

LUNCH WITH BILL AND CHARLIE

Written by

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INT. DINER - DAY

Looks like its been around forever. Much like the two occupants Bill and Charlie who are far from spring chickens. When it comes to age even the booths they're sitting in would give them a run for their money. It creaks whenever it feels like. Christmas scenes painted in the windows and a cheap metal tree sits by the register.

Bill is fussing and losing to a small recording device.

BILL

C'mon you bastard...you're supposed to be simple.

CHARLIE

Give up on simple. At our age putting a plug in a wall deserves a round of applause.

BILL

Say something. Let's see if I got this.

CHARLIE

When I was eight I had my first wet dream. In a panic I woke up my parents and told them my stomach had exploded. There's goo all over. My father was furious with me. Told me I can't talk that way in front of my mother.

Charlie looks at Bill who seems mesmerized.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You need more?

BILL

Yes. What did you think when your father said that?

CHARLIE

I think I'm dying and he's pissed off about it - what the fuck?!

(gestures)

Let's hear it.

Bill hits the play back.

CHARLIE RECORDED VOICE

When I was eight I had my first wet dream.

WAITRESS (O.C.)
 What took you so long?

Bill startled, quickly snaps off the tape as we now see the waitress. Big woman. Heavily tattooed. Real butch.

CHARLIE
 Pearl...say hello to Bill.

Pearl grunts her hello.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 (to Pearl)
 Did you ever hear of a book called
 'My Turn to Walk the Dog'?

PEARL
 No.

CHARLIE
 My friend here made the New York
 Times best seller list for writing
 it.

PEARL
 Good. Let him leave the tip. Give
 me something to look forward to.

CHARLIE
 Pearl loves to kick men when
 they're down.

PEARL
 What are you girls having for
 lunch?

BILL
 (looking toward both
 Charlie & Pearl)
 I don't know... what's good in
 here?

CHARLIE
 Bring the question down to fair,
 and give us a fighting chance.

PEARL
 (case closed)
 Go with the cheeseburger.

BILL
 Done.

CHARLIE
I'll have the chateaubriand and
Potatoes au gratin.

PEARL
Two cheeseburgers.

With that she's gone.

CHARLIE
I hate when people know you too
well.

BILL
What's the odds of you and me
taking Pearl in a fight.

CHARLIE
She'd be wanted for murder.

BILL
That's how I figure it. I'm leaving
her a 20 dollar bill.

CHARLIE
So what is this? What do you want
to know?

BILL
Everything, starting after we split
up in Reno.

CHARLIE
People really want to read about
this stuff?

BILL
My publisher does. Wants a BIG dose
of Charlie Waters.

CHARLIE
Sounds like a venereal disease.

Bill chuckles.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I take it I'm Chazz in your book.

BILL
Absolutely. People just loved the
character.

CHARLIE

What's not to love. I'm everybody's favorite idiot.

BILL

My burning first question is - How long did your money last after you left Reno?

CHARLIE

Who says I left Reno with any money?

BILL

(disbelief)

You blew it all back??

CHARLIE

What was I supposed to do with it...Stare at it for a few months?

BILL

I think I deserved that answer.

CHARLIE

Took myself straight over to the Mustang Ranch for some good ole fashion fun. After two days one of the lovelies asked if I would marry her. I said why not and for the rest of the story I'm charging 100 bucks.

Bill quickly reaches into his pocket and plunks down a c-note.

BILL

Go.

CHARLIE

Did I say 2 hundred?

BILL

Start talking or I'm taking back the hundred.

Bill hovers his hand over the hundred.

Charlie pockets the hundred.

CHARLIE

Alright, where were we?

BILL
Matrimonial bliss.

CHARLIE
Aah...yes.

Charlie reaches back in his pocket and puts the hundred back on the table.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Here's a free shot at the hundred.
Did we last 5-1/2 months, one year,
three years or two hours short of
our fifth anniversary?

BILL
The last.

Charlie reaches to pocket the hundred.

BILL (CONT'D)
(quickly)
Five and 1/2 months.

CHARLIE
Seven days.

BILL
You never said anything about seven
days.

CHARLIE
Just because I look 120 doesn't
mean I turned into that big of an
idiot.

Charlie pockets the hundred when something suddenly strikes Bill's funny bone.

BILL
Within 2 days you married a hooker
from the Mustang Ranch?

CHARLIE
Hey...they don't make'em like Flo
Fernandez anymore.

BILL
(while still laughing)
I guess not.

CHARLIE

Said she slept with 2000 guys, but
I was her favorite good time
Charlie.

BILL

I take it somewhere along the line
it ended.

CHARLIE

Yeah, the old story. She cheated on
me.

BILL

(more laughter)
You've got to be kiddin' me??

CHARLIE

(raising right hand)
Word to whoever. She was a very
religious girl. Said she would
never be with another man after she
gave her vow of marriage. A week
later she lost the battle. Didn't
bother me, but she was
inconsolable. Took a Greyhound to
Guadalajara. As far as I know I
could be still married.

Bill laughs again. It's perfect Charlie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Did you really get that close to
giving the homeless dude all your
winnings?

BILL

I know it's unbelievable but it's
the god's honest truth.

CHARLIE

I knew there was something off when
you left Reno. I just thought you
needed a nap not a shrink.

BILL

Had my hand halfway down my pocket
when he looked up and told me to
get away from him. Didn't need my
pity or my shitty one dollar so
just go the fuck home and leave him
the hell alone.

CHARLIE

When I read that I didn't know
which one of you to feel sorry for.
The belligerent street guy who just
missed out on 41,000 G's, or the
lucky loon.

BILL

Higher power in play.

CHARLIE

You really think he was an angel in
disguise?

BILL

It worked like a miracle for me. I
knew right then what I had to do.

CHARLIE

(knowingly)
Your turn to walk the dog.

BILL

The first thing out of her mouth.
It was like I never left.

CHARLIE

You better keep that woman away
from me. I'll try to steal her.

BILL

My wife is already too anxious to
meet you. I'm having second
thoughts.

CHARLIE

Smart man.

BILL

No. Blessed. Humbled. And full of
gratitude.

CHARLIE

Same here. Broke. Aimless. And full
of I don't care.

BILL

Hopefully the book will handle the
first part. Like the old days we're
full partners in this.

CHARLIE

Wow. I knew there was a reason I
always liked you.

BILL

So what happened after the Flo
Fernandez saga?

CHARLIE

I love how her name came trippingly
off your tongue.

BILL

Well, thanks to you I'm in full
appreciation of her. Long live Flo.

CHARLIE

Long live Flo, don't you know.

They exchange high fives.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

(memory stir)

So...life after Flo. Life after
Flo...where did I go...Orlando!

BILL

Florida?

CHARLIE

Bought 3 first class tickets and
took Barbara and Susan to Disney
World, where we were busted for
drugs.

BILL

No!

CHARLIE

There is no way anybody in their
right mind should go on 'It's a
Small World' unless they're ripped.
Granted, Disney's movie Fantasia
was a real trip, but all those
animatronic dolls singing that song
in their native tongues wasn't
chopped liver.

BILL

Were you jailed?

CHARLIE

Lucky for us the arresting cop had
a crush on Susan and of course she
fell madly in love with him, so he
just confiscated our stash of weed
but slipped Susan one joint for the
road.

BILL
 (fond memory)
 How are the girls? I thought of
 them often through the years.

CHARLIE
 When they come in my dreams,
 they're always in great spirits.
 Helps the missing.

Bill is momentarily taken back.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Since you never came back to the
 card clubs again, there was no way
 I could let you know.

BILL
 How?

CHARLIE
 Susan got a bad cancer. Went quick.
 Barbara just couldn't handle the
 world anymore.

It's obvious Bill is affected by the news.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 (looking off)
 Don't let it ruin your lunch that's
 not coming.

Bill follows Charlie's gaze and they both watch Pearl slam
 out the door.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 (knows the drill)
 Pearl hates the cook again. Won't
 be back 'til tomorrow.

BILL
 This happens often?

CHARLIE
 Once a week.

BILL
 And they let her get away with it?

CHARLIE
 Being the owner comes with perks.
 Do you have one of those cell
 phones?

BILL
 (while removing it)
 Sure.

CHARLIE
 How does a large pepperoni pizza
 sound to you?

BILL
 Good. Fantastic.

CHARLIE
 Dial 310-278-6349

BILL
 (while dialing)
 6-3-4...
 (pauses)

CHARLIE
 Nine.

BILL
 Nine.

CHARLIE
 (without missing a beat)
 Two German 'yes men' on vacation...

Bill hands over his phone looking somewhat puzzled.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Never owned one of these things. Am
 I missing anything?

BILL
 I'm still working on two German
 'yes men' on vacation...

CHARLIE
 Gino. Charlie. Can you send over a
 large pepperoni pizza to Pearl's as
 soon as possible?
 (listens a moment)
 Of course. She's probably right now
 in an Uber telling the driver he
 should bathe more often.
 (a beat, then quickly)
 Make it a jumbo.

Finished. Hands Bill back his cell.

BILL
 Jumbo?!

CHARLIE

You can go to war over Gino's
pizza. Just playing it safe.

BILL

Oh my god. Did I really hear the
'safe' word come out of your mouth?

CHARLIE

Yeah, shoot a poison dart before I
tell you I bought life insurance.

BILL

No...please.

CHARLIE

William, if I ever let you down
that badly, you can donate my share
of profits to saving the Singapore
fresh water crab.

BILL

I'm not sure there would be any
profits if that were the case.

CHARLIE

Don't expect a wild and crazy guy
either. Someone slipped me
chamomile tea once, and I've
mellowed considerably.

BILL

(beat)
Sorry Chazz about the girls.
(quick correction)
I mean Charlie.

CHARLIE

(shrugs)
Fiction. Non-fiction. Who knows
what's real and what ain't?

BILL

(beat)
Do you believe in God, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Not to the point where I ever asked
her to come through for me on the
river.

BILL

I don't mean in terms of cards or
gambling or...

CHARLIE

For some reason my dearest bride
Flo asked me on our wedding night
would I rather be buried or
cremated. I told her surprise me.
If the book is going to be triple X-
rated I can go into further
heavenly detail.

BILL

No...No. I blush too easily.

CHARLIE

Good. I've never been big on kiss
and tell stories.

BILL

Ever been in love Charlie?

CHARLIE

Fell hard for pocket aces once.
Played it soft. Took me to the
cleaners.

BILL

I'm pretty sure I know the answer,
but did you ever get close to
packing in the whole gambling
scene? Wave the white flag?

CHARLIE

Surrender?!

BILL

That's what I thought. Forget it.

CHARLIE

We're working with different angels
William. Mine are all junkies.
Crave the action. Yours sent you
back to a woman with the kind of
shoulders that you don't appreciate
until you do.

BILL

(real pleased)

So glad you said that. I've always
felt the book didn't do her enough
justice.

CHARLIE

You're probably right there. Joan
of Arc might have had an edge on
her.

BILL

(laughs)

I'm definitely never going to leave her alone with you.

CHARLIE

You're safe. Nowadays my mind is just into courting a good bowel movement.

BILL

Tell me, how would Charlie Waters describe himself as a kid?

CHARLIE

Wonderfully.

BILL

Care to expand on that?

CHARLIE

Not really, but you're the book writer and I'm thinking about my end of profits, so I'll give it a shot.

BILL

Can't wait.

CHARLIE

As the story goes, I stood up at five months without help from a couch, walked at six months and was running at eight months. According to family lore, that made me one of the wonders of the world, sandwiched between the Taj Mahal and the Great Pyramid of Giza.

BILL

Well at least you didn't grow up under any pressure.

CHARLIE

Being president of the US by nineteen seemed reasonable, until I failed miserably in every course I took in school except Greek mythology.

BILL

Zeus and the boys, huh?

CHARLIE

Forget the guys. Athena is the one that knocked me out. Smart as a whip. Cute as the devil. Really had the hots for her.

BILL

Did you go to college?

CHARLIE

College?! The boy wonder never went back to his final year in high school. How dare they ask me to go to summer school when it's play time.

BILL

That must of gone over well with your parents.

CHARLIE

My father didn't care. He was already planning his escape to Miami with good ole' Dolly.

BILL

Who's Dolly?

CHARLIE

Dolly Reingold - his pre-school girl friend. Used to draw funny pictures for her, and she laughed. Never got over her. Said she was Ingrid to his Bogie.

BILL

A real romantic, huh?

CHARLIE

No, a true jerk. Dolly couldn't stomach him. Filed within a year. We threw a party in honor of Dolly's wise judgment.

BILL

Did he ever try to get back with you guys?

CHARLIE

Yeah, but after tasting freedom for a year, mom wouldn't have any part of it. We threw another party.

BILL

I take it you and your mother were very close?

CHARLIE

The closest. I could never do anything wrong in mom's eyes.

BILL

What did you do for money and a job?

CHARLIE

I made pick ups and deliveries for four-fingered Freddy, the neighborhood bookmaker.

BILL

How old were you?

CHARLIE

A snappy twelve.

BILL

You were picking up and delivering money at twelve?!

CHARLIE

Sometimes, big money.

BILL

Unbelievable. They must have had a lot of trust in you.

CHARLIE

More than I had, but I was raking it in from both sides, so why take a chance of losing a finger.

BILL

You never ran into trouble carrying that kind of money around?

CHARLIE

One time. I picked up some heavy dough and took my usual shortcut through this alley and got grabbed. Some dude put a knife to my throat and told me not to make a sound because it would be my last. I immediately went into my scared kid routine 'oh please, please don't hurt me. I have lots of money I can give you.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Just don't hurt me, please,
please'. 'Ok kid, he says relax,
but just make it fast.' Now, when
he's convinced I'm no more of a
problem, he starts looking over his
shoulder to make sure nobody's
coming, and I'm just lining him up
for when he turns back. As he does,
I uncork one of the best left hooks
of my life, hits him flush, and
drops him. At which point I put on
the jets and I'm gone.

BILL

Wow. That's quite a story.

CHARLIE

Not bad right, because none of it
is true. All bullshit, but four-
fingered Freddy, pays me triple for
my bravery.

BILL

Charlie Waters.

CHARLIE

I was a pretty industrious kid,
plus Freddy had it coming for
always trying to scare me by
telling me he lost his finger by
getting too cute with other
people's money. When it came to
style, the man had none.

BILL

This was all back in Brooklyn?

CHARLIE

One block away from Ebbets Field.
(Rapidly)
Home of Hodges, Reese, Cox,
Robinson, Campy, Snider, Furillo,
Hermanski, Newcombe, Roe, Erskine, -
need more??

BILL

No, I'm surprised enough. I always
thought your favorite team was the
one that gave you the best price.

CHARLIE

Things change. Back then, there is no way I can ever forget how a high-and-inside fastball sent my sorry little ass straight down to the East river.

BILL

(knowingly)
The shot heard round the world.

CHARLIE

Took me too many years to forgive Ralph Branca. He's since become my patron saint.

BILL

How did that little miracle happen?

CHARLIE

I met a guy years ago who knew Branca real well. Told me it was amazing. Branca NEVER let it get him down. Stood tall and moved on. Got me to thinking... if old Ralphie had no problem, why should I remain in the toilet? The guy played a game he loved, threw a pitch he thought would work, it didn't. Happens all the time. New ball game - batter up.

BILL

Don't you wish it could all work that easy.

CHARLIE

Why couldn't it? No one's twisting arms. You want to be miserable or happy? Choose one. Who else is in fuckin' charge out here?

BILL

Hey, I'm with you on this.

CHARLIE

I know, I just quoted from your book.

BILL

(laughs)
I thought that sounded familiar.

CHARLIE

It was really good stuff. I didn't recognize you at all.

BILL

I hope you meant that as a compliment.

CHARLIE

Of course. I knew you were a bright guy, but we were into parlays and round robins. Who knew about the holy roller part.

BILL

Give me a break with the holy roller stuff.

CHARLIE

No! Nickname heaven has just arrived. Sorry.

BILL

Oh god.

CHARLIE

Blame it on Reno. I've never seen a better run at the crap table before or since. 'Holy roller' it is. Send down a halo.

BILL

Can we get back to you?

CHARLIE

Whatever you say. I'm all yours.

BILL

(beat)

I did have a pretty good run, didn't I.

CHARLIE

Oh baby. I want to take it. Hold it. And kiss it.

BILL

Let's not get carried away. It's long gone.

CHARLIE

Not for me, HR. Not for me.

BILL

Sticking with the subject, my publisher wanted me to make sure I ask you 'is there any cool advice you can give to the gambler, other than quitting'.

CHARLIE

The only thing that helps in gambling is the ability to find fresh money when you tap out.

BILL

I think he's looking more on the lines, of what it takes to win.

CHARLIE

Win? Are you kidding me!? Breaking even puts you a step ahead of Einstein.

BILL

So...basically hopeless.

CHARLIE

First of all, you can't be a person that thinks. Throw that away, along with 'please god'. Both cash burners. Now...without a brain and a prayer, there is a sliver of hope.

BILL

Don't give up, gamblers. There's still a sliver.

CHARLIE

It's called intuition. That little whisper inside that says, 'hey you, smart-money, your lock is for the shits. Turn back numb-nuts before it's too late'. But no, you're dedicated to the lament, 'I could kick myself...I should have listened!' I was enrolled in that school for too many years.

BILL

I think I graduated summa cum laude from there.

CHARLIE

Oh, and while we're at it, never bet a one point favorite.

BILL

I'll make a note of that if I ever fall off the wagon.

CHARLIE

You better not or I'll hunt you down with an elephant gun, and keep in mind elephants never forget.

BILL

I always wondered, is that really true?

CHARLIE

Yes. They have fantastic memories, so don't say you haven't been warned.

BILL

Got it.

CHARLIE

Good. Next question.

BILL

What was your most depressing loss?

CHARLIE

I lost count.

BILL

There must be one that was a killer. Every gambler worth his salt has one of those.

CHARLIE

Yeah, I flipped a coin one time and called heads. It came up tails. Said a lot about not owning a gun.

BILL

Bet you couldn't sleep for months.

CHARLIE

Years. Still not completely over it.

BILL

Old memories die hard.

CHARLIE

That they do, William. That they do.

BILL

Moving on.

CHARLIE

The sooner the better.

BILL

Just curious. Was your dad a gambler?

CHARLIE

No. Just a jerk, but mom was a whiz at bingo.

BILL

How is anyone a whiz at bingo?

CHARLIE

Belief. Her results made me a believer.

BILL

She won that often, huh?

CHARLIE

Nah...she was just big on believing in yourself.

BILL

(suddenly a real discovery)

Now it makes sense! Mom's the culprit. All these years I've been thinking 'what am I missing'? I'm a bright enough guy. I know one and one makes two. I mean, I felt way ahead of the curve when it came to what's going down out here. Sure, I had my problems, but I could see straight. I just didn't want to go in that direction. Maybe I was bored. I felt a little like Ulysses in Homer's Odyssey. I just needed...more. More of all kinds.

CHARLIE

When do you drop a clue so I know what the hell you're talking about?

BILL

You. You, Charlie, you. I just couldn't understand where such confidence came from.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

Even when it felt like you didn't know what you were talking about, there was such belief behind it, it made a believer out of me. That's magic, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Most of the time that's just considered an idiot, but what you pulled off, going from questionable gambler to big shot writer, that's magic.

BILL

You're giving me too much credit...

CHARLIE

Fine, call it the man behind the curtain. All I know is you're my new hero and I'm not interested in debating it.

BILL

Hey, I'm here to talk about you.

CHARLIE

Okay...so, I've been asking the question 'who am I and what am I doing here', and so far nobody is spilling the goods. What's with that?

BILL

(amused)

You really did read the whole book.

CHARLIE

Went back and forth between that and the racing form.

BILL

Did it supply any insight on picking a winner?

CHARLIE

Actually, it did on one occasion.

BILL

Just tell me it came with a hefty payoff.

CHARLIE

Not quite as big as Egyptian Femme, but...

BILL
Egyptian Femme! Wow Egyptian Femme!
(loves it)
You remember that woman throwing
oranges at me?

CHARLIE
My best elephant memory is when you
threw her purse back and she said
'you asshole, you can't even
throw'.

Bill and Charlie both find amusement in that memory.

BILL
The memory that never leaves me is
us and the girls getting held up in
the parking lot.

CHARLIE
What parking lot?

BILL
What parking lot?! Was there more
than one where you refused to give
a hold up guy our money?

CHARLIE
Oh, that imbecile...

BILL
Yeah, the dummy with the gun
pointed right at your face.

CHARLIE
I gave that dude half the dough.
What are you talking about?

BILL
Not before a little Russian
roulette which could have gotten us
all killed.

CHARLIE
Nah, I knew his story.

BILL
Then you pressed it by calling him
a bum, and to 'get the fuck outta
here'.

CHARLIE
That was the clincher. You gotta
know who you're dealing with.

BILL

Well I didn't know who I was dealing with at the time, so forgive my blood pressure for going off the charts.

CHARLIE

(looking off)

Where the hell is the pizza?!

BILL

Well, we could walk next door. That might speed things up.

CHARLIE

(beat)

William, whatever your gods are feeding you, it's fucking pure genius.

EXT./INT. - GINO'S PIZZARIA

Bill biting into the pizza, followed by a sexual moan.

CHARLIE

With that, and Viagra, the party is seriously on.

BILL

Bless Pearl for walking out. This is ridiculous.

CHARLIE

Didn't I tell you about this place before?

BILL

It's funny, just before I walked into the diner it hit me. Ginos? Is this the place Charlie always raved about??

CHARLIE

Better than any Chicago pizza, right?

BILL

Hey, don't try to get me to throw my hometown under the bus. Yes it is!

CHARLIE

Gino would be a wealthy man if he wasn't so devoted to making sure his five bookmakers never go hungry.

BILL

(knows the type)
Oh boy.

CHARLIE

He's a double oh boy! Can't make 'dough' fast enough to pay off what he owes. Totally crazed.

BILL

Should I leave him a copy of my book?

CHARLIE

Only if you want to get killed by me when he bars us from the joint.

BILL

I'll help you pull the trigger.

CHARLIE

You know, if the homeless guy wasn't an angel, I would bet that you saved his life.

BILL

How do you figure that?

CHARLIE

Either he would have died of a heart attack, or with all that loot, he would have been knocked off by nightfall.

BILL

So I'm a hero?

CHARLIE

Fuckin'-A.

BILL

(chuckles)
I don't think so, Charlie. I might have made an unconscious assist, but somebody else sunk the basket.

CHARLIE

Well, whoever is in charge of your spiritual journey, let's hope they stay in your corner for the second book, if only for my sake.

BILL

Let's both keep the faith.

CHARLIE

Deal. Keep piling on the questions.

BILL

How do you look at the world? How do you see it?

CHARLIE

When I'm in the plus column it's not bad. When I'm in the minus column, I'm probably performing a hard luck story for my bookie.

BILL

Put gambling aside for a moment.

CHARLIE

Easy for you to say. You found the light.

BILL

I don't think...

CHARLIE

I know, it found you. Sorry. Continue with the questioning.

BILL

What specifically do you worry about...the one thing you can't get off your mind?

CHARLIE

Besides Georgia, your wife, and Dumbo, I'm good to go.

BILL

(laughs)

You know, when we first met, and discussed our mutual love for Dumbo, I knew we were bound to be best of friends.

CHARLIE

Dumbo flew. Man, oh man.

BILL & CHARLIE
(simultaneously)
I've seen an elephant walk, but
I've never seen an elephant fly. My
god.

Fondness for that memory lingers, as Gino, the owner
approaches their table.

GINO
(to Bill)
Don't listen to anything this guy
says.

BILL
Now you tell me.

GINO
Have you gone out of your mind for
the pizza?

BILL
Completely. I don't know if I'll
ever recover.

GINO
(in hushed tone)
If you're a gambler, call your
bookie right now and take the
points against the Lakers. I just
got word LeBron is going to be a
late scratch. Hush, hush stuff, but
don't mention it to Charlie.

BILL
Mums the word.

GINO
How come you never been in here
before? What's wrong with you?

BILL
The list is too long. Let's just
say you're going to get tired of my
face pretty soon.

In the background we hear a woman's voice call out 'Gino'.

GINO
The wife gets nervous when I'm
around this character.(indicates
Charlie)

CHARLIE

He lies to her all the time about me.

GINO

(wicked laugh)

That's true.

(to Bill)

Call your bookie before the LeBron news gets out.

With that, Gino heads off.

CHARLIE

Are you tempted?

BILL

Nope.

CHARLIE

No twinge?

BILL

Twingeless.

CHARLIE

You're a better man than I am Gunga Din.

BILL

(reaching into pocket)

You want my cell to bet it?

CHARLIE

Nah - my credit's run a little dry, plus with Gino's luck, the Lakers will run away with the game, almost guaranteed.

BILL

Feels like he might be a bad loser.

CHARLIE

Oh yeah, he's great. At last count he's put 4 TVs out of commission, broken 3 lamps, kicked a table so hard it sent red wine sailing over to his wife's newly bought white sofa. During the cleanup the misses flung the wet rag at him, which he ducked, and it broke her favorite porcelain schoolgirl doll worth \$3000.

BILL

And I thought I was bad for allowing 3 minute eggs to boil to a point that it set off the smoke detector.

CHARLIE

Yeah, you're small potatoes when it comes to Gino. He was forced to move out for a month before she let him back in.

BILL

You're a good loser.

CHARLIE

I've been waiting to hear that all my life.

BILL

(chuckles)

You know what I mean.

CHARLIE

Well, after you've lost thousands of bets, it's time to realize it's a possibility.

BILL

I'll change the name but I have to find room for Gino in the book.

CHARLIE

If they make a movie out of it, who do you think should play me?

BILL

Who would you like?

CHARLIE

Nicole Kidman.

BILL

You have a keen eye for casting. That would have been my top pick.

CHARLIE

C'mon...hit me with more questions before I get too old to remember who you are.

BILL

My wife wanted me to ask you a question.

CHARLIE
There's no question I'd rather
answer than hers.

BILL
She's betting five bucks you
can't tell the color of my eyes.

Bill instantly covers his eyes. Charlie's in trouble.

BILL (CONT'D)
You have 'til the count of ten...
one, two...

CHARLIE
Wait a minute, wait a minute...

BILL
There's no wait a minutes...three,
four...

CHARLIE
Give me the first letter and I'll
give you two bucks.

BILL
What do you think, I'm some
cheating husband?

CHARLIE
Three dollars.

BILL
(says immediately)
"B".

CHARLIE
Brown.

BILL
Blue.
(uncovering his eyes)
Beautiful blue eyes.
(flutters his eye lids)
Easy money she said, but I'm really
upset you never noticed them
before.
(sticks out his palm)
Pay up sucker.

Charlie appears somewhat disgruntled as he pulls out his
hundred dollar bill.

CHARLIE

I need change.

BILL

Get outta' here.

CHARLIE

I'll write her a check. How does she like "Pam" spelled?

BILL

I'll pay her the fiver, but don't take advantage of our friendship anymore until we see profits.

CHARLIE

I'm not answering any more questions from her. She's a ringer.

BILL

Do you really have a checking account?

CHARLIE

No.

BILL

Have you ever had a checking account?

CHARLIE

No.

BILL

No cell phone. No checking account...

CHARLIE

But I do have two percent of my genes from Neanderthal man. Swear on Lucy my mother, who, by the way, was the one who broke the news to me, that the Beatles song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was not about LSD.

BILL

What a minute...wait a minute.

CHARLIE

There's no wait a minutes...your rule.

BILL

Alright, first things first. Who told you about this Neanderthal stuff?

CHARLIE

Not told. Tested by Mr. Chow, a crazy-ass gambling professor from Princeton University, who paid me \$300 cash to delight him with my DNA. Slipped me another \$50 when his hockey parlay of Rangers to Boston Bruins came through in flying colors. Remind me what was the second thing.

BILL

The Beatles song.

CHARLIE

Right. The song was written about Lucy Vodden. Julian Lennon brought home a drawing of his little classmate, and father John ran with it.

BILL

Absolute certainty, there was no drugs involved?

CHARLIE

None. Mom was so depressed about it she didn't smoke her weed for 3 weeks.

BILL

Do you have any more tidbits you'd like to share at this moment?

CHARLIE

Yes. Did you know there are more stars in the universe than every grain of sand on all the beaches on earth.

BILL

Now, wait a minute...

CHARLIE

Because you're an old friend, I'll allow one 'wait a minute'.

BILL

Is there a catch in this?

CHARLIE

None. In fact there are at least ten times more.

BILL

This is tough to get my head around.

CHARLIE

You know in terms of mass and brightness, our largest known star is called the Pistol star, like in the song Piston Packin' Mama. She's 100 times as massive as our Sun and 10,000,000 times as bright.

BILL

Of course. Who didn't know that.

CHARLIE

Do you know why stars twinkle?

BILL

It slipped my mind for a second. Give me one more 'wait a minute'.

CHARLIE

As light from a star races through our atmosphere, it bounces and bumps through the different layers, bending the light before you see it. Since the hot and cold layers of air keep moving, the bending of the light changes too, which causes the stars appearance to wobble or...

Charlie graciously extends his hand for Bill to answer.

BILL

Twinkle.

CHARLIE

As mom would say...Bingo!

BILL

Well, if it isn't 'Charlie friggin' Galileo Waters' - who knew?

CHARLIE

Would you like to hear a few lyrics of Pistol Packin' Mama?

BILL

Well, since I'm in this deep let's
have it.

CHARLIE

(singing)

'We're 3 tough gals
From deep down Texas way.
We got no pals,
They don't like the way we play.
We're a rough rootin' tootin'
shootin' trio
But you ought to see my sister Cleo
She's a terror make no error
But there ain't no nicer terror
Here's what we tell her
Lay that pistol down, Babe.'

BILL

My God, a twinkling star is born.

At that moment a CUSTOMER suddenly appears, puts down a
coffee cup, stuffs it with a five dollar bill, then exits the
restaurant.

BILL (CONT'D)

Don't tell me I don't know talent.

Charlie removes the five spot and hands it to Bill.

CHARLIE

Pam's paid.

BILL

What else do you have up your
sleeve, you sly little devil?

CHARLIE

Who's to know.

BILL

Well, I'm going to keep prying.

CHARLIE

Pry away. I'll tell you everything
you need to know.

BILL

And want.

CHARLIE

Well, I don't know about 'want'.
Pushy, pushy.

BILL

That's what you get for being colorful Charlie. People want to know what you're all about.

CHARLIE

Namely, the guy paying the freight.

BILL

How'd you know?

CHARLIE

Color me psychic when it comes to hard cash.

BILL

Speaking of that, I'm going to try to whittle a little up front money for you.

CHARLIE

Any whittle that could send me back to Reno where I could kvell over that portrait of you in the lobby will be highly appreciative.

BILL

(starting to laugh)

What are you babbling about?

CHARLIE

You didn't know after that incredible win streak they hung up your picture? People pay a dollar just to touch it.

BILL

You are a funny man, Charlie.

CHARLIE

The last guy that said that to me kicked me in you know where, and broke my nose.

BILL

As I recall, you delivered some payback.

CHARLIE

What the hell was his name?

BILL

Bad loser is good enough for me.

CHARLIE

(beat)

I looked for you in the card clubs
for a long time. You had me a
little worried there.

BILL

I don't ever remember you being
worried about anything. That's
sweet of you to say that.

CHARLIE

No gushing, I said a little.
Teensy. I just didn't want to read
about you doing something stupid.

BILL

You were checking the newspapers?!

CHARLIE

C'mon, you did go a little weird on
me.

BILL

(beat)

Yeah, I guess I did. Sorry.

CHARLIE

No 'sorrays'. It worked out great.

BILL

I should have tried to get in touch
with you.

CHARLIE

There's no 'should haves'. If I had
a date with an angel, I wouldn't be
looking for you. Guaranteed.

BILL

Still...

CHARLIE

There's no 'still'. Things happen
exactly the way they should. I'm in
a best selling book. Are you
kidding me?

BILL

And ready to take center stage in
the next.

CHARLIE

Yeah, so take vitamins, do workouts, get lots of rest, don't screw up my future.

BILL

I'll do my best.

CHARLIE

Do even better. I wanna go on a big expensive safari to Africa and see Dumbo in person.

BILL

That would be terrific. Let's do that.

CHARLIE

(adamant)

I won't go without Pam.

BILL

Have no fear. I can already see her jumping up and down.

CHARLIE

C'mon then, where's the questions? More questions.

BILL

When and why did you leave Brooklyn for California?

CHARLIE

(slightly evasive)

I don't remember when, but I just needed to get out of town.

BILL

Sounds like you were trying to get away from someone?

CHARLIE

(tough moment)

Well...if you must know, I was suspected of killing 3 people.

BILL

What?!

CHARLIE

It was either that, or I was desperate to find out if you could pick an orange off a tree and nobody cared.

BILL

Those are my two choices?

CHARLIE

The only clue I'll give is that, the ambulance chaser in you is going to be disappointed.

BILL

Were they as sweet as the ones in Florida?

CHARLIE

Oh c'mon. I can't give that reveal. That has to be the big third act finish. I'm sure the writer in you must understand.

BILL

Absolutely. Pushy, pushy is right.

CHARLIE

So, you talk to Jesus. What's the real scoop on death and dying?

BILL

Where in my book does it say I talk to Jesus?

CHARLIE

I always read between the lines. Sometimes it makes me too smart for my own good, but that's the hand I've been dealt.

BILL

What I can say is...I have little fear of death anymore, so life feels better than it's ever been.

CHARLIE

If you feel you have time to look at a tree for an hour, you're either nuts, or something's happening.

BILL

That tree had it's eyes on me for a long time, I just never saw it before.

CHARLIE

Well, whatever the story kiddo, keep up the good work.

BILL

How do you look at it?

CHARLIE

I like trees, but I'm not going to take one to dinner.

BILL

No no, I mean death. How do you think about it?

CHARLIE

Well..If it's the winter blizzard of 1846 and I'm part of the Donner party, I'm definitely food for thought.

BILL

Let's just pretend the weather's beautiful and you avoided being cannibalized, what do you think happens?

CHARLIE

Well, my fantasy is, I'm riding off into a fading sunset, and some little kid is yelling 'Come back Shane'.

BILL

(with a little kid voice)
'Come back Shane'.

CHARLIE

If that's the best you can do it's for sure I ain't comin' back.

BILL

I'll work on that, but in the meantime, does it fascinate you when you hear of so many people who have gone through near death experiences, and some even pronounced dead, talk about some heavenly white light and the glorious beings they met while in that state.

CHARLIE

Well, for a guy who's always chasing the big payoff, sounds pretty good to me.

BILL

Do you believe in reincarnation, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Why not...I'm not saying I'm going all in, but as a gambler I'm always looking to give myself an out.

BILL

I think we have been here before.

CHARLIE

Did you get some inside information?

BILL

In a way. Death used to scare me. Now it doesn't. Why?

CHARLIE

The way I see it is we're living on a tiny dot surrounded by trillions of miles of nowhere. The fact that we even get a chance to burn the toast, puts us way ahead of the game. So the truth is I'm good on however and whenever it goes down.

BILL

Of course the voice in my head, Mister Ego, says don't be so cavalier. You need to get that second book done.

CHARLIE

Far for me to be on the side of the ego, but in this case...

BILL

Yeah, I know...self-preservation is the ego's trump card. Has to win at all costs.

CHARLIE

Whichever way it goes William, there is no need to sweat it. It's all going to work out just fine.

BILL

A lot of people have their doubts about that.

CHARLIE

Doubting Thomases are a dime a dozen. Love to play poker with them. More 'tells' than Bank of America.

BILL

(beat)

It's such a drag feeling 'less than'.

CHARLIE

The 'never enough' bullshit.

BILL

That's exactly what it is - bullshit. Ego bullshit.

CHARLIE

I seldom pay any attention to it. It hates that.

BILL

I used to always have this dream where I arrive at the pearly gates and I'm tongue-tied. I know they know the whole truth about me, but I still want to put my spin on it. Charm the crap out of them if I can. Knowing full well if I do, they're going to send in the grim reaper and tell me 'go with him'. I know I have only one course of action, but still I hesitate. Maybe they'll take pity because at least I know, they know, where I'm coming from. They'll forgive my feet of clay. I always woke up at the same moment, pissed they held back the answer.

CHARLIE

What did you want them to say?

BILL

(beat)

That I'm the greatest guy in the world and here's the reason I didn't know it.

CHARLIE

Well, what do you know now that you didn't know then?

BILL

Well, I know the voice in my head isn't me.

CHARLIE

I'll bite. Who is it?

BILL

A pretender who wants me to get involved with its scenarios of 'he's good, she's bad, you're wrong, I'm right, screw this, screw that' - it's a never ending con story that looks to put me in the middle, like it belongs to me. It doesn't. Its habitual chatter that takes up residence in your skull like a bad spirit that needs to be exorcised if we're to have any chance out here at survival.

CHARLIE

William. William.

BILL

I know. It's not something I discuss every day of the week, but don't get me going.

CHARLIE

Why not. What's the fear?

BILL

It's a good question and I don't have the answer.

CHARLIE

Sure you do. Why the hell are you writing about me, when you got all this stored up, and don't give me the publisher wants.

BILL

But it's true. The publisher wants your story.

CHARLIE

The publisher wants to make money anyway he can. If you got something better for him I'd be yesterday's news, which in fact, that's what I am.

BILL

No, we're doing this with you.

CHARLIE

It kills me to tell you, I'm not your passion, but it's true.

BILL

Charlie, what are you doing?

CHARLIE

Doing a service for a friend. Is that not good enough for you?

BILL

No. My next book is about you.

CHARLIE

William, you're a loyal guy. Get over it.

BILL

It's not loyalty. You make for great copy.

CHARLIE

What you write about me may amuse, but it won't stick to the gut.

BILL

Charlie, you're giving me a headache.

CHARLIE

Good. Maybe you need one. Put a check in the mail.

There's a long silence, then...

BILL

Okay...what if I promise you after I finish the assignment I was sent to do, I'll consider what you're talking about.

CHARLIE

It's what you're talking about that matters. I'm just a nudge.

BILL

And I appreciate it. Thanks for showing me my resistance level is still thriving.

CHARLIE

You're welcome. Send a bigger check.

BILL

You're an unabashed opportunist.

CHARLIE

And proud of it. That's the sad part.

BILL

Now that that's all settled, let's get back to you.

CHARLIE

It's about time.

BILL

Say we met up in the...hereafter. What do you think we would talk about?

CHARLIE

Well, before all the harps and festivities, I want to come face to face with my pet peeve, which is the titans of industry in the 1920s, who slaughtered 500 mustangs a day for pet food and called it progress.

BILL

(in horror)
Did that really happen?

CHARLIE

Yes. I'll take whatever demerits the gods want to hand out for some well timed left hooks.

BILL

I'd join you for some good swift kicks in the ass.

CHARLIE

Great. Then we'll hang out and let the good times roll.

BILL

Do you think they'd be into sex?

CHARLIE

We could inquire. If they have something better we'd really have something to talk about.

BILL

(chuckling)

Charlie, you haven't changed.

CHARLIE

Well that sucks. How old do I have to get before a growth spurt steps in?

BILL

I mean, you're not exactly the same.

CHARLIE

You're like night and day to me. I feel like I've gone from half past twelve to just short of one o'clock.

BILL

(laughs)

Well, you'll always be Charlie and that's a good thing.

CHARLIE

I think I'd be better off if you didn't recognize me.

BILL

What are you saying?

CHARLIE

Look at you. You're successful.
Back with a fabulous wife. Heading
for you're own ashram. It's
beautiful. I don't see the old
Bill.

BILL

Thank god. The old Bill was heading
off a cliff. I was a total mess.

CHARLIE

You were a little hyper I guess
but...

BILL

No Charlie. I was berserk. Maybe
you didn't see it, but I felt it,
and every day it was making
inroads, sinking its claws in ever
deeper. Of course the arrogance,
the ego, was saying 'you're Bill
Denny, you'll dig yourself out of
this hole. What's the worry? Don't
be a wuss. Have some fun for God
sakes'.

CHARLIE

I'm sure I didn't help.

BILL

You did. You actually did.

CHARLIE

(looking skyward)
Did you hear that? Keep that in
mind when we meet up.

BILL

You don't need any testimonials
from me. You're true to yourself
and that was a great lesson to
learn, especially after my
exhibition in Reno.

CHARLIE

The best. What a high!

BILL

What a torture.

CHARLIE

Torture?

BILL

What I did to you. You love 'action' more than anybody I've ever known, and I denied you that. Pretty shitty.

CHARLIE

You were on an incredible hot streak and you didn't want anything or anybody to interfere with that. That's just how a gambler thinks.

BILL

I'm not a gambler, Charlie. I was just a guy out to prove something at your expense.

CHARLIE

Well then you failed. I won \$41,000 dollars thanks to you.

BILL

Yeah, that's how it worked out but...

CHARLIE

Forget these 'buts'. There's no 'buts'. Everything is what it is and Reno was glorious.

BILL

Yeah, because it was all about me. I didn't care if you suffered. In fact I probably enjoyed it.

CHARLIE

If it makes you feel better to be the bad guy, so be it. Take one of those pilgrimages where people flog themselves if that's what you need to feel okay.

BILL

I'm just trying to tell you I'm sorry and I apologize.

CHARLIE

Fine. Next time don't wait a ton of years to forgive yourself for who you were at a moment in time. Leave that to Neanderthal man.

Before Bill can respond...

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Do you know how long it took me to forgive Pat O'Brien for making Cagney scream like a coward for the sake of those Dead End kids?

BILL

(beat)
Wasn't that...

CHARLIE

Yeah, a fucking movie. So that should tell you what lengths we'll go, to prove we're idiots.

BILL

Listen, can I take my apology back?

CHARLIE

No, that's already covered in your book.

BILL

(impressed)
You can read between the lines.

CHARLIE

If you play poker as long as I have, it's nice to know who you're playing with.

BILL

Better to receive checks than write them. That's for sure.

CHARLIE

Hopefully. Don't always work out, but it beats sitting around wondering if you took out the garbage.

BILL

I think you know first hand I used to be a serious garbage collector.

CHARLIE

Except for Reno. A moment in the sun, and don't you forget it.

BILL

Alright. You win, but I didn't know what the hell I was doing except winning.

CHARLIE

And discovering broke-ass angels
with dirty faces. Nice parlay.

BILL

You know, Pam thinks that you're
the real angel in disguise.

CHARLIE

Well, she's got the broke-ass part
right.

BILL

She doesn't believe in coincidence
or accidents, very much into
everything happens for a reason.

CHARLIE

'Their's not to reason why, their's
but to do and die.'

BILL

Shakespeare.

CHARLIE

Sometimes I still wish you were a
betting man. It was my boy Al.

BILL

Al?

CHARLIE

Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'The Charge
of the Light Brigade'. He wrote
that in 1854, a month or so after
the charge.

BILL

Charlie Waters...I just don't know
what to make of you at times.

CHARLIE

Don't make me anything. Let me
always start anew, and see how I
do. Being pigeonholed is for the
birds.

BILL

No argument there.

CHARLIE

The one thing we know for sure is
that Gino's pizza is other-worldly.

BILL

That's a good segue for us to talk about aliens.

CHARLIE

The movie or the real McCoy?

BILL

The real deal.

CHARLIE

Well, if they look or act like they do in the movie, it's going to take a lot more than Sigourney Weaver for me to get a good night's sleep.

BILL

What do you make the odds of there being alien life out there?

CHARLIE

It's a lock. In fact, I make it pick'em we make contact before I check out.

BILL

That's a lot of confidence even for someone like you.

CHARLIE

Doc Holliday was a gambler, right? What if you told him a hundred or so years ago we'd be walking on the moon. He'd probably shoot you down like a rabid dog.

BILL

Point being?

CHARLIE

Lack of faith is not only a useless item, it's dangerous. I never leave home without it.

BILL

Yeah, but there are Doc Hollidays lurking everywhere.

CHARLIE

That's true and fuck'em.

BILL

If you had a chance to go to Mars, would you take it?

CHARLIE

No.

BILL

That surprises me.

CHARLIE

Look, I like action, but I'm not traveling 6 to 8 months just to discover impactite.

BILL

What the hell is impactite?

CHARLIE

That's my point. Next question.

BILL

If you're not that interested in an outer journey, what about an inner one?

CHARLIE

As long as it's not a colonoscopy, I'm listening.

BILL

I know I'm asking a bunch of questions...but who is it that's asking the questions?

CHARLIE

I take it you won't settle for Bill Denny.

BILL

That's just a name someone gave me, but who am I?

CHARLIE

I could come up with all kinds of funny answers but you're serious, so let's take it from there.

BILL

Thank you. I don't want it to be serious but I'm living with this question more and more.

CHARLIE

Pam too?

BILL

Oh yeah, Pam's got more of a bead
on this stuff than I do.

Gino approaching.

GINO

How are you guys doing?

CHARLIE

We're trying to figure out the
meaning of life Gino - have any
thoughts?

GINO

I'm still trying to figure out why
I married the ball buster in the
kitchen, so any wisdom from me went
south when I said I do.

CHARLIE

Gotcha.

Gino turns to Bill.

GINO

Did you get down?

BILL

Down?

GINO

On the game.

BILL

Oh no...I'm just...

Wife's voice rings out 'Gino'!

GINO

(exasperated)

Aaarghhh...Maybe I should go by my
middle name 'leave me the fuck
alone'.

With that, Gino's gone.

CHARLIE

Life in a nutshell.

BILL

After we visit Dumbo, let's skip
over to Tibet and pay our respects
to the monks.

CHARLIE
Love wind chimes.

BILL
Ever heard of a man called Rumi?

CHARLIE
Rooney, the big shylock from the
Bay area?

BILL
No, this guy was a kind of mystic
who said 'silence is the language
of God, all else is poor
translation'.

CHARLIE
Two different ball games. The one
I'm talking about was just 'pay up
or else'.

BILL
I played in that game for way too
long. Was never any fun.

CHARLIE
I'm always up for testing the
waters of better thinking.

BILL
All I know is that I'm not ahead of
the game, but I got my rally hat
on, and the spectator in me is
getting excited.

CHARLIE
You should be a writer.

BILL
I'll give it some thought.

CHARLIE
I remember our neighborhood tailor
that everybody went to because he
was dirt cheap. Never got anything
right, but he was the Will Rogers
of tailors. Never made an
alteration he didn't like. You
could go to him and tell him he
left the pants too long and he'd
say 'Don't give me your headache.
Just grow into them'. No one could
figure out if that was ego-speak,
or some kind of wisdom.

BILL

Probably a little of both. They don't come from the same neighborhoods. One is hard of hearing, and the other talks in a whisper.

CHARLIE

Houston, we have a problem.

BILL

That's about it.

CHARLIE

(beat)

Wouldn't it be fun if Voyager 1 or 2 suddenly heard 'Hey, earth, how ya' doing? Long time no see.'

BILL

Yeah man, and we dig that Chuck Berry and the Johnny B Goode stuff.

CHARLIE

We've been traveling like 43 years, over 13 billion miles, at 35,000 miles an hour, reaching interstellar space, and we still have approximately 40 years to go before they make a close approach to any other planetary system. That's the kind of bottle in the cosmic ocean that shows me some fuckin' spirit.

BILL

Amen.

Worth a high five, and the boys deliver it, then fall into momentary silence.

CHARLIE

I think I changed my mind about Mars. I would go and pick up some impactite.

BILL

What is impactite?

CHARLIE

Rock.

BILL

Rock?

CHARLIE

Rock that's been belted for years
by meteorites. When rock gets
messed up like that, NASA people
turn into silly putty over it.

BILL

I salute you for going.

CHARLIE

Thank you, but I ain't going unless
I have 1200 boxes of Gino's pizza.

BILL

Absolutely...and don't budge on
terms. Play the filibuster card if
needed.

CHARLIE

Bet your ass. No going down like
wimps.

This calls for another high five for the boys.

BILL

I'm feeling drunk with power.

CHARLIE

Yeah -
(calling off to nobody)
Bring this table 14 bottles of vino
and bring my drunken friend Bill
the tab.

BILL

(calling off to nobody)
Make it 16!
(to Charlie)
Charlie, do you have any plans for
Christmas?

CHARLIE

I'm not too big on the holidays.

BILL

Why don't you come over for
Christmas day. Pam makes her great
pot roast. You can meet my
daughter. It'll be fun.

CHARLIE

Thanks, but I'm sure I'll be going
to the track.

BILL

Charlie, I know you're a man who craves action, but that's taking it a little too far, don't you think?

Charlie is momentarily confused.

BILL (CONT'D)

It's Christmas day, man. If you see any horses running, you better get medical help immediately.

CHARLIE

What are you talking about? It is 1934, isn't it?

BILL

Sure it is. Listen, if you run into Al Jolson, Will Rogers and Clark Gable out there, be sure to send my regards.

CHARLIE

Maybe I should stop hanging out with Rod Serling. What do you think?

BILL

Good idea. The man is into weird time zones. So...let's talk Christmas day.

CHARLIE

OK, here's a Christmas day story. There was this successful dentist, Doc Strub. He teamed up with the big shot movie producer Hal Roach, and wanted to reopen Santa Anita track, but couldn't raise enough money. So Strub, who lost over a million bucks in the great depression, went to the bank for a loan to make sure he could fade every bet. The bank was understandably worried about the loan, so they attached unusual conditions to the deal. They wanted to be repaid that very night. The bank hired armed guards to stand watch, to make sure they got their dough paid back. That was Christmas day, 1934, and they raced on Christmas day right up to 1949.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

There's not many people that know that story, and they're the lucky ones. With that, I will entertain more questions, my good sir.

BILL

Ah, yes - 'to be or not to be'.

CHARLIE

(immediately)

'Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings or arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing, end them'

BILL

You're on a roll. Don't stop now.

CHARLIE

'To die, to sleep no more, and by sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.' I will have to conclude before I'm compelled to pass the hat around for a fresh hundred.

BILL

You mercenary.

CHARLIE

Sorry, it's a rough go out there.

BILL

(beat)

If you were able to have your life all over, what would it be like? Dig deep.

CHARLIE

How deep is deep?

BILL

You tell me.

CHARLIE

(beat)

I'm not usually stuck for an answer, so this is a very good question.

BILL
Take your time.

CHARLIE
That's great. Where ya' gonna be 6 months from now?

BILL
Hopefully with Charlie Waters at a successful book signing. But at this moment, there's no place I'd rather be than eating Gino's pizza with you.

CHARLIE
Gino likes you, by the way.

BILL
How would you know that?

CHARLIE
Gino's allergic to strangers. Never likes new customers.

BILL
What kind of a businessman is he?

CHARLIE
The worst. I've seen on a really off time, when the joint is only three quarters full, tell a new customer it's a 4 hour wait for a table.

BILL
(chuckling)
How does the misses feel about that?

CHARLIE
It's the only quality she likes in him. She hates strangers more than he does.

BILL
They must be a delightful pair at a dinner party.

CHARLIE
A long-hauler.

BILL
What?

CHARLIE

That's what I'd like to be if I could live my life all over.

BILL

How deep did you dig to come up with that?

CHARLIE

Just hit me.

BILL

Am I missing something? Where is the appeal?

CHARLIE

Well, I like to be always on the go, and you can make 80 to 100 G's a year. Not bad.

BILL

What about the loneliness?

CHARLIE

That's just a state of mind. I would know many people along the way that would be fun to visit.

BILL

I hear a lot of long-haulers have to wear diapers.

CHARLIE

Hmmmmmmmm....

BILL

Right. I don't see you in that job.

CHARLIE

Good - I just quit.

BILL

Really, what whole new existence would appeal to you?

CHARLIE

I wouldn't mind being a velociraptor.

BILL

That I could see.

CHARLIE

Right?...fast, furious, bad ass deluxe...C'mon, we got something going here.

BILL

No rent, no taxes, easy to run down a meal.

CHARLIE

That's it. Who needs being a people?

BILL

Maybe we did get the short end of the stick.

CHARLIE

And even at the end, when the big banana struck Earth, you wouldn't know what hit 'ya. Sweet dreams Velo.

BILL

Jesus, I'm getting nostalgic for the good old days.

CHARLIE

That's the spirit, William!

With that, it's another high five moment.

BILL

Let's do a lightning round of questions and answers. No thinking.

CHARLIE

On your mark... get set...

BILL

If you were given the chance to make a movie, what would it be about?

CHARLIE

Me. From page one to page two. It's a short film. The popcorn concession would be screaming bloody murder.

BILL

If you were in the middle of the ocean in a flimsy raft surrounded by sharks, what would you do?

CHARLIE

Call out for a dolphin and see if it's true they're into people.

BILL

If you were running to catch the winning touchdown in the Super Bowl, who would you like at quarterback?

CHARLIE

Bubby Brister.

BILL

If the most enticing female in the world was throwing herself at you, who would you like it to be?

CHARLIE

Pam. But don't tell her husband I said so.

BILL

If you found ten million dollars in unmarked bills what's the first thing you would do?

CHARLIE

Pee in my pants in honor of long-haul drivers.

BILL

(starting to laugh)

I'd better stop before I pee in my pants.

CHARLIE

Oh, c'mon William. I was only getting warmed up.

BILL

Who's Bubba Blister?

CHARLIE

Bubby Brister...and if you don't know, I'll never tell.

BILL

Just tell me if he was a real football player.

CHARLIE

Are you kidding me? The Louisiana Special. Bubby 'I don't mop up for anybody' Brister...c'mon.

BILL

Alright. You're going to force me to check out Wikipedia for old Bubba.

CHARLIE

Bubby. And if you see him, tell him I sent ya'.

BILL

You have my word on it.

(beat)

How would you like to be remembered Charlie?

CHARLIE

By who?

BILL

Anybody who knew you.

CHARLIE

As a nice enough guy, who never once thought of giving a homeless man \$41,000.

BILL

Can't let that go, huh?

CHARLIE

Impossible. What did your wife think about that?

BILL

You might be surprised to learn I never told her.

CHARLIE

Shocking.

BILL

After the book came out she was...how should I say this?

CHARLIE

Looking at you a little funny?

BILL

Not funny.

CHARLIE

Worried. Cuckoo's Nest time?

BILL

Before I start, let me just say,
before we separated...we had a rug
issue.

CHARLIE

She wanted new ones and yes, you
were coming up with every excuse
known to man how you couldn't
afford it.

BILL

Not quite. I wanted the new rugs
and she was concerned about the
money. I think she suspected I
wasn't gambling 'just for fun'
anymore.

CHARLIE

Women know. Guys think they're
fooling them, but they know.
They're just a nicer people.

BILL

Pam certainly is. Wins hands down.
Anyway, after she reads about it,
she says to me 'I don't feel good
about the homeless man situation'.
And I quickly say, honey, you've
got to understand, I was not in my
right mind. I didn't know who that
person was filling in for me. And
she says, 'I'm not talking about
you. It just humbles me to think
that through all his anger and
despair, he served as such a gift
to us'. I don't think she ever
missed a night that he wasn't in
her prayers.

CHARLIE

(the best)
Our girl Pam.

BILL

Our girl Pam... whom you will meet
on Christmas day if you say yes.

CHARLIE

I can't.

BILL

That sounded serious.

CHARLIE

It's just not a good day for me.

BILL

Yeah, I know some people get depressed around the holidays, but...

CHARLIE

My son was killed on that day.

BILL

(absolutely stunned)
Your son?

CHARLIE

He insisted on surprising me on Christmas day with his super duper special present, as he called it. So his mother took him in a cab... there was a bad accident. She survived. He didn't. He was 7.

BILL

(heartache)
Charlie...Charlie...

CHARLIE

I know. It kills and you're dead. I just got lucky. I had a determined kid, who just showed up one night in my dreams and told me to quit holding him so tight because he couldn't breathe. He made it clear to me it wasn't an accident. It was just his time to go and he was having the time of his life, except for the concern about me. Basically the message that came through was, he didn't want the babysitter role - so bite the bullet, and live the life out of each and every day, if I wanted to make him truly happy. That was it. We struck a deal. I keep him alive and well - he keeps me alive and well.

BILL
(getting more emotional)
Well, you two are doing better than
I am at this moment, that's for
sure.

CHARLIE
We've had years of practice. Take a
deep breath. It really helps.

Bill takes a deep breath.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Better?

BILL
Barely.

CHARLIE
Drink some water.

Charlie moves the glass forward.

BILL
I'm okay...it's just...just...

CHARLIE
Yeah, it's all of those things, but
I'm fine. The kid and I have a
great ongoing relationship. Believe
me.

BILL
(beat)
What was...is his name?

CHARLIE
John. Johnny. JW. He's good with
any of those.

BILL
Feels like he's here now.

CHARLIE
Wouldn't be surprised. He's no
slacker when it comes to
visitations. That's why I keep
Christmas day just for him.

BILL
I understand.

CHARLIE

He doesn't. I'm sure he'd rather see me back in some department store, wearing a fat Santa suit so he could laugh.

Charlie chuckles at the memory.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I wasn't trying to be funny but it laid him out flat on the floor. Thought I was hysterical.

This time Charlie laughs at the memory, when suddenly he's surprised at being gripped with emotion.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Whoa...hello. My kid caught me there. Sometimes I try to sneak some personal feelings by him, but it's no dice. Can't get away with anything. Mr. Johnny on the spot makes Sherlock Holmes look like Quasimoto.

Charlie gathers himself.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Sorry my friend.

BILL

For what? Being a father who cares and doesn't fold when the odds are against him?

CHARLIE

That was all my boy's doing. Left to me, I wouldn't be waiting for the fat lady to sing.

BILL

You're still here and so is John. I can't see it getting any better than that.

CHARLIE

Thanks William.

BILL

(beat)

Would you feel comfortable with me writing about this?

CHARLIE

I don't know...if the book's a hit, people will never stop asking me about him, and there goes our privacy.

BILL

Could be uplifting to a lot of folks.

CHARLIE

He'll check in with me. I'll let you know.

BILL

Would you mind me asking how old you were when this happened?

CHARLIE

I just turned 30 that day.

BILL

You were born on Christmas day?

CHARLIE

Yep. Ho, ho, ho.

BILL

(really hurting)
Oh God, Charlie, I always thought of you as a surprise a minute, but this is beyond.

CHARLIE

Just keeping the faith William.
Just keeping the faith.

BILL

I don't know how you do it. I can't even imagine myself in that situation.

CHARLIE

Neither could I, but my kid saw it differently. So I listen, and he never fails.

BILL

Is it that you just feel him, hear him, see him in your dreams...that sort of thing?

CHARLIE

All of it. If I need him, he's there. You wrote about some of these levels in your book.

BILL

I know. I just have trouble at times believing they're real.

CHARLIE

I gave up on that a long time ago. I'm still breathing because of him. I don't know what else to tell ya'.

BILL

I don't doubt you Charlie, for a second. It's ME I doubt, and it pisses me off at times.

CHARLIE

So get pissed off. You'll get over it. We don't give up easy on anything out here.

BILL

I know there's more going on. I just know it.

CHARLIE

That's good enough. This is not war time when you need to break a code.

BILL

But if it's right there, don't you feel you want to know more?

CHARLIE

Of course, but you can't push. Doesn't work. My kid is alive and well and that's a fact. For ME. I don't need anybody else's opinion.

BILL

Did you ever find out what the special gift was?

CHARLIE

Yeah. It was his hand-painted map of the world that he had framed.

BILL

That's beautiful.

CHARLIE

It really was. I can't draw a circle, but this kid was like... pure joy. I'll show it to you next time.

BILL

I'm going to hound you until you do.

CHARLIE

The way he highlighted all the places we wanted to visit, was...
(stopped by a thought)
You know, from the moment I left Brooklyn until now, I have never spoken to anyone about this. My son is absolutely giddy (big smile). He's doing cartwheels.

BILL

John. Johnny. JW. You and your dad are the best. Thank you both for spending time with me. It's truly an honor.

CHARLIE

(starts to chuckle)
He's looking to put you in the book son, and he called me a sly little devil.

BILL

It's tough to get anything past your dad, young mister, but as far as I'm concerned, you two are the book.

CHARLIE

(having some fun)
So good, isn't he? Well...what do you say Johnny boy, are we in?

At that moment, Bill's cell phone chimes out a Christmas tune (possibly 'It's Beginning to Look a lot like Christmas', or something appropriate to the piece.)

BILL

(to Charlie)
It's Pam.
(in the phone)
'Hi'ya baby...no I'm still with Charlie... I'm not sure about that...uummmm, I'll ask again.'

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

(to Charlie)

Pam says she hopes you'll be coming
for Christmas day dinner.

CHARLIE

Tell her...tell her I'll be coming
with bells on.

BILL

(back to the phone)

'He says he wouldn't miss it for
the world'.

With that, Bill raises his hand, and as Charlie completes the
high five, we freeze frame. Credits roll