

A Streetcar Named Desire



BACKGROUND INFO

AUTHOR BIO

Full Name: Thomas Lanier Williams III

Pen Name: Tennessee Williams

Date of Birth: March 26, 1911

Place of Birth: Columbus, MS

Date of Death: February 25, 1983

Brief Life Story: Born in Columbus, MS, Williams moved to St. Louis, MO as a child. Williams's literary career began early: at age sixteen, 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. But after Williams failed military training during junior year, his father pulled him out of college and put him to work in a factory. At age twenty-four, Williams suffered a nervous breakdown, left his job, and returned to college, studying at Washington University in St. Louis but finally graduating from the University of Iowa in 1938. Williams lived in the French Quarter of New Orleans in 1939, writing for the Works Progress Administration. He later traveled to Hollywood to work as a screenwriter.

Williams's first major success came in 1945 with his play *The Glass Menagerie*, and in 1947, the enormously popular *A Streetcar Named Desire* cemented his fame in the theater. The play's raw, animalistic, explosive sexuality formed a sharp contrast to both the gentility of *The Glass Menagerie* and the musical comedies and revivals that dominated Broadway at the time. Over the 1950s, Williams earned two Pulitzer Prizes (including one for *Streetcar*), three New York Drama Critics Circle Awards, and a Tony Award, among many other accolades. However, Williams remained restless and insecure throughout his life. During the 1960s and 1970s, his plays were critical and box office failures. Williams descended into alcoholism and drug abuse, precipitated in 1963 by the death of his partner, Frank Merlo. In 1983, Williams choked to death on the cap of a pill bottle.

KEY FACTS

Full Title: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Genre: Psychological drama

Setting: New Orleans, LA

Climax: Stanley's rape of Blanche at the end of Scene Ten

Protagonist: Blanche DuBois

Antagonist: Stanley Kowalski

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

When Written: 1946-7

Where Written: New York, Los Angeles, and New Orleans

When Published: Broadway premiere December 3, 1947

Literary Period: Dramatic naturalism

Related Literary Works: Williams's 1945 play *The Glass Menagerie* also revolves around tense familial relationships, memories, and dreams. Blanche du Bois shares many similarities with both Amanda Wingfield, an aging Southern belle who clings to memories of her past as an ingénue, and Laura Wingfield, the fragile, somewhat unstable sister. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* also portrays a family through generations and explores the interaction between dreams and reality.

Related Historical Events: During and immediately after World War II, most of the mainstream American art was patriotic and optimistic, rallying the country around the idea of a robust, victorious nation. Many critics see

Brando's dangerous yet seductive portrayal of Stanley as leading the way for the youth movement and the rock-and-roll culture of the 1950s and 1960s.

EXTRA CREDIT

That Rattle-trap Streetcar Named Desire. The Desire streetcar line operated in New Orleans from 1920 to 1948, going through the French Quarter to its final stop on Desire Street.

Streetcar on the silver screen. The original 1947 Broadway production of *Streetcar* shot Marlon Brando, who played Stanley Kowalski, to stardom. Brando's legendary performance cemented the actor's status as a sex symbol of the stage and screen. Elia Kazan, who directed both the original Broadway production and the 1951 film adaptation, used the Stanislavski method-acting system, which focuses on realism and natural characters instead of melodrama. The Stanislavski system asks actors to use their memories to help give the characters real emotions. Brando based his depiction of Stanley on the boxer Rocky Graziano, going to his gym to study his movements and mannerisms. Largely due to Brando's Stanley and Vivian Leigh's iconic Blanche, Kazan's film has become a cultural touchstone, particularly Brando's famous bellowing of "STELL-LAHHHHH!"

Oh, Streetcar! In an episode of *The Simpsons*, the characters stage a musical version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* called *Oh, Streetcar!* Mild-mannered Ned Flanders as Stanley gives the famous "STELLA" yell, singing, "Can't you hear me yell-a? You're putting me through hell-a!"



PLOT OVERVIEW

The play is set in the shabby but rakishly charming New Orleans of the 1940s. **Stanley** and **Stella** Kowalski live in the downstairs flat of a faded corner building. Williams uses a flexible set so that the audience simultaneously sees the interior and the exterior of the apartment.

Blanche DuBois, **Stella's** sister, arrives: "They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then to transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at--Elysian Fields!" Blanche is a fading Southern belle from Laurel, Mississippi. An English teacher (though hardly a schoolmarm), dressed in all white, she is delicate and moth-like. **Blanche** tells **Stella** that Belle Reve, the family plantation, has been lost, and that she has been given a leave of absence from her teaching position due to her nerves. Blanche criticizes Stella's surroundings and laments Stella's fall from their elite upbringing.

In contrast to **Stella's** self-effacing, deferential nature and **Blanche's** pretentious, refined airs, Stella's husband **Stanley Kowalski** exudes raw, animal, violent sexuality. While Blanche flutters in semi-darkness, soaks in the bath, and surrounds herself in silky clothes and costume jewels, Stanley rips off his sweaty shirts under the bare kitchen light bulb. Though Stella still cares for her sister, her life has become defined by her role as Stanley's wife: their relationship is primarily based on sexual chemistry. Stella's ties to New Orleans rather than the lost Belle Reve are further emphasized through her pregnancy: she is bringing a new Kowalski, not a DuBois, life into the world.

While **Blanche** is bathing, **Stanley** rummages through her trunk, suspecting Blanche of having sold Belle Reve and cheated Stella – and thereby himself – out of the inheritance. Blanche reveals that the estate was lost due to a foreclosed mortgage, showing Stanley the bank papers to prove it

Later that night, in the "lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum" of the kitchen, **Stanley** and his friends are still in the thick of their drunken poker night when **Blanche** and **Stella** return from an evening out. Stanley's friend **Mitch** catches Blanche's eye, and as she asks Stella about him, she maneuvers herself skillfully in the light to be caught half-dressed in silhouette.

Blanche and **Mitch** flirt. Blanche hangs a **paper lantern** over a bare bulb. **Stanley** seethes that Blanche is interrupting the poker game. Eventually,

Blanche turns on the radio, and Stanley erupts: he storms into the bedroom and tosses the radio out of the window. When **Stella** intervenes to try and make peace, Stanley hits her. Blanche and Stella escape upstairs to **Eunice's** apartment. The other men douse Stanley in the shower, which sobers him up, and he is remorseful. Stanley stumbles outside, bellowing upstairs: "STELL-LAHHHHH!" Stella slips back downstairs into Stanley's arms, and Mitch comforts Blanche in her distress.

The next morning, **Stella** is calm and radiant, while **Blanche** is still hysterical. Stella admits that she is "thrilled" by **Stanley's** aggression, and that even though Blanche wants her to leave, she's "not in anything that [she has] a desire to get out of." Blanche suggests that they contact Shep Huntleigh, a Dallas millionaire, to help them escape. The only thing holding Stella and Stanley together, Blanche says, is the "rattle-trap street-car named Desire." Stanley, unbeknownst to Stella and Blanche, overhears Blanche criticize Stanley as being coarse and sub-human. Blanche tells Stella, "In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching . . . Don't--don't hang back with the brutes!"

Later, **Stanley** lets drop a few hints that he knows some repugnant details about **Blanche's** past, and Blanche is nervous, but the tension does not crack just yet. While Blanche is in the apartment for **Mitch** to pick her up for a date, a **Young Man** comes to collect money for the paper. Blanche fervently flirts with him and kisses him on the mouth before Mitch arrives.

When **Blanche** and **Mitch** return from their date, she is exhausted with "the utter exhaustion which only a neurasthenic personality can know" and still nervous from Stanley's hints. Blanche is still playing at being a naïve Southern belle who still blushes at a kiss. Mitch boasts of his strapping manliness, but by speaking quantitatively about his athleticism rather than stripping his sweaty shirt and baring his torso.

Blanche melodramatically tells **Mitch** about her tragic love life: when she was sixteen, she married an effeminate young man who turned out to be homosexual. Blanche reproached her husband while they were dancing the **Varsouviana Polka**, and her husband committed suicide. Blanche is still haunted by his death (and the play will become increasingly haunted with the background music of the polka).

About a month later, **Blanche** is offstage soaking in the **bath** while **Stella** prepares Blanche's birthday dinner. **Stanley** tells Stella all about Blanche's sordid history in Laurel, as Blanche sings "**Paper Moon**" from the bathroom ("It's a Barnum and Bailey world / Just as phony as it can be / But it wouldn't be make-believe / If you believed in me!"). After losing Belle Reve, Blanche moved to the dubious Hotel Flamingo until getting kicked out for her promiscuous ways. Blanche is not taking a leave from her school due to her nerves: she has been fired for having an affair with a seventeen-year-old student. Stella, rushing to defend Blanche, is horrified, and she is equally horrified when Stanley tells her that he has also told these stories to **Mitch**. Stanley informs Stella that he's bought Blanche a one-way bus ticket back to Mississippi.

Mitch does not show up for **Blanche's** birthday dinner. Blanche senses that something is wrong. **Stanley** and **Stella** are tense. Blanche tries to telephone Mitch but doesn't get through; Stanley, Stella, and the audience know what Mitch knows, though Blanche does not. Stanley presents Blanche with the bus ticket. As we hear the faint strains of the polka, Blanche rushes out of the room. Stanley and Stella nearly begin a huge fight, but Stella goes into labor.

Later that evening, **Blanche** is alone in the apartment and **drunk**; the **Varsouviana** is playing in her mind. **Mitch**, also drunk, arrives and confronts Blanche. She admits that Stanley's stories are true - that after her husband's suicide, she had sought solace in the comfort of strangers. A **Mexican Woman** comes to the door and offers "Flores para los muertos." Mitch tries to have sex with Blanche but without agreeing to marry her, though he then stops himself. She cries "Fire! Fire!" and he stumbles away.

It's several hours later the same night, and **Blanche** has been **drinking** steadily since **Mitch** left. Stanley comes home from the hospital to get some rest before the baby comes. Blanche has put on an absurd white evening gown and a rhinestone tiara. Blanche makes up a story about Shep Huntleigh sending her a telegram from Dallas, and then tells **Stanley** that Mitch came back on his knees with roses to beg for forgiveness. Stanley shatters her stories, saying, "You come in her and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and

cover the light bulb with a **paper lantern**, and lo and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are the Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say--Ha!--Ha!" He bursts out of the bathroom in his brilliant silk pajamas, and advances on Blanche. She attempts to resist him, but Stanley overpowers her with physical force: "Tiger--tiger! Drop the bottle top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" She sinks down, and he carries her limp body to the bed; the swelling music indicates that he rapes her (offstage).

Weeks later, **Stella** and **Eunice** are packing **Blanche's** bags while the men play poker in the kitchen and Blanche takes a **bath**. They have made arrangements for Blanche to go to a mental asylum, but Blanche believes Shep Huntleigh is coming at last to take her away. Blanche has apparently told Stella about the rape, but Stella refuses to believe her. When Blanche emerges from the bath, she is delusional, worrying about the cleanness of the grapes and speaking of drowning in the sea. A **Doctor** and **Matron** from the asylum arrive, and Blanche sweeps through the poker players to the door. When she realizes that this is not Shep Huntleigh come to take her away, she initially resists, darting back into the house like a frightened animal, but she cannot hide from the Matron's advances. **Stanley** yanks the **paper lantern** off the light bulb. The Matron catches Blanche and drags her out. The Doctor treats her more calmly, calling her by name, and Blanche is mollified, grasping at her final shreds of dignity: "Whoever you are--I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." The Doctor leads her offstage. Stella, holding her baby in her arms, breaks down in "luxurious sobbing," and Stanley comforts her with loving caresses.



CHARACTERS

Blanche DuBois – **Stella's** older sister, about thirty years old, was a high school English teacher in Laurel, Mississippi until recently forced to leave her position. Blanche is nervous and appears constantly on edge, as though any slight disturbance could shatter her sanity. As a young woman, she married a man she later discovered to be homosexual, and who committed suicide after that discovery. When Blanche arrives at the **Kowalskis'** apartment, she is at the end of her rope: she has spiraled into a pattern of notorious promiscuity and alcoholism, and she has lost Belle Reve, the family plantation, due to a string of mortgages. But she clings desperately to the trappings of her fading Southern belle self: "Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth." Blanche loves Stella and tries to get her sister to escape New Orleans. Blanche is repulsed by **Stanley**, yet finds herself almost hypnotically attracted by his physical power, like a moth to the flame.

Stanley Kowalski – **Stella's** husband, is full of raw strength, ferocity, violent masculinity, and animal magnetism. He wears lurid colors and parades his physicality, stripping off sweaty shirts and smashing objects throughout the play. His extreme virility is a direct contrast to **Blanche's** homosexual husband who committed suicide. Stanley loves **Stella**--she is the soft, feminine foil to his violent ways. Their connection is indeed, as Blanche says derisively, "sub-human": their physical relationship creates a deep bond between them. However, Stanley is drawn to Blanche, and in the play's climax, he rapes her while Stella is in the hospital having the baby.

Harold Mitchell (Mitch) – The "gentleman" of **Stanley's** poker-playing friends. Much more genteel and mannered than the animalistic Stanley, though still a man with physical desires. He and **Blanche** develop a relationship, but Blanche pretends to be much more naïve and innocent than she actually is, and Mitch is ultimately driven away when he learns of her sordid recent past.

Eunice – **Steve's** wife and the **Kowalskis'** upstairs neighbor. Eunice is vivacious, earthy, and practical. She and Steve constantly fight and make up.

Steve – **Eunice's** husband and the **Kowalskis'** upstairs neighbor. Steve is one of **Stanley's** poker-playing and bowling friends. He is brash, hot-tempered, and somewhat comic, and he and Eunice constantly fight and make up.

Pablo – Another one of **Stanley's** poker-playing friends.

Negro Woman – A neighbor who is chatting with **Eunice** when **Blanche** arrives at Elysian Fields for the first time.

Doctor – A doctor from the mental asylum who comes to take **Blanche** away.

Matron – A nurse from the mental asylum where Blanche is sent at the end of the play.

Young Man – A collector of subscriptions for the newspaper whom Blanche seduces.

Mexican Woman – A street vendor who comes to the apartment to sell “Flores para los muertos,” frightening Blanche.

Stella Kowalski – Stella is Blanche DuBois’s younger sister and Stanley Kowalski’s wife. She is the emotional center of the play. Stella is the calm, reasonable foil to Blanche’s frenetic hysteria, and she is the soothing, feminine voice that counteracts Stanley’s violence. Although she loves Blanche and is hurt when Blanche is hurt, and although she is wistful, Stella has no desire to return to her past: she has chosen her present circumstances willingly, and she has made her life in New Orleans with Stanley. Stella’s pregnancy underscores her commitment to her Kowalski future, not her DuBois past. Stanley dominates Stella: she is drawn into the magnetic pull of his powerful physical presence. By modern-day standards, Stella is the victim of domestic violence, but in the play, her decision to return to Stanley even after he hits her is not judged as definitively right or wrong.



THEMES

In LitCharts each theme gets its own color. Our color-coded theme boxes make it easy to track where the themes occur throughout the work.

SEXUAL DESIRE

Many critics believe that Williams invented the idea of desire for the 20th century. The power of sexual desire is the engine propelling *A Streetcar Named Desire*: all of the characters are driven by “that rattle-trap street-car” in various ways.

Much of Blanche’s conception of how she operates in the world relies on her perception of herself as an object of male sexual desire. Her interactions with men always begin with flirtation. Blanche tells Stella that she and Stanley smoothed things over when she began to flirt with him. When Blanche meets Stanley’s poker-playing friends, she lights upon Mitch as a possible suitor and adopts the guise of a chaste lover for him to pursue.

Blanche nearly attacks the Young Man with her aggressive sexuality, flirting heavily with him and kissing him. Blanche dresses provocatively in red satin, silks, costume jewelry, etc: she calls attention to her body and her femininity through her carefully cultivated appearance. Blanche clings to her sexuality more and more desperately as the play progresses. To Blanche, perhaps motivated by her discovery that her first husband was in fact homosexual, losing her desirability is akin to losing her identity and her reason to live.

Stella’s desire for Stanley pulls her away from Belle Reve and her past. Stella is drawn to Stanley’s brute, animal sexuality, and he is drawn to her traditional, domestic, feminine sexuality. Stella is pregnant: her sexuality is deeply tied to both womanliness and motherhood. Even though Stanley is violent to Stella, their sexual dynamic keeps them together. When Blanche is horrified that Stanley beats Stella, Stella explains that the things that a man and a woman do together in the dark maintain their relationship.

Stanley’s sexuality and his masculinity are extremely interconnected: he radiates a raw, violent, brute animal magnetism. Stanley’s sexuality asserts itself violently over both Stella and Blanche. Although he hits Stella, she continues to stay with him and to submit to his force. While Stella is at the hospital giving birth to his child, Stanley rapes Blanche: the culmination of his sexual act with Stella coincides with the tragic culmination of his destined date with Blanche.

Throughout the play, sexual desire is linked to destruction. Even in supposedly loving relationships, sexual desire and violence are yoked: Stanley hits Stella, and Steve beats Eunice. The “epic fornications” of the DuBois ancestors created a chain reaction that has culminated in the loss of the family estate. Blanche’s pursuit of sexual desire has led to the loss of Belle Reve, her expulsion from Laurel, and her eventual removal from society. Stanley’s voracious carnal desire culminates in his rape of Blanche. Blanche’s husband’s “unacceptable” homosexual desire leads to his suicide.

FANTASY AND DELUSION

In Scene One, Blanche takes a streetcar named Desire through Cemeteries to reach Elysian Fields, where Stella and Stanley live. Though the place names are real, the journey allegorically foreshadows Blanche’s mental descent throughout the play. Blanche’s desires have led her down paths of sexual promiscuity and alcoholism, and by coming to stay with the Kowalskis, she has reached the end of the line. Blanche’s desire to escape causes her to lose touch with the world around her. By the end of the play, Blanche can no longer distinguish between fantasy and real life.

The tension between fantasy and reality centers on Blanche’s relationship with both other characters and the world around her. Blanche doesn’t want realism—she wants magic—but magic must yield to the light of day. Although Blanche tries to wrap herself in the trappings of her former Southern belle self, she must eventually face facts, and the real world eclipses and shatters Blanche’s fantasies. Throughout the play, Blanche only appears in semi-darkness and shadows, deliberately keeping herself out of the harsh glare of reality. She clings to the false, illusory world of paper lanterns and satin robes: if she can keep up the appearance of being an innocent ingénue, she can continue to see herself in this fashion rather than face her checkered past and destitute present. By maintaining an illusory exterior appearance, Blanche hopes to hide her troubled interior from both herself and the world at large.

When Stanley tells Stella the sordid details of Blanche’s past, Blanche is offstage bathing and singing “Paper Moon,” a song about a make-believe world that becomes reality through love. But Blanche’s make-believe world does not overtake reality: her fantasy version of herself crumbles. At the end of the play, Blanche is taken to a mental asylum, permanently removed from reality to her own mind.

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR APPEARANCE

The audience of *Streetcar* sees both the inside of the Kowalskis’ apartment as well as the street, which emphasizes the tense relationship between what is on the outside and what is on the inside throughout the play. The physical attention to inside versus outside also symbolically demonstrates the complicated relationship between what goes on in the mind versus what occurs in real life. As the play progresses, the split between Blanche’s fantasy world and reality becomes sharper and clearer to every character in the play except Blanche, for whom the interior and exterior worlds become increasingly blurred.

Social and class distinctions also point to the tension between interior and exterior. Blanche is trying to “keep up appearances” in all aspects of her life. She surrounds herself in her silks and rhinestones and fantasies of Shep’s yacht to maintain the appearance of being an upper-class ingénue, even though she is, by all accounts, a “fallen woman.” Blanche also calls Stanley a “Polack” and makes snide remarks about the state of the Kowalski apartment in order to maintain her own sense of external social superiority.

Williams uses music to play with the boundary between the interior and the exterior. The “blue piano” that frequently plays outside evokes tension and fraught emotions inside the apartment. Although the blue piano is a part of the exterior world, it expresses the feelings occurring inside the characters. Blanche sings “Paper Moon” in the bath offstage while, onstage, Stanley reveals to Stella Blanche’s hidden and sordid history. Music also allows the audience to enter Blanche’s head. When she hears the *Varsouviana Polka*, the audience hears the polka, even though it is only playing in her mind. Just as Blanche’s fantasy blurs into reality, Blanche’s point of view and the perspective of the whole play become blurred.

MASCULINITY AND PHYSICALITY

Masculinity, particularly in Stanley, is linked to the idea of a brute, aggressive, animal force as well as carnal lust. His brute strength is emphasized frequently throughout, and he asserts dominance aggressively through loud actions and violence. Even his clothing is forceful: he dresses in bright, lurid colors. Stanley’s masculinity is deeply connected to the “sub-human.” Williams describes him as a “richly feathered bird among hens” and a “gaudy seed-bearer.”

Much emphasis is placed on Stanley's physical body: he is frequently seen stripping his shirt off; cross at **Blanche** for not letting him spend time in the bathroom (where the audience cannot see him, but can imagine his naked form). Stanley asserts his masculinity physically as well as psychologically. Physically, he bellows in a sort of animal mating call at **Stella**. He also forces himself upon Blanche. Psychologically, he investigates Blanche's sordid past and brings it into the limelight, airing Blanche's dirty laundry (both literally and metaphorically) to affirm his position as not only the alpha male but also the head of the household. Yet although Stanley is aggressively animal in his male nature, his masculinity also asserts itself in his response to the feminine. He has tender responses to Stella's pregnancy; his tone shifts suddenly both when he breaks the news to Blanche and when Stella tells him that she is in labor. He also breaks down when Stella leaves him after he hits her.

Stanley is a prime specimen of manhood, but he is not a gentleman. Stanley represents the powerfully attractive but powerfully frightening threat of masculinity, whereas **Mitch** represents masculinity as a trait of comfort and refuge. If Stanley is the alpha male, Mitch is a beta male: still a masculine force, but not asserting the same kind of physical dominance over the space. But Mitch still finds his power through physical assertion. Mitch brags about his body to Blanche and insists on his precise measurements (six foot one, two hundred seven pounds). Even though Mitch isn't as violently male as Stanley, he is just as imposing a physical specimen. Blanche sees Mitch as male enough to radiate a carnal attractiveness, but not physically or psychologically dangerous in the way that Stanley is.

FEMININITY AND DEPENDENCE

Blanche and **Stella** demonstrate two different types of femininity in the play, yet both find themselves dependent on men. Both Blanche and Stella define themselves in terms of the men in their lives, and they see relationships with men as the only avenue for happiness and fulfillment. Blanche is a fading Southern belle who clings to coquettish trappings, preferring "magic" and the night to reality and the light of day. She performs a delicate, innocent version of femininity because she believes that this makes her most attractive to men. Blanche insists that Stella should attempt to get away from the physically abusive Stanley, but her solution also involves dependence on men, as she proposes that they contact the Dallas millionaire **Shep Huntleigh** for financial assistance. Blanche's tragic marriage in her youth has led her to seek emotional fulfillment through relationships with men, and men have taken advantage of her nervous, fragile state. Even though Blanche's first marriage ended disastrously, she sees marriage as her only path. Blanche views **Mitch** as a refuge and a way to rejuvenate her shattered life. Although Blanche's sexual exploits make the other characters perceive her as a shameful, fallen woman, these same characteristics are seen as conferring strength and power in **Stanley**.

Stella's femininity is based not on illusions and tricks but on reality. She does not try to hide who she is nor hide from her present circumstances. Stella's pregnancy asserts the real, physical, unmasked nature of her conception of herself as a woman. Stella chooses her physical love for and dependence on Stanley over Blanche's schemes. Even though Stanley hits her, she is not in something she wants to get out of, as she explains to Blanche. **Eunice** demonstrates a similar, practical reliance on men, and she convinces Stella that she has made the right decision by staying with Stanley rather than believing Blanche's story about the rape.

characters must submit to its power, and they are carried along to the end of the line.

VARSOUVIANA POLKA

Blanche associates the polka with her young husband's suicide. Blanche and her husband were dancing the polka when she lashed out at him for his homosexual behavior, and he left the dance floor and shot himself. The music plays when Blanche is reminded of her husband in specific or when she is particularly disturbed by the past in general. The polka continues until some event in the real world distracts her or until a gunshot goes off in her memory. Although the polka plays in Blanche's mind, and she is the only character onstage who hears the tune, the audience also hears the polka when she hears it.

BATHING

Blanche takes frequent baths throughout the play to "soothe her nerves." Bathing is an escape from the sweaty apartment: rather than confront her physical body in the light of day, Blanche retreats to the water to attempt to cleanse herself and forget reality. Blanche's constant washing is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth's famous hand-washing scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which the queen cries that all Neptune's ocean could never wash the blood from her guilty hands. Blanche also seeks rejuvenation, as though the bathwater were a Fountain of Youth. But although bathing may provide a temporary respite, she can never escape the past. In contrast with Blanche's use of bathing to escape reality, the men dunk **Stanley** in the shower to sober him up so that he face the real world.

PAPER LANTERN AND PAPER MOON

The **paper lantern** over the light bulb represents **Blanche's** attempt to mask both her sordid past and her present appearance. The lantern diffuses the stark light, but it's only a temporary solution that can be ripped off at any moment. **Mitch** hangs up the lantern, and Blanche is able to maintain her pose of the naïve Southern belle with him, but it is only a façade. After **Stanley** has told Mitch about Blanche's past, Mitch angrily tears the lantern off so he can see Blanche's face, and she cries, "I don't want realism--I want magic!" At the end of the play, Stanley takes off the paper lantern and presents it to Blanche. A paper world cloaking reality also appears in the song "**Paper Moon**." While Stanley tells **Stella** about Blanche's sordid history, Blanche sings this saccharine popular song about a paper world that becomes a reality through love. Blanche feigns modesty and a coquettish nature, but behind the veneer, she hides a much darker past.

ALCOHOL AND DRUNKENNESS

Both **Stanley** and **Blanche** drink frequently throughout the play. When Stanley gets drunk, his masculinity becomes exaggerated: he grows increasingly physical, violent, and brutal. Stanley makes a show of drinking, swaggering and openly pouring himself shots. Blanche hides her alcoholism, constantly claiming that she rarely drinks while secretly sneaking frequent shots. She uses drinking as an escape mechanism.

SHADOWS

Shadows represent the dream-world and the escape from the light of day. Initially, **Blanche** seeks the refuge of shadows and half-light to hide from the harsh facts of the real world. When Blanche first sees **Stella**, she insists that Stella turn the overhead light off: "I don't want to be looked at in this merciless glare!" But at the end of the play, shadows become menacing to Blanche. When **Stanley** approaches Blanche to rape her, his shadows overtake hers on the wall before he physically overpowers her. In the play's final scene, when the Doctor and Matron come to escort Blanche to the asylum, shadows contribute to the jungle-like, mad atmosphere. Rather than representing a longed-for escape from reality, shadows become a threatening element.



QUOTES

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



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **red text** throughout the Summary & Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE STREETCAR

Williams called the streetcar the "ideal metaphor for the human condition." The play's title refers not only to a real streetcar line in New Orleans but also symbolically to the power of desire as the driving force behind the characters' actions. Blanche's journey on Desire through Cemeteries to Elysian Fields is both literal and allegorical. Desire is a controlling force: when it takes over,

SCENE 1

They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!

—Blanche



Stella, oh, Stella, Stella! Stella for Star!

—Blanche



Sit there and stare at me, thinking I let the place go? I let the place go? Where were you! In bed with your—Polack!

—Blanche



Since earliest manhood the center of [Stanley's] life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens.

—Stage direction



SCENE 2

I never met a woman that didn't know if she was good-looking or not without being told, and some of them give themselves credit for more than they've got.

—Stanley



Now let's cut the re-bop!

—Stanley



After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion.

—Blanche



Oh, I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve.

—Blanche



Red-hot!

—Tamale Vendor



SCENE 3

The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum.

—Stage direction



I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action.

—Blanche



STELL-LAHHHHH!

—Stanley



SCENE 4

There are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant.

—Stella



What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire!—the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter.

—Blanche



There's even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet!

—Blanche



Don't—don't hang back with the brutes!

—Blanche



SCENE 5

I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft—soft people have got to shimmer and glow—they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a—paper lantern over the light...It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft *and attractive*. And I—I'm fading now!

—Blanche



Young man! Young, young, young man! Has anyone ever told you that you look like a young Prince out of the Arabian Nights?

—Blanche



SCENE 6

We are going to be very Bohemian. We are going to pretend that we are sitting in a little artists' café on the Left Bank in Paris!

—Blanche



And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle...

—Blanche



Sometimes—there's God—so quickly!

–Blanche



SCENE 7

The Flamingo is used to all kinds of goings-on. But even the Flamingo was impressed by Dame Blanche!

–Stanley



It's only a paper moon, Just as phony as it can be–But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!

–Blanche



Hey, canary bird! Toots! Get OUT of the BATHROOM!

–Stanley



SCENE 8

I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is a one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack.

–Stanley



SCENE 9

I told you already I don't want none of his liquor and I mean it. You ought to lay off his liquor. He says you've been lapping it up all summer like a wild-cat!

–Mitch



I don't want realism. I want magic!

–Blanche



SCENE 10

Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say–Ha!–Ha! Do you hear me? Ha-ha-ha!

–Stanley



Tiger–tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!

–Stanley



SCENE 11

I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.

–Stella



Please don't get up. I'm only passing through.

–Blanche



You left nothing here but spilt talcum and old empty perfume bottles–unless it's the paper lantern you want to take with you. You want the lantern?

–Stanley



Whoever you are–I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

–Blanche



Blanche! Blanche! Blanche!

–Stella



SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

The color-coded boxes under "Analysis & Themes" below make it easy to track the themes throughout the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SCENE 1

The play is set in a two-story, white-frame, faded corner building on a street called Elysian Fields, which runs between the train tracks and the river in New Orleans. The neighborhood is poor but has a "raffish charm." **Stanley** and **Stella Kowalski** live in the downstairs flat, and **Steve** and **Eunice** live upstairs. The stage is set such that the audience can see both the interior and the exterior of the building. Music from a "blue piano" is heard offstage.

In Greek mythology, the Elysian Fields are the final resting place of the heroic and virtuous. The street name is both a literal street in New Orleans and a symbolic resting place. Williams romanticizes the neighborhood: even though it is poor, all races and classes are mixed, and the constant music gives everything a slightly dreamy quality.



Eunice and a **Negro Woman** are sitting on the front stoop when **Stanley** and **Mitch** come around the corner. Stanley bellows for **Stella**, and when she comes out on the first-floor landing, he tosses her a package of bloody meat from the butcher. Stanley and Mitch leave to go bowling, and Stella soon follows them. Eunice and the Negro Women crow delightedly over the sexual innuendo of the meat-tossing.

Tossing the package of meat symbolically captures Stanley and Stella's sexual relationship: he hurls himself physically at her, and she accepts delightedly. Raw physical lust forms a vital part of the life-blood of New Orleans, and of their relationship.



Blanche DuBois comes around the corner, looking distinctly out of place: dressed in white and fluttering uncertainly like a moth, she stares uneasily at a slip of paper at her hands. She is looking for her sister, **Stella**, and she has been told to take "a street-car named Desire" and transfer to Cemeteries to arrive at Elysian Fields. **Eunice** assures Blanche that she is in the right place, and the **Negro Woman** goes to the blowing alley to fetch Stella.

Blanche's journey is both literal – these are real places in New Orleans – and allegorical. She has ridden Desire to the end of the line and has hit rock bottom before arriving here.



Eunice lets **Blanche** into the Kowalskis' flat and tries to make small talk about what **Stella** has mentioned about Blanche--that the latter is a teacher from Mississippi, and that they grew up together on a plantation called Belle Reve. Blanche tells Eunice that she'd like to be left alone.

Blanche's nervousness at Eunice's questions indicate that she has something to hide in her past and that there is more to her seemingly innocent appearance than meets the eye.



Blanche perches uncomfortably as she looks around the dim, messy apartment. There are two rooms in the apartment: the kitchen/dining room, which also contains a fold-out bed for Blanche, and the bedroom. Suddenly, Blanche springs up to the closet, finds a **whiskey** bottle, and quickly takes a drink. After replacing the bottle and washing the glass, she resumes her original seat.

Blanche considers herself to be above her surroundings. Her concealed drinking shows her desire to escape reality as well as the fact that she is quite adept at hiding facts about herself. Blanche is very concerned with keeping her delicate surface appearance intact.



Stella bursts into the apartment, and she and Blanche embrace excitedly. **Blanche** speaks with a feverish hysteria and lets her criticism about the dingy state of the physical and social surroundings slip into her effusive greetings. She asks Stella for a **drink** to calm her nerves, though simultaneously insisting that she's not a drunk. Once the drink is poured, she again laments Stella's living conditions, calling the place something out of an Edgar Allan Poe story.

Blanche's disapproval of Stella's lifestyle allows Blanche to reinforce her own sense of superiority. She romanticizes the situation, envisioning herself as an ingénue in a tragic narrative. Blanche portrays herself as a lady who rarely drinks, but her words are directly opposite to her actions.



Stella's quietness makes **Blanche** anxious that Stella isn't glad to see her, but Stella reassures her to the contrary. Blanche tells Stella that she is taking a leave of absence from her job as a schoolteacher due to her nerves. She comments that Stella is looking plump and draws attention to her own girlish figure, saying that she hasn't changed a bit since Stella left and their father died. Blanche is shocked to find that Stella does not have a maid in the two-room flat, and she takes another **drink**.

Blanche's commentary on Stella's body and the appearance of the apartment draw a contrast between the physical life that Stella has chosen and the dream world that Blanche desperately wants to inhabit. Though Stella has changed and moved into a new life, Blanche clings to her version of the past.



Blanche worries that **Stanley** will not like her and that she will have no privacy from him in the apartment. She makes disapproving comments about Stanley's lower-class status and his friends ("Heterogeneous--types"). **Stella** is very much in love with Stanley, and she tells Blanche not to compare him to the boys they knew at Belle Reve.

Blanche is both disdainful of Stanley and afraid of him. He holds the power in the apartment, even though Blanche sees herself as elite. Her disparaging comments about the mixed social class show Blanche trying to cling to her prior social status.



Blanche bursts out that she has lost Belle Reve, and, with steadily mounting hysteria, she recalls how she suffered through the deaths of their parents and relatives. She accuses **Stella** of abandoning the family and the estate to jump into bed with her "Polack." Stella springs up and rushes into the bathroom, crying.

The loss of Belle Reve, the "beautiful dream," represents the loss of Blanche and Stella's previous way of life. Rather than face the consequences of her actions, Blanche blames Stella for choosing the lower-class, Polish Stanley over the DuBois family.



Outside, the men return from bowling and discuss their plans for poker the following evening. **Blanche** nervously flutters around the apartment as they speak. **Stanley** enters, exuding raw, animalistic, sexual energy, and he sizes Blanche up at a glance. Stanley casually makes small talk with Blanche, who is stiff and a little hectic. Stanley pulls the **whiskey** bottle out to take a drink, noting its depletion.

Blanche is immediately seen as Stanley's direct opposite: fluttering, insubstantial, and pale rather than a robust, muscular specimen. In this way, Stanley and Blanche are like the sun and the moon. Blanche may be able to hide her alcoholism from devoted Stella, but not from Stanley.



Stanley pulls off his sweaty shirt in front of **Blanche**, asking her about being an English teacher in Mississippi. **Stella** is still in the bathroom. When Stanley asks Blanche about her marriage, **polka** music plays faintly in the background. Blanche tells Stanley that "the boy died" and sinks down, saying she feels sick.

Stanley's physical presence dominates the apartment. The polka music is only in Blanche's mind—even though the audience hears it—and its appearance signifies that she is haunted by her dead husband.



SCENE 2

It is the next day, at six o'clock in the evening. **Blanche** is taking a **bath** offstage. **Stella** tells **Stanley** that she and Blanche are going out to the French Quarter for the evening since the men will be playing poker that night in the apartment. Stella tells Stanley that Blanche has lost Belle Reve. She asks Stanley to compliment Blanche on her appearance and instructs him not to mention Stella's pregnancy.

Blanche's frequent baths symbolize her yearning for emotional rejuvenation and cleansing. The revealed pregnancy explains Stella's weight gain. Stella has not yet told Blanche so as not to surprise Blanche's delicate nerves all at once.



Stanley turns the subject back to the loss of Belle Reve. Insistent on seeing papers from the sale, Stanley insinuates that **Blanche's** hysteria is a cover-up and that she has swindled Stella out of the money from the estate. If **Stella** has been swindled, he says, then he has been swindled, too, according to the Napoleonic code, in which a wife's property belongs to her husband and vice versa.

Stanley is not concerned with Blanche's emotional fragility: he is only looking out for his own interests. He immediately distrusts Blanche, as he senses that she has some power over Stella, whereas he wants to have Stella completely.



Stanley thrusts open **Blanche's** trunk and digs through her clothes, searching for the bill of sale. He thinks that her flashy dresses and costume jewelry are expensive, glamorous pieces that cost thousands of dollars. **Stella** tells him that they are fake fur and rhinestones and stalks out angrily to the porch.

The fact that Stanley is blinded by the flashy dresses and fake gems shows his lower-class origins: all that glitters seems to be gold to his animalistic, avaricious eye.



Blanche emerges from the **bath** in a red satin robe and lightly closes the curtains to dress. When she asks **Stanley** to do up the buttons in the back of her dress, he gruffly brushes her off. Stanley asks sarcastically about her clothes, and though Blanche fishes for compliments, Stanley refuses to bite.

The red satin robe suggests sexuality. Blanche tries to flirt with Stanley by emphasizing her femininity, but Stanley continues to assert his aggressive physical dominance.



Stanley breaks the banter by yelling bluntly, "Now let's cut the re-bop!" **Stella** rushes in to play peacemaker, but **Blanche** sends her to the drugstore to buy her a Coke. Rejecting Blanche's flirtatiousness, Stanley demands to see the papers from the sale. Blanche unearths a box filled with papers from the trunk and hands it to Stanley. He grabs another set of papers and begins to read them, but Blanche snatches them away, saying that they are all love-letters and poems from her dead husband.

Though Stella tries to mediate between Blanche and Stanley, the power struggle is between the two of them. Stanley is suspicious of Blanche and insistent that she is hiding something from him. Blanche does not want Stanley to contaminate the love letters from her husband: she does not want her romantic vision of her past soiled by the present.



Blanche hands **Stanley** all the papers from Belle Reve, and he realizes that that the estate was indeed lost on mortgage, stretching back through generations of mismanagement to the "epic fornications" of her ancestors. Stanley is sheepish and lets slip that Stella is going to have a baby.

Blanche traces the loss of Belle Reve to mismanaged sexual desire. Stanley realizes that Blanche is as destitute as she pretends to be and that he still has power over Stella. Stella's pregnancy makes her choice of Stanley's world over the DuBois world concrete.



Stella returns from the drugstore, and **Blanche** greets her exuberantly, flushed with the news of her pregnancy. The men begin to arrive for the poker game, and **Stella** and **Blanche** leave, Blanche commenting that Stanley's animal blood might be just what their aristocratic strain needs. Outside the building, a tamale vendor yells, "Red-hot!"

The tamale vendor yelling "Red-hot!" symbolizes the power of the red-blooded physical world over lost dreams of the past. Stella bears the promise of new life into the dying DuBois line.



SCENE 3

It is 2:30 in the morning. The kitchen is lit up in "lurid nocturnal brilliance": the light bulb is under a vivid green shade, the men are dressed in bright colors, and they are eating watermelon and drinking **whiskey**. The men deal out yet another hand of poker. **Mitch** worries that he should get home to his sick mother, and he rises and goes into the bathroom.

The artificially lurid, vivid kitchen in the middle of the night is somewhat sinister and hell-like. The card-playing and drinking amplifies the men's animal natures. When Mitch worries about his mother, he goes into the bathroom, leaving the masculine space.



Stella and **Blanche** return, and Blanche powders her face before entering the apartment. Stella tries to make introductions, but the men barely look up. When Stella suggests that they stop playing for the night, **Stanley** slaps a hand on her thigh, and Stella, offended, goes into to the bedroom with Blanche.

When the women enter the apartment, they walk straight into the heart of the masculine space. Stanley asserts his dominance physically over Stella, and she and Blanche retreat to the shadowy, feminine bedroom space.



Blanche is about to take a **bath** when **Mitch** emerges from the bathroom. Mitch is sheepish and awkward, and Blanche looks at him with a "certain interest." A bit later, she and **Stella** discuss the men as Blanche undresses strategically in silhouette. Blanche says that Mitch seems "superior to the others," and Stella says that **Stanley** is the only one likely to move up in the world.

Blanche encounters Mitch under her terms, that is, in the half-light of the bedroom that hides reality. She sees that she can draw him in with her flirtation, and she views him as a potential suitor. Faithful Stella sets Stanley above the rest of the men in her estimation.



Stanley yells at **Blanche** and **Stella** to be quiet. Blanche turns on the radio, but Stanley turns it off and stalks back to the game. **Mitch** skips the next hand to go to the bathroom again, but Stella is in there, and as he waits he and Blanche begin to flirt. Both are a little **drunk**.

Stanley is upset that Blanche is demonstrating power in his house: he wants to dominate the entire space, but Blanche is creating her own gravitational pull.



Blanche and **Mitch** discuss his sick mother, and as they smoke Mitch's cigarettes, Blanche reads the inscription on his cigarette case: a quotation from an Elizabeth Barrett Browning sonnet. Blanche claims to be younger than **Stella**, and she asks Mitch to hang a **Chinese lantern** over the naked electric bulb. **Stanley**, in the kitchen, seethes at Mitch's absence from the game.

Blanche and Mitch have both lost their sweethearts, and the death of loved ones draws them together. Blanche hangs a paper lantern over the bare light bulb to create shadows and illusions that hide the reality of her real age.



As **Stella** comes out of the bathroom, **Blanche** turns the radio back on, and she and **Mitch** clumsily begin to dance. **Stanley** leaps from the table and throws the radio out the window. Stella yells at him, and he strikes her violently. The men rush forward and pull Stanley off Stella. Blanche shrieks hysterically, pulls out some of Stella's clothes, and takes her sister upstairs to **Eunice's** apartment.

Stanley breaks the harmony of the scene and throws everything into discord when he breaks the radio and shatters the music. Stanley violently asserts his aggression over Stella in an abusive demonstration of dominance. Blanche and Stella retreat into a safe female space.



The men force **Stanley** under the shower to sober him up, but as he continues to lash out at them, they grab their poker winnings and leave. Blues music plays from offstage. After a moment, Stanley emerges, soaked and repentant. He cries "Stella" over and over, his howls increasing each time in volume and desperation. Stanley stumbles outside, still dripping wet, and bellows, "STELL-LAHHHHH!" After a moment, **Stella**, disheveled, eyes red from crying, emerges from the upstairs flat. She and Stanley stare at each other. She slowly walks down the stairs to join him. He falls to his knees and presses his face to her belly, then picks her up and carries her into their apartment.

Unlike Blanche's bathing, which serves as an escape from reality, Stanley's shower brings him back to his sober self in the real world. His bellow is like a wounded animal roaring for his mate. Stella returns to him wordlessly, and the two embrace and make murmuring noises as they hold each other. Their relationship exists on a deep, primal level. Even though Stanley abuses his wife, and even though Blanche protects her, Stella chooses to come back to Stanley.



Blanche rushes downstairs, confused and frantic. **Mitch** appears and tells her not to worry, that this is just the nature of **Stanley** and **Stella's** relationship. He offers her a cigarette, and she thanks him for his kindness.

Blanche tries to save Stella from Stanley, but Mitch tells her to let their relationship run its course. Blanche lets the moment with Mitch hint at intimacy.



SCENE 4

The next morning, **Stella** lies tranquilly in bed when **Blanche**, wild from a sleepless night, comes in. Blanche is relieved to find Stella safe, but horrified that she has spent the night with **Stanley**. Stella explains that Stanley gets into violent moods sometimes, but she likes him the way that he is--she is "sort of--thrilled" by him. Blanche insists that Stella can still get out of her situation, but Stella explains that she's not in something she has "a desire to get out of."

Although Stella claims to repudiate Stanley's violence, she is clearly aroused by his aggression. Stella is calm, peaceful, and glowing, as though still lit with some of the lurid kitchen lighting of the previous night. Though Blanche sees Stanley's actions as unforgivable, Stella, to a certain degree, is under the spell of some of the violence--as she says, she finds it thrilling.



Blanche, still frantic, says that she recently ran into an old beau of hers, Shep Huntleigh, who has made millions from oil wells in Texas. Blanche proposes that Shep could provide money for she and Stella to escape and begins to compose a telegram to him. **Stella** laughs at her. Blanche says that she is broke, and Stella gives her five dollars of the ten that **Stanley** had given her that morning as an apology.

Even though Blanche is horrified at the way Stanley treats Stella, her solution to get out of the situation also relies on a man. Blanche wants to believe that she is staying with Stella by choice, rather than necessity, and that at any moment she can sail away with Shep, though the audience can tell that her fantasy is just that: a fantasy.



Stella says that **Blanche** saw **Stanley** at his worst, but Blanche replies that she saw him at his best. Blanche claims not to understand how a woman from Belle Reve could live with a man like Stanley, and Stella explains that the "things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark" make everything else all right. Blanche declares that the "rattle-trap street-car" named desire is no basis for a life.

Stella defends her relationship with Stanley through their sexual chemistry. Blanche uses the streetcar named Desire symbolically, saying that carnal desire is not a way to run a life. But Blanche herself has ridden Desire to arrive in New Orleans; in other words, her own lust has taken her to the end of the line.



Blanche bursts into a rant against **Stanley**, calling him an ape-like, bestial creature. "There's even something--sub-human" about him, she cries, telling **Stella**, "Don't--don't hang back with the brutes!" Unbeknownst to the women, as Blanche pours out her vicious rant, Stanley has come into the apartment and has heard the whole tirade.

Blanche's rant demonstrates the last gasp of the agrarian South, the melodramatic notion held by many former plantation owners that the end of life in estates such as Belle Reve was the end of civilization.



Under the cover of a train's noise, **Stanley** slips out and re-enters. **Stella** leaps into his arms, and Stanley grins at **Blanche** as the "blue piano" music swells in the background.

Unbeknownst to Blanche, Stanley hears her whole speech against him, but he stores this up as power against her. The swelling piano music underscores Stanley and Stella's passion.



SCENE 5

Stella and **Blanche** are in the bedroom. Blanche laughs at a letter she is writing to Shep Huntleigh that is full of fabricated stories about cocktail parties and society events that she and Stella have been attending all summer.

Blanche's lighthearted tone is a thin veneer over her pointed critique of Stanley and Stella's lower-class, non-aristocratic society: bowling and poker nights are a far cry from yachts and cocktail parties.



Upstairs, **Steve** and **Eunice** are heard fighting. Eunice accuses Steve of sleeping with another woman, and she cries out when he hits her. After a clatter and crash of furniture, Eunice runs downstairs, screaming that she is going to call the police.

Steve and Eunice, like Stanley and Stella, have a relationship that blows hot and cold and has ferocious underpinnings. Sex and violence are paired on both floors of the house.



A while later, **Stanley** comes in and says that **Eunice** is getting a **drink** at the Four Deuces, which **Stella** says is much more "practical" than going to the police. Steve comes downstairs with a bruise on his head, asks for Eunice, and when he learns where she is runs to the bar to find her.

Eunice and Steve, like Stanley and Stella, reconcile quickly after their fight: though they passionately lash against each other, they just as passionately make up.



Stanley and **Blanche** make tense conversation: she attempts to banter lightly, while he is more than usually brusque. Blanche guesses that Stanley is an Aries by the way that he loves to "bang things around," and she is highly amused to find that he is a Capricorn, the Goat. Blanche tells Stanley that she was born under Virgo, the Virgin, and Stanley guffaws contemptuously.

Blanche tries to explain the world around her through mythology, but Stanley cuts through her fantasies and symbols. The discussion about the stars is also an oblique power struggle over Stella ("stella" means "star"): Stanley rejects Blanche's interpretation of the constellations.



Stanley asks if **Blanche** knows anyone named Shaw in Laurel. Blanche blanches, but tries not to show her anxiety. Stanley says that Shaw knew Blanche from the Hotel Flamingo, a disreputable establishment. Blanche attempts to dismiss the accusation lightly, but she is visibly shaken. **Steve** and **Eunice** return arm-in-arm to the building. Stanley leaves for the Four Deuces, saying that he will wait for **Stella** there.

Stanley asserts his power over Blanche through veiled threats rather than direct confrontation: by showing his power without physically wielding it, Blanche knows that it is there, a smoking gun, but has no control over when, or if, he will pull the trigger.



Blanche frantically asks **Stella** what people in town have been saying about her. Blanche admits that there was a great deal of sordid gossip spreading about her in Laurel. She was too soft, she says, not self-sufficient enough to cope properly with the loss of Belle Reve, and she cloaked herself in half-shadows and **Chinese lanterns** to make herself attractive.

Blanche does not tell Stella the full truth about her time in Laurel. Just as she hides her face from direct light by putting a paper lantern over the bulb, she glosses over the nasty facts of her history and insists on the illusions.



Stella hands **Blanche** a Coke and tells her not to talk so morbidly. Blanche asks for a shot of alcohol in the Coke, and Stella pours some **whiskey** into a glass, insisting that she likes waiting on her sister. Blanche hysterically promises to leave before **Stanley** kicks her out. Stella tries to calm her as she pours the Coke, but accidentally spills some on Blanche's skirt, and Blanche shrieks. They blot out the stain quickly, though, and Blanche recovers.

Blanche drinks to escape the present and to blur the harsh edges of reality. When she thinks Stella has stained the dress, she overreacts as though Stella has ruined her whole dream of herself, and she is overly relieved when the stain blots cleanly away. If the stain had stayed, Blanche would have seen herself as tarnished forever.



Stella worriedly asks **Blanche** why she overreacted to the stain, and Blanche claims that she is nervous about her relationship with **Mitch**—they are going on another date tonight. She has not been honest with him about her age, and she has not given him more than a kiss, but she wants to keep Mitch interested in her, as she sees him as her way to rest and to get out of Stella and **Stanley**'s apartment.

Blanche claims that she is only nervous because she wants things with Mitch to go well, but this is also the end of her line, her last chance: she is clinging to this relationship as a way to make her dream about herself stay alive. She is dependent on Mitch to restore her "honor" and security as a married woman.



Stanley comes around the corner and bellows for **Eunice**, **Steve**, and **Stella**. Stella tells **Blanche** that everything will work out, and she runs off to join Stanley at the bar with Eunice and Steve, leaving Blanche alone in the apartment.

Stanley bellows his mating-call yell again, and Stella runs to his summons, joining the New Orleans world and leaving Blanche behind.



As **Blanche** waits for **Mitch**, a **Young Man** arrives, collecting subscriptions for the *Evening Star* newspaper. Blanche flirts with the boy, offering him a **drink**, and attempts to seduce him, calling him a young Arabian prince. She kisses him on the mouth but then sends him on his way. A few moments later, **Mitch** arrives with roses, which she gushes over.

*Blanche's direct flirtation with this young boy foreshadows the affair with the student that we later learn was the real reason she lost her job, and reveals the voracious, uncontrollable sexual appetite that Blanche tries to keep hidden. The paper's name, the *Evening Star*, recalls Stella, since "Stella" means "star."*



SCENE 6

It is two o'clock in the morning. **Blanche** and **Mitch** have just returned from an amusement park. Blanche is clearly exhausted, and both are strained. Mitch apologizes for not entertaining her that evening, but Blanche tells him that it was her fault. She says that she will be leaving the apartment soon. Mitch asks if he can kiss her goodnight, and Blanche says that he needn't ask permission. Mitch says that he asks because Blanche stopped him from becoming too familiar, and Blanche says that a single girl must be careful not to get "lost."

Stanley's veiled hints that he knows the truth about Blanche's background have unnerved her. Neither being with Mitch nor the gaudy, fake world of the amusement park can fully distract Blanche from the nightmares of her past. Her treatment of Mitch's advances exposes her double standard: though she will barely let Mitch kiss her, in secret, she aggressively seduced the paper-boy.



Blanche invites **Mitch** in for a night-cap. She lights candles and suggests that they pretend to be Bohemians in Paris. She asks if Mitch speaks French, and when he says that he doesn't, she teases by asking in French if he will sleep with her. Mitch says that he wants to leave on his coat because he perspires, but Blanche insists that he be comfortable, and she removes it. Blanche admires Mitch's strapping physique, and he boasts about his physical regimen.

Blanche's sexual seduction in a language that Mitch cannot speak further emphasizes her hidden past and her complicated relationship with sex. Unlike Stanley, who asserts his physical dominance without asking, Mitch brags about his manliness with Blanche's permission. Mitch is a beta to Stanley's alpha-male.



Mitch lifts **Blanche** up, declaring her "light as a feather," and, while his hands are around her waist, begins to embrace her more tightly. She gently reproaches him, declaring that she has "old-fashioned ideals" while rolling her eyes out of Mitch's sight.

Blanche wants to cultivate the image of herself to Mitch as a young, dainty ingénue, so even though she is quite sexually experienced, she pretends to be naïve, even though she knows—signified by her eye-roll—that it's an illusion.



When **Mitch** asks where **Stanley** and **Stella** are, **Blanche** explains that they are out with **Eunice** and **Steve**. Mitch suggests that they all go out together, but Blanche demurs. Blanche asks Mitch what Stanley thinks of her, explaining that she is convinced that Stanley hates her. Mitch says that Stanley probably just doesn't understand her.

Blanche doesn't want her relationship with Mitch to become another version of the Stanley / Stella or Steve / Eunice dynamic: she wants to see Mitch as a gentleman and an escape from her surroundings. And Mitch truly does seem to be more sensitive than Stanley.



Blanche launches into a somewhat hysterical rant against **Stanley**, and also bemoans her impoverished state. **Mitch** interrupts to ask how old she is. Blanche asks why he wants to know, and Mitch explains that he has told his ill mother about Blanche, and that his mother would like to see him settled before she dies.

Blanche depicts herself as a damsel in distress, positioning Mitch as a knight in shining armor. She never wants to reveal her age because she wants Mitch to think she is much younger than she is.



Blanche says she understands about being lonely. She tells **Mitch** about her first husband: she married him while they were both very young, and though she loved him passionately, he was unhappy, always possessing a certain nervousness and softness. One day, she discovered her husband in bed with an older man. She and her husband pretended that nothing had been discovered and drove out to a casino together. But while Blanche and her husband were dancing the **Varsouviana polka**, she erupted, telling him that he disgusted her. Her husband, who she refers to as "the boy," rushed out of the casino and committed suicide.

Blanche is surprisingly frank when she gives the tender account of her homosexual husband's suicide. Williams uses music and light and dark imagery to emphasize the poignant nature of both the relationship and the death, and the connection of the polka with this incident explains to the audience why this music appears during times when Blanche is distressed and especially anxious—it indicates how Blanche is haunted by this past.



Mitch approaches her and embraces her, saying that they both need someone. As they kiss, **Blanche** sobs, "Sometimes--there's God--so quickly!"

The tender, sad story draws Mitch in and wins his sympathy for Blanche. Blanche comments on how quickly everything is moving, but of course she's done a lot of quick-moving in the past. She's still playing the innocent ingénue.



SCENE 7

It is an afternoon in mid-September. **Stanley** comes into the kitchen to find **Stella** decorating for **Blanche's** birthday. Blanche is taking yet another **bath** to soothe her nerves, which Stanley mocks. Throughout the scene, Blanche's singing of the popular song "**Paper Moon**" is heard in counterpoint to Stella and Stanley's conversation.

The juxtaposition between Blanche's bath and her birthday emphasizes that the desire to bathe not only marks Blanche's desire for escape but also her desire for a Fountain of Youth. Blanche wants to hide behind a make-believe world rather than face reality. She wants the feminine magic of the moon, but as her song indicates that moon is paper and, by extension, can easily rip.



Stanley sits **Stella** down to tell her all the details he has heard about **Blanche**. Shaw, a supply man for his company who travels to Laurel frequently, has supplied Stanley with this information. Stanley tells Stella that Blanche was living at the disreputable Hotel Flamingo and had developed such a scandalous reputation that the hotel had kicked her out. Her home had even been declared off-limits to soldiers in the nearby military base.

Stanley's revelations show both Blanche's hypocrisies and Stanley's cruelty in their ugliest lights. Stanley does not try to sympathize with Blanche, but instead relishes the most sordid, scandalous details. He enjoys asserting his power over her.



Stanley also reports that **Blanche** was not taking a leave of absence from school on account of her nerves, but that she had been fired after having an affair with a seventeen-year-old student.

Stanley's revelation about Blanche's affair with a minor makes her seduction of the paper-boy fit into the spiral of Blanche's mental breakdown.



Stella is dazed. At first, she doesn't believe **Stanley**, making the excuse that **Blanche** has always been "flighty." She explains away some of Blanche's psychological instability on account of her tragic marriage. Stella begins poking candles into the birthday cake, saying that she will stop at twenty-five. **Mitch** has been invited, she says, but Stanley tells her not to expect Mitch, claiming that he felt it was his duty to tell Mitch about Blanche. Stella is aghast, exclaiming that Blanche thought Mitch would marry her.

Stella remains loyal to Blanche despite Stanley's stories. She doesn't deny Blanche's instability, but she doesn't want to see all the ugly, physical details. As always, Stella is the mediator between Stanley and Blanche, the play's emotional gravity. Stella is horrified that Mitch knows about Blanche not because she is thinking about her own reputation but because she is worried about how Blanche will feel and because she knows--perhaps always knew--that Mitch represented a last chance for Blanche.



Stanley says that he has bought a one-way bus ticket for **Blanche** to go back to Laurel. Then he bellows at Blanche to get out of the bathroom. Blanche enters the room in a gleeful state, but her mood quickly darkens as she feels the tension in the air, even when Stella says that nothing has happened. The piano offstage goes into a "hectic breakdown."

Just as Stanley yells for Blanche to get out of the bathroom, he reveals the bus ticket that will take her out of the house for good, asserting his power over the household on both small and large scales.



SCENE 8

Stanley, **Stella**, and **Blanche** are finishing the dismal birthday supper. There is an empty fourth place at the table, meant for **Mitch** who did not show. Blanche tells a lame joke about a parrot and a priest, but no one laughs. Stanley pointedly eats a chop with his fingers. When Stella reprimands him, he throws his dishes on the floor, declaring that he is sick of Blanche and Stella's queenly ways and that he is "King of the House." Stanley slams out of the apartment to the porch, and Stella begins to cry. Blanche asks her again what Stanley had said while Blanche had been **bathing**, but Stella refuses to tell her.

Even with the empty place at the table, Blanche tries to gloss over the reality of the situation with a joke. Stanley's gobbling of the chop and Stella's disgust is a reversal of the opening scene, where Stanley tosses a piece of meat up to Stella and she is delighted: this reversal shows the tension that has escalated in the house as a result of Blanche's arrival. Stella also protects Blanche from the destruction of her fantasy.



Blanche rushes to the phone to call **Mitch**, even though **Stella** tells her not to. Stella goes out to **Stanley** on the porch, and he holds her in his arms, telling her that things will go back to the way they were once Blanche leaves.

Blanche doesn't let herself suspect the reason why Mitch didn't come. Stella and Stanley make up on a non-verbal, physical level.



Stella goes inside and begins lighting the candles on **Blanche's** birthday cake. Blanche and **Stanley** join her. Blanche reproaches herself for calling **Mitch**. Stanley complains about the heat from Blanche's **bath**, and she retorts that a "healthy Polack" couldn't understand about having delicate nerves. Stanley heatedly replies that he is neither Polack nor Pole but American.

Blanche's elitism and her disparaging comments about Stanley's lower-class, immigrant background make the atmosphere even more tense. Even Blanche, who typically speaks in a fluttery manner, snaps back sharply.



The telephone rings, and **Blanche** expects that it is **Mitch**, but it is one of **Stanley's** friends. When Stanley returns, he tells Blanche that he has a birthday present for her and gives her the bus ticket to Laurel.

Unlike Stella, who soothes and protects Blanche, Stanley sees no reason to treat Blanche with delicacy or kindness.



The **Varsouviana polka** rises in the background. **Blanche** tries to smile and laugh, but she crumples and rushes into the bathroom, gagging. **Stella** reproaches **Stanley** for treating Blanche so harshly, saying that Blanche is a soft creature who has been abused and hurt throughout her life.

Stanley's cruelty pushes Blanche to a breaking point: she is overwhelmed with emotions and memories when Stanley rips away her illusions.



Stella demands to know why **Stanley** has been so cruel to **Blanche**. He says that Stella thought that he was common until he took her off her pedestal, and then things were wonderful between them.

When Stella and Stanley argue, her grammar becomes more precise, while his becomes sloppier, emphasizing the differences in their upbringings.



A sudden change comes over **Stella**, and she tells **Stanley** to take her to the hospital—she has gone into labor. Stanley instantly leaves with her, murmuring softly.

In Stanley and Stella's relationship, the physical is dominant: their fight abruptly ends when Stella goes into labor.



SCENE 9

It is later that night. **Blanche** is sitting in her red satin robe in the bedroom. The **Varsouviana polka** music can be heard from offstage. The stage directions say that the music is playing in Blanche's mind and that she is **drinking** to escape it.

Blanche's past continues to haunt her. The red robe indicates her more dangerously sexual side, rather than the innocent, naïve white she wears throughout most of the play.



Mitch, unshaven and disheveled, rings the doorbell. The **polka** stops. **Blanche** hurriedly puts on powder and perfume and hides the **liquor** before letting Mitch in. She greets him with a hectic and excited chiding and offers a kiss, but he refuses and stalks past her into the bedroom.

For the first time, Mitch has lost his gentlemanly composure. Blanche still wants to maintain an image of herself as an innocent girl, hiding the evidence of the alcohol and covering up her natural scent.



Mitch asks **Blanche** to turn off the fan. She offers him a **drink**. Mitch says that he doesn't want **Stanley's** liquor, but Blanche replies that she has her own. She wants to know what is the matter, but says she won't press Mitch about it. The **polka** music begins again, and she is agitated. Blanche says that the music always stops when she hears a gunshot. Blanche and the audience hear a shot, and the music stops. Mitch doesn't hear anything.

When the polka music plays inside Blanche's mind, her composure begins to crack. She talks about the music as though Mitch can hear it, too, although it is only inside her head. Blanche is beginning to mix up reality and illusion.



Blanche pretends to happen upon the **liquor bottle** in the closet and pretends that she doesn't know what Southern Comfort is. **Mitch** again refuses a drink, saying that **Stanley** says she has been drinking his liquor all summer.

Blanche continues to play the role of the innocent, even though Mitch is now refusing to play along with her version of the world



Blanche asks **Mitch** what's on his mind. Mitch says that he's never seen Blanche in the daytime or in the light. He rips the **paper lantern** off the light bulb. Blanche gasps, crying, "I don't want realism. I want magic!"

Mitch wants to reveal the truth about Blanche and to get rid of the persona that she has constructed. Blanche is terrified to face reality, declaring that she would rather live in her romantic, beautiful version of the world.



Mitch stares **Blanche** in the face. He says that he doesn't mind her being older than he'd thought, but he does mind all the lying. Blanche begins to deny it, but Mitch says he's heard the stories about her from three sources: Stanley, Shaw, and a merchant in Laurel.

Mitch isn't disgusted when he sees Blanche in the light of day; rather, he is only angry that she has lied to him. Blanche keeps her constructed version of herself alive as long as she can, but soon realizes that Mitch knows the truth.



At first, **Blanche** declares that all three men made up the stories out of revenge. But as she takes another drink, she breaks down into sobs. She admits that after her husband's death, the only solace and sense of protection she found was in "intimacies with strangers." She says that she didn't know what she was doing and that she acted out of panic. **Mitch**, she says, was the first man who gave her hope. After a pause, Mitch says that Blanche lied to him "inside and out," but Blanche says that she never lied in her heart.

Blanche continues her melodramatic performance for Mitch: even after he throws the spotlight on her and takes away her illusions, she continues to act theatrically, playing the role of a tragic heroine rather than reacting as a real woman. Mitch, however, wants reality, not melodrama.



A **Mexican Woman** comes to the door, selling "flores para los muertos" (flowers for the dead). Blanche is frightened and slams the door. The **polka music** begins again, and the Mexican Woman's voice can still be heard from outside.

Blanche is terrified by the Mexican woman because the "flowers for the dead" remind her vividly of her dead husband, and the memory tortures her.



Blanche gives a tortured, almost hallucinatory soliloquy about Belle Reve and the camp of soldiers stationed near the plantation. Blanche says that she would solace herself with the soldiers occasionally. She says that the opposite of death is desire.

Blanche begins to descend into madness, living simultaneously in her memories and the present. Symbols and reality are beginning to mix in her mind.



Mitch begins to embrace **Blanche**, but Blanche insists that he marry her first. Mitch drops his hands, saying that she is not clean enough to bring home to his mother. Blanche yells at Mitch, insisting that he leave before she screams fire. When he doesn't leave, she indeed begins to scream, "Fire! Fire! Fire!" Mitch clumsily clatters out the door and around the corner. Blanche falls to her knees as a piano plays in the distance.

Mitch still seems to have feelings for Blanche—both sexual and emotional. But he can't get over her past. At the same time, he refuses to take advantage of Blanche sexually, which – even though she refuses him first – makes Blanche even more hysterical. Mitch leaves Blanche alone. Her only mode of escape is her own mind, and she begins to show signs of a breakdown.



SCENE 10

It is still later that night. **Blanche** has been **drinking** steadily since **Mitch** left. She has dressed herself in a white satin gown and her rhinestone tiara. She stares at herself in the mirror and flirts with imagined suitors. Examining herself more closely, she catches her breath and slams down the mirror. It shatters.

Blanche has been drinking to escape reality. She dresses herself in costume jewelry and gowns, but the only audience for her fantasy version of herself is herself. When she looks at herself more closely, though, even she can see through the illusion, and so she smashes the mirror, indicating the failure of her illusory world and also her nervous breakdown.



Stanley enters the apartment, slams the door, and gives a low whistle when he sees **Blanche**. Stanley is also **drunk**. He says that the baby won't come until morning, so the doctors sent him home to get some sleep.

While Blanche has been drinking to escape her real self and the consequences of her past, Stanley's drunkenness emphasizes his virility. This sort of contrast between Stanley and Blanche is common in the play—they do the same things: drink, act physically and sexually, but in Stanley these actions are seen as powerful and in Blanche they are seen as signs of weakness and degradedness.



Stanley asks **Blanche** why she is so dressed up. Blanche says that an admirer of hers, Shep Huntleigh, has invited her to come with him on a cruise of the Caribbean in his yacht. Stanley mildly expresses his excitement, as though half-listening. He takes off his shirt, and Blanche tells him to close the curtains, but Stanley says that that is all he will undress for the time being.

Stanley strings Blanche along like a cat toying with its prey: though he knows that she is lying, he lets her live in her delusions while he half-undresses.



Unable to find a bottle opener, **Stanley** pounds a **beer** bottle on the corner of the table and lets the foam pour over his head. He suggests that they both celebrate their good news. **Blanche** declines the drink, but Stanley stays in high spirits. To mark the special occasion, he pulls out his silk pyjamas he wore on his wedding night.

Stanley continues to humor Blanche. He knows her delusions are false, and he continues to hold her in suspense. The special silk pyjamas symbolize Stanley's sexual prowess, but they also symbolize the purity of his wedding night with Stella.



Blanche continues to gush about Shep, exclaiming that he is a cultivated gentleman, as opposed to the "swine" she has been casting her pearls to. **Stanley's** good humor suddenly disappears at the word "swine."

When Blanche insults Stanley, he drops his good-natured veneer and exposes his violent, inner nature.



Blanche claims that **Mitch** had arrived that night with roses to beg her forgiveness. **Stanley** asks if Mitch came before or after the telegram, and Blanche is caught off guard. Stanley drops his affability and confronts Blanche, saying that he knows she has not received any telegram at all and that Mitch did not come by begging for forgiveness.

Stanley asserts his dominance cruelly over Blanche. Just as Mitch ripped the paper lantern off the bulb, Stanley tears off Blanche's fabrications to reveal that he knows the truth.



Stanley mocks **Blanche** for dressing up in her glitzy attire, saying that he's been on to her from the start: powders and perfumes and **paper lanterns** couldn't fool him. Lurid, grotesque **shadows** and reflections on the wall surround Blanche.

Blanche usually cultivates shadows in the play, preferring to stay in half-darkness instead of facing the harsh light of reality. Now, however, the shadows are threatening.



Blanche wildly rushes into the kitchen to the telephone to call Shep Huntleigh, but since she doesn't have his number, the operator hangs up on her. She then tries to telegraph Shep, saying that she is "caught in a trap," but she breaks off when **Stanley** emerges from the bedroom in the silk pyjamas.

Blanche still tries to convince herself that she can escape, but her delusions of a male rescuer cannot save her from the reality of Stanley's violent, overpowering, animal presence.



Stanley grins at **Blanche** and replaces the phone on the hook. He steps between Blanche and the door. Blanche, with mounting hysteria, tries to get by him, but he doesn't let her.

Stanley approaches Blanche as though she is his prey and he the predator. Williams makes the scene appear jungle-like through lighting and symbolic language.



Stanley continues to advance toward **Blanche**. She smashes a **bottle** on the table and waves the broken end of the top at him. He springs toward her, overturning the table and grabbing her wrist. "Tiger--tiger!" he says. "Drop the bottle top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!"

Stanley addresses Blanche in animalistic terms, drawing her under his domination and into his violent, physical world. He casts their encounter as fate, the necessary end to the primal struggle of their opposing forces.



The bottle top falls. **Blanche** sinks to her knees. **Stanley** picks up her limp body and carries her to the bed. A hot trumpet and drums swell in the background.

The fact that we don't see the rape echoes classical Greek tragedy, in which the play's most climactic and violent act happens offstage.



SCENE 11

It is several weeks later. **Stella** is packing **Blanche's** things. Blanche is in the **bath**. The men are playing poker in the kitchen, where the atmosphere is raw and lurid again. **Eunice** comes downstairs and into the apartment. **Stanley** is bragging about his good poker luck, and Eunice calls the men callous pigs.

Blanche now uses the escape of bathing not to attempt to wash off her sordid sexual history in the more distant past but to cleanse herself of Stanley's rape. Stanley is still the swaggering, aggressive, dominant male.



Eunice tells **Stella** that the baby is asleep upstairs, and the woman discuss **Blanche**. Stella says that they have told Blanche that they have made arrangements for her to spend time in country, but Blanche thinks she is going off to travel with Shep.

Stella cannot raise her baby with Blanche in the house: the baby will be a Kowalski, not a DuBois. Blanche does not - or cannot - understand where she is going, so she tells herself the story she wants to believe.



Stella tells **Eunice** that she couldn't believe **Blanche's** story about being raped by Stanley, since if she believed it, she couldn't go on living with him. Eunice assures Stella that she has done the right thing and that she must move forward with her life.

Stella admits to Eunice that she chooses not to believe Blanche's story about Stanley's rape. Eunice supports Stella's decision, reinforcing this construction of reality. Stella now is the one living in a fantasy in order to maintain her life.



Blanche peeks out to check that the men won't see her when she comes out of the bathroom. She appears in the red satin robe. The **polka** music plays in the background. **Stella** and **Eunice** murmur appreciatively over Blanche. Blanche asks if Shep has called, and Stella tells her, "Not yet."

The polka music emphasizes that Blanche can no longer distinguish between reality and illusion. Stella and Eunice allow her to live in her dream-world rather than face society.



Upon hearing **Blanche's** voice, **Mitch's** face and arms sag, and he lapses into a daydream. **Stanley** yells at him to snap out of it. The sound of Stanley's voice startles Blanche. Her hysteria mounting, she demands to know what is going on. **Stella** and **Eunice** soothe her, saying that Blanche is going on a trip.

Mitch feels guilty for his treatment of Blanche. When Blanche hears Stanley's voice, she reacts hysterically, as the very sound calls to mind the painful memory and triggers her hysteria.



Eunice offers **Blanche** a grape, and Blanche launches into an odd, hallucinatory monologue about perishing at sea by eating an unwashed grape. As she speaks, a **Doctor** and **Matron** have come around the corner, and **Stella** and **Eunice** grow tense in anticipation.

In Blanche's mind, symbols and imagination are just as real as reality, if not more so: to her, a paper moon is the real moon. The mental asylum waits in the wings.



The **Doctor** rings the doorbell. **Eunice** answers and announces that a gentleman is calling for **Blanche**, but Blanche says that she is not quite ready yet. The **polka** plays faintly in the background, and drums also begin to play softly.

The threatening jungle beat and lurid shadows mix with the polka music that haunts Blanche, representing both her madness and her sensation of being trapped.



When **Eunice** mentions a "they," **Blanche** grows more nervous. Eunice says a plainly dressed lady is also with Shep. Blanche is anxious about walking through the poker game, but **Stella** goes with her. As Blanche crosses through and the men (except **Mitch**) stand awkwardly, Blanche says, "Please don't get up. I'm only passing through."

In contrast to the first poker game, in which Blanche is eager to make the men notice her, now, she craves withdrawal, wanting to retreat from their gaze and their perceived danger.



When **Blanche** sees the **Doctor**, not Shep, she retreats back to the apartment, frightened. They all stand tensely for a moment. Blanche tries to go back into the bedroom, but **Stanley** blocks her way. She rushes past him, claiming that she has forgotten something. Lurid reflections and **shadows** appear on the walls again, and the **polka** music plays distortedly, accompanied by noises of the jungle.

Just as Stanley trapped Blanche like an animal in a cage in Scene Ten, he is now involved in capturing her again - this time, however, to dominate her by removing her from society, not raping her. Blanche is trapped both in her own mind and under Stanley's physical force.



The **Doctor** sends the **Matron** in to grab **Blanche**. The Matron advances on one side, **Stanley** on the other. The Matron and Stanley's voice echo around the room. Blanche retreats in panic, crying that she wants to be left alone. The echoes throb around her.

Though Blanche continues to retreat from the force of law represented by the Matron and Stanley's animal force, the trap draws tighter and tighter.



Stanley says that the only thing **Blanche** could have forgotten is the **paper lantern**. He rips it off the bare bulb and holds it out to her. Blanche shrieks. All the men rise up. **Stella** runs out to the porch and **Eunice** embraces her. Stella sobs, saying, "What have I done?" Eunice is firm, telling Stella that she is doing the right thing.

Williams notes in the stage directions that when Stanley dangles the paper lantern in front of Blanche, it is as though he is showing her herself, and the gesture terrifies Blanche. When Stella sees Blanche's horror, she herself is sympathetically anguished.



While **Stella** and **Eunice** are speaking on the porch, **Mitch** has started toward the bedroom, but Stanley blocks him from entering, shoving him away. Mitch crumples at the table in tears.

Stanley asserts his alpha-male dominance over Mitch, and Mitch bows out of the fight, recognizing Stanley as holding the power.



The **Matron** has seized **Blanche**. She asks the **Doctor** if Blanche needs a straitjacket, but the Doctor says, "It won't be necessary." The doctor leads Blanche gently out, supporting her by the arm. Blanche says, "Whoever you are--I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

Blanche departs the social world of the play and retreats permanently into her mind. She does not distinguish between the Doctor's gentlemanly actions and those of her suitors, responding to his treatment just as she responded to Mitch's. To the very end, Blanche plays her role of the persona of the southern belle Blanche. And it's true, ever since her husband's suicide she has always relied on the kindness of strangers, though that kindness was not the polite gentlemanly kindness but rather sexual "kindness" of men she did not know. But she means the former here, indicating her complete withdrawal into her idealized past.



Blanche and the **Doctor** walk out of the house and around the corner. **Stella** cries out, "Blanche! Blanche! Blanche!" but Blanche doesn't turn. **Eunice** places Stella's baby in her arms.

Just as Stanley had cried, "Stella! Stella!" to get Stella to come back, Stella calls her sister's name, but Blanche does not return. And Stella does not chase after her. Instead, Stella holds her baby, accepting her future rather than her past.



Stanley joins **Stella** on the porch. She starts to sob "with inhuman abandon," and he holds her in his arms, caresses her and murmuring wordlessly. In the kitchen, **Steve** says, "The game is seven-card stud."

Stella and Stanley reconcile on a non-verbal level, underscoring the physical nature of their relationship. The poker begins again; life goes on.

