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## A Child in Limbo: An Allegory

My feet forever argue. I find it all so amusing. One foot will choose to remember, the other will opt to forget. Then each always ends up seeing the other's position. How fickle feet are! And how rude the sound they make! I hear a steady, plodding thud which seems to shake the floor . . . hard soles would have made a cheerier sound than these rubber blocks. There is a shyer sound here, too, a faint mimicking of my own footsteps. The other footsteps are those of a child, a shadow, following me by merging with other shadows. Shadows should be seen and not heard, or so they say. Echoes are just shadows which are heard and not seen.

A flattened cardboard tube is this hall . . . it's like being at the core of a squashed toilet paper roll in a neglected gas station bathroom. Down at the end of the hall, the Outside taps on the clear square film and peers in. LOOK, it says. I look to see what all the complaining is about. Indeed there is reason for those wrinkly, baggy clouds under the skies. Silhouetted, steel wool threads with frayed ends prick the brooding blue and draw blood. I cannot watch the flowing red; it makes me faint. To cool my heart, I close my eyes and count.

I am weary of this hide-and-seek. The shadow will help to bring peace, but it will not catch up to me until I fall . . .

Then the child presents herself. "How are you here?" I ask her. "You were kidnapped so long ago and thrown into the chasm and now you are dead—and good riddance, They say."

"I am a ghost. And you . . . you are a fool; we're both dead, so all is even," the shadow-child says.

And I say that I am afraid.

"That is why you are a fool," she tells me. "You must learn to see the world with your heart."

"But . . . my dear child, They cast it down into the chasm with you."

"And I have kept it safe," she says.

She leads me backwards down a passage, and also backwards

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Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand.



-Plato

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down the hall. A cramped tube simply will not do for her. I crouch before the yellow lockers. She says that I am a tree frog squatting on a branch. Look at all these rows of ripe bananas! Thanks, kid; the tropics sure beat the gas station.

How did I allow her to lead me onto a branch? Never, never, do I walk on a branch; certainly I cannot know it will not break and let me fall. The child marvels at the beauty of the heavens above this jungle. I try to look up, too, but I am very much concerned with the integrity of the intimidating branch below me. The branch is the excuse, not the enemy. The only enemy is self. Maybe the child will lead me to surrender.

This is what I owe to coming Earlier, when the day is deeply dark but filled with the innocence of morning rebirth.

—Colleen Cooper,  
Tenth grade, Mount St. Mary High School,  
Nashua, New Hampshire

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All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings:

it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. ”

-William Wordsworth