

It is difficult to stare at a face too long without regretting your choices



The Missing Anthology

Jalan Besar Volume: 14 September 2023
Edited by Vanessa Ho, Raksha Mahtani, nor

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This cover was designed by Nicol Tan



About Project X

Established in 2008, Project X is a local non-profit organisation in Singapore that provides social, emotional and legal support to sex workers in Singapore. We envision a society where sex workers no longer face violence and discrimination.

Project X plays a pivotal role in addressing the unmet needs of sex and entertainment workers in Singapore. We contribute to the fight for human rights and better quality of lives of sex workers by channeling key resources, evidence-based advocacy, key population research, community building and strategic partnerships. If you wish to support our work, you may donate via our QR code or through our [Give.Asia](#) link



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A Note from the Editors

Vanessa Ho, Raksha, nor

We kicked off 2022 with an open call on Project X's social platforms. As part of our Jalan Besar Fellowship funded by Singlit Station, Project X was able to facilitate writing workshops for adult service providers in Singapore. 26 people expressed their interest and to our surprise, we received sign-ups as far and wide from Europe, Africa and the United States. Sex workers everywhere share our sentiment – it is high time for sex workers to reclaim narratives surrounding the profession.

In Singapore, narratives around sex work in mainstream media have the tendency to dehumanise, glamourise, and sensationalise. Often sex workers are perceived as coerced and separate from their own agency. Previous attempts at publishing sex worker voices in Singapore literature such as *Invisible Trade: High Class Sex for Sale in Singapore*, *Scarlet Harlot*, *17A Keong Saik Road* and *Lancing Girls of a Happy World* show that there is an urgent need for sex worker-led narratives. Certainly, there has been extensive scholarship on sex work in the fields of communication studies, public health, history, and sociology in exploring aspects of the trade, yet few focus on centering the narratives of marginalised groups. To this end, Project X has been documenting sex worker voices through our blog.

With over 10,000 sex workers who move in and out of Singapore's industry, the illicitness of sex work also casts a shadow on how these groups are understood, represented, addressed, regulated, and policed. These give way to complex inequalities across the industry that differ based on visa status, nationality, race, gender identity, sexuality, age, and disability – and these have serious implications for concerns of social and economic mobility, stigmatisation, and safety and vulnerability at work. Sex workers' narratives counter and complicate overly simplistic representations of them and their work present in mainstream media and policy, highlighting their various productive (and reproductive) contributions to society. Beyond resisting assumptions that sex workers are coerced, these stories underscore the everyday lived experiences of people in the industry and suggest different possibilities for how we imagine the sex industry and the people who make it happen.

The workshops introduced aspects of writing to the participants, many of whom had little access to these tools in their lives. It held space for participants to experiment with their own writing, with many avenues to explore literature that might be relevant to their craft. These were led by the multi-talented team of **Diana Rahim, Ila, and Marylyn Tan**, who introduced various elements and genres of writing: points of view, character building, speculative fiction, writing for social change, writing as resisting mainstream narratives, and LGBTQ poetry.

Some effects of the workshop underlined the reality of social isolation common in sex work, especially for those working in the industry part-time, online, and freelance. Participants expressed how glad they were for the opportunity to meet others in similar lines of work and share common experiences. This showed in positive reception of the collaborative exercises in getting the participants to bounce off ideas and prioritise what they would explore in their writing. Participants also shared that it was meaningful to meet older (and younger) members of the community and learn from each other, which contributed to a stronger sense of intergenerational sharing of histories and identities. Participants came away with complete pieces that they worked on during the workshop, which some submitted to this volume.

In this volume, you will be taken through different themes, literary forms, and points of view. We move from **Smelly Birds'** call for bigger spaces for transient love, to **Sadie's** bodily experiences servicing second-hand hearts. We learn from **Selena** what it means to start sex work during the Asian Financial Crisis, reflecting on comforts and tensions for intimate workers in secondary, informal service economies. Poems from **Gxddess Charlotte** and **Selena** dialogue on the capture of dommeing. **Alvarez** treats us with a digital image visualising the familiar fear sex workers recognise in society's eyes towards them. **Mai** catapults us to a world of violent liberation, while **Smelly Bird's** second piece awashes us with the freedom of the great sea. **Sherry** underscores the importance of activism and the delicate balance (read: street-smarts) it requires while **Karen** reminds us that 'not [being] poor' is as good as an orgasm. **Kamini's** heartfelt letter to her younger self shines in its tenderness and grace as an everyday practice of self love in the face of stigma and marginalisation. Her work echoes **Pom's** letter to her son as both address how crucial sex work was in providing for themselves and their loved ones. These cumulatively re-centre sex workers' voices from the margins, and spotlight their struggles, aspirations, desires, and despairs.

It has been an incredible ride putting this Missing Anthology together - missing because every other organisation out there seems to have one except us! We are infinitely grateful to all our participants, contributors, facilitators, and funders at Singlit Station for helping us make this volume a reality. Moving forward, we hope The Missing Anthology: Jalan Besar Volume can become the backbone of a fuller, more extensive collection of stories by sex workers in time to come. Please help us share this far and wide, and don't forget to tip the writers if you have enjoyed their works. You may do so via [Give.Asia](https://give.asia) until 31st December 2023.

Second-Hand Hearts

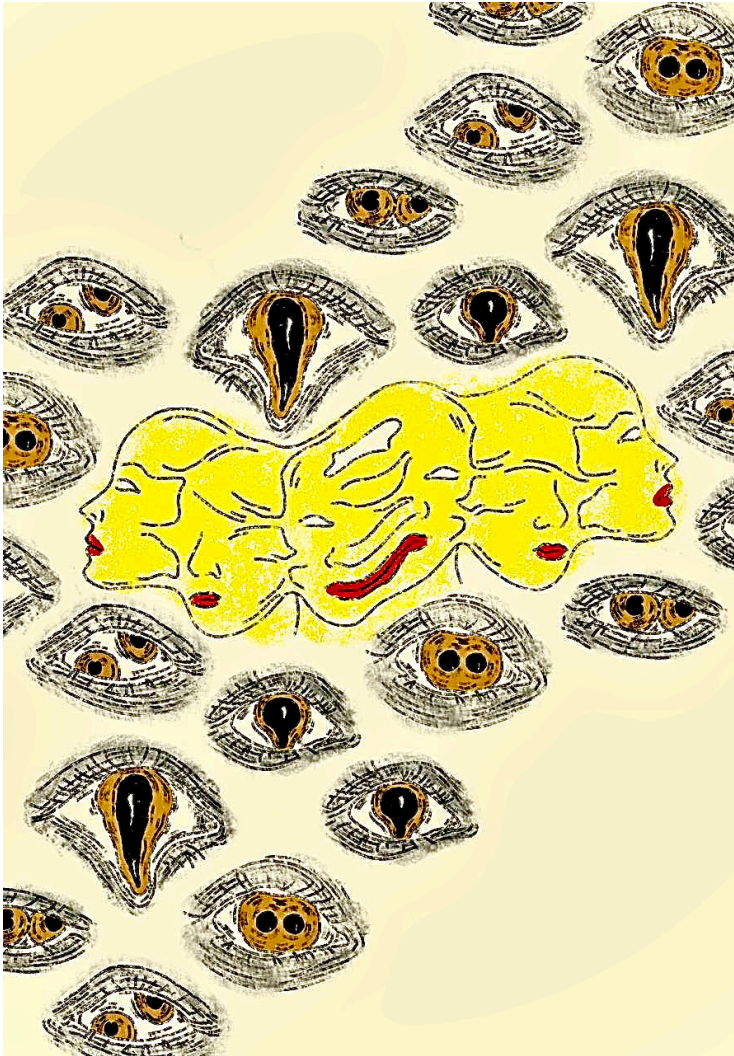
Sadie

I contort my body on hotel beds, knock on doors of married men's houses,
climb over toy trucks and barbie dolls, eye his wedding band and
framed vacation photos, once even a "happy anniversary darling! I love you!"
card.

I serve up first-hand pleasure to second-hand hearts,
sell bottled-up love in vacuum-sealed test tubes,
see the lust in their eyes, hunger tearing my clothes apart,
dirty fingernails leave claw marks on my breasts.

Their thumbs dig into my skin like they're peeling open an orange,
unwrapping the dimpled coarseness to get to the prize underneath,
the juicy shine of a girl less than half their age. Open legs,
wet pussy, no one needs to know it's just lube.

Them
Alvarez



Confirmation bias is common in society; a negative worldview of sex workers. They look like everyone else, but society sees them differently through the lens of fear, choosing to ignore other emotions a person may experience.

திசைகள் (Ticaikal) | *Directions*

Kamini

Dheem-Dheem!

Let me begin again.

Dear younger Kamini,

During your twenties and thirties, you were uncertain of the future. Having hindsight is so unfair. You will soon learn that hope and tragedy are two sides of the same coin. Any sense of security is only momentary.

At 32, you will become a mother to a beautiful baby boy. His cries of hunger, need for his Amma reverberated across the rooms. As you carry your new bundle of joy, what's possibly one of the greatest achievements in your life, you can't help but heave a plaintive sigh.

You will look at your Surya playing with his son, all three of our heartstrings twisted and coiled onto each other, tugging amusingly at the sight of each other. You wanted this. You needed this. A seemingly picture-perfect family that radiated warmth you lacked growing up.

But love doesn't pay the bills.

What திசை could my life have taken if I chose the men who lusted after me over sex work? If you think I sound like I regret my decision...you're thoroughly mistaken.

After NS, you will find that there will not be a lot of life opportunities in Singapore. I left for Malaysia. I lied to my family that I was going on vacation, only to reveal to them after a while that I was not coming back home. They didn't insist that I come back home. Sex work in Malaysia was so dangerous back then. It was me against the world. No one in my family knew. I saw many men who were high on drugs and abusive towards the girls working on the streets. Even people who were meant to help us had forgotten about us. I recall how helpless and dumbfounded I felt when the police officer pointed at the stack of files and chided me, "Tengok tu! Ni semua bapak!". Tears welled in my eyes. I left feeling like the world colluded against me because I was different. But don't worry, I found strength in numbers – with my Thirunangai community.

If the periyaguru [transelder] working on the streets didn't save me and my friends that day... I am confident of the exact துிசை our lives would have traversed. We could have become drug addicts. Worse, dead with nothing accomplished.

Sex work indirectly brought about my first reet-rivai. Back then, who understood Thirunangais? We were outcasts so we all banded, lived together, ate together, and did sex work. I became someone's daughter, someone's chela, and at the same time made someone a mother. We found solidarity in the little things amongst ourselves. They taught us about taking hormones, how to dress, doing household chores, and how to handle customers. It was very strict back then. I remember how in the presence of a periyaguru, we had to sit on the floor, abiding by everything she uttered. It felt like every minute they would be ordering my sisters and I to do something for them. We couldn't talk back. After doing sex work, the younger girls had to wear a nightie over our clothes before we entered the house because our young exposed flesh might seduce their husbands. We laughed amongst ourselves, "These old women are more demanding than men!". While that may be true, it was also true that the men you meet during sex work can be some of the most violent creatures you ever meet. Your Thirunangai mothers may scold you but they never laid their hands on you. These rude men, however, feel entitled to abuse you just because they paid for your time. I hope one day that ends.

You will find sex-working days fun yet tough... I began drinking to overcome my apprehension of being intimate with my clients. It helped me to relieve my tension. Soon people became enamoured by how provocative I was. I paraded around in thigh-high boots, in a risqué blouse that could have exposed everything with one unexpected sneeze, and a suede mini-skirt. You may ask, what was that like? It masked how uncomfortable and unsafe I sometimes felt. I had to be more bold than I usually am, but it became easier with time, just like any other job. At the end of the day, it was just a job.

I was determined to save enough money for my reassignment surgery! Rosie mummy, who is my Thirunangai mother till this day, is not even my actual contam (blood relation) and she never expected anything in return from me. But to ensure that our bond doesn't lose meaning, she helped me beyond what my own mother could do! Rosie mummy always looked out for me. Be it strategising on protecting myself against clients or other petty politics that Thirunangais would have with each other, she allowed me to flourish without bringing me down. She even offered to pay for my surgery! I refused as I wanted to reach that milestone on my own.

“Jai Jai Mata! Santhoshi Mata! Jai Jai Mata! Santhoshi Mata!”

My Thirunangai family surrounded me, clapping their hands, thanking the Mother-Goddess for my safe return from death's doors during the sex reassignment surgery (SRS). The colours, atmosphere, sounds surrounding me was a sensorial excess. I kneeled and hunched in front of the Mother Goddess, clad in a green sari with my face covered by my pallu [loose end of the sari], in front of the elaborate padayal [offerings] of fruits, sweets, snacks, food, lamps. The periya Thirunangais, angling the mirror, raised my pallu so that both the Mother Goddess and I caught a glimpse of each other first. Again, tears welled in my eyes, but this time beaming with pride. My hands clasped, I thought, “Aatha [referring to the Mother-Goddess], you have helped me through this ordeal. My SRS was a success and now no one in the world can deny that I am a woman. Even my identity marker on my IC states ‘F’”.

My Surya was also there, witnessing this ceremony. I could only envision myself as a woman whenever I was with him, as his wife, not his boyfriend.

Sex work enabled me to survive when I left home after NS. Sex work allowed me to make sense of who I am as I transitioned. To undergo SRS is an achievement among us, Thirunangais! We know how hard we had to fight to figure out who we are. Sex work gave me a sense of belonging with my Thirunangai community. I am respected because of my journey. Of course, belonging will mean radically different things to you at different stages of life. But the fleeting moments of everyday sex work during my younger days remain as the durable threads that structure my life with meaning till this day.

I initially left sex work when we got married. You may wonder, of all the proposals that came my way, why I went with this man? As cliched as it may sound, it was the unspoken understanding and abundant love that my Surya drowned me in. After so many years of knowing each other, his affection for me never waned. That's when I knew he was the one. I have seen my fair share of men and I have given my heart to many but no one accepted and protected me like my Surya. None were quite like my Surya.

Aiyo! I snapped out of my daydreaming as I heard my son crying. That was an ominous cry I never heard before. I didn't know what he wanted.

"What do I do now?", I thought. We were living in Malaysia. I went back to sex work in Singapore without Surya knowing. I obtained my yellow card after my son was born and worked for another two years. I was always back home in Malaysia by 9am. When I finally told and explained to Surya that I had been doing sex work all this while, he was awfully silent. He didn't speak to me for a while. When he finally broke his silence, he explained that he wanted space to understand why I did sex work. He couldn't understand why I did it, why I didn't rely on him more but he never judged me for it. For that, I was grateful.

Now he is gone. It's been a few years since his passing, and it still hasn't registered that the man I loved with every breath wasn't by my side. Have I stopped living? No. I have my son, my family, and my friends by my side. Has it been easier? No.

I don't know what the future holds for me now. This is why hindsight is so unfair. Look at the dire financial situation you're trapped in, younger Kamini! Barely enough to get by, you can't help but wonder which is more important, work or this relationship... You could have spent more time with your Surya if you chose him. One gave money, and the other needed money to sustain. Either way, we all need money to survive.

Be kind to yourself, Kamini. Grief and trauma are not fleeting moments. This too shall pass.

Rooting for you,
Kamini

Dheem-Dheem!

Alligators Don't Cry
Smelly Birds

Supreme KTV at Far East Shopping Centre. 3.32pm. Friday. July 2021. 34 deg.
As **Man** sits on the bed going off on some tangent, **Alli** picks up her pieces of skin and scales from the room.

Man You're good.

Alli Thank you.

Man I really appreciated the whole twisty thing you did with your body. I thought it's impossible to get into that shape. I mean - I've never seen anyone do that. It really made the whole thing different. How did you do it?

Alli It takes time.

Man Really? You train everyday? Secretly in your room? All these positions... You're a naughty girl ah. I mean, what if your mum walks in?

Alli smiles.

Man Where do you live?

Alli I'm sorry?

Man Oh I didn't mean to be rude. I was just going to ask where you're headed.

Alli I'm meeting someone else.

Man Oh. So fast? It must be tough during these times. Did I give you a good time?

Alli Yeah, definitely.

Man You can be completely honest. I know I paid and everything, but it's important that both of us enjoy this. That is the most important part about sex. I'm sure girls like you have it difficult. Not everyone understands.

Alli smiles and does not reply.

Man Sorry if I hurt you. I didn't mean to.

Alli Oh. It's not you.

Man You were crying. You can tell me, you know. What's going on in your mind? Something far away? Your home? Your distant lover?

Alli We cry when we blink. It's difficult to not blink when you're making love. People will get scared. Run away. Scream. Or maybe not. It is difficult to stare at a face too long without regretting your choices. It is difficult to not cry when we make love. To get into the momentum, we mount, collapse, combine, and conform to the shapes that make us lovable. We can't stop. We make noises not because we can't help it, but it is a constant reminder to breathe, to take in oxygen sharply so our bodies can withstand it. And then we convulse and force air through our sinuses and the tears spill. We cry not because we are in pain. We cry because we need to breathe.

Man So you didn't enjoy the kisses?

Alli I don't do long kisses.

Man And why is that?

Alli I dislike the feeling of wetness, that feeling of sinking into something deeper and deeper, and you're drowning, suffocating.

Man That's what being in love is like.

Alli Is that so?

Man Have you loved someone?

Alli My mind wanders. It's difficult to just love one thing when I can see the whole world. I see the movement of everything, every slight thing. It's getting...

Alli ...too tiring, so I close my eyes. And when I open my eyes, they are gone. But I'm good at short love, I can imagine two people loving each other with a destination. I can only do things when I know it will end.

Man Do you often want to end things?

Alli Not in that way, I just want to move on. Quickly. Move to somewhere better. But we don't know where. Do you want to?

Man Now that I get more time by myself, I start to think about those things again.

Alli You mean dying?

Man Not dying per se. But after being trapped somewhere for so long, you start to notice the things that you have and have neglected. They pile up in front of you, they swing by your face everyday. But what can you do when you're trapped in a far away country? My son no longer wants to get on the call with me because he thinks I don't want to go back. He can't understand me. He can't understand the pandemic. Everyday he is forgetting me. Everyday I remember that we are forgetting each other. Maybe people like us are just not capable of love.

Alli It must be painful. To be separated from your son.

Man Do you have a kid too?

Alli Do you ever regret?

Man That we are trapped here?

Alli Don't you think we trap ourselves sometimes? We come from a far away land, knowing that we will live the underlife. And it's hard to exist.

Man But we could co-exist, you and I. Everyone who is trapped in a small space. We can merge these spaces and exist in a bigger space. We can love and care for each other, while our families are far away.

Alli Not now.

Man Yea I miss the grass at City Plaza.

Alli At least we get to see each other now.

RADIO: Breaking news! Just 10 minutes ago, our prime ministress has published a new discovery on Facebook regarding the COVID 19 situation. "Today I learn that virus can spread not just through host by hostess." An emergency team has been formed immediately to identify hostesses that remain dangerous to the society. More updates will come in shortly. Meanwhile, stay safe and sanitize yourself. Don't forget to practise safe entry!

Alli I must go now.

Man When will I see you again?

Alli There won't be a next time.

Man How are you so sure?

Alli I only do short kisses.

Selena

Selena

You can call me Selena, I am currently in my 50s. Still going strong. Agile as ever. Very much still sought after. I do all kinds of sex work. I treat it like a social experiment, almost. I started this profession to learn about sex. I wanted to know what it was all about. For a big part of my life, I was an introvert. At the age of 35, I started getting curious about sex. I felt a deep desire to seek what I was missing out on. Why so late? Having come from a conservative background, it was drummed into me that premarital sex was a huge no-no.

It was also during this period that I began transitioning. Though I started my transition as early as the age of 18, I was hesitant and halted it at different times. I considered furthering my studies and developing a career for myself. I wanted a “proper” job. I also denied myself from becoming who I truly was. I wanted so badly to be straight like everybody else. After my parents passed, I felt lost. However, their passing liberated me. I could finally decide what was good for me.

I had a deep fear of the unknown when it came to meeting people. Sex work was a way of meeting men in private and getting paid for it too. I knew that I deserved to be paid for my time. There were overhead costs to be dealt with as well as outstanding bills. In the late 90s, I began sex work on the streets of central Singapore, where other transgender women like myself were working. While I knew of this spot, I was new and did not know enough people. This led me to learn the ropes the hard way. I had to make trials and errors and met many undesirable characters of which I do not wish to speak. I was clueless and gullible. Once, a taxi driver hired me and took me to a deserted place I was not familiar with. It was quite a distance away from my workplace. I had forgotten to collect payment upfront. When the deed was done, he had to offload me there and then as he had an urgent call to attend to. I was disappointed and left to walk away penniless.

There were two major global events that stood in the way of my decision to be a sex worker full-time. Unfortunately for me, I started sex work at the wrong time. My infancy stage collided with the 1997 Asian economic crash. This was followed by the SARS pandemic in 2003. I was a deeply impatient person and I felt that God was teaching me a valuable lesson. Patience is a virtue...and I went through hell. But never doubt the ability of a businesswoman. I’ve always had a preference for the finer things in life and I knew I had to turn towards a clientele

with economic access. This was not gonna happen through the men I met on the streets. Ahead of my time, I took my business online in the early 2000s. I began by exploring adult websites whereby one in particular was immensely popular for a while. For better or for worse, the website is now defunct. I would post about myself, spelling out my personality in depth. I had to tell them what I'm made of, and what I'm keen on. That website was popular with older working professionals, expatriates, and visiting businessmen. I portrayed myself as somebody sophisticated and grounded, approachable and friendly in person. I encouraged them to explore their darkest secrets and inner kinks. I made myself very interesting, not only because I want to project a persona, I was presenting an authentic image of myself where interested clients expressed wanting to be their genuine selves. I could talk about anything under the sun.

It was through this website that I met three interesting individuals. The first was an expatriate client-turned-boyfriend. He was married and has had a steady career as a senior engineer in Singapore for many years. He took good care of me and spoiled me. Next was a long-distance boyfriend based in Australia. He was a manager, much older than I am, and was desperate for a partner who would care and love him. Around the same time, I met a generous British playmate. He was a lawyer and believed in me. He saw my sincerity and honoured my intense passion for love, lust, and friendship in every sense of the word. Due to these relations with my weekly upscale clientele, both newcomers and regulars alike, I experienced upward mobility. My finances improved tremendously. Locally, not many sex workers were on the online scene yet. My generosity and my willingness to share about this new platform resulted in my own competition. I felt an obligation to help the struggling girls. Afterwards, I had to work even harder to stand out from the very people whom I guided and helped to get clients.

As a young person, I focused on building a career in the travel industry. The 9-to-5 life was not for me as I was never a morning person. I left. I was ambitious - I wanted to strike it on my own and call the shots as my own boss. Wake up anytime I like and go to bed anytime I like as well. The first destination I got flown out to as a sex worker was Dubai and I have never looked back since. Using my travel geography, I planned my itinerary carefully. I travelled far and wide to first-world countries. By and large, I was mostly seeing upscale, wealthy gentlemen who knew how to treat women right. Needless to say, there were also a couple of clowns. I wouldn't sweat it too much thinking about them.

There were many highlights and stories I could share. There was an abundance of generous gentlemen. One distinguished gentleman, in particular, stood out to me. He told me that his country needed more girls like me. By that, he meant dainty well-mannered Asian girls like myself. He would outrightly tell me that I could not hold a candle to the hot Brazilian trans female worker before me. She was hot and sexy. But to him, I shone through my mannerisms. I would offer him drinks in a submissive manner and massage him as well. Performing sincerity was key in everything I did. I was never a scheming type. I think that's why God always protects me and sees to my well-being as my intentions are pure.

Remember my expatriate boyfriend in Singapore? He was aware of my profession and allowed me to continue on as that was how we got to know each other. He took care of me both emotionally and financially. It was a fulfilling time I had with him. As I started to travel abroad, our relationship deteriorated. Due to my absence, he found another local woman who shared the same kinks as him. During an off-season, I came back to Singapore and we had a good chat. We parted ways amicably. I have so many fond memories of him which still lingers on till this day. Having said that, I would like to reiterate that it is still possible to have a loving relationship despite the profession. However, we must be very careful that we are not being taken for a ride in terms of our emotions and finances.

As sex workers, we have so much to lose. We have to employ intense navigation to get things right as we deem fit. A word to the younger sex workers: Never be embarrassed or humiliated by our so-called immoral profession. At the end of the day, we are doing a lot of justice to the existence of mankind. Sex workers do not only satisfy the sexual needs of our clients, we also provide emotional support when needed. This can look like counselling about their interactions with their spouse and their family, as well as educating them about the importance of safe sex practices at all times. Many a time, I encountered clients with mental issues, social awkwardness, and substance use which is on the rise as of late. In this very sense, sex work is a noble career. But sorry to say, not everyone is cut out for it.

If I really had the chance to turn the clock, I would have done something else. If I had not been transgender, I would not have turned towards sex work. However, I harbour no regrets whatsoever. At least, I dared to take the plunge and tried my very best to be a better version of myself. I have learned the true meaning of the word patience.

This life chapter has taught me to take responsibility for my decisions. As we grow older, our expectations change. So do our aspirations. I have always fantasised about material excess and while I have tasted and enjoyed it, it was not up to my expectations. These days, as much as I work hard, I also want to rest and relax well. I want to enjoy life and whatever quality there is to be derived from it.

Mommy

Selena

My lingerie is pink
La Senza was the in thing
so pretty it was, made me sing
till it discoloured, no more bling

in the height of its use
it saw a boy desperate for me
to punish him for failing his test
as loving dearest stepmommy

MOMMY PLEASE DON'T CANE ME
MOMMY PLEASE DON'T CANE ME
MOMMY I TRIED SO HARD STUDIED SO HARD
I'M SO HARD FOR YOU
SEXY MOMMY

INSOLENT BOY. but more insolent parents
a lesson to you all
a deprivation of love be such that it sank
into an enjoyment of physical pain
because there's no other way out
of your prisons of childhood
except to lust whereby the forbidden
turns bidden, the painful into pleasure,
the hidden into heights
the immoral child obsessed with being enough
the lingerie is my armour, fading over
the years. when it retires, i wonder who will punish
the doctor, the GP teacher, the handsome nice Chinese boy,
the professional emailer, the sweet Catholic son, the big business boys,
who will mommy these mommyless men.

I am my mother's child

Mai

It's quiet now.

Their disgusting moans of pleasure had finally ceased, and I had zero doubt that they were now in deep sleep after drinking unhealthy amounts of alcohol, followed by fucking each other. Slowly propping myself up on my elbows, I winced as my head started to throb and my vision grew darker. I stopped all movement, assessing the damage my body had taken today to carefully calculate how I could get myself off the floor without losing consciousness or throwing up. After what felt like an eternity, I was finally sat up in my room as I willed the tinnitus away. The ringing in my ears I was all too familiar with, had to go away for me to be able to function.

My hands shook involuntarily as I brought them to inspect the state of my face. The old cuts and bruises did not get a chance to heal as they befriended with fresh ones I've obtained today. My hands were on autopilot now, fingers scraping off dried blood on my temples and running across the short bristles of my shaved head repeatedly until they no longer shook. I gently rested my fingers on my neck, feeling for the bruises and scratches.

The boiling rage inside of my chest was ready to erupt as I uncovered every ache in every inch of my body. I was greeted with another round of agony as I attempted to swallow the lump forming in my throat. Now engulfed in fiery red, I hoisted myself up from the floor and scanned my pitiful room for a weapon. Boxes upon boxes stacked on the metal racks were bound to have something I needed. Despite this cramped storage room being the room I was banished to live in, it was still being utilised as a storage room by them, further demeaning my existence.

I let my lips curl up in defiance of the swells and cuts as my eyes fell on a toolbox, partially obscured by their miscellaneous junk. My injuries screamed at me to stop, but I continued dragging the hefty toolbox from the rack closer to me. My shoulders and neck were on fire, but I was too adamant and had had enough of sleeping off my injuries. I undid the latch and was greeted by dust and rust. Various shapes and sizes of screwdrivers I never knew existed laid in the pile. A claw hammer lay at the bottom, calling out to me. The neglect was evident from the mildew on its handle to the rust across its head. I held the hammer, admiring its weight and appearance. The rust and wood rot did not deter my adoration.

I stood by my mother's side of the bed and stared at her and her boyfriend's sleeping form. Their exposed bodies fed the flame of disgust inside of me.

With both hands around the wooden handle, I lifted the hammer over my head and swung downwards straight to my mother's face. The claw landed straight into her eye as the other shot open, and her entire body jerked.

The excruciating pain I had been in for the past five years disappeared with each strike, and she never even got a chance to fight back as her skull was annihilated by my hands. Her face seemed to have burst open, and her pink, red, and white inside were splattered everywhere.

The stench of booze in the house was finally gone, over-empowered by the tang of metal, similar to when I first opened the toolbox.

Amidst the obliteration of my mother, he had not once stirred from his sleep. His breaths were loud and heavy as I wasted no time reaching him with my trusty hammer in hand. I willed the anger I'd accumulated over the years as I raised the weapon into the air and let my rage possess me as I struck every inch of his face. With each clobber, I could feel the physical and mental anguish they caused me to dissipate. His body twitched as I continued to ravage his skull. Chunks of brain matter and blood spurts danced in synchronise with my swings until the place where his head used to be was a bloody incomprehensible pulp.

I was not done yet.

I aimed for his chest, utilising the hammer's claw again to bore him open. Liquid crimson flowed everywhere, encouraging me to keep going as if I needed further encouragement. I planted the hammer's claw into his abdomen and dragged it downwards until I reached his vile crotch. The involuntary movements his body made post-mortem had me giddy with joy. I continued to desecrate what was left of him until nothing was satisfying for me to crush.

The physical scars they've bestowed upon me were now enveloped by gore. They no longer stung and felt healed from being showered in their liquid red.

I went to the kitchen and poured myself a bowl of cereal, placing the hammer on the table while I ate. My eyes closed as pure bliss washed over my entire body. The flavours of the cereal swirled in my mouth, ridding me of my starved self. My throat ached with every swallow, but I was too hungry to care.

I can finally roam around the house, no longer confined to the small inadequate space they made me live in.

It's safe now.

雞 GAI

Smelly Birds

Characters 人物:

大鸡 Big Chicken.

小鸡 Small Chicken.

雞 (gai) in Cantonese and 鸡 (ji) in Mandarin has historically been used to refer to prostitutes/sex workers. However, in contemporary Western advocacy, the term “sexwork” is used to replace “prostitutes” to recognise sexwork as work, a discourse that remains relatively absent within the Chinese community. Referring to a sex worker as an animal could also be dehumanising and derogatory.

The use of 雞 (gai) in this piece is intended to interrogate how our society continues to maintain dehumanising and derogatory stereotypes on these individuals.

Scene 1: Itch.

一、痒。

BIG Chicken is putting on makeup, **SMALL Chicken** is scratching an itch.

大: Oi.

BIG: Oi.

小: 哇,你今天怎么化这么浓的妆?你是不是要去唱戏啊?

SMALL: Wah, why your makeup today so thick? Going to sing Chinese opera ah?

大: 人家老啦,满脸皱纹,男人看了都要跑。

BIG: Old already la, need to cover all my wrinkles. Later customer see already want to run away.

小: 你技术这么好,谁管你脸上有什么。

SMALL: Experience more important than looks lah.

大: 不只是脸。我做的时候都开始喘了。

BIG: Its not only that. Now my stamina sucks too.

SMALL continues scratching.

大: 欸,你这样一直抓会抓坏的。

SMALL: Oi, you will hurt yourself if you keep scratching

小: 我本来不要理他的。但是痒死了。

SMALL: I wanted to ignore it. But it's so itchy

大: 痒就去看医生啦。

BIG: Then go see a doctor.

小: 神经病啊,没看一次customer就去看医生咩,这样不用赚了啦。

SMALL: So what, after every customer go for check up meh? How to earn money?

大: 是啊,如果是HIV怎么办?

BIG: Yeah, what if its HIV leh?

[BIG realises that she said something wrong and walks over to look at her chicken]

小: CHOY, 嘴巴那么臭, HIV哪里有发痒的?

SMALL: CHOY, don't curse me ok. Anyways HIV doesn't give you an itch.

大: 我来看看。哇... 真的不好咧... 我觉得你今天不要去还是比较好。

BIG: Let me see. Oh wow, that looks quite bad. I think you should stay in for a bit.

小: 你养我啊?

SMALL: You take care of me ah?

大: 不会死的啦。

BIG: Rest for a bit won't die one lah.

[BIG's phone rings]

你自己看好来, 先走了。

BIG: I got to go. Don't go to work ok.

[Music cue: Wips of Whorls right after Da Gai finishes line]

Scene 2: Rubber Bands and Gums

小: 喂, 陈哥, 对不起, 我等下不能和你见面, 我们改天再约吧。真的不好意思, 下次给你带啤酒过去。对不起, 我知道你准备了很久, 这种事发生也不是我要的啊, 你要我说多少遍... 【他挂你电话】烦死了... 【电话又响了】

喂, 陈哥... 哦, 妈。谁是陈哥? 大客户, 他刚从我们公司买了一个大空调, 对啊最近这里很热。反正, 钱进来了我再发给你。嗯我先去忙, 拜。

Small: Hey, sorry I can't make it later? Really sorry about it, I didn't want this to happen also. I'll bring you beer next time. How many times do I have to tell you [customer hangs up] ... Annoying... [Hp rings again] Hey, Mr Tan... Oh uhm hi mum... Who's Mr Tan? Oh, I was expecting a call from a huge client, he just bought a very expensive aircon from our company. Yea, the weather is a bit crazy here recently. Anyway, I'll send you the money when I have it. I'll have to go. Bye.

SMALL feels rather lost and starts using the rubber condom to hit herself.

BIG GAI comes back.

大： 有用吗？

BIG: Does it work?

SMALL GAI is flustered to have BIG walking in on her.

大： 没事，我的社工也跟我说这样做。但有点无聊啦，但主要是客户都不喜欢看到我身上的疤。

BIG: Don't worry, my social worker told me to do that too. It's pretty darn lame, but my customers always get disturbed when they see scars on my body.

小： 你怎么那么快就回来？

SMALL: Why are you back so soon?

大： 取消了咯。

BIG: Guy cancelled on me.

小： 又来？

SMALL: Again?

大： 跟你说了，老女人很难做。

BIG: I told you, it sucks being an old woman.

小： 那你至少拿了定金吧

SMALL: At least you got your deposit.

大： ...

BIG: ...

小： 你没有要定金？

SMALL: Are you kidding? You didn't ask?

[BIG Gai brings out some condom packs from her box at middle stage. SMALL gai takes interest and walks over.]

小： 你怎么那么多???

SMALL: Why do you have so many of these?

大: 最近买的,但看来用不上了。

BIG: I bought a lot of these recently, but it seems like I won't need them anymore.

小: 你真的不做了啊。

SMALL: Are you really going to stop?

大: 不知道啦。你拿去吧。

BIG: I don't know. You can have them.

小: 不用。我都很久没有用了。

SMALL: No man. I stopped using them a while ago.

Scene 3: Negotiating with a condom

三、保险套

大: 你觉得它靠谱吗?

BIG: You think we can count on this?

小: 我们还不是放弃了它。。。。

SMALL: We all gave up, didn't we?

大: 包装上说有98%有效

BIG: This says 98% effective.

小: 哈, 98%? 人们总是以为只要有保险套, 就会安全。

SMALL: Yea right. They sound like as long as there is a condom in the room, we will be safe.

大: 讨人厌的 spot check。

BIG: Yeah I hate those spot checks.

小: 也倒不是。我还算幸运, 没遇到这样的事情, 至少目前还没有。但有一天有个顾客跟

我说, 如果这样下去的话, 迟早会出事。然后我就开始想, 如果迟早完蛋, 为什么要花那么多钱来保住自己... 我知道他那样说是一番好心, 要劝我不要做这一行... 但他只让我觉得这个世界少了...

SMALL: Oh, no. I've never gotten into any of those. Yet. But one day someone told me that if I keep doing this, one day I will definitely get into trouble. So why bother spending so much money on trying to protect something that is going to... I know he was being nice and trying to tell me to quit. But it just made me lose faith altogether.

大： 你看，你很令人失望哦。

BIG: [to condom] You disappoint me.

小： 所以那么多套要怎样。

SMALL: So what are you going to do with all these?

大： 也不能怎样，现在行情不好，我用不上，你又不想用。

BIG: Well neither of us can go see any clients now...

[SMALL GAI starts snapping herself with rubber band again]

大： 欸，不要这样了，我们来做一些别的。你想听我的秘诀吗？

BIG: Oi, stop doing that. We can always do something else. Do you want to know some old tricks?

小： 什么来的？

SMALL: What's that?

大： 快乐的秘诀？

BIG: The secrets to happiness.

小： 在这样的环境下还谈开心，有时候我忘了做爱可以是一个开心的感觉。

SMALL: Ugh happy is not a word to describe me now. I freaking hate sex.

大： 这些东西是讲究办法的。

BIG: There is a way.

小： 你的方法就是，习惯这样的环境？

SMALL: To get used to all the shit?

大： 不是，来，让我给你看。

BIG: Nope, come, let me show you.

[BIG GAI takes off her clothes]

小： 不要啦！神经病啊？

SMALL: Omg... Are you crazy?

大：都还没有做你就呱呱叫。你先放轻松，你真的不舒服的话你就喊 safe word 咯。来来，过来。

BIG: You're complaining so much before we start. Just relax, just shout your safe word when you don't feel comfortable. Come, come over.

小：你确定吗，我下面可能有病。

SMALL: Are you sure? I may have something going on down there

大：没事的。

BIG: It'll be fine.

BIG and SMALL are naked and jumping to the beat of EDM playing in the background

小：我们到底在干嘛???

SMALL: What are we doing?????

大：跳就好！

BIG: Just dance!

小：我快不可以了！

SMALL: I can't anymore...

大：忍住！很快就会过去了！甩头！甩手！甩脚！

BIG: Keep it up! It will pass! Move your head, your hands, your legs!

小：我们这样下去，邻居又要投诉了！

SMALL: If we go on like this people will complain!

大：鸡本来就不应该压抑自己的鸣声！

BIG: We chickens shouldn't have to suppress our calls.

小：但现在是凌晨三点！邻居都会投诉我们！

SMALL: But it's 3 am in the morning! Our neighbours are going to complain!

大：难怪你做得那么辛苦。你的戒备心太重了，放松！

BIG: You're too uptight. No wonder you're struggling so hard. How are you ever going to enjoy yourself?

[Music stops and both Chickens flop to the ground]

小： 我们在哪里？

SMALL: Where are we?

大： 梦里。

BIG: In my dream.

小： 鸡可以梦？

SMALL: Chickens can dream?

大： 为什么不可以？

BIG: Why not?

小： 只是，我已经很久没有这样了。我已经忘了怎么梦。

SMALL: It's just... I haven't dreamt so long, I've forgotten how to.

大： 没关系。你就紧跟着我就可以了。

BIG: It's alright, just follow my lead.

[They both soak in the water. The sound of waves.]

小： 我们为什么会在这个地方？

SMALL: Why are we here?

[Both start to take off their lingerie.]

大： 我跟你一样大的时候，我什么都没有，只有一片海的画面。我每天持续重复想象，之后，就学会传送意境。[OPEN] 对像海一样生动的东西，客人就会瞬间忘记思考和语言。你记起发生什么事吗？

BIG: When I was your age, I had this fantasy with the sea. And all I had to do was to make it happen, again and again. And I realise you can build an entire world yourself with stubborn repetition. When I show this to my clients, they get to clear their minds of thoughts, of words. Do you remember what happened?

小： 嗯，以前我要成为一个OL，跟我妈住在豪宅里。

SMALL: Yes, I wanted to be an OL. Live with my mum in a bungalow.

大： 然后呢？

BIG: And then?

The waves get stronger.

大： 能感到你内心的澎湃？

BIG: You feel something stirring within you?

小： 我只感到里面是个深渊。这就是你说的内心？

SMALL: I feel like I'm spiralling deep into an abyss, So is this what is inside me?

大： 嗯，你看到什么？

BIG: What do you see?

小： 黑暗。

SMALL: Darkness.

大： 除黑暗以外？再仔细、深入些。

BIG: What else do you see? Look closer, deeper.

小： 我看到一只身体赤裸的鸡。白嫩光滑，一个被人渴望的躯体。

它手里什么都没有，只有黑暗。那只鸡在滴血。那只鸡在叫。

SMALL: I see a body stripped naked, glowing soft, white and fluffy. I see a body loved and desired. She has nothing, but darkness. Then there's blood, and screaming.

[Her emotions intensify into a climax as she says this sentence. BIG Gai flies to SMALL Gai to pass her the condom]

大： 快，用这个。

BIG: Quick, come in here.

小： 为什么???

SMALL: What??? Why???

大： 别问，快点，不然来不及了。

BIG: Don't ask, faster, or else you won't make it in time.

Scene 4: Blow

四、吹

[Small GAI came into the condom. They use condoms to regulate breath.]

小： 我第一次出来接客人的时候，紧张到心脏都快跳出来了。跟见面不到5分钟的男人一起睡

觉，简直就是史无前例的体验。事后，他说很爽。可能是我紧张的状态让他感觉很刺激吧。我事后情绪真的很复杂。感觉像一个大石头掉进了海里，惊动了海里的内疚，忏悔，难过和那么一丝不易察觉的愉悦。

SMALL: The first time I met up with a client, I was so nervous my heart was going to jump out. Imagine sleeping with a man you barely know. That is something I have never experienced before. He said he enjoyed himself. Maybe my anxiety turned him on. It felt complicated. There was a huge rock that hit the waters, and it riled up feelings of regret, remorse and sorrow, and even a slight tinge of ecstasy.

[They take another breath]

大： 在我们年代，很多鸡都住在同一个“妓院”里面。不是每个老板都很糟糕，但亏

那些姐妹，要是客人给你添麻烦的话，只要一叫，你知道有整个kampong 的鸡给你撑腰。

BIG: During my time, many chickens lived collectively in brothels. Not all pimps were horrible, and thanks to my sisters, if any of the customers were to do something funny, there's always someone there to count on.

[They take another breath]

小： 有的时候，我会遇到一些粗暴的客人。每次遇到他们之后，我都需要躲起来，疗养。毕

竟，没有人喜欢瑕疵品。有时候，我会在晚上偷偷许愿。我能过上我想要的日子。但是每天早上刚一睁眼，又是残酷的现实。

SMALL: Sometimes, I will meet up with unpleasant customers. After seeing them, I will have to go into hiding, into healing. No one likes a flawed product. Sometimes, I will pray at night. I pray to live the life that I want to, but then I wake up to the harsh reality again in the morning.

[They take another breath]

大： 我们总以为这些套只能装精子，实际上从我们内心漏出来的东西比精子还多很多。

BIG: People think this can only be used to contain semen, but it contains much more than that.

小： 你觉得我的极限在哪里？

SMALL: How much do you think this can tahan?

大：那天环保局在新民一代巡逻时候，我也刚巧在那一代。好几个姐妹被他们抓去了，还好我逃的快。不久以后，我失去专注做爱的能力，我总觉得整个身体再也无法舒展开来，好像即将有人将闯进来把我们擒住的感觉。

BIG: That day Nparks was patrolling around Sin Ming Lane, and I was there for a job. A few sisters were caught, but I was lucky to be able to escape. After some time, I began to lose the ability to commit during sex. I've lost the ability to relax myself, I often feel like someone is going to barge in and bring me away.

[They take another breath]

小：我遇到一个很好的客人，他让我动了离开这一行的冲动。但是如果我走了，我去哪里赚到那么可观的一笔钱？我真的受够了吃了上顿没下顿的生活。

SMALL: I met a great client, I thought I could leave with him, and stop working in this industry altogether. But what if he is just doing this to get free sex? I don't want to go back to how I lived life in the past.

[They take another breath]

大：之后听到了消息，好像是禽流感席卷而来，法律才会忽然开始在意我们。

BIG: After that, I heard that a wave of bird flu is coming. No wonder people suddenly remembered our existence.

小：我觉得快不行了。

SMALL: Don't think can tahan anymore.

大：都空出来了么？

BIG: Did you get everything?

小：那晚我打给我妈，原本打算告诉她这些钱从哪里来的，但就是说不出口。我一想到电话对面的她会是什么表情，什么心情我就感到慌张。

SMALL: That night I called my mum, I wanted to tell her everything. But nothing came out of my mouth. When I think of her reaction on the other side of the call, I panic.

[They take another breath]

大： 他们说，如果太多鸡聚在了一起，又担心我们起义。以前所有社会运动的源头，多多少少跟鸡相关。但你要知道，鸡是很少起义的，毕竟我们都是食物链的底部...

BIG: They say, if we have all the chickens in one place, we may start a protest. Historically, many social movements involved prostitutes. But you know, poultry can hardly be aggressive to humans. We are at the bottom of the food chain.

[They take another breath]

小： 从做这一行起，我开始把大部分的自己隐藏起来。有时候渴望被人看见，但又害怕被错的人看见。我站在警局外，我感到愤怒和无助，最终还是没有走进去。

SMALL: From the time I started out in this industry, I pretty much led an invisible life. Sometimes, I wish people could see this side of me, but I always worry I get the wrong type of attention. I stand outside the police station, feeling angry and helpless about my predicament, but I never went in.

Scene 6: Tie.

六、绑。

大： 看起来像粒大鸡蛋。

BIG: Looks like a giant egg.

小： 我开始很喜欢它。

SMALL: I'm starting to like it a lot.

大： 够了吧。

BIG: I think this should be about it.

小： 所以你跟客人都是这样做的？

SMALL: So this is what you do with clients?

大： 可以说是吧。最后一个步骤就是把这个放开。

BIG: Pretty much. The last step is to let this go.

[BIG releases the condom, they watch it fly everywhere before landing on the ground. SMALL hesitates]

大：怎么了？

BIG：What's wrong?

小：我不想。我挺喜欢它的。我可以把它绑起来吗？

SMALL：I kind of don't want to let go of this. I like it. [Small hugs the egg close to her] Can I tie it up?

大：你知道它最后还是会变瘪的对吗？

BIG：You know it will deflate right?

小：嗯，我理解那种感觉。那种慢慢慢慢会消失的感觉。我只想多陪它一下。

SMALL：I guess nothing lasts forever. But I do want to spend more time with it.

[SMALL GAI proceeds to tie the condom up.]

大：来，想看看它吗？

BIG：Do you want to take a closer look?

大：想对她说什么吗？

BIG：What do you want to say to her?

[SMALL writes "LEGALISE US" before throwing the balloon midair]

小：你觉得，这里有多少个我们？

SMALL：How many of us do you think there are now?

大：我也不知道，可能一次有几千几万只。我会偶尔想起大家，不知道其他人都怎样。

BIG：I'm not sure. Perhaps a few thousands. I wonder how everyone is doing?

小：很想跟他们说话。

SMALL：It would be nice to meet them too.

大：可能我们可以把这个信号都传给大家，至少会让他们知道也有人念着他们。

BIG：Maybe we can send this to them, you know? At least it makes them feel that someone is thinking of them.

SMALL: If they see a condom flying in the sky, it's like our shooting star.

[SMALL AND BIG throws the condom at the audience]

小/大: 不要掉哦! 这可是很珍贵的, 不能掉! 来传给另外一边的观众! 小心! 不要弄破! 传给另外一边, 让我们所有的鸡朋友都看得到!

SMALL/BIG: Careful, don't drop it! It's a precious egg, pass it down!

Careful, don't break it! Pass it down! So that everyone can see this!

[Loud banging from the door]

[Lights off]

Sex Work Leads Me To...

Sherry Sherqueshaa

I am Sherry Sherqueshaa, a 32-year-old Malay-Muslim transgender woman. I have also been a sex worker for 12 years. At the age of 20, I began sex work as I transitioned. I came to terms with my gender identity halfway through National Service. It felt like a missing puzzle piece that just made sense. For the first time, I knew why I did not fit in with my brothers and my male cousins. There were steps I needed to take immediately. I began by putting on makeup and wearing women's clothing.

Prior to sex work, my expertise was in fine dining and hosting. Having faced countless rejections by restaurant managers, I turned to sex work to the surprise of many. With no prior sexual experience with men, I stood on the streets those many years ago and began my career as a street-based sex worker. As a rookie sex worker, it was almost a requirement to be under the wing of a "mother", or what we would call a "mak ayam". Not being under anybody's care, I would stand on the streets on my own. However, I was never truly alone. I had elder sister figures looking out for me. There were a few sex workers I really looked up to because of their looks, charisma, and above all their sincerity. They influenced my visions and goals. Looking back at it, I would even argue to say that having an elder sister figure is even better than having a mak ayam. While I never had an official "mother", there were a few older trans women that I have lovingly called Mama, Mother and Momsy. They were generous with their affection for me and validated me in the ways necessary for me to grow. While these relationships were formed on the streets, they evolved beyond the spaces of work. Throughout the years, I have been invited to their homes and they have cooked for me. During Hari Raya or any festive season, it has become a tradition for my trans sisters and me to visit their homes.

The support systems between sex workers happen because we know better that we need each other. There is always a need for solidarity and mutual understanding between us no matter what stage we are in our journey. It is a natural instinct to step in, whether we are close friends or freshly acquainted. You will want to help when you see another transgender sex worker get in trouble. Street-based sex work comes with its own set of challenges. In the past, I have seen sex workers get physical with their customers when they are mistreated or abused. Myself included. I was fiercely protective of my peers. Initially, it was satisfying to see justice meted out when the bad grapes got their just desserts. At this stage of my career, however, I see no point in violence as it does not bring any good to the workplace environment. As both a sex worker and activist, I advocate clear communication and the importance of being calm.

For transgender sex workers especially, the support system often extends beyond the workplace. This can take shape in the form of surgical aftercare. While it is not necessary, feminisation enhancements are both gender-affirming and beneficial for the profession. In the early stages of my transition, transgender sex workers close to me have both recommended as well as accompanied me on trips for surgical enhancements. Now, I choose to return the favour by accompanying my trans sisters. At this stage of a transgender woman's transition journey, a support system is so important. Aftercare can be demanding and much moral support is needed. Having seen and experienced how others have been taken care of, I not only want to return the favour but also provide them with a much better experience than I did.

Sex work, especially street-based sex work, comes with its own challenges. On the streets, there are sex workers at every other corner. Crossing lines and territories you're not supposed to work on is inevitable. It all boils down to how well you handle these situations. That's why they call it street smart. Street-based sex workers often have to pick up skills such as client reading, and sustaining their interest to ensure a high return rate. People often overlook that sex work can be joyous too. Sex work has allowed me to be more extroverted as I learnt how to handle strangers. I definitely enjoy the uncertain nature of this work, but what I enjoy most is how I am able to touch the lives of complete strangers. Beyond fulfilling their sexual needs, I am invested in providing a holistic and fulfilling experience for my clients. I want them to come out of their session having experienced a wholesome human connection.

If you told me 12 years ago that I would get to experience travelling opportunities in the name of advocacy for sex work, I would have asked how would it be possible. Currently, I am involved in international advocacy efforts such as the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), the Global Network of Sex Worker Projects (NSWP) and the Red Umbrella Fund (RUF). I never dreamt of being part of Project X, what more these prestigious international organisations. I used to have so many doubts and suspicions about my decision to go down this career path, but now I am empowered and vocal about it. However, there have been times when I needed to be careful with my choice of words.

Something that people need to understand is that my advocacy for the rights of sex workers is not a call for recruitment. My intention is to raise awareness of the plight of work conditions. However, if somebody approached to ask me about the intricacies of sex work and I found out later that they have gotten into sex work, I will feel the need to check in on them more frequently. As I grow older and wiser, I strongly believe that other people's actions are not my responsibility.

Each day I wake up so motivated to go to work. The routines that I have created revolve around the work that I do and I am more than eager to share it on my social platforms. There have been instances where I have managed to get people to change their stance on sex work. I have had clients and followers on my social media affirm that the work that I'm doing - both sex work and advocacy is important. believe in the years of work I have done, I have contributed to a change in perception of what a transgender woman and a sex worker can look like. What can I say? The world needs its dose of Sherry Sherqueesha!

Dancing under the stars

Karen

I cannot remember names but nameless faces I remember.
I cannot unsee varicose veins, dirty nails and your teeth.
I don't see your clothes or your cash- I remember your muttering rude words,
your dismissive manner-
Your condescension will be your downfall.
I hold the power and I am in the best position-
The paid position is my Kama Sutra.

I gave up my dignity from 3-12 so that I can live in dignity.
My identity is a clutch I cling on and humour is my armour de la resistance
To gather my pot of gold with my 3 Holy Grails - not smelly, not tired and not
poor.
I am just a girl standing before the world asking to be loved
But all they wanted is intercourse without connections and not my telephone
number
I am courage. I am self love
I am a lotus without mud
Emancipation- I Like long words.

I am not GuanYin. I am not your KPI - I am not your story time. I not an
encyclopaedia or only worth the ink on a survey form.
I always wanted to be the cat among the pigeons

My heart is feather light on Anubis scales
I won't see you muggles on the other side .
I am already in heaven on earth-drawing circle in the sand.
Let John first cast a stone at her.
I am putting down my stone.
I enjoyed the privilege.

You are not a doormat to me. You are a teacher, a mentor and You bring me to
a place of orgasmic self-actualisation- I like long words- no homo sapiens can.
I am grateful. I am content
I am dancing

I am dancing under the stars and
I see your star shining back at me

I know you are free
Always

I see life from both sides now- I still reminisce that dingy room with cum streaks
on the wall-

I missed the wee dicks and the inflated egos

I have to be dumb and dumber and you have to be holier than thou

Cleanliness is next to holiness he muttered as he washes anticipating entering
me.

I see life from both sides now

the gxddess learns to pray

Gxddess Charlotte

the hottest findomme in the world
exists for the money, of course. the hottest
findomme in the world exists because
she owns the prettiest feet she's ever seen.
pretty is only problems upon problems
so we'll make pretty work for it

Gxddess walks on not water but plantar warts / splinter-corns
ingrown toenails / the faces of men
deep-dive dreams of being trampled,
safety in subjugation let her put this
little piggy to sleep

wat svcs u offer? wat else? anythng else? always
the anything else, can I get something for nothing, added value, a
cup of extra, can you touch my cock, as a favour to me, as a favour to you,
you'll love it, I am not bad looking, I am young, not like other men, got a thick tool,
I just love pleasuring women, pussy-eating skills are amazing, that's not market price,
can we be friends, a GREAT listener, for nothing at all I can be
your

the ones I like I handpick for my pig-pen,
a line of grovelling snouts I hand-feed
every morning every pen left open
piglets left to their own often leave,
trotting absent & flaky citing
their sexless wives, their joyless jobs,
to the next farm over, or
getting run over by trucks. I

develop affection for hand-reared pork & am
nauseous with
disappointment.

I imagine Circe flaying and
stringing up tenderloin to cure. they watch me
with dull wet eyes, they roll over to worship,
fleshy urinals begging me for piss down their throats
they ask to be my special boy. they ask to
watch

the hottest findomme in the world starts out
scrabbling for a minute corner of psychic space,
a funereal niche in which she can stow ambition

kissing grateful the marbled privacy afforded death
where the other parts of her body, drained bloodless,
 stutter
keeping her head above drowning's edge
 making several hundreds in an hour
 making
 a sweet boy eat phlegm off Hotel Bliss's tiled toilet floor
her respite for this month *does Gxddess feel anything after* *our*
session?

yes relief having something to pour into
her pretty partner who asks, prettiest partner she's ever seen.
 pretty is

problems upon problems
and so what if she can't walk on water?

pretty doesn't have to know
as long as she's kept

a float

To my dear son,

Pom

You are growing older each day. You are now at the age where you are turning from boy to man, and there will be many things about yourself and your surroundings that you may learn about. It is my hope as your mother, that you will grow to become a good person. I hope for you to have a better life than I did, a good job that you love, and most importantly, to complete your education.

I first came to Singapore more than a decade ago. A friend of mine back in Thailand shared with me that there was a job opportunity as a masseuse here. She helped me find an agent, and shortly after, I was on a holiday visa. In the first month that I worked here, I managed to earn 10 times the amount I earned at my job back home. I often heard from other Thai girls who had worked in Singapore. Many have shared stories about Singaporean men falling in love with Thai girls. They told me that if I was lucky, I could end up getting married to a Singaporean and eventually move here. All I knew was that I wanted to earn money for just one month, then go back home.

When I came to Singapore, my agent picked me up, and I immediately went into massage work. I had no friends except for the other girls working alongside me. I had to quickly learn the ropes. Two weeks into working, I met your dad. He was my client. He had fallen in love with me during my short stay here! When I returned to Thailand, he told me that he missed me. He even went to find me and visited me in Thailand twice. At that time, I found him to be quite the romantic. After a year of courting, I came back to Singapore for the second time to get married to him. I left my life in Thailand, leaving behind my parents under the care of my siblings. While I was pregnant with you, I stopped massage work temporarily. Unfortunately, your dad's love for me faltered. When I found out he was being unfaithful, I had to make the difficult decision to get a divorce. While we share custody of you, it was important for me to be able to raise you. It sparked a need in me to earn even more money to be able to provide for and care for you.

After working in Singapore for about 1-2 years, I encountered brushes with the police many times. When I experienced my first raid, I was let off with a warning as I was already a Permanent Resident of this country. The officers told us that the work we were doing was illegal as we operated massage services without the proper licence. My boss, however, got arrested.

As you grew older, I felt that I was not earning enough working under a boss. With guidance from my other masseuse friends, I mustered the courage and learned to operate my own massage shop as a boss. With three other Thai workers working with me, I earned twice as much. You would have already turned 8 by then. With you under the care of your grandmother, I managed to work on weekdays. I valued my weekends the most because I was able to spend time with you, my dearest. Being a boss also had bigger implications. I would soon experience what happened to my former boss. When I first got arrested, I was detained for two days. I only had one fear. In my anxious state, I dreaded the possibility of being deported and not being able to return to Singapore ever again. That would have meant that I would not be able to see you anymore and that you would have to return to your father. Thankfully, nothing too drastic happened. I had to pay a fine, and shortly after, I was reunited with you again.

Do you recall the days when I would bring you to work? There are times I wonder how you might react, knowing the full extent of what I have done to sustain us both. I am blessed that you have never questioned me about what I do. Throughout your childhood, you have seen other Thai mothers just like myself in this field. We are not the only ones doing this type of work. There are plenty of mothers in this line of work, be they Thai, Vietnamese, or Singaporean. We really are no different from other mothers who simply want to give their children the best life possible. I have little worry should you ever find out that I have been doing sex work. We are close. Throughout the years, you have reciprocated my love and showered me with gifts and flowers on Mother's Day and my birthday. Even when your father was available, you came to me when you needed help.

It was never my intention for you to grow up with your parents separated. I wanted a happy family for my son. I still believe that love is possible for all of us. Over the years, I experienced my fair share of clients declaring their undying love for me - they were merely sweet talkers. Empty talk! In hindsight, this divorce has taught me that I can only rely on my own self-love and in my own ability to provide for the both of us.

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about the future. I plan to work as a masseuse for five more years before finding another job. I am getting older. As I have learned in recent years, demand for workers like myself will decrease with age. I want you to know that when you are able to work and fend for yourself, I don't expect you to take care of me. I wish to retire back home. Being an elderly person in Singapore will cost a lot of money. In Thailand, I will be able to relax and be free from financial stress. I will even be able to plant my own vegetables!

In my eyes, you are a sensible boy who will grow to become a good man, unlike the clients I meet. You have also proven yourself independent and responsible by being able to cook for yourself and helping me clean the house. I trust that you will be able to take care of yourself.

Mummy loves you and only wants the best for you.

Yours always,
Mummy

Contributors

Kamini (she/her)

Kamini is a transgender activist, former performing artist, and former theatre actor. She has also successfully produced many beauty pageants for the trans women community. She has written, published, and performed her poetry and writing. Nowadays, she enjoys spending time with her son, family, and loved ones.

Smelly Birds (she/they)

Smelly Birds is fascinated by bodies, mathematics and animals. She can be intimate and dissociative and wants to create porn that makes consent sexy.

Sadie (she/her)

Sadie has mixed feelings about lots of things, including about sex work and her relationship with the job, but one thing she's sure about is her unwavering love for popcorn (salted butter is superior, and no one can convince her otherwise), fluffy pancakes (the wobblier the better), and poetry that makes her feel things (Mary Oliver and Pablo Nerudo never fail to hit hard).

Selena (she/her)

Selena is a writer...on Facebook. She writes as a form of therapy and enjoys publishing movie reviews on her social platforms, or when she is paid to do so. She has plans to work on a tell-all memoir someday and is confident that it will be a bestseller novel. At the same time, she is hesitant to spill the beans as she does not want to hurt the people she loves.

Alvarez (he/him)

While Alvarez was in the industry, it opened his eyes to see the world in a new light and subconsciously improved his communication and social skills as a result. It was a bittersweet experience that allowed him to learn about people while also discovering himself. During that period, Alvarez was involved in many different sexual activities with both men and women.

Mai(they/them)

Mai is a genderfluid queer individual who started their writing journey at seven, drawing comics of themselves in hopes of becoming the character they created. They found solace in crafting fictional stories to escape the various abuse they endured. Mai's dyslexia never stopped them from falling in love with reading and writing. Mai also enjoys writing informative non-fiction pieces to tell their story.

Sherry Sherqueshaa (she/her)

Sherry is a Muslim transgender sex worker. She has been with Project X since September 2014 and is now their Community Relations and Engagement Director. She has been involved in numerous interview and media presentations. With her experience and passion, she aims to shine a positive light on transgender and sex workers through advocacy work.

Karen (she/her)

Karen is a transgender woman who worked voluntarily as a regulated sex worker in the Desker Road area for 20 years. Doing the same routine and positions over and over, the joy of her days was when she encountered clients with fetishes. Her preferred position is always is the Paid position. She has since left the sex industry. She still maintains that sex work is her proudest accomplishment.

Pom (she/her)

Pom is a Thai masseuse and a mother of one. She has been working in Singapore for 15 years and has tried her hand being a worker and a boss of her own massage businesses.

Gxddess Charlotte (any pronouns)

Gxddess Charlotte is the hottest findomme in the world, a humiliatrix, a clown, a decent liar, owner of the prettiest feet you've ever seen, and a lover of fisting adorable puppybois. You can email her at gxddesscharlotte@gmail.com

Nicol (they/he/she)

Nicol is a genderfluid, self proclaimed artist. They interned at Project X in the summer of 2023, and have immense respect for the work the organisation has brought to the community. From graphic design and 3D modelling, to gouache and pottery, he finds much of his time in the sometimes insufferable throes of creative expression (entirely self-inflicted). In her free time, she enjoys attempting to peruse a book from her growing emotional support pile of unread books (failure rate: 80%), and disturbing petting void deck cats.

Glossary

Aatha - a term used to refer the Mother Goddess in Hinduism.

Amma - a Tamil term for mother

Amour de la resistance - A comical subversion of the French saying of “La Resistance D’el Amour”, translating to resistance of love. Here, it means love of the resistance

Anubis scales - In Egyptian mythology, Anubis is the god of funerary rites and the guide of the underworld. It is believed that the heart of the dead is weighed against the feather of truth

Bapok - A derogatory term in Malay used to refer to transgender women or effeminate men

Choy - A Hokkien term often used to ward off bad luck. Translates to touch wood

Chela - A Hindi term referring to a disciple

Dheem Dheem - The distinctive sound produced when South Asian transgender women clap their hands. ‘Clapping hands’ is unique to the South Asian transgender women community (hijras, kinnars, kothis, thirunangais, jogappa etc) as it used to convey a sense of belonging and kinship within the community. Depending on the context, clapping hands could mark the start of a happy occasion, be the harbinger of something important, or ominously warn someone.

GuanYin - The Chinese equivalent of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. She is also known as the Goddess of Mercy. Throughout history, Guan Yin has been portrayed through both male and female representations.

Guru - a Hindu spiritual teacher

John - a Biblical figure who is one of Jesus’ twelve disciples

Kama Sutra - an ancient Indian Sanskrit text on sexuality, eroticism and love life

KPI - acronym for Key Performance Indicator

Mak Ayam – Malay term translating to Mother Hen. This term traditionally refers to a female pimp, but can also be used to refer to an informal mother figure for sex workers.

Semua – Malay term for all

Tengok – Malay term for see

Thirunangai – refers to a transgender woman in Tamil. It is widely recognised and adopted as a respectable identity marker by the community for self-identification and representation.

Padayal – Tamil term for offerings

Pallu – Loose end of a sari, a garment commonly worn in the Indian subcontinent

Periya – Tamil term for grand

Reet-Rivati – It is a ritualistic ceremony where a daughter is initiated into the transfeminine kinship system.

SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

SRS – Sex Reassignment Surgery

