The Glass Menagerie

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Born in Columbus, MS, Williams moved to St. Louis, Missouri as a child. His father was a heavy drinker, and his mother was prone to hysterical fits. At age sixteen, the already prolific Williams won five dollars for an essay entitled "Can a Good Wife be a Good Sport?" Williams attended the University of Missouri, where he frequently entered writing contests as a source of extra income. After Williams failed military training during junior year, his father pulled him out of college and put him to work in a shoe factory, which Williams despised. At age twenty-four, Williams suffered a nervous breakdown and left his job. He studied at Washington University in St. Louis and then at the University of Iowa, finally graduating in 1938.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Great Depression of the 1930s deeply affected the United States economically as well as psychologically. Jim mentions the Chicago Word's Fair of 1934, an exhibition symbolizing the promise of American industry and the possibility of escape. But the history that most clearly impacts The Glass Menagerie is Tennessee Williams own personal history. *The Glass Menagerie* is deeply autobiographical in many ways. Williams's real name is Thomas, or Tom: "Tennessee" comes from his father's home state. Williams's mother, Evelina, had been a Southern belle, and his father was both tyrannical and frequently absent. Williams was very close with his elder sister Rose, who was delicate and supposedly mentally ill. Laura's nickname "Blue Roses," a mis-hearing of "pleurosis," also links her to Rose. In 1943, Rose underwent a pre-frontal lobotomy, and Williams felt guilty that he hadn't been able to help her more, since he had long since left the family home in St. Louis. *The Glass Menagerie* is a memory play for both Tom Wingfield and Tom "Tennessee" Williams as they try to overcome their regrets and to reconcile themselves with the past.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

A Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams's 1947 play, features Blanche du Bois, an aging Southern belle who shares many similarities with Amanda Wingfield. Like *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is set inside a tenement apartment, and the play revolves around tense familial relations as well as memories, dreams, and different characters' ideas about escape. In Thornton Wilder's 1938 play *Our Town*, the character of the Stage Manager speaks directly to the audience and presents a symbolic framework, much as Tom does in *The Glass Menagerie*. Arthur Miller's 1949 play *Death of a Salesman* explores family dynamics and failed dreams.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Glass Menagerie*
- **When Written:** Williams worked on various drafts during the 1930s and 1940s. Much of the play is based on his 1943 short story "Portrait of a Girl in Glass."
- **Where Written:** Around the United States, though primarily Los Angeles, California.
- **When Published:** The play premiered in Chicago in 1944 and moved to Broadway in 1945. Random House published the play in 1945.
- **Literary Period:** Late Modernism
- **Genre:** Memory play
- **Setting:** St. Louis, Missouri in the 1930s
- **Climax:** The Gentleman Caller's visit in scenes six and seven, particularly when the glass unicorn shatters.
- **Point of View:** Tom narrates the play and also is a character in it.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Laugh Menagerie. Christopher Durang's one-act play *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls* is a parody of *The Glass Menagerie*, featuring the pathologically shy Lawrence and his collection of glass cocktail stirrers. ("This one is called string bean because it's long and thin," he says. "I call this one thermometer because it looks like a thermometer.")

Glass Blue Roses. At the turn of the twentieth century, the German glassmakers Leopold and Rudolph Blaschka created hundreds of biological models entirely of glass. Famed for their scientific precision and prized for their exquisite beauty, these extraordinarily finely detailed glass marine animals and glass flowers receive thousands of visitors every year at Harvard University's Museum of Natural History.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Glass Menagerie is a memory play, and all the events are drawn from the memories of the play's narrator, Tom Wingfield, who is also a character in the play. The curtain rises to reveal the dimly lit Wingfield apartment, located in a lower-class tenement building in St. Louis. The apartment is entered by a **fire escape**. Tom stands on the fire escape and addresses the audience to set the scene. The play takes place in St. Louis in

the nineteen-thirties. Tom works in a warehouse to support his mother, Amanda, and his sister, Laura. A gentleman caller, Tom says, will appear in the final scenes of the play. Tom and Laura's father abandoned the family many years ago, and except for a single postcard reading "Hello––Goodbye!" has not been heard from since.

Tom enters the apartment, and the action of the play begins. Throughout the play, thematic **music** underscores many of the key moments. The Wingfields are seated at dinner. Amanda nags Tom about his table manners and his smoking. She regales Tom and Laura with memories of her youth as a Southern belle in Blue Mountain, courted by scores of gentleman callers. The stories are threadbare from constant repetition, but Tom and Laura let Amanda tell them again, Tom asking her questions as though reading from a script. Amanda is disappointed when Laura, for what appears to be the umpteenth time, says that she will never receive any gentleman callers.

Amanda has enrolled Laura in business college, but weeks later, Amanda discovers that Laura dropped out after the first few classes because of her debilitating social anxiety. Laura spends her days wandering alone around the park and the zoo. Laura also spends much of her time caring for her **glass menagerie**, a collection of glass figurines. Amanda is frustrated but quickly changes course, deciding that Laura's best hope is to find a suitable man to marry. Laura tells Amanda about Jim, a boy that she had a crush on in high school. Amanda begins to raise extra money for the family by selling subscriptions for a women's glamour magazine.

Tom, who feels stifled in both his job and his family life, writes poetry while at the warehouse. He escapes the apartment night after night through **movies**, drinking, and literature. Tom and Amanda argue bitterly, he claiming that she does not respect his privacy, she claiming that he must sacrifice for the good of the family. During one particularly heated argument, precipitated by Tom's manuscripts pouring out of the **typewriter**, Tom accidentally shatters some of Laura's precious glass animals.

Tom stumbles back early one morning and tells Laura about a magic trick involving a man who escapes from a nailed-up coffin. Tom sees the trick as symbolic of his life. Due to Laura's pleading and gentle influence, Tom and Amanda eventually reconcile. They unite in their concern for Laura. Amanda implores Tom not to abandon the family as her husband did. She asks him to find a potential suitor for Laura at the warehouse. After a few months, Tom brings home his colleague Jim O'Connor, whom he knew in high school and who calls Tom "Shakespeare." Amanda is overjoyed and throws herself into a whirlwind of preparation, fixing up the lighting in the apartment and making a new dress for Laura. When Laura first sees Jim and realizes that he is her high-school love, she is terrified; she answers the door but quickly dashes away. Amanda emerges in a gaudy, frilly, girlish dress from her youth and affects a thick Southern accent, as though *she* is the one receiving the gentleman caller. Laura is so overcome by the whole scene that she refuses to join the table, instead lying on the sofa in the living room.

After dinner, the lights in the apartment go out because Tom has not paid the electricity bill––instead, as Tom and Jim know but Laura and Amanda don't, Tom has paid his dues to join the merchant marines. Amanda lights candles, and Jim joins Laura by candlelight in the living room. Laura slowly warms up and relaxes in Jim's gently encouraging company. Laura reminds Jim that they knew each other in high school and that he had nicknamed her **"Blue Roses,"** a mispronunciation of her childhood attack of pleurosis. Jim tells Laura that she must overcome her inferiority complex through confidence. Laura shows Jim her glass collection and lets him hold the **glass unicorn**, her favorite. They begin to dance to the strains of a waltz coming from across the street. As they dance, however, Jim knocks over the unicorn, breaking off its horn.

Jim kisses Laura but immediately draws back, apologizing and explaining that he has a fiancée. Laura is devastated but tries not to show it. She gives him the broken glass unicorn as a souvenir. Amanda re-enters the living room and learns about Jim's fiancée. After he leaves, she accuses Tom of playing a trick on them. Tom storms out of the house to the movies, and Amanda tells him to go to the moon. Tom explains that he got fired from his job not long after Jim's visit and that he left his mother and sister. However, no matter how far he goes, he cannot leave his emotional ties behind. The play is his final act of catharsis to purge himself of the memories of his family.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tom Wingfield – Amanda's son and Laura's brother, Tom plays a dual role in the play as both the narrator and protagonist. The play is from the perspective of Tom's memories. He addresses the audience directly to frame and present analysis of the events, but he also participates in the play's actions as a character within his own recollections. Tom feels fettered by the constraints of his job and his family and yearns for escape in all aspects of his life. Dissatisfied with his monotonous warehouse job, he writes poetry on the side and plots a future in the merchant marines. Tom frequently goes to the fire escape and smokes cigarettes, symbolically escaping the house yet remaining trapped onstage and in the tenement. He goes to the movies night after night, attempting to escape into action-adventure narrative; he also attempts to escape through alcohol, as indicated by the bottles poking out of his pockets. The oscillation between Tom's desire for freedom and inability to escape forms the emotional tension underlying the entire play. Although Tom leaves his family in the end, abandoning

Amanda and Laura to pursue an independent future, the fact that he has created this play shows that he can never truly leave his memories, and therefore his family, behind.

Amanda Wingfield – Tom and Laura's mother. Amanda was a Southern belle in her youth, and she clings to this romantic vision of her past rather than accepting her current circumstances of poverty and abandonment. Amanda does not live in the past; rather, she lives in her own version of the present that she sees through the veil of memories and illusions. Unlike Tom and Laura, who retreat into their own private fantasies to escape from reality, Amanda lives her daily life through the rose-tinted glasses of her memories and dreams. Amanda is pragmatic in many ways––for example, she makes ends meet by selling magazine subscriptions. However, Amanda's vision of the way she thinks her world should work and the reality of the situation often do not intersect. She constantly nags Tom, and she refuses to accept Laura's peculiarities, projecting her own ideals of femininity onto Laura rather than accepting or even recognizing her daughter for who she is. Amanda is both a very comic and deeply tragic figure. Her exaggerated, larger-than-life statements and actions are often so out of touch with reality that they seem quite funny. However, her self-delusion and inability to see the world around her is also sad and painful to watch. For example, when the Gentleman Caller comes to visit, Amanda puts on a frilly dress she had worn as a young ingénue, slips into a thick Southern accent, and minces daintily around the apartment, as though she were sixteen again. Her actions are absurd, but she cannot see how desperately and pathetically she is acting, which makes the scenario tragic.

Laura Wingfield – Tom's sister and Amanda's daughter. Laura is deeply fragile, both emotionally and physically: she is painfully shy, and a childhood illness has left one leg slightly shorter than the other, making her walk with a limp. The glass menagerie of the title refers to Laura's prized collection that she carefully polishes and rearranges. Laura herself is as delicate, beautiful, and otherworldly as her miniature animals, and she retreats from the anxiety of social interactions and the pressures of daily life by slipping into a fantasy world populated with beautiful, immortal objects: she goes walking in the park, visits the zoo and the greenhouses, plays the Victrola, and immerses herself in her glass collection. Her nickname, "Blue Roses," derives from Jim's mishearing of "pleurosis," the disease that left her crippled. Both Tom and Jim see Laura as like a blue rose, exotic and frail in her rarity. Yet despite her fragility, Laura does not willfully delude herself about the nature of her reality. She accepts her leg injury and her shyness without trying to pretend that she is another version of herself. When she confesses her schoolgirl crush for Jim O'Connor before he enters the play as the Gentleman Caller, she does not spin a wild fantasy life of wedded bliss between herself and Jim, but rather presents the memory as though it were a glass animal itself, a beautiful but immobile creature. Indeed, although Laura is symbolically linked with the fragile glass and the exotic Blue Roses, she may have the most strength and willpower of anyone in the play. Laura serves as peacemaker between Tom and Amanda, soothing both parties and helping to mend some of the wounds. When Tom escapes at the end of the play, he realizes that as far as he goes, he can never abandon Laura: "Oh, Laura, Laura," Tom exclaims, "I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!"

Jim O'Connor – The Gentleman Caller whose arrival in scene six spurs the play's climax. Tennessee Williams's stage directions describe Jim as "a nice, ordinary, young man." Jim works with Tom at the warehouse. He and Tom were acquaintances in high school, where Jim was the hero: sports star, lead in the theater productions, class president, etc. Jim is Tom's foil, the steady, working man who is neither haunted by the past nor yearns for a seemingly impossible future. Unlike the play's other characters, Jim does not visibly long for escape from his present situation. Instead, he is content in his working-class, ordinary lifestyle. Jim is pleasant and affable, amused by Tom's poetic inclinations and sympathetic to his ambitions rather than threatened or confused. When Tom invites Jim over for dinner, he knows that Laura knew Jim in high school, but he does not know that she had such a profound crush on him. After he comes to dinner, Jim exits the Wingfields' world to return to his fiancée and his real life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mr. Wingfield – The absent father of Tom and Laura and husband of Amanda. He never appears on stage, but his portrait dominates the living room, and his presence looms throughout the play.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MEMORY

In his monologue that opens the play, Tom announces, "The play is memory." The play is Tom's memory of the past, and all of the action takes place in his head. That action is therefore dramatic, sentimental, and emotional, not realistic. As is fitting in a play that is itself a memory of the past, in *The Glass Menagerie* the past haunts all the characters.

Tom the character (the Tom who Tom is remembering as he "creates" the play) feels trapped by memory. He sees the past

as a physical and emotional restraint that prevents him from living his life. And yet there is something in it that holds him, too—he is compelled to return to memory over and over again. His repetitive actions, such as smoking and going to the movies, demonstrate both his desire to escape and the relentless cycle of the past. And the fact that the play itself is a memory he feels the need to transform into a play suggests that Tom has still not escaped that past. Amanda uses her memories like a veil to shield her from reality. She clings to the Southern belle version of herself who received seventeen gentleman callers in a weekend.

As the play progresses, and things do not work out as Amanda hopes they will, she clutches the past more desperately. When the gentleman caller arrives, she wears a ridiculously frilled dress and slips into a Southern accent, becoming her former self rather than accepting the reality of her present situation. Laura retreats to the past as a safe haven, a perfect world removed from time. Her delicate memories, such as being called "Blue Roses," are much like her fragile glass menagerie in their perfection and fragility. Unlike the other characters, Jim is not haunted by his past: he remembers his youth but does not feel the need to re-live it. Nonetheless, when the Wingfield's treat him as the high-school hero he used to be, and with the help of the candlelight and the music, he seems to slip into this memory. But when the glass unicorn breaks and the spell is broken, he returns to his own life, outside the Wingfields' memories.

ABANDONMENT

The male characters in the play all abandon Amanda and Laura. The father, whom we never see, has abandoned the family: he worked for the telephone company and "fell in love with long distances." The traumatic effect of this abandonment on Amanda, and Amanda's resulting fear about her own helplessness, is clear in her relentless quest for Laura to gain business skills and then to marry. Jim's abandonment of Laura forms the play's dramatic climax: the Wingfield's (not to mention the audience) hope against hope that somehow he will stay, though there is always the sense that he cannot, even before the glass unicorn shatters. Tom, meanwhile, spends the entire play in tension between his love for his mother and sister and his desire to pursue his own future, thus abandoning his family. Yet, at the same time, Tom has in some sense *already* abandoned Amanda and Laura before the play has even begun, since the entire play is actually his memory of the past.

But does Tom really abandon his family? Even though he leaves them physically, the fact that he remembers them through the act of creating the play indicates that he has never entirely left, that in leaving them he paradoxically became closer to them, more deeply connected to them. He left them, but in the play he also immortalizes them, transforms Amanda and Laura into a kind of glass menagerie of his own. "Oh Laura, Laura," he says at the play's end, "I tried to leave you behind, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!"

ILLUSIONS AND DREAMS

Tom explains that in creating the play from his memory that he is giving "truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion," and the stage directions of the play are designed to create a nostalgic, sentimental, non-realistic atmosphere to create the unreal yet heightened effects of a dream. The lighting in each scene adds emphasis and shadows: for example, the electric light that goes out, the candelabra, moonlight, the paper lantern that hides the broken lightbulb, Tom's lit cigarette, all draw attention to the artistic, emotional, and artificial nature of the play. The stage illusions in the gentleman caller scene—the switch from electricity to candlelight, the music on the Victrola—further this sense of an unreal, dreamlike realm. Though the scene begins as comedy, the lighting and music tenderly develop it into romance, which then shatters into tragedy as the glass unicorn breaks and the dream shifts suddenly back to reality.

The characters in the play are also full of dreams, though these dreams operate in different ways. Tom dreams about escape from his present life. He writes poetry in the warehouse, discusses joining the merchant marines, and escapes into action-adventure movies. He comments to Jim, at one point, that *all* of the people at the movies are there to escape into illusion and avoid real life. Amanda's dreams are desperate attempts to escape the sadness of her present, and as such they become self-delusions, blinding her to reality and to the desires of her children. She insists that Tom *will* fulfill her vision of him as the successful businessman. And when the dream of Laura in business school falls apart, rather than see reality Amanda constructs a new fantasy life for her daughter in the realm of gentleman callers and marriage prospects.

For Laura, dreams do not take the form of ambitions, but instead offer her a refuge from the pain of reality. Unlike Amanda, Laura does not delude herself by pretending that her physical disabilities do not exist. Instead, she retreats from the world by surrounding herself with perfect, immortal objects, like her glass menagerie and the "Jewel Box" she visits instead of going to business school classes. Tom suggests that Jim might have once had high hopes for himself but has since slipped into mediocrity, which might show Tom projecting onto Jim and not necessarily how Jim sees himself. Unlike the Wingfields, Jim neither lives in a dream world of the past nor in a secret future dream-life, but in the present. And yet Jim is himself hoping for a career in radio and television—an industry that might be described as being in the business of creating dreams or believable illusions—and in this way the play suggests that the Wingfield's are not alone in their susceptibility to dreams.

ESCAPE

Escape in the play operate in two directions: from the real world into the world of memory and dreams, as Amanda and Laura demonstrate; or from the world of memory and dreams into the real world, as Tom desires. Amanda and Laura escape reality by retreating into dream worlds. Amanda refuses to see things as they are, insisting on seeing what she wants to see. Amanda still lives as a past version of herself, even as she projects ambitions onto Laura. Rather than accepting Laura's peculiarities or Tom's unhappiness, she escapes into her fantasy version of the world as she thinks it should be.

Laura escapes from the imposing structures of reality into worlds she can control and keep perfect: her memories, the glass menagerie, the freedom of walking through the park. When Amanda confronts Laura, she tries to escape by playing music loudly enough to block out the argument. However, both Amanda and Laura *can* see their present situations, and they do try to make their realities better. Amanda raises subscriptions for magazines to earn money. Instead of escaping the fighting, Laura serves as peacemaker between Amanda and Tom.

Tom does not want to escape into dreams or other fantasy worlds—he wants to physically escape, to leave. And even when he can't bring himself to actually leave, he is constantly escaping from something: he escapes from the apartment onto the fire escape; he escapes from the coffin in the magic show; and he sneaks away at the warehouse to write poetry, a mental and physical escape from a menial job. He fantasizes about joining the merchant marines and escaping from not only his claustrophobic life but also the landlocked Midwest. Tom goes to the movies every night to watch an escapist fantasy on the screen. He also uses alcohol to escape reality: we see bottles in his pockets, and "going to the movies" is a euphemism for getting drunk. Yet all of Tom's escape mechanisms are cyclical: while they offer the promise of freedom, they also trap him. "I'm leading a double life," Tom shouts at Amanda at the end of Scene Three. He intends to hurt her so that he might break free of her power over him, but ultimately, he can't escape his love for his family.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GLASS MENAGERIE

The title of the play, and the play's most prominent symbol, the glass menagerie represents Laura's fragility, otherworldliness, and tragic beauty. The collection embodies Laura's imaginative world, her haven from society. The old-fashioned, somewhat childlike, timeless nature of the menagerie further highlights Tom's depiction of Laura as a figure who exists outside the traditional confines of time and space. The glass menagerie also represents the vulnerability of memory and of dream worlds: one false move and the entire shimmering universe can shatter. The idea of a "glass menagerie" becomes representative for anything that is too beautiful and too fragile to survive in harsh reality.

FIRE ESCAPE

Tom frequently stands on the apartment's fire escape, a literal and figurative temporary release from the confines of his daily life. Tom smokes on the fire escape, removing himself from the metaphorical domestic fires by lighting his own flame, which also symbolizes his desire to control his destiny rather than be consumed by his family and his history. His frequent escape to the fire escape foreshadows his eventual departure from the apartment. In contrast, the one time Laura is forced onto the fire escape, she stumbles, emphasizing how inextricably she is bound to life in the Wingfield world.

GLASS UNICORN

The glass unicorn, Laura's favorite figurine, is particularly representative of how Tom envisions Laura: beautiful but magical and unique. When Jim breaks the glass unicorn, it becomes a normal horse, no longer a magical creature. The unicorn's shattering occurs just before Jim kisses Laura, but it signals the impossibility for Jim and Laura to be together: she cannot exist in his world without breaking. Laura presents the broken unicorn to Jim as a souvenir. The figurine becomes a memory of Laura that Jim can bring with him when he leaves Laura and returns to his life, but it also signifies the normal woman that Laura will never become.

BLUE ROSES

Jim calls Laura "Blue Roses," a mispronunciation of "pleurosis," a disease that caused Laura to miss some school during high school. The name "Blue Roses" turns Laura's defect into an asset: her unusual, otherworldly qualities are seen as special rather than debilitating. Laura is closely based on Tennessee Williams's sister, Rose, who underwent a lobotomy while Williams was writing the play, and the nickname is also likely in tribute to her.

MUSIC

Tennessee Williams's stage directions frequently call for music to underscore key moments in a scene. "The Glass Menagerie" theme repeats frequently

throughout the play. Laura and Amanda associate music with the absent Mr. Wingfield, who left the family his Victrola. The Victrola player provides Laura an auditory escape and contrasts with the clickety-clack of the **typewriter**, which reminds her of her failed attempt to attend business college. Laura also associates music with Jim, whom she met in the school choir; Jim, we are told, has a beautiful voice.

THE MOVIES

Tom escapes to the movies night after night, immersing himself in action-adventure films, envisioning himself as the hero of narratives other than the one in which he's stuck. Yet the movies can only provide a temporary, and therefore false, escape: Tom goes to the cinema to live alternate lives, but he must always return to his own. "The movies" themselves are also a code within the play: sometimes Tom does go to the cinema, but sometimes he uses "going to the movies" as a euphemism for drinking, a different sort of escape. The movies also provide a commentary on the nature of theater itself: just as the audience is escaping reality by watching a play, Tom escapes the reality of his play by watching a theatrical spectacle.

TYPEWRITER

For Laura, the **typewriter** symbolizes the confines of the business world that she escapes by walking in the park or immersing herself in her glass menagerie. For Amanda, the typewriter comes to signify both Laura's failure to finish her business course as well as Tom's failure to commit himself more fully to his warehouse job. For Tom, however, the typewriter serves as a means of escape from the confines of his world, as he uses it to compose his manuscripts.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the New Directions edition of *The Glass Menagerie* published in 1999.

Scene 1 Quotes

The apartment...is entered by a fire escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

The play opens with a long, poetic stage direction that sets the scene and tone. Williams uses elaborate, lengthy stage directions throughout the play, and these stage directions provide a very firm interpretive grip over the actions in the play, since Williams deliberately does not leave much room for ambiguous interpretations of the type of mood or tone that he wants to convey. These lush, evocative descriptions also make the play more able to be visualized immediately by a person reading the script rather than sitting in the theater. This is a play that lends itself to being experienced as a written text as well as a drama realized in performance. The stage directions go well beyond the realm of nuts-and-bolts descriptions intended to tell the director what is supposed to be on the stage, painting the intended mood and atmosphere through the description as well. Williams is also showing off his chops as a writer, reminding the reader that even though Tom might assert himself to be the author of the events of the play, Williams is ultimately the master of events. Here, notably, he introduces idea of "escape" through the very name of his symbolic stage prop, the fire escape.

The scene is memory and therefore nonrealistic.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Tennessee Williams presents this vision of the play as a stage direction, not as a voiced statement in the play itself. Williams is not trying to create the illusion of reality, that is, that the audience is watching something happening in real-time and in real life. Rather, Tennessee Williams wants the audience members to be fully aware that they are watching an artistic, subjective representation of certain events. Tom is both a character in the play's action and the "author" of the play--and the person in whose memory all the action takes place. This stage direction suggests that the set be symbolic and suggestive (perhaps of a kind of nostalgia or blurred memory), since the audience is meant to be fully aware of the interaction between art and life. Indeed, much of the tension in the play comes through the friction between idealized conceptions of the past and the truths of the present day. Since the play is filtered through Tom's

perspective and memory, the audience does not get to see an unfiltered version of the action, but rather the perception of past events as Tom himself saw them both at the time and how he recalls them now.

> Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

This is the first line that Tom, the narrator of the play, says, thus presenting himself as the author of the events that are to come. Tom is both a character in the play's drama and the manipulator of the scene that the audience sees. Tom doesn't spell out exactly what he will give the audience. Instead, he declares that he will give truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion--thus asserting that the events of the play are objectively "true," but filtered and softened through his memory and the artifice of the theatre.

At the same time, there is another "magician" at work beyond the one that Tom explicitly presents. When Tom enters the stage, he himself is presented as the author of the play, and the events of the play are portrayed as springing from his own memory. However, Tennessee Williams, not Tom, is the play's real author, of course. This means that when Tom steps outside the action to set the stage, as he does in this first scene, he is still a character in a framed, fictional play. The audience is thus watching a stylized portrayal of a character who then presents an elaborately stylized portrayal of the main events of which the drama is composed--further emphasizing the illusory, dreamlike aspect of the action we are about to observe.

> There is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantel. This is our father who left us a long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances...The last we heard of him was a picture postcard...containing a message of two words: "Hello—Goodbye!"

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker), Mr. Wingfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Tom, in the role of the play's narrator, introduces his father as yet another stage prop, not as a real human being. The father only enters the play as a figure in each of the characters' memories. Although he no longer has any active interaction with any of the characters, the father looms large psychologically over the Wingfield household--and this is represented symbolically as he looms physically over the play's deliberately unrealistic set. The father's absence makes Amanda, the mother, even more domineering and insecure, both because she is the only voice of authority and because she is still in pain over her husband's disappearance. The father's absence also makes Amanda even more hectically eager to see Laura married, since she wants to redeem the failure of her own marriage by seeing her daughter happily married.

For Tom, his father's absence is a huge symbolic burden because of Tom's conflicting guilt over whether or not he should stay or leave his family. Tom feels trapped in the apartment. He wants to leave and pursue his own life, but he also does not want to be yet another male figure who betrays his mother and sister.

> Resume your seat, little sister—I want you to stay fresh and pretty—for gentleman callers!

Related Characters: Amanda Wingfield (speaker), Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Here Amanda projects her own past and her own relationships onto Laura. Rather than seeing and appreciating Laura for who she is, Amanda insists on attempting to mold Laura after the ingénue that she envisioned herself as being. Amanda calls Laura "little sister," which accentuates the psychologically strange nature of their relationship. On the one hand, "little sister" is a term of endearment, a nickname that demonstrates the affection and familiarity between these two characters. Yet "little

sister" is a strange term of endearment from a mother to a daughter. Amanda wants to retain the image of herself as an young, flirtatious woman who still receives gentleman callers, even though that version of herself is far in the past. By referring to Laura as her "sister," rather than her daughter, Amanda can still maintain her fiction about herself. Amanda also projects her memory of her former self onto Laura's present self, even though Laura, in reality, is hardly the same person as Amanda. Amanda prepares Laura for "gentlemen callers" not because Laura wants them, but because Amanda wants to demonstrate her own power and re-live her youth.

Scene 2 Quotes

❝ What are we going to do, what is going to become of us, what is the future?

Related Characters: Amanda Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

When Amanda learns that Laura is no longer in secretarial school, the "us" in Amanda's exclamation to Laura is extremely revealing. Amanda projects herself and her life onto Laura's decisions. The "us" in Amanda's sentence represents the way that Amanda often addresses Laura. Instead of saying "you," which would separate herself and her daughter, she implies through her syntax that Laura does not have any opinions or thoughts of her own that are not somehow mediated through Amanda. Amanda is speaking to Laura about Laura's revelation that she has quit her typewriting school, and as she interrogates Laura about this choice, the audience learns that she is much more concerned over the impact on *herself*, not whether or not the decision benefits or hurts Laura.

The "us" is also, therefore, a kind of royal "we." Amanda turns Laura's decision into a behavior that has been designed to impact her own life, rather than a choice that Laura made for Laura's sake. Amanda is very much the center of her universe, and she sees everyone else's lives as revolving around her own. In Amanda's point of view, people's choices are judged on a scale of how much and in what way they impact Amanda's life. Thus Laura leaving the secretarial school becomes, in Amanda's perception and Amanda's narrative, a decision that has the most consequences for Amanda.

❝ I went in the art museum and the bird houses at the Zoo...Lately I've been spending most of my afternoons in the Jewel Box, that big glass house where they raise the tropical flowers.

Related Characters: Laura Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Laura spends her days attempting to escape from reality. The art museum and the Jewel Box are, symbolically, other iterations of the glass menagerie that Laura keeps in the living room. Laura herself is like a rare tropical flower in a glass box. She is a delicate creature, unable to withstand the harsh realities of daily life. Secretary school proves too difficult for her not because of the subject matter, but because being exposed to the world day in and day out is too intense. She retreats from the school, and then she retreats from admitting to her mother that she has left the program, because this conversation is likewise too harsh a reality to face. Instead, Laura attempts to keep herself in her beautiful, delicate, and false idea of the world.

The audience also must remember that Laura's character might seem even more frail because she is being portrayed at all times through Tom's biased narration and Tom's memory. Tom remembers all the events of the play through the lens of his own guilt. He knows that he has left his family, and he feels as though this action has betrayed Laura, so he can't help but remember her as even more exquisite yet fragile than she actually might have been in real life. Tom wants Laura to seem as beautiful, delicate, and helpless as possible, because this is the vision of her that he keeps in his memory.

What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife!—stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room—encouraged by one in-law to visit another—little birdlike women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life!

Related Characters: Amanda Wingfield (speaker), Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

When Laura drops out of secretarial school, Amanda paints a gruesomely exaggerated picture of the sorry fate that an unwed, unemployed single woman must face. Since Laura has failed to secure a career, Amanda suggests that the only thing she can do is marry, even though Laura is extremely shy and does not seem very eager to pursue romance. Amanda wants to make the best of what she perceives to be a dire situation, and she latches onto her idea of what might be a sliver of hope.

Amanda is fearful about her own future. Her husband has left her, she is not trained in a career, and she is no longer an attractive young woman, which, in her own calculus, means that she may have to live off the charity of others. But instead of admitting her worries about herself, Amanda projects her fears onto Laura. Amanda still pretends that she lives as a golden past version of herself, and to admit a lack of self-confidence in her own capabilities would be to face the real world and her own flaws in a way that she's not capable of doing yet.

You'll go up, up on a broomstick, over Blue Mountain with seventeen gentleman callers! You ugly—babbling old—*witch*...

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker), Amanda Wingfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Tom and Amanda have been arguing vehemently over Tom's role in the family. Although Laura doesn't speak during the argument, the spotlight stays on her the entire time, showing that she is often at the center of their fights. Both Tom and Amanda project themselves and their concerns onto Laura. Tom desperately wants to lead an independent life, but he feels trapped at home. Tom yells at Amanda because he feels as though he has no privacy. Amanda accuses Tom of doing sordid things and ruining his reputation when he claims that he is going out to the "movies" at night. Not only does she assume that he's lying, she assumes that he is being disreputable, which will give the family and thus Amanda herself a poor reputation by association. Tom lashes out so violently against Amanda because he sees that she doesn't trust him and that she wants to control every aspect of his life. Even though Amanda is stifling Tom, Tom does not exactly demonstrate fair and balanced behavior to Amanda. Tom leaps around the stage, admitting to all the horrible deeds Amanda accuses him of undertaking.

When Tom calls Amanda a witch, however, he has gone too far, and the relationship between them literally shatters: as Tom violently leaps around the stage, he knocks over Laura's glass menagerie, and some of the animals shatter. Tom and Amanda have reached the breaking point, and this becomes literally rendered in the breaking of the animals.

Scene 4 Quotes

But the wonderfullest trick of all was the coffin trick. We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail. [*He has come inside.*] There is a trick that would come in handy for me—get me out of this two-by-four situation!...You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker), Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Tom's description of the coffin trick to Laura is deeply symbolic of the way he feels about his own life. Tom escapes the apartment when he goes to the movies at night, but the

movies can only offer an imaginary, temporary escape, and he still feels trapped day after day. Because he perceives himself to be stuck and stagnant, with no foreseeable change in his future, he feels dead, caught physically and emotionally in the same place. Tom feels as though the external forces of his mother and the world at large have kept him nailed into place, and the magician's ability to escape represents his greatest desire. However, Tom never quite articulates what he would do with his freedom.

It's important to note that Tom is also trapped inside his own head and his own memories. The apartment is a coffin, but the stage itself is also a trap for Tom. He keeps putting himself voluntarily back into the coffin of his memories because he feels too guilty to escape completely.

I go to the movies because—I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much of at work, so I go to the movies.

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

After Tom and Amanda have had their enormous fight about Tom leaving the house every night, and after Tom has called Amanda a witch, he eventually apologizes to Amanda, and they resume their conversation about the movies in a more measured, civil fashion. Amanda is afraid that Tom has inherited his father's desire for escape, which is why she objects so strongly to his fantasy life. She becomes domineering and clingy because she fears that if she loses control of Tom, he will leave the family, just as her husband has. Tom feels stifled both at home and at work, so he seeks adventure through other methods. The movies allow Tom to have the freedom, even if that freedom is imaginary, to be the hero of another story. Though Tom is trapped physically, he finds some solace in imagination. However, the movies are only a temporary relief.

The movies also serve as an intriguing parallel to the space of the theater that the play itself inhabits. *The Glass Menagerie* does not hide its theatricality and artifice. On the contrary, the play is always very aware of its status as an art object. The audience is at the play for some reason, and that reason might well be to escape from some aspect of the real world. Just as Tom seeks adventure at the movies, so the audience might be seeking adventure at the theater.

Amanda: A little silver slipper of a moon. Look over your left shoulder, Laura, and make a wish! ... Now! Now, darling, *wish!*
Laura: What shall I wish for, Mother?
Amanda [*her voice trembling, and her eyes suddenly filling with tears*]: Happiness! Good fortune!

Related Characters: Amanda Wingfield, Laura Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Laura and Amanda are in a co-dependent relationship, which stifles both of them and keeps them stuck in the past and in their own imaginations instead of moving forward into the future. Laura does not know how to desire anything for herself, so she defers to Amanda to tell her what to wish for. Laura has not had the opportunity to practice any sort of independence for herself. Amanda, meanwhile, projects her own wishes and desires onto Laura. Amanda says that she wants Laura to be happy, but Amanda does not really listen to what Laura wants. Instead, Amanda wants Laura to want Amanda's definition of happiness.

Indeed, Amanda projects all her desires onto her children. Earlier that evening, when she and Tom had been looking at the moon over the fire escape, Amanda tells Tom that she has wished for success and happiness for her children. Tom then reveals to her that he has arranged for a gentleman caller for Laura. In the first scene of the play, Tom calls himself a "magician," and now, it seems as though he is making Amanda's wishes come true. However, the scene is also tragic, since the audience knows that the happily-ever-after ending Amanda seeks will not come to pass.

Scene 6 Quotes

[Jim] seemed to move in a continual spotlight. ... He was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty.

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker), Jim O'Connor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

When Tom begins to describe Jim, the other man seems like Tom's opposite in many ways. In high school, Jim had been a star. Tom describes young Jim in a way that makes him sound like a hero in one of the adventure movies Tom now watches night after night. Tom's memory of Jim was of a perfect "golden boy" with an extremely bright future.

At present, however, the paths of the two men have converged. Despite seeming to be on such different paths at the end of high school, Jim and Tom are now both in the same position at the warehouse. Tom's description of Jim is just as influenced by memory as his description of the rest of the characters, and Jim also relies on memory and the glory of the past to help soothe the harsh realities of the present. Since Tom knew Jim in Jim's glory days, he can see him in this more flattering light, which allows Jim to see himself as the shining star he was, rather than the stalled worker he is now.

❝ A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting.

Related Characters: Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

This description of Laura as a piece of glass comes from the stage directions for the scene in which the family is preparing for Laura's gentleman caller. Since the description is written for the reader or the actor to internalize rather than for the audience to witness, the line does not move the action forward, but rather sets the symbolic tone for the scene. The stage direction also indicates that this description of Laura as glass-like is intended as symbolic. In Tom's memory, Laura is just like one of the creatures from her beloved menagerie. Like the glass, Laura is beautiful but fragile, seemingly about to break at any moment. She is also removed from the realities of the world. The world is too harsh and cruel for her, and just as Tom breaks the glass animals when he lashes out against Amanda, Laura cracks under the pressures of reality. Laura would rather live in a dream world, kept safe and untouched in a beautiful bubble.

Scene 7 Quotes

❝ Jim lights a cigarette and leans indolently back on his elbows smiling at Laura with a warmth and charm which lights her inwardly with altar candles.

Related Characters: Jim O'Connor, Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

The stage direction about Jim's cigarette emphasizes light, and throughout the scene, Williams depicts many different kinds of light, which symbolize different aspects of both hope and melancholy. The fuse box goes out and they all have to light candles, which makes the scene seem more magical and removed from harsh realities. Throughout the scene when Jim comes to visit the Wingfields, the many different kinds of light that appear are highly symbolic. Jim's cigarette demonstrates control and confidence, since it keeps a tiny, private spotlight around him at all times. Laura idolizes Jim, so to her, the cigarette comes to look like altar candles, since he represents hope. Tom describes the high school version of Jim as seeming to be under a spotlight at all times, and Jim is certainly symbolically in the spotlight throughout this whole scene. Amanda, Tom, and Laura all wish on the moon, calling attention to the moonlight, which is a softer light that symbolizes both romantic hope and foolish dreams. Jim is also like a shooting star, both in his personal life and in the role he plays in the Wingfield family. Although Jim had been a rising star in high school, his rising has stalled and his star has dimmed. When Jim comes into the Wingfield house, he seems to be a shooting star again, a ray of light that cuts through their life. However, like a shooting star, he only passes through without staying.

Jim: What kind of glass is it?
Laura: Little articles of it, they're ornaments mostly! Most of them are little animals made out of glass, the tiniest little animals in the world. Mother calls them a glass menagerie!...Oh, be careful—if you breathe, it breaks!...There now—you're holding him gently! Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him?

Related Characters: Jim O'Connor, Laura Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

When Laura describes her glass menagerie to Jim, she is also describing herself. Laura is like a tiny, delicate animal, kept in careful seclusion from the world, living in a protected fantasy life rather than entering harsh reality. However, the fact that she lives separate from the real world doesn't mean that she doesn't experience emotions and desires. Laura projects some of these emotions into the glass animals. The glass animals seem to be static and ornamental, yet they react to how they are treated and the environments they are in. The glass unicorn that Jim holds is especially symbolic of Laura herself. When he holds the unicorn to the light, the unicorn itself seems to glow (to "love the light"). The light that appears again in this quote reminds the audience of the importance of light throughout this entire scene. Even the high school yearbook is called "The Torch." Jim and Laura aren't exactly old flames, but in this moment, Jim brings light into Laura's life, which makes her glow.

Unicorns—aren't they extinct in the modern world?

Related Characters: Jim O'Connor (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Although Jim is supposedly talking about Laura's glass unicorn, he is also describing Laura herself. Laura feels a particular affection towards the glass unicorn because she sees herself in it. She is very delicate and fragile, and she does not quite exist within the normal scope of reality. Laura wanders in her own fantasy life, spending her days in gardens and greenhouses, and spending her nights cooped in the apartment. She is shy and skittish, like the mythical unicorn, and she makes others want to protect her. Jim's comment that unicorns are extinct suggests that Laura herself would also become extinct in the real world, a dim imaginary figure rather than someone living a robust, vital life in a community.

Jim's light joke about the unicorn also shows that he is humoring Laura by playing along with her as she shows him the menagerie. Though Jim is respectful and kind to Laura, he treats her glass menagerie as a pretty, innocent, somewhat childlike collection, and nothing more serious than that. To Laura, however, the glass animals are much more than mere dolls, and caring for them is an enormous part of her daily ritual. The glass animals, she feels, are dependent on her, and she takes responsibility for them.

Jim: Aw, aw, aw. Is it broken?
Laura: Now it is just like all the other horses.
Jim: It's lost its—

Laura: Horn! It doesn't matter...I don't have favorites much...I'll just imagine he had an operation. The horn was removed to make him feel less—freakish!

Related Characters: Laura Wingfield, Jim O'Connor (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

When Jim dances with Laura, they knock into the table where Jim had set the glass unicorn. The unicorn falls and its horn falls off. Laura attempts to put on a brave face, but she identifies strongly with the glass unicorn, so she feels its pain acutely. However, she suggests that the break comes as a possible blessing in disguise, as she puts it, because now, the unicorn could be treated normally ("just like all the other horses").

The unicorn's broken horn also serves as a parallel to

Laura's own disease. In high school, Laura's pleurosis caused her leg to hurt quite badly, and she had to wear a brace for some time. Just as Laura's leg had been struck, now the unicorn's horn is gone. When the unicorn's horn breaks, Laura is shaken, but she masks her disappointment by suggesting that now the unicorn is like all the other horses, and doesn't have to feel ostracized for being "freakish." If Laura had never had the disease, Jim would never have noticed her in high school and called here "Blue Roses," a mishearing of "pleurosis." Yet if she had not healed, Jim would not be dancing with her in the living room. Breaking the unicorn's horn also has subtle sexual undertones, suggesting a possible erotic charge to the scene.

> They're common as—weeds, but—you—well, you're—*Blue Roses!*

Related Characters: Jim O'Connor (speaker), Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

After he dances with Laura and breaks the unicorn, Jim suddenly takes much closer notice of Laura. He has been kind to her throughout the scene, but now, he sees her as not only a sweet but lonely woman, but as a pretty ingénue, someone who could possibly be the object of his affections. "Blue Roses," once a lighthearted childhood nickname, is now presented to Laura as though it were a rare bouquet. Jim moves from polite interaction to what appears to be genuinely emotional courting.

The stage direction notes that the music changes as soon as Jim calls Laura "Blue Roses." Although she is quiet, Laura is extremely overcome with emotions as Jim shifts from describing her as though she were a sister to starting to view her as a potential lover. The scene seems like one of Tom's magic tricks, however, since he is, after all, the magician of the play. Jim's speech is beautiful, but, like the glass menagerie, feels doomed to shatter.

> Go, then! Go to the moon—you selfish dreamer!

Related Characters: Amanda Wingfield (speaker), Tom Wingfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In Amanda's final line of the play, she accuses Tom of being selfish and of not facing reality, yet she is also guilty of these exact qualities. She lashes out at Tom because she thinks that he has made a fool out of Laura and, by extension, out of Amanda. Amanda feels like Tom has betrayed the family by creating a dream and then shattering it. By inviting Jim over to dinner, Tom gave both Amanda and Laura the hope that Jim would be the hero who would come in and save the family. However, Jim already has a fiancée, and he will not leave his current life to come live with the Wingfields. Tom has created stage magic, but now the magic evaporates. Amanda is even more furious at Tom for presenting a possibility to them that then gets snatched away. Not only is Tom a selfish dreamer for only thinking of himself, he is also a selfish dreamer for presenting dreams that will not become reality. Amanda would rather live in memories and in a haze of the past than in the present. Tom takes Amanda's angry cry at her word and leaves the house for good, and unlike their earlier fight, Tom does not return. He has finally succumbed to his desire for escape, and abandoned the family just as his father did.

> I didn't go to the moon, I went much further—for time is the longest distance between two places.

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Tom ends the play with a long monologue that describes his escape from the Wingfield apartment. When Tom leaves his family, he leaves behind not only their reality but also their fantasy lives. The moon symbolizes hope and dreams throughout the play, as the family wishes on the moon to make their lives better. However, Tom realizes that wishing on the moon and dreaming is keeping himself tied to illusions and the past, rather than allowing him to move forward in his life. Tom abandons the promise of the moon

and the dreams of his youth to try and pursue a new kind of life for himself (but also by following Amanda's angry command to "go to the moon").

The final monologue also re-introduces time into the play. This monologue pulls the audience out of the scenes in the apartment and presents a span of time over many years. Throughout the play, there is a continual tension between the characters' recollections of the past and the present that they live in now. Amanda wants to cling to the past, and she fights against the realities of the present. Laura seems to exist in a bubble outside time. Tom, meanwhile, resents the past and the present and wants to fling himself into the future.

> Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box. I left St. Louis.

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Tom's literary ambitions and his desire for adventure finally outgrow his life, and he breaks free of what he perceives to be his prison. Boxes are extremely symbolic for Tom. He sees the apartment that he lives in as a stifling box, and the fire escape is the only place that provides any kind of relief. Tom describes the magic trick with the man who escapes from the coffin as a metaphor for Tom's own life, since he feels trapped and dead inside his physical and symbolic box. The warehouse is another box that imprisons Tom inside a dead-end job. Even the movies, Tom's escape mechanism, are inside a screen and a theater that are both box-like. The shoe-box is symbolic of Tom's feeling of being trapped. However, the shoe-box is also what sets Tom free. He takes the symbolic shoes out of the symbolic box and walks away from what he perceives to be his prison. Tennessee Williams's description of Tom's literary ambitions is also somewhat autobiographical. Williams himself had literary ambitions that extended beyond the scope of his own life in St. Louis, and he, too, left the city to pursue bigger dreams.

> I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space. I traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches.

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker), Mr. Wingfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 96-97

Explanation and Analysis

The image of the city sweeping about Tom like dead leaves is perhaps a reference to a famous description in the *Inferno*, in which Dante describes souls as fluttering around the Underworld as lightly as dead leaves. Tom believed that when he left the apartment and sought his freedom, he would be able to escape (via the "fire escape," symbolically) the forlorn nature of the house. Tom felt like he was dead in that apartment, as he signified in his speech to Laura about the magician's trick of getting out of the coffin. However, Tom learns, perhaps too late, that though he thinks he can find freedom by roaming far afield, he is still in the underworld, since he is still trapped within his own memories and his emotions. Physical freedom is not the same thing as psychological escape. Tom's world becomes an inferno, the seasons and cities as empty and fruitless as dead leaves and dead souls. Just as the family is haunted by the specter of the father who left them, Tom is haunted by the specter of the family he himself left. Tom's sudden break feels like a victory in the moment, but in reality, because he has had no closure, a huge part of Tom still remains in that apartment (as the very existence of the "memory play" itself makes clear).

> The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker), Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

In Tom's final monologue, memory, reality, symbols, time, and space all swirl together in Tom's head. Although Tom thinks that he can escape the prison of his stifling home life when he leaves the Wingfield apartment and travels far afield, Tom cannot escape the memories of his past. Tom is heartbroken at the end of the play because he feels as though he has betrayed his sister. Even though Tom left the family to obtain his own freedom, which is what he thought he wanted, he hadn't counted on the deep bond between himself and his sister, and his deep love and affection for her. He sees images of her everywhere, representing the guilt he feels. Tom shattered a bond between himself and Laura when he left, and every time he sees delicate glass objects, he is reminded of this symbolic shattering, because glass reminds him of Laura. Tom also sees himself in the glass, or, rather, the memory of his former self.

> For nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura—and so goodbye...

Related Characters: Tom Wingfield (speaker), Laura Wingfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Tom's final line of the play emphasizes the symbolic importance of the many different kinds of light and darkness that appear throughout the play. The lightning that strikes in this line is a very violent kind of light. Lightning is even more cruel and harsh than electric light or the light of the sun, since it is so highly concentrated and powerful. The lightning here also represents Tom's feelings of guilt at leaving his family behind. Like the moon or the stars, lightning is a natural phenomenon, but it is quick, powerful, temporary, and all too real. The lightning also symbolically divides Tom's present from his past. Tom knows that he can never return to the world of moonlight and candlelight that Laura and Amanda inhabit, because this world doesn't even exist anymore. The memories of his family haunt Tom, but he must live in the present day. He thinks about Laura all the time, and his interior life has been lit by her memory since he left the family physically, but he also knows that he has to let her go in order to move forward with his own life.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SCENE 1

The Wingfield apartment is in a lower-middle-class St. Louis tenement building that faces an alleyway. Through the dim lighting, the audience first sees the apartment's **fire escape**, then the living room which features a **typewriter**, a display case with glass animals, and a blown-up photograph that the stage directions explain is of the absent Wingfield father. The stage directions also describe a screen located on stage upon which words and pictures will sometimes appear during the play.

The cramped apartment emphasize the tough times facing the Wingfields. The fire escape gives the glimmer of escape from the close quarters, but it's not a real escape. The father's portrait dominates the scene just as his absence haunts the family. The onstage screen that displays images keeps the audience aware that the play is meant to be symbolic and stylized rather than realistic.

Tom enters, dressed as a merchant sailor and smoking a cigarette, and speaks directly to the audience. He explains that he is the narrator of the play as well as a character in it. Tom sets the historical and social background of the play in the late 1930s, when the working class of the United States was still suffering from the aftereffects of the Great Depression. He comments that the play is a memory play, his memory, and not a realistic depiction of life.

Tom's direct address to the audience signals that he is creating this play. His out-of-place merchant marine uniform suggests he's creating it from some time in the future, after leaving. Since the whole play occurs in Tom's memory, all the action is filtered through his perspective. Tom manipulates stage effects such as lighting and music to control the play's emotional tone.

Tom tells the audience about the four characters in the play—himself, his mother Amanda, his sister Laura, and a man named Jim they knew from high school—and adds that the father is the fifth character, although he abandoned the family years ago and only appears as the portrait. The last that the family heard from him was a postcard from Mexico saying "Hello––Goodbye!"

The absent father looms large as a reminder of the Wingfields' past. His abandonment haunts the family and sets the precedent for male figures who will abandon Amanda and Laura, just as his blown-up portrait suggests that the family doesn't face reality, the fact that he is gone and doesn't seem to care.

Tom enters the apartment and joins Amanda and Laura at the dining-room table. The words "Ou sont les neiges" ["Where are the snows"] are projected on the screen. Amanda nags him about displaying proper table etiquette until Tom, exasperated, gets up to smoke. Laura tries to rise to serve dessert, but Amanda insists she sit and stay fresh for gentlemen callers.

When Tom takes his role as a character in the play, the words on the screen reminds the audience that the play is still in Tom's head. This is a stylized version of a typical dinner scene, and all three characters' actions and reactions are habitual—it's like they are stuck in roles they are playing for each other.

Amanda tells a story of her youth in the South when on one Sunday afternoon she entertained seventeen gentlemen callers at her home in Mississippi, a story she has clearly told many, many times before. The lights dim and **music** begins to play. At Laura's gentle urging, Tom mechanically plays along, asks his mother questions about the story, as though reading from a script.

The dimmed lights and music underscore Amanda's romantic but helpless nostalgia. Amanda still sees herself as a young girl, and Laura plays along with her mother's illusion. Tom indulges Amanda, but has to be nudged to do so, showing his frustration with the seemingly endless cycle of repetition.

Amanda suggests that Laura practice her typing as she waits for gentleman callers to arrive. The **music** of "The Glass Menagerie" plays as Laura tells Amanda that there won't be callers coming for her, as she isn't as popular as her mother was.

Amanda tries to project two separate visions of success on Laura: one of Laura being a business success via her typing, the other of Laura becoming the sort of Southern Belle Amanda remembers herself being. Laura doesn't believe in these visions, though, and doesn't seem to believe in herself.

SCENE 2

An image of **blue roses** appears on the screen. Laura sits in the apartment, polishing her **menagerie** of glass figures. When she hears Amanda ascending the fire escape stairs, she hastily puts away the glass figures and pretends to be studying a keyboard diagram at the **typewriter**.

Laura escapes from her mother's expectations (the typing) by playing with her perfect glass menagerie of figurines. Her focus on these fragile items suggests her own fragility .

Amanda enters, dressed in the outfit she wears to her Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.) meetings: cheap velvet coat, outdated hat, outsized pocketbook. She looks upset, and Laura becomes visibly nervous and guilty. Amanda tears the keyboard diagram and typewriting alphabet in two.

Amanda wants to portray herself as a member of high society and clings to the trappings of appearance. She is upset by Laura's deception and failure to meet her expectations rather than concerned for her daughter's well-being.

Amanda tells Laura that she stopped by the business college where Laura has supposedly been enrolled. One of the instructors informed her that Laura stopped coming to class after the first few days, when she was so anxious that she became physically ill. Laura explains that instead of going to school, she has been walking in the park, the museum, the zoo, and the "Jewel Box" greenhouse.

The stress of public exposure and expectation is too much for Laura to bear. She escapes into her own thoughts and into the beautiful realm of objects untouched by the pressure of social interactions.

Amanda wonders what will become of Laura, now that her career opportunities have been ruined, and warns her about spinsters dependent on the "crust of humility" their entire lives. The only alternative, she says, is marriage.

Amanda projects her own idea of ambition onto Laura. Instead of listening to what Laura wants, she doggedly pushes her daughter to fulfill Amanda's visions, though it's clear that these visions are driven by Amanda's sadness about her own desperate, lonely state.

Amanda asks whether Laura has ever liked a boy, and Laura admits that she once had a crush on Jim, the high school hero, who sat near her in chorus. Laura once told Jim that she had been out of school for a while because she had pleurosis, but he misheard the word as **"Blue Roses,"** which became his nickname for her. Amanda declares that Laura will marry some nice man. Laura reminds her mother that she is crippled, that her two legs are different lengths, but Amanda insists that she not use that word and that she must develop charm.

Laura's recollection of Jim has been as carefully polished and cared for as one of the glass animals in her menagerie: he made her feel special, and she cherishes this memory in a special place in her heart, but to Laura, this is firmly in the past, not a possibility for the future. It's safer that way. Amanda's relentless insistence that Laura is normal signifies Amanda's desire to cling to her own dreams.

SCENE 3

The words "After the fiasco" appear on the screen. Tom stands on the **fire escape** and tells the audience that after the "fiasco" at the business college, Amanda has become obsessed with the idea that a gentleman caller must come to the house for Laura, and an image of a young man carrying flowers appears on the screen. Tom says that to raise extra money, Amanda has taken up a telephone campaign to sell subscriptions for The Homemaker's Companion, a ladies' magazine.

Tom's narration from the fire escape represents both his desire for escape and his inability to leave: he is both in the scene and out of it, bound to the action but yearning to withdraw. Amanda sees in Laura a vision of her own youth rather than who Laura truly is.

Amanda enters with a telephone and elaborately, over-enthusiastically praises the magazine, describing one of the stories in the journal as the next *Gone With the Wind*. The customer hangs up, and the lights dim.

Amanda over-eagerly promotes a conventional style of femininity. She sees herself as a heroine of a novel such as Gone With the Wind, but her reality does not match her perception. And others perceive her desperation.

Tom and Amanda are heard arguing behind curtains hanging over a door. Laura is standing in front of them, and throughout Tom and Amanda's entire argument, the light is on Laura. Tom is furious about his lack of privacy, enraged that his mother has returned his D.H. Lawrence book, which she calls "hideous," to the library.

Tom feels trapped in every aspect of his life: his mother dictates not only his work but his mind, censoring his books and chastising him for attempting to escape. Laura does not speak, yet she is always at the center of the family.

Tom rips the curtains over the dining room door open, and he and Amanda continue to fight as Laura watches helplessly. The typewriter and Tom's manuscripts are scattered across the dining room. Tom attempts to leave the apartment, but Amanda insists that he stay and hear her out. They argue about his nightly excursions, and she accuses him of doing something shameful under the guise of going to **the movies**, claiming that he will jeopardize his job.

To Laura, the typewriter represented the business college that she had to escape from, but for Tom the typewriter gives him a way to escape, through writing. Tom constantly seeks alternate narratives for himself: a version of himself as a writer, a version of himself he writes about, and the action-adventure star of the screen.

Tom explodes at Amanda, claiming that he'd rather be bludgeoned to death with a crowbar than go back to the warehouse every morning. He points to the father's picture on the wall and says that were he as selfish as Amanda claims he is, he would have abandoned the family long ago.

Tom is tempted to follow in his father's footsteps and abandon his family, but he is equally haunted by guilt and remorse at the thought of doing so.

When Amanda declares again that she doesn't believe Tom is going to **the movies**, Tom sarcastically tells her she's right and claims that he is, indeed, leading a double life: going to an opium den, frequenting casinos, joining a gang of hired assassins. Tom calls Amanda an "ugly––babbling old––witch." He tries to wrench on his overcoat, finds himself trapped in it, jerkily pulls it off, and throws it across the room, where it smashes into the shelf holding the **glass menagerie** and breaks several of the animals.

When Tom invents the story of his double life, piling on increasingly ludicrous details, his hysteria and wild desire to escape become so violent that he shatters the glass menagerie, which symbolizes the fragile balance of the Wingfield family dynamic. Tom's breaking of the glass animals suggests that the wounds inflicted through this argument have caused a rupture with permanent repercussions. His desire to escape breaks Laura's means of escape—though he wishes they weren't, the two are at odds.

Music begins to play. Laura shrieks, "**My glass!––menagerie**..." Amanda, stunned, declares that she will not speak to Tom until he apologizes. Tom awkwardly kneels to collect the broken glass and glances at Laura as if to say something but does not.

Laura, who is still standing at the center of the argument between Tom and Amanda, shrieks but can only repeat, in broken tones, what Tom has just shattered.

SCENE 4

As a church bell tolls five times, Tom stumbles up the fire escape and into the apartment, visibly drunk. **Movie** ticket stubs and an empty bottle spill out of his pockets as he fumbles for his door key. Laura opens the door for Tom, and he tells her about the movies and about a magic show that he has been to, in which Malvolio the Magician turned water into wine, then to beer, and then to whisky. Tom gives Laura a rainbow-colored scarf, a souvenir from the show. He describes the "wonderfullest trick of all," the coffin trick, in which a man is nailed into a coffin and escapes without removing a single nail––which, Tom remarks, would come in handy for him.

Tom continues to try to escape through the movies and through drink, but he is always pulled back his family and his job. The Shakespearean name Malvolio connects to Tom's poetry, as Jim calls him "Shakespeare" in Scene Six. The rainbow-colored scarf is reminiscent of the rainbow-colored light refracted through Laura's glass menagerie. The description of the coffin trick––an escape from a confined space without removing a single nail––perfectly symbolizes the predicament Tom perceives himself as being in, and his wish that he could escape it without harming anything—and Tom himself recognizes this symbolism. The coffin trick also symbolizes the Resurrection.

The bell tolls six times and Amanda calls out her customary "Rise and Shine!" She asks Laura to relay the message to Tom, as they are still not speaking. Laura begs Tom to apologize, but he remains unwilling. Amanda sends Laura to buy groceries on credit, and as Laura leaves, she slips on the **fire escape**.

The ominous bell and Amanda's wake-up call bring Tom from his nightly fantasy of escape to the inevitable reality of the morning. Laura is the emotional mediator between Amanda and Tom––she tries to put out the flames they fan. When Laura goes to the fire escape, she slips, suggesting that she can never escape this world.

"Ave Maria" plays softly in the background as Tom finally apologizes to Amanda for his behavior. Amanda nearly breaks down as she speaks of the pride she has in her children. She makes Tom promise that he will never be a drunkard.

Laura exits the scene but remains at the emotional center, as she is the force that reconciles Tom and Amanda. Amanda sees Tom following the same path as her husband did, and she desperately wants to keep him within her conception of the family unit.

Amanda turns the discussion to Laura, and **"The Glass Menagerie"** theme begins to play. Amanda says that she has caught Laura crying because Laura believes Tom is unhappy and that he goes out every night to escape the apartment. Amanda tells Tom that she is afraid he will begin drinking like his father did.

Amanda and Tom are united in their love for Laura: she is the emotional core holding both the family and the play together. Tom's love for Laura is what draws him back to the apartment. Some critics suggest that Tom has incestuous desires for Laura, which makes his reluctance to leave even more complicated.

When Amanda presses Tom to explain where he goes, Tom says that he goes to the movies for the adventure he lacks in his job. "Man is by instinct a love, a hunter, a fighter," he says, which angers Amanda, who insists that Christian adults should not need to follow such animal instincts.

Amanda reproaches Tom for following his own desires rather than committing himself to the family's needs. Although she accuses him of not being a good Christian adult, Tom ironically portrays himself as a martyr, sacrificing his own desires for the sake of his sister.

Amanda tells Tom that they have to make "plans and provisions" for Laura. She knows that he has received a letter from the merchant marines and that he is eager to go, and she tells him that he reminds her more and more of his and Laura's father, who abandoned them suddenly and with no explanation. Amanda urges Tom to stay until Laura has someone to take care of her.

The looming figure of the father who abandoned the Wingfield family is a constant psychological force in all of their lives. Amanda can see Tom following in his father's footsteps, but she does not want to enter into another cycle of abandonment.

Amanda asks Tom to bring home a gentleman from the warehouse to introduce to Laura, and as he leaves the apartment, Tom reluctantly agrees. Still troubled but faintly hopeful, Amanda makes another phone call for the glamour magazine subscription drive, calling the potential client a "Christian martyr."

Tom's consent is ambiguous, as it feeds Amanda's illusion of how she thinks Laura ought to live. Finding a man for Laura will also, under Amanda's terms, release Tom from his ties to the family. Both Tom and Amanda see themselves as martyrs sacrificing for the family—for Laura.

SCENE 5

It is spring, 1937. Amanda nags Tom about his appearance and his smoking. Tom steps onto the **fire escape** with his cigarette and reminisces about the Paradise Dance Hall across the street from the tenements, remembering the rainbow-colored lights and the young couples.

The rainbow lights at the Paradise Dance Hall recall the rainbow light refracted through the fragile glass menagerie. Paradise for the dancing young couples will not last forever, as another world war looms on the horizon, just as the menagerie offers only a fragile escape.

Amanda joins Tom on the **fire escape**, and they look at the moon together. They each make a wish on the moon. Tom doesn't tell Amanda what he wished for, and Amanda tells him that she wished, as she always does, for the success and happiness of her children.

Both Amanda and Tom dream of escape from their current lives, but while Tom wants to flee the apartment and his family, wants something for himself, Amanda projects her dreams and delusions through her children.

Tom reveals that a gentleman caller will be coming to dinner: he has invited a colleague from the warehouse to come to the apartment. A fanfare plays, and a gentleman caller with a bouquet appears on the screen. Amanda is delighted. Tom tells her that the gentlemen caller is coming tomorrow, which throws Amanda into a whirlwind. She chides Tom for not giving her enough time to prepare and immediately begins setting plans into motion.

As stage magician and narrator of the play, Tom makes Amanda's wish seem to come true. The overly triumphant fanfare and screen image of the gentleman caller are tragicomic: although Amanda's prayers appear to have been answered, the audience knows already that everything will not be resolved in Amanda's version of a happy ending.

Amanda begins to whisk around the apartment, simultaneously re-organizing the apartment and brushing Tom's hair while interrogating him about the gentlemen caller. Her first concern is that the gentleman caller must not be a drinker, as she does not want Laura married to a drinker, which Tom sees as a little premature.

Amanda spins the smallest idea of a gentleman caller into a grand fantasy of marriage for Laura. Her obsession that the gentleman caller not drink is a direct response to her own experience with a husband who drank and abandoned the family. Amanda is projecting both her own past and her dreams for the future onto Laura.

Amanda continues to pump Tom for information. She learns that the caller's name is O'Connor, and he works as a shipping clerk in the warehouse. She grills Tom about Jim's salary, his background, and his ambitions. Amanda is pleased to hear that Jim attends night school for radio engineering and public speaking.

Amanda sees in the gentleman caller a second chance for her own life through Laura. She assumes that Jim is a prospective husband for Laura and assesses him as she assessed her own gentleman callers when she was the belle of Blue Mountain.

Tom tells Amanda that he hasn't told Jim about Laura: he just invited Jim over for a family dinner without any qualifications. Amanda is convinced that Jim will be smitten with Laura. When Tom tries to tame Amanda's expectations, reminding her that Laura is shy, crippled, and different from other girls, Amanda brushes his doubts aside, refusing to hear that Laura is peculiar.

Tom tries to dispel Amanda's fantasies, but she has surrounded herself so thoroughly in her view of the events that she refuses to hear his objections. Amanda convinces herself that Laura is the version of Laura that she projects onto her rather than accepting Laura as she is with all her peculiarities.

Tom leaves for **the movies**, and Amanda calls Laura to the front room. She points out the moon to Laura, turns her toward it, and commands her to make a wish. Laura asks what she should wish for, and Amanda answers, "Happiness! Good fortune!"

Amanda physically turns Laura toward the moon and puts her own wish into her daughter's mouth, highlighting her desire to fulfill her own dreams and ambitions through her daughter, although these are not her daughter's dreams.

SCENE 6

Leaning on the **fire escape**, Tom tells the audience about Jim. He describes Jim as the high-school hero, captain of sports teams, star of glee club, etc.: Jim seemed to be a rising star. But six years later, Jim's star has stalled, as he and Tom are both warehouse clerks. Tom says that he is important to Jim as someone who knew Jim in his glory days. Jim calls Tom "Shakespeare" and is amused by his writing rather than resentful or hostile. Tom knows that Jim and Laura knew each other, but doubts that Jim remembers Laura.

Jim is Tom's foil: a high school star and now a steady working man content with his lifestyle. Unlike Tom, who is filled with a constant restlessness, Jim is content to continue in his status quo. Because Jim is grounded in the real world and does not yearn for any other, he doesn't resent Tom's dreams and ambitions. Jim represents an in-between life for Tom: not trapped in the Wingfield apartment, but not an escape into an alternate reality.

In preparation for the gentleman caller, Amanda has transformed the apartment with lampshades and curtains. She dresses Laura, who is visibly nervous, in a soft, pretty dress, and stuffs "Gay Deceivers" in Laura's bosom, laughing away Laura's objections with the claim that girls must be a "pretty trap" for men. Amanda leaves to change and sweeps back into the room in a frilly dress that she wore to a cotillion in her youth. She carries a bouquet of jonquil flowers and reminisces about when she first met Laura and Tom's father.

Amanda hides the broken and bare light bulbs with drapes just as she veils her view of the world with her own illusions. Amanda dresses Laura up as a version of her own youthful self and the version of a glamorous woman portrayed in the ladies' magazines she sells. And she sees herself as the self that she fancies she once was, rather than the reality she occupies.

When Laura learns that the caller is none other than Jim O'Connor, the boy she loved in high school, she panics, claiming that she can never sit at the table with him. Amanda lightly dismisses her fear, but the legend on the screen reads "Terror!"

When Laura's dream world collides with reality, she is terrified: Jim represents the fantasy of love, and his memory is her safe haven from facing the reality of a physical presence. She is terrified that her fragile fantasy will shatter when it comes into contact with the harsh real world.

Tom and Jim arrive and ring the doorbell. Laura is terrified and begs Amanda to open the door, but Amanda refuses, forcing Laura to be the one to open it. Tom and Jim can be heard talking on the landing. Laura desperately tries to buy time by winding the Victrola to play **music**, but eventually, she reluctantly opens the door.

Laura's view of the world and Amanda's view collide when Laura refuses to open the door. Amanda doggedly clings to her fantasy of Laura's interaction with the gentleman caller and physically forces Laura to play a role that Laura is both unwilling to play and unsuited to take. Laura turns to the Victrola as a means of escape from the intense situation.

After awkwardly greeting Jim, Laura dashes to the Victrola and then through the portieres. Tom explains that Laura is terribly shy. Jim and Tom go onto the **fire escape** as Tom smokes, and Jim tells Tom to enroll in his course on public speaking.

Tom and Jim go to the fire escape nearly as soon as they enter the apartment, foreshadowing that they will both eventually escape and abandon Laura and Amanda. Jim's way of living in the concrete, real world of the warehouse comes as a sharp contrast to Tom's desires.

Tom tells Jim that he's sick of **the movies** and wants, instead, to move. He reveals that instead of paying the light bill for the month, he paid his dues to become a member of the Union of Merchant Seamen, and proclaims that he is much like his father.

Tom has already begun to sacrifice his family for the sake of his own dreams, rather than vice versa. He has set into motion his escape: by literally turning out the lights, Tom the character will leave the family and Tom the narrator will, perhaps, leave the memory play.

Jim and Tom re-enter the house to find Amanda transformed into a grotesque version of herself as a young Southern belle. Amanda puts on her girlish mannerisms and thick Southern drawl. She praises Laura to Jim and recounts stories about her coquettish youth.

Amanda is so deep into her own vision of the world that she cannot see how ridiculous she appears in her bygone girlish garb. She aggressively cloaks herself in the past and views the present from the vantage point of these illusions and memories.

Amanda sends Tom to fetch Laura for supper, but Tom returns and announces that Laura is not well and will not come to the table. Amanda calls Laura, and Laura enters, but with a clap of thunder, Laura stumbles and moans. Amanda sends Laura into the living room to lie on the sofa. Amanda asks Tom to say grace as she glances anxiously at Jim.

Laura's psychosomatic illness makes her seem more and more like her fragile, otherworldly glass menagerie. The grace recollects the elements of Christianity underlying Amanda and Tom's earlier fight.

SCENE 7

Laura is still lying on the sofa, beautiful in the dim lamplight. As dinner is finished, the lights flicker and go out. Amanda lights candles and asks Jim to check the fuse box, which he does, although he knows why the lights have gone out. Amanda asks Tom if he has paid the light bill, and Tom admits he has not. Amanda assumes that he forgot, and Jim's enthusiasm helps to smooth over the tense moment.

Instead of transforming Laura into the idealized glamour magazine version of the perfect woman that Amanda envisions, Amanda's new floor lamp and dress have brought out Laura's own otherworldly, fragile beauty. The extinguishing of the lights foreshadows Tom's eventual abandonment of the family.

Amanda gives Jim an antique candelabrum from a church and a bottle of dandelion wine, instructing him to go to the living room and keep Laura company. Jim speaks to Laura gently and lightly. The incident is much more fraught and anxious for her than for him. Laura speaks faintly, though she eventually relaxes somewhat.

The candles and the wine help to remove the scene between Laura and Jim from reality. Memory, as Tom explains in the beginning of the play, is dimly and romantically lit, as it is here. Laura begins to feel as though she living in a dream scenario, which is where she feels comfortable.

Jim sets the candles on the floor, sits on the floor as well, and urges Laura to join him. As he chews a piece of gum, he talks about the Century of Progress in Chicago. Laura eventually, hesitantly, relaxes a little, accepting a piece of gum from Jim.

Jim's gum-chewing is the banal, less dangerous version of Tom's chain-smoking. Laura's acceptance of the piece of gum is, for her, a bold and intimate gesture.

Laura asks Jim if he has kept up with his singing, and she reminds him that they knew each other in high school. At first, Jim doesn't remember, but when Laura mentions **"Blue Roses,"** he springs up with a vivid flash of recollection. They recall their chorus class together. Laura describes her embarrassment when she had to clump with her leg brace up the aisle, but Jim tells her that he never noticed. Jim tells Laura that she need not be so shy, that everyone has problems.

The nickname "Blue Roses" draws Jim into Laura's world of memories. Jim's recollection of Laura is very different from her version of herself: though she remembers dragging her leg as though in the spotlight, all eyes on her, Jim claims not to recall her slow marches up the aisle of the choir room.

Laura and Jim leaf through the high school yearbook, *The Torch*. Laura admits that she had wanted Jim to sign her copy of the program from the light opera he starred in, which he does now. She works up the nerve to ask about the girl to whom he was supposedly engaged, but Jim says that they were never engaged and that he doesn't see her anymore.

The yearbook's name, The Torch, is yet another source of light in the play; "torch" is also a slang for an old crush or romance. Laura's vague hopes, kindled by the shared memory of Blue Roses, grow stronger when Jim tells her that he and his high school sweetheart have broken up.

Jim asks Laura what she has done since high school, and she starts to explain that her **glass collection** takes up much of her time. Jim launches into a long speech about inferiority complexes. He tells Laura that she lacks confidence and that all she needs to overcome her shyness is to think of herself as superior. He announces his goal of becoming a television producer.

Just as Amanda projects her dreams and vision for the future onto Laura, Jim uses Laura's shyness as a springboard to discuss his own success at overcoming inferiority complexes. Not only is Laura like glass in her fragility, she also refracts everyone else's light so that their personalities seem to shine more brightly.

Laura tells Jim about her **glass animals**. She hands him the **unicorn**, her favorite, to hold. He says, lightly, that since unicorns are extinct in the modern world he must be lonesome. Jim puts the unicorn on the table, as Laura directs him to do, away from the rest of the collection.

The glass unicorn, Laura's favorite figurine, is much like Laura herself: beautiful, unique, and extinct in the modern world. The unicorn's movement to the table, away from the rest of the animals, mirrors the change of scenery that Jim's presence provides for Laura. Laura tells Jim that the unicorn likes the change, leaving unspoken the subtext that she does, too.

Jim and Laura hear waltz **music** from the Paradise Dance Hall. Despite Laura's protests, Jim leads her in a clumsy waltz around the room. They suddenly bump into the table, and the unicorn falls. Its horn is broken off. Laura appears to be unfazed, saying that now it's become like all the other horses.

As Jim leads Laura in the waltz, she lets herself trust him. But just when the dance seems to be going most smoothly, the unicorn's horn shatters. Laura's apparent calm suggests that she enjoyed being treated as an ordinary girl, not as a cripple, and perhaps might be able to see herself as ordinary.

Jim tells Laura that she is as uncommon as **blue roses** and says that someone ought to kiss her. He turns her toward him and kisses her on the lips. As Laura sinks into the sofa, Jim immediately curses himself for what he has done and lights a cigarette.

The accident makes Jim more aware of Laura as a woman, and her peculiarities are attractive to him. His impulsive kiss, however, breaks the spell. He lights a cigarette, which reminds the audience of Tom's use of cigarettes as an escape mechanism: rather than the gum that sticks him to the scene, the cigarette lights his way out.

Jim confesses to Laura that he is engaged to Betty, an Irish Catholic like himself. Laura is disconsolate, but Jim does not notice the depths of her despair. She places the broken **unicorn** in his hand, telling him to keep it as a souvenir.

When Jim tells Laura about Betty, Laura's dream shatters like the glass horn. The broken unicorn souvenir becomes a memory that Jim can carry into the reality of his everyday life, but it now also symbolizes the normal woman that Laura will never become.

Amanda waltzes in with lemonade, and Jim becomes awkward and tense. Amanda tells Jim that he will have to be a frequent caller in the future. Jim says that he has to leave and tells her about Betty, and though Amanda maintains her poise, the atmosphere suddenly changes. Jim says goodbye to everyone and leaves.

Amanda still sees the scene through her deluded eyes until Jim tells her about Betty, whereupon her vision shatters. Although she treats the information without missing a beat, her overly cheery reception and frozen smile show that just under the veneer, she is crumbling.

"Things have a way of turning out so badly," says Amanda. She accuses Tom of playing a joke on them, but Tom insists that he didn't know about Jim's engagement. He leaves to go to **the movies**, and Amanda yells that for all he cares about the family, he might as well go to the moon.

Rather than accepting reality for what it is, Amanda accuses Tom of deliberately tricking her. She does not recognize how she foisted her own hopes and dreams on the situation, instead blaming the turn of events on Tom and, by extension, her husband.

Tom smashes his drink glass on the floor and bursts onto the **fire escape**. Inside the house, Amanda holds Laura in her arms, stroking her hair. Tom delivers a passionate, emotionally fraught closing monologue. He tells the audience that he left St. Louis, going much further than the moon, "for time is the longest distance between two places." He wandered from city to city, following in his father's footsteps. But no matter how far he traveled, some piece of glass or flash of light always reminded him of his sister. In the living room, Laura blows out the candles as Tom bids her goodbye.

Amanda soothes Laura, but since we cannot hear them, we do not know whether or not Amanda is still immersed in her own delusions. Tom the character exits, and Tom as narrator delivers his impassioned, poignant final monologue. Although he has physically escaped the apartment, his emotions linger. The play itself is Tom's cathartic attempt to purge himself of his memories and to free himself through this final act of escape. Laura blows out the candles, extinguishing her hopes, as Tom turns away and frees himself, perhaps, from the family and the play.

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