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Grade: 5

Title: The Wall

AMANDA

Amanda gazed over at Aunt Edna, struggling to get her brace on her foot. Amanda sighed a sigh so deep and sad that the air around her felt sad and grey. Nothing about Aunt Edna was depressing her, but Amanda's spirits were naturally about as high as her ugly green converse that she had to wear. She had complained about her disgusting shoes to her Aunt Edna, but her Aunt just took out the Society's Book of Bleh Rules. Well, maybe it didn't say bleh, but Amanda thought that book was bleh if ever anything was. Aunt Edna would pull the dusty, leather-bound book from the only bookshelf permitted in their house, flip to page 862, and read aloud;

"Girls, Ages 10- 13, Clothes, Shoes. Each girl in the King James Perfection Society is allowed 1 pair black and pink tennis shoes, 1 pair light pink sandals, 1 pair dress shoes, 1 pair green converse." Amanda never got anything blue.

"Blue is a boy's color," Aunt Edna would say. "No niece of mine is going out in public wearing a boy's color in the King James Perfection Society."

Amanda walked over to her Aunt and strapped the brace onto her foot. Aunt Edna's foot felt cold and clammy from soaking her feet in some putrid old lady stuff every day. Amanda would much rather have been sitting in her perfectly green backyard feeling depressed, but young women were "required to help their elders" in her society. Unfortunately, Aunt Edna had arthritis, and helping her all the time was a royal pain in the hindquarters.

Wiping her hands on her khakis, she went outside into the rain and shielded her eyes from the heavy droplets as she glanced up at THE WALL. THE WALL was a tall cement blockage that separated the King James Perfection Society from the Free Society. From what Amanda knew, on the other side of THE WALL, you could play whatever sports you wanted, you could wear whatever pleased you on the particular morning, and there definitely wasn't a Book of Bleh Rules.

"Sounds like a pretty good package deal to me," Amanda muttered to herself. THE WALL was right at the back of her yard, behind the carolina allspice shrubs, and shaded her yard quite nicely on hot afternoons. However, it was not a particularly hot afternoon, for weather was one of the few things that the government found they couldn't control. If it was right there, why wouldn't she just climb over it? Well, there were no footholds, just a smooth, blank sheet of hard. That the government knew of. There, in fact, was one small chink, and it was located about a foot up the wall, in the backyard of Amanda Snicket. Sure, she looked, but there wasn't much through the wall. Just an abandoned alley by night, and a sunnier abandoned alley by day.

But, on this particular afternoon, Amanda was feeling slightly less somber than usual. And, as she climbed through the carolina shrubs, muttering to herself about the bushes' scent that much reminded her of her Aunt's gross old lady products, she heard something. Whispering. But, she couldn't quite make it out through the loud pitter-patter of the rain. Was someone stalking her? (That wasn't allowed in the King James Society). As she approached THE WALL, she was a nervous wreck. Amanda lowered

herself down so that her stomach was just grazing the muddy soil, and placed her eye to the chink. OMG. Amanda jumped back in surprise and screeched, forgetting that screeching was not allowed above 75 decibels. Calming down, she crawled back to the crack. Yup, she had seen what she thought she had seen.

A boy, about her age, was leaning against the other side of THE WALL, holding a squirrel. And, he was a charming boy if ever she had seen one.

JESS

Jess didn't like people. Okay, he was a person, though not a very dignified one. But, Jess much preferred other species, mainly cats and squirrels. He had a way with animals, almost a sense of direct communication, or a mammal hotline, as his sisters would say. Maybe it was because he didn't have much good experience with people. His father had been killed when he was two. He didn't have any details, and he didn't want any details. His older sisters were both glamorous, but maybe too glamorous. His oldest sister, Cassie, worked at the ear-piercing station at the mall. His slightly younger sister, Lulu, didn't have time for a job. She was too busy being beautiful. Basically, he lived in a house full of girly girls, with no boys to get through to his inner manly core, and he had learned to love the color pink.

"You're lucky you live in a free society," his mother would tell him, her blood red lip ring wobbling as she spoke. "You see that wall? On the other side, you could be sent to prison for expressing your love for pink. This here is the way to go." Still, Jess wondered about what it would be like to live over there. You walk two feet, and it's like you've entered a whole nother world. Politically speaking. It wasn't quite that easy. There was the fact that there was a gigantor cement wall with no stairs. Of course, there were rules, like no chewing with your mouth open, but you were allowed to play football if you were a girl (Jess knew some surprisingly buff female seventh graders).

He skipped outside, into the aqueous and inky night, tilting his face upward so that raindrops streaked down through his rusty ginger hair. Chill bumps sprouted up on his arms, as he twirled around in the dazzling sodden flurries of rain. Twirling and twirling until he was dizzy, Jess collapsed onto the slick grass, muddying the seat of his jeans.

The bushes next to him ruffled. Jess attempted to brush off his pants, only smudging the dirt onto his hands. Hurrying over to the far end of the backyard, his socks squeaked inside his high tops, and rain continued to drench him, widening the crooked grin plastered onto his face. A small squirrel fell out of the hydrangeas and Jess slid to catch him, managing to get soil all up his front. Jess spoke slowly, talking only to the creature in his arms.

"Back so early, Cleo?" The squirrel, completely ignoring his question (As many squirrels will) leaped from Jess' grasp and took off. "Whoah!" Jess yelled to the squirrel, scrambling to chase after it.

You have got to see this, Jess! There's a single hole in THE WALL and i've located it! The animal's lips didn't move, but Jess understood it perfectly. Panting to keep up with the squirrel, Jess whispered,

"What then?"

I squeezed through, and it's a horrid place! Every house, everyone's clothes, all the cars look exactly the same! Jess closed his eyes for a second as he ran, which he probably shouldn't have done, but he had excellent balance. He tried to picture a world with no diversity. It was difficult. They raced past the

houses and turned a corner. There, in front of them, stood one small section of THE WALL, towering at the back of a trashed alleyway.

Shhhh! whispered Cleo. There's a girl on the other side! And, just then, there was mumbling, as someone audibly thrashed through a patch of bushes. Jess scooped up Cleo, and flattened himself against THE WALL. Jess' heartbeat quickened, now louder than the downpour.

I'm hungry. Do you have any-

Suddenly, there was a big, hazel eye peeping through the chink in THE WALL. Jess heard a shriek, the owner of the eye stumbled, and then, there it was again, looking straight at him.

AMANDA

Now, Amanda didn't have much experience with boys. The government permitted her only to play with other girls, and there was no disobeying the government unless you wanted to get squashed like a bug. And Amanda, being nervous little Amanda, did not particularly enjoy the idea of getting squashed like a bug. And now, this boy she was looking at, he seemed friendly, sweet, and outgoing, all good things in a friend.

"Do you live in the Free Society?" Amanda whispered, trembling in the downpour.

"Do you live in the Perfection Society?" The boy whispered, also shaking, and clutching his squirrel tightly. There was an understanding passed between them, that they were both people of many questions, and people of few answers.

"Do all people in the Free Society have squirrels?" questioned Amanda, burying her nose into a soggy, yellow scarf, which provided her with no heat, and a wet nose. Another understanding passed between them, that they lived in completely different worlds, and would not be allowed to know each other. With a nod of their heads, though, they decided they didn't care about rules, and would know each other anyway. This was the first time Amanda had disobeyed the rules, and she tensed with even more worry. But, the small rebel part of her let loose, and it felt really good.

"So there, Aunt Edna," Amanda muttered. The boy tilted his head to the side, and Amanda's cheeks reddened. "Nothing, really." She half-expected for her Aunt to yell "I heard that!" but all that came was a short and high-pitched meow from the distance.

"That cat wants to be let inside," said the boy. Amanda's nose crinkled adorably.

"Excuse me?" The boy blushed from his head to his toes. Both children, from different political worlds, turned away from each other, embarrassed and flushed. The hammering rain and obfuscous darkness blotted out their vermilion tints, and neither noticed the other's alter in color. It was the boy who finally diverted in closer to the hole, and confirmed,

"Seven o' clock, tomorrow." And both knew what to do.

JESS

"A girl?!" Cassie giggled and put her hands to her mouth, as she burst out into a wide grin, showing off her perfect white teeth.

I never should've told them, thought Jess. It was, after all, Cleo's idea.

"Do you like her?" whispered Lulu, leaning in. "Or do you like her?"

"I DON'T KNOW!" yelled Jess. Everything had become very confusing, yet that girl made it all seem so simple. He realized he didn't even know her name, and he hadn't told her his. Jess, He thought to himself. My name is Jess.

The hours ticked by very slowly. Jess glanced at the pink clock on his bedroom wall.

5:46.

Jess walked around his bedroom with his eyes closed, to build up his sense of direction. He did this often. It calmed him down.

Jess strutted outside into the luminous daylight, vibrant shafts of light streaming down onto his bare neck. He decided a walk would do him some good.

Cleo was waiting for him by THE WALL.

I've been waiting a while.

"It's not seven o' clock yet."

I know.

"You seem to know a lot of things."

I know. Jess scooped Cleo up in a big hug, and spun him around in circle until they were both dizzy.

What was THAT for? The squirrel was blushing as much as a squirrel could.

"Oh, nothing." They sat, back to back, for a long time, and Jess must've dozed off, because he awoke to Cleo jabbing him in the arm, and the girl looking at him through the chink. Jess' eyes got wide, and he sat bolt upright.

"Jess. My name is Jess!" He said with a crooked smile.

"Amanda," said the girl. "My name is Amanda."

"No," said Jess. "Not all people in the Free Society have squirrels. This is Cleo."

Cleo beamed at the mention of his name, then jumped through the hole in THE WALL.