



Stella Chester

Adapted from the play by Harold Chapin

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Muddle Annie was first produced by the Scottish Repertory Theatre Company at the Royalty Theatre, Glasgow, on March 13, 1911: Alfred Wareing, director.

JENNY: Calypso Valetta

MABEL: Muriel Pope

GEORGE ROSE: Charles Francis

ANNIE: Irene Clarke

ETHEL: Hilda Honiss

ALBERT BROAD: Cyril Griffiths

MRS. WRIGHT: Gwynneth Galton

Muddle Annie

1

Muddle Annie

COMEDY. Adapted from the play by Harold Chapin. Nicknamed "Muddle Annie" by her sisters, Annie is the nervous, clumsy, socially awkward eldest Wright sister who has a tendency to trip, fall, and spill tea at the most inopportune times. So when Annie gets engaged to George Rose, her mother is overjoyed as she believes him to be a proper gentleman. However, George is actually a rogue wanted by the police and has his sights set on swindling Annie out of her inheritance and running away with her sister, Mabel. When a policeman arrives to have tea at the Wrights' home, he realizes George's true identity. However, the policeman is unable to arrest George as etiquette prohibits one guest from arresting another guest under the roof of a mutual friend. In the end, it's up to Annie to make sure George and Mabel get their just desserts!

Performance time: Approximately 45 minutes.



Harold Chapin (1886-1915)

About the Story

Harold Chapin was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1886 to an old New England family. When Chapin was a toddler, his mother, an actress, moved to Paris and then settled in London. Harold lived the rest of his life in England, where he worked as an actor from a young age and wrote several one-act and full-length plays as an adult. Chapin's plays are best known for their sympathetic, comedic portrayals of the poor. Married with a young child, Chapin enlisted in the British Army in 1914 and was killed at the Battle of Loos in 1915.

Characters

(2 M, 5 F)

MRS. WRIGHT: Pleasant and dignified matriarch who has four unmarried daughters; female.

ANNIE WRIGHT: Mrs. Wright's awkward, nervous, eldest daughter who is engaged to George Rose and has been nicknamed "Muddle Annie" by her sisters due to her clumsiness; looks matronly and wears ill-fitting clothes; female.

EFF WRIGHT: Second eldest daughter, bright and sensible; female.

MABEL WRIGHT: Third eldest daughter who has a crush on George; pretty, spiteful, and wears cheap jewelry; female.

JENNY WRIGHT: Youngest daughter who is clever, witty, and has common sense; walks with crutches and wears a dress that is prettier than her sisters; female.

ALBERT "BERT" BROAD: A pleasant, dependable young policeman who is courting Eff; wears an ordinary tweed suit and heavy boots; has a tanned face and a very faint moustache; male.

GEORGE ROSE: Rogue who is posing as a gentleman; has a heavy black mustache and wears a black frockcoat, white vest, and patent boots; speaks with a cockney accent (opt.); male.

Setting

1900s, London, England.

Set

Wrights' parlor. A shabby, comfortable parlor with dark red wallpaper. A large table is CS. Two armchairs are near the fireplace. The fireplace has a mantel with a clock on it. There is a sideboard with a tablecloth and lamp on it below the door SR. Between the double and single doors against the back wall are chairs. Other chairs surround the table. A sofa with pillows sits against the back wall. The inner room, a drawing room, is brightly decorated and can be partially seen through folding doors.

Props

Crutches	Tablecloth
2 Magazines	Overcoat, for Bert
Matches	Plate with bread and butter
Matchbox	Lumps of sugar
Crushed top hat	Money
Lamp with chimney	Coins
Sofa pillows	Hat and coat, for Annie
Tea tray with teapot, creamer, sugar dish, etc.	Hat and coat, for Mabel
Teacups	4 Gold bangle bracelets

Special Effects

Light from fireplace	Cab whistle
Sound of match striking	Two blasts from a police whistle
Sound of footsteps	
Door banging shut	

"Is it etiquette
for one guest
to arrest another guest
under the roof
of a mutual friend?"

—Bert

Muddle Annie

(AT RISE: London, 1990s. Mrs. Wright's parlor, 5:30 p.m. The stage is dark except for the light coming from the fireplace. Mabel and Jenny are sitting in armchairs before the fire. Mabel is sitting slightly farther from the fireplace, facing it. Jenny is sitting in an armchair that has its back to the fireplace. Jenny is reclining on the arm of an armchair with her crutches by her side. There is a magazine on the floor and a magazine on Mabel's lap. Pause.)

JENNY: (Without lifting her head.) Mabe! Mabe! Stop reading!

MABEL: I wasn't reading.

JENNY: Well, stop trying to in this light. You'll ruin your eyes like poor —

MABEL: I wasn't trying to. I was only watching the fire.
(Sighs deeply.)

JENNY: Oh, stop sighing. What time is it?

(Mabel looks up at the clock on the mantelpiece.)

MABEL: It's too dark to see. Must be past teatime, though.
Shall I light some lamps?

JENNY: If you like.

MABEL: It seems a shame.

JENNY: What does?

MABEL: To light up and spoil it all. I love the dark and the firelight.

JENNY: All right, let poor Annie come in with the tea things and fall all over everything in the dark. I don't care.

(Mabel jumps up and her fingers fumble around on the mantel searching for matches in the dark.)

MABEL: I can't find the matches. Mr. Rose will be sure to have some. He'll be down in a minute.

JENNY: Where is he?

MABEL: Upstairs lying down.

JENNY: Lazy brute!

MABEL: (*Shocked.*) Jenny, how can you? He is not lazy. He works terribly hard...with his brains, too. You know what brain fog is, don't you?

JENNY: Yes! Humbug! I don't believe in his beastly brains!

MABEL: Jenny!

JENNY: I don't. He just wants to look pale and interesting to poor Annie.

MABEL: I don't see where the "poor Annie" comes in! Why should he go to the trouble for Annie?

JENNY: I believe you're jealous...

MABEL: (*Insulted.*) Jealous, indeed! (*Scoffs.*) And of Annie?! (*Rattles matchbox and crosses to the door.*) I'll light up the hall first. (*Mabel exits. The sound of a match striking is heard and then a hat falling from a hat rack. Offstage.*) Oh, Jenny!

JENNY: Well?

MABEL: (*Offstage.*) I've knocked down George's hat that was on the hat stand, and I believe I've stepped on it!

JENNY: (*Laughs.*) Good job.

MABEL: (*Offstage.*) Oh, Jenny, you wouldn't laugh if it was his new hop hat!

JENNY: I should. I should yell.

(The sound of a match striking is heard. A light in the hall throws a beam of light across the stage through the doorway.)

MABEL: (*Horried, offstage.*) Jenny!

JENNY: (*Impatiently.*) Well?!

MABEL: It was the top hat! (*Jenny laughs. Mabel enters, carrying a crushed top hat.*) Oh, Jenny, you are cruel to laugh. I shall have to tell him. Oh, how awful! (*Sound of footsteps outside the door is heard.*) Oh, here he is. (*Spies George off.*) Oh, George...

(George Rose enters and stands in the doorway. Mabel takes a step toward him and pauses at the corner of the table.)

GEORGE: Well?

MABEL: I've smashed your hat...your best hat!

(George takes the hat from her.)

GEORGE: Oh, never mind that. *(Pats her forgivingly on the shoulder.)*

MABEL: How good you are! Of course, I'll buy you a new one.

GEORGE: Nonsense.

MABEL: Oh, but I will! I know you can't afford –

GEORGE: Never mind what you know. You can make up for it another way. *(Flirtatiously.)* I fine you one kiss... *(Thinks.)*

No, two kisses. *(Puts his arm around her waist and kisses her. She pushes him away with a gesture of warning, which he does not notice.)* What's wrong? I shall make it three if –

MABEL: Sssssh!

(Mabel points to Jenny, who is calmly watching them from her seat on the arm of her armchair. George steps quickly away from Mabel and goes to the lower corner of the table.)

GEORGE: Hullo, Jenny!

JENNY: *(Flatly.)* Hullo.

GEORGE: Not used to having a brother-in-law about the place yet, are you? I'll soon be your brother-in-law. Privileged people, aren't they?

(Mabel fetches the lamp from the sideboard and lights it during the following.)

JENNY: Are they?

GEORGE: Yes, of course. Kiss their sisters-in-law good morning and all that sort of thing. I shall soon be Mabe's brother-in-law now, you know.

JENNY: And mine! Come and kiss me.

GEORGE: All the pleasure in the world. *(Crosses in front of the table to Jenny, bends down, and gives her a peck on the cheek.)* There! *(Goes to the other armchair, flings cushions out of it onto the sofa, and prepares to settle down comfortably.)*

JENNY: *(Thoughtfully.)* Is that a brother-in-law's kiss?

(Mabel lights the lamp. George sits.)

GEORGE: Um-hum.

JENNY: Well, you didn't seem to kiss Mabe that way, and it doesn't make me say "shhhhh" and stop you or go all shaky, either.

(Mabel nervously rattles the lamp chimney. Carefully carrying a tea tray with teapot, etc., Annie enters, clumsily trips, and the tea tray and its contents fall to the floor. George rises, and with ostentatious courtesy, helps Annie pick up the tea tray and its contents and place them on the sideboard.)

ANNIE: *(Looking up, shyly.)* Thank you, George.

(George returns to his chair.)

GEORGE: Don't thank me, Annie, dear. It's a man's duty to—

JENNY: Oh, be quiet. You've said all that before.

(Annie takes the tablecloth from the sideboard.)

ANNIE: Don't mind her, George.

GEORGE: Mind Jenny? *(Holds the lamp while Annie and Mabel spread the tablecloth. George puts the lamp down and returns to his armchair. He stands for a moment watching Annie and Mabel*

busily bringing things from sideboard to the table. Annie keeps clumsily dropping things onto the floor and tripping. Approvingly.) I love to see you busy, Annie, dear. *(Sits.)* A woman should be always busy.

JENNY: Annie generally is.

(Annie, while setting the table, passes the arm of George's chair. He puts an arm out and draws her to him and she awkwardly falls onto him.)

GEORGE: Annie is my ideal of a perfect woman. *(Gives her a peck on the cheek.)*

JENNY: Er... *(With emphasis.)* ...brother-in-law...

GEORGE: *(Startled.)* What?

JENNY: Oh, nothing. I just wanted to see if it would remind you too. Now, about kissing—

[END OF FREEVIEW]