

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

The Play

SCENE ONE

Tennessee Williams gives you a lengthy set of stage directions at the start. He wants you to see the run-down tenement where the Wingfield family lives, and he wants to create a mood that combines dinginess, desperation and depression. After you are familiar with the play, return to the opening scene and reexamine Williams' choice of details: the fire escape, the alley, the blown-up photo of smiling Mr. Wingfield, and the typewriter keyboard chart. All, you will see, play important roles somewhere in *The Glass Menagerie*.

When Tom steps out on the fire escape to talk to the audience, he tells you the social background of the play (the 1930's). He introduces himself and the play's other characters, including his father. Although Mr. Wingfield shows up only in his photograph, he's an influential character in the play. Later on you'll see why.

By the end of Tom's opening speech you know a great deal about him. From his appearance you know he is a merchant sailor. You know, too, that he has a way with words and a "poet's weakness for symbols." His first words—"Yes, I have tricks in my pocket"—alert you to his playful disposition. He's going to trick you by giving you truth in the guise of illusion. That is, he's going to tell you a true story but make it seem unreal. Illusions, you'll soon see, pile up one after the other as the play proceeds.

NOTE: On illusion The very nature of theater depends on illusion. When you watch a play you make believe that the actors on stage *are* the characters they portray. The better the acting, the more easily you accept the illusion. Here Tom forewarns you that the play is unreal. The characters, setting, props, effects, and so on are not meant to be real but rather to serve as metaphors and symbols of reality.

While illusion is part of any play, it is particularly vital in this one. Illusion, in fact, is a major theme. The characters survive because their illusions protect them from the painful facts of their lives. As you continue, keep in mind that illusions can prove to be self-destructive as well as helpful. Do the Wingfields' illusions create damage, or are they merely harmless aspects of their personalities?

The very first "trick" Tom has in store is a quick change in identity. In a moment, he leaves his role as narrator and as a younger man walks into the Wingfield dining room to join his mother Amanda and sister Laura at supper.

NOTE: Tom shifts between his role as narrator and his role as a character several times during the play. As narrator Tom moves the story from one episode to the next, informs you about himself and his family, and describes the social and political context of the play. Try to compare Tom's personality in his two roles. The narration takes place years after the story's events occurred. Do you notice differences between the two Toms? Which do you prefer? Think of what might have happened to him between the time he left his family and the time he comes back to tell his story.

Tom wishes he hadn't sat down, for no sooner does he start to eat than Amanda begins to lecture him on the need to chew his food properly. If you've ever been scolded about your table manners, you know how Tom feels. His mother gives advice kindly, but Tom can't stand it. He bolts from the table and reaches for a cigarette. But Amanda doesn't like Tom's smoking any more than his chewing.

NOTE: On staging the play Tom's cigarette is probably imaginary, just like the table knives and forks. Remember, the play is not supposed to be realistic. Still another unrealistic feature is the use of legends and images projected on a screen. The legend which preceded this dinner scene reads "Où sont les neiges," a phrase from an old French poem which asks, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" The answer, of course, is "gone," just as the past is always gone. This legend lends an element of nostalgia to your feelings for Amanda. Throughout the play you will find other phrases and pictures. What, if anything, do they add to the play? Some critics have said they detract from the drama. Do you agree?

Laura offers to bring in the dessert. Is she being helpful or does she simply want to avoid listening to her mother nag Tom? Either way, Amanda stops Laura and says she'll play the "darker," a word that gives you a clue to Amanda's origins. She's from the South.

From the kitchen, Amanda begins to tell her children about the gentlemen callers she had as a girl in Blue Mountain. You can tell from Tom and Laura's reaction that they've heard the story before. Laura listens politely. Tom, on the other hand, is skeptical and impatient. Their reactions are important clues to their personalities and to the roles they play in the family. Because the facts of the tale change from time to time, Tom teases Amanda and utters sarcastic comments. He doesn't believe a word she says.

Does Amanda herself believe the story she's fond of telling? Does she really think that seventeen wealthy young admirers came to call on her one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain? You'll see later in the play that Amanda often twists truths. Does that mean she's a liar? She doesn't deceive anyone, and she's not out to harm anyone with her inventions. In fact, her intent is quite admirable, for she wants to help Laura find romance in her life. Many think that she deserves a pat on the back for her efforts. Tom, however, rejects Amanda's fantasy.

SCENE TWO

Alone in the apartment, Laura washes and polishes her glass collection. At the sound of her mother's footsteps outside, Laura hurriedly stows her menagerie and pretends to study the typing chart on the wall. Why doesn't she want to be caught caring for her glass animals? At the instant of Amanda's entrance, Laura starts to explain that she was just studying the chart. But as though she sees right through the pretense, Amanda says, "Deception? Deception?" But it's another deception that Amanda has in mind.

She acts brokenhearted, weeping and lamenting as though a terrible tragedy has occurred. She makes the most of this opportunity to play the role of betrayed mother. She is so melodramatic that you can't take her too seriously. She even yanks the typing chart from the wall and tears it into pieces.

Meanwhile, Laura behaves as though she can't possibly imagine what has kindled Amanda's dismay. Laura may well suspect the origin of the trouble, however. For weeks she's been skipping her typing classes at Rubicam's Business College.

Sure enough, Amanda has found out. Typing seems like a fairly harmless course, but not for one as fragile as Laura. The pressure made her so sick that she threw up at the school. Then, instead of telling her mother, she has wandered the city each day until it was time to come home. For Laura it was easier to visit the zoo or the park than to reveal the truth and see that "awful suffering look" of disappointment on her mother's face. Does Laura's story sound plausible? While it explains her truancy, does it excuse her deception?

NOTE: On themes Have you noticed that two interrelated themes—deception and illusion—have just appeared? They will show up repeatedly in numerous variations throughout the play. You should have no trouble spotting them.

In this scene both Amanda and Laura have practiced deception, pretending to be what they are not: Laura posed as a student of typing, and Amanda as a mother crushed by her daughter's betrayal. True, Amanda is wounded by Laura, but not to the extent she claims. Any time Amanda meets hard unpleasant facts, she's likely to be hurt. Perhaps that's why she often makes up illusions. Pretending

keeps painful truths at arm's length.

For now, Amanda is caught in the illusion that Laura's problems will be solved by a typing course. Would you agree that learning to type seems like an effective way to solve Laura's problems? Laura herself doesn't seem to think so. She acts as though it's perfectly okay to play with her menagerie instead of working. She chooses to walk in the park instead of owning up to failure. When Laura says "I couldn't face it," she analyzes her condition accurately. She truly cannot face reality. And when Amanda discovers the truth about Laura, she has the urge to "find a hole in the ground and hide myself in it forever!"

Laura apparently fails to share her mother's concern about the future. She never talks about it, and despite Amanda's warnings, she does nothing to prepare for it. Laura seems almost like a small child in that respect.

Compared to Laura, Amanda is almost a realist. Experience has taught her that unless you earn a living you will inevitably depend on others all your life, eating the "crust of humility." Amanda asks Laura, "Is that the future we've mapped out for ourselves?"

The only choice left, of course, is marriage. Perhaps Amanda has considered it and discarded the notion for Laura. Remember that her own marriage turned out badly. What would Laura do if she, like Amanda, ended up with a runaway husband? Also, as far as we know, Laura has never had a date.

Regardless, Amanda's spirits are revived by the thought of Laura's marriage. Since Laura isn't cut out for a business career, she'll have to marry a nice young man. Laura objects: "I'm—crippled!" But Amanda won't hear it. She doesn't even want Laura to say the word.

NOTE: Does Laura have a point? Is she truly "crippled"? She limps just slightly. Would you say that she is more psychologically than physically crippled? What do you know about her thus far to suggest that she'll always have a hard time functioning in **the** world?

Amanda cringes at the word "crippled." She told Laura never to use the word. Perhaps Amanda believes in the power of words. That is, if you tell a lie often enough, after a while you begin to believe it. In what respects does this saying seem to be valid in *The Glass Menagerie*

SCENE THREE

Tom returns as narrator to tell you about Amanda's obsession: finding a nice young man to marry Laura. If you have ever known someone with a one-track mind you can appreciate what Amanda must have been like at the time. She even took a part-time job selling magazine subscriptions by telephone to earn extra money for re-doing both Laura and the apartment. Amanda is a woman of action as well as words.

While Tom doesn't object to his mother's frantic activities, he doesn't support them either. Rather, he thinks they are amusing. At least he seems to poke gentle fun at Amanda's efforts. But do you note an ache in Tom's recollection of Amanda on the telephone with Ida Scott? He remembers how pathetically Amanda tried to ingratiate herself with a customer who obviously didn't care. Rather than admit to his pain, Tom recalls the situation with bitter humor. Like many people who demonstrate a talent for laughter when their emotions are stirred, Tom may laugh to keep from crying. What does Tom's attitude reveal about his deepest feelings toward his mother?

NOTE: As you continue with the play you'll have numerous chances to laugh at comical lines (mostly Tom's) and situations. Some of the humor may be pure, unadulterated fun. But some of it may strike you as humorous only until you realize that the words or actions grow out of the characters' desperation. Would Amanda, for instance, find humor in Tom's rendition of her quest to find Laura a husband?

When Tom steps back into his role in the play, you find him embroiled in a shouting match with his mother. Evidently, she has interrupted him at his writing and has criticized the books he reads. "I won't allow such filth brought into my house!" screams Amanda. Tom won't permit Amanda to claim their apartment as "my house," for his salary pays the rent. Consider Tom's reasoning. Does the fact that he is the family breadwinner give him the right to disregard his mother's wishes? The fury between mother and son intensifies. Tom is about to curse at his mother and rush out the door. Laura desperately calls out: "Tom!" At the sound of her voice, the shouting diminishes. Tom, now in control of his passion, talks intensely to Amanda about how he hates the life he leads.

NOTE: On Laura Do you find yourself taking sides in the fight between Amanda and Tom? You're not given much choice when the antagonists are a bossy, narrow-minded woman and her selfish, irresponsible son. Since Tom and Amanda will fight to a draw anyway, pay attention to Laura's role in the conflict. Isn't she, after all, the reason that Tom and Amanda fight? If there were no Laura, Tom would probably have moved out of the house long ago, and Amanda would have no one to worry about but herself. As in all families, each member has a particular function. In the Wingfield household, Laura serves as peacemaker. You'll see her step between Tom and Amanda several more times in the play.

Tom's catalog of grievances includes a miserable job at the Continental Shoemakers warehouse. He also hates living in this wretched little apartment where he has a nagging mother, no privacy, and nothing to call his own. He feels like a slave to his job and family. Every morning when Amanda's piercing "Rise and shine!" awakens him, he'd prefer to be dead. No, he's not selfish, Tom replies to Amanda's accusation. If he were, he'd be like his father—gone! Does Amanda lack compassion for her own son? It may seem so at times. Perhaps fear of the future and anxiety for Laura blind her to Tom's problems. All she can think of is that Tom's erratic and irresponsible behavior jeopardizes her security as well as Laura's. Since both she and Laura depend on Tom for life's necessities, does she have a good reason to be apprehensive? How would you feel about depending on Tom for your livelihood?

As Tom starts to leave again, Amanda grabs at him. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the *movies!*" he replies brutally.

She calls him a liar, an accusation which launches him into a semi-tragic, semi-comic list of his nightly sins. Although you can find humor in Tom's speech, you may also be struck by the

bitterness of his words. Although his speech is one of the funniest moments in the play, its tone is bitter and sarcastic. Tom concludes by calling Amanda an "ugly— babbling old—*witch*. ..."
As he rushes from the apartment, his arm gets caught in the sleeve of his bulky coat. Impatiently, he hurls the coat away. It strikes the shelf holding Laura's menagerie, shattering the glass animals. Laura is stunned. When you consider how highly Laura values her menagerie, its wreckage probably marks a turning point in her life. But how sharply she might change remains to be seen. Do you think she has the capacity to change very much?

NOTE: You have seen that all the characters feel trapped by the circumstances of their lives. Since people naturally seek freedom, each has figured out a way to escape, at least temporarily: Amanda uses her illusions, Laura retires to her glass collection, Tom goes to the movies. How well each of these escape mechanisms works becomes clear in the next few scenes. Pay particular heed to Laura. See if the breaking of the glass menagerie sets her free from her illusory world. On the other hand, the damage to the glass could have the reverse effect. That is, it could shatter her inner peace.

Deeply hurt, Amanda calls after Tom, "I won't speak to you—until you apologize."

SCENE FOUR

Slightly drunk, Tom returns to the apartment at five in the morning. Laura opens the door for him. Last night, Tom explains, he went to the movie theater. The stage show featured Malvolio the Magician. (In those days, when you went to the movies, you were offered a full range of entertainment. Movies were often accompanied by live performances.) Malvolio performed tricks of illusion that had the appearance of truth: turning water to wine, then to beer, then to whiskey. But the best trick was Malvolio's escape from a nailed up coffin. Tom says bitterly, "There is a trick that would come in handy for me—get me out of this two-by-four situation."

NOTE: Tom's references to magic and illusions should call to mind the opening of Scene One. You have already observed several examples of deception and illusion in the characters' actions. Stay alert for more in the scenes ahead.

Tom's allusion to his trap—his "two-by-four situation"—reveals that escape is never far from his thoughts. Would it have startled you to learn that Tom had taken permanent leave from home last night after his blow-up with Amanda? He had a tailor-made opportunity to go, but here he is, back again. Why did he come back? What might it take to drive him off for good?

After you hear the six o'clock church bells, Amanda starts her day. Although she's still angry about last night, she unleashes a few "rise and shines" in Tom's direction, but she won't talk to her son. Laura, the peacemaker, tries without luck to get Tom to apologize to Amanda. What do you suppose prevents him from making up?

Soon Amanda sends Laura on an errand to the deli. Laura objects, however. She is afraid to face the scowling deli man when she asks for credit. But she goes, and then slips on the fire escape on her way out.

NOTE: On symbolism It may seem like a trivial incident, but Laura's stumble shouldn't be ignored. Why did the playwright have her stumble on the fire escape? Symbolically, it could suggest the perils of entering the real world.

Some readers object to the search for symbolic meaning in every action or word. Be assured, however, that symbolism in *The Glass Menagerie* is not accidental. Tennessee Williams stated at the outset that the play is full of symbols, but ultimately you're the one who must decide whether to take his statement at face value. You needn't seek symbols in every line of

dialogue and each piece of stage business. But if you uncover symbolic treasures as you continue, studying the play may be that much richer an experience for you.

In this scene thus far you might consider the potential symbolism in Tom's rainbow-colored scarf, and the illumination of Mr. Wingfield's photograph. You'll soon be hearing the strains of "Ave Maria," perhaps reminding you that Amanda resembles a suffering madonna when she is deeply disappointed by her children.

As soon as Tom apologizes, you see the gradual return of the old Amanda. First she bemoans her fate and then plays the role of a hurt and troubled mother: "My devotion has made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children." What can Tom possibly say in reply, especially after he has just apologized?

Amanda doesn't give up easily. She wants to discuss Tom's drinking and moviegoing again, hoping that Tom will see the connection between his habits and his sister's future. Tom explains that because he's restless for adventure, he goes to the movies. Amanda asserts that most men find adventure in their careers. Of all people, though, Amanda knows how comforting a short flight into illusion can be. So she accepts, somewhat reluctantly, Tom's reasons for his nightly escape. Instead of trying futilely to restrain him, Amanda makes a deal with him. She will not hold him back if, in return, he provides a man for Laura.

Tom has been manipulated by Amanda, but he doesn't seem to mind. He probably views the deal as a small price to pay for freedom. As he goes off to work, he agrees to bring home a friend from the warehouse.

SCENE FIVE

Winter has surrendered to spring. The legend projected on the screen reads "Annunciation," suggesting that in this scene an announcement of some note will be made.

NOTE: The "Annunciation" refers to the biblical account of the angel Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin Mary that she was to bear the son of God. The annunciation in this scene may not seem quite as momentous as the original, but to Amanda it is almost as important, as you will see. Also, the feast of the Annunciation is celebrated on March 25, so the legend on the screen helps to note the arrival of spring.

The months have not altered Amanda. She still badgers Tom and laments his lack of ambition. She's still hoping that Tom will settle down, and find contentment as a CPA. Tired of the nagging, Tom retreats to the fire escape, where, as narrator again, he addresses the audience.

He observes life outside the Wingfield apartment. Every evening, young couples used to come to the Paradise Dance Hall to while away hours dancing or kissing in the adjacent alley. That, Tom says, was their form of escape from dull, dreary lives.

Little did these young people know that change was approaching in the form of war. Many of them would be killed fighting the Nazis. But in their innocence, they danced to the music of "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise." As Tom comments, the wait was really for "bombardments."

NOTE: Tom names people and places associated with the coming of World War II.

Berchtesgaden = Hitler's mountain headquarters.

Chamberlain = British prime minister blamed for failing to stop Hitler's march across Europe.

Guernica = a Spanish town destroyed by the fascists in 1937 and which became a symbol for atrocities against innocent people. Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" painting, depicting the horrors of war, is world famous.

On this warm spring evening Amanda joins Tom on the fire escape. While talking with Tom, she sounds much like a young girl flirting with a gentleman caller on the plantation porch. Tom uses the opportunity to give Amanda the news she's been wanting to hear for many months. He has invited a young man, Jim O'Connor, to dinner—tomorrow!

Amanda is ecstatic, of course, but also very businesslike, thinking of what has to be done to prepare for the guest. Her mind races through the list of chores: do the laundry, polish the silver, put up fresh curtains, plan the menu. She quizzes Tom about Jim's job, background, and looks. She wants to know especially if he drinks. Jim would not be right for Laura if he were a drinking man. Although she's just heard of the invitation, Amanda speaks of Jim as Laura's future husband, as a man with family responsibilities. Amanda has probably imagined this moment so often, has anticipated every detail of the courtship, that the news merely triggers the plan into action. Tom tries to yank Amanda back to reality. He hasn't told Jim about Laura's existence. The invitation was casual, not couched in terms of "don't you want to meet my sister?" Furthermore, Tom reminds Amanda, Laura is not one to make an instant good impression. She's peculiar, living "in a world of her own—a world of little glass ornaments . . . She plays old phonograph records and—that's about all."

Tom's accurate description of Laura troubles Amanda. But it's only a temporary setback. She has too much invested in her illusion to be waylaid by the truth.

SCENE SIX

You're soon to meet Jim O'Connor, the man designated by Amanda to rescue Laura from a life of dependency. Early in his narration, Tom called Jim a symbolic figure—"the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for." At the start of this scene Tom tells you about the real Jim O'Connor:

Tom recalls that Jim was the most revered student at Soldan High School—popular, talented, athletic—the kind everyone envies. You suspect, too, that Jim is the high school hero Laura liked years ago. But the real world failed to treat Jim as kindly as the world of school. Six years after graduation, he holds only a modest job at the Continental Shoemakers warehouse. Because Tom remembered the days of Jim's triumphs, Jim valued Tom's friendship. He also nicknamed Tom "Shakespeare" for his habit of writing poetry in the warehouse bathroom during slow hours. Jim's arrival approaches. Amanda has brightened up the apartment overnight. Laura wears a new dress. The stage directions say that 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." Do you find the last few phrases of that description ominous? Is Laura's prettiness an illusion? Amanda intends to snare the unsuspecting Mr. O'Connor. The final touch is her own "spectacular appearance." She dons the same party dress that she wore as a girl—the one she wore the day she met her future husband. The garment is totally out of place in a St. Louis tenement, but to Amanda, for the time being, the apartment could just as well be a mansion in Mississippi on the night of the Governor's Ball. Can there be any doubt that Amanda has attempted to recreate a piece of her own youth? If Laura can't win Mr. O'Connor with her lovely fragility, Amanda intends to overwhelm him with charm.

Amanda has kept Jim's name from Laura until now, just a few minutes before her prospective beau is due to arrive. Another little deception, Amanda? Laura is horrified by the revelation. She's overcome with fright and claims to feel sick. She refuses to open the door when the knock comes. Instead, she darts to the record player, her safe haven. But Amanda forces her to let Jim in. Jim acknowledges Laura, but hardly notices her. He's too involved in telling Tom about a public speaking course he's taking. Jim is also intent on advising Tom to shape up at the warehouse. The boss disapproves of Tom's work and has talked about firing him. The warning doesn't trouble Tom. Rather, he almost welcomes it because he knows that he has completed his side of the bargain with Amanda. He tells Jim that he's ready to quit the job anyway. He's even tired of the vicarious thrills he gets in the movies. He wants firsthand excitement now. Tom shows Jim a Union of Merchant Seamen card, which he bought with money that he should have used to pay the light bill. Jim, however, dismisses Tom's revelations as hot air. Could it be that Jim doesn't believe his friend, or that he doesn't understand him?

Presently Amanda, oozing charm, joins the two young men. Her appearance shocks Tom. Even Jim is taken aback slightly. Amanda must think that talking nonstop is the best way to impress Jim. She plunges ahead at full throttle, skipping from topic to topic at random. This is Amanda in her prime, entertaining a flock of gentleman callers in Blue Mountain.

Tom is embarrassed, but Jim, after his initial shock, is won over. He nods and smiles at Amanda's monologue, and during the remainder of the scene says literally only one single word.

Meanwhile Laura remains terror stricken in the kitchen. Her illness is not feigned. Fear has brought on a fever. Amanda explains to Jim that Laura became ill standing over a hot stove. Tom helps Laura into the living room to lie down.

SCENE SEVEN

Although Laura lies huddled on the couch all through dinner, Amanda remains cheerful. She's so high spirited that you'd think that Jim was invited to dinner for her and not for Laura.

No sooner does the scene start than the lights go out. Tom, you've heard, has not paid the light bill, and the electric company has chosen this moment to cut off the power. Can you imagine what Amanda might say about Tom's failure to pay the bill if Jim weren't present?

NOTE: On "light" You have seen numerous references to lights of all kinds throughout the play: moon, lightbulbs, match flame, candlelight, torch, lightning. If moonlight conventionally symbolizes romance, what could lightning represent? Could it be the harsh light of reality? When Tom remarks that "nowadays the world is lit by lightning" he seems to be referring to war. Since a courtship of sorts dominates this scene, you'll see many lights usually associated with romance: candles, moonlight, and so forth. The abrupt loss of electricity, while reminding you that you can't ignore the reality of paying your bills, also provides a convenient reason for using candles to illuminate this "love" scene between Jim and Laura. At the same time, though, keep in mind that the whole play is dimly lit to represent memory.

Amanda manages to remain charming despite the stress she must feel. But even as she banters with Jim, you'll hear hints of seriousness. In a few sentences of apparently light conversation, she mentions the "mysterious universe," the "high price for negligence," and "everlasting darkness." Perhaps these phrases have been included to prepare you for things to come in the play, although you should guard against reading something too ominous into the words.

Finally, Amanda sends Jim into the living room to keep Laura company. To light his way, she gives him an old candelabrum, a relic from the burned-down Church of the Heavenly Rest.

NOTE: On Christian references Are you tempted to seek a symbolic meaning in the church candelabrum? This isn't the first reference to religion in the play, but it comes at a crucial moment. Amanda may view Jim as a "savior" of sorts as he goes to talk to Laura. Could that be the reason she equips him with a holy object? Jim as a Christ figure may be hard for you to accept. Nevertheless, he has been summoned to save Laura. And don't ignore the fact that earlier in the play Amanda plans fish for dinner because Jim is Irish Catholic. Fish, you may know, is a traditional symbol for Christ.

We're about to find out if Amanda's carefully laid plan—or would you prefer to call it a trap?—will work as she hopes. Jim sits down with Laura and talks with her warmly. Frightened and breathless as usual, Laura listens.

Jim dominates the conversation. He's friendly and self assured. Maybe he's practicing what he learned in his courses on how to be successful. His monologue may remind you of Amanda's behavior earlier in the evening. Is he trying to win Laura's admiration as he was won over by Amanda?

Jim obviously likes to talk about himself. Laura is just the opposite. As soon as Jim swings the topic of conversation to Laura's shyness, notice how nimbly Laura tosses the ball back to Jim. Laura raises the subject of Jim's singing. It's her way of reminding him that they've met before. As they talk, memories of high school come flooding back. Jim remembers that he called Laura "Blue Roses," a name that rhymes with pleurosis, an ailment that kept Laura out of school for a time. The name fits somehow, even six years later, because a blue rose, like Laura, is "different," set apart from others. If you ever see a blue rose, you can bet it's one of a kind.

Laura steers the conversation to Jim's triumphant high school career. When she hands him their high school yearbook (notice its name: *The Torch!*), Jim accepts it "reverently." To Jim, the book is a precious record of his past glory.

Although he delights in recalling the past, Jim keeps his eye on the present. (Remember, Tom labelled Jim "an emissary from the world of reality.") He confesses to Laura that he hasn't yet ac-

complished all that he once hoped to. Jim's willingness to talk openly emboldens Laura. She asks about Jim's high school sweetheart. The news that he dropped her long ago sends Laura's insides into a tumult. Instinctively, she reaches for her glass menagerie, her haven in times of stress. Laura wouldn't think of Jim as her "savior" in the religious sense. Yet, he shows the zeal of a missionary in his effort to redeem Laura from lifelong feelings of inferiority. Notice his long, sermon-like speeches about the proper way to lead one's life. Christ taught many moral lessons through example. In his preaching, Jim cites his own actions to illustrate self-confidence. Will Jim actually rescue Laura from misery? If you think so, you're seeing Jim through rose-colored glasses, the way Amanda and Laura do. On the other hand, if Jim strikes you as just an ordinary fellow out for a pleasant evening, you're probably more realistic about him. Look closely at his behavior. Does he truly intend to change Laura? Or does he brag a bit only to boost his own ego?

His advice to Laura could just as well be delivered to himself. It heightens still more his desire to keep striving for success. He's even moved to sing the praises of American democracy.

NOTE: Jim's vision of American democracy is cloudy. It's based on his naive belief that a young person with the right connections and a few night school courses in executive behavior will zoom to the top of the corporate ladder. But how many young people achieve success that way? Jim's plan sounds like an obsolete success myth — that is, an illusion. In addition, Jim ignores the approach of World War II, a real event which postponed or upset virtually every American's plans for the future.

Jim takes a polite interest in Laura's glass collection. Observe how respectfully Jim accepts Laura's fantasy about her unicorn. A less sensitive person might ridicule Laura's notion that the unicorn "loves the light," but not Jim. He's more appreciative than she could wish.

Then he asks Laura to dance. You have to admire him, for who would have thought that anyone could ever get Laura to dance? While dancing they bump the table. The unicorn falls to the floor. Its horn has broken off. Now it's like all the other horses.

NOTE: The symbolism of the unicorn's breakage is as transparent as the glass itself. But that doesn't make it any less poignant or effective. Without its horn, the unicorn is no longer unique. During the evening Laura has broken out of her world of unreality. She, too, has become less "freakish." It's a significant moment in the play.

Jim blames himself for the mishap, but Laura seems not to mind at all. How much Laura has changed! Recall that earlier in the play she had been distraught when Tom knocked the menagerie shelf to the floor. Jim is struck by Laura's graceful good humor as well as by her uniqueness. Suddenly, he's overcome by emotions he can't control. He is tongue tied. He can't think of anything better to do than kiss Laura on the lips.

Jim immediately realizes his mistake. He shouldn't have led her on. Gently, he breaks the news to Laura that he won't be calling again because he's engaged to Betty. Laura is speechless with shock. As Tennessee Williams writes, "*The holy candles on the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out.*" Jim asks Laura to speak, but she can't. Instead, she gives him the broken glass unicorn as a souvenir. A souvenir of what? Of a happy evening? Maybe a token of appreciation for his attempt to help her overcome her problem? Or does she intend to make him feel guilty? Do you blame Jim for withholding the information about his engagement? Was it wrong for Jim to lead Laura on under false pretenses? Or is he perfectly justified in doing so because he had been invited to dinner only for the purpose of meeting Laura? You might sympathize with him for being a victim of his own conflicting emotions. Perhaps he would like to love Laura, but he feels compelled to hold back because she doesn't fit the mold of a business executive's wife.

Amanda chooses this moment to serve lemonade. As bubbly as before, she encounters a tense and somber situation in the living room. Her gaiety makes the news of Jim's engagement all the more shocking. In a moment, Jim is out the door. Not only has Jim failed to be Laura's knight in shining armor, but he hasn't even been an eligible candidate.

While the evening may not have been a disaster for Laura, it has been for Amanda. She casts about for someone to blame. She won't blame herself, of course, although you might argue that she should have known the risks of investing so much in one evening. Tom, therefore, has to be responsible. Amanda's temper rises. She accuses Tom of deliberate deception, of living in a dream world and manufacturing illusions. Do you see that Amanda could just as easily be talking about herself? In this instance there may be truth in the old idea that we dislike in others what we dislike about ourselves.

Tom refuses to take the blame. It was an innocent mistake, he claims, but Amanda refuses to accept such an excuse, Tom knows his mother well enough to realize he has no hope of dissuading her, so he immediately sets off for the movies. But, as you'll see, he goes much farther. He has fulfilled his obligation at home and can do no more. As he leaves, Amanda shouts after him, "Go to the moon—you selfish dreamer!"

Do you share Amanda's judgment that Tom is a selfish dreamer? You may also appreciate Tom's desperation and his need to do what every young person must do at some point in life: break from home and find one's own identity and place in the world.

NOTE: Tom leaves the apartment in a rage, but he doesn't leave St. Louis until he is fired from his job. If you could look into Tom's head you might find considerable confusion. He wants to leave home, but it's difficult to do so. He also may realize that he could fail to find his dream out in the world. To guard against assuming total responsibility for possible failure, he waits until he is fired. As a result, he can blame his boss instead of himself in case things turn out badly. Tom, like his mother, needs a scapegoat.

Tom's closing speech reviews his wanderings since he left St. Louis. Does he believe that he made the right choice to follow his father's footsteps? Did he find the adventure he sought in the merchant navy? Tom declares that "cities swept about me like dead leaves . . . torn from the branches." Does the statement suggest that world travel suited him?

Why did Tom apparently fail to find the romance he craved? Has life so embittered him that he can't ever be saved from self-pity and sullen-ness? Or is he guilt ridden over deserting his mother and sister? Still another possibility is that Tom was doomed to chase rainbows. Adventure, romance, excitement—that's what you see in the movies. To pursue them in real life amounts to self-deception, for they are often as elusive as illusions.

Tom can't shake loose his memories of the past. Images of Laura haunt him. His emotional ties to the past may stretch, but they never break. Do you think we are all held captive by our past or is Tom a special case? In the last moment of the play Laura blows out her candles, casting the stage into total darkness. Williams has devised a dramatic ending to the play, but the action also suggests that Tom has finally rid himself of Laura's memory. Why he should suddenly be able to do so, however, is not totally clear. Perhaps the war, symbolized by lightning, has changed everything, including the way men think.