**DA**

**By Hugh Leonard**

The play is initially set in Charlie's old home in Dalkey, County Dublin, in 1968. Later, there are numerous flashbacks to times and places remembered from Charlie's youth. The play is largely autobiographical: its protagonist, an expatriate writer named Charlie, represents Leonard himself. The play deals with Charlie's relationships with the two father figures in his life: "Da" (an old-fashioned Irish nickname meaning "Daddy" or "Papa"), his adoptive father, and Drumm, a cynical civil servant who becomes his mentor.

Charlie, a writer who's been living in London for many years, returns to his boyhood home in Dalkey, a suburb of Dublin, Ireland, after the death of his adoptive father. He finds that the house is filled with ghosts, of his parents and of his younger self. Charlie talks and interacts with all the ghosts, relives important moments from his youth, and comes to grips with his complicated feelings for his adoptive parents. Through Charlie's conversations and interactions with the ghosts in his home, we see both why he loved his parents and why he was so eager to leave them far behind.

Charlie's family was not dysfunctional or abusive. On the contrary, Charlie's parents adored him, and made great sacrifices to give him a good education. His Da, a gardener for a rich Anglo-Irish family, was kind and patient, but also woefully unsophisticated and lacking in ambition. Charlie loved Da, but was also embarrassed by him, and felt guilty for this embarrassment. Charlie was an illegitimate child at a time when this carried a heavy stigma in Catholic Ireland. Though Da accepted Charlie fully, Charlie always felt like an outsider, heavily indebted to Da. Moreover, Charlie could never find a way to repay Da, or even fully express his love and gratitude.

The genial, undemanding Da was the polar opposite of Charlie's other father figure, Drumm, a high-level civil servant. Since Drumm was one of the few prosperous, educated Irishmen in the vicinity, Charlie's parents hoped he could find Charlie a job. In 1945, they invited Drumm to their home to introduce him to 17-year-old Charlie. The introduction went disastrously, as Da made a series of foolish, embarrassing statements (Da believed that a German victory in World War II was imminent, and he was plainly rooting for this outcome). Charlie was humiliated, and was astonished to learn that, despite everything, Drumm had actually taken a liking to him.

Drumm was intelligent, shrewd, and very pessimistic. He saw Charlie as the son he never had, and offered him the unsentimental advice to regard his Da as his enemy, someone who'd hold him back from succeeding in life. Drumm advised Charlie to emigrate from Ireland, which was no place for an ambitious young man. However, Charlie instead took a job as Drumm's clerk. He imagined the job would be only temporary, but he ended up working for Drumm for 14 years. Like his Da, Charlie kept an unprestigious, low-paying job far longer than he ever intended to.

In the late Fifties, as Charlie began to experience success as a writer, he unthinkingly snubbed Drumm in public; Drumm never forgave this crime, and turned against him. About the same time, Da's employers sold their home, leaving Da unemployed. They gave him a tiny pension and, as a parting gift, a tacky paperweight made from dozens of discarded eyeglasses. Da received the gift as a grand honor, which only increased Charlie's disdain for his father, a man who felt privileged to receive a worthless knickknack, so long as it came from "the Quality" upper classes.

Soon after, Charlie moved to England with his fiancée, and his adoptive mother died. Charlie visited Da regularly, giving him a few pounds for spending money, and begging the old man to come live with him in England. Da always refused, which hurts Charlie more than the old man could have realized.

After Da's death, Charlie receives a visit from Drumm, now an elderly man himself. Drumm still bears some ill will toward Charlie, but has been asked by Da to make sure that Charlie receives his inheritance. To Charlie's horror, the inheritance turns out to be the paperweight made of eyeglasses, and an envelope containing all the spending money Charlie had ever given to his Da.

Charlie is forced to accept that he could never repay his father. In fact, Da adored him, and selflessly gave him his entire legacy: the money and the paperweight. Charlie berates his father's ghost, pledging to leave Ireland forever, outraged that Da never accepted any help, and saddened that Da refused to move to England. The ghost decides to make up for lost time, and come back to England with Charlie. As the play ends, Charlie leaves his house with the ghost following him. His Da will always remain a powerful presence in his life.