

# Good Things Bad People

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The sanguine sky does little to alleviate the somber mood below. Underneath the crisp blue is a dark splotch amidst a sea of green. The gathered, an ensemble of friends, family, and those unable to ignore a sense of obligation, are dressed in black. Vehicles spread for miles through the twisting cemetery roads like fiberglass tentacles reaching out from the great mass of mourners.

In the front row, the family of the deceased is transfixed on the coffin as the reverend speaks. The mother, by all accounts a strong and vibrant woman, is unrecognizable in her current state of uncontrolled weeping. Heavy ugly sobs shake her frame while her husband holds her tight, as if her trembling form might crumble at any moment. She does not feel his tears drip into her tightly bound hair. He is on the brink of a complete collapse himself, but struggles to be strong for her.

Beside them sits a young boy. If the casket lid were pried open, a face similar to the boy's could be found. The boy's hair a lighter shade of blonde. His cheeks slightly more round. He stares blankly at the coffin before him. His reaction, or lack thereof, to his brother's death is assumed to be either complete shock or a deep grief that could rush to the surface at any moment. The boy perfectly understands the finality of death and what the loss of his brother means. Perhaps more than most there. No one truly understands death, but he has a unique relationship with it. He ponders what the funeral would look like if they knew what he knew.

Near him, another loudly weeps. Even with eyes red and swollen with tears, and strands of hair broken out of their neat formation, she is beautiful. Her gloved hands work to gingerly dab her chocolate eyes with a cloth, bits of mascara clinging to it. As she rocks forward, a woman rubs her back lightly with one hand. Her other hand moves across the beads of her rosary with the agility of years of practice, whispering Spanish prayers her mother had taught her. She briefly breaks from her prayer to console her daughter.

"Everything happens for a reason, my love. Even something as terrible as this."

The girl faces her mother. The woman is troubled by the unfamiliar glaze in her daughter's eyes.

"That's what you tell people to make them feel better about how terrible the world is. It's not fair and pretending there is a reason for this, whatever the hell this screwed up situation is, isn't going to make me feel better about it. Nothing good will come of this. Sometimes bad things just happen to good people."

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Outside of her comfortable suburban home, Patricia watched her eldest son, Julian, hang an absurd amount of plastic grocery bags from his arms. The bags swayed heavily on his limbs, the tight plastic seemed to slice into his flesh. Looking from the trunk full of bags to the determined grimace on her son's face, it appeared as if he intended to fit the entire load onto his arms. Her head cocked to the side as she stared at her haughty son.

"Why do you always do that? We're ten feet away from the house. Just make another trip."

"You sweet...simple...woman," he responded between heavy breaths as he further encumbered himself with even more bags.

"Excuse me?"

"Taking more than one trip is ridiculous. That's giving up. No one respects multiple trip takers"

"No one is going to respect you when they see you get beat by your mother in the driveway for calling her simple."

"I called you sweet too."

"Uh huh. Where's Jake? He should be out here helping so you don't drop all of my groceries on the ground."

"He is finishing up his game. I told him I would handle groceries."

"My sweet simple son. Just don't drop anything or I'm making you go to the dinner with us tonight."

Jake walked into the kitchen as his brother and mother were putting away groceries. As he looked at the forest of plastic, he was glad he didn't have to help carry any of them inside. He was grateful that his mom didn't trust him to put things in the right place so he didn't have to worry about getting roped into helping unpack them. She moved with a sense of urgency that reminded him that they would have to leave soon for some adult dinner thing that was sure to be super boring. If he was helpful and did some last minute sucking up, he hoped there was a chance he could still get out of going. Besides, he had gotten frustrated with his video game. Before the familiar rush of anger overtook him, he felt it was best to take a step back and help his chances of getting to stay home.

His brother was putting something away in the cabinets while his mother was organizing stuff on the counter to go in the refrigerator. Jake went over to the still-full bags and began rummaging through them to find an item he could help put away.

"Give up already?" Julian paused for a moment to look over his shoulder at his younger brother.

Jake stared at him for a moment. They were not supposed to give up on anything. Their dad was constantly reminding them of the merits of hard work and perseverance. This was usually in reference to sports



and not getting stuck on a video game though. Julian never gave up. He was good at everything he did. It made everyone very happy when he did well. Jake never thought it made his brother happy. His brother did well because he had to. It's just what he did. He did all sorts of things and did them all well, but it didn't seem like he got to do what he really wanted to do. Whatever that was. At first, Jake felt bad for his brother because of this. These days he wasn't sure how he felt.

"I didn't give up. That game is just stupid."

"That's why you spend hours a day playing it?" his mother asked. She always had something to say. His mother was compassionate, and everyone thought she was funny, but Jake didn't like arguing with her because he never won. Julian won everything from his high school football games to family trivia night. Jake was only half his brother's age, but already felt far behind as far as accomplishments went. Even Julian knew better than to try to beat their mother in an argument.

"We'll get past that level tomorrow. I'll help you out, bud."

Of course he would. His brother was always helping people. Sometimes Jake liked to figure things out himself.

"I love when you two work together. So much that I'm going to let you finish putting these away while I get ready."

"Are you sure I have to go? Why is Julian getting out of it?"

"So he doesn't get in trouble with Sofia. He is almost as scared of her as he is of me."

"Why would he be scared of his girlfriend?"

"Because I taught him well."

Jake didn't understand. He thought it was dumb that his brother could make plans with his girlfriend instead of going to some charity dinner. If Jake wanted to hang out with his friends instead of going, he wouldn't be allowed to.

He began clearing a stack of flyers off of the kitchen counter to make room for groceries. The words "Lost Dog" hung above a photo of a bright-eyed beagle. Their home telephone number was listed below, as well as a reward that Jake offered to fund with his own allowance.

"Oh, did anyone call about Rosco?"

He stared at his mother for a moment, caught off guard by her question. Julian told him not to be so upset about the dog and explained that he wouldn't be coming back. He said a bunch of weird stuff and asked questions about how losing his dog made him feel. It made Jake uncomfortable. He looked at Julian somberly while his brother gave him an odd look.

"No." Jake set the flyers down, hoping to move past the subject.

"I'm sure he will show up soon. We can go hang up more flyers tomorrow."

"No, thank you."



His mom paused for a moment. She looked confused as she bent down closer to him. Her hand rested on his shoulder as she looked at him.

“Why not?”

“No one is going to find him. We should just forget about it.”

“Why wouldn’t anyone find him?”

“Something probably happened to him.”

“Why would you say something like that?”

“All finished. You guys should start getting ready.” Jake didn’t even notice that Julian had put away the rest of the groceries.

His mother seemed surprised by Julian’s fast-paced work as well. She lost track of the conversation she was having with Jake and checked her watch. A small frown formed when she realized that the charity dinner was fast approaching.

“Right. Jake, please put something decent on the first time so I don’t have to make you change.”

“Sure thing. I’ll go pick out one of Julian’s pretty dresses.”

Patricia’s youngest son suddenly adopted a rather light-hearted mood as he flashed a mischievous grin and scurried out of the kitchen. She was confused about his reaction to Rosco. Just a couple of days ago he had refused to let the matter go and insisted on them searching for the lost dog constantly. The dog often ran off, but never for too terribly long. She did not have time to reflect on Jake’s sudden shift in attitude.

The dinner was fast approaching and she still had to get ready. More than likely, she would have to supervise Jake getting ready as well and then have to rush her husband when he got home as he was as problematic about these sort of things as their youngest. Normally, she would also have to worry about Julian, who always took longer than her to get ready for any event, but not tonight.

She was disappointed that he would not be attending, but for mostly selfish reasons. Julian was a bit bold with his sarcasm at times, but she found his company entertaining. Frankly, she was expecting to be a bit bored herself at the event that evening, but could not let her husband or Jake know or else they would double their efforts to convince her to allow them all to skip it. Under normal circumstances she would force Julian to suffer along with the rest of them, but his girlfriend had personally asked if he could be free to join her for dinner then some party since it was their seven month anniversary. Something she knew Julian likely cared little about. He would go out of his way to help anyone, but he was not exactly a sentimentalist. Sofia was a sweet girl though, so she gave Julian permission to go.

Patricia and Julian watched Jake dash upstairs. Julian exaggeratingly shook his head before speaking to her about the joke Jake



had made before his escape.

“That little jerk. Mother, I don’t know how to tell you this, but you raised a monster.”

“I know Julian. I raised two of them. Anyway, we’re hopefully leaving as soon as your dad gets home. Try to tidy up a bit around the house before you go out. He is going to be grumpy after having to sit through this thing all night and it will be a nice surprise for him to come home to a clean house.”

“I can handle that. I’ll start with my room.”

Julian locked his door behind him. He then quickly browsed through some playlists on his computer before selecting one titled “Preparation Playlist”. Big band horns blared from his speakers as he took a moment to get into the mood. From a drawer, he removed some rubber gloves and nimbly pulled them over his hands. His shoulders bounced to the music as he made his way to his closet. After a few moments of shifting various items, he pulled a black gym bag from its hiding place. He wiggled his door handle to make sure it was locked, then set the bag on his bed.

He carefully removed a surgeon’s mask, a taser, a box of rubber gloves, a hand towel, origami figures folded in a variety of shapes, an icepick, and organized them on his bed.

Finally, a moleskin sketchbook. He turned the pages of the notebook carefully, studying them as if deciphering profound literature.

He paused on a page and smiled.

There were blueprints drawn in crisp blue ink. A map of a house and the area surrounding it. Notes were scrawled in small neat writing in the margins. Clearing his throat, he then began to speak to himself in his best reporter voice while being careful to avoid being audible to potential eavesdroppers over the music.

“A grisly murder took place at 1353 Maple Drive last night. Karen Meyers was found dead on her back porch. Early autopsy reports suggest that the woman’s brain was destroyed using some sort of sharp object forced through the nose.”

Julian turned the page to a diagram he had made of mummification techniques. Great detail was shown in a sketch of a small hook being used to scramble the brains before pulling them out of the nose. He reached for the icepick and rotated it slowly in his hand as he continued to give his mock report.

“It seems that the victim was somehow subdued and executed at her own home while her family slept inside, unaware of the terrible crime that happened right outside their door. The only evidence found so far is a small piece of paper folded into the shape of a bird, presumably left on the body by the killer. The bird figure seemed to be a folded doctor’s note



of sorts, where the killer left a note prescribing death to the victim. No arrests have been made as the murderer remains at large.”

It was a poor reporter imitation, but a pleased smile played on his lips nonetheless. He turned the page to another diagram, satisfied with his mock report on his future actions. Switching to a different reporter’s voice, he ran his fingers over another hand drawn map of a different home.

“Another victim of this unidentified serial killer. Another origami animal was found with a victim that seems to have been killed by a single precise puncture wound in the skull. No connection has been found between the victims so far. Citizens fear for their safety as victims continue to be found dead in their own homes while police appear to be no closer to finding any suspects.”

Julian turned another page and adopted an authoritative reporter’s voice.

“Another disturbing murder by the Serial Surgeon.”

His phone vibrated loudly on his desk. Julian closed his book, set down his items, and turned off the music. He let out a sigh before answering the phone in a friendly voice.

“Hey babe,” Julian answered.

“Anything else?” Sofia replied.

“Um...no?”

“Are you sure there is nothing else you want to tell me?”

“Damn. I didn’t think you would find out. I’m so sorry, but it’s true. I’m...I’m pregnant.”

“You have been looking a little plump lately.”

“Plump? You’re insane. Do you know how many women have told me that I have a body that would make the gods themselves weep?”

“Probably zero since nobody actually talks like that. And if they did tell you that, you should remind them that today marks exactly seven months that your amazing girlfriend has put up with you.”

“I remember. I was actually just telling some of the guys about how I couldn’t believe it has been seven months already and how lucky I am.”

“Really?”

“No. No one cares about that stuff. When we hit a year, I may acknowledge it. Maybe get a plaque made or something.”

“Shut it. So what time are you going tonight?”

“Probably not until a bit later. The family is leaving in a few minutes, so I’m going to enjoy a few rare moments of peace before heading over to the party. Plus, mom wants me to clean a bit. The party is so close that I’m just going to walk. I’m not in a huge hurry.”

“Sounds good. And be careful. There are creeps out there. Don’t want anyone snatching you since apparently you are such a hottie.”

“I appreciate your concern, but that’s just my cross to bear.”



“My brave man. See you when I see you.”

“Okay. Happy seven months my precious butter dumpling.”

“You’re ridiculous. Never say that again. Love you.”

“You too. Later babe.”

Julian hung up the phone and returned to his notebook. This page had a timeline on it. He began to play with an origami bird while reading it to himself.

*10:00: Arrive at party. Be seen by everyone. Plenty of alibis. Hide kit in dryer.*

*11:15: Leave party. Take prepared route to 1353 Maple Drive. Wait behind tall bushes on west side of back porch until victim goes out for her nightly smoke after putting children to sleep. Remember gloves and mask. Execute as practiced. Taser first. Once down gain control of body. Place towel in her mouth. No screaming. No noise. Swift motion with icepick at correct angle through nose. Smooth swirling to scramble brain. Leave origami. Swan this time.*

*12:00: Be back at party by this time. The sooner the better. Drop supplies back at my house first. People should be drunk by the time I return and no one should have noticed my absence.*

“I’m home!”

Jake opened his door and stepped into the hallway upon hearing his father. He was hardly ready for the dinner, but knew his father would be understanding since they were both being forced to go to the dumb event. The sound of Julian’s door unlocking caused Jake to look towards it. His brother leaned out of the doorway. Then he lifted a paper swan. By tugging on its tail he made the figure flap its wings. He remembered when Julian made one that looked like a dog.

“Hey dad.”

“Hi dad,” the younger brother echoed.

Their father began to walk up the stairs as Jake watched his brother toss the paper figure back in his room and take off his gloves. He then stepped into the hall to greet their father. The large man hugged them both and chuckled when he saw that Jake was still not ready.

“You’re going to get us both killed, bud. Which might be better than sitting through some stuffy dinner. I should go get ready though.”

Jake watched his dad walk down the hall before looking at his brother. Julian smiled at him. Jake quickly retreated back into his room.

Later that night, Julian strolled across a small bridge. His black gym bag was firmly clenched in one hand. Music played from his headphones. He would be at the party in less than ten minutes, though his mind was going over plans that would be executed later in the





evening.

Headlights passed over him from behind. Initially, he thought nothing of it. He quickly realized that the vehicle seemed to be directly behind him even though he was on the designated walkway on the side of the narrow road. He dove to the side. It was a moment too late. The car struck him mid-air. His bag and some blood went into the river. His body collided with one of the steel bars of the bridge's frame before bouncing back onto the road. Lifeless.

The driver awoke as his vehicle struck the boy. He slammed on his brakes and skidded into the side of the bridge. In his rear view mirror he saw the broken body in the road. The man rushed toward the boy and collapsed to his knees. He did not need to check for signs of life to see that he had killed him.

He struggled to dial 911 as his hands shook. His mind raced to his own daughter; his little girl still in the hospital he was traveling to. After getting very little sleep the past week because of his time visiting her in the hospital, he had driven back to their home a few towns over to retrieve one of her stuffed animals she kept asking for. The toy was still buckled in the back seat of his car, as his daughter had always insisted on.

The dispatcher's voice coming from his phone summoned his thought back to the present. He had realized that he had not said anything to her yet. It was not too late. He could not go to jail. His daughter needed him. He could not let this boy's parents suffer either.

"Hello. I...Oh God...I...I need an ambulance. I just hit a kid with my car. He's dead."

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The entire town attends the funeral. To mourn the young high school football star. The bright student. The caring son. The loving brother. The loyal boyfriend. The compassionate volunteer. The supportive friend. To mourn all that was left undone.

The reverend clears his throat before continuing to address the crowd. He had known Julian well. Most of the community did. Every loss is devastating in its own way, but this is a true tragedy. People would struggle to make sense of what seemed like random and terrible circumstance. They would look to him to help with the healing. Never a simple task.

"Julian will be missed. He was so heavily involved with our small community that it will be impossible to ignore his absence. He truly cared for everyone and embodied the spirit of loving thy neighbor. He had so much potential and was looked up to by so many. Imagine what he could have accomplished if only he had more time."

