

THE ROSE MERCHANT

PLAYERS

JAMES, a businessman in his late forties, attired in a tuxedo and topcoat.

SUSAN, his wife. Attired in an evening gown, wrap and pearls, carrying a small clutch.

THE ROSE MERCHANT, an older man, wearing an apron and a down-filled Chicago Bears jacket.

The play takes place in Chicago on a cold Valentine's evening.

AT RISE: The Rose Merchant is arranging roses in a plastic pail on the sidewalk before the Lyric Opera.

James and Susan enter from stage right.

JAMES
I'll flag a cab.

SUSAN
Okay.

MERCHANT
[To James] Evening. A rose for the lady?

JAMES
No. Thank you.

SUSAN

[*Tisk-tisk*] You used to buy me roses. All the time.

MERCHANT

Twelve stems for eight-fifty.

JAMES

And a night on the town used to be a three-dollar burger at Billy Goat's.

MERCHANT

One stem: one dollar.

JAMES

I said, no. Thank you. [*Gesturing forward*] Taxi!

SUSAN

So. One rose would break the bank?

JAMES

Let it go, Susan.

MERCHANT

Make it fifty cents, mister. It's Valentines Day.

SUSAN

It is Valentines Day, isn't it?

JAMES

Where are all the taxis?

MERCHANT

A day for roses, wine and love.

SUSAN

You hear that, James? Love?

JAMES

[*Lurching forward*] Taxi! [*Looking away*] Ugh...

MERCHANT

You know, the roses will freeze overnight. Take the bunch. No charge.

JAMES

[*With an edge*] No.

SUSAN
We couldn't.

MERCHANT
Why not? They'll go to waste. Please. Take them.

JAMES
No. Buzz off.

SUSAN
What my husband is trying to say is, we don't need roses.

MERCHANT
Everybody needs roses.

SUSAN
No, once you reach a certain plateau, a certain maturity in a relationship, roses are—o, what's the word you used the other night, James? Superfluous?

JAMES
Taxi!

SUSAN
James? Superfluous?

JAMES
I said, let it go, Susan.

SUSAN
See?

MERCHANT
[*Perplexed*] Yes, I see...

Pause.

JAMES
O, for Christ's sake.

If you want the roses, take them. He offered. So, take them.

The rose merchant holds forward a bunch of roses.

SUSAN
No. I don't want a bunch. I just want one ro—

JAMES
Taxi!

MERCHANT
Common', mister. Just one. That's all she's asking for.

JAMES
[*Angered*] No. That's *not* what she's asking for.

SUSAN
It's not?

JAMES
No. [*Suddenly addressing Susan more directly than before*] You want the man who bought you roses. All the time.

SUSAN
What's wrong with that?

JAMES
[*To the merchant*] Ninety dollars for opera tickets. I worked two hours on a Saturday for those. Those pearls: seven full weekends punching numbers.

SUSAN
[*Touching her pearls*] They were for my birthday.

JAMES
That dress—she has eight more just as nice— a summer lost.

SUSAN
You exaggerate.

JAMES
I work my fingers to the bone to keep this woman in feathers.

SUSAN
He always exaggerates—

JAMES
But, that's not good enough. Now she wants a God damned rose.

SUSAN
James!

JAMES
Flores! Flores por los superfluous muertos!

SUSAN
[*Umph*] I can't take this anymore.

JAMES
Flores! Flores!

Neither can I, Susan. Neither. Can. I.

Pause.

SUSAN
So..?

JAMES
So, what?

SUSAN
So, you won't buy me a rose?

James shakes his head, no.

Fine.

Susan fishes a dollar from her clutch and hands it to the rose merchant.

Here. I'd like to buy a rose.

MERCHANT
Yes, miss.

SUSAN
For my husband.

The Rose Merchant takes Susan's dollar and hands her a rose.

Susan offers the rose to James.

Happy Valentine's Day, James.

JAMES
[*Refusing*] Why would you think I want that?

SUSAN
What's wrong with it?

JAMES

You just don't get it, do you?

SUSAN

Get what?

James turns away in a manner that shows his indifference to Susan.

JAMES

[*Abnormally loud*] Taxi!

Slight pause.

Got it?

Susan lets the rose fall from her fingers.

SUSAN

Yes, James. Got it.

JAMES

Good.

The Rose Merchant dumps the pail of roses on the sidewalk.

Susan eyes the roses with sadness.

DIM OUT