

(A local Rotary Club dinner. JOHN, 80, the guest of honor, moves slowly downstage, using a walker.)

JOHN

Thank you for inviting me here. My daughter thought that I would make a good speaker—course she's wrong. You don't have to invite her back. I guess what she wanted me to do was tell y'all a story. I used to tell her a lot of stories when she was real small, which is why she's got in her head that I could stand up in front of a group of 200 people and tell this one. At one point in time I was going to write this down, but I find I can remember it all right. I thank God that I still have my memory. Don't jump as high I used to, but...

(he looks off to the side.)

Yes I know dear I'm rambling. I do that. I'm eighty years old. This is the risk you took by bringing me up here.

(he gathers himself and looks back at the audience.)

I figure you've heard a lot of war stories. This one's mine.

(JOHN sets his walker aside as the lights change.)

(Darkness. Flashes of light. Distant explosions. The noises become more and more distant as the lights slowly rise on a broken road in the ruins of Charlemont, an old village in northeastern France. Snow flutters. JOHN, 18, an American soldier, stands alone, shivering. Two small CHILDREN run out, chasing one another. They are quite thin and dressed in ill-fitting, ragged, heavy coats.)

CHILD #1 *(in French, referring to a marble)*

<Give it back!>

CHILD #2 *(in French)*

<You shouldn't have dropped it! You obviously didn't want it!>

CHILD #1 *(in French)*

<You grabbed it out of my hand!>

CHILD #2 *(in French)*

<If you wanted it, you would have held on to it harder!>

(They stop as they spot JOHN. They stop shouting at each other. CHILD #2 head off quickly. CHILD #1 remains, watching. JOHN smiles at her, then settles against a wall with a pen and paper.)

JOHN

Dear Mom,

Merry Christmas.

(Pause.)

I'm sure it'll be past Christmas by the time you get this but... I just wanted to let you know that I am fine. It seems like all the action's been just ahead of me, everywhere I've gone. I guess that's a good thing. I'm the youngest one in my company, and they've all seen battle; our sergeant even made it through Normandy. He was a little gruff when I met him—

(GEORGE appears.)

GEORGE

What's your name?

JOHN

John Tsavakis, sir.

GEORGE

You ready to fight and die for your country, John?

JOHN

Yes, sir.

GEORGE

Have any idea what that means?

JOHN

Guess I'll find out sir.

GEORGE

Reckon you will.

(lights fade on him.)

JOHN *(the letter again)*

But the other guys are great. I guess I should tell you where we are—I can't get too specific, but we're in a little French village just west of the German border. It must have been beautiful once.

(LAURA, a young widow, enters and grabs CHILD #2 by the scruff of the neck and escorts her out.)

There are some pretty nice things about it though. We're supposed to stay put for a few days, which is fine with me. At least I'll have Christmas some place nice. Don't worry about me, okay? I'm going to be fine. If you have a chance, send me some socks. Thick ones, because it's cold. Say hi to Jenny for me, and tell her her brother's going to be home soon. And Merry Christmas. Oh, and one more thing—

KAPPA

You always talk to yourself while you're writing a letter?

(JOHN quickly puts away the letter and sees KAPPA, a big young soldier leaning against a wall.)

JOHN

You always sneak up on people?

KAPPA

When they aren't paying attention. Who you writing to?

JOHN

My Mom.

KAPPA

That's sweet. Most guys write home to their sweethearts, but you got your Mommy. That's nice. Real mature. Nazis respect that.

JOHN

Well—

KAPPA

I ain't telling nobody. We'll keep it a secret, all right? Can you put in there that Kappa sends kisses? Damn it's cold out here.

JOHN

Yeah.

KAPPA

I got icicles in my underwear.

JOHN

I'm not melting them for you.

(KAPPA starts shaking around, trying to get the icicles out.)

KAPPA

I don't know why we gotta guard this dump. Georgie sends us out here to watch the road while he's cozied up in the mayor's office. Nothing's coming down this road, let me tell ya. The Krauts got their tails kicked ten miles south of here and they ain't coming back.

JOHN

I don't mind it here.

KAPPA

Yeah you don't mind it, no one's shooting at ya.

JOHN

What time is it?

(KAPPA checks his watch.)

KAPPA

Five after seven.

JOHN

Well I'm done.

KAPPA

You're not gonna stay out here with me?

JOHN

It's cold.

KAPPA

Come on Johnny, stick around. Keep me company. We'll talk about girls back home.

JOHN

I don't have a girl back home.

KAPPA

Yes, but there were girls where you were from, right? You didn't grow up in some kinda compound, didja?

JOHN

No.

KAPPA

We'll talk about your Mom, then. She got a nice rack?

JOHN

Shut up.

KAPPA

You learn that from those philosophy books you been reading? We'll talk about my girl then.

JOHN

Does she have a nice rack?

KAPPA

Hell yes she does! But her sister's got a nicer one!

(he laughs at his own joke and takes out cigarettes.)

You want one?

JOHN

I don't smoke.

KAPPA

You haven't been here long enough.

JOHN

I hear they're bad for you.

KAPPA

So are bullets.

(He lights one.)

Where are you from anyway, Johnny?

JOHN

Cleveland.

KAPPA

Cleveland. Land of the cleves. Everyone in Cleveland like you?

JOHN

No.

KAPPA

Must be a fun place then. I'm just kidding ya, kid. Don't take it personal. I kid everybody. When we were at Rouen, we're getting shot to pieces, and I call over to Georgie and I says, "Georgie, get down!" and he looks at me and says, "that's Sergeant to you!", so I says, "Sergeant! Get your dumb ass down!" Course he didn't get shot that day.

JOHN

Does he get shot a lot?

KAPPA

Every damn fight we're in he gets shot. I don't know how he's still walking around. But you'll see. Stick around. You'll get shot too. It's fun. Nah, I'm kidding ya. You won't get shot. You're our good luck charm. Ever since you got here the most fight we've seen has been three crows trying to get a nut from a squirrel. I like you, John. You know that? We had this kid in school, smartest kid in the school, he was a lot like you.

JOHN

Thanks.

KAPPA

I figure you're too smart to die here. That's why I'm standing next to you. Everywhere we go, you move, I move, 'hey, who's that dumb idiot standing right behind me, oh, that's Kappa.'

JOHN

Well I'm too smart to stand out here in the cold. You have fun.
(JOHN starts to leave.)

KAPPA

That hurts. That hurts. Hey—what do you want for Christmas?

JOHN

Peace.

KAPPA

Seriously.

JOHN

Socks. Maybe a scarf.

KAPPA

Me too.

(JOHN starts to leave.)
Maybe a bottle of rum. You drink rum?

JOHN

No.

KAPPA

You got a lot to learn, smart boy!
(KAPPA goes back to watching the distance, smoking his cigarette.)

(If you would like to read this rest of this play, please e-mail me at don@donzolidis.com and note your name, where you are located, and what school you are affiliated with. I will send you a script for free, but rights are \$35 per performance.)