

## Synopsis

A tranquil afternoon at a Victorian manor descends into comic chaos when Lady Agatha discovers her gardener hiding naked in the orchid house with an improbable explanation. Matters become even more complicated when an inquisitive friend arrives for tea, threatening scandal, misunderstanding, and a cascade of increasingly awkward social predicaments. This version plays in the style of a Victorian drawing-room farce, where the comedy comes from propriety, misunderstanding, and social embarrassment rather than anything risqué. A Victorian comedy for four people.

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## THE ORCHID HOUSE

**Written by Tanya Reddin**

*A Victorian Comedy in One Act*

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### Characters

**LADY AGATHA PEMBROKE** – Mistress of the manor, dignified, intelligent, and fond of orchids.

**MR. ALFRED POTTS** – The gardener. Earnest, practical, and perpetually unlucky.

**MRS. BEATRICE WILLOUGHBY** – Lady Agatha's friend, a cheerful collector of gossip.

**MABEL** – The maid. Efficient and observant.

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### SCENE

The Orchid House at Pembroke Manor.

Exotic flowers crowd the glasshouse. A small Victorian bistro style table with two seats, sits among the plants. It is a warm afternoon.

When the curtain rises, **MR. POTTS** is crouched behind a large orchid display.

Enter **LADY AGATHA** carrying a notebook.

**LADY AGATHA**

Mr. Potts?

**POTTS**

(startled)

Good heavens!

**LADY AGATHA**

Are you there?

**POTTS**

I most certainly am, my lady.

**LADY AGATHA**

Then kindly step out from behind the orchids.

**POTTS**

I would rather not.

**LADY AGATHA**

Rather not?

**POTTS**

No, my lady.

**LADY AGATHA**

Mr. Potts, I employ you. Kindly emerge at once.

*(A pause.)*

**POTTS**

I must respectfully decline.

**LADY AGATHA**

Decline?

**POTTS**

Until certain circumstances improve.

**LADY AGATHA**

What circumstances?

**POTTS**

My state of dress.

**LADY AGATHA**

Your state of...?

*(realising)*

Mr. Potts!

**POTTS**

Yes, my lady.

**LADY AGATHA**

Are you telling me that you are naked?

**POTTS**

Entirely, my lady.

**LADY AGATHA**

Good heavens!

**POTTS**

That was my reaction exactly.

**LADY AGATHA**

What possible reason could there be?

**POTTS**

A very good one.

**LADY AGATHA**

I await it, with growing alarm!

**POTTS**

A swarm of hornets, my lady.

**LADY AGATHA**

Hornets?

**POTTS**

I disturbed a nest near the potting shed.

**LADY AGATHA**

And this resulted in your being entirely unclothed?

**POTTS**

One hornet got inside my collar. Another inside my sleeve. By the time the third entered my trousers, I felt decisive action was required.

**LADY AGATHA**

Well, I cannot fault the urgency.

**POTTS**

Thank you, my lady.

**LADY AGATHA**

Where are your clothes now?

**POTTS**

Hanging outside. I discovered several hornets had taken refuge in them.

**LADY AGATHA**

This is the most ridiculous conversation I have ever had.

**POTTS**

It is not my finest afternoon either.

*(A bell rings in the distance.)*

**LADY AGATHA**

Oh dear. Mrs. Willoughby is arriving for tea.

**POTTS**

Perhaps she will not visit the greenhouse, my lady.

*Enter MABEL.*

**MABEL**

Mrs. Willoughby has arrived, my lady.

**LADY AGATHA**

Excellent. Keep her away from the orchid house.

**MABEL**

Very good, my lady.

*(A loud voice is heard.)*

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY (offstage)**

Agatha! Are your prize orchids in flower?

**LADY AGATHA**

Oh no.

Enter **MRS. WILLOUGHBY** energetically.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

There you are!

*(She notices Lady Agatha's flustered expression.)*

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

My dear, you look as though you've discovered a body.

**LADY AGATHA**

Not exactly.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Then what are you hiding behind those orchids?

**POTTS**

Good afternoon, madam.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Mr. Potts?

**POTTS**

The very same.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Why are you behind the orchids?

**LADY AGATHA**

Because...

**POTTS**

Hornets.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Hornets?

**POTTS**

An unusually persuasive species.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

I don't understand.

**POTTS**

Nor would I recommend attempting to.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Agatha, what is going on?

**LADY AGATHA**

Mr. Potts has suffered a horticultural emergency.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Why does that sound scandalous?

**POTTS**

Because it is being described politely.

*(Mabel suppresses a cough.)*

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Wait.

*(realisation dawns)*

Surely not.

**POTTS**

I regret that it is.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Good gracious!

**POTTS**

Again, an entirely reasonable response.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Agatha, you've been alone in a greenhouse with a naked gardener?

**LADY AGATHA**

For less than five minutes Beatrice!

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

That is precisely how rumours begin.

**LADY AGATHA**

Nothing improper has occurred.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

I know that.

*(pause)*

But imagine how entertaining it sounds.

**LADY AGATHA**

Beatrice!

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

I would never spread such a story.

*(pause)*

Until it became absolutely irresistible.

*(Suddenly a buzzing is heard.)*

**POTTS**

Hornets!

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Aah!

**LADY AGATHA**

Duck!

*(Everyone ducks.)*

**MABEL**

It's landed on the tea tray.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Kill it!

**POTTS**

I cannot. My circumstances remain unchanged.

**LADY AGATHA**

Mabel!

**MABEL**

Yes, my lady.

Mabel calmly covers the hornet with a teacup.

**MABEL**

There.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Remarkable.

**MABEL**

Thank you, madam.

**POTTS**

If I may say so, Mabel has nerves of steel.

**MABEL**

And sleeves without hornets.

**POTTS**

A considerable advantage.

**LADY AGATHA**

Can we now recover your clothes?

**MABEL**

I already have, my lady.

*(She produces a neatly folded bundle.)*

**POTTS**

You found them?

**MABEL**

I shook out twelve hornets.

**POTTS**

Twelve!

**MABEL**

I stopped counting after ten.

**POTTS**

You have saved my dignity.

**MABEL**

There wasn't much left to save, sir.

**LADY AGATHA**

Now please, Mr. Potts, restore yourself to polite society.

**POTTS**

At once, my lady.

*(He disappears behind the orchids.)*

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Agatha?

**LADY AGATHA**

Yes?

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

This is unquestionably the most exciting tea invitation you've ever issued.

**LADY AGATHA**

I shall try to be duller in future.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Please don't.

*(Mr. Potts reappears, fully dressed and respectable.)*

**POTTS**

Normality has been restored.

**MABEL**

Tea is served.

*(She begins pouring.)*

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Mr. Potts, may I offer some advice?

**POTTS**

Please do.

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Next time you encounter hornets...

**POTTS**

Yes?

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

Run somewhere less memorable.

**POTTS**

An excellent suggestion, madam.

*(They all laugh.)*

**LADY AGATHA**

To surviving hornets.

*(Raises her tea cup.)*

**MRS. WILLOUGHBY**

To preserving reputations.

*(Raises her tea cup.)*

**CURTAIN**

Mille & Mai

Mille & Mai

Mille & Mai

**END**

Mille & Mai

Mille & Mai

Mille & Mai

Mille & Mai

Mille & Mai

Mille & Mai