

# The Glass Menagerie



## INTRO

### 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

**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.

**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 each theme gets its own color and number. Our color-coded theme boxes make it easy to track where the themes occur throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, use the numbers instead.

### 1 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 Wingfield's memories.

## 2 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!”

## 3 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.

## 4 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 **red 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,” the childhood disease that left Laura crippled. 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.

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Mr. Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:

1 2 4

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: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:

3 4

The scene is memory and therefore nonrealistic.

- Related themes: Memory
- Theme Tracker code:

1



## QUOTES

The color-coded and numbered boxes under each quote below make it easy to track the themes related to each quote. Each color and number corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### SCENE 1 QUOTES

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

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:

3

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!"

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.

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:

3

[The gentleman caller] is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something we live for.

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Jim O'Connor
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:

3

One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain—your mother received—*seventeen!*—gentlemen callers!

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



## SCENE 2 QUOTES

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

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



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!

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Speaker: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



...they cultivate other things to make up for it—develop charm—and vivacity—and—*charm!* That's all you have to do! [*she turns again to the photograph*] One thing your father had plenty of—was *charm!*

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Amanda Wingfield, Mr. Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



Fifty dollars' tuition, all of our plans—my hopes and ambitions for you—just gone up the spout, just gone up the spout like that.

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



## SCENE 3 QUOTES

I'm going to opium dens...I'm a hired assassin...I'm leading a double-life...I go to gambling casinos...Oh, I could tell you many things to make you sleepless!

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



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

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Amanda Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



Look!—I've got no thing, no single thing...in my life here that I can call my OWN!

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Related themes: Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



Listen! You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? [*He bends fiercely toward her slight figure.*] You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that—*celotex interior!* with—*fluorescent—tubes!* Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains—than go back mornings! I go!

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Amanda Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



### SCENE 4 QUOTES

But the wonderfulest 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?

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



Oh, I can see the handwriting on the wall as plain as I see the nose in front of my face! It's terrifying! More and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours without explanation—Then *left! Goodbye!* And me with the bag to hold.

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Tom Wingfield, Mr. Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape

- Theme Tracker code:



Try and you will *succeed!* [*The notion makes her breathless.*] Why, you—you're just *full of natural endowments!* Both of my children—they're *unusual children!* Don't you think I know it? I'm so—*proud!*

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Tom Wingfield, Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



### SCENE 5 QUOTES

No girl can do worse than put herself at the mercy of a handsome appearance!

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment
- Theme Tracker code:



[Laura] lives in a world of her own—a world of little glass ornaments, Mother...

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:





In Spain there was Guernica! But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows...All the world was waiting for bombardments!

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:

1  3  4

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!

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield, Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:

3

## SCENE 6 QUOTES

A telephone man who—fell in love with long-distance! Now he travels and I don't even know where!

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Mr. Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment
- Theme Tracker code:

1  2

Finally there were no more vases to hold them, every available space was filled with jonquils. No vases to hold them? All right, I'll hold them myself!

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:

1  3

[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.

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Jim O'Connor
- Related themes: Memory
- Theme Tracker code:

1

All girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be.

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:

3

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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:

3

Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me.

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment
- Theme Tracker code:

1  2

I'm tired of the *movies* and I am *about* to *move*!

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:

3  4

## SCENE 7 QUOTES

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

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield

•Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Illusions and Dreams, Escape

•Theme Tracker code:



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.

•Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield, Jim O'Connor

•Related themes: Illusions and Dreams

•Theme Tracker code:



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?

•Speaker: Laura Wingfield, Jim O'Connor

•Related themes: Illusions and Dreams

•Theme Tracker code:



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.

•Speaker: Tom Wingfield

•Mentioned or related characters: Mr. Wingfield

•Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Illusions and Dreams, Escape

•Theme Tracker code:



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

•Speaker: Tom Wingfield

•Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Illusions and Dreams, Escape

•Theme Tracker code:



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!

•Speaker: Laura Wingfield, Jim O'Connor

•Related themes: Illusions and Dreams

•Theme Tracker code:



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

•Speaker: Amanda Wingfield

•Mentioned or related characters: Tom Wingfield

•Related themes: Abandonment, Escape

•Theme Tracker code:



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

•Speaker: Jim O'Connor

•Related themes: Illusions and Dreams

•Theme Tracker code:



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!

•Speaker: Tom Wingfield

•Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield

•Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Illusions and Dreams, Escape

•Theme Tracker code:



Things have a way of turning out so badly.

- Speaker: Amanda Wingfield
- Related themes: Abandonment, Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



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

- Speaker: Tom Wingfield
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Memory, Abandonment, Illusions and Dreams, Escape
- Theme Tracker code:



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

- Speaker: Jim O'Connor
- Mentioned or related characters: Laura Wingfield
- Related themes: Illusions and Dreams
- Theme Tracker code:



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded and numbered boxes under each row of Summary and Analysis below make it easy to track the themes throughout the work. Each color and number 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.

**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** 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 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'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.*



*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.*



**Amanda** enters, dressed in the outfit she wears to her Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.) meetings: cheap velvet coat, outdated hat, oversized 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.*



## 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** 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.*

1  3

### 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.*

1  3

**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.*

3

**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.*

3

**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.*

3

**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.*

2  3

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.

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.

*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.*



*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.

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**.

"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.

*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 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.*



*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 gentleman 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 gentleman 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.*

3  4

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.*

3  4

**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.*

2  3  4

**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.*

1   3

**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.*

3  4

## 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.*

2  3

**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.*

3

**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.*

3

**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.*

1  3

**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.*

1  3

**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.*

1  3  4

**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.*

3  4

**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.*

3

**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.*

2  3

**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.*

2  3

**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.

“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.

*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.*

**2** **3** **4**

*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.*

**2** **3**

**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.*

**1** **2** **3** **4**

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Raphel, Adrienne. "The Glass Menagerie." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 16 Sep 2013. Web. 26 Oct 2016.

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Raphel, Adrienne. "The Glass Menagerie." LitCharts LLC, September 16, 2013. Retrieved October 26, 2016. <http://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-glass-menagerie>.

