

WAY BEFORE THE BIG BANG

by

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Joe and I were having a beer before watching the Masters. I was opening the sour cream Pringles when Joe suddenly goes into one of his intense, melodramatic spiels. Apart from golf, Joe has two abiding interests – astrology and cosmology. I know - strange bedfellows! Joe tells me that we get on fine because he’s a Scorpio and I’m a Cancer. Anyways, all of a sudden, Joe gets a faraway look in his eye and starts rambling incoherently. “Before the big bang,” he says popping two Pringles in his mouth, “*way* before, there was something else. Even bigger and better than nothingness. Bigger and better than just one universe.” Joe swilled the chips down with a gulp of Moosehead Lager. “There was, I’ve been reading, a multiverse. That’s right - A MUL – TI – VERSE ... or if you wish, a multiverse and a god.”

“O.K. Joe, but look, Rory McIlroy is on the tee,” I said trying to re-establish priorities. Joe didn’t appear to hear me. “These guys are blowing my mind. They’re saying that there are no limits to this multiverse. You know what they’re saying man? They are saying that ... are you ready?... that infinity and eternity exist.”

I made another attempt, becoming seriously concerned that Joe was sailing into one of his longer monologues. “Jeez Joe, did you see that?” McIlroy just hooked his drive into the trees.” I liked watching McIlroy. Talk about infinity, it’s like there was no limit to how far that guy could hit it. If, on the rare occasion that McIlroy drove it into the trees, I had a mild case of *schadenfreude*. ‘He’s human after all’, I would think.

Joe grabbed another beer and leaned towards me. “Listen, man, I’m trying to tell you something here. This is important,” he said sounding irritated. “We’re not talking astrology here ... or golf for Chrissakes!. These guys, these cos-mol-o-gists” ... Joe enunciated the word slowly and respectfully ... “they’re saying we know now there’s

not one but zillions and zillions of universes, and not only that, they're saying there's no end in sight, it just goes on and on and on, forever."

My brain was reeling. "O.K. Joe, whatever you say," I responded, reflecting ruefully that I tended to be eternally and infinitely patient with Joe. On the widescreen TV, the camera showed McIlroy's ball, gleaming white against a bright blur sky as it soared over the tall Georgia pines. "Wow, what an escape! Look Joe, on the green in two and only four feet from the hole."

But no, the man was on a roll. "I mean, for ages we have known that like 13.7 billion years ago, there was a big bang, a very big bang." For a moment, I wished I could have conjured up a fart to emphasize Joe's point but alas, our snack was Pringles not bean burritos. Joe continued. "And at that time, 13.7 billion years ago, our very own universe was born, torn out of the mother multiverse, like a lightening swift cosmic caesarian."

"Oh *please*," I thought to myself, as Joe paused for a moment, reconsidering this lurid simile. But then on he went.

"There was a new birth, a new baby on the block. There was an actual start to our universe. There was an abundance of particles and waves from which grew a large family of galaxies and stars.."

There had to be a way to stop him. I pointed to the screen. "Look ... look! He just drained his putt. McIlroy just birdied number eleven." I exclaimed as I passed the chips.

"But ... (another dramatic pause) ... there will be an end."

"What?!" Now I was getting irritated. "Yes, Joe, please let there be an end. This is all way beyond me."

"But I'm not finished. So, anyways ... the cosmologists say there will be a grand finale. An end to it all. Way down the line of course. Our precious world"... was Joe beginning to slur his words? ... "our sun and moon and beautiful milky way, even the whole damned universe, all of that will die in a violent death, not in a big bang man, but in a BIG CRUNCH,"

That was it. That was the point that I gave up. I jumped out of my chair, grabbed the remote, and turned off the TV. "For God's sake Joe. We've waited all year for this. The Masters, our once-a-year ritual for ... for how

long now? ... twelve years! Who cares about big bangs and big crunches. We live. We die. We strive to make par, or even a birdie once in a while.”

But Joe wasn't phased. “No no, but you don't get it, you're not listening. You need to know this. Our universe may die but ...” Joe paused dramatically... “here's the thing ... our mother multiverse will not be gone. That's the point about infinity and eternity. You gotta take the long view. The play must go on. Don't you see? The thing is that in the multiverse, there are always new baby universes springing up.”

“*Baby universes!* What the fuck?” Where do you get this stuff Joe? I'm worried about you.” I got triggered a little when he referred to babies being born. Years ago, my wife had a miscarriage. We never got to have kids.

Joe put down his can of beer and his expression changed. “Seriously man. We just go on, day after day, like our lives are going to go on forever. We're so small, so insignificant,”

The fact is I had some reason to be concerned. Joe had recently come out of a clinical depression. It had been hell. Day after day, week after week, into several months, Joe had withdrawn from the world. He didn't talk. He didn't read or watch TV. He didn't go out. He even stopped eating. Lost a lot of weight. He said it was the worst thing he's ever experienced. He said it was like he'd been sucked into a black hole. He said he never ever wanted to go through that again. We had been through a lot together, Joe and I. The miscarriage, the depression. We had a deep connection. I was his anchor to reality.

I could feel myself softening momentarily. “Full moon tomorrow,” I said.

“Really?” Joe took notice. He looked weary. It seemed as if the monologue had reached its conclusion.

“What's that you were saying about McIlroy?” he said turning on the TV.