

Having not completely worked out the logistics of the scientific theory he'd created, The Hypothetical Friend found himself in a quandary. He and Jame van Tittle were in a room that was impenetrably black. There were no light sources within itself, and there were no windows, doors, or transoms through which light could pass if it felt so inclined. The only item in the room was a table. A black table. In fact, they only noticed this table by bashing their shins into it at least three times apiece. Among the things that were not in the room were sounds, objects, instructions as to what to do, eels, and exits.

"Now what?" Jame asked.

That was precisely the kind of impatient mindset that The Hypothetical Friend was hoping to avoid. Consequently, he didn't acknowledge the question. The Hypothetical Friend knew that if there were something for him to do in this room, someone or something would let him know.

Two hours later, Jame spoke up again. "What happens now?"

That was precisely the kind of impatient mindset that The Hypothetical Friend had once hoped to avoid but now found himself thinking. In the simple effort to avoid a laborious inventing process, The Hypothetical Friend discovered that he not only prolonged the inventing process, but made it inconceivably harder on himself. If he followed the clauses in his Theory, it was his duty, upon enlarging, to create a device that would have made his enlarging ever possible. He fully expected to have to do this.

Only he did not expect to end up in a black room with no exit, no windows, no props, and no eels. This wasn't what he wanted at all – his entire objective was to resume his task of taking blame for other people's problems. Now, the only problems he over which he could take responsibility were his own, and they were indeed pressing.

Jame, however, had much graver consequences that could result from him not returning to human size. After all, he had to overthrow the governmental systems of Earth, rearrange a few laws, and get some golf going.

Of course, The Hypothetical Friend made one minor miscalculation in his theory, or perhaps he just assumed something he shouldn't have. Theories that can't possibly happen probably won't work the way you want them to.

"So, Mr. Hypothetical Friend, you got us here, I think it's your job to get us out," Jame slurred through clenched teeth. Jame wasn't very good at being upset, and he had to repeat himself when The Hypothetical Friend didn't understand a word he had said.

"Well," answered The Hypothetical Friend, "obviously we can't build an enlarging machine, unless you know some wonderful ways to convert an average table and the shirts off our backs into a technological miracle the likes of which nobody has ever seen."

"No," Jame stated. "We didn't learn that kind of stuff in putting school." Jame cleared his throat quietly. "So what you're saying is that we're not leaving here, are we?"

"I said there's no way we can build an enlarging machine."

"Which means we aren't ever leaving here!"

"Not necessarily," chimed The Hypothetical Friend. "There are two parts to the Prolepsis Theory, right? The written applications and the physical manifestations."

"Sure, whatever."

"Okay, let me clarify," pleaded The Hypothetical Friend. "I invented this theory, or rather hypothesis, by putting words on paper. Surprisingly, or rather impossibly, the words themselves worked with no physical backing. Now, according to the *words*, we need to create the physical manifestation or else the theory would collapse."

"But you just said we can't."

"And I stick to that. We can not build a time machine."

“If you were real right now, I’d punch you.” Jame’s impatience hung on him like a dead goose.

“If we can’t remedy the situation by changing the second part of the theorem, the physical part, why not change the first part? Why not rewrite the theorem to compliment our predicament? We simply eliminate the clause in the theory dealing with the construction of the physical—” The Hypothetical Friend was saying until Jame interrupted him, knowing exactly where he was going.

“Hold on there, caddy, let me see if I have this straight. Let me use a metaphor. We’re basically asking our mothers for cookies by promising that we’ll clean our rooms, right? Okay, then we get the cookies and then refuse to clean our room. That’s basically what we’re doing here, aren’t we?”

“Actually, that’s exactly what we’re doing.”

“But what about punishment?”

The Hypothetical Friend blinked. “What do you mean?”

“Well, still going with the cookie metaphor—”

“I’m hungry,” The Hypothetical Friend commented.

“If we were to refuse to clean our rooms, wouldn’t our mothers therefore punish us for lying?”

“Jame, our mothers probably don’t even know where we are right now. And I doubt they’d be all that upset over a little scientific experiment—”

“That’s not what I mean. There’s bound to be some lasting repercussions of our actions. We’re dealing with something totally impossible. Therefore, couldn’t anything happen as a result of our changing this?”

The Hypothetical Friend looked blankly at Jame for a moment or two. Then, extracting a piece of paper from his pocket and a pencil, he quietly scratched out the third part of the Prolepsis Theory which stated that *if successful in the completion of the event, one must then vow to then make it possible for the event to ever have happened*. “Looks like we’ll find out,” The Hypothetical Friend smiled and waited.

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Something revolutionary happened. Perhaps revolutionary doesn’t quite fulfill the description of the event that transpired as a direct result of the eradication of the final element of the Prolepsis Theory. Something happened that definitely caused much confusion, several worried expressions, and the disintegration of a red Ford Pinto.

But along with this truly mind-boggling event, the erasure of the final part of the Prolepsis Theory also resulted in a very minor occurrence that really took nobody by surprise because it was exactly nobody who realized it had taken place. The Hypothetical Friend had abandoned forty-seven clones in order to try to complete the Prolepsis Theory. Somewhere in Parable’s brain lurked forty-seven identical men who had little to no idea of the current whereabouts of their prototype. Of course, since human cloning hadn’t been perfected at this point, The Hypothetical Friend had accidentally stumbled upon this process. In essence, he had used the Prolepsis Theory without having known it.

Then, before he gave a second thought to the remaining clones, he destroyed the Theory. This didn’t destroy the clones, but combined them. All forty-seven clones became one clone, the perfect clone of The Hypothetical Friend. Also, strangely, the clone ended up in ancient Rome, trying desperately to figure out why he was in an aqueduct and what Cicero’s problem was.

The major consequence of The Hypothetical Friend’s action was significantly more important.

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William Retrograde repaired his car purely by accident. One day, he looked at his old Buick with distaste and a fair amount of skepticism. The hood, part of the roof, and even the hubcaps were caked with a layer of rust that took any beauty the car had at one point possessed and threw it in the trash compactor. Silently, he wished for a foolproof way to remove rust.

On the same day he had decided to invent a product that would remove rust from metallic surfaces, he noticed his car was completely rust-free. He found this coincidence bizarre, but attributed it to a stroke of luck. Over the course of the next few months, he spent many hours in a chemist's lab inventing the first rust remover after first taking note of the chemical composition changes in his car's exterior.

Incidentally, he had unknowingly applied the Prolepsis Theory to life. Then, years after this monumental step in automobile restoration, The Hypothetical Friend made void any work that William Retrograde had achieved by creating the authoritative Prolepsis Theory. Needless to say, this caused immeasurable confusion every time William went out and sprayed more Rust or Bust™ on his car only to discover that not only was the rust getting worse, but the paint job was chipping.

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Calvin Baxter was returning home from the hardware store where he bought another three cans of Rust or Bust™ rust remover. He swore by that stuff. Countless times it had turned his pathetic excuse for a Ford Pinto into an exceptional example of a Ford Pinto, which was still just below a rickshaw.

As Calvin was driving, he noticed something rather peculiar. Rust began to form on his hood, near his hood ornament. It wasn't a tiny splash of copper chips, either; this was a virus-like spread of rust all over the front of his car. Curiously, he pulled his car to the road to examine it closer. No sooner had he opened his driver's side door than *the entire car disintegrated*. Without hesitation, every piece of matter that had once comprised Calvin's wonderful red Ford Pinto suddenly became very disinterested in existing in solid form and simply stopped doing so. Obviously, this elicited a look of concern from Calvin, who didn't wonder *why* that happened, but rather *how* a car could suddenly dissipate without provocation.

What upset Calvin most was that his Rust Or Bust™ was, in the process, also completely destroyed.

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"That seems too easy," Jame said, straightening his tie. Jame and The Hypothetical Friend found themselves once again on the streets in narrow daylight.

"Science is funny like that," The Hypothetical Friend retorted. "Consider Newton. This guy was heralded as a genius when, in reality, he found that things fall. How did he find this? Not by rigorous laboratory testing, no. He was hit on the head with an apple."

"Newton?"

The Hypothetical Friend sighed. "Right, you don't know Newton. Well, he was the guy who discovered gravity."

"How do you go about discovering gravity? I'm sure he wasn't the *first* person to say, 'Hey look! I can't fly.'"

"No, he wasn't. But he was the first one to write a formula based on it."

Jame laughed. "It's pretty easy to get scientific notoriety here, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

The conversation suddenly went into cardiac arrest and, with little fanfare, died. Neither Jame nor The Hypothetical Friend made any attempt at resuscitation, either. What else was there to say?

“Yaaaaaaauugh!” was what Jame considered to be the appropriate mood-breaker, caused specifically by the impact of two adults running, full force, into him. Admiring from afar, The Hypothetical Friend noticed some familiarity to one of the two high-speed pedestrians. “Samantha Boulkhausen!”

Peeps looked up from her awkward position. “Hey, it’s another one of those clones!”

“No, it’s me, The Hypothetical Friend.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Peeps said with far too much of an apologetic tone. “You guys look alike.” It was at this point that Peeps noticed Jame. “Who are you?”

Jame replied with the highly repetitive question, “Who are you?”

The Hypothetical Friend chimed in with the answer to both questions, “You’ve already met, at the clone rally. This,” he said indicating Jame, “is Jame van Tittle, President of Albatross. This,” he indicated to Peeps, “is Sammy. She has an uncanny ability to plow into pedestrians in excess of fifty miles per hour.” He smiled at Peeps. Peeps did not return the smile, but rather kept it an added it to her collection, which was up to over two hundred sixty.

Sammy finally realized that he was alive, and merrily inserted his two cents. “You’re Paula’s father? She was looking for you.”

“Paula was looking for me? Is she okay?”

“She’s fine. Look, we really can’t talk. There are people looking for us.”

“We hope,” added Peeps.

“Where are you headed?” questioned The Hypothetical Friend.

“We’re not sure, but we’ve got a while, we assume, to figure that much out.”

Jame smiled. “Well, the best of luck to you.”

The Hypothetical Friend turned to Jame after Sammy and Peeps had run off. He even bowed slightly. “Thank you for your help, but I’m afraid I must go. I sort of have a job I need to get back to. There are a whole lot of spineless people out there who need my help.”

“Are you a political speechwriter?”

The Friend smiled warmly. “Nope, not even close.”

“Are you a psychiatrist?”

The Hypothetical Friend tried to mimic one of Jame’s smiles, but it was only the type of smile that could talk a salmon into migrating downstream. “You could say that.”

“I could also say you are an ashtray. What do you do?”

The Hypothetical Friend increased his smile a few dozen registers and, while turning around, said, “Maybe you’ll find out some day, if you run into trouble.” Then, accompanied by a quick rendition of the Gunsmoke theme, he disappeared.