

Static

An original play.

Written by: Nah Damien
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Runtime: 20 minutes

Characters:

Charlie
Grace
Father
Mother
Teacher
Narrator
Chorus (various members)

Scene 1: Death | Returning

The extended family is having a gathering. Father is talking with his brothers at centre stage. Other family members are scattered throughout the stage.

Family member: Let's take a family picture!

Everyone gathers around centre stage to pose.

Charlie: When I first saw him there, lying motionless-

Chorus: One minute ten seconds. (*Pose: Extended family.*)

Grace: ...with his head tilted back and mouth agape-

Chorus: One minute thirty seconds. (*Pose: Waving Goodbye*)

Charlie: I didn't know what to do.

Chorus: Two minutes forty seconds. (*Pose: Wall*)

Grace: The great, strong Ox in my life-

Chorus: Three minutes twenty seconds. (*Pose: Father passed out.*)

Charlie: ...*collapsed* on our living room couch.

(Mother and Grace rush into the scene. Chorus slowly forms up behind them.)

Mother: Charlie! Grace! What happened? I'm calling an ambulance!

Charlie: Initially I thought, this is it. Who's going to buy me video games now? My mom's not very fond of buying 'things we don't need'.

995 Operators: 995, what's your emergency?

Mother: Hello? 995? Something happened to my husband, he's passed out... I think he had a, a-a heart attack or seizure or something...

Grace: But speaking of buying things we don't need, his birthday was only the day after. I guess that's one less birthday gift to ponder over. (looks over shoulder) Great timing, dad.

Mother: Please, please hurry... I don't know if he's going to make it...

Chorus: Have you ever watched someone die?

Mother: Honey, please... please don't do this-

Chorus: It feels like they are slipping, slipping away.

Mother: It's going to be alright, okay? He's going to be alright-

Chorus: Like they're leaving for a place you can't see.

Mother: They're coming, okay? Please stay with us, the ambulance is coming-

Charlie/Grace: They'll never make it on time, mom.

Chorus: They didn't make it on time.

Charlie: After that, I took a week off school. One whole week. I smiled throughout the funeral. I tried to smile. I didn't cry at all. After a week, I went back to school.

T: What's wrong with Charlie? Why is he just staring at nothing?

W: Charlie, are you okay?

S: Let him off, guys, his father just passed away.

M: Charlie, it's okay. Just let it go, Charlie, just let it go.

Charlie: *(grabbing her/him by the collar, Chorus reacts in shock)* Don't you tell me what to do.

Scene 2: Life Goes On

(Teacher comes in. Chorus and Grace are students. Students greet Teacher, after which Teacher collects their homework. Teacher approaches Grace.)

Chorus:

L: A whole week of school.

How do you expect to keep up?

T: How are you going to catch up?

You have homework to do today, let's start with that!

J: Homework from two weeks ago!

What are you going to do?

W: You have a test next friday, on topics you've never learnt!

Chorus: What are you going to do?

Grace: So I stopped. I stopped doing homework. I stopped paying attention in class.

Teacher: And what do you get for your 'dy over dx'? What do you get?

(Students/chorus are not paying attention. Teacher sighs.)

Teacher: Class, look up. There's something I want to tell you.

I know that when I teach maths, it's very boring for you. Every day we always go 'dy over dx' then you use it to find your gradient, and solve the question, and blah blah blah. I know It becomes very repetitive, but that is maths. That is school. That is life. Life goes on, okay?

I know when you listen to me teach maths, it's very tiring, but it's tiring for me too, to see you not paying attention. Just hang in there for 9 more months and sit for your exams, then you're done. Right now, you need to learn maths. Life goes on.

Chorus: Life goes on.

Scene 2.5: Funeral Reflections

(Charlie is looking over the body of Father. Father lies motionless on the ground, maybe with a cloth draped over his head.)

Narrator: At the funeral, I once touched my father's body as it lay in the casket. It felt cold and tough, like touching metal. Cold, dead, dead to the heart.

The thing is, I'm not a bad kid. I was in the top class of my primary school. Well, the bottom half of the top class. But still, my grades aren't bad. I guess I score high and aim higher. It makes me feel good to do well.

I'm not a bad kid. I hang out with good people. People who do care about me. But, I don't expect them to. My father told us before, that we shouldn't expect anything from others. That no one is a special little snowflake, and that our sufferings will not be unique. That in the end, we're all the same, decaying, carbon-based organic matter as everyone on this planet.

Scene 3: Memories

Charlie/Grace: It's been a month, since his passing. When I think of my father, a few memories come up.

Charlie: It's February 2014.

Grace: It's September 2013.

Charlie: The night was cold.

Grace: The night was warm and stifling.

Chorus:

M: I hear him hit her.

A: Then I hear him throw her onto the floor.

Y: She screams, but she doesn't plead.

M: She just waits for it to stop.

Father: 你要看我邪恶的一面啊！ (You want to see my dark side?)

Charlie:

He always said he had a dark side.

Charlie/Chorus:

As if | there's a force that takes control of him.

As if | he can't control himself.

As if | it's not his fault and doing.

Charlie:

I hear him hit her again.

Grace and Charlie:

(with growing ferocity) And again. And again. And again. AND AGAIN. AND AGAIN.

AND it stops.

(long pause.)

Charlie: Silence.

Somehow my mother stuck through the wretched depths of my father's twistedness. We were still together. We were still a family. That night,

Chorus:

I sat motionless in shock.

Charlie:

I didn't know what to do.

I inched my way towards my bed.

I drew the blanket over my face,

Chorus:

praying the night to go away,

praying the night to be a dream.

Charlie:

Later, he knocks on my door.

He tells me 'I'm sorry'.

(Father: "I'm sorry.")

He tells me 'I won't do it again'.

(Father: "I won't do it again.")

He tells me 'I love you'.

(Father: "I love you.")

Grace: Love is blind and strange in ways that we can't understand.

Charlie: Everything's chaos in my head.

Grace: How can I claim to have loved my father,

Charlie/Grace: When this is what comes to mind when I think of him?

Scene 3.5: Complications

Grace: When Ms Loi told our class, "Life goes on", it almost felt as if she was talking to just me. "Life goes on". She says it as if everything is that simple; but of course, it's not. Life doesn't just "go on". Life bends and flips, twists and turns. Life is far from simple.

Speaking about that, it's not that simple to talk about my father's death either. People don't know how to help or comfort someone like me. They don't know how it feels like. Those who try to help assume I just feel sad.

But it's not just sad I feel.

(A slapping/slamming sound comes from offstage.)

Grace: Charlie? I better check on him.

(running off) Charlie!

Scene 4: Resurrection

(Charlie is sitting at his desk.)

Charlie: It's March.

Chorus:

G: It's time to study.

A: To do well in school.

M: To get good grades.
S: To impress your teachers.
Y: So you won't be a disappointment.
A disappointment to your father.
Charlie: (*confused*) What father? He's not even here.

Chorus:

A: Open your textbooks.
G: It's time to study.

Charlie: Study what?

Y: Sine squared theta plus cosine squared theta equals one.

Charlie: Study who?

S: 7th December, 1941, a date which will live in infamy.

Charlie: Study how?

G: This rolling waltz of life never ceases to tire the restless soul.

Charlie: Study why?

A: For every action, there is an equal and opposite... reaction.

(Chorus backs away into a wall. Charlie looks like he's in despair. He pauses for a moment before pushing the table away violently.)

Chorus:

M: What do you think you're doing?

Y: Do you think you're a special little snowflake?

G: Do you think your suffering is unique?

A: You are the same, decaying, carbon-based organic matter as everyone on this planet.

M: So get up.

S: Get up and study.

Get up and study!

(ensue the Marcus physical theatre idea with every chorus line with a [!])

Chorus:

Y: A is for average. [!]

G: B is for below expectations. [!]

M: C is for can't have dinner. [!]

A: D is for don't come home. [!]

S: E is for earn your own allowance. [!]

D: F is for find a new family. [!]

Y: Study harder[!]

G: Study better.

A: Study faster[!]

S: Study smarter.

Y: STUDY HARDER.

G: STUDY BETTER.

A: STUDY FASTER.

S: STUDY SMARTER.

STUDY-

(Charlie slaps himself. Chorus moves their heads in unison; they back away.)

Scene 5: Siblings

Grace: *(offstage)* Charlie?

(Chorus hides, Narrator comes onstage. Grace follows soon after.)

Grace: Charlie? Charlie, are you alright?

Narrator: Yeah, I'm fine. Go away.

Grace: *(with greater concern)* Charlie.

Narrator: No, I'm not fine. I feel bad, alright? I feel terrible.

Grace: *(light-heartedly)* You know what... to be honest, I'm not exactly feeling great either. Do you want to talk about it?

Narrator: Why do you care?

Grace: Come on, let's talk. Nothing to be ashamed about - we shared the same father, we share the same loss.

Narrator: It has nothing to do with you, now please, get out!

Grace: Charlie, I'm just trying to understand what's going on inside your head.

Narrator: You want to know what's going on inside my head? It doesn't just hurt, it burns. You know who I hate the most right now? I hate myself. Everything, my actions, my inactions, it's all on me. I mean, who else can I blame for this... downfall? Am I supposed to blame our father for this? For dying? Or for giving me the memory of a nightmare?

Oh right, you weren't there. The worst night of my life. It was February. You were out having the time of your life at some friend's birthday party. You don't know what it feels like to sit there, doing nothing, just waiting for it to stop.

Grace: Charlie... why don't you talk to us? You can always share your pains. It's a hard time for all of us, but we can carry each other, we can move on together. We'll be okay.

Narrator: Don't tell me it's going to be okay; don't tell me it's going to be alright. Don't lie to me like that!

Grace: Alright, Charlie.

Look. I don't know what's going on in your head. I don't know if what I'm going through is any better or any worse, but I'm struggling too. I don't know if I should be sad or if I should be glad, that our father is dead. It's confusing, and it's frustrating. But I'm trying to understand you. I'm trying to help you.

(pause.)

We both know, there will come a day where we will have to move on, to let go; but moving on isn't as scary as it sounds. I want to move on from this, and I hope you do too. Our sufferings may differ, but our bond is unique. Please, let me walk with you.

Scene 5.5: Static

Chorus: Static.

S: Lacking in movement, action, or change,

L: especially in an undesirable or uninteresting way.

(pause)

Static electricity.

P: An imbalance between positive charges, and negative charges.

Positive.

Negative.

Positive.

Negative.

Positive.

Negative.

Positive:

A: You should be sad for your father.

T: He raised you up since you were young.

- He raised Charlie up since he was young.

T: He was your father.

P: Why don't you feel sad for him?

Grace: But, I do. I love him.

Negative:

J: No! You should be glad that he's gone.

L: He was a poor, abusive excuse for a human being.

G: He BEAT THE HELL out of your mother.

S: Again. And again. AND AGAIN.

J: Why aren't you glad he's dead?

Grace: But I am, in some way. I think. Am I?

Positive:

P: But why?

T: Don't you remember all the happy memories with him?

A: Why are you so happy that he's dead?

P: Are you some sort of sadist?

Grace: That's not- I'm not a sadist. I do miss him.

Negative:

S: But why?

J: Don't you remember those nights of fear and terror?

G: Why do you still miss him?

L: Why do you still care for him?

Grace: I don't- I mean, I do, I mean-

Positive:

Can't you see?

A: He's gone.

T: He's dead.

A: Now, you can't turn back the clock.

P: Now, you can't go back to save him.

Negative:

J: But now, he's gone for good!

L: Gone forever.

S: Gone with the wind.

G: Gone into the afterlife.

Long gone!

Positive: You should be feeling sad for him!

Negative: You should be feeling glad for your mother!

Positive: You should be grieving for him!

Negative: You should be letting him go!

Grace: What am I supposed to feel? WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME.

(pause.)

Grace: I don't know what to feel.

Scene 6: Second Death

Chorus:

- Candidates who have in their possession
- any electronic devices
- Capable of storing visual or verbal information
- Or any unauthorised reference notes and materials
- May be prohibited from taking the exam
- Expelled from the examination room
- And or refused sitting for subsequent papers.

Candidates are to behave themselves during the examination.

M: ...alright Charlie, $64 \text{ times } 3 \text{ quarters equals } x \text{ over } 16 \text{ times } 64$.

Chorus: *(softly)* What do you think you're doing?

M: Just carry on, Charlie. $3 \text{ times } 16 \text{ equals } 4x$.

Chorus: You are not a special snowflake. Your suffering is not unique.

(Charlie is making small head shakes, as if trying to rid the voices.)

M: $4x \text{ equals } 48$, $x \text{ equals } 12$.

Chorus: You are the same, decaying carbon based organic matter as everyone on this planet.

M: Charlie, focus. You have to focus.

Chorus:

- What do you hope to achieve?
- After all this time?
- Suffering in the dark?
- You and your selfish act!

M: Charlie? Charlie?

Father: *(to Narrator)* Charlie.

Chorus: Charlie.

Father: Is that you?

Chorus: Is that you?

Father: Where were you?

Chorus: Where were you?

Father: How are you, Charlie?

Chorus: *(echoing)* [It's your fault.]/[How are you?]

Father: *(slowly approaching)* Stop running from me, Charlie.

Chorus: *(echoing)* [Stop running.]/[Feel sorry for me.]

Father: You are weak, Charlie.

Chorus: *(echoing)* [You are weak.]/[You are nothing.]

Father: So stop running and give it up.

I said, GIVE IT UP!

(Charlie walks up to Father and grabs him firmly. Father struggles. Chorus freezes.)

Charlie/Narrator: You're not my father. You're just a reflection, an idea. You're just a memory. So not now, not today. *(pause)* Not while I'm still alive.

(Charlie lets go of Father; Father falls limp onto the ground.)

Scene 7: Aftermath

Charlie: You know, I think it took me too long to figure this out. I'm not depressed, I'm not schizophrenic, I'm not insane. I'm normal. I just had too much food for thought. I was just thinking too much. But, to be honest, I don't know how to move from here. Yet in the end-

(pause.)

Charlie: *(with small optimism)* Moving on isn't as scary as it sounds.

Grace: Life goes on.

Charlie: Life goes on... hmm.

Grace: *(pause.)* Does it make me a terrible person if I told you I'm glad he's gone?

Charlie: No, not at all.

Grace: But at the same time, I still love him.

Charlie: Me too.

Grace: Why?

Charlie: Because... he was our dad. We can't entirely fix all that he's broken, and we can't change what we already know of him. But what if we don't know everything?

Grace: Maybe that's why Mom still talks to him.

(turns to look at Mother sitting on the block upstage, folding clothes and talking to Dad in her mind)

(Dad is behind Mother in neutral position. They get up to approach him.)

Charlie and Grace: Happy belated birthday, Dad.

(Grace hugs Dad, Charlie pats him on the back. They walk towards Mum without looking back at him.)

Mother: You know, when I was pregnant with both of you, your father would always help me fold clothes.

You know, before his drinking problems, your father never touched alcohol? The only time he ever drank before that was on his eighteenth birthday, with some of his friends. I was there. After that, he stayed away from it.

I've been dreaming of him every now and then. Do you two dream of your father too?

I had a dream where, it was like we were younger. We were at one of our friend's birthday party. He was drinking with his friends. He looked so happy.

(Dad starts walking towards Mother slowly.)

Then he sees me, and he starts walking towards me. He stumbled, but he had this genuine smile on his face. But just before he could reach me...

(Dad stops.)

I wake up.