

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry

A Short Play

by

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ISAAC

An older man, portly, in a newsboy cap or beret, suggesting something rakish. HE has a lovely singing voice.

FRANKIE

An older lady, ISAAC's wife of 60 years, elegant, nicely but not expensively dressed. More reserved than ISAAC.

SETTING: On the Staten Island Ferry, on seats with a view of the outside.

TIME: Now.

SCENE ONE.

ISAAC sits on a seat on the Staten Island Ferry. HE waits impatiently.

FRANKIE enters. SHE holds her handbag close.

ISAAC

It took you long enough.

FRANKIE

Not that again.

ISAAC

I was just waiting for you, that's all. I bet over the years you've checked out every bathroom on this boat.

FRANKIE

There aren't that many. And I don't go to "check them out." I wish they had the paper things, like they do in California. You know, the whachamacallits, they're big white paper with a big hole in them...

ISAAC

Seat covers. Seat covers! Get your jargon right. That's a California thing.

FRANKIE

Well I like it. Then I wouldn't have to go through all the tissue in my purse wiping the seat.

ISAAC

You're kidding me, right? With the spritzing and the masks and you name it, you're wiping the seats, too?

FRANKIE

Just want to be safe.

ISAAC

We didn't go on our annual overseas trip to discuss the toilet!

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 2.

FRANKIE

Oh yes. Our annual celebration. Some overseas trip.

(Softening)

It is kind of fun.

ISAAC

Remember when we first met?

FRANKIE

How can I forget? Every year, this is your routine. What, after 60 years, you think I'm gonna leave you?

ISAAC

(With humor)

A guy could get lucky.

FRANKIE

You got lucky alright.

ISAAC

Aw, schwoozle, just sit with me and admire the view, while I tell you a tale of young love...

FRANKIE

Oy, every year, Isaac, every year. You think I don't remember?

(SHE snuggles against him)

ISAAC

Now then, there was this beautiful girl, with a touch of copper in her hair, curly hair she had, so pretty, and she came up to this resort in Woodridge...

FRANKIE

With a chaperone, of course...

ISAAC

Yes, yes, with a chaperone, the old crow...

FRANKIE

She let me go to the dance.

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 3.

ISAAC

Of course she let you go to the dance - that's why you were up at the hotel to begin with! Can I tell it or not? You be quiet.

FRANKIE

Alright. So this beautiful girl...

ISAAC

She wore this blue grey dress, really soft, swirling around her ankles when she danced, the color like the sky at dusk. I was up visiting Cousin Jesse that weekend.

FRANKIE

Just that one weekend...

ISAAC

And Jesse said we should crash the hotel dance...

FRANKIE

The hotel didn't like those local boys coming into their fancy dancy ballroom...

ISAAC

And I saw this girl, with the curls touched with copper, and that tiny little waist, and we danced... It was 1931.

(THEY hold hands, lost in a wonderful memory)

ISAAC (CON'T)

And then I wrote to her for the next seven years... Seven years!

FRANKIE

I was only sixteen when we met! Writing was all I was allowed to do! And even then, my parents had to see what I wrote. And you were far away, in school.

ISAAC

You looked older. You had quite a figure. Those big...

FRANKIE

That's enough of that. Someone might be listening.

ISAAC

And if they were? Nowadays, kids have seen everything under the sun by the time they're six years old. You know what's on the idiot box every night.

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 4.

FRANKIE

They don't call it that any more. We're living through the second golden age of television.

ISAAC

Yeah? How come with 850 thousand channels, there's still nothing to watch? Besides, I'm telling you, these kids have seen things I didn't know about even after going to war! They grow up with this stuff.

FRANKIE

Doesn't mean we have to say it to them. Never mind. I suppose nobody's listening anyway. We might as well be invisible.

ISAAC

(Looking around, appreciating the sights)

Very funny, Frankie. I like going overseas every year. This is one of my favorite activities.

FRANKIE

I think I'd rather go to Europe.

ISAAC

Naw you wouldn't. Nothing beats this, schwoozle. You got to be here to pass the Statue of Liberty.

FRANKIE

That's true. I like our "overseas" trips, too. You know, that was the only weekend we could possibly have met? And it was very unusual for my parents to let me go anywhere. I guess they knew something.

ISAAC

"They knew something." Like that time they visited us when we were first married, and crept into the house through an open window when we didn't answer the bell! That's knowing something?

FRANKIE

Yeah, well we agree, they should have called first. But they had made a long trip to see us...

ISAAC

Oh, schwoozle, you were so mad...

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 5.

FRANKIE

Well, when your mother announces at the top of her lungs “Frankie, get out of the shower with Isaac and open the door,” it’s - embarrassing.

ISAAC

Back in 1939, when we first started doing this, you weren’t worried about paper seat covers.

FRANKIE

I didn’t know from paper seat covers. Going to California back then - it was like going to another country.

ISAAC

It’s still like going to another country. (Aside) The Land of Fruits and Nuts.

FRANKIE

Yeah, well, that’s true. Remember the old seat covers? I mean, on these seats. Not the toilet. Kind of wicker-looking?

ISAAC

I think you’re thinking about the subway. The green and yellow striped ones. And then later it turned into a kind of brown plastic. Turd-colored.

FRANKIE

Shh. Don’t say that.

ISAAC

When did you become such a prude, Frankie?

FRANKIE

Well maybe I’m mixing it up with the different seats on the subway. You sure they weren’t like that on the ferry, too?

ISAAC

The water was cleaner in the thirties.

FRANKIE

Was it? I was always looking at your face, your handsome face and your beautiful head. You have a nice-shaped head. I wish you wouldn’t hide it with your silly caps.

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 6.

ISAAC

I'm not hiding it, I'm accentuating it. [Singing] O SOLE MIO!

FRANKIE

Oh, is that what's going on. Remember when the ferry boats were white? They were so pretty.

ISAAC

The orange is safer.

FRANKIE

Is that so, Mr. Engineer?

ISAAC

Yeah, well I read it. That's why they changed the color to orange.

FRANKIE

Do you think that'll stop the maniacs with swords from getting on?

ISAAC

Oh, that happened a long time ago, just once. You don't need to worry about that.

FRANKIE

I liked it when they had cars on the ferry. Like a real ferry.

ISAAC

We didn't have a car.

FRANKIE

I know, but I liked to pretend we'd get one someday. One time I saw a Bugatti. Wow.

ISAAC

You don't need a car in New York.

FRANKIE

That depends. A Bugatti would have been nice.

ISAAC

You were such a looker. I couldn't believe you said yes.

FRANKIE

Really. And why wouldn't I? I was very young and stupid.

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 7.

(SHE gives him a penetrating look)

ISAAC

Well, I know I could be...

FRANKIE

Difficult? Grumpy? Hot-tempered?

ISAAC

That's enough. Yeah, all those things, but you don't have to list them so fast. You could pretend you needed to think of the word.

FRANKIE

Like "seat cover?"

ISAAC

Well, something better than that.

FRANKIE

Think of all the people who sat in these seats, over the years. Watching those same waves.

ISAAC

I bet they weren't celebrating with an "overseas voyage." A super duper party.

FRANKIE

You don't know. Everybody on this whole boat might be celebrating something.

ISAAC

We sure are.

FRANKIE

Never gets old.

ISAAC

Except, we got old.

FRANKIE

Yeah, we did. All that stuff, the Depression, the War, the Fifties, McCarthy, the crazy sixties - all those drugs -

ISAAC

Yeah, time flies when you're having fun.

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 8.

FRANKIE

And six children. I don't think I slept for 15 years.

ISAAC

They were fun. Most of the time.

FRANKIE

You think they ever take the ferry, for an "overseas" trip?

ISAAC

Nah. They wouldn't get it.

FRANKIE

I have to go, Isaac. This isn't real, you know. I said goodbye a long time ago.

ISAAC

I know, Schwoozle. January 26. A day before Mozart's birthday.

FRANKIE

I'm not that old!

ISAAC

You know what I meant. Month and day. The years...

FRANKIE

Yeah, who can keep track. And you said goodbye, too, only nine years later.

ISAAC

I didn't want to last that long without you. But somehow, I did.

FRANKIE

The kids took good care of you.

ISAAC

It was the grandkids that kept me going. I'm sorry you missed Mabel. A real bundle of energy, that one.

FRANKIE

So you'll come get me, for next year's celebratory overseas trip?

ISAAC

You know I will, Frankie. You're my Queen of the Ferry. Even if we're just ghosts.

Frankie, Queen of the Ferry 9.

FRANKIE

Don't say "just." We've seen a lot. We should spread some joy. Make sure everybody's celebrating something. That's the way to live.

(THEY hug, stand, and look out at the view.)

END OF PLAY