

THE REASON WHY

A Monologue

by

Eric Coble

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CHARACTER:

PAUL: A man working it out, 20's-50's

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PAUL

No, no, no. The thing is, when she walked in I almost had that frog completely in the blender.

That probably needs an explanation.

A month ago I read this thing online, this new diet, it was based on this Aboriginal diet in Australia. There's this chemical, isobutyl anthranilate I think it's called? And it's in reptiles, or amphibians -- in a gland in amphibians. And tribes who eat it never get cancer. Like 0%. And there's this company online -- there's a company for everything on line, right -- but they send live frogs, like cryogenically frozen, or not frozen, but sleeping, dazed -- it's some crazy new invention -- they send you a month supply of dazed frogs in a box, so they're like fresh, right, with recipes and tips on storage, explaining it to loved ones, etc. It's surprisingly inexpensive. Postage is the killer, but I needed the anti-cancer frogs 'cause Marjorie asked me to paint the house!

Which I guess needs an explanation.

I'm a good housepainter. Like it could almost be called a calling. Like God told Joan of Arc to free France, sometimes I think God's telling me what color other people's houses should be. It's a gift and a curse. Like being French. Which I'm not. But what I am is a damn fine house painter and Marjorie knows this and she asked me to paint the house this coming summer, and it's a big house, big lovely colonial, and I'm all about painting it. But I'm concerned being up on that ladder for hours at a time in the direct sunlight -- I've got these moles that I'm keeping an eye on, some new little freckles, etc, and I'm worried that all that direct sunlight might just be the final melanoma-activating straw, you know? And I can do sunscreen, hat, etc, but I know I'm at heightened risk -- I have been ever since I was a kid and buried Stanley Wisnewski out in the desert.

Which, okay, I should explain.

My parents and Stanley's parents took us all out to the Painted Desert in Utah for a family vacation when we were kids. It was great, we saw a roadrunner and heard coyotes and saw a yucca plant flowering and it was great, except this one morning Stanley and I, we were like eight, we got up before everyone else and we went for a hike, like desert adventurers, like Mormons, and we were walking and talking and the sun got higher and higher, we were just in tank tops and shorts and I could feel my skin stinging red, feel it before we could see it. And we hadn't brought any water because we were morons, and we got kind of lost. Not totally lost. But enough where when we thought we were heading back nothing looked familiar. Or actually everything looked familiar, it was all the same desert whichever way we went. And Stanley, he was a pretty weak kid. Smart and good with a yo-yo, but where was that gonna get him in Utah? So he was getting redder and redder and weaker and weaker and we had this idea. I mean, okay, it was my idea, but he absolutely went along with it. To bury him in sand until I could bring back help.

But only like up to his neck. So he'd be less exposed, right? So we buried him. And he was pretty cheerful. This happy little head sticking out of the dirt like a new little rock formation. Which, okay, hindsight is 20/20, was it a good idea? I can see both sides. But I went for help and I found help, or it found me -- a ranger - and we rescued Stanley and we were all fine but our parents were screaming, you know, the usual, "Your kid tried to murder my son", "Murder is such a harsh word" "You'll be hearing from our lawyer" "Put the lamp down and we'll talk". You know. And all I could think as my skin was peeling and laying the groundwork for cancer later and I was passing out, all I could think was "None of this would have happened if Grandpa Arnett just hadn't had that stupid affair with Carmen Miranda."

Which I can explain.

Grandpa Arnett, fresh off the boat from Scotland, not content with fleeing his family and friends an ocean away, he just kept heading west and west and west, like he just had to find out where the sun went when it sank. Hunger. The man was always hungry. Even after marrying Grandma Harriet, six kids, still hungry! He's on a ladder crew that ends up working on the stucco of Carmen Miranda's house one hot day. She makes some iced tea for the crew, one thing leads to another and his wife and kids never see him again. Except as an extra singing "Ca-Room Pa Pa" in "Nancy Goes to Rio".

But I could feel it, that same Grandpa Arnett gene sparking to life when Stanley Wisnewski and I were staring at the desert that dawn. The "Let's Go!" gene.

The gene which, while it wrecked my father's family, I don't blame on Grandpa Arnett, I blame on the chowderheads who got tired of eating barley on the Nile.

You know, the Egyptians before they were called Egyptians, who were all of a sudden like "Oooo, I'm tired of barley. I'm tired of wheat. I'm tired of living in the cradle of humanity itself. What's over that hill?" And the next and the next until they found themselves in Scotland and Asia and Australia for god's sake -- what kind of Grandpa Arnett gene does it take to try that adventure?? "I can't see any land out there, but I'm gonna paddle my little canoe into the ocean beyond the horizon and hope for the best, see ya!" Seriously??

But I mean it's not, it's not, it's not their fault, I get that, they wouldn't have found Australia if it hadn't been for the Big Bang.

Right?

Something had to start every molecule in the universe wanting to blow apart from every other molecule -- that Grandpa Arnett subatomic particle imbedded in every single atom of every single corner of the universe saying "What's over there? How far can I go? Let me just try oonnne more thing".

Like putting a frog in a blender.

I tried explaining all this to Marjorie, it seemed so clear to me that night or morning or whenever it was, but here we are -- My life is in utter utter shambles because something caused every single speck of matter in the universe to blow apart 13 billion years ago.

Which I blame on the Shriners.

And I should probably explain that.