

STREET SCENE

by Elmer Rice

Rose (20) - Sam (21)

The Play: Elmer Rice was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1929 for this poignant look at life in a big city neighborhood. The play is set in "a mean quarter" of New York City, in the middle of a hot spell. The heat, in fact, contributes to flaring tempers and explosions of ideas and passions. The walk-up apartment house that serves as the backdrop for the action is inhabited by the Kaplan, Maurrant, Jones, Simpson, Hildebrand, Cushing, Buchanan and Fiorentino families, a diverse cross section of America, struggling through troubled times in cramped quarters. The interaction between the inhabitants is an interaction of cultures, beliefs, language, interests, and needs. The catalyst of the drama comes from the conflicts within the Maurrant family, when Mrs. Maurrant's husband catches her having an affair with the local milk collector and kills them both. Amidst the complex microcosm of this American composite is the romance of Rose Maurrant and Sam Kaplan, the young people of the story. Their perspective on life and the events of the play are unique in that they are attempting to sort out the destiny of their lives. As they see the mixture of life around them, conflicting beliefs and morals, they embrace an idealism for the future that is challenged not only by the heat of the city and the dramatic energy that rolls toward the murders, but equally by the search for a way to escape the hopelessness they see around them. When Sam asks Rose what else matters if they have each other, Rose answers, "...They [the adults] all start out loving each other and thinking that everything is going to be fine—and before you know it, they find out they haven't got anything and they wish they could do it all over again—only it's too late."

The Scene: Sam has just stood up to Vincent, who has been making unwanted advances toward Rose. Vincent, a bully who is bigger and older than Sam, has just pushed Sam to the pavement, shaming him in front of Rose. As the scene begins, Sam picks himself up and shouts at Vincent, who has just gone inside the building.

STREET SCENE

SAM (*hysterically, as he rushes to the foot of the stoop*): The dirty bum! I'll kill him!

ROSE (*turning and going to him*): It's all right, Sam. Never mind.

SAM (*sobbing*): I'll kill him! (*He throws himself on the stoop and, burying his head in his arms, sobs hysterically. ROSE sits beside him and puts her arm about him.*)

ROSE: It's all right, Sam. Everything's all right. Why should you pay any attention to a big tough like that? (*SAM does not answer. ROSE caresses his hair and he grows calmer.*) He's nothing but a loafer, you know that. What do you care what he says?

SAM (*without raising his head*): I'm a coward.

ROSE: Why no, you're not, Sam.

SAM: Yes, I am. I'm a coward.

ROSE: Why, he's not worth your little finger, Sam. You wait and see. Ten years from now, he'll still be driving a taxi and you—why, you'll be so far above him, you won't even remember he's alive.

SAM: I'll never be anything.

ROSE: Why, don't talk like that, Sam. A boy with your brains and ability. Graduating from college with honors and all that! Why, if I were half as smart as you, I'd be just so proud of myself!

SAM: What's the good of having brains, if nobody ever looks at you—if nobody knows you exist?

ROSE (*gently*): I know you exist, Sam.

SAM: It wouldn't take much to make you forget me.

ROSE: I'm not so sure about that. Why do you say that, Sam?

SAM: Because I know. It's different with you. You have beauty—people look at you—you have a place in the world—

ROSE: I don't know. It's not always so easy, being a girl—I often wish I were a man. It seems to me that when you're a man, it's so much easier to sort of—be yourself, to kind of be the way you feel. But when you're a girl, it's different. It doesn't seem to matter what you are, or what you're thinking or feeling—all that men seem to care about is just the one thing. And when you're sort of trying to find out just where you're at, it makes it hard. Do you see what I mean? (*Hesitantly.*) Sam, there's something I want to ask you— (*She stops.*)

STREET SCENE

SAM (*turning to her*): What is it, Rose?

ROSE: I wouldn't dream of asking anybody but you. (*With a great effort.*) Sam, do you think it's true—what they're saying about my mother?

(*SAM averts his head, without answering.*)

ROSE (*wretchedly*): I guess it is, isn't it?

SAM (*agitatedly*): They were talking here, before—I couldn't stand it any more! (*He clasps his head and, springing to his feet, goes to the right of the stoop.*) Oh, God, why do we go on living in this sewer?

ROSE (*appealingly*): What can I do, Sam? (*SAM makes a helpless gesture.*) You see, my father means well enough, and all that, but he's always been sort of strict and—I don't know—sort of making you freeze up, when you really wanted to be nice and loving. That's the whole trouble, I guess; my mother never had anybody to really love her. She's sort of gay and happy-like—you know, she likes having a good time and all that. But my father is different. Only—the way things are now—everybody talking and making remarks, all the neighbors spying and whispering—it sort of makes me feel— (*She shudders.*) I don't know—!

SAM (*coming over to her again*): I wish I could help you, Rose.

ROSE: You do help me, Sam—just by being nice and sympathetic and talking things over with me. There's so few people you can really talk to, do you know what I mean? Sometimes, I get the feeling that I'm all alone in the world and that—

(*A scream of pain from MRS. BUCHANAN.*)

ROSE (*springing to her feet*): Oh, just listen to her!

SAM: Oh, God!

ROSE: The poor thing! She must be having terrible pains.

SAM: That's all there is in life—nothing but pain. From before we're born, until we die! Everywhere you look, oppression and cruelty! If it doesn't come from Nature, it comes from humanity—humanity trampling on itself and tearing at its own throat. The whole world is nothing but a blood-stained arena, filled with misery and suffering. It's too high a price to pay for life—life isn't worth it! (*He seats himself despairingly on the stoop.*)

STREET SCENE

ROSE (*putting her hand on his shoulder*): Oh, I don't know, Sam. I feel blue and discouraged sometimes, too. And I get a sort of feeling of, oh, what's the use. Like last night. I hardly slept all night, on account of the heat and on account of thinking about—well, all sorts of things. And this morning, when I got up, I felt so miserable. Well, all of a sudden, I decided I'd walk to the office. And when I got to the Park, everything looked so green and fresh, that I got a kind of feeling of, well, maybe it's not so bad, after all. And then; what do you think?—all of a sudden, I saw a big lilac-bush, with some flowers still on it. It made me think about the poem you said for me—remember?—the one about the lilacs.

SAM (*quoting*):

"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd
And the great star early droop'd in the western
sky in the night,
I mourn'd and yet shall mourn, with ever-
returning Spring."

(*He repeats the last line.*)

I mourn'd and yet shall mourn, with ever-
returning Spring? Yes!

ROSE: No, not that part. I mean the part about the farmhouse. Say it for me, Sam. (*She sits at his feet.*)

SAM: "In the door-yard, fronting an old farm-house,
near the white-washed palings,
Stands the lilac-bush, tall-growing, with
heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom, rising delicate,
with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush
in the door-yard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-
shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break."

ROSE (*eagerly*): Yes, that's it! That's just what I felt like doing—breaking off a little bunch of the flowers. But then I thought, maybe

STREET SCENE

a policeman or somebody would see me, and then I'd get into trouble; so I didn't. I'd better go up now, Sam.

SAM: Do you have to go to bed when you're told, like a child?

ROSE: I know, Sam, but there's so much wrangling goes on all the time, as it is, what's the use of having any more? Good night, Sam. There was something I wanted to talk to you about, but it will have to be another time.

(She holds out her hand. SAM takes it and holds it in his.)

SAM *(trembling and rising to his feet)*: Rose, will you kiss me?

ROSE *(simply)*: Why, of course I will, Sam.

(She offers him her lips. He clasps her in a fervent embrace, to which she submits but does not respond.)

ROSE *(freeing herself gently)*: Don't be discouraged about things, Sam. You wait and see—you're going to do big things some day. I've got lots of confidence in you.

SAM *(turning away his head)*: I wonder if you really have, Rose?

ROSE: Why, of course, I have! And don't forget it! Good night. I hope it won't be too hot to sleep.

SAM: Good night, Rose.

(He watches her, as she opens the door with her latchkey and goes into the house. Then he goes to the stoop and seating himself, falls into a reverie. A POLICEMAN appears at the right and strolls across, but SAM is oblivious to him. In the distance, a homcomer sings drunkenly. A light appears in the MAURRANT hall-bedroom, and a moment later ROSE comes to the wondow and leans out.)

ROSE *(calling softly)*: Hoo-hoo! Sam! *(SAM looks up, then rises.)*
Good night, Sam.

(She wafis him a kiss.)

SAM *(with deep feeling)*: Good night, Rose dear.

(She smiles at him. Then she pulls down the shade. SAM looks up for a moment, then resumes his seat. A scream from MRS. BUCHANAN makes him shudder. A deep rhythmic snoring emanates from the Fiorentino apartment. A steamboat whistle is heard. The snoring in the Fiorentino apartment continues. SAM raises his clenched hands to heaven. A distant clock begins to strike twelve. SAM's arms and head drop forward.)

TRIBUTE

by Bernard Slade

Jud (20) - Sally (22)

The Play: Scottie Templeton, a former scriptwriter and occasional Broadway press agent, is a charming, elegant man who has managed to live his life without ever taking it too seriously, particularly love, marriage, and, unfortunately, fatherhood. While he has never been a great success at any one job, he has been a great success at making lasting friendships—even his ex-wife still adores him. In fact, everyone seems to like Scottie except his son, Jud, whom he has alienated through years of neglect. Now, at fifty-one, Scottie's life turns serious; he is terminally ill. There doesn't seem to be enough time to make up for all of his past sins, yet he is determined to win the love and respect of his son. Scottie sends for Jud, and the boy reluctantly comes for a visit. Father and son soon have a bitter, yet revealing and ultimately healing confrontation which brings about their reconciliation. Jud finally convinces Scottie to seek treatment for his illness, and then sets about organizing a major tribute for his father at a theater.

The Scene: Unbeknownst to Jud, who is somewhat awkward when it comes to girls, Scottie has arranged for his friend Sally (whom Jud has never met) to "pickup" his son while the boy is out visiting a museum (Jud is an intelligent young man who plans to attend UC/Berkeley for a Ph.D. in history). Jud has surprised himself by asking Sally back to his father's apartment. The two have decided to have an indoor picnic: Jud has just spread a blanket on the floor, and Sally is unpacking a shopping bag of food.