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Dramatic Publishing
SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER
Or, The Mistakes of a Night

Oliver Goldsmith’s 18th-Century farcical comedy

Adapted by
ROBERT M. SINGLETON

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(SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER:
Or, The Mistakes of a Night)

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SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER:
Or, The Mistakes of a Night

A Play in One Act
For 7 Men, 4 Women, Extras, doubling*

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

MRS. HARDCASTLE ........... a pretentious, would-be lady
MR. HARDCASTLE ........... an old-fashioned country squire
TONY LUMPKIN . Mrs. Hardcastle’s son by an earlier marriage
KATE HARDCASTLE .......... Mr. Hardcastle’s daughter
CONSTANCE NEVILLE .... Mrs. Hardcastle’s niece and ward
DRINKING FELLOWS ........... Tony Lumpkin’s alehouse friends
STINGO ............................. an innkeeper
MARLOW .......................... a shy fellow among ladies of note
HASTINGS ........... Marlow’s friend, in love with Constance
VALET .................. personal servant to Marlow and Hastings
SERVANTS .................. in Mr. Hardcastle’s home
A MAID ....................... to Kate Hardcastle
SIR CHARLES MARLOW ....... Marlow’s father and
Mr. Hardcastle’s friend

*With doubling the play can be performed with as few as ten actors.

SETTING: In and around Mr. Hardcastle’s country estate.
England, 1773.

Playing time: About 40 minutes.
SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER was successfully produced by the adapter in the Texas One-Act Play Contest in 1977. The show advanced through several competitions from among nearly a thousand entries to the highest level, the top forty in the state. The original cast was as follows:

Mrs. Hardcastle .................................. Julie White
Mr. Hardcastle .................................... David Longstreet
Tony Lumpkin .................................... Steve Hardison
Kate Hardcastle .................................. Suzy Fay
Constance Neville .............................. Mindy Blitch
Drinking Fellows ................................. Jean McKendree

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER was successfully produced by the adapter in the Texas One-Act Play Contest in 1977.

Julie White
David Longstreet
Steve Hardison
Suzy Fay
Mindy Blitch
Jean McKendree

Stingo .............................................. Charles Fay
Marlow ............................................ Michael Anderson
Hastings .......................................... Steve Hauck
Valet ............................................. Jim Hill
Servants ........................................... Charles Fay

Charles Fay
Jean McKendree
Larry Evans
Matt Lyons

Susan Youngblood
Larry Evans
Matt Lyons

A Maid ........................................... Susan Youngblood
Sir Charles Marlow ............................ Vincent Herod

Sir Charles Marlow

* * * *

Scene One: A sitting room
Scene Two: The Three Pigeons, an alehouse
Scene Three: An entrance hall
Scene Four: The sitting room
Scene Five: Another room
Scene Six: The garden behind the house
Scene Seven: Another room

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A glossary of unusual words:

**Baw!** - an expletive of displeasure

**Ecod!** - an expletive meaning "by God" (pronounced ee-'cod)

Incontinently - at once, without delay

**Lud!** - an expletive meaning "Lord" (rhymes with mud)

**Morrice!** - a command to lively and rhythmic movement

suggestive of a morris dance

**Mun** - must

**Odso!** - an expletive, variant of "God's wounds"

(pronounced 'odd-so)

**Wauns!** - an expletive, variant of "God's wounds"

(rhymes with gowns)

**Zounds!** - a strong expletive meaning "God's wounds"

(pronounced to rhyme with wounds and not with mounds)
She Stoops to Conquer

Ground Plans:

Set Pieces
2 - 1' x 4' x 8' platforms
2 - 1' x 1' x 8' pylons
1 - 1' x 2' x 4' two-step unit

Furniture Props
- Fireplace
- Wing Back Arm Chair
- Inn Table and Bench
- Folding Screen
- 4 - Potted Bushes

Scenes One and Four:
A Sitting Room in Hardcastle’s Home.

Scene Two: Three Pidgeons Alehouse.
Ground Plan: Page 2.

Scene Three: Entrance Hall, Hardcastle's Home.

Scenes Five and Seven: Inside Hardcastle's Home.

Scene Six: Hardcastle's Garden.
SCENE: A sitting room in Mr. Hardcastle's home. The house is old-fashioned and bare of any unnecessary decorations. It looks more like an old lodge or inn rather than a wealthy country squire's home. There is an old-fashioned fireplace with a fire screen and other fireplace items. Two candlesticks are on the mantle. Beside the fireplace there is an old, well-used, but comfortable arm chair.

AT RISE: MR. HARDCASTLE, a comfortable-looking country squire, and MRS. HARDCASTLE, a too fancily-dressed pretentious woman with a wig of questionable taste, are discovered arguing. HARDCASTLE is seated in his chair looking over a letter from his friend Sir Charles.

MRS. HARDCASTLE (primping in an imaginary mirror D). I vow, Mr. Hardcastle, you're very particular. Is there a creature in the whole country, but ourselves, that does not take a trip to town now and then to rub off the rust a little?

HARDCASTLE. Aye, and bring back vanity and affectation to last them the whole year. In my time the follies of the town crept slowly among us, but now they travel faster than a stagecoach.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Aye, your times were fine times, indeed! You have been telling us of them for many a long year. Here we live in an old rumbling mansion that looks
for all the world like an inn. I hate such old-fashioned trumpery.

HARDCASTLE. And I love it. I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine; and, I believe, Dorothy, you'll own I have been pretty fond of an old wife.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Lord, Mr. Hardcastle, I'm not so old as you'd make me. I was but twenty when I was brought to bed of Tony, that I had by the late Mr. Lumpkin, my first husband; and he's not come to years of discretion yet.

HARDCASTLE. Nor ever will, I dare answer for him. It was but yesterday he fastened my wig to the back of my chair, and when I went to make a bow, I popped my bald head in Mrs. Frizzle's face!

MRS. HARDCASTLE. And am I to blame? The poor boy was always too sickly to do any good. Anybody that looks in his face may see he's consumptive.

HARDCASTLE. Aye, if growing too fat be one of the symptoms.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. He coughs sometimes.

HARDCASTLE. Yes, when his liquor goes the wrong way.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. I'm actually afraid of his lungs.

HARDCASTLE. And truly, so am I; for he sometimes whoops like a speaking trumpet—(TONY yells from off-stage.) Oh, there he goes—a very consumptive figure, truly!

(TONY enters running. He is a wild, red-cheeked young man who speaks with a strong brogue.)

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Tony, where are you going, my charmer?

TONY. I'm in haste, Mother; I cannot stay.
MRS. HARDCASTLE. You shan’t venture out this raw evening, my dear.

TONY. I can’t stay, I tell you. The Three Pigeons expects me down any moment.

HARDCASTLE. Aye, the alehouse, the old place. I thought so.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Pray, my dear, disappoint them for one night at least.

TONY. But I can’t abide to disappoint myself.

MRS. HARDCASTLE (holding onto him). You shan’t go.

TONY. We’ll see which is strongest, you or I. (TONY lifts MRS. HARDCASTLE to his shoulder and runs off, with her screaming.)

HARDCASTLE (watching them go off). Aye, there goes a pair that only spoil each other.

(Enter KATE HARDCASTLE, wearing a fancy dress.)

HARDCASTLE. Blessings on my pretty innocence! (Noticing the dress.) Goodness! What a quantity of superfluous silk hast thou got about thee, girl!

KATE (charming him). You know our agreement, sir. You allow me the morning to dress in my own manner, and in the evening I put on my working dress to please you.

HARDCASTLE (indicating the letter from Sir Charles). By the bye, I believe I shall have occasion to try your obedience this very evening.

KATE. Sir, I don’t comprehend your meaning.

HARDCASTLE. To be plain with you, Kate, I expect the young gentleman I have chosen to be your husband from town this very day. (KATE reacts with exuberant excitement.) Mr. Marlow is the son of my old friend, Sir Charles
Marlow. (He looks through the letter.) I am told he's a man of an excellent understanding, very generous...

KATE (reading over his shoulder). I believe I shall like him.

HARDCASTLE. Young and brave...

KATE (topping these lines). I'm sure I shall like him.

HARDCASTLE. And very handsome.

KATE (with the highest excitement). My dear Papa, say no more. He's mine, I'll have him!

HARDCASTLE. And, to crown all, Kate, he's one of the most bashful and reserved young fellows in all the world.

KATE (running back to see the letter over his shoulder again). Eh! You have frozen me to death again.

HARDCASTLE. It was the very feature in his character that first struck me. (Putting away the letter.) In the meantime, I'll go prepare the servants for his reception. As we seldom see company, they need as much training as a company of recruits on the first day's muster. (Exits.)

KATE (to the audience). Lud, this news of Papa's puts me all in a flutter. Young, handsome, these he puts last, but I put them foremost.

(Enter CONSTANCE.)

KATE. Tell me, Constance, how do I look this evening? Am I in face today?

CONSTANCE (noting KATE's blushed excitement). Now I look again—bless me!—has the last novel been too moving?

KATE. No. I can scarce get it out—I have been threatened with a lover.

CONSTANCE (sharing her excitement). And his name?

KATE. ...is Marlow. The son of Sir Charles Marlow.
CONSTANCE (most excited). As I live, the most intimate friend of Mr. Hastings, my admirer. They are never asunder. (Changing her tone.) He's a very singular character, I assure you. Among women of reputation and virtue he is the most modest man alive; but his acquaintances give him a very different character among creatures of another stamp. You understand me? (Pause, as the oddity of the situation sinks into KATE.)

KATE. An odd character, indeed. (A new tone.) But how goes on your own affair, my dear? Has my mother been courting you for my brother Tony as usual?

CONSTANCE (laughing). I let her suppose that I am in love with her son, and she never once dreams that my affections are fixed upon another.

KATE (laughing with her). My good brother holds out stoutly. I could almost love him for hating you so.

(KATE and CONSTANCE exit as actors bring on an inn table and bench, carry off the fireplace and chair, and rearrange the set for...)

SCENE TWO

SCENE: An alehouse room. Several shabby FELLOWS drinking merrily are sitting around a table, tankards in hand, and singing lustily. TONY, singing more lustily than the rest, is at the head of the table.

ALL (finishing the song). Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Bravo! Bravo!

A FELLOW. The young squire has got spunk in him.
TONY. I promise you. I have been thinking of Bet Bouncer and the miller’s gray mare. But come, my boys, drink a bout and be merry, for you pay no reckoning.

(STINGO, the innkeeper, enters.)

TONY. Well, Stingo, what’s the matter?
STINGO. There be two gentlemen at the door. They have lost their way and are talking something about Mr. Hardcastle.
TONY. One of them must be the gentleman that’s coming down to court my sister.
STINGO. I believe that may be.
TONY. Then desire them to step this way, and I’ll set them right in a twinkling. (STINGO exits as TONY herds the FELLOWS out,* indicating he is about to play a trick on the strangers.)

*[Note: If the actors playing the FELLOWS don’t have to double for the SERVANTS at the top of Scene Three, they may remain on stage during the rest of this scene working hard to keep from laughing at TONY’s plan.]

TONY. My stepfather has been calling me whelp and hound this half year. Now, if I pleased, I could be so revenged upon the old grumbletonian.

(STINGO enters, leading MARLOW and HASTINGS who are followed by their VALET. They are tired and irritable with each other and their surroundings.)

MARLOW. What a tedious, uncomfortable day have we had of it! We were told it was but forty miles across the country, and we have come above threescore!
HASTINGS. And all, Marlow, from that unaccountable reserve of yours that would not let us inquire more frequently on the way.

TONY *(speaking up with caution).* No offense, gentlemen, but I'm told you have been inquiring for one Mr. Hardcastle in these parts. Pray, gentlemen, is not this same Hardcastle a cross-grained, old-fashioned, whimsical fellow with an ugly face, a daughter, and a pretty son?

MARLOW. Our information differs in this: the daughter is said to be well-bred and beautiful; the son, an awkward booby, reared up and spoiled at his mother's apron string.

TONY. He-he-hem! Stingo, tell the gentlemen the way to Mr. Hardcastle's. *(Winking at STINGO.)* Mr. Hardcastle of Quagmire Marsh...you understand me.

STINGO *(understanding the ruse).* Oh! Master Hardcastle's! Lack-a-daisy, my masters, you're come a deadly deal wrong! When you came to the bottom of the hill, you should have crossed down Squash Lane. Then you were to keep straight forward, until you came to four roads.

TONY *(jumping in).* Aye, but you must be sure to take only one of them, till you come to Farmer Murrain's barn. Coming to the farmer's barn, you are to turn to the right, and then to the left, and then to the right about again, till you find out the old mill—

MARLOW. Zounds, man!

HASTINGS. What's to be done, Marlow?

MARLOW. This inn here promises but a poor reception, though perhaps the innkeeper can accommodate us.

STINGO. Alack, master, we have but one spare bed in the whole house.

TONY. And to my knowledge, that's taken up by three lodgers already. What if you go on a mile further, to the Buck's Head—*(Winking again at STINGO as he leads MARLOW*
and HASTINGS to the door.) the old Buck's Head on the hill—one of the best inns in the whole country?
STINGO (aside to TONY). Sure, you be not sending them to your father's as an inn, be you?
TONY. Mum, you fool, you. Let them find that out.

(TONY and STINGO lead MARLOW and HASTINGS out as other actors carry out the table and bench and re-arrange the set for...)

SCENE THREE

SCENE: An entrance hall in Hardcastle's house. HARDCASTLE is discovered with three or four awkward SERVANTS whom he has lined up in military fashion.

HARDCASTLE. When company comes, you are not to pop out and stare, and then run in again, like frightened rabbits in a warren.

SERVANTS. No, no.
HARDCASTLE. Suppose one of the company should call for a glass of wine, how will you behave? (Pretending to be company.) A glass of wine, sir, if you please. (Pause.) What, will nobody move? (The SERVANTS speak, among themselves, willy-nilly.)
FIRST SERVANT. I'm not to leave this place.
SECOND SERVANT. I'm sure it's no place of mine.
THIRD SERVANT. Nor mine, for sartain.
FOURTH SERVANT. Wauns, and I'm sure it canna be mine.
HARDCASTLE. O, you dunces! I find I must begin all over again. But don't I hear a coach drive into the yard?
(Pauses as he waits for the SERVANTS to respond.) To your posts, you blockheads. Greet our guests. I'll go in the meantime to finish the rest of the preparations.

(HARDCASTLE exits as the SERVANTS run about as if frightened, each going out a different exit. Another SERVANT enters, leading MARLOW and HASTINGS followed by their VALET.)

SERVANT (over-profusely). Welcome, gentlemen, very welcome! This way.

HASTINGS. Upon my word, a very well-looking house, antique but creditable. (MARLOW waves off the SERVANT who leaves together with the VALET. Still upset by the inconveniences of the day.) I have been often surprised that you could never yet acquire a requisite share of assurance.

MARLOW. Where could I have learned that assurance you talk of?

HASTINGS. In the company of women of reputation I never saw such a trembler, but among females of another class, you know—

MARLOW. Why, George, I can't say fine things to women of class. They freeze, they petrify me.

HASTINGS. But how do you intend behaving to the lady you are come down to visit at the request of your father?

MARLOW. As I behave to all other ladies. Bow very low; answer yes, or no, to all her demands. But for the rest, I don't think I shall venture to look in her face.

HASTINGS. I'm surprised that one who is so warm a friend can be so cool a lover.

MARLOW. To be explicit, my dear Hastings, my chief inducement down was to be instrumental in forwarding your happiness, not my own. Miss Neville loves you. The fam-
ily here doesn't know you; but as my friend you are sure of a reception.

(HARDCASTLE enters, followed by ROGER, a servant with a tray on which are three cups and a wine flagon.)

HARDCASTLE. Gentlemen, once more you are heartily welcome. Which is Mr. Marlow?

MARLOW (aside to HASTINGS). He has got our names from the servants already. (To HARDCASTLE in an offhand way.) We approve your caution and hospitality, sir. (Ignoring HARDCASTLE he turns back to HASTINGS to continue his conversation.)

HARDCASTLE (overly hospitable). Here's cup, sir. Will you be so good as to pledge me, sir? Here, Mr. Marlow, here is to our better acquaintance. (Drinks.)

MARLOW (aside to HASTINGS). A very impudent fellow this! But he's a character, and I'll humor him a little. (To HARDCASTLE.) Sir, my service to you. (Drinks. HARDCASTLE immediately refills their cups.)

HASTINGS (aside to MARLOW). I see this fellow wants to give us his company and forgets that he's an innkeeper before he has learned to be a gentleman.

MARLOW. What has your philosophy got in the house for supper?

HARDCASTLE. For supper, sir! (Aside.) Was ever such a request made to a man in his own house!

MARLOW. Yes, sir, supper, sir. I begin to feel an appetite.

HASTINGS. Let's see your list of the larder, then. (HARDCASTLE looks at the two with surprise.) I ask it as a favor. I always match my appetite to the bill of fare.

MARLOW (to HARDCASTLE who looks at them with surprise). Sir, he's very right, and it's my way, too.