Something Fishy This Way Comes

by Rita Weinstein

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Harriet Guildenstern, in her mid-20s, has been in therapy for years because she cannot make a decision. The play opens the day before her marriage to Adrian, a strange guy who thinks he has psychic gifts. The mysterious Adrian spends all of his time upstairs behind a locked door, on the phone. Gertrude Guildenstern, Harriet's stepmother, is completely discombobulated by the upcoming wedding because she's desperate to see Harriet settled at long last. She's worried that once again Harriet will change her mind. So she keeps calling her telephone psychic, Madame Ophelia, who keeps telling her to "think those good thoughts." Neither she nor anyone else realizes that Madame Ophelia is actually her future son-in-law, Adrian. That's what he does on the phone all day, in partnership with his no-good brother Larry.

As Harriet tries on her wedding gown, she has a visit from the ghost of her mother, Jocasta, dead nearly 20 years. Harriet thinks Jocasta has come to give her blessing for the wedding. Instead, Jocasta announces that she was murdered by Gertrude in order to marry Harriet's dad, Claude. And she demands that Harriet avenge her.

Harriet is badly shaken and is clueless as to what she should do. Fortunately, her level-headed old friend Rosie Krantz arrives from London, on her way to LA. Rosie is now a writer for the tabloids. Deeply skeptical, Rosie decides to stick around and find out what really happened to Jocasta, and to debunk Adrian.

CAST OF CHARACTERS *(4 m, 4 w)*

HARRIET GUILDENSTERN: Bride who has trouble making decisions, mid-20s.
ADRIAN ORSINO: The bridegroom with a mysterious job.
LARRY ORSINO: Adrian's brother, late 20s.
GERTRUDE GUILDENSTERN: The worried stepmother.
JOCASTA GUILDENSTERN: Deceased mother of the bride.
CLAUDE GUILDENSTERN: Jovial father of the bride.
ROSIE KRANTZ: Harriet's good friend.
REX MacDUFF: Police detective, mid-20s. (Also doubles as Delivery Man in Act I.)

SETTING

A garishly over-decorated living room. Stage left is a staircase. Downstage left is a door leading to the kitchen. Stage right is a coat closet. Upstage is the front door. Along a wall is a sideboard with bottles of liquor and glasses. On top is a vase full of fake flowers and in a drawer is a pair of scissors. Pocket-size knickknacks adorn other surfaces. Gift boxes wrapped in wedding wrap are stacked on both sides of the sideboard. The sofa in the center of the stage is frilly and flowery. An afgan is folded over an arm. Prominent near the sofa is a freestanding full-length mirror, set so that it conceals the actor portraying the ghost. On the floor beside the sofa is a very large, white dress box. Packing tissue lies all around.

PROPS

Carry-on bag containing tape recorder, cosmetic bag, camera with flash, notebook, pen, handgun and crumpled newspaper; wedding dress and veil; tray with sandwiches; tuxedo on hanger; crumpled bank deposit slip; blonde wig; clipboard, pen and package; purses; car keys; cell phone; checkbook and pen;; diary, leaves, newspaper folded into pirate's hat, ironing board, business card, handcuffs, man’s handkerchief.

ACT I

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on GERTRUDE GUILDENSTERN entering. She is a wealthy matron in her 40s, wearing a ruffled dress that almost matches the sofa, as well as too much makeup, hairspray, and gaudy jewelry. She's the plump mother hen personified, clucking and fluttering over everyone and everything she cares about. She enters from the kitchen with a cell phone in one hand, a piece of paper with the phone number on it in the other. As she punches in the number, she glances upstairs nervously. In a moment, the person she's dialing answers.)

GERTRUDE: *(In a stage whisper.)* Madame Ophelia? Madame Ophelia, I hate to keep bothering you ... it's ... why yes, this is Gertrude. How did you ...? Oh, silly me, you're psychic, of course. Duh! What? *(HER eyes widen.)* Oh my, you are divine ... just divine. Yes, she is. She's having second thoughts again ... no, nothing exactly, but a mother knows. Even if she is just a stepmother.

(A loud THUMP at the top of the stairs.)

GERTRUDE: *(Cont.)* She's coming! Quick, what should I do? *(Listening, SHE closes her eyes.)* Yes, I see it, a perfect day, everything's perfect. And she's saying "I do." Good thoughts, yes, good thoughts, good thoughts ...

(Another loud BUMP from upstairs.)

GERTRUDE: *(Cont.)* I have to go. *(SHE hangs up the phone and shouts up the stairs.)* Be careful, Harriet. Watch the train.

(Another BUMP.)

HARRIET: Oww!

(HARRIET GUILDENSTERN, Gertrude's stepdaughter, comes down the stairs. Harriet is in her mid-20s, but still as awkward and uncertain as a teenager.)

(Wearing no makeup, she has an innocent sweetness and simple beauty. She's dressed in a heavy, gaudy wedding gown that nearly swallows her. The veil is balanced crookedly on her head. A long train is wrapped uncomfortably around her arms. Gertrude gets dewy-eyed as she watches Harriet descend.)

GERTRUDE: Oh, Harriet! You look like an angel.
HARRIET: I feel like a roll of toilet paper.
GERTRUDE: How odd. It sounded just like there was a barnyard animal in here. I don't see any barnyard animals, do you? Let's see. *(SHE pulls HARRIET in front of the mirror and stands beside her.)* No, no animals here, just a beautiful, radiant bride.

(HARRIET tries to straighten the veil, but can't move her arm because it's wrapped in the train. Trying to pull free from the train, she ends up tugging herself in a circle, bumping into GERTRUDE.)

HARRIET: I can't ... move. Can't ... breathe ...
GERTRUDE: Honey ... honey ... let me help you ... don't ...

(HARRIET tries to untangle herself from what's now the veil and train, all jumbled up. She trips, nearly bringing them both down.)

GERTRUDE: LET ME!

(HARRIET rights herself, then stands docile as GERTRUDE smoothes, pulls, and untangles her in front of the mirror. When finished, Gertrude lets out a long sigh of satisfaction. Harriet pulls the veil down over her face.)

HARRIET: Why don't they make these things harder to see through?
GERTRUDE: Nonsense. You're beautiful. Wait till your daddy sees you. And why are you being so negative? Adrian adores you. You're going to be very, very happy.
HARRIET: I want to be.
GERTRUDE: I know, honey. All those years of therapy. All those schools and tours and cruises. And therapy.

End of Freeview

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