

**THE HANDKERCHIEF PLAY**

By Maggie Smith

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Draft Three

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## **THE EDWARDS'**

**WINIFRED** — 21; the family's oldest daughter; independent, full of energy, not looking for love

**OTTILIE** — 19; the family's youngest daughter; a gossip who's interested in anything you have to say

**ELEANORA** — 40s; the family's mother; desperate for perfect daughters and a happy home

**GRANVILLE** — 40s; the family's father; kind, honest, and straightforward

## **THE TAILORS**

**GEORGIA** — 21; Clarence's niece, Anthony's cousin; quick-witted and sarcastic

**ANTHONY** — 23; Clarence's son, Georgia's cousin; a romantic, chasing love

**CLARENCE** — 40s; Georgia's uncle, Anthony's father; generous and intelligent

## **THE WOODS'**

**VICTOR** — 24; the family's only son; charismatic, always found lounging where he ought to not be

**CHARLOTTE** — 19; the family's only daughter; a busybody who's friends with everyone

## **SETTING**

New York, the 1890s

## **NOTES**

This is a historical play. A period piece. If you're tempted to not cast specific races because you're wanting to be "historically accurate," please don't do this play. You do not know what accuracy is, and also you're mean. The same goes for disabled performers— If you don't want to cast diverse representations on your stage, then my plays aren't for you.

The topic of gender for this play depends on the role. To me, it's important that Anthony's pursuit of Georgia is viewed as heterosexual, and Winifred and Georgia's relationship is viewed as sapphic. Beyond this, gender is completely open for all characters. "Sapphic" is a bit of an open-ended term, as there are plenty of ways to portray a sapphic relationship, so it's absolutely encouraged to explore this in casting! As usual, don't discriminate based on gender-identity.

This play features queer characters and relationships. If you are upset by this, claiming acceptance of queer people isn't historically accurate, I genuinely do not want to hear it. I cannot emphasize how much of a fuck I do not give. This is my play. I wrote it for a reason. Do not tell me that people like me didn't get to be happy back then. Go eat a banana and talk to me when you've calmed down.

There's also cursing in this play. We've talked about this before. If you want to do a reading of the play, perform the play, etc., but you're afraid of the cursing element in it, that's okay. Reach out to me. We can work it out. But if you want to erase the queer sapphic relationship at the forefront of the story, I'll bite you.

That's all I have to say on this play, I think. I'll talk to you later. Enjoy the play!

**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE ONE**  
**SORRY, I'M STARTING ANOTHER PLAY WITH A FUNERAL**

*[A parlor, midday. From the decorations, a Victorian audience could tell the home belongs to a family in the upper-middle class of the Victorian Era. A modern audience, however, knows that the class system is disgusting and is only being used as a reference point for design and setting. ELEANORA and GRANVILLE inhabit the room, mid-discussion. WINIFRED, OTTILIE, and CHARLOTTE sit to the side, ears open and mouths shut. Next to them, VICTOR lounges, improper but still respected. All are dressed in mourning.]*

ELEANORA

It really was a lovely service.

GRANVILLE

Nothing but the best for Aunt Teresa.

ELEANORA

You delivered a lovely eulogy. You stumbled over the Bible verse, but the rest of it was lovely.

GRANVILLE

She would have laughed, dear. Then chastised.

ELEANORA

Well, what is an aunt's purpose if not for bettering oneself.

*[ELEANORA looks to the younger members of the family.]*

ELEANORA

And the children! You haven't spoken a word all afternoon! How are you feeling? Victor?

VICTOR

I'm fine.

ELEANORA

Grieving?

VICTOR

She wasn't my aunt.

ELEANORA

Girls? Are you feeling faint at all?

GRANVILLE

Dear, why would they be feeling faint?

ELEANORA

Burying a body is hardly an event young women should be viewing. *[To the girls]* Do you need to lie down? Do you need a fan? I have a fan. Winifred, do you need a fan?

WINIFRED

I feel perfectly normal, thank you.

*[GRANVILLE clears his throat, making eye-contact with WINIFRED.]*

WINIFRED

Mother. Thank you, Mother.

ELEANORA

Oh, the will! Granville, we need to go to the reading of the will!

GRANVILLE

I don't understand why you're insisting upon reading the will today. The woman isn't even buried, yet.

ELEANORA

If we wait we'll forget.

GRANVILLE

Fine. Come along, girls.

ELEANORA

No. No, this is hardly a conversation that would be appropriate for young women to be a part of.

GRANVILLE

Nonsense. It involves them. Their futures.

ELEANORA

And we can tell them all about their futures once we've laid eyes on the will. Girls, I'll speak with you later. Charlotte, Victor, it's always a pleasure.

*[The younger generation stands as ELEANORA exits.]*

GRANVILLE

I'll speak with you all later. For now, I must attend Mrs. Edwards.

*[GRANVILLE exits. For a moment, all is still. After the younger generation is sure the adults are gone, there is a physical change in their demeanor.]*

OTILIE

Fuck.

CHARLOTTE

I thought they'd never leave.

WINIFRED

I feel faint. Do I look faint?

VICTOR

You look faint.

WINIFRED

What do I do?

CHARLOTTE

Sit down.

WINIFRED

But my back hurts.

OTILIE

Then stay standing.

VICTOR

How long until Charlotte and I can leave?

A woman just died.

WINIFRED

“Just” is a strong word.

VICTOR

Do you have better things to do?

OTTILIE

No.

VICTOR

Then don’t leave.

OTTILIE

Otilie, get me water.

WINIFRED

Get the water yourself.

OTTILIE

I can’t move. The room’s spinning.

WINIFRED

Do you think I’m mentioned in the will?

CHARLOTTE

Absolutely not.

VICTOR

That bitch.

CHARLOTTE

You barely spoke a word to her.

VICTOR

And here I am, attending a memorial service for her. That’s worth at least a small fortune.

CHARLOTTE

VICTOR

Winnie and Otilie are right there.

OTILIE

Oh, I don't care, Great-Aunt Teresa sucked.

WINIFRED

And I learned to tune out anything Charlotte says years ago.

CHARLOTTE

Impressive.

VICTOR

And that doesn't bother you?

CHARLOTTE

I learned to tune out Winnie's opinions years ago.

WINIFRED

Clever.

OTILIE

Winnie, sit down.

WINIFRED

If I sit down I'll never stand up again.

VICTOR

Your mother asked you if you needed a fan, why didn't you take it?

WINIFRED

I don't accept help from Eleanora.

OTILIE

You'd better not let her hear you call her that.

CHARLOTTE

Did she die of natural causes?



OTTILIE

My mother is still alive. You saw her five minutes ago.

CHARLOTTE

Not your mother. Teresa.

WINIFRED

She had a fever.

CHARLOTTE

And she just died of it?

WINIFRED

I don't know. I wasn't allowed in the room.

CHARLOTTE

I'll bet she looked cool.

OTTILIE

She looked dead.

CHARLOTTE

That, too.

VICTOR

Winnie, sit down.

WINIFRED

I think I'm going to die.

OTTILIE

Then tell Great-Aunt Teresa we say "hi."

CHARLOTTE

Oh, my God. Just—

*[CHARLOTTE pulls WINIFRED by her wrists to the sofa, and pulls her down to sit.]*

CHARLOTTE

Better?

WINIFRED

I can breathe again.

CHARLOTTE

Great.

*[ELEANORA enters.]*

ELEANORA

Otilie, Winifred, get up. It's time to go to the burial.

*[ELEANORA exits.]*

WINIFRED

Goddamn it!

*[Transition into:]*

**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE TWO**  
**AWW, THEY'RE LIKE SIBLINGS**

*[The Tailor Home, where ANTHONY and GEORGIA sit at a rounded table in the kitchen. It's old, partially worn down, but it reminds you of home. The two are playing with cards, ANTHONY playing solitaire, and GEORGIA attempting to make a house of cards. ANTHONY flips over a card, and sits with it for a moment. GEORGIA doesn't even have to look over at him.]*

GEORGIA

You have a ten of hearts that your nine can go on.

ANTHONY

Damn it.

*[He moves the card.]*

ANTHONY

If you're so good at this game why aren't you playing it?

GEORGIA

I've already played a perfect game. I'm into physics now.

*[She places a card. It doesn't fall.]*

GEORGIA

See?

*[ANTHONY looks at his next card.]*

GEORGIA

You have an ace the king can—

ANTHONY

It's called solitaire for a reason, Georgia.

GEORGIA

Yes, which should make it even more upsetting that you need my help.

*[GEORGIA grows bored and lets her house topple over. They fall all over the table, across ANTHONY and his game, and onto the floor.]*

ANTHONY

Georgia!

GEORGIA

At least now you have an excuse to stop that pitiful attempt you called playing.

ANTHONY

My father's going to ask me to pick this all up when he gets home.

GEORGIA

Then at least that'll give you a chance to familiarize yourself with the cards.

*[CLARENCE enters, wearing funeral attire.]*

CLARENCE

Anthony, Georgia.

ANTHONY

How was the funeral?

CLARENCE

A wonderful service. Beautiful. A perfect way to honor Mrs. Edwards.

GEORGIA

You know, Uncle Clarence, I still don't see why we couldn't have gone.

CLARENCE

A funeral is no place for a young lady. You would have fainted at the sight of her corpse.

GEORGIA

Was it morbid?

CLARENCE

No, it was just a corpse.

GEORGIA

Was Winifred there? And Otilie?

CLARENCE

Well, yes. But Mrs. Edwards was their great-aunt. They had a reason to be there.

GEORGIA

And how about the Woods? Were Victor and Charlotte there, too?

CLARENCE

Yes.

GEORGIA

They aren't related to Mrs. Edwards!

CLARENCE

Yes, but their parents don't keep a close enough eye on them to know whether they're at home or not.

*[GEORGIA rolls her eyes at this but doesn't fight.]*

CLARENCE

Did you two have fun while I was out?

ANTHONY

As fun as two people who weren't invited to a funeral can have on a Thursday evening.

CLARENCE

Well, get ready for more fun, then. We'll be hosting the Edwards for dinner. In three days.

GEORGIA

For... Fun?

CLARENCE

For fun? Yes. For fun. It'll be fun.

ANTHONY

Father, I don't want to argue with you but... Doesn't hosting a dinner just make more work for us?

CLARENCE

Their matriarch just died, show respect.

ANTHONY

Apologies. Respectfully, doesn't hosting a dinner just make more work for us?

CLARENCE

This isn't about how much work we have. It's about extending a hand to a family in need.

ANTHONY

Look at the size of their house. They're not a family in need.

CLARENCE

They're in despair.

GEORGIA

Mourning.

CLARENCE

Mourning, right. And we do things for people in mourning.

ANTHONY

Are you sure this is a good idea?

CLARENCE

Why wouldn't it be?

ANTHONY

We're on our own, here. We don't have staff, no one to help prepare the home, it's just the three of us. We're not what they're used to, as of late.

CLARENCE

Maybe. But they're friends. And moreover, they don't judge. And as for preparing the home, we'll be doing that ourselves.

ANTHONY

Ourselves? That's one, two— Four extra people.

GEORGIA

That's not a large amount.

ANTHONY

Eight, if we include the Woods', because we always end up including the Woods'.

GEORGIA

Mr. and Mrs. Woods would never come. It would only be Victor and Charlotte.

ANTHONY

Six, then. Add that to us, that's nine.

GEORGIA

Uncle Clarence, I have to commend you on Anthony's education, what he lacks in critical thinking he makes up for in his math skills.

ANTHONY

Nine bread plates, nine napkins, twenty-seven forks— Are we having dessert?

CLARENCE

Probably.

ANTHONY

Thirty-six forks! Eighteen spoons, nine salad plates, / nine bowls for soup, depending on what the individual drinks anywhere between nine and twenty-seven glasses

GEORGIA

Stop. Stop. Stop. Anthony stop!

ANTHONY

What?

GEORGIA

We don't care.

ANTHONY

And what about food? Food for nine people, sets of dishes for nine people— And the courses. How many courses—

GEORGIA

He's having an episode.

ANTHONY

When are they coming? What day? What time?

CLARENCE

Sunday evening, after Mass.

ANTHONY

Which gives us no time—

CLARENCE

I'm not interested in your pessimism. We'll have the house ready by Saturday.

ANTHONY

Even less time.

CLARENCE

It gives us two days.

ANTHONY

Jesus Christ.

CLARENCE

You'd better be praying if you say that name.

GEORGIA

We can handle it.

ANTHONY

You sound sure of us.

GEORGIA

We're Tailors. We could get it done in one day.

*[Transition into:]*



**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE THREE**  
**PICK OUT YOUR DRESSES WHILE THINKING OF ME**

*[WINIFRED'S bedroom. She looks at herself in the mirror smiling while moving her dress back and forth.]*

OTTILIE

*[Offstage]* It's ugly!

WINIFRED

No, it's not.

OTTILIE

You haven't even seen it!

WINIFRED

It looked great on me. I don't know why you're complaining.

*[OTTILIE exits the closet in a dress that's bordering on hideous. She has the mannerisms of a child getting ready for Mass.]*

OTTILIE

I look like a goose.

WINIFRED

Geese aren't green.

OTTILIE

A sick goose is. A goose that's about to die from sickness.

WINIFRED

You're welcome to look for another dress.

OTTILIE

No. All of those dresses were bought for you.

WINIFRED

You were in my closet.

OTTILIE

Only because Mother won't give me anything that's not a hand-me-down.

WINIFRED

That's not true. She bought you a hat last week.

OTTILIE

Only because my head's bigger than yours! Oh, it's not fair! I'm going to look horrible!

WINIFRED

Come here.

*[OTTILIE walks to WINIFRED. WINIFRED inspects the dress.]*

WINIFRED

Well, you're wearing it inside out and backwards, for one thing.

*[OTTILIE looks in the mirror.]*

OTTILIE

Oh. Then I look pretty good, all things considered.

WINIFRED

I have a blue dress hidden towards the back of the closet. Try it on.

*[OTTILIE goes into the closet. She talks to WINIFRED from inside. WINIFRED sits at a vanity and begins to do her hair.]*

OTTILIE

Charlotte and Victor are meeting us there.

WINIFRED

Charlotte and Victor are invited?

OTTILIE

Victor weaseled his way in. He's good at things like that.

WINIFRED

I noticed. I don't remember Mother or Father telling me that they invited the Woods' to the funeral.

OTTILIE

Well, no one can say no to them.

WINIFRED

I suppose you'll be spending the entire night talking with Charlotte, then.

OTTILIE

Don't be silly. I'll talk with you, too. I'll need you to help me remember the details of everything Charlotte talks to me about. She knows so much.

WINIFRED

Too much, if you ask me. I don't know how she fits all of that gossip in her head.

OTTILIE

Well, she doesn't read, she says it takes up too much space in her brain that could be used for more important things.

WINIFRED

Like which couple's engagement ended because of an affair?

OTTILIE

Exactly.

*[OTTILIE comes out in a blue dress. She does a twirl.]*

OTTILIE

How could you not have told me about this dress? I don't remember you buying it.

WINIFRED

I didn't. It was a gift from Georgia.

OTTILIE

Tailor?

WINIFRED

Yes.

OTTILIE

I'll have to thank her for it tonight.

WINIFRED

I'm not giving it to you, if that's what you think.

OTTILIE

I know. But I'm still wearing it, aren't I? Move over.

*[WINIFRED moves on the stool, and OTTILIE joins her, looking in the mirror.]*

OTTILIE

God. I need to get out of this house. It's so cramped.

WINIFRED

You have your own vanity in your room, you know.

OTTILIE

But there's no one to talk to in there!

WINIFRED

You should learn to be alone with your own thoughts. It's good for you.

OTTILIE

You're lucky. You get to go out of the house more than I do.

WINIFRED

You'll get to do that when you're my age.

OTTILIE

Not if you're still living at home, I won't.

WINIFRED

It's not up to me.

OTTILIE

Yes it is! You can get married whenever you'd like!

WINIFRED

Jesus, this again?

OTTILIE

It's like you want me to suffocate!

WINIFRED

I'll leave home when I'm ready. And maybe I'll be ready soon. Maybe I won't be. It's not really any of your business either way.

OTTILIE

I want a rich husband and to travel the world, and I won't get any of those if you're playing spinster under Mother and Father's roof!

WINIFRED

I'm not playing anything. Your hair has a knot in it.

OTTILIE

Oh, I knew that hat was bad! I told Mother!

WINIFRED

Get a smaller head, then.

OTTILIE

How can you be happy living here? You can leave here anytime you want.

WINIFRED

Oh, it's not so bad. I have everything I want. Friends just around the corner. My family a room away. I don't really need for things to change right now.

OTTILIE

You could be throwing a party of your own instead of attending one.

WINIFRED

That doesn't sound tempting at all.

OTTILIE

Fine, then. I'll be enough of a socialite for the both of us.

WINIFRED

A socialite! Let me tell you, if anyone got word of what you've said about them to Charlotte, or the other way around, no one would want to set foot in a room with you ever again.

OTTILIE

Then I'll be a socialite who only talks to Charlotte. Can I borrow a necklace?

WINIFRED

Fine.

*[OTTILIE looks around on the vanity, and pulls a necklace.]*

OTTILIE

This one?

WINIFRED

I was going to wear that one.

OTTILIE

What is it?

WINIFRED

A locket. From Georgia.

OTTILIE

Is there anything in this room that's not from Georgia?

WINIFRED

Yeah, that dress that made you look like a goose. Are you almost finished?

OTTILIE

Almost. Did I get the knot out of my hair?

WINIFRED

It looks worse.

*[OTTILIE groans and lays her head on the vanity desk.]*

OTTILIE

What am I going to do?

WINIFRED

You could ask for help.

OTTILIE

I'd rather die.

WINIFRED

Noted. I'm going to find Mother, then. Have a nice time tearing your hair out.

*[WINIFRED walks toward the door.]*

OTTILIE

Winnie, wait!

*[WINIFRED stops and turns, looking at OTTILIE expectantly.]*

OTTILIE

You really won't consider finding a husband soon?

WINIFRED

Goodbye, Otilie.

*[WINIFRED leaves. OTTILIE stares at her hair in the mirror. Transition into:]*

**[END OF SAMPLE. FOR THE FULL WORK, PLEASE CONTACT:  
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