



The Scrivener

2021-2022
DALAT INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

FOREWORD

"I can't write," you said. Yes, you've all said it. I have too; I used to hate writing, no joke!

I'll let you in on a little secret: you were lying. (And no, the irony of me cluing you into a lie you're telling does not escape me.) You can write—in all probability, you can do so pretty well. After all, your teachers really are very clever; they dragged you down the corridor of learning kicking and screaming, and you have now begrudgingly reached competency.

Congratulations. As the Vogon guard said, "Resistance is useless!" Writing is a fundamental part of who you are, a tiny pillar holding up a deep, dark corner of your heart you never knew existed but which would send you into cardiopulmonary arrest were it to collapse. You are, at base, a scrivener.

Whether you believe me or are still running through the circuitous and quite frankly dubious track of my logic, let us accept as a given that you, in fact, can write. Therefore, the question is not whether you can write but whether you will write.

Will you?

I sincerely hope so, from the most writerly depths of my heart, but that is not why we are gathered here today. I have asked you here so that you, whether a writer or not, can be a reader. Here we, the editors of *The Scrivener*, have gathered fifteen works of literary merit, composed by students and teachers of this school, ones who took the plunge and discovered that they could, in fact, write, and do it well. Phenomenally well.

Please, reader: read. Read and enjoy, read and laugh, read and cry, read and share your reading with your friends, but above all—read. Then, once you have read to the point of overindulgence, write.

I can't wait to see your creations.

– Benjamin Hollon, on behalf of The Editors

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I WROTE THIS HAIKU
by Taylor Johnson

I wrote this haiku
It seemed easier than prose
I gamed the system

EVICTION NOTICE

by Joyce Wan

See the path that runs between
Acai palms, Brazilian nut trees,
Through the thousands of flora and fauna
Who've long lived here freely.
Then the toucans, the hornbills, the scarlet macaws—
They're the first to testify
Something's afoot as they soar,
Into the dusty grey sky.
Frogs follow their lead,
Jaguars fade into night,
Owls' wings rustle like they know what's to come,
Like they know something's not right.

And the road that runs between
Lies await for the rumbles of loggers,
For the glare of electric lights' shadows,
Without a howler monkey's cry
Or the sparkling magic of a firefly.

GAME OVER

by Benjamin Hollon

You died five minutes ago.

It must seem odd to see the sun shining in a bright blue sky over such a solemn occurrence. As if nature doesn't care, didn't notice that you left.

It didn't.

There you are, collapsed on the sidewalk. Right now, everyone is inside, trying to escape the heat, but they'll come running in a couple of minutes. They'll call an ambulance, but it's too late. You know that, right?

Heart failure, the doctors will tell them. Such a shame.

The shouting and screaming will commence shortly; for now, let's take a look around. Not at the things, the props strewn 'round the world you called home; they don't matter. Let's look at the people.

You didn't know your neighbors very well, but you caught occasional glimpses of their lives. Old Mrs. Werner across the street knits a blanket for every child she meets. Mr. Smith works long hours every day in the city—even on weekends. He wants to retire and live his last few years in comfort. Little Tommy is always running around, playing games, and breaking things as comprehensively as an elephant smashes a china vase with its foot—his parents don't know what to do with him.

I wonder which one of them got it right. Is it best to live your life for others, for yourself, or to have fun? I wouldn't know, I'm just the tour guide of Death.

Moving on. Let's look at your life. You always expected it to "flash before your eyes" as you lived your final moments, but you only get to see it all now that you're dead.

I have an appointment to keep, so you get the summary. It's nothing personal; I'm simply very busy. There are so many people in line to be disillusioned about their lives, and only one of me to do the job.

I see that you enjoyed playing video games, so perhaps I should show you your Total Score:

Time

Total life: 1,230,746,400 seconds

Time spent awake: 83,444,605,920 seconds (67.8%)

Time wasted while awake: 34,823,890,021 seconds (41.7%)

What, you don't like that? You think that you spent most of your life productively? That's a laugh.

Do you know what counts as "wasted"? Any time you're not building up the people around you or improving your own ability to help them. You're dead; the only things you left in this world are the effects you had on other people and a pile of meat on the hot-enough-to-fry-an-egg sidewalk. Your money doesn't matter. Your secret obsession with antique stamps doesn't matter. Your job will only go to someone else (and let's face it, whoever replaces you will probably do a better job).

Actions

Selfless deeds: 129,929 (9 per day)

Selfish deeds: 332,044 (23 per day)

Lives saved directly: 0
Lives saved indirectly: 2
Deaths caused directly: 0
Deaths caused indirectly: 3

I can tell that you're most hung up on that last bit. Who died because of you? Can that really be right?

Take it from me, people died because of your decisions. More accurately, they died because of decisions you *didn't* make, responsibilities you neglected. There's an overlap between your selfish deeds and the deaths you've caused.

At least you didn't kill anyone directly? At least you've saved some lives, too, if indirectly? Well, you'll have to tell me if that makes a difference; life isn't exactly under my jurisdiction. The way I see it, there's no extra credit for things you don't do.

Would you like to see more, or is that enough? I'm on a tight schedule, so if you're quite finished—

Hey now, don't cry. You've got nothing to be ashamed of; it's not like most people have done much better than you. Anyway, you can't change it now; you're dead.

I tell you what, why don't you help me with my next job? It's someone you know—your neighbor, Mr. Smith, just died. Why don't you try your hand at introducing him to Death?

—

You're not looking, but I'm still watching you from over here as you comfort Mr. Smith. You're telling him that it's okay, showing him the good he's done while skimming over the bad. Pointing out that everyone's got faults, and the best they can do is to focus on the good and try to do better.

Not bad, kid, not bad.

If you were still alive, I'd have to tick your "selfless deeds" stat up a notch.

CITY LIGHTS AS MYTH

by Yong-Yu Huang

The rain stilling in our mouths & we are quiet,
passing through these flooded streets.

In June, a city catatonic in its sickness,
wreaths of streetlights stretching its mouth

in shades of disaster. I watch an entire reel
of gaslight unfold. With a torch,

everything is permissible, permeable.
Overhead, the moon blurring like sycamores

on a night train. I burn skin-suits,
sheens of motor-oil in the basement.

Like how you traded for a net of every name lost
in the throat of a storm — a miscarriage of salt.

Tracks stretching all the way to the shore,
turning bird-bodied. A swarm of swallows to sacrifice.

Come dawn, I flatten my face against
every storefront window — altar god, candles drowning

in gold. My hands never fast enough
to catch a hymn or the engine's whistle.

Here, I search for everything we burned to keep
the power on, pockets of mercury.

Previously published in *Strange Horizons*.

FOR HIS THOUGHTS ARE HIGHER

by Marissa Yost

Kate was excited about her short story. She had most of the ideas planned out, and now she was just going to write and let the rest of the details shape themselves.

Unexpected Gifts

The moment the school bell rang, nine-year-old Toby raced out the doors and flew to the bike section of the parking lot. He stood beside his bike, waiting for his sister. They were going to go to the store so he could show her a cool toy he had seen.

She paused. *Well, that's a little boring,* Kate thought. *I have to show how excited he is to see it!* She scribbled out the last two sentences and continued, her pencil racing across the paper.

He hopped up and down as he waited for his older sister, Marie, to join him. He couldn't wait to see the plastic green dinosaur toy he had noticed last week when he went to the store with his mom. He didn't have any money, but he just wanted to stare in awe at the fearsome claws, jagged teeth, and blazing red eyes of the beast. Finally, Marie emerged, and together they set off on their bikes.

The white pavement sidewalk shone brightly as they went, and in their hurry, Toby bumped his bike over something sticking up in the tiny crack between two slabs of stone. He didn't fall, but his acceleration had been messed up, so he quickly stopped pedaling and turned to look at what had tripped him. A flash caught his eye. He wheeled his bike back to the crack in the sidewalk, kneeled down, and picked up a quarter. Behind him, he heard Marie stop her bike. Squinting down, he saw that another coin and a dollar bill were buried deep in the space. He carefully pulled them out. Wow! he thought, A whole dollar and fifty cents!

He stood up and looked around, wondering who had dropped the money. A few people strode by on the road, but no one paid him any attention.

"What is it?" Marie called from ahead.

"I found some money!" Toby shouted back. "Who's do you think it is?"

Marie shrugged.

"Should we leave it here?" Toby asked, not wanting to steal.

His sister considered this for a moment. "No, it's not that much money, and I don't think a person would care too much if you had it," she finally said. "You're not stealing it, don't worry," she added upon seeing his concerned face.

"So I can keep it?" Toby asked excitedly, thinking again of the dinosaur. Marie nodded, smiling, and they set off again. On the way, Toby furiously tried to remember the price of the dino and was pretty sure he could buy the green plastic toy with the money he had.

Once they reached the store, Toby told Marie about the toy he wanted to get, and together they looked for it. On the way to the figurines section, they passed the musical instruments aisle. A tiny silver...

"Wait," Kate muttered to herself, "That won't work. Marie can't be there...." She quickly crossed off the last paragraph and started writing again.

Toby couldn't remember where the dinosaur was, so he and Marie split up to look. He searched through the left-hand aisles. As he was about to enter the figurines section, he felt a tug at his heart.

No, that's too obvious, Kate thought, erasing the last sentence.

As he entered the figurine section, he heard a bell ping. Looking around, he saw that he was right next to the musical instruments aisle. A little girl had tapped a tiny silver bell. Getting closer, he saw that the bell had beautiful designs etched all around the edges. He suddenly thought of his sister, how she loved to hum and how his mom always told Marie she

thought she was the prettiest girl ever.

“Marie would really like this beautiful bell,” Toby murmured to himself. “Plus, she was really kind to let me have all the money for my dinosaur.”

He suddenly remembered the dinosaur, and glancing at the price tag, saw that the bell was exactly a dollar fifty. That took all the money he had found!

Toby stood there for a while, considering what to do. Finally, with the bell in hand, he dashed off to the counter. Having made his decision, Toby felt like a hero or a spy on a mission. He had to buy the bell before his sister could find him and insist on purchasing the dinosaur!

He reached the purchasing counter and glanced furtively around. She wasn't in sight! He quickly bought the bell and shoved it into his pocket. He searched for Marie, happily anticipating the look on her face when she saw what he had bought her. He barely felt sad at all that he wouldn't have that green dinosaur.

He finally saw her and waved her over to him.

“Did you find it?” She asked, looking disappointed as she saw his empty hands.

“No... but look what I got instead!” He replied, pulling out the bell grandly. “It's for you!”

“Oh!” Marie exclaimed. Toby grinned at the delight and surprise on her face. He carefully handed her the delicate bell. She tapped it, and it gave a soft, clear melodic ring. Marie hugged him.

“Thanks, Toby! That was so kind of you!” He just beamed, happy to see her smiling.

Once home, the two kids burst through the door, excitedly chattering to their parents and telling them about their day. As they told them the story, Toby noticed his mom had a peculiar smile on her face.

“What are you smiling about?” Toby asked her.

She laughed and hugged them both. “Oh, I am just happy to see the generosity of both of my children,” she replied. She paused, then, with her brow furrowed, said to Toby, “you told me how you paused and tried to figure out if you should buy the bell or the dinosaur. What made you decide on the bell?”

“Well,” Toby replied, “I...”

Kate stopped writing. Why did he end up buying it? she wondered. He was so excited about his dino, and he was so young... Why did he pause to even consider it? After pondering for a while, she knew what to write.

“Well,” Toby replied, “In Bible class today, we read a verse: ‘for as high as the heavens are, so are my thoughts above your thoughts, says the Lord’ or something like that,” he said, waving his hands. He continued. “And when I heard and saw the beautiful bell, I thought of Marie, and so then maybe I figured God wanted me to buy it for her.” He then looked down in embarrassment. “I was sad at first, but then maybe God helped make my heart happy? Because after I bought it, I was excited to give it to Marie!”

His sister hugged him. “Thanks again, Toby! I really like it,” she said.

Their mom nodded, still with a funny expression on her face. “Well, Toby, I am very proud that you listened to God,” she said, getting up and fishing around in her purse. “You might be tempted to consider this a coincidence, but I went shopping today...” She pulled out a green dinosaur toy and handed it to an awestruck Toby. “For His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways higher than our ways.”

The End

Kate put her pencil down, grinning. The story had turned out better than she had expected! Thank you, Lord! She thought, and felt a silent answer stir her heart.

CATS

by Lee Anne Lim

In she slinks
Into the kitchen
Sniffing here and there
Maybe some leftovers
Are under the table?

In the other slinks
Following in her steps
Sniffing there and again
Maybe she missed something
Some food next to the chair?

Onto the table
Another one jumps
Looks around curiously
Smells a nice fragrance
Food under the cover?

In, a kitten barrels
Noisy little thing
Meowing all the while
“I’m hungry, I’m hungry
Mother, have you milk?”

In, its two siblings
One silent as a ghost
Though not quite as pale
Another black and white
Maybe it’ll meow too?

THE QUEEN'S SILENT HANDS

by Sara Vossler

I kissed my queen's delicate hand. "Your majesty, forgive me for standing before you in this disheveled state. But it would not do to wait for a bath before coming to you.

"Five months ago, you sent me to regain what is yours. Many knights heard the call, but I alone possessed the courage to do my duty."

I straightened, my left hand clutching the small purse hanging around my neck. The precious object lay inside, bound by a scrap of the finest silk. It stirred beside my heart.

My queen took a deep breath and bowed her head gently.

"Not even that witch's mellifluous words could convince me to abandon my quest. And I have succeeded in retrieving what was stolen from you--nay, from our whole kingdom. At last, we shall hear your voice again. Once more, your words will echo through the halls of the palace, and the once-silent castle shall be filled with your song. You shall be whole again, Your Majesty."

She bit her lip and turned to the advisor at her side.

He cleared his throat and coughed, bringing a gloved hand to his mouth. "There's... been a mistake, sir."

I shook my head. "There can't have been a mistake. I know what I possess, Your Majesty." I untied the purse and held it out with a callused hand. "I have searched across our kingdom to bring this back. I have seen it myself--heard it, too. I gave it to a fair maiden--only the most beautiful in that village, of course--to test it, and at once I heard your words come out through her mouth! How I wept at the sound of your voice! And when I took it back, I placed it even closer to my own heart. There has been no mistake, Your Majesty. I have returned your voice, which was so greedily stolen!"

The queen sighed and made some gesture at her advisor, who gestured back before saying, "You don't understand. So much has happened since your departure five months ago."

I shook my head. "I must admit, this is hardly the welcome I was expecting after five months of such a quest. Forgive me for speaking so plainly Your Majesty, but I thought you would take this off my hands the moment I walked through these oaken doors."

The advisor opened his mouth, but the queen put one hand on his arm. At the advisor's nod, she began to move her hands. As he spoke, he left his eyes on her hands. "When the witch stole Her Majesty's voice--which was the pride of our castle--nay, our entire kingdom, we mourned with the queen. But Her Majesty cannot allow silence to keep her from her duty, and writing everything became far too cumbersome. We needed a new way to communicate."

"I don't understand."

The queen held her hands still and nodded to the advisor, who continued on his own. "Few here knew that my son was born unable to hear. It was difficult at first, but my wife and I developed a way to communicate with him...using our hands."

I looked down at my callused hands. "How is that even possible?"

"Each gesture is a different word or phrase. After you left, I taught Her Majesty the language we had created. Of course, I taught it to everyone else at court and translate for her when visitors arrive. Now we all honor our queen by using the hand-speak. Everyone."

I gestured to the guards around the room. "Everyone?"

The queen nodded.

"But Your Majesty, you no longer have need for hand-speak! I have retrieved your voice!" I approached her throne and pressed the small bag into her ivory hands. "You can

Speak for yourself now.”

But she gave it back as the advisor put a hand on my arm. “You speak as though Her Majesty is no longer whole,” the advisor said, “as though a piece of her very soul was stolen along with the voice you hold in your hands. And perhaps for a time that is how we felt. But the connection we have with the queen is far too powerful to be broken by a mere curse, and the silence cannot drown out our love for her.”

The queen began her gestures again. “She says she no longer has a need for her voice,” the advisor translated. “Her hands are her voice now.”

“No longer need for a voice? But Your Majesty, not even for music? Your singing was legendary throughout the kingdom. Surely you wish to bless us with song again!”

“She says she needs no voice to bless us with song,” the advisor concluded. “She is learning the piano.”

THE STORM

by Josh Conklin

Garrett Stone raised the weathered spyglass to his eye and peered out at the grey, unsettled North Sea. His target was a beleaguered Spanish galleon by the name of the *Trinidad*. For days the *HMS Godspeed* had pursued the man o' war after the decisive Battle of Gravelines. Having been routed with the rest of Armada, the *Trinidad* retreated north, with the majority of the British navy following them to make sure they never returned. This particular ship had gotten separated from the main retreat in a brief firefight some days ago. Stone had insisted on the Admiral permitting the *Godspeed* to hunt it down before meeting with the rest of its sister ships. The Admiral, a utilitarian, strategically-minded commander like himself, agreed.

Ahead of him, the captain saw a warship of Spanish make and model, a magnificent vessel by all standards. On each of its three masts, unfurled sails billowed in the south-westerly wind. Rigging hung like spider webs throughout the ship in an intricate, haphazard-looking fashion. The stern of the boat was ornamented with elaborate designs and glass windows where the captain's quarters were. Its hull, built with a deep keel for the open sea, cut through the waters. This vessel had proved surprisingly elusive for one of such size, but it was by Captain Stone's own choice he had not openly attacked. He wisely kept his distance, only harrying it with the *Godspeed's* superior manoeuvrability and speed. Though the Spanish galleon packed more firepower than the *Godspeed*, its powder supply could not last forever in a chase where every ounce of acceleration mattered.

Just then, an interesting thought occurred to the British seaman: Why had the galleon not faced him openly early on when their probability of winning was higher? Perhaps they had learned their lesson. "Rightly so," he mused, and dismissed the idea for later cognition.

Looking closer through the lens this time, he saw Spanish sailors scurrying about on the upper decks and rigging, readjusting ropes and knots for the unmistakable change in wind direction. An experienced captain himself, Stone could feel it, as could his men.

A storm was coming.

Stone lowered his eyeglass and turned to his right to note the increasingly turbulent grey ocean. Not far out to Starboard, the storm in question brewed ominously; the blue-grey waters beneath darkened even further by its shadow. He had noted the clouds on the horizon a few hours ago. Every knowledgeable English seaman knew the oceans to be capricious this time of year--sunny skies one day and mast-splitting gales the next.

No storm will keep us from our prize today, Stone thought, gazing at the foreboding clouds that were now much closer. *It is only a minor setback*. With that, he pocketed the instrument and faced the crew, already at work.

"Look sharp men: a storm approaches off to Starboard," the British captain bellowed to the crew. "We make our move on the Spanish ship now while the wind favours us," For Britain and the Queen! Step lively!"

With that, the crew plunged into the hurried but controlled rush to prepare for the battle and chase to come. Stone looked once more at the *Trinidad* still sailing doggedly on and allowed himself a thin smile of satisfaction. *I have you now, Spanish scum*.

—

The British boat, its triple masts standing tall, sails billowing in the wind, loomed menacingly not far off. The seafoam lapped and splashed around its shallow hull and keel, parting as the vessel cut through the water. Captain Juan-Carlos Pérez of the *Trinidad*

furrowed his brow as he lowered the spyglass. The ship had pursued them since they got separated in the last scuffle at Gravelines. Pérez had hoped to meet up with the Duke and the rest of the Armada, but the wind had been unfavourable, and he could not risk another encounter. Pérez turned to his men; they were exhausted, with many suffering from illness and lack of food. The loss of the offensive in the English channel had left them broken and disheartened; the pride of Spain, the Armada, had been crushed.

Furthermore, they were low on gunpowder and did not dare use the precious element unless necessary. The Spanish captain lifted his spyglass again to the English ship. It seemed that the captain was toying with them, using their superior speed to harry the more massive ship. Twice, they had pulled alongside the stern and blasted a few shots, leading to pointless misses on his crew's part. What pride Pérez still retained contorted and fumed at these acts.

Just then, he saw the enemy sailors break into the controlled chaos of battle preparation. The English boat unfurled the sails to full and made a clear headway, right towards them.

Captain Pérez shut the spyglass, and with a serious expression, he turned to his first mate, Rodrigo, his voice low,

"The English ship has picked up speed and is heading straight for us. It seems they mean to do battle. I want to know how many cannons we have at the ready."

"Only twenty, captain, and we have limited powder supply," replied Rodrigo.

"Only twenty?" Pérez asked, incredulous.

"We were forced to jettison the rest. Without doing so, we would have been long dead."

The captain walked to the other side of the boat, deep in thought. He looked up, seeing the black clouds of the approaching storm low on the horizon.

"We can't win a fight with that little firepower. The British will tear us to pieces. We certainly can't outrun them any longer before throwing our rations or men overboard," he muttered quietly.

"Then we are lost," the mate said, disheartened. "We might as well surrender..."

"No!" the captain replied with surprising boldness, turning towards his mate with a determined expression. "Do not say such things. I will never surrender this ship, my ship, to English dogs. Never! Not while God gives me breath! There must be another way."

Pérez turned and watched the storm, now quite close. The clouds hung low and menacing, and thunder occasionally rumbled, daring anyone to come close. As he leaned on the side rails, the wind tousled his hair and hat from behind, sucking air to the swell.

Rodrigo joined his commander at the rail. "Even the British seas torment us. The weather has antagonised us ever since we left Spain," he said, gazing at the storm.

Just then, an idea came to Pérez's head; a daring and dangerous plan, but the best they had.

"Tell the men to set a course into the storm," he said with new confidence.

"What do you mean, Captain?" asked Rodrigo, confused.

"You heard me. Tell the men to set a course straight into the storm. It's our only hope. We can lose them there." Pérez left the railing, striding purposefully to the main deck. "No captain save one desperate or on the brink of insanity would dare follow us. And we, my friend, are desperate."

"But Captain," Rodrigo said fervently, "The likelihood of us surviving a storm like that is nigh impossible! And where would we go assuming we *do* survive?"

"We make for Scandinavia," the captain replied calmly. "Perhaps our Lady will take pity on our plight and deliver us to safety. If not, I would rather go down with my ship at sea than rot in an English prison." These last words he spat out vehemently.

Rodrigo stood silent for a moment, taking a glance at the enemy ship before nodding

grimly. "You are right; we have no other choice. I will tell the men."

—

"All is good, Captain Stone; we are making headway and should catch up to the galleon in a few minutes," reported John White, the first mate of the *Godspeed*.

"Indeed, proceed," the grizzled skipper replied, looking again through his glass. The lens faced the *Trinidad*, its sails billowing, trying to gain as much speed as possible.

"What is our plan of attack, sir?" White asked.

The captain did not change his position and answered without hesitation, "Our speed is superior to the Spanish galleon. I guess they have little powder or cannon to fight us with and have not faced us for that reason. While we approach, we will ready our guns and aim for the rudder and lower deck. They will be sitting ducks then. Assuming they do not raise the white flag, we board them and take the officers prisoner."

"Then we meet up with the fleet."

"Yes..." Stone started but suddenly became more interested in what he saw.

"What is it, Captain?" White asked as he moved to his commander's side, squinting out.

"It seems our adversary is changing course."

"Their heading?"

"I cannot tell at this moment...*wait!*—They are heading hard to Starboard!" The captain quickly lowered his spyglass, his eyes wide.

"Straight into the storm."

Irritation and rage replaced Stone's generally placid and calculating face. He swore with venom.

"They must be trying to lose us in it! By God, they *are* desperate!" White concurred, glancing between the storm closing in and the fleeing Spanish ship.

Stone briskly turned to face the crew, "No Spanish cowards will flee on my watch!" The captain swore again. "All hands on deck!"

The crew looked up to see their captain in a rare state.

"The Spanish ship makes for the storm in a cowardly attempt to flee our might! They will not escape today. We shall follow them to their end. Full speed ahead!"

The men hesitated. They murmured amongst each other and wore faces of confusion and fear. Some glanced at the squall itself, inching ever closer. The older, braver ones asked, "Captain, you mean to sail straight into that mother of storms? Only God himself could save us once inside that. We should let them sail to their peril. They'll inevitably capsize due to their lack of experience in this region." The crew agreed with the man, nodding their heads and murmuring approval.

"So you would rather let the enemy potentially escape? You would rather be spineless cowards?!" Stone's face grew red with rage, a stark contrast to his blue navy uniform. "Would you rather let these accursed lowlives who attacked us, burned our houses, killed our countrymen, and sunk our ships go unpunished? I say to you: I will personally throw overboard any of you who thinks such cowardly and weak-minded thoughts! These Spanish scum have offered us a challenge, and I plan on accepting it. We will fight! Now—" He paused. "—Any objections?"

No one dared speak. Even White was speechless at his commander's outburst.

"Good," Stone said, back to his eerie calm. "Then get back to work, you lubbers! We've wasted enough time as is! Step lively!"

At once, the men snapped to work, unknotting and retying ropes to angle the sails

correctly. Stone returned to his commanding position, gazing with determined eyes in the direction of the storm as the Spanish ship sailed straight for it.

The rain began as a drizzle, and eventually grew to such a torrent that it rendered all navigation instruments useless. Pérez and his men were soaked to the bone, weary, but still pushed on through the storm. As he stood beside the helmsman on the quarterdeck, Pérez could see the prow of the ship, rising and falling with each crest of the waves. Thunder rumbled somewhere in the grey mass of cloud and rain as the ocean stirred into a liquid frenzy. Occasionally, a swell would douse the crew closest to the rail in cold water, though not making them any wetter. The only respite laid in their inability to see the British boat thus far. Pérez saw no end to the tormented waters and knew his men's hope dwindled the longer they stayed within the storm.. They had only agreed to his bold request conscious it was their only option, save surrender, the one thing Pérez stubbornly refused to acknowledge.

Pérez wiped the rain from his face, and long hair, having discarded his hat long ago, and scanned the horizon through the sheering torrent. The cries of men added to the chaotic tumult.

God may have mercy on us yet, he thought with hope, seeing no pursuit. Just as he turned to order the men, a flash of lightning caught his eye. Pérez whipped around and peered into the abyss. With another flash of light, he froze: not two hundred metres away, was the *Godspeed* itself.

The *Trinidad* lay not too far ahead. It had been challenging to keep track of them at times, but their lanterns and the occasional lightning flashes helped straighten their heading. The crew prepped the guns and rigging, and the *Godspeed* braved the squall soon after the Spanish entered. Stone's superior knowledge of the region aided him and his pilot significantly in their chase. For some time, he thought he had lost the enemy galleon, but eventually he found it again. This time, he would have them. Stone turned and bellowed over the wind and waves to the crew, his uniform and hat drenched but still exuding an unmistakable air of authority.

"Attention, men! The enemy is within our sights! Hard to port! Ready the guns! We attack when we are broadside to broadside!"

Captain Pérez called above the chaos for his men to get to battle positions. "We have little time before they are on top of us! Run out the cannons! Give them everything we've got!"

Around them, the storm continued to blow and howl, but that was the least of their worries for now. The British boat would soon be upon them.

The minutes stretched into aeons, all that was heard was the storm, intensifying by the moment. The swell got higher; the rain lashed harder; the dark sky trembled with thunder and light; both captains stood tense and soaked, gripping the slick rails.

The Godspeed caught a strong wind and skimmed alongside the *Trinidad*. For a moment, Stone locked eyes with the captain of the hated enemy who had defiled his home and country.

"Fire!" he bellowed. The Spaniard echoed the words.

Immediately the sound of cannon fire rang in the humid air. The resulting din of battle added to the cacophony of the storm. Men fell, fire exploded, and ships shuddered and creaked. Shouts of triumph, war, and death echoed on both sides. Around them, the ocean swirled and battered the vessels, spraying the cold water of the sea into the faces of the combatants.

After an eternity of smoke, blood and rain, a stray shot from the *Trinidad* hit the *Godspeed's* rudder. The British vessel, with no way to maintain a straight course amidst the tossing and turning of the storm, lurched to the right, smashing into the Spanish galleon. Wood splintered, creaked, and snapped with deafening cracks upon impact. The uppermost riggings tangled, locking the two ships together as one. The shudder from the impact sent many reeling and toppling, killing some and throwing others overboard.

Upon reorienting himself, Pérez saw the plight and realised that now there would be no escape for him or his crew; they were meant to fall here in the storm. If this be how he died, it would be an honourable end.

"Spaniards!" he cried to his remaining crew, "Arm yourselves and fight on! This is our last stand! For Spain, for God, and for glory!" He drew his blade as the men grabbed tools and weapons to charge.

—

Stone picked himself up off the deck, noticing that the two ships were now one : conjoined by the forces of nature and fate. Moreover, they had lost all capacity to steer. Trapped here in the storm with the enemy, numerous possibilities ran through his mind, but saw no way, even by miracle, that they, that he, would escape: this was the end and he would go down fighting at sea, captain of his ship.

"To arms, men!" Stone hollered to his crew, drawing a sabre. "To battle! For God and for the Queen!"

—

Amid the swirling storm, aboard the wreckage of the two proud ships, they fought. Blade met blade, as the men gave everything, the fear of death fading away. The blood of the fallen created a slippery concoction with the rain that further slicken the floorboards. In the midst of it all, a stray bolt of lightning struck the mast of the *Trinidad*, resounding in an ear-splitting crack. Timber fell to relieve several fortunates to timely deaths. The waves picked up around them, tossing even the surest of footings into the sea. Then, the biggest swell ever came towering towards them; its shadow struck new fear into the hearts of every man aboard.

"Good Lord," Captain Stone whispered, his eyes wide.

"Christ deliver us," breathed Pérez in his native tongue.

FORMATIVE DAYS

by Savanna Choi

One once questioned dearly
the morning radio which

Spat and spurt all the
fragrance over the rotting
truth of fragility,

Found the joy of menace
in the heart of the ordinary
mediocrity,

Why aren't they singing about love?

Perhaps the comfort of the void
that flees the echo, flightless too
at last brought in the time it took
to plant the ruin in truthful voice;

Perhaps it was among ourselves
that signed the forward-moving bless
to flee us from our truthful selves
and settle for the gray and less;

Perhaps should run back in our time
to stop the question just before
it echoes through the timeless times;

LIFE OF A VIRUS

by Michael Hsu and Anna Phuah

Pt. 0: *The Last Laugh*

I'm so hungry,
I am within a metal monster's jaws,
Trapped inside for days with nothing,
My hearing worsens as I grow weary,
A human's meal,
With little strength, my anger grows,
Hot and red it brings me the last warmth,
Eat me, I implore,
Fry me, boil me, roast me,
Inside me, a creature lies,
Invisible, they will fly,
Many, they will multiply,
In many ways,
I have stayed alive.

Pt. 1: *Bless you*

I opened my eyes
two, three hours ago
Then I find myself in the air
propelled at 200 kph
with thousands of my brothers,
my sisters, my cousins.
The air!
It races against my tiny,
aerodynamic body,
I am the wind!
Silent, on a mission.
Just a dry, quiet cough,
that started everything.

Pt. 2: *Infection*

A quiet slip into the lungs,
The warfare that is to come,
An infiltration of the best,
More and more we reproduce,
We begin to poke and prod,
Then scratch and tear,
Till your gaping lungs are laid bare,
Up we reach, down we go,
Our city spreads,
We wait for the final blow,
As we send more out to share our growth,

Pt. 3: *All the Best*

Every dry, wheezing cough
reaffirms our existence,
our work, our purpose.
Send them off,
our sons, our daughters,
our grandsons, our granddaughters.
Ensure the next generation,
this we chant,
As we approach
critical mass.

THE CLOUDS I SEE

by Jens Hieber

What is it about the clouds I see—
the bulbous swirl and building towers,
the tawny glow as setting sun alights—
That strikes me so with awestruck wonder?

What is it about the sea I watch —
the rippling wash and rumbling rows,
the aqua gray of sparkling lights—
That catches me in breathless pause?

What is it about the stars I glimpse—
the distant shine and swarming horde,
the darkness midst the points above—
That muzzles me through sheer expanse?

What is it about the watch I threw—
the ticking counter of each moment gone,
the now unshackled from then and yet—
That holds me not in timeless thrall?

The clouds and sea and stars absorb—
what guardians of unbound time,
that infinite of matchless grace—
The growing moments into each and all.

THE MINSTREL'S DAUGHTER

by Keiryn I. Sandahl

Two figures, their backs to the sun, wandered a dusty track deep in the Midlands; a bent-backed man with a fleshy, pockmarked face. He walked like his joints swung too loosely, and he wore a strange costume, a suit of red and orange patches stitched together, faded and stained, and a peaked red cap with a tassel. He had a harp strapped to his back and a pipe at his waist. A little girl walked hand-in-hand with him. She was scrawny, spritely, with dark eyes and hair.

"Papa, how much further to town?"

"Very soon now," murmured Taggus absent-mindedly. He could see the thatched roofs of Gholl, which meant they would reach the town within the hour. But he could see something else -- a dead rabbit on the path ahead of them, left to rot, and the marks of misshapen feet disappearing into the grass. *Goblins*. He squatted down next to the carcass, noting which way the prints ran away, and beckoned to the child.

"Can you tell me what happened here?"

The girl's eyes widened, and her lips moved soundlessly as she considered the spectacle. "Goblins killed it."

"How do you know?"

"Wild animals eat their kill," she said haltingly. "And those are goblin's feet." She pointed to the odd prints, no two feet alike.

Taggus grunted approval. "And why did the goblins leave it here?"

She hesitated, glancing at him sideways and squirming. He waited. "Perhaps they killed it for fun..." but she trailed off as he shook his head. "Oh! A warning?"

He smiled, his face collapsing into innumerable wrinkles, and he reached out to tousle her hair. "Precisely, my dear. The goblins must have a hole about here somewhere -- the rabbit is meant to frighten travellers away."

"But we aren't frightened."

"Not a bit." His eyes twinkled. "Can you tell me how many goblins savaged the rabbit?"

That stumped her. She counted on her fingers, paused, stamped her foot, and counted again, but finally she gave up with a frustrated sigh. "The feet run all over each other."

"It takes practice to read such a clamor. Never mind, you did well enough. I was simply curious. See," and he pointed out the tracks as he spoke, "I would guess three or four goblins trod here."

"Will we go after them?"

"Not to-night. Never hunt a goblin after dark."

She crossed her arms and planted her feet, but he laughed and scooped her up, effortlessly setting her on his shoulders. She screeched with delight and took his ears in her hands like the reins of a horse, resting her chin on his head.

Like most villages in the Midlands, Gholl was a collection of wattle-and-daub hovels huddled around a communal well. The drought had reduced gardens to messes of dry vines and tilted fences. A few dull-eyed goats lay wherever they could find a shadow to shelter them from the sun. Flies buzzed over them, and once in a while one of them would snatch a mouthful of brittle grass to chew, perhaps to pass the time. Chickens ran free to find what sustenance they might during the day, and in the evenings the villagers' children caught them and returned them to their pens. To the south, a small brook had once provided a place for clothes washing and bathing, but only a trickle remained. The tilled land behind the village spoke of the cruelty of the summer; dead wheat and weeds alike black and rotting on

patches of pebbly soil. The wind blew dust. Most of the villagers were resting indoors, saving their strength so they could forage in the evenings.

Taggus unhooked his pipe from his belt. With his daughter still riding on his shoulders, he played "Here We Are to Gather", an Olandish folk song, hopping and stepping in time as though his walking were a dance, perfectly balanced on his feet, the little girl never shaken from her perch. Children shouted from inside the cottages, and all around the village, doors burst open. Villagers thrust their heads from their windows to get a good look at the commotion, and the minstrel's daughter waved at them. Taggus lowered his pipe and bowed while the girl slid off his neck. Children now surrounded him, nearly all of them emaciated, their clothes tattered and their bodies streak with dirt.

"Another, another," they demanded of him in chorus. He shook his head with a smile and waded through them. Some of the smaller ones grasped at his funny garments, but he gently pushed their hands aside. A ring of grown villagers waited at the edge of the children, almost as eager. Taggus approached them and bowed again, the tassel at the end of his cap flopping comically.

"Well met, minstrel-man," said one of the men, a hunter called Thent. "You stayed away too long."

"And I lament it as much as you. If I could, I would be everywhere at once, but there are too many places like Gholl. However, I do plan to winter here."

Taggus shook hands with the hunter and with several of the others. "If the children will take care of my daughter, I have much to discuss with the elders."

"Is he your pa?" asked a tow-headed girl of the newcomer, once the villagers had disappeared with Taggus. "Do you go everywhere with him?"

"Of course," the stranger replied. She sat enthroned on a fat stone with her hands in her lap while the others gaped at her.

An older girl asked, "What's your name?"

"I'm called Seraphis. What's yours?"

"Ganda," said the other, tipping her chin a bit. "It's Ma's name."

"Papa says my name means 'belonging to the fairies'."

"Oooh," said the tow-headed girl wistfully, but a couple of the boys snorted. "Are you a fairy?"

"No," said Seraphis, laughing. "That's silly. I'm a person."

"But your pa's a fairy," persisted the tow-headed girl.

"He isn't."

"He's funny, not like a person."

"You're funny," said one of the boys, "try listening to 'er. Anyway, fairies don't visit the likes of us."

"Will your pa bring the rain back?" queried a girl about Seraphis's age.

"Papa can't do that. But he will make everything better. He's done it before."

Ganda took the stranger's hand. "If your pa makes anything better with only a pipe and a harp, he must be a fairy." She helped Seraphis to her feet, and among all the others, they scampered out into the wilderness surrounding Gholl, where they rooted about in the grass for "scrub" -- anything edible they could find.

That night, Taggus played another melody for the children, out by the well and under the stars. The villagers built a fire and Ganda's mother sacrificed one of her chickens to make the meal festive, even if the bird was so scrawny no one got more than a taste. Seraphis sat on Ganda's lap in the midst of her new friends, clapping to the music like any of the rest. After the villagers dispersed, Thent took the strangers to his cottage and bedded them on straw pallets.

"Papa," said Seraphis sleepily, "when will you kill the goblins?"

"Tomorrow. I discovered they've attacked Gholl several times, making off with livestock, smashing windows, ripping up gardens. And they carried a little boy down the road and dumped him in a ditch, and it took two days to find him. If we don't kill them all we'll at least send them fleeing back to the Faemonts."

"Can I help?"

He turned over on his pallet to look her in the eye. He smiled tenderly at her. "One day, I hope you will help. But not yet. You are still so very small, my precious daughter."

She watched her father and the men of the village set off to destroy the goblins' nest. The children of Gholl played with her all day, but all she talked about was her father and the goblins. At last, at twilight, she saw him coming up the rode with twenty men behind him, piping and dancing a jig, she ran out to meet him. He put away his pipe and met her with both arms, twirling her around.

"We sent them running," he told her, and then he broke into song.

*Gone, the rascals, gone away
Set a fire to the nest
Chop up the rest
Gone, gone, gone away*

"Did you really chop them up? All into pieces?"

"No, of course not. We smoked them out and clocked them neatly on their lumpy heads." He embraced her, nearly crushing her. "Little by little, o my little girl, we will rid these lands of the scourge."

Though she didn't like feeling little, and though she would have liked to clock goblin heads also, Seraphis thought the wide world could offer nothing better than a place in her father's arms, with the first star of the night winking at her.

Taggus stayed in Gholl until spring. At his advice, the villagers dug a second well, and the children watered the gardens daily with water from the ground. Taggus took Seraphis with him three days upstream, where together they discovered rubble blocking the water's flow and mended it. Seraphis learned which roots could be eaten and which could not. She learned six different ways to catch a rabbit. During the winter, when even Taggus's cleverest hunting failed to feed the whole village, she learned what hunger meant.

But when spring came, and with it rain and budding crops, Taggus packed his things. He left in the dead of night, carrying his sleeping daughter over one shoulder. Before Gholl had faded behind them, however, she stirred and opened her eyes. Sleepily, she said, "Are the adventures over, Papa?"

"Oh, no. How many times have I said there are plenty of villages just like Gholl?"

"We're going to another?"

"Wherever we're needed. There's always more trouble." He squinted down the road with a twisted smile, and, whistling, turned his back to Gholl.

THAT SINKING FEELING

by Myra Lim

disappointment,
or as some call it, missing an appointment

because it's those moments,
where you couldn't beat your opponent.

or as you plunge onto your bed,
thinking maybe you should have kept it all in your head.

maybe as you walked through the hallway,
knowing that it isn't always your way.

or it could be as easy, such as living up to expectations
from all your past generations.

maybe it's when you couldn't get that job,
which perhaps made you really sob;

even in upsetting situations,
where things aren't met
such as expectations
or even the feeling of regret.

disappointment,
a portrayal of an ugly emotion.

as simple as some things needed to end,
like a relationship with a friend.

disappointment ranges from lots of things,
but none are appealing.
from losing a prized wedding ring
to missing that final baseball swing.

but it all concludes to that,
as some can be settling on a mat
while on that ground kneeling,
for we all knew in our head, that it was that sinking feeling.

WHERE THE PAPER ENDS...

by Himani Alagan

Where the paper ends is a sigh of relief.
A disbelief that it has come to an end.
A sense of pride that all is done.
Oh, how glorious it must be to see where the paper once ended.

Where the paper ends is a flood of doubt.
For only time can tell the words of a wretched fate, being graffitied
over with stains of red and blue blood.
It is a battlefield- the general has advanced.

And on that fateful day where the light blazes across the dark
quivering canvas of stillness, your heart fades away, but a flicker of
hope remains as your mind melts away.
And the peering balls of brown, blue, green, or grey see the
triumphant general advancing in.
Thud, thud, thud, thud.
Destroying the tower that once stood tall and proud.
They could only watch as it crumbled down, down, down.

And it was all because of *that* paper which once ended.

Where the paper ends is where your words end.
Where words end is where your pen ends.
Where your pen ends is where your mind transcends to a realm of
incomprehensible thought.
Wondering wondering wondering, what could have been if only
the paper were not to end.

A FINAL PLEA
by Benjamin Hollon

Write while you can,
Before darkness turns to day.
Write while you know
How wide oceans really are.

While the world tries to fall,
Write a pillar, keep it up;
Write the Moon in the sky to
Pull the tides to the shore.

Write while your fears
Still loom silent out of reach.
Write while your friends
Flee the wreckage of your dreams.

When the end comes at last,
Write to family, write to friends;
Write the last letter ever,
Haunt the void with a light.

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Cover

Art by Ning Yi Chia:

"The fast fashion industry is responsible for various destructive effects on the environment, and among those variables is smoke pollution. 'Annihilation' conveys the underlying cost of supporting cheap clothing in exchange for labor exploitation. The smoke is replaced with fabric as a means to emphasize the environmental impact of consumer behavior and challenge the norms."

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Thus ends *The Scrivener*
Thanks for reading!