

Excerpt Terms & Conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity of scripts.

Family Plays

Nicholas Udall's

RALPH
ROISTER
DOISTER

Adapted by
I.E. Clark

RALPH ROISTER DOISTER

After receiving the highest rating at the Montana State Festival, Calvin Wahl of Hamilton High School wrote: "We had such an enjoyable time putting on *Roister Doister* that every moment was treasured."

"Your cutting of the play cannot be praised too highly. It has offered our students a new and exciting dramatic experience." (Ardmore, Penn.)

"We are happy to say that we won our middle-school play competition with this piece. Our community is so excited with our performance that they have asked us to perform it one more time." (Jenae Glanton, Director of Theatre Arts, Vivian Fields Middle School, Farmers Branch, Texas)

Comedy. Adapted by I.E. Clark. Based on the play by Nicholas Udall.

Cast: 2m., 4w., extras. This one-act version of the oldest play in English is hilarious. Ralph thinks he is a lady's man and chooses Dame Custance as the lady. But she can't stand the conceited nincompoop. Their tempestuous courtship, complicated by a mischievous meddler and Custance's cute servant girls, rocks the stage in this historically important play. *Ralph Roister Doister* was printed by Nicholas Udall in 1566, and considered the oldest play in English. Similar to earlier Roman comedies, the setting is the space between two houses, and the main character is a wealthy but not-so-bright hero prodded by a wise but not-so-wealthy parasite. *A director's script is available containing full stage directions, costume sketches, characterizations and other information.* *Place: London street. Time: 16th century. Approximate running time: 30 to 35 minutes. Code: RB6.*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

ISBN-13 978-0-88680-161-8



9 780886 801618 >

Ralph Roister Doister

NICHOLAS UDALL'S

Ralph

Roister Doister

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

© Family Plays

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by FAMILY PLAYS without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website www.FamilyPlays.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: FAMILY PLAYS, 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

© 1965 by
I.E. CLARK

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(RALPH ROISTER DOISTER)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-161-8

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

RALPH ROISTER DOISTER

Dramatis Personae

Mathew Merygreeke, a parasite

Ralph Roister Doister, a gentleman

Dame Christian Custance, a young widow

Madge Mumblecrust, her nurse

Tibet Talkapace
Annot Alyface } her maidservants

***Harpax** (1st Servant to Ralph)

***Dobinet Doughtie** (2nd Servant)

***Hodge** (3rd Servant)

***Podge** (4th Servant)

*May be played by men or women

Scene: A residential street in 16th Century London

ABOUT THE PLAY

Ralph Roister Doister is famous throughout the English-speaking world as the first real play ever written in our language. Authored by Nicholas Udall somewhere between 1534 and 1553, it was first printed in 1566.

Udall was obviously affected by the Renaissance, which had just hit England, for his play shows an elbow-bending acquaintance with the comedies of Plautus, Terence, and Menander. *Ralph Roister Doister* has the same setting (the space between two houses) and the same main characters (a wealthy-but-not-very-wise hero aided and prodded by a wise-but-not-the-least-bit-wealthy parasite) which populate the plays of the three classical authors. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* avouches that Udall's play is "infinitely superior" to the works of the Romans.

The parasite, Merygreeke, depends upon his patrician, Ralph, for food, clothing, entertainment, and all the other necessities of life. To earn these things, he does Ralph's spying and less savory errands...and most of all he activates Ralph's highly active ego. It's his business to make himself indispensable.

Ralph considers himself irresistible to the ladies, and he falls in love with every attractive damsel who passes his way. As the play opens, we discover that Ralph has just found a new love (he doesn't know her name, but she turns out to be Dame Custance), and he is confident that the lady loves him. But he needs Merygreeke's assistance to get the courtship going. Merygreeke discovers that Custance is engaged to another man and that she despises the conceited Ralph. The parasite knows that it would be disastrous to his own welfare to deliver this information to Ralph; therefore, Merygreeke must conjure up devious methods of keeping Ralph ignorant (a ridiculously simple task). The way Merygreeke and Custance manage to make life miserable for Ralph provides most of the comic scenes in this delightful farce.

NOTE: A director's Production Script is available for this play giving full stage directions, costume sketches, characterizations, and other information helpful to the busy director. See page 20 for details.

Ralph

Roister Doister

Adapted by I. E. Clark

[CURTAIN opens on an empty stage. At Up Right is a small house; at Right Center is a bench; at Left is a tree stump. The faint sound of someone singing is heard, and the sound gradually increases until we catch the words of "Ralph's Ramble to London" (words and music in 'Stage Magic' Production Script). MERYGREEKE enters at UL, singing loudly and happily. He has almost reached center stage when he realizes that an Audience is watching him. He looks at the Audience boldly for a moment, and then—with a twinkle in his eye—decides to tell them why he is there.]

MERYGREEKE. As long liveth the merry man, they say, as doth the grumpy man, and longer, by a day. Yet the grasshopper, for all his summer piping, starveth in winter with hungry griping. This lesson must I practice, or else ere long, with me, Mathew Merygreeke, all will go wrong. And wisdom claims that I must now bethink where to be provided this day with meat and drink. My living lieth here and there, by Hod's grace...sometime with this good man...sometime in that place; sometime at Nicol Neverthrive's I get a sip; sometime I feast with Bryan Blankenship; sometime I hang on Hankyn Hoddydoddie's sleeve; but this day on Ralph Roister Doister's, by his leave. Agree with Roister Doister in all that he doth say; and ask of him what you will, ye shall have no nay. But now of Roister Doister somewhat let me express that you may esteem him according to his worthiness: in these twenty towns, and even farther abroad, is not a rootstock whereon to graft such a fraud. All day long he is

bragging and boasting of his great acts in fighting and roasting; but when Roister Doister is put to his proof, to keep the Queen's peace is more for his behoof. If any woman smile, or cast on him an eye, up he is to the very ears in love by and by; and in all the hot haste must she be his wife, else farewell his good days, and farewell his life. Then his chief counsel must be Mathew Merygreeke [*bows, introducing himself to AUDIENCE*], and all about the streets is he for Mathew to seek. But such sport have I with him that I would not trade, if you please, though I should be bound to live with bread and cheese. I can, when I will, make him merry and glad; I can, when I like, make him sorry and sad; I can set him in hope or else in despair; I can make him speak rough, and make him speak fair. But I marvel that I've not seen him at all today. I will seek him out...but lo! he cometh this way. There is weight in his walk, and gloom in his bounds. He's in love again, I'll wager twenty pounds. [*MERYGREEKE hides, peeking out to watch RALPH enter.*]

RALPH. Come death when thou wilt; I am weary of my life.

MERY. [*Steps out stealthily from his hiding place and speaks to Audience in an aside*] 'I told you we should woo another wife. [*He hides again.*]

RALPH. Why did God make me such a handsome person?

MERY. [*Aside*] He is in by the week; we shall have sport anon.

RALPH. [*Looking around stage for MERYGREEKE; he ends up looking off R so that he does not see MERYGREEKE come out of hiding at L*] And where is my trusty friend, Mathew Merygreeke?

MERY. [*To Audience, confidentially*] I will make as I saw him not, since me he doth seek. [*Pretends to be strolling down street, leaving a group of friends, waving to them off L.*]

RALPH. [*Still searching, he turns to L and sees MERYGREEKE. To Audience*] I have him espied, methink. Yonder he is. Ho! Mathew Merygreeke, my friend, a word with thee!

MERY. [*Aside, to Audience*] I will not hear him, but make as if I had haste. [*Waving to imaginary friends off L*] Farewell, all my good friends, the time away doth waste. [*Turns to R, feigns surprise at seeing RALPH; takes steps toward him, holding arms wide as for an embrace*] God keep thee, worshipful Master Roister Doister...[*RALPH opens arms to MERYGREEKE, who ducks and passes under RALPH's arms*] and fare thee well, lusty Master Roister Doister.

RALPH. I must speak with thee a word or twain.

MERY. Within a month or two I will be here again. Negligence in great affairs, ye know, may mar all.

RALPH. Attend upon me now, and I'll reward thee well.

MERY. I have taken my leave, and the tide is well spent.

RALPH. I die except thou help me; I pray thee be content. Do thy part well now, and ask what thou wilt, for without thy aid my matter is all spilt.

MERY. Then to serve your turn I will some pains take, and let all mine own affairs alone for your sake.

RALPH. Thanks, Merygreeke, most bound to thee I am.

MERY. But up with that heart, and speak out like a ram! What is this great matter, I would fain know? We shall find remedy for it, I trow.

RALPH. I thank thee. Had ever man such a friend!

MERY. You give unto me; I must needs to you lend. But what is it then?

RALPH. Of love I make my moan.

MERY. "Ah, this foolish love, will it never let us alone?" But because you were refused yesterday, you said you would never more be entangled that way.

RALPH. Yea, but I cannot so put love out of my mind. By my troth, I would have her for my wife.

MERY. Then you are a good man, and God save your life! And what or who is she, with whom you are in love?

RALPH. A woman whom I know not by what means to move.

MERY. Who is she?

RALPH. A woman yonder.

MERY. What is her name?

RALPH. Her yonder.

MERY. Whom?

RALPH. Mistress—ah—

MERY. Fie, fie, for shame! You love and know not whom—not even her name!

RALPH. [*Pointing to house*] She dwells in this house.

MERY. What, Christian Custance?

RALPH. Except I have her as my wife, I shall run mad.

MERY. Nay—“unwise” perhaps; but “mad”? Not that bad.

RALPH. I am utterly dead unless I have my desire.

MERY. Where are the bellows that blew this sudden fire?

RALPH. I hear she is worth a thousand pound or more.

MERY. Yea, but learn this one lesson of me before: a hundred pounds of marriage-money, doubtless, is about thirty pounds stirling, or somewhat less; so that her thousand pound, if she be thrifty, is much nearer two hundred and fifty. How-be-it, wooers and widows are never poor.

RALPH. Is she a widow? I love her better already.

MERY. But I hear she is promised to another.

RALPH. He shall never have her, even were he my brother!

MERY. I have heard say, I am right well advised, that she is to Gawyn Goodluck promised.

RALPH. Who is this Gawyn Goodluck?

MERY. A merchant-man.

RALPH. Shall he speed before me? Nay, sir, by sweet Saint Anne! I am sorry God made me so handsome, for that makes me so highly favored, and all women on me so enamored.

MERY. “Enamored,” say you?—have you found out that? Ah, sir, marry, now I see you know what is what.

RALPH. Yes, everywhere they gaze upon me and stare.

MERY. Yea, Malkyn, I warrant you, as much as they dare. And ye will not believe what they say in the street, when

your maship* passes by, all such as I meet. And, as well as I can, I answer them all. [*Pantomimes conversation*] “Sir, pray you, what lord or great gentleman is this?” “Master Ralph Roister Doister, dame,” say I, like this. “O Lord,” saith she then, “what a goodly man it is. Would Christ I had such a husband as he is!” “O Lord,” say some, “that the sight of his face we lack!” “It is enough for you,” say I, “to see his back.”

RALPH. [*Highly pleased, believing every word MERY-GREEKE has said*] I promise thou shalt not lack, while I have a groat.

MERY. Faith, sir, and I never had more need of a new coat.

RALPH. Thou shalt have one tomorrow, and gold to spend.

MERY. Then I trust to bring the day to a good end. But now to your widow, whom you love so hot.

RALPH. By cock, thou sayest truth! I had almost forgot.

MERY. To her then like a man, and be bold forth to start! Wooers never speed well that have a false heart.

RALPH. What may I best do?

MERY. Sir, remain ye awhile here; ere long one or another from her house will appear.

RALPH. Yea, now let me alone!

MERY. In the meantime, sir, if you please, I will home go. [*Exit R.*]

RALPH. [*Calling after MERYGREEKE*] Fetch my servants so I can make a good show.

[*TIB enters from house singing. She breathes fresh air fondly and deeply. When RALPH sees her, he looks for a place to hide, sees tree stump at L and hides—very inadequately—behind it. TIB pirouettes in front of house until she hears MADGE coming. MADGE trudges on stage from house fuming and scowling, carrying her distaff and yarn.*]

MADGE. If this distaff were spun, Margerie Mumblecrust..

*Contraction of “mastership”