

# Dreams of Jimmy Bannon

A One-Act Play

## CHARACTERS

*Jimmy Bannon, a gruff, retired sportswriter, over 65 but energetic*

*Timothy "Sparky" Jenkins, young cub reporter*

*Joe DiMaggio, a famous baseball player, erroneously thought to be dead*

*Ty Cobb, another famous baseball player, also inexplicably alive*

*A young Cassius Clay*

*A traveling salesman*

*Frank Sinatra, alive as ever*

*Margaret Tucker, an elegantly mysterious yet tawdry woman from the 1930s*

## SETTING

*A dingy and sparsely furnished one-bedroom apartment with one window, through which a partial view of an urban skyline is visible. There are two doors; one is the entrance to the apartment and the other leads to the bathroom. The main room has a small kitchenette at stage right with a cupboard and a small table with two chairs. There is a bottle of bourbon on the table and a couple of glasses. A wooden desk is at stage left, on top of which is an Olivetti typewriter.*

*At curtain, the apartment is empty. Louis Armstrong's "Basin Street Blues" is playing quietly from an old-fashioned radio. There are grunting sounds and rude intestinal noises emanating from behind the bathroom door. These go on for a minute or so, and then there is the sound of a toilet flushing. The door opens and Jimmy Bannon emerges, dressed in rumpled clothing with a pained expression on his face. He turns off the music, then looks straight out at the audience and seems to address them as he speaks.*

## BANNON

Christ, what a day, the kind of day we used to have back on Thurman Street growing up in the back lots of Philly or some other little craphole city, when the fancy coats and the chalk lines and the little fuzzy ball hanging off the top of your navy wool hat that your mother put on you while you did the Cross St. Louis Toodle-oo. Let me tell you something. In those days we would have been glad for a piece of string or a tissue hanging off your shoe and sure, we knew Rocky Marciano was bled for his fame and Charlie Goldberg and your mother didn't like it but nobody else counted. So you're clumsy when it counts against Donnie Cockell and your wife tells you to retire and Sonny Liston's police record and the check grabbers and hand shakers measure you like some beef stew and a stubby forefinger right in your face, but where was Society Kid Hogan when the whiskey came and Doc got rid of the money. It's easy enough to quit when you're bored but...

*[There is a knock at the door.]*

BANNON (cont'd)

Who is it?

JENKINS

It's me, Mr. Bannon, Timothy Jenkins, from *The Bugle*. I'm here to interview you about your legendary career as one of the all-time great sportswriters. We had an appointment, sir.

BANNON  
*[opening the door]*

I'm not feeling too well. I started the interview without you to save us both a little time so I can get back to bed. We're almost finished, in fact. Be careful, I've got wicked gas, gas like they used to have when we'd sit around the flickering flame and listen to FDR tell us how the bookmaker with his bulging bifocals used to be stingy and cruel, only he didn't know Robinson lost it twice and won it back as a middleweight. He was an egotistical S.O.B. but Lombardo bawled himself out and Gainford boxed Fusari, who considered himself quite the beau, but baseball is no mystery to Berra and Henkley gave up the beans when Flanahan started painting posies.

JENKINS

Sir?

BANNON

Sit down, Sparky, and tell me a story. Tell me a story about the time Barrymore walked into the bar and everyone but everyone who knew said it was no accident. Tell me this: Does a guy earning a cool seven G's a quarter stop to wish a gal a franchise and some chewing tobacco with a hip pocket full of bitter memories and a shortwave radio in Houk's office? Tell me that Clay on that cold gray day in Memphis didn't know Pedro Ramos got picked up by the Yankees for relief while a two-dollar player's jockey chiseled small praise on another man's tombstone. Yeah, sit down, Sparky, have yourself a seat and try to forget her, try to forget the way she looked out the window at the way they marched down the Champs-Elysee on a cold night with a piano and the USO troupe and a young pug drinking orange confectionary while the Dodgers and an unknown kid named Sinatra tried to shanghai Porky and ship him out before the honeymoon.

JENKINS

It's Timothy, sir, Timothy Jenkins.

BANNON

Eh?

JENKINS

Not “Sparky,” sir. Timothy. Timothy Jenkins.

BANNON

You’re a little bastard, aren’t you Sparky? Kids like you would run a dimestore Jesus with the garrison soldiers at Fort Dix while we all gagged gulping bourbon whiskey after trudging five miles so Teddy Brenner could have lunch at Madison Square Garden and Glaser’s agent threatened to foreclose on a guy named Pender who was supposed to fight Robinson. Things were different then Sparky, but when a woman in a certain kind of coat would come in we’d all reach for the black sheep and render an unintelligible soliloquy while a mediocre heavyweight went back into impoverished obscurity off the Loop in Chicago. Don’t you want to write any of this down, Sparky?

JENKINS

It’s fine if you want to call me Sparky, sir.

BANNON

Eh?

JENKINS  
*[flustered]*

Yeah, erm, yes sir. Yes, I’d better start writing. Have we started yet sir? Of course, of course we have. I’ve got a pen and a pad of paper in my bag. *[Fumbles with his bag, finally producing a pen and a pad of paper]*

BANNON  
*[chuckling]*

Cub reporter, eh? Sit down, kid. *[Jenkins sits at the table by the kitchenette]* You know, nobody asked me, but I remember just starting out in the business a hundred years ago. This fight manager wouldn’t fight to defend his own mother but sure, he’s an underworld guy, but with his own code of honor. When Kearns came in the joint was closed, and Doc had to give him a swizzle stick and some whistles before the artificial grass in left field became a swamp under Willie Mays’s feet. You’re Joe Namath and you never felt the pain. You’re Mickey Mantle on fish day and there’s a pile of rubbers in the corner. You’re Lew Alcindor coming in as Bob Cousy is going out and you’re measuring distance holding a raw egg on a spoon. You’re...

JENKINS

Mr. Bannon?

BANNON

Yes?

JENKINS

Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?

BANNON

*[eyes Jenkins up and down, pulls a cigarette out of his shirt pocket and lights it]*

A sleuth, eh, a spook, a detective, private eye. Homicide? Sure, you can ask me anything you want, and I don't even care if you've got a warrant. I've got nothing to hide, detective. A silk suit is sharp with a 1960s kind of elegance. It's a part of the deceit that this lean and powerful man, face still young, but with lines of exhaustion betraying him in his prime and not yet forty. You tried to soften it up for Braddock, but you ended up becoming what he used to be. You know you're finished. You knew it before anyone else did. You're the guy taking the punches. Hemingway always wanted to die with grace, that was important to him. The sniper always kept him within range.

JENKINS

*[writing as fast as he can]*

You sure have a unique way of telling a story, Mr. Bannon. I can't make any sense of you most of the time.

BANNON

Durante had sense enough to think he had a chance against Little Mandel when he walked into the betting shop with a pair of deuces doing social work. It's a shame he didn't have a shot at the off-track action. It was a sickness he couldn't cure. But then he never thought of himself as a municipal benefactor.

JENKINS

Erm, right. That's right, Mr. Bannon. Tell me, did you know Joe DiMaggio? Can you tell me what it was like in the old days?

BANNON

DiMaggio? Has DiMaggio been murdered? Sure, I knew him, I've got nothing to hide. He used to use my apartment when he needed a place to take his whores in a ceremony of deceit and the trays didn't bang and there wasn't a clatter of dishes being stacked and falling cutlery and a standing ovation and nobody is concerned with ethics and they paid him ten million to duck the draft. He wouldn't like me telling you though, he was always looking out for his public image. Public image was everything to Joltin' Joe. Everything except a loose-hanging crag end of a unanimous Supreme Court decision with flaws, but a country doesn't turn on a man because his repugnant theories stir the dreams of countless factory-bored office-tired job-disgusted solitude-mad girls full of Darryl Zanuck's canned mirages.

*[There is a knock at the door.]*

BANNON (cont'd)

Who is it?

DIMAGGIO

Open up, you lousy son of a bitch.

*[Bannon opens the door. As soon as he opens it, Joe DiMaggio takes one step into the room and punches him in the face, knocking him sprawling across the apartment floor. Bannon gets up, dazed, shaking off the impact.]*

BANNON

Joe! Joe DiMaggio! I thought you were dead! Sparky here says you were murdered!

DIMAGGIO

I don't know a thing about it, Jimmy.

JENKINS

Is it really him, Mr. Bannon? Is it really Joe DiMaggio?

DIMAGGIO

Sure it's me, kid. Ain't ya never seen the Yankees play, kid? Sure, I'll give ya an autograph.  
*[He grabs Jenkins' pad and signs it]*

JENKINS

Hey, that's my...well...that's swell Mr. DiMaggio, real swell. Thanks. Thanks a whole bunch.  
*[pauses uncertainly]* It's true though. Not about the murder. I...I didn't say that. But you died, Mr. DiMaggio. I'm awful sorry but it was in all the newspapers. Erm, although your 56 game hitting streak endures as one of the most remarkable records in all of sports history!

BANNON  
*[chuckling]*

Kid says you're a dead man, Joe, how do you like that? Tell me something, Joe. [rubs his jaw] Why'd you slug me? Why'd you slug me like Joe the Barber on opera day when Carni'd shut up the shop and stand in line all day for gallery seats and a hand-cranked phonograph with a tulip horn.

DIMAGGIO  
*[shakes his head]*

Same old Jimmy. It's my public image, pal. You know my public image is everything to me. That wasn't me using your apartment for any cheap whores, and I'm not going to stand still while you cast aspersions to some young cub reporter who's going to take *The Bugle* and trumpet it all over town. It was Ty Cobb. Remember? Ty Cobb!

*[Turns to leave, heads for the door, opens it, pauses halfway through, and turns to Jenkins.]*

DIMAGGIO (cont'd)

You got that, kid? Ty Cobb!

*[JENKINS scribbles in his notebook as DiMaggio exits.]*

BANNON

Let me tell you something, Sparky, because I've got something to tell you and I like you and I was once a cub reporter like you and I've taken a shine to you, kid, a real shine, like Schmeling for the troops on VE day and we rode around in a jeep. It was the gayest town I've ever seen. The lineman always figures he can play another season, kid. When his wife isn't in the room he practices his grimaces and sings in a language I couldn't understand and doorway crap games and ropes of beads for curtains. I could smell the witch hazel and hear the plume of steam rise tittering from the boiler where the hot towels were stacked. Tatter, tatter, ratter tatter tat tat tat!

JENKINS

Sir?

BANNON

Eh?

JENKINS

You were going to tell me something? Or, erm, was that it?

BANNON

Sleuth, eh? Private dick. Sure, I'll tell you everything I know. What's it to you? What does it mean for a guy who carries an average of 157 yards a game and never handles a cue himself but takes a piece of the other guy's action? When the patrol comes out of the paddies on the left flank with seven prisoners and Hemingway's got a bottle of cognac in each pocket of his flak jacket and you're Fran Tarkenton, a straight arrow in a swinger's town. Your scrambling style offends the purists and the fear broke through the constant sedatives.

JENKINS

Sorry?

BANNON

Save it, detective. Save it for the boys who fought with one eye blinded and got paunchy and were always happy to make a bleak living and a raging desire he couldn't control. A .38 bulged in the pocket of the stooped man and he spoke a private language of insult and despair. If New York could talk it would sound like Lou Stillman. But I don't expect you to coach Pittsburgh for Durocher on a night when poetic dignity suggests you're entitled to pity and Musial stood up and held onto a strap.

JENKINS

*[shrugs his shoulders]*

Sir, was that really Joe DiMaggio just now?

BANNON

DiMaggio? DiMaggio was a purist, son, and his public image meant everything to him. He was always worrying about it. No, it was Ty Cobb who'd come and I'd let him use the place when he needed somewhere to take his prostitutes and I'd go and pad his checks in the joint and the trainers were as furtive as a candy store bookmaker. DiMaggio would never go in for that sort of thing. Did he think he was above it? Did he ever hawk a sentiment with disgusting banality while the scummy touts of every track from Tanforan to Rockingham claim that their eyes get moist and the horses mince out on the track to "My Old Kentucky Home"? Cobb was a hard man and restaurants that drench cold meat with hot gravy should say so on the menu, but when he rolled the dice he eventually seven'd out and stood contemptuous and triumphant. Sure, I'd let him use the place. He just wanted to be the best, or so it seemed. I had to wonder.

JENKINS

You've been around all the greats, Mr. Bannon. Tell me, did it ever wear you down inside, being so close to the spotlight, standing at the edge of greatness with all its human flaws and promise, yet being relegated to the fawning edges of professional idolatry? Did it ever make you sad?

BANNON  
*[pauses, falters]*

I...I...well you see, kid, I... *[he starts to weep pitifully, and for the first time sits down at the table, his head down, shoulders heaving]*

JENKINS

Aw, geez Mr. Bannon, I'm awful sorry, real sorry! I didn't mean to make you...you know...I never meant to upset you...I...

BANNON  
*[lifts his head, speaking quietly]*

No, son, it isn't that. I never craved the spotlight, not like that. Sure, who wouldn't envy all those guys in the prime of their lives who had it all, the money, the fame, the girls. But that's not why I'm crying kid. A man can cry, by the way, kid, hell I'd lay even money that it's good for him from time to time. No, what gets me is that, my god, it's a beautiful world we live in, son. A man is born, reaches the peak of his youth, takes a shot at the big leagues, and with the right combination of skill and breaks he makes it. He shines out for a moment in history, just a moment, like a beacon of hope for the other guys, all the kids, kids like you Sparky, and I was a kid once, and he's a symbol of all that's possible in the world, a hero, kid, a real hero. And then as soon as it hits it starts to fade, and then it's gone, and he's just a memory, just something on some old film or in a book. That's the way of the world, Sparky, that's just how it is. It's beautiful, son, as beautiful as any sunset, but it'll break your heart every time. That's what chokes me up from time to time. The heart-breaking beauty of our wondrous, fleeting existence.

*[There is a pause.]*

JENKINS

Wow. That was beautiful, Mr. Bannon. I...I'm surprised. I don't know, it's just...well...that's the first thing you've said that makes any...the first thing that I've really understood. I feel like I'm finally getting to know you, like we're bonding. I'm starting to catch a glimpse of the real Jimmy Bannon. I...

*[There is a knock at the door.]*

BANNON

I got it.

*[Bannon gets up and goes to answer the door. As he opens it, Ty Cobb takes a quick step inside and sends Bannon sprawling with a hard punch to the face. Cobb enters the room, pulls Bannon to his feet, gives him a gentle shaking, helps straighten his clothes, etc., as Bannon comes to his senses.]*

BANNON (cont'd)

*[Looks into Cobb's face, points at him.]*

Ty Cobb. Humorless. Fierce. A cruel style but probably the greatest all around player in the history of the game, like music played on an adding machine. Why'd you slug me, Ty? Why'd you slug me right in the face like a three-chair shop on Spring Street off of Varick when Adley was nothing but a part-time janitor in the gym, and old Bessie used to come in walking sideways with that old shellump, shellump and a tinhorn delicatessen philosopher after drinking a quart of bootleg hooch who despised cops and was always being run out of the precinct house?

COBB

Don't play it coy with me, Jimmy, not after that crack about me and the prostitutes in your apartment. Tell the world, why don'tcha? Some pal. Not that I care what people think. Public image means nothing to me. But I had to slug you for it Jimmy. Matter of principle. Don't take it personal, pal. I gotta go.

*[Cobb gently and almost affectionately slaps Bannon on the cheek, winks at him, and then exits.  
There is a short pause.]*

JENKINS

Sir, that can't have been Ty Cobb. Ty Cobb most definitely died quite some time ago. He died in the early 1960s. I remember reading about it. It was sad. Hardly anybody showed up for his funeral. He died 30 years ago!

BANNON

Sure, technically, and you can talk statistics until you're blue in the face, but it doesn't change the way a man sits in his room and watches the leaves blow around in the backyard and brags with his friends about how tender the turkey was. They all claimed to have eaten a leg. You're Shoeless Joe Jackson and Cobb's inside your mind until you slip to .406 in the last week of the season. You're Two-Head Charlie and Gypsy Daniels is your first idol. You're Cassius Clay or Archie Moore but you never pause in your blues blowing on a tarnished harmonica even while

you're stomping your singed foot from Marty McGann's three match cigar. You're a gangling private, scrawny and red-haired, and there's a big-bellied stove in the center of the room while the snow falls on Bastogne and half the girls have gold teeth.

JENKINS

Well I just don't know what's going on around here at all. Dead guys showing up at the door full of spit and vinegar--none of this makes any sense! And gee whiz Mr. Bannon, now that I think of it, you've been around so long that you ought to be about 90 by now yourself. But look at you! You look barely 60 years old. Are my eyes deceiving me? Have my ears gone crazy? *[getting hysterical]* Just what on earth is going on around here?!

BANNON

Simmer down, Sparky, you're getting hysterical. Take a real good look at the fleshy stranger in your doorway on the verge of middle age, thick and mussed like a jeep driver who spent too much time forgetting the bad days. How many cigarettes was it, and how many girls and hangovers? How many songs and dollars and cups of coffee in a two-penny suit on Milton Boulevard off Tribbleman Street? You're Jocko in a hat made of sausages and you get your medal just for being alive. You're the dusk sifting quietly through the rows of tents across from the old Red Cross building where Louis licked cigars and painted funny faces on your chin while you hung upside down and counted the pounds on an old pug as you get older. The man once said nobody ever gets over being in Paris and for once the chances are he wasn't talking about a thrust and a jab and sleeping bags in a black market restaurant serving buck sergeants over a torch you carried for three chunks of chocolate graham pie. Have yourself a little bourbon there son, it'll steady the nerves.

*[He picks up the bourbon from the table and pours two short glasses, sliding one over to Jenkins.]*

BANNON (cont'd)

I can see you're confused, kid, like the whole world isn't making any sense and frankly Sparky I'm the least of it. Sure, it's still Campanella, Reese, Robinson and Furillo, but the sun's gone down and Mantle's sound and Podres is doing a stint in the service. It was a myth that lefties can't win in Ebbets Field when MacSaren strolled a block to the B and G and started downing Jellos and Cokes, but he could only eat out of the one side of his mouth. Billy the Rose was a small man but the last time his leg hurt him he was patting a dog, like a hawk imprisoned in a sparrow in a half-filled demitasse watching its own funeral at the El Morocco in a timid glide. I don't expect any of this to make you feel any better, kid, but that's not the point. That's not the way it works, see. Just when you think nobody's ever called Toots anymore, then whose saloon was it when half my life went by like a speakeasy doorman named Hubbell and Leiber and Mancuso. He was a profanely bitter man with twelve thousand spectators and rocks strewn around, arrogant in their stupidity with chopped meat, lettuce, and onions. Just don't let it bother you, kid. Let 'em go about their business while you walk under the great arch into Mexico looking for the ecstasy that no man can borrow from another and until then you're Hemingway,

using the slang in savage colors and assumed poses, cruel and harsh, a pacing cavalry led by a lunatic dressed like an umpire in a bullfight. It's a slow-coming morning and you're the confetti on the clockless hours of a Vegas loser in the bootleg age. You're the satchel betting fins on a monk's pocket in a loft above the garage. You're the King of Greece and you're bankrolling a Dutch Schultz bootleg hoodlum syndicate with a shoe manufacturer in a run-down movie studio. It's acey-deucey time and the desert wind has bumped the raise like a sniffling child with his cold-bruised hand with a fistful of crushed and melted jelly beans.

*[There is a pause. Jenkins stares at Bannon, dumbfounded, then takes the glass of bourbon and downs it in one gulp.]*

JENKINS

Well, I, erm...

BANNON

Go on, ask me another one. You're the detective.

JENKINS

Sure, I mean...

BANNON

Private dick. Sleuth. Copper. G-Man.

JENKINS

Mind if I have another bourbon?

BANNON

Sure, kid, sure.

*[Bannon pours him another shot, which Jenkins promptly drinks.]*

JENKINS

Well, tell me about, tell me about...boxing! Boxing, and the old days, and drinking, and pugs and bookmakers and horse players and backrooms of sloughed saloons and the way it was!

BANNON

Well sure kid, sure, I...I...[he gets choked up, he struggles, and finally his head falls to the table in sobs and weeping.]

JENKINS

Gee whiz Mr. Bannon, I'm sorry, I'm awful sorry, I, I, did I say the wrong thing? Tell me whatever you want to tell me about Mr. Bannon, I don't mind, honest!

BANNON  
[looking up]

Nah, it ain't that, son. It's just, well, you got me thinking, thinking about the old days and how I missed it back in the 60s when Clay came out and spoke his mind and denounced the war, and hell, I really gave it to him hard back then. He was beautiful, so beautiful and so honest and so clear, a genius, kid, a real genius. And I couldn't see it. Oh, I saw it all right, only later, much later on. At the time I was bitter, and stupid, and pig-headed, and stuck on Joe Louis and I couldn't change with the times fast enough and [he starts to cry again, and knocks back his glass of bourbon] I, I, I wasn't fair to him, Sparky. I didn't see it and I wasn't fair and he was so beautiful and...

[There is a knock at the door. Bannon looks up uncertainly, then approaches the door very timidly.]

BANNON

Who is it?

CLAY

Cassius Clay.

BANNON

Jesus. [Turns to Jenkins.] Tell you what, kid, why don't you get it? [Jenkins shakes his head no and holds his hands up.] Come on, come on, come on, make yourself useful!

[Bannon pulls Jenkins up and pushes him towards the door. Jenkins tries to slip around behind Bannon and push him ahead, and a struggle of pushing each other to the door ensues. Jenkins lands at the door first and, after a momentary pause, he opens it, with Bannon standing behind him in a semi-crouch. As Jenkins pulls the door open, they both duck and close their eyes. Cassius Clay is standing there, with an empty measuring cup in his hand. He looks at the two

*cowering men and smiles. They both slowly open their eyes and look at him, then awkwardly straighten up, embarrassed.]*

CLAY

Look at the two of you! You look like you're expecting to take a punch in the face!

BANNON

How are you, Clay?

JENKINS

You better call him Ali. He's not Cassius Clay anymore. I heard it makes him mad.

CLAY

That's not for a few years yet, kid. Look at me! I'm a young man! I just took out Sonny Liston! I shook the world, kid! I shook the world!

BANNON  
*[hanging his head]*

Yeah you did. You sure did, Clay. Say, you ain't sore with me, are you?

CLAY

I don't know what you're talking about. I just came over to borrow a cup of sugar. You got any sugar in the house, Bannon?

BANNON

Uh, sure, sure thing, Clay, I've got sugar. Plenty of sugar. *[Opens the cupboard, which is packed full with boxes of sugar. He takes out one of the boxes and hands it to Cassius Clay.]* Here. Keep it. Take the whole box. I've got plenty of sugar. I don't even use the stuff.

CLAY

Much obliged, Bannon, thank you kindly. Hey. You don't look so good, Bannon. *[Bannon is still clearly on the verge of tears.]* Hey, hey, hey. Come on now. Heeeeeyyyyyy. *[Clay gives Bannon a nice hug and rubs his back.]* Thaaaaat's better, thaaaaat's all right now. Stop it now, you're making me feel bad. I'm in the prime of my life. I'm a baaaaaaaad man!

*[Clay gives Bannon a big kiss on the cheek and then walks out the door. Bannon and Jenkins look at each other and, without a word, sit back down at the kitchen table. Jenkins grabs the bottle of bourbon and refills both their glasses.]*

JENKINS

Wow. This is the strangest day of my life! What is going on around here? Was that really Cassius Clay Mr. Bannon? Are you OK Mr. Bannon?

BANNON  
*[completely recovered now]*

Let me tell you something, Sparky. You're a Broadway sportsman living in Brooklyn with your widowed mother but you take your coffee in the chop house. You occasionally take out a hostess in a dance hall but you're terrified when it comes to risking money. You can't even read a racing form but you're too afraid to ask anybody, so the next night in Lindy's you collar a young publicist and tell him the story of when Sinatra laid out fifty to a louse with a racket out of the goodness of his heart and the guy laughs. You don't believe Liston can be damaged by another man's fists and your wife is called Geraldine. Her jewelry is impressive and the Scranton Elks recently attended an amateur tournament with a mediocre heavyweight called Jimmy Adamick but you went to sleep Saturday night with padded cheeks and fluff toy called Blinky. It was no picnic. Seaver always said the curveball went before the fastball so you scuffled for a meager existence skipping meals as a charmer on Madison Avenue while stalks of corn somewhere in Minnesota turn hound on a word of honor for pool and shylocks. But the trotter was a bad card player, and they'd scream abuse at him when the defense put the pressure on Allie Sherman. Ask Hodges if you want to hear a sob story in street clothes for a flabby hard-boiled muskrat moustache bordelaise.

JENKINS

Well I'm sure glad to hear you sounding like your old self again, Mr. Bannon. Maybe we should try talking about something other than sports. We were talking about sports, weren't we Mr. Bannon? Anyway, maybe you could tell me a little bit about the war, the big one, Mr. Bannon. Didn't you cover the war also, for a while, Mr. Bannon?

BANNON

Cub reporter, eh kid? Young scout. Greenhorn. Beanpole. Let me tell you something, Sparky. You're Korea, only now the trouble is on the sea and Max Schmeling's equipment went bad and conversations in Europe were repeated verbatim like carbine crutches down the peninsula off Yancy Street. The caked mud runs down your leg, only nobody likes walking in the sleet while New York lishes eat chop suey in high heels and skinny legs. You're the noisy ally of the persecuted and a package of soggy donuts heeds the false prophets across the picket line while faithless politicians become ghosts in the haunted mansion of Nathan Hale. Sure, we belonged

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to unions. We paid our dues. But marines are crazy and mortar juice from Grand Rapids and if I step on your toes I'll break them, I swear I will, so mind your toes, kid, understand? Well do you?

JENKINS

No, sir.

BANNON

Let me put it to you this way, kid. You're Johnny Unitas, hiding under the table pretending to be an old dried up piece of oatmeal that everyone's forgotten about, everyone except the little kid who used to crawl on that floor and spit up in the corner so's nobody would notice. You're Ethel Barrymore's underpants and there's no place for you to hide. You're Gil Hodges in a weather balloon on cheese day and it's fifteen below. Somebody called the cops because Uncle Louie did his pants trick in the barber shop only this time it's the Germans and you're the gravy on Mom's old mashed potatoes. We had our chances, kid, but we didn't know that Wally Moon did a Marciano on the flip side of a lonely handkerchief in Tinseltown. And suddenly in walks a long cool piece of elegance with nylons like you've never seen before and it's tinky winky stand-up time on a Tuesday with a dime-store pair of apples.

JENKINS

Erm, sir?

BANNON

There's a song in the air, kid, only it's wearing cosmetic jewelry and working its way up your drainpipe to dance like kittens with a cheap paparazzi in bodysuits. Truffles never felt it like gym bottoms when confetti would rain down like roast pork and leave drip stains on Fenniman's finery. There's only one way to go from here, Sparky, but you'll never jump the bunion drifting through mock fights in a Hirsch Jacobs imitation of Smolinski doing a hang dog Jerry Koosman. Take it to the bank, son, and give it a tickle for me. Wait a minute, petunia, there's somebody at the door.

*[There is a knock at the door. Bannon gets up briskly and cheerfully and answers it. Jenkins is sitting speechless.]*

BANNON

Who is it?

SALESMAN

Salesman!

BANNON

What are you selling?

SALESMAN

I can sell anything!

BANNON

Come on in. *[Opens the door.]*

SALESMAN

What do you need?

BANNON

A friend of mine once said he needed a certain photograph and some staples. He was a jockey, tiny, as all jockeys are, they're all tiny, jockeys. Unfortunately Sherman couldn't find his baseball cap, and I remember patronizing the athletes who kidded me. I'll take a powder.

SALESMAN

You know, I can tell that you're the kind of guy who knows exactly what he wants and doesn't want, and I'm not just saying that because I'm trying to sell you something. You think I'm just feeding you a line trying to sell you a bill of goods and lead you on a merry dance. Not at all. What I'm offering you is not the most amazing thing you've ever heard in your life, and I'm not going to stand here and tell you that it is. What I'm offering you is very, very simple. Here it is. I'm offering you a top quality vacuum cleaner at a very affordable price. I know, I know, you've probably already got some sort of vacuum cleaner lying around that you've had for years and it's good enough to do the job like it always has. Probably you bought it as soon as you had your first place right out of college. Am I right? *[laughs]* Sure I am! Ha ha ha! Now are you going to die without this new vacuum cleaner? No, of course you're not and I'm not going to stand here and tell you that you are. That's not what I'm here for. That's not the way I do business.

The way I look at it, I am never going to sell you anything unless I am prepared to offer you something that you're willing to buy. Now I know nobody wants to buy anything at first, I understand that, believe me. I understand that right now probably every impulse in your body is struggling and straining to find a polite way to tell me to go straight back to hell. It wasn't your idea to buy a vacuum cleaner today. As far as you're concerned this vacuum cleaner just came right out of the blue and landed at your doorstep. If I hadn't come here and tried to sell it to you, you never would have missed it. You could so easily just save the money and live with your existing vacuum.

Hey, I'm a kidder, but I'm not trying to kid you. You're a man, I'm a man, we know how it works. Lookit, I'm not going to tell you anything you don't already know. I know how we

usually like to buy things. We think it up ourselves! We see an ad somewhere or something, or somehow we get some idea in our heads about something we just have to have. Am I right? Whatever that thing is we've just got to have it. But it's our own decision. No pressure. Nobody is trying to talk us into anything, we're talking *ourselves* into it in our own time and in our own way. *We* think up the thing to buy. *We* decide when to buy it. We talk *ourselves* into spending the money. And now suddenly here's this guy at the door and he wants us to buy something that we've never even thought of buying, and you know as well as I do that it's his job to get us to buy it regardless of whether it's the best thing for us at the time. He's trying to take our money to put food on his table, understand what I mean? He'd be very happy if you bought that thing even if you didn't need it and couldn't afford it and little Timmy had to go without shoes this winter.

I understand how you feel, sir! This is battle! I don't stand a chance in the world unless you like me, and unless I have a fascinating product. You have to think about the vacuum cleaner for long enough to get comfortable with the idea. I know you're already thinking about it because I'm standing in your house and we're talking about it. Well hey, maybe it's time to get a new vacuum cleaner. Sometimes people need a new vacuum cleaner and I like to be there when they've made that decision. And it's always a whim sir, it's never the sort of thing you plan out ahead. The opportunity presents itself somehow in some way and then it's goddamn christ almighty I'm going to buy that motherfucking vacuum cleaner right now. I've seen it happen a million times, that's my line of work. Nice new vacuum cleaner. Shiny. Sleek Powerful--it's a very powerful model by the way sir. This thing will suck up all your dirt right up into it sir, I don't care how tiny that dirt is or how much it's stuck onto something else, it's coming up and heading to the promised land inside one of these here vacuum cleaner bags. This thing will suck the mites right out of your pillows, and I'm not even joking. And I'm almost embarrassed to tell you how cheap it is, because it makes *me* feel cheap--it's just some small amount of money per time period, sir, a very very easy way to buy things.

## BANNON

I'm wise. Chester Burman used to drum up a little business on South End Street off of Myrtle, before Myrtle used to blow bugle for the elm trees like a virulent Swiss chocolate doing the matador on French carpets. I knew a pug with a chance at the dilapidated piano until a boy's simplicity and an awkward diminishing badness because he wasn't old enough to handle the booze. Sure, a guy might hit close to four hundred when food is scarce but if Marlene Dietrich read it to you you'd believe it.

## SALESMAN

I know I would! Well that's exactly what I mean! Listen, the truth is I've got one of these puppies myself and I love it. Look I know your momma told you not to believe me but I wouldn't sell these things if I didn't think they were great. I wouldn't do it and I couldn't do it, it's not the way I do business. Why would I sell vacuum cleaners if I didn't believe in them? I could sell anything, I told you that before I came in the door. I'm selling a quality product, that's why I can present it to you with a lot of confidence. I'm not trying to sell you a bill of goods

here, it's not my style. The way I see it a man's got to sleep at night, that's job number one, always has been. Am I right?

*[There is a slight pause.]*

BANNON

I'll take one.

SALESMAN

Well congratulations to you, because you are going to love this thing. Just sign here ... *[there is a pause while Bannon signs]* ...very good...and credit card info here ... *[another pause while Bannon scribbles on the form]* ... initial here and here *[pause again, more scribbling]* ...and this puppy is yours to keep. Pleasure doing business with you sir. I'll let you get back to your little pal. *[nods at Jenkins]* Bye now. Enjoy!

*[The salesman leaves. Bannon goes back and sits down at the kitchen table with Jenkins. Jenkins looks a bit nervous, and edges just slightly away in his chair. There is a pause as Bannon stares at Jenkins without speaking.]*

JENKINS

So, um...where were we?

BANNON

Cub reporter, young pup. Women make you nervous, Sparky?

JENKINS

Erm, yes, but we, I mean you, were talking about...

BANNON

I'm talking about women, Sparky, long-legged women that have a way of walking that you don't always see at the lunch counter delicatessen on Canal Street where Sid Luckman refutes the spiteful myth of megaphones on a special train where loosey goosey couldn't get out of her seat. Women with a nostalgic gladness for the horse players and shag carpet and the fight mob throws you dinner because you're Ezzard Charles at forty seven and it's all about the swelter of the fancy dog afternoon show at Crimpleton's.

JENKINS

Say, can I ask you something, Mr. Bannon? Have you...

BANNON

Flat foot. Copper. Lieutenant.

JENKINS

Erm, yes, ahh, anyway, have you lived your whole life alone, Mr. Bannon? I mean, single? Were you ever...were you ever in love, Mr. Bannon?

*[Bannon's lower lip quivers and it is immediately apparent that he is about to weep once more.]*

JENKINS

Ah, geez, no, I didn't...

*[It's too late. Bannon collapses into weeping, his head down on the table, his shoulders heaving.]*

JENKINS

*[sighing, slightly impatiently]*

I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

BANNON

*[Lifting his head, gaining a semblance of calm]*

It ain't that, kid. I'm not crying because of a woman I used to know or because I've got a broken heart. I was in love once, of course. Many years ago now. Her name was Margaret. Margaret Tucker. We were young and impetuous and we thought the whole world was laid out for us. But I was a young cub reporter then and I was married to my job. The travel, the constant deadlines, the pressure. It was no life for a young woman. Eventually, she'd had enough. I don't blame her, kid, and that's not why I'm crying. I'm crying because, because well, it takes you back, doesn't it kid, and it's all so beautiful, people being young, and time passing, and love and mistakes and choices and life and death, it's like a gorgeous symphony played on heart strings and it's overwhelming, so beautiful. I was shedding tears of joy, kid, sentimental tears of beautiful joy and sadness, all mixed together out of ...

*[There is a knock at the door.]*

BANNON

I got it. *[Goes up to the door.]* Who is it?

SINATRA

Whatsa matter, you don't recognize my knock anymore?

BANNON

*[Opens the door.] Frank Sinatra. Class guy. Blue eyes. Singer. Come on in Frank. Make yourself at home.*

SINATRA

*[Steps into the apartment. Looks around, smiles, hands on his hips. Suddenly he punches Bannon right in the face for no reason, sending him sprawling across the room.]*

Sorry about that, Jimmy. I haven't laid into anyone for a long time. Too long. I just had to slug somebody. Part of my image. Tough guy. Mob connections. But I didn't come by to waste your time with my small talk, Jimmy. I brought somebody with me. Somebody I thought you might want to see.

*[Bannon stands up, shakes off the effects of the punch. Looks towards the door, which is still open. A woman walks in.]*

BANNON

Margaret?

TUCKER

It's me Jimmy. I've come back. Did you miss me?

BANNON

Margaret Tucker. Old flame. Hot one. Good times. Punks got rich fighting in the Garden during the war but soon my right eye was swollen with a malarial infection. I tried to tell her about the calculated ferocity of the meat buyers and a guy called Bobo who used to run patrol through a blotted out world with a ten cent cigar and a pair of noodles called charity. You're Satchel Paige and the ceremony was mean and sour. You're Babe Ruth and it's Turkish bath time at the spelling bee. You're an old pork chop and balloons are dancing in the dank hallway like curly fries, the kind with cheese on them and a laced up mangled leg and nobody asked me.

TUCKER

Come on Jimmy, come on out with us. It'll be fun. Like old times.

SINATRA

Yeah, like old times, Jimmy. We'll paint this old town red again, baby.

*[Bannon hesitates. He looks at Jenkins, and back at Margaret. He takes a half step towards her, and towards the door.]*

TUCKER

That's right Jimmy, come on now. I know you missed me. I'll bet there's a lot of things you miss about me. And I've missed you Jimmy. Come on, we've got a car downstairs and the motor's running.

BANNON

*[Turning to Jenkins]* I've got a Joe Pepitone bumpersticker in a double crew babble upper deck of trouble, Sparky. You can have the place while I'm gone. Make yourself at home. It's an honor when a bookmaker sends you over a drink and you're wise money with a half a mind to roister with Joe Jacobs, only you don't like the taste of tobacco and a cityroom stock company of bogus folklore. The slandered man seldom protests, and the majority of dog fanciers offer an illusion of conquest for economic stability while the doctors gave Duggan six months. He squandered his blisters on a lemonade with an enormous belly as strangers smile at subway guards or a frozen leopard. No trees ever intimidated the best fat actors from England and high freckled foreheads with homely waitresses sat in boxes and bragged about Cincinnati. Nobody's ugly in a red roadster or lonely in a sports tuxedo and shoulders, kid. You're Casey Stengel only Ray is friendly with Glaser again. You're Henry Wismer and the rage bawled out on the Polo Grounds like a squeezy toy with muted ventriloquism. All I can do is elude the rush, scramble, duck out of a two-man pincer with long silences like a crow only flamboyant like a secretive macaw. Take care of the place, Sparky, and don't wait up. Are you writing all this down?

SINATRA

*[Addressing Jenkins, who rises out of his chair, looking troubled]*

We're out of here, sunshine. A word of advice for you: Be careful with your treatment of Mr. Bannon there. The way I see it, Mailer, Breslin, and their ilk couldn't carry his Olivetti. See you in the funny papers, kid.

*[Bannon, Tucker, and Sinatra leave, closing the door behind them. Jenkins looks around, sizing up the place, and begins to look quite pleased with himself. He goes over to the radio and turns it on. "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" by Duke Ellington and Louie Armstrong comes on as the lights dim and the curtain comes down.]*