

**SOLITUDE**

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A short play

By Dean Lundquist

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

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## **SOLITUDE**

### **CHARACTERS**

OLD CHARLIE: a elderly man of an indeterminable age.

YOUNG CHARLIE: a younger version of Old Charlie. The two men should be dressed in the fashion of sometime past.

### **SETTING**

Charlie's sparse apartment. A table, a chair, an old telephone, a typewriter and a door.

### **TIME**

The present.

**SOLITUDE**

*OLD CHARLIE sits at a table in a room with nothing but a door, an old typewriter and a telephone. He wears a black bowler hat. He catches a fly and puts it in a glass jar.*

OLD CHARLIE  
All I ever wanted was some solitude.

*YOUNG CHARLIE appears.*

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Ah, you're awake.

OLD CHARLIE  
It would seem so.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
You talking to your fly collection?

OLD CHARLIE  
You know these things keep me alive.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
I bet you never thought you'd become a rancher.

OLD CHARLIE  
Or a farmer. *(laughs)* Yes, a farmer. Very funny that.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
So, I suppose you want some entertainment?

OLD CHARLIE  
You know whenever I want entertainment, I just let my thoughts wander.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Shall we begin?

OLD CHARLIE  
*(giving him his hat)*  
Take this. You're going to be late for work. You know what the boss said would happen if you were late again.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
That I'd be fired.

OLD CHARLIE  
Yes. Now don't forget the phone bill--it's already past due.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Ah yes, the phone bill. *(He picks it up, heads for the door and breaks his key off in the lock.)* Ah, shit!

OLD CHARLIE

I love this. You broke the key off in the lock? Try the screwdriver.

YOUNG CHARLIE

What good's a screwdriver?

OLD CHARLIE

Just try it.

YOUNG CHARLIE

This is pointless.

OLD CHARLIE

What about the hinges?

YOUNG CHARLIE

They're on the inside.

OLD CHARLIE

I guess you'd better call a locksmith.

*YOUNG CHARLIE dials phone.*

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hello. My name's Charlie and I've locked myself in my apartment.

OLD CHARLIE

I'll be the locksmith.

*OLD CHARLIE goes to opposite side of door and rings bell.*

YOUNG CHARLIE

Who is it?

OLD CHARLIE

*(as Locksmith)*

The locksmith. What seems to be the problem?

YOUNG CHARLIE

My key broke off in the lock.

OLD CHARLIE

On the inside?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Uh...yeah.

OLD CHARLIE  
Why didn't you say that on the phone?

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Sorry. Can you fix it?

OLD CHARLIE  
It's a very difficult job. I'll have to take the whole lock apart. It's going to take me at least three hours.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Three hours? But I've got to go to work!

OLD CHARLIE  
Then I suggest you call them and tell them you'll be late.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Oh shit...

OLD CHARLIE  
You got fifty dollars?

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Fifty dollars?

OLD CHARLIE  
Is that a problem?

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Well, I don't have that much on me, but as soon as you get me out, I'll go to the bank.

OLD CHARLIE  
I'm very sorry, sir, but you see, I'm a member of the Locksmiths' Union, and union rules clearly state that every locksmith must receive payment before the completion of a job.

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Really?

OLD CHARLIE  
Yes, really. Can you imagine how many people would have me unlock their cars and then just drive off? Or the kind of people who would have me open their front door only to then lock me outside without paying?

YOUNG CHARLIE  
Couldn't you just pick the lock and go in after them?

OLD CHARLIE  
That would be unethical.

YOUNG CHARLIE

You've got to be joking.

OLD CHARLIE

No sir, I can assure you, union rules are no joking matter. Of course, not everyone can understand them, since they are written a symbolic or esoteric language. Nevertheless, I believe you will understand the locksmith's eight basic maxim: "If they don't pay, we walk away."

YOUNG CHARLIE

Please, be reasonable. Just 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

Something like that. So, you must understand that if I were to violate union rules, word would get out and 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 the locksmiths' ethics are like the greatest of safes: un-crackable. Good day, sir.

YOUNG CHARLIE

What a nutter!

OLD CHARLIE

*(as himself)*

I thought so too. Now what?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'll show him. I'll call another locksmith, and this time I won't tell him I can't pay until after he opens the door.

OLD CHARLIE

All right. Go right ahead.

*YOUNG CHARLIE goes to phone.*

OLD CHARLIE

*(as Francesca)*

Hello, A-1 Locksmith. This is Francesca. How may I help you?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hi. I've locked myself in my apartment.

OLD CHARLIE

What's the address, sir?

YOUNG CHARLIE

4142 Lethe Way, Apartment 10-A.

OLD CHARLIE

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

YOUNG CHARLIE

What? How did you--

OLD CHARLIE

Goodbye, sir.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Now listen here! Don't be ridic-- She hung up!

OLD CHARLIE

*(as himself)*

Don't despair. Try something else.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'll call the super!

OLD CHARLIE

Worth a try, I guess. *(as Superintendent)* Hello?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hi this is Charlie in 10-A. I've locked myself in my apartment and I can't get a locksmith to get me out.

OLD CHARLIE

So?

YOUNG CHARLIE

So, do you think you could come up and help me?

OLD CHARLIE

Two things: 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 as buildin' superintendent is maintainin' the exterior of the buildin' and the minor repair of plumbin', heatin' and electrical problems.

YOUNG CHARLIE

But, come on...I'm trapped in here.

OLD CHARLIE

Furthermore, not once have you ever given me a tip--not even at Christmas--you stingy bastard!

He hung up.

YOUNG CHARLIE

OLD CHARLIE  
*(as himself)*

You got any other bright ideas?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Um...How about Dominique?

OLD CHARLIE

Dominique?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Yeah, you remember Dominique, don't you? Dominique le Fantastique?

OLD CHARLIE

Ah, Dominique. I'd nearly forgotten about her.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Dominique?

OLD CHARLIE  
*(as Dominique)*

Charlie?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hey beautiful, how you doin'?

OLD CHARLIE

So, you finally remembered to call?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Uh, yeah. So...um, what have you been up to, baby?

OLD CHARLIE

You told me you loved me, you know.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I did?

OLD CHARLIE

What!?!?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I mean. Yeah...I did...

OLD CHARLIE

I haven't seen hide or hair from you in over a month and then you call me up out of the blue? What do you want?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'm very sorry, Dominique, but you see, I'm--

OLD CHARLIE

You know what? I don't want to hear it! I'm not your plaything. You can't just toy with a girl's emotions like that. If you think I'm going to be your beck and call girl, then you can just forget about it! Don't ever call me again!

YOUNG CHARLIE

Dominque, wait! She hung up!

OLD CHARLIE

*(as himself)*

Why don't you call Mike at the office?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Good thinking. Mike. Good old Mike. C'mon buddy.

OLD CHARLIE

*(as Mike)*

Good morning, this is Mike. What can I--

YOUNG CHARLIE

Hey Mike. This is Charlie.

OLD CHARLIE

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

YOUNG CHARLIE

He is?

OLD CHARLIE

Yeah, he said if I heard from you to tell you...

YOUNG CHARLIE

What? Tell me what?

OLD CHARLIE

What was it? Oh yeah, "you're fired."

YOUNG CHARLIE

Oh shit!

OLD CHARLIE

Where are you, man?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I locked myself in my apartment.

OLD CHARLIE

Was it the key or the lock that broke?

YOUNG CHARLIE

The key.

OLD CHARLIE

And it's inside the lock?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Half of it's inside, and I broke off the other half.

OLD CHARLIE

Did you try using a screwdriver?

YOUNG CHARLIE

A screwdri--Yes, of course I tried, but the hinges are on the inside and the key's jammed in there real good.

OLD CHARLIE

Oh... Well then, you're just going to have to call a locksmith.

YOUNG CHARLIE

You think I didn't think of that? He wanted payment in advance.

OLD CHARLIE

So, why didn't you pay him?

YOUNG CHARLIE

I don't have any cash on me.

OLD CHARLIE

Man...(pause) Chucky?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Yeah?

OLD CHARLIE

You're screwed.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Uh...yeah.

OLD CHARLIE

Hey pal, I got to go. I got promoted. I'm leaving for the Tokyo office.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Tokyo?

OLD CHARLIE

Yeah, can you believe it?

YOUNG CHARLIE

But...I...was...supposed...to...

OLD CHARLIE

Catch you later. *(he hangs up)*

Wait!  
YOUNG CHARLIE

Too late.  
OLD CHARLIE  
(*as himself*)

I should have asked him to come over or to bring me some money, or to get someone to help... (*he paces the room*)  
YOUNG CHARLIE

Oh well. Now what?  
OLD CHARLIE

Pace around the room trying to figure out what to do for the rest of the day until I fall asleep?  
YOUNG CHARLIE

That's what I did.  
OLD CHARLIE

*YOUNG CHARLIE falls asleep at the table.*

Hey, Charlie. Wake up!  
OLD CHARLIE

Is it morning already?  
YOUNG CHARLIE

Did you have a nice sleep?  
OLD CHARLIE

Yeah. I dreamt that I locked myself in my apartment.  
YOUNG CHARLIE

That was no dream.  
OLD CHARLIE

It wasn't? Oh, shit! I got to call somebody. (*he tries telephone*) The phone's out of order.  
YOUNG CHARLIE

Why don't you call the phone company?  
OLD CHARLIE

I would, but THE PHONE IS OUT OF ORDER!  
YOUNG CHARLIE

Hmm. I wonder why...  
OLD CHARLIE

*YOUNG CHARLIE picks up bill and realizes.*

YOUNG CHARLIE

The phone bill!

OLD CHARLIE

You could try breaking down the door.

*YOUNG CHARLIE slams into it.*

YOUNG CHARLIE

Oh! God, that hurt...

OLD CHARLIE

Okay. Forget about that. What about the balcony?

*YOUNG CHARLIE goes to balcony.*

YOUNG CHARLIE

Help! Hey! Up here! Please help me!

OLD CHARLIE

The street noise is deafening; who could hear you yelling all the way up here?

*YOUNG CHARLIE waves at man below then watches him walk away.*

OLD CHARLIE (CONT'D)

How about those papers.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Good idea.

*YOUNG CHARLIE sits at the typewriter and loads it with imaginary paper as OLD CHARLIE looks over his shoulder.*

OLD CHARLIE

Dear Sir or Madam: My key has broken off in the lock. I am stuck in my apartment. Please, do something to free me. 4142 Lethe Way, Apartment 10-A.

*YOUNG CHARLIE crosses to balcony and mimes throwing the paper and watching it fall.*

OLD CHARLIE

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

YOUNG CHARLIE

The first one wafted about whimsically on the wind. It fluttered like a drunken butterfly and then disappeared.

OLD CHARLIE

A drunken butterfly. I like that. What about the others?

YOUNG CHARLIE

The next three all fell into the street and were run over in traffic. But there's one 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. She's shading her eyes from the sun. *(He puts on a friendly face. He waves.)* Hey! Up here! *(to OLD CHARLIE)* She's attractive.

OLD CHARLIE

That's a bonus.

YOUNG CHARLIE

She's walking towards the entrance. She doesn't see me. She's folding up the paper and...putting it in the trash!

YOUNG CHARLIE, devastated,  
tries the telephone again.

OLD CHARLIE

You tried that already. Eventually, they will turn off the gas, the electricity and the water. It's a good thing your parents left you this place in their will, otherwise you'd have to pay rent.

YOUNG CHARLIE

How am I going to survive? *(long pause)*

OLD CHARLIE

It will be difficult at first. On sunny days, you will use a magnifying glass to start a fire and you will burn your books and furniture for fuel. From this, you will learn what is truly essential. You will feel lonely at first. You will contemplate suicide. You will lose all notion of time. You will lose your ambitions as well as your fears. But your loneliness will eventually transform itself into solitude.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Solitude?

OLD CHARLIE

From a comfortable distance, you will watch the world go by and find special providence in the fall of a sparrow that has flown into your man-cage and become your dinner. For entertainment, you will let your thoughts wander. You will gather rainwater on the balcony.

(MORE)

OLD CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You will catch and breed insects and grow cherry tomatoes and green peas in your flower pots.

YOUNG CHARLIE

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

They look at each other as if looking in a mirror.

OLD CHARLIE

You will devise any number of ways to free yourself, but then decide that you'd rather not leave after all. And one day, 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, and you will then say "good night" to your former youthful self.

YOUNG CHARLIE

But will I be happy?

OLD CHARLIE

Happy? *(pause)* Yes, of course you will be happy.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Good. Then I'm going back to sleep. *(he removes his hat and places it on the table)*

OLD CHARLIE

Good night.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Good night.

*YOUNG CHARLIE disappears. OLD CHARLIE dons the hat, catches a fly and puts it in a glass jar as before.*

OLD CHARLIE

All I ever wanted was some solitude.

*YOUNG CHARLIE enters.*

YOUNG CHARLIE

Ah, you're awake.

OLD CHARLIE

It would seem so.

Lights fade. End of play.