

LOUIS
Have you thought about casting?

EDDIE
I have.

LOUIS
Who?

EDDIE
Later, Louis. Later.

Lights shift.

LAURETTE AS AMANDA AS EDWINA

Family pictures are added to the set, including the one of the father on the wall and tabletop framed photographs of Tom, Laura and Amanda.

Tennessee enters, walks toward the image of Mr. Wingfield on the wall. As he looks at it, Laurette enters.

LAURETTE
My Dad was an ass.

TENNESSEE
Seems that most are - at least in my experience.

LAURETTE
I gathered as much.

TENNESSEE
(pointing at the picture)

From Mr. Wingfield here?

LAURETTE

Yeah. Why no first name?

TENNESSEE

Don't believe he deserves one.

LAURETTE

Is he based on your own father?

TENNESSEE

Like the other characters, he has his essence.

LAURETTE

As a picture on the wall?

TENNESSEE

As in absent. Physically and emotionally absent.

LAURETTE

I see.

TENNESSEE

In an early version, he came home.

LAURETTE

Wow. Now that would be quite the scene.

TENNESSEE

It always was.

LAURETTE

Why'd you change it?

TENNESSEE

Every time I would write it, it felt like a lie.

LAURETTE

Because?

TENNESSEE

I wanted him to be something he is not. And will never be.

LAURETTE

Well. I think Mr. Wingfield on the wall does what you need it to.

TENNESSEE

Yeah. I'm not sure.

LAURETTE

Who is the actual man in the picture?

TENNESSEE

Like the real person?

LAURETTE

Yeah.

TENNESSEE

No idea. Just some guy I've never seen.

LAURETTE

Huh.

TENNESSEE

Not sure where they found it.

LAURETTE

Well - he looks like somebody Amanda would marry.

TENNESSEE

You think so?

LAURETTE

You don't.

TENNESSEE

I suppose I've only ever imagined him to look one way.

LAURETTE

I suppose you would.

TENNESSEE

Yeah.

Pause.

LAURETTE

My son is a writer.

TENNESSEE

I know.

LAURETTE

You do?

TENNESSEE

Sure. *Lipstick, Paris in Spring. Gay Divorce.*

LAURETTE

Actually, RKO changed it to *The Gay Divorcee*. And *Cole Porter* did the music.

TENNESSEE

It was Astaire's last Broadway performance. Before he became a movie star, I believe.

LAURETTE

You know, that play was based on a story by Hartley, my husband.

TENNESSEE

I'm sorry . . . for . . . well . . .

LAURETTE

Oh lord. It's been over a decade - you'd think at some point the grief has to lessen.

TENNESSEE

Like part of your soul has been kidnapped.

LAURETTE

Something like that, yes.

TENNESSEE

Honestly, I must say, I was quite disappointed.

LAURETTE

I'm sorry.

TENNESSEE

In the play. *Gay Divorce*. Was hoping for much more gay, and much less divorce.

LAURETTE

I suppose you would be.

TENNESSEE

. . .

LAURETTE

Oh. Wow. That was impolite.

TENNESSEE

(smiling)

Impolite, perhaps, but not wrong.

LAURETTE

Must have left my manners in the bottom of a martini glass.

TENNESSEE

Mine disappeared long ago, left them in Mexico, never to be seen again. Adios modales.

They laugh. Wait, these two might like each other after all.

LAURETTE

Can I ask you something?

TENNESSEE

Sure.

LAURETTE

Why "Tennessee?"

TENNESSEE

Why the name?

LAURETTE

Yeah.

TENNESSEE

Tom Williams is pretty darn boring, wouldn't you say.

LAURETTE

I suppose so.

TENNESSEE

It is boredom personified.

LAURETTE

Are you from Tennessee?

TENNESSEE

No. No I am not. It is the great lie of my life. It's quite simple, really. When I was in college, my fraternity brothers referred to me as Tennessee because of my southern drawl, and I guess it just stuck.

LAURETTE

Well, I think it's a perfect pen name.

TENNESSEE

Thank you. You know I almost went with something different.

LAURETTE

Really? What?

TENNESSEE

Valentine. Valentine Criswell.

LAURETTE

You're kidding.

TENNESSEE

I'm a romantic, what can I say.

LAURETTE

Well, I'm glad you settled on Tennessee.

TENNESSEE

So am I. *So. am. I.* May I ask you something?

LAURETTE

Uh-oh.

TENNESSEE

Don't worry.

LAURETTE

I swear I will learn all my lines, word for word.

TENNESSEE

Good to know, but that's not it.

LAURETTE

Oh goodie.

TENNESSEE

Amanda.

What about her? LAURETTE

Do you like her? TENNESSEE

Do I *like* her? LAURETTE

Yes. TENNESSEE

I'm not sure this is a conversation we should have. LAURETTE

Why not? TENNESSEE

Because, Tennessee, she is based on your mother. LAURETTE

So. TENNESSEE

So. *So*. You aren't really asking me to opine on a character, Tennessee, you are asking me, really, if I like or dislike your mother. Your Mom - and that's not really something I think would be healthy for a friendship that began only moments ago. LAURETTE

You're right. TENNESSEE

I am. LAURETTE

You are. TENNESSEE

I know. LAURETTE

Pause.

How is she? LAURETTE (CONT.)

Who? TENNESSEE

Your mother. LAURETTE

Oh. Good, I think. TENNESSEE

Edwina, right? LAURETTE

Yeah. TENNESSEE

LAURETTE
I'll tell you one thing, Tennessee. I have never played this fascinating of a *character* in my entire life. I don't know how similar Edwina and Amanda are, but, as an actress, I couldn't ask for better material to work with.

Really. TENNESSEE

Yes. LAURETTE

I'm not sure . . . TENNESSEE

Take the compliment. LAURETTE

Thank you. TENNESSEE

I'm going to tell you something. LAURETTE

Alright. TENNESSEE

LAURETTE
I know you are worried about me. I am a washed up old widow with a helluva drinking problem - that is all true. But one thing I know is I am one of the best actors alive.

You are too young to have ever seen me, but when the lights go down and I step onto that stage - for me, it's like going home. It's the one place in world that I feel whole. The *only* place on this godforsaken planet that I feel safe.

TENNESSEE

You don't have to tell me this, Laurette.

LAURETTE

I do. I see it on your face. I hear you all talking. You are all worried. Hell, I would be too. But let me say this right now, to you: I will not let you down. I know I don't deserve this opportunity - in no way have I earned it - so I will not squander it. And, this play is just too good. You are a once in a lifetime talent Tennessee. I see it. I know writers - and I don't know if you know this yet, but as far as writers go, you are one of the best. And I've only read one of your plays. (*beat*) Now, you wouldn't happen to know where I could find some gin?

TENNESSEE

At a bar. But we have hours of rehearsal left.

LAURETTE

Oh Valentine. Lighten up.

TENNESSEE

I'm trying.

LAURETTE

Try harder. And call your mother.

Laurette exits.