

It was widely accepted that Charlie, if you let him, could sell anything to anyone. Freezers to Eskimos and oil to the Arabs, that kind of thing. But it was also a generally held conviction that it was hardly a reason to condemn him. People should be held responsible for their own foolishness, after all.

When he stepped into the bar that cold night in December, Charlie acted as if Flanagan's was definitely not the first stop he had made. If anyone had asked, everyone, and I do mean everyone, from me to Mayor O'Reilly, would have said Charlie looked like he had been partying since noon. Still, he somehow maintained the dignified presence that seemed to follow him wherever he went.

As Charlie smiled and wobbled his way slowly through the tables, I shook my head in wordless wonder. Charlie ignored many empty seats and finally plunked himself down at the bar.

He took the stool right next to old Beelzebub....