

GEORGE BAKER

COMRADES

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Содержание

COSTUMES	5
ACT I	6
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	13

Comrades A Drama in Three Acts

COSTUMES

Royal. Age 35. Act I. Velvet breakfast jacket, light pants, dark vest, dark curly wig slightly sprinkled with gray, dark mustache, and side whiskers. Act II. Dark suit, thin travelling “ulster,” slouch hat. Act III. Dark mixed suit.

Matt. Age 45. Act I. Ragged suit, with army cap, full gray ragged beard, rough gray wig; red nose, and general make up of a drunkard. Act II. Riding coat, light pants, riding boots, wide collar rolled over coat, open at throat; neat gray wig, long gray side whiskers; face clean shaved, a little florid, whole appearance neat. Act III. 1st dress. Old ragged army overcoat, buttoned at throat, slouch hat, whiskers and wig as in act II, but chin rough and dirty, nose red, general rough appearance. 2d dress, on last appearance, same as in act II, chin clean and smooth; general appearance the same as in act II.

Marcus. Age 24. Act I. Genteel riding suit, with boots and whip. Act II. Darksuit, and travelling overcoat or ulster. Act III. Handsome mixed full suit. Hair and mustache natural.

Simon. Age 25. Act I. Fashionable “loud” spring suit, red neck-tie, white hat, red wig. Act II. Dark pants, green apron, short green jacket. Act III. Light pants, blue coat with brass buttons, black hat, large gold chain, diamond pin *a la* Tweed; dark pants and white gaiters.

May. Act I. Tasty morning dress, with pretty morning cap. Act II. Afternoon dress, muslin; apron and gloves on entrance. Act III. Evening dress, handsome and tasty.

Bessie. Three dresses of the same character to contrast with May.

Nancy. Act I. Balmoral Petticoat, calico dress, pinned up; sleeves rolled up. Act II. Neat muslin dress, with apron. Act III. Brown dress, white collar and cuffs.

ACT I

Scene. —*Room in Royal Manning's home. Doors C., open to garden; long window in flat; L., with curtains, draped back, stand of flowers before it; upright piano against flat, R., of door, at which Bessie is seated, playing, back to audience. Mantel, R., with fireplace. Royal standing in chair hanging a sabre (sheathed) above the mantel. Table L., C., May seated L. of it, sewing. Chair R. of table, hassock near it; ottoman back near window. Doors 1 and 3 entrance R.; door 2d entrance, L. Flowers in vase on mantel; whole scene tasty and comfortable. Music at rising of curtain, — "The Dearest Spot on Earth to me is Home, Sweet Home!"*

Royal. There, May, we'll hang this relic of my warrior days above the mantel, to remind us, that now I have become a husband, the sword is beaten into a ploughshare.

May. Very appropriate, now you have become a husbandman.

Roy. Good, very good! Wedlock has sharpened your wits. Yes, I am the happy husband of the best little wife ever erring man was blessed with. Oh, blissful state of matrimony! why did I not become your naturalized citizen before? (*Steps from chair*). There, old friend, rest in peace! no more shall we in fellowship dash upon the enemy; no more, hand in hand, encounter the perils of the battlefield, the glory of triumph, the shame of defeat. Oh, rest in peace, old dog of war, until you grow rusty with honorable age!

May. How very pathetic! You have pronounced the eulogy. Bess, a dirge would be appropriate just now.

Bess. Yes. How would "Old Dog Tray" suit the occasion?

Roy. Very bad. A biting sarcasm (*Looks at sabre*). Rather ornamental. Hey, May? (*Sits in chair, R. of table.*)

May. It has a wicked look. It makes me shudder.

Roy. Indeed! then down it comes. (*Rises.*)

May. No, let it hang. I only fear that, like its master, it may occasionally have martial fits, and then —

Roy. Fits! Well, what then?

May. My poor vases would fall beneath the sword.

Roy. Never fear; like its master, 'tis securely tied to your apron-string. How time flies! 'Tis ten years since my old friend and I closed our campaign.

May. And just three months since we closed our campaign —

Roy. Of courtship, yes, and massed our forces for the battle of life. Yes, yes. Then I captured the heart, which, for two years, I had so valiantly attacked.

May. Valiantly, indeed. 'Twas with fear and trembling, you, the veteran warrior, approached the citadel.

Roy. Which was longing to surrender.

May. No; I'll not confess that.

Roy. But you do not regret it, May? You are happy here?

May. Happy, Roy? I never dared to dream of so much happiness. I, a poor sewing-girl, earning my living with the needle, have now a home any lady might well be proud of, and a husband —

Bess. Ahem!

Roy (*rising*). Hallo! Little Pitcher's ears are wide open. (*Crossing to mantel, and leaning against it*). What's the matter, Bess?

Bess (*swinging round on stool*). Can't you speak a little louder, you two? It's so provoking to only hear the ripple of a conversation which you know will be sure to end in a smacking breeze.

Roy. I was not within saluting distance. (*Aside.*) I wish I had been.

Bess. Then I should have had a full report of your conversation. Ha! ha! ha! you two have been married three months, and have not yet finished your courting. Remarkable vitality! I thought love-making ended at the altar.

Roy. Remarkable ignorance, Bess. But you are young and green. Did you, indeed?

Bess. Yes; and that the flame of love was extinguished when the husband, poor man! was obliged to rise, on a cold, frosty morning, to build the fire.

Roy. That only adds fuel to the flame.

Bess. That the fountain of affection ceased to flow, when he had to go a mile to draw a pail of water.

Roy. Liquid nonsense. You are alluding, of course, now, chatterbox, to our first effort at housekeeping; but all that is over; everything is nicely arranged, and we can now bask in the warmth of domestic fires.

Bess. If the chimney doesn't smoke, – which it does, you know, awfully.

Roy (*crossing to chair R. of table*). Hang the chimney! You'd put a damper on anything. May, what shall we do with this girl?

May. Let her scoff. It will be our turn soon; her fate is approaching.

Bess (*jumping up*). Did you hear his step?

Roy. Ha! ha! ha!

“By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.”

Bess. It's Marcus, and you have told me. (*Exit C.*)

May. Stop! stop! Bess! I hear nothing.

Roy. Let her go; no doubt she'll meet Marcus, and, having found him, she'll *mark-us* no more. Do you know, May, I'm getting anxious about that young man.

May. He's a very agreeable fellow, seems honest, and is fast winning the affections of Bess.

Roy. Yes, I know all that you know; but what we don't know is what bothers me. When, in pursuit of happiness, I made my way to the humble but comfortable residence of the late Mrs. Bradley, you being the attraction, I found this young man paying court to Bess in the parlor, while I emulated his example by making love to you in the sitting-room.

May. They were well called suite (*soot*) er rooms, ha! ha! ha!

Roy. Allow me to correct your pronunciation for suite (*sweet*) er, rooms, they must have been, with two pair of lovers. Well, Mrs. Bradley died. You must have a home; there was nothing to hinder, and we were married, came here, and brought Bess with us, a welcome addition to our household.

May. Dear girl! She is the light of our house.

Roy. Well, I cannot exactly agree with you, having a star of the first magnitude before my eyes. As a matter of course, Mr. Marcus Graves follows. I don't object to that, but I do object to his secretiveness. Who is he? He seems to have no relatives, no friends: at least he never speaks of them.

May. You know his business?

Roy. Yes. He's a drummer.

May. A military man. Then you surely should like him.

Roy. A military man – not exactly, our military drummer – musters his men to battle with the rattle of his sheepskin; your civil drummer, with the rattle of his tongue, taps the sheepskin of the men he musters, and too often makes enemies in his own ranks, with short and poor rations not up to sample. Yes; I have become the natural protector of this young lady, and should know something about this ardent suitor who never speaks of marriage.

May. To be sure you should. Well, why don't you?

Roy. What! Pin him in a corner, and, like a stern parent, ask him who are his parents, and what are his intentions.

May. And what then?

Roy. Ten to one he'll fly into a passion, tell me it's none of my business, and quit the house in disgust.

May. Somehow, Roy, I have faith in Marcus Graves.

Roy. Because Bessie loves him. Oh, the warm cloak of affection covers a multitude of sins!

May. For the world I would not bring a pang to her dear heart! Her mother, for fifteen years, was the dearest friend I had in the world. When the war broke out, my father went to battle. We were all in the West then. What ever became of him I never knew. No doubt he died for his country as bravely as he went forth. My mother —

Roy. Deserted you! Fled with your father's friend! It's a sad story, May. Don't speak of it.

May. Yes: I was left to the care of strangers. And this kind neighbor, Mrs. Bradley, took pity upon me. She was poor; but, hard as was her lot, I was treated as her own child. O Roy! she was a mother to the friendless little stranger! Heaven knows I am grateful! All the tenderness she bestowed upon me I have tried to repay in love for her child. In days of poverty, Bess and I shared our crusts together; and now that fortune has blessed me with prosperity, her happiness is more than ever, with your dear help, to be the aim of my life. Comrades in adversity should be comrades in prosperity.

Roy. Right, Mary. For her happiness we will strive together. Comrades! ah, that brings back the old days, May! But I forget; you do not like to have me speak of them.

May. You do not mean that, Roy. Am I not proud of your war record? Do I not glory in your triumphs, there where brave men fought and fell.

Roy. That old sabre, if it had a tongue, could tell wondrous stories. Ah! old fellow! you failed me once. In those old days I had a friendship for a man in our regiment, with whom I made a queer compact, something after the manner of yours and Bessie's. He saved my life one day. 'Twas at Antietam, we were swooping down upon the enemy, — a cloud of horsemen with flashing sabres. Just as we reached the foe, my horse stumbled and fell. I thought my time had come. But between me and a descending sabre rode my comrade. I was saved. That night in camp we renewed our friendship, and, in jovial mood, vowed that whatever good fortune should be in store for us in the future should be shared between us. We were both poor — nothing but our soldier's pay. The war ending, we parted. He went West in search of friends. I come here, to find my only friend, my father, dead, and, to my surprise, a small fortune awaiting me. Poor fellow! I often wonder if he fared as well. (*Rises, goes R.*)

May. And you have not seen him since?

Roy. No: one of these days I mean to hunt him up.

May. To share with him your fortune?

Roy (*comes to back of her chair, hand on table; looks at her*). If he be poor, yes; for I shall still be rich. He could not claim my chief treasure, my pearl above price, — you (*stoops to kiss her*).

(Enter Bess, C.)

Bess. Ahem!

Roy (*starting up, and crossing to R*). Bother that girl! Well, what now?

Bess. I smell smoke, and where there's smoke there must be fire.

Roy. Not where you are. You're a capital extinguisher.

May. Did you find him, Bess?

Bess. No. 'Twas a false alarm. Oh, dear! why don't he come?

Roy. Poor dear! how sad! Hasn't seen him since last night — no, this morning; for I'll be hanged if the sun wasn't rising when I got up to fasten the door after him!

Bess. Yes, your father's son. What a shame —

Roy. You're right. I nearly caught my death.

Bess. To talk so! You know he left the house before ten.

Roy. This morning, yes. Quite time to be moving.

May. Roy, don't torment her. See how anxious she is!

Roy. As anxious as a cat to seize a poor little mouse, that she may tease it.

Bess. Oh, you wicked wretch! You know we never quarrel. (*Goes L.*)

(Marcus runs in C., riding-whip in hand.)

Mar. Oh, here you are, Manning! Call your chickens under their mother's wing; fasten up the hen-roost; barricade your pigpen; call out your troops, and plant your biggest guns upon the ramparts. The enemy is at your door!

Roy. Halloo! Halloo! What's the matter?

May. Enemy! what enemy?

Bess. Marcus, have you been drinking?

Roy. I told you he was up late. Well, old fellow, who is the enemy?

Mar. The terror of housekeepers! the devourer of cold meats! the robber of the clothes-line! Hush! "take heed! whisper low" – the tramp.

Roy. Oh!

Bess. Ah!

May. Indeed!

Mar. Yes. I met a true type of the fraternity half a mile below. He stopped my horse, and begged money. I always make short work of these fellows, so tossed him a quarter and rode on. He turned into that shanty set apart for the entertainment of man and beast, and no doubt will pour entertainment down his throat in beastly style. So look out, Manning. He may pay you a visit.

Roy. 'Twill be a short one, then; and I'll give him no quarter.

Mar. Well, how are you all, particularly my bonny Bess? (*Shakes hands with her, L.*)

Roy. Half a mile below. Did he look rough?

Mar. Rough, but good-natured. Dress ragged, face bloated, figure plump. These fellows thrive on their pickings these pests.

Roy. Don't say that, Marcus. The fellow may have been unfortunate.

Mar. Unfortunate? Bah! What's misfortune but a roll in the dust? – jump up, shake yourself, and you're as good as new. I've no patience with a man who wants vim – something on the side of his face – you know – cheek!

Roy. Yes: a quality which tramps (*aside*) and drummers (*aloud*) possess in a wonderful degree. (*Bess goes up to piano.*)

Mar. For my part, I never allow myself to be staggered by the blows of fate. When they come, I take a long breath, and hit out straight from the shoulder.

May. When did you hear from your father, Mr. Graves?

Mar. (*confused*). Eh, – my fa – yes – oh, yes! That is – not lately.

May. He was well when you heard?

Mar. Oh, yes, beautiful – that is hearty – he wishes to be remembered to all my customers – my friends, I mean.

(Goes up to piano.)

Roy (*coming to table*). May, what are you doing?

May. Pinning him in a corner. You men are so afraid of each other. Woman's curiosity knows no fear. We've found out one thing: he has a father.

Roy. Yes, and one other: he's afraid of him. Did you notice his hesitation?

May. Yes. There's some mystery about that father, which I mean to fathom.

Roy. But not now; give him time. You staggered him – after his boast, too. He didn't strike out well. Come, let's go into the garden. The young people want to be left alone. (*Goes up.*)

May (*rising*). Yes. I want you to look at my heliotropes; they're just splendid! (*Goes up and places arm in Roy's.*)

Roy. All right. Good-by, Bess. Don't catch cold. There's a smacking breeze coming.

Bess. And another going. Good-by.

(Roy and May exit C.)

**(Graves comes down slowly and sits in chair R.,
of table. Bess watches him without speaking.)**

Graves (*slowly*). Now what possessed Mrs. Manning to speak of my father? A subject to which I have never alluded. Can she mistrust me? Egad! she nearly took away my breath. My boasted boldness vanished like a flash. (*Bess rises, takes a wisp of hay from mantel, and comes behind him.*) And yet I've nothing to be ashamed of, – only a mystery. Mystery! why should I have a mystery here? (*Bess tickles his ear with the wisp. He brushes it off quickly.*) Confound it! it's hurting me. This girl loves me, and I love her. I've only to speak and she is mine. (*Bess tickles him. He brushes it off.*) Hang it! I'm tormented with doubts. But confession is a sure road to favor. I'll make a confidant of Bessie. If anybody else should tell her I should be (*Bess tickles him again*) stung with shame. Yes, I'll meet it (*Bess puts her arms round his neck and brings her face round as he speaks this*) face to face.

Bess. Dreaming, Marcus? (*Sits on hassock at his feet, back to audience*).

Mar. Why, Bess, what a brute I've been! Yes, dreaming, Bess, of a happy future, I trust, in store for you and me. Do you ever dream of that time?

Bess. Not I. When the skies are bright above us, why should we seek to peep even in dreams beneath the horizon when we know not what storms may be gathering there to roll over the brightness of the present?

Mar. Yes; but the cautious mariner is ever alert for the faintest signs of the coming storm.

Bess. Well, I am not a mariner, and my umbrella is always at hand.

Mar. Bess, can't you be serious?

Bess. I don't know. Try me.

Mar. Bess, I love you.

Bess. A failure, Marcus. That pleases me.

Mar. And you are to be my wife?

Bess. Another, Marcus. That delights me.

Mar. Yes, Bess; I know my love is returned. For three years we have been all in all to each other; and now, Bess, I tell you I am unworthy of your love.

Bess. You, Marcus! Now, you surprise me!

Mar. You trust me fully? You would go with me to the altar hand in hand, beyond the altar to death itself —

Bess. To death itself, Marcus!

Mar. And yet, on my part, there has been no confidence; into my past life you have had no glimpse. You took me, a stranger, to your heart, – never questioned me; and, beyond the interchange of affection, myself, my fortune, and my home are strangers still.

Bess. Blind, Marcus! Blind, are you? My woman's curiosity sought in the beginning to know you; my heart's instinct probed you, to know if you were worthy. I found you polite, chivalrous, charitable, with a heart open to every cry of distress, a hand ever ready to proffer assistance. Oh, I tried you deeply, as your purse can show! I found you true, noble, sincere. I had no right to question further.

Mar. But you must know me, Bess.

Bess. When you please, Marcus.

Mar. Then patiently hear me; for on your judgment rest my hopes of future happiness.

Bess. Indeed! Now, Marcus, I *am* serious.

Mar. Bess!

(Enter Simon Stone, C., quickly.)

Sim. Beg your pardon! Don't rise – I may be right. I may be mistaken – Don't rise. Is this the abode of Miss Nancy Nipper?

Bess (*risés quickly*). **Marcus** (*sits still*). Yes. Nancy is in the kitchen.

Sim. Oh, made a mistake! Yes, yes. Can you point out the position of the culinary department of your dwelling?

Bess. I will call her in. Take a seat.

Sim. Ah, thank you. (*Bess exits R. I. E.*) Here's my card. Gone! gone without it, and I went to the expense of getting up that card for the express purpose of having it placed in the hands of Miss Nancy Nipper. Says I, "Simon, don't be shabby. Go, like a gentleman. Spare no expense." – and it's useless. (*Comes down R., turns, and sees Marcus in chair.*) Halloa, Mark! – Mark, the perfect man.

Mar (*risés*). Si, old fellow where in the world did you drop from? (*Gives hand.*)

Simon (*takes hand and shakes it*). Well, in truth, Mark – But stop. I interrupted a *tete-a-tete*. There was a young lady sitting on that hassock. O Mark, this is too bad! I'm in the way. Good-by (*starts for door*).

Mar (*detaining him*). Stop, stop, Si! it's all right. But why are you here?

Simon. I – why – well – Look here, Mark, I know I'm in the way. I'll come again (*starts for door*).

Mar (*detaining him*). No, no; it's all right, Si. I see – you're in love with our Nancy.

Simon. Our Nancy! Our – Good gracious, Mark! You don't mean to say that you are aspiring to the affection of that damsel?

Mar. Ha, ha, Si! You need not fear. When I said our Nancy, I meant our girl – help, you understand.

Simon. Oh! Ah! Then you are one of the family.

Mar (*confused*). Well, no. Not exactly.

Simon. Oh, I see. Don't blush, but I'm sure I must be in the way. I'll come again (*starts for door*).

Mar (*detaining him*). Simon, stop. If you leave this room we are enemies.

Simon. But, Mark, I might blast your prospects, were it known that you and I —

Mar. Were friends, dear friends; that you were the only one who reached out a helping hand to me a destitute stranger, when I entered yonder city, five years ago.

Simon. None of that, Mark. Don't be shabby; helping hand, indeed, to a loft in the sixth story, a bed on a heap of rags, and dry bread washed down with water.

Mar. Divided your substance with me. Sim, when I forget your kindness, may I be as hungry as I was then.

Simon. Yes; but, Mark —

Mar. Hush. Here comes Miss Bess.

Simon. Then I'll just step outside (*going*).

Mar (*detaining him*). Not a step.

(Enter Bess, R. I. E.)

Bess. Nancy will be here in a minute. Mr. —

Mar (*coming down L., leading Simon, the right hands clasped*). Bess, Miss Bradley, allow me to present a very dear friend, — Mr. Simon Stone, my chum.

Bess. Indeed (*offering her hand*). Mr. Stone, you are very welcome here.

Simon (*takes hand*). Ah — yes; thank you. Thank you — very kind (*goes L.*). Chums. Chums, — before her, too. There's nothing shabby about that.

Mar. We'll leave you, Simon, to your friend; but don't go until I've seen you again.

Bess. Oh, no. You must stop to dinner.

(Bess and Marcus exeunt, C., arm in arm.)

Simon. Yes, thank you, much obliged. Well, now, that's hearty; pretty as a picture, and he, there's nothing shabby about him. Now, for Nancy. Won't her eyes glisten when she sees me in this stunning get-up. I never did care for dress, but when I made up my mind to look after Nancy again, I said to myself, "Simon, don't be shabby; do the thing in style;" and here I am, bran' new from top to toe, from shampoo to shining leather, but with the same old heart inside of me, advancing double-shuffle to the tune of "Nancy is my darling."

(Enter Nancy, R. I. E.)

Nancy. Now, I'd like to know who — Good gracious! it's Simon Stone.

Simon. Nancy, it is. Simon, your Simon. How dye do (*offers hand*).

Nancy. Well, I declare! rigged out like a dancing-jack. You extravagant dog!

Simon (*turning round*). Gay, ain't it. Cut to order by an artist, (*turns round*); look at the "elegance of expression" in the back of that coat, and the *tout ensemble*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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