

# LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL III TOP HONORS 2009

Dear James Frey,

I never read *A Million Little Pieces* intentionally; in fact, it was a complete coincidence I found it, lonesome on a shelf in a corner of my basement. But despite the way it came into my life, each word until the four-hundred thirtieth page stays in a place I hold near my heart. You see, I couldn't understand why she never looked at me again. I didn't understand why he was so angry with me. I never understood because I never tried. She was my best friend; he was my father. I used the past tense for the relationships that no longer exist, the ones I lost to a world of anger, addiction, and abuse. Although they led two completely separate lives, they left me with scars I thought I'd never lose.

Back then, she and I shared a bond no one would dare to break. Back then we were two naïve girls who thought life was just a joke we would laugh our way through. I still remember those first days apart, the days I saw her drifting. We were walking the streets late in the afternoon of a hot summer day. There were only a few more of these days before the leaves would meet the ground and our eighth-grade year would begin. Her phone rang that familiar tone I had heard so many times before; I had no idea this phone call would be the beginning of a broken road. I continued forward through her conversation, with a voice on the other line I couldn't recognize. "How much?" she responded with a distant annoyance. "Are you kidding me? How am I supposed to get high off *that*?" My stomach dropped to the ground so hard it went numb. The rest of the conversation is a blur to me; I had heard all I needed to. As the year progressed, my phone calls went unanswered and my room became more and more lonesome with no one to occupy the chair she had always filled by the window. At first, I thought it was me. I thought I had done something wrong. Our friendship finally got to a point where we could sit in the same room and not say a word; we could walk down the halls without a simple "hello." Another year had gone by when I first heard she was in jail. People talked as if it were nothing. It was her second home by then. She had spent weeks in rehab, over and over again. Still, my phone calls went unanswered, and the lonesome chair by the window remained empty.

Behind closed doors, however, she was not the only suffering I had to endure. My parents divorced when I was about eleven. At first I was angry with my mother for pushing him away. But as I grew older, I started to see the person behind those eyes so much like my own. I'd visit my father two days a week, Tuesday and Thursday to be specific. I'd visit him on the days he wasn't running from the law for crimes I still have yet to know. Each time there were more empty bottles. Each time there were more empty bags. Each time the words he spoke in my presence became even harder to hear. Each time I was more and more terrified of what I'd have to take. I couldn't possibly figure out why he blamed me for his own mistakes, and why he found me responsible for all of his own pain. After a while, I stopped crying. After a while I blocked it out. After a while, I stopped trying to understand. I haven't spoken to him for months now. I had given up my desire to be loved, my desire for an apology for the things he did to me.

My father was Miles, and she was Lilly. I just didn't know it then. My father's world came crashing down the day he left the family he broke behind. Her world came crashing down as she became addicted. Their worlds came crashing down, and I didn't even try to save them. With each phone call unanswered, with each silent dinner, I grew further from the two people in this world who meant the most to me.

As I took in the story of your abuse, friendships, struggles, and everything in between, I began to see my losses in a different way. I saw Miles in his room with his head in his hands as he went on about the mistakes he had made and the regret haunting him. I saw Lilly as she searched desperately to find peace within herself and a way to rebuild a new life. I watched as they pushed away the people they loved to avoid the shame, to avoid facing the disappointment they knew they had caused. As I watched, I saw pieces of my own experiences before me. There were moments where I sobbed for Lilly and Miles, moments where I sobbed for my father and my best friend.

I know now it's not their fault, nor is it mine. You have taught me that no matter how far someone falls that you should never give up. You have taught me to accept that everyone makes mistakes, and that it's never anyone's purpose to cause pain. It's never too late for second changes, and sometimes life is easier when you can see it from perspectives other than your own. I'm a better human being from knowing that forgiveness is earned and never easy. It has to come from within yourself.

Sincerely,

*Kelly*

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