

## **BLUE ROSES SYNOPSIS**

### **Blue Roses by Sandra de Helen**

Drama          One hour          4F, 1M

Two young, upper class women named Rose end up in an asylum together. It's 1940 and Dr. Freeman is on the cutting edge of mental health. The Roses are attended by Tee and Flora, who have obstacles of their own to overcome.

CHARACTERS:

ROSE	23 year old woman from Boston, with upper class Bostonian accent; think Jack Kennedy
ROSE ISABEL	28 year old woman from St. Louis, Missouri, but with a genteel Southern US accent, such as from Atlanta; think Jimmy Carter
TEE	A young African-American woman, working as a nurses' aide.
FLORA	A young woman from the poor working class, working as a member of the cleaning staff.
DR. FREEMAN	30-40 white neurosurgeon who popularized the lobotomy in the United States in the late 1930's and early 1940's. This actor should be fairly androgynous, rather than highly masculine.
NUN	Doubled by Actor who plays Dr. Freeman
RICHIE	A young man's voice, off-stage only. Can be taped.

TIME AND PLACE:

Early 1940s. All action except first scene takes place in an asylum in Maryland. The first scene takes place in a convent, which is very similar, and can simply double. Hospital staff should wear white. The nun wears a habit (or partial at least). The Roses should be costumed appropriate to their upper middle class status, and in dresses.

*(A convent in Boston. ROSE MARIE is sleeping on a single bed, with a cover pulled over her head. Downstage is a window, with moonlight streaming through. It's about 10pm, summer. Upstage is a closed door. NUN in full habit opens the door and peers in. She is fully lit from behind. Still no lights onstage except moonlight.)*

NUN

Rosemary? (pause) Are you sleeping?

*(Steps in, uncovers Rose's sleeping face. Exits.)*

*(Beat.)*

*(ROSE springs out of bed, fully clothed in early 1940's dancing attire. Fishes her handbag from under her pillow, goes to the window, applies lipstick. Stares into darkness, eyes twinkling, searching.)*

ROSE

Richie? You out there? (Pause) Too quiet out there.

*(She paces back and forth in front of the window, touching her breasts, smoothing her dress over her sides and hips, rubbing her legs together to hear the sound of her stockings rustling. She touches her hair, her face, her cheeks, throws her head back and strokes her throat. In between these actions, she looks out the window, looking for Richie.)*

YOUNG MAN

*(Offstage)*

Rosie? Where are ya, honey? I can't see a thing out here.

ROSE

Up here, ya big lug. Second floor on the right side above the main door. Here, I'll lean closer to the window ...

*(ROSE goes up to the window, takes a penlight from her purse and shines it on her bared breast, for an instant, then onto her laughing face)*

See me now?

YOUNG MAN

*(Offstage, but closer)*

I see ya. Loud and clear! How ya gonna get down?

ROSE

Wait right there. I'll come around the back.

*(ROSE stuffs her pillows under the covers, then tiptoes to the door, eases it open, slips out, and quietly shuts it behind her.)*

NUN

*(Offstage)* Aha! Where might you be going, Miss Rosemary?

*(ROSE and NUN enter. NUN has ROSE'S arm twisted behind her back and is marching her back into her room. NUN forces ROSE onto the bed, after throwing back the covers and putting the pillow at the head of the bed.)*

Well? What have you to say for yourself?

ROSE

I don't have anything to say to you, Sister.

NUN

Very well. We'll see what your parents have to say to the Reverend Mother then.

ROSE

Oh, come on, Sister.

NUN

Come on, indeed. Rosemary, do you realize how many times it is that you've been caught sneaking out of the convent after hours? And dressed like a tart I might add.

ROSE

I'm 23 years old, Sister! I shouldn't be cooped up in this convent anyway. I'm a grown woman, with grown desires and needs. I should be out in the world with the rest of my sisters and brothers, not shut up here with a bunch of nuns.

NUN

Your parents know what's best for you, Rosemary.

ROSE

Oh pish.

NUN

Rosemary!

ROSE

What? That's not a swear word.

NUN

Well, it's slang, and it's very close to swearing. You'd better remember to confess it.

ROSE

My parents be damned. Yes, I know ... that's a swear word. And I'm breaking a commandment as well. I don't honor them! Not for this! What did I ever do to deserve to be locked up in this convent? I'm not a child! I'm a grown woman with needs ... I'm getting out of here, and you cannot stop me. (Suddenly fierce) Now back off.

*(ROSE rises and takes a menacing stance against the NUN, who decides to capitulate, rather than come to blows. ROSE straightens her hair, dress, and stockings, grabs her handbag again, and this time she sashays out the door without a backward glance. The NUN makes the bed, picks up any props that pertain to the convent and exits the room, leaving the door open. She turns one direction, TEE and ROSE ISABEL enter from the other.)*

ROSE ISABEL

Don't you just adore that Dr. Freeman? He is so handsome. I would allow him to bite my nipples or put his fingers in my pussy any time he so desired. Wouldn't you do the same, Nurse Tee?

TEE

Now Miss Rose Isabel, you mustn't talk like that. Remember? The nurses get very upset with you when you start talking that sex talk.

ROSE ISABEL

Why, I don't know what you mean. Whatever can you be discussing? What sex talk? And anyway, aren't you a nurse? You're dressed all in white.

TEE

Yes, ma'am. I'm dressed in white, but I don't have a hat. See? I'm what they call a nurse's aide. You remember, don't you? We have orderlies, and cleaning staff, and aides, and nurses, and then there's Dr. Freeman. And sometimes Dr. Watts.

ROSE ISABEL

I don't like Dr. Watts.

TEE

Really? I'm sure Dr. Watts is just fine.

ROSE ISABEL

How would you know? You're just an ignorant fool. Now go fetch me my tea things.

TEE

Miss Rose Isabel, why don't you have a seat over by the window? We're going to get a new patient this afternoon, and maybe the two of you will have something in common.

ROSE ISABEL

I'm hungry. I want a pie. And not a raisin pie, either. A real pie.

TEE

I'll have to see what the menu is for today. Shall I go do that?

ROSE ISABEL

Tell my mother I need some new underwear. My panties are all sticky.

TEE

Now Rose, don't start ...

ROSE ISABEL

Don't call me Rose! Don't call me Rose!

TEE

I'm sorry! Please, just calm down ... I forgot. I mean Rose ISABEL ... Okay?

ROSE ISABEL

(Pouty now) Don't ever call me Rose.

TEE

I'm going to go now, Miss Rose Isabel. You just look at a magazine or something while I go get the new patient and bring her in. Okay?

ROSE ISABEL

Bring her in. Okay?

TEE

I'm going to.

ROSE ISABEL

I'm going too.

TEE

No, Rose Isabel, you're not going. Now go back and sit down.

ROSE ISABEL

Sit down and stick your finger up my butt.

TEE

I'm going to have to report this sex talk to the nurses if you don't stop.

ROSE ISABEL

Stop what? I'm not doing anything.

TEE

Okay. Just sit there. Right there. I'll be right back.

*(TEE exits)*

ROSE ISABEL

*(picks up a magazine and begins flipping through the pages. When she comes to recipes with pictures, she lingers, caresses the food, then licks the pages.)*

ROSE ISABEL (cont'd)

Needs more sugar.

*(idly smooths her dress over her breasts, then reaches into the neck of her dress down into her bra and begins to pull out tissue paper, but just from one side, leaving her misshapen.)*

Look at this tissue. Why, it's of the poorest quality. Mother would have a conniption fit if she saw how I was being treated here. A lady like me should have fine handkerchiefs made of the finest linens to stuff her bra, or at the very least a decent facial tissue. This won't do. I must find Dr. Freeman and lodge a complaint.

*(TEE enters with ROSE MARIE, just as ROSE ISABEL reaches the door. They nearly collide.)*

ROSE ISABEL

Nurse Tee! Thank heavens you've come!

TEE

What is it, Miss Rose Isabel?

ROSE ISABEL

I need to see Dr. Freeman right away.

TEE

Of course you do. But first, why don't you let me introduce you to another Miss Rose? This is Miss Rose Marie. She's just joining us. She's going to be Dr. Freeman's patient as well. You two get acquainted. I'll be back in a jiffy to take Miss Rose to her room.

ROSE

*(To Tee)* Wait! You can't just leave me here! Who is this? Is she ... I mean, will I be safe with her?

TEE

What an imagination. She's as docile as a lamb. Unlike you. Now just calm down and make nice. *(Raising voice and speaking to Rose Isabel)* You be good to our new patient now, you hear, Rose Isabel?

*(TEE exits)*

ROSE

You can call me Rose. I don't like my middle name. Just Rose is just fine. How about you? Can I call you Rosie?

ROSE ISABEL

No! Never call me Rose! Never! Never Rose!

ROSE

*(Shaken by the outburst)* Well, now, Miss ... Whatever you said your name is ... I didn't say "Rose" did I? Very well, I shall call you Georgia, because that's where you're from, isn't it?

ROSE ISABEL

Why I never! In all my life ... No. Of course I'm not from Georgia. And even if I were, who would want to be called by the proper name of a state? You may call me Rose Isabel.

ROSE

No, you know what? In my family we all have nicknames. And when we like somebody, and well, you're just so likeable, well we give them nicknames. I'm going to give you one. One that I'll bet no one has thought of yet. It suits you, it's related to your given name, and it's proper too, just the way you like it. I shall call you Miss Thorn.

ROSE ISABEL

I've never had a nickname before. Mother says they're common.

*(Beat.)*

But I think I would rather enjoy being called Miss Thorn. Yes, I shall let you call me Miss Thorn... Rose.

ROSE

So, Miss Thorn, why are you locked up here?

ROSE ISABEL

The security is for my protection. I thought you knew.

ROSE

Knew what?

ROSE ISABEL

Nurse Tee! Take this subject away. This interview is tiresome. Bring me my afternoon snack.

ROSE

Why are you so hard to talk with? What happened to you? Were you born this way, or what?

ROSE ISABEL

I'm perfectly easy to speak with, so long as you remember your place. You are my subject and I am your queen. And yes, I was born that way. What about you?

ROSE

What do you mean?

ROSE ISABEL

Why do you talk so funny?

ROSE

You mean my Boston accent?

ROSE ISABEL

Is that what it is? I thought you were putting on for some reason.

ROSE

No, I'm from Boston. Born and bred, as they say.

ROSE ISABEL

You've been bred? Why that's shocking!

ROSE

Of course not, it's a saying.

ROSE ISABEL

We don't have sayings like that in St Louis.

ROSE

If you're from St. Louis, why do you sound as if you're from Atlanta?

ROSE ISABEL

Aren't you a clever girl? My mother is from Atlanta, and we lived with her parents when I was a child, clear up until I was a teenager, and that's where I acquired my way of speaking.

ROSE

Why are you here? Do you know? Did your parents put you here?

ROSE ISABEL

If you talk sex talk, the nurses take away your privileges.

ROSE

What about if you speak in non sequiters?

ROSE ISABEL

No one cares. Most people aren't that literate.

ROSE

Wait a second, are you ... are you lucid right now?

ROSE ISABEL

I know what you're talking about, if that's what you mean.

ROSE

So are you faking? Or what?

ROSE ISABEL

It's wearying. Sometimes I know where I am and what people are talking about, and sometimes I seem to be in a different world altogether, do you understand?

ROSE

How long do you have?

ROSE ISABEL

I have no idea.

ROSE

Do you know what happened to you? How you got here?

ROSE ISABEL

My mother brought me, I think. And I was here for awhile, seeing Dr. Freeman, but I guess I was violent, and so they gave me a special treatment to make me calm. And to stop me from embarrassing my family.

ROSE

Oh, you mean the sex talk?

ROSE ISABEL

What? The nurses told you about that? Oh my word.

ROSE

I'm sorry if that ... no, Miss Thorn, you told me yourself.

BIO: SANDRA DE HELEN

Sandra de Helen's "*Beauty Standards*" was produced in 2008 and 2006. Her play *Blue Roses* had a directed reading in January 2008 in Portland. Her one-act *Murder at Chez Rouge* was performed at the Winterhaven 24 hour play festival May 2008; Her 10 minute play *The Thing Is* was produced as part of the Spotlight Program at Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland, June 2008. Her libretto *Alberta* was published in the July 2006 issue of Oregon Literary Review. de Helen is currently part of a multi-cultural playwriting group in Portland Oregon. Her website is [www.SandradeHelen.com](http://www.SandradeHelen.com); she can be reached at [sandra@sandradehelen.com](mailto:sandra@sandradehelen.com).

**BLUE ROSES PRODUCTION HISTORY**

Staged Reading

January 15, 2008