

the beginning of

**THE CRASS MENAGERIE,
OR WHY AMNESIACS SHOULDN'T WRITE MEMORY PLAYS**

a short comedy by Rich Orloff

(from **SMALL WONDERS**)

Time: Early Tennessee Williams

Place: A St. Louis apartment that has seen better days,
and they weren't that great, either

Characters: MIRANDA WINGNUT, an older woman who was once beautiful
and irresistible, or more likely she's just delusional
TIM, her self-pitying and resentful son,
or in other words, an aspiring playwright
CLARA, her daughter, who uses a wheelchair
(and thus has no negative qualities whatsoever)
JIMMY, a gentleman caller, although it's debatable
how much of a gentleman he is

As the play begins, a light shines on TIM:

TIM

(to the audience:)

This is a memory play. It's set in the non-specific
past, not too long ago but not recently either,
because the vagaries of time are among the
more precious comforts that protect our fragile
egos from the ephemeral wound we call life.
I'm a writer, so I get to say crap like that
all the time. I am the narrator and also a
character in this play, because as a writer,
I both observe *and* participate – and because
as a playwright, I know small-cast plays get
produced more. It's almost dinner time tonight,
but tonight's not like any other night. It's not
like it's Passover; it's just an unusual night.
What's not unusual was that my mama
was driving my sister and me nuts.

The lights reveal the apartment. In one corner is a pile of stuffed animals and
inflatable dolls. MIRANDA is fussing at CLARA.

CLARA

Mama, stop fussing at me!

MIRANDA

The Gentleman Caller will be here any moment.
You need to spruce yourself up more.

CLARA

Mama, this is a waste of time.

MIRANDA

When I was your age, I once had seventeen gentlemen callers in one day. By the time the last one left, I was bow-legged for a week.

(catches herself:)

From horseback riding, of course.

CLARA

Oh, if only I had the strength to leave this place.
Then I could become a princess – or a stenographer.

MIRANDA

Clara, you flunked out of typing school. Do you know what they call women who flunk out of typing school?

(a short beat:)

Wives!

CLARA

Maybe I'll convert to Catholicism and become a nun.

MIRANDA

You will not become a nun!

CLARA

Why not?

MIRANDA

Black and white are not your colors.

CLARA

I don't care. If I were a nun, I wouldn't have to worry about men or making a living, and I could dedicate my life to noble things... like spanking bad schoolchildren.

MIRANDA

You will not become a nun! You will impress the Gentleman Caller and become his wife.

CLARA

Mama, he's not going to be interested in me.

MIRANDA

And why not?

CLARA

Because I'm crippled!

MIRANDA

The only thing crippled about you is your attitude. You're not crippled. You just have a little defect – barely noticeable, even.

CLARA

I'm in a wheelchair!

MIRANDA

And just think how much you'll save your husband on furniture.

CLARA

Mama –

MIRANDA

You have to stop defining yourself by your affliction. I do not see you as someone with a disability but as my beloved daughter, whom God hath inflicted upon me.

CLARA

Mother, please. Admit it, I'm crippled.

MIRANDA

I will not let you pity yourself, Clara.

CLARA

What's wrong with pity? Without pity I'd never be able to butt in line at supermarkets.

MIRANDA

If you have a minor, barely noticeable affliction, then you compensate for it by developing other parts of yourself, like your mind... your heart... or your jaws.

CLARA

Please do not allude to such sinful activities. I'd rather take comfort in my collection of stuffed animals and blow-up dolls.

Clara grabs a stuffed animal and holds it tight.

MIRANDA

I'm tempted to throw those things out.

CLARA

Don't you dare!

Clara grabs another stuffed animal – and starts rubbing the two together.

TIM

Mama, I wish you'd accept us for who we are.

MIRANDA

Why limit yourself to who you are when there are so many nicer people we'd rather you be.

TIM

I think I'm going to the movies.

MIRANDA

The Gentleman Caller will be here any minute; you are *not* going to the movies! I do not understand how any young man can spend so many hours at the movies.

TIM

I spend a lot of time in the bathroom.

MIRANDA

This young man you've invited over –

TIM

Only so you'd stop pestering me to find a gentleman caller –

MIRANDA

Does he come from a family on the social register?

TIM

I don't know. I know they're wealthy.

MIRANDA

So he comes from a family on the *cash* register.

TIM

All I know is, he's the only one at work who talks to me. I showed him some of my plays. He calls me Noel Coward.

CLARA

Why Noel Coward?

TIM

Because I'm not good enough to be Shakespeare!

MIRANDA

I wish you'd stop wasting your time
writing and show some real industry.

TIM

You don't believe in me, and you never did!!!
You're a witch, Mother, a witch, and you
make my life a living hell!!! I sure hope
I can get a Tony-winning play out of this.

Miranda takes out a couple of rolled up socks and walks to Clara.

MIRANDA

Now, Clara, to help us impress the young man,
let's stuff these in your bra.

CLARA

Mother!

MIRANDA

It's no big deal. I call them "gay deceivers".

TIM

When I go to the movies, I stuff them
in my underwear.

MIRANDA

If you had any respect for me,
you wouldn't act the way you do.

TIM

And if you really loved me, you'd take up morphine
so I could write LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT!

The doorbell rings.

And the play continues.