

THE JOY OF SOLITUDE

A short play

By Dean Lundquist

(loosely based on *Un Estilo de Vida* by Fernando Sorrentino)

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THE JOY OF SOLITUDE

CHARACTERS

OLD CHARLIE: a elderly man, balding with a long, white beard.
YOUNG CHARLIE: twenties, a younger version of Charlie.

The two men should be dressed alike in the fashion of sometime past.

SETTING

Charlie's sparse apartment. A table, a chair, a phone bill, a broken key, a glass jar filled with flies and two flower pots each with a cherry tomato plant and a green pea plant.

TIME

The present.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Joy of Solitude opened at The Play Den, The Arts House, Singapore as part of the Short+Sweet Singapore Festival on July 14, 2010. It was directed by the playwright. The cast was as follows:

OLD CHARLIE Paul Lucas

YOUNG CHARLIE Tim Garner

The Joy of Solitude was selected as a Judge's Choice Pick for the Short+Sweet Singapore Gala Final at The Esplanade Theatre Studio, August 5-7, 2010. It was directed by the playwright. The cast was as follows:

OLD CHARLIE Karl Chaundy

YOUNG CHARLIE Tim Garner

The production received the following honors in the festival:

Best Director Dean Lundquist

Best Actor

Runner-up: Tim Garner as Young Charlie

The play was also the runner-up for Best Script and Best Overall Production.

THE JOY OF SOLITUDE

OLD CHARLIE, sits snoring at a table. He catches a fly & puts it in a glass jar. YOUNG CHARLIE appears.

YOUNG CHARLIE
Ah, you're awake.

OLD CHARLIE
It would seem so.

YOUNG CHARLIE
Shall we begin?

They look at each other, nod and then snap their fingers. YOUNG CHARLIE goes to pick up the key from the table.

OLD CHARLIE
You're going to be late. You know the boss said if it happened again...

YOUNG CHARLIE OLD CHARLIE
I'd be fired. You'd be fired.

OLD CHARLIE
Don't forget the phone bill--it's past due.

YOUNG CHARLIE picks it up, goes to door and breaks off his key in the lock.

YOUNG CHARLIE
Ah, crap!

OLD CHARLIE
I love this. You broke the key off in the lock? You'd better call a locksmith.

YOUNG CHARLIE
I'd better call a locksmith! (he dials as OLD CHARLIE crosses to the door.) Hello. My name's Charlie Sumac, and I've locked myself in my apartment. (OLD CHARLIE rings the doorbell.) Who is it?

OLD CHARLIE
(as Locksmith)
The locksmith!

YOUNG CHARLIE
Man, that was quick! (crossing to the door)

OLD CHARLIE
What seems to be the problem?

YOUNG CHARLIE
My key broke off in the lock.

OLD CHARLIE
On the inside?

YOUNG CHARLIE
Yeah. Can you fix it?

OLD CHARLIE
It's going to take me at least three hours.

YOUNG CHARLIE
But I gotta go to work!

OLD CHARLIE
Then call 'em and tell them you're gonna be late.

YOUNG CHARLIE
Oh crap...

OLD CHARLIE
Oh, you got fifty bucks?

YOUNG CHARLIE
Well, not on me.

OLD CHARLIE
I'm very sorry, sir, but you see, union rules clearly state that we must receive payment before job completion.

YOUNG CHARLIE
You've got to be joking.

OLD CHARLIE
No sir, union rules are no joking matter. The locksmith's eighth basic maxim is "If they don't pay, we walk away."

YOUNG CHARLIE
This is absurd! Open the door and I'll pay you afterward!

OLD CHARLIE
I'm sorry, sir. You see, we locksmiths are a tightly-knit fraternal order--we're like a secret society, if you know what I mean.

YOUNG CHARLIE
You mean like the Freemasons or something?

OLD CHARLIE

And if I were to violate union rules, I would be shunned by my brothers of the lock and key. There are ethics in every profession, and I'd like to think that ours are like the greatest of safes: un-crackable. Good day, sir.

YOUNG CHARLIE

What a crackpot! (going to the phone)

OLD CHARLIE

(as himself)

I thought so too. Now what?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'll call another locksmith.

OLD CHARLIE

(as Rosie)

A-1 Locksmith. Rosie Palmer speaking. How may I help you?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hi. I've locked myself in my apartment.

OLD CHARLIE

What's the address, sir?

YOUNG CHARLIE

121 Lethe Way, Apartment 10-A.

OLD CHARLIE

I'm sorry, sir. Union rules prohibit us from doing any work at that address.

YOUNG CHARLIE

What? Why?

OLD CHARLIE

Goodbye, sir. (click)

YOUNG CHARLIE

Now listen here, lady! (to Old Charlie) She hung up!

OLD CHARLIE

(as himself)

Don't despair. Try something else.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'll call the super! (he dials)

OLD CHARLIE

(as Superintendent)

Hello?

YOUNG CHARLIE
This is Charlie in 10-A.

OLD CHARLIE
So?

YOUNG CHARLIE
I've locked myself in my apartment.

OLD CHARLIE
So?

YOUNG CHARLIE
So, you gonna help me or not?

OLD CHARLIE
In the first place, I don't know nothin' about openin' no locks, and, in the second place, if I did, I wouldn't, because my job is the minor repair of plumbin', heatin' and 'lectrical problems.

YOUNG CHARLIE
Come on! I'm trapped in here.

OLD CHARLIE
And in the third place, not once have you ever given me a tip--not even at Christmas--you stingy bastard! (click)

YOUNG CHARLIE
He hung up! (beat) Oh! How about Dominique?

OLD CHARLIE
Ah, Dominique. I'd nearly forgotten.

YOUNG CHARLIE
Dominique?

OLD CHARLIE
(as Dominique)
Charles?

YOUNG CHARLIE
How you doin', sugar?

OLD CHARLIE
You told me you loved me.

YOUNG CHARLIE
I did?

OLD CHARLIE
What!?!

YOUNG CHARLIE

I mean. Yeah...of course I did doll face...

OLD CHARLIE

I haven't seen you in over a month and then you call me up out of the blue?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'm very sorry, Dominique, but you see, I'm in a tight spot.

OLD CHARLIE

Really? Who is she? Oh, I don't want to know. I'm not your plaything! Don't ever call me again! (click)

YOUNG CHARLIE

Dominique, wait! (to Old Charlie) She hung up!

OLD CHARLIE

(as himself)

Why don't you call Mike at the office?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hey, why don't I call Mike at the office! Good thinking-- Mike. C'mon buddy.

OLD CHARLIE

(as Mike)

Good morning, Sisyphean Life Insurance, this is Mike.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hey Mike. This is Charlie.

OLD CHARLIE

Hey, Chuck. Where are you, slick? The boss is looking all over for ya.

YOUNG CHARLIE

He is?

OLD CHARLIE

Yeah, he said if I saw you to tell you, you're fired!

YOUNG CHARLIE

Oh crap!

OLD CHARLIE

Where are you, Daddy-0?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I locked myself in my apartment.

OLD CHARLIE

Why don't you call a locksmith?

YOUNG CHARLIE
I did. He wanted payment in advance.

OLD CHARLIE
Jeepers! I don't know what to tell you Ace, except welcome to Crapsville, population you!

YOUNG CHARLIE
Uh...yeah.

OLD CHARLIE
Hey pal, I'm leaving for the Metropolitan office! I got promoted!

YOUNG CHARLIE
But that was supposed to be my position.

OLD CHARLIE
Yeah, I know. See you later alligator! (click)

YOUNG CHARLIE
Wait! Damn it!

OLD CHARLIE
Now what?

YOUNG CHARLIE
Wallow in my own self pity for the rest of the day until I fall asleep?

OLD CHARLIE
Well, you could do that.

YOUNG CHARLIE
Well then, good night.

OLD CHARLIE
Good night.

YOUNG CHARLIE falls asleep at the table. OLD CHARLIE goes to door, considers leaving but then changes his mind.

OLD CHARLIE
Hey, Charlie. Wake up!

YOUNG CHARLIE
Is it morning already?

OLD CHARLIE
How should I know?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I dreamt that I locked myself in my apartment.

OLD CHARLIE

Oh ho! That was no dream.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Oh, crap! I gotta call somebody. (he tries the phone) The phone's out of order.

OLD CHARLIE

Hmm. I wonder why... (YOUNG CHARLIE realizes and replaces phone bill.) You could try breaking down the door.

YOUNG CHARLIE slams into it.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Oh! God, that hurt...

OLD CHARLIE

Okay. Forget that. What about the window?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Help! Hey! Up here! Please help me!

OLD CHARLIE

Who could hear you yelling all the way up here? (beat) How about dropping a note out the window?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Good idea. You got a pen?

OLD CHARLIE

How about the typewriter?

YOUNG CHARLIE loads the typewriter with imaginary paper as OLD CHARLIE provides the sound effects.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Dear Sir or Madam: (bing!) I am locked in my apartment. (bing!) Please free me. (bing!) 121 Lethe Way, Apartment 10-A. (bing!)

YOUNG CHARLIE throws it out the window.

OLD CHARLIE

From way up here the possibilities of a vertical drop are almost non-existent. (beat) What's happening?

YOUNG CHARLIE

It's whimsically wafting on the wind like a drunken butterfly.

OLD CHARLIE

A drunken butterfly. I like that.

YOUNG CHARLIE

It's landed on the sidewalk!

OLD CHARLIE

Good.

YOUNG CHARLIE

There's a tall woman in a hat. She's picking it up. She's looking up. Hey! Up here! (to OLD CHARLIE) She's a real looker.

OLD CHARLIE

That's a bonus.

YOUNG CHARLIE

She's walking towards the entrance. She's folding up the paper and...putting it in the trash can! Nooooo! (he writhes on the floor in despair)

OLD CHARLIE

Eventually, they will turn off the gas, the electricity and the water. It's a good thing your folks willed you this place, otherwise you'd have to pay rent.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'll be trapped in here forever! What am I gonna do?

OLD CHARLIE

It will be difficult at first. You will toss technology to the wind in order to learn what is truly essential. You will lose all notion of time. You will feel lonely. And you will contemplate suicide. (Young Charlie jumps to his feet) Until you undergo your metamorphosis.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Metamorphosis? (they stand opposite each other as if looking in a mirror)

OLD CHARLIE

From your window you will watch the world go by and find special providence in the fall of a sparrow...

YOUNG CHARLIE

Huh?

OLD CHARLIE

When it flies into your man-cage and becomes your dinner. You will catch and breed insects for food. And in your flower pots you will cultivate green peas and cherry tomatoes.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I will become a rancher of bugs and a farmer of vegetables!

OLD CHARLIE

You will devise any number of ways to free yourself--

YOUNG CHARLIE

But decide that I'd rather not leave after all!

OLD CHARLIE

For entertainment, you will let your thoughts wander back to the day this all began. And one day you will look in the mirror and see your baldness and long, white beard and feel the ache in your bones, and you will realize that you have grown old.

YOUNG CHARLIE

But will I be happy?

OLD CHARLIE

Happy? (pause) Yes, having found...

OLD CHARLIE
The joy of
solitude.

YOUNG CHARLIE
The joy of
solitude.

OLD CHARLIE

Exactly. Well then...

YOUNG CHARLIE

Good night.

OLD CHARLIE

Good night.

YOUNG CHARLIE disappears. OLD CHARLIE, snores and catches fly as before. YOUNG CHARLIE appears.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Ah, you're awake.

OLD CHARLIE

It would seem so.

Shall we begin?

YOUNG CHARLIE

They nod and snap their
fingers. Blackout.

End of play.