

# Drowning the Stream

A play

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*Cast*

Charlie  
Male, early 30's.

Sam  
Male, teens. Charlie's brother.

Adult Courtney  
Female, 25-30 years old. Charlie's daughter.

Young Courtney  
Female, 5 years old. Charlie's daughter.

Claire  
Female, early 30's. Charlie's wife.

Mom  
Female, mid-40's. Charlie's mother.

Bully #1  
Male, pre-to-mid-teens.

Bully #2  
Male, pre-to-mid-teens.

Police Officer  
Male, mid-aged.

Priest  
Male, mid-aged.

Funeral Guest  
Male, mid-aged.

Nurse  
Male/Female, mid-aged.

*Minimum cast size: 8*

***Setting:***

Charlie's mind. The present.

*(At rise the stage is dark.)*

**YOUNG COURTNEY:**

*(Singing, in the blackout:)*

Row, row, row your boat, gently down the  
stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily,  
merrily, life is but a dream.

**CHARLIE:**

*(In the blackout:)*

Oh God, baby. I'm sorry.

*(The lights come up and CHARLIE stands alone. There should be very little set, nothing should seem permanent. The lighting changes often and seemingly without predictability, but each change should be deliberate. The lighting should have a surreal quality to it, at times making it seem like things are too bright, too dark, or too diaphanous. When other characters enter, it is sometimes quickly for just one line. These should feel like passing thoughts.)*

*(Charlie is a man in his 30s. He looks disheveled but should appear more chaotic as the play progresses. He is wearing slacks and a buttoned down, collared shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He trembles until he speaks, a desperate, frightened man.)*

**CHARLIE:**

No, no, no, don't make me do this— My life  
is full of things I don't want to do, but  
have to. Making a choice is the loneliest  
thing you can do. And I know you'll judge  
me, but it's the only way I know to escape  
that look in your and everyone's eyes— but  
that doesn't make it any less terrifying.  
*(Singing:)* Row, row, row your boat.

*(SAM enters. Sam is a young man in his teens. His hair should always look wet.)*

**SAM:**

*(Panicked:)*

No! What are you doing!

**CHARLIE:**

What are you doing here?

**SAM:**

You brought me here. To help.

**CHARLIE:**

No. I'm not ready!

*(YOUNG COURTNEY and ADULT COURTNEY enter. Young Courtney is about 5 years old and Adult Courtney is between 25 and 30 years old. They always appear together, save once. Adult Courtney usually stands behind or next to Young Courtney. They are both in pajamas that are nearly identical. Young Courtney is usually holding a stuffed animal.)*

**ADULT COURTNEY:**

Some times you have no choices.

**CHARLIE:**

You too? No, please.

*(CLAIRE enters. She is about the same age as Charlie. She is dressed semi-formally, but comfortably.)*

**CLAIRE:**

*(Horried:)*

Oh my God! Charlie! What have you done?

**CHARLIE:**

This isn't right—

**ADULT COURTNEY:**

This doesn't help.

**CLAIRE:**

It's what he wants. Charlie, how could you?

**CHARLIE:**

I—

**SAM:**

That's really funny!

**CHARLIE:**

Why? I thought— No.

**ADULT COURTNEY:**

Please, Dad. There's not much time.

**SAM:**

*(Cruelly:)*

You're an ugly sick little thing.

**YOUNG COURTNEY:**

Daddy, you're funny!

**CLAIRE:**

How could you?

**CHARLIE:**

No.

**ADULT COURTNEY:**

Please, Dad.

**SAM:**

You're an ugly—

**CHARLIE:**

Not now. Give me—

*(Claire, Young Courtney, Adult Courtney, and Sam exit.)*

**CHARLIE (CONT.):**

Time. Stopped. I'm always short on time. My whole life I've felt I'm running behind. Like a heavy judgment hanging over my head. But you shouldn't be judging me. It's not supposed to be possible. Now instead of just innocence, there's scorn, pity, laughter and everything else I hate so it causes a rush of heat surging up from deep inside until it's ready to fly out of my mouth, teeth, hair and fingers like blazes of light-fire and the only way to cool it down is the stream. I used to love it. The water washing it all away. I used to go to the stream to find something. Not tranquility. Deeper. Safety. Lost now, like childhood. Everyone has that one spot in their childhood that is better than any teddy bear, where it seems nothing can harm you. The stream was that.

*(Sam enters.)*

**CHARLIE (CONT.):**

This is hard!

**SAM:**

It takes skill. It's all in the wrist.

**CHARLIE:**

How can a rock skip?

**SAM:**

It just does. See.

**CHARLIE:**

Why can't we do something else?

**SAM:**

You're the one who wanted to come here.

**CHARLIE:**

I just don't want to be around those guys anymore. They're so mean.

**SAM:**

That's why they're called "bullies," Charlie.

*(A beat. Charlie tries to skip another rock.)*

**CHARLIE:**

I can't do it.

**SAM:**

Some people just aren't talented.

**CHARLIE:**

Hey! That's not fair!

**SAM:**

Life isn't fair.

*(Sam sticks his tongue out at Charlie. Charlie sticks his out back. They do this for awhile until Sam gets bored.)*

**SAM (CONT.):**

Let's play a different game.

**CHARLIE:**

Okay.

**SAM:**

*(In a military voice:)*

This bench will be our base of operations. Lieutenant Charlie?

**CHARLIE:**

Yes, Captain Sammy?

**SAM:**

We'll set our perimeter here, and here. No one in or out. Understood?

**CHARLIE:**

Yes sir! *(A beat.)* Uh, Sammy?

**SAM:**

Come on, Charlie! It's Captain.

**CHARLIE:**

Our swords are back at the house.

**SAM:**

We don't need them. We have magic!

**CHARLIE:**

Right! Magic!

**SAM:**

I'll keep a look out, lieutenant!

*(Sam puts his hand above his eyes, surveying the land.)*

**CHARLIE:**

What do you see, sir?

**SAM:**

*(In a pirate voice:)*

Arg! Ocean, ocean as far as the eye can see, matey.

**CHARLIE:**

*(Still in military voice:)*

No sign of those rascally pirates, sir?

**SAM:**

Wingnut! We are the pirates!

**CHARLIE:**

Oh. Well— arg! Any sign of the fleet, Cap'n?

**SAM:**

Not just yet, matey. But they best not come across us. The meanest pirates to sail the seven seas.

**CHARLIE:**

Arg!

**SAM:**

Arg!

**CHARLIE:**

Magic pirates!

**SAM:**

Arg!

**CHARLIE:**

Ahoy, Cap'n! A ship just appeared off our starboard bow! It's the head ship of the fleet, sir!

**SAM:**  
Ready cannons! Fire!

**CHARLIE:**  
BABOOM! Direct hit, sir!

**SAM:**  
Look out! They're returning fire! BABOOM!

*(Charlie and Sam fake like they are knocked about by an explosion.)*

**CHARLIE:**  
Augh!

**SAM:**  
We're sinking! Abandon ship! Abandon ship!

*(They both jump. Sam lands on his feet. Charlie sprawls out on the ground.)*

**SAM (CONT.):**  
Uh oh.

**CHARLIE:**  
Shh!

**SAM:**  
What?

**CHARLIE:**  
I'm dead.

**SAM:**  
Then how come you're talking?

**CHARLIE:**  
Dead people can talk.

**SAM:**  
I don't think so.

**CHARLIE:**  
They can!

**SAM:**  
Ha!

**CHARLIE:**  
If they're ghosts!

**SAM:**

Oh man, Charlie, you're soaking wet.

**CHARLIE:**

You said to abandon ship.

**SAM:**

You jumped right into the water.

**CHARLIE:**

We would have to if it was a real ship. (*A beat.*) Is Mom gonna be mad?

**SAM:**

We'll just tell her you slipped.

**CHARLIE:**

Okay.

*(Charlie gets up.)*

**SAM:**

Wait a sec.

*(Sam brushes Charlie off.)*

**CHARLIE:**

C'mon. Last one to the house is a rotten egg!

**SAM:**

Awww. I don't know. I'm tired.

**CHARLIE:**

C'mon!

**SAM:**

Maybe— (*Said very fast:*) One, two, three, GO!

*(Sam sprints offstage.)*

**CHARLIE:**

Hey! That's not fair! It wasn't fair, but it was safe. But then it was all taken away, and then horrible. And now it's happening again— It will go on forever and ever into eternity— an infinite loop— trapping me inside like everything else in my whole life— a cell with bars of hate— even though I try to escape. And even singing won't break me free— (*Singing:*) Row,

row, row your boat gently down the stream.  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is  
but a dream— (*Spoken:*) that I can't wake up  
from even though I'm trying but now instead  
of safe, I feel like I'm drowning like I  
always have since—

*(Sam enters.)*

**SAM:**

*(Panicked, as before:)*

No! What are you—

**CHARLIE:**

No, no, no, don't remember—

**SAM:**

It doesn't have to be this way.

**CHARLIE:**

Doesn't exist— that's what I've convinced  
myself and everyone else, because you can  
create your own reality— stuck in the loop—  
so afraid of what's now, what's next—

*(Young Courtney and Adult Courtney enter.)*

**ADULT COURTNEY:**

Dad?

*(Sam exits.)*

**CHARLIE:**

No, stop, stop, stop—

**ADULT COURTNEY:**

Dad? Why are you doing this?

**CHARLIE:**

*(Singing:)*

Row, row, row your  
boat.

**ADULT COURTNEY:**

There's no time—

**CHARLIE:**

*(Singing:)*

Gently down  
stream—

the

**ADULT COURTNEY:**  
None of this is  
real.

**YOUNG COURTNEY:**  
Daddy, you're funny!

**CHARLIE:**  
*(Singing:)*  
Merrily, merrily,  
merrily, merrily—

**YOUNG COURTNEY:**  
Daddy! You're hurting  
me!

*(Young Courtney and Adult Courtney exit.)*

**CHARLIE:**  
I can't do this. I have to stop thinking  
about what might be— what is— what was—  
just live what is never— feel the cool  
water wash over my hands like it did, once—

*(Sam enters.)*

**SAM:**  
*(Panicked:)*  
No! What are you—

**CHARLIE:**  
If you're going to be here, it's not for  
that.

*(Sam exits.)*

**CHARLIE (CONT.):**  
I'll just speed it up, just like her eyes  
close so quickly— but I need it faster,  
before she comes home and judges—

*(Claire enters.)*

**CLAIRE:**  
*(Horried, as before:)*  
Oh my God! Charlie! What have you done?

**CHARLIE:**  
Because she'd never understand— never— how  
can anyone? There'd be no sympathy.

*(Claire exits. Sam enters.)*

**SAM:**

*(Cruelly, as before:)*

You're an ugly sick little thing.

*(Sam exits.)*