



# ROSE

BY  
LAURENCE LEAMER



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PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

ROSE  
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The Off-Broadway premiere of ROSE was produced by Nora's Playhouse (Caroline Reddick Lawson, Artistic Director) at the Clurman Theatre at Theatre Row. It was directed by Caroline Reddick Lawson; the scenic design was by Anya Klepikov; the costume design was by Jane Greenwood; the lighting design was by Caitlin Smith Rapoport; the sound design was by Jane Shaw; the projection design was by Anya Klepikov and Lianne Arnold; the stage manager was Emily Paige Ballou. The play was performed by Kathleen Chalfant.

## **CHARACTERS**

ROSE FITZGERALD KENNEDY,  
the seventy-nine-year-old matriarch

Voiceovers as indicated

## **SETTING**

The living room of the Kennedy home in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. Little has changed in the house in decades. The living room has that proud disregard for the fickleness of style common among the Boston Brahmin elite. There is a large sofa with end tables. A telephone sits on the end table stage left. Half a dozen photo albums sit on a coffee table in front of the sofa. A chair sits stage left. Family photos in silver frames are on a table stage right. There are fresh-cut flowers everywhere. Windows look out on the ocean.

## **TIME**

An afternoon in late July 1969.

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# ROSE

*Rose enters stage left and stands looking out a window to the ocean beyond. She has a posture and figure that speak of endless discipline. She is lost in reflection. Startled to realize that she is not alone, Rose turns to look at the audience.*

ROSE. Oh, my goodness, Mr. Coughlan, you startled me. I didn't realize you were still coming... I thought you would have realized... No, please don't leave... I don't want to be... I don't want to be alone. Just sit there for a while. They've all gone, everyone, all the family except for Joe, of course. He's upstairs.

*(Speaks authoritatively to audience.)*

Just sit there.

*(Points stage right.)*

No, not *there*. That's Pope Pius the twelfth's settee. That's where he sat in 1936. Well he wasn't the Pope then. He was Cardinal Pacelli, but you can't sit there. Anywhere else. There. That's fine.

*(Turns toward her guest.)*

Stay until Teddy returns. He took the *Victura* out yesterday. Teddy loves the sailboat as much as the President did. When the waves are high and the wind so strong that others are returning to port, Teddy loves to be out there.

*(Looks out the window stage right, from which she thinks she will see Teddy's boat returning home.)*

Not a cloud in the sky, but the wind is coming up out of nowhere, and the surf is high. A sailor's day.

*(V.O.—Muffled sound of surf.)*

Teddy won't be away much longer. Oh, don't worry. You'll hear him

coming. There's nothing louder and bolder than Teddy. I don't know why he didn't come back last night, but that's Teddy.

*(Crosses to armchair stage left.)*

Go ahead and tape this if you want, but not everything I say is for my autobiography. Teddy made that clear to you, didn't he? But if you are to write my book, there are certain things you must understand.

*(Sits.)*

I was forty-one years old when Teddy was born. His brother Joe would pick him up and toss him like a football to Jack, and Jack would throw him back, and Teddy knew his brothers would never drop him. We all watched out for Teddy. And now in recent years Teddy has been watching out for us. He watched out for Jack's children and Bobby's and his own and for Joe and for me. It was all too much, too much for any man. And nobody was watching out for Teddy.

*(Looks down, shaking her head.)*

That girl's death last week was terrible. When Teddy arrived after the accident, he ran upstairs to his father's bedroom. I followed behind and stood in the doorway as Teddy knelt beside his father's bed. Since my husband's stroke back in 1961, he has been getting worse. He can't move or speak much more than grunts. But Teddy hoped Joe would tell him what to do. He took his father's hand and spoke in a half whisper that I could hardly hear.

*(Leans forward as if attempting to hear.)*

"Dad, there was this house party on Chappaquiddick for Bobby's girls who helped in the campaign. I drank a little and when I left one of the girls wanted a ride back to the hotel. I didn't even know her name, Dad. Somehow I made the wrong turn and came to this bridge and the car went into the water. I got out. I dived but I couldn't save her. I'm telling you the truth, Dad, it was an accident."

*(Pauses as she remembers this moment.)*

Joe looked up at Teddy. He stared at him for the longest time. Then Joe shut his eyes, and Teddy rushed out of the room and down the stairs.

*(Points to the stairs.)*

I had to talk to my son. I wanted no one to hear. I walked with Teddy out on the lawn. I took his big hands in mine and held them. And he cried. You think Kennedys don't cry. They cry but not when you can see them. Teddy cried when his brother Joe died and Jack died and Bobby died, but I have never heard him cry like this.

*(Stands and steps downstage.)*

I told my son, "Teddy, God gives us no more than we can bear. Joe and Jack and Bobby are looking down at you. You will not resign from the Senate. You will rise and our family will have more triumphs. But first you must stand up. Family is everything. Go back there, Teddy, and stand up for yourself, for your family, for everything."

I dropped my hands and walked back to the house. I wanted to turn back to look at Teddy. I wanted to say more. But I could not hold him up.

*(Crosses to window stage right.)*

Three of my sons and one of my daughters are gone, and another, well she is gone too. And my husband? He will not return either. And Teddy, who knows?

*(Pauses and reflects.)*

I'm thinking unnecessary thoughts. I always keep busy, but what can I do? I can't go to early morning mass. The reporters sit in nearby pews whispering their queries. I can't take my daily walk on the golf course either. The photographers and the gawkers follow me even there.

*(Shakes head.)*

I have never obsessed over the deaths of my sons, but these days that's all I think about. I look up in the sky and there is young Joe flying above. I sit down to dinner and Jack is sitting next to me. I put on my eyelashes, and Bobby stares at me out of the mirror.

*(Picks up book from coffee table and sits in the chair stage left.)*

When Jack was a little boy and sick so often, he read for hours in bed. He never stopped learning. I've always been like that too. These past days I've been reading Greek tragedies. I read Euripides'

*Hecuba* this morning. Queen Hecuba's daughter has been killed and she feels pain that only a mother who has lost a child can feel.

*(Opens book to passage.)*

“Woe, woe is me! What words, or cries, or lamentations can I utter? Ah me! For the sorrows of my closing years! Sons, where are they? Where is any god or power divine to succor me?”

*(Looks at audience.)*

You find it strange that I seek solace where there is no solace? But doesn't the saddest song sometimes lift our spirit?

*(Stands.)*

All my life I have avoided asking certain questions, having certain thoughts. But now I must know why it has come to this, to the dark, enveloping waters of Chappaquiddick.

*(Motions toward half a dozen thick photo albums and a box in front of her on the coffee table.)*

This morning, I went up to the attic and had all these albums brought down. I haven't looked at most of these photos for years.

*(Sits on sofa, opens one of the old scrapbooks, starts leafing through.)*

Where is my father?

*IMAGE OF A FORMAL JOHN FITZGERALD APPEARS ON SCREEN*

Oh my goodness, this isn't *him*. John Fitzgerald never stood still except for a formal photo. Father was always laughing, talking, shaking hands, touching people. He danced the Irish jig. He sang “Sweet Adeline.” My father was American-born just down from the Old North Church. He told me stories of the great Irish famine and how the Irish fled half-starved and desperate settling in the North End.

*(Stands up.)*

Up on Beacon Hill lived the Brahmins, the Protestant elite. They looked down at the hordes of new arrivals with disdain and fear, hoping some way to quell their rise. My father knew the only thing of value the Irish had was their numbers. That's why he entered politics.

*(Gives a knowing nod, and turns the page to another picture, steps downstage.)*

*IMAGE OF FITZGERALD ON REVIEWING STAND APPEARS ON SCREEN*

My father—Honey Fitz they called him—was born to stand on a campaign stage, among the banners and the bands. My mother didn't like to campaign. So there I was right beside him.

*IMAGE OF AN EXUBERANT FITZGERALD APPEARS ON SCREEN*

My father could outtalk and out promise anyone. He loved seeing his name in the paper.

*(A laugh that is like a benediction of love.)*

When my father ran the first time for mayor, he brought a reporter to do a story on the Fitzgerald family. He told the reporter how every evening after dinner we stood around the piano and sang. My father was never home for dinner except Sunday, but he didn't tell the reporter *that*.

*(Laughs, the audience sharing in the joke.)*

My father had me play the piano while he sang. He loved to sing the songs of the day.

*“And then he'd row, row, row  
Way up the river he would row, row, row  
A hug he'd give her  
Then he'd kiss her now and then  
She would tell him when  
They'd fool around and fool around  
And then they'd kiss again.”*

Oh, my my. We thought that song was so risqué!

*(Offstage—Vehicle approaches the house.)*

That's Teddy. Nobody comes roaring up the drive like that. How many times I've told him he's going to run over the maid or the gardener, but he's always late. Late for dinner. Late for speeches. And we wait for him. And we're happy to see him. That's Teddy.

*(Rushes to the window facing land.)*

# ROSE

by Laurence Leamer

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ROSE is the Kennedy story as told by the matriarch who lived it all. Set in 1969 at the Kennedys' Hyannis Port compound the week after Teddy's fateful accident at Chappaquiddick, Rose struggles with all the tragedies the Kennedys have overcome and finds new understanding of the choices she made as well as those made by her husband and children. Inspired by audio recordings Rose Kennedy made, ROSE takes the audience on a fascinating and unexpected journey with someone we think we know.

*"... this charming solo show... has moments of magnificence. ... a ladylike drama, in keeping with its subject's public persona..."* —**The New York Times**

*"... an incisive, sobering take on the family with perhaps the greatest claim (earned or otherwise) to American royalty..."* —**TalkinBroadway.com**

*"ROSE is a rare and personal glimpse into this great woman's life and legacy. ... Anyone who has studied the Kennedys will appreciate the diligence with which playwright Laurence Leamer goes to in capturing Rose's awareness of her family's position."* —**Theasy.com**

*"... there is real drama here: As Rose lets her public stance slip, Leamer does something clever, almost cruel: He makes Rose the unreliable narrator of her own life, showing how her dedication to the Kennedy myth made her a leading player in the almost unimaginable series of tragedies that have brought her, in her 80th year, to this desolate place. ... ROSE is a remarkable portrait of a woman who played the hand she was dealt without ever looking back."* —**LightingandSoundAmerica.com**

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