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Dramatic Publishing



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Charlie Cox Runs With Scissors



Comedy by
Michael McKeever

Charlie Cox Runs With Scissors

"The playwright seems to have been influenced by the Ingmar Bergman film *The Seventh Seal*, but rather than make this a heavy drama, he has turned it into a romantic comedy fantasy."

—*TalkinBroadway.com*

Comedy. By Michael McKeever. Cast: 3m., 2w. When Charlie Cox, a middle-aged editor, learns that he has the incurable, degenerative condition known as Lou Gehrig's disease, he gets in his car and starts driving. He soon finds himself in the Arizona desert, where he uncharacteristically picks up a hitchhiker, a sarcastic, impatient guy named Wally, who happens to be his own personal death emissary. As Wally urges him to get it over with, lovely, sexy Kiki enters the picture wearing dark glasses since "love is blind." Wally is infuriated when love blossoms between Charlie and the widow Nell, and the ensuing battle between Death and Love teaches Charlie the importance of living life to the fullest. *One interior set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: CE8.*

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CHARLIE COX RUNS WITH SCISSORS

A Play

by

MICHAEL MCKEEVER



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*Death destroys a man,
but the idea of death is what saves him.*

— E.M. Forester, *Howard's End*

for Marcia Mahon

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All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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“Originally presented by Florida Stage in Manalapan, Florida,
on October 24, 2003, Louis Tyrell, Producing Director,
Nancy Barnett, Managing Director.”

CHARLIE COX RUNS WITH SCISSORS

CHARACTERS

CHARLIE COX
NELL TODD
TRAVIS DUNN
WALLY
KIKI

SETTING

The back parlor of a rundown motel. Somewhere between
Phoenix and nowhere. Last summer.

Charlie Cox Runs With Scissors (formerly titled *Running with Scissors*) received its world premiere production at Florida Stage in Manalapan, Fla. It opened on October 24, 2003 with the following cast:

Charlie Cox	Robert Elliot
Wally	Paul Tei
Nell Todd	Angie Radosh
Travis Dunn	Dave Cory
Kiki	Karen Stephens

The production was directed by Louis Tyrrell. Set design by Richard Crowell. Lighting design by Suzanne M. Jones. Costume design by Suzette Paré. Sound design by Matt Briganti Kelly. The production stage manager was James Danford.

CHARLIE COX RUNS WITH SCISSORS

Scene i

(Black.

A single spot slowly illuminates WALLY. Dressed completely in black, he wears goggles and army boots. He is a crazy quilt of texture and attitude. He sticks out his thumb as if hitchhiking and holds a cardboard sign which reads "Nowhere."

From the darkness, we hear the voice of CHARLIE COX.)

CHARLIE. A speck. He was nothing more than a speck. A tiny black dot on the vast horizon of nothingness spread out before me. Barely perceptible in the flickering heat coming off the road. And yet there was definitely something there. There was no mistaking it. Ever present and immobile. And slowly... No, quickly, actually...as my car approached, he started to take form. All attitude and arti—

WALLY. That's where you're going to start?

CHARLIE *(beat)*. Yeah.

WALLY. Really?

CHARLIE. Really.

WALLY *(beat)*. Okay. *(Beat.)*

CHARLIE. All right. What's wrong with starting there?

WALLY. Uhhh. Lemme think... It sucks.

CHARLIE. Excuse me?

WALLY. It sucks.

CHARLIE. What do you mean it sucks?

WALLY. What part of "sucks" don't you get?

(Lights come up full.)

WALLY is standing in the center of a dusty sun-bleached back parlor of a tiny motel somewhere in the Arizona desert. Stage right, an archway leads to the office and front desk. A drawn curtain partially hides the office from view. Next to the archway, is a small closet. Stage left, a door leads out to the kitchen and storage area. Along the upstage wall a hallway leads to a bathroom and bedrooms. Windows let in the harsh white Arizona sunlight. On one of the walls is a darkened silhouette where a large crucifix once hung. There is a small couch, a coffee table and several mismatched chairs. The furniture, like the room, is worn out and tired. Other than WALLY, there are no bright colors to be found. Everything seems faded and washed out and sad. Sitting in one of the chairs is CHARLIE COX. Average in every possible way, CHARLIE seems as faded and tired as everything else in the room. He holds a small portable tape recorder in his hand.)

CHARLIE. Well, where do you suggest?

WALLY. How about the beginning.

CHARLIE. That's not the beginning?

WALLY. Nope.

CHARLIE. It's how we met.

WALLY. It's not the beginning.

CHARLIE. It's not?

WALLY. Nope.

CHARLIE. Well then, what is?

WALLY. Like you don't know.

CHARLIE. Well, obviously, I don't.

WALLY. God, this gonna be one crappy book.

CHARLIE. Why don't you just te—

WALLY. Wuss.

CHARLIE. Wally—

WALLY. Wussalicious. Wussiman. Wuss in Boots.

CHARLIE. All I'm sa—

WALLY (*singing*). If you knew Wussy like I knew Wussy.

Oh. Oh. Oh, what a—

CHARLIE. All right! I'll start at the beginning.

WALLY. Good. I'll play the doctor...

(WALLY picks up a chair and sets it in the center of the room. He is now the doctor. CHARLIE sets down the tape recorder and moves to him.)

WALLY (*as the doctor*). Mr. Cox, I'm afraid I have some terrible news. Some terrible, terrible news. Please... please, sit down. Give me your hand...

CHARLIE. He never said that.

WALLY (*ignoring him*). You seem tense. Can I get you anything? A glass of water?

CHARLIE. Oh for... There was no water. There was no hand-holding. There was no bad dialogue. If you're going to play the doctor, play it right. Say what he said. Do what he did.

WALLY. And what did he do?

CHARLIE. He just walked into the room and said... *(He stops himself.)*

WALLY *(quietly)*. What? *(Beat.)*

CHARLIE. You know. *(Beat.)*

WALLY *(smiles, and once again, he is the doctor)*. Mr. Cox, You have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

CHARLIE. I have what?

WALLY *(as the doctor)*. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. *(Beat.)*

CHARLIE. WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?

WALLY *(as the doctor)*. Lou Gehrig's disease. You have Lou Gehrig's disease. *(Beat. CHARLIE stares at him.)* Mr. Cox...?

CHARLIE. I can't.

WALLY *(as the doctor)*. You can't what?

CHARLIE. I can't have Lou Gehrig's disease.

WALLY *(as the doctor)*. I beg your pardon?

CHARLIE. I said I can't have Lou Gehrig's disease.

WALLY *(as the doctor, confused)*. Why not?

NELL. How's it going, Charlie?

(Both men turn to find NELL entering from the hallway. She is an attractive woman about CHARLIE's age. She carries a wicker basket filled with wet sheets. Throughout the play she never looks at or acknowledges WALLY.)

CHARLIE. Oh. Hi Nell. Okay, I guess. I've just started.

NELL. Well, if you need me for anything, let me know. I'll be out back at the clothesline.

CHARLIE. Okay.

NELL *(indicating the front door)*. If you hear the pumps...

CHARLIE. No problem.

NELL. Okay then. Good luck with your story. (*She exits through the kitchen.*)

WALLY. She wants me.

CHARLIE (*ignoring him*). Where were we?

WALLY. You know what I find amusing, yet at the same time vaguely disturbing?

CHARLIE. What?

WALLY. There hasn't been a car drives by this place for the last—what is it?—three days. And yet, every time she goes out back, she says “If you hear the pumps...” Like she's expecting a parade to pass by, and they're all going to need gas.

CHARLIE. Wally...

WALLY. And, while I'm at it, why is she changing and washing the sheets? She herself says there hasn't been a customer in this dump of a motel for weeks now. Other than the old fart in the back room. And God knows, he's not a customer.

CHARLIE. WALLY!

WALLY. What?

CHARLIE. Can we please get back to the story.

WALLY. Oh. Sure. Uh...so, where were we?

CHARLIE. The doctor just told me.

WALLY. Right. And you said—

CHARLIE. I can't have Lou Gehrig's disease. I just can't.

WALLY. And he said... (*As the doctor.*) And yet you do.

CHARLIE. Doctor, you don't understand. I can't...I mean, I've done everything I'm supposed to. You know? I watch what I eat. I get enough sleep.

WALLY (*as the doctor*). Mr. Cox—

CHARLIE. My family doesn't have Lou Gehrig's. My family has diabetes. And high cholesterol. But no Lou Gehrig's. There is no Lou Gehrig's in my family!

WALLY (*as the doctor*). Mr. Cox, it's not necessarily hereditary.

CHARLIE. I don't care. I'm a good man. I take care of myself. Good men who take care of themselves live long healthy lives. Good men who take care of themselves don't get Lou Gehrig's disease.

WALLY (*as the doctor*). They do. Sometimes, they do. (*Beat.*) Mr. Cox, two weeks ago when you first came to me, I told you that we'd find out what was wrong with you—

CHARLIE. I assumed you were going to tell me it was stress!

WALLY (*as the doctor*). It's not. It's not stre—

CHARLIE (*cutting him off*). There's no cure for this, is there?

WALLY (*as the doctor*). No.

CHARLIE. So the stumbling and the shaking in my hand, that's all just gonna get worse and worse, until—

WALLY (*as the doctor*). Well, let's not get ahead of ourselves.

CHARLIE. I mean, isn't there like the slightest possibility that your diagnosis is...you know...wrong?

WALLY (*as the doctor*). You're more than welcome to get a second opinion. But I'm afraid the diagnosis is going to be the same.

CHARLIE. It is, isn't it?

WALLY (*as the doctor*). Yes. (*Beat.*)

CHARLIE. Well doesn't that just suck?

WALLY (*as the doctor*). Mr. Cox, the situation isn't quite as dire as it seems. There are several treatments available. I'd like to go over some of the—

CHARLIE. Fifty percent of people who are diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's die within eighteen months. (*Beat.*)

WALLY (*as the doctor, quietly*). That's correct. How did you know that?

CHARLIE. Listen. I'm sorry. I can't do this.

WALLY (*as the doctor*). Excuse me?

CHARLIE. I can't do this right now. I can't...I'm sorry, I...um...I've got to go. (*He turns and steps away, breaking out of the scene.*)

WALLY(*no longer playing the doctor*). So what do you do then?

CHARLIE. I leave the doctor's office.

WALLY. That's right. But you don't go back to work.

CHARLIE. No.

WALLY. And you don't go home.

CHARLIE. No.

WALLY. You just get in your car and you drive.

CHARLIE. Yes.

WALLY. You keep thinking about the old woman across the hall, don't you?

CHARLIE. She wasn't family. My family doesn't have—

WALLY. You remember how frail she became. How she wasted away. How she literally decayed before your eyes. Like tissue paper—dissolving—falling to bits in the water.

CHARLIE. That is not going to happen to me.

WALLY. And yet it is.

CHARLIE. No.

WALLY. Your mom was a good neighbor. She helped take care of her. And so did you. As a little boy, you helped feed her, didn't you? You held the spoon up to those pale trembling lips and—

CHARLIE. Don't.

WALLY. Fed her. You remember all of it. You do. It clings to you like a film. The way she looked at you. The quiet horror in her eyes. The way she smelled. The way she—

CHARLIE. DON'T! I won't go back there. I can't.

WALLY. And so you drive.

CHARLIE (*quietly*). Yes.

WALLY. You have no idea where you're going.

CHARLIE. Not a clue.

WALLY. But still you drive. You get on State Road 10 and you drive, the setting sun behind you.

CHARLIE. Into the desert. Into the night.

WALLY. It's not fair, is it?

CHARLIE. No.

WALLY. You spend your entire life doing everything right. Doing everything safe. You play by the rules.

CHARLIE. Yes.

WALLY. There's a time, early on...

CHARLIE. What?

WALLY. You were going to be a writer.

CHARLIE. Yes.

WALLY. The next Fitzgerald.

CHARLIE. Yes.

WALLY. You were that good.

CHARLIE. I was.

WALLY. And yet...

CHARLIE. And yet...

WALLY. You chicken out. You settle. You become an editor.

CHARLIE. I do.

WALLY. Fear of failure and a dog-eat-dog industry.

CHARLIE. It was all so hard.

WALLY. And so you settle.

CHARLIE. I settle.

WALLY. You become an editor. And, one by one, you watch your dreams slip away, as you fall in line with the rest of the drones.

CHARLIE. Because...

WALLY. Because that's what good men do. They play it safe and stay in line. Because they know one day it will all pay off.

CHARLIE. And then...

WALLY. And then life turns around and screws you royal. With a little dash of...*can you say irony*...Lou Gehrig's disease.

CHARLIE. It's not fair.

WALLY. But life isn't, is it?

CHARLIE. No.

WALLY. And so...

CHARLIE. There I am.

WALLY. The next morning.

CHARLIE. Still driving.

WALLY. You don't know where you are.

CHARLIE. No.

WALLY. You realize that eventually you'll have to turn around.

CHARLIE. Of course.

WALLY. You're tired.

CHARLIE. Yes.

WALLY. You're hungry.

CHARLIE. Yes.

WALLY. You're about to run out of gas.

CHARLIE. Any minute.

WALLY. And then...

CHARLIE. And then...

WALLY. This is my so favorite part. *(He picks up the cardboard sign and strikes the same pose he was in at the top of the play.)*

CHARLIE. I see a speck. Nothing more than a speck. A tiny black dot on the vast horizon of nothingness spread out before me. Barely perceptible in the flickering heat coming off the road. And yet there was definitely something there. There was no mistaking it. Ever present and immobile. And slowly... No, quickly, actually...as my car approaches, he starts to take form. All attitude and arti— *(From the hallway we here a bell being rung.)*

WALLY. Oh for Chrissakes! *(The bell rings again.)* Doesn't he ever get tired of ringing that freakin' bell?

CHARLIE. What do you think he wants now?

WALLY. Let me think... *(Beat, He thinks.)* ...Nope. Don't care.

(NELL reenters. The basket is now empty.)

CHARLIE *(to NELL)*. He's ringing again.

NELL *(weary)*. Of course he is. Has he been at it long?

CHARLIE. No, he just started.

(NELL sighs, sets the basket down and exits down the hall, as the bell rings again.)