

WINCHESTER GEESE
Sample Packet
By Maggie Smith

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SYNOPSIS: Inspired by the history of the Crossbones Graveyard, this play tells the story of Avis, Cecily, and Bridget, three young women stuck on earth since their burials, all of whom spend their afterlives clinging onto the hope of one day being remembered.

CHARACTERS

CECILY — one of the Winchester Geese, died in 1616 from syphilis at 27, bitter and believes she deserves better (female, open ethnicity)

AVIS — died unidentifiable on the street at 19 in 1801, guilt-ridden but hopeful she'll see her family again (female, open ethnicity)

BRIDGET — a member of the working poor, died in a workhouse accident that was covered up in 1746 at age 42, maternal, strong-willed but not optimistic (female, open ethnicity)

THE MOURNERS — those who enter the graveyard and put ribbons onto the gate; never speak, can be played by the actors playing Avis, Bridget, and Cecily, completely different actors, crew members doing transitions. There's options.

SETTING

The Crossbones Graveyard, Southwark, London. Present Day, Only After Dusk

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE
SO WE'RE ALL DEAD, IT SEEKS

[The Crossbones Graveyard, Southwark, London. Dusk. Eyes should go immediately to the gate, covered in brightly colored ribbons, photos, and anything else that could be viewed as a respectful remembrance. Each ribbon has a name, maybe more. The graveyard is taken care of, with stone benches to sit on, flowers and shrines, anything to make it seem like a graveyard, save actual headstones. CECILY is lounging on one of the benches, AVIS is across from CECILY, staring at her. Both are frozen. BRIDGET is facing outward, and addressing the audience directly, almost out of her own reality.]

BRIDGET

The first thing you don't know about death: If you die with your eyes open, they're going to feel dry for the rest of eternity.

[CECILY and AVIS unfreeze, mid-argument. CECILY is rubbing her fingernails against the fabric of her skirt furiously. BRIDGET has heard this all before, and is barely interested. She is still staring outward.]

CECILY

They don't actually care. They only like the aesthetic of it.

AVIS

The aesthetic? They're actively mourning.

CECILY

Mourning people they never knew.

AVIS

It's sweet.

CECILY

It's sick. And fake. They don't feel sad, they just want to be a part of our tragedy.

AVIS

And what tragedy are we a part of?

CECILY

I don't know. Death? The patriarchy? A systematic oppression? Give me some time and I'm sure I can come up with something. The point is, it's romanticizing us. They think they're being profound or poetic when they take pictures on one of these benches or tie a ribbon on the gate with some fake tears in their eyes. You know, I've seen at least three ribbons get tied to the gate this week with some bullshit names of people who were never actually buried here, just so they can seem like they're doing some dead girl a service. But it's just some type of morbid ceremony they put themselves through so they feel in touch with their emotions.

AVIS

No. No, they're not just using us, they're— What are you doing? Stop that.

[CECILY looks down at her nails as she stops rubbing them against her skirt.]

CECILY

There's dirt underneath my nails.

AVIS

Don't do that. It's annoying.

CECILY

So are you.

[CECILY continues rubbing her nails. AVIS is about to interject but is stopped by BRIDGET.]

BRIDGET

[Absentmindedly] Joan's gone.

AVIS

[Abruptly forgetting about the argument] She is?

BRIDGET

Someone tied a ribbon with her name on it earlier this morning. And no one's seen her since.

AVIS

And her daughter?

BRIDGET

Clara? She's still here.

AVIS

Poor girl. But it's good that Joan's gotten to move on.

CECILY

Yeah. Good for Joan. Bad for us.

BRIDGET

Bad how?

CECILY

Well, we're still here, aren't we?

BRIDGET

Yes...

CECILY

So it's bad for us. There's one less space on the gate for one of our names.

AVIS

We can build more gates.

CECILY

She shouldn't be gone. One of us should've gotten to leave.

BRIDGET

If it wasn't Joan, then it could've been anyone else.

CECILY

Then why wasn't it me?

AVIS

Can't you think about how happy she is? Seeing everyone she left for the first time in centuries.

[Beat] You know that's what I miss the most.

CECILY

Can we not do this again?

AVIS

I'm going to see them again. My sisters, my mother and father. All of them.

CECILY

[To BRIDGET, not whining] Make her stop.

BRIDGET

[To CECILY, same tone] Let her smile.

AVIS

My youngest sister, I hate to say it but I miss her the most. She was so small. She'd fit right into my arms when I'd hug her.

CECILY

[To BRIDGET] Don't indulge this.

BRIDGET

[To AVIS, definitely indulging] And what about the others?

CECILY

Stop talking. Stop talking.

AVIS

There was Margaret, but my mother called her Missy. She was untamable. A lot like Cecily.

CECILY

Are you going to elaborate on that?

[AVIS shrugs.]

CECILY

Then are you done?

AVIS

I'll be done.

CECILY

Good. Because after having to sit through that speech for what must be the millionth time I definitely deserve to move on instead of Joan.

BRIDGET

Move past it. It's over.

CECILY

I can be upset.

AVIS

Keep it to yourself.

BRIDGET

That's not what I said. *[Beat, quieter]* I would've phrased it kinder.

[The graveyard is silent, but not uncomfortable. The tension slowly rises within CECILY, but the other two don't notice, until she finally speaks.]

CECILY

But can you honestly say that you're happy for Joan?

BRIDGET

Of / course.

AVIS

Yes.

CECILY

And can you say that you'd rather Joan move on from the graveyard than you?

[There's a hesitation from BRIDGET and AVIS.]

CECILY

Well?

BRIDGET

No one wants to be here.

CECILY

So is that a yes?

BRIDGET

I wouldn't take away her place wherever she is now.

CECILY

You won't admit it, but you'd take her place in a heartbeat if someone offered it to you.

AVIS

Of course she wouldn't. She's not a selfish person.

CECILY

I'm selfish for wanting what's best for me?

AVIS

You're selfish for choosing your own happiness over someone else.

CECILY

No. It's self-preservation. If I could've watched another girl die instead of me I would have.

AVIS

That's horrific.

CECILY

That's life. You end up dead if you don't think for yourself.

AVIS

You thought for yourself and look where you are now.

CECILY

[Beat, almost impressed if she weren't mad] Don't twist my words.

AVIS

I didn't twist your words, I said exactly what you did.

BRIDGET

This isn't worth the fight. Cecily, Joan deserves to move on. End of story.

CECILY

It's not a black and white issue.

AVIS

It is. You're wrong. I'm right.

BRIDGET

Avis.

AVIS

No. You said the fight is over. It is. I'm not arguing about this anymore. It's done.

[AVIS begins to exit. BRIDGET and CECILY watch her go, frozen. Transition into:]

[END OF EXCERPT]

For the Full Script, Please Contact: maggiesmithwrites@gmail.com