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*Dramatic Publishing*

# A Rose for Emily

A One-Act Play

By

**JOSEPH ROBINETTE**

Based on the story by

**WILLIAM FAULKNER**

**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**



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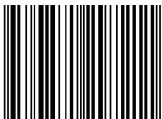
## A Rose . . . .



## for Emily

Nobel Laureate William Faulkner's most famous short story has become a powerful play of exquisitely revealed characters and a strong sense of a time and place in American life. Miss Emily Grierson is the proud and very private daughter of a small Southern town's now-deceased leading citizen. She lives alone in the mansion left to her by her father until, to the surprise of everyone, she takes up with a handsome man from the North who is in town briefly on a contracting job. They are seen going about together and then he is seen no more, nor is Miss Emily, who no longer leaves her mansion. As we discover what has really happened, we come to a shocking climax of great dramatic impact. Prize-winning playwright Joseph Robinette has skillfully captured the essence of the Faulkner story while creating roles that are both challenging and intriguing.

ISBN 10: 0-87129-721-3  
ISBN 13: 978-0-87129-721-1



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[www.DramaticPublishing.com](http://www.DramaticPublishing.com)

Code: R-33



printed on recycled paper

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WILLIAM FAULKNER

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(A ROSE FOR EMILY)

ISBN 0-87129-721-3

A ROSE FOR EMILY  
*A One-Act Play*  
*For Five Men and Four Women*

C H A R A C T E R S

MEREDITH WYATT . . . . .	<i>in her late twenties</i>
DEWEY NIX . . . . .	<i>about forty</i>
ELDA TATE . . . . .	<i>in her sixties</i>
EULOLA HOLCOMB. . . . .	<i>in her mid-fifties</i>
REAVIS QUINTON. . . . .	<i>in his early fifties</i>
WILL CARTWRIGHT . . . . .	<i>about thirty</i>
“GENERAL” SILAS CHAMBERS . . . . .	<i>nearly seventy</i>
EMILY GRIERSON. . . . .	<i>from thirty to sixty</i>
HOMER BARRON . . . . .	<i>in his thirties</i>

*Time: About 1930*  
*(With Flashbacks as early as 1890.)*

*Place: The Grierson Home*  
*Jefferson, Mississippi*



## A ROSE FOR EMILY

SCENE: The upstairs of a once-fashionable Southern home built shortly after the Civil War.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: Voices are heard coming up the stairs.

MEREDITH (offstage). I can't believe how many people were at the funeral. The whole town must have turned out.

(MEREDITH and DEWEY enter from the stairs. MEREDITH carries a notebook and pencil, writing frequently as she takes an "inventory" of the furnishings.)

DEWEY. That's not surprising. You see, we looked on Miss Emily as a tradition, a duty, a care. A sort of hereditary obligation upon the town. The people came to the funeral as a respectful affection for a fallen monument. 'Course some came just to see the inside of this house. Nobody's set foot in here for the last ten years – except Miss Emily, of course, and her servant, old Tobe.

ELDA (offstage). Dewey, are you all up there?

DEWEY. We're here, Mrs. Tate.

REAVIS (offstage). Is it okay if we come up, Dewey? (DEWEY



looks at MEREDITH for guidance.)

MEREDITH. Of course. I'd be curious, too, if I'd lived in the shadow of this house all my life.

DEWEY (at the stairs). You all come on up, Reavis. But be careful. Those steps are steeper than the ribs on a washboard.

MEREDITH (examining a box and writing in her notebook). I appreciate you escorting me up here, Mr. Nix. I just didn't want to do the inventory on this part of the house all alone. It's so creepy in here. (She examines a corn sheller.) Goodness. What's this?

DEWEY. A corn sheller. Don't tell me you folks don't have corn shellers over in Birmingham.

MEREDITH (writing in her notebook). I know what it is. I meant — what's it doing up here?

DEWEY. Miss Emily used to shell the corn in here and throw it out the window to the chickens.

MEREDITH. Why didn't she shell it out in the corncrib like other people?

DEWEY. Because in many ways your Aunt Emily was not like other people.

(ELDA, EULOLA and REAVIS enter and quietly survey the area.)

EULOLA. My, my. Would you look at this.

ELDA. Squalor. That's what it is, Eulola Holcomb. Just plain squalor.

REAVIS (going to a rocker near the window). Here's the very rocking chair she was sitting in the night we sneaked in and sprinkled lime all over the place. I couldn't have been more than twenty back then.

WILL (offstage, coming up the stairs). Take it easy, General.

One step at a time.

(WILL and SILAS, in a Confederate uniform, enter.)

ELDA. Silas Chambers, you got no call to be straining up those stairs.

SILAS. Now, Elda, you know wild horses wouldn't keep me out of here. I want to see every nook and cranny of this place. I'm just as nosy as the rest of you.

DEWEY. Still and all, don't be forgetting your bad lung, General.

EULOLA. You looked real nice at the funeral, Silas. Handsome uniform.

SILAS. It was my daddy's, you know. He got killed right here in the battle of Jefferson. That was two months after I was born.

MEREDITH (to WILL). Oh, Mr. Cartwright. I was hoping to see you again and thank you for picking me up at the station this morning.

WILL. It was nothing, really. I had to pick up some packages anyway.

MEREDITH. I must have looked a fright after riding all night without more than ten winks of sleep.

WILL. Oh, no, ma'am. You looked just fine.

MEREDITH. Why thank you, Mr. Cartwright.

WILL. I'd be just as happy if you called me "Will."

MEREDITH. Than I will – Will. (MEREDITH and WILL laugh self-consciously.)

EULOLA (a bit pointedly). It's too bad your papa couldn't come to the funeral.

MEREDITH. He had to stay home and supervise the cotton picking. You know how those people are if they don't have

good supervising. Anyway, Papa *will* be here after picking season to settle Aunt Emily's estate.

ELDA. You call this an estate?

REAVIS. Is the house the way you remember it, Miss Meredith?

MEREDITH. Why, this is the first time I've ever been here, Mr. Quinton.

WILL. You mean you never saw your Aunt Emily before?

MEREDITH. Never. Actually, she was my *great* aunt. But us Wyatts were her closest relatives. Papa met her once or twice. He told me a little about her. Would you say she was a bit on the . . . eccentric side?

ELDA. It might be closer to the truth to say she had a rather large hole in the bottom of her rain barrel.

SILAS. Elda!

ELDA. I'm just answering the sweet thing's question.

MEREDITH. What caused her to get that way?

DEWEY. Who can say?

EULOLA. Maybe it was . . . just the vapors.

REAVIS. Or the sign she was born under.

WILL. Or even this house.

ELDA. Or her daddy. (A beat.) He started it anyway. Putting it in her head that the Griersons were a little better than everybody else.

SILAS. Elda's right there. He kept telling Miss Emily that none of the young men in this town were good enough for her. But some of us did right well. I wish he'd lived long enough to see the way I . . . (He is a bit embarrassed. His voice trails off.)

EULOLA. No question the man had a strong hold on her. Why, even when he died, she wouldn't admit it.

MEREDITH. What do you mean?

SILAS. I was one of the first to get here after it happened. I recall her voice. It was different than I'd ever heard it before.

Her voice was strong, but very strange. I remember it yet.  
(The scene changes to the past as ALL except MEREDITH move to the downstage area. Emily's voice is heard.)

EMILY (offstage). Tobe, there seem to be some people here.  
Please show them in.

(EMILY enters.)

EMILY. May I ask why you all have come?

DEWEY. Miss Emily. Words cannot express our sorrow. We insist on staying with you in this hour of need.

SILAS. My wife is coming over with two rhubarb pies, Miss Emily . . . to help feed the mourners.

EMILY. I still do not understand why you all are here.

ELDA. You *know* why we're here, Miss Emily.

EULOLA. To grieve after your poor father who passed on yesterday.

EMILY. My daddy is not dead.

WILL. The scriptures must be obeyed, Miss Emily. We must bury the dead.

REAVIS. My dear. Rejection of a deep loss is understandable, up to a point. But I . . . your family doctor of eighteen years . . . have pronounced your father deceased.

EMILY. My daddy is not dead. (She exits as ALL watch her. The scene changes back to the present and ALL rejoin MEREDITH upstage.)

MEREDITH. How on earth did they finally get through to the poor thing?

DEWEY. They were about to resort to the law and force their way in. But she finally broke down.

EULOLA. They buried the man as quick as they could.

MEREDITH (examining the contents of a box, then writing in

her notebook). Well, I am happy to report I've almost finished the inventory up here.

EULOLA. What about that door back there? Where does it lead?

MEREDITH. For heavens sake, I didn't even notice it. I hope somebody'll stay with me while I inventory in there. This place gives me the willies.

WILL. I'll keep you company, Miss Meredith.

MEREDITH. Why, thank you, Mr. Cart . . . Thank you, Will.

DEWEY (trying the door). This door's locked.

MEREDITH. Oh, my.

REAVIS. Probably nothing but a closet anyway. Or a storage area.

MEREDITH. Then I'm not even going to waste my time with it. Why don't we all go down . . .

SILAS. It's a bedroom.

EULOLA. How did you know that, Silas?

ELDA. He's been in this house before. He once came courting over here, you know.

SILAS. Elda Tate, the years haven't slowed down your tongue one bit.

MEREDITH. Well, if it *is* a bedroom, I guess I'd better write down everything that's in there so Papa can evaluate it properly. I wonder why the door's locked.

EULOLA. Tobe's got the keys. I'll bet he's around here somewhere.

ELDA. I haven't seen him since he let us in this morning.

WILL (at the stairs, calling). Tobe! We need the keys to open up a door. You bring them on up, you hear?

ELDA. I wouldn't depend on him. He's as odd as she was.

MEREDITH. When was the first time you noticed that Aunt Emily was . . . a little different.

SILAS. I never did think she was crazy.

ELDA. Well, she was, Silas. But we understood why she acted the way she did when her father died. He had driven off all the young men, and now he was gone, too. So, with nothing left, she had to cling to that which robbed her. As people will.

EULOLA. And her daddy would have certainly driven away the next man, too, but he was no longer alive to do so. (The scene changes to the past.)

(HOMER enters.)

HOMER. Yes sir, mighty fine town. Wouldn't mind hanging my hat here for a few months. But that decision is in the hands of the aldermen. (He exits, or turns away from the action, as the OTHERS, except MEREDITH, move to the downstage area.)

REAVIS. I say we don't need them. Too much money.

DEWEY. I say we *do* need them. We've got to protect those who *walk* from those who *ride*.

SILAS. Hear, hear! The way some of these young whipper-snappers fly up and down the streets with their horses and buggies, a body's liable to get killed – or worse.

WILL. All in favor?

WILL, SILAS, DEWEY. Aye!

WILL. All opposed?

REAVIS. Nay!

WILL. The "ayes" have it. Jefferson will commence to have its sidewalks paved immediately. (There is applause.)

ELDA (aside to EULOLA). I'm glad they voted for it. But I still don't see why the construction company has to have a Yankee for a foreman.

(HOMER enters, or turns toward them, laughing.)

DEWEY. You must be Mr. Homer Barron.

HOMER. Indeed I am. (DEWEY and HOMER shake hands.)

DEWEY. Mighty impressive set of mules and machinery, Mr. Barron. We're sure you'll do an able job here in Jefferson.

WILL. Don't work too hard though, Mr. Barron. Leave a little time for recreation. Feel free to join us for libations and such down at the Elks Club whenever you can.

DEWEY. And we have some lovely young ladies here in Jefferson, Mr. Barron. I understand you're not married.

HOMER. To be honest, I'd rather *pour* cement than get stuck in it myself. (The MEN laugh.) But I'm certainly not above promenading with a handsome young lady after a hard day's work.

WILL. Or even *before* a hard day's work, I'd say. I saw you this morning with Levi Taylor's oldest daughter having a phosphate at Whitfield's Drug Store.

HOMER. She was showing me the town. I was obliged to show my appreciation.

DEWEY. Have a fine stay in Jefferson, Mr. Barron.

HOMER. I plan to. I certainly plan to. (DEWEY and WILL move away.)

(EMILY enters.)

HOMER. Afternoon, ma'am. I'm Homer Barron.

EMILY (non-committally). Mr. Barron.

HOMER. I'm the foreman of the sidewalk paving.

EMILY. I hope you find it pleasant here. (She starts to exit as HOMER stops her.)

HOMER. I'm sure I will. And the more people I get to know, the more I'll like it.

EMILY. I suppose.

HOMER. That's why I'd be pleased to know you. Your name, at least. I'm from a big city where people don't hardly speak to each other. To me, one of the charms of a small town is people talking to everybody — calling each other by name.

EMILY. My name is Emily Grierson. Now that we know one another, I'll bid you a good day, Mr. Barron.

HOMER. Unless you're in some gosh awful hurry, Miss Grierson, I'd be pleased to buy you a strawberry phosphate over at the drug store.

EMILY (fighting the attractive invitation). I . . . I'm afraid I am in a hurry.

HOMER. Some other time then.

EMILY. Perhaps. (She starts to exit.)

HOMER (to himself). Grierson. (He stops EMILY again.) Excuse me, ma'am. You wouldn't be related to Samuel Grierson, would you?

EMILY. He was my daddy. He . . . passed on recently.

HOMER (sincerely). I'm sorry to hear that.

EMILY. How did you know my daddy?

HOMER. He was one of the early promoters of the sidewalk paving. He was on the committee that came calling on our company for estimates and details. I recall he was particularly impressed.

EMILY. He approved of you — personally?

HOMER. Yes. I mean, he approved of the firm. And me, too, I suppose, since he knew I'd be the foreman of the job. (A beat.) I'm sorry as I can be to hear of his passing. In a sense, I have him to thank — in part — for my job here.

EMILY. Yes. Especially if you had his . . . personal approval. (A beat.) Well, I really must be going. (She moves a couple of steps away, then turns back to HOMER.) Mr. Barron. I will be at home around five. It's the largest house on Elm Street. The



name is on the fence. If you come properly calling, I might be available for that strawberry phosphate. The drug store is open until six. (HOMER smiles and watches EMILY exit, then he exits in the opposite direction. The scene returns to the present.)

REAVIS. Yeah, I remember my folks talking about it when Miss Emily took up with Mr. Barron.

EULOLA. The whole town was talking about it from what I heard.

SILAS. Everybody thought it was nice that she finally had an interest.

ELDA. Although we knew that a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner. And when all was said and done, he really was nothing more than a day laborer.

MEREDITH. Did she stop keeping company with him?

EULOLA. Law, no.

WILL (moving to MEREDITH). When you care about somebody, their station in life shouldn't matter. Wouldn't you say so, Miss Meredith?

MEREDITH. I quite agree.

DEWEY (looking down the stairs). I don't think old Tobe's down there. If he is, he's keeping his distance.

REAVIS. Maybe I can jimmy this lock open with my pocket knife. (He begins to work at the lock.)

WILL. If that doesn't work, I'll go out to the shed and look for a crowbar.

MEREDITH (going to the door). I wonder why she locked that door in the first place.

EULOLA. Child, that woman had locks on many things. The doors to her house as well as the doors to herself.

MEREDITH. Was it Mr. Barron who made her the way she was? Obviously, she was quite interested in him.

ELDA. Interested? In the beginning, maybe. But before long, interest gave way to total commitment.

(The scene changes to the past as HOMER and EMILY enter.)

HOMER. Miss Grierson, I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed your companionship over those phosphates these past couple of weeks.

EMILY. Thank you, Mr. Barron. But I wonder if we're seeing each other a bit too frequently. You know how it is in a small town.

HOMER. Can't say as I do. I'm from the city. Remember? Anyhow, to show my appreciation, I'd like to invite you to the social mixer at the Elks Club this Saturday night.

EMILY. Oh, I couldn't do that.

HOMER. Sure you could. Anyway, it doesn't start till eight o'clock. All those busybodies with the wagging tongues won't even see us. They'll already be in their nightcaps, reading their Bibles, getting ready for church the next day.

EMILY. I'm afraid the Elks Club is not a place for . . . a person like me.

HOMER. It'll be perfectly decent. I promise you the men will all be on their best behavior for the women.

EMILY. I'm sure there are others who'd happily accompany you for the evening.

HOMER. I guess I'd be lying if I said that wasn't true. But the others just don't measure up to you, Miss Grierson. (Embarrassed, but pleased, EMILY turns away.) Do you know what first struck me as attractive about you?

EMILY. I . . . can't imagine.

HOMER. That charming, serene look you have. Like those angels you see in the windows at church. I hope you'll consider