

# Waiting for John

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## Waiting for John

### Cast:

**Fred.** Father of John, husband to Edith

**Edith.** John's mum

**Nurse.** Fred's nurse, Male or female, any appropriate age.

### Premise:

The play uses 3 characters, the 2 central to the story, and a third part written in to allow for one-act competition compliance (the nurse). This character can easily be written out if you wish to have a two-hander. The nurse can be male or female, any appropriate age.

Each of the 2 main characters occupies one side of the stage, completely independent of the other. They never acknowledge each other. The two scenes are not related. However, at times in the play, their dialogue does interact, as if they are recalling conversations they had. They also at times interact almost physically, when the characters face each other and perform tasks, independent of each other and without acknowledgment.

The audience will realise, towards the end of the act, that the man, Fred, has lost his mind. He is waiting for his son John to come home, as he does every day. The audience will not know (and it is only disclosed towards the end) that his son John is in fact dead.

The man's wife Edith, on the other hand, is now alone – she has lost her son and husband. She was responsible for having Fred committed, and cannot forgive herself.

The set is quite simple; no walls or doors, except for a shelf which splits the stage centrally into two parts left and right, and which can be accessed by either character. The shelf is otherwise see-through and must be designed in such a way that it does not affect the audience's concentration or view. Each character has a chair (Edith's is a rocking chair). Fred has a trunk containing toys or mementos of his son. Each side has a tea-making facility with kettle/cups/etc., and a small side-table. Each side table has a framed photograph of John, placed so that the audience can see. In the picture John is a young man/teenager.

When the curtain rises each character is sitting quietly in their chair. Edith's side of the stage is in darkness, Fred's is lit. Fred has a stick and a pen knife, he is whittling. During the first part of this scene Edith does not move, and her lighting remains off.

*(Fred sits quietly for a few moments, whittling away. He puts the stick and the knife on the table and rises slowly. Moves forward and peers 'out' over the audience. He is looking for something. Waiting for someone.)*

**Fred:** My son! My son John comes home today! At last, he is on his way! I will wait here for him, he will be expecting me to be here. *(He pauses, thinking)*

He'll come by train most likely. Not by car. No, he hates cars. Yes, train, and then he'll walk up from the station. He's a big, strong lad, is John. He'll walk up with his suitcase, right up the road, strong as you like. Dressed smart as usual. I'll see him from here, for sure. *(He pauses a few moments)*. I would have fetched him, only I don't know what time the train gets in. And anyway, Edith doesn't like it when I drive. "It's dangerous, Fred."

*(Fred looks at his watch)*

It's early yet. Not even eight. I'll have time for tea, maybe breakfast. And Edith will be wanting her coffee. She loves her coffee in the morning.

*(He moves stage left to his tea stuff and starts preparing tea and coffee. While he does this, the light come up slowly on Edith, and we see her rocking gently in her chair)*

**Edith.** It's early yet. Fred will be making coffee. A good man, Fred. Always made me coffee, first thing every day. Coffee, and a cup of tea for him. A good man, always treated me well. And John. He loved that boy. I remember well how they used to sit, every morning, making tea. And they'd talk. Just the two of them. Oblivious to the rest of the world. How they loved that time together.

**Fred.** Well I won't make John's tea just yet, of course. I'll surprise him with a nice cup when he gets here. Just a cup for me then, and a mug of coffee for Edith. Then I'll wait.

**Edith.** That was before, of course. Before John .... Before he left us. I remember that.

**Fred.** We used to drink tea together, you know. Every day, John and me. Before. Before he went away. *(He sits in his chair)* What did he say just before he left? Ah, I remember; "Dad, keep a cup warm for me. I'll be back soon enough". That's right my boy, a fresh cup of tea for you when you get back. I can't wait! It will be so exciting to see him again! My boy. Big, strong lad, he is. He'll be here today, you'll see. Then it'll be just like it was before. John and me with our tea, chatting about things. Edith and her coffee. "Take this to your Mum", I would say to him. "The coffee, take it to your Mum. Then come and join me here." "MUM," he would shout, "I'm bringing your coffee!"

**Edith.** Then John would call me. "MUM! Your coffee". Always brought me my coffee. He was a good boy that. Coffee in bed every morning. How spoilt! *(Gets up and moves stage centre where she has a coffee cup on the shelf. She picks it up and moves stage C)*

**Fred.** He's a good boy that. My John. Polite too. You ask Mrs. Brown next door. Ask her, she always said it. "Your John's such a good boy. So polite. He's a credit to you, Fred, a credit." *(He pauses)* She'll be out and about soon enough. Busy-body, Mrs. Brown. Up and down the street, knows everyone's business. A good stick, though. Her heart's in the right place, even if her nose isn't. She'll be out. I'll see her, too, from here.

**Edith.** We taught him well. Remembered his manners, too. All the time. Even Mrs. Brown next door said so. Old busy-body. And her son Ronald. Nothing but trouble, that one.

**Fred.** She'll be off soon. Off to see Ronald. Every week this time, off she goes. *(He grunts)*. Nothing but trouble that one. "Keep away from him, my boy", I told John. I told him that. "Keep away from young Ronald. He's nothing but trouble, that one." *(He leans forward, opens the trunk and pulls out a wooden train.)* He broke this, Ronald did. Bloody broke it in two! On purpose, mind you, not by accident. Deliberate like. I fixed it, of course. Gave it a new coat of paint, too.

**Edith.** I remember when he broke John's train. On purpose. Just broke it. My Fred threw a fit I can tell you! *(She laughs)* Ha! Almost burst a blood vessel. Calmed down though. John told him. John said "It's OK Dad, we can fix that". He was like that, you know, always the peace-maker.

**Fred.** I nearly burst a vessel, I was so cross. Still, John said I must calm down, it would be OK. He is like that you know. A good boy, my John. Not like that Ronald, I can tell you.

**Edith.** I never said anything about the train, you know. To Mrs. Brown. Or to Ronald either. Fred fixed it up, gave it a new coat of paint. He told John to stay away from Ronald. "You keep away from him, boy", he said. "He's nothing but trouble." He was right, you know. Look at what happened to him. Old Mrs. Brown never accepted it though. Still thinks her Ron is innocent. Fred told me one day...

**Fred.** That Ronald! A bad sort, got himself into big trouble, like I knew he would. I knew he would! Always said it, didn't I? "Edith", I said. "He'll end up in jail, he will. Or dead".

**Edith.** Fred told me. *(Shakes her head)*. You may be right Fred, but let's not wish bad luck on other people then. And when it happened, well, we just knew, didn't we? A long time coming, it was.

**Fred.** I knew he would end up in trouble. Anyway, water under the bridge. And now John's coming home. Today! *(He gets up and move front-stage. He 'sees' Mrs. Brown.)* There she is! *(Calls and waves to her)* Mrs. Brown! Hello! You're off then? To see young Ron? *(He waits a moment. Mrs. Brown is talking)* I'm just waiting here for John, Mrs. Brown. He's coming home today! I'll see him from here, he'll come walking up from the station no doubt. *(He waits a moment)* You said that before, Mrs. Brown. You're wrong, I know my John. He's due back today. I'll wait for him here.

*(He moves to the trunk and replaces the train during Edith's line).*

**Edith.** *(Moves back towards her chair; pauses at the table to pick up the photograph)*. And now she goes every week to see him, you know. Every week. She doesn't care about John though. It's all about her Ron. *(She strokes the picture.)* Beautiful boy my John was. Inside and out. This was taken ... about a week, maybe, before he went away.

**Fred.** (*Picks up the photograph*). He'll have changed a bit though, from when this was taken, what, about 3 years ago. It was our holiday at the sea, I remember. (*He walks towards the shelf stage centre, as does EDITH.*) Look at him, a picture of him as a lad at the sea. I remember that day well. (*He is now standing before the shelf, looking at the picture, as is Edith*).

**Edith.** We went to the sea once. Before. Before he went away. I remember it so well, it was a beautiful time. Fred took some photos. He had one framed, you know. A picture of John at the beach. A beautiful picture.

**Fred.** (*He and Edith slowly put the pictures on the shelf*). I took this picture. Had it framed. Beautiful. (*The both sigh, together, and turn towards audience*)

**Edith.** (*Moving forward*). How we laughed that day! Almost as if we had no cares in the world. All light and happiness.

**Fred.** We were happy that day. No worries about anything. Edith and I danced on the beach. We were always dancing, we were. How my John laughed! (*He smiles and starts waltzing around, humming to himself*)

**Edith.** We danced on the sand. How funny that was! (*She starts waltzing around. They both laugh and then stop*).

**Fred.** (*Edith sits quietly. Fred sits in his chair, leans forward and opens the trunk again*). All of these things. All John's. I am keeping them, you see. For when he comes back. He'll be back later, I know, and he'll be asking after his stuff. (*He rummages through the things and draws out a soccer ball.*) There you are! Look! John's ball! What a sportsman he is. Big and strong, my John. Loves his football. Cricket too, I remember.

**Edith.** Fred kept all his things you know. Every damned thing. Even his clothes. His damn toys! Wouldn't get rid of them. Every bloody thing they ever made together. All of it.

**Fred.** She'd go on at me, your Mum. About your stuff. She didn't mean it, mind you. Her heart was in the right place. She just didn't think you'd be needing it again.

**Edith.** Ever since the day John left us. Hoarded it all, in the trunk.

**Fred.** Wouldn't be right to throw this all out, Edith. This is John's stuff. He'll be wanting it back.

**Edith.** How he got it all in there I'll never know.

**Fred.** A lot of stuff for one small trunk! He'll be missing all of this about now. Edith wanted me to get rid of it. Throw it away?? No!

**Edith.** Come on Fred, he'll not be needing that where he is. It's cluttering up the place.

**Fred.** No!

**Edith.** You vex me, Fred. That's what you do, you vex me.

**Fred.** She said I vexed her. Frustrated her. What couldn't she understand? I knew he was going to come back any day, and he'd want his stuff.

**Edith.** He just wouldn't accept it. I couldn't handle it any more.

**Fred.** It seemed to me like Edith just forgot about him, soon as he went away. Out of sight, out of mind! *(He rises and moves forward, angry.)* Damn you, woman! That's our boy you're talking about!

**Edith.** He used to make me scream! *(She rises and moves forward, angry.)* Damn him! He just couldn't let go!

**Fred.** I couldn't just let go! What would John think if he came back and all his stuff was gone? No, damn you, no!

**Edith.** Please Fred! Please! Let go now, he's gone! Gone! *(She starts sobbing.)*  
Gone, and you too Fred, I am losing you too!

**Fred.** No! No, Edith. *(He quietens down, moved back to his chair, sits.)* He's my boy, and I will wait for him. Come. Come now, let's wait together.

**Edith.** Please! *(She quietens down.)* I don't understand you, Fred.

**Fred.** Maybe you don't understand, Edith. Maybe you just don't love him like I do. Maybe you don't love us anymore.

**Edith.** No, Fred, please! *(She sinks to her knees.)* Please, I can't do this now. *(Sobbing again)*

**Fred.** You know, Edith did cry when he went away. My, how she cried! *(Stands)* Come now, Edith, come my love. It's OK, he'll be back soon enough love. He's almost a grown man, Edith, he'll be alright!

**Edith.** No, no Fred. He won't come back. Please! He won't come back!