Excerpt terms and 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.

Dramatic Publishing

She Stoops to Conquer

Comedy by
OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Adapted into a one-act play by
AURAND HARRIS

She Stoops to Conquer

This is the celebrated play that restored "laughing comedy" to the English stage and put Goldsmith in the great tradition of Chaucer and Shakespeare. It is an excellent classical piece for high-school or college actors.

Comedy. Adapted by Aurand Harris. From the play by Oliver Goldsmith. *Cast: 6m., 3w., 1 either gender.* Kate "stoops" to pretending that she is a country servant and so wins her city lover. The fun of this good-humored play lies in the contrast of country and city manners, farcical intrigues and mistaken identities. It is as true today as when Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote of this play in 1773, "I know no comedy that has so much exhilarated an audience, that has answered so much the great end of comedy, making an audience laugh." *Single set. 18th-century costumes. Approximate running time: 40 minutes. Code: SU5.*

ISBN-13 978-1-58342-790-3
ISBN-10 1-58342-790-2

9 781583 427903 >
She Stoops to Conquer (Harris)

Dramatic Publishing
311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098-330
ph: 800-448-7469

www.dramaticpublishing.com

She Stoops to Conquer

Comedy by
Oliver Goldsmith

Adapted by
Aurand Harris

Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

*** NOTICE ***

(SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-790-3

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

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

of Woodstock, Illinois

Introduction

In *She Stoops to Conquer*, Goldsmith attacked the eighteenth century genteel sentimental comedy then in vogue. He hoped to restore "laughing comedy" and banish sentimentality from the theatre. *She Stoops to Conquer* is effective because of the broad characterizations and the farcical humor. The fun is in the situations, characters and dialogue. Various titles were suggested: *The Belle's Stratagem*, *The Old House a New Inn*, *The Mistakes of a Night*. He chose *She Stoops to Conquer* with *The Mistakes of a Night* as a sub-title.

Oliver Goldsmith, a second son of a poor Protestant clergyman, was born November 10, 1728, at Palles, in Langford, Ireland. As a boy he was a poor student and often humiliated because of his small stature, ill-matched features, and pock-marked skin. In 1749 he graduated from Trinity College in Dublin. After briefly studying medicine in Edinburgh and a walking tour through Europe, he arrived in London in 1756, "without friends or money" and only "his brogue and blunders" to recommend him. He earned a meager living by writing articles and poetry for several periodicals. He met and was helped by Dr. Samuel Johnson, who at this time was foremost among men of letters.

In December, 1764, publishing *The Traveler* made Goldsmith famous as a poet. In 1766, *The Vicar of Wakefield* established him as a novelist. These were followed by his first play, *The Good Natured Man*; *The Deserted Village*, his second poem; and *She Stoops to Conquer*, his second play. A year later, April 4, 1774, Goldsmith died. In seven years, he was acclaimed in four—possibly five—different fields—as an English essayist, poet, novelist, playwright—an eccentric.

With his country manners and his Irish brogue, he amazed, amused, horrified and charmed London's elegant society. Physically unattractive, he was vain, a compulsive gambler, extravagant, envious, and often acted the comic buffoon. To some he was "an idiot." Horace Walpole added, "An inspired idiot." David Garrick wondered how anyone could "write like an angel but talk like poor Poll." Even his friend, Dr. Johnson, wrote, "No man was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he had." For all his faults, he was for

Joshua Reynolds, "a man of genius," for Thackeray, "the most beloved of English writers," and to Goethe, "To Shakespeare, Sterne, and Goldsmith my debt has been limitless."

After some difficulty, *She Stoops to Conquer* opened on March 15, 1773. Dr. Johnson wrote, "I know of no comedy for many years that has so much exhilarated an audience; that has answered so much the great end of comedy, making an audience merry." However, when one critic, "Tom Tickle," attacked the play in the *London Packet*, Goldsmith attacked the publisher and was fined fifty pounds. The play ran for many months and gave two command performances before the king.

In all Goldsmith's writings he tried to show audiences their errors, to remind them of their blessings, to give them a love of life. And he wrote in terms they could easily understand and heartily enjoy. Because of "his comic vision, his clear insight and sympathetic humor" critics have put Oliver Goldsmith in the great tradition of Chaucer and Shakespeare.

CAST

MR. HARDCASTLE, ***an old-fashioned country gentleman***
MRS. HARDCASTLE, ***his flighty, fashion-loving wife***
TONY LUMPKIN, ***a country bumpkin, son of Mrs. Hardcastle by a previous marriage.***
KATE HARDCASTLE, ***the pretty daughter of the Hardcastles***
CONSTANCE NEVILLE, ***the pretty niece of Mrs. Hardcastle***
STINGO, ***owner of the tavern The Three Pigeons***
YOUNG MARLOW, ***a handsome London gentleman***
GEORGE HASTINGS, ***best friend of Young Marlow's***
SIR CHARLES MARLOW, ***a London aristocrat***
SERVANT, ***helper in the Hardcastle household***

SCENES: ***The action takes place in the country house of Mr. Hardcastle's and in the nearby tavern The Three Pigeons.***

England, 1770.

She Stoops to Conquer

(*The main room of a large country house. MRS. HARDCASTLE enters, followed by MR. HARDCASTLE. She is middle-aged, vain, and foolish. She is comically over-dressed, trying to imitate the fashions of London. Mr. Hardcastle is a hale and hearty country squire.*)

MRS. HARDCASTLE: 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 London now and then?

MR. HARDCASTLE: Ay, and bring back vanity and affection to last them the whole year.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Here we live in an old rambling mansion, that looks for all the world like an inn. I hate such old-fashioned trumpery.

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

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Mr. Hardcastle, you're forever at your Dorothys and your old wifes. Add twenty to twenty and make money of that.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Let me see; twenty added to twenty—makes just fifty and seven.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: It's false, Mr. Hardcastle! I was by twenty when I wed Mr. Lumpkin, my first husband—Tony's father. And Tony has not come to years of discretion yet.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Nor ever will, I dare answer.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: We must not snub the poor boy, for I believe we shan't have him long among us. I'm actually afraid of his lungs.

MR. HARDCASTLE: And truly so am I! For he sometimes whoops like a speaking trumpet.

(*Off L is heard some loud noises of TONY's calling.*)

Listen. Here he comes—truly a very consumptive figure.

(*TONY rushes in from L. He is 21, a loud, crude, country-bumpkin, likeable with his boisterous sense of humor.*)

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

TONY: I am in haste, mother; I cannot stay. The Three Pigeons expect me down every moment. There's some fun going forward.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Ay, the alehouse.

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

TONY: As for disappointing them, I should not so much mind; but I can't abide to disappoint *myself*.

(*Laughs loudly at his own joke.*)

MRS. HARDCASTLE: I say you shan't!

TONY: We'll see which is the strongest, you or I.

(*He suddenly puts her over his shoulder and exits R, laughing loudly. She kicks her feet and calls for help.*)

MR. HARDCASTLE. Ay, there goes a pair that only spoil each other.
(*Looks off L.*)
Ah, but here comes my pretty darling Kate. The fashions of the times have almost infected her, too. By living a year in London, she is as fond of gauze and French frippery, as the best of them.
(*KATE enters. She is young, pretty, and vivacious. She is dressed in a most becoming fashionable gown, which she shows off in entering, then curtsies to her father.*)
Blessings on my pretty innocence! Goodness, what a quantity of superfluous silk hast thou got about thee, girl!

KATE: You know our agreement, sir. You allow me the morning to receive and pay visits and to dress in my own manner.
(*Shows off dress.*)
Then in the evening, I put on my plain housewife's dress to please you.

MR. HARDCASTLE: And remember I insist on our agreement. And, by the bye, I believe I shall have occasion to try your obedience. I expect the young gentleman I have chosen to be your husband from London

this very day. I have his father's letter, in which he informs me his son is set out, and that the father intends to follow himself shortly after.

KATE: Indeed! Bless me, how shall I behave? It's a thousand to one I shan't like him.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Depend upon it, child, I will never control your choice. But Mr. Marlow, whom I have pitched upon, is the son of my old friend, Sir Charles Marlow. I am told the young man is of an excellent understanding.

KATE: Is he?

MR. HARDCASTLE: Very generous.

KATE: I believe I shall like him.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Young and brave.

KATE: I am sure I shall like him.

MR. HARDCASTLE: And very handsome.

KATE: My dear papa, say no more! He is mine. I will have him!

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

KATE: Ah! You have frozen me to death again. A reserved lover, it is said, always makes a suspicious husband.

MR. HARDCASTLE: But before he arrives, I must go prepare the servants for his reception. (*He exits.*)

KATE: Lud, this news of papa's put me all in a flutter. Young—handsome, these he put last, but I put them foremost. Sensible—good-natured, I like all that. But then—reserved and sheepish, that's much against him. Yet . . . can't he be cured of his timidity by being taught to be proud of his wife? Yes! But I vow I'm disposing of the husband, before I have secured the lover.

(*CONSTANCE NEVILLE enters. She is young, pretty, another romantic young lady.*)

Constance!

CONSTANCE: Kate! (*They rush to each other.*)

KATE: Oh, I'm glad you're come, Constance. Oh, tell me, please, how do I look? Is it one of my well-looking days? Am I in face today?

CONSTANCE: Perfectly, my dear.

KATE: I have been threatened—I can scarce get it out—I have been threatened with a lover!

CONSTANCE: A lover! And his name?

KATE: Is Marlow. The son of Sir Charles Marlow.

CONSTANCE: As I live, the most intimate friend of Mr. Hastings, *my* admirer. They are never asunder.
(*Delicately tries to speak of the unspeakable.*) Your Mr. Marlow . . . he is a very singular character, I assure you. They say . . . among women of reputation and virtue, he is the modestest man alive. But . . . his acquaintance give him a very different character among creatures of— of another stamp. You understand me.

KATE: An odd character, indeed. What shall I do? No . . . we will think no more about him, but trust to occurrences for success. Now tell me, how goes on your own affair, my dear? Has my mother been courting you for my brother Tony as usual?

CONSTANCE: I continue to let her suppose that I am in love with her son, and she never once dreams that my affections are fixed upon another. Ah, my aunt's bell rings for our afternoon's walk. *Allons*! Courage is necessary, as our affairs are critical.

KATE: Would it were bedtime and all were well!

(*They exit. Music. Curtains close. The next scene is played in front of the curtain. A tavern sign, THREE PIGEONS, is placed at the side.*)

STINGO: (*The owner of the tavern, enters.*) Master Tony! Master Tony!

TONY: (*Enters*) Well, Stingo, what's the matter?

STINGO: There be two gentlemen at the gate. They have lost their way, and they are talking something about Mr. Hardcastle.

TONY: As sure as can be, one of them must be the gentleman that's coming down to court my sister.

STINGO: Here they come.

(*YOUNG MARLOW and HASTINGS enter. Marlow is a handsome young man, elegant, and sure of his place in London society. Hastings, his friend, is also a dashing young man. They are both dressed in the height of fashion.*)

MARLOW: What a tedious, uncomfortable day we had of it!

HASTINGS: And all, Marlow, from that unaccountable reserve of yours, that would not let us inquire more frequently on the way.

TONY: Gentlemen, I am told you have been inquiring for one Mr. Hardcastle. Pray, gentlemen, is not this same Hardcastle a cross-grained, old-fashioned fellow, with an ugly face daughter—and a pretty son?

HASTINGS: He has a daughter and a step-son.

TONY: The daughter, a tall, traipsing, trolloping, talkative maypole. The son, a pretty, well-bred, agreeable youth, that everybody is fond of.

MARLOW: The daughter is said to be well-bred and beautiful; the son an awkward booby.

TONY: (*Insulted.*) Then, gentlemen, all I have to tell you is, that you won't reach Mr. Hardcastle's house this night!

HASTINGS: Unfortunate! What's to be done, Marlow?

TONY: I have hit it!
(*Crosses to Stingo, and points out the way.*)
If you go on a mile further to the Buck's Head—the old Buck's Head on the hill, one of the best inns in the whole county!

STINGO: (*Aside to Tony.*) Sure, you be sending them to your father's house as an inn!

TONY: (*Aside to Stingo.*) Mum, you fool. Let them find that out.
(*To Hastings.*)
You have only to keep on straight forward, till you are right by a large old house by the roadside.

HASTINGS: We go to the right, did you say?

TONY: No, no! Straight forward. I'll just step with you myself and show you a piece of the way.

(He motions, and MARLOW and HASTINGS exit. STINGO bursts out laughing.)

Mum!

(Starts off, eager for the fun.)

So begins – the mistakes of a night.

(TONY exits. STINGO follows. Music. The sign is pulled back from view. The curtains open. The scene is the main room in the Hardcastle house. SERVANT enters with candles.)

SERVANT: Welcome, gentlemen, very welcome. This way.

(SERVANT bows and exits.)

HASTINGS. *(He and MARLOW enter.)*

After the disappointments of the day, welcome, Charles, to the comforts of a country inn, with a clean room and a good fire.

MARLOW: The usual fate of a large mansion. Having ruined the master, it at last becomes an inn. My life has been chiefly spent in a college or an inn. I don't know that I was ever acquainted with a single modest woman – except my mother.

HASTINGS: And in the company of women of reputation I never saw such an idiot, such a trembler. How do you intend behaving to the lady you are come down to visit?

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

(HARDCASTLE enters.)

Zounds, this fellow here to interrupt us.

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

(MARLOW nods cooly.)

Sir, you're heartily welcome. I like to give my friends a hearty reception at the gate.

MARLOW: We approve of your hospitality, sir.

(Talks to Hastings.)

I have been thinking, George, of changing our traveling dresses in the morning.

MR. HARDCASTLE: I beg, Mr. Marlow, you'll use no ceremony in this house. This is Liberty Hall.

MARLOW: Yet, George, if we open the campaign with too fine a clothes, we may want ammunition later to secure a retreat.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Your talking of a retreat, Mr. Marlow, puts me in mind of the Duke of Marlborough, when we went to besiege Densin. He first summoned the garrison—

MARLOW: Do you think the gold waistcoat will do with the plain brown?

MR. HARDCASTLE: He first summoned the garrison, which might consist of about five thousand men—

MARLOW: The girls like finery.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Which might consist of about five thousand men. "Now," says the Duke of Marlborough—

MARLOW: What, my good friend, if you gave us a glass of punch in the meantime.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Punch, sir!

MARLOW: A glass of warm punch, after our journey, will be comfortable.

MR. HARDCASTLE: Speaking of punch, reminds me of Prince Eugene, when he fought the Turks at the battle of Belgrade.

MARLOW: Instead of the battle of Belgrade, I believe it's almost time to talk about supper.

MR. HARDCASTLE: (*Aside.*) Such a brazen dog sure never my eyes beheld.

MARLOW: And then to see that our beds are aired and properly taken care of.

MR. HARDCASTLE: I entreat you'll leave all that to me.

MARLOW: I always look to these things myself. (*Aside.*) A very troublesome fellow this, as ever I met with. (*Exits.*)

MR. HARDCASTLE: Well, sir, I'm resolved at least to attend you. (*Aside.*) This may be modern modesty, but I never saw anything look so much like old-fashion impudence. (*Exits.*)

HASTINGS: (*Starts to follow, but stops.*)
What do I see? Miss Neville, by all that's happy!

CONSTANCE. (*Enters.*) My dear Hastings! To what unexpected good fortune am I to ascribe this happy meeting?

HASTINGS: Rather let me ask the same question, as I could never have hoped to meet my dearest Constance here – at an inn.

CONSTANCE: An inn? What could induce you to think this house an inn?

HASTINGS: My friend, Marlow, and I have been sent here by a young fellow whom we accidentally met.

CONSTANCE. Ah, certainly it must be one of my cousin Tony's tricks.

HASTINGS: You must know, my dear Constance, I have just seized this happy opportunity of my friend's visit here to get admittance into the family. And when the horses are refreshed, we will soon be landed and wed in France.

CONSTANCE: Though ready to obey you, I should hate to leave my little fortune behind. It chiefly consists in jewels and is in my Aunt's protection.

HASTINGS: Perish the baubles! You are all I desire. In the meantime, my friend Marlow must not be let into his mistake. He would instantly quit the house before our plan was ripe for execution.

CONSTANCE: But how shall we continue to deceive him that this is an inn?

(CONSTANCE sees MARLOW entering. She motions to HASTINGS, who greets Marlow.)

HASTINGS: My dear Charles! the most fortunate accident! Who do you think is just alighted? Our mistresses, boy, Miss Hardcastle and Miss Neville.

(*Presents CONSTANCE.*)

Give me leave to introduce Miss Constance Neville to your acquaintance. Happening to dine in the neighborhood, they called on their return to take fresh horses here at the inn. Miss Hardcastle has just stepped into the next room.

MARLOW: (*Acknowledged CONSTANCE'S curtsey without looking at her, is now in a panic.*)

Miss Hardcastle! What if we postpone the happiness of meeting her till tomorrow? Tomorrow at her own hours. Yes, tomorrow it will be.

(*Starts to exit.*)

HASTINGS: (*Stops him.*) By no means, sir. She knows you are in the house.

MARLOW: Oh, the devil! Hastings, you must not go.

HASTINGS: Pshaw, man! It's but the first plunge, and all's over. She's but a woman, you know.

MARLOW: And of all women, she that I dread most.

(*KATE enters R, still in her elegant dress. MARLOW quickly turns away, too nervous to look at her.*)

HASTINGS: Miss Hardcastle, Mr. Marlow. I am proud to bring two persons of such merit together, that only want to know, to esteem each other.

KATE. (*Aside.*) Now, for meeting my modest gentleman with a demure face, and quite in his own manner. I am glad of your safe arrival, sir. I am told you had some accidents by the way.

MARLOW: Yes, madam. No, madam. I mean—yes, madam.

HASTINGS. (*Aside.*) You never spoke better. Well, Miss Hardcastle, I see that you and Mr. Marlow are going to be very good company. I believe our being here will but embarrass the interview.

MARLOW: Not in the least, Mr. Hastings! (*Aside.*) Zounds, George, sure you won't go now!

HASTINGS: You don't consider, man, we want a little *tête-à-tête* of our own.

(CONSTANCE and HASTINGS exit. KATE, enjoying MARLOW'S discomfort, prolongs the awkward silence. She clears her throat, fans, and finally speaks.)

KATE: While living in London, I hope the ladies have employed some part of your addresses.

MARLOW: *(Never looking at her.)* I – I – I – have studied, madam – only – to – deserve them, madam.

KATE: And that, some say, is the very best way to obtain them.

MARLOW: I am afraid I – I grow tiresome.

KATE: Not at all, sir. There is nothing I like so much as grave conversation. Do you agree?

MARLOW: In the variety of tastes there must be some – who – wanting a relish – for – a – a –

KATE: I understand you, sir. There must be some who, wanting a relish for refined pleasures, pretend to despise what they are incapable of tasting.

MARLOW: My meaning, madam, but infinitely better expressed.

KATE: *(Aside.)* Who could ever suppose this fellow impudent upon some occasions? You were going to observe, sir . . .?

MARLOW: I was observing, madam – I – I protest, madam, I forgot what I was going to observe.

KATE: *(Aside.)* I vow, and so do I.

MARLOW: But I am sure I tire you, madam.

KATE: Not in the least, sir. Pray go on.

MARLOW: Yes, madam. But I see Miss Neville expecting us in the next room. Madam, shall I do myself the honor to attend you? *(Holds out his arm, still not looking at her, exits.)*

KATE: Was there ever such a sober, sentimental interview? I'm certain he scarce looked in my face the whole time. Yet the fellow, but for his

unaccountable bashfulness, is pretty well, too. If I could teach him a little confidence, it would be doing somebody that I know of a piece of service. But who is that somebody? That, faith, is a question I can scarce answer!

(*KATE exits, as TONY enters, followed by CONSTANCE.*)

TONY: What do you follow me for, cousin Con?

CONSTANCE: I hope, cousin, one may speak to one's own relations.

TONY: Ay, but I know what sort of a relation you want to make me. Keep your distance. I want no nearer relationship. (*MRS. HARDCASTLE enters, followed by HASTINGS.*)

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Well, I vow, Mr. Hastings, you are very entertaining! There's nothing in the world I love to talk so much as London, though I was never there myself.

HASTINGS: Never there! From your air and manner, I concluded you had been bred all your life at St. James's.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Pray, Mr. Hastings, what do you take to be the most fashionable age about town?

HASTINGS: Some time ago, forty was all the mode, but I am told the ladies intend to bring up fifty for the ensuing winter.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Seriously? Then I shall be too young for the fashion.

HASTINGS: Who is the young lady there?

MRS. HARDCASTLE: My niece.

HASTINGS: Your niece is she? And that young gentleman—a brother of yours, I should presume?

MRS. HARDCASTLE: My son, sir. They are contracted to each other. Ah, Tony, child, what soft things are you saying to your cousin Constance?

TONY: I have been saying no soft things. Egad! I've not a place in the house now that's left to myself but the stables.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: (*To HASTINGS.*) Was ever the like for a son!