

(The Actress puts her hair up with a clip, pulls off the eyeglasses, and uses the glasses to gesture as if she is lecturing in a large hall, as she becomes Charlotte.)

CHARLOTTE

... the way I communicate with the world. I got this from these parents of mine. I'm mighty proud to have them here in the audience tonight. For they have filled me with a love and a sense of pride for the people and the land that bred me.

I am from the very best part of America, The Southern Appalachian Mountains. Now, you might be surprised to hear me put it in quite those terms. Everybody feels sorry for the poor mountaineer. But, ours is not a poverty of ideas, and certainly not a poverty of culture. Appalachia is a storied land. It is filled with people who merely have to close their eyes and hear once again in their heads the sound of the human voice rising and falling on the night air. I guess about the saddest fact, that I know in all of this world is that the average life of a story is just about five generations. That's a little better than a hundred years...or as we say in the mountains, "from my grandmother's grandmother unto me." So you see any story that you get that is much older than a hundred years is like a wonderful *bonus*. These are the stories that cast their spells upon us, get into our blood and perhaps make us who we are.

I know a story about a little girl who came to this country when it was unsettled -- inhabited by Indians. She came to this country in 1846, two

years before they took up the Land Grants. She was an orphan child. She came to live with her brother and his wife. She was six years old at the time. Her name was Nancy. She had only been living here about a year, and she was out in the barn doing her morning chores. There was a snake in the corner of the stall. It spooked the horses, and she was trampled. It broke her back in two or three places. They figured she would die, and she almost did. But they were living on the skirts of the old Cherokee Nation. This was just before the Trail of Tears. Two old Indian women came down out of those hills and stretched the child up with sheets from the rafters in the barn. Rigged her up like traction. They stayed with her all winter long there in the barn, and turned her while she was healing. They fed her on teas and potions and tonics made from ground up roots and herbs. And the whole time they were there they spoke not one word to the little girl or between themselves -- in our language or in their own. After they saw she was healing properly, they left in the middle of the night, with no sign or word. Now, they saved her life. She never did get to be very tall, and she always had a great big old hump on her back, but in a time when most people don't live to see their three score and ten, she lived to be eighty years old. And, she was my Grandmother's Grandmother, Nancy Black.

So, I guess you can see the reason I'm such a crazy fool for anything old-timey. You see, I was brought up in a four-generation household. I was raised by my Grandmother, Big Mama. She was a

big influence in my life. But, my best buddy until I was six years old was my Great-Granddaddy, Hyden Tyler. Hyden Tyler had wanted a little boy because he had no sons, no grandsons, and no sons-in-law that he wanted to talk about. So, it looked like I would be the only great-grandbaby that old Hyden Tyler would live to see. Things were getting serious bad. So, Hyden Tyler decided to make the best of the situation. He called me Charlie, dressed me in overalls, and we went everywhere together.

Hyden Tyler and I were just as thick as thieves -- just inseparable. He talked and told me stories of a night and all. It was my job to button up his Union Suit. He wore the old-timey long underwear, and his fingers were old and stiff, he couldn't handle all those buttons. Every morning, Hyden Tyler and I would wake up, and we'd head out to the Westfield Store. So, it was just this real BIG ordeal to get us put across the highway there -- U.S. 411, because Hyden Tyler's blind and I'm only four years old and I don't know anything about cars. So, Big Mama would walk us down the hill, put us across the highway, and get up pointed on the dirt trail towards town. She figured once we got into town we'd be all right. Nobody would let us get run over. Usually, somebody would come out of the drug store and check on us, and we'd be on our way to the Westfield Store.

There were all these old men sitting around there in a circle. Hyden Tyler was the youngest one of them, which is to say, they were all somewhere

between 85 and 100. All of them had a chair, and I had a little rocker. So, there'd be seven of us sitting around there. Hyden Tyler always wore a hat -- had to have a fine hat, a Stetson hat and a suit coat. Now, sometimes he might have his suit coat on over his overalls, but he always wore a suit coat. Hyden Tyler and I would be walking down the street, and I'd have him by the hand. `Course, it looked like to everybody else that he had me by the hand -- people didn't understand exactly how blind he was. And, I was supposed to pull twice on his hand if it was a woman we were passing, and once if it was a man -- so he'd know when to tip his hat. Well, how does a kid know who somebody is, what their station in life is. Lord knows who Hyden Tyler tipped his hat to in his day. But, he felt like he was doing the right and gentlemanly thing.

Hyden Tyler always thought of himself as a businessman. Of course, he went on and retired twenty-five years before he died. So, he didn't have a thing in the world better to do than just sit around Westfield Store getting into it. So, anything that I wanted, I just got. Anytime some of them would tell me no, I knew my court of *last appeal* was my Great-Granddaddy. I was always wanting money from him. So, he'd give me coins. Well, I didn't want coins, no sir. I wanted folding money. So, he'd give me the folding money and I'd give him all the coins back. I didn't quite have all that figured out yet.

It was at the end of World War II, and I let Hyden Tyler know that I wanted Santa Claus to bring me

a tricycle for Christmas. Well, Christmas came and no tricycle. I was awful disappointed. They were rationing the gas and the metal by then, and he couldn't find me one -- new or used. That spring, it was coming up on my fifth birthday there in June, and I let Great-Granddaddy know that this just would not do, that I just had to have myself a tricycle. So, Hyden Tyler commenced to having letters `writ' to all of his former connections in the mercantile business. But, he could turn up no tricycle.

So, I guess that's how come it was we got into our most famous little episode. Hyden Tyler decided one morning, instead of stopping off at Westfield Store, we'd go on across to the other corner and catch the bus, got to Dalton, catch the other bus, go to Chattanooga. We were gonna get Charlie a tricycle. This was a long ride for an old man and a little girl. It was war time and the buses were real crowded -- people just hanging on straps and all. For Oglethorpe was in operations there just outside of Ringgold, Georgia. The bus stopped there and we went in to go to the bathroom. Now, my Mother, Willie Sue, had taught me what to look for on a bathroom door, but it never occurred to me that I should look for something different to take Great-Granddaddy in to. So, I found my door and I took Hyden Tyler in ... him, blind as a bat. He does his necessaries, and I do my necessaries, and we're standing there working on that old union suit. The door opens and a woman in uniform comes in. She sees Hyden Tyler and yells, and it is just this little bitty bathroom -- just two or three

stalls. We get all turned around this way. She steps on my foot. I holler and Hyden Tyler thinks somebody is attacking his Great-Grandbaby. You know, he always carried a cane, so, he takes to belaying it about like this. He can't see who he is attacking. She is hollering, and there is all of this commotion. Well, we end up down to the police station. She's all mad, wants to press charges. Well, we weren't too much interested in doing that. But they wanted to know, "Who are you? Where are you supposed to be?" Hyden Tyler wouldn't let me give our name. He said, "Don't give your name." And they got the state patrol in on it. Everybody's buying me ice cream trying to find out what my name is. I'm saying nothing. He's saying nothing. But, I sure did eat a lot of ice cream that day.

Meantime, Mother comes in from school, we're obviously gone. Big Mama is beside herself. Her whole menagerie is breaking up. I don't know how long it was before word got to Dalton that Hyden Tyler and his Great-Grandbaby were missing, but apparently the people in Dalton got up with the people in Ringgold. That state patrolman gets us up in his patrol car and drives us all the way back to Chatsworth, Georgia. Hyden Tyler and I think this is *fine*. This is just *real* fine. We get to the city limits, and Hyden Tyler leans up and taps the state patrolman on the shoulder and asks, "Do you have one of them sirens -- some of them flashing lights?" So, Hyden Tyler gets the patrolman to turn them on. So, we can go into town in *style*.

Well, I want you to know, they got me a tricycle for my fifth birthday! Somebody took some time off from work and to get serious and locate me a tricycle. It was a used one, but they got it all fixed up. I guess they were afraid Hyden Tyler would wake up the next morning and take off for New York City.

My Mother, Willie Sue, always says that my whole trouble is because of the war. She had to leave me back there with the old folks, and I never did get shed of it. I guess that's true. I've spent my life talking to mountain people; studying them and listening to their stories because my childhood was so influenced by this older generation.