

ALIGNMENT

By: Gloria Baek

Artwork by: Elaine Zou

Esther, New York Senior, November 23, 2022. 5:30 P.M.

I stepped onto the porch, key in hand. As I fumbled around with my keys, a notification rang.

November 24, Quiz No. 3. I groaned, twisting open the key to the door of my house. I immediately spotted my older sister, her art supplies laid out all over the dining room table. It looked like she was working on her self-portrait.

"Hey, how was your day?" My keys clanged down on the table.

"It was fine, how about you?" My sister replied.

We slowly settled down on the couch, facing each other. I looked at the clock and it was slightly after 5pm.

"I mean school was fine. Tomorrow I have a quiz I didn't even start studying for yet....". My hands covered my face as my heart tightened.

"Well, you still have time right? Don't worry, I'm sure you'll be fine. It's only the second quiz, you have like, what, three more quizzes left?"

"Yeah, thankfully the teachers understand since it's college application season." Another notification rang.

November 26th, Hagwon¹ Assignment Due.

Oh my-

"What is it?" My sister inquired as she peered onto my phone.

"I have an assignment due for hagwon... I'm so screwed..."

She laughed, her eyes twinkling. "Ah, those were the days. Those days were the worst for sure, especially during college application season. I'm so happy I'm in college already."

"Yeah, yeah 언니². I get it, you're free from the shackles of hagwon homework." My body was too comfortable on the couch, but I forced my legs to support my body as I got up.

"Well I'm off! Wish me luck..." She waved me off, as she went to the table to continue her art.

Grabbing my things that were placed in front my door, my feet slowly moved towards my room.

I entered my room. Plain white walls, with a window right across the door. The sun was trickling in, its rays enveloping the room. I could feel the warmth of the sun, as the chill of the wind travelled throughout from my window.

My first task was to change. There was a feeling of ickiness I got coming back from school. I immediately headed to the shower, as I washed up from the day.

I left the bathroom, and while sitting on my bed, I clicked on my hagwon homework on my laptop that I had yet to finish. My eyes scanned the title. SAT Exam 2022.

I was nervous. I needed to ace the November SAT exam.

Why?

Because of NYU. They only accept the best of the best.

To be exact, it's been my dream school of mine throughout high school.

I had visited the campus a couple times to eat at the restaurants near there. The purple flags struck out to me, as I gazed upon the buildings. It felt majestic and proud, a symbol of exclusivity and prestige. My heart started pounding, as my mind began to reminisce on the visit.

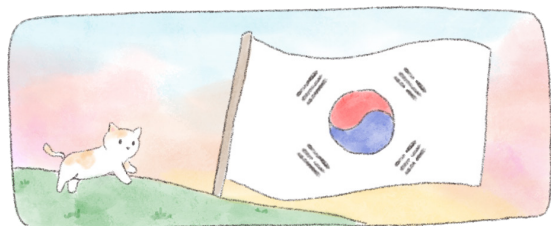
As my feet walked on the pavement near Washington Square Park, I could feel the energy of the city. It was almost a bubbling energy, as the chatter of other tourists walking circled around me.

I saw the way that the students at this school interacted with each other, and it was almost surreal. People of every walk of life enveloped the park, and that fascinated me. Especially foreign students, it felt like seeing a different cultural part of the world.

I sensed a type of connection I had never felt before. I craved opportunity.

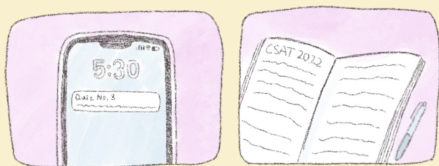
But here, you could see similar yet different aspects of the international students.. It was so....different. The students all walked around, wearing outfits that just screamed of money. One of them wore black barrel jeans, white furry coat, and Dior bags on their shoulders. As an immigrant child born and raised in the boroughs, I had never seen this kind of wealth before. It felt as though everyone had their own distinct aura, which was something I had never seen.

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¹ Hagwon: A type of prep school, typically for college

² 언니: Older sister



The day I returned to the hotel, I checked out the universities website, and I had to blink multiple times. They had study abroad programs all over the world, especially ones in South Korea. I have always wanted to study there, as it was where all my favorite artists lived. There were so many other places that NYU had connections to as well, and it hit me.

I want to attend this school.

I continued typing away as I started to envision the life I could have there. I was stressed out, but thinking about the possibility of attending the school made the corners of my mouth go up.

I rubbed my eyes. Closing the computer, I spot the time being 2am.

In my dream, there was a tiger, sprinting across the horizon, to the east.

My chest heavy, I slowly climbed on the bed. The minute my head touched the pillow, my body sank into the mattress and I was out like a light.

In my dream, there was a tiger, sprinting across the horizon, to the east.

Eunbi, New York Senior, September 23, 2022. 10:55 P.M.

I stepped onto the mat, key in hand. As I fumbled around with my keys, a notification rang from my phone.

It was my calendar notifying me that I had a quiz coming up later in the week. I groaned, unlocking the door to the apartment. I immediately spotted my sister, her textbooks supplies laid out all over the dining room table. It looked like she was studying for school.

"Hey, how was your day?" I set my keys with my car keys down on the table.

"It was fine." My sister replied. Silence fell over us, and my feet headed towards my room.

Opening the door I immediately spot my textbook open to the chapter I had to study. As I settled down into my room, my mom pokes her head in.

"How was prep? Did everything go well today?"

I nodded and explained to her that I need to spend more time studying there. I looked at

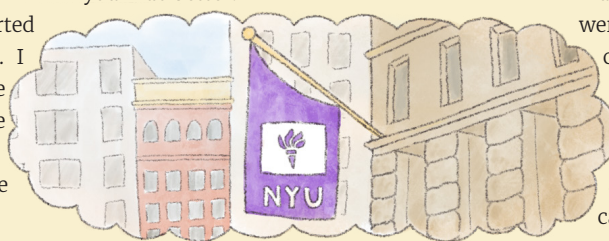
the clock. 12am.

I sighed, and sensing that I was tired my mom encouraged me to study a bit more and sleep.

"You know that college application season is coming up right? You have to do well on the SAT's...." My eyes felt heavy as I blinked. I could see that my vision was starting to blur as I yawned.

"I understand Mom. Don't worry about me and just go to sleep. I still have to study a little bit more."

She looked at me and sighed. "Your older sister went to a good school, but I trust that you'll do better."



I nodded, feeling like I was sinking lower and lower into my bed. I fought the temptation to just lay down flat and instead counted to three to get up. As I sat down on my desk, I opened up my laptop.

I got to work, opening up my workbook that I had yet to finish before the due date. My eyes scanned the title. CSAT Exam 2022. I looked at my laptop open on the table. NYU 2023.

I was nervous. It's been my dream school of mine throughout high school. I had visited the U.S. back in middle school, as a graduation trip for my older sister. I remember going through Washington Square Park, amazed by the fountain.

As my feet walked on the pavement near Union Square, I could feel the energy of the city. It was almost a bubbling energy, as the chatter of other tourists walking circled around me.

I saw the way that the students at this school interacted with each other, and it was almost surreal. People of every race enveloped the park, and that fascinated me. Back in Korea, it was homogeneous so you rarely saw people of other races within the country.

I sensed a type of liberation I had never felt before. I craved freedom.

But here, you could see the pop of color, the hairstyles of all different cultures. It was so.....different. The students all walked around,

wearing outfits that just screamed New York. One of them wore blue jeans, white top trench coat, and Longchamp bags on their shoulders. Another student wore a black dress with laced boots and tights. Her hair was pink, a color I've never seen on someone before. It felt as though everyone had their own distinct style, which was something I had never thought of doing.

I sensed a type of liberation I had never felt before. I craved freedom.

My eyes opened and closed, and my desk came back into view. Cluttered, there were books all over the desk, and I could see the math problem crossed out in a red pen. There were still 2 pages left to do. Looking at the clock, I saw that it was 12am.

Sighing, my hands continued scribbling away on my homework. My eyes started to see blurs on the page, and so I closed my eyes. I still had 4 more calculus problems to work on.

My body slowly sunk into the chair, as I rubbed my eyes. There was a certain heaviness in my heart and throughout my body. It felt like it would never end.

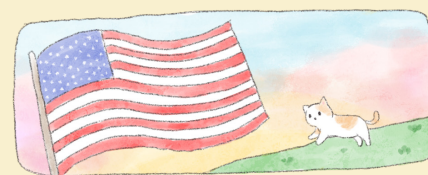
But I wasn't going to give up now.

Finally closing the computer, I spot the time.

In my dream, there was an eagle, soaring across the horizon, to the west.

2am.

My feet dragged across the floor as I went to the bathroom to get ready. Brown eyes stared back in the mirror, dark circles underneath. It was getting to the point where I couldn't hide it with make-up anymore.



My chest heavy, I slowly climbed on the bed. The minute my head touched the pillow, my body sank into the mattress and I was out like a light.

In my dream, there was an eagle, soaring across the horizon, to the west.

Gloria Baek is a junior at Steinhardt majoring in both Music Performance and Politics. She's a big fan of Raye!

Elaine is a senior studying Business and Computer Science at NYU. In her free time, she likes to read and try new restaurants around the city.