

CAROLINA FRIENDS SCHOOL



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Editors: Gwyneth, Isabel, and Kat

Cover art: Liam



Nick

Screen

Touch screen
New screen
Bright screen
Big screen
Little screen
Home screen
Work screen
Computer screen
Life screen
I scream

-Ryan



Lukas

Wish Upon a Star

"Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight." She squeezed her eyes shut and sent her wish to the star. Maybe, if she was lucky, it would come true this time.

"Sir, we've got another one coming in!" I yelled to my boss. Night had just fallen, and we'd already gotten a dozen wishes.

"Seriously? We're already up to our ears in wishes!" My boss wasn't the kind that would be all serious around us. Sure, he'd play up his role from time to time, but he knew what it was like to be a Dreamcatcher.

Our job was simple: find and catalogue wishes on stars. Then we had to match the wish to a Granter. They would do whatever they could to fulfill the wish, and *voilà*, job done. But every once in a while we get a hard one.

"Boss, this isn't a normal wish. This is, well ... " I hesitated.

"Spit it out, kid."

"You should come see for yourself, sir."

With a last glance at what he was doing, my boss shuffled over. "What's all this kerfuffle about? It can't be that..." He stopped mid-sentence, his jaw hanging open.

"I can't quite believe it myself, sir. We have no protocol for this. Do we have to grant it?"

The boss's mouth opened and closed without making any noise. Finally, he said, "Yes, we have to grant it. We are required to grant every wish that comes our way, in some fashion. But this one is too specific; there's no way around it."

Sometimes people made wishes we didn't want to grant, but they were usually vague enough that we could find an alternate way to give them what they were asking for. But this wisher was good; every detail was laid out.

"I, I guess I'll pass it on to Granting then. Any Granter in particular I should give it to?" I didn't want to make anyone do this.

"Pick Wilsher. He's about to retire, so this shouldn't mess him up too bad."

"Yes, sir. I'll call him up right away." I dialed for Wilsher, then waited for him to arrive.

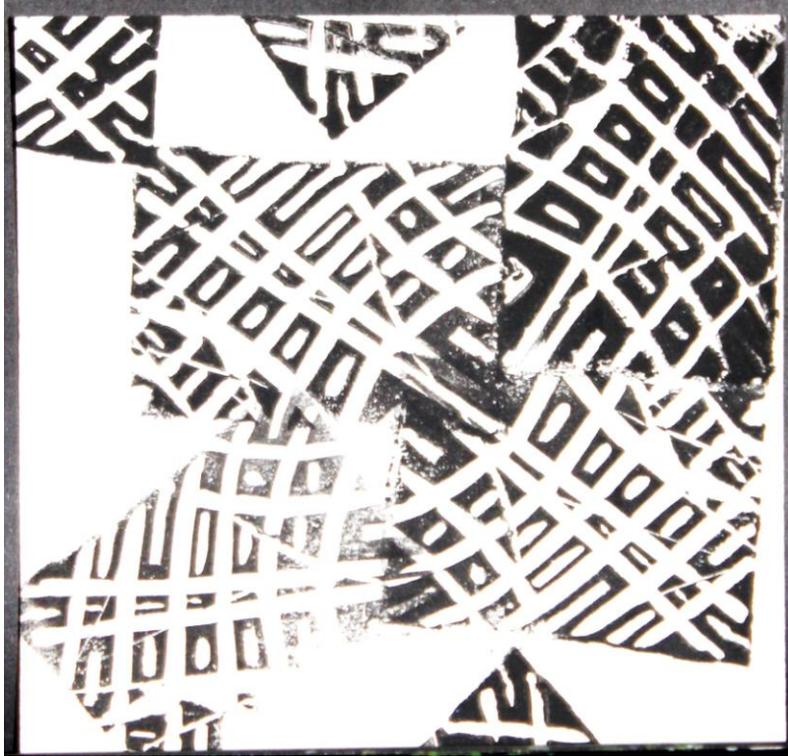
"What job do you have for me today, Cadet?" Wilsher grumbled. He really was close to retiring.

"Here's your assignment. It's a bit of a hard one."

Wilsher grabbed it out of my hand and read it over. His eyes widened. He threw the paper to the ground.

"What do you mean I have to murder her sister?"

-Isabel



Jason

Prompt: Following the model of Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino, invent and describe your own city.

The City of Markarth

For foreigners standing on the edge of Markarth, there is only one clue of what is contained within the city. Crushed between two cliffs stands an enormous stone wall, and in the center of that wall lies a comparatively tiny hammered gold door. I shouldn't leave out the fact that this is a double door, for that would surely take away from the regal aspect of this city that strikes you as soon as it meets your eyes. This door provides the one hint of what life is like for the rich inside Markarth, yet the longest held secret of the city is accessible to almost no one outside the walls.

Inside Markarth, all the buildings are crafted out of gold and artisanally cut stone. Some people in this city are freaks when it comes to luxury, with the wealthiest ones living in residences solely made of gold. There was a point in time when this demand for luxury became so prominent that the Emperor of Markarth ordered his men to stack level after level on every existing building. Nowadays, Markarth is characterized by the winding pathways that accompany the rows of buildings, both going endlessly up into the sky.

The true gem of the city, however, is without a doubt the emperor's palace. Following the main pathway through the city leads you directly to this masterpiece. It is built in the side of a mountain, adorned with what seems like everything reflective and expensive that the original founders of Markarth could possibly find. This palace alone was enough to draw me to this city. It emanates hope and prosperity within its walls, a dream of royalty that seems to be just in reach.

-Eliot



Soren

Robinson

Winter came with a drifting of snow, and the little hut stuck out. The brown wood looked black in the swept white plain. Fire burned inside; smoke leaked out through the chimney. The candles were expensive – none burned by the windows; and in the rooms, in the house, in the children's room, there was dark. The dining and sleeping room, with the roaring fireplace, was bright, however, and it was there that the Robinson family held out for the siege of winter.

Mr. Robinson was a big man with broad forearms and a thick beard. He was the only member of the family who was in the children's room, with the door locked. An axe leaned against the wall, and he sat, thinking, mumbling. The other family members, Mrs. Robinson and George and Stacie Robinson, remained in the other room, the one with the fire, beds, and a table. They sat around it, playing cards. George always won.

He always cheated.

Mrs. Robinson listened to the howling of the wind and the wolves outside. She didn't know what day it was. The windows were dark and she hadn't been out in what must have been weeks.

She played a card, letting Stacie gasp and pout. Stacie was only four. She hadn't learned the trade, how to lie and cheat. George, however, was seven. He was a man now, and Mr. Robinson had taught him. He played his own card, and again Mrs. Robinson found herself stumped. She had no moves to make. He had won again.

There was a period of quiet, and George begged her to play with him again, to take him seriously this time, to which she would absently agree, and tell him she was being serious. Nothing could be more serious than cards with George.

But this time, it was Stacie who spoke up. "Mommy, why is daddy in the other room?"

"You know he doesn't like to be inside. It's his way of distancing himself, I guess." She supposed that answer was too much for young Stacie. But she nodded, as if she understood. It seemed she would be even more of a prodigy than George.

Another game. George won again.

And again, Stacie asked a question. "Why is the door locked?"

"I don't know, Stacie. He always asks us to lock the door."

"You want to open it and see what he's doing in there?"

"No. He wants his quiet, so we'll leave him alone. Anyway, it's cold in there."

"I want to give him a blanket."

"No."

Stacie wriggled from Mrs. Robinson's grasp, grabbing a blanket and running toward the door.

"Stacie, NO!"

She grabbed the key from the floor and twisted it in the lock. The door opened, and Stacie went in.

Mrs. Robinson gave a resigned sigh. She didn't bother following.

And Stacie never came out.

-Lukas



Nick

Fall

The branches of trees roof the trail through the forest,
I know fall is coming.

Leaves,

Yellow, red, and some remaining green,

Fluttering, whirling, falling down at the base of trees.

When I walk into that narrow gap,

Crackling, crackling, crackling...

I can clearly hear each of my footsteps,

How wonderful...

How melancholy...

Staring at falling leaves.

They are sapped of their pigment

And taking on an albino look.

Oh...

-Jiatong



Sean

Waking

I woke in my bed
A current of wind cut through my ajar window.
It washed over me and sleep faded away.
The sky outside looked as if a black sheet was covering the earth.
Silence sat in the air, unbroken.
Not even an insect piped its striking voice.
Streetlamps cast shadows on the houses and trees around me.
I inhaled deep and rose out of bed,
Gliding to the window.
The stream of air pushed against my face.
I stopped and leaned out the window.
The breeze, like ice on my skin, brushed the hair away from my face.
The curtains billowed and curled around my legs and body,
Twisting and encircling me like a fluid shell.
I could smell it,
It was coming.
Snow would start to drift over the house soon.

-Mia



Hannah

When They Need Me

"Password," the voice says for the second time, as I try to maneuver my sight around the chamber of the gun that's being pointed at me through the window. Friendly. *It's a Glock*, my brain unhelpfully says. *Gee, thanks*, I want to tell it. *Can you tell me something useful?*

"I don't know it," I say, and the gun cocks. Uber friendly.

"Then your name and identifier."

I don't know! I want to scream. *I don't know anything!* Instead I take a deep breath and recite the words that have been pounding through my head lately.

"Agent Zero. Wolfe." The gun vanishes, and a head pops up from behind the window.

"You're dead," the girl says. "I shot you."

A girl sits in the middle of an empty street, alone. She is young. Her hair is curly and red, and her boots have little frogs on them. Her fingernails, I can see from here, are painted alternating pink and yellow.

She has a bomb strapped to her back. She hasn't moved at all in the past six minutes. The girl must be no older than ten, and she already has the haunted look in her eyes that every soldier here does. The one that says, "I know I'm going to die."

I work quickly at the base of the wires, knowing one wrong move can trigger an explosion that will kill her and destroy the entire street – people's houses, businesses, and lives. And a little girl dead. I refuse to give her back to her family in a box.

We are minutes away from detonation when I finally cut the wire. I turn to her and smile, open my mouth, and then I scream.

"Wolfe? Agent Zero? Are you okay? Do you know where you are? Can you hear me? Wolfe? Stay with me, Wolfe!" a voice yells above my head. Screaming. Everything about it hurts. "I'm going to get a medic."

"Wolfe," a different voice says. "I need you to open your mouth." Commanding, but desperate.
"Open it, please."

I open my mouth. A hand puts something in it – and makes me swallow.

"This is going to keep you alive," the voice tells me. "This is going to keep you alive, so you can come back when we need you."

"What are you doing? What's happening?" The other voice is back.

"She's dead," the desperate voice says roughly. "She died. It hit her full on. She's *gone*."

"Right," the other voice says quietly. "Take her to Nine, then. I'll, uh, I'll let everyone know. I mean, we knew she would die going in. She knew."

Am I dead? I don't feel dead – I feel like *hell*. Maybe I died. Maybe I'm in Hell. Maybe Hell is lying on the ground in extreme pain without being able to move or make noise or open your eyes.

Maybe Hell is still being able to think.

"That little girl shot you," the original voice tells me.

I've decided I'm hallucinating. In what world does a little girl shoot someone? I can't even remember any little girl. My body feels like it has been trapped in the moment right before I was supposed to die, and I'm being forced to stay in a coma for this random voice's mission.

So I can come back when they need me.

When they need me.

They need me.

Need me.

Need me to wake up.

Wake up

WAKE UP

"Holy shit, Catrina, wake up!" Sarah's hands are shaking my shoulders again. "You had another one. Another nightmare." She brushes the hair out of my eyes. "Was it about the same thing?"

I nod weakly. The same memories, the same people, the same thing. It always ends at the same time – with the same words – as I pass out in the dream and wake up in real life. I can't help but think it means something, that I'm missing something important, but Sarah claims it's just a post-crash dream and my real memories will come back eventually.

I want to believe her. I really do.

-Kat



Parker

Noise

What was that noise
From a innocent source
It surely springs
The rustle of trees
Or the snap of twigs
But it sets my weary mind aflutter
With images of profound monstrosity
This noise that means no harm
Has transported me into a realm of my fears
It dwells inside my sleepy thoughts
And turns the dream into the nightmare
My fear swells from the unknown
And my mind turns the unknown to my enemy
And so I lie awake for hours
With demons prowling all around
As I lie upon my bed
Trapped in a prison
Of my own head

-Ryan



Samuel

Words

The sentiment that filled my empty mind taunted me with countless memories, now washed away by the sea as I stare at these pages. Since your death, the harsh chains of despair rub against my soul, making bruises unable to heal. It has been days, months, years of trudging along the same unending path through prickly forests and dry, sandy deserts.

My feeling of this is simple, yet complex. I experience an ache in my soul that cannot be unleashed, for it will take ten times longer to rebuild my gates once they fall down. I cannot describe the longing in my mind that yearns to be with you again. My abandoned ship searches for a new captain while lost in the reckless sea, tossed and turned but finally finding something in the distance. An island! Oh, it's deserted. But an island nonetheless, a safe haven from the harsh, uncharted waters that wash against the metal siding – siding that could withstand any current until it encountered a monstrous storm that whirled out of control at incredible speeds. The muscles in my hands relaxed their clenched fists after your departure from a life that was a rollercoaster of a journey, the same journey that other ships take every day, sailing to places people never thought they could.

Knowing that your spirit lingers on assures me of peace throughout the struggle as I hold this book you wrote: your poems and stories that needed to be told. A book of peace and resilience. Words. Your words – the ones that you thought, wrote, and spoke, the only things I have left to hold onto. But wait – words are nothing, just something to calm me down, take my mind off reality. Words can never amount to what you did, never replace the influence you had by civilized, real, face to face conversations that will never again take place. The words, though yours, are restricted by the pages that hold letters in like a caged lion at the zoo, trying to break free with all its power.

The cage, however, is too strong. The cage, just like this book in my hands, can never reveal the true strength buried within. Buried. Gone. Lost. Washed up on the shore. On that deserted island. Under the rays of the sun that breathe life into words. The same words that are in this ratty old book.

-Asheton



Ruth

"The snow. Even now, saying 'snow,' my lips move so that they kiss the air. No mention has been made of the snowplow that seemed always to be there, scraping snow off our narrow road. An artery cleared, though neither of us could have said where the heart was."

– from "*Snow*," by Ann Beattie

Pressing a rubber boot
Forgetting the cement underneath
Slathered with powdered sugar
Eventually melting
Frosting the cake
Beckoned by the bright lamp
His wiry hand clasped mine
We were led to the tree
He had kneeled last summer
Carved my title into the bark
I was smothered with white
Dipped into a jar of paper
He tugged me
I was blanketed by him
But I could still feel the frost seeping in

Ruth

-Gwyneth



Jackson

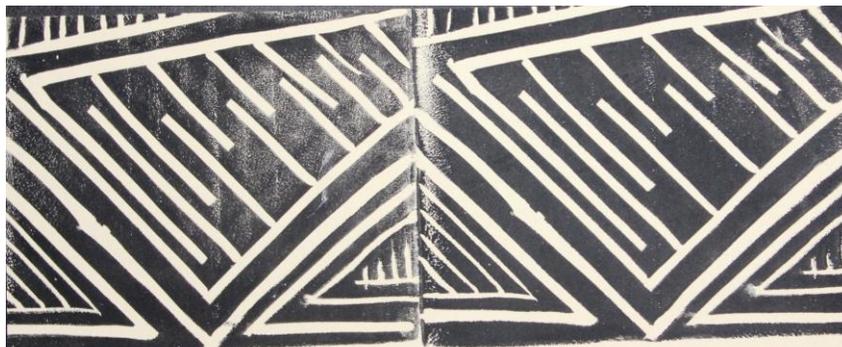
City of Water

The city is unpredictable, risky. Some outsiders try to avoid it, some love it. It depends on their tolerance, for there are days it is beautiful and calm, days it is relentless and stormy. It is always moving at a different pace.

The buildings are tall and towering, as if you are under water at the bottom of an ocean, and the water will collapse in on you at any moment. The streets are made of stone and sand. At certain times of day, the sun hits the city at just the right angle and it turns to diamonds glistening out of the milky blue walls. It shifts its colors – sometimes deep blue, sometimes so light it is almost clear; sometimes undertones of green streak through it.

The inhabitants are emotional, constantly switching personalities. They tend to follow the patterns of the city. When it's clear and bright, you know the people are pleasant and friendly, but when it's dark and cloudy, you know to stay away. It's indecisive, and the same with the people; they can never decide if they like each other or not. It's a place where the line between love and hate is stretched thin, and people cross sides daily. And the city's love-hate line isn't any thicker – for if you are a foreigner and the city decides it doesn't like you, the tall ocean walls might just topple over you, and you'll be lost at sea.

-Mia



Jason

I am from

I am from the suburbs

I am from the big yards and the cul de sacs

I am from the "hey neighbors" and the "you left your lights on"

I am from the Joes the Pauls the Jeffs and the Bobs

I am from the "American Dream"

From the big houses and the white picket fences

I am from the doctors and the go getters

From the private schools and the tutors

I am from the borrowed cups of sugar and the weekend strolls

I am from the old white person neighborhood

And I fit in just fine

-Jamie



Liam

Hero's Journey

With a gentle push, the door in front of me opens. I don't want to do this, but Karen said I had to, or else. I'd usually laugh at something like that, but when Karen says "or else" you know she's serious. She also said she'd give me twenty bucks if managed to get through.

The room I enter is dark. There's a fog creeping across the floor. I hear noises by my feet, like the scurry of rats. I'm frozen to my spot, too scared to move on. But I have to. If I don't move, I'll be stuck here forever.

I move through the room, trying not to jump when a bat flies over my head. Needless to say, I fail miserably. I tiptoe into the adjacent kitchen. I have no idea what I'll see next. The oven door opens and closes, revealing a partially baked brain inside. "Ick, ick, ick!" I screech. I'd say that the table is set, except the dishes are floating half a foot in the air. It seems to be sweltering in here, and I get out of the room as soon as I can

Liam

Next I have to go up a flight of stairs. At the top there's a hallway. I open the first door on my right and a skeleton with bits of skin still hanging on its bones jumps out at me. I spring back, barely keeping my stomach from emptying itself. The rest of the rooms aren't much better. There's one in which a vampire is sleeping in a coffin. If you get too close, it reaches out and grabs you. The bathroom is quite possibly the worst. The tub is filled with blood, and if you look in the mirror you'll see your own skeletal reflection looking back at you.

I finally make it to the end of the hall and try to run down the stairs. When I'm halfway down, something reaches between two stairs and grabs my ankle. I scream at the top of my lungs and topple over. A moment later the hand releases me, and I skid down the rest of the stairs. When I reach the bottom I sit for a moment, making sure I'm not hurt. Once I'm good, I get up, brush off the dust, and continue through the house.

Why did I agree to do this? I'd say no to anyone except Karen. For some reason I can never say no to her. She must have thought it'd be an easy win, but I will not back down this time.

I only have one room left. I don't think it can be as bad as everything else I've seen, but boy, am I wrong. I timidly enter the living room. My head is down and my hair covers my eyes, obscuring my view for a moment. Slowly I lift my head and look around. There's a television in the room playing nothing but static. It's also the only light source. There are three couches, and on each one sits something different. On one couch there's a human-sized voodoo doll, with pins sticking out in every direction, and an old witch cackling to herself. The other couches are filled with an assortment of wicked and terrifying creatures.

The werewolf peeing on the carpet would make me giggle in any other situation, but not this one.

I think I'm done – but as I'm backing toward the exit, all of the figures jump out at me as one. I release a scream worthy of an award and run out of the house as fast as possible.

I stand outside, catching my breath. The bright lights of the carnival blind me after being inside for so long, but out of the corner of my eye I can see my friends approaching. They're laughing their heads off, Karen most of all. With all the strength I can muster, I stand up straight, look Karen in the eye, and say, "You owe me twenty bucks, lady."

-Isabel



Natalie

The Dancing Man

Why does this man prance around

To the beat of a drum

Or the strum of a string

Why does he wear his silly clothes

And smile his silly smile

There is no reason for him to move this way

There is no logic behind his choice

Yet there he is

Perhaps he dances because he doesn't know what else to do

Perhaps he seeks out this simple joy

For no reason other than it makes others happy

Maybe he's just passing the time

With nowhere to go

Maybe the dancing man

Is just waiting

Waiting for someone

Waiting for change

Waiting until people no longer need his dance

Maybe he's lost

Maybe we all are

-Ryan



Liam

Teenager Markell

Teenager Markell could care less
About his brothers and sisters making a mess
Not even luck from a four leaf clover
Can give his life a makeover
He hated everything except for his one true love
Something he put above
He felt like his life had hit a wall
Until he found out about basketball
He still could not care about life
He felt it's filled with pain and strife
His parents didn't seem to help
They didn't know how he felt
But once he hit the basketball court
He knew he was playing his favorite sport
There were no distractions
He had less reactions
It was just him, the ball, and the hoop
It all ends with him catching an alley-oop
This is how he blocks the world out
Without it he would scream and shout
Every day he trained to be the best
If he made it he would know he was blessed
Around the world he would go
If he earned enough someday he would go pro
He can't get cut with a knife
To know that Ball is life

-Tyler



Liam

City of Sunlight/Moonlight

People call it a city worthy of the gods. It radiates strength and warmth and so much light that it's hard to look at. Its golden-yellow glow blankets the city with a calming peace. Every day feels like a warm spring afternoon.

It's a place where people unfamiliar with the city don't feel like complete strangers; they feel welcome and eased by it. No matter what is happening around it, the city rests in a warm bubble, completely separate from the surrounding world. It's the first thing to catch your eye on the horizon, so rich in color that it makes the space around it look faded and gray.

From far away it looks like the sun, a bright dome resting on the earth, but as you approach you can begin to see the fuzzy outlines of buildings and streets. Up close, the walls look transparent, as if you could walk right through them, and in the sky a warm golden haze has settled on the clouds. The people who live in the city are elegant and regal. They glow like the city itself.

During the day the streets are crowded, but by night everything turns quiet. As the day closes, the city goes through a multicolored cycle, turning bright orange and light pink and eventually a deep blue-black. The walls glow a white silver, and the far off sun turns into its sister, the moon, just as stunning and eye catching against the dark sky. The busy people of the day have their rest, and the ones who dwell by night emerge. There are fewer of them. They move with a softer pace, they are quieter, and far fewer people see them. But they have as much grace as those who live in the sun. Strangers notice them less – but when they do, they become mesmerized by their dulcet voices and gentle demeanor. Their silver aura can be seen better than that of the people in the golden sun, because the air is darker and they shine like ghosts gliding through the streets. But eventually, like every night, they become overpowered by the light, so they retreat and wait for the golden sun to fade into silver once more.

-Mia

Hack

It was dark for a lab. Labs were supposed to be white. This one was a dark, monochromatic grey metal. There were windows, but they were tinted, and mirrored on the outside. Light rarely came through, and the fluorescents had begun to go out years ago. Frederic clanked down the hallway, worn boots hitting the metal floor. He glanced wistfully at the crack of sunlight outside the metal door in the metal wall at the end of the hallway. It hurt his eyes, but they still lingered. He could imagine the birds and the flowers.

Not going there, he told himself. I'm not going there. He turned instead through a different door, this one held open by a wooden wedge – one of the only non-metal things in the lab. He found himself in a large, rectangular room filled with rows of chairs and computers, green numbers and graphs flashing across the screen. Only about a third of the computers had men sitting in front of them.

Fredric was hailed by a man at the computer closest to the door.

"Hey *Frederico*," the man said, emphasizing the *rico* part. Fredric's name was not short for Frederico. It was just Fredric. But Andy always called him Frederico anyway. It was just Andy. Fred pulled a chair out next to Andy. A graph played across the computer screen. It was a general viewing of the thought that *HPM* was doing. He was running through massive amounts of information even as Fredric sat down.

HPM was an artificial intelligence – the reason they were here. *HPM* was the digitalised mind of a young boy from almost a hundred years ago. He had been frozen, and it had taken them almost fifty years to figure out a way to convert his brain and its functions from neurons to code. Then it had taken them almost forty more years of programming and tests to download him into the biggest supercomputer ever conceived by man. It was only for the last few years that he had been conscious, and he had been tested relentlessly to make sure that all his programs were functional.

This was, after all, the clone of Victor Andrei whose artificial brain they were working with here. If they screwed this up, the fact that the man was dead would not stop him from killing them.

Still, that wasn't to say that Fredric didn't like his job. He did. As the monitor of this project, he would enjoy the prestige that came with its completion. And he was sure he would be the one to complete it – unlike the generations of scientists before him, he would work all the way through this. And it would be his name in the headlines when it was completed.

He shook his head. Back to the task at hand. His eyes struggled to focus on the computer screen, and he gazed helplessly at the wiggling line on the graph in front of him. Interesting – it looked like there was a pattern. He called Andy over to him.

“Hey, what up, Frederico?”

“Hey, Andy, look at this. You see anything?”

“No, why?” Then Andy looked closer. “Oh... shit.”

Fredric’s pulse raced. No, he would *not* have a problem now, not when he was so close to success. But he forced himself to ask, “What is it?”

“Uh... it’s in Morse Code.”

He gave a frustrated sigh. He would wring Andy’s neck.

“Damn it, Andy, what does it say?”

“It’s saying ‘error, error, error’ over and over again,” said Andy.

It was so tempting, it would be so easy to just blow this off as another one of Andy’s stupid jokes. But his professional caution demanded he investigate. He called out to the room.

“Hey, is anyone else seeing this? What is going on with the computers?”

Thirteen heads, not including Fredric’s and Andy’s, turned towards their screens. If this was real... well, they were screwed. But why in the world did... it seemed like the computer was altering its computing so that the status graph would read error, error, error in Morse Code.

A scientist on a computer elsewhere in the room began to speak, but he was cut off by an alarm. *BEEP*, it said, *BEEP*, *BEEP*. Red lights shone out of the ceiling. A computerized voice rang out: *Please exit the building, please exit the building, please...* and it cut off.

The first ten things that went through Frederic’s mind were ‘shit.’ Shit, shit shit shit shit shit shit shit. Then he felt his mind go blank. He crashed. What had gone wrong? What kind of emergency even *was* this? A fire or something would surely not leave the computer intact. It was maddening.

Then the computerized speakers laughed. *Ha ha ha ha, you should have seen your faces!*

-Lukas



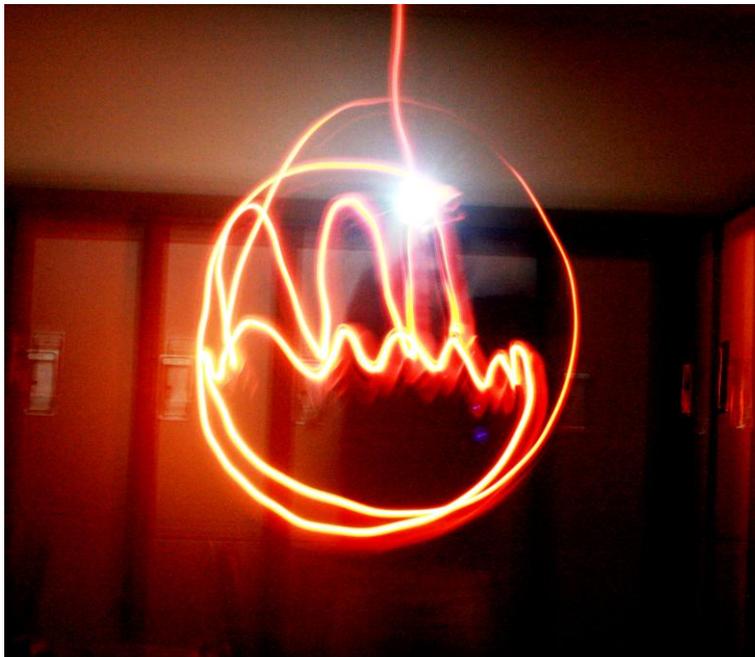
Camilla

They

They said I was crazy when I told them my stories, and even more so when I built the bunker. They said that my spacemen weren't real. They said I'd never been taken. Called me loony, if they were trying to be nice. Then the lights came. Shimmering harbingers balanced precariously on the edge of the world's vision. I knew what it was; no one else did, but I did. I locked the doors and waited. At first there was a gentle knock knock knock on the door. They thought they could just cozy up next to me after years of ridicule. But still I waited. Then the knocking got faster and faster and faster – a deep tremendous pounding accompanied by the beautiful sounds of pleading and screaming and cursing my name.

Then, silence. The only sound is the sound of breath outside the door, not theirs, but the others.

-Ryan



Jackson

City of Lies

There's a city that no one enters. No one speaks of it; some think it's only a myth. No one knows exactly where it is, as if it's always moving and shifting. Some never see it, and some get trapped there. The city runs from the people who spend their lives looking for it, but hunts those who spend their lives running from it. It seeks out the ones who are weakest, because those are the ones it can break down the most easily. They quickly become a part of the city despite their resistance.

Everything in the city is inky black but translucent, a hazy veil covering the walls and streets. The fewer people who inhabit the city, the clearer everything in the city looks, but the more people, the darker and more solid the walls. If not enough people live in the city, it will shut down and disappear until new people reopen it. It never fully goes away, but it can be subdued for periods of time, unable to take in new residents.

That's why it began hunting people, so its spirit stays alive. It used to gain people naturally. The darkest ones in the world would either find it or be sent to it, to live out their days in a city that slowly drains them. For the people who have been hunted, the process is slow. They start out hiding away from everyone, refusing to speak like those around them, but the city draws it out of them. All the darkness in each person is channeled in the city and fuels it, meanwhile making their darkness more potent and consuming until they are like shells, as black and twisted as the city itself. Their skin turns gray and papery, and they never say a truthful word. Slowly but surely, everyone eventually turns into the dark hollow shells that lurk in the streets, each one of them made of lies.

-Mia

Riff on a Poem called 'Cake'

*I wanted one life
you wanted another
we couldn't have our cake
so we ate each other*

It was a match made in heaven,
or so it seemed
From the outside looking in
that's what we played it to be
But we knew it wasn't right
we knew from the start
And now we're both left
With two halves of a broken heart

But how could this be
we grew together so well
I guess the fear of a future
Caused insecurities to swell
"Where were you last night?"
"I was out with some friends"
Yeah sure I thought
when will these lies end

But I caught myself
I'm not the jealous type
Who am I to care
if you and your friends get hype
You can party
go, have your fun
Who am I to stop you
I'm your girl not your mom

You however
you were blinded with rage
You could never trust me
And the hate grew with age
"He's a friend babe I promise"
"Then why text so much"
I saw you last week with that man having lunch"
"Babe please don't be mad"

I've known him since college"
"I don't care
Quit texting
I don't need any background knowledge"
"But baby, I can't"
"Don't 'baby' me hoe
do you love me or not"
"I can't believe you'd ask that..."
I had been punched in the gut

I hung my head low
and mumbled a yes
But as I turned to leave
Your hand caught my neck
"I can't hear you" you yelled
"I love you" I cried
Never before
Had you made me fear for my life

You were changing before me
I didn't see it at first
I was blinded by love
Or maybe just the fear of getting hurt

You were jealous
Not protective
You couldn't take no
And it took me too long
To find the strength to go

But I did, and it hurt
I said screw you and left
I broke free from your bonds
From your shackles and chains
Looking back it may have been
my heart I that I lost
But more importantly it was my life I regained

-Jamie



Maria

A Poem Inspired by the Story "Snow" by Ann Beattie

The bright red cardinal perched on an icy tree branch.
A chipmunk hopped through the woods, trying to escape the powdery forest floor.
We sat together in the living room in overstuffed armchairs,
Holding hands by the crackling fire.
Outside, the smoke twirled out of the chimney, dissipating into the chilly air.

It was our first winter living together.
We made the run-down, broken house our own.
Slowly peeling away the moldy wallpaper and replacing it with fresh, new paint.
A new beginning.
A new adventure.
Each layer of pungent paint represented a new layer of trust to our relationship.
It wasn't a house anymore.
It was a home.
A home filled with the warm scent of love and trust in the air.

The harsh morning sun streamed through the window.
Tiny diamonds of snow cascaded from the sky, blanketing the ground in a shimmery glitter.
She left our bed and fled to the shower to escape the cold, nippy air.
The soft tunes of her voice, mixed with the slow trickle of the shower, were like music in my ears.
When she emerged, her skin glistened with little droplets of water slowly dripping down her neck.
She looked just like a melting icicle gleaming in the light.

The air grew colder, the snow grew deeper, and we grew closer.
Tucked away in our secluded burrow, like bears hibernating during the winter.
I gazed into her dark brown eyes, seeing the snowy landscape reflected in them.
Her sticky, red lips brushed against my smooth cheek as I dropped to one knee,
pulling out something shiny and heard her whisper the word 'yes.'

That night, we crouched over an old fashioned camera watching memories fly by as fast as a snowy blizzard.
I held her close as the roaring winds came knocking at our front door, and I tried not to let her go.

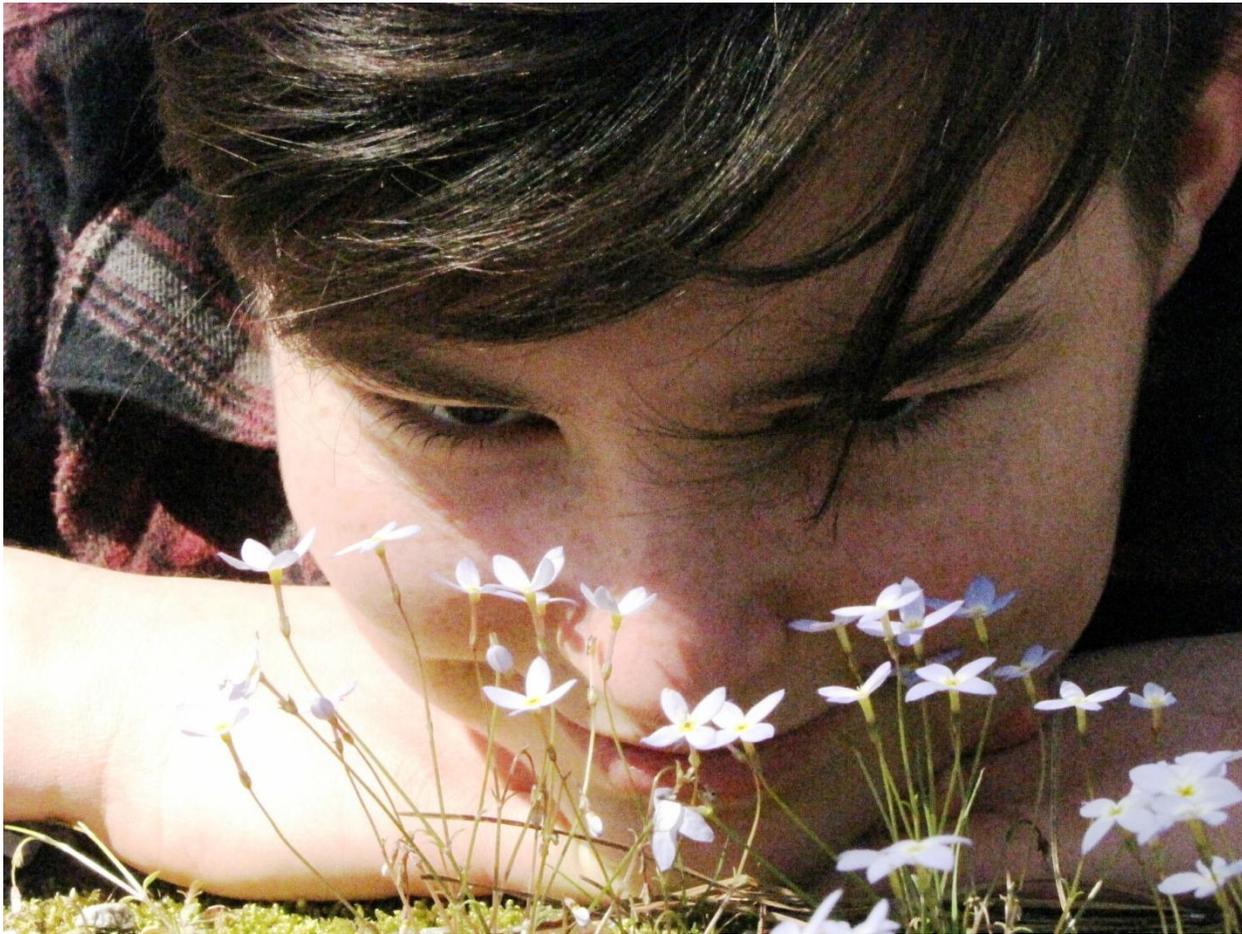
Slowly I could feel her melting away like the powdery snowflakes in our front yard.
The warmth from the fire just wasn't warming her the same way anymore.
The bright red flames licking at her frigid body only made her shiver more.

The warm spring air flowed through our front door, carrying the cold winter breeze away.
Our time together wouldn't last longer than the life of a spring flower.
For weeks we had thrived but slowly we were withering and shriveling back into the ground.

That was one winter I will never forget.
The spring that followed I probably won't either.
It was like smelling warm hot cocoa topped with whipped cream and then taking your first sip
and getting burned.
The hurt feeling stays there for a while but the scent will never be forgotten.

Every day I play back that time like a movie in my head.
The diamond ring that she never could wear still carries the reflection of her face.
That winter was something special, like a silver locket or a golden key.
The snowy landscape melting with the love that we felt for each other will always have a warm
place in my sad, cold heart.

-Hannah



Tomás/Lizzie

Prompt: Base a piece on a sentence in which the first letter of each word spells out the name of the person sitting next to you.

Isabel

I stole all Breanna ever loved. Every piece of her heart, every necklace from her closet. I even took her dog, Chloe. Damn Corgi. I don't even like Corgis.

But Breanna had crossed a line. She had not only kissed my boyfriend, but she had kissed my best friend, held her hand, said she loved her, and broken her heart. Breanna didn't have to live with months of Emma crying, blaming herself, drinking, and breaking things. Breanna didn't have to deal with the aftermath. Breanna didn't have to wait up til 3 am for Emma to come home, scared of a phone call saying that she might be gone for real this time. Breanna had been all Emma had loved, and she had left.

So I decided to take everything Breanna had ever loved. Her stupid expensive jewelry I sold on the streets and in pawn shops, which got me enough to buy a plane ticket to San Francisco, where I gave Chloe to my aunt. Her shoes – oh my *god, her shoes, who needs that many shoes* – I gave some to friends, set the rest on fire. I burnt all her bras, too. If she was going to be a petty little bitch, so was I.

When I got back, I drove her tiny Prius all the way from Manhattan to Maine before Emma called to say that she had reported the thefts. So I crashed it, torched it, and kept her wallet. I used her credit card to buy a new car, a computer, some other basic supplies, and I turned around and headed towards Chicago. During pit stops I'd stop and hack into her social media or email accounts just to make her life miserable, just to see how much hell I could cause in her life. (Quite a bit). I'd leave little messages, too – though it wasn't like she didn't know it was me. But it was still fun to expose her from afar.

The only thing that hurt, though, was when she emailed me drunk on a Thursday night. There was no subject line, no message inside, only old photos. Pictures of us in fourth, fifth, sixth grade, all the way through the end of high school. Photos of when she got that horrible bowl cut and hated it, so I got the same one to make her feel better. Photos of when I had surgery after the car accident and had a buzz cut on the right side of my head, so she shaved designs into it and gave herself a matching haircut – even let me shave designs into hers. Photos of when she gave me tattoos over the scars from the surgeries and the crash. Photos of our old poetry book. Photos of me and her and Emma. Photos of me looking at Emma like she was the world – like she was the sun. So many photos, so many memories I thought she would have forgotten, I thought she had buried in sex and parties and new boys.

I thought our friendship would last forever. I thought Breanna and I would withstand everything. I wasn't expecting to fall in love with Emma and I wasn't expecting Emma to fall in love with Breanna and I *certainly* wasn't expecting Breanna to fall in love back.

And I wasn't expecting Breanna to drop out of my life after two weeks away at different colleges and show up months later, suddenly "straight," with hollowed eyes and pale skin that screamed of nights spent in the arms of boys who smelled like sweat and tobacco. Forgetting about our past. Forgetting about the way she screwed Emma over and coming back and almost tipping Emma past where she was before, right as she had been getting better. Right as I started seeing genuine smiles on Emma's face, when she started looking forward to going to therapy and she stopped having nightmares every night. That's when Breanna decided to show back up. *That's* when Breanna decided to push me past my tipping point.

-Kat



Hallie

Prompt: Base a piece on a sentence in which the first letter of each word spells out the name of the person sitting next to you.

Katherine

Kicked away to **h**ellish **e**ternity. **R**ipped into **n**othingness. **E**ven when I did nothing to deserve this fate. But I've been sucked down anyway and landed right in the middle of hell. The weird thing is, it looks nothing like what I was expecting. There's no fire. No devils, no demons, no endless screaming. At least none that I can see. Simply looking at the scene, it's very pleasant actually. There's a limitless blue sky stretched over a field of grass so bright green it looks fake. Far ahead, atop a hill, stands a sparkling white house that resonates warmth, beckoning me forward. The air smells of apples and cinnamon, like my mother's kitchen, guiding me toward the towering house. A soft wind tickles my ears, carrying dulcet music I recognize as lullabies from my childhood.

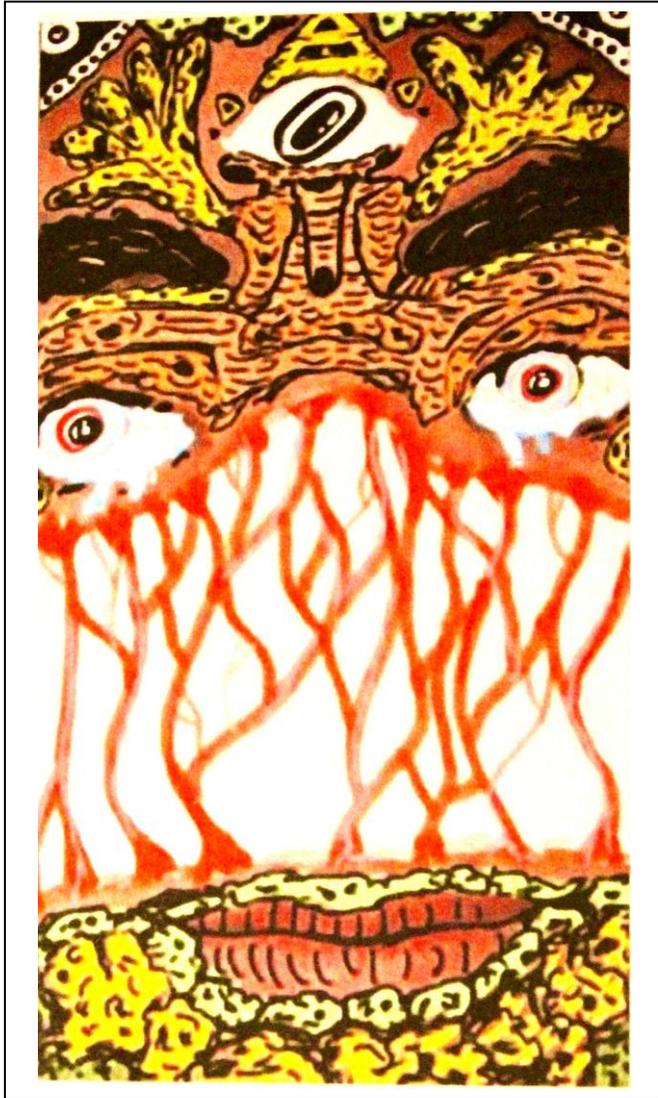
As I walk closer to the house, it looks more and more like the house I grew up in. Looking around, I see that everything around me looks like something from my past. The clouds make the shapes I remember pointing out to my sister; the field starts growing buttercups and dandelions like the ones that grew in the field where my brother would chase me near my house. I can see the old tire swing I used to play on in the distance.

The scene around me has everything I loved in one spot. I start crying. As I walk up to the house, the smells and sounds intensify. I'm reaching out to put my hand on the doorknob when I hear a faint sound from deep within the house. It sounds like the muffled mix of a cry and scream. My hand recoils from the doorknob, but the wind picks up, swirling the music and smell around me, welcoming me into the house. I grasp the handle to the door and swing it open.

Inside looks nothing like my old house. There's a dark staircase leading downward. Echoing up from it is the same faint noise I heard before. A hot gust of wind blows fiercely from the house and spreads out over the scene behind me. I hold onto the railing on the porch as I watch everything transform in front of my eyes. The field turns brown and crunchy, the clouds turn gray and cover the brilliant blue, the wind is hot and carries only a burnt smell and the painful wounds of down below. The tire swing breaks and the house grows dark and cracked. Everything I loved is now turning to nothing, becoming ruined, and I can do nothing. I sob harder, looking helplessly at my broken hopes. Now I know I'm in hell. Only hell would first show me every good thing in my life and then destroy them all. For I know now that it was all fake, and I will never see the real thing again.

The field begins to catch on fire as an invisible hand grabs my throat and pulls me down the staircase.

-Mia



Nick

Prompt: Write a piece using only words of one syllable.

Free

We have two more days to go till we get to the states where we can be free. We feel scared and tense from a long life of not having a chance to feel glad. I have worked just a short time but it hurts to see my mom, my dad lose all their hope. My thick, black hair has been cut off so that I will not get hurt on our long trip through the land.

"Run, run, run, child, run!"

I do not feel scared, not till my mom is. But she is not. She is strong – or looks strong, at least. I know we are close when I hear a loud dark voice not far from us. Our lead man is not scared, though. He only says in his deep low voice that we have to hide.

"Get down now, down, do not breathe loud. They will not find us. You will not get hurt, I swear!"

We will not die. We will fight. This is not right. In the years to come we will be free. We have had a tough past, but we have a bright life to come. My kids will be free, and glad to be. They will play and learn and love it. That is in years to come, though. First I need to turn ten years old, first I need to grow up. I need to find a man, I will have kids, then the kids of my kids, and the kids of my kids' kids. But in front of all of that, I need to live past this day.

For the next hours, while the white men look for us, we do not make a sound. I have to make sure I take each breath, even though at times it is so soft that I can not hear it. One day, in the next days, months, years, ten years, ten times ten years, we will be free. I know that, as a ten year old girl, I have hope.

-Mara



Sydney

Flight

People yearn to fly
To spread their wings and soar away
They wish to push boundaries
And find their own limitations
They use their skill to break free of the bonds of the world
They crave freedom
They aspire for greatness
They reach for stars
So they can use them as a handhold to reach ever higher
We all share a hunger for the impractical
A dream for the unbelievable
And an ache for impossible

-Ryan

City of Air/Wind

It's a city that breathes. It's in constant rapid motion. From afar it's a whirlwind. Strangers who watch it become confused, lost, unable to keep up, to keep time, forgetting where they are and eventually who they are. They watch the walls that never rest in a still, solid state. There is no floor, just air that pushes people upward like a tornado. They walk on air as if they can see invisible steps and bridges, walking down the streets above one another in vertical layers. Everyone darts like flies in a hectic cycle, walking in fast motion, navigating around the buildings and people at indistinguishable speeds.

But the people inside see things differently. They look at the walls and see them twist in lazy patterns, swirling as if snails are dragging the winds. People pass each other with a slack pace, a city of sleepwalkers brushing through the streets. The wind lifts them up like a broken elevator that hasn't fully stopped working, just moves at the speed of a sloth. Their slow pace makes their minds numb. But no one can leave, for if they did they would become strangers to the city and see it for what it is with all its speed. They can never get back into their lazy pace again. So the inhabitants stay in their sluggish and lax state, oblivious to the speeds they really travel.

-Mia



Hannah

A City Where They All Know Me

Approaching the city, I saw homes of all sizes. There were large townhouses and tiny apartments. There were little shops with windows above, hiding living spaces behind closed blinds. The roads were paved with cobblestone. It wouldn't be good for cars, but here, everyone could walk anywhere they needed to go.

All of the doors were flung wide open and people shouted cheerfully across the street to their neighbors. There was a woman tending a flower garden in front of a barber shop. There was a man walking a dog that was trying to pee on every fire hydrant. They didn't really need the hydrants, but people liked the aesthetic.

When I looked between two buildings, I could see a pathway that led to a playground for parentless children. It was sad, but some just didn't have them. Most of them currently live in a group home, but I had decided to make it my mission to get as many of them as possible put with loving families. It was the least I could do for these people. Only one child stopped playing long enough to spot me, but he grinned when he did.

It was incredibly strange having so many people know who I am. Not only that, but know who I am and like me. He'd told me it would be like this, but I hadn't believed him. In the distance, I could see the castle. It had towers that reached up through the clouds. I wasn't quite sure what the point of the towers was, but I liked them nonetheless. Besides, if I didn't like them, I could take them down. It was my castle, after all.

I was about to walk back there when I felt a pair of arms go around my waist. I smiled as Lucifer held me for a moment before talking.

"So Lilith, how are you liking Hell? Everything you'd hoped it would be?"

"Everything and more," I responded.

-Isabel



Keith

Prompt: Write a piece with an unexpected ending.

Pink

It is a very pretty pink. It is bright during the day, but soft enough at night so that I can sleep. I like staring at the wall, imagining myself soaking into the lush paint. But, I'm not supposed to touch it. She said that touching it would make a dark smudge, and it wouldn't be the pretty pink I love anymore. I don't want that. The left corner is my favorite corner. That is where the purple unicorn must sit. It isn't as good as my old unicorn, but it is close enough. Purple is almost as nice a color as pink. I'm glad the unicorn was from the same store as the old unicorn. I like hugging her and pressing my face into her fur. She has the smell of soap, like the scent of Irish Spring. I see Irish Spring in the other room, and I don't really like it. It is green, and green is an icky color. I prefer pink. Or purple. Purple is the color of the new unicorn, and it is almost as good as the old unicorn. The old unicorn had a sweet smell, the smell of Tide. I remember Tide because I used to help Mommy in the washroom. She would let me put my nose up to the clean clothing and breathe in deeply. It was warm, straight out of the dryer. I wish the new one would use Tide, but they don't ask me what I want. The only reason that I have the new unicorn, the purple one, is because they had seen it in the pictures. Mommy has a blog, and she would always put up a picture of me, every week. She never took my picture without my pink unicorn. I wish I still had her with me. I wish I could touch the pink wall. Mommy would let me. I love pink, not purple. In my old room, I colored on the wall. Mommy wasn't very happy. She would sigh, scold, but give me a kiss at the end.

"A kid will be a kid. I love you. However, remember to listen."

I don't color anymore. What would they would say if I colored now? In this room? My back is really itchy, and I can't reach the new unicorn. I just want to hug it, but the mean chain won't let me.

-Gwyneth



Liam