

BURNING UP

A play in 10 minutes

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For Tennessee Williams and other gay men I love.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

TW: Tennessee Williams, his first time away from home, newly come out as homosexual (to himself, not to the world).

STONE: A 21 year old blond Greek God of a young man.

ALMA: A spinster of a certain age; a Southern lady.

BORIS: A Russian spy, really bad at his job.

RUTH: An 18 year old prostitute. Stunningly beautiful.

SETTING: A 4th floor balcony overlooking Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, New Orleans, Mardi Gras night. The streets below are completely filled with partying thrill-seekers, parades and parade-watchers, police, firefighters and their equipment trying to reach the fire.

AT RISE: BORIS is flattened against the wall of the balcony, using a monocular to scan the streets below. He wears a long black trenchcoat, a slouch hat, and gloves.

ENTER RUTH.

RUTH

My, what a gorgeous evening for a parade. Would you mind holding my glass while I slip out of this wrap? The heat is just overbearin', don't you think?

BORIS

(With heavy Russian accent) How did you?

RUTH

What? See you? Honey chil', I din't hafta see you, I could smell you before I entered the room, let alone come out on the balcony. Did you ever hear of a showerbath? And Good Lord, sweetie, get out of that heavy coat and gloves and such! You must be sweltering! No wonder you're so rank! Excuse my French.

BORIS

French?

RUTH

I mean to say, I'm sorry for bein' so rude, but my dear, you'll never get a girl smellin' like that, not even if you pay her, and believe me, you'd have to pay ME plenty, well dependin' on exactly what services you wanted rendered o'course...

BORIS

(still standing there fully dressed, holding her glass, and now her wrap as well): My English ...

RUTH

Never mind, honey. You don't look like you're lookin' for love, I'll just move along ...

ENTER TW

TW

(nearly hysterical): My God! My God! The fire escape, where's the fire escape?

RUTH

Fire escape? Slow down honey, you're kinda cute ...

TW

Where's the fire escape!!!!

RUTH

Where's the fire? (Laughs at her cleverness)

TW

Right behind you, you idiot! In the room right behind you! Now where is the goddamned fire escape?

ENTER ALMA, nearly fainting, wiping her brow, listing first left, then right, leaning on the doorframe, waving a hankie.

ALMA

My Lord, my Lord, somebody get me a sip of water, please!

TW

(Searching every corner of the balcony for a fire escape, he finds Boris) Shit! Holy Christ, man, you scared me! What are you doing here?

BORIS

I... I...

SOUND: SIRENS, CROWD SCREAMING, DIXIELAND JAZZ FROM BELOW

TW

What?

RUTH

What?

ENTER STONE (looking calm, cool, collected, eyeing everyone)

TW

Hello, sir. Is the way behind you clear now?

STONE

Zorba.

TW

Excuse me?

STONE

Zorba.

RUTH

Never mind him, honey, he doesn't speak English. He's trying to tell you he's Greek.

TW

(So interested, he forgets the fire for a moment) You don't say.

ALMA

Won't SOMEONE please bring me a glass of water or a mint julep before I faint dead?

BORIS

What is mint? Money?

RUTH

(Waving to crowd below) Help! Help! We've got a fire up here honey!

BORIS

Fire?

STONE

Zorba!

TW

I'll Zorba you, you hunk of butter. Come over here and save me, mister man!

RUTH

You? He's gonna save me! Come on sweetie, come to Ruth. It's only fair, I saw him first!

ALMA

Thirst, you think you've got thirst? I've been begging for liquid ever since I stepped over that threshold.

BORIS

Police! Police are there!

TW

Great, they can save us.

RUTH

Police don't carry firehoses, I'm sorry to tell you.

BORIS

Must run! (Tries to get back inside, flames force him back onto the balcony, he shuts the door. They are all now permanently trapped on the balcony.)

SOUND: Now so loud they cannot understand each other.

RUTH

Hey Zorba! Save me!

STONE

Zorba!

ALMA

Water! Please, water!

RUTH

(Goes to balcony, leans over, bares her breasts) Hey! We have a fire up here!

FX: BEADS ARE TOSSED ONTO BALCONY

TW

You idiot, that's not helping!

STONE

(Goes to balcony, bares his buttocks to the crowd below) ZORBA!

FX: BEADS ARE TOSSED ONTO BALCONY

TW

My God, I want that ass! Zorba!

STONE

Zorba?

RUTH

Hey! I don't care if you are the famous Tennessee Williams, I saw him first! Oh yes, I know who you are.

TW

I know who you are too. Or I should say, I know what you are. In any case, he's mine!

BORIS sheds coat, hat, gloves, is dressed as a cat burglar. He begins to climb over edge of balcony. ALMA climbs him like a tree.

ALMA

Take me with you!

BORIS

Police!

ALMA

My God you stink! (Tries to cover her nose, slips, appears to fall to crowd below).

BORIS

Nyet! Nyet!

TW and ZORBA are up against the back wall, in the shadows, making out. RUTH leans over the balcony, flashing her breasts, and yelling for help. BORIS is hanging from balcony's edge, when EXTENSION LADDER APPEARS AT EDGE OF BALCONY.

TW, BORIS, RUTH, STONE

Oh, it's you.

ALMA

This kind firefighter caught me, poor little Alma, he caught ME, and now we've come to rescue the rest of you.

RUTH

What firefighter? I don't see a firefighter.

ALMA

Oh dear, he seems to have fallen to the ground. I suppose I must have stunned him when he caught me.

TW

When you flattened him, you mean.

ZORBA

Zorba?

BORIS

Boris must have ladder!

ALMA

Here, grab onto the ladder, but please! Do not touch me, you smell so dreadfully foul...

BORIS GRABS THE LADDER,
DISAPPEARS.

TW

I thought he'd never leave.

RUTH

You and me both, honey.

ALMA

Who's next? Zorba?

STONE reaches for the ladder. TW and RUTH pull him back.

TW

No, no, ladies first! You must go first, I insist.

RUTH

You just want to hog him for yourself.

STONE

Zorba?

TW

Truly, it is simple chivalry.

RUTH

My ass.

TW

Nothing to do with your ass, I assure you.

STONE

Ass?

ALMA

Now let's not have any ass talk. Come on dear, descend the ladder to safety.

RUTH

Sometimes safety is not all it's cracked up to be.

TW

Please, just go. You too, Miss Alma is it? You too Miss Alma, we'll make our own way. You ladies go ahead and reach the ground. We'll be right down. Right, Zorba?

STONE

Ass?

TW

That's right, ass. Your delicious ass. I'll save it, right after I savor it. Say goodbye to the ladies, bye bye!

STONE

Bye, bye!

ALMA AND RUTH DISAPPEAR, LEAVING THE BALCONY TO TW AND STONE.

TW

It's getting awfully hot up here, don't you agree Zorba?

STONE

Bye?

TW

I think we need to shed some of these clothes, here let me help you (begins stripping Stone of his clothing).

STONE

(enthusiastically stripping his own clothes) Bye! Bye bye! (tosses his clothes over the balcony)

SOUND: Loud crashing of glass and overwhelming sounds of fire approaching.

TW

Oh Christ! It's too close! We have to leave. Dammit dammit dammit, come on beautiful boy, we

have to go! Yes, we'll go now, come later.

STONE

Bye bye?

TW

Bye bye.

TW is already on the ladder, pulling Stone along with him. As soon as Stone is over the edge of the balcony, a deluge of beads showers the balcony.

END