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*Dramatic Publishing*

# ROCK SHORE

A Play in Two Acts

by

LISA DILLMAN



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(ROCK SHORE)

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“*Rock Shore* was commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, Illinois, Martha Lavey, Artistic Director and Michael Gennaro, Executive Director.”

“*Rock Shore* was supported by a residency and public staged readings at the O’Neill Playwrights Conference of the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, Waterford, Connecticut.”

The American sanatoria movement was a vital step in the war against tuberculosis at a time when the disease was a leading cause of death worldwide. The isolation of a life spent curing in the woods was a boon to some, a curse to others. *Rock Shore* looks at this strange moment in American history—a time of plague and the feverish world of “the outdoor cure.” The play explores questions of individuality, community, and hope in a world bound by catastrophic illness.

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## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*Rock Shore* was supported by a residency and public staged readings at the 2003 O’Neill Playwrights Conference of the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, Waterford, Conn. It was originally commissioned by the Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, Illinois.

*Rock Shore* premiered at Theaterwork, Santa Fe, New Mexico, on September 16, 2005, with the following artists:

*Emma Cartmill* . . . . . Angela Janda  
*Ida Cartmill* . . . . . Liliana Ashman  
*Mary Cartmill* . . . . . Rose Provan  
*Dr. Quilton* . . . . . Jonathan Dixon  
*Nurse Cork* . . . . . Virginia Hall-Smith  
*John Caleb* . . . . . Adam Harvey  
*Lillian Corelli* . . . . . Elizabeth Calvert  
*Mrs. Palmer* . . . . . Patricia McKay  
*Christian McDade* . . . . . Aaron Piros Coteff

## PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

*Director/Set Designer* . . . . . David Matthew Olson  
*Lighting/Sound Designer* . . . . . Jack Sherman  
*Costume Designer* . . . . . Deborah Kruhm  
*Props Master* . . . . . Richard Gonzales  
*Production Manager* . . . . . Susan Friedman  
*Stage Manager* . . . . . Louisa Gilani  
*Lighting/Sound Technician* . . . . . Paula Olson

To the Dead in the Grave-Yard Under My Window:  
Written in a Moment of Exasperation

How can you lie so still? All day I watch  
And never a blade of all the green sod moves  
To show where restlessly you toss and turn,  
And fling a desperate arm or draw up knees  
Stiffened and aching from their long disuse;  
I watch all night and not one ghost comes forth  
To take its freedom of the midnight hour.  
Oh, have you no rebellion in your bones?  
The very worms must scorn you where you lie,  
A pallid mouldering acquiescent folk,  
Meek habitants of unresented graves.  
Why are you there in your straight row on row  
Where I must ever see you from my bed  
That in your mere dumb presence iterate  
The text so weary in my ears: "Lie still  
And rest; be patient and lie still and rest."  
I'll not be patient! I will not lie still!  
There is a brown road runs between the pines,  
And further on the purple woodlands lie,  
And still beyond blue mountains lift and loom;  
And I would walk the road and I would be  
Deep in the wooded shade and I would reach  
The windy mountaintops that touch the clouds.  
My eyes may follow but my feet are held...

— *Adelaide Crapsey,*  
*Saranac Lake, 1913*





flow into one another; therefore, blackouts should be avoided except where specifically noted. There should also be a sense of the continuous life of the sanatorium throughout the action of the play. In most cases the characters can all remain onstage and involved in various pursuits even when they are not part of a specific scene.

## ACT ONE

*(Late July 1913. In the darkness the soft tinkling of wind chimes. A single light comes up on EMMA standing alone, arms folded, looking off. A train whistle in the distance. EMMA turns in the direction of the sound and listens until it has passed. As the light on her fades, another light comes up on DR. QUILTON making a speech to the donors.)*

DR. QUILTON. Gentlemen, I'll be blunt: I want your money. Why? The answer can be summed up in four words: The Adirondack Cottage Cure. Our best—I might say our *only*—hope in the fight against tuberculosis.

*(More general lights slowly rise on several areas of Rock Shore Cottage Sanatorium. As various patients are discovered, DR. QUILTON's speech continues.)*

Let me remind you, gentlemen, this plague does not discriminate. It is not, as was once thought, solely the dominion of neurasthenics, weak-spleened poets, and bums on the dole. We are *all* at risk. Rich and poor, banker and hobo—our nemesis is lurking, ever lurking, in the shadows. Any one of you might awaken some morning with a heavy feeling in your chest and a hectic flush

upon your face. You will note a spiking fever, a wracking cough. And soon your flesh will begin to disappear as if by a vile and terrible magic. Will it be too late for you, gentlemen? For your families? Is it worth the gamble? If your answer is no, then let me see your wallets emerge from your pockets. For we know, good sirs, do we not, that only science can save us now. And science comes with a fearsome price tag.

*(The light on DR. QUILTON fades. The wind chimes continue for a few moments as the lighting intensifies on MARY seated in a cure chair. She is doing needlepoint, a process somewhat hampered by the fact that she is wearing gloves. MR. CALEB sits nearby in his wheelchair reading The Journal of the Outdoor Life. He begins to scratch himself. MARY looks up, watches him for a moment, sighs, and returns to her needlepoint. MRS. PALMER enters with her parasol. Around her neck hangs a pair of ornate opera glasses.)*

MRS. PALMER. Have you heard? Little Cora Solloway's gone home!

MARY. She *hasn't*.

MRS. PALMER. I saw her leave, Mrs. Cartmill. Not five minutes ago. Trunks, hatboxes, everything.

MARY. But she had a hemorrhage just last week. In the dining room. You were there!

MRS. PALMER. Be that as it may. Her room is being fumigated even as we speak—and a new occupant is checking in.

MR. CALEB *(scratching)*. What does she look like?

MRS. PALMER. And just what difference would *that* make, I wonder?

MARY. Cora Solloway was worse off than anyone else here...

MR. CALEB (*turning to MARY*). There are only two ways to get released from this place, madam: Get all better. Or get much worse.

MRS. PALMER. So glib today, Mr. Caleb.

MR. CALEB. Oh. I forgot to mention the third way: Run out of money.

MRS. PALMER. God hates a cynic just as much as He does a sinner, you know.

*(MR. CALEB coughs, whips out his sputum cup, pops the lid up, and spits into it. He bangs the lid up and down a few times, and holds it to his ear.)*

MR. CALEB. Hear that?

MRS. PALMER. What?

MR. CALEB (*scratching himself again*). My music box. I just pop open the lid and it plays "Nearer My God to Thee."

MRS. PALMER. Gallows humor is completely wasted on me, I'm afraid... Do you have *fleas*?

MR. CALEB. Cora's gone on to one of the publics.

MRS. PALMER. She has gone *home*.

MR. CALEB. Let me share a little story, ladies.

MRS. PALMER. Dear Lord, look down and spare us.

MR. CALEB. Three or four summers back, when I was a younger and, shall we say, more ambulatory man, I took a stroll into the village one day as I often liked to do in the nicer weather. The train had just pulled in at Saranac

station and what do you think I saw being unloaded onto the platform? Coffins, m'dears. At least fifty of them. Pine boxes all lined up and stacked five high. They weren't for the *Rock Shore* TBs. Of course not. Heaven forefend! But have you never seen the last leggers from Salt Hill? From the dollar-a-week houses in Saranac? Wasted to skeletons. Their eyes like bottomless wells. Those coffins arrive empty. But they go back full of lungers, and anyone who doubts it is a damn fool.

MRS. PALMER. *Language.* Do you take us for sailors? What *is* your point, I wonder?

MR. CALEB. Only that a lunger with money lasts longer than a lunger with none.

MRS. PALMER. And you assume that I believe otherwise?

MR. CALEB. Far be it from me to pry into your beliefs, Mrs. P.

MRS. PALMER. My husband and I donate to a great many charities for the wretched. I refuse to feel guilty over the things we have! You don't fool me, John Caleb. Over here with the ladies as if you're nothing but a harmless little lamb! Always playing the poor cripple so you can get away with doing and saying whatever you please. It's a poisonous habit, sir, I don't mind telling you!

MR. CALEB. Speaking of habits, isn't it time you got busy? I'm counting on a complete character assassination of our new lunger by suppertime. (*He wheels himself off.*)

MRS. PALMER (*turning abruptly to MARY*). The doctor knows best, my dear. If you don't believe that then why in heaven's name have you come to Saranac?... Although there ought to be *some* sort of fanfare when one of us ventures back to the land of the living. A little

cake. Some lemonade at least... (*MRS. PALMER looks through her opera glasses and scans the horizon.*)

MARY. How long have *you* been at Saranac, Mrs. Palmer?

MRS. PALMER. Eight years, my dear. Eight glorious summers. Seven bracing winters.

MARY. And you've improved?

MRS. PALMER. Rock Shore was my last hope. But as you can see. I haven't perished yet.

MARY. No...you seem in excellent health.

MRS. PALMER. I wouldn't go that far. My fever goes up and down with the barometer, I'm afraid, and the doctor says he must keep me another six months at least. "Well. What's six months after eight *years*?" That's my question to him. What we *don't* say is what we both *know*: six months from July is *January*. And there's no leaving Saranac *then*. No, I'm afraid I'm sentenced to another ten or eleven months at the very least. There's no way around it.

MARY. Do you never miss your home? Your family?

MRS. PALMER. Every blessed *day*, my dear. But what good am I to them as an invalid?... Of course it's lovely that *you* have your children here with you. But when are we to meet the *man* of the family, that's what I'd like to know! (*Looking through her opera glasses.*) There's your older girl now. Hello! Amanda, dear, come sit with us.

MARY. Emma. Actually.

MRS. PALMER. Just look at that poor creature. So pale and, I hate to say this, but so *severe*. She passed me in the hall the other day—the expression on her face should have burned off all my hair. But then of course she's *here*—and without prospects, or so I've heard. Your

*other* daughter's so pretty, though. I'd keep a tight rein on *that* one. Short life but a merry one, that's the attitude of some of these young people... Tell me. How bad is she? I don't listen to idle gossip, mind you, but Nancy Spurlock dropped such a dark hint the other day... Is that Dr. Quilton? Doctor? Doctor!

*(MRS. PALMER hauls herself out of her chair and bolts off, using the parasol as part cane and part vaulting pole. EMMA enters cautiously.)*

- EMMA. Someone must have just filled Mrs. Palmer's dish.
- MARY. The nosy old cod. She keeps a file on every one of us. But she never listens to idle gossip.
- EMMA. She's come to the right place then. The gossip here is never idle.
- MARY. Still. You ought to try a little harder with her.
- EMMA. She's always *squeezing* my arm with that hot, pudgy little hand. Peering into my face with her jowls all trembly. My God, what a place.
- MARY. Have you heard? Cora Solloway's left the San. *(EMMA turns to her sharply, then after a moment shrugs.)* Just smell that balsam. The air up here *is* wonderful.
- EMMA. It ought to be—the way they're always braying about it. What are you doing there? *(MARY holds up the embroidery.)* "There's no place like home."
- MARY. For your father.
- EMMA. I'm sure he'll put it with the others.
- MARY. Did you sleep last night?
- EMMA. Hah.

*(Beat. They have run out of conversation. EMMA sits and begins to read. The lights crossfade. LILLIAN and NURSE CORK are face to face and toe to toe in LILLIAN's room.)*

LILLIAN. You goat-faced *vampire*. You goddamned *toad-stool*. How *dare* you—?

NURSE CORK. Look here now, there's no call for all this. I've seen it all, you know. *Screamers*. *Kickers*. *Biters*. People too sick to stand up'll still claw the eyes right out of your head. But will you just look *around* you?... The grounds're beautiful, the food's delicious. The air is like *wine*, everybody says so. So let's call ourselves a truce, shall we?

*(LILLIAN makes a sound as if hawking up spit. NURSE CORK dodges away. DR. QUILTON enters. NURSE CORK flings up her apron to shield DR. QUILTON from further spitting.)*

NURSE CORK. Careful, Doctor! She's an expectorator, just like they said.

DR. QUILTON *(putting out his hand)*. Welcome to Rock Shore, Miss Corelli. I'm Dr. Quilton. *(He looks steadily at LILLIAN for a moment; she finally shakes his hand.)* You're very lucky to be here. But luck is a fickle thing, you know, and it can run out. So you'll take care, won't you? I'll examine you later in the day. For now Nurse Cork here will familiarize you with our rules. You'll be expected to listen. Quietly. And, oh yes? No more spitting.



*(He continues to gaze at her, cocking his head slightly. LILLIAN finally nods. DR. QUILTON exits. NURSE CORK reads from a folded paper.)*

NURSE CORK. You will rise promptly at six a.m. Sponge-wash thoroughly and clean your teeth. You will breakfast at seven sharp. No skipping of meals unless so instructed by the doctor. Mealtime conversation is confined to pleasantries and slight discussion. Absolutely no discussion of politics or religion. *No foul language or blasphemy. Absolutely no lewd or lascivious behavior of any kind. All underlined, by the way.*

LILLIAN. I *can* read, you know.

NURSE CORK. That's not the way we do things here. *I* read. *You* absorb. No arguing with other patients or with any member of the staff at any time for any reason. No complaining. Absolutely no using another patient's handkerchief or sputum cup.

LILLIAN. Good God, a cup devoted to sputum.

NURSE CORK. Absolutely no spitting except into the aforementioned cup. In the booklet on your bedside table, you will write down the precise time and significant details of each and every bodily evacuation, to be reviewed weekly by the doctor. Lights out promptly at nine p.m.—

LILLIAN. So after a full day of exchanging pleasantries and chronicling my feces, I'm off to the Land of Nod at dusk? You'd best fetch my things, I think. I can't possibly stay here.

NURSE CORK. I might as well warn you, Your Highness. If you light out, we won't let you back in. It'll be off to the publics for you and fifty beds to a room—that's *if*

they find a place for you. You've been coughing blood?  
*(Beat. LILLIAN nods.)* Well. Here at Rock Shore, that's not so much of a much. Dr. Quilton is a miracle worker. So climb down off that high horse and start your cure. We'll get along all right.

*(The lights crossfade to IDA on the Cartmill cure porch. She is trying to drink from a Mason jar full of cream but soon gives up. She sets it on the floor and begins to sing softly. After a moment McDADE appears via a ladder outside unseen by IDA.)*

IDA. Will no one come play with me, the little chick said.

No, no, said Mother Hen, it's past time for bed.

What else can we do for the cold in your head?

No playtime for you—it's off with you to bed.

*(She is stopped by a fit of coughing; she notices McDADE.)* Oh.

McDADE. There's a broke shingle up top there.

IDA. I don't—

McDADE. What's that you's singin'?

IDA. Just something I made up.

McDADE. Do it again.

IDA. You shouldn't be up here. *(McDADE shrugs, starts to climb down.)* It has twenty-two verses in all.

McDADE. Let's hear some more.

IDA. No...I couldn't. It's private.

McDADE. Well. Ain't we in private?

IDA *(after a moment)*.

Will no one come swim with me, the little fish wept.

Oh no, said Mother Carp, it's time that you slept.

Come doze in this cavern, way down in the depth.

No swimming for you—it's high time you slept.  
*(She giggles, then coughs.)* Each verse has a different creature and a different activity, you know—swimming, dancing, playing, skipping and such. Do you know what I mean?

McDADE. They all end up the same though, huh? In bed?  
You ain't drank your cream, kitty, kitty.

IDA. I can't manage it today. *(McDADE picks up the jar and starts to drink.)* Don't! I've sipped on that.

McDADE. Don't worry about me, girly. TB come after me I beat the tar out of it. *(McDADE winks at her, toasts, and downs the cream, then licks his lips.)* I sing a little. *(IDA giggles.)* You don't believe me? *(Hand on heart, he begins to sing, picking up the tune of IDA's song; he adds plenty of flourishes to the notes, which delights IDA.)*

Will no one come kiss me, the ol' tomcat said.  
See here, says Miss Kitty, get outa my bed.  
But darlin', sweet darlin', you might soon be dead.  
So let us have pleasure pretending we're wed.

*(IDA nearly collapses with giggling. MARY enters. She does not see McDADE who scrambles down the ladder and exits quickly. IDA, still giggling, covers her face with a copy of The Journal of the Outdoor Life.)*

MARY *(dropping herself onto a cure chair)*. You're turning into a ninny, Ida.

IDA. No I'm not.

MARY. Have you written to your papa today?

IDA. No.

MARY. Ida.

IDA. “Dear Papa. Here we are. Still at the San. Lying out on the porch in an agony of boredom.”

MARY. You *could* tell him about the dance.

IDA. “Dear Papa. The other night all the TBs came together at the Adirondack Hotel ballroom dressed in our Sunday finest. Of course, despite a lovely orchestra, we were forbidden to exert ourselves, so we sat there like tree stumps all evening long.”

MARY. You didn’t lack for attention. In fact, you seemed perfectly giddy over it.

IDA. “Dear Papa. I was ‘perfectly giddy’ over all the attention from the admiring lungers. As they clanked the lids of their spit cups up and down, up and down.”

MARY. You’re getting a permanent little frowny crease between your eyebrows, do you know that? Maybe *that’s* why your papa hasn’t been up to see us—

IDA. “Dear Papa. The summer air here is a tonic. And we do miss you so. I know you’d enjoy trekking through these dense Adirondack forests. They say the fish here jump right out of the lake to grab the hook—”

MARY. Don’t waste it on *me*, darling. Run get your stationery.

*(IDA jumps up and exits. The lights crossfade to the examining room. EMMA is seated in a cure chair with a thermometer in her mouth. DR. QUILTON stands next to her. He removes the thermometer.)*

DR. QUILTON. I understand you’ve gotten very good at croquet.

EMMA. I’m very bad at it actually. I can never remember the rules.