A Streetcar Named Desire
Notes: Scene 2

What happens in this scene:
One day later, Stanley is annoyed by Blanche’s presence

Characters:
• Stanley
• Stella
• Blanche
Blanche’s presence annoys Stanley

- Stella is taking Blanche out for dinner because Stanley is having his friends over to play poker. Because she is doing so, she didn’t cook Stanley a hot dinner.
  - STELLA: “I put you a cold plate on ice.”
  - STANLEY: “Well, isn’t that just dandy!”
- Stella asks Stanley to be kind to Blanche and to compliment her looks.
  - STELLA: “When she comes in, be sure to say something nice about her appearance [...] and admire her dress and tell her that she’s looking wonderful. That’s important with Blanche. Her little weakness!”
- This shows that Blanche is an insecure, fragile, and sensitive person.
Shh! It’s a secret!

• STELLA: “And, oh! Don’t mention the baby. I haven’t said anything yet, and I’m waiting until she gets in a quieter condition.”
  – It is strange how a woman would not share her good news with her own sister.
    • For Stella, it seems that blood (Blanche – family) isn’t thicker than water (Stanley – married into family).
  – Maybe the reason for the delay is because Stella is being attentive to Blanche’s needs before her own.

• STELLA: “She wasn’t expecting to find us in such a small place. You see, I tried to gloss things over a little in my letters.”
  – Stella never told Blanche that she was living in a low-income neighborhood like Elysian Fields.
    • What does this say about Stella and Blanche’s relationship when Stella keeps important news from her sister?
Stanley suspects Blanche

• STANLEY: “Let’s see the papers! [. . .] Let me enlighten you on a point or two, baby. [. . .] In the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code, according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa. For instance, if I had a piece of property, or you had a piece of property – [. . .] It looks to me like you have been swindled, baby, and when you’re swindled under the Napoleonic code I’m swindled too. And I don’t like to be swindled.”

  – Stanley believes the Blanche is lying to Stella about how Belle Reve is lost. He accuses Blanche of swindling (stealing from) her sister.

  – Because he also believes in the “Napoleonic code,” Stanley is arguing that Blanche stealing from Stella is the same as Blanche stealing from him.

  – Stanley is furious. He most likely thought he one day would inherit money from Belle Reve, which would be a source of pride for him. He would have real money for the first time in his life.
Stanley examines the evidence

- STANLEY: “Open you eyes to this stuff! You think she got them out of a teacher’s pay? [. . .] Look at these feather and furs that she come here to preen herself in! What’s this here? A solid-gold dress, I believe! And this one! What’s this here? Fox-pieces! Genuine fox fur-pieces, a half mile long! Where are you fox pieces, Stella? [. . .] And what have we here? The treasure chest of a pirate! [. . .] Pearls! Ropes of them! What is this sister of yours, a deep-sea diver? Bracelets of solid gold, too! Where are your pearls and gold bracelets? [. . .] And diamonds! A crown fit for an empress!”
  - Stanley is accusing Blanche of having spent the money from the sale of Belle Reve on herself, sharing none of it with her sister.
  - Stella points out that all of these items are fakes: “Inexpensive,” “costume jewelry,” and “rhinestones”

- STANLEY: “I have an acquaintance that works in a jewelry store. I’ll have him in here to make an appraisal of this. Here’s our plantation, or what was left of it, here!
  - Unconvinced, Stanley tells Stella that he will investigate Blanche.
Stanley and Blanche: alone together

• Blanche is flirtatious with Stanley.
  – [Blanche comes out of the bathroom in a red satin robe.]
  – “I’m going to ask you a favor in a moment [. . .] Some buttons in back! [. . .] You men with you big clumsy fingers.”
  – “May I have a drag on your cig?”
  – “But look at me now! [She smiled at him radiantly.] Would you think it possible that I was once considered to be – attractive?”
  – [She sprays herself with her atomizer; then playfully sprays him with it.]

• She hopes to distract him from asking questions about Belle Reve’s loss.

• This behavior is also inappropriate; Stanley is her brother-in-law.
Stanley sees through Blanche’s flirtation

• STANLEY: “I don’t go in for that stuff. [. . .] Compliments to women about their looks. 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. I once went out with a doll who said to me, ‘I am the glamorous type, I am the glamorous type!’ I said, ‘So what?’ [. . .] That shut her up like a clam. [. . .] Some men are took in by this Hollywood glamor stuff and some men are not.”

• STANLEY: “If I didn’t know you was my wife’s sister I’d get ideas about you! [. . .] Don’t play so dumb.”
  – Stanley lets Blanche know that women can’t fool him, and that he isn’t impressed with her looks or advances.
  – He even tells Blanche that he knows she’s coming onto him.
Papers and love letters

• BLANCHE: “These are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy. [He snatches them up. She speaks fiercely] Give those back to me! [. . . ] The touch of your hands insults them! [. . . ] Now that you’ve touched them I’ll burn them!”
  – Blanche feels violated that Stanley would touch the love letters from her husband. These letters are a metaphor for her heart. By touching the letters, Stanley is grabbing at her heart.
  – She tells Stanley that he is not good enough to be touching her letters.

• BLANCHE: “Poems a dead boy wrote. I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can’t! I’m not young and vulnerable any more. But my young husband was and I – never mind about that! Just give them back to me!”
  – Blanche suggests she did something to her husband that could have caused his death.
  – She is also trying to tell Stanley that she is just as strong as he is and that he can’t get the better of her.
How Belle Reve was lost

• BLANCHE: “...our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications – to put it plainly! [. . .] The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation...”

– Blanche explains to Stanley that her father and male relatives, for generations, sold off tracts of land and personal property to pay for the gifts they would lavish on their prostitutes.

– To fornicate means to have sex.
A random voice

• At the end of the scene, a vendor on the street calls out, “Red hot!”
  – Symbolic of the tension between Stanley and Blanche. They have both angered one another.
  – When metal is extremely hot, it glows red.
    • This suggests that things are about to explode in the next scene.