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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **TO SEE THE STARS**

**A Play in Two Acts**  
**by**  
**CYNTHIA MERCATI**

**This play is based on real people and actual events.**



**Dramatic Publishing**  
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(TO SEE THE STARS)

ISBN 0-87129-997-6

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*TO SEE THE STARS* received a staged reading at the National Youth Theatre Playwriting Symposium at the Indiana Repertory Theatre in Indianapolis, Indiana. It was subsequently performed in April 1999 at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts. The world high school premiere was presented at the Urbandale High School Theatre, Urbandale, Iowa, on April 23, 1999. The production was directed by Robert Prigge and included the following artists:

### CAST

Anya Rosen . . . . .	JESSICA de REGNIER
Clara . . . . .	SARAH HALL
Bridget Feeney . . . . .	ALLISON VERMIE
Nella . . . . .	DILEK DOGRUYUSEVER
Bessie Murphy . . . . .	KATIE HART
Grace . . . . .	EMILY MOLLMAN
Agnes . . . . .	DANIELLE KOVOLICK
Teresa . . . . .	MEGAN TORMEY
Margaret . . . . .	ANGELA BECKER
Sonia . . . . .	LINDSEY CROWLEY
Angela . . . . .	CHRISTINE MUELLER
Girl #1 . . . . .	JULIE JORGENSEN
Girl #2 . . . . .	SARAH STEVENS
Lenore Van Meer . . . . .	MERIDETH NEPSTAD
Violet Vandercort . . . . .	ANNIE RISSMAN
Hazel Belmont . . . . .	MELANIE LONG
Prison Matron . . . . .	CARRIE MUELLER
Joe Russo . . . . .	ERIC SHEPARD
Martin Roth . . . . .	JUSTIN SCHADE
David Rosen . . . . .	DEREK MORAN
Dennis Vandercort . . . . .	AARON BERDOFE

Patrick Lannon . . . . .	NICK FRANCIS
Benjamin Ziegler . . . . .	TRAVIS NUCKOLLS
Jonathan Stolle . . . . .	ALEX KIMBLE
Judge Powell . . . . .	JUSTIN MCCARTY
Warden . . . . .	ZAC MCCUNE
Union Men . . . . .	KENNY LAYTON, TIM WELCH
Thugs . . . . .	BRANDEN BYERS, BRYAN JOHNSON, BOB RIVERA
Factory Girls . . . . .	NINA AMATO, ERIKA BROWN, STEPHANIE PETERS, ASHLEY PALAR, BROOKE WALTERS, JESSICA WHITE, JENNY WON

## PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant Director . . . . .	ALLISON NUCKELS
Student Director . . . . .	JESSICA de REGNIER
Stage Managers . . . . .	ALLISON VERMIE, ERIC SHEPARD
Scene Shifting Managers . . . . .	CINDY RULLAN, JESSICA MEISINGER
Lighting Managers . . . . .	ERIN TALBOT, ERIC SHEPARD JOE GLAZEBROOK
Wardrobe Managers . . . . .	JESSICA de REGNIER, ALLISON VERMIE
Head Seamstress . . . . .	JAMIE CROSBY
Properties Managers . . . . .	EMILY MOLLMAN, DANIELLE KOVOLICK
Make-up Managers . . . . .	EMILY MOLLMAN, DANIELLE KOVOLICK
House Managers . . . . .	JUSTIN SCHADE, ERIC SHEPARD
Poster/Program Design . . . . .	TRAVIS NUCKOLLS

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

### ACT ONE

- SCENE 1: Outside the factory, August 1909. Morning.
- SCENE 2: The Union Hall, August. Night.
- SCENE 3: Outside the factory, August. Day.
- SCENE 4: The city jail. The next day.
- SCENE 5: The Cooper Union Hall, November 21. Night.
- SCENE 6: Outside the factory, December. Day.
- SCENE 7: A courtroom, December. Day.

### ACT TWO

- SCENE 1: Outside the factory, January 1910. Evening.
- SCENE 2: Outside the factory, January. Evening.
- SCENE 3: A cell in the Tombs, January. Night.
- SCENE 4: A room in the Tombs, January. Day.
- SCENE 5: The Tombs, February.
- SCENE 6: The courtroom/Outside the factory, February. Day.
- SCENE 7: Outside the factory, March. Day.

# TO SEE THE STARS

A Play in Two Acts

For 10-13 women, 8 men, doubling; cast may be expanded

## CHARACTERS

These roles continue throughout:

ANYA ROSEN . . . . . a factory girl, 17

BRIDGET FEENEY . . . . . a factory girl, 18. Irish accent

RUTH . . . . . a factory girl, 18. Russian/Jewish accent

CLARA . . . . . a factory girl, 16. She has tuberculosis

TERESA . . . . . a factory girl, 17. Italian accent.

She often repeats what the other girls say,  
trying to learn the language

LENORE VAN MEER . . . . . wealthy society woman, early 20s

VIOLET VANDERCORT . . . . . wealthy society woman, early 20s

MARTIN ROTH . . . . . the factory boss, early 20s

JOE RUSSO . . . . . union organizer, early 20s

DAVID ROSEN . . . . . Anya's deceased father, middle-aged,  
Russian/Jewish accent

Additional FACTORY GIRLS can be used.

The CITY CROWD appears throughout, and doubles other roles:

MAN #1

WOMAN #1, immigrant

MAN #2

WOMAN #2

MAN #3

WOMAN #3

MAN #4

MAN #5, immigrant



These are very small roles that are doubled:

AGNES, SONIA, BAILIFF, JOHANNSEN'S SON,  
FACTORY OWNER, RICH MAN, RICH WOMAN,  
PREGNANT GIRL, BOYFRIEND, OLD MAN,  
SCRUBWOMAN, UNION MEN, THUGS, SOCIETY  
GIRLS, WELLESLEY STUDENT, MINER,  
NEWSBOYS, MCALISTER COLEMAN (reporter)

These are larger roles that can be doubled:

MARGARET, LENORE VAN MEER, VIOLET  
VANDERCORT, PATRICK LANNON, JONATHAN  
STOLLE, BENJAMIN COHEN, JUDGE FISHER

If needed, DAVID ROSEN and MARTIN ROTH can also  
double in crowd scenes.

TIME: 1909-10.

PLACE: New York City.

SETTING: Stair-stepped platforms are suggested. Lighting,  
music, and set pieces are used to indicate place. A brick  
wall may be used to represent the factory. Additional  
crowd noise may be taped and played during the crowd  
scenes.

## ACT ONE

*(In the darkness, we hear the FACTORY GIRLS chant.)*

In the black winter of 1909  
When we froze and bled on the picket line  
We showed the world that women could fight.  
And we showed the world a woman's might.

### SCENE 1

SCENE: *Outside the factory, the lower east side of Manhattan, August. Morning.*

AT RISE: *We hear klezmer music, lively, with a hint of melancholy, then the lights come up and the full noise of the city bursts wide. The clip-clop of horses' hooves, the clanging of trolley cars, the shouts of the pushcart vendors. GOOD FRUIT! BARGAINS ON FRUIT!; BIG FISH, LITTLE FISH, BLUE FISH, WHITEFISH!; USED CLOTHES FOR SALE, USED SUITS, USED SHOES, USED CORSETS!; SABBATH CANDLES!; HOMEMADE BREAD! GOOD AND CHEAP!; PICKLED MEAT! SMOKED MEAT! All of the vendors are urging people to BUY! BUY! NOT FROM HIM, FROM ME! There might also be a hurdy-gurdy man, a young girl dancing to his raucous tune; a housewife with a shawl over her*

*head, a basket on her arm; an Hasidic Jew; a boy with a baseball bat over his arm, swiping a piece of fruit as he dashes by, causing further uproar; a small girl jumping rope; a man rolling a barrel through the street shouting HERRING! FRESH HERRING! These roles are played by the CITY CROWD. Additional crowd noise may be taped and played over the live noise.*

*The noise continues for a beat or two, the voices loud and hectic, a great number of the voices with Italian, Irish, and Russian/Jewish accents. Then the scripted lines are called out.*

MAN #1. Took the missus to see the vaudeville last night!

WOMAN #1. You never!

MAN #2. See the fan dancers, did you?

MAN #3. You must be a rich man!

MAN #1. I save my money!

MAN #4. When will you be buyin' the automobile then?

MAN #2. Passing fancy.

WOMAN #1. I'd like a ride in one.

WOMAN #2. I'd like a ride in a flyin' machine!

MAN #2. The sky is the place for angels—or fools!

*(ANYA, BRIDGET, CLARA, RUTH, TERESA and MARGARET enter through the crowd, talking as they move toward the factory. Additional FACTORY GIRLS may be added. The noise fades under their voices, but the CITY CROWD, kibitzers all, join in their conversation, a natural part of city life. ANYA says nothing at first, her frustration building.)*

BRIDGET. It's not fair! Six days a week we work at Johannsen's. Twelve hours a day. For four bloody dollars a week!

MARGARET. As if we'd make more anyplace else!

*(Afraid of being overheard, CLARA's protest is softer, as she looks around at who might be listening.)*

CLARA. It isn't fair. If we're a minute late in the morning, they dock us half a day's pay.

MARGARET. As if it's better anyplace else!

RUTH. It's not fair that we have to pay Mr. Roth to rent the very machines we sew on, the very crates we sit on—

BRIDGET. Crates, mind you, not chairs!

RUTH. —the very oil that makes our machines run! And the needles and the thread! And if we don't pay up, we're sacked!

MAN #1. So you've got to kick back some dough to the floor boss, so what?

MAN #4. That's how things work.

BRIDGET. But if we should get sick and miss just one day—

RUTH. We're sacked anyway!

BRIDGET. And that's how it is six bloody days a week, twelve bloody hours a day!

MAN #3. What right do you have to complain, you're just factory girls!

RUTH *(proudly)*. We're shirtwaist girls!

MAN #1. And what's that?

BRIDGET. Shirtwaists are blouses, you ignorant man!

WOMAN #1. Cotton blouses! With high-necked collars and big, billowy sleeves!

RUTH (*indicating the shirtwaist she wears*). This is a shirtwaist!

MARGARET. A cheap shirtwaist!

RUTH (*answering her right back*). Just like yours!

WOMAN #2. It's only the Vanderbilts can afford the ones made out of taffeta and silk—and costing six dollars and ninety-five cents!

MAN #5. Nothin' could cost six dollars and ninety-five cents!

BRIDGET (*indicating CLARA and ANYA*). They make the sleeves. (*Indicating herself*.) I make the collars and the cuffs!

RUTH. I make the buttonholes!

THE GIRLS (*gesturing to TERESA*). And *she* snips the thread!

TERESA (*making a scissors-like motion with one hand*). Snip, snip, snip!

MAN #2. You're still just factory girls! And immigrants, too, most of you. Greenhorns!

WOMAN #1. And so am I!

MAN #5. And me!

RUTH. Me, too!

BRIDGET. What of it?

TERESA. *Sí*, what of it?

WOMAN #3. So greenhorns shouldn't expect any more than what they get!

MAN #3. If you don't like how it is here, go back to the old country!

RUTH. Never!

BRIDGET. I came to America for a finer life!

MARGARET. And have you found it, that finer life?

BRIDGET. Not yet, but I will!

MARGARET. You won't! You'll sleep on three chairs pushed together for the rest of your days, just like me!

You'll wear cheap clothes and eat cheap food, and if you lose this job because of your big mouth, you'll have to take home piecework—and earn less than you do now!

BRIDGET. Maybe not! Maybe things will be different for me!

MAN #4. Things don't get different for people like us!

ANYA (*bursting out with it*). They could—if we make them different!

WOMAN #3 (*scoffing*). Listen to her!

MAN #3. Sure, you could marry a millionaire!

TERESA. *Si!* I will marry Mr. Sears and Roebuck!

RUTH. Marry Mr. Rockefeller! They'd have to give us a day off for the wedding!

BRIDGET. They won't give us a day off for our own funeral!

*(MARTIN ROTH, the factory boss, enters. At the sight of him, the girls are instantly subdued. They hate him, but they also fear him—and he enjoys their fear. He speaks to them now with nasty condescension.)*

ALL. Good morning, Mr. Roth.

ROTH. Thought I heard some angry voices just now.

MARGARET. Not from me, Mr. Roth!

BRIDGET (*muttering*). Apple polisher.

ROTH. What was that, Bridget?

BRIDGET (*all wide-eyed guilelessness*). You heard never a word from me, Mr. Roth!

ROTH. You girls should be glad you got work! You should go down on your knees and thank Mr. Johanssen for keepin' you on!

ANYA. Should we?

RUTH (*warning*). Anya— (*Moves on ANYA.*) New York's crawlin' with girls who need jobs. Girls who talk nice to their bosses and don't sass back. I fire you today, I can hire another girl just like you tomorrow! (*He grabs one of ANYA's hands and jerks it aloft.*) A pair of hands, that's all you are! That's all any of you are! A pair of hands. (*Dropping his hold on ANYA, he turns on TERESA.*) Isn't that right, Teresa?

TERESA. Si, Mr. Roth.

ROTH (*muttering—but none too softly*). Dirty immigrant. (*To all of them.*) It don't make no difference to me who gets your four bucks a week—but I bet it makes a big difference to you. (*Attacking CLARA now—the weakest of the herd.*) Right, Clara?

*(Head down, too frightened to look him in the eyes, CLARA tries and fails to hide a cough, speaking through it, which turns ROTH vicious.)*

CLARA. Yes, Mr. Roth.

ROTH. I told you I don't like girls coughin' all over the place! I told you—it bothers me.

CLARA. Yes, Mr. Roth.

ROTH. If you keep coughin', Clara, and it keeps botherin' me, what do you think I just might have to do?

CLARA. I... don't know, Mr. Roth.

ROTH. I just might have to let you go.

ANYA (*protectively, pulling CLARA away*). It's just a cold.

ROTH. It's almost time for work, girls. Don't be late. (*To ANYA.*) And don't forget what I said. (*Lifting his voice.*) Don't none of you forget! (*He exits into the factory.*)

BRIDGET (*looking after ROTH, angrily*). Some folks have a mighty high opinion of themselves!

MARGARET. As long as he can hire and fire us, he can have any opinion he wants.

BRIDGET. We all know what side you're on!

MARGARET. There is only one side!

TERESA. I spit at Mr. Roth! (*And she does, indeed, spit, and then goes on—much deflated.*) I mean when he's not seeing, I spit at Mr. Roth.

BRIDGET. Someday I'm going to tell the likes of Mr. Martin Roth what I think of him!

MARGARET. That's the day you'll be unemployed!

BRIDGET. It's a coward you are, Margaret Murphy!

MARGARET. It's a coward with a job is what I am, Bridget Feeney!

ANYA (*indicating the factory*). Every morning we walk up those rickety stairs. We sit at those machines. Backs bent, heads down.

BRIDGET. Mouths shut.

ANYA. And that's the way they want us!

RUTH. Maybe we're all cowards.

ANYA. And maybe that's because we haven't given ourselves the chance to be anything else! (*With growing spirit.*) I'm tired of waking up with nothing to look forward to! Nothing to tell me that tomorrow's going to be better.

MARGARET. Because it won't!

ANYA. But it could be! If we're fed up—if we're angry enough—we have to fight back!

MARGARET. There isn't any way!

ANYA. There is!



MAN #4. There isn't! You, me—they've got us stuck. And the lid's on tight! (*A beat, then—*)

ANYA. We can strike.

*(This sets off an immediate buzz in the crowd and among the girls.)*

MARGARET. I won't listen to any strike talk! Do you hear me, I'm out of this!

ANYA. I read in the *TIMES* that a shirtwaist factory in Philadelphia went on strike—and now the girls only work ten hours a day! And they make six dollars a week!

CLARA. Truly?

BRIDGET (*in disbelief*). Go on with you!

RUTH. Do you think that could happen here?

ANYA. Why not?

MAN #1. Johannsen's is too big— Mr. Johannsen's too rich! He'd never back down!

BRIDGET. Maybe he would—if we made enough noise!

MARGARET. You're all crazy! If you go out on strike, you'll just lose the little you've got!

TERESA. Anya, I want to make the strike— I want to make the more money!

MARGARET. You don't know anything, Teresa, you're just off the boat!

BRIDGET. And so am I! And we've got the right to speak up, same as you!

MAN #3. There was a strike at Johannsen's, a couple of years ago. There's been strikes at lots of the factories! They last for a couple of days, then the boss clamps down and the workers give up.

WOMAN #1. Maybe these girls won't!

MAN #1. They will!

WOMAN #2. You don't know that!

MAN #1. I do!

WOMAN #3. A few days on the picket line, and they'll be beggin' for their jobs back.

BRIDGET. We won't.

MAN #2. You will!

RUTH. Maybe we could win a strike, maybe we couldn't. I don't know. But I do know I don't want my mother's life! (*Mimicking.*) Your Ruthie could be another Rachel, Mrs. Stein, another Rebecca! That's what the matchmaker says. I tell her I don't want a husband! But I don't want this life either. Too poor to buy an ice cream cone—too tired to take a walk in the park. I want— more.

MARGARET. Don't you think I want more than what I got? (*She turns from the girls; honestly.*) I'm that scared to come home without a pay envelope.

CLARA. I went out to the fire escape last night. Just so I could breathe. In the summer, there's no air in our rooms. In the winter we freeze. And I thought, why is it like this for us? (*With tentative spirit.*) I'm scared, too. I'm scared of Mr. Roth— I'm scared of losing my job. I'm scared of getting sicker and sicker and not having any place to go. But if you ask me to, Anya, I'll make signs and I'll march up and down in front of the factory, like I've seen the men do when they're on strike. And I'll be scared. But I think we have to do this. (*A beat. To ANYA.*) Do you think we can?

ANYA. I think—we can do anything's in us to do!

MARGARET. Anya Rosen, you're a dreamer!

*(Lights down; spot up on ANYA. She speaks to the audience.)*

ANYA. I've heard that all my life! Anya, you're a dreamer! Anya, why does it always have to be you who starts the trouble! Who makes the scene! Ever since I was a little girl, people have been telling me that. Telling me to be some other way than what I am! Especially Papa. *(Remembering.)* I asked him one day if I could read his paper. "Girls don't care about the news!" That's what he said. Sometimes, when he came home from work, he'd find me sitting on the stoop. Talking politics with the men. He'd grab me away. He'd say, "Girls don't discuss! Anything!" And when I wanted to go to high school, he said—

*(Special up on DAVID, ANYA's father. He will always appear in the same special. He speaks to the audience.)*

DAVID. I said, "Girls don't need an education, they need a husband!"

ANYA. That's when I told him I wasn't ever going to get married!

DAVID. Which is when I said, "Anya, girls always get married!"

*(ANYA and DAVID speak to each other now.)*

ANYA. Not *all* girls, Papa!

DAVID. Not the ones with the fuzzy hair or the squinty eyes, maybe! But the ones like you, the pretty ones, they get married!

ANYA. What if there's something else I want to do?

DAVID. Like what? Be President?!

ANYA. Maybe!

DAVID. Girls get married, Anya. Especially Jewish girls! And it doesn't matter if we're here or in Russia! They get married, they have children, and their husbands take care of them. That's the ways things are done—that's the way things have always been done!

ANYA. And what happens if a girl's husband dies, like you did?

DAVID. Then your children take care of you!

ANYA. And what if your children can't help you—or won't help you! What then?

DAVID. Then— (*A beat.*) You ask too many questions!

ANYA. Papa, don't you want things to change? For me—for the family?

DAVID. Change isn't always good. At least now you know what you got. If things change, then maybe they get worse.

ANYA. Or maybe they'd get better!

DAVID (*triumphantly*). And what if they get worse before they get better?

ANYA. Maybe it's worth it!

DAVID. So now you're telling me you're going to change the world, all by yourself, a girl of seventeen, with no education and no money!

ANYA. If I don't do it, who will?

DAVID. Anya, you're a dreamer!

(*Blackout.*)