

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**

**a play by
James Bentley Campbell**

(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. There is an overflowing litter basket SL. The air is bright with a pale light diffused from a sky heavy with clouds. A young woman. ARLENE ZARELLI, enters UL, X's 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.)

FRANK

Late. Ah, yeah. Late. The bus is late. It's late. I might've missed it. I don't think I missed it. Did I miss it? *(Pause. ARLENE stares at FRANK.)* The bus. Did I just miss it? ... No! I get this everyday and I ain't seen you before. If you would've seen it, you would'n'a been here. You'd'a been on it. I should've 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 go just 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 everyday, 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? (*He sits on the bench.*) You married...? (ARLENE *looks at the sky, unheeding.*) I just asked...Wow, look at those clouds...

ARLENE

The sky is so white. It's going to snow.

FRANK

Snow...In July? (FRANK *extends his hand.* ARLENE *ignores the gesture.*) My name is Frank. Konig. Frank Konig. That's kind of 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.*) 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 roomin' 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, smilin'. 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. 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

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, an awkward silence.*) What time is it?

FRANK

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

ARLENE

No. The bus is late. We'll have to wait. Oh, look! There's one! 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

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

FRANK

I don't smell nothin'. It's July. It'll rain. You must really like snow, hah?

ARLENE

After it has stopped falling. When everything is covered, 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?

ARLENE

What do 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 tryin' 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

Look, I just wanted to talk, that's all. I wanted to talk to you.

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 hand to meet ARLENE's fingertips with his. He is within a millimeter of contact when ARLENE suddenly snatches her hand away. FRANK leaps backward in alarm.*) 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 next to me.

FRANK

I thought you was a nice girl. I just wanted to 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 wanted 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..."Young, pretty...Princess.."

ARLENE

I am young. 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

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 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

Not funny, ha-ha. I mean funny the other way. You're strange, like.

ARLENE

You could if you wanted to...be a Cossack. You have the makings of a first class Cossack, I think. The hawk-like profile, the weathered jaw, the 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 driver's 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. It's 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?