

The City Scene

By Frank Gagliano

PART ONE
PARADISE GARDENS EAST

PART TWO
CONERICO WAS HERE TO STAY



Samuel French, Inc.

THE CITY SCENE

(Two Plays, PARADISE GARDENS EAST and CONERICO WAS HERE TO STAY)

PARADISE GARDENS EAST

(First Play in “The City Scene,” published by Samuel French)

***BROTHER: This'll scare the rapist off. It fires blanks. If he gets by that
(Pulls out switchblade knife) This button springs it. Here you try it.
For God's sake, don't you be afraid if it! That filthy rapist has to be afraid of
it! We'll have a little dry Run. Now. . .I'm the rapist. . .***

Sis, suffering from terrible laryngitis, arrives in the big city from Bodoni County. Her brother, who lives in a New York apartment complex, Paradise Gardens East, takes her in and sets out to protect her from prowlers, rapists and other horrors.

While he is out on a violence-repelling errand, Brother locks Sis in his apartment, and a strange young man, who calls himself William Saroyan O'Neill, appears on her window ledge. Protesting air pollution, he threatens to jump. The crowd below thinks he is suicidal wants him to jump.

The brother returns. A furious encounter with William Saroyan O'Neill on the ledge results in an unexpected ending and with Sis regaining her voice.

Part I:

PARADISE GARDENS EAST

A Play in One Act

by

Frank Gagliano

CHARACTERS

SIS

FAT LADY

WINDOW MAN

ALARM MAN

SOUNDPROOFING MAN

BOSSA NOVA VOICE

LONG-HAIRED VOICE

BROTHER

WILLIAM SAROYAN O'NEILL

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

SCENE

An apartment on New York's Upper East Side.

Paradise Gardens East

SCENE: *A newly painted efficiency apartment in a fairly new apartment house in New York's upper East Side. The room has a stepladder-stool, a newly-installed phone that is on the floor, some closed cartons and a few lamps. The door—of solid wood—is locked with a Segal lock, a spring lock, a bolt and a chain.*

AT RISE: SIS, wearing a striped dress (or striped blouse and striped skirt) and a scarf around her throat, sits on the stepladder-stool in the center of the room spraying her throat with a pocket atomizer. At the open window, a WORKMAN is installing hinges for folding gates which are leaning against the wall near the window. On his back is written the legend: KEEP OUT RAPISTS. INSTALL ACE WINDOW GATES. Through the window, a fairly wide concrete ledge can be seen. ANOTHER MAN is putting wire around the closet door. His legend: DISCOURAGE RAPISTS: ACE ALARM SYSTEM. A FAT LADY, wearing a robe with floral design, is holding a can of beer which she occasionally sips through two straws.

FAT LADY. Location-wise, sweetie, you got a pretty good deal. (*Goes to window.*) This high up you only get about half as much the soot as the lower floors.

(SIS cheerfully moves to the FAT LADY and accidentally knocks the gates over.)

WINDOW MAN. Watch it, lady.

FAT LADY. (*Ignoring him.*) Super says—Super's my

husband, sweetie—Super says they were thinkin' of installin' those her-met-ic-al-ly sealed windows here in Paradise Gardens East. Would'a hated that. I like to open windows an' look out on the world.

(SIS steps into the gates again.)

WINDOW MAN. The gates, lady!

FAT LADY. I'm down lower, you know. Right over that beautiful statue in the garden. Adam and Eve coverin' their privates. Super says that statue is one helluva expensive work o' art. And that garden— isn't it a honey. Not one blade o' grass is real. Not one blessed bush. Class. Real class. *(SIS rises, moves to the door.)* Now, you don't want to get to the door, sweetie. The draft out there is bad for your sore throat. *(SIS sits again and sprays her throat.)* Say, your brother says you paint and make up poems and things. You'll love this neighborhood, too, then. *(Thinks.)* You can't see the river from here, of course. And there ain't many trees to speak of. *(Brightening up.)* But there's all them artistic statues. Julius Caesar at Colosseum East. That naked statue of David at Sodom House . . . Really gives me a charge, this neighborhood. Well, I was used to the West Side before. Super worked three brownstones there. *(Disgusted.)* Stoops . . . kids . . . garbage cans . . . People movin' in and movin' out in the middle of the night. And *you* know what people I mean. They work for us here on the East Side. I rate a terrific girl myself. And, sweetie, if you or your brother ever wants a good worker—dirt cheap—I'll give him mine . . .

(SIS is up again and backs into the ALARM MAN.)

ALARM MAN. Careful, will ya? You want me to trip the alarm?

FAT LADY. And the fairies are different here, too. Very refined. Don't you like the way they all wear the same clothes and kind'a talk alike? Very elegant. On the West

FAT LADY. Runt dwarf! (*She grabs him and hurls him across the room.*)

BROTHER. (*Disentangling himself from SOUNDPROOFING MAN and ALARM MAN.*) Get back to work, I said! (*He stands just as the flying WINDOW MAN crashes into him and he's down again.*)

(*SIS keeps staring at the blank wall.*)

SOUNDPROOFING MAN. (*Rising.*) You can't see from here anyway. (*He rushes to the door, unlocks all the locks and runs out. The other two WORKING MEN follow.*)

WORKMEN. "Right!" "Let's go!"

FAT LADY. Crap! He's still around the bend. They're right. (*She runs out and knocks over BROTHER who has just gotten to his feet.*)

BROTHER. What is this? A goddamned soccer game? (*Staggers to his feet.*) I'm no goddamned soccer ball. (*He turns, goes to the satchel, pulls out an ice bucket with three splits of champagne sitting in crushed ice. He takes one bottle and uncorks it and drinks. The loud POP spins SIS around.*) Now don't get scared. It's only champagne. (*She can't believe it. She moves closer.*) Champagne! Tiny bottles of champagne! From that shipboard, bon-voyage party for Mr. Clap—or Syph—or whatever-the-hell our former Commissioner's name is. *Shipboard party!* Remember? The one I *thought* I was invited to. (*To the door.*) Well, O.K., Mr. Syph—you and the other politicians and your molls treat me like dirt under your feet—like I'm not there—so— (*He makes the Italian F-arm.*) I steal your champagne.

(*The door bursts open and FAT LADY, followed by all the WORKMEN, come running back in, knock over BROTHER and rush to the window.*)

FAT LADY. He's coming around the bend.

(*Similar business at window. SIS, frightened, has retreated to her wall again. She sobs.*)

head.) Tsk! Tsk! Tsk! I can just see their poor, strapped-in fannies. Black and blue from being—suffocated. Black and blue like they've been pinched all over. All black and blue . . . and plump! (*Turns to Sis.*) Do you want black and blue plumps? (*Sis shakes her head.*) I mean, you play their kind of game, and a guy—half-excited off his nut—will follow you home one night and— (*Sings to the tune of "You Oughtta Be in Pictures."*)

"You're gonna make the headlines—

Dismembered in the dark . . ."

So, please . . . please don't try to get out. Look, Sis, this isn't Bodoni County any more. No more keeping doors open. No more trusting anybody. No more taking walks anywhere—any time. Now, I told you that. And it isn't only that grisly stuff I'm talking about. It's that sick-to-your-stomach feeling you get when you come home, find you apartment's been turned inside out—ransacked—violated . . . Well, he's not going to violate my castle—or my sister. You'll see. I'll climb that old ladder of success and have money and power to . . . 'Cause I won't be one of those faceless men downtown for long; kept behind a cage just stamping building permits. (*Shakes bottle at door.*) That's right, Mr. Syph! —I'll get to know the ropes, start from the bottom and get a political job—maybe even yours. (*To Sis.*) So you'll relax, huh? Paint, write, read and just cook for your important brother. And I'll be mother, father, body-guard and private detective to . . . the little sparrow. (*Sings.*)

"She's only a bird in a gilded cage,
And she better act her age."

SIS. Cough, cough!

BROTHER. That damned, silly laryngitis. (*Offers her the bottle.*) Try some of this. (*Pulls it away.*) No. You'd get high and topple out the window. (*He drinks. Looks around.*) Now—how have things been going? (*Goes to window.*) Gates ready to be put on hinges. That's something . . . Long way to go on soundproofing . . . Alarm . . . (*Moves to fuse box fixture near the front door and*

forehead.) Lock up behind me. (*He unlocks all the locks and opens the door. Sees something.*) Oh, damn! (*Steps out for a moment and carries in two rolled-up sleeping bags.*) Lucky thing they weren't taken. (*He places them in the center of the floor.*) Outfoxed the department store. Knew they'd be late with the cots. So I got these. (*Moves to the door, looks back over his shoulder as he talks.*) Always gotta be one step ahead— (*He trips. Quickly gets to his feet and mumbles as he leaves.*) Goddamn floor . . . That super better watch it. (*He exits, sipping his champagne. We hear a BOLT closing on the other side of the door.*)

(*SIS runs to the door. Tries it. It won't open. She backs up into the room and almost back-trips over one of the sleeping bags. The CROWD noises outside have grown considerably louder. She picks up bed roll to move it out of the way. She feels something in the bed roll. Unties it, rolls it out and about a dozen splits of champagne go rolling around the room. She runs around picking up the bottles and when she has just picked up one near the window, a YOUNG MAN, wearing a surgical mask, suddenly appears on the window ledge. CROWD roars. SIS runs away from the window still clutching the armful of champagne.*)

YOUNG MAN. (*Squatting.*) They want me to jump. Can't blame them. Why else would the shmuck be on the ledge? (*SIS is frantically moving about the apartment. He pulls off surgical mask.*) Hey. Don't be frightened. I won't come in. (*Points down.*) They might leave if I get off the ledge. Excuse me a minute. (*He stands and appears to be losing his footing. The CROWD roars. Squats again.*) I lose them if I don't do that once in awhile. (*SIS has put the bottles down and picked up the satchel. She places one hand in it and leans back against the door.*) I'm extremely sure-footed. That's one of my problems. Otherwise I'd probably just slip and—schplat!—that's the end of that. Owe that to my father. Damn him. Loved heights. Only took jobs on skyscrapers, bridges—

tight and *air out the room?* Remember how great it was, when you came back, to find the room *aired out?* A magical moment! But kids today can never know that. The room can't be aired out because the windows can't be opened because of . . . AIR POLLUTION. (*Grabs Sis's hands.*) Oh, Miss, I know it's sick to fix so obsessively on something everyone accepts, but IT MAKES ME DESPAIR!

(*SOUND: AMPLIFIER feedback.*)

AMPLIFIED VOICE. OK, you up there! The countdown has begun. 100-99-98-97-96-95—(*Continues under.*)

(*Pause.*)

WILLIAM SAROYAN O'NEILL. (*He releases her as he sniffs the air.*) There's little time left. (*Speaks faster.*) I told them a man—THIS man—would do away with himself if something wasn't done. The police. The newspapers. And those faceless people downtown. I informed them all. They thought I was kidding. Well, here I am. (*Stands.*) I wasn't kidding!

(*CROWD roars out one word.*)

CROWD. Jump!

WILLIAM SAROYAN O'NEILL. (*Kneels.*) Yes, now I'm here and it's all mixed up. It won't change a thing. That voice before didn't even mention my name. No one knows my name. This gesture is for nothing. So I just forget it. Right? But I can't. I got something started now. A terrible, absurd action that demands a resolution. And the resolution they want is the violent one. You heard him—either jump or they tear me apart. That's really the only choice. And they're right. This insane thing I started demands that kind of resolution. Anything less would be dissatisfying. But, Miss, I don't want to fellow-through that way. I said "schplat" before. Now "schplat" frightens

CONERICO WAS HERE TO STAY

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