

ISSUE 002

SPRING 2024

THE UPLANDS UPDATE

THE WORLD OF SCIENCE
THE WORLD WE KNOW
CLOSE UP

FICTION
POEMS
MOVIES & TV
THE GALLERY

UNDER THE
LENS

THE UPLANDS UPDATE

SPRING, MAY 2024.

Editors Preface

Under the Lens: The Hidden Beauty Within Everyday Experiences.”

Are you reading closely?

Day by day, the world spins rapidly around us. The hum of voices blur like the faces passing us, growing into a hurricane of moments and movements. The voices, the smells, and the sounds we experience accumulate by the millions- it's all too much.

Why are we constantly caught up in our own routines and responsibilities? We constantly overlook the world around us.

Imagine walking down a bustling street: the noise of traffic blends with the chatter and footfalls of pedestrians. In the midst of this chaos, a pod of seeds falls from a tree, unnoticed. Stop and observe it. Watch it delicately twirl and dance in the gentle wind. Do you see the beginning of the cycle of life?

So, let us take a break. Stop for a moment, and look amidst the chaos. Watch time still and zoom into the quiet beauty of the unnoticed. It's in the small details- the gentle breeze on a hot day, the blooming flowers of spring, the creativity that buzzes in everyone.

There is beauty and complexity all around us, if only we take the time to look. We invite you to notice the unnoticed and give the due appreciation to those who deserve it.

It is time to look under the lens.

Elysse Siau, Editor-In-Chief

Elysse Siau
in

OUR TEAM



The Magazine Team!



Spring 2024!

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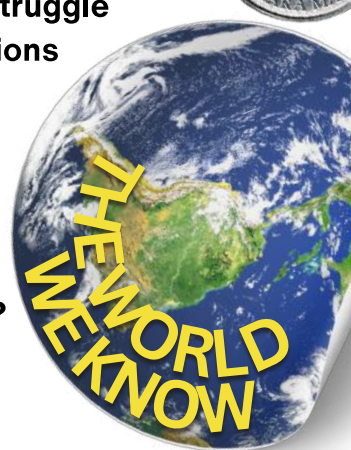
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SCIENCE'S GHOSTBUSTERS: THE "GHOST" PARTICLE

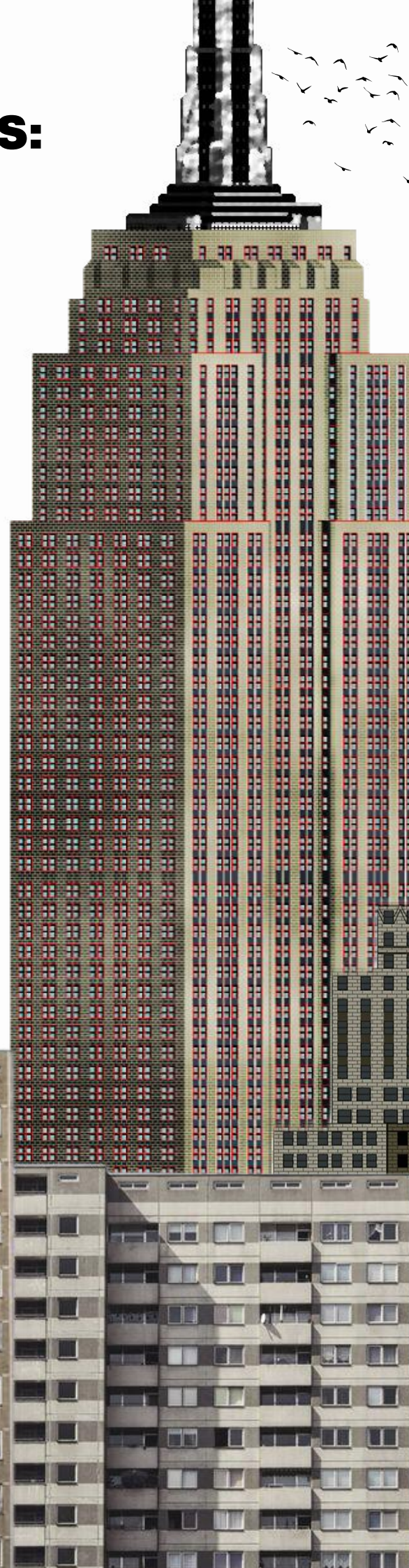
By Emeline Ang

Scientists at CERN, home to the largest particle accelerator in the world, may have found a way to prove whether long suspected mysterious "ghost particles" in our world exist. The current theory of particle physics - the Standard Model - says that everything in the universe is made up of a family of 17 particles, and yet there are signs - the way our galaxy moves - that point to the fact that what we observe is a mere 5% of the universe. "Ghost particles" are thought to be the phantom doppelganger of these 17 particles. However, if these otherworldly particles really do exist, it would be extremely difficult to prove their existence, seeing as they are subatomic ghosts, passing straight through anything and everything, passing under the radar of our devices. But the theory is that ghost particles very rarely disintegrate into Standard Model particles and can then be picked up by detectors. Hunting down and finding the particles could lead to one of the biggest breakthroughs in physics yet.

THE DAY THE MOON OBSCURED THE SUN

By Yu You Phuah

On Monday, April 8, the 2024 total solar eclipse painted the sky of North America, astonishing all spectators - those watching online and in person alike. This magnificent spectacle occurs when the moon is relatively close to Earth and blocks the entire disk of the sun, and the last time this happened was in 2017! To prepare for this event, excited viewers in North America prepared eclipse glasses that contained certified solar filters, while global observers sat in front of their screens, anticipating broadcasts from organizations such as NASA and Exploratorium. Pam Melroy, who is the deputy head of Nasa, commented: "There's something very mysterious about a total solar eclipse, when literally day turns to night, animals start to behave differently, and we see changes in the Earth's atmosphere." She sums up the fascination of all onlookers perfectly! The next time we will be blessed with this display will be on August 12, 2026, in Greenland, Iceland, Spain, Russia, and a small part of Portugal. Astronomy lovers - be sure to mark your calendars!





TALK OF THE TOWN

PLUTO'S ICY HEART

By Elysse Siau


In 2015, the discovery of Tombaugh Regio on Pluto captivated the world. This heart-shaped region, with its high-albedo surface, captured our hearts and our minds with its mystery. It wasn't just its shape that intrigued scientists; it was also the stark contrast in terrain between its western and eastern halves.

Tombaugh Regio is a unique region of Pluto, consisting of different terrains. The western side is mountainous and deep, while the eastern half is smoother and more flat. This difference in topography suggests that these two regions were formed by separate events, which coincidentally created the iconic heart shape we see today.

The origins of this basin of frozen nitrogen and ice have been a mystery since its discovery, until now. Through computer simulations, scientists have recently discovered the violent origins of the western region of the heart: a collision.

A planetary body with a diameter double the size of Switzerland smashed into Pluto, carving the unusual shape. Factors such as Pluto's frozen core and the angle of the collision prevented the body from sinking into the dwarf planet. Instead, the body likely remains flattened on the surface.

The discovery of the origins of the Tombaugh Regio has deepened our understanding of Pluto's geological history and its origins, reminding us of the complexity and multifaceted origins of our universe.



“IF IT DOESN'T FIT, YOU MUST ACQUIT” - A TWISTED CINDERELLA TALE?

By Angel Sun

O.J. Simpson passed away on April 10th. Though he rose to fame, as the New York Times points out, as a “football star turned Hollywood fixture”, he is best remembered by his murder trial for the killings of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown and her friend Ron Goldman. He still rattles the world in death, as people try to make sense of the trial and the infamous glove fitting. So, what exactly could be the reasons it didn't fit? Here are some possible theories: first, is the fact that Simpson allegedly stopped taking his anti-inflammatory medications that help with his arthritis. Secondly, he was wearing latex gloves below it, and the mere friction could've caused it to not fit. Thirdly, the prosecution also proposed that the glove will “lose 15% of the size” when drenched in blood and dried. Some of these theories were disproved, but what do you think?

THE
WORLD
OF
SCIENCE

DE

NOISE

Unveiling scientific research and understanding, this section explores our connection to the scientific world from animal research to the micro-interactions.

Behind Locked Lab Doors

By Yu You Phuah

Invisible Threads

By Michelle Wang

BEHIND LOCKED LAB DOORS



By Yu You Phuah

Dear readers, don't you absolutely adore your pets? And now: if you saw them crying for help, would you save them? After all, it's human decency to help others, isn't it? Sadly, this isn't the case for many. In the lab of your favourite cosmetic brand, that shampoo company you're so loyal to, and the household cleaner you use every day, there are those who ignore begs of mercy. Not of humans - but of animals!

In this day and age, many scientists demand that health research organisations should educate the public about the critical role of animal studies. More often than not, they purposefully misinterpret our desperate justice for the helpless subjects as ignoring their contributions. However, we are not belittling the influence of wildlife experimentation — we are questioning this process. Are these inhumane trials truly critical? Many overestimate the success rate of these tests; in reality, the failure of them is an unacceptably high rate of 90%. The animals are shocked. Poisoned.

Restrained. Isn't it hypocritical of experimenters to accuse us of depreciating them, while researchers are ignoring the creatures' howls of unnecessary suffering on a daily basis? Furthermore, testers frequently claim that many of the images that expose these studies are distributed by animal rights activists, drawing the rash conclusion that the photos are selectively shot and edited to indoctrinate the public. Nevertheless, this argument proves to be untrue. After pictures revealing the mistreatment of animals in a North Carolina laboratory were released, the facility shut down, allowing the victims to become loved pets. Appallingly, one of the photographs showed ticks being strapped onto a rabbit. That isn't a "test". It's torture under disguise, under a label, under the guise of a helpful experiment. The fact that the trials came to a halt clearly demonstrates that the evidence was not to support an anti-research agenda - it was to reveal the indisputable truth!

Supporters of animal testing often declare that the animals are treated with heartfelt kindness. Nevertheless, one can only wonder: is it "kindness" that causes only 3% of these subjects to barely escape the grasp of Death? According to the Humane Society of the United States, animals are often not given any kind of pain medication. Is this the "compassionate care" the creatures deserve? Undoubtedly, half of their suffering is rooted in the experiments, but the other half develops from their housing. For us, the creatures get stuck in barren cages. For us, they go through unimaginable anguish. All this, just for drugs that fail 9 out of 10 times. They feel, they think, they experience pain — who are we to steal their freedom?

A former animal tester, Michael Slusher, decided to take a courageous step and revealed the harsh truth. Young Michael loved the bundles of joy, and so he built a career around it. However, his dream job was not what it seemed - it was an endless nightmare.

"I BEGAN HAVING NIGHTMARES ABOUT LABORATORY ANIMALS. FOR EXAMPLE, [IN] ONE THERE IS A RABBIT JUST LAYING ON A COUNTER AND AS I APPROACHED IT, HE ROLLED OVER AND HIS INTESTINES AND GUTS JUST SPILLED OUT ON THE TABLE. OTHER DREAMS INVOLVE BEING CHASED DOWN HALLWAYS BY HUNDREDS OF RATS AND MICE."



Slusher was often ordered to dispose of wrong batches of innocent creatures: something that distressed him greatly. Ultimately, he quit and became a farmer instead. This is the horrifying truth of animal testing; this is what truly happens behind locked lab doors. These victims are treated as convenient stepping stones for humanity; just because we don't understand them, doesn't mean that we can inconsiderately twist their fates!

Outwardly, animal testing may be a small sacrifice unrelated to you. However, visualise this: your loyal dog not there to greet you after school anymore because he was sent away to "contribute to humankind", as researchers say - but that's alright, the rumours about wildlife trials being heinous are merely misleading claims, right? Your quiet cat - not there to cheekily knock things off shelves - but that's alright, because she will "save humanity", and will be treated with the utmost consideration, right? Would you accept that excuse? Animal voices are voices - let us remember that!

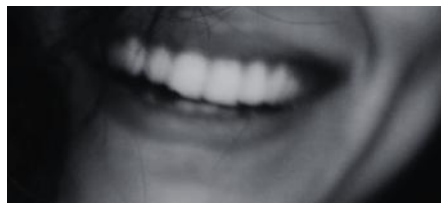
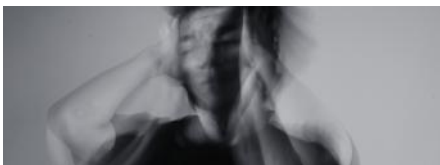
- Michael Slusher, former animal tester (CBC, 2018)

Invisible Threads

Exploring the Psychology Behind Micro-Interactions

By Michelle Wang

In the intricate tapestry of human connection, there exists a realm of subtle exchanges that often go unnoticed: micro-interactions. From the gentle curve of a smile to the reassuring motion of a nod, these seemingly small gestures weave invisible threads that bind us together in a web of shared emotions and experiences. This article delves into the psychological intricacies behind these micro-interactions, shedding light on their profound influence on human emotions.



Micro-expression: Smiles

At the heart of micro-interactions lies the language of micro-expressions, a silent communication that speaks volumes without uttering a word. Every movement carries its nuanced meaning, capable of conveying empathy, understanding, and even affection. Psychologists suggest that our brains are attuned to interpret these subtle cues, tapping into a primal instinct for social connection.

Facial micro-expressions are brief facial movements in reaction to emotional stimuli that reveal hidden emotions (Ekman, 2003). Micro-expressions have been analysed to reveal underlying emotions in the clinical and psychological fields, security systems, and lie detection (Yan et al., 2013). Among the most powerful micro-interactions is the smile, a universal symbol of warmth and goodwill. Research has shown that the act of smiling not only signals happiness but also triggers other psychological responses, releasing pleasure hormones such as dopamine and endorphins. Thus, a simple smile has the power to uplift spirits, forge bonds, and create a ripple effect of positivity within social circles.



Micro-interactions: Touch

Equally significant is the role of touch in micro-interactions, offering a tangible expression of empathy and support. Whether it's a reassuring pat on the back or a comforting hold of the hand, physical contact has been shown to reduce stress levels and foster feelings of connection. Psychologists believe that this dates back to our earliest experiences of bonding, reinforcing trust and intimacy in our relationships.

From the moment we are born, touch plays a crucial role in our development. The gentle caress of a parent's hand or the warmth of a hug communicates safety and security, laying the foundation for healthy attachment and emotional resilience. As we grow older, touch continues to serve as a vital means of communication, conveying empathy, support, and affection.

In the context of micro-interactions, even the briefest moment of physical contact can have a lasting impact. A pat on the back during a challenging moment or a hand squeeze in times of distress communicates solidarity and understanding, strengthening the bond between individuals. These small gestures of touch serve as reminders that we are not alone, fostering a sense of connection and unity in our relationships.

In a world where digital communication often dominates, the importance of physical touch cannot be overlooked. Whether it's a handshake, a hug, or a simple touch on the arm, these physical gestures bridge the gap between us, reaffirming our shared humanity and reinforcing the ties that bind us together. By embracing the role of touch in our micro-interactions, we can cultivate deeper connections and foster a greater sense of empathy and understanding in our relationships.



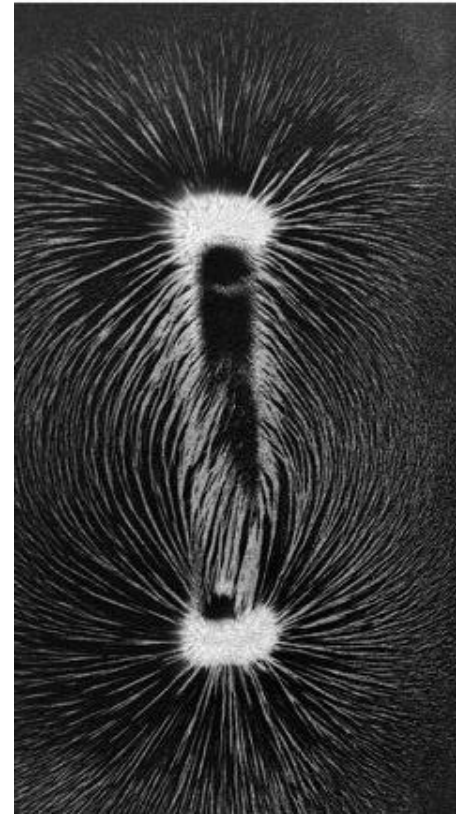
Concept of reciprocity

Central to the dynamics of micro-interactions is the concept of reciprocity—the exchange of gestures between individuals that fuels a cycle of mutual understanding and empathy. When one person offers a smile or extends a hand in friendship, it sets in motion a chain reaction of positive responses, creating a harmonious rhythm of give-and-take in social interactions. Picture it as a dance: when one person takes the lead by extending a friendly gesture, such as a smile or a handshake, it sets the stage for a friendly exchange. This act of kindness naturally prompts others to respond in kind, creating a beautiful rhythm of give-and-take.

Think about a scenario where someone holds the door open for you as you enter a building. Your immediate response is likely to be a nod of gratitude or a "thank you." This simple act of reciprocation not only acknowledges the gesture but also affirms the connection between you and the person who held the door. In turn, this acknowledgement can inspire them to continue their kind behaviour, fostering a positive cycle of interaction.

Reciprocity isn't just about returning favours—it's about building rapport and strengthening relationships. When someone offers a smile, a compliment, or a helping hand, it communicates warmth and openness. By reciprocating these gestures, we validate the bond between us and the other person, deepening our sense of connection and belonging.

In essence, reciprocity fuels a dynamic exchange of positivity in our social interactions. It's the glue that holds our relationships together, fostering mutual understanding, empathy, and trust. By embracing this principle in our interactions, we contribute to a harmonious social environment where kindness begets kindness, and everyone feels valued and appreciated.



In the bustling noise of daily life, it's easy to overlook the significance of micro-interactions—the fleeting glances, the fleeting smiles, the gentle touches that bind us together as human beings. Yet, it is in these seemingly insignificant moments that the true essence of our humanity lies. By understanding the psychology behind these invisible threads, we can cultivate a deeper appreciation for the profound impact of small gestures on our emotional well-being and interpersonal connections. So, let us embrace the power of micro-interactions, for in them, we discover the beauty of our shared humanity.



Taking a step back to appreciate The World We Know, our writers critique the importance of reflection. Acknowledging the idiosyncratic imperfections and dissecting local records, this section invites you to reminisce on our universal melting pot of shared experiences.

THE WORLD

A satellite with large solar panels is shown in orbit above the Earth. The planet's blue oceans and white clouds are visible against the blackness of space. The title 'THE WORLD' is written in large, bold, yellow, serif capital letters across the upper portion of the image, partially overlapping the satellite and the Earth's horizon.

**Rejuvenating Plants;
Human Connections**

By Mark Wee

**The Psychological Struggle
to Accept Imperfections**

By Amelia Li

The Rojak Identity

By Nicholas Khor

Where is the Power?

By Elyse Siau

OWE WE KNOW

By Mark Wee

Amidst our bustling world and the relentless whirlwind of existence, a profound allegory mirrors the average human experience. Like delicate tendrils of a grapevine reaching out, we find ourselves curled in between nature, with each tendril representing human resilience.

Picture a plant, its journey akin to ours, leading a silent life, often overlooked in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. It stands as a witness to the ebb and flow of time, resisting the force of the elements. In the springtime, we witness the emergence of new life unfurling shoots from the earthy soil. Yet, through the waning seasons and the harsh hand of winter descends, we are reminded of the fragility of existence. Leaves wither and fall, petals fade and the once vibrant hues of life are swathed in a veil of dormancy.

In our haste, we overlook the silent suffering of the plant as it withers away. But from within lies a quiet resilience that stirs an indomitable spirit that refuses to yield to the relentless passage of time. And so, as the days lengthen and the warmth of the sun returns, we witness the plant's remarkable transformation. Life begins to stir once more and shoots emerge from barren soil, reaching inching towards the sky. Just as the plant endures the trials of winter and emerges stronger for it, so too do we weather the storms of life and hopefully emerge resilient and renewed.

Rejuvenate
PLANT
HUMAN
connection



maturing
NTS;
MAN
ctions

Let this serve as a reminder not to overlook the profound beauty nestled within the simplicity of our surroundings. From the fleeting smiles exchanged with strangers to the quiet passage of time, let us pause and appreciate the little things we often take for granted. Like the network of roots that anchor the plant to the earth, we can ground ourselves, reinforce our foundations and blossom once again.

Therefore, as we navigate life, let us remember the quiet resilience of the plant and draw inspiration from its unwavering determination to thrive against all odds. In the end, our ability to endure, persevere, and find beauty in the most unlikely of places defines us as human beings.



By Amelia Li

We often live our mundane everyday lives without pausing to think about miniscule details and imperfections that make up the world around us. Leaves scattered on the pavement, coffee dripping off the edge of the cup, pigeons seated in non-uniformed rows atop houses – without these things, the world around us simply wouldn't be complete. They have immense sentimental value to the human mind. At first thought, it may seem as though these imperfections are unnecessary to even glance at, as there are constantly more pressing things to be concerned about. Life, like a canvas, is composed of bold brush strokes and vivid colors that overlap. In this chaotic canvas, delicate imperfections are interwoven with the beauty of the whole piece when you take a few steps back and take a second look at the portrait of life. What if, instead of painting over these imperfections, we let them be and let the light seep through?

The desire for perfection

The media often plays a major role in how we expect the world around us to be, in terms of mental and material subjects. Such frequent viewing of such content can lead to an unrealistic expectation of everyday life. Peer pressure as well as cultural expectations are other examples of societal pressure internationally that lead us to desire for perfection. Internal pressures such as high expectations for ourselves and the world around us and a fear of failure influence and often rewire our brain to be unappreciative of imperfections in everyday life. Striving for perfection in major aspects of our lives – such as our career and studies – can sometimes be beneficial. However, in a societal rat race that leaves us with no space to breathe, we forget the minor details that make up the world that we live in. This perfectionism stifles us, and completely paints over the delicate imperfections on the canvas of life, turning our canvas into one single-color piece of work.



The psychological impacts of perfections and imperfections

The psychological impact of imperfections can be significant and multifaceted. Striving for perfection - both major and minor- leads to stress and anxiety. Our constant expectations of perfection in the world around us can affect the way that we live our lives. The perfectionism paradox is a contradiction when a perfectionistic individual spends excessive amounts of time perfecting a characteristic in their life while neglecting other aspects of their life such as hobbies and their relationships with others. Such an issue contradicts the meaning of perfectionism as an individual like this would only worsen one aspect of their life while improving on another. Not only does perfectionism lead to mental health concerns, but it can also cause impaired performance in everyday life. Impaired performance includes procrastination (an avoidance of tasks that might seem unattractive to perfectionism), overthinking, second-guessing, and overall decreased productivity and effectiveness. Understanding and accepting our imperfections can lead to improved mental health, increased self-esteem, and a more balanced and fulfilling life. Numerous studies by professionals in psychology have shown that people who accept the small imperfections in everyday life tend to lead a happier life through reduced stress, personal growth, and increased self-esteem. Living in the moment can allow humans to enjoy life as it unfolds. It is our imperfections that make us unique and human.

The struggle to accept imperfections

Cognitive dissonance refers to the uneasiness or discomfort individuals may feel when they hold two or more contradictory beliefs, values, or attitudes. In the context of imperfections, individuals often struggle with the dissonance between their ideal self and their real self. This dissonance can cause significant psychological struggles, leading individuals to deny their imperfections in an attempt to reduce this discomfort. A fear of failure is another factor that leads to the unaccepting attitude that perfectionism has towards imperfection. Many people associate imperfection with failure. However, it is the minor imperfections that make up the natural world around us with its ununiformed details. Not only are minor imperfections constantly present in human life, but major imperfections (though associated with failure) have a constant positive and negative impact on the human mind. Major imperfections include societal and individual struggles that take a lot of effort to resolve. Meanwhile, everyday minor imperfections have a wide range: from a stain on a white shirt to a typo in an email.

Perfectionism has deep roots in cognitive dissonance and a fear of failure. As perfectionism is a trait characterized by an individual's desire for perfection in themselves and the world around them, perfectionists are blinded by their desire for perfection and fail to notice the beauty in everyday life, thus neglecting the present. In addition to this, perfectionists may view themselves as personal failures. Perfectionism may be caused by cultural or societal expectations that stresses the need for individual perfection. Individual perfection, in the opinion of many, includes physical appearance, mental state, career and lifestyle, as these features are what is most noticeable in most humans at the top of the iceberg of the individual's life.

The human desire for perfection, its psychological impacts, and our struggle to accept imperfection is what makes up the canvas of life. All these everyday occurrences make life interesting by adding variety into our day. When we accept these imperfections as a part of life, we better appreciate the moments when things go right. The complexity and depth of the brushstrokes and imperfections on our canvas of life is what completes the portrayal of human life. For it is in these imperfections that we discover our true selves—the flawed, beautiful, perfectly imperfect humans we are meant to be.



Rajak Identity

The

*"Abuden?!" "Cincai la!"
"Lai, 7 belanja!"*

*"Anywhere also can!"
"Heyp, abang!"*

*"Aiyah..." "Jom! Let's go!"
"Mana ciak?" (or "mana chit!")*

A Short Take on Malaysia's Unique Multiculturalism

By Nicholas Khor

Any Malaysian — or indeed, anyone who has been in Malaysia for more than a couple of months — has surely heard one or more of the above phrases being thrown around. Go anywhere with a couple or so locals, and one is bound to pick up our mannerisms of speech, or (dare I say) even prefer our vocal ways. It fills our homegrown atmosphere, establishes a commonality for us Malaysians, and intrigues the foreign ear with a language so familiar, yet so interestingly different too.

As a matter of fact, calling it 'a language' speaks volumes about our way of life, as Manglish — as it's affectionately named — is actually an amalgamation of the array of languages and dialects which have rooted themselves in Malaysian soil.

Of course, English acts as the basis, owing to our colonial

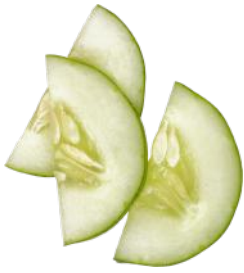
history, but then we sprinkle in the "lah"s, the "kan?"s and the "lo"s, followed by the vivid expressions of "aiyah...", "abuden?", "fuiyoh!". To top it off, we toss in our mother tongues into the pot, and stir to form the boiling pot that is Manglish.

It's just easier! Instead of saying "where do you want to eat?", we can just compress it to be "go where eat?" (a direct translation from the Chinese languages), or better yet, "mana ciak?" (the combination of Malay and Hokkien, leaving out English entirely). Instead of asking for takeaway, we may ask for "tapau", or "taobao", and instead of saying "I'll treat you guys", we'll say "I belanja!", or "I chiam!".

And let us not forget how many different ways we change the meaning of one word, simply by the expression after it:

Can: "to say that it is possible for somebody/something to do something, or for something to happen" — the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries

Then, there are the Malaysian variants:



Can lah
Yes/doable



Can leh
Yes, of course/of course its doable



Can lor
Yes, I think so/should be doable



Can hor
Oh yes, its possible



Can meh?
Are you certain?



Can hah?
Are you sure?



Can can
Confirmed yes/doable



Can liao
Already done



Can wor
Yes, its doable (usually to emphasise some obscurity)



Can qua
Maybe



Can liao la
Enough/its ok already
("Manglish", 2016)

Again, it's just easier!

But underlying this fantastical and at times humorous language of ours is a testament to the unique identity Malaysians have carved for ourselves – the Rojak Identity (Not an actual term – just a fun name I use to describe it). Through Manglish, every major group who calls Malaysia home is represented: Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin and Tamil all form an important piece of the puzzle toward Manglish, with English being the encompassing background due to our colonial past. Thus, the Malays, Chinese and Indian populace, alongside our foreign friends, can all unite under our spoken discourse, for we better understand each other as a result of it. Crazy as it may seem, I'd even argue that without Manglish, racial polarisation and disharmony would be at heightened levels both unwanted and perhaps even unimaginable. Alternatively, the lack of Manglish would indicate a failure in fostering a Malaysian identity, with this nation instead carved into smaller factions who dare not mingle with each other. Though, that is an opinion best saved for another day.

You, the reader, may have intuitively noticed that the examples given at the start implicitly hinted toward food. That was intentional because just like our language, our food also reflects our rich history and multiculturalism which has blossomed into a truly unique Malaysian trademark. Why else is Penang so renowned for its street food, if not for its vast array of delicious delicacies borne from a thriving culinary culture from years prior? We only need to go to any hawker centre to see our unity present itself: where else in the world can one find (using my neighbourhood example) nasi lemak, char koay teow and Indian mee sold side-by-side, with each hawker helping the other keep watch should they not be present? Inversely, where else in the world can we find English, Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil and possibly Hindi fill the atmosphere and intermingle with each other like a chaotic symphony? Where else can we find so many different groups of people sitting together in the same place, united in fondness for the tastes each culture has to offer?

Our food also makes a pretty good metaphor for this racial unity. Going back to the Rojak Identity, rojak is a salad-like dish that mixes fruits and vegetables, with dressing on top, that is popular in Malaysia, Singapore and originating from Indonesia. Though it is a Malay dish, the Chinese and Indian communities have also adapted the dish to their cultural recipes – whilst Malay rojak uses tempeh and beancurd, Chinese rojak consists of cucumber, radish, taupok and dough fritters. Whilst Malay rojak uses belacan as its sauce, Indian rojak uses a mix of chilli, peanuts and spices as its sauce. Thus, this piece uses rojak as a symbol of Malaysia's multiculturalism as it is a dish that is a messy but delicious mix of ingredients, that has been further laced with different cultural culinary traditions to add even more flavour to it – just like how our embrace of our various cultures has allowed us to carve a unified identity that encompasses all Malaysians. Where others see cause for contention, even within our society, our daily lives are hardened proof that a majority of Malaysians see cause for celebration, for our differences further fuel our sense of pride, and our uniqueness in the world.

And that is the point of this article – just as this magazine revolves around the theme "Under the Lens", we do not need to search far and wide for evidence that Malaysian multiculturalism has thrived. We simply need to observe what some might call the mundane, for that is where the greatest elements of our diversity lie. By simply observing our daily lives, we can gain greater appreciation for our rich and harmonious way of life. Thus, we better embrace the Rojak Identity.

WHERE IS THE

“Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government...”

By Elyse Siau

What does it mean to live in a democracy?

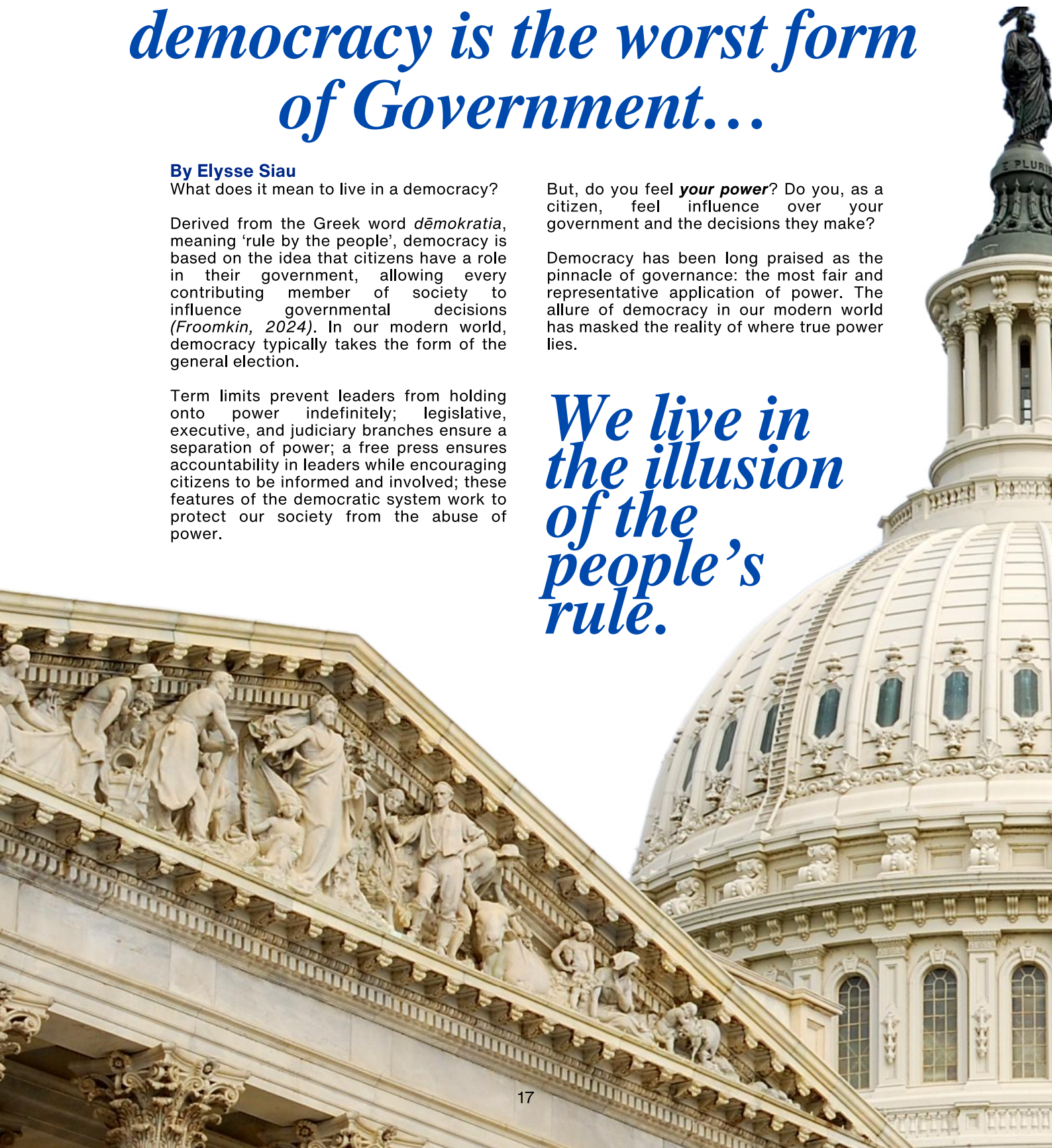
Derived from the Greek word *dēmokratia*, meaning ‘rule by the people’, democracy is based on the idea that citizens have a role in their government, allowing every contributing member of society to influence governmental decisions (Froomkin, 2024). In our modern world, democracy typically takes the form of the general election.

Term limits prevent leaders from holding onto power indefinitely; legislative, executive, and judiciary branches ensure a separation of power; a free press ensures accountability in leaders while encouraging citizens to be informed and involved; these features of the democratic system work to protect our society from the abuse of power.

But, do you feel **your power**? Do you, as a citizen, feel influence over your government and the decisions they make?

Democracy has been long praised as the pinnacle of governance: the most fair and representative application of power. The allure of democracy in our modern world has masked the reality of where true power lies.

We live in the illusion of the people’s rule.



THE POWER?

What does it mean to hold power? Power, as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary, is the “ability to act or produce an effect” or “possession of control, authority, or influence over others”. Democracy aims to share the authority and influence over decisions with the people. This is done through elections to obtain consensus, reflecting the decisions of the majority.

Yet, how much of our votes matter?

The truth is, probably not much. On January 21, 2010, the decision in *Citizens United v. The Federal Election Commission* brought about the Supreme Court ruling that would change political campaigning in the United States: corporations spending money on political campaigns would be recognised as a form of protected free speech under the First Amendment. This decision equated financially supporting campaigns to expressing support for a political candidate, allowing unlimited political spending (*Lau, 2019*).

*With this ruling,
lobbying had
found a pathway
to operate with
subtlety*

True power now lay in the hands of wealth and influence, where any corporation could donate to political campaigns to gain access and favour from elected officials and leaders.

Media corporations, with their vast audiences and ability to shape public opinion, are some of the most explicit examples of capitalising on the ruling. Fox News is currently the most-watched cable news network in the United States, amassing over 1.3 million daily viewers, and standing as one of the most influential and wealthy media corporations in the United States (*Flood, 2024*). Their immense viewership and loyalty from viewers have given them significant influence and authority over public and political discourse (*Jones, 2023*).

It is widely known that Fox News and the Republican party have a close and mutualistic relationship. Fox News’ conservative platform heavily resonates with Republicans, as shown in a recent New York Times and Siena College survey, where over 91% of viewers believe that “Trump has not committed any serious federal crimes” (*Times/Siena Poll, 2023*). A study published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* reveals a trend in media exposure and results of elections: towns with exposure to Fox News tend to vote for Republicans by a margin of 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points higher (*DellaVigna, 2007*). This finding proves the significant influence the media yields in electoral outcomes. In return, Fox News also benefited heavily from Trump’s presidency, gaining access to exclusive interviews, and boosting their viewership and ratings (*Illing, 2019*).

Similarly, Amazon remains a major lobbyist for the Democratic party, which as a major tech company, has interests tied to passing lenient data privacy regulations. An investigation by Reuters reveals how in 2021, Sen. David Marsden, a Democrat, passed a privacy legislation bill drafted by Amazon (*Reuters, 2021*). This “victory” for Amazon shows their influence in politics can shape legislation to their advantage.

The Washington Post is another leading media corporation in the United States, known for its political reporting, and has been found to endorse Democratic candidates. Guess who owns The Washington Post?

Jeff Bezos.

Media corporations will favour a government that favours them. Even the government must bend to the will of the people- until now, it was just unclear who. This is where true power lies: those with influence and reach are more likely to turn the head of the government towards their interest, drowning the voices of normal citizens.

Although we participate in the democratic process of voting for our leaders, the decisions made by them are independent of the will of the people,

preferring the favours of the corporations that run our world.

Recently, the United States has passed a bill calling for the divestment of TikTok out of national security concerns with foreign access to American user data (Hale, 2024). In contrast to platforms owned by Meta, which have faced criticism for censoring content (Human Rights Watch, 2023), TikTok has become the platform for users to freely share what they believe in. TikTok and other social media platforms pose a threat to traditional forms of media, with audiences having more autonomy over the information they want to consume, giving power back to the people. Banning TikTok totally might be a step backward, as it can be seen as limiting the free flow of information.

However, social media is not without its criticisms. Social media platforms play a huge role in the spread of false information, posing a threat to information literacy. Furthermore, the history of content moderation and censorship shows how social media companies ultimately have control over public discourse.

Power has again been passed from one corporation to another.

...except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time...”

Absolute monarchies and authoritarian regimes are a form of dictatorship. Dictatorships occur when a single individual or a small group holds absolute power and authority (*Britannica, 2024*). Dictators and authoritarians present themselves as capable of solving all societal problems. They criticise the bureaucracy and corruption found in democracy, simplifying complex issues to straightforward solutions, and gaining support from those desperate for change. They build a cult of personality with propaganda but eventually succumb to the greed and paranoia of staying in power. Muammar Gaddafi, Augusto Pinochet, and Mobutu Sese Seko are all examples of dictators who abused their power to remain in control and amass wealth. Mussolini and Hitler worked to remove opponents to their regime, favouring loyalty over expertise, at the expense of society (*History, 2024*). In all these examples, the concentration of power to a small group led to the suppression of human rights, and the failure to adapt to changes, leading to people losing their faith and rising against injustice and oppression.

However, democracy is also not without its flaws. One of the fundamental assumptions of a democracy is that all individuals possess free agency, implying that we have the freedom to make our own choices and decisions independently. This assumption ignores the explosive influence of the media and the concept of the tyranny of the majority. Decisions made solely by numerical superiority through applying the will of the majority, can ignore ethical considerations, and violate human rights.

This brings about the question of whether we require a higher authority to hold our values in place.

Unlike monarchies and dictatorships, democracies allow for the peaceful transition of power without a revolution or unnecessary bloodshed. Democracies remain the best form of governance compared to the extreme alternatives. It recognised the principle to allow people the power to make their own decisions. When applied well, democracies can balance the power of a higher authority and represent people's interests.

With society becoming more aware, recognising where true power lies, can be our first step to taking back our power.





Our writers closely magnify, in striking detail, the triumphs and endeavours of today's illustrious musical artists. And designated to our football readers, a commendation to the brilliant football manager, Jurgen Klopp.

REPUTATION

By Daryn Zulkarnain

Liverpool's Pep Roulette

By Timothy Ang

**Outliers of Rock #3
"Rammstein"**

By Joel Mohan

ASAP

Reputation

By Daryn Zulkarnain

"Reputation", Taylor Swift's well known electropop and synth-pop oriented album, known as a significant milestone in her career. On November 10th, 2017, Swift's comeback to the music industry with her "Reputation" releasing 15 new songs resulted in spending 4 weeks atop billboard 200, predicted sales of \$2 million and receiving 8 awards from 12 nominations. Swift's return to the music industry had left worldwide fans stunned with her 6th studio album showcasing the results of her work during her hiatus following the infamous incident at the 2009 VMAS.

On 13th September 2009, 19-year-old Taylor Swift attended the MTV Video Music Awards, being presented the Best Female Video Award for unrequited love anthem "You Belong With Me". However, while accepting the award, Kanye West interrupted her speech by jumping on the stage and said the following words that he infamously told her:

"I'mma let you finish, but Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time! One of the best videos of all time!"

While Taylor Swift was left dumbfounded, still processing on what had just happened, MTV had cut the cameras to Beyoncé in the audience, looking horrified and in disbelief at Kanye's words.

This may have been seen as a petty nothing of a moment, average drunk celebrity with a turbulent history acted poorly on stage at an award show: Why was this a big deal? Why is this situation still relevant today?

From this moment onwards, Kanye West was marked as a "pop culture villain" which led to an explosive fallout.

According to Billboard's oral history, Kanye returned to his seat with glares darted at him. Famous singer Pink, walked up to him and chewed him out. Shortly afterward, MTV had escorted him out of the building and was asked to leave.

Meanwhile backstage of the show, producers had rushed to comfort both Beyoncé and Taylor who were crying.

Later that same night, Kanye posted a public apology on his blog, directing it to Taylor and all her fans. However, little did he know, this was only beginning of the scandal that is still ingrained in the current cultural consciousness now after 15 years.





I'M SOOOOO SORRY TO TAYLOR SWIFT AND HER FANS AND HER MOM. I SPOKE TO HER MOTHER RIGHT AFTER AND SHE SAID THE SAME THING MY MOTHER WOULD'VE SAID. SHE IS VERY TALENTED! I LIKE THE LYRICS ABOUT BEING A CHEERLEADER AND SHE'S IN THE BLEACHERS! I'M IN THE WRONG FOR GOING ON STAGE AND TAKING AWAY FROM HER MOMENT!..... BEYONCE'S VIDEO WAS THE BEST OF THIS DECADE!!!! I'M SORRY TO MY FANS IF I LET YOU GUYS DOWN!!!! I'M SORRY TO MY FRIENDS AT MTV. I WILL APOLOGIZE TO TAYLOR 2MRW. WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD!!!! EVERYBODY WANNA BOOOOO ME BUT I'M A FAN OF REAL POP CULTURE!!! NO DISRESPECT BUT WE WATCHIN' THE SHOW AT THE CRIB RIGHT NOW CAUSE ... WELL YOU KNOW!!!! I'M STILL HAPPY FOR TAYLOR!!!! BOOOYAAAWWWW!!!! YOU ARE VERY VERY TALENTED!!! I GAVE MY AWARDS TO OUTKAST WHEN THEY DESERVED IT OVER ME... THAT'S WHAT IT IS!!!!!! I'M NOT CRAZY YALL, I'M JUST REAL. SORRY FOR THAT!!! I REALLY FEEL BAD FOR TAYLOR AND I'M SINCERELY SORRY!!! MUCH RESPECT!!!!

09.13.2009

Kanye West BLOG

Reactions to this were unpleasant, especially from celebrities.

Kelly Clarkson demanded of Kanye on her blog, saying: "What happened to you as a child?? Did you not get hugged enough??"

Additionally, Katy Perry commented "ITS LIKE YOU STEPPED ON A KITTEN"

At first, the incident that occurred at the 2009 VMAs appeared to be a piece of pop culture ephemera that would gradually fade away. Instead, every time a new scandal involving both Taylor and Kanye would emerge, the VMAs scandal seems to be linked to it, bringing out an ugly strand of everyone involved. In January 2016, just as the drama was slowly being forgotten, Kanye debuted a new track titled "Famous" which had the following lyrics:

" I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex/ Why? I made that [****] famous! "

Kanye claimed that he sought approval from Taylor before the release of the song, he said: " I called Taylor and had an hour long convo with her about the line and she thought it was funny and gave her blessings."

Taylor responded, denying this in a statement which she had claimed Kanye did not run the lyrics past her, but instead asked her to promote the song: Kanye did not call for approval, but to ask Taylor to release his single

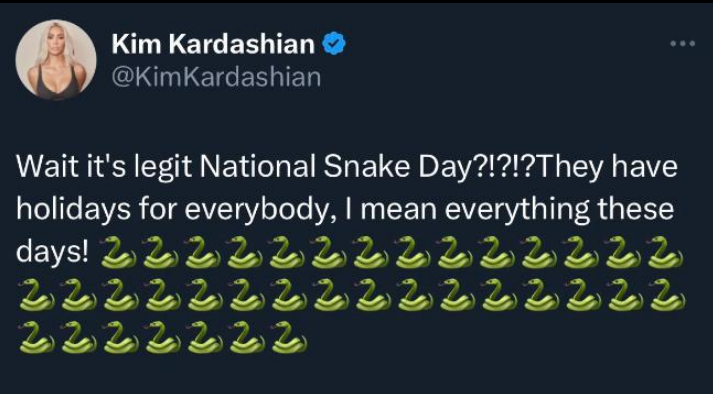
“Famous” on her Twitter account. On June 16, 2016, just as the situation was gradually being silent yet again, Kim Kardashian stepped into an interview claiming that Taylor “totally approved that”.

Kim went on to claim that the conversation on the phone between Kanye and Taylor had been recorded: “And then they sent an attorney's letter like 'Don't you dare do anything with that footage,' and asking us to destroy it.”



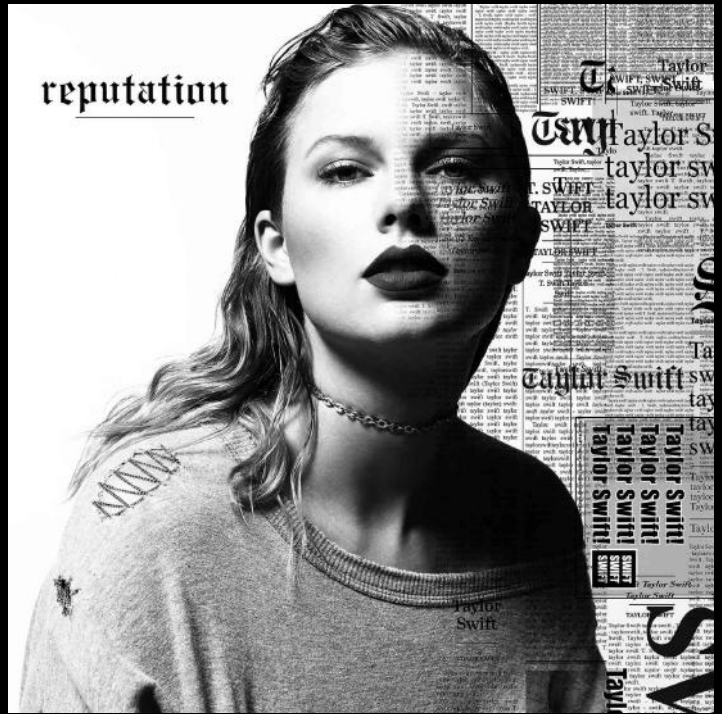
18th June 2017, it's been a year since Kim called out Taylor Swift for lying about her approval of Kanye West's

'Famous' lyrics, and people were celebrating hard on twitter:



The relentless barrage of snake-themed tweets that took up every corner of her social media platforms, Taylor Swift made a pivotal decision to retreat from the digital realm. During her hiatus, Taylor took a break from social media to work on her “Reputation” album. This period gave her time to focus

on her music and her mental health. The ‘Miss Americana’ documentary, Taylor showcased her process of dealing with hate off-camera and her dedication to her music, revealing intimate moments of her songwriting and recording sessions.



Watching the documentary, we are reminded of how easily we have forgotten that Taylor was only 19- years-old when Kanye ambushed her speech, stealing a special moment from her. One of the most heartbreaking moments of the documentary was when she mentions that she thought the crowd was booing her. This had become a chain reaction in her life, she strives to be the best. Even though she had won Grammys, plaudits, earned immense praise and love, she has always felt like it was never enough. Taylor also addresses the trending #TaylorSwiftIsOver hashtag which ruined her “good girl” image she had carefully maintained and created began to fall apart. Talking about the social media trend, she said:

“ Do you know how many people have to be tweeting that they hate you for that to happen?”

Swift also explained that she vanished for a year because that's what the fans wanted, before returning with a comeback album. She also added that during her time of healing from the media, she was falling in love with Joe Alwyn. The documentary features phone videos of Taylor strumming the guitar or either playing the piano that appear to have been filmed by him.

She said: “I felt really alone, I felt really bitter. I felt sort of like a wounded animal lashing out. I figured I had to reset everything.”

She revealed that during her time off , she wanted to accomplish short term goals such as learning CPR or making a cocktail.

“This is the first time in 10 years that I haven't known [what's next]. I just decided that after the past year, with all of the unbelievable things that happened.. I decided I was going to live my life a little bit without the pressure on myself to create something.”

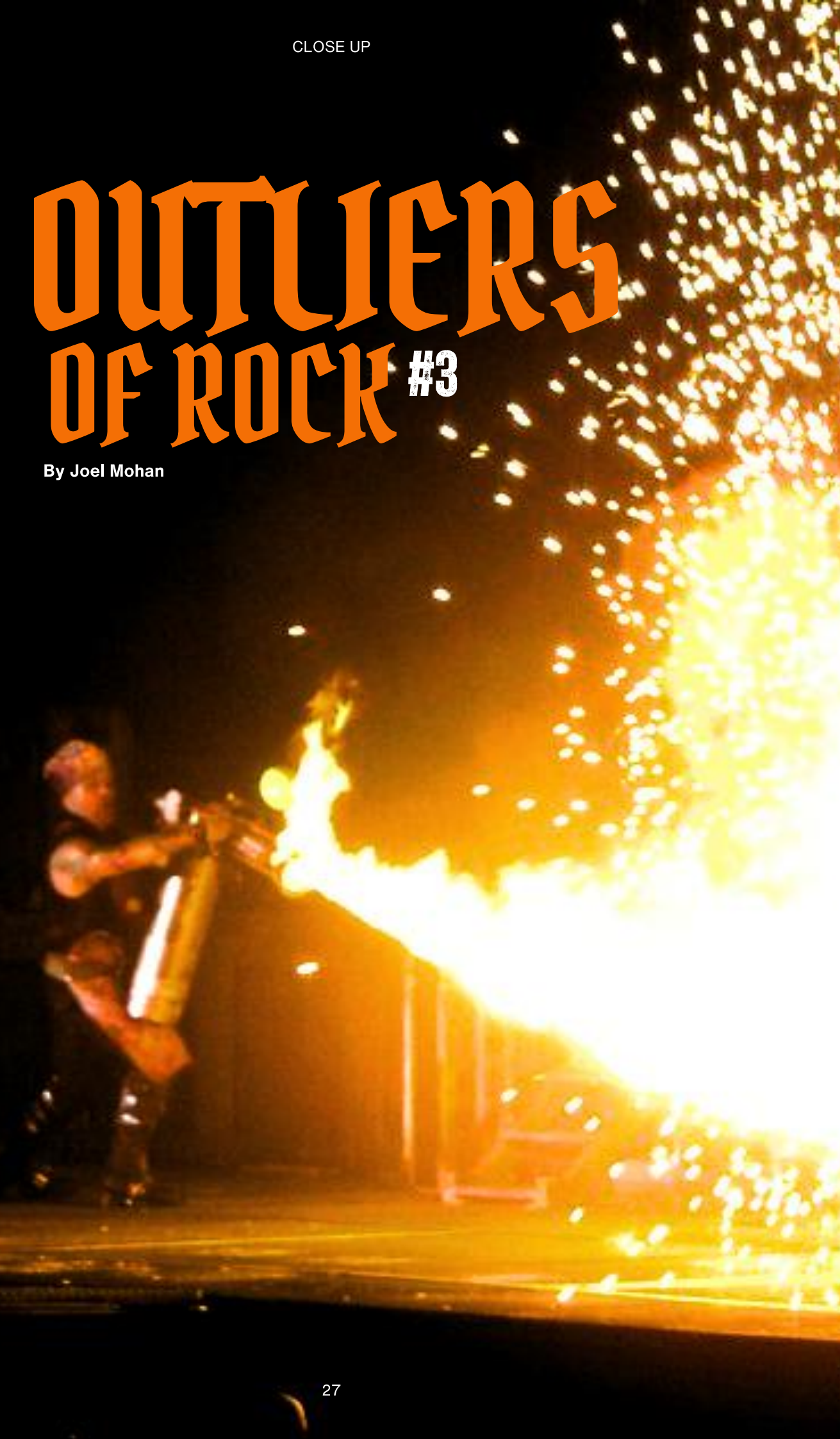
10th November 2017, Taylor releases one of her most anticipated album Reputation, and fans had a lot of reactions and theories about there being sings about Taylor's exes Calvin Harris and Tom Hiddleston, also two songs about Taylor's feud with Kanye and Kim. Within one week of release, Reputation sold 2 million copies worldwide, nominated as Grammys “Best pop vocal album” with 7,628,304,244 streams. In 2024, Taylor Swift has truly become a powerhouse in the music industry with her successful release of 4 new albums and 4 re-recordings of her old albums, like a mirrorball, she's dazzling across the globe.

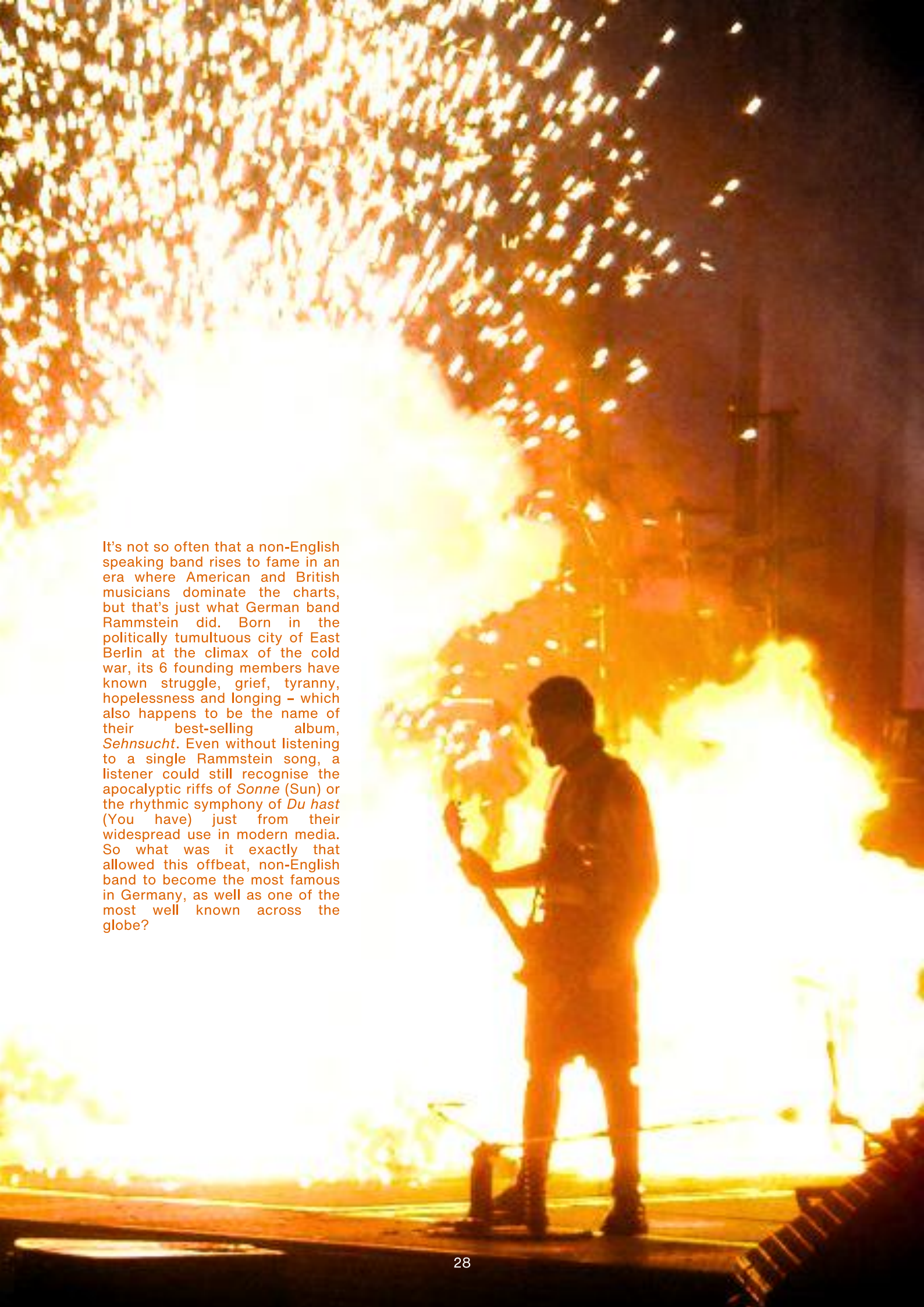
CLOSE UP

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OUTLIERS OF ROCK #3

By Joel Mohan



A musician is silhouetted against a massive, intense fire that fills the background of a stage. The fire is bright orange and yellow, with a dense canopy of sparks or embers falling from the top. The musician is standing in the center, holding a guitar. The overall atmosphere is dramatic and powerful.

It's not so often that a non-English speaking band rises to fame in an era where American and British musicians dominate the charts, but that's just what German band Rammstein did. Born in the politically tumultuous city of East Berlin at the climax of the cold war, its 6 founding members have known struggle, grief, tyranny, hopelessness and longing – which also happens to be the name of their best-selling album, *Sehnsucht*. Even without listening to a single Rammstein song, a listener could still recognise the apocalyptic riffs of *Sonne* (Sun) or the rhythmic symphony of *Du hast* (You have) just from their widespread use in modern media. So what was it exactly that allowed this offbeat, non-English band to become the most famous in Germany, as well as one of the most well known across the globe?

In 1992, Richard Kruspe, a guitarist, and Till Lindemann met for the first time in Schwerin, Germany and subsequently travelled to the US together alongside Ollie Riedel, who would later become their bassist. At first, the former two were in separate bands but upon travelling together, they decided to form a new band that wasn't influenced by other American bands at the time. Their motivation was that they wanted their band to have a new "sound" and not live in the shadow of larger rock bands. Till was originally supposed to be the drummer for this up-and-coming band, but he eventually settled on vocals with Christoph Schneider taking his place.

The first major step in Rammstein's career was winning a 1994 competition in Berlin for "amateur bands", which granted them a week of access to a professional recording studio. At the competition, they performed early demo versions of the song *Herzeleid* (Heartbreak) amongst many others, which were actually partially written in English. Noticing the prospects of this new band, Christian "Flake" Lorenz would soon join them as their keyboardist and Paul Landers would follow suit as their second guitarist.



Finally, in September 1995, Rammstein released their first album, the aforementioned *Herzeleid*. For a debut album, it performed exceedingly well charting at #2 in Germany, #4 in Switzerland, #11 in Austria and even breaking into the top 100 in non-German speaking countries such as France, Belgium and Hungary. The album, however, was shrouded in controversy – its cover (which you can find on Spotify), depicted the 6 members half-naked and covered in sweat. The press reported this new

album and the new band as being *Herrenmenschen*, a German term to describe people who view themselves as the "Master race" with links to Nazism. Kruspe would retaliate by stating "*Das ist völliger Quatsch, das ist einfach nur ein Foto*" (Totally stupid. It's just a photo), though when interviewed about it later in 2016, he would reflect that it was embarrassing and not representative of the band's values.

SEPTEN
ACT



VERSARY
ITION



Rammstein's miracle that catapulted them immediately into international fame came with their second album, *Sehnsucht* (1997). Not only did it contain Rammstein's most globally acclaimed song, *Du hast* but also several other highly popular songs such as *Engel* (Angel), *Bück dich* (Bend over) and *Sehnsucht* (longing) itself. The album charted at #1 in both Germany and Austria but most impressively, broke into the top 50 in the USA. This was particularly important for the band as this was the first English-speaking country with a highly saturated music market that had accepted this German speaking album into its top charts. Some of this fame can be attributed to their "family values" tour alongside household names such as Korn, Limp Bizkit and Ice Cube

Controversy, however, continued to plague the band. In Summer of 1999, Rammstein was performing the song *Bück dich* live in Maine in the USA, when two of their members (Till and Flake) were arrested for "indecent exposure" for a stage stunt that they attempted. Despite only spending a single night in a jail in the USA, both members would have to explain to US customs every time they would visit why they had a permanent red mark on their track records, that being probation. This would end up being a huge deterrent to Rammstein tours in the USA despite their popularity in the nation as it would cost them a lot of time lost to bureaucratic processes and interviews.

In the same year that Till and Flake were arrested in the USA, they released their first live album, *Live aus Berlin* (Live from Berlin) in 1999, although recorded a year earlier in 1998.

Instead of hiding from controversy, Rammstein embraced it, using it as a launching pad into international success. This is what truly set them apart from most other metal bands at the time and made them stand out from the rest. For example, the song *Spiel mit mir* (play with me) on the *Sehnsucht* album initially received backlash in Germany because people believed that it was a song about an incestuous relationship. Ironically, a different song, *Tier* (animal) on the same album actually was about an incestuous relationship but controversy over *Spiel mit mir* somehow gained more attention. In actuality, the song was merely about an abusive relationship in the family as seen from the parents point of view.



It also goes without saying that Rammstein's discography is populated by songs that address the uncomfortable, malicious and disturbing side of the human psyche. *Mann gegen Mann* (Man against man) juxtaposes the extremes of both homophobia and homophilia. *Stein um Stein* (Brick by Brick) discusses the gradual "walling in" of oneself and their loved ones, culminating in domestic abuse. *Was ich liebe* (What I Love) describes the nihilistic perspective of a heartbroken lover unable to recover from their past. Thus it wasn't just controversy through actions that helped bring fame (or infamy) to the band - any and every song had the opportunity to become a powder keg for any naïve news agency.

Finally, in January of 2001, the heralded song *Sonne* (Sun) saw the light of day as a single and later in April, on Rammstein's third album, *Mutter* (mother). This would end up becoming their 2nd best selling album overall right behind *Sehnsucht* and once again, gained international recognition – peaking at #77 on the US Billboard 200, #86 in the UK and #1 in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Despite being overshadowed by *Sonne* itself, each of the other songs on *Mutter* is capable of standing its own ground, also going on to become some of Rammstein's most popular. *Mein Herz brennt* (My heart burns), *Feuer frei!* (Free fire / Open fire) and *Ich will* (I want) are just some of the fan favourites that come off of this legendary album, thus they are played relentlessly at every concert since their release. Most people would say that the era between *Mutter* and *Sehnsucht* was the peak of Rammstein's career.

One of the biggest catalysts that helped Rammstein stand out from their competitors in the German music scene as well as on the global stage were their outrageous use of stage props and pyrotechnics. From the very beginning of their tours, the members of the band believed that they needed a way to differentiate themselves from any other performer in order to rise to any level of fame. Thus, they came to the conclusion that having magnificent concerts that go beyond just playing an instrument would be their *modus operandi*. Interestingly enough, Till's decision to use props and pyrotechnics came about because he wasn't sure about what to do with his hands while performing, so having something to do would at least make him feel less uneasy.

The band was so dedicated to their use of pyrotechnics and stage props that Till took the efforts to become a professional pyrotechnician. He began hiring a team of other pyrotechnicians to coordinate the use of flammable props and fuels to use for concerts. Not only that, but the PR potential of putting on costumes for each of their songs was too valuable for the band to pass up, especially since they were already putting on fire performances on stage. One pyrotechnician who worked with Rammstein remarked that they would consume about 1000 litres of gasoline per show. In fact, Rammstein's use of fuel and flames was so notable that they wrote the song *Benzin* (Gasoline, 2005). This song in particular delves into Rammstein's blood curdling relationship with hydrocarbons – although the band confirms that *Benzin* is just a tribute song to their use of pyrotechnics on stage, the lyrics make it appear as if it is a lethal and cripplingly-addictive drug. This can be seen most visibly in the bridge of the song through the lyrics:

**“Es fließt durch
meine Venen”
(It flows through my
veins)**

**“Es schläft in
meinen Tränen”
(It sleeps in my
tears)**

**“Es läuft mir aus
den Ohren”
(It leaks out of my
ears)**

**“Herz und Nieren
sind Motoren”
(Heart and kidneys
become motors)**

As stated previously, the graphic lyrics are what Rammstein does best – embrace controversy.

One of their most prominent examples of this comes from live performances of the song *Mein Teil* (My Part, 2004) which was written about Armin Meiwes, a German cannibal. Meiwes specifically stated that he was "looking for a well-built 18- to 25-year-old to be slaughtered and then consumed." and was subsequently nicknamed *Der Metzgermeister* (The Master Butcher). As with Rammstein customs, they refused to hide from the controversy and took not only the opportunity to talk about Meiwes' killings but also to do so in a completely overblown way. To start, the aforementioned quote by Meiwes was slipped into the very beginning of the song as well as his nickname. When performing the song live, Till drags on a gargantuan cauldron containing a stuntman while dressed as a bloodied butcher. A special microphone is brought on which is attached onto the end of a knife. Midway through the song, he grabs a flamethrower and starts roasting the bottom of the cauldron as if cooking his victim, while explosives are triggered under the cauldron itself.

Over the next decade, Rammstein would go on to release 3 more albums: *Reise, Reise* (Rise, rise / Travel, travel) in 2004, *Rosenrot* (Rosy red) in 2005 and *Liebe ist für alle da* (Love is there for everyone) in 2009, none of which reached the same international fame as *Sehnsucht* or *Mutter* did. The most notable song out of any of these would have to be *Amerika* (America, 2004) which describes an omen of Americanisation and the dangers it poses for cultures elsewhere. At this point, the band was also starting to slow down since each of its members started to become embroiled in their own projects. Most notably, Till Lindemann joined with Peter Tägtgren from Sweden to form the band "Lindemann" where they began to record songs purely in English, which came as a surprise to many long time listeners.

Following the release of *Liebe ist für alle da*, Rammstein went on a 10 year hiatus where no music was released. The only exception to this rule were the songs *Mein Land* (My country) and *Vergiss uns nicht* (Don't forget us) which were released together in 2011 on their greatest hits album, *Made in Germany 1995-2011*. This was where the band members' side projects were at their most active, though none gained significant worldwide popularity (with perhaps the exception of the aforementioned Lindemann).

Finally, in 2019, Rammstein finally unveiled what was behind the curtains for the past 10 years with their newest album, the untitled album. On many streaming services and platforms, this album is simply titled "Rammstein" but it has no official name. This album, for many, was a return to the style of Rammstein from 1995-2001 and thus became instantly popular. It broke several records to the band, one of which was charting at #1 in over 10 European countries as well as in the US upon its release. This was also the first time that Rammstein had risen to #1 on any international music charter outside of German speaking countries, a near-impossible feat for any non-English speaking band. At time of writing, their most popular song from the album, *Deutschland* (Germany) is their #3 most played song on Spotify just barely trailing behind *Sonne*, very impressive for a song that's only existed for 5 years compared to *Sonne's* 23.

Most recently in April of 2022, they released their 8th Studio album, *Zeit* (Time). It enjoyed much of the successes of the untitled album reaching #1 in over 10 European countries and appearing at #1 in the US Top Hard Rock Albums and #2 in the US Top Rock Albums, though wasn't nearly as popular as its predecessor. Although none of the songs on the album reached the same level status as *Deutschland* or *Sonne*, many critics and fans would comment that *Zeit* was an album that encompassed everything that Rammstein stood for – the controversy, the twisted nature of humanity and the lyrical storytelling.

With all things considered, Rammstein has come a long way since its inception as a motley crew of Germans living in the USA. With their most recent European tour in 2023 and their upcoming European 2024 tour, the band doesn't seem to show any signs of slowing down despite the members being in their late 50s and early 60s. To this day, they remain the only band in the world to get a German album certified double platinum in the USA, that being *Sehnsucht*. The combination of their controversial song topics, over-the-top live performances and their refusal to be inspired by larger bands and live in their shadow was what eventually brought them to where they are today. To this day, they stand as a shining example to every other non-English speaking band to prove that they, too, could compete with english-speaking musicians in the highly competitive markets of the USA and UK.

LIVERPOOL'S PREP ROULETTE




By Timothy Ang

The 26th of January was meant to be of no particular importance.

No shots were fired, but over a hundred million felt the loss of a loved one.

Nobody had died, but countless grieved.

I do not cry often, but that evening, I shed a few tears for the first time in a long time. Tears for a man who is oblivious to my existence, but is so tightly woven into my childhood.

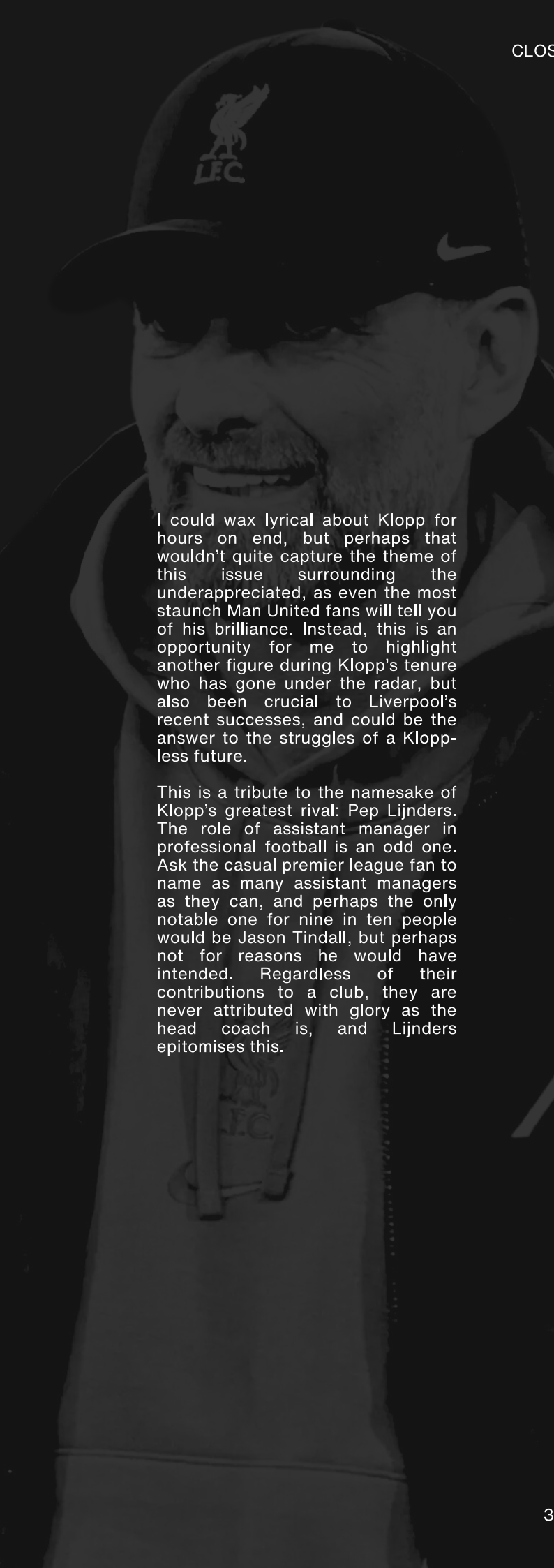


My venture into the world of football began in the 2013-14 season, which as a Liverpool fan meant that I only had to endure through two seasons without the impassioned presence of Jurgen Norbert Klopp at the helm of the club. The past eight seasons have been, for lack of a more flattering word, a privilege.

However, it was on that regular January day that the abrupt decision reached the ears of the public, reminding us that even for those whose hair and teeth miraculously age in reverse, they are not spared from the tantalising grip of Father Time.

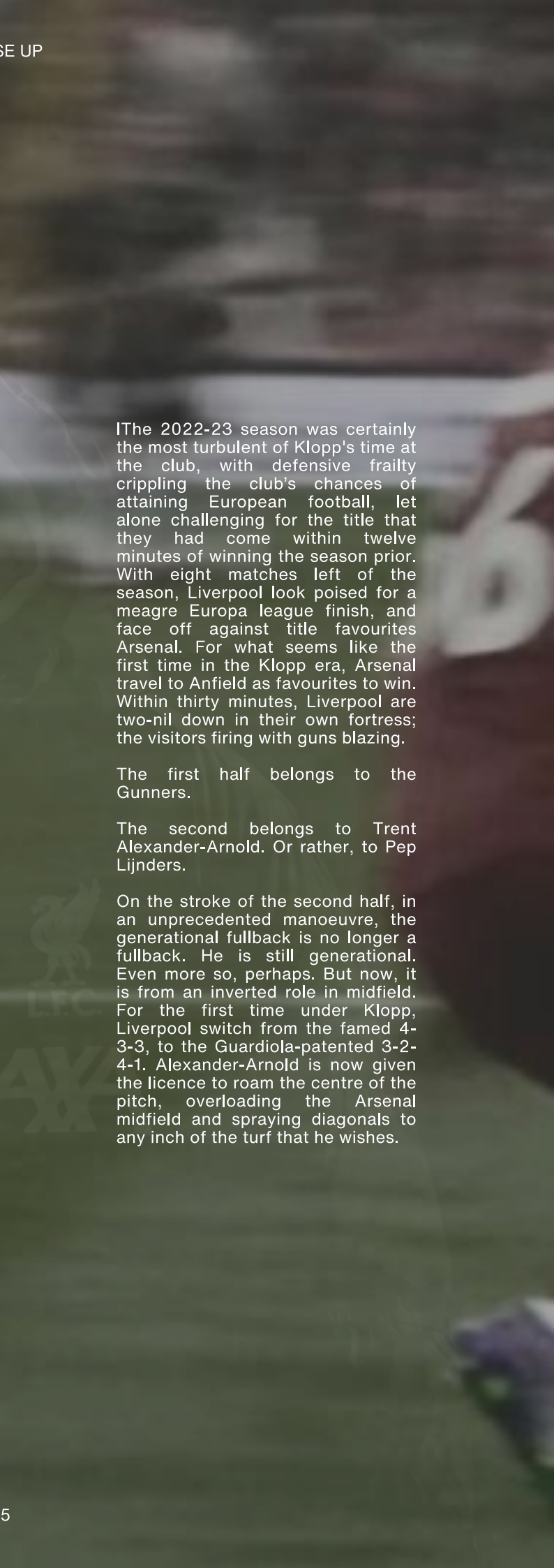
The news was broken via a twenty-four minute YouTube video, which progressively morphed into a sort of Pandora's box with each passing word uttered in the familiar German-hinted cadence. Damnation to a future of poverty, pain and sorrow. Just that at the end of this Pandora's box, instead of the emergence of the silver lining of hope, there was a transition into a five-second FoodPanda ad.

It was almost as if Liverpool Football Club had been diagnosed with a terminal illness, for which the timeline ended in concurrence with the 2023-24 season. The disease? An overworked heart unable to sustain its ever-present, exuberant pulse of redness that had coursed through a team; a city; a league, and a global body for eight gruelling, gratifying seasons. Yet, Klopp's influence transcends just one anatomical metaphor. He is the brain behind anything Liverpool; the limbs that help the organised chaos to function. His impact on the club is immeasurable, and for many of my generation, a Liverpool without Klopp may not be Liverpool at all.



I could wax lyrical about Klopp for hours on end, but perhaps that wouldn't quite capture the theme of this issue surrounding the underappreciated, as even the most staunch Man United fans will tell you of his brilliance. Instead, this is an opportunity for me to highlight another figure during Klopp's tenure who has gone under the radar, but also been crucial to Liverpool's recent successes, and could be the answer to the struggles of a Klopp-less future.

This is a tribute to the namesake of Klopp's greatest rival: Pep Lijnders. The role of assistant manager in professional football is an odd one. Ask the casual premier league fan to name as many assistant managers as they can, and perhaps the only notable one for nine in ten people would be Jason Tindall, but perhaps not for reasons he would have intended. Regardless of their contributions to a club, they are never attributed with glory as the head coach is, and Lijnders epitomises this.




The 2022-23 season was certainly the most turbulent of Klopp's time at the club, with defensive frailty crippling the club's chances of attaining European football, let alone challenging for the title that they had come within twelve minutes of winning the season prior. With eight matches left of the season, Liverpool look poised for a meagre Europa league finish, and face off against title favourites Arsenal. For what seems like the first time in the Klopp era, Arsenal travel to Anfield as favourites to win. Within thirty minutes, Liverpool are two-nil down in their own fortress; the visitors firing with guns blazing.

The first half belongs to the Gunners.

The second belongs to Trent Alexander-Arnold. Or rather, to Pep Lijnders.

On the stroke of the second half, in an unprecedented manoeuvre, the generational fullback is no longer a fullback. He is still generational. Even more so, perhaps. But now, it is from an inverted role in midfield. For the first time under Klopp, Liverpool switch from the famed 4-3-3, to the Guardiola-patented 3-2-4-1. Alexander-Arnold is now given the licence to roam the centre of the pitch, overloading the Arsenal midfield and spraying diagonals to any inch of the turf that he wishes.



Still trailing 2-1 in the 86th minute, he makes a darting run from the centre circle to the right byline, collecting the ball from skipper Jordan Henderson, then approaching rival fullback Oleksandr Zinchenko face-on. In a split-second, the Ukrainian's calves are bashfully fastened together, while Alexander-Arnold collects the ball from between them a full 180 from where Zinchenko is facing. He then lays the ball on a sixpence for Roberto Firmino, who heads home to a clamorous Kop end. 2-2. Precise. Delicate.

All derived from the tactical foresight of Pep Lijnders to take a page out of the other Pep's book, to be perfectly translated into the Liverpool system. He had supposedly been waiting for months for the opportunity to invert Trent, betting Klopp a year's worth of his salary if it didn't succeed. Liverpool went unbeaten for the rest of the season with the new tactic, narrowly missing out on the top four spots that the berth to had seemed so wide initially. This is just one example of Lijnder's role in the Liverpool setup, and we may never even know what other contributions he has made to the side, as it is all lumped under Klopp's brilliance.

Lijnders is a man, who like Klopp, has won every honour at the club, and is Liverpool through and through. Tactically astute; familiar with the dressing room. In the desperate hunt for the Klopp replacement, we have scoured Germany for Alonso and Portugal for Amorim, yet none seem to be perfect fits. Maybe the answer lies a bit closer to home. Could Lijnders be the one to continue the surging Red dynasty? Knowing the ins and outs of the Liverpool body as well as the currently waning heart, he seems to possess the qualities needed to become the pulse that takes over.

Maybe it will take a Pep of our own for Liverpool to avert the crisis faced by the other post-dynastic sides like Ferguson's United. However, till then, let us still savour the moments that we have remaining with Klopp himself, for even if Lijnders were to fist pump with both arms three times a match, the Kop's response would still pale in comparison. Truly, irreplaceable.

Join our writers in critiquing and rating the latest cinematic masterpieces, exhibiting the threads of storytelling. From Dune: Part Two to The Holdovers, these writers share their candid opinions on these works, providing you with expert recommendations to enhance your viewing experience.

FFMFM



Priscilla

By Ines Chave

The Holdovers

By Ines Chave

Dune: Part 2

By Monica Zhang

& RTW

Priscilla

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY

Sofia Coppola

PRODUCED BY

Lorenzo Mieli & Youree Henley

STARRING

Jacob Elordi & Cailee Spaeny



By Ines Chave

Starring Jacob Elordi as Elvis and Mare of Easttown star Cailee Spaeny as the titular character, Priscilla begins when the couple first meet, when she's only 14 years old living on an Army base with her parents in Germany, where the 24 year old global icon, well regarded Elvis Presley happens to be stationed during his service. The quiet moments paint a picture of just how out of place Priscilla is there - she has no friends of her own, and spends her time between a diner, school, and at home with her parents. A friend of Elvis approaches her to invite

her to a party thrown by the King of Rock & Roll because he thinks Elvis will like her. Priscilla is thrust into a fast life of drugs and parties just to keep up with the man she loves while finishing her senior year of high school in order to appease her military father.

What struck me most about "Priscilla" was the film's ability to weave a narrative that felt both intimate and sentimental. It offered a window into Priscilla's life, revealing her fears and the indomitable spirit she faced. The portrayal felt so surreal and heartfelt that I couldn't help but feel a profound connection to her story, how much of her life was almost lived in fear and isolation and until this day her story is still new to many people.

The filmmakers' commitment really enhanced my appreciation for the movie. Every detail, from the costumes

and settings to the dialogue, felt meticulously crafted, transporting me to Priscilla's era. This attention to detail, coupled with a compelling script and stellar performances, made the film an emotional journey. I think also uncovering the darker aspect of Elvis's life puts the spotlight on his legacy and the controversy behind it.

It's a film I would recommend not just for its historical significance but to remind us of the complexity of our journeys, and the enduring power of love and authenticity.

The Holdovers

WRITTEN BY
DAVID HEMINGSON

DIRECTED BY
ALEXANDER PAYNE

PRODUCED BY
MARK JOHNSON, BILL BLOCK,
DAVID HEMINGSON

STARRING
PAUL GIAMATTI, DA'VINE JOY
RANDOLPH & DOMINIC SESSA



By Ines Chave

A film set in the 1970s at an English boarding school, where Mr. Paul, an unconventional teacher is tasked with supervising a group of boarding students who are not able to go home for the holidays. Among the students, Angus, an unruly and troubled student, develops an unexpected, wholesome bond with Mr. Paul over the holidays. two vulnerable, lonely, family-deprived humans appreciate each other when they notice the importance of the little things in life, the people you cross paths with, and finding beauty in the most unexpected

places. Together, they embark on a journey of self-discovery and mutual understanding.

It's a heartfelt narrative that highlights the importance of empathy, understanding, and the sometimes-surprising moments that bring people together. The story explores themes of connection, the impact of education, and the unexpected ways individuals can change each other's lives.

A poignant and heart-warming movie that focuses on the essence of human connections and the unexpected friendship that can shape your lives. I was really touched by the themes of the movie, the loneliness, the feeling of belonging and the power of mentorship. I think many people can resonate with the protagonist of this story because it is a common pit to fall into and feeling dispirited is an endless cycle. This movie serves as a reminder to appreciate the moments in life and the people around you who make these moments significant. Look around

you, there are so many people to be appreciative of, from family to your friends, notice them and thank them. I would recommend this to anyone, it speaks to multiple generations and offers a powerful message.

DUNE

PART

DIRECTED BY
DENIS VILLENEUVE

PRODUCED BY
MARK JOHNSON, BILL BLOCK,
DAVID HEMINGSON



By Monica Zhang

In the age of fast-media consumption, a film written, directed and made for the cinema is not only a breath of fresh air, but also a glimpse of hope for aspiring filmmakers who have the ambition to create masterful films, yet feel defeated by the “popular taste” among the general audience of the entertainment industry, as predominating studios such as Marvel fail to provide depth and artistry with their production yet are constantly leading in the box office. Fortunately, that was not the case with Dune 2, an artful yet successful film. With a \$190 million budget, it grossed a glorious \$684 million box office, surpassing its predecessor, Dune part 1 --- a rare and somehow cherishable phenomenon, where the sequel of a film has more popularity. It is cherishable because it demonstrates how a sequel can be more than just a quick cash-grab for the makers, rather they can be masterpieces that were planned even before the release of the original, leaving the audience in such awe that they would even end up preferring it.

The Dune trilogy, with 2 currently released films, is adapted from a book series of the same title by Frank Herbert, and is directed by Denis Villeneuve, who had previously contributed science fiction staples to the film industry such as the iconic Blade Runner 2049. Of course, the range of his abilities was nothing new to discover, but the glaring contrast between Dune and Blade Runner proved, once again, that he had a solid and influential position as a director.

The beauty of Dune lies in its mystery, a deep and unsettling mystery that might have even come off as arrogant before the release of this sequel. The story occurs in the distant future, the minimalist settings, unhurried pacing and unanswered questions of Dune 1 painted itself as an ambitious and confident work of art. The protagonist Paul Atreides was portrayed as a key figure to the fate of the universe, as he and his family were tangled between interstellar affairs involving other kingdoms. The root of all conflict, is of course, greed. No matter how much of the fighting was for honour, for love, the driving force of all misery happened to be the thing that everyone desired the most -- spice, a magical and powerful tool of such value that it could assist world domination. My interpretation of the message is based around another theme of the film: free will. I believe that spice did not lead to destruction, the producers and consumers of it did. Religion did not lead to insanity, the creators and followers of it did. So much of this is relevant in current issues, yet these are problems we have faced since the beginning of humanity. With an emphasis on how dreadfully long humanity has been dealing with problems of greed and faith by playing with time through secular motifs, Dune 2 does an especially excellent job on addressing these themes particularly by using a “saviour” concept, the “Messiah” Paul is torn between the choice of following fate (accepting that he is destined to save the world) and free will (join the Fremen as one of the fighters), the apple of Eden he felt afraid to bite. If fate is predestined, is there any use to fight against it?

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RT 2

ATED BY
LENEUVE

STARRING
TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET, ZENDAYA
& REBECCA FERGUSON



The film goes back and forth between the poles, puzzling the audience as well as intriguing them to think deeper about what should and what will happen.

Set in numerous bleak and dystopian environments, Dune felt hazy, veiled and even eerie to me when I watched it on a plane years ago. In part 2, the setting was the memorable vastness of a desert. Aside from the obvious biblical/islamic allegories, I could not help but think of ancient Egyptian myths while watching it, due to the associations that come with such a setting. The life cycle of Ra, the order and principle of Maat, the holy life giving water, just like the Nile river --- for a sci-fi about the future, its mystery also relies upon the beautiful, unexplained parts of history. And the integration of both the present, the future and the past makes a sci-fi feel full and fleshed out. A sequel's quality is often dependent on how well it develops the original plot and fills out the gaps within the story, and very rarely is it done masterfully --- Dune 2 does exactly that, while still not making the story overflow with information, preserving its original mystery and leaving room for the imagination. As one watches the sequel they may find that it makes up for any incompleteness of the previous film, and still, stands out alone as a cinematic masterpiece. A duality which all sequels should achieve -- but how many really did? And how many sci-fis, in recent years, really polished their character relationships to show realistic human reactions of difficult conditions and how it affects love and familial bonds?

The only criticism I had in mind for this film was the overdone "white saviour" trope it somehow implied, and the unclear elaboration of such a powerful weapon-- the water of life. The film started off somewhat like a typical white saviour story: a foreigner goes to a nation of indigenous communities, winds up being stronger than most of its strongest fighters and saves the day almost entirely alone. Though the development of the story leads to a different direction -- that Paul might be an anti-hero, or at least not exactly a "messiah". And just as I have waited for the completion of Dune 1 with patience, I will do so with Dune 2. I believe that the water of life will be explained further as a major vessel of destruction and the complications of Paul's character will eventually clear out into his true self being revealed during the holy war.

All things considered, Dune 2 is in my opinion, the best film to come out so far in 2024, and possibly one of the best science fiction films of our generation. It is the evidence that in spite of all the over-commercialisation in the entertainment industry, tasteful art can still be made and be appreciated. My rating for the film is 4.5 stars or 9/10.

Star

By Olivia Ang



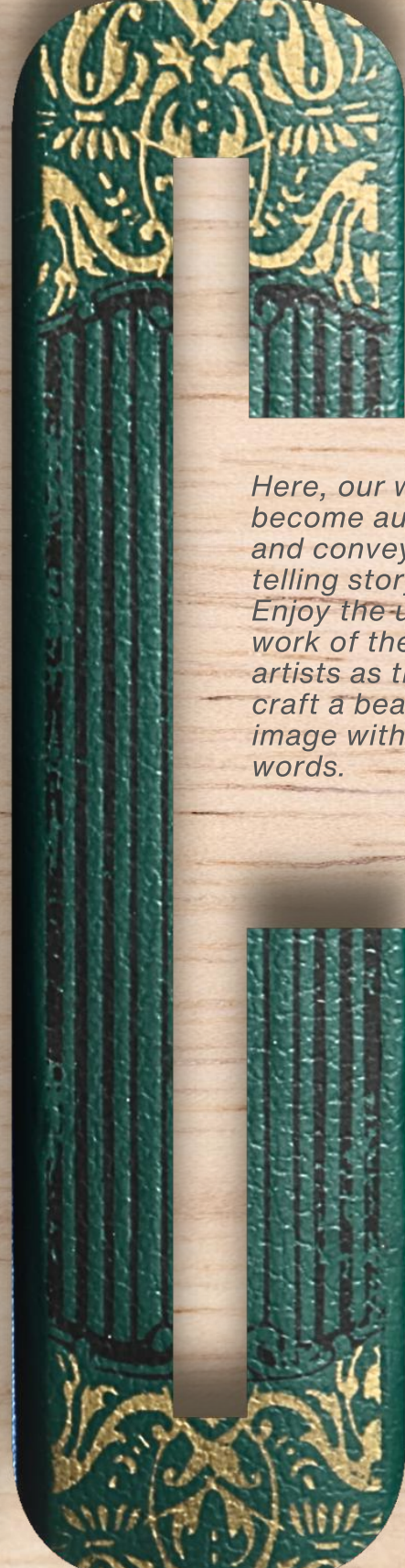
Watch it Grow

By Vivian Lang



Rebound

By Kai Ning Chan

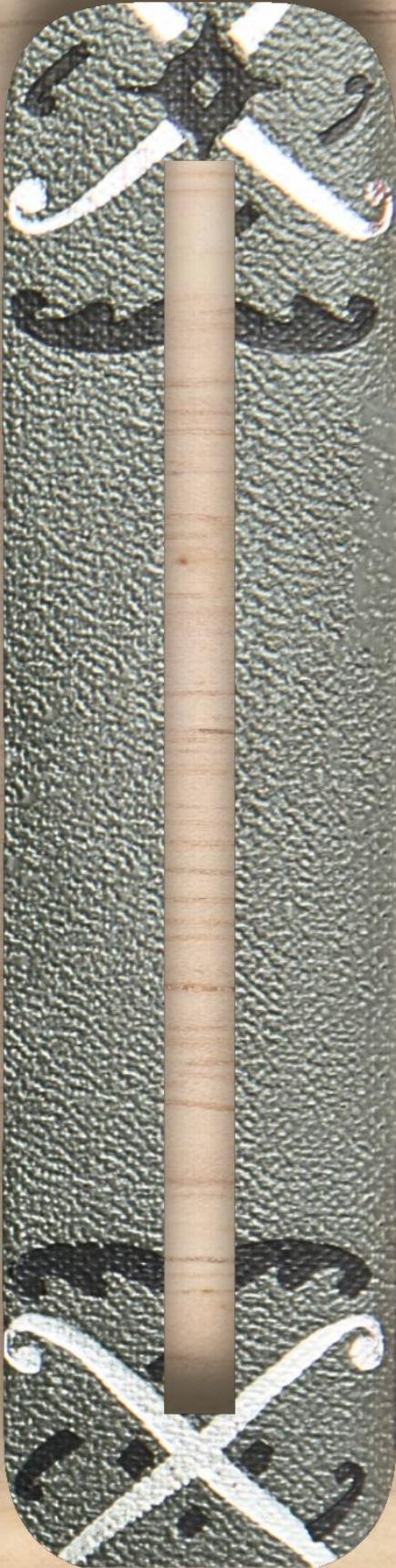


Here, our writers become authors and convey a telling story. Enjoy the unique work of these artists as they craft a beautiful image with their words.

Spirals N' Insanity
By Elli Mason



Cabaran Diri Adam
By Eloise Ang



**Aduh, apah yang berlaki
kepada gigi saya?**
By Melissa Y8

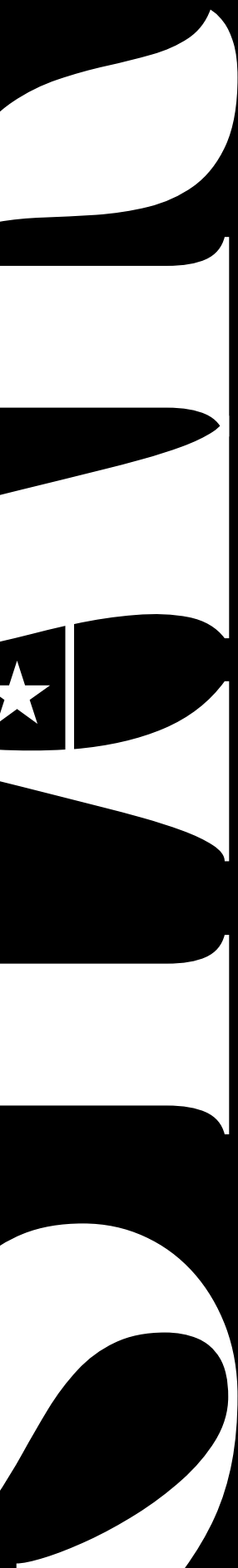


By Olivia Ang

I feel hollow. Like a giant chasm in my heart, all there is is nothingness and darkness. My mum is starting to worry, she keeps coming into my room at random times, asking if I'm alright, her face is pinched with concern, and I can see the deep worry lines engraved into her face. I try to respond to her brightly, I put on my "I'm going to say I'm okay but I'm really not okay" face and tell her the same words I say every time, it's become routine at this point, "Yes Mum, I'm okay, don't bother about me, close the door on your way out". I feel bad for shunning her but I don't want her to see me like this. Every day of her seeing her useless, broken daughter is just a reminder of the incident, it's hard to feel anything when I am just completely numb all over. Sometimes I see a hint of relief in her eyes when I ask her to leave the room, I think I'm a burden to her grieving process, we both prefer it anyway, when we're by ourselves in our respective rooms, just soaking in the silence until it feels like it's eating us up.

I try to stamp some feeling into my legs as I finally leave the bed and fumble around my desk for my phone. When I find it, I stare at the black, empty, cracked screen. A sense of — fills my heart, it reminds me of myself. Empty. Shattered. My hand trembles over the power button, after 8 days I still don't have the courage to turn my phone on. It took three days for me to even pick up my phone after I threw it against the wall, and five days later, I still haven't turned it on. Part of me is curious about what is happening in the outside world, while I confine myself to these four walls, but the fear overwhelms me. I can't put my finger on what exactly is preventing me from turning on my phone, maybe it's the fact that the world is progressing onwards while I feel that I can never move forward, or maybe I'm scared of the influx of condolence messages that could trigger another panic attack. Whatever it is, it haunts me so deeply, that my heart is perpetually painful. I stare back down at the black screen, my brain battles with my heart, as my logic tells me that I can't continue living like this and I'll have to move on someday, while my heart responds, arguing that the pain of seeing the news articles and messages on the incident will be too overwhelming for me to handle. My emotions swamp my reasoning and I drop my phone defeated. I stare at the clock on the wall, each second that passes is just as excruciating as the other, that's what's so painful about grieving. No matter how long ago it happened, it's just as painful as when it just happened. 11:09 pm the clock reads. It has been exactly 11,622 minutes since I have felt myself. Since my heart shattered.

I return back to my bed, nighttimes are always harder than the daytime. The complete, eerie silence is strangling and the blackness of the sky engulfs me with bad, scary thoughts. I try to fall asleep as I shift around in my bed restlessly. Eventually, I give up and just stare out the window into the sky that glitters with the stars. Long ago when everything was normal, I remember watching the news and an elderly lady came up on the screen. She said that all our lost loved ones became stars in the sky and they were looking out for us, watching us from afar.



Every time they sparkled, they were reminding us that although not there physically, they were with us in our hearts. I look back at the night sky that is dotted with hundreds of stars that seem so tiny and far away and I wonder which star he is. A smile fills my face and for once in the past eight days, I feel a slight sense of hope. I am mesmerised by the sparkling stars that blink in and out of focus and my eyes finally shut to the blinking jewels in the sky that blaze with their fiery determination.

He's there, standing by the lake, with his back facing me. I stumble backward, shocked. He isn't supposed to be here. He's dead. My leg hits a rock as I fall back, it skids and hits another rock with an ugly clang. His back stiffens with the noise and he turns his head tentatively.

His face hits me with a blast of nostalgia. The familiarity of his brown, gentle eyes and the freckles that are scattered across his face look the exact same. However, instead of his usual cheeky, mischievous grin, his lips form a sad smile. The space between us is almost tangible. I'm barely 10 metres away from the boy I thought I lost forever.

"How? What? Why?", I stammer, breaking the silence.

"It's just a dream Koala", my brother says, using my nickname that he created for me when I was only three years old, due to my clinginess. My heart plummets. Part of me was hopeful when I saw his familiar face again, but to know it was only a dream crushed the hope that I had.

"Remember this place?" he asks, gesturing towards the beautiful, scenic lake around him. We used to play her when we were kids when we were carefree and innocent with no burdens of the world. The place is exactly how I remember it, with the leaves that reflect a myriad of colours, and the clear water in the lake that ripples with the wind.

I nod my head, "Yea".

"I always loved this place, whenever I was here I could almost forget the heavy burden on my shoulders and the cruel world."

"Why? Why would you do it?" I ask, my voice breaking as tears cascade down my face.

He stares at me, his eyes are sad, and I can see the pain in his face. "Because I didn't fight hard enough. I couldn't look past the series of unfortunate events and I didn't see the true beauty in the world. But listen Koala. Take it slowly, one step at a time. Don't end up like me, because, behind the pain and the grief, there is actual beauty in the world, you just have to see the beauty in small things"

When I wake up, my eyes are wet with tears. Seeing him again is like a wake-up call. This morning seems different somehow. While every day since the incident felt suffocating, today the air almost feels sweeter. While the tweeting of the birds used to feel obnoxious, today their chirping forms a harmonious melody. Today, I realise that, yes, grief will never get less painful, but by seeing the beauty in the small things, it makes it a lot better.





By Vivian Lang

Each life on this planet is the product of a myriad of miracles. The necessary light traveled 149 million kilometers to make it to Earth. The perfect temperatures to warm the seed just enough to begin the process. The chances of that gentle breeze or raging tempest pulled the seed to its resting spot. Or perhaps it was an animal hungry for a treat that carried that small hope to rest. The chances of the seed being brought to a place with space for it to grow... It is a miracle in itself to see it even germinate in the soil.

So maybe you find it as a seed...or maybe you find it as a sapling, but don't leave it there to die.

Watch it grow.

Watch as it changes.

Watch as it changes the world around it.

Watch as...

The small green poking out from the brown. Soft leaves reaching for the warmth. One leaf after the other, growing taller day by day. As the seasons change and those first green hues yellow and weaken before falling, marvel as the ones above grow larger, each leaf more vibrant than the last, as the stem grows stronger, taking on a greater load. The stem and its leaves stretch out towards the sun, trying to catch as much sunlight as possible. The shadows cast upon the soft earth grow larger as those first few greens turn yellow and drop.

Watch as...

The shell of brown cracks, splitting across the thin trunk as the sapling grows ever taller and wider.

Patiently wait until one day, that tiny pair of leaves becomes a young

tree with a small trunk. Until one day, little buds start forming on the spindly branches. Until, on a chilly spring day, the soft pink petals unfurl, each tiny bud blooming into a wonder to gaze at. Eventually, the branches will be covered in hues of pink, with bark peeking out from behind.

Watch as...

The birds flit around and, perchance, nest between the spindle branches. The small bees sip at the nectar and return home to make honey as lovers carve initials into its bark. Children play in circles, chasing each other around as checkered blankets spread out upon the ground, baskets of sweet cakes, chocolate-covered strawberries, and cucumber sandwiches. Small cuttings of flowers are placed as gifts. As a young child presses a fallen flower between the pages of her heaviest book...years later, a white-haired woman gently caresses the dried petals, reminiscing of more playful times she once had.

Watch as...

Day by day, the tree will grow stronger and taller. As seasons go by, each moment- a tableau of perfection. The pink carpet of fallen flowers, vibrant greenery, the sunset that falls to the ground before snow covers the branches. Watch as time passes; each moment different yet wonderful. Watch as ages pass, as it survives as itself, and perchance through its legacy in art and the seeds that fall to the ground or are carried off in the wind.

By Kai Ning Chan

He was a wizened old man, maybe seventy-years of age, long grey whiskers bristling on his chin, his demeanor calm but mysterious. Half of his features were mired in darkness, the other half, a yellow parchment of dried wrinkles that sent shivers down my spine. The cloying stench of incense pallid the mouldy room, the smoke shrouding every corner, as if its purpose was to hide incriminating evidence of my purported crime. The chamber was gloomy, narrow and dark, just four windowless wooden walls. A low table sat before me, innocent of feature until I glanced at the lone object atop it, like a gruesome centerpiece. It was a bottle, a Mason jar, really, and in it dark viscous liquid partially obscured the object within. In the flickering light, I caught sight of something pale within the blackened folds. The shaman raised his eyes and smiled.

My heart hammered in my chest. I knew the abilities of this medium, and I swore I saw two crimson orbs gleaming within the Mason jar. The old shaman did not care which race I was, which gender I was or how much money I could offer.

The only thing he inquired was the religion of my chosen recipient of the spirit's incessant assails. He had warned me of the consequences, should the bodach be unsatiated from his mischief, and the outcome would not look pretty. Servility certainly was not a trait of the toyol. Though, if luck was on my side, the malignant soul would be able to feed off of the victim's yang energy for as long as it thrived. Cold beads of sweat trickled down my temple, pooling at the base of my neck. It was as if I knew something would go wrong, like my gut feeling was throbbing with an ache to take back what I said, and cancel my appointment. But it was too late. Equipped with his prayer beads, talismans and the incense, the shaman had done his work.

Poor Myra. If only she could see what was coming for her. As my stepsister, her 'alacrity' never failed to assuage my father. Such a conniving snake she was. My mother was a woman blinded by love, and even as she witnessed the light of her life with another, she refused to accept the fact that he was disloyal. Even on her deathbed, she wished him happiness and everlasting devotion towards my stepmother.

My dad was starstruck by Myra. Her affable, altruistic and easygoing nature was merely a facade, cast upon my father for the sake of earning her place as an English citizen. The very place that I was meant to own! Under the limelight she flourished, and my shrewish stepmother complained and nagged me just because she assumed the previous standing of my mother. Together they pestered me day and night, from minor inconveniences to petty crimes like spilling water onto me, slapping me, insulting my mother just because she was dead.

It was so unfair, the way she stole my position from under my nose. I was supposed to be the favourite. Not her. I'd had enough of the asinine remarks and brooding remonstrance of Nora, my stepmother. That woman had entranced my father and harboured gratuitous animosity towards me to the extent that I had a compulsion to make a move. They were absolutely revolting towards me, disregarded my feelings and even went as far as asking me to jump off the balcony. They had driven me to the point of insanity. And my dad just turned a blind eye on all of this. In search of a scheme that could appease my vengeance, I stumbled upon Lydia, my chemistry seatmate, who knew a bevy of bomohs and mediums she'd tampered with on several occasions. She was euphoric that I'd finally decided on meddling in with the supernatural.

Lydia shoved in my hand a devious piece of parchment decorated with lists of contacts. And here I was now, in front of the withered necromancer, compelled by Lydia to make Myra **suffer**.

I was mistaken.

Myra wasn't mean. Myra wasn't conniving or rude or disrespectful. Myra swore on her life she would never repeat her misdemeanours and apologised like there was no tomorrow.

It was Nora that coerced her to drive me insane, just because she needed her daughter to move to London, away from this horrid country. I had seen red and transgressed on an impulse. I flounced to the old shaman with the long grey whiskers and skin like parchment, and begged him to recall the toyol in addition with a fee I willingly paid. The shaman quirked a brow, and did as I told. Truth be told, I didn't believe that the spirit would actually rebound and attack me, just because its fill wasn't satiated. I convinced myself that it was just a silly tale he spun to get me to pay the money. Anyway, toys weren't bloodthirsty and couldn't cause mortal harm, so I left the shaman to settle the situation. Life went on after that as I tried to reconcile with Myra and rebuild the bridge I had burned.

But something was off. As the sun closed its eyes and the moon stretched its bright limbs, I heard mocking whispers of an unknown dialect permeate my hearing. An eerie, disconcerting aura fell upon my bedroom, and I sensed inordinate amounts of derision from every corner pouring into me. A child sang nursery rhymes in the back of my head, a baby wailed in my ear perturbingly, the echoes of children giggling near me reverberated through my skull. A pitch black silhouette dashed past my peripheral vision as bushes rustled where I strode. I was terrified; night after night, my vision became emaciated, starved of colour and life.

The stuffed toys in my room shifted positions, for reasons unknown. Painful sores erupted upon my skin, burning like fire. I inadvertently tripped and fell into a ditch while out walking, a scarlet gash adorning my shin. Today, I was startled awake by a stinging ache in my breast. Jolted and petrified out of my skin, I dared not move an inch. Was it cardiac arrest? I shifted uncomfortably in my duvet, checking the time. 4:44am.

There was a weight on my chest. I stiffened. Pale eyes met carmine, bloodthirsty ones. A half-formed fetus, blood-stained fangs glinting in the moonlight. Its pale body, deformed and lurid, perched upon the blanket.

It giggled.

By Elli Mason

Five months after sprinkling my father's ashes in the seas of Ramsgate, I found myself lying on my bed, tears trickling down my face as I looked at my right arm. Wrists were full of cuts to remember the days when I struggled to keep myself sane from all the deranged and harsh situations that occurred throughout those specific months. Bored out of my mind, I grasped my phone and skimmed through my phone's photo gallery, past all the selfies and screenshots of Asian celebrities till I was met with a picture of my recently deceased father.

The picture was of me and my father standing in front of a monumental statue of the classic Eddie Van Halen red and black striped series, a beautifully designed guitar. The picture was taken in Los Angeles, about six months before as we went to celebrate my mum's birthday and before he went for a life-changing surgery. I glanced at the guitar in the backdrop, feeling my face contorting into a small grimace smirk, small tears continued to fall down my face and onto my phone, and I realised that I had never been heavily influenced by my British or even Western culture in general. My life was full of Asian friends who all enjoyed their own cultures. As I looked at what once made me joyful, merchandise from Chinese and Korean bands. The more I stared at it, the more it made me feel revolted about my Asian heritage. Everyone else liked the beauties of East Asia and I wanted to seem like I appreciated it too.

The whole thought process had caused a big transition to my whole identity, I felt like a big 'Question Mark' as if I was constantly questioning myself.

Back then when I was five till around eight, I liked listening to classic '60s to '80s songs from genres of Pop, Punk Rock, Rock N' Roll and Metal. Bands such as The Beatles, Ramones, Led Zeppelin, Mötley Crüe, and Guns N' Roses. These different bands are mostly from my father's influences and a few from my own self-discovery of these specific genres and decades. But nobody understood why I liked it, calling my father's and my own music 'strange' and 'satanic'. Young and naive at the time, thinking that I should be what was deemed 'normal' by my peers, I started liking K-Pop which was the craze at the time. Unfortunately, I didn't understand myself despite being extremely defensive whenever my dad argued that Korean men weren't really men due to their feminine features. This statement would always cause fury between the both of us who would constantly clash about the different beauty standards of Asian and Western men. And myself lying on my bed, tears trickling down my face. Perplexed and slightly frustrated at myself as it was now too late to apologise to him for squabbling about the cultural differences between what was considered a man, I started to throw out each piece of evidence of my past.

Only left a few picture books and gifts from friends as my mum had refused to throw them away, still wanting me to keep some kind of reminiscence of my Asian heritage. 'Why don't you just keep them for the sake of remembrance?' My mum asked, to which I silently shook my head and continued to throw each piece of evidence into a black rubbish bag. 'Why was I so selfish and foolish for fighting with him?' I kept pondering as I forced my way past the furniture in my bedroom.





If only you could burn memories from your mind, I would've been at alleviation. Life would've been so much more painless if I had been able to redeem myself and tell him physically that I had finally seen the light that he was navigating me towards, but it was too late.

As I rummaged through, glancing at the hard copied pictures of myself during that phase, I crunched them up as it was like a punch to the gut, making me nauseous knowing that I couldn't turn back time and correct the problem which was myself. My head whirled as I stumbled towards my phone, deleting as many recollections of myself during that course in order to free myself from the imaginary shady figure which was my past, following me like a shadow, reminding me if I didn't put myself wanting to be like everyone else in my friend group first, I wouldn't have to see the dimmer sides of my healthy and precious relationship with my devoted father who just didn't understand as he came from a culture where men were hairy and were more masculine.

I was spiralling out of control as I continued rummaging through my shelves and drawers, eagerly grabbing each and every piece of evidence that had some sort of connection to Asian music with frustration. Just like the dark figure, the proof of my past taunted me throughout as if it were a reminder of how I had failed as a daughter whenever we argued just because I wanted to be like my friends, thinking that I would finally be 'cool' to everybody else... Which was the outcome that I asked for, but at 'what cost?'

I had to now face the consequences of my selfishness without him knowing that I wanted to hug him tightly, tell him that I was sorry and that I would do anything to change myself in order to see the same light with joy.

If we didn't bicker about such rubbish topics... If I didn't blindly follow my friends in order to be able to fit in and be able to have conversations with them... Would I have possibly been more at ease about his death? My mind spiralled out of control again as I dropped to the floor, curling into a ball, and closing my eyes tightly as I felt the imaginary shadows getting bigger, consuming me entirely.

Although too late, I decided to go in search of my original Western roots just for him as I opened my eyes, it all made sense now... I was never like my peers and I would never be. Fully discarding the black rubbish bag of everything that reminded me about my 'obsession' with Asian music before running towards my dad's stash. Looking at each and every vinyl, CD and DVD all the way from the '60s up to the '90s, tears trickled down my face slowly as I was truly amazed at how he still managed to keep every part of his passion for music in good condition, knowing that it was going to eventually be handed down to me and my brother. Holding them for dear life as music was not only his passion but mine, making sure to continue on his passion and legacy all his friends knew him for. Hugging the music records which were now mine, the shadows slowly dissipated like a cloud.



By Eloise Ang

Pada waktu pagi, Adam bangun awal dan bersedia untuk pergi ke sekolah. Kemudian, Adam mengambil sarapan. Biasanya, dia makan kek dan minum jus oren. Walaupun Adam tahu makanan ringan tidak sihat dan berkhasiat, dia masih memilih untuk makan makanan segera kerana sangat sedap. Selepas itu, Adam pergi ke sekolah. Dia berasa sangat gembira dan teruja. Adam berjalan-jalan ke sekolah sambil berbual-bual dengan ibubapanya. Adam tidak sabar untuk memulakan hari di sekolah.

"Ibu, saya sangat seronok pergi ke sekolah. Saya mahu berkenalan dengan kawan-kawan baharu." Adam berkata.

Apabila dia tiba di sekolah, Adam melihat ramai orang sedang berjalan-jalan di kawasan sekolah. Semasa dia masuk ke dalam kelas, tidak ada orang yang mahu duduk dengan Adam. Adam sangat sedih kerana dia tidak tahu mengapamereka mengelakkan dia. Semasa waktu rehat, dia mendengar rakan sekelas mempersendakan dia kerana Adam sangat gemuk.

"Adam badan sebesar pulau!"

"Lihat, Adam ialah seekor gajah!"

"Aiyo, tidak cukup ruang kerana adam duduk di bilik ini."

Adam berasa amat sedih dan dia pergi ke kantin untuk makan biskut. Dia duduk seorang diri dan menangis. Kemudian, dia pergi ke kelas bahasa inggeris dengan perasaan sedih. Dia duduk di meja belakang dan tidak ada kawan-kawan duduk dengan Adam. Semasa waktu makan tengah hari, tidak ada sesiapa yang mahu makan dengan Adam dan dia makan seorang diri.

Sepanjang hari sekolah, dia sangat sedih dan bersendirani. Adam mula hari kedua di sekolah dengan pengalaman yang sangat buruk dan dia tidak mahu pergi ke sekolah. Semasa makan tengah hari, dia makan sanwic dan kentang goreng. Dia sangat suka makan makanan tidak berkhasiat walaupun Adam tahu makanan yang dia makan tidak baik untuk kesihatan badannya. Semasa dua kelas akhirnya, dia berasa lebih gembira kerana dia suka sains dan matematik. Dia juga suka guru sains kerana dia baik hati

Apabila sekolah tamat, Adam berjalan pulang ke rumah dan menangis. "Rakan sekelas mempersendakan saya kerana saya gemuk." Adam berkata. "Adam, jika kamu tidak mahu rakan sekelas mempersendakan kamu, kamu mestilah bersenam dan juga makan makanan berkhasiat dan seimbang. Kami juga warjalah berjumpa dengan doktor supaya kamu boleh mengelakkan penyakit." Ibu menasihati Adam. Adam mendengar nasihat Ibu, mahu membawa Adam berjumpa dengan doktor untuk nasihat.

Pada hari kedua, Adam berjumpa dengan doktor. Doktor memberitahu Adam perlu mengambil makanan berkhasiat dan mengikut piramid makanan supaya dia boleh makan makanan yang mengandungi enam khasiat utama. Doktor juga menggalakkan Adam bersenam sekurang-kurangnya tiga kali setiap minggu. Adam berfikir untuk menjadi sihat dan supaya rakan sekelas tidak mempersendakan dia, Adam perlu mengubah gaya hidupnya.

Adam menjadi bermotivasi untuk mendapatkan tubuh badan yang sihat. Dia menghindari makanan segera dan minuman ringan. Adam juga makan makanan berkhasiat dan seimbang seperti buah-buahan, sayur-sayuran dan banyak lagi. Selain makanan berkhasiat, Adam juga minum air yang secukupnya dan mendapat rehat yang cukup.

Adam juga bersenam setiap hari dan membuat banyak jenis senaman seperti berjalan-jalan, berjogging, berenang dan juga berbasikal. Adam kadang-kadang dengan ibu dan bapa bersenam. Apabila Adam bersenam, dia menjadi lebih berdisiplin bak kata pepatah, badan cergas minda cerdas.

Akhir sekali, Adam menjadi sihat dan sangat bangga dengandirinya. Dia tidak gemuk dan menjadi lebih tampan. Adam menjadi berdisiplin dan juga ada banyak amalan yang baik. Apabila Adam pergi ke sekolah, rakan sekelas tidak mempersendakan dia dan juga mahu berkawan dengan Adam. Adam sangat gembira dan juga ada ramai rakan-rakan.

By Melissa Y8

Siti seorang kanak-kanak perempuan berusia lapan tahun. Dia seorang budak bersikap peramah dan pintar yang suka bergaul dengan orang lain. Jadi, Siti ada banyak kawan di sekolah malah cemerlang dalam pelajaran. Atas sebab itu, dia suka pergi ke sekolah. Semasa rehat tengah hari, dia sangat suka bermain bola sepak dengan kawan-kawannya bak kata pepatah badan cergas minda cerdas. Kerap kali, jurulatih Siti akan memintanya mewakili sekolah untuk perlawanan bola sepak. Sudah tentu, dia akan menjaringkan banyak gol untuk pasukannya dan akan memenangi perlawanan bola sepak. Siti sangat aktif membuatkan badannya sihat. Dia ialah seorang kanak-kanak yang mempunyai perwatakan yang cantik, matanya besar dan bulat, rambutnya panjang dan licin. Namun begitu, giginya rosak akibat tidak dijaga dengan baik.

Siti ada masalah gaya hidup yang tidak sihat akibat dia bersikap degil. Setiap hari, dia sentiasa suka diam-diam makan gula-gula dan makanan yang sangat manis walaupun ibunya menyuruhnya berhenti makan gula-gula dengan kerap. Selepas mengambil sebiji gula-gula, dia mahu lebih sehingga dia tidak dapat berhenti mengunyah gula-gula itu. Tambahan pula, dia tidak mahu pergi ke klinik gigi untuk membuat pemeriksaan gigi. Malahan, dia tidak suka menggosok gigi setiap hari. Setiap kali, ibu bapa Siti menasihatinya untuk berhenti tabiat yang buruk itu namun nasihat mereka bagai mencurah air ke daun keladi. Barisan bawah gigi Siti sudah mula reput, walaupun dia belum perasan lagi. Tidak lama kemudian, kesan buruk itu akan mula memberi kesan yang akan membawa mudarat kepadanya. Siti sangat jahil dan tidak ambil tindakan awal.

Ibu Siti: Siti sayang! Kamu haruslah mengelakkan makan makanan yang manis. Kalau tidak, kamu akan menyesal nanti. Bak kata pepatah “sesal dahulu pendapatan, sesal kemudian tiada berguna”

Siti: Mak, janganlah asyik membebel. Saya tau akibatnya dan sebabnya, saya hanya makan beberapa gigi gula-gula setiap hari, bilangan gula-gula itu tidak banyak bilangan. Secara jujurnya, saya fikir mak bertindak secara berlebihan. Tasilnya, ibu selalu mengeluh bila-bila masa saya makan lalu mencuci mulut. Ini tidak adil!

Ibu Siti: Sekiranya kamu tau, kamu pasti makan makanan seimbang. Siti, kamu sentiasa makan makanan yang tidak berkhasiat yang memudaratkan kesihatan tubuh badan kamu seperti kek, ais krim, biskut, coklat dan banyak lagi. Tambahan pula, kamu tidak mahu menggosok gigi.

Siti berasa sangat marah, dia tidak mahu mendengar nasihat ibunya lalu memarahinya lagi. Dalam kecewaan, dia membalik sebuah buku keluar dari bilik tidurnya. Kebetulan masa itu, bapanya berjalan di tempat dia membalik pensel. Dia melihat sekeliling dengan sangat keliru, sehingga dia melihat Siti di atas katil, dengan riak wajah yang kelihatan masam. Bapa Siti: Hai Siti, ibu hanya memberitahu saya tentang tabiat makanan kamu yang tidak berkhasiat dan kamu terlalu malas untuk menggosok gigi.

Ada ketikanya saya menawarkan membawa kamu untuk pergi ke doktor gigi namun, kamu segera menolak. Siti, kamu haruslah menggosok gig dua kali sehari, makan makanan yang seimbang, dan melawat doktor gigi sekurang-kurangnya dua kali setahun untuk membuat pemeriksaan supaya dapat mengekang masalah penyakit berbahaya seperti darah tinggi, sakit gigi, kencing manis dan banyak lagi. Bak kata pepatah sediakan payung sebelum hujan.

Siti: Baiklah bapa, saya akan cuba berubah.

Sekarang, Siti rasa sangat sedih dan putus asa. Dia tidak tahu apa yang perlu dilakukan, mengubah tabiat buruknya.

Keesokan harinya di sekolah, Siti mula merasakan sedikit sakit pada salah satu batang giginya. Dengan berani, dia cuba mengabaikannya. Pada waktu rehat, dia teruja berlari ke bangsal untuk mendapatkan sebiji bola sepak. Selepas itu, dia berjalan ke arah rakan-rakannya dengan bola pada tangan, bersedia untuk memulakan permainan bola sepak. Malangnya, sebaik sahaja dia menghampiri mereka, mereka kelihatan jijik dan melarikan diri daripadanya. Kawan-kawannya menjerit ke arahnya:

“Kamu tak gosok gigi ke? Nafasnya berbau sangat busuk, mari kita tidak bermain bola sepak hari ini. Kami minta maaf”

Siti terkejut, akibat dari amalan buruknya mula berlaku. Tiada siapa yang pernah memperlakukannya seperti ini kerana mereka menghormati pencapaian dan kecantikannya. Terasa sunyi, dia berlalu pergi dengan air mata mengalir pada pipinya.

Sejak kawan baik Siti, Preethi, telah pergi menyertai lawatan sekolah, dia tiada pilihan selain daripada duduk bersendirian pada waktu makan tengah hari. Kali ini, Siti tidak mahu makan tengah hari atau pencuci mulut sebab sakit giginya semakin tidak tertanggung olehnya. Giginya berdenyut dan membengkak menyebabkan dia menangis lagi. Dengan sebab pada matanya, dia melihat rakan-rakannya di padang bergembira bermain bola sepak tanpa dia. Ketika ini, dia menyesal kerana tidak mendengar nasihat ibu bapanya. Jika dia tidak bersikap degil, dia tidak akan mengalami pengalaman yang tidak menyenangkan ini.

**ADA
APA YANG BERLAKU**

Siti fikir sendiri: “Saya berasa bersalah kerana tidak menerima nasihat ibu saya yang menjaga kesihatan saya namun semuanya sudah terlambat.”

Sebaik sahaja Siti pulang dari sekolah, dia menerangkan pengalamannya di sekolah. Kali ini, dia memohon untuk membuat pemeriksaan gigi agar tidak mengalami kesakitan gigi. Tambahan pula, Siti mahu bermain bola sepak dengan kawan-kawan lagi. Ibu bapa Siti tergesa-gesa membuat temu janji dengan doktor gigi. Siti meminta ampun daripada ibu bapanya bahawa dia menyesal tidak mendengar amaran mereka yang membawa kepada akibat ini.

Akhirnya, pemeriksaan bermula dan doktor memeriksa giginya dengan teliti. Doktor gigi menasihatinya menggosok gigi yang tidak menyebabkan sakit gigi dan tiada kaviti pada gigi Siti. Sepanjang pemeriksaan, Siti mengalami kesakitan akibatnya dia tidak mengambil tindakan awal. Selepas kejadian itu, Siti berharap giginya sihat dan permukaan giginya bersinar-sinar.

Doktor gigi menasihatinya untuk menggosok gigi dua kali sehari selama dua minit. Sekarang, Siti berasa senang hati dan puas kerana kebimbangannya akan hilang.

Hari berikutnya, Siti memberitahu kawan baiknya, Preethi, tentang apa yang berlaku di sekolah apabila dia tidak hadir. Dia mahu mengubah tabiat buruknya selepas menghadapi akibatnya sungguhpun, Siti tidak tahu langkah-langkah pengambilan makanan yang berkhasiat. Sejak Preethi melawat pameran gaya hidup sihat semasa lawatan sekolahnya, dia memberi nasihat kepada Siti. Pertamanya, dia menggesa Siti untuk menggunakan piramid makanan supaya dia tahu beberapa hidangan bagi setiap kategori makanan yang dia boleh makan sehari. Aras empat ialah buah-buahan dan sayur sayuran yang perlu dihidangkan lima hingga tujuh kali sehari kerana terdapat banyak kebaikan yang boleh diberikan kepada kita. Misalnya, makan banyak buah-buahan dan sayur-sayuran membantu badan kita daripada penyakit berbahaya seperti kencing manis, darah tinggi, dan banyak lagi. Buah-buahan dan sayur-sayuran mengandungi vitamin, serat, dan mineral yang sangat penting untuk tumbesaran dan penghadaman yang baik. Makanan yang berlemak, bergaram, dan bergula tidak mempunyai nilai pemakanan dan badan kita boleh menjadi gemuk akibat pengambilan makan makanan kategori ini.

Adalah penting untuk makan makanan berkhasiat yang mengandungi enam khasiat utama yang diperlukan oleh badan kita seperti protein, karbohidrat, lemak, vitamin, dan galian dalam kadar yang mencukupi.

Sekarang, Siti rasa sangat yakin untuk menjalani gaya hidup yang lebih sihat. Preethi memberi cadangannya sambil dia menulis nota pada sekeping papan. Apa yang dia perlu lakukan ialah mengambil tindakan. Siti berterima kasih kepada Preethi atas kesabaran dan pertolongannya.

Sejak hari itu, Siti hampir tidak makan gula-gula atau makanan manis. Dia mendapati bahawa makan makanan yang seimbang membuatkan dia berasa lebih gembira dan bertenaga. Setiap hidangan, Siti memastikan makan makanan campuran buah-buahan, sayur-sayuran, gandum, daging, tenusu, dan minyak. Pilihan makanan yang sihat ini memberi manfaat kepada giginya kerana makanan itu boleh menguatkan gigi daripada cepat mengalami kerosakan. Seterusnya, makanan ini dapat meningkatkan air liur untuk membersihkan cebisan makanan yang menghalang kerosakan gigi. Ibu bapa Siti kagum dan bangga dengan perubahan sikap baharu Siti. Mereka berasa lega kerana dia belajar daripada pengalaman buruknya dan menjadi lebih bertanggungjawab terhadap tubuh badannya. Setiap pagi dan malam, Siti menggosok gigi tanpa sebarang keluhan. Tambahan pula, Siti juga meminta maaf kepada ibu bapanya kerana menderhaka dan tidak menghargai nasihat mereka.

Beberapa bulan kemudian, Siti akhirnya menyelesaikan masalahnya. Giginya putih berkilauan tanpa tanda-tanda kerosakan gigi. Semua rakannya sanggup bermain bola sepak dengan Siti pada waktu rehat kerana mulutnya berbau segar dan bersih. Semasa perlawanan bola sepak, prestasinya lebih baik dan badannya berasa lebih kuat. Wajahnya kelihatan ceria dan memberi kesan positif kepada orang ramai.

Perubahan positif yang besar dalam dirinya dengan memberi ucapan terima kasih kepada ibu bapanya dan Preethi. Ibu bapanya sangat sabar dan mengambil berat walaupun dia bersikap degil. Namun begitu dia tidak mendengar nasihat mereka, mereka cuba bercakap dengan Siti tentang masalah itu. Preethi sangat baik hati untuk menasihati Siti tentang cara pemakanan yang sihat dan mengubah tabiatnya. Sebelum itu, dia fikir terlalu sukar untuk menghentikan rutin biasanya sedangkan seperti kita yang sedia maklum pepatah berbunyi, di mana ada kemahuan di situ ada jalan.

DA.
KEPADA GIGI SAYA?

Stress is a Running Dog

By Elias Y8

Illustration By Monica Zhang

Beauty in Chaos

By Ashraf Natasha Mohamed Anees

Illustration By Monica Zhang

Drops in the Ocean

By Emeline Ang & Rachel Y10

poee

I Love You Mum

By Elysse Siau

In this enchanting section, our talented writers show their poetic prowess. Their verses will take you through a kaleidoscope of emotions and introspection.

Question

By Ranee Tan

A Summer Ride

By Keira Jade Jordan

Illustration By Monica Zhang

ems

Drops in the Ocean

By Emeline Ang

Drip drip

Water falls from the sky
It drops in the ocean

Drip drip

He watches the raindrops fall
Deep into the ocean they sprawl
Leaving traces unseen by his penetrating glare
So imperceptible it's almost not there

Drip drip

He watches the life beneath the ocean surface
Its absence within him are followed by regrets

He sits there
Hours upon hours
Days upon days
No thought goes by
No spark nor sign

Of his hope for after this stormy part
Of the daylight in the dark

Drip drip

He sits there
Letting the world whiz past
Disregarding the time
Like an old toy who's just been cast
Away and left to feel the rot of time

Drip drip

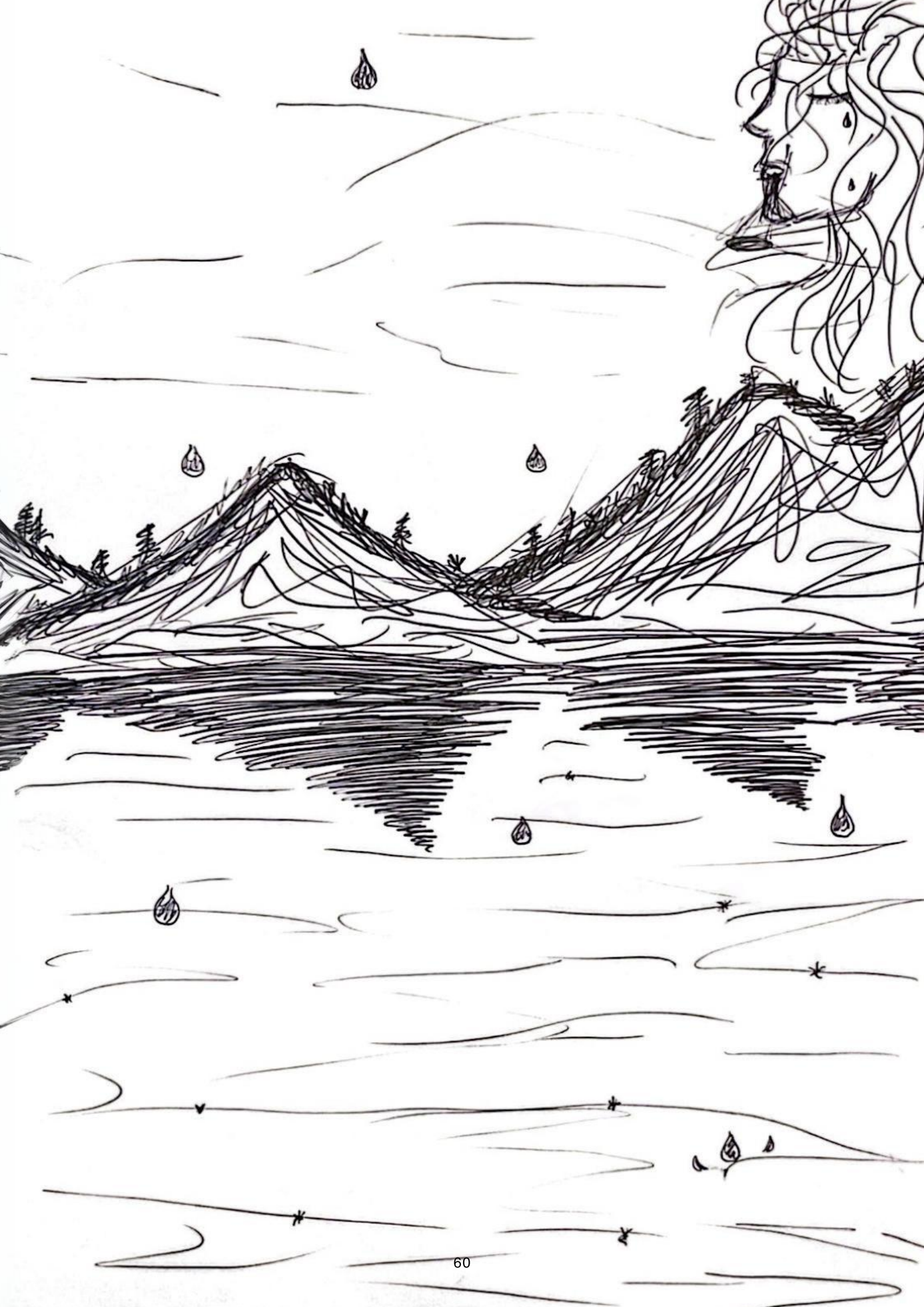
Time drains away from the man by the lake
Time waits for no one leaves despair in her wake
She slinks away unnoticed at first
But she catches up to him and then he is cursed
Doomed to regret what he didn't appreciate
Complacent and arrogant he took the bait

Time's absence once small now acutely felt
Like rain falling from the sky
Like a plan set in motion
Like the drops in the ocean



An art piece about enjoying the time we have
now and not taking it for granted

By Rachel, Y10



Stress is a Running

Dog

Stress is a running dog
It lets you jump like a frog
And makes you feel relentless pursuit
Till you earn the deserved tribute.

It provokes a heightened state of alertness
And leaves you in the darkness.
The brown-furred animal begins to sweat
But the dog is not exhausted yet.

By Elias Y8

**Illustration
By Monica Zhang**

It gives rise to the urgency
Which pushes aside your efficiency
And the body gets slow and slower
In addition, it steals your power.

In the end, you did die,
People think of you every time they look at the sky,
With the holy cross on the crying coffin,
Stress is a running dog, it kills your brain very often.



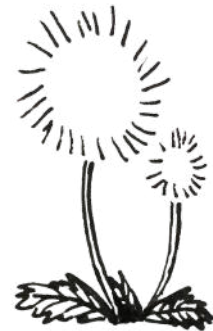
Beauty in Chaos

By Ashraf Natasha Mohamed Anees

a dandelion alone in the wind,
through simplicity its beauty shines,
the gentle breeze blowing in,
the concept of time declines.

yet its beauty goes unnoticed,
by eyes that are too wound up,
in their woes and only focus,
on the things in this world that are
Corrupt.

if only they knew,
peace can never be found,
unless we start anew,
and enjoy the world around.





A Summer

Ride

By Keira Jade Jordan

**Illustration
By Monica Zhang**

The valley is dotted with colours of
quiet yellows and vibrant violets
appearing seemingly insignificant under the stormy sky.

It is this day, this scene
that a grandfather and his granddaughter
embark on a valley ride.

The myriad emotions are pervasive and penetrate into the atmosphere;
fear of the unknown, of being inadequate, of being imperfect.
Even the loudest thought was lost by the noise of the horse's hooves
clacking the ground, breaking into a canter.

The deafening stresses that life inevitably holds
were nowhere to be found as the chestnut horse broke into a gallop.
"Being up here, looking down below has a way of clearing one's mind" he shouts
she wonders how he was able to speak clearly while on horseback.

A hurdle appears in the distance
a steepness, a sharpness, the unknown.
the rain that was light is now pelting against her face
she leans forward, putting her trust in the horse.

She urges her horse to gallop faster
as though she were on the run from the
destructive forces that follow closely behind her.

Tears fall but not of fear
of the overwhelming feeling that she
may encounter a sense of freedom.

The hurdle is appearing nigh,
her grandfather leads and she
follows.

She blinks, and is met with the
serene landscape she had only
encountered in books.

One of hope.
The fear that once coveted her life
melted in an instant
on that summer day.



By Elyse Siau



Mum

I sit behind a glass door
staring out, blanking out
to a song I have heard before.

The piano tink
under her weathered hands
and in my mind I think:

In my bowl,
the bigger half,
when she could have the whole,

and how

even after a long day,
my clean school clothes
without any delay.

The song plays on,
in my chair, I sit back
and I see her yawn.

She is beauty and wisdom
and then some.
To the door I whisper
goodnight
and, I love you Mum.

Feminist literary criticism focuses on the patriarchal representation of women in literature, dissecting societal norms and expectations that dictate their roles. In *Deaf Republic*, Kaminsky successfully employs Momma Galya's character to retaliate against patriarchal ideologies of women's image by transforming societal views on the exploitation of women's bodies. He does so by portraying women's bodies as a weapon that empowers them, rather than a vulnerability that subjects them to harassment and marginalisation. Initially celebrated for leading a courageous insurgency against the soldiers' violence, Momma Galya became a symbol of women's empowerment. However as the story proceeds, the transient nature of women's authority becomes increasingly evident. The poem delves into Momma Galya's struggles, revealing society's unfair expectations towards women in power. It exposes the profound injustice inflicted on her and explores the aftermath of her loss. The piece prompts reflection on the collective lack of remorse felt by a society that failed her, highlighting the tragic irony of her solitary bravery. This creative endeavor offers a multifaceted exploration of feminism within "*Deaf Republic*," emphasizing the brevity of women's power and the enduring struggles embodied by Momma Galya.

By Raneer Tan


What is a woman?
A quiet between two bombardments.

A woman is a silencer of most tongues, and yet
A shadow whose footsteps merely echo past a wall.
The woman who pedals barefoot
On her green bicycle.
She is the lullaby whose melody
Scribbles itself onto the dust of wind.
The puppeteer whose stage silenced bullets for a few heartbeats within the walls of Vasenka.

She is a mother.
A mother I am a stranger to, but whose tears
Stained my tongue and lingered
Even as the years grew beyond her. She plants the seeds in her soil,
Serenades the puppets to bed, the mother of beautiful,
Beautiful Vasenka.

She fades in the fog of my memory, a silhouetted figure
I cannot remember. Yet I still breathe
The smell of her tears
And taste the salt on her wounds.

In the crucible of silence, a woman blooms,
Her innocence woven in the fabric of resistance.
A puppeteer of the muted play,
Gazing beyond the facade of Vasenka's charade.



Between the lines of patriarchal decree,
She etches verses of autonomy.
She presents a tapestry of resilience,
“Hush”, the puppeteer signs, a magnificent brilliance.

A mother, yes, but more than the tears she shed
In my heart, a sanctuary where she paints the walls red.
Galya Armolinskaya, a name rippling in the echoes,
Yet, she yearns for a voice that resounds.

In this game of chess, she is both pawn and queen,
A Pandora's box in a society unheard.
Within the puppet's elusive dance,
She finds moments to break free, to inhale a newborn's fragrance
Is her newfound glee.

In the puppetry of life, she paves the way,
Threads of resistance woven in each play.
A green bicycle, her liberation,
In this silence, she finds her nation.

A heroine in shadows, her voice is concealed,
Yet, in the chaos of her mind, it is revealed.
Responsibility is a pacifier she wears,
A mother's heart burdened with silent affairs.

In Vasenka's gaze, she stands alone,
The puppeteer, Anushka's mother, a head overthrown.
The applause fades, replaced by murmurs of a hush,
As she swallows the Earth, the silent crush.

The wind now traps the green bicycle between its legs in stillness,
Frozen as the clock stops, but soldiers still wander,
Vasenka, once bathed in the hues of rebellion,
Now grapples with the ripples of silence's spell.

What is a woman to a world that forgets?
The puppeteer takes a bow to her live audience, an empty crowd of clouds.
The people of Vasenka, like puppets revealing their stage fright,
In these streets, they hide from the sunlight.

And yet on some nights, when patrols march,
The children mimic the wooden fists of a puppet that once belonged to their mother.
She signs, “dim the lights”, the child folds in her blanket,
Trapped in her little head the puppet show that was her bedtime story.

In the silence, Galya's spirit persists,
Their silence no longer signs rebellion but a testament of their sin.
Behind the curtains of her theatre,
The echoes of her footsteps ring in their guilty conscience.

In a time of peace, a subtle revolution starts,
For what is a woman, if not the naked pulse of Vasenka's heart?



The

Capturing the essence of life, this series of photographs captures ideas and thoughts that transcend time and photography may just strike you. Under The

Stop To Look

By Vivian Lang

Happiness Is Me Always

By An

Behind the Scenes

By Connie Cao



Gallery

A selection of visual artworks express written forms. Evocative paintings are enough to appreciate the beauty of the lens.

Stars... You and Me and Forever
by Alison Ip

Stars in the Void
By Asiia Uzalova

Winter Sky
By Erin Verity

Stop
to
Look.

Looking up at stars and dreams is important, but don't forget about the beauty at your fingertips

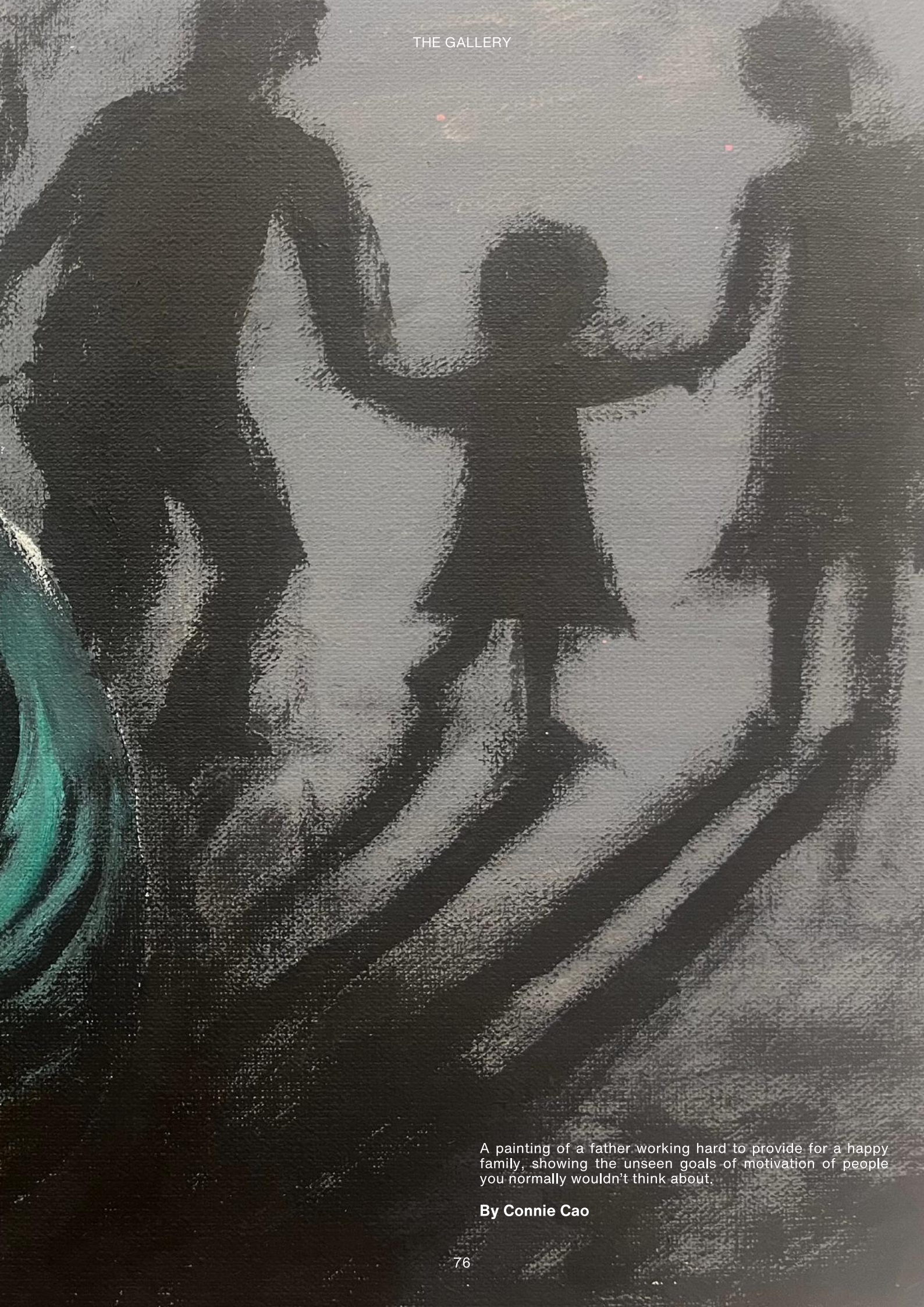
By Vivian Lang











A painting of a father working hard to provide for a happy family, showing the unseen goals of motivation of people you normally wouldn't think about.

By Connie Cao

Winter's Sky

A deer is suffering from hunger as the winter season begins and cannot find enough food for the family.

By Erin Verity





*Happiness Is... You
and Me Always
and Forever*

His name is Chips, my best furry-friend.
Always there for me, in the best and worst of times
Present unconditionally love and grace
Pleasure to go for a walk together
I care for him and he loves me
Never judges my appearance
Experience with me, no matter where I am
Snuggle up, make me feel safe, and love me as much as I love him
Swear to stay together, as long as we have each other

By Anson Ip

Stars in the Void

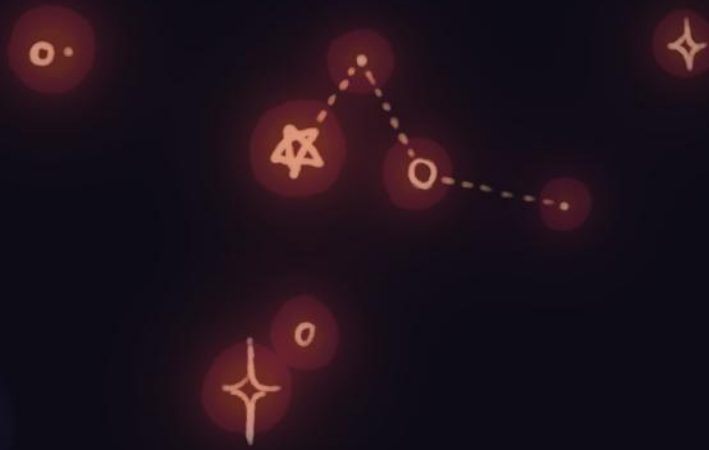
“You - you alone will have the stars as no one else has them.

In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars were laughing, when you look at the sky at night.

You - only you - will have stars that can laugh.”

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince.

By Asiiia Uzalova



But if you start
seeing stars among the
sky on the darkest night ...

it's not so bad,
is it ?

MYTH

Our writers, as truth seekers
reality. Is what you believe in
be

CONCEPTIONS

rs, unravel commonly-told myths and reveal the indisputable
a fact? Or is it a myth? Join us as we clarify the blurred lines
between truth and misconceptions.

THE UPLANDS

MYTHS DEBUNKED

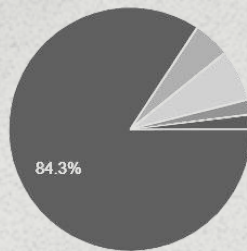


BANANAS DON'T GROW ON TREES?

Top Mythconception of this season!

Science on the table: bananas don't grow on trees. Bananas grow from a root structure that produces an above ground stem. This stem does not actually form a woody trunk, meaning that it technically can't be classified as a tree. The reason behind the term "banana tree" is the fact that these large plant species can grow to the size of a tree. So, the banana, an elongated berry, is actually the fruit of the world's largest herb.

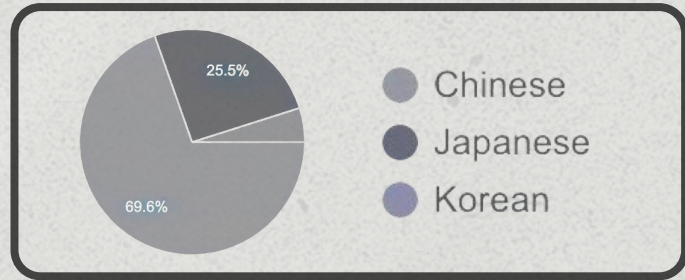
- Emeline Ang



- Trees
- Herbs
- Bushes
- Shrubs
- Vines

95.2% OF YOU GOT THIS WRONG!

THE ORIGIN OF FORTUNE COOKIES



Surprise not surprise, fortune cookies are indeed not Chinese! Let me explain.

Many confectionery and pastry shops near Kyoto, Japan around the 1870s created a cracker with the same twisted, Pac-Man shape and a paper telling your fortune tucked within. The "tsujiura senbei", according to Jennifer 8. Lee, author of "The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food", was made of sesame and miso instead of the typical ingredients vanilla and butter used to bake modern day cookies.

The fortune cookie most probably arrived in the US around the 1880s to the early 1900s after Japanese immigrants came to Hawaii and California due to the Chinese Exclusion Act, which created high demand for cheap labour. Following this exodus, many Japanese bakers set up bakeries mainly in Los Angeles and San Francisco, making miso and sesame-flavoured "tsujiura senbei", which later evolved into the more common fortune cookie we see served in Chinese restaurants all around the US. Myth debunked!

- Kai Ning Chan

UPDATE TIMES

EBUNKED!



**CALIFORNIA ROLLS-
NOT FROM CALIFORNIA?**

California rolls did not originate in California!

California rolls are a staple of American sushi. It has been influential in the spread of sushi as a global cuisine, as it is one of its most popular fusion variations. While it being an American staple sharing a name with the U.S. state of California may incline you to believe that it is named after the state, this is actually not the case! The 'California' in the name comes from CA, abbreviated from the added toppings of crab (C) and avocado (A). While this sushi variation is not of Japanese origin, it does not originate from California either. In fact, it actually originated in Vancouver in the 1970s!

The California roll eventually became a hit in the state of California, and even made its way back to Japan years later as a popular dish! (in Japanese it is referred to as California maki or Kashū Maki (加州巻き).)

- Max Tsui

DID YOU FALL FOR THE MYTHS?

THE UPLANDS

MORE MYTHS

THE BRAIN'S CAPACITY: A LIE?

Research and brain imaging studies have shown that humans use most, if not all, of our brain. During periods of rest, our brain is also fully active. The brain weighs about 3 pounds and contains around 100 billion neurons (cells that carry information). A common brain imaging technique, called functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), can measure activity in the brain while a person is performing different tasks. Using this and similar methods, researchers show that most of our brain is in use most of the time, even when a person is performing a very simple action. The percentage of brain use differs by individual, affected by what the person is doing/thinking about. This myth originated from a 1907 article by psychologist William James, who argued that humans only use 'part of their mental resources'. This myth has then been re-enforced by the media. - Amelia Li



BATS' MYSTERIOUS EYESIGHT

The misconception that bats are blind is indeed widespread and misleading! Contrary to this belief, bats possess the ability to see and navigate effectively in nocturnal conditions, essential for their nocturnal lifestyle! They are very active during the night and this is a skill which has allowed them to detect objects as fine as a human hair in complete darkness. Bats have eyes and can see, even though it's true that their vision might not be as developed as that of daytime animals, it is certainly functional. Bat eyes are just highly more sensitive to low light levels.

- Ines Chave

UPDATE TIMES

CONCEPTIONS

BULLS AND THE COLOUR RED

The colour red doesn't make bulls angry. As they are partially blind, they actually cannot see the colour itself. During bullfighting, these animals are often shown to be furious as the matador (bullfighter) swings their muleta (the small red cape). However, the bulls are likely irritated not by the colour red, but by the movement of the muleta. Therefore, if the flag were to be the colour yellow, orange, or purple, the bulls would still react the exact same way!

- Yu You Phuah

SLEEPING AND DIGESTION

There's no evidence that supports the mythconception that sleeping on your front aids digestion. Digestion takes place in the stomach and intestines. Therefore, the position you sleep in doesn't affect this process. For some, it can put pressure on your neck and spine. Sleeping on your front might be uncomfortable and affect your sleep quality. It's also not the most comfortable position for breathing and bring difficulties breathing properly.

To aid digestion, it's better to focus on maintaining a balanced diet, eating at regular intervals and avoiding large meals before bedtime. These factors impact your digestive health more than the position you sleep in.

- Mark Wee

HOLDING SNEEZES



It's dangerous to hold a sneeze

The myth surrounding the dangers of sneezing centres on the potential risks associated with suppressing this natural reflex. While there shouldn't typically be adverse effects from holding a sneeze, there are circumstances where it could pose potential harm. Specifically, if an individual holds their nose and sneezes against a closed nose and mouth, the pressure generated by the sudden expulsion of air may be redirected to delicate structures like the ears, potentially causing discomfort or injury, particularly for those with pre-existing ear conditions.

Furthermore, holding in a sneeze can exert strain on various muscles and may lead to sensations of tightness or pain in the chest, abdomen, or throat. While the risks are relatively low for most individuals, it's important to exercise caution, especially for those with underlying health issues, and to prioritize allowing the body's natural processes to proceed unhindered when possible.

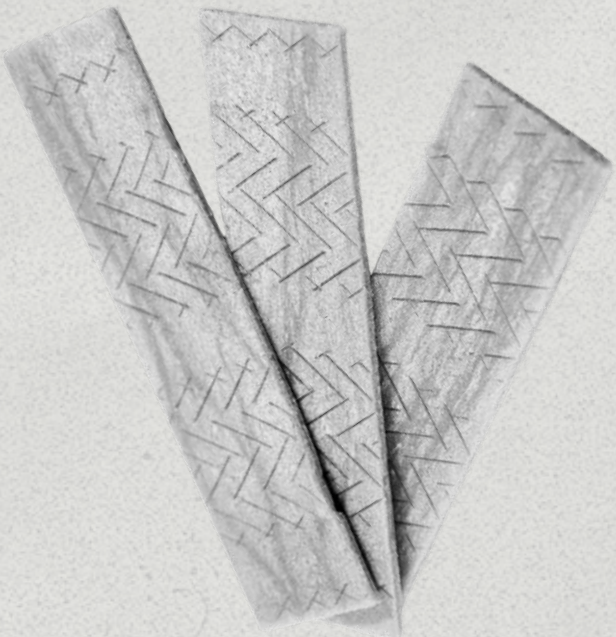
- Michelle Wang

THE UPLANDS

EVEN MORE MYTH

GUM: THE SECRET KILLER?

When it comes to reasons why children shouldn't swallow gum, you may have heard that it's because it stays in your stomach for years on end. The less common (but more outrageous) claim is that it sticks to your throat, and as you keep swallowing more gum, it accumulates to choke you. As you may have guessed, this is wildly untrue. The throat is covered in mucus, making it possible for gum to slide through with ease. The real reason children shouldn't swallow gum is due to the choking hazard and the fact that eating what is essentially rubber provides no nutritional benefits for the growing body. - Gimin Oh



THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Hello space lovers and everyone else!

Today, I want to talk to you about the myth that talks about the "dark side of the Moon". The myth tells us that there's something weird and mysterious on the side of the Moon that we can't see from Earth.

It is, in fact, not true. My point of the argument is that there's no "dark side" on the Moon! Earth's dear little companion rotates, as we all know, and sometimes goes into shadow that we call the new moon. And, when the Moon is in the shadow, its other side is lit by the sun! The other side of the Moon can be just as light as ours is, no need to demonize such a pretty planetary object known as our natural satellite. :)

Also, NASA has photos of the other side of the moon - just search it up in any browsing service and you can find them. - Asiia Uzalova

UPDATE TIMES

THE CONCEPTIONS

COLOUR OF THE SUN

Which color would you refer the sun to? Yellow? Orange? Both of these answers are wrong! Contrary to popular belief the sun is an impressive array of all colors. Rainbows are actually the rays of the sun separated. The sun may appear yellow to white to the human eye as all the colors are being mashed together. If you didn't know, white is not a color but a combination of all colors.

- Astride Petithomme, Siena Wedler Palaci

SWIMMING AFTER EATING

A common myth across generations is the swimming and eating misconception. "Swimming after eating is bad for you, you can't digest food correctly". Is this true? We are here to debunk this myth for you.

According to an American Red Cross science advisory, swimming after eating is bad for you was said to be a myth. It was explained that even though blood flow is diverted when swimming, there is no medically supported evidence of this being harmful to one. Dr. Melissa Stoppler stated, "Although doing any kind of exercise after eating a very large meal could be slightly uncomfortable, it is not in any way dangerous".

In conclusion, according to modern-day medical professionals, You can go ahead and enjoy your meal before taking a dip in the pool without any worries! - Dante Raszl



BASKETBALL AND GROWTH

It is said that if you play basketball, you're going to get taller. This is because some people think that when you're playing basketball you stretch your muscles and your bones get stronger, hence it aids the growing process.

- Rachel Y10

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And for all the people who do so much behind the scenes,
our parents,
our teachers,
and our friends.

