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*Dramatic Publishing*

A ONE-ACT PLAY

# No Fading Star

By  
CELESTE RASPANTI



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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CELESTE RASPANTI

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(NO FADING STAR)

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# NO FADING STAR

*One-Act Play*

For 10 Women, Extras

## CHARACTERS

MOTHER FRANZISKA *Mother Superior of Convent*  
SISTER KLARA . . . . . *Her assistant*  
KLAAS SHOEFFLER . . . . . *Worker for convent*  
DAVID SACHS . . . . . *Jewish child brought to convent*  
MIRIAM SACHS . . . . . *His sister*  
SERGEANT HEIMLICH . . . . . *Nazi sergeant*  
SISTER MONIKA . . . . . *Sister in charge of kitchen*  
SL MOELLER . . . . . *Franziska's sister, married to Nazi*  
COLONEL LAUBER . . . . . *Nazi commander*

OTHER CHILDREN

Time: The Holocaust

Place: A Convent, near Baden

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

There is documentary evidence in the testimony of Jews, who as children, were saved from the Holocaust through the efforts of religious women in the convents of Germany and other Nazi occupied countries . . . This play is dedicated to these nameless women and the good people who worked with them to write some few bright words in the dark history of the Holocaust.

The first production of **NO FADING STAR** was presented at Centre Stage, Minneapolis, under the direction of Stephen Phillips.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

This play takes place in a period of several hours, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. It should move quickly from scene to scene with light and/or music bridges.

The director may choose to suggest the grandeur of a medieval structure like the monastery of Maria Morgenstern with arches or other set pieces, but basically the set is bare. Platforms and a few pieces of simple furniture can evoke a suitable environment.

Religious women in Europe wore simple, practical clothing. Originating as it did, in the peasant dress of the country, the habit should be simple, not ostentatious in the use of veils or other accessories.

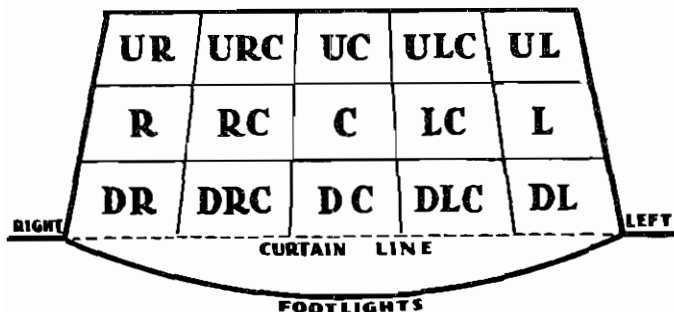
The Bar Mitzvah scene should be the focus of attention, with the tension created by the guards whose searching threatens the serenity of the ritual. Though much of the scene could be mimed, it may be effective to hear David as he reads the Old Testament lesson, speaks his commitment and gives the blessings. The scene can be abbreviated or extended to conform to the director's concept of the scene.

**MUSIC:** The *Salve Regina*, an anthem that closes Vespers, is available on records in collections of Gregorian Chant. It is also available in hymnals. Though Gregorian Chant is usually sung without accompaniment, the director may choose to enhance the scene with appropriate organ music.

**SOUND:** There are numerous recordings of chapel bells, ringing, chiming, tolling, easily available from commercial theatre suppliers.

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## CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



## STAGE POSITIONS

*Upstage* means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

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**NOTE:** Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.



**For Robert G. Pitman**

**19 -1978**

**Actor, Director, Friend**

**5**

## NO FADING STAR

Scene: The stage is set with platforms indicating areas of action. UC, silhouetted against the sky, an escape to the border. DR, the office in the convent of Maria Morgenstern, Mary, the Morning Star, near the town of Baden, not too far from the French Border. The chapel of the convent is merely indicated UL when the nuns are at prayer. Other areas of action exist when lighted in the C area. At rise, several nuns are in the chapel just concluding morning prayers. The *Salve Regina*, the traditional anthem that concludes the service, is heard. DSR a fire is burning in the stove.

MOTHER FRANZISKA (feeding the contents of a file drawer into the fire, which seems for a moment to blaze out of control and light up the stage). There! There's the last. (The chapel bell starts to chime slowly; the early morning service has ended.) And in time for . . . another day.

SISTER KLARA. Good morning, Mother.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Good morning, Sister Klara - do you see that glorious sun coming up, and the morning star fading? It makes me want to nudge that old bell a little - and let it ring - with a little less dignity.

SISTER KLARA. It's hundreds of years old - it rings a lot of memories . . .

**MOTHER FRANZISKA.** Yes, I suppose. But so much dignity - I cherish this friendly old sound, bold and happy. (She takes an old school bell from the desk and rings it loudly.) There, that's the way to ring in the sun.

**SISTER KLARA.** Yes, but . . .

**MOTHER FRANZISKA.** Well, Sister, it may be the only cause for smiling we have this day, please, try, please . . .

**SISTER KLARA** (a weak smile). Mother, **Klass Hoefler** is here - with a truckload of supplies - flour, bolts of linen, and the rest of the things we asked for.

**MOTHER FRANZISKA.** And you frowning? Thank God, we can stop counting out peas and beans - and do better with the soup tonight, though Sister **Monika** does well - with what she has - I will admit. Why the frown?

**SISTER KLARA.** He's brought - children - again, two children.

**MOTHER FRANZISKA.** Children? And only two? Well . . . now that the school is closed, we'll have to say, to say . . . they're . . . the nieces of **Herr Doktor Schneider**. He'll claim them until we can get them out.

**SISTER KLARA.** Yes, Mother, but these children - you call them - **Herr Doktor's** nieces - I don't think anyone will believe that . . . you see . . .

**MOTHER FRANZISKA.** Of course they will. We've done that many times before.

**SISTER KLARA.** Well . . . you'll see. (She turns to go.) Mother, I don't know how we can

continue . . . last week . . . three times . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Yes, I know, the searches, unannounced. Since the order came to close, we're being watched, I'm sure. It may be that we've come to the end of our usefulness, at least with the children, but . . .

SISTER KLARA. Klaas is growling again. He hears what they say in town, and he's been warned.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. By whom?

SISTER KLARA. Well, by Herr Doktor Schneider, for one. Kurt Frieberg said they announced the last search of the ghetto.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. I've taken some precautions. I've burned the records. Any notes, forms, anything at all that will give proof that - black on white - the children in the school were not who we said they were.

SISTER KLARA. The birth certificates?

MOTHER FRANZISKA. If they find any trace that we've been creating false documents, they'll search even further. So I've burned them all.

KLAAS (breaking in). Mother Franziska, Sister Klara, I won't wait any longer - while you two stand here gossiping. Ach, my feet hurt, my back aches. I've been out to the farm before dawn, and I won't wait.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Of course not. Klaas, my dear scowling friend, come in here and growl a bit at me. It makes my day complete.

KLAAS. Well, now, it's just that I . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. It's just that you're tired. You've been out to the mill and the farm,

you've haggled for the flour and the meat, and now you can sit here for a few minutes and growl at me. Sister Klara, there must be a cup of hot coffee, real coffee, not that ersatz brew we've been drinking, real coffee in the kitchen for Klaas.

SISTER KLARA. With a pinch of sugar, if Sister Monika can spare some. (She leaves.)

KLAAS. That's better. I tell you, Mother Franziska, I'm not able to do this much longer. I can't keep up the pace -- loading the sacks, driving half the night, most of the day, bargaining and conniving to get what we need here for . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. For the work that must be done here. It's hard, so hard, dear friend, I know.

KLAAS. Oh, I suppose I complain a lot, but what can I do, what can any of us do? Last night in the town, another search and . . . (Suddenly solemn.) There are two children in the truck, two more, and I'm afraid . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Sister Klara told me. Yesterday, I had decided, almost, after last week's random searches -- I had almost decided to stop for a while. Kurt tells me the Gestapo is savage in its searches of the wagons and trucks. But now, when the children are here -- how can we refuse them? We can take them in as the nieces of Herr Doktor Schneider. He's helped us in the past; he'll do that for us again.

KLAAS. Claim them? Ach, Mother Franziska, you mean he'll tell a little lie for us.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Now, Klaas, it's really not a lie -- we've been through this before, you and I. For the Herr Doktor to claim one or the other of the children here as his nieces -- well, it's not really a lie. For all we know, with the families and cousins in and about Baden, so many relatives -- he may very well be an uncle, a distant uncle of the children . . . he may very well be.

KLAAS. Yes, yes, I know the argument. Somewhere in the distant past, we are all related, and the Gestapo has not time to climb the family trees of "respectable" citizens like Herr Doktor and the nuns at Maria Morgenstern.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. And Klaas Hoeffler. You've been an uncle more times than you know -- than I have remembered to tell you. It's what I call -- an honest deception -- do you know what I mean?

KLAAS (with good humor). Yes, and the birth certificates and the Aryan passports -- all honest deceptions.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Yes, and the "nieces" of Herr Doktor, two girls in the novitiate of Maria Morgenstern. They'll leave them alone.

KLAAS. But there's just one thing . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Yes?

KLAAS. One of these nieces is a nephew!

MOTHER FRANZISKA. A boy? Oh, I was not expecting that . . . but . . . well, we shall have to work that out. We won't turn him away.

KLAAS. You may not have a chance. He may run away; he's an angry fellow! What are you laughing at?

MOTHER FRANZISKA. A boy in the novitiate!

Klaas, it's actually amusing. A boy! Well, we'll work it out.

KLAAS. Perhaps, but this time, these must be the last. After last week, we'll jeopardize the whole group, those who are even now on their way to the border. I swore Monday night, no more, no more. But these two, I could not refuse.

SISTER KLARA (returning). Here, here is a good hot cup of strong coffee for you -- with a little pinch of sugar. And from Sister Monika in the kitchen -- kuchen!

KLAAS. Ah, kuchen! It's a bribe, that's certain, a bribe. But, ah, what an aroma!

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Klaas Hoeffler, you are shamelessly corruptible, a slice of kuchen! You'd sell your soul.

KLAAS. I would, I would. (Eating heartily.)

MOTHER FRANZISKA. No, Sister, just a cup of coffee for me. And tell Sister Monika that Klaas will be stopping in the kitchen to unload the supplies. Perhaps she can reinforce this bribe with a loaf of fresh bread for Marta and the girls.

KLAAS. I'm obliged to you, Sister Klara. I'll stop in the kitchen -- you can warn Sister Monika.

SISTER KLARA (leaving). Oh, don't worry, she'll be ready for you.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Now, the children.

KLAAS. Gerda Sachs -- you remember?

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Gerda? Yes, of course, but I thought she had left Germany. Gerda -- we

were best friends.

KLAAS. They've been called. Last week the Gestapo broke down the door and arrested Martin. Things had been quiet in the ghetto for the last weeks, but without warning, without reason . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Reason?

KLAAS. They broke down the door and took him for questioning, they said. But he's not returned and Gerda hears that he -- he's on the train. Then yesterday, Gerda . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. My God, Gerda and Martin!

KLAAS. You see why my feet are dragging -- one by one, our friends, but Martin -- such good friends -- and nothing can be done.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. We do what we can.

KLAAS. Oh, sometimes I remember -- at first, the stars. The shame of it. I couldn't look Martin in the eye. But even he, he used to say -- 'Ach, this will be the end of it -- the stars, the ghetto -- the war will be over -- so it goes.' Even he didn't know all this would happen.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. But who could have imagined the hate -- and the power of that hate. And now, we must do what we can . . . we must save the children. Take some comfort, friend, we do what we can.

KLAAS. The children, yes, the children. Gerda has asked me -- this letter, from her. (He hands her a letter.)

MOTHER FRANZISKA (opens it slowly). 'Dear Fritzie,' (To KLAAS.) She is the only one



of all my friends who still calls me that. Fritzie! She'll never change . . . (She continues with the letter, interrupting now and then to include KLAAS.) 'Dear Fritzie, Forgive me, for I take your life into my hands as I write this letter. We are the last to leave Ludwigstrasse, the last Jews.' I suppose Martin's work at the clinic kept them there. She says they've burned the school and the synagogues and . . . here, she says, 'It seems we are all being swept into flames that will destroy us.' The Sterns and the Rosens have gone and she, she must have written this just before leaving. She says, 'Lisl, your dear Lisl, has changed so, we dare not approach her.' Oh, and here, she says, 'Except for Klaas and Marta and the Friebergs, we are alone.'

KLAAS. Yes, we shared what we had . . . and I promised to bring the children here.

MOTHER FRANZISKA (continues to read). 'I am sending my children to you -- David and Miriam -- save them for me -- for all of us. I cannot bear to think that they will perish in the flames. Your friend, Gertie.' (She pauses to glance over the letter again, turns the page.) Oh, here, a note, "David will be thirteen next week. He would have been Bar Mitzvah this Sabbath . . ." (She folds the letter slowly.) My dear, dear Gertie . . . (She throws it on the table.) And my poor sister Lisl!

KLAAS. Poor? A fool! That's what! (Hesitant.) Perhaps I shouldn't say so, Mother Franziska, but

you know me as an honest man, and I say, I say  
Lisl is a . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA. She's a fool, Klaas, and it's pitiful that she destroys everything she knows to be right in her foolishness, but she's my sister and she's a grown woman. I despise what she stands for -- and yet, I still grieve for what she is.

KLAAS. I'm sorry, but it's the truth. No one trusts her. The people in town know she's a sympathizer -- and though they respect you, and the memory of your good father and mother, they will not give her a crumb of sympathy -- or friendliness.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. What can I say? Married to Captain Moeller, she makes her choice to stand against us -- her friends -- and family. She knows how I feel, avoids me -- and it's just as well. I don't want her here, asking questions, seeing what she should not see -- or hearing. It's just as well. She would not understand . . . any of this. That we could not face the living God -- or ourselves if we did not, as dear Gerda says -- take our lives into our own hands.

KLAAS. What Gerda said was -- *she*, Gerda, *she* takes *your* life into *her* hands -- you are no longer ignorant of her. She is right. She takes your life into her hands.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Klaas, tonight -- will you make another trip, notify the Friebergs?

KLAAS. Do you hear me? I say, she is right, she takes your life and the lives of all of us, the nuna, the few sick who are still here -- the whole monas-

tery, Maria Morgenstern -- here for hundreds of years -- she takes it all into her hands -- with a letter -- evidence. If Heimlich and the Gestapo come again . . . they will not leave alone.

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Yes, I'm afraid that's true.

Kurt warned me yesterday that they would be making unannounced visits any day. I burned all the records -- all the papers.

KLAAS (trying to understand). She takes your life . . .

MOTHER FRANZISKA (with resolution). No! No, I take my life into *my own* hands! My life -- the sisters, the monastery, all of it -- you and I -- and they -- all of it -- in my hands! It's too late! (She picks up the letter and with one last look, throws it into the fire.) But the children, they will not be destroyed! (Gently.) Klaas, my dear friend Klaas, will you work, will you stay with us in this work?

KLAAS. Yes, what else can I do?

MOTHER FRANZISKA. Now, where are the children?

(LIGHTS GO DOWN as MOTHER FRANZISKA begins to set things in order. LIGHTS COME UP DIMLY on the two children huddled together.)

DAVID. Miriam, it's all right. Klaas will come back -- and you have to stay here.

MIRIAM. Why? I want to go with you.

DAVID. Please, Miriam, you must stay here. I have to go. I'm not going to hide here like, like a -- little boy, hide in a convent!

MIRIAM. But where are you going to go?