

A NOTE FROM ALEXANDRA LEIGH YOUNG

I can split my life into two distinct halves: the time before I knew about K-pop and the time after. It all started in 2014, when I quit my job in New York City and moved to South Korea for a tiny artist residency and to report on the music industry there. I was instantly hooked. K-pop is epic—the personalities are irresistible, the visuals are dazzling, and the music is so catchy, you'll wash your hair twice just to keep singing it in the shower. But then a friend told me I could actually see idols “up close and personal” at a show called *M Countdown*. I wasn't sure what he meant, but nothing could have prepared me for what I experienced.

As I waited outside the *M Countdown* studios with about a hundred other fans, a small van with tinted windows rolled right up to us. To my utter surprise, the six poised but humble members of Teen Top emerged in their matching black suits and stepped right into the crowd. To my even greater shock, the people in line with me didn't scream or try to mob them; they were just as gracious as the idols themselves. Teen Top signed autographs, posed for photos, bowed and thanked the grateful crowd, then loaded back up into the van and drove off. It was unlike anything I had seen back when I used to tour manage for pop bands in the United States, where artists keep rabid fans at arm's length.

After Teen Top left, I interviewed members of their fandom, and there was one girl in particular who stood out. She had straight black bangs and was in her high school uniform: a long skirt with knee-high socks and loafers. We struggled to talk to each other in my broken Korean, but she explained to me that loving K-pop isn't just worshipping idols. Idols and their fans look out for one another, and both know that one wouldn't exist without the other. I realized then that the idol-fan relationship is just that: a relationship.

Idol Gossip is about Alice, a Chinese-American girl who moves to Seoul with her family and pursues her K-pop dreams. Even though I can't sing to save my life, I had similar dreams growing up, which is why pop music has remained so important to me. As she trains for her K-pop debut, Alice learns about fitting in and standing out, owning her privilege, and, of course, the idol-fan relationship. I think K-pop fans get a bad rap for being crazed or obsessed. What I've learned over the years is that K-pop is so much more than a fleeting craze—it's about family, big dreams, and the power of a group united under one cause. And that's really what I set out to capture in my book.



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