

TONIGHT AT THE STAGE DOOR

A Ten-Minute Play
by
Donald Loftus

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"Tonight, tonight,
Won't be just any night..."
-S. Sondheim

TONIGHT AT THE STAGE DOOR

Cast of Characters

CHARLIE **Age 50-70's** A night watchman at The Broadway Theatre, NYC, NY.

JIMMY **Age 20'S** A chorus boy in the revival of "West Side Story".

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SETTING: The bare, dark stage at The Broadway Theatre in NYC. An unlit stage lamp or "ghost light" is at center. The upstage brick wall is exposed. At SL is the stage door leading to the outside. A well-worn chair is positioned near the door.

AT RISE: *CHARLIE, the night watchman, sits slouched in his chair near the stage door. He has an old, well-worn throw pulled up around him. HE is asleep.*

TIME: Tonight. 11:30 pm

(JIMMY enters and stands on the other side of the stage door, shivering from the cold. HE pounds on the door, which awakens CHARLIE)

JIMMY

Hello? Hello? Is anybody there? Hello! Can anybody hear me?

CHARLIE

(Startled, HE rises, talking under his breath)
What the...!?! Hear you!? Jesus! They can hear you in Harlem!

(Now yelling)
Go away! We are closed!

JIMMY

What?

CHARLIE

We're closed! The virus! The pandemic! Do you live under a rock!?! Surely by now... you gotta know...

JIMMY

No, but you don't understand...

CHARLIE

No! **YOU** don't understand, you numbskull! Now, go away!

JIMMY

Charlie? Charlie, it's me...Jimmy. I'm in the chorus.

CHARLIE

You're in the chorus of what?

JIMMY

Well, I **was** in the chorus...of West Side Story. I'm Anxious.

CHARLIE

Yes, you sound anxious.

JIMMY

No, I mean I play Anxious... or rather, I played Anxious before the pandemic shut us down.

CHARLIE

Anxious? I don't remember no Anxious. Snowboy, Mouthpiece, A-rab...these I know. But I do not know no Anxious.

JIMMY

Okay...maybe you know me as chorus boy seven.

CHARLIE

Chorus boy seven? So now you're chorus boy seven?

JIMMY

Well, not now... but before the virus. I was chorus boy seven. That's how the director referred to me.

CHARLIE

Nice! What, he couldn't call you by your name?

JIMMY

Well... I didn't have any lines. It was a small part...

CHARLIE

Hey kid...there are no small parts! And in fact, now...there are no parts, period...because we are closed. So please...go on home now Anxious-boy.

JIMMY

No wait. Charlie, please. Could you please open the door? It's freezing out here.

CHARLIE

Look kid, it ain't gonna happen. I ain't gonna open this door for a total stranger.

JIMMY

But we're not strangers. You know me. I'm the chorus kid who stuck around to watch your card trick each night. Every night! You even showed me how some of the tricks were done.

CHARLIE

The little kid with the bright eyes and the big smile? I do remember you. All the other chorus punks raced out each night...but you stayed to watch. I appreciated that.

JIMMY

Yes! So, could you please open the door?

CHARLIE

No, I'm sorry, but I'm not to open the door for no one..

JIMMY

C'mon please. Just a few minutes...just until I warm up...

CHARLIE

Okay, okay...but let me get the hand sanitizer. Do not touch the doorknob until you use the hand sanitizer!!!

(CHARLIE rises and looks for the sanitizer)

Where is that stuff... Hold on. It's dark as pitch in here.

(HE finally finds it in his pants pocket. HE moves to the stage door, unlocks and opens it, handing the sanitizer to JIMMY who enters shivering. JIMMY uses the hand sanitizer)

Okay, come in... but keep your distance! Six feet they say. Oh my god! You are shivering! Your lips are blue!

JIMMY

Yes. I know. I'm freezing!

(CHARLIE takes the well-worn throw from the chair, and puts it around JIMMY)

CHARLIE

Damn! Here, put this around you. It looks pretty seedy, but I promise, you won't catch anything from it, and it's warm.

JIMMY

Thank you, Charlie. Oh my, it's so nice and warm in here.

(After a beat)

CHARLIE

Feeling better?

JIMMY

Yes, I can almost feel my toes again.

CHARLIE

Well, that's a start.

JIMMY

This place is kind of creepy at night. It's so dark.

CHARLIE

Yeah, well...it's not always this dark. I did something tonight I ain't never done before. I turned off that ghost light...the lamp there at center stage...

JIMMY

Yes, I know what a ghost light is.

CHARLIE

I just thought, what's the point of keeping it burning? I mean the theatre is empty. The theatre ain't going to have anything going on... probably for months...

JIMMY

I know but... isn't that supposed to be bad luck in the theatre?

CHARLIE

I guess...

JIMMY

I mean, they say the light's function is to chase away the mischievous ghosts that are said to inhabit virtually every theatre in the world...

CHARLIE

Theatrical folks are a superstitious lot. Wishing actors a broken leg instead of "good luck", avoiding whistling backstage and being careful not to say *Mac*...I mean, "The Scottish Play". And they do say turning off the ghost light is gonna bring bad luck...but considering where we are these days...I figured how much worse can it get!

JIMMY

I totally get it.

CHARLIE

But that of course...that was before you came pounding at the door.

JIMMY

Geez, thanks.

CHARLIE

So, what's going on? You're dressed like its summertime. What the hell is wrong with you? Are you trying to catch your death!?!

JIMMY

No. I just don't have any clothes for this weather.

CHARLIE

What!?! You didn't see it coming!?! It's freakin' March in New York City! It's always colder than a penguin's pecker...

JIMMY

I only recently came up from Wickenberg...

CHARLIE

Wickenwhat?

JIMMY

Wickenberg... a small town in Arizona. A small hot town. It's like eighty degrees there today. I don't really have many clothes appropriate for this weather...

CHARLIE

You are going to get sick running around like that. Why are you even out on such a night? There's a curfew... You can get in a lot of trouble...

JIMMY

My landlord threw me out... and he's keeping whatever belongings I do have as collateral for the back rent... including my only warm jacket...

CHARLIE

Damn! He sounds like a real, heartless jerk!

JIMMY

Well... truth be told...I was already behind in my rent...and then when the show closed...he said it was the last straw.

CHARLIE

That's horrible. So, are you going back to Wackingbird?

JIMMY

Wickenberg. No. I can't. I have no money. I can't even afford bus fare to Brooklyn, let alone Arizona.

CHARLIE

Maybe your folks could send you some... like a wire transfer.

JIMMY

I just have my Mom and she has less money than me. Besides, it would break her heart. She was so proud of me getting into a Broadway show. It has been a dream that she and I have shared since I was a kid.

CHARLIE

That's kinda nice that you could share a dream like that.

JIMMY

I think she originally probably wanted it for herself... in the early days...but once she realized it wasn't going to happen for her...she decided to devote her efforts to see that someday it would happen for me.

CHARLIE

What about your dad? Was he cool with all of this?

JIMMY

My dad left us when I was seven. Ran off with some floozie.

CHARLIE

A floozie, huh?

JIMMY

Yeah. Floozie...that was my mom's word for her. Oh, but it never slowed her down. My mom is strong willed. Nothing slows her down. She spent every day since my dad walked taking care of me...looking out for me...trying to help me see my dream come true. Our dream. When I was a kid, in addition to her day job, she took in laundry at night... just so I could afford to go to dance classes. And so...when I got the part on Broadway...she lit up like a marquee. It would break her heart to see where I have ended up.

CHARLIE

But she must know about Broadway closing down. It is happening all over the world. Even in Wackybird.

JIMMY

Wickenberg. Yes, but I've convinced her it is just temporary and that I'm doing fine. I cannot let her know...

CHARLIE

So, what are you going to do? Is there a friend you can...

JIMMY

No. I have no friends. I've been in rehearsals every minute since I arrived. I haven't had time to make friends.

CHARLIE

Where are you going to stay?

JIMMY

Well, that's just it. I was hoping I could stay here.

CHARLIE

What!?! Here! No, that's not possible! Forget about it. Get that idea right out of your head!

JIMMY

But the theatre is closed. You are the only one here. No one would have to know...

CHARLIE

No, I'm sorry, that is just not going to happen.

JIMMY

But I have nowhere else to go.

CHARLIE

There must be somewhere.

JIMMY

No, there's not. Why can't you just let me do this? I won't be a problem.

CHARLIE

(After a beat)

Look, if I tell you something...you gotta promise to tell no one. No...really, I mean it. If I help you out...you gotta promise me...and not for just now. You gotta promise you will never...

JIMMY

Okay. I promise. Never ever. What is it?

CHARLIE

I am the night watchman here...but I also live here.

JIMMY

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

I also got thrown out... nearly twenty years ago...but not by a heartless landlord? I got thrown out by a heartless wife. So, I moved in here...and no one has ever been the wiser...

JIMMY

Whoa! That's awful! Why would she do that to you?

CHARLIE

It wasn't her fault. Oh yeah...she was awful... but I was worse. Not exactly faithful and a bit of a drinker to boot. The marriage was doomed from day one. When she kicked me out...I was working here...but not making enough to get a place of my own...not with the child support I needed to pay.

JIMMY

You've got a kid?

(CHARLIE takes out a photograph from his wallet)

CHARLIE

Not so much a kid anymore. She's nearly twenty-two.

JIMMY

She's beautiful.

CHARLIE

She is, isn't she. Her name is Maria...

JIMMY

(Singing)

Maria...Say it loud and there's music playing..

CHARLIE

Yes, kind of ironic, right? And like your Mom is proud of you...I am very proud of her. She is just finishing her senior year at Yale Drama. Like you...she wants to be an actor. God only knows why!

JIMMY

That's fantastic. But Yale. That's expensive. Are you paying her tuition?

CHARLIE

Not on this salary. No, she got a scholarship, but I do send her what I can. So, the secret is... I too am homeless... or would be...except, I live here...in the basement of the Broadway Theatre as I have for nearly twenty years. And nobody...until now...has ever known it.

JIMMY

That's unbelievable! But why are you telling me... I mean, after all these years...?

CHARLIE

I think now, more than ever, we all need to do what we can to help each other. The world is in a mess. And I see you are in deep trouble. I want to help you.

JIMMY

I think I am going to start crying.

CHARLIE

Go on then...cry. This is a theatre. We are supposed to feel free to express our emotions in this particular cathedral.

JIMMY

Ha. Yeah, I guess so.

CHARLIE

I'm also helping you because of my Maria. When she comes to New York, she too will struggle. All actors do. All artists do. I hope if she ever got into trouble, someone would help her too.

JIMMY

Charlie, I cannot tell you how much this means to me.

CHARLIE

There are unused dressing rooms in the basement.

JIMMY

There's a basement?

CHARLIE

Nobody knows it...and no one remembers the dressing rooms that are down there. It's from back in the day when the shows had casts of sixty or seventy. I use the men's dressing room down there. You can use the women's.

JIMMY

Okay.

CHARLIE

It's kind of a mess right now. But there's a couch to sleep on and it's warm because you'll be near the furnace.

JIMMY

I can't believe this. Charlie...I will never forget this day.

CHARLIE

You mean this night. It's nearly midnight.

JIMMY

Yes, this night. Tonight.

CHARLIE

(Singing)

Tonight, tonight...won't be just any night...
Tonight you became my morning star!

JIMMY

Tonight, tonight
You've saved my life tonight...

BOTH

And for us stars will stop where they are...

JIMMY

(Spoken)

Thank you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

My pleasure... friend. Here's to better times!

JIMMY

To better times!

(Suddenly the ghost light turns on and gets brighter as they stare at it and each other a total surprise)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)