Lillenas® Drama Presents

The Other Side of the Fence
from Body Language
By Joe Lovitt

Theme
The Rapture and the importance of neighborhood witnessing

Scripture
John 11:25

Character
One male
Lenny: An affable, likable person; earthy but not crass; not the world’s greatest storyteller but is compelled to share his story, nonetheless. The audience should not feel superior in any way to the character.

Tone
Serious with occasional humor

Running Time
13 to 15 minutes

Synopsis
A nonbeliever who witnessed the Rapture talks about how it happened, the mood of those left behind and the resentment he carries toward those who were taken home, not because they’re privileged but because they didn’t tell him how he could be saved.
Setting/Props

Setting: a coffee shop, preferably with a small table and a counter. Props: Cup of coffee, coffee warming pot, sugar and cream packets, silverware, newspaper, money.

Costume

Street clothes for cold weather, including a nice winter coat.

Note

Character is written for a male but can be performed by a female with a few obvious changes in the script.

LENNY sits at a table or the counter in a coffee shop, reading the front page of a newspaper. He shakes his head slowly, obviously reading something that disagrees with him. He folds the paper and rubs his eyes. He picks up his coffee cup for a drink—empty. He looks off to the side as though talking to an unseen character.

LENNY: Hey, Jimmy. (Pause) Jimmy! Could you fill up my pot over here? Unleaded this time. (Pause) I do so have time for another one. My bus for home doesn’t stop by here for another five minutes. Which means I’ve got at least half an hour to kill. (Pause) It’s not loitering when I’m sitting here paying for coffee. If I was tearing up napkins and stealing your tip money, then you could call the cops. (Pause) Because I’d rather wait in here than freeze to death in the dark out at the bus stop. They’ve got some nerve calling that thing a shelter. Have you been outside? I swear, it’s dropped 30 degrees since yesterday. (Pause) Sure, the jacket keeps me warm. I just don’t want to . . . (Pause, then sharply) Yeah, it’s new. So what about it? (Pause) Aw, I’m sorry, Jimmy. I’m just on edge because of . . . you know . . . (indicates newspaper) all this stuff going on. (Pause, changing the topic) Been busy today? (Pause) Well, get used to it. It’s bound to be a little slow from now on, huh? (Laughs, then realizes it’s a mistake) Hey, Jimmy, I’m sorry, huh? Come back here. I didn’t mean to make you all emotional and stuff . . . hey, does this mean I don’t get my coffee? (Pause, no answer) Great.

LENNY picks up the coffeepot from his table. He unscrews the top and stares inside. He starts to pour the contents into his cup, then stops. His gaze turns toward the direction of the audience. LENNY smiles, obviously seeing someone at the next table.

LENNY: You want some of this? (Pause) No, really, you can have it. Jimmy won’t be back out here for a while. (Pause) Suit yourself. (Indicating the newspaper) You want this? Bound to be a collector’s item someday. (Pause) I’m sorry. I don’t mean to bother you. I just usually say what’s on my mind,

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y’know? By the way, name’s Lenny. I’m a regular in here. (Pause) Oh, don’t mind Jimmy. I’ve known him for years. He tends to wear his heart on his T-shirt sleeve. But I guess we’re all a little touchy today after, uh . . . after what happened last night. What do they call that thing again?

(LENNY picks up the newspaper, scanning the front page for the answer.)

LENNY: The Rapture. (Reading) “God’s own people taken from earth in the blink of an eye.” Man, that’s all everyone talked about at work today. “Where were you when it happened? When did you first notice? Who did you lose?” I didn’t lose anybody. Nobody close to me, anyway. Some people I worked with, a few relatives I haven’t heard from in years. Um, my next-door neighbors, on the other side of the fence. The McBrides. They’re gone. (Pause, then brighter) My wife and son are still here. I don’t know if that’s good or not. To hear some people talk, it’s probably best they weren’t around for what’s coming up. Everyone’s got a theory—floods, fires, famines, earthquakes. I’m no expert. (Laughs nervously) Well, just as long as Herman’s Hermits don’t get back together again. Then we’ll know we’re in trouble, huh? (Laughing in desperation now) I like I said, I’m no expert. Matter of fact . . . I tried not to think about it at all today. Because when I do I just feel so . . .

(LENNY tapers off, at a loss. Throughout the remainder of the scene, Lenny tries to work off nervous energy—playing with silverware, sugar packets, and the like. Sometimes he sits, other times his story takes him away from the table, to the counter for another coffeepot, etc.)

LENNY: I admit, it’s probably my fault I’m still here, OK? Yeah, I know hindsight’s 20/20, you can’t change the past, don’t cry over spilled milk, blah, blah, blah. I’ve heard it all in the last 24 hours. It’s like people are consumed with rationalizing how we screwed up! I’m sick of it! It’s so pathetic . . . (gaining control) You know who I really feel sorry for are those people who knew what to do and they didn’t do it. Or they lost it or something. They had it right in their hands, you know? Everyone’s saying all it took was one little prayer: “Yes, God, I do. Yes, God, I will,” and—ta-da—a free ride to the big sky country! (Pause) Or wherever it was they all went. What a day. I’ll never forget it as long as I . . .

(LENNY pauses, not knowing how to finish the statement. He’s standing now, getting into his story.)

LENNY: I mean, I’m riding the crosstown highway bus like I always do. And the thing is packed. People keep getting on the bus and getting on the bus and nobody is getting off the bus! So, one minute I’m standing there holding the strap, wishing someone would get off the bus. And the next minute . . . the bus driver . . . is gone! Vanished! Out of the picture! And nobody knew where he went! Face it, who pays attention to the bus driver, right? None of us would have noticed if we hadn’t, uh . . . hit the ice cream truck in the other lane. We all felt this smack and looked out the
window at the guy in the ice cream truck who was giving us the . . . well, he was kind of waving at us. Then we looked at the bus driver, who wasn’t there of course. So, me and this other guy who smelled like a drugstore—you know how they always smell like Right Guard aerosol?—anyway, we both grabbed the steering wheel at the same time. He tried going left, I tried going right, and . . . well, the ice cream truck was in pretty bad shape after the third or fourth hit. So, we finally stopped the bus, and the ice cream guy is ticked off. He’s yelling, “How did you ever get a license to drive this thing?” And me and the other guy look at each other and say, “Uh, we didn’t.”

(Lenny laughs a little, looking for reassurance.)

Lenny: Well, he didn’t laugh, either. So, I let Right Guard deal with the Good Humor man, and I went inside the bus to look for a radio to call the bus company. And I notice there are empty seats on the bus now. Not a lot, mind you, but most of the people who were standing before are all sitting down now. They’re all laughing this creepy laugh, trying to make jokes about the whole thing and wondering what happened. And then . . . and then over the laughter there was this woman’s voice. And she was crying. And she said, “Oh, Jesus. Oh, please, Jesus, no. It can’t be. Not now.” See, she’d lost her sister who’d been sitting next to her. And she knew what had happened. She told the rest of us. (Pause) There were a few people who didn’t believe her at all. One guy said he was an atheist. There was a woman who claimed she was a Christian. Both of them said they didn’t believe the world would start ending this way. Funny—they finally agreed on something. (Pause, hearing a question) Yeah, I believed her. Right away. How else do you explain something like that? And then I thought of my neighbors over the fence, the McBrades. I knew they were gone. They had to be. (Pause) I remember going out to get the paper on Sunday mornings and I’d see the McBrades all dressed up, carrying their Bibles and stuff, getting into the car. I’d yell, “Good morning!” And Ray—that was the dad—he’d wave and say, “Good morning.” And they’d be off. He was a great guy, y’know. (Pause—another question) No, we weren’t best buddies or anything like that. Sure, I’d let him use my lawn mower ever since his broke down a couple years ago. But we never had much in common. But every few weeks or so, Ray and I would end up in the backyard at the same time and we’d talk over the fence. Just catch up on things for a few minutes. You know, family stuff, work, baseball—no big deal. No big deal at all . . .

(Lenny pauses, remembering his neighbor. Another question brings him around)

Lenny: Yeah, I finally got the bus station on the radio. It took awhile to get through. People were just starting to realize what had happened. The dispatcher told me they were pulling their employee files and looking under “religious affiliation” to find out how many drivers wouldn’t be showing up to work the late shift. Smart, huh? So, everybody got off the bus, like
they might disappear, too, right? So, we just sat outside, waiting for our driver. The ice cream man turned out to be a pretty nice guy. He started passing out treats to all of us. One guy had a boom box, so we listened to news reports on the radio. (Pause) Yeah, weren’t those a riot? It sounded like a bad Monty Python routine. Some businesses actually announced they were closing early due to the Rapture. A lady who was hard of hearing thought the announcer said “rupture.” That got a laugh. And those schools and day-care centers were in a panic. They thought there’d been a rash of abductions. I heard some factories shut down last night because they were missing too many workers on the assembly lines. Everywhere on the dial, we heard about more and more “missing persons.” (Pause) Congress had record attendance yesterday. Go figure. The ones I loved were the reports of abandoned cars driving off the road. But I guess the lion’s share of accidents were caused by people rushing to church. Better late than never, huh? There was a 12-car pileup outside the cathedral. We all got a laugh out of that. We were still laughing when this . . . this car roared past us. It ran right into one of those retaining walls doing about 90 miles an hour. Didn’t even slow down. And we all thought, “Hey, another driver missing in action!” But when Right Guard and I ran over to check the wreck, we . . . uh . . . we found a guy behind the wheel. He’d done it deliberately. With his wife. And three kids. None of them made it. (Pause)

Up to that point, we’d all been pretty numb to the reality of what had happened. Then it all started sinking in. That’s when we knew there was no hope. And there was nothing we could do. So, we just sat by the side of the road, listening to the radio, crying our eyes out eating Eskimo pies.

(Lenny tries to lighten up, but it’s getting harder.)

Lenny: I remember one Sunday afternoon in the backyard. Ray was staining his patio deck, and I was putting together a swing set. Neither one of us was too caught up in our work, so we took a little time out to talk for . . . oh, an hour or so. And I figured, why not, we’re neighbors. So, I invited his family over for burgers on the grill that night. And he said, “No, thanks. Tonight we’re hosting a prayer meeting.” Or a Bible study or a squirrel roast or something. I don’t know what kind of things they used to do. He never talked about that stuff with me. I said, “Don’t sweat it. I can respect that.” And he kind of brightened up, like I’d made some sort of . . . connection with him or something. And he said, “You do?” And I said, “Yeah, I can respect that. You’re committed to having a meeting, and you have to stick with it.” His smile went away and he gave me this strange look. And he said, “Yeah, I guess you’re right.” Then he went back and did an absolutely terrible job on his deck. That was the most he ever talked to me about . . . you know . . . what he believed. (Pause) My wife and my little boy got home just as the bus dropped me off at our corner. We stood there holding each other in the driveway, saying how much we loved each other. We didn’t say what we were really thinking: “Weren’t you supposed to know this was going to happen?” We went over to the McBride’s house together. Just walked inside. The TV was on. Ray’s wife

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had been making a cheesecake. The hand mixer was on the floor, scuffing up the linoleum. I went out to the backyard. One of his kids must have been doing yard work because the lawn was half cut, and my mower was still running. I turned it off. My wife was in the kitchen going down the list of numbers next to the phone, trying to call someone, anyone who’d need to know the McBrides were gone. I looked around the house. Ray had never invited us inside. I’d always wondered what his house looked like. It wasn’t much different from ours—two and half baths, neutral carpeting, light oak cabinets in the kitchen. Matter of fact, it was almost exactly like ours, except for some knickknacks on the wall with Bible verses on them. I still remember one of them. It had one of those pictures—you know, the pretty sunset or sunrise or something. And it said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” And before I knew it, there were tears in my eyes. And I thought, “Oh, so, that’s how it was supposed to work.” I wandered around the house in a daze with those words going through my mind. (Numbly, pulling the collar of his coat together) I don’t remember where I found the coat. I just picked it up and put it on. My wife didn’t mention it when we left.

(Pause. LENNY begins building here. He isn’t wanted to say this, but he can’t stop it.)

LENNY: After dinner I went back to Ray’s yard and finished mowing the grass in the dark. I know it wasn’t necessary. But I guess you never know what little favor people will appreciate. When I was done, I couldn’t bring myself to go back in my house. As I stood in his yard, there was nobody I hated more than Ray McBride. I hated that he was gone and I was still here. I hated . . . (maintaining control) I hated what he knew and didn’t share with me, you know? I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to see him over the fence one more time. I just wanted to say, “Hey, Ray . . . why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you tell me that all I had to do was call on Him and He’d be there for me and my family. Because you should hear people calling on Him now, Ray! Would it have killed you to take just one minute to tell me your little secret? For crying out loud, I was just on the other side of the fence! It was just me! It’s not like I was a dope dealer or a car thief or something! I’m a good man with a good family! Why couldn’t you tell me? What harm would it have done? The worst I could have done was say, ‘No, thanks! I’m not interested!’ (Pause) But I don’t think I would have said that.”

(Len ny finally makes eye contact again with the person across the table. He realizes he may have just gone too far. He forces a smile and tries to recover.)

LENNY: But hindsight’s 20/20. And you can’t change the past. And here I sit, bothering people, waiting for a bus that’s never gonna get here. (Rises, zips up his coat, and puts money on the table) Make sure Jimmy gets this. There’s still some coffee in there, if you’re interested. I think I’ll go find a pay phone, see if my wife can come pick me up. I’ll see you around, huh?

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(LENNY walks briskly to the door, stops and walks back to the table.)

LENNY: Hey, you need a ride anywhere? (Pause) OK. Just asking. I always like to ask these days. I mean, we’re all in this together. Right?

(There is obviously no answer. Lenny manages a meager smile, which quickly fades. He exits.)