

A ROSE in the COURTYARD

By Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

On the eve of his appointment as governor of the Roman district Tysus, Prefect Flavius faces a tragic dilemma. His daughter, Gena, professes she is a Christian during one of the great persecutions. Flavius' wife, driven by ambition, wants nothing to block the appointment - even if that means her husband must sentence her step-daughter to death. Flavius is torn between his desire to uphold the law, his love for his daughter, and an inner light that seems to be guiding him contrary to all that he believes.

SETTING

The courtyard of Flavius, the Roman Prefect. There is a bench, CSL. DSR is a rosebush filled with beautiful blossoms. A second bush with blossoms is needed for Scene 2. If only one is used, the blossoms must be reattached between scenes.

TIME

Just before the dawn of the second century, a.d.

RUNNING TIME: 30 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 M, 3 W)

CORDELIA: A bitter, ambitious woman who detests being tied to the fortunes of a man. She is devoted to her emperor and the glory of Rome without question, for they best represent her self-serving ideals.

MYRA: An old, gentle servant who bothers no one and asks that no one bother her.

FLAVIUS: A Roman Prefect, a thoughtful man who is slightly out of step with his time. As the cadence quickens, his conscience moves his steps to a different beat. This, however, torments him greatly and forces him to look for peace.

GENA: Flavius' daughter, about seventeen. She is a gentle young woman, who finds courage when it is most needed. She is capable of great love.

SEXTUS: A Roman marshal. He is a tool of the state who questions little. An arm of the law, his duty is to bring offenders before the Prefect.

ANTONIUS: A young potter, he is courageous and dedicated to his beliefs. His strength is an example to Flavius.

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COSTUMES

Period Roman. Long, flowing togas are fine for each. Antonius should wear a shorter tunic representing a more “plebian” or poorer lifestyle. If a uniform is available, Sextus can wear it, but a toga is sufficient.

PROPERTIES

A knife for Flavius, green shawl and fish necklace for Gena, clippers, and a rope binding Antonius’ hands.

LIGHTING

Two blackouts, as indicated. (Curtain closings are fine, too.)

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The delicate MUSIC of a lute is heard. CORDELIA watches as MYRA prepares to snip roses from the bush.)

MYRA: *(Frightened.)* It's not right, my lady.

CORDELIA: *(Haughtily.)* You are insolent, Myra! The mere fact that you've lived so long doesn't entitle you to question the commands of your mistress.

MYRA: The bush was planted by my master's first wife

CORDELIA: *(Sarcastically.)* Wasn't everything?

MYRA: She said at the time she would never cut it's blossoms ... never separate the flowers from the branches.

CORDELIA: *(Angrily.)* Cut the last of them! Your master's first wife died fifteen years ago, and I have no particular liking for that bush!

(FLAVIUS enters from SL.)

FLAVIUS: But I do, Cordelia

CORDELIA: *(Business-like.)* Flavius ... how long have we been married?

FLAVIUS: Thirteen years.

CORDELIA: And in that time I have shown a great deal of respect for your first wife, have I not?

FLAVIUS: I am grateful for your ... catering to my whims, my dear.

CORDELIA: I have allowed her likeness to remain in our chamber. I have kept on the servants she first trained. I have raised that sniveling child she bore you. ...

FLAVIUS: You are NEVER to speak of my daughter in that fashion, Cordelia .

CORDELIA: *(Bitterly.)* "My" daughter, indeed! She IS your daughter, and not OURS. All the world knows it. How I would feel if only you would show such care for OUR children ... those we conceived.

FLAVIUS: I love them the same.

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CORDELIA: As much as that bush? *(After a slight pause.)*

I think not. Cut that rose, Myra.

FLAVIUS: *(To MYRA.)* Touch nothing.

CORDELIA: *(Viciously.)* I need the flowers for the table.

Tonight the emperor's emissary dines with us!

FLAVIUS: Myra, you are excused.

CORDELIA: *(To FLAVIUS.)* I instruct the servants.

FLAVIUS: *(Calmly.)* Myra ...

MYRA: *(Rising.)* Very good, sir. *(SHE exits SL.)*

CORDELIA: *(Bitterly.)* You expect me to keep the servants' respect when you undermine my authority? You do not command the house, Flavius!

FLAVIUS: How well I know.

CORDELIA: The emissary is arriving tonight perchance to bring word from Rome! You may be the next governor of Tysus!

FLAVIUS: So my roses will sway his opinion?

CORDELIA: Make fun, but mark my words. If all goes well tonight, I shall sleep with the new Roman governor tomorrow.

FLAVIUS: That would please you, my dear?

CORDELIA: Do I look like a fool? Of course, it would please me! I, the wife of a governor! You will then have lived up to your promise, Flavius ... for I saw that success in you thirteen years ago.

FLAVIUS: These are troubled times, Cordelia. Very troubled.

CORDELIA: Precisely why a man of your talents is needed to control the spread of this diabolical cult!

FLAVIUS: And just what can my talents do against this ... this Christianity?

CORDELIA: *(Proudly.)* Stop it! Stamp it out by punishing those not loyal to Roman rule. By making examples. You are an effective officer, Flavius. You rule your people firmly, but fairly. The emperor knows you can enforce the law with justice.

FLAVIUS: What does the emperor know of justice?

CORDELIA: *(Frightened.)* Flavius! Say nothing more ... the very bricks have ears!

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