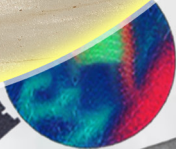
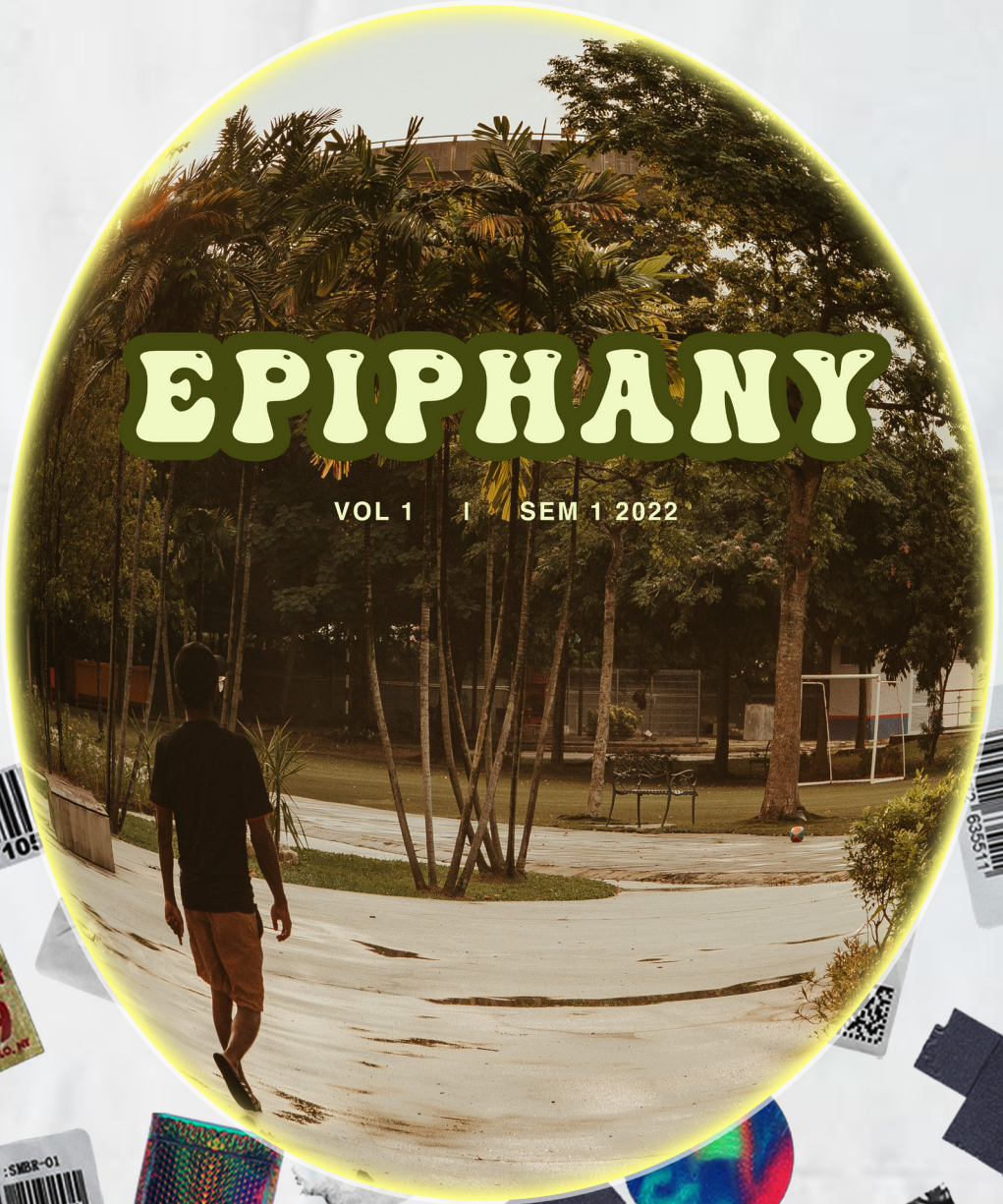


EPIPHANY

VOL 1 | SEM 1 2022



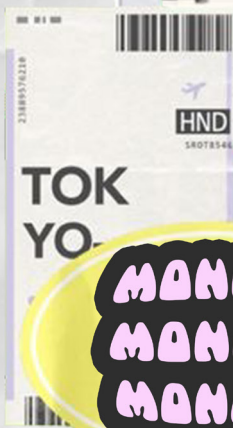


what

is

epiphany

?



Documents

PLS READ ME :D



Epiphany (n.) a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience.

The entirety of our lives is marked with milestones and a series of firsts. The first trembling steps of a baby, on their tiny, tiny legs as his or her parents shriek in excitement, running for the nearest camera. The scream of a child as they cling to their parents' legs, refusing to be parted on the first day of school. The sense of exhausted yet exalted trepidation as the dean hands you your degree and you walk down the steps of the stage, wondering: "what the f*** do I do now?"

We are constantly on the move, pressured, by these huge, life-changing events that are supposed to define us, imprinting the societal definition of "identity" that marks and shoves us into tiny categories where we are then forced to operate for the rest of our lives. From the moment we are born, we find ourselves in a perpetually infinite race, forever eager to prove that we're better than everyone else around us that we often forget the reason we started the race in the first place.

We are surviving instead of *living*.

"Epiphany" is the universal, introspective pause button that we all wish we had. We ask that you not just celebrate the big things but to also look at the little things, the raucous, head-tipped back, full-bellied laughter that is a result of being surrounded by the people you love the most, the atmosphere of laziness that comes with an afternoon of not having anything to do and being perfectly content with that.

In the first edition of MONGA 2022, we invite you to just... be comfortable with your place in this world, instead of fighting to live, because *there is so much more to life than just survival.*



Ap

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Confirm

VIEW EDITORS' NOTE BELOW
THANK YOU!

OK



SEMESTER 2, 2021

FOUR GIRLS GATHER NERVOUSLY FOR THEIR FIRST ZOOM MEETING. AS THE POP-UP WINDOW OPENS AND THEIR FACES COME INTO VIEW, INTRODUCTIONS COMMENCE AS THEY GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER, HESITANT AND UNSURE AT WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR THEM AS 2022 MONGA EDITORS, FRESH FROM ELECTION RESULTS AND WONDERING WHAT THE HELL THEY JUST GOT THEMSELVES INTO.

SEMESTER 1, 2022

THE SAME FOUR GIRLS ARE IN A SOMEWHAT (BUT COULD BE MORE) SPACIOUS OFFICE AND THE VIEWER CAN TELL FROM THEIR MANNERISMS THAT THEY ARE AT EASE, COMFORTABLE AND FAMILIAR WITH EACH OTHER. ANY PASSERBY WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT THESE GIRLS WOULD HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR YEARS, NOT MERE MONTHS AS THEY SURVEY THEIR NEW OFFICE AND BEGIN PLANNING FOR THE YEAR AHEAD, FILLED TO BURSTING WITH CREATIVE ENERGY.



END OF SEMESTER 1, 2022



Ap



HI THERE!

Cac



ASHLEY HERE FROM MONGA AND ON BEHALF OF THE EDITORIAL TEAM, I'M HERE TO FORMALLY THANK YOU, DEAR READER, FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PICK UP THE FIRST EDITION OF THE 2022 MAGAZINE! THIS COMPILATION OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR'S ACTIVITIES, ARTICLES AND ALL ROUND SHENANIGANS HAS BEEN A LABOUR OF LOVE, STEMMING NOT JUST FROM OUR EFFORTS, BUT OF COURSE THOSE OF OUR AMAZINGLY TALENTED AND DILIGENT SUB-COMMITTEE TEAM AND THE WONDERFUL STUDENT BODY OF MONASH MALAYSIA.

Desk



File



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ADMITTEDLY, BEING THE FIRST OFFLINE MONGA EDITORS SINCE COVID HAS BEEN A CULTURE SHOCK, BUT, LIKE THE HUMAN RACE WE HAVE WEATHERED THROUGH THE UPS AND DOWNS, ULTIMATELY COMING OUT STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT, WITH A MUCH MORE PROFOUND APPRECIATION OF THE PEOPLE AND PLACES AROUND US. YES, LIKE EVERYONE WE HAVE MADE MISTAKES, BUT WE ARE STRIVING TO BE BETTER, TO CEMENT OUR READERS' FAITH IN US AS 2022 EDITORS.

TO THOSE THAT HAVE SUPPORTED US SINCE DAY 1, WE ARE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL.

TO THOSE WHOSE EXPECTATIONS WE HAVE YET TO FULFIL, WE PROMISE WE ARE TRYING OUR BEST AND WE HOPE THAT YOU CAN FLIP THROUGH OUR HUMBLE LITTLE MAGAZINE AND APPRECIATE IT FOR ITS ENTIRETY, FLAWS AND ALL.

<3, TSHEE, JINGWEI, CHAI TING & MYSELF AKA THE EDITORS OF MONGA 2022.



TO BE CONTINUED IN SEMESTER 2, 2022...



2022'S MONGA: A READING GUIDE

ONE.

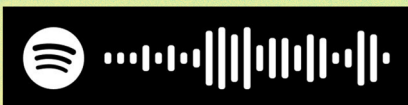
Lawlessly

At MONGA, we aren't in the business of narcissistically telling you how to read your magazine. Everyone (including our writers, media and graphic design team) views the world through their own specific lens, so whether you want to start from the beginning, middle or end, that's up to you! Maybe you need a break from assignments, because all the tabs open on your screen are starting to bother you, or maybe you wanna take a trip down memory lane of your time at Monash in the year 2022. Regardless, our little digital magazine will always be here and ready for your perusal!

TWO.

Our love language: Spotify

Okay, maybe we do have one teeny, tiny rule ... We've curated a playlist that specifically embodies the very soul of this semester's magazine theme and we'd HIGHLY recommend that you have it playing in the background as you scroll through. Just open up the Spotify app, click on the camera icon and scan the bar below to plug in and enjoy! Alternatively you can always click the link down below to be redirected to our playlist page.



THREE.

If you got it, flaunt it

Our beloved graphic design team has gone to great lengths to ensure that the magazine this year is as Instagrammable as it always has been therefore, with a simple screenshot and click of a button, you can unashamedly show off your favourite piece of work in this semester's MONGA on Instagram, allowing all other university publications to see the slightly in envy (••••).

Also if you find yourself in our magazine, feel free to snap a pic and use us to get yourself some well earned clout (wink eye emoji), BUT only if you tag us @musamonga, cause if you don't tag us then how are we gonna repost your beautiful stories -_-

FOUR.

Down to some serious shit

The stories and articles here have RANGE and there's definitely something for everyone, however we will acknowledge that, being a student-led magazine, some articles do contain sensitive content that may not appeal to all. Therefore, we have placed trigger warnings before the beginning of each article, to ensure that continue to remain a safe space for all our readers <3

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**METAMOR-
-PHOSIS**



H U M a N S

♥ O F ♥

m O N A S H





Faheem

Written by Elly

I've been on the move all my life. I was born in Seoul, South Korea because my dad worked there as a diplomat. I've lived in eight different countries, including Malaysia. After Seoul, I moved to Iraq, but then we left because of the Americans. . . bombing and all.

We went to Bangladesh and lived there for about four years. Then we went to Canberra, Australia for another three years before we came back to Bangladesh for four years. Those four years were the worst four years of my whole life.

I got clinically diagnosed with OCD at 11 years old. I got suicidal back then, so my dad was like, you know what? We need to get you treatment. The psychiatrist told me I carried a deep sense of perfectionism. When I was still in Australia in 2010, I did a month of fifth-grade class before going back to Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, I had to repeat the fourth grade as the Bangladeshi education system focused more on rote learning, whereas the Australian education system was more holistic. We were shoved down with so many subjects and textbooks for the sake of "learning". By the time the half-yearly exams came, I had a complete breakdown due to how much I needed to study. I never had to study this much before in my whole life!

But anyway, luckily, my dad was there and he helped me out. He developed a structured study plan for me and then you know what? I got the highest cumulative marks in my class- around 746 out of 800. After that, I received so much recognition and praise from my classmates and teachers. I felt good about it at first, but now I have to uphold this expectation. I couldn't. Then in fifth grade, came the Ramadan break.

I started having suicidal thoughts as a result of my religious mom. She instilled this fear in me that, let's say, if I miss a prayer, she calculated how many years I'll be in hell. Or when you're in the grave, you're going to be bitten by snakes, the angels are going to hammer you because you didn't pray and read the Qur'an. So, I had these messed up, incoherent thoughts until I got so scared, that I'll offend God, anger the prophet, or I'll end up in hell.



humans of monash 01

Those thoughts drove me insane. They just kept coming, you can't turn it off because that's what OCD is like. But when I do housework like cleaning, it's like 'no thoughts, head empty', literally. Yet, the thing about my OCD is it's about control and power. Because of my dad's job, I did not have the liberty to experience a lot of things.

I could never hold friendships down because people were never that genuine and they lost touch with you as soon as you were out of their vicinity. I had to leave a room I made my home several times. I lived several different lives. Each new country and city felt like it was a new life for me. Leaving places all the time messed me up—emotionally, psychologically & physically.

The OCD was how I was somewhat able to reclaim control over some aspects of my life. For example, my bedroom was the most sanctimonious place. It was where I kept all the things I loved. And when I was a child, I LOVED stationeries and I would buy all sorts of stuff which I didn't necessarily need—but hey, I bought them because it was cute!

Having to move around a lot, I discovered that I have a profound appreciation, or rather deeply sentimental and attached for objects I can call my own. Yet, I don't feel the same for people anymore because... if you do, you'll be in deep trouble. Yes, I do appreciate the brief and ephemeral friendships I have with the people I've met throughout my life, but it's never stable for me.

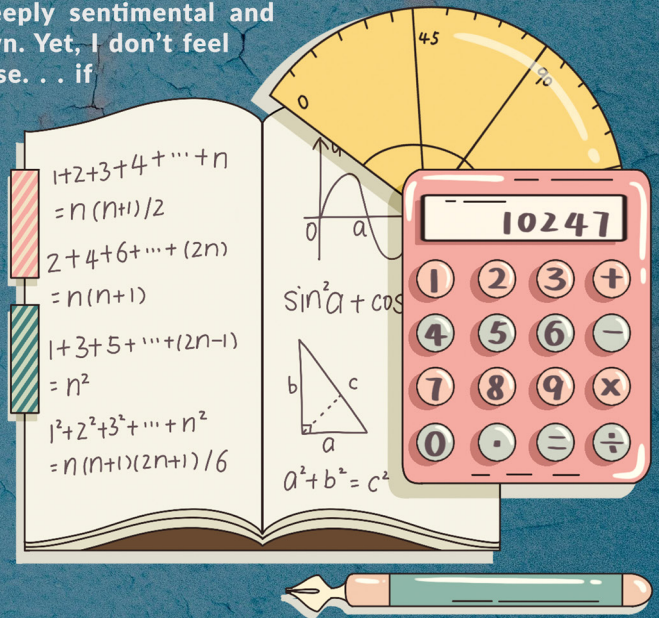
My therapist once asked me if I think I'm defective or anything, but I don't think so. Imagine — there are 500 pieces of a puzzle, but this puzzle happens to have an extra piece so now it has 501 pieces. I am that puzzle piece that doesn't fit anywhere on the puzzle. I'm just... me, you know? It sounds cliché as hell, but every person is unique in their ways.

But I feel really good about this year, this semester, about myself. I have a lot of hope and optimism, although sometimes I can be pessimistic. Now I feel like it's all clear. Like there's still hope, there's still hope.

creative talents, and conceptual ideas

Hope /həʊp/

n. 1 The expectation and desire for something to happen





Jensen

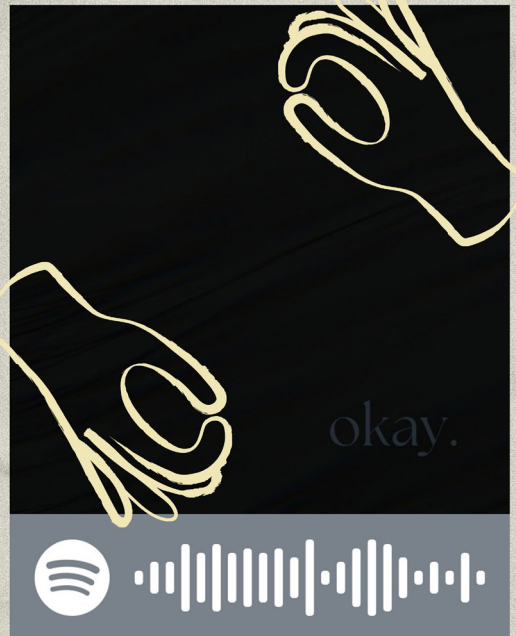
Written by Shau

There's a word sonder, and sonder if I'm not mistaken is the realization that everyone has their own story, their own struggles, their own everyday life. I feel like I'm always drawn to people. I always love just getting to know people and know their story, because everyone has a story worth telling and I feel like this was the opportunity for me to tell my story. Thank you for listening.

All right so, I'm going to focus on, you know the emotions that I felt recently. And how that led to me releasing my newest song, called "okay."

The song is a very simple, yet sharp reminder, that no matter what you are going through, we will be OK. I got to writing this song because of the pandemic, and during those times, just like a lot of people I assume, I went through a pretty dark period of my life. I mean, I went through a dark period of time because obviously, you know there's the normal, *Oh my God, I can't see my friends!* you know, *I'm away, I have to stay at home. Oh my God it sucks—* but I actually ended up losing a lot of my friends—they didn't die—but yeah, apparently you know there was a very complicated situation going on where some of them didn't really like me anymore or something like that.

So, they kinda teamed up together and decided to stop interacting and start talking to me at all right? And these were not just friends,— these were not, you know, people I just said hi and hello to— these were people I considered my brothers 'cause, I knew these guys for six to seven years of my life, you know. I spent a large chunk of my life with these guys. So anyway, losing them wasn't the easiest time, it took quite a toll on me. You know you lose your closest friends, and it's like you lose your brothers. And because I lived in a small town overseas, it was really hard for me to make new friends and from that sudden loss, I realized very quickly that no one is gonna comfort you.



humans of monash 02

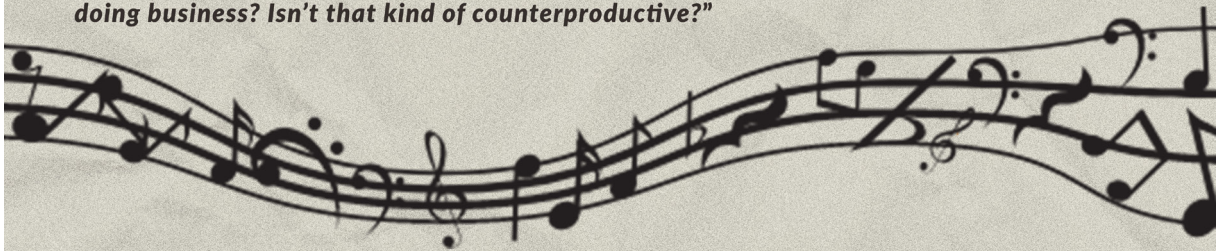
No one's gonna, you know, comfort you just because you don't feel OK. Or just because you feel down—because it's not their business. You know at the end of the day you are in charge of your own happiness. You're in charge of your own mental health so, it's a very, hard, and cold concrete slap to the face. But you know I understood, and at that moment I stopped complaining so much, I stopped sobbing so much, and thinking *Oh my God why don't I have friends?* And it became more of a *How can I effectively use this time?* Because back then I would go with my friends, and I mean we lived in a pretty conservative country so there was no getting drunk and smoking and all that, but we still hung out. So now that they're gone, *how do I use this time more effectively? How do I use this time to benefit myself?*

And at that point I already started making music. And ever since I was young, I had that curiosity, and now that I had quite literally all the time in the world, I'm like alright, why don't I, instead of crying both metaphorically and literally—I mean I had some sad nights. But you know, instead of crying and moaning. Why don't I, take my energy, and take my time and put it into something that I truly love. And music is not going to leave you. One Spotify click, and you can listen to any song. You can listen to rap, country music, Justin Bieber, over and over again. To anything. So, I decided to focus and really dedicate my time to my music, and that was how we got here, and how this song was created.

When I tell people that I'm a musician the first thing they assume is, "Ah, you play piano. Very good." Truth is, I am talentless, when it comes to instruments—but I am pretty damn good when it comes to music production. I make everything using my laptop, I just learn off of YouTube. And one thing a lot of people ask me as well is, "If you're doing music, then why the hell are you in Monash doing business? Isn't that kind of counterproductive?"

'Darling, you will be okay. And all the bad things they will all fade, will all fade. Why are you crying? It's only Friday, only Friday. And I hope I can still see you someday, see you someday.'

- okay. By Jensen



And the thing is, a lot of it (making music), you can learn straight from the Internet for free, I've picked up all of this from YouTube. The whole aim for this song was to make it short and simple because, it's a reminder, it's a reminder for myself. It's really just me talking to myself. So why should I bring in metaphors you know like, *you are the sun of my life, the flowers to my seed*—this type of crap, when it's just like *you will be okay*. All these bad things will fade, they will go away eventually. Do not give up. I want to be able to still be here in the future and see myself happy and just shining bright, free from what caused me to write this song in the first place.

humans of monash 02

But the thing with art is it's never predictable. A lot of people think that, oh, you guys make music, you know just press a few buttons and then out comes from the factory this finished product. But a lot of it is honestly trial and error. This song in particular however— it was very spontaneous. I thought of the lyrics very quickly, and what I do for lyrics, is that I would just keep writing. I tried not to stop because then, you give yourself writer's block. So why limit yourself when you can just allow yourself to be free and flowing with ideas? And then at the end of the day you can pick the good ones and discard the rest.

And like I said, the whole purpose of the song was to be a reminder. So, every time I listen to it, it's just a cycle of, *Alright, you know we've been through this*. We've been through the melancholy, the sadness, and all that stuff—we've been through it—that feeling of desperation, and the feeling of hopelessness, so why go through it again, when I know the right things I need to do. I don't claim to be a mental health advocate, I'm just speaking from my story, my experience. What I found worked for me, was to learn to focus on myself. A lot of people say *Oh, you got depression? Well, just BE happy*. And it's bullshit.

So, one thing that I found works for me, was to focus on myself—all aspects of myself. I go to the gym, yesterday I swam—all that stuff's been great for my physical health. For my mental health, I try not to put too much stress on myself, I try to treat myself. You don't want to, just treat yourself, you also have to work. I focus on my ambition, what gives me hope, a bright future.

The tragic part of being a musician is that you'll find that musicians or artists often—I'm not trying to generalize—but what I found is that they usually have some sort of pain in their life where they went through some sort of dark times that allow them to talk about something right because, it's like the whole rapper thing—if you're not from 'the hood' not from 'the ghetto', a lot of people might feel your music is disingenuous—because these people express their art from a place of pain, and from a place of real experiences. I rap too but I don't rap about getting hoes, getting lit, and all that crap. I rap about my life, learning how to be confident, dealing with haters, dealing with people who doubt me, so it's always drawing from life experiences.

I think I'm a very family-oriented person. I love my family. My brother and sister, Jermaine, and Jenelle, they mean everything to me. When I lost a lot of my closest friends, I realized very quickly that all I had was that—family. And they never, once disappointed, you know, they never once let me down and they were always there for me. I love them so much. They were with me, every step of the way. And when I would do performances, they were the ones who helped record it, they would always be there to support, rain or shine. One of the things I told them a lot, especially right before I left to come to Malaysia was, *Be great. You guys are going to be great*.

humans of monash 02

Everyone's got potential right? I don't believe in people being stupid unless they voluntarily choose to be. I don't believe in people being incapable. There are people out there with no limbs doing things we cannot even imagine. So, what's your excuse? We have no excuse; we have to try something.

I want to make my parents proud. I mean of course they're proud of me and they let me know and I love them so much. But I want them to do that old people thing where they tell everybody about their grandkids. You know that their grandkids are doing this and that. I want them to be so proud of me that they go around telling their friends, "*Well my son is doing this, my son is doing that.*"

And those are the three most important things for me: To do my siblings right, to make my parents proud, and to succeed for myself. I know it sounds selfish, but if you don't take care of yourself, then who will? Like I said earlier, no one is going to come save you, give you a pat on the back or a hug and tell you it's going to be ok. Your friends do it because they care about you but at the end of the day it's their choice to do that. They don't have to, it's not like there's a gun man in your house making them do that.

So yeah, three things: *Do it for yourself. Do it for your siblings. Do it for your family.* Because those are the people who stuck with me through thunderstorms, tsunami, earthquakes, you know when my ground was not stable and I had nobody, when I felt alone; they were that foundation that allowed me to build up myself, to be strong, and confident in myself. I count my blessings because you know when you take away everything I have, at the end of the day I still have an incredibly supportive family, and I owe everything to that.

And the thing is, I didn't always feel this way, I'm the oldest brother, and I'll admit it I wasn't the best. When I was younger, I didn't prioritize showing them how much I loved them, or I didn't know how to show it. There have been moments back then where I would get really upset with them over the pettiest things and I deeply regret that, and I've apologized—and they're so loving and accepting and forgiving, and sometimes it feels like I don't deserve them if I'm being honest.

And it was just us overseas, together, so we've always been caring and protective of each other, but I just didn't overtly show that. It wasn't until going through this pandemic when I realized that, when you go home, and you're sitting all alone by yourself, that it's your family that's going to comfort you, be there for you. And that's when I realized that I have to reciprocate— that I have to make sure they know I love them no matter what, because they've always loved me unconditionally. And during the pandemic, I got into quite a bit of trouble, and they were there, through thick and thin, they spoke up for me even though I know they were stressed out too. And we've moved past that together, and they're my number one.

humans of monash 02

Alright, let's talk about something more positive now. Let's leave all this dark stuff behind. One thing I'm very excited about is to start performing now that fingers crossed, COVID cases go down and we can start easing restrictions. I'm in the music club already, and hopefully we can get to have actual face to face live performances because I have a lot of pent-up energy that I just want to, get on stage, and let out. I want to jump around. Get people going, and then of course hit everybody in the feels with the sad songs too. I'm very passionate and very excited, I cannot wait.

And I know you know people always say stuff like, "Guys go hit that like and subscribe button, it means the world", and all that, and I do all this for me. You have to do something for you because you want to. Because when you take away the fame, take away the girls who want your number, take away the power, the money, you still have to have that same passion. That's how you know what you really love and how you know what your ambition or your future is. So of course, you know I love making music, even if my only fan is me.

But again, without my family, my friends, without the beautiful fans supporting me, it makes it all incredibly grim. It's like being at the gym by yourself. Cool. You get your space or whatever, but at the same time you don't have anyone pushing you, you don't have anyone encouraging you, and so with the fans, there's just every nice comment out there pushing you to do more. Oh, and shout out to Sebastian, who's this amazing kid from Europe that I met on Instagram, and from the first day I told him I made music he has been so incredibly supportive, even though we've never met physically, he's supported every song or content I've made, he's always there to comment, and show love. So, huge shout out to Sebastian. And I told him that, anything you want in the world, if you're crazy enough to think that you can do it, you can do it. So, from the bottom of my heart, I appreciate and love all of my fans, all of my family and friends.

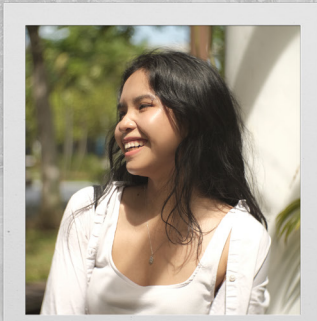
I'll leave you with this, no matter what you do of course—*don't do anything illegal*. Make sure your passion is legal, right? *But* as long as your passion is, you know good for society as a whole. Do it and when you do it, make sure that you have heart that you face fear and conquer the challenges ahead.

You can listen to Jensen's newest single *okay*. on all streaming platforms.



humans of monash 03

PHOTO TAKEN BY SEAN TAN



Nurul

Written by Shabnam

“She’s into superstitions, black cats and voodoo dolls”

She’s always had these two sides to her. Upon initial impression, one would perceive her as rather dreamy, a little ditzzy, spontaneous, bright-eyed and bubbly. Essentially, what one would deem, the ever so controversial Manic Pixie Dream Girl. She would just randomly whip out her deck of tarot cards and tell someone she had just met all about their wondrous love-life, making intense eye contact, staring deep into their soul, trying to create a sense of affinity between them.

Nurul liked leaving a magical impact sometimes but most times this then leads to people never seeing past this side of her. If one were to genuinely get to know Nurul, they’d realise that her wants, needs, motivations, and desires aren’t just surface level. She manifests independent goals for herself but is constantly misunderstood for just having quirky idiosyncrasies and for always being high on life.



The Nurul I know is indeed full of life but in the sense that she makes you feel at ease. She opens herself up to you so that you don’t feel the need to conceal your eccentricity. Her vulnerability allows the circle she’s in to enjoy embracing a fantasy that isn’t merely just a concoction of one’s imagination. Her way of doing away with conventions revitalises a way of life that lets you live freely.

Don’t get me wrong, these traits make Nurul memorable, exceptional even, but her vivacious personality is only a fraction of a much more robust narrative. As elementary as this may sound, there’s more to her than meets the eye.



humans of monash 04

PHOTO TAKEN BY SHAWN WONG



Rain

Living with
Bipolar II and ADD

Written by Rain Lee

“Don’t freak out, it’s just a small matter.”

To a perfectly normal person, it may be. But to me, before therapy, before treatment, it meant the world had come crashing down for me. Unbeknownst to me, I had Bipolar Disorder (Type II) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which are psychological conditions that are genetically determined.

I had no self-esteem, but full blown “self-confidence” (basically a nice way of saying narcissism). That led me to many places which I didn’t want to head to. Every conversation that spewed out of my mouth would somehow lead to me, myself and I. I freaked out at every little thing. Everything was a distraction to me, I could never focus. My grades were failing, my social life was becoming a mess and I didn’t know why.

My breaking point was when I lost an entire group of friends. Then, I decided I would have to seek the opinion of a professional psychiatrist. appointment and was provisionally

Late in November 2021, I went for my first diagnosed with my conditions. Eventually, in December 2021, after some tests, I was formally diagnosed with Bipolar II and ADD and put on medication.

At first, I told my psychiatrist that I was afraid to take the medicine because it would make me, firstly, seem like a crazy person and secondly, I would develop a dependency on it. After a long talk, he made me understand that mental health conditions are equivalent to physical health conditions. He likened my bipolar disorder to high blood pressure, where medical treatment was vital to lowering blood pressure, while ADD was like a long-lasting flu, that would eventually go away but medical treatment would still be required at first.

Months into medicine, and those by my side have told me that I’ve gotten calmer, much more mellow, much more relaxed, and I find myself being less distracted.

To the people I’ve hurt, I’m sorry. To the ones that are going through anything, stay strong and remember it’s okay to seek help.

Here I am, telling my story. Seeing a psychiatrist, having mental health issues, taking medicine and seeking treatment for them do not make you crazy. Don’t forget - mental health is as important as physical health, and seeing a psychiatrist and/or counsellor is as important as seeing a doctor for a flu.



**RANDOM
SH*TS AT
MONASH**

SEM 1 / 2022

return to campus

PHOTOS TAKEN BY
SAN JUN HOE, TSHETEN
YANGDEN BHUTIA, WONG Zi Yi
& YANG THONG CHEN











Famous Coconut

Member-Ready! Shell Soujana Utama
Johor Bahru - Soujana Utama
Central Mart Soujana Utama

Fruit Shake

1. Caramel Shake RM7
2. Mango Milk Shake RM5

Fruit Shake

1. Banana Milk Shake RM7
4. Strawberry Milk Shake RM5

Tea Chocoffee

1. Lemongrass RM5
2. Chocoffee RM7
3. Caramel Coffee RM5

Forma 1471

RM6



Monch

March edition

Photos by Tsheten Yangden Bhutia
Written by Ashley Lim

Therefore Cafe

Lot O2-G, Menara Symphony, 5, Jalan Professor Khoo Kay Kim, Seksyen 13, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor

Set against the backdrop of Menara Symphony Square's grey steel-and-glass structure, Therefore Cafe's (@therefore.cafe) iconic pink hue was a welcome reprieve from the drab and rainy Grab ride we had just endured. Well-known for its almost entirely pink-and-gold accented colour palette, Therefore Cafe has been featured in many Subang-ites Instagram feeds... but aesthetics aside, will it be MONCH-worthy?

The moment we passed through the brass-gilded doorway, we presented our vaccination status before being shown to our seats (we had booked a table in advance for fear of not being able to find a spot if we had merely walked-in). The layout of the restaurant is simple enough, familiar to any regular cafe hopper, with three main seating areas: comfortable U-shaped couches on the left, a long, almost family-style dining table that spanned the middle of the room and individually separated tables on the right.

As we settled in, we quickly perused their e-menu, which features a range of trendy

brunch items, pastas, main dishes and desserts. Like most cafes in PJ, their menu does lean towards more Western options, however there are a few which have been given a local twist to cater for a wider range of customers.

There is nothing heartier nor more comforting on a cold rainy day than a bowl of warm soup which was one of the first things we ordered.

Rapa-pump-pump (RM18) is a smooth roasted butternut squash soup, dotted with onion confit, chantilly cream and adorned with a small pink edible flower. Although soup is often thought of as just a starter and quickly dismissed once the main meal arrives, this was definitely not the case.

Light, subtly sweet, with gentle, savoury flavours of roasted garlic and just creamy enough so that one does not feel too satiated, it took us less than five minutes to annihilate the entire bowl. Easily one of the best things we had the entire time.

SUNBATHING SCALLOPS

Sunbathing Scallops (RM32) was a simple appetiser of four lightly seared scallops on a spoonful of roasted cauliflower mousse and encircled by drizzles of herbed butter and a seafood emulsion. Visually, this dish is a wonderful mix of warm reddish, orange and light yellow tones, nicely complimented by the pink backdrop of the plate. The taste itself is reminiscent of an ocean breeze however, the texture of the scallops left a



bit something to be desired as it was overcooked and on the chewy side, without the supple softness that usually comes to mind when we think of perfectly cooked scallops. Coupled with the hefty price tag of RM32, this dish may not be the most bang for your buck.

IT'S A BIG DAY



Seeing as the brunch options were available all the way till 4pm, we jumped at the chance to order It's A Big Day (RM42) which is Therefore Cafe's rendition of the classic "Western" breakfast that we often see on kopitiam menus, elevated to PJ cafe levels. The dish consisted of beet-cured salmon gravlax, haricot beans, sauteed wild mushrooms, a petite salad, roasted potatoes with herbs, pomegranate seeds, fig slices, grilled chicken cheese sausages, an english muffin, fruit preserves and a choice between scrambled eggs or an omelette of which we chose the former. Although on paper it may seem like a lot of food, the dish was of average breakfast plate size, with a pool of creamy scrambled eggs taking up most of the plate. Other than the slightly watered down mushrooms, the rest of the components of the dish were relatively up to par. The salmon was laid on top of the english muffin that had been slathered

with fruit preserves, cutting through the earthy flavour of the beets with a tinge of sweetness. The roasted potatoes and chicken sausage were the stars of the show as there was a sense of comfort to their heartiness that rounded off the breakfast nicely.

Our next brunch item of the day was the Shalala Lamb (RM 33). Brought to the table in a cast iron serving dish, this oven-baked shakshuka contained Australian minced lamb, organic eggs, ricotta cheese, pesto kale herbs and two buttered and toasted slices of sourdough bread. Two delightful egg yolks oozed through the sea of red tomato sauce, providing a nice creamy reprieve from the acidity of the sauce and slight gaminess of the minced lamb. The crumbled ricotta cheese and pesto kale added another caveat of complexity to the dish, providing a saltiness and herbiness that would have caused the flavour itself to be far too monotonous without it.



The shavings of cheese gave a sharp tang, sour-sweet bursts of tomato and earthy mushrooms rounded off the dish nicely and we will definitely be coming back for more of it.

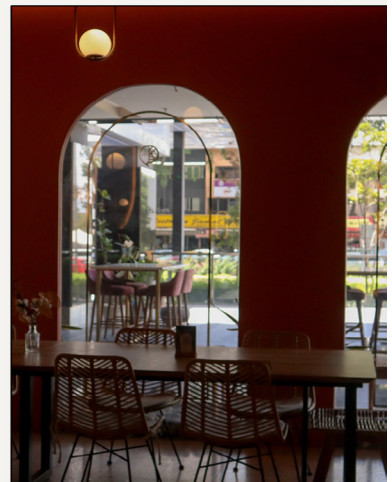
PESTO MEMENTO



The final and second favourite dish of the day was Pesto Memento (RM28), a short

grained arborio rice risotto, with kale herb pesto, sauteed wild mushrooms, tomato confit, fontina cheese and fresh leaves (this sounded slightly sus to me when we ordered it but it's all good guys). This dish is one of their few vegetarian options. Now, I am personally in awe of vegetarians because I'm very much a carnivore at heart (GIVE ASHLEY HER KBBQ!!) and often grow hungry when I eat just vegetarian meals, but this risotto was a pleasant surprise both flavour-wise and "filling-up-my-tummy-wise". Often, risotto uses bases such as chicken or beef stock to bring out the starch in risotto resulting in the creamy, rich texture and taste that we know and love. However, this risotto was able to achieve the very same satisfying mouthful, made even better with the herbaceous flavour of the pesto. The shavings of cheese

SHALALA LAMB





Unfortunately, we were far too full to order any desserts however we were able to wash down all of our food with a medley of drinks consisting of:

Hojicha Latte (RM15) which to my disappointment, was lost in the sea of milk and sweetener, lacking the nutty taste that I love so much.

Sunkissed Violet (RM15) was a visual stunner as the butterfly pea tea lent its signature dark blue-purple hue to the drink, accompanied by grapefruit puree, mint, lime, orchid syrup and sparkling water. The taste of the drink transported me to a serene garden in the spring countryside, however do make sure you stir it up first to allow the flavours to mingle with each other or else you'll end up with a mouthful of drab, blue-tinted tea.

Passionate Pair (RM15) was a cold-brewed lemongrass tea, accented with pear puree, passion fruit and boosted with a refreshing zing of sparkling water. Overall, it was refreshing but forgettable as I was unable to taste the fruit that had been advertised in the menu.

And finally the most basic thing anyone can order in a cafe: two iced lattes. Pretty much a staple at any cafe, this was another drink that

went down without much fuss but nothing too spectacular either.

With that, this Head Writer's very first MONCH in two years comes to an end :(Being a bit of a cafe hopper myself during the weekends, the dishes at Therefore Cafe, with their cute names and of course notable ambience was a good addition to my cafe rotary list and all of their dishes, despite their flaws are still most assuredly MONCH-approved!



Monch

April edition

Photos by Jerry Foong
Written by Natasha Maya

*This article features a halal restaurant.

Located in the heart of KL, a cosy unassuming restaurant sits between rows of buildings in Jalan Panggong. The exterior of the restaurant is simple with a touch of traditional nostalgia as seen by the wooden details of the entrance.

We made the mistake of coming right during lunch hour on a Saturday (this was before Ramadan) which meant that we had to jot our names down and wait. But it all worked out in our favour because it gave us the chance to explore the area behind the shop lots and take a lot of Insta-worthy pictures!

The wait took less than half an hour and the service was relatively quick considering that the whole restaurant was full. But not to worry, the seating arrangements were spaced out well enough that we had our privacy while eating.

Their menu had an interesting range, from local delights like nasi lemak and mee goreng to lighter food such as toasts and buns. After a good 20 minutes and a lot of "Wow this looks good, oh wait, this one looks good too," we finally decided on the following:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Luckin Kopi Kaw Cold | RM5.50 |
| 2. Luckin Cham Cold | RM5.50 |
| 3. Salted Egg Rice - Chicken | RM13.50 |
| 4. Luckin Sizzling Chicken Rice | RM18.90 |
| 5. ABC | RM8.90 |

Honestly, the drinks themselves deserve a whole article on their own - it was so good that I could probably write a poem about it. The Luckin Kopi Kaw Cold was refreshing and rich, with a slightly bitter aftertaste (but in the best way). I don't know how they did it, but they managed to find the perfect balance



of milky but not too milky. And despite the ice melting, it maintained its rich caramelised taste throughout the meal. As a broke uni student, nothing beats affordable yet good quality caffeine! :')

As for the Luckin Cham Cold, I personally did not enjoy the first sip but after a while it grew on me. It was the perfect blend between tea and coffee, two of the best tastes in one! And to top it all off, our Ipoh-born photographer approves of their cham, going as far as to say that it was almost on par with Ipoh's cham! (That's when you know it's good good).



Luckin Kopi

14, Jalan Panggong, City Centre,
50000 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah
Persekutuan



The Salted Egg Chicken Rice looked good in the menu pictures, but tasted even better than it looks. Don't let the small portion fool you, it turned out to be very filling that we had a food coma afterwards. The

**SALTED EGG
CHICKEN RICE**



chicken maintained the familiar crispiness and tenderness of fried chicken, but without being dry or oily. Even the sauce is good, not too thick, not too salty with just a hint of chilli to compliment its milky flavour.

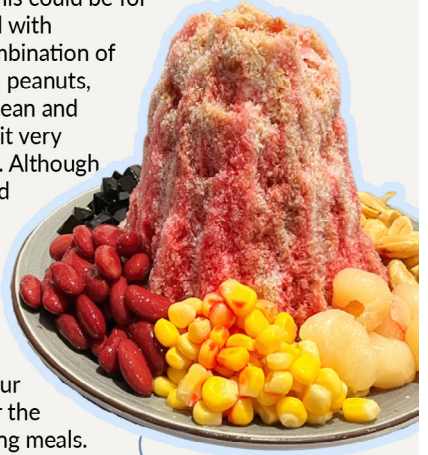
Personally, the Luckin Sizzling Chicken Rice was the star of the show. It was served raw on a hot plate and a waiter came every once in a while to flip the chicken to ensure that it was thoroughly cooked (so that my lack of culinary skills would not be the end of me).

With a mixture of corn, chicken, thick gravy, blocks of butter and rice over a banana leaf, this meal was both visually pleasing and incredibly delicious. Every ingredient complimented each other such as how the corn added texture to the soft tender chicken.

Thankfully, they were also very generous with their portions because I could not get enough of it!

Unfortunately every great establishment has their flaws, and this came in the form of their ABC. For full disclosure, we are not huge ABC fans but we've tasted a few good ones in our lifetime. Don't get me wrong, the ABC was still pretty good and I think those with a sweet tooth will enjoy this. If you're adventurous with your desserts and your taste buds are looking for something new, this could be for you.

It was served with an interesting combination of lychee, black jelly, peanuts, orange skin, red bean and corn which made it very visually appealing. Although the ingredients did not seamlessly blend with each other, the sweet shaved ice bandung syrup was refreshingly good to cleanse our taste palates after the heavy yet satisfying meals.



ABC

Considering the restaurant is only a 5-minute walk from the Pasar Seni LRT, the location is quite convenient. We would definitely recommend this place to any person looking for an innovative local restaurant. We confidently dub this restaurant as MONCH- APPROVED!



Located in Jalan Sultan, one stop away from Pasar Seni and amidst a line-up of various other tempting cafes, Mingle Cafe sits unassumingly, its entrance covered in foliage and plants, as if trying to set itself apart from its competition. Immediately upon entering you're greeted with an enticing, extensive collection of cakes, pastries, loaves and cupcakes - good luck trying to resist yourself from saving desserts for the end! Walking in, you get encased in the rustic, vintage and homely feel of the cafe right away. Its warm ambient lighting, eclectic posters and paintings covering its walls, assortments of memorabilia strewn around the cafe, and especially their use of upcycled furniture - they even used old doors as tables - truly sets them apart from other vintage cafes.

The cafe was fairly crowded since it was rush hour and it was the day after Raya as well, but even so everything we ordered came relatively quickly and the staff were very friendly. The first thing we ordered was their cappuccino, and we all agreed that it was the only thing on their menu that wasn't up to par - it tasted somewhat bland and watered down, and it won't impress actual coffee-lovers.

Their food menu ranged from Malaysian options to Western ones, so we had a variety to choose from. We decided on:

- Nasi Ulam (Daging Rendang) - RM 27
- Salted Egg Chicken Spaghetti - RM 27
- Chicken Burger - RM 25
- Cappuccino - RM 12
- Lotus Biscoff Burnt Cheesecake - RM 22

SALTED EGG
CHICKEN SPAGHETTI



We started off with their salted egg chicken spaghetti, and from the very first bite it won us over. The pasta was perfectly al dente, well-salted, and the egg flavour was perfectly balanced - it coats your mouth in such a way that it hits all the right spots in your taste bud. The chicken pieces were satisfyingly crispy and juicy; all of which resulted in a dish that not only fulfilled our stomachs, but also gave us plenty of aesthetic pleasure as well.

NASI ULAM



Next, we had the Nasi Ulam, which is a traditional Indonesian and

Malaysian mixed dish consisting of a blend of aromatic herb rice, and it also turned out to be one of our favourites. The rice was incredibly fragrant, and the beef was so soft and buttery that you could pull it apart with just your spoon. It was served with a side of salad including rocket and thyme basil, which added the hint of freshness and greenness that this dish needed. All in all, everything in the dish was well-balanced, fragrant and fulfilling, and the quantity was good for the price as well. It also had the added factor of looking extremely appeasing.



Monch

May edition

 **Mingle Cafe**

55, Jalan Sultan, City Centre, 50000 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Photos by Jun Hoe & Luanne Choong
Written by Sreana Habiba

CHICKEN BURGER



Next was the chicken burger - this was interesting. It was an amalgamation of sweet and savoury flavours, with the egg mostly overpowering the whole thing. The bun was flavorful but slightly burned at the edges. The actual chicken could have also been juicier, since it failed to really give us that hit of dopamine when you bite into a really delectable burger. Regardless, it was still tasty, just not the best burger we've had in our lives.

And finally - desserts! We had to give their flavour of the month a try, which was the Lotus Biscoff Burnt Cheesecake. The first bite quite literally melted in our mouths - it was so lusciously soft and smooth, with the cheesecake being perfectly creamy and, well, cheesy. It was, as its name states - burnt from the sides and impossibly soft on the inside, which created a heaven of an experience for our taste buds. Although we did enjoy the cake, we also noted that the price (RM 22) could be a bit less, and the Lotus Biscoff flavour could be more pronounced.



LOTUS BISCOFF BURNT CHEESECAKE

If you're looking for a place to eat that has an incredibly warm and homely ambiance and amazing bites both savoury and sweet, this is the cafe for you! One of our photographers who's a Penang local also noted that the cafe gave her Penang cafe vibes, which is also a plus for them. And lastly, if you're a Harry Styles fan you're going to love Mingle Cafe because it was all their playlist consisted of. We definitely were not complaining.



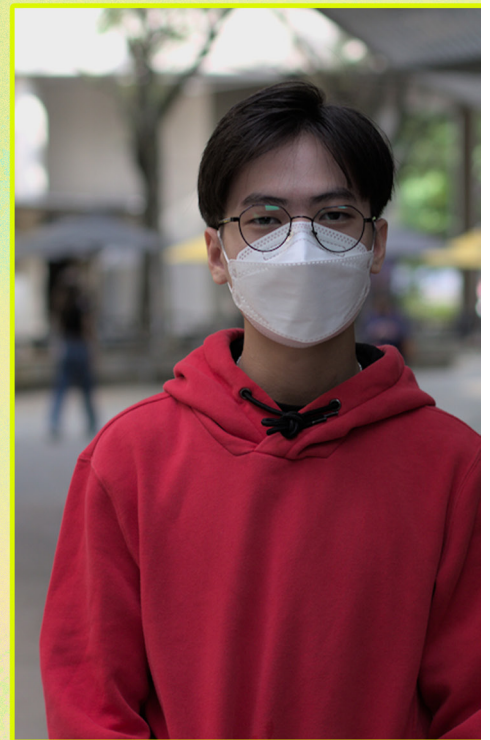
TAKEN BY YANG THONG CHEN,
SEAN TAN, SHAWN WONG,
NURSYAFIQA ALEEYA &
HANIF RAFLI

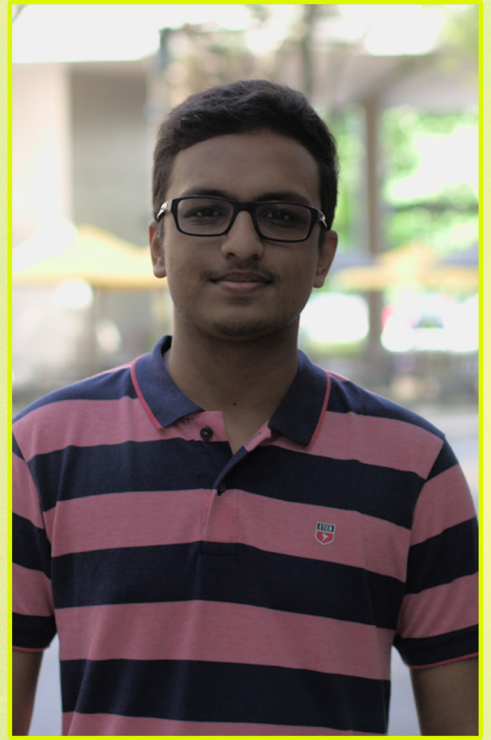


PORTRAITS SOFI MONASH









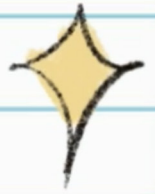






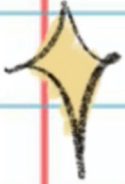


MONASH



FIT

CHECK



PHOTOS TAKEN BY
TSHETEN YANGDEN BHUTIA,
NURSYAFIQA ALEEYA,
YANG THONG CHEN,
& LUANNE CHOONG

MONASH

FIT

CHECK

thE cATegory iS:

Black and White
Black and White
Black and White
Black and White







SNEAKER
SHOWCASE











PHOTOS TAKEN BY TSHETEN YANGDEN BHUTIA
& YANG THONG CHEN



PHOTOS TAKEN BY TSHSTEN YANGDEN
BHUTIA, YANG THONG CHEN & NURSYAFIQA
ALEEYA

7-SCHOOL SPIRIT WEEK

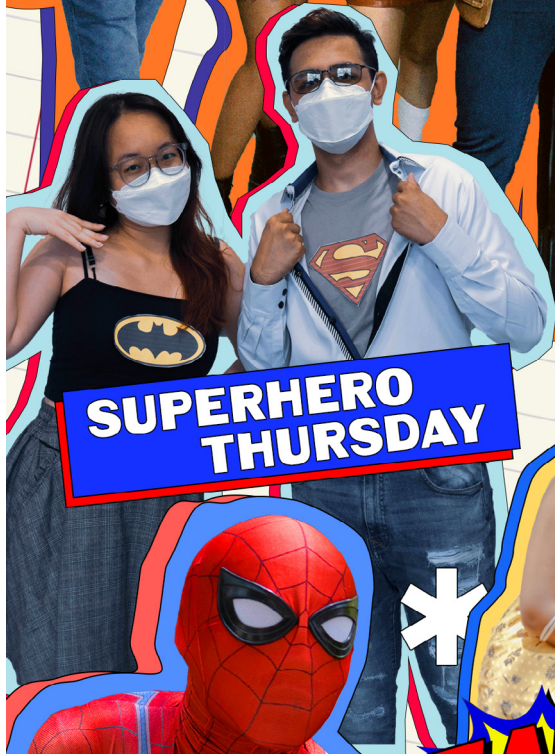
CHRISTMAS
IN MARCH

DUO TUESDAY

70'S FRIDAY



COLOUR WARS



SUPERHERO THURSDAY



ZAP! 7-SCHOOL SPIRIT WEEK

SOIT X SOE DESTRESS NIGHT



The much needed de-stress night was the perfect way for Monashians to wrap up a long semester's work of deadlines and assignments. Held by the SOIT and SOE for students on the 27th of May, from 6:30PM - 10:30PM; this event was one of the many coveted for occasions post-covid by everyone. Expectations and excitement for such an event were at an all-time high.

This event gave students the option to play some games and chill with friends at the student lounge, join a LAN party which took place in the badminton lounge or even head out to Audi 1 and watch some movies on the big screen.

The night started off with students trickling into the student lounge where they were met with good food and even greater company. Upon entrance, you would register by the table and then you were free to join a round of snooker, or some fun board games. Mostly however, students seemed content chatting to themselves while snacking on pizza that was being served, while a handful of students huddled around by the couch lost deep in what seemed to be a very competitive board game.

The lounge had been transformed into a fine hangout spot, with dimmed lights, and disco lights, followed by the steady thrum of people having a great time. There was a long table spanning nearly the length of the lounge stacked with boxes of pizza, and you had your pick of snacks and drinks. The event organisers did an amazing job making sure everyone got something to eat, not to mention them checking in on students that seemed to be by themselves ensuring no one was left feeling alone.



"It's been good, being able to look forward to tonight as a way to de-stress," said Jasper, a first year student from the School of IT. He and his friends, Manan and Abhishek, had just finished a gruesome assignment and found that nights like this were essential to keeping their mental health in check.

Audi 1 had a completely different vibe altogether, with snacks being handed to students as they entered the auditorium. The room had been slightly dimmed and students had voted for Free Guy as their movie of choice to be played in the hall. Students slid into their seats, arms full of snacks, and as they awaited for the movie to start, they murmured amongst themselves, smiles donning their faces.

"I've had a full on stress breakout from wearing masks all day trying to finish my assignments," joked Isha, a student from the School of Arts and Social Sciences. She and her friend Shameema were thrilled to see Ryan Reynolds on the big screen and were beyond relieved to finally untangle the mountains of stress they were carrying from a jam-packed semester.

"We're heavily caffeinated, overly tired, but still really excited to be here, because we haven't had anything like this because of COVID, so we're trying to attend as many events as possible to make up for all the time we've lost to the pandemic."

Min Hao, the representative for the School of IT, said that one of the most rewarding things about planning such an event, aside from seeing students enjoying themselves, was being able to see everyone physically for the first time. JQ, the representative for the School of Engineering echoes this sentiment of finally seeing everyone together. Lastly, above all, the representatives wished to thank the dedicated team that came together to put together the de-stress night.

"The organising team was absolutely spectacular during the entire event, and a huge shout-out goes to both the SOIT and SOE subcommittee teams along with Ally and Sue Wern for the whole tiring and fun process of planning an amazing night!"

Well here's to more de-stress nights for students to let loose and have fun!





GRN movie night



PHOTOS BY WONG Zi Yi



Amidst the stifling, stress-filled haze that was Week 11, came a saviour in the form of Monash's Green Representative Network (GRN) Outdoor Movie Night which was held on the 18th of May 2022 at 6.30 pm. Admission into the event was free of charge however students who had pre-registered but all students who were interested in spending a relaxing night underneath the stars were welcome. All participants were also given the chance to win Grab vouchers via a lucky draw during the event as a small appreciation gift for participating.

In keeping with the club's theme that advocates for environmental appreciation and sustainability, the event was held at the Monash Football Field, with the setting sun providing a perfect backdrop for the movie: Netflix's "Don't Look Up", which consists of A-list celebrities such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Ariana Grande and Timothee Chalamet.

The movie entails two low-level astronomers must go on a giant media tour to warn mankind of an approaching comet that will destroy planet Earth, an ominous and striking form of foreshadowing as in reality we grapple with the ever-concerning issue of global warming, which may not be as urgent as a comet coming to destroy our planet, but is nevertheless just as deadly.



The event began with a mingle session as students milled and socialised amongst each other, all of them bringing along a myriad of picnic supplies, the field slowly dotted with colourful blankets and mats, with many students leaping upon the opportunity to attend one of the first on-campus events held in the past 2 years.

Pizza, snacks and coolers of drinks were also provided during the event for those who had registered earlier, however most students were encouraged to bring their own cutlery as part of GRN's efforts to reduce waste and encourage a more eco-friendly lifestyle. The movie began as soon as the last rays of Sun dipped below the horizon, with a line of fairy lights providing soft and cosy illumination.

Despite being understandably busy during the event, GRN's President, Lim Yi Shan expressed her gratitude and elaborated on her experience of hosting the club's first offline event:

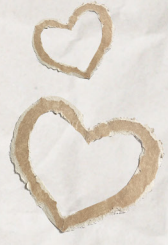
"While there were many hiccups along the way, our committee had pulled through and made it a successful event even without prior experience in hosting a physical event together. We were glad for the opportunity to finally provide our fellow GRs and Monashians a fun and relaxing time, and are so grateful to hear that some attendees said they experienced an actual uni-life event for the first time."

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY LIM



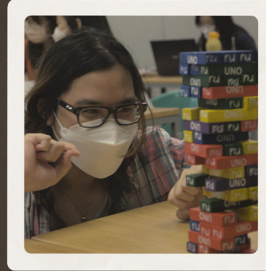
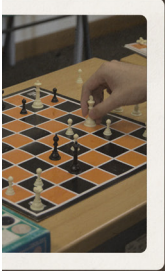


m u s a s o s
m i n g l e n i g h t



A collage of board game boxes and a werewolf cutout with decorative doodles. The background is a blurred image of a person's hands playing a board game on a wooden table. In the foreground, several board game boxes are visible, including 'Cards Against Humanity', 'Ultimate Werewolf', 'Codenames', 'Uno', 'King of Tokyo', and 'Munchkin'. A cutout of a brown, furry werewolf with a fierce expression is placed on top of the 'Cards Against Humanity' box. The text 'monash board gaming night' is written in a colorful, bubbly font across the center. The text is surrounded by various white doodles, including swirls, stars, and plus signs. The overall aesthetic is playful and fun.

monash board
gaming night



Every Tuesday from 5-8pm, Monash Board Gaming Club welcomes students from different schools and distracts from the never-ending online assessments. By setting up the venue, music and slides, we ensure that our members can enjoy their fullest when joining our session!

Currently Monash Board Gaming Club has around 50 board games which ranges from family feud to strategic games which enables a spectrum of challenges and fun. Not to mention, our club works like a board game cafe, where members can come in anytime to have some fun!

As our club revolves around our members, we make sure their voices are heard as we buy new board games according to the member's suggestions! With any extra fees, we will spend it all on the members by allowing them to feast on some pizza!

All in all, the purpose of this club is to create a welcoming board gaming community, to allow new students to join or for your group of friends to come in and play as well. We hope joining the Monash Board Gaming Club gives you the opportunity and reason to prosper your friendship at your time in Monash University.



m p a c D r a m a
n i g h t



PHOTOS BY HANIF RAFLI
ARTICLE BY NATASHA MAYA



MPAC Presents: A Night of Drama

To conclude the hectic month of May, Monash Performing Arts Club (MPAC) hosted their annual Night of Drama on the 30th and 31st of May, the first time since campus reopened. Registration was done through google forms and was priced at only RM5 for students to enjoy a collection of five acts, each spanning around 15-minutes long respectively. The members of the club were separated into groups and given creative freedom to address the burning opinions they have about the world around them. And the result? A dramatic two-hour event filled with audible gasps, stifled giggles and even a loud “what the fuck” directed at plot twists from the audience.

Located at the student lounge dance studio, the intimate setting provided viewers with an immersive experience by granting a close-up view of the actors' raw and emotional facial expressions. The subtle movements and shift in energy was also easier to detect due to the close seating arrangements to the flat stage. Although the small room was packed, it was still spacious enough to comfortably accommodate the attendees while still maintaining social distance.

The event officially started at around 7:15 p.m. after a brief warning regarding the elements of violence, addiction and self-harm that was present in some of the plays. MPAC members successfully demonstrated their skills in acting, directing and script writing by effortlessly introducing thought-provoking topics through their impeccable performances. The first play consisted of a heated argument between a wife and her cheating husband who was exploring his sexuality, each dialogue cleverly revealing more details about their background.

The second act featured a forbidden love story between two highschool kids who introduce an expiration date to their relationship, the plot twist being that they were cousins all along (the crowd was shook at this one). The third play followed a symbolic representation of a troubled high-achieving student who was confronted by her neglected inner self. The fourth act embodied an abstract take on the experience of losing a loved one and how it could drive a person to insanity. The last act portrayed a toxic relationship and how the characters overcame their worst selves by being apart.

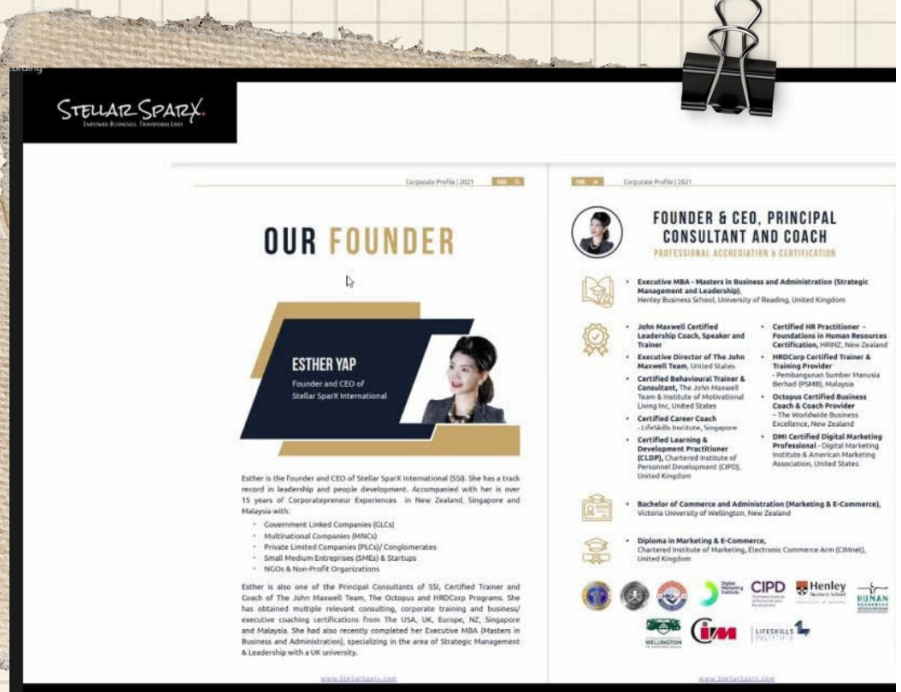
Despite the number of performances, it was not overwhelming as there was a 15-minute intermission after the first two plays to allow audiences to fully grasp the storylines and process the plot twists. And by the end of the event, the audience was buzzing with excitement and chatter, enthusiastically discussing the different plots amongst themselves. They also had the chance to take pictures and mingle with the performers after the show.

From the start, the intention of the event was to spark conversations which wouldn't have otherwise happened. Judging from the impression it left on the audience, this event was definitely a success. One of the driving factors to the smooth event can be credited to the teamwork between members of the club. The seamless transitions from one scene to the next truly brought the performances to life. We certainly look forward to seeing more of MPAC and what they have in store for us in the future!



SOFT SKILL WORKSHOP

MONASH CAREER PEER



Monash Career Peer (MCP) soft skills workshop brought along with it a plethora of sage advice, guidelines as to how to learn to be a better human being not only in the workforce but just in your everyday life as well, along with thought-provoking entrepreneurial discussions. Our speaker for the second day of the seminar was Miss Esther Yap, who is the founder and CEO of Stellar SparX International. She has extensive experience in leadership and people development, as well as over 15 years of Corporate Preneur Experiences in New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia.

After being introduced, she started off the seminar talking about the importance of emotional intelligence and how pertinent it is to have it in regards to being in a working environment; it is the hallmark of being a good teammate and a good leader. It also ties in with

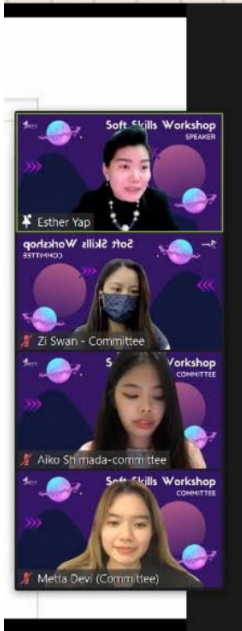
our communication and teamwork skills as it helps us to understand other people better and gain empathy. She discussed how to apply Law of Awareness to recognize your communication strengths and limitations, how to understand how others' viewpoints and how to work with differing personalities in the workplace. She talked about how to move from 'me' to 'we' team: through communicating and appreciating the styles of others and working well together.

Next, she talked about various other 'quotients' a person can inhabit - SQ (social quotient) which means having social awareness and AQ (adversity quotient) which deals with how you respond to challenges, among many others. "Empathy can only be communicated properly if you CAN communicate it properly," she said about having a high enough EQ.



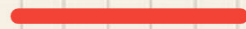
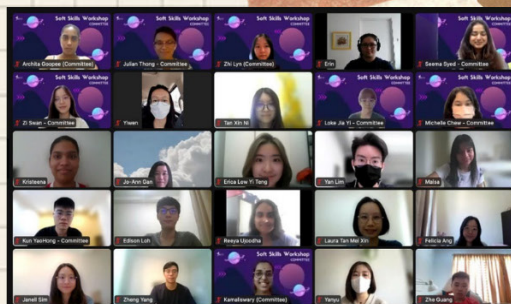
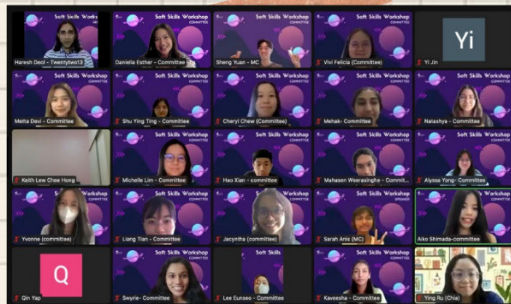
She also used a volcano analogy - how if you're not able to effectively manage high feelings and if you don't have a sufficient EQ, your feelings and emotions will bottle up and eventually implode, consequently damaging your relationships and career opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial to exercise your emotional intelligence as it is a fundamental thing to master. Throughout her talk, she included many interactive sessions through which participants could offer their own insights in regards to the topics being discussed, which allowed the listeners to integrate the material in a more comprehensive manner.

After a break, she talked about the Maxwell Method of D.I.S.C., which is a tool for improving emotional intelligence of any individuals and teams at any workplace, with the aim of improving communications and increasing team productivity. It guides the application of it for continuous professional and leadership development. For example, D archetypes are dominant and determined, I types are influencing and inspirational, C types are competent and conscientious, S types are stable and secure and so on. This tool, Ms. Esther said, is vital for improving productivity and harmony on a professional level.



At the end of each workshop, Ms. Esther held a QnA session where participants got to inquire her about their personal experiences, which was followed by a lucky draw and winner announcement.

Ultimately, the goal of this seminar was to guide the participants in improving and growing their inner lives and their emotional worlds, as well as urging them to be cognizant of their productivity types which will then in turn be fruitful and prolific when it comes to their careers.



MCP
EVENT

WRITTEN BY SHAURA NAEEM

Sri Lanka, the beautiful island nation in the heart of the Indian Ocean, currently faces the worst economic and political crisis since the country's independence. Over 22 million people have been left to fend for their own without access to food, water, gas, electricity, and medicine, all by a corrupt government that mismanaged the country's funds to the brink of destruction. Millions of Sri Lankans spend their days stuck in an endless cycle of waiting for basic goods. Shops have been forced to shut down because they do not have electricity. Homes do not have air conditioning or fans, and young children and infants have been suffering from heatstroke as Sri Lanka copes with one of their hottest years. People have died standing in lines for hours under the sweltering heat to fuel their tanks.

SRI LANKA PROTEST

"you messed with the wrong generation"

Although corruption has run deep through the country for many years, the pandemic coupled with the current government's failure to respond effectively has pushed Sri Lanka to what people have been calling, 'near the point of no return'. During the height of the pandemic, the government made the fatal mistake to ban fertiliser imports, declaring Sri Lanka an organic farming nation, which drastically impacted the agricultural industry and led the country to become heavily reliant on imports. "You can't hide forever. The government has to be accountable; for all they've done toward the minority groups, like the Tamils and the Muslims. It's sickening how this was kept under wraps for so long, and only now is it all coming to light, more people are seeing how corrupted they really were." said Lakshani Sathasivam, a Sri Lankan student from Monash.



For the first time however, things are different. The historically divided nation stands united, with the collective goal of setting things right. And the group at the forefront of spearheading this change is the youth.

Aamina Mustaqdeen, Monash's Sri Lankan country representative in Malaysia, shared her insight on the situation, "We, the younger generation, are being more vocal about this now, especially with social media—it's different. Our parents didn't do much about this, they went about their life, but we the youth, we're loud, we're opinionated, and we are trying to clean up their messes, because this is our world to live in."



Aamina and the Sri Lankan community in Monash University Malaysia gathered on university grounds for a peaceful demonstration on the 5th of April 2022. They join the legions of Sri Lankan people scattered over the world, all standing together in solidarity for their brothers and sisters at home.

"It's hard to hear our family back home talk about the struggles they face at home, and all we as Sri Lankans living abroad can do is to pray and spread awareness about how bad the situation is at home," said Lakshani.

"We are Sri Lankan students from Malaysia, we are far away from home still feel the fire inside our people, our brothers and sisters are fighting for our country, people are out on the streets to build a future for our next generation. We hear you; we see you; we feel you. Our hearts are with you all!" said Thineth Nanayakkara who was at the demonstration.



"We are Sri Lankan students from Malaysia, we are far away from home still feel the fire inside our people, our brothers and sisters are fighting for our country, people are out on the streets to build a future for our next generation. We hear you; we see you; we feel you. Our hearts are with you all!" said Thineth Nanayakkara who was at the demonstration. For the Monash students that want to help, both Aamina and Lakshani echo the same sentiment: Be kind and mindful towards your Sri Lankan peers. "They're going through unimaginable pain, and people leaving hate online towards the Sri Lankan community doesn't help," said Lakshani, "We shouldn't compare different country's problems. They are all valid." "You know, I'm living abroad, I have a roof over my head, I'm very privileged to have this, but my brothers and sisters at home do not have that luxury, so please donate to them if you can," said Aamina. Although it may seem insignificant, signing petitions have historically been crucial to advocacy, and spreading awareness. "The biggest thing you can do is talk about it, spread awareness, donate, and sign petitions. The more eyes we have on them, the harder this will be to hide. Put pressure on the government, on your leaders. We all just want this sorted as quickly as possible," said Lakshani.

PHOTOS BY JERRY FOONG



"THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH WE AS CITIZENS CAN DO, I REMAIN HOPEFUL BECAUSE HOPE IS ALL ANY OF US. THAT AND OUR VOICES."



Read a
secret,
leave

A

SECRET.

↳



I have a fear
of missing out
on my youth

;

hooked up
with
someone
from MUSA
in the disabled
toilet.



by the end of it,
you were loving someone
who used to exist,
and i was loving someone
who never did.

I know I deserve better,
but i'm not strong enough
to end things with him.

I THINK I'M IN
LOVE WITH MY
LECTURER

I wish I can
Live up to what
is expected of me

Graduation



and so

the adventure begins



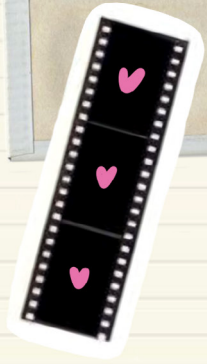


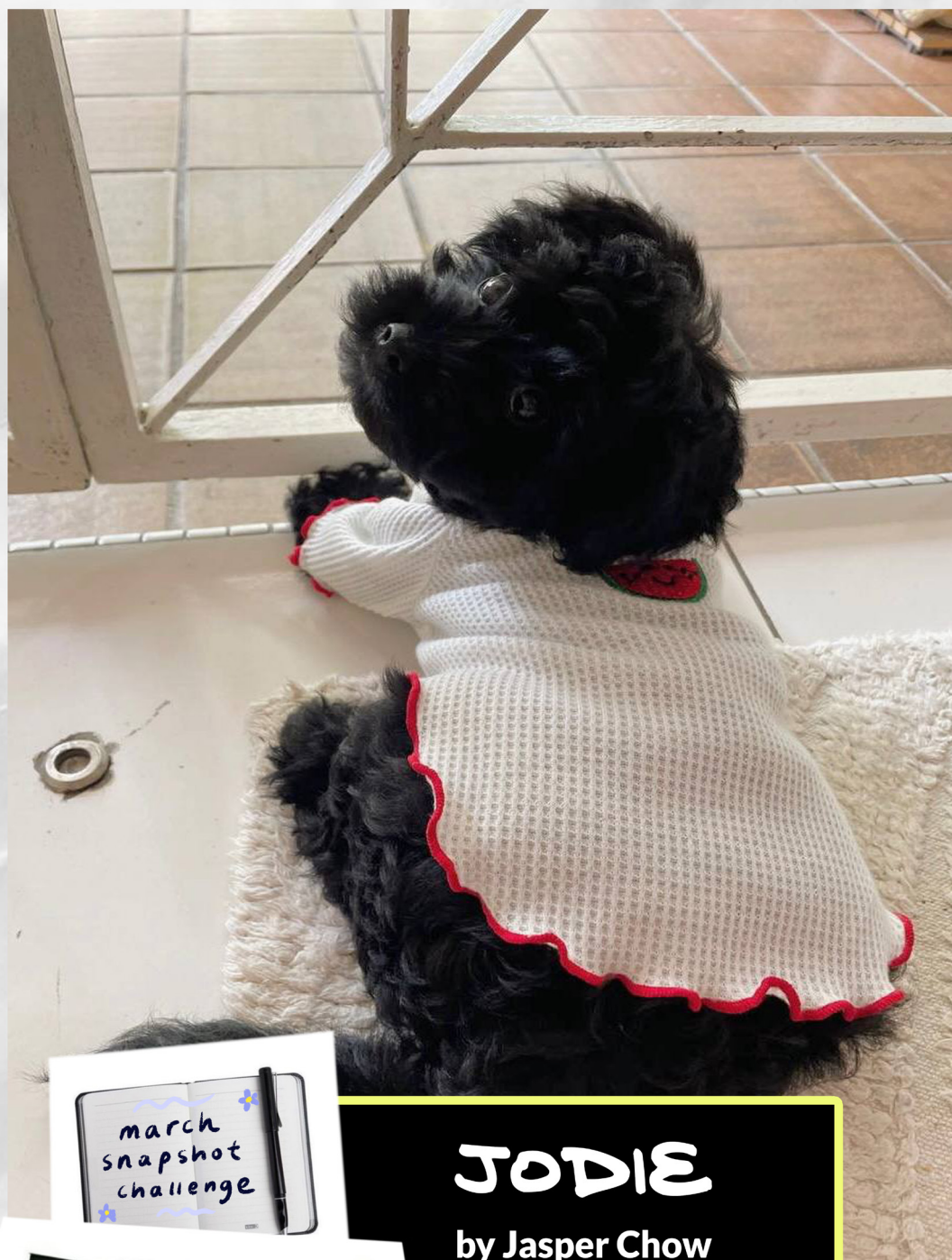
I feel at home when I am with you



SNAPSHOT
CHALLENGE
WINNERS

2307216734 POLAROID® 3





march
snapshot
challenge

HOME

JODIE

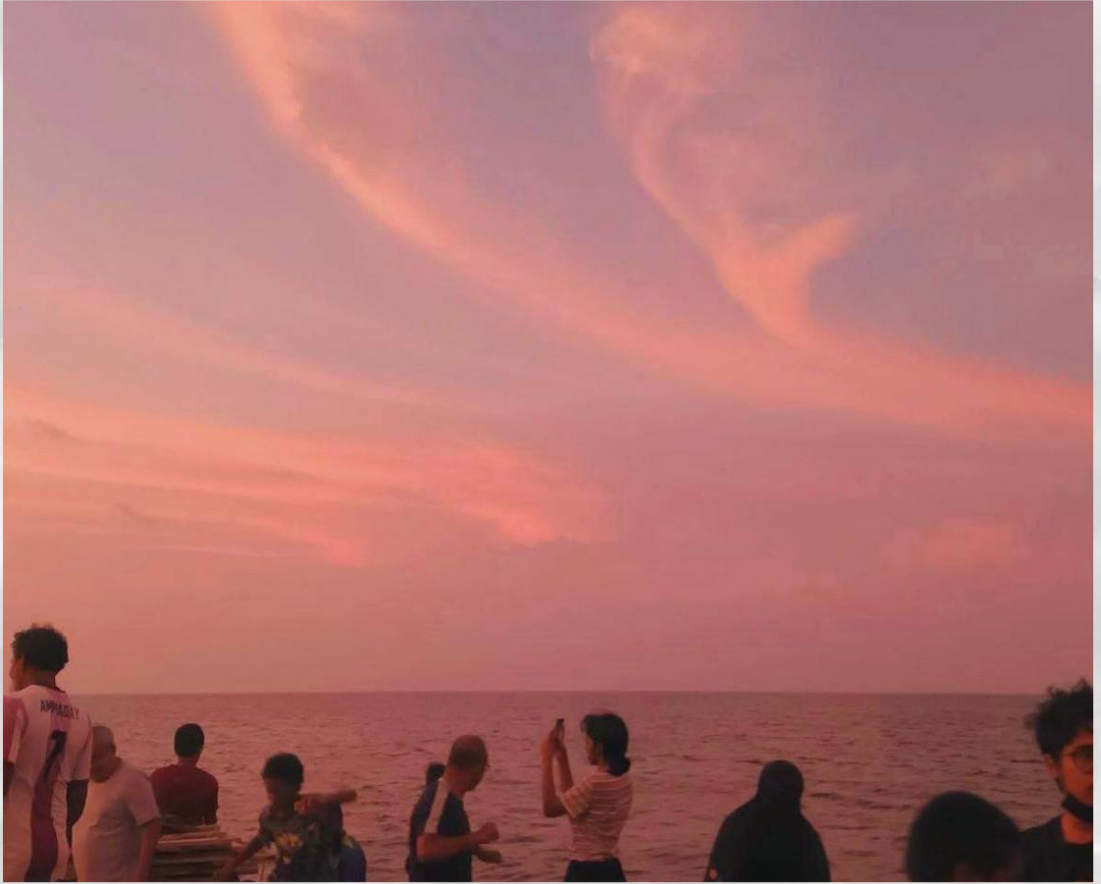
by Jasper Chow

I wear cute clothez mai
hooman givz me in exchange
4 belly rubz



SWEATER by Prissie
WEATHER Ong

*But it's too hot in Malaysia
for sweaters*



H O M E

WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

by Inan Muawiyath

reminds me of the feeling of my heart being utterly full of joy and contentment while surrounded by the people I love most

Magic Hour



"Every sunset is a work of art. My favourite time of the day is when the colours dissolve into a palette of orange, purple and blue - magic hour."



by Niitya Laxmi Gobinathan

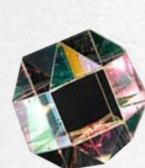




Good Times

by Daryl Khor

"Memories I won't forget."

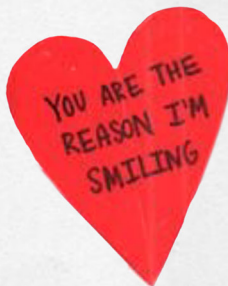


Summer Evenings



*"You lived by the beach and I was always chasing sunsets.
That day you stood in front of me and fell in love with
the view. Its funny that day I fell in love too."*

by Sakura Matsuyama





RICE

BOWLS OF HAPPINESS

PASTA

SOUP

**SPICY MISO
SOUP RAMEN
W/ SALMON**

"Food has always been subjective, but one should never judge a book by its cover."

by Athan





RICE PASTA
BOWLS OF HAPPINESS SOUP

by Xin Yi



BEST POKEBOWL EVER.

MAY SNAPSHOT CHALLENGE:
BOWLS OF HAPPINESS



THE PERFECT BREAKFAST.

RICE
BOWLS OF HAPPINESS

PASTA
SOUP

"It was one of the best breakfast I had with my favourite person!"

by Ivan Liew



dream on
little dreamer



love today;
love tomorrow



MARCH thematic month

the what if's, the other you's that could have been.

BUTTERFLY



EFFECT

Inspired by the classic heartwarming movie "It's A Wonderful Life", MONGA gives you the "redo" button that so many of us have pined for in separate moments of our lives. We invite you to look back on the chances not taken, the opportunities that just slipped through our fingers, and how our futures could have been so much more different that it is now.

Phanton Limb

by Ashley Lim

"YOU DON'T WANT A SIBLING. THEY'RE TEDIOUS, ANNOY THE SHIT OUT OF YOU AND HONESTLY IF THEY'RE YOUNGER THAN YOU, YOU MIGHT JUST END UP TAKING CARE OF THEM INSTEAD OF YOUR PARENTS."

A lot of people have told me how fortunate I am, having been born the only child, allowing myself to be the sole receiver of my parents' affections (and punishments). Despite that, I've always wanted a sibling regardless of their age - older brother, younger sister - I don't care, I've just always wanted one.

I guess it's more for the feeling of solidarity and companionship than anything else. With two middle class working parents, I often found myself spending more time alone than with anyone else. After school it's right back to four walls and a ringing silence in my ears that I've endured, but can slowly drive an individual mad. Sure, I had my extended family and my cousins, but being in a whole other state didn't leave much room for interaction other than the usual family gatherings.

But life goes on doesn't it? I made friends, I grew my social circle and the silence didn't seem as deafening anymore, but it was always there, a tiny kernel of hope and desperation that one day I wouldn't have to come back to an empty house.

Until one day, when I was around 15? 16? And my parents sat me down for a "talk". My mom could barely look me in the eye and even my dad in all his stoicness seemed to crack a bit under the pressure of the words they were about to deliver to me.

And a couple of minutes later I understood why.

It was as if a pile of bricks had been dropped onto my head, leaving me dazed, confused and dumbfounded.

I had *had* a sibling. An older sibling to be exact.

Barely in the beginning of her second trimester, my mother had miscarried. The zygote hadn't attached properly to the uterine lining resulting in what my dad described to be a "spontaneous abortion."

What do you do when you receive news like that? What do you think? My mind raced at all the possibilities, of all the things that could have been.





An older sibling that could chauffeur me around, pay for my food, that I could fight with over the most trivial things. If it had been a girl, we could have gone cafe hopping whenever we wanted, I finally could have had someone that could take good Instagram pictures without having to rely on my parents and their horrendously bad angles. And if it had been a boy, well I would have had someone that could protect me and honestly that I wouldn't mind beating the crap out of at whatever games we chose.

Or maybe... I would have never been born at all.

My parents had started life late... and looking at their financial situation at that time, I don't think that they would have chosen to have another child (to be fair I'm already a handful). So... if my sibling had been born would that mean technically I wouldn't have?

Thinking of an older or even male version of me makes my head spin but then again they wouldn't necessarily grow up to inherit all my wonderful (see here: annoying) qualities right? They'd just be this whole other person, a whole other individual with an amazing rich life that would mirror mine but with so many minute differences that they would basically be a stranger.

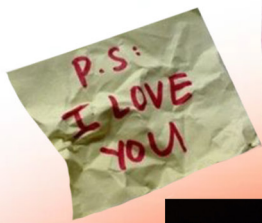
Scientists say that amputees can experience phantom limb pain, a neurological condition wherein pain is still felt in the area where an arm or leg has been amputated despite it not being there. The nerve endings at the site of the amputation continue to send pain signals to the brain, making them think that the limb is still attached to their body.

And maybe that's what I experienced and am still experiencing: the ache of the possible sibling that I could have had. The ache for all the memories that never had the chance to be made. The gaping hole of loneliness for the other person whose life we will never know.

Maybe it's fate. Maybe I was chosen for a reason instead of my lost sibling, but I just hope (if you believe in the concept of the soul like I do), that they had your chance to be born again.

SO, DEAR SIBLING IF YOU'RE OUT THERE, THANKS FOR GIVING ME MY CHANCE.





Missed Signals

by Elly Zulaikha

What does it mean when someone texts you first?

Is it out of necessity because of work?

Is it out of boredom?

Is it the burning curiosity you have of someone else?

And what is the appropriate reaction anyway?

Do we reply politely?

Do we leave them on read?

Do we block and archive them altogether?

Or do we keep the conversation going for days, weeks, months, and years before stopping at once?



Regardless of the reason(s), I am terrible with texting. I either read too much into each text or I somehow arm myself with million assumptions of why someone would text me in the first place.

Of course, I'm not counting close friends or family members. I know their intentions well enough to not pay attention to my never-ending series of 'what ifs' behind their texts.

As a socially inept person with a debilitating fear of humiliation and rejection, I have formed this habit of forming assumptions and worst-case scenarios out of anyone I have never encountered or have limited interaction(s) with. Even when I know someone, I tend to read into patterns and make hypotheses too quickly, especially if it involves a misunderstanding, arguments, etc.



"Hi, I'm XX from ABC."
"Oh hey, XX."

What was their intention in the first place? Why did they text me first? What brings their attention, their desire to hit up with a casual "Hi"? Why did they choose *me* out of 50+ people in our unit WhatsApp group?

Do you want to be friends? Were you testing my responses? Were you bored?

Tell me why.

I get that It's normal for people to text a few times- talking about the weather and asking what major are you in and all- before growing disinterested when the conversation seems like it's heading to nowhere.

In fact, I'd freak out if I suddenly spilled everything about myself in one night - yes, that occurred to me not too long ago and my reaction permanently left an embarrassing taste ingrained in my mind. I shudder thinking about how I'm *bound* to meet this person someday on campus, one way or another. Anyways. . .

I shrugged it off at first. Plus, with me being very awkward, I didn't think a few fleeting texts meant anything serious, let alone when they strike a conversation randomly at 9 PM.

Thus, my experience was exactly that. It started innocently enough, and it ended respectfully in such a brief period.

"If we meet on campus one day, that'd be pleasant."

There seems to be more going on behind it. Or was it? It sounded logical to bid goodbye that way.

So why can't I shake it off now? Why *now*? Did I miss something? What is my gut feeling trying to say about this?

I can't blame the pandemic for causing me to be this dense at basic texting etiquette(s), right?

And so I am left with the regret that I'll never know what might happen if I didn't stop at "You too! And stay safe!". Had I returned the gesture by texting first, just what would happen back then?

Would a friendship blossom if I kept the conversation going? Or would it turn into something else?

Meh.



wasted time

by Sreana Habiba

When I look back upon the expansive yet monotonous yore of the past twenty years of my life, the sentiment that I feel the strongest isn't necessarily regret. I did the best with what I had at the time, that's the mantra I've been trying to incessantly memorize. However, what is life but a yawning chasm of wistfulness, of what-ifs, could-have-beens or should-have-dones? While I'm not plagued with bad decisions and treacherous regrets, there are a plethora of instances and phases of my life that I wished had gone differently - either by the flick of the wrist of fate or by my own actions.

What especially haunts me as I reminisce on my past is wasted time. All the days, months, years I've let pass me by without actively participating in my own life, giving into extended bouts of daydreaming and waiting for things to happen to me instead of taking control of my life and making them happen firsthand. In my own life, giving into extended bouts of daydreaming and waiting for things to happen to me instead of taking control of my life and making them happen firsthand. As a teenager, I was painfully shy and self-conscious, and with the added trappings of having to perform femininity at all times, all the unhealthy and damaging messages I'd been spoon-fed through movies and TV shows and social media - they all amalgamated to form a *me* that I wasn't really proud of. A *me* that was passive, self-involved, unmotivated, focused on all the wrong things. My attention and energy had been diverted not into doing my best to study and get the best grades, but into needlessly vying for validation in whatever form it may come in, into wasting my time with the wrong boys and the wrong friends.

Had I been conditioned differently somehow, consumed different kinds of media and mixed with different crowds, I would probably be someone I wouldn't be able to recognize now. Someone who has nothing in common with me. I often find myself wondering - what would have gone differently if I had utilized the time stretching out in front of me and been more proactive? I wonder where life would have led me had I given into it with abandon, lived my adolescent years with all the zest and passion I could muster. Would I have been better or worse? More fulfilled, more confident, more self-assured of my own capabilities?

Sure, if I had a different mindset back then or if I wasn't so debilitatingly anxious and shy, maybe I would have acquired a variety of experience regarding things like love, my career, friendships and just life in general. On bad days and stagnant stretches of time, I find myself envisioning the 'me' that exists in this ostensible alternate reality: I imagine she has her life figured out. I imagine she's more self-adjusted, braver, stronger. It's easy to fall into the trappings of believing in a 'you' that exists in an parallel universe, who is somehow better, smarter, more likable and competent because life had gone differently for them. It's indubitably more appealing than the life that you're currently living.

But I also staunchly believe that there is no other way my life could have gone. I had to go through things - or not go through things, in my case, let life pass me by - in order to realize that I need to start truly living. To not just float through life. And even if I did waste years of my life: so what? I can start now. I can do all the things I wished I did and experienced when I was younger. Sometimes it's hard for me to remember this, but it really is never too late to start. Just start here, right now, with whatever life has given you and make it beautiful and meaningful. That's all any of us can ever do.



The road taken looks real good now

BY
SHAURA NAEEM

I love the idea of filmmaking and storytelling. Always have, and probably always will. I love the way ideas, visions, dreams, come to life on the screen. The nuances in how emotion, setting, and ambience is portrayed in film. It's something I could talk about for hours. And so naturally, when it came time for me to search for university courses, I couldn't help but be drawn to film production, to screenwriting.


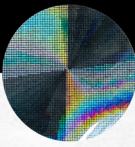
I went as far as to apply for a film school in Sydney for a diploma course, not really expecting much of it, but lo and behold, I got in.

I actually got into my dream school. I was beyond ecstatic, couldn't wait to share the news with my parents— because well, I hadn't told them I was applying. Didn't want them to get their hopes up in case things didn't pan out.



But as fate would have it, my dreams of attending film school crumbled as quickly as they had materialised. My parents— notoriously traditional Asian parents, who wanted their only child to 'do them proud', didn't think film school was the way. It wasn't the law, business, or med school they expected their daughter to sign up for. It was shrouded in uncertainty and doubt. What would everyone say? What kind of parents would send their kid to film school? The film industry isn't for people like us. And so, no matter how badly I wanted it, I couldn't follow my heart. I had to stay behind. It was hard, I felt trapped, and it fuelled this dark bitterness towards them. It didn't seem fair.

I often found myself thinking, how different my life could have been, if I was allowed to spread by metaphorical wings. *Do the things I wanted to do. Would I have been happier? Would I have made a name for myself, now surrounded by incredible opportunities that only come with going abroad?* It's hard to say. On one hand, a part of me resents my family for clipping my 'wings', for holding onto me; but another part understands. I'm everything to them. They do all they can to make sure I have the best possible life. They truly thought what they were doing was in my best interests. I'll admit, I didn't have this epiphany immediately; it took me years to come to terms with their decision— to even accept it.

I like to believe that when things don't go our way, we end up creating a new path for ourselves. I was left clutching the pieces of my broken dreams, desperately scrambling to find another road, and in doing so I found my way to Monash. It wasn't the dream I had envisioned, but it quickly became something



better than what I could've hoped for. This new path led me to discover my love for communication studies— something I wouldn't have realised, had things happened differently. I found friends, built relationships, and had experiences that I wouldn't trade for anything in the world. It's funny, past me would have jumped at the chance to rewind time, to do things differently. In fact, it was something she would fantasise about on the daily.

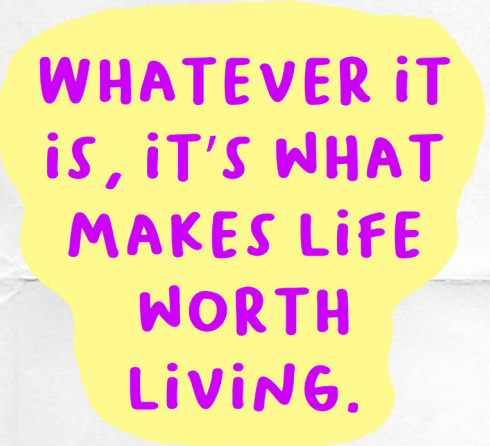


But the me now? Well, she hardly cares. The me now is content with where she's at. And I gotta' say it feels fucking good to actually believe it. So sure, I guess I didn't get to learn the craft of directing, producing, screenwriting from my dream school. But why should I let that stop me? As cheesy as it sounds, *where there's a will, there's a way*. We're in a world where knowledge is quite literally at our fingertips. So yeah—so what if I didn't get to pick the path I most wanted. So what if my life could've been different? That's what makes it life. We can plot our lives, try to set goals for ourselves in the future, and sure, we can always work towards that, but the beauty of

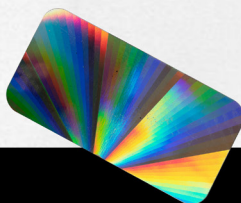


WHERE
THERE'S A
WILL,
THERE'S A
WAY

life—living, is that everything about it is uncertain. The universe is pure chaos, and the littlest things can change the entire trajectory of your life. Isn't that horrifying? Nerve-racking? Exhilarating?



WHATEVER IT
IS, IT'S WHAT
MAKES LIFE
WORTH
LIVING.



Words Between Silence

Words Between Silence

by Natasha Maya

Words rarely come easy to me.

Which is ironic considering how I identify myself as a writer. Yet, a wall sits between my heart and tongue. The whole concept of saying what I feel is foreign to me. Sure, I am aware that certain things make me feel a certain way - sometimes my heart drops, or my blood boils, or my eyes sting. But the feelings are never tangible enough that I sometimes question how much of what I've felt in the past is real.

The words in my head are a murky pool of emotions so deep that I fear I may drown, or so shallow that I come to question my humanity. I rather not dive in because the unknown brings me comfort than the alternative of confrontation. But what if, I lived in a world where I swam in my emotions and the words to express how I feel came out easily. Would I be more content? Be loved by others more? Be able to fully love others in return?

In that world, I'm back in my highschool years, meeting him for the first time. I'll come back home and acknowledge how his smile lingers in my mind. And when he asks me to hangout with him alone, I'll allow myself to wonder if this could go beyond the strict perimeters of friendship. I will say "Thank you." for all the times that he compliments me instead of rolling my eyes, and I'll be able to compliment him back. We will be sitting side by side in the library as we always do, but this time I do not flinch when he leans in closer. I will not talk about other boys for the sake of pushing him away, and he will not get jealous or defensive. I'll let it show that I feel sad when he brings up other girls, and maybe he'll stop and we'll talk about us. I will not laugh or change the topic when he asks me out on a date and I'll realise that perhaps we may have a shot together. I'll allow the emotions to build up from the bottom of my heart till it reaches the tips of my tongue.

And when we walk back to the library with the burning red sunset hanging above us and a comfortable silence approaching like the night, I'll allow the words to spill out: I like you.

In that world, my thoughts will be spoken into existence, never to be forgotten or buried away. And who knows where a simple emotional expression would have taken me. Perhaps, he'll look stunned, until a smile creeps in and he says those three words back. Or perhaps he'll burst out laughing and our friendship fades away. Regardless of the outcomes, I will have spoken my feelings into existence and that silly highschool crush was real.

But as much as I ponder about the what ifs of life sometimes, I know that nothing I do can change the past. The feelings have faded, and we've both moved on with our lives. The memories of us are but a droplet in a sea of what could have been.

Ever since then, I've learned to be more vocal with how I feel, leaving no room for what ifs. As a result, I'm with someone I really like now, which would not have been possible if I've kept my feelings bottled up like before.

So to anyone who's reading this and struggles with opening up, I hope this article can inspire you to take the risk and speak your mind. I know that I still have a long way to go, and I still have trouble finding the right words to say. But as cliché as it sounds, *life is too short to not take a chance.*

APRIL
THEMATIC
MONTH

"I WOULD DO ANYTHING,
BE ANYONE FOR YOU."



Inspired by one of the songs in Olivia Rodrigo's hit debut album SOUR, Favorite Crime talks about the type of passionate love that is all-consuming, world-turning and which burns too bright and too fast, leaving you the shell of a person that you used to be.

august

by sreana habiba



The way a song near-perfectly encapsulates the exact sentiment or experience you're going through at a moment in time. The way a song takes your heart and warmly cradles it, comforting you, while simultaneously breaking it apart, obliterating you. For me, that song was *August* by Taylor Swift.

scan the spotify barcode below to listen to *august* by taylor swift <3




The parallels were unsettling and uncanny - whatever I was going through with this guy took place in August, we weren't actually in a relationship, he was 'never mine', etc, etc. When it first started, things were good and sweet and right, as these things often are; but gradually it sucks you into a pit of all things murky and desolate. The rot travels through your gut and builds a home, takes root within your very being and you feel unfixable, unlovable.

This relationship - or situation-ship, if you want to call it that, I still struggle to find a label for it - made me have several epiphanies about circumstances like this. If you create an atmosphere with all the elements of tenderness, intimacy and vulnerability, you're bound to feel like you're in love.

An atmosphere filled with whispers of sweet nothings, of holding them close until the space between you is absent and holy, him telling you he loves you so sincerely and so softly that you almost believe him, of warmth and comfort and silence that feels cathartic. None of which is love. A microcosm of it maybe, but not the real thing. You give something the perfect resources to survive and the ideal conditions to thrive in, a controlled environment, it blossoms - while in actual real life scenarios, it probably would not. It would struggle and eventually die.

Love is in the hard places, not carelessly, lazily, accidentally constructed spaces where only good feelings exist, and the only reason those feelings exist is be-



-cause the thing - what we had - wasn't real, and you can construe and mould things that aren't real to fit whatever fantasy you have in your head because nothing existed in that space to begin with. *You were never mine, you weren't mine to lose, etc.*

The uncertainty of it all, how it makes you second-guess and doubt every action you take and everything you say. How nothing is ever, ever enough; how love is never enough - to sustain a relationship, to make someone stay. When someone isn't 'yours', you're never sure where you stand with them. You're always hanging on the precipice, trying to anticipate their next move. *Wanting was enough, for me, it was enough, to live for the hope of it all.*

The song *August*, fundamentally, expresses the sentiment of settling for less than you deserve, knowing it and yet still not caring because you're willing to make yourself small, willing to shrink your needs if it means having the person and living in the facade and delusion of being together because that's better than nothing at all. I remember asking him, after trying for five whole minutes to squeeze these words out, terrified I'll sound too vulnerable or too pathetic or too in love with him, the shame soaking through me while trying to ask him this with some semblance of grace and dignity as if that was even possible: *why am I not enough for you?* I don't remember what he said afterwards. Probably empty words trying to bring me solace and stumbling over his own words. It's sad how I'm always rummaging through our history, through what we had, to find proof of something good and real so I can come up and say, see, look. What we had was tender and beautiful and warm and golden, even for a little while. Because if it wasn't, what was it all for? Whose ghost did I love?

After it all ended and I was finally left disillusioned, instead of regretting it I actually felt somewhat grateful. Because now I know that I'll never let myself get involved in a situation like that again or fall so deeply for someone who wasn't emotionally available, because I know how much it can scar you. How it can make you question your own worth. I never want to go through that again, I hope I never will.



BETTER

BY NATASHA
MAYA

**Disclaimer: A toxic portrayal of love*

ALL THE THINGS I DID, JUST SO I COULD CALL YOU MINE.

At the end, it all boiled down to actions he could not take back. The severed friendships, the late night shouting matches with his mother, the mountain of debt accumulating in his bank account. There were other things too, like his ego that he left when he stood outside of her house begging for her to come back, his self-confidence that he lost in the process of changing himself, his heart that he broke by mistrusting her with it. All these things he thought he could recover if he could just win her back.

It was not supposed to end like this, no one expected a guy like him to walk down this path. He had a good thing going for him; a likeable personality and a face that compelled girls to smile at him wherever he walked. He was not necessarily smart but he was charming enough to convince teachers to bump his D's to C's. And the one thing he took the greatest pride in was his speed, he never won first place, but he was a familiar face on the sports podium.

He noticed her in the second year of

of high school when no else did. It felt like catching the first glimpse of sunlight as dawn broke. They ended up sitting together in the first class and she avoided all his attempts at small talk. He refused to change seats though, because she always had perfect scores on her quizzes and all he needed to do was glance from the corner of his eyes to get an above average grade without studying.

But this arrangement did not last long. Three weeks later, she confronted him about his tendency of copying her answers for every task. The guilt swallowed him whole and he gave the most sincere apology that he could muster. She looked surprised for a split second before huffing and walking away in the opposite direction.



For the next week, he brought little gifts to apologize - candies, canned drinks, chocolates. Each like a candle trying to melt an iceberg. And his last offering was pushing his answer sheet to the side of the table which made it easy for her to look at his work. She took one glance and burst out laughing. The ice had melted.

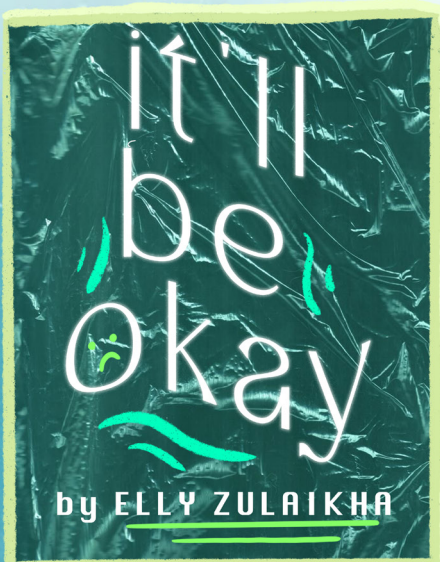
The following week she had a sudden experimental phase where she came to school in different fashion styles. Day one was somewhat of a grunge look with a red flannel and ripped jeans. Day two was a preppy style with a dark skirt and a collared button up. Day three was an e-girl look with noticeable make-up and fishnet stockings. Day four was a soft-girl aesthetic with a lilac crop top and a white skirt. He told her she looked good that day and she stuck to that aesthetic throughout the remainder of their highschool years.

Their list of mutual friends slowly grew and he found her in his own close-knit friendship circle. She grew out her short hair and blended in with all the other girls in the group. Everyone was always watching whenever they conversed, giggling to themselves. But he was always focused on her, the seamless conversation they had about video games, action movies, this small town and how they couldn't wait to escape it. And then she confessed her romantic feelings for him, and for the first time in his life he felt like a prize, something worthy.

It did not take long for him to yearn for her, not in the sweet way that a child yearns for a teddy bear, but in the desperate way that a drowning man yearns for oxygen. That should have scared him and yet it only pushed him to give more of himself to her. He would provide her with anything that she asked for because he could not think of any other way to repay her for how she made him feel.

Her voice of reassurance was the only thing louder than the noise of doubts creeping in his head whenever he failed a test or when he lost a race or when he felt unlikeable. Despite all his failures, she'd look at him with the same nervous admiration every time.

And he admired her too. He thought she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen even when none of his friends seemed to agree. He loved the way she learned how to follow fashion trends that he liked. He loved the way that she joined the gym just so she could keep up with him on the track. He loved the way that she got good grades and tutored him without making him feel inferior. He loved the way that she was always trying to get better - that is until better took the form of another guy.



A short story inspired heavily by Shawn Mendes's *It'll Be Okay*.

Are we gonna make it? The thought ran wildly through my mind. A slow decay, that's the reality of us. Yes, life happens and it occasionally gets in the way. But I sensed it began with fewer texts, fewer calls, less of everything that shined eagerly in the beginning.

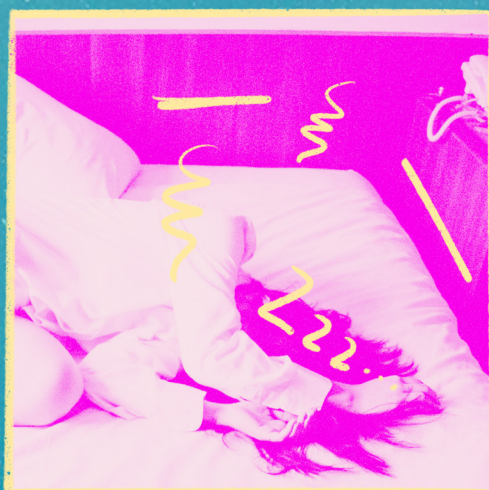
They say when you are with someone long-term, everything about them becomes a familiar routine. Sinking into that routine is supposed to feel mundane and it's normal. But I came across something/ someone said that when you're used

to chaos, the mundaneness of your romantic relationship terrifies you or makes you uncomfortable, when in reality that's what is supposed to happen in a thriving, healthy relationship.

Is this gonna hurt? At first, that was my assumption. As with any breakup, we're bound to feel hurt. Hurt because our partner abused or manipulated us, hurt because of betrayal, and so forth.

OH, WE CAN TRY TO SEDATE IT,
BUT THAT NEVER WORKS.

Since day one, despite the moments of excitement we shared together, my inner self has been preparing for this goodbye. Because rarely do people stay around in our lives, except for a select few such as our closest friends or family members, I'm always in the state of 'fight or flight'-- in the sense that if I absolutely have to flee, I would prepare in advance. *Oh, we can try to sedate it, but that never works.* Indeed, my 'preparedness' can never save me from this inevitable fall.



I start to imagine a world where we don't collide. The universe sent you for me, perhaps for obvious reasons. A preview, almost- of what it looks like to love the right person. But because it was the wrong time, we had to leave after meeting halfway. I don't regret, per se, that we were together for a while, but perhaps it felt like 'what a shame' to witness such an ending.

Because as soon as I heard you discreetly implying you were willing to let me go just like that, I couldn't process it, at least not at first. It could be because of the way you casually dropped this in one of our long calls. Yet a part of me knew it was bound to happen and I shouldn't be taken aback- but I did anyway. "I don't want to keep you to myself if you find someone better than me. You deserved them way more than I do. In fact, I'd be happy for you, Elise." That's what you said. So you knew it too? If you tell me you're leaving, I'll make it easy.

**IT'S MAKING
ME SICK BUT
WE'LL HEAL
AND THE SUN
WILL RISE.**

Now I'm surrendering to time to nurse me back to life. I might feel stuck for a while, but I don't want to deny what I'm going through. If it takes me crying all night for weeks on end or feeling the bitterness all of a sudden, then so be it. It'll be okay if we can't stop the bleeding

**WE DON'T HAVE
TO FIX IT, WE
DON'T HAVE TO
STAY.**

But you know what? I'm relieved that we chose to move on in the most respectful, mature way possible. Forget the blame game, forget the silent treatment. And since we've been fostering this at the beginning of our relationship, to sit down and discuss our true feelings, closing this chapter became bearable. Almost like we slowly slip our hands away from each other in a sea of people. Because *I will love you, either way, Henry.*

It'll be okay, soon. The right person and the right time will come. I wish you all the happiness in life, Henry. And thank you for loving me. I hope what I offered you throughout our time together will be cherished.

5 STAGES OF GRIEF

by Ashley Lim

They say there are five stages of grief.

Stage 1: DENIAL

*I'm okay.
No, I'm not*

*I don't miss you.
I miss you so much that the mere mention of your
name renders me powerless*

*Why did it have to be you?
I don't know.*

There are so many things that, deep in my heart of hearts, I want to tell you, but I refrain. I hold back because of ego, my swollen sense of pride that eclipses my normally rational mind. I'm stuck in a senseless, stupid battle of wills, a war fought by one liner texts, cold shoulders and blatantly ignoring you in hallways.

Ks, instead of okays, GNs instead of goodnights, when the hell did I become illiterate? Why the fuck can't I talk to you like a normal person? When did sending you a single line of text become so difficult, my thumb hovering over the green and white arrow button as I think for the 50th time whether I should send it or not. In the end, the cursor backtracks, erasing the message that was meant for you and silently I turn off my phone so as not to be tempted to type it all out over again.

My solution?

I throw myself into my work because if I allow my mind to wander, even for the briefest of moments, all the roads in my conscious thoughts somehow go back to you. So, I work. And I work and work and work until I run myself ragged... to the point where my eyes can barely

open and my mind shuts down before my head hits the pillow.

But the torment doesn't end, because you're right there, in the blurry nowhere between conscious and unconscious so far yet so close that I could almost touch you, but a shadow, a mere silhouette of the real you that fades as the sun rises. And when I wake up, I don't know what hurts more, being with the version of you in my head that leaves as soon as I open my eyes, or seeing you but not being able to be with you at all.

Stage 2: ANGER

And just as much as I long for you, I hate you almost just as much.

I loathe, abhor you with every cell in my body. But it's a misdirected anger, one internalised from hours of agonising and aching over you.

I'm not really angry at you. I'm angry at myself.

But it's easier to blame you rather than compartmentalise my feelings, shove them into a tiny drawer forcing it into the back of my head and praying to every God imaginable that it never resurfaces.

It doesn't work like that. So yeah, as much as I love you. I hate you. I hate you for making me feel this way because I'm caged by my own heart. A gilded cage of my own doing, constructed out of my own hubris, of which only you hold the key to, as unknowing and ignorant as you are.

I beg of you, free me.

Stage 3: **BARGAINING**

Friends attempt to console me but their words fall onto deaf ears. Invites go unanswered, lectures go unwatched and interests lose all meaning.

That's when the insecurities rear their ugly head and the deals begin.

I make deals with myself, with God, with any higher being in the universe who might be listening.

Please just give me one chance.

I plead to no avail because my soul feels just as hollow as it was when you left and it seems that the pain will never, ever stop no matter what I trade for the possibility of your existence in my life.

Stage 4: **DEPRESSION**

So, I turn to other methods.

I attempt to fill the absence of you with others. Meaningless swipes left and right across dating apps, 2AM conversations with other potentials... but none of them come even close and after a while they too fade to the background.

In the struggle to forget you, I make a deal with the bottom of a bottle, exchanging my memories of you along with my sobriety for some peace of mind.

The fiery burn is a sweet soothing relief and for a few hours I can forget you.

Alcohol provides a temporary blindness and ignorance from the harshness of reality but even the most heartbroken of people need to come up for air eventually.

Stage 5: **ACCEPTANCE**

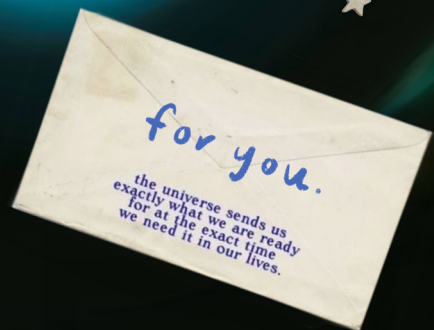
Time doesn't heal all wounds. But it does lessen the blow.

I come to terms with the fact that you will never be mine, a realisation that on bad days, I still struggle to accept.

But that's okay.
Because above all, I am still human.
I can and still will be able to live in a world where we will be nothing more than what we are now.

I do not regret falling for you in the first place, but I do resent myself for loving you a bit too deep, falling a bit too fast and realising it a bit too late.

That, in the collective story of me and you, was my one true crime.





may thematic month

hello future.

Inspired by NCT Dream's repackaged album, "Hello Future", MONGA invites you to tap back into your inner child, shed off the shackles of the pandemic, look forward with a spark of hope in your eye and tell us of all your repressed dreams, big or small, without fear or judgement. Because...we can spend our entire lives being miserable and held back by what society tells us to be or we can break free and embrace the flighty, tumultuous mistress known as the future.

HELLO FUTURE

by Elly Zulaikha

"Hello, future."

The words echo into oblivion. The silence was loud and deafening, but I know someone, or something out there, is listening to me.

"It was rather impolite of me, isn't it? if i don't offer you a greeting."

Again, no response. Fair enough.

"I'm aware of my . . . lack of manners in the past, for insistently asking 'when will the future be here?' because, well, that's the thing—you never miss your timing, not even once."

I may be deranged, as I attempt to 'banter' with this construct that is the 'future'. Yet here I am, buttering up to the 'future' when I've been haunted by the past, and now masking that pain and exhaustion by 'living' precariously through the present.

"There is not a single ounce of hope left in my future. I used to look forward to your arrival, when I thought things would get better from there. I used to pine for you when i'm anguished at the cruelty of my present, which forced me to face it head-on even when I said to them, 'I can't, I'm tired!'"

I swore time used to move awfully slow, but now it forbids us from catching our breaths. The world is failing me, or us, dear readers, due to the amount of devastating news being vomited left and right.

"I feel like I'm on autopilot most of the time. I don't have the autonomy to even stand defiantly at whatever's pulling me to you, even when I'm not ready (nor if I ever will) to face the unknown that is you."

I swallowed the biggest lump forming in my throat, while I struggled hard to fight back the tears that'll blind me if I don't contain it.

I'm sorry future, for my nonsensical rant over here. I know you couldn't care less about my existential issues. After all, you're here because you are part of the equation. You're just doing your job here.

"Future, I'm beyond burned out. I'm constantly analyzing all the possible scenarios I could take that might change the trajectory of my life. I want to stop, but I can't. you say 'be prepared', which i am! But please, I'm tired. Please fill my head with nothing so I can float in the abyss in silence for a few seconds. I need it, I promise I'll get on with my life after this ad break."

I blinked a few times, I could sense my eyes and throat getting dry by the minute. That, and I'm feeling those cold sweat slowly dripping down from my forehead. I'm getting nauseous and light-headed here by my own thoughts and words.

"So, future. wake me up when you're here. I'm just . . . going to take a nap."

An anxious anecdote of mine.

We all have **big dreams and big thrills**.

Get all As
 Get into a good university
 Graduate with all HDs
 Get a good job, 5 figure salary and above only
 Marry before they call you an old maid
 Have a family

I'm now 20 and I've just barely ticked off the first two but it feels like I'm doing well, right? I'm in my 3rd year, maintaining my grades, planning an exchange semester, one internship already under my belt, already looking for my second one and currently the editor for this year's magazine.

I'm on the right track and my future is as secure as I can get it to be
 Or is it?

It's amazing how three small words that collectively make up one single intrusive thought suddenly brings it all crashing down. Like **Icarus** who **flew too high** and too close to the Sun as well as his hubris blinding him to reality, I suddenly feel the metaphorical wax melt off of my wings and I'm plummeting, plummeting, plummeting into a sea of anxiety.

The air turns to lead in my lungs, my hands turn clammy, my clammy palms sliding against each other as I attempt to mash down the panic into a little ball, forcing it to disappear.

It doesn't work.

Spots fill my vision and the panic constricts my lungs, like a python asphyxiating its prey and suddenly I'm drowning on land. **Cynical thoughts** fill my head, images of failing, every single thing that I think can go wrong as I play out every scenario in my head, an endless, infinite loop that I cannot break.

*Everyone is doing better than you
 Life is a race and you're falling **behind***

A visit to the emergency room and as I lay on the bed, watching numbly as the nurse takes a vial of blood for me, the exhaustion continues weighing me down as I contemplate the other four tasks on society's checklist that I have to face, whether I'm **ready or not**. I feel like Sisyphus, staring down the spherical face of that goddamned boulder that he's forced to push every single time, only for it to come crashing down, waiting for him at the bottom of that hill, tauntingly waving its defiance in his face.

That was the first time I ever had a panic attack.

And I would continue having them intermittently, but everytime I do, I get better, I learn to cope, I learn what coping mechanisms I need to help me get through a bout of anxiety. Honestly, I don't know why I'm pouring out this tiny part of me into words, but if it helps someone... anyone who reads this feel better about themselves, then my job here, as a writer, will have been fulfilled.

And I guess that's the moral of my story, if I even have one: it's that the future can wait, the future will not suddenly disappear if you take time for the present. Because if you spend too much time living and planning for the person you want to become, you'll never be able to recognise the one you still are.

by Ashley Lim

STRUGGLING

Photos by
Tsheten Yangden Bhutia

Vernorexia

(n) A romantic mood inspired
by spring.





Vernorexia

Photos by
Nursyafiqa Aleeya







Vernorexia

Photos by Lim Xin Yi



Vernorexia

Photo by Luanne Choong



Vernorexia

Photos by Wong Zi Yi





Vernorexia

Photos by Kiki Marisa



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Photos by Shawn Wong

Vernorexia

Photo by San Jun Hoe

Vernorexia





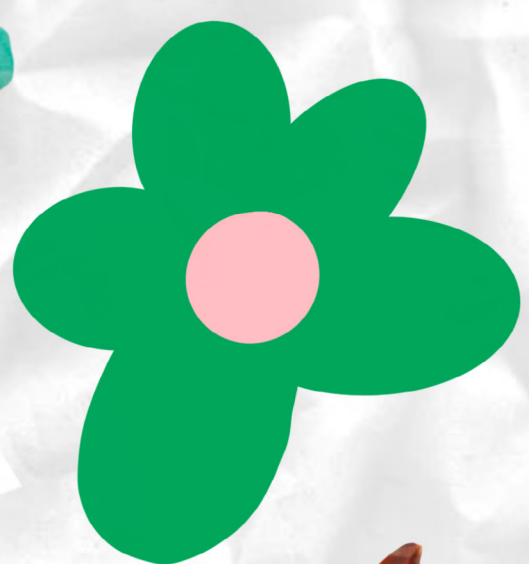
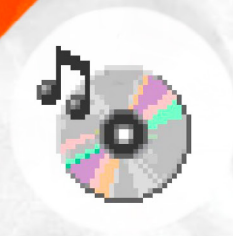
DIGITAL ART BY
CHAI TING HO



YOU ARE

MADE OF

STARS





WRITERS
CORNER.



WOMEN ARE



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ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

BY ASHLEY LIM

WHAT TO DO

An op-ed on the Roe v Wade ruling told from the perspective of a staunch pro-choice feminist. Song Recommendation: The Man - Taylor Swift

I wrote about the Roe v Wade ruling for my final paper in AMU3451 (Freedom and power in the media), mostly because I have a raging passion for women's rights. Not the "I condemn men in every way possible" type of feminism, but more of the "girls just want to have FUNdamental rights and equal pay" type of feminism. So, when I heard that the inevitable happened, I, of course, lost whatever hope I had in the American justice system and constitution (not that there was much to begin with anyway). But I'm not here to talk about politics or Republicans or the Supreme Court because that's a huge, heaping hornet's nest that I just do not want to get into.

No, I'm here to talk about the very essence of this issue which is just: women... and the fundamental right to choose what to do with their own goddamn bodies. You might be thinking: "Why the hell does she give so much of a damn about a ruling that has nothing to do with her?" Well, the very retraction of abortion access by a group of individuals, not only affects pregnant mothers in America, but it sets a global precedent for other governments. It's basically saying:

"WE, A MAJOR FIRST WORLD COUNTRY, ARE GOING TO TAKE AWAY A WOMAN'S ACCESS TO A MAJOR HEALTHCARE PROCEDURE AND IF YOU STILL GO AHEAD WITH IT, WE'RE GOING TO TOSS YOU IN JAIL, ALONG WITH THE DOCTOR THAT DID IT, EVEN IF YOU WERE RAPED OR THE BABY WAS CONCEIVED OUT OF INCEST"

Call me a feminist all you want (it's really not the insult you think it is), but men shouldn't be telling women... or anyone else for that matter what to do with their bodies. Did you know that the penalty for raping a woman, in the United States is actually markedly lesser than the penalty a woman receives for getting an abortion, regardless of whether it was medically necessary or not? And that's not all, here's another cute tidbit for you: a doctor who actually performs said abortion, a job they were trained years for, could actually be sent to jail. For doing their goddamned jobs. For saving a life. And here I thought the world couldn't get any less fucked.

I'm ready for the "pro-lifers" to come in with the "life begins at birth" and "all lives are precious" arguments, be regulating the mass shootings that happen so often now in American schools nationwide that it's... and I'm horrified as I type this, considered normal. Just another average day in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.

Land of the Free, my ass. More like the land where the uterus is more regulated than firearms. Where's universal healthcare? Where are the subsidies for marginalised communities, where abortions are even more essential? What of mothers that could die if they carry the baby to term? Ectopic pregnancies? Potential stillbirths? Tell me, what does your "all lives matter stance" argument say about that? When does the life of the mother suddenly outweigh that of the foetus? Is the mother not as deserving of life as her potential child? The moment the very children you are attempting to "save" are born, your radio-silence on these matters are deafening and your pretentious preaching is suddenly silenced as you turn to other matters you deem more

Take your hypocrisy and your cloyingly condescending court decisions and shove it down your throats, please, instead of up their uterus. Growing up on American media (High School Musical, Grease, FRIENDS and the such), it deeply, deeply saddens me to watch a country that I once thought had so much potential, that emphasised so particularly on their citizens' rights to choose, suddenly rip a fundamental right out of womens' grasps, handing it on a silver platter to governments who should have absolutely no say in the matter.

I mourn for the absolutely devastating blow that has been landed on nearly half a century's worth of women's rights advocacy, I mourn for the generations to come that will have to continue to tirelessly pick up their protest signs and megaphones as they march for the right to their own bodies,

But ultimately...

I mourn for the future of young girls everywhere in America as they sit, shivering in their bone-chilling bathrooms alone, legs spread, bent and misshapen clothes hanger in hand as they are forced to make the impossible choice between unprepared motherhood, potential death or a life forever condemned behind bars, if they are caught choosing themselves over the life they did not want in the first place.

MOTHER, AM I A WOMAN NOW?

Mother, I wore that dress you bought, it's pink, with frills around the bottom. You did my hair up in that ponytail and made me wear some lipstick. You told me girls are supposed to look pretty all the time. I'm five, but I hope I'm more of a girl now.

Mother, it's hard for me to sit with my legs crossed, I feel more at ease with them spread. You don't tell my brothers to do that, mother can you tell me why? *Oh. Girls don't sit like that. Girls sit straight, tilt their body at an angle, and keep their hands on their lap.* I'm seven, I'm looking pretty and sitting still. I hope I'm more of a girl now.

Mother, I'm not yelling, I'm just excited. Why do you tell me to keep my voice down during the football game? My dad and his friends are screaming because their team won, why can't I join in? *Oh. That's not ladylike.* I'm nine, I'll be quiet, sit still and look pretty. I hope I'm more of a lady now.

Mother, there's blood rushing out, everything hurts. What's happening to my body? *Oh. Things are changing.* You hand me pads and tell me this is the start of my womanhood. So was I not one all those years before? I'm twelve, my underwear is stained crimson, and it feels like my insides are being ripped apart. But I'll be quiet, sit still, look pretty because I know I'm a woman now.

Mother, it doesn't seem fair for us girls to set the table and clean up after the boys. They're playing out in the yard, and we're here scrubbing their spit off our plates. Mother your hands are scarred from all the meals you've made dad, but has he done the same for you? *Oh. That's a job for the women.* We're supposed to be in the kitchen, supposed to keep the house tidy. Supposed to smile and have hot meals out for the men. I'm sixteen, I'll make sure the boys get fed. I hope that makes me a proper lady now.

Mother, you're looking to pair your daughter with a man. One that promises her a life in a cookie-cutter house, dog, and all. One that promises to make sure your daughter carries on being a woman. Because you're terrified, she won't be one away from you. That my womanhood was something I could lose. That I was only a woman if people around me agreed. What if that's not something I want? *Oh. Women are supposed to want this.* Women are supposed to want to carve slices of herself out for the men to dig in. I'm twenty four, and I'm tired of supposed to's. Mother, I am a woman, but maybe not the woman you want.

Mother, you tell me women are supposed to have children. We're meant to continue this cycle. But what if I poison them with the wisdom you've taught me? What if I ruin them like how you've ruined me? I can't blame you, but I do. For I'm a woman, looking up at the only woman that I know— a mirror of me. I'm getting old, and I'm being told my eggs are dying, that my purpose as a woman was fleeting. I'm a woman, but a wasted woman.

Mother, I have been a woman all this time, yet it feels like I'm not enough of one.



Stacks of History

Written By Shau

You whisper in my ear about the rumours. It's no surprise you've heard them

"Some of the kids have sex in the stacks."

You glance over at me, a devilish smirk on a perfect face

I suppose it's no coincidence you tell me this when we're searching for history books

Your tongue darts out to lick your lips—an invitation to sin

And the library feels staggeringly more intimate than it did moments ago

Did you get off on the idea of imagining me pressing myself against you between the history of Rome and Cyprus?

The idea of us writhing together, tangled mess of limbs hidden by centuries old academia?

Were you hoping I'd be okay being on my knees for you as your fingers gripped the spines of Homer and Wilde?

Or were we truly just searching for books?

Because I swear, then and there by the stacks, I wanted to make and destroy history with you





The Male Gaze



Written by Sreana Habiba

“Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it’s all a male fantasy: that you’re strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren’t catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you’re unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.”

- Margaret Atwood

The patriarchy, systemic oppression of women, daily microaggressions, reproductive rights sanctions... the lexicon for discrimination towards our gender is endless. Focusing on these realities is mundane and difficult, especially since it’s a lived reality for all women, but I think being cognizant of the workings of these issues is important if we want to challenge them head-on. What I’ve been contesting with lately, barring some of the bigger issues in feminism, is the concept of the ‘male gaze’: it’s the idea that men view women through a distorted lens that sexualizes, objectifies and dehumanizes us. Through this lens, the woman only exists as a commodity, an object of desire for the man, with no real inner life of her own. That in itself is abhorrent enough, but what really feels disturbing to me is that almost all of us have internalized this masculine

gaze. If you think you haven’t, think again! Examine where all of your notions of femininity and beauty come from! Then get to work on dismantling it.



For as long as I can remember, almost from my early teen-age years, I’ve felt a nagging sensation of somehow being watched, of feeling like I was putting on a perpetual, unending performance for some imaginary audience. Even when I was alone in my room I would feel this constant need to look pretty, to sit or lie on my bed a certain way, to move with grace, etc; when I was in public I had to be demure, polite, soft-spoken, never taking up too much space (god forbid!). It was only a few years ago that I realized who this ‘audience’ was: the male gaze that I internalized through societal norms, through TV shows, movies and books, through my interactions with men, and especially through social media. The pressure of having to look and dress a certain way did not come to us inherently; these ideals of beauty and of sexiness have been force-fed to us since we were little girls. We spend hours of our days shaving our bodies, meticulously putting on makeup, choosing the right outfits, doing our hair, obsessively analyzing every part of our body and our personalities so that it’s infallible and beautiful, something you could put in a gift box and wrap a pretty bow around. It seeps into intricate habits as well, like what we eat, how we eat, what kind of media we consume, what kind of music we listen to and so on. It’s exhausting and dehumanizing. It is built to pit women against each other, to have women always be catering to men, to empower men by any means. But the first step to rejecting the male gaze is simply being conscious of it.

The systems in which we live, our societies, is one of the main facets to blame. We just exist inside of it, oblivious. But that doesn't mean we can't reform or even completely reject these ideologies - in fact, we should! It's the only thing we can do. If you're reading this, regardless of your gender, I urge you to take a closer look and examine the preexisting biases or notions you have regarding things like race, class, sexuality, and especially gender. How do you treat and view the women in your life? Do you sometimes accidentally perpetuate mildly misogynistic rhetorics by making lighthearted but offensive comments? Do you call your male friends out when they make crude remarks toward women, when they make rape jokes or sexualize them? If you're a woman, do you instantly and subconsciously view women as competition instead of your allies? Do you make sure to uplift them whenever you can? Do you subconsciously view women as 'lesser', as being less competent somehow than men? Question your biases, however inconsequential. Then question the people around you. Corny as it may sound, we're all in this together - sweeping changes always start with you and your interpersonal relationships.



So what's the antithesis to rectifying this issue? We don't have definitive answers, but I think a good place to start would be openly talking about it with other women, building solidarity with them, helping each other out. Analyze and examine all the subtle signs and messages you come across in media and in real life that bolster the male gaze. Then look inwards, and ask yourself what it is that you, as a human being, actually want for yourself. Just live for yourself; let yourself be free. It's easier said than done, I know. But it is the only way we can achieve true empowerment.

I leave you with this quote from Agnès Varda:

"The first feminist gesture is to say: "Ok. They're looking at me. But I'm looking at them." The act of deciding to look, of deciding that the world is not defined by how people see me, but by how I see them."



I swipe. I swipe a lot. I swipe incessantly. I swipe so much that I hate myself for it but I can't stop myself from it.

The app, the people, the desires, needs, wants; the simplicity of it all makes it so accessible to construct a fantastical fictionalised reality for me.

People become objects. I have an addiction. If I like an object, I need that object.

Left, left, left, right.

It's a match! My heart skips a beat. My hopes spring eternal. I make a mistake. I get too ahead of myself.

I am 22. I want something but I don't know what that something is. I want to feel something. I want to fill a void but fill it with what? Love or lust or neither?

Left, left, left, right.

We start talking. I don't know them but I feel giddy, I feel whole. I feel wanted; I feel happy.

I become a version of myself I don't recognise. I become needy. I become sad.

Their attention consumes me, it keeps me going but then it fizzles. I self-sabotage.

I am passionate, smart, crafty, quirky, a little unhinged in a good way but I fail to see these qualities in myself. I become envious of the one thing others have. Attachment.

Left, left, left, oh, a superlike!

I am a commodity too I realise. I could advocate for anything but myself. My desire for attachment was accompanied by shame, anxiety, emptiness.

I was desperate to know what it felt like to be wanted. I was desperate for intimacy but intimacy came with rules. They say "I only want something casual".

I respect the forwardness, the honesty, the bluntness but it stings. I muster the courage to accept their want. I convince myself that if I accepted the want, it would be a stepping stone to fulfilling my want.

'This user has unmatched you'

I grieve the loss of someone that I only knew two-dimensionally. My fantasy shatters. I am back to square one. I am right where you left me.

Except, you don't know that; you move on and obtain your 'something casual'. I overthink too much. This is so cliché of me. I can't pin down why I'm so bothered.

Left, left, left, right. Here we go again...

I objectify and get objectified. I am a feminist but this experience isn't liberating. I create this façade of wanting to fulfil what they wanted while convincing myself I was acting like a progressive feminist.

I am what I like to call 'a self-destructive masochist'.

*Left, left, left, *delete account**

I need to build a relationship with myself. I will not settle for crumbs. I deserve the whole cake. I need to stop seeking. I think it'll be worth it.

THE FALL OF “PICK ME”

I'm not like other girls.”

Is honestly my favourite punchline as a joke, simply because of how ridiculous it sounds. And my friends are always in on it as well, along with the rest of the internet sphere, always ready to make fun of the concept of 'pick-me' girls. But there was a dark time *shudders* when it was not a joke, but rather a defensive statement pertaining to one's uniqueness. Because heaven forbid you, the main character of your own 2000s teen movie, could ever be as “dull” as the other hyperfeminine female antagonistic characters.

So, what is a 'pick-me' girl? To put it simply, it is usually a girl who puts other girls down in an effort to seem superior in the eyes of the opposite gender.

Typical phrases include:

“Girls who wear make-up are so fake. I don't wear make-up because I'm all natural.”

“I only hangout with boys because girls are so dramatic.”

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with choosing not to wear make-up nor is there anything wrong with wanting to be friends with boys. However, the problem arises when a girl feels the need to shame other girls in pursuit of these things. You can have traditionally masculine interests like football, video games, beer etc., just don't shame other girls who prefer traditionally feminine activities.

Girls are allowed to enjoy anything they want without needing to be defensive about it. But this article is not to shame 'pick-me' girls because to be frank, society has a tendency to make fun of girls enough as it is. And as embarrassing as it sounds, I too had a pick-me girl phase (in my defence it was also my Wattpad phase).

At age 12, I deemed myself to be a rare female breed because I...read *gasps*.

Quirky, I know. My Facebook was flooded with questionable posts that pit women against each other with the whole “other girls vs me” type of content.

It is almost as if women are one-dimensional beings that could only fit into one mould.

Many of the girls I talked to recall their own 'pick-me' phase. Perhaps you even had a pick-me phase yourself. It is important to understand that the issue does not stem directly from the individual. Rather, it is years of conditioning through unrelenting patriarchal values and the media which shape young impressionable girls to become competitive against each other.

Throughout history, it has been a man's world and women have to fight each other to receive male validation in order to be considered relevant. Traditional values still trickle down and influence us today, reinforced by societal pressure to conform by acting as passive side-characters in a man's life.



THE RISE OF WOMEN

Could you really blame girls for trying to deviate from that association? For wanting to be different? Films and books which fail to portray women as multifaceted characters are also to blame. The copy-pasted troupes of a hyperfeminine mean girl against the nerdy or sporty protagonist leaves an impression that girls can only be one or the other. The audience is meant to relate to the socially awkward yet relatable main character whose whole plot often revolves around getting a boy's attention. At the same time, it demonises other girls for being too "girly", depicting interests in make-up and fashion as something shallow and superficial. This may lead to internalised misogyny because it cements the belief that one type of girl is better than the other.

Fortunately, times are changing with new waves of female representation that allow women to act freely and to be loved unconditionally. It is time we understand that every girl is their own main character regardless of their interests and how they choose to present themselves. With more women as creative directors in the entertainment industry we are now exposed to media which celebrates the average woman, the woman who is loud, the woman who is messy, the woman who exclusively wears pink, the woman who chooses to follow the stereotype or the woman who chooses to break the stereotype.

Let us stop desperately trying to be the exception and be proud of the similarities we may share with each other as women. Let us celebrate the rise of women together. There is no longer a need to be a 'pick-me' because the conversation has shifted in finding ways for this patriarchal society to pick **us**.

WHEN 'NO' ISN'T ENOUGH

Written by: Elly Zulaikha

Content Warning: Mentions of rape and violence

"Do you want a lift from me? I can drop you off at the train station anytime."
"No, thank you, hahaha. I prefer to sleep on the train."
"Are you sure? Let me pick you up, then you can sleep at the train station."
"Nope, that's okay. But thanks for the offer!"

Imagine someone you never met telling you this two days after getting acquainted. Can you imagine how weird and uncomfortable it was for me? Or the countless and almost guaranteed instances where I receive not-so-discreet stares from motorists and drivers alike whenever I'm waiting at a bus stop?

Don't even get me started on what I wore whenever I go out- to work, for school, or for an outing. I could be wearing a worn-down potato sack and, still, men have the AUDACITY to OGLE at me, laser-focused and determined to find my 'hidden treasures'.

I could still remember this boy from my English tuition class who was practically training to become a certified stalker and creeper. No, it wasn't an innocent attraction. He was obsessed with me. Upon every opportunity to pair up for a project, he insisted on being my partner. He would stare at me whenever he could as if I was a prized object. When I told him, "Don't touch my things!" he would purposefully stare at me while doing the very thing that I forbade him.

I was grateful my classmate Emily (bless her) would always protect me from the creepy boy. Even though he was tall and lanky for an 11-year-old boy with bowl hair, he was no match with Emily, who was strong and athletic. Yet, with Emily around, I still felt unsafe.

And the last straw happened when that boy followed me all the way to the toilet. He stood at the entrance, and I remembered this clearly in my mind when he said, "Remember me?" while blocking my path. Of course, you dumbfuck! You gave me a lifetime's worth of nightmares!

You're the reason I get easily shaken when men are being insistent towards me when they throw unwanted advances despite the million 'No'(s) I gave. It's like no matter how discreet or blunt my no is, nothing can stop a man from saying or doing things that cross the line of harassment.

You can't tell a woman, "Oh, maybe if you explain to them nicely, they would understand." Yeah, I can personally vouch that that sentence works in only one out of every million scenarios.

If this was the case, then, how come we still come across news where women were murdered, raped, burned alive, fired from a job, humiliated when they say 'No' to a man?

HOW MANY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY(S) DOES IT TAKE TO SLAP THE SHIT OUT OF SOCIETY THAT THIS IS STILL A PERVASIVE ISSUE EVEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

What's even more mocking is how we still dedicate just one day every year on 8th March to celebrate and honour women for their achievements. It's even more hypocritical when this celebration only extends to certain ethnicities and nationalities.

And you know damn well how annoying it is when someone who belongs to a majority, comes up to virtually give a 'pat on the back for less fortunate women on this day, yet simultaneously ignore, perpetuate and justify misogynistic practices and lashes out when someone counters with, "Yeah but have you ever looked closely at why women of color face more discrimination daily?"

No shit Sherlock! This is the reality that assumes its place once 8th March ends. being recognized, honoured, and celebrated on this day- so much so that we'll fill up our social media timelines with 'Shoutout to my girlies', share inspirational stories about women, and even gift each other with material things because 'It's your day.' But why stop at just one day out of 365 days in a year? Why not every day?

Fine, if we can't celebrate every day, all I ask for you, dear readers, no matter what your gender or race is if you see someone being harassed, please stand up to them. When they confide with you and share how uncomfortable and terrified they are, don't interject. Listen. Believe their words. Don't shame them.

“SO WHAT?”

by Ashley Lim

I curated a Spotify playlist which I titled “어쩌라고.” which in Korean means: “So What?”

Yeah, it sounds obnoxious I know, but bear with me because I swear I have a reason. I’m a 20 year old Malaysian Chinese female who comes from a relatively traditional extended family. Very joystick-toting, “no boyfriend yet ah?”, children-are-meant-to-be-seen-and-not heard type family. You know what I’m talking about right?

Which is probably why if you ask anyone in the MUSA office or even my fellow editors that I honestly, in the most respectful way possible do not give as much of a f*** as I should when it comes to these traditions.

So, it’s no wonder that I get weird looks at every reunion dinner when I tell my family, confidently and unashamedly in response to their barrage of questions, that I don’t even plan on looking for a boyfriend till I’m 26 or 27.

“No one will want you by then.” They joke.

“Wouldn’t you be an old maid by then?” They tease.

“Marry a rich man la.” They advise me.

(When one of them said that I actually candidly said: “I’m not going to marry a rich man, I plan on being the rich man.”)

True story.

Of course all of these are said in jest, or so I hope. I often sweep these under the carpet, attributing this behaviour to years and years of generational ideals that stem from patriarchal behaviour. And besides, it’s just my extended family, it’s not like I have to see them every day right?

Just smile and let it slide Ashley.

But there was one thing that really, really hit home while I was driving my mom back from our dog, Boba’s, vet appointment. My usual vet is a wonderful woman in her late 20s whom we adore mainly because of her patience when it comes to us fretting over Boba.

“The vet will make a good wife one day. She’s sweet, soft spoken and patient.”

Which are amazing attributes, I agree. But is that really all a woman is meant to be? I mean she’s a successful vet who regularly performs surgery on animals, a feat that I

can't even begin to wrap my head around because of the stress and emotional weight of the job. And the one thing that my mom takes away from that is that she's good "wife material"?

Yes, being respectful to your future partner is one of the core foundations of every marriage, but does that mean every "good" wife has to be sweet and soft spoken? And what about their male counterparts? When I asked her what makes good "husband" material she went on to list out:

"Well, he should be the breadwinner of the family, tough and carry on his family name."

heavy sigh

The thing is, I can't blame her for thinking like that, but I grew up in a world where the Internet liberated me from such ideals.

I've always been a feminist, which I think many people often associate with the fact that I'm misogynistic, which is the farthest from the truth (my shrine to NCT Dream in my office will certainly prove otherwise). The thing about feminism, or at least my version of is that I just want the same number of opportunities to be provided to the female community, without having to put down anyone else.

I believe an individual, regardless of the reproductive organs they are born with, should be treated based on their merit and qualifications without prejudice, a quality which extends to my image of an "ideal husband".

Who says that men can't be stay at home dads?

Who says that women can't bring back the bacon while also fulfilling the maternal desire to have children?

Who says that men can't cry after they've had a long day at work?

These gendered stereotypes of husband and wife need to be crumpled, tossed out of the window and purged in every other way imaginable, because we live in a society where women are marrying later and having less children while men are learning how to be more emotionally vulnerable in a world that has always forced them to repress their feelings.

So what if I prioritise my career over my love life?

So what if I want a guy that's just as sweet spoken as I should be?

So what if I want someone who ultimately isn't good "husband" or even "wife" material but just a good partner?



Creation Story

by anonymous

In spacetime before the First Rising, the Aqueon (now known as Earth) was only made up of the seas and skies. The Great Serpent emerged from the deep Aqueon waters and clawed its way onto the lands. The hails of soil it sent flying into the sky turned into clouds while the holes it left on the ground formed valleys and lakes. The Aqueon waters seeped into the cracks of the earth and gave life to the land - sprouting plants that touched the atmosphere. The blessed water collected in the footprints of the Great Serpent, creating muddy mounds that would form creatures both big and small, with feathers, fur, scales, wings, legs, eyes, horns, hair, teeth, fins. The hum of this brave new world grew steadily as life flourished.

Upon hearing this rich sound booming through spacetime, the Moon turned to find the source of the vibrant melody. There had never been any sound in spacetime before, making it the first time Moon had felt the sense called Hearing. And so Moon shifted its body with great might and desperation, finally facing the pale blue glow of Aqueon. Moon had been all alone in spacetime, too far away to speak to Sun, too slow and heavy to run like Stars. But when Moon saw Aqueon, there was overwhelming feeling deep inside Moon. An aching, ripping, gnawing gravitational pull that could not be named, one that is felt between lovers meeting again after years of separation, of a soldier trudging home from a long war. This feeling boiled and burst out as tears, becoming the first rain to fall on Aqueon.

The tears of the Moon plinked like chimes in the wind as they met Aqueon's soft face. Their ghostly sheen casted spots of light in the dark forest, catching the eyes of its inhabitants. The creatures of the earth crawled closer inch by inch, their deep growls daring each other to make the first move to snatch the tears. Scratch, scratch, scratch. The forest of ears pricked up as they heard and eventually saw the Pangolin poke its head out of the ground. Pangolin gathered the tears with its long claws and wrapped itself tightly around them as the other animals raced toward Pangolin, kicking, screaming, biting, knocking, hitting, ripping until eventually they gave up one by one. See, you need to have hard scales like me to survive in this world, Pangolin cooed to the glowing gems. You'll get eaten in an instant if you stay this soft, Pangolin muttered, I'll bury you underground so you can be hard like the earth. The tears were then hidden away in the dark belly of Aqueon, growing harder and stronger as the days passed by.

Swan walked by one day, and dug around the earth to find something to eat. Ouch ! Whatever hit me better be tasty, or else, Swan grumbled as it dug deeper in the ground. The unearthed tears winked at Swan, their hard surfaces reflecting Swan's own face. Swan gasped in delight and scooped up Moon's tears in its wings, flying away to its pond. It is a sin for beautiful creatures like you to be in a place like that, Swan fussed while shining each tear with its feathers. I see the light inside of you, it is old magic. Ethereal creatures like us should becelebrated and worshipped. Beauty, romance, magic - these are the joys of life - . With every polish, each tear turned a different shade of the rainbow, mirroring the galaxies they came from. As Swan went about swimming and basking in the sun, the Lotus cradled the tears and sang them lullabies. Day and night, Lotus sang to them, played with them and taught them the ways of the world. The tears listened to Lotus, laughing and crying together as time passed. The tears were grown now, each one with eyes that spoke a thousand languages, tongues carrying honey and milk, hair that flowed like the rolling plains. Lotus carressed their faces and lead them to the heart of Aqueon, the Mangrove forest.

This is my final lesson to you children, it is a gift from the Great Serpent that has passed down from generation to generation among us plants. This is our legacy on Aqueon, Lotus said, the pride in its voice enveloping the dark forest like a thick fog. Go below, you will find it there. The tears crouched down and found the network of Mangrove's roots. Each root bulb blinked up like a sky of fireflies, the patterns of light signalling secrets of ancient times to one another in a language only they understood. The roots spread far and wide under the entirety of Aqueon, learning, watching and listening as the world breathed through the days and nights. The tears held firmly onto the bulbs and emanated the same light from Mangrove's bulbs. The entire Mangrove lit up like a thousand Suns, and from the mouths of the tears, flowers began to spill. Petals, stems, pistils, leaves, thorns, buds kept tumbling out - their sweet fragrance blossoming throughout Aqueon.

The tears laughed with joy and began to climb up Mangrove's trunks, playing and giggling together as they made their way to the top of Mangrove. They sat amidst the sea of leaves, and looked up at Moon. They cried out for Moon, and Moon turned to face Aqueon for the second time in its life. Moon said, my children how big you have become ! Has Aqueon been kind to you all these years ? The tears danced and sang with pride, telling stories of Pangolin who gave them strength and grit, Swan who showed them magic and beauty, Lotus who gave them love and knowledge, and Mangrove who taught them to create and give life. Moon cried and blessed these creatures, giving them the honour of raising her tears for the ages to come. The tears joined hands and their hearts joined in accord as they decided to call themselves gen, which we now call woman. This is how woman came to be.

post semester reflections by aiman & kiki. an interview

slumped over in bed, i telephoned a close friend of mine- kiki, for an interview- asking for her thoughts, feelings and understandings developed throughout her first semester of her second year as a theatre school dropout majoring in gender studies, as a girl and as a student. she- in a bathtub with an arm and an ear attached to a wired housephone. i in bed, writing frantically her words as she scatters them. thoughts manifesting, i depicted my first question being

KiKi:

i think the biggest thing a semester has taught me is the

AiMAN AND KiKi (at the same time):
the inadvertence of dysphoria

AiMAN:

the inadvertence of dysphoria! right! like it just never ends; it's like pulling on the end of a ribbon and finding out the string never detaches from where it's supposed to end. and so now, all you have is this tongue of pink satin.

KiKi:

you read my mind ... and it's almost cruel how much zoom demands of studenthood

AiMAN:

there's a weight with having your camera turned off in class

KiKi:

yeah! and it's like you feel terrible having it off, sure- but having it on... it's like this playpen of students who are willing to almost be vulnerable and surveilled for an hour of class. ur backdrop being your room, and every minute, small shifting motion of your face and your hands- just forever, there on a recording of tiled landscapes. it's strange and it's sick, and it's funny and not.

AiMAN:

well, how do you feel about the idea of ipts opening up campuses again? for classes?

KiKi:

well, it would be great? i think. it's gonna be foreign as all hell, for sure. dude! i remember a phase i had during the semester, where i wouldn't know how to smile for zoom. like i couldn't place out when to smile, and when not to smile and how you should start smiling over camera and when you need to drop the smile off your face. there was a politic over this small signalling of expression for me! can u imagine!

AiMAN :

i literally can

KiKi:

-to translate the idea of that, onto an irl college experience. you know the comic strip, i think it's a meme somewhere. the sketch goes "this is gonna be weird, im gonna make this weird..."

AiMAN:

i think i do.

KiKi:

it's that. and it's gonna be that, for months on end. until we get our bearings, our cognitive bearings right again. from having to scrape and start things fresh from the pandemic.

AiMAN:

if you ultimately

KiKi:

had to choose?

AiMAN:

yeah

KiKi:

offline school, for sure. let it be awkward. like, let's stumble through figuring and reorienting ourselves to campus spaces and making friends again.

AiMAN:

absolutely. before the tangent of, you mentioned 'dysphoria'. what is that for you?

KiKi:

mmm...! for me? i don't know, being seen as a boy, i guess? you know, i opted for wearing a long wig during the first few classes i had. and then i just hated it, so i took it off and all i had was this short hair and adam's apple, and this five o'clock shadow staring right back at me on zoom. i say 'inadvertence' because it made me sad that i couldn't escape dysphoria even through online school which, i would believe to make more manageable. here is the internet: this ecosystem where everyone gets to carve an image for themselves, you get to share what you need to, in reflecting your true identity from person to screen ... and then zoom happens, and it's this unfiltered internet and teachers need you to speak up to get the ball rolling in classes. and that was dysphoric. i don't want to be a boy.

AiMAN :

and you're not!

KiKi:

it's that. and it's gonna be that, for months on end. until we get our bearings, our cognitive bearings right again. from having to scrape and start things fresh from the pandemic.

AiMAN:

we'll figure it out.

KiKi:

we always do. anyway, gender aesthetics are a bell curve, and not a binary, even if things do seem to be floating only insularly through one. jesus.

AiMAN:

how have you coped through that during the semester?

KiKi:

my best friend, nik aina sofia. so, she and i went through this ritualistic process, and there's fire and snakes and blood. and we sacrifice ourselves to this fire, and it envelops us and we're witches. but anyway, what that does- is that it allows for us to share our bodies with each other. this way, our spirits travel through the other, in what is almost a vessel. the details are murky, but nik and kiki possess each other? i want to say. she sees what i see, then feels what i feel and eats what i eat. we defecate and shower and go through the same haircuts, and it's this dimensional experience of a shared something. it helps because i get to breathe in the body of a cisgendered woman, and she lives through a queer idea. she recognises 'i love dick' by chris kraus in writing, because i had to read 'i love dick' by chris kraus for contemporary fictions, and i'm technically chambering in a law institute while i major in gender studies. down to us both understanding what simulacrum means, ha ha.

AiMAN :

that reminds me of suspiria. the luca guadagnino cover.

KiKi:

absolutely where we retained the idea from. the bodying of women with other women, like the coven, or dance company, sharing an eye and overseeing everything: the ins and outs of the tanz.

AiMAN:

that scene where the dance teacher stops to stare at olga.

KiKi:

and the other teachers, you could feel, almost collectively understood. yeah. that.

AiMAN:

you girls are witches, then?

KiKi:

haha, sure. we breathe through the other, and our bodies are just ... physical, really. it's taking body neutrality to this whole other level. it sounds convoluting, but then again, womanhood is convoluting.

AiMAN:

what are your plans post-semester?

KiKi:

well, i have films that i am part of. so shooting approximately will encompass a span of three months, almost? i am very strict on making sure work never touches school schedule. i can't wait to watch films and read and write, and then totally hate that i never get started on these things because, girls get lazy. i plan to weave tapestries, that's something i'd like to totally get my hands into.

AiMAN:

wow, what kind? what images do u plan on weaving?

KiKi:

hmmm, maybe texts? jenny holzers' inflammatory essay collection has always inspired me and my voice, so i'm imagining a something like that but on yarn exclusively. or just illustrations i've planned for pen on paper, but totally applying that to tapestry art.

AiMAN:

there's that queer artist...

KiKi:

huh? who

AiMAN:

she makes dolls. transgender. new york city.

KiKi:

greer lankton?

AiMAN:

yeah!

KiKi:

oh, i love her work! the bedroom installation she had, it was so fragmenting of the decay of womanhood. which resonates soundly to chris kraus' i love dick- again. it's so funny to me, that kraus is like IM A WOMAN AND IM OLD. and i read through it, and she speaks almost as if her positionality is the Only positionality of a woman in the world. her voice is so... primarily speaking of. i read that, and i'm only a year old girl- can't even call myself a woman even

AiMAN:

you could totally move from being purely illustrative to what greer lankton does in her work! dolls on beds! and yeah, kraus is... this privileged understanding of woman, really.

KiKi :

i was so opinionated going into the reading of that book. there were lapses where i would read it and had to put it down almost, like shut up! you're annoying - and whiny! ha ha

AiMAN:

you seem to have really enjoyed the task of reading that. what other assessments did you enjoy?

KiKi:

gosh. assessments i enjoyed? well, there was the reflective essay for gender, culture and sexualities in southeast asia, which was scary, but i remember the conclusion of the work being encouraging for us to Actually reflect and write something transparent on the way we felt about the things we learned- i remember my lecturer being absolutely open in that we write in our voice. i chose media text pertaining to indonesian cinema and the queer identities within that topic being suppressed and it was almost painful having to write about something that resembled closely my living area. essays that push you to be reflexively writing are always fun to me! the other one i had to do was for cities and citizens, and that was like a heavy dissection on my end because i worked on taman tun dr ismail, and that being the area i grew up in versus the displacement of indian long-house settlers within that area. how malay-muslimhood was accommodated for, over the expense of the livelihood of a minority group. crazy. film essays were funny to work on too- i always manage to reroute the essays into this gender discussion, and it kept happening for every film histories writing. the films were good too! close-up by abbas kiarostami had this ... dialogue on the mirroring (or imposter) of masculinities, and it made iran look so warm like a rothko painting. i was weirdly blessed into the really good work groups for projects too- so that made everything 'enjoyable'. i made friends i think. i hope. i talked a lot in classes because, well i had ideas on things and theories

AiMAN:

what wasn't enjoyable?

KiKi:

gosh, i can't think. maybe just don't call me a boy.

AiMAN:
duly noted.

KiKi :
duly noted. warm regards?

AiMAN:
warm regards. dude, student emails are another thing to have to write. woah sorry i called u dude.

KiKi:
i'm fine with being called dude. but yeah, student emails are like ... this fun practice of reflexive writing for me. i like doing it i'm not sure they like reading it ha ha

AiMAN:
are you going to keep writing 'reflexively' outside of the semester now?

KiKi:
well i like doing it.

AiMAN:
you have to keep doing it. Yeah.

KiKi:
dude, something people needed to talk about is how your music taste gets thrown into disarray when you go through a semester. i don't know what it is? maybe it's that we need music to concentrate and then another soundtrack to accompany the celebration of an assignment submitted? gosh i have to read out my on repeat for you on spotify! it goes :

1. volk by thom yorke
2. sticker by net 127 (music video came out a day before cities and citizens essay submission) (crazy)
3. agrim agadez by etran de l'air (discover weekly is a blessing)
4. big star by lorde (i had to lie down on my bed for an evening straight with this in my ear, after i thought i made myself look like an idiot for a workshop session)
5. lola by the raincoats (i don't care what anybody says, me listening to this is reclaiming queer culture)
6. she came in through the bathroom window by the beatles (beatles=bad)
7. focus by net 127 (iiiiii can't wait no moreeee)
8. superhuman by net 127 (this is an alarm clock of a song PLEASE listen for 10am classes)
9. a message from the aching sky by cindy lee
10. has ended by thom yorke (suspiria soundtrack ftw)
11. dreamer and road trip by 127

AiMAN:
that is a lot of 127...

KiKi:
shut up.

AiMAN:
bias?

KiKi:
i am 22 years old.

KiKi:
but johnny.

AiMAN:
the semester really supplemented your ... audio sensory, if you will.

KiKi:
it absolutely has. and the films and the books it handed over to me. like i get to add these things like a checklist over onto goodreads and letterboxd. makes me feel like im a serious person. im gonna get a blazer for when school starts so i can look it too.

AiMAN:
you do that. this ... has been a conversation, kiki! thank you! i feel so well endowed with your ideas on things and your thing about the ideas you have, really.

KiKi:
thanks for having me 'dude'

AiMAN:
'dude' thanks for having me 'simulacrum'

KiKi:
warm regards warm regards

AiMAN:
warm regards.



To All My Foremothers

To all my foremothers,

I apologise for not knowing your name
When you carried generations of *us* in your
womb

I apologise while you bleed to carry a male
heir, women around you taunted at your
failure

I apologise that you died seeing the days
pass by as you fulfilled your *duty*

I apologise for not honouring you everyday
when you nourished me with burnt
fingers

I apologise to have let your own hopes and
dreams die under the burden of
responsibilities

I apologise for I am here because of all the
sacrifices you made for me

By Maeesha Seraj



m E T a m O R P H O S i s



OUR NEW AND
PERMANENT LGBTQ
CORNER

Many ancient myths often have an element of metamorphosis in it, often described as the transformation or transition into something that is new, beautiful and unexpected. Even natural substances may also undergo metamorphosis: the unrelenting heat and pressure over thousands of years may eventually turn tiny organisms into petroleum, and coal into diamonds. And the most beloved of natural metamorphoses is probably the transformation of caterpillars into butterflies.

Like most things in the natural world, the process of slowly realising and accepting your sexuality is a long and difficult journey, but one that will undoubtedly end with you emerging from your chrysalis stronger and more resilient than before. MONGA invites you, this Pride Month, to celebrate and acknowledge your story,

...serving as a reminder of your personal identity, wherever you fall on the spectrum. Whether inspired by a celebrity, a close friend or even a passerby, tell us your story (anonymously if you feel more comfortable) of how you started becoming who you were truly meant to be all along and of feeling completely and 100% comfortable in your own skin.

Yeah, sex is cool but...

I worry sometimes that I would never receive the love they write about in books, the one's they make movies about, because everything I've ever seen has always revolved around the aspect of sex. Sex has been a topic rarely discussed in my neck of the woods, and when it was brought up, I found myself cracking jokes as a way to steer clear of the conversation. It remained taboo at home, which meant it was an easy topic to dodge, but amongst friends, sex was used to represent the pinnacle of popularity. It's not hard— to sound like you know what they're talking about— to refer to moments and pretend that you've gone through them, so that people don't think you're a freak, so that they think you're -one of them. And I know that not everyone has sex before marriage, and that the concept of virginity is flawed and outdated, but there is an undeniable stigma around virgins, more so as time passes. The question always comes back

to, are you not desirable enough for someone?

And I think I struggled with that greatly, because sex isn't and wouldn't ever be something I'm interested in. It feels weird to type that out, because I've always thought and believed it to be a part of everyone's life, but the thought of sex repulses me. For the longest time I felt horrified at myself. I tried to bargain and convince myself that I only hated sex because no one could find anything to love about my body. That I only hated sex because I hated myself. And maybe a part of that remains true, but I'm a lot older now, and with time I've grown to appreciate my body for what it is, and though I may not go so far as to say I love myself; I am damn proud of myself. But one thing still remained. The thought of having sex continued to disgust me, still made me want to hurl.



But why?

Why was something everyone seemed to prattle on about, make movies about, sing and talk constantly about, something I didn't want?

Was I scared?

Did I think I'd be bad?

I genuinely thought I was damaged. Broken. That something just wasn't clicking in my head the same way it did for everyone else. I constantly skirted around conversations where my friends would gush over guys, or anyone they found 'hot'. Sure I knew when someone was conventionally attractive, and aesthetically pleasing to look at, but did it make me feel hot all over? No. Did I understand what exactly my friends were saying when they said they wanted to take these people to bed, to rip their clothes off and show them a good time? No. But I pretended like I did. And as I grew older, people began asking questions, wondering why I never really talked about my crushes the same way they did. And of course this made things even more confusing because I quickly realised that I drew a line between romance and sex. It's often intertwined— almost exclusively portrayed in the media as one and the same, but that wasn't exactly the case—at least not for me. I found certain people fascinating and had this urge to be with them in a romantic way. I longed to spend time with them, and bond on an emotional level, but had little to no interest in the sexual element that was expected to come with that sort of connection. Needless to say I felt like a walking contradiction.

It didn't help that around this time I began to realise I wanted to be with girls romantically, the same way I did boys. It felt like the universe was throwing another curveball my way, because now was I gay? Bi? Pan? I didn't

seem to *fit anywhere*, because all these labels were sexual orientations, and I on the other hand was completely averse to sex.



The internet is a wonderful, magical, place filled with all sorts of knowledge, and for me it's where I found who I was. Where I first heard about asexuality.

Asexuality. A term that was part of the LGBTQIA+ community - defined as having little to no sexual feelings or desires, unlike allos (people that did have sexual feelings and desires). People that identified as ace could still feel and desire romantic relationships, they could even be biromantic, panromantic, or even homoromantic.

Reading those words, a wave of complete relief washed over me. It sounds cheesy to say that I felt like I finally belonged, and maybe it is, but that sensation of finding people that viewed love, sex, romance, the same way you did, and *not* feel ashamed about it... it's euphoric.

I started following accounts owned by ace influencers, slowly building this bubble of people like me, which was incredibly validating, and I learned how asexuality in itself was a spectrum with a range of varying degrees of sex aversion, with some aces



being more sex favourable than others. I read stories about aces who managed to find and forge meaningful romantic relationships with other aces and even allos. I read stories of aces who lost their loves because they couldn't give them what they wanted. There were stories where people shared how some believed asexuality wasn't real, that it was just something people said to get attention, that everyone wanted on some level to have sex, and those that didn't had to have been traumatised. That asexuals just needed to have good sex to know they weren't ace. And although it initially hurt to read comments filled with such hate and vitriol, it brought me comfort to know that the ace community had turned these harsh words into running gags amongst themselves; slowly taking its power away. I began to do the same, and soon found myself making jokes about my asexuality. Finally being able to laugh and love the part of myself I had long thought to be broken.

It's a rush knowing that a whole host of people like you existed, and that it was okay to just be me, and if the people I cared about, cared about me, me being ace wouldn't change things.

AND IT DIDN'T.

The friends I've told continued to love and be there for me. Sure I did have to explain myself a couple of times before they understood, but honestly, they took it way better than I could've expected. And I'm beyond grateful for that.



Coming out as ace to your parents is tricky, telling Asian parents you don't want to have sex... Well on paper that sounds like a good thing. God knows the amount of times they've tried drilling in the whole 'no sex before marriage' idea. But what if there was no sex even after marriage, you know? That's not something I can easily bring up. But that's something I hope the future me eventually tackles, and I have no doubt she will.

Having the lexicon to finally describe who I was, was the best thing that's ever happened to me, and if you made it to the end of this long-winded story, and if any part of this resonated with you, here are some of the things I wish I heard when I was struggling with figuring out my identity.

**YOU'RE NOT ALONE,
YOU'RE NOT BROKEN,
YOU'RE NOT DAMAGED.
YOU'RE LOVED.
I HOPE YOU
EVENTUALLY LOVE
YOU,
AND ALL YOU ARE TOO.**

WRITTEN BY: ANON

the gift

BY AIMI OTANI

"I HAVE A GIFT FOR YOU."

She refused to tell me what this gift that was chained and secured with the most sophisticated lock as if it was caging a yet-to-be-known creature. Even I, the greatest locksmith of the heart, wasn't able to crack it. I guessed and guessed, but I still couldn't hit the jackpot. I was the boiling water in an ordinary pot, continuously bubbling. Just couldn't swallow my chagrin. But at the same time, while I was concerned about the gift, I couldn't believe how much I cared. I was shocked at how much I have changed from the beginning.

We met at a bar in November. That day, in dim lights, I saw that fire of desire in her charcoal eyes when she asked me if I was alone. Fleeting, I saw minuscule shining stars floating. But after five seconds of playing catch, she diminished them. I hated the way she spoke. Her personality was spiky like a sea urchin. I was so sure that she was only going to be a one-night-friend who I would never get in touch with again. All of these thoughts formed at the speed of light the moment she tossed back the ball to me with a "Holy Shit!". *Where the hell were her manners? Unbelievable.* We were total

strangers a few seconds ago and still sort of were..

I walked home that day in the quiet late night. No cars, no bikes, just serenity. By the time I separated myself and the world with my lids, ready to commit to my dream, I had already erased ninety-five percent of her from my mind. But she was not a quitter. From the bottom of the valley that her first impression threw herself into, she climbed up to where I was resting with just a backpack full of sorcery. And cast a spell on me.

Was I mad that she was a witch? No.

I was teleported to a new world where I couldn't see anything but her. And I couldn't help but falling love with it. Yet every night, just before I lay to rest, I awoke to the old world I grew up in, and the accumulation of this routine had my fear grow in me like the mold in a humid bathroom. I couldn't tell if I merely adored the new world alone with her or if I was fond of her. Standing at an awkward and tilted place on the hill together, looking into each other's eyes, I didn't know which direction to set my next footstep.

On the day she promised to hand me the gift, I was a broken retro metronome. In a taxi, on the way to her place, I spared no effort to control the unsteady swing. But there was no way she didn't notice. She was a musician by nature—me being even a bit off-tempo would have caught her attention. Fuck. However, time never waits. We soon arrived at our destination. It was winter but I was sweating like the sun had grilled me for hours. As she slowly walked into her room, I dashed into the restroom. I was not ready. I wasn't ready for whatever she was planning. *What if I like the gift a little too much? What if I don't like it at all?* My concerns were like tangled hair and I was attempting to work it out with a wide-toothed comb so carefully to avoid any tears.

As I finished fixing my hair and made my way to her room, the metronome cured itself and ticked at a simultaneous pace as the second hand. Sixty beat-per-minute enlarged and thickened the fog in my brain. I gripped the knob and twisted my wrist. And there was light. And through the light, there she was in front of the piano.

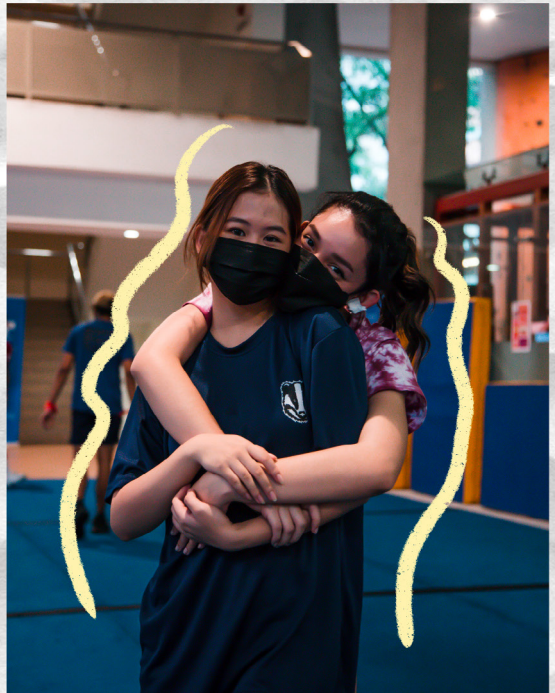
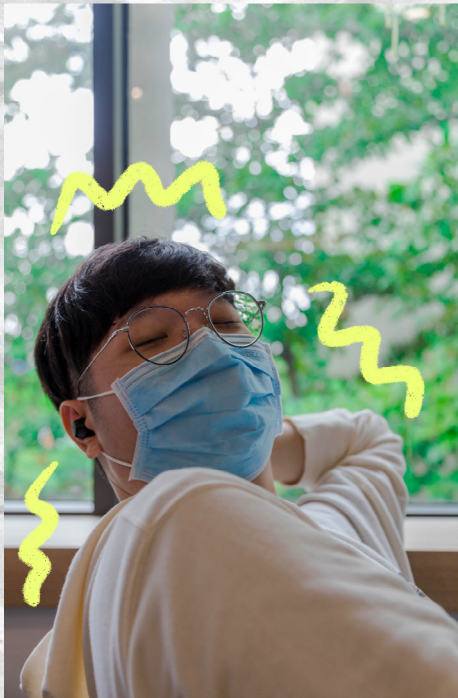
The gift was a live performance of an original song about us. My heart soared high up into the sky and my arms gave her an inescapable sudden hug. Then, her being a competitive person, gave me an inescapable sudden peck in return. I sat beside her on the duet

bench, gazing at her silhouette and feeling the rhythm while she sang. It was pure happiness. That realm we were in blocked every worry that may exist. But just when she played the last note, time froze.

All the noise vanished except the faint sound of her breath. As she looked into my pupils trying to study them, I saw that fire of desire in her again. My body turned into a magnet and my mind turned into fuel. I dragged myself onto one of her legs. My hands caressed her shape while hers gently wrapped around my waist. Our moist lips interlocked, and during our hockey match, she began to shake the leg I was perching on. I couldn't resist knitting my brows. The unruly yet delicate cries that were encased in gasps broke our silence. Her devilish grin made me melt on her knee. My mind caught on her fire and we were together in flames.

The night blazed a little too hard that left me a good burnt. I can't help but laugh at how I was simulating again and again in front of the restroom mirror how to perform a perfect reaction when she presents me with the gift. To me, the heart-piercing gift wasn't the song or the frantic yet beautiful interlink we had. The greatest gift was her and only her. On the hill, affirmation grew in our eyes. *Fuck locksmiths.* Simmering love was what uncaged our untamed and tender creatures of heart. As they merged into one in the air, I looked up at the distant tip of the mountain and held her hand. And there we took our very first step up the hill, sure and firm.







attributionS



EDITORS 2022

Ashley Lim Ai Lim
Ho Chai Ting
Lau Jing Wei
Tsheten Yangden
Bhutia

ADMIN ASSISTANT

Danelle Yap

PHOTOGRAPHERS / VIDEOGRAPHERS

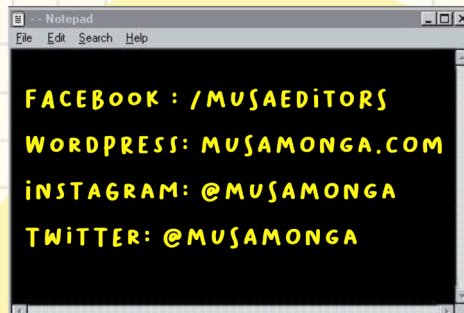
Dina Ghazali
Jerry Foong
Hanif Rafli
Kiki Marisa
Lim Xin Yi
Luanne Choong
Nursyafiq Aleea
San Jun Hoe
Sean Tan
Shawn Wong
Timothy Wee
Wong Syen Jeng
Wong Zi Yi
Yang Thong Chen

DESIGNERS

Aerin Tang
Chung Phei Sing
Gerald Lee
Januli Wijekoon
Megan Tang
Tan Zi Swan
Winnie Ooi

WRITERS

Elly Zulaikha
Shauna Naeem
Natasha Maya
Shabnam Sidhu
Sreana Habiba





THANK

YOU

FOR

Reading



HAVE A
NICE DAY!

