

POTATO STEW: A SHORT STORY

by Stephen Yan

On the sandy dunes of Jacobian XIII a timid fifteen-year old girl, code name S. Dya 474, lived a quaint life with her overbearing parents. She never got to see the world as it really was beyond the vast brown plains of Sector 5A. She longed and longed to have friends but passed the days wallowing about her sandy dune hut.

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Along came S. T-V 632, a young wanderer who had lost his way, now dying of thirst on the outskirts of 474's desolate hometown. 474 was making potato stew for her weary parents; they had just returned from a hunt, and they had brought back nothing.

She whiffed then looked out the window and noticed a tiny speck. Seldom did she notice a change of scenery in Sector 5A and never had she even the prospect of a visitor. With sudden uplifted spirits, 474 turned off the sand stove and dashed out the door escorted by a thinly-veiled excuse.

It was a sandmeter or two before 474 realized that something was off; the speck wasn't moving and gradually, she started running frantically towards it. 632 had fainted from dehydration, but luckily 474 carried pocket elixirs in the event that her parents were out during the arid aftermath of a rainshower.

474 revived him successfully, and their eyes met inquisitively. 474's delighted to see another like her, and 632's stirred to have met another before his seemingly impending drought-death.

"Who are you?" 474 inquired.

632 did not respond. He lacked the breath to even mutter coherent words.

Still wondrous and baffled, 474 motioned him towards her home. But 632 gestured no. Instead, he motioned the very opposite direction - towards the high mountains that decorated a possibly wonderful place - beyond them glared a resplendent aurora at which 474 ached and throbbed with curiosity.

474 thought about her parents for a moment and then thought about how long she had lived the same dull way in her sandy hut. She meandered between the two prospects, but before she could even decide, 632 pulled her away.

The journey itself was long and arduous, but for 474 it was fleeting. Never too long was the time she spent thinking about what lay on the other side of those mountains. In no time, they were at the steppe and just across it was something wonderful.

But 474 stopped in her tracks. 632 tried to push her along, but she did not budge. Her head hung low - she turned around, her shadow cast over 632 like a cloud.

632 looked at her, but she shook her head. He looked at her more urgently, and she only stepped forward, away from him. It was at this moment that 474 realized that she desperately yearned for her mother and father. She longed for the dry confines of her dune hut and the consistency and the promise of tomorrow and the potato stew she had made.

632 understood, but it was not in his prerogative to escort 474 back. It was here that they parted.

474 feared the way back. She had not noticed the great silence and emptiness of the world. She overwhelmed herself with thoughts of her parents, her golden hammock, and the taste of the potato stew.

She could see her hut on the horizon, and it calmed her frantic heart. She accelerated more and more as her anxiety crept over her lagging shadow. She dashed into her hut with the same enthusiasm she had initially dashed out. Her once usually listless parents, speechless and on the brink of tears, were there to embrace her.

She could not be happier.

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That night, she savored the taste of some leftover stew her parents

left for her and tucked herself into her sturdy hammock. Once more before she drifted off to the land of her dreams, she glanced outside the sand hut window and thought she saw 632. She blinked - but he was already gone.

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In her dream, she saw again that mystical glimmer of the city beyond the mountains. She woke up, relentlessly rubbing her eyes as if to remove the incredulity that stained her face. She dashed out in her nightwear, and in the breath of the hot morning air she saw the one hut next to the lone sand hut of all of Sector 5A and through it 632, drinking his morning potato stew, smiling at her. She smiled too for she had a friend.

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