



Hankies – To Show or To Blow.....

I've always had a nose for handkerchiefs. Home from boarding school one spring break, I frequented Manhattan's Brooks Brothers handkerchief counter, and finally mustered the courage to stammer a request for a dozen of the store's costliest Irish linen ones, with "SNOT RAG" rather than my own initials to be embroidered in tiny pale green letters. To my great relief, the sales matron didn't even cock a penciled eyebrow. Instead, with a poker face, she said, "Of course. Please don't be embarrassed. The hankie and shirt departments get unusual custom order requests, all the time. I presume this a house charge, young man?"

Way back when, in the gory days of Ancient Rome—before Brooks Brothers even existed or Kimberly-Clark's shocking 1930 debut of Kleenex®—the handkerchief was called an "orarium" and dropped to signal the start of the gladiator games. More recently, Bette Davis repeatedly dropped hers—also to great effect, and grave consequence—in Warner Brothers' magnificently costumed three-hanky weeper Mrs. Skeffington.

But where does the word come from? "Handkerchief" is a variation on the word "kerchief," from the French *couvre-chef*, "cover the head." Until the unwashed masses spoiled the unbridled frivolities at the royal hunting lodge at Versailles, over-the-top fops minced about carrying enormous perfumed lace handkerchiefs in oval and rectangular shapes. A petulant Marie Antoinette disapproved of the showy one-upmanship and decided a small square was more chic. The royal edict, preserved in the Archives Nationales, decreed all handkerchiefs to measure no greater than 16 inches square: hence, the modern pocket square.

"Bandana" is a much older word for the same thing, from the Sanskrit *badhnāti*, "he ties." Today, the colorful cloth with a paisley motif remains indispensable headgear, tied as a skullcap, for urban street thug gangs as well as prep school lacrosse teams. I always carry one in my back pocket: to spit-shine my Nile crocodile paddock boots; for use as a Molotov cocktail wick; or even occasionally as a sling, when I get thrown by "Hunt Buttons," my rather grumpy 16hh Andalusian.

In summary, it's hardly surprising that once again Kenny Rogers has the last word: "You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em..." Indeed, there are many ways to fold 'em, including: Presidential Fold, One-point Fold, Two-point Fold, Three-point Fold, Four-point Fold, Straight Shell Fold, Diagonal Shell Fold, Puff, and Reverse Puff. Dapper gents Errol Flynn, Gary Cooper, Jimmy Cagney, and Fred Astaire all have signature hankie folds named in their honor!

However, it's my duty to impart a few words of caution regarding sartorial self-expression. Handkerchiefs can be crucial evidence in foul play. Think Shakespeare's Othello, The Brothers Grimm's Bluebeard, Agatha Christie's Death on the Nile. So clean up your evidence and puh-leeze remember: only magicians and morticians wear matching ties and pocket squares. Most importantly, if you're sporting one of Horse Country's best silk numbers, and your date gets tipsy and dribbles Château Margaux on her blouse... well, for Heaven's sake, don't hesitate—yank it out and hand it to her. Your hanky, I mean. Immediately! You may recall the chivalrous Sir Walter Raleigh cleverly (and cunningly) flung his velvet cloak over a puddle before Queen Elizabeth I. And was granted a big ole estate in Ireland because of it.

[By all means, blow your nose with great enthusiasm in Horse Country's zebra, fox, or Scottie dog motif bandanas. And wear our hand-embroidered cotton handkerchiefs, or printed silk pocket squares, all made in England expressly for you.]

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