

A Short Story

BE POSITIVE

Being Positive is the way

By Andrew
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As our world changes in no time, the words of this story are assisted by AI; the story itself was created, designed and constructed by the author.

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TO SERVE

As the Pastor gazed down the bush track, he wondered how much farther they had to go. The rolling terrain had exposed his lack of fitness, yet something compelled him onward. His companion, Shem, a devoted member of his church, had suggested this peaceful excursion to the Knowah Caves. Nestled within a eucalyptus forest near Mount Gingera, the limestone formations promised serenity. Still, after the three-hour drive and the long walk ahead, he hoped the journey would prove worthwhile.

Shem suddenly veered off the path toward a towering rock wall. The Pastor followed, crunching over dry leaves and stepping carefully around fallen branches. Ahead, a narrow gap between stone pillars beckoned. He ducked between, and a new world opened.

A cave opened around him, vast and overwhelming. As his eyes adjusted to the dimness, a strange warmth spread through his body, unexpected in the cool air. It felt like relief, like crossing a finish line.

“Father! Over here!” Shem called.

The Pastor turned toward the voice and noticed a faint glow pulsing in the darkness. He moved closer, drawn by something he couldn’t explain. The cave’s entrance cast just enough light to reveal a small pool nestled in the rock wall. Above it, a single stalactite trembled with a droplet ready to fall. He glanced upwards and froze.

The ceiling shifted like a restless ocean, dark and alive. A shiver ran through him. Below, the pool glowed softly, warm

and inviting. Above, the darkness churned, cold, ominous, magnetic. He felt caught between the two forces.

Shem stood beside him, equally transfixed.

The Pastor knelt and dipped a finger into the glowing water. He lifted it, sniffed, then tasted.

Sweetness spread through him instantly, flooding his senses. A profound calm followed, certainty, peace, purpose. It was as though every doubt had vanished. Without thinking, he bowed his head in prayer, Shem joining him.

Then something dropped onto his shoulder. He brushed at it absently, then paused. The texture was wrong. Slimy. His trance was shattered.

Looking up, he finally understood.

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Pastor Kash had always felt nervous before Sunday service, but today his anxiety was tempered by quiet confidence. His plan was in motion.

Stepping up to the altar, he scanned the congregation. Sparse. He could count them in seconds.

So few, he thought.

The Church of Positivity had dwindled year by year. He often wondered why faith had faded, and always arrived at the same answer: imbalance.

The service began. When it came time for communion, each member stepped forward to receive bread and wine. As they drank, he watched closely, and there it was, that subtle shift, reassurance, and calm. It was working.

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He tried everything to draw people back. handing out pamphlets on street corners, conversations with strangers, anything.

“Being positive is the way,” he would say.

Most ignored him. Some mocked him.

“God isn’t real.”

He would respond calmly, “Reality and feeling are not the same. You may not believe, but positivity will save you.”

Still, they walked on.

**

Attendance grew, slightly. Not enough. So he escalated.

Advertisements flooded television and radio. Billboards rose across the city, shouting his message. At the church entrance, he erected a massive glowing plus sign, blazing through the night like a beacon. But still, they did not come. It was as if the world preferred darkness.

**

One evening, he stood beneath the glowing sign, staring up at it. It reminded him of the cave, the warmth, the light, the pull. Beyond it lay the cold, indifferent city. Then, footsteps.

“HEY FATHER! Turn that effing sign off!”

The Pastor turned. Henry, his neighbour.

“Oh, Henry. How have you been?”

Henry didn’t answer. His face was tight with anger.

“Turn it off. Or I will.”

The Pastor noticed the rock in his hand.

“Henry, please, let’s talk inside.”

“No.”

The tension snapped, and Henry hurled the rock.

The glass exploded. The sign shattered in a deafening crash. Fragments rained down. Something struck the Pastor’s head, and he collapsed.

**

There was darkness inside the cave, and the distant glow. A voice whispered: *Your path is forward. The time has come.*

**

He awoke on the church steps, surrounded by broken glass. The sign was gone, and so was his peace. Rage simmered inside him now, displacing the warmth he once felt. He clenched his fists, trembling. Then the voice returned

The time has come.

He looked skyward.

“Forgive me,” he whispered.

**

It began quietly, a cough, a fever, then came the flood. The virus spread relentlessly, unstoppable, merciless. For forty days and nights, it consumed the population. No

precaution mattered. It had already taken hold. Everywhere, except one place. The church on the hill.

**

Pastor Kash stood at the entrance as the last of his followers gathered safely inside. A figure staggered up the path. It was Henry, broken, bleeding and dying.

“Father... why...?”

The Pastor regarded him calmly.

“You chose not to be positive.”

He stepped inside and closed the door.

**

At the altar, he reflected on the plan. The pool from the cave, the bats and the contamination.

Through filtering and refinement, he produced a virus and a vaccine.

He had understood immediately. In another life, he had been a medical practitioner. *This voice* had guided him to the wine, distributed through communion and immunity for the faithful.

He turned to his congregation, a faint smile forming.

“Being positive!” he declared, “is the way.”

REDEMPTION

Sitting in the front pew opposite the altar, Shem watched the Pastor closely. His eyes narrowed at the faint, wry smile playing across the man’s face. It didn’t belong, not here, not

now. Beyond these walls, devastation reigned. People were dying. Yet the Pastor carried himself with quiet confidence, his movements almost unnervingly composed. The Pastor was too composed and too positive. Shem's mind drifted back to the cave.

He remembered how the Pastor had collected both the glowing liquid from the pool and the filth from the cave floor. Since that day, something had changed. The Pastor had grown distant, absorbed in his work, spending long hours in the manor behind the Church.

One afternoon, Shem had visited him there. What he found unsettled him. The back room had been transformed into a makeshift laboratory, with medical equipment lining the benches, trays of test tubes neatly stacked inside a refrigerator, and a large machine resembling a CD player, shielded beneath plastic.

When Shem asked about it, the Pastor had replied casually, "An analyser." He'd added, almost as an afterthought, that he had once worked as a medical technician.

At the time, Shem had been impressed, almost proud. Now, watching that same man at the altar, that pride curdled into suspicion.

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As the service ended, the congregation filed out. Shem followed, his thoughts churning.

Outside, the Pastor stood at the steps, farewelling each member. When Shem reached him, they shook hands.

"Make sure you come back next week," the Pastor said softly. "Otherwise, the negativity will get you."

Shem paused at the bottom step. The words lingered, heavier than they should have.

Was he overthinking this?

Does the virus have anything to do with you?

The question hovered on the edge of his mind, but he said nothing. Instead, he walked to his car and sat behind the wheel, staring ahead, trying to make sense of it all.

After a moment, he glanced back at the Church. The Pastor had already disappeared inside.

Driven by unease, Shem stepped out of the car and made his way toward the house behind the Church. As he rounded the corner, he froze.

The Pastor emerged from a rear door, carrying the communion chalice.

Shem ducked out of sight.

The Pastor moved quickly toward the manor, entering the lab at the back. Once the door shut, Shem crept closer. Around the side, he found a window and peered inside.

He watched as the Pastor lifted the chalice, took a measured drink, then placed it carefully into the fridge.

Shem frowned.

Why refrigerate communion wine?

A noise behind him, the door opening. He darted away, heart pounding.

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Moments later, he returned. The lab door, surprisingly, was unlocked, and he stepped inside.

The room felt different now. Before, it had inspired curiosity. Now, it felt clinical... and wrong. He opened the fridge.

Inside sat the chalice, and rows of test tubes filled with red liquid, perhaps wine.

He pulled out a tray. Each tube was labelled.

“Week 18.”

Dated for next Sunday.

Another empty tube was marked with today’s date. A cold realisation crept over him.

Shem took out his phone and snapped photos. Then, acting quickly, he poured the contents of several tubes into a plastic container. He refilled them with tap water, tinting it with the remaining liquid's residue, and slid the tray back into place.

He had no idea what he was holding, but he needed answers.

Clutching the container, he hurried back to his car.

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He drove without direction until he reached a place that might matter. The gate loomed ahead. Beyond it lay the city’s water storage.

He sat there, engine idling, gripping the container.

Every day, the virus claimed more lives. His brother was barely holding on. If this liquid was what he thought it was...

Could it save them?

Or had the Pastor already decided who deserved to live?

Shem stared at the tank beyond the gate. The Church members were untouched, immune. They kept returning each Sunday, drawn back by the Pastor’s warning:

“Negativity will get you.”

And yet outside, life was beginning to stabilise. People were surviving. Surely this wasn't part of the plan. The thought struck him hard. He looked down at the container in his hand.

If this is a vaccine... why control it? Why ration it by weeks?

A new possibility formed, terrifying, but undeniable. He opened the car door.

**

The next week, the Pastor stood at the Church entrance, uneasy. The attendance had dropped. He checked his watch.

A flicker of doubt crept in. Had the absentees fallen ill? Or worse, had they survived without him?

He stepped forward, scanning the empty driveway.

Then, headlights, not one car, but many. He smiled with relief.

Shem's vehicle led the procession. Police cars followed close behind. They pulled up sharply at the steps. Shem stepped out, his face set. Behind him, officers emerged, moving with purpose. He met the Pastor's gaze.

“Pastor,” he said, voice steady, “your time's up. Everyone knows what you've done. Your days of being ‘positive’ are over.”

The Pastor blinked, confusion flickering across his face.

“What are you talking about?”

Shem held up a test tube.

“I think you know.”

The colour drained from the Pastor's face.

A police sergeant stepped forward.

“Pastor Kash, you are under arrest for crimes against humanity, extermination of life, subsection C 268.9. This carries a life sentence.”

The Pastor looked up at the empty space where the glowing plus sign once hung.

“Positivity will prevail,” he murmured.

Then he turned and fled inside, locking the doors behind him. His mind raced. I must escape; there had to be a way.

He turned down the aisle and stopped. A figure stood waiting. He was well-dressed and calm. It was Henry, alive, recovered and armed.

Henry smiled coldly.

“I knew you were hiding something. Couldn’t trust a slimy maggot like you.”

The Pastor’s breath caught.

“When Shem told me about your little lab,” Henry continued, “I had to see it myself. I lost my family because of you.”

He raised the crossbow.

“So what’s it going to be? Prison... or death?”

“Henry, please, ” the Pastor began.

A sharp click and impact exploded through his shoulder.

He collapsed, gasping, staring at the dart embedded in his flesh. Henry stepped closer, calm and deliberate.

“Injection works faster than ingestion,” he said. “Let’s see if you survive this.”

The pounding on the front doors echoed through the Church.

Henry pulled the dart free, slipped it into his coat, and walked away. He opened the doors as police rushed in.

“Boys,” he said casually, “no more positivity today. He’s all yours.”

He stepped outside, pausing on the stairs.

For a moment, he looked up at the empty space where the glowing sign once burned.

He grimaced.

“Yeah,” he muttered. “Positivity is the way.”

AUTHOR

If you listen to my American accent, you will detect a Boston and an Australian pitch. I was born in Melbourne and dragged to Philadelphia when I was 3 years old. My father pursued a doctorate at Temple, and we lived there for 3 years. After my dad finished his studies, he landed an associate professorship at Boston University, which led us to move to Massachusetts. Having spent most of my formative years at elementary, middle, and high school in Framingham, MA, I decided to exercise my right to a free College education in Australia. Yes, further education was free back then, but not now. I never became an American citizen; I only had resident alien status. So I was brought up as a Yankee, as some Australians would say, a “septic tank” rhymes with Yank. Go figure? I finished my education and have lived in Canberra for 40 years. Currently working as an Electronic Technician in Canberra. I’m married with two children.