

The End of the Game

An extract from the play by Phil Tong

THE CONSULTATION

A LIGHT SNAPS UP ON CHARLIE WHO IS STOOD ALONE IN THE SPACE.

CHARLIE

Sheila? Is this how it's gonna be? What it's gonna be like?

LIGHTS SNAP OFF CHARLIE AND UP INDIVIDUALLY ON DOCTOR 1 AND DOCTOR 2. BOTH ARE DRESSED IN WHITE COATS. CHARLIE REMAINS IN THE DARK.

DOCTOR 1

We think we've found something.

DOCTOR 2

We think we've found something.

DOCTOR 2

Has it?

DOCTOR 1

Spread? Yes. I'm afraid so.

LIGHTS SNAP BACK UP ON CHARLIE WHO STANDS APART AND IS ILLUMINATED SEPARATELY.

DOCTOR 1

Come in, Charlie. How are you today?

DOCTOR 2

You look well. How do you feel?

DOCTOR 1

Now, I know this may not be the news you were hoping for...

DOCTOR 2

Expecting, even.

DOCTOR 1

But...

DOCTOR 2

We have your results back from the lab.

DOCTOR 1

And it's not good news, I'm afraid.

DOCTOR 2 We think we've found something....
DOCTOR 1 We think we've found something....

DOCTOR 1
 On your scan.

DOCTOR 1 We're so sorry.
DOCTOR 2 We're so sorry.

DOCTOR 2
 At the time...

DOCTOR 1
 We couldn't be sure...

DOCTOR 2
 Which is why we did the biopsy. But....

DOCTOR 1
 I'm afraid those results confirm.....

DOCTOR 2
 Something we had hoped never to have to say to you.

DOCTOR 1
 We did say that that this could go either way....

DOCTOR 2 Didn't we?
DOCTOR 1 Didn't we?

DOCTOR 2
 There were always a number of possible endings to your story... But, I'm afraid...

DOCTOR 1
 Those possibilities have now narrowed.

DOCTOR 1 Sorry, Charlie.
DOCTOR 2 Sorry, Charlie.

*LIGHTS SNAP TO BLACK APART FROM THE
 LIGHT ON CHARLIE.*

ALONE AND IN THE DARK

*THE DOCTORS EXIT. DOCTOR 3 ENTERS AND
 HANDS A TIE AND A HAT TO CHARLIE.*

HE ALSO HAS A WHEELCHAIR. CHARLIE SITS IN THE WHEELCHAIR. DOCTOR 3 THEN EXITS. CHARLIE FINISHES DRESSING. HE TIES HIS TIE, SLIGHTLY COMICALLY, AND PUTS ON THE PORK PIE HAT. HE ADJUSTS THE PORK PIE HAT TO A 'JAUNTY' ANGLE.

CHARLIE

Sheila? Is this how it's gonna be? Me? Sat here? All on my own? I'll be honest with you.... This is not how I imagined it. I used to tell people, "She taught me how to live and she'll teach me how to....."

CHARLIE SIGHS AND BREATHES OUT HARD

CHARLIE

This feels a bit like one of those cartoons we watched as kids. Looney Tunes! Remember those? Wile E. Coyote and the roadrunner! Meep. Meep! Every week another episode where that stupid bird would run out of road, and end up just hanging, suspended in mid-air; his feet a madcap blur of terror and xylophone paradiddles. And we all watched and waited for the inevitable to happen. Watched it again and again. And laughed. Over and over. And then came the 'cut away' shot to that ridiculously deep canyon... And so we waited, hung out like washing on a line, unable to breathe, in the certain knowledge that.... Until, finally, the hapless bird was shot into the oblivion of the drop. This feels a bit like that. And if I listen, I can almost hear.....

SFX OF XYLOPHONE PARADIDDLES.

CHARLIE'S HOME

LIGHTS UP TO ILLUMINATE THE WHOLE OF HIS LOUNGE. CHARLIE IS SAT IN A WHEELCHAIR AS MARTA, HIS CARER ENTERS. SHE IS OF EASTERN EUROPEAN ORIGIN.

MARTA

Morning Charlie.

CHARLIE

Morning Marta.

MARTA

How are you this morning?

CHARLIE

Much the same.

MARTA

Well, that's good. Isn't It?

CHARLIE

Is it?

MARTA

Put it this way... You're no worse.

CHARLIE

No, I'm no worse! But, whatever happened to waking up and thinkin'... ' Today's gonna be a great day!'

MARTA

Good luck trying to remember one of those, Charlie!

CHARLIE

What're you sayin'?

MARTA

Nothing.

CHARLIE

Seems a bit pointed!

MARTA

It wasn't meant to be.

CHARLIE

You make me sound like a right miserable git!

MARTA

That's not what I meant! If I thought you were like that, I would tell you.

CHARLIE

So what are you sayin'?

MARTA

I told you.... Nothing!

CHARLIE

You do remember I'm not very well. Don't you?

MARTA

Of course , Charlie. I know. I know that It's just that...

AN AWKWARD SILENCE. MARTA IS CLEARLY UPSET .

CHARLIE

Sorry. I didn't mean to

MARTA

It's not to do with you....

CHARLIE

Things not going too well for you either?

MARTA

No.

HE HANDS HER A HANDKERCHIEF. SHE USES IT TO DAB AT HER EYES.

MARTA

It's been a long week.

CHARLIE

I thought you liked this job.

MARTA

I do. Normally.

CHARLIE

Except when you have to come here and do breakfast for some grumpy old bastard like me, you mean?

MARTA

It's not just you.

CHARLIE

What are you sayin'? That all your clients are grumpy old bastards?

MARTA

No. Not everyone. Just some of them.

CHARLIE

But me especially!

MARTA SMILES

Especially you, Charlie!

MARTA

There... That's better.

CHARLIE

Yes.

MARTA

All sorted?

CHARLIE

No. Not all sorted. But better.

MARTA

Enough to carry on?

CHARLIE

Yes. Enough.

MARTA

That's all you need, really.

CHARLIE

Is it?

MARTA

To get by.

CHARLIE

Ah, yes, 'To get by'... This is very English.

MARTA

Is it?

CHARLIE

Yes.

MARTA

Yeah. I suppose it is really.

CHARLIE

Getting by. Backs to the wall. Make do and mend. Cup of tea!

MARTA

CHARLIE

Can't beat a nice cup of tea!

MARTA AND CHARLIE SHARE A SMILE

CHARLIE

I'm glad we got that sorted. I don't like it when we fall out. Thought we were tight? You and me?

MARTA

We are! Most of the time. Tight.

CHARLIE

Except on mornings like this.

MARTA

You are a bit touchy this morning, Charlie. Did you not sleep well?

CHARLIE

Never do. Not these days. Somethin' to do wiv gettin' older, I reckon. That, and... Too much goin' on in my head. Wonderin' if.... If I close my eyes.....

MARTA

I understand. I do. It must be difficult. Do you want me to get someone to prescribe something? I could call them.

CHARLIE

No. I don't want to take any more pills. Anymore and I'll rattle.

MARTA

But I'm glad that you and me, we're still friends.

CHARLIE

Yeah. Me too.

MARTA

I don't like it when things are..... How you say, 'Awks'

CHARLIE

And that's another thing! Why does nobody talk properly these days? Everybody wants to talk like they're writing a text message!

MARTA

You're way behind the times, Charlie. It's all Insta and TikTok these days. Even SnapChat's hit the buffers.

CHARLIE

I can't keep up with it all. When I was born, TikTok was just the sound made by your alarm clock.

MARTA

Believe me. You're not missin' anythin'. I just let it wash over me most of the time. The kids, they come home talking about this and that and the other and I go.... 'Really?' 'Oh. That's a shame' No idea what they're talking about most of the time.

CHARLIE

And it don't worry you?

MARTA

No. There's more important stuff to worry about than who's in and who's out! What's hot and what's not!

CHARLIE

I've always been a worrier.

MARTA

Really? You do surprise me.

MARTA SMILES

MARTA

And where did it get you? Hmnn?

CHARLIE

No. You're right.

MARTA

I know. I usually am.

CHARLIE

Maybe you need to take some of your own advice then.

MARTA

Yes. Maybe. But now! Breakfast.

CHARLIE

Is it that time already?

MARTA

It is.

CHARLIE

This is too early for me. Normally.

MARTA

Yes. What happened? I usually end up having to get you washed and dressed.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

MARTA

But not today?

CHARLIE

No.

MARTA

So? Are you going to tell me?

CHARLIE

Just wanted to do it for myself. Once more. Choose what I was gonna wear.

MARTA

And you chose that?

CHARLIE

Yeah, What's wrong with it?

MARTA

Nothing. I'm only teasing you. Is it your birthday?

CHARLIE

No.

MARTA

So what's so important about today then?

CHARLIE

Dunno. Ask me tomorrow.

MARTA

I will do that! But first, a cup of tea.

CHARLIE

Why not!

MARTA LAUGHS AND EXITS

AT THE START OF THE DAY

ENTER WILLIAM FOLLOWED BY VICTOR. THEY ARE BOTH DRESSED FORMALLY IN SUITS OF THEIR ERA; AS THOUGH THEY'RE GOING TO A FUNERAL. CHARLIE IS STILL ON STAGE IN HIS WHEELCHAIR, HE IS ILLUMINATED BUT NOT THE FOCUS OF THIS SCENE.

VICTOR

What are we even doing here?

WILLIAM

I told you.

VICTOR

It shouldn't be our job.

WILLIAM

What does it matter who's job it is.

VICTOR

Where's his wife?

WILLIAM

She can't make it.

VICTOR

What d'you mean, 'She can't make it'?

WILLIAM

Just that?

VICTOR

Did she give a reason?

WILLIAM

Does she have to?

VICTOR

Yes. She does. Especially if she wants us to stand in for her.

WILLIAM

She had something on.

VICTOR

What?

WILLIAM

I don't know. Something.

VICTOR

What you mean is, you know, but you ain't tellin' me.