

Not All Vegans Go to Heaven

I'm a vegan. That's not very important anymore, but I thought I'd come out and say it. I was always under the impression that perhaps my virtuous practices would save me from things like ignorance and heart disease – and maybe they would have, but I'll never find out because I'm dead now. It turns out that no amount of kale can save you once you've already been hit by a truck and are staring at the smattered remains of your own body, smeared across an intersection like a sadistic finger-painting.

Oh yeah, did I mention I'm dead? Just died, actually. Right now, I'm standing idly by while my physical body is scraped off the asphalt like a wet pancake. Sorry about all of the similes – I use figurative language to cope with traumatic events.

There are people watching from the Del Taco on the corner. I usually love attention, but the way I landed must have caused my shirt to ride up because my entire left tit is hanging out, completely exposed to the crowd that has started to gather on the sidewalk. The paramedics don't even have the common decency to cover it up, or to at least pull the other one out for the sake of being consistent. I try to scream. *Hey officers! There are at least thirty people staring at a dead girl's tit right now!* But they can't hear me, because I'm dead. They're too busy trying to clean up the messy bits on the ground anyways. Of course, the one time someone decides that gore requires more censorship than a female nipple, it just has to be my nipple. I look back to the Del Taco. A man just spilled part of his eight-layer veggie burrito on the front pocket of his shirt. Sour cream. Doesn't he know how bad dairy is for him? For the environment? For the *cows*?

To be completely honest, getting hit by a truck is definitely the second worst thing that has happened to me this week. My boyfriend Brad broke up with me three days ago. He said it was so he could focus on his career as a Soundcloud rapper, but I know it's because he's been

hooking up with Emily Davidson behind my back. Whatever, I'm over it. The problem is that I use breakups as an excuse to cheat on my veganism – and when I say cheat, I mean *cheat*. I'll go through gallons of milk and pints of Ben and Jerry's until I can convince myself that Phish Food is more satisfying than actual human interaction. Ethical dilemma aside, I'm mildly lactose intolerant, so dairy has the same effect on me as Willy Wonka's Three-Course Meal Gum had on Violet Beauregarde.

Anyways, I was on my way back from the mall because I was craving Cinnabon. Call me a heathen, I don't care. It's only half a mile from my apartment, and I figured that the ten minutes it took me to walk there would balance out the 940 calories I was about to consume in one sitting. I don't know, I majored in economics, not nutrition. I was just about to bite into it when the truck decided that it was the right day to run the red light and ruin my entire life. But you see, it wasn't just any truck. It was fucking a Pillsbury truck. With a giant picture of the Pillsbury Dough Boy stuffing his chubby face with a *cinnamon roll*. So, picture this – I'm lying there, dead in the intersection, left tit out and stomach distended beyond recognition, surrounded by the scattered remains of my Cinnabon. At the same time, I'm standing here, looking at myself spilled all over the pavement, thinking *holy shit, I kind of look like the Pillsbury Dough Boy right now*. The last thing I ever wanted was to die under ironic circumstances, but I don't even have time to continue having a post-existential crisis before a tall, lanky kid makes a beeline toward me through the crowd. Nobody tries to stop him. He makes direct eye contact with me, so I assume he can see me. This brings me some semblance of fleeting joy, but then I realize he's probably Death coming to take me away, and there's no way I'm leaving earth until I get to see Brad's reaction to my cruel fate, so I crouch down behind the ambulance and attempt to channel whatever ghost powers I might have so that I can turn myself invisible.

"I can still see you, Jessica," the kid says as he appears around the corner of the ambulance.

"How do you know my name?"

"Don't you remember me?" He blinks, squinty eyes hidden by a pair of wire-framed glasses. I examine him more closely. He's cute, but in a dorky, going to be rich when he's older kind of way. Nothing particularly memorable about him.

"Uh, no, sorry." I avert my eyes in the hopes that he'll leave me alone, but he doesn't budge. I guess the guy can't take social cues.

"Seriously?" He sounds offended, as if I was supposed to attempt to preserve his feelings by pretending to recognize him. As if I'm not dead, cowering on my hands and knees next to the ambulance that's about to take my mutilated body to the morgue. "We went to high school together."

I groan internally. I've more or less repressed all of high school. That paired with four milligrams of Xanax a day, I'm lucky I remember how to tie my shoes. "Oh yeah! Kevin, right?" I say enthusiastically, feigning recognition.

"Actually, my name's Oliver." He takes a step forward so that he's uncomfortably close to me, and I lift myself off the ground slowly so that I'm eye-level with his face instead of his groin.

"Shit, yeah, sorry. I've always been horrible with names." I flash my most charming, apologetic smile as I wipe the gravel off of my jeans. He purses his lips, and I take this as an acceptance of my apology. "Can you tell me what's going on, Oliver?"

"You're dead," he says matter-of-factly.

"No shit," I respond, gesturing to the scene on the other side of the ambulance. "I mean, why are you here?"

"I'm here to inform you that you're going to hell." He says it so casually that I can't tell if he's joking, but his expression remains grim.

At first, I'm not quite sure how to respond to this. In all honesty, I'm not surprised. I'm not saying I was a bad person, but I can't attest to the inverse either. "Seems like a hefty decision for someone with adult braces to make," I laugh, hoping that he'll join in. He doesn't.

"I didn't make the decision," he explains. "I just get to be the bearer of bad news."

"How'd you get that gig?" I ask.

"Well, I got into heaven," he says. "Part of the deal is that when people who wronged me in my lifetime go to hell, I get to be the one to tell them. Sort of like a retribution thing."

"And you enjoy doing that?" I ask incredulously.

"I do," he replies.

"That's kind of fucked up."

"Now's not the time to suddenly have morals, Jessica," he scoffs.

"What did I do to you that was so awful?" I sift through the doldrums of my subconscious, but nothing of significance comes to mind.

"Are you the guy I rear-ended in the Target parking lot and gave the fake insurance information to?"

He sighs, either out of defeat or impatience. "I asked you to prom in tenth grade, and you rejected me." His voice cracks with an unexpected surge of emotion, and I fight the urge to laugh. Feelings make me uncomfortable.

"Prom? Really? Since when was a promposal rejection grounds for eternal damnation?"

"You told our entire class that the reason you rejected me was because I had Super Herpes," he says bluntly. "And they believed you. They called me Super Herpes for the next two years. Super Herpes isn't even a *thing*."

I suppress another fit of giggles. It definitely sounds like something I would have done. "Worst superhero name ever."

He rolls his eyes. "I'm glad you still think it's funny. Anyways, I never said you're going to hell for that specific reason, it's just the reason I get to tell you."

"Then what else did I do to deserve going to hell? It's not like I murdered anyone," I pause for a second. "Wait, I didn't murder anyone, right?"

He reaches into his pocket and produces a piece of paper longer than I care to admit. Think the length of the receipt you get at Costco when you tell yourself you only need paper towels but somehow end up spending four hundred dollars. He clears his throat, for what I presume to be dramatic effect. "Let's see – you don't tip at restaurants, you have three credit cards in your little sister's name, you borrow your grandma's car so that you can park in the handicapped spot at the bars, *then* you drive home drunk from the bars in your grandma's car –"

"Okay, I think that's enough," I say.

"I didn't even get to the part where you flushed your sister's goldfish down the toilet and replaced it with a Goldfish cracker," he smiles bleakly. There's a piece of lettuce stuck in his braces. I don't tell him.

"Well, thanks for the warm welcome," I clap my hands together. "But I have to a lifetime of suffering to endure, so I'll be on my way."

"You don't even know how to get there," he says.

"I'll just call an Uber."

"Don't be silly," he smiles again, but this time with a hint of warmth. "I'll give you a ride." I'm put off by his kind gesture, but it's not like I have anything to lose by accepting it.

"Gee, thanks."

He snaps his fingers and a 2014 Honda Civic appears in front of us. "Please tell me this wasn't your vehicle of choice," I groan as I climb into the passenger seat.

"It's fuel efficient," he says, buckling his seatbelt. I guess safety still comes first in the afterlife. "My mom used drive one before she passed away."

"I'm sorry," I say quietly. I want to say something reassuring, but I don't know how to. I want to be empathetic, but I'm not sure I even know what that word means. So I say nothing.

"Not your fault," he says. The next few minutes pass by in complete silence, and I watch as he pulls out of the intersection and down an unfamiliar street. I have to say; mainstream television got this part right – the part where you leave your body and are forced to wander the astral plane as a lonely, vengeful spirit. Except there aren't any hunky, ghost-hunting brothers to exorcise me and put my soul to rest. There's only oversharing Oliver, with his checkerboard Vans and his Honda Civic with a GPS taking us straight to hell. Well, taking me straight to hell.

"What if I don't really want to go to hell?" I blurt out, surprising myself. Although I'm pretty sure the answer is going to be in the ballpark of *tough shit kid, you shouldn't have been such an asshole*.

"Nobody does," Oliver's expression softens. "But somebody has to."

The rest of the drive is just as quiet, and I gaze out the window as our surroundings become less and less recognizable. The air grows unbearably cold, and instinctively I reach to turn on the car heater.

"I didn't say you got heat privileges," Oliver laughs, but he doesn't stop me.

"I didn't think it would be so cold in hell," I try to muster a smile.

As we drive further into uncharted territory, the air thickens with fog until I can hardly make out what's several feet in front of us. This is when Oliver brings the car to a stop. "This is the farthest I can take you," he says.

"We're in the middle of nowhere," I say, trying not to let him hear the panic that's evident in my voice. "How do I get to Hell from here?"

"Just keep walking straight. You'll know it when you see it."

I observe the single road ahead of me, shrouded in fog, and open the passenger door slowly. A part of me hopes that Oliver will take pity on me and plead my case in front of the man upstairs or sneak me through the pearly gates in the trunk of his car. I look back, but he only gives me a sad smile. "Good luck Jessica," he says. I think of something nice to say. Anything nice to say.

"Sorry they're not able to do anything about your acne in heaven."

I don't know why I say it, but I do, and before I can apologize the Civic is already screeching in the opposite direction, passenger door still wide open. I sigh and turn toward the desolate path in front of me, and as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'm scared shitless.

Hopefully they have vegan food in Hell.