Sadie sighed. She just knew she would fail the Moral when she saw the first question: “Have you apologized when a problem was your fault and tried to fix it?” Unfortunately, the lie detectors made it impossible to go back from your first thought on an answer.

It was expected though. Everyone tries to be “the best they can be” their whole thirteen years before the Moral. Sadie’s brother, Steve, who used to be easily annoyed as a child was inspired by their neighbor. Their neighbor, the doctor of their town, taught Steve the benefits of treating others well. He changed himself for the better to live a life helping others. Steve was studying to become a doctor, and now he was able to keep his anger and complaints contained. For the most part anyway.

Despite that, it was one of his complaints that helped make Sadie this way. She had heard from her brother at five what a nightmare high school was, and then decided she’d be okay with anything if she was able to live her life the way she wanted to. It wasn’t as if Sadie didn’t try, she did… at least for a little while.

When she was young, she used to tug on their cat’s tail to see if the cat would scream. Molly was her mother’s cat from college, who was always there to comfort the family, but she ran away soon after Sadie discovered the tail-pulling trick. Sadie’s mother was crying for days after the loss of her beloved cat. In *A Guideline for the Loss of Loved Ones*, Sadie read about good little children helping their parents as much as possible and comforting them with good memories of their beloved. She spent her days watching television and patting her mother on the back.

Once Sadie accepted her fate with the Moral, she was free to live life the way she
pleased. She took every opportunity she could to make the best of life, whether it was stealing her favorite candy from friends or speaking her mind when she thought someone was wrong. Which was often. While the other little girls and boys ran about in the playground, playing nicely, following the rules, and making sure everyone felt included, Sadie was plotting a new scheme. Pranks on her teachers, jokes on her friends, and making fun of her parents were all flawless ways to earn a good laugh.

There were a lot of times when Sadie wished she wasn’t as alone in her activities. She often asked her friends to join her, but they always refused. They claimed her activities were “against the rules,” and that she shouldn’t participate in them if she didn’t want to get in trouble. Alone in her devious ways, Sadie grew to despise the others praised for following the foolish rules.

_The Moral_, Sadie thought. _This stupid test._

It was the year 2122 that changed everything—when the human population rose beyond Earth’s carrying capacity. The land of America became a refuge from the dying wastelands beyond, and to salvage what remained of Earth, the Government created a fool-proof morality test. At first, the experimental test backfired horribly. Yet as time went on, global warming, poverty, and crime began to decrease, and the test was labeled a “huge success.” The Moral’s one-hundredth anniversary was coming up, now that she thought about it.

Everything was “better,” and yet here she was, locked in a room with a “surprise” that would take effect in… nineteen minutes. According to the hourglass, that is.

_Well, what can I do now?_ Sadie snorted.

The room she found herself in when she woke up was brightly lit and painted neutral gray, the air smelling sharp and brisk. The driver in the black limousine had promised a fancier,
swankier room. However, it made sense the Government had only lied to comfort her parents.
Who would ever know?

Besides a stiff straight chair, the only other furniture in the room was a long wooden table. It included a viewing orb with her whole life story embedded into a thirteen-minute video, a notebook and pencil to write letters, and an Imagineer, which would show your dreams come true in a simulation.

Sadie picked up the smooth glowing orb, admiring its beauty, and the ability to hold her life in her hands. If only, she thought.

There is no time left to dream and I don't think there is anyone who loves me enough to bother reading my writing. I have nothing better to do, so I might as well watch a movie.

The viewing orb began, and a few minutes into the story, Sadie was able to see a fight she had with her former best friend, Mari, when she was ten:

“Sadie, why are you wasting your money on a ticket?” Mari told her, “Do you know how many people have died in the Hurricane at the carnival?”
“Nothing’s going to happen!” Sadie replied, exhausted by Mari’s concern. “You’re so dramatic!”
“Hey! If you get even a bit hurt, I’m going to be the one they blame!”
Before Mari could blink, Sadie sat in the roller coaster seat. “Are you actually- HEY! SADIE!”
“Relax!”

Sadie remembered going on the Hurricane. It was a thrilling rise and fall. Her own life was filled with drops but this ride had heights beyond her imagination. This jerk in her class, Jasper, bet her fifty dollars she wouldn’t make it off alive.

She ended up breaking both her legs, an arm, and her fingers.

Mari was grounded for an entire year for not keeping Sadie in check. Despite being
friends and neighbors since birth, after that incident, it was as though Mari had disappeared into thin air.

*It’s not like Mari was the greatest friend in the world. She’s always talking about becoming a bit better every day. If she was a bit better that day, she would have been able to handle me and I wouldn’t have gotten hurt.* It wasn’t Sadie’s fault, anyway.

While these thoughts came easily into Sadie’s mind- being reminders she thought whenever she remembered that incident- somehow her heart tightened to think of them again.

A few scenes later, a new scene triggered her memory. It was when Sadie refused to compete in a Morality Competition as part of her Camp for Improving Children last summer. Her parents begged her to compete, except it went against Sadie’s desire to not do anything she didn’t want to do. She remembered calling them on the day before the competition:

> “Sadie,” her mom begged, “Just participate in even *one* competition- you don’t understand the stakes behind this! If you don’t participate…”

> “NO! I don’t care what happens. Why am I the one being forced to do something when it's your fault I’m in the situation in the first place?” She blamed angrily, “I just wanted to go to soccer camp, *like I’ve been saying all summer*, but you made some lame excuse that the government’s trying to reprimand us before we’re thirteen and SENT ME HERE!”

> “Sadie, please understand!” Her dad yelled, “That was true! I…”

> The speaker on the phone went dead silent when Sadie cut the call.

She was only acting the way she always had. Why didn’t that feel right anymore? Why was her stomach hurting that way? Every second she watched on the viewing orb made her feel uneasy. She was the one right to do what she was doing! Everyone else was wrong! Not her… it was never her.

The video on the viewing orb was almost finished. The last scene was her last day before she came here, the Center for Ends. She had to say goodbye to her family- her mother, father,
and brother.

Her parents’ cheeks were drenched, their eyes shining, as they cherished their last moments with their only daughter.

“Sadie, we love you so much,” Her mom told her, hugging her tightly.

“You know that, don’t you? If we could save you…” her dad added.

The repulsion to their tears was easy, the words she’d said next were easier:

“If you loved me, you would have tried harder. You never loved me at all!” She yelled back at them, getting into the limousine that had come to pick her up. She thought about all the times they’d tried to make her change her mind about her choices, how controlled she felt under the threat of the Moral. It wasn’t fair, to live a life she didn’t choose!

“You should have fixed the world for me, not tried to fix me!”

Then came the hard slap from her brother’s hand. “Sadie, don’t say foul things to your parents like that. We all loved you, and we still do. But YOU are the reason you’re in this situation. It is no one else’s fault but yours.”

Sadie could still feel the burn on her cheek from the slap. She still felt the anger that coursed through her blood, the anger that spread from the tips of her toes and spilled out of her mouth like sweet truths. Anger at her family, anger at the world, anger at the whole situation.

It pointed towards herself, for once.

By the end of the video, tears that had never left her eyes before rushed down her cheeks. She looked at the hourglass. Only six minutes left. She carefully took the notebook and began writing as quickly as she could. On and on she wrote, confessing all the apologies and emotions that bubbled up after she understood just why she was in this room. Her “surprise” was creeping closer as the sand in the hourglass fell.

Two minutes left.

Sadie looked at the table again and saw the Imagineer. Maybe she could tell her family how sorry she was and see them again, even if they were only a simulation! She scrambled to put
the helmet on, and before her eyes, she saw her mother, father, brother, and Mari.

Her mother had stayed home and lovingly took care of her whenever she was sick, despite the family’s financial problems. How could she forget how much her mother had done for her?

Her father, whose clever words helped her get over her fear of public speaking when she had to present in her social studies class. There was nothing he wouldn’t do for her...

Steve, who had never failed to make her laugh and was always ready with a positive attitude to contrast with her negative personality. Was there ever a time he wasn’t there for her?

Mari stayed with Sadie through the pain of scraping her knee in kindergarten to the harsh scoldings Sadie got for misbehaving in fifth grade. She was the best friend I could have ever asked for, and I gave her up...

The tears continued to drop, and as Sadie reached out to hug them, she prepared herself to say the words she had never spoken in her entire life.

“I’m sorry-”