

# THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF

*A comedy in one act*  
*Based on the short story by O. Henry*

**Adapted by Burton Bumgarner**

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

This hip, contemporary adaptation of O. Henry's short story, "The Ransom of Red Chief," is a fun-filled roller-coaster ride, with an abundance of twists and turns and surprises. When Bridget Driscoll picks up Dolly, a young girl lost in the New York subway, she has no idea what a little monster lurks beneath the cute exterior. Bridget takes Dolly home to the apartment she shares with her brother, Billy, and her sister, Bonnie, only to have her good Samaritan deed turn into a nightmare. Dolly has a "take no prisoners" approach to playing; and she gleefully demolishes the apartment and its inhabitants, stressing the already tenuous relationship among the three siblings well beyond the breaking point. The surprising resolution, in vintage O. Henry style, twists the comic knife one more time.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(2 men, 4 women, 2 flexible, extras, doubling possible)*

**BONNIE DRISCOLL:** Wants to be a writer.

**BRIDGET DRISCOLL:** Bonnie's sister, wants to be a model.

**BILLY DRISCOLL:** Their brother, wants to be a musician.

**DOLLY DORSET:** A young girl who follows Bridget home.

**EDWARD DORSET:** Dolly's father, a wealthy New Yorker.

**FIREMAN**

**COP**

**WOMAN ON THE SUBWAY**

**OTHER SUBWAY PASSENGERS**

**The place**

A dumpy apartment in New York City.

**The time**

The present, a rainy autumn morning.

**Setting**

The living room of the dumpy New York apartment of Bonnie and Bridget Driscoll and their brother Billy. A window with fire escape is upstage center. A ratty sofa, worn chairs, and desk with computer are downstage.

**Scene 1**

*(During the BLACKOUT we hear a computer.)*

COMPUTER: You've got mail. *(Sound of a printer is heard.)*

*(AT RISE: It is 10 a.m. BILLY is picking at a guitar, lost in thought, and BONNIE is reading a letter from their mother.)*

BONNIE: Mom says we can come home anytime we're tired of trying to be big shots in New York. She says Bridget will never be a model, I will never be a writer, and you have as much chance of being a successful musician as she has of being a brain surgeon. We all need to move back home so Bridget can work in a department store, I can work in a bank, and you can go on unemployment ... again. Good old Mom. Always so encouraging and optimistic. *(Mood changes.)* She never should have had children. *(Wads up letter and tosses it over HER shoulder. She looks at BILLY.)* Did you hear what I said? *(Sour chord on guitar.)* Billy, I'm talking to you.

*(SHE crosses to BILLY and hits him with a pillow.)*

BILLY: Hey! What's the deal?

BONNIE: I was talking to you.

BILLY: You were?

BONNIE: We got another letter from Mom.

BILLY: Oh. I guess I heard the word "Mom" and I stopped listening.

BONNIE: She has no business being so critical. So what if we took our life savings and moved to New York! People are supposed to pursue their dreams, aren't they? *(Sour chord from guitar.)* Billy? Are you listening to me?

BILLY: What?

BONNIE: *(Mood changes.)* Mom wants us to come home. We have a thousand dollars left in the bank and our credit cards are maxed out. Bridget has yet to even get an interview with a modeling firm,

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BONNIE: *(Continued.)* I'm too busy being a waitress to write a novel, and you ... you just sit here all day and do nothing.

BILLY: I am practicing my art!

BONNIE: What art? You couldn't play that thing if you took lessons!

BILLY: I don't need lessons. I'm a blues singer. My material comes from everyday experiences. *(Plays chord and sings.)*

I come up to Manhattan *(Chord.)*

Just to play around. *(Chord.)*

I got here on Tuesday *(Chord.)*

And they know me all over town.

Three weeks of work. What'd you think?

BONNIE: *(Disgusted.)* One is either born a blues singer or one is not. And little brother, the news of the day is ... you're not!

BILLY: Hey! I'm a professional! I've earned money!

BONNIE: *(Indicating guitar.)* You took that stupid thing out in the subway and a lady gave you fifty cents not to play it!

BILLY: That makes me a professional musician.

BONNIE: That makes you a professional street person! And we're all going to be out on the street in about a month unless something happens.

*(The door opens. BRIDGET and DOLLY DORSET enter. Bridget takes off her raincoat and hat, and hangs up umbrella. Dolly carries a small suitcase and Bridget carries a magazine. Dolly quickly crosses left and exits. BILLY picks irritatingly at his guitar.)*

BRIDGET: It's raining again. I couldn't get on the train because it was packed with people.

BONNIE: Bridget, what was that?

BRIDGET: *People* magazine. You know, I'll never get to be a model if I can't even get to the agency for an interview!

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BILLY: (*Chord, then sings.*)

It's raining in the city.

I can't get on the train.

It's a crying pity

My life is ... is ... what rhymes with train?

BONNIE: PAIN!

BILLY: (*Sour chord.*) Pain.

BONNIE: Did you see a little person run across the room?

BILLY: Huh?

BRIDGET: I have a degree from the Mail-Order School of Modeling! I graduated with honors! First in my class! But do you think that carries any weight around here?

BONNIE: Bridget, who was that little person who ran through our apartment?

BRIDGET: Little person?

BILLY: (*Chord, then sings.*)

We got a little person

Running all around ...

(*BONNIE stuffs pillow in BILLY'S face.*)

BONNIE: (*To BRIDGET.*) Little person! (*BILLY plays a chord and starts to sing.*) If you play one more awful note on that thing I'll break it over your head! (*To BRIDGET.*) And you still haven't answered my question. Who was that little person who ran into the kitchen?

BRIDGET: Oh. Well, that's sort of a long story.

BONNIE: I'm sure it is. Since everyone but me is unemployed, we're down to our last thousand dollars, and it's a couple of hours to lunch, why don't you tell us why you brought a child home?

BRIDGET: Well, that adorable little girl thinks I'm her nanny.

BONNIE: Her ... nanny?

BRIDGET: Her nanny. I was trying to squeeze onto a downtown train, when I notice this little girl looking kind of sad and lost. No one's lifting a finger to help her. She walks up to me and asks if I'm her new nanny. I just couldn't resist. I brought her home.

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*(A loud war whoop is heard from the bedroom. BILLY jumps.)*

BILLY: What was that?

BRIDGET: It's Dolly.

BILLY: Oh. *(Returns to guitar.)*

BONNIE: You found a little girl in the subway station and brought her home?

*(From offstage: War whoop, beats on a pan with a ladle.)*

BRIDGET: She's absolutely adorable. She can be the little sister I never had.

BONNIE: I'm your little sister!

BRIDGET: But I never liked you.

*(Offstage crash.)*

BILLY: What was that?

BONNIE: Sounded like a window.

*(DOLLY enters and runs into BONNIE, who almost falls over.)*

BRIDGET: Isn't she cute?

*(DOLLY screams in BONNIE'S face and exits into the kitchen.)*

BONNIE: She looks kind of ... familiar.

BRIDGET: Her name's Dolly Dorset.

BONNIE: Dolly Dorset. Dolly Dorset. Why does that name sound familiar?

BRIDGET: She said her father works in a bank or something. His picture's in this magazine. She showed me.

BONNIE: *(Takes the magazine and flips the pages.)*  
"Investment banker Edward Dorset, lovely wife Jacquelyn, and daughter Dolly, return from French Riviera vacation."

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