Larry Swain's Universe

by Dan Frazier

Larry had always been a problem for the Swain family. They tried to raise him properly and give him values they could be happy with. But, Larry was a rogue. Dire threats were perceived by him as challenges and often, the results were... at best... unfortunate.

He was a gifted child, but he used his intelligence for mischief. By fiddling with the time space continuum and mixing in liberal quantities of quarks from his "Li'l Bang Dimensional Digester", Larry created an entirely new universe in his garage. This was a flagrant violation of Cosmic Law. It could not be ignored, nor could it go unpunished.

When the authorities caught wind of this event, Larry's Dad had to pay a stiff fine and promise to support the upkeep of this universe until it's natural decay... Mr. Swain punished Larry by making him take care of his creation until the last proton was gone. It would take about 10 billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, billion years. While this is an instant in the scheme of infinity, to a small child like Larry, it seemed like an eternity.

However, that wasn't enough to deter. Larry's innate curiosity caused him to experiment incessantly. One summer while mixing household chemicals and copious amounts of kitty litter, Larry created life in his bathroom sink. That is strictly forbidden. Life is a tenacious pest that once established, can be extremely tricky to get rid of. It will hide in the most unlikely places and take over entire existences if left unchecked.

Larry knew he was in trouble. He scooped up as much of the life as he could into his palms and looked for a safe place to dispose of it. The steady 1420 MHz hum coming from the universe in his garage alerted him to an easy solution. He would hide it there.

Checking all around to be sure he was not seen, Larry darted into the garage. He slapped his hands together and a thick cloud of DNA drifted into the mass of galaxies swirling next to his Dad's Buick. The disturbance rippled through his universe and dislodged a small

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proto star cloud at its edge. It flew into the driver's side door and left a long scorch mark. Larry sighed. Maybe Dad wouldn't notice.

Relieved, Larry felt assured that no one would ever catch wind of his little mistake. However, children are notoriously bad at covering their tracks. When he got home from school, a scant 3 billion years later, his parents were waiting for him in the living room.

"Larry," his father's voice boomed in a most unhappy manner. "Your teacher called and said you've been bragging to your classmates about your universe!"

His mother quickly jumped in. "We searched your room and found this in the bathroom." She held up a small baggie filled with a green substance. "This is life Larry... where did you get it?"

Larry blanched white. "I don't know. I didn't do it."

"Don't lie son... that just makes it worse. We know you made it." His father was clearly disappointed. "This stuff is very dangerous. Is this all of it?"

Larry dropped his head. He thought as hard as he could, but in the end could only come up with the truth. "No Dad, I dumped the rest of it in my universe."

Both parents went into panic. His mother wrung her hands. His father moaned and dragged Larry by the ear out to the garage. "Where?" He thundered.

"It went everywhere, I didn't think it would hurt."

Dad's face went red. He sputtered and lightning crackled all around. A great wind swirled papers and knocked all the tools off the shelves. They clattered to the floor. "I don't know what I am going to do with you son."

A faint, but growing murmur began to fill the room.

"Oh no," Dad groaned and covered his face with his hands. He took a deep breath and tried to compose himself. "Do you hear that?"

Larry nodded.

"That's your life calling out to you." Dad pointed at the universe.

Larry gulped hard.

"Now besides just taking care of this, we're all going to have to listen to it." Dad grabbed an old tattered chair from the corner of the garage and made Larry sit in it and stare at his universe. The chants and pleads grew noisier by the second.

"I want you to sit here and think about what you have done. This racket isn't going to stop until your universe has run its course. It will get much worse before it gets better. You are going to stay here and pay attention. If this yammering doesn't make you stop being naughty, I don't know what will."

Mr. Swain left in disgust. He turned out the overhead lights in the garage leaving only Larry's universe as dim illumination. Tears rolled down Larry's cheeks. It was so unfair. He put his hands over his ears, but nothing could stop the sounds.

Voices from his universe rose to a roar. Larry's sobs were lost to all but him.