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Return of the Frogs

A Short Comedy

by

Ross Peter Nelson

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Return of the Frogs

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CHARACTERS

1W / 2M / 2 Either Gender

BETH: Female, early 20s. Nerd, goth, political activist.

JOSH: Male, early 20s. BETH's slacker boyfriend.

CHARON: Either sex, indeterminate age. Ferryman to Hades.

ARISTOPHANES: Male, 60s, dead Greek playwright.

CHORUS: One person of either sex.

NOTES

The play is meant to be relevant to the local audience, so feel free to substitute a different city for Washington (pg 1), international hot-spot for Syria (pg 1), and famous large theatre for Kennedy Center (pg 3).

Return of the Frogs

by Ross Peter Nelson

(BETH and JOSH have just returned from an anti-war demonstration. They toss their signs on the floor and sit down.)

JOSH

What a complete waste of time. Chanting, marching in circles. What's the point?

BETH

The point is, we're sending a message to Washington.

JOSH

Nobody cares about the war in Syria. Everyone's too caught up in the economic mess and the latest reality show. I'll bet we won't even be on TV.

BETH

It would be nice to do something dramatic. Remember that night we saw Lysistrata? That certainly got the audience riled up.

JOSH

Yeah! We could wear big foam rubber dicks next time we march. That might even get us on CNN.

BETH

Wearing foam-rubber dicks is hardly the point.

JOSH

What *was* the point of that, anyway? I mean, it was funny but...

BETH

The women told the men, no more nookie until you guys stop the war. The men tried to wait it out, but after a few months they got so desperate they were in a continual state of arousal. Hence the giant --

JOSH

-- foam-rubber dicks. Got it. I still think it would get us on CNN.

BETH

No, stupid, foam rubber won't stop the war, we need ideas. We need a new writer. Someone who's provocative. Who'll shake things up.

JOSH

A new Aristophanes.

BETH

What about the old one?

JOSH

Dead, for one. Decomposed, for another. Reduced to powder twenty-five hundred years ago, for a third. Probably moldering at the bottom of a Grecian urn.

BETH

We could summon him.

JOSH

As in messing with the spirit world, kind of summon him?

BETH

Yes!

JOSH

You wanna end up like Linda Blair? I don't need a head-spinning-green-puke kind of girlfriend? Besides, you saw *Evil Dead*; that kind of thing never works.

BETH

Maybe we could just visit.

JOSH

I told you, I don't want anything to do with unseen forces.

BETH

No, I mean go down to Hades and bring him back.

JOSH

You want to go to hell?

BETH

Hades. It's not the same.

JOSH

Still. What, you're going to chug a bottle of Drain-O on the off chance you'll meet Aristophanes?

BETH

You don't have to be dead if you're just going to visit.

JOSH

So, you've got some sort of map to the dark lands in your backpack?

BETH

Didn't you watch Buffy? Pretty much every high school is a direct gateway to the underworld.

(Jumps up.)

Let's go.

JOSH

Just like that? No preparations, no supplies, nothing?

BETH

You're right, we'll need a chorus.

(CHORUS enters.)

JOSH

That's your chorus?

BETH

What do you think this is, Kennedy Center?

CHORUS

And so our brave and dynamic pair
Tread a path few others dare.
Following elder footsteps tread,
They seek the land of the dead

(Lights dim. JOSH and BETH pull out flashlights as they make their way.)

JOSH

This is kind of wild. What's that over there? It looks like...wow, a Woolworths. My mom used to talk about that place.

BETH

Of course. Companies die too. I'll bet all the junk in the world ends up down here.

JOSH

Oh man, you think I could find some of my old Spiderman comics? I bet they'd would be worth some real money by now.

BETH

Go ahead Josh. You stay here and search through the detritus of all human history for an old comic book while Aristophanes and I stop the war.

JOSH

I'd probably need extra flashlight batteries.

(Pause.)

Ewww. I stepped in something wet.

CHORUS

Ree-deep. Ree-deep. Ribbit. Ribbit.

BETH

It's starting to get swampy. Good.

JOSH
Good?

BETH
It means we're getting close.

JOSH
How do you know all this stuff?

BETH
Ever play Hecate's Domain?

JOSH
Is that that internet thing you're always doing?

BETH
It's not a thing, it's a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game.

JOSH
Whatever.

BETH
It's not just a dumb game, it's literary. It's based on Homer, Virgil, Dante; all those guys who created mythic worlds. Basically, they were all closet dungeon-masters.

CHORUS
Brekekekex. Ko-ax. Ko-ax. Brekekekex.

JOSH
Those frogs are huge. They're giving me the creeps. And they don't sound like any frogs I've ever heard.

(The CHORUS makes more frog sounds and begins to jump around. JOSH picks up a rock and throws it at the frogs.)

BETH
Stop that! You could destroy California.

JOSH
What are you talking about?

BETH
Frogs fight the giant worms that cause earthquakes. Don't you know anything?

JOSH
Apparently not.

(The lighting improves. JOSH and BETH switch off their flashlights. They've come to what looks like an abandoned midway/boardwalk at the beach of a large body of water. They knock on the counter of a decaying ticket booth.)

BETH

Hello?

JOSH

Anybody home?

(CHARON enters.)

CHARON

Get out of here. Can't you see this place is closed?

BETH

I thought this was the entrance to Hades.

CHARON

Not any more. Everyone takes the monorail nowadays.

JOSH

Cool.

BETH

We want to do it the old-fashioned way.

JOSH

I wanna take the monorail.

BETH

We're here to visit someone in the underworld.

CHARON

Look. In the first place, you need a coin to pay the ferry. In the second place, since you're still living, you need way more than a coin, you'd need a golden bough from the sybil of Cumae. Finally, once you get across, you're going to run into Kerberos and he'll rip you to shreds, eat your heart on the spot and save your balls for breakfast.

JOSH

This is why I hate D&D: find the entrance to Hades, trudge through frog-filled swamps, locate the ferryman, get the golden bough, avoid the three-headed dog, yada-yada. Let's just take the monorail.

BETH

No, once you're in the system, it's the ultimate roach motel. They'll get your driver's license number, social, fingerprints, you're screwed. And if Homeland Security finds out, forget about ever boarding a plane again.

JOSH

OK. Look, we don't have a golden bough, but I've got a gold Mastercard. Is that good enough?

CHARON

A ferry ride across the Archeon, one obol, a drugged honeycake to feed to Kerberos, ninety-five obols, a visit with a dead playwright, priceless.

JOSH

You wouldn't know the exchange rate, would you? How many obols to the dollar?

CHARON

Talk to Wells Fargo. Oh, and there's just one thing.

BETH

What?

CHARON

My back is out. You can take the boat, but you've got to row it yourself. I'm staying here.

CHORUS

Into Charon's fabled raft
Our heroine did climb –

CHARON

Hey! Take your damn chorus with you too, all right? I'm not going listen to all that blather while you're on a honeymoon cruise across the river.

JOSH

We're not married. We're just friends.

(CHARON exits. JOSH, BETH, and CHORUS strike a pose on the raft.)

BETH

You said that awfully fast.

JOSH

What?

BETH

We're just friends.

JOSH

Well, we're not married.

BETH

Just row. OK?

CHORUS

After sweating many a manly stroke,
The further shore they made

(JOSH and BETH feed cake to a growling Kerberos.)

And Kerberos, drugged with the cake
On his side was laid.

BETH

Poor doggy.

JOSH

Only you would look at a three-headed, millennia-old hell hound and say poor doggy.

BETH

He does look old, just lying there. And the way get gobbled that cake. Sweets aren't good for dogs, you know.

(CHORUS makes farting noises.)

JOSH

Oh god, maybe Kerberos sleeping is worse than Kerberos awake. What is it about dogs that makes them fart in their sleep?

BETH

It's a good thing he's got three heads and not three asses. Phew. Let's get out of here.

CHORUS

Their adventures were legion
As they sought the Grecian poet
But since we're half way through page seven
We're skipping all that bullshit.

(CHORUS exits. ARISTOPHANES enters.)

BETH

Oh, Mr. Aristophanes! I'm so happy to meet you. I'm such a big fan. My name is...

ARISTOPHANES

Beth. I know. And you have political problems.

BETH

The war is still going on.

ARISTOPHANES

What do you want of me? I'm no longer of the earth, merely a shade in the realm of Erebus.

BETH

We want to bring you back to write another great anti-war drama.

ARISTOPHANES

No one gets out of here alive.

BETH

Euridyce did. (*Beat.*) Almost.

ARISTOPHANES

Only because Hades was such a Stones fan. Can you play the lyre as well as Orpheus?

JOSH

I broke a hundred thousand once on Guitar Hero.

BETH

Shut up, Josh. Won't you even try? What about the people who are dying?

ARISTOPHANES

Perhaps they will welcome their rest in Elysian Fields.

BETH

But we need your voice for peace the way Athens did when you wrote *Lysistrata*.

ARISTOPHANES

And the war went on for six more years! Such is the power of poetry to move men's hearts. So it goes.

(BETH turns away, disappointed.)

JOSH

Do you have any idea what she went through to get here? Kerberos, the River Styx, giant frogs! She pinned all her hopes on you, and all you can say is "So it goes?"

END OF PLAY

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes