

DEMONS

CHARACTERS:

JOHN, 25-35
SISTER MARY FELICIA
JOHN'S MOTHER
ELAINE, John's Ex-Wife

(All three women's roles can be played by one versatile actress.)

SETTING: Each act has blow-ups of appropriate photographs from John's life:
Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood.)

(The play takes place on Christmas Eve. On a table there is a small partly decorated Christmas tree on a table that John has been trimming. He has already opened one present — a camera.)

JOHN (using Christmas cards as decorations, stopping to read a few) "May Christmas cheer be yours throughout the year." Signed "Love, John." Aww! (Reads another.) "Holiday Greetings. From John." A little vague, but appreciated. (Kisses the back of his own hand.) Only two?

(He dials the telephone.)

Hello, God? This is John Rivers. Merry Christmas! And, hey, happy birthday too! Fine, thank you. Just decorating the tree. And how about yourself? Depressed? Gee, that's too bad. What's wrong? Oh, that. Right. And that . . . true. Mind if I try to cheer you up? Okay, here goes! (sings) Hark the herald, angels sing! Glory to the newborn king! Hark the herald, angels sing! Glory to the newborn king! . . . Oh, it was nothing. Glad to help. Listen, God, I hate to bother you; you're probably very busy and everything, but I'm alone on Christmas Eve and, ah, I'm sort of wondering what you think about my divorce and, well, you know. I'm sort of worrying about telling people. Who? Oh, my mother, my ex-wife. People like that. How do you think they're going to react? (Immediately the lights swirl.. John reels as Sister Mary Felicia, wearing a traditional nun's habit with a larger-than-life wimple, enters. She makes an imposing figure, the way she did when he was eight. John cowers like a child.)

SISTER What's this I hear about you, young man!

JOHN (cowering) N-Nothing.

SISTER Are you positive?

JOHN (shaking his head yes)

SISTER Are you keeping a secret from me?

JOHN No, Sister. . .

SISTER Do you know what happens to little boys who tell lies?

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

JOHN (gulps like a child) Well . . . maybe . . .

SISTER What do you mean maybe? Are you or aren't you keeping a secret from me?

JOHN You'll be mad.

SISTER Have you been a bad boy?

JOHN You might think so.

SISTER I know what you've done.

JOHN You do?

SISTER (not really sure) You bet your boots I do. But I want *you* to tell me!

JOHN Well . . . I'm . . . I've . . . I'm . . .

SISTER You've become a sodomite, haven't you?

(Thunder and lightning.)

JOHN (referring to the telephone) God didn't seem to mind!

SISTER Never mind what God thinks! I mind! (Bigger thunder and lightning.)
Don't you realize that sex of any kind is a terrible sin?

JOHN "Judge not lest ye be judged!"

SISTER Come over here, you! (Lights up on oversized desk and blackboard.) She pulls him by the ear to the desk and makes him sit.) Now, you just sit there, young man, until you stop being a sodomite!

JOHN I have to finish decorating the tree and then take some pictures of it.

SISTER What sort of pictures?

JOHN Just ordinary pictures.

SISTER I know the kind of pictures you people like!

JOHN I got a new camera for Christmas and I'd like to try it out.

SISTER I'll bet Santa Claus didn't bring it. He doesn't bring presents to little perverts.

JOHN I thought Catholics weren't supposed to believe in Santa Claus.

SISTER Are you criticizing me?

JOHN No, Sister . . . (getting up) I'd better finish decorating —

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SISTER You touch that Christmas tree and a bolt of lightning will burn your penis off!

JOHN (not too sure) I don't think that's really going to happen, Sister.

SISTER You contradicting me?

JOHN (raising his hand tentatively) Sister . . . Sister! I think I'm grown up now! I think —

SISTER Grown up? (Writes on blackboard, which is possibly imaginary.) Sins of impurity! Is that what being grown up means, hmmm?

JOHN Sister, you weren't invited here and you come in and —

SISTER (grabbing a large ruler from the blackboard ledge and slapping him with it) Shut your mouth, you despicable sinner! (John sulks.) That's better. Now I want you to sit there and write until you drop or I say stop, whichever comes first.

JOHN What should I write?

SISTER THOU SHALT NOT! THOU SHALT NOT!

JOHN I shalt not what?

SISTER We'll fill that in later! Just write!

JOHN How much should I write?

SISTER Are you giving me a hard time?

JOHN No, Sister Mary Felicia.

SISTER Then write! (John writes and writes.) That's more like it.

JOHN Can I get up now?

SISTER Have you stopped being a sodomite?

JOHN Ahh . . .

SISTER What does "Ahh" mean? Have you stopped or haven't you?

JOHN I won't know until I get up.

SISTER If you get out of that seat, young man, you'll turn into a homosexual!

JOHN I don't think it happens that way, Sister.

SISTER Don't tell me how it happens! I don't want to know about such things. Now sit still and write! I have an assignment to put on the board. (Turns her back and puts a lesson on blackboard. John sneaks up and stabs her in the back many times. She doesn't notice, until she spies him out the corner of her eye.) What are you doing out of your seat?

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- JOHN (hiding the knife behind him, stuttering) I'm — I'm — I'm —
- SISTER Sit down at once! (She leads him back to the desk, forces him to sit. He accidentally knocks the camera off the desk, picks it up.) What have you got there?
- JOHN (hiding the camera) Nothing, Sister!
- SISTER (trying to see) It looks like a camera to me! Didn't I tell you no dirty pictures!
- JOHN (on the spur of the moment) Can I take your picture, Sister?
- SISTER My picture? Why?
- JOHN Because I'd like to remember you when I'm older.
- SISTER Are you sure that's your camera?
- JOHN You have my word of honor.
- SISTER Here you are an admitted Lutheran and I'm supposed to take your word!
- JOHN (correcting) Admitted sodomite.
- SISTER Well, you can't take my picture. You're just trying to get around me! Besides, it would be the sin of vanity.
- JOHN (slyly) Not in your case, Sister. And anyway, it'll only take a moment. (Gets up and aims the camera.)
- SISTER (primping a little against her will) Are you sure this is all right?
- JOHN At Christmas time, of course! Give me a big smile, Sister!
- SISTER How's this? (She smiles and holds up the ruler like a weapon.)
- JOHN Oh, that's so *you*, Sister! (Takes the picture, hands her the quickly developed photograph.) Not bad for a Polaroid. How do you like it?
- SISTER (softer) I'm sort of homely, aren't I?
- JOHN We kids used to call you Sister Mary Dracula.
- SISTER Did you really?
- JOHN You didn't have a very good color.
- SISTER Well, we didn't wear make-up. We really looked quite natural . . . You'd better sit in your desk again. This photograph was just an excuse to get out of your seat. (She steers him to his seat, using the ruler. Then she grabs his shoulders and leans toward him, talking right into his face.) Now stay where you're put!

Demons

- JOHN Sister, do you remember that time somebody put a bottle of Listerine on your desk?
- SISTER (serious) Oh, did you do that? Wasn't that a little cruel to me?
- JOHN Well, actually some of the other kids did it. You did have . . . bad breath. We just wanted to let you know.
- SISTER (hurt) Yes, children are always so . . . kind.
- JOHN I didn't put —
- SISTER You children had been watching too much television, worrying about your worldly 'smells' instead of your spiritual fragrance. . . . I don't think I was that bad! (She turns away and cups her hand to check.) I had to ask Sister Agnes Irene what the bottle of Listerine was for, did you know that?
- JOHN I'm sorry, Sister. . .
- SISTER (recovering) Why were you thinking about such fleshly things in the first place! That was a sin too! (Goes to blackboard and writes "FLESHLY" and underlines it.)
- JOHN Maybe having bad breath is a sin, Sister Mary Felicia.
- SISTER I'll decide what's a sin and what's not, young man!
- JOHN I'm grown up now. Haven't you noticed?
- SISTER What happened to little Johnny Rivers? You used to be one of our best little altar boys. I remember you in your white surplice — you were darling!
- JOHN You know something — I never wanted to be an altar boy.
- SISTER You were serving Almighty God at the holy sacrifice of the Mass.
- JOHN You just came around one day in Third Grade and shanghaied us. You didn't ask if we wanted to sacrifice God on some altar. You just signed us up and started teaching us Latin.
- SISTER It was good for you.
- JOHN I didn't have the faintest idea what any of the words meant.
- SISTER It taught you a foreign language.
- JOHN A dead language.
- SISTER Well, it got you together with the other boys and that helped you overcome your shyness.
- JOHN I hated those other boys. They were always punching each other. And you know what else? They used to spit into the altar wine!

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

SISTER You mean after it was consecrated?

JOHN I don't know if it was consecrated, but Brian McGreevy used to spit in the cruet!

SISTER Spitting on the precious body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ!
(threatening with the ruler) And you didn't tell me?

JOHN I had terrible nightmares about it.

SISTER As well you might, young man! Why didn't you speak up?

JOHN (daringly) It was all nonsense anyway.

SISTER (puffed up, the ruler raised) What was nonsense?

JOHN Thinking that the wine was the body and blood of Christ. (Jumps up and hides behind the blackboard, afraid.)

SISTER Come back here!

JOHN (peeking out) I don't want to.

SISTER I want to talk to you. I'm not going to hit you.

JOHN Yes, you are.

SISTER No, I'm not. I promise!

JOHN Then put down the ruler.

SISTER Don't you trust me to keep my word?

JOHN (Shakes his head no.)

SISTER Well, really! (Puts the ruler down.) There! You can come out now.

JOHN You're going to hit me.

SISTER (loudly) I am not going to hit you! Didn't I promise?

JOHN (creeping out a little bit) Remember, it's a sin to break a promise.

SISTER What more can I do to make you believe me!

JOHN Kick the ruler toward me.

SISTER (disgusted) There! (John grabs it and hides it under the desk and sits on the top.)
Now, where were we?

JOHN Talking about God's blood. The priest was supposed to be drinking God's blood!

Demons

SISTER That's the miracle of Transubstantiation!

JOHN Even that little piece of bread was supposed to be God!

SISTER It is God! Don't you even know God when you see Him!

JOHN Sister, didn't you realize what you were teaching us?

SISTER The fundamentals of your faith.

JOHN Sister! Eating God! That's cannibalism! And you were so pious about it!

SISTER That's not cannibalism. Cannibalism is what primitive people do — like Protestants.

JOHN If you eat somebody's living body and blood — and that's what you told us — then you're a cannibal.

SISTER See! First you have doubts, then you leave the Church, then you become a sodomite!

JOHN Sister!

SISTER And who are you to say what's right or wrong! Sit down, young man!

JOHN It's about time *you* sat down and listened for a change! (He slaps the desk.)

SISTER Sit in that seat, Johnny Rivers!

JOHN (intimidated, almost sits down, but then resists) I don't have to anymore. I'm grown up!

SISTER I detect a certain amount of aggression here.

JOHN I was such a mousy kid. I always did what you wanted!

SISTER I just tried to give you some discipline — self-discipline.

JOHN I don't mind the self-discipline. I just hate the theology.

SISTER Sorry, it was a package deal! Offer up what you don't like for the poor souls in Purgatory.

JOHN There is no Purgatory.

SISTER What! I can't believe my ears! Next thing you'll say there's no God! Help him, God! Let him repent before he is smothered in brimstone and boiling lava — not to mention mental torment — for billions and billions of years!

JOHN For having a thought?

SISTER Save him from his sexual sins, Almighty God! It's not too late to save his young Catholic body from the corruptions of the wicked, like Oscar Wilde and Truman Capote!

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- JOHN Sister, that's another thing. You made me think my body was disgusting.
- SISTER But your body is disgusting! Do you think I don't know what you do with your heinie? Huh? I'm supposed to stand around and watch you flaunting yourself?
- JOHN What do you call what you're doing? (Gestures toward her habit.)
- SISTER I'm wearing Godly raiment. This habit declares our marriage to Our Savior.
- JOHN Jesus is your husband? Religion sure makes strange bedfellows.
- SISTER I don't think I want to hear any more.
- JOHN (gesturing at the desk) Yes, you do! Why don't *you* sit down for a change, Sister!
- SISTER I don't care to, thank you.
- JOHN Come on, sit down! It'll do you good. It'll be very educational!
- SISTER I don't consider blasphemy educational, and I'm not going to sit there.
- JOHN But you are! (Grabs the ruler and forces her to sit.)
- SISTER Is this the Johnny Rivers I used to give A's to?
- JOHN I'm just getting warmed up, Sister.
- SISTER You wouldn't dare use that on me!
- JOHN Oh, wouldn't I? (Threatens her into the desk.) I just want you to learn about your sins, Sister Mary! (Writes on the blackboard.) Sin #1 — Cruel and Not Unusual Punishment using a ruler on a child!
- SISTER I never hit you — not once. You were a good boy then!
- JOHN I was just bending down to pick up my pencil from the floor and you sneaked up behind me and whacked me across the ears! So hard you made me cry!
- SISTER Well, why were you really bending down? You must've had it coming!
- JOHN That's just it — I hadn't done anything! I always tried to please you, all the time!
- SISTER Better than always trying to make my life miserable. That's how the kids behave in the schools nowadays. (Shakes the desk.) It's not the kids who have to worry about being mistreated these days!
- JOHN You were so arbitrary!
- SISTER Then you should have learned that life isn't fair.
- JOHN Why do you always try to make every bad thing a lesson?

Demons

- SISTER It's going to happen anyway — you might as well get something out of it!
- JOHN I looked up to you, Sister, and then you smacked me like I was Brian McGreevy or any other little brat in the class!
- SISTER Well, you can't get even with the past and it's time you realized it.
- JOHN Oh no, you don't! You're not going to make me feel bad for resenting what you did!
- SISTER I was only trying to educate you to the best of my ability. (sadly) I gave my whole life to my students . . . my whole life . . .
- JOHN Is guilt the only way people can be made good?
- SISTER Right this minute there are thousands of others angry because nobody bothered to give them a sense of "guilt," that is, a sense of responsibility.
- JOHN That's what tyrants always say.
- SISTER Don't put all the blame on me, young man. It was your own free will that made you do what you did.
- JOHN Free will? I didn't have the guts to stand up to you. And I may not have the guts now . . .
- SISTER I told you what I thought, according to the lights that God gave me.
- JOHN But he didn't give you enough lights, Sister. That's what I'm saying! Don't you remember what you told us about sex?
- SISTER Of course I do. Sex is nasty.
- JOHN Exactly! Don't you recall telling us we'd go to hell if we "played with ourselves"?
- SISTER But you will!
- JOHN You can't believe this, Sister. You can't! You had me so petrified I was afraid to touch anything!
- SISTER And now you want me to approve of your "touching" it?
- JOHN I didn't even know what "playing with myself" meant. I thought it meant I wasn't allowed to "play by myself," and so I'd run around trying desperately to find some little brat to play with so I wouldn't be committing a sin!
- SISTER I was merely trying to teach you to save yourself for the one you love — and I don't mean another man!
- JOHN Do you know that I used to cry every time I masturbated? Every single time.
- SISTER That was God telling you not to touch your pee-pee.

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

JOHN It was you! It was you telling me! I can't believe that any Almighty God gives a damn about my pee-pee!

SISTER God wants you to use your semen for procreation, not for recreation!

JOHN There is no God, Sister! You made him up!

SISTER I suppose you'd prefer to be rutting in the streets, like buffalo. What kind of civilization would that be?

JOHN Lusts are nice, Sister Mary Felicia! (Writes on blackboard.) Lusts are nice!

SISTER Masturbation and homosexuality are sterile, absolutely sterile!

JOHN So is chastity! *You* don't reproduce!

SISTER But I don't have any fun when I do what I do, and that makes it all right. Can you say as much?

JOHN Sister, you're tearing my head apart!

SISTER You're making your body into a cesspool.

JOHN I'm not!

SISTER Oh, no? What about gay cancer! AHA!

JOHN We'll find a cure! You just wait and see! They did for TB. They did for polio!

SISTER We treated our bodies like temples, not like sewers!

JOHN But our bodies aren't temples! They're bodies, and you should know that. When I think of all the years you made me suffer from sexual starvation, I want to kill you!

SISTER Just try it, young man! Just try it! (She grabs him and throws him to the ground, holds him down.)

JOHN (pulling her wimple loose) So you *do* have hair!

SISTER Of course I have hair.

(Holds him down with her foot.)

JOHN How about other hair? Or do you shave it off?

SISTER Why are you obsessed with my hair?

JOHN Because you deny it, that's why! And you denied it in me too! Do you know what I thought when I was growing up — that nuns have no breasts!

SISTER They don't! How dare you mention nuns' breasts!

Demons

JOHN Thinking bad thoughts was a sin! Not saying my prayers was a sin. Even looking at myself in the mirror was the near occasion of sin! Every time I went to Confession I had to get inside my soul and pick and pick and pick because if I left anything out that would be yet another sin!

SISTER I made you civilized instead of a brute. Or at least I'm trying!

JOHN Let me go! Let me go!

SISTER Resisting a nun is a mortal sin! (She gets him in a hammerlock.)

JOHN I remember that day you told us how long Hell lasts. It's like a little sparrow that flies for a millions years to a distant desert and drops a single grain of sand, and then the sparrow flies back for another million years and picks up a second grain of sand and flies back to the desert, and then again and again, and when at last it has the whole desert emptied of all the grains of sand, that's just the first second of eternity!

(They are in a hammerlock but in awe.)

SISTER It's true!

JOHN That's insane. I really think you people are insane! (He breaks loose.)

SISTER The Church is re-thinking some of its extreme punishments. You can't judge the Church by —

JOHN You were the teachers! You were spelling out the dogmas and influencing the way I'd look at the world for the rest of my life — to this very moment!

SISTER Don't be so hard on the nuns. Don't you realize some of us had difficult lives? Have you no sympathy for our problems?

JOHN Twisting our minds and calling it purity! Afraid to touch your sex organs! I have no sympathy! Not one ounce!

SISTER I'm sorry my education made you so intolerant. I guess I failed you.

JOHN Don't you try to get around me that way — don't you do it! Burning heretics to death! When you're in power, you punish the slightest deviation from the party line. Don't preach to me about tolerance!

SISTER You'd like to murder me, wouldn't you, and that's worse than anything we may have done to you.

JOHN There are different forms of murder — and don't you try to make me feel any more guilt! Or I swear I will kill you! (Grabs her throat as she sits at desk.)

SISTER (Not resisting, limp in his hands) Go ahead, choke me. Don't feel guilty about it! Oh no, nobody must feel "guilty" about anything. Nobody should feel the slightest hesitation in doing exactly what he wants.

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- JOHN You're not going to talk me out of it! (But he can't quite bring himself to choke her.)
- SISTER What's wrong? Surely you aren't going to let mere "sin" stand in your way? (She spreads her arms, as though crucified, waiting for him to choke her.)
- JOHN (trying to make himself do it, but unable to. Finally he flings himself to the side) Get thee to a nunnery! (Laughs bitterly.)
- SISTER See why I did what I did? You would've strangled me if I hadn't educated you.
- JOHN Then it's a phony goodness.
- SISTER People's real selves are savages. I'll take any "phony" goodness I can get.
- JOHN Would you really have let me choke you?
- SISTER Eventually of course I would've strangled you with my rosary. (Shows him the rosary.) But I stopped you without the need of force. (Looks smug.)
- JOHN Don't look so smug!
- SISTER I didn't have to raise a hand to do it.
- JOHN They say your religion is a religion of the weak — how the feeble triumph over the strong.
- SISTER You'd better be glad it is, little Johnny Rivers. I seem to recall a few bullies in your past who beat you up — and they would've been even worse if they hadn't been educated by people like me to feel sorry for those weaker than themselves. Oh yes, be a bit grateful, my young sodomite, because you've been a weakling too!
- JOHN But I'm not weak now.
- SISTER Do you think indulging in rectangular intercourse takes strength?
- JOHN Do you mean rectal? Do you think fighting you takes weakness?
- SISTER You'll never get rid of me, young man!
- JOHN I may not choke you, but I can do other things.
- SISTER Oh, can you?
- JOHN (getting the ruler, banging the desk) Sit down.
- SISTER I don't care to right now.
- JOHN I said to sit down. (Threatens her until she sits.) Okay, now stand up!
- SISTER (sitting) You just told me to sit down!

Demons

JOHN Now I'm telling you to stand up. (Reluctantly she stands.)

SISTER What do you think you're proving?

JOHN Sit down! (She does.) (with ruler under her chin) Stand up!

SISTER (standing) This is ludicrous.

JOHN Sit down! (She sits.) How do you like the taste of your own medicine, Sister? Stand up!

SISTER (standing) Why are you acting so silly?

JOHN That's not for you to question, Sister Mary. You do what you're told. Sit down!

SISTER You're just giving meaningless orders. I never —

JOHN How do you think you sounded to a little kid, huh?

SISTER There were certain things you couldn't possibly have understood —

JOHN That's right — it's a matter of faith! Stand up!

SISTER I never made you do absurd things like this!

JOHN Put your head down.

SISTER I don't want to.

JOHN (forcing her head down) It's time for a nap, class. So take a nap!

(She puts her head down on the desk.)

JOHN Put your cheek on your hands.

SISTER Really now!

JOHN Hands flat! Rest your cheek on them! There's only one way to take a nap. My way! (Reluctantly she follows orders.) Very good, young lady.

SISTER (head still down) How long are you going to make me do this?

JOHN No talking, class! If I hear one more peep out of you, you'll all have to go to Confession!

SISTER I'm —

JOHN I said no talking! You're going to make me very angry, young lady.

SISTER I hope this is making you happy.

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- JOHN Is that you still talking, Mary? I'm afraid it's Confession for you! (He pulls up a chair and becomes the priest hearing her confession.) What are your sins now — every single one, from venial to mortal!
- SISTER May I please get up now?
- JOHN Tell us those sins! We like hearing other people's sins!
- SISTER I don't have any to tell.
- JOHN (pouncing) Oh, that sounds like a sin of pride right there! Go on! More! More sins!
- SISTER All right . . . I was too lenient with the students today, Father.
- JOHN Too lenient? (loudly, as if to a class) Does Mary have to go to the lavatory? That's the third time today, class!
- SISTER I didn't embarrass you like that!
- JOHN You and your rules! "Once in the morning, boys and girls. Once in the afternoon!" How do you know how many times people have to pee!
- SISTER I was trying to maintain order in a class of thirty-five. Forgive me, Father!
- JOHN I had a weak bladder and you made me sit there day after day, afraid to ask to use the bathroom!
- SISTER A lot of those children used going to the lavatory as an excuse to leave the room. How did I know you weren't one of them?
- JOHN I was so terrified of you I couldn't even talk to you!
- SISTER Maybe you'd like it better now! The youngsters don't even bother to leave the room to pee! You seem to assume that all children are innocent little angels! They aren't! So I guess my biggest sin, Father, is keeping that classroom of little gangsters from murdering each other!
- JOHN Tell us your real sins! Confess those!
- SISTER Bless me, Father. I have sinned. It's been one week since my last Confession. I had bad breath.
- JOHN Go on!
- SISTER I tried to keep Johnny Rivers from getting anal warts!
- JOHN Go on! Those aren't sins!
- SISTER I had an affair with Father Maloney.
- JOHN (surprised) You did? Really?

Demons

SISTER We used to meet in the basement and do it on the ping-pong table.

JOHN Are you telling the truth?

SISTER Not very pretty, is it? You sure you want to hear all the real sins people commit?

JOHN I want to hear every last one of them!

SISTER All right, enough of this! I'm getting up.

JOHN A rebellion?

SISTER Call it whatever you like.

JOHN If you get up, Sister, you'll be sorry.

SISTER (still sitting) I'm getting up.

JOHN Go ahead and see what happens to you.

SISTER I'm getting up and that's all there is to it. (Slowly she starts to rise, still touching the desk.)

JOHN You stay there till I tell you it's all right to get up!

SISTER Stop this!

JOHN Get back in that seat. Confession isn't over yet.

SISTER I don't want to!

JOHN Get back in that desk!

SISTER (standing) Make me!

JOHN Say that again.

SISTER Make me!

(John holds the ruler aloft as if to hit her, while she continues to defy him. As they glare at each other, it becomes a showdown. Finally he slams the desk with the ruler.)

JOHN I'm not backing down!

SISTER Neither can I. Not now and not then. Don't you understand that now?

JOHN (breaking down, crying) Did you have to be that mean? That mean? . . . How does anybody know for sure what's right and what's wrong? How does anybody know?

SISTER All children really understand is force.

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

JOHN (crumpling) I don't want to turn into what you were! (Moves away, throws down the ruler; his head down.)

SISTER May I leave now?

JOHN Where are you going?

SISTER Back into your memory.

JOHN I don't want you there.

SISTER I'm afraid there's nothing you can do about it . . .

JOHN We'll just see about that!

SISTER (starting to leave) God be with you!

JOHN Don't forget your photograph. I don't want any memories.

SISTER (looking at it) It's a good likeness.

JOHN It's pornographic.

SISTER (closer to the exit) Someone else is waiting to visit you tonight.

JOHN I don't want any more visitors. (Holds his head.)

SISTER It's somebody important to you — and you have no choice.

JOHN Who is it?

SISTER You'll see. . . (near exit) When you need forgiveness for your sins, little Johnny Rivers, you'll come back to the Church (with thunder) — even if it's on your deathbed!

(He starts to answer, his arm extended, but she is gone. He turns to the audience as if to speak, but he doesn't.)

End of Act I

Demons

ACT II

(It is probably best not to have an intermission until after Act II.)

MOTHER (entering, also larger than life, carrying the paraphernalia she'll need) Hello, John!

JOHN Please, Mother, would you mind going back inside my brain.

MOTHER Aren't you glad to see me, darling? (Kisses him.) It's a holiday!

JOHN Are you the Spirit of Christmas Past or Christmas Yet to Come?

MOTHER (Laughs, then abruptly.) What's this I hear about you going homo?

JOHN Did you come to insult me?

MOTHER I came to talk some sense into you. (Offers a treat from pocket or inside her blouse.) Look what I've brought!

JOHN I'm not hungry, Mother.

MOTHER Not hungry for little treats? Only hungry for cheap thrills? Here, have a treat! (Offers it again.)

JOHN I'm on a diet. (Doesn't take it.)

MOTHER Really, John, what are my friends going to say when they hear that my son is a pansy?

JOHN Tell them it's a phase they're going through.

MOTHER Why couldn't you stay married? I didn't have to hide my head from anybody then!

JOHN I don't know how to phrase this precisely, but maybe my reason for existence isn't to please your friends.

MOTHER Sure you don't want a treat?

JOHN No, thank you.

MOTHER Not hungry?

JOHN I am, but . . .

MOTHER Oh, come on! One little treat won't bloat you up! (Holds it out.)

JOHN I'd really rather not.

MOTHER (wiggling the bait) It's liver-flavored!

JOHN (giving in) Well, maybe just one. (As he reaches for it, she moves away.)

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

MOTHER First, however —

JOHN (stumbling as he misses the tidbit) First what?

MOTHER Don't you think you should do something to earn it? (Nibbles.) It's positively scrumptious!

JOHN I'd sort of like to have one now, Mother. . . (Holds out his hand.)

MOTHER Can't you do a little something for me for it?

JOHN (standing on one foot, arms held out for balance) How's this?

MOTHER (Applauds, but not much.) Very good, dear, but I'm not sure that deserves a treat. (She eats one herself.)

JOHN How about this? (Does a cartwheel, not too well.)

MOTHER (Applauds but still not much.) Nice, John! But that's not it!

JOHN What do you have in mind?

MOTHER (reminiscing) Remember that Arlene What's Her Name you took to the Junior Prom? You looked so handsome together! And that day you got married — oh, you were so manly in your tuxedo, dancing with Elaine while we all watched.

JOHN (turning away) I never cared for liver that much anyway.

MOTHER (taking another one and holding it out between her pinched fingers as if to a puppy.) Oh, look! This one's chicken-flavored!

JOHN Do I really have to do this?

MOTHER Of course not, John, darling! Far be it from me to force you into anything! (finding another tidbit) Oh, look! This one's cheese!

JOHN Please put your temptations away.

MOTHER Tell you what! For this cheese one, all you have to do is say you'll think about getting married again!

JOHN Mother, please!

(She hurries over and pops a treat into his mouth like an animal trainer.)

MOTHER There, that wasn't so bad, was it!

JOHN Mother, I don't want to be married anymore.

MOTHER (taking out a cattle prod) Here's something that might help you change your mind.

Demons

- JOHN (afraid) What's that?
- MOTHER (happily) A cattle prod! (following him) This is what we use on stubborn boys!
- JOHN Mother, you wouldn't!
- MOTHER Well, if the little treats won't work, I've got to use something to make you normal!
- JOHN I am normal, Mother.
- MOTHER I think you're just trying to be trendy!(cornering him) You see this? (Pokes the prod at him.) Are you going to shape up or aren't you?
- JOHN Do I have a choice?
- MOTHER (overly sincere, still holding the prod) Oh, John, I only want what's best for you! Here, let me show you, dear. (She gets a big hoop.)
- JOHN What is it?
- MOTHER Don't ask questions, dear. Just jump through it. (She holds it with one hand and the cattle prod with the other. He jumps through.) Excellent! Excellent! Now once again! (He jumps back through it.) Now that wasn't so difficult, was it?
- JOHN (in a small voice) No . . .
- MOTHER You deserve a treat for that! (Pops one into his mouth.) Now once again! (He jumps through.) And again! (He jumps back.) Oh, you're doing so well, John! (He flaps his arms like a trained seal and makes seal noises, mockingly.) Very good, darling! I knew we'd see eye to eye if we only just talked! Now let me put these things away and we can get down to other matters. (Discards the hoop and the cattle prod.)
- JOHN (sneaking away with elaborate steps across the room)
- MOTHER John, where are you going?
- JOHN (ironically) To Hell in a hand basket? Down the primrose path?
- MOTHER I should hope not! Haven't we come to a little understanding?
- JOHN No, Mother, we haven't.
- MOTHER (exasperated and weary) Oh, John, what do I have to do to get you over this queer business? Don't you have any wholesome diversions? What about your photography? Come on now, take my picture! (Gets the Polaroid and tries to make him take it from her.)
- JOHN I don't want to.
- MOTHER Don't pout, dear. Let me stand over here. (Lights up on a large ironing board and iron. Stands on a box, picks up the iron, starts to iron.) Do I look natural this way?

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

JOHN Too natural.

MOTHER My, that sounded sort of unpleasant. And you used to be such a pleasant boy. Well, maybe not pleasant, but at least bearable.

JOHN I guess I'm changing, Mother mine.

MOTHER Do you have anything that needs ironing?

JOHN No.

MOTHER That shirt you have on is wrinkled. You never used to be wrinkled!

JOHN Mother, I may not be straight any longer, but I'm not wrinkled.

MOTHER Give it to me and I'll iron it. (Comes closer.)

JOHN (protectively touching the shirt, as though it's his new life) Don't touch it!

MOTHER Take that off! It'll only take me an hour to do it.

JOHN Mother!

MOTHER God knows I've always hated ironing, but you used to let me iron your shirts and pants and handkerchiefs, and even your socks!

JOHN Well, you don't have to now.

MOTHER Has something changed between us?

JOHN You'll want something for it.

MOTHER That's not a very nice thing to say! Come on now, John! Take that shirt off, and I'll get all those awful wrinkles out! (John resists, but she manages to get the shirt off his back.) Now that's more like it! (Holds it up by the shoulders to see how bad it is.)

JOHN (snatching it back) Give me that! I don't want you to iron it!

MOTHER But I want to do it for you! Please let me!

JOHN No!

MOTHER (grabbing the tail end of the shirt) Give it here! (They have a tug-of-war, with John finally pulling it back.) Now see what you've done! It'll never be the same!

JOHN (putting it back on) I like it this way.

MOTHER Now you're just acting silly. Give me that shirt this instant!

JOHN It's mine! Let me decide what to do with it!

Demons

MOTHER Let me iron your goddamned shirt, you little prick!

JOHN (in disgust he tosses it at her) Goddamn it, there!

MOTHER Don't you swear! Don't you have any respect for your own mother?

JOHN *You* swore!

MOTHER That's different! (Starts to iron.) Oh, this ironing! But what would I do if I didn't stand around ironing all day long? Or washing your clothes. Or making the beds. Or cooking the meals.

JOHN I didn't ask you to do all those things.

MOTHER How do you think you got your belly filled when you were a baby? Who do you think cleaned up your Number One and your Number Two?

JOHN And my Number Three!

MOTHER What's Number Three?

JOHN Don't you remember, Mother? Something really perverse!

MOTHER What a spiteful boy you've become! And I had such pain giving you birth, but what does that matter to you! Go on, make yourself abnormal, John, even if it is only going to make you miserable!

JOHN I'm happy! Can't you see how happy I am? (Makes a silly face.)

MOTHER Who is this man you're doing this for? Are you hiding him here? (She searches in several places.) Where is he? Under the bed?

JOHN There's nobody in particular.

MOTHER You mean you don't even have a lover?

JOHN Not at the moment.

MOTHER How terrible! No lover! Maybe I could understand all this if there were some stability in your life! Somebody you felt you couldn't live without.

JOHN You've seen too many Warner Brothers movies, Mother.

MOTHER You make love sound like it's always awful.

JOHN You make love sound like it's always wonderful.

MOTHER But somebody's got to love somebody! What if I hadn't loved you, or you me?

JOHN You call that love?

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- MOTHER What do you call it then?
- JOHN May I be direct?
- MOTHER I've always encouraged you to be direct.
- JOHN Okay then, I'll tell you what it was — you owned the food supply.
- MOTHER The food supply?
- JOHN (gulping but proceeding) First your breasts. And then the Gerber's baby food — with extra sugar added. Remember those little carrots you used to give me? Yes, you controlled the food supply and I was hungry. So I did what you wanted me to do and said what you wanted me to say. "Da Da! Ma! Ma!"
- MOTHER Is that what you want to reduce it to? This is that homosexual bitterness I've read about!
- JOHN I'm just trying to see it as it really was.
- MOTHER I suppose you would've preferred me to let you starve! No doubt I should have grabbed the little carrots away from your little mouth!
- JOHN I'm not trying to make you feel guilty.
- MOTHER Like hell you're not! I'm sick of kids always blaming us for everything that happened to them. I'm not taking the blame because you're flying homo!
- JOHN You don't seem to understand — "flying homo" isn't something bad. So there's nobody to blame!
- MOTHER (not listening) We did this or we didn't do that! What about all the things you did to me? Who was I? Oh, just some old drudge who does the ironing, don't mind her!
- JOHN Why don't you stop ironing — right now! Don't ever iron again!
- MOTHER Maybe I've done it so long I can't stop. Here! Give me your pants!
- JOHN No!
- MOTHER Come on! Give 'em here. (Tries to take them off him.)
- JOHN Mother! (Blocks his crotch.)
- MOTHER You haven't got anything I haven't seen before! (unzipping him, pulling his pants down) Come on now! I'm going to straighten you out if it's the last thing I do!
- JOHN There comes a time, Mother, when a boy wants to call his body his own!
- MOTHER Give me those legs! (Makes him lie on the floor and extend his legs, then pulls the pants off.) Here they go! Wheee!

Demons

JOHN (shivering) At least give me my shirt to wear!

MOTHER (handing him the shirt) There! What a strange child I raised!

JOHN (putting on the shirt) You didn't raise me to go into burlesque, did you?

MOTHER (ironing the pants) What are you so embarrassed about? I don't suppose you're embarrassed to show it to God knows who else when I'm not around!

JOHN (Runs over and tried to grab the iron away.) Give me that!

MOTHER Stop it! You'll burn me! You'll burn yourself!

(John gets burned.)

JOHN (moving away, waving his burned hand) Oh, damn it!

(Moves around in pain.)

MOTHER I hate to say it, but I told you so.

JOHN (wincing) Oh, god, it hurts!

MOTHER Well, if you had acted your age instead of —

JOHN Don't start on me!

MOTHER I'll start on you and I'll finish on you too!

JOHN (ironically) I wanted to learn for myself, Mother (Winces.) Ouch!

MOTHER Come over here. (Holds out her hand.)

JOHN Why?

MOTHER (Beckons.)

(Slowly he goes over to her.)

MOTHER Let me see it. (Reluctantly he holds out his burned hand.) Want me to kiss it and make it better? (Ashamed of himself for doing so, John acquiesces. She kisses the fingers.) There! Now it's all better.

JOHN (looking at his fingers) No, it's still burned!

MOTHER Maybe next time you'll be more careful!

JOHN There isn't going to be a next time.

MOTHER You aren't planning to exclude me from you life, I hope — not at Christmas! Do you want to be like Scrooge?

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- JOHN Mother — Mom — there comes a time when a person has to go his own way . . .
I thought I did that some years ago.
- MOTHER Kids take and take from you, and then they turn around and say you're trying to
keep them from being themselves. Listen, you can't have it both ways!
- JOHN I don't mean to be snotty about it. Really I don't.
- MOTHER (Forgiving) Well, I don't either. Why don't you take my picture now? (She poses
near the ironing board.)
- JOHN (obviously lying) I'm out of film. (Picks up camera.)
- MOTHER Oh, go ahead and take it!
- JOHN Maybe I don't want it.
- MOTHER What's that supposed to mean?
- JOHN I'm sorry, but sometimes I'd just like to forget you.
- MOTHER I see. Don't you ever imagine I'd like to forget about you too?
- JOHN Why don't you then?
- MOTHER Could it be because I have all these scars on my brain? Whooping cough at two.
Measles at five. A broken arm at eight. At eleven your eye almost poked out with
a stick. Acne — very bad acne — at thirteen. The car crash at seventeen. And
now this crisis!
- JOHN I have some scars on my brain too. Nerves, always nerves! And dizzy spells!
“Don't play so loudly, children. Mother is having one of her dizzy spells!”
- MOTHER Well, I did have dizzy spells! I think I may be having one now!
(She staggers and falls down.)
- JOHN (staring at her prone body) Mostly psychosomatic.
- MOTHER (still lying down) You and your cheap psychology! You don't know the first thing
about the problems I had with my body!
- JOHN I don't mean to be insensitive . . . We're supposed to be so “sensitive,” right?
- MOTHER (getting up) And, John, if you stay queer, I'm going to be worse — a positive
nervous wreck! Do you mind if I smoke (Not waiting for an answer, she lights up
a cigarillo.) At least I'm smoking something different now. It's got low tars and
practically no nicotine. It's made by Jehovah's Witnesses out of sagebrush or
something. It tastes like absolute shit, so it must be good for me! We've got to keep
up with fashion, but we've got to draw the line somewhere, John . . . Sometimes I
wish you could've been born into some other family.

Demons

- JOHN Is that what I felt when I was growing up — that you were doing me a favor by raising me?
- MOTHER Now that isn't what I said. . .
- JOHN I never quite spelled it out before, but you didn't want me, did you?
- MOTHER Of course I wanted you.
- JOHN Me personally, not just any child?
- MOTHER We have to take what we get.
- JOHN What a horrible thought.
- MOTHER Then don't think it. You were always like that — worried that somebody wouldn't like you!
- JOHN All I remember is you saying "You didn't do the dishes right, John!" "You didn't comb your hair either!"
- MOTHER Are mothers supposed to be fan clubs? I praised you sometimes. I criticized you sometimes. You did have some pretty obnoxious habits, actually.
- JOHN What?
- MOTHER I don't want to embarrass you! (to herself, but aloud) Oh, was that ever disgusting!
- JOHN Mother!
- MOTHER Wild horses wouldn't drag it out of me. (Blocks her mouth with her hand.) I never said anything then and I won't say anything now, because I don't want you to have an inferiority complex. But you were always so dreamy! I was always getting your report cards from the Sisters with little notes. "John is a very dreamy boy and we are quite worried about him."
- JOHN Maybe I wasn't dreamy. I was only trying to get away from the nuns, at least in my mind.
- MOTHER Oh, but they were so cute, those nuns! Those little wimples! And you'd see them all sitting in little rows in their station wagon!
- JOHN You didn't see them up close! They weren't cute! They weren't the least bit cute!
- MOTHER Why are you so bitter?
- JOHN I'm trying to work it out so I won't be bitter.
- MOTHER You know what? You look just like you did when you were fourteen? Why can't you stand up straight and tall, like a man?

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

JOHN I'm trying to!

MOTHER Here, let me show you what you look like. (She imitates his shyness and awkwardness, three different ways.) "No, I don't want to try out for the football team." "Gee, I don't want to go on a date with a girl." "Ah, I don't want to be well-adjusted." And you father and I had such high hopes for you!

JOHN Who gave you the right to make me a carbon copy of you and Dad?

MOTHER (surprised) Name one place anywhere in the world where they let children do anything they want! Especially what you want!

JOHN You didn't ask me what I wanted or needed. You just went ahead and pushed what you needed on me!

MOTHER Of course we did! That was our right as parents.

JOHN Maybe you shouldn't have that right.

MOTHER And who's to decide then? What does a five-year-old child know about how he should be raised! We tried to do the right thing!

JOHN Let me be myself, okay?

MOTHER But you won't have any children! Think of the tragedy of it!

JOHN I don't want any children! I don't need any children!

MOTHER The world will die out!

JOHN So many goddamn people are competing with each other now for jobs and space, we all hope the others ones starve to death!

MOTHER Homosexuality caused the fall of . . . something or other. What was it? (remembering.) The fall of the House of Usher!

JOHN More crimes have been committed in the name of the family than in the name of anything else!

MOTHER Oh, I feel a dizzy spell coming! I'm going to faint! (Staggers.) What are people going to say? They'll say I caused it! (Falls to her knees, swaying.)

JOHN No, Mother, you don't understand. Take the credit. "Oh, Mrs. Rivers, your boy is a homosexual! How wonderful and special for you, my dear!"

MOTHER (moaning) Oh, you don't even want to be normal. OHHHHH!!

JOHN Accept it, Mother! It's a reality!

MOTHER (moaning the words) OHHH, please, John! Don't be queer! OHHHH! Maybe I should have tried to talk to you more about sex when you were growing up!

Demons

JOHN A teensy taste? No, much better to entrust my sexual education to a bunch of virgins!

MOTHER I did try to talk with you a few times about sex, but you didn't want to listen. You cut me off when I reached out to you. (She is kneeling, reaching out.)

JOHN (not sure of himself) Did I do that?

MOTHER From your fifteenth birthday on!

JOHN I was just trying to establish my own identity.

MOTHER Cliché! Cliché! Cliché! Oh, I hate this! (Throws away her cigarillo.)

JOHN You made fun of me then too.

MOTHER You're damned right I made fun of you. Do you think I wanted you to be a little twerp! Maybe we should have sent you to military school. Maybe we —

JOHN Mother, go away! (Jumps at her) BOO! BOO! You won't stop trying to make me what you want, will you?

MOTHER Haven't I ever done anything right?

JOHN I'm not saying that. Only you've made being myself so difficult! So difficult!

MOTHER I'm just a mother trying to do the best she can. (softer) Oh, I'm sorry, John! I'm so sorry . . . And I promised myself I wasn't going to cry. (She cries.)

JOHN I can't cry. I can't fight that way. You fight dirty, Mother!

MOTHER (still weeping) I'm just trying to make the right decision for you.

JOHN I know, I know . . . why is life so complicated?

MOTHER Do you forgive me?

JOHN (Doesn't answer.)

MOTHER Say you forgive me . . . and then maybe next week I can have that nice girl from your father's office — that new one — come over for spaghetti dinner, and you could come —

JOHN Mother!

MOTHER What's wrong?

JOHN (swooping her up in his arms, running around with her) How does it feel?

MOTHER Put me down!

JOHN Oh, Mommy doesn't know what's best for her! How would she know!

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- MOTHER John, this is ridiculous. Put me down!
- JOHN But I wuv her. She's my baby-boo! (Snuggles his head next to hers.) She's my very own big baby!
- MOTHER Enough is enough now!
- JOHN But Mommy's being very bad! Very, very bad! (He puts her down. She tries to get away, but he catches her and puts her over his knee.) I'm afraid Mommy's butt needs spanking (Spanks her.) Mommy's been a bad, bad girl and she needs her little butt spanked. (Spanks harder.)
- MOTHER This is sick!
- JOHN Just a little "parent abuse." (Spanks harder.) A little bit of family S&M, that's all!
- MOTHER (getting away, feeling her butt) I never hit you that hard!
- JOHN You're hitting me now, Mother, and you don't know you own strength!
- MOTHER Strong, aren't we, when we're dealing with phantoms.
- JOHN Don't make fun of me, Mother. "It's not nice to make fun of people. Nice mommies don't do things like that."
- MOTHER But I'm not a nice mommy, remember?
- JOHN "A little sass here, hmm? You want me to wash your mouth out with soap? You want me to send you to military school?"
- MOTHER If you had children of your own, John, you'd want them to get married!
- JOHN But I don't have any, do I, Mother, as you've reminded me more than once! "No children? Aren't you virile, John? Why, what's wrong with you, John? Without children you won't have anybody to slap around! You won't have anybody to give orders to! And how will you ever get revenge for all the things your parents did to you if you don't have children of your own!"
- MOTHER That's unfair, John.
- JOHN I decide if I want children. I decide, not you! (grabbing the camera and placing her in an awkward position.) Okay, want me to take your picture now? Like this?
- MOTHER No . . .
- JOHN Earlier you wanted me to!
- MOTHER I'm a mess now.
- JOHN Sorry, it's already finished. (Looks at the picture when it comes out and then tosses it into her lap.) Ugh!

Demons

MOTHER (slowly lifting the photograph, looking at her rumpled image) I need . . . ironing.

JOHN Shall I put you on the ironing board? (Starts to come toward her.)

MOTHER John, this isn't funny anymore!

JOHN (getting the iron) We're just ironing out our problems, aren't we, Mother?

MOTHER Why do you hate me so much?

JOHN No, I'm simply trying to keep you from hating me so much!

MOTHER You don't care anything about me, do you? Nothing at all.

JOHN (frustrated) I come up to you and try to touch you (Moves his hands around the contours of her body, not touching it.) and try to penetrate this shell around you — but I can't get through. I can't even make one single dent!

MOTHER (meaning to hurt him) You know what, John? You make me wish I'd never had you! You were always an effeminate little sissy, did you know that?

JOHN Sometimes I want to . . . hurt you, Mother!

MOTHER (seriously) Maybe I should have killed you when you were a baby.

JOHN Mother!

MOTHER Yes, if I'd known what you were to become I would've aborted you. I guess you were a mistake, a biological mistake.

JOHN I won't let you say these things . . .

(His mother glares at him.)

MOTHER I don't want you near me. I don't want you to have a picture of me. (She tears up the photograph) You've turned into a hateful, perverted man, and I don't care if I ever see you again. Please leave me.

JOHN Please, I can't take this . . .

MOTHER PLEASE LEAVE ME! (He stays, silent.) All right then. I'll leave you!

(She starts to exit, then stops to throw the pieces of the photograph away.)

JOHN MOTHER!

(She doesn't look back, exits. John turns towards the audience in desperation, then collapses, his hands over his eyes.)

Slow Fade
(Intermission)

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

ACT III

(Elaine, John's ex-wife, enters, dressed in a modern "hip" fashion, carrying an oversized gold wedding band large enough to slip over the head.)

(John is still kneeling where he was at the end of Act II.)

ELAINE Hello, John. Gastric distress?

JOHN Hello, Elaine.

ELAINE I came to return your ring. I'd love to keep it, but it was turning color and you know how bad I look in green!

JOHN You can keep it if you like.

ELAINE You paid for it.

JOHN (not taking the ring) Are you all right?

ELAINE Oh, everybody should have a divorce or two — very broadening! Sudden thought — why didn't we have divorce pictures taken — to match our wedding pictures!

JOHN It isn't done in respectable families.

ELAINE Oh, don't be old-fashioned! By the way, how are you getting on in your new life? I came to wish you well.

JOHN You did?

ELAINE Do you think I'm a hard loser? Well, think again!

JOHN Elaine, you don't know how happy that makes me!

ELAINE Just call me the happiness-bringer! Anything else — chocolate cookies, key to the city, endowments? What's the big deal?

JOHN (referring to the earlier visitors) Some people have a hard time with it.

ELAINE It's just boring as far as I'm concerned. So you're gay! So what?

JOHN Do you really feel that way?

ELAINE (yawning) Gay's boring! Real boring! Oh! Your ring! I almost forgot. (Brings it to him.)

JOHN (taking the ring) Thank you.

ELAINE Well, I guess we have nothing else to say to each other, do we, silly old us!

JOHN Do you know something?

Demons

ELAINE What?

JOHN You were the hardest one to tell about myself.

ELAINE Me? Why?

JOHN Because I was closer to you than anybody else in my whole life. Because it would have hurt the most if you had rejected me.

ELAINE Why should I hurt you? I just think it's all incredibly boring.

JOHN I hope I didn't hurt you . . . by leaving you and . . .

ELAINE They say it builds character. (Sharply) Besides, I've recovered!

JOHN (looking at the inscription inside the ring) I did mean this inscription, you know.

ELAINE (reading it) "To Boo-Boo Honey Sweetums, Kissy, Kissy, Kissy" How sweet!

JOHN (reading the real inscription) "To my wife, with all my affection and all my heart."

ELAINE (acting surprised) Is that what it said? Very nice. (Beat) That was a few years ago, though, wasn't it?

JOHN I feel I owe you some explanation about what I've . . . my new life, I mean.

ELAINE Oh, you can spare me the details. (Yawns again.)

JOHN Do you mind if I take a picture of you?

ELAINE For your scrapbook? Of course not! I've always wanted to be scrap!

JOHN You were very important in my life.

ELAINE And you were very important in mine too. Where do you want me to stand? On my head?

JOHN How about with the ring? (Hands it back to her.)

ELAINE Like this? (She puts it around her neck, as though hanging herself.)

JOHN Was our marriage that bad?

ELAINE Just a joke. Can't you take a joke?

JOHN (focusing the camera) Okay, don't move for a second!

ELAINE (moving away) I'd really rather you didn't take my picture.

JOHN What's wrong?

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- ELAINE Nothing's wrong. I don't want you to steal my soul!
- JOHN Come on.
- ELAINE Seriously.
- JOHN You don't want me to have your picture?
- ELAINE What good is it to you? That part of the melodrama is over. No use dwelling on it.
- JOHN You're still angry.
- ELAINE I'm not angry! Why do you say that!
- JOHN I really hope we can remain friends. I want that more than anything.
- ELAINE (mockingly) More than the whole world? The whole universe? Well, why not? Some of my best friends are fageroos! I make a perfect fag hag!
- JOHN I really didn't mean to hurt you.
- ELAINE Who's hurt? (Some hurt is showing.)
- JOHN What's a fageroo?
- ELAINE (with the double meaning) Oh, nothing important!
- JOHN I thought you'd be more understanding.
- ELAINE Hey, what's to understand? I understand — so there! Want me to take your picture? (She puts the wedding band around his neck.) There! The Poor, Mistreated Husband Caught By the Evil Wife and Made to Wear the Bonds of Matrimony!
- JOHN I'm afraid we were both victims.
- ELAINE Oh, aren't we solemn! I thought you were supposed to be 'gay' now! Gay! Gay! Let's all camp it up!
- JOHN There are different ways of being gay.
- ELAINE I know that! All trivial.
- JOHN I'm sorry. I'm not trivial.
- ELAINE You destroyed our marriage for tight Levi's and a T-shirt?
- JOHN You can reduce anything like that if you want to. Why should I have stayed with you — for pin curlers and a noose? (Tugs on the ring around his neck.)
- ELAINE But, honestly, John, to become a fairy! You'd think you'd have more originality.

Demons

- JOHN I'll try to do better next time.
- ELAINE You used me as a cover, didn't you? And, stupid me, I fell in love with you! And yet there was nothing on the other side — nothing coming from you!
- JOHN I'm not proud of what I did. But I thought I was supposed to have a wife, and so I got one. I did care for you.
- ELAINE Fake love — that's what you gave me. Simulated, fake, phony. Why did it take you this long to find "the real you"? Why weren't you brave before you gave me all this pain?
- JOHN I wish I could have been, but I just couldn't do it before. Even now it's not easy.
- ELAINE Let me help you. You are sending out printed announcements, right?
- JOHN Elaine, you don't seem to hear me.
- ELAINE All right, go ahead. I'm listening. Just don't be boring!
- JOHN I've always had homosexual feelings, ever since I was a child, and I'm tired of suppressing them, tired of lying about them. Tired of apologizing. It's true I made a mistake, and unfortunately you had to be part of the mistake, but I couldn't go on making the same mistake for the rest of my life.
- ELAINE You're boring me!
- JOHN It's as though we live in different universes. I don't want to be unfair or unkind or cruel and yet —
- ELAINE And yet I've got to stand up and say, "You're hurting my little gay feelings. I want to hold my proud little head high, just the way any other person does!"
- JOHN I'm boring. I'm trivial. I'm also 'sick.' I'm sinful. I'm antisocial. I'm not a real man. I'm merely fashionable. I'm a mincing ninny! I have terminal dandruff!
- ELAINE See, you're beginning to sound like a faggot already!
- JOHN Would you prefer that I beat you up? Like a Real Man!
- ELAINE A real man can be strong and considerate and still love a woman!
- JOHN Then find one. Get married again.
- ELAINE It's hard to. Everybody's turning queer! Besides, don't you realize how much time and emotion I've invested in you? I'm just supposed to forget our seven years together? Seven years down the old drain! Nothing to show for it but shame that I married a — pardon me, you supply the term!
- JOHN Elaine, you're just trying to get back at me!

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- ELAINE (striking a quick series of poses, perhaps with accessories) Remember this? The girl you wed. Miss Cheerleader. (She does a cheer.) “Hey, hey, what do say! Nobody likes you when you’re gay!” You wanted to be normal, so naturally you married a wholesome type!
- JOHN Elaine!
- ELAINE And remember this? (being a nurse) When you were sick who took care of you? Cleaning up messes for seven years! Taking care of whatever ailed you! But I guess I don’t have that special knack to cure you now, do I?
- JOHN Stop it!
- ELAINE The show’s not over yet! Remember me? The Wife as Intellectual Friend. “Did you know that Emmanuel Kant opposed vaccination because he thought it put men on a level with beasts? You didn’t?”
- JOHN Elaine —
- ELAINE I’m almost done! Hang on, honey! Don’t you recall this? (draped provocatively) The Wife Who Did Provocative Sexual Acts for the Pleasure of Her Mate! But I guess all that twisting and turning just wasn’t enough!
- JOHN It wasn’t you!
- ELAINE Be the fag that you must be! What would a woman do with a fag anyway?
- JOHN Don’t you see how you’re hurting me? You think I’m like some insect.
- ELAINE A ladybug?
- JOHN Stop putting me down!
- ELAINE What, no sense of humor? Why not? A faggot is worth, at best, a joke!
- JOHN I don’t want your snide jokes!
- ELAINE What is the Wronged Wife supposed to do, dear? Applaud? You want me to be ecstatic that you divorced me so you could get fucked up the ass?
- JOHN I won’t make myself ridiculous by answering that.
- ELAINE Such dignity! Are you that dignified when you stick your legs up in the air?
- JOHN You’re the one who’s boring. Goddamn it, I’m not going to take this! (He struggles out of the wedding ring.) Take your goddamn ring and get out of here! (Tries to give it to her.)
- ELAINE You keep the damned thing! I don’t want anything of yours! And I’m not leaving yet!

Demons

JOHN I'm supposed to stand here and take all your abuse? Well, I won't do it!

ELAINE Get away from me! You comic creep!

JOHN It's yours! Take it! (She avoids the ring.)

ELAINE You hate women, don't you?

JOHN That's a lie! Women are fine. I just hate you! Don't you realize what you're doing?

ELAINE (indifferent) What am I doing?

JOHN (pulling himself by the ring around his neck) Oh, look, it's a fag! Let's beat it up! (Tries to move away.) Better yet, let's kill it!

ELAINE Are you finished yet?

JOHN And it lisps too. Did you hear that lisp? (Yanks himself.)

ELAINE I never said you should be beaten up.

JOHN This queer thinks it can talk right up like everybody else. We'll just see about that. (Yanks himself to his knees.) Hey, look at him squatting! He must think he's gonna suck some cock. You wanna suck my cock, cocksucker?

ELAINE They don't do things like that!

JOHN Hey, fellas, all five or six of us, let's make this fairy suck us off and then smash his face in. Five against one — that's the way real men do it! And of course gettin' a blow-job won't be homosexual for us — only for him.

ELAINE I'm not going to listen.

JOHN Of course not! It's boring! Other people's pains are boring! (to himself) Hey, weirdo? How you feelin'. You got feelin's?

ELAINE You're exaggerating!

JOHN (to himself) Why don't you call the police? Oh yes, the police love homosexuals! And if the police don't help, why then call out the Marines!

ELAINE If you don't like it here, then go away. Find some faggot country. Know any?

JOHN Oh, how clever! Must be a queer — they're always so clever. So terribly, terribly witty as they're carted off to prison.

ELAINE Spare me the harangue, please! Nobody puts you in prison for something you don't deserve!

JOHN Left-wing, right-wing, you name it. They can't agree on anything except they all hate the homos!

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

ELAINE Maybe they have a right to hate you. What good are you?

JOHN (pulling himself around) Hey, look at the worthless sickie. Hang it up and hit it with a stickie!

ELAINE Such self-pity — how disgusting!

JOHN (furious) Come here, you! (Goes after her, puts the ring around her neck.) How does it feel? (Pulls her.)

ELAINE I've had enough of this. Let me go!

JOHN Oh, the queer's dissatisfied. Why you ungrateful wretch! How dare you not be completely satisfied with the way things are! (Pulls her.)

ELAINE Oh, stop. Please!

JOHN Oh, look, it whines! God, I despise whining! Come on, march! (Makes her march around in a circle.) That's right! March! March! We'll make a man of you if it kills you!

ELAINE I don't want to march.

JOHN Come on, you boring, queer good-for-nothing! March! March! March! (Marches her until she's tired.) (suddenly) Okay, faggot, now you can fix my hair!

ELAINE Stop this. Stop it!

JOHN Had enough? I haven't. Sit up and beg!

ELAINE I don't want to.

JOHN Don't want to? Who the fuck are you? You're nothing but a goddamned dog!

ELAINE Women have been treated like dogs too!

JOHN Oh, no you don't! One minority at a time! (Takes the ring off her neck and throws it.) Fetch!

ELAINE You aren't serious.

JOHN You're a dog, faggot. When are you gonna realize it? Fetch!

ELAINE I'm not into this scene. I won't do it!

JOHN Yes, you will! FETCH!

(We see the struggle of wills between them.)

ELAINE Please, John . . .

Demons

JOHN FETCH, FAGGOT!

ELAINE (wearily) Will you let me go if I do?

JOHN We'll see.

(She goes over and picks up the ring and brings it back in her mouth.)

JOHN Good faggot doggie! (Throws the ring away as though he didn't want it anyway.)
Now say something witty!

ELAINE Can I get up now?

JOHN I can't hear you. Dogs don't talk! Don't you know that goddamn dogs don't open their mouths — unless it's to bark! Go ahead, faggot! Bark. Just once. I dare you. Come on, little doggie, woof, woof! Well, well, the little pooch is afraid to bark. And of course nice doggies don't bite. Nice doggie! Nice doggie! (Holding his hand in front of her mouth.) Come on, you fucking faggot, bite me! Bite me, I dare you! (Elaine collapses, slumps.) (breaking the scene) Are you all right?

(No answer.)

Elaine?

ELAINE It's all right.

JOHN Do you see why I did it? Do you understand now? Do you?

ELAINE Would you help me up?

JOHN (helping her) Are you hurt?

ELAINE Just my knee a little bit.

JOHN Let me look at it.

ELAINE It'll be fine.

JOHN Let me look at it. (He touches her knee.) Does that hurt?

ELAINE Yes.

JOHN I'm sorry. But I just couldn't let you tell me my whole life — everything I've been through — is boring to you! . . . Can I get you something? Some water?

ELAINE (after a pause) Would you . . . hold me for a minute?

JOHN . . . Of course. (Takes her in his arms.) Better?

ELAINE (Shakes her head yes.) It does.

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

- JOHN Yes, it does.
- ELAINE Remember how it used to be?
- JOHN We had some good times together.
- ELAINE Remember that Halloween party — those cupcakes with the black icing!
- JOHN And we danced for hours afterward.
- ELAINE Don't you ever miss me?
- JOHN It wasn't personal, Elaine. That's not why I left you. I didn't mean to reject you, to reject anybody. Only to accept. To accept!
- ELAINE Hold me tighter.
- JOHN There! (Hugs her hard.)
- ELAINE Strange as it may seem, I still love you.
- JOHN I still love you too. But now I'm going in a different direction. Not higher or lower, just in a different direction.
- ELAINE (softly) I can't hold you, can I? I have to force you to hold me . . . Why do I feel so . . . insulted?
- JOHN You shouldn't. . . You'll marry again.
- ELAINE I don't want to be the horrible wife who can't let go, the "widow" who doesn't know when her husband's dead, and yet I keep thinking there's something inside me that's at fault, that if I just do one more thing just so, then I'll change you back. Not really because I love you all that much — I think it's the challenge. No, it's even deeper than that. I feel . . . I feel as though you have wounded me in the very core of myself. And that throbs and throbs like a vicious, black bruise. Oh, I can listen to you from now till next Christmas or live through a fag-bashing, and yet nothing's going to change, nothing at all. I understand you as a human being. I understand your words. I can probably repeat word for word everything you've told me, because I do "understand" what you're trying to tell me. I do understand it, but only with my mind . . . only with my mind.
- JOHN In time people will accept it, they will.
- ELAINE Did you hear the one about the two queers on the bus?
- JOHN (quietly) Yes, I heard that one.
- ELAINE It's pretty funny.
- JOHN (softly) A riot.

Demons

ELAINE Know what I remember most about our marriage? The quiet moments, like this. They were nice.

JOHN They were beautiful. . .

ELAINE Yes, beautiful . . . Well, I guess I'd better go back into your memory, hadn't I?

(She plays with the wedding ring, not wanting to leave.)

JOHN We can still be friends, can't we?

ELAINE (with a brave, little smile) Thanks a lot, she said, with a brave little smile.

JOHN Where are you living now?

ELAINE Oh, I have an apartment. Nothing much. Still taking lots of photographs?

JOHN Yes.

ELAINE Would you mind taking a picture of me after all?

JOHN Of course not.

ELAINE Where should I stand? Here? (Assumes a pose.)

JOHN (getting the camera) That's perfect.

(He snaps the picture. They are quiet, awkward while the picture appears and develops.)

ELAINE How is it, breath-taking?

JOHN It's quite nice. Here, look!

ELAINE (moving away) No, I don't want to see it. I never take a good picture.

JOHN It's really very nice. Here, take it . . .

ELAINE (turning back to him) Do you want to keep it? (She is hesitant, afraid he'll say no.)

JOHN (touched, looking at the picture, then at her) Of course I'll keep it . . . (He kisses the photograph.)

ELAINE Thank you for that.

JOHN My pleasure.

ELAINE Well, I guess we've used up all the things we have to say to each other, haven't we?

JOHN What would you like to say? I'm in no hurry.

ELAINE (as a little joke) I still think you're a fageroo.

Collected Plays of Daniel Curzon

JOHN (softly and ironically) Former cheerleader.

ELAINE (softly, ironically) Queer.

JOHN Housewife.

ELAINE Pervert.

JOHN I thought we'd come to an understanding.

ELAINE Oh, John, why? Why? We should have lasted forever.

JOHN That would've been expecting too much.

ELAINE (resigned) Maybe so . . . (She takes a step or two away, her back to him.) Bye . . .

JOHN Bye, Elaine.

ELAINE Would you mind turning around?

JOHN Turning around?

ELAINE I'm not going to stab you in the back or anything. I don't want you to see me leave.

JOHN Elaine —

ELAINE Please!

(He looks at her, finding it difficult to speak, then turns his back.)

(She runs over and kisses the back of his neck and then runs off. He touches the spot that she kissed and keeps his hand there, turning to find her gone.)

JOHN (picking up the telephone, as at the beginning of the play) Hello, God? This is John Rivers. I'm fine, thank you. And yourself? Glad to hear it. It's been quite a Christmas Eve! How's the New Year shaping up? . . . Hello? Hello? (clicking) Hello?

Blackout.
The End