

My best friend

By

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Cast of Characters

John: a man in his 30s

Robert: a man in his 40s

Scene I

A private hospital room.

There's a bed, a table and a chair next to it.

A window. Sometimes it rains. Sometimes the light is bright.

Sometimes footsteps can be heard from the corridor.

Robert is in a coma and lying in bed.

John enters. He's dressed like a bum and carrying a book like it's his first time.

JOHN

Hello Robert.

He seems to wait for a response.

JOHN

Rob?

It doesn't come. That's a relief.

JOHN

Your sister asked me to- I don't know.

He attempts a laugh.

JOHN

Really wish you could speak. You were always the leader, you know? None of us ever admitted it, but it's true. And I couldn't tell ya why this has been left on my shoulders.

Pause.

JOHN

Well, I could, I suppose. I know you want me to read this book, that's what your sister told me to do, but I'm thinking you'd want to know about the old gang... and why they're not here. They all have their reasons, trust me.

John sets the book down onto the bed and relaxes a little bit. Looks around and gathers his thoughts.

JOHN

Peter runs a restaurant in New York. He's got a few actually. I've never been, but I've seen the reviews

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JOHN (cont'd)

and- Let me think now. Leon is in Russia. Whenever I ask him what he does he just looks at me with this expression, like I couldn't even *begin* to understand, and says: "Finance, John. I'm in finance." And Nathan... poor Nathan. The funeral was beautiful. So many people came- I didn't- I had no idea he was so beloved, you know? He was always popular, but this was- It just felt grander somehow.

A pause. He looks at Robert.

JOHN

So, everyone's... good. We don't talk that much anymore. But I figure: it's natural. It's how it goes. You get older. Life happens. You lose touch.

Pause.

JOHN

D'you want me to read a book?

He leafs through it.

JOHN

Can't remember when I last read something. Honest.

Black.

SCENE II

Next week.

John is sitting and reading from 'Look Homeward Angel.'

His voice becomes more confident as he reads.

JOHN

He wanted opulent solitude. His dark vision burned on kingdoms under the sea, on windy castle crags, and on the deep elf kingdoms at the earth's core. He groped for the doorless land of faery, that illimitable haunted country that opened somewhere below a leaf or a stone. And no birds sing.

John mulls it over. Doesn't really like it.

JOHN

Okay if I open the window? Let some air in.

Robert doesn't answer.

John opens the window.

JOHN

Okay if I smoke?

Robert doesn't answer.

John smokes. Leafs through the book.

JOHN

I've never read it, mind you, but... it's a bit morose, isn't it? Jesus! Like, wouldn't you want something more.. happy? 'And no birds sing?' If I'm ever in your position, god almighty, read me some children's books instead. Something nice and easy. With a likable rabbit.

A pause.

JOHN

Not that it matters anyway. Look at you. You can't even hear me, and if you did, you couldn't make sense of what I said. I'm being all polite with you and you're- What? Just a warm body.

A pause. He finishes his cigarette.

JOHN

Remember that time in ninth grade on the swings? You guys threw cigarette butts at me. You really were kind of a bully weren't you? Sometimes. And then sometimes you were nice. My best friend.

Robert doesn't answer.

Black.

SCENE III

3 days later.

John next to the bed.

He's looking at Robert.

He sits in the chair.

He lights a smoke.

JOHN

I'm getting paid for this, you know? To talk to you. Your sister- I don't think she can spend your fortune until you're actually gone, but she can hire me. Apparently. So, really, you're paying me. Paying me to sit next to you.

He enjoys the cigarette.

JOHN

I think about you when I go to sleep. Just kinda- Try to imagine what it's like. Lay all still like- like you are. Close my eyes and really try. Try to see the black nothing. The big dark sleep. It's refreshing. But I can't quite get there. The window is open so I hear people on the street or- just smell the wet air.

A pause.

JOHN

So I can't reach you. Not really. And I'm just... talking to myself. Aren't I?

He laughs.

He puts out the cigarette against the bedside table.

Flicks the butt at Robert.

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JOHN

Imagine that?

He leaves.

Robert sleeps there for a while.

Black.

SCENE V

A day later.

John enters.

He's wearing an expensive looking suit.

JOHN

Huh?

He does a spin.

JOHN

Not bad, is it? I feel like it fits me better than it ever did you, you know?

He takes on Robert's persona.

JOHN

Now, John, you can't just waste your life away like this. Seeing the world is all just fine, but at some point one must settle down and make something. You've got two hands, put them to use, my friend!

John dances and laughs in front of Robert.

JOHN

For the first time in my life, I really understand you Robert. Just this suit- makes me walk different! Like you walked. Makes me talk different. Think different. Or, like you.

He jumps up onto the bed and preaches.

JOHN

'Through Chance, we are each a ghost to all the others, and our only reality; through Chance, the huge hinge of the world, and a grain of dust; the stone that starts an avalanche, the pebble whose concentric circles widen across the seas.' It's from your book. I get it. Finally, I get it!

He jumps back down.

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JOHN

It's like those stories of brothers and sisters meeting later in life and falling in love. Fucked up, but... we're *drawn* towards each other. Can't you feel it? There's something familial between us, isn't there? We're more than old friends! Don't you dare tell me otherwise! I can feel it!

A pause. Robert doesn't answer.

JOHN

I just- I really want to hear you say it. It's enough for me to- But I want you to say 'Yes.' Say it. Say yes. Say yes. Say it. Say yes! SAY IT! SAY IT. TELL ME YES!

Exhausted, John crumples onto the floor.

JOHN

You fucker. Getting me so agitated.

Pause.

JOHN

I read some of your letters. You get loads. Got some today, actually. The mailman thought I was you. Reckon, it's 'cause of the suit. No, but- I should talk more like you. More people should, anyway. A bit more refined. Stature. Power.

Robert doesn't answer.

JOHN

Huh?

Black.

SCENE VI

A day later.

It's raining.

John is staring out of the window, contemplating.

At points, Robert will move his fingers.

JOHN

I've been practicing your signature. I think I got it down pretty good. I need to see your sister and then- after that- I'll... I'm just wondering how to- But I'm thinking like you. How to make things mine. I don't think-

He stares at Robert for a moment, alert.

Comes over and checks his breathing.

Touches Robert's cheek.

Again, but stronger.

He hits Robert.

But Robert does not respond.

JOHN

Do you want me to read to you? One last time, huh? Friend.

Black.

SCENE VII

An hour later.

John is sleeping. The book is on his lap.

Nothing happens for a while and then...

Robert moves his hand.

His foot moves.

John wakes up. Sees Robert moving.

Robert's eyes open. Slowly.

John looks at him.

Robert looks at the room.

Blinks. A few times. Takes it in. He turns his head.

Sees John.

JOHN

Robert.

John stands up abruptly.

The book falls from his lap.

Black.