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Opening extract from

Rose Between Two Thorns

Written by

Anne Perry

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Anne Perry

Rose Between Two Thorns

A Timepiece Novel



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Chapter 1

Dignity

A woman in a white cap and a red cloak watched from the crowd as the tall, thin man walked out onto the wooden platform. It was a dark, windy day, and the man's grey hair blew out from under his tall black hat. As he passed across the platform, a small girl ducked between the men and women in the crowd, ran forward and reached up to touch his feet.

The tall man stopped in front of a shorter man with fair hair. They spoke for a moment and then the tall man turned away. He took off his black hat, his rings and the medal round his

neck and passed them to a third man, who wore the white collar of a priest. Then he tied a white cap over his hair and went down on his knees in front of the block.

Under the stage, the small girl watched the axe rise into the air. As it fell, bright red blood splashed down on her face.



"And that's all it took," said Mr Jones. As the lights came on, the screen stayed frozen on the shot of the girl with her face covered in blood.

The class blinked and shifted as they came back to the here and now. Many still stared at the girl on the screen.

"Just one axe blow," Mr Jones carried on, "and King Charles I was dead. It was 1649 and Oliver Cromwell and his New Model Army were in charge. England would never be the same again." He turned and looked at the class. "Let's see …" he said. "Stacey, what did you think of the film?"

Stacey Summers screwed up her nose. "Call that a film?" she asked. "Give me a bit of hot vampire action any day."

A few other girls sniggered and one of the boys gave a wolf whistle.

Mr Jones shook his head. "Witty as ever, Stacey," he said. "Let's try someone else. How about you, Rosie? What did you make of it?"

"It was good," Rosie said. "It was like you could feel how upset the people in the crowd were. And the man who played the King was fantastic. He made you feel so sorry for him. He had such … dignity, even when he was going to die."

"You're right, Rosie," Mr Jones said. "King Charles did die with dignity. And many people did feel sorry for him. We must remember, class, that a lot of people in 1649 didn't want their King to be put on trial, and for many, many more the idea of *killing* a king was terrible. That's why Oliver Cromwell stopped a lot of MPs from going into Parliament when the vote was cast. He kept the ones away who would never agree to a trial." The history teacher smiled at Rosie. "Thank you for your input, Rosie. Well done."

For the rest of the lesson, Rosie felt like Stacey's eyes were burning holes in her back. She knew that Stacey would be furious. It was

bad enough that Rosie had stopped being her friend and mucking about with her in class, but now she had gone and showed Stacey up in front of Mr Jones. Stacey had a nasty side, and Rosie was worried about what she would do to get her own back. When the bell went for Break, Rosie hung about at her desk putting her pens and books away in her bag. She wanted to put off going out into the corridor for as long as she could, in the hope that Stacey would have gone.

No such luck. As Rosie stepped out of the classroom, she heard Stacey say something about 'dignity' and then there was a burst of sniggering from the gang of friends she always had with her. Rosie kept her head down and went to walk past.

"You know that Rosie can't read, don't you?" Stacey asked her friends, in a loud voice so Rosie could hear. "Must have made it so much easier for her, having that video to watch today."

"What are you talking about, Stacey?" said another voice.

Rosie swung her head up in horror. Zack Edwards was coming along the corridor towards her, and he had heard what Stacey had said. Zack was Rosie's friend, maybe even her

boyfriend, and Stacey knew that he was the person whose opinion mattered most to Rosie.

"Of course Rosie can read," Zack said, and put an arm round Rosie's waist. "Can't you, Rosie?" he asked, and smiled down at her.

"I – I – I – " Rosie stuttered.

"See?" Stacey said. "Told you she can't. There's something wrong with her, isn't there, Rosie? Poor cow."

Rosie turned on her heel and fled.

Rosie was sitting on the wall behind the school with her head in her hands when she felt a shadow fall across her. She lifted her head far enough to see Zack's green trainers on the ground in front of her, then covered her face again.

"You're not a dog, Rosie," Zack said. "Even if you can't see me, you know I'm here."

Rosie didn't say anything.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Zack asked. "I mean, it's a big thing to keep to yourself." When Rosie didn't answer, he kept on. "I thought you liked me," he said. "In fact, I thought you liked

me a lot. Was I wrong? Is that why you didn't tell me?"

"I do like you," Rosie said. "But I knew *you* wouldn't like *me* if you knew I was thick."

"You *are* thick," Zack said. "If that's what you think."

Rosie felt the tears slide down her cheeks but she managed to get a tight little smile onto her face. "Thanks," she said. "Well, at least I know where I stand now. I'm thick, and you're shot of me. Bye, Zack." She stood up and swung her bag over her arm.

"Come on, Rosie! That's not what I said and you know it!" Zack tried to grab hold of her as she passed him, but she twisted out of his grasp and ran off. She heard him shout after her, but she didn't go back. She ran and ran and only stopped when, at last, she was out of breath.

