

2019-2020

# *the Scrivener*

DALAT INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL



# Foreword

This school year has been a wild one, to say the least. It's changed our perspectives, our mindsets, and the very way we live our lives. Back in the first semester, we thought that three days off from school because of the haze was mind-blowing and look at us now! But through the chaos and uncertainty of this past year, the Dalat community continued to express themselves in various ways.

All the way back in August, a small group of students started meeting on Friday afternoons with Mr. Hieber to write and discuss all sorts of things—both writing-related and not—and we decided that we wanted to give both students and teachers a place to share their writing. And so this magazine was born.

We want to thank everyone who was brave enough to send in their pieces for us to read through. We know how scary it is to share things that you've written, and we are incredibly honored to have gotten the chance to read through everyone's writing. We also want to thank everyone on this team who edited these pieces, showed up to meetings, and sat through a disturbing number of potato-related discussions. And finally, a big thank you to Mr. Hieber who has been supporting us from the start, gives us advice and guidance, and lets us hang out in his classroom after school. It's been a crazy year, but we did it!

We are proud to present the inaugural edition of *The Scrivener*.

— The 2019-2020 Dalat Creative Writing Club

# Table of Contents

Deeply Content <i>by Kalia Brewster</i> .....	4
Out of the Sky <i>by Yong-Yu Huang</i> .....	6
Ice Cream Flavours <i>by Nathan Lam</i> .....	7
A Creator's Self-Portrait <i>by Corinne Fraley</i> .....	12
Ablaze <i>by Abigail Leigh</i> .....	13
The Vendor <i>by Benjamin Hollon</i> .....	14
Story of Poor Blind Beggar of Great Faith .....	27
Impression #1 <i>by Christopher Ramos</i> .....	31
The Potato Paragraph <i>by Benjamin Hollon</i> .....	36
The Day When Fate Departed <i>by Ziyu Moey</i> .....	37
Ode to Koi & Pond <i>by Jens Hieber</i> .....	42
She Had Them Too <i>by Laviynia Menon</i> .....	43
The Final Leg <i>by Corinne Fraley</i> .....	45

# Deeply Content

by Kalia Brewster

One evening, a happy family walked along the beach together. They all stood hand in hand along the shore. The little girl gazed up at her mother with bright eyes and a big smile on her face. She was content. Her mother lit up with joy when she saw that her daughter was content. She turned and smiled at the girl's father. He was looking up at the sky.

*Oh, how I wish I could fly!* thought the father as he looked longingly at the seagulls. *I would have all the freedom in the world if only I could fly.*

"If only," he sighed, returning his gaze to the sand as he walked along.

"If only...what?" asked the girl's mother, searching the father's face for an explanation.

He pointed to the sky.

"If only I could fly! Then I would truly be happy," he said, exasperated. The mother looked to the ground. She squeezed her daughter's hand quickly, trying to hide a disappointed frown.

Further ahead was a grove of palm trees. The wind blew through them and rustled their leaves. The trees whispered to themselves.

"Did you hear what he said," one tree scoffed.

"If only, if only, if only," another snickered.

"At least he isn't stuck in the ground. He has his own pair of legs to get him around," said another. "Honestly, if anyone should be complaining, it should be us. We have to sit here all day in the hot sun, providing those complainers with shade!"

They continued to whisper until the wind carried their voices

to a little fern sitting deep in the jungle.

He thought to himself, *Why can't those trees be happy? They get to enjoy the breeze and the sunshine. On top of all that, they have a magnificent view of the ocean, whatever that may look like. I wish I could see the ocean, but I'm stuck in this dark jungle with no view and no breeze.* He sighed, and a shiver went down the little plant into the roots.

A rock deep under the surface felt this shiver. He was a quiet, content little rock.

*I can't wait to see what this day holds!* he thought to himself, for he had no idea the day was instead coming to a close. *I hope I can be a good foundation for the plants above me. I sure am comfy with all this soft soil around me, but I hope those plants up above aren't too cold. Aren't I lucky to have such a nice home.* He thought, and he thought, because all he could do was think. He didn't have legs to walk, or a gentle breeze to cool him down, or even air to breathe. But he was content. "Aren't I lucky to be a rock," he said at last.

# Out of the Sky

by Yong-Yu Huang

a month ago  
the moon fell out of the sky  
and now cows are lowing  
and jumping over  
broken bridges and stampeding—  
paper lanterns crushed under-hoof—  
into the streets.

empty streets that should have  
been filled with bustling red scarves  
and feathered hats  
but are filled with the empty cries  
of a child, water in his lungs,  
because the loss of the moon  
took his parents and he  
is cursed now because  
he was born during  
the year of the empty sky,  
the year when the moon splintered  
and fiery comets tumbled down.

the moon fell out of the sky  
a month ago  
and there is no gravestone for it.  
my neighbor swore that it splintered into pieces  
and that night moondust rained  
over the fields. but that exists only  
in the eyes of those who saw  
the distant glimmer on the wind.  
all i see is that  
the stars are bright and closer than ever  
tonight.

# Ice Cream Flavours

by Nathan Lam

If nostalgia was an ice cream flavour, what would it taste like? Sweet, like a smooth vanilla cone? Or slightly bitter, of smooth dark chocolate? Is it fruity and rich? Or is it creamy, with a plain but fresh flavour? Does it taste different for everyone? For you? For me? Do the memories hurt? Are they the pangs of a brain freeze? Is it chunky, similar to the rocky road it took to get here?

That was your dream, wasn't it? To become a professional ice cream taster. You would've done a fantastic job too, but you've given up now. Back then, you used to be so determined. You'd never give up on anything until you saw it through. Nobody in our neighbourhood would dare to stop you when you had that spark in your eyes. But it's gone out, and all I can see now are the dying embers of the fire you once had.

Nostalgia is bitter. It's full of old regrets you can never let go. Situations you wish you could've changed. Friends lost to the passing of time. Changes that shook us to our foundation. Things that you can never have again. I hate it sometimes.

You're so quiet now, and it's killing me inside. I think it's killing you too. Why can't you let me in? Why can't I comfort you like you did with me? I understand what it's like. I've felt it too. But you keep shutting me out. Did you forget what we used to be? We were bestest buddies, and bestest buddies stick together forever, right?

It's hard, isn't it? Going through every day knowing he isn't here. The messy piles in his room. The tangled controllers in the living room. The snacks he never got to finish. It makes sense why you've been avoiding me. Why would you want to see a friend, when all he reminds you of is your memories with your brother.

He used to take us to the best ice cream places. You'd always get a new flavour, and I would stick to chocolate. You didn't really like it, saying it was too bitter. He would never get anything, and instead, would sit with us, making us crack up with the jokes he made. Those are my favourite memories. I'm guessing they were yours too.

Is that why you don't eat ice cream anymore? Was it why you gave up on trying all the flavours in the world? Was it the reason you gave up on your dreams? You lost hope when he died. So did I. And instead of going through it together, you drifted away from me. You chose to be alone, even when no one else was there to help. That hurt me more than you would think, but I let you go. You needed some time apart.

In the beginning, everyone was sympathetic, pitying you. But then they began talking behind your back. When is she going to move on? It's been two months now. She needs to realize that brooding isn't going to help. And slowly, over time, they started shouting. Yelling at you for not trying hard enough, refusing to accept the truth. They never got it, but I do. There is nobody in the world who gets it more than I do. We grew up together. Shared our victories, our defeats. We didn't care if we lost to each other, as long as one of us won. But you don't care anymore. I still do.

I know you were looking for someone who could help. And I tried, so hard. But no one else did, and it was hard to keep the both of us afloat. You gave up, like how everyone else had. But I held on. It's so pointless for a finch to try and carry the burden of the world upon its wings, but I was never reasonable. I would've held up the sky for you, and I knew that once, you would've carried it for me.

I know you hate people sometimes. They judge you for not forgetting, not moving on, but they never wonder why. You're wrong, but only because they say so. I understand why you hate them. But some days, the weight feels too heavy to carry, and I want



to scream at you too. I want you to help me like I'm helping you. Broken people shouldn't be the ones to comfort others. But then I remember, and suddenly, I lose my voice. You're broken too. You don't deserve this. Not after everything that happened to you.

It still hurts. You abandoned me, even when I didn't. I'm still here, by your side, but you aren't by mine. Did you forget what I went through? Or did I fool you, like I fooled everyone else? Bestest buddies don't lie to each other. But I did. Just because I needed to be strong. Just because you needed me to be strong. It would've hurt you so much to see me broken like that. Your childhood friend shattered by a freak accident. You invested so much in me, and I couldn't let it go to waste.

I was so quiet eleven years ago. I would go for months without speaking, just reading my books. But then we moved, and our new neighbours had a girl my age who, for some reason, wanted to be friends with me. You were my first friend, and you taught me that there is a world out there that's worth putting down a book.

Bestest buddies stick together forever. Bestest buddies don't lie to each other. Bestest buddies are winners together or losers together. Bestest buddies help each other, no matter what. Bestest buddies always share. Bestest buddies are bestest buddies forever and ever and ever. Bestest buddies always help each other.

For all the ice cream you ate, you never had a favourite flavour, did you? Never could decide which one was the best. You've always admired chaos and change. I preferred stability. I wanted to be able to base my life on things that stayed. I guess that's why my life came apart so quickly.

You're not the only one who lost someone, you know? It hurts, knowing that you'll wake up every day, missing something that can never be there. I loved her. You did too. Everyone did. She was always kind, no matter what the circumstances. The first time you

came over, we had nothing planned. But somehow, she managed to whip up a feast for our first guest. She knew I needed a friend, and she knew you were the best choice for me.

You compared her to vanilla ice cream, seemingly plain and simple, but beautifully creamy and sweet. I thought she was a songbird – small and inconsequential, but with a song that was for everyone. A song of healing, and of hope. A song of a family, of love. Of Home.

I miss her so much. She was beautiful. An angel who had not fallen, but descended to this world. She always knew what to say or what to do. Now that she's gone, none of us has any real purpose or goal anymore. And now, nobody comes into my room each night and gives me a hug. Nobody makes homemade chicken soup when I'm sick. Nobody takes us out on a fancy dinner when I ace a test. I wouldn't be able to take another loss. But Fate plays us in cruel ways.

Your brother was the feather that broke this camel's back. I lost another anchor point in my life. But you – you were devastated. Things were beginning to unravel, and I had no idea what to do. I looked to you, but you had closed off. You were hurting, and I put aside my pain to help you. You were supposed to be the strong one out of the two of us. Guess things have changed.

But this might be enough to help you. To make you see things differently. Maybe you can pick yourself up and start looking at the future. And, for a turn, help me instead. It's selfish, I know, but I can't bear the strain for much longer, and when I collapse, there's nothing else that can save you. So please, wake up. I don't want to lose anyone else. I can't lose any more anchor points.

Do you ever wonder if this world is just a waiting room? A place for us to stop and rest our wings before flying on? Before flying home? I do. I hope it's true. I hope that we can see them again,

one day. You wouldn't like nostalgia ice cream. There would be too many bitter memories to recall. But I do. For me, it's always been bittersweet. I draw strength from the past – memories that hurt the most, but also the ones I treasure above all else. The memories of you – abandoning me, becoming silent. But I remember us as well, the recollection of our time together – of the bestest buddies. Because beneath the bitterness of regret is the sweet taste of hope, and that is always worth fighting for. Always.

# A Creator's Self-Portrait

by Corinne Fraley

Puffs of interloping clouds  
With dashes and a smidge  
Of white cotton threads tangled in darling light baby blue.

Sun poking through a peephole,  
Skipping over sand  
Rays gliding across watery patches.

New clouds separate in gold and creates streaks  
Painting the sky in conscious glory.

Humming, cooing, tweeting, whistling,  
The birds conduct their own ensemble.

Dazed Morning Glories peeled back their petals,  
And dreamily stretched open in the full bath of light.

So yes in all this majesty,  
It's clear to me that the Lord is good,  
And also dabbles in the arts from time to time.

# Ablaze

by Abigail Leigh

The door's open  
Feel free to come in

The world's going crazy out there  
The sirens keep wailing "Will we ever learn?"  
Everyone's hurling accusations and screaming at their former friends  
So caught up in drawing the line between us and them

No point in just standing out in the cold  
Don't argue with me. Leave your shoes at the door

You carry a torch and I wouldn't dare try to take it away  
But your fire's burning low, dear.  
one more disappointment another missed hour of sleep  
Plunged into such darkness that you can't see your feet  
It's a lot easier to keep marching,  
when you can see what's a few steps ahead  
So come in for a moment  
You need a rest, and I've a spare bed.  
Off waging everybody's war, but when it comes to you,  
seems like you couldn't care less.  
Taking on everything,  
You've forgotten you have needs, just like the rest.  
Stop for a bit please and just breathe.  
There's less you can do when you've been brought to your knees.

No, it doesn't make you any less of a fighter to pause,  
If only, to rekindle your fire and keep marching on.

# The Vendor

by Benjamin Hollon

“Crickolate, Coptorn!” the Vendor cried. His dry and husky voice hissed over the hot Martian sands.

The Vendor wandered on, his voice continuing unceasingly. “Crickolate,” he cried again, “Coptorn!”

On all sides of the Vendor scores of Martians walked silently, their faces cold and impassable as they walked by him without speaking or even sparing the poor Vendor a glance.

“Crickolate?” he pleaded with the moving statues. “Coptorn? It’s delicious and very cheap, worth the price!”

The Martians bustled past him, taking no notice. Each Martian was talking to an unseen listener, listening to an invisible speaker, seeing sights and smelling smells that simply weren’t there.

The Vendor, seeing the relentlessness of the crowd, walked over to a small bench and sat down to rest his tired feet. He let a sigh hiss from between his lips as he passed a hand through the black mop of hair that he shared with the other Martians.

As he rested, he nibbled on a square of Crickolate from his tray, his tongue tasting the bitter flavor of despair. The bittersweet of the Crickolate and the piquant aftertaste of the Coptorn, while satisfying the gnawing pains in his stomach, brought to mind the painful memory of his lowly station, his endless purgatory for the crime of being an outsider. They reminded him that he was alone, terribly alone, even among the hosts of others.

He thought of the crowd and their cold, unfeeling reactions—or nonreactions—to him. It was all the fault of the Personal Enhancement Centers, he thought bitterly.

Personal Enhancement Centers, or PECs, as the Big Compa-

nies called them, were not only the latest and greatest advancement of technology but were likely to be the last advancement of technology. Nothing more was needed. The PECs solved all of the world's problems: hunger, thirst, poverty, and even the lack of happiness. The one Martian instinct the PEC couldn't satisfy was restlessness. The Martians now took to the sandy streets in hordes, not because they had somewhere to go, but because they longed to.

The PEC was the logical conclusion of all the advancements that had taken place in the last few centuries. It was the final installment in the series of inventions which sought to satisfy the Martian's want to retreat into Himself, his growing independence from everyone around him.

First came the Book, allowing a temporary retreat from those around him. The Book was a healthy way in which one could take a break from the interactions one was subject to in the Real World.

But Martians, tasting the pleasure of the Book, wanted more. Next came the Screen, where the stories in the Book could come to life without the bother of having to think. A Martian could lie on the couch, another invention made to shield one from the troubles of the Real World, for hours, staring at the Screen in front of him.

But then, thought the Martian, why should I be able to retreat into Myself only from my home? I will take the Screen with me everywhere I go. I will carry a door to Myself in case I should ever become tired of Real Life while on the go.

And so the Martians became slaves to the Screen. One could go nowhere without seeing Martians with their Screens out. Every Martian retreated more and more into the realm of Myself.

It didn't stop. Martians spoke of the need for Progress, and improved their retreat to no end, with earpieces so they could listen as the meaningless phrases were whispered to them and more portable Screens that could be used in even more ways.

And then came the PEC. It came in the name of Progress, and yet it came to end all Progress. How can you improve Perfection? All previous inventions had merely offered relief for the senses. The PEC went to the core of the issue and changed the senses. The PEC, an implant in a Martian's brain, could read and change all senses before they were processed by the Martian.

All previous inventions had been building up a Dream that Martians could retreat into, but a distinction between the Dream and Real Life had always been present. The PEC had broken through this barrier, torn it to pieces, and sent it fleeing for its life.

Now what you saw didn't have to be what your eyes saw. The PEC could change it, make you see your friend when he wasn't really there, or see stories unfold around you in such a real way that Martians began to confuse the Dream with Real Life.

Now what you tasted didn't have to be what your tongue tasted. With the help of the PEC, a plate of the Martian sand could now taste like a gourmet meal. A watery gruel could taste like steak and mashed potatoes. Even hunger did not have to be felt any longer. A Martian could choose to be hungry or not to be hungry as his fancy tickled him. If he did not eat, he would die, but he wouldn't care if he died because he wouldn't know he was dying until he was dead.

Neither did the Martian continue having to hear what his ears heard. Now he could hear the voices of his friends speaking to him as he went about his day.

Nor did his mouth have to speak, for the PEC could read what he thought and transmit it directly to the listener's PEC. Why go to all the trouble of making your lips move when one can simply think? Many still chose to speak, out of the force of Habit, but it was an unnecessary extravagance. In fact, most of what the Martians did were now unnecessary extravagances, mere formalities that time would be able to dispel.



Some had resisted this Improvement, this Change to end all Changes. They had argued that it would give the Big Companies too much control. But really, how could the Big Companies control through the PECs when they used them?

Some were afraid that there would be no Real Life left. They were right. But why mourn for Real Life when you could have your own Fake Life that could unfold in whatever wonderful way you wished?

Even knowing of all the marvelous benefits of the PECs, a few stubborn Martians did refuse to use them. After a few months, however, they changed their minds. It wasn't that they lost their fear of Progress, but that they were afraid of being left out. Everyone else was using these marvelous PECs. In Real Life, there was no one left to talk to, to enjoy life with. What more was left in Real Life? There was nothing left to mourn for when one obtained a PEC.

Then why, one might ask, does the Vendor still wander around alone in Real Life? Why doesn't he have a PEC?

A few, a very small few, didn't get PECs, not because they didn't want them, but because they couldn't afford them. The Vendor was one of these. He wandered around, searching unceasingly for someone who would buy his snacks, hoping to save up enough money to one day buy a PEC and retreat from the nightmare of Real Life into the Dream.

For the PEC had not only been the end of Progress but the destruction of past Progress. The PEC served all needs. There was no longer any need for Restaurants, Stores, or any Entertainment apart from the PEC. A lone wanderer without a PEC had nothing. Nowhere to eat or buy food, no one to talk to, and nothing to distract him from harsh Reality.

And it was just so that the Vendor wandered. He had nowhere to lay his head at night, but would lie on one of the sandy dunes and

stare up at the cold, uncomfortable light issuing from the Martian Stars. He learned to know each Star by name and tried to become friends with them, but Stars are poor friends and can offer you little escape from Real Life.

There were no houses left on Mars, for no one saw anything but what they wanted to see or felt anything but what they wished to feel. The only need a Martian had left was to satisfy his restless desire for movement, the feeling that something was not quite right where he was. What good is a house when one is always on the move and can have the same empty happiness wherever one is?

The Vendor finally stood back up from the bench where he had been sitting. He let out another long, hissing sigh. He picked up his tray of wares and hung it around his neck once more.

“Crickolate,” he yelled again, raising his tired voice above the murmur of all the mindless zombies around him. “Coptorn!”

A rush of dizziness came over him, and he stumbled into the path of one of the Martians. The Martian, blinded by her PEC, tripped over the Vendor’s leg and fell, bloodying her knee. The PEC, unprepared for the sudden action, didn’t nullify the pain fast enough, and, for a brief moment, the Martian felt the sensation of pain. She stood up again, furious at the Vendor.

“What do you think you’re doing?” she shrieked, waving her fist angrily at him.

“I’m so sorry,” the Vendor said, covering his face to shield himself from the blows.

“You’d better be,” she said, seemingly pacified by his contrite apology. “Just don’t do it again.” She lowered her fist and helped him up.

“Thank you,” he said.

“No problem,” she said absentmindedly. Now that the initial shock at feeling something Real had evaporated, the PEC was able to

calm her down and soothed her with peaceful feelings. She was more disposed to be kind to the Vendor now.

“Would you like to buy some Crickolate?” the Vendor asked hopefully. “I also have Coptorn.”

“Oh, I’d love some,” she said. “It’ll be nice to taste Real food for once. I’ve gotten tired of the PEC’s manufactured tastes.”

The Vendor was confused. “You don’t like the PEC’s tastes?”

“Do you?”

“I don’t own a PEC. I’m saving up my money to buy one.”

“Oh, I see. You probably don’t understand what I’m talking about, then. At first, the PEC was amazing. I could eat anything I wanted and still taste a delicious gourmet meal. After a while, though, it gets tiring. Sometimes I find myself longing to taste something as it Really is.”

“Oh.” The Vendor was silent. After a moment of thought, he straightened up. “I’m so sorry,” he said, “I forgot to give you some Crickolate.” He removed a brown square from his tray and handed it to the Martian. She thanked him and gave him a coin. The Vendor’s eyes widened.

“Oh no,” he said. “That’s far too much.”

She smiled. “Keep it. I don’t have much need for money anymore, now that I have the PEC. Your Real food is worth more to me than that coin.” She took another coin out of her pocket and placed it in his hand with the other. “Take this too,” she said. “May it help you find happiness.”

“Thank you,” the Vendor said after a pause.

The Martian walked off into the crowd and quickly became indistinguishable from the rest. The Vendor stood staring after her for a moment and then walked off, deep in thought.

Could she have been speaking the truth? Was it possible that the PEC wasn’t everything it seemed?

The Vendor shook his head. That was impossible. Everyone he saw walking by seemed so happy. After a moment of thought, a quiet realization shook him. Did their smiles mean anything? Could the PEC give you the joy of knowing the name of a Star, of becoming friends with it over hundreds of quiet nights of lying on the dunes? Of course, it could not.

*Even so, thought the Vendor, anything is better than the life I'm living.*

He walked on, further and further, leaving the bustling intersection of the Martian trails behind and walking far off over the dunes, each step leaving a print in the red dust.

He walked on and on until the endless twilight that was day became the endless darkness that was night. The Stars above looked down upon their friend, who traveled on unceasingly.

Finally, as a dim light began to show in the East and the night drew to a close, the Vendor reached his destination.

Before him were the ruins of a Martian town, the walls crumbling and the golden color of the domed roofs fading into the forgotten past. Before the PECs, this town had been the stronghold of Martian life in the battle against the Dream. Now, the Martians were scattered across the land. Their old houses had crumbled under the wind, which had brought the red sand that now covered everything.

The sand was the only thing on Mars more inevitable than time. It represented unfulfilled ambitions, shattered dreams, and abandoned hopes. Whenever a Martian lost hope or abandoned his work, the sand closed in, wiping away the memories.

The Vendor walked into the town with determination. He walked up the street that had been Main Street and into a house that had belonged to a Martian, long ago, before the PECs had come and forced him to wander the land, selling his wares and trying to earn enough money to allow him to fit in.

He pushed open the door, which was covered with cracks and had withered under the relentless march of time. He walked into a bedroom which had, once upon a time, been his. He slid aside the door of the closet and opened the safe.

The money was still there. The Vendor took it and spread it all out on the double bed. He took the two coins out of his pocket and, adding them to the rest, counted the money carefully. It was just barely, barely enough.

He sat back and sighed in relief. There was only one more walk to make.

He swept the coins into a fold of his cloak and strode out the door. Even though the coins weighed him down, he felt lighter than he had been in years and walked with a spring in his step that hadn't been there since the PECs had come.

Once again, the Martian, who need be a Vendor no longer, took a trip across the sands. This trip was longer than the other, but he embarked on it with a determination that had not crossed his face in decades.

The Stars came out again.

"Look at me," the Vendor called to them, "I did it! Tomorrow I'll be a new man!"

The Stars only twinkled sadly.

"Aren't you happy for me?" the Vendor asked, confused.

The Stars did not reply.

"This is what I've always wanted. To be like everyone else."

The Stars were still silent.

"Goodbye, old friends," the Vendor said at last. "I will keep you in my memory."

The Stars blinked their farewell.

The Vendor took all night and most of the next morning to reach his new destination. Finally, he neared his goal. Before him,

sparkling columns rose up from the red sand, vast and imposing, their indestructible might defying nature and proclaiming the dominance of the PEC over instinct. The Vendor, seeing them, began to laugh and walked faster. When he saw the short building between the columns, he decided that walking was too slow and began to run.

He sped over the sands, the coins that would set him free jingling in his pocket as he ran toward the end of his sadness, the extinguishing of his feelings, the end of having to think for himself. His feet kicked up great clouds of red sand as they rushed him toward the end of the self he had been.

As he reached the gates, he slowed and finally stopped and just stood there, staring at the sparkling columns, breathless and panting, but with joy in his heart.

He stood for a moment, drinking in the last sights he would see with his eyes before the PEC would change everything. He stood there, oblivious to the fact that this would be the last time he would feel the feeling of pure, unaided joy.

Then he pushed open the door and walked into the building.

In front of him was a long line of young children, all waiting to receive their PEC for the first time. He joined the queue, an air of astonishment spreading across his face.

“Goodness,” he said to himself, “they’re even putting them on Children now.” But his mind was drawn away by the thought that he also would become free that day.

The line moved quickly, each child being swallowed up by one of the six doors in front of the line. The children did not return from the doors. The Vendor thought that they must come out on the other side, complete with a PEC, thoroughly happy for the first time in their lives.

A few short minutes and then he was at the front of the line. His heart was pounding so hard that he thought it would burst out of

his chest.

Then one of the big black doors opened for him. He walked in. The door shut with a clang behind him.

He found himself in a small, dark room containing only a tiny chair, which he sat in. He sat there for a moment, wondering what would happen next.

Then a door he hadn't noticed slid open in the wall, and a Martian walked in. She stopped when she saw him. She walked around him slowly, sizing him up.

"You're not like the others," she said at last. "You're bigger, older."

"I never had a PEC," the Vendor said. "I couldn't afford it."

"And you can now?" she asked suspiciously.

The Vendor nodded and removed the coins from his pocket. He handed them to her with a slight reluctance. She placed them in a drawer that popped out of the wall and then vanished again into its void blankness.

"So," she said, "would you like to have a PEC?"

"Yes," the Vendor said joyfully. Then, remembering the Martian from the street, he hesitated. "At least," he said, his voice faltering, "I thought so."

The Martian sighed impatiently. "Do you want a PEC or not?" she asked angrily.

"I don't know," the Vendor said. He thought for a moment. "Could I try it first?" he asked at last.

She shook her head disapprovingly. "I suppose so," she admitted grudgingly. She took a headset out of a drawer and unwound a wire, which she plugged into the Vendor's chair.

"This," she said at last, "will give you a brief and limited glimpse of what a PEC is like. Put it on."

The Vendor took the headset and placed it on his head. He did-

n't notice anything different.

"Now," she said, taking a small object out of the drawer, "what does this look like?"

"Something to eat," the Vendor said, "but it doesn't look like it will taste like much."

"In fact," she said, "it is completely tasteless." She walked over and pressed a button on the Vendor's headset. Suddenly, the object in her hand was transformed before his eyes into a delicious pastry. The Vendor grabbed it and stuffed it into his mouth. It tasted heavenly to his tongue, very different from the bitter Crickolate that was his usual fare.

"That," the Martian said, "didn't actually change. The same thing ended up in your stomach. You only thought it was different. Your mind viewed it differently because of the PEC. The PEC can do that and more. This headset can't let you see the benefits in communication, but I can show you a preview of the PEC's entertainment value." She pressed another button.

Immediately the room disappeared, and the Vendor found himself in a different setting. He had no idea what the tall green and brown things rising around him were, but they seemed to be some kind of growth or plant. Over him, he saw a bright red bird flying, and the ground beneath his feet was brown and soft to stand on, very different from the Martian sands.

All around him, he could hear sounds of animals and birds that were hidden from his view, and somewhere on his left, the music of running water tickled his ear. He looked around in awe, taking in every sight with great pleasure.

Then the colors drained away, and the sounds were cut short. The Vendor was back in the small room, and the Martian was in front of him, an amused smile playing across her face.

"That's only a glimpse of what you can do when you have a



PEC. Would you like to have one now?”

The Vendor nodded his head slowly, anticipating the pleasures that would soon be his.

The Martian smiled again and walked into a side room. She walked back in with a small device.

“This will only hurt a bit,” she said.

Suddenly, the ground began to shake, and there was a loud rumbling. The Vendor jumped out of the chair and looked around him anxiously, trying to find the source of the sound.

“What is it?” he cried.

“What do you mean?” the Martian said, confused. Her PEC had cut out all notice of the rumbling. To her, everything was perfectly normal. “Is something wrong?”

“The shaking!” the Vendor screamed, running out of the door in a panic. He found himself back outside on the red sands, with everything shaking and beginning to crumble. He ran over to a giant rock and took shelter underneath it.

From his position, he watched as the glittering towers, projecting a haughty disdain of nature only a moment before, crumbled and fell, shattering on the sands beneath. The building’s roof collapsed, hitting the ground beneath with a crash that could be heard for miles and killing any who had remained inside. Great clouds of red dust were sent up.

The quaking began to die down, and the pieces of the towers settled on the sandy desert floor. The dust fell back down, landing all over the remains. Silence set in, more deafening than the rumbling had ever been. The Vendor covered his ears, trying to shut out the horrible calm that had succeeded the storm. He screamed in agony, but even his scream was swallowed up by the silence.

Time swept on, as it always does, and the ruins, like everything else on the planet, were covered by the red Martian sand. The

Martians never noticed that anything had changed, and they went about their empty lives in the same empty way as before. A traveler walking past the ruins, however, can still stop awhile and stare at the red walls and shattered pillars.

If the traveler is quiet and listens carefully, he will hear a mournful sound. Floating above the ruins, the wailing of a timeworn refrain can still be heard: “Crickolate! Coptorn!”

# Story of Poor Blind Beggar of Great Faith

Anonymous

“Dad, Dad! Tell me one of your stories!” asked my youngest daughter, Aviva.

“Why all of a sudden, my little princess? Can’t you play with your friends? I’m a bit busy today, I also told you a story yesterday!” I replied, a bit annoyed.

“Abigail can’t play with me today. Her family went to go see the temple of Jerusalem. Can you please tell me a story?” Aviva begged.

“Alright then, just one story. I’ll tell you two stories if you don’t interrupt me,” I said with a smile. “Now listen carefully, to the story of the sad blind man of great faith.”

He had never been saddened by the bird’s singing in the dark black skies. He had never hated how freely a fish could swim in the vast open seas. He never despised the people that he loved and trusted. Now that he looked back, that suffering had changed his life forever.

He was tortured every day with the words that they called him. They told him he was pathetic, delusional, cursed by God, and that there was no place left for a beggar like him in the dirty streets of Jericho. He could see nothing but darkness because he was a sad blind man. He had lots of friends, colleagues, and family. Rather, he used to: they were only nice to him because he was the firstborn of a rich merchant family.

He couldn’t understand all the descriptions they called him, especially when the others said he was cursed by God. He never did

anything bad, or at least he thought so. He just woke up one day and just couldn't see.

His father and mother never got along because of his father's faith. His father believed that God will one day send a savior, and that person will save us from the darkness in our hearts and cleanse our soul. He always thought there was a reason why he was in this pitiful state. But even as a blind man, his love for God never burned out.

The beggar heard weird rumors from the guards that a man of miracles was visiting the town. The city people were talking about how generous and passionate he was, and some said he was sent by God. Others said it was tricks and witchcraft. The beggar heard a person walking by, so he asked if this man really had the power to heal.

"Of course he does! In fact, I saw him heal a blind man from birth. And before that, I heard that the mysterious teacher of the light went to Bethesda to heal a paralytic man! I think they called the teacher Jesus, the son of David," said the man.

The blind beggar believed the man's words; he knew that he wasn't lying. The beggar had met thousands of cheaters and liars when he was still working to be a merchant. Like his father was. He was eager to meet this man who could heal any sort of sickness or disease. He hoped that he could meet the mysterious teacher someday.

One morning, the sad blind man was woken up by his friend Gabeel, the only person he trusted. His friend told him that the teacher had come to Jericho. The teacher who could perform miracles.

The blind man got all the belongings that he had and went towards the enormous city gate, to see this mysterious person with his friend. His friend explained to him that the place was crowded with people of all different colors and races. It seemed that the crowd was surrounding just one person. The mysterious person.

He tried getting close to the mysterious teacher, but the barricade of people was like the ancient walls of Jericho. He cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" His voice was muffled by the voices of happiness and prejudice of the crowd.

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

"Hey! What do you think you are doing!?" said the person behind the poor blind beggar. Of course, the blind man paid no attention. He was going to get healed!

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The people around him started to notice a voice reaching out. A desperate voice, of an insignificant blind beggar. They shushed him by punching his soul and silenced him with their sharp poison arrows instead of helping the blind man.

"Son of David, have mercy on me! Hav- mercy..."

He fell to the dirty faded street, crumpled into a ball, and covered his ears. The light and hope he had faded away. The world around him seemed to have stopped, it became gray with sadness and depression. A few seconds of silence passed. He was used to the world of darkness but the world of gray was much colder and deeper. In the gray world, he silently reflected on the state he was currently in. Then he came to a conclusion, that the world was only gray and depressing because he imagined it to be that way. He finally understood, no, he could finally see it!

The gray world was noticed by a teacher of the light. The blind beggar didn't notice, but the person was in front of him. "Your faith has saved you."

The beggar turned toward the warm gentle voice. He saw the color blue, then white, then a crowd of confused people. "I can see! I can see!" The blind beggar cried out, as tears came down like raindrops from his cheeks. The once blind beggar looked around the

beautiful world of color. He saw the teacher and he hugged him. The beggar said the biggest thank you to the teacher who healed him. Legends say that the beggar still doesn't know how he got healed, but he believes that the teacher is still doing good out there, in the world of gray and darkness.

“Dad, I don't really get the story. Does the blind beggar even have a name? How did the beggar know it was the teacher who healed him. What if he hugged a random stranger?” Said Aviva.

“It's okay, there is a whole lot more to the story than what I said. The name of the beggar doesn't really matter. Also, I'm sure the beggar had this gut feeling that he was thanking and hugging the right person,” I explained, trying to hide my sad frown as Aviva looked at me with a puzzled face. There was a sudden knock on the door. I hurriedly went to greet the guest as my little princess was begging for the promised second story.

“Hey, Gabeel! How long has it been?” I smiled as I greeted my old friend.

“Haha, what do you mean? I saw you yesterday! It's good to see you, Bartimaeus!” said my old friend.

# Impression #1

by Christopher Ramos

What is the narrative of Michael's story? What is the theme? What is the golden thread? Does any one person's life have a single golden thread that can weave the whole thing together? Or is a life simply too complicated to unravel so neatly in one color? These things seem to be easier to find in literature—but life is not so neatly organized.

It has been nine years since his death and I am still trying to figure out what his life meant, what it continues to mean. Of course, I am trying to figure out what everything means, but it seems weird to me that I have yet to apply a decent measure of closure to Michael's life and death as influences on my own life.

The further complication is that of memory. My memory is full of pictures, feelings, sounds, ideas, and short clips, but it is not full of any kind of narrative. Perhaps this is my problem with processing the life and death (and life-through-others) of Michael Nall.

I have all of his impression, but none of his arc.

And that is more my fault than his—for he was obsessed with stories, and with branding. If anybody in real life has a nice arc, it is him. He has a truly exceptional redemption story, complete with plenty of endearing colors and humors, coming-of-age, and well-developed side characters. He was marked by societal forces, and he marked himself upon them in his struggle against. He truly is a perfect narrative. It is just unfortunate that it falls upon others to write it, because he was also an exceptional writer.

I never understood a haunting until he died. I was (and in some ways still am) a rural, Southern, Christian conservative, and I did not

believe in ghosts. But I understand that term now. It is odd how he continues to creep up on me in my present life—in ways that tempt me to believe he is still alive. I cannot count how many dreams I have had where I wake up thinking—knowing—he is still alive, only to have that notion overwhelmingly crushed as my wide-open eyes adjust to the dark still-point turning of my bedroom. And this impression, of the weightiness of his aliveness, can seize my heart and hold it still in the most profound ways.

It was evening on the tropical island of Penang, Malaysia. Life takes all of us—third-culture kids and small-town Texan good ol’ boys alike—to the strangest, most unexpected places. But I was catching our stars, as I was told to do, and so I was driving to Tesco in order to pick up some last-minute groceries for the next day on a surprisingly empty road. It was a pleasant evening, so I had the windows down in my tiny Kenari, and I was enjoying the salty air rushing through the car. It was the perfect moment to indulge in some Malaysian radio.

I had no idea what the stations were in Penang, so I pressed the scan button. After about a minute of scanning, Michael seized my heart from beyond his grave. Through my junk speakers, the music of Breaking Benjamin (“So Cold”) whisked my mind far away from Malaysia.

I first went back to the 9th grade, May 2006. We were at the Texas State Solo and Ensemble Contest at Texas State University, and Michael and I were in a French horn quartet together hoping to bring home a superior rating—I was playing 2nd horn and he was playing 4th, but not because of his lack of ability, rather because of his reliability in the low registers. I am not sure how it fits into his arc, but I remember quite clearly watching him listen to Breaking Benjamin. He had headphones that had the connecting bar sitting be-



hind the head, as was the fashion back then for CD Walkmans, and through a headphone splitter he was sharing the band's 2004 album *We Are Not Alone* with Justin Vitz, another friend of ours. I do remember feeling slightly jealous of them as I watched them sit in a stairwell, backlit by San Marcos's afternoon sun. I am pretty certain he was wearing that black jacket, which was part of his self-branding, and which I thought was stupid in the Texas heat. I still do a little bit, except that this single item of clothing has taken on so much significance in mine and others' lives now that calling it stupid makes me feel a little bit guilty.

Breaking Benjamin was a hot band in our circle of friends. I do think it was Justin who first introduced us to them, and in this memory, we were all anxiously anticipating the release of *Diary of Jane* the following month. At the time, I was just wishing I was enjoying "So Cold" with one of them instead of the two of them enjoying it together. What incredibly selfish and self-centered lives we lead as fifteen-year-olds.

But Michael's relationship with Justin was just being repaired, and so they probably really needed that bonding time. Michael throughout our childhood had been bullied, even by his own friends. I did my best to stay by his side, but I sometimes failed. One of those failures was at the end of the 8th grade when I decided I wanted Justin in our circle of friends at Michael's expense. But throughout the 9th grade, through the crucibles of marching band, youth group, and general high school coming of age, Michael and Justin finally became friends, and Michael was quick to forgive, as he always was.

A song like "So Cold," or later "Diary of the Jane" is truly a perfect backing track for Michael. We all had these strangely intense fascinations with coupled ideals like chivalry/nihilism, or loyalty/fatalism. So metal was a good genre, and Breaking Benjamin was popular enough to know while keeping us safely separated from the

pop-country rural aesthetic of the rest of the town. We were all full of teenage angst and energy, but Michael had an exceptional talent for taking it to the extreme. And Michael really did love the music while he also purposefully and sometimes not-so-purposefully lived it out.

His love life before Ashley truly was a Breaking Benjamin song. He tried so hard to be what he thought his crushes wanted from him, but for whatever reason, they never wanted to be a part of it. And somehow I was always in the middle of it too, often because I was the only one he felt he could confide in, but also because I was often a good friend of the other party too. I truly longed with him to succeed in his romantic endeavors, but I didn't know how to make his crushes fall in love with him. And every time he was rejected it was always so intense, and fast double bass pedal thumping with thrashing guitar and driving-too-fast always accompanied our interactions at these times. Yes, Breaking Benjamin was a good fit, and also somehow a weird projection onto his life.

But then there was Ashley, and everything changed. But that's definitely part of his arc and has less to do with this particular impression.

Something's getting in the way  
Something's just about to break  
I will try to find my place in the diary of Jane.  
So tell me how it should be....

Next, I went to a few months after his death. I think I might have been coming home from a piano lesson, or perhaps I was headed to McKinney via all those quiet backroads. But it was a pleasant day, enough so that I had the windows of the F-150 down. For whatever reason Diary of Jane was in the CD player (I was still in high school) and I had it cranked as some kind of means of channeling my own angst (my high school breakup was looming). I was on FM

2478, actually rather near its junction with CR 88 where Michael drove too fast for the tragic last time. The music was loud, but even then my own heart beating more quickly than normal. This was my first haunting.

I had to pull over, turn down the music a bit, and slow my breathing. I could only wonder how many times Michael had done this very thing—drive down FM 2478 with the wind in his blonde hair (or stubble) and metal in his ears. He may as well have been in the truck with me, and my soul told me he was, even though my senses told me he wasn't.

And so, on a quiet evening in Penang nine years later, I also pulled over by the Chinese Swimming Club to slow my breathing and check for ghosts. It seems after almost a decade these episodes haven't stopped, but at least now they're familiar. This time, all I could think was, Who even listens to these guys anymore? Malaysians I guess. I could not believe how quickly and forcefully and instantaneously I was transported. Enough that it interfered with my driving.

Michael died in a car after all, so it makes sense I suppose.

Does a DJ in his sound-proof booth ever think about what kinds of traffic violations he might be inadvertently causing? I still don't believe in ghosts, but I do believe in hauntings.

# The Potato Paragraph

by Benjamin Hollon

It was midnight when the potatoes came for him. Potatoes, potatoes everywhere, all seeking revenge. The humid night air reeked of their lust for blood. And yet he slept on, oblivious to his impending doom. A shadow passed over his face. He murmured sleepily and rubbed his eyes. He sat up to see what had woken him and froze as he saw the potatoes, silently waiting in their ranks. He tried to scream but couldn't. The Spud King moved up to him, moonlight glinting off his knife. And then, he struck. The camper dodged, and the blade flew past his ear, the Spud King losing his balance and falling after it. The man backed into a corner of the tent, afraid to move or speak as the potatoes closed in silently. Just as the potatoes had reached him and were preparing to leap on him, the camper woke up and realized that it had been a dream. Letting out a sigh of relief, he sat up and looked around him, joyfully drinking in the sight of a spud-free tent. But wait—had something moved up on the table? The camper, hesitant and nervous, moved closer to the table and was met by the flash of the Spud King's waiting blade.

# The Day When Fate Departed

by Ziyu Moey

Excerpt from *Mayanso*

There's a war going on.

The government officials backed out of this war long ago. The streets are filled with the anger of soldiers and the fear of civilians. This particular war had been going on for a while now—it is the longest war that humanity has faced since the World Wars.

In every war, there's a good side and a bad side. The rebel organisation that's trying to govern the land that I'm residing in is called the Affiliation of Resurrections. They say, in their beliefs, that a savior named Mayanso will someday come from the heavens to stop this Undying War, and put an end to the so-called 'Mayanso Resistance.'

The leader of this rebel group?

My father.

The sky was pouring upon us.

Rain began to soak through our clothes. The city's weather blocked out electricity from the powerhouse, so we had to use candles. Even then, it was no use; the wind was the dangerous element.

There's a bar in the city of El Camino- the place where I live. The bar's a beautiful place; it's not crowded, and everyone's having a good time. The bar was underground, with the windows looking straight out to the ground where people walked. It's a vast place, with all the furniture on the sides. In the middle was a narrow, but walkable corridor.

People were smoking and drinking, ignoring the war that has killed hundreds of citizens. The bar's a neutral zone. Nobody talks

about the war, and nobody talks about anything political. That's why I'm there.

At the age of 22, I'm used to living by myself with nobody to talk to. At the bar, nobody talks to me or sits near me. I'm an outsider.

All because of my father.

I looked out the window and saw nothing. The night sky covered the beauty of the city, and the wind dimmed the brightness of the candles. The rain hit on the bar's small windows hard. There was nobody around from where I was sitting. It was a long table, with the chairs barely reaching the tabletops. I grabbed my drink and sighed as the liquid swept down my throat.

Out of nowhere, the sound of gunshots surrounded the area. The guests at the bar ran for cover, leaving their drinks and belongings behind. Cups began to shatter on the wooden floor, and glass shards began to cut the skins of the guests. People were shouting for their lives. Outside, people's bodies began to drop to the floor with the continuous noise of the military rifles in the background. I could tell that many people began to die because bodies were starting to block the view from outside. Then, the gunshots suddenly stopped. I heard people yell, and the soldiers got out of their vehicles. They loaded their guns and checked if the bodies that they shot were indeed dead. *They were.*

After a while, a man with a soaked overcoat walked into the bar.

The guests were so frightened that they began throwing random utensils, sake bottles--- anything that you could find at a bar.

Taking in the hatred of the guests, the man sighed and snapped his fingers. With that, his underlings came in and wiped them all out. Blood filled the floor of the bar, and not a single soul was heard

breathing again. Except.

“Ugh...”

The bartender of the bar struggled to recover. His left hand was covering his wounded chest, and the other was searching for an object to defend himself.

The man in the overcoat and his troops ignored me for some reason and went straight for the shopkeeper.

The bartender’s breathing began to grow faster with each second as the man walked closer to him. The man grinned as he reached the owner of the bar.

“Thought that the war wouldn’t reach this place, am I safe to assume that?”

The bartender didn’t respond. He was trying to save his strength for another, disastrous thing.

The military personel sighed again, but this time, he closed his eyes.

“This bar was supposed to be neutral. Everyone was supposed to live in harmony here. The higher-ups even agreed with your terms, bartender,”

The man bent down until his face was aligned with the shopkeeper’s. “*Then what’s a family member of the Bercener family doing here?*”

The bartender’s eyes widened, as though he only knew then why people were avoiding me this entire time. Not because I was an introvert, but because of my family’s lineage.

“I... Didn’t know that...” The bartender struggled to speak those words.

“Do you take me for a fool?” The man grabbed the bartender by his pale, silver hair. “Where is he?” The man spoke in all seriousness.

That's when I began to make my move.

On my right was a body. Her eyes were still widened by the surprise of her death. To my left, there was nothing except for the door—the exit.

I hurriedly began my escape from El Camino's bar as the man snapped the bartender's neck.

The man dropped the body as if it were nothing, and turned towards the direction that I was heading towards.

The man grinned and then ran towards me almost at the speed of sound. That would be impossible for an average human.

Not an average human?

Then what was he?

Despite my knowledge of the war, I couldn't think of any way of how he could've obtained this ability, but it was too late to do anything now. The man in the overcoat had reached my location, and his grin grew wider.

“I take it that you're Yaz Bercerner?”

That was the first time that anyone talked to me at this bar in El Camino.

“What if I say yes?”

“Then you're coming with me. So, are you Yaz Bercerner?”

I hated my life. Because of my father, people had been ignoring me; I even couldn't go to college.

Even my family members had gone their separate ways to survive the war.

My father, though- he was prospering from the war and was governing his rebel organization.

Ever since my father left the Bercener lineage, another family has taken over this country of the Mayanso Republic, but I'd forgotten their name.



“Then I say yes,” I gave away my true identity, “but may I ask your name, man in the overcoat?”

The man changed his expression as he introduced himself.

“Spencer Gillian,” his overcoat somehow fluttered without the presence of the wind, “My name is Spencer Gillian, thanks for asking.”

# Ode to Koi & Pond

by Jens Hieber

Dive to the depths, dashing sleek,  
Angelic shimmer, with orange flash.  
Movements, scaled and wondrous meek,  
slice nautical furrows by your swish.  
Yet darkly thou art e'er confined,  
Bounded by that shining surface, dipping  
down to regions green and dimmer;  
by edges hard and base defined,  
Limiting thy play and darting,  
Offering us but partial view and glimmer.

Drooping vines hang lively from eaves  
framing the bouldered and mossy pools;  
Browning, decaying the surface of leaves;  
the sprinkling of outer wetness cools.  
The algae from within expands the depths  
As sprinkles leave their hasty stippling.  
For some, dullness suffused the erratic splatter,  
But your realm is undaunted by the drops.  
From below arises the controlled rippling,  
Home to shelter, undisturbed by scatter.

Conjoined, this pond my spirit lifts:  
Both immobile plant and cut as knife,  
Reflective sheen and dark Balthazar's gifts,  
Puddle and luck merge—sphere of life.  
The constant drop and splash of water fall  
is movement no less live than feeding shadowed;  
The plants, limbs extending, waving, drooping,  
As vital as the wall and violent squall:  
Immortal blend of breath and breathing hallowed  
Extends to dome & dust—alert in vibrant teeming.

# She Had Them Too

by Laviynia Menon

Flashes of colour,  
A ball like no other.

Blue, yellow, gold and green,  
their eyes are decorated, completely unseen.  
He walks past them, one after another,  
He can't even tell between his sister and his mother.

From the bridges of their noses,  
Their masks frame their eyes with roses.  
Dresses magnificent, smiles warm,  
He looks at his reflection and thinks he should be trying to conform.

He refuses whispers of a dance,  
Their eyes all lovely and pure, they're in a trance.  
For how brown and pretty are theirs,  
His should be no different, he declares.

Broken mirrors and shattered glass,  
His eyes are not the same, alas.

Then he spots her, empty eyes and all,  
A shy wave, he answers her call.  
A dress as magnificent as the rest,  
But her eyes— they're the best.

Hollow and empty, devoid of love,  
She fills the checkboxes, all of the above.  
Her smile is shallow, it doesn't reach her eyes,  
It looks eerily familiar, to his surprise

Youth is adrenaline, energy and more,  
They dance, her dress sweeping the floor.  
But when the song ends they part their ways,  
Both their lonely eyes ablaze.

He watches her disappear, his vision fades.  
He's so sick of masquerades.

# The Final Leg

by Corinne Fraley

Tailed by a white foamy alligator, the frightened boat skipped faster across the water. Desperately bouncing towards the shore with the watery jaws nipping close at the hull, the captain worried for his vessel. The old girl creaked and groaned while the pitiful engine sputtered pathetically. They'd make it to the shore— that he was certain of... But how much farther than that? Sighing, the captain held the wheel steady and pushed on.

Closer and closer... The storm snapped at the rudder. The shore snickered only a little ways off— yet still too far. Despite the countless times this chase between the boat and the sea had transpired, the man questioned whether this next thrashing wave marked the last moment of their journey.

“Come on, one last jump,” he whispered. The boat kicked and struggled a last leg, coughing up a large horrid plume of smoke. She choked miserably.

“Almost,” he pleaded, “Please, almost there old girl...”

The boat wheezed as she made land, heaving gratefully on the rain-bulleted shore. The engine made a final sickly hack and died away as the captain empathetically patted his lady. He hopped onto the war-torn sand and turned to gaze at the bruised and battered boat. The storm had ensnared its prey and ravaged the poor thing from stern to bow. It had attacked mercilessly and finally, even after years and years of fighting upon mountainous waves and against perilous snapping winds, it fully devoured the little boat. Years the captain spent with the boat stuck on by scratches, water patches, little encrusted barnacles and a tattered sea flag were all washed away. A cold, curdling wind slapped his face viciously. He squeezed deeply

into his coat. The storm recoiled venomously, glaring at his escape. His eyes shifted blearily back and forth from the solemn beach to his old friend. The boat stared helplessly at him.

“I’ll have to get a new one,” the stoic captain hummed. Curling overhead, dark clouds began dripping, warning of the beast’s renewed strength. The captain took a last look at the sky and then quietly strode off, leaving the carcasses for the storm to finish. He was a practical man.

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Thus ends *The Scrivener*.

Thanks for reading!