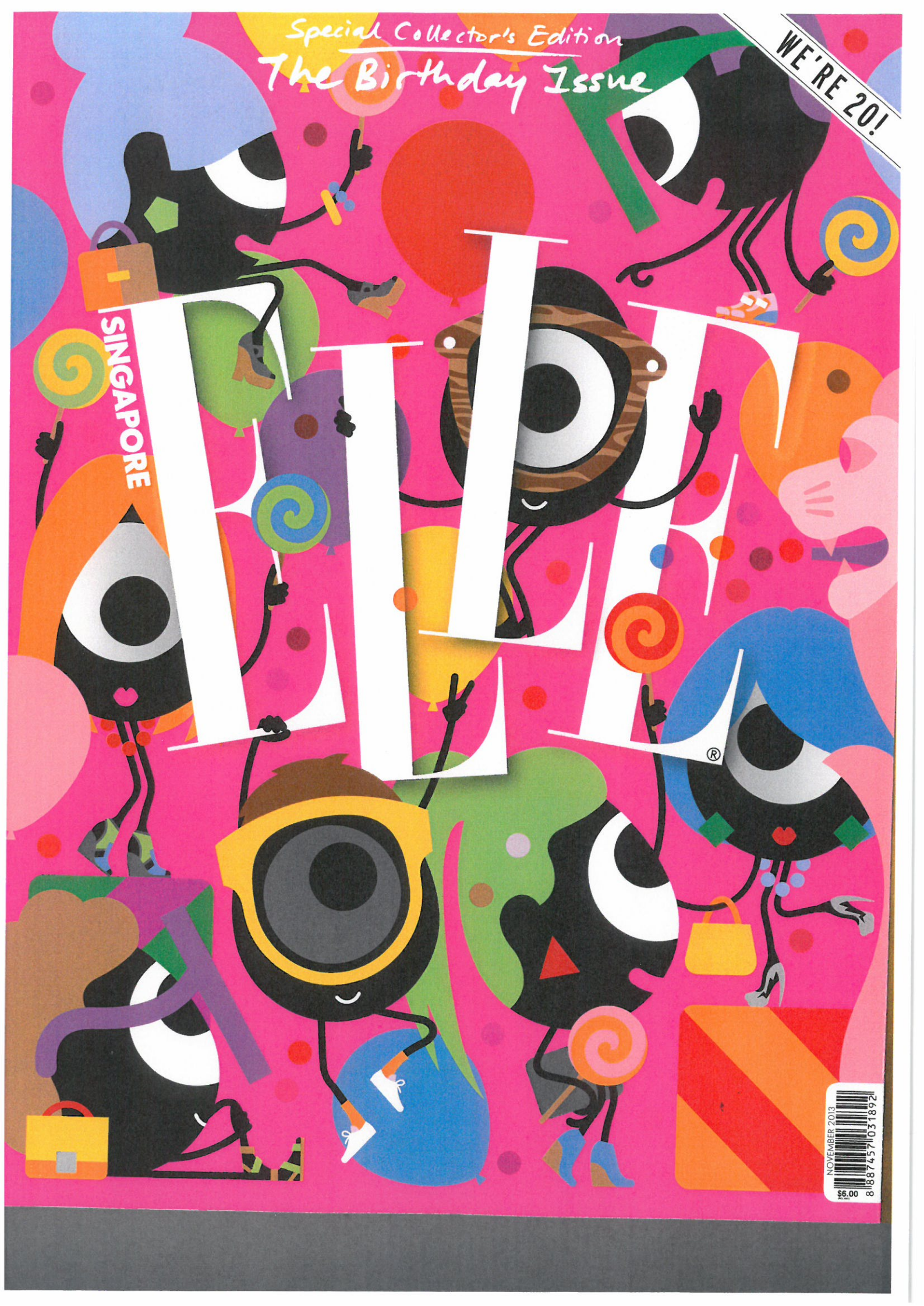


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# THE STORIES WE TELL

The art of story-telling is alive and well in Singapore, as young and published writers show in the **first-ever ELLE Writes competition.**

We started ELLE Writes as part of our 20th-anniversary celebrations for new writing talents to gain exposure.

The brief: Write a short story (no more than 800 words) using either of these sentences as a starting point: "I remember it like it was yesterday..." "After looking at the bag of out-of-season pieces I was about to donate, I hesitated..."

Submissions were judged on creativity, structure, pace of plot and use of language by local authors Colin

Cheong and O Thiam Chin, as well as ELLE features and lifestyle editor Stacey Anne Rodrigues and ELLE editor-in-chief Sharon Lim.

And what talent there is in this city! From the entries that arrived at the ELLE office, five were clear winners. Their prize? A three-hour critique, organised by the Singapore Writer's Festival 2013, with authors Cheong and O.

In the following pages, immerse yourself in the writing of these young

writers, alongside works by established names in various writing genres — poet Pooja Nansi, fiction author Noelle Q de Jesus, features editor of *Style:* magazine, Charmaine Ho, travel writer Pamela Ho and documentary filmmaker, Seah Kui Luan.

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WINNER!

## THE BIKER JACKET

By Alice Bianchi-Clark

After looking at the bag of out-of-season pieces I was about to donate, I hesitated. On the very top was a black leather garment with zips, which I recognised as my prized Versace biker jacket.

Madonna's *Hung Up* was playing on the radio. My mother rustled her copy of *The Times* and squinted through her bi-focals. "Are you listening to me, Mary?" she asked. "Ludovica will be auctioning all her mum's clothes to raise money for Breast Cancer Research UK. The auction will take place next week, here, in London." She pointed at a photograph of a racy leopard print dress with gold Medusa heads, featured alongside the article she was reading. "Hey! I thought this would interest you — Ludovica was your best friend, wasn't she?"

I was eight going on nine when I swapped *The Sound of Music* for Madonna's *Material Girl*. I remember how Ludovica and I pranced around her mum's bedroom in shoes twice our size. Long strands of pearls hung around our necks. Our lips were smeared with lipstick; our fingernails were gloopy with polish. The mink bedspread was draped in clothes, except they weren't just any clothes.

My mother was working on her crossword now.

"Mum! Did you put this into the charity bag?" I asked, showing her the black leather jacket.

She folded away her newspaper. "You're the one who said you needed 'help' — she curled her fingers into quotation marks — "clearing out your wardrobe. You said looking after a wardrobe is like tending a garden; it needs pruning."

I stared at my mum's Crocs and her dry heels. Ludovica's mum didn't know her camellias from her gardenias but she owned silk slippers fit for Cinderella.

"It is, Mum, but it involves careful weeding, not eradicating. Versace was the rock star of fashion. He is to the 1990s what Balmain is to the present day."

Her eyebrows shot up. "I thought



women only wore black in Bahrain?"

"Versace mixed Baroque, Pop Art, animal print —"

"Now I see why you never wear it," she said, crossing her arms.

Ludovica's mother had been a model, not the Linda Evangelista or Christy Turlington supermodel sort, but when she strutted into school assembly, heads turned.

Once, when one of her jackets went missing, she summoned Ludovica into her bedroom. I peeped through the keyhole and watched my friend tighten her fists, while Madonna's *Vogue* played silently on MTV.

"Mary would never do that," Ludovica had protested. "She's Catholic!"

Mum was arranging flowers in a vase now. I picked up her newspaper, grabbed my handbag and the biker jacket. "I'm popping out. Nice flowers, Mum," I said by way of a thank-you.

"They're not just flowers, they're proteas; they stand for courage. Not that you need any. You're the bravest person I know."

"Am I?"

The label in the window of Christie's on Old Brompton Road read: "Linda Evangelista photographed by Irving

Penn. Dress by Gianni Versace S/S 1992." Next to it was a mannequin wearing the dress featured in today's newspaper.

I walked in, heading for the reception desk and there she was: Wearing a Balmain jacket, ripped jeans and the flaming red hair I adored as a child. She walked straight past me but when I called her name, she turned around and said: "No one calls me Ludovica anymore. I'm Vicky, may I help you?"

"Don't you recognise me?"

She tilted her head. "Should I?"

What had I expected? It had been over 20 years since I'd kissed her first boyfriend. I didn't even like him.

"I think I made a mistake," I said.

"Don't we all? Well, I do hope you'll come for the auction next week. My mother's clothes are terrific."

"I'm sorry for your loss. She was a stylish woman."

She peered into my eyes. "Mary?" she asked.

I looked down at my All Stars in dismay. Won't she be disappointed I'm still a nobody?

"What was that?" I asked.

"Please excuse me. I was remembering someone I loved."

And, as she walked away, lithe and graceful with her assistant scurrying behind her with a notepad, I realised why I had always wanted to be like her, why I'd coveted everything she had. She was good, unselfish and forgiving just like the princesses in Grimm's fairytales.

I scribbled a note: "Dear Ludovica, this Versace jacket belonged to your mother. I'm sorry I didn't return it. In case you wonder how I got it, please remember that only a best friend believes their friend to be better than what they actually are. Mary"

I zipped it inside the jacket. "Excuse me," I told the receptionist, "I think Vicky left this behind."