

Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant, *The Lady Eve* with Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda, *His Girl Friday* with Rosalind Russell and Cary Grant). Pray to cinematic heaven and ask it to guide you.

Two additional things about Mrs. Sorken.

Sometimes the humor can lie in saying something matter-of-factly—as when she says, “Maybe after he dies I’ll go somewhere,” or when she identifies with the “poor Mermon woman in *Angels in America*.”

And also, don’t be afraid to figure out what words Mrs. Sorken enjoys saying. Mrs. Sorken’s language is ornate, she uses words and phrases like “etymology” and “sedating tablet” and “teeming unconscious.” So when your instincts lead you to it, relish the fancy words. It’s hard to say “teeming unconscious” without enjoying the word “teeming” a little bit. “Photosynthesis” is probably slightly pleasurable to say.

In most cases, I prefer you not use a British accent, or a “Connecticut” lockjaw one. Just use your own voice and let the character sound how you sound, saying and believing what Mrs. Sorken says.

I don’t mean to inhibit your acting impulses, but if you had experienced the difference between say, Patricia Elliott doing the speech in a charming, funny way that took ten minutes and another actress taking many pauses and making the piece be close to 20 minutes—I think you would understand my desire to guide actors through these notes.

Well, that’s all.

For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play is a parody spin-off of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Audiences unfamiliar with the play seem able to enjoy it anyway—because parent-child tensions are the core theme of it—but the play is definitely geared to people who know the Williams' play.

I've always had a strong reaction to *The Glass Menagerie*. I think it's quite a wonderful play. I first was captivated by the play in high school when I took home a recording of it from the library which featured the stellar cast of Jessica Tandy as Amanda, Montgomery Clift as Tom, Julie Harris as Laura, and David Wayne as the Gentleman Caller. Tom's feeling trapped, Laura's feeling overwhelmed by the world (and typing class), and Amanda's trying to force them both to be other than who they were—these themes reverberated with me.

In graduate school at Yale School of Drama, however, I discovered that as I got older there was something in me that was starting to find the Amanda-Laura relationship funny—these two souls stuck together, one hopelessly trying to change the other one, who couldn't and wouldn't budge.

I befriended fellow playwright Albert Innaurato and we ended up writing a strange sketch based on *Menagerie* in which he played an overbearing Amanda and I played a shy, withering Laura, but we didn't dress as women, we dressed as priests. Well, it made sense to us at the time.

Our take on *Menagerie* was about seven minutes, and was exceptionally lumatic. (It became part of a cabaret act Albert and I did together called *I Don't Generally Like Poetry But Have You Read "Trees"?*)

I didn't think about *Menagerie* again until I saw yet another production in the mid-80s. I actually quite liked the production, but found that between the various movie and TV versions, a couple of high school productions, and some other stage ones, I felt overexposed to the play. And though I still admired the play quite genuinely, I seemed to have reached that place where I found it hard to respond normally because I knew it too well.

And though I as a child always felt sympathy for Laura, as an adult I started to find Laura's sensitivity frustrating. I mean, how hard was typing class really?

And though in my youth I found Laura's interest in her glass animals to be sweet and otherworldly (with the appropriately perfect symbolism of her loving her glass unicorn best because it was different), now as an adult, I felt restless with her little hobby. Did she actually spend hours and hours staring at them? Couldn't she try to function in the world just a little bit? Why didn't she go out bowling or make prank phone calls or get drunk on a good bottle of bourbon?

Anyway, I started to find Laura annoying and frustrating.

It's out of this irritation with Laura's sensitivity—a feeling greatly at odds with the Williams' original—that I seem to have written this parody, *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls*. (I say "seem" because I often say "seem" and because I approached writing this parody on impulse, unaware consciously of how my

feelings toward the play had changed. Writing the parody was a way of playing with, and releasing, some of what I felt after seeing the play for what seemed the 100th time.)

I've been happy that some of the critics have described this parody as "affectionate." I do feel affectionate toward the original play. But there is something about sweet, sensitive Laura that seems to have gotten on my nerves.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls was part of *Durang Durang* at Manhattan Theatre Club. The cast was as follows:

Amanda	Lizabeth Mackay
Lawrence	Keith Reddin
Tom	David Aaron Baker
Ginny	Patricia Randell

The spring before this production, the play was presented by Ensemble Studio Theatre as part of its one-act Marathon 94. The cast and the director were the same. And it was partially from this production's good reception that Manhattan Theatre Club approached me and Walter Bobbie about doing a full evening of one-acts, which became *Durang Durang*.

Several years before these two productions, there was a showcase production of an earlier version of *Belle*. It was directed by Scott Allen, and its cast was Laura Waterbury as Amanda, John Money as Lawrence, Timothy Kivel as Tom, and Julie Knight as Ginny.

And subsequent to that showcase, there were two staged readings of *Belle*, one at the Westport Artists Theatre Workshop in Connecticut, and one at a benefit for The Glines Theatre in New York City. Both times E. Katherine Kerr and myself played Amanda and Lawrence; John Augustine and Julie Janney were Tom and Ginny in Westport, and Jeffrey Hayenga and Cristine Rose were Tom and Ginny at the Glines' benefit.

CHARACTERS

AMANDA, the Southern belle mother

LAWRENCE, her sensitive son

TOM, her other son

GINNY, a visitor

FOR WHOM THE SOUTHERN BELLE TOLLS

Scene: A warm, fussy living room setting. A couch, a chair, homey and warm. Maybe a fringed throw over the couch. Maybe a vase of jonquils. Enter Amanda, the Southern belle mother. Dressed nicely, for company. Feminine clothing, though perhaps an earlier feeling to what she's wearing.

AMANDA: Rise and shine! Rise and shine! *(Calls off.)* Lawrence, honey, come on out here and let me have a look at you!

(Enter Lawrence, who limps across the room. In his 20s [or maybe a young-looking 30], he is very sensitive, and is wearing what are clearly his dress clothes. Amanda fiddles with his bow tie and stands back to admire him.)

AMANDA: Lawrence, honey, you look lovely.

LAWRENCE: No, I don't, mama. I have a pimple on the back of my neck.

AMANDA: Don't say the word "pimple," honey, it's common. *(With hopeful energy.)* Now your brother Tom is bringing home a girl from the warehouse for you to meet, and I want you to make a good impression, honey.

LAWRENCE: It upsets my stomach to meet people, mama.

AMANDA: Oh, Lawrence honey, you're so sensitive it makes me want to hit you.

LAWRENCE: I don't need to meet people, mama. I'm happy just by myself, playing with my collection of glass cocktail stirrers. *(Lawrence smiles wanly and limps over to a table on top of which sits a glass jar filled with glass swizzle sticks.)*

AMANDA: Lawrence, you are a caution. Only retarded people and alcoholics are interested in glass cocktail stirrers.

LAWRENCE: *(With proud wonderment.)* Each one of them has a special name, mama. *(Picks up one to show her.)* This one is called Stringbean because it's long and thin. *(Picks up another one.)* And this one is called Stringbean because it's long and thin. *(Picks up a blue one.)* And this one is called Blue because it's blue.

AMANDA: All my children have such imagination, why was I so blessed? Oh, Lawrence honey, how are you going to get on in the world if you just stay home all day, year after year, playing with your collection of glass cocktail stirrers?

LAWRENCE: I don't like the world, mama. I like it here in this room.

AMANDA: I know you do, Lawrence honey, that's part of your charm. Some days. But, *honey*, what about making a living?

LAWRENCE: I can't work, mama. I'm crippled. *(He limps over to the couch and sits.)*

AMANDA: *(Firmly.)* There is nothing wrong with your leg, Lawrence honey, all the doctors have told you that. This limping thing is an *affectation*.

LAWRENCE: *(Perhaps a little steely.)* I only know how I feel, mama.

AMANDA: Oh if only I had connections in the Mafia, I'd have someone come and break *both* your legs.

LAWRENCE: *(Slightly amused.)* Don't try to make me laugh, mama. You know I have asthma.

AMANDA: Your asthma, your leg, your eczema. You're just a mess, Lawrence!

LAWRENCE: I have scabs from the itching, mama.

AMANDA: That's lovely, Lawrence. You must tell us more over dinner.

LAWRENCE: Alright.

AMANDA: That was a *joke*, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: Don't try to make me laugh, mama. My asthma.

AMANDA: Now, Lawrence, I don't want you talking about your ailments to the feminine caller your brother Tom is bringing home from the warehouse, honey. No nice-bred young lady likes to hear a young man discussing his eczema, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: What else can I talk about, mama?

AMANDA: Talk about the weather. Or Red China.

LAWRENCE: Or my collection of glass cocktail stirrers?

AMANDA: I suppose so, honey, if the conversation's comes to some go-

dawful standstill. Otherwise, I'd shut up about it. (*Becomes coquettish, happy memories.*) Conversation is an art, Lawrence. Back at Blue Mountain, when I had seventeen gentlemen callers, I was able to converse with charm and vivacity for six hours without stop and never once mention eczema or bone cancer or vivisection. Try to emulate me, Lawrence, honey. Charm and vivacity. And charm. And vivacity. And charm.

LAWRENCE: Well, I'll try, but I doubt it.

AMANDA: Me too, honey. But we'll go through the motions anyway, won't we?

LAWRENCE: I don't know if I want to meet some girl who works in a warehouse, mama.

AMANDA: Your brother Tom says she's a lovely girl with a nice personality. And where else does he meet girls except the few who work at the warehouse? (*Thinking it's odd, but not sure why.*) He only seems to meet men at the movies. Your brother goes to the movies entirely too much. I must speak to him about it.

LAWRENCE: It's unfeminine for a girl to work at a warehouse.

AMANDA: (*Firm, frustrated.*) Now Lawrence—if you can't go out the door without getting an upset stomach or an attack of vertigo, then we have got to find some nice girl who's willing to support you. Otherwise, how am I ever going to get you out of this house and off my hands?

LAWRENCE: (*Sensitive, unknowing.*) Why do you want to be rid of me, mama?

AMANDA: I suppose it's unmotherly of me, dear, but you really get on my nerves. Limping around the apartment, pretending to have asthma. If only some nice girl would marry you and I knew you were taken care of, then I'd feel free to start to live again. I'd join Parents Without Partners, I'd go to dinner dances, I'd have a life again. Rather than just watch you mope about this stupid apartment. I'm not bitter, dear, it's just that I hate my life.

LAWRENCE: I understand, mama.

AMANDA: Do you, dear? Oh, you're cute. Oh, listen, I think I hear them.

TOM: (*From offstage.*) Mother, I forgot my key.

LAWRENCE: I'll be in the other room. (*Starts to limp away.*)

AMANDA: I want you to let them in, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: Oh, I couldn't, mama. She'd see I limp.

AMANDA: Then don't limp, damn it.

TOM: (*From off.*) Mother, are you there?

AMANDA: Just a minute, Tom, honey. Now, Lawrence, you march over to that door or I'm going to break all your swizzle sticks.

LAWRENCE: Mama, I can't!

AMANDA: Lawrence, you are a grown boy. Now you answer that door like any normal person.

LAWRENCE: I can't.

TOM: (*From off.*) Mother, I'm going to break the door down in a minute.

AMANDA: Just be patient, Tom. Now you're causing a scene, Lawrence. I want you to answer that door.

LAWRENCE: My eczema itches.

AMANDA: (*Impatient.*) I'll itch it for you in a second, Lawrence.

TOM: (*From off.*) Alright, I'm breaking it down.

(*Sound of door breaking down. Enter Tom and Ginny Bennett, a vivacious, friendly girl dressed in either factory clothes, or else a simple, not-too-frilly blouse and slacks.*)

AMANDA: Oh, Tom, you got in.

TOM: (*Very angry.*) Why must we go through this every night???

(*To Ginny.*) My kid brother has a thing about answering doors. He thinks people will notice his limp and his asthma and his eczema.

LAWRENCE: Excuse me. I think I hear someone calling me in the other room. (*Limps off, calls to imaginary person.*) Coming! (*Exits.*)

AMANDA: (*Angry, focused on Tom.*) Now see what you've done. He's probably going to refuse to come to the table due to your insensitivity. Oh, was any woman as cursed as I? With one son who's too sensitive and another one who's this big lox. (*Suddenly re-notices Ginny; switches to Southern charm and graciousness.*) I'm sorry, how rude of me. I'm Amanda Wingvalley. You must be Virginia Bennett from the warehouse. Tom has spoken so much about you I feel you're almost one of the family, preferably a daughter-in-law. Welcome, Virginia.

GINNY: (*Very friendly, and very loud.*) CALL ME GINNY OR GIN! BUT JUST DON'T CALL ME "LATE FOR DINNER"!! (*Roars with laughter.*)

AMANDA: Oh, how amusing. (*Whispers to Tom.*) Why is she shouting? Is she deaf?

GINNY: (*Still talking loudly.*) You're asking why I am speaking loudly. It's

so that I can be heard! I am taking a course in public speaking, and so far we've covered organizing your thoughts and speaking good and loud so the people in the back of the room can hear you.

AMANDA: Public speaking. How impressive. You must be interested in improving yourself.

GINNY: (*Truly not having heard.*) What?

AMANDA: (*Loudly.*) YOU MUST BE INTERESTED IN IMPROVING YOURSELF.

GINNY: (*Loudly and happily.*) YES I AM!

TOM: When's dinner? I want to get this over with fast if everyone's going to shout all evening.

GINNY: What?

AMANDA: (*To Ginny.*) Dinner is almost ready.

GINNY: Who's Freddy?

AMANDA: Oh, Lord, No. dear. DINNER IS READY.

GINNY: Oh good. I'm as hungry as a bear! (*Growls enthusiastically.*)

AMANDA: You must be very *popular* at the warehouse, Ginny.

GINNY: No popsicle for me, ma'am, although I will take you up on some gin.

AMANDA: (*Confused.*) What?

GINNY: (*Loudly.*) I WOULD LIKE SOME GIN.

AMANDA: Well, fine. I think I'd like to get drunk too. Tom, why don't you go and make two Southern ladies some nice summer gin and tonics? And see if sister would like a lemonade.

TOM: Sister?

AMANDA: I'm sorry, did I say sister? I meant brother.

TOM: (*Calling as he exits.*) Hey, four eyes, you wanna lemonade?

AMANDA: Tom's so amusing. He calls Lawrence "four eyes" even though he doesn't wear glasses.

GINNY: And does *Lawrence* wear glasses?

AMANDA: (*Confused.*) What?

GINNY: You said Tom called Lawrence "four eyes" even though he doesn't wear glasses, and I wondered if *Lawrence* wore glasses. Because that would, you see, explain it.

AMANDA: (*Looks at her with despair.*) Ah. I don't know. I'll have to ask Lawrence someday. (*Switches to energy, and Southern charm again.*) Speaking of Lawrence, let me go check on the supper and see if I can convince him to come out here and make conversation with you.

GINNY: No, thank you, ma'am, I'll just have the gin.

AMANDA: What?

GINNY: What?

AMANDA: Never mind. I'll be back. Or with luck I won't.
(*Amanda exits. Ginny looks around uncomfortably, and sees the table with the collection of glass cocktail stirrers.*)

GINNY: (*Looking at stirrers.*) They must drink a lot here.
(*Enter Tom with a glass for Ginny.*)

TOM: Here's some gin for Ginny. (*Offers drink.*)

GINNY: What?

TOM: Here's your poison.

GINNY: No, thanks, I'll just wait here.
(*Ginny now notices the offered drink, and takes it.*)

TOM: Have you ever thought that your hearing is being affected by all that loud *machinery* at the warehouse?

GINNY: Scenery? You mean, like trees? Yeah, I like trees.

TOM: I like trees too.
(*Tom sort of gives up on conversation, and leafs through his newspaper.*)

AMANDA: (*From offstage.*) Now you get out of that bed this minute, Lawrence Wingvalley, or I'm going to give that overbearing girl your *entire* collection of glass gobbledygook—is that clear?
(*Amanda pushes in Lawrence, who is wearing a blue night shirt.*)

AMANDA: I believe Lawrence would like to visit with you, Ginny.

GINNY: (*Shows her drink.*) Tom brought me my drink already, thank you, Mrs. Wingvalley.

AMANDA: You know, dear, a *hearing aid* isn't really all that expensive, you might look into that.

GINNY: No, if I have the gin, I don't really want any gator ade. Never liked the stuff anyway. But you feel free.

AMANDA: Thank you, dear. I will. (*Takes Tom by the arm, to lead him away; back to charm.*) Come, Tom, come to the kitchen and help me prepare the supper. And we'll let the two young people converse. Remember, Lawrence. Charm and vivacity.

TOM: (*Putting down his newspaper.*) I hope this dinner won't take long, mother. I don't want to get to the movies too late.

AMANDA: (*Irritated.*) Oh shut up about the movies. (*Smiles charmingly at Ginny and Lawrence.*)
(*Amanda and Tom exit. Lawrence stands still, uncomfortably. Ginny looks at him pleasantly. Brief pause.*)

GINNY: (*Loudly.*) HI.

LAWRENCE: (*Startled.*) Hi. ...I'd gone to bed.

GINNY: I never eat bread. It's too fattening. I have to watch my figure if I want to get ahead in the world. (*Suddenly wondering.*) Why are you wearing that nightshirt?

LAWRENCE: I'd gone to bed. I wasn't feeling well. My leg hurts, and I have a headache, and I have palpitations of the heart.

GINNY: I don't know. Hum a few bars, and I'll see.

LAWRENCE: (*Hears her odd statement, can't figure it out; says shyly.*) We've met before, you know.

GINNY: Uh huh.

LAWRENCE: (*Telling a precious memory.*) We were in high school together. You were voted Girl Most Likely to Succeed. We sat next to one another in glee club.

GINNY: I'm sorry, I really can't hear you. You're talking too softly.

LAWRENCE: (*Louder.*) You used to call me BLUE ROSES.

GINNY: Blue Roses? Oh yes, I remember, sort of. Why did I do that?

LAWRENCE: I had been absent from school for several months, and when I came back, you asked me where I'd been, and I said I'd been sick with viral pneumonia, but you thought I said "blue roses."

GINNY: I didn't get much of that, but I remember you now. You used to make a spectacle of yourself every day in glee class, clumping up the aisle with this great big noisy leg brace on your leg. God, you made a racket!

LAWRENCE: (*Sensitive, embarrassed.*) I was always so afraid people were looking at me, and pointing. (*A bit resentful.*) But then eventually mama wouldn't let me wear the leg brace anymore. She gave it to the salvation army.

GINNY: I've never been in the army. How long were you in for?

LAWRENCE: I've never been in the army. I have asthma.

GINNY: You do? May I see it?

LAWRENCE: (*Confused.*) See it?

GINNY: Well, sure, unless you don't want to.

LAWRENCE: Maybe you want to see my collection of glass cocktail stirrers. (*Lawrence limps to the table with his precious collection. Ginny follows behind him.*)

LAWRENCE: (*Holds up a swizzle stick.*) I call this one Stringbean, because it's long and thin.

GINNY: Thank you. (*Cheerfully puts it in her glass and stirs it.*)

LAWRENCE: (*Fairly appalled.*) They're not for use. (*Takes it back from her.*) They're a collection.

GINNY: (*Not having heard, but willing.*) Well I guess I stirred it enough.

LAWRENCE: They're my favorite thing in the world. (*Holds up another one.*) I call this one Q-tip, because I realized it looks like a Q-tip, except it's made out of glass and doesn't have little cotton swabs at the end of it.

(*Ginny looks blank.*)

LAWRENCE: Q-TIP.

GINNY: Really? (*Takes it and puts it in her ear.*)

LAWRENCE: No!!! Don't put it in your ear. (*Takes it back.*) Now it's disgusting.

GINNY: Well, I didn't think it was a Q-tip, but that's what you said it was.

LAWRENCE: I call it that. I think I'm going to throw it out now. (*Puts Q-tip aside somewhere; holds up another one.*) I call this one Pinocchio because if you hold it perpendicular to your nose it makes your nose look long. (*Holds it up to his nose.*)

GINNY: Uh huh.

LAWRENCE: (*Holds up another one.*) And I call this one Henry Kissinger, because he wears glasses and it's made of glass.

GINNY: Uh huh. (*Takes it and stirs her drink again.*)

LAWRENCE: No! They're just for looking, not for stirring. (*Calls.*) Mama, she's making a mess with my collection.

AMANDA: (*From off.*) Oh shut up about your collection, honey, you're probably driving the poor girl bananas.

GINNY: (*Calls off to her.*) No bananas, thank you! My nutritionist says I should avoid potassium. (*To Lawrence.*) You know what I take your trouble to be, Lawrence?

LAWRENCE: Mama says I'm retarded.

GINNY: I know you're tired, I figured that's why you put on the night-shirt, but this won't take long. I judge you to be lacking in self-confidence. Am I right?

LAWRENCE: Well, I am afraid of people and things, and I have a lot of ailments.

GINNY: But that makes you special, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: What does?

GINNY: I don't know. Whatever you said. And that's why you should pre-

AMANDA: Hadn't you better be going?
GINNY: What?
AMANDA: GO AWAY!
GINNY: (*Hearing the last phrase.*) Well, I guess I can tell when I'm not wanted. I guess I'll go now.
AMANDA: You and Betty must come over some evening. Preferably when we're out.
GINNY: Uh huh. (*Calls off.*) So long, Shakespeare. See you at the warehouse. (*To Lawrence.*) So long, Lawrence. I hope your rash gets better.
LAWRENCE: (*Saddened, holding the broken swizzle stick.*) You broke thermometer.
GINNY: What?
LAWRENCE: YOU BROKE THERMOMETER!
GINNY: Well, what was a thermometer doing in with the swizzle sticks anyway?
LAWRENCE: Its *name* was Thermometer, you nitwit!
AMANDA: Let it go, Lawrence. There'll be other swizzle sticks. Good bye, Virginia.
GINNY: I sure am hungry. Any chance I might be able to take a sandwich with me?
AMANDA: Certainly you can shake hands with me, if that will make you happy.
GINNY: I said I'm *hungry*.
AMANDA: Really, dear? What part of Hungary are you from?
GINNY: Oh never mind. I guess I'll go.
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
GINNY: (*Cheerful, her basic nature.*) Well, so long, everybody! I had a nice time. (*Exits.*)
(*Quiet. Amanda walks toward the kitchen and calls off to Tom in a contained voice.*)
AMANDA: Tom, come in here please. Lawrence, I don't believe I would play the victrola right now.
LAWRENCE: What victrola?
AMANDA: Any victrola.
(*Enter Tom.*)
TOM: Yes, mother? Where's Ginny?
AMANDA: The feminine caller made a hasty departure.
TOM: Old four eyes bored her to death, huh?

LAWRENCE: Oh, drop dead.
TOM: We should have you institutionalized.
AMANDA: That's the first helpful thing you've said all evening, but first things first. You played a little joke on us, Tom.
TOM: What are you talking about?
AMANDA: You didn't mention that your friend is already spoken for.
TOM: Really? I didn't even think she liked men.
AMANDA: Yes, well. It seems odd that you know so little about a person you see everyday at the warehouse.
TOM: The warehouse is where I work, not where I know things about people.
AMANDA: The disgrace. The expense of the pigs feet, a new tie for Lawrence. And you—bringing a lesbian into this house. Why, we haven't had a lesbian in this house since your grandmother died. And now you have the audacity to bring in that...that...
LAWRENCE: [REDACTED]
AMANDA: [REDACTED]
TOM: Oh look, who cares? No one in their right mind would marry four eyes here.
AMANDA: You have no Christian charity, or filial devotion, or fraternal affection.
TOM: I don't want to listen to this. I'm going to the movies.
AMANDA: You go to the movies to excess, Tom. It isn't healthy.
LAWRENCE: While you're out, could you stop at the liquor store and get me some more cocktail stirrers? She broke Thermometer and she put Q-tip in her ear.
AMANDA: Listen to your brother, Tom. He's pathetic. How are we going to support ourselves once you go? And I know you want to leave. I've seen the brochure for the merchant marines in your underwear drawer. And the application to the air force. And your letter of inquiry to the Ballet Trockadero. So I'm not unaware of what you're thinking. But don't leave us until you fulfill your duties here, Tom. Help brother find a wife, or a job, or a doctor. Or consider euthanasia. But don't leave me here all alone, saddled with him.
LAWRENCE: Mama, don't you like me?
AMANDA: Of course, dear. I'm just making jokes.
LAWRENCE: Be careful of my asthma.

AMANDA: I'll try, dear. Now why don't you hold your breath in case you get a case of terminal hiccups?

LAWRENCE: (*Willing; a new possible ailment.*) Alright. (*Holds his breath.*)

TOM: (*Fed up with everything.*) I'm leaving.

AMANDA: Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going to the movies.

AMANDA: I don't believe you go to the movies. What did you see last night?

TOM: (*Somewhat defiant.*) Hyapatia Lee in *Beaver City*.

AMANDA: And the night before that?

TOM: I don't remember. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

TOM: [REDACTED] Leave me alone!

AMANDA: These are not mainstream movies, Tom. Why can't you see a normal movie like *The Philadelphia Story*. Or *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*?

TOM: Those movies were made in the 1930s.

AMANDA: They're still good today.

TOM: I don't want to have this conversation. I'm going to the movies.

AMANDA: That's right, go to the movies! Don't think about us, a mother alone, an unmarried brother who think he's crippled and has no job. (*See Lawrence, pokes him.*) Oh, stop holding your breath, Lawrence, mama was kidding. (*Back to Tom.*) Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure. Go see your pornographic trash that's worse than anything Mr. D.H. Lawrence ever envisioned. Just go, go, go—to the movies!

TOM: Alright, I will! And the more you shout about my selfishness and my taste in movies the quicker I'll go, and I won't just go to the movies!

AMANDA: Go then! Go to the moon—you selfish dreamer!
(*Tom exits.*)

AMANDA: Oh, Lawrence, honey, what's to become of us?

LAWRENCE: (*Sees Tom's newspaper on the table.*) Tom forgot his newspaper, mama.

AMANDA: He forgot a lot more than that, Lawrence honey. (*Sits on couch next to Lawrence.*) He forgot his mama and brother.
(*Lights dim on Amanda and Lawrence on the couch, perhaps with Lawrence's head on Amanda's shoulder. Lights lower to a dim glow on the two of them, as if they are memory. They are still. Tom enters from*

the side of the stage into a bright spotlight, and addresses the audience directly. His tone is mournful and elegiac.)

TOM: I didn't go to the moon, I went to the movies. In Amsterdam. A long, lonely trip working my way on a freighter. They had good movies in Amsterdam. They weren't in English, but I didn't really care. And as for my mother and brother—well they were impossible to live with, so I didn't miss them.

Or so I thought. For something pursued me. It always came upon me unawares, it always caught me by surprise. Sometimes it would be a swizzle stick in someone's vodka glass, or sometimes it would just be a jar of pigs feet. But then all of a sudden my brother touches my shoulder, and my mother puts her hands around my neck, and everywhere I look I am reminded of them. And in all the bars I go to there are those damn swizzle sticks everywhere.

I find myself thinking of my brother Lawrence. And of his collection of glass. And of my mother. I begin to think that their story would maybe make a good novel, or even a play. A mother's hopes, a brother's dreams. Pathos, humor, even tragedy. But then I lose interest, I really haven't the energy.

So I'll leave them both, dimly lit, in my memory. For nowadays the world is lit by lightning; and when we get those colored lights going, it feels like I'm on LSD. Or some other drug. Or maybe it's the trick of memory, or the memory of some trick.

Play with your cocktail stirrers, Lawrence. And so, good-bye.

AMANDA: (*Calling over in Tom's direction.*) Tom, I hear you out on the porch talking. Who are you talking to?

(*Lights come back up on Amanda and Lawrence.*)

TOM: No one, mother. I'm just on my way to the movies.

AMANDA: Well, try not to be too late, you have to work early at the warehouse tomorrow. And please don't bring home any visitors from the movies, I'm not up to it after that awful girl. Besides, if some sailor misses his boat, that's no reason you have to put him up in your room. You're too big-hearted, son.

TOM: Yes, mother. See you later. (*Exits.*)

LAWRENCE: (*Holding up a swizzle stick.*) Look at the light through the glass, mama. Isn't it amazin'?

AMANDA: Yes, I guess it is, Lawrence. Oh, but both my children are weird. What have I done, O Lord, to deserve them?

LAWRENCE: Just lucky, mama.

AMANDA: Don't make jokes, Lawrence. Your asthma. Your eczema. My life.

LAWRENCE: Don't be sad, mama. We have each other for company and amusement.

AMANDA: That's right. It's always darkest before the dawn. Or right before a typhoon sweeps up and kills everybody.

LAWRENCE: Oh poor mama, let me try to cheer you up with my collection. Is that a good idea?

AMANDA: It's just great, Lawrence. Thank you.

LAWRENCE: (*Holds up yellow swizzle stick.*) I call this one Daffodil, because it's yellow, and daffodils are yellow.

AMANDA: Uh huh.

LAWRENCE: (*Holds up a clear one.*) And I call this one Curtain Rod because it reminds me of a curtain rod.

AMANDA: Uh huh.

LAWRENCE: (*Holds up a blue one.*) And I call this one Ocean, because it's blue, and [the ocean is...]

AMANDA: I THOUGHT YOU CALLED THE BLUE ONE BLUE, YOU IDIOT CHILD! DO I HAVE TO LISTEN TO THIS PATHETIC PRATTLING THE REST OF MY LIFE??? CAN'T YOU AT LEAST BE CONSISTENT???

LAWRENCE: (*Shocked; hurt.*) No, I guess, I can't.

AMANDA: (*Still angry.*) Well, try, can't you? (*Silence.*)

AMANDA: I'm sorry, Lawrence. I'm a little short-tempered today.

LAWRENCE: (*Still hurt.*) That's alright.

(*Silence. Amanda looks at Lawrence, and feels bad for yelling at her pathetic child. She decides to try to make up.*)

AMANDA: Do you have any other swizzle sticks with names, Lawrence?

LAWRENCE: Yes, I do. (*Holds one up.*) I call this one "Mama." (*Throws it onto the floor with a sudden sharp motion.*)

(*Pause. Amanda has to take this in.*)

AMANDA: Well, that's lovely, Lawrence, thank you.

LAWRENCE: I guess I can be a little short-tempered too.

AMANDA: Yes, well, whatever. (*Deciding to defuse this argument.*) I think we won't kill each other this evening, alright.

LAWRENCE: Alright.

AMANDA: I'll just distract myself from my rage and despair, and read about other people's rage and despair in the newspaper, shall I?

(*Picks up Tom's newspaper.*) Your brother has the worst reading and viewing taste of any living creature. This is just a piece of filth. (*Reads.*) Man Has Sex with Chicken, Then Makes Casserole. (*Closes the paper.*) Disgusting. Oh, Lawrence honey, look—it's the *Evening Star*. (*Holds the paper up above their heads; we see its banner reads Evening Star.*) Let's make a wish on it, honey, shall we?

LAWRENCE: Alright, mama.

(*Amanda holds up the newspaper, and she and Lawrence close their eyes and make a wish.*)

AMANDA: What did you wish for, darlin'?

LAWRENCE: More swizzle sticks.

AMANDA: You're so predictable, Lawrence. It's part of your charm, I guess.

LAWRENCE: (*Sweetly.*) What did you wish for, mama?

AMANDA: The same thing, honey. (*Wistful.*) Maybe just a little happiness, too...but mostly just some more swizzle sticks.

(*Sad music. Amanda and Lawrence look up at the Evening Star. Fade to black. End.*)

TO THE ACTOR

I've seen Amanda played a number of ways, all of which seemed to work.

It was a pleasure to watch Lizbeth Mackay's work on the role at MTC. Lizbeth was a fellow student at Yale School of Drama. As a dramatic actress, she's fluid and effortless and very moving. She brought all this same commitment to the comic exaggeration of my Amanda and it deepened the play. Although the play remained very much a comedy, with Lizbeth doing the part we actually felt for this woman whose life seemed to be over. And because Lizbeth is still young and attractive, she was very believable as someone who would have other possibilities available if only she could unload her impossible son Lawrence.

Lizbeth was wonderfully convincing on the Southern charm. When she'd lecture Lawrence on it, she seemed to have real knowledge to impart.

When the "feminine caller" arrived, her graciousness was an extremely funny starting place for her ongoing realizations of how limited and odd Ginny turned out to be.

The director Walter Bobbie felt that playing the negative was a danger—if Amanda believed that there was *no* chance that this evening would work out for Lawrence, then the actress had nowhere to go and nothing to play. So, in a way,