



# PARTICLE

UNM'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

*malahari*

ISSUE 17 | AUTUMN 2021



# PARTICLE

UNM'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

Particle is an online literary magazine run by the students of the University of Nottingham Malaysia.

Established in 2013, Particle publishes biannually, committed to providing a platform to amplify the voices of both emerging and established writers and artists.

The work contained in this magazine does not necessarily represent the opinions and views held by the Particle staff or any member of the University of Nottingham Malaysia.

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# Editor's Note

**Dear Reader,**

Growing up, we always heard phrases such as, ‘There is light at the end of the tunnel’ or ‘You need the darkness to see the stars’—for a while, we believed that.

We would put on our binoculars, build a cheap store-bought telescope, and wait 12 long hours for a glimpse of light. Sometimes we missed it, sometimes we couldn’t wait that long and settled for a good night’s sleep, sometimes the darkness didn’t seem so dark anymore.

In Issue 17 Matahari, you will find intriguing works—works that will cause you to stop and wonder: how? How did they find comfort in the darkness and learn to wait patiently for the vow of a returning sun. How did they have faith in the dark unknown and find a hand to hold in the midst of it all.

In Matahari, these beautifully-talented writers will prove to you that light exists *within* you. And it is illuminating. So much so that it could fill an entire cathedral, only if you allow it, only if you give it a chance.

We would like to thank our creative and brilliant team for all their hard work on this issue. Every edit, every design, every decision, and every stroke of colour was fantastically thought-out, deliberate, and mesmerising. The pages of this issue are dripping with sunlight because of you.

Thank you to the contributors for allowing us to share their stories of endurance and light.

Finally, thank you reader for being here. We hope you find love and light within these lines, we hope they provide you with the sunshine you’ve been yearning for.

Our beloved readers, we hope you become that sunshine.

**Love,**

**Sara Mostafa & Ivan Ling**  
Co-Editors in Chief

# Contents

|    |  |    |  |
|----|--|----|--|
| 1  | Rainbow Sky<br><b>Phoebe Law</b>               | 17 | <i>do not swallow the sun</i><br><b>Ismim Putera</b> |
| 3  | The Cure to Cynicism<br><b>Wong Xiu Wei</b>    | 19 | Sun Cross'd Lovers (嫦娥诉悔)<br><b>Lau Yee Lynn</b>     |
| 5  | Under the Ketapang Tree<br><b>Ismim Putera</b> | 25 | She Who Chased the Sun<br><b>Tan Li Ling</b>         |
| 7  | Counterpoint<br><b>Isaac Tan</b>               | 27 | Bloom<br><b>Nehl Mahmood Ghani</b>                   |
| 9  | Sunrise & Sunrise 2<br><b>Jedidah-Joy Lai</b>  | 29 | Glory to Apollo<br><b>Zoe Wee</b>                    |
| 11 | Love Letter<br><b>Aurelle Livia</b>            | 31 | Ernest<br><b>Isaac Tan</b>                           |
| 15 | For The Eyes Of My Day<br><b>JY Tan</b>        | 33 | I hated the sun<br><b>Azra</b>                       |

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 35 | <i>The Stench of Garlic</i><br><b>Wong Xiu Wei</b>       |
| 37 | <i>Golden Apple Craft</i>                                |
| 39 | <i>Icarus Falls</i><br><b>Hasya Fatiha</b>               |
| 43 | <i>it aches her soul</i><br><b>Ayleen Pang</b>           |
| 45 | <i>Victims of Vampirism</i><br><b>Allyson Tan Xin Ee</b> |
| 49 | <i>Sun(shine)</i><br><b>Annisa Liyana</b>                |
| 51 | <i>My Lover's Flowerpot</i><br><b>Versha Chaudhary</b>   |
| 53 | <i>Here Comes The Sun</i><br><b>Parvathy Santhosh</b>    |



# Rainbow Sky

Phoebe Law | Poetry

On burdened shoulders  
And my restless, troubled mind,  
On the back of a sticky,  
Humid July night,  
My eyes greet the rainbow sky.

Watercolour paint,  
Canvas of the setting sun,  
Pigments fade to black.

The streetlamp flickers.  
My body becomes lighter.  
I stare in wonder.

Because I know that—

On lifted shoulders  
And a clean slate of thinking,  
On the back of a clear,  
Gleaming August morning,  
I will greet the sun, shining.

Downy blanket blue,  
Dotted with scant, puffy clouds,  
Filter of bright white.

The curtains scatter.  
My mind smiles wider.  
Today is better.

Because I have  
hope.

# The Cure to Cynicism

Wong Xiu Wei | Poetry

is to become an Alien amongst men.  
Cut an onion in half to find more  
than tears, then run it raw  
over your tongue to rearrange  
your taste buds  
long clung to bitterness.

Be an Alien who believes  
in monkey, trying to catch  
the elephant on acrobat swing.  
Swing a bat in empty air and strike  
down that dried star there, just dead  
atop tired Christmas trees.

Complement the king with  
a rose to match his new clothes,  
then whisper the truth to him—  
They are blind, bind-jagged by  
that jade, jade, you loathe.

When darkness falls  
on pellucid dreams out of reach,  
stretch that strip of black  
into an arrow only you see.  
Puncture yourself:  
deflate and ascend above.

While over the moon, tell Chang Er  
it's okay she mustered the ten suns;  
they're masters of morose-colored  
gazes with their shrewd sham-shades.  
Cradle her; caress this cratered  
planet, this pounding, throbbing rabbit,  
and yes, even that tatty, trampled  
welcome mat.

Return to Earth with revised mentra:  
you are an Alien amongst men—  
only an Alien amongst Aliens amongst men.

# Under the Ketapang Tree

Ismim Putera | Poetry

Under the ketapang tree  
we leaned against the skinny trunk  
a white sun teared up  
our sweaty shirt and another  
smaller sun arrowed our eyes with  
scorching light

We stood frozen in the shade,  
wiping the dews on our forehead  
with the back of our wrists  
We talked about fishes  
but dreamt of rivers

Alas! little stars sizzled  
around our feet  
we hopped and twirled around them  
like mud crabs pecking on sea grasses  
High above the tree  
fan-like leaves kept snapping  
but we didn't see any of them falling  
down

You pointed at the sky again  
I saw boat-shaped clouds sail away  
and those white suns rolled into  
a furry red ball—  
like a giant samboi  
The wind hugged  
our body from behind  
and laughed along with us  
as we ran and ran  
into the swirling  
shade



# Counterpoint

Isaac Tan | Poetry

My love is always sin, even when none deems it.  
My love from within, an interminable discernment  
of imitation, in the name of rinsing  
the reek of survival.

What is a man who sees two images in the mirror—  
love and terror,  
twofold in their pretence of life?  
Anguish and laurels,  
so tangled I sing praises for the pain?  
Why does it cost so much  
to billow for the boy  
birthed from the other side  
of the compass?

I want to stop hearing the howling  
of that hollow whitespace.  
I want to depart from anywhere  
but this second-language left  
toward that destination of validity,  
always, always  
on the horizon.

I don't understand this sin.  
This need to finish this note.  
This need to be life. To be  
The Life.

So let me sing another prayer,  
while I have nothing else to do.  
Let me pretend I have native clarity  
on the false and the foreign,  
on the borrowed boundaries  
beyond which the destiny of these lines,

*magnificently lies.*

# Sunrise 1

Jedidah-Joy Lai | Artwork



# Sunrise 2

Jedidah-Joy Lai | Artwork

# Love Letter

Aurelle Livia | Fiction

Dear Samantha\*,

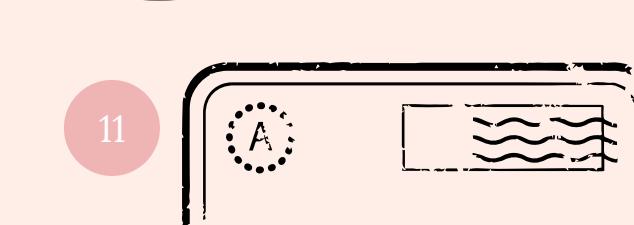
Almost a year after being in quarantine, I struggled to stay afloat, drowning in a monotonous, boring routine of eating and sleeping that set my nerves on edge. Not to mention the amount of family conflict I had to endure that managed to drag me deeper into a downward spiral. One day, uneventful like the rest, I decided to reinstall this pen pal app that my friend had introduced. I thought nothing of it as I set up a new account. Yet, I know it's so cliche when I say this, but I never knew that I would have met you.

Every letter you wrote gave me that much-needed boost of serotonin. Your words were lively and captivating; an unexpected rush of warmth filled me as I read the exact words over and over again until your words were etched into the back of my eyelids when I tried to go to sleep. Every little thing about you made me realise that we have a lot in common. We are both avid readers. Our favourite genre for books and movies is historical fiction. We have the same taste in music. And most importantly, we both like girls.



After months of sending letters back and forth, I finally worked up the courage to ask for your Instagram, hoping I didn't cross a boundary and frighten you. To my utter delight, you said, "Yes!" I have to admit that I had a crush on you even before I knew how you looked. But as soon as I saw you, and I'm not even joking, I thought you looked like the girl of my dreams. I could gauge your sweet personality from our letters, but this... this was the icing on the cake. The way your glossy, wavy hair frames your face. How your dark brown eyes catch the sunlight, changing the colour to honey brown for a mere moment. You with your spontaneity. Your impromptu trips with your friends to the beach. Your screams of delight as you jumped into a fountain. Don't even get me started on your enchanting smile. How did a girl as magnificent and striking as you come into my life?

Dozens of letters exchanged, but this is one I'll never send to you. Knowing you is both a blessing and a curse because I could never have you. You live on the other side of the Earth, where your nighttime is my daytime; a deep blue sea separates us, but I long to be on the same continent. Besides, it's not like me to have my feelings reciprocated. Maybe I'm just a coward who couldn't confess to you, but I like where we are. I love waiting in anticipation for your following letter. I love catching glimpses of you on your Instagram stories. I don't want to change that. I don't want to ruin it.



I long to meet you in person. Travelling on a piece of metal in the sky as I cross oceans so I can lightly pinch your olive skin to convince myself that you are real. I wonder what the local library you frequently go to looks like. Do you get whiffs of the salt air as you walk to your classes since your college campus is situated near a beach? Do you think about me as often as I think about you? Most probably not. Because you found a group of amazing people that you could call your friends after months of quarantine. And I am not half as interesting as you.

I'll never get to hear the sound of your voice as you talk about your day. I'll never know if you have a silent laugh or a loud, rambunctious laugh. I might never know you well enough as all we do is communicate from our respective screens. But that's perfectly fine. So I'll cling onto these snapshots of you frozen in time and imagine that it's me behind the camera.



I'll never get to hear the sound of your voice as you talk about your day. I'll never know if you have a silent laugh or a loud, rambunctious laugh. I might never know you well enough as all we do is communicate from our respective screens. But that's perfectly fine. So I'll cling onto these snapshots of you frozen in time and imagine that it's me behind the camera.

Thank you for being the scattered light when I was drowning.

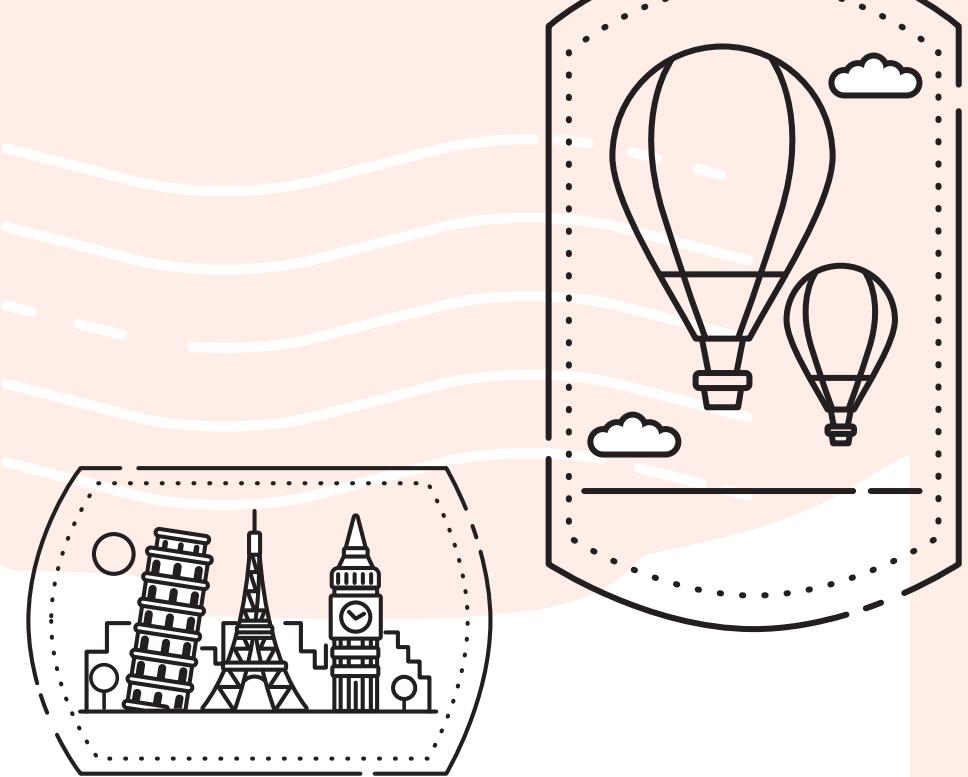
Thank you for being my source of comfort in these desperate times.

Thank you for being something I look forward to every week.

Samantha\*, this is my love letter to you.

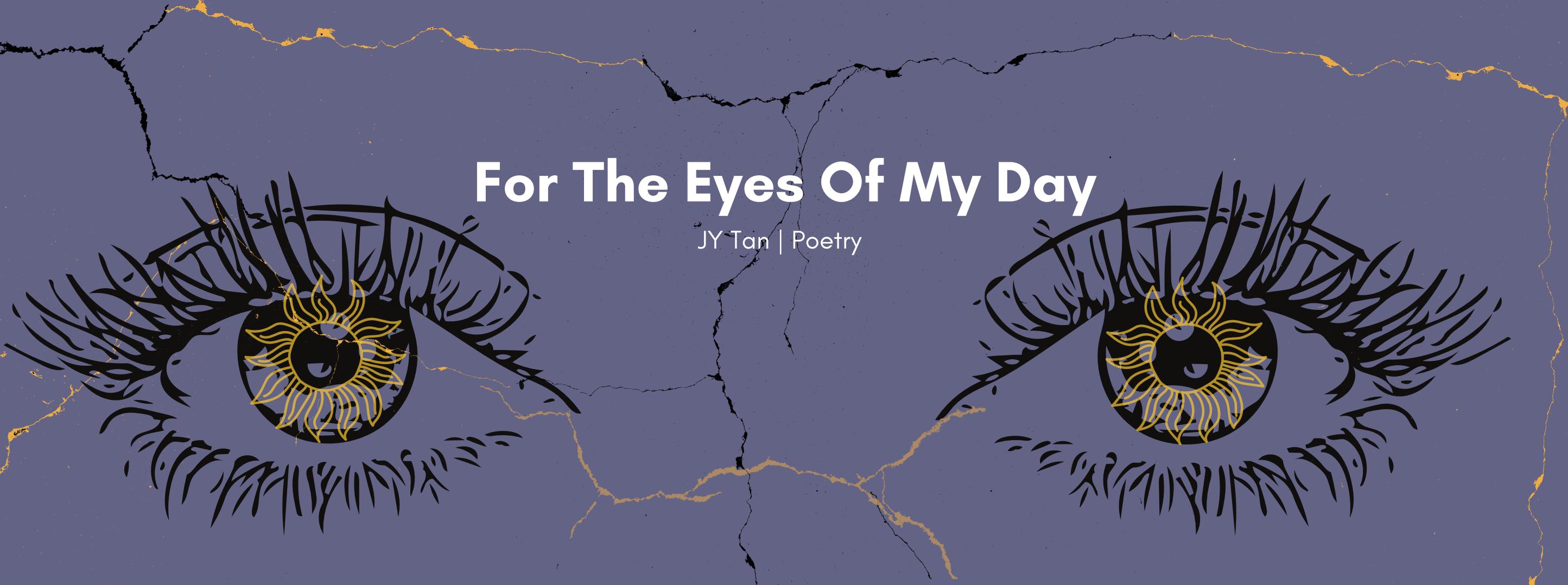
Love,  
Livia

\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.



# For The Eyes Of My Day

JY Tan | Poetry



I came from a family of merciless suns.  
They took pride in their unrelenting heat, even as I  
withered and cracked  
under the weight of their expectations.

(Hou Yi became a hero by murdering nine suns. I became a villain  
just by cutting three ties.)

Every sun I met after that,  
I kept at arm's length.  
The nights would freeze my fingers stiff,  
but I was terrified of getting burnt again.

(My third-degree wounds took years to heal. You made me an  
Icarus in six months, max.)

Except I was no foolish Greek,  
but a sun who thought itself incapable of harm.  
Nuclear fusion fueled my flames,  
a cursed hellfire of pride and paranoia.

(Buddha trapped Sun Wu Kong under a mountain for 500 years.  
All you asked was that I grow right next to you.)

It'd been weeks since we ate at the same table.  
Yesterday, we shared lunch and cake  
and enough laughter to fill  
my heart for years to come.

(Heracles completed twelve labours to atone. I'd do the same a  
thousand times over to become the friend you deserve.)

# do not swallow the sun

Ismim Putera | Poetry

do not swallow the sun  
it is not an anti-psychotic pill  
that blinks like stars

he is sitting on the chair  
his tongue beefy red—  
tasting the heat from the sun

Bad childhood  
his house crumbled after a great fire  
parents nowhere to be found

He likes the sun  
particularly the ones hiding  
behind the monsoon clouds

the flimsy rays are soft  
wrapping his chest  
“like a silk scarf,” he told me

he glows at noon, after a downpour  
like a celestial being  
after swallowing the blue sun



# Sun-Cross'd Lovers

## (嫦娥诉悔)

Lau Yee Lynn | Fiction

A retelling of the age-old tale of Chang'e and Hou Yi, dedicated to the original star-crossed lovers of Chinese folklore.

I was there the day you shot down nine suns, figure ablaze with righteous glory.

Nine times you nocked an arrow to your bow; nine times a sun died, and fell from its pedestal in the jade sky.

You left only one, the tenth and the weakest, alive in the wake of your quest.

I was there too, when the barren earth, finally freed from the overbearing heat of nine suns, was once again blessed with the gift of fertility. When harvest season came and the crops flourished, it was met with the hum of excitement and exuberance for the first time since the oppressive reign of the ten suns. The mortal realm crowned you their saviour.

They swarmed to you, like eager, wide-eyed children to a hero of legend, offering their sweetest fruit and their strongest wine in utmost gratitude. Contentment swelled within me then, warm and saccharine, to see you wear the steadfast glow of your honour with pride. To call you, golden and glorious as the lone sun in the sky, mine.



Perhaps it was naïve of me to have thought that we could bask in the afterglow of your heroic deeds, to relish in the mundane peace of the mortal realm. I dreamt of us, of leading a slow, sweet life of domesticity amongst the thrumming, ephemeral vitality of the humans.

On the night of a full moon, this foolish reverie of mine was shattered.

"Niangzi," You had gently roused me from slumber then, eyes alight and burning with exhilaration, twin suns in the dark of night. "The Jade Emperor has ordered me to head east of the Kunlun Mountains."

The drowsiness cleared instantly. "To slay a beast?"

You nodded, mouth set in determination. "Zaochi. That damned monster has been causing trouble near the Divine Palaces. The lesser deities will tolerate it no further."

A bitter ache welled up in the hollow of my throat then – I could not bear to part with you – but I wrestled it down and pressed my lips to your cheek, the pleasant warmth you radiated alleviating my unease. My arms clasped tighter around the broad, steady frame of your back. "Safe travels, Fujun. May the heaven officials bless your journey."

The coarse pads of your fingers, calloused from decades of mastery with the bow, brushed gently across the crown of my forehead, leaving lingering trails of heat. "Rest assured, Niangzi, I will return with Zaochi's head."

I waited, full of faith in you.

On the eve before the first snow of winter, you came home victorious.

Zaochi's fangs hung above the fireplace, a newly added adornment to our quaint abode, gleaming in the waning light of the flames. You lay fast asleep, brows creased in exhaustion after your arduous quest, and I was content to watch you, heart heavy with relief and joy now that you had returned.

Hou Yi, if only you could see yourself the way I saw you then – smouldering bronze skin radiating with the sheer brilliance of your divinity, luminescent in the night as if pure liquid gold ran through your veins, the ichor of gods – my sun. I was struck with the urge to hide you away from the world, to have myself alone be the sole receiver of your warmth, the sole witness to your glory.



It was too late.

When the Jade Emperor learned of your victory against Zaochi, he sent you out for Jiuying the nine-headed hydra, who had been terrorising human villages in the north. When you returned, bruised and battered but glowing from the divine pride of your triumph, he once again ordered you to hunt down Dafeng the ferocious bird of prey, harbinger of windstorms. After that came Fengxi the wild, frenzied boar of the marshlands, and then Bashe, the giant python with armoured scales who devoured elephants whole.

They took you away from me, again and again.

The mortal realm had gained a hero, but I had lost the one I loved, *my sun*.

Your name became immortalised in the mortal realm. Everywhere I went, your presence lingered – in the mouths of storytellers performing vivid, animated recounts of your heroic quests; in the lilting, silken voices of the yiji songstresses as they sang tales of you, dainty fingers fluttering against the strings of their sanxian lutes, entertaining rowdy crowds of enamoured guests – Hou Yi the Lord Archer, saviour of the mortal realm, golden son of the Heavens.

It struck me then, the realisation that this – this was what it meant to love a sun. To never be able to grasp it tightly in the cusp of your palms and seek solace from it alone; to be forced to share its warmth and glory with the rest of the world – to never call it yours again.

When I stole the elixir of immortality that had been bestowed upon you and downed the gleaming contents of the vial without remorse, fleeing and ascending to the moon thereafter, let it be known that I have never regretted it once – I did it for myself.

Our love was one that could not withstand your divine fate of a hero; this bitter truth was inescapable, the fact that you were destined to belong to the people. I wish I could have loved you, not as the Lord Archer, saviour of the mortal realm, but as the man Hou Yi, who once shielded me from the Jade Emperor's wrath by taking me in as his lifelong partner.

Our tale started with ten suns, and it ended with your rise to glory as a sun, as a beacon of hope and heroism.

The Jade Rabbit of the moon asks me why I weep when I sing your tale. I smile, but do not answer.

但愿人长久, 千里共婵娟。I wish you well, my sun, so that although we are separated by a thousand miles, we may still admire the grace of moonlight together.

# She Who Chased The Sun

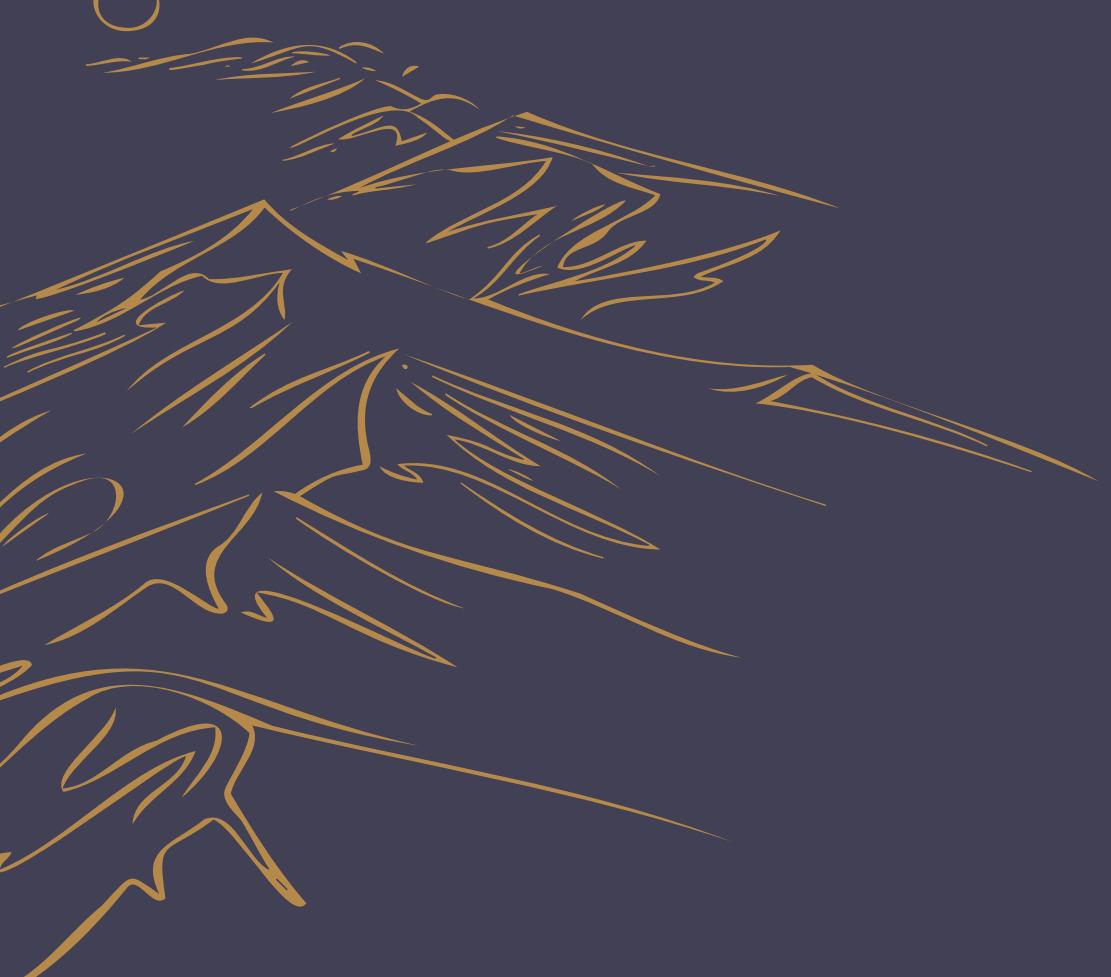
Tan Li Ling | Poetry

She lay awake beneath a sky  
Devoid of any light,  
And plunged a hand to reify  
A heart that festered blight.

She thought about the time that passed  
To only end concerned.  
So prayed did she that night would lapse,  
For the symptoms have emerged.

It swelled her throat and stung her eyes,  
And whispered words of spite.  
Until it silenced her outcries,  
And broke her with each strike.

As night dragged on, her will collapsed,  
Her spirit on its verge.  
Then east it came – a blinding blast;  
With streaks of gold, it surged.

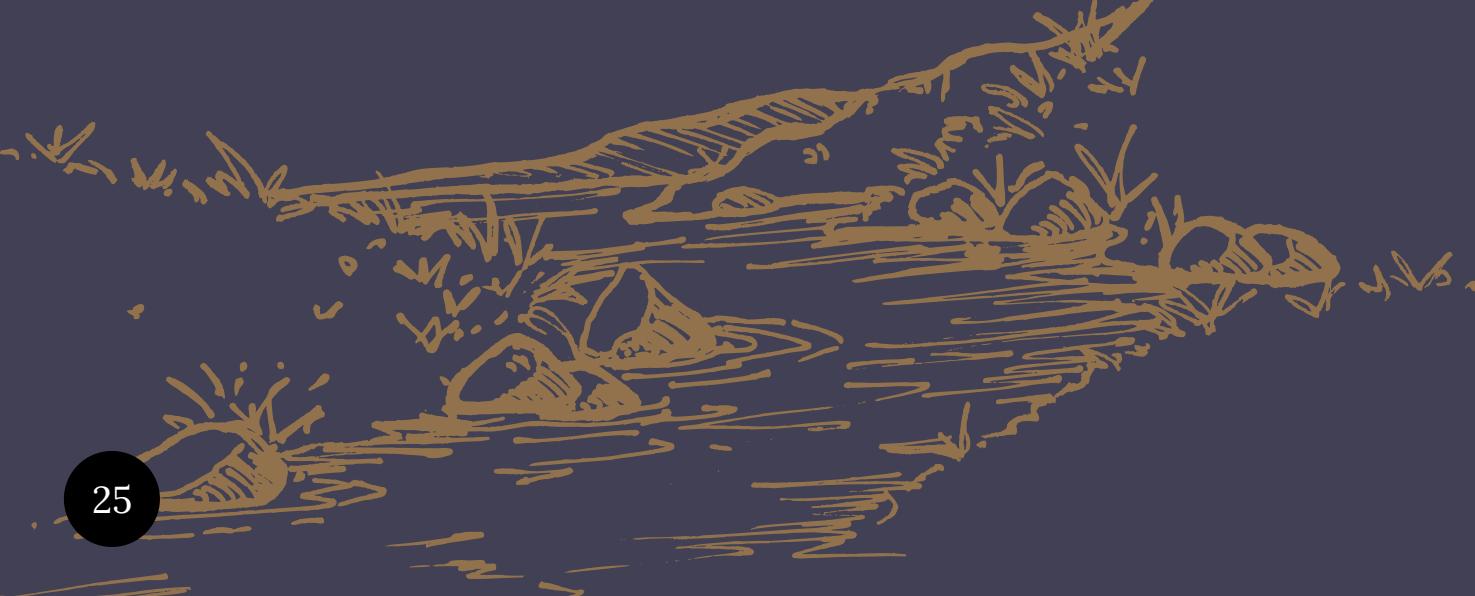


So up she ran by second sight,  
Hands reaching out up high  
Until she grasped it with delight –  
Its warmth brought her to life.

She stayed under the glow to bask;  
Alas, the blight had burned.  
She reached into her heart to clasp –  
A peaceful gleam returned.

Deep down, she knew that night may come,  
for it cannot be denied.

Yet, as she stood beneath the Sun,  
she knew she would survive.





# Bloom

Nehl Mahmood Ghani | Artwork



# Glory To Apollo

Zoe Wee | Poetry

Basking in the passion and heat of his belligerent glare,  
Skin smouldering under such heated opia,  
It almost feels too much to bear.  
Light flickers in my eyes as beams of incandescence cascade upon the land.

Blooming from masses of untainted radiant white,  
The lines of luminescent lustre glisten as they descend on ochre-hued sand.  
Bouncing off the cool sheen of a babbling naiad of lapis;  
Sparkles flow through her lustrous hair where his touch grazes.

The work of Zephyr bellows through his subjects,  
They sway their verdant appendages, lush with life,  
And adoration for their lord, a dance in his honour, he who is bedecked  
With the gilded glint of a thousand glittering stars.

For the warmth in the air we breathe, and the light,  
That casts over crashing waves and quaking earth.  
He graces us in the flames of his benevolent mercy,  
Lest life ceases to exist in the biting chill of unrelenting night.

Clouds bubble and toil, encasing the rage of divinity,  
Erupting into molten gilded streaks whipping through skies of Hyacinth.  
They adorn stiff peaks of marble, such beauty  
Incomparable to mere measly recreations of men's hands.

Reposed upon a chaise lounge of pearly alabaster,  
He showers the land at dusk in magnificent vigour.  
Torrents of red-hot gold and vermillion raining upon the calm serenity.  
A storm of silken fire, shades of medallion and ruby shimmer.

And as the sky split apart, a bounty of golden white lava spilt,  
Over wisps of cotton-like ivory,  
Oh, how the heavens opened,  
And cried the tears of those whom we, so undeserving, shan't see.

Glory to Apollo!  
To he who scorches the skies in opulence,  
And lavishes the land in his love,  
Wielding an aureate arrow, guiding his loyal subjects.

# Ernest

Isaac Tan | Creative Nonfiction

The man is fishing at the pier, alone, and I am watching him. I am 24. He's 50. 55, maybe. With the way he looks nowadays I can't be sure. I want to walk up to him and say, Good evening, Sir. I hope you've had a fine day. But what after that? What does a child like me know about the ways of the world, as the man did? I could say Sir, I am a huge admirer of your work, but how inaccurate would that be, to say I admired Mr. Hemingway's work when I know him so *much, much* beyond that?

Then there's that feeling of being disgusted with myself, presuming to share a profundity with him, pretending to know some part of him, when all I know is this: Do not worry. You (*and I*) have always written before and you (*and I*) will write now. So how could I feel special, when millions have been touched by his words, when thousands have written about his words in a depth I could not ever reach? Who am I to tell him Sir, you have written beautiful and true things?

I could let him go. I could let him go home, to his wife and children, and let this be just another day. For him, and for me. Then, I could regret this decision forever. This moment of hesitancy, of suppressing the implosion within me so that I did not give him the truth in my heart: I did not do what he had taught us.

But I cannot help but think What if, what if what if, what if somehow my artless words would change *that*? What if really no one had really bothered to give him more than accolades and applause, legacy and love? And all that they saw of Ernest was only the legend, but not the terror which made him that?

I could give him that: a piece of myself.

Would then, before he pulled the trigger into his mouth to blast the terror off onto the walls, recall this moment of tiny sincerity from me? Would he know that he had a magnitude and vastness that could make a boy in 2021 feel this way?

Would he then put the gun down, and believe that Ernest Hemingway was bigger than death, without having to prove that by putting a bullet through his brain?

# I hated the sun

Azra | Poetry

Because of you, I can see,  
But I wake up seeing more chores to do.  
Your presence is not easy,  
The times I'm calm, are very few.

Because of you, I'm always sweaty:  
My eyes are squinting when I'm out.  
My room, the closest to you, is an oven,  
And I'm the bread they forgot about.

When the moon is here, I'm calm—  
It comes with a breeze of tranquility,  
I'm alone and I'm not on edge,  
Unless there are other entities with me,

But then again, I can't see them,  
And I don't know if they can see me.  
Can you see me? When I'm calm?  
I doubt it, since your presence only makes me busy,

However, despite the restless days,  
You are the reason I get to see my mom,  
Of course my dad and my brother too;  
I like to see them, even if it is troublesome.

When I was at my lowest, you were there,  
In the reflection of my laptop screen,  
Or during a panic attack when I was gasping for air—  
I don't think that was a very pleasant scene.

You were there when I stole my brother's chocolate,  
When he stole my cookies, coffee, and chocopies,  
Or when I made my mom laugh,  
And when my dad finally fixed the wifi after so many tries.

You didn't really do anything,  
You did nothing,  
Still, you didn't judge me or my family,  
You were just in the background of everything.

I guess I should appreciate you for that.  
You may not have helped us a ton,  
But during times we struggled,  
You were there, and you were the sun.



# The Stench of Garlic

Wong Xiu Wei | Poetry

In the battlefield it is of utmost  
uttermost importance that garlic,  
the bedrock of our home  
recipes, is pulverized to a pulpy heap,  
a placid paste, MAKE-HASTE-MAKE-HASTE  
General Mom says, and I lead my mittens  
out of the frying pan into the oven.

Fearsome, she pounces and pounds  
on surrendered gizzards and pork innards  
no match for fiery tongue and two hands  
bringing down blunt knife on thin neck.  
CHOP, creak, repeat, General Mom calls the shots  
of fire and oil for each dish that go under stern  
scrutiny for sure victory, our pores permanent  
with this odor of honor, of gallant garlic, spicing  
up our war as a pungent prompt  
of our thriving.

Dusk falls on weathered woks while we retire  
from culinary conquer, our creaking bones  
croaking greetings as we sit down for dinner  
with father, ready to relish the sweet food  
of our labor. I said thank you God,  
thank you for the meal and picked up a fork,  
when suddenly  
Father divinely roared—  
What. The Fuck. Is this?

I look down and see a baby  
bulb of garlic, swathed in gravy,  
sleeping soundly under a leaf.

# Golden Apple

Craft | Artwork



# Icarus Falls

Hasya Fatiha | Fiction

All he could see was the sky, curved around him like an overturned ceramic bowl. Three hundred feet below, turquoise-blue waters of the Aegean Sea stretched out far in front of him. Sparkling as though thousands of diamonds had been sewn into the fabric of the waves. In a fit of spontaneity, Icarus spread out his wings completely and plummeted towards the sea, barely stopping in time to skim the surface with the bottom of his sandals. He had spent years in that cramped workshop, where smoke from the forges lingered and made their breathing ragged – this was absolute paradise. Was this what heaven felt like? To feel the wind whipping past and through your feathers, to almost drown in the abundance of fresh air, to feel your hair and skin dampen from the vapour of both clouds and sea?

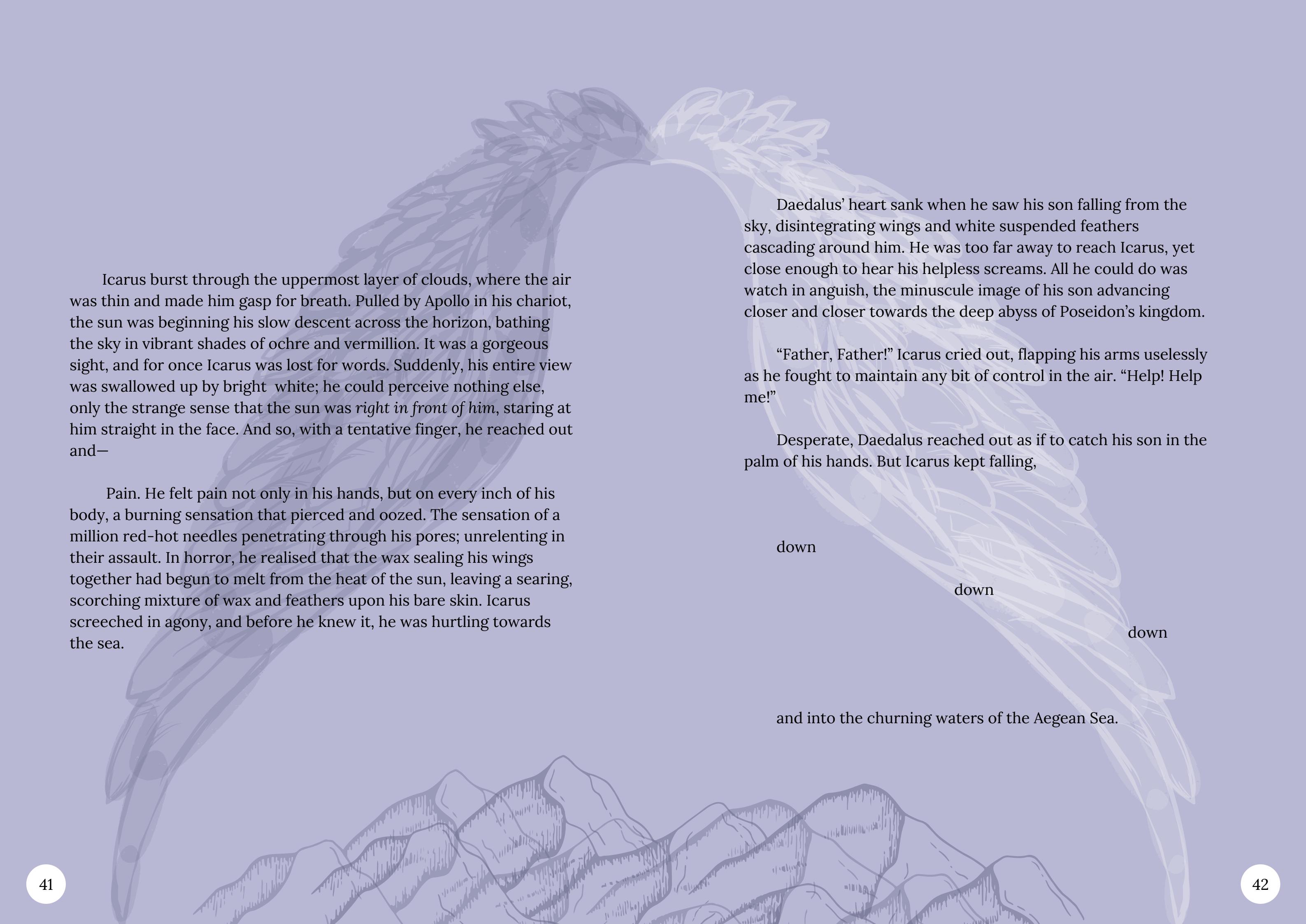
“Look at me, Father!” Icarus laughed jubilantly, gliding over the surface with his arms wide open as if to hold the sea. “Look at me!” His tunic brushed against the ocean’s surface, spraying streams of salty water across his waxen skin.

Daedalus, the father, loved his son dearly. He was the only thing keeping him sane during those harrowing years spent imprisoned within his own labyrinth.

“Son,” he called out apprehensively, “If you get your wings wet, they’ll weigh you down!”

“I know, I know. But look at me!”

He kicked off from the water and soared into the sky, an unstoppable force of nature, reminiscent of an angel ascending the stairway to heaven. His wings curled around him, the soft plume of feathers tickling his face as he spun faster and faster. Drunk on his own freedom, Icarus was unable to register his father’s weak protests against flying too high, for his wings would too melt under the glare of the sun. But alas, Daedalus was an old man, too slow and frail to keep up with the vitality his son radiated with. He had forgotten what it had been like to be young and beautiful, and so was unable to recognise the hubris starting to consume young Icarus. All he could do was watch, as his son was swallowed up by the sun.



Icarus burst through the uppermost layer of clouds, where the air was thin and made him gasp for breath. Pulled by Apollo in his chariot, the sun was beginning his slow descent across the horizon, bathing the sky in vibrant shades of ochre and vermillion. It was a gorgeous sight, and for once Icarus was lost for words. Suddenly, his entire view was swallowed up by bright white; he could perceive nothing else, only the strange sense that the sun was *right in front of him*, staring at him straight in the face. And so, with a tentative finger, he reached out and—

Pain. He felt pain not only in his hands, but on every inch of his body, a burning sensation that pierced and oozed. The sensation of a million red-hot needles penetrating through his pores; unrelenting in their assault. In horror, he realised that the wax sealing his wings together had begun to melt from the heat of the sun, leaving a searing, scorching mixture of wax and feathers upon his bare skin. Icarus screeched in agony, and before he knew it, he was hurtling towards the sea.

Daedalus' heart sank when he saw his son falling from the sky, disintegrating wings and white suspended feathers cascading around him. He was too far away to reach Icarus, yet close enough to hear his helpless screams. All he could do was watch in anguish, the minuscule image of his son advancing closer and closer towards the deep abyss of Poseidon's kingdom.

"Father, Father!" Icarus cried out, flapping his arms uselessly as he fought to maintain any bit of control in the air. "Help! Help me!"

Desperate, Daedalus reached out as if to catch his son in the palm of his hands. But Icarus kept falling,

down

down

down

and into the churning waters of the Aegean Sea.

# it aches her soul

Ayleen Pang | Poetry

Her body thrums with incessant buzzing,  
a feeling so uneasy it makes her soul freeze.

Despite so,  
when the tips of her fingers make contact with her being,  
cold was absent, and left in wakes are the itchy warmth  
that no amount of cold water could wash down:  
insatiable, that is her nature.

Her body a vessel for the war between hot and cold,  
leaving her to sew back the torn pieces.  
It aches, her soul.

The swelter of the sun and biting of the moon repeat their cycle,  
and she went along with it.

How many times has she sat down now?  
On the windowsill, with the sun still,  
hoping the hot air would melt the ever-growing emptiness in her being.

It was getting tiring,  
to sleep one more night,  
to wake one more morning,  
for her soul that seemed to still be mourning.  
Of what? I do not know.

But there were those moments,  
body under the sun, sweat ruining her outdoor days,  
skin sensitive to goosebumps from the cold whispers of the night.  
These days, though not always,  
she seemed to rest, no warmth or cold occupying her growing hole.

It is a short-lived peace of mind, she is aware.  
But these moments belong to her, solely her.

And she felt alive, even if for a second.  
And it is enough for her to move forward,  
to wake one more morning,  
to sleep one more night.

The swelter of the sun and biting of the moon repeat their cycle,  
and she went along with it.  
Though it aches, that is her insatiable soul.

# Victims of Vampirism

Allyson Tan Xin Ee | Fiction

“Do you remember how the sunrise looks like, my love?”

Life was such a fickle thing, Athena thought to herself as she lay bloodied on the ocean shore, crimson seeping from her wounds and flowing towards the ocean as all rivers did eventually. She faintly heard the frantic cries and sobs of her lover in the distance, she remembered the feeling of her lover's hands on her body; it's the only warmth she's needed since they were turned into creatures that defied everything holy, forced to live with a hunger only satiated by the same blood that leaves her.

She's been cursed for centuries, stuck in an endless purgatory. “Is it really living, if your heart beats no more?” she had asked herself as she walked the earth, unable to feel the release of arriving at death's door. She had imagined how this moment would be like, as it was something to ponder about in the quieter moments of her life. She expected to relive each moment of the centuries she's existed, for the seconds to flash before her eyes as her vision faded into nothing.

Who could describe the feeling of being at death's door? You're only truly there for a few moments before your life ends with the breaking of a thread, before Hades dictates your fate. Your soul dwells in either the depths of Tartarus, or the Asphodel Meadows amongst the people who had lived lives no one knew of. She knew she would never see Elysium, the heavens which were showered in gold, free of sickness and plague and the monstrosities of humanity – everything her very species embodied.

People often deem vampires the monsters from their storybooks; merciless, bloodthirsty, presumed to be the monsters that lurk in the shadows. They're always concealed in darkened alleyways awaiting their next meal, only to be warded off by golden rays of sunlight that incinerate their unholy spirits, turning them to ash. As a result of this fear, humans lose themselves to their pathetic superstitions, foolishly assuming that these pitiful beliefs will protect them. They adorn themselves with wreaths of garlic and hanging crosses, so easily forgetting that most vampires were once human, now victims of their own kind. It's in human nature to obsess over one's self, so much so that people forget most vampires are victims to something; to the vampires that turned them, in a fit of hunger-induced lust and desires; to the vicious cycles enabled by their newly reformed biology; to the eternal repetitions of regret and remorse with every attempt to live on.

Her hands were stained with the products of her dead heart, the remnants of her life pooling on the sand below her body. Yet, her hands felt warm as she awaited her inevitable withering and the peace the sun will bring her.



Smiling at the sight, her vision slowly faded as the first rays of light arose from the horizon. She knew it'll be the last thing she sees and she won't regret it, not now. She would not feel shame, for every moment of her life has led her to this. Her tears fell as she gazed upon the rising sun, savouring the seconds she had left to etch this scene into her memory, even if it's worth nothing. She watched the sunlight paint the sky in soft hues of pink and orange, noted how the ocean sparkles when it kisses the shoreline; the sun's golden crystals gathering at her feet gathering at her feet. It felt welcoming when her body started to perish and she didn't feel the pain she expected to feel. It must be her body's way of protecting her. She knew the human body is capable of it; offering relief to shield your mind one last time.

She let out a breathless laugh at the thought; the weak, frail laugh of another victim who lost it all to the very things all vampires fall prey to. The longevity of eternity.

She hadn't expected to wonder how the sunrise felt on her cold, undead body, or for her eyes to be illuminated in molten gold. She felt peace for the first time in an eternity. As her body disintegrated, her soul is finally placed to rest amongst the creatures that dwell beneath the rushing waves of the ocean.

"Thank you." Her final words are washed away with the ocean waves, pieces of her whisked into the world she longed to see in the daylight. With the last seconds of her vision, she watched her ashes disappear within the waves, and she did not regret. She felt no shame, no loss. There was a rare, genuine smile on her face as the last of her faded away with the light, the last of her tears bittersweet.

She's done being a victim. She's free.

# My Sun(shine)

Annisa Liyana | Artwork



# My Lover's Flowerpot

Versha Chaudhary | Poetry

My lover gifted me a flowerpot  
in the autumn of the last year as he  
left the city behind.

The deciduous shrubs shed  
their leaves counting the days of his  
return.

The leaves grew back, the flowers bloomed  
in hopes but  
withered  
in neglect.

Only the longing grows  
as I water the flowerpot  
to find solace.

The last season had  
no warmth despite  
the overwhelming heat –

The seasons perpetuate,  
and it is autumn again,  
but the leaves  
fall  
like  
flowers.



# Here Comes The Sun

Parvathy Santhosh | Poetry

Here comes the sun...

Did you chase for, under stormy drapes,  
The glow that sustains life,  
Only to turn, with clouded lens,  
To screens and mirror-balls?

Did you leap straight for the gleaming gold  
Looking to warm your soul,  
Only to splash right through the salt  
And into blue-black depths?

Did you run amok on brilliant sands,  
In scorn of concrete woods,  
Only to fall and scorch, astray  
From shadows that could soothe?

Did you scamper past the darkest nights,  
Eyes trained towards the sun,  
Only to pine for winking stars  
When under garish glare?

Did you ponder, question, stare too long  
At screaming hellish blaze,  
Only to see your senses burn away  
To raging scarring sores?

Did you dismay roaming coasts abroad  
In quest of tranquil light?  
Instead, let's, like Candide's blissful Turk,  
Work what falls natch on our lots.

Come, let's toil back-to-back  
In those yet-barren yards of ours;  
We'll grow those seeds we choose to pick;  
We'll prune and weed what's wild...

And when our saplings take deep root,  
We'll plough around their shade;  
And when we have some time to pause,  
We'll plant for those outside.

We'll share those harvests, good and bad,  
Share seeds and bows and tools;  
In rest, we'll look at rain and shine  
Through canopies we raise.

Thank you for your time thus far,  
For reading through my verse...  
Now, join me with your garden forks;  
Now, here comes the sun...

# Contributor Bios

## Artist of Sun(shine)

Annisa Liyana or more comfortably known as "Kat" is a freelance illustrator, creative maker and an aspiring small business owner based in sunny KL. She loves to play around with various mediums and love experimenting with different art styles. She creates cute and beautiful merchandise inspired by her environment, movies, her favorite artists and her hobby of spending hours scrolling down social media.

## Author of Rainbow Sky

Phoebe Law, or better known by her pseudonym - Flaw, is undertaking her degree in Bachelor of English with Creative Writing. Currently, her most well-known work is 'Warfare of the Brain', a collection of poems published on Inkitt. Other works include the ongoing 'Tomorrow Stray Dogs' series published on Archive of Our Own as well as a selection of poems and short stories published in her high school anthology and yearbook, 'Beyond Imagination' and 'Beneath the Surface' respectively. While Flaw continues collecting her favorite books to build her own at-home library, she also hopes to continue publishing more of her work in the future.

## Author of Glory to Apollo

Zoe is a Second Year English Student, who despite marveling at the beauty of the sky, sun and light so much that she would write a piece fully dedicated to the Hellenic Deity of (but not limited to) Poetry, Sun, and Light, she still prefers to drink iced coffee, even in snowy weather.

## Author of For The Eyes Of My Day

JY Tan is a final-year Creative Writing major. She started writing short stories for various zines in 2018, but recently started writing her first novel (Progress is excruciatingly slow, and likely will remain so for the foreseeable future). When she isn't writing or scrolling through Twitter endlessly, she likes to tell adults that she was born in 2000 and watch them instantly age 10 years.

### **Author of *The Cure to Cynicism* and *The Stench of Garlic***

Xiuwei aspires to be able to wield the pen as well as she wields her fork. Her work has been published in Alluvium (Literary Shanghai), Eksentrika, The Asian Writer, and Malaysian Millennial Voices. She is currently trying her best to show up for her dreams everyday. Feel free to connect with her at xiuweiwong@gmail.com!

### **Artist of *Golden Apple***

Rania, or their preferred name Craft is a 20 year old, self-taught digital artist. Their artworks consists of original characters, fan art, and short comics. Drawing digital art is a hobby for them and also an escape from reality.

### **Author of *Icarus Falls***

Hasya is a first year Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience student at UNM. She hails from Sarawak and ever since she was little, has been crafting stories to send to her late grandfather who lived all the way in West Malaysia. When she is not studying, she can be found watching rom-coms or reading A Tree Grows in Brooklyn for the nth time.

### **Author of *Under the Ketapang Tree***

Ismim Putera (he/him) is the author of poetry chapbook "Tide of Time" (Mug and Paper Magazine, 2021). His works can be found in many online literary journals and are forthcoming in "To Let The Light In" Poetry Anthology (Sing Lit Station), Lyric: Anthology of Speculative Poetry (Paper Djinn Press) and Colours of Tapestry: Stories from Asia.

### **Author of *Victims of Vampirism***

Allyson Tan is a English with Creative Writing student in her first year, who has had a passion for stories ever since 2014. She has aspirations to become a fiction author or a film producer after university. In her spare time, she likes to play sports such as netball and volleyball, as well as spending time with her loved ones.

### **Artist of Sunrise & Sunrise 2**

Jedidah is an aspiring self-taught artist who is currently in their first year of Foundation studies. They see the face is their ultimate blank canvas always ready for art, even if it'll only last a few hours. In their free time, you can find them rewatching Grey's Anatomy or scrolling through Pinterest, waiting for inspiration to strike. Follow @\_\_kkay\_ for more artworks. :)

### **Author of Counterpoint and Ernest**

Isaac Tan Hee Jin is a final year Creative Writing major at Nottingham University. The following is a tribute to him from a friend:

"Isaac is a writer of unparalleled tenacity with a natural affinity for language. He picks up the pen with a seriousness in intent that equals that of the subjects he tackles in writing. When you read something Isaac has written, read it with the assurance that every word has been chosen meticulously and every line crafted with great, delicate care. You are in good hands for Isaac writes with the utmost respect for the written word.

Person-wise, Isaac is similarly admirable for his maturity and diligence. His wit and generosity make him a delightful friend to have for conversations that ring with meaning and depth. When you are friends with Isaac, you are in good hands as well."

- Wong Xiu Wei

### **Author of She Who Chased the Sun**

Tan Li Ling (Violet) is a FAE student at UNM who aspires to be a full-time writer. She began writing at a young age, a hobby that stemmed from her love for stories. Her style typically favours the use of symbolism, metaphors, and melancholic themes. In her adoration towards storytelling, she finds poetry to be the mode that remains closest to her heart. This is mainly because, she believes that poetry helps create an imagery that can better express emotions, or, in her exact words, "Emotions can be a tangled mess. Sometimes it's not enough to say you're happy or you're sad. Sometimes you have to explain how these feelings can be seen, heard, felt, or even taste in a physical sense."

### **Artist of Bloom**

Nehl is a Psychology & Cog Neuro student, who spends most of her time living in her head than in actuality, drifting away in thoughts of the infinite wonders of the universe. When she is not with her family, studying or cooking, she indulges her love for mysteries and thrillers by reading novels and watching crime documentaries. With her undecisive nature and interest in so many things, to those who know her, she is an enthusiastic nerd, who is equally sarcastic and humorous.

### **Author of *it aches her soul***

Ayleen Pang is starting her first year as an International Communication Studies with English Language & Literature student in UNM, her love for literature is what has brought her here. She recently got into an anime that named its characters based on real life authors and poets, which fuelled her passion into learning the subject deeper. Ayleen writes poem rarely and reads just as little- she bought a piece of poetry book from Rupi Kaur many years ago but that's it. She finds poetry very pretty, and wishes to travel from place to place to gain inspiration to write more. The poem '*it aches, her soul*' is her first published piece for the public to read.

### **Author of *Here Comes The Sun***

Parvathy Santhosh is an undergraduate student in Psychology at UNM. She welcomes any criticism and opinions on her stumbling attempt at poetry.

### **Author of Sun Cross'd Lovers (嫦娥诉悔)**

Lynn is a foundation student at UNM, and several of her poems have been published in the literary magazine Aster Lit. She is in love with mythology and folklore, and weaves it into her writings as much as she possibly can. Aside from writing angry poetry, things that make her happy include: danmei novels, MMORPGs, and scrolling through photos of hanfu on Weibo for hours on end, knowing that she will never be able to afford them.

### **Author of I hated the sun**

She doesn't often write, but ideas came flooding in when she heard the theme was the sun. Azra faces many challenges in a day, just like many others, and hopes some can relate to her poem.

### **Artist of My Lover's Flowerpot**

Versha Chaudhary is a final year student at UNM, majoring in Business Economics and Finance. She discovered writing in an attempt to express herself. Her writing style has changed over the years, but she appreciates all her works. During pandemic, she decided to give her poems a shot and published her debut book "Untold Paths of Life" in January 2021.

### **Author of Love Letter**

Livia is a second year Communications student at the University of Nottingham Malaysia. Her love for books started at a young age due to her mother being a bookworm herself. She doesn't have much experience in writing fiction but she does, however, write a lot of letters to her pen pal.

# Editor Bios

## Sara Mostafa (she/her)

### **Co-Editor in Chief**

Sara Mostafa is a poised writer who is well-versed in various tasks, including editing and proofreading. She is an avid reader, poet, and writer endeavouring to make small changes in the world using her words.

## Amalin Sofiya (she/her)

### **Marketing Director**

Amalin Sofiya is in Particle. Amalin Sofiya is Particle's Marketing Director. If you've read this far, please follow Particle's Instagram page @particle\_unm - Please.

## Ivan Ling Chen Chuen (he/him)

### **Co-Editor in Chief**

Ivan is in his final year of Creative Writing here at UNM, and trying not to lose his mind! He'll say, "Everything is fine" as he continues to buy and collect books (but not read them!), and overdosing on Americano. With the mountains of books and lack of bookshelves around him, he just writes poetry and manages his blog (Once Every Week) in peaceful solitude.

**Varsha Murali Kaushik (she/her)**  
**Secretary**

Varsha's an avid lover of romances, K-dramas and a big-time Swiftie. She loves writing YA novels, and loves designing recommendation posts for her Bookstagram page. Vanilla and Butterscotch are her favourite ice-cream flavors. She hates tragedies with a passion and is all about a well-deserved Happy Ever After.

**Arpita Singh Bhatia (she/her)**  
**Assistant Marketing Director**

Arpita discovered her passion for media during the early lockdown period. She was fascinated by the know and how of media industry. Arpita loves painting especially acrylic landscapes, and reads and bakes during her free time. She gives credit for most of her knowledge of the field to her internships that she did after her A-Levels. Arpita believes kindness is the biggest superpower in the world. She loves learning and interacting with people everyday.

**Chrystal Pancratius (she/her)**  
**Assistant Secretary**

Chrystal is a driven individual in her second year of international communications studies with film and television. Interests include theatre, reading and finding easter eggs in films and games. While having limited experiences in the literary field she loves to explore new things and is always up for executing random ideas and impromptu outings. You can almost usually find her looping Fabulous Secret Powers (which is, admittedly, something she wishes she has) as she completes her work at ungodly hours.

**Chee Xin Yuan (she/her)**  
**Treasurer**

She's 20, studying pharmacy but never wanted to part ways with literature and books reading for pleasure. Never enough time living her best life with food, people and appreciating sceneries. In her free time, she bakes, plays the piano and writes her diary.



### **Muhammad Aqil Najhan bin Faris Najhan (any)**

#### **Head Editor of Poetry**

Aqil Najhan thinks his legal name is a little too long. Chiefly interested in the fields of performing arts, linguistics, and, of course, poetry, his work has recently been published in the Malaysian Millennial Voices anthology. If you can't find him busying himself with some theatre project or other, you might find him digging in his Notes app, looking for half-formed poems to polish.

### **Raisa Anan Mustakin (she/her)**

#### **Junior Editor of Poetry**

Raisa is an inquisitive being, who finds curiosity in basically anything related to poetry, nature and sports. Currently, she is trying to hone her skills in skateboarding and pastoral poetry.

### **Lau Yee Lynn (she/her)**

#### **Junior Editor of Poetry**

Lynn is a foundation student at UNM, and several of her poems have been published in the literary magazine Aster Lit. She is in love with the exhilarating thrill of debate, and hopes to get over her irrational deathly fear of public speaking. Aside from writing angry poetry, things that make her happy include: danmei novels, MMORPGs, and Ruelle's music.

### **Evelyn Patricia Ramli (she/her)**

#### **Junior Editor of Poetry**

Evelyn is a second-year English Language and Literature student at UNM. Evelyn's interest and passion for poetry, especially editing poetry, have been snowballing. At the same time, she enjoys exploring new design ideas and enhancing her artistic skills! Constantly inspired by her peers, she is determined to do and learn as much as she can, and she is excited for her future in the literary world, wherever it may take her.



### **Tan Jie Ying (he/she/they)**

#### **Head Editor of Fiction**

JY Tan is a final-year Creative Writing student. Her short stories have been published in various zines and NutMag: Home Groan, an anthology showcasing Penang writers and poets. She hopes to finish her first novel before the pandemic ends.

### **Lam Ying Xuan (she/they/them)**

#### **Junior Editor of Fiction**

Her name's Ying Xuan, but feel free to call her Mat. A first-year major in Education, Mat has had quite some experience in editing; be it in writing circles or on the internet as a beta reader, where you'll most likely find her editing and reading fanfiction. Laid back and just a tad eccentric, she's an open person ready to talk about anything with anyone—no topic too far flung for this girl!

### **Nadzirah Najlaa (she/her)**

#### **Junior Editor of Fiction**

Najlaa, a final year English Language and Literature student, is a proud mother of two felines and Pilates enthusiast. Harboured with an insatiable appetite for books, you occasionally find her lurking in Kinokuniya for her next read. She also enjoys a piping hot mug of tea paired with a bucket of ice cream every now and then to soothe her worries in life.

### **Zoe Wee (she/her)**

#### **Junior Editor of Fiction**

Zoe is a bubbly person with a sweet tooth who's hobbies entail D&D, collecting soft toys and watching various TV shows.

**Nur Sabrina Azalea binti Shahizan (she/her)**

**Junior Editor of Fiction**

Sabrina considers herself an old soul who dabbles in writing. She enjoys her own company in which she fills it by savouring written works. She aspires to create works that presents glimpses of Malaysian lives, especially female-centric works set in an androcentric society. On track in graduating from UNM in Creative Writing, she takes whatever opportunity she can to polish and sharpen her skills in producing meaningful takeaways from her stories, as well as skills to experience and learn more about the mechanics of everyday human relationships.

**Chin Sze Wei (she/her)**

**Junior Editor of Fiction**

Sze Wei (Kaitlyn) is an aspiring editor who wishes to improve her skillset to include writing. She greatly enjoys movies, reading books and writing poetry. Her journey with editing began a few years ago when she started editing and proofreading for authors online and fell in love with the process. She hopes that she will continue finding new passions and experiences in life.

**Wong Xiu Wei (she/her)**

**Junior Editor of Creative Nonfiction**

Xiwei is a final year undergraduate student majoring in English with Creative Writing at Nottingham University. Her writing has been published in Alluvium, Eksentrika, the Asian Writer, and Malaysian Millennial Voices. She strives to have the courage to be honest and true to life so that it reflects in her writing. Reach her at [xiuweiwong@gmail.com](mailto:xiuweiwong@gmail.com)! She's friendly. :)

**Lai Chien Yue (she/her)**

**Intern Editor of Fiction**

Lai Chien Yue (Julia) is a 2nd year English Language and Literature student full of curiosity on both subject's interconnectivity. When not studying or staring at her screen, invested in writing works of her own, she shuts herself in her room and indulges in visual novels for hours on end with a cup of good, warm Milo by her side. (She is especially partial towards romance or mystery visual novels).

**F. Zahara Anver (she/her)**

**Intern Editor of Creative Nonfiction**

Zahara is a cat-obsessed bibliophile. She loves reading the Classics in particular and writing nothing in particular. She also likes the word particular.

**Vanessa Chua Hui En (she/her)**

**Junior Editor of Creative Nonfiction**

Since childhood, Vanessa has found her way with words through writing personal diary entries which has drawn her to exploring descriptive essays and creative non-fiction as a young adult today. She still very much considers herself a new kid on the block when it comes to writing but her passion drives her to diligently learn and polish her skills from her peers and superiors. While she'd like to believe that she writes inspiring stories, Vanessa's writings are actually just full of angst and existential crises.

**Kishaun Xavier (he/him)**

**Junior Editor of Creative Nonfiction**

I like sleeping in rainy days and I actually like some classics, just some. Like maybe one.

### **Evelyn Patricia Ramli (she/her)**

#### **Head of Design**

Evelyn is a second-year English Language and Literature student at UNM. Evelyn's interest and passion for poetry, especially editing poetry, have been snowballing. At the same time, she enjoys exploring new design ideas and enhancing her artistic skills! Constantly inspired by her peers, she is determined to do and learn as much as she can, and she is excited for her future in the literary world, wherever it may take her.

### **Damia Norazharuddin (she/her)**

#### **Web Designer/Illustrator**

Damia is a computer science student whose course makes her well experienced in HTML and web design. She also does digital art and illustrations as a hobby and has years of experience using Photoshop. Her love of digital art translates to her interest in watching animated films and her ideal day off is playing super smash bros on switch and painting.

### **Arina Sofea (she/her)**

#### **Graphic Designer**

Being a first year English with Creative Writing student, Sofea spends most of her time crying over books or rewriting her essays for the umpteenth time. Currently spending her free time freelancing, she aspires to become an editor, or maybe a copywriter, or maybe... a baker? Who knows anymore?

### **Eriya Khongsuwan (she/her)**

#### **Interning Graphic Designer**

Eriya is pursuing a degree in Creative Writing and is someone who enjoys creating stories and letting her imagination run wild. She can be both very shy and very friendly but do not fear, she is very caring of those she holds dear to her heart.

