

## Tennessee Williams

# The Glass Menagerie

### Summary

The action of the play centers on Tom, his mother Amanda, and his sister Laura. In 1937 they live together in a small apartment in St. Louis. Their father abandoned them years earlier, and Tom is now the family's breadwinner. He works at the Continental Shoemakers warehouse during the day, but he disappears nightly "to the movies". Amanda is a loving mother, but her meddling and nagging are hard to live with for Tom, who is a grown man and who earns the wages that support the entire family. Laura is a frightened and terribly shy girl, with unbelievably weak nerves. She is also slightly lame in one leg, and she seldom leaves the apartment of her own volition. She busies herself caring for her "glass menagerie", a collection of delicate little glass animals.

Amanda dreams constantly of the long-ago days when she was a young Southern belle and the darling of her small town's social scene. She enrolled Laura in classes at Rubicam's Business College, hoping that a career in business would make Laura self-sufficient. She discovers that Laura stopped attending class a long time ago, because the speed tests on the typewriter terrified her. After the fiasco at Rubicam's, Amanda gives up on a business career for Laura and puts all her hopes into finding a husband for her.

Amanda's relationship with Tom is difficult. Tom longs to be free - like his father - to abandon Amanda and Laura and set off into the world. He has stayed because of his responsibility for them, but his mother's nagging and his frail sister's idiosyncrasies make the apartment a depressing and oppressive place. Tom also hates his job. His only escape comes from his frequent visits to the movies, but his nightly disappearances anger and baffle Amanda. He fights with Amanda all the time, and the situation at home grows more unbearable.

Amanda, sensing that Tom wants to leave, tries to make a deal with him. If Tom and Amanda can find a husband for Laura, a man who can take care of her, then Tom will be free of his responsibility to them. Amanda asks Tom to bring home gentlemen callers to meet Laura. Tom brings home Jim O'Connor, a fellow employee at the warehouse. He is an outgoing and enthusiastic man on whom Laura had a terrible crush in high school. Jim chats with Laura, growing increasingly flirtatious, until he finally kisses her. Then he admits that he has a fiancé and cannot call again. For fragile Laura, the news is devastating.

Amanda is furious, and after Jim leaves she accuses Tom of playing a cruel joke on them. Amanda and Tom have one final fight, and not long afterward Tom leaves for good. In his closing monologue, he admits that he cannot escape the memory of his sister. Though he abandoned her years ago, Laura still haunts him.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Glass Menagerie Summary", **Grade Saver**, [www.gradesaver.com/the-glass-menagerie/study-guide](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-glass-menagerie/study-guide)