

REBIRTH

DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE #: 3

WRITER #: 36

INT - JOHN'S STUDY - LATE NIGHT

JOHN sits quietly on a love seat in his study, reading a newspaper. He is preoccupied and listening. A very faint sound of breaking glass is heard. He sets the newspaper down over the crack between the seats and crosses one leg over another. Then JOHN settles back to wait.

INT - HALLWAY IN JOHN'S HOME - LATE NIGHT

FRED, a small man dressed in black, walks quietly down a hallway toward the study. Before FRED enters, he crosses himself, draws a gun, and reaches for the knob.

INT - JOHN'S STUDY - LATE NIGHT

JOHN watches the door. When he sees the knob slowly turning, he calls out quietly.

JOHN

Come in, Freddy. The door's open.

The startled FRED opens the door swiftly, training the gun on JOHN. He looks swiftly around the room before closing the door. He is puzzled.

FRED

You were waiting for me?

JOHN

From the moment the first service was broadcast. Wasn't sure though. It's been a lot of years, Freddy.

FRED

The witness protection program did a good job burying you ... until you splashed your face all over the tube. I wasn't talking about those years. You were waiting for me just now. How did you know?

JOHN

(Smiles wryly) I paid a detective to watch and let me know when you headed this way. You've been on camera since you got here.

JOHN gestures toward the computer on his desk, by way of explanation. FRED moves swiftly to a corner of the room, gun still trained on JOHN.

FRED
This a trap, Johnny?

JOHN
Hardly! Just wanted to know when you were coming. I needed to prepare myself. (Motions to the desk) Have a seat, Fred.

FRED cautiously moves to the desk. He closes the drapes at the sliding door before taking a seat. He sets his gun on the desk, right beside his hand.

FRED
I'm sorry Johnny. I've got to go through with this.

JOHN
(Mildly) Why is that?

FRED
(Bitter) After your testimony put Dad in the pen, he got pneumonia. They didn't treat him till it was too late. You know the last thing he said to me?

JOHN raises his eyebrows, waiting

FRED
He made me promise I'd kill the rat that did it to him.

JOHN
He did it to himself, Freddy. I begged him not to make the deal. I promised I'd testify if he went through with it. He did it anyway. I keep my word.

FRED
Oh Johnny! That part I understand. A promise is a promise. But I gave

Dad mine. And I have to keep it.
It's the way we were raised. I
keep my word too.

JOHN

(Reaches to pick up the newspaper)
I'm counting on it! That's why I
waited for you.

FRED

(Incredulous) You want me to
believe you planned this?

JOHN smoothly drops his hand below the paper, in between
the seat cushions. He brings up a pistol with a silencer
attached. FRED freezes, glancing sideways at the pistol on
the desk. JOHN shakes his head.

JOHN

Don't even think about it, Freddy.
There'll be a hole between your
eyes before you touch the grip.

FRED

(Sweating) I know how you shoot!

INT - HALLWAY IN JOHN'S HOME - LATE NIGHT

A little hand reaches up to the knob of the study.
CHRISTOPHER rubs his eyes as he pushes open the door.

CHRISTOPHER

Daddy? Who's here?

JOHN slides the gun he holds below the newspaper on his
lap. He is watching FRED coldly, very tense.

JOHN

This is a friend of Daddy's,
Christo. Say hello to Fred, then
get yourself back to bed. Okay?

FRED

Call me Uncle Fred, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER smiles shyly, then goes straight to FRED. He reaches up for a hug. JOHN partially rises. He is gripping the gun below the paper hard.

CHRISTOPHER

Nice to meet you, Uncle Fred. Good night!

As the boy disengages and turns to leave the study, FRED touches his hair sadly and lightly.

FRED

Good night, little one.

Both men sit quietly until the boy leaves the study, pushing the door shut behind him.

FRED

(Sullenly) Relax, Johnny. I don't hurt children. Or use them as shields. That boy looks like my youngest did. But what now?

JOHN

Now you make me a promise. That you'll never do anything to hurt my wife or children. I'm asking for your word.

FRED

Let me guess. Then you'll just let me walk away?

JOHN

Not exactly! First, your word?

FRED

(Sighs) I give you my word I'll never hurt your family. Now what?

John stands and crosses to the desk. He extends the silenced pistol toward FRED, who flinches. Then he reverses it, offering it butt first to the man behind the desk.

JOHN

If you decide to shoot me, use this. Don't wake up my family.

JOHN walks to the sliding glass door and stands looking outside. A shaken FRED also rises. He leaves both guns on the desk.

FRED

Johnny? What's happened to you?
You've always been my hero.
Anything new we tried, you always
went first. Then you showed me
how. But now you seem like a total
stranger to me.

JOHN

(Dreamily) You hear stories about
actors who get lost in their
roles. They can't find their way
out. In a way, that's me.

INT - CHURCH - MORNING

JOHN sits in a church pew, reading a Bible. The church is empty. The morning sun illuminates the scene, colored by stained glass. JOHN'S voice continues.

JOHN (V.O.)

So many identities, so many moves.
With this one, I was supposed to
be a retired preacher. How's that
for a stretch? But I attended
church to make it believable.

FRED (V.O.)

(Sarcastic) You found God?

JOHN (V.O.)

Not really! He found me in
the form of a pastoral search
committee. Ours was retiring. I
almost choked when they offered me
the job. I would've refused, but
my control ordered me to take it.

FRED (V.O.)

Were you nuts? You're no preacher.

JOHN (V.O.)

(Sighs) Tell me about it. I had two weeks to get ready. I've never been so frightened. I started cramming. I read the Bible four times that first week. I went to the church and started praying. And praying! I needed to learn how to at least fake it.

In the church, John goes to the altar and begins to pray.

JOHN (V.O.)
 God keeps His Word too, Freddy.
 That promise in 2 Corinthians
 5:17? All that exposure to God
 started changing me, a piece at a
 time.

FRED (V.O.)
 You're creeping me out, Johnny.

As the voice continues, we see Pastor JOHN visiting the sick, laying hands on them to pray.

JOHN (V.O.)
 Me too, Freddy! Me too.

In the church, JOHN pantomimes preaching. A man comes to the front. The INTRUDER begins yelling in pantomime and shaking his fist at JOHN.

JOHN (V.O.)
 (Dreamy) I'll never forget the day
 a parishioner's husband showed up
 mad. He accused me of trying to
 turn his wife against him. Then he
 slapped me in the face. In front
 of the whole church.

The force of the INTRUDER's blow rocks JOHN backwards.

INT - JOHN'S STUDY - LATE NIGHT

FRED winces, staring at JOHN. JOHN stares out the door.

FRED
 How bad did you hurt him?

JOHN

(Dreamy) I didn't. I felt so sorry for him. How confused and hurt he had to be to do something like that. I hugged him and prayed for him and his marriage.

FRED backs slowly up to the desk again. He is shaking his head. He is whispering.

FRED

What have you become?

JOHN turns to him, equally bewildered.

JOHN

I don't know. My congregation was sure I was the holiest man alive. I just felt ashamed. Their love and respect embarrass me. They don't know me. I told God to find someone else to pastor these good people. Someone better! Instead, he sent me a dream.

INT - AN OLD BALLROOM - SUNRISE

It's a masquerade ball, but no one's really laughing. Inside the flickering candles cast a dim light on figures twirling in dark cloaks and costumes. The music is discordant. The masks on their faces are hideous caricatures of smiles. One dancer pulls away from the group, shaking his head. It's JOHN in disguise. A LADY follows him out of the crowd.

LADY

Hey baby. You're missing the fun.

JOHN

I'm really tired and this isn't really fun. Wonder what would happen if we turned on the lights?

LADY

(Draws back) Don't be a kill joy. No one's perfect. We like it dark.

(She laughs. It sounds manic) The darker the better.

JOHN

(Stumbles toward the door) I need to get some air.

LADY

(Turning back to the dance) Suit yourself. I'm gonna keep dancing. It only gets sad when you stop. You'll see. You'll be back.

JOHN stumbles out on the porch. The sun is just rising. JOHN cries aloud and falls to his knees. He is pulling at his mask, trying to get it off.

JOHN

Someone! Get this thing off me!

A shaft of sunlight hits him. The string on the mask breaks and it falls away. The clasp on the black cloak does likewise. It falls away to reveal JOHN, kneeling in the bright light, clothed in white.

LADY

(Heard from inside) Come back inside, lover boy.

JOHN instead chooses to get up and run.

INT - JOHN'S STUDY - LATE NIGHT

JOHN turns to the desk where FRED sits

JOHN

I discovered three things that night, Freddy. The first? The cure for lonely was never the crowd. And my smile without the mask is better than the one before. I stood exposed, but unashamed, for the first time in a long time.

FRED

(Incredulous) You're preaching to me, Johnny? I'll bite! The third?

JOHN

I told God I'm wasn't worthy to be
in His presence. I have way too
much blood on my hands.

FRED

(Grim) You sure do.

JOHN

God told me the same thing He told
Peter. He said not to call
unclean, what He'd called clean. I
realized the. Clean was how we
were created. We can go back home
any time we wish. So I decided.

FRED

(Confused) What?

JOHN

I wouldn't let my past control me
anymore. No more masks. I agreed
to televise services from the
church. I knew you'd find me. But
I can't tell you how many came to
God in the meantime.

FRED

(Sadly) Oh Johnny! You should've
stayed hidden. I wasn't even
looking any more. My wife's been
making me watch religious TV with
her. There you were. And there was
the promise I made to Dad. Now
here we are. You trapped by your
new identity, me by my promises.

FRED picks up the pistol with the silencer. His hands are
shaking.

FRED

At least step outside so your
family doesn't hear anything.

EXT - JOHN'S DECK OUTSIDE STUDY - LATE NIGHT

JOHN shrugs and steps out first, moving away from the door. As FRED steps out, JOHN moves over by the rail. He's at the end of the same wide plank on which FRED stands.

FRED

You're making this too easy for me, Johnny. Do you want to die?

JOHN

No! But I promised God I would never resort to violence again. I would let God do as He wished with my life. So I won't stop you, no matter how tempting or easy.

FRED

(Amused) How could you possibly stop me at this point?

JOHN sighs, shakes his head, and steps sideways. Free of John's weight, the board FRED stands upon tips up. It isn't nailed down. FRED staggers. Before he can recover, a bladed hand strikes his wrist and the pistol is in JOHN's hand. He helps FRED back to his feet before handing him back the pistol. He walks back inside and turns to face the door.

INT - JOHN'S STUDY - LATE NIGHT

FRED follows him in, badly rattled.

JOHN

No man's ever really helpless in his own castle, Freddy. I know where every weapon lies. Every board that needs repaired.

FRED

(Looks at the gun in his hand) Is this thing even loaded?

JOHN

It's loaded, brother. The question is what you will do with it.

FRED

What should I do, Pastor Johnny?

JOHN walks to him and hugs him before turning away.

JOHN

That depends on what you want from your future. You promised that the man responsible for your father's incarceration would die. The old man was responsible. He died. You could look at it that way.

FRED

And if I can't? If I specifically promised that you would die?

JOHN

You promised the Johnny who testified would die. That man's long gone. You can choose to look at it that way.

FRED

(Begins crying) And if I can't?

JOHN

(Smiles) Part of preparing for this was buying a good life insurance policy. And my family will have you to protect them.

FRED

How can you be so calm?

JOHN

(Smiling more broadly) You're not the only one who keeps his word, Freddy. How foolish we once were, to assume death was really final. I'll only sleep for a while.

FRED shakily rises and points the silenced pistol at JOHN once more.

FRED

I am who I am. I gave my word to our father.

JOHN

(Spreads his arms out wide) Then I think you should keep it, brother.

FRED begins to squeeze the trigger, but cannot finish. He lets the pistol fall before burying his face in his hands.

FRED

I'd rather die than shoot you. But you counted on that, didn't you? You gambled with your life.

JOHN

(Shakes his head) No, I gambled for yours.

FRED

(Head in hands) What do I do now, Johnny?

JOHN picks up the fallen pistol in one hand. He takes the one from the desk in the other. He gazes down at them, musing.

JOHN

(Quietly) I guess you need to die, brother.

FRED glances up, startled, as JOHN continues.

JOHN

Ever wish you could die and just start over? I personally recommend a new identity. One in God's witness protection program.

FRED

(Face in hands) I don't know how.

JOHN lowers both guns carefully into the trash can, then goes to place his hand on FRED's shoulder.

JOHN

(Smiling) Funny how life works! I've been right there too. I believe I can show you.