**A Street car Named Desire – Tennessee Williams**

**Scene 2 – Summary**

It is six o’clock in the evening on the day following Blanche’s arrival. Blanche is offstage, taking a bath to soothe her nerves. When Stanley walks in the door, Stella tells him that in order to spare Blanche the company of Stanley’s poker buddies in the apartment that night, she wants to take Blanche out, to New Orleans’s French Quarter. Stella explains Blanche’s ordeal of losing Belle Reve and asks that Stanley be kind to Blanche by flattering her appearance. She also instructs Stanley not to mention the baby.

Stanley is more interested in the bill of sale from Belle Reve. Stella’s mention of the loss of Belle Reve seems to convince Stanley that Blanche’s emotional frailty is an act contrived to hide theft. He thinks Blanche has swindled Stella out of her rightful share of the estate, which means that *he* has been swindled. In order to prove his own victimization, he refers to the Napoleonic code, a code of law recognized in New Orleans from the days of French rule that places women’s property in the hands of their husbands.

Looking for a bill of sale, Stanley angrily pulls all of Blanche’s belongings out of her trunk. To him, Blanche’s glitzy evening dresses, feather boas, fur stoles, and costume jewellery look expensive, and he assumes she has spent the family fortune on them. He claims he’ll have his friend come over to appraise the value of the trunk’s contents. Enraged at Stanley’s actions and ignorance, Stella storms out onto the porch.

Blanche finishes her bath and appears before Stanley in the kitchen wearing a red satin robe. She says that she feels clean and fresh, then closes the curtains to the bedroom in order to dress out of Stanley’s sight. Stanley replies gruffly to Blanche’s idle chatter. When she unashamedly asks him to come and fasten her buttons, he refuses. He begins to question sarcastically how Blanche came to acquire so many fancy dress items, and he rejects Blanche’s flirtatious bids to make the conversation more kind-spirited. Sensing that the impending conversation might upset Stella, Blanche calls out to her sister requesting that she run to the drugstore to buy a soda.

Blanche takes from her trunk a box filled with papers and hands it to Stanley. Stanley snatches additional papers from her trunk and begins to read them. Blanche is horrified and grabs back this second set of papers, which are old letters and love poems she has saved from her husband. She redirects Stanley’s attention to the papers she originally handed to him, and Stanley realizes that Blanche has acted honestly—the estate really was lost on its mortgage, not sold as he suspected.

Blanche describes the estate’s decline. Her ancestors owned an enormous plantation, but the men so mishandled affairs with their “epic fornications” that only the house and a small parcel of land containing the family graveyard were left by the time Blanche and Stella were born. Blanche manages to disarm Stanley and convince him that no fraud has been perpetrated against anyone. Stanley lets slip that Stella is pregnant.

Stella returns from the drugstore, and some of the men arrive for their poker game. Exhilarated by the news of Stella’s pregnancy and by her own handling of the situation with Stanley, Blanche follows Stella for their girls’ night out. On their way offstage, Blanche comments that mixing their old, aristocratic blood with Stanley’s immigrant blood may be the only way to insure the survival of their lineage in the world.

*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.*

**Analysis**

Scene Two starts to move our sympathies away from Stanley as the more malignant aspects of his character start to surface. Whereas Scene One stresses the sexual attraction that drew Stella and Stanley to one another despite class differences, Scene Two shows Stanley acting disrespectful to Stella and antagonistic to her sister. Meanwhile, our compassion for Blanche increases as Williams reveals just how destitute she is by showing that all of her belongings in the world amount to a trunk full of gaudy dresses and cheap jewellery.

In one sense, Stanley and Blanche are fighting for Stella—each would like to pull Stella beyond the reach of the other. But their opposition is also more elemental. They are incompatible forces—manners versus manhood—and peace between them is no more than a temporary cease-fire. Blanche represents the Old South’s intellectual romanticism and dedication to appearances. Stanley represents the New South’s ruthless pursuit of success and -economic pragmatism. When Stanley confronts Blanche after her bath, she shows that she understands the nature of their clash when she tells him that Stella doesn’t understand him as well as she does.

Calling upon the Napoleonic code enables Stanley to justify his feelings of entitlement toward Stella’s inheritance. In doing so, he shows that he is ignorant of legal technicalities, because Belle Reve, located in Laurel, Mississippi, wouldn’t fall under New Orleans jurisdiction. However, Stanley’s repeated references to the Napoleonic code highlight the fact that his conflict with Blanche is also a gender showdown. Stanley’s greed reveals his misogyny, or woman-hating tendencies. As a man, Stanley feels that what Stella has belongs to him. He also hates Blanche as a woman and as a person with a more prestigious family name, and therefore suspects that Blanche’s business dealings have been dishonest.

Blanche takes the first of many baths in this scene. She claims that steaming hot baths are necessary to calm her nerves, a believable excuse given her constant hysteria. Yet Blanche’s constant need to wash her body symbolizes her need for emotional, spiritual, and mental cleansing. Her bathing foreshadows the eventual revelation of her sordid past. She desires to rid herself of her social blemishes and start over after leaving Laurel.

Two mysteries from Scene One are solved in Scene Two. Blanche reveals the “boy” she spoke of at the end of Scene One to be her husband. She tells Stanley that she hurt her husband the way that Stanley would like to hurt her, warning him that his goal is impossible, since she is “not young and vulnerable anymore.” Blanche knew her husband’s weakness and unfeelingly used that weakness to destroy him. Yet she is naïve to think that Stanley won’t be able to do the same thing to her. She would like to believe that her age and experience protect her against Stanley’s callous assaults, but Stanley recognizes Blanche’s essential weakness. Also, Stella’s revelation to the audience that she is pregnant (when she asks Stanley not to mention her pregnancy to Blanche) explains Blanche’s remark about Stella’s weight gain, and Stella’s refusal to discuss her weight gain with her sister.