

WAKING CHARLIE

By Dan D'Amario

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CHARACTERS

CHARLIE TARVER: 17-year-old who recently committed suicide

ANDY: 24-year-old free spirit who died about one year ago

JOHN and MARY TARVER: CHARLIE's parents

MELISSA TARVER: 10-12 years old, CHARLIE's sister

GORDON: CHARLIE's best friend

REBECCA: GORDON's girlfriend

AMY: CHARLIE's ex-girlfriend

MOURNERS: family and friends (3 aunts, 3 uncles)

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

TIME AND PLACE

Current day in a funeral home.

Stage Right: A large picture of CHARLIE and an architectural/artistic drawing are displayed next to an open casket. Three chairs for the family are arranged next to the casket facing the audience. A row of chairs for mourners faces the casket.

Center Stage: Two chairs against the back wall facing the audience for CHARLIE and ANDY.

Stage Left: Two rows of chairs for mourners in front of a doorway. A sign by the door reads "Charles Tarver."

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SCENE 1

The song "Alone Again (naturally)" by Gilbert O'Sullivan is playing in the empty room. As the music fades, FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters. HE is stiff in stature, moves slowly and fluidly and is expressionless as HE walks around the room checking that everything is in order. HE then leaves without touching anything in the room.

Lights down. As the lights come back up, CHARLIE is sitting in one of the two chairs staring straight ahead.

Lights down. As the lights come back up, ANDY is sitting next to CHARLIE. They both stare straight ahead.

ANDY: Nice day for a wake.

CHARLIE: Unfortunately.

ANDY: Why do you say that?

CHARLIE: I was hoping for some miserable weather so everyone would feel extra miserable!

ANDY: Ohhh. It's gonna be one of those wakes, is it?

CHARLIE: One of what wakes?

ANDY: The kind where you want the whole world weeping over your loss. (*singing; mocking the Bee Gees' song "I Started a Joke"*) I decided to die, that started the whoooooo woorld crying.

(CHARLIE gives ANDY an annoyed look. ANDY gets up and slowly walks over to the casket. HE looks down into the casket, looks at the picture of CHARLIE, then looks at CHARLIE in disbelief.)

ANDY: Dude! What did you do?! Are you sure you're in the right room?

CHARLIE: (*walks over to the casket and hesitantly looks in*) That doesn't look like me!

ANDY: Dude, makeup does not become you.

CHARLIE: (*angrily*) This is just great!

ANDY: Not exactly what you pictured?

CHARLIE: Not exactly.

ANDY: You thought you'd look... regal? Intelligent? Mature?

(CHARLIE, annoyed, scans the room.)

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ANDY: You wanted more flowers?

CHARLIE: More than this, I thought.

ANDY: Maybe a little Irish “woe is me” music?

CHARLIE: Very funny! But a little sad music would be nice, and a little rain. (**raising his arms and looking up**) Who do I have to kill to get a little rain?

ANDY: Obviously not yourself.

CHARLIE: (**sarcastically**) You are hilarious. Could I get a little sympathy here? My parents should be here soon. What time is it?

ANDY: Don't know, don't care.

(MELISSA, holding a teddy bear, enters hesitantly and stands by the entrance staring at the casket across the room.)

ANDY: Who's that?

CHARLIE: (**very upset**) Oh, God! Oh, God!

ANDY: Let me guess – sister?

(MELISSA lowers her head, turns, and quickly leaves the room.)

CHARLIE: I forgot about... I didn't know they would bring... She shouldn't see me like this – like that!

ANDY: Ah, yes. We want so many people to suffer – just not all the people.

CHARLIE: Quiet! This ruins everything.

ANDY: Actually, it's just the kind of thing you need. The grief-stricken little sister at her first wake. That should make everyone nicely miserable. I think your luck is changing.

CHARLIE: Shut up! This wasn't about her.

ANDY: Who was it about?

CHARLIE: Everyone else. Everyone else who didn't understand, who made me mad, who made me anxious, who made me feel... inferior! Not her! They shouldn't have brought her to this.

ANDY: It's too late to be trying to control events, don't you think?

CHARLIE: I just wanted everyone to come, see me lying there, think about what part they played in this tragedy and then go away with a rip in their heart or a hole in their stomach so they could feel like I felt for so long.

ANDY: And the award for leading actor in a melodrama is... Oh! It's Charlie Tarver! (**clapping his hands**)

CHARLIE: What do you know?

ANDY: Quite a bit, actually. I've seen your story time and time again, a hundred times over. Sorry to disappoint you, but you are not unique.

CHARLIE: What are you doing here, anyway?

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ANDY: I'm not exactly sure, but I think it has to do with *unresolved issues*. As far as expertise goes, however, I've been to about a hundred of these... parties.

CHARLIE: This isn't a party.

ANDY: No? Let's see. This is an event about you specifically, all your family and friends are attending, and I'm sure your parents will be serving food and drinks. **(yelling and waving his hands)** PARTY!!!

(JOHN and MARY TARVER enter looking tired.)

MARY: John, don't forget that after you leave here you need to stop to pick up the ice cream and more plastic cups. I'll get a ride home with my sister. And we need to remember to take the ice cream cake out of the freezer so it has time to soften.

(JOHN and MARY make their way over to the casket.)

ANDY: Mom and Dad?

CHARLIE: Yep. Mom's always got everything under control... except me.

MARY: He looks good, don't you think?

JOHN: Better than... before.

MARY: **(wiping her eyes)** My dear, sweet boy. Just another day, Charlie, and it will all be over.

JOHN: The room looks good.

MARY: The flowers are beautiful!

CHARLIE: There should be more flowers! Where are all the flowers?!

(JOHN and MARY walk toward the exit.)

MARY: Should we bring Melissa in to... see him before everyone gets here?

CHARLIE: No! She shouldn't be in here. She's too young!

JOHN: Why don't you let me take care of that?

CHARLIE: Do you see?! Do you see what they are going to do to a 10-year-old?

ANDY: They seem like very nice people if you ask me. **(getting a dirty look from CHARLIE)** But, nobody asked me.

(JOHN and MELISSA enter. JOHN holds MELISSA's hand as they walk slowly toward the casket.)

JOHN: Remember what we talked about? That's where they put Charlie so he can rest before he goes up to see God. And remember how I said Charlie was going to look different because they had to fix where he got hurt?

CHARLIE: **(following behind them)** Why are you putting her through this?! This is just like you! You gotta grow up, take responsibility! She's just a little girl!

(JOHN helps MELISSA step up onto the kneeling bench so she can look into the casket. MELISSA stares into the casket for a while. CHARLIE turns away, shaken.)

MELISSA: Hi, Charlie. Mom and Dad said you have to rest so you can go to see God. Mr. Teddy wanted to say goodbye to you, too. **(holds her teddy bear up)**

JOHN: Tell Charlie about the card you got.

MELISSA: Oh, yeah. I got a card from my teacher and all the kids in my class. It said, "Our deepest sympathy... all our prayers are with you and your family." Everyone wrote their names on it. It has a bird on the front.

JOHN: Okay, honey, say goodbye to Charlie.

MELISSA: Goodbye, Charlie. Mr. Teddy wants to go with you in case you don't know anyone in heaven. **(places the teddy bear in the casket; JOHN helps her down and they walk toward the door)** Can Charlie stay with us a little longer?

CHARLIE: **(very upset)** I'm sorry, Melissa.

ANDY: **(wiping his eye)** Wow! That was what it's all about. Too bad everyone wasn't here to see that. The little girl putting her teddy bear into the casket so you won't be lonely... priceless! That would have made everyone nicely miserable.

CHARLIE: **(sitting down)** Leave me alone.

ANDY: Wish I could, dude, but I think we're in this together.

(MARY enters with three WOMEN.)

FEMALE MOURNER 1: This dress is at least five years old, but I only wear it to funerals.

MARY: It still looks fine.

FEMALE MOURNER 1: Are you coming up with us, Mary?

MARY: No. John and I had some time earlier. I'll just take my seat.

FEMALE MOURNER 1: **(as they approach the casket)** Charlie, Charlie, Charlie. Why did you do this to us?

FEMALE MOURNER 2: He was always such a nice boy.

FEMALE MOURNER 3: **(crying)** And so good looking. Look at him now!

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ANDY: Here we go! It's getting good now. Is this what you wanted?

CHARLIE: Those are my aunts. They were always good to me. I didn't want to hurt them.

(The three WOMEN move over to MARY, hug her, and take their seats.)

FEMALE MOURNER 2: That's a beautiful picture, Mary. When was that taken?

MARY: That's Charlie's graduation picture. They take them in February.

FEMALE MOURNER 3: And that drawing? That's one of Charlie's isn't it?

MARY: Yes. That was one of his favorites. He could have gone to art school or architectural school next semester if he had just... ***(starts sobbing)***

ANDY: If you had just what? Applied? Not killed yourself? What?

CHARLIE: Both, I guess.

ANDY: Looks like you had some talent. Why didn't you want to go to college?

CHARLIE: I couldn't stand all the pressure. Charlie, where are you going to apply? Charlie, when are you going to apply? Charlie, what do you want to study?

ANDY: So, you didn't want to go to college?

CHARLIE: No. Yes. I don't know! See, you're just like them!

ANDY: I see. Do you want me to be nicely miserable?

(FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters, silently leading two MEN through the room to the casket and then leaves. The two MEN take a few seconds then walk over to the WOMEN.)

MALE MOURNER 1: We'll be outside having a smoke.

MALE MOURNER 2: They want to use my car in the procession tomorrow. You girls can ride with me if you want.

FEMALE MOURNER 1: We'll see.

(The two MEN leave.)

CHARLIE: Did you see that?! They didn't say one word about me.

ANDY: Your uncles?

CHARLIE: Yeah, my uncles. I might as well not even be here! I don't think anyone would miss me.

ANDY: They are all starting the process of putting the hurt and pain behind them so they can get on with life. What do you want from them?

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CHARLIE: (**angry**) This is my freakin' funeral! If I can't get some... respect, some attention! No one's getting it! No one's getting my message! No one's...

ANDY: Listening?

CHARLIE: Yeah, I guess. This is about as big a message as I can send, don't you think?

ANDY: Yeah, it's right up there with, "Mom, Dad, I'm gay, my girlfriend is pregnant and I'm a Republican."

CHARLIE: (**not amused**) Ha, ha, ha.

(FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters, silently leading a few more MOURNERS to the casket. They take a moment, give condolences to MARY, and take seats in the back of the room. JOHN enters and walks over to MARY.)

FEMALE MOURNER 3: John, how's Melissa taking it?

JOHN: She's asleep in the office. This has been a rough day for her.

FEMALE MOURNER 2: Poor dear. Does she understand it all?

JOHN: I don't think it has really sunk in yet. Charlie and she were so close. I think she expects him to come back. She idolized him.

(JOHN starts to sob as do the WOMEN.)

CHARLIE: That's it, Dad, cry now. Cry for Melissa. Where are the tears for me? Where were the tears when I needed them?

ANDY: Dude, there's some stuff going on here that I just can't handle. All this anger and emotion...

CHARLIE: And your life was just perfect?

ANDY: All in all, not bad, actually.

CHARLIE: Then why are you here... with me?

ANDY: (**defensively**) Oh, no! I didn't do... I'm not like you.

CHARLIE: Yeah, right? How did you do it? Wrists, pills? Yeah, you look like a pill popper. Overdose, right?

ANDY: Not even close! Well, not real close.

CHARLIE: Let's hear it. I'm not going anywhere.

(FUNERAL DIRECTOR enters, silently leading a few more MOURNERS to the casket.)

ANDY: I was hiking up in the mountains. I would stuff my backpack, head up into the park and just start walking until I got so far away from everything that the only sounds I could hear were the birds, the waterfalls and the wind in the trees. When I felt the stress completely gone from my body, I'd head back down – sometimes not until the

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next morning. Anyway, I was up there one day sitting on this rock cliff watching a waterfall and a big old eagle flying around hunting for food and...

CHARLIE: And what?

ANDY: I decided to have a little smoke.

(CHARLIE looks confused. ANDY holds his fingers up to his mouth like puffing on a cigarette.)

CHARLIE: **(loudly)** You mean marijuana?

ANDY: Shhh!

CHARLIE: **(whispering)** You mean marijuana? Hey, why am I whispering? We're dead!

ANDY: **(laughing)** That's right, my naïve corpse, grade A weed. Usually I smoke about half a joint with a friend, but there was no one there to enjoy it with me. So...

CHARLIE: You smoked half a joint by yourself?

ANDY: No, I smoked the whole thing by myself. I just sat there smoking, looking at the view, smoking, looking at the view, smoking...

CHARLIE: Then what?

ANDY: Well, I finished the joint around 6 p.m. and thought I'd better start heading down before it got too dark. Then I thought I could just *fly* down. Dude, I was feeling so good! I was on top of the world! I was Superman! I was an eagle! I could feel no pain... until, of course...

CHARLIE: No way!

ANDY: Way! I took off my backpack and... **(puts his arms out like wings)** I was flying! I was actually flying!

CHARLIE: Then how did you end up...

ANDY: Like you? Well, let's figure this out mathematically. I jumped off a cliff that was about 75 feet high. At 32 feet per second... you're the architect, how long is that?

CHARLIE: **(figuring)** That's about... 2.34 seconds.

ANDY: Then I was flying for 2.34 seconds!

CHARLIE: And then?

ANDY: SPLAT!

CHARLIE: Did it hurt?

ANDY: Not really, although I didn't die immediately. I'm not sure how long I was conscious, but I do remember lots of mosquitoes.

CHARLIE: Mosquitoes?

ANDY: They were landing on my face and I couldn't move anything to swat them away. I hate mosquitoes!

CHARLIE: That's gross!

ANDY: Like what you did is all Martha Stewart?

CHARLIE: I was making a point – a statement.

ANDY: (*looking around the room at the sparse turnout*) Some statement.

CHARLIE: Everyone's not here yet.

FEMALE MOURNER 1: Mary, do you remember that time at the cookout - Charlie must have been about 5 and he was watching that plane fly overhead and his ice cream cone started tipping... (**JOHN, MARY, and the WOMEN start to giggle.**) and didn't realize the ice cream had fallen off the cone onto John's seat? (**They giggle harder.**)

MARY: And then John comes over and starts looking up in the sky and says... (**trying to compose herself**) "Hey there, Charlie, whatcha lookin' at?" And then SPLAT!

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