

New Year's Eve

by

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Setting

A retirement home.

Time

Now and then.

Cast

MR. HOLLINS - Man over 60.
LAURA - Caretaker in her 20s-30s.

(MR. HOLLINS hobbles onstage with a cane or walker, helped by LAURA. She gets him to a chair and he sits down. She stands behind him as he looks around.)

MR. HOLLINS

This is complete and utter bullshit.

LAURA

Let's try and keep a positive attitude.

MR. HOLLINS

You know when people tell you to keep a positive attitude? When things are complete and utter bullshit.

LAURA

You don't have to talk so loudly.

MR. HOLLINS

I'll talk as loudly as I goddamned want.

LAURA

You'll disturb the others.

MR. HOLLINS

They need to be disturbed. Any kind of brain activity at all would be a blessing to most of them.

LAURA

Don't say that.

MR. HOLLINS

You know it's true. I know you're paid to pretend it's not true, but it's true and that's that.

LAURA

Other people are enjoying themselves. Look at Mrs. Davis.

MR. HOLLINS

Mrs. Davis would enjoy herself if you parked her in front of a brick wall for six hours. Although fifty years ago, that's a piece of tail I'd have been all over.

LAURA

I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.

MR. HOLLINS

Exactly. That's your job--pretending. Pretending you don't hear, pretending you don't see, pretending you don't think. And you're pretty damned good at all three.

LAURA

My job is helping. My job is being kind and considerate and understanding.

MR. HOLLINS

And ass wiping. Don't forget the ass wiping. I'll bet that's what you hoped you'd end up doing when you were in school, wiping the wrinkly asses of geezers who can't reach back there without falling off the damned toilet.

LAURA

Is this really necessary?

MR. HOLLINS

Is what really necessary?

LAURA

Being this unpleasant. It's New Year's Eve. Tomorrow is a new day, a new year...

MR. HOLLINS

Go on. What else?

(off her silence)

I'll tell you what else. A new goddamned nothing, that's what else. You want to ask the people here for their New Year's resolutions? Half of them will be "to die in my sleep tonight."

LAURA

No, they won't! This is a vibrant community of senior citizens who have led full, productive lives, and who are entitled to enjoy all the benefits of their golden years.

MR. HOLLINS

Jesus Christ. What...did you memorize that from the brochure? You must have. No normal human being would talk like that.

LAURA

What I'm saying is, no one here is going to make the kind of New Year's resolution you just mentioned.

MR. HOLLINS

Oh no? Every time the EMS unit shows up, people can't wheel themselves into the lobby fast enough. Who is it now? They're like a bunch of seals watching one of their own being dragged into the surf by a killer whale. There goes Marge. Oh, they got Joe this time. They're all jostling around in their electric scooters, trying to see who's getting carried out of here, knowing that any day now it's going to be them on that stretcher.

LAURA

That's a little morbid, don't you think?

MR. HOLLINS

No. What's morbid is, every time the lobby fills up with those flashing red and blue lights, and every time you hear the EMS guys squawking on their radios, half of these poor sons of bitches wish it was them with a sheet over their face.

(off her silence)

What's the matter? Nothing perky and upbeat to say?

LAURA

I don't understand why you have to be like this.

MR. HOLLINS

Because I'm pissed off, that's why! It's New Year's goddamned Eve and look at me! Am I dressed up? Am I dancing? Am I popping open a bottle of champagne? No, I'm sitting in the lobby of the goddamned Parkview Retirement Home with a limp pecker and a clear head. Son of a bitch!

LAURA

Mr. Hollins...can I get you a brownie or some nuts?

MR. HOLLINS

And what time is it? Please be so kind as to tell me what goddamned time it is.

LAURA

It's ten minutes to twelve.

MR. HOLLINS

Oh, that is good. Ten minutes to twelve she says.

LAURA

What do you want me to say? That is the correct time!

MR. HOLLINS

Technically, yes. But not really, and you know it.

LAURA

I think the Barry Manilow impersonator is about to start. He's opening with "At the Copacabana."

MR. HOLLINS

It's ten minutes to goddamned noon! Not midnight. Noon! You think I don't know that? It's the middle of the goddamned day!

LAURA

I'm aware of that.

MR. HOLLINS

Then why are we here? The new year isn't for another twelve hours, so why are we here pretending it starts in ten minutes?

LAURA

I'm not going to let you bait me. You know very well why.

MR. HOLLINS

Because we're old. Because we can't stay up that late. Because our medications will get out of whack.

LAURA

Right. And instead of having no New Year's celebration at all, we thought it would be nice to have it at noon instead. Lots of retirement places do this.

MR. HOLLINS

You know something? When you get to a point in your life where you have to celebrate New Year's Eve at noon, someone should have the decency to just put a goddamned bullet through your head.

LAURA

Stop that! This is a good thing! Other people like it! They think it's fun! They get a treat, they have some sparkling grape juice, they get a paper hat...it's fun!

MR. HOLLINS

What are you doing tonight?

LAURA

I'm going to a party.

MR. HOLLINS

With who?

LAURA

My boyfriend.

MR. HOLLINS

Are you going to drink?

LAURA

In moderation.

MR. HOLLINS

What are you going to drink?

LAURA

I don't know...champagne, I suppose.

MR. HOLLINS

And what are you going to eat?

LAURA

You want me to run through the entire menu?

MR. HOLLINS

Yes. I want you to run through the entire menu. What are you going to eat?

LAURA

I'm not sure. Probably some shrimp, maybe some caviar, cheese...you know, appetizer, finger-food type things.

MR. HOLLINS

Okay, so you eat, you drink, it's midnight, the ball drops in Times Square, and then what happens?

LAURA

Well, we'll probably--

MR. HOLLINS

Are you going to get laid?

LAURA

I am not answering that!

MR. HOLLINS

Why the hell not?

LAURA

Because that's...because it's none of your business, that's why not!

MR. HOLLINS

I'd just feel better about this whole New Year's Eve business if I knew one of us was getting laid.

LAURA

You're trying to goad me and I'm not going to let you. Here, let's blow our noisemakers.

(LAURA holds out a noisemaker to MR. HOLLINS as she blows on her own noisemaker for all she's worth. MR. HOLLINS stares at her like she has lost her mind.)

LAURA

All right then, how about a hat?

(She holds up a paper Happy New Year hat.)

MR. HOLLINS

You're kidding me.

LAURA

Other people are wearing hats.

MR. HOLLINS

Other people are wearing diapers too.

LAURA

Fine. Don't wear a hat.

MR. HOLLINS

I'll wear the hat if you'll answer one question.

LAURA

What's the question?

MR. HOLLINS

First the hat, then the question.

(LAURA puts the hat on him.)

LAURA

There.

MR. HOLLINS

Thank you. Now I look as stupid as everyone else.

LAURA

What's your question?

MR. HOLLINS

This boyfriend of yours, is he any good in the sack?

LAURA

Give me that!

(LAURA grabs for the hat and they tussle for it, until MR. HOLLINS wins and puts the hat on his head.)

MR. HOLLINS

We had a deal!

LAURA

No, we didn't!

MR. HOLLINS

One hat equals one question.

LAURA

I'm not responding.

MR. HOLLINS

It's a funny thing with men. Some guys, they get it up and they can go all night. Other guys...one shot and they're done. Straight to sleep. Which one is your boyfriend?

LAURA

I said you could ask a question. I never said I would answer it.

MR. HOLLINS

Straight to sleep, huh?

LAURA

Listen, instead of worrying about my sex life, why don't you hook up with Mrs. Cavanaugh tonight? She got her hair done, her nails done, and best of all, she's got Alzheimer's, so she won't remember whether or not you could get it up.

(mortified at what just passed
her lips)

I shouldn't have said that.

MR. HOLLINS

No--

LAURA

I'm sorry. That was a horrible, horrible thing to say.

MR. HOLLINS

It's all right--

LAURA

Please don't tell anyone I said that.

MR. HOLLINS

No, no. This is just between you and me.

LAURA

Thank you.

MR. HOLLINS

I'm not some blabbermouth.

LAURA

I appreciate that.

MR. HOLLINS

I still have some common sense, you know.

LAURA

I know you do.

MR. HOLLINS

And I like the way you think.

LAURA

Oh my God...please...you can't...Mrs. Cavanaugh--

MR. HOLLINS

Relax. I have about as much interest in banging Mrs. Cavanaugh as I have in banging a dried out gourd.

LAURA

Good...I mean, no, that's not good. I mean, it is, but it isn't.

MR. HOLLINS

Let me tell you something. When I was twelve years old, what I wanted more than anything else in the world was to bang a beautiful eighteen-year-old girl. And when I was eighteen, same thing. Twenty-eight, same thing. Fifty-eight, same thing. And today...same thing. You think that feeling will go away. And then after a while, you pray to God it will go away. And eventually you pretend that it has, you know, just to make everyone feel better. But it never goes away...it's a helluva thing...to want to live when you should already be dead.

LAURA

Mr. Hollins...I don't want you to feel this way.

MR. HOLLINS

That makes two of us.

LAURA

What do you want?

MR. HOLLINS

Want? I want to feel that little burn of the bubbles as the first glass of champagne slides down my throat...maybe some caviar on toast...I want the girl I'm with to edge closer to me, so I can feel her warmth, smell the sandalwood perfume she has on, and feel her fingers curling around mine when midnight is a minute away. And I want to know that this year, more than any other year, this year is gonna be the best goddamned year of my life. That's what New Year's Eve is about. Not this...it's not this.

(They look at one another and LAURA opens her mouth, platitudes ready to spring forth, but they die on her lips as they hear the sound of a siren, which dies as red and blue flashing lights fill the space.)

LAURA

Oh no.

MR. HOLLINS

I don't want to see this.

(He struggles to his feet as LAURA helps him. He takes his hat off, tosses it on the chair. He starts to walk off, assisted by her.)

MR. HOLLINS

I want you to have a good time at your party.

LAURA

I'll do my best.

MR. HOLLINS

I want you to appreciate it.

LAURA

I will.

MR. HOLLINS

Promise me you won't listen to Barry Manilow.

LAURA

I won't listen to Barry Manilow.

(He pauses and turns, shaking his head at what he sees.)

MR. HOLLINS

Goddammit.

(He looks at her for some glimmer of connection and understanding.)

LAURA

I'll bring you back some of that champagne.

MR. HOLLINS

We're not supposed to have champagne.

LAURA

That is complete and utter bullshit.

(He smiles at her and she smiles back. She puts her hand on his arm and they exit together.)

END OF PLAY.