

FIRST TO SEE THE LIGHTS GO ON

a one act drama

by James Campbell

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FIRST TO SEE THE LIGHTS GO ON was first presented at Thresholds Theatre in New York City in January, 1967 with Bob Mastrant and Lois Yasgur in the cast and directed by Don Signore. A second production was made by Thresholds eight months later with Richard Nettum and Mary Lyon. Other productions followed over the years at The WPA Theatre, American Theatre of Actors and at many other venues, off-off Broadway and regionally, including The Minnesota Ensemble. I am ever grateful to all those involved for their enthusiasm and good work.

James B. Campbell

CAST

ARLENE ZARELLI.....A young woman

FRANK KONIG.....A man, older than ARLENE

(A bus stop in a suburb of a large northeastern city. The time is the late fifties or early sixties. It is a summer morning, early. There is a bench, C, for passengers. LEFT, there is an overflowing litter basket. The air is bright with a pale light diffused from a sky heavy with clouds. A young woman, ARLENE ZARELLI, enters UL, Xs to R of the bench, examines it for dust and sits gingerly at the edge, knees together, holding a patent leather purse in front of her with both hands. She is a small, slender girl, carefully made up and neatly dressed, wearing a hat and gloves. PAUSE. A man, FRANK KONIG, enters UL. He is wearing a leather jacket and jeans. He comes DR of the bench and faces off L. PAUSE.)

FRANK

Late. Ah, yeah. Late. The bus is late. It's late. I might've just missed it. I don't think I missed it. Did I miss it?

(Pause. ARLENE stares at FRANK.)

FRANK

The bus. Did I just miss it? ... No! I get this every day and I ain't seen you before. If you would'a seen it, you would'n'a been here, You'd'a been on it. I should'a known that. See, 'cause that's what I do...I work on the buses. For the bus company.

ARLENE

Oh?

FRANK

Yeh, the buses, that's what I do.

ARLENE

You're a driver.

FRANK

Who?

ARLENE

You. You're a driver.

FRANK

No, not me. I'm kind've in the garage...Yeh... You going to the City?... You got a long ride...That's a long way to go...Yep...

ARLENE

Do you go there?

FRANK

Ah, no, I don't go there. I just go a little ways. Just a coupl'a miles. I don't go there. I go there sometimes...You work in a office?... You like it? To work in a office, everyday, I mean?... Not me. I wouldn't like it. I mean, if I was in one, you know what I mean?

ARLENE

What?

FRANK

It would drive me crazy. See, a place like a garage, you can do things, you can touch things with your hands. I mean, when you've done something, you can see it. But like in a office, I think you'd be always, y'know, doing the same thing, like. You'd never get done, coming in every day, b'blah, b'blah, and always doin' the same thing. In a garage it's different. I mean, you're never doin' the same thing all the time. See, there's always something new that comes up all the time. And when you get it done, well that's it, it's done, like. I mean you can always point to something and say, "That's it. I done that." I don't think you can do that in a office. I don't think you can. Do you think you can?

ARLENE

Well. It would be a routine thing. Nice. Clean. Everything where it belongs. An old, conservative firm...

FRANK

Did you go to college or anything? I didn't go to college. I know a lot, though. Experience. That's better than out of a book. When something happens to you, you really know it. You know what I mean?

(FRANK sits on the bench.)

You married....?

(ARLENE looks at the sky, unheeding.)

FRANK (Looks up.)

I just asked...Wow, look at those clouds...

ARLENE

The sky is so white. Like it's going to snow.

FRANK

Snow,... in July?

(FRANK extends his hand. ARLENE ignores the gesture.)

FRANK

My name is Frank. Konig. Frank Konig. That's kind've European, I think.

ARLENE

Eastern Europe. Land of the Cossacks. Fierce and brutal. Burning towns and capturing women. They would ride off with the women.

(FRANK withdraws his hand.)

FRANK

Well, I certainly ain't no Cossack.

(ARLENE looks up.)

FRANK

You know they might not be late. I mean we might be early. We might be too early for the bus. What's your name?

ARLENE

Arlene Zarelli.

FRANK

Italian, huh.

ARLENE

Yes.

FRANK

Bet you got a big family.

ARLENE

Yes. A family.

(PAUSE.)

FRANK

I live a coupl'a blocks up on the hill. It's kind've a rooming house, like. There's an old lady that runs it. She owns it. She's Italian. Can't speak English. She's nice though. She smiles all the time when you look at her. All the time. Y'know, always with this smile. When she comes to collect the rent, even. She just stands there with her hand out. With this stupid smile. Oh, I don't mean she's stupid or anything, y'understand. I mean like, there she is, smiling. She just smiles stupid.

ARLENE

Maybe she's lonely.

FRANK

Lonely?

ARLENE

People do things when they're lonely. Little things, like smiling. They need anything you can give them, even pain. They welcome it.

FRANK

No kidding?

ARLENE

Yes.

FRANK

You think she's like that, hah? You think she's one of them?

ARLENE

One of them?

FRANK

One of those people that need pain all the time. Like you said.

ARLENE

What?

FRANK

Do you think she's like that? One of those people that got to have pain all the time?

ARLENE
What are you talking about?

FRANK
About what you said.

ARLENE
What did I say?

FRANK
You said...You know. You said...

ARLENE
I said she might be lonely.

FRANK
Oh.

ARLENE
She's lonely.

FRANK
That's funny.

ARLENE
Funny?

FRANK
Yeah. I mean I never met anybody like that, that smiled all the time because they were lonely. That's sick, like. I mean she could say something.

ARLENE
She can't speak English. She can't speak to you.

(PAUSE.)

ARLENE
What time is it?

FRANK
'Dunno. Maybe past eight. We're late.

ARLENE
No. We're on time. The bus is late. We'll have to wait...
Ohhh look! There's one!

FRANK

What?

ARLENE

A snowflake. It's beginning to snow. I think it will snow all day. The snow will cover the ground in drifts. Everything will be covered with snow.

FRANK

It's July. You know that. You want me to believe it'll snow?

ARLENE

Try to believe it. See the clouds, how heavy they are? You can smell the heaviness in the air. It's like that before a blizzard.

FRANK

I don't smell nothing. It's July. It'll rain. You must really like snow, hah?

ARLENE

After it has stopped falling. When everything is covered and quiet. Quiet and clean. In the stillness, waiting. I wish it would stay that way. Quiet and clean.

FRANK

Yeah, but then it all turns to slush. Well I mean it does, y'know. Things change all the time. Nothing stays the same.

ARLENE

You mustn't always see things the way they are.

FRANK

Yeah, but that's the way they are, right?

(PAUSE.)

ARLENE

What do you mean by sitting so close to me?

FRANK

Who, me? Nothing.

ARLENE

How old are you?

FRANK

What?

ARLENE

You tried to get familiar with me.

FRANK

I wasn't trying to get familiar with nobody.

ARLENE

Oh yes you were. I can tell.

FRANK

I wasn't doin' nothin' like that. We was just talking, that's all. I never even touched you. You shouldn't talk like that.

ARLENE

You came and sat next to me, a total stranger. You asked me my name, where I was going, the land of my ancestors, and if I was married to mention only a few things. What was your reason? What did you have on your mind? You don't talk that way to a stranger, a total stranger, not without a reason. You know what I think? I think you had evil thoughts. I don't think you're right. I think you wanted to touch me, the way you touch things in your garage.

FRANK

You're...look, I just wanted to talk, that's all.

ARLENE

Why? Do you like me?

FRANK

No. I mean...

ARLENE

You don't like me.

FRANK

No, I...

ARLENE

You hate me?

FRANK

Oh, no...

ARLENE
You don't hate me?

FRANK
No. Look, I...

ARLENE
What do you want?

FRANK
I wanted to talk to you.

ARLENE
You want to talk to me?

FRANK
Well, yeah.

ARLENE
Well, go ahead.

FRANK
Go ahead what?

ARLENE
Talk to me.

FRANK
Oh. What'll I talk about?

ARLENE
I thought you wanted to talk?

FRANK
Yeah. I did.

ARLENE
Would you like to touch me?
(ARLENE extends a gloved hand to FRANK.
He is wary.)
Come, don't you want to touch me?

(FRANK stretches out his arm to meet
ARLENE's fingertips with his. It is
like reaching out to touch a third rail
on a dare and hoping it is not alive.
He is within a millimeter of contact
when ARLENE suddenly snatches her hand

away and screams. FRANK leaps backward in alarm.)

ARLENE

If you touch me, I'll scream!

FRANK

You're crazy lady!

ARLENE

I knew you had something on your mind the minute you sat down next to me.

FRANK

I thought you was a nice girl. I just wanted too talk.

ARLENE

You tried to touch me.

FRANK

You asked me to.

ARLENE

I did not. I said, would you like to? And you did, didn't you?

FRANK

What?

ARLENE

You wanted to touch me. Ever since you sat down. Ever since you started to talk, that's all you wanted to do. That's all you ever think about. You like to touch people.

FRANK

You asked me if I wanted to. So what's wrong with that?

ARLENE

I didn't say there was anything wrong with it. It's a perfectly normal impulse. Men are expected to have the urge to touch a young pretty woman. But, to you, I am a princess. You touch me and the penalty is death!

FRANK

Wow.

ARLENE

What?

FRANK

You sure think a lot of yourself. Calling yourself all those things, like. I mean, you really think you're something, don't ya? ..."Young, pretty,... princess..."

ARLENE

I am young. I am a young woman. And I'm pretty. Look at me. Don't you think I'm attractive?

FRANK

Yeah. You're attractive.

ARLENE

Are you angry?

FRANK

Yeah. A little.

ARLENE

Why?

FRANK

Are you kidding? You've been making fun of me ever since I got here. I just came down here to get the bus. On my way to work, right? Minding my own business, like I said, and then I felt like talking. I just wanted to talk. A harmless conversation to pass the time like, and you've been all over me ever since. I never bothered you. If I was bothering you, why didn't you say something? You make fun of everything I say. I get shot down every time I turn around.

ARLENE

Wouldn't you like to be a Cossack?

FRANK

What for?

ARLENE

You could ride off with the women.

FRANK

You're funny.

ARLENE

Why, do I make you laugh?

FRANK

I don't mean that way. I mean funny the other way. You're strange, like.

ARLENE

You could if you wanted to.

FRANK

Could what?

ARLENE

Be a Cossack. You have the makings of a first class Cossack, I think. The hawk-like profile, the weathered jaw, dark, barbaric eyes. You'd look good on a horse. Better than you do standing up.

FRANK

How do I look standing up?

ARLENE

Like a man who's looking for a horse and can't find one.

FRANK

You talk about horses. I haven't even got a drivers license. I never met anybody like you. Are you always like this? I mean every day?

ARLENE

No. Not always. Today is special. The first day. This is the first day I am like this. I have never been like this before.

FRANK

What's so special about today?

ARLENE

It's new. The first day of winter.

FRANK

There. You see what I mean? We've been over this before. Today is summer, not winter. Where've you been anyway?

ARLENE

I've been away. I was lost in a wood, in the Enchanted Forest with a magic prince who turned into a frog and finally gave me warts but I'm all right now.

FRANK

Oh, do you think? You're talking crazy.

ARLENE

No I'm not. I was just teasing you. I was playing a game. I have an active imagination. When I was a little girl I would always imagine things, make up little games. Didn't you ever do that?

FRANK

Sure. But we used to play real games, like ring-o-leevio, stickball, red light, spit-on-the-pole...

ARLENE

Spit-on-the-pole – What's that?

FRANK

Nothing. Just a game. We used to fool around, like.

ARLENE

No. Tell me. I've never heard of that. Spit-on-the-pole. How do you play that?

FRANK

No. You don't want to know, it's...

ARLENE

I'm serious. I really want to know. I wont tease. I promise.

FRANK

You really want to know?

ARLENE

Yes. Please tell me.

FRANK

It's a game we used to play, like say it was getting dark, see? And around the neighborhood we had these wooden poles. You know, the light poles, the street lights. When it started to get dark, they would turn on all the lights. Only they didn't go on all at the same time. You could see them maybe half a block away. They would come on one at a