FOREWORD

Fiction Singapore is back with fifteen new contemporary titles from Singapore’s best authors, writing in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

The writers range from first-time novelists to award-winning stalwarts of the Singapore literary scene. From traditional kampongs of 1960’s Singapore to a post-apocalyptic zombie dystopia; from the forbidden love of Chinese Admiral Zheng He to a test of loyalty in the battlefields of the Vietnam War, the writers weave together a diverse tapestry to create uniquely Asian stories that transcend the boundaries of time, language and culture. Many of these works are available in English for the first time.

We invite you to reach out to the authors or their publishers. The relevant contact details can be found after each extract.

KHOR KOK WAH
Senior Director
Sector Development (Literary Arts)
National Arts Council
Singapore
The National Arts Council (NAC) is a Singapore government agency which nurtures the arts and makes it an integral part of the lives of the people in Singapore. It supports the practice and appreciation of the arts in Singapore and facilitates the internationalisation of Singapore artists and their works through various initiatives, programmes and events.

NAC’s funding supports the creation of literary content, research, capability and talent development, organisational development, publishing and translation, production and market development, and the presentation and promotion of the literary arts.

International publishers and literary agents can tap on grants and other assistance to bring original Singaporean literary works to the world.

An important event on the literary arts calendar is the Singapore Writers Festival, which has multilingual programming, with a strong emphasis on Singapore’s four official languages - English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

For more information on NAC’s grant schemes and initiatives, please visit the Council’s website at: www.nac.gov.sg or email: nac_literary_arts@nac.gov.sg
Amanda Lee Koe

MINISTRY OF MORAL PANIC

SYNOPSIS
Meet an over-the-hill Pop Yé-yé singer with a faulty heart, two conservative middle-aged women holding hands in the Galápagos, and the proprietor of a Laundromat with a penchant for Cantonese songs of heartbeat. Rehash national icons: the truth about racial riot fodder-girl Maria Hertogh living out her days as a chambermaid in Lake Tahoe, a mirage of the Merlion as a ladyboy working Orchard Towers, and a high-stakes fantasy starring the still-suave lead of the 1990s TV hit serial The Unbeatables.

Heartfelt and sexy, the stories of Amanda Lee Koe encompass a skewed world fraught with prestige anxiety, moral relativism, sexual frankness, and the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection. Told in strikingly original prose, these are works that plough, relentlessly, the possibilities of the improbable necessity of human connection.
SYNOPSIS
A rape, a baby, a bone bangle, and a murder—these are the pieces of a puzzle that Thong Tran, a Vietnamese man, must decipher to understand who he is and win his wife back.

As the Heart Bones Break follows Thong Tran, a Vietnamese man, as he navigates a maze of dubious allegiances, double-dealing intelligence agents, and a family and country torn apart by war; treacherous territory he continues to occupy even as he flees to the USA. It is only when Thong’s American-born Vietnamese wife discovers his double life and demands full disclosure that the Mekong Delta boy and Viet Cong spy become an American aerospace engineer is confronted with the true cost of being a man with no real home.

EXTRACT FROM AS THE HEART BONES BREAK
The back gate to the villa had been open, the door to Chu Hai’s room ajar. All appeared in readiness for your first lesson after the Tet New Year holidays. But the room was in disarray. Chu Hai’s armchair had been pushed back in a hurry. A cushion lay on the floor. The standing lamp, which he assiduously turned off whenever he left the room, was still alight with its lampshade askew. The five photographs of American fighter planes fanned out neatly on the coffee table, the promised subject of this session, were soaking in the dark liquid that had spilled from a toppled coffee filter. Chu Hai was nowhere to be seen.

He’d left in a hurry. Whatever the reason, you too should make yourself scarce. Turning off the reading light, you slipped out into the narrow back garden. Someone had kicked over the basket housing the remaining bantam and it was wandering about disconsolately making soft squawking cries. You stepped over it, noticing as you did, noises coming from the villa beyond the servant’s quarters... Men shouting orders, doors being kicked open, tinkling glass, gunshots, a woman’s screams. The sound of boots and dragging sandals came towards you.

You retreated back into Chu Hai’s room and between his two cabinets, thankful now for their American bulk. Outside, you heard feet scuffling, a body slammed against the wall, a woman whimpering, a man grunting, another man, then the woman begging them to stop. “What the hell do you think you’re doing? And to her of all people!” someone shouted. “Get your useless ass back here,” someone else called in a familiar voice.

There was more scuttling. Quiet. A woman’s soft keening. And then from somewhere to the side of Chu Hai’s room, kicks and a crack, like a table leg or bone being broken.

Through the gap between the cabinets you saw a stumbling man with his head covered by a sack pushed into the viewing aperture that was Chu Hai’s open door. He was surrounded by three uniformed police corporals who shoved and kicked at him to move on and out of sight. Next to come in view was a tall policeman’s trousers. With his head covered by a sack, you could see no more.

“Quiet. A woman’s soft keening, and then from somewhere to the side of Chu Hai’s room, kicks and a crack, like a table leg or bone being broken."

Had you seen right? You pressed your face into the gap between the cabinets to make sure. But the pot-bellied man had already moved out of sight. All you could see was the moss covered garden wall. Then a squawking bantam rooster appeared at the threshold. It strutted into the room and walked under the cabinet legs towards you. It was crowing, each crow rising in volume as it made its way to your hiding place until it seemed to you the crowing must only fill the room but also spill out to the garden. The crowing was all you heard, drowning out the screaming of the man being beaten on the pathway just meters away, the final sharp whack as the club hit his head and then the muffled sound of a gunshot. Your one thought was to catch the bantam and put your hands over its head. To hold its beak shut. To twist its neck around. To keep it quiet, dead quiet.

The bird’s neck cracked. Finally the bird was still, so still you could hear Oldest Brother-in-Law, say quite clearly, quite recognizably, “That’s it then. Let’s take him away.”

Months later, after yet another coup, when the Army had re-arranged itself and everything was under control again, you would realize that the man whose brains were knocked out was Albert, the other man in Chu Hai’s cockfight. Many years later, Chu Hai and you would finally get around to talking about it and he would confirm that the man was indeed the villa owner, the government official who was also working for the other side. Chu Hai would also say that in addition to knocking Albert’s face in and tearing off his balls, the perpetrators had raped Albert’s sister, a nun. Somewhere in between, you would have found the answer to your bloodfather’s question. You would not fight, but like the dead undercover agent Albert, you would do whatever one man could. In the moment, though, all you apprehended was that no one was what they seemed—neither policemen nor villa owners. Not a seemingly benevolent Oldest Brother-in-Law. Perhaps not even an admired English tutor or a much looked up to sixth brother or a blood-father.

And like them, you too had to create shades of yourself to survive.

You had witnessed a killing and you had taken a life. Whether you liked it or not, you had stained your hands. You had stepped off the sidelines and joined the war.
JOSEPHINE CHIA is an internationally published Peranakan author who has written fiction, non-fiction and even a cookbook. She has contributed to literary anthologies and has eight published books to date. Josephine has won awards such as the UK's prestigious Ian St. James awards for short fiction (1992). She is a sought-after speaker and has spoken at international writers' festivals and conferences.

Josephine lived in UK for 30 years before returning to Singapore. When she is not writing, she teaches yoga as a certified yoga instructor.

SYNOPSIS
Kampung Spirit, Gotong Royong, Life in Potong Pasir 1955 to 1965 is a heart-warming recollection of life in the little village of Potong Pasir in Singapore during the years 1955 to 1965.

In this book, Josephine takes us into the world of her childhood in a kampong. Though deprived of modern comforts like electricity or running water, her multi-racial neighbours lived harmoniously with each other in their attap homes, and had a wonderful zest for life and a strong sense of community. This vibrant kampong spirit or gotong royong, was a significant aspect of living in a kampong.

The period 1955 to 1965 was also a dramatic era for Singapore. As the country struggled towards nationhood, the social and political events of the time are seen through the eyes of the common folk.

This collection of delightful, real-life short stories will take you through Singapore’s history and heritage at a human level. For some, it will be a journey of discovery and for others it will be a time of reminiscing for those nostalgic years.

EXTRACT FROM KAMPUNG SPIRIT, GOTONG ROYONG, LIFE IN POTONG PASIR 1955 TO 1965

The day after the parties, lots of uneaten food was thrown out. Of course some food items were unsalvageable, but food like cakes could survive if left in tins or wrapped well in baking paper.

Fruits and vegetables like apples and carrots, luxury items for us, were also hardly enough to survive being chucked into bins. Hunger meant that you could not afford to be proud. The positive aspect about being deprived is that everything you get is a bonus. So getting even ordinary or small things can make you joyously happy.

“Be careful of the Alsatian!” Third Brother warned me.

Now that I was older, he was confident enough to let me go on my own. One of the English families kept an Alsatian dog, which guarded the premises vigilantly, and it nearly bit off my arm once when I tried to steal its lunch – a huge steak.

My friends and I came back from this particular round of scavenging with a whole packet of boiled sweets, fairy cakes still in their waxed-paper cups and a train set with some carriages broken. But my prize was an Enid Blyton book, Five Run Away Together from her Famous Five series, complete with illustrations. It was slightly the worse for wear, but I did not care. I enjoyed the stories in Enid Blyton’s books and dreamt about the kind of life she talked about and the privileges the children in her books had. It was my dream to go and live in England where I would always have food to eat. Now that I was in school, I could actually read the words in the books, whereas earlier I could only look at the pictures. I was overjoyed to be educated. It was the unexpected fulfillment of a dream.

“Will you read it to me?” Parvathi said, wistfully.

She was tall and beautiful, four years older than me. Despite her family’s poverty, her hair was silky and luxuriant, and her eyes, ringed with kohl, were large and black. Parvathi had never been to school. Since she started menstruating, her father, who was nearly always drunk, kept on threatening to marry her off to an older man. As she was the eldest child in the family, she had to go out to work so that she could help bring in money to buy food for the family and medicine for her younger brother, who suffered from fits. Many village children had to work to help their families. I sold the nonya Aueh and nasi lemak my mother made, to get money for me to go to school. Other children helped out at food-stalls, collecting bowls and plates after customers had finished with them; some washed other people’s clothes, worked in shops, sweeping floors, some at the rattan factory, weaving baskets or mats. Parvathi worked at the paper factory in the village, folding squares of paper into envelopes. The process had not been mechanised yet. The crisp new paper was so sharp that it often cut her hands in many places.

“I wish we could run away together,” she said when I read her the story. “Then we can have an adventure and I won’t be forced to marry.”

Many uneducated girls in the kampong were still subjected to arranged marriages. As soon as they became teenagers, their fates were sealed. That was why I was so grateful that my mother had fought for me to attend school. Otherwise my fate would have been like theirs – although my father still fought for me to marry off as soon as I was eligible. But like Parvathi, I had planned to run away if my father forced me to marry. Except that I did not want to hurt my precious mother.

“What are ham rolls?” Fatima asked when she heard that Julian, Dick and Anne, the English children in the story, ate ham rolls and drank ginger beer. She was a Muslim and proclaimed that she would never drink an alcoholic drink like ginger beer and weren’t Western children liberal to be drinking beer at their age? She, like Parvathi did not go to school. Of course I hadn’t a clue either but I did not want to look stupid.

“Some kind of meat,” I said. “Hmh, chicken is from hens, beef from cows, so ham must be from hamsters.”

“What is a hamster?” Fatima wanted to know.

“A kind of animal-lah!” I said exasperated, not wanting to show my lack of knowledge. “The kind of animal that lives in England, obviously! Don’t ask stupid questions-lah!”

This is a very well written book with vivid descriptions that are believable. It could be a useful reference book for students of the history of Singapore.” – Jennie Lisney, Vice President of UK’s Society of Woman Writers & Journalists.
The Aryavarta Chronicles: Kaurava

SYNOPSIS
Emperor Dharma Yudhishthir of the Kauravas and Empress Panchali rule over the unified realm of Aryavarta, an empire built for them by the cowherd-turned-prince, Govinda Shauri. An empire that is now in peril.

As the power of the firstborn—mighty scholar-princes who serve as the realm’s conscience-keepers—wanes, their forgotten enemies, the Firewrights, rise from the ashes of the past. Treacherous alliances emerge and Aryavarta transforms under the weight of its own flawed, corrupt system till Emperor Dharma gambles away his empire, the tormented empress is forced into exile, and the many nations of the realm bid to conquer each other.

His dreams of peace and prosperity shattered, Govinda is left a broken man. The only way he can protect Aryavarta, and the woman he had trusted to rule it, is by playing a dangerous political game that may destroy them all.

The Aryavarta Chronicles is a multi-part series that delves into the history behind the great Indro-Asian myth, the Mahabharata, to present a tale of political intrigue and social revolution that will appeal to audiences worldwide.

EXTRACT FROM THE ARYAVARTA CHRONICLES BOOK 2: KAURAVA

Dussasana’s touch seared, violated. Pandali felt anger prick the back of her neck and she pulled her shoulders back in instinctive defiance. The sensation lasted for just a moment and then fell heavily to the pit of her stomach, turning into a cold, clammy, desperate trepidation that became an incomprehensible sorrow. It did not occur to her to beg for mercy. She felt her rage to fight tamed into numbness by shock and fear. She willed her hands to move, her legs to kick and her voice to scream, but they did not. Words, voices, images—she was racing through them, in search of something. Some meaning, or an anchor. Lucidity came in tenuous bursts, and she realized that the screaming in her head was not against her aggressor but against her own sense of helplessness and despair, the petrified stillness that had taken over. Her being was hers, every pore of it, to always own and give as she wished. And that was precisely why Dussasana wanted it. His was not an act of lust. It was an act of dominance.

Pleasure was something any one of these men could easily have in greater measure and at a lesser cost. Dussasana hungered for power, for blood, for the silent thoughts and hidden emotions of the humans around them.

Her forthcoming collection, The Innocence of Envy, explores themes of gender, identity and violence. She is also working on a novel based on the mytho-history of Singapore’s founding by a Srivijayan prince. When she is not writing, Krishna works as a Lecturer at the Nanyang Business School, where she also obtained a PhD in Strategic Management.

“Some things are defined only by their property to destroy another. Every antidote is defined by its poison.”

Review/Awards
“Strikes an intriguing balance between novelty and existing ideas... Surprises with retellings that are startlingly different.” —DNA Daily

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NICHOLAS YONG is a freelance writer, journalist and blogger based in Singapore. From 2008-13, he covered the travel and entertainment beats at the Life! section of The Straits Times, Singapore’s largest newspaper.

He is co-founder of the popular culture website Geek Crusade, and the annual Singapore Zombie Walk. Someday, he hopes his parents will reveal that he was actually sent to Earth in a rocket as an infant. Land of the Meat Munchers is his first novel.

SYNOPSIS
In the wake of a zombie outbreak in Singapore, three young survivors must find their way from the heartlands of Ghim Moh to sanctuary in the hipster district they call Tiong Bahru. But five million very hungry meat munchers are standing in the way – and who knows if our dynamic trio will kill each other first.

EXTRACT FROM LAND OF THE MEAT MUNCHERS
The boy bearing the oversized backpack was pedaling furiously. His legs ached and his lungs were burning as he urged the bicycle forward, swerving past the rotting corpses and overturned buses that littered the road. The afternoon sun beat down on him and the handles of the bike were slick with sweat. Panting and grunting, the boy pushed on, further and further into the west, never daring to look back. Behind him, amidst a trail of severed limbs, abandoned briefcases, torn backpacks and cracked handphones, they were closing in. It was a Saturday.

As he tore down Commonwealth Ave West past the chain link fence that surrounded New Town Primary School on his right, he could see the train just ahead. It was dangling from the elevated tracks between Commonwealth and Buona Vista stations. Several carriages had come to rest on the road like a giant metallic and fibreglass snake, almost completely blocking off the three lanes. The rest of the carriages perched serenely on the tracks, the cracks on their windows forming spider webs that almost seemed to move as the boy got closer and closer.

On the opposite side of the road, rows and rows of abandoned cars, representing literally millions of dollars in COEs, were packed tightly together. They spilled onto the pavement as well as the road divider directly beneath the tracks, making the way almost impassable for the boy. But there was still a tiny gap between a carriage, lying at forty-five degrees to the road and the row of railings, just big enough for a man to fit through. Though he usually negotiated the little entrance carefully, the boy did not even pause this time as he veered to the right and pedaled through, ducking his head just in time.

Before he was even aware of it, he began tumbling to the ground. His speed and the sudden swerve had unbalanced the bike, bringing him crashing to earth moments after he had sped through the gap. The boy slid along the ground, tearing a hole in his cargo shorts and leaving long bloody marks on his left leg. His left arm, which he had instinctively thrown out to break his fall, felt the impact too. The boy got up at once, ignoring the pain of the abrasions. He had been tempted to wear sandals that morning, but he knew that sneakers were always the safer choice, in case he had to run or pedal quickly. Now, the choice had saved him from further cuts on his feet.

As he struggled to mount the bike, he stole a peek behind him. The first of them came through the gap, snarling and sniveling and limping at speed towards him like some badly controlled marionette. He had obviously been a professional of some sort – the remnants of his Armani shirt and tie, caked with mud and blood, clung to his torso. Anyone might have thought he had recently been in a car accident, or perhaps gotten into a fight. But his skin was a deathly grey pallor, and his eyes were bloodshot and lifeless. Not to mention the fact that his lower jaw was no longer where it should have been, and his once handsome features were hard and skeletal. As his bony arms stretched out towards the boy, he uttered a shrill, fractured sound like an animal in its death throes, making the boy shiver.

Preparing to pedal again, he heard a sudden creaky sound that made him stop. The stupid bastards were trying to get through the crevice between train and railing all at once, a frenzy of thrashing grey limbs and decomposing flesh. But they only succeeded in jamming up the way and as they struggled against the underside of the train, the remaining carriages that still clung to the tracks were starting to tremble. In an instant, they came down to earth with a deafening crash of metal and glass, landing directly on the maddened crowd. Some were flattened, making a sound that reminded him of the time he had dropped a watermelon on the kitchen floor. Others were literally cut in half with their upper bodies left slowly crawling in circles on the ground, their entrails leaving a bloody mess behind them.

The boy got ready to take off again, expecting to see the survivors climbing over the train carriages. But to his surprise, the few who had made it through – the ones who had not been severed in half – looked confused and disoriented. Even the once and former office employee was stumbling away from the wreckage of the MRT train in random circles, like some passenger who couldn’t understand why his train was taking so long. It was the first time he had seen them show fear or confusion, and all it needed was for an entire train to fall on them.
O Thiam Chin

**LOVE, OR SOMETHING LIKE LOVE**

**SYNOPSIS**

A woman reminded of her past through the acts of her grandson. A band of swordsmen on a failed mission. The forbidden love of Zheng He, the great Chinese Admiral. A young daughter forming a strange bond with her deceased father’s cat. Presenting ten stories in his fifth collection, O Thiam Chin plumbs the joy and despair, hopes and fears of men and women caught different in their lives. Some had children. Some of us courted their girlfriends, and later their wives. Some of us had children – one even had four (three girls, one boy), but he was already in his late fifties, and of course, no one mentioned any of this when we slept with her. Some of us really liked her, found her cute, sweet, warm; while others liked the way she looked with her long dark hair, full sensual lips and the firm grip of her slender hands when she held us. Yes, she was many things to all of us, and we wanted to believe we were special, and special to her, and that she really liked us back, too.

O Thiam Chin’s short stories have appeared in several literary anthologies as well as international literary journals and websites. His short stories have been translated into Swedish and German, and a mash-up of two of his short stories, “The Yellow Elephant and The Girl Who Swallowed The Sun” was adapted for the stage for Singapore Writers Festival 2012. He was an honorary fellow of the Iowa International Writing Program in 2010, and a recipient of the National Arts Council’s Young Artist Award in 2012. Thiam Chin is currently working on his first novel.

**EXTRACT FROM LOVE, OR SOMETHING LIKE LOVE**

Some of us wanted to sleep with her just for the sake of sleeping with someone. Some wanted to do it because they wanted something different in their lives. Some had been doing this for a long time, in their early teens, when they were in the army, when they were courting their girlfriends, and later their wives. Some of us had children – one even had four (three girls, one boy), but he was already in his late fifties, and of course, no one mentioned any of this when we slept with her. Some of us really liked her, found her cute, sweet, warm, while others liked the way she looked with her long dark hair, full sensual lips and the firm grip of her slender hands when she held us. Yes, she was many things to all of us, and we wanted to believe we were special, and special to her, and that she really liked us back, too.

Some of us found ourselves questioning whether it was the right thing to do, being first-timers, though it never stopped us from making our first booking with the agency, one we discovered online late at night when our wives and children were sleeping. Some of us did it with our eyes closed, having slept with a girl – or woman – just last week, a weekly affair. Some of us chose to meet her at cheap, nondescript hotels at Bencoolen Street or Balestier Road, while others preferred to splurge extravagantly, unheedingly, on six-star hotels and expensive suites. A few of us met the girl in our own homes in the suburbs – Ang Mo Kio, Tampines, Jurong – and did it on the beds where we slept with our wives every night of our lives after we were married, and one of us even went as far as to do it on his daughter’s bed surrounded by her Hello Kitty dolls.

Most of us were gentle with her, treating her with respect and politeness, while others went into it like a brute, an animal in heat, in hunger. Some of us held the girl like how we held our wives, adopting the same position and rhythm, making the same grunts and moans. Some wanted to try new things, with toys and restraints and punishments. A few of us wanted to be stopped on, spat at and insulted; one even wore the girl’s underwear (he gave a huge tip afterwards, he claimed). And always, the girl, already seasoned in her role, a professional, professed to feel so good (did we feel good too? she would ask us), yes, no one had ever made her feel so good, yes, so good. And all of us wanted to believe this was true, even for those who had barely started and were done in three or five strokes.

No one knew her real name, though it never bothered us, well, some of us. She could be anyone we wanted her to be, someone with a clean slate, no history, no complications, no burdens of responsibility or duty. She was Linda, Jessie, Yvonne, Madeline, Sarah, Jenny. She was a projection of our desires, a girl that stirred the thick blood in us, that made us breathless, even helpless, at the bare sight of her. All of us closed our eyes and went along with what we had decided to do, no point chickening out. She might look young, but her body was all ready, ripe for the reaping. When she sat on top of us, rocking back and forth, some of us tried to kill the images of our own daughters sitting astride our bodies, wanting to play aeroplane, or ride a horse, and almost instantly we got soft. Some of us, when holding her breasts (too big for a young girl, just nice for a woman, we felt), would think about our wives’, how different (or similar) they were, the weight, the softness, the shape, and secretly took comfort in the familiarity (or foreignness). To most of us, a woman’s body would always be a foreign country with its own laws, customs and secret passageways, and no matter how many of them we slept with, we would always be visitors, looking in, curious and fascinated, but always lacking local knowledge, left out.

Most of us didn’t want to think about the implications, or consequences. Fear was contagious, and we didn’t want any of it. We weren’t thinking with our head (or we were just thinking with the second head, one of us joked), and because we were careful (though some of us gave our real names and phone numbers, stupid bastards) and diligent in covering our tracks, we thought we could get away, like masked robbers after a heist, and get on with our jobs and families. And some of us did, already putting the girl behind us, moving on, while others chose to go back for seconds and thirds, raising the stakes. A few even wanted to keep her as a regular, a girlfriend of sorts, which sounded ridiculous to some of us.

Yes, it’s true, some of us did really love the girl, even after what happened later, when all of us were revealed for what we had done. We believed we finally had a chance at love, or something like love. We really did.

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Inside him. This collection of many stories long percolating putting into words some of the felt he could no longer ignore prose throughout his school traveling, reading and writing. Russ yearned for more time to senior corporate executive, he thrived and excelled as a early retirement. Although About a decade ago, Russ SYNOPSIS

Not The Same Family is a collection of 10 short stories that engage an array of families—both conventional and unconventional. Though the families depicted in each narrative are expectedly different in circumstance, it is often through the honest, genuine dialogue between characters that we find the almost-too-familiar sense of home. Settings spanning from as far as Boston, USA and Perth in Australia to the local neighbourhoods of Singapore, Not The Same Family brings difficult issues confronting the modern Singaporean family to the forefront—navigating many facets of this volatile landscape we call family while uncovering the individual so often buried under its weight. 

EXTRACT FROM NOT THE SAME FAMILY

“She said she wished she could call the whole thing off.”

“The wedding?” His voice was rising, but was contained within the library by the closed doors. “Isn’t it a bit late for that?”

“No, no, not that, my dear,” I know I shouldn’t, but I couldn’t help letting out a chuckle. Nudging him to sit down, I told him. “She means the dinner reception.”

“What about it?”

“You said you didn’t want her to wear the sari.” I said that slowly.

“No, I didn’t!” I felt him rising again, added slowly, “But she said there’s something about the gown…”

“Strings? What strings? I don’t know of any strings? Do you?”

“No.” I pulled him down into his seat again. Holding one of his arms by the closed doors. “Isn’t it a bit late for that?”

“Same thing. Anyway that’s how she sees it.”

“Oh, Zheng, you of all people!” He brushed my hand away, rose and went behind the armchair, both hands gripping the top of its back. “You know that’s absolutely not true! There never was any condition. You know that! The whole thing was planned and decided by her from the beginning. She chose the form, the date, the time, the place, and even the menu. We didn’t interfere ourselves until she called on us for logistical help. We didn’t even develop a guest list until she showed us hers, so that we can fit ours to hers. Every decision that needed to be made was made by her. “It’s her wedding. It’s her reception. She should have it the way she wants it.” Wasn’t that what I said to you? Isn’t this the position you and I adopted since the beginning? You know that! There had never been any string attached. So what in the world string is she referring to? Tell me!”

“The sari.”

“The sari? The sari. But that, as I’m seated. Go on, tell me. Please.”

“Our trap. The trap that we laid for her.”

“What?” he shot up again. “What in the world are you talking about? What trap did we lay for her?”

“Our offer to host the dinner reception.”

“Sorry, I’m lost.” He looked lost.

“She said she had accepted the offer for what she thought it was – a sincere generous gesture. She said she feels stupid now to have believed it. She said she didn’t know it came with strings attached.”

“She says she feels trapped.”

“I was telling Boon about the conversation I had with our daughter in the car the night before, on the way home from running some errands.

“What?” she sat up from his armchair, “What do you mean ‘trapped’?”

“That’s the word she used.”

“But what did she mean by that?”

He had stood up now, “How’s she trapped? Who trapped her? Didn’t she want to marry him?”

“She said she’s so angry with herself for falling into the trap.”

“In a sense you did. You asked me to tell her that you would be disappointed if she wore a sari for the occasion.”

“But that’s not a condition. I was merely stating a preference.”

“No.” I pulled him down into his seat again. Holding one of his arms used strong language like this.

“She said she had accepted the offer for logistical help. We didn’t even interject ourselves until she called on us for logistical help. We didn’t even develop a guest list until she showed us hers, so that we can fit ours to hers. Every decision that needed to be made was made by her. “It’s her wedding. It’s her reception. She should have it the way she wants it.” Wasn’t that what I said to you? Isn’t this the position you and I adopted since the beginning? You know that! There had never been any string attached. So what in the world string is she referring to? Tell me!”

“The sari.”

“The sari? The sari. But that, as I’ve said is only a statement of preference, not a condition.”

“She sees it as one.”

“Damn! After all the care we took not to interfere or impose. And all the money we are going to spend. And it’s come to this. I am really pissed!” I knew he was. He seldom used strong language like this.
SYNOPSIS
Ping, the daughter of Chinatown's Pipa (a Chinese string instrument) Queen, falls in love with Weng, the voice of the people. Family circumstances drive them apart, and Ping is forced to leave suddenly for the USA, while Weng is sent to prison for his part in local protests.

Years later, Ping returns to a country transformed by prosperity. Gone are the boatmen and hawkers who once lived along the river. In their place, rise luminous glass and steel towers proclaiming the power of the city state. Can Ping face her former lover and reveal the secret that has separated them for over 30 years?

A beautifully written exploration of identity, love and loss, set against the social upheaval created by the rise of Singapore.

EXTRACT FROM THE RIVER’S SONG

My memories are stirring up a storm. The girl is slipping in and out of my head as I pack the old pipa into its worn leather case, its faded red string still tied to the handle. I had never thought of cutting it off.

I see my six-year-old self holding Ah-ku’s pipa. Sunlight was streaming down from the skylight in the roof. It lit up the pipa in my arms. My fingers stroked the glowing beauty, its body curved like a golden brown pear. I touched its four strings gently, and plucked one of them. A soft ‘ping!’ uttered my name scattering silvery dust across that room above Old Kim’s coffee shop. I plucked it again. An arrow hissed down from the skylight in the roof. It lit up the pipa in my arms. My memories are stirring up a storm. The girl is slipping in and out of my head as I pack the old pipa into its worn leather case, its faded red string still tied to the handle. I had never thought of cutting it off.

The Emperor on a golden platter at the Forbidden City. Once, an imperial maid playing the four-string lute caught the Emperor’s eye. In a fit of violent jealousy, the Empress ordered her maid’s hands chopped off and her eyes gouged out and served to the Emperor on a golden platter at the imperial banquet.

Do you know of any scholar who’d kept count of the number of women killed, abused or sold into slavery in the history of the pipa? Find out and tell me after the summer break. It’s the signature assignment for my course on Asian music each year.

Sometimes, I play a song that Ah-ku used to sing:

‘O, we scale the stars, and climb the moonshine, Fight with dragons fierce and wild. We ride the ocean’s waves, We, the pipa girls, the weavers of a hero’s dreams.’

When Ah-ku was living in the big house in Juniper Garden, she was full of songs and stories of these pipa girls, stories that she trotted out whenever the tai-tai, the wives of the rich and famous, visited her. They used to sit by the swimming pool, sipping their iced jasmine tea, and feasting on the piping hot dim sum that Kan zieh, her amah, had made.

Pipa girls used to sing in the teahouses and music halls along the Singapore River and in Chinatown. Thousands would come each night to gawk at these girls. They floated like butterflies in their silk qipao, gliding up the stairs. Just to see and listen to these girls sing was heaven to me when I was a child. Such sweet joy and sorrow in their songs I tell you! She embroidered and gushed as if she had never been one of these gilded butterflies. A load of rubbish, of course. My research as a musicologist has shown that pipa songstresses were nothing like what she described. Those pubescent girls were often locked up in pleasure houses and forced to learn the pipa and the art of pleasuring men from a very young age. Nothing as romantic as Ah-ku likes to paint, now that she’s a respectable matron.

– Did I send you to school to play this damn thing? Ah-ku’s cane flamed my arm; her knuckles almost cracked my skull.

Shocked, I blink away my sudden tears. Half a century has passed, yet the memory still hurts. There’s something cruel, violent and lyrical in the music of the pipa, I often tell my freshmen class in UC Berkeley. Originally designed for strumming on horseback, the pipa sings of war and heartbreak. Plucking its strings, Chinese military musicians had led thousands to their death in the snowy plains of the Yellow River. Like flies they fell building the Great Wall in the bitter snow, while the Son of Heaven and his concubines played their pipas to serenade a lonely moon in the Forbidden City. Once, an imperial maid playing the four-string lute caught the Emperor’s eye. In a fit of violent jealousy, the Empress ordered the maid’s hands chopped off and her eyes gouged out and served to the Emperor on a golden platter at the imperial banquet.

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SYNOPSIS
The British have been comprehensively beaten and Singapore is now a Japanese colony. Dennis Chiang finds himself torn between his anglophile Baba identity and his new loyalty to the conquerors. He is taken under the tutelage of a Japanese aristocrat who is determined to make him a proper Nippon-jin, a loyal subject of the Showa Emperor. Meanwhile, his old employer d’Almeida has gone underground as a British agent and calls on Dennis to help him find a job with the Japanese. Complicating matters, an old flame re-appears – Siew Chin, the Communist agitator – bringing with her Comrade Number 1, the head of the Malayan Communist Party, seeking sanctuary from the Kempeitai. Dennis finds himself walking on the edge of a samurai sword between the devil and the deep blue sea. Things come to a head when the Japanese suddenly surrender and the Communists take over before the British can re-occupy Singapore.

This is the fourth book in Walter Woon’s Baba quartet, and sits third chronologically in the series.

EXTRACT FROM
THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

The thing that struck me was the sound of nightjars. The firing had stopped for the moment. My ears were still ringing. At first I thought that the metallic toc-toc cries of the nightjars were just part of the general buzzing in my head. It took me a couple of minutes to realize that it came from the birds. There were crickets too. The peaceful sounds strangely out of place after the carnage. Someone plucked at my sleeve. “Chiang-san, it is time to go. We fall back.”

I nodded and followed like an automaton. We left the corpses where they lay. My head felt as if it was stuffed with kapok. I couldn’t think. Hojo led the way. With his eye-patch and face blackened with smoke he looked even more piratical than usual. I didn’t know where we were going and didn’t much care. We pulled back to the dubious shelter of the machine-gun emplacement. The remnants of Hojo’s platoon were already there. The faces of the survivors were impassive. Did they fear death, like the rest of us? I couldn’t tell. They were completely inscrutable. I knew that they would remain at their posts whatever the odds. Japanese warriors didn’t surrender. If relief didn’t come before we ran out of ammunition, Hojo would give the order for one final banzai charge. No one would hold back.

I wasn’t sure when the moment came that I would be able to join that last suicidal wave with them. But the alternative of capture didn’t hold any attraction. The Chinese Communist resistance fighters of the Malayan Peoples’ Anti-Japanese Army had a certain way of dealing with collaborators. Their war with Japan was fought with the ferocity and barbarity of a medieval crusade. They hated the Japanese – any Japanese, all Japanese. Any Chinese on the wrong side deserved a death of the most dreadful sort. I pushed the thought away.

The night was dark. There was no moon but Orison was up, his belt shining clear against the black sky. I gazed upwards. It was comforting. Betelgeuse, Belatrix, Rigel, Saiph; familiar guides reminding me of charcoal-black nights catching fireflies among the mangroves around the kampong in a different lifetime. Alnitak, Alnilam, Mintaka. Memories of that lost age washed over me: lying on the beach with the full lullaby of the waves in my ears, watching the stars slowly wheel overhead. Something stirred in the black void ahead. The present intruded. Around us the trees pressed in closely. I peeled intently, trying to separate shadow from shade. There was nothing to be seen. It seemed that the Communists were leaving us alone. Perhaps they had gone away, to hunt some other quarry. I put down my rifle and rested my head on my arms for a moment. It was a long time since I had slept. I just needed to shut my eyes for a minute, only a minute...
Ai Yu

The Soul of the Sea

SYNOPSIS

The Soul of the Sea is a collection of eight award-winning short stories, such as "Snake Girl", "The Soul of the Sea", "September Sky", "Out of Fate", "Red Lotus", "Tu Long Niao", "Trapped" and "Knots in Life". Set in the 1940s to current times, each unique story reflects the hardworking and resilient spirit of the underclass in Singapore. The stories seek to evoke emotion and empathy in readers, through tales of hardship and universal struggles.

EXTRACT FROM THE SOUL OF THE SEA

Translated by Jeremy Tiang

The year she turned seven, Mummy and Daddy decided to bring the family to Nanyang.

Where was 'Nanyang'? She had no idea. All she knew was that Daddy said they couldn't survive in the village, and their only escape route was travelling to 'Nanyang'.

"Nanyang" was a good place?

"Was 'Nanyang' really such a good place?"

"Maybe she couldn't bear to leave the other people in the roundhouse!"

Everyone came to say goodbye, bearing gifts of preserved vegetables and salted eggs, to sustain the family in Nanyang.

It was a long walk to the harbour, where a small boat waited for them. Hearing that this would only take a short while before they had to change to a bigger boat, Xiuying was quite happy, having been on so many boats before.

She took a seat by the table didn't seem to be there. But the boat was no longer there!

She looked all over for it, then finally the table didn't seem to be there. "Where is the table?"

"Is it so important?"

"Very important!" Mummy stretched out the word 'very'.

"Wait for me!" Xiuying called out trustingly, before turning around.

"We'll wait for you – promise!"

Daddy's voice was choked with tears. She didn't notice at the time, and it was only later that she realised this had all been planned beforehand.

Running as fast as she could, she made the difficult journey home, where it would remain lit forever.
Yeng Pway Ngon

THE NON-EXISTENT LOVER

SYNOPSIS
A man who falls in love with a character he creates; another who goes to great lengths in an attempt to get to USA but ends up in the mental hospital, and yet another unemployed man who becomes close friends with a white bird. A character who worries he might turn into a flower; a parrot which has been sued for libel; an ant who falls in love with himself.

Penned by Yeng Pway Ngon between the 1960s to 2000, the stories capture absurd situations in life through its black humour and surrealism.

EXTRACT FROM
A MAN WHO FALLS IN LOVE
Translated by Jeremy Tiang

‘I admit, my wife’s always complaining that I’m not realistic,’ I conceded sadly. ‘But, even if I were to leave her, how would she explain this to other people? She could hardly tell them her husband’s run off with a character he created himself.’

‘Listen – it’s not your wife’s problem, it’s yours. She’s right, you are unrealistic. Not only that, but you’ve actually been avoiding reality. You’re unwilling to get real. Mark my words, you’re just like me, we don’t exist in this realm, therefore we can’t stay here for long. We need to find somewhere suitable for us, where we can exist, where we can make a life for ourselves.’

‘I can’t stand the thought of losing everything I have here.’

‘Everything? That’s just your delusion. What you can’t bear to face is sorrow. What does that mean, “everything”? You have nothing. I’ve already decided to go, whether you come or not. You’ve seen how I’m getting weaker and weaker. If I remain here, I’ll soon vanish altogether.

Come, come away with me. We’ll find somewhere we can live.’

I stared blankly at her.

After this, Peipei came two or three more times, her body and voice visibly losing strength which each visit, colour draining from her face, so pale it broke my heart. But my mind was in disarray, by heart full of scattered feelings, and I simply couldn’t make the decision to abandon my wife and kids, to leave everything before me and go off with her.

‘I knew you wouldn’t come,’ she said sadly, her voice light as gossamer, her whole self practically withered away. ‘I can’t wait any longer, I’m going.’ Her eyes were shining with tears, her unhappy gaze directed at me.

I lowered my head with guilt, avoiding her fearful stare. She turned around and firmly pulled open my office door.

I roused myself instantly from my stupor, colour draining from her face, visibly losing strength which each time, complaints that I’m not realistic, my bookcase, the books on it, my fragile face (I knew it would, like a stone or dead tree branch in mid-air, on air, as if I were plummeting into the abyss might, in his confusion, grab onto a stone or dead tree branch in mid-air. In the glass, I saw a pesty, fragile face, and felt momentarily flustered, uncertain what to do next.

My bookcase, the books on it, my typewriter, the words contained in it, my fragile face (I knew it would, like Peipei’s, grow paler and paler each day, more delicate, even withered, before vanishing altogether). My tiny office, my whole life, all of this actually did seem to grow unreal, as if it were a work of fiction.

If I hadn’t felt a pang of hunger just then, reminding me it was lunchtime, I might really have believed that I and my surroundings were completely fictional, non-existent. But my stomach rumbled, adding to my confusion and sadness.

I was a fictional character who could experience hunger.

Yeng Pway Ngon

Yeng Pway Ngon is a poet, novelist, playwright and critic who has published 25 books: five novels, two collections of short stories, three volumes of poetry, two collections of stage plays, 11 volumes of essays and a collection each of social critiques and literary critiques.

His novels, A Man Like Me (一個像我這樣的男人, 1987) and Tumult (一個像我這樣的男人, 2002), won the National Book Development Council of Singapore’s Book Award in 1988, and the Singapore Literature Prize in 2008 and was also named one of the Ten Best Chinese Novels of 2006 by Asia Weekly (亞洲周刊).

His works have been translated into English, Malay, Dutch and Italian.
不存在的情人

“但是，我的妻儿呢？我可舍不得离开他们啊！我怎么向我太太解释？我对她的背叛行为姑且不谈了，告诉她，因为我爱上了一个自己虚构的人物，所以放她这个现实的人物又？”

“你的思想和性格完全不适合这儿，所以，你在这儿是不存在的。在这儿，你是可现实的人。换句话说，你也是个虚构的人物。你的太太是个现实的人，你想，一个现实的人会长久爱上一个虚构的人物吗？”

“我承认，我太太常埋怨我不现实。”我颓丧地说：“但是，即使我离开她，但她怎么向其他的人解释？说她丈夫和他创作的人物一起逃走了？”

“你应该离开这儿，这儿是不现实的地方。换句话说，你也是个虚构的人物。”

“我舍不得我这儿的一切。”

“一切？这只不过是你的幻觉，是你不敢面对的悲哀。什么一切？你一切都没有。不管你走不走，我是决定走了。你也看到，我越来越衰弱，如果我在这儿待下去，我很快就会消亡。走吧，跟我走吧，到一个适合我们活下去的地方。”

“我舍不得我这儿的一切。”

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我木然地望着她。

过后，培培再来了两三次，身体和声音更加衰弱，脸色也更加苍白；衰弱苍白得令人心碎。但我总是千头万绪，心乱如麻，一直决定不下来，抛开妻儿，抛开目前的一切，随她离去。

“我知道你是不会跟我走的。”她哀伤地说，声音细得像游丝一样，整个人简直完全枯萎了。"我不再等下去了，我走了。”她的眼眶闪着泪光，凄然地凝望着我。

我愧疚地低下头，避开她可怕的目光。她转身，毅然地打开我办公室的门。

我立刻从愧疚惊醒，紧追出门。

办公室外的走廊空荡荡的，她完全消失在我的视野内。我知道，从此，她是不会再在我的生活里出现了。

像梦游般地，我恍惚地回到办公室内。我的办公室变得出奇的寂寥，灰暗。我怅然地望着书架上书，寂寞的打字机，打字机上未完成的书籍，迷茫地触摸着我的书架，架上的每一本书，整个人就像空空落了似的，不断地往下堕。我挣扎着，猛然抓起架子上的一面小镜子，犹如一个在夜空中的陨落的人，在慌乱中抓住半空中的一块石头，枯木一样。在镜中，我看到一张苍白憔悴的脸。我顿时仓皇失措起来。

我的书架，我的书，我的打字机，打字机上的文字，我憔悴的脸（我知道，它将会像培培的脸一样，一天比一天苍白，憔悴，甚至枯槁，然后完全消失）我这个小小的工作室，我整个生活。这一切，仿佛真的都不是现实的，而是一部虚构的小说。

如果不是因为肚子饿，提醒我吃午餐的时间到了，我真的会相信：我，包括我这小小的空间，的确是完全虚构与不存在的。但是，因为肚子饿，使我更加的惶惑悲凉。

我是个会肚子饿的，虚构的人物。
SYNOPSIS

“Rawa is the name of the island and its waters. Rawa is the wind. It is also the name he has lived with for seventy years. He is Rawa, in name and essence. He's now returning to the land, to the waters. He is coming back to the winds after more than thirty years.”

Spanning three generations from 1950s to 1980s, Rawa is a stunning portrayal of how the Orang Seletar, the boat-living aboriginals of Singapore, became refugees from their own land during an era of modernisation and socio-political flux in sixty-Singapore through the quiet observations of the titular character.

Part of a trilogy of novels published by Silverfish Books, Rawa provides a powerful discourse on the relationship between culture, nature and modernity.

EXTRACT FROM RAWA

Rendered in English from original Malay by R Krishnan

When they got to the Pulai River in the afternoon, Rawa looked for a suitable mangrove where the current was not too strong to secure this boat. Mother and daughter awoke with a start when he shook them and looked around at the beautiful serene quietness of the Pulai estuary. Temah smiled blissfully while Kuntum started to babble excitedly.

They looked at Merambong Island far in the distance, opposite the river mouth, and the large bed of seaweed between it and the estuary, rich in dugongs, seahorses, turtles and all sorts of fish amongst the corals.

Much to Temah's surprise, Rawa dived into the chest-high water right away and began swimming. Mother and daughter laughed as he swam and dived, and swam again. He approached his boat and asked Temah to hand Kuntum over to him, which she only did after a little persuasion. He lowered Kuntum into the sea with care. The child shivered a little in the cool waters, but soon got accustomed to it and grinned excitedly with joy. She babbled as she swam with her father and, it was at times like this that Rawa realised how close he felt to his child and how much he loved her.

If you enjoyed this extract, you can purchase the novel, Rawa on Amazon or at bookstores worldwide.
BERHENTI MERONTA-RONTA. SENYUMAN KUNTUM MENGGISIK SEJENAK KERANA DIRENDAMI AIR SUNGAI. TUBUH MEMBIARKAN TUBUH ANAKNYA DENGAN PERLAHAN-LAHAN RAWA KEPAIDAH SUAMINYA.

RAWA BERKELAP-KELAP KERANA KETAKUTAN. TEMBAKUL BERENANG JAUH DARI TEMPAT RAWA. BEBERAPA EKOR IKAN GEMBIRA MELIHAT RAWA MENYELAM DAN SEGAR DAN NYAMAN. KEDUA-DUA BERENANG-RENANG SEJENAK. TERASA TANPA JANGKAAN TEMAH, RAWA TERUMBU KARANG YANG TERDAPAT DI SITUS.

TANPA JANGKAAN TEMAH, RAWA KEMUDIAN TERJUN KE DALAM AIR YANG SEDALAM PARAS DADANYA DAN MULA BERENANG-RENANG SEJENAK. TERAH SEGERA DAN NYAMAN. KEDUA-DUA TEREKAYA DAN DIKUNINGKAN. KUNING KUNINGAN KEREN DENGAN SUKUH SOK_SL. RAWA MELEPASKAN KUNTUM AGAR DIA BERENANG DAN MENANGGUNG DIRI. RAWA TIDAK SEMPAT TINGGELAM DALAM AIR. BEGITULAH BAPA DAN ANAK BERGERUWA SENDBA DISAMIL ISUAN YANG KINI ASIK TELATI KELAKI TEMUA DENGAN KELAYAKAN MEREKA.

TIBA-TIBA JIWA RAWA DISINGGALI DIRASA SAMA. SEJURUS DINASA, RAWA MELEPAKAN KUNTUM DAN BERENANG DENGAN WAKI. KUNING KUNINGAN DENGAN SUKUH SOK_SL. RAWA TIDAK SEMPAT TINGGELAM DALAM AIR. BEGITULAH BAPA DAN ANAK BERGERUWA SENDBA DISAMIL ISUAN YANG KINI ASIK TELATI KELAKI TEMUA DENGAN KELAYAKAN MEREKA.

KUNING KUNINGAN DENGAN SUKUH SOK_SL. RAWA TIDAK SEMPAT TINGGELAM DALAM AIR. BEGITULAH BAPA DAN ANAK BERGERUWA SENDBA DISAMIL ISUAN YANG KINI ASIK TELATI KELAKI TEMUA DENGAN KELAYAKAN MEREKA.

BARULAH TANGISNYA REDA SEKEDAT SETELAH TUBUHNYA BERTEMU KEPADA SANGAT NYAMAN. TEMAH MEMANGGUL TANGAN RAWA.

TIGA BERANAK TADI BEREHAT DALAM PAU KAJANG DAN SAMA-SAMA MENERANGKAN DBAN. MENGGEREMBERANGAN BERSAMANYA MEREKA. RAWA TERLEHARI DAN MEMBACA BUKU. RAWA MEMANGGUL TANGAN RAWA DAN MEMBACA BUKU. RAWA TERLEHARI DAN MEMBACA BUKU.
Mohamed Latiff Mohamed

**CONFRONTATION**

**SYNOPSIS**

Adi loves his life in the kampong: climbing the ancient banyan tree, watching ten-cent movies with his friends, fetching worms for the village bomoh. The residents of Kampung Pak Buyung may not have many material goods, but their simple lives are happy. However, looming on the horizon are political upheaval, race riots, gang wars and the Konfrontasi with Indonesia.

Mohamed Latiff Mohamed, three-time winner of the Singapore Literature Prize, brilliantly dramatises the period of uncertainty and change in the years leading up to Singapore’s merger with Malaya. Seen through the unique perspective of the young Malay boy Adi, this fundamental period in Singaporean history is brought to life with masterful empathy. In the tradition of Ben Okri’s The Famished Road and Anita Desai’s The Village By the Sea, Confrontation is an incredible evocation of village life and of the consequences that come from political alignment and realignment.

**EXTRACT FROM CONFRONTATION**

Translated by Shaffiq Selamat

When Adi and his friend Dolah Supik arrived at the Chinese school the following week, they found many students preparing to walk out in a procession. Each student had a placard, inscribed with Chinese characters, in their hands. It had been several days since the students had begun to boycott their classes. They had gathered in the school compound and remained there; their parents brought them their meals, and showed anxiety and fear on their faces when they left in a procession. Outside the school, posted all around the school compound, police officers kept a watchful eye. Adi noticed that the policemen were no ordinary cops; they had helmets and carried shield and truncheons. Many students of the Chinese High School had gathered and formed a line. Their leader, a student with curly hair was giving instructions. They seemed to be ready to storm out. Adi had heard from Abang Dolah’s reports. He imagined that bus drivers and workers too had held demonstrations. The situation had worsened. A policeman had been killed, burnt alive by the protesters. Many buses had also been overturned and set alight. It was very chaotic. Secret societies took advantage of the situation to rob and kill. The police seemed unable to control the situation. Many Gurkha policemen were brought in to keep the peace. Adi listened attentively to Abang Dolah’s reports.

According to Abang Dolah, a reporter from America had also been killed. Students of the Chinese school had destroyed dozens of lorries near City Hall. They had covered their faces with handkerchiefs and gone on a rampage.

“The Communists influenced these immature youngsters!” said Abang Dolah. Adi did not quite understand the word ‘Communist’. He imagined them to be evil and fierce. Abang Dolah had said the Communists did not believe in Allah. Adi was afraid when he heard this.


Kamaladevi Aravindhan

A DARK STREET

SYNOPSIS

A DARK STREET is a collection of critically acclaimed and award-winning short stories that explore love, revenge, justice, retribution, and redemption. From the victims of sex trafficking to the consequences of escaping Singapore’s compulsory military service, Kamaladevi uses her pen to tear into society stereotypes and give a very human face to the fringes of society.

“How could we even think about living luxuriously in Singapore, with our son back there?”

Things were going well till Ramanathan signed as a guarantor for a huge loan that Seenithandu Sithappa took out. Ill fortune came upon them just three months later when Seenithandu died of a heart attack. It turned out that Seenithandu Sithappa was up to his neck in debt. He had even mortgaged his house just to feed his family.

It was Ramanathan who paid the price. The creditor didn’t let Ramanathan off the hook even after he sold most of his land to pay the debt, only keeping a small piece of land for his family's sustenance. The creditor had been all smiles when Ramanathan had signed on as a guarantor, but turned nasty when demanding repayment. Ramanathan was shattered. He had never faced such humiliation. Could he get such a huge sum of money? He had to wipe out the life savings he had put aside for his son’s future.

It was then that Shenbagam’s mind became disturbed. She would neither talk nor eat for days on end, staring into space. She refused to sleep even for a while. She often stayed up the whole night, not sleeping a wink. It was painful to even look at Shenbagam, as she sat unmoving, unable to bear the emptiness and ennui of the days that passed. Ramanathan wouldn’t sleep either, staying up to watch over Shenbagam. However, he fell asleep one night, tired.

When the next day dawned, Shenbagam’s corpse was floating in the village well.
Macchan – a kinship term used to address a male cousin or brother-in-law. It is also commonly used to address a contemporary.

Maappillai – a kinship term used to address a son-in-law, brother-in-law or nephew. It is also commonly used to address a younger male friend.

Akka – a kinship term used to address an older sister. It is also commonly used to address an older female out of respect.

Thambi – a kinship term to address a younger brother. It is also commonly used to address a younger male.

Athai – a kinship term used to address a paternal aunt or mother-in-law. It can also be used to address an older female out of respect.

Maamaa – a kinship term used to address a maternal uncle. It can also be used to address an older male out of respect.

Sithappa – a kinship term used to address a paternal uncle. It can also be used to address an older male out of respect.

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we knew if he thought we were awake, he would fill us up with his belt. Mother would continue to fry chicken, quietly weeping. I think Mother's feelings slowly died over time. Perhaps she rationalised that it was natural for an animal to act according to its nature.

Sometimes, we wondered if beating Mother was Father's hobby. There were occasions when our neighbours lost their patience with Father's behaviour and called the police. Father would immediately be on best behaviour when the police arrived. The police knew that Father hit Mother and that he flogged us. But they couldn't do anything because Mother always refused to lodge a complaint. "My husband is tipsy. I will talk to him once he is sober," she would say, and send the police away, like a modern day Kannagi.

Once the door slammed shut, he would shout at my mother. "Did you tell the man next door to call the police? How long have the two of you been invaded? Is that why he feels so much for you? Do you think you can send me to jail and fool around with him? If that's what you want, then take your curses and go to hell!"

After all this, he would order her to fry chicken. The chicken was always kept in the freezer, specially marinated for him. We weren't allowed to even touch it. We could only watch enviously as Father loudly relished the chicken. As Mother prepared the chicken, he would berate her with obscenities, usually about her "infidelity." We would pretend to be fast asleep, because knowing how much of our lives have ever seen them? Father didn't have ten heads, sharp fangs, huge threatening eyes and he didn't have a hudking build. Still, to us, our father was a monster and demon put together.

FATHER DIDN'T HAVE TEN HEADS, SHARP FANGS, HUGE THREATENING EYES AND HE DIDN'T HAVE A HULKING BUILD. STILL, TO US, OUR FATHER WAS A MONSTER AND DEMON PUT TOGETHER.

The garbage from the older housing flats went straight to the bigger rubbish chutes located on the ground floor. Mother and the rest of us went down and rummaged among the decaying rubbish for the packet of rice. Mother had brought along some water to wash the packet clean. When we returned, Father was sleeping, snoring loudly. After this incident, Mother started working a part-time job. Father didn't stop her. It suited him, gave him an excuse to get a respite from Father's beatings. Second Brother must have seen something; Father headed to the restaurant. The delicious aroma of biryani he had bought from a popular restaurant. The delicious aroma of biryani wafted through the entire flat.

Mother had gone out to buy something; Father headed to the toilet. Second Brother, then twelve, quickly ripped open the packet and started frenetically gobbling up the biryani. Eldest Brother warned that Father would beat him with the belt, but Second Brother's hunger prevailed. I don't know what insanity had gotten into his head. Father emerged to behold Second Brother shovelling rice into his mouth. In his rage, he gave Second Brother an almighty kick- Second Brother flew across the room, hit the wall and wet his pants in fear. I quickly hid behind the sofa. Eldest Brother ran forward to help Second Brother and got flogged by Father for that.

When Mother returned, Father railed at her about the way she had brought us up. Second Brother must have been another man's son and that was why he had behaved in that manner! Mother covered, humiliated, unable to do anything but hug Second Brother and cry.

Mother and the lot of us would only get a respite from Father's beatings on the day of Deepavali. That was because Father and his drunkard friends needed someone to cook chicken, mutton, crab and prawn while they drank from dawn to dusk. When we asked Mother to come and light fire sparklers with us, she would say, "It will only be Deepavali for me when this Narasakuran dies." We didn't understand then how deep rooted her hatred for Father was.

SYNOPSIS
Naan, translated as "I", is a collection of 15 short stories that explore what it means to be human through a combination of real and imagined incidents. From a model housewife who grapples with an increasingly abusive husband to a jail drug dealer who has barely avoided Singapore's death penalty- "I" can be anyone's story- yours, an acquaintance, a stranger, a loved one. Traversing everyday characters in the midst of life's challenges, Rethnna's "I" can be anyone's story- yours, an acquaintance, a stranger, a loved one.

Extract from "An Old Rubbish Bin"

"FATHER DIDN'T HAVE TEN HEADS, SHARP FANGS, HUGE THREATENING EYES AND HE DIDN'T HAVE A HULKING BUILD. STILL, TO US, OUR FATHER WAS A MONSTER AND DEMON PUT TOGETHER."
Rakshashas are generally considered to be demons in Hindu mythology. Asuras are sometimes called demigods or demons in Hindu mythology, constantly battling the Devas. Puranas are ancient Hindu texts, containing myths, legends and divine stories. Kannagi is the central character of the Tamil epic Silappathikaram. She is generally held up as the embodiment of chastity. The term ‘Uncle’ is commonly used in Singapore to address someone older, as mark of respect. The person need not be a relative. Goddess Mariamman is a Hindu deity, commonly worshipped by Tamils. According to Hindu mythology, Nalayini was the chaste and devout wife of an ancient sage. Curses or words uttered by such virtuous women were believed to come true.

Deepavali or Diwali is the Hindu festival of lights. Narakasuran was a tyrannical demon king in Hindu mythology. His slaying, and the resulting freedom of his oppressed kingdom is commemorated on Deepavali.