

SUBVERSION 1605

A WEEK AFTER THE ILL-FATED GUNPOWDER PLOT
THE MAIN CULPRITS ARE EITHER DEAD OR IN CUSTODY

HERE THREE MINOR SUSPECTS ARE BEING QUESTIONED
ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT

THREE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS
THREE DIFFERENT INTERVIEWS
THREE DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

CHARACTERS

SIR ROBERT CECIL - SECRETARY OF STATE & SPYMASTER

THOMAS BATES - CATESBY'S SERVANT & LOYAL FRIEND

FRANCIS TRESHAM - MISTRUSTED BUT WEALTHY CONSPIRATOR

LADY ELIZA VAUX - HARBOURS FUGITIVE PRIESTS

PRODUCTION NOTE

THE SETTING IS A DARK AND DINGY INTERROGATION ROOM WITH A
TABLE AND A CHAIR AT EITHER SIDE.

THERE IS A FILE FOR EACH OF THE THREE SUSPECTS ON THE TABLE
AND A CARAFE OF WINE AND SOME WINE GOBLETS.

ALL THE CHARACTERS ARE IN MODERN DRESS.

AT RISE

CECIL IS SITTING AT ONE SIDE OF THE TABLE AND BATES AT THE OTHER. HE IS DISHEVELLED AND SCARED. CECIL, IN SHIRT SLEEVES AND LOOSE TIE, FLICKS THROUGH BATES' FILE.

CECIL You're a very lucky man, Thomas Bates; you're to be spared the rack - provided, that is, you tell me what I want to know. (HE POURS TWO GOBLETS OF WINE)

BATES I'll tell you what I can.

CECIL We'll come to that. But in the meantime, let's drink a toast. (HE PUTS A GOBLET IN FRONT OF BATES)

BATES What's to celebrate?

CECIL My success at Holbeach House. Four conspirators shot dead, three wounded, one on the run and the rest taken prisoner - some in very bad way I might add as a result of the accident with the gunpowder. A cause for celebration. So drink.

BATES I'd rather not.

CECIL I said, drink! (HE YANKS BATES' HEAD BACK AND ATTEMPTS TO POUR THE WINE DOWN HIS THROAT)

BATES RESISTS AND COUGHS AND SPLUTTERS AS WINE SPILLS OUT OF HIS MOUTH. CECIL WALKS AWAY WITH HIS GOBLET WHILE BATES RECOVERS. WHEN CECIL HAS FINISHED HIS DRINK HE TAKES CATESBY'S CRUCIFIX OUT OF HIS BREAST POCKET AND DANGLES IT IN FRONT OF BATES.

Recognise this?

BATES It's my boss's. (HE REACHES OUT HIS TREMBLING HAND TO GET HOLD OF THE CRUCIFIX)

CECIL QUICKLY CLASPS HIS ROUND IT AND WITHDRAWS IT. BATES SOBS.

CECIL It was fortunately retrieved before the rabble militia began looting and defiling the bodies.

BATES Who else didn't make it?

CECIL Thomas Percy and the two Wrights. Put up quite a fight by all accounts.

BATES And who's on the run?

CECIL Robert Wintour. He's a nobody. Right, let's concentrate on you now, shall we, and your part in the conspiracy. Fawkes told me you were responsible for transporting the gunpowder to Catesby's lodgings in Lambeth. Is that correct?

BATES I drove the wagon.

CECIL You also acted as his messenger boy, delivering instructions to your comrades.

BATES I did. Yes.

CECIL In fact, you were Catesby's right-hand man. Loyal and trustworthy. Obedient - like a dog! (HE SLINGS THE CRUCIFIX ACROSS THE ROOM) Fetch!

BATES OBEYS AND RETRIEVES IT. HE HANDS IT TO CECIL WHO PUTS IT BACK IN HIS BREAST POCKET.

BATES I'd do anything for him.

CECIL And so dependable, you were at all the crucial planning meetings.

BATES Most. But not all.

CECIL You must be lost without him - now he's dead.

BATES I loved him like a brother.

CECIL How touching! Yet, yet in his hour of greatest need you abandoned him. Why?

BATES I was terrified. We'd been found out. The gunpowder blast had caused some terrible injuries. And we were heavily outnumbered. We were in a hopeless position.

CECIL But instead of standing with your 'brother' to fight you ran off like a scared rabbit. You're a coward Bates! And there's only one thing I hate more than a coward - a Papist.

(MORE)

CECIL CONT'D Kowtowing to Rome. Makes me sick. On your knees Bates.

BATES DITHERS.

I said, on your knees! (HE DRAGS BATES OFF THE CHAIR AND ON TO HIS KNEES) Denounce the Pope as a heretic and acknowledge His Majesty the King as supreme head of the Church of England.

BATES (IN A STATE OF DISTRESS) Please don't make me do this.

CECIL Do it! (HE SUDDENLY GRABS BATES BY THE THROAT)

BATES GASPS FOR AIR.

Do you denounce the Pope as a heretic and acknowledge King James as head of the Church of England?

BATES Yes! Yes, yes, yes.

CECIL Good! (HE RELEASES HIS GRIP) And if you maintain this spirit of co-operation we'll be lenient. A pardon even.

BATES FIGHTS FOR BREATH.

You associate with the Jesuits, don't you?

BATES They're my friends. (HE HAS A COUGHING FIT)

CECIL How many of your so-called friends were recruited into your nest of vipers?

BATES IS STILL STRUGGLING AND FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO SPEAK.

(LOUDLY) How many?

BATES (HOLDING UP THREE FINGERS) Three.

CECIL And their names?

BATES (BARELY AUDIBLE) Fathers Tesimond, Garnet and Gerard.

CECIL Did you say, Tesimond, Garnet and Gerard?

BATES NODS REPEATEDLY.

CECIL And did they often meet up with Catesby to discuss the strategy?

BATES (WITH DIFFICULTY) Several...times. The last...was...October...Harrowden.

CECIL By the way, isn't there a fourth priest: one who uses the alias Meaze?

BATES That's Father Garnet, the Father Superior.

CECIL Number one Papist. The devil incarnate!

BATES Our spiritual leader.

CECIL He's a subversive, Bates. Hell-bent on bringing the country under the thumb of Rome. I want to know where these priests are holed up.

BATES Hard to say.

CECIL Let's make it easy then. (HE PLACES A SMALL MAP OF THE RECUSANT STRONGHOLD IN THE MIDLANDS IN FRONT OF BATES) Show me. Point to any property where they might be.

BATES DALLIES.

(ANGRILY) Hurry up Bates. I haven't got all day.

BATES (HE POINTS ONE BY ONE) White Webbs. Harrowden Hall. Baddesley Clinton. Hindlip House.

CECIL Excellent! (HE PUTS THE MAP AWAY) I've had my suspicions but you've just confirmed we're on the right track and I've not sent my men on a wild goose chase. With any luck they'll flush out a priest or two - ideally the devil himself - and at worst unearth some popish paraphernalia. But it's all damning evidence.

BATES You will put in a good word for me with the King?

CECIL No point, Bates. Your fate is already sealed.

BATES But you promised a pardon.

CECIL Slip of the tongue. I was lying.

BATES (DESPERATELY) I have money. I can buy a pardon.

CECIL (LAUGHING) Purely out of interest, Bates, how much do you reckon your miserable life is worth?

BATES Twenty pounds. And all of it yours if you spare me.

CECIL A charge of high treason waived for a paltry twenty pounds. A fair deal would you say?

BATES It's all I have.

CECIL And how did you get it? By fiddling Catesby's books or some illicit deals?

BATES Kit Wright gave it me at Holbeach.

CECIL A parting gift, was it? How very thoughtful. And what about the rest of the money he gave you? Where's that?

BATES What other money?

CECIL The missing eighty pounds meant for his wife and child?

BATES I don't know anything about that.

CECIL Are you sure?

BATES I'm telling the truth, I swear.

CECIL The truth is, Bates, you didn't give a toss about Wright's family that's why you stole the lot and made a run for it. (CECIL TAKES A BAG OF MONEY OUT OF THE TABLE DRAWER AND PLONKS IT IN FRONT OF BATES) You were seen hiding it. And the note to your wife as to where to find it was, shall we say, intercepted.

BATES Don't hurt her, please.

CECIL You, Bates, are the scum of the earth and will be found guilty of conspiracy to murder; bribing a Government Official and now theft. Pity you'll only hang once. Now get out! And back to that shithole of a prison. (HE PUTS THE BAG BACK IN THE DRAWER AND SLAMS IT SHUT)

BATES IS A BROKEN MAN. HE LEAVES.
CECIL TURNS TO TRESHAM'S FILE AND
LOOKS THROUGH IT.

CECIL (SHOUTING) Tresham! In here, now!

TRESHAM ENTERS SMARTLY DRESSED.
CECIL CLICKS HIS FINGERS AND
POINTS TO THE EMPTY CHAIR.

TRESHAM (HE SITS) Can I ask why I've been arrested?

CECIL Three reasons. One: you're Catesby's cousin. Two: you've got money. Three: I want information. Satisfied?

TRESHAM What information?

CECIL Don't play the innocent. Tell me what you know about recent events.

TRESHAM Oh, you mean the caper beneath the Lords' Chamber?

CECIL I don't share your sense of humour, Tresham.

TRESHAM I don't wish to sound glib either, but as it turned out is wasn't serious. No one was hurt.

CECIL There was an attempted regicide. Is that not serious enough?

TRESHAM Of course it's serious! But the plot was uncovered and the culprits are either dead or in custody. What's the problem?

CECIL You sound mightily relieved.

TRESHAM I'm just glad the King is safe and well.

CECIL Are you really! Now, there's a surprise.

TRESHAM I wish him no harm.

CECIL You wanted him dead.

TRESHAM (INDIGNANTLY) Who told you that?

CECIL The same person who named you as a conspirator.

TRESHAM Huh! Someone with a grudge who wants to settle an old score? Or was it a jealous rival out to make trouble for me?

CECIL You make your own trouble by the looks of this.
(MORE)

CECIL CONT'D (HE REFERS TO THE FILE) 1591: imprisoned for abusing the authority of a warrant. 1596: arrested and imprisoned for conspiracy. 1601: arrested and imprisoned for involvement in the Essex Rebellion. 1602/3: suspected of involvement in the Spanish Treason. And now 1605: involvement in the Gunpowder Treason.

TRESHAM If I may remind you, I only played a very minor role in the Essex Rebellion.

CECIL And may I remind you, Tresham, it was only your father's intervention and bribery that got you off a charge of treason and certain execution! You won't be so bloody lucky this time.

TRESHAM With respect, you can't assume me guilty because of my...my chequered past.

CECIL Stop bleating man! You're a seditious and unscrupulous liar, and true to your colours, embroiled yourself in a plot to assassinate the King and subvert the Government by mob rule.

TRESHAM I must protest! The allegation is totally unjust.

CECIL And why should I care? You cared little for justice when you beat up a tenant farmer and his daughter.

TRESHAM They owed my father money in rent arrears.

CECIL But that didn't give you the right to assault them.

TRESHAM Give that sort an inch they take a mile.

CECIL You took a life.

TRESHAM Whose?

CECIL The girl, Tresham, was pregnant and had a miscarriage soon after.

TRESHAM One less brat to feed!

CECIL You prick! (ANGRILY) Stand up!

TRESHAM STANDS. CECIL CIRCLES
THEN VIOLENTLY KNEES TRESHAM IN
THE BALLS.

TRESHAM (DOUBLED UP) I'm sorry. What do you want? (HE FLOPS ON TO THE CHAIR)

CECIL You to admit you knew about - and were involved in - the conspiracy to kill the King.

TRESHAM IS SWEATY AND FEELING UNWELL AND CAPITULATES.

TRESHAM I did know what Catesby was up to. But I wasn't actively involved in it.

CECIL You funded your cousin's murderous plan to the tune of two thousand fucking pounds. What is that if not active involvement?

TRESHAM It wasn't for the fighting fund. It was a bribe.

CECIL Like father, like son.

TRESHAM I pleaded with him not to go ahead but he was having none of it. He got angry. Accused me of being a traitor. Said he'd kill me if it was me that had written the letter warning Lord Monteagle not to attend the opening of Parliament.

CECIL I stuck my neck out for you, Tresham. Gave you a chance to leave the country and get you out of my hair. Why didn't you take it?

TRESHAM I daren't! They were watching me like a hawk. I'd have been dead before I got anywhere near a ship.

CECIL Treachery comes with a cost.

TRESHAM My life.

CECIL A high price to pay for a letter: your death warrant.

TRESHAM I trusted him. Expected him to destroy the evidence not hand it to you.

CECIL His lordship is an arse-licker. What's more, the bastard's stolen my thunder and received a king's ransom into the bargain.

TRESHAM IS GRIPPED BY PAIN.

TRESHAM Aargh!

CECIL You're sweating like a pig. My God! Better not be the plague!

TRESHAM No! It's strangury. The pain will pass.

CECIL Just between ourselves, Tresham, there never would have been an explosion. You see, I had my men make a discreet search of the cellar and they found the gunpowder but it had decayed and was useless. Nevertheless, I ordered it to be left where it was.

TRESHAM Fawkes walked into a trap.

CECIL All the culprits accounted for - bar one - and the King forever in my debt. How's the pain by the way?

TRESHAM Excruciating!

CECIL Where is it? Show me?

TRESHAM INDICATES HIS LOWER ABDOMEN. CECIL GENTLY PLACES A HAND ON IT.

Here?

TRESHAM Yes.

CECIL SUDDENLY PRESSES DOWN HARD AND TRESHAM CRIES OUT IN AGONY.

CECIL I can rely on you to keep your mouth shut about the gunpowder, can't I, Tresham?

TRESHAM Yees!

CECIL (TAKES HIS HAND AWAY) I must get you something for the pain.

TRESHAM Pleeease! I can't stand it much longer. (HE IS IN AGONY)

CECIL (FEIGNS CONCERN) Now go and rest. (HE USHERS TRESHAM OFF) I'll see to it. You'll be fine. I'll see you're put out of your misery - permanently! (HE RETURNS TO THE TABLE AND LOOKS THROUGH ELIZA VAUX'S FILE THEN GOES UPSTAGE AND POLITELY CALLS HER) Eliza Vaux, please.

SHE ENTERS. SHE IS A LADY OF
STYLE AND ELEGANCE AND BRIMMING
WITH CONFIDENCE.

CECIL Please. (HE MOTIONS FOR HER TO SIT)

SHE SITS.

(SITTING) I'm Robert Cecil.

VAUX I know; your reputation precedes you.

CECIL I'm heading the investigation and shall be
conducting this interview. You are The Dowager
Lady Vaux of Harrowden Hall.

VAUX A bit of a mouthful. You can call me Eliza.

CECIL Not Evie?

VAUX Pretty name but not mine. Sorry.

CECIL I take it you've never used it then?

VAUX Why would I?

CECIL To hide the fact that you're an associate of
the conspirator Guido Fawkes?

VAUX I think you're mistaken.

CECIL I have a letter that was found on him at the
time of his arrest. It's signed Evie.

VAUX That's all very interesting but why tell me?

CECIL Because you wrote that letter. The signature
had me fooled at first but then it came to
me...if you take the initial letters of Eliza
Vaux, the E and the V and say them together you
get E.V. - Evie! You!

VAUX Very clever! But there must be any number of
women with the initials E.V.

CECIL Quite possibly but the letter links you with
Guido Fawkes and so implicates you in the plot
to blow up Parliament.

VAUX That's preposterous!

CECIL You were involved as early as Easter. You even mentioned it in a letter to Lady Wenman. But unfortunately, she was away so her mother-in-law, Lady Tasborough, took the liberty of opening it. The wise old bird suspected something was afoot and quite rightly passed it on to me. (HE GETS THE LETTER FROM THE FILE AND READS) "Pray that we shall soon see Tottenham turn French." Interesting turn of phrase, don't you think, Eliza?

VAUX FEIGNS IGNORANCE AND JUST SHRUGS HER SHOULDERS.

Common parlance, I believe, suggesting a significant event is about to take place. Care to enlighten me as to what event you were referring to?

VAUX It was many months ago and I can't say with any certainty. Although, I do remember around that time I was arranging my eldest son's marriage to Lady Elizabeth Howard. Likely as not it was about that.

CECIL PUTS THE LETTER AWAY.

CECIL Does the name Meaze mean anything to you?

VAUX Yes. He's a convivial Catholic gentleman with a great love of music and a fine singing voice.

CECIL A frequent visitor to Harrowden?

VAUX He has, on occasions, entertained us with his vocal skills.

CECIL Was this before or after he'd said Mass?

VAUX They were just social evenings with our usual hospitality. And music of course. Nothing religious about it at all.

CECIL What would you say if I tell you your Catholic gentleman is a Jesuit priest?

VAUX A priest? No, that's absurd! He's not at all how I imagine a priest to be let alone dress like one. A priest indeed! (SHE CHUCKLES)

CECIL Don't take me for a fool, Eliza.

(MORE)

CECIL CONT'D A servant girl told pursuivants your 'songster' friend performed priestly duties at Harrowden and White Webbs only recently.

VAUX You're taking the word of a servant girl - who was doubtless coerced into lying - against that of a lady?

CECIL I'll take the word of a compulsive liar if it suits my purpose.

VAUX And perjure yourself in a court of law?

CECIL I'll do whatever it takes to rid this country of the Papist canker! Do you deny then knowing the priest who calls himself Meaze?

VAUX I only know Mr Meaze the singer.

CECIL Then you also know the priest Father Garnet.

VAUX Your reasoning is illogical.

CECIL Meaze is an alias used by Garnet. They are one and the same.

VAUX IS NOT COWED.

It's pointless you continuing to deny it because I know all about you and your sister-in-law, Anne Vaux, and your network of recusant safe houses for fugitive priests.

VAUX We're being unfairly persecuted. The pursuivants repeatedly search our homes and find absolutely nothing. Why can't you just leave us alone as the King promised?

CECIL I have information naming the four main properties used as hideouts. Yours is one along with White Webbs, Baddesley Clinton and Hindlip House. All are being searched as we speak.

VAUX Ransacked and looted to be correct.

CECIL This time my men will be thorough and are quite within their rights to seize goods and possessions.

VAUX And what is it you hope to find - this time - you've not found before?

CECIL I want Garnet: the main instigator. He does the Devil's work disguised as a priest aided and abetted by you and your sister-in-law.

VAUX You have such a vivid imagination. Makes me wonder what you're going to dream up next.

CECIL I know a lot about Garnet: his insatiable appetite for wine and women.

VAUX I'm not listening to this; it's too ridiculous for words.

CECIL He apparently has an incestuous relationship with his "loving sister" Alice. I have a love letter to prove it.

VAUX A forgery.

CECIL I've also been told Dorothy Brooksby's two children - Anne's nieces - are his bastards!

VAUX How dare you!

CECIL And sleeps with Mrs Perkins who rents White Webbs. And I wouldn't be at all surprised if he shares his bed with you and your sister-in-law.

VAUX Your insinuations are vile, and although I don't know the man, I feel sorry for him. You are deliberately blackening his name with your salacious lies and slander.

CECIL Garnet is an enemy of the State and I'll stop at nothing until I have stained my hands with his Catholic blood! (HE REFERS TO THE FILE) Tell me about your pilgrimage to Holywell, North Wales, at the end of August.

VAUX I would prefer not to. It's personal.

CECIL Women's trouble?

VAUX Don't be vulgar!

CECIL What then?

VAUX I went to take the healing waters at St Winifred's Well, if you must know.

CECIL Did the fool-smelling waters do you any good or just make you puke?

VAUX There were most beneficial actually.

CECIL My sources tell me Garnet also took a group to North Wales at the same time for a meeting with the Welsh rebels.

VAUX What has that got to do with me?

CECIL Strange you all just happened to descended on Holywell at the same time.

VAUX As I said, I was there to take the waters and that's all.

CECIL You were there to help Garnet drum up Welsh support for a rebellion.

VAUX What utter nonsense!

CECIL A rebellion that was to be led by Digby from Dunchurch, kidnap the Princess Elizabeth from Coombe Abbey and install her as a puppet queen. That was the plan, wasn't it?

VAUX You really do need to keep your imagination in check; it's running riot - no pun intended!

CECIL Give me the names of all those who were on that pilgrimage to Holywell at the end of August starting with your sister-in-law Anne. I also want a detailed description of Garnet, Tesimond and Gerard, and a list of their aliases.

VAUX I can't help you, I'm afraid.

CECIL It would be in your best interests if you did.

VAUX But I don't have the information you're after. I suppose I could always take a leaf out of your book and use my imagination.

CECIL You wouldn't dare make a false statement.

VAUX No more than you dare make false accusations.

CECIL You're a smug bitch!

VAUX I'll take that as a compliment.

CECIL In spite of your bravado, you've made a fatal error. (HE TAKES A LETTER FROM HER FILE) This letter of yours - to Sir Richard Verney.

VAUX What about it?

CECIL You offered him a bribe to release the three men he'd arrested in Kenilworth.

VAUX Wrongfully arrested. They're friends of mine who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

CECIL He must have suspected them of something.

VAUX A trumped-up charge of being priests I shouldn't wonder.

CECIL If they weren't, why didn't you give Sir Richard their names instead of describing them?

 VAUX HAS BEEN CAUGHT OUT BUT
 REMAINS CALM AND SAYS NOTHING.

You couldn't, could you? Because you hadn't the faintest idea which alias they were using at the time of their arrest. You could face the death penalty over this.

VAUX And my friends?

CECIL Certain death.

VAUX Where are they now?

CECIL Bridewell. (HE CLOSES THE FILE) You'll be placed in the custody of alderman Sir John Swynnerton while I make further enquiries into your dubious activities then I'll decide what is to be done with you. You may go.

 VAUX MAKES A DIGNIFIED EXIT.
 CECIL GATHERS THE FILES AND
 FOLLOWS HER OUT.

 CURTAIN.