

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Invited
by Jennifer Reichert

Christmas Eve. Behind an ice skate rental counter at Lasker Rink, Central Park, JULIAN, 19, sweet and awkward, and WENDY, 21, Type A and eager, wear poly vests and elf caps. Holiday music squawks from a speaker.

A smoochy couple leans on the counter, oblivious to Julian, waiting for them to relinquish their skates. Wendy sprays the insides of skates. Finally, the couple loose their grip on each other long enough to leave the skates and saunter off, enraptured by each other. Julian sighs. Wendy eyes them.

Wendy *(re: the couple)* Jesus spare me.

Julian Only four more hours.

They work.

Julian *(cont'd)* I thought you were off tonight.

Wendy I was. Mick and I were supposed to go for dinner. I took Nina's shift so she could catch an earlier train.

Julian He bailed?

Wendy Yeah. He's going home to his folks. Bastard. We had a whole Christmas in the city planned. Then his folks freaked out about him not being home. And by then the flights were so expensive. So plans...kah-plooeey.

Julian That bites.

Wendy We were going to this candlelight service tonight at my old church in Jersey...Now I have to go alone. I'll be bawling. Boo. And we were going to pull off the highway and look at the lights in the neighborhoods on the way. I borrowed the car from Kara, my roommate. I told her I'd get up and move it for the street cleaners for the next three weeks, if she'd let us borrow it while she's away.

Julian Go with someone else. There's gotta be someone else in town who'd love to go with you.

Wendy No. I called. Every single other person has gone. I'm surprised you're still here.

Julian I'm catching the last bus tonight. Then my friend Nadine's picking me up at the Red Rooster. I'll get home in the late wee hours.

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Wendy I didn't realize you were from around here.

Julian Well, way upstate. Northumberland Farms.

Wendy A farm? Is it very farm-y?

Julian Not a working farm. Just remote and big. But we'll be overrun with everyone's kidlets. Although I guess now that the barn's converted, they'll be in there.

Wendy That sounds lovely. And festive.

Julian Yeah. I'm looking forward to it. It'll be good to get out of here.

Wendy smiles and nods. She starts mopping. Julian watches her. She sighs and mops.

Julian *(cont'd)* You wanna come with me? For Christmas?

Wendy Oh, I don't know. I don't think so.

Julian You sure?

Wendy I couldn't. Thank you, though. That's very sweet of you.

Julian It's no sweat.

Wendy wrings out the mop in the bucket. Julian pulls out a cloth to wipe up melting ice from the counter. Wendy stops and turns back to Julian.

Wendy You know what? Yes, I will go! That would be so fun.

Julian Really? You want to come?

Wendy I'd love to.

Julian *(beat)* Great. Excellent.

Wendy Thank you! This is great.

Julian Yeah. *(beat)* Y'know, I didn't even think about it, but I already have my bus ticket. They're probably sold out at this point.

Wendy I have Kara's car! I can drive us!

Julian Great. That's...better.

Wendy begins checking skate blades, blithely humming. Julian eyes her.

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Wendy I have the car, parked on 103rd, so after we close up, we'll just swing by my place. I'll grab some clothes and we'll be on the road by midnight. I have some cookies I can bring.

Julian Dean was gonna meet me.

Wendy We can drive to the--what is it? Red Hen?

Julian No, the Red— *(a beat)* Really? “Yes?” Really?

Wendy I think—

Julian What do you mean, yes? You're supposed to say no. No one says yes to that. I-- I-- I can't have you in my house on Christmas morning. What? Are you gonna sleep in the living room with my tree? Do I have to wake you up for stockings--? You won't have a stocking. You'll see me in my pajamas! No. And my dad's robe. No. Or are we supposed to get dressed for opening presents? I wasn't even gonna get you anything. Now my mom is gonna give you a sweater. And you'll just sit there while I open gift after gift. It'll be awful. My grannie pays me to eat Christmas pudding! I'm sorry, no, you just can't come.

Wendy stares at him. He swallows.

Wendy I'm going to call my pastor and see if they still need volunteers at the nursing home.

Wendy picks up a pair of skates and heads for the sharpener. She flips it on and grinds the skate's edge in an unholy racket. She finishes one skate. Julian approaches gingerly.

Julian I didn't think.

Wendy I didn't mean to wreck up Christmas.

Julian You didn't wreck up anything. I shouldn't have offered. I'm sor--

Wendy grinds the other skate.

BLACKOUT. END OF PLAY.

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