

Truth in Fiction

by

Timothy R. Baker

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York

College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

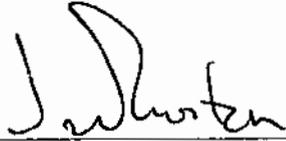
April 16, 2011

Truth in Fiction

by

Timothy R. Baker

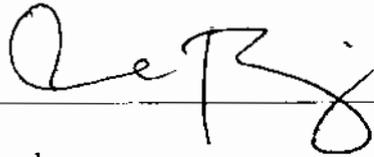
APPROVED BY:



6/9/11

Advisor

Date



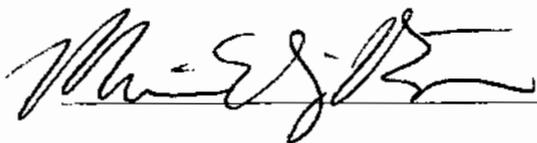
7/23/11

Reader



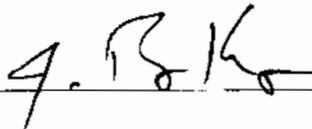
7/23/11

Reader



6/10/11

Chair, Graduate Committee



10/20/11

Chair, Department of English

Abstract

According to literary tradition and genre classification, fiction has often been regarded as writing that lacks a foundation of truth. However, this does not necessarily mean that fiction contains no elements of truth. In this thesis, Timothy Baker argues that fiction contains traces of truth – truths that may not be fundamentally based on facts, yet can still be recognized as embodying the deep-seated essence of truth. These ‘essential truths’, though largely shunned from the non-fiction genre, can be utilized to establish the groundwork of fiction – making the genre a reflection of reality itself – instead of a captured moment of reality. Fiction that contains essential truths, though not based on actual events, can still be recognized as realistic and existentially valuable. This thesis includes three short works of creative writing by Timothy Baker: “Letters from Llea,” a creative essay, “Perfection,” a short story, and “Desperate Desires,” also a short story – all of which, he argues in the introduction, contain essential truths.

Table of Contents

Introduction	v
Letters from Llea: A Metaphorical Manifesto	1
Perfection	8
Desperate Desires	22

Introduction

If there are any two works of literature that have had the most profound impact on my understanding of fiction, truth, and creative style, it would be Lauren Slater's *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* and Paul Coelho's *The Alchemist*. The reason for the pairing of these very different works and authors is principally due to their atypical treatment of truth. Before reading these works, my only understanding of truth was that of the socially accepted construct: truth is equivalent to fact. I recognized that an individual's perspective is an important component in the understanding of truth, but I have come to understand that there really is not a definitive and concrete definition that fully encapsulates the idea of 'truth' in its entirety. The 'essence' of truth, rather, has a fundamental core that is the direct reflection of reality; thus, the 'essential truth' defines reality more completely than the 'truth' that society decides for it. I recognize that is a vague way of explaining this abstract concept, so here is another way of putting it: fiction (since it is not based on factual people, events, or situations) has the potential to express and reveal the essence of the truth – whereas nonfiction can only present bona fide examples of any given truth. In the end, these examples are merely examples – not actual expressions of truths. This, in my eyes, empowers fiction with a unique capability that has an extraordinarily powerful effect on its audience and their perception of the world and society.

When writing fiction, my primary objective is to identify and utilize an essential truth as the foundation of my work. These essential truths allow for my

stories to speak of something deeper than the subject matter itself. At the heart of my works, I attempt to embed truths that are intangible yet still recognizable, truths that explore the murky gray areas of social experience and probe the mysteries of human nature. When writing, I pursue truths that make universal statements by commenting on the human experience and what it means to live, to love, and to recognize one's own mortality. This, I believe, when done successfully, leaves my audience with not only new perspectives on traditional truths, but also with a curious energy that only comes from recognizing and acknowledging that they have come to understand something new – yet timeless – about the human spirit. This, however, is often easier said than done.

Though I endeavor to enrich my stories with this elusive yet transcendent quality, the reality is that I often become distracted and lose sight of my original goal. I become obsessed with particulars (such as character traits, dialogue, or actions), I persevere over the sound of a particular sentence instead of how it should feel – sacrificing clarity for artfulness – and I distort the natural direction of the work for what I think will entertain the reader more. However, these failings, in a way, naturally ground my work through human error – becoming examples themselves of the nature of writing; and, with this optimistic attitude, I find the motivation to continue writing – even though failure is more probable than success. This, for me, is the reality of writing – which is worth every bit of the effort.

The difficult part is that I cannot just sit down and think up these essential truths; instead, they come from brief moments in my daily life that move me in ways

that I cannot pin down or explain through any other medium than fiction. I'll overhear something in a conversation or see an action someone makes when they think nobody is looking – slight incidents that take me by surprise and imbed themselves deep within my subconscious understanding of the world. They will be trivial irregularities that ring uniquely true, irrefutably and unexplainably true – observations that provoke me to celebrate or despair for the sake of humanity. These essential truths are what I strive to use as the root of every story – whether it has an unrealistic plot, dialog, or characters, at least it captures some universal truth that will stay with my reader long after they have finished reading my work.

Nevertheless, identifying and appropriately utilizing an essential truth in a story is not all that there is to writing. Since I began writing, I have taken special note of specific methods and styles that other authors have employed successfully – using their works as models to improve and inspire my own writing. Such authors are Margaret Atwood, Orson Scott Card, Joyce Carol Oates, Franz Kafka, and Rod Serling – to name a few.

Atwood's novels have taught me to slow down my descriptions and to pay close attention to detail – like her knack for transforming even the most mundane aspects of one's surroundings into poignant and beautiful descriptive gems that are capable of drawing her audience's absolute attention and adoration. Card demonstrated the unique quality of devising imaginative and impossible concepts that became convincingly possible under certain probable conditions. Oates, specifically through her short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" and

Kafka, through “A Hunger Artist,” exhibited the incredible possibilities of constructing entire stories out of single symbolic metaphors that imply many different interpretations all at once. And, lastly, I admire Serling for his countless examples of innovative and highly varied plot and character types that explored the boundaries of the short story and science fiction genres in a very refined and highly evocative manner.

In this thesis project, I have included a creative essay and two short stories that I believe best exemplify this philosophy of capturing essential truths as well as exhibiting a variety of writing styles and forms that I have experimented with over the past two years in this writing program. The first work in this collection, “Letters From Lea,” is a work of creative non-fiction that I wrote in the spring of 2008 to describe my writing process. My intention was to write a manifesto of my writing craft, but when I was finished, I found that “Letters From Lea” was something more – it was my first attempt to consciously capture an essential truth in a work.

The second work in this collection, “Perfection,” is a work of fiction that I wrote in the fall of 2008 after hearing a news story about the Fritzl family of Austria. According to the press release, a girl was imprisoned by her father in a windowless cellar for twenty-four years. The girl gave birth to seven children in this underground prison, some of them were taken up to be raised normally, yet several of them were raised underground – never experiencing the things everyone else in the world takes for granted – such as sunlight, grass, fresh air, spaces larger than the cramped underground prison... the list is endless. Despite the tragedy of this unfortunate

situation, I was still intrigued by the unique perspective those children must have developed and the truths they were raised to know. In “Perfection,” I drew from the curiosity I had for the extremely sheltered children of the Fritzl family – narrating the story through the limited perspective of a young girl whose only knowledge of the world came from the small room around her and the little bits of information her father gave her. Being so sheltered and innocent, Miranda, the protagonist of “Perfection,” has no knowledge of the freedoms and the life she had been deprived of. Through Miranda, I explored the truths of Miranda’s world and how the introduction of one simple freedom changed her entire world.

The third work in this collection, “Desperate Desires,” is a work of fiction that I wrote in the spring of 2009 in an attempt at capturing two universal truths: first, the realization that not everything in life goes as planned – even when you are convinced that it will, and second, the understanding that the truths you experience are not necessarily the same truths others experience. Told in the aftermath of an emotionally devastating conversation, the story follows Charlie, the protagonist, as he pieces through what was said to find clues to the apparent truth he had been previously blinded to.

When writing all three of these works, it was not my goal to explore the murkiness of truth within them; rather, it was my ambition to simply produce stories that I believed contained interesting moments in them – moments that my audience could relate to or at least find engaging. But having gone back to re-examine my writing as a whole, I can see that I have always based my writing on singular

existential qualities that inspired the root of the work more than the plot, characters, settings, and dialogue. For instance, in “Letters From Llea,” my goal was to merely describe the nature of creativity (in a creative fashion), not pin down an essential truth and put it on display; and in “Desperate Desires,” I only wanted to capture the complex physical, mental, and emotional sensations of a broken heart – not make a statement about the fallibility of one’s personal truths due to their own egocentrism and particular perspective. Yet, considering my works with an analytical distance, I can see the underlying similarities imbedded in each of them – the fundamental motivating factors that compelled me to write each of these works. From this vantage point, I can see that I was indeed pursuing a common aspiration – an aspiration for truth.

Works Cited

- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Anchor, 1998. Print.
- . *The Blind Assassin*. New York: Anchor, 2001. Print.
- . *Oryx and Crake*. New York: Anchor, 2004. Print.
- Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*. New York: Tor, 1991. Print.
- . *Speaker For the Dead*. New York: Tor, 1991. Print.
- . *Xenocide*. New York: Tor, 1991. Print.
- Coelho, Paul. *The Alchemist*. New York: HarperLuxe, 1993. Print.
- Kafka, Franz. "A Hunger Artist." *The Complete Stories*. Ed. Nahum N. Glatzer. New York: Schocken, 1971. Print.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? Selected Early Stories*. Princeton: Ontario Review, 1993. Print.
- Serling, Rod. *The Twilight Zone: Complete Stories*. New York, NY: HarperCollins (TV Books), 1990. Print.
- Slater, Lauren. *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2001. Print.

Letters from Llea
A metaphorical manifesto

*If a soul has no body
And a conscience has no substance
Then Llea has no boundaries*

~~~~~ Part I ~~~~~  
Metaphorical Muse  
Perception and Personification  
~~~~~

For the benefit of your understanding, I will start by constructing the metaphor of Llea before you. Since I believe Llea to be fundamentally indescribable, I will deliberately assign artificial attributes to Llea that will ground it as a tangible metaphor:

Llea has no body, shape, nor form ...

Llea has a female voice (we will assume Llea is feminine).

Llea has no habitat...

Llea resides in my mind (we will assume in my subconscious).

Llea has no origin...

Llea has always been a part of me (we will assume Llea pre-existed me).

Suppose we consider Llea this way:

- Llea is the instrument of my subconscious used to speak to me while I am in a conscious state of mind.
- Llea is the elusive guide that hides in the shadows yet vigilantly leads me in the right direction – refusing to give up on me – despite my failings.

➤ Llea is my Jiminy Cricket, so to speak. She established a set of rules that I must abide by. These rules force me down certain paths – paths I might not find without her – paths that produce works that *yearn* to be written:

- 1) I must not taint Llea's words with unnecessary obscenities.
- 2) I must not imitate the creations of others.
- 3) I must not work when the mood is not right.

~~~~~

Llea first found me when I was child – restless and fidgety – the victim of insomnia. Every night I would lie hopelessly awake in the faint glow of my seashell shaped nightlight – tossing and turning – waiting for a sleep that wouldn't come. Llea had the cure – a sedative of thought – an exercise of imagination. She told countless stories – exhilarating my childhood delights – lulling me to sleep. Her stories felt like dreams, yet having a say in what I dreamt; Llea was always open to my suggestions. Instead of dreading the night, Llea made bedtime a delight. Her stories would stick with me every morning – lingering in the back of my mind all day – calling me back at night – my beacon of respite in a sea of sleeplessness.

When I was an adolescent, I began to record Llea's stories – waking early to jot them down before they faded. But, this proved to be a difficult task. I would elaborate – filling all the fuzzy blanks with my own ideas. I was rebellious. I was ambitious. I began to subvert Llea's creations – choosing to tell my own fantastical stories – pushing hers aside. It was around this time when Llea went away. It would

be a long time before I would feel her presence again – lingering, lovingly, along the fringes of my conscious mind.

For years I did not think of Llea. When Llea left, she had taken her stories with her. Without her I slept – for there was no more insomnia – but it was a still sleep, a dreamless sleep. Without her prompts I eventually stopped writing. For a while, I tried to maintain the act – scrawling feeble stories out of habit more than desire. Without her I felt different – incomplete. But she was gone. It was time for me to establish my own identity – my own talents – my own ambitions.

But in a few short years, the itch to write returned. I was more mature now – more humble. I invited Llea back and she returned – as if she had never left. As if she had just been waiting, knowingly, letting time do its work. This time I *listened* to what Llea had to say. I now appreciated her role in my writing – and I understood my role in her art. She was the artist, and I the brush. She was the cause, and I the effect. With this agreement, Llea and I became united – an inseparable team. We completed each other.

However, there was a catch to this relationship – we could not always work as one. Llea, like any meticulously careful mistress, relied heavily on secrecy and patience – we would meet only once a year. These weeklong get-togethers were always planned and highly anticipated. During these weeks, we would be immensely productive – producing large swaths of writing – devoting nearly thirty hours of writing in each of the weeks – nearly all of it done deep in the night – every night – turning out writing that no one else but myself and Llea knew about – like I said, we

were secretive. And in the meantime (that being the other fifty-one weeks of the year), I would receive letters from Llea – little reminders that she was still hard at work, preparing for the busy week we had planned – the week where we would truly unite – when the writing became real.

~~~~~

To explain myself better, let me twist Llea into a second metaphor – one that is far more tangible than the phantasmic embodiment of my unconscious imagination – the subject being that of a lion. Now, in order for the general public to see a lion, one must visit the zoo; where, instead of observing a *real* lion, what they view is a lion of the flesh, but not of the spirit. Zoo lions *do not* act like ‘real’ lions because they *cannot* act like ‘real’ lions. In captivity they grow tame – they grow soft. They are not the same lions that might have once experienced rage when ripping a poacher to shreds for hunting their offspring. Zoo lions never know hunger – they are fed prepared meat on a scheduled basis. Zoo lions never know solace – since they are perpetually on display to the eager eyes of humanity.

Likewise, by writing this manifesto – I am putting Llea behind the black bars of my sentences – sentencing Llea to a caged existence for your viewing pleasure. Consequently, what you see is the ‘idea’ of Llea – but not the ‘real’ Llea.

Ultimately, when writing these metaphors, I am like an artist sculpting a statue of Llea – using words to chisel down a block stone until an accurate representation of Llea has been created; but, in reality, the sculpture of Llea will forever remain a rock – merely shaped by my efforts to replicate the image of Llea – not Llea herself. And

if I were to paint a portrait of Llea – my words, the careful strokes of a fine brush – would only amount to creating a two-dimensional representation – nothing more than a depthless still-life.

Yet in the end, Llea *is* a metaphor. All that I have said, and all that I believe about Llea, is a work of fiction. I have attempted to describe something that is beyond words; thus, my words have distorted what Llea *really* is – my words have forced Llea to fit into a realm of linguistic limitations. In describing Llea, I have become distanced. Llea is no longer what I thought she was – or what I want her to be. In the end, I am no closer to Llea than when I started.

~~~~~ Part II ~~~~~  
 Scientifically Speaking  
 An absurdly unqualified medical explanation of Llea  
 based on groundless facts to make sense of things.  
 ~~~~~

We human beings naturally only use half of our brains to think – some only use the left half, and some only use the right. I only use the left half. My left half controls conscious thought, the right half controls subconscious thought. The right half sends subliminal cryptic messages (letters, if you will) to my left half – and the left, once it has quieted, can check its messages (like one does with a mailbox). If given the proper attention, these messages can be the most enlightening and most important thoughts our brain ever constructs.

The right half of my brain belongs to Llea – the right half of my brain *is* Llea.

Sometimes, in extremely rare occasions, both halves of my brain collaborate as one. I become united with Llea. We become one. How do I know this? Here is my best explanation: when I am united with Llea, my reality becomes warped – my senses begin to blend – sending false signals. I feel as though I am slowly rolling forward – upward – my arms downward – away. My vision spins – gravity no longer applies to me, but my hands remain pressed to the keyboard. *I* am elsewhere – even though my *body* remains unmoved.

This is what it feels like to unite with Llea.

This is what it feels like to write.

This is why I write.

~~~~~ Part III ~~~~~  
 Universal Unsatisfaction  
 A rhetorical retraction, a perfunctory protraction, an inevitable interaction.  
 ~~~~~

To be completely honest – I have been dishonest. It is in my nature to hyperbolize, to exaggerate, and to even flat out lie. If this is shocking to you, I do not mean it to be read as such – instead, I hope you will understand that no truthful manifesto would ever be complete without the necessary presence of untruths. In my estimation, lying is an inescapable element of human nature – one which we must not reject as an abomination; rather, we must welcome it with open arms as well as open minds. We must first embrace our falsity if we ever hope to understand our reality.

The truth is this: Llea is not a metaphor.

Llea is exactly as I described in this manifesto.

This is exactly how I understand Llea to be.

This is exactly how I experience Llea.

This *is* Llea.

Perfection

In a comfortable straight-backed chair, Miranda sits rigid and patient, her eyes locked on the familiar Cheshire cat wall clock. Its tail lolling back and forth, just like it always did, second by second. Its unfocused gaze drifting routinely from side to side, scanning the room at all times, ceaselessly searching for something – something unknown – something Miranda hasn't been told of. She always assumed it was looking for her, and, if she was correct, the eyes will stop today. At the present moment, and for all of Miranda's life, Miranda has not been worth seeing; but today, the eyes will find her – for today she will turn thirteen. Today she will be perfect. And when she is perfect, the eyes will stop looking – for they will have found what they have been so anxiously looking for.

~~~~~

“Father,” a nine-year-old Miranda asked, “when will I go to Heaven?”

“On your thirteenth birthday Miranda, that will be the day *we* will go to Heaven,” her father replied. His voice was soft and clean, like the “music” she had occasionally heard coming from behind the door deep in the night. Father had called it ‘music’ – something that came from the ‘world’ – something that sounded like soothing noises and wispy voices, strange voices, nothing like hers or her Father's. But Father always said not to pay it any attention – and Miranda always tried to do as she was told. She wanted to be perfect.

“But how will I know they are here? How will I get to Heaven?” Miranda asked.

“You must trust me, Miranda.” His hand rose toward the door and pointed up at the Cheshire cat clock – that’s what Father named it, the ‘Cheshire cat clock’.

“When that clock stops, they will be here.”

Miranda nodded obediently, but she still worried. “And you will go with me, right?”

“Of course Miranda, I have waited and planned for this opportunity for far too long to miss it. We will go together – *all* of us.”

~~~~~

Below the clock there is a door. It is shut. It is always shut – except, of course, when Father is either coming or going. The door is white, like the walls, floor, and ceiling. The doorknob is polished and shiny; near the upper hemisphere of the knob, there is a trapezoid of reflected white light. Miranda squints at the doorknob, and she sees herself. She is almost the same color as the rest of the room. In its brassy reflection, she is nearly camouflaged. However, she wishes she were as white as the walls; the slight-pinkish tint of her skin wasn’t pure – she hoped the faint blemishes of color wouldn’t ruin her anticipated perfection.

~~~~~

“Father, what is outside the door?” a ten-year-old Miranda asked.

“Beyond that door, Miranda, is the world. You know that,” her father answered, while setting down her dinner and drink.

“I know,” Miranda said in a meek voice as her mind echoed the way her father said ‘world’, like *wuuurlt*, expressing an ardent disdain for the place. Her jaw gyrated

smoothly as she silently repeated the word to herself, trying it out, savoring the feel of it in her mouth – hidden and noiseless.

She looked back up at him. “Father, can I see the world, even if it is for just a moment? I promise I will never ask to see the world again.” Her eyes welled with desire – exposing the tremendous yearning she has had all of her life.

Her father took a seat on her bed. This frightened her. He rarely ever sat; Miranda had only ever seen him sit when he was upset with her. “Miranda,” he said in a mild tone – but Miranda could still detect a slightly veiled edge of exasperation in his voice – “the world is *not* a place you want to know. It is a *terrible* place, a place that is unfit for you. You are pure. Just one brief glimpse at the world outside would destroy everything you have lived for...” His hands squeezed the edge of her mattress – crinkling the sheet. His lips were tight. Tiny red lines snaked in the whites of his eyes.

“Father.” Miranda spoke just above a whisper, her head lowered toward the floor. “I wish I did not disappoint you. I do not want to see the world. I *will* wait patiently for the *next* world. I know what I must do and I will not disappoint you.”

“Thank you.” His voice was quieter now. His hands loosened. “Promise me, Miranda, promise me you will never open that door.” His voice was barely audible.

“I promise.”

~~~~~

Click.

Miranda looks at the clock. The two lines are not yet one. But in a moment, they will be. Only three more clicks until it is time.

Behind Miranda there is a bed, a single mattress with a pillow at one end, a white sheet overtop. To her left is a table; it is empty, as it is always empty when Miranda waits. She dare not leave anything out of place. The room must be perfect – *she* must be perfect.

Click.

The lines on the clock squeeze tighter. *Two*, Miranda echoes inside her head. She anticipates the next squeeze – the exact angle it will make – the precise moment it will occur. She closes her eyes. Her mind recreates the same image her eyelids just blocked out. She has seen it before; she has seen it every day. She must prepare for the next click. If the next click is not perfect, *all* may be lost; she must be pure, she must think no thoughts. It is a test. A test she has practiced for every day.

Click.

She thinks of nothing, she feels nothing, she *is* nothing – she is pure, she is perfect. Nothing can disturb her...

Click-click.

Her eyes bolt open. The clock has stopped – its eyes are locked onto hers. Her mind makes the clock's smile appear to sway in attempt to comprehend the unnatural stillness of its form.

She is silent. *Now what happens?* Miranda's mind began to panic. *Where are the angels? Where is father?* Her eyes waver from the eyes of the Cheshire cat clock to the doorknob. *I must not be pure enough. I must try again. I must be pure.*

She forced her eyelids shut. She held her breath. *Think nothing. Do nothing. Be nothing. Perfection...*

~~~~~

"Father," a twelve-year-old Miranda asked, "what is Heaven like?"

"Well, Miranda, nobody can know for sure exactly what Heaven is like," her father said, "but you must believe that it is better than this world, that it is a world that will reward us for all of the preparation we have done."

Miranda smiled and nodded.

"Father, what do *you* think Heaven is like?"

"Me? Well I believe it is a place where we will never suffer or know any pain... a place where everyone is equal, and safe, and happy. That is what I believe Heaven is like."

"I think Heaven is like that too, Father."

~~~~~

When Miranda finally opened her eyes, she found herself lying in a small puddle of blood. Miranda had never seen this much blood before. It upset her greatly, drawing the breath from her lungs. Clumps of her long translucent-blond hair stuck to the congealing crimson smear across the left side of her forehead, staining her pale

skin. Rushing over to the doorknob, Miranda examined her wound in the reflection, peering through teary eyes at the gash. Terror jolted through her – she was imperfect!

Her father had once told her that every drop of her blood was sacred – never to be wasted. She couldn't let the angels see this. They would know she is impure. They would know that she was incomplete without that much of her blood.

Diving to the floor Miranda used her hands to gather the blood, pressing the cold and sticky liquid to the gash on her head. The sensation sent chills down her spine. Tears finally sprung from her eyes. *Another imperfection!* Father had warned her against crying – it was a sign of weakness, a sign that she was imperfect. But she could not stop. The more she concerned herself with how imperfect she ended up being, the more the tears flowed. Deep behind her nose she felt a sting – causing her nose to run.

What will they say when they see me? Miranda thought. She could feel the panic pulsing in her throat. Through blurry eyes she looked at her palms. They were coated in blood. *Where are they?* She looked at the clock; the lines were still connected – they had not moved! And the eyes – she noticed with horror – were still looking straight forward. They had not followed her to the floor.

Re-entering the clock's line of sight, she sat back down in her chair. Her posture was perfect, but her appearance was not. Gently she laid her hands onto her lap, ignoring the feel of the fabric sticking to her fingertips. Pressing her eyelids shut, she tried to stop more tears from coming. There was nothing else for her to do besides wait.

~~~~~

“Father,” an eleven-year-old Miranda asked, “how will I get to Heaven?”

“At this very moment, a ship is on its way. Most people do not know it is coming – we dare not overcrowd the ship and suffer leaving any one of us behind.”

“How do the people of this world not know about it? Doesn’t everyone want to go to Heaven?”

“Yes, I’m sure they *want* to, but most people are too impure to risk coming onboard. There are only a few of us, the purest of believers, who have been preparing long enough in advance to board the ship.”

“How do we know this ship will take us to Heaven?” Miranda asked.

“Because, Miranda, Jesus is on this ship.”

~~~~~

Without the ticks of the clock, seconds slipped into minutes, minutes melted into hours, and hours dissolved into indefinite eternity. The rumble of Miranda’s stomach alerted her to the fact that it must be past dinnertime. Father has not come – and neither has Jesus. *It is done. I am impure.* Oddly, this no longer terrified her. Now, all she felt, was a dull sense of dread.

What do I do now? Jesus must have taken Father. Miranda knew there was only one thing to do: she would wait. She would wait until her father returned to this world – or, she would wait for Jesus to realize he forgot her. *If I am still pure, Jesus might come back!* Miranda thought hopefully. *Father might convince him to come back for me!*

Then another thought occurred – a terrible thought. *But if I truly am impure, then they will not return. I will be left here forever.* Miranda's empty stomach twisted and creaked. Without the ticking of the clock, she did not know how many meals she had missed. *I need my meals,* Miranda thought to herself. *Where is Father? How will he bring me my meals if he is on the next world?* Miranda began to cry again, this time out of despair. *If only I could open that door and go find Father... but I promised I wouldn't... I cannot open that door.*

Her stomach gurgled and churned again. This frightened her. Her stomach had never felt like this before – she always had her meals. Father would always bring them. But if Father was really gone, then so were her meals.

Miranda waited, hungry, frightened, and impure.

Then another thought came to her – a dreadful thought – an unthinkable thought: she could open the door. But she had promised she wouldn't. *Father said it will make me imp...* Miranda's mind froze for a moment. *I'm impure. I am impure.* The threat of the door subsided a little. *If I am already impure, then there will be no harm in opening the door.* The thought sounded insane at first – unthinkable. But, perhaps if she opened it, she could find her meal and come back. *Yes!* Miranda felt momentarily elated. *I could go get my meal and come right back here so Jesus can find me!* The idea began to make sense. It might even be plausible. *I can open the door!* A sudden rush of excitement made her shiver. *I will open the door!*

Though her mind was resolved upon the issue, her body was not. As she stood, her legs shook – pleading her to sit back down. She forced her hesitant feet

toward the door – step by step. She knew she had to do this. Her hand stretched out before her, quivering uncontrollably. Her hand was still red with blood; it stuck to the doorknob as she grasped it. Squeezing it made her knuckles creak and ache. Her body tried to pull her hand away, but the sticky blood helped adhere her palm to her plan. *I can't! I promised Father! I cannot leave this room...* a whimper escaped her trembling lips. *I must do this. I must!* Her thoughts suddenly evolved into shrieking words. “Father...” she cried out, “Father... forgive me Father... for I am about to sin...”

Her eyes squeezed shut. Her teeth gnashed together. The knob turned. A cry leapt from her lungs. She pushed the knob; it swung forward, easily, readily. She let go. The door continued to open on its own until it hit something solid and made a jarring rattle.

With another squeaky sob, she forced her right eyelid open just enough to see. There was a long thin room that stretched out before her with a dim light at the end. Everything was gray and rough – compared to the smooth white walls of her room.

The door was open. There was no going back now. The damage was already done. She had broken her promise.

~~~~~

“Father,” Miranda had asked yesterday, “what if Jesus does not accept me?”

“Miranda, do not even consider that!” Her father’s eyes seemed glassy and hollow. He was paler than usual. “You are the purest of us all. If he does not take you, he will take none of us. You were not meant for this world, it was *your* destiny to

become an angel – our angel. Without *you* as a beacon of the *purest* innocence, Jesus wouldn't know where to find us.” He tried to smile at her, but he just bared his teeth.

Miranda nodded her head. “Father?”

“Yes Miranda?”

“If they do not come, can I see *this* world?”

Her father let out a long sigh. He was not angry. Any other day this would have bothered him, but he seemed to have already thought about this. “If they do not come, do not leave this room. There may be a chance that they will return. We cannot know for sure how this will happen, but we must have faith that it *will* happen. We *will* be saved. Promise me you will stay here.” She noticed a slight reservation in his eyes. They looked at her like they never had before – they inspected her, they memorized her – they absorbed her. She knew this was the last time they would see each other on this world. If everything went according to plan, they would see each other soon enough onboard Jesus' ship. But she could see in his eyes that there was a sliver of doubt. She could sense that this might be the last time they would ever be with each other.

“I promise.”

~~~~~

At the end of the long gray room Miranda found another door. This one was unlike the other, it had no knob; instead, there was a silver circle next to it. She gave it a closer look; it did not stick out so she could not spin it like the knob. She touched it. It was cold and unstable. She pushed on it with her finger. Behind the door, a

humming sound instantly followed the push of the circle. She jumped at this, not knowing what to make of it – the door was still shut. She had heard this humming before, which made her even hungrier. It was the sound that she heard right before her father came to her with food – it was also the sound she heard after he left. The only difference was that it was much louder now.

After a moment, the humming stopped and the door slid open. There was a small room inside – smaller than her room and even thinner than the long gray room. She could see that there was nothing inside it besides shiny gray walls – no sink, no bed, no desk – not even a chair. Miranda was confused by the purpose of the room – it was too small to be used for anything – even if there were anything in there to be used. The door closed. Nothing happened. She pushed the circle again and without a hum or hesitation the door slid back open. *What if I get trapped inside? I can't live in there! It's too small!* Miranda began to panic again. She looked back at her room; it was so far away, its door still open. She could see her chair and her bed; they looked weird. She had never seen them look so small. The door to the small room closed again. Making up her mind, she decided to continue with her plan; she pushed the circle for a third time. This time she stepped into the new room. It was unstable; she felt it sway ever so slightly as she entered. The door shut behind her. She turned around very carefully, trying not to make it wobble with her movements. There were two circles, one above the other. She pushed the bottom one. Again the door opened. *Good*, Miranda thought, *at least I can go back*. She pushed the other button, the door shut; the room shook and leapt – nearly causing her to lose her balance. The humming

sound returned; it was above her head. She tried pushing the bottom button again but the door remained shut. She pushed it again and again in terror. *What's going on?* She whimpered aloud.

At long last, the room shuddered and stopped. The humming went away too. The doors opened. There was a new room. This astonished Miranda. *How could the room change? It looks very similar, it's long and thin, but it isn't gray. This room is white – and my room isn't at the end of it!* Miranda panicked. *What happened to my room?* Miranda instantly regretted having commenced this journey. Though she was disoriented and lost, she stepped out of the small unstable room, glad not to be in there anymore. The door closed behind her. There was a circle near the doorframe, just like before, but there was also strange hole. She pushed the button – nothing happened. The door stayed shut. There was no hum. This frightened her as she realized she could no longer go back to her room. *I've gone too far, I must be too impure to return...*

At the end of the long room, Miranda found three doors. She tried the one on the wall to her right. It opened easily. The room inside was incredibly large – she never could have imagined such a large room – it had to be four or five times larger than her room. Along the walls she saw stacks of beds protruding out toward the center of the room. There were people in the beds, all of them covered by the same looking purple blankets that only covered their faces and torsos – leaving their legs exposed. They wore black pants and strange black and white shoes. One by one she looked the sleeping people over. They were all so still. *They are asleep,* Miranda

thought, *this must be what I look like when I'm asleep*. Cautiously she reached out and tapped one of the sleeping people. There was no response. *Is this how I am when I sleep?*

Curious to see what these people looked like, she lifted the blanket off of one person's face. It was covered in a thin transparent material. She could see that it was not Father; though, this man did resemble him despite the dark line of hair that grew between his mouth and nose. She placed the blanket back the way it was and unveiled another face, and then another. Each face was slightly different from the last; some with no hair, some with yellow hair, some with hair on their chin – but one thing was the same, they all had the same, strange, crackly and clear material over around their heads.

After having looked at each of the people on the bottom row, she stepped on the bottom beds to look at the people on the top beds. None of them were Father. She began to feel anxious and scared again. She left that room, shutting the door behind her.

The middle door was at the very end wall of the long room. This was her next choice. This opened as well. There was only one bed in this room, and it was massive. A sole individual lay in the middle of it. She looked around. It resembled her room, except everything was larger and there were a few objects she did not recognize.

She crawled carefully onto the bed. It was softer than hers and the others in the other room. She lifted the blanket. This time it was her father – he too had the strange material around his head. She smiled and laughed – at last, she found him.

Now all she had to do was wake him – but shaking and calling out his name didn't seem to have any effect. She was hungry, and thirsty, but the only thing she could do was wait for him to wake up. On a small desk beside his bed she saw two cups; one was full of red juice, the other empty. She grabbed the full one eagerly, glad to have at least found something to fill her empty stomach. The juice smelled bad, but she saw that her father had finished a glass already, so it couldn't be *too* bad to drink. She drank it quickly to avoid allowing the liquid time to linger on her tongue. It burned for a few seconds inside of her. Seemingly instantly, she felt very tired. Lying down next to her father she pulled some of his purple blanket onto her and she shut her eyes. A strange calm washed over her body and mind. *When we wake up*, she thought drowsily to herself, *he will give me my meal*. Then she thought of something different and smiled. *When we wake up, he will show me the world*.

Desperate Desires

Charlie awoke to the sound of a gunshot echoing off in the distance. Startled, his eyes flicked further open – making him suddenly aware that they had not been shut. This realization made Charlie wonder just how long he'd been staring blankly into the dark – frozen in a state of semi-consciousness. He tried to recall his last thoughts; if he had not been asleep then he certainly must have been lost in a long train of thought – but, if he had been awake, then the gunshot must have been real.

For a moment, he lay still, too tired to move, but too shaken to let this incident go uninvestigated. Charlie lifted his head and looked around – noticing that his bedroom was no longer pitch-black; everything was tinged red from the faint glow of his alarm-clock's display: 3:33 AM. His mind now became fully engaged, washing away any trace of lingering sleepiness. Rising further from bed, Charlie lifted his shade and peered out into the darkness of his family's backyard. He couldn't see anyone or anything that might have made the sound. The neighbor's floodlight allowed him to see all the way to the row of spruces lining the back border of their property. In and out of the trees' bristly branches hung a thin wisp of fog – or was it gun smoke? – hovering patiently; shaped like fingers and palms, poised and ready to catch an oblivious firefly if only one dared to stray within its grasp.

For an instant, Charlie was reminded of a nightmare he had as a child. In it, E.T. had emerged from the shady left corner of the spruce row and slowly wandered to the right, eerily gliding through a similar haze, unaware of the young observer at the window. Charlie strained to see the far left corner of their yard – probing for E.T.

There was a slight shift in the fog, and a hand-sized patch of darkness – or maybe even face-sized – seemed to appear out of nowhere. A quick chill trickled down his spine – drawing him back to the present. His heartbeat felt thick and heavy as it thundered through his temples. *Don't be ridiculous... it's not E.T.* Charlie told himself with a patronizing tone of voice in his mind. *It's nothing. I need more sleep. I must be hallucinating... there was no gunshot and there was definitely no E.T.* The image of a surprised E.T. accidentally firing a pistol made him smile.

His nerves gradually calmed, Charlie flopped back into the warm concavity of his bed. He tried to lull himself back into a relaxed state by clearing his mind, but only a moment passed before Jillian's face slipped through, reminding him of the original reason why he had not yet fallen asleep. Deep within him, a knot twisted and pulled. *I cannot believe I said that to her... I'm such an idiot!* Charlie sighed heavily. *Don't dwell on it now. It's done. I can't do anything about it now. I just need some sleep – just a couple hours... but I can fake sick and skip school tomorrow. Mom fell for it last time. I'll just tell her I couldn't sleep! It's not like I have a test tomorrow or anything. I just can't bear to see her tomorrow – I need a day. No, I need more than that... dammit! Why did I have to ask her tonight? I always make things so miserably awkward!*

Another sigh, and for what felt like a full minute he did not breathe back in – savoring the burning lack of oxygen. In a bizarre way, the searing of his lungs felt like a pleasant relief – or at least a distraction – from the distinct lump of regret that twisted just below his Adam's apple. *There's nothing I can do now. I need some*

sleep. Again he tried to clear his mind, but after lying still for barely a minute, Charlie was overcome by a festering impulse to remind himself of his heartache. Rolling onto his side, he reached across the gap between his bed and desk; grabbing his laptop computer, he heaved it onto his lap. He could not stop himself; like a child with a fresh scab, Charlie could not leave it alone – even though he knew that picking at it would only make it worse.

Charlie flipped the screen up, and an instant wash of blinding white light pained his eyes, drowning out the dull red hues of the room in utter dark contrast to the intensely radiant rectangle floating above his lap. His eyes adjusted quickly. Before him, on the screen, was an AOL Instant Messenger box – just as he had left it a few hours before. It was already an artifact of his life, a regret-ridden reminder of his desperate impatience. He read over her last line again:

I'm sorry but it would be unfair to you, im gladd we're
friends, i really am, but i cannot do this. It would be
wrong because i dont feel the same way you do.
sorry...

Charlie's heart collapsed. He pressed his tongue to the back of his throat to stifle the sob that attempted to roll out of his chest, causing his ribs to instead heave inward and hold tightly. A cold tear streaked down his cheek before he even knew it

had formed, leaving an evaporative line that felt more dry than wet. The droplet sounded heavy as it splattered against his pillow case.

Knowing that he shouldn't, Charlie scrolled up toward the beginning of the conversation. For a moment, he reasoned with himself; perhaps he had missed something the first time? What if she left a clue – hidden in a phrase, or a word, or anything – anything that could let him into her heart – anything that could let him understand her reason why. With a final draw of air through his nose, Charlie filled his lungs until they nearly burst before he let out a torrential sigh, releasing all of the tension, all of his anxiety, and all of his pain, until there was nothing left except maybe a dry heave. Feeling an odd sense of focus he finally let his lungs operate normally. He began to read.

Chucky333: hey hows life

JILLYGRL: ing it.

JILLYGRL: sorry that was meant for someone else...

JILLYGRL: I'm fabulous how're you?

Chucky333: good good

JILLYGRL: brb

Chucky333: k

Charlie remembered the long pause that occurred here. *Oh how I wish I could go back to this moment of my life – when there was still hope – when I still knew in*

my heart that she had feelings for me. At the time, he had been YouTube-ing The Ataris's old concerts. They were Jillian's favorite band, and, as of recently, one of Charlie's new obsessions – absorbing everything he could about them in hopes of somehow using their music to either gain entry in to her heart or to slyly woo her with their lyrics. A small giggle found its way through the mire of his sullen mood as he recalled why she had paused for so long.

JILLYGRL: Casper just climbed out my window! I had to climb out onto the roof after him! I swear that damn cat is gonna be the death of me.

Chucky333: just be glad hes not puking on your pillow again

JILLYGRL: Lol true...

Once again Charlie's mind was filled with a familiar passionate love for Jillian. *There has to be something else I can do... she can't feel absolutely nothing for me, can she?* The momentarily forgotten fear and dread quickly returned with a vengeance – as if the blissful hope he once had had occurred in another life. He read on.

JILLYGRL: OK question for you, wait a sec.

Chucky333: k

JILLYGRL: Would you rather have one of your legs
amputated at the hip or contract an incurable disease
that makes you have a severe stutter?

Charlie bit the knuckle of his index finger in order to stave off the edgy
laughter that somersaulted within him. His vision blurred; this was just one of the
many reasons he knew she was meant for him – despite the internal hell he was going
through at the moment, her quirky sense of humor still had the ability to lighten his
mood. To put it simply, she was unpredictable; her thoughts, as whimsical and
enchanting as a solitary firefly, constantly shifting position yet never losing its
captivating glow. Likewise, her personality, at least to him, was a beguiling dance of
grandiose outward expression and elusive internal mystery – balanced and perfect.
Charlie couldn't imagine anyone else worth his infatuation.

Reinvigorated with optimism, Charlie continued reading – there had to be
some way he could salvage his fate – some hidden message he could extract and
utilize.

Chucky333: um... which leg?

JILLYGRL: dominant

Chucky333: id go amputation, I could go around doing
wicked wheelies all the time in my wheelchair

JILLYGRL: lol I agree

Charlie imagined the two of them having a blast in wheelchairs together: drag racing down the local mall's foyer, from one fountain to the other – or even starting up a dog-sitting business in order to harness the locomotive energy of ten yipping chihuahuas and one token shih-tzu as they get towed down the beach boardwalk (just because they like the feel of the wheelchairs on their butts as they vibrated over the weathered wood panels). If he knew she'd say 'yes', he'd propose marriage tomorrow – there was no need to wait, he knew his love was genuine. He yearned to spend the rest of his life with her – only her. If only...

JILLYGRL: ok how about this...

JILLYGRL: would you rather serve a life sentence
with no parole in a foreign prison or have HIV?

Is this a hint? Does she have HIV? His libido informed him that it would be worth contracting if it came from enacting his fantasies with her; but unfortunately that wasn't the question.

Chucky333: whats the security level of the prison and
when would I be arrested

JILLYGRL: medium security and you'd be arrested
immediately

Chucky333: well, the prison offers a chance of escape,
since it is onhly medium, and aids might be cured
before I die from it... idk I suppose given what goes on
in prison id prolly get hiv anyways, so I vote no prison
JILLYGRL: nice logic!

Does that mean she feels the same? At least I impressed her.

Chucky333: k I've got one give me a min

JILLYGRL: ok

Chucky333: would you rather learn that you were
accidently switched at birth with Chelsea Clinton -
since you share the same birthday with her, or would
you rather learn that you were dropped off at your
parents doorstep as an infant and never know your real
parents? and for either one youd find out tonight, not
when you were young.

JILLYGRL: Well, it'd be cool to have Hillary as a
mom because she's an amazing woman, but I don't
think I'd want to grow up in the white house, that'd
really suck. So I'd go with the doorstep baby.

Chucky333: you'd have been SWITCHED, so you'd still have your normal parents for either choice.

JILLYGRL: Oh, in that case I'd definitely be a Clinton and let Chelsea live in the limelight, plus I'd know that I posses brilliant genes!

Chucky333: so youre saying your parents dont have brilliant genes?

JILLYGRL: Shush!!

Charlie had met her parents for the first time just two weeks ago when he picked her up for what he considered their second date (the first being a spontaneous meeting that occurred at the county fair that past summer; they went on the Scrambler together – he could still vividly recall the exact warmth and feel of her body as it was helplessly squashed up against his – after that she was too woozy to endure the fair any longer so he walked her home).

Her father was a gruff man with an impressive pepper colored moustache; he never said a word, but Charlie could see in his eyes that he didn't expect Charlie to have the guts to touch his daughter. He was right; but it was still unsettling to have his manhood judged by a father who probably acted otherwise when he was Charlie's age. Damned if he did and damned if he didn't – either way he felt he was being mocked, so he might as well have behaved himself.

Her mother was attractive (as far as mothers go); Charlie recognized traces of Jillian's face in hers. She was in an ecstatic mood – for it was Jillian's first 'real' date (as was it Charlie's). However, they weren't 'boyfriend and girlfriend'; they were merely going to go see a movie out of mutual interest as any two friends might do – there was no distinction of formality or any noticeable romantic element (even though Charlie had desperately wished for that barrier to have been broken). He expected Jillian would complain on that car ride about how her mother's giddiness was annoying and unwarranted, but she did not. They rode in practical silence, and it was nice; nothing needed to be said – he believed, at least at the time, that they both felt the same way about each other. Charlie recalled that particular moment and smiled – he'd have given anything to experience that again; but that was no longer possible. The barrier was indeed broached, on this night instead of that, and it was far more impenetrable than he had ever anticipated. Now there was no going back.

JILLYGRL: Ok, I've got another one...

Chucky333: k

JILLYGRL: would you rather be forced to have sex
with a good looking and nice gay man or a hideous and
demented butch woman with syphilis?

All Charlie could think about was the fine wispy strands of hair on the back of her neck that would stick out when she put her hair up in a bun, and how much he

relished the velvety soft feel of them on his cheek as she hugged him goodbye after the carnival 'date'. He desperately craved the warmth of her skin on his lips – but felt tormented by the fact that he never would; this knowledge, this utter hopelessness, was the worst feeling Charlie had ever experienced in his lifetime – and yet, despite the nagging reality of the situation, he still believed there was some way he could win her heart.

Chucky333: wow great choices

JILLYGRL: lol that's the point!

Chucky333: I'd have to say the man, syphilis makes
you go insane and kills you.

Reading this over, he felt himself going insane – *how could he have misread her to such an embarrassing degree? This couldn't be possible. There must be a misunderstanding. It's so ridiculously clear that we were meant to be together – maybe she's just 'playing hard to get'. Maybe all that I need to do is wait patiently – simple persistence is all that's needed. I'll wait her out – I'll demonstrate that this isn't some petty attraction or an impulsive act of lust. I swear I will not let her down – she'll see that this isn't an act of stubbornness – it's a demonstration of how pure my love is for her.*

JILLYGRL: I agree, I'd rather go with the man.

Chucky333: that's not fair... what would you chose if it were the same but their genders switched

JILLYGRL: well, considering I've already had sex with a hot lesbian I can't say I'd have a problem with it ;)

Chucky333: REALLY?!?!?

JILLYGRL: LOL no I'm def. into men ;)

Charlie felt his heart pound out a tremendous rhythm – *seriously! If this isn't a sign, then nothing is! I'm not insane, she has to feel at least some attraction to me – why else would she have toyed with me like that? Why else would she follow that statement with a flirty wink? What if this was all a joke to her?* Charlie felt the contents of his stomach twist and nearly eject through his esophagus. *What if this is just how she is – just the way she makes conversation and talks to all of her friends?* His eyes burned with an intense sensation of saltiness. *Or even worse, he thought, what if she pities me? What if she knew all along how much I love her, and she just played it all off with feigned naivety as to not encourage my false hope? No, if that's so she wouldn't have had a conversation like this – she couldn't possibly have been acting; I know that she has some amount of feelings for me – she has to!* He eyes felt raw and itchy. He rubbed them until the back of his eyelids flickered with a dim bluish-orange kaleidoscopic light. When he opened them back up, he could only see a direct tunnel leading to the remaining text.

Chucky333: well that's good to know

JILLYGRL: What you thought I was a lesbian?

Chucky333: there's nothing wrong with lesbianism,
many actresses get filthy rich making movies exploring
the possibilities

JILLYGRL: You've got the filthy part right, but idk
about rich, those kinda girls are pretty desperate for
money. They'll do ANYTHING.

Chucky333: yeah like DVDA

JILLYGRL: What's that?

Chucky333: i dare you to google it

JILLYGRL: No thanks, I prefer a virus free computer.
I accidently clicked on a link that sent me to a hardcore
porn site and for two weeks a popup informed me of a
new pill that would increase the size of my member :0

Chucky333: that must be some powerful pill for it to
have that kind of effect on you...

JILLYGRL: LOL!!

A short burst of a laughter escaped through his nose, but instead of feeling
like a laugh, it felt more like a bit of his former self had slipped out – leaving a

hollow husk of his true self behind. He knew what was coming up next. *Why couldn't I have just kept the stupid humor going? If only I had, then I'd still have hope.* But it was useless; there was nothing he could do now besides force himself to relive the latest mistake of his life over again. There was no option out – he'd read too far – he had to finish.

Chucky333: ok how bout this one...

Chucky333: would you rather never meet your true soulmate yet not know it, or know that you met your true soulmate but hate him?

JILLYGRL: well if I didn't know then I'd assume whoever I end up with would be my soulmate.

Chucky333: true

Chucky333: ok I've got another question...

JILLYGRL: shoot

Here it was. The end of his life as he knew it. The end of his two-year-long pining for Jillian, all to come crashing down in one horrible moment. Charlie's eyes pressed shut, they were painfully dry and stung for a moment. He held them shut, waiting for the moment to feel right... for his mood to be primed for the poignancy that his mind was already memorializing as the single worst moment in his life to

date. It was time. With one last sigh he flung his eyes open – letting the words penetrate his eyes like cobra venom.

Chucky333: would you rather be my girlfriend or not
my girlfriend?

He remembered the agonizing wait after he posed the question. How long had it been? Five minutes? Ten? At the time it had felt like an eternity. He recalled the adrenaline rushing through his veins, the icy waterfall of sweat drizzling down his sides; he remembered chewing all ten of his fingernails down to sore nubs – and then the exquisitely nauseating shock of her response.

JILLYGRL: What? Seriously, your asking me over
IM?

Chucky333: it's the same question no matter where I
ask it

Another excruciating pause. Charlie had no idea how long this pause had taken – maybe only three minutes in real-time; but he could not remember, he had been overcome by a hysterical fit of panic – there is no measure for time when you're waiting on an answer such as this.

JILLYGRL: I'm sorry, but I can't.

Chucky333: I swear I'd treat you like a queen

JILLYGRL: Ataris quote

Even hours later, Charlie was still dumfounded by how little of an effect the quote had on her – she instantly recognized the words, but had she somehow missed the meaning? It was the last line of “San Dimas High School Football Rules”, a song of unrequited love where the singer desperately tries to persuade the girl of his dreams to date him – there could not have been a more perfect analogy to his situation and she apparently disregarded it as effortlessly as if he had used a cheesy pick-up line on her.

Chucky333: I know but it's true... please give this a try

JILLYGRL: I'm sorry, nothing against you, you're a really great guy, but I have strong feelings for someone else...

Chucky333: can I know who then?

Why did I have to ask that? It just made me sound jealous and immature... I should've just stopped and cut my losses right then.

JILLYGRL: you don't know him, he's a guy I met last summer.

Chucky333: can you at least give me a chance if he doesn't work out?

She must think I'm so pathetic... how am I going to be able to see her tomorrow?

JILLYGRL: I'm sorry but it would be unfair to you, im gladd we're friends, i really am, but i cannot do this. It would be wrong because i dont feel the same way you do. sorry...

Chucky333: can we at least give it a try, if it doesn't work out then we can at least have a few good laughs in the meantime

JILLYGRL: I'm sorry...

JILLYGRL: Goodnight.

Charlie closed the message box. It was gone... forever. His eyes filled with stale tears. His mind felt worn and stale. His skin – stale. His heart – stale. And his soul...