

Not Quite Write.

Feedback Report

'Echoes of Regret' by ChatGPT

In the dimly lit cafe, Lily sipped her espresso, staring out the rain-streaked window. She twirled a strand of her auburn hair, lost in thought. Today marked the anniversary of a fateful decision, a choice that had blurred the lines between right and wrong.

Her favourite novel lay open on the table, its pages worn from countless readings. It had always been a source of comfort, a familiar escape. But today, even her cherished words couldn't drown out the memories that echoed in her mind.

The bell above the door jingled, drawing her attention to the man who entered—a figure from the past, unexpected and unwelcome. James, with his piercing gaze and a smile that had once been her favourite. The atmosphere in the cafe shifted as he approached, breaking the delicate balance of her solitude.

He took a seat across from her, his eyes probing hers with a familiarity that made her uneasy. "Lily," he said, his voice laden with regret, "we need to talk."

She sighed, glancing at the rain-soaked streets outside. The cafe buzzed with muted conversations, a backdrop to the confrontation she hadn't anticipated. "We crossed a line, James," she said, her voice trembling, "a line we can't erase."

He nodded, his fingers tracing the rim of his coffee cup. "I know, and I'm sorry. But there's something I need to tell you."

Lily raised an eyebrow, a mixture of curiosity and apprehension playing on her features. James took a deep breath, choosing his words carefully. "I've never stopped thinking about you. You were my favourite part of life, and losing you was my biggest regret."

Lily's heart wavered, caught between the past and an uncertain future. She felt a pang of nostalgia for the moments they had shared, but she also remembered the pain that followed.

The rain intensified outside, a drumroll to the emotions swirling within the cafe. James reached across the table, his hand hesitating in the air, a silent plea for forgiveness. Lily hesitated, too, torn between forgiveness and self-preservation.

Their eyes locked, and for a moment, the world stood still. Then, with a gentle shake of her head, Lily withdrew, reclaiming the space she had fought to create within herself. The line, once blurred, became distinct again.

"I can't," she whispered, and with that, she stood, leaving the cafe and the weight of the past behind. As the door closed, the bell jingled one last time, a sound marking the end of an era.

Word count: 414

Commented [A1]: 'Echoes of Regret' is a somewhat intriguing title however it is also quite general. It doesn't provide any clear or memorable link to this story in particular. Consider how you can use your title to add value to your story and help it stand out from the crowd.

Commented [A2]: You addressed the anti-prompt by scattering numerous adverbs throughout the story. While this approach was sound, a more creative or bold handling of this anti-prompt, if executed well, may have elevated this story against other entries.

Commented [A3]: Is this the most interesting detail you can find to describe Lily? Can you think of another detail which gives the reader more to "read between the lines." Consider for example, the implication of instead choosing to show Lily rubbing a distinctive scar.

Commented [E4]: This would be a perfect opportunity to expose an element of Lily's character through her history. What was the fateful decision? Can it be tied back to her encounter with James in a way that is less ambiguous, and which elevates the tension or the meaning behind the current encounter?

Commented [A5]: The word favourite is a strong choice when opting to "hide" this prompt.

Commented [E6]: This is another opportunity to be specific in a way that enhances our understanding of the character and her motivations. What novel is she reading? ... [1]

Commented [A7]: You describe James' arrival as "unexpected" however the interaction feels planned to coincide with anniversary of their breakup. This kind of ... [2]

Commented [E8]: You could create a more personal and direct evocation by showing rather than telling. Instead of the atmosphere shifting, consider what specifically you ... [3]

Commented [A9]: You chose to address the "crossing the line" prompt overtly and this became a key theme of the story. This was a valid choice.

Commented [A10]: We don't see James order a coffee however moments after arriving he is "tracing the rim" ... [4]

Commented [E11]: Selecting specific moments from their prior relationship could help increase the reader's investment in this relationship. ... [5]

Commented [E12]: I enjoyed this payoff to the third reference to the rain outside the café. It lends intentionality to the previous occurrences.

Commented [E13]: While we have a sense of Lily's internal conflict, we do not really have a sense of these characters and the reasons that have led to Lily's final decision. ... [6]

Commented [A14]: Calling back the jingling bell at the end of the story was a good choice. This kind of circularity helps create a satisfying reading experience.

Commented [A15]: The opening and closing sentences can make or break your story. Here, you have chosen to end on the somewhat cliché phrase "the end of an era." Wh ... [7]

ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK

About the judging of this story for the Not Quite Write Prize

Your story was randomly assigned to Group 4. It was first read by Amanda and did not proceed to consideration by Ed.

What the judges liked about your story

You have a clear and direct writing style which serves you well in communicating your ideas. Your sentence structure is strong, and you've managed to clearly convey what is happening in the scene.

You have chosen to hone in on a single "shattering moment," i.e. Lily's decision to leave her relationship with James in the past. This tight focus was an excellent choice as it provides the opportunity for readers to connect more deeply with the scene.

This is also a highly relatable scenario which many readers will immediately understand (a painful break-up). This makes it a great candidate for flash fiction, as it is easy to drop the reader into the action without the need for a lot of explanation.

You have a strong sense of drama and an ability to infuse the small moments in your scene with dramatic intensity. Each element of the interaction between the two lead characters feels heavy with meaning.

What the judges thought needed work

This story met the brief from a technical standpoint however we were left wanting more. We know little about the characters beyond surface details. This leaves them feeling more like archetypes than individuals. Who is Lily, really? What made the relationship between Lily and James interesting? What can you reveal to make readers cheer when she decides to leave the past behind forever?

While we appreciate that you're working with a tight wordcount, we think there are opportunities in this story to veer away from cliché and find more nuanced and original details to focus on. For example, you have chosen to show Lily reading her favourite novel. Which novel is it? What could the choice of novel tell us about Lily? Can it offer any clues about her relationship with James?

In our comments we have suggested some opportunities where specificity of detail could highlight aspects of your characters' motivations and desires and help bring them to life. We recommend actively searching for such opportunities during the editing process. It is impossible to create a powerful and satisfying conclusion to your story without first establishing a strong connection between the reader and your characters.

General comments

Thank you for participating in the Not Quite Write Prize for Flash Fiction. We hope you enjoyed the experience, and that this feedback has given you inspiration as you progress in your writing journey.

We look forward to seeing your name in future writing competitions!

This sample report was prepared by Ed and Amanda to demonstrate the kind of critique you might receive if you purchase Personalised Feedback with your entry to the Not Quite Write Prize for Flash Fiction.

For more information, email us at contact@notquitewritepodcast.com

Page 1: [1] Commented [E6]

Ed

25/11/2023 17:54:00

This is another opportunity to be specific in a way that enhances our understanding of the character and her motivations. What novel is she reading? Perhaps there is a way you could use this reference to ground amplify the emotions that are being alluded to.

Page 1: [2] Commented [A7]

Amanda

27/11/2023 07:51:00

You describe James' arrival as "unexpected" however the interaction feels planned to coincide with anniversary of their breakup. This kind of coincidence can be jarring to readers unless fully justified or explained within the story.

Page 1: [3] Commented [E8]

Ed

25/11/2023 18:01:00

You could create a more personal and direct evocation by showing rather than telling. Instead of the atmosphere shifting, consider what specifically you could describe to indicate the change in a more tangible way. Perhaps it is the reaction of the staff, some of whom may even recall the incident one year ago, or perhaps you could describe something about Lily's body language which has changed.

Verbs are often the most important parts of a sentence when it comes to conveying emotions. Consider more powerful alternatives to neutral verbs like "shift".

Page 1: [4] Commented [A10]

Amanda

27/11/2023 07:52:00

We don't see James order a coffee however moments after arriving he is "tracing the rim of his coffee cup." I'd recommend sharing your story with a trusted reader to help pick up this kind of minor inconsistency.

Page 1: [5] Commented [E11]

Ed

25/11/2023 18:11:00

Selecting specific moments from their prior relationship could help increase the reader's investment in this relationship.

What if there was a happy moment in their past which was echoed in this moment? Perhaps he had served her coffee while on a romantic getaway, and the particular way he stirred his coffee today reminded her of that.

Such details can be very relatable, and help the reader not only understand, but actually *feel* the regret and conflict that Lily feels.

Page 1: [6] Commented [E13]

Ed

25/11/2023 20:06:00

While we have a sense of Lily's internal conflict, we do not really have a sense of these characters and the reasons that have led to Lily's final decision.

For a reader to be invested in the outcome of a story, they must first become invested in the characters. The goal of your writing should therefore be establishing that connection between the characters and the reader.

Page 1: [7] Commented [A15]

Amanda

27/11/2023 07:52:00

The opening and closing sentences can make or break your story. Here, you have chosen to end on the somewhat cliché phrase "the end of an era." While there is nothing technically wrong with this choice, I wonder what the impact might be if you chose a more creative and unique way to end your piece?

