

*Starlight III**by B. E. Turner*

A one act play of about 15 minutes duration.

CAST:

DON: Husband of Jan.

JAN: Wife of Don.

SCENE: A lounge or other suitable location at night.

SET: A minimum set would be two sitting appurtenances, one for each character.

PRODUCTION: There should be no black-outs during the course of the presentation. Where the word *Silence* appears in the script there should be a substantial *Silence* during which the actors do not move about the stage, although they may move about either before or after the *Silence* (which is possibly the best place to.) It is up to the director to define appropriate moves and lighting plot.

NOTES: The astronomical details are accurate. The play was written for Jane Roach and David Stephens who presented the first version (now called *Starlight II*) in March 1992 and a discarded version in July 1992, both at Stagecraft Theatre, Wellington. This is the final version. It was first presented at Corner Theatre by Ian Gainsford and Jo Stenning, directed by Ann Elliot-Smith, in June 1993. The original title was *Night*. (Inspired by Pinter's play.)

Don is sitting in a lounge chair reading a newspaper, book or magazine. Jan is looking from the window.

Silence

DON: *(Looks up)* Is there something exciting happening outside?
JAN: *(Turns back)* Exciting? No.
DON: I'm not missing a fireworks display am I?
JAN: No. It's just the night. It's very dark.
DON: Quite clear and still is it?
JAN: Yes. *(Pause)* I've been watching a star. It's been moving.
DON: Moving?
JAN: There's a twig that makes a V with a branch of the magnolia tree. The star has moved from one side of the V to the other. Now it's behind the branch. I didn't know that stars moved. I thought they were fixed in the sky.
DON: Stars don't move. It is the Earth that moves.
JAN: Really?
DON: The stars and the sun appear to move, but in reality it is the Earth that moves. It rotates on it's axis.
JAN: How did you know that?
DON: I read it. In a book on astronomy.
JAN: Do you think there would be people there?
DON: People? Where?
JAN: On the star.
DON: You couldn't have people living on a star. A star is like the sun. Anybody living on the surface of a star would be instantly vapourised. The temperature is over five thousand degrees. It is even hotter at the centre.
JAN: Five thousand degrees? Fahrenheit or Centigrade?
DON: I can't remember.
JAN: Surely the stars are smaller than our sun.
DON: No. Some of them are smaller, but some of them are much larger. The radius of some stars extends as far as from the sun to the earth.
JAN: But they look smaller.
DON: That is because they are a long way away.
JAN: And a star is like our sun?
DON: A star is just a ball of incandescent gas. If you flew a spacecraft at one it would fly right through.
JAN: I thought you said it would be vapourised.
DON: I am assuming the spacecraft would be resistant to heat. *(Pause)* There are many types of stars. The types are given the letters O,B,A,F,G,K,M,N and S. Our sun is a type G star.
JAN: How could you possibly remember that series of letters?
DON: Because of the phrase: "Oh Be A Fine Girl, Kiss Me Now. Smack!".
JAN: Scientists are childish. If stars were suns they could have planets around them couldn't they, like our Earth goes around our Sun?
DON: I don't know.
JAN: Didn't your astronomy book tell you about other planets?
DON: I don't think the scientists have seen any planets around other stars. The telescopes aren't large enough.
JAN: But they could be there, even though they can't be seen.

DON: Possibly.

Silence

JAN: I think that star was shining the night we first met.

DON: I'm sure it was. Stars never go out.

JAN: You aren't in a very romantic mood tonight.

DON: No. I'm in a scientific mood.

JAN: I'm sure I saw it shining, in the sky. I remember, I asked the taxi to stop at the gate, because the night was so still and warm. I walked up the drive to the house. I remember the friendly feeling of growing things all around. I could smell the earth and the plants. I knew that Marjory grew roses, but I could not smell them. Wasn't it you that told me that the aroma of roses is most redolent when the sun is on them?

DON: I think it was.

JAN: As I came up to the front door I looked up through the branches of a tree, and I am sure I saw that star.

DON: It could not have been that particular star.

JAN: Why not?

DON: It's away from the pole. It was spring then. It is autumn now. In each season the night has a different population of stars.

JAN: Does it? Why is that?

DON: Because the Earth travels around the sun, once a year.

JAN: You are in a very scientific mood tonight.

DON: Perhaps. But I remember quite well the night we met. I don't remember the stars though. I think I spent the early part of the evening at the club. I was at a bit of a loose end and Carruthers asked me if I'd make up the numbers at a dinner party. We drove there in my car. It was leather upholstery and cigars you know. Man's things. We stopped at the front door and walked straight in. We didn't look at the sky. Black tie wasn't it?

JAN: Yes black tie. Very formal.

DON: The only person I knew was Carruthers. Why did they sit me next to you?

JAN: It was my partner that, defected.

DON: Oh.

JAN: That was why you had to make up the numbers.

DON: You never told me that.

JAN: It was just a silly affair. It's strange isn't it, our old affairs never seem to have happened now, there's just you and me.

DON: Yes.

JAN: Together.

DON: Yes.

JAN: Poor old Jonathon. I told him it was over, and when I suggested that we still keep the appointment at Marjory's for the sake of form he got the most terrible headache. You see I knew I was due to meet someone, braver. It was in the stars.

DON: You and your astrology. The stars could not possibly have any influence on what we do. They are too far away.

JAN: That's what you think. *(Silence)* Did you look in on the children?

DON: Yes. Fast asleep.

JAN: I thought I heard a cry.

DON: Just that old morepork (owl) I think.

JAN: It could have been. *(Silence)* I'm trying to remember what we talked about on the night we met.

DON: I seem to remember discussing the weather.

JAN: That's right. You said you that it might be a fine day for the cricket tomorrow, and I said "What cricket?".

DON: Did I really?

JAN: Yes. Is that what you always used to say to women when you met them for the first time?

DON: Good heavens no. I remember seeing you sitting there and I was so flabbergasted I said the first thing that came into my head.

JAN: Flabbergasted?

DON: At your beauty. I was absolutely bowled over.

JAN: Were you? I didn't realise... When I first saw you I thought you were someone, special. But your statement seemed so gauche, I couldn't understand it. Did you really, admire me when you first saw me?

DON: Love at first sight.

JAN: I didn't realise. You didn't tell me. We could have become, lovers, that night.

DON: I wanted to. I think I indicated as much when we went out onto the balcony after dinner.

JAN: You didn't even look at the stars, you didn't even breathe in the aromatic night, you just suddenly grabbed me in your arms and tried to kiss me.

DON: I didn't really grab you did I, not roughly?

JAN: You did. Not roughly but quite firmly. It seemed quite out of character. Why did you do that?

DON: I was afraid. I thought the clock might strike twelve and that the whole cloth with it's painted figures would crumple and dissolve into the air. I thought your reality was too fragile to be sustained. I had to touch it to find out if there was something to grasp hold of.

JAN: It was a foolish thing to do. It almost ended our relationship then and there.

DON: Did it?

JAN: How could any woman with a sense of morality allow a man to take her in such a casual fashion? If I had permitted you to, take advantage, you would have thought me, cheap. You wouldn't have wanted to have anything more to do with me.

DON: Perhaps. *(Pause)* I know it was a mistake, but you saved the moment.

JAN: Did I? How?

DON: You pushed me away, quite gently, and then you gave me your card. So formal. It was then that I realised that you weren't a dream.

JAN: Silly. How could I be a dream?

DON: All our affairs are transient. People come and go, there's no permanence about anything. I didn't want you to decay and disappear, not like all the other things in this world.

JAN: So you knew how you felt about me at that stage?

DON: Yes.

JAN: Well if you knew why weren't you able to express it in a proper manner?

DON: Just imagine if I had suddenly said that I loved you dearly and wanted to be with you forever; wouldn't you have thought that a bit odd?

JAN: Well yes, I might have, but it wouldn't have changed my feelings about you.

DON: How was I to know you had, feelings about me?

JAN: You must have known, in your heart.

DON: But you were a stranger to me then.

JAN: How could I be a stranger? We were lovers from the moment we first saw each other.

DON: You were a stranger according to the world of convention. You know, the convention with affairs.

JAN: But you didn't follow that convention. One is supposed to get to know one's potential partner, and then, sometime later, a question is asked.

DON: I know that. It is what happened in the end though.

JAN: Yes. *(Pause)* But I never really understood why you made that advance the way you did.

DON: I told you, it was a mistake in the heat of the moment. You must forgive me you know. It was all in the past.

JAN: Yes. In the past.

DON: And that is no longer the present.

Silence

JAN: Did you think, when you met me, that we would get married and live together?

DON: I don't know. I think I did somehow. One always expects to marry a special person, but one isn't always prepared for the shock of recognition.

JAN: No, one is not prepared. It was only when you took me out to The Ritz a week later that things began to develop in a satisfactory manner. If we really felt like that about each other on the night we met, why couldn't we express it?

DON: I was awkward and shy.

JAN: You should have been able to communicate your feelings. If we had a perfect understanding you would have known.

DON: Perfect understanding?

JAN: Yes.

DON: I don't know what you mean by perfect understanding.

JAN: We should be able to know all there is to know about each other. You should be able to know exactly how I feel, all the time. And I should be able to know all about your feelings?

DON: It is a thing that is not possible in practice. How can I live inside your skin? How can I live inside your mind? I would have to have extra-sensory perception in order to do that.

JAN: We should be able to. We should be able to, if we have a marriage that was ordained in heaven.

DON: Ordained in heaven?

JAN: You said yourself you experienced a recognition. It must have been inevitable. It must have been foretold. It must have been in the stars.

DON: I told you, I don't believe in astrology.

JAN: You see we don't have perfect understanding.

DON: Is that what you mean by perfect understanding?

JAN: What?
DON: Being able to read each other's minds?
JAN: Yes.
DON: We don't have that.
JAN: No.
DON: But we do have, something special.
JAN: Do we? What is that?
DON: We are good friends aren't we? We are well suited and our life together is an admirable partnership. We like to be together and we love each other.
JAN: Yes. But is that all there is too it?
DON: There may be more to it, but you can't deny our customs and our culture.
JAN: I know. We go out to dinner with the Carlton's and you introduce me to them as 'my wife' in the same way as you would introduce 'my dog' or 'my car'. We follow the vagaries of the stock-market and the weather with pragmatic concern.
DON: That's the way we live.
JAN: And underneath all that...
DON: Yes?
JAN: Underneath all that, we might really have perfect understanding.
DON: We might.

Silence

JAN: The night is a black curtain, sewn with shining sequins. If you pulled it aside what would you see?
DON: I don't know.
JAN: All this stuff that we have around us. Can't we just tear it away?
DON: What for?
JAN: There might be a different world behind the tinsel. Elves with tinkling bells. Something wonderful. We might find a deeper kind of knowledge.
DON: It's just a dream isn't it?
JAN: A dream?
DON: What would you see if the illusion were broken?
JAN: I don't know.
DON: You never know what's behind the scene. There could be rough and unpainted rafters. Dilapidated flats piled up against the wall, and the stage manager eating fish and chips, not this marvellous voluptuous scenery. You might see an old man with a key, winding up the universe. We have to live our ordinary lives, that's all. It's not our course to investigate other forms of reality.
JAN: No I suppose not.
DON: If we tear away the illusion we might find perfect understanding, but we might find darkness.
JAN: Darkness? What do you mean, darkness?
DON: The darkness, of the night.
JAN: But the night is not dark, it is full of stars.
DON: A different night. *(Pause)* It is better to accept what we have.
JAN: I suppose so.
DON: It is better.

Silence

JAN: Did you say that the stars changed with the seasons?
DON: The stars of the zodiac do, not the stars around the poles.
JAN: Why don't the stars around the poles change?
DON: Because the axis of rotation of the Earth is inclined at an angle to the ecliptic.
JAN: That is perfectly clear.
DON: It would take me some time to explain it. That is if I understood it properly myself.
JAN: And when you look at the stars, do you hear them sing?
DON: Sing? No, I was never conscious of hearing them sing.
JAN: A majestic symphony of silence.
DON: (*Somewhat aside*) Of course. How else might they sing?

Silence

JAN: (*Listens*) There's the cry of that morepork (owl) again.
DON: Yes, I told you it was a morepork (an owl) .
JAN: Don, I can see the star.
DON: What star?
JAN: The star I saw before. The one that shone on the night we met.
DON: Oh, that star.
JAN: It's just peeping out from behind the bough. It's moved that far while we have been talking.
DON: It shows you how far a star can travel in twenty minutes.
JAN: You know, there could be people up there like us. They could be sitting in their lounges and looking up at our sun which would look like a star to them. They could be having conversations just like this.
DON: We'll never know.
JAN: But they must get frightfully dizzy, whizzing around the sky like that.
DON: Oh, you are a most unscientific person.

CURTAIN