



Dwayne Yancey

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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P.O. Box 1401

Rapid City, SD 57709

THIS ROSE HAS THORNS was first performed by the Burwood Student Theatre company, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia, April 2018: John Jennings, director; Robert Lawrence and Alex Wadds, assistant directors; Lucas Beyer, Tom Montgomerie, Matthew Carcassi, Jennifer Howell, Monique Lautier, and Deborah Whitaker, crew.

ROSE: Ashlee Lambton

LILY: Bianca Heard

TOBY: Sam Corr

PERCY: Michael Young

PHOEBE: Melanie Thoren

LADY EDWINA: Tia Hogan

MAYOR DIDDLESPOON: Jordan McGowan

MORGAN: Anna-Jean Bala

MISTRESS SLOWLY: Lucia Kelly

CONSTABLE: Nick Sidari

MAD MARY: Rachel Lawrence

ROBERT: Richard Ung

WILLIAM: Rayhan Maskun

THIS ROSE HAS THORNS

Winner, Victorian Drama League Award, 2018

FARCE. Audiences will love this side-splitting Shakespearean parody! Rose and Lily receive letters informing them that their “true” loves, William and Robert, have been arrested, imprisoned in the Tower of London, and are awaiting execution. Vowing to rescue their beloveds, Lily and Rose set off disguised as a nobleman and his servant. Along the way, Rose and Lily meet two scoundrels, Toby and Percy, who swindle them out of their riches. Penniless, Lily and Rose hear of a village where residents hate actors so much, they pay for them to go away. All they have to do is find some “actors.” Who best to play actors? Why, the scalawags who swindled them out of their money and horse, of course! When the foursome reaches the village of Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese, they are dismayed when Mayor Diddlespoon insists they perform a romantic comedy so he can win the heart of the wealthy Lady Edwina. The only problem is that puritanical, book-burning Lady Edwina hates theatre! This uproarious play features scene-stealers for everyone in the cast and numerous opportunities to showcase physical humor.

Performance Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(6 M, 7 F, extras)

ROSE: Eldest daughter of Lord Northumberland who disguises herself as a nobleman and sets out to rescue her beloved, William, from the Tower of London; plays the role of Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*; wears clothing to disguise herself as a nobleman; female.

LILY: Rose's younger sister who disguises herself as a servant and sets out to rescue her beloved, Robert, from the Tower of London; plays the role of Count Paris in *Romeo and Juliet*; wears clothing to disguise herself as a nobleman's servant; female.

TOBY: Dimwitted con artist who swindles Rose and Lily out of all their money and a horse; plays the role of Juliet's Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*; male.

PERCY: Toby's chatty partner in crime, who is a tad smarter than Toby; plays the role of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*; male.

MAYOR DIDDLESPOON: Mayor of Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese who is in love with Lady Edwina because she is rich; male.

LADY EDWINA: The Puritanical, book-burning, theatre-hating daughter of a wealthy lord; wears an unadorned brown or gray dress with a high neck or Puritan collar; female.

PHOEBE: Lady Edwina's spirited servant who loves theatre, particularly romantic comedies; female.

CONSTABLE JACK SPROUT: Sleepy, gullible constable of Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese who loves theatre; male.

MISTRESS SLOWLY: Slow-moving pub wench in Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese; female.

MAD MARY: Mad peasant who continuously searches for roots to eat; female.

“SIR” MORGAN: A woman disguised as a knight who is in the service of Lord Northumberland and tasked with bringing Rose and Lily home; female.

WILLIAM: Rose’s beloved, who is a real cad; male.

ROBERT: Lily’s beloved, who is also a cad; male.

EXTRAS: As Theatre-Goers, Pub Patrons, and Wenches.

SETTING

Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese and Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese, Elizabethan England.

SETS

Settings may be suggested with simple props.

Rose's bedroom. There is a large trunk and assorted clothing and weapons.

Castle library. There is a fireplace and stacks of books.

A road near a woods. There is a backdrop of a forest and two trees large enough for Rose and Lily to hide behind.

Town square, Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese. There are two stockades. Later, seats are brought on for play's audience.

Mayor's office, Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese. There is a chair and a small desk with a pile of official papers on it.

Pub. There are several small tables with chairs.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Lord Northumberland's castle, Rose's bedroom.

Scene 2: A castle in another village, the library.

Scene 3: A road that leads to Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese.

Scene 4: Town square, Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese.

Scene 5: Office of Mayor Diddlespoon, Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese.

Scene 6: Town square, Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Town square, Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese, the next day, before the performance.

Scene 2: A castle in another village, the library.

Scene 3: Town square, Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese, the next day, before the performance.

Scene 4: Town square, Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese, the performance is about to begin.

Scene 5: An alley, Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese, minutes later.

Scene 6: Inside a pub, Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese, a short time later.

Scene 7: A road that leads away from Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese.

PROPS

Trunk
Assorted clothing
Mace
2 Daggers
Letter
Knitting needles and yarn
6 Swords
Pillowcase with a hole in it
Nobleman's clothing that can be worn under a dress, for Rose
Assorted books
Bouquet of colorful flowers
Whip, for Constable
Coins
Sword, for Sir Morgan
Bright, gaudy clothing to disguise Toby and Percy as actors
Dress, for Toby's Nurse costume
Dress, for Percy's Juliet costume
Men's clothing, for Lily's Count Paris costume
Men's clothing, for Rose's Romeo costume
Cards
Money
2 Horse reins
Cork

THIS ROSE HAS THORNS
jo

SOUND EFFECTS

Knock on the door

Sound of a ruckus

Sound of crockery breaking

THIS ROSE HAS THORNS
II

"WE'RE NOT FRAUDS...
WE'RE ACTORS."

—ROSE

ACT I
SCENE I

(AT RISE: Lord Northumberland's castle, Rose's bedroom. Cool, calm, and collected, Rose is methodically packing a trunk with clothes. She then starts packing weapons. As she takes each weapon, she coolly admires it and wraps it in clothing.)

LILY: (Offstage, calls.) Rose! Rose! Rose! Where are—?
(Frantic, she enters, waving a letter. Lily also has her knitting with her.) Oh, there you are! It's horrible! It's dreadful! The most awful thing has happened!

(With her back to Lily, Rose continues packing and calmly replies during the following.)

ROSE: I know.

LILY: My Robert...he sent me a letter—

ROSE: I know.

LILY: He says he's been arrested!

ROSE: I know.

LILY: They're taking him to the Tower of London!

ROSE: I know.

LILY: He says they're going to chop off his head, and I'll never see him again, and I—

ROSE: Should forget all about him and forget he ever existed and just get on with—

LILY: My life and— (Stops, confused.) How did you know that?

ROSE: I got the same letter from William.

LILY: They arrested William, too?

ROSE: (Calmly, off-handedly.) High crimes...treason...this, that, or the other.

LILY: But what did they do?

ROSE: I hardly think that matters at this point, now does it?

LILY: *(Thinks.)* Oh, I suppose not. *(Emotional.)* But they're going to chop off his head!

ROSE: That is the standard punishment.

LILY: But...but...they're going to kill him!

ROSE: Having one's head removed does tend to result in that condition.

LILY: But...but...how can you be so calm about all this?

ROSE: Do I look calm to you?

LILY: Yes!

ROSE: Good. It's important to be calm. "Keep calm and carry on," that's what they say.

LILY: What's what who says?

ROSE: That fellow Shakespeare, I think. If not, he should have. In any case, I'm saying it now, "Keep calm and carry on."

LILY: Carry on? But I don't want to carry on! I want to do something!

ROSE: I agree.

LILY: We've got to go tell Father!

(Rose picks up a sword and starts to wrap it in clothing.)

ROSE: Father will do nothing. He will say they're rogues and rascals and deserve whatever they get and instead marry us off to the boring sons of some minor, but thoroughly respectable, nobleman and not think anything more about it until he comes to attend the christening of the first of our 11 children.

LILY: Eleven children?

ROSE: Well, maybe 13 for you. I don't judge.

LILY: But...but...but... *(Slight pause.)* Is that father's sword?

ROSE: Quite possibly.

LILY: Why do you have Father's sword?

(Rose unwraps the sword.)

ROSE: (*Showing it off.*) Because it's sharp.

LILY: But—

ROSE: And because I don't have one of my own.

LILY: Well, of course not.

ROSE: (*Waving the sword around.*) Somehow Father thinks teaching young ladies how to use a sword is rather unladylike. Do you think it's unladylike? I don't think it's unladylike. But it is unquestionably sharp. (*"Pokes" a hole in the pillowcase.*) This one ought to do good service if put to the test, don't you think?

(*Lily peers into the trunk and pulls out a mace.*)

LILY: Is this a mace?

ROSE: Very good. I see you've been paying attention at all the jousting tournaments.

LILY: They don't use maces at jousting tournaments.

ROSE: Trick question. All the better, you'll do just fine.

LILY: Just fine at what? (*Spies something in the trunk.*) Wait. Are those...daggers?

(*Lily pulls several daggers from Rose's trunk. Rose takes one of the daggers.*)

ROSE: (*From "Macbeth," recites.*)

"Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee."
We saw that one last summer. You hold it like this.
(*Demonstrates.*) Now, put those back. Can't you see I'm
packing, not unpacking?

LILY: What are you doing?

ROSE: What do you think I'm doing? I'm going to do what any young woman in love would do when her beloved is unfairly arrested and taken to the Tower, never to return upon pain of death.

LILY: Grieve for a week and then marry someone else?

ROSE: Don't be ridiculous. I'm going to rescue him.

LILY: You're going to what?

ROSE: You heard me..."rescue." It's a common enough word. Didn't our tutor teach you anything, or were you too busy doing needlework to be a proper lady?

LILY: I know what the word means!

ROSE: Then you know what it is, then.

LILY: But you can't go rescue him!

ROSE: Of course, I can. And you're coming with me.

LILY: Me?

ROSE: You're in love with Robert, aren't you?

LILY: Well, yes, but—

ROSE: And he's been arrested, too, hasn't he?

LILY: Well, yes, but—

ROSE: Then there you have it. It's settled.

LILY: What's settled? I don't understand! We can't just go riding off to London to assault the Tower by ourselves!

ROSE: And why can't we?

LILY: Well, for one thing, the Tower is guarded...well guarded!

ROSE: And we're well armed. Plus, we have the element of surprise. The attacker always has the advantage. Elementary warfare. One of Father's knights taught me that. You know, the new one who doesn't smell like horse breath yet? Taught me a few fancy moves, too. (*Demonstrates a few moves with the sword.*) I knew those dance lessons would come in handy. En garde! That's French for "prepare to be spit-roasted." Next?

LILY: But...but...London is a long way from here.

ROSE: Then we'll have to travel, won't we?

LILY: But we're...we're young ladies!

ROSE: A fact I am intimately familiar with.

LILY: We can't just go riding off to London on our own! It's dangerous! It's probably against the law! It's...it's...it's just not done!

ROSE: You're right. It's not. Two young ladies out on the road together...easy prey for highwaymen or wolves, or worse.

LILY: I hadn't even thought about wolves.

ROSE: Which is why we won't be traveling as young ladies.
(Starts to remove her dress, revealing men's clothing underneath.)

LILY: What are you talking about? What are you doing?

ROSE: We'll be traveling as men...young, adventurous, bold-hearted men. Behold, a nobleman from the north country! And, as we all know, every nobleman carries a sword.
(Takes out her father's sword and brandishes it.) Stand back, you villains, or I'll make a mince pie out of you!

LILY: But...but...but what about me?

ROSE: I'm not going to make a mince pie out of you. I don't even like mince. (Stops brandishing the sword and admires it.) But I do like this sword. (Puts the sword back. From "Romeo and Juliet," recites.) "A rose by any other name..." and all that. Let's just say this rose has thorns.

LILY: I mean, what am I supposed to do while you're dressed up like that?

ROSE: You...you, my dear little sister Lily, you shall be disguised as my faithful servant.

LILY: A servant?

ROSE: A faithful servant. Every nobleman needs a servant. It's how you know he's a nobleman. Otherwise, he's just a chap in fancy clothes. Now, here, go get ready. We leave at midnight.

LILY: Midnight? I can't...I won't...this is—

ROSE: Do you love your Robert?

LILY: Well, yes, but—

ROSE: Midnight by the garden gate.

LILY: But—

ROSE: Fine. Take one of the daggers. You'll need it. (Lily looks in the trunk, pulls out one of the daggers, and studies it suspiciously.) You might want the other one. It matches your eyes. You always care about that sort of thing, not that

it matters much when you're engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

LILY: I'm not carrying a dagger.

ROSE: *(Acting out her imagined assault.)* That may prove to be somewhat of a handicap when we're fighting our way into the Tower...and back out again.

LILY: Ladies do not carry weapons.

ROSE: You carry knitting needles, don't you?

LILY: Well, yes, but—

ROSE: Let me see those. *(Lily holds up the knitting needles. Inspecting the knitting needles.)* Hmm...sharp...good for sticking things at close range. Sounds like a dagger to me.

(Lily grabs her knitting needles back from Rose.)

LILY: Then they'll do just fine, won't they? So there.

ROSE: You cannot go into battle armed with knitting needles. *(Lily pokes Rose with a knitting needle.)* Ow! Fine, fine, whatever. Just go get dressed.

LILY: *(Realizes.)* Oh!

ROSE: Now what?

LILY: I don't have a thing to wear!

(Exasperated, Lily exits. Rose continues to pack. Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: A castle in another village, the library. Edwina is rummaging through a great stack of books in her father's library. She takes a book flips through it, mutters disapprovingly, and tosses the book into the fireplace.)

EDWINA: (Looking at another book.) Disgusting! (Tosses the book into the fireplace and picks up another.) Disgraceful! (Tosses the book into the fireplace and picks up another.) Despicable! (Tosses the book in the fireplace and picks up another.) Well, this one may not be so bad... (Flips through the book.) Oh! Deplorable!

(Edwina tosses the book into the fireplace and picks up another. Phoebe enters, carrying a bouquet of colorful flowers. Edwina doesn't look up.)

PHOEBE: My Lady—

EDWINA: (Indicating bouquet.) Take them away.

PHOEBE: But, my lady—

EDWINA: I said, I don't want them!

PHOEBE: But what's wrong with them?

EDWINA: They're too colorful.

PHOEBE: They're flowers.

EDWINA: I'm aware of that. And do you know why flowers are colorful?

PHOEBE: Um, to be pretty?

EDWINA: To attract the attention of bees.

PHOEBE: I'm pretty sure there aren't any bees in here.

EDWINA: It's how flowers— (Stops.) Well, I'm not going to say it. It's indecent.

PHOEBE: (Smells the flowers deeply.) Oh!

EDWINA: Throw them out.

PHOEBE: But Mr. Diddlespoon sent them to you.

EDWINA: All the more reason to dispose of them. Dreadful little man. (*Indicating book.*) Speaking of dreadful... (*Tosses the book into the fireplace.*)

PHOEBE: But he's the mayor! The mayor of Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese!

EDWINA: Exactly, a small-minded little peasant who's been inexplicably raised up so high in his squalid little excuse for a town that he thinks he's a giant.

PHOEBE: Oh. But he's quite good looking! And charming! And... (*Smells the flowers deeply.*) Oh!

EDWINA: Disreputable. (*Tosses another book into the fireplace.*)

PHOEBE: Oh, no, he's quite— (*Slight pause.*) Why are you throwing your father's old books in the fireplace?

EDWINA: Because that is customarily where one burns things.

PHOEBE: But why do you want to burn his books?

EDWINA: I don't wish to burn his books. I wish to rid this household of the vile contagion of diseased thoughts.

PHOEBE: Diseased thoughts? You're burning medical journals?

EDWINA: I'm burning anything that's meant to infect the world with the sins of idleness and frivolity and inappropriate joy.

PHOEBE: "Inappropriate joy"?

EDWINA: You're right, an unnecessary phrase. Joy alone will suffice. We must purge ourselves of all unnecessary things: unnecessary words, unnecessary thoughts—

PHOEBE: (*Sarcastically.*) Unnecessary wealth?

EDWINA: Don't be ridiculous. The peasants are unable to control their—urges—as they are. We, of higher breeding, must protect them from their baser instincts. It's bad enough we allow them their trivial sports and amusements; just imagine if they could afford even more extravagant indulgences? That's why we tax them so much.

PHOEBE: So by taxing them, you're protecting the poor from themselves?

EDWINA: Of course.

PHOEBE: (*Sarcastically.*) I'm sure they're grateful.

EDWINA: Gratitude is an earthly sentiment that betrays the weakness of emotion. Their reward shall be in heaven. Or someplace somewhat lower, if need be. (*Indicating book.*) Diabolical. (*Tosses the book into the fireplace.*)

PHOEBE: Don't you think your father is going to miss those books when he gets back from London?

EDWINA: I rather think he should thank me.

PHOEBE: Thank you? For what?

EDWINA: He'd be unhappy to return to find his fields untended and weeds choking out his crops, wouldn't he?

PHOEBE: Well, yes, but—

EDWINA: Same principle applies here. I'm merely weeding out noxious growth before they can take root and spread.

PHOEBE: I'm not sure he'll see it that way.

EDWINA: That's because I'm afraid he has fallen prey to— (*Indicating book.*) Oh, my! Debauchery! (*Tosses the book into the fireplace.*) I am determined not to succumb to such debasement and degradation—

PHOEBE: And debt.

EDWINA: Gambling debts, I'm sorry to say. Once my father returns from paying them off in London, he will return home to find a more wholesome environment.

PHOEBE: And some holes in his library shelf.

EDWINA: I've also taken the liberty of having the wine in his cellar poured out.

PHOEBE: Not the wine!

EDWINA: The Lord works in mysterious ways, but the devil's work is quite well-known. Satan will find no refreshment here.

PHOEBE: (*Muttering.*) Nor will anyone else, apparently.

EDWINA: Sometimes the child must be parent to the father. It's for his own good, and everyone else's as well.

PHOEBE: I see. So...is there any message you'd like me to take back to Mr. Diddlespoon?

EDWINA: I have no interest in having any [intercourse-slash-discourse] with that man whatsoever. [*If desired, may replace with "discourse."*]

PHOEBE: (*Dreamily.*) But I do...

EDWINA: I beg your pardon?

PHOEBE: I mean, it would be polite to respond...

EDWINA: Politeness is a form of dishonesty. We must purge politeness from society.

PHOEBE: ...or least practical. You could...you could tell him you never want to hear from him again, so maybe he won't send you any more flowers. (*Smells flowers.*) Ah!

EDWINA: Very well, then. You may convey that message to him. As you can see, I have much work to do.

PHOEBE: Are you sure you really want—?

EDWINA: (*Indicating book.*) Depraved! (*Tosses the book into the fireplace.*)

PHOEBE: (*Gets an idea, mischievously.*) I'll get right to it.

(*Phoebe exits. Edwina inspects a new book.*)

EDWINA: (*Indicating book.*) Extraordinary! (*Slight pause.*) But egregious. (*Tosses the book into the fireplace. Blackout.*)

SCENE 3

(AT RISE: A road that leads to Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese. Disguised as a nobleman, Rose enters from the woods, looking slightly bedraggled from her adventures. She looks around.)

ROSE: (Calls.) Lily! Lily! Hurry up! We're burning daylight! (To herself.) That sounds familiar. Where have I heard that before? I rather like it. I think I'll make it my new catch phrase. (Calls.) Lily! Daylight! Burning! (Disguised as a male servant, Lily enters, doubled over. It is obvious Lily is sick. She is coughing, hacking, and clutching her stomach.) There you are. It's about time. You've got to keep up!

LILY: It would help if I could keep things down!

ROSE: It's not the plague. It'll pass.

LILY: That's not a problem, either.

ROSE: So where are the horses? (Unable to speak, Lily holds up one finger and points toward the woods.) Well, go get them. (Studies the road.) Now, I wonder which way we want to go here?

LILY: There's just one horse now, remember?

ROSE: Oh, yes...that.

LILY: Yes, that. (Starts coughing.)

ROSE: What's wrong with you? Buck up now. Be a man! Even if you're not.

LILY: I'm not a man, and I'm— (Starts coughing.) Oh, goodness! (Runs behind a tree to throw up.)

ROSE: What's the matter, little sister, can't handle your liquor? Maybe you shouldn't have had so much to drink back there at that pub!

(Lily emerges from behind the tree.)

LILY: Maybe you shouldn't have gambled away one of our horses!

ROSE: It's important to blend in, act the part, be one of the boys.

LILY: Maybe we shouldn't have even gone into that pub!

ROSE: We were hungry...thirsty. I just had no idea it would be so –

LILY: Dirty? Disgusting?

ROSE: (*In a revolting way.*) Manly.

LILY: Like I said –

ROSE: So...we still have one horse. Off we go, then.

LILY: Why'd you think it was a good idea to get involved in that card game, anyway?

ROSE: Because I had no idea we'd run out of money so quickly. Who knew ordering the roasted pheasant with cream sauce would be so expensive? It never is at home. Father just says he wants a roasted pheasant, and, behold, there's a roasted pheasant. He doesn't have to pay anything for it. Do you think that's because he's a lord?

LILY: I noticed everyone else was eating...well, I don't know what it was.

ROSE: They did take more interest in us after we ordered the pheasant, though I must say it was a rather small bird they served us.

LILY: Looked more like a pigeon to me. Tasted like one, too. (*Picks the remains out of her teeth.*) Oh, gross! Is this a feather?

ROSE: And that cream sauce was most..."unique."

LILY: I don't think that's the word for it.

ROSE: It tasted like neither cream nor sauce.

LILY: It was lard.

ROSE: Fortunately, there was lots of wine to wash it down...lots of expensive wine.

LILY: I think they tricked us.

ROSE: Now, now, I don't think it's proper to question the local cuisine. "When in Rome" ...all that.

LILY: We're not in Rome! We're not anywhere!

ROSE: Cultural enlightenment is a sign of proper breeding.

LILY: There might have been some breeding going on back there, but it certainly wasn't proper.

ROSE: Besides, after that, those nice fellows invited us to play. It seemed the gentlemanly thing to do.

LILY: It wasn't so gentlemanly when they took our horse.

ROSE: It was all we had left. Decisions had to be made.

LILY: What made you think you knew how to play cards, anyway?

ROSE: I've watched Father before. *(On second thought.)* Well, from a distance...peeking through the keyhole.

LILY: Oh, goodness, here it comes again— *(Runs behind a tree to throw up.)*

ROSE: So why is the one with just one diamond worth so much and the ones with two so little? That makes no sense. *(Lily makes vomiting noises from behind the tree.)* You know, whenever Father has too much to drink, he always asks for something called, "hair of the dog." Perhaps we could find a puppy for you. *(Lily makes vomiting noises from behind the tree.)* Although I'm not sure how dog fur is supposed to help.

LILY: *(From behind the tree.)* No dogs. No nothing.

ROSE: Suit yourself. Now, this road—

LILY: *(From behind the tree.)* So why didn't you get sick?

ROSE: Because I ordered only the finest French wine. A nice claret, as I recall. That's what a nobleman would do.

LILY: That wasn't wine. That was pig swill.

ROSE: As my faithful servant, you had to make do with something a little less...refined.

LILY: That's not fair!

ROSE: It's custom...the natural order of things. *(Gesturing to indicate their stations in life.)* Master...servant. Big sister...little sister. It's all pretty much the same.

(Lily emerges from behind the tree.)

LILY: So you spent all our money on fancy food and drink and then gambled away one of our horses –

ROSE: If I'd won, we would have had a whole stable of horses pulling us in a fine carriage all the way to London. It seemed a fair wager.

LILY: So now what are we going to do? We can't carry everything and both of us on one horse!

ROSE: (*Annoyed.*) We could, if you hadn't brought along three trunks full of clothes.

LILY: You don't expect me to wear this old thing... (*Indicating her servant disguise.*) ...when we get to London, do you?

ROSE: Very well, then. You'll just have to walk.

LILY: Walk? I'm not walking all the way to London! Not in these shoes!

ROSE: (*Indicating Lily's shoes.*) Why are you wearing those?

LILY: Because I'm saving my heels for when we get to London. (*Rose gives her a look.*) What? I at least hold on to a shred of dignity because there's certainly none in these clothes you're making me wear. Do you think there's a shoe store around here somewhere?

ROSE: Your beloved Robert is in London, wasting away in the Tower, while every day the executioner sharpens his blade just a little bit more...or maybe dulls it, I'm not sure which.

LILY: Fine, I'll walk. But I'm still keeping my eye out for a shoe store...and maybe a hairdresser. I bet my hair is going to be a mess after all this.

ROSE: You do that. You also keep your eyes out for unicorns and fairies in case we run across any of those as well.

LILY: But we're going to need money.

ROSE: True, a most perplexing situation. How can two young ladies disguised as men raise money out on the road? (*Rose looks at Lily. Lily looks at Rose.*) I have no clue whatsoever.

LILY: Me, neither.

ROSE: We could sell the horse.

LILY: How would we travel then?

ROSE: We could get a cheaper horse. We could keep trading down until we get to London.

LILY: At that rate, we'd be riding into the city on a goat.

ROSE: We could sell all our earthly possessions...at least the ones we have packed in our trunks.

LILY: Not my ball gowns!

ROSE: And not my weapons. We'll need those weapons when we get to the Tower and burst in and — *(Hears a noise.)* What's that?

LILY: What's what?

ROSE: Quick! Assume the position!

LILY: What position?

ROSE: Whatever position a faithful servant assumes! I don't know! Now, quickly! Hide and follow my lead!

(Rose and Lily hide behind some trees. Mad Mary enters.)

MAD MARY: *(Muttering to herself as she looks for roots.)* Roots. Roots. Dig them up. Pull them up. Eat them up. Roots. Roots.

(Rose steps out from behind a tree, haughtily. Lily steps out from behind a tree, not quite so haughtily.)

ROSE: *(Calls.)* Excuse me, my good woman, cast your eyes hither.

(Mad Mary stops, looks up, seems to pull at her eyes, and stops.)

MAD MARY: Aye, my lord. One might cast dies as snake eyes, but I cannot cast my own eyes. They be attached. Shall I pluck them out for thee, my lord?

ROSE: I mean, look upon me, good woman, and tell me what you see.

MAD MARY: Aye, I see a man. A nobleman, by your bearing, my lord. *(Rose nods knowingly to Lily. Looking closer at Rose.)*

A rather fair-faced man. A smooth-faced man. A soft-faced man. A right womanly man.

ROSE: (*Uncomfortable, stepping away.*) That's rather enough.

So tell me, good woman, who might you be?

MAD MARY: Aye, they call me Mary. Mad Mary.

ROSE: Mad? What angers you, good woman?

MAD MARY: What angers me? Roman numerals anger me.

Games that end in ties. A sun that can only rise in the east and set in the west and never the other way around. Raindrops that can only fall down but never up. Streams that only know one way to flow. The lack of dragons flying across the sky. Yes, I do believe a good dragon now and then would improve my humor –

ROSE: Right, I see –

MAD MARY: But, mostly, I'm just mad. Mad as a hatter, except we don't have hatters yet. So I don't know why they call me that. I don't even have pins to stick between my teeth. Now, if you're through asking me, I'd be obliged if you'd tell your servant to step to your right, my lord.

LILY: My right? But why?

MAD MARY: You be standing on a root. That's me supper.

LILY: Oh, pardon me.

(*Mad Mary picks up a root/tuber.*)

MAD MARY: Or dessert. I think I'll call it dessert. Now, that would be the life! Dessert four times a day! Aye, this is dessert. I shall count myself a queen. Let them eat roots! (*Looks at Lily's shoes.*) Or shoes. Those are quite...distinctive.

LILY: Thank you. I got them at –

MAD MARY: (*Excited.*) We could boil them! Soften them up! I bet they'd make a fine broth, too, they would!

LILY: You're not boiling my shoes!

MAD MARY: Toss in some roots and have ourselves a stew! We could feast on footwear!

ROSE: I see. So, speaking of roots...what route be this through these woods?

MAD MARY: This root? A tree root, mostly likely. Or some kind of tuber. Or perhaps the insane root that takes reason prisoner. The root of all evil. The square root of 42. Or maybe just a turnip. 'Tis hard to say from this distance. And hard to chew. That's why we should boil them!

ROSE: I mean this road, woman. Where does this road lead?

MAD MARY: The road leads on to glory. Or, if you go that way... (*Points off.*) ...to the Cheese.

ROSE: Cheese? What kind of cheese? The big orange kind or that kind with all the little holes in it?

MAD MARY: Not that kind of cheese. (*Scoffs.*) And they call *me* mad! The Cheese is a river. More of a creek, really.

ROSE: A river of cheese? The mice should like that!

LILY: She means it's a creek called Cheese.

(*Rose glowers at Lily.*)

ROSE: Oh.

MAD MARY: That way – about one day's ride, or three day's walk – there's Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese.

LILY: That sounds like some of what we had for supper last night.

ROSE: (*To Mad Mary.*) You must pardon my servant. He is sometimes –

LILY: Truthful?

ROSE: Troublesome. Please, go on, strange madam, continue.

MAD MARY: Lower Moldingham. That's the one you'll come to first. A place of no consequence. Or maybe there are consequences. All depends. Then a little farther, there's Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese. That's the one to be afraid of.

ROSE: Afraid? Why should we be afraid of it? It sounds pleasant enough, if you don't mind mold.

LILY: I mind mold!

MAD MARY: Oh, 'tis a place of no humor...nor tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical, one-act plays, or long poems.

ROSE: What is your meaning, madam?

MAD MARY: I mean, they allow no liars there.

ROSE: So it's an honest place, then?

MAD MARY: Honesty has nothing to do with it, nor do comedians and tragedians if they know what's good for them. Likewise, traveling minstrels, poets, puppeteers—

ROSE: What's wrong with traveling minstrels?

MAD MARY: 'Tis the law there. They allow no troupes.

ROSE: No soldiers? How do they keep the peace?

MAD MARY: No troupes of actors to say their piece!

ROSE: Oh.

MAD MARY: But they leave with more pieces than when they arrive.

ROSE: I don't understand.

MAD MARY: Pieces in their purse: gold pieces, silver pieces, pieces of eight, if you be Spaniards. But you don't look like Spaniards to me. You look strangely like—

ROSE: But if they don't perform, why are they getting paid?

MAD MARY: And I'm the one they call mad! Isn't it as plain as day? Plain as the nose on your face? As plain as your face? In fact—

LILY: (*Insulted.*) Hey! Who are you calling plain?

MAD MARY: Plain as in smooth and unshaven—

ROSE: (*Unsheathes her sword.*) To your point, madam, or I shall give you my point!

MAD MARY: As you wish. The town pays actors to go away.

ROSE: And not perform?

MAD MARY: Saves the cost of hiring a hangman, I suppose, or at least buying the rope. I miss a good, stout rope. The condemned man lasts just long enough to fall. But boil it just right, and that very same rope can last the living long past the fall. Perhaps all through the winter if you don't

overcook it. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have roots to grub. "Eat your vegetables," my mother always told me, "Eat your vegetables." Aye, you want to eat them before they eat you! Someday, we all go back into the ground. *(To herself, muttering.)* Roots. Roots. Dig them up. Pull them up. Eat them up. Roots. Roots. *(Exits.)*

LILY: *(To Rose.)* That was...strange.

ROSE: Serendipitous.

LILY: Weird.

ROSE: Wonderful.

LILY: Bizarre.

ROSE: Beautiful.

LILY: Somehow, I don't think you and I are seeing this the same way.

ROSE: Tell me, what are you seeing, little sister?

LILY: I'm seeing a strange old woman who lives on roots and ropes. What are you seeing?

ROSE: I'm seeing a way to pay our way to London.

LILY: By digging up roots and selling them?

ROSE: By pretending to be something that we're not!

LILY: I thought that's what we were already doing.

ROSE: Didn't you hear what she said about Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese? They hate actors so much they pay them to go away!

LILY: Yes, but I don't see—

ROSE: So we form an acting troupe!

LILY: Two people are not an acting troupe.

ROSE: So we find some more. Should be easy enough. We'll just go into Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese and find some fellows we can pass off as actors. We show up at Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese, they'll pay us to go away, and off we go with coin in our purse and the wind at our backs all the way to London Town! What could go wrong?

LILY: You really want me to answer that?

ROSE: Your beloved Robert sits in the Tower this morning, fearing that this will be his dreaded day of judgment, while

my William wastes away in the next cell...our betrothed reduced to feasting on rats and the scrap of hope that someone, anyone, will come to rescue them from their doom.

LILY: *(Recites.)* "O Romeo! Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

ROSE: That's the spirit, except that's Juliet's line.

LILY: So?

ROSE: You're dressed up as a man. You need to do Romeo's line.

LILY: Oh. This is kind of confusing.

ROSE: You'll get the hang of it.

LILY: I wish you wouldn't say "hang."

ROSE: This way to the Cheeses, my good fellow. You keep rehearsing. With any luck, you won't need to actually know it.

LILY: What do you mean "with any luck"?

(Rose and Lily exit. Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(AT RISE: *Town square, Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese. Toby and Percy are locked in a stockade. Constable Jack Sprout is watching over them.*)

PERCY: *(To Toby.)* This is rather hard on the back.

TOBY: Better the back than the rack.

PERCY: I might be needing the rack to straighten out my back.

CONSTABLE: It's your behavior you need to be straightening out, you villainous swine. *(Tries to figure out how to use the whip but fails.)*

PERCY: Villainous? I don't know that I'd say villainous, exactly. Mischievous, maybe. Troublesome, technically. Disobedient, definitely.

CONSTABLE: Will you just hold your tongue? I can't concentrate when you're going on like that.

PERCY: Well, I can't really hold by tongue, you see, because my hands are— *(Indicates his condition of being in the stockade.)*

CONSTABLE: Why, you ignorant knave! I'd beat you... *(Indicates whip.)* ...if I knew how this thing worked.

TOBY: There might be some instructions on the handle.

CONSTABLE: Really?

TOBY: In small print.

CONSTABLE: Oh. Well, that's a problem.

TOBY: Poor eyesight?

CONSTABLE: Oh, my eyesight's fine. I just never learned to read. Too much work.

TOBY: Want me to have a look?

CONSTABLE: Well, I suppose. If you think you can.

(Constable holds the handle of the whip close to Toby's face so he can read the directions. Rose and Lily enter and watch from a distance.)

They recognize Toby and Percy as the two men who conned them at the pub in the last town.)

LILY: *(To Rose.)* Hey, those are the two men who took our horse back at that pub.

ROSE: Indeed, although their fortunes appear to have declined markedly, I must say.

LILY: It's about time they got some justice! My feet are killing me. I told you I need some new shoes. Oh, I wish I hadn't used the word "kill."

ROSE: Hush, little sister. I have a plan.

LILY: I hope it's a better plan than when you gambled away — *(Realizes.)* Oh, no! You don't mean — ?

ROSE: I mean what I said...and what I haven't said.

LILY: But they're...they're swindlers! They're tricksters! They're professional deceivers!

ROSE: Which means only one thing.

LILY: What's that?

ROSE: They'd be perfect. Besides, maybe we can get our other horse back. Now, follow along...

(Rose and Lily hang back, unseen by Toby, Percy, and the Constable.)

CONSTABLE: *(To Toby, indicating whip handle.)* So what's it say? Can you tell?

TOBY: I'm not sure. It appears to be in...Chinese.

CONSTABLE: Really?

TOBY: Oh, yes, completely unusable if you can't read the instructions.

CONSTABLE: That's a shame.

TOBY: Quite a shame.

PERCY: Why's he need instructions on how to — *(Toby kicks at Percy. Realizes. To Constable.)* I mean, that is a shame. I was really looking forward to it.

CONSTABLE: You were looking forward to being whipped?

PERCY: Well, sure. I've got a bit of an itch...just under my right shoulder. You wouldn't mind giving it a scratch for me, would you?

CONSTABLE: I'm not going to scratch your itch, you thieving scoundrel!

PERCY: Well, I'm not sure I'd call what we did to be thieving, exactly.

CONSTABLE: What kind of fool do you think I am, anyway?
(*To Toby.*) So it's really in Chinese, is it?

(*Toby nods.*)

PERCY: Technically, confidence games are more of a misdemeanor. It's not a felony like highway robbery or a capital crime like high treason—

CONSTABLE: Oh, just be quiet, both of you!

PERCY: So you accept the logic of my reasoning, then?

CONSTABLE: No. It's time for my nap. All this crime and punishment wears me out.

TOBY: Not exactly a picnic for us, either, you know?

CONSTABLE: I don't know how I'm going to get in all the whipping I'm expected to do. This job is harder than it looks. All the waiting, all the watching, all the counting! Did you know I have to keep track of how many times I whip you?

TOBY: Really? They make you do that?

CONSTABLE: And now I apparently have to learn to read Chinese just to do that!

PERCY: When you do, could you scratch that itch on my back?

TOBY: (*To Constable.*) Oh, we wouldn't want to inconvenience you any, would we, Percy? Since you need your nap and all.

PERCY: Well, my back does still itch.

TOBY: Enough about your back! Think about his needs for a change, will you? Look at him! He's worn out...practically exhausted. Can't you tell?

CONSTABLE: Can you? Really?

TOBY: Oh, yes. I can see the weariness on your face. *(To Percy.)* Can't you see the weariness on his face?

PERCY: Well, right now, I mostly see his backside— *(Toby makes a gesture with his head, which Percy finally gets.)* Oh, yes, complete weariness. Weariness beyond words. World-weariness. Practically wasting away before our very eyes.

CONSTABLE: Do I really look that bad? I mean, I feel a little tired, but "weary"? "Wasting away"? *(Concerned for his health, starts feeling his face.)*

TOBY: Why, the weight of responsibility bears down on his shoulders like on Ajax himself. Meanwhile, look at us here...practically freeloaders, contributing nothing to society, always taking, never giving anything back. It just doesn't seem fair, does it?

PERCY: Well, I wouldn't exactly say we're freeloaders. Those fellows back in that pub were paying us right good money for playing cards until we were arrested. Granted, it was for cheating, but we were still earning a living, just not an honest one, mind you— *(Toby gestures with his head for Percy to stop. Realizes.)* Oh, yes, complete freeloaders! Just parasites on society we are...no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Social pariahs who ought to be whipped— *(Stops.)* Oh, speaking of which—

TOBY: Say, I have an idea. Uh, Mr. Constable, what if—this is just an idea—what if, you know, maybe you could pay us to whip each other? That would save you the trouble. In fact, you wouldn't even have to pay us. We could do it on what they call the honor system.

CONSTABLE: The honor system, eh? What's that?

TOBY: Well, first, you'd have to let one of us out and—

CONSTABLE: Let you out, eh?

TOBY: Yes, and then we'd need to borrow your whip. *Borrow, mind you.*

CONSTABLE: You'd give it back?

TOBY: Oh, yes, of course. Most assuredly so! That would be thievery, and thievery's a crime. We don't associate with thieves...base creatures...repulsive. So we'd borrow the whip and—

CONSTABLE: Wait a minute. You're just trying to trick me.

TOBY: Trick you? Oh, no. I wouldn't think of tricking you. Would I try to trick him, Percy?

PERCY: Well, actually, I thought that was the point. *(Realizes.)* I mean, no. Oh, no. We wouldn't trick him. Confuse him maybe. Bamboozle him, sure. But trick him? Oh, no, that'd go against the code.

CONSTABLE: Yeah, well, this is against the code, too. *("Smacks" Toby and Percy.)* Now, shut up and let me get some shuteye. I'll just have to whip you later. Wasting away, am I? Wasting away? *(Sits, settles in for a nap, and almost immediately begins to snore.)*

TOBY: *(To Percy.)* Worth a shot.

PERCY: I've still got that itch.

(Rose steps forward and approaches the snoring Constable.)

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* Excuse me, good sir.

(Constable snores loudly.)

PERCY: *(To Toby, indicating Rose.)* Say, isn't that the nobleman we snookered back in that—

TOBY: Ssssh!

PERCY: Think he's still sore about the horse?

TOBY: Just be quiet about the horse.

PERCY: But what if he's here to punish us?

TOBY: What does this look like to you?

PERCY: Oh, right. I'd forgotten.

(Constable snores loudly.)

ROSE: *(To Constable, louder.)* I said, excuse me, good sir.

(Constable continues to snore. Louder.) I said—

LILY: Oh, here, just do this...

(Lily takes out one of her knitting needles and "pokes" the Constable.)

CONSTABLE: *(Jumps.)* Ow!

LILY: *(To Rose.)* That's what Mother always does with the help. It's more ladylike.

CONSTABLE: *(To Rose.)* Oh, pardon me, my lord. A thousand pardons. At your service, my lord. Very much at your service.

(Lily gives Rose a look. Rose continues.)

ROSE: So tell me, Constable— *(Slight pause.)* That is your rank, I take it?

CONSTABLE: Yes, my lord. Constable. Constable Jack Sprout. Constable of all Lower Moldingham-on-the-Cheese.

ROSE: Constable of it all? Quite impressive!

CONSTABLE: Well, Acting Constable.

ROSE: Acting? Why only acting? I don't know if we can deal with an Acting Constable. That might be beneath our station. *(To Lily.)* Wouldn't want to violate any social norms, now, would we? Can we deal with a mere Acting Constable?

LILY: I'm not sure.

ROSE: *(Correcting.)* I'm not sure, my lord. *(To Constable.)* Always have to keep underlings in their place. *(To Lily.)* Well, go on, say it.

LILY: *(Bitterly.)* I'm not sure, my lord.

ROSE: That's better. *(To Constable.)* So what became of the regular constable?

CONSTABLE: He got a promotion, my lord.

ROSE: A promotion, you say? What sort of promotion?

CONSTABLE: He's been named executioner, my lord.

(Toby and Percy look at each other, fearful.)

ROSE: Oh, you have a lot of executions here, do you?

CONSTABLE: Not here, my lord. He's been called down to London. He'll be swinging in the Tower soon, I imagine.

(Rose gives Lily an alarmed look.)

ROSE: London, you say? Do they have a big need for executioners in London?

CONSTABLE: Oh, the biggest, I hear, my lord. Dawn to dusk. Very hard on the shoulders.

LILY: Rather hard on the shoulders of the condemned, I imagine.

ROSE: So tell me, Mr. Acting Constable, just how does one work his way up to executioner, anyway?

CONSTABLE: Oh, practice, my lord. Practice. Years upon years of practice. The old master...he practiced day and night—

ROSE: I see. And so are you practicing on these gentlemen here?

(Toby and Percy look at each other, fearfully.)

PERCY: *(To Toby.)* I told you we shouldn't have—

TOBY: Ssssh!

CONSTABLE: *(To Rose.)* Oh, these are no gentlemen. These are prisoners.

LILY: I hear in London there's no difference between the two.

CONSTABLE: Executioner...now there's a fair trade. A man can rise up in a profession like that.

LILY: Just not the ones he's doing execution upon.

ROSE: So, tell me, Acting Constable, do you aspire to be an executioner?

CONSTABLE: Me? Oh, no, my lord! 'Tis fearful hard work!

LILY: Or just fearful.

CONSTABLE: Now, the old master...he had ambition. The sort of ambition to get a man ahead in life.

LILY: Or lose it.

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* And you lack such ambition, I take it?

CONSTABLE: Oh, I don't lack the ambition. I just lack patience. Me, I like me naptime too much.

LILY: A small favor.

ROSE: An honest man, at least. *(Indicating Toby and Percy.)* Unlike these scoundrels!

PERCY: Please, my lord, we can explain. We didn't mean to—

(Toby kicks at Percy.)

TOBY: Sssh.

PERCY: But—

TOBY: Sssh!

ROSE: So, tell me, Acting Constable, what exactly are these miscreants doing penance for?

CONSTABLE: Oh, the worst sort of villainy!

ROSE: The worst sort? Murder? Or dare I speak its name...treason?

CONSTABLE: Oh, no, my lord, nothing like that. Trickery!

PERCY: Uh, excuse me, but technically it wasn't trickery. It was skill! *(Toby gestures to Percy with his head. To Toby.)*

What?! He's misrepresenting the nature of our offense!

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* Trickery is a crime here in Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese?

LILY: Apparently, it's not back in whatever that other place was.

CONSTABLE: Aye, it is when it involves playing cards and large sums of money.

PERCY: I believe the name of the town was –

(Toby kicks at Percy.)

TOBY: Sssh!

PERCY: Ow! I was just trying to help!

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* Large sums of money, you say?

CONSTABLE: Aye, and some of the town's most prominent citizens!

ROSE: So these rascals cheated at cards, did they?

PERCY: "Cheat" is a strong word. I don't believe the rules were ever really written down.

(Toby just gives up and rolls his eyes.)

CONSTABLE: *(To Rose.)* Aye, and pretended to be someone they weren't.

ROSE: Oh, heavens forefend! The horrors of such a deed! Tell me...who did they pretend to be?

CONSTABLE: Honest gentlemen.

ROSE: Now I see the reason for their shackling them!

CONSTABLE: Pulled the very wool over everyone's eyes, they did. Leastways, they did till the truth came out.

ROSE: So tell me...what was it that gave them away?

CONSTABLE: The way it was told to me— *(On second thought.)* Well, it's not a tale fit for telling in front of one such as you.

ROSE: One such as me?

CONSTABLE: Well, you know, you're a—

ROSE: I'm a what?

CONSTABLE: A gentleman!

LILY: Oh, thank goodness, I think.

CONSTABLE: *(To Rose.)* A right fair and fine-looking nobleman you are. Very...fair...and fine...well-proportioned even—

LILY: *(Insulted.)* Hey!

(Rose shoots Lily a look.)

CONSTABLE: I meant no insult, sir. It's just that many a noble lord has, well, sat too long at the table, if you catch my drift. But you...you are what a man should look like.

LILY: I don't like that, either!

ROSE: Quiet! Or it's back to cleaning out the stables for you! *(To Constable.)* You'll have to pardon my servant. He's still learning his place... *(To Lily.)* ...isn't he?

LILY: Yes.

ROSE: *(Annoyed.)* Yes, *what?*

LILY: Yes, my lord.

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* Please, go on. Let's hear this sordid tale.

CONSTABLE: Well, they say the ugly one there— *(Indicates Toby.)*

TOBY: *(Insulted.)* Hey!

CONSTABLE: *(To Rose.)* That be him.

ROSE: Yes?

CONSTABLE: They say he tried to make away in disguise.

ROSE: What sort of disguise?

CONSTABLE: Dressed up like a pub wench, he was.

ROSE: Most...unusual.

CONSTABLE: And quite a surprise to the wench!

PERCY: In his defense, they were rather nice clothes.

LILY: What sort of clothes were they?

TOBY: And I planned to sell them! *(Realizes.)* Oh, maybe I shouldn't have admitted that.

PERCY: They did look rather good on you, though.

LILY: I always like a nice chiffon myself...or silk. Silk is always in fashion.

(Rose shoots Lily a hard look.)

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* So, these two wandering jacks came into your town, passed themselves off as someone they weren't, charmed the people with smooth and honeyed words, and sometimes wore women's clothes?

CONSTABLE: That's pretty much the shape of it. That and the cheating at cards.

ROSE: Interesting. *(To Lily.)* Wouldn't you say that was interesting?

LILY: Quite interesting. *(Rose shoots Lily a hard look.)* Quite interesting, my lord.

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* So, tell me, when will you release these professional prevaricators?

CONSTABLE: Well, I don't know about the prevaricators, but I can't release these two until their time is up.

ROSE: And when will that be?

CONSTABLE: Not for another month.

ROSE: Another month?

LILY: Another month... *(Rose shoots Lily a look.)* ...my lord?

CONSTABLE: Aye, they've only been serving their sentence barely a day. Truth be told, we may never be able to release them.

TOBY: Never?!

PERCY: *(To Constable.)* That's rather harsh!

CONSTABLE: *(To Rose.)* Aye, they have no master.

ROSE: No master?

CONSTABLE: Everyone must have a master. 'Tis the law.

ROSE: And how are they supposed to find a master if they're locked up in the stocks?

CONSTABLE: Same way the debtors pay off their debts in prison, I suppose.

ROSE: Logical.

CONSTABLE: I always did wonder how debtors pay off their debts...

ROSE: So if these two had a master who promised to take charge of them, could you release them?

CONSTABLE: Aye, if they had a proper master.

ROSE: Oh, so now it's a proper master, is it? So what constitutes a proper master?

CONSTABLE: Well, a lord, my lord.

ROSE: A lord such as myself?

CONSTABLE: Aye, a lord such as yourself.

ROSE: So if I were willing to take these two—creatures—off your hands, you'd release them to me?

CONSTABLE: Aye. 'Tis the law, and I follow the law...to the letter. Every "T" dotted, and every "I" crossed. Or is it the other way around? All I know how to do is make an "X."

ROSE: Well, then, let's get on with it, shall we?

CONSTABLE: Get on with what, my lord?

ROSE: The law...justice...releasing these two criminals to me. Chop-chop, let's get on with it.

LILY: I wish you wouldn't say, "chop-chop."

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* Well, what's taking you? Is there paperwork? If so, let's have it.

CONSTABLE: Paperwork, right. Paperwork...paperwork. Let's see, party of the first part, party of the second part—*(Stops.)*

ROSE: What's wrong?

CONSTABLE: Two things, actually.

ROSE: Yes?

CONSTABLE: For one thing, I can't read.

ROSE: A peculiar problem in executing contracts, I suppose.

LILY: I wish you wouldn't say "execute."

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* And the other impediment?

CONSTABLE: I don't know who you are, my lord.

ROSE: Oh. So you need my name, then.

CONSTABLE: For the paperwork.

ROSE: Very well, then. I am...Lord Rose.

CONSTABLE: Lord Rose? I'm unfamiliar with a Lord Rose.

ROSE: *(Haughtily.)* And I pray you shall not be familiar.

CONSTABLE: No, of course not, my lord. I just meant that I had not heard of your house. Are you the red rose or the white?

ROSE: Neither. Green, for unopened.

(Lily coughs.)

CONSTABLE: All right, well, I suppose it's all right then...you being a lord and all. I mean, you look like a lord. You act like a lord.

ROSE: I have a servant like a lord.

CONSTABLE: So you must be a lord, then.

ROSE: Unquestionably.

CONSTABLE: I'll just draw a little picture, then. *(Starts to draw a picture of a rose on a piece of paper.)*

ROSE: *(To Toby and Percy.)* Don't you take me for a lord?

TOBY: Oh, yes, most certainly.

PERCY: *(To Constable.)* Technically, we took him for several crowns and a horse— *(Toby hushes Percy.)* Absolutely! The lordiest of lords! A lord most high!

ROSE: *(To Constable as he draws the rose.)* Why don't you put some thorns on that? Yeah, like that. Maybe a few more. A little sharper? Yeah, that's good. All right.

(Constable finishes the drawing and Rose signs it. Constable lets Percy out of the stockade.)

CONSTABLE: *(To Percy.)* Well, here you go, then.

PERCY: Oh, I think my back is going to be hurting in the morning.

(Constable lets Toby out of the stockade.)

CONSTABLE: All right now, go on, both of you.

TOBY: *(To Rose.)* Oh, thank you, my lord, thank you! My associate and I are much indebted to you for your kindness.

ROSE: Indeed, you are. Indeed, you are.

CONSTABLE: I'm afraid we can't offer you accommodations, my lord. Well, we could, but these two must get out of town.

ROSE: Quite understandable. My servant and I must make haste, anyway. The life of a lord is a busy one, I'm afraid. Fancy balls...invitations to court...that sort of thing.

LILY: Shopping!

ROSE: (*Glaring.*) Faithful servant, show our new charges the way.

LILY: (*To Toby and Percy.*) Come with me.

TOBY: (*To Rose.*) Thank you, my lord, thank you. You're not going to torture us, are you? We'd pay you back, but I'm afraid they took all our money. (*Realizes.*) Well, I suppose, technically, much of it was your money. And the horse...I don't know what became of the horse.

PERCY: The horse ran away, remember? (*To Rose and Lily.*) I guess we're not particularly good with animals.

LILY: The horse ran away?!

PERCY: I think Toby's snoring spooked it.

TOBY: I wasn't snoring!

LILY: You lost our horse?!

PERCY: Well, technically, by then it was our horse.

LILY: (*To Rose.*) They lost our horse!

ROSE: Forget about the horse!

TOBY: But if we can repay you in other ways, my lord...I swear we can—

ROSE: Yes, yes, all that, move along now. Just do as I say and nobody gets hurt.

LILY: But now we have four people and only one horse!

PERCY: Say, would you mind scratching right beneath my shoulder blade? (*Toby "smacks" him. To Toby.*) What?

LILY: You two are walking...just so you know.

(*Lily, Toby, and Percy exit.*)

ROSE: *(To Constable.)* I wish you well, good sir. You have done good service today. I tell you this truly: I can only hope the wardens at the Tower are as diligent as you.

CONSTABLE: Oh, thank you, my lord! Most gracious, my lord. *(Rose exits. To himself.)* A most noble lord. A most excellent lord. Oh, all that wears me out. I need a nap. *(Settles down for a nap and starts to snore. Blackout.)*

SCENE 5

(AT RISE: Office of Mayor Diddlespoon, Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese. Mayor Diddlespoon is sitting at his desk working on some official papers.)

MAYOR: (To himself.) So...should singing in public be punished the same as whistling in public? That one's louder, but the other is more annoying. Decisions, decisions! I wonder what the Lady Edwina would do? She'd probably tell me to cut their tongues out. Oh, what a woman! Such fire! Such steel! Such rejection. Besides, you don't use your tongue to whistle, or do you?

(Mayor starts whistling to find out. Knocks at the door. Phoebe enters.)

PHOEBE: Sir? (Mayor doesn't hear her. Louder.) Mayor Diddlespoon?

MAYOR: What? Oh! Phoebe, come in, please.

PHOEBE: Sir, were you...whistling?

MAYOR: What? Me? No? Never! Whistling...whistling's a crime...or will be once I issue this new proclamation.

PHOEBE: I'm pretty sure I heard whistling.

MAYOR: It was...the tea kettle. Yes, that's it! The tea kettle was whistling. They do that sort of thing. We may have to ban that, too.

PHOEBE: Except I don't see a tea kettle.

MAYOR: I-I keep it hidden...because it whistles. You know how Lady Edwina feels about such things. Whistling sounds too much like...amusement.

PHOEBE: I love whistling!

MAYOR: You do?

PHOEBE: Oh, yes!

(Phoebe whistles. Mayor is briefly entranced and then reverts to form.)

MAYOR: Stop that!

PHOEBE: Why don't you whistle for me?

MAYOR: No!

PHOEBE: Come on...pretty please...

MAYOR: Never! It would be...inappropriate.

PHOEBE: I know!

MAYOR: As Mayor, I intend to stamp out all forms of—

PHOEBE: All forms of what?

MAYOR: Amusement, entertainment, distraction...all that kind of jibber-jabber. I may even ban words like "jibber-jabber." Sounds too—

PHOEBE: Fun? Frisky?!

MAYOR: Never mind about that. So what did the Lady Edwina think of the flowers I sent her?

PHOEBE: Oh, those.

MAYOR: Did she like them? Did she send a message? She must have if you're here. Please, tell me...what does she have to tell me?

PHOEBE: She — *(Stops.)* I'm not sure I should say.

MAYOR: Not sure you should say? You're her servant! Of course, you should say!

PHOEBE: I wouldn't say I have a message, exactly.

MAYOR: No message?

PHOEBE: But you might say I know my lady's mind.

MAYOR: Ah, tell me, then. Unfold it.

PHOEBE: It'll cost you.

(Phoebe has a kiss in mind. The Mayor is thinking of money.)

MAYOR: Fine. *(Reaches into his pocket and pulls out a coin.)*
Here's a token of my...appreciation.

PHOEBE: *(Sighs.)* I guess that will do.

MAYOR: So...out with it. What does my lady think of my...entreaties?

PHOEBE: Well, I just happen to know...certain things.

MAYOR: What things? (*Pause. Phoebe doesn't respond. Annoyed.*) Fine!

(*Mayor gives Phoebe more coins.*)

PHOEBE: Oh, you're rich!

MAYOR: I'll be even richer when I marry the Lady Edwina...if I marry the Lady Edwina. So what did she say? What do you know?

PHOEBE: I know my lady has certain...desires.

MAYOR: Yes? Desires?

PHOEBE: Dark desires.

MAYOR: What kind of dark desires?

PHOEBE: Desires that only you can satisfy.

MAYOR: Yes! I knew it! Oh, thank you, Phoebe! Thank you! Oh, I could — (*Prepares to hug and kiss Phoebe.*)

PHOEBE: (*Eagerly.*) Yes?

MAYOR: Shake your hand in gratitude.

PHOEBE: Oh.

MAYOR: Yes! This is how a man rises up in society! He marries rich!

PHOEBE: She wants to see theatre.

MAYOR: I beg your pardon?

PHOEBE: Theatre, plays, comedy, tragedy...that sort of thing. Well, not so much tragedy. More comedy, especially romantic comedy.

MAYOR: (*Confused.*) The Lady Edwina wants to see theatre?

PHOEBE: Right out in the town square.

MAYOR: But-but—

PHOEBE: What's the matter? Think it would interfere with all the hangings?

MAYOR: No. I mean, yes. But...I'm confused.

PHOEBE: Love can be, or so I hear.

MAYOR: But I thought she was against that sort of thing?

PHOEBE: I did say it was a secret desire...a dark desire.

MAYOR: That you did.

PHOEBE: And if you should, say, arrange for such a thing
and maybe invite her to watch with you –

MAYOR: Yes?

PHOEBE: I'm sure you'd get quite the reaction.

MAYOR: Oh! "Quite the reaction"! I do like the sound of
that. I mean, um, yes. Of course. Certainly. Well, that will
be all, Phoebe. You're dismissed.

PHOEBE: You don't need me to stick around and help out?
Maybe help you heat up that tea kettle again? I could
even...polish it for you?

MAYOR: Uh, no, that won't be necessary. Theatre, you say?

PHOEBE: Live theatre.

MAYOR: Well, then!

PHOEBE: Our secret, remember?

MAYOR: Of course. Mum's the word. I don't know how I
can ever thank you, Phoebe.

PHOEBE: Oh, I'm sure you'll find a way. *(Smiles and exits.)*

MAYOR: Now, where can I find an acting troupe?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 6

(AT RISE: Town square, Lower Moldingham-on-Cheese. The Constable is sleeping near the stockade. With a confident air, Sir Morgan, a knight, enters. Sir Morgan looks at the Constable, waits, draws his sword, and puts it under the sleeping Constable's chin.)

MORGAN: (To Constable.) Tickle, tickle. (Constable stirs and mumbles something.) Tickle, tickle.

CONSTABLE: (Wakes up, realizes what's happening.) What? Oh! Don't hurt me! I give up! I surrender! Please, don't hurt me!

MORGAN: Give me one good reason.

CONSTABLE: I-I-I won't hurt you! I'll do anything you say! I'll tell you anything you want to know...anything at all! Please, just don't hurt me!

MORGAN: That's three reasons. I should run you through for not knowing how to count.

CONSTABLE: I-I-I-I—?

MORGAN: You make it too easy. (Withdraws sword.) Besides, if I were to hurt you, I wouldn't get what I want.

CONSTABLE: What is it you want? Who are you? I'll give you anything I have! It's not much, but it's yours! Please, please, just don't hurt me!

MORGAN: I don't want your money.

CONSTABLE: What do you want, then? Just name it...it's yours.

MORGAN: I want information.

CONSTABLE: Information? But I don't have any information!

MORGAN: Uh, I'll be the judge of that!

CONSTABLE: A judge? Your worship, who are you?

MORGAN: I said I was the one who wanted information, not you. But my name, if you must know, is Morgan...Sir Morgan. Sir Morgan, the... (Thinks.) ...Magnificent?

Malevolent? Sir Morgan, the Mysterious! I am a knight in the service of Lord Northumberland.

CONSTABLE: Lord Northumberland! Anything for Lord Northumberland! (*Realizes.*) I've never heard of Lord Northumberland. (*Morgan puts the sword under the Constable's chin.*) But I suppose if he's a lord –

MORGAN: Have you, by chance, seen two young ladies pass this way?

CONSTABLE: Young ladies? Young ladies? Young ladies? There were some milkmaids a little while ago. Woke me up with their buckets all a-rattling. It's hard to get a decent day's nap around here. But I wouldn't say they were young, exactly. More like old maids. Old milkmaids. Crones, actually. Practically, hags. Oh, I don't know! I was trying to sleep! Please don't hurt me!

MORGAN: I'm not looking for milkmaids, young or old. I'm looking for the two daughters of Lord Northumberland...high-born ladies who seem to have been a bit too high-spirited and left the family estate.

CONSTABLE: You mean they ran away from home?

MORGAN: More like rode away from home on two of the lord's best horses. Between you and me, I'm not sure which he wants back more...his daughters or his horses. Depends on which would fetch the most on the open market, I suppose. In any case, he wants them back. Horses, daughters, the lot...probably not in that order. Have you seen them? They might possibly be in disguise.

CONSTABLE: In disguise?

MORGAN: The eldest of the two has [*insert hair color of actress playing Rose*] hair, is about this tall [*indicates height of actress playing Rose*], and might know a few sword-fighting tricks.

CONSTABLE: Sword-fighting tricks?

MORGAN: I should never have taught her those. And her father's favorite sword is missing, too. He wants that back, as well.

CONSTABLE: A young lady with a sword? Oh, that should be easy to spot.

MORGAN: The youngest is about this tall... *[Indicates height of actress playing Lily.]* ...with *[insert hair color of actress playing Lily]* hair, but probably no sword...unless knitting needles count.

CONSTABLE: So two young ladies...possibly in disguise...with two horses...and a sword?

MORGAN: That's right.

CONSTABLE: No, can't think of anyone like that. I'd definitely recognize someone in disguise.

MORGAN: Oh, you would, would you?

CONSTABLE: Eyes like steel traps.

MORGAN: Mostly shut, I suspect.

CONSTABLE: Nobody can get past me. No, sir. Not in a disguise. I'd spot 'em a mile away.

MORGAN: Perhaps you should step back a few paces, then?

CONSTABLE: But, no. No young ladies traveling in disguise through here. I can guarantee you that.

MORGAN: Well, if you do spy any, just know there's a reward.

CONSTABLE: A reward?

MORGAN: A very sizable reward. Those are apparently some quite valuable horses.

CONSTABLE: I see. Well, now that you mention it—

MORGAN: Yes?

CONSTABLE: There was a right noble young fellow who came through here a few days ago, but he was a man. Most definitely a man.

MORGAN: You're positive?

CONSTABLE: As positive as I am of you standing before me.

MORGAN: I see. So humor me...tell me about this young nobleman you saw?

CONSTABLE: A right fair young fellow, he was.

MORGAN: Fair? Fair how?

CONSTABLE: So fair that he took custody of the two good-for-nothing card thieves I had locked up in the stocks there. Said he'd have them work off their sentence in his service somehow. Were that all noblemen were so fair! See, here's the paperwork he signed.

(Constable produces the paper Rose signed.)

MORGAN: Lord Rose?

CONSTABLE: With thorns. He made me put thorns on it.

MORGAN: He did, did he?

CONSTABLE: Be a family crest, it is. Not my place to be asking questions of noblemen.

MORGAN: Or noblewomen.

CONSTABLE: I beg your pardon?

MORGAN: Not my pardon you'll need to be begging. What else did this "Lord Rose" make you do? What did he want with the men you had in your stocks?

CONSTABLE: Oh, that was it. Just took those two scheming layabouts and headed down the road to Upper Cheese. Not sure what he wanted them fellows for. Might have beat them to a bloody pulp once he had them out of my sight. Goodness knows, they deserved that much, pretending to be somebody they weren't. All I know is...not my problem anymore. Under my watch, crime here in Lower Cheese has been reduced...to zero! I don't mean to brag, but I think it's my eagle-eye.

MORGAN: *(Mutters.)* A blind eagle.

CONSTABLE: But now that you mention it...

MORGAN: Yes?

CONSTABLE: I remember now. He did have a servant with him.

MORGAN: A servant? What kind of servant?

CONSTABLE: A manservant, of course. A right proper manservant. Actually, not all that proper. Seemed rather

troublesome at times. He must have been new...still getting used to his role.

MORGAN: I'm sure he was...

CONSTABLE: Had the tiniest little sword I'd ever seen...like a knitting needle, it was.

MORGAN: Very like, I suspect.

CONSTABLE: But they weren't the ones you're looking for, no, sir.

MORGAN: How can you be so certain?

CONSTABLE: How else? They only had one horse between 'em!

MORGAN: *(Puts the sword to the Constable's chin.)* All right then, chin up. Eyes forward. Look alive.

CONSTABLE: Yes, sir. Of course, sir. Anything you say, sir.

MORGAN: And remember this...

CONSTABLE: Yes?

MORGAN: Sir Morgan always gets his man...even if he's not.

CONSTABLE: That doesn't make any sense.

MORGAN: *(Withdrawing sword.)* Aw, just go back to sleep. *(Exits.)*

CONSTABLE: Nothing gets by me. No sir, nothing gets by — *(Falls asleep and snores. Blackout. Curtain. Intermission.)*

ACT II

SCENE I

(AT RISE: Town square, Upper Moldingham-on-Cheese, the next day, before the performance. To pass as actors, Toby and Percy are donning some brightly colored clothes that Rose and Lily had in their trunks. [Note: The clothes need not be women's clothes, just something bright and gaudy.])

PERCY: *(To Toby, indicating clothing.)* This doesn't make any sense.

TOBY: Just shut up and put them on.

PERCY: But think about it—

TOBY: You know thinking's not your strong suit. In fact, I'm not sure what is, actually, but it's definitely not thinking.

PERCY: But why does a nobleman need to pretend to be in an acting troupe?

TOBY: It's not our place to question the ways of our betters, Percy. Now just get your clothes on. Or at least put these clothes on.

PERCY: He said he was traveling to London in disguise. Why would a nobleman want to be in disguise?

TOBY: So jacks like us don't take their money?

PERCY: True. But it's a little late for that, isn't it? We took him pretty good back in Lower Cheese.

TOBY: Maybe he learned his lesson there. I don't know.

PERCY: So is he still a nobleman if he doesn't have any money?

TOBY: Being a nobleman has nothing to do with money.

PERCY: Really? So could we become noblemen, then?

TOBY: It doesn't work like that.

PERCY: So how does it work, then? Because I'm confused.

TOBY: You have to be born a nobleman.

PERCY: Oh. So do you think we could pass ourselves off as noblemen, then?

TOBY: No, we cannot pass ourselves off as noblemen.

PERCY: We've passed ourselves off as other things. Great men of learning who have sacrificed all our worldly goods for knowledge but wouldn't mind a few contributions to get us on our way. That's a good one as long as people don't ask too many questions. Soldiers wounded in desperate battle for the King against some fearsome foreign foe. Oh, that's another good one. *(Realizes.)* Well, as long as there's a war. But the King's always fighting somebody, so it usually works out.

TOBY: Just get dressed.

PERCY: Respectable merchants. Horse traders. Not that horse traders aren't respectable merchants, mind you, although I don't think we were particularly respectable, I suppose.

TOBY: Just get dressed.

PERCY: And then there was that one time when—

TOBY: I said, just get dressed!

PERCY: *(Sarcastically.)* But, no, we can't pass ourselves off as noblemen. *(Looking at his clothes.)* I feel ridiculous.

TOBY: Just be glad he got us out of those stocks and hope he doesn't put us back in them.

PERCY: But why would he—? *(Toby glares at Percy.)* Fine.

(Rose and Lily enter. Lily is knitting, which Rose doesn't realize.)

ROSE: *(To Lily.)* Now, remember, I do all the talking.

LILY: You always do anyway.

ROSE: *(Notices Lily knitting.)* What is that?

LILY: I'm making a scarf...for Robert.

ROSE: They'll be making a hangman's noose for him if we don't pull this off. Now, put that away. We're noblemen. Noblemen don't knit!

LILY: Noblewomen do!

ROSE: We're not noblewomen! Not right now, anyway.

LILY: Fine, see if I invite you to my wedding.

ROSE: There won't even be a wedding if we don't get to London on time. Now, just follow my lead.

LILY: Oh, well. I'm about out of yarn, anyway.

(Lily reluctantly puts her knitting away. Rose circles Toby and Percy, inspecting them.)

ROSE: So, how fare our players?

LILY: *(Recognizes some of her clothing.)* Hey, that's my —! *(Rose glowers and gestures to indicate someone hanging. Realizes.)* Oh!

ROSE: Inspection time, gentlemen. *(Toby and Percy stand.)*

Wrong! You just made your first mistake. You're not gentlemen, you're actors. You need to act like actors.

PERCY: Excuse me, but how does one act like an actor?

TOBY: Just do as he says.

PERCY: I'm trying to do as he says, but I need more direction.

What's my motivation?

ROSE: *(Brandishing her sword, threateningly.)* Your motivation is you don't want me to run you through.

PERCY: But what about the stocks? I thought you were going to put us back in the stocks?

ROSE: I might put part of you back in the stocks.

PERCY: Oh. Well, if you put it like that...

ROSE: As for how to act like an actor...just imagine yourself as poor in pocket—

PERCY: That's easy enough, isn't it, Toby?

ROSE: *(Continuing.)* Lacking in certain social graces.

TOBY: *(To Percy.)* You've got that one down, I'd say.

ROSE: *(Continuing.)* Misanthropes, both of you.

PERCY: I have no idea what that means, but it sounds about right.

ROSE: *(Continuing.)* But with an uncommon knack for deceiving people. Do I make myself clear?

(Rose puts her sword to Toby's neck.)

TOBY: Very to the point, sir.

PERCY: (*To Rose.*) Is it really deceiving people if they agree to pay for admission? (*Rose puts the sword to Percy's neck.*) On the other hand, I suppose interpretations can vary.

ROSE: So, let's look the part now, shall we? (*As befits actors, Toby and Percy assume a somewhat disreputable air. Begins inspection.*) Passable...acceptable...thoroughly adequate.

PERCY: I think I need one of those funny hats, you know, with the pointy tips and the little bells on the end.

TOBY: Will you just be quiet?

ROSE: (*To Percy.*) No hats, funny or otherwise. This will have to do. (*To Lily.*) Don't you think this will do?

LILY: Yes... (*Realizes.*) ...my lord. (*To Percy, threateningly.*) You get that thing dirty, and I'll run you through with one of these. (*Brandishes a knitting needle.*)

PERCY: Is that a knitting needle?

LILY: (*Threateningly.*) Tear it, and I'll run you through with both of them!

PERCY: Yes, sir!

ROSE: So...places, everybody! Let the show begin!

TOBY: Excuse me, pardon me, my lord—my gracious lord—but I do have one teeny-tiny question.

ROSE: And what is that?

TOBY: You will pay us, won't you?

ROSE: Pay you? Do you mean with money?

TOBY: We are going to be coming into some payment, aren't we? Some remuneration? When the town pays us to go away, it seems only fair that we should receive a share. Doesn't it seem fair, Percy?

PERCY: Oh, most fair.

ROSE: You want fairness, do you?

TOBY: Just a wee bit of fairness.

PERCY: (*To Rose.*) Actually, more than a wee bit, if you don't mind, my lord.

ROSE: Then I shall be most fair.

PERCY: Most fair?! Did you hear that, Toby?! Most fair!

ROSE: I won't send you back to Lower Cheese to be locked up in the stocks again. How's that for fair?

PERCY: Oh. Well, if you put it like that...

TOBY: *(To Rose.)* Forgive me, my lord. I should know my place.

ROSE: And your part. Now, look sharp. The Mayor approaches. *(Mayor enters with Phoebe. [Note: During the following, the Mayor eyes Rose, Lily, Toby, and Percy disapprovingly.] Phoebe waits expectantly. To Mayor.)* My good sir, we are honored to present our traveling troupe of exotic troubadours for admittance to your oh-so-respectable town.

PERCY: *(To Mayor.)* Oh, exotic! I feel special already!

MAYOR: *(To Rose, sharply.)* Are these the players?

ROSE: Aye, my lord, a motley collection of fools appear to thine eye...ragged, disheveled—

PERCY: *(Upset.)* "Disheveled"? Do I look "disheveled"?

(Toby glares at Percy.)

ROSE: *(To Mayor, continues.)* Dressed in strange garb.

LILY: *(Insulted.)* "Strange"?! That's my best—

(Rose glares at Lily.)

ROSE: *(To Mayor.)* Pay no heed to what your eyes may tell you, or vile rumor may have whispered. We are, I assure you, quite respectable...as players go. As respectable as a...as a...as a...as a pub full of Morris dancers on the eve of the solstice! Oh, yes, very respectable, very respectable, indeed. Ragged but respectable. So, with that ado, we do humbly beseech you to grant us admittance to your town for the purpose of offering various low entertainments, idle amusements, and minor spectacles designed to excite the base instincts of peasants and tradesmen alike, including but not limited to dancing, juggling—

PERCY: *(To Toby, surprised.)* I didn't know you could juggle.

Can you juggle?

TOBY: Sssh!

PERCY: *(To Lily.)* Can you juggle? *(Lily "jabs" him with a knitting needle.)* Ow! *(Hops around screaming silently in pain.)*

ROSE: *(To Mayor, continuing.)* Pantomimes...French pantomimes...from France!

TOBY: *(To Percy, sarcastically.)* Oh, look, there's a mime right now.

ROSE: *(To Mayor, continuing.)* Clowns! Puppetry! Magic!

PERCY: *(To Toby.)* I don't know any magic. Do you know any magic?

ROSE: *(To Mayor, continuing.)* Various tricks with cards, dice even!

PERCY: Oh! We know those!

ROSE: *(To Mayor, continuing.)* And, of course, that most daring and controversial and risqué of all diversions!

PERCY: Oh, risqué! I want to see this!

ROSE: *(To Mayor, continuing.)* Live theatre!

PERCY: *(Disappointed.)* Oh, I was expecting something more exciting than that.

TOBY: Will you just be quiet?!

MAYOR: *(To Rose.)* Theatre, huh?

ROSE: Live theatre! Quite scandalous. With actors and everything. Actors who can convey great...passion! Wouldn't your townspeople like to feel...passion? Open their minds, introduce them to new ideas, show them new ways to look at the world! Of course, if you think that's too dangerous, you could just pay us to go away, and we'd be on our way.

MAYOR: I'm not paying you to go away.

ROSE: *(Surprised.)* What? But I thought—

MAYOR: You may perform tomorrow at midday.

ROSE: What? Perform? Tomorrow?

MAYOR: You can set up in the market square.

ROSE: You mean perform...like a play?

MAYOR: I certainly hope it's a play. Something light...a comedy. And romantic...definitely romantic. A romantic comedy! *(To Phoebe.)* Don't you think a romantic comedy would produce a response?

PHOEBE: I think a romantic comedy would definitely produce a response.

ROSE: *(To Mayor.)* Well, I'm not sure we know any romantic comedies. We're more the dramatic troupe...sword fights, that sort of thing. Death, doom, destruction all around. Not very romantic. Very sad. *(Indicating Lily, Toby, and Percy.)* Aren't they very sad?

TOBY: Quite sad.

PERCY: Unspeakably sad.

LILY: Very sad.

MAYOR: *(Ignoring them.)* Something about forbidden love. Love conquers all! That sort of thing.

ROSE: Well, I'm not sure we can—

MAYOR: You can keep 50 percent of the gate.

ROSE: Fifty percent?

MAYOR: Fine. Seventy-five percent, then.

ROSE: Seventy-five?

MAYOR: All right, 100 percent, then. But only if you perform a romantic comedy. Otherwise—

ROSE: Otherwise?

MAYOR: We do have dungeons in this town, you know. That will be all. Good day. *(Starts to exit with Phoebe. To Phoebe.)* You must think of some ruse to get your mistress into town. Can you think of something? I want this to be a surprise.

PHOEBE: Oh, I can think of something, and it will definitely be a surprise!

(Mayor and Phoebe exit. Rose, Lily, Toby, and Percy look at each other, horrified.)

LILY: *(To Rose.)* Tomorrow?!

TOBY: *(To Rose.)* We perform?!

LILY: *(To Rose.)* Tomorrow?!

PERCY: *(To Rose.)* Did he say a “romantic comedy”?

LILY: *(To Rose.)* Tomorrow?!

TOBY: *(To Rose.)* We can’t perform! We’re not actors!

PERCY: *(To Rose.)* Well, technically, we’ve acted, just not on stage.

LILY: *(To Rose.)* You said he’d pay us to go away!

TOBY: *(To Rose.)* He’s going to lock us up in the dungeon!

PERCY: *(To Rose.)* If it’s all the same to you, I’d just as soon go back in the stocks.

ROSE: Quiet! All of you!

LILY: Do you have a plan? You always have a plan. You better have a plan.

ROSE: Yes, I have a plan.

LILY: Thank goodness! What’s the plan?

ROSE: The way I see it, we only have two choices.

TOBY: I hope at least one of them involves getting out of here.

LILY: *(To Rose.)* What are our two choices?

ROSE: Either “Pyramus and Thisbe” or “Romeo and Juliet.”

(Lily, Toby, and Percy react with horror. Blackout.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]