

## The Rehabilitation of John

(It is the living room of a working class home. Part of the room serves as a dining area. There are Christmas decorations scattered about as well as a sincere if artificial tree. A woman in her late fifties or early sixties fusses about. The doorbell rings. She hurries to answer it. A woman in her early thirties stands outside. Her arms are full of presents.)

LAURA

Merry Christmas!

MARION

Laura! I knew you'd come. Alice said you wouldn't, but I knew better. And *Merry Christmas* to you! Come in Dear. Oh, look at the presents. Aren't they lovely! And chocolates? You remembered how I love chocolates on Christmas day!

LAURA

Where should I put them?

MARION

Why under the tree, of course! I love presents under the tree. Are they all for John? He'll be so pleased.

LAURA

They are not all for John. This one is for you, and there's one for Barry and for Alice too. This one is for John.

MARION

Only the one?

LAURA

You can always give him yours, Marion. When is he supposed to get here?

MARION

He won't be long, now. Barry's gone to get him. Alice is coming around by taxi. Barry was going to drop her off and then go get John, but he had to go on his rounds this morning after all. Imagine having to make deliveries on Christmas day?

LAURA

Imagine.

MARION

Alice wasn't pleased. Not one bit, but there was nothing to be done. What with the time being so short.

LAURA

She could have gone with Barry to get John.

MARION

Oh, I don't think that would have been a good idea. Not a good idea at all. She was quite upset with Barry for saying he'd go in the first place. I don't know what she expects. John and Barry have always been close.

LAURA

Does the hospital know to expect him?

MARION

It's all arranged with the doctors. His leave starts at ten. I do hope Barry gets there on time. John gets so nervous when he has to wait around.

LAURA

I thought they were fixing that. Isn't developing patience part of the therapy?

MARION

That and other things. They say he's working very hard. That's what they call it in group--working. Sometimes they work on issues. Sometimes they work on behavior. The doctors say he's doing very well. They say his attitude is entirely changed.

LAURA

Wouldn't that be nice? How long is the leave?

MARION

Twenty-four hours. The doctors thought that would be a good starting place. Twenty-four hours. I wanted the whole week. I don't think that was so much to ask.

LAURA

I'm sure the doctors know best.

MARION

Seems mean of them.

LAURA

It isn't a matter of meanness, Marion. It's a rehab program. There are rules. That's why the Judge recommended that he go there. John needs structure.

MARION

Structure.

LAURA

Boundaries. (Pause.) And when you get down to it, it beats the hell out of prison.

MARION

Really, Laura, I think you could be at least a little bit positive.

LAURA

I'm being realistic. John's only been in that place for six months. He'd still be lying around stoned somewhere if the court hadn't made him go. Or in jail.

MARION

But he's getting better. It's an illness and he's getting better. The Doctors say so.

LAURA

Don't you think I'd like to believe that?

MARION

John is a very unhappy person, Laura. He's had so many terrible disappointments.

LAURA

Who hasn't, Marion?

MARION

It was that last let down with the agency that started all this. I think they brought on this whole business--those dreadful people at that agency.

LAURA

They only expected John to stick to his contract. Can you imagine that? Someone actually expected him to keep his word.

MARION

He's sensitive, Laura, and you have to treat people like that differently. You'd think anyone calling themselves an Artist's Agency would know something as fundamental as that. (Pause.) Oh, let's not talk about the past. It's the present that counts. (Pause. She titters.) Speaking of *presents*, what did you get him?

LAURA

Excuse me?

MARION

I made a little pun, Laura. You know--presents? What did you get him?

LAURA

Get who? John? A book. I got him a book.

MARION

Oh, he loves books! Does it have lots of pictures? He always loved those Time-Life books I got him. Do you remember?

LAURA

It's not a picture book, Marion.

MARION

Oh.

LAURA

It's a biography of Duke Ellington.

MARION

Oh.

LAURA

The composer? The legendary jazz composer?

MARION

Do you think that was such a good idea?

LAURA

Why wouldn't it be a good idea? John loves Duke Ellington.

MARION

But he's dead, isn't he?

LAURA

Yes, Marion. He's dead.

MARION

It's a lovely gift. (Pause.) He needs shirts.

LAURA

Why don't I leave now?

MARION

Oh, no. . .don't. . .I--

LAURA

I should never have agreed to come here. It was a stupid idea.

MARION

John will expect you here. You know he will. I promised I'd have you. He'll feel so let down.

LAURA

I can't help that.

MARION

John loves you. You're his wife.

LAURA

His "ex-wife," Marion. Not his wife. His ex-wife. The divorce was final three months ago.

MARION

Yes, well, I don't understand all that. I only--

LAURA

For Chrissakes, what's there to understand? We're divorced!

MARION

(Stricken)

I wish you wouldn't swear, dear. Not on Christmas day.

LAURA

(Long Pause.)

Oh, what the hell! All right. Don't look like that. I'll stay.

MARION

I just want so much for it to be a special day for all of us. John wants it too. He said so in his letter.

LAURA

Letter? John wrote a letter? I've never known John to write a letter in his life. Did he ask for money? (Pause.) You didn't send him any, did you? You haven't sent

him any money?

MARION

A little here and there. He's my son, and I'll give him money if I want. It's bad enough he has to be in that dreadful place.

LAURA

He's there to learn to make it on his own.

MARION

He will. He needs time. This has been such a setback.

LAURA

Are you even listening to anything the doctors say?

MARION

What do they know about my John? It breaks my heart to think of him there.

LAURA

You'd rather see him in jail? He drove his car through the agency's bay window. He should have gone to jail.

MARION

Bay window, indeed! Pretentious if you ask me.

(Phone rings. Both women freeze.

Marion goes and picks it up.)

Yes? . . .yes, this is she. Oh. . .I see. . .No, I don't think there's any problem. . .I'll call and make certain everything is all right. . .No. No. I'm sure everything is fine. Yes. Thank you. (Hangs up.) Oh dear! Oh, dear!

LAURA

What is it? Marion! Stop shaking! What is it?

MARION

Oh, dear! Barry's not come to get John yet.

LAURA

So? It's only ten o'clock now.

MARION

John expected him by now. He's upset, of course. If only Barry hadn't had to run those silly rounds. People should order their milk ahead not expect it on Christmas day.

LAURA

So what? Is John throwing a fit? They're probably afraid they'll have him on their hands

all day.

MARION

I'll have to call. That's all there is to it. I'll have to call.

LAURA

Leave it. Barry's just a little late.

MARION

I expect it was Alice who held him up. It would be like her. Maybe he can't go at all. Would you go, Laura? Would you go and get him?

LAURA

No.

MARION

I'm sure he would be good.

LAURA

We are not talking about an obnoxious ten year old.

MARION

I know that.

LAURA

We are talking about a man who held a pillow down over my face the last time I saw him.

MARION

That's not fair Laura. He didn't hurt you. Not really. Not that time. He told me what happened. He was afraid you were going to leave him. He had to do something.

LAURA

Forget it, Marion. I will not go and get him. He'll have to call a cab.

MARION

Someone has to sign him out.

LAURA

Then I guess you had better call Barry and see what's up, hadn't you?

MARION

Alice won't like my bothering them. But something might have happened. I don't have much choice do I? No. I have to call. I'll go and call right now.

(Goes to phone, hesitates then begins to dial.)

. . .three. . .oh. . .four. . .two. . .(Pause) Alice? Hello dear, it's Marion. . . Well, of course I would expect you to recognize my voice. . . Yes, I know we're sisters. Anyone would expect you to know my voice. . . yes. Uh, could I talk to Barry? Oh. He's gone then? Good. No. No. Nothing's wrong. Yes, I know it's inconvenient getting a cab. Well, yes, Laura, is here but--

(Looks at Laura who makes exaggerated  
Negative signals.)

No. I don't think she can come and get you. . . I don't think her car is running all that well. All right then, we'll see you in a bit. What? All right then, Merry Christ--

(She hangs up the phone.)

I think that was the cab honking. She hung up. But Barry's left already. It's all going to be all right. I knew it would. Funny, isn't it? How Barry and John get on so well. You wouldn't think it. Barry's such a quiet boy.

LAURA

He isn't any more a boy than John is. They're the same age.

MARION

And look at all these years he's worked for the dairy. Never late once. Always hands his paycheck over to Alice. Always takes her on a nice vacation every year.

LAURA

It's a damn shame he never got married.

MARION

But then who would look after Alice?

LAURA

Old Alice could try looking after herself.

(She spots an unopened bottle of  
whiskey on the sideboard.)

What is this doing here?

MARION

Mrs. Kramer brought that by. A Christmas present, she said. Imagine that? Her being Jewish and all, but it was a lovely thought. I gave her one of my fruitcakes. I wasn't sure if it was kosher or not, but she seemed delighted.

LAURA

Well, you better get it out of sight. Lock it up somewhere before John gets here.

MARION

Oh, you needn't worry. John won't touch it. The doctors have been very clear about what could happen. I was there when they told him. He mustn't ever drink again. It will

kill him. He knows that.

LAURA

I don't care what he knows or what they told him. I know John. Don't leave it standing around. Put it under the sink. No, that's the first place he'd look.

MARION

(Taking the bottle and starting to put it inside the sideboard.)

It just seems such a shame, we can't all have a little toast on Christmas Day.

LAURA

It is Marion. It's a rotten shame, but it's the way things are right now. Look, is there something I can check on in the kitchen?

MARION

I suppose you could bring out the rest of the dishes. We could finish setting the table. I'm using my Christmas dishes. The ones I got with gold stamps?

LAURA

I'll get them.

(Exits.)

MARION

(Calling after her.)

Thank you dear. They're in the right hand cupboard.

(Smiling vaguely, she unscrews the top off the bottle and sniffs at it. She picks up a small glass from the table and pours a healthy shot.)

Well, maybe I'll just have a tiny toast all by myself. Little bitch shouldn't tell me what to do in my own house. If she had stood by John, he'd be all right now. He just needs encouragement. And a steady job. Maybe Barry can get him on at the dairy. Then, he could stay home here with me until he gets back on his feet.

(ALICE opens the front door and steps into the room during the last part of this speech. She is a solidly built woman with little charm and less grace.)

ALICE

Talking to yourself, Marion? Best have Barry take you back to the funny farm with John.

MARION

(Not awfully pleased to see her  
Sister.)

Alice. . .I didn't hear the cab drive up.

ALICE

Well, you wouldn't with all that mumbling, would you? Where's Laura? Laura! Her car looks all right to me.

MARION

No. Wait! (Guiltily, she hides the bottle and glass.)

ALICE

What's the matter? Are you telling me you're sneaking a drink in your own house? That's a sin, Marion. It's your house. You do as you goddamn well please. No one tells me what to do in my own house. Let alone some little street slut who--

LAURA

(Enters with dishes.)

Well. Alice! I thought I heard you in here. Merry Christmas!

ALICE

Laura. Don't you look nice. What a nice blouse, did you make it?

LAURA

No, Alice, I stole it.

ALICE

Well, it's your color, anyway.

MARION

It didn't take you long to get here.

ALICE

The cab had got there just as you called. Can you believe he charged me extra for waiting. No tip for you, then, I said. Taught him to be greedy. Is there coffee out there? I'll just go and get myself a cup. (Exits into Kitchen.)

LAURA

God, how does Barry stand her?

MARION

There should be more boys like Barry. The world would be a better place.