

Copyright © 2007. Anne Phelan. Sample. **The Rose and the Rake:** A Play in Two Acts. For scripts and performance rights, contact anne@annephelan.com.

CHARACTERS:

ROSE SHERSTON	Quaker governess, early 20's
THE RIGHT HONORABLE GEORGE THE EARL OF HAMPSHIRE	Colonel in the British Expeditionary Forces; 30 years old; handsome, arrogant and too charming for his own good
COLLEEN CONWAY	Irish maid, early 20's; originally from Dublin; earthy, sensuous, has a crush on DECLAN
DECLAN PATRICK MCMANUS	Butler, late 20's, from rural Ireland
THE RIGHT HONORABLE AMELIA EDITH OWEN	GEORGE's elder sister, 31 years old; in semi-mourning for her late fiancé; her intentions are the best, but she hasn't much of a way with people; seems older than her years
THE RIGHT HONORABLE ALEXANDRA VICTORIA OWEN	ROSE's charge; GEORGE and AMELIA's little sister; 17 years old

SETTING:

The house and garden of the Owen family in London over the course of eight days, Saturday May Sixth through Sunday May Fourteenth, 1916.

SCENES:

ACT I

Scene 1	ROSE's bedroom, late Saturday/ early Sunday
Scene 2	Library, later Sunday morning
Scene 3	Nursery, early Sunday afternoon
Scene 4	Library, Monday morning at 10 AM
Scene 5	AMELIA's sitting room, early Tuesday afternoon
Scene 6	GEORGE's sitting room, late Tuesday

afternoon
ACT II

Scene 7	ROSE's bedroom, Wednesday morning
Scene 8	Laundry Room, a little later Wednesday morning
Scene 9	Garden, late Thursday morning
Scene 10	Master bedroom, Friday noon
Scene 11	Larder, Saturday noon
Scene 12	AMELIA's sitting room, Saturday afternoon
Scene 13	Garden, late Saturday afternoon
Scene 14	Master bedroom, Sunday evening

A one-act version of this play was showcased by the Aboutface Theatre in 1992. This current version has not been professionally or otherwise produced.

Synopsis:

GEORGE Owen, the Earl of Hampshire is home on leave from the Western Front in France during World War One. He is a deeply cynical man in his early thirties whose only solace from his fears is the company of a bottle. Determined to drag everyone around him down to his level, he turns his attention to his teen-aged sister's governess. ROSE Sherston is a young woman forced to go into service since her father's arrest for his pacifism: he went to jail for distributing copies of "The Sermon on the Mount" and was found guilty of treason. Destroying ROSE's goodness and purity becomes GEORGE's obsession, from verbal battles to a near-rape after he returns home early one morning from a heavy bout of drinking. Unable to break her either physically or psychologically, GEORGE is forced to confront his own fears about his imminent return to France, and is forced to admit that what he feels for ROSE is love. ROSE and GEORGE are able to enjoy only a few hours together before he is torn from her arms for his trip back to the battlefields of France.

The torturous journey of the young lovers involves GEORGE's sister ALEXANDRA, who is convinced that her adored brother is the perfect match for her governess, and his older sister AMELIA, whose own fiancé has been killed in the war. AMELIA's only purpose in life has been to run the house and look after ALEXANDRA. But ALEXANDRA is growing up, and AMELIA's position in the family is precarious because it may be usurped by whomever GEORGE chooses to marry. When GEORGE does confess his love for ROSE, AMELIA's life is shattered.

In contrast to GEORGE and ROSE, COLLEEN, the maid, and DECLAN, the butler, have a joyous attitude toward their love. But DECLAN and COLLEEN's love is hindered by another war, the one being waged in Ireland. In the end, love triumphs for GEORGE and ROSE, winning out over the bleak reality of the war.

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

(Late Saturday evening, May 16, 1916. The governess' bedroom in the Owens' house in London. A small room, with well-worn but serviceable furniture. ROSE SHERSTON, the governess, is in HER early 20's, wears a simple dressing gown with no jewelry or ornamentation because SHE is a member of the Society of Friends- a Quaker. ROSE sits in the chair brushing HER hair. SHE seems nervous and distracted. Standing near the door is THE RIGHT HONORABLE AMELIA EDITH OWEN, the eldest of the family. SHE wears an expensive dress in the colors of semi-mourning. SHE is 31 years old, but seems older than HER years)

AMELIA:

Mr. Wilson has the face of a Cambridge don.

ROSE:

He taught at university.

AMELIA:

Princeton.

ROSE:

And at a Quaker college for young ladies prior to that.

AMELIA:

Because he believes in women's suffrage?

ROSE:

He couldn't find a situation to teach men. He's no friend to suffrage.

AMELIA:

Professor, President- he must gain satisfaction by giving orders.

ROSE:

Few men don't.

AMELIA:

Poor Mrs. Wilson!

ROSE:

Barely cold in her grave. You don't think that they- while Mrs. Ellen Wilson was still alive-

AMELIA:

I'd be astonished if they hadn't.

ROSE:

I doubt it's entirely Mrs. Edith Wilson's doing. Many men remarry in haste. Judgment seems to play little part in it. I'm rather fond of her.

AMELIA:

(With a sniff)

She was in trade.

ROSE:

You wouldn't have us do without shops, would you?

AMELIA:

No, but marrying into it-

ROSE:

As my father did?

AMELIA:

(Shocked)

Your mother is so refined-

ROSE:

Yes, she is.

AMELIA:

(Unsettled)

My apologies, Rose. I'd no idea.

ROSE:

It's what I've been attempting to explain to you. The nobility has this overweening desire to cut their daughters off from the rest of the world.

AMELIA:

Papa took us abroad-

ROSE:

To places you'd meet others of your rank. Why shouldn't you think that tradesmen are avaricious and petty? They haven't the luxury of not fretting about pounds, shillings, pence.

AMELIA:

But some of them-

ROSE:

And there are members of the royal family who are no more pleasant, I'm sure. There's much of the world you've no experience of. It isn't your doing.

AMELIA:

Mrs. Wilson seems common to me.

ROSE:

Mrs. Wilson- Mrs. Galt, she was- became a widow at a young age.

AMELIA:

How young?

ROSE:

Thirty. Did she cower behind her widowhood? Flee to her parents? No, she resumed her place in Washington society and took over her late husband's business. All alone. I think she's brave.

AMELIA:

In the States, these things are a matter of course.

ROSE:

I doubt they're anymore open-minded than here. The Yankees deport people or throw them in prison for speaking their minds. Making a speech is a most dangerous act on either side of the Atlantic.

AMELIA:

How's your speech coming along?

ROSE:

I haven't begun it.

AMELIA:

When would you have had a free moment? You must take all the time that you need tomorrow and Monday. I'll occupy Alexandra.

ROSE:

Would you?

AMELIA:

Don't give it another thought. I can't wait to read it.

ROSE:

Will you come to the hall?

AMELIA:

I'll make it a point to be there.

ROSE:

I'm glad.

(Brushes once more)

There! I think that's one hundred- I wasn't keeping close count.

(Puts the brush down)

AMELIA:

You count your brushstrokes! My mother used to do that every night.

ROSE:

As does mine. She made me promise to, when I came to London. It's my secret vice: I'm terribly vain about my hair.

AMELIA:

And your mother encourages you?

ROSE:

Yes, my hair is her vice as well. We're quite wicked.

AMELIA:

If vanity is your worst sin, I wouldn't be too concerned. Yours is God's gift.

ROSE:

I nearly forgot-

(Reaches across the table and picks up a religious

pamphlet)

Here's the tract that you asked for.

(Hands it to AMELIA)

AMELIA:

(Taking it)

Why, thank you, Rose. I'm sure I'll enjoy it. I know almost nothing about Quakerism.

ROSE:

(Prompting)

The Society of Friends.

AMELIA:

Very warm sounding, isn't it? My father was always so suspicious of all the Nonconformist denominations- thought they'd radicalize the common folk. So we never learned anything about them.

ROSE:

He may well have been right.

AMELIA:

You're joking!

ROSE:

Christ was a radical himself.

AMELIA:

Yes, but-

ROSE:

Pacifism, equal rights for women, tending to the sick and the needy- that's hardly conservative.

AMELIA:

Not if you put it in those terms.

(Crosses to the window)

Until you came to stay, I'd never been in this room.

(Looks out)

So many chimney pots on so many houses. Lives are played out beneath each of them. The roofs are so near to each other, you could walk for miles, stepping roof to roof.

(Scowls)

ROSE:

What's wrong?

AMELIA:

I keep worrying that I've forgotten something.

ROSE:

Don't-

AMELIA:

My brother is particular- I doubt that even the Army has knocked that out of him. I must thank you, Rose, for all the extra work you took on to get the house ready.

ROSE:

I was glad to do it.

AMELIA:

It's taken such a burden off of me to know that I can count on you, and trust that whatever the task may be, I couldn't have done it better myself.

ROSE:

You flatter me.

ALEXANDRA:

(Enters in HER nightgown, underneath which SHE is obviously naked. SHE is THE RIGHT HONORABLE ALEXANDRA VICTORIA OWEN, AMELIA's younger sister.

SHE is 17 years old, bouncy, vivacious and as full of fun as AMELIA is regal)
I've come to say good night, Rose.

ROSE:

You're naughty to wander around the house half-dressed.

ALEXANDRA:

I'm not naked.

ROSE:

You might as well be.

ALEXANDRA:

What's to see?

ROSE:

Your figure is fine, merely too exposed.

AMELIA:

Rose is correct, Alexandra. Standards must be kept up.

ROSE:

Wear a dressing gown the next time.

AMELIA:

Why aren't you in bed?

ALEXANDRA:

I've been waiting up for Georgie.

AMELIA:

The troop ship must be delayed. No telling when it may dock.

ALEXANDRA:

But his leave is for so short a time-

ROSE:

Alex, you heard your sister. Mind, now.

(ALEXANDRA reluctantly kisses ROSE good night)

Say your prayers. Thank God for bringing your brother home safely.

ALEXANDRA:

I hadn't thought of that, but I shall.

AMELIA:

(Pecks ALEXANDRA on the cheek)

Ring for Colleen when you go downstairs, and tell her I need her.

ALEXANDRA:

Good night.

(Exits, haltingly)

ROSE:

(Calling after HER)

Straight to bed- don't forget.

AMELIA:

About my brother, Rose.

ROSE:

I do look forward to meeting him. I've become, if I may say, fond of you and Alex over the course of the past few months-

AMELIA:

That's how we feel about you. But George is different: he's a man.

ROSE:

They are a different species.

AMELIA:

He's of the roving variety. His eye flits from lady to lady, as if they're so many flowers in a garden and he's the bee.

ROSE:

Are you warning me, your ladyship?

AMELIA:

Yes, and asking you to lock your door. Colleen is bringing the key.

ROSE:

(Surprised)

I've never felt the need-

AMELIA:

While his lordship is here, I suggest that you do.

ROSE:

He has a history of-

AMELIA:

Quite a blatant one.

ROSE:

Thank you for telling me.

AMELIA:

I couldn't live with not telling you on my conscience. Not after the last incident.

(A big explosion is heard. ROSE rushes to the window.
THEY both look out)

ROSE:

A zeppelin bomb?

AMELIA:

I can't see a thing, can you?

ROSE:

Nothing.

AMELIA:

It sounded near by.

ROSE:

It didn't sound like a German bomb, did it?

AMELIA:

There was no squealing sound. More like fireworks.

ROSE:

But louder.

AMELIA:

(COLLEEN the parlormaid enters. SHE is a bit older than
ROSE)

What's happened?

COLLEEN:

A bomb, your ladyship. Seems to have landed in the Bates' garden.

AMELIA:

No one on the staff was injured?

COLLEEN:

Not here, miss.

AMELIA:

(Crosses to the door)

The key is for Miss Sherston, Colleen. I'm going downstairs to have a look `round, or Alexandra will be rooting through the shrapnel for a souvenir. I'll ring for you, if need be.

COLLEEN:

Yes, Miss.

AMELIA:

Good night, Rose.

ROSE:

(Rises)

Good night, your ladyship.

(AMELIA exits. COLLEEN takes a key out of HER apron pocket, and tries it in the keyhole)

COLLEEN:

It works, miss.

(Hands the key to ROSE)

ROSE:

(Taking the key)

Perhaps I shan't need it.

COLLEEN:

The Second Coming may happen tomorrow, but I wouldn't place a wager on it.

ROSE:

Shall you lock your door?

COLLEEN:

As if my life depended on it.

ROSE:

Is he really that ... randy?

COLLEEN:

Every waking moment.

ROSE:

I can take on some overgrown child of the gentry. I'm not afraid.

COLLEEN:

He can be mighty persuasive, miss. He's tried with me.

ROSE:

He wouldn't dare with me- I'm not a true servant.

COLLEEN:

His lordship stirs things up, that's for certain. "Georgie Porgy, pudding and pie, kissed the girls and made them cry," should be on his tombstone.

ROSE:

Those sort of men are always so tiresome.

COLLEEN:

That's the God's truth.

ROSE:

I'd hoped he'd be someone else to talk to.

COLLEEN:

Only if the talk's about him having his way with you. Will you be wanting your tea at the same time tomorrow?

ROSE:

Yes.

COLLEEN:

And your breakfast with your tea?

ROSE:

Why should I?

COLLEEN:

With his lordship at home, it's been the custom for the governess to eat in her room.

ROSE:

Did Lady Amelia tell you to do so?

COLLEEN:
No, but I thought-

ROSE:
(Threatened)
Then I suggest you keep such thoughts to yourself.

COLLEEN:
(Stung)
Yes, miss.
(Exits)

ROSE:
(Ignoring the key, SHE sits on the bed and closes HER eyes to meditate)
Dear Lord, I've done my best to do your will.
(Offstage, GEORGE hums "The Honeysuckle and the Bee")
But this man who's coming threatens it all-
(Humming nears, louder)
my home and my position. Show me the-
(The knob turns, the door opens and THE RIGHT HONORABLE GEORGE DAVID THE EARL OF HAMPSHIRE, an officer in the British Expeditionary Forces in France, for which HE wears the uniform, enters)
- way.

GEORGE:
Whose little girl is this?
(ROSE opens HER eyes)
We can't get acquainted if you refuse to hold up your end of the conversation. You're a pretty one.

ROSE:
Who... who are you?

GEORGE:
You know perfectly well who I am.
(Sits down next to HER on the bed. Smiles charmingly)

ROSE:
Get off of my bed!

GEORGE:
(Strokes HER cheek. SHE pulls away)
Why bother to fight me- it's inevitable.