

STREETCAR DERAILED

(A Comedy in Four Scenes)

by

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THE CHARACTERS

STANLEY DUBOIS, An English Instructor and a poet, 30s

STELLA DUBOIS, His Wife, 20s

BLANCHE KOWALSKI, Stella's sister, 40

HAROLD TWITCH, Stanley's colleague, 40s

PABLO VILLAREAL, A Spanish Instructor, 30s

THE SCENE

Stanley and Stella's home

THE TIME

Recently

STREETCAR DERAILED

Scene 1

(We're in a living room/kitchen, 'Arty' in that it is decorated with the artwork of friends: doors rear and right. A pregnant STELLA is on the sofa, reading a magazine. Then STANLEY enters, a bit nervously)

STANLEY

(Clears his throat, when she fails to look at him) Do you remember I'm having my poetry group to the house this evening?

STELLA

Of course I remember, so I'm taking Blanche to the little Italian place on the corner for dinner.

STANLEY

(Too visibly relieved) I think that's very nice of you.

STELLA

So she'll be out of your hair for a couple hours, and you won't have to worry about my sister embarrassing you in front of your poet friends.

STANLEY

Are you implying I'm a snob?

STELLA

I didn't actually use that word.

STANLEY

That's not fair.

STELLA

All right, I'll use it. You're a snob. But I'll still keep my sister out of your hair tonight, if you promise to get to know her better.

STANLEY

Are you implying I've been rude to your sister?

STELLA

She's been here for three days, and you've been avoiding her. You figure it out.

STANLEY

(Pause) She makes me nervous.

STELLA

You make her nervous, too. And you're making her feel unwelcome. Can't you understand how depressed and insecure Blanche feels about coming to us after she lost the family farm?

STANLEY

She doesn't act depressed.

STELLA

Now look, snob. Get to know my sister better, or else. (She exits).

STANLEY

Hey, where are you going?

(BLANCHE enters, not entirely dressed)

STANLEY

(Startled) Blanche?

BLANCHE

Am I such a terrifying sight?

STANLEY

Yes—

BLANCHE

Aren't you the gallant one?

STANLEY

I think I should leave the room until you finish dressing.

BLANCHE

I trust you. Stella says you're very trustworthy.

STANLEY

She should know.

BLANCHE

I have to be honest. I was real nervous about meeting you,

STANLEY

You *were*? Why was that?

BLANCHE

Well, with you being a professor, I thought you might be suspicious.

STANLEY

Er, suspicious of what?

BLANCHE

I was thinking you might not believe I lost the farm because of all the debts, and I sold it for a big profit and I was holding out on my little sister.

STANLEY

You wouldn't do that. Would you?

BLANCHE

There, you see! Now listen, has this state got a Napoleonic code?

STANLEY

I know we have an area code and a zip code—

BLANCHE

Look, I can *prove* you got no reason to be suspicious. (She exits).

STANLEY

I can't understand why she makes me nervous!

BLANCHE

(Then returns with a suitcase, from which she begins removing items) Look at this.

STANLEY

You mean that fur?

BLANCHE

Imitation rabbit—

STANLEY

I believe you.

BLANCHE

And this here—

STANLEY

It's a very nice dress.

BLANCHE

Salvation Army boutique, dummy! And this cheap jewelry—I'm embarrassed even to show it to you!

STANLEY

You don't have to. You've made your point.

BLANCHE

I just figured if I showed you the cheap junk I have to wear, you'd understand I don't have any money. Now do you trust me?

STANLEY

I'd be afraid not to, Blanche. You're Stella's older sister.

BLANCHE

Just by a couple of years.

STANLEY

I was about to say you don't look it.

BLANCHE

You devil you! (She punches him on the arm and re-stuffs the suitcase).

STANLEY

That hurt.

BLANCHE

It was meant to, silly. You know Stella was telling me you got some poet friends coming to the house tonight. I'll bet you want me out of the way 'cause you think I don't understand poetry?

STANLEY

I just think you'd find it boring.

BLANCHE

I bet you didn't know I had a boy friend who wrote poetry, and he said I inspired him.

STANLEY

Inspired him to do what?

BLANCHE

I'll show you. I got one of his poems right here.

STANLEY

No, Blanche, I'm sure it would be too personal.

BLANCHE

(Takes a paper from her purse) Here. You read it.

STANLEY

(Awkwardly takes the paper) Um, 'My darling, I love you with all my heart. I can't bear to be apart. Your eyes are like flames. Your breasts are like'—I thought you said they weren't too personal?

BLANCHE

Oops! Wrong poem!

(And then STELLA re-enters. Ready to go)

STELLA

Are you ready, Blanche? I hope you and Stanley had a pleasant conversation.

BLANCHE

Oh, yeah. Didn't we, Stanley?

STANLEY

I'm not sure if pleasant can accurately describe it. (They exit. BLANCHE is laughing happily).

STANLEY

(He looks momentarily shell-shocked. Then he exits and returns with a pitcher full of liquid, pours a drink, gulps it down. He breathes a sigh of relief) I hope I'm not going to have trouble with Blanche.

(Now the doorbell rings. STANLEY goes to the door and lets in TWITCH, who is then followed into the room by PABLO, who carries a CD player)

TWITCH

Hi, Stan, I think you've met Pablo. He's joining our poetry group.

STANLEY

Hello, Pablo, It's wonderful to have you with us. Now then, how would everyone like a drink? (He gestures to the pitcher).

PABLO

I'm all for that. Where there is poetry, there must be drinking, eh?

STANLEY

Try this, but be careful!

TWITCH

(Sips his drink) Oh, this is incredible, Stan! What is it?

STANLEY

It's a new brand of lemon tea with a touch of jalapeno in it.

PABLO

(Dubious, having expected something stronger) Yes, it's—very interesting.

TWITCH

Oh, by the way, Steve won't be here tonight.

STANLEY

Why not?

TWITCH

His wife's bowling team is going for their league championship tonight, so he's watching the kids.

STANLEY

You know what I say to that?

TWITCH

(Pause) Steve's a wimp.

STANLEY

No. I say good for him! Family is very important.

TWITCH

Don't I know that? Did I mention that my mom—

STANLEY

(Cutting him off) Of course poetry is also important—to us.

TWITCH

I'll drink to that. (He takes a large gulp of his tea, then gasps slightly) Whew! (PABLO stares at them with amazement).

STANLEY

So let me ask you a question, Twitch. What is poetry about?

TWITCH

(He thinks) It's about—many things, Stan. Don't you know that? The possibilities are endless. There are poems about——

STANLEY

Yes, yes, so what you're saying is that poetry about *life*.

TWITCH

That is very well observed, Stan.

STANLEY

I mean it.

TWITCH

I am going to remember that! (He takes out a notepad, writes in it).

STANLEY

Okay, so why don't we get started. But Pablo, let me say, once again, it's wonderful to have you in our little group.

PABLO

I was really happy to learn there were other poets here.

TWITCH

I have to warn you that Stan is the genius of our group.

PABLO

Is that so?

TWITCH

If you don't believe me, ask him.

STANLEY

(Laughing) What can I say?

TWITCH

You could lie, like I just did.

STANLEY

That's enough from you. Now why don't we get down to some serious poetry? Twitch, did you get anything published or written this month?

TWITCH

I'm afraid not. The truth is, Stan, my mom's been ill, and I'm pretty darn upset about it.

PABLO

Su madre es enfermo? I'm sorry. Is she very old?

STANLEY

(Quickly) No, she isn't.

TWITCH

I wasn't going to come tonight, but when Steve crapped out, I felt obligated.

STANLEY

We certainly appreciate your sacrifice, Twitch. But if you don't have anything to read for us, I have a little piece—

PABLO

I had a poem published.

STANLEY

Did you? Well, that's great.

TWITCH

Oh yeah, congratulations.

PABLO

Would you like me to read it?

TWITCH

Absolutely—

STANLEY

That's what we're here for.

PABLO

If you'll excuse me. I see you have a CD player. This is for the proper mood. He turns on a tape of Latin American music for the recitation of his poem,)

PAX NEBULAE

Anigular es un palabra
Demasiado fuerte.
Mas como un pedazo
De hielo en la sombra,
En la escina, derretiendo.
O como la lluvia calmada
Calliendo sobre el Bosque,
Cuyos sus arboles no se
Escuchan quando caen.
O un ojo como un diamante
Fijado en un solar lugar
En un cielo oscuricido.
Adonde el sol no sea
Visito por horas.

(PABLO turns off the tape and awaits a response. STANLEY and TWITCH stare at each other in total confusion)

STANLEY

Um, we were kind of expecting it to be in English.

PABLO

But it was published in Spanish.

TWITCH

Well, I'll tell you this, Pablo. What I understood I liked very, very much.

STANLEY

Do you know Spanish?

TWITCH

No, but I understood the *emotions*, Stan. I thought they were very well expressed.

PABLO

Thank you very much.

STANLEY

Naturally, we're really pleased you got it published, Pablo, but next time maybe you could give us an English translation?

PABLO

Of course—This was my mistake. (Perhaps implying something about the entire evening).

STANLEY

Well then, since Twitch didn't bring anything tonight—

TWITCH

Actually, Stan, I did bring a poem by Yeats, which I'd like to read for my mother, if you don't mind. (He takes out a piece of paper).

STANLEY

Hold it! Twitch, you know the rules, only original compositions. I mean if you wanted to read a poem for your mother, you should have written one.

TWITCH

I just thought since she wasn't well. (STANLEY frowns) But you're right.

STANLEY

So moving on, last week I had a little something accepted by the 'Rutland Review,' and if there are no objections, I'll go ahead and read it. (He prepares to read his poem).

TWITCH

Stan, could you hold it for just one sec?

STANLEY

What is it?

TWITCH

I should give mom a call.

STANLEY

You've only been here a half an hour.

TWITCH

I know, but when I left the house she thought she was coming down with a fever.

STANLEY

Look, suppose I read the poem and you tell me what you think and then you call your mother?

TWITCH

I can live with that.

STANLEY

Then may I proceed?

TWITCH

I'm looking forward to hearing it.

STANLEY

Thank you.

PABLO

I know *I'm* ready.

TWITCH

(To PABLO) Stan's poems are usually pretty short.

(BLANCHE and STELLA appear, but momentarily unseen)

STANLEY

(As STANLEY reads his poem he becomes more and more impassioned)

THE MOON

The moon is a mad slut
in an erotic farce.
Hot and insatiable
her lust burns without remorse.
Each night she screams
to the tree's dark shafts,
'Come to me!
Come to your whore!
I can't live without your icy passion.
Give me more,
my silent cockatoo,
I beg you, give me more.'

(There is a slightly awkward pause)

STANLEY

Anyone have a comment?

PABLO

I don't think you wrote that for *your* mother.

TWITCH

Oh boy! I hope *mine* never hears it. But I really liked it a lot, Stan.

STANLEY

(Humbly) Thank you, Twitch. Tell me. What specifically did you like about it?

TWITCH

Specifically, I liked all of it.

STANLEY

(Frowns) Could you be a little *more* specific?

TWITCH

Well—I think 'icy passion' is an interesting oxymoron.

STANLEY

What did you think of the overall structure?

TWITCH

I think—I think I should call mom now.

STANLEY

(Mild eruption) Twitch, couldn't you just tell me what you think of the poem?

(At this point STELLA and BLANCHE suddenly make themselves known)

BLANCHE

(Giggling a bit, she is somewhat tipsy) Well, I thought it was naughty!

STANLEY

Blanche—Stella? You're home very early.

BLANCHE

Are we butting in on you boys?

STELLA

I'm afraid I started feeling a little ill, Stanley.

BLANCHE

(Giggles) And I had a third martini. I guess I embarrassed my little sister.

STELLA

It's only that Reverend Brown was sitting at the next table.

BLANCHE

Stanley—why don't you introduce me to these handsome poets? (STANLEY is still a bit shell-shocked).

PABLO

(Suddenly, all 'Latin' charm, he kisses her hand) Pablo Villareal is at your service, dear lady.

BLANCHE

I think I like him.

STANLEY

(Coming out of it, nervous smile) This is my wife Stella and her sister Blanche.

BLANCHE

(Growls playfully at PABLO) Hi ya, Tiger!

PABLO

(To STANLEY) You have a charming wife.

STANLEY

No, I don't!

STELLA

Thanks a lot!

STANLEY

I mean *this* is my wife. (He goes to STELLA) And that's her sister, Blanche. She's, um, visiting from Tennessee, and Blanche, this is my friend Twitch.

BLANCHE

Twitch? Honey, I won't even ask!

TWITCH

(Laughs) Actually it's my last name, Harold Twitch. I'm very pleased to meet you, Blanche.

BLANCHE

So charming! I thought poets were supposed to be rowdies?

STANLEY

Only the ones you've known, I guess.

STELLA

It seems as if we've interrupted you. We'll just go into the other room and watch TV.

PABLO

Oh no, we couldn't think of chasing you from your living room. (He smiles at BLANCHE)

TWITCH

Oh boy! That reminds me. I haven't called mom yet.

BLANCHE

At *your* age you got to check in with your mother?

TWITCH

Mom's not feeling well. I promised I'd call to check on her.

BLANCHE

Oh. I think that is so sweet.

PABLO

(Shaking his head sadly) *Mi madre es muerta.*

BLANCHE

(Looks at him, smiling uncomprehendingly) Is that good or bad? Well now, you just go on with your poetry and pretend we're not even here.

STANLEY

Actually we're finished.

BLANCHE

(Suddenly stares daggers at him) Oh yeah? I bet that's because of me!

STANLEY

Of course not! Why would you say that?

BLANCHE

(To the others) 'Cause Stanley don't think I'm cultured enough to hear your po-ems! Ya see I'm just a farm girl and a truck stop waitress! So Stanley looks down on me!

STELLA

Blanche, that's not so. Is it, Stanley?

STANLEY

Certainly not, Blanche—I'm sorry if you feel like that.

BLANCHE

(Getting very worked up) Bull roar! You look down on me and you look down on my sister, too! You think we're just a couple a vulgar hicks, who can't appreciate your *culture!*

STELLA

(Affronted) I don't think I'm a vulgar hick!

BLANCHE

Well, you are according to *him*! (She points her finger at a very shocked STANLEY).

STANLEY

Blanche, that's not true!

BLANCHE

Huh! Well, you know what you are?

STANLEY

(Shrugs, nonplussed) I don't know what to say.

BLANCHE

Well, I do! With all your culture you're missing something very important, baby—instinct! And without a little animal instinct you're just half a man! Now let me show you what I think of your nose-in-the-air sophistication! (She suddenly grabs PABLO'S CD player and throws it out the window).

STELLA

Blanche! What are you doing! (Apologetically) She's upset.

BLANCHE

I ain't upset, honey! I'm pissed off! But I ain't as vulgar as he thinks I am! (She then takes a half pint bottle from her purse and takes a slug)

TWITCH

(To PABLO) Wasn't that your CD player?

PABLO

I'll pick it up on my way out. (He bows to BLANCHE) Allow me to thank you for a very interesting evening. (He exits).

BLANCHE

(To STELLA) And I suppose you think I made a fool of myself, huh?

TWITCH

(When STELLA shrugs, confused) Personally I think you were darned impressive.

BLANCHE

(Now near tears) Oh God, I can't *stand* it any longer! I got to get out of here!

STELLA

Blanche, that is ridiculous! Isn't it, Stanley?

STANLEY

Um—yes. Blanche, I'm sorry if you think I was rude to you.

BLANCHE

I *think*! (To STELLA) I tell you. I aint gonna stay some place where I'm looked down on! Honey, we got to get out of here!

STELLA

We? This is my home, too.

BLANCHE

(She takes another slug from her bottle) I know! I know what I'll do! I'll call Shemp! Yeah, you remember Shemp, don't ya, honey?

STELLA

(Stares at BLANCHE) Who?

BLANCHE

Shemp! Shemp Huntley! He once promised me—(She starts staggering around the room) Where's the phone? (She stumbles into TWITCH'S arms).

TWITCH

Is there anything I can do?

BLANCHE

(Smiles blearily at him) My! Aren't you strong?

STELLA

Now Blanche, listen to me! Nobody is going anywhere! We're all going to spend the night here and behave like responsible adults, instead of spoiled teenagers! Is that perfectly clear to everyone?

(Suddenly, the telephone rings. Pause, then STANLEY, still stunned, answers)

STANLEY

Hello? (Pause; he looks at TWITCH) Twitch, it's your mother. (TWITCH then looks at STANLEY, horrified)

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

(It's a week later. STELLA is lying on the sofa, reading a magazine. STANLEY enters tentatively, with a glass of iced tea)

STANLEY

I brought you a glass of iced tea, honey.

STELLA

Thank you, Stanley. I don't know how you put up with me.

STANLEY

I compare you to Blanche.

STELLA

That's not fair! Try to remember the stress Blanche has been under! And she has no one but me—but *us*. She did apologize for her behavior last week, and she also promised she would cut down on her drinking.

STANLEY

She has been behaving remarkably well. So then may we go to bed?

STELLA

I have to admit I'm just a little worried, Stanley. It is pretty late.

STANLEY

That was *my* point. For heaven's sake, Stella, Blanche is your *older* sister, isn't she?

STELLA

Not if you ask her.

STANLEY

Look, Stella, if Twitch and Blanche are out late, they must be having a good time, so why not let them? And in the meantime it's giving us some time to ourselves, which we really deserve.

STELLA

I suppose you're right. After all, what could happen?

STANLEY

I don't want to touch that.

STELLA

Oh, all right. (He helps her up. They exit, turning down the lights).