

# The Other Three Sisters

By Tara Meddaugh

With portions adapted from  
Jane Austen's short epistolary story, *The Three Sisters*, circa 1792.

***EXCERPT***

Copyright © 1998 by Tara Meddaugh

All rights reserved. No part of this play may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. Any members of educational institutions wishing to photocopy part or all of the work for classroom use, or publishers who would like to obtain permission to include the work in an anthology, should send their inquiries to Tara Meddaugh Playwriting, 20 Fremont St, Harrison, NY 10528 or via email to [tmeddaugh@gmail.com](mailto:tmeddaugh@gmail.com).

CAUTION. Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *The Other Three Sisters* is subject to a royalty. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound taping, all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as information storage and retrieval systems and photocopying, and rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved. Actors may use portions of this play for audition or showcase purposes.

### **A Note from the Playwright**

When I first opened *Sense and Sensibility* back in the summer of 1998, I had no idea how much Jane Austen would pervade my life. What started as casual summer reading turned into a seminar of intense study of all of Austen's novels. The more I read of Jane Austen, the more I became attune to her keen sense of the absurdities found in her society. So when I happened upon "The Three Sisters," a short epistolary story, I saw its potential for a wonderfully absurd piece of drama. We can laugh at Mary's obsession for having just the right kind of carriage and we can shake our heads at her accepting Mr. Watts's hand to spite her neighbors (the Duttons) because we feel removed from these situations. Yet while the problems in Austen's day "may not be exactly in the same line" as ours today, they are not too dissimilar either. It is for this reason that I have juxtaposed the 18<sup>th</sup> Century three sisters with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Other Three Sisters. They are of a different place, era and society, yet they still must deal with the same issues of marriage, money and societal appearance. Of course, how these problems manifest and resolve in the different societies are indeed, very different.

Character Breakdown

MR. WATTS	A man in his early thirties.
MARY	A girl of about 19.
MRS. STANHOPE	A woman in her late 30s or early 40s.
SOPHY	A girl of about 18.
GEORGIANA	A girl of about 16.

Setting

A family sitting room of a modest home. The time period changes throughout the play, from the late 1700s, England, to the mid 1900s, New York (Queens or Brooklyn). The same room, set and actors are used for both time periods, although specific changes (in lighting, props, costume etc.) may signify time period changes.

SCENE I

At rise: *18<sup>th</sup> Century England*. The sitting room in a home, well furnished, yet not, by any means, extravagant. MR. WATTS, a large, plain, ugly man in his early thirties sits with a newspaper. While he is not unkempt, one cannot help but cringe at his slovenly demeanor. The ostentatiousness of his attire merely signals wealth, not taste. Near him, although certainly not next to him, is a beautiful young girl, MARY Stanhope. She is a high-strung, fickle young lady more interested in appearance than anything else. Her elegant dress and haughty posture are not enough to hide her silly, spoiled nature. There is a lengthy pause as MR. WATTS turns a page of a newspaper while MARY sits with her hands folded neatly on her lap. Neither appears to be particularly interested in the other.

MR. WATTS

So, Miss Stanhope, I shall detain you no longer, but merely propose what I came here for and then take my leave of you. I hope that you will accept this humble offer and honour me with your delicate, white hand.

MARY

I'm not certain I—

MR. WATTS

Let's not complicate the issues, Miss Stanhope. Kindly give me an aye or a nay.

MARY

Are you proposing to marry me, Mr. Watts?

MR. WATTS

Well, yes, I suppose I am. A man at two and thirty—

MARY

My first marriage proposal! I hardly know how to value this enough! Oh, how I shall triumph over the Duttons! I am sure they have not received any proposals, Mr. Watts. How jealous they will be when I shall hold this over them!

MR. WATTS

So you accept then?

MARY

Accept? I am sure I don't know what you mean.

MR. WATTS

Do you accept my proposals?

(pause)

Answer the question, Miss Stanhope. I'm due for dinner at the Branghtons!

MARY

I am appalled at your audacity, Mr. Watts! To speak to a young lady such as myself in such a coarse manner. Why I am rightly quite horrified. I don't know if I can accept your hand.

MR. WATTS

(rising)

Very well then.

MARY

What? You are leaving?

MR. WATTS

If you will not accept me, I shall make proposals to your sister, and if she will not accept, then I shall have your youngest sister. I am, by no means, guided by a particular preference to you above your sisters. It is equally the same to me which I marry of you three.

MARY

But Sophy cannot marry before I! And Georgiana—why, I am three years her senior. I will not be chaperoned by my youngest sister.

MR. WATTS

Then you will have to accept my offer.

MARY

Well...

MR. WATTS

I will mention the affair to your mother. Perhaps she will—

MARY

No! Do not breathe a word of this to Mama. Please, Mr. Watts, she will only make me—that is, she will only complicate the issue—which you said yourself you did not desire.

MR. WATTS

Of course, Miss Stanhope. I won't mention it to her, again.

MARY

Oh! You are the most ill-tempered man I have ever met, Mr. Watts! I do not know how I shall tolerate you!

MR. WATTS

Well, I intend to have a new carriage for our marriage.

(pause)

MARY

A new carriage?

MR. WATTS

Yes, a new carriage.

MARY

Oh...well, then...that sheds new light on the situation. A new carriage...How wonderful! I can chaperone Sophy and Georgiana to all the Winter Balls!

MR. WATTS

I do not like to dance.

MARY

Well, I do.

MR. WATTS

If I do not like to dance, there is no reason you should like to dance. It really makes no sense, Miss Stanhope. Once you are married, you should have no purpose at a ball. Furthermore, I believe, and it shall be noted, that a woman's place is really in the home, not at a silly ball.

MARY

Oh, I think you shall feel differently when you have your new carriage. I have often looked at your carriage and remarked on how dreadfully plain and brown it is. One could have no desire to go to a ball in a plain brown carriage, Mr. Watts. Now you shall have a new one; it shall be blue spotted with silver. Oh, and hung much higher than your old one. Your old one is much too low. This new one shall be very high, and blue spotted with silver. Oh, Mr. Watts, how elegant our new carriage will be! The Duttons shall be very jealous indeed when they see me chaperoning my sisters to a ball in such a carriage!

MR. WATTS

The new carriage shall be brown.

MARY

Brown? But, your old one is brown! Why should you get a new carriage of the same colour?

MR. WATTS

Chocolate brown.

MARY

Mr. Watts! That is unreasonable! That chocolate is such a hideous colour! You must be in jest.

MR. WATTS

I am not in jest, Miss Stanhope. It shall be brown like my old one and it shall be just as low as my old one.

MARY

Just as low? Now, Mr. Watts, you are being impossible!

MR. WATTS

Perhaps Sophia will not think me so impossible.

MARY

Wait!

MR. WATTS

Yes, Miss Stanhope?

MARY

I have given you no answer yet. You cannot propose to a second when the first has not yet answered. That would be very ill treatment.

MR. WATTS

Well?

(pause)

MARY

I do not know.

MR. WATTS

You do not know?

MARY

That is correct, sir. I am not yet certain of my decision.



MR. WATTS

Well, then, I shall come again tomorrow evening and take your final answer at that time.

MARY

Tomorrow evening? So soon? That gives me hardly any time to—

MR. WATTS

Tomorrow at midday then, and I shall stay for tea!

(MR. WATTS exits into another room.)

MARY

Oh! What a disagreeable man! So old and so plain I cannot bear to look at him! And so healthy too! What good are his large settlements on me if he be in such good health! Oh, I hate him more than any body in the world!

(MR. WATTS enters again followed by MRS. STANHOPE, Mary's mother. MRS. STANHOPE is a practical woman in her late 30s to early 40s. She is not a woman of wealth, although she, like Mary, wishes she had more of it.)

MR. WATTS

Good day, Mrs. Stanhope.  
(he makes a small bow)

MRS. STANHOPE

Good day, Mr. Watts.

MR. WATTS

Miss Stanhope.

MARY

Hm.

MRS. STANHOPE

Mary bids you a good day, as well, sir.

MR. WATTS

Her utterance speaks volumes, to be sure.

(He picks up his coat and exits outside.)

MRS. STANHOPE

Why must you speak so disagreeably to him, Mary?

MARY

Why must he be so disagreeable?

MRS. STANHOPE

Your point is taken. Now then, Mary, I wish to speak to you on a very particular subject not far from the one of which we're speaking.

MARY

(grabbing up her sewing)

Ah! I know what subject you mean. That old fool Mr. Watts has told you all about it, though I bid him not to. However, you shan't force me to have him if I don't like it.

MRS. STANHOPE

I am not going to force you, child, but only want to know what your resolution is with regard to his proposals.

MARY

You can hardly call them proposals, Mama.

MRS. STANHOPE

He has asked you to be his wife, has he not?

MARY

One might have thought he was merely reading an advertisement in the paper.

MRS. STANHOPE

I'm sure he was more impassioned than that.

MARY

What about Mrs. Watts seems at all passionate to you?

MRS. STANHOPE

Your point is valid. But be that as it may, I will have to insist upon your making up your mind one way or the other, that if you don't accept him, my dear...Sophy may.

MARY

Indeed! Sophy need not trouble herself for I shall certainly marry him myself.

MRS. STANHOPE

If that is your resolution, why should you be afraid of my forcing your inclinations?

MARY

Why, because I have not settled whether I shall have him or not.

MRS. STANHOPE

You are the strangest girl in the world, Mary. What you say one moment, you unsay the next. Do tell me once for all whether you intend to marry Mr. Watts or not.

MARY

Law, Mama, how can I tell you what I don't know myself?

MRS. STANHOPE

Then I desire you will know, and quickly too, for Mr. Watts says he won't be kept in suspense.

MARY

That depends upon me.

MRS. STANHOPE

No, it does not, for if you do not give him your final answer tomorrow when he drinks tea with us, he intends to pay his addresses to Sophy.

MARY

Then I shall tell all the world that he behaved very ill to me.

MRS. STANHOPE

What good will that do? Mr. Watts has been too long abused by all the world to mind it now.

MARY

Oh, I wish I had a father or a brother because then they should fight him!

MRS. STANHOPE

They would certainly be quite cunning if they did for you know Mr. Watts would run away before anyone could fight him. Therefore you must and shall resolve either to accept or refuse him before tomorrow tea time.

MARY

But why if I don't have him must he offer to my sisters?

MRS. STANHOPE

Now, Mary, they are as pretty as you are.

MARY

But will Sophy marry him, Mama, if he offers to her?

MRS. STANHOPE

Most likely. Why should she not?

MARY

Because he's a disagreeable old fool! He intends on having another low brown carriage, Mama, just like his old one!

MRS. STANHOPE

Many would be pleased by a plain carriage. And I daresay your sister shouldn't mind it much. If however she does not choose a life with him, then Georgiana must, for I am determined not to let such an opportunity escape of settling one of my daughters so advantageously. So, make the most of your time. I leave you to settle the matter with yourself.

(MRS. STANHOPE exits. MARY flops onto the sofa and groans.)

SCENE II

(*20<sup>th</sup> Century New York*: MARY remains on the sofa where she flopped down. While the set remains the same, the time period changes to this 20<sup>th</sup> Century home. SOPHY, Mary's younger sister enters. She is as beautiful as Mary, but has a more sensible and gentle air about her.)

SOPHY

Is he gone?

MARY

Yeah, he's gone. Y'know, Sophy, that's the third time he's stopped by today.

SOPHY

I suppose three times in one day after five years of nothing can be a bit overwhelming. What'd he say this time? Did he give you a different reason yet?

MARY

The same one.

SOPHY

I never liked that man. But at least he had some kind of excuse, Mary.

MARY

Excuse? You call that an excuse?

SOPHY

I didn't say it was a good one.

MARY

What the hell kind of excuse is that, hah?! What the hell—I mean, what the hell?!

SOPHY

I said I never liked him. I even told all the girls in my swimming class at the Y. First day I met him. I'm standing by the pool, I'm puttin' on my cap, you know how they make you wear it. Sheila tells me how she saw you and James in church that day, makin' eyes at each other like you were teenagers.

MARY

We were.

SOPHY

But I tell her right then, there's something about him. Call me psychic I say—I really say that. She doesn't like that because she's scared of psychics, but I just get this feeling. And see somethin' about him. Like...like he's weak. I can tell...I knew it. I never liked him.

MARY

I never knew him! I mean, do you understand that? Sophy, I was married to the man four days before he left. What the hell?!

SOPHY

And you'd only been dating him two weeks. You can't know a man in two weeks.

MARY

Ma liked him.

SOPHY

Ma didn't like him. She said he had a good job, he seemed smart. A good provider. She never said she liked him.

MARY

Well those are the things she said mattered. Daddy was cute and funny but he left us with nothin', right? That's not a man you want to marry.

SOPHY

I don't know. Daddy was nice.

MARY

Yeah, he was nice, what we can barely remember of him. But wouldn't you have liked to have one dress, one toy as a kid, that wasn't Cousin Tina's hand-me-down? Wasn't from a bin at the Salvation Army?

SOPHY

Never mattered to me.

MARY

Well, it mattered to me.

SOPHY

So you found your husband. One not like Daddy. There you go.

MARY

I'm not saying I should've married him. Ma pushed me. You know she did.

SOPHY

Maybe.

MARY

Anyone Father Matthew introduces to her she thinks walks on water.

SOPHY

Well this guy didn't.

MARY

No, he didn't.

SOPHY

He's—James—he's just...weird, I guess.

MARY

Weird? Nah—the man's insane. I think he really is.

SOPHY

Wouldn't put it past him.

MARY

I never knew him.

(SOPHY takes out a bottle of nail polish)

SOPHY

I never liked him.

(GEORGIANA, the youngest sister, enters. Since she has been away at Catholic school, she has gained a new sense of independence. She is energetic and bold.)

MARY

And that excuse? What the hell, Sophy?! What the hell?!

SOPHY

Alright already, what the hell. What the hell. I dunno, Mary, what the hell, but you gotta stop sayin' that. It ain't right in front of...y'know—

(nods her head toward Georgiana)

MARY

Mary, Mother of God forgive me.

GEORGIANA

It's alright, really. I curse sometimes too.

SOPHY

Georgiana!

GEORGIANA

All the girls at Catholic School do it.

MARY

See? It ain't bothering her.

SOPHY

I did what I could.

MARY

So, Sophy, what do I tell them now?

SOPHY

Who?

MARY

Them. Everybody. The grocer. My hairdresser. The dentist. Them.

GEORGIANA

We are talking about James Watts, your husband, right?

MARY

Yeah.

GEORGIANA

Then tell 'em he's a bastard!

SOPHY

Georgiana!

MARY

It's not that simple.

SOPHY

Bastard or not—what's the deal? How many stories are out there?

MARY

I dunno. A few.

SOPHY

A few?



MARY

A few.

SOPHY

A few.

MARY

Yeah, a few.

GEORGIANA

How many "few?!"

MARY

Fifteen or twenty.

SOPHY

(flinging paint brush around)

What's the matter with you, hah? You got problems or something, Mary? Fifteen or twenty? Why so many?

MARY

Careful with your wand, Sophy! They—they just came out.

SOPHY

They just came out?

MARY

Yeah, they just came out.

SOPHY

And you're askin' me what to do when you told fifteen or twenty different stories to—how many people?

MARY

I dunno. Everyone. How many people we know—a hundred something maybe? Two hundred? Three? I—

SOPHY

How do you keep them all straight?

MARY

Photographic memory or something. I dunno.

GEORGIANA

Let me get this straight, Mary. You told everyone you know fifteen or twenty different versions of why your husband left you?

MARY

Yeah, so maybe I did.

GEORGIANA

Why'd ya do that?

MARY

Excuse me, Miss-Perfect-Little-School-Girl, but you might understand if your husband had left you with no explanation. I had to give some reason, y'know, Georgiana? Maybe you'll understand when you get older.

GEORGIANA

Well, no matter how old I get, I'm never gonna marry some man after knowing him two weeks.

MARY

It ain't that simple, Geo. There's a lot you don't understand.

GEORGIANA

I understand that you wanted a car and Ma couldn't buy one for you. I understand that you wanted to travel like the Dutton girls did and Ma said we couldn't afford it. And I understand that you started dating this old guy, James, who wasn't nice or funny or handsome—but he was rich. Is there something I'm missing?

(pause)

MARY

Thirty two is not that old.

SOPHY

Why are you grillin' her like this, Geo? This is supposed to be your break from school.

MARY

I told you she wouldn't understand.

(pause)

(GEORGIANA picks up nail polish and begins painting her nails too)

GEORGIANA

So he's finally come back and told you the real reason?

MARY

Yeah.

GEORGIANA

So what is it?

MARY

It's a ridiculous reason.

GEORGIANA

You can tell me. I'm your sister.

SOPHY

Don't get her going on this one.

MARY

You're too young. You'll make fun of me.

GEORGIANA

I won't. Come on, Mary. Whatever his reason, it's not your problem. It's his. Tell me.

(pause)

MARY

He was tired.

GEORGIANA

Tired?

MARY

I mean, what the hell kinda reason is that? What the hell, Sophy? What the hell?!

SOPHY

Here she goes.

GEORGIANA

What do you mean he was tired? He was sick of you after four days?

MARY

No, he was tired. Sleepy. He wanted to sleep.

GEORGIANA

Oh.

(pause)

What the hell kind of reason is that?

MARY

I know! What the hell?

SOPHY

You're gonna ruin your nails, Geo.

GEORGIANA

Did you ask him?

MARY

I asked him— 'course, I asked him. I said, "What the hell kinda reason is that?" And he said, "I was tired. I was tired and I had to sleep. It wasn't you, darling. Why would you think it was you? We were married four days, what could you do wrong?" So I asked him why he didn't tell me then—five years ago—why he didn't tell me then he was gonna leave and he tells me, he goes, "I didn't plan on being away five years, sweetheart. It just happened that way. I was just going down to the creek to sleep." So then my Rip Van Winkle says next thing he knows it's now and he comes back to see his wife and here he is, and that's fine and all, but what the hell kind of reason is that? I mean, really, what the hell? Jennie Dutton thinks he joined the army in Kuwait, the butcher thinks he ran off with a girl from Wisconsin and Mrs. Frances who sits behind me in church thinks he's on a fishing expedition with National Geographic. I got a dozen more interesting places my husband has been—any one of them I'm satisfied with. But to have left me because he wanted to sleep? Angela's husband left her because he couldn't stand how loudly she always breathed. Debbie's left her to join that tobacco farming cult in Chicago. Even Jilian's husband left her at least for an exotic dancer. What would the girls say if I told them my husband left me because he was tired? I mean, really, what the hell?

SOPHY

He says it's his way.

MRS. STANHOPE (O.S.)

Sophy? Georgiana! I need to talk with you!

SOPHY

Coming, Ma! We'll think of something, Mary. Don't worry.

(They exit)

SCENE III

(18<sup>th</sup> Century England: MRS. STANHOPE is concluding a speech to her daughters, Sophy and Georgiana.)

MRS. STANHOPE

And therefore, if Mary won't have him Sophy must, and if Sophy won't, then Georgiana shall.

(She exits.)

(Pause)

SOPHY

Georgiana?

GEORGIANA

Yes, Sophy?

SOPHY

Would you be happy with Mr. Watts?

GEORGIANA

Happy with Mr. Watts? I should think not, my dear sister! Mary is not singular in her particular dislike for him. He's so deficient in every respect and I doubt you shall argue with me. Hideous in his person and without one good quality to make amends for it. I could never be happy with him.

SOPHY

I had figured as much.

(pause)

Then if Mary does not accept him—

GEORGIANA

Sophy—I know you hold one of the best natures I have encountered and your sisterly affection toward me has always exceeded what I could ever have imagined in a sister. But if Mary should refuse Mr. Watts, I should not expect you to sacrifice your happiness by becoming his wife out of generosity to me.

**END OF EXCERPT**

For the complete play, please visit:

<http://www.tameddaugh.com/the-other-three-sisters>

For permission to perform, please contact [tmeddaugh@gmail.com](mailto:tmeddaugh@gmail.com).

#### ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



Tara is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University's MFA program in Dramatic Writing. Her work has been presented by The Director's Company, Theatre One, Fusion Theatre, One Armed Man, Oracle Theatre, Inc, the Bobik Theatre Ensemble, Woman Seeking..., the Acme Theatre Company, and various universities including Gardner-Webb and Colgate. Her plays have also showcased at the Artists of Tomorrow Festival in NYC, the Pittsburgh New Works Series and the Last Frontier Theatre Conference in Alaska and her monologues have been performed world-wide. Serial monologues she wrote were performed for two years by the internationally recognized receptionist-robot, Valerie, and she toured in a Children's Theatre Troupe, which she wrote for, co-directed, and performed in. She has taught Playwriting and Screenwriting to students in High School, college and adult education programs. She has also led Creative Dramatics Workshops for children and teenagers in underserved areas throughout New York and New Jersey and has a background in social work. She is a recipient of the Shubert Fellowship in Dramatic Writing, the New Works for Young Women [Actors] Award and is a member of the Dramatist's Guild. Tara has written a children's book, a novel, and writes and records music in the chick-core rap band, Girl Crusade. She lives in Westchester County, NY, with her husband and dramatic children.

For more information about Tara Meddaugh or her work,  
visit her website at [www.tameddaugh.com](http://www.tameddaugh.com).