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by the author of ACCEPTABLE LOSSES

IRWIN SHAW

Rich Man, Poor Man

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PART ONE

Chapter 1

1945

I

Mr. Donnelly, the track coach, ended the day's practice early because Henry Fuller's father came down to the high-school field to tell Henry that they had just got a telegram from Washington announcing that Henry's brother had been killed in action in Germany. Henry was the team's best shot-putter. Mr. Donnelly gave Henry a chance to go in and change his clothes alone and go home with his father, then whistled to gather the whole squad in a group and said they could all go home, as a gesture of respect.

The baseball team was practicing on the diamond, but nobody on the baseball team had lost a brother that afternoon, so they kept on practicing.

Rudolph Jordache (two-twenty low hurdles) went into the locker room and took a shower, although he hadn't run enough to work up a sweat. There never was enough hot water at home and when he could he showered at the gym. The high school had been built in 1927, when everybody had money, and the showers were roomy and with plenty of hot water. There was even a swimming pool. Usually, Rudolph took a swim too, after practice, but he didn't today, out of respect.

The boys in the locker room spoke in low tones and there was none of the usual horsing around. Smiley, the captain of the team, got up on a bench and said he thought that if there was a funeral service for Henry's brother, they all ought to chip in and buy a wreath. Fifty cents a man would do it, he thought. You could tell by the looks on the boys' faces who could spare the fifty cents and who couldn't. Rudolph coudn't spare it, but he made a conscious effort to look as though he could. The boys who agreed most readily were the ones whose parents took them down to New York City before the school term to buy the year's clothes for them. Rudolph bought his clothes

in town, in Port Philip, at Bernstein's Department Store.

He was dressed neatly, though, with a collar and tie and a sweater under a leather windbreaker, and brown pants, from an old suit whose jacket had gone through at the elbows. Henry Fuller was one of the boys who got his clothes in New York, but Rudolph was sure Henry wasn't getting any pleasure from the fact this afternoon.

Rudolph got out of the locker room quickly because he didn't want to walk home with any of the other fellows and talk about Henry Fuller's brother. He wasn't particularly friendly with Henry, who was rather stupid, as the weight men were likely to be, and he preferred not to pretend to any excessive sympathy.

The school was in a residential part of the town, to the north and east of the business center, and was surrounded by semi-detached one-family houses that had been built at about the same time as the school, when the town was expanding. They were all the same originally, but through the years their owners had painted the trim and doors in different colors and here and there had added a bay window or a balcony in forlorn attempts at variety.

Carrying his books, Rudolph strode along the cracked sidewalks of the neighborhood. It was a windy early spring day, although not very cold, and he had a sense of well-being and holiday because of the light workout and the short practice. Most of the trees had already put out their leaves and there were buds everywhere.

The school was built on a hill and he could see the Hudson River below him, still looking cold and wintry, and the spires of the churches of the town, and in the distance to the south, the chimney of the Boylan Brick and Tile Works, where his sister Gretchen worked, and the tracks of the New York Central, along the river. Port Philip was not a pretty town, although once it had been, with big white Colonial houses mingled with solid Victorian stone. But the boom in the 1920's had brought a lot of new people into town, working people whose homes were narrow and dark, spreading out into all neighborhoods. Then the Depression had thrown almost everybody out of work and the jerry-built houses had been neglected, and as Rudolph's mother complained, the entire town had become a single slum. This wasn't absolutely true. The northern part of the town still had many fine big houses and wide streets and the houses had been kept up through everything. And even

in the neighborhoods that were run down there were big houses that families had refused to leave and were still presentable behind generous lawns and old trees.

The war had brought prosperity once again to Port Philip and the Brick and Tile Works and the cement plant were going full blast and even the tannery and the Byefield Shoe Factory had started up again with Army orders. But with the war on, people had other things to do than worry about keeping up appearances and, if possible, the city looked more dilapidated than ever.

With the town spread before him like that, planless and jumbled in the windy afternoon sun, Rudolph wondered if anybody would give his life to defend it or to take it, as Henry Fuller's brother had given his life to take some nameless town in Germany.

Secretly, he hoped that the war would last another two years, although it didn't look now as though it would. He was going to be seventeen years old soon and another year after that he could enlist. He saw himself with a lieutenant's silver bars, taking an enlisted man's salute, waving a platoon to follow him under machine-gun fire. It was the sort of experience a man ought to have. He was sorry there was no more cavalry. That must have been something—waving a saber, at a full gallop, charging the despicable foe.

He didn't dare mention anything like this around the house. His mother became hysterical when anybody as much as suggested that perhaps the war would last and her Rudolph would be taken. He knew that some boys lied about their age to enlist—there were stories about fifteen-year-old boys, even fourteen-year-olds, who were in the Marines and who had won medals—but he couldn't do anything like that to his mother.

As usual, he made a detour to pass the house where Miss Lenaut lived. Miss Lenaut was his French teacher. She was nowhere in sight.

Then he walked down to Broadway, the main street of the town, which ran parallel to the river and which was also the through highway from New York to Albany. He dreamed of having a car, like the ones he saw speeding through town. Once he had a car he would go down to New York every weekend. He wasn't quite sure what he would do in New York, but he would go there.

Broadway was a nondescript thoroughfare, with shops

of all kinds mixed together, butcher shops and markets next to quite large stores that sold women's clothes and cheap jewelry and sporting goods. He stopped, as he often did, before the window of the Army and Navy Store, which had fishing equipment displayed along with work shoes and chino pants and shirts and flashlights and penknives. He stared at the fishing rods, thin and elegant, with their expensive reels. He fished in the river and, when the season was on, in the trout streams that were open to the public, but his equipment was primitive.

He went down another short street and turned to his left on Vanderhoff Street, where he lived. Vanderhoff Street ran parallel to Broadway and seemed to be trying to emulate it, but doing it badly, like a poor man in a baggy suit and scuffed shoes pretending he had arrived in a Cadillac. The shops were small and the wares in their windows were dusty, as though the owners knew there really was no use. Quite a few of the shop fronts were still boarded up, having closed down in 1930 or 1931. When new sewer lines were laid down before the war the WPA had felled all the trees which had shaded the sidewalks and nobody had bothered to plant new ones. Vanderhoff was a long street and as he approached his own house the street became shabbier and shabbier, as though just the mere act of going south was somehow spiritually a decline.

His mother was in the bakery, behind the counter, with a shawl around her shoulders, because she was always cold. The building was on a corner, so there were two big windows and his mother kept complaining that with all that glass there was no way of keeping the shop warm. She was putting a dozen hard rolls in a brown paper bag for a little girl. There were cakes and tarts displayed in the front window, but they were no longer baked in the cellar. At the start of the war, his father, who did the baking, had decided that it was more trouble than it was worth and now a truck from a big commercial bakery stopped every morning to deliver the cakes and pastries and Axel confined himself to baking the bread and rolls. When pastries had remained in the window three days, his father would bring them upstairs for the family to eat.

Rudolph went in and kissed his mother and she patted his cheek. She always looked tired and was always squinting a little, because she was a chain smoker and the smoke got into her eyes.

"Why so early?" she asked.

"Short practice today," he said. He didn't say why. "I'll take over here. You can go upstairs now."

"Thank you," she said. "My Rudy." She kissed him again. She was very affectionate with him. He wished she would kiss his brother or his sister once in a while, but she never did. He had never seen his mother kiss his father.

"I'll go up and make dinner," she said. She was the only one in the family who called supper dinner. Rudolph's father did the shopping, because he said his wife was extravagant and didn't know good food from bad, but most of the time she did the cooking.

She went out the front door. There was no door that opened directly from the bakery to the hallway and the staircase that led up to the two floors above, where they lived, and he saw his mother pass the show window, framed in pastry and shivering as the wind hit her. It was hard for him to remember that she was only a little over forty years old. Her hair was graying and she shuffled like an old lady.

He got out a book and read. It would be slow in the shop for another hour. The book he was reading was Burke's speech *On Conciliation With the Colonies,* for his English class. It was so convincing that you wondered how all those supposedly smart men in Parliament hadn't agreed with him. What would America have been like if they had listened to Burke? Would there have been earls and dukes and castles? He would have liked that. Sir Rudolph Jordache, Colonel in the Port Philip Household Guards.

An Italian laborer came in and asked for a loaf of white bread. Rudolph put down Burke and served him.

The family ate in the kitchen. The evening meal was the only one they all ate together because of the father's hours of work. They had lamb stew tonight. Despite rationing, they always had plenty of meat because Rudolph's father was friendly with the butcher, Mr. Haas, who didn't ask for ration tickets because he was German, too. Rudolph felt uneasy about eating black market lamb on the same day that Henry Fuller had found out his brother had been killed, but all he did about it was ask for a small portion, mostly potatoes and carrots, because he couldn't talk to his father about fine points like that.

His brother, Thomas, the only blond in the family, be-

sides the mother, who really couldn't be called blonde anymore, certainly didn't seem to be worried about anything as he wolfed down his food. Thomas was just a year younger than Rudolph, but was already as tall and much stockier than his brother. Gretchen, Rudolph's older sister, never ate much, because she worried about her weight. His mother just picked at her food. His father, a massive man in shirt-sleeves, ate enormously, wiping his thick, black moustache with the back of his hand from time to time.

Gretchen didn't wait for the three-day-old cherry pie that they had for dessert, because she was due at the Army hospital just outside town where she worked as a volunteer nurse's aide five nights a week. When she stood up, the father made his usual joke. "Be careful," he said. "Don't let those soldiers grab you. We don't have enough rooms in this house to set up a nursery."

"Pa," Gretchen said reproachfully.

"I know soldiers," Axel Jordache said. "Just be careful."

Gretchen was a neat, proper, beautiful girl, Rudolph thought, and it pained him that his father talked like that to her. After all, she was the only one in the family who was contributing to the war effort.

When the meal was over, Thomas went out, too, as he did every night. He never did any homework and he got terrible marks in school. He was still a freshman in the high school, although he was nearly sixteen. He never listened to anybody.

Axel Jordache went into the living room up front to read the evening newspaper before going down to the cellar for the night's work. Rudolph stayed in the kitchen to dry the dishes after his mother had washed them. If I ever get married, Rudolph thought, my wife will not have to wash dishes.

When the dishes were done, the mother got out the ironing board and Rudolph went upstairs to the room he shared with his brother, to do his homework. He knew that if ever he was going to escape from eating in a kitchen and listening to his father and wiping dishes it was going to be through books, so he was always the best prepared student in the class for all examinations.

Maybe, Axel Jordache thought, at work in the cellar, I ought to put poison in one of them. For laughs. For anything. Serve them right. Just once, just one night. See who gets it.

He drank the blend straight out of the bottle. By the end of the night the bottle would be almost gone. There was flour all the way up to his elbows and flour on his face, where he had wiped away the sweat. I'm a goddamn clown, he thought, without a circus.

The window was open to the March night and the weedy Rhenish smell of the river soaked into the room, but the oven was cooking the air in the basement. I am in hell, he thought, I stoke the fires of hell to earn my bread, to make my bread. I am in hell making Parker House rolls.

He went to the window and took a deep breath, the big chest muscles, age-ridged, tightening against his sweaty skivvy shirt. The river a few hundred yards away, freed now of ice, carried the presence of North with it like the rumor of passing troops, a last cold marching threat of winter, spreading on each side of its banks. The Rhine was four thousand miles away. Tanks and cannon were crossing it on improvised bridges. A lieutenant had run across it when a bridge had failed to blow up. Another lieutenant on the other side had been court-martialed and shot because he had failed to blow the bridge as ordered. Armies. Die Wacht am Rhein. Churchill had pissed in it recently. Fabled river. Jordache's native water. Vineyards and sirens. Schloss Whatever. The cathedral in Cologne was still standing. Nothing much else. Jordache had seen the photographs in the newspapers. Home sweet home in old Cologne. Bulldozed ruins with the ever-remembered stink of the dead buried under collapsed walls. It couldn't have happened to a nicer city. Jordache thought dimly of his youth and spat up and out of the window in the direction of the other river. The invincible German Army. How many dead? Jordache spat again and licked his black moustache that drooped down at the corners of his mouth. God bless America. He had killed to get there. He took one last breath of the river's presence and limped back to work.

His name was on view on the window of the shop above the basement. BAKERY, A. Jordache, Pro. Twenty years ago, when the sign had been put up, it had read A. Jordache, Prop., but one winter the *p* had fallen off and he hadn't bothered to have it put back on. He sold just as many Parker House rolls without the *p*.

The cat lay close to the oven, staring at him. They had never bothered to give the cat a name. The cat was there to keep the mice and rats out of the flour. When Jordache had to address it, he said, "Cat." The cat probably thought its name was Cat. The cat watched him steadily all night, every night. She lived on one bowl of milk a day and all the mice and rats she could catch. The way the cat looked at him, Jordache was sure the cat wished she was ten times bigger than she was, as big as a tiger, so she could spring on him one night and have one real meal.

The oven was hot enough now and he limped over and put in the first tray of the night. He grimaced when he opened the oven door and the heat hit him.

III

Upstairs, in the narrow room he shared with his brother, Rudolph was looking up a word in an English-French dictionary. He had finished his homework. The word he was looking for was longing. He had already looked up hints and visions. He was writing a love letter in French to his French teacher, Miss Lenaut. He had read *The Magic Mountain*, and while most of the book had bored him, with the exception of the chapter about the seance, he had been impressed by the fact that the love scenes were in French and had painfully translated them for himself. To make love in French seemed to him to be distinguished. One sure thing, there was no other sixteen-year-old boy writing a love letter in French that night anywhere in the whole Hudson Valley.

"*Enfin*"—he wrote, in a carefully fashioned, almost printed script that he had developed over the last two years—"*enfin, je dois vous dire, chère Madame, quand je vous vois par hasard dans les couloirs de l'école ou se promenant dans votre manteau bleuclair dans les rues, j'ai l'envie*"—that was the closest he could get to longing—"*très profond de voyager dans le monde d'où vous êtes sortie et des visions délicieuses de flâner avec vous à mes côtés sur les boulevards de Paris, qui vient d'être libéré par*

les braves soldats de votre pays et le mien. Votre cavalier servant, Rudolph Jordache (French 32b)."

He reread the letter, then read it in the English in which he had first written it. He had tried to make the English as much like French as possible. "Finally, I must tell you, Dear Madame, that when I see you by accident in the hallways of the school or walking along in your light-blue coat on the street, I have a deep longing to travel in the world you came from and wonderful visions of strolling arm in arm with you along the boulevards of Paris, which has just been liberated by the brave soldiers of your country and mine."

He read the French version again with satisfaction. There was no doubt about it. If you wanted to be elegant, French was the language for it. He liked the way Miss Lenaut pronounced his name, correctly, Jordahsh, making it soft and musical, not Jawdake, as some people said it, or Jordash.

Then, regretfully, he tore both letters into small pieces. He knew he was never going to send Miss Lenaut any letters. He had already written her six letters and torn them up because she would think he was crazy and would probably tell the principal. And he certainly didn't want his father or mother or Gretchen or Tom to find any love letters in any language in his room.

Still, the satisfaction was there. Sitting in the bare little room above the bakery, with the Hudson flowing a few hundred yards away, writing the letters was like a promise to himself. One day he would make long voyages, one day he would sail the river and write in new languages to beautiful women of high character, and the letters would actually be mailed.

He got up and looked at himself in the wavy little mirror above the battered oak dresser. He looked at himself often, searching his face for the man he wanted to be. He was very careful with his looks. His straight, black hair was always perfectly brushed; occasionally he plucked two or three bits of dark fuzz from the space between his eyebrows; he avoided candy so that he would have a minimum of pimples; he remembered to smile, not laugh aloud, and even that not frequently. He was very conservative with the colors he chose to wear and had worked on the way he walked, so that he never seemed hurried or exuberant, but walked in an easy gliding motion with his

shoulders squared. He kept his nails filed and his sister gave him a manicure once a month and he kept out of fights because he didn't want to have his face marred by a broken nose or his long, thin hands twisted by swollen knuckles. To keep in shape, there was the track team. For the pleasures of nature and solitude he fished, using a dry fly when somebody was watching, worms at other times.

"Votre cavalier servant," he said into the mirror. He wanted his face to look French when he spoke the language, the way Miss Lenaut's face suddenly looked French when she addressed the class.

He sat down at the little yellow oak table he used for a desk and pulled a piece of paper toward him. He tried to remember exactly what Miss Lenaut looked like. She was quite tall, with flat hips and full breasts always prominently propped up, and thin, straight legs. She wore high heels and ribbons and a great deal of lipstick. First he drew her with her clothes on, not achieving much of a likeness but getting the two curls in front of her ears and making the mouth convincingly prominent and dark. Then he tried to imagine what she might look like without any clothes. He drew her naked, sitting on a stool looking at herself in a hand-mirror. He stared at his handiwork. *O, God, if ever!* He tore up the naked drawing. He was ashamed of himself. He deserved to live over a bakery. If they ever found out downstairs what he thought and did upstairs . . .

He began to undress for bed. He was in his socks, because he didn't want his mother, who slept in the room below, to know that he was still awake. He had to get up at five o'clock every morning to deliver the bread in the cart attached to a bicycle and his mother kept after him for not getting enough sleep.

Later on, when he was rich and successful, he would say, I got up at five o'clock in the morning, rain or shine, to deliver rolls to the Depot Hotel and the Ace Diner and Sinowski's Bar and Grill. He wished his name wasn't Rudolph.

IV

At the Casino Theater Errol Flynn was killing a lot of Japs. Thomas Jordache was sitting in the dark at the rear of the theater eating caramels from a package that he

had taken from the slot machine in the lobby with a lead slug. He was expert at making lead slugs.

"Slip me one, Buddy," Claude said, making it sound tough, like a movie gangster asking for another clip of 45 cartridges for his rod. Claude Tinker had an uncle who was a priest and to overcome the damaging implications of the relationship he tried to sound tough at all times. Tom flipped a caramel in the air and Claude caught it and started chewing on it loudly. The boys were sitting low on their spines, their feet draped over the empty seats in front of them. They had sneaked in as usual, through a grating that they had pried loose last year. The grating protected a window in the men's room in the cellar. Every once in a while, one or the other of them would come up into the auditorium with his fly open, to make it look for real.

Tom was bored with the picture. He watched Errol Flynn dispose of a platoon of Japs with various weapons. "Phonus bolonus," he said.

"What language you speaking, Professor?" Claude said, playing their game.

"That's Latin," Tom said, "for bullshit."

"What a command of tongues," Claude said.

"Look," Tom said, "down there to the right. That GI with his girl."

A few rows in front of them a soldier and a girl were sitting, entwined. The theater was half-empty and there was nobody in the row they were in or in the rows behind them. Claude frowned. "He looks awful big," Claude said. "Look at that neck on him."

"General," Tom said, "we attack at dawn."

"You'll wind up in the hospital," Claude said.

"Wanna bet?" Tom swung his legs back from the chair in front of him and stood up and started toward the aisle. He moved silently, his sneakered feet light on the worn carpet of the Casino floor. He always wore sneakers. You had to be sure-footed and ready to make the fast break at all times. He hunched his shoulders, bulky and easy under his sweater, and tucked in his gut, enjoying the hard, flat feeling under the tight belt. Ready for anything. He smiled in the darkness, the excitement beginning to get him, as it always did at these preliminary choosing moments.

Claude followed him, uneasily. Claude was a lanky, thin-

armed boy, with a long-nosed squirrely wedge of a face and loose, wet lips. He was nearsighted and wore glasses and that didn't make him look any better. He was a manipulator and behind-the-scenes man and slid out of trouble like a corporation lawyer and conned teachers into giving him good marks although he almost never opened a school book. He wore dark suits and neckties and had a kind of literary stoop and shambled apologetically when he walked and looked insignificant, humble, and placating. He was imaginative, his imagination concentrating on outrages against society. His father ran the bookkeeping department of the Boylan Brick and Tile Works and his mother, who had a degree from St. Anne's College for Women, was the president of the draft board, and what with all that and the priest-uncle besides, and his harmless and slightly repulsive appearance, Claude maneuvered with impunity through his plot-filled world.

The two boys moved down the empty row and sat directly behind the GI and his girl. The GI had his hand in the girl's blouse and was methodically squeezing her breast. The GI hadn't removed his overseas cap and it peaked down steeply over his forehead. The girl had her hand somewhere down in the shadows between the soldier's legs. Both the GI and the girl were watching the picture intently. Neither of them paid any attention to the arrival of the boys.

Tom sat behind the girl, who smelled good. She was liberally doused with a flowery perfume which mingled with the buttery, cowlike aroma from a bag of popcorn they had been eating. Claude sat behind the soldier. The soldier had a small head, but he was tall, with broad shoulders, and his cap obscured most of the screen from Claude, who had to squirm from side to side to glimpse the film.

Listen," Claude whispered, "I tell you he's too big. I bet he weighs one seventy, at least."

"Don't worry," Tom whispered back. "Start in." He spoke confidently, but he could feel little shivers of doubt in his fingertips and under his armpits. That hint of doubt, of fear, was familiar to him and it added to his expectation and the beauty of the final violence. "Go ahead," he whispered harshly to Claude. "We ain't got all night."

"You're the boss," Claude said. Then he leaned forward and tapped the soldier on the shoulder. "Pardon me, Ser-

geant," he said. "I wonder if you'd be so kind as to remove your cap. It's difficult for me to see the screen."

"I ain't no sergeant," the soldier said, without turning. He kept his cap on and continued watching the picture, squeezing the girl's breast.

The two boys sat quietly for more than a minute. They had practiced the tactic of provocation so often together that there was no need for signals. Then Tom leaned forward and tapped the soldier heavily on the shoulder. "My friend made a polite request," he said. "You are interfering with his enjoyment of the picture. We will have to call the management if you don't take your cap off."

The soldier swiveled a little in his seat, annoyedly. "There's two hundred empty seats," he said. "If your friend wants to see the picture let him sit someplace else." He turned back to his two preoccupations, sex and art.

"He's on the way," Tom whispered to Claude. "Keep him going."

Claude tapped the soldier on the shoulder again. "I suffer from a rare eye disease," Claude said. "I can only see from this seat. Everywhere else it's a blur. I can't tell whether it's Errol Flynn or Loretta Young up there."

"Go to an eye doctor," the soldier said. The girl laughed at his wit. She sounded as though she had drunk some water the wrong way when she laughed. The soldier laughed, too, to show that he appreciated himself.

"I don't think it's nice to laugh at people's disabilities," Tom said.

"Especially with a war on," Claude said, "with all those crippled heroes."

"What sort of an American are you?" Tom asked, his voice rising patriotically. "That's the question I would like to ask, what sort of an American are you?"

The girl turned. "Get lost, kids," she said.

"I want to remind you, sir," Tom said, "that I hold you personally responsible for anything your lady friend says."

"Don't pay them no mind, Angela," the soldier said. He had a high, tenor voice.

The boys sat in silence again for a moment.

"Marine, tonight you die," Tom said in a high falsetto, in his Japanese imitation. "Yankee dog, tonight I cut off your balls."

"Watch your goddamn language," the soldier said, turning his head.

"I bet he's braver than Errol Flynn," Tom said. "I bet he's got a drawer full of medals back home but he's too modest to wear them."

The soldier was getting angry now. "Why don't you kids shut up? We came here to see a movie."

"We came to make love," Tom said. He caressed Claude's cheek elaborately. "Didn't we, hotpants?"

"Squeeze me harder, darrrling," Claude said. "My nipples're palpitating."

"I am in ecstasy," Tom said. "Your skin is like a baby's ass."

"Put your tongue in my ear, honey," Claude said. "Ooooh—I'm coming."

"That's enough," the soldier said. Finally he had taken his hand out of the girl's blouse. "Get the hell out of here."

He had spoken loudly and angrily and a few people were turning around up front and making shushing noises.

"We paid good money for these seats," Tom said, "and we're not moving."

"We'll see about that." The soldier stood up. He was about six feet tall. "I'm going to get the usher."

"Don't let the little bastards get your goat, Sidney," the girl said. "Sit down."

"Sidney, remember I told you I hold you personally responsible for your lady friend's language," Tom said. "This is a last warning."

"Usher!" the soldier called across the auditorium, to where the lone attendant, dressed in frayed gold braid, was sitting in the last row, dozing under an exit light.

"Ssh, sssh!" came from spots all over the theater.

"He's a real soldier," Claude said. "He's calling for reinforcements."

"Sit down, Sidney." The girl tugged at the soldier's sleeve. "They're just snotty kids."

"Button your shirt, Angela," Tom said. "Your titty's showing." He stood up, in case the soldier swung.

"Sit down, please," Claude said politely, as the usher came down the aisle toward them, "this is the best part of the picture and I don't want to miss it."

"What's going on here?" the usher asked. He was a big weary-looking man of about forty who worked in a furniture factory during the day.

"Get these kids out of here," the soldier said. "They're using dirty language in front of this lady."