

Obsession With Green

- Yee Nay Sun -

Translated by Lyn S. Aye



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Translator's Note

This story tells the tale of the last human child born in a post-apocalyptic society, who yearns to see the lost beauty of nature, and for this reason is seen as having lost his sanity. Since it was published during the military era and now there is also a brutal military junta in Myanmar, it is also evocative of the desperation and plight of the country's youth.

Obsession With Green

A short story by Yee Nay Sun

Translated by Lyn S. Aye

A young man strode along the quiet, still avenue. His face prideful and unyielding, seemingly prepared to take on the world, he glared to his left, then to his right. He wore an insignia of rank so exalted that it guaranteed that he need give way to no one, an insignia that everyone would recognize and bow down before. In the reflection from the metal road filtered by the innocuous rays of the sun, his undeniably youthful looks were startlingly apparent. He grabbed everyone he met, loudly demanding, "So the hills are **Green**, are they?"

A ragtag group of violinists stood by the roadside, visibly shaken by his rage.

“Patience, lad! Excuse us. We are old and ignorant,” said an old violinist as he bowed to the youth. Beneath his long white locks, the musician’s eyes were kind as his warm gaze washed over the youth.

“Are the hills really **green?**” The youth asked brusquely. The musicians exchanged nonplussed looks.

“Well, yes. There are a few references to **green** hills in some songs of yore.”

“Play me that ‘**green**’ song.”

Some of the vagrants lolling about looked up, stirred by the forcefulness in the youth’s command. The roadside violinists played a meandering, dusty tune filling the world with the sound of their strings. “Teenagers are the embryos of the Earth... when the clouds dissolve and the skies end... the children are the spirits that will repopulate the land... when the **green** hills vanish... storms will scour the Earth...”

“Stop! Stop that horrible mewling! Idiots!”

The youth’s face became apoplectic with anger. The music tailed off in a discordant wail. The violinists stood in a line, heads bowed like penitents. One of the vagrants tried to engage the youth in conversation.

“If you want to know if there are green hills, you should go to the painters. Someone like you who is destined to be a world leader should know how to get what you want. You should be on your way to the artists.”

“Don’t tell me what to do!”

Passers-by gazed in wonder at the angry youth, and

called out greetings. They seemed to be eager to express their affection for him. "Worthy fellow! He'll lead us right!"

Everyone seemed to be of one mind. In this aging world stripped of natural products, patched up solely with artificial, man-made stuff, this adolescent was the sole remaining hope.

In reality, Earth had been a derelict, diseased world for eons. Everything was fashioned of the same material, a new compound which helped to keep temperatures constant. The atmosphere itself was composed of only gasses compatible with human existence. An artificial Earth, swaddled with an artificial atmosphere, bandaged with an artificial sky... True, human life spans had been extended, but the quality of living itself had shrunk. With most physical frailties eliminated by medical advances, the world (with the exception of those who, tired of existence, applied for termination) was full of those who clung on desperately to sterile existences. But they were, in truth, not in love with the loss of their youth. They yearned for new, youthful ideas, new lives as they trudged through their old worn out days. Even God had forsaken this bedraggled, derelict planet.

"Fine! But if you keep playing sappy love songs, believe me, I will personally cut off your effing violin playing hands!"

The artists, meanwhile, were running around, trying to fashion new tints and colors. They knew from watching their screens that the youth would soon descend upon them.

"**Green**, the color **green**... what are you? Where can you be?"

Across many generations, they had fashioned so many new and vibrant colors, that they had never returned to primary colors.

One of them, bent-backed, white haired, crouching over his palette in his studio uttered a sigh, a sob. Damning these days of super rapid transportation, he could already feel the cold gaze of the youth stabbing into his back. He could hear the heavy breathing of the young man.

“Excuse me! Can you show me **green** hills?”

The youth seemed to be settling down. But just because the sea is still, can one guarantee that waves still won't come crashing in?

“Hills that are **green**? You mean the color **green**?”

The old artist sat down opposite the young man. He could see rage convulse the youthful features.

“Are you pretending to be a lunatic? I really want to see what **green** hills look like. I was told you could show them to me, so show me now!”

“Look, I can't paint green hills. But painters from eons ago have painted symbols of green hills, so I can paint those. But then again, I do not have a true green color on my palette. I do have a new tint which could represent green. I will draw a representation of hills and mixed with the new tint, I will produce a painting which you can experience and expand with your imagination to visualize green hills. It has been so long since I have attempted representations of nature.”

Feeling a strange sense of guilt, the painter drew

trembling fingers across the keyboard of his computer. Spectacular seductive images flickered across the screen on the wall.

“Hey! Stop this charade at once. Do you think you can fool me this easily? I’ll destroy your fake images just like that!”

Anger surged across his handsome features.

“Young man, forgive me. I know I have a responsibility to the color green, but I beseech you , please forgive this dotard who is too ignorant to know the color **green**. Have you thought of going to the Director of the Archeological Museum? Such an organized, obsessive collector must surely have a drop or two of **green** hoarded up somewhere.

The young man stomped out of the studio. The whole world kept eyes on him anxiously. Some launched searches of their own for the color **green**. The Leader of the Global Village launched a feverish inquiry into who had set the young man off on his quixotic search .

Meanwhile the keeper of the Museum flipped furiously through all his ancient artifacts for a mention of **Green Hills**. Sweat dripped from his brow onto the metallic floor. Even if he came across **green**, he doubted he would recognize it. His personal assistant gazed forlornly at the artifacts, anxiety clouding her guileless features.

“I love him. But I hate the way he acts, like a raging bull. If he were my son...” The Museum Director snapped his mouth shut.

“The life blood of the world does not rage heedlessly. Please be careful with your words. You could get us in so much trouble.”

The Museum Director stopped short. The boy was here. Still angry, chest heaving.

“Here, Museum Director. Can you show me **Green Hills?**”

The Museum Director wiped sweat off his brow, greeted the youth fulsomely, settled him on a couch. The world watched with bated breath, praying that the Museum Director would be able to produce the object of his desire.

“My son, are you interested in the relics from the First Global Nuclear War?”

The boy frowned. Everyone on Earth could clearly see his face on the ComNet. Affection and goodwill from everyone engulfed him, yet he remained unmoved.

“Hmmm... if you should be interested in weapons from the earliest wars, or say, the first space vehicle to roam the galaxy, I would love to show you the relics.”

“Liar! Idiot! I’m talking about Hills! Hills! **Green Hills!** I want to see **Green Hills! Show me!**”

So angry was he that his voice cracked, and tears glistened in his eyes. Outside, the world was restless. Where could these green hills be hiding? Inquiries and exhortations flooded the ComNet. All work had stopped. The whole world was focused on the boy.

“You’re hiding the **Green Hills** just so I can’t see them.”

So loud was his accusation that it shocked the world. He threw a childish tantrum. His loud sobs reverberated

across the ComNet.

“You fakes! Liars! Charlatans! You’re making a fool of me. Show me **Green Hills** right now or all of you will regret it!”

The boy screamed with all his might. He jumped up and down, punched the walls, banged his head on them, smashed windows. The Museum Director and his assistant wrung their hands in despair. Finally, the Director pressed the emergency button. The world’s foremost physician appeared in a flash.

The doctor looked mistily at the boy’s tear-streaked face. The boy looked up at him with hope. Two sets of eyes, eerily similar.

“Are you here to show me **Green Hills?**”

The doctor shook his head wearily as he palpated the boy’s pulse.

“So! You’re useless too!”

Anger and sorrow flooded the boy’s chest. Suddenly, his heart stopped as his emotions overwhelmed him.

There was a collective gasp all across the world. The doctors swiftly initiated resuscitation procedures. Other doctors appeared, trying to restore the boy’s heartbeat, the veritable lifeblood of the world.

Hours later, the world was finally able to let out a sigh of relief when the doctor appeared on screen, sweat-soaked but smiling triumphantly. World leaders scrambled to contact the medical team. The world woke up from a deathly pall.

“Are we safe now?” an Elder of the Earth spoke up.

“Yes, we were in time.”

“Who’s the culprit? Why is he so obsessed with **Green Hills**? Who instigated the memory of something that we ourselves can barely remember in the world’s only child? I’m not happy at all. The whole planet knows that we can’t afford to lose our only hope. We have to find the culprit.”

Pulling off his gloves, the surgeon said, “Well, the culprit is in his head. Just as you know. And I’m not touching his brain. We are on the brink of the abyss. Every single cell of his brain is crucial. In my opinion, there is a small cluster of neurons on one of his gyri that has some memory of **Green Hills**, an inborn error. There hasn’t been a person on Earth for thousands of years who has experience of and can describe **Green Hills**. This is a strange and unusual obsession which should not be done away with.”

“Look here, Doc. When he wakes up he’ll still be searching for **Green Hills**. And you’re still going to be treating him. I know it’s not easy. But you need to take out those cells before he wakes up. Let him have no memory, no inkling of **Green Hills** when he regains consciousness. Let him forget forever that **Green Hills** ever existed in this world. How about it, Doc?”

The doctor stiffened.

“Are you crazy?”

The image of the doctor vanished from the screen. The world leader was stumped. What to do when the boy woke up?

The doctor hung his head. Having long realized life’s meaninglessness, he regarded himself as a long-rotted

husk. His applications for self termination had been denied many times. His tired fingers hovered over the keyboard, summoning up photos of a child. Indeed **this** was his only child, the one he had to give up to the child-hungry world for adoption.

Ages ago, in a world with an ever-declining human population, cloning with edited genomes (hoping for “improved” humans) had become widespread. Their infinite possibilities had led, unfortunately, to countless global conflicts. Now humans had learned to value and long for the product of wholly natural processes. But natural births had become increasingly rare and precious. It had been a while since teenagers had been seen on Earth. Inevitably viral illnesses had carried off newborns.

Against all odds, “The Boy” had survived. He had always yearned for **Green Hills**. His affliction had been dubbed “Obsession with Green.” The doctor had not shared this knowledge with anyone, knowing that he, the doctor himself, had this obsession on his mind. No cure existed. Not even something to ameliorate this hunger.

The doctor sobbed like a child.

“The hills are **green**, are they? Show me, show me those **Green Hills!**”

About the Author

Yee Nay Sun is the pen name of Dr. Phyu Phyu Thinn Zaw, a Burmese medical doctor, an epidemiologist, activist and author. She is a Myanmar-Australia Visiting Fellow at both ANU and the University of Melbourne in 2024. A graduate of the University of Medicine Mandalay, Burma (Myanmar), she received a Ph.D. in Epidemiology from Prince of Songkla University, Thailand, and a Master of Public Policy from Oxford University, UK. She has been a Visiting Scholar at Stanford University, USA, and is currently a lecturer at HKU. She has published numerous essays, short stories and has won two local awards for her short stories. Her translation into Burmese of George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* has been a bestseller in Burma. She is categorized as one of the very first female sci-fi novelists in Myanmar and her full length sci-fi novel *Rachel Oo*, published in 2019, became a best-seller in the country and has been translated into English by Lyn Swe Aye.

About the Translator

Lyn S. Aye, M.D., a retired anesthesiologist, poet and translator, was born in Burma (Myanmar) and currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. His translations of Burmese poems have been published in numerous anthologies including *Americans' Favorite Poems* and *An Invitation to Poetry* edited by Poet Laureate of the USA Robert Pinsky, and *A World of Poetry* (The American Poetry and Literary Project commemorating the 2002 Winter Olympics). He has appeared on nationwide TV and radio (PBS and NPR). Other works, including original poems, have been published in Myanmar and the USA. He served for many years at the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose, California and as Clinical Associate Professor of Anesthesiology at Stanford. He resides in the United States and has recently completed the English translation of Yee Nay Sun's novel *Rachel Oo*.