulbright Scholarship, to becoming a multiplatform reporter in Washington, D.C., to conducting interviews with top officials, including the Director of the National Security

Agency (NSA), Gazis has chased after her every curiosity.

Graduating from journalism school amid a recession, Gazis entered the workforce at a time when job opportunities were particularly scarce. However, in what she recalled as being a “weird twist of fate,” she managed to get her foot in the door at CBS News and began to climb from the “very, very, very bottom rung.”

“I started in the research department for the CBS Evening News, where I was essentially a fact checker, or like a ‘fact finder.’ [I researched] how many gallons of melted snow would fill an Olympic sized swimming pool – stuff like that – that would color the language of the Evening News broadcast. And then I moved to working as an associate producer for co-host Norah O’Donnell at CBS’s morning show, which involved my getting up at 3:30 in the morning to get to the office before 5:00 AM to digest the news of the day and be on top of things.”

“That part also involved a lot of travel to cover breaking stories. If there was a tornado or a mass shooting in some part of the country, [I would have] to pack a bag in literally minutes,” Gazis said. “I think 12 minutes is my record for packing a suitcase and getting to the airport.”

“So it was a lot of unpredictability, a lot of excitement, a lot of landing somewhere...and trying to figure out what you need to know,” she said.

Gazis told the group that, in order to improve as a journalist, it was crucial to “build confidence by getting uncomfortable.”

Reflecting on her early days reporting on Capitol Hill, Gazis recognized that she had

faced a learning curve. “I made dumb mistakes. I asked silly questions, sometimes in front of a lot of people. But all of those things, I like to think, made me smarter, stronger and taught me that one of your best assets when confronting the unknown is having at least a little residual confidence [in your abilities]. And the best way to do that is to seek out new and challenging situations from time to time.”

Gazis relied heavily on residual confidence when she was first asked to interview the Director of the National Security Agency, a discussion that was scheduled to take place for forty minutes live on stage in front of thousands of people. Normally, such interviews are reserved for journalists with decades of experience in the field. Gazis was surprised when someone from the agency reached out to her at that point in her career.

“My first, internal reaction was, ‘Are you sure you have the right person?’” she recalled. “But I called the person back and asked, ‘Is this really what it sounds like?’ And they said, ‘Yes.’ And despite being incredulous that this was even happening, I told them, ‘Yes. Absolutely. I’ll do it.’”

“I had no idea *how* I was going to do it,” Gazis continued. “The night before and even the day of, I was literally shaking, dressed up in my suit, trying to rehearse my questions in front of a mirror, trying to think through all of the various scenarios that could happen on stage— whether that was... running out of time or having too much time or mispronouncing somebody’s name or even falling flat on my face.”

“The only thing that I could do, I felt, was to prepare,” she said. “And, somehow, I did it. And I stunned myself that I did it.” “Were there things that I could have done better?”



Absolutely. Did I get compliments from some of the veteran journalists who probably were wondering what I was doing there on stage to begin with? Yes. And it was a great learning experience,” she said.

“It was a great boost in my confidence and my credibility as a journalist, that I could sit down and have a substantive conversation with a significant national security leader. And I think the way that I got there was locking myself into that ‘Yes.’ Just saying to myself, ‘All right, this sounds terrifying – but I’ll find a way to do it.’”

Gazis assured all the young girls in the audience that no one has to know what they would like to do right away.

“I think like most of you, I was five years old, and I said, ‘I really want to be an Intelligence and National Security reporter,’ she joked. “And I sent away for the handbook and it came in the mail, and I just followed it step by step, because that’s how it works!”

“Obviously not,” she continued. “I, for a very long time, did not know exactly what I wanted to do.”

Her advice to those still exploring their interests is simple: “Be oriented, but open.” Though she once assumed she would pursue policy or law, Gazis never closed herself off to new ideas and in that way discovered a love for journalism.

“While I was in Poland [researching my Fulbright project], it involved interviewing refugees... getting their stories, and writing them down. And I found that I was really interested in talking to people and crafting those stories in a compelling way.”

Though I personally am still unsure of where my path lies in the future, meeting a journalist as dedicated to her work as Olivia Gazis has inspired me to never stop asking myself: “How would you spend your Saturday?”

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*Kaitlyn Donato is a student at Princeton University. In her sophomore year, Kaitlyn recognized that there were too few magazines focused on writing for and by young women and created The Alcott Youth Magazine. With the magazine, she hopes to publish inspirational writing for all young people to enjoy.*

*Kaitlyn would like to thank Erin Brown and all other team members from Inspiring Girls USA for making this interview possible. Inspiring Girls USA, an organization dedicated to fostering the ambitions of young girls by connecting them with successful women role models, aims to show girls that they can break down gender barriers and achieve their highest aspirations. You can learn more about their organization at [inspiringgirlsusa.org](http://inspiringgirlsusa.org).*

*Kaitlyn would also like to show her gratitude for the assistance she received from everyone at Books and Bridges, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that coordinates with elementary school teachers to read stories to younger students about women in leadership roles. Books and Bridges believes that discussing female leaders is important for acknowledging women in history and furthering confidence in young girls. To learn more about the organization, please visit [booksandbridges.org](http://booksandbridges.org).*

# WRITING

“The writer is an explorer. Every step is an advance into a new land.”

*– Ralph Waldo Emerson*





# Tiffany

By Seoyoung Ann

*P: How much do you like Tiffany?*

*H: I like her 38%, what about you?*

*P: I'd say 56%.*

*P: Sometimes she's just so annoying and weird.*

*H: I hate that we have to wear the bracelet she made for us. It's not even pretty. Sitting in front of my two best friends on the blue-wool rug of my third grade classroom, I fidget around with the colored letters implanted on the blue. My eyes fixate on their bracelets, the rainbow ones, the ones I spent hours making.*

My heart sinks and it hurts to bring my voice out.

“Who is Tiffany?”

They exchange looks. That look. The one where I could tell no matter what they said next, it wouldn't be true. The one where I could tell that no matter how hard I tried to be friends with them, they would never consider me as they would to each other.

H: You wouldn't know because she's our friend outside of school.

“Oh.”

I was eight years old back then. I wasn't completely clueless.

I had already solved the equation: Tiffany = Me.

But what had I done wrong? What can I do to strengthen our friendship? These were questions I asked myself many years ago, for many weeks. The answer: nothing.

Seven years later, I realize that the questions I asked myself were wrong. They shouldn't have been centered around *me*. Sometimes people are mean. Sometimes friends are not friends. You can ask yourself what you may have done wrong, then correct the wrong. But thinking that everything is your fault is not the solution to a strong friendship. Sometimes people just create Tiffanies.



*Seoyoung Ann is a rising sophomore at her high school in South Korea. She enjoys writing, especially about the little moments in her life that have affected her even years later. She is an editor of her school's literary review and hopes to share her stories through other media platforms.*



# The Swagger Wagon

By Madeline Monroe

Last September, my family's 2008 black Sienna Minivan skid to a stop and released a massive flume of smoke on Highway 50, halfway between Santa Cruz and Sacramento. My dad was driving. My brother was in the passenger seat. They waited an hour for a tow-truck, and my dad thanked God he had renewed his Triple A membership the week before.

I was 3,000 miles away sitting in my American Literatures class. I was devastated. I thought I'd get at least one more drive.

When I left for college in Boston, and no longer needed the minivan to drive between work and school, the car had become my family's designated road trip vehicle. Our other cars just couldn't fit five people, a dog, four suitcases and two hockey bags.

The mechanic told my parents the car was done for. They unstuck my dashboard hula girl from below the windshield, and left the minivan at her final resting place: Jim Bagan's Toyota Repair Shop.

My family bought the minivan in 2010 as a family car. I got my driver's license in 2019. My mom told me I could have the minivan if I agreed to pick up my siblings from soccer practice. I was sixteen and itching for freedom, so I said yes. Minivans were made for picking kids up at soccer practice anyway.

The very first place I took the minivan, on my own, was my highschool's parking lot. I had the newfound freedom of a driver's license, but I was still mandated, by law and by my parents, to go to school.

My classmates designated the minivan "The Swagger Wagon" mostly out of irony because a minivan is, perhaps, the most un-swagger vehicle I could have possibly owned.

It was my minivan that my friends and I sat in, chatting, while we waited for the first bell to pierce through the frigid morning air. Emma sat in the front next to me, and Ana sat in the back.

"This is a car for a mom," Ana said one day. She was brushing her hair in the back seat.

"But doesn't it make sense?" Emma said. "Maddy is such a mom."

Which was true, of course. It had always been true, even before the minivan. I was the oldest sister, and the oldest grandchild. I sat at the childrens table until I was nineteen, not because anyone saw me as a child, but because it had become my responsibility to watch my nine younger cousins. The adults enjoyed their food and laughed with each other, while I wiped mashed potatoes off little faces.

"What would we do without you?" my aunts and uncles often ask.

*"Take care of your own kids for once, maybe"*

Of course I never said that. I usually didn't even have the chance to respond before a cousin needed me to cut their turkey, grab the fork they dropped, or help them get out of their high chair.

As frustrating as it was, it was always important to me to make sure no one in my life was left without a necessity. And I found out that the minivan was big enough to contain anything anyone might need.

A bandaid?

In the center console.

Advil?

In the glove compartment.

A pen? A charger? A snack? A shoulder to cry on?

Yep, I had all of that.

The minivan had seven seats, more than any of my friends' cars, and more leg room. It made sense that we always used it. Trips over the hill to Target, milkshake runs after football games, fancy dinners before homecoming, hungover journeys home in the early morning, me and my minivan took everyone everywhere.

I became nothing if not reliable, and I can't recall if it was before or after the minivan that I stopped saying no.

"Can you grab your brother from his sleepover?"

Sure

"Can you give us a ride to the game?"

Yes

"I know you drove last weekend, but can you drive again tonight?"

Yes

"Can you come get me? My ride bailed."

Yes

"Can we go for a drive? My parents are fighting again."

Yes

I always said yes. I loved these people, even when they drove me crazy. So the answer was always yes, whether that meant picking up takeout or letting tears fall into my passenger seat. The minivan helped me help others. It made me a good friend, a good sister, a good daughter. I thought "good" was the most important thing I could be. I felt like being needed was how I knew people loved me, so I did what was asked of me, again and again, even when I was worn out.

Sometimes, I contemplated making a conscious change in my personality, contemplated stopping all the little errands and favors, contemplated filling the Swagger Wagon up with gas and driving away without anyone else. Just me and my van, just us, doing something for just us, for once. I was tired of being everyone's crutch, and I was desperate for a break. But I never did run away from my responsibilities. I couldn't find a way to not be there when people needed me.

Even when I left for college, and left the minivan at home, I held onto those same qualities I had when I had gripped that leather wheel beneath sweaty palms. I still didn't know how to say no, and I was still the friend that could be counted on.

"Can you call us an uber home?"

Yes

"Can you put your card down, and we can pay you back later?"

Yes

"Can you sit with me? I don't feel good."

Yes

"Can you read this paper for me?"

Yes

I had tried to be the person who needed others. The person who asked the questions instead of replied. Every once and while, I wanted to be the burden. But I couldn't shake the minivan, even if she was sitting behind a garage door 3,000 miles away. Maybe that's why I was so ready to go home and drive by the end of my freshman year. I had spent nine months being the mom friend without the car to complete the look.

The minivan was not going to last forever, she was creeping closer and closer to 200,000 miles. I wondered, when she eventually took her last drive, would I be able to let the weight of responsibility go?

Part of me blames myself for the Swagger Wagon's demise. The summer before my senior year, someone in my grade decided house parties were out, and driving forty

minutes up a dirt road to get drunk in the woods was very, very in.

I thought it was stupid, and unsafe, but my friends wanted to go. So I said yes, everytime. I knew the jagged, steep roads were slowly killing my van. But if I wasn't driving my friends would have ended up in someone else's car. Someone who would maybe be drunk, or high, or distracted. I had heard too many stories about other friend groups who hadn't been careful, stories where girls were injured jumping over fences, stories where boys reached so far out car windows they fell onto concrete, stories where friends got lost in the forest running from police. Of course, I wanted to party too. And I did, sometimes, but every beer came with horrifying thoughts of what could go wrong now that I wasn't the one taking responsibility. If something happened I would find a way to put it on myself. I had to be in control, so I risked the vans' well being, and mine, every other weekend for two summers straight.

After every trip up that dirt road, the van drove a little more slow and a little less smooth. I knew it was probably best to stop taking my minivan up that mountain, but I never did. People needed me. And, as a result, the minivan began to wither. She couldn't go more than 60 miles an hour if there was an incline, and she made a weird bubbling noise if she was running for more than an hour and a half. We weren't incredibly surprised that she broke down. My family used to joke that one day one of us would be driving the van and the wheels would stop and all the doors would fall off.



Which wasn't far off from what happened in the end.

The Swagger Wagon stopped moving forward, but my people pleasing tendencies did not. There may not be a car to drive, but there are still people to look out for. There will always be friends who have had a little too much to drink. There will always be siblings who need help from someone a little older, a little wiser. There will always be someone who needs me to listen. And, unlike the Swagger Wagon, I will not waver after too many years of work.



*Madeline Monroe currently splits her time between her hometown, South Lake Tahoe, California, and Boston, Massachusetts, where she's earning her BFA in Creative Writing at Emerson College. Both her west coast and east coast homes are close to her heart.*

# A Letter to a Long Lost Me

By Levi Kim

I hold on to shards of the past like books, lining them up in my head in neat, orderly rows. Each of them is sorted into a shelf; happy memories, sad memories, nostalgic ones... Some of them are almost new, the spines barely cracked, dust floating off their pages as I open them for the first time. Some of them are torn and ripped, read and reread to the point of disrepair, the quickly scrawled words barely legible. All of them, old and new, good and bad, happy and sad, I keep close, tucked away in the depths of my mind. I preserve my happy childhood in these pages, grasp on to the warmth of inexplicable joy like a lost fantasy, a safe haven I can return to in my darkest moments.

I read these books—these memories—as a comfort, a reminder of who I used to be. Sometimes for nostalgia, sometimes for support, sometimes just to remember that in a time long long ago a cheerful little girl walked so I could run.

Once upon a time a younger me lived these pages, briskly skipping across lines of dialogue to meet their friends at the park, painting the neat cursive text with the dynamic brushes and turns of dance, dotting the ends of sentences with final jumps in 4th grade hopscotch matches.

I recall being asked as I graduated elementary school—a momentous occasion for me at the

time—“What’s your best memory from 5th grade?” And I didn’t respond with “Halloween where I dressed up as Luna Lovegood,” or “decorating cookies at our Holiday Party.” I described a day I barely remembered at the time. I talked about a simple day with my friends, sitting on the grassy field, an endless blue sky above. Someone said something I can’t recall and we couldn’t stop laughing for a long long time.

At the time I didn’t know why that memory stuck with me so deeply, but I do remember the quiet. The silence of my own mind. I still think of that moment, even to this day; how easy the world was to breathe in back then. An inhale—friends, laughter, peace of mind; An exhale—blissful undisturbed ignorance.

I believe in my past. I believe in the power it holds and the way it shapes me. I believe in the support it gives in the worst and best moments. And finally, I believe in the person I used to be, who I miss more and more every day. Trapped forever in time, unable to respond, all I can do is try to reach out. And remember.

*Dear long lost me,*

*Do you recall laughing as you turned in assignments just on time? And stressing over tests but still maintaining straight As with ease? Do you remember the happy moments, the silly things you used to worry about;*

*looks, crushes, even grades that didn't really matter. There were days you didn't have a care in the world, ignorant yes, but blissfully peaceful. Do you remember the moment everything changed?*

*Your desire for approval eventually shifted into a need. Your fierce independence paved the road for loneliness. Your obsession with perfectionism, a minor inconvenience at the time, became your life. The silly worries, unchecked, became more than just silly. They became a hell you created for yourself.*

*It's been a while since I've seen you. All I have to remember you by is these books, these memories. We could catch up at a coffee shop, or meet at the park. I'd love to see you around some time. I miss your smile.*

*Sincerely,  
Future you*

---

*Levi Kim is a sixteen-year-old rising junior from the Bay Area and has been crafting stories for as long as they can remember. They enjoy the process of writing as a method of expression and advocacy, often delving into topics such as queerness, racial injustice, and environmentalism. They've written numerous short stories, essays, and most recently, a poetry collection.*



By Zoe Parrott

### Teenage Villanelle

Nostalgia in a flower pot,  
In glittery darkness, shy wallflowers decay,  
For me, the memories all fade and rot.

Two lovers guiltily caught,  
Lipgloss, carnival lights, a kiss led astray,  
Nostalgia in a flower pot.

Tears, over stupid exams, cafeteria napkins blot,  
Cliques gather in such-and-such cliché,  
For me, the memories all fade and rot.

No pad, on the toilet, a blood dot,  
Smearing ketchup, an overthrown lunch tray,  
Nostalgia in a flower pot.

With what such careful, meticulous art,  
Do you value particular things of yesterday?  
Nostalgia in a flower pot,  
For me, the memories all fade and rot.

By Lexi Merring

### Dear Icarus

Tell me you loved  
the sun so much that  
you gladly burned for it  
and that each feather  
on your wings fully embraced  
the freedom of the wind.

Tell me the waves  
thrashed in ways that  
just barely mirrored  
your fiery spirit  
and that you touched  
everything you ever dreamed of,  
if only for a moment.

Tell me the smell of smoke  
only stoked the fire  
in your burning heart.

Tell me it was worth it,  
falling from the sky  
after tasting the sun.

Don't tell me  
that the sun's jealousy  
spread over your wings  
like summer wildfire or  
that you couldn't  
swim in the ocean, but  
that your regrets could.

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*Zoe Parrott is an 18-year-old recent graduate of Livingston High School. She has special interest in poetry, fiction, and op-eds, and has had work accepted or published in the Scholastic Writing Awards and Teen Ink.*

Don't tell me  
your passions disintegrated  
piece by piece,  
becoming ash  
alongside your wings.

Don't tell me  
your arms reached up,  
but you still couldn't feel the sky or  
that your heart got cut on broken dreams  
and drowned in the waves.

Don't tell me  
smoke choked you  
on the descent,  
making you forget  
how to fly.

It wasn't your fault  
that the world simply  
was not ready  
for the fire  
in your soul.

## **The Echo of Immortality**

You are graffiti  
on the walls  
beneath an overpass  
and handprints  
pressed into  
the drying cement  
of a sidewalk.

You are  
words on bathroom doors  
that scream,

*I was here,*  
and initials etched  
into peeling tree bark.

I hear you.  
You echo.

But you are also  
scribbles on a desk  
so easily erased  
and chalk on driveways  
destroyed by light rain.

You are  
sunlight before  
a thunderstorm  
and dandelion seeds  
before the wind blows.

You're permanent, you're fading.  
But I still hear  
your echo.

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*Lexi Merring is an incoming graduate student at Montclair State University where she will be earning an M.A. in English. Her work is forthcoming in The Central Avenue Poetry Prize, and she has been published in Canvas Literary Journal, Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle, and Women Who Write's Goldfinch.*

By Alice Xie

## Midnight Delusions

It's midnight / I stand in the downpour of rain / on the corner of 94th / drowning in my misery / the rain is nothing / the droplets can slip through my fingers / but the weight on my shoulders won't budge / my screams mix with the pounding of rain on concrete / when my lungs are scraped red and raw / and my thorax burned and eyes gouged / will I finally be enough?

The dormant demon inside / shatters the barriers of my mind / and spews forth in ugly rainbows / I imagine the colors would make the ugliest shade of green / I'm upset with the way the rain washes the stains away / at least the vomit was evidence / now I have nothing to show / maybe this is a sign / maybe it's all in my head.

When my blood runs cold / and I'm chilled to the bone / I'll gather myself and go home / because out of sight, out of mind / I'll convince myself that I'm okay / by embellishing my problems / so their woes are hidden / or by presenting my anger on a jeweled plate / to make it all seem better / I'm overreacting.

I look up at the endless sky / longing for closure / and reaching for stars that don't exist / the rain cleanses my mind / and suddenly I was being petty / I wonder if I'll remember this moment in the morning / and start letting go of the past / but who am I kidding / this won't be the last time I find myself on the corner of 94th / drowning in my misery.

## The Ocean Between Us

I sit across the candlelit table  
as Grandpa recites his *gu shi*:  
traditional chinese poetry.

I listen as his words lilt in haunting rhythms,  
pulsing in all the right places  
and breathing life into the antique.

Grandpa speaks of clouds jaded by the gauzy heat,  
of countless city lights woven into tapestries,  
and of water lilies resting on ponds of glass.

Grandpa commands his words like a warrior wields a sword,  
his tongue rolling with the perfect accent  
and words dancing in tempo.

His words are water, sanding down the roughest banks,  
and trickling in streams through untapped places,  
bringing calm into the unruly wild.

I feel my heart beat to Grandpa's words,  
my pulse liven and my mind whirl.  
But he stops all too soon, turning to me—*your turn*.

I try, but the words curl off my tongue unevenly, my mouth cracked and dry.  
I cannot command my mother's tongue, my words sound nothing like Grandpa's:  
his are a heavenly choir and mine a cacophony of inexperience.

My voice melds into white noise as I raise my head  
to look at Grandpa over the wooden table,  
mourning the size of the ocean that has pooled between us.

## **Superstore Sorrows**

It's only an ad. But the slogan of a deodorant brand I've  
never seen before makes me wonder if it'll bring you

back into my life. Like lavender scented hygiene products  
will magically recreate the past. The wind in my hair, a

smile on your face. We used to dance together under the  
sated sun, our bodies entwined in a sacred rhythm. It was

like time had slowed down, and all I could feel was the  
warmth of contentment wrapped seamlessly around our

limbs. I may have fallen first, but you fell harder. Anyone with eyes could see that. I remember when we were young,

I remember those moments in sunny fields and on my rain soaked porch. I can still feel the ghost of you holding my

face, holding my body, holding my heart in those hands I was so convinced it belonged in. But now those moments are only

memories, merely the prologue to a tragic movie. For time pulled us in opposite directions and I was too naive to fight

for our happy ending. And so I find myself thinking of you, halfway between the pickles and the bread, and a good safe

distance from the truth.

## **My Mother, My Moon**

I trace Mother's hands with my own, the soft pads of my thumbs falling victim to the deep fissures running over

her palms. Her hands are a map of her adventures, a humble reminder of the love she marked on her children.

The blisters that crown her hand tell a titan's tale, of how she held up the sky to watch her daughter run free. The

worn skin of her once fleshy fingers are a testament, to the countless times she siphoned night terrors from her

daughter's dreams, smoothing back matted hair and gently caressing youthful cheeks. The scars on her palms are

remnants of the needle and thread she used to patch the doubts in her daughter's mind. Mother's taut skin almost

bursts at the seams: a reminder of the protection she bought for the easy price of flesh and blood. And as Mother raises

her head to the night sky of my window, I see the moon reflected in her eyes. She keeps watch through the night, the

constellations in her irises veiled with sleep. Mother wanes with the moon, her luster fading with every waking minute.

I never understood the crazy things you do for love, yet I was the sun to my mother's moon. And the moon eats all the

darkness in this world, dying every day so the sun can live.

## **Euphoric**

Funny, how the lull of the drowsy wind makes ideas swirl in my mind. Drunk on 3 AM bliss, I think in a language only someone as fatigued as me could

decipher. But the moon doesn't need words. The crescent shines through the gloom of the devil's hour, bleeding light into the stars. Enveloped by the eerie

calm of night, I wonder if there's anything I can't do. Under the twinkling stars, I hold infinite power over life. I am the sky, the sea, the earth. The trees groove

to a swaying rhythm and I dance to the beat of the breeze. It's euphoric how the fog of yesterday's rain clouds my head and suddenly the flowers have never

chirped and the birds swayed more majestically than now. And as I spin in circles, my blood runs ichor. It's crazy how intoxicating the drug of early

morning is—captivating when under the influence, but treacherous the next morning when my head hurts from the sun's rays and the stars that once kept

me company are chased away. And yet I live for those moments, when the buzz of life slows to a crawl, and the shadow of witching hour does nothing to

dampen my mood. I desire those moments where I'm humming incoherent tunes and using the moon to light the world as my stage, mesmerized by the

night sky and wishing not for sleep to sweep the wisps of ecstasy under the rug.



## Lethargic

We used to fall asleep to the wind at night. The soft wind of evening would spread the paints of the sky across the horizon, showering the cosmos with pockets of light. What started out as blobs soon smudged into an ombre of purple, blue, and indigo. The nighttime wind would rustle the leaves of the old elk tree that we used to sit under, talking about anything and everything. The wind was like a lullaby, drifting softly to our ears and pushing us one step closer to oblivion. I'd slump against your shoulder, unable to hide the droop of my eyes. And you'd only laugh, acknowledging the wistful sigh of the wind with a good natured smile. The summer breeze broke up the stuffiness of a warm evening, wrapping us both in the seamless cocoon of its embrace. The wind danced alongside our dreams, lilting and swaying to the haunting rhythms of unconsciousness. The wind was enough to tear me from the grip of reality and insert me into my own fantasy, one where we danced together through oblivion. The songs of the wind, beautiful in the same way chimes are after a storm, would float through the air and close its warm fist around your mind, drifting you slowly into sleep, long after I had relented to its clutches. The wind was, perhaps, a maternal figure. It cared for us, sheltered us from the fear of growing up, and sang us to sleep with the most heavenly choir of notes. Every night, the wind possessed the ability to bring sleep upon us, and I doubted if the wind would ever *not* be enough. The wind is always enough; you and I are enough.

---

*Alice Xie is a teenager from California, with a passion for writing and an ambition to make the best of her teenage years. Since joining her school's newspaper in junior high, Alice has fallen in love with the vast field of writing and has continued to write journalistically for her newspaper and creatively for her own personal happiness and sanity. Many of Alice's works explore the parallels between the relationships in nature and the relationships between people and emotions.*

By Madeleine Higgins

### **Love Letter to My Long Hair:**

Is sixteen years too late to say  
*it's not you, it's me?*

Trite, I know.

But oddly, for something that is (was) meant to be  
a symbol of fertility,

You were so dead already—

Literally

So (scientifically), but also *deadened*

By the spindly fingers of my mother,  
Straightening you for years until I learned to myself,  
Picking and loosing and scabbing  
Until my arms ached to the fingertips.

What is it they say? When it's bad,  
It's bad, but when it's good,  
It's *really* good (e.g.  
The way you fell down my shoulders like  
A sack of heavy coins on the night of my sophomore prom,  
Making me into a wild princess  
or a Miss Universe winner, pretty  
*Effortfully*. Deadly.)

Oh, love—it  
Was all too much, my scalp was heavy and bleeding,  
Melodramatizing and anthropomorphizing, deadly,  
So now you sit,  
Snipped,  
To be swept on the floor of the salon.

Or on  
Someone else's  
Head.

---

*Madeleine Higgins is a junior in high school who lives in Manhattan, New York. She writes poetry, essays, and nonfiction when she's not juggling being both a STEM and humanities focused student.*

By Yoon Park

## Strangers

While the first yellow leaves  
stare from their unforgetting,  
and summer starts to become nothing  
more than a hallucination, I myself  
start to unforget. Familiar strangers start to recur  
on the walls, and it's funny—  
because I've been making new strangers  
wherever I go. Like the sentimentalist I  
am, I cry over these strangers. I cry  
over their dead friends and  
brothers and sister, because everybody's got dead people,  
and it tastes bitter: like when you keep toothpaste  
on the inside of your cheek for too long. And  
now what? Faces swarm like deadly hornets  
into haunted smears of color, painting an ugly portrait of what could easily be  
a grotesque image of a monster that only exists in my world  
and *my* world only. Blue and purple limbs and delicate,  
stitched skin around the eyes dotted with makeup, while  
twisted in all the wrong angles, like some *thing*  
drawn by Picasso.

I've never really liked Picasso.

## Vast Oceans

He spent more than half his youth, just  
pursuing, building walls, living  
a life of luxury, every moment a cinematic  
fantasy, building up what he  
considered to be  
independent, keeping his capelet  
billowing in the strongest  
stadiest of winds  
over the vast oceans  
and the bitterest icebergs, because  
people called him unsinkable, and  
he was a god, and he was made from the finest  
carbon metal, pearls from the heart of the ocean,  
little children dancing the waltz  
with their fathers like little ladies with  
missing front teeth, coated with the blackest  
paint and the goldest of plates,  
and the people called him as magnificent  
as the ship of dreams—

—until he met *her*.

I once read that the hole in the Titanic  
was no bigger than a human figure.

## No Win

You know that game,  
Where you think of it,  
You lose?  
You're welcome,  
By the way. And *Welcome*,  
To my life.  
Only, it's not one thing,  
It's a huge list, I'm  
The only one playing.  
It's not a game,  
And I always  
Lose.

---

*Yoon Park is a dynamic high school student enrolled at Seoul Academy in Seoul, South Korea. She channels her creative energy into writing and visual art and finds joy in expressing herself through these mediums. Additionally, she has a passion for music and spends her spare time playing the piano. Her dedication to her craft has earned her recognition and admission into the prestigious Sewanee Young Writers Conference.*

By Nadia Ziarati

## Wild Blue Eyes

Not a day goes by  
When I don't recollect  
Those Wild Blue Eyes:  
Blue but cloudless;  
Tranquil but bright with rich radiance.

This mere but blissful recollection  
Can be the most festive restoration  
Of my withered and wrinkled soul;  
It brings me back on my feet,  
And it raises me to pull aside my blue bedsheet.

Those eyes, I've kept to myself so far,  
Even more than the daily gruesome revelation,  
Incite me to begin a fiery revolution;  
To express my lofty wild thoughts;  
And to cry out my reserved agony like explosive gunshots.

But alas and alack!  
Every day that goes by,  
I have less and less remained  
Of what refines my respiration and my mind;  
And of what I called those Wild Blue Eyes!

My spirit slowly runs towards its irrevocable cessation,  
My frame of body barely makes any fine motion,  
And my mind no longer does a proper function.  
And yet, I'd rather crawl to my nigh end  
Than not recall for one last time  
One single sight of those Wild, Wild Blue Eyes.

---

*Nadia Ziarati is an English language and literature graduate from Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran. She has completed her BA course and is now working as an English language instructor, willing to continue her studies in a literature-related major for an MA program abroad. Since the beginning of the four rich years of the bachelor's program, she's written a few pieces of creative literature.*

By Joelle Viray

## **Milky Mere**

Swimming through the milky mere, I found a seashell;  
Pearl to my eyes and silk to my fingertips,  
It effortlessly drew away the odious clouds I had been submerged in.  
My core inhaled a fresh, iced shot.  
A pinch of song which played in my system,  
A tinge of cyan which ran through my blood.

One simple seashell, manufacturing the meaning of sanctity whilst releasing all tension of mind.  
Both you and I had forgotten I was in a lake to begin with.

With one pulse and one crash,  
The seashell vanished with the waves,  
Locked back into the milky mere.  
I guess I focused too much on the beauty  
And not enough on the fact that it was actually in my hands.  
Perhaps I should be more grateful to have held it at all,  
To have seen it is already more than a blessing, yet  
I would rather it be in my palms than in my imagination.

I still go back to those dirty waters,  
Canoe the perimeter of the shore.  
I no longer desire to bring home the shell but rather share with it one more brief moment-  
If only I held on a little tighter,  
Or did I hold on too tight?

Either way, I recently realized something.  
While I wish against this,  
Attempt to pray away its reality,  
I know that others can see the shell's beauty too.  
And I know there will always be the possibility

That someone else brought it home instead.



## Venus

Let's not speak of Venus.  
Shapeshifted into a tiny pea,  
Situated at the back of my tongue,  
It lounges.  
It dangles.  
And while I cannot swallow it,  
It tempts me,  
And I choke.

So when I have the chance to expectorate, I do.  
The pea glides off my tongue and inflates  
Into the planet it once was; Venus.

This soon develops into a polysyllabic frenzy  
Comprised of several tongue movements I cannot control,  
A release which travels down a track  
Prayed to one day be a lucid ride.

Thrown into hysteria,  
My mouth which marks euphoria,  
This state of mind lasts only until I realize  
Venus  
Is not earth.  
And I do not live in its arms.

So let this pea create habitat at the back of my tongue  
Let it lounge, let it dangle, and let me choke.  
While I'm not sure when,  
I hope that one day,  
Its grip will grow loose,  
And I will be able to swallow  
Once more.



*Joelle Viray, a 16-year-old high school student, is entering her senior year at an arts specialized school located in the city of Toronto. She has always held a passion for writing, photography, and playing the piano.*

By Junseo Lee

Cause when he did reach that peak  
He'd tumble back down  
All over again.

## The Mountain

A pile of papers  
Grows in the corner  
Like mold on leftover rice

He averts his eyes  
Glances at it a few times  
Still there  
Like a brick in a wall

But he's busy with reports  
And stock exchange prices  
So he'd rather not  
Do this right now

His favorite song's playing  
He's drawing cartoons  
It's a little too early  
To ruin his mood

But soon he'd signed all his papers  
His playlist had played  
Meaningful work was  
But a memory

Every financial report, every drawing he drew  
Now lay on a mountain  
Of papers eschewed

So he began climbing  
That mountain  
Sweeping it clean  
Though he could not see the top  
He hoped, at least,  
That he would reach it one day.

---

*Junseo Lee is a dedicated high school student at Seoul International School in Seoul, South Korea. He has a passion for writing and is currently compiling a portfolio to showcase his work for university applications. With an unbridled enthusiasm for the written word, Junseo hopes to continue exploring different styles and techniques to develop his craft.*

By Audrey Calderone

## **The Hop of Faith**

there drifts away my life  
feeling like a stabbing knife  
I don't know where i go  
and it hurts ever so  
i sit here thinking  
as my mind continues leaping  
no one sees what's going on  
so sometimes i think I'm already gone  
and some friends left  
floating away on a small raft  
while some grew closer  
but some are on their own roller coaster  
and no one can blame them at all  
for life is not always that tall  
and one day we will be nothing  
will we even ever be a something?  
life is short, not enough time  
sometimes it feels like a sour lime

and we don't know who's next to die  
so we need to take this chance to fly  
we are really all one  
and we might not all be done  
but some people are sitting there  
not even knowing where  
and no one sees how much they are hurting  
so they all just sit there sorting  
and what are they really sorting?  
they say their life but do they even know?  
and i know how it hurts ever so  
so lets all just hold on to at least one dream  
we can hold it tight with even one small seam  
because we can all be strong  
even if it feels really wrong  
I'm still figuring out the meaning of life  
but somehow that feels okay

---

*Audrey is a 14 year old girl from Massachusetts. She loves writing poetry and short stories, and reading Stephen King. She enjoys playing her flute in band, dancing/singing in show choir, acting in theater and camping on the weekends!*

By Claire You

**for my dog days.**

i woke up one day  
the sweat on my fingertips turned to water  
standing alone under the sky, turning the glass around me blue  
standing up and i can hear cracks around me form  
a dizzy yet clear sense of anxiety

parched throats that search for anything other than oceans  
a vast body of sapphire surrounding my body  
swimming and swimming until it feels like i am drowning  
the usual memories of summer beach days fade away until  
i am only left staring into the eyes of loneliness

surprising, summer is supposed to be ice cream trucks and loud laughter  
mine is filled with pencil scrawls and rapid breaths  
hot while the ac is running, my own ambivalence and confusion

tomorrow i will wake up, ten days from school  
i might wake up in the same cold field of glass  
reflecting my ugly tears that stay frozen in time  
standing in stagnant water  
with slow waves brushing against my ankles  
wondering if it might suddenly knock me down  
or continue this uneasy melody

but that is the summer's song  
its own hum and lullaby with the morning cicadas

## lawnmower and tea

dirty sweet smell of freshly cut grass  
marks summer time sadness  
fumes of gray gasoline follows the vigorous hum of the machine  
eating both weeds and grass until everything is back to  
normal

dirty sweet dreams i make up in my mind before i fall asleep  
you count sheeps, while i count ifs  
guilty pleasure-waves of wants before bitter bile wakes me up  
telling me to be cautious of my own little expectations  
its a mix of both odd narcissism and inferiority complexes  
that slowly becomes a god's complex without a  
god

so the dirty sweet months i spend  
till i leave my beautiful and cruel room i spend hours alone with  
meeting egos and vices  
that burn like saccharine  
hot tea matches summertime tears

---

*Claire You is a hobbyist writer and photographer. She lives in the States and has been published in multiple different magazines as well as been the editor's pick. She enjoys gaining inspiration from the world and scenery around her.*

By Ali Ashhar

## Vagary

Time fleets. From the yards of Nicosia, she made her way to the stars. The sky holds her journey through the timeline. It feels like yesterday when she used to be a highschool pupil. Perhaps, the enclosed space of learning faded when time rippled her across the shores of life. Experience was her sole teacher, prodigy her perennial comrade. She fell in love with vagary melodies and I was infatuated by her tone.



*Ali Ashhar is a poet, short story writer and columnist from Jaunpur, India. He is the author of the poetry collection, Mirror of Emotions. Following the release of his book, he was chosen as the Best Debut Author for the year 2021 by The Indian Awaz and was the recipient of a India Prime 100 Authors Award. His works appear in Indian Review, The Raven Review and The Bosphorus Review of Books, among others.*



# **VISUAL ARTS**



# Chayangi Hatle

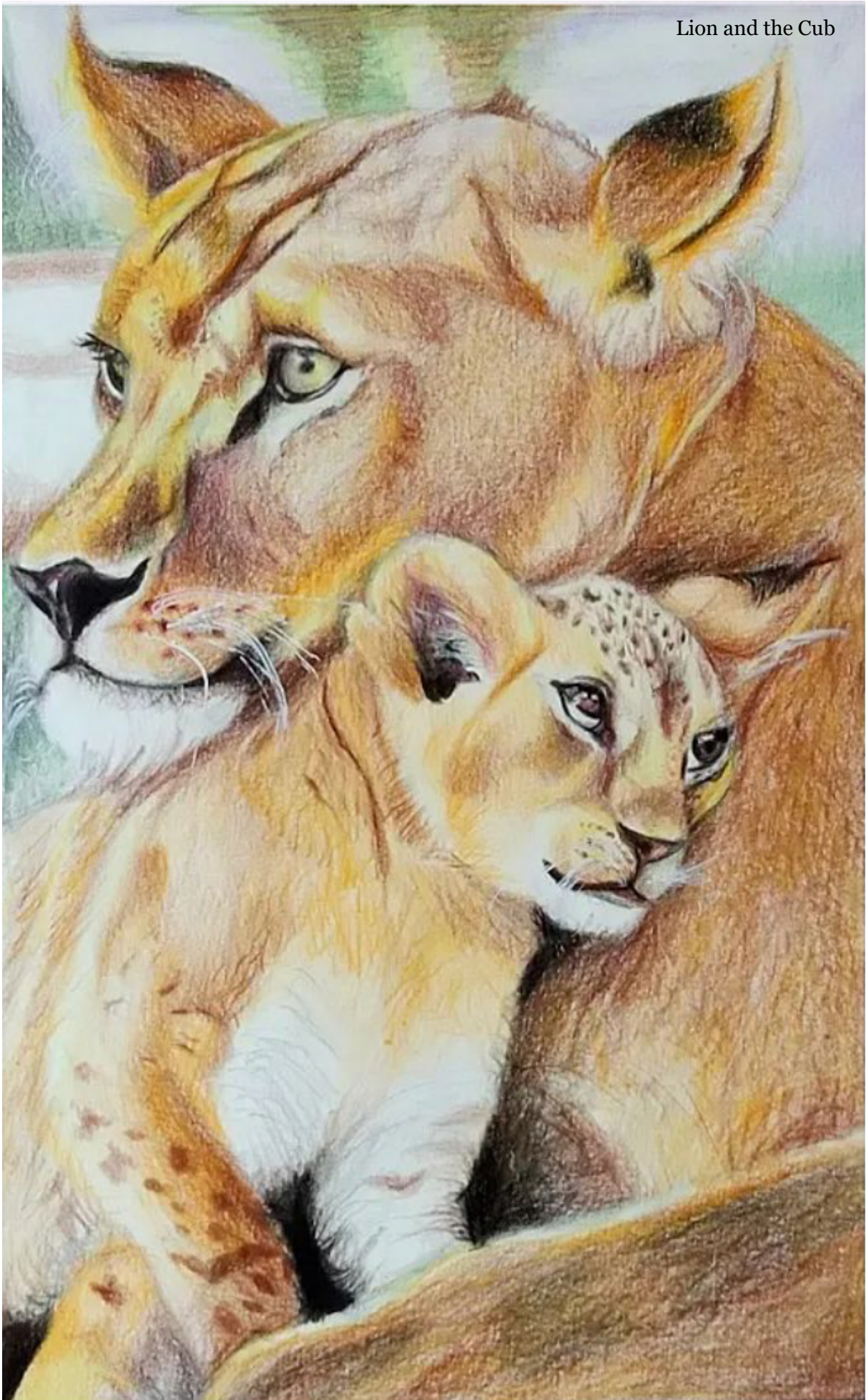
Artwork Collection



*Chayangi Hatle is an aspiring artist from Goa, India*



Lion and the Cub







Wave



Monsoons

# Gideon Grandis- McConnell

Artwork Collection

*Gideon Grandis-McConnell is a high school Senior from Richmond, Virginia. She enjoys creating digital illustrations as well as animation, and she is drawn to the surreal in her work. In addition to creating art, she enjoys learning Japanese.*

Stone Blues





Anemone



Crystal Agrarian



# Ewelina Kuczera

Artwork Collection







© Ewelina Kuczera







Paris Cafe

*Ewelina Kuczera is an artist from Poland. She specializes in creating detailed animal portraits and watercolor illustrations depicting cities of the world.*



# Siya Gupta

Photography Collection



Riya



My Father

*Siya Gupta is a rising senior from Long Island, New York. She enjoys working with and developing black and white film and through her art, she hopes to inspire others to pursue work with film.*



# Anshika Nichani

Photography Collection



Spot at the River



Merlion



Sunny Sundays

*Anshika Nichani is a student at the Georgia  
Institute of Technology with a passion for  
photography.*



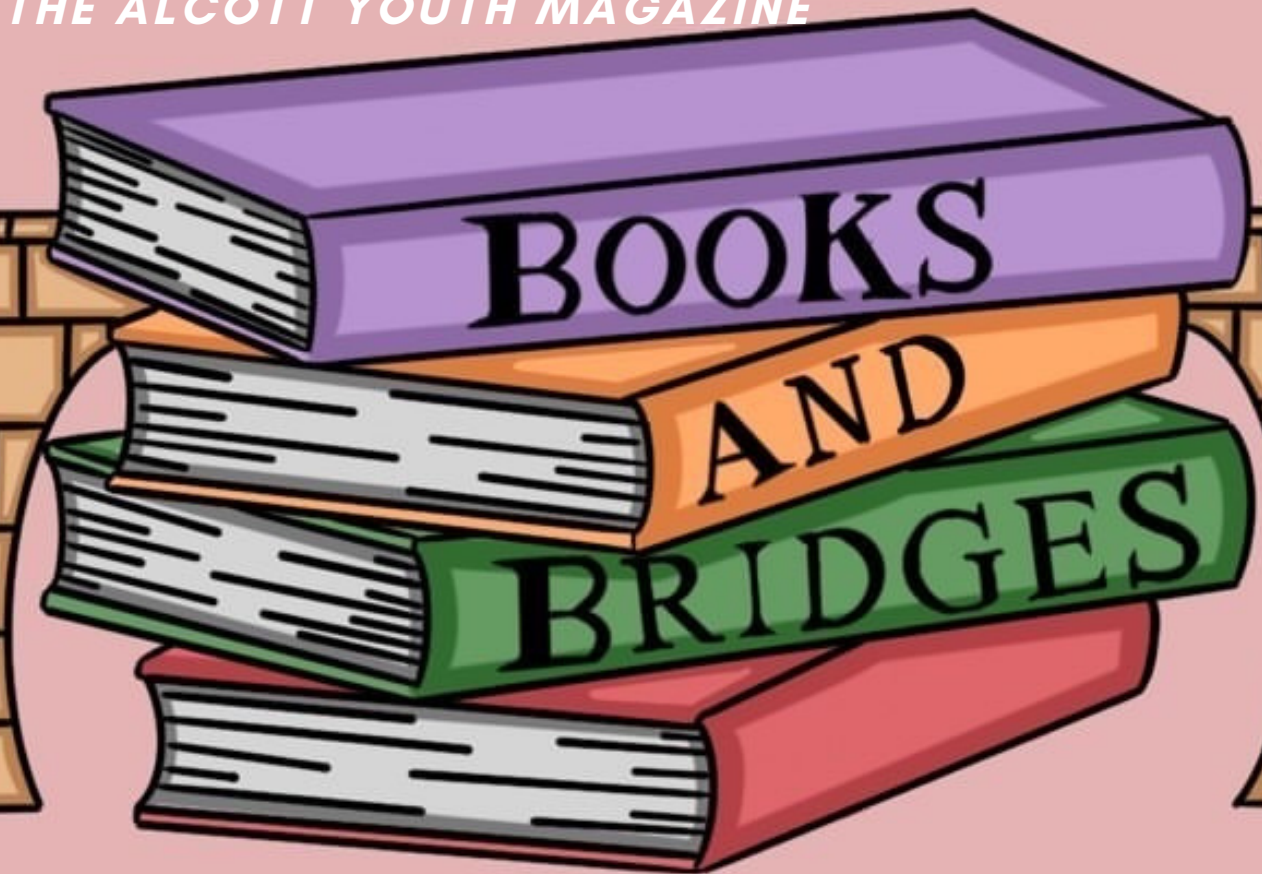


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