

# The Roses of Eyam

Don Taylor

*The Great Plague started in the village of Eyam, Derbyshire and the play is set there. Each day more villagers die, and here the local madman, known as the Bedlam, watches and talks of the sad happenings in his own strange way.*

*Time: 1665.*

*Note: Two short speeches have been joined here.*

**BEDLAM.** I seen it, I seen it! (*Whispers as though a secret.*)  
Three new graves, open in the churchyard. I laughed and danced, but they sent me away. They don't think it's funny, putting a man in a hole. . . . (*Sees a procession with a coffin.*)  
. . . They've got Peter Halksworth in that long box. . . .  
They've nailed him in. In case he changes his mind. . . .  
(*A second cortège appears.*) . . . They've put Thomas Thorpe in that one, because he didn't wake up this morning when they shook him. And in that one his wife Mary. Just because her toes went black. They owned a shop. But last night a white cricket sang at the back door, and this morning the shutters are closed. . . . They've stopped all the music, and planted them in the earth. Perhaps they think they'll grow, like flowers. . . . (*MOMPESSON enters.*) . . . Mister! . . .  
Can I come with you? . . . I been playing in the grass by the church! I seen four graves. Four. . . . There's one all grass. Not opened yet. . . . (*MOMPESSON leaves and BEDLAM shouts after him, his words gradually becoming terrified.*) . . .  
And I seen another one, and another, and another, all in a line, and black buds on all the trees, and a forest of crosses growing up in the street, and over the river and all across the valley, till it's all thick and dark, no more people, just

big black trees . . . ! (*Alone.*) . . . Nobody listens to the mad boy. . . .

*He turns in circles, holding up his hands as though catching snowflakes.*

Snow - snow - snow - I'm going to build a snowman for Christmas. I'll make him big and strong like Marshall Howe, with a hat and a clay pipe, and a stick in his hand. He'll be all right while it stays freezing. But when it gets warmer his face will go black and dirty, and he'll get old, and when the sun comes out again, I'll watch him melt away to a little pool of dirty water. Then he'll be all gone, and there'll be nothing left except his hat and his clay pipe and his stick, and I expect I'll wonder why I bothered to make him at all. . . . (*He looks very sad for a second, then bends down scrabbling in the snow and making noises.*) Nobody listens to the mad boy! (*Exits, bell tinkling.*)