

## ACT ONE

### Scene One

*Tutbury, February 1569.*

ROSE 1 *and* ROSE 2.

ROSE 2. The night before it all starts, I have a row with Ma because she's found out I've been stealing. She yells at me, says I could have got caught. I tell her –

ROSE 1. I never stole anything in me life!

ROSE 2. Which is a lie – I steal something at least once a week. Ma does her usual bit about how she wishes she had a son instead of me, that she can't hold her head high in society –

ROSE 1. What are you talking about? We live in a stinking hovel!

ROSE 2. She gasps and takes a swing – but it doesn't hurt because she's too drunk and can't see what she's doing. Then Ma's New Man comes in.

ROSE 1. Oh, no...

ROSE 2. Incidentally he does have a name, but they change so often I just call them all New Man. Ma says, 'Oh, New Man, she's been stealing again.' And New Man says, 'We're not angry, just disappointed.'

So I leave before being tempted to throw something very hard at his face.

I go to The Dog and Partridge. I drink the dregs of someone else's pint while they're not looking, and relieve a poor old gent of a burden he shouldn't have to shoulder in his later years.

ROSE 1 *holds out a wallet.*

And then I go to my favourite place, which is this ditch on the other side of the river, just beyond the village.

ROSE 1 *sits on the floor.*

I don't sleep very much because it's February and I'm gonna die if I don't keep moving, but for a while I wrap myself up and look at the castle. It's high above my head, and I can see the candlelight flickering where the rich folks go about from room to room. I reckon they've got time to have clever thoughts because they don't have to think about how they're gonna survive the night.

I tell myself:

ROSE 1. Tomorrow, I'm gonna finally leave this place. I can't stay in Tutbury. I've got to get out of here, go and learn to do something proper and beautiful, like... sewing!

ROSE 2. Don't laugh. I know it's not for people like me. But I like patterns. These grubby little hands that currently steal from others could become –

ROSE 1. The delicate fingers of a seamstress!

ROSE 2. Alright. It's a long shot.

But the wallet I've stolen will give me enough money to get to a new village, get employment somewhere, start doing something with my life.

It feels good.

ROSE 1. Tomorrow is the start of a new dawn!

ROSE 2. Then I open up the wallet.

ROSE 1 *opens the wallet.*

And there's nothing in it.

ROSE 1 *sighs. She puts her head in her hands.*

And I wonder how long I can just sit there, without moving, considering the sheer, blinding, pointlessness of my life, before I freeze into a statue.

But that's because it's the night *before* it starts, and as of tomorrow, I start to be a little bit less pointless.

This is the story of a thief who changed the course of history.

*Enter BESS 2, a WAITING LADY, and MARY 2.*

MARY 2. No. It's the story of a queen who triumphs over adversity.

WAITING LADY. It's the story of a sovereign who extends the hand of friendship to an unworthy cousin.

BESS 2. It's an administrative nightmare, that's what it is.

*Everyone exits except BESS 2, who stays onstage for the next scene.*

## Scene Two

*In The Dog and Partridge Inn, Tutbury, the next day.*

BESS 1, BESS 2 and WALSINGHAM.

BESS 2. I am not fond of taverns, especially the notorious Dog and Partridge. But I have been summoned here to meet the master schemer himself, Lord Walsingham. And an invitation from Walsingham cannot be refused.

BESS 1 *is looking at paperwork.*

I am reading papers that chart the journey of Mary, Queen of the Scots, as she makes her inexorable way towards my house.

WALSINGHAM. She escaped from Scotland in a fishing boat and has been held at Bolton Castle. She will arrive here tomorrow.

BESS 1. Why us?

WALSINGHAM. If she goes home now, her own people will kill her. But if she travels to France or Spain she will become a rallying cry for Catholics everywhere. The kingdom is too unstable – there are plots and rumours enough already without adding fuel to the fire. Her Majesty feels that you are one of the few people she can trust. Mary will stay with you until a safe return to Scotland can be arranged.

BESS 1. We are barely ready. The castle is freezing and the kitchen's too small.

WALSINGHAM. Her Majesty appreciates the inconvenience.

BESS 1. We will need more money.

WALSINGHAM. Your husband indicated otherwise.

BESS 1. George knows nothing of the accounts.

WALSINGHAM. We have already provided a / significant –

BESS 1. Nothing like enough – it will cost me fifty-two pounds a week.

WALSINGHAM. I will entreat Her Majesty for more funds.

BESS 1. Thank you.

WALSINGHAM. Grant me a favour in return. I need to know everything she says. Obtain a copy of all correspondence and send it to me.

BESS 1. I thought she was forbidden to write –

WALSINGHAM. On the contrary, it should be encouraged. How else will we know her plans? But she must not know it is being intercepted. One of my men will come here once a week to collect anything you have. If there is something urgent – concerning Her Majesty's safety – it is better for it to come straight to London. Send someone who would never be suspected.

BESS 1 *goes to the door.*

BESS 1. Cecily.

*Enter CECILY.*

CECILY. Yes, madam?

BESS 1. She's been with me since she was a little girl. *(To CECILY.)* This is Lord Walsingham.

WALSINGHAM *(studying CECILY)*. Yes. Good.

BESS 1. How will I make sure she reaches you safely?

WALSINGHAM. I have people stationed at inns all the way along the London road – if she presents an agreed token she will be looked after and accompanied to the next one with no questions asked. What will be the token?

BESS 1. This ring?

*She shows him a ring, which he briefly inspects.*

WALSINGHAM. Very well.

BESS 1. We have insufficient staff.

WALSINGHAM. Recruit more, pick them up off the street if you have to.

BESS 1. I cannot just coopt people –

WALSINGHAM. Accuse them of a crime, then tell them they can either face justice or come and work for you.

BESS 1. Is that how you do it?

WALSINGHAM. Cecily, here is your first task. See that girl out there? I want you to make it look as though she has stolen your mistress's glove.

*CECILY is alarmed. She looks at BESS 1, who takes off her glove and gives it to her.*

CECILY. Madam – I –

*WALSINGHAM goes to the window and shouts –*

WALSINGHAM. Stop – thief! That girl stole the lady's glove! Catch her!

*(Back to CECILY and BESS 1.) You've got about a minute before they start to pull her hair out. (To CECILY.) When she's on the floor, plant the glove.*

BESS 1. Go.

*CECILY exits.*

WALSINGHAM. Plenty of time for a drink before you face the cold air.

*He pours them both a glass of wine.*

How you stand living in the north I have no idea.

BESS 1. We are born with thicker skins.

*They drink.*