

**The Trouble With Cashews**

by

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Setting

A backyard family gathering.

Time

Present-day, the Fourth of July.

Cast

PAUL - Male, younger brother of TARA, in his 20s-40s.

TARA - Female, older sister of PAUL, in her 20s-40s.

(PAUL stands, a beer in his hand, staring fixedly at the horizon as he is approached by TARA, who has a glass of wine.)

TARA

Hi Paul!

PAUL

Mmm...

TARA

How's my little brother doing?

PAUL

I'm above ground.

TARA

Okay...it's great seeing you! I'm really glad you could make it to our Fourth of July party this year.

PAUL

Yeah, well...what are you gonna do?

(TARA looks to see what PAUL is staring at, then back to PAUL.)

TARA

Is something wrong?

(PAUL nods toward the horizon. TARA turns again.)

TARA

What?

PAUL

You can't see it?

TARA

See what?

PAUL

Right over there.

TARA

I don't see anything.

PAUL

Yes, you do. Waves of light are ping-pong around off your retinas and forming images in your brain. What do you see?

Aunt Dorothy? TARA

Bingo. PAUL

What about her? TARA

Just watch her. PAUL

Okay...I see an old woman sitting at a table, drinking a glass of wine, and eating some nuts out of a bowl. TARA

Is that it? PAUL

Pretty much. Am I missing something? TARA

Watch when she goes for a nut. PAUL

Okay. And...she just ate a nut. TARA

Right. PAUL

What about it? TARA

Just...look, she's doing it again! PAUL

You're right...no denying it...she ate another nut. TARA

Notice anything? PAUL

I really, really want to say yes, but no. TARA

You're not looking closely enough! Watch her! PAUL

(long beat)  
She just ate another nut. TARA

PAUL

And?

TARA

Paul, all I see is an elderly woman sipping wine and eating nuts.

PAUL

Oh, for God's sake!

TARA

What?

PAUL

What's in that bowl?

TARA

Nuts!

PAUL

What kind of nuts?

TARA

They're...it was a, you know, assorted nuts. They come that way. All kinds of different nuts in a bag. I poured them out of the bag, into the bowl, then put them on that table.

PAUL

Exactly. Now, watch her again.

TARA

(peering, confused)

She's eating them one at a time?

PAUL

No! You don't see what she's doing?

TARA

What? What is she doing?

PAUL

She's only eating the cashews!

TARA

What? That's ridiculous--

(PAUL grabs TARA's elbow and turns her ninety degrees.)

PAUL

Don't let her see you!

(A beat, then PAUL and TARA cautiously look sideways.)

PAUL

And...down goes another cashew.

TARA

Paul...would you like me to get you some cashews?

PAUL

That's not the point.

TARA

Then--

PAUL

She's looking this way!

(PAUL and TARA turn away, then back.)

TARA

Then what is the point?

PAUL

You're looking at it.

TARA

Paul, you're worrying me.

PAUL

Assorted nuts. What does that mean?

TARA

It means there's more than one kind of nut.

PAUL

For example?

TARA

For example what?

PAUL

What kinds of nuts?

TARA

Well, peanuts...um, almonds, I think I saw some hazelnuts, walnuts, and cashews.

PAUL

And is it just a random assortment? Equal amounts of every nut?

TARA

No, I think it's mostly peanuts.

PAUL

Mostly peanuts. And why would that be?

TARA

Because they're cheaper?

PAUL

And they're cheaper because?

TARA

I don't know...because they're easier to grow? People like them less than other kinds of nuts?

PAUL

And off the top of your head, of all the nuts you just mentioned, which kind of nut do people like the most?

(off her hesitation)

Go on...say it.

TARA

Cashews.

PAUL

Cashews.

TARA

You're saying she's deliberately eating only the most expensive and tastiest nuts.

PAUL

And that's not the worst part.

TARA

It's not?

PAUL

No. The worst part is, she knows what she's doing. That's why she keeps looking around to see if anyone is watching. It would be one thing if she was so out of it that she was only eating the nuts she liked best, you know, like a chimp or something. But she knows what she's doing.

TARA

Paul, I can get you some cashews.

PAUL

It's not about the damned cashews! It's about...look, who are the two biggest pricks at this party?

TARA

You're talking about our family!

PAUL

Answer the question.

TARA

Reggie and Stan.

PAUL

Reggie and Stan. Now, what do Reggie and Stan have in common, besides being the biggest tools in the world?

TARA

They're brothers?

PAUL

And who is their mother?

(They both turn back to look at Aunt Dorothy.)

TARA

She just ate another cashew.

(PAUL takes a deep breath, trying to pull himself together.)

PAUL

I'm sorry, Tara. See, this is why I shouldn't come to these family things. I get myself all worked up and...you know what? Forget it. Forget I said anything. How are you doing? You look great!

TARA

(gaze fixed on Aunt Dorothy)

Goddammit. She's eating all the fucking cashews!

PAUL

I shouldn't have brought it up.

TARA

What the hell? Who does that?

PAUL

Aunt Dorothy, apparently.

TARA

Would you do that?

PAUL

No.



TARA

And neither would I! I would want other people to have some cashews too!

PAUL

Absolutely.

TARA

(long beat as she stares)

Now she's pushing other nuts out of the way to get at the cashews at the bottom of the bowl. This is unbelievable.

PAUL

Tara, I didn't mean to--

TARA

She's not going to stop. She is going to empty that bowl of cashews.

PAUL

And by this point, she probably doesn't even want any more. Now she's just making sure no one else gets any.

TARA

I feel sick. I feel physically ill. How are we even related to her?

PAUL

Well...maybe we're not.

TARA

What do you mean?

PAUL

See, that's what I was standing here thinking...just trying to make sense of this. And it finally occurred to me...maybe she's a reptoid.

TARA

A what?

PAUL

Reptoid. A shape-shifting reptilian humanoid from the Alpha Draconis star system. They're part of a global conspiracy to destroy humanity.

(off TARA's look)

Not that I actually believe that! I mean, I'm just speaking, you know, metaphorically.

TARA

No, I think you're onto something.

PAUL

You do?

TARA

Not that I think Aunt Dorothy is a shape-shifting humanoid from another star system. It's worse than that.

PAUL

Seriously?

TARA

She's not an alien. She's one of us. And what she's doing, her behavior, it's hard-wired into us. You know the first thing a baby shark does when it's born? It eats all of its brothers and sisters.

PAUL

Like cashews?

TARA

Exactly like cashews. But as we evolved, human beings gradually lost a lot of that sociopathic, me-first impulse, because we realized we were better off working together and being a community and helping one another.

PAUL

So, you're saying that Aunt Dorothy is some kind of throwback to our primeval, reptilian DNA.

TARA

Right. And it would be okay if it was just her and her kids. We'd just be down some cashews. But there's plenty of people just like her. People who not only want their fair share, they want everyone else's share too. In fact, do you know what we're witnessing here? The end of humanity. The total and complete destruction of human beings as a species.

PAUL

Because of Aunt Dorothy?

TARA

Yes! That instinct? That primeval, reptilian, I got mine and screw you attitude? Where does that end in a world where every other country and tinpot dictator has a nuclear arsenal?

PAUL

I never thought of that...

TARA

It's us versus them, Paul! The human humans against the reptile humans. And only one side can win.

PAUL

Well, what should we do? I mean, we have to help our side. We can't just stand here and let this happen!

TARA

And we're not going to let it happen. Because this is war. War between people like us and people like Aunt Dorothy and the spawn of her evil loins.

PAUL

Okay then, let's do this. I've got a plan. First, you distract her with, I don't know, some pictures on your phone or something. Then when she's not looking, I'll grab the bowl of nuts. She won't know what hit her!

(off TARA's look)

What? You don't think that would work?

TARA

Sure it would work. We could steal those nuts. But what does that make us? We'd be just like her! Doing whatever we want simply because we can get away with it.

PAUL

Damn it! You're right. Then what do we do?

TARA

The only thing we can do, because drastic measures are called for.

(TARA pulls out her car keys and dangles them in front of PAUL's eyes.)

PAUL

You're going to run her over with your car?

TARA

No! We're going to the grocery store. You and me. And when we come back, we're going to have two five-pound bags of cashews with us. Enough cashews for everyone!

PAUL

Oh yeah...yeah! Of course! That's beautiful! That's exactly how it should be, but...cashews aren't cheap.

TARA

Either humanity and the planet are worth fighting for, or they're not. Are you in or out?

PAUL

I'm in. Of course, I'm--she's looking this way!

(PAUL turns away, but TARA doesn't move.)

TARA

Let her see me. I want her to see me. And I want her to know that I see her.

(TARA points two fingers towards her eyes, then in the direction of Aunt Dorothy. Emboldened, PAUL does the same thing.)

TARA

She knows. We know. And she knows we know. Game on.

PAUL

I love you, Tara. You're my favorite sibling.

TARA

I'm your only sibling.

(waving the keys)

Now, shall we do our part to save the world with delicious cashew goodness for all?

PAUL

We most definitely shall.

(TARA and PAUL link arms and exit.)

END OF PLAY.