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Dramatic Publishing

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

O. HENRY'S

The Ransom of Red Chief

ADAPTED BY

ANNE COULTER MARTENS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF)

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THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF
A Play in Two Acts
FOR FIVE MEN AND NINE WOMEN

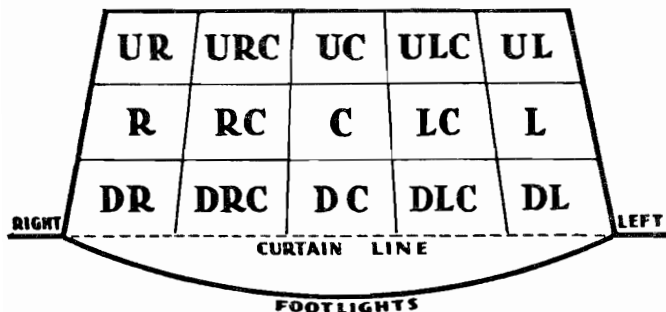
CHARACTERS

SAM BLAKE }
BILL DRISCOLL } *a pair of schemers*
RED CHIEF (JOHNNY) *a lively boy*
EBENEZER DORSET *his uncle*
MRS. RUDGE *the housekeeper*
JANE CHANDLER *Ebenezer's sister*
ABIGAIL }
ELLIE } *her daughters*
SUSAN }
MARY ALICE *a young neighbor*
MRS. MILLER *her mother*
MISS OLIVER }
MISS RUSSELL } *bird watchers*
CONSTABLE JONES *the law*

TIME: *A few years ago. Summer.*

PLACE: *A small town.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Cave area (main set): Cave entrance, rocks, old fence post, shrubbery. Act One, Scene Two: Simulated wood fire, two potatoes, coffee pot, bread, jar of jam, pair of tongs, frying pan, piece of board, several small boxes (one containing pencil and paper), three blankets and first aid kit (including bandage, tape and iodine) inside cave. Act One, Scene Four: Tin can and bucket of water by rocks, sugar (to use for sand) hidden by rocks, no fire. Act Two, Scene One: Rope near cave, blanket, sticks of wood, dim fire. Town Park (in front of curtain): Two park benches, shrubbery. Ebenezer's home: Table with red-checked tablecloth, two chairs, rocking chair, serving stand, breakfast dishes on table, empty cup and saucer and tray on serving stand.

BILL: Newspaper, bag of candy, tin plate of food, fork, bandage on arm (Act One); blanket (Act Two).

SAM: Newspaper, watch, letter in envelope (Act One); small box wrapped in paper and tied with string, knife in pocket, roll of bills in pocket (Act Two).

RED: Bow and arrows, headband with two feathers (Act One); knife, rope tied around ankles and hands, handkerchief gag (Act Two).

EBENEZER: Brief case, cup of coffee.

MRS. RUDGE: Shopping bag (Act One); coffee pot, hat, coat, suitcase (Act Two).

MARY ALICE: Ball, balloon on string.

MRS. MILLER: Bag of groceries, knitting, watch, workbag.

MISS OLIVER: Binoculars.

MISS RUSSELL: Butterfly net.

JANE, SUSAN, ABIGAIL and ELLIE: Each carries a suitcase and coat, hat if desired. Ellie also has magazines.

PRODUCTION NOTES

For ease in production, alternate scenes are played downstage in front of the curtain, using a minimum of props. These can be set up during brief blackouts. The cave set, with a few easily moved props, remains in place throughout the play, except for the final scene. A blackout provides time to set up enough props to suggest an eating area.

While the time of the play is unimportant, it should obviously not be the immediate present. A mere suggestion of costuming, such as longer skirts for the women and girls, different hair-dos, etc. will give the effect of a few years ago.

The characters of Sam and Bill should have a rather childlike quality, almost as if they are grown-up, not-too-bright boys playing at being desperate men. They should never appear to be a real menace to young Red. The situation is exactly the reverse.

This play may be given by a young cast, or by a combination of adults and children.

ACT ONE

Scene One

SCENE: *The town park. This scene is played in front of the curtains. There is a bench at R C and one at L C. A few stylized pieces of shrubbery may be used to give a park effect. It is an afternoon in summer. Entrances are L and R.*

AFTER A BLACKOUT: *BILL, a plump (well-padded), good-natured fellow in his twenties, sits on the bench L reading a newspaper which he holds high up before his face. He wears casual clothes. Although the "confidence man" type, he is essentially harmless and not too bright. MARY ALICE, a pretty little girl standing C, is happily bouncing a ball, chanting as it bounces.*

MARY ALICE (*to the bouncing rhythm*). How--many years--until--I mar--ry? One--two--three--four--(*During this BILL lowers his paper and looks at her, then raises it again.*)--five--six--
--(*She misses the ball.*) Oh, shucks! (*Goes after ball and as she picks it up, catches BILL looking at her from behind paper which he lowers. To BILL:*) Mister, do you think I'll get married in six years?

BILL. How would I know? (*Raises paper again.*)

MARY ALICE (*bouncing ball again*). What--kind of man--will--ask for--my hand? Rich man--poor man--beggarman--thief--doctor--lawyer--Indian chief----(*She misses.*) No fair! I won't marry an Indian chief.

BILL (*lowering paper*). Why don't you bounce your ball some place else?

MARY ALICE. I always play here in the park while my mother's at the store.

BILL. How long will that be?

MARY ALICE. It depends on how much talking she does. (*BILL grunts and raises his paper. MARY ALICE waits.*) Are you reading something important?

BILL (*paper still up*). Run along, little girl. Don't bother me.

MARY ALICE. I have to stay here. (*Bounces ball.*) How--many--people--at my wed--ding? One--two--three--four----

(As she counts, SAM comes in R. He is a little older than BILL, casually dressed, but smoother and a little bit more intelligent. He carries a newspaper raised high before his face and sits on the bench R, apparently engrossed. Behind MARY ALICE'S back he lowers his paper quickly, glances toward BILL, and motions with his thumb, "Get rid of her!" BILL shrugs helplessly and hides behind his paper again.)

MARY ALICE (*stopping her ball bouncing, to SAM*). Hello, mister.

SAM (*paper up*). Hello.

MARY ALICE (*to BILL*). You want to bounce the ball back and forth with me?

BILL (*paper up*). No.

(CONSTABLE JONES saunters in from R. He wears a semblance of a uniform and considers himself very important).

MARY ALICE. Hello, Constable Jones.

JONES. How are you, Mary Alice?

MARY ALICE. Fine, thank you. Catch any crooks lately?

JONES. I'm keeping my eyes open.

MARY ALICE. I bet they can't fool *you*.

JONES. They'd just better not try. (*Goes out L.*)

MARY ALICE. That was Constable Jones. He's not afraid of anybody.

SAM (*lowering his paper a little*). Is anybody afraid of him?

MARY ALICE. Only bad people. He locks them up in our jail. You're not from around here, are you?

SAM. Pretty little town you have.

MARY ALICE. I don't have it. Mr. Dorset owns most of it. (*Bounces ball again.*) How--many--chil--dren--will I--have? (*Counts.*) One--two--three----(*Behind her back, BILL and SAM lower their papers and look at her in exasperation. When she misses and turns toward them, BILL raises his paper.*)

SAM (*making a show of looking at his watch*). My watch is stopped. Little girl, would you do me a favor?

MARY ALICE. Maybe.

SAM. Bounce your ball around the park where you can see the big clock on the bank and let me know what time it is?

MARY ALICE. Okay. If my mother comes, tell her I won't be long.

SAM. Thank you so much. (*MARY ALICE bounces her ball as she goes out R. SAM turns to BILL.*) I don't want a silly little kid in the way when we pull the snatch

BILL (*a trifle nervously*). You didn't tell me they had a constable in this town.

SAM. Just a hick.

BILL. I don't hanker to find out how nice that jail

room is.

SAM. Scared?

BILL. Look, you and me have pulled a lot of jobs together, and you know I'm one of the best. But I've never tried kidnaping, and I ain't too sure I want to.

SAM (*getting up*). It's all worked out. That cave up in the hills is well stocked with provisions, and our car is parked just around the corner.

BILL. We could take our hundred bucks and play the horses.

SAM. We need two thousand smackeroos to start that real estate swindle.

BILL. You're sure this kidnaping won't cause us no trouble?

SAM. I've cased the town and know just the kid to snatch. A boy by the name of Johnny, nephew of old Ebenezer Dorset who's loaded with the green stuff.

BILL. Nephew?

SAM. He lives with old Ebenezer and a housekeeper. Lively little kid, and I'm sure the old boy will melt down for two thousand ransom.

BILL. I'd sure like to be rich!

SAM. This boy plays around here every afternoon while the housekeeper goes shopping. We just offer some candy . . . and swish! . . . off to the cave.

BILL. He's kind of dumb, huh?

SAM. Any kid's a pushover for candy.

BILL. When I was a kid, my old lady never let me have no candy money.

SAM. Lay off your childhood.

BILL (*sadly*). The other kids wouldn't play with me because I was sort of fat.

SAM. How did you get fat if you didn't eat candy?

BILL. Snitched it, of course.

SAM. This Ebenezer Dorset is the richest guy in town. Respected citizen. Holds mortgages on practically everything. Passes the collection plate in church.

BILL. What a sweet racket. (*Offstage, RED'S [JOHN-NY'S] voice is heard.*)

RED. Leggo my hand!

MRS. RUDGE (*also from offstage*). You come back here!

(*SAM sits down quickly, raising the paper before his face. RED, an aggravating young imp, nicknamed for his spirit, runs in R. He is a boy of fiery spirit, a wild imagination, and a fierce determination to get even with the entire world of people that care nothing for him. He wears casual clothes.*)

RED (*chanting*). Ya, ya, you can't catch me!

(*MRS. RUDGE, a sour-faced woman of middle age, comes in after him, a shopping bag in her hand.*)

MRS. RUDGE. I'll tell your uncle! You'll catch a---

RED. I'm faster'n greased lightning! (*Keeps out of her reach.*)

MRS. RUDGE. You'll be sorry if he gives you another licking.

RED. Nothing hurts *me*!

MRS. RUDGE. You play around here till I get back. And don't get into any more fights. (*Glances curiously at the two men, who keep their papers up.*)

RED. Nobody better start fights with me. I'm a killer.

MRS. RUDGE (*firmly*). Right here, understand?

RED. Why?

MRS. RUDGE. Because I say so. *(Takes a step toward him.)*

RED *(to be tantalizing)*. Why, Mrs. Rudge? Why do you say so? *(Dodges away from her, purposely bumping BILL'S outstretched legs.)*

BILL. O-ow! *(Rubs his ankles.)*

MRS. RUDGE. Johnny, apologize to the gentleman.

RED. Don't call me Johnny! My name is Red.

MRS. RUDGE. Apologize.

RED *(obviously not meaning it)*. Excuse me. It was an accident.

BILL *(muttering)*. I'll bet.

RED. Why can't I go to the store, too?

MRS. RUDGE. Because I can't keep my eye on you all the time. *(Their backs are now turned to the two men. SAM and BILL lower their papers and BILL points to RED, silently asking a question. SAM points to RED, nodding, and they raise their papers again.)*

RED. I don't have nobody to play with.

MRS. RUDGE *(annoyed)*. Try standing on your head! *(Starts off L.)*

(EBENEZER DORSET, a tight-faced, well-dressed man, comes in L carrying a brief case.)

EBENEZER. Going shopping again, Mrs. Rudge? I don't know what you do with all the food.

MRS. RUDGE. Ask *him*. *(Indicates RED.)* Mr. Dorset, could you take him for a little walk? He gets into fights when I leave him here.

EBENEZER. Impossible. I'm on my way to a bank conference.

RED. Uncle Eb, can I go to the bank with you?

EBENEZER. Act your age, boy.

RED. Why can't I go?

MRS. RUDGE. He drives me crazy with his questions.

RED *(to her)*. Why?

MRS. RUDGE. You see?

EBENEZER. I see. I'm paying you to look after him, and I want him taught manners. *(Goes out R.)*

MRS. RUDGE. You heard what your uncle said. Behave! *(Goes out L.)*

RED *(after she has gone)*. Why?

SAM *(lowering his paper)*. Kids your age shouldn't talk back to older people.

RED. Why?

BILL *(lowering his paper)*. They're bigger than you are.

RED. I'm a lot bigger than I look.

SAM. Say, boy, how would you like to go for a little ride.

RED. Where?

SAM. Up the back road, maybe.

RED. Why?

BILL. This kid has a one-track mind.

SAM. Just a nice ride.

BILL. And I have some candy in my pocket.

RED. What kind?

(BILL and SAM get up, ready to go into action. MARY ALICE comes in R and they sit down again, sighing.)

MARY ALICE. It's five minutes after three, mister.

SAM. Thanks so much. Now, run along.

MARY ALICE. I like it here. *(Glances at RED.)*
Tell him to go away.

RED. Nobody tells me nothing.

MARY ALICE *(to SAM)*. I hate boys.

RED. Girls oughta be drowned in the lake. *(Takes her hand and pulls her R.)* Come on.

MARY ALICE *(yelling)*. I won't! *(Pulls free.)* He's

awful bad. (*Begins to bounce her ball.*)

BILL. He seems like a nice little fellow to me.

RED (*insulted*). Don't call me dirty names, mister.

MARY ALICE (*bouncing*). What--kind--of--house--will--I--live in? Pal--ace--man--sion-- (*RED snatches the ball and throws it out R. She yells.*)

I hate you!

RED (*happily*). I sure wouldn't want you to *like* me!

(*MARY ALICE hurries out R after the ball.*) All girls are sissies.

SAM. You say your name's Red?

RED. Yeah. Wanna make something outta it?

BILL. Not right now.

SAM. About that ride up the back road----

RED. What about it?

SAM. We have a car around the corner, and we'll be glad to take you sightseeing.

RED. Ain't no sights to see around this town.

BILL. You might be surprised.

RED. Maybe after awhile. (*Goes R.*) I gotta find her ball so I can throw it in the lake. (*Goes out R.*)

BILL (*glumly*). Lovable little devil, huh?

SAM. Just all boy. We'll have no trouble with him.

BILL. He didn't rise to the candy bait.

SAM. Give him time.

BILL. You think he'll go quietly?

SAM. If not, we'll grab him.

(*MARY ALICE comes in R, crying a little.*)

MARY ALICE. He threw my ball in the deep part!

BILL. Tsk, tsk!

MARY ALICE. Make him go away.

BILL. Maybe that can be arranged.

SAM. Quiet, you!

BILL. What did *I* say?

SAM. One of your usual stupid remarks. Let *me* do the talking.

(MRS. MILLER, a friendly but gossipy woman, comes in L with a bag of groceries. SAM and BILL raise their papers again.)

MARY ALICE. Mother, Johnny threw my good ball in the lake!

MRS. MILLER. What that boy needs is a hair brush applied in the right place.

(RED comes in R, dodging around out of reach and laughing.)

MARY ALICE. Now he's laughing!

MRS. MILLER. Young man, it's time you changed your tune.

RED. Why?

MRS. MILLER *(annoyed)*. Just ignore him. Come, Mary Alice. *(Takes MARY ALICE out L. Before she goes, MARY ALICE turns and sticks her tongue out at RED. He does the same. SAM and BILL lower their papers.)*

RED. See why I hate girls? They don't fight back. They just squeal on you.

SAM. A fellow could have fun riding up the back road looking for bears.

RED *(interested)*. Bears?

SAM. They tell me lots of bears up that way.

RED. I ain't never been that far from home.

SAM. Then let's go. *(He and BILL get up. They fold the newspapers and put them in their coat pockets.)*

RED. Wildcats, too?

BILL. Most likely.

RED. Indians?

BILL. Well, now----

SAM. Who knows, till we go look?

RED. Well--I dunno.

BILL. Don't forget. I got candy. *(Takes a bag of candy out of his pocket.)*

RED. Gee! *(Comes closer.)* Can I have a piece?

BILL. Sure, help yourself. *(Holds out bag.)*

RED *(snatching the entire bag).* Thanks, mister. *(Keeps out of reach.)* I'll go bear hunting some other time.

BILL. Give me back that bag of candy!

RED. Try and get it! *(SAM and BILL are R and L of him, coming closer.)* Why are you looking at me so funny?

SAM. Grab him! *(They reach for RED. He kicks BILL on the leg.)*

BILL. O-ouch! *(He retreats. SAM attacks from the rear, getting RED'S legs and pulling him down.)*

SAM. Grab his shoulders! *(BILL takes RED by the shoulders.)*

RED. Leggo of me! *(Turns his head, trying to bite BILL'S arm.)*

BILL. He's biting my arm!

SAM. Hold on to him! *(With RED kicking and fighting, they go R.)*

RED. I don't want no ride!

BILL. Kid, you're on your way! *(They take him out R.)*

BLACKOUT