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Rose

A Play

Andrew Davies

Samuel French — London
New York — Sydney — Toronto — Hollywood



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ROSE

First produced by Colin Brough at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on the 28th February 1980, with the following cast of characters:

Rose	Glenda Jackson
Mother	Jean Heywood
Smale	Stephanie Cole
Malpass	Gillian Martell
Jim Beam	Tom Georgeson
Sally	Diana Davies
Jake	Richard Vanstone
Geoffrey	David Daker
Father	Richard Vanstone

The play directed by ALAN DOSSOR
Settings by John Gunter

The action takes place in and around a Midlands town

Time—the present

NOTE ON THE SETTING

On each side of the stage are four doors, painted black in a black wall. Across the back wall are three arched entrances, also black, which can be covered by black curtains. No front-stage lighting is directed on these entrances, and the floor in front of them is also painted black. The main acting area is a brightly lit square c. Furniture and properties for the various scenes are brought on and off by the stage management during the action, so that it flows without a break.

ACT I

Slops Wine Bar

The Light comes up on Rose, seated at a table in the Bar. There is a half-pint of bitter for Rose and a sherry for her mother on the table

Smale, Malpass, Beam, Mother, Sally, Geoffrey and Jake each open a door and stand in the doorway with the Lights behind them as their voices surround Rose

Smale Mrs Malpass will tell the story. Fingers on lips.

Malpass Once upon a time there was a little girl who thought she was very clever.

Beam I'm just looking for some kind of spark, you know? I think you might have got it.

Mother You must be fond of a treat, turning out on a night like this.

Sally Warwickshire's a lovely county, Rose, it's just the people who live here.

Geoffrey Do you know, there's not so much as a piece of bloody cheese in the fridge.

Jake Susan.

Geoffrey It doesn't matter.

Jake No, Rose.

The sound of children's voices is heard

Smale Is that your class, Mrs Fidgett?

Malpass She just sails through it.

Sally Don't you let 'em get you.

Malpass She seems to think it's fun.

Geoffrey You care for nothing and you notice bloody nothing.

The sound increases

Smale One line. With your partners. Now don't you dare move. That's better.

The sound fades, the doors close and the Lights change

Mother comes in and sits with Rose

Mother Well, that was a nasty experience, Rose. And the lock wouldn't work.

Rose Did you get invaded then?

Mother I'd like to see them try.

Rose Well never mind, you'll be all right at the theatre, Mother, they've got quite a nice one there.

Mother I'll beg leave to doubt *that*, Rose. Seemed a pokey little place to me. And that lad in the ticket office. Selling tickets in his vest, there's no need for that!

Rose Well, it's only the *studio* theatre, Mother.

Mother They used to do that in evening suits. That lad at the ballet had one.

Rose Who?

Mother That time you took me to the ballet.

Rose Which time?

Mother That time we went to the ballet. The *only* time! When we went to the *big* theatre, the *proper* theatre! Don't you remember, Rose, we were sat there, waiting, and then a man came on in evening dress with a piece of paper . . .

Rose Oh, yes.

Mother And then he said that owing to an indisposition Serge somebody would not be able to dance the part of the Prince, and everyone in the whole theatre moaned. Yes, a great moan went up. It's funny, I didn't know who this Serge was from Adam, I'd never seen him in my life before, but I felt I had to join in that moan. (*Pause*) I enjoyed that moment more than anything else in the whole evening.

Rose You would.

Mother (*sharply*) What?

Rose Nothing.

Mother You didn't have to ask me out tonight, you know.

Rose I *wanted* to.

Mother Can't think why.

Rose Oh, Mother.

Pause

Mother That's the only evening suit I've set eyes on all the time I've been down here.

Rose Well, they don't wear them so much nowadays.

Mother You don't need to tell me that, Rose, that's what I'm saying. No danger of finding one in this place, is there? What do they call it?

Rose Slops Wine Bar, Mother.

Mother Yes. I know what sort of place this is.

Rose What?

Mother (*with deep contempt*) *Casual*.

Rose Oh, dear.

Mother There's no need to make fun of me, Rose, you know what I'm talking about. Look at that one behind the bar, I'd like to know what *his* aim is, shirt open down to there. And ear-rings. *That's* not necessary, Rose.

Rose He's only got one ear-ring, Mother.

Mother Don't know what he's so proud of, he's as hairy as a monkey.

Rose Mother!

Mother And he's got a belly like a poisoned pup.

Rose Ssh!

Mother No need to shush me, they don't care one way or the other, people like that.

Rose Oh, Mother, how d'you *know*?

Mother Well, it's obvious, Rose.

Rose Oh, that's typical.

Mother I didn't ask to come here tonight, I know you didn't want to bring me.

Rose I did, I did, look how many times I asked you.

Mother Oh, asking's one thing.

Rose What's that supposed to mean?

Mother I don't want to say any more about it.

Rose I wanted you to come out with me, I wanted you to come out with me and have a nice time. I thought we'd enjoy ourselves! I thought it would be nice for you to come out and see somewhere different and have a couple of drinks, instead of being stuck home every night!

Mother There's no need for you to feel sorry for me.

Rose (*loudly*) It's not that!

Mother Ssh!

Rose It's not that! Can't you understand it? I thought it would be nice to go out with you for a change!

They are both cross with each other

Mother What's the matter with your husband?

Rose There's nothing the matter with my husband! I wish you wouldn't call him that.

Mother Well, he is that, isn't he?

Rose He's got a name.

Mother I know he's got a name, there's no need to talk to me as if I was half-witted, and where is he anyway?

Rose It doesn't matter where he is, he's got nothing to do with this, this was going to be an evening for you and me.

Mother Hm.

Rose He's got some thing on in Birmingham.

Mother What sort of thing?

Rose I don't know. One of his things.

Mother Well, hope he remembers he's married.

Mother brings this out with some triumph. Rose lets out a big exasperated sigh. Pause. Then she makes an effort

Rose Mother! Look. Let's have another drink. We've got time.

Mother No, thank you.

Rose Oh, come on.

Mother Nor for me, Rose, thank you.

Rose I think I will.

Mother I don't need alcohol to enjoy myself. It's no use trying to turn me into an alcoholic.

Rose I'm not trying to turn you into an alcoholic, I just thought you might fancy the other half, that's all!

Mother And I don't like to see women drinking beer either.

Rose I'll turn the other way.

Mother I'm sorry, I just don't like to see it. Women never used to drink beer.

Rose Ah, well, that's emancipation for you, Mother. But I only drink halves, don't I? Only halfway there in the struggle for self-realization. The spirit's willing, honest, it's just the flesh. If it weren't for the dreaded cystitis, I'd drink pint for pint with any man here.

Mother No need for that, Rose.

Rose Oh, think of all the things there's no *need* for! If we were all like you no-one would ever do *anything*!

Mother Well, I'm sorry I'm spoiling your evening, I can see you won't invite me again in a hurry.

Rose Look, for the last time, I *wanted* you to come with me, and I'm sorry if I *asked* and *asked*, but I *don't know* any other way of getting people to do things.

There is a splutter of protest from Mother

What did you want me to do, kidnap you? And I just wish you'd stop talking about spoiling my evening and no need for this and no need for that, because I wish you could just get it into your *thick* head that this is supposed to be *fun*, you and me going out together and having a nice time just for a change, because you're my *mother* and I *love* you!

Mother If you're going to talk to me like that I'm going now.

Rose Like what, for Christ's sake? What do you *want*?

Mother Somebody here might know us!

Rose Nobody here knows us! Nobody knows anybody!

Mother Oh, stop trying to be clever, you don't suit it. All right, if you're quite determined that I've got to make an exhibition of myself, I'll tell you! I don't want you worrying about me and feeling guilty about me, and I know it's not for me anyway, it's to make you feel better; and if you think I'm not making an effort and keeping my mind alive, well, haven't you ever stopped to think I might not *want* to keep my mind alive? What do I want to keep my mind alive for? I don't need to keep my mind alive! You're like that woman next door always trying to get me to go and play Bingo with her!

Rose Well, why not Bingo?

Mother I'll tell you why not Bingo, because I did go once, which you never have, I went with that woman next door, and we sat and played Bingo, all us old widows, and it might have been all right for them, but it wasn't all right for me, he didn't even say Kelly's eye and two fat ladies or whatever it is, it was just the numbers, no pretending there was any fun about it at all, just a lot of old widows trying to take their minds off waiting to die, seventy-nine, eighty-five, all those numbers, it just makes it worse, if you had the wit to see it, but you don't, you just think about yourself, don't you, and whether you've done enough, well you have, you've done quite enough, and you don't have to worry about me any more, thank you very much, and it was very nice of you to take me out, but you needn't have bothered, You'll see when you come to it yourself,

it'll be like the scales falling off your eyes, you'll see. You just want to be let alone, and not mucked about, and made to see the point of things. Ooh, it'll be such a relief when I'm dead. Eeh! I'm sorry about that little outburst, I think I'll take meself home now, you go to the play and enjoy yourself, Rose . . .

Rose Don't be silly. I'll come with you.

Mother No, I'd never forgive myself.

Rose Right!

Mother No, I'll get the bus and I'll be home and tucked up in bed by nine and that'll have seen another day off, it's putting the time in that counts.

(She suddenly stands up, produces a pound note and slaps it down) Have one for me. *(She walks off)*

Rose Mother!

Mother And remember you're married!

Mother goes

Rose Terrible. Terrible.

Rose gets up, comes forward and addresses the audience. During the following, the scene is set for Assembly

Well, I'm sorry to have inflicted all that on you. I mean I do realize that you can perfectly well get all that sort of thing in your own homes, I mean you've all got mothers somewhere, I s'pose. Yes? And my only excuse is this, something Rosa Luxembourg said: that it's in the tiny domestic struggles of individual people as they grope towards self-realization that we can most truly discern the great movements of society. Splendid, that. I wonder where I got it. Back of a matchbox, perhaps. Must have been a bloody big matchbox. Household size? Look, I can see you're worrying about mother, but it's *all right*. She did catch the bus, just like she said she would, and no one molested her, in fact she had a very nice chat with a Sikh conductor about the manners of the younger generation. And I tore myself away from the delights of Slop's Wine Bar and took myself and two tickets to the theatre. *(To scene shifters)* Thank you. *(Turning back to the audience)* And I went round next day, and we made it up, no hard feelings, because she is my mother, and I do love her and who else has she got, and we have that sort of scene, if you can believe it, about once every three weeks; and really, if her idea of enjoying herself is having a bad time, who am I to interfere in the twilight of her life? Still you know all about that. And anyway, this isn't about her, it's about me, she thinks it's about her but it isn't, it's about me. I'm not just a pretty face. I have a job. I teach six-year-olds in an infant school, and it's worthwhile, and I'm quite ambitious, I fancy becoming some new kind of headmistress eventually, but ooh, I don't know. If you could see it. Let's say it's assembly, and I'm late.

Malpass and Smale come on. Malpass sits at the piano, playing, and Smale stands facing the "children"—the audience

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