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Dramatic Publishing

AMELIA LIVES

A One-Act Play

by

LAURA ANNAWYN SHAMAS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY
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(AMELIA LIVES)

AMELIA LIVES

A One-Woman Play*

AMELIA EARHART daring aviatrix, mid-thirties;
a striking woman, clad in flying togs; intelligent;
with a dry sense of humor; angelic but ghostly;
at home in the sky.

TIME: July, 1937

PLACE: An airplane in flight over the Pacific Ocean

*Running Time 75 minutes

AUTHOR'S NOTES

With thanks to Mrs. Willard Lewis for permission to quote Amelia Earhart in a dramatic work.

I would also like to thank director Jane Page, Amelia Earhart's second cousin, for all her help in shaping *AMELIA LIVES*.

This play is dedicated to my mother, Annawyn

AMELIA LIVES

AT RISE: *A large piece of scaffolding, or another simple structure that represents an airplane, is standing CS. Dry ice may be used to create illusions of clouds in this opening moment. AMELIA EARHART sits in the plane, sporting brown flying togs, boots, a lavender scarf, a cream-colored silk shirt, goggles, and a leather cap.*

AS THE LIGHTS FADE UP: *AMELIA EARHART (hereafter referred to as "AE") speaks into the radio in her plane. Two crate-like prop boxes have been placed on either side of the platform, one DR and another DL, to form a wing pattern with the platform at the center.*

(AE, anxiously.)

"This is Earhart to Cutter Itasca. Fuel running low. Please give bearings. Do you copy?"

(She pauses, then puts down the radio receiver. She looks at her watch and then back out in the sky that surrounds her.)

Three hours since their last transmission. Such a big ocean. So much water.

(She breaks the reverie and looks straight ahead at her gauges.)

Three hours and fuel almost gone... Almost gone. Think Amelia, think.

(She grabs for the radio again.)

"Switching to lower frequency, 6040. Running north and south. Do you copy? Anybody out there listening? Anybody at all?"

(She pauses, looking around at the clouds one last time, as if finally realizing that the end is near. AE grabs the radio one last time, firmly.)

"This is Earhart to Cutter Itasca -- or anyone in the immediate vicinity. Will be forced to crash-land in approximately five minutes -- have been circling for the last four hours and am off course. Would appreciate you looking for me. Earhart out."

(She hangs the radio up.)

Earhart out. Yes, Earhart out. Nowhere to land. Endless waves. I couldn't survive for more than half an hour down there.

(Pause. AE peers down.)

I don't want to descend. I don't want to go down. I belong up here. Woo-wee! It's hot up here.

(She takes off her goggles. An engine noise begins, growing louder, until sputtering noises are heard.)

Don't take me down there, Electra. I want to stay up here with the clouds. With you. With you, Electra, I'm free. G.P. said you were bad luck, named after a lost star. But what does he know? I am nothing without my wings. Fuel is gone. We're going down. Woo-wee! Woo-wee, we're going down.

(Lights change as AE stands up in the cockpit.)

I've got my wings... My first free flight, free floating flight. Woo-wee, Granny. I built me a rolley-coaster and we're going down!

(AE jumps off the platform and climbs back up again on top of it to play the game again. Lights have changed to a rosy sunlight, noises of birds are heard chirping. Engine noises have completely faded into these outdoor sounds. AE hangs up her jacket on the post of the platform and rambunctiously continues to jump off the side of the platform.)

I bet this is the first one in Kansas. You don't like it when I use the barn roof this way, do ya, Granny? And Grandpa is in there yellin', "Meely, you get down off there. That ain't no way for a six-year-old girl to behave!"

(She giggles.)

But I don't want to get off this barn, because it's fun. Ha, ha! I pretend I'm a bird in this cart, rollin' down the side of this here barn.

(She climbs back on the platform, and notices a neighbor watching her, another child. Takes off coat.)

You can't call me a scaredy-cat anymore, now, can you, Frankie? You don't have the brains to rig up one of these. What was that? I dare you to say that again. Go on. I dare you.

(She strides towards him.)

You leave my daddy out of this. You don't know anything. Yeah? If you call my daddy a drunkard again I'll punch you in the nose. I gotta go eat dinner. My granny's callin'.

(She hides her mouth, trying to fool Frankie, and makes a "Granny" voice:)

"Meely, you get in here or you'll be askin' for a cold dinner and a warm paddle."

(She turns to Frankie.)

Hear that? See you tomorrow.

(She skips away from the plane, then mimes going into a house. She dusts her feet on a pretend doormat.)

I'm inside, Grandma. I'm dustin' my feet! Where's my little sis?

(She calls:)

Oh, Pidgeon. I mean, Piglet. I mean "Pidge." Hey, what happened to my sled? I had it out for a special project.

(AE smiles, then crosses to the prop box underneath the plane. She pulls out a pair of white bloomers, holding them up to her legs, then putting them on her head, and twirling around the stage like a ballerina.)

Pidge. I wore my bloomers today.

(She laughs.)

Granny was right. Everybody stared.

(She lies down on the floor, lounging.)

But I'm glad Mommy got 'em for us, 'coz you sure can't do anything in a dress for long. Can't run in one, can't climb a tree in one, can't ride a horse in one. Can't play football in one, can't really walk in one, or if you do, you can't fall down without someone seeing your underwear.

(She pauses.)

Well, you can cook, sew, and clean in one. But who wants to do any of that? Certainly not me!

(Discards bloomers. She runs up to the plane cockpit, as if it's now the room she shares with her sister. She motions Pidge to follow her.)

Come here. I need your help. I've got a secret project.

(She mimes looking out the window with binoculars.)

You know that horse that Mr. Oldham keeps shut up in that rickety shed? I found out her name. It's Nellie. When the shed wiggles like that *(She points out into the distance.)* she's scratchin' the side of the shed, trying to get out. She's suffocatin'. Pidge, we must free her. He chains and whips her. He's lettin' her die in that old wooden box.

(With excitement.)

We'll chop it up and cart it away on my sled. Will you help me?

(She pauses, putting her hand on her hip.)

Pidge, I know it isn't our property, but does that make it any less our business? Go ahead, tell on me. But you'll have a hard time sleepin' tonight, knowin' that Nellie is bein' beaten. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

(AE rises, hearing a noise.)

Did you hear that? Look! Nellie's broken down the door and escaped! She's jumpin' the fence. Nellie's a runaway. Go, Nellie, go. Run as fast as you can! Run until your legs break. There she goes!

(She turns to Pidge.)

Woo-wee. Nellie's goin' to the river. Uh-oh. There's a bunch of men trying to stop Nellie. They're scarin' her, grabbin' for her reins. No, Nellie, no. Don't do it. Pidge, you stay down, don't look. Nellie, you don't have to jump, do you? The bridge is too far. Stay there. At least you'll live.

(AE looks out with tears in her eyes, then covers her ears and looks down.)

No, Nellie. She's hit the river rocks. She's dead.

(AE looks up as if her mother has entered.)

Yes, Mother. We saw it all. No, we won't take anything over to Mr. Oldham. I don't care if he is our neighbor. No. I bet Pidge won't do it, either. Will you, Pidge?

(Pause.)

See, we won't take cake or anything to that horrid man, even if his leg is broke. I'm glad he got hurt. Spank me if you want to. But I won't do it.

(School alarm rings. AE scampers off the platform.)

Mother, what's a martyr? Does that mean you don't have many friends or something?

(AE crosses over to the prop box and pulls out a mirror and brush. She starts to brush her hair. She makes funny faces into the mirror, as if trying to find an angle that she finds attractive about her face. She stops and puts down the mirror. She pulls school books out of box.)

What do you mean, ask your father? It isn't Dad's fault, is it? Is it, Dad?

(She strains to see him.)

You look funny, Dad. Your eyes are all red, and I can't understand a word you say. You smell. Mother, what's wrong with Dad? I don't see that it's my fault that we don't have many friends or neighbors. We move so much because you keep changing jobs. You've had more jobs than anyone else's daddy I know. People are always asking me in school what my daddy does. It used to be so easy to say, "My daddy's a lawyer with such and such a firm." Or, "My daddy's a lawyer

with the railroad." Or even just, "My daddy's a lawyer." But you're not even a lawyer anymore.

(She jumps as if to dodge something that's thrown at her.)

Dad, that book could have hit me! I'm not playing around. I'm asking a serious question. What's a martyr? Mother said you know the answer better than anyone else in the family, and I'm just wondering for my own good about a word. Forget it, Dad. I read it in a book, okay?

(She quietly approaches him.)

Give me that bottle. If you throw anything else at me, you'll mess up my school dress, and then everyone in town will know that our family's not... well... not right. We're not wrong, but we're not right. We're not the way we used to be before you started moving us to Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota and Illinois. We liked Kansas, you know. Don't let Pidge see you this way. I'm twelve and I understand these things because I'm older. But Pidge is still a child, she's only ten, and I wouldn't want to ruin her opinion of you when she's so young.

(Sweetly.)

Dad, remember when we used to do fun things together? It was when you were working. We were so happy. Like the day you bought me a rifle. And my first football. Or when we used to go fishing together. And when I told you I didn't like dolls, you said you were glad to hear it, so you took me to the air circus! You said you were *very* happy to have a daughter who liked to do adventurous things. When are we going to do some of these things again? All you do now is drink and fight with Mother. I just want us to be happy. Pidge and I don't care if there's no money. Mother will just have to get used to it.

(AE turns her head, as if watching him walk away. She gets a sad expression on her face, then jumps up, calling after him.)

(AE turns her head, as if watching him walk away. She gets a sad expression on her face, then jumps up, calling after him.)

Martyr must be a bad word to have made you so angry. If someone will help me spell it, I'll look it up in the dictionary at school. Don't leave, Dad.

(She sits back down with the mirror.)

I'll just try not to worry about not having any friends. I was hoping I'd find some in Chicago.

(She makes more faces in the mirror.)

I don't think I'm ugly. But boys don't think I'm pretty, or if they do, they're too scared to face my father to ask for a date... because... things aren't right with him. So they call me "The Girl in Brown Who Walks Alone." I picked this high school because it's the only one in town that has a chemistry lab that's not a kitchen sink. But every other course is awful. Mother, are you listening? I mean it. Miss Dingee, my English teacher, this is how she conducts class. I know it's not nice to imitate, but this is the truth. Every morning, she says this:

(AE crosses to the front of the stage, adopts a ridiculous posture and speaks in an outrageous voice:)

"Class, please read to yourselves, quietly. This is an English class. We read books here. No talking. Just reading. If you have any questions, see your parents. Now, please continue reading *Nicholas Nickleby*. There will be a test next Friday covering the events that occur in all 900 pages of it."

(AE turns her back to the audience and sits on the prop box like a student. She raises her hand emphatically.)

Miss Dingee! MISS DINGEE!!!

(No response. AE turns around to speak to the other members of the class.)