

REXY!
(Excerpt)

As the house lights dim, we hear an instrumental version of "Tea For Two". A light pops up on JOAN.

JOAN: The day Willy King came back from his state trip to Europe I was set to burst. Dear old family friend though he was, I was tired of his Ottawa stories. But Europe! For once I'd hear tales of adventure! Tales about people who mattered! And in 1937 that meant tales about that little monster with the moustache.

(Lights up on KING at table with sandwiches and tea.)

KING: And they made such a fuss over me. Enormous state luncheons, full of Herr King this and Herr King that; the occasional "Sieg hiel" ripping through the crowd.

JOAN: So what about *him*? Is he like Mr. Chamberlain says?

KING: Is who like Mr. Chamberlain says?

JOAN: You know perfectly well. *Him!*

KING: Oh, *him*. Well, let's just say that Herr Hitler is definitely an experience.

JOAN: Did he rant?

KING: No, he didn't. We spoke quietly over sandwiches and tea as a matter of fact.

JOAN: Quite civilized for a German.

KING: Yes. Did you know he's devoted to his mother?

JOAN: Really?

KING: And was once a Catholic choir boy?

JOAN: My, my!

KING: Amazing what one discovers over sandwiches.

JOAN: Like about the odds on war?

KING: I broached the subject.

JOAN: And?

KING: Well, curiously enough, he smiled and asked if I listened to Wagner.

JOAN: He likes music?

KING: He likes Wagner. I said I myself was fond of "Lohengrin". He nodded, began humming, and peered at his sandwich as if it were some strange distant land. There's little doubt in my mind that he's a mystic. A fellow spiritualist perhaps.

JOAN: So there's hope for him yet.

KING: Oh, yes. I can't abide Nazis but Hitler himself may one day be known as the great peasant liberator of his people. Perhaps even the deliverer of Europe. A modern-day Joan of Arc.

JOAN: How exciting!

KING: But something quite troubling. As I sat watching him watching his sandwich I had a very peculiar wide-awake dream. As if I was looking into a mirror. And Mother was on the other side with *him* and everything I'd do *he'd* do and everything *she'd* do *you'd* do.

JOAN: Me?

KING: You were in my dream on *my* side of the mirror. Then suddenly people were screaming and everything went black and you threw a brick at the mirror and it shattered. And for some strange reason I had to put it back together again before Mother came home or I'd be spanked. And there were all these pieces, all these peculiar reflections, staring up at me from the floor -- little mirrors I had to put back together into *one*. And my dear little Pat was barking and I said, "Stay back, you'll cut your paws!" But Pat said, "I've a bone to pick with you," and stood on his hind legs and did a sword dance through those shards of mirror into my arms and...

(KING freezes, hands outstretched on the table, "seeing" something. Lights dim quickly and a clock strikes twelve.)

JOAN: Rex?

(KING stares off in a trance. JOAN removes the tea things from table and places her hands opposite his, fingers touching. Backlit, the spectral figure of MACKENZIE with cane appears.)

We feel your presence. Would you like to speak to us? ...

(Beat, then two sharp knocks.)

JOAN: Are you known to us?

(Two knocks.)

KING: Grampa?

JOAN: Are you Rexy's grandfather?

(Two knocks.)

KING: Will there be war, Grampa?...

(Silence.)

JOAN: Are you still there Mr. Mackenzie?

(Two knocks.)

KING: Is the British policy correct? Cooperation and understanding? Is that the correct policy? *(Two knocks.)* Good, yes, thank you.

JOAN: Is Mr. Hitler to be feared? *(One knock.)* Mr. Hitler is *not* to be feared? *(Two knocks.)*

KING: Go on, Grampa.

JOAN: *(To MACKENZIE)* Do you have a message for your grandson? ...Mr. Mackenzie?...

MACKENZIE: The fate of Europe depends on Great Britain.

KING: The fate of Europe depends on Great Britain.

MACKENZIE & KING: *(Together)* The fate of Great Britain depends on Canada. The fate of Canada is in my grandson's hands. He was predestined to be prime minister at this time. Long ago I saw that he would be a peacemaker. Long ago I knew God had chosen him for this purpose. Long ago...

(Silence. Suddenly KING's body begins trembling.)

JOAN: Rex? ...Rexy??

KING: *(Trembling increasing.)* Yes, Grandfather, yes. Yes!

JOAN: REX? REX?

KING: Oh Joan, it's going to be all right. Everything's going to be all right.

(Lights down on KING and JOAN. We hear Big Ben. Lights up on RIVERDALE.)

RIVERDALE: Prime Minister King was an absolute bastard. Difficult, dangerous, and maddeningly obtuse. 1939 -- we all knew war was about to break -- but Mr. King? He knew better. Still favoured the old appeasement approach, of all things. As chief British liason officer I had cause to meet him two months before the unpleasantness began.

(Lights up on KING and RIVERDALE.)

KING: These new treaties of yours, Riverdale. Very noble documents indeed. Stirring.

RIVERDALE: We think as much.

KING: Oh yes, no question. Britain hops to the defence of Poland should she be attacked by the swastika. Very brave.

RIVERDALE: The Kraut stands warned, what?

KING: That he does. But the Kraut listens to Wagner, and do you have any idea how he reacts to warnings?

RIVERDALE: How?

KING: The way any Kraut does. With drums, trumpets, tubas, and thundersheets!

RIVERDALE: Thundersheets?

KING: Warnings are the last thing we need, for God's sake.

RIVERDALE: What's this about thundersheets?

KING: I'm saying you're a fool to make treaties with *those* people. I mean what's *Poland*?

RIVERDALE: Mr. King!

KING: Forgive me, but to threaten global war on account of a country the size of New Brunswick is ridiculous. Especially with forecasts of peace.

RIVERDALE: Peace?

KING: Yes, peace.

RIVERDALE: Despite the upsets in Austria and Czechoslovakia?

KING: Even so. I have it on the highest authority. What we need is a bridge between Herr Hitler and ourselves. Detente.

RIVERDALE: I'm afraid our government disagrees.

KING: Oh it does, does it? And with whose blood does it disagree? With whose blood do you intend to pay for this Baltic adventure?

RIVERDALE: It's not so much a question of paying as a question of drawing the line.

KING: Whose line?

RIVERDALE: Ours, naturally.

KING: You threaten world peace with a treaty which requires our support. Good, bad or indifferent, you sign it without our knowledge or approval as if we're some breed of sheep, cattle or some form of lemming, some...

RIVERDALE: If you don't mind me saying so...

KING: I DO! You flesh out your foreign policy with Canadian bodies -- and you expect us to praise God for the honour of dying for your cobblestones.

RIVERDALE: We were hoping...

KING: You were *hoping*. That's much more like it, my good Lord Riverdale. Frankly, I'm not at all sure we Canadians like your little game of "Bait the Kraut".

RIVERDALE: I say, that's rather strong.

KING: But as you say, this is the time to draw lines, to graph positions. Your people assume the colonial phrase "mother country" should be taken at face value. It's an assumption which glosses, and none too discreetly, a naked thrust for power over our foreign affairs.

RIVERDALE: But no such assumption exists.

KING: Don't insult my intelligence.

RIVERDALE: I *assure* you.

KING: There was a time, Riverdale, when I thought your accent masked only stupidity. Does it house duplicity as well?

RIVERDALE: There are limits, sir!

KING: Such as Poland? Well, one final thought. *If* we decide to enter a war -- *if* -- the decision will be that of Parliament: *our* Parliament and *our* Parliament alone. Is that clear?

RIVERDALE: (*Beat, then a little too sweetly*) to a point. Is it true what I read of His Majesty's tour?

KING: Depends what you read.

RIVERDALE: That the country's beside itself. Civic authorities from Moncton to Victoria commissioning statues of His Majesty.

KING: Yes. And no doubt we'll also see a proliferation of renamed roads, schools and sewage plants.

RIVERDALE: Being a monarchist, such popular devotion warms my heart.

KING: You must skate on the Rideau, Riverdale. It makes on very aware of thin ice.

RIVERDALE: Does it indeed?

KING: You see, I quite appreciate the depth of feeling exhibited for their Majesties by prairie farmboys, Ontario barristers and members of the I.O.D.E. Not least, I appreciate that they vote. But there are those in this country with no love for Britain, the Empire or King George. Quebec! Sixty-five seats and I've got sixty-four of them. They parler "la belle langue", Riverdale. Blood of the Crucifixion is what they understand and I'll be their Judas if I ship them off on a British "tally ho".

RIVERDALE: You won't help at all?

KING: I won't be assumed.

RIVERDALE: But if war breaks out...

KING: *If war breaks out, my greatest contribution to the effort might well be keeping this mess of a country together, English and French united. After all, of what help could any nation battling itself be to you battling Germans? (He smiles.)*

RIVERDALE: *(Beat.)* With your permission, sir, good day.

KING: Au revoir.