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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Da

by Hugh Leonard

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-60765-3

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THE CAST

CHARLIE NOW

OLIVER

DA

MOTHER

CHARLIE THEN

DRUMM

THE YELLOW PERIL

MRS. PRYNNE

THE PLACE: A kitchen and, later, places remembered.

THE TIME: May 1968 and, later, times remembered.

THE SET: There are several playing areas. The main one is the kitchen. This is the kitchen-living room plus small hallway of a corporation house. An exit at the rear to the scullery. A hint of stairs running up from the hall. There are two areas at either side of the kitchen and a series of connecting steps and ramps which climb up and over, behind the kitchen. One of the two areas is the seafront . . . it includes a park bench. Behind the seafront, on the rising platforms, is the hilltop. On the other side of the stage is a neutral area, defined by lighting. This can be a number of locales as the script requires. (In the Second Act there is an ornamental bench there; the park bench is removed.) The kitchen, however, is the womb of the play.

Da

ACT ONE

CHARLIE, *overcoat on, is at the kitchen table, sorting letters, family papers, old photos, etc., into two piles. He finds one paper of interest and puts on his glasses to examine it. He then goes to the range and pours boiling water from the kettle into a teapot. He then picks up the teapot as* OLIVER *comes to the door.*

He is CHARLIE'S *age—early 40s. His clothes are too neat for him to be prosperous; youthful bouncy step, handkerchief exploding from his breast pocket. He sees that the door is ajar. He knocks all the same.*

CHARLIE. Yes? (OLIVER *is about to come in, but stops to remove a crepe bow from the door.*) Yes, who is it? (OLIVER *steps into the hall and coughs. Half to himself.*) I didn't ask how you are, but who you are. (*Then, seeing him.*) Oliver!

OLIVER. Instant recognition. Oh-yes, full marks.

CHARLIE. You . . . good God.

OLIVER. (*Careful speech, equal emphasis on each syllable.*) Well, I'm still a native-you-know. Not a globe-trotter like some. (*Almost wagging a finger.*) Oh, yes.

CHARLIE. Well, today's the day for it.

OLIVER. Par-don me?

CHARLIE. Old faces. They've turned up like bills you thought you'd never have to pay. I'm on my own . . . come in. (*He puts the teapot down on the table.*)

OLIVER. Won't intrude. Thought I'd offer my . . .

CHARLIE. Sure.

OLIVER. For your trouble. (*Holding up the wreath.*) I took the liberty.

CHARLIE. That's damn nice of you, Oliver. Thank you.

OLIVER. It was . . .

CHARLIE. He would have liked that.

OLIVER. It's from the door.

CHARLIE. From . . . ? (*A loud laugh.*) I thought it was a . . . gift-wrapped Mass card. I mean, Masses in English, the priest facing you across the altar like a chef at a buffet luncheon . . . I thought it was one more innovation. (*Taking it purposefully.*) Yes, by all means. (*He drops it into the range.*)

OLIVER. Gwendolyn—the wife-you-know—saw the notice in the "Press." I would have gone to the funeral—

CHARLIE. What for!

OLIVER. But business-you-know.

CHARLIE. It's nice to see you. It must be ten . . . I don't know, fifteen years? Sit down . . . the mourners left a soldier or two standing. (*He takes a bottle of stout out of a crate.*)

OLIVER. It's seldom I take a drink.

CHARLIE. I've made tea for myself, do you mind? I never drink in this house. Every Christmas the Da would say: "Will you have a bottle of stout, son?" Couldn't. It was the stricken look I know would come on my mother's face, as if I'd appeared in my first pair of trousers or put my hand on a girl's tit in her presence.

OLIVER. (*Dutifully.*) Ho-ho-ho.

CHARLIE. So I . . . (*Blankly.*) What?

OLIVER. Joll-y good.

CHARLIE. My God, Oliver, you still think saying "tit" is the height of depravity. You must find married life unbearably exciting.

OLIVER. (*Beaming.*) Haven't changed, haven't changed!

CHARLIE. (*Pouring the stout.*) Anyway, I kept meaning to take that Christmas drink and send her upstairs in tears with a frenzied petition to St. Ann. Next thing I knew, there I was aged thirty-nine, the year she died, a child on my lap who was capable of consuming the dregs of everyone else's tawny port to wild grandparental applause, and my wife sitting where you are, looking with disbelieving nausea at the man she had half-carried home the previous night, as he shook his greying head virtuously and said: "No, thanks, Da, I still don't." (*He hands the stout to* OLIVER.) After she died, the not altogether frivolous thought occurred to me that the man who will deliberately not cause pain to his mother must be something of a sadist. I suppose I could have had a drink since then, but why spoil a perfect . . . (*Looking down at* OLIVER.) You've got a bald spot.

OLIVER. Me? No . . . ha-ha, it's the wind. (*Producing a comb.*) Breezy out. No, no: fine head of hair still-you-know. (CHARLIE *smiles and pours his tea, using a pot-holder. As he combs.*) Warm for a coat, but.

CHARLIE. Yes.

OLIVER. Month of May-you-know.

CHARLIE. (*An evasion.*) I was halfway out the door when I remembered this lot. Rubbish mostly. HP agreements, rent books, insurance, broken pipe . . . (*He moves them to the bureau.*)

OLIVER. Now!

CHARLIE. What?

OLIVER. (*Bowing his head for inspection.*) Look. You see . . . see?

CHARLIE. Mm . . . you were right and I was wrong. Hair care is not an idle dream.

OLIVER. The old massage-you-know.

CHARLIE. Ah-hah.

OLIVER. (*Firmly.*) Oh, yes. (*Stroking his hair, he picks up his glass and drinks.*)

CHARLIE. Have you children? (*Drinking,* OLIVER *holds up four fingers.*) Ah? (OLIVER *jabs a finger towards* CHARLIE.) Um? (*Takes a sip of tea.* CHARLIE *points interrogatively towards himself and raises one finger.*)

OLIVER. Ah.

CHARLIE. What else?

OLIVER. What?

CHARLIE. Is new.

OLIVER. Oh, now.

CHARLIE. Long time. So?

OLIVER. Oh, now. (*He thinks. Pause.* CHARLIE *waits, then is about to go back to his sorting.*) Yes, by Jove, knew I had something to tell you. Six years ago . . .

CHARLIE. Yes?

OLIVER. I finally got the theme music from "King's Row."

CHARLIE. Is that so?

OLIVER. Only electronically-simulated stereo-you-know. But still . . .

CHARLIE. Still . . .

OLIVER. That was a good fillum.

CHARLIE. Wasn't it.

OLIVER. I got billy-ho for going with you to that fillum. My mother wouldn't let me play with you over that fillum.

CHARLIE. Why?

OLIVER. Oh, pretend he doesn't know!

CHARLIE. Remind me.

OLIVER. You made me miss my elocution class.

CHARLIE. (*Remembering.*) So I did.

OLIVER. Ah, sappy days. Do you remember that expression we had, ah, sappy days? I was glad I kept up with the old elocution-you-know. A great stand-by. Always pronounce properly and look after your appearance: that's how you get on.

CHARLIE. *Did* you get on?

OLIVER. Oh-well-you-know.

CHARLIE. How fantastic.

OLIVER. No harm being ready and waiting.

CHARLIE. None.

OLIVER. That's why I was always smart in myself.

CHARLIE. And got all the best girls.

OLIVER. I did, though, did-n't I?

CHARLIE. Betty Brady . . .

OLIVER. Oh, now.

CHARLIE. And that one who lived in the maze of buildings behind Cross Avenue. What was it we called her?

OLIVER. The Casbah.

CHARLIE. The Casbah. And Maureen O'Reilly.

OLIVER. Maureen . . . oh, don't-be-talking. There was a girl who took pride in her appearance. With the big—well, it was-you-know—chest.

CHARLIE. Tits.

OLIVER. (*As before.*) Ho-ho-ho.

CHARLIE. She once told me . . . she said: "Oliver is going to be a great man." Believed it. (OLIVER's *smile crumples; it is as if his face had collapsed from inside.*) Mad about you. They all were. What's up? (OLIVER *shakes his head. He affects to peer closely at a wall picture.*) All I ever seemed to get was the

kind of girl who had a special dispensation from Rome to wear the thickest part of her legs below the knees. (*Looking for reaction.*) Yes?

OLIVER. (*Face unseen.*) Oh, now.

CHARLIE. Modelled yourself on Tyrone Power, right? I favoured Gary Cooper myself, but somehow I always came across as Akim Tamiroff. Jesus, Oliver, us in those days! We even thought Gene Autry could act.

OLIVER. (*Turning.*) He could sing "Mexicali Rose," still and all.

CHARLIE. Least he could do.

OLIVER. Your drawback was you didn't take the Dale Carnegie course like I done.

CHARLIE. Too lazy.

OLIVER. Very worthwhile-you-know. Then, after you went over the Pond, as they say, I joined the Rosicrucians. That was a great comfort to me the time the mother died. It's all about the soul surviving-you-know in the Universal Consciousness. Do you think I should keep on with it?

CHARLIE. Of course, if it helps.

OLIVER. Your da-you-know came to the mother's funeral. I never forgot that to him.

CHARLIE. Well, he was always fond of you. (DA *comes in from the scullery and looks at* OLIVER.)

DA. Fond of him? Fond of that one? Jesus, will you give over, my grave's too narrow to turn in. (*He goes out again.* CHARLIE, *in whose mind this has happened, winces.*)

CHARLIE. In his way.

OLIVER. In the end, was it . . . 'em, if you don't mind me asking . . . ?

CHARLIE. No, it wasn't sudden. He got these silent strokes, they're called. Old age. What I mean is, it wasn't unexpected. He *went* suddenly.

OLIVER. (*Still delicately.*) You weren't, em . . .

CHARLIE. I was in London: flew over yesterday, off tonight. Well, my middle-aged friend, now we're both parentless. We've gone to the head of the queue.

OLIVER. Queue for what? Oh, now. Long way to go yet, only getting started. (*He bounces to his feet.*) Well!

CHARLIE. Don't go. Finish your drink.

OLIVER. The wife-you-know.

CHARLIE. Let me finish here and I'll run you home.

OLIVER. No, must be riding the trail to the old hacienda.

CHARLIE. (*A hint of urgency.*) Ten minutes.

OLIVER. The little woman . . . (OLIVER *moves to the door, takes gloves from his jacket pocket.*) Queer-you-know how a house looks empty after a funeral. What will happen to it now, do you think?

CHARLIE. This place? It'll be re-let, I suppose.

OLIVER. I wondered—what was it I wondered? —do you happen to know anybody in the Corporation?

CHARLIE. Me?

OLIVER. Well, I hear you got on, so they tell me. Gwendolyn and me are on the list for a house this long time. If you had a bit of pull-you-know.

CHARLIE. (*His manner cooling.*) No, I haven't. Sorry.

OLIVER. Oh, now. Man who's up in the world . . .

CHARLIE. I haven't.

OLIVER. Oh. Well, ask not and you receive not.

CHARLIE. Dale Carnegie.

OLIVER. Ho-ho. Oh, now. Well, see you next time you're over. Sorry for the trouble. Sappy days, eh?

CHARLIE. Sappy days. (OLIVER *goes.* CHARLIE *closes the door.*) Fucking vulture. (*He faces the empty room. He returns the teapot to the range with* OLIVER'S *un-*

finished tumbler of stout. He looks briefly at DA's *chair and then goes to the bureau and begins to sort papers. He finds a wallet and puts on his glasses to examine a photograph in it.* DA *comes in. He wears workingman's clothes: Sunday best. Refusing to look at him.*) Hoosh. Scat. Out.

DA. That wasn't too bad a day.

CHARLIE. Piss off. (DA *sits in his chair,* CHARLIE *looks at him.*) Sit there, then! No one is minding you.

DA. I knew it would hold up for you. You were lucky with the weather when you came over at Christmas, too. (CHARLIE *ignores him and returns the papers to the table and goes on sorting them.*) Mind, I wouldn't give much for tomorrow. When you can see the Mountains of Mourne, that's a sure sign it'll rain. Yis, the angels'll be having a pee.

CHARLIE. (*Whirling on him.*) Now that will do!

DA. That's a good expression. Did you ever hear that expression?

CHARLIE. Did I? Thanks to you, until I was twelve years of age every time the rain came down I had a mental picture of a group of winged figures standing around a hole in the clouds relieving themselves. Go away; I'm working, I'm clearing up. (*Working, half to himself.*) Oh, yes, that was him. A gardener all his life, intimately associated with rainfall: ie, the atmospheric condensation of warm air which, when large enough to fall perceptibly to the ground, constitutes precipitation. Hot air rises, the rain falls; but as far as he was concerned that kind of elementary phenomenon was . . .

DA. Codology.

CHARLIE. Codology. No, it was easier and funnier and more theologically orientated to say that the angels were having a pee. (*He goes to the range and drops a large pile of papers in.*)

DA. You ought to put that down in one of your plays.

CHARLIE. I'd die first. (DA *rises and, without moving more than a step or two, takes a look at* CHARLIE'S *teacup, then turns towards the range.*) What are you doing?

DA. Sitting there without a cup of tea in your hand.

CHARLIE. I've a cupful.

DA. It's empty.

CHARLIE. It's full.

DA. (*Dismissively.*) G'way out that.

CHARLIE. Now don't touch that teapot. Do you hear me? For forty-two years I've been through this, you and that bloody teapot, and I know what's going to happen. So don't touch it!

DA. Not a drop of tea in his cup . . . no wonder he's delicate.

CHARLIE. Look, will you— (*He watches dumbly, almost tearfully, as* DA *picks up the teapot and starts with it across the room. Halfway across he sets the teapot down on the floor.*)

DA. (*Agonized.*) Jesus, Mary and Joseph. (*He hugs his hand.*)

CHARLIE. I knew it.

DA, CHARLIE. (*Together.*) That's hot.

CHARLIE. Too damn headstrong. Couldn't you have waited until my ma came in and let her— (*Softly.*) Jesus. (DA *begins to stalk the teapot.*)

DA. Bad cess to it for an anti-Christ of a teapot. The handle must be hollow. Whisht, now . . . say nothing. (*He takes* CHARLIE'S *cup from the table and looks contemptuously into it.*) Empty! (*He pours the contents—it is three-quarters full—into a scuttle, then kneels down, placing the cup in front of the teapot. He holds the handle of the pot between fingers and thumb, using the end of his necktie as a potholder, and*

pours the tea. Wincing.) The devil's cure to it, but it's hot. (*Rising.*) Oh, be the hokey. (*He sets the cup before* CHARLIE.) There you are, son.

CHARLIE. (*Controlling himself.*) Thanks.

DA. (*Hovering.*) That'll put the red neck on you.

CHARLIE. Right!

DA. Where's the sugar?

CHARLIE. I have it. (*Beating him to the sugar and milk.*)

DA. Is there milk?

CHARLIE. Yes!

DA. If you don't want tea I'll draw you a bottle of stout.

CHARLIE. No! (*More composed.*) You know I never . . . (*Correcting himself.*) I don't want a bottle of stout. Now sit.

DA. Sure there's no shaggin' nourishment in tea. (*Returning to his chair. He is brought up short by the sight of the teapot.*) How the hell are we going to shift it? Hoh? If herself walks in on us and sees that on the floor there'll be desolation. The gee-gees let her down today, and if the picture in the Picture House was a washout as well she'll come home ready to eat us. That's a right conundrum, hoh?

CHARLIE. (*Coldly.*) Cover it with a bucket.

DA. That handle is hot for the night. (*A solution.*) Don't stir. Keep your ear cocked for the squeak of the gate.

CHARLIE. Why? What . . . (DA *goes to the range, picks up a long rusting pair of tongs and starts to use them to lift the teapot.*) Oh, God. (CHARLIE *rushes over, grabs the teapot and puts it back on the range.* DA *drops the tongs. He sucks his scorched hand.*) Now will you get out and leave me be. You're dead. You're in Dean's Grange, in a box, six feet under . . .

with her. I carried you . . . it's over, you're gone, so get out of my head. (DA *sits in the armchair, unperturbed, filling his pipe with tobacco.*) Or at least stay quiet. Eighty miserable years of you is in this drawer, and as soon as I've sorted out the odds and ends, I'm slamming that front door and that's *it*. Your nephew Paddy got the TV set, I gave the radio to Maureen and Tom, and Mrs. Dunne next door got my sincere thanks for her many kindnesses and in consequence thereof has said she'll never talk to me again. The junkman can have the rest, because I've got what *I* want. An hour from now that fire will go out and there'll be no one here to light it. I'll get rid of you. I'm sweating here because I couldn't wait to put my coat on and be off. So what do you say to that?

DA. (*Amiably.*) Begod, son, you're getting as grey as a badger.

CHARLIE. Old Drumm was right about you. The day he came here to give me the reference.

DA. Drumm is not the worst of them.

CHARLIE. He had *you* taped.

DA. Was he here today?

CHARLIE. He was at the Mass . . . next to the pulpit.

DA. Was that him? I wouldn't recognize him. God, he's failed greatly.

CHARLIE. You can talk.

DA. Decent poor bugger, but.

CHARLIE. Do you know what he called you? The enemy.

MOTHER. (*Off.*) Charlie, will you come down when I tell you.

CHARLIE. Who's that?

MOTHER. (*Off.*) Charlie! (*She comes in from the scullery. At this time she is in her late 50s;* DA *is four*

years older. Looking towards the ceiling.) Do you want me to come up to you?

CHARLIE. I'd forgotten what she looked like.

MOTHER. (*To* DA.) Will you get off your behind and call him. He's in the lavatory with his curse-o'-God books again.

DA. (*Galvanized into action, yelling.*) Do you hear your mother? Come down out of there. You pup, come when you're called. If I put my hand to you . . .

MOTHER. That will do.

DA. (*Now wound up.*) Slouching around . . . skipping and jumping and acting the go-boy. Mr. Drumm is halfway up the path!

MOTHER. I said that will do. Read your paper.

DA. (*A grotesque imitation of a boy leaping about.*) With your hopping and-and-and leppin' and your playing cowboys on the Green Bank. Buck Jones.

CHARLIE. You were always behind the times. I hadn't played cowboys in five years.

DA. Hoot-shaggin'-Gibson, Tim McCoy and Randoloph Scott.

MOTHER. You'd give a body a headache.

DA. (*Subsiding.*) And-and-and-and Jeanie Autry.

MOTHER. When Mr. Drumm comes in this house you're not to say yes, aye or no to him, do you hear me?

DA. Sure *I* know Drumm. Who was it pruned his rose-trees?

MOTHER. No passing remarks. (*She picks up the teapot.*)

DA. Mag, that teapot is . . .

MOTHER. Say nothing. (*She takes the teapot into the scullery.*)

CHARLIE. I never knew how she did it.

DA. "Tynan," says he to me, " 'clare to God, I

never seen the beating of you for roses." That's as true as you're standing there, Mag. Never seen the beating of me. (*Ruddy with pleasure.*) Hoh?

CHARLIE. Throw you a crumb and you'd call it a banquet.

DA. "I hear," says he to me, "you're a great man for the whist drives." Do you know, I nearly fell out of my standing. "Who told you that?" says I, looking at him. "Sure," says he, "there's not a dog or divil in the town doesn't know you!" (*He laughs.* YOUNG CHARLIE *comes downstairs. He is 17, shabbily dressed. He carries a book. To* YOUNG CHARLIE.) Charlie, I was saying, sure I know old Drumm these donkey's years.

CHARLIE. Oh, God: not that little prick. (YOUNG CHARLIE *looks at him, smarting at the insult. Their contempt is mutual.*) You were, you know.

YOUNG CHARLIE. And what are you, only a big—

CHARLIE. Careful, that could lead to a compliment. (YOUNG CHARLIE *sits at the table and opens his book.*)

DA. Oh, Drumm will give you a grand reference. (MOTHER *returns with the teapot and pours boiling water into it.*) And if he didn't itself, what odds? Aren't we all grand and comfortable, owing nothing to no one, and haven't we got our health and strength and isn't that the main thing?

CHARLIE. Eat your heart out, Oscar Wilde.

MOTHER. (*To* YOUNG CHARLIE.) Don't lie over the table . . . You'll get a hump-back like old Totterdel.

DA. Old Totterdel was a decent man.

CHARLIE. What's the book?

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Surly.*) "Story of San Michele." (*He pronounces it "Michelle" as in French.*)

CHARLIE. (*Italian.*) Michele, you thick.

MOTHER. The state of that shirt. I'll give you a fresh one.

YOUNG CHARLIE. It's only Tuesday.

MOTHER. Take it off.

YOUNG CHARLIE. How am I to wear one shirt all week?

MOTHER. You can go easy on it, can't you? Do as you're told. (*Going into the scullery.*) More you do for them, the less thanks you get. (YOUNG CHARLIE *removes his shirt: under it is a singlet.*)

DA. You could plant seed potatoes on that shirt, son.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Muffled, the shirt over his head.*) Ah, dry up.

DA. (*Singing to himself: the tune is "The Girl I Left Behind Me."*)

"Oh, says your oul' wan to my oul' wan,
'Will you come to the Waxie Dargle?'
And says my oul' wan to your oul' wan,
'Sure I haven't a farthin'.' "
The Waxies were tailors and the Waxie Dargle was a fair they used to have beyant in Bray in old God's time. You never knew that. Hoh?

(YOUNG CHARLIE, *shivering, ignores him.*)

CHARLIE. (*Glaring.*) Answer him.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*To* DA.) Yeah, you told me. (*To* CHARLIE.) You're a nice one to talk about being polite to him.

CHARLIE. Privilege of age, boy.

DA. (*Pinching* YOUNG CHARLIE's *arm.*) Begod, son, there's not a pick on you. "I'm thin," the fella says, "and you're thin"; but says he: "Y'r man is thinner than the pair of us put together!" (MOTHER *has returned with the shirt.*)

MOTHER. This is newly-ironed. Put it on. (*She holds it for him. It has been lengthened by the addition of ill-matching pieces from another shirt to the tail and sleeves.*)

YOUNG CHARLIE. What's that?

MOTHER. Put it on you.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Look at it.

MOTHER. There's not a brack on that shirt, only it's gone a bit small for you. There's many a poor person 'ud be glad of it.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Then give it to them.

MOTHER. You cur.

YOUNG CHARLIE. God, look at the tail.

MOTHER. Who's going to see it?

YOUNG CHARLIE. I'm not wearing it.

MOTHER. (*Flinging the shirt down.*) Leave it there, then. Don't. (*Picking it up at once.*) Put that shirt on you.

YOUNG CHARLIE. I won't.

MOTHER. (*Turning to* DA.) Nick . . .

DA. (*A half-feigned, half-real, rather frightened anger.*) Do like the woman tells you. Can we not have a bit of peace and quiet in the house the one day of the week? Jasus Christ tonight, do you want old Drumm to walk in on top of you?

MOTHER. (*Quietly.*) That will do you with your Sacred Name. (*To* YOUNG CHARLIE.) Lift your arms.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Already beaten.*) I'm not wearing that— (*She slaps his face briskly and, almost in the same movement, thrusts the shirt over his head. She pulls his arms into the sleeves, jerks him to her and fastens the buttons.*)

DA. (*Relieved.*) That's the boy. Herself cut up one of my old shirts for that, son: didn't you, Mag?

CHARLIE. You were always there with the good news.

MOTHER. (*Coldly, wanting to hurt back.*) The day you bring money in, you can start being particular. Time enough then for you to act the gentleman. You can do the big fellow in here then, as well as on the

sea front. Oh, it's an old saying and a true one: the more you do for them . . .

DA. Sure that looks grand.

MOTHER. How bad he is . . . And at the end of it they'd hang you. (YOUNG CHARLIE *puts his jacket on. He sits and picks up his book.*)

CHARLIE. You always gave in. Too soft to stand up to them. No guts. (MOTHER *is at the door looking out.*) It could have been worse. Like the time you had the date with Ita Byrne and you asked her (MOTHER) to press your navy-blue trousers: told her it was for the altar boys' outing. She'd never pressed a pair of trousers in her life, and she put the creases down the side. And every little gurrier in the town followed you and Ita that night singing "Anchors Aweigh." Remember?

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Now grinning.*) Sappy days.

(*The gate squeaks.*)

MOTHER. There he is now. (*To* YOUNG CHARLIE, *fearfully, the quarrel forgotten.*) God and his holy Mother send he'll find you something. (DA *starts towards the door. She yanks him back.*) Will you wait till he knocks.

DA. (*Almost an incantation.*) Sure I know old Drumm.

MOTHER. And keep that mouth of yours shut. Have manners.

YOUNG CHARLIE. He's only a clerk, you know. (*She looks at him venomously.* DRUMM *comes into view: he is in his mid-50s, thin, acerbic. He knocks.* MOTHER *and* DA *go to the door. The greetings are mimed.*)

CHARLIE. He was a chief clerk. (YOUNG CHARLIE *looks towards the door, anguish on his face, fists clenched.*) Five-fifty a year . . . not bad for nineteen-forty . . . what?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Four . . . November.

CHARLIE. What's up?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Nothing.

CHARLIE. Don't be proud with me, boy.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Listen to them: they always *crawl.*

CHARLIE. Blessed are the meek: they shall inherit the dirt. The shame of being ashamed of them was the worst part, wasn't it? What are you afraid of?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Tell us . . . That day.

CHARLIE. When?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Then. Now. Today. Did they . . . say anything to him?

CHARLIE. About what? (DRUMM *is shown in.*)

MOTHER. Still, we're terrible, dragging you out of your way.

DRUMM. Is this the young man? (*Shaking hands.*) How do you do?

DA. (*Belatedly.*) Shake hands, son.

DRUMM. A bookworm like myself, I see.

MOTHER. (*To* DA.) Move out and let the man sit down.

DA. (*Offering his chair, saluting with one finger.*) Here you are, sir!

CHARLIE. (*Angry.*) Don't call him sir.

MOTHER. Now you'll sit there and have a cup of tea in your hand. (*She sets about pouring the tea.*)

DRUMM. (*Quite sternly.*) No, I will not.

DA. (*Aggressive.*) Don't mind him. Yes, he will. You will!

DRUMM. You're a foolish woman. In these times we may take hospitality for granted. A ration of a half-ounce of tea per person per week doesn't go far.

MOTHER. (*Serving him.*) Now it won't poison you.

DA. And them's not your tea-leaves that are used and

dried out and used again, sir. Get that down you. There's your milk and there's your sugar.

DRUMM. Look here, my dear man, will you sit. I'm not helpless.

MOTHER. Nick . . .

DA. Sure what the hell else have we only for the cup of tea? Damn all . . . amn't I right?

DRUMM. (*Ignoring him, to* YOUNG CHARLIE.) Your name is . . . ?

MOTHER. Charles Patrick.

DRUMM. And you've done with school?

MOTHER. He's got a scholarship to the Presentation Brothers. There was many a one got it and took the money; but no, we said, let him have the education, because it'll stand to him when we're gone.

DA. Oh, Charlie's the boy with the brains.

DRUMM. Bright are you? Who's your favourite author?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Shakespeare.

CHARLIE. You liar.

DRUMM. And where do your talents lie?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Dunno.

DRUMM. An authority on Shakespeare shouldn't mumble. I asked, what kind of post do you want?

MOTHER. He'll take what he's offered. He's six months idle since he left school. He won't pick and choose.

DA. And if there's nothing for him, sure he can wait. There'll be any amount of jobs once the war's over.

DRUMM. Past history says otherwise. There's usually a depression.

DA. Not at all.

DRUMM. You're an expert, are you?

DA. (*A stock phrase.*) What are you talking about, or do you know what you're talking about? The Ger-

mans know the Irish are their friends, and sign's on it, when the good jobs and handed out in England they'll give us the first preference.

DRUMM. Who will?

DA. The Jerries, amn't I telling you . . .when they win.

DRUMM. You support the Germans, do you?

CHARLIE. (*To* DA.) Shut up. (*To* YOUNG CHARLIE.) Don't go red. Smile. (YOUNG CHARLIE *summons up an unnatural grin. He laughs. At once* DRUMM *looks at him bad-temperedly.*)

DRUMM. Is something amusing you?

YOUNG CHARLIE. No.

DA. Hitler's the man that's well able for them. He'll give them lackery, the same as *we* done. Sure isn't he the greatest man under the sun, himself and De Valera?

MOTHER. (*Not looking at him.*) Now that will do . . .

DA. What the hell luck could the English have? Didn't they come into the town here and shoot decent people in their beds? But they won't see the day when they can crow it over Heil Hitler. He druv them back into the sea in 1940, and he'll do it again now. Sure what's Churchill anyway, bad scran to him, only a yahoo, with the cigar stuck in his fat gob and the face on him like a boiled shite. (*Pause.* DRUMM *just looks at him.*)

MOTHER. There's plenty more tea in the—

DRUMM. No, I must be going.

MOTHER. (*With a false smile.*) You oughtn't to mind him.

DRUMM. I don't at all. I thought the boy might walk with me, and I could ask him what it is I need to know.

MOTHER. Charlie, do you hear? Go and comb your hair and give your face a rub. (YOUNG CHARLIE *goes upstairs, glad to get away.*) I know you'll do your best for him. You will.

DRUMM. It would be a poor best. There's nothing here for anyone. Have you thought of letting him go to England?

DA. England!

DRUMM. There's work there.

MOTHER. Ah, no.

DRUMM. It might be for his good.

MOTHER. No, we'd think bad of losing him.

DA. There's good jobs going here if you keep an eye out. I'm gardening above in Jacob's these forty-six years, since I was a young lad . . . would you credit that?

DRUMM. Yes, I would.

MOTHER. What is there in England only bombs and getting into bad health? No, he'll stay where he's well looked after. Sure, Mr. Drumm, we're all he has. His own didn't want him.

DRUMM. His own?

MOTHER. (*Bitterly.*) Whoever she was.

DRUMM. Do you mean the boy is adopted?

(YOUNG CHARLIE *comes downstairs at a run, anxious to be off. He hears what* DRUMM *has said and hangs back on the stairs.*)

MOTHER. (*Purely as punctuation.*) Ah, don't talk to me.

CHARLIE. And I listened, faint with shame, while you delivered your party-piece.

MOTHER. I took him out of Holles Street Hospital when he was ten days old, and he's never wanted for

anything since. My mother that's dead and gone, the Lord have mercy on her, said to me: "Mag, he's a nurse-child. You don't know where he was got or how he was got, and you'll rue the day. He'll turn on you."

DA. (*A growl.*) Not at all, woman.

MOTHER. Amn't I saying! (*To* DRUMM.) You try rearing a child on thirty shillings a week then and two pounds ten now after forty years of slaving, and see where it leaves you.

CHARLIE. Stand by. Finale coming up.

MOTHER. And a child that was delicate. She tried to get rid of him.

DRUMM. Get rid?

CHARLIE. Roll of drums, *and* . . . !

MOTHER. Before he was born. Whatever kind of rotten poison she took. Dr. Enright told me; he said, "You won't rear that child, ma'am, he'll never make old bones." But I did rear him, and he's a credit to us.

CHARLIE. Band-chord. Final curtain. Speech!

MOTHER. He's more to us than our own, so he is.

CHARLIE. Thunderous applause. (*To* DRUMM.) Hand her up the bouquet.

DRUMM. You're a woman out of the ordinary. The boy has cause to be grateful.

CHARLIE. Well done. House-lights. (YOUNG CHARLIE, *his lips pressed tight together to suppress a howl, emits a high-pitched half-whimper, half-squeal, and flees into the garden.*) And the scream seemed to come through my eyes.

MOTHER. Charlie?

DRUMM. (*Looking out.*) I see he's leading the way. Goodbye, Mrs. Tynan: I'll do what little I can.

MOTHER. Sure I know. God never let me down yet.

DRUMM. (*He looks at* DA *and then at* MOTHER.) You surprise me.

MOTHER. Nick, say goodbye.

DA. Are you off? Good luck, now. (*Giving a Nazi salute.*) We shall rise again. Begod, we will.

DRUMM. You're an ignorant man. (*He nods to* MOTHER *and goes out.* DA *laughs softly and shakes his head, as if he had been complimented. Off.*) Young man, come here.

DA. (*As* MOTHER *comes in from hall.*) There's worse going than old Drumm. A decent man. "I never seen the beating of you," says he, "for roses." (*She glares at him, too angry to speak, and takes* DRUMM'S *tea-cup out to the scullery.*)

CHARLIE. (*To* DA.) You could have stopped her. You could have tried. You never said a word.

DA. (*Calling to* MOTHER.) I think I'll do me feet tonight, Mag. I have a welt on me that's a bugger.

CHARLIE. All those years you sat and looked into the fire, what went through your head? What did you think of? What thoughts? I never knew you to have a hope or a dream or say a half-wise thing.

DA. (*Rubbing his foot.*) Aye, rain tomorrow.

CHARLIE. Whist drive on Wednesday, the Picture House on Sundays and the Wicklow regatta every first Money in August. Bendigo plug-tobacco and "Up Dev" and "God bless all here when I get in meself." You worked for fifty-eight years, nine hours a day, in a garden so steep a horse couldn't climb it, and when they got rid of you with a pension of ten shillings a week you did hand-springs for joy because it came from the Quality. You spent your life sitting on brambles, and wouldn't move in case someone took your seat.

DA. (*Softly.*) You're a comical boy.

CHARLIE. (*Almost an appeal.*) You could have stopped her.

(MOTHER *comes in.*)

MOTHER. Ignorant, he said you were, and that's the word for you.

DA. (*Taken aback.*) What?

MOTHER. With your "Up Hitler" in front of him and your dirty expressions. Ignorant.

DA. What are you giving out about?

MOTHER. You. You sticking your prate in where it's not wanted, so's a body wouldn't know where to look. I said to you: "Keep that mouth of yours shut," I said. But no . . . it'd kill you.

DA. Sure I never said a word to the man, good, bad or indifferent.

MOTHER. You're not fit to be let loose with respectable people. I don't wonder at Charlie running out of the house.

DA. What? Who did?

MOTHER. It wouldn't be the first time you made a show of him and it won't be the last. God help the boy if he has you to depend on.

DA. (*Upset.*) Ah now, Mag, go easy. No . . . sure Charlie and me is—

MOTHER. *Anyone* would be ashamed of you.

DA. No, him and me is—

MOTHER. He's done with you now. Done with you. (*She goes out.*)

CHARLIE. Serves you right. You could have stopped her.

(*The lights go down on the kitchen and come up on the promenade. The sound of seagulls.* DRUMM *and* YOUNG CHARLIE *appear. They stand in front of a bench.*)

DRUMM. The wind has moved to the east. Do you take a drink?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Not yet.

DRUMM. You will, please God. Do you chase girls?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Pardon?

DRUMM. Female persons. Do you indulge?

YOUNG CHARLIE. The odd time.

DRUMM. As a diversion I don't condemn it. Henry Vaughan, an otherwise unremarkable poet of the seventeenth century, summed it up happily when he wrote "How brave a prospect is a bright backside." Do you know Vaughan?

YOUNG CHARLIE. "They are all gone into the world of light."

DRUMM. So you do read poetry! Listen to me, my friend: if you and I are to have dealings you had better know that I do not tolerate liars. Don't try it on with me ever again.

YOUNG CHARLIE. I didn't . . .

DRUMM. (*Firmly.*) Shakespeare is nobody's favourite author. (*He gives* YOUNG CHARLIE *a searching look.*) We'll say no more about it. Yes, chase away by all means and give them a damn good squeeze if you catch them, but be slow to marry. The maximum of loneliness and the minimum of privacy. I have two daughters myself . . . no boys.

YOUNG CHARLIE. I know your daughters.

DRUMM. Oh?

YOUNG CHARLIE. To see. Not to talk to.

DRUMM. I would describe them as . . . bird-like.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Trying to say the right thing.*) Yes, I suppose they—

DRUMM. Rhode Island Reds. You may laugh . . .

YOUNG CHARLIE. I wouldn't.

DRUMM. I say you may. *I* do. No . . . no boys.

(*He sits on the bench and motions for* YOUNG CHARLIE *to sit beside him.*) There will be a vacancy in my office for a filing clerk. I don't recommend it to you: jobs are like lobster pots, harder to get out of than into, and you seem to me to be not cut out for clerking. But if you want to sell your soul for forty-five shillings a week I daresay my conscience won't keep me awake at nights.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Do you mean I can have it?

DRUMM. If you're fool enough. My advice—

YOUNG CHARLIE. A job. A job in an office, in out of the cold. Oh, Janey, I think I'll go mad. (*He jumps up.*) Yeow! (DRUMM *taps the umbrella on the ground.*) God, I think I'll split in two. I'm a millionaire, Mr. Drumm . . . any time, if there's e'er an oul' favour I can do for you over this—

DRUMM. You can speak correct English.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Honest to God, Mr. Drumm, I'm so delighted, if you asked me to I'd speak Swahili. A job!

DRUMM. (*Sourly.*) And this is how we throw our lives away.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Grins, then.*) Beg your pardon?

DRUMM. You'll amount to nothing until you learn to say no. No to jobs, not to girls, no to money. Otherwise, by the time you've learned to say no to life you'll find you've swallowed half of it.

YOUNG CHARLIE. I've been looking for a job since school, Mr. Drumm. I couldn't refuse it.

DRUMM. To be sure.

YOUNG CHARLIE. I mean, I'm the only one at home . . .

DRUMM. I'm aware of that. (*Considered it settled.*) So be it. There's a grey look about your face: I suggest you begin to wash yourself properly. And I'll

need a copy of your birth certificate. What's your name?

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Surprised.*) Tynan.

DRUMM. I mean your real name. You overheard what your foster-mother told me, didn't you? That you're illegitimate. Don't give me that woe-begone look. It's a fact, you're going to have to live with it and you may as well make a start. Bastardy is more ignominious in a small town than in a large one, but please God it may light a fire under you. Do your friends know? (YOUNG CHARLIE *shakes his head.*) Probably they do. So don't tell them: they won't thank you for spiking their guns. What ails you? Look here, my friend: tears will get no sympathy from me. I said we'll have done with it . . . people will take me for a pederast. Your nose is running: wipe it.

YOUNG CHARLIE. I haven't got a handkerchief.

DRUMM. Well, you can't have mine. Use something . . . the tail of your shirt. (YOUNG CHARLIE *is about to comply when he remembers.*) Well?

YOUNG CHARLIE. I won't?

DRUMM. (*Bristling.*) Won't?

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Loftily.*) It's a disgusting thing to do.

DRUMM. You think so? (*They outglare each other.* YOUNG CHARLIE *sniffs deeply. Brass band music is heard in the distance.*) Well, perhaps there's hope for you yet.

YOUNG CHARLIE. There's a band on the pier.

DRUMM. (*Rising to look.*) Hm? Yes, the Artane Boys from the orphanage, by the sound of them. (YOUNG CHARLIE *whips out his shirttail, wipes his nose and readjusts his dress as* DRUMM *turns to face him.*) Your . . . mother, shall we call her? . . . is a fine woman.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Yeah. Except she tells everyone.

DRUMM. About you?

YOUNG CHARLIE. All the old ones. Then they say to her: isn't she great and how I ought to go down on my bended knees. Even the odd time I do something right, it's not enough . . . it's always the least I could do. Me da is different: if you ran into him with a motor car he'd thank you for the lift.

DRUMM. I'm fond of him.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Disbelieving.*) Of me da?

DRUMM. I can afford that luxury: I'm not obliged to live with him. You are. That's why he's the enemy.

YOUNG CHARLIE. The what?

DRUMM. Your enemy.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Straight-faced, trying not to laugh.*) I see.

DRUMM. Don't be polite with me, my friend, or you'll be out of that job before you're into it. Once at a whist drive I heard him say that the world would end in 1940. It was a superstition that had a fashionable currency at one time among the credulous. Well, 1940 came and went, as you may have noticed, and finding myself and the county of Dublin unscathed, I tackled him on the subject. He was unruffled. He informed me that the world hadn't ended because the German bombs had upset the weather. (YOUNG CHARLIE *laughs boisterously. He bangs his fists on his knees.* DA *enters the neutral area and rings a doorbell.*) Yes, the dangerous ones are those who amuse us. (*The bell is rung again.* DA *puts his pipe in his pocket and waits.*) There are millions like him: inoffensive, stupid, and not a damn bit of good. They've never said no in their lives or to their lives, and they'd cheerfully see the rest of us buried. If you have any sense,

you'll learn to be frightened of him. (*A light is flashed on* DA's *face as if a door had been opened.*)

DA. (*Saluting.*) That's a hash oul' day, ma'am. Certainly you know me . . . Tynan, of Begnet's Villas, sure I'm as well known as a begging ass. And do you know what I'm going to tell you? . . . that back field of yours, the meadow: if you was to clear that field of the rocks that's in it and the stumps of trees and had it dug up with a good spreading of manure on the top of it, begod, you wouldn't know yourself. There's bugger-all you couldn't grow in it.

DRUMM. From people too ignorant to feel pain, may the good God deliver us!

DA. The young lad, do you see, he's starting work. Oh, a toppin' job: running an office, sure he's made for life. And the way it is, I'd think bad of him starting off without a decent suit on his back or the couple of good shirts. Sure you couldn't let him mix with high-up people and the arse out of his trousers. Have you me?

DRUMM. I'm advising you to live in your own world, not with one foot in his.

DA. I'll come to you so on Sundays and do the field . . . sure it won't take a feather out of me. (*Embarrassed by mention of money.*) Very good, yis . . . I'll leave that to yourself: sure whatever you think. (*Saluting.*) Thanks very much, more power. (*He starts off, then bobs back again.*) More power, says oul' Power when young Power was born, wha'? (*The door-light snaps off. As he moves away, the lights on the neutral area go down.*)

DRUMM. Are we still on speaking terms?

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Hating him.*) Yes!

DRUMM. You aren't angry?

YOUNG CHARLIE. No!

DRUMM. Indeed, why should you be! Shall we stroll

down and listen to the Artane Boys? (*They walk off. Lights come up quickly on* CHARLIE *and* DA *in the kitchen as before.*)

CHARLIE. And I went off with him like a trollop.

DA. Drumm is a decent skin. Came in here once to see how I was managing after herself died. Three years ago this month, yis. Gev me a packet of cigarettes. "No," says I, "I won't. You will," says he; "take them when you're told to." So I did. Wait now till I see where I have them.

CHARLIE. We listened to the band and I even made excuses for you. Told him about your grandfather and two uncles starving to death in the Famine.

DA. Oh, aye. Them was hard times. They died in the ditches.

CHARLIE. What ditches? I made it up!

DA. Fierce times they were. Where the hell did I put them? You can smoke them in the aeroplane. (*Going to the dresser.*)

CHARLIE. I don't want them.

DA. (*Searching.*) Yes, you do.

CHARLIE. Don't make a— (*He takes a packet of "Player's" from his pocket.*) It's all right . . . look, I found them.

DA. Hoh?

CHARLES. Look.

DA. Good lad. Yis, it was in the month of— (*He breaks off.*) Drumm smoked "Sweet Aftons" . . . that's not them. (*He resumes the search.*)

CHARLIE. Messer!

DA. It was in the month of May herself died, and it was in the month of May I went. Would you credit that? (*He climbs on a chair.*)

CHARLIE. Congratulations. I should have stuck up for you and told him to keep his job. Then I could have

hated you instead of myself. Because he was dead on: he described you to a— (*Seeing him.*) Oh, get down. (DA *finds the cigarettes on top of the dresser. He begins to climb down.*) You destroyed me, you know that? Long after I'd quit the job and seen the last of Drumm, I was dining out inLondon: black dickie-bow, oak paneling, picture of Sarah Bernhardt at nine o'clock: the sort of place where you have to remember not to say thanks to the waiters. I had just propelled an erudite remark across the table and was about to shoot my cuffs, lose my head and chance another one, when I felt a sudden tug as if I was on a dog-lead. I looked, and there were you at the other end of it. Paring your corns, informing me that bejasus the weather would hold up if it didn't rain, and sprinkling sugar on my bread when Ma's back was turned. (DA *gives him the cigarettes as if he was passing on contraband.*)

DA. Say nothing. Put this in your pocket.

CHARLIE. So how could I belong there if I belonged here?

DA. "Take them," says Drumm to me, "when you're told to."

CHARLIE. And it was more than a memory. She was dead then, and at that moment I knew you were sitting here on your own while the daylight went. Did you think bad of me? I wish I were a fly inside your head, like you're a wasp inside of mine. Why wouldn't you come and live with us in London when we asked you?

DA. What would I do that for?

CHARLIE. You were eighty-one.

DA. Sure I was a marvel. "Begod, Tynan," says Father Kearney to me, "we'll have to shoot you in the wind-up." What a fool I'd be to leave herself's bits and pieces here where any dog or divil could steal

them. And for what? To go to England and maybe land meself in an early grave with the food they serve up to you.

CHARLIE. No, you'd rather stay here instead, like a maggot in a cabbage, and die of neglect.

DA. I fended for meself. No better man.

CHARLIE. Out of sight, you were a millstone. You couldn't even let me lost my virginity in peace.

DA. Lose your what?

CHARLIE. Nothing. It's a slang word, now obsolete.

(MARY TATE *walks on. She is 25, a loner.*)

DA. Who's that? That's a fine figure of a girl. What's she doing around here?

CHARLIE. She's not here: she's on the sea-front. And she wasn't a fine girl. She was known locally at the Yellow Peril. (YOUNG CHARLIE *and* OLIVER—*younger now—are lounging in the neutral area.* MARY *walks by. They pay her no obvious attention.*)

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Suddenly, singing.*)
"Underneath the lamplight . . ."

OLIVER.
"By the barracks gate . . ."

YOUNG CHARLIE.
"Darling, I remember . . ."

OLIVER.
"The way you used to wait."

YOUNG CHARLIE, OLIVER. (*Together.*)
"I heard you walking in the street,
I smelt your feet,
But could not meet,
My lily of the lamplight,
My own Lily Marlene."

(MARY's *step falters as she hears the lyrics. She continues on to the bench, where she sits and opens a copy of "Modern Screen." The two youths go on singing—quietly now and to themselves.* YOUNG CHARLIE *looks covertly at her once or twice.*)

CHARLIE. (*To* DA.) We all dreamed, privately and sweatily, about committing dark deeds with the Yellow Peril. Dark was the word, for if you were seen with her, nice girls would shun you and tell their mothers, and their mothers would tell yours: the Yellow Peril was the enemy of mothers. And the fellows would jeer at you for your beggarman's lust—you with your fine words of settling for nothing less than Veronica Lake. We always kept our sexual sights impossibly high: it preserved us from the stigma of attempt and failure on the one hand, and success and mortal sin on the other. The Yellow Peril never winked, smiled or flirted: the sure sign of an activist. We avoided her, and yet she was a comfort to us. It was like having a trusty flintlock handy in case of necessity. (YOUNG CHARLIE *and* OLIVER *both look at* MARY.)

YOUNG CHARLIE. They say she's mustard.

OLIVER. Oh, yes. Red-hot-you-know.

YOUNG CHARLIE. And she has a fine-looking pair.

OLIVER. Of legs-you-mean?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Well, yeah: them, too.

OLIVER. Oh, Ho-ho-ho. Oh, now. Joll-y good. (MARY *looks up from her book as* OLIVER *raises his voice: a calm direct look, neither friendly nor hostile.*)

YOUNG CHARLIE. She's looking. (*To* MARY, *bravely.*) 'Evening.

OLIVER. (*Embarrassed.*) Don't.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Why?

OLIVER. We'll get ourselves a bad name. Where was I? Yes . . . I was telling you about Maria Montez in "Cobra Woman." Now there's a fine figure of a—

YOUNG CHARLIE. They say she'd let you. All you have to do is ask.

OLIVER. Maria Montez? Is that a fact?

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Pointing.*) Her.

OLIVER. Ah, yes: but who is that hard up for it?

CHARLIE. I was.

OLIVER. I mean, who wants to demean himself?

CHARLIE. I did.

YOUNG CHARLIE. God, I wouldn't touch her in a fit. I'm only—

OLIVER. And she would make a holy show of you, you know, like she done with the man who tried to interfere with her in the Picture House.

YOUNG CHARLIE. When?

OLIVER. I think it was a Bette Davis. The man sat down next to her and as soon as the big picture came on the screen he started tampering with her in some way. And she never said a word, only got up and dragged him to the manager by his wigger-wagger.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Stunned.*) She never.

OLIVER. True as God. He felt very small. I can tell you.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Still, if she minded she can't be all that fast.

OLIVER. Oh-I-don't-know. If she wasn't fast she'd have dragged him by something else.

(YOUNG CHARLIE *looks at* MARY *in awe.*)

CHARLIE. Lust tied granny-knots in my insides. I wanted the Yellow Peril like I wanted no girl before or no woman since. What was worse, I was wearing my

new suit for the first time and I had to do it now, now or never, before the newness wore off.

OLIVER. (*Who has been talking.*) So will we trot up to the billiard hall?

YOUNG CHARLIE. You go.

OLIVER. Me?

YOUNG CHARLIE. I'll follow you. (*He looks almost tragically at* OLIVER. *Pause. Then* OLIVER *stares from him to* MARY.)

OLIVER. Her?

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Agonised.*) Go on.

OLIVER. Ho-ho-ho-ho. Oh, now. (*Dismay.*) You wouldn't.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Olly . . . fizz off.

OLIVER. But you don't want to chance your arm with her; she'd *let* you. (*Then.*) Where will you take her?

YOUNG CHARLIE. I dunno; down the back.

OLIVER. I'll see you, then.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Yeah.

OLIVER. I suppose you know you'll destroy your good suit.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Will you go on. See you. (OLIVER *does not move. Hostility forms on his face.*)

OLIVER. I was the one you came out with-you-know. (YOUNG CHARLIE *waits for him to go.*) They say it's very disappointing-you-know, very over-rated. (*Pause. Angrily.*) Well, don't salute me in the town when you see me, because you won't be saluted back. (*He goes.* YOUNG CHARLIE *goes towards the bench. He stops, suddenly panic-stricken.* CHARLIE *has by now moved out of the kitchen area.*)

CHARLIE. Do you want a hand? (*Still looking at* MARY, YOUNG CHARLIE *motions to him to be quiet.*) If they think you're afraid of them they attack you. You said yourself, all you have to do is ask.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Dry up, will you. (MARY *looks at him.*)

CHARLIE. Now . . . quick!

YOUNG CHARLIE. 'Evening.

MARY. You said that.

CHARLIE. Sit. (YOUNG CHARLIE *sits beside her. What follows is ritual, laconic and fast.*)

MARY. Didn't ask you to sit down.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Free country.

MARY. Nothing doing for you here.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Never said there was.

MARY. Ought to have gone off with that friend of yours.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Who ought?

MARY. You ought.

YOUNG CHARLIE. What for?

MARY. Nothing doing for you here.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Never said there was.

(*Pause. Phase Two in conversation.*)

MARY. What's your name, anyway?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Bruce.

MARY. (*A sceptical grin.*) Yeah?

YOUNG CHARLIE. It is. (*He crosses his eyes and thums his nose at* CHARLIE *by way of defiance.*)

MARY. Bruce?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Mm.

MARY. Nice name.

YOUNG CHARLIE. (*Pointing off.*) He's Oliver.

MARY. That so?

YOUNG CHARLIE. He's from the town.

MARY. Where *you* from?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Trinity College.

MARY. That right?

YOUNG CHARLIE. English Literature.

MARY. Must be hard.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Bits of it.

(*She goes back to her reading. A lull. End of Phase Two.*)

CHARLIE. Ask her.

YOUNG CHARLIE. She's not on.

CHARLIE. Ask. (*Instead,* YOUNG CHARLIE *clamps his arm heavily around* MARY. *She does not look up from her magazine during the following.*)

MARY. Wouldn't Edward G. Robinson put you in mind of a monkey?

YOUNG CHARLIE. Let's see. Do you know, he does.

MARY. One of them baboons.

YOUNG CHARLIE. Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. (*At each "yes" he slaps her vigorously on the knee. She stares as if mesmerized at his hand as it bounces up and down and finally comes to rest on her knee in an iron grip. As she returns to her magazine he begins to massage her kneecap.*)

CHARLIE. (*Staring.*) You insidious devil, you.

MARY. It doesn't screw off.

YOUNG CHARLIE. What?

MARY. Me leg. (*His other hand now slides under her armpit, intent on touching her breast. He is unaware that he is kneading and pinching her handbag, which is tucked under her arm. She watches this hand, fascinated.*)

CHARLIE. I think you're getting her money all excited.

MARY. (*Having returned to her reading.*) You needn't think there's anything doing for you here.

YOUNG CHARLIE. I don't.

MARY. Dunno what you take me for . . . sort of per-

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