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Writers' Challenge!

The two winners of the summer edition Writers' Challenge that tied for first place, Stephen Carey and Amy Sprague, had designed two brand-new prompts for the winter/spring edition. Below you will find the original prompts as well as the winning entry from Kaley Johnson, who will receive a \$15 giftcard to Barnes & Noble bookstore. Although we could only choose one winner, it was a difficult choice. Here we'd like to give honorable mention to the following entrants: Cheryl Sommese, Chrys Fey, Jill Marcotte and Rachel Smith.

Prompt: Snapshots in Time (designed by Stephen Carey)

Create a word scrapbook. Think of how a single photograph captures the essence of a moment in time. Tell a story about someone making a positive difference in another's life through describing a photo or a series of photos and providing details on the significance behind the images. Examples might include a character talking about a few previously unknown black & white photos they discover of a relative that inspired them or there could be a series of child to adulthood photos that show a friendship over the years. The story can be fiction or non-fiction, based on imaginary or real photographs. Use only a few lines to describe the photo(s) and beneath each description of an image, elaborate on the sentiment behind the image(s). You may tell the story from any perspective. Word Limit- 1,000.

Prompt: Put it in a Letter (designed by Amy Sprague)

Someone is waiting to hear from their doctor about test results concerning whether or not they have a terminal illness. Have them write a letter to one person talking about the lessons they have and have not learned in their lives. What is most important to them? Who do they choose to send this letter to and what kind of relationship do they have with that person? What issues do they address in it? Word Limit- 1,000.

Winning Entry by Kaley Johnson, using the second prompt of 'Put it in a Letter'

Dear Baby Girl,

I'm writing this letter and hoping to God that one day you will read it. But lately, God hasn't been listening.

They say that your chances are dwindling every day. The doctor pulled out his cold instruments and they told him the truth that human eyes cannot see. I hate those instruments; those metal devices that probed and prodded and discovered the darkest nightmare I could imagine.

I just want to tell you a few things. Firstly, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, and no matter how many times I say it, it still will mean nothing, words thudding onto a page without an ounce of ability to change the past. If I had known this would be the price I'd pay, I never would have taken it. I hope you never have to completely understand why I did it, because I never want you to have to feel that pain. If you ever get the chance to feel pain at all. Oh god. I just wanted to forget things for a little while. That feeling of being nowhere, of being someplace filled with whirlwinds, a place where thinking doesn't really mean anything, where hurt and memory fade away in the greatest release. That needle hits your skin and that's it. The world melts away beneath you and suddenly you forget the way that life has knocked you onto your knees and kept you there. But now, I'd take it all back. It is because of that chemical compound that you may never breathe the air of this world. Because of my weakness, those small, blue baby shoes may remain forever unworn. And I'm sorry.

The next thing I want to tell you is that, if you do get the chance, the miracle, to come into this world, you need to know that it is hard. The world around us is not a perfect place. And a lot of the time, it isn't even a good

place. Windows are covered in smog. Men aren't princes. And fathers don't always love their daughters the way they should. This life will take everything from you and set you on fire, watching you burn, trying desperately not to drown in your own ashes. Hands can do wonderful things, but they don't always choose to. Mouths whisper hateful words, your feet will take you to dark places, and your wrists, no matter how much time passes, may always have those thin scars. I want you to remember this though; your heart keeps beating. No matter how much darkness there is around it, no matter how many times it gets sliced in two by the sharpness of this world, it will continue to flutter in its cage. Because the shadows of the world are long, but if you are amidst shadows, that only means the sun is shining just around the corner.

Next. I've only seen you once. You were snuggled inside the blackness of a machine, connected to me for one moment through sight within that sonogram. I swear to you, in that moment, you were the most beautiful person I'd ever seen. Nothing in this universe can compare to the way you curled up in innocence, moving those miniscule fingers and wiggling those indescribably perfect toes. Within that split second of absolute purity, you were untouched by the harshness of the world, unmarred by the scars that life will inflict on you.

But when you are born--if you are born, please god--that wholesomeness can't last forever. There may come a time when you will feel ugly. Pictures on T.V., models in magazines, words from others; all these things will try and convince you that in some way or another, you aren't good enough. They will say your hair is the wrong color, your skin is too pale, and, the worst one of all, that you're the wrong size. You will meet girls who are disasters under their skin. They will push away food, survive for weeks on only bottles of water and their own hatred for what they see in the mirror. Collarbones and thigh gaps will dominate their minds. When that moment comes, you will need to burn the magazines. Throw the T.V. out the window. Turn aside from the whispers. Stand in front of the mirror. And say to your reflection, to the perfect individual standing before you, "I am beautiful." Because you are. You were when you were that blob displayed before me, and you will be forever and for always.

This is the last thing I'm going to tell you. My baby, my love, my everything. They want me to kill you. They say if you survive, I probably won't. My wrecked body is no match for your strong spirit. But I searched inside of myself and found nothing within me that would be capable, or willing, to

destroy such an amazing entity as you. I am corrupted by the scars of this world, inside and out. You are the image of perfection, a blank slate for beauty to be painted on. I refuse to destroy any chance you have of ever seeing the sunshine so I can simply take it for granted for days to come. When that time comes, if that time comes, that you must enter this world only for me to leave it, I will not despair. I've had my time here, and now it's your turn.

In years to come, there might be a time when you finally understand this letter and what it means. This is important: do not burden your heart with my choices. I may regret a thousand things, but this is one decision I know in my heart is right. And although it weighs heavy on me that you may have to face the world without my hand to guide you, I know that you'll be okay.

Hang in there.

Love always,

Your mother

Bio- Kaley Johnson is an eighteen-year-old high school senior. She plans on pursuing a career in humanitarian journalism in order to make some sort of difference in the world through writing. She spends most of her time applying for scholarships, running cross country and track, reading, writing, and operating as the Editor-in-Chief of her high school newspaper. Her favorite books include *The Lord of the Rings*, *Gone with the Wind* and *East of Eden*.

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