

An Excerpt From:

THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

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A moment. The front door moves from the outside. It can't swing open because Morris has blocked it with so many boxes.

PAUL (O.S.)

Morris?

The door is pushed further.

PAUL (O.S.)

Morris!

The door is pushed open further. Paul squeezes inside.

PAUL

You didn't leave?

(smiles)

Okay. Well. So you know. She *has* moved out. And you can collect her things, but Evie, she, when she cries, I'll tell her what happened to her things and then I'll refer her to you -- that okay? I mean, *Morris*. Evie is just this cradle of big city blues, you know --

MORRIS

I realize.

PAUL

And when she does one thing, it's followed by another ... reaction. That's all that's going on here.

MORRIS

Science experiments.

PAUL

The science of men and women. Chemicals and chemistry. More complex than Bigfoot. Our biology is a mindfuck to the scientists. And Morris, if public radio can't get the funding, this one doesn't stand a chance!

Paul smiles. Tracy enters.

TRACY

Counterfeit pie's done.

PAUL

Yeah?

TRACY

All there.

PAUL

They cool yet.

TRACY

One was. I gave a piece to Mr. Blackenship.

PAUL

What did he say?

TRACY

He found a pit.

Paul smiles.

PAUL

Oh. You find a pit, Morris?

MORRIS

Yes.

Paul enters the room now.

PAUL

Where'd he spit that pit?

(smiles)

S'okay if you did. This rug may be swept under us and I may do it! Saw John and John said absolutely yes I have a case and he's already filed on my behalf a junction of some order that'll say just that. And I said, "send a press release John, to Rolling Stone, to let all our fans know those old days are getting rectified and a buggy's coming down Main Street with my stately sum!"

TRACY

Are you going to start writing again?

PAUL

Songs are sparked.

A shift. The horse enters from the corner. Only Paul sees it. Lights change. Paul grabs his guitar.

He hurriedly tries out different riffs but nothing catches on. The horse wanders away. The lights switch back. Yet Paul is still caught in that moment, watching the horse exit.

PAUL

There's all sort of ways.

A beat. He shakes the moment out of him and returns to the present.

PAUL

And I'll produce! Money'll come in, I'll cut back the work, plus have satisfaction the slate is wiped, you know? Songs come like that in a whole 'nother chapter! Like Picasso painting his best work when he was ninety. And look at Dylan: He's got money. He's got songs. He's *paid* to write songs.

TRACY

Like he's on a payroll?

PAUL

No, he gets *recognized*. And one of the recognitions is the steady stream of deposits into his bank account. Or likely bank *accounts*. It's nice not to worry.

A beat.

PAUL

Morris? I could write you a check.

MORRIS

I have a pile of checks from you on my windowsill. All postmarked *ad infinitum*.

Paul laughs.

PAUL

Then cash them! Our song was played on the radio, appeared on fourteen movie soundtracks, three commercials -- Audi, Tums and Maalox. It was covered by a girl group in Switzerland and some DJ in Milan remixed it so the gay discos, I hear, made it the go-to song to say last call. It's on the piped-in CDs they sell to, among others, the Gap. My yoga teacher Doug said he was having a private moment trying on chinos when he heard my harmonies on the first verse and fadeout. And he *bought* the chinos. VH-1 still lists it as the song of "Your Eternal Summer." It is part of people's lives -- a ringtone option they offer when your cell phone goes off. *My* song interrupts your dinner!

(he laughs)

And, and, all I'm sayin' is that there's a percentage I get. Of all that.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)

You don't bet for these things to happen then don't claim your winnings when they do. On the phone with John, I realized: this is how people define themselves. Have's and have nots. That's it, only. Be a have, be happy. Have not, not a chance. There are so many ways to be unhappy -- endless ways, ways that make living feel like a dirtier trick than dying. So why not, if the dice is already rolled, why not pick those fuckers up and toss and toss until they have no choice -- have no *chance* -- but to fall down flat in your favor?

MORRIS

I was under the impression you do have a choice.

PAUL

You were born against your will, weren't you? The entire game is fixed from the beginning!

TRACY

I found a letter my dad wrote my mom saying what a mistake it was having children in this country.

PAUL

When you bet, you bet against *all* odds. Even when it's not obvious you're gambling!

TRACY

He said this country ruins children, that in his country they understand how everyone fits in God's plan.

PAUL

There is no plan! You know that, don't you Morris?

MORRIS

What?

PAUL

How the fools suffer framing life when it'll never fit behind glass?

MORRIS

Where is my daughter.

PAUL

Where all you can hope for is adaptation meant for only the craftiest and most desperate among us...

MORRIS

Where did Evie go?

PAUL

...the ones who are willing to let go of who they were born as and bury it to become something new. Not wake up useless at thirty-nine.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)

After watching everyone in my life -- my band, my songwriting partner, my wife -- all of them evolve past their wildest dreams. I've got a lot of catching up to do!

TRACY

The letter was dated last week. My mom doesn't know I found it. All she says is "men leave."

MORRIS

Tell me what happened to Evie -- she died!

PAUL

Then you know!

MORRIS

I don't know a thing!

PAUL

Because it's not in your genes!

A beat.

PAUL

Right, Morris? Say it's right. Why should you know anything, right? You shouldn't know anything when it comes to Evie. Neither should I. Our feet, entombed. While Evie, she has wings.

MORRIS

I was twenty-six years old when I found her.

PAUL

She told me. She says how it happened.

MORRIS

In the train station. Deposited in a crate for oranges someone filled with feathers.

A shift. Tracy and Paul fade out. Morris is alone with his story. A single feather drops from above, circling the air. He watches it.

MORRIS

I spotted one feather at the top of the stairs when I went through the turnstile. Then there was another.

One by one, very slowly, feathers fall. It should never feel like a rush, just lazy and hypnotizing, they fall.

MORRIS

They weren't in a straight line or in any sort of order but I'd keep seeing them in the corner of my eye, these feathers.

(MORE)

MORRIS (cont'd)

As if they were planted in a code only my eye could follow. I missed three trains that morning following the trail of white feathers down the stairs, through the platform, behind the benches and down into the tracks. I thought someone would see me but I must have become invisible for a day. I inched along the wall through the miserable tunnel, the white feathers ahead, lighting my steps. The ones I held became a soft pillow in my palm I gripped for comfort whenever the trains blasted around the corner. But they never blew away the feathers. They remained calm and in place, waiting patiently for me to discover each one, pick each one up and draw closer. To this infant girl swaddled in a sea of white velvet fingers cradling her up and down in waves, so when she looked up and into my eyes for the first time, I was swallowed in happiness I never even knew could exist. I stopped being an anxious young clerk working for his first firm and stood confident as a man. The troubles of being a man shackled to my hands and to my feet but their weight could be maintained in that illuminated tunnel, deep as a dungeon and long as a life. I couldn't say much about myself before going down those long steps but at least, when I walked back up them, gripping that crate in my arms, a trail of feathers fluttering at my heels, at least I could say, "this is who I am, I'm Evie's father."

The feathers stop drifting down. A shift returns us to the living room.

PAUL

Just like that, Morris?

MORRIS

Something like.

PAUL

You never told her, but she knew every detail. She was always holding the cards, just like that!

MORRIS

Tell me where she is.

PAUL

You wouldn't understand.

MORRIS

I'm her father!

PAUL

That's just it: you're not. And am I her husband? Do I look like her husband? Fathers, mothers, husbands and wives -- they're just names nature doesn't listen to! You can't fool it!

MORRIS

You don't know what you're talking about! You tricked Evie! You tricked her into marrying you so you could pipe into my money...

PAUL

Aw, you're sick, you don't even know yourself...

MORRIS

A musician always marries up and the girls of the world don't care -- and you *knew* that.

PAUL

Morris, you talk about Evie as if you knew her and I'll tell you what: No one did. Once she realized she had no roots to this earth, that a lonely Nowhere Man who called her "daughter" and a cokehead bass player who called her "wife" -- that these, in fact, were invalid? She...I'll tell ya, she...she evolved. I buried her alone because at least I respected the distinction between the future age and today. And I'm catching up -- right, Tracy?

TRACY

When are you gonna write?

PAUL

Tomorrow.

TRACY

Who's gonna help with the demos?

PAUL

You! Wanna?

TRACY

Sure. I've been working on songs, too.

PAUL

I'll critique. You wanna ear, doncha?

TRACY

Forever.

The kitchen timer rings. A beat. Tracy smiles at Paul. She exits into the kitchen.

MORRIS

Evie. I just want to know.

PAUL

That she died. You couldn't have done a thing. She knew it was dangerous keep jumping that horse higher and higher, but she didn't care.

MORRIS

I took her to the stables when she was little. I put her on her first horse.

PAUL

That was a good thing.

Paul tries hitting the pinata with a baseball bat. It does not break open.

PAUL

Am I this weak?

He tries again.

PAUL

You super glued this shut.

MORRIS

It's more ornament than anything...

PAUL

There's candy -- !

He whacks it.

PAUL

-- Rotting in there! Candy I can't eat!

He whacks it. They both study it swinging in front of their faces. A beat.

PAUL

You can take her stuff.

MORRIS

Please take me to her.

PAUL

It's not like that.

MORRIS

I have a right to see her grave.

PAUL

Do you listen. This isn't that.

MORRIS

She's cremated then.

PAUL

No!

He whacks the pinata. It does not break open, but swings. A pause. Paul laughs. He stops the pinata with his hands. He turns to Morris.

PAUL

She's a horse.

A shift. The horse enters from a side platform, above the action. This is Evie. She is in a blue light, looking quite noble. Only Paul sees her.

PAUL

She was properly buried and blessed. Given all our good-byes. Mourned publicly, mourned privately. Reminisced at the deli until after lunch. Enough time for it to happen.

MORRIS

For what to happen.

PAUL

You heard me Morris, you heard me!!

MORRIS

I heard "horse."

PAUL

When I went to collect her saddle and things, yes, a horse. Standing alone by an ancient oak. Drinking in the sunset through eyes. Evie's eyes. Perfectly her's. I shuddered like when you see someone you recognize on the escalator going down as you're going up? Those eyes. The shadow of her body. She turned away.

MORRIS

This horse?

PAUL

Evie. Switched into wandering a hill. Not a hill I could climb, or allowed. A blue hill. She was Evie. I've gone to this horse several times a week, I haven't done much else. It's Evie. Digs her chin to her chest like that. Powerfully quiet. Her back, slender. See how this can happen, so out of the blue? It can. No one's proved why not. Evie. I have tried -- I dunno -- maybe reconcile in some way. Not that we were in an argument -- but I've been showing up to show her ...

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)

That I can tell. That I know. I see you -- me! And all of life is a test for that. To recognize all you love after the scenery changes. I just wanted her to know that. How she's in every song outta me. The stables are next to a highway and when I take the exit, I see her on top that hill, alone, shouldering the sky almost like an ancient god. She watches over me. Evie still does. She's a horse now, Morris. It's who she became.

MORRIS

I knew she wasn't dead. See -- I could feel it!

PAUL

A foolish wish, but if you must...

MORRIS

She is alive, still here, my daughter.

PAUL

You have no such thing. You obsess --

MORRIS

Have you talked to her.

PAUL

Talked to her? She nays!!

MORRIS

Have you tried.

A pause.

PAUL

I've tried.

He looks up at Evie.

PAUL

I can't get even close.

MORRIS

Alright. See. We can try. It's not against the law.

PAUL

What?

MORRIS

Reuniting! Even like that.

PAUL

Like that it might. Agree it's not common.

MORRIS

Okay. But who is. You remember how you found her. You remember the first time?

PAUL

Yes.

MORRIS

Then it can happen again! She was born to be found, wasn't she?

PAUL

I don't know.

MORRIS

Of course you do! Remember!

PAUL

No! I can't!

MORRIS

You are a liar. You know how it happened. Just like me. She told me it was so.

PAUL

She told you?

MORRIS

One's older. One's younger. But there *is* a common thread right here in this room!

PAUL

Don't say anything Morris! Go out!

MORRIS

You remember, damn it -- We both know it's true!

PAUL

What's true?

MORRIS

The discovery.

A pause.

PAUL

The discovery.

MORRIS

Yes. Yes, you know.

PAUL

That's the word for it. It is ... the most appropriate word.

MORRIS

A nice word for it.

PAUL

Yes.

MORRIS

(smiles)

See? You did it too. See?

PAUL

With my head in a cup of coffee trying to inhale. Trying to figure out the next step. Travis kicked me out after we'd been up for two days since our gig at the taco stand. It took someone -- not me -- to call it a night. Two days with three delivery runs that end trailed up our nose. So much so my face was numb before I stepped into the cold. Trying to figure out the next step. Anything better than bed. At three a.m. Monday morning even, there are possibilities. Snow falling.

A shift. Morris and the living room fade away. Snowflakes gently fall from above. Paul stands, watching.

PAUL

Maybe just forty minutes already. It was new. In front of me, the purest stretch, sort of like pearls glowing in the street lamps. With only one pair of feet walking through it before me. A tiny ball for a heel, supporting a boot cut like a diamond. I thought: "I could follow this." After one block, I noticed threads beaded behind by a long coat, maybe a cape. Every block, the footprints were the only imprint in the new snow. I was a clod tramping behind something so elegant and assured. I went with it so long, streets became new streets, directions got out of date, neighborhoods blurred. The trail glided me through, I didn't know where I was and didn't recognize anything. Around every corner, I thought I'd catch them at their pace but I never could catch up. Just at the end. The end at the bus stop. Where Evie, in a long white feather padded coat, stood, looking for a taxi. Because he was waiting at the airport, she said, to take her -- this year -- to the mountaintops of Peru. Where it was sure to be nothing she was interested in but he was her father and he had no one else -- no friends, little family, just her. And he would crumble if she wasn't there. I looked around me and didn't know where I was. Coulda been a different state, a new country, anywhere. I was in love with the stride of those footsteps, how they were paced so evenly, that they hesitated just a little. It was like how music can be in my head -- hesitant, but barely.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)

I broke into this Volkswagon and got it started and told her "get in." We drove to the airport and before we got there, I told her everything there is to know about me. And that I'd wait until she got back to learn everything there is to know about her. Then I watched her plane take off. Then I went home. Then I stayed up three days and wrote the greatest songs of my life. Then, three months later, we had a career.

MORRIS

So? You see? You see now?

A shift back to Morris and the living room. Paul is lost, searching for Evie in his head. Without removing his eyes from her, he backs away, puts on his coat, grabs his keys. He pats Morris on the back as he exits, rushing. Morris, scans the living room, spots a guitar case and grabs it. He exits, following.

A blackout.

END OF ACT ONE