## , National Centre

for Writing

# Sharing Stories, <br> Connecting Lives 



## Sharing Stories, Connecting Lives

In February 2023, in the welcome note to the opening session of our online creative writing course 'Sharing Stories, Connecting Lives,' supported by the British Council Connections through Culture, Nyi Pu Lay, the President of PEN Myanmar, noted the dearth of creative writing and translation courses in Myanmar, which had resulted in an overwhelming number of applicants to the course. He urged the successful candidates to expect the usual challenges associated with the country- power outages, unreliable internet connection and the MyanmarUK time difference. By the end of May, some of the Myanmar-based participants of the course had also survived the Cyclone Mocha that made landfall in Myanmar earlier that month.

The outcome of the course is an exciting array of flash fiction in three distinct linguistic groups; stories by Myanmar-based writers who wrote in Burmese, stories by Myanmar-based translators who wrote in English, and stories by the UK-based writers who wrote in English.

The Burmese language workshop, led by senior writer San Tun Thaung translator Dr. Zaw Tun and editor Myo Myint Nyein, yielded seven stories reflecting the violences and idiosyncrasies of Burmese life under tyranny 'The Country of Joy' by Hsu alludes to 'The City of Joy' by Dominique Lapierre, and is a sardonic take on daily life in Myanmar, often disrupted by power outages and always disturbed by the cost of living crisis. In 'Childhood Sweetheart', Po Po Phoenix makes a direct reference to well-known Burmese pop song and its lyrics. While the story itself is a simple reminiscence about a childhood sweetheart by a grown-up person, understanding the decade, the 80 s, when the song was popular, and perhaps being able to hear the song in one's head, may be key to understanding the story.
'If the World were Divided in Two' by Thu Ta, a story sprinkled with Burmese slang, is a challenge to any translator. In 'Have a Wonderful Time at the Festival', Aung Naing Htoo muses on the Burmese words pwe, for 'festival', and sitpwe for war, creating a 'festival of armed conflicts.' In 'The Princess of the Town', Thandar Tun shares a story of a neurodivergent woman who was routinely abused by men. 'Come and Rob Me of My Love by Shwe Eain San is about child abuse of an incestuous nature, a tragedy
not uncommon in Myanmar vividly told from the perspective of the child victim. 'Dawn: A Life is Born' by Thinn Thiri Tun is a nature-focused narrative. The reader will hear a bird hatchling speak and tweet in her story.

The English language group, led by Ko Ko Thett and Thett Su San, comprised six Myanmar-based translators, and four UK-based writers. our out of the six translators were inspired by the UK-based writers to come up with their own stories in English. 'Farmer' by Olivia Ma is based on a true story of a farmer from the Irrawaddy delta, who was fixated on owning a satellite dish, a status symbol in Myanmar, so much so that he fashioned one out of bamboo, and got himself into trouble with the thorities. In 'Blissful Thanksgiving' the ethnic Kachin writer Nhkum athorities. In Blissful u weaves her sory are where the hole community gaths 'The Lis as well as poetry recitals and dance competitions. 'The Library' by Nu Htet Htet Lwin perhaps is an allegory for the situation in Myanmar, where the country's hard-earned democratic transition was ended by a putsch in 2021. 'Dreams' by Hsu Lei Nwe features a Burmese Pollyanna, who finds solace in dreams amidst the unfavourable reality of her circumstances

Stories by the UK-based writers present no less a challenge to Burmese ranslators, but writer-translator collaboration between the Myanmar translators and the UK authors bore fruit.

The translated stories danced between cultures, tugging at the heartstrings of both languages and emotions.
'The Boy at the White Hotel' by Mika Royd is a bold LGBTQ+ story, a genre that has yet to be developed in the Myanmar literary landscape. 'Writer's Block' by Mariyam Karolia is about an honour killing, with a subtle twist. The Kitchen Table' by Jessica Wright impressed our guest editor, Nathan Hamilton of Strangers Press, as a piece of flash fiction that can say so much in so few words. 'Bewilderment' by Gus Mitchell is about a man who started talking to an unassuming birch tree in a park, and ended up becoming a reluctant celebrity.

The course, the first of its kind for Myanmar, provided an exceptiona platform for literary collaboration and cross-cultural understanding. As the workshops approached their final sessions, the Myanmar literati was hit with the news that Nyi Pu Lay suddenly passed away from a cardiac arrest after he got home from his usual walk on the morning of 21 June 2023. Sayagyi Nyi Pu Lay, or Grand Master Nyi Pu Lay, as he was called in Myanmar, was a highly accomplished short story writer and a former prisoner of conscience who served nine years in jail in the 1990s. He was to deliver the closing remarks at the final session on 4 July. At the closing session, we, Myanmar workshop participants and tutors, fondly emembered him as a major force in contemporary Burmese literature To his memory we would like to dedicate these short stories.

Thett Su San \& Ko Ko Thett

## The Country

By
Hsu

Sometimes recalling beautiful memories from the past is like electricity is going on, when we know that it will be going off; especially now, when I am living as an insignificant and battered person not useful in the present.

The summer temperature is extremely high. The power went off and hasn't come back on for over 24 hours. As if people are in hell, I've no idea where to stay comfortable in summer. How about you, my daughter? Don't worry if you can't contact with us when you're online. The power banks have run out of energy. My phone battery has 3\% left and it'll be off very soon. Take care of everything, my daughter. You're not in your mother country. I'm worried about you. You know, I'm saying prayers every night for your safety.

My mother is talking on the phone with her daughter who got a scholarship and is studying in America peacefully. Her voice is full with worries as well as dissatisfaction

Ma Thi, don't use so much water when you take a shower. As electricity is cut, we can't get enough water. I told you not to take a bath, but you did.' Mee Nge is angry with me again, fanning her pet dog who is suffering from heatstroke. She is worried about running out of water in the kitchen f I have a bath.
'It's terribly hot. From the opposite neighbourhood, the ceremony to propitiate the Gods still hasn't finished. It's really ear-splitting. Ma Th take a shower quickly. I can't stay anymore. I'll have a bath after you.'
'There! The elder one doesn't listen to me. My little son, no bathing today! There's only a little water left. There will be no water left for using in the kitchen and also in the toilet.

Oh, Mom! It's very hot. I assume that it's hotter than hell. I'll surely take a bath. If there's no water, you can call the Purified Water Seller.
'It's been two days since the electricity went off. His phone is also turned off. There is no way to call him.

You guys, I don't wanna talk to you anymore. No one obeys me. What kind of people are you all?

As electricity is cut off during the hot and stuffy season, mom nearly explodes as usual. She starts to explode at me and my younger brothe for taking a shower. The meat in the refrigerator must be cooked, otherwise it will rot, so Mee Nge, cooking the meat over a charcoal fire, curses, saying, 'Me, who sweats the most, has no chance to take a bath Alright! Alright! Only all of you have a body and a soul! xxxxxxxxx'

## 'Hello! I'm speaking.'

'Your phone is not registered with a real identity card. So, I am calling to ask you to register again. If you don't re-register by April 18", your SIM card will be canceled.'
'Is that right? Just this morning, I re-registered with my real identity card as shown in the registration form. What else I need to do?'
'Listen carefully to what I'm saying, madam. Use the Atom application and .......'
'I told you that I did that step by step this morning. What should I do next? Let it be! I won't use your operation anymore.' The summer day was roasting hot, and I nearly exploded, this kind of inconvenient operator is such a problem.

Mee Nge sitting next to me, said 'Don't be so rude, Ma Thi. Answer politely. You shouldn't respond curtly to people.' She is right. These days, I am satisfied with nothing, and I shout at everyone at home. And then, egretting it, I am angry with myself, and I cannot get out of my temper cycle. Scolding our siblings, feeling dissatisfied with everything, Mom said, 'When you stop taking the medicine prescribed by the Psychiatrist, you behave like this. You don't listen to me. And you're easily angry, aggressive and also cynical.' Mom scolds me and my younger sisters in turn.
At home, everyone is fuming like a bomb about to explode very soon and feeling dissatisfied with everything. All of us shout at each other. I have to be careful not to say the wrong thing. In fact, they think that I am very sensitive as I did not continue taking medicine. These days, my younger brother and Mee Nge (my youngest sister), who dropped the plan of the university strike as part of CDM movement, are highly sensitive and cry easily. In my mind, I am thinking of how to convince them to see the doctor.

Actually, it is not their fault they get depressed. Due to the political problems, they have stopped going to university and have been looking for a job. But they have not got a job yet. They think of pursuing university education, like others, but my salary is just enough to pay for our household expenses at home. They can't afford to attend educational courses if they are not free. When I think of their not-bright-but-dark future, I almost stop breathing.
'Ten eggs, madam. Pork costs twenty thousand kyats, so my mother asked to buy eggs.
Here you are. It's two thousand and five hundred kyats, Aunty Mon.'
'You can't get it for two thousand and five hundred kyats, Ma Thi. An egg costs three hundred and fifty kyats. It's three thousand and five hundred kyats.'

When I think of the prices I learnt in the market this morning, I find it harder and harder to breathe. Before, my salary was around two-hundred-thousand kyats and I also had annual increments. And I got nearly promoted, so I was very satisfied with my life. Mee Nge and my brother only have one year left to finish their university education. When they got a job after university, we planned to buy Mom a nice, spacious flat. It was a wonderful time. Discussing with family members about buying a new flat, all of our siblings looked full of energy and enthusiasm. On weekends, we had a lot of fun, going out in our own car and eating home-made snacks together. Now, with the gradually rising price of goods, national companies have left in a hurry as they were not provided with a proper electricity supply. I almost took sleeping bills and selfishly attempted suicide on many occasions, working for a very low salary as my mother's health slowly collapsed.

Sighing and unable to sleep, I used the internet (Facebook) to find relief The oppressed crowd in their small flats are blaming and criticising various things, sharing posts such as 'How to live peacefully', 'Mindfulness and Minimalism' and 'Contentment' on Facebook. They are always worried about their household expenses with slowly-rising price of goods month by month. As electricity is cut, the air-conditioner cannot be switched on when it is extremely hot. Besides, bitten by mosquitoes, they are afraid they would suffer from leprosy.
n our country, everything is deteriorating. Looking at the latest posts on the newsfeed, our citizens - who can't even charge their phones and computers - respect motivational speakers from America who take their money, preaching success stories that say, 'If you try, anything is possible.' That's so funny.

I burst out laughing when I saw a post shared by Ma Muyar who sent her son to an international school. Her post says: 'Because of people like the children who continue to attend public school, we still can't beat those dog-beggars.' Looking further down the newsfeed, an acquaintance working at a Children's Rights Organization wrote about 'How smart Elonmart is' and 'Why youths need to study IT from now on so that, when AI replaces people, they will not be left unemployed.'

I cannot turn on the air-conditioner because there is no electricity. And I cannot sleep because of being unbearably hot and bitten by mosquitoes. so, I am sitting in the dark and scrolling through Facebook, my thoughts rambling here and there. Dor need to continue taking medicine as my mother and my sisters say? Or does everyone need to take medicine except for me? After I stop thinking, I am reading the book'The City of Joy', which I have read ever since my childhood. Getting a bitter taste of the human hell that we can experience without actually going to hell, I upload a post on Facebook
'If you look to the east, it's pitch dark. At present, I am suffocating like a bird trapped in a small glass bottle. Like a man doomed to death, in a helpless life, the saying 'If you try, nothing is impossible' is like a hot iron put into that bottle, to make me feel strongly.

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## Childhood

Translated by
Zar Myo
Thandar

## Sweetheart

Someone told me once that everything in the world will be beautiful if you behold it with the eyes of love

Someone special, who was mine once
Someone I love..
I think loving eyes means loving heart.
I like staying alone and calm. For me, addicted to writing and reading,
my ten-foot-wide room is my own little world.
My little world I love.
I love the bookshelf in the corner. I love my study table with a table clock. I love the simple white tablecloth with a beautiful little blue vase placed on it.

I love the only window in my room, which, though I can't see the whole world through it, can hide me from the whole world.

I love the warm sun, rays slanting down on my face when I open the window in the morning. I love the cool moonlight putting its chin on the window ledge on a yellow-moon night. I also love the smell of coral jasmine wafting from the front of the house, coming to me through that window.

When I opened the window today, the warm sun I ove seemed to un away as the rain drops fell. It was a holiday but there was no place needed to go. So, outside on the balcony, I was trying to pass a rainy morning, sipping a cup of coffee big enough for two people, engrossed in reading a novel by Kyi Aye. A song from the tea shop on the road reached my ears. It was 'Nge Chi Oo' (Childhood Sweetheart) by Sai Htee Hsai.
'It's been a long time,
I thought I had forgotten everything about the past
Alas! It had been very long time! The music came through my eardrums into my heart. Because of the rain, the bleeding started again from the deep-rooted wound in my left breast. From 'Childhood Sweetheart', the song by Sai Htee Hsai, all of my thoughts began to fly back to my own childhood sweetheart.

The Raindrops of May 2000
His purple Pheasant bicycle was the main protagonist in our love story. I sat on the rear seat of his bicycle and hugged his waist tightly. It was the most wonderful time, as if the whole world belonged to me.
'Pedaling, I feel tired physically, but not mentally ...' Oh, those days!
In his bicycle basket, the lunch box I prepared for two; and on my head, a string of starflowers he had picked very early in the morning aughing and gigaling enchantedly, we pointed at each other and said 'You are my whole life' We even mocked Adam and Eve, holding hands You are my whole life. We even mocked Adam and Eve, holding hands and entwining our necks. The goddess of love came and spread felicity between us.

I was so happy
Now, I am still missing him.
At that time, I never thought that the day would come to me when would be drinking this coffee made for two, feeling so lonely; the day when I would be picking up seashells all alone whenever I went to the beach; the day when my only companion would be a lonely poem whenever I turned my feet towards the green fields.

Between the two of us, seven wide rivers had never flowed between us, and seven mountains had not blocked our way. It was simply a thin layer called 'misunderstanding' that had separated me from him.

But that thin layer made us run away from each other far, far away.
He was a guy who was always trying to keep abreast with the times, while I would stand and stare at the passing hands of the Clocks of Tim and draw paintings on contemporary scenes. Although I was content with
a firefly's light, he wanted to spread brilliant rays around the world lik the sun

We were not black and white, but I could not get on with him
anymore.
'Alright, let's not see each other.'
He held onto what he thought was the truth, and so did I. What was
wrong was only destiny that made us meet and love each other
The sound of the rain from the roof became louder and louder. It
was raining heavily outside. The music from the tea shop had already
stopped.
In my heart, the sound of music still remained and questions, like the
yrics of the song, rose in me once again
'Now, if we meet again,
Like before,
Will our hearts beat again?
Like in the past, will our smiles still be warm?'


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# If the World were Divided into Two, I'd Rather Live in the Hemisphere of the World Where Yati Was Not By Thu Ta 

One July morn in 2018- the most hectic moning ever-took my father away, farther away. Then I had a crush on Julia. I happened to make a call to her, telling her my old man had passed away. But I found no sign of her among the mourners at the funeral. I didn't realise, then, that a girl named Yati, would come to replace her at the end of my father's funeral service. If I had been informed about her visit, I would have sent a notification to the Immigration Supervisor's Office of Attachment, requesting that they not issue a visa for that girl.

When there was no more chance to fall in love with Julia, the one I had a crush on, the Hall of Entertainment of the Parliament sent me a beautiful girl as a gift. Let's call her Rose. I was performing a play a love story, with her, I thought Yati would have given up hope of making an approach to me. I was wrong! That bimbo's always finding a chance, like a prowling tigress. On the days and nights when my relationship with Rose had turned sour, there she would pop up from nowhere! Cajoling, caressing me. She even mocked me, saying, 'Can you resist my seducing you?' And she giggled to herself. torrential rain, as is her love. She always finds a way to raid my heart. When I know she's coming, I seek advice from my pals, 'That cat's going wild. How can I free myself from her claws?' They know I have my girlfriend Rose, and maybe they accuse me of having an affair with another girl. No wonder their advice sounds vague. Their silent reactions led me to find a book by Maung Thar Ya, the title being, 'Who is Going to Bell the Cat?'. No way. I've lost the bell, too.
4. The Year 2021-the most wretched year should be wiped out from the calendar-was rung out. And Rose found her rest in another guy's lap. No words to express how heart-rending it was! 'When Rose is gone, Yati finds a better opportunity!' is the catchword in our friends' circle. Nothing blocked her from coming closer to me. She came in the morning, she came in the afternoon, she came at night Her love had no time limit. No shame to pop up before me over and over again. Oh, how I hated her! The way she stared at me with her screwed up eyes. I didn't know if I should feel scared or disgusted. One thing for sure is she stirred in me no doting feelings at all.
5. July, my foe and friend-I am July born-was the woebegone month of the year! Now my father was gone! And our beloved Genera (General Aung San, the assassinated leader)! Now Nitric Acid was snatched away from my Lab of Love. No shield could stop it in time. I know when you are playing the role of a gladiator, you must fight the wild beasts to death! But you can't stop the dagger's unexpected stabs in the back. I was assassinated in my small room by that gir named Yati. She has blotched my bachelor's virginity. I faltered, I floundered under her wiles. I wished I had a mental cushion for some kind of buffering effect. But I was so helpless, not even time to put on a condom for resistance to the vicissitudes of Life under her wild, lustful kisses.
6. To my shock, Mi Yati has been sleeping with my friends one after another these days. Please keep that nymphomaniac beast under control! Now!

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@EMU University of Oregon

## Have a Wonderful Time

## By Aung Naing Htoo

## at the Festival

Translated by
Zar Myo
Thandar

As the war festival will be held near our village, our children will have a wonderful time, playing music through Bluetooth speakers and dancing merrily. They gather friends from far and near and make plans for fun. Not only our children are happy, but also the elderly people are delighted. They are too busy to welcome the visitors coming to watch the war festival near the village.
The village chief, Maung Toke, recites the lists of caterers and cooks with intonation and stress. He explains where arriving visitors should take a rest and in which place we should treat them to meals. It is very good to obey actively. Before he finishes announcing the duty lists, some people have already taken the embalmed corpses of soldiers and military equipment to be displayed at the war festival out from the villag military equipment to be displayed at the war festival out from the village monastery. The pagoda trustee, Kyaw Thein, and his team,
renovate the neglected pavilion after the last war festival.
renovate the neglected pavilion after the last war festival.
The active and disciplined youth leaders have learned lessons from
The active and disciplined youth leaders have learned lessons from previous events. When visitors come, toilets are very important for getting rid of waste liquid or waste matter. During the previous war, as there was no comfortable toilet, one of the visitors prayed that the war would cease. He was consoled with five or six bullet shells. Another visitor was totally satisfied, as long as he was served a piece of meat from a soldier's dead embalmed body. So, it is necessary to build about ten or fifteen toilets urgently. Some dig the ground, others carry bricks and sand. To build the toilets, materials such as tinplate and thumbtacks are collected in five minutes flat.

Not only the village administrator but also all the villagers make a decision to be hospitable to visitors and to participate in the war festival During the festival, we do not want our villagers to be absent and irresponsible. In the festival season, war festivals are not held at just one place since they have been very popular. Here and there, war festivals are held in parallel. Now, war festivals have been springing up everywhere, so we need to make the audiences aware of the festival in our village. We search for the most attractions that we can: visitors coming to the festival will hear the original song of war clearly with a very good sound system; they can watch scenes of people swallowing bombs to get bigger bodies; they can buy everything at a suitable price. This war festival is not only a happy festival but also an amazing carnival. The characteristics of our festival are typed up and the pamphlets are distributed in the town. The updated post about our unique festival by the administrator's wife has been shared by 3.4k Facebook users
As it is a very profitable business that will increase the village's income the villagers carry out their tasks thoroughly. They actively work together because it is the festival they have always desired the most.
'Listen to the Head of village, move in harmony

## Try your best happily

For the next generation, for the next generation only!'
Although they sing their own tuneful songs cheerfully, there is still one thing to worry about. As war festivals are held seasonally, they have to wait one whole year to enjoy the next one

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## Princess

## By Thandar Tun

## of the town

Translated by<br>Zar Myo<br>Thandar

Our small town produced a considerable number of famous people some time ago. Then the Storm came, destroying most things on earth Still alive but in a life full of ruins was like being dead. Aunt Ma Aye Nu's life was also torn apart by the storm, but nobody knew when. Nor did we know how strongly the typhoon had blown into her life.

Aunt Ma Aye Nu was Princess of the Town. She was the very first who wore her hair in the style of Pop Singer Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein, who was not then a celebrity in Myanmar. She had a round face, a bald head with a few strands of stubble, and a plump body. She was always found dangling her bags and packs. Not only the old but also the young, all of the townsfolk, knew her well - she was the celebrity of our town, but not for people from other towns. Some loved Aunt Ma Aye Nu, others hated for people from other towns. Some loved Aunt Ma Aye Nu, others hated loathed her. The saying generally associated with Top Guns her and loathed her. The saying generally associated with Top Guns goes, 'The higher the Tree, the stronger the wind that blows it', but this
is not true in her case. There were plenty of people who loved, hated, is not true in her case. There were plenty
A woman with too many packs straddling her shoulders and around
and loathed her. her neck. These were her worldly belongings, of course. She carried them all wherever she went. Sometimes, she might pack her things using a patched piece of Paso (male longyi) or a worn-out Htamein (female ongyi), sometimes with a crumpled plastic bag or a gunny. Sometimes she wore a bamboo hat on her head. Maybe someone had kindly given it to her to cover her head as she often wandered around the town without any cover in both heavy rain and blazing sun. The bamboo hat was just nough to cover her head. It was full of holes, all in tatters, the bamboo nough to cov head. it were full of holes, all in tate bamboo strips getting loose. But there she went, looking so confident, in her torn and rimless bamboo hat. She seemed to trust the townspeople as mu as her
Walking like a fashion model, from one street to another in the whole town, was her daily routine. The children ran away if she came into their street. Some watched her in groups, others teased her by calling out to her, 'Lunatic Ma Aye Nu!'

Whenever the children teased her like that, Aunt Ma Aye Nu chased them and hit them with her bamboo hat. If her bamboo hat was not with her, she hit them with her umbrella or her pack. Then, the children got out of her way. Aunt Ma Aye Nu cursed them with the worst vulgar words. She did not stop cursing them until she reached another street and another district. If she came across her acquaintances once, she and a for fice, curry or money - anything she could grom the would askurnces were men and youths She also begged for something Her acquaintances were men and youths. She also begged for something anything - from strangers. Some were very charitable indeed. Some drove her out with anger and disgust. If she saw the door of a house was open, she would stride straight into the house and take a seat there as though the house was her own. When the house-owners drove her out, she would come out of the house with a long face. But she cursed them, standing in front of their house. Some compassionate elders taught her not to say rude words and she obeyed them. But as soon as she was a short distance away from them, she fell back to her bad habits again. And she might give a whacking to anyone who came her way.

Some gave food to Aunt Ma Aye Nu and some money if they met her. She never said thank you to anyone who gave her charity. Under the shadow of the tree, she ate rice and curry given by others and sometimes took a nap there. When she woke up, she wandered off from place to place. At nighttime, she slept under the rain tree in the field called Kyohn Pyaw Khun. In the rainy season, she had a sleep on the walkaway in front
of the market. It had no wall, but it did have a roof, so it was convenient for her to stay. Maybe, she totally ignored all the sufferings she was faced with. Who did she share her feelings with? She could endure staying on the streets in terrible weather; very hot or very cold. But what was the pain she suffered so much?

Aunt Ma Aye Nu never took a shower. Did she have the habit of brushing her teeth? Her body smelled awful as she was wandering the streets all day. Some sympathetic people gave her a bath, cut her very long hair and also gave her their hands-me-down to wear.

Sometimes she mumbled to herself, wandering along the roads. She imputed guilt to others and asked lots of questions. Mostly she put those questions only to men.
'Hey, dude! You owe me money. I must get money from you. You f**'d , last night, ya know.'
'Bullshit!' the guys would say. 'This slut's talking shit. If you say that again, you'll get a whacking. Mind that!'

Humiliated, most of the men felt bitterly furious. They could not bear that kind of humiliation. Many people blamed Aunt Ma Aye Nu, complaining that such an idiot should be a troublemaker to everyone.

Who else would be on her side? Aunt Ma Aye Nu never searched for anyone who would support her. Did she believe that the judge of time would tell the truth to those people?

Aunt Ma Aye Nu had no family, no home and no food. She did not know that she had lost her mind. Looking so weather-beaten, she had no more beauty. Who dared sexually abuse poor Aunt Ma Aye Nu? She should be offered sympathy and treated as a sister or a mother. Unfortunately, she got pregnant several times, going through hell over and over again. She gave birth time after time, but the babies were not born alive. Many a time she had gone through an abortion. A pitiful sight, the people in the neighbourhood took care of her.
Aunt Ma Aye Nu never revealed who had abused her. As a result,
there were no broken families in the town
Now Aunt Ma Aye Nu did not fully recover from her latest illness. The end fell upon this celebrity of the town. To their shock, the whole town earned that she was suffering from AIDS! The townspeople saw her off at her funeral service as it was her very last journey. Aunt Ma Aye Nu's life had completely ended. But the lives of the townspeople and their families were undamaged, and continued functioning as usual.

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## Come and Rob Me of

## Shwe Eain San

Her little body was thrown onto the soft, springy mattress. She hurt a little, but she was giggling with joy. Father lifted her in his arms, and again, threw her down. She hurt a little this time too, but she held out her hands to him.

The fun the father and the daughter were having brought the mother into the bedroom; she was watching TV in the room for visitors. No! You two! Stop! You're spoiling the mattress!
'Well, then, I'll get a new one. I bought this for my little daughter's sake so she can jump to her heart's joy.
'Mom, come and join us.'
Jumping on the mattress, her daughter called her mother to join her but she shook her head, quite pleased with how her child was having fun. When her father saw his little daughter raise her hand and call her mother, he said, as though in an angry voice:

See how you've changed the moment you see your mom. No more playing with your dad? Come on.

He tickled her little body, and she giggled, trying to seek a hiding place in her mother's lap, but her father pulled her back.
'Where could you find a place to hide yourself, sweet babe? Now, seriously, who do you love better, mom or dad?

## Mom, for sure. Hee ... hee ...

'Why mom? Why not me? Give me your love you've given to your mom.'
Mom took her baby in her arms, but her dad pulled her back in his arms and tickled her. The kid giggled, even though she had tears in her eyes.

## Strange

The father's tickling hands now turned rather rough, hurting her more painfully than ever. Normally, if she giggled in tears, he would stop tickling her, but now he kept on. Normally, if she was crying, lying on her bed, she would feel stuffy or suffocated, so he would warn her not to cry like that, and pull her upright into a sitting position. When she was suffering like that, he would open his mouth, showing her how to take in breaths.

But now her father was blocking her mouth.
Wait! Her father's tickling hand was hurting her. 'I am hurt!' she cried out in her heart, but her mouth was shut tight. She was lying there, crying, eeling so suffocated. She tried to take in deep breaths in but no way! What's her mom doing? Normally, she would take her in her lap, but no today. Why?

Her lids were as heavy as lead. She opened her eyes. So painful! So dark She tasted saltiness in her mouth. What's that? So painful! What's that dark shadow? Who is it? So painful! Mom! Dad! Come and rob me of my love

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Translated by Thinn Thiri Tun

Oh! It's dark. What a narrow space! Both my hands and legs feel as though they're tied so tight, I have to bend my body like a bow. So hot and stuffy. I wriggle, making a slight move.
I try hard to stretch out my limbs and my little bald head. My body hits against the hard covering, it hurts. Bruises and cuts on my limbs. But I continue struggling because I can't handle this asphyxia any more.

Oh! I could see a thin strip of pale light. I think I did it! I must keep on trying. By and by my limbs are able to move, my head's now tilted up a little. The pale light also looks a bit brighter.

Amm ... I thought I heard a sound like 'Crack'. All of a sudden, the rays of dazzling light invade my space inside, like lances. I can't open my eyes fully. The brightness is so powerful. I frown and screw my eyes tight.

What the heck! It's so noisy. I think my ears have gone deaf. A shift from the dark, narrow space out into the wide, bright and noisy place, I can't adjust very well to the new situation. Feels so scary. I cuddle myself in fear.

A few moments ago, I was choking inside, with my limbs tied so tight, and my head hidden between my hands, so I struggled to get out of this suffocating space. But now, the new environment scares me so much that I have to bend and hide my body in fear as though I am under threat of danger
Time passes. I just stay where I am. No one is hurting me. I blink and open my eyes, and out of curiosity, I look around. In the glaring light, I check myself. My upper and lower bodies are not the same. I have two feathery hands that I can flap, and my scaly legs and feet have little bony toes. As I stretch out my hands, I touch something accidentally. The white oval covering has cracked in half. A few moments ago, I got myself out. I am as free as air.

The place I have found myself inside has a little springy floor. A bit wide for me, of course. The surrounding wall, filled with dry bits, is circular in shape. I feel curious about the environment, outside of the wall, so I try very hard to stand up. But I can't. I fall down again and again.
_ooking up from my vantage point, I can see shaking, swaying, whispering greens. Up above is a big, big blue space, boundless and bare. I try my best to look up but I can't. It's too bright.

Ah! At that very moment, I hear a violent roar, and suddenly, the whole place is shaking terribly. I feel scared. I roll down to the opposite side of the wall. I try to clutch something on the wall, but my hands and feet are not strong enough. I am pani-stricken, and I bite something popping out of the wall. It hurts. I wait till the surroundings turn quiet, but I am still biting the thing in my mouth out of fear.

I stay quiet, then feel hunger burning in my stomach. I am starving, and eeling so cold. My hungry eyes look around, and I find something. It's a small insect. My mouth touches and feels it, but it doesn't move. So hungry, I devour this unknown insect. Now my stomach is full. To protect myself from the cold, I cuddle myself close into a cozy nook, lost in thoughts.

## Who am I? Where am I?

I am locked in rambling thoughts, I can't understand the situation, then I fall asleep, tired

When I wake up, I screw up my eyes to see what's happening. The blue space above my head is dark. Oh! I feel so scared. Sometimes, a scream comes from nowhere, and disappears. What an insecure, terrible environment!
'Tweet!... Tweet!'
Oh! Something is coming to me. My trembling little body is embraced by her warm arms, she makes me feel secure, and comfortable. This moment is the best, the warmest and the safest time since my birth. I am not alone, and having someone near me gives me really, really happy feelings.

Relieved, I try to talk about the terrible noise that I heard, about how the whole place was shaking and how I tried to catch part of the wall with my mouth, and how hunger made me eat an unknown insect. I also want to ask her who am I and about the environment I am in. But no words come out of my throat

She embraces and talks to me affectionately. I can't understand what she is tweeting, but she continues. I feel safe hearing her gentle voice and I fall asleep again.

When I wake up, I find her still with me. She tweets something, and puts a ittle insect into my open mouth. The surroundings aren't dark like before It is bright. My eyes are more open than before. I can see her clearly. In detail, she is bigger than me and similar to me, so I know we are the same species. And she knows who I am, and I hope she can help me with the problems I can't solve.

When I try to stand up, she is watching me with her eyes full of hope and affection. My feet are so groggy I fall down again and again. She gazes at me with love and understanding.

The time passes day by day. Now I can stand by myself. I can speak a little, and communicate with her in the language we share. Besides, I can understand my mom's words of advice. Even my hands, equipped with thick feathers, are strong, almost ready to flap harder and harder. My mom says that I will be able to fly soon. As I look out into the world from this nest, a thought comes to my head that if I can fly, I can see everything that I want to see. My mom always tells me about other nimals, humans and the environment. I am curious about all these

The day that I start flying is so scary because I fall out of the nest. As my mom catches me in time by the neck, I'm not injured. Otherwise, I would have fallen from the high tree. 'I don't want to fly,' I say. 'Mom, it's awful! scary thing!'. My mom embraces and explains, saying, 'This is the gift of vature. You must accept it. Every little fledgling starts off like this and inds a way to fly in the vast sky. You made a mistake in your first step, maybe, but you don't need to be shy, don't be scared. You should learn the art of flying step by step.'

Later, I can fly. I fall down again and again but I can handle it. If I get pain, I rest awhile and try to fly again. Eventually, I can fly well. I've decided to help my mom look for food, I fly joyfully, leaving my nest.

The world is fresh, green and delightful. The sky is wonderful, blue, adorned with pure white clouds. I laugh and enjoy my flight, flapping my wings, gliding in the wind for ages. Then, I remember what my mom eminded me: 'Don't go far away, don't get too close to other animals' At that moment, I try to return home, but I've lost my way back home Everywhere I look, the surroundings seem the same.
alight on the branch of the nearest tree and look around. I miss my mom, feeling so sad. I wish my mom were looking for me. 'I've lost my way back home, Mom'. I regret I refused to follow my mom's advice.

At that moment, I hear a hissing sound. When I check where this sound has come, I see a long, round creature slithering along. He slips and slides very fast, trying to do harm to me. Scared, I fly away. I don't know where I am. Later, I'm tired of flying and check my environment carefully, then, I alight on a tree where I see no sign of an animal.

On that tree, I cry regretfully for a long time until I hear mom's voice My mom says that the place I had flown to was far from our nest, so she ooked for me, full of worries. She warns me about not doing that again, not going out all alone without knowing the route. She also stresses the andmarks of the flying route that I have to remember.

I promise that I will never do it again, I will listen to her advice. I am so scared, you know. The world is not as beautiful a place to live as I once magined. I understand that it is not only blessed with natural beauty but also blighted with waylaying dangers.

On the following days, I practice searching for food together with my mom. I try to memorise what my mom has taught me about the environment, other animals, especially the dangers wrought by Homo sapiens. I've learned that all things have good and bad sides.

The world has amazing beauty but also unseen dangers. Kindness s precious so it is difficult to find. I must always take good care of everything so that I can survive. I've learned that I must try my best to keep myself alive. And so the days go by.


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## Farmer

## By Olivia Ma

As soon as I had left, a military intelligence (MI) agent visited my hut. He had learned what I was up to and when he couldn't find me alerted the MI in Pathein to hold me for questioning. But I was faster and smarter than he gave me credit for and had by this stage already arrived, having headed straight to Yangon, though I had told my family and neighbours that I'd go via Pathein

On arrival, I went straight to the house of opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and tried to meet with her. I didn't get to see her in person but one of her aides, U Win Htein, received me warmly. I passed the interview tape to him. That very night, while I was staying at Kyimyindaing monastery, the MI officers caught up with me and arrested me. I was taken straight back to Hinthada the following day. They searched my whole house and interrogated my family but eventually had to release us as they couldn't find any evidence ultimately for sedition.

Then a few days later, my interview video was broadcast by an Australian network. It must then have gone viral because the Myanmar authorities saw it too. I was taken into custody again. This time, they had hard saw it too. I was taken into custody again. This time, they had hard
evidence. They made me read Section 124A of the Penal Code several times; 'Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards [the Government established by law for the Union or for the constituent units thereof,] shall be punished with imprisonment for life or a shorter term, to which a fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which a fine may be added, or with a fine.'

I didn't know how to defend myself in court and I couldn't afford a criminal lawyer. My family sold three cows so they might hire one and though she tried her best we both knew I was doomed from the moment my face appeared on Western TV. The judge sentenced me to seven years imprisonment. This was back in 1996.

As a result, my children and relatives, who all relied on me, couldn't manage to keep up the farm. They borrowed money from neighbours without my permission. Loans which they were unable to pay off. After my release, I had to settle these with proceeds from selling my nine and a half acres. It still aches my heart. It was good land

So all I have now is a paddy on a plateau. And according to the weather forecast, there will be a drought this season. I have found it increasingly difficult to grow things in the traditional way, ploughing with a pair of oxen. I would die for a drop of rain. I am just a humble farmer, whose ancestors were also farmers. I know no other way of living. Rain or not, I till the fields.

## Blissful <br> Thanksgiving

By<br>Nhkum Lu

## Oh.o.o....O..о.......Ooh..о......O...○...○.....oooohhhhh....

The 'Mangai ta' songs from the speakers of the local church spread through the neighbourhood on this cold winter morning. Brang Dut remains in bed, listening to the songs, in the warmth of thick blankets. He opens his eyes and looks outside the window near his bed and sees that it's the blue hour. After chilling out in bed for another fifteen minutes, he gets up and gets ready for the day. It's Saturday and he has a plan to go and volunteer at the church in preparation for the thanksgiving ceremony on Sunday. He carefully picks a shirt, a hoodie, and a pair of trousers for this cold winter morning. He needs to stay warm, as well as stylish There will be girls doing volunteer work at church. He looks at the mirror countless times, trying to fix his hairstyle. He hears his granny calling him.

Brang Dut, wake up now. You said you are going to the church to volunteer.

## Ae ae.... I am ready.'

Brang Dut is a third-year university student majoring in English. He was appointed as the Block (3) leader this February during Youth Retreat, which is why he is actively participating in local church activities. His house is just two blocks away from the church and he can usually hear church music in the mornings.

Our Kachin community celebrates thanksgiving on the last Sunday of November in every church, and they call it 'Chyeju Dum Poi' or 'Nlung n-nan sha poi'. In Kachin State, November and early December are the times for harvesting. The season is known as 'Mangai Ta', 'the season of growth.' During this time, everyone feels blessed as they have so much food from their farms. Everyone is very eager to try the first harvest rice that they get from their farms. The aroma and the taste of first harvest rice is very different from other rice. Thanksgiving celebration is all about being thankful and counting the blessings that we have all throughout the years with our families, friends and communities.

The nearer he gets to the church, the more clearly he can hear the songs from the church speakers. When Brang Dut arrives at the church, there are already many people: elders, adults, and youths. Everyone seems to be working to the rhythm of the songs. The thanksgiving songs make people more energetic. He can see an uncle from the church choir, busy with a long broom, collecting fallen leaves on the cement floor of the church compound. When the uncle sees him, 'Brang Dut, can you find me a dustpan? I need to pick up these leaves.' Brang Dut quickly runs to the place where the church helpers usually put the brooms and dustpan, and then brings it to the uncle. He also helps him put the trash into a trash bin.

Then his friend, Naw Lawn, calls him to help them find a long bamboo stick to remove the spider web from the church ceiling. When he goes nside the church, he sees some girls wiping the dusty glass windows with a piece of clothing. Everyone is very busy cleaning the interior and the furniture of the church, singing and dancing along to the songs. After cleaning for a while, they have breakfast prepared by the church aunties. Then they continue with their chores.

Brang Dut helps the aunties set the long table in the reception hall to display the vegetables and fruits from donors. While they are setting the table, one church member brings fresh big yellow pumpkins from their back garden in a rattan basket on a motorcycle.

The aunties said, 'Gai looo.... Gai looo..... We have church members coming in. Welcome. Welcome.'

The aunty on the motorcycle shouts, 'Brang Dut, can you please help me put this basket down from the motorcycle? It is so heavy, and I can't do it alone.'
'Ae ae... yes, sure.'
One aunty commands him, 'Brang Dut, count the pumpkins and make notes in the notebook that is on the reception table. I will take this aunty to the praying areas to receive prayers.'

Brang Dut calls his friend and carries the pumpkin basket to the display table and puts them on the table beautifully. From then on, church members keep coming in and bringing the best vegetables and fruits from their farms and back gardens for donation to the church. By noon, the long table in the reception hall is topped with fresh and colourful vegetables: pumpkins, eggplants, long beans, chillies, ginger, garlic, nions, apple, orange, banana, papaya, eggs and so on. The aunties in the reception hall are busy organizing and displaying the vegetables, and aunties in the church kitchen are busy cooking lunch and dinner or the volunteers. Some elderly aunties are sitting together in a group, chatting and peeling garlic, onions and potatoes that will be used for the thanksgiving feast tomorrow. Brang Dut's granny is also there. The uncles are busy chopping pork into small pieces. The church decorators re looking for the choicest fruits and vegetables for display on the altar tomorrow. Brang Dut helps them carry the vegetables that they choose inside the church and helps place them beautifully for decoration.

In the evening, Brang Dut helps the youth to practice group songs for the prayer. After that, the youth rehearse reciting their harvest poems that they will present at the mass worship. The poem Brang Dut has in mind is called 'Rice'. Excited by thoughts of having to perform the poems in front of an audience, most of them forget their lines during the rehearsal. The youth leader reminds them about the schedule for tomorrow and the traditional costumes they have to wear for the recital.

When Brang Dut reaches home, he takes out the traditional costume and rons it. He is very excited for the poetry recital. He knows that he needs to look smashing as his crush will join the worship service. He keeps repeating his lines, looking at himself in the mirror. Then he remembers something and shouts,
'Grandma, can you wake me up at 7:00 in the morning?' Soon after that he is fast asleep.

It's Sunday morning. Brand Dut is very excited. He is dressed in an mpeccably pressed traditional costume as he walks to church. The Wunpawng Band is already at the front gate, warming up for the welcoming songs. The church service will start at 10:00 a.m. But the church members come to the church at 9:00 a.m. as they are afraid that they will not get seats inside the church. During the church service for thanksgiving celebration, it can be very crowded, as most of the church members come back home to enjoy the festivities. Brang Dut and his friends stand beside the Wunpawng Band and dance along to the welcoming songs. They sway left and right, welcoming the church members who come early for the service.

The worship starts with an opening prayer. After that, the youth sings group songs. The worship programme continues. Then there is the poetry recital. When the thanksgiving songs are played, the youths, who will recite poems, come to the front and dance to the music. When the music dies down, the whole church goes quiet. Brang Dut is the first to perform a poem. His palms are cold and sweaty. Even though he is very nervous, he nails the poem, 'Rice'. However, as soon as he finishes, he accidentally lets out a very loud sigh at the microphone. The whole church breaks out in laughter.

After the poetry recital, Brang Dut changes into everyday wear, a white collared t-shirt and Kachin longyi. Every thanksgiving, the church provides lunch for everyone who comes to the service with the donations hey received from church members. We Kachin believe that feasting at church for thanksgiving brings blessing and luck. Therefore, everyone eats the thanksgiving lunch to their heart's content.

For lunch, the aunties pack hot white rice in banana leaves, and put it on the table. This year, on the menu are pork and potato curry, chicken and potato curry, taro vegetable soup, assorted vegetables salad and spicy pounded banana flower. Around two hundred tables are laid out, eight seats per table. Once the service is finished, the church members come to the tables for lunch. Brang Dut's church has around 2,500 church members. To be able to feed all the members of the community in time, the volunteers have to be very quick in clearing the tables and laying them out again when one table is finished eating.

Brand Dut is in charge of carrying rice to the tables. He instructs his friends to bring rice packets and dishes when there are tables available The volunteers are very busy serving the people. People are enjoying lunch. Friends greet each other at the lunch table. The children are running around and playing. Some people are waiting for their turn to enjoy lunch. Some people are taking photos with the vegetable decorations inside the church. When the feast is over, the youth help clean up the dining areas.

At the end of the day, the volunteers take a group photo inside the church, with the thanksgiving decoration in the background. At the group photo call, Brang Dut gets a chance to stand next to his crush. Of course, Brang Dut is smiling widely.

## The Library

By<br>Nu Htet<br>Htet Lwin

Everyone in our village counted the days until this moment. Today the first library ever, a small wooden building with a thatched roof, was opened through our blood, sweat and tears. Sixty used books wer stacked on an old bookshelf in fresh blue paint in the left corner. Three pairs of long school desks and benches were arranged by the youth team hear the windows on the right side. The interior mural paintings by Ko Moe with books and Myanmar proverbs about reading books, such as Wisdom is in the books, Books are friends, created a cosy atmosphere. The children, reading comics on the solid hardwood floor, were fighting a war of words about the characters. The village elders also gathered in front of the library to mark the occasion, without reminding themselves of their inability to read. They all wore radiant smiles.

After the opening of the library, evenings became the community's hours for gathering near the library. Every evening the village elders usually had a long talk about random topics under the shady mango tree in front of the library. Children and young people enjoyed the evening reading roundups in the library. Parents waited for their children near the mango tree.

Two months later, many library members requested that the library team add new books to the library. They also suggested regular activities. The ibrary was run by a community fund, to which everyone contributed Within a tight budget, the library team decided to buy ten new books every two months and to begin with low-cost activities.

Of the four regular activities suggested by the majority of library members, the biweekly 'Read \& Discuss' sessions started that weekend The teenage and adult sessions were facilitated by the librarian himself. I was forced to take on the moderator role for children's sessions.

Whatever you say, Little Alien Kha Kwe is the most powerful. He can do everything. He helps everyone. He can even cure dying people. This is why he is more powerful than Superman,' concluded Group A

Group B argued 'Superman sacrifices himself, even his life, for othe people. He is the best superhero ever.'

The first children's session ended with a heated debate over the superpower rivalry of Little Alien Kha Kwe v. Superman.

Thanks to the photos of our lively debates regularly uploaded by Ko Moe, our coordinator, on the library's social media page, two local civil society organisations donated a hundred books and a bunch of stationery to the library. The donations included sheets of drawing paper, colour pencils, watercolour paint sets, and palettes.

The library proudly announced that it would launch drawing sessions soon. Ko Moe, a graduate from the National University of Arts and
Culture, would be the instructor for the drawing sessions.
As soon as the library members heard the news, children and teenagers came to the library and prepared for their gallery wall. They planned to start drawing sessions on the first anniversary of the library, which was only a month away

It was rice harvest time. This year's high yields brought smiles to the farmers, who promised that a huge contribution would be made to the library's first anniversary celebration. There was a tradition in our village: the harvest festival with bonfire.

The village head vetoed the request of the library team to make the place for the bonfire further from the library. Local legend had it that since the settlement of the village, the bonfire had been lit in the open field ocated only three doors away from the library. The village elders also unanimously supported the village head's decision. They firmly believed that something bad would happen if the festival was not held at the original spot. The library team had no option but to accept that decision.

Everyone was occupied with their volunteer duties for the lavish feast in the open field. The delicious smell of traditional chicken curry wafted up from the cauldron. Raw mango soup, roasted and pounded chilli dip, and vegetable salad were all tasty. Nothing was better than a hot meal on a cool and windy night. Three plates of rice and yummy dishes made me full.

The bonfire would be lit at 8:00 pm. I didn't think I could dance on a full stomach around the bonfire, so I decided to rest early that night. The next morning, Ko Moe and I would go to town to run errands for the library.

Fire! Fire! A warning shout woke me up around midnight. When I looked from the balcony, I saw a big fire raging near the library, only a distance of ten minutes. I ran there with a portable fire extinguisher. When I got there, huge flames had engulfed the library. Auxiliary and volunteer firefighters tried to bring the huge blaze under control. The librarian, Ko Moe, other villagers and I also joined them. We succeeded in putting ou the fire an hour later. No casualties, but five houses and the library were burnt down. No one knew exactly how the fire started. We eventually drew the conclusion that the strong wind that night must have carried embers from the remnants of bonfire onto the thatch roof of the library.

The following morning, many villagers gather near the burnt library in silence. All the books have turned to ashes. So have our hopes. The ashes are spread out by the breeze, little by little. We stare at the ashes floating in the air until they are out of our sight.

## Dreams

The evening sky is flushed with colour, clouds move in the wind and small birds fly high, returning home. The brightness of the sun lightens the whole sky as though a beautiful horizon painted by angels. It is hard to turn her eyes from the view. She walks alone on this quiet path to feel the coolness of the air that comes from the big pine trees. As she walks, t becomes darker and darker. She is thinking so hard she doesn't notice the music in her headphones has stopped.

When she reaches home, she feels different, less satisfied, as all the chores she has to do weigh her down. In the dark kitchen, she feels gloomy and exhales a heavy sigh, and murmurs, 'I don't want to live like this,' she said, 'But there is nothing I can control.'

At one time, her mind was stable, but now, every emotion has become unpredictable. She doesn't remember the last time she felt peace of mind.
'You hear me, May?'
'You say something to me?'
'Yeah, take out the things from the cart. We have to prep for tomorrow. Have you finished chopping the vegetables?'

## Not yet, Mom. Where is Linn?

'He is at the shop, doing some cleaning
May takes out a knife and board, starts chopping all the vegetables for their restaurant in the market.

She thinks about her life, the future, dull and uncertain, stressing her out but she tries to be optimistic and mumbles:

I am fine; I am very happy with my life; better days are about to come.'
Then, she wonders, if her family were happier, would she still feel this emptiness? In a world full of darkness, it must be really terrible for mom to raise her children all alone. If that man, whom they should call 'father, was here, would mom be happy?

A few minutes later, May pictures a sunset in a small port town by the sea A teenage boy and girl sit on the sand, watching ships. The boy reaches out and takes the girl's hand. They have made a thousand promises, both are determined to keep them. They believe they will be able to keep every promise they have made and love each other forever, even though they do not even understand what forever means.

She tries to imagine a girl waiting alone at the docks at the next sunset And the next, walking alone even on rainy days. She waits for him every day with the twins in her womb. Maybe he never intended to keep the promises. The girl becomes a woman, the twins grow to be her companions. A heart wounded so young in youth can never be healed. She still wonders what happened to the sailor she once loved.

May wants to know about her father, eager to know if she or Linn looks most like him. When she has finished all her work, she prepares for bed Neglecting every emotion, hoping to get a good night's sleep. Then, she falls under, and May dreams, images influenced by an impression of her past.

It begins with a warm morning where red peacock flowers are blooming beautifully, and the air is refreshing. Her hair is bouncing in the air as she walks. Heavy steps run up from behind her. She knows it's Linn. 'Why didn't you wake me up, May?' he complains in his loud and exhausting voice.

I did, but you were in a deep sleep, sleeping like a dead person.'
'Ah, I missed breakfast, do you have something to eat?'
No, I ate it all.'
'You're so mean. I will just go to the school canteen.'
Then he runs to the canteen; he'll be late for class and get scolded by the head teacher. Giggles and laughter of the students are spreading in the school compound.

As her dream progresses, she hears a tune which is pleasing to her ears. suddenly, she is in class. As the teacher plays the guitar, the students sing along with him. She sees the English teacher telling stories, the students acting out dramas in front of the class, and how the science teacher tells jokes whenever they feel bored during lessons. It was such a blessing to be with grateful people.

Now, she is at a different place. Some upbeat songs are playing.
The sound of the clapping hands and shouts of joy and excitement. Cheerleaders enter the stadium; the players close behind them. Linn waves at May in the stands. Linn scores a goal in the second half, winning the game.

That night, their family celebrates with a party at their house, and even Mom sings her favourite song. She loves classical music, but Linn interrupts and forces her to dance with him. Mom is smiling brightly, so brightly that they can see the dimples on her cheeks. May has missed her mom's dimples. She doesn't smile very often. May sings along with them clapping and swaying her body from side to side. Their hearts are filled with joy.

Her mom enters her room to check on her. May seems to be smiling; maybe her dreams are good. She leaves, slowly closing the door. May rolls her body towards the door, but doesn't wake.

In this moment, May sees herself at the beach. The sun is slowly diving into the crystal-blue water. There, a boy and a girl are building a sandcastle. A woman is taking pictures of them; she looks like Mom, but younger. She can hear the giggles and see a moment full of happiness. The little boy swims out to sea, the girl following him. Later, they start teasing each other by splashing water. A tall man comes closer, capturing the twins in his muscular arms. She can't see his face, and everything swirls into smoke.

Resurfacing through the fog, the school is beautifully decorated, with flowers on both sides and a red carpet. They are in their best clothes. May's eyes are filled with ambition and confidence. Being a clever student, she goes up the stairs proudly to accept her prize. She knows she deserves it. After receiving he prize, she turns around. She turns around to the stage, gradually collapsing. She falls into a pitch-black void, the cheers changing to screams as she wonders how she got there. There is no trophy, no goal, noone. The path that she has paved has disappeared. She is calling out for help, but no one hears her.

Mom, Mom, Mom!!!!!'
She wakes up with tears continuously falling down her cheeks. She's frightened; her heart is beating so fast it exhausts her. She knows she is trapped between good memories and nightmares.

She gets up from the bed and slowly moves to the dressing table. t breaks her heart to know that she is no longer at school. Life is errible, two weeks off school to help her family became years. She looks at herself in the mirror. She is not a kid anymore, and she has responsibilities. Everyone in this house is tired. But who will understand her feelings? Who cares about her dreams being destroyed?
She tries to be optimistic by reciting 'I am fine; my life is enjoyable; I am happy'. She has heard that manifestation really works. She listens to piano tunes to relax her mind. It is past midnight before she falls asleep

Dark woods. No people. The sharp-pointed leaves and vines on the trees This place, almost remembered, but she's lost. She sees something glowing. A brook with strange lights dancing across the surface leading her forward to somewhere brighter, calmer and more pleasant. The dazzling sun forces her to close her eyes, until she becomes used to it. In front of her is a gorgeous, dreamy, turquoise sea. The waves are crawling gently to the shore. She goes closer as the clear water attracts her. It seems familiar.

## 'Beep beep beep'

She wakes up to the sound of her alarm. Half-conscious, dizzy, she hits the snooze button. She feels great after this short dream. For the first time in her life, she feels peace and hope. The sea reminds her of her hometown, her father. Could he be waiting at the same place where they lived? He might be looking for them, she wants to find him. She decides o start a quest for her father.

She runs out of the bedroom and heads to the kitchen.

## Mom Mom!'

May wants to ask permission but she doesn't reply
She looks in the toilet, bedroom; finally, in the living room, she sees a tall man with broad shoulders who is standing, facing the wall.

As he hears her footsteps, he turns around and smiles at May. That man gave her those thick eyebrows. She smiles back at him.

## The Boy at the

## by Mika Royd

## White

## Hotel

The lift in Emmett's apartment building requires a code. He mentioned this, but it slipped your mind. You scroll through his messages on your phone.

A young woman is standing next to you, a small dog at her feet. She
keys in the digits and the doors open.
'Going up?'
'Thanks,' you say.
She follows you into the lift.
'We've had problems with drunks before,
'Oh right,' you say, and wonder whether she can smell the alcohol on your breath.

Emmett cuts three lines with his credit card.
'One each,' he says in his teacher voice
When it's your turn you roll the ten-pound note into a tube, bring it to one nostril and close the other with your index finger. The line of powder disappears like a magic trick.

Along the main road, new apartment buildings give way to old warehouses and disintegrating brickwork. A discarded takeaway lies strewn across the pavement. Soon this too will be flats, you think; the clubs will move further out until there's nowhere left for them to go. It is just like you to be nostalgic before they are gone. You look at the faces of your friends, laughing as you step over the remains of stir-fry.

The bass shakes the whitewashed walls of the garage-turned-club. The DJ surveys the crowd from behind the decks, her braids swaying. A new track sends a sea of hands into the air. That's when you see him under the strobing lights, for a moment, then lost again to darkness, then reappearing in a different pose, over and over. His dance is different to the others. He unfurls his arms slowly, his hands carving shapes in the , ticky air. He is younger, his cropped hair bleached blond, a faint fuzz on is grinning face. The track builds, the crowd convulses. When you look gain, he is gone.

## In the courtyard outside Emmett lights your cigarette. 'Why do you

 always go for straight guys?You take a drag, inhaling the smoke deep into your lungs
'Yeah, what's so wrong with gays?' Luca adds, digging his elbow into your ribs.

You like to think your desires are independent from such influence, but deep down you are not so sure. 'Who says he's straight?

Babe it's obvious.' Emmett says, wide-eyed. 'Did you see his friends?
They literally fist-bumped each other
Luca raises his fist in parody. Emmett reciprocates and they fall about aughing. You exhale the smoke over your shoulder. You can't help but smile.

The music comes in waves, each more powerful than the one before. You are dancing with the others when you see him. He looks over and smiles, and then he is beside you.
'Where did you learn to dance?' you ask into his ear.
'Here,' he says gesturing to the club
He is beautiful, but not in a classical way. Your friends would pass him over. You can't think of anything more to say, so you dance and he dances, close so that you are touching and really you want to kiss him right there and maybe it's the drugs, but your hand moves to his shoulder and when you notice this you say
'Is this OK?'
'Is what OK?' he says smiling
You squeeze his shoulder. 'My hand, here'
'Oh right,' he says, glancing at his friends. 'Not my thing,' a note of apology in his voice. You take your hand away.
'Sorry.'
He smiles. 'Fancy a bump?

The queue for the toilets stretches along the corridor. People talk in loud voices to be heard above the music, punctuated by shrieks of laughter. Others walk past on their way to the urinals. 'GET MORE TOILETS!!!' says the graffiti on the wall. George tells you about a project he is working on The council want to demolish a skate park. He is making a documentary. He studied film.

What do you do?' he asks.
Just then the door to a cubicle opens and three people spill out, sweaty and smiling. You follow George inside and lock the door. The sudden privacy is intoxicating, the stink of piss erotic. George produces a bag of white powder from the inside of his sock.
'You got a key?' he asks.
You offer him your house key. He concentrates, carefully loading the powder before holding it out for you. You snort it back.

Good job' he says, smiling.
Then it's his turn.
'Can you hold it,' he says, handing you the key. He takes your hand and guides it to where he wants it. His touch is electric. When he is done, you put the key back in your pocket. He takes your face in his hands and you kiss, long and slow.

Someone bangs on the door. 'Hurry the FUCK up!

Outside it is light. The sun rises from behind the warehouses. It is February but you aren't cold, even in your shorts. People are gathered by the road waiting for taxis to take them home. Emmett and Luca left an hour ago. They came to say goodbye, hookups in tow. George is leaning against a wall, chatting to his friends who wear sunglasses, impossibly fresh.

Hey, you say but he doesn't hear. You wait to catch his eye.
'Oh hey,' he says, but something has changed.
I just came to say bye.
Reluctantly, he turns to face you but he cannot hide the look of
disgust, so he stares at the ground instead. You get it. You've been here before.
'Get home safe,' you say, as you walk on down the road towards the city.

Translated by Thinn Thiri Tun

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The Poet, by Lily Prigioniero (Italy, b. USA) 2021

## Writers Block

By Mariyam Karolia

He trips on the mat at the entrance of the café, his search for inspiration, a muse to focus his garbage thoughts, forgotten as he tumbles into wakefulness. Sleeping has not been in darkness for some time, nor without a knife stashed between ink-stained pillows that refuse to come out in the wash

Commandeering a booth at the rear, where he can observe anyone who walks in, he one-eighties the room, the chess floor, dotted with tables black and metallic, decorated with soft cream silk and centred with a bowl of tainted sugar cubes.

A floor-to-ceiling window acts as focal point, pale, clouded sunlight filtering through to discover Highland canvases trying to add green andscapes to dull brown walls. Outside plastic bags and spent nitrous oxide canisters dance to the music of a stiff breeze.

Behind the counter, a waitress replaces a display of baked goods, single item for single item.

You're quiet today?' He asks, her bored approach with stylus and pad, the chewing of nude pink lips, the look of reproach in harsh brown eyes, almost making the question rhetorical

In two minds, debate flickers across her features, settling on truth and the shrug of a caught-out teenager. 'Dog got loose yesterday, had an accident on a bell-end MP's shoes.' Her voice lowers to that of coconspirator, 'a number two kind of accident'

Casing the exterior before approaching the building, there is no evidence of a dog, of any animal, save for a kitchen hand throwing out the slop of unprepared, rancid meat.
He anticipates more, letting the silence of the room connect the dots fo her.
'Half of 'em sided with the mutt, wanted him left unchained... half questioned whether we were patriots. They all walked out.' The waitress returns his expectation, her nib poised, itching to scribe.
'Peppermint tea' he requests 'With a spoonful of honey on the side. No food.' No ink is used.

Filling the kettle with bottled water, she digs beneath the counter for the unopened box of mint chai. Someone dances in the kitchen, the hand, the chef, maybe both, the strum of a Strauss Waltz and a mechanical voice calling out the next movement, beckoning through the barely closed fire door.
'One side together, back side together, one two three, one two three...' on endless repeat.

With his foot, he nudges the chair opposite out of place when the gir returns with his beverage. 'Sit, please?'

She eases her stick-thin frame into the seat with caution as if the slightest knock may break her

I read your book.' Her softly spoken voice punctuates with the occasional pen tap on the table.

What did you think?'
She perfectly places the pad so it lines up with the nib in front of her Were you high when you wrote it?'
He laughs, a small unnerving laugh, which jolts her back to her regular state of caution. 'Something like that.'

The poetry made me cry.' Living in the pregnant silence that follows her words, becomes too much, too quickly. 'Tell me a story.

## The plea of a lonely child.

What about?' he answers.
Unconsciously, she pushes the pad towards him. 'Snow white... I dunno.. make something up?

The poet considers. 'Once upon a time...' he begins
'No' she interrupts. 'Scary... a murder.
Not my forte,' he reminds her.
'You watch telly, I'm sure you'll manage.'

The bones of a smallish hand rose out of the earth in the mountains above Inverness, uncovered when unprecedented rain washed away swaths of soil from unreachable peaks. A group of teenagers on a weekend hike celebrating the end of the makeshift monsoon came across the pungent smell of drying rotting meat still permeating the air and then the hand and the skeleton still hanging onto pieces of flesh. Two returned to civilisation to contact the Polis while the others waited, thankful for their futures.

A day later a coroner determined female, suffocation caused by non-biodegradable plastic bag filling her oesophagus. Teeth, DNA fingerprints didn't match with anyone on national databases. The autopsy was logged as unable to determine identity or connection to any missing person report filed
'Why?' asks the waitress. 'Why would no one report her?'
'Maybe she was a frequent runaway, or maybe her family just didn't care?'
If it was my sister, I'd say something.' She brushes her hair out of her face, twisting it back, grabbing the pen to pierce through the jumble. Her hair falls back to her shoulders, the pen to the floor. 'What happens next?'

Facial reconstruction, disseminated in national papers, on television and social media, brought no fresh leads which left the diamond nose ring that had slipped through her deteriorating flesh and settled into the soi like the seed of a beanstalk ready to destroy worlds.

How can everyone see the reconstructed face?' the waitress interrupts, her hunt for a rubber band so successful she treats herself to a cup of black coffee. The plate of unwanted pastries settles exactly halfway between them before she adds an almond croissant to her prize tally, biting into the dry buttery flavour until the custard centre oozes from the side of her mouth. She swipes it away with the back of her hand
'Let's just assume everyone who matters saw it.' He picks up her pen and doodles a quick sketch of his victim's face on the pad. 'But no one admits to knowing her. No school. No friend. No family. No one.

There was nothing special about the nose ring except the 2-karat blue diamond and rhodium pressed in gold. Engraved in the back was th etter G with no room for anything else. A search through jewellery brands was unfruitful, until the morgue assistant suggested a one-off conceit. Photos were sent to major jewellery houses, Bvlgari, Cartier Graff, Winston. Not one of ours. Someone at Graff mentioned an apprentice that had walked out a few months previous with no notice. He hadn't returned but nose rings had been his specialty.

A last known address, a knock on the door, revealed a tango in full flow, a figure emerging from the room beyond, a young man with drowning eyes that had forgotten how to breathe.

He told a tale about a forbidden dance, a family who felt the only solution o saving their honour was to disappear a daughter into a marriage in a far-off land, a sister who had promised to aid an escape and had pivoted to betray, and a promise, a promise that no matter how long it took she would find him again.

Sadness ends the tale floating away like a child's dream in the sun, like a sister's nursery rhyme fading from sleepy ears, like plastic bags crinkling on the wind.
The waitress draws in a breath. 'Why didn't he admit to knowing her when the picture was released?

The poet sips his now cold tea, the honey hiding the over-infused
bitterness of green leaves. He takes his time placing the cup neatly back on the saucer. 'Because the day he makes the call, she's gone - and he wasn't ready.

The waitress clears her pen and pad back into her pocket, empties the crumbs into the bin and hurries the china into the bowl of kettle-hot water. She returns for his empty cup. 'What happens to the family?'

Unmitigated grief returns with the lifting of the veil around his own estimony - parents escorted to life sentences, adored sister lost for playing cricket. His book had been a declaration of brotherly affection and a mandate for men to speak out, demand change, everywhere. 'I don't know yet.'

Outside flashing blue lights blur in the raindrops on the glass. The music in the kitchen gone, unnoticed.
'Did my sister suffer?' her voice breaks, her eyes welling with tears that will never be truthfully shed.
'Unimaginably,' answers the poet taking out his warrant card to read her rights

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## The <br> Kitchen

## Table

## By Jessica Wright

Maggie leaned against the doorframe. 'I'll take it apart while you're out.'
'Dude.' Jo smiled across the lawn. 'It's not going anywhere.'
After they left, Maggie went into the bedroom and dug through Jo's toolkit. She returned to the table with three screwdrivers of different diameters. Grass stubble furrowed her knees. Her fingers ached. The cry of cicadas gritted the night.

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## By Gus Mitchell



A man, clearly of no fixed abode, started talking to the birch tree on a uesday morning. It was, or is, somewhere in one of the larger public parks. Maybe it was something in a particular arrangement of trees that called out, found its voice somewhere in this man's mind, got him o sit down and start talking. In any case, this is what he did. As of this moment, he still is

Some people have lingered longer than others, fascinated, even entranced by the sight, others have only passed by, glancing, having somewhere else to be. His age is hard to determine. His lifestyle appears o have kept him lean - in some respects. He has a long beard, which fits his profile well. No one can remember his face - from before, that is, before this incident, this defining moment in the life of this man.

He has managed to touch a great many people. But something about him seems forbidding. It's not anything he says, for he talks only to the tree, always, never even glances up at people who might be on a lunchtime or evening stroll, or who hover and watch him with curiosity, amusement, certain intensity. It's more that it seems indecent to get close enough to take a clear picture. He is so clearly rapt and in such personal communication with the tree. Doubtless the police will get involved, but no-one has wanted to tell them yet.

What they have done is turn him into a social star - content is circulating widely. They didn't ask permission to film him, back turned, or facing hem from a distance away, because they assumed, correctly, that he wouldn't respond if they were to. So, they filmed him from a distance, variously enhancing or editing the photos to make them more interesting or amusing. One of the better-known memes has text imposed over oth man and tree, text explicating, apparently, traits peculiar to two very specific types of young people one might encounter in this neighbourhood.

It was Tuesday morning when he sat down in front of the tree. He has not moved since, only shifting his position a little when getting stiff. He has not been seen to touch it. He keeps what onlookers call' a respectfu distance. What is he saying? What is the substance of their conversation? It is impossible for anyone to discern, due again to the distance people seem impelled to maintain. Moreover, he talks in fairly low tones, and the tree of course says nothing. All the same, certain things, certain words, phrases, certain rhythms, tones, themes, even, have been mentioned enough that they might be judged significant. A minor discourse is emerging on the internet exchanging ideas over these interpretations. (If sufficient interest is shown from readers, more details will be shared.)

And the tree？The tree，as we have said，is a birch．It is not large．Nobody has paid it much attention before．It is hard to say much more about the tree，since the continuing proximity of the man has prevented anyone wanting to approach since Tuesday．It＇s a nice tree，as far as it goes， people agree，but nothing special．

As time passes，more and more speculate about the trajectory of this meeting of minds．Nobody has seen this man sleep；he shows no fatigue． If anything，his stature，and energy，have grown，the longer he has conversed，which accounts perhaps for the growing throngs that now choke the converging routes in the park in which this strange site is ound．Word is starting to spread abroad；so considerable is the pull for interviews that some more inconsiderate journalists can now be heard，
timidly yelling requests and questions at him most days．He ignores
them；his silence（aside from what is reserved for the tree）remains total．
People now report a peculiar rapture at being in the presence of this conversation．It is something which the pre－circulated images seem unable to dim．When actually in the presence of the gaunt figure by the tree，which is by all appearances an equal interlocutor，they are compelled by the luminosity of focus，the humour and directness emanating from their communion．To everyone present，it belies the otherwise likely
conclusion that this man is purely mentally unwell．They stress the
humility that is to be gained from this witnessing，one difficult to explain． What will become of this man，of his situation，is still uncertain．

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## About the contributors

Hsu Mon Thein is a researcher in humanitarian and development fields, for over three years in Post-conflict Areas Education and fo six years in medical humanitarian aid. She has expertise in nonexperimental research, program management and teaching to young earners. Together with writing formal reports and paper, she is also earning to write short stories and novels while sharing non-fiction related to skin care, research and short stories. This short story is her very first short story published after formal learning about creative writing. With passion to support social justice, Hsu is excited to extend her skills and networks to share untold stories to build a just society ogether, where every child would reach full potential without poverty and conflict-induced barriers.

## Po Po Phoenix is a writer from Myanmar.

Thu Ta co-founded the Lashio University English Club and Book Clubs, and received an MA in English from Lashio University in 2018. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he initiated literature discussion shows at his alma mater, in the Lashio community, and on social media. Recently, he published his first e-book, 'Little Grains of Soul Rice,' on his Soul Rice Facebook page. In 2023, he earned an MA In Education Methodology, Policy and Leadership from the University of Oregon. He currently resides in Eugene, Oregon, and works as an Education Assistant for students with special needs in Bethel School District.

Aung Naing Htoo (his pen name being Nyein Hlaing) was born in Ponnakyun, Rakhine State in August 1997. He contributed a few poems to the Annual Magazine of Sittwe University, local magazines and magazines ssued in mainland Myanmar. He has written modern poems in collective poetry books written in Rakhine language. In 2019, he published his poetry in Rakhine language, entitled Wut-Sone. He has been engaged in he art movements, Kan Yoe Tan Art Platform, based in the Rakhine State, and took the lead in poetry recitation and paper readings. He was already writing poems when, in 2023, he started writing short stories in Sharing Stories, Connecting Lives in the NCW project supported by PEN Myanmar

Aye Aye Moe (her nickname, Aye Moe, her pen name Thanda Tun) was born in a village by the Lay Myo River in Mrauk Oo, Rakhine State on October 1, 1995. She has been interested in poetry since she was a Grade 9 student. Her first poem, 'Amin' appeared in print in the Annual Magazine of Sittwe University. Some poems and an essay of hers also appeared in local magazines and the annual university magazins. Rakine Thu Myat Readers Club works with budding writers and publishes poetry books. In October 2018, six Rakhine women writers published a poetry book, 'Akyun Swa Ma Mar Tayauk' in Rakhine language. In the story collection 'Yat Kyaw Ywa Kyaw Stories', published under Third Story Project, she wrote a short story, 'Byein Saung'. In the present, she volunteers at the Sarpi Garu Mobile Library of Marauk Oo. She works for a nongovernment organization in Sittwe.

Shwe Eain San is a writer and translator. Her passion for writing ignited at a young age, though she initially lacked the confidence to share he work. Encouragement from professors led her to contribute articles to the University Annual Magazine, exploring themes of womanhood. Recognition followed, inspiring her to pursue writing further. In 2022, her short story, 'It's okay, you know,' was published in an online magazine. The Link the Wor(l)ds literary translation workshop was a pivotal moment, motivating her to amplify her roles as a writer and translator. She hopes to provide readers with a window into the unknown worlds of diverse lives through her writing

Thinn Thiri Tun was born in 1993 and her parents are Government employees. She graduated as a Bachelor in Civil Engineering from Taungoo Technological University in 2015. Since University student life, she has been passionate about creative writing and translating. After graduating, she worked as a senior assistant engineer in Department of Basic Education from January 2015 to February 2021. Then, she started o work as a translator. She has been translating English novels and Chinese novels as a freelancer. She participated in Link the Wor(l)d's Literary Translation Festival held in July - October (2022) as a translator. In this workshop, she translated 'State of Emergency' by Jeremy Tiang and 'LIFEPLAN' by Jeremy Tiang. Then, she also participated in Link the Wor(l) d's Sharing Stories, Connecting Lives held in February - July (2023) as a creative writer and translator. She works as an English teacher in an international school.

Olivia Ma is a writer and literary translator, based in Myanmar. In 2019, she enrolled as a trainee lawyer at the Supreme Court of the Union of Myanmar. Following the Myanmar military coup in February 2021, she left her courtroom apprenticeship, and began to chase her dream to become a writer and literary translator. In 2022, she completed an online course in literary translation studies at the National Centre for Writing, UK. She also gives free legal advice to people with social care needs.

Nhkum Lu belongs to the Nhkum clan in Myitkyina in Kachin State in northern Myanmar. She is a Kachin peace educator and writer. Her essays and stories have appeared in Women's Libber, and Portside Review magazines. She is currently working on a project called 'Kachin: Stories from an Uncivil War' which reimagines the impact of the Myanmar civil war on the Kachin people through writings by Kachin writers.

Nu Htet Htet Lwin took her first step into the literary world by
participating in the Link the Wor(I)ds Literary Translation Workshop in 2022. As someone who loves to live in her own literary cocoon and would rather express her thoughts in writing, an essential medium for her. She is navigating her way in pursuit of storytelling expertise.

Hsu Lei Nwe read English literature at Mandalay University. She currently wears the hat of an English language teacher. In her leisure time, she finds joy in translating books and poems from English to Burmese or vice versa, and is immersed in imaginations for her own stories.

Mika Royd is a writer and editor. Their fiction was recently commended for the University of East Anglia's New Forms Award and longlisted for the Desperate Literature Prize. Mika is represented by David Higham and lives in Manchester, England.

Mariyam Karolia is an emerging writer and poet of Indian heritage She believes in the power of storytelling to form human connections and as a catalyst for social change and is very proud of being part of Sharing Stories, Connecting Lives.

Jessica Wright is a historian and writer based in West Yorkshire. Her recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Queerlings Magazine Mslexia, Whiptail Journal, and streetcake magazine. She also writes about the history of the brain and mental disorder, and her first book, The Care of the Brain in Early Christian (2022), has been described as 'surpassingly researched and beautifully written'. She teaches in the Lifelong Learning Centre at the University of Leeds.

Gus Mitchell is a writer in London. He graduated with a BA in English at Trinity College, Cambridge. He writes about the performing arts, books, music, culture in general, and environmental issues. He also works on film and theatre projects, which are shown in London and elsewhere.

Zar Myo Thandar was born in Twinma Village, Myaing Township, in rural Magway region in the heartland of Myanmar. She earned an MA n English from Yadanabon University in Mandalay in 2007. She was a ecturer in English at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages, with over twelve years of professional expertise, when she resigned from her ob in protest against the 2021 military coup. She continues to work as a private educator and literary translator in Mandalay. In Myanmar she publishes under the pen name Hsue Yanant.

Mozart Brang is a writer and translator from one of the marginalised ethnic communities in Myanmar, left his studies in political science at Yangon University, in protest following the 2021 military coup. He s currently pursuing an undergraduate degree at Parami University, Yangon.

This project is supported by the British Council Connections Through Culture Programme

We would like to thank all the contributors from the UK and Myanmar; tutors San Tun Thaung, Dr Zaw Tun, ko ko thett and Thett Su San; editors Myo Myint Nyein and Nathan Hamilton; and everyone at PEN Myanmar.

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