

The Electra

A Play in One Act

Component Play for Hospital Suite

by Cheryl Ann Costa

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Premise: Charleen “Millie” Glenn is a top marketing manager and consultant for a marketing firm in a high-rise in Bethesda, Maryland. She wakes up in the hospital with a case of amnesia. She's the victim of an bad electrical shock at the office, which caused her to flatline in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. Her doctor, who's a specialist in memory and neural problems, makes great efforts to restore her memory. She becomes obsessed with the idea of getting her memory back.

One day after some tests she meets another patient, an old aircraft mechanic, [Ramis “Bo” McKenzie]. The old man comes in and chats with her; small talk at first, then about flying and finally the vintage Lockheed Electra 10E. Slowly she begins to remember bits and pieces of aviation knowledge and, more profoundly, the Electra 10E. Intrigued with these memories, she presses the old man to talk to her about his life experience in aviation. Later, the man is dying and needs to release his guilt. He feels that if he had been there, Amelia Earhart wouldn't have been lost. Charleen connects with a deeper self and the Millie aspect assures him there was nothing he could have done. 09/01/98

This play is a one-act intended to stand alone on its own merits. This play is also a component part of an evening of one acts - Hospital Suite. The plays in the context of the Hospital Suite presentation should be presented in the following order.

1st - “Convictions”, 2nd - “Barbara & Diane”, 3rd - “The Electra”

Themes - Confession, Justice, Redemption

Characters

Charleen M. Glenn - “Millie” Late thirties. A woman in crisis, struggling to regain her memory and her life.

Ramis “Bo” McKenzie - Late eighties - early nineties. Retired from Lockheed aircraft as a career mechanic.

Nurse Nagursky - Thirties to fifties. She's warm and compassionate, but very much down to business. Built like a freight train and the victim of the nickname “Nurse Knockers.”

Doctor Thomas Franklin – Late thirties. Neurologist – A specialist in memory problems.

The set is a hospital room, a single hospital bed and typical hospital furniture.

Scene One – I am me but who am I ...

Time: 17 June 1997 9:17a.m.

Place: Silver Spring Medical Center – Room 1720

Doctor: Good morning Charleen. How are we doing today?

Charleen: WE are not doing very well at all considering that I'm bored out of my mind.

Doctor: And what would you rather be doing?

Charleen: That's the damn of it. I know I'm bored and that I rather be doing something else, but I haven't the foggiest idea what I would rather be doing.

Doctor: I've never heard amnesia quite put that way before. *[looking over her chart]*

Charleen: Doc, tell me who I am and how I got here again?

Doctor: Hmmmm, The last time I told you was two days ago.

Charleen: Hmmmm what?

Doctor: Not only is your long term memory disrupted but it seems that your short term is still out of whack too.

Charleen: What's the difference?

Doctor: Short term is stored differently than long term memory. It's sort of a chemical thing and the slightest thing can disturb it.

Charleen: Like what?

Doctor: A good stiff drink of alcohol for one.

Charleen: I could use a stiff drink.

Doctor: Do you remember drinking?

Charleen: No! Just that it might be nice. It's sort of a warm feeling.

Doctor: Perhaps you're making a connection with a social occasion.

Charleen: I don't want a social occasion, I want to know who I am. Will you please tell me who I am? *[whining]*

Doctor: OK, you're Charleen Glenn, you're 35 years old and you're a marketing manager for an advertising firm in Bethesda, Maryland. And from what I've heard, you're very much the eligible young lady.

Charleen: Eligible for what?

Doctor: Marriage!

Charleen: And how did I get here?

Doctor: You received a very serious electrical shock from a defective desk lamp. The shock knocked you unconscious. For a few moments in the ambulance your heart stopped and you were momentarily dead.

Charleen: Doctor, in case I forget, will you remind me to throw away that desk lamp?

Doctor: Certainly, but from what I understand it's some product your company is marketing. *[he buzzes the nurse]*

Charleen: Great, I can see the ad now. "The lamp that makes you forget your troubles."
[beat] Why did you buzz the nurse?

Doctor: She's going to bring your medication.

Charleen: What medication?

Doctor: I'm thinking about trying an experimental new medication on you. Frankly, I'm a little hesitant to try it though.

Charleen: Why? At this point I'm willing to try anything.

Doctor: It's thinking like that, that makes me want to forget about the whole idea. It's a tough decision.

Charleen: I thought you doctor types make tough decisions all the time.

Doctor: We do! But we try and make them in an informed manner, carefully weighing the risks against the goal.

Charleen: Then decide Doc, isn't that why you get payed the big bucks? *[pauses and thinks for a moment]*

Doc, decide whether or not the goal is worth the risks involved. If it is, stop worrying.

Doctor: You certainly are a gutsy lady, Charleen.

Charleen: So what is this dreaded new medicine?

Doctor: Well, it's an experimental enzyme that helps knit up the loose ends of your brain's neural pathways.

[nurse enters and goes thru the motions of giving the doctor the pills in a little paper cup.]

Charleen: Where's this enzyme come from?

Doctor: Sardine oil of all things.

Charleen: What are sardines?

Doctor: You really don't know? Ha! *[Recomposes]* Alright, they're little smelly fish that you eat while drinking beer.

Charleen: Delightful! Why not just have me eat the fish?

Doctor: Because that many fish, my dear, would make you very sick to your tummy. *[Serious]* Are you sure you want to do this? Charleen, it's your decision.

Charleen: Doc, do you eat sardines?

Doctor: Absolutely, I love them.

Charleen: If they're good enough for you, they're good enough for me. Sure, what the hell, bring the little smelly guys on!

Doctor: OK, two pills in the mouth for the doctor. *[Doc hands the pills and a glass of water to her.]*

Charleen: How long will it take to work?

Doctor: I have no idea.

Charleen: *[bronx cheer]*
[end of scene- fade to black]

Scene Two – A few weeks later - The awakening...

Time: 18 July 1997 9:25a.m.

Place: Silver Spring Medical Center – Room 1720

Doctor: Good morning, Charleen, what's the good word today?

Charleen: Nothin.

Doctor: Oh, come on hon, you must have something nice to tell me on this bright shining day.

Charleen: OK, it's been three weeks and I think your little fish pills are a flop.

Doctor: And why do you say that?

Charleen: I don't remember anything any better than I did when you started me on them.

Doctor: Oh really?

Charleen: Absolutely. If those pills worked I figure I'd be remembering something important like my childhood. Perhaps my parents, maybe even something significant like my graduation from college or something.

Doctor: I'm sorry Charleen, I had hoped that you might remember something significant by now, myself. I've never met anyone who went to Harvard before and I was hoping you could tell me about their medical school and....

Charleen: Who told you that? I didn't go to Harvard, I went to the University of Syracuse.

Doctor: Oh, I stand corrected. I've been told that Syracuse is a serious party school.

Charleen: Nah, only if you run around with the jocks. Most the girls I met there were J.A.P.s from Long Island trying to land a husband like a Jr. Professor or a doctor or something.

Doctor: Excuse my ignorance. What's a J.A.P.?

Charleen: Good God Doc, did you have a sheltered life or something? J.A.P. stands for Jewish American Princess. Pampered little rich bitches from Long Island.

Doctor: Oh really, you don't say?

Charleen: Yeah you should see some of them on the first day of college. Stretch limos with chauffeurs bring them to school. It's unbelievable! I was lucky to get my Dad to drive me there in an old '73 Buick. *[beat]* Now that car was a heap of shit....*[beat]*

SHITTTT! I just remembered my Dad's car. *[building excitement]* That big beautiful rusty green piece of shit!

Doctor: Congratulations kiddo, I think we're making progress.

Charleen: Jeepers, those sardine pills must really work.

Doctor: Perhaps they do. I'm going to keep you on them a while longer. I think I'm going to order up a neural scan in the morning to see what your neural pathways look like.

Charleen: This is terrific, how long do you think before I can go home?

Doctor: I don't know, let's be patient and see how you progress.

Charleen: Be patient he says? Come on Doc, I hate being cooped up here. There's got to be more to life than playing cards with Nurse Knockers.

Doctor: Her name is Nagursky! Charleen, you must be patient.

Charleen: Come on, doctor, please consider it?

Doctor: OK. *[pauses, thinks a moment]* Where did you say you live on University Avenue?

Charleen: Ahh I'm not sure. But does that really matter where I live on University? I mean my Dad could drive me there, right?

Doctor: Yeah it does matter hon, it matters a whole lot. I'm sorry to say your Dad's been dead five years and you live on Georgia Avenue!

Charleen: *[stunned]* My Dad is dead???. *[Frustrated, struggles to grasp it]* Doc how many other little tragedies have I forgotten? How many more will I have to endure again?

Doctor: Hon, you are going to have to face up to the fact that you're going to start remembering good memories as well as bad. *[beat]* If I had a magic pill to filter out the bad ones I would certainly give it you to, but I don't. You're going to have to deal with it!

Charleen: *[whining]* What else???! What the fuck else???! I just want to go home!

Doctor: *[A bit stern]* The fact that your heart stopped added an additional shock to your body. You need rest and relaxation, I'm going to see to it that you get it! *[more friendly]* Charleen, look, I promise you we'll do it by HMO rules. I'll get you out of here at the earliest possible moment. OK?

Charleen: *[obviously reserved]* HMO huh? Shouldn't I be going home today? *[Doc gives her the look]* OK, just joking. *[beat]*

Doctor: Like it or not, I'm encouraged that you remember HMO's!

Charleen: Doc, I have another question. Will this medical situation affect my flight status? They won't pull my ticket, will they?

Doctor: Flight status!?!? Since when did you start flying?

Charleen: I've been flying for years, since my early twenties.

Doctor: *[puzzled]* You've been a licensed pilot since your early twenties? *[back to business]* Well, if that's the case you know the rules. I'll have to file a routine health report with the FAA. *[ponders for a few moments]* Please understand that they'll most likely ground you until your memory comes back, but *[thinks a moment]* I don't see them grounding you permanently.

Charleen: I can live with that. Thanks doc!

[fade to black]

Scene Three – So you think you're a pilot...

Time: 20 July 1997 3:27 p.m.

Place: Silver Spring Medical Center – Room 1720

[Lights come up as nurse knockers is walking in.]

Nurse: Good morning. How are we this morning?

Charleen: Hmmm, Muhmmp. WE are fine, I guess.

Nurse: Why don't you get up and take a nice shower before your breakfast gets here.

Charleen: A shower -- yeah right! You know something, I've been here for weeks for rest and relaxation and you hospital folks haven't let me sleep in yet!

Nurse: Hospital routine dear, just routine.

[doctor enters the room, grabs the chart]

Doctor: Good morning Charleen. How'd you sleep last night?

Charleen: Just fine Doc, better than I have in years. *[a bit perky]* Can I go home yet?

Doctor: Well that all depends *[he sits]* *[beat]*

Charleen: Depends on what?

Doctor: Depends on how you answer some questions.

Charleen: Questions huh? Well I'm all ears, shoot!

Doctor: OK, for starters, how long have you been a pilot?

Charleen: Hmm, you know I can't remember exactly but it feels like a really long time.

Doctor: Single or multi-engine certified?

Charleen: Multi-engine.

Doctor: What have you flown?

Charleen: Oh, God I've flown a lot of stuff, but my favorite is the Lockheed Vega.

Doctor: Do you own an aircraft?

Charleen: You bet! I've got a Lockheed Electra 10E.

Doctor: Really?

Charleen: Yep and she's a beaut -- In fact I've toyed with the idea taking a long vacation and flying her around the world. The hard way, right around the equator!

Doctor: Ambitious.

Charleen: *[Perky]* There you go Doc, see? Healthy goals and a positive attitude!
[To business] So can I go home now?

Doctor: *[Very reserved searching for the right words]* Charleen, I'll be straight with you. WE have a problem.

Charleen: What do you mean WE have a problem?

Doctor: When I called the FAA, to file my health report on you, they couldn't find a record of a Charleen Glenn having ever having a pilot's license or even a permit. Has Charleen Glenn always been your name?

Charleen: Yes, that's my birth name -- what do you mean no license? That's impossible! I've been flying for years. I soloed when I was twenty.

Doctor: That's very interesting. *[beat]* The other thing that bugs me is that, the Lockheed Vega and Electra are considered vintage aircraft. There aren't more than a handful of Electras left in existence. Yet you say you own one.

Charleen: *[floored]* Doc, I can't explain it. In my heart I know I'm telling you the truth. *[A bit upset]* I guess this makes me either *[struggles]* a liar or *[beat – almost crying]* or nuts!

Doctor: OR *[trying to calm her]* -- OR a lady who's had a near fatal electrical shock and who's read a book or two on aviation, and perhaps is still very, very confused.

Charleen: *[a bit deflated]* WHAT!! ?

[Straight talk]

Doctor: Charleen, in my opinion, I just think you're still a little scrambled from the shock and the cardiac incident. I suspect that you read a couple of books on vintage aircraft and as a result of the accident, you think you're the pilot of one of them. *[consoling manner]* Hon, I really don't think you're nuts. Let's just be patient and let your nervous system get balanced and get its bearings.

Charleen: *[mildly hysterical]* Scrambled he says, *[beat]* you're making me feel like a big basketcase, Doc.

Doctor: Nah, I don't think you're a big basket case. *[beat – trying to lighten the moment]* Perhaps a small basket case.

Charleen: Doctor Franklin! That's a terrible thing to say. *[whining]*

Doctor: Sorry, it was just a little joke. *[beat]* But seriously, I have reason for concern, so I'm going to schedule you for a full scale neurological work up.

Charleen: *[whining]* More tests?

Doctor: Hey kiddo, it won't be that bad. We'll C.A.T. scan your noodle and maybe we'll run you through a set of psychologicals. I just want to cover all the bases. *[beat]* OK?

Charleen: *[giving him a thumbs up gesture]* Oh OK, you're the doctor. *[Tom is troubled by the thumbs up gesture]*

Doctor: Courage hon, C o u r a g e.

Charleen: Courage he says...*[reflective as if reciting poetry]* Courage is the price which life exacts for granting peace.

Doctor: *[jotting down some notes on the chart]* Remembering an idle piece of poetry, good! Just be patient, Charleen, I think we're on the right track. Let's just practice patience. *[he leaves]*

Charleen: Perhaps we are on the right track, who knows?

[upon leaving he says]

Doctor: Chin up Patience and courage.

[She sits and ponders and then reflects]

Charleen: Courage is the price which life exacts for granting peace. The soul that knows it not, knows no release from little things.

[end of scene – fade to black]

Scene Four - The old man's stories...

Time: 21 July 1997 1:40 p.m.

Place: Silver Spring Medical Center – Room 1720

[Charleen's room -- Charleen is sitting reading Reader's Digest. The elderly McKenzie wheels into the room]

Bo: Knock Knock. Good afternoon, Miss. Can I come in?

Charleen: Certainly. What can I do for you, sir?

Bo: Well Ma'am, I believe I saw you down in radiology this morning.

Charleen: Yes, I was down there getting a C.A.T. scan. Why?

Bo: No, nothing special Miss, except this book. I believe you were reading it. I just thought I would mosey by and return it you.

Charleen: Oh thank you, thank you very much! I was just getting to the good part when they stuck me in that infernal machine. Then I forgot all about it. *[handing it back to her]*

Bo: Pardon me for asking Ma'am, but aren't you a little old to be reading "Black Beauty"?

Charleen: I recently realized that I have a love for animals and my doctor suggested that I read it to connect with that love.

Bo: Well, I best be going back to my room and let you get back to your book.

Charleen: No, please stay if you like. I mean I'd love the conversation if you're up to it. If it's not any trouble.

Bo: Ain't no trouble at all Ma'am.

Charleen: Well for starters please stop calling me Ma'am. My name is Charleen Glenn and you are?

Bo: Ramis McKenzie. Pleased to make your acquaintance.

Charleen: Likewise. Have you been here long?

Bo: Oh, a few days, I've got a few ailments. At my age you tend to wear out like an old car. And yourself, Miss Glenn? Nothing serious I hope. You look too pretty to be in here sick, Ma'am.

Charleen: *[giggle]* Charleen please!!! You'll make me blush, Ma'am is reserved for my mother.

Bo: OK Charleen it is. Some folks call me Bo, but that is a bit hick these days. Why not call me Ramis?

Charleen: Regarding my illness, actually I have a case of amnesia and I'm having a tough time remembering the little things in life. Who I am, where I live, that sort of thing.

Bo: I'm so sorry, been here long?

Charleen: Weeks and weeks, but the doctors tell me I'm making progress.

Bo: Well, that's great. So what do you do, for a living I mean? Are you married?

Charleen: I'm a marketer, sort of a sales promoter and public relations person all rolled into one.

Bo: Really, do you make good money?

Charleen: They tell me I do, but to be frank with you I can remember a cent of it. Fact be known, my partners could rob me blind and I'd never know.

Bo: You should get a good accountant to go over your books when you get out of here to be on the safe side.

Charleen: That's a good idea, perhaps I will. As for being married, not to my knowledge. NO, I figure if I was, my husband would have turned up here to claim me.

Bo: No doubt in my mind that he would claim a pretty lady like you.

Charleen: What do you do Ramis?

Bo: Oh, I've been retired for some time, but I used to be an aircraft mechanic for Lockheed. Started working for them during World War II and retired in the early seventies.

Charleen: Wow, that's quite a career in aviation. You must have worked with some really special people. Did you ever meet any astronauts or anybody like that?

Bo: Yep, I've known every manner of aviator. Racing pilots in the 30's, military pilots during the wars and some great military and civilian test pilots. And yes, I even met an astronaut.

Charleen: Really, who? *[excited]*

Bo: John Glenn! Any relation??? *[Charleen shakes her head no]*
I had the pleasure to meet him about a year after he flew Friendship 7.

Charleen: What's that?

Bo: Oh? Ohhh, you must have been a baby when he flew. Glenn was the first American to orbit the earth. He flew one manned Mercury space capsule called Friendship 7. He's class A hero in my book!

Charleen: Gosh, I'll have to brush up on my history when I get out of here. I don't remember any of this.

Bo: You should do that, a lot of very brave men and women made a lot of sacrifices to make aviation what it is today. Charleen, you were saying that you work in advertising?

Charleen: Yes I do.

Bo: I used to know a man by the name of George Putnam who was in advertising and marketing and that sort of thing. He made a ton of money doing it.

Charleen: I don't recall ever hearing about him. Perhaps I should read up on him too. So Ramis, since I don't remember all that much about my life, why not tell me about yours?

Bo: Well, I was born in 1907 in Louisville, Kentucky.

[fade to black]

Scene Five – Baring one's soul ...

Time: 23 July 1997 8:11 p.m.

Place: Silver Spring Medical Center – Room 1751

McKenzies room

Charleen: You wanted to see me, Ramis? Nurse Knockers said you were asking for me.

Bo: I wanted to apologize to you for not dropping by yesterday. They had me down for tests all day.

Charleen: I understand completely, how did everything turn out?

Bo: Charleen, I've never been one to mince words. They tell me that I'm dying.

Charleen: What of?

Bo: Just old age, things wear out. Sometimes an engine just wears out to the point no matter what you replace in it, it just plain doesn't want to run any more. I guess that's it in a nutshell for me. The old body is just plain worn out.

Charleen: I'm sorry Ramis, I truly am.

Bo: Nothing to be sorry about, I've had a rich, full life and I've had the opportunity to travel to the nicest places and meet the nicest people. *[pats her hand on the edge of the bed.]* Did I tell you about when I was your age, I used to work for this movie stunt and racing pilot names Paul Matz? There was one nice fella, and a talented pilot too.

Charleen: Ramis, is there any one you'd like me to call? Family, perhaps one of your old pilot friends?

Bo: No, the family isn't very good company and the pilots, all the ones I cared about at least, are all dead.

Charleen: I'm so sorry.

Bo: Don't be. Most of them died doing what they wanted to be doing, flying! Let's not talk of death. Lets talk about something else. How'd your C.A.T. turn out?

Charleen: OH that! The scan turned out just fine, just things are not turning out so fine.

Bo: Like what?

Charleen: The doctor is trying to make me out some sort of liar because as I've been getting my memory back, I began thinking I might be an airplane pilot.

Bo: What's wrong with that?

Charleen: He says he called the FAA and they've never heard of me.

Bo: Ho, don't get me started on the FAA. So Charleen, what kind of planes did you fly?

Charleen: Vegas and Electras ever heard of them?

Bo: Vegas and Electras, you bet I have!!! I worked on both of them, both built by Lockheed. Now that Electra was a technical innovation for its time.

Charleen: What was so special about it?

Bo: The Electra was the first aircraft to use wafered aluminum. You see aluminum is too weak by itself to build a very strong aircraft. But some whiz kid back then discovered a way to sandwich aluminum around a really strong alloy. That made it possible to construct an aircraft with a full metal skin that was very strong.

Charleen: Must have made a lot of money for Lockheed.

Bo: Did it! Lockheed in 1932 was near bankruptcy, then they released the Electra 10A. It was an overnight success. The Electra sold for \$50,000 dollars which was a pile of money in those days. Within three years, Lockheed had done \$2 million dollars worth of business. So, Charleen, what model did you fly?

Charleen: The Electra 10E.

Bo: Electra 10E. Ohhh a special plane in itself. A 55-foot wing span – biggest in its day.

Charleen: With wing tanks.

Bo: Yes, it did have wing tanks, powered by two 550 horsepower Pratt & Whitney Wasp engines.

Charleen: Didn't they have the special S3H1 pistons?

Bo: Yes they did. She was over 38 feet long and could fly at a little over 190 miles per hour.

Charleen: 202 mile per hour to be exact, faster in a dive and I believe it was 38 feet 7 inches long to be exact.

Bo: I stand corrected, so it was. You sure you're not a mechanic?

Charleen: Sorry Bo, I don't mean to split hairs, but I'm remembering all this technical stuff.

Bo: Perfectly OK with me. My dear, perhaps you are a pilot. You sound like a pilot to me.

Charleen: So did you work on Electra's in the field or the factory?

Bo: Both, The first one I worked on wasn't exactly a stock model. You see, the base range of a 10E was 810 miles, carrying up to ten passengers. It could fly a lot further with modifications.

Charleen: I always thought that if you took out the passenger seats and installed some extra fuel tanks you could extend her range a few thousand miles. Maybe even fly coast to coast!

Bo: I helped do exactly that once. We took out the seats and put in six custom tanks and extended the range to 4000 miles.

Charleen: Wow, the Electra could fly coast to coast nonstop with range like that.

Bo: She did Charleen, she did!

[pondering for a few moments]

Charleen: You know with range like that you could almost fly around the world in short hops.

Bo: That you could. Amelia Earhart tried it, but failed!

Charleen: What happened to her?

Bo: It's a big mystery, nobody knows for sure. She took off from Lae, New Guinea after completing 28 legs of flight totaling over 22,000 miles. Then she and her navigator Freddy Noonan disappeared.

Charleen: Was there a search for her?

Bo: One of the biggest in the history of aviation but they were never found.

Charleen: I'm sorry Ramis, it sounds like you admired her a lot.

Bo: Of course I admired her, but beyond that she was a damn good friend.

Charleen: Do you have any guess what happened to her?

Bo: Oh there's a pile of wild stories about her being taken prisoner by the Japanese, and that she was a spy for the US Government.

Charleen: What do you think?

Bo: I think she just plain ran out of gas and cracked up in the ocean.

Charleen: Like you said she probably died doing what she loved best.

Bo: That she did. *[he pauses and struggles to get some words out]*

Charleen: Are you OK Ramis ? Do you want a glass of water?

Bo: Charleen, I've never shared what I'm going to tell you with anyone, so I'd appreciate if it remained our little secret.

Charleen: All right, mums the word.

Bo: If I.... *[pause – gathers his thoughts]* If I ever had any regrets about Millie's disappearance, it was that I didn't go with her.

Charleen: Ramis, if you had, you might have died with her.

Bo: What's haunted me all these years is ...*[pauses to catch his breath]* I can't....

Charleen: Just say it Ramis.

Bo: *[almost in tears]* I just feel that another pair of eyes would have been all she needed.

Charleen: What do you mean?

Bo: Perhaps if I had been up there, maybe controlling the fuel flow to the engines, she could have gotten more range out of the Electra. Maybe I could have bought her just a little more flying time.

Charleen: Ramis, that's a lot of ifs and maybes.

Bo: My dear, I'm so tired. Would you mind if I closed my eyes and napped for a few minutes?

Charleen: I can leave you and let you rest.

Bo: Please stay. A man my age doesn't often get the company of a lady as pretty as you very often, especially not in his bedroom. Please stay, I'll rest for a few minutes and we'll chat some more.

Charleen: As you wish, I'll just sit here and read my "Black Beauty."

[He closes his eyes and she opens her book]

[Fade to black]

Scene Six – Redemption...

Time: 23 July 1997 10:16 p.m.

Place: Silver Spring Medical Center – Room 1751
McKenzie's Room

[later – McKenzie wakes up very quietly]

Bo: Charleen, what time is it?

Charleen: About 10 o'clock. Why, Ramis?

Bo: I just wanted to know if it was still the night or the early morning.

Charleen: What difference does that make?

Bo: I think I might be dying.

Charleen: What makes you think that Ramis?

Bo: It's getting very hard to breath.

Charleen: I should call the nurse and...

Bo: Please don't! They'll only start some damn fool heroic measures, I don't want any of that. I don't want all those strangers in here. Can't we just sit here and let it happen?

Charleen: If that's what you wish.

Bo: That is my wish my dear. You will stay with me?

Charleen: If that too is your wish, I would be honored Ramis. I'll be right here. What are you feeling?

Bo: Feeling? My only feeling right this moment is jittery.

Charleen: Who wouldn't be?

Bo: I don't mind telling you that I'm scared, really scared I wish I had the courage to face this.

Millie/Charleen: *[recites tender style "excerpt from Courage by Amelia Earhart"]*

Courage is the price which life exacts for granting peace.

The soul that knows it not, knows no release

From little things;

Knows not the livid loneliness of fear

Nor mountain heights, where bitter joy can hear

The sound of wings.

[Bo mystified and rallies a bit]

Bo: Millie??? Millie Earhart is that you? How can this be?

[In a Kansas accent and country style, with slightly more perk]

Millie/Charleen: Bo McKenzie! Just what are you doing being a scared of dying. I never knew you to be a man who was sacred of anything.

Bo: Millie!!!! It is you! How?

Millie/Charleen: Never you mind how, you'll learn all about that later. I want you to just settle back and fly with the moment. All right?

Bo: You're the boss, Millie.

Millie/Charleen: Bo, you listen to me, dying is as easy as falling off a log. It's nothing to be afraid of. Do you remember the first time I took you up in my old Vega, your knuckles were white from clenching the armrests.

Bo: I must have looked really silly.

Millie/Charleen: Remember how you just relaxed as we coasted down the runway to lift off. I still remember your words, "It's so beautiful!"

Bo: I did say that, didn't I, Millie?

Millie/Charleen: You bet you did. Now Bo, dying is just as easy and just as beautiful as that. Do you trust me?

Bo: Millie it is you! Of course I trust you!

[Millie rolls her wheelchair around to the right of him, and sits next to him facing out toward his feet, as if to be his co-pilot during the next two lines]

Millie/Charleen: Of course it's me. Did you think I was going to stay dead forever?

Bo: I missed you for a long time, Millie.

[Millie in position]

Millie/Charleen: Bo, I want you to close your eyes and imagine a nice long dry runway. You're sitting in a nice shiny new Electra 10E with those nice big Pratt & Whitney engines just purring. You're sitting in the 1st seat. Bo, put your hands on the yoke.

[His eyes are closed]

Bo: But Millie I'm not a pilot! I can't fly!

Millie/Charleen: Sure you can Bo! Besides, you'll have to do this one solo, but trust me, you can do it, just trust me. *[beat]* Bo, are the engines warmed up enough?

Bo: They're just fine Millie.

Millie/Charleen: All right, I want you to put your feet on the brakes and pitch the props gently together. *[Bo puts his right hand up on an imaginary set of levers.]*

Feel the bird strain forward.

[Millie puts her hand upon his shaking hand, partly holding it up, partly helping him push the throttle]

Start pushing both throttles to nearly three-quarters, be sure to watch your RPMs.

Bo: Watching the RPMs.

Millie/Charleen: Gently ease off on your brakes. You're rolling now Bo, use your brake pedals to keep the ship centered on the runway while you build up speed. Now, after you lift off, I want you to retract the gear, don't forget OK?

Bo: Will do!

Millie/Charleen: OK Bo, just after you reach liftoff speed, I want you to pull back gently on the yoke and just let the Electra climb on her own, OK?

Bo: Sure thing!

Millie/Charleen: Once you're airborne continue to climb and fly into the light.

Bo: Thanks Millie. Thanks for everything.

Millie/Charleen: You're at liftoff speed Bo. Gently pull the yoke toward you. *[beat]* See, easy as pie.

Bo: Millie!!! Oh my goodness, I feel so light and free, like I haven't a care in the world.

Millie/Charleen: Gear up!

Bo: Gear up, aye!

Millie/Charleen: You're clear of the field Bo, just open the throttles up and fly to the light.

Bo: It's so beautiful Millie. *[beat]* It's so so beautiful, so loving and bright... so so bright....gasp....ohhhh *[he relaxes into a slump]*

Millie/Charleen: Bo *[beat]* Bo *[realizes he's dead - buzzes the nurse]*
Happy landings my friend.

Nurse: Is there a problem?

Millie/Charleen: I think Mr. McKenzie has passed away, you might want to attend to it.

Nurse: Oh no, he was such a nice man and he seemed really fond of you.

Millie/Charleen: You know nurse, there are three things that are important to a pilot. A good luck charm, a good engine and a good mechanic. I was fortunate enough to have all three. Bo McKenzie was one of the best mechanics!

Nurse: What ever you say, Charleen. I better get the duty resident.

Millie/Charleen: Bo, I'll never forget you!

Doctor: Charleen, what are you doing here?

Millie/Charleen: Nothing special, just helping an old friend take a flying lesson.

Doctor: Well, your old friend is dead. If he's flying, he's doing it with the angels.

Millie/Charleen: I would put money on it.

Doctor: Charleen, what the hell's gotten into you? Look, it's past your bedtime and besides there's nothing you can do here. You go back to your room and I'll look in on you before I go off duty.

Millie/Charleen: Anything you say Doc! *[rolls out of the room]*

Doctor: Nurse, we'll call it at 10:37p.m. We best notify the family as soon as possible.

Nurse: Certainly doctor.

[Fade to black

]

Epilogue –

Time: 24 July 1997 1 a.m.

Place: Silver Spring Medical Center – Room 1720

[Charleen is downstage staring out the window, detached and distant]

Doctor: Still up I see? Everything is all taken care of with Mr. McKenzie.

Charleen: You've spoken to his family?

Doctor: Yes they've expressed an interest to come by and chat with you about his passing is that OK?

Charleen: Certainly.

Doctor: Good, I'll pass that along to them. As for you, you need your sleep. You get some rest and I'll see you in the morning.

[he starts to leave]

Charleen: So Doc, what does a girl have to do to eat some sardines and drink beer with you?

Doctor: Huh, what do you mean?

Charleen: OK Doc, I think it's high time you take me to that quaint little diner where you eat battered sardines and drink beer.

Doctor: What are you talking about Charleen?

[she puts her arms around his neck.]

Charleen: Thomas, it's time to take me home! It's time to take your wife home! I miss my things, I miss you and I miss our bed!

Doctor: You remember! You remember who you are? Oh sweetheart, it's good to have you back. *[embrace and kiss]* I was beginning to wonder if you were ever going to remember us.

Charleen: Sweetheart, I remember everything, and then some.

Doctor: That's great!

Charleen: Thomas? *[in a little girlish style]*
Will you buy me a welcome home present?

Doctor: Sure honey! Anything you like; a car, a new house, what will it be?

Charleen: An airplane.

Doctor: An airplane????

Charleen: Yes an airplane. I'm thinking about taking flying lessons.
[they kiss some more]

[Fade to black]

The End

The Electra

“The Electra” began humbly enough with me reading an edition of National Geographic™ magazine in the late 90’s while spending the weekend my friends Di & Q. The magazine had a spread on famed aviatrix Amelia Earhart on the occasion of her hundredth birthday. After reading the article I looked at Di’s baby and thought what if Amelia was reincarnated? What if she came back? Came back to life to help someone still alive from her flying days. Someone, who was still carrying around the burden that they were somehow responsible for her loss and couldn’t move on to their destiny, someone who was seeking absolution as their unfinished business? What if she didn’t remember who she was?

I drafted some notes on my ever-present and trusty spiral notebook. I bounced the idea past John an artistic director I’m pals with for his opinion. He liked the concept but we both struggled with the issue of whom that person was that was still alive and is carrying around the burden. About six months later I saw an obituary in the Washington Post newspaper.

As it turned out, one of Amelia’s mechanics had just died. He was very elderly and the detailed obituary was very revealing, it suggested that he carried a personal burden of blame for her disappearance. I based the character of Bo McKenzie on someone from her real life ground crew. Much later I found out through research that the Coast Guard was partly responsible for the loss of Earhart but that is topic matter for a second story; set in a different period with a different theme.

“The Electra” was the play that had a lot of people crying during the deathbed scene, which was something that I set out to do. The other thing that garnered complement was the production design of the debut.