AMANDA SIDES

AMANDA #1. I found this old dress in the trunk, Laura. It used to have a lot of flowers on it, but they got awful tired so I had to take them all off. I led the cotillion in this dress years ago. I wore it to the Governor’s ball in Jackson, and I had it on the day I met your father. I had malaria fever, too. The change of climate from East Tennessee to the Mississippi Delta—weakened my resistance. Not enough to be dangerous, just enough to make me restless and giddy. Oh, it was lovely. Invitations poured in from all over.

My mother said, “You can’t go any place because you have a fever. You have to stay in bed.” I said I wouldn’t and I kept on going and going. Dances every evening and long rides in the country in the afternoon and picnics. That country—that country—so lovely—so lovely in May, all lacy with dogwood and simply flooded with jonquils.

My mother said, “You can’t bring any more jonquils in this house.” I said, “I will,” and I kept on bringing them in anyhow. Whenever I saw them I said, “Wait a minute, I see jonquils,” and I’d make my gentlemen callers get out of the carriage and help me gather some. To tell you the truth, Laura, it got to be a kind of joke. “Look out,” they’d say, “here comes that girl and we’ll have to spend the afternoon picking jonquils.” My mother said, “You can’t bring any more jonquils in the house, there aren’t any more vases to hold them.” “That’s quite all right,” I said, I can hold some myself.” Malaria fever…your father…and jonquils.

AMANDA #2. Tom, I think you’re doing things that you’re ashamed of, and that’s why you act like this. I don’t believe that you go every night to the movies! Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody in their right mind goes to the movies as often as you pretend to. People don’t go to the movies at nearly midnight, and movies don’t let out at two A.M. Come in stumbling, muttering to yourself like a maniac. You get three hours’ sleep and then go to work. Oh, I can picture the way you’re doing down there. Moping, doping, because you’re in no condition. How dare you jeopardize your job? Jeopardize our security? How do you think we’d manage—you…you selfish dreamer!
LAURA. Please don't stare at me, Mother. I couldn't go back to that business school. I— threw up—on the floor! So most days, I go out walking. I went inside places to get warmed up. I went in the art museum and the bird-houses at the Zoo. I visited the penguins every day. Sometimes I did without lunch and went to the movies. Lately I've been spending most of my afternoons in the jewel-box, that big glass-house where they raise the tropical flowers. I didn't mean to deceive you. But when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum. I couldn't face it.

AMANDA. But I know so well what becomes of unmarried women. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South - barely tolerated spinsters stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room. Oh Laura, haven't you ever liked some boy?

LAURA. I liked one once. I came across his picture a while ago. It was in the yearbook. His name was Jim. He was in “The Pirates of Penzance,” the operetta the senior class put on. He had a wonderful voice. We sat across the aisle from each other Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the auditorium. He won a silver cup for debating. He used to call me—Blue Roses. That’s because when I had that attack of pleurosis—he asked me what was the matter when I came back to school. I said pleurosis—he thought that I said “Blue Roses.” So that’s what he always called me after that. Whenever he saw me, he’d holler, “Hello, Blue Roses!” I didn’t care for the girl that he went out with. Emily Meisenbach. Oh, Emily was the best-dressed girl at Soldan High. But she never struck me as being sincere…I read in a newspaper once that they were engaged. That’s a long time ago—they’re probably married by now.
TOM SIDES

TOM #1. What do you think I’m at the end of, Mother? Aren’t I supposed to have any patience to reach the end of? I know, I know. It seems unimportant to you, what I’m doing—what I’m trying to do—having a difference between them! You don’t think that. Do you think I’m crazy about that warehouse? You think I’m in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty-five years of my life down there in that **celotex interior** with **fluorescent tubes**?! Honest to God, I’d rather somebody picked up a crow-bar and battered out my brains—than go back mornings! But I go! Sure, every time you come in yelling that bloody “Rise and Shine! Rise and Shine!” I think how lucky dead people are! But I get up and I go! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever! And you say that self is all I think of. Oh, God! Why, if self is all I ever thought of, Mother, I’d be where father is—GONE! As far as the system of transportation reaches!

TOM #2. I didn’t go to the moon. I went much further, for time is the longest distance between two places. Not long after that I left St. Louis. I descended the steps of our fire escape for the last time and from then on I followed in my father’s footsteps attempting to find in motion what was lost in space.

I traveled around a great deal. The city swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches. I would have stopped but I was pursued by something that always came upon me unawares taking me all together by surprise.

Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I’m walking along the street at night in some strange city before I have found companions. And I pass a lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. Windows filled with pieces of colored glass. Tiny transparent bottles and delicate colors like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder and I turn around and look into her eyes … Laura. Laura. I tried so hard to leave you behind me but I am more faithful than I intended to be.
JIM. You know what I judge to be the trouble with you, Laura? Inferiority complex. That’s what they call it when a fellow low-rates himself. Oh, I understand it because I had it, too. Only my case was not as aggravated as yours seems to be. I had it until I took up public speaking and developed my voice, and learned that I had an aptitude for science. Do you know that until that time I never thought of myself as being outstanding in any way whatsoever.

Yep—that’s what I judge to be your principle trouble. A lack of confidence in yourself as a person. Now I’m basing that fact on a number of your remarks and on certain observations I’ve made. For instance, that clumping you thought was so awful in high school. You see what you did? You dropped out of school, you gave up an education all because of a little clump, which as far as I can see is practically non-existent. It’s hardly noticeable even. Magnified a thousand times by your imagination.

You’ve got to think of yourself as superior in some way! Look around you a little and what do you see? A world full of common people! All of ‘em born and all of ‘em going to die! Now, which of them has one-tenth of your strong points! Or mine! Or anybody else’s for that matter? You see, everybody excels in some one thing. Well—some in many! You take me, for instance. My interest happens to lie in electrodynamics. I’m taking a course in radio engineering at night school, on top of a fairly responsible job at the warehouse.

Because I believe in the future of television! I want to be ready to go right up along with it. I’m planning to get in on the ground floor. Oh, I’ve already made the right connections. All that remains now is for the industry itself to get under way—full steam! You know, knowledge—ZSZZppp! Money—Zzzzzzppp! POWER! Wham! That’s the cycle democracy is built on! (Pause.) I guess you think I think a lot of myself.