A NIGHT OF STARS WITH TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

(sample)

by Maxim Vinogradov

(If interested in reading the full script, please go to the CONTACT section of the website and request a free copy.)

GRAPHIC: a black-and-white "A NIGHT OF STARS WITH TENNESSEE WILLIAMS" accompanied by '40s fanfare and a celestial logo. The music gradually becomes distorted as the image flickers.

Cut to:

int. Living room - night

Black-and-white camera on him, we see TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (40) sitting in a comfy chair as crew members faintly discuss something off screen. Tenn stares absently off.

Tenn's clutching a BOTTLE as if loosening his grip will make the bottle explode into shrapnel. He's mustached, his lungs adopting New York but clearly born of a Mississippi drawl. Tenn, unblinking, raises the bottle, then lowers it.

Behind him is a decadent living room, clean and tastefully stained, complete with a bar, bar stools, and connecting his to kitchen. One would think it was a studio set rather than his house, which is exactly what Tenn would've wanted.

Tenn looks up, as if addressing a different camera. He doesn't speak at all like he's intoxicated, but pleasant:

Tenn

Memory... It's like youth. Elusive. A luxury that one forfeits when one submits himself to the eroticism that is alcohol. I think I have more memories that have been stolen by the bottle than I have stowed around my attic. And the ones that persist only do so hazily. They're more dreams than memories. And when you wake up, you haven't the slightest idea of what they meant. You remember a boy and a girl --

An off screen crew member says something to Tenn, but it's DISTORTED and INDECIPHERABLE.

Tenn

(looking behind our camera)

Mm?

The off screen crew member repeats the phrase.

Tenn

We're not...?

The off screen crew member says something quickly.

Tenn

Who's running this? Who do I -- ?

(pointing at our camera)

Is it this one?

EDWINA (O.C.)

Don't worry -- I got him.

Tenn

(looking behind himself)

She...? We're...?

(looking back at different camera)

All stars have their final bow and they spread across the cosmos to make our atoms --

Cut to:

GrAPHIC: A BLACK-AND-WHITE "A NIGHT OF STARS WITH TENNESSEE WILLIAMS" ACCOMPANIED BY '40S FANFARE AND A CELESTIAL LOGO. THE MUSIC is triumphant and perfect.

edwina (V.O.)

Hello, ladies and gentleman! Thank you for tuning in again! Tonight shall be a tour of the stars with a man that knows the stars better than anybody alive or dead: Tennessee Williams!

dissolve to:

Int. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

In the last moment of the dissolve, Tenn drops the bottle and smiles at our camera.

Tenn

Hello, hello, hello! Hello. Folks, my name is Thomas "Tennessee" Williams and I'm here to take you on a tour of the stars! This is what happens now. This is what we do. You get to a certain age, and then you have to give people tours of the universe.

Tenn looks behind himself. After a moment, the lights FLICKER, then GO OUT. Tenn sighs as a PROJECTION OF THE NIGHT SKY hums to life across the living room behind him.

Tenn

(pointing)

This, right here, is the universe! It's got stars... And we're gonna look at 'em... If any of you thought that we would be looking at actual stars tonight --

Tenn plucks up his spilling bottle and SIPS instead of finishing the sentence.

Tenn

Right-o! Lil' Edwina! Where do we wanna launch off tonight?

Tenn looks to his side and waits. Nothing happens.

eDWINA (O.C.)

(whispered)

More introduction!

Tenn

(turning back to camera)

More introduction! My name is Thomas "Tennessee" Williams and I am seventy-one years of age.

(referring to his youth)

My secret is wine. Yes, you're gonna pretty quickly understand that things don't look how they happen. It's fantasia...

(back to the side)

Lil' Edwina, why do these things happen?

EDWINA (O.C.)

More introduction!

Tenn

(back to camera)

More introduction! My name is Thomas "Tennessee" Williams, I write plays, I make people famous, I grew up in Mississippi so I didn't masturbate till I was twenty-six --

EDWINA (O.C.)

Sufficient introduction!

Tenn

Wonderful!

(pats his pockets)

Where the hell's my point-point?

Tenn looks around, then back to the side. After a moment, EDWINA (60s) briefly enters the shot, produces a laser pointer, and hands it to him. Edwina leaves the shot.

Tenn

Thank you. This, right here, is the universe! Now, to begin our tour, we'd like to start -- Oh, meet Lil' Edwina! She... Come on, just --

Tenn physically PATS at the camera till it turns to face Edwina. Edwina's in a sequin dress and pleasant as peaches, manning the STAR MACHINE. She's the assistant you'd expect to be the Vanna White type, but, again, in her 60s.

Tenn (O.C.)

Meet Edwina! She's...

EDWINA

(shyly)

I'm a student.

Tenn (O.C.)

(surprised by the answer)

A student...? Yes! She's a student of astrology.

EDWINA

Astronomy.

Tenn pulls the camera back to focus on him.

Tenn

Forgive her: she's a Scorpio. Now, I don't know a whole ton about anything I see behind me right now, so Lil' Edwina's gonna correct me whenever necessary.

EDWINA (O.C.)

(chuckling)

It's gonna be necessary!

Tenn

We're starting!

(laser pointing vaguely back)

This, right here, is the universe! The universe is full of stars. There are some you know. There are some only some know. We neglect the ones that no one knows because they're so goddamn boring. We like to begin with one everyone knows.

Tenn peeks back and laser points at a star.

Tenn

This star here... this is... Polaris.

Tenn peeks at the out of frame Edwina, moving his pointer.

Tenn

This one's Polaris...

(moving again)

Polaris?

EDWINA (O.C.)

Oh, heavens...

Tenn

Well, I don't know! I know if you draw lines between these ones y'get Aries! I'm an Aries. Typically Aries have tempers, but --

Tenn drinks instead of finishing the sentence. Edwina comes and SNATCHES THE BOTTLE.

Tenn

That's my dancing juice, goddamn it!

EDWINA (O.C.)

Language!

Tenn

(cooling)

I...! All right...

Tenn looks back to the camera and tries to put on his best televised persona.

TENN

(pointing)

This here's Aries: these four. Aries are born between March 21st and April 20th. They are adventurous, courageous, maybe a bit unable to express their emotions in a conservative manner. We do not punish them for this; they are incapable of change. Let's start tonight with one of the first stars I made... His name, at the time, was Bud. He was also an Aries -- That's why I'm thinking 'bout him; ol' Tenn idn't just defective in the attention span. Now, I had just written and'd had produced The Glass Menagerie. This was a play about my growing up... I...

The thought forces Tenn to pause at a memory.

Tenn

Mm...

The screen FLICKERS as Tenn keeps thinking.

Cut to:

Ext. BALCONY - NIGHT

FRANK MERLO (20s) smokes a cigarette on a balcony above a mass of SAND DUNES. He's disarmingly handsome, his eyes gently exploring every star.

Cut to:

Int. LiVING ROOM - half a second later

Tenn smiles, then sees the camera and shakes the memory off.

Tenn

That play went really well! It took me a while to write the next one, surrounding a woman named Blanche. This was A Streetcar Named Desire. Now, this --

QUICK SHOT:

The screen FLICKERS AGAIN, giving another moment of Frank under the stars.

BACK TO SCENE:

Tenn stares at the camera, wide-eyed.

Tenn

Did something just...? Just -- okay, well. Streetcar. I'd wanted John Garfield for the lead male. We could not get this man. Instead, a no-name was referred to me by the great Elia Kazan, hereafter "Gadg," whom Gadg called one of the best young actors he'd ever seen. Best anybody had.

Tenn pauses again, smiling at a thought.

Tenn

But memory is elusive. Everything I remember, I remember it with a rum-soaked filter. When I remember them all, they're beautiful. They're young. Did you ever notice that? As soon as a star dies, all their pictures become young again.

BRANDO (O.C.)

What's wrong with the lights in here?

The camera shifts to see MARLON BRANDO (20s) in the living room. He's young, thin, and playful, flipping a LIGHT SWITCH to no avail.

Tenn

That young!

Tenn smiles at the camera and stands to greet Brando, the camera smoothly following after him.

Tenn

Hello, sir I've never met!

BRANDO

Why don't your lights work?

Tenn

Because when you flip the switch they don't turn on.

BRANDO

Mmm... Where's your box?

Tenn

(winking to camera)

Excuse yourself.

BRANDO

In here?

Brando OPENS A DOOR, seemingly looking down to a basement, heading down the stairs to locate the electrical box.

Tenn

(to camera)

Now, everyone, this was way before anyone had ever heard the name... Hold on, what was his name...?

The lights go back up again.

Tenn

Goodness, the lights work.

Brando enters, hitting the light switch to turn them off.

BRANDO

I liked it like this anyways.

(extending hand)

Bud.

Tenn

(shaking hands)

Bud? Your name's -- ? No, what's the one on the paper?

(re: camera)

The one they know.

Brando confusingly looks to where Tenn pointed, not seeing any camera or people.

BRANDO

Marlon?

Tenn

Marlon! Everyone, this is -- Marlon, is that you?! Jesus God, were you ever this thin?! ... Oh!

(putting on an act)

You're the no-name actor who wants to take on the role of Stanley Kowalski. How reasonable.

Tenn opens a drawer, producing AUDITION SIDES.

Tenn

I'm not interested in a no-name like "Marlon Brando." That sounds more like a canned tuna company.

BRANDO

I don't wanna read either! Gadg gave me twenty bucks to do this, and then I'm outta here!

Tenn

(looking at sides)

Oh my, well -- Wait, this is Menagerie...

Tenn crumples up the paper and throws it in another drawer. He gets the correct sides.

Tenn

Oh my, well I guess this read's gonna just smart, isn't it? You look nothing like Stanley Kowalski!

(to camera)

Stanley is supposed to be a middle-aged man, you know.

BRANDO

Well, I'm not too sure about this part either! I figure I'm a pretty decent guy and this is just... a harsh guy.

Tenn

Then I guess that's that! Good day to you, Starkist!

(throwing the sides back in a drawer)

Oh, all right! If you insist!

(pulling out sides)

But only because Gadg -- Wait, this is Menagerie again. Who put Menagerie in here? Hey, who put...?

Brando stands still as Tenn inspects the paper.

Tenn

Laurette Taylor read off these sides...

Tenn reads the sides, smiling.

EDWINA (O.C.)

Eh-hem.

Tenn

Right, uh. I just -- hold on.

(to Edwina)

Laurette Taylor read off these sides...

(to camera)

I wanted Greta Garbo, but she denied me flatly.

EDWINA (O.C.)

Finish the Brando memory!

Tenn

Uh...?

EDWINA (O.C.)

We'll get to Garbo later!

Tenn

(still looking at sides; uncaring)

Brando's nervous and sweet on the inside but reads so well as a bad man that it redirects both of our histories; really, all of entertainment history. He fixes my plumbing and sleeps on my floor and in the morning we walk up and down the beach in total silence.

(to camera)

Wadn't that fun?

(to Edwina)

I'm sorry, but I remember Garbo and I had this excellent conversation about celebrities; the audience'd love to hear it.

(to camera)

We were at this party, or, no it was a bar --

EDWINA (O.C.)

You can't leave the memory until Brando agrees to read.

The camera backs itself up, now trying to include Edwina in the shot. Edwina sees this, trying to shoo it away, but as soon as her face is in the shot, smiles kindly.

Tenn

Oh, right.

(to Brando)

Would you like to read?

EDWINA

(fake smiling)

That isn't what you say to him. Come on.

Tenn

Uh...

(remembering)

Toughen up! Be a barrel-chested behemoth and read this! What, you can't confront the --

(to Edwina)

Sorry, Charlie; this is no fun to say. He was avoiding becoming his father.

EDWINA

Wow, maybe we should just skip Garbo tonight.

Tenn

(to Brando)

What, you can't confront your fears? Life needs these ugly things; that's what makes it so beautiful! Be the ugly man and for as long as you have stamina you can run from the later consequences!

Brando stares for a moment, then tentatively takes the sides and studies them.

BRANDO

You Blanche?

The screen FLICKERS and BRANDO DISAPPEARS.

Tenn

Wonderful, wonderful! Wadn't that trivial.

Tenn goes back to the chair as the camera resets to just him.

Tenn

(to camera)

Now, I'd always admired Greta Garbo -- even as a young boy. She was a Virgo.

GRETA GARBO (20s) enters in a huff, blazing through the room.

Tenn

Ahh... Greta!

GARBO

Sorry, sir! I'm so sorry: rush!

Tenn gets up and follows Garbo, the camera quickly chasing him too.

As they round the corner of the living room, Garbo is gone, giving no time to look at her. Tenn's filled with glee.