



香港中文大學
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

文學院
Faculty of Arts

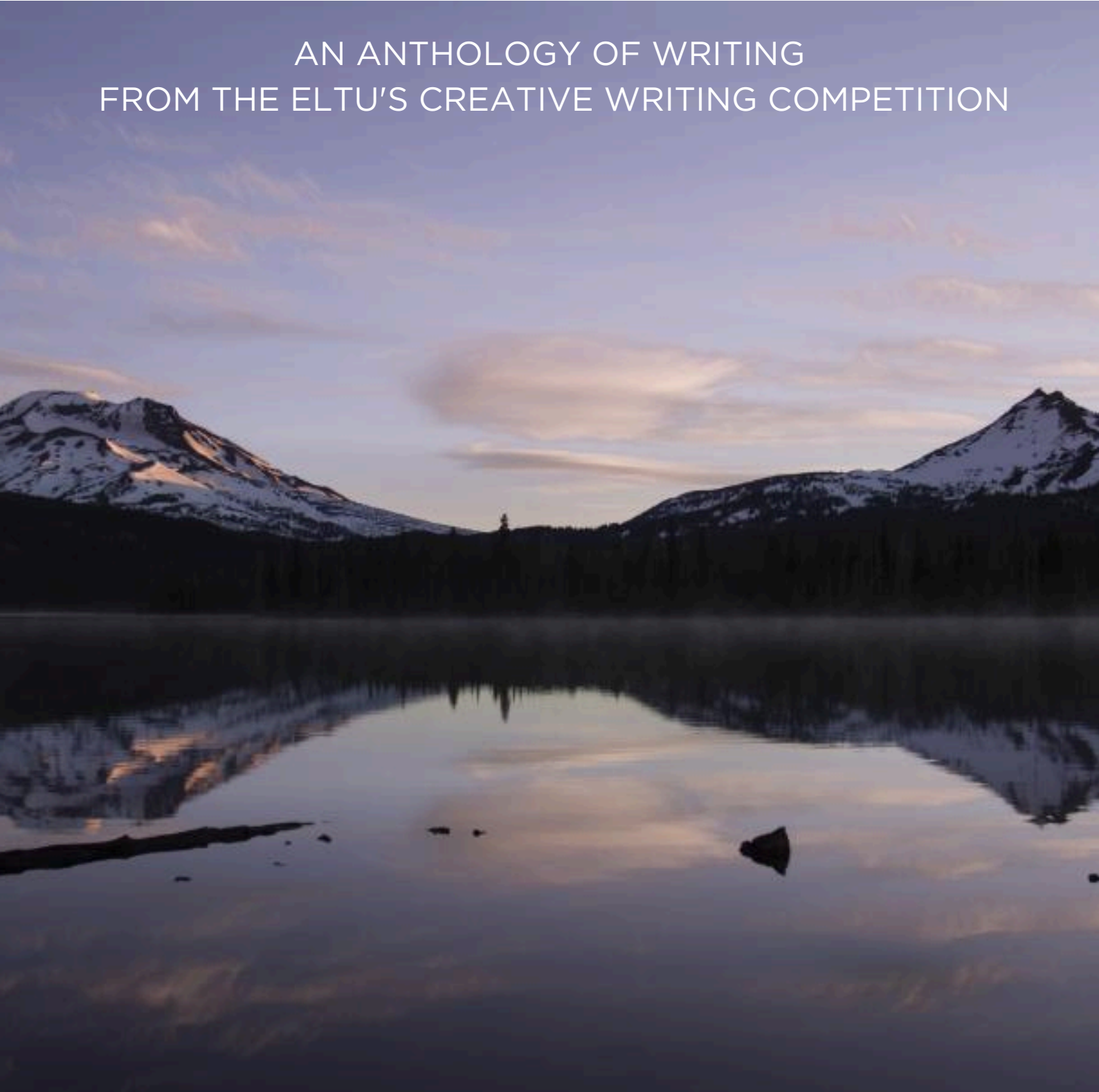
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English Language Teaching Unit

FALL WINTER 2023 - 2024

GENESIS

NEAR AND FAR

AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITING
FROM THE ELTU'S CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION



ISSUE #5

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The ELTU's Creative Writing Project and Competition is implemented by the English Language Teaching Unit at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. It launched in the 2019-20 academic year, and offers workshops, a campus-wide writing competition, literary events, and publication opportunities for all CUHK students. The project is currently funded by the Teaching Development and Language Enhancement Grant (TDLEG).

The competition encourages students to express themselves creatively and demonstrate their skills in English writing. The fifth issue of this anthology celebrates the achievements from the ELTU's Fifth Annual Creative Writing Competition 2023-24 and spotlights CUHK students' interpretations of the competition theme, "**Near and Far.**"

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EDITOR'S LETTER

The theme for this year's CUHK Creative Writing Competition was **Near and Far** – opposing concepts that have been interpreted inventively by our writers. From exploring emotional distance to investigating how love and loss can alter our experience of time and space, the pieces in this anthology cover an array of experiences, realities and imagined futures. Heartfelt thanks go to all the writers, both within this anthology and without, who attended workshops or submitted their writing to the competition.

This year we saw our Creative Writing Project team grow considerably, as we welcomed Ms. Natalie Cheung back, as well as three new members: Ms Nadeemy Chen, Dr Benjamin Driscoll, and Mr Jon Stoeckel. The team, alongside guest workshop facilitator Mr Johnson Chan, conducted four Creative Writing workshops over the 2023-2024 semester that encouraged students to stretch their character development, poetry, short story, and food writing skills. Kind thanks to all the facilitators who created engaging workshop materials and guided students through various writing exercises. Sincere thanks also go to Natalie and Benjamin, who served as keen editors for the Creative Non-fiction and Short Story categories, respectively. On a sad note, we said goodbye to our Teaching Assistant, Sarah Abramson, who once again was invaluable in supporting the project and the students. We wish Sarah all the best with their studies!

I would also like to sincerely thank the judges, Dr Patrick Holland (Creative Non-Fiction), Dr Suzanne Wong (Short Story), and Dr Collier Noguees (Poetry), who read through the many submissions and offered their expert opinions. Hearty thanks also go to Ms Rhea Murdeshwar, our new Visiting Tutor, who has been instrumental in putting together this anthology, assisting in the editing, and preparing the project for the new academic year. Finally, kind thanks go to principal supervisor Dr Jose Lai, who has offered advice and helped grow the Creative Writing Project team.

The above contributors have built a space for expression at CUHK, and I hope we can continue to create a home for CU students' creativity in the years ahead.

Ms Jenna Lee

Lecturer, English Language Teaching Unit

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

CREATIVE NON-FICTION



The Nature and Logic of a Frog

Stef

First Prize

My grandpa told me a story from his childhood years in Indonesia. He recounted hearing the frogs that lived in the wilderness, and how they chirped incessantly into the night. They were small, but they were plentiful, and they could be heard throughout the wilderness. Less small, but as plentiful, were the snakes that happened to find these plump little frogs very delectable.

One night, he found himself walking around the perimeter of his house when he came across a pond. He spotted the tiny glints from the bulging eyes of a small frog perched between the glass at the side of the water. Not far from the frog, the grass rustled with the sound of a slithering creature that had just located its dinner. The frog, having the

normal set of senses a wild frog might have built into its slimy membrane, flicked around to face its greatest danger. Now, my grandpa was not an animal expert by any stretch of the imagination, but he could tell the frog was petrified.

Its beady black eyes were fixed onto the danger shrouded in the blades of grass. The snake, knowing that he had been noticed, also froze in its tracks, for the water was just behind the frog and this particular species of snake was not a strong swimmer.

But just as the frog had the good sense built into him to notice the snake, the frog's movements were restricted. Its little legs were long and powerful compared to the rest of its pudgy body, but they could not walk or run, they could only propel themselves forward, advancing towards whatever direction its eyes fixated on.

And in this instant, the frog had been hardwired to fix its eyes towards the snake. Perhaps towards a lesser danger, or towards a delectable fly, the frog would have been able to look away or reformulate its position. But the danger was imminent – its thin, semi-permeable skin was no match for the sharp fang of the snake, built to pierce through and digest small frogs. So the frog kept its eyes glued onto the sight of the snake, cautiously observing its next move. And then it began to hop.

And hop. And hop.

Until it reached a vicinity close enough for the snake to crane its readied body and snatch the frog into its gaping maw in a flash. It was over – for the frog at least. I presume the snake probably got to return to its burrow or den with a full belly.

This was where his story ended. Upon hearing the story as a small child, I scoffed at the stupidity of the frog. To me, a human who had the freedom to turn their head, to look up and down and let my legs take me wherever I desire, I had ruled that the frog deserved its demise. It could've used its logic, gathered what little brain power it had to realise that its fear would only lead to its doom, and then turned its eyes towards the water and propelled itself to safety.

As I grew up, I started to empathise with the frog. Indeed, what did the frog know about the totality of all of its circumstances – a combination of its anatomy, its limitations of the snake, and its fear? Perhaps if the frog, in that infinitesimal moment when it laid eyes on the snake, had suddenly received a lightning strike and, in a series of a strange coincidences, was transported into the mind of my grandpa, and in the next second, was transported back into its little body, it might have been able to turn its eyes and leap away in the next instant.

But that doesn't happen. So, the frog fixes its eyes on the snake, unable to look away from the fear it is hard-wired to feel. The only two choices it knows is to hop or stay still. All it knows is that if it hops, it might still have a chance of survival. And so, it hops.



Miriam Choi

Himson

Second Prize

Miriam's presence is like a cat: practically non-existent in my life, then suddenly appearing at the most random time and place in need of attention, then vanishing into thin air once it got what it needed. The last time I saw Miriam was five years ago, in a canteen at my university, where she said hi to me. But her trace would pop up in the most random of ways, like if I rushed past an MTR movie ad or if I mindlessly scrolled through my IG feed. And whenever her presence did emerge, a smile would spontaneously grow at the corner of my mouth and my mind would reminisce about the brief moments we spent together, almost as if my life had been so abruptly interrupted that I needed time to recover from her fleeting but influential impact on me.

I met Miriam fatefully five years ago in an introductory course on film studies at our university. The course consisted of a two-hour lecture at eight o'clock on Monday mornings and tutorial classes on different days of the week. During the morning lectures, the lecturer introduced different literary styles and their historical background. And, during tutorial classes, we either analysed movie clips, or presented, in pairs, our analysis of a movie to the class for 30% of our grade. Since the course had over eight hundred students enrolled and the lecturer wanted to keep the tutorial classes small, he randomly assigned everyone into sixteen different tutorial classes. And our tutor, though only dealing with twenty students, also randomly assigned our presentation partners, which was how Miriam and I ended up in the same tutorial class as presentation partners.

Although we were partners, we hardly socialised before returning to our separate lives. Firstly, I skipped morning lectures because I was not, and still am not, a morning person; she didn't attend the tutorial classes because they clashed with one of her Biomedical classes. Secondly, we worked on the presentation on Google Presentation and, though we used WhatsApp, we only messaged each other about the presentation. Finally, on the day of our presentation, when we met in person, we were too preoccupied to acknowledge each other's presence. Before we presented, we had frantically clicked through our slides, quadruple-checking if any mistakes had occurred and, when the class ended, we had been the first ones to vanish from the class. We had sat next to each other for at least an hour, but neither of us had a strong impression of the other's appearance.

If I had to describe our relationship at that time, we were, at best, two stones in the Asteroid Belt, something I wished I had realised at that time, for I swore we had been the hydrogen gas by-products of an explosive reaction. Before we began our

presentation, we opened our stopwatch application and silently agreed that we would skip the unnecessary parts if we were to be low on time. And, during our presentation, we intuitively knew when to click to the next slide without either of us having to say “next slide please.” But for most of the time, it just felt like we knew what we were thinking and feeling, like how she knew that my favourite spot in the class had been the seat closest to the door because I was claustrophobic, or how I knew she would spend most of her time explaining off-topic nuances of the movie rather than the actual movie.

To be frank, I could practically read her like a book because she had a similar personality to my secondary school friend, Rosei. Just like Miriam, Rosei was thrilled by unsound possibilities and would have absolutely applauded Miriam on her callous and thorough analyses of different wild interpretations of the movie. When experiencing stress, Rosei would twirl her fingers between her hair and pick the tangles out, while Miriam mindlessly scrolled through her IG feed; they both went completely silent and repeated actions to relieve their stress. And, when speaking to a crowd of people, both Rosei and Miriam had radiated the confidence comparable to Steve Job’s during the announcement of the first iPhone. Though they both stood calm and composed, they, in fact, couldn’t control their excitement as they carefully walked through their arguments.

To be honest, that short and stressful tutorial class was the steel in a concrete building in my assumption that Miriam was Rosei, since I had become friends with Rosei under the same situation. As with Miriam, I had been partnered up with Rosei, through random selection, to do an assignment together. We had to perform a titration and had been stressed out because chemistry hadn’t been our strong suit. We were also so worried about following the procedure to the letter that we had hardly looked at each other. Furthermore, Rosei and I had also not been acquainted yet. Even though we had known each other since the first day of secondary school, we never had a reason to be friends

as our interests rarely overlapped. She was a student leader who had frequently volunteered in non-profit organisations; I was antisocial and frequently locked myself inside the library.

Thankfully, after we had completed the experiment, we hadn't returned to our separate lives without gaining a level of admiration for each other. Since I hadn't known her well at that time, I had taken out a book to read once we had cleaned up our table. I couldn't remember which book it had been, or what we had said, but I could remember the reason we had become friends. For me, it had been her bravery to tango with my non-canonical opinions with absurd possibilities because, besides her, no one had dared to entertain my conventional viewpoints, let alone my twisted thoughts. For Rosei, it had been my blunt but honest analysis on any subject, even the mystical, which I had discovered when I asked her about it a week ago for this story's purpose.

Therefore, due to my projection of Rosei onto Miriam, I had, without hesitation, asked her if she would be interested in watching the latest instalment of the Matrix franchise with me. The first Matrix movie was one of the movies Rosei and I were obsessed with as it unleashed many unanswered philosophical questions. Though the sequels hadn't lived up to the standards of the first movie, we nonetheless had watched them all multiple times, but never together in the cinemas; we hadn't been friends when the movies had been released. However, when the fourth Matrix movie was released, Rosei had been studying in Europe. I must have let my sorrow simmer into Miriam, because I had immediately asked her to accompany me, despite only hearing her reference the Matrix movie once during her presentation.

I hadn't noticed my mistake until a week later when she'd replied with a question mark. During that week, I had been eagerly anticipating her response, but also expect that she might ignore my message due to the busy Hong Kong lifestyle. Thus, I swam through

that school week like a shark: listening to lectures without much enthusiasm only to spring onto WhatsApp whenever something reminded me of her, like if I'd walked past an MTR ad for the movie. Thus, I was taken aback by her confusion in the message she had sent me in the middle of the night. Only when I tried to reiterate my invitation had I realised that I couldn't justify my excitement. I hardly knew anything about her, and explaining my speculations based on Rosei seemed far-fetched. In the end, I resigned my pride and told her my mistake and explained that I had mixed up her and my friend's number.

The incident with Miriam happened three years ago already and yet it lingered in my mind like an embarrassing tattoo on the butt cheek. I tried to distance myself from any signs of Miriam; I deleted her number, her e-mail address and presentation file. And yet, I couldn't allow myself to erase my memories of her, reminding me, to this day, as fresh as a paw print on a snowy path. Perhaps, I still believed that we could've been great friends. Perhaps, I needed someone to tolerate my presence. And even after Rosei had returned from her studies, I yearned to meet her once more so I could stare at her face, even if it's just for a minute, and know the shades and colours that composed the person called Choi Ying Hei Miriam.



Distant Memories: A Lament for Lost Time

Marco Sito

Honorary Mention

Sometimes as I slumber, I dream of the times long past, of the joy-filled carefree days, living my life in ignorance and bliss, feeling free; and, for a moment, the dream becomes my reality, but alas, it always ends and I wake to the bitter reality of the present, far from the certainties of the past and closer to the vagaries of the future. Perhaps fortune and contentment await me in the times to come, but I can't help but miss those bygone days, drifting further away.

I often ponder on the nature of time. At times, I think it is a cruel master taking away life's many moments, but in my contemplation, I see that time is not cruel, it is merely indifferent and in its indifference, it marches onwards, relentless, unwavering and

unrepentant, turning tomorrows to yesterdays, before to afters, and what once "will be" to what once "was". And we can do nought but accept, for it is the incessant flowing river carrying us along our journey as we pass through life's moments. Still, I wonder if anything can stop its endless march, for I often look back, to moments passed, those times that once seemed so near growing ever further away, receding from view.

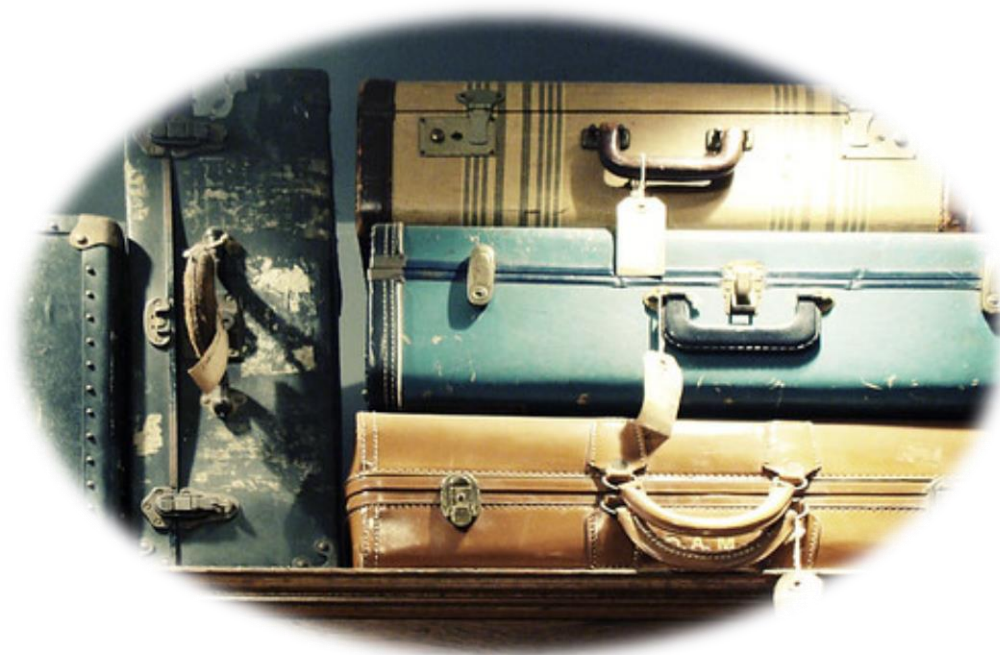
So as time marches on, what is left then in its wake? Memories, those remnants of what once was, like the embers of a fire long gone. Though mere remnants they may be, just as embers may still impart warmth, memories can still kindle my heart, and so I have come to cherish them. And yet even these scant impressions of times long gone, time still takes away, for memories fade and grow dimmer with each passing day. As the flow of time hollows out my memories like dripping water hollows out a stone, I am overcome with despair, for time is taking a part of me I can never regain.

But what can I do? Only a fool thinks he can stop time, but still, I try, I write of the days I have lived, and though I do not excel at it, I take pictures of passing moments. I find solace in these pursuits, as I wish to believe that I'm preserving just a small figment of these fleeting moments in time, never to fade like the memories I hold. One day, I shall look upon them as windows to a distant unchanging past I can never return to, an ode to what once was. Time is eternal and inescapable. It takes us further from those that were once near, but perhaps I can take a small memento of those times to keep near me, even when I have ventured beyond their reach.

So let me end by saying that what once seemed so near may soon be far away, so please, cherish the moments you have now before they vanish into the distance.

Because somewhere, a clock softly ticks...

POETRY



BFF

Marco Yung

First Prize

Days with patches of loneliness were hard.

Memories like sugar beans, bittersweet. Times

I wished to but could never

Rewind, probably got you to my digestion,

hard to mouth, hard to swallow.

Face and laughter that always comes to mind.

Never handsome, but pleasingly special

to my eyes. The pair that had screened

unconditional and closed sensations.

~~reminiscence. days of sweat dripped
beneath your white shirt after motion. you dashed
around the football field until the sun
went down. i liked the way you focused.~~

i tear
tissue into two separate halves,
half for you.

Bite by bite, it tortures.
Wings wander looking for the board.
Feelings reaching inside when you were next to me,
that was almost briefly forgotten.

~~reminiscence. home walks after the bell rang and
sharing a box of McNuggets along the road.
habitual farewells before your building's gate
and me walking back to mine alone in regular tempo.~~

i take out
the tissue that was separated into two halves,
the remaining half also for you.

02:43 a.m., it's time to go.

I swallowed the last piece of
McNuggets soaked in sweet and sour sauce.
still plain, oily, bland, drying out my throat. Rip
entry of feathers diving into another ocean.

~~reminiscence. the sunset you cried on my
shoulder as you broke up with your first love. Your
tears like infection, it hurt my heart.
you almost peeled me off naked.~~

i ate up
all lemons and made you lemonade,
lemons had tough skin.

In wheels that compressed all of your clothing
in a nutshell, you hoped
it wouldn't get thrown around.
You tag that handle with your favourite team.

~~reminiscence. the night you fell asleep after a day
of mass games, just you and me in the tent of two.
i could have kissed you on your lovely cheeks
after i turned off the camping light.~~

i fear
both of us wouldn't be able to bear,
the ashes of burning wood.

In wheels of a cart you placed your luggage,
you pushed that to the deposit in a thrill.
I captured our last polaroid framed in white, and
witnessed you walking towards your next destination.

~~reminiscence. the last lesson that we spend together
before examination, you went to your lover's table
and kissed her forehead. I treasured your genuine smiles and
signed your white shirt off with my best writing.~~

bff, happy graduation.

In wheels that were taken in and glided, you
probably watched your selection of movies
and enjoyed your airline meal that is supposed
to taste better than our box of greasy fryers.

Home walks after the departure and
aftertaste along the road.
no more habitual farewells before your building's gate
and me walking back alone in slow motion.

Good Trip.



0317am, From Another Place

Marco Yung

Second Prize

I picked you up pressing green, sleepily,
as you phoned me across the continent.
A call from an edge, cold and colder.
You sounded heavy.

You must have been stressed,
about the kind of connection that
still remains like exile
from thousands of miles away.

Coat in the froze, like one stoned.
You seemed to be walking through
your tunnel. I ear until you shut,
eventually leaving me unanswered.

Did you ever get a split second of sorrow?
Did you ever get a sharp hint of delight?

Halts when it comes to the tip of the tongue.
It would have been much better
for you to keep my number sinking
eternally in your list of contacts.

A dark romance teaching me to bear the pain,
with expected emotions assumed simply.

If I were you, I won't choose
to bother, but leave
my voice message like the mischievous
pranks we did when we were both naive.

Will you do the same press
like I did
if I meet my demise on some random glaciers
like you did?

If that was me
in my last breath in a distant place
tonight, would you be willing
to catch a red-eye flight?

It feels selfish,
to burden you with this responsibility, and
to be the last person
to cause you trouble in this lifetime.

“Whatever I’ll do.”



Sea Fish (Still Alive)

Ariel Airan Wen

Honorary Mention

Land? I've seen the land,
Though I've been breathing in the sea since birth.
Swallowing feed, its sweetness cloying,
Flicking my tail spine through caressing waves,
I headbutted into your net.

If, and I mean if,
Human lips are unusually soft,
My tongue touched yours, and you remained yours,
The pain of torn flesh and peeled skin is all the same.

(What are you thinking, you little wretch!)

Not dead yet—the bones of desire

Break and heal anew.

Thin spikes thrust into my veins,

The excitement that aches the stomach flows throughout.

Love makes one close their eyes, take a deep breath,

Spit out, spit out all the excess suspense in the mind!

Until only a puddle of clear water, not mixed with gastric juice, remains,

A collapsed heart lying in the remnants, taking center stage!

Shine a light on her—our protagonist,

A fish dying of thirst! *Give me water, even just a drop,*

Give me water, my water, water, you, wate-r you!



a letter that was never written

Yikiu

Honorary Mention

dear (what do i even call you now),

all this buildup all this buildup all this buildup all this buildup all this buildup all this
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buildup

it had to come to a crash, didn't it?

why did you do it

did you even love me— wrong question i' m being immature i' m sorry
i know you did it was obvious and i felt it i' m sorry

why did we reach this point

let me in let me in let me in let me in let me in the wind is harsh and the rain is
unforgiving please let me in let me in let me in let me in let me in

(don' t open the door)

if i close my eyes and

if i open them to dull yellow walls and

if i find myself on blue bedsheets on my lower bunk again

if i were given one chance to go back to the beginning

would i paste that sticky note wishing you good luck on the front page of your planner you happened to leave on the stairs, again

(you were waiting for me as

long as i was, we still

would've found our ways to

each other somehow)

would i show you my writings i don't show anyone and would you write me pages and pages of poems and letters in return and would you tell me i'm strange for liking girls and tell me to stop being friends with that strange guy who likes guys and and and

(ah, it still would've ended this way

i think)

do you remember the first time you saw me cry, it was a month after i saw you cry, your gentle hands rubbing my back in slow circles as you scolded me: *why are you being so*

hard on yourself why do you have to be the only selfless one here be selfish this once for fucks sake—

—and a soft: pride yourself for surviving another day. because i'm proud of you

(i still think of that

i still think of you)

I think of you when it's sunny out

(is it sunny where you are?

if it is, do you still go with

your mother to see lakes?

if it isn't, do you ask your

sister to make you pancakes?)

i think of you when i—

i can't stop it i can't run

i want to run run run run r u n r u n r u n r u

n
run

away

?

(i can't run away)

run

to you

?

(i can't run to you either)

i don't want to answer.

don' t write back.

still yours somehow,
(do you still think about me?)



you are:

Yikiu

Honorary Mention

there are pieces of you in the sea: a boat between high waves: the calm after a storm: birds drifting high up in the sky: another name for love: the colour blue: you are in the little rocks i collect on a walk: butterflies passing by: the cat down the street: you are part of a camping trip to the woods: that old campervan: hot drinks over the fireplace: my favourite sweater keeping me warm: headbands: your big heart hidden in the smallest of acts: home cooked meals: a life-changing soup: cutting up fresh fruit for a friend: tangerines: a hand to hold: echoes of you in every melody: piano music coming from my neighbours: someone playing guitar on a park bench: the quiet of the night: under the moonlight: you are in every photo of the sunset: a blank canvas full of possibilities: clouds painted orange on blue: the dreams i hold onto: trials ending in full bloom: the reminder

of a tomorrow: in growing old together: there are pieces of you all around: near and far:
in my heart: always:



My Face

Ningwa Shakti Limbu

Honorary Mention

There are times I hate my face,

My nose is too flat and my eyes are too sad and my cheeks are too wide and my teeth have gaps, and I would swap it for anything.

But this is my face,

This is my mother's flat nose,

And I've never seen my father cry, but I have his eyes.

I like looking in the mirror and knowing it's still me.

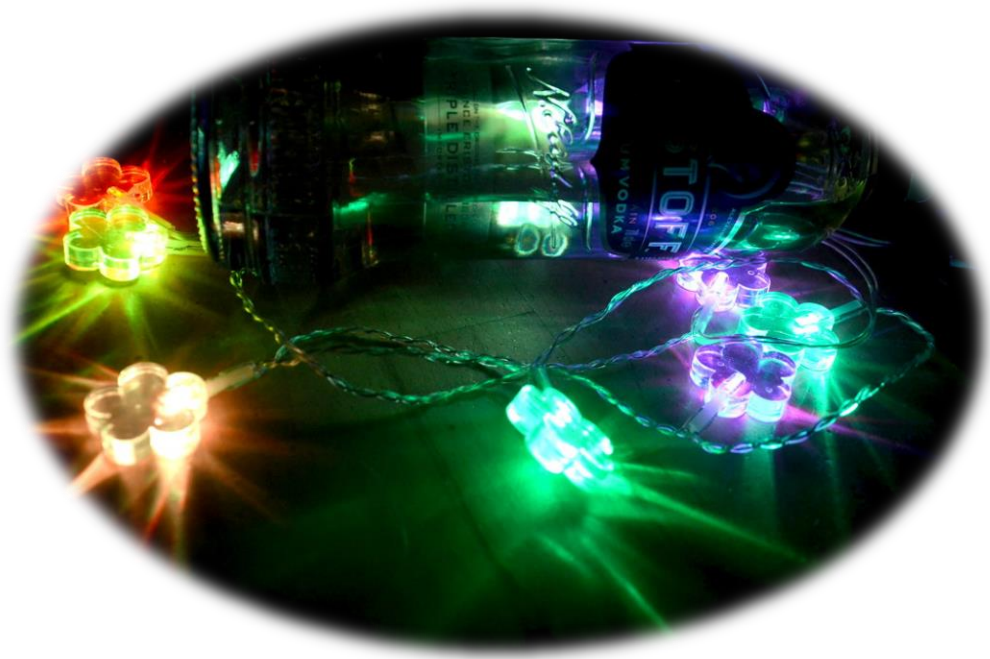
When my parents pass,

I just look at my reflection and say hello.

If I changed it, where would my mother go? How would my father be able to cry?

This is my face; how else will they know it's me.

SHORT STORY



Interspace of Ions

Mono Chow

First Prize

**

Near. So close. I love you.

**

I sat on a wooden chair as Ivan sat on a short plastic stool on my right, despite his awkwardly bent long legs. He was pointing at the Chemistry textbook on the table.

"A cation is an ion with extra electrons, whereas an anion is missing electrons.

Let's say the cation is a boy, and the anion is a girl. So, naturally, when the cation meets the anion, it shares an electron with the anion and bonds with it. Just like a boy and a girl – you put them together, and bam! They click instantly."

"That sounds...romantic, I guess," I replied. My eyes looked up from the book, accidentally landing on Ivan's, locking with his.

"Is it romantic?" Ivan repeated softly, so soft I could barely catch it.

He cleared his throat and glanced at the textbook.

"I don't think it's supposed to be romantic, Mace."

**

Far. So distant. I have lost you.

**

We were close friends. So close I knew every single thing about him, and he knew every single thing about me as well. All except one thing – that I was in love. In love with him, my closest friend, who also saw me as a friend, and a friend only. Could he tell? That is a question I will never be able to answer. If he had known, he must have been ignoring the signs. He did it quite well, actually, having ignored them for four whole years.

But I couldn't ignore them. My feelings. There was no way to hide them from him or from myself.

"I love you." I would practice in front of a mirror every day, not wanting to miss the chance to confess.

"I love you." Every time I had to gather all my courage to let those words out, only to feel embarrassed immediately and give up.

"I love you." I knew this was something I had to let out. I had to let him know.

The night after the farewell party for our classmate, Ivan was walking me home while holding his bike. The streets were silent. Only the sound of our footsteps and the turning of the metal chain on his bike could be heard. That was when I decided it was a perfect opportunity to unlock the cage in my heart and set those three words free.

"I love you."

Ivan could never guess that, behind these three easy words, were weeks of practice and years of unrequited love.

And I could never guess that, even when I thought he shared the same feelings, my love for him would stay unrequited.

Ivan froze as soon as he heard the words, his soft gaze now ice-cold, and his grin faded away. I knew I had messed up. I had messed up real bad. I tried to read his face, to gather every piece of information I had learnt about him and figure it out without waiting for his response. Yet all the confessions from the girls in our class were not enough for me to know the answer, for I had never seen this expression before. I couldn't process it, and I felt like he couldn't either, as I watched him turn his back to me. He hopped on his bike, hesitated, and rode away, leaving me dumbfounded on the dark and empty road.

He left me for good. Blocked and all.

Just like the protagonists in romance novels, I cried. My heart broke. I wanted to scream and destroy every gift he had given me, but I couldn't. "It's my fault," I told

myself. He didn't need me, nor did he want me. He never had, and yet I had foolishly chased after him all these years, just like Icarus, who at last flies too close, crosses the boundary, and dies.

And that was it. That was the end of our story. Two close friends growing apart, now as far away as strangers would be, simply because of one stupid decision I had made.

At least that's what I thought.

**

Near and far. You are everywhere.

**

Years later, I went to a party with my friends from school.

"Ivan!"

Ivan, the name I used to call out daily. It now sounded so distant, so strange, but at the same time, it flooded my brain. Ivan. Ivan. Ivan. Ivan. Now the only thing I could think of was this four-letter word that should represent a person. Yet it now meant anger, anxiety, grief, and somehow, delight.

Wait.

Ivan?

A few steps in front of me was the boy I had been longing for, crying for, hurting for, over and over again these few years. The boy whose touch I still remembered but could only feel in my dreams. Dreams that turned into nightmares when I woke up and realised how delusional I was. I stood still, my heart racing for whatever reason. Maybe it was my heart fluttering because I was so happy to see him. Or maybe it was my heart urging me to leave because the fear and anxiety had caused me to panic. All I knew was that my friends had walked towards him, almost in slow motion. They smiled and laughed as they paced forward, not knowing what I had been through – what we had been through.

I didn't say, "Nice to see you" or "I missed you", when I walked towards him. Instead, I said, "Hi." I hoped in the simple "hi" he could perhaps understand my emotions. But I couldn't tell if he could, for in his eyes sparked the same fake enthusiasm he had every time he was not alone. I believed that was what was happening. As if I knew him. Him, as in the boy who I had not spoken to for years, who I thought shared the same feelings as I did, only to realize I did not understand him a single bit.

A friend of mine noticed my weak smile and walked towards me.

"Hey Mace. You alright?"

I let out a loud chuckle. "More than alright! Why would I not be?"

We all stood in a circle as our classmates asked Ivan about his recent life. From his university major, to scholarships, to his competition in the United States... Their voices grew louder and louder as they spoke, so loud that my silence meant nothing. I didn't know how I should feel, to know that his life had been lovely and well, while I struggled with the aftermath, the mess he had created for me, and only me. "Why?" I

asked. He glanced up, his face in pure shock. He should know – he must know – that he was at fault for my downfall, for everything I had had to go through these years. “Why am I responsible for what you did to me?”

He didn’t answer. He wasn’t looking at me. In fact, the question had never even been asked out loud.

It was all in my head.

It’s always been.

**

But I am nowhere around you.

**

I wanted to hide in the snack room for the rest of the party. But I couldn’t.

“Hey.”

I looked up to see who came in, expecting it to be no one and purely a hallucination, only to see Ivan standing beside me.

“I was just, uh, here to grab some snacks. You know? Uh, feeling hungry and all after socialising so much.”

“Okay”, I replied, hoping I sounded indifferent, when the awkward silence that followed made it obvious that I wasn’t, and neither was he.

“You... Haven’t talked much. I suppose something’s bothering you? Wanna talk about it?”

Of course. Ivan had always only been academically smart. This man could not read the room at all.

I watched the reflected neon lights flash through his dark eyes, now glimmering with pink and blue. The area under his eyes was puffy and darker than his skin tone. Dark circles, something I had also got after countless nights of tears and insomnia. I wondered where he had got them from. Could it be the same reason as mine? Could he maybe, just maybe, feel the grief and sorrow I had been feeling as well? His tarnished hair, I just noticed, now dyed into chestnut brown. My hand reached up, wanting to touch it, but he backed up. Again. Our distance grew. Again.

Or, come to think of it, we had never truly got closer – he had always been far away from me.

“Ivan!” Some random girl walked into the room, slipping her arm into his.

Ivan flashed out his iconic grin and scratched his nose.

“This is my girlfriend, Maya. Maya, this is-”

“Mason. My name is Mason.” I forced a smile and swallowed the lump in my burning throat. “They usually call me Mace.”

But at last, we were both cations.

And cations are not supposed to bond.



An Expected Goodbye

Careese Poon

Second Prize

I rush into the hospital, passing the ticket machine without a second glance. The car is badly parked, I know that, but getting to Mum is much more important. People pass me by, but who they are or where they are going is of no interest to me as my scurrying feet carry me through the automatic doors and into the oncology unit. Mum has been here for 8 months now, so the stark signs and smells are familiar to me. The pungent disinfectant hits me when I walk in, and most people recoil a little, but I'm used to it by now. I've visited nearly every day since she was diagnosed. Cancer. They said that hateful word so casually, and yet the hard sounding 'C' still cut me to the core. Why couldn't they have labelled it something softer? It would have helped. She'd been ill for

a while before they knew, before we knew, and the chemo is failing; they've been honest about that for 6 months now. Mother is failing.

The sirens of a distant ambulance can be heard throughout the waiting room, reverberating, the backdrop soundtrack for all these patients and their visitors. I don't bother stopping at the reception. They know me now, and the emergency call will surely have been enough for them to know I wouldn't be stopping for a chat this time. Dad had rung, his voice solemn and heavy on the phone...I knew the unspoken words he was trying to utter. Her condition had deteriorated. The words echo in my ears. How could she leave me? How could she? I push the thoughts aside whilst I jab at the lift button. Two minutes go by, the lift is finally here. I barge people out of the way, hoping to make it easier and faster for me to get into the lift. I wait for the lift to close and press '3' several times. The door opens, and I rush into Unit 3C, haring down the sterile corridor and dodging a moving trolley, screeching an apology as I round the bend frantically. As I approach, I slow and even my breath. I can see my father's shoes under the curtain of her unit, the familiar brown leather offers a small sense of comfort as I momentarily forget why I'm there.

Dad is sitting next to mum, with an unusually downcast face. On the bed, I see her dark brown eyes starting to fade listlessly. Her breath comes in short, shallow gasps, her back shrunken like a camel's. It's the pain. Her body is malnourished because of different treatments she has been trying. All I can tell is she is weak. I hear the heartbeat monitor going 'Du..Du..Du..' every 2 seconds, as if time asks me to treasure this abbreviated period I share with my mother.

Looking at her, I am antagonized and bitter. I feel a fire burning in me. This horrible thief has stolen the precious time with my mother. I gaze at my mother's pale face, and tears flow down my cheek. How paralyzed I feel. The weight on my shoulders drags me to the

stone-cold floor. Holding her hands gently, I can feel them turn from soft and gentle to aged, scarred and calloused. I look closely at her hair. It is completely white and scraggy. I didn't realize mum has turned old. Flashing back, mum has been the most pivotal person in my life. She put so much effort into nurturing who I am today. I get sucked into the pool of nostalgia, drowning in the thought of the warmth dwindling from my mother's hands, the hot chili on a snowy day, and all the earnest advice when I am at my lows: teaching me how to be an affectionate little girl, and then a considerate teenager. She is not only a unique mother but also my mentor. Every night when I come back home, no matter if it's from school or work, I can smell the aroma of home-made food: the smell of sweet-chili chicken and meat feast pizza are therapeutic for me after an exhausting day. Mum will always wake up earlier than me just to iron my suits for me to get ready for work. And I take all that for granted. Now she is not able to do anything for me, for the family. Staring at her uncomfortable face, she seems to fall into unconsciousness. My heart races, like a runaway train, beating faster and faster, louder and louder, harder and harder. It beats so quickly, as if it is hammering to get its way out. I have mixed feelings. I don't want her to suffer, yet I don't want her to wither in front of my eyes. Dad shows me a picture, a picture of when I was a pure, naïve child, when I had a healthy home. Time can never go back now. Throughout these 8 months, I have been witnessing home's atmosphere transform from delightful to dismal.

I have never seen dad being so somber and heartbroken. For so many years, dad has been holding on to their proposal ring and the commitment they promised. Mum and dad are made for each other, they bring out the best in each other. No matter what, they have gone through all their ups and downs together. Their 40th wedding anniversary is around the corner, and obviously dad knows the ambition of celebrating this memorial day is never going to come true. He has always been sleeping here with mum just because he doesn't want her to panic when she wakes up at night, staring at

the cold, bleak ceiling, and realizing that she's alone to undergo this excruciating battle. Every year, we have a reunion and celebrate Mid-Autumn Festival at home, share laughter and mooncakes and enjoy the colossal moon. It marks the agony and elation we share together. Dad knows there will be no chance to experience this disappeared day, so he treasures, treasures the things he still has, reminiscing about the harmonious moments they have had. Although dad is no cancer expert, he knows there's not much time left for him to hold her hands, like he has always done for the past 40 years. Dad shows his clutched emotion on his face. His eyebrows seem to fall. He hasn't smiled for 8 months. His hands shiver. He doesn't know what to do without her. Chaotic thoughts race through his mind. He keeps his hostility hidden behind a cheerful façade, but I know he suffers as much as mum does. Looking at her condition now seems to make him suffer more. Tears have flooded his world. Soundlessly, I can see there's a tear drop on the floor.

Perhaps our hushed movements have aroused her. Arduously, she slowly opens her eyes. She tries to speak, but her strength is failing her. I know she can no longer speak as fluently as before, no longer the cheerful mum, no longer the one who cycles me around when the sun is unbearably hot in the summer. Dad is obviously overjoyed that she has woken up, telling her that everything is okay. She uses all her effort and gives us a smile. Attached to many pieces of medical equipment, she can barely move. Her face looks even paler. She fails to open her eyes, she struggles to breathe, she clenches her fist. We can feel that she is in absolute pain. Dad's scared, he hasn't seen mum reacting like that before. He stands up immediately and presses the emergency button. Holding on to my mum's hands, I can feel them shaking. Looking at how pain has spread to her entire body, I don't understand why she has to suffer from all this. She has been the most altruistic, optimistic and kind person in the world.

The medical apparatus beeps quickly and loudly. We all stare at the machine, I notice the heart rate is dropping insanely quickly. '50, 42, 36, 24, 18, 10, 5, 2'

'0,' and there is a long beep.

Dad breaks down.

That minute, time seems to stop. There seems to be a lump in my throat when my voice starts to quiver, and I have got endless words to say to her. Hot tears fill my eyes, I try to hold back, but it doesn't seem to work. Eventually, tears spill over my face like a waterfall.

She didn't even say goodbye to me, to dad.

Her body slowly turns cold and stiff.

Tonight, the moon is especially bright and seems close enough for me to reach the sky. I raise my hands as if I could feel her warm hands and hear her talking to me. But I know this is never going to happen again.

Something drops onto the floor. I pick it up.

It is a recording pen.

I play it out loud.

It is the lullaby she used to sing to me every night.



Green

Ariel Airan Wen

Honorary Mention

The way the waiter kneels beside their table, wiping the spilled carrot juice, reminds Jenkins 01 of how he knelt beside his little master Luni as the parrot boy's green feathers slowly dulled into the color of dust beneath them. Not one bird knows how Jenkins implanted his chip inside the boy's body where a tiny red heart was supposed to be beating at this moment when two adult green parrots sat in front of Jenkins-slash-Luni in a cafe perched high in the crown of the giant, ancient fig tree.

Just yesterday, he was still the family's cyborg robot, Luni's nanny, caretaker, best friend, bedtime story reader, and the most beautiful music box in the little boy's whole world.

Now he is dead, thought Jenkins. Luni's soul is gone, and "Jenkins the cyborg" no longer exists. Now they are one, sealed together like a big, fat joke, weaved together so gently by the hands of another cyborg (funny to think that a stranger he never knew before became his God, and now he is his Adam) in that damp, nasty underground bar into a kind, soft lie, like the light peck-kiss that Luni used to get from his parents before bed.

The boy had had sweet dreams every night and always told Jenkins what he had dreamed of. He dreamed of stars and strange planets, but most of the time, he dreamed about humans. If a human dream had lived in the night once, Jenkins would have been flooded by Luni's questions in the morning, mostly about what humans had been like, what they had eaten, and why they had died out, blah, blah, blah. One question Luni liked to ask the most was why humans had existed in the first place. Why not birds? Why not sea fish? Why not dinosaurs? Jenkins, though programmed to be unbelievably patient with young little birds of Luni's age, could not help but feel his CPU burn as his system searched the cloud database for an answer. Fortunately for Jenkins and unfortunately for the rest of the dwellers in their town, Luni had never got to ask that question for the second time, as the whole house had been flooded in seconds.

Jenkins had reacted fast and wrapped around his little master. For how long the two swam and floated and were at last gushed to a wasteland, he had lost count (as the WiFi system had been ruined). Luni coughed and shivered but was calm enough to grasp Jenkins's hand as they tried to find the nearest Oasis.

—Have you ever seen an Oasis? If not, you should see it with your own eyes someday—what a marvelous place. Yet you would not want that day to come, for only civilians who have lost their homes seek such a place. The last human ruin. The mega-metropolis of

wings. If paradise could only have one color, it would be green, green like that of bird's nest fern, green like these feathers of yours—

Luni never made it to the Oasis. The coughs and shivers slowly turned into long periods of silence. Once a day, he would look up at the sky with squinting eyes. Jenkins waited for Luni to ask him another question, but he was too dry, so dry that all the questions he could ever ask in future days, under a banyan tree in the summer light, slipped out of his shrinking body like good days that passed and would never come back.

"Jenkins, can you be me for me?"

That was the last question from the little green parrot's beak.

That's how the boy finds his home, and together, they live happily ever after.

Only one hour later, Jenkins had reached the cyborg slum.

Now that he remembered, it was the dirtiest place Jenkins had seen since the moment he was first charged with battery: in the dimly lit confines of this underground bar, the best lie in the world was going to be fabricated. In his memory vault, he still has the data analysis of the components of the air, which were thick with oil and metal. Unlike traditional bird bars, this bar did not serve any biological needs, but there were plenty of parts and pieces for robots or cyborgs to take. He remembered how he had clutched Luni's body in his arms, adjusting his optical sensors to the dimness, making his way through the customers who were absorbed in their own repair business and had paid no attention to the dead parrot and his cyborg nanny. He remembered how he had found his "relative" (they were made of the same type of model) behind the counter and paid the stranger to do the operation. ("My. Entire. Body," said Jenkins when asked how

to pay. Oh! That shock emoji the other cyborgs had showed on their faces.) He remembered how, as he had crawled upon one of the two “operation tables” (that were pulled to the center of the bar in this case since it was an emergency), the neon lights had flickered intermittently, casting a purple glow over shelves lined with parts belonging to whoever they might belong to.

...finds his home, and together they live happily ever after.

“Trii-lilili!” screeched one of the two green parrots sitting beside a table near the window as their son stepped inside the center cafe of Oasis City, where every newcomer was registered to contact their family. Jenkins recognized the parents of his little master immediately. Miranda, the mother in a flowery dress, liked to cook her breakfast out in a little pink pot. Back at their old house, she was always seen with Cleaner 02, vacuuming the floor until there was no feather. Michael, the father, was still in the same set of suits and ties as when the flood had crushed their house. He wore glasses and had a beak so stern that he almost had the same expression as their family robot, Guard 03.

Afterward, everything went sort of like this:

The cafe door swung open. The mother, her green feathers shimmering and her eyes brimming with tears of joy, with a cry that was half a sob, rushed towards her boy. Her voice broke as she threw her wings around him. The father joined in, and the three parrots stood there, soaked in summer light, locked in an embrace that seemed like it would last forever, their bodies shaking with sobs. The waiter, trying to get past them, accidentally nudged the mother, who was startled and knocked over a glass of carrot juice. The bright orange liquid spread across the table as she gasped and fluttered her wings...

So, in short, are tears and hugs involved?

Yes, tears and hugs were involved. The three of them settled down at the table, and they talked of their journey:

"Trii-lilili, krri-kirri-krri," Miranda says as she wipes her eyes.

"Chiri-chiri," Michael murmurs, patting his wife's back.

"Trii-lilili, chak-chak!" Miranda says. She clicks her beak and pushes a piece of sunflower seed cake towards her son. Now in Luni's body, Jenkins flicks his tail in his father's direction and replies at the slowest speed possible, making time for his language program to be fully downloaded: "Trra-trra-tiio."

Wing flapping. "Kri-krri-kirri." Soft coos. "Chiri-chiri." Tail flick again. Sharp beak clicks! "Chak-chak!"

"Trri-lilili, krri-krri-krri, chak-chak, trra-trra-tiio, chiri-chiri!"

The conversation goes on for another hour or two before the untouched cake is pushed back to Jenkins for the fifth time. After the operation, Luni's cyborg body does not need food anymore. Should Jenkins eat just for the sake of pretending? There is no way to spit it out; he does not want to waste the food. Yes. Better let the parents have it.

The cake is pushed back for the sixth time.

...together, they live happily ever after.

"What if" are two beautifully horrible words.

...they live happily ever after.

They live happily ever after. Happily, they live.

The nude flock takes to the sky. Citizens and asylum-seekers and the rich and the poor ascend one by one, spiraling around the towering, giant fig tree, flying across the canvas of the LED dome. They fly like an ode to ecstasy, unbound and soaring. The air around the fig tree vibrates with the beats of their wings, each stroke a drum against the fabricated blue of the dome overhead. They fly as though they know they are born in the wild. They fly as though their bodies remember the rhythms of wind and wing. They fly in a way as old as the past and as new as now. They fly as though they reclaim the sky. They fly as if they have never flown before, fly in the way that birds are supposed to fly, fly as if they are celebrating something.

Jenkins watches. Then, for the last time in his life, the memory of the operation comes to his mind. For the last time in his life, he feels the cold silver slits across his old titanium chest, feels the heart cords being pulled away by the stranger in the bar whose name he remembers for the last time (What was it again?), remembers the plastic veins of his body being torn and thrown into the air, blue, red, blue, red, blue, red, red, red red red red red.

Be me. Be him.

Be us. Be them.

Celebrating life.



Twelve Hours Away

Lam Tsz Hei Errin

Honorary Mention

This is the promise we make when we graduate: text hello every week, call every month, hang out every summer. I decide to start work with a high school diploma. You decide to pursue higher education in New York.

We're snuggled up on the couch at your place, using Google Maps to find your new downtown apartment so you won't have to talk to people for directions. At some point the red brick buildings all blend together, so we cheat and use the Manhattan street grid. Someone has graffitied a two-story tall Nyan Cat onto the side of the building. The rest looks kind of like someone went ham with a few spray paint cans, one of them filled with glitter.

You love it. It's got *character*. Also, the cat is right next to your fire escape. You can reach out and pet it every day, because you'll interact with a 2D cartoon figure but not a human being.

We snap a screenshot of your new place and send it to the group chat. You complain about having to change your phone number and then point at the clock in the corner of the laptop screen. There's a twelve-hour time difference. When you land in New York, it'll be the same time as it was when you said goodbye to me at the airport in Hong Kong.

I'm pretty sure that's not how the math works. You laugh so loudly I wallop you in the face with a cushion.

Some days, I think the divide was inevitable. The unblinking laptop clock is always AM on one end, PM on the other. We were two people walking two very different paths. Other days, I look at the round clock in my bedroom, and I think we had so much time to fix it. We just didn't. There's a gaping swathe of time where the second hand races ahead of the minute hand, the minute hand marches in front of the hour hand, and we all come back full circle.

Except you kind of didn't. You're kind of on the other side of the world.

The group chat is full to bursting at first, as our friends grow accustomed to their new lives. Everyone's scrambling for a scrap of familiarity. Our friends cheer when I show them my new workplace, with a spiffy office chair and a snazzy computer devoid of faded stickers and cat keychains. They cheer louder when you show them a picture of the Empire State Building, with a Godzilla-size Grumpy Cat curled around the spire.

It's comforting to know that even while everything changes, I can rely on some people to never change. I turn off my phone, and the room becomes a little quieter, a little emptier. That's okay. You'll be right there when I wake up, just a text away.

In the first week, I have to stop myself turning around five times an hour to make bad jokes at you. I used to see you every day. Now I only see your face in your tiny profile picture, if I squint really hard, or during our monthly calls.

The group laughs itself silly over your budding New York accent. You make jokes that take a little more effort to appreciate. I thought Times Square was really famous? Yeah, everyone in New York hates it, you wouldn't understand. You go on a rant about this hot new TV show on Netflix before I search for it and find out it's not available in Hong Kong. Oh, sorry. No problem, what else have you been doing recently?

Slowly, the texts and bodega cat pictures dwindle. I'm happy for you. You must be coming out of your shell, you must be making new friends, but there's a strange tightness in my chest when I scroll up. The last time you said hello was seven days ago.

I can't seem to catch you at a time when we can have long, rambling heart-to-hearts over text because you're living healthy, you're on the New York diet, you're sleeping earlier. I'm supposed to be twelve hours ahead of you, but somehow I'm always playing catch-up. When you wake up, I fall asleep. When I wake up, you fall asleep. Your exam timetable gets pinned to the chat when finals season arrives. Our texts taper off even more while you're revising. I memorize the time of your last December exam and stay up until three in the morning to send you confetti emojis and cat GIFs.

No reply. I fall asleep at three oh five.

You don't reply the day after, or the week after that. You don't reply to the deluge of texts reminding you that the monthly call is starting now, started five minutes ago,

started an hour ago. That's okay, I guess. I know you're probably just caught up celebrating with your new friends, but it doesn't stop the tightness from twisting into a knot of upset confusion.

Christmas arrives. Everyone sends in their Merry Christmases to the group chat, but Boxing Day rolls around and you haven't said anything, not even in our private chat. The last cat GIF blinks up at me, yawning sedately above the SEND button. It takes hours to straighten my thoughts out into crisp black words, looking at the ceiling. Will you read them? Do I want you to read them? One button and my thoughts will go flying across the world, trailing impersonal zeroes and ones. These words can't convey the hurt boiling in my gut because I'm not looking at your face. Do you miss me? Do you still think of me?

You are so far away that your absence cannot be anything but close to my heart.

The words never take flight, and I wonder why they call it BACKSPACE. I wish there was a button called BACKTIME.

The group plans summer hangouts as people start announcing when they'll fly back. You haven't texted in half a year. Finals season arrives in May, and I don't know your exam schedule. I don't know what's going on in your life anymore. The hurt spills over into affront, and then resentment. I spend summer with our old friends, trying valiantly to make up for the missing people.

I wake up one day in August. Pick up my phone. See the date before I do the Facebook notification: it's your birthday.

I hesitate, and in the end, I don't have to decide. Someone in the group starts the long chain of happy birthday messages. I tack mine on, put the phone down, and then somehow, I spend your birthday scrolling through our private chat. Not the trickle of

texts from last year, but the thousands of texts before that, GIF bombardments and panicky 3AM text walls, filled with typos from shaky hands and teary eyes. This is the first birthday of yours that I have not spent with you. In the group chat, I see the discussions you started, the conversations you barged into and wouldn't leave. It feels like reading a diary we wrote together. Like a reminder that you were here, once.

The resentment fades. Your second birthday passes. There are even fewer people in the group, and only a few of us meet up that summer.

My autocorrect still remembers your name.

I don't know how many birthdays have passed, because I have to rely on Facebook to tell me. I think you've graduated. Once a year, I visit the memories we've made. I bump my nose against the laptop screen by accident, trying to zoom in enough on your profile picture to be face to face with you.

You're a lot further away than twelve hours, now.

I come to terms with it. Zeroes and ones are impersonal, in the sense that they remember everyone indiscriminately. No one is forgotten. Maybe you don't remember the years we spent together, but that's okay. I'm here. I will remember for us. I miss you. I hope you're doing well. I'm not there to hold your hair in the bathroom and cheer you up with badly drawn cats anymore, but I hope someone is. When the archives have all dried up and the group chats sit empty like ruined castles, the zeroes and ones will stand witness to the truth: we were here.

Facebook nudges a notification my way.

hey flying back

sorry for not texting. i missed you. wanna meet up?

Something in my chest flares up, and then loosens. Anger? Relief? I have so many questions to ask you: why did you leave me behind, leave me-and-you behind, but these are questions for later. Right now, I just want to see your face.

I'll pick you up from the airport. What time are you landing?

I receive a picture of you holding your plane ticket, and yeah, those are tiny cats painted onto your nails. It's been a while, but that's okay.

You're only twelve hours away.

JUDGES

Creative Non-Fiction | **Dr Patrick Holland**

Dr Patrick Holland is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities & Creative Writing at the Hong Kong Baptist University. This is his second time serving as a judge for the ELTU Creative Writing Competition. Many thanks to Dr. Holland for his continued support.

Poetry | **Dr Collier Nogues**

Dr Collier Nogues is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she teaches undergraduate and MA creative writing and literature courses. Dr Nogues joined us as a judge this year. Welcome and kind thanks, Dr Nogues.

Short Story | **Dr Suzanne Wong**

Dr Suzanne Wong is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she teaches creative writing courses on short stories. This is her second time serving as a judge for the ELTU Creative Writing Competition. Many thanks to Dr Wong for her continued support.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ariel Airan Wen

Ariel Wen is a CUHK English major undergraduate in Hong Kong and Shenzhen and the founder of Trace Under Roof Poetry Club. She is a Peking University Wusi Literature Society member and has been published online and in Guang Mang poetry magazine, the CUHK English Anthology, etc. She specializes in writing contemporary poems. She is a huge animal lover.

Careese Poon

Hello everyone, my name is Careese. I do not have any experience in joining competitions, however, I do love writing and brainstorming lyrical essays. I think lyrical essays leave readers a profound sense of contemplation. This year's competition theme 'near and far' hits my heart and I would like to bring out the idea of 'treasure the present and cherish the people you have around you', don't regret and reminisce afterwards instead in which I think many modern people have forgotten and ignored. Don't take everything you have for granted, things may slip through silently one day without your notice.

Himson

Himson is more an keen reader than a writer. Finding joy mostly in reading classical literature, he would rather be in at the Library of Alexander than a Chinese New Years

gathering. His writings are mostly about people's personality and describes in-depth how a person is rather than how s/he looks like.

Lam Tsz Hei Errin

Errin is a second-year Business and Law student who writes fantasy and dystopia. She has a passion for diversity and inclusion, social justice, and philosophy. She is working on her debut novel, addressing issues including mental health, morality, and relationships. Her work has appeared in The Temz Review. Find her at hazelmist0.wordpress.com.

Marco Sitio

My name is Marco, I am a Year 2 Student from Indonesia majoring in Statistics.

Marco Yung

Majoring in English at CUHK, I am an emerging writer that writes mutiple genres. I mostly write poetry about different encounters in my life, and I usually draw my inspirations from my memories of my past lives, daily lives, music movies, and people I knew. Creative writing to me is more than a practice, but a process, of communicating with, and reflecting upon hearing my own personal voice. Writing provides a platform for me to present an alternative ego and mindset. I could be found on Instagram @with._marco, feel free to discuss words with me!

Mono Chow

Not a writer. Just an average person with lots of stories to tell.

Ningwa Shakti Limbu

Ningwa Shakti Limbu is a Biochemistry undergraduate student at Morningside College.

Stef

An amateur writer with a great love for film and the surreal.

Yikiu

(i) 銥 (yī): This character refers to “iridium,” which is a chemical element with the symbol Ir and atomic number 77. It is a very hard, brittle, silvery-white transition metal of the platinum group and is considered to be the second-densest metal (after osmium). In the context of a name, it could symbolise something rare, valuable, or strong. **(ii) 翹 (qiào/kiu4):** This character can mean “outstanding” or “to lift; to raise.” It can also refer to the end of something, like the tail of a bird or the tip of a branch that sticks out. As part of a name, it may stand to symbolise excellence, aspiration, or prominence. When these two characters are combined, 「銥翹」 stands to convey a sense of exceptional quality and rarity, implying a sense of distinction and excellence.