

## Chapter II

## II. The disillusion of Tom, Chance and Brick

## A. Tom Wingfield works in a boring factory, later becomes a wanderer

The play is narrated by Tom Wingfield who is also one of the characters in the play. It is a memory play that begins with the dark, grim wall of the Wingfield tenement to give an unrealistic and poetic atmosphere. As he remembers his mother and sister in St. Louis, he talks about the difficult period of his life in the Wingfield family. Because *The Glass Menagerie* is partly autobiographical, Tom, in the play, sometimes represents the playwright himself. Like Tom, Williams himself spent his youth in St. Louis with his mother, sister, and his father who was absent much of the time. Full of imagination, Tom likes to read literature, and dream of adventure. As we mentioned in the last chapter, he follows in his father's footsteps, he left home to become a Merchant Seaman. However, after a period of traveling, Tom comes back home, and he begins to recall the time he spent with his mother and sister. Now Tom speaks from the fire escape landing. Maybe, the fire escape symbolizes the escape to freedom. But, a critic, Bloom, said that, "the fire escape doesn't primarily or ultimately symbolize freedom or escape, but rather the opposite. Like the alleys, it indicates the potential for catastrophe (Bloom 27). The critic, Bauer-Briski, said that Tom lives both his romances and his adventures vicariously through the movies (Bauer a: 22). Tom recalls that he went to movies to escape the boredom of working in the shoe factory. When he was tired of the movies he told Jim that he was getting ready to make a move:

TOM: I'm planning to change. I'm right at the point of committing myself to a future that doesn't include the warehouse and Mr. Mendoza or even a night-school course in public speaking.

JIM: What are you gassing about?

TOM: I'm tired of the movies.

JIM: Movies!

TOM: Yes, movies! Look at them— All of those glamorous people—have adventures—hogging it all, gobbling the whole thing up! You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there's a war. That's when adventure becomes available to the masses! ... It's our turn now, to go to the South Sea Island— to make a safari—to be exotic, far-off! But I'm not patient. I don't want to wait till then. I'm tired of the movies and I am about to move!

(*Understanding* 127)

Now Tom speaks in a sentimental tone to show how he misses his family as a wanderer in a strange country, especially, his sister, Laura:

TOM: ...Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes (*Understanding* 140).

Tom is like his father who loves adventures. In the play, Tom can not fulfill his dream of freedom or success. Consequently, he follows in his father's footsteps to escape from home. As for his father, Tom recalls: "The last we heard of him was a picture postcard from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words: "Hello—Goodbye!" and no address" (*Understandings* 108). Although Tom escapes from

his family, he cannot escape from Amanda and Laura after all. Tom clearly cares for Amanda, Laura, and Tom has to face his memories of family from time to time. As he is walking along the street, he imagines that his sister touches his shoulders. His loneliness is revealed from his memory: "I traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches (*Understanding* 139). A critic, Berkowitz, said that the reality of this play is that of Tom, the sailor a decade later, reliving his past (Berkowitz 89). On the contrary, Tom's friend, Jim, is the gentleman caller and attends the same high school as Tom and Laura. Jim is a regular man with a future when he visits the Wingfield family; he has given them a touch of reality. Jim is studying public speaking for his future advancement. As a critic, Falk described Jim as a white-collar worker and a not too imaginative American (Falk a: 50). Ultimately, Jim's appearance, "an emissary from the world of reality," in the Wingfield family and is not enough to solve the domestic or economic problems haunting this family. Because Jim is going to get married, Amanda's hopes for Laura turn out to be quite disappointed.

Under the pressure of a domineering mother, Tom and Laura are very close to each other, but at the end, Tom goes away to be an adventurer; Laura still retreats into her glass menagerie. The necessity of leaving home and the guilt constantly haunts him. Although he loves Laura, he can not assume the responsibility that Amanda imposes upon him. As a wanderer, with his romantic character, he is unable to forget his family.

## B. Chance becomes a gigolo to a faded film star

Chance Wayne once was “the most beautiful boy in St. Cloud.” At a very young age Chance fell in love with Heavenly Finley. When Chance was seventeen and she was only fifteen, he had an intimate encounter with her. They could not get married, because of her father’s interference, which made him anxious to search for success and fame. At the age of nineteen, Chance left his hometown, trying to find a fast way to become successful. At the beginning of Chance’s career, he had some success in small roles on Broadway and in Hollywood. But after each failure, he returned to the arms of Heavenly. Then, the last time in St. Cloud, Chance returned home, when he was completely broke. Heavenly had to pick up his tabs in restaurants and bars, and had to cover bad checks he wrote to banks. This continued until he met a rich Texan, Minnie, and they spent a week together on her yacht. At the same time, he got something besides “his gigolo fee from Minnie” (*Sweet* 102). While he was making love to Heavenly during the week, Minnie went to bed with any man she could pick up on Bourbon Street or the docks. During Chance’s love visit, he gave a venereal disease which got from Minnie to Heavenly who has to be “spayed like a dog”. Now her father, Boss Finley, and her brother, Tom, are seeking revenge toward Chance. The disease makes Heavenly feel frustrated. She tells her father that she would like go into a convent. She declares that “Dr. George Scudder’s knife had cut the youth out of my body, made me an old childless woman. Dry, cold, empty, like an old woman” (*Sweet* 71). Chodorow<sup>1</sup> said that pregnancy and childbirth can make a woman feel so complete that “a man may or may not be psychologically necessary or desirable to the mother-child exclusivity” (Hall 680). With no other way to make a living, Chance returns to St. Cloud with a faded film star, Princess Kosmonopolis. A critic, Nancy, pointed out that in *Sweet*

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Chodorow published the book of *The Reproduction of Mother: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1978) This book describes the literary representations of motherhood that have been especially numerous in the past five years. The late period of Williams’s plays were particularly influenced by her theory.

*Bird of Youth*, Williams portrayed a common type of show biz failure: a young man who has only modest talent, no training in his craft, and little taste for hard work (Tischer c: 104).

Chance knows that Princess has a large block of stock, so he asks her to give him a contract:

CHANCE: You said that you had a large block of stock, more than half ownership in a sort of a second-rate Hollywood studio, and could put me under contract. I doubted your word about that. You're not like any phony I've met before, but phonies come in all types and sizes. So I held out, even after we locked your cabana door for the papaya cream rubs.... You wired for some contract papers we signed. It was notarized and witnessed by three strangers found in a bar (Sweet 38-9).

Chance and Princess's relationship is geared on money and sex. Princess pays all of the bills in exchange for sex and companionship. However, Chance can not fully trust her. He calls her a "phony". Obviously, Chance and Princess are in the same situation with problems of alcohol. Princess uses sex and alcohol to forget her glorious past, and Chance drinks vodka voluminously. By pursuing this way of life, Chance and Princess can avoid facing facts and coping with reality.

After Chance discovers that Heavenly was spayed on his account from his brother, Tom, he declines to leave town with the Princess and waits for Boss Finley and Tom's revenge:

PRINCESS: Chance, we've got to go on.

CHANCE: Go on to where? I couldn't go past my youth, but I've gone past it.

PRINCESS: You're still young, Chance.

CHANCE: Princess, the age of some people can only be calculated by the level of — level of — rot in them. And by that measure I'm ancient.

...

PRINCESS: Yes, time (*Sweet* 122-23).

Chance knows that there is nothing left from him. Later, he becomes disillusioned. And then, he gives up being a gigolo. He recognizes that he is no longer youthful. He disagrees with Princess' objection. A critic, Nancy, points out that this play finally reminds of one of Tennessee Williams' favorite poets, John Keats. In "Ode on Melancholy,"<sup>2</sup> Keats said that the most intense pain comes to the one who cares about Beauty, Joy, and Pleasure (Tischer c: 112). As a result, he rejects leaving with the Princess, and declares that he is not a piece of her luggage:

PRINCESS: I'll send a boy up for my luggage. You'd better come down with my luggage.

CHANCE: I'm not part of your luggage (*Sweet* 121).

Another critic, Bauer-Briski, suggests that at the end of *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Chance finally remembers what has really mattered to him: Heavenly. But he also realizes that there will be no common future for him and Heavenly, because he is solely responsible for her misery (Bauer 321). There is nothing that can satisfy him, and he waits for his punishment. Heavenly's fate turns him to face himself. He realizes that life has been nothing but a dream. So, he becomes disillusioned. Williams' explains that Chance is being used by Princess at this time as a gigolo. He is almost thirty, and he does not want to depend on his looks and charm for the "chance to make good"<sup>3</sup> (Devlin b: 621). Even as a gigolo to Princess, he still only cares for and loves Heavenly.

<sup>2</sup> Keats implies that beauty, joy, and pain are inseparable and to experience joy fully we must fully experience sadness.

<sup>3</sup> This phrase comes from Williams' letter to Audrey in 1956.

## C. Brick becomes an alcohol addict

The play is set in Glorious Hill. Big Daddy who is the owner of the biggest plantation in the Mississippi Delta, does not know that he is dying of cancer. He has not made a decision to give his wealth to Gooper, his first son, or Brick, his second son. Gooper and his wife, Mae, have five children, and the sixth child is on the way. They are longing for Big Daddy's estate. On the other hand, Brick who is a former football star is indifferent to everything around him. So, his wife, Margaret, would like to help him to get the estate. At the beginning of the play, Brick, a charming and handsome male protagonist appears in a bedroom. He is totally indifferent to Margaret's complaining about "no-neck monsters." He is only interested in drinking:

BRICK:

Wha'd you say, Maggie? Water was on s' lould I couldn't hearya...

MARGARET:

Well, I! — just remarked that! — one of th' no-neck monsters messed up m' lovely lace dress so I got t' —cha-a-ange....

(*Cat 17*)

Margaret tries to get closer to him, but Brick always pays more attentions to alcohol. When Margaret and Brick were students, they went to the same college. They double-dated at college and then they got married in the summer of their graduation. She felt so happy, blissful, and "hit heaven together every time that they loved!" (*Cat 58*) As she tells to Brick:

MARGARET:

Such a wonderful person to go to bed with, and I think mostly because you were really indifferent to it. Isn't that right?

Never had any anxiety about it, did it naturally, easily, slowly, with absolute confidence and perfect calm, more like opening a door for a lady or seating her at a table than giving expression to any longing for her. Your indifference made you wonderful at lovemaking—strange? —but true... (*Cat* 30)

A critic, Bauer-Briski, said about the relationship between Brick and Margaret “ The fact that he was never anxious during his lovemaking, performed naturally and with confidence, shows that he knew what he was doing and that there was no question whether this was the right thing or not, no question about ambivalent sexual orientation either” (Bauer b: 242). On the other hand, Williams portrayed Brick’s indifferent response to Margaret in the bedroom:

He stands there in the bathroom doorway drying his hair with a towel and hanging onto the towel rack because one ankle is broken, plastered and bound. He is still slim and firm as a boy. His liquor hasn’t started tearing him down outside. He has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle. But now and then, when disturbed, something flashes behind it, like lightning in a fair sky, which shows that at some deeper level he is far from peaceful....(*Cat* 19)

Between Brick and Margaret’s conversation, Brick shows an unconcerned attitude. After Skipper committed suicide; he was fully drawn into depressions, and had to be forced to forget his irreparable pain through alcohol:

BRICK:

Did you say something?

MARGARET:

I was goin’ t’ say something: that I get—lonely. Very!



BRICK:

Ev'rybody gets that...

MARGARET:

Living with someone you love can be lonelier—than living entirely alone! —if the one that y'love doesn't love you....

(*Cat 27-8*)

Because of the truth of events, he refuses to have a physical relationship with Margaret. Skipper is his best friend who had played football with Brick through school, and college. On account of Skipper's suicide, Brick is willing to live indifferently. His only interest is to drink. Therefore, he refuses to sleep with Margaret, and does not care about Big Daddy's estate. Berkowitz, a critic, said that Brick's idealism is not untinged with an adolescent resistance to process. He wants to cling on to the world of college sports and male relationships and when that fails him he turns to alcohol (Berkowitz 57).

In the talk between father and son, Brick and Big Daddy have a climax rivalry in the bedroom. Big Daddy always warns Brick not to drink so much, but Brick does not worry about his health. Big Daddy urges him to give up the alcohol quickly from the father's responsibility:

BIG DADDY:

Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto. A man that drinks is throwing his life away. Don't do it, hold onto your life. There's nothing else to hold onto... (*Cat 84*)

Brick is standing aside, and waiting for the "click" which symbolizes the kind of forgetfulness he wishes to get:

BRICK:

That's truth, Big Daddy. I'm alcoholic.

BIG DADDY:

This shows how I—let things go! (*Cat 98*)

By means of whiskey, Brick wishes to freeze for a short time. Before talking to Big Daddy about “click”, Brick’s reason for drinking is that he longs for the click that produces peace of mind. It is surprising that Brick can not admit the real reason for drinking, and can not stop complaining about society and mendacity. Only liquor can console his soul. However, Big Daddy forces Brick to face his best friend’s death:

BIG DADDY:

Anyhow now! —we have tracked down the lie with which you’re disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with, Brick. You been passing the buck. This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself.

You!—dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it!—before you’d face truth with him! (*Cat 124*)

Williams gives us the clues about Brick turns into an alcoholic, when he wrote a letter to Gadg<sup>4</sup> (Devlin b: 555):

To be brief: the part I buy is that there has to be a reason for Brick’s impasse (his drinking is only an expression of it) that will “hold water”.

Why does a man drink: in quotes “drink”. There are two reasons, separate or together. 1. He’s scared shitless of something. 2. He can’t face the truth about something. —then of course there’s the natural degenerates that just fall into any weak, indulgent habit that comes along but we are not dealing with that sad but unimportant category in Brick.

According to this letter’s clues, Brick is afraid of being reminded of the relationship between

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<sup>4</sup> This letter was written by Williams on November, 31, 1954 in the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Skipper and Margaret. He needs some alcohol to keep the truth away; as he sees it as the only logical reason that he can forget it. A critic, Falk, explained that Brick says, “Mendacity is the system we live on. Liquor is one way out a “death is the other” (Falk b: 85). For Brick, the younger and beloved son, neither Big Daddy’s estate nor his death has much interest. He is an alcoholic who can not understand why so many people always care about life or possessions. Brick discovers that the communication with Big Daddy is impossible when he talks with Big Daddy:

BRICK:

No, I can’t. We talk, you talk, in—circles! We get no where, no where! It’s always the same, you say you want to talk to me and don’t have a ruttin’ thing to say to me! (*Cat* 102)

On the other hand, Brick refuses to have any contact with Margaret, so he drinks a lot:

BRICK:

I wasn’t conscious of lookin’ at you, Maggie.

MARGARET:

Well, I was conscious of it! What were you thinkin’?

BRICK:

I don’t remember thinking of anything, Maggie.

MARGARET:

Don’t you think I know that---? Don’t you—? —Think I know that—? (*Cat* 27)

He also rejects the offer to sleep with Margaret as a punishment. He is not concerned about Margaret’s feelings. Because Brick knows about the relationship between Skipper and Margaret, Brick punishes her severely. The other punishment is that Brick tells Margaret to find another lover, but Margaret just thinks about getting Big Daddy’s estate.

Metaphorically, she prefers to become a cat staying on a hot tin roof, and awaits Brick's return to their relationship:

BRICK:

Maggie, I wouldn't divorce you for being unfaithful or anything else. Don't you know that? Hell. I'd be relieved to know that you'd found yourself a lover.

Margaret:

Well, I'm taking no chances. No, I'd rather stay on this hot tin roof.

BRICK:

You could leave me, Maggie.

MARGARET:

Don't want to and will not! Besides if I did, you don't have a cent to pay for it but what you get from Big Daddy and he's dying of cancer! (*Cat* 50-1)

Definitely, she will not take another lover as her husband, because she will not end their marriage which means the loss of Big Daddy's plantation.

