

There was a RED-HEADED GIRL, Charli, who had joined the line with a gathering of the sick and the elderly, people who were calm because they had seen death coming long before they found themselves at heaven's gates. Her body was blanched and frail, childlike. She must have been older than she appeared, though, because the way her arms circled her knees and the way she stared ahead almost without blinking spoke of the kind of patience that you do not find in children. Her clothing was plain, white and grey and her feet were bare. She did not know where her shoes had gone.

Charli had decided that she would die when she was walking past the grocer that morning. She did not know when or where or how specifically. And it didn't matter to her that she had been taught in Sunday school that she would be denied heaven, because she didn't really believe that anyway. And then she stepped out into the street and there was a cab and she was hit and was killed. This was not her suicide. She had not heard the car coming around the corner before she heard the people on the street shouting, and was not fast enough to move. The driver had had too much to drink the night before because he was lonely and probably an alcoholic like his father even though he wouldn't let himself admit it. He had not seen the person in the road. And now Charli had heaven.