

A (**FICTION**) Zine
A (**LENS**) Zine
A (**SPARING**) Zine
A (**CLOSURE**) Zine
A (**ISSUE-SIX**) Zine
A (**CHARLOTTE**) Zine
A (**TEGAN**) Zine
A (**E·K**) Zine
A (**LEWIS**) Zine
A (**BRISBANE**) Zine

A () *Zine*, issue six, featuring art by **Charlotte Tegan** and words by **EK Lewis**, put together by **Jerath Head & Jonathan O'Brien**, and published by **pseudonaja.group**.

When we first sat down with the idea to make a zine during quarantine, the whole country was in roughly the same boat. Quarantine meant staying home, and we figured staying home meant we'd all be missing each other, and we'd all be looking for things to do. And then we thought—just because we can't see people doesn't mean we can't make something together.

We reached out to some of our favourite Brisbane creatives, who are also some of our favourite people. We said—we don't have any money or particularly coherent ideas, but it'd sure be nice to work with you and put some of your work in front of the public during this time, and to maybe pair you up with someone else to make something that is each of you, and also its own thing, and also uniquely Brisbane.

As it turned out, the coronavirus lockdown meant different things to different people. In Queensland we were fortunate, many of the people involved in this zine particularly so—some found themselves busier than they thought they would, and others ended up busier than when lockdown began.

So this zine became a slow process. This was almost exclusively our fault. But everyone was patient, and didn't complain, and gave freely of their time and energy. Charlotte and Emma's works both ration light, and when it came time to lay this zine out, setting the text and images against darkness was irresistible. Emma's story takes the mood of Charlotte's images and gives it flesh, playing on an understated tension that feels like being locked in a room, peering through the window, just making sure that the world's still out there turning. And for now, it is, and so maybe take a turn or two to enjoy this parenthetical zine, this quaranzine, this six-of-eight zine. We enjoyed making it.

[J+J]



Outlook

When Connor moved out, he took the blinds with him.

In the early hours of the morning I'd stepped through the front door and into a living room that glowed a deep, dim red. Light flooded in through the thin glass windows from the cluster of neon signs in Mandarin and English that advertised the bars and restaurants on my street. The familiar, muffled pulsing of nightlife drew me closer, and for a while I looked down to watch as figures flowed through the streets below. Some stopped to fill the plastic chairs that littered the pavement, cramming themselves around tables still laden with other people's empty pitchers and pint glasses. Others hovered at the entrances of clubs, craning their necks and calling out to friends who had wandered off elsewhere, before disappearing through the doorways together.

'I've done you a favour,' Connor said when I called to confront him that afternoon. 'You'd go days without seeing any light otherwise.'

'And?'

'And?'

I knew from the way he repeated my question that someone was there with him, someone he was hoping would get him to elaborate on the call after he hung up.

'I bought them when we moved in, and I needed them for my new place,' he added when I didn't respond. 'Not everything has some hidden meaning, Dill.'

He'd said the same thing three weeks earlier when I asked why he'd started going to the markets that I frequented in Chinatown. He hadn't seen me there, and I'd watched from a distance as he walked through each row, feigning interest in the stalls on either side of his path as his eyes searched beyond them.

In the early days of my new life in Singapore, I hadn't ventured further than a few kilometres from our apartment building. Each morning, having calculated how much time it would take for me to get to university for a 9am lecture, I left home half an hour earlier than Connor did for work. For the next hour I'd wander the streets of the neighbourhoods close by. Then I'd weave my way back to the apartment where I'd spend the rest of my day, careful to ensure that, by the time Connor got home, it looked much the same as it had when he'd left.

Money became an issue far sooner than I'd anticipated, forcing me to take the first job that I was offered. It was bar work not far from the university, which would have worked well had it not meant that I needed to be there at night instead of during the day. I regularly cursed the past version of myself who had first volunteered to split the rent of the apartment evenly with Connor, then insisted on doing so.

'Are you sure? Half of the rent's written into the new contract. I'm happy to split the remaining half with you.' He'd reminded me in the final days before our departure. 'I doubt you'll have time for a job with how often they want you in class. But I guess that's why they give you all that money—so that you can focus on the study and still get by.'

Connor had always been more academic than I had when we were friends in high school, but his ambition made him restless. As soon as school finished, he moved out of the town we grew up in and away to the

city for an entry level role in financial services. I stayed put and pulled pints at the local pub. With the exception of the odd 'Happy Birthday!' message we'd lost touch, and I didn't see him again until he walked into the pub almost four years later. I recognised him immediately and was pleased when he recognised me too.

'Nah, I'm not back. Not really,' he told me from across the bar. 'Well, just for a few weeks to say my goodbyes. Work's transferring me to Singapore in a little over a month. It's been on the cards for a while, but it all went through last week.'

'That's so weird,' I replied. 'I've just found out I'm moving there too.'

With the hours my new job required me to keep, my routine began to fall apart. With it, so did Connor's trust. His questions about university, once asked with curiosity, began to sound sceptical. He'd noticed that—too tired to drag myself from bed after another late-night shift—I no longer left the apartment before he went to work. I'd become complacent about the mess I made during the hours in which we were both supposed to be out and, as his suspicions grew, he began spending his lunch hour at home. Having frequently found me fresh out of the shower or sprawled on the sofa too many days in a row, I stopped claiming to have taken yet another sick day and Connor stopped feigning surprise when he saw me, opting instead to make a quip about my tight class schedule. Eventually, I decided the best way to avoid the topic was to avoid Connor himself. Finishing work after midnight most evenings, I began visiting the nearby markets that ran from dusk to dawn. It was there that I met Louise.

It took me a couple of weeks to ask her to dinner on my night off. It was 4.30am, still dark but for the battery powered lamps and string lights that stall holders plugged into their portable generators. Between the whirring of motors, the melding of pop songs that blared from tinny stereos, and the shouts of vendors undercutting one another on the prices of grouper and crab, durian and ginger, I'd had to shout the invite at her. We were standing with her stall between us; Louise had just sold me a kilogram of lychees for four Singaporean dollars even though they were advertised at six. I stopped to purchase fruit from her most mornings and had taken to



striking up conversation, a habit that I'd worked hard to convince myself was coincidental despite looking forward to seeing her. When I asked if she'd like to come over for dinner, she asked me to repeat myself.

'Tonight?' she said uncertainly. Then she agreed, lifting the remaining bunches of bananas from a cardboard box and flipping it over to write my address on the underside with a small smile on her face.

Connor was supposed to be having drinks with his workmates. I'd commented on how surprised I was to see him as soon as the door began to open, regretting the remark as I made it for what it revealed. He'd thrown me a strange look, one that crept into a smirk when he saw I wasn't alone.

'Dillon didn't say she was having company tonight.'

He smiled, extending his hand and leaning toward where Louise and I sat on the couch so that she should shake it. 'Is there a drop spare for me?' He gestured to our half empty wine glasses. 'I can top you up too. So, how do you know each other?'

Later, after Louise had left, Connor was quick to revisit the topic.

'Sounds like you were projecting,' he called from the couch. 'You thought she'd given you a discount because she wanted to get to know you, but that's what you wanted. She just wanted to get rid of some lychees. Kinda like when we met.'

I was in the kitchen cleaning up and grateful for the distance it put between us, however slight.

'Harsh.'

'Kidding.'

I struggled to picture the expression on his face, wondering if it revealed more than his neutral tone.

'Anyway,' he said eventually. 'It worked out fine. She's nice. And it seemed like she had a good time. Which stall did you say she works at again?'

I hadn't.

I didn't hear from Connor again after our phone call about the blinds, but I ran into him a few months later as I came out of the MRT station on my way to work. He was with Louise. Connor pointed out that they were in a rush and Louise nodded as he spoke, looking past me and into the station. I suggested that we meet for drinks one night, somewhere nearby.

'So you really do go to uni here then?' Louise asked in response, gesturing in the direction of the campus. I didn't answer. 'On a scholarship to study History?' She paused. 'Connor's still unsure.'

I looked at Connor, waiting for him to say that she was wrong—that he wasn't unsure, or that it didn't matter. He stared back, blankly.

The daylight had been fading fast when I'd left the apartment that evening and I realised then, watching the expressions on their faces shift in the glare from the station sign above us, that the lights around us had come on and it was almost dark. ◇





(a p s e u d o n a j a p r o j e c t)

Charlotte Tegan is a sessional teaching academic at the Queensland University of Technology, teaching in interactive and visual design theory, art history, photomedia, and creative practice. Her PhD research explored the effects of digital connection and isolation on creative capacity in contemporary photomedia. Often working with analogue photographic methods, film, plastic cameras and experimental processes, Charlotte investigates and explores methods of seeing and viewing, and how perspectives change depending on the devices we use.

EK Lewis is a writer whose work has been published by the likes of *Voiceworks*, *Commonwealth Writers*, and *Hot Chicks with Big Brains*. She is Deputy Online Editor of *Archer Magazine*, and works at Brisbane's Avid Reader Bookshop where she runs literary events and hosts a monthly book club.

Pseudonaja is a small independent literary group based in Brisbane. A () Zine is their first project. More details, including financial breakdowns and digital versions of this publication, can be found online at pseudonaja.group. You can reach out to the collective at pseudonaja.group@gmail.com.

The traditional owners of the lands on which Brisbane sits—and where this zine was made—are the Yugara and Turrbal people, and their sovereignty was never ceded.

**WITHOUT SEEING
ANY LIGHT.**

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