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Dramatic Publishing



**In the
Garden
of
Live
Flowers**

**Drama by Attilio Favorini
and Lynne Conner**

In the Garden of Live Flowers

A Full-length Play

by

ATTILIO FAVORINI and LYNNE CONNER



Dramatic Publishing

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(IN THE GARDEN OF LIVE FLOWERS)

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“Conner and Favorini are masterly in presenting complicated information in familiar settings.” *Tribune Review*

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Playwrights' Note

In the Garden of Live Flowers forms one continuous action and should be performed without blackouts (except for the Act break). If your mind works metaphorically, you may think of the action as Rachel Carson's journey, taking her from spring to winter. If your mind works psychologically, you may think of it as Rachel's life flashing in front of her eyes as she confronts the news of her terminal illness. If you prefer to seek theatrical signposts, consider *Peer Gynt* or *Cymbeline* in which adventure, farce and fantasy intermingle with scenes of domestic and political realism. If your mind works politically, you may think of the action as buying time—for Rachel from the illness threatening her life, for all of us from the environmental poisons threatening the earth.

The “family” with whom Rachel interacts is both her own and an allegorical Typical American Family whose domestic challenges include environmental threats conceived in pop-cultural imagery. We meet this family first in a story-theatre episode and last in a scene evoking the “Ozzie and Harriet” television show. In between they pass through 1930s radio drama and 1950s film. Knowing the conventions of these genres will help the ensemble grasp the dramatic values of these scenes and convey the passage of time. Particularly useful are the radio show “Baby Snooks” and the movies *Them* and *Dr. Strangelove*.

In the Garden of Live Flowers takes its title from a chapter in *Through the Looking Glass*, and we have come to think of our piece similarly as a fable or fantasia. Its real-world central figure moves dreamlike between the realms of tragedy and comedy, emotion and imagination, science and literature.

In the Garden of Live Flowers was commissioned and originally produced by the University of Pittsburgh Repertory Theatre in March 2001 under the title *Silent Spring: Alarums and Excursions*. It is the recipient of the 2002 Kennedy Center/ATHE David Mark Cohen National Playwriting Award and a Jane Chambers 2002 Honorable Mention Award.

In The Garden of Live Flowers

A Full-length Play
For 4 Men and 5 Women*

Characters

RACHEL CARSON

ENSEMBLE #1: SALESMAN; ROBERT; SECRETARY; FRED;
BIRD

ENSEMBLE #2: CATERPILLAR; KID 2; TRAVELING SON;
BABY; ROGER; WILSON; PILOT; SHAWN; BROTHER; BIRD

ENSEMBLE #3: DOCTOR; KID 2; BOB; BIRD

ENSEMBLE #4: GNAT; HUSBAND; KID 1; DOCTOR #2;
WAITER; BROWN; NAVIGATOR; LOU; DAD; BIRD

ENSEMBLE #5: ALICE; DOROTHY; REPORTER; MOMMY;
WASP; TIGER LILY

ENSEMBLE #6: MARIE RODELL; SNAPDRAGON FLY;
CHILD 2; GIRL; TRAVELING MOTHER; KID 2; SIS; BIRD

ENSEMBLE #7: NURSE; FAWN'S VOICE;
YOUNGEST TRAVELING DAUGHTER; DOCTOR 3; CHILD;
KID 1; WASP; BIRD; BREAD-AND-BUTTERFLY

ENSEMBLE #8: MARIA CARSON; QUEEN OF HEARTS' VOICE;
WIFE; TRAVELING OLDEST DAUGHTER; MOMMA; MOM;
WOMAN; WASP; BIRD

**All but one role are double/triple cast. No gender flexibility.*

Setting: In the original production all scenes took place on a unit set whose design components suggested both the checkerboard of farms illustrating “A Fable for Tomorrow” (Chapter One of *Silent Spring*) and the Tenniel illustration of a countryside laid out like a chessboard in *Through the Looking Glass*. An uprooted sapling was suspended upstage. The stage floor had a slightly raked platform of irregular shape backed by a painted scrim that could be front or back lit. A section of the platform was removed to reveal a tide pool which remained visible from the end of Scene 6 through the final curtain. The predominant colors were blues and greens. A gurney on wheels functioned as an examining table, dining table, desk, etc. A set of chairs formed the train of Scene 6 and the cockpits of Scene 13.

Two battles dominated the last years of Rachel Carson's life: her ultimately losing struggle with breast cancer (a condition her doctor concealed from her) and the triumphant publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962. Scene 19 depicts the first battle, while scene 20 represents the fragmented memory of past encounters that helped or hampered her as she pursued her life's goals.

Scene 19: I Shall Be Too Late/Take Four

DOCTOR and RACHEL as in I Shall Be Too Late/Take One. A NURSE hovers on the fringe.

RACHEL. Can you feel them?

DOCTOR. I feel some density.

RACHEL. They're tumors, aren't they?

DOCTOR (*still palpating*). They're growths. It's not clear of what type.

RACHEL. They feel exactly like the tumor you removed two years ago.

DOCTOR (*finishing the palpation, gestures toward her blouse on the table next to her*). You can dress now.

RACHEL. It's returned.

DOCTOR (*writing something down, not paying attention*).

Returned?

RACHEL. The...tumor.

DOCTOR (*looking up quickly*). That was in the other breast.

RACHEL (*feeling the lumps*). You're suggesting this is unrelated?

DOCTOR. At the moment I'm not making any diagnosis. We'll do some more tests first thing in the morning.

RACHEL. What else could they be?

DOCTOR. Miss Carson, as I already stated, the tumor I removed two years ago was not malignant. (*Picking up the x-ray, which has been resting on the examining table.*)

You can button up now.

RACHEL. What does the x-ray show?

DOCTOR. It's not definitive.

RACHEL. I'd like to look at it.

DOCTOR. Miss Carson, do you really think that's appropriate?

RACHEL. I'm perfectly capable of hearing the truth about my medical condition.

DOCTOR. Why don't you finish dressing now. (*RACHEL, upset, struggles with the buttons on her blouse.*)

RACHEL. I don't want to be kept in the dark.

DOCTOR. Shall I get the nurse to help you with those buttons?

RACHEL (*reaching out, touching his arm*). From one scientist to another?

DOCTOR. Miss Carson. I have treated many other women in your...condition. You will believe me, then, when I tell you I know what's best.

RACHEL (*somewhat frantic*). I have a book to finish.

DOCTOR. You're upset. Let me get the nurse...

RACHEL. I want the truth.

DOCTOR (*avoiding looking at her*). If you were married...
if there were someone else to discuss this with...

RACHEL. Please! (*Holding him from walking away.*)

DOCTOR (*finally turning to look fully at her for the first time in the scene*). Miss Carson. (*Puts his hand on her arm, as if to hold her back.*) As your doctor, I am telling you everything you need to know. (*RACHEL finally takes his hand away.*) Are there any other questions then? (*RACHEL is silent. Lighting a cigarette.*) I admit we are puzzled. (*The DOCTOR looks off to his left, smoking the cigarette, staring at the x-ray.*)

RACHEL. I'm not a child. There's something you're not telling me. (*Pause.*) How long? (*Pause.*) Well?

DOCTOR. You are healing nicely, Miss Carson. (*Pause. DOCTOR walks off, smoking, staring at the x-ray.*)

RACHEL (*to the DOCTOR's back*). I have no time for this.

(NURSE approaches and, as in the earlier versions of the scene, tries to help her put on a new costume piece, this time a hat, circa 1962. But RACHEL doesn't go along with the scene as before.)

RACHEL (*confronting NURSE*). NO! (*NURSE steps back in alarm. RACHEL runs after the DOCTOR, grabbing his arm as he tries to disappear into the black light at the edge of the stage.*) How much time do I have left? (*DOCTOR turns to RACHEL and pats her on the shoulder.*)

DOCTOR. Shhhhhh now, Rachel. Everything will be just fine. (*DOCTOR walks off, smoking, staring at the x-ray, NURSE again approaches RACHEL, handing her a hat.*)

NURSE. You may go now, Miss Carson.

(RACHEL enters next scene.)

Scene 20: Silence

The “Shhhh” from the end of the previous scene becomes an offstage chorus of “SSSHHHHHHHHHH” that grows louder and louder.

RACHEL walks out of the doctor’s office and onto the shoreline. There is a conch shell resting at the edge of a tide pool. She picks it up, puts it to her ear and listens. The SSSSHHHHHH slowly disappears and is replaced with the sound of the ocean.

RACHEL (*listening, then looking up to audience*). It’s not the ocean I’m hearing, of course. My own blood, actually. (*Sound gradually gives over to a beating heart.*) Moving through my veins and arteries, echoing back at me through the chamber inside the shell. (*RACHEL gently puts the conch shell in the tide pool, causing the water to move. Observing the water:)* Ripples.

MARIA’S VOICE (*recorded*). Page four hundred seventy-five. We’ll begin with the lesson’s Leading Thought.

RACHEL. Nature Study Lesson One: “How to Enter a Tide Pool.” First, place your foot ever so gently on the sand bottom. (*She takes off her shoes and leaves them by*

the side of the pool. Then she puts her foot in the tide pool without making a sound.) Do not wriggle. Do not scrunch. Above all, Do Not Disturb.

SALESMAN'S VOICE (*recorded*). Bit of a bumpy ride.

RACHEL. Now, place the other foot in, ever so gently.

Again, do not wriggle. Again, do not scrunch. Above all, Do Not Disturb. (*Observing the water.*) Ripples.

DOCTOR 2'S VOICE (*recorded*). You'll have to put the book down, Miss Carson.

RACHEL. Lesson Two: "How to Watch for the Creatures Beneath the Tide." Stand firm. Stay still. Study the waves. Look down.

ROGER'S VOICE (*recorded*). Does your book have pictures?

RACHEL. Look closer.

RACHEL'S VOICE (*recorded*). No, don't... My mother is different... That's a different situat...

RACHEL. Remain still.

FRED'S VOICE (*recorded*). Why a spinster with no kids is so concerned about future generations is beyond me.

RACHEL. Study the waves. And. Above all. Do Not Disturb. (*Slowly she begins splashing the water with her hands.*) Do Not Disturb. (*Bigger splashes with hands and feet.*) Remain still. (*She begins to laugh.*) Study the waves. (*More splashing, laughing.*) Look down.

MARIE RODELL'S VOICE (*recorded*). She's celebrating. She needs to finish every precious drop.

RACHEL (*laughing, almost dancing, dousing herself with water*). And watch for the creatures beneath the tide. (*Suddenly she stops, seeing something at the bottom of the tide pool. It's the conch shell. She reaches in, picks it up, and puts it to her ear.*)

DOROTHY'S VOICE (*recorded*). Ohhhhh. Perfect. Perfectly lovely.

RACHEL (*listening*). It's getting harder and harder to hear. (*Looking up to audience.*) My beating heart, that is. It doesn't pump well anymore, you see. The radiation—it shrinks the tumors, but at the same time...it shrinks my arteries. (*Drops the conch shell in the water.*) Ripples. (*Observing the ripples, RACHEL begins to sob.*)