

Helping
by
Deb Norton

Deb Norton
805.794.0101
Deb@officialdebnorton.com

Copyright (c) 2006 by Deb Norton -- All Rights Reserved

CHARACTERS

Kevin: 30's-40's double amputee. Just learning to walk on prosthetic legs.

Marilyn: Kevin's mother.

SET REQUIREMENTS

A toilet (or something representing a toilet) and a door.

(cont'd)

Helping

By Deb Norton

(Kevin, 30's-40's, makes his way slowly toward the bathroom with the help of a cane. He is just learning to walk on his new prosthetic legs and it is an effortful and awkward process - each step is fought for. His mother, Marilyn, hovers, hoping to be of some help.)

MARILYN

You didn't eat much. That nurse today, said you aren't eating enough. You'd think with how they work you out in rehab you'd be ravenous. I mean I made your favorite, but maybe your favorite has changed. You just have to tell me. I won't mind.

KEVIN

Can you just get the door? I've got it from there.

(She hustles to open the door.)

KEVIN (cont'd)

Thanks. And lift the seat please.

(She hustles to lift the seat.)

MARILYN

You got it.

KEVIN

Thanks.

(A moment. She stands at his side, ready to support him.)

KEVIN (cont'd)

So, I'll be using the toilet now.

MARILYN

Well, but how do you... go, you know, without falling.

(Miming awkwardly)

I mean you have to use your hand to- to-

KEVIN

I'll manage.

MARILYN

Well I can just steady you. I won't look. Not that I'd exactly be shocked or die of fright or something.

KEVIN

Mom!

MARILYN

Right. I'll be within range.

(She exits the bathroom and closes the door. Her composure abandons her. She keeps talking to keep herself from screaming.)

MARILYN

Kevin? You know what? I'm not sure if you even want to know this, but, well, your father called.

(During the following, Kevin leans his crutch against the wall, begins trying to undo his fly. He starts to fall forward, steadies himself on the tank, resets, tries again.)

MARILYN

Apparently, he's living in Alaska, but he wants to fly down here. Isn't that- I mean, he has a plane. He flies. I didn't recognize his voice. Well, it's been I don't know how long. He sounded, strange. Small. I'm not sure how he found out about the accident, but I suspect Judy might have tracked him down. She always felt... Well. I didn't say yes or no, just that I'd ask you.

(While he is concentrating on unzipping his fly one-handed, his leg buckles and he pitches forward, bounces off the toilet and ends up wedged between the toilet and the wall.)

MARILYN

What was that? Kevin?

KEVIN

I'm fine. Stay out. I'm- No! I don't need you.

MARILYN

Stay out, my foot. I'm coming in.

(He tries to hold the door against her, but he doesn't have a good angle. She pushes in and goes to him.)

MARILYN

Kevin! Are you hurt? What hurts?

KEVIN

Nothing. Just let me get sorted out.

MARILYN

Did you hit your head? Let me get your leg straight so you can-

(She grabs on leg and tries to straighten it.)

KEVIN

I can do it. Just give me a minute. Let me- Will you let me- Mom, will you get OFF!

(He slaps her hands away from his leg. She jumps back. A beat.)

MARILYN

Am I supposed to see this as heroic or something? This big show of fierce independence?

(During the following he gets himself into a sitting position against the wall, pulls one leg into a bent position, then the other so that they will be likely to support him. He grasps the toilet bowl rim and tries to pull himself up. No good. Not enough leverage and the weight isn't distributed evenly. He teeters and goes over sideways. He rests a moment and then tries again. His mother keeps talking while watching this. Although it kills her not to, she doesn't help.)

KEVIN

Self-reliance.

MARILYN

Well, look where it gets you. You're going to spend a lot of time on the floor.

KEVIN

I have to learn to do things on my own.

MARILYN

The hard way. The hardest possible way.

KEVIN

Look, I've been out of the center for less than 4 hours. Can't you just-

MARILYN

All the way home, all through dinner, "no I've got it," "don't touch me," "let me," "leave me," "don't." I can just open the cage door far enough to toss in the chop or you come at me all teeth and fur.

KEVIN
What?

MARILYN
You slapped my hands!

KEVIN
Then don't-

MARILYN
Don't, don't, don't. People want to help. That's love. You can't just slap at people's love. That is so- You did that with Judy. She-

KEVIN
Oh, no, not Judy-

MARILYN
Until it just wore her out. Men. Do everything for me, but don't help me. We're all worn out with not helping you. You know, the bigger you try to be, the smaller you're going to get.

KEVIN
Oh, shit. Right. Dad called. You talked to Dad.

MARILYN
It's everybody else. It's never you. I mean what are you afraid of? Judy'd still be here, you know, if you weren't such a- a big- such a big *chicken*.

KEVIN
Judy and I were already headed there. It was as much her decision-

MARILYN
It was not her- You didn't give her a choice. It scared you, all that love in her eyes.

KEVIN
I did love her. I tried to make her happy.

MARILYN
Am I speaking English? You didn't let her love you back. If you had, this never would have happened. Double-shifts. Graveyards. You held her hostage, all of us, while you ground yourself-

KEVIN
I got it.

MARILYN

You drove yourself too hard and we all saw it coming, we knew, but you, so stubborn, nobody could help-

KEVIN

(overlapping)

I got it. Okay? I got it! This is not helping! You are not helping!!

(They are silent for a moment.)

KEVIN (cont'd)

Can't you just help me the way I need it? Does it have to be the way you want to help?

(He grabs his crotch, wincing)

Shit, this is becoming an emergency. I just need you for leverage.

MARILYN

It's all on your terms.

KEVIN

I just wanted to pee on my own! It's creepy, your mother helping you pee after a certain point in life. It doesn't mean- Look, it's a guy thing.

MARILYN

Oh, you are so infuriating. This is not about peeing or standing on your own as a man. This is about whether you're ever going to accept the love that is rightfully- Aaaagh!

(direct, fierce)

Face it Kevin, you are a chicken of love.

KEVIN

Stop messing around. I really have to go. Seriously.

MARILYN

Say it! Say, "I am a chicken of love."

KEVIN

You're a chicken of love.

MARILYN

When you get tired of the floor, let me know.

(She starts to exit. Kevin loses it, screaming at her.)

KEVIN

All right. I'm a chicken of love. I'm a chicken of love! Okay?! I'm a fucking chicken of love!

(He stares at her, huffing with rage, but the absurdity works on him and he begins to laugh. It is the kind of laughter that pushes through any effort toward control.)

There. Are you happy?

MARILYN

No.

(Now she is laughing too. It builds, between them to something nearing hysteria.)

KEVIN

Chicken of love! Oh, shit.

MARILYN

I know. What an idiot. It seemed like the thing I meant to say.

KEVIN

It sounds like a canned meat. Oh, God. Stop. I have to stop laughing, I think I'm damaging my bladder.

(The laughter begins to subside.)

KEVIN (cont'd)

Help me up before I wet my pants.

(He arranges his legs into a bent upright position. The laughter bubbles up now and again making things a bit more difficult.)

KEVIN (cont'd)

Brace my feet.

(She pushes her feet up against his.)

MARILYN

Okay. I'm ready.

(He grabs onto the toilet with one hand. She pushes her shoulder under his armpit and, from a squat, pushes up. He is standing now, but completely dependent on her. They work their way around so that he is facing the toilet upstage and she is facing out toward the audience.)

MARILYN (cont'd)

All set.

(They wait.)

KEVIN

I don't think I can. God damn it.

MARILYN

It should be your father, here. Not me. Then you'd be okay.

(Kevin is silent)

MARILYN (cont'd)

But you know what? He couldn't have done this. It's why he left. Us loving him just about killed him.

KEVIN

I'm not like that.

(A beat.)

KEVIN (cont'd)

I'm not.