

ALL THE ANSWERS

By

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Characters:

ISABELLE, 16

JOE, 40s

Setting:

Some place between Heaven and Hell.

Time:

Now.

Lights up on ISABELLE, who is standing alone in a room with only one chair, which is empty and facing her. ISABELLE looks rather vacant and more than a little bored. JOE enters, apprehensive, but excited.

Hi.

JOE

Come on in.

ISABELLE

So, is this it?

JOE

Is what it?

ISABELLE

I was told this is the place that has all the answers.

JOE

Yes, this is it.

ISABELLE

Really?

JOE
(disappointed)

Yeah, really. What were you hoping for?

ISABELLE

Something a little more profound.

JOE

Like marble and lots of books?

ISABELLE

Maybe. I don't know.

JOE

This is it. Deal with it. My name is Isabelle.

ISABELLE

I'm Joe. Aren't you a little young?

JOE

I know. Ironic, isn't? Turns out some teenagers do know everything.

ISABELLE

JOE gestures to the one empty chair.

JOE

Do I sit?

ISABELLE

You're going to be a total nightmare, I can tell. Yes, Joe, the chair is for you.

JOE

You don't have a chair?

She looks down, condescendingly, at the empty space around her.

ISABELLE

No.

JOE

Why not?

ISABELLE

I'm not allowed to have one.

JOE

You want mine?

ISABELLE

I'm not allowed to have yours.

JOE

That seems awfully cruel. How long have you been doing this?

ISABELLE

It'll be 958 years next month.

JOE

That's terrible. How long do you have to keep doing it?

ISABELLE

It's been 958 years, how long do you think? For-eh-ver.

JOE

Forever?

ISABELLE

Let me explain something, Joe. You may be in Heaven, but I am in Hell. This is my eternity. Standing here answering all the questions that humanity has grappled with for all of time.

JOE

Wow, that's awful.

ISABELLE

Yes, Joe, Hell is bad. This should not be news to you.

JOE

No.

ISABELLE

Look, why don't you sit down and ask away?

JOE sits.

ISABELLE (cont'd)

All right. What do you want to know?

JOE

Well, wow, I have so many questions.

ISABELLE

Don't worry, you won't trip me.

JOE

No, it's not that. It's just, wow, I have so many questions.

ISABELLE

I'm sure you do. Just try and make it interesting, OK? I've had some real yawners this morning. One lady wanted to know about her mother's secret lemon merengue recipe. And then I had this old burnout ask me about the lyrics to some Doobie Brothers' song. And, of course, I got "what is the meaning of life?" for the five billionth time.

JOE

You really do know all the answers?

ISABELLE

Yes.

JOE

All of them?

ISABELLE

All of them.

JOE

That's staggering.

ISABELLE

You get used to it.

JOE

So, wow, like you know who really killed Kennedy and whether we actually descended from apes and whether my first girlfriend cheated on me with that bucket head in my Existentialism class in college?

ISABELLE

I do.

JOE

So who did kill Kennedy? No, wait. I think I'd rather know about my girlfriend first. No, hold on. I don't want to know that. If it's true, then I'm going to be obsessing for, I don't know, forever, maybe, and I really don't want to do that. I mean, frankly, I'd rather know about the apes thing.

ISABELLE

Is this your question?

JOE

My question?

ISABELLE

Yes, your one question.

JOE

Uh...what?

ISABELLE

I should have said something right from the top because way too many people come in here thinking that they can get an answer to any and all questions because I have the answers to any and all questions. So let me be clear. You only get one question.

JOE

You're kidding.

ISABELLE

I'm not allowed to kid.

JOE

Oh, man. This is disappointing.

ISABELLE

Welcome to my life.

JOE

One question?

ISABELLE

Yes.

JOE

Wow, that makes it really hard.

ISABELLE

I know.

JOE

How much time do I have?

ISABELLE

10 minutes.

JOE

10 minutes? Who made up these rules?

ISABELLE

Your Man and mine. It was quite a negotiation, I'll tell you. Your guy's so straight about everything and mine just lies like crazy. I don't know how they settle anything.

JOE

Wow. 10 minutes.

ISABELLE

Actually, you're down to six minutes and 20 seconds.

JOE

I am?

ISABELLE

It was 10 when you walked in.

JOE

It counts down from the moment I enter? But I need more time. And I need many, many, many questions answered.

ISABELLE

I think that's the thing. I can't get to everyone if I answer all of your questions. People are piling up outside. There are, currently, 107 deaths per minute on Earth.

JOE

There are?

ISABELLE

Yes. I keep telling you. I know everything.

JOE

Right.

ISABELLE

Fortunately, not every one of those 107 comes to me. Some people die and nothing matters to them anymore. But it seems like more and more people these days want answers. Hence the madhouse out front.

JOE

Yes. I was in line a long time. I thought I'd died and gone to a new iPhone launch.

ISABELLE

You're wasting time. You've got five minutes and forty-five seconds to come up with a question.

JOE

But how am I going to pick one question?

ISABELLE

Is that your question?

JOE

No! Of course not!

ISABELLE

Look, I've already given you a bunch of freebies, so don't get upset at me.

JOE

You have not.

ISABELLE

"So, is this it?" "Really?" "Do I sit?" "You don't have a chair?" "Why not?" You want me to go on?

JOE

But those aren't questions.

ISABELLE

If you have to put a question mark at the end of a sentence, it means it's a question. The clock is ticking.

JOE

All right! Wow. OK. One question. Let me think. This isn't going to be easy. OK. What have I always wanted to know more than anything? And, no, that's not my question.

ISABELLE

Duh.

JOE

Wait. If you know everything, then you know what my question is going to be.

ISABELLE

I cannot read minds, nor predict the future. I can only tell you what is. I'm not God after all. Four and a half minutes.

JOE

Stop pressuring me! All right. Let's see. Wow. OK. You know, I'd kind of like to know about the true demise of my guppy. You see, I had this guppy when I was kid and my neighbor claims he did not feed it to his cat, but I very much suspected that he did, and all over the fact that I couldn't come up with a suitable name for the guppy. I was just so indecisive!

ISABELLE

Imagine that.

JOE

What do I want to know? Well, I've always wanted to know what Heaven was like, but I'm here now, and I have to tell you, so far, I'm not that impressed.

ISABELLE

You just came straight from the airport, so to speak. Your opinion of Heaven will change.

JOE

How do you know about Heaven?

ISABELLE

I told you, I know everything.

JOE

Yeah, but, how can you know about Heaven, if you're in Hell?

ISABELLE

You see that's part of what makes living in Hell so painful. I know exactly what I'm missing. You've got three minutes and 55 seconds.

JOE

OK, OK. This is like dealing with a burning fuse. And, to be honest, it's little unfair. I die, get to heaven, and I get one thing answered. All my life I was plagued with questions about life. I was a philosophy major. And nothing I ever tried worked out. Career paths that went nowhere. Two wives who hated my guts. My father got brain cancer and died an ugly death. Brain cancer! I mean, really, what is the reason for the existence of brain cancer? And, of course, I could never, ever understand how America can be the most cynical society in the world and yet we elected to our most important job a man who says "believe me." My life was a parade of punchlines. But you want to know what kept me going? The idea that when I died, all would be revealed.

ISABELLE

Sorry.

JOE

"Sorry?" That's it?

ISABELLE

Look, speaking from experience, let me tell you, there is no joy in knowing all things. You can't imagine what I know and live with and will carry around for all of time. Yeah, some people come in here and ask idiotic questions, but most people want to know some pretty awful things.

Like what happened to their abducted child and "why did my husband abandon me" and "what did the Huns do with my father when they took him away?" And guess what? I have to tell them. I can't lie. I can't even sugar coat it. Years and years ago I had this little Irish kid who'd died during the potato famine and he came in wanting to know where his mother was, so he could see her again. And I had to tell him the truth. That he was never going to see her again. Never.

JOE

Why not?

ISABELLE

Families don't always end up together, Joe. Sometimes one of them goes you-know-where.

JOE thinks about this. Then...

JOE

So how did you end up in Hell?

ISABELLE

I was burned at the stake for being a witch.

JOE

That's horrible. But how could you go to Hell for that?

ISABELLE

I really was a witch.

JOE

Oh.

ISABELLE

A murderous, rampaging horror.

JOE

Really?

ISABELLE

Hey, I know it was the Dark Ages back then, but we had peer pressure, too. You have two and a half minutes.

JOE

Where are you from, Isabelle?

ISABELLE

You're wasting time.

JOE

Are you French?

ISABELLE

No.

German?
JOE

Why are you hung up on this?
ISABELLE

I just want to know!
JOE

I'm Spanish!
ISABELLE

Why don't you speak with an accent? Or in Spanish?
JOE

It's called 900 years of assimilation! You're unbelievable!
You're going to blow this!
ISABELLE

I'm a curious person! I'm sorry!
JOE

The clock isn't going to stop!
ISABELLE

I should have more than one question and I should have longer
than 10 minutes!
JOE

You don't!
ISABELLE

Well, I should!
JOE

It doesn't matter! You can't change the rules!
ISABELLE

I don't like the rules!
JOE

It doesn't matter how you feel about the rules! The rules
are the rules!
ISABELLE

I have no say?!
JOE

No! None! Zero! Zip!
ISABELLE

I wish I had known this before I walked in here!
JOE

ISABELLE
Two minutes, Joe!

JOE
That's not enough time!

ISABELLE
Stop making excuses!

JOE
It's not fair!

ISABELLE
You are dead, Joe! Right and wrong, good and bad, fair and unfair no longer matter!

JOE
It does to me!

ISABELLE
Ask your question, Joe! No one has ever come in here and not asked a question!

JOE
Really?

ISABELLE
Really. And no one has ever asked *me* a question. About me. Until you. Ask your question, Joe. Please. I really want to answer it.

JOE
All right.

He hesitates.

ISABELLE
Don't hesitate, Joe.

JOE
I can't help it.

ISABELLE
You're under two minutes. Ask.

JOE
OK.

ISABELLE
Now.

JOE
OK. One question. (beat) I don't want to know anything about my wives.

And I certainly don't want you to explain love, because, you know, I'm afraid the answer will require all of eternity. The philosopher Heidegger asked why is there something rather than nothing? I spent a whole semester in a brain lock over that one, but, really, who cares? I lost a dog once. I'm sure that didn't end well. I've always been fascinated with Bigfoot and the Abominable Snowman, but those things seem pretty trivial now. Were they real? *Who cares?* I used to have arguments with my mother about whether O.J. really did it. Again, *who cares?* (beat) Was my father ever proud of me? I'm afraid of the answer to that question. Is global warming true? Is Tom Cruise gay? What killed off the dinosaurs? Who built Stonehenge, how did they do it, and, well, why? "Will we ever find a cure for cancer?" I guess that's of no consequence now that I'm dead. One question. Wow. This is really hard. What do I really want to know? I'd like to know if the Patriots cheated to get their Super Bowl wins. I'm a Patriots fan and I'd like to put that matter to rest once and for all! (beat) I want to know why I had so much heartache. Getting kicked out of college for plagiarizing a paper, which I didn't do. Losing my little restaurant after five years of blood and sweat and work. There was so much failure. So much disappointment. So much wishing for things to be different. So much pain. And I'm not even talking about my own death, which was, I have to tell you, quite a little card hand I got there. I'm 44 years old. I get the flu, it turns into pneumonia, and, then, here I am. I mean, I guess I could ask why, you know, why me? Why did I die from pneumonia? But I'd be saying "why me" about my whole life. OK, I'm in heaven, great, wonderful, fantastic, but why me, you know? Why me?

He gets emotional. Looks up at
ISABELLE.

JOE (cont'd)

Wait. I've got it. I think I know what I want to know. Will I ever go back? Will I get to live life over again? Will I get another chance? That's what I want to know. That's it. That's my one question. Tell me. Will I get to live life again?

ISABELLE

I'm sorry, Joe. I warned you. Time's up.

Lights out.

THE END