

The Pinocchio Equation

What would happen if Pinocchio, whose nose grows when he tells a lie, said the sentence “This sentence is a lie?” Would his nose grow or would it not?

If we assume that he speaks the truth then his nose does not grow. But if “This sentence is a lie” is the truth, then this sentence is “a lie”. And when this is the case, his nose will grow.

Similarly, if we assume that he is lying, his nose will grow. If “this sentence is a lie” is a lie, however, then this sentence is “the truth”. And when this is the case, his nose does not grow.

There is no solution to this paradox. Pinocchio’s nose simultaneously grows and doesn’t grow, he is simultaneously lying and telling the truth. No matter how long you search for an answer, the equation will not change. There will never be a definite solution.

Truth or lie?

When I came home that night, after we first met, still a little drunk and smelling of your perfume, I knew my life was simultaneously over and about to begin. The moment I first saw you at that party was playing in my head like a broken record. It felt like my life was over when I asked you your name and you smiled.

“Annie,” you said, and it felt like my life began.

I sneaked past my parents’ room and into my own, carefully closing the door behind me. And in the dark solitude of my room, I allowed myself to feel. The pull I felt when you hugged me goodbye, the urge to never let go of you until your skin became mine. The flutter in my stomach when your hair got entangled in my earring and your face so close to mine, your laughter on my skin while with soft fingers you detangled your hair from the crescent moon dangling from my ear. The shaking of your hands against my jaw in which I recognized the same nervousness that had washed all over me.

Even now I can recall exactly how you made me feel. I remember it all, like muscle-memory for my emotions; when I find a polaroid of you under my bed or when I listen to the songs you played in your car or when I pass a stranger on the street who is wearing your cologne.

You asked me out on our first date, remember? I told my parents I was meeting a new friend, when all I wanted to tell them was that I was going on a date with another girl. I wanted to scream it out into the world, I wanted to relish in the excitement.

I wanted it to last forever.

My parents watched from the window when you picked me up, and I only gave you a quick hug, nothing that might have concerned them, when all I wanted to do was wrap my arms around you and bury my head in your hair. In your car on the way to the beach we talked about our families and I was so relieved to hear that you understood exactly why I acted the way I did around my parents.

“How can they preach love every Sunday but then condemn any love that doesn’t fit into their small-minded world?”, you said. I didn’t have an answer then, and I don’t have one now. I was raised in a religious household and I remember the shame I felt when I first realized I wasn’t only interested in boys. How can they make a person feel ashamed for loving someone while at the same time celebrating love as the highest virtue?

No matter how long you search for an answer...

After our first date at the beach, after the sunset in the sand, after the sea-salt kiss, I knew that you were special. I knew it by the tenderness in your touch and by the soothing in your voice. The sun had made your freckles show and I made you laugh by attempting to count them all. You told me a story about a sailor and his love for the sea and then you wrapped your arms around me when it made me cry. And when you said you wanted to see me again my heart expanded against my lungs and I breathed out the first thing that came to me, “I want to see you again, too, I want to see you every day.”

And now, I can’t help but wonder: How did we do it? In a world that made us hide who we truly were, how did we find each other? How did we love each other, in a world that is filled with hatred against those who are like us? That to me is still a miracle. Or perhaps, just another part of the equation.

And the equation will not change.

For a while, we made it work, and it worked beautifully. We were in love, and we didn’t care about the rest. I remember how one time, after having been apart for a few days, I came over to your house and we sat in your kitchen in the middle of the night, surrounded by your mom’s high-tech kitchen utensils and illuminated by the cold blue light of the LED-display on

the fridge. We spent hours talking and when we got up of the floor you hugged me so tightly I could feel your heartbeat against my chest, and you whispered into my ear, as gently as snow kissing the fields, "I'm so jealous of your arms because they get to hold you every day."

Every time we met it was like layer after layer was peeled away from us until what remained were two truths unveiled in three words, and for a while, we made it work. We were always careful in public and around our parents, scared of rejection, scared of hostility. But being on our own or among friends allowed us to fully be *us*, and I cherished every second of it. You were my first serious relationship and I remember how I told you then that without you, my life would have never begun. Perhaps I was being naïve, blinded by the novelty.

Perhaps I was.

Because after a while, something shifted. I don't know how or why; all I know is that suddenly, there was estrangement. Short episodes, fleeting. I looked at you and there was no flutter of my heart, only a numb impression of what I knew still had to be there. You took my hand and I pulled back, confused by the strangeness of your hand in mine. We were sitting in your room watching a movie and when you laughed, I only heard an echo. It was new to me, and upsetting, because I didn't want it. I wanted the day at the beach, the drive in your car, the cold kitchen floor beneath our feet. When you asked what was wrong, I said I didn't know and apologized. I didn't want to hurt you, and I still don't have an answer...

But then again, for every time it felt alien to be with you, there was a time it felt natural. For every time I wanted distance, there was a time I craved your embrace. For every time it felt like a lie, there was a time it felt like the truth.

There will never be a definite solution.

You know all of this already, I realize that. So why am I telling you now?

Perhaps because I need to see what happens when I say it out loud. Pinocchio's nose can only grow when he speaks.

So, when I tell you "I love you", will you say "*truth*" or "*lie*"?