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Finalist

2019 CFUW Writing Contest

### A New Home

The message was clear: she was going to be late to the party. Transit employees in bright orange vests had entered the tube cars and were guiding riders towards the exits. With an exasperated sigh, Fay hastily stuffed her earphones in her jacket pocket and gathered her what-seemed-to-be endless belongings. Just when she had somewhat settled into the lull and rhythm of this vibrant city, she found herself being rattled out of routine every once and awhile. This tube delay was merely one of many disruptions to her new quotidian life.

Fay avoided bumping into people while weaving in and out of the bustling crowds, balancing a backpack full of textbooks on one shoulder and gift bags of drugstore wines and gingerbread biscuits on the other.

*I should have gone home first*, she thought in frustration as she reached the tube exit, out of breath from carrying an entire day's worth of belongings. She rested against the icy metal gate that lined the sidewalk stairwell and pulled out her cell phone.

*Hey Rachel, I'm at Southgate—the Piccadilly Line is down. Will be late!* She texted, her fingers numb from the chilling wind.

Turning the street corner, she began walking, ignoring the mass of black cabs pulling up to the curb trying for her attention. After all, she was living on only a student budget.

As she navigated further and further into a maze of inroads, the noise of the city dissipated; car horn blasts and the lively Christmas music played along the major intersections dulled to an afterthought. All that was present were whistles of frigid wind lashing at her cheeks

and the crunch of stale snow under her feet. In this moment of isolation, Fay felt wistful, but whether melancholy or hopefulness followed, she could not tell. She was not a stranger to bouts of homesickness—the first week of city-living had her pining for the comfort and constancy of her rural suburban home. During the day she paid no attention to these ruses, as her busy school schedule and the plain rush of transport were therapeutic distractions. When the clock struck 17:00 and the sky began to darken, however, Fay always imagined parallels of herself back at home. On the tube, she would close her eyes and imagine herself riding in the passenger seat of the family truck, nodding off after a long day. While microwaving cold macaroni and frozen vegetables in her apartment, she would imagine setting the table with her younger brother as the aroma from her father's curry dish lingered in the air. Working on her literary reports in bed on a Tuesday night would prompt her to imagine sitting beneath the wide pane window in the living room, sipping a steaming cup of tea and overlooking the fields.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Fay struggled to piece together her current emotions. There was no doubt that she missed her family and the comfort of routine, but she also understood the merits of the new. *Keep an open mind*, her parents would tell her. *Learn to make your surroundings a home*. Within the first month she had nailed down a favorite spot to eat, a preferred library at which to study, and a shortcut from campus to the bookstore. She had managed to improve upon her first set of essays, after much effort and assistance from her professors. She made a few friends here and there and found time to share laughs and movie suggestions.

Fay's reflections and recollections were suddenly interrupted by a faint call from down the street.

“Fay! Fay! Over here!”

Fay looked up and saw Rachel in the distance, peering out from the brightly lit porch. She waved enthusiastically and beckoned Fay to hurry up and come inside before disappearing back behind the door. As Fay approached the household, the pulse of music and lively chatter could be heard, as well as the distinct clinking of glasses. She felt color return to her cheeks and glorious warmth spread all over her body. The swell of nostalgia had not subsided -- it instead harmonized with a dawning sense of excitement and of newfound appreciation for a new familiarity.

For once, Fay could not imagine herself back at home. She embraced and lived in the present.