

A STREETCAR NAMED NAPOLEON
a ten-minute play
by Michael Armenia

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Pablo Gonzalez: Man, approx. 35-50 years old, born in New Orleans, descendant of Spanish soldier stationed in Cuba during the Civil War

Maria Gonzalez: Woman, approx. 25-50 years old, a nurse, married to Pablo

Isabella Delacroix: Woman, approx. 35-50 years old, married to Eugene

Eugene Delacroix: Man, approx. 35-50 years old, married to Isabella

Streetcar Operator: Man (no lines)

Passenger(s): Extras, men or women (no lines)

SCENE

Various places in New Orleans

TIME PERIOD

20th century, Post World War II

SCENE 1

(Suppertime. The kitchen of Pablo and Maria Gonzalez. The front entrance is stage right. The door to the kitchen is off on stage left. There's a table between center stage and stage left. Maria comes home from her job as a nurse at a nearby hospital. Tired, she quietly enters apartment and sets her purse down on a small table near the door. Pablo, who has been at home cooking dinner, comes from the kitchen wearing an apron and surprises her. He sets plates down on the table)

MARIA

What are you doing home so early, mi tesoro?

PABLO

Cooking dinner for you. (He sets dishes down on the table.)

MARIA

(She greets him with a kiss.)

I fell asleep before you came home last night and I missed you this morning.

PABLO

I didn't come home last night.

MARIA

What do you mean?

PABLO

I got home after two this morning.

MARIA

Well, you were playing at Stanley's right? You boys tend to stay a bit too long at his house...at least that's what his wife says.

PABLO

Yeah. Well, I don't think that will happen again.

MARIA

Why? What happened, Pablo? Tell me.

PABLO

Please sit. (They sit.) I've told you Stanley's sister-in-law, Blanche, has been staying there with Stanley and Stella for months now.

MARIA

Yeah.

PABLO

After months of his typical abuse aimed at Blanche - you know how he is with Stella - it turns out that Stanley finally had his way with Blanche...against her will. And as if that wasn't traumatic enough, he and Stella had her committed afterwards.

MARIA

What? Noooh!

PABLO

They had some doctor from the mental hospital come and collect her during the game last night. It was awful to me. I've listened to yelling in that household, but...that poor thing just broke my heart. I don't know anything about her other than what Stanley told me. But, if that woman is dangerous to herself or anyone else, then I'm the devil! Sure she was a vulnerable woman of questionable morality, and supposedly a maker of fantasy and lies...but, hell! This was all Stanley's

doing and I know it now. When all this happened I had to ask myself 'why was I hangin' round the likes of Stanley Kowalski?' In fact, I left the poker game early last night to take a walk. That's why I got back late. And after a few hours of sitting on the bank of the Big Muddy, it finally came to me...the truth, I mean.

MARIA

What's that?

PABLO

Ever since I lost my dad at age fifteen, I clung to anything that reminded me of him. My mom never remarried and then died not long after. Some time passed and then all of sudden there's this guy at work - Stanley - who drinks too much and abuses his wife in quite the same way dad did to mom. Although we are around the same age, I believe I subconsciously took Stanley as a sort-of...father-figure, an authority. After this ordeal last night...and sitting at the poker table afterwards...I just felt...disgusted. I'm not going to play poker with him and his boys anymore and I don't want anything to do with him.

MARIA

Well, you won't get an argument from me. I never liked Stanley. *(pause)* So, why are you home from work so early today?

PABLO

I quit.

MARIA

What?

PABLO

I quit the plant. I never did like the job. I can't stand running into Stanley as often as I do. I'm tired of going to work only to make money that just goes to

other people - if it's not the government or bills,
it's poker losses.

MARIA

You could just quit poker, you know!

(he looks at her, glaringly)

Spend more time at home.

(he continues looking at her)

So, what are you going to do now?

PABLO

Well, you know we've been talking casually about my opening a restaurant. You love my cooking and I love to cook and play host. And there isn't a decent Cuban restaurant in this part of New Orleans. It's high-time at my age that I follow my dream, and the circumstances seems right. The only problem is finding a location and maybe an investor. We can't afford to rent a commercial building and I don't think we're gonna get a bank loan for a restaurant on top of this place.

(pause)

MARIA

Pablo...Pablo! I've got it!

PABLO

What?

MARIA

Your restaurant! The building. It's perfect.

PABLO

What's perfect?

MARIA

My cousin, Isabella...

PABLO

Your cousin Isabella is perfect?

MARIA

No. No. No. Listen. Her husband is Eugene Delacroix. You've met him. He owns a building that's been in his family for generations. It's owned and paid for. There's no mortgage. He's rented it out in the past and I know from Isabella that it's now vacant. I know if I ask Maria, she would be able to convince Eugene to go into business with you, saving you rent in exchange for a portion of the profits.

PABLO

(excited) Maravillosa suerte! Really? It can't be this easy. When can we talk with them?

MARIA

I will call Isabella later tonight.

PABLO

I could kiss you!

MARIA

What's stopping you?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

(A little later at the site for the proposed restaurant. At stage left just a few feet inwards is a two step platform that serves as a porch. It has a doorframe at the center of the porch , the entrance to restaurant. When light go up, Eugene, Isabella, Pablo and Maria are inside looking at the mostly barren space. There is one table near stage right

and some chairs in the main room. At center stage is a frame with two french doors that swing at the center curtain break for Pablo to walk through.)

EUGENE

This large area was once a living room, a doctor's office and at another time a restaurant.

PABLO

That den over there would be a nice grotto for large parties.

EUGENE

There's one other room, an old bedroom, that makes a great office. The kitchen is through those french doors.

(Eugene points to the doors which lead off center stage and Pablo walks through them.)

ISABELLA

(to Eugene) Pablo doesn't drive - they don't have a car - how's he going to get there every day?

EUGENE

He can ride the streetcar. He'd take the Napoleon line about twenty blocks up and then walk a few blocks to Cadiz St.

MARIA

Oh no!

ISABELLA

What's wrong?

MARIA

Pablo has what he used to call 'the Napoleon complex' but he hasn't talked about it for years.

ISABELLA

He doesn't seem short to me! Is he compensating for something?

MARIA

No! (*chuckle*) When Pablo was fifteen, his father was struck and killed by a streetcar named Napoleon. The man was the village drunk which is embarrassing enough, but one night he tumbled out of a tavern all boozed up, crossed the line and...well, just like that he was gone. Because of that Pablo has never taken to the bottle, and he has since then refused to ride the Napoleon. To him the streetcar is a demon.

EUGENE

I suppose he could take several of the other lines and change a few times, but that could take an hour or two.

ISABELLA

Or walk it? But that's still a lot of wasted time, isn't it?

MARIA

With his night-blindness, he won't walk more than a dozen blocks away from home at night. No, if he's to do this, he will have to face that demon. Maybe the excitement of seeing this place will inspire...help him overcome his fear. Nothing good comes easy. And when it does it should make you stop and think anyway.

EUGENE

The most productive level for human achievement is situated somewhere between comfort and danger.

(Pablo returns from the kitchen)

PABLO

I think I'm going to cry, Maria. It is as you said...PERFECT!

ISABELLA

What do you think, Eugene?

EUGENE

Frankly, I don't think I've got anything to lose. Don't see why we can't try it. What percentage are you thinking in exchange for the rent, Pablo?

PABLO

I've no problem with 50% of the profits.

EUGENE

Well, that's awfully generous. But, we're not talking about a business with a large profit margin. You will have to buy a commercial oven, stove...and a refrigerator for that matter. Why don't we start with 20% of profits for the first six months? Then, if you are making a good profit, we can fix a reasonable rent instead.

PABLO

Let me think for a moment if you don't mind.

EUGENE

Sure. Look around.

(Pablo begins to circle the restaurant envisioning how it will all look and what obstacles he may have to overcome. Maria, Isabella, and Eugene sit down at the table in the room and continuing talking quietly. Pablo goes to the entrance and turns around, framing the room with his hands.)

Pablo backs out from the porch at stage left. He slowly walks backward away from the steps and continues offstage [in the reverie, in the music of future success that he hears in his

imagination, he forgets himself. He accidentally steps off where the curb and street would meet.] The sound of streetcar zipping by and blasting horns can be heard. Pablo enters the stage again and collapses down on the porch steps looking off stage left as he makes the sign of the cross three times, a vestige of his Catholic upbringing. His heart is racing. From inside the others see this through the window and rush to the porch to check on him.)

EUGENE

Are you OK?

PABLO

(Frightened and trying to find the breath to talk.)

Yeah!

MARIA

Now, Pablo, you do need to realize that to make this work, you will have to ride that streetcar.

PABLO

Oh!

(He goes from frightened to puzzled.)

OH NO! Not...

(He can barely whisper the name.)

...the Napoleon. Well, I could take other lines then...and...no...

(He goes from puzzled to sullen and almost sick to his stomach and angry at the same time. He rises goes inside and sits at the table.)

(loudly now slamming his fist on the table)

Mi suerte está maldita!

MARIA

Calm down, Pablo.

(She goes over to Pablo, sits next to him and puts her hand on his shoulder)

Don't worry about the future just yet.

ISABELLA

(joining Maria in comforting Pablo)

Dear Pablo, my husband often says: somewhere between your comfort level and a present danger, lies a nursery for magic.

EUGENE

Well, something like that...but what you say is quite poetic, my bride. You do listen to me!

ISABELLA

Once in awhile!

EUGENE

No. No. This is a sign. It is a sign that I should not do it. That streetcar is an omen to be heeded!

(He stares out through the door.)

MARIA

Pablo, look at me. Look at me!

(He turns around and she takes his hands in hers.)

You have been so superstitious all your life allowing your fears to make your decisions for you. Yes, everything is a sign when you think about it. But, it is you who gives a sign its meaning. You define it. Your father - God love him - was a drunk, in the wrong place at the wrong time. The streetcar that hit him and the operator that drove it meant no harm. These things happen all the time. You know that. We are not what happens to us, Pablo. We are the person that comes out of what happens to us and that's a choice we make. We are...our choices. That's who we become.

PABLO

That may be so. But, it doesn't mean that we should ignore the signs.

MARIA

Of course not. See them. Look at them. Interpret them, but don't let fear be the translator. The right choice in a given situation is often not the easy one or the one that looks the safest. Pablo, you may never have this opportunity again.

PABLO

Maybe not.

MARIA

Look. Stanley Kowalski has more demons in him than this streetcar line. Don't you forget that! And you walked away from that abusive brute despite a strong psychological bond. You quit the poker group and left your job. All of that took courage. If riding this streetcar line is what it takes to make the restaurant a success, I don't think it will take any more courage than that. You can do this!

PABLO

You think so?

MARIA

Stanley was a demon. The Napoleon is an opportunity. Can you see that now?

PABLO

You know what? I think I can.

(BLACKOUT)
(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

(A month later, early morning, a few blocks from the Gonzales house where the Napoleon stops, Pablo and Maria are standing on the corner waiting for the streetcar. There is merely a streetcar sign on the proscenium in front of the closed curtain.)

PABLO

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous.

MARIA

You will be fine. Is Eugene meeting you there?

PABLO

Yes. And the men I've hired to repaint the place. The kitchen equipment is coming tomorrow.

MARIA

With any luck, you'll be open before Mardi Gras.

PABLO

You know what I found out?

MARIA

What?

PABLO

There's a Chinese place a few blocks away. I know I'll be cooking in my own restaurant soon enough, but I do love chop suey!

MARIA

Yes, I know you do. I'd rather see you spend your newly hard-earned money on chop suey than poker losses.

(He first glares at her, then smiles.)

A video projection of a streetcar in motion rolls onto the curtain from stage right and stops such that the entrance to the car is at stage center where the curtain breaks. The streetcar approaches and she kisses him goodbye for the day.)

Have a wonderful day, mi tesoro.

PABLO

You, too, love.

(Pablo climbs aboard the streetcar. In effect, the actor walks off center stage behind the curtain. The projected video screening on the curtain shows a silhouette, taking a seat, blowing a kiss and waving from the window. Maria waves as the car rides off stage left.)

*(BLACKOUT)
(END OF PLAY)*