

Captain Cockroach

a play by Ryan M. Bultrowicz

EMAIL: Ryan.Bultrowicz@live.longwood.edu
PHONE: (703) 509 6802

Lights up on a dirty street in New York City. Two cockroaches, RAY and CHARLIE, haven taken shelter by the trash. RAY scribbles, with a broken pencil, on some paper.

RAY

Captain's log: Day two. It's been twenty-four hours since my insidious metamorphosis.

CHARLIE

You're writing a captain's log?

RAY

I was writing a captain's log. Then I was interrupted.

CHARLIE

You have to be a captain to write a captain's log. You're not a captain. You're a cockroach.

RAY

I'm still in charge.

CHARLIE

You're not in charge.

RAY

I was your supervisor when this cruel twist of fate fell upon us. That puts me in charge. That makes me the captain. Cockroach or no cockroach.

CHARLIE

You were a supervisor at a Krispy Kreme donut shop. Good for you. Now you're a cockroach. Now we're cockroaches. That makes us equal.

RAY

Nobody asked you.

CHARLIE

All cockroaches are created equal.

RAY

I'd rather not have to reprimand you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

What are you going to do? Write me up?

RAY

Actually, that's exactly what I'll do.

RAY holds up the broken pencil and paper.

RAY

I'm well within my authority to do so.

CHARLIE

You have no authority anymore, Ray. You. Are. A. Cockroach.

RAY

...Well.

Pause.

RAY

Well, then when this whole mess is sorted out – that's when I'll write you up! I may be a cockroach but I have a memory like an elephant. And when we're human again, you'll have quite the write-up! Three of those and they let you go, you know?

CHARLIE

This mess may never be sorted out. We may be cockroaches until the end of our lives. We may be cockroaches for all of eternity. Maybe we died. Maybe that's why we just suddenly transformed. Maybe this is the afterlife. Maybe this is Hell.

RAY

No! Don't say that. That's an awful thought. We're not dead and we're not in Hell. You have to do bad to go to Hell and I'm good. I do good.

CHARLIE

What kind of good do you do?

RAY

General goodliness. You know the sort.

CHARLIE

No. I don't.

RAY

I don't have to explain myself to a subordinate!

CHARLIE

Whatever. I'm not religious anyway. I won't believe in Hell until the metal pinchers are stabbing into my nipples.

RAY

I...your nipples?

CHARLIE

I don't know. Religion is weird like that sometimes. That's why I don't buy into it.

RAY

We're cockroaches right now...but religion is weird.

CHARLIE

Two things can be weird at the same time. Don't be so close-minded.

RAY

You will not talk to me this way!

CHARLIE

You can write me up. I don't care. As far as I'm concerned, I quit the second I turned into a cockroach.

RAY

...You have a losing attitude.

CHARLIE

You're the one having a power-trip over here. Aren't we supposed to be figuring out why this happened to us? Aren't we supposed to be trying to figure out a way to transform back?

RAY

I was trying to do that! I was going to think through it with my captain's log!

CHARLIE

Alright, sorry. Jeez. I just think it's weird to call it something it's not.

RAY

I'm the captain!

CHARLIE

Of what?

RAY

Of...of...well...you!

CHARLIE

No.

RAY

Yes, I am.

CHARLIE

What are you going to do if I disobey an order?

RAY

I...will...write you up.

CHARLIE

I already quit. Remember, elephant brain?

RAY

Not a Krispy Kreme write-up. A cockroach write-up!

CHARLIE

What the hell is a cockroach write-up?

RAY

Three cockroach write-ups...and...and...I won't help you turn back into a human.

CHARLIE

Okay? But then I also wouldn't be helping you turn back into a human.

RAY

I'll probably figure it out first. What can you accomplish with that losing attitude of yours?

CHARLIE

You know what?

RAY

What?

CHARLIE digs through some of the trash until eventually they pull out some paper and a pencil.

CHARLIE

I'm giving you a write-up.

RAY

Excuse me?

CHARLIE

Yup. For inciting violence.

RAY

Inciting violence? That's ridiculous! I haven't incited any violence.

CHARLIE is scribbling.

CHARLIE

You're making me want to hit you. That's inciting violence pal, don't care how you spin it.

CHARLIE finishes scribbling and hands RAY the paper.

CHARLIE

You've been served. That's a thing people say.

RAY

Not in this context.

RAY takes the paper.

CHARLIE

Well. I just did. So...yes in this context. When you're wrong, you're wrong.

RAY ignores this as he reads the paper.

RAY

This is absurd! Take this back.

CHARLIE

Are you kidding me? It's already been written, Ray. I can't just take it back. Like how officers can't undo a ticket once they've already written it. Life doesn't have undo buttons. You made your bed and now you've got to sleep it.

RAY

There has to be an appeal process then. I don't want this!

CHARLIE

Oh, there's an appeal process. This is America after all.

RAY

Okay. How do I appeal?

CHARLIE

Let me see the write-up.

RAY hands CHARLIE the write-up. CHARLIE scribbles on it.

CHARLIE

Ah. Says here you waived your right to an appeal the second you became a cockroach.

RAY

You just made that up!

CHARLIE

Don't argue with me – I'm just reading what it says. The write-up stands!

RAY

This is stupid! You're stupid!

CHARLIE

And you're just asking for another write-up. Cool your mandibles.

RAY

I don't need you. I don't need your help.

RAY moves away from CHARLIE.

RAY

I'm going to be over here – and I'm going to figure out how to turn back into a human. And I'm not going to tell you how when I figure it out! And you know what else?

CHARLIE

What else?

RAY

When I'm human again, I'm going to look at you wriggling around on the pavement, and I'm going to pick you up. I'm going to put you in a shoebox and you're going to be my little pet for the rest of our lives! I'll feed you Werther's Originals every day. That's it. Nothing but Werther's Originals.

CHARLIE

I like Werther's Originals.

RAY

Fine. What's something you hate?

CHARLIE

In general? I hate those advertisements on YouTube videos that are counting down so you think you can skip them but then you realize it's an unskippable ad. It's like false hope. Should be illegal if you ask me.

RAY

No what's a food you hate!

CHARLIE

Are we sticking with candy for this?

RAY

Sure, whatever!

CHARLIE

Swedish fish. Those are disgusting. The country of Sweden should be ashamed...if they did make those. If they didn't...well, they should sue whoever did.

RAY

Fine. I'll feed you Swedish fish every day!

CHARLIE

You're a real monster.

RAY

Just leave me alone!

CHARLIE

Whatever you say, "boss".

RAY

I don't care if that was sarcasm. You still acknowledged me as the boss.

CHARLIE

(Under their breath) You're so petty.

RAY

What was that?

CHARLIE

Nothing. Just ignore me. I'm just livin' my best cockroach life over here.

RAY begins scribbling again.

RAY

Captain's log: Day two. We had just closed up shop when the unspeakable happened. There was no pain, just a slight disorientation as-

CHARLIE begins scribbling.

CHARLIE

Captain's log: Day two: The slimy, short-tempered, roach I was with, Ray, has abandoned me. It's for the best, though. As Ray has always been weak. In his human form he lacked strength and in his-

RAY

What are you doing!?

CHARLIE

Hm? Oh. Nothing. Why do you care what I'm doing?

RAY

What are you doing!?

CHARLIE

What's it look like I'm doing?

RAY

It looks like you're doing something you shouldn't be doing.

CHARLIE

Well. Get your eyes checked because I'm doing exactly what I should be doing. I'm writing my captain's log.

RAY

You can't write a captain's log! I'm writing a captain's log!

CHARLIE

That's silly. You can't write a captain's log. You're not even a captain. It's a basic prerequisite to writing a captain's log.

RAY

You're not even a captain! You're a cockroach!

CHARLIE

Yeah. I'm captain of the cockroaches.

RAY

No, you are not!

CHARLIE

We voted.

RAY

Who voted?

CHARLIE indicates that they both were involved.

CHARLIE

Uh, we did...

RAY

I did not!

CHARLIE pulls out the write-up paper and scribbles on it.

CHARLIE

Says here that by getting written up, you therefore cast a vote for me to be the captain of the cockroaches.

RAY

I didn't agree to this!

CHARLIE

Don't worry. I will be firm but just. Let's be honest, I'm the best roach for this job. I bring with me some dignity to the title.

RAY

Let me see that write-up.

CHARLIE

That's a negative.

RAY

Let me see it.

CHARLIE

No. I'm the captain now. Get used to it.

RAY

Charlie...

CHARLIE

Yes, subordinate?

RAY charges CHARLIE. They grapple for the write-up until RAY wins it over and rips it into pieces.

RAY

There! Null and void! Now there's no write up! Now you're not captain! You're just a cockroach!

CHARLIE

...You're right, Ray. There's no more write-up...and nothing has changed. You're still you. I'm still me. We're still cockroaches. There are no captains. There never was. We're just two bugs on the streets of New York. We shouldn't be wasting our time arguing over made-up things. We should be doing what cockroaches do best. We should be surviving. This is all very confusing and strange, but that's all we can do right now.

RAY

I...I think you may be right. We don't need to be captains right now...we just need to be. You know? To be there for each other. To help and support this...unfortunate transition.

CHARLIE

Well said. Now, what do you say we go scavenge the streets for some sewage we can dig our mandibles in? Let's survive.

RAY
Let's slurp some sewage.

The two cockroaches scatter off together.

BLACKOUT