

Ian:

Michael, you sent me an email. Can you just lay out the story you told me in your email?

Michael:

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. So, I have a little boy. His name is Charles, and he's a bit over two years old, and in the pandemic we'd been taking walks around our town. That's been the new fun thing to do and our hardware store, the local ACE Hardware set up a little hand washing station outside with a couple sinks and some soap dispensers and some paper towel dispensers.

Michael:

And, for whatever reason, my son just became fascinated by the paper towel dispenser. And it was very specifically one of them, not the other, because there was two. He would wave at the little paper towel dispenser and say hello. And when he would come home, he would ask us to tell him stories about the little paper towel dispenser, like bedtime stories.

Ian:

The two papers towel dispensers, is there something that makes one... Is there a difference between them?

Michael:

None. They're identical.

Ian:

There's something so wonderful about being a toddler that they never know what the thing is the next day that is going to become their everything.

Michael:

Yes.

Ian:

There's always something out there that could take them over completely.

Michael:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Martin:

Ian, can I get personal for a second?

Ian:

Of course. Yeah.

Martin:

Okay. I know you have a child, right?

Ian:

Yeah. I have a baby daughter.

Martin:

Baby daughter, okay. You know that one day she's going to ask you a very important question of, "Where do paper towels come from?"

Ian:

Okay.

Martin:

You're going to want to lie. I know this. I know you're going to want to say, "Oh, there's a big, old, paper towel bird that comes and leaves paper towels on your porch." But don't lie. Don't do it. There's no reason. You know where it comes from. Where does it come from, Ian?

Ian:

A paper towel dispenser.

Martin:

It comes from me. I am Martin and I am a paper towel dispenser.

Martin:

When I'm not being used, I typically just look around and wonder, "Where did everything else come from?" You know? Where's the person dispenser? Where's the bus dispenser. Is there a puppy dispenser? You know, there's little dogs coming out. Or clouds. I see a lot of clouds. Day clouds, night clouds. Yeah. What's poofing them out?

Ian:

You just imagine dispensers somewhere over the horizon, dispensing all of creation?

Martin:

Well, yeah. I mean, as everything else, it can't just appear. That'd be madness.

Ian:

I guess then you have to think about where did the dispensers come from?

Martin:

A dispenser dispenser, I would assume.

Martin:

Yeah. I hope to one day meet the big dispenser and thank it. What if dispenser was one of us?

Ian:

Do you have a picture of what the big dispenser looks like?

Martin:

Well, yeah. I mean, all dispensers are made in the big dispenser's image. So, I figure that the big dispenser just looks like me, but bigger.

Ian:

I guess I don't really dispense anything. It's words, maybe.

Martin:

I don't know. I've seen what you people dispense, and I don't mean you people as in white people. I mean you people as in humans.

Ian:

Right.

Martin:

Yeah. And you have various slots, several in fact. You have your three whole slots in your face area and then you've got the other two slots. I don't even want to talk about those.

Martin:

There is a guy that comes by, I want to say once a week, and I've seen his name tag, it's Bill, and I don't know what is on his hands, but I know that he has to use me so much. I worry for him. I don't know if maybe it's he's eating something, or he just keeps falling into something.

Ian:

What's it look like?

Martin:

It's a bluish-brown color.

Ian:

Okay.

Martin:

Texture-wise, it's like a loose hardness, like it's stiff, but very wet. It's crunchy. It's very crunchy, but it's soft, like a soft crunch. It feels like it would be milky, but milky in the way of a flame. It's been around. It does stuff, like it shouldn't move while being still, but it does.

Martin:

I don't like to pass judgment on the people, especially Bill, he seems like a very nice guy, but I want him to change for him. Not even for me. I want him to change for him.

Ian:

But I imagine also for you.

Martin:

Yeah. I mean, yes, for me. A lot for me.

Ian:

Martin, to be clear, you are one of the touchless paper towel dispensers.

Martin:

Yes. I haven't been touched in a very long time.

Ian:

Well, the way you work, where someone waves a hand in front of your sensor, a paper towel comes out. I'm wondering, has it ever happened by accident? You know, when somebody is just kind of walking by, makes a towel come out.

Martin:

Every now and then. It really depends on how hand-like their body is. I would hope that if someone realizes that their body is very fingerly and hand-like to, at the very least, do a bigger walk around.

Ian:

What makes a body hand-like? Or fingerly, as you said.

Martin:

Well, it's thin, but with one really chunky limb.

Ian:

Right. The thumb limb.

Martin:

The thumb limb, yeah.

Ian:

I think you're describing a skinny person with a big head. That's hand-like. I think you're describing me.

Martin:

No, I think that is exactly what it is, which, I think all bodies are beautiful. So, that's on me for insulting the... Because I don't know if you've noticed, I have been dispensing a little bit every time you move, but I appreciate you acknowledging it so I didn't have to.

Ian:

Martin, I want to ask you about other ways people dry their hands.

Martin:

Yeah. Please do.

Ian:

One, in bathrooms, there's often a machine where you push a button and it blows hot air onto your hands. Are you familiar with these?

Martin:

Well, yeah. Laurel.

Ian:

Okay.

Martin:

Yeah. That's a good friend of mine. I feel like a lot of people don't realize what is happening in that situation. He's not enjoying it.

Ian:

When he's blowing.

Martin:

Yes. That's all pain. That's agony. That's a horrific thing to do to him. It's pain. Laurel?

Laurel:

Yeah?

Martin:

Can you explain real quick what it's like to have to deal with the heat stuff?

Laurel:

You mean that hot air?

Martin:

Yeah, the hot air.

Laurel:

Yeah.

Martin:

All right. It's bad, right?

Laurel:

I hate it.

Martin:

See, Laurel is not a fan. So, just give it a pat every now and then, on the side.

Ian:

I'm also curious about when someone, and I'm certainly guilty of this myself, when someone wipes their hands on their pants instead of using a paper towel, or Laurel. How does that feel when you see that?

Martin:

I don't want to say there's envy or jealousy or bitterness. I find that, to an extent, pants are able to do the same job of paper towels, which is... Yeah. Good for them. It's not the same, and I think that is the issue that there is a lack of fairness between pants and paper towels, and I think the best way to balance that out and make it a little bit more fair is if one day paper towels could be pants.

Ian:

Because pants are being paper towels, someone could wear paper towels as pants.

Martin:

Right. Exactly. Okay, just go with the scenario with me for a second, will you, Ian?

Ian:

Okay.

Martin:

Imagine a man wearing paper towel pants, and he put them on and you don't have to button them or zip them, you just slide them on. You felt paper towels on your hands. Imagine them on your legs.

Ian:

All right.

Martin:

Then, when you have to take them off, you don't have to worry about, "Oh, no, I have to unbutton them." Or, "How am I going to slide them off my legs? That's so difficult and painful."

Ian:

Okay.

Martin:

You just walk into a Lake or dip yourself into a bath and it dissolves. Just goes out. I think it's beautiful.

Ian:

Pants just melt away.

Martin:

Someday, I would like to talk to the pants dispenser about that.

Ian:

When the hardware store closes at night, do you sleep?

Martin:

Yeah, of course.

Ian:

Do you dream?

Martin:

Yeah. When I sleep only. Yeah, I have this reoccurring dream where I'm an ATM. You're familiar with ATMs, right?

Ian:

Like a cash machine.

Martin:

Yeah. And then in the dream, the best part is I get to charge a fee of \$2.75. What a life.

Ian:

Martin, when you imagine people taking the money, what do you imagine them doing with it?

Martin:

I imagine they then go and buy more dispensers, so that way they can get an excess of things that they need. So, just get a big old house dispenser and they can have all the houses you want.

Ian:

Just to have an endless supply of everything.

Martin:

Yeah.

Ian:

But I guess, too, there's only so much space on the earth. So, thinking about continually dispensing new things, new paper towels, new houses, clouds, puppies. I think he said...

Martin:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ian:

Eventually there just won't be room for all these things.

Martin:

Well, then you use the room dispenser.

Ian:

Just make more room.

Martin:

Yeah.

Ian:

On and ever on, forever.

Martin:

Yes. Because he had the time dispenser.

Ian:

This is Everything is Alive. Our show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag, with Eva [Wolchover 00:14:56]. Special thanks to Emily Spivack. Our editor is Hillary Frank. Martin, the paper towel dispenser, was played by Martin Morrow. Martin is a comedian, writer, and improviser in Los Angeles. You can follow him on socials at @martinMMorrow and stream his album Magic of the City.

Ian:

Thanks to Michael and Charles for getting in touch about the little paper towel dispenser at the hardware store. I hope this has been a satisfactory bedtime story. Everything is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. Without Julie Shapiro, executive producer, we would be stuck forever in the show dispenser. You can get in touch with us any number of ways everythingisalive.com. See you soon.

Ian:

Support for Everything is Alive comes from Lagunitas Brewing Company. For more than 20 years, Lagunitas has delivered edgy brewing at the edge of ruin. Their IPA has long been one of my favorite beers. So, when they told me they were sending me some to help me get acquainted with their product for this ad, I was more than happy to pretend like that was necessary and that I didn't already have some in my fridge. Lagunitas is now in 20ish countries around the world. So, their beer is so close you can hear it, but not in a creepy way. Find a six pack near you at lagunitas.com.

Ian:

Before you go, I want to tell you about another Radiotopia podcast you might like, Criminal. Criminal is a show I really love. They report on the most interesting crimes. The first animal put on trial, the first stalker at the super bowl, the first case of Stockholm syndrome, the first crime involving a lemur. Criminal is the first of its kind. Sometimes funny, sometimes scary, often poetic, always very human. Listen to Criminal on Apple podcasts or at thisiscriminal.com.