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RUBBER BOOTS.



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RUBBER BOOTS

A Farce in One Act

BY
MANLEY H. PIKE

BOSTON:

Walter H. Baker & Co.

1898

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CHARACTERS.

PAULINE, }
LOU, } *Sisters, who have more or less to say.*
SOPHIE, }
A TRAMP, *for and by whom there is nothing to be said.*

Costumes modern, with concessions to the tramp in the matters of antiquity and appropriateness.



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RUBBER BOOTS.

SCENE. — *An interior, as pretty as possible. Practicable window at back, C. Doors R. and L. Portière across L. back corner, well out. Sofa R. C., back to the front. Chair R. front. Sideboard, with bowl supposed to contain salad, plate of rolls, plate of doughnuts, L. front. Vase upon sideboard, bottle inside. Pair of men's rubber boots on floor L. of sideboard.*

(Screams heard before rise. PAULINE, LOU, and SOPHIE discovered clinging together, C.)

PAULINE (*screaming*). Oh!

LOU (*same*). Oh!

SOPHIE (*prolonged scream*). Oh-h-h-h! (*They clutch one another and look apprehensively about.*)

LOU. Think of it! The very day papa and mamma are called to Aunt Alice's, the cook goes away without giving warning!

SOPHIE. And the second girl gives warning, and then goes away too —

PAULINE. Without warning. Though, fortunately, if the cook did take French leave, she left us some French rolls (*indicating plate*) — which I don't like.

SOPHIE (*indicating bowl*). Salad — which I hate.

LOU (*indicating the other plate*). And doughnuts — which I abominate. They're so old-fashioned.

PAULINE. Besides leaving us alone.

LOU. If it were only that, Pauline. It isn't being left alone that I mind, but not being left alone after you're left alone.

SOPHIE. Why, there isn't a soul within two miles!

LOU. Oh, how I hope there isn't!

PAULINE. Why, Lou!

SOPHIE. You hope there isn't?

LOU. Yes; for if there is, he's a tramp!

PAULINE. }
SOPHIE. } A tramp! (*All scream.*)

PAULINE. How silly! Aren't there three of us?

SOPHIE. Yes; but that's no advantage. We're only just three times as frightened.

PAULINE. Pooh! We've got arms — a pistol and a sword.

LOU. But I never fired a pistol in my life.

SOPHIE. And I never fired a sword—oh, eh—what am I saying?

PAULINE. Well, the pistol isn't loaded.

LOU. And the sword won't cut.

SOPHIE. That's lucky for the tramps, or for us — I don't know which.

LOU. I do. Lucky for us. We'd be morally certain to shoot or slice ourselves; and what's the use of defending your life if you kill yourself in doing it?

SOPHIE (*half crying*). I'd j-just as s-soon be k-killed as sc-scared to death!

PAULINE. Come, come, girls! We must be brave, and act like men — I mean, like women.

SOPHIE (*plucking up courage*). I will. (*Goes very timidly to sofa and looks under it.*)

LOU. O Sophie, how brave you are! I thought of that, but didn't dare do it. (*Opens door of sideboard; looks in and starts back.*) Oh!

THE OTHERS. What was it?

LOU. Nothing; but I was afraid there might be something, and it was an awful shock to find that there wasn't.

PAULINE. For shame, girls! Do you call this acting like women?

THE OTHERS. Yes, Pauline, we do!

PAULINE. I must say I blush for my sisters. Haven't you both had every opportunity for 'strengthening your minds? Lou, didn't you learn all about "What to do before the doctor comes"?

LOU. Yes; but that doesn't tell me what to do after the burglar comes.

PAULINE. You, Sophie, attended a whole course of lectures on "First Aid to the Injured."

SOPHIE. But I don't want to be injured at all; and if I could injure a tramp I shouldn't care whether he had any aid or not — first, second, or third.

PAULINE. So it seems that there is only one person in this house who has any courage. I don't mean to fall into a panic, even if papa is away. Didn't I write my graduation essay upon the subject, "Woman's Opportunity is in Man's Absence"?

SOPHIE. Yes; but that doesn't include the cook's absence.

LOU. Or the second girl's. And what's more, Pauline, I believe you're just as scared as either of us. (*Suddenly.*) Oh, there he is! (*Points off.*)

PAULINE. Oh, mercy! (*Jumps on chair, R.*) Who? Where? What? How many of him? (*The others laugh.* PAULINE, *jumping down*) Very well, Miss Lou, very well. Perhaps before this night is over you'll be sorry that you tried to shake your sister's nerve.

LOU. I tried — and I succeeded, too.

SOPHIE. And sister's nerve shook!

PAULINE (*vexed*). Go to your rooms this instant, children. Remember what I've told you, try to act like reasonable beings; and (*changing tone*) please be very sure to look under all the beds. (*Exeunt R., LOU and SOPHIE, laughing.*)

PAULINE (*walking about*). They were perfectly right. I was frightfully frightened. I didn't mean to show it, though, and now I must do something to retrieve my reputation for courage, or I'll never hear the last of this. Suppose I play some innocent joke, to convince them that they're not so brave as I am? I will. Now what can I — (*sees boots*) — why, papa's forgotten to put away his rubber boots. (*Holds them up.*) Don't they look consolingly masculine? If only there were a man in them! (*Pause.*) A man in them! I've got it — my innocent joke! (*Looks around room; finally at portière.*) Ha, ha, ha! (*Continuing to laugh at frequent intervals, arranges boots under portière, toes resting against each other, and tops concealed.*) There! Wouldn't one suppose that a man had crawled in there and gone to sleep? It's perfect. Now I'll call the girls, and we'll see if sister's nerve is shaken. (*Exit R.*)

(*Pause.* THE TRAMP *appears outside window. With hands to his face, which is pressed against the glass, he carefully examines room; then very cautiously opens window and climbs in. Piano begins "The Rogue's March."* He stares about, until, seeing sideboard, he makes a wild rush to it, and begins eating extremely fast, using hands alternately, and glancing nervously over either shoulder. Looks into various empty pitchers, and then opens sideboard. Attitude of joy. Takes out bottle, draws cork with teeth, smells, grins with delight, and takes long drink. Contemplates salad-bowl. Sudden inspiration. Seizes ornamental vase, pours salad into it, puts vase out of window. Grins. Looks at plate of rolls. Another inspiration. Puts them into his hat very rapidly, one at a time, then replaces hat on head. Grins again. Contemplates doughnuts, and has a third bright idea. Goes to window, reaches out, produces stick, returns to sideboard, and strings the doughnuts on stick. Now perceives boots under portière. At first much alarmed, he stealthily approaches, and finally discovers that they are

not on any one's feet. Sits on floor, takes off his worn-out shoes, puts on boots with great delight. He has been growing sleepy, however, and he looks about for a resting-place. Piano plays some lullaby air. He crawls under portière, leaving boots projecting exactly as before. Piano stops.)

(Enter PAULINE, R.)

PAULINE. It was all I could do to get those girls out of their rooms. I thought I should never succeed. But they're coming at last, and now for an exhibition of bravery.

(Enter LOU and SOPHIE, R., frightened.)

LOU and SOPHIE *(rushing to PAULINE)*. Oh, did you hear a noise? Down here? Did you see anything? What was it?

PAULINE *(impressively)*. There is a man in the house! *(They cling to her.)* Now you will see whether you really shook your sister's nerve. There he is! *(Points to boots. Girls terrified.)* I'll show you that the title of that essay ought to have been, "Woman's Opportunity is in Man's Presence." *(Walks majestically toward portière. THE TRAMP moves his feet. All shriek and fall back, PAULINE trying to get behind the others. Attitudes. THE TRAMP lazily lifts one foot and lets it fall over the other. PAULINE rushes out L., other girls at R. THE TRAMP parts portière, sits up, looks stupidly about, then takes a doughnut from the stick and eats it. Drops back, feet in same position as at first. Enter PAULINE, L. She wears a man's hat and ulster and carries a sword.)*

PAULINE. I'm so terrified that I'm full of courage. That person is certainly a tramp, and he may be a burglar and a murderer and an incendiary into the bargain. No matter. Somehow or other, this hat and ulster give me no end of self-confidence. He may possibly think me a man, if I can only speak gruffly enough, and flourish this horrid sword with sufficient energy; although really I'm almost as afraid of cutting myself with it as I am of being slaughtered by him. *(Growing nervous.)* But suppose he doesn't think me a man? Suppose he isn't impressed at all? Suppose he rises right up and takes my life? *(Collecting herself.)* Nonsense! I won't suppose — I'll bully! *(Walks up and raps one of THE TRAMP'S feet with sword. He draws foot up out of sight. Same business with the other. She parts portière quickly and jumps back. THE TRAMP discovered sitting tailor-fashion, looking very much befogged. She points sword against him. He looks at it stupidly, and then, as if by a happy thought, puts a doughnut on the end of it, and grins inanely.)* Ha, ha, ha! The poor fellow isn't dangerous. He wouldn't harm a fly. But what

a dreadful odor of liquor! (*Looking at sideboard.*) Oh, I understand! He's been at papa's brandy. And he seems to have eaten enough for seven strong men. No wonder he's so mild. I think I'm mistress of the situation. (*Puts hand to her chin and surveys THE TRAMP, who gazes back, still grinning.*) Ha, ha, ha! (*THE TRAMP gives a short, quick chuckle.*) What a ridiculous creature! But it's time he should go. He must come out, and those boots must come off. (*Makes threatening signs. THE TRAMP is puzzled, and offers another doughnut; then takes off his hat, full of rolls, and offers that. Finally comprehends, and removes boots. PAULINE, putting on boots while speaking.*) I'll add the finishing touch to my costume. There! And there! (*Stamping.*) Now I really feel like a man. (*Makes signs.*) Get up, sir! (*Stamps.*) Get up, I say! (*Stamps. THE TRAMP slowly arises. She drives him around stage and to window, stamping at every other word, while he falls back in time with each of her advances.*) Leave these premises at once, and never let me see you here again, or you'll be instantly arrested and tried and hung and drawn and quartered — quartered in jail, at least. Now, get out of the window! Now, go! (*Shuts window, drops sword, and puts hands to her head.*) Oh, he went just in time — he and his doughnuts — for I'm going to cry — no, I'm going to laugh — no, I'm going to do both at once — for sister's nerve is shaken at last! Ha, ha, ha! Boo, hoo, hoo! (*Hysterics. Throws herself upon sofa, showing boots projecting over one arm of it. Hysterics gradually subside. Enter R. LOU and SOPHIE, former with pistol, latter with large knife.*)

LOU (*looking at portière*). Why, he isn't there!

SOPHIE (*indicating boots*). No, he's there! (*Both start.*) He's stolen papa's boots and ulster and cap.

LOU. O Sophie, I never shall dare!

SOPHIE. Neither shall I.

LOU. But we must, though.

SOPHIE. Sha'n't we hunt up Pauline?

LOU. Pauline! No! She's run away and hidden herself. We must do it alone.

SOPHIE. But how?

LOU. We'll smother his head in the sofa-cushions, and then tie him. Here's some cord.

SOPHIE. But suppose he won't let us?

LOU. We'll make him.

SOPHIE. You must put your pistol to his head.

LOU. And you must dig your knife into his ribs — hard!

SOPHIE. And we must threaten him awfully.

LOU. Only he'll know we're girls by our voices.

SOPHIE. We'll change them. (*Hesitatingly.*) And — and —

LOU. What is it?

SOPHIE. Lou, did you ever hear any one swear?

LOU. Swear? Why, no, of course not — yes, I have, too, once. I heard Cousin Joe.

SOPHIE. What did he say?

LOU. I don't want to repeat it, but I can if I must. He said — he said —

SOPHIE. Yes, yes!

LOU. Oh, he said — (*explosively*) — darn!

SOPHIE. Oh!

LOU. Wasn't it awful — d-a-r-n!

SOPHIE (*solemnly*). Lou, do you think you could say that?

LOU (*appealingly*). Sophie!

SOPHIE. You've got to. It will make that object there quail before us, it sounds so shockingly bloodthirsty. Yes, you've got to.

LOU. I will. But I never, never thought I should ever have to use such a wicked word.

SOPHIE. No; and we never thought we should have to smother anybody's head in sofa-cushions and tie him.

LOU. But what will *you* say?

SOPHIE (*fiercely*). "Surrender, and I will spare your life. Resist, and I will scatter your dismembered fragments over the floor!" (*Natural voice.*) How's that?

LOU. It's too sweet for anything.

SOPHIE. Now we're ready. You rush in on that side, I on this. One, two, three, and away! (*They fling themselves upon the sofa.*)

LOU *piles cushions on PAULINE'S head, while SOPHIE ties her.*)

SOPHIE (*hoarse voice*). Surrender, and I will spare your life. Resist, and — (*suddenly becoming plaintive*) — I'm sure I don't know what in the world I'll do!

LOU (*very rapidly, and in a whining tone*). Darn, darn, darn, darn, darn!

SOPHIE. There! I have him tied.

LOU. There! I have him half-suffocated.

SOPHIE. Can you see what he looks like?

LOU. No; I'm sitting on his head. Besides, I wouldn't dare look at him — he must be too hideous for anything.

SOPHIE. I think he's secure.

LOU. Then we'll run and find Pauline, and show her what heroes — I mean heroines — we are.

SOPHIE. And make her take her turn in sitting on his head.

(*Exeunt L.* PAULINE *struggles, then sits up, her head appearing above back of sofa.*)

PAULINE (*looking about*). Well? (*Pause*.) Well? (*Pause*.) Well? I'm alive, I believe — perhaps I won't go so far as that; but at any rate, I'm not dead. What horrid ruffians! I never in all my life heard anything quite so awful as the threats of the one who tied me, excepting the way that other wretch swore — why, I couldn't even have fancied such frightful profanity; what they said afterward I couldn't hear, because I was nearly smothered; but it was even worse, I'm sure. Where can the villains be? They've gone to burn the girls and murder the house — I mean burn the house and murder the girls. That's certain. And — why, upon my word, they've tied me so loose that I can free my hands! Yes, and get out of these boots. (*Rises*.) I'll find out where those scoundrels are. (*Exit, L.*)

(*Music, "The Rogue's March," as before. Re-enter, quickly, at window, THE TRAMP, who goes to cupboard, and drinks from bottle. Sees boots on sofa, puts them on and crawls under portière, boots projecting just as before. Music stops. Re-enter the three girls, L., PAULINE speaking very fast as they come on.*)

PAULINE. And they tied my feet and they tied my hands and they piled cushions on my head and they sat upon them until I thought I never should breathe another mortal breath — (*at C.*) — and now what do you imagine can have become of them?

LOU. The one we captured must have got free and seized you.

PAULINE. Did you capture him here?

SOPHIE. Yes; on the sofa. His companion must have come and released him, and then they did the same to you as we did to him — out of revenge, no doubt.

PAULINE. Well, it's evident they've been frightened away. You were a pair of brave girls, and I'm proud of you. I wish you'd show me how you did it. After what I've been through tonight I've grown fond of assault and battery.

LOU. So have I.

SOPHIE. It's a regular trade with me.

PAULINE. Well, then, charge!

SOPHIE (*rushing to sofa*). Surrender, and I will spare your life. Resist, and I will scatter your dismembered fragments over the floor!

LOU (*same*). Darn, darn, darn, darn, darn, darn! (*PAULINE sinks into chair R., and bursts out laughing.*)

LOU. }

SOPHIE. } (*at sofa*). Wasn't that well done?

PAULINE (*between bursts of laughter*). Oh, I shall die, I shall die, I shall certainly die! O girls, O girls — it was you — it was I — oh, dear, I don't know how to tell you!

THE OTHERS (*coming to her*). What's the matter?

PAULINE (*as before*). Nothing — nothing at all — only you took me for a sleeping tramp and I took you for two very wide-awake ones!

LOU. What?

SOPHIE. Was it you?

PAULINE. Yes; and I thought I'd never heard such desperate threats and such horrible profanity — oh, dear, oh, dear, ha, ha, ha!

LOU. Ha, ha, ha!

SOPHIE. Ha, ha, ha, ha! (*Prolonged laugh, stopped abruptly as she sees boots under portière. LOU continues to laugh. SOPHIE puts her hand over LOU's mouth, and turns her slowly around until she can see boots. LOU in attitude. PAULINE left laughing alone. SOPHIE twists her quickly about till she faces boots, and laugh stops instantly. THE TRAMP moves his feet, and all recoil in attitudes.*)

CURTAIN.

(*For Recalls. First Picture. THE TRAMP is getting out of the window, threatened by the girls. Boots on floor, c. front. Second Picture. Girls embracing. THE TRAMP appears at window, beckoning. SOPHIE gets bottle, secretly turning it upside down to show that it is empty, laughs, and gives it to THE TRAMP. He lifts his hat in burlesque thanks, and the rolls in it fall all over him. PAULINE holds boots aloft in triumph.*)

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