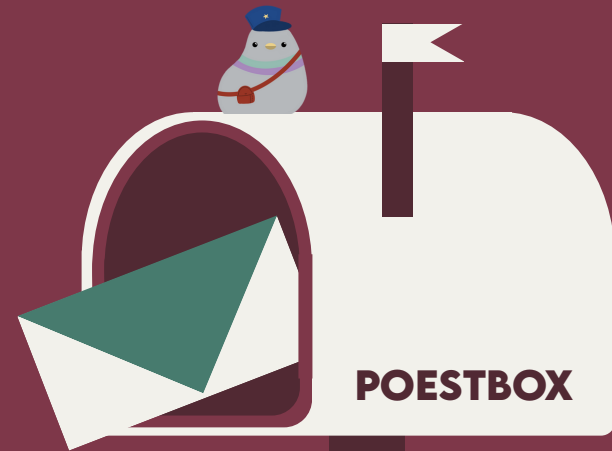


# INVITE



# POEISIS

# 01

# FOREWORD

Since its founding in 2021, Kaleidoscope – EJOrigin’s very own Fiction Committee – has committed itself to crafting stories that entertain and inspire. We’ve written poems; we’ve written short stories; and we’ve grown into a voice of the Origin in ourselves.

But now, the spotlight is not just on us. With Poeisis, we enter new territory: letting Eunoians submit their authentic voices, their work, and their stories for everyone to read. For the first time since 2021, you will have your voices in print—not our stories, but yours.

As we embark on this maiden venture together, we at EJOrigin hope that you’ll enjoy these poems, short stories and essays (essay?) as much as we did. But as you read the works of your fellow Eunoians, never feel too daunted to show us what you’ve got, too. Have a wonderful read :)

– Kaleidoscope



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# SHORT



# STORIES

FROM:  
A parting soul,  
A shot of What I Was,  
A pump of Could Have Beens,  
A dash of Unsaid Sorries.

EVAN SIA 25-E1



# Observance

(a lipogram)

01

Too Little, Too Late.

## Observance (a lipogram)

EVAN SIA 25-E1

Entombed below a stack of ads and announcements, a folded, crumpled, and somewhat water-soaked envelope lay at rest on the edge of the cold, hard, marble table.

Slowly but surely, the envelope would be exhumed from that jagged and layered mound. The excavators? A pentad of slender feelers, attached to a creased and puckered hand. Carefully, they take apart the papyrus grave sheet by sheet to extract the drenched envelope. An old woman holds up the envelope, cradled by her unsteady hands. Rough surfaces touch as the convex swell of the woman's thumb caresses the cockled paper softly, gently, and *fondly*. She already knows what, or *who*, the envelope concerns. She exhales, a feeble rasp, then chuckles under her breath, chortles suppressed even though there was no one around to hear her laugh. Not anymore. What was so humorous? The letter came late.

She hobbles over to the brown leather sofa that fronts the boxy TV, artefacts of an age long past. The flakey and tattered armrests of the couch as her crutch, she rests her weak frame on the left end of the two-seater sofa. Just as she starts to ease by her cosy corner of the couch, she remembers and moves to the centre; but that feels wrong, so she moves back to her favoured spot on the left.

Once comfortable, the old woman stares at the ebony characters scrawled across the small, cream-coloured envelope. She observes that what was meant to be her name had been water-smudged to form a jet-black gorge that hovered above the address. That dark spot, dead centre on the unadorned envelope, caught her eye: the last segment of a puzzle. The lost segment of a puzzle. As empty as a cavernous null space, an exposed wound. Entranced, she stares down that deep abyss. The creases and sags of her forehead fold as

she frowns: her aged face almost resembles a flesh-coloured prune.

She pauses for a moment, entranced.

After the awkward adjournment, awakened from her trance, the woman proceeded to tear open the envelope to extract the letter ensheathed by the paper sarcophagus. The lacquer-smooth letter looked elegant. Glossy cardstock paper and embossed artwork of chrysanthemums at the corners lent the feel of lustre and luxury. On that card, a couple of short sentences were followed by a date and venue. A request or summons to an event of some sort? A banquet, perhaps? Or maybe a –

An onslaught of shattered scenes and fragments echo through me. Broken shards of the past: an assembly of abstract photographs, brutally amalgamated to form what was once whole, comparable to a messy montage or haphazard gallery...

*A young boy plays with model cars. He squats and pushes them back and forth on the uneven wooden floorboards of the house to recreate how a sports car accelerates, or goes “vroom, vroom,” as he expresses exuberantly. The cherry red toy motor has small scratches and cracks on the roof; he wants an upgrade: a better, newer model. But Mama and Baba always tell the boy that “We don’t have enough money for toys.” He makes a resolve to one day own an actual sports car.*

*Next, a young entrepreneur focused solely on one goal: money. Out to prove the world wrong, the youth ascended the corporate ladder, holed up between the four walls of the workspace. He neglects meals to save some cash, and on weekends, he spends even longer hours hard at work to catch the boss’ eye. A beat-up Toyota Corolla was the only attachment he was proud of. These long hours of work must someday pay off, he mused.*

5 *They do pay off. Last, an old man atop the world. He has all he*

*could ever want: a devoted spouse, a daughter, two grandsons, three Good Class Bungalows, an opulent fleet of sports cars, and almost seventy percent of shares of an extremely large MNC. Was that man meant to be me? Was that my legacy?*

Once she reads the letter, her eyes start to swell; salty tears break the dam of her ocular apertures. She attempts to hold them back, but her efforts are nugatory. They run off her concave, parchment cheeks. A usual occurrence by now, a common scene. The torrent of flashbacks resumes:

*A solemn teardrop rolled down a younger, smoother, rouge-powdered cheek. On our tenth date, you were seated by the storefront aperture of the haute restaurant for our rendezvous. The clock had struck twelve a.m., we were supposed to meet at half past ten. Talks with my stubborn boss bled over to after hours. After the clunker of a Toyota had been parked, my legs refused to make a mad dash towards the restaurant doors, and my stubborn mouth opposed the utterance of an apology. The only “sorry” you got was “surely you understand the utmost urgency of my job?” As usual, you nodded and brushed the tears off your perfect, heart-shaped face.*

*Cut to another scene, years later. The growl of my Porsche heralded my entrance through the gates of our bungalow. You rested atop the brand-new leather sofa you bought last week, our toddler daughter on your lap, huddled towards the left of the couch; the seat next to you was left empty for me. You muttered a few words about how much you need me and how our daughter needs me even more, beyond my money. To brush you off, my reply was about how employees nowadays demand too much and how fresh graduates are the worst, such far-fetched demands. As usual, you nodded and brushed the tears off your lovely but weary face.*

*The banquet had ended. The moment our daughter left the ballroom, cradled by her newlywed husband, your mask of joyfulness fell to reveal sorrow. The young couple had departed.*



*You, however, had not. You stood by the entrance of the hall, feet rooted to the floor, lanky arms folded. You stood there for half an hour. Or so you told me, after my return from overseas on corporate travel. My rebuttal was: Blame my secretary, she arranged the return journey on the wrong day, not me. As usual, you nodded and brushed the tears off your old, exhausted face.*

Now, even as my soul returns to you for one last moment, my very essence calls out to you and begs you not to cry anymore because at last, at long last, I am here. But to borrow what we CEOs used to tell second-rate employees: “A day late and a dollar short.”

The characters etched on the letter are clear now:

“Dear XXX...

We welcome you to accompany us  
to celebrate the legacy of the...”

... Not “beloved” nor “dearly departed,” just *late*.  
Too late.



Ephemera

the act of  
impermanence

Yen Wei Shern 25-U5

# Ephemeria

YEN WEI 25-U5

*Jackson covered his eyes as the Sun's golden rays shone down on him. This pair of sunglasses has served him well over the years, considering he bought them at Chinatown for a good 5 bucks.*

*The Big Apple. The City That Never Sleeps. Empire City. New York. Probably the most famous city known to mankind, now also the newest location of where Jackson's dreams of earning big, finding love and settling down are being squashed.*

*As he walked through the streets, Jackson felt his stomach growl. Great, the thought of food reminded him of how much he misses food back in Malaysia. Searching on his phone for nearby cheap food, Jackson was once again reminded why his mum always screamed at him to look up from his phone when he felt his shin bang against a hard signboard.*

*The loud bang on the street was enough for passer-bys to stare at him, largely with judgement, and for the door to swing wide open with an old man. "Young man, are you alright?" He asked, face filled with concern. Albeit, Jackson didn't hear the old man's words, but did notice his shin screaming at him due to impact.*

*"Child, come on in. The Sun is bright but you don't seem much to be. Come come," The old man guided Jackson inside, one hand picking up the sign and the other opening the door. Jackson limped in, while trying to figure out if his toes can still wiggle.*

*Jackson was no stranger to bookstores, but this one was definitely a different dimension from the rest. The smell alone gave off vibes of tradition and history. The sights of shelves stacked with books yellowed with age, the lamps hanging in every corner barely giving-*

*-off light and the old wooden and probably unstable chairs around a small coffee table, really made Jackson think he teleported to the cafe where George Washington must have written the Constitution. And then there's the old man, who despite having white hair on top and no hair elsewhere, still smiles like he is ready to spend the next 20 years of his life partying.*

*"Well sit down child, or do I have to invite you to do that too?" The old man laughed. Jackson shook his head, "Thank you for inviting me in. I apologise for the commotion I caused up front."*

*"Ah, that old signboard of mine. Janet always told me to remove it, but what am I to do? My old wife made me draw it with her, much against my will," The old man smiled, amusement written in his tone. Jackson stuck out his hand, "I am Jackson, do you own this store?" "Indeed I do, I'm Teddy, Teddy Brown. Here, take a muffin, my daughter baked it." The old man placed the muffin in Jackson's outstretched hand. Never thought muffin could offer greetings, Jackson thought. Biting into it, Jackson remarked, "Strawberry and caramel? That's exciting." "Teddy snorted, "Yeah, that girl likes to make me her guinea pig." Yet, Jackson swore he saw a sparkle in his eyes as Jackson complimented the cupcake.*

*"Had lunch Jackson? If not, I brought a bit too much," Teddy scurried over to the counter to rummage through his bag. Teddy laid out a surprising spread of home-cooked food." "What's the occasion?" Jackson asked. "Eat first, talk later," he said, handing Jackson a plate. Jackson stumbled out of the bookstore and looked at his watch. 4.51 pm. He had entered at around 12.30 pm, last he checked time wasn't supposed to soar like that.*

*The lunch, though unorthodox, had been enjoyable nonetheless. Jackson and Teddy chatted through various topics, and Jackson had to admit he hadn't found a better person to talk to in a while.*

*Teddy, though being nearly 80 years old, still runs the bookstore everyday. Despite business being bad, he never once wanted to -*



-close down. "Me and the wife opened it when we retired. This is the place we spent many years together. You may be too young to realise this but certain attachments are too hard to let go," Teddy explained while attempting to wrap his piece of pineapple in bread. Teddy also had the weirdest eating habits. They finished lunch and explored their shared love for books. Teddy introduced many old and unknown books to Jackson, while Jackson continued bringing up his childhood memories of reading numerous story books.

Jackson looked at the book held in his hand, "Limerence". Jackson knew it as being infatuated with another person, which didn't really explain why Teddy shoved it into his arms before Jackson left. "Trust me and just read it, it's a good book, you just need to open your eyes and read the words. Remember, it's left to right, not up to down. You don't come from Ancient China," Teddy winked and waved goodbye to Jackson.

Jackson looked up, he was back at his apartment. He opened the door, took a long bath before snuggling comfortably into his bed to read his new book. It wasn't until a week later that Jackson got reminded of his interaction at the bookstore. A letter came for him, with the word "INVITE" written on it. Opening it with a confused expression, Jackson raised an eyebrow as he read through the letter. Teddy was inviting him for an event that he held once a week at his bookstore, a gathering for old readers. Me? Old? He's crazy, Jackson thought as he went to pull out fits to get ready for that evening.

As Jackson stepped into the bookstore, he realised that it was empty, with Teddy sitting at the counter peering over a book. "Seems like you came," Teddy murmured. Jackson shrugged, "Didn't have plans for tonight. Where's everyone else?" Teddy smiled, "I sent invitations every week to my old friends and buddies, they come every once in a while, despite them promising me they would come every week. " Jackson realised that smile was full of sadness, " Well I'm here for the coffee you promised me."

Teddy's face brightened up, "Boy, its 7.30pm. I'm grabbing my wine."

And so it became a weekly routine. Each Friday, Jackson received an invitation and spent the evening talking with Teddy over wine. Sometimes old friends joined, sometimes Janet brought questionable muffins. Slowly, Jackson found comfort—and feelings —growing

"So Janet, are you free tomorrow night?" Jackson asked, trying to be cool about it. Janet looked right at him with those eyes Jackson swore he could see the stars in, "Probably, why? Are you asking me out?" She laughed. Jackson felt his throat close, her laughter was making the butterflies in his stomach laugh. "If there is dinner involved, I want to come." Teddy shouted from halfway across the room.

"How did he hear me?"

"No clue, somehow he can hear but can't taste when I ask him to try my brownies."

"Hey! I can still hear the two of you!" Jackson laughed, he hadn't felt such joy in a while. I hope this lasts, he thought.

As Teddy and Jackson waved Janet goodbye that night, Teddy smacked Jackson on the arm, "You dare ask out my daughter without my permission? Rude." "Well, may I?" "Over my dead body." Teddy snorted. Jackson smirked, before starting to pack up. "Jackson my boy, will you promise me one thing?"

"If it's helping you run away from the police, it's a hard pass." Jackson chuckled out.

Teddy snorted, "That I can do myself." He looked out the window at the heavy rain. Jackson, feeling the mood shift, sat down as well and looked out the same window.

*“Look after her, will you? When I am gone.” Jackson nodded. The weight of those words lingered long after the rain outside faded.*

*Two days later, Jackson heard a knock on the door. Another letter came for him, with the same words “INVITE” written on it. Taken aback, Jackson read the letter with a million thoughts in his mind.*

**Dear Jackson,**

***I am writing my very last invitation to you, this time, my funeral.***

***I thank you for the happy conversations and discussion you had with me over the past 10 months. You have made this old man very happy, and very peaceful.***

***Cancer took me away, to bring me to meet my wife once again. And I hope you and Janet will one day get married. Yes, I knew you two were dating, I am not stupid.***

**Regards,  
Teddy Brown**

*Tears rolled down his face. But why? He knew of this – Janet had told him on their first date. He blinked away his tears and rushed to the bookstore.*

*Janet sat there staring at the ceiling. Jackson sat in the chair next to her. The silence hung between them.*

*“Died in his sleep...” Janet trailed off.*

*“He knew, he just did.” Jackson said softly.*

*They held hands in silence.*

*Jackson looked down at the piece of paper in his hand. Then it hits him like a truck -*

*Teddy’s very last invite.*

# POETRY





# Those Lightless Times

DYLAN JORGE FINLAYSON 25-A4

When sun rays creep past valleys deep,  
By the second shadows stretch along quiet roads that weep.  
No longer creatures hide in fixtures;  
Emerge from their dingy hovels; paint the night in haunting features.  
Black – like tar's – all the stars  
Succumb to darkness; the night's, not all are willing to mar.  
Light will sever but return never,  
Just like hope the lost await because they know forever:  
In here, you decide safety is near  
But it rarely is. Such that you can't control your fear.

The night scares off all its invitees. This host is most cruel.

But. It rarely is such that you can't control your fear.  
In here, you decide. Safety is near,  
just like hope. The lost await because they know forever:  
'light will sever but return'. Never  
succumb to darkness, "the night's knot". All are willing to mar  
black – like tar's. All the stars  
emerge from their dingy hovels. Paint the night in haunting features  
no longer. Creatures hide in fixtures  
by the second. Shadows stretch along quiet roads that weep  
when sun rays creep past valleys deep.

# intrusion

GAEL 24-E1

the door  
broken  
down  
welcomed.  
my home  
drowned  
in  
crevices, corners  
and  
whispers,

"your candlelight will meet charon, and cross the river down south. divorce is  
final, parting is the end.  
sometimes the best thing a flower can do for us, is die.

all that  
is  
left  
is  
to  
give  
into  
the night  
create  
a void  
and  
fill  
me  
Whole

# Locked Out

LIYANA 25-13

i see you in pictures you didn't know others could see..  
i see you in angles you'd be shocked to know exist.  
i see you in places, doing things you've never told me.  
i ask you what you've been doing,  
just to test if you'll actually let me back into the life you used to readily  
share with me.

but you've barred the doors.  
i've crept too far from the line and i've lost the key,  
and you're not letting anyone else in anymore.  
i've locked myself out of your life,  
but who's to blame?  
is it you, for deciding to lock away your stories,  
or is it me, for waiting for an invitation back in?

well, now i'm stuck outside the ball, in my nicest gown,  
and you're letting in people who are unkempt  
and have no manners at all.  
they're way too loud,  
but you smile and laugh as they yell at you,  
joining in with the rowdiness as if it was all natural to you.  
why can i no longer elicit the same reaction from you, no matter what i do?

i'll learn the names of the guest list that i have been excluded  
from, and learn what they've got that i've been lacking all along.  
when i see them around, you bet that i'll be staring, watching their every  
move. what do they have that i don't?  
is it their smile, their laugh or their carefree spirit?  
there's so much i can change about me,  
so much i can fake,  
so, just invite me back in,  
just let me back in.

let me be a part of the party,  
let me sip your favourite wine that you're  
serving. let me at least know what colour it is,  
so when your birthday comes again,  
i'll serve you bottles of it,  
while the others forget and give you worthless things.  
just let me take one step back into the room, that i  
used to be so familiar with,  
that i used to have the key to.  
how dare i lose it?  
why was i so foolish to believe you'd replace it? now,  
i'm locked out of your life, with no way to break in. but  
i'll keep searching for the key,  
i'll keep begging the guards,  
i'll keep banging the locked doors,  
i'll keep searching for a window i can  
break. i'll keep looking for a way in.  
you could never lock me out for long.





# rejuvenation

## PRETZELS 25-O1

what is rejuvenation? the act, the emotions, the feelings  
the indecision  
ultimately, where do we draw the line?

memories fade, cities fall, countries disappear  
Yet they experience rejuvenation in some form  
whether is it now  
or  
in the future  
no one knows, its for those who seek solace to  
figure out. is this what laissez-faire means?

philosophers speculate, historians debate, governments  
dictate. what is truly representative of our society  
one might never find out

while one hinges upon the past failures, trauma, disappointment  
the world moves on  
when we choose to move on  
it might be too late  
why is it too late to experience rejuvenation though?  
it isn't.

rejuvenation takes place when we choose to allow it to take place  
not when circumstances forces us to move on  
the tyranny of the reality  
which forces conformity  
what then is rejuvenation? the act, the emotions, the feelings  
or the indecision



# remembering hiroshima

## PRETZELS 25-O1

hiroshima, what an icon  
brought to fame by its history  
narrated by its survivors  
yet, we learnt beyond the ideals of peace  
immersing ourselves in the progress it has made  
and  
the traditions they hold onto so dearly

writing this, while suffering from post-trip depression

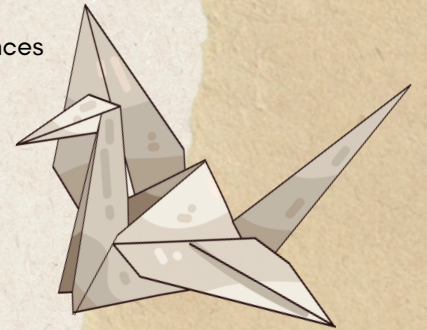
a humbling feeling  
that the emotions, the adrenaline, the experiences  
can never be experienced again.

these memories, slip away as the days slip by  
is there a way to stop this process?  
this inevitable feeling of nostalgia  
is something we yearn for

yet  
if we continue to hold onto the past  
that makes us no different from  
those who resist change  
who eventually regress into  
mediocracy

why is the realities of life so  
unfair.  
unforgiving.  
unkind.

at the end of the day, at least we experienced those special feelings once  
sometimes, it's about being grateful, being fulfilled about what we have  
hiroshima, you were a once in a lifetime experience  
till the next time we meet!





# Unarmed in your arms

MEGAN HANNAH 25-16

You are the one fortress in which I can lay down my sword and dance unarmed

for I am  
that I am

I lay down and  
found

You in my  
dream

arms.

You held my arm

and danced

that I am

You own my sword,  
so

hold me

one of in all

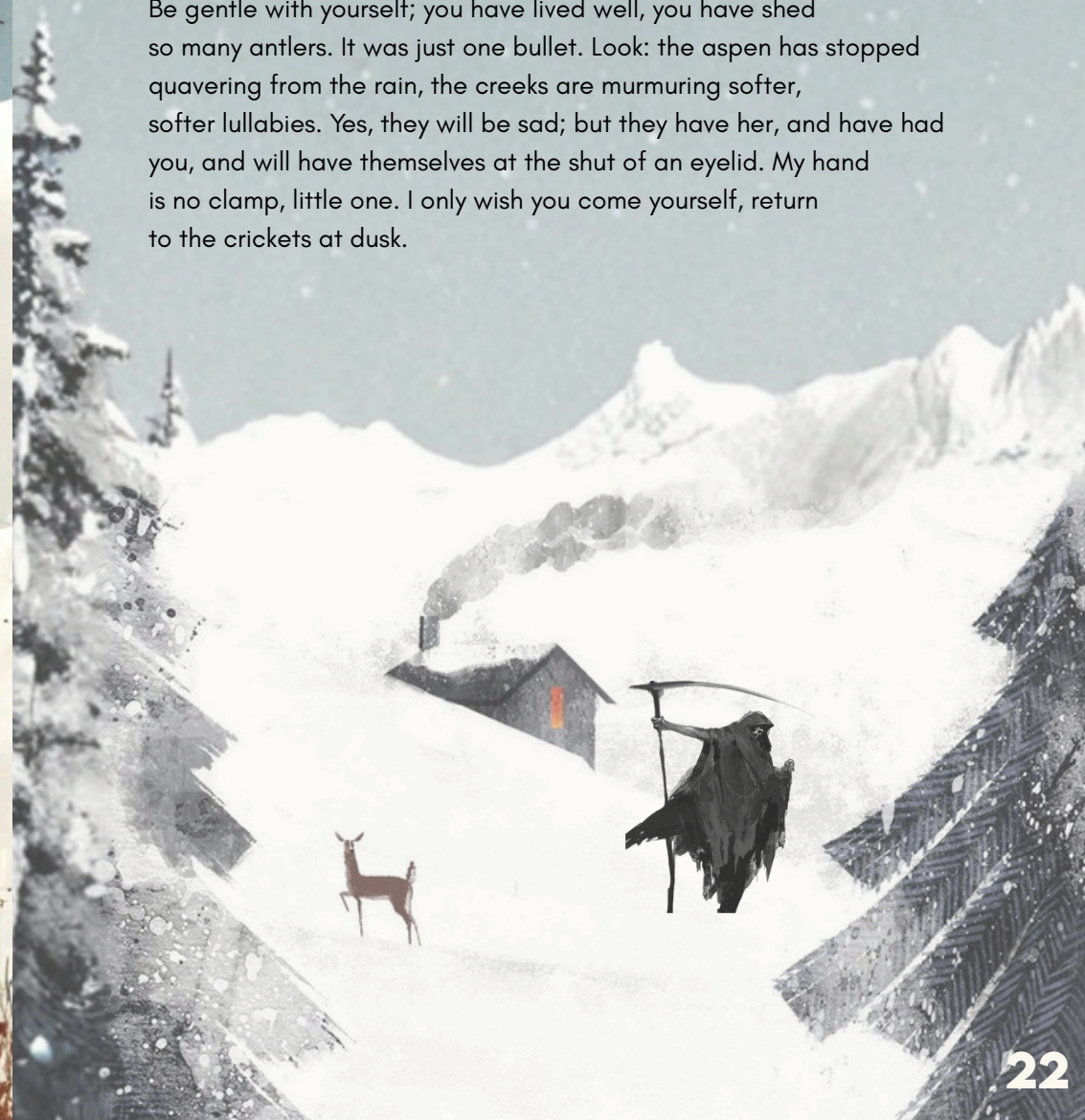
that I am



# Elegy to a Deer

Elliot Chew 25-U1

Be gentle with yourself; you have lived well, you have shed so many antlers. It was just one bullet. Look: the aspen has stopped quivering from the rain, the creeks are murmuring softer, softer lullabies. Yes, they will be sad; but they have her, and have had you, and will have themselves at the shut of an eyelid. My hand is no clamp, little one. I only wish you come yourself, return to the crickets at dusk.





# The endless march of time

JAKIN ONG 25-15

Perhaps time is a train,  
and life is an invite on this mysterious ride.

People step on and off without warning,  
but the train stops for no one,  
slows for no one.  
Nothing derails its march to infinity.  
Some have tried to hold on forever,  
but no one can ever outsmart the conductor.

We are assigned a carriage at birth  
with no explanation,  
no rhyme or reason why.  
Some spend their journey wondering  
why their walls rattle more than others,  
why their lamps flicker,  
why the seats feel colder.  
Some don't notice at all,  
lost in conversation,  
or laughter,  
or the rhythm of the wheels  
humming their own quiet lullaby.

We reach desperately for meaning.  
Some look back into the dark behind us,  
Some study the train's workings,  
Some place their faith in things unseen,  
Some lose hope.  
But all go to the same destination.

There are times,  
when the night deepens,  
and the world outside becomes still,  
we see clarity in the glass  
and realise—  
perhaps the point was never to question the tracks,  
nor to outrun the conductor,  
but the beauty was always in the journey,  
and in the invite to ride we hold.

## Replying to an Invite (a sonnet)

EVAN SIA 25-E1

"Five more days before submissions will close"  
The online invitation clearly states.  
With not enough time to write this in prose,  
I Google up some poetry templates;

Shakespearean sonnets look simple enough,  
Just three quatrains followed by a couplet.  
Finding a theme for this poem was tough,  
Again, I refer to the internet;  
GPT wrongly writes it Petrarchan,  
Grok just spouts whatever the hell it likes.  
Hopeless, I return where this quest began,  
The email, at once, inspiration strikes.  
I gift this literary synthesis,  
As my contribution to Poeisis.



too hard to draw  
and they remind me of the fish i swallowed  
when i was 8 i fell into the pond  
the pond was a circle too  
i dont like circles

sometimes i imagine the fish is still alive  
circles in me until they divide  
was it when i learnt the world is made of circles?

the trees are made of circles  
humans are just circles  
but how are rectangles circles they are not  
circles are round rectangles are not

who was it that taught me of circles

The first time i

truly

saw circles on circles  
it was dripping red and falling apart  
I told myself not to look at circles  
but how can i roll up circles  
when nothing i see is made of circles

circles can be blue can be  
red can be yellow green can be red  
can be pink purple indigo can be red  
green brown indigo violet magenta red  
color the circle yellow green blue purple red  
color circle lebu ytwo grenen purpel piknr red

red

Red

REd

RED

RED

COVER YOUR CIRCLES OR YOU WILL SEE RED

BUT COVER MAKE NOTHING IS CIRCLE IS RED

COVER YOUR CIRCLES OR YOU WILL HEAR RED

WHEN WAS IT I LEARNT THE WORLD IS RED

YOUR MOUTH CAN YOU TASTE RED BITE HARDER  
YOUR

eyes

skin

heart

RED RED RED RED THE THIRD PLANET IS RED RED RED RED THE  
THIRD PLANET IS RED

the third planet is red

The third planet is red

thethirdplanet isacircle thegalaxy isacircle everything isacircle

I Am Circle

# circle

ANONYMOUS 25-O1

# roadtrip

ANONYMOUS

don't all roads lead to you, anyway?  
forgiveness.  
so when time tries to  
interject and space bites his  
tongue

i hope you know  
that my map ends there too.

but right now,

we're on the same bus  
hurtling down the highway  
swerving; rattling; tumbling; dancing a fiery tango with the clouds  
teasing guardrails  
taunting falling rocks  
while we close our eyes  
blind to the abyss.

# threshold

ILH 25-O1

strip of light to cross the line — not so far there's no return — space  
nonetheless valuable  
decisions blurred by flat static's low hum  
door held open but  
at arm's length  
you extend what you can  
in the possibility  
falter

# hiroshima castle

ILH 25-O1

auburn razed to ash  
castle stands anew — remains  
ground again, ground up

# UPROOTED

ATHENS SAGE 25-I1

Moving through the world,  
finding our own footing in this ever-evolving landscape  
letting the moments,  
different faces, and  
experiences  
find its way into our lives.

Nothing is forced to stay,  
and nothing is chased away.

Life simply sorts itself out  
in mysterious ways.

Some things settle softly into place,  
others fade before one even notices they're gone.

-----FILTERED-----

One discovers what truly belongs to him  
and what was only ever meant to brush against his path before drifting on.





# to the little boy picking flowers on the overhead bridge

ANONYMOUS


when you grow older,  
you will learn to watch from afar  
to let bougainvillea bask in sun  
and to leave beauty unmarred

but right now,  
clumsy fingers grasp sun-kissed petals  
branch stretches through railing  
bloom dances from palm to bike basket  
and takes a breath on books of dreams.

you'll realise, one day  
hands can always choke  
and scraped knees tend to scar  
but on this bridge, there is spring  
she caresses every bud  
til life is unhurt by time

glass makes up no blossom  
is anyone truly alive?  
flowers, rooted in dirt  
exist only in purgatory.

i see my mother  
in the bleeding hearts on the shelf  
aching, yet anchored  
by the puddle of faith at her roots



my sister  
a wreath of amaryllis  
soaring above the doorstep  
daring gravity to pull her down

i am a roadside bougainvillea  
woody in nature, made of grit

i hope i never learn to dream



# wet tarmac dreaming of the sky

ANONYMOUS

most days, you don't exist  
you cradle the burning light around you  
purify, polish, and keep it in your pocket  
marble of sun, smooth to your rough touch

but when smoke permeates the air,  
stains lungs with ash,  
chokes eyes with ink,

i see you  
under slippery tyres,  
beneath soaked soles  
wishing for nothing but the world

rain-soaked tarmac  
is surprisingly blue.





# my soul could fit in a crow's nest

ANONYMOUS

twigs of time;  
hurt woven in

in my mind, there is a crow  
beady iris, shimmering wing  
he likes stones that have lain in the sun  
emanating warmth but cool to the touch

see; beneath his fierce talon,  
his boastful plumage  
guards a prized possession

seaglass  
most moulded for the palm  
yet some deceptively sharp;  
enough to mark skin and pierce hearts

it is no secret that  
life wittles down the treasure we stow  
we deny that  
time ebbs and flows just beyond our grasp

so perhaps the crow is foolish  
clinging to grit and trash  
but what else, if not this collection,  
is proof of days long past?

# MICRO FICTION





# Answering the Night

## Answering the Night

KAIDON 25-11

The knocking started at 11.22pm — three slow taps, as if rehearsed.

Cyrus froze.

His grandmother's old warning slid back into his mind: A vampire can't enter unless you invite it.

He'd laughed at those stories as a kid. He wasn't laughing now.

Another knock.

Then a voice, soft and trembling.

*"Cyrus... It's cold. Please let me in."*

His breath hitched. For a heartbeat—just one—he believed. It sounded so achingly like his sister: the tremble, the soft way she used to say his name. The familiarity hit him like a punch.

And just as fast — his mind spat out the truth he'd tried to bury — want wasn't the same as reality.

She had been dead for 3 months. He was hallucinating.

He squeezed his eyes shut, telling himself this was stress, exhaustion, anything but what it sounded like.

The voice shifted, still hers, but smoother; hungrier.

*"Open the door, Cyrus. You invited me once, remember? On the night I came back."*

His stomach dropped.



That night, half-asleep and drowning in tears , he had dreamed of her silhouette beyond the glass. He remembered whispering, *Come in*, before waking to emptiness.

A shadow slid across the window, stretching too far, bending wrong.

"Once, you welcomed me," it murmured.

*"Now—again."*

"No," Cyrus said, voice shaking. "I take it back."

The door handle rattled violently—then silence.

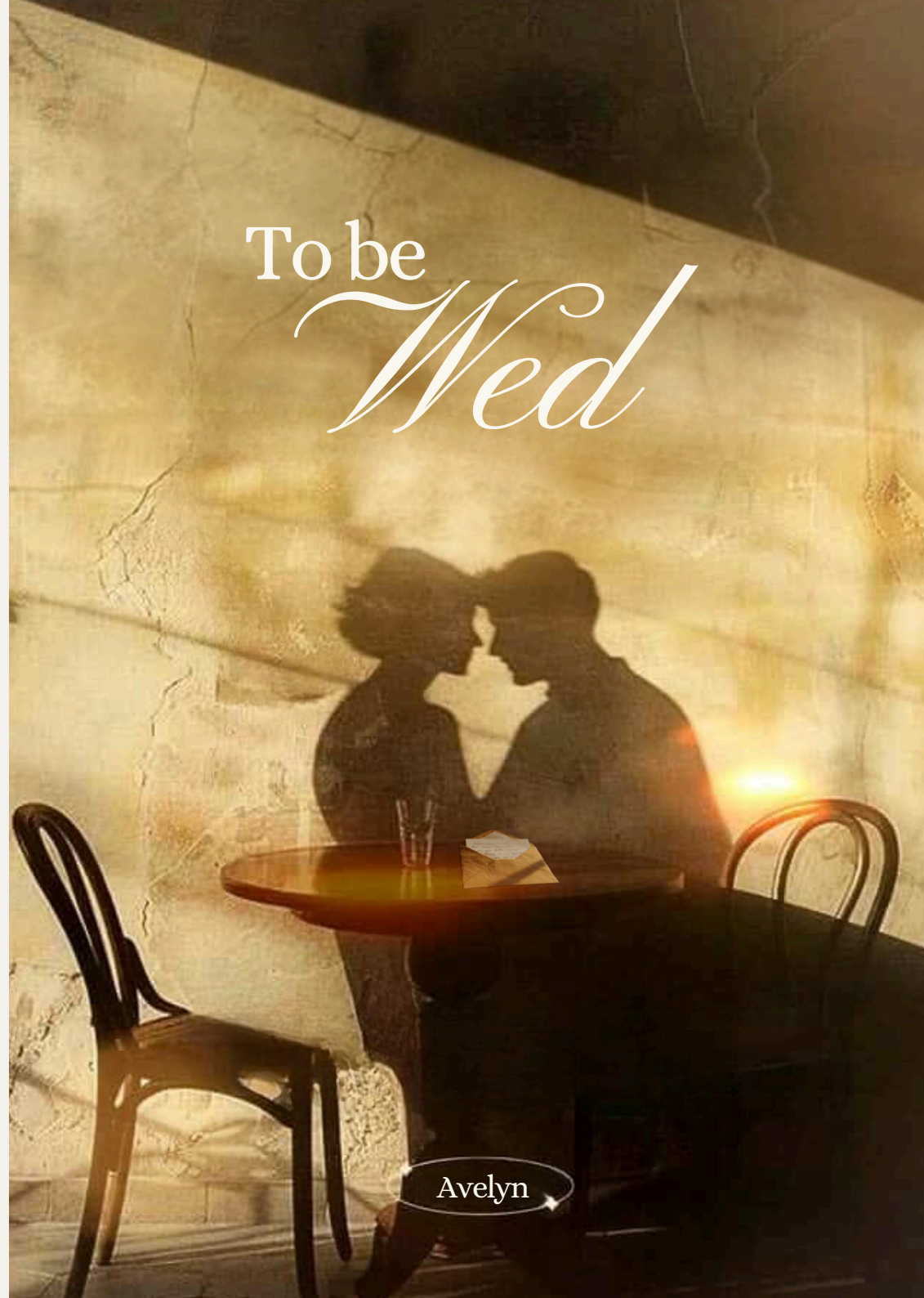
He barely breathed—until he heard it whisper from the window, closer than before:

*"Guard the door, Cyrus—*

*I'm already in your mind; and that's closer than your home ever was."*



# To be *Wed*



Avelyn

# To Be Wed

AVELYN 25-A2

It came in a thick cream envelope embossed with their initials. Sealed with a wax stamp that shimmered when it caught the light. Beautiful, fancy, completely unlike her. Pulling out the invitation, he skimmed the contents.

Kiana and Ashton cordially invite you to celebrate their wedding day!

She was getting married.

He barked a laugh, flipping the card over, half expecting some sort of fine print to explain the joke.

29th of March, Wednesday. Of course she would pick her birthday — she was too sentimental to not pick a day of significance for her wedding.

She was getting married. Someone else was going to stand beside her, saying vows she once said she didn't believe in.

Tracing the wax seal with his thumb, he couldn't help but feel like the entire invitation was a mockery. Kiana hated fancy things. She used to call ceremonies "performative and nonsensical". This vineyard wedding, the gold calligraphy, the wax stamp, simply weren't her.

He sank into a chair, folding the invitation back into the envelope, the weight of the past pressing into his ribs.

For a moment, he held it between his fingers, and wondered if she'd hesitated before sending it; if her hand hovered over the way it did now.

But his name and address was written in her neat script, steady and certain.

She wanted him there.

# Envelope



# Envelope

## CHUE EUNG 25-O1

Void black, stained with gilded cursive characters that arched and twirled. A single blood red seal keeping the message hidden in its folds.

Eyebrows arched, eyes widened, lips twitch. Fingers glide along the envelope, feeling its edge and its smooth matte body.

Lips pursed, eyes blinked, eyebrows furrowed. Withered hands scratched their head whilst they muttered about “these days”, “teenagers”, “got to be a prank”.

Sighing, a body plops onto the velvet cushion with a “ploop” and “poosh” and the crinkling of the envelope paper filled the windowless yet warmly lit room.

“Invi...tation?” the voice whispered out.

Brown-aged polaroids of idiotically grinning faces, photographs (and of course unglams of a younger, more carefree them), voices of friends, of family, of life. They all tumbled out of the envelope and to the ground in a heap. Groaning, they bent down and gingerly picked each one up, hands trembling slightly.

“Stupid tremors,” HE chided himself.

One, by one, by one, each wide smile, each wheezing laugh, each loving gaze HE heard and that HE saw, HE broke. Just a little.

Then he found her. And his heart broke into billions of tiny shards that elicited a groan from him.

Too.. many...emotions.

Her starry black eyes that he fell into, the laugh lines he traced, that perfect smile he could spend an eternity staring into. Her laughter beyond the singing of sirens; her touch fiery to his skin; her hopes that paralleled his. She’s called him back.

Then a picture of her decked in perfect white, beside her stood a handsome groom drinking in her cheery lil dance with a silly little smirk. On it was written two words.

Come home.

Clenched fist.  
Photographs strewn.

Step

By

Step.

Door knob. Hand.

Twist. Open.

Glowing light.

Step

By

Step.

Home.

Invited home.



# ESSAYS



## An Invitation to Reflect on Male Loneliness & Friendships

ROYDEN NEOH 25-14

### **(Side-note) Structure of the essay:**

*The essay will start with an observation on male friendships, then progress to the context of Singaporean society and the stance of the essay as to why males are lonely in Singapore. Continuing from the stance, friendship and pragmatism will be defined. This will then lead into how systemic factors, local values and global narratives, will influence male loneliness in Singapore. Finally, the essay will end with a conclusion and a reflection.*

### **My observation on my male friendships:**

*Here's my brief observation. For all the ease and loud camaraderie found in male friendships, they are rarely as all-encompassing as their counterparts. In many instances, male friendships serve to fulfil transient pleasure rather than build on emotional vulnerability, resulting in a sizeable number of males feeling lonely in our generation. Typically, male friendships often look like this: guys ask to hangout, meet at the gym together, or play a sport, but rarely do they talk about their vulnerabilities - insecurities, emotions and life-problems. Even in group chats, conversations are frequently dominated by memes, banter and ironic detachment. Personally, I've often encountered many male friends going home feeling empty despite a fervent day of activities. Why the incongruity? If constant activities are mainly how male friendships sustain, shouldn't that fill the void one has? As a guy myself, I don't believe that the frequency of activity in male friendships is an inherent issue.*

*In fact, frankness and ease as a result of these activities are crucial in forming the first layer of connection, a connection that I believe most female friendships initially struggle to cultivate given the saccharine politeness that often dominates most interaction. However, male friendships often do not pass that initial layer of connection.*

### **Context of Singaporean society & stance:**

*Singaporean society is dominated by our staunch, deep rooted values of pragmatism. Pragmatism alters one's view on friendship through the lens of utility, productivity and outcomes. Simultaneously, global influences such as stoicism, redpilled content and the promulgation of anti-vulnerability rhetoric intensifies emotional withdrawal in men. When local values, global influences, and structural systems converge, male friendships are systematically undervalued which results in widespread male loneliness in Singapore.*

### **Definition of Friendship and Pragmatism:**

*To analyse this issue, there is a need to distinguish between the different forms of friendship. In this argument, friendship refers to a holistic bond that encompasses emotional reciprocity and shared vulnerability, rather than relationships grounded solely in utility. The erosion of emotional expressiveness in male friendships is the central concern. Singapore's pragmatic values refer to beliefs that prioritise utility and efficiency, often prioritised over emotional considerations that are considered less important. Lamentably, I would argue that the undervaluation of male friendships is a central driver of male loneliness in Singapore. Once the narratives take root, male friendships are not as prioritised and emotional intimacy is framed as unnecessary throughout our journey in life.*

### **The pragmatic choice on focusing on romantic relationships and parenthood rather than friendships:**

*Friendship is usually placed secondary to romantic and familial obligations, which sidelines the importance for male friendship. Singapore's housing and family policies create a trajectory where romance and parenthood are framed as central adult goals. Central Provident Fund (CPF) housing grant provides up to \$80,000 for first time buyers of flats, while non-married individuals can only purchase a flat when they are 35 years of age. Support is also given to new parents through the Baby Bonus Cash Gift scheme. Beyond policy, the government has also always emphasised on the need for Singapore to have a strong family unit for the prosperity and continuity of Singapore. When social focus is placed on romantic relationships and parenthood, male loneliness can be difficult to place a finger on, as lives are perceived as "complete" once these milestones are achieved. This underappreciation of friendship means emotional and social needs are inadequately fulfilled, contributing to a pervasive sense of loneliness among men. Moreover, emotional intimacy with a friend may not be deemed as necessary when one can rely on a romantic partner. Allocating effort into developing meaningful male friendships thus becomes the non-pragmatic choice. Yet, it is rare for a single partner to fulfil all emotional needs, and when the pillar of support falters, the absence of strong friendships leaves many men vulnerable to persistent loneliness.*

### **Conclusion and reflection:**

*In conclusion, male loneliness in Singapore is not merely a product of individual disposition, but the result of the interplay of local values, structural systems and global narratives. For readers of this essay, I invite you to take a moment to reflect on your own personal friendships. Loneliness does not mean that one does not have friends. Rather, it comes from the lack of a fulfilling one.*

*Holistic friendships can be as rewarding as any romantic relationship, yet their importance is often undervalued in our society. By neglecting such an important facet of the human connection, men miss out on relationships that provide mutual support and fulfillment. I, too, have been shaped by these invisible societal rules, and have experienced the cost of sidelining friendships. Perhaps the first step is to start small: try reaching out to your friends, checking on them, gradually breaking down that invisible barrier that prevents deeper connection. And maybe one day our friendships will be more than just memes, banter and ironic detachment.*

# FIN

**THANKS FOR  
READING!**

