

The Glass Menagerie Summary

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Summary

Scene 1

Introducing the Characters and Struggles

Tom, who is both the narrator and a character in the play, walks toward the fire escape of his apartment. He gives a brief account of what's happening in the world. He mentions events like the Spanish Civil War and problems with labor in American cities. He tells the audience that the events in the play are from his memory (it means the actions/story of the play happened in the past). Tom introduces the other characters: Amanda, his mother; Laura, his sister; and a gentleman caller. He also mentions an important, yet absent, character—Amanda's husband and Tom and Laura's father—who abandoned the family. But his large picture hangs on the wall throughout the play. Tom explains that his father was a telephone company worker who left them.

Tom walks into the apartment where his mother, Amanda, is calling his name. From this moment, the acting of the play starts. During dinner, Amanda constantly talks. She gives Tom advice about table manners and how to behave. This irritates Tom, and he leaves the table to smoke. Amanda always tells a story about the many men who admired her when she was young. She talks about Laura needing to find a gentleman. But Laura says that no one is coming because she is not popular like her mother was in Blue Mountain. Amanda worries that Laura will never get married.

Scene 2

Laura's Life and Amanda's Despair

Laura is polishing her collection of glass animals (these glass animals are called Glass Menagerie). She hears her mother coming. Quickly, she hides the animals and pulls out a diagram of a typewriter keyboard. Amanda enters, looking upset. Laura asks her mother why she did not attend her D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution) meeting. Amanda says she had instead gone to check on Laura at Rubicam's Business College. She found out that Laura had dropped out just a few days after starting. Laura explains that she became very

nervous during a typing test. She became sick and couldn't return. Amanda is disappointed with her. Laura admits that instead of going to college, she has spent her days walking around the city, visiting museums, zoos, and movies. Amanda is worried that they will have to depend on the charity of their relatives since Laura cannot hold a job. When Amanda talks about marriage, Laura confesses that she once had a crush on a boy in high school. The boy nicknamed her "Blue Roses" after he misheard her saying she had pleurosis (a lung disease). Amanda decides that Laura's only option now is to get married. Amanda tells Laura to ignore her limp. She tells her to focus on being charming.

Scene 3

Conflict Between Amanda and Tom

Tom narrates from the fire escape. He describes how Amanda has become obsessed with finding a husband for Laura. She spends the winter and early spring selling subscriptions to a magazine to make some extra money.

Tension builds between Amanda and Tom, especially when Amanda criticizes Tom's choices, including the books he reads and how he spends his nights. Tom is frustrated with her mother's constant nagging. In his anger, he calls Amanda an "**ugly—babbling, old—witch**" and throws his coat across the room. He accidentally knocks over some of Laura's glass animals with the coat. The breaking glass brings a shocked silence to the room.

Scene 4

Tom's Night Out and Amanda's Request to Find a Husband for Laura

At 5:00 A.M., Tom returns home from a night out. He has been watching movies and drinking. Tom tells Laura a wild story about what he saw, including a magician who turned water into whiskey. He gives her a scarf, claiming it was used by the magician. Laura helps him to go to his bed, trying not to wake Amanda. However, Amanda wakes up. She sends Laura to the store for butter. But Laura is nervous because they owe money to the storekeeper. As she leaves, Laura slips on the fire escape stairs. Tom finally apologizes to Amanda. Amanda admits that she only pushes him because she loves him and wants a better future for him and Laura. She begs him to stay with the family until Laura is married. She also asks him to bring home a nice man from work for Laura to meet. Tom is surprised by this request.

Scene 5

The Gentleman Caller

It is now spring. After dinner, Amanda nags Tom about his appearance and how much he smokes. She suggests Tom could save the money for an accounting course. Tom brushes off her advice. Stepping onto the fire escape, he becomes the narrator again. He describes the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley, where young people go to enjoy life. He hints that war is coming. He mentions how young people like him will soon face World War II. Amanda joins him on the fire escape. She sits on the fire escape as if it were a porch (veranda). She remembers her Southern past (in her youth, Amanda lived in the Southern region). As they make wishes on the moon, Tom surprises her by revealing that he has invited a friend from work for dinner the next evening. Amanda becomes excited. They discuss Jim O'Connor, Tom's friend. Tom mentions that Jim is ambitious, studying radio engineering and public speaking. Tom says he did not tell Jim about Laura's shyness or her limp. Amanda refuses to worry about these things. She focuses only on preparing for the dinner.

Scene 6

Preparing for the Gentleman Caller

Tom narrates again. He explains that Jim O'Connor was a popular and successful student in high school. He expected to do great things. However, now he works in the same warehouse as Tom. Despite this, Jim is still well-liked and confident. Jim nicknames Tom "Shakespeare" because Tom writes poetry during his free time at work. Tom knows Laura had a crush on Jim in high school. But Jim does not know where Laura is.

Amanda, meanwhile, has been working nonstop to prepare the apartment and their appearance for Jim's visit. When Amanda tells Laura that Jim O'Connor is coming, Laura is horrified. He was the boy she admired in high school. The news makes her nervous and physically ill. When Jim and Tom arrive, Laura is so nervous that she can barely answer the door. Amanda becomes frustrated with her daughter. Jim and Tom smoke on the fire escape. Jim talks about his plans for the future. He encourages Tom to take a public speaking class with him. Tom, however, has other plans—he shows Jim his membership card for the Union of Merchant Seamen. Tom reveals that he is planning to leave. He admits he used the money meant for the electric bill to pay his dues. Amanda enters the room. She wears a gown from her youth days. She begins charming Jim with her Southern hospitality. When Laura arrives at the table, she nearly faints. Tom helps her to sit on the sofa. Despite this, Amanda insists that they begin dinner.

Scene 7

Laura's Disappointment and Tom's Departure

After dinner, the lights suddenly go out. Jim checks the fuses and realizes the electricity has been cut off because Tom did not pay the bill. Amanda is furious but keeps her anger in check. She gives Jim a candelabra and sends him to sit with Laura while she and Tom clean up the dinner table.

At first, Laura is shy, but Jim's friendly personality helps her relax. They talk about their high school days. Laura reminds him that he once called her "Blue Roses" when he misheard her saying she had pleurosis. Jim encourages Laura to find something she is good at. He admires her uniqueness. Laura shows him her collection of glass animals. Her favorite is a unicorn because it is different, just like her. They hear music from the dance hall, and Jim convinces Laura to dance. As they dance, they accidentally knock over the unicorn, breaking its horn. Laura is surprisingly calm. She says that now the unicorn is more like the other horses. Jim praises Laura and kisses her, but quickly apologizes. He explains that he is engaged to another woman named Betty. He will marry her soon. He leaves, and Laura gives him the broken unicorn as a parting gift.

After Jim leaves, Amanda lashes out at Tom. She accuses him of playing a cruel joke by bringing home a man who was already engaged. Tom feels the weight of the situation and decides to leave for good. Amanda yells after him, calling him a "**selfish dreamer.**"

As the narrator, Tom explains that he left St. Louis and traveled the world, but he could never escape the memory of Laura. Even small things, like bits of glass or soft music, always remind him of her.