

Cosmic Justice

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Sweat started to drip down Jerry's forehead. He struggled to catch his breath. The questions were in his mind again and they wouldn't go away. How had this all worked out this way? Was there a God? There couldn't be. If there were, it would be different.

Jerry Doyer was a piece of shit, and he knew it. He had always been that way, even when he was a kid. He bullied, stole from, and generally abused anyone he could. And yet, things always seemed to work out for him.

He was an absolute legend in sixth grade after he gut-punched Jimmy Inkle in the cafeteria line, causing him to crap his pants. That was the first time he realized it didn't matter how badly he acted. He had charisma, and people seemed to love it. Soon he was dating Kelly Morris, one of the cutest girls in his class. She was only the

first in a long, essentially unbroken string of attractive girlfriends he would have throughout his life.

His bad behavior intensified as he grew older.

As an adult traveling in Munich, he convinced a girl to have unprotected sex with him by swearing that he had had a vasectomy. He had not. Several months later, she sent a message to one of his alternate “hookup” emails—her only line of contact with him. The heading was “Please reach out to me! We need to talk!” He deleted it without opening it, and then shut down the account. He wasn’t exactly sure what the message was about, but he was pretty sure he wanted to remain unsure.

And he wasn’t just charismatic—he was lucky too. He would do reckless, illegal things without a wiff of comeuppance. He drove blackout drunk constantly. One more than one occasion, he woke up the next day to find his car

smashed up. One time it was even spattered with blood. At the time he had panicked. But, looking back, he couldn't imagine why. He was Teflon—nothing ever stuck to him. He hosed his car down, had it repaired, and never heard anything else about it. He even got his insurance to foot the bill.

His charisma and uncanny knack for getting away with things made him a very wealthy man. He started work as an investment banker immediately after college and quickly worked his way up the ranks, making sure to step on and intimidate everyone along the way.

During a particularly contentious battle for a promotion, he made life a living hell for his opponent, Bill Fisher. It wasn't enough to get into his head at work. Jerry had to make sure his whole life came apart. He started sleeping with the Bill's wife. It wasn't hard for Jerry to seduce her—it never was. The week before the promotion decision came down, Jerry put

pictures of himself and the wife fucking into Bill's mailbox. Jerry's face was blurred out, and he told the wife that if she ever revealed his identity he'd kill her. She never said a word.

Bill had a mental breakdown and had to leave the company. Jerry thought he remembered hearing someone say Bill ended up killing himself, but he wasn't sure.

These are not the worst things Jerry ever did. They are a random sampling. Any other random collection would be equally disturbing.

But Jerry was self-aware. He knew his behavior was horrendous—he was just so consistently rewarded for it that it became his nature. Life worked out for him, and he didn't want to examine it too closely.

But in the pit of his stomach he knew he was caca. As he lay in his penthouse NYC apartment, next to one of several beautiful women he was sleeping with at the time, he

began to panic. This was becoming a regular event.

He had made 200 million dollars by the time he was forty, and he couldn't remember doing a single good thing in his life. As he looked back on the carnage, bad thoughts stirred.

“Why is God letting me live like this? Does he exist? Is there no balance in the universe? Or is he just letting me pick up as much momentum as I can before he smashes me to pieces?”

He felt like a serial killer, begging to be caught.

His stood up and tried to pace away the panic growing in his head.

“What's wrong, honey?” The woman on his bed asked dreamily.

“Mind your own fucking business,” he snapped. “What's wrong is you're still here—why are you still here?” He was in no mood to hold a conversation with a nineteen year old.

“Fuck you!” She picked up her clothes in a bundle and walked out of the room.

“Yeah, go fuck yourself.”

He continued to pace.

The anxiety was unbearable. His heart beat so hard and fast he felt like it was going to seize up. The sweat was now pouring off of him. He barely made it to his bed as his vision began to grey around the edges, and then went black.

When he woke up, he was feeling good for the first time in a while. Even in the blackness, his subconscious mind had continued to work. He had made a decision.

‘Give it all away. Go and live humbly. The universe can’t complain if you end up doing enough good’

Lying there, with that warm thought on his mind, it was a while before he noticed he wasn’t alone.

He gasped when he first saw the man staring at him from the far end of the room. It

would have been shocking enough to simply have a stranger in his room, but there was something physically off about the man that made it even more disturbing. It was hard to pin it down, but his limbs were wrongly proportioned somehow—too long, and disjointed. He wore simple, grey clothing that fit him oddly. The stranger stepped forward and spoke.

“Mr. Doyer. Please don’t be alarmed. I’m not here to hurt you. I need to speak to you about something important.”

“What? Who are you? How do you know me?” Jerry’s mind raced.

The man stepped into a beam of light that was shining in from the window. Jerry was now certain there was something weird about him. The features of his face were all wrong. Just like with his limbs, they were strangely off kilter. The sight sent a wave of panic down Jerry’s spine. He reached for the pistol he kept in the

table by his bed, and aimed it at the thing in front of him.

“Now you just stay right where you are!”

The thing took another step in his direction. Jerry squeezed the trigger but it wouldn't budge. The gun grew hot, and he dropped it on the floor. It glowed a pale yellow for a moment, then fused into one solid chunk of metal.

“Please, Mr. Doyer. I know this is very alarming, but you must let me speak.”

Jerry thought about it for a moment.

“OK, speak.”

“Sir, as you can likely tell by now, there is something strange about me.”

“Yeah..” Jerry mumbled, bobbing his head slightly.

“That is because I am not a human being. I am a member of a very old and advanced race of aliens. You can call me Richard. I know that this is an abrupt introduction. Ordinarily I wouldn't

reveal myself to a human this way.

Unfortunately, this meeting must happen now.”

“What do you want with me?”

Richard sighed. “I’ll get there, but first I have to explain a few things.” He walked up to the foot of the bed and put an elegantly elongated hand on the bedframe. Jerry pulled himself into a full sitting position with a jolt. “Human physicists have decoded many of the forces of the universe. They describe gravity, entropy, inertia—essentially all of the universe’s physical characteristics. There are, however, forces that physics cannot describe. Did you know that moral balance is a universal constant? It’s not just a concept—it exists—it has measurable properties.”

Jerry’s mouth was dry as sand. He wanted to speak but his voice wouldn’t come.

“The universe’s sense of moral balance is powerful—and the same way a black hole can destroy a solar system, an imbalance in morality

can have a devastating impact. If it's significant enough, it can even tear apart the very fabric existence. It can end everything.”

“Jesus.” Jerry was finally able to mutter.

“Yes. As I mentioned, my race is very old—perhaps the oldest in the universe. When we reached a sufficient level of technology—far more advanced than humans are now—we detected the Universal Moral Balance. We soon understood the significant risk of a moral imbalance in the universe. At first, we tried to maintain balance by regulating our own behavior. We took great pains to never be too bad, or too good. It worked, for a while, but eventually our measurements once again detected imbalances. We knew it wasn't coming from our planet, so we reasoned that life on other planets must have become advanced enough to have a significant moral impact.

By that point, our technology was sufficiently advanced that we could reach galaxies

at the far end of the universe in a very short time. As the Balance grew dangerously unstable, we sent out legions of ships to correct the greatest inequalities. That has been the great mission of my race ever since. We keep track of the Balance, shifting events and circumstances one way or another in order to bring the universe back to order.”

Jerry nodded his head. “I knew it. I knew this couldn’t be right. I don’t deserve this life. I could feel it in my gut.”

“Yes, all sentient creatures feel the pull of morality, much as they feel the pull of gravity. It is not an instinct—it’s an intuition about the nature of the universe.”

“Well look, I’ve already decided. I’m giving it all away. I’m going to liquidate all my assets, donate the money to charity, and live a simple life—doing good where I can.”

“I know about this decision. That is why I am here. That is why this conversation is so

urgent. Mr. Doyer, you must not follow through with that plan. The fate of the universe depends on it.”

Jerry blinked heavily three or four times. “Jesus, are you kidding me? I don’t get it.”

Richard paused for a long moment before continuing. “Let me tell you a story that I think will make things clear. Some time ago, I visited a planet that was an especially aggressive generator of negative moral energy. It was giant, and very densely populated. Hundreds of billions of good people, subjugated to unthinkable atrocities—slavery, rape, fear, pain. There was small ruling class of evil and exploitative overloads, who lived in unimaginable luxury.

To tip the scale, I gave a piece of advanced technology to an industrious and good-hearted young slave named Bizmak Touron. It allowed him to produce valuable minerals out of sand and dirt. He quickly used it to build a fortune, and to

pull himself and many, many others out of poverty and subjugation. Balance was returned.

Unfortunately, he did not stop there. Unbeknownst to us, he used his significant resources to help decode the secrets of the device we gave him. His examination revealed fundamental secrets that allowed him to create many new pieces of advanced technology. His discoveries set off a chain reaction that entirely changed the planet.

There was suddenly enough food and resources for everyone—and ships to explore other parts of the galaxy, easing the overpopulation. Practically overnight, billions were drawn out of abject misery and given the opportunity to live well...It was a calamity unlike the universe has ever known.”

“What? Why? That sounds great!”

“It wasn’t great. The universe does not favor ‘good’ over ‘evil’. It doesn’t have a moral compass. It craves equilibrium. This sudden

influx of 'good' put more strain on the universe than we thought it could bear."

"So what? I still don't understand why you're here."

"I'm here because you are, as far as we can tell, the only thing holding the universe together at this moment."

Jerry paused for a long moment as that statement sunk in. "Because I'm such a piece of shit?"

"Exactly. The planet causing the problems revolves around Alpha Centauri, the closest star to your solar system. Because of the planet's relative proximity, your imbalance has an especially strong effect."

"It reaches all the way out there?" Jerry said dreamily.

"Technically it reaches everywhere, but distance is a factor in calculating its impact."

"OK, so what do you want from me?"

“First and foremost, under no circumstances must you give your money away to charity and live a good life. If you do that, there is no doubt in my mind that the universe will tear to shreds under the strain. Second, it may take us some time to rectify the situation on the other planet. Until we do, you must increase your level of negative output.”

“Increase it? How?”

“Keep being the same awful person you’ve always been—in fact, ramp it up! And we’re going to make sure that no matter what, you always win. We want you to shoot for the moon. Have you ever wanted to be President of the United States? How about ruler of the world? This is your shot. Just make damn sure you leave a trail of slime on your way up.”

“I’m going to be President? And I . . . have to be a dick?”

“Yes.”

“Or the universe will end?”

“That’s right.”

Jerry rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms. “So I’m the savior of the universe, and I will always get anything I want, as long as I act like a total bastard along the way?”

“Correct.”

Jerry let out a heavy sigh. “OK. I think I can do this.”

“Thank you, Jerry. It is impossible to overstate the crisis you are helping to avoid. We will be watching.”

With that, the alien bowed awkwardly and walked towards the door. Before he left, he turned around. He had a look on his face that Jerry interpreted as thoughtful, although his alien features made it difficult to know for sure.

“I know the question you have been asking yourself for some time now. To thank you for your help, I would be willing to answer it for you. Would you like me to tell you whether there is a God?”

Jerry thought for a moment. “No. I don’t think so.”

Richard nodded and left.